PERSIAN PAINTINGS
in the India Office Library

B W ROBINSON
PERSIAN PAINTINGS
in the India Office Library

B. W. ROBINSON

The collection of Persian miniature
paintings in the India Office Library is
published here for the first time. Most of
the illustrated manuscripts and paintings
were acquired by the East India Company,
including some from the library of Tipu
Sultan of Mysore and others from the
collection of Warren Hastings. The finest
manuscripts, however, and the great
majority of separate miniatures and
drawings in the collection were assembled
by Richard Johnson during his service with
the Company between 1770 and 1790.

Among these are the outstandingly rare
Anthology of Dhuways of 1314-15, from the
Mongol period of Persian painting, the
Khamsa of Jami, illustrated at Baku in
1576 under the Turkman prince, Pir Budag,
and numerous fine individual miniatures by
Muhammad, Riza-i 'Abbasi, and artists of
the sixteenth-century Khurasan school.

The India Office Library collection, which
ranks with the collections of the British
Museum and the Bodleian Library, covers
the period 1200-1850 and is particularly
strong in works of the Safavid school of
Shiraz. This extensively illustrated
catalogue contains more than 1300 entries
and gives descriptions of all the
miniatures and drawings in the
collection, grouping them in their periods
and schools, and supplying a succinct
historical and artistic background. It thus
introduces a considerable body of hitherto
unknown material which will be of primary
importance to scholars, students and
everyone interested in the field of Islamic
art.

nbs 052667 026 X

Jacket illustrations: Rustam and the White
Demon (front) from Firdawsi's Shahnameh,
Shiraz style, c. 1570; Poets in Discussion
(back) from the Anthology of Dhuways.

Published in Great Britain

THE AUTHOR

B. W. Robinson is a leading authority on
Persian and Japanese art. After serving
with the Indian Army in India, Burma and
Malaya during the Second World War he
resumed his work at the Victoria and
Albert Museum where he became Keeper
of the Department of Metalwork (1960-73).
From 1970 to 1973 he was President of the
Royal Asiatic Society. He has contributed
articles to a wide range of periodicals and
his publications include a catalogue of the
Persian paintings in the Bodleian Library
(1958), a monograph on the Japanese print
artist Kiyohisa (1961), and a handbook on
the Japanese sword (1964). He
contributed to the Cluster Beatty catalogue
of Persian manuscripts and miniatures in
1960 and 1962, and arranged and
catalogued the 1967 Loan Exhibition of
Persian paintings at the Victoria and
Albert Museum.

Other books on Oriental art published by
Sotheby Parke Bernet

Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills
A Survey and History of Pahari Miniature
Painting
W. G. ARCHER
800 pages, 3 colour and 950 monochrome
illustrations. Two volumes.

Pahari Paintings and Sikh Portraits
in the Lahore Museum
P. K. ABDUL REHMAN
With a Foreword by W. G. ARCHER
About 270 pages, 16 plates in colour and
280 in monochrome.

Japanese Prints and Drawings from
the Vever Collection
JACK MILLER
About 1000 pages, 70 plates in colour and
970 in monochrome. Three volumes in
slipcase.

Qajar Paintings
Persian Oil Paintings of the Eighteenth and
Nineteenth Centuries
K. J. PALL.
112 pages, 63 colour and 25 monochrome
illustrations.
Distributed by Faber and Faber.

SOTHEBY PARKE BERNET
PUBLICATIONS

34 & 35 New Bond Street, London W1A 2AA
or 81 Adams Drive, Teaneck, New Jersey 07602
Persian Paintings in the India Office Library
Persian Paintings in the India Office Library

A Descriptive Catalogue

B. W. Robinson
Keeper Emeritus, Victoria and Albert Museum

Sotheby Parke Bernet
Soon after the publication of my *Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Paintings in the Bodleian Library* in 1958 I was asked by Mr S. C. Sutton, who was then Librarian of the India Office Library, if I would undertake a similar catalogue of the Persian miniatures under his care. I willingly agreed, and now, nearly sixteen years later, the work is complete. It has been a long time, but it was difficult to combine such a task with a full-time job at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and a number of other unavoidable commitments: the work had to be done in a long succession of short spurts. I am only sorry that I was unable to complete it before Mr Sutton’s retirement, and I should like to express here my gratitude and appreciation for his unfailing kindness, patience and enthusiasm. It is also a pleasure to offer my warm thanks to his successor, Miss Joan Lancaster, Director of the India Office Library and Records, and to Mr R. Desmond, Deputy Librarian, for much sympathetic help and encouragement during the latter stages of preparation.

I have endeavoured to carry out Mr Sutton’s intention in keeping the catalogue as close as possible in arrangement and character to its Bodleian prototype. To quote the preface to the latter: ‘A catalogue such as this should furnish the fuel, but not fan the flames, of controversy. Its basic purpose is, in fact, simply to present the material in question clearly set out, classified, described, and indexed, both to assist those pursuing their studies on the spot, and to give students of the subject elsewhere an adequate idea of the nature and scope of the collection.’ The classification, broadly speaking, remains the same, but there are differences of content. The present collection, in comparison with the Oxford material, is weak in the Timurid period and heavily weighted in the Safavid. On the other hand it has a very notable manuscript of the Mongol period (Nos 1-55)—a style unrepresented in the Bodleian—and its Timurid material, sparse as it is, includes two manuscripts of prime importance for the study of painting under the Turkman rulers, a branch of the subject which has only recently begun to receive serious attention. Thanks to the Johnson Collection,1 separate miniatures and drawings are far more numerous than in the Bodleian.

1 For an account of Richard Johnson and his career, see *Richard Johnson (1755-1807)*: *Noted Collector and Scholar*, issued by the India Office Library and Records, 1975, in connection with an exhibition of the same title. The exhibition was prepared by the Library and Record Office as a contribution to the sesquicentenary celebrations of the Royal Asiatic Society.
One feature of the Bodleian catalogue will not be found here, namely the lists of 'manuscripts for comparison' which were appended to each section. To reprint these, even with updated references and the addition of a number of manuscripts published in the last sixteen years, would have involved much wasteful duplication: to print the new material alone would have been out of the question. Indeed it may be suggested that the time has come for these lists to be expanded into a separate book—and it would be quite a large one—entirely devoted to a classified list, or corpus, of illustrated Persian manuscripts, grouped according to their miniatures and provided with references. This would be a considerable undertaking, involving much travel and long hours in libraries over a number of years, but it might prove (if I may quote old John Aubrey) 'an Inclination to some Ingenious and publick-spirited Young Man, to polish and compleat what I have delivered rough heven'. Another desideratum is a series of publications listing all the subjects of miniatures found in the standard classics, Nizami, Sa'di, Jami, *Kalila wa Dimna*, etc. An excellent start has been made by the University of Michigan with the publication of a Preliminary Index of Shah-namah Illustrations by Jill Norgren and Edward Davis with an introduction by Oleg Grabar which I have found invaluable, and it is greatly to be hoped that this admirable lead will be followed up.

As in the Bodleian catalogue, all the miniatures and drawings are numbered throughout in a continuous series, which makes for ease of reference. Where it has been necessary to refer to a manuscript as such, the number of the first miniature it contains has been used. Persian and Arabic names and readings have been checked by Mrs Ursula Sims-Williams of the India Office Library staff, to whom I here express my most sincere gratitude. In transliteration I have followed the excellent principle laid down twenty-five years ago by the late Eric Schroeder: 'Except for very familiar words like “dervish” or “Hera,” I have used . . . the Royal Asiatic Society’s system without diacritical marks. It is believed that to Orientalists such marks are unnecessary; and it is known that to most readers they are offensive.'

Usefulness has been my aim throughout, as it was in the Bodleian catalogue, and if I can be said to have succeeded in this, the long and sometimes tedious labours involved will have been amply repaid.

B. W. R.


---

Footnote:

1 Ann Arbor, 1969.
Abbreviations

A


Arnold and Grohmann


Art Is.

*Brunois*, published semi-annually. (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1934-51).


Burlington

The *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* (London, 1903-).


BWG


Kühleng, IM


London 1931


Robinson PD


Robinson PM


Stchoukine MS


Stchoukine MT


Stchoukine SA


VAM 1951


VAM 1952


VAM 1965


VAM 1967

Sources of the Collection

A full account of the sources of the India Office Library collections will be found in S. C. Sutton, *A Guide to the India Office Library*, HMSO, 1967, and it will therefore only be necessary here to summarise the information therein contained, in tabular form:

1804 Gift of Lieut Col William Fitzpatrick.
Cat No 321, 363, 1269.

1806 Part of Tipu Sultan’s Library, taken at Serampore, 1799.
Cat Nos 156, 324, 363, 424, 592, 1063, 1175, 1224.

1807 Collection of Richard Johnson, purchased from his widow.

1809 Collection of Warren Hastings, purchased.
Cat Nos 269, 378, 433, 906.

e 1815 Sir Barry Closs.
Cat No 533.

1816 Committee of Correspondence (East India Company).
Cat No 1239, 1278.

1824 Part of the John Leyden Library (Bibliotheca Leydeniana).
Cat No 266.

1837 College of Fort William (ex Tipu Sultan),
Cat Nos 453, 1140.

1836 Haileybury College (returned MSS, originally deposited there by the India Office Library).
Cat Nos 377, 460 (ex Johnson), 953, 1115, 1152 (ex Warren Hastings).

1876 Royal Society MSS, collected by Sir William Jones.
Cat Nos 134, 344, 345, 549.

1877 Elphinstone Collection, presented.
Cat No 1280-83.

Various late acquisitions by purchase.
Cat Nos 74, 78, 213, 232, 1235, 1286.

Of doubtful provenance (so designated by C. A. Storey in his classified list of the Persian MSS according to provenance: [MSS Eur D 543]):
Cat Nos 236, 256, 1009, 1129, 1184.
1 Sultan Sanjar and the poet Mu'izzi viewing the moon. Mongol style, 1315

40 Poets in discussion. Mongol style, 1315
89  Khusraw spies Shirin bathing. Turkman style, c. 1505

105  Bahram Gur shoots a lion and a wild ass. Turkman style, c. 1505

138  Khusraw and Shirin in the hunting-field. Tabriz style, c. 1530
210 A *flute* player. Quzwin style, late sixteenth century

152 A young dervish by Muhannadi, c. 1575
221 Scene in a mosque. Khurasan style, c 1575

264 Timur's family council. Shiraz style, 1533
Plate VIII

Iskandar before Queen Quydafa. Shiraz style, 1560

Plate IX

Rustam slays the demon Barkhyas. Shiraz style, 1560