EUROPEAN ARTISTIC INFLUENCE AT ISFAHAN IN THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The introduction in the seventeenth century of the European aesthetic
sensation about two ways. First, European paintings were much sought after
at the Safavid court. Second, European artists chose to work in Isfahan for
Persian patrons, and thereby, European prints were finding their way to Persia
and India by this time in larger numbers. While the initial impetus for this
may have been due to the intellectual curiosity and patronage of Shah Abbas I, a
key factor was the resettlement of a large colony of Armenian merchants from
Old Julfa on the River Abar on Isfahan in 1604. Under the patronage of
Shah Abbas, they were invested in a suburb south of the city across the
River Zayandeh, christened New Julfa. The shah granted the Armenians
a monopoly of the silk trade to Europe, and the Armenian merchants were
primarily responsible for the transmission of European art to Persia.

They swiftly became prosperous and built a number of churches decorated
with European-style paintings and magnificent private houses similarly
embellished. As few Persians were proficient in European languages,
they had to rely on the artists to act as interpreters for foreign missions to the
Persian court.

Armenian-Muslims, the foreign visitors were invariably housed with the
Armenians in New Julfa, and many of them settled permanently and
remained with the Armenians. John Fryer in 1668 recounts that ten years
previously there were European craftsmen living in New Julfa who included
“watchmakers, jewellers, pummarists and watchmakers.” There were also
painters, of whom several were noted by contemporary European travelers.

Paolo dianco traveled to Persia, the Persian painter, “Govaert,” who
left his service in Isfahan to find employment with Shah Abbas I. Later the
shah sent him back to Europe, to Flanders and France to seek out other
painters.

Sir Thomas Herbert mentions “John, a Dutchman” who might well be the
same painter “Govaert,” and Tavernier tells us that during the time of Shah
Abbas I, there were two more Dutchmen, probably went by the Dutch East
India Company, who were trading to the monarch to draw. The contact with
Holland can be explained partly by the fact that the Armenians had a large
and important community in Amsterdam. The first printed Armenian Bible
was produced in Amsterdam in 1666, and the Armenians introduced the art
of printing with movable type to Julfa as early as 1664. This contact with
Europe and the post-Renaissance artistic vocabulary inevitably influenced
local artists, and nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the Armenian
Cathedral in New Julfa, which is decorated with wall paintings from top to
bottom in a diverse assortment of both European and local styles.

While this European influence is a noticeable and significant aspect of the
art, as a whole, research by A. Adler has indicated a possible link to
Georgia (see Adler 1996, where he describes certain of those pictures as
being of the Georgian-Persian school). This link is more iconographic than
stylistic, and in some pictures, artists such as costume, adornments, and
symbols appear to have Georgian as well as Safavid influence. However, the
social and artistic links between Safavid Iran and Georgia (indeed, between
them and Georgia in general since ancient times) is well established. Iranian
artists frequently painted Georgian scenes, there was certainly a Georgian
Community in Tabriz, and Georgian artists often worked at the Safavid
court, one such being Smyrnes the Georgian, who had worked on the
great Shahnameh for Shah Isfandiyar in 1576-7. Thus, though Adler’s research points
to a possible Georgian connection of some sort in some of these paintings,
Armenians more likely than they would have

BEEN PAINTED AT THE GREATEST ARTISTS, CULTURAL AND COMMERCIAL CENTRE AT THIS
TIME – Isfahan, and this is the opinion of the majority of art historians who
have written on the subject. Most recently Armi Lankinen has submitted a
PhD thesis to Oxford University on the artistic developments of this
period, and its publication is eagerly awaited.

WHERE WERE THEY PAINTED?

The most obvious reason for their existence was to decorate the houses of
the Persian nobility and the wealthy Armenian merchants in Isfahan
and New Julfa. The existence of stylistically similar wall paintings in
New Julfa supports this theory, but the existence of so few extant free-hanging
portraits of this style indicates that perhaps these were considered the
most prestigious works of art with which to decorate one’s house and with
which to show off one’s wealth and, importantly, one’s fashionable
appreciation of international cultural influences.

However, the fact that the present picture is clearly one of a male
and female pair (the latter having been sold at the same Christie’s auction in
1974, see provenance above) gives rise to the idea that they could have
had an additional function. Others of this small group are effectively pairs
and it is possible that they were painted as marriage portraits in much
the same way as had occurred in Europe for centuries.

THE PRESENT PORTRAIT

Dr. Layle Dib’s discussion of these paintings in the catalogue of the seminal
exhibition "Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch, 1785-1925" is worth
reproducing verbatim.

"The young woman in this painting, dressed, richly, holds a delicate pink
rose in one hand and a goblet in the other - attributes that allude to her
feminine charms and her intoxicating beauty. At her feet are displayed
blue and white dancing bowls and a gold jeweled long necklace; elements
characteristic of the rich visual and sepals recorded by visitors to the
Persian courts and frequently depicted in the visual sources. The woman
wears a peaked scarlet cap (red under her chin) embellished with a
feather and necklace, indicating her high social rank and married status.
The figure is also conveyed by the lankiness of the silk brocade patterned dress and trousers that she so charmingly wears.

The painting’s subject projects a sense of modesty and dignity in contrast to many of the female depictions of the period, which show scantily clad or sensitively Persian courtesans in inviting attitudes with their veil slipping off their heads or bareheaded European women in classical or early seventeenth-century lowly European gowns.

A feature that invites comment is the background’s red lacquered wood burlastyle. A representation of the Armenian merchant Khwajeh Petros Yalbugh, Cathedral Museum), associated in Madrid by a painter trained in European techniques in 1732, exhibits a similar burlastyle. Owing to the extensive commercial network, paintings from western India may have been commissioned by the Armenian merchants of Isfahan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and may have provided the prototypes for the Chinese burlastyle in this painting.” (Dibra and Batinic, p. 115)

A further very interesting feature of the present portrait is that the design of the silk brocade textile of which the woman’s dress is made (see detail of previous page) is identical to that of three other of this small group of early portraits. The Portrait of a Lady sold at Colnaghi’s in 1796, lot 37 (now Sudabah Museum of Fine Arts, Tehran), the Portrait of a Lady sold in these rooms 16 October 1999, lot 69 (now Museum of Islamic Art, Dubai), and the Portrait of a Lady sold in these rooms 16 October 1999, lot 69 (private collection). Of the thirteen known paintings in this general group, only six are female subjects, thus four out of the six extant female portraits are of the same design. These textiles are not just similar in design, but identical, and this leads to some interesting questions. Did these particular portraits have closer links then simply the generic ones of this small group? Can the specific textiles design used on the dress have had associations with a particular social group within Safavid society, perhaps Armenian nóobærnerness? Or could it have been associated with a particular event or occasion, such as betrothal or marriage, within aristocratic society. The four female portraits which share this textile design must all have been painted close together chronologically, since we know that Safavid society took changes in fashion and costume very seriously (See Scree, 2002), leading perhaps to a re-evaluation and compressing of the dates of this group, which have so far been as wide as 1640-1722.

Another possibility is that these four women belonged to a specific group within court circles where textiles of specific design sourced from the royal workshop were in vogue. The headless of the figures in the present portrait is close in style to that of the female portrait sold at Colnaghi’s in 1796, lot 37, which is an outdoor scene. Another shared feature of several of these portraits, including the present one, is a chequered marble floor.

THE ISKANDAR SCHOOL

The second half of the eighteenth century at Isfahan saw a remarkable development in painting, from the quasi-calligraphic style of the Piri Abbassie to a new style showing more attention to naturalism, which was manifestly influenced by European art, with Moghul influence evident too. The chief proponents of this new style were Shabtay Abbassie and his sons, Mohammad Taghi and Ali Naq, Mohammed Zaman, Ali Quli Jabbarie (who was himself of European origin) and Shahi Abbass; but there must have been many more whose names are not recorded. These artists are known to have produced watercolours and gouache paintings along traditional lines and to have produced occasional works on lacquer, but the concept of large-scale oil painting on canvas was more or less alien to them. However, there are marked similarities between the figures in several of the portraits mentioned above, the small scale water-colours of Shaykh Abbass and Ali Quli Jabbarie, and certain anonymous works such as those in an album sold at Sotheby’s, London, 26 July 1977, lot 222, and later at Colnaghi in 1796 (Colnaghi, no. 142 H). In addition, in the churches and houses of New Julfa and in the Chehel Sutun Palace in Isfahan a great variety of large-scale mural had been painted during the middle decades of the seventeenth century, showing figures dressed in both Persian and European costumes. Thus, though freestanding oil portraits were not common, the idea of large-scale portraits, even life-size ones, was not a revolutionary concept to anyone living in Isfahan from about 1640 onwards, and the stylistic links between the large and small scale works of Persian artists of the mid-seventeenth century are closer than they at first appear.

It has been suggested on occasions that the artists of this small group of life-size oil portraits could be European themselves, and that their European-influenced Persian contemporaries. Given the variations of paintly hands evident within this small group of pictures, it seems most likely that they are the work of both European and Persian artists, working side by side in one or more studios in Isfahan and New Julfa.

LITERATURE


Aldie, 1996.


E. Sims, “Late Sassanian Painting: Chehel Sutun, the Armenian Houses, the oil Paintings”, in Arthiw des XVII. Internationalen Kongress fur antike Kunst und Archeologie, Munich, 7-9 September 1976, Berlin, 1979, pp.693-698.

Mary Ann Frazier, Essex Down, pp.147-150 and plates 38-9.


YUSUF (JOSEPH) WITH HIS FATHER YA'QUB (JACOB) AND ELEVEN BROTHERS. QAJAR, IRAN, CIRCA 1850-1850

Oil on canvas, previously arch-shaped, now extended at upper corners, framed

On by 91cm

Scenes from Biblical and Qur'anic sources, and from Persian literature, were very popular subjects for Persian artists of the later period. Many stories from the Bible and Qur'an became the subject of important medieval Persian poems, and thus popular in a literary as well as religious context. The transfer of these themes to a pictorial context was therefore a natural one and had been occurring for centuries.

In this case, the subject of Joseph's life appears in the Old Testament (Genesis 37-50) and the Qur'an (Surah Yusuf: vv1-104) and was the subject of Jami's ever-popular poem Yusuf va Zulaykhah. The Biblical/Qur'anic story relates how Joseph's brothers became jealous of his status as Jacob's favourite son and cast him into a pit in the desert, where he was discovered barely alive by shepherds, who took him to Egypt. Once there he went through various trials and torments, whilst remaining true to his faith in God, before being elevated to a powerful position in the household of the Egyptian Pharaoh. He then brought his father and brothers to Egypt to live with him. Jami's poem concentrates on the relationship between Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Zulaykhah, and its mystical interpretations.

The present painting shows him as a young man in the company of his father, Jacob, his ten older brothers and his one younger brother Benjamin. It is taken from the earlier part of the story, when Joseph is still at home with his family and working as a shepherd. This can be deduced both from the youth of Joseph and his younger brother Benjamin, and from the fact that Jacob's beard is not yet grey (in the original painting this one is white). Jacob's beard is grey and he is shown as an old man.

Two closely related paintings are in the Sadabad Museum of Fine Arts, Tehran, see Kelenius 1992, nos.14-15. For a general survey of Biblical themes in Persian painting see Mittas 1981. Other Qajar depictions of scenes from the story of Joseph can be found as follows: Fokl 1972, nos.31, 40, 41, 42 (now all in the Sadabad Museum of Fine Arts, Tehran), see also Diba and Efrati 1996, fig.XVI, p.194); Milstein 1991, nos.6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; Szebehely, New York, 10 December 1981, lot 140A.

**£ 20,000-30,000** £ 25,200-37,800

YUSUF (JOSEPH), SURROUNDED BY HIS BROTHERS, EMBRACES HIS FATHER YA'QUB (JACOB) ON HIS ARRIVAL IN EGYPT. QAJAR, IRAN, CIRCA 1850-1850

Oil on canvas, previously arch-shaped, now extended at upper corners, framed

127 by 91cm

Exhibited


Literature


See footnote to previous lot.

**£ 20,000-30,000** £ 25,200-37,800

52

No Lot
A PORTRAIT OF MUHAMMAD 'ALI PASHA OF EGYPT (1805-1848), EGYPT, 19TH CENTURY

200 BBY 1924

W 60,000-80,000 € 75,000-100,000

Muhammad 'Ali, also known as the ‘Father of Egypt’ and the ‘Lion of Alexandria’, is arguably the most significant figure in the make-up of modern Egypt. Before his rise, Egypt was a country whose indigenous nature had been practically forgotten after centuries of occupation and overshadowing by other Empires, the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs and finally Ottomans. From the commencement of his rule until 1922, Muhammad 'Ali and his dynasty would control Egypt and Sudan until the Egyptian revolution of 1952.

Born in Naucala, Macedonia in the late 1760s, Muhammad 'Ali rose to prominence in the commander of an Albanian military contingent that united with British and Ottoman Turkish forces to defeat Napoleon Bonaparte and the French occupation of Egypt in 1802. Having achieved the Turkish and British-styled back home, Muhammad 'Ali remained in Egypt, and declared himself the country’s de facto ruler in 1803, still nominally subject to the Ottoman Empire, and in time came to be recognised by the Ottoman court (porta) as governor or pasha. Remarkably, Muhammad 'Ali was successful in founding an autonomous and hereditary dynasty with an increasingly centralised administration, particularly at a time when the Ottoman court was asserting its authority in many other Arab lands.

The Empire Muhammad 'Ali came to control in 1802, however, was still very much in the hands of the Mamluks, whose land was still their source of great wealth and power, having taxed and administered the country for centuries in the name of the Ottoman emperor. Realising this, Muhammad 'Ali carried out a number of strategic actions in 1811, when he installed the Mamluk Emir to be a front to celebrate the declaration of war against the Wahhabis of Arabia and killed almost all of them in an ambush that became known as the ‘Mess of the Citadel’. Having decimated the power of the Mamluks (with thousands more and their families being killed in the following weeks), Muhammad 'Ali set about exploiting his growing power with incursions into Palestine and Syria in 1811. However, his occupation of these two countries in 1840 posed enough threat to Ottoman stability that several European powers joined up with Ottoman forces to expel Muhammad 'Ali in Syria at the battle of St. Jean d’Acre, where he was soundly beaten. Ever the opportunist, though, Muhammad 'Ali managed to keep hold of the hereditary principate of Egypt in 1811, after many lengthy negotiations between himself and the European powers and the Sultan of Turkey, but was deposed of his other territories.

Despite the plights of an Egyptian empire being swallowed, Muhammad 'Ali turned his attention back to Egypt, and the programme of internal reform policies that he had already initiated earlier in his reign. Since his position within the Ottoman Empire was generally less threatening after his emphatic defeat at Acre, Muhammad 'Ali realised the opportunity for regaining favour with Britain and France, and ubsorbing the military and technical advances of the West in order for Egypt to flourish and progress. With political ends in mind, therefore, the newly reinstated pashas of Egypt set about courting British, France, and the West, implementing Western educational systems and industries and establishing printing presses in Alexandria and Cairo from which newspapers were printed at an unprecedented rate. These reforms brought Muhammad 'Ali and Egypt a good deal of attention in Europe, where these social and economic occurrences, including the revival of Alexandria, caused considerable (yet admirable) surprise, and it would be fair to say that he ranked with his contemporaries the Ottoman Sultans Selim III and Muhammad Il as a pioneer in the modern Middle East. So much so that, when the British occupied Egypt in 1882, they were able to take direct control over a process of westernisation in which they had already been long involved.

Interestingly enough, Muhammad 'Ali rejected French and European clothing fashions and military uniforms, instead of opting to retain the traditional dress of Egypt. This can be seen in both the portrait present and also in the present painting of the pasha by David Wilkie, executed in 1841 by invitation of Muhammad 'Ali whilst the artist was visiting in Alexandria for the ship he would return home aboard (see Tromba 2008, p.19, fig.44). In this instance he wears a tunic in accordance with Ottoman decrees, but is otherwise dressed in traditional Egyptian dress, centring the dictates of the time. Furthermore, he is sporting a full beard (as is the present example) instead of the close-run variety worn by his Ottoman contemporaries such as the famous French sculptor Abd al-Majid (also painted by Wilkie in 1840, see Tromba 2008, p.39, fig.45). The message in both Wilkie’s portrait and the present one is clear to its audience: Muhammad 'Ali ruler and reformer of Egypt is a modernising Bushi (a term applied by the English in the late 1830s), distinct from the Ottoman sultans (see Tromba 1996, p.125). In fact the overall appearance and features of the present portrait could be described as generally more aggressive than that of the plucked subject depicted in Wilkie’s portrait. By appearing in national dress, Muhammad 'Ali offers his people a symbol of nationalism, appearing as a man taking pride in the indigenous traditions of his adopted country.

LITERATURE
A CURTAIN FOR THE Tomb of the Prophet (Hijrat al-Qubr Al-Nabwi al-Sharif) in Medina

of square form, the pistachio green with silk ground applied with red, green and salmon pink silk panels, embroidered with silver metal threads with central hanging mosque lamp with pendant cartouches filled with inscriptions set within a pointed arch supported on columns with a pair of stylized candlesticks, the spandrels of the arch filled with foliate scrolls, a large ovoid cartouche above filled with Qur'anic inscriptions, palmette borders above and below 245 x 196cm.

INSCRIPTIONS
Top panel: Qur'an, surah Al-Adha (22:28), 45, followed by: ‘The Most Supreme, the ever-Forgiving God told the truth’

In the hanging lamp, in mirrored form: ‘O Oponi [of all gates]’

In the two green cartouches we read: Allah is Allah the one and only Allah, and we testify that there is no god but Allah and we certify in sincerity that we had neither a companion nor a helper.

And may The Mighty God be satisfied with Abu Bakr and Umar and Uthman and Ali and the Companions all of them.

In the tear-drop cartouche:
On the top: ya asad Allah
‘O Messenger of God’

In the middle band: Manusia al-sultan al-rasul al-shahab’s
Our Lord the Sultan seeks (Prophet’s) intercession

In the lower band: hadith al-mubah al-nabawi
This is the Prophet’s milk.

£ 40,000 - 60,000 £ 75,000 - 100,000
A CURTAIN FOR THE TOMB OF THE PROPHET (HURJAT AL-QUBR AL-MASRI) IN MEDINA WITH THE TUGHRA OF SULTAN MAHMUD (1225-55/1808-39), DATED 1229 (1815-14)

of rectangular form, the black silk ground applied with red, green and salmon-pink panels, embroidered with silver and silver-gilt metal threads, with a central calligraphic mosque lamp emitting rays above a fan-formed cartouche filled with inscriptions set in a lobed arch flanked by columns, the spandrels of the arch filled with two calligraphic roundels on a ground of scrolling foliage, the centre with a row of six coloured-ground calligraphic roundels, with a pair of large foliate scrolls flanking a further small calligraphic roundel, three rows of inscriptions below set between columns, the imperial tughras at the foot framed in a foliate cartouche tied with ribbons, framed within a border of palmettes alternating with stylised roses, the composition surrounded by a row of eight coloured-ground calligraphic cartouches.

245 by 140 cm.

INSCRIPTIONS

In the top 8 roundels, repetition of: allahu akbar (God is great)

*God is my Lord. God suffices me* 

In the two roundels: the shahada,

In the top Qur'ans surah al-Nur (XXIV), parts of 35

In the 8 roundels:

The names of the four Orthodox Caliphs, Hasan and Husayn

Underneath the above roundels, the date: 'The year 1229 (1815-14)'.

In the cartouche: 'The Banu'

In the panels Qur'an, surah al-Baqara (2), 255

Tughras of Sultan Mahmud (r. 1225-55/1808-39)

W

£40,000-50,000  €75,000-100,000
A CURTAIN FOR THE TOMB OF THE PROPHET IBRAHIM AT MECCA WITH THE TUGHIRA OF SULTAN ABDUL HAMID II (R. 1876-1909)

of tapered rectangular form, the black silk ground with applied red and cream silk panels, embroidered with silver and silver-gilt threads, with foliate cartouches, enclosing Qur’anic inscriptions, a central oblong-shaped cartouche flanked by half-columns against a ground of scrolling foliage, the borders with chevron-shaped leaves and other minor bands.

186 BY 92 CM.

INSCRIPTIONS
In the top panel: Qur’an, surah al-Baqara (2), p. v. 125
The tughril of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1259-1337/1876-1909)
In the middle panel: Qur’an, surah Al’Hajj (22), p. v. 97
In the lobed cartouche: The names God and the Prophet Muhammad
In the lower cartouche: 'Al-Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid Khan ibn al-Sultan, the military campaigner 'Abd al-Majid Khan ibn al-Sultan Mahmud Khan ibn al-Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid Khan'.

£50,000-70,000 €60,000-80,500
A SILK AND METAL THREAD CALLIGRAPHIC BAND (HIZAM)

Of rectangular form, the black silk ground embroidered with silver and silver-gilt metal threads, with a monumental calligraphic frieze, bordered by a band of scrolling foliage.

468 by 7004

INSCRIPTION

Qur'an, surah al-Fath (XLVII), 9 mazālim.

W

£ 50,000 50,000 € 63,000 63,000
AN OTTOMAN EMBROIDERED SILVER AND SILVER-GILT TEXTILE
WITH THE TUGHIRA OF SULTAN ABD AL-MAJID (1255-77/1839-61), DATED 1265/1849-9

of rectangular form, the silver and silver-gilt metal threads embroidered on a cotton-wool ground with a central pointed arch niche enclosing a hanging lamp above the imperial tughra which is set in a floral swastika with paired foliate sprays tied with ribbons at the bottom, the spandrels of the arch with calligraphic roundels or a ground of scrolling foliage, framed at the sides by oblong cartouches enclosing inscriptions with further foliage in the interstices

317 x 212 cm.

INSCRIPTIONS
In the two roundels: The shahada
In the lamps in mirrored form: ya’ suf (for sif, 'O Owner of [all doors].')
In the roundels: Qur’an, surah al-Qasas (CXXI)
The tugha of Sultan ‘Abd al-Majid (1255-77/1839-61).

W
£ 25,000-35,000  $ 51,500-72,000

A SMALL SILK AND METAL THREAD CURTAIN FOR THE TOMB
OF THE PROPHET (HJURAT AL-QUBR AL-NABI AL-SHARI) IN
MEDINA WITH THE TUGHIRA OF SULTAN MAHMUD II
(R. 1225-55/1808-39)

of rectangular form, the green silk ground applied with red calligraphic cartouches and roundels, embroidered with silver and silver-gilt metal threads, with a central five-line inscription below three hanging tassels, at the foot the imperial tughra within a ribboned foliate wreath, the ground scattered with further ribbons and scrolls, with an outer border of undulating palmette scrolls and rosette corner pieces

194 x 97 cm.

INSCRIPTIONS
In the top cartouche: ‘Allahu akbar wa manha nabiyyu Allah wa ittala al-’azama
‘Between my grave and my pulpit lies a grave from the graves of Paradise’
In the panel al-sob al-‘ashab as-syakku ya’ al-shahadah
‘Salutation and Peace upon you O Friend of God!’
In the two roundels: The shahada
In the panel: Qur’an, surah al-Baqara (ii), 285.
The tugha of Sultan Mahmud (1225-55/1808-39).

W
£ 40,000-60,000  $ 51,500-72,000
AN OTTOMAN SILK AND METAL THREAD CURTAIN,
19TH CENTURY

of rectangular form, with red silk ground with panels of applied green and grey silk embroidered with silver and silver gilt threads with a central inscription flanked by two columns, supporting an arched niche with stalactite, the spandrels with calligraphic roundels bordered by a band of repeating eight-pointed stars, at the foot a pair of vases with leafy stems, the border with repeating palmette design.

214 BY 123CM.

INSCRIPTIONS

In the two roundels: The shahada

In the cartouches in the arch, repetition of:

shahīd ya rasūl allāh

Intercession, O Messenger of God!

In the panels: Qur’an, surah al-Ma’yin (60:18), 45

In the tear-shaped cartouche, the name ‘Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Hamid’.

In (I have forgotten to note where), in mirrored form:

Allahu al-ghafir

“God is the Most Forgiving”

W *

£ 50,000-70,000 € 67,000-98,500