Mughal patrons and artists dotted on the world and its inhabitants. No pains were spared to record them realistically in life-oriented pictures, usually of people and animals. The people are exceptional—some of mankind’s most extraordinary worldlings and wisest saints, shown in depth, to be scrutinized inside and out. All the folios reproduced here were made for the Mughal emperors of India or their immediate families during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They were intense essences of their culture, showing emperors and their courts in elaborate settings, scenes of suspense and excitement depicting hunts, demons, and elegant elephants, as well as a group of striking genre scenes in which the subtle rendering of light, learned from European painting, imparts a poetic quality that provides a striking contrast to the highly finished treatment of the royal portraits. The Introduction and Commentaries to the individual folios reproduced here have been provided by Stuart Cary Welch of The Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University.

IMPERIAL MUGHAL PAINTING

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GEORGE BRAZILLER  One Park Avenue, New York 10016

ISBN: 0-8076-0871-8

Printed in Switzerland
IMPERIAL MUGHAL PAINTING
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Acknowledgments

This book would be less interesting and useful without the help of many friends and colleagues. For historical and literary information I am especially grateful to Annemarie Schimmel, Martin R. Dickson, and Wheeler Thackston, who also translated numerous passages of Persian and identified several baffling subjects of pictures. Brian Silver most generously and insightfully translated the Urdu Ghazals of Bahadur Sham II quoted in the Commentary to Plate 40. As usual, I am beholden to Mr. and Mrs. W. G. Archer, Richard Ettinghausen, Ralph Finder-Wilson, Norah Titley, Robert Skefton, and Pramod Chandra, for information both published and by word of mouth. Esin Arıl, Milo Beach, Toby Falk, Ellen Smart, Mark Zehrowski, Sheila Canby, and Joyce Paulsen have also been most kind in offering help, as have Marie Świętochowski and Daniel Walker. I am especially grateful to Seymour Slive of the Fogg Art Museum; Joan Lancaster of the India Office Library; John Irwin and Helen Angus of the Victoria and Albert Museum; Dr. G. M. Morrison, Ernest Anderson and K. J. Ames of the British Library; Ann Walsh, A.C. Butler, and J.G. Burton-Page of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London; Dr. Manfred Kramer of Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt; R.A. May and Rosemary McKendrick of The Bodleian Library; P. Henchey of The Chester Beatty Library; Marie Lawrence of The India Office Library and Records; Fredd Gordon of The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Carl Nölö of the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst; Judy J. Roland and Betty L. Zimmerman of The Cincinnati Art Museum; Jan Fontein of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; as well as the late Harold P. Stern and Thomas Lawton of the Freer Gallery of Art for permission to reproduce masterpieces from their collections.

I would also like to add a special word of thanks to the staff at George Braziller, in particular, Adele Westbrook and Priscilla Truman, for their enthusiasm and combined efforts on behalf of this book.

The author and publishers would like to express their sincere thanks to the following institutions and individuals who kindly provided materials and granted permission to reproduce them in this volume.

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and Picture Fund, Plates 16, 17, 20; Purchased, Arthur Mason Knapp Fund, Plate 39.

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Black-and-White Figures

Boston, Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912

and Picture Fund, Figure V.

Cambridge, Fogg Museum of Art, Figures III, IV.

London, The British Museum, Figure I.

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Figure II.
Foreword

Mughal patrons and artists doted on the world and its inhabitants. No pains were spared to record them realistically in life-oriented pictures mostly of people and animals. The people are exceptional—some of mankind’s quirkiest worldlings and wisest saints, shown in depth, to be scrutinized inside and out, if necessary with a magnifying glass.

All the pictures published here were made for the Mughal emperors or their immediate families. Like the richest cream at the top of the milk, they are intense essences of their culture, to be savored slowly and completely. Everyone can enjoy their virtuosity and naturalism; but the more one learns about Mughal historical and cultural background, the more nourishing the paintings. In this book, I have tried to open wide the Mughal door.
Introduction

Babur (1526–1530)
The founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur, a Muslim of the Sunni sect, was descended on his father’s side from Timur (Tamerlane) and from Chinghiz Khan on his mother’s. He was born in Ferghana (now in Soviet Turkestan) in 1483. When he was scarcely twelve years old, his father was accidentally killed by falling from a pigeon tower. At fourteen his will to carve out a kingdom was set. The dynamic and adventurous young prince forsook Ferghana and led his followers unsuccessfully against Samarkand. After a time of wandering, he won back Ferghana in 1498, and in 1500–1501 he captured Samarkand, which he soon lost to the Uzbeks. His first major success came in 1504, when he captured Kabul and Ghazna, from which he made frequent military forays in the years ahead. Always eager, he led five expeditions through the vulnerable passes of the northwest into Hindustan (northwestern India) between 1519 and 1525, when he crossed the border for the last time, at the head of ten thousand men.

In 1526, his cavalry and artillery defeated the Muslim Sultan of Delhi and the Hindu Raja of Gwalior at Panipat, near Delhi. At Kanhu, a year later, he overwhelmed the combined armies of the remaining Rajput (Hindu) princes, thereby gaining a secure hold on Hindustan. Although Arab, Turkish, and Iranian Muslims had come to India, some to establish dynasties, since the seventh century A.D., Babur’s became the greatest Muslim power in Indian history. Always a warrior, his expansionist policies continued until his final illness in 1530, when he named as heir his son Humayun. Ironically, Babur disliked India and never adjusted to its climate and customs. His remains were buried at Kabul, where Shah Jahan built him a mausoleum in 1656.

Although no works of art can be associated with Babur as patron, his extraordinarily lively autobiography, (the Wazir-i- Baburi, written in Chaghchati Turkish and translated into Persian as the Babur-Nama) reveals his mentality so fully that from it we can imagine how they might have looked. Like his descendants, Babur was deeply concerned with people and nature. His book abounds in vividly insightful descriptions of mankind as well as flora and fauna. Although he was happiest writing prose, his ideas are those of a poet and scientist, a seemingly paradoxical mixture that set the mood for future Mughal art. While the miniature paintings of his Persian forebears can be described as visual equivalents to rhymed verse, views of the world in arabesque, a new concern with naturalism was infused into the tradition by the Mughals, whose pictures are closer to prose.
The Technique of Mughal Miniature Painting

Miniature painters sat on the ground while working, with one knee flexed to support a drawing board. Their technique was deceptively simple: opaque watercolor on paper or occasionally on cotton cloth. Artists learned the trade secrets of their ateliers as apprentices, often from fathers or uncles, as this craft was frequently a family occupation. As children, they were taught how to make balanced, finger-fitting paintbrushes of bird quills set with fine hairs plucked from kittens or baby squirrels. They also learned how to grind mineral pigments, such as malachite (green) and lapis lazuli (blue), in a mortar; how to sort them grain by grain according to purity and brilliance; and how to prepare the aqueous binding medium of gum arabic or glue. Other pigments were made from earths, insect and animal matters, and metals.

To make metallic pigments, gold, silver, and copper were pounded into foil between sheets of leather, after which the foil was ground with rough salt in a mortar. The salt was then washed out with water, leaving behind the pure metal powder. For a cool yellow gold, silver was mixed with it; for a warmer hue, copper was added. Because such pigments as copper oxide were corrosive, the paper was protected from them by a special coating. Some artists, such as Basawan (Plates 6, 8, 12, 13) were particularly admired for their manipulation of gold—which they pricked with a stylus to make it glitter—burnished, or modelled with tinted washes.

Although artists did not make paper, they were connoisseurs of its qualities. Composed of cloth fibres, it varied greatly in thickness, smoothness, and fineness. Akbar's painters of the late sixteenth century preferred highly polished, hard, and creamy papers, while Shah Jahan's artists employed thin, extremely luxurious sorts, possibly made from silk fibres.

A complex, very costly series of steps involving many people was required to make a Mughal painting. Pictorial ideas usually began with the patron, who summoned the appropriate artist (or artists) to carry them out. Several of the most renowned Mughal artists were specialists, such as Govardhan, who was noted for portraits of saints, musicians, and holy men (Plate 24), or Mansur, famed for birds and animals (Plates 26-27). After the painter and patron had conferred, sketches, such as Figure V, were prepared. In this instance, the artist drew from life, which lent his sketch disturbing immediacy. Like others of the sort, it was intended not for the patron but for the workshop, as a model from which to paint, and it did not have to be formal and tidy. Mistakes were scumbled over in white pigment and redrawn.

Later, in the artist's studio, the drawing would either be copied or pounced (traced) onto the thicker paper or cardboard of the finished work (Figure V, Plate 23). Tracing was done with a piece of transparent gauze skin, placed on top of the drawing, the contours of which were then pricked. It was then placed on fresh paper, and black pigment was forced through the pinholes, leaving soft, dark outlines to be reinforced and clarified by brush drawing. Sometimes, the original drawing included notations of colors, in words or washes of pigment.

Unfinished paintings reveal the progress from bare paper to thin outlining in black or reddish brown ink and to the many stages of coloring, which was built up layer by layer to enamel-like thickness. Usually, gold highlights were the last step before burnishing. Burnishing was done by laying the miniature upside down on a hard smooth surface and gently but firmly stroking it with a polished agate or crystal, a process comparable to varnishing an oil painting, which provided protective hardening and gave an overall unity of texture.

The length of time it took to accomplish all this varied according to the painting and period when it was done. Robert Skelton and Ellen Smart discovered a small marginal inscription on an illustration to the Babur-Nama stating that Ram Das worked on its fifty years (see Figure II). Other paintings published here must have taken considerably longer. After the artist had finished his picture and shown it to the patron, who had probably overseen its progress step by step, it was turned over to other specialists to be trimmed, mounted on splendidly illuminated borders, and bound into a book or album, according to imperial wishes. Occasionally, pictures were mounted on walls (Plate 17).

The social position of artists varied greatly. Akbar himself learned to paint as a child; and some of the artists were aristocratic courtiers who also served in diplomatic or other governmental capacities. Most court painters, however, were revered but humble craftsmen, whose talents had earned them privileged positions near the throne. A few, such as Jahangir's favorite artist, Abu'l Hasan, who was honored with the title "Wonder of the Age," grew up in the royal household.

Paradoxically, the lot of artists was often more secure, and probably happier, than that of princes. Artists painted on and on, from one reign to the next, while royalty rose to dizzy pinnacles of wealth and power, too often only to be imprisoned or murdered. Since all but a few Mughal rulers were keenly interested in painting, artists were generously rewarded. Salaries must have been ample, and when a prince was especially pleased, presents were lavish. Bichitr painted himself in the foreground of a picture (Plate 22) holding a miniature of an elephant and a horse, gifts no doubt from Jahangir.

Nasir-ud-din Muhammad Humayun (1530–1556)

The first documented patron of Mughal painting, Humayun, was a puzzling and intriguing figure. An inheritor rather than a founder, albeit of a retiring empire, he was less charismatic than his father, more formal and reserved, gentler, and more concerned with protocol. But he was also a gifted general on occasion, as when he defeated Bahadur Shah in Gujarat in 1555.

Characteristically, however, he leaped into triumphant pleasure at Agra
instead of pushing ahead. Wine, opium, and ease were Humayun’s (and his dynasty’s) temptations. Much energy was also expended directing highly complicated astrological schemes. He commissioned a huge tent, with compartments for each month, where his courtiers could gather according to astrological signs. He also possessed a large carpet with nine astrological circles, each named after a star, where courtiers stood according to rank. When his son Akbar was born, astrologers gave a reading so favorable that he danced for joy.

His own horoscope was less auspicious. For kindly, gentlemanly Humayun’s reign was usually ill-fated. His brothers, Hindal Mirza and Kamran, were constant threats; worse still were the Afghans, led by Sher Khan, an erstwhile noble of Babur’s who seized Bengal and challenged Humayun for the rest of Hindustan. After driving Humayun back to Agra in 1539, the Afghan chief assumed the title of Sher Shah. As dynamic and ambitious as Humayun was fatalistic and dormant, Sher Shah forced the Mughal emperor to flee towards the Punjab, after a second defeat at Bilgram. At this critical moment, Mirza Kamran—dependably nasty—blocked off the Punjab and Kabul, forcing Humayun into Sind, where Akbar was born in 1542. After two years of miserable wandering, Humayun was given refuge in Iran by the Safavi ruler, Shah Tahmasp.

The Shah’s generosity to Humayun was probably motivated by politics and religion. As a Shah Muslim threatened by Sunni powers (the Ottomans to the West, the Uzbek to the East), he was keen to gain a strong Shah ally by converting the Mughal emperor to his sect. To secure military and economic support for his reconquest of Hindustan, Humayun probably met the Shah’s terms. Aided by the Safavis in 1545, he captured Qandahar, the strategic fortress at the gateway to India which remained a bone of contention between Safavis and Mughals (Plate 53). Although he had agreed to return it to the Safavis, after garrisoning Qandahar, Humayun moved on to Kabul, which he captured from Mirza Kamran. As this brother persisted in his treachery, Humayun blinded him at the insistence of his nobles in 1555.

Two years later, when the Afghan power had broken down in India following Sher Shah’s death, Humayun recaptured Agra and Delhi. Seven months later, he tripped on the stairway of Sher Shah’s library and fell to his death. Humayun’s twenty-five year reign, ten of it spent in exile, left the Mughal empire scarcely stronger than it had been at the death of Babur.

Humayun’s visit to the Safavi court in 1548 was as crucial to art history as to the empire. While there, he admired the brilliant paintings by Shah Tahmasp’s artists (see Welch, Persian Painting, Brazillier, 1976, especially Plates 1, 19, 28, 29). By happenstance, Shah Tahmasp’s inspiring patronage of painting was then being replaced by more “responsible” interests, and in 1546 Humayun was able to summon two Safavi artists. These were Mir Sayyid ‘Ali, whose artist father Mir Musavvar followed later, and Abd us-Samad, both of whom left Tabriz along with a bookbinder and a mathematician in the summer of 1548. They first went to Qandahar, where they waited for a year while Humayun fought Kamran, until a full in the war enabled Humayun to have them escorted to Kabul. They arrived there in November 1549 and were kept busy until the march to Hindustan five years later, in November of 1554.

Humayun’s choice of Abd us-Samad and especially Mir Sayyid ‘Ali was consistent with the tendencies to naturalism already apparent in Babur’s prose. Of all Shah Tahmasp’s artists, Mir Sayyid ‘Ali was the sharpest and most accurate observer, sparing no pains to record the precise shape and texture of fur or metal or the odd bumps of a nose. He was also a brilliant designer of arabesque, who shared his father’s genius for abstracting figures into stunningly ornamental patterns. Unfortunately, the Mir’s artistic wizardry was accompanied by a moody and suspicious temperament.

Less gifted, but far more flexible and adaptable was Abd us-Samad, whose Moghul phase was far longer and more productive. Paintings by him from the Kabul period reveal that he soon began to adjust his Safavi style to conform to the growing Moghul desire for accurate portraiture and anecdotal reportage.

Although it is unsigned, damaged, and considerably repainted, The House of Timur (Figure 1) can be recognized as Abd us-Samad’s work at Kabul or in India just after the return. Grand in scale, sumptuous in color, and a total reflection of Humayun’s royal taste, this picture on cotton is the major monument of early Moghul art. Apparently, it continued to be highly regarded, for it was brought up to date by the addition of portraits of three generations of Humayun’s heirs.

Abul Fath Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar (1556-1605)

Without Akbar, the Mughal empire and its art would be known only to specialists. The empire’s re-founder, he was one of India’s wisest and mightiest rulers, whose energy and inspiration sparked his followers to peak performances. When Humayun died, Prince Akbar, although not yet fourteen, was already soldiering in the field, having been sent to the mountains with an army to expel the ex-king, Sikander Shah Afghan. Bairam Khan, one of his father’s ablest generals, improvised a throne on which the boy began his reign. Later, as regent, Bairam Khan brought stability to the shaky kingdom and enabled the young ruler to grow with some degree of tranquility. But Akbar resented domination, even at fourteen. Physically dynamic and adventurous in spirit, he balked at many of the subjects usually taught princes, so preferring hunting and wrestling to reading that he remained illiterate. His son, Jahangir, reminisced that Akbar “always associated with the learned of every creed and religion . . . and so much became clear to him through constant intercourse with the learned and the wise . . . that no one knew him to be illiterate, and he was so well acquainted with the niceties of verse and prose composition that this deficiency was not thought of.” Jahangir’s lively
like the people of the world, and the glory of God manifested itself in him. Notwithstanding his kingship, his treasures, and his buried wealth past com-utation, his fighting elephants and Arab horses, he never by a hair's breadth placed his foot beyond the base of humility before the throne of God, and never for one moment forgot Him. He associated with the good of every race and creed and persuasion, and he was gracious to all in accordance with their condition and understanding. He passed his nights in wakefulness, and slept little in the day; the length of his sleep during the whole night and the day was not more than a watch and a half. He counted his wakefulness at night as so much added to his life. His courage and boldness were such that he could mount raging, rutting elephants and subdue to obedience murderous elephants which would not allow their own females near them.” (Jahangir’s Memoirs, tr. by Rogers and Beveridge, London, 1914, pp. 53–54).

Although Jahangir’s recollections are of Akbar in full maturity, Akbar the boy must have been similarly magnetic, powerful, and effective. In 1556, at Panipat, his army defeated Hemu, the Hindu general of the Surs, who was dragged before him with an arrow skewered through an eye and out the back of his skull. The Mughals were never squeamish, but it must have been a terrible moment when Bajiram Khan urged his young ruler to prove his valor by hacking off Hemu’s head. Whether or not he did so, Akbar’s view of Bajiram Khan was changing from boyish hero worship to the discontent of a young man eager to be his own master. In 1560, Akbar broke his shackles by sending the general on a pilgrimage to Mecca. En route, Bajiram Khan was killed by revengeful Afghans.

But this death did not fully free the young king. In Bajiram Khan’s place, a many-headed dragon of harem ladies became powers behind the throne for four more years. Coping with them, in addition to leading armies, organizing a state, and supervising the multifarious activities of a burgeoning culture, must have been frustrating indeed. It is no wonder that the young Akbar often tempted fate by subjecting himself to outrageous dangers, such as the one depicted in Plates 12 and 13, where he is shown riding an enraged elephant across a bridge of boars. In later years, he explained such madcap deeds to his friend and biographer Abu’l Faiz by saying that he deliberately risked death so that if God disapproved of his acts He could take his life.

A practical visionary, Akbar was amplified by at least two mystical experiences. The first took place when he was twenty, in 1562. Like Saint Paul, he was riding a horse that stumbled; although no engulfing flash of light was reported in Abu’l Faiz’s account of the incident, “He, the wise and foreseeing one, regarded this as a message from God, and prostrated himself in devotion. A new foundation was laid for Divine worship.” (‘Ain-i-Akbari, “Mode of Governing,” vol. III, p. 338.)

At this time, Akbar took several steps crucial to the success of his empire. He overcame the clique of harem ladies, prohibited the enslavement of Hindu prisoners of war, allowed Hindus to occupy important governmental
posts, abolished a tax on pilgrims in 1563, and a year later did away with the jizya, a poll tax on non-Muslims. In 1562, he also married a Hindu princess, the daughter of Raja Bihari Mal of Amber.

All of these steps were radically at odds with Orthodox Muslim opinion. That he took them proves that he was ruling with full confidence and realized that the rift between Muslims and Hindus was the empire’s greatest cause of disunity. Rajputs (Hindus of the warrior caste) were now more willing to serve the imperial cause, and further marital alliances with them brought Akbar powerful Rajput brothers-in-law, along with their armies. His military successes read like a grand tour: 1558, Gwalior; 1560–62, Malwa; 1561, Jaunpur; 1568, Chitor; 1573, Gujrat; 1585, Kabul; 1586, Kashmir; 1592, Orissa; 1594, Baluchistan and Maran; 1595, Sind; 1596, Berar; and in 1600, several parts of Ahmadnagar in the Deccan.

With devious practicality, Akbar appointed Rajputs to high positions; and once they had tasted Mughal power, he controlled them by the carrot and stick policy. Loyal service earned promotions and enjoyable positions, such as the right to sound kettledrums or to wear precious ornaments; uncooperativeness courted disaster. Akbar realized the danger of united Rajput opposition, which could have driven the Mughals from Hindustan, and played upon the traditional rivalries among the Rajput clans, such as the Haras and Rathors. Moreover, he made it impossible for Mughal noblemen, whether Hindu or Muslim, to pass on power and wealth. At death, all lands, gold, elephants, horses, gems, etc. reverted to the crown; and only if the emperor approved were the heirs permitted to inherit any part of their estates.

Rajputs and Muslims, however, were not the only members of Akbar’s circle, nor were all his close associates Indian born. Word spread throughout the Muslim world that Akbar welcomed men of ability to his court. Poets, musicians, soldiers, theologians, painters, merchants, and others seeking fortunes were drawn from Turkey, Iran, and Arabia. Adventurers came from as far afield as Europe and Africa to add their talents to Akbar’s cosmopolitan glittering court.

The emperor also sought talent at home from all religious groups and ranks of society. He chose Raja Todar Mal, a Hindu of the business caste, as his revenue officer. Raja Birbal, a Brahmin, became one of Akbar’s favorite companions, the so-called nauroza on Nine Jewels. Known for his wit and poetry, this man of religious background was one of the first to join Akbar’s new sect, the Dini-Islami or Divine Faith, another part of the imperial plan for the unification of India’s disparate religious groups.

The Divine Faith probably grew from theological discussions held in a special hall at Fatehpur Sikri, the “City of Victory” founded by Akbar in 1563. Zoroastrians, Jains, Hindus and Muslims of all sects, and Christians joined in these serious all-night conversations, during which the emperor’s questions must have been as upsetting as they were penetrating.

Although his close associates joined, the Divine Faith was never a popular success and perhaps was not intended to be.

Akbar’s projects were always purposeful; however diverse, all contributed to his grand imperial scheme. The translation into Persian of such Hindu religious works as the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Harivansa (Plate 10) was intended to enlighten the Muslims of the empire and to further bridge the gap between them and the Hindus.

Although illiterate, Akbar loved books, particularly illustrated ones. His vast library included volumes that would now be catalogued as history, with particular emphasis on his own dynasty: natural history; medicine, including veterinary; anthropology; comparative religions; mathematics; engineering; military strategy; government; astrology; astronomy; and literature. The final volume of the Ain contains sections on the arts of writing and painting, sandwiched between discussions of shawls and stuffs and the royal arsenal.

Abul Fazl quotes the emperor’s opinion of painting: “There are many that hate painting: but such men I dislike. It appears to me as if a painter had quite peculiar means of recognizing God; for a painter in sketching everything that has life, and in devising its limbs, one after the other, must come to feel that he cannot bestow individuality upon his work, and is thus forced to think of God, the giver of life, and will thus increase his knowledge.” (Ain, p. 115). In his discussions of Akbar’s thoughts on literature, Abul Fazl offers an apt description that can be equally applied to his taste in painting: “Most old authors who string out their words..., and display a worn-out embroidery, give all their attention to the ornamentation of words, and regard matter as subservient to them, and so exert themselves in a reverse direction. They consider cadence and decorative style as the constituents of eloquence and think that prose should be tricked out like the works of poets.”

A small percentage of Akbar’s artists was inherited, including the Tabriz masters Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd as-Samad, who were put in charge of training many new ones. Akbar especially admired Hindu painters whose pictures, many can be linked on stylistic grounds to earlier Rajput and Muslim styles, from Rajasthan, the Deccan, Central India, and elsewhere. (For a comprehensive study of the manuscript see Pranod Chandra, The Tuti-nama of the Cleveland Museum of Art, Graz, 1976.)
The most remarkable artistic project from Akbar’s reign is the *Hamzanama* ("Tales of Hamza"), a series of giant pictures on cotton describing the fabulous adventures of Amir Hamza, an uncle of the Prophet. The paintings are perfect visual equivalents of Akbar’s surging spirit during the years when he had taken full control of the government and was advancing his schemes with godlike energy and intelligence. A picture such as *Mirdasht’s Escape* (Plate 2) fairly bursts from the page. Water seethes and pounds, men dash, and the heroine gestures with theatrical bravado. Even the rocks are dynamic, recalling Abu’l Fazl’s claim that “even inanimate objects look as if they had life.” (‡’n, pp. 113–114)

An important category of Akbar’s paintings are illustrations to de luxe volumes of the literary classics, of which an early example is *The Ape Outsmarts Thieves* (Plate 4) of 1570. Later examples are Plates 8, 9, and 11. Such pictures were invariably assigned to the most admired artists, working unassisted. But while these miniatures can be ranked as the atelier’s “masterpieces,” they are not necessarily the most exciting. Outstanding artists also worked on less refined projects, such as the copiously illustrated historical manuscripts that described not only Mughal history but also its precursors in the Islamic world. Perhaps the earliest surviving manuscript of this sort is a dispersed *Baburnama* (the Persian translation of Babur’s autobiography) of about 1580, the year when the Khan Khuman, one of Akbar’s most literary nobles, completed the translation. *Babur Receiving Uzbek and Rajput Envoys in a Garden at Agra* (Figure II) contains one of the most believable portraits of the founding emperor in his favorite garden surroundings, receiving envoys at Agra in 1528 from the Safavids, Uzbeks, and Rajputs. As usual under such circumstances at the Mughal court, robes of honor, gold and silver, and richly worked swords and daggers were presented to the guests.

More dramatic and immediate is *Akbar Restraints Hawai’i* (Plates 12–13), from another dispersed manuscript, the emperor’s own copy of Abu’l Fazl’s *Akbarnama*. As usual in Akbar’s historical subjects, this magnificent composition was designed by a major artist, in this case Basawan, assisted by a lesser hand, here Chitra. The division of labor, however, was not lightly prescribed, and it is evident that even minor passages of this miniature were fully painted as well as designed by Basawan himself.

Not all of Akbar’s pictures illustrated manuscripts. Many were made as independent compositions to be kept in albums. Some were animal studies. One such, among the earliest Mughal animal studies, is *Cow and Calf*, ascribable on stylistic grounds to Basawan (Figure III). More common at this time, however, were portraits of courtiers and others who interested the emperor. According to Abu’l Fazl, “His majesty himself sat for his likeness, and also ordered to have the likenesses taken of all the grandees of the realm. An immense album was thus formed: those that have passed away have received a new life, and those who are still alive have immortality promised
them." A portrait of a stout Muslim nobleman with bristling mustachios,
cragsy profile, and a wrestler's proportions probably belonged to this album
(Figure IV).

Akbar's last years were soured by the rebelliousness of his son, Prince
Salim (later Jahangir) who was impatient to rule. After 1600, he assumed
royal prerogatives, and he once marched with a threatening army from Alla-
halad, where he was governor, towards the capital. Akbar was so alarmed
that he ordered Abu'il Fazl to come from the Deccan to his aid. No con-
frontation took place; but after Abu'il Fazl threatened him, Salim promised
favors to Bir Singh Deo, the Raja of Orcha, if he would assassinate his
father's biographer and closest friend. A deadly ambush took place in August
of 1602. Abu'il Fazl's severed head was sent to Salim, who tossed it into a privy.

It says much for Akbar that he spared Salim after such cruel behavior. For
a time, he considered bypassing Salim in favor of his other surviving son,
Danyal, in spite of the latter's serious addiction to alcohol, the family vice.
Fortunately for Salim, Danyal died in 1604, after taking a final quaff smug-
gled to him in a rusty gun barrel. Salim's path to the throne was now clear.

Akbar's final illness began in September 1605, not long after his portrait
was painted by Manohar (Plate 13). A month later, Salim ventured to his
father's deathbed. Akbar "opened his eyes and signed (to his attendants)
that they invest Salim with the turban and robes which had been prepared
for him, and to gird him with his own dagger. The attendants prostrated
themselves and did honor; at the same moment that sovereign, whose sins
are forgiven, bowed himself also and closed his life." (Asad Beg, quoted by
Elliot and Dowson, vol. VI, pp. 169–172.)

Nur-sud-din Muhammed Jahangir (1605–27)
On his accession, Prince Salim took the name Jahangir (the "World-
Seizer"). He was the first Mughal ruler to inherit an empire worthy of the
name. His Memoirs (the Tuzuk-i-Jahangir) reveal him as a very human
autocrat capable of touching kindness, occasional fickleness, outstanding aesthetic judgment, and endless curiosity. When he saw the imperial elephants
shivering at their winter baths, he ordered that their water be warmed. One
of his most charming buildings was a memorial to a pet antelope. But he was
not a sentimentalist, and his hard-headed curiosity probed everywhere: when
the milk of a particular camel pleased him, he investigated its diet and had
the same mixture of cow's milk, fodder, and herbs given an entire herd. And
when a huntsman cut open the stomach of a game-bird he had shot and
showed him its repellent contents, he resolved never to eat another. Court-
tiers eager to please brought him strange news or unusual presents, such as
exotic animals (Plate 27), European jewels or art, and oddments of nature.
One of his daggers had a hilt of meteor.

In the Memoirs, he describes a hermaphroditic cat capable of both siring
and bearing kittens. Less fruitful was the mating of a yogi with a tiger.
Another holy man, however, was taken far more seriously. Jahangir visited Jadu, a breach-clouted hermit who lived in a tiny mud hut, and talked with him intimately and at length. On taking leave, Jahangir embraced him, much to the distress of his more orthodox courtiers.

Too often dismissed as a pleasure-loving dilettante of the arts, Jahangir in fact served his nation well. It prospered and was largely at peace during his reign; most of Jahangir’s days were spent receiving visitors, administering justice, and attending to sundry imperial chores. To make himself available, he ordered that a rope attached to a bell be put within reach of those in need.

Although he dallied with a full harem of concubines and dancing girls, Jahangir was particularly devoted to one wife, Nur Jahan. She was born as Mehrunissa, the daughter of a Persian courtier who had risen in Akbar’s service. Mehrunissa was first married to Sher Afkon, a soldier of fortune who was killed in Bengal. After her death, she returned to the imperial court as lady-in-waiting to one of Akbar’s widows. At a bazaar held by the court ladies in 1611, she was sighted by Jahangir, who married her two months later. The titles he gave her, first Nur Mahal (“Light of the Palace”) and later Nur Jahan (“Light of the World”) are perhaps some indication of her ambition. With her she brought both her father, who had been honored with the title Imam-ul-Daulah (“Pillar of Government”) and Asaf Khan, her brother. The trio soon became the most powerful faction in the empire. Moreover, their influence lingered. For Prince Khurram, Jahangir’s eldest son, who was to rule as Shah Jahan, married Nur Jahan’s niece, the daughter of Asaf Khan. He was later rewarded with the position of chief minister after maneuvering Shah Jahan’s succession. Still later his son, Shuja‘t Khan, held high posts under Aurangzeb, Shah Jahan’s son and successor.

Greatly interested in the arts, Nur Jahan commissioned one of the most elegant of all Mughal buildings as her father’s tomb. She was also a taste-setter in costume and perfume, a benevolent empress admired for providing dowries to needy girls, and a crack shot. Intrigue, however, was probably her greatest interest, and to follow her plots and sub-plots for and against potential inheritors of Jahangir’s throne would require more words than we have. Notwithstanding her deviousness, she seems to have been truly devoted to Jahangir, whom she kept happy by every means she could, down to screening his dancing girls to make sure that they were sufficiently charming to please but not so charming as to endanger her own position. Although she earned the enmity of many rivals, and in the end she was outsmarted by her own brother in behalf of Shah Jahan, she remained a loyal wife, and her widows, spent in the shadow of Jahangir’s tomb built by her near Lahore, was impeccable.

Jahangir died at fifty-eight, while encamped between Kashmir and Lahore. He had been failing for several years, apparently from a weak heart worsened by too much wine and opium, too much love-making, and the constant
strain of family intrigues. Not long before he died, he was kidnapped while leaving his bathroom. The villain was Mahabat Khan, a former friend and general who could no longer stomach Nur Jahan's slights. Although the affair fizzled out and no one was impaled or even hurt, it must have been exhausting. More deeply disturbing was the continuing rebelliousness of Shah Jahan, the crown prince and onetime favorite, who had also been alienated by Nur Jahan's schemes. In Jahangir's Memoirs, his rise and fall can be traced by changes of name: at birth he became Khurram ("Joyous"); in 1616, after he had subdued Mewar, the most turbulent of the Rajput principalities, he rose to Shah Khurram; a year later, following a diplomatic triumph in the Deccan, he was further elevated to Shah Jahan ("King of the World"); but from the time of his revolt in 1622, he was referred to as Bi-bulat ("Wretch"). Sadly, father and son never reconciled their differences and never again met.

Except possibly through his Memoirs, Jahangir is most accessibly and appealingly known through his paintings. It Jahangir's life at times reads like the plot of a romantic melodrama, his paintings reveal him as dead-earnest. They often give the impression of having been coaxed by stroke, with each painted smile or scowl master-minded by the art-loving ruler. Preferring quality to quantity, and lacking his father's protean penchant for grandiose imperial projects, Jahangir greatly reduced the staff of the royal studios soon after his accession. This spread the Mughal style far and wide and enabled Jahangir to concentrate his attention on a small number of favored masters. As governor of Allahabad, he had maintained busy studios which included several of the artists who now blossomed under his imperial patronage. Prior to 1605, Jahangir's artists had already diverged from the more vigorous but less refined path of Akbar. They had been encouraged to paint with increased verisimilitude and subtlety, with softer colors, less turbulent rhythms, and more harmonious designs. Characterizations of both people and animals were gaining in depth and complexity.

As in Akbar's time, artists illustrated literary classics and histories of the reign (Plates 16-18); they painted animal studies (Plates 25-27), and portraits (Plates 19-24, 28, 29). But under Jahangir, the ongoing, objective, purposeful encouragement of painting was replaced by a more private vision. The subjects of Jahangir's pictures are often as quirky as his Memoirs. We can no more imagine Akbar asking his artists to record the last moments of a dying man (Figure V, Plate 25) than we can envision Jahangir commissioning a picture of a Hindu god in order to encourage religious toleration among his Muslim courtiers (Plate 10). Nor would Akbar have directed his painters to illustrate fulfilling allegorical pictures based upon his own dreams (Plate 21). It would also have been unlike him to set such consciously art-historical tasks as adding a self-portrait of an artist painting a scribe at work to the colophon page of a favorite manuscript (Plate 19); or the "translation" of less viable figures in Persian miniatures by totally repainting them as realistic Mughal ones.

Jahangir's interest in painting was passionate and connoisseurly. "As regards myself," he wrote, "my liking for painting and my practice in judging it have arrived at such a point that when any work is brought before me, either of deceased artists or of those of the present day, without the names being told me I say on the spur of the moment that it is the work of such and such a man. And if I have a picture containing many portraits, and each face be the work of a different master, I can discover which face is the work of each of them. If any other person has put in the eye and eyebrow of a face, I can perceive whose work the original face is, and who has painted the eye and eyebrow." (Memoirs, II, pp. 20, 21.) On the sixth of August in 1616, when Sir Thomas Roe, the English ambassador, had given Jahangir a painting that he "was confident that noe man in India could equall," the emperor boasted that one of his artists could make a "COPY of the like it that I should not know myne owne." That night, "he sent for mee, being hasty to triumph in his workmen, and shewed me 6 Pictures, 5 made by his man, all pasted on one table (cardboard), so like that I was by candle-light troubled to discern which was which . . . ." Pleased with his artist's success, Jahangir "was very

Shahab-ud-din Muhammad Sahib Qiran Sani Shah Jahan (1628–1658)
Like his father, Prince Khurram was born of a Rajput mother. His early years were spent at the court of Akbar, who admired him above all his other grandchildren and at whose deathbed Khurram remained to the end. Intelligent and effective, he was responsible as a young prince for many of the military successes during his father’s reign. Although he was first betrothed at fourteen, when he also received his first military rank and the right as eldest son to pitch a red tent, he did not marry Mihrun-Nisa (Nur Mahal, “Light of the Palace”), daughter of Asaf Khan and niece of Nur Jahan, until 1612. Best known as Mumtaz Mahal, she was as devoted to Khurram as her aunt, Nur Jahan, was to Jahangir. But unlike her aunt, she avoided intrigue. She bore fourteen children, among whom were: 1614, Jahanara; 1615, Dara Shikoh; 1616, Shah Shuja; 1617, Roshanara Begum; 1618, Aurangzeb; 1624, Murad Bakhsh; and 1631, Gauhar Ara Begum, at whose birth she died. The Taj Mahal (1632–48) was built as her tomb.

Although the tranquility of Shah Jahan’s reign was marred by occasional rebellions and wars with the Safavids over Qandahar (Plate 33), it was notably peaceful and prosperous until his serious illness in 1657.

In that year, the fear that he might die sparked the wars of succession, one of the most tragic and destructive phases of Mughal history, in which brother was pitted against brother in a contest of military strength, intrigue, and duplicity. Shah Jahan’s favorite son, Dara Shikoh, whose religious tolerance was unattuned to the spirit of the time, lost to the orthodox and militarily effective Aurangzeb. In 1658, after imprisoning Shah Jahan in the fort at Arga (where he died at seventy-six in 1666), Aurangzeb assumed the throne as Alamgir I.

Since the beginning of Akbar’s region, the Mughal ethos had gradually become more rigid. In religion, Akbar’s inspired toleration of non-Muslims and encouragement of hootodoxy was lessening towards the end of his reign, and this trend gained momentum during the seventeenth century. Symptoms of this tightening can be found in all aspects of Mughal life and thought. They are clearly visible in paintings, as can be seen by comparing the sweeping dynamism of pages from the Hauza-nama (Plates 1–3) with the tranquil harmonies of The Birth of a Prince (Plate 16). A further step towards crystalline coldness is apparent in a double-page miniature from the Shah Jahan-nama, the last great Mughal historical manuscript. Appropriately, this tautly disciplined composition shows a gathering of the religious orthodoxy prior to the marriage of Prince Dara Shikoh (Plates 31–32). Had one of Akbar’s courtiers wandered into such a scene, he would have found the atmosphere stifling.

Human beings, and particularly artists, however, continued to find ways to express their inner freedom. While Prince Dara Shikoh’s recklessly unorthodox views cost him his life (he was executed as a heretic after a formal trial by the judges of the realm), Payag the painter was able to vent his wilder moods in a battle scene notable for sturm und drang (Plate 33). Moreover, the deep romantic love of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal is paralleled in a painting by Bahadur of Shah Shuja gazing into the eyes of his wife (Plate 35).

‘Alamgir I and the Later Emperors
Abu’l Fazr Muhi-ud-din Muhammad Aurangzeb ‘Alamgir (1658–1707)
’Azam Shah (1707)
Kam Baksh (1707)
Mu’azzam Shah ‘Alam I, Bahadur Shah (1707–1712)
’Azim-ush Shah (1712)
Mu’izz-ud-din Jahan Dar Shah (1712–1713)
Muhammad Farrukhabad (1713–1719)
Rahul-ud-darajat (1719)
Rahul-ud-daulah, Shah Jahan II (1719)
Muhammad Shah (1719–1748)
Ahmad Shah (1748–1754)
‘Aziz-ud-din ‘Alamgir II (1754–1759)
Shah Jahan III (1759)
Ibrahim Baksh (1788–1806)
Akbar Shah II (1806–1837)
Bahadur Shah II (1837–1858)

Shah Jahan’s third and hardiest son, ‘Alamgir I, brought the Mughal empire to its peak of power and wealth after conquering the Sultanates of the Deccan in the late seventeenth century. In so doing, however, he overextended its boundaries, and his reversal of Akbar’s religious policies so offended the Rajputs and other Hindus that many turned from friends into foes. He was brilliantly unwise and often ruthless, but he was also known for his gentleness of manner, thoughtfulness, and piety. A zealously orthodox Sunni, he copied out Qur’ans, tore down Hindu temples, and built mosques. He was the busiest of all Mughal emperors. Before he died at ninety, he realized that his policies had in fact weakened rather than strengthened the empire.

At once the upholder and victim of orthodoxy, his legalistic position forced him to turn against such arts as dance, music, and painting. Although his portrait with a son and Shaista Khan (Plate 37) and a hunting scene (Plate 38) are among the finest Mughal pictures of their genre and suggest that he had a true feeling for the art, by 1608, when he promulgated restrictive religious ordinances, he virtually closed the royal ateliers. As at the beginning of Jahangir’s reign—although for quite different reasons—impe-
rial Mughal artists spread to other courts.

Further wars of succession followed the death of Auranzeb in 1707. And while Bahadur Shah I won and survived a short reign, most later Mughal history can be seen as a peculiar nightmare, unwinding like a crazed film with a cast of thousands. Ambitious, greedy courtiers became king-makers; dancing girls played tinsel Nur Jahan’s; wrestlers and buffoons assumed noble titles; plump adolescents occupied thrones—until they were strangled, to be replaced by slender puppets.

As in the past, weakness attracted predators. But the pace quickened, and most of the personalities in this grand tragicomedy lacked dignity. Freebooters from the Deccan, Maharashtra, and England joined the chaotic struggle for power once restricted to Rajput princes and Muslim noblemen. Imperial eyes were gouged out with penknives; royal bodies were carted unceremoniously from the palace. Towards the end, princes fought over bits of chapatti (flat bread).

Occasionally the empire fared better. Even when the government had collapsed, Mughal literature, art, and manners were respected and emulated. Muhammad Shah, whose reign was interrupted by Nadir Shah’s invasion and looting, was a gifted musician with a keen eye for painting. An imperial artist painted his slightly bovine form being carried through a delightful garden (Plate 39); and while the silhouetted flowers and vivid rainclouds are more perceptively handled than the emperor’s mask-like face, it was probably not a good time to scrutinize imperial countenances.

Mostly due to Akbar’s extraordinary formula for government, the Mughal empire took a long time to die. The central power somehow withstood wave after wave of attacks. As the structure gave way, strong nobles created their own domains, in Bengal, Oudh, and Hyderabad, where new schools of painting, based on the imperial tradition, flourished. Even at the center, artists continued to paint up-to-date versions of the traditional hunts and court scenes, although such costly pigments as lapis lazuli were in ever shorter supply.

A final Mughal portrait shows the last emperor. Bahadur Shah II, accompanied by two of his sons, seated beneath Shah Jahan’s marble scales of justice (Plate 40). The girt lions of the throne now resemble puddles and the emperor himself has taken on a look of disembodied spirituality, with the deeply set eyes of some Byzantine saint. His dignity remains, however, and it is heartening to know that while more than a century has passed since he was exiled to Burma by the British, musicians still sing his verses in Delhi.

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