The peacock rushes forward, intent upon the small snake in his beak. Excited, the hen twists her neck, eyeing the squirming morsel. Mansur, to whom this unsigned masterpiece has long been ascribed on grounds of style, must have started this picture from life, perhaps while crouched in a thicket, where he drew in the birds' elusive gestures. To catch every nuance of the peacock's sinewy rear leg, he sketched and resketched it, covering over his mistakes in white. The effect is spontaneous and convincing.

Later, in the workshop, he completed the picture, more concerned with artistic effects than naturalism. Inspired by the "eyes" of the tail feathers, he painted dazzling plumage, with golden highlights brilliant as fireworks. Piling on the richest lapis lazuli, he painted the bird's roundly feathered neck, modelling it with darker washes, and lending it iridescence with almost invisible strokes of vermilion.

The landscape, with its delightfully conventionalized trees and flowers, must also have been improvised in the studio. Distant hills and rocky cliffs, still faintly suggestive of hidden grotesques, recall earlier examples (Plates 2,5). The ornamental patterns of trees and flowers twist, turn, and soar in sympathy with the peafowl. Partly grounded in nature, partly fanciful, this miniature's total effect is wholly lyrical.
PLATE 27

A Zebra

When Jahangir was given this "exceedingly strange" animal, the first to reach his extensive zoo, he described it in his Memoirs (vol. II, p. 291). Because it was so odd, "some people imagined that it had been colored . . . (but) after minute inquiry into the truth, it became known that the lord of the world was the creator thereof." Later, "as it was a rarity, it was included among the royal gifts sent to my brother Shah 'Abbas" (Plate 21).

The painter is thus described in the Memoirs: "Ustad ("Master") Mansur has become such a master in painting that he has the title of Nadir al-'Asr, and in the art of drawing is unique in his generation. In the time of my father's reign and my own, these two (Abu'l Hasan and Mansur) have had no third." (Memoirs, vol. II, p. 20). Elsewhere in the Memoirs he mentions commissioning Mansur to paint a water-bird known as a Saj (op. cit., p. 157), a falcon (op. cit. p. 108), and says that the artist has painted more than one hundred of the flowers of Kashmir (op. cit. p. 145).

When the emperor described this artist as unique "in the art of drawing" his words were carefully chosen; for surviving pictures by Mansur suggest that unlike Abu'l Hasan, who was a painterly artist, Mansur was a draughtsman whose pictures are invariably drawn and tinted rather than conceived and executed more coloristically. The delightful border, a spiralling arabesque of vines and blossoms, was added to the painting before it was bound into one of the royal albums.
PLATE 28

A Rustic Concert

Leading through Jahangir's or Shah Jahan's albums, one would have come upon folios of calligraphy by contemporary or earlier scribes, portraits of the royal family, miniatures removed from Persian or Mughal manuscripts, European prints, animal studies, and pictures such as this, showing musicians performing in the countryside. For the emperor, most of whose life was spent in the formal ambiance of the court, these genre subjects must have been refreshing, vicarious strolls into a more relaxed orbit.

Akbar had commissioned such subjects, the origin of which can be traced to the studies of servants in the House of Timur (Figure 1). But European example further spurred Mughal artists in this direction, which was a specialty of Govardhan. This portrayal of musicians performing for a holy man, right, and his servant (?) is particularly indebted to Europe in the handling of a distant landscape. Paradoxically, this imported idea enabled Govardhan to paint one of the most Indian of scenes. Beyond the tents, the panorama includes thatched-roofed village houses, elephants, a horse cart, and many other nostalgic observations from life.

In discussing Plate 24, also by Govardhan, we have considered his characterizations in very general terms. Minor clues to his style are also helpful, such as his way of drawing thin, bony fingers, and edging folds of cloth with sinuous, wiggling outlines. He also liked to bring out fine details from broadly brushed areas of grays and tans.
PLATE 29

A Scribe

Intently copying lines from a larger manuscript to a smaller, this old calligrapher sat unselfconsciously for his likeness. His hands are crabbedly arthritic; his lean shoulders and elbows, pointed as arrows, jut out picturesquely, wearing thin his stiff, waftred-silk coat. He has been hunched in this position for a lifetime, propped against a bolster as far as he is lean. The toes of his right foot are calloused from rubbing against the silver and brocade pillow that balances his moving wrist and fingers. Next to him, a Chinese blue and white pot contains a day’s supply of the lustrous black ink; he has already tracked gallons of it across countless reams of paper.

Lively pictures make us listen. This one is almost silent; we hear only the gentle scratching of a reed pen against paper, interrupted by an occasional dry cough. Like a perpetual motion machine, this old man writes on and on. But the happy, bouncing pattern of flowers in his carpet (a royal present) is denied by the mysterious dark shadow of the open door.

The intensity of this portrait, with its uniquely foreshortened face and unusually thick pigment, suggests that the artist was strongly moved and feared that his revered friend might never pose again.
PLATE 30

Shamsa ("Sunburst")

This was the opening page to an album of calligraphies and miniatures assembled for Shah Jahan. Although he is chiefly remembered artistically as the builder of the Taj Mahal, the tomb of his wife, who died in childbirth after bearing him fourteen children, he was also a connoisseurly patron of painting. But unlike Jahangir, whose ideas on painting differed from those of his father, Shah Jahan encouraged artists to continue painting as they had for his father. His pictures, therefore, are sometimes difficult to differentiate from Jahangir's, although their colors tend to be more jewel-like, and their mood is usually more restrained.

A serious collector of gems, many of which he ordered set into his renowned Peacock Throne, Shah Jahan insisted upon opulent perfection in everything he commissioned. The workmanship and sumptuous color of this rosette by a specially trained illuminator rather than figure painter, as well as its nobly designed calligraphic inscription, bring together qualities of architecture, jewelry and painting. Indeed, this glorious design might be considered the embodiment of the verses inscribed in the emperor's Delhi Audience Hall, "If there is Heaven on Earth, it is here; it is here, it is here."

Such mathematically abstract and cerebral arabesque designs bring to mind the Mandalas of Buddhism and Hinduism, psychocosmograms designed for meditation. Here, the center of the composition can be interpreted as the pivot upon which all turns, the axis connecting the existential world with those above and below. It is no accident that Shah Jahan's titles are inscribed at the center of this heavenly image. As if to reinforce its celestial spirit, magnificent golden phoenixes, or simurghs, and other birds soar round the central figure.
PLATES 31–32

Shah Jahan Honors the Religious Orthodoxy

Like Akbar and Jahangir, Shah Jahan commissioned an official history of his reign. Although paintings were made for it over the years, it was assembled at the very end of his rule, and one can imagine him reliving happier days by turning its pages during the nine years of imprisonment in the Red Fort at Agra following Aurangzeb's seizure of the throne.

When it was assembled, a selection was made among the many pictures painted for the project. This double page and the battle scene of Plate 33 were omitted, perhaps because their subjects were adequately represented by other choices, and in due course they were separated from the manuscript. Persian floral borders signed by Muhammad Sadik and dated 1747 suggest that this audience scene (along with Plates 21 and 22) was in Iran by that time, presumably as part of the hoard carried off by Nadir Shah at the sack of Delhi in 1739. The manuscript itself had reached Lucknow in the late eighteenth century, when it was presented to Lord Teignmouth "for deposit in the royal library" by the Nawab, Asaf ud-Daulah (1775–97), whose sack races of old women apparently pleased the Britisher less than the book.

PLATES 31–32 (Continued)

Although uninscribed, it can be surmised that this painting depicts a banquet honoring Mullahs (theologians and specialists in religious law). Shah Jahan is seated on the throne platform, with a shield adorned with birds of paradise in front of him. Dara Shikoh, his eldest and favorite son, who was usually kept nearby and was virtually promised the succession, sits just behind his father. His youthful features are identical to another portrait, in the Windsor manuscript, showing him being given jewelled necklaces by his father at the time of his marriage in 1635 (folio 125v). Like this picture, it can be attributed to Murad, to whom still another Shah Jahan-nama illustration (folio 195v) is attributed, with the statement that he was a pupil of Nadir al-Zaman. It is known that of all Shah Jahan's sons, only Dara was permitted to sit on the throne platform, and it seems likely that the Mullahs were assembled on the occasion of the prince's marriage festivities.