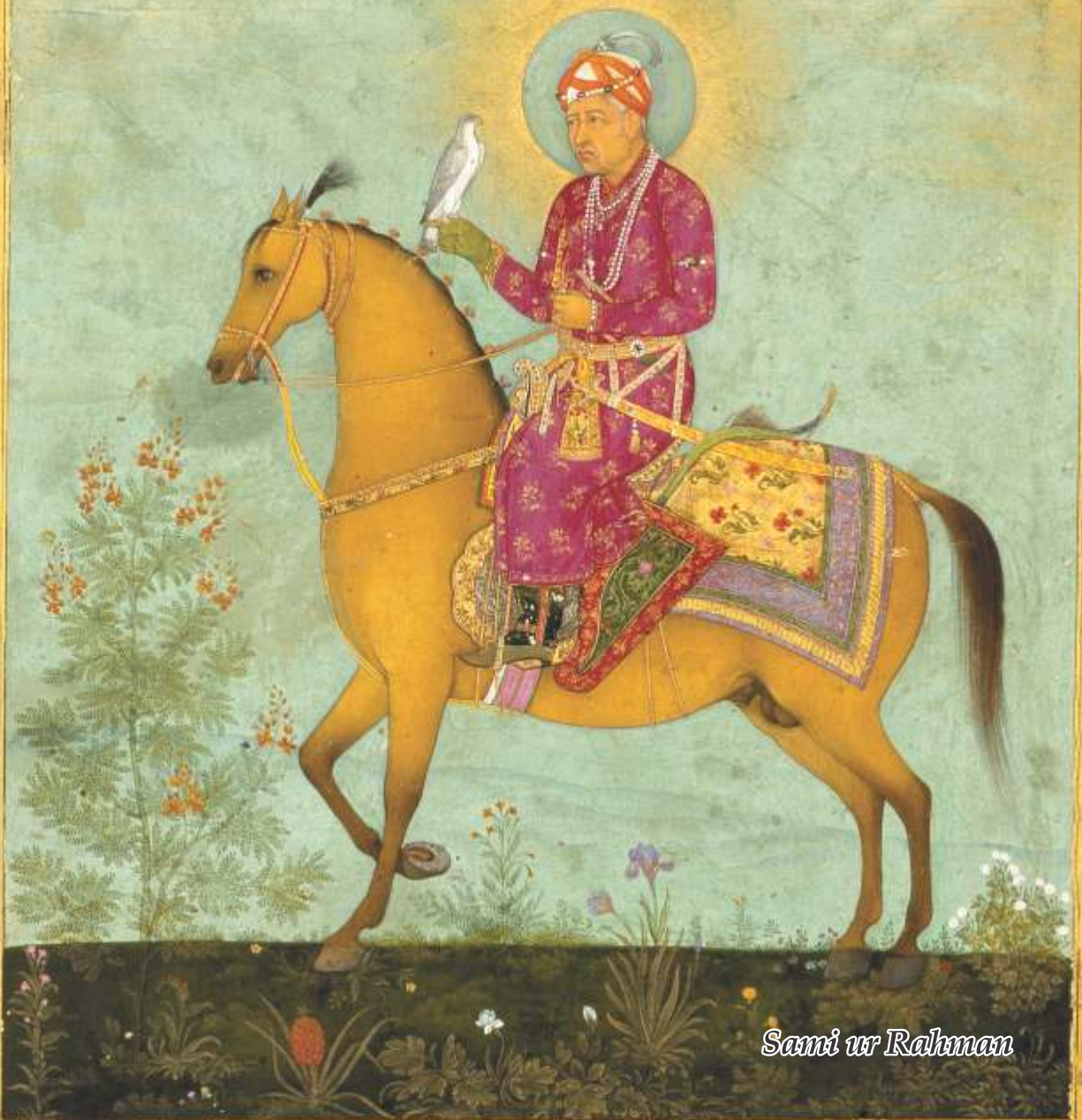


The Art of Falconry in the *Mughal Empire*



Sami ur Rahman



The Art of Falconry
in the
Mughal Empire

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This book is dedicated to His Highness
Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan
President of the U.A.E.
for his untiring efforts to promote
the princely sport of falconry in the positive light



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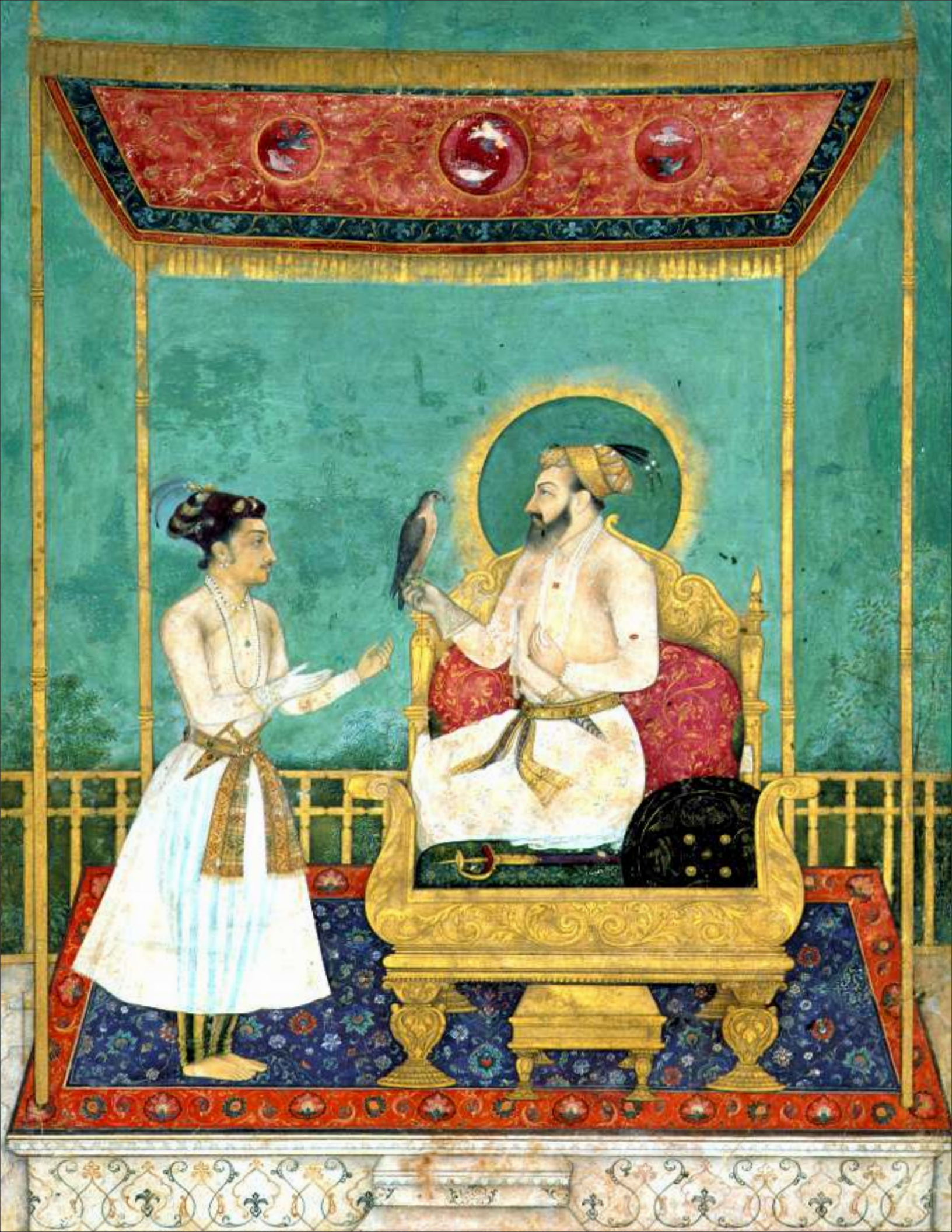
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Introduction

The origin of the princely sport of falconry has been the subject of a heated debate among scholars and historians for a long time. There are quite a few contentious arguments both in favor of and against each theory claiming one region or another. In almost all cases, the prospective contenders date back to the ancient civilizations that flourished before the Christian era. Geographically, it is also somehow a settled matter now that the cradle of the field sport was the Orient and not the Occident. The *Horus-hawk* of the Egyptians, though, is the omnipresent symbol of most of the official documents and ceremonies, is not what practical falconry is all about. The 8th-century B.C. Assyria – which now is part of the greater Arab world – did know something about the sport and it is something supported by empirical data in the form of stone reliefs and historical texts. The Chinese fall short of any credible evidence, which is a *sine qua non* for such a claim. Persia, on the other hand, is a serious contender for its long history of field sports. Whether falconry was known to the ancient Greeks, is a matter of pure speculation and conjecture.

Wherever and whenever the art of falconry might have its genesis, one thing is for sure: that is, there has been no other civilization in the world history – both in the Middle Ages and medieval times – that has depicted hawks, hounds, horses, and hawking scenes more aesthetically and exhaustively in art than the Mughal empire, which flourished in the Sub-continent between 1526 and 1857. The sheer aesthetics and artistic brilliance of the Mughal atelier surpasses the collective oeuvre of any individual civilization – ancient or medieval. This is apparent from the plethora of miniature paintings that have survived during all these centuries and are now preserved in major museums, libraries, and private collections around the world.

The present book, in a sense, is the very first attempt to treat the subject matter in a holistic and comprehensive manner. It mainly covers the historical period from 1550 to 1750, when the Mughals ruled much part of the Sub-continent, comprising modern-day Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. Dubbed as the most opulent and powerful empire of its time by the renowned Scottish historian, William Dalrymple, the Mughals were great patrons of art, architecture, and literature who left indelible imprints on the history of South Asia.¹ Their vast architectural heritage is preserved today in the shape of wondrous monuments like the Taj Mahal, Red Fort, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Tomb of Humayun, Wazir Khan Mosque, Tomb of I'timad-ud-Daula, Badshahi

¹ William Dalrymple, "The East India Company: The original corporate raiders," *The Guardian*, March 4, 2015, International edition.

Mosque, and Shalamar Garden etc.

The other great contribution that the Mughal civilization made to the collective heritage of humankind is, indeed, in the field of miniature painting. The illustrated works and *murraqas* or illuminated albums that were executed during the classical Mughal era are the finest specimens of human creativity and artistic draftsmanship. This volume, which is exclusively devoted to the art of falconry, represents such masterpieces from the Mughal oeuvre. Works from the Pahari, Deccani, and Rajasthani schools of art – that gave rise after the decline of the Mughal empire in the early 18th century – have also been duly represented to give the reader a glimpse into the workshops of local courts.



Detail of an illustration to *Khamsa of Nizami* by the Mughal painter Daulat showing him and the calligrapher, Abd al-Rahim, c. 1595 © The British Library, London

The long history of depicting birds and animals in the Muslim world has its roots in the legends of religious figures like Noah, Solomon, and King David. So, in the Great Deluge, we see Noah as protecting the animal kingdom from the unprecedented catastrophe, whereas Solomon is believed to summon all the world's animals and birds at one command. Likewise, King David, who was endowed with a magic voice, is said to swoon birds and animals with his songs. The love story of Laila and Majnun – the eastern equivalent of Romeo and Juliet – also captured the imagination of the Oriental artists and one specific event of the legend, where Laila visits the emaciated Majnun in the wilderness accompanied by birds and animals, has frequently been depicted by them.

The Mughal rulers who were fond of hawking and hunting showed great interest in birds and animals right from the Babur's times. They were also enamored by the Arabic, Sanskrit, and Persian literary classics and animal fables. The very first illustrated work that emanated from the Mughal atelier was called *Tutinama* or 'Tales of a Parrot', which is a collection of fifty-two moralistic stories narrated by the bird. The manuscript was illustrated with 250 paintings between 1555 and 1565 by the two early Mughal artists of Persian origin, Abd –al Samad and Syed Mir Ali. Other animal fables that were also illustrated include the 2nd-century Sanskrit work *Kalilah wo Dimnah* (Fables of Bidpai) and the famous *Ayar i Danish* (Fables of Aesop). Autobiographical works like the *Akbarnama*, *Baburnama*, *Jahangirnama*, and *Padshahnama*, while poetical classics such as the *Khamsa of Nizami*, *Baharistan of Jami*, and *Khamsa of Amir Khusrau* also contain hundreds of paintings, depicting hawks, hounds, horse, and hunting scenes.

While the Mughal miniature technique had its origins in the Turkish and Persian schools of art and it borrowed heavily from them, over the time it absorbed other elements – more importantly the European – and evolved into a form and style that was entirely its own. So, unlike the Persian and Turkish miniature paintings, which were of quite remote, exquisite, and mythical nature, the Mughal works exhibit a palpable proclivity toward realism and self-possession. In a sense, the vague gave to the real and remoteness to clearness. In the process, a new genre was also introduced in the form of portraiture art during the era of Jahangir[®]. 1605-1627), which was quite foreign to the other two schools.

The pioneers of this particular genre were two illustrious Mughal artists, Mansur and Abul Hasan, who almost two centuries before James John Audubon (1785-1851) produced wildlife portraits

that may aptly be called as masterpieces. The trend itself, however, owed much to Jahangir's own keen interest in the animal studies. In the introduction to the book *Jahangir – The Naturalist*, the celebrated Indian ornithologist describes the Mughal emperor in these words: “Jahangir may truly be considered the living prototype of the best kind of the later-day British sportsmen—naturalist in India to whom we owe so much for the scientific knowledge of the fauna and flora of the country that we possess today. His Memoirs are a veritable gazetteer of natural history of India of his day, the outstanding quality of his observations and descriptions being their first-hand character and their scientific accuracy. Most of his accounts are precise enough to permit unambiguous diagnosis of the organism concerned and their value is vastly enhanced by the superb supporting illustrations which it was Jahangir's practice to get painted by Ustad Mansur or one of his school of gifted animal painters.”²

The stupendous amount of wildlife portraits produced by the Mughal artists was also unprecedented: “Besides, to decorate the folios the Mughal painters showed a preference for the pictures of birds and animals painted in columns within the panels of the text. Best examples of such representation are the decorated folios of *Gulistan* of Sa'di (Persian MS. No. 258, Royal Asiatic Society of London, dated 1581) and the *Divan-i Hafiz* (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, MS. No 15, dated 1582). These represent a large number of bird and animal pictures. Losty has noticed that in the *Gulistan* MS. there are about two thousand animal figures,” writes the Indian art critic, S.P. Verma.³ This trend of individual bird studies continued during the rule of Shah Jahan (r. 1627-1658), the best example of which is the Dara Shikoh Album, preserved in the Indian Office Library, London.



Noah's Ark by Miskin, c. 1590 © Freer Gallery of Art, New York

Again, contrary to the Persian and Turkish albums that were only meagerly illustrated, the number of paintings in the Mughal manuscripts is quite monumental. For instance, the *Hamzanama* (Adventures of Amir Hamza), an early work commissioned by Akbar (r. 1556-1605), contained well over a thousand large-sized illustrations. Likewise, out of the 528 folios of the five deluxe copies of the *Baburnama* that Akbari workshops produced, each version had well over 180 paintings. In the same vein, out of 268 folios of a volume of the *Akbarnama* 110 were illustrated. In contrast, the *Shahnama* of Firdausi, prepared for the two grandsons of Timur, Ibrahim Sultan and Muhammad Juki, had only 51 and 32 paintings in their 468 and 528 folios respectively. The *Zafarnama* or Biography of Tamerlane commissioned by Timur's great-grandson, Sultan Hussain Mirza Bayqara, had only six

² Dr. Salim Ali, introduction to the *Jahangir – The Naturalist* by M.A. Alvi and A. Rahman (New Delhi: Lakherwal Press, 1968), 15

³ S.P. Verma, *Mughal Painters of Flora and Fauna: Ustad Mansur*, (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1999), 22

double-page illustrations by the great miniaturist, Kamal-ud-Din Behzad (1550-1535).⁴

Unlike the West, where larger-than-life paintings were executed mainly with a view to hang them on walls, the Mughal works were basically intended for the royal manuscripts and albums. That explains their miniature size. This deficiency of small size, however, was compensated in a masterful manner by the hairsplitting detail, which is the hallmark of this specific technique. A true miniature painting is somehow details within details or a world within a world, as they say. It is simply more than what meets the eye. That's the true essence and beauty of it. The more one magnifies it, the more hidden secrets it reveals. In fact, one needs a magnifying glass to fully appreciate these works.

It seems the Mughals loved the miniature art to distraction. The early miniaturist, Abd –al Samad, is said to have painted a polo scene on a grain of rice, while his son, Muhammad Sharif, executed a picture of an armed horseman on the same material.⁵ In the same way, Jahangir, who was the collector of all things exotic, writes in his memoirs about one particular painting that had 240 individual portraits: “Of the valuable and rare things Khan Alam [Jahangir's envoy to Persia] brought – and truly it was through his auspicious ascendant that such things came into his possession – one was a picture of the Sahib-Qiran [Temur]'s battle with Iletmish Khan containing likenesses of his mighty sons and grand amirs who participated in the battle. Each portrait was identified by name. The picture contains 240 portraits. The painter has written his name as Khalil Mirza-Shahrukhi. His work is very masterful and fine. It bears every resemblance to the work of Master Bihzad. Had the artist's name not been written, it would have been thought that it was by Bihzad.”⁶

In the early phase of the development of the Mughal art, an illustration would be executed in a two-stage process, involving two or more artists. First, a master hand would sketch or design the composition. Later on, relatively junior artists would paint or color the work. In the artistic lingo, the former process was called *tarah* and the latter *amal*. This method was prevalent in the era of Akbar, in whose workshop hundreds of Hindu, Jain, and Muslim artists were employed, who worked industriously to meet the requirement of huge number of royal commissions. During the reign of Jahangir, the process was changed to the universal mode and works of individual artists were encouraged by the connoisseur king.

Being a direct descendant of the Turco-Mongol conqueror, Timur or Tamerlane (1336-1405), King Babur – who founded the Mughal empire in 1526 after his decisive victory against Ibrahim Lodi in the First Battle of Panipat – was a natural heir to a great artistic and literary heritage. Born in Andijan in modern-day Uzbekistan in 1483, he had inherited the throne of the small Fergana kingdom at the very young age of twelve when his father died accidentally by falling from a staircase. He had a checkered career right from the beginning and saw many ups and down in his early campaigns, winning and losing his ancestral Fergana and Samarkand almost three times. He conquered Kabul in 1504 and later afterwards diverted his attention to India, which he saw as a legitimate dominion due to Timur's earlier forays into the land.

Among other things, Babur was an accomplished poet, a prolific writer, a sportsman, and a keen observer of flora and fauna. His autobiography, *Baburnama*, has been termed as the best Muslim work of its genre by historians. He has meticulously recorded major events of his epoch and is quite frank and candid throughout, mincing no words in admitting his own flaws and failures. As far as

⁴ Kavita Singh, *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens: Mughal Painting Between Persian and Europe*, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2017), 83

⁵ Gregory Minissale, *Images of Thought: Visuality in Islamic India 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006), 34

⁶ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 319

falconry is concerned, the work is replete with many references. It is evident that the field sport enjoyed great popularity among his Central Asian ancestors of both Turkic and Mughal backgrounds.

Speaking of the Timurid ruler of Samarkand and Bukhara, Sultan Ahmed Mirza (r. 1469 – 1494), he notes: “He was a good marksman. With his arrows and forked arrows he generally hit the mark; and in riding from one side of the exercise ground to the other, he used to hit the brazen basin several times. Latterly, when he became very corpulent, he took to bringing down pheasants and quails with the goshawks, and seldom failed. He was fond of hawking, and was particularly skilled in flying the hawk, an amusement which he frequently practised. If you except Ulugh Beg Mirza⁷, there was no other king who equalled him in field sports.”⁸

Sultan Mirza's maternal uncle, Derwish Muhammad Terkhan, was also “extremely skillful in falconry, and excelled in flying his hawks,” according to Babur. Baki Terkhan, who was an officer of the same Mirza and also his maternal cousin, likewise, was “very fond of hawking, and is said to have had seven hundred falcons at one time.” Muhammad Berenduk Beg – who was in the service of the famous ruler of Herat, Sultan Hussain Mirza Bayqara (r. 1469 – 1506) – loved his birds ardently: “He was extremely fond of his hawks, insomuch, that if he at any time learned that one of his hawks was dead or lost, he used to take the name of one of his sons, and say, 'Had such a son died, or such an one broken his neck, I would have thought nothing of it in comparison with the death or loss of such a hawk.’”⁹

Elsewhere, he writes: “Hassan Ali Jalair was grand Falconer to Sultan Hussain Mirza. He was a poet, and assumed the poetical name of Tufeili. He wrote many beautiful *kasidehs* [eulogies] and was the most eminent of his age in that species of composition. When I took Samarkand, in the year 917 [1511], he joined me, and was in my service for five or six years. He addressed to me some very fine *kasidehs*.”¹⁰ Sultan Hussain Mirza, to whom Hassan was grand falconer, is known to be a just king, who not only built numerous architectural monuments including a large university during his reign, but was also a patron of art. It was at the royal workshop of the Mirza at Herat, that Behzad, the greatest of all miniature artists, worked early in his life, before moving to Shiraz in Persia.

Coming back to Babur's passion for hunting and hawking, he informs us: “While I remained in these winter quarters [Armian and Nushab in Uzbekistan] I rode a-hunting every two or three days. After scouring the larger forests, where we roused and hunted the mountain-goat and stags, we hawked



Timurid Mounted Falconer Hunting, Persia, c. 1420
© David Museum, Copenhagen

⁷ Ulugh Beg (1394-1449) was also a Timurid ruler of Samarkand and Bukhara, and quite an influential one for that matter. He was at the same a far-sighted ruler, an accomplished mathematician and an astronomer. He built many schools and universities during his reign and is specifically famous for constructing the Ullugh Beg Observatory, which has been termed by scientists as one of the finest of its kinds.

⁸ King Babur, *Memoirs of Zahir-ed-Din Muhammad Babur Vol. I*, trans. John Leyden and William Erskine (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 31, 32

⁹ Ibid. 299

¹⁰ Ibid. 307



Babur and his Hunting Party, an illustration to the *Baburnama*, c. 1590s © The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

in the smaller jungle for the jungle-fowl, and also shot them with forked arrows. The jungle-fowl are here very fat. While we remained in these winter quarters we had the flesh of jungle-fowl in great abundance.”¹¹ There are also numerous occasions where Babur mentions hawks, hounds, and horses as the main items of the tributes paid to him by noblemen of the conquered territories to show their allegiance.

Later in 1504, when Babur conquered Kabul, the capital of modern-day Afghanistan, he maintained his passion for hawking with the same zeal, while at the same time recording the geography and

fauna of the newly-conquered land: “In the spring, there are many hunting grounds in Kabul. The great passage of the fowls is by the banks of the river Baran [contemporary River Kabul], for that river is enclosed by mountains both on the east and west. Right opposite to this spot, that is, by the banks of the river Baran, is the grand pass up Hindu-kush, and there is no pass but itself in this vicinity. On that account all the game ascend the mountain by this route. If there be wind, or if any clouds rest on the pass up Hindu-kush, the birds are unable to ascend it, and they all alight in the vale of Baran, when multitudes of them are taken by the people of the neighbourhood.”¹²

The migration route Babur refers to here is part of the Central Asian Flyway (CAF), extending from the northernmost breeding grounds in Siberia to the southernmost wintering grounds in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and the Indian Ocean Territory etc. He continues, “About the close of the winter, the banks of the river Baran are frequented by multitudes of water-fowl, which are extremely fat. The cranes, the *karkareh* (or *begla* heron), and the larger game afterwards arrive in innumerable flocks, and are seen in immense quantities. On the banks of the river Baran, great numbers of cranes are caught in springes [local devices for catching birds], which they make for that purpose, as well as the heron, the *begla* heron, and the *khawasil* [pelican].”¹³

Later when the adventurer king headed for India, he notes in his diary: “In the month of Shaban, when the sun was in Aquarius, I set out from Kabul towards Hindustan; and proceeding by way of Badam-chashmeh and Jagdalik [Afghan towns], in six marches reached Adinapur [a major city in eastern Afghanistan, now called Jalalabad]. I had never before seen the *garmsir* (or countries of warm temperature), nor the country of Hindustan. Immediately on reaching them, I beheld a new world. The grass was different, the trees different, the wild animals of a different sort, the birds of a different plumage, the manners and customs of the *Ils* and *Uluses* (the wandering tribes) of a different kind. I was struck with astonishment, and indeed there was room for wonder.”¹⁴

There is a long chapter in his Memoirs dealing with the bird species that Babur encountered on his march. The Indian peafowl, for instance, was quite new to him. So were the Himalayan monal, the Indian great bustard, the florican, the sarus crane, the pied myna, the white ibis, the king curlew, the

¹¹ Ibid. 119

¹² Ibid. 247

¹³ Ibid. 247

¹⁴ Ibid. 252, 253

grey jungle fowl, and the rock bush quail etc. He's quite concise in making descriptions of the birds and is ever ready to interject a humorous sentence. Speaking of a hearsay myth about the monal, he ends the discussion in such a funny way: "People tell this wonderful thing about it [monal]: When the birds, on the onset of winter, descend to the hill-skirts, if they over the vineyard, they can fly no further and are taken. God knows the truth! The flesh of this bird is very savoury."¹⁵

It wasn't only the new bird species that amazed Babur, but also the animals of the Sub-continent e.g. elephants, rhinos, blue bulls, monkeys, hog-deer and wild buffalos. After Babur's death in 1530, his eldest son, Humayun, ascended the throne. Although, the new emperor wouldn't share his father's writing skills, he compensated this shortcoming by establishing the first-ever *tasvirkhana* or painting workshop by inviting three master Persian artists to his court, namely, Abd -al Samad, Syed Mir Ali, and Dost Muhammad. The first two painters in particular would later train dozens, nay hundreds, of local Hindu and Muslim students in the royal workshop and pave the way for a new era of miniature painting in the region.



The Princes of the Houses of Timur by Abdul al-Samad, c. 1550, The British Museum, London

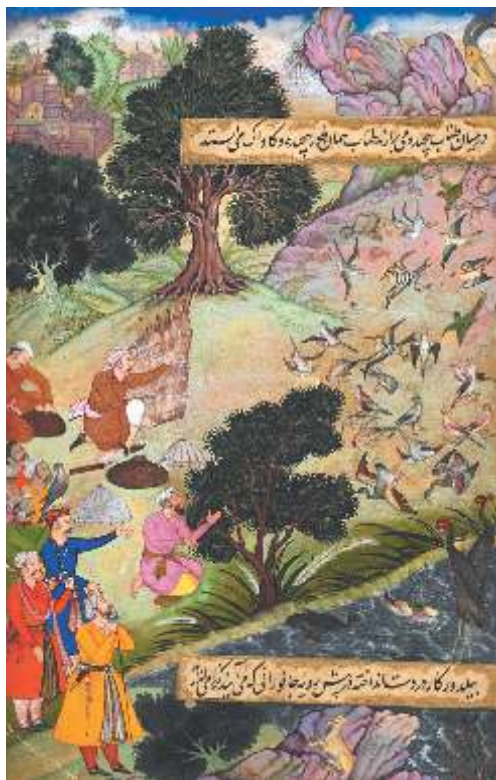
Samad is also credited for the very first painting of the Mughal workshop titled as *The Princes of the House of Timur*. It's an extra-large size work by the Mughal standards (108 × 108 cm) and is partially damaged, depicting Timur along with his long line of descendants. At a later period around early 1600s, the portraits of Akbar, Jahangir, and young Shah Jahan were also added to it, in which Jahangir is holding a hawk. It's also worthwhile to mention that the very first Mughal falconry-related painting – which shows prince Akbar hawking with his mentor, Bairam Khan – was executed by this master hand, too.

Humayun's political career, however, was mired in crises. A decade after his rule, in 1540, he was overthrown by an Afghan commander, Sher Shah Suri. He tried to seek refuge in Afghanistan, which was ruled by his brother, Kamran Mirza, but failed due to the latter's fear of losing his dominion and antagonizing Sher Shah. Later on, he moved to the neighboring Safavid empire, reigned by the powerful Shah Tahmasp at the time. With the Shah's support, he was reinstated in 1555, but only a year after his return, he fell from the stairs of his library with his arms full of books. The fall proved fatal and he died on 27 January 1556. With his death, history somehow repeated itself in an ironic way. Some 66 years ago, his grandfather had died exactly in the same way, forcing Babur to carry the burden of governance on his feeble shoulders. Now was Akbar's turn, who was only sixteen then.



The detail from The Princes of the Houses of Timur

¹⁵ King Babur, *Memoirs of Babur Vol. II*, trans. Annette Susanna Beveridge (London: Lusac & Company, 1922), 496



Bird Catching at Baran, an illustration to the *Baburnama*, c. 1590s © The British Library, London

Before moving to Akbar's golden era, however, it's apt to quote a couple of references from the *Tazkereh al Vaqiat* (Private Memoirs of King Humayun), written by Humayun's ewer-bearer, Jouher. The writer narrates an event that happened during the emperor's flight from India and which proves two things at the same time: First, Humayun's keen interests in birds; second, the fact that he had artists at his court even before his exile in Persia. It is as follows: "Soon after the Rana had retired the King undressed, and ordered his clothes to be washed, and in the meanwhile he wore his dressing gown; while thus sitting, a beautiful bird flew into the tent, the doors of which were immediately closed, and the bird caught; his Majesty then took a pair of scissors and cut some of the feathers off the animal; he then sent for a painter, and had a picture taken of the bird, and afterwards ordered it to be released."¹⁶

While in exile, Humayun would often be invited by the Persian monarch to accompany him on his hunting trips that occurred mostly around the historic Persepolis: "Whilst we were on our return to the camp, his Majesty took the opportunity of viewing the ruins of Persepolis... The next morning the King again joined the hunters, and, having proceeded to a place about four cos [roughly eight miles] from the Tukhti Solaiman [Persepolis ruins], began the

sport, but the orders of Shah Tahmasp were, that no person but himself and the King should discharge an arrow without express permission. After a short time, a deer came bounding towards his Majesty; when the Persian monarch called out, 'Now, Humayun, let us see how you shoot.' On which his Majesty, discharged his arrow, which struck the animal behind the ear, and it fell struggling on the ground; at which all the Persians were astonished, and said, 'Certainly Humayun will be a fortunate prince.' The party soon after returned to the tents and nine deer were sent as present to the king."¹⁷

Elsewhere, Jouher writes: "His Majesty then returned to Kabul, but frequently went to amuse himself in hawking and fishing on the river Baran and in other places with his companions. During this period he sent letters to Samerkund, Bokhara, and other towns, inviting the chiefs and warriors to accompany him on his invasion of Hindustan: to some of the chiefs he sent presents, and letters explanatory of his intentions, with prayers for their combined success."¹⁸ It's the same environs where he once had hunted with his father as a child, and was now making preparations to attack India to reclaim his throne.

When Humayun died in 1556, Akbar took the reins of the Mughal empire and ruled it for almost fifty years. Akbar's was an era of massive expansion and consolidation. It was also an exemplary period of religious harmony and Muslims, Hindus, Jains, Jews, and Jesuits all had access to the spiritually-inclined sovereign. A man of action that he was, Akbar was also successful in almost all his military campaigns, including the strategically vital Chittor and Ranthambore sieges in the late 1560s. He was a great patron of art and literature and besides constructing numerous architectural

¹⁶ Jouher, *The Tezkereh al Vaqiat*, trans. Major Charles Stewart (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1832), 63

¹⁷ Ibid. 98, 99

¹⁸ Ibid. 159

marvels, he founded a new city about 37 km east of Agra, naming it Fatehpur i.e. the “City of Victory.” During his reign, Arabic, Sanskrit, and Turkic classics were translated in Persian and luxuriously illustrated with miniature paintings. His court historian, Abul Fazl, notes in *Ain-i Akbari* (Constitution of Akbar):

“The number of master-pieces of paintings increased with the encouragement given to the art. Persian books, both prose and poetry, were ornamented with pictures, and a very large number of paintings was thus collected. The *Story of Hamzah* was represented in twelve volumes, and clever painters made the most astounding illustrations for no less than one thousand and forty passages of the story. The *Chingiznamah* [History of Genghis Khan], the *Zafarnamah* [History of Tamerlane], this book [Constitution of Akbar], the *Razamnamah* [Mahabharata], the *Ramayan*, the *Nal Daman*, the *Kalilah Damnah* [Fables of Bidpai], the *Ayar Danish* [Aesop's Fables] etc. were all illustrated.”¹⁹

There is also a curious statement in the *Ain* that shows the emperor's liberalism and broadmindedness. “One day at a private party of friends, His Majesty who has conferred on several the pleasure of drawing near him remarked: ‘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 anything 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 in knowledge.’”²⁰ It may be recalled that painting and sculpting didn't flourish in most parts of the Muslim world due to the opposition by the clergy for quite wrong reasons.

Interestingly, the official historian of Akbar's court was aware of the superiority of the European artworks, but claimed with a certain amount of confidence that much progress had been made during the Akbar's reign and that the quality of the work was no less inferior than those of other civilizations: “The mixture of colors has especially been improved. The pictures thus received a hitherto unknown finish. Most excellent painters are now to be found, and master-pieces worthy of a Bihzad, may be placed at the side of the wonderful works of the European painters who have attained a world-wide fame. The minuteness in detail, the general finish, the boldness of execution etc. now observed in pictures, are incomparable; even inanimate objects look as if they had life. More than a hundred painters have become famous masters of the art, whilst the number of those who approach perfection, or of those who are middling, is very large.”²¹

So much for Akbar's liberalism and his encouragement of art and literature, when it comes to field sports, he was a phenomenal huntsman with acutely novel and innovative ideas. About the emperor's passion for falconry, Abul Fazl observes: “His Majesty is very fond of these remarkable animals, and often uses them for hunting purposes. Though he trains the *baz* [goshawk], [black] *shahin*, *shunqar* [gyrfalcon], and *burkat* [golden eagle] falcons, and makes them perform wonderful deeds, His Majesty prefers the *basha* [sparrowhawk] to which class of hawks he gives various names.”²² It is quite curious to see that despite the having such wonderful raptors species at his disposal, the mighty king would love the tiny sparrowhawk. Given Akbar's spiritual disposition and his humility, however, this is understandable.

Expanding on the topic a bit further, he adds: “In the middle of spring the birds are inspected; after this they are allowed to moult, and are sent into the country. As soon as the time of moulting is

¹⁹ Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain i Akbari Vol. I*, trans. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: G.R. Rouse, 1873), 108

²⁰ Ibid. 108

²¹ Ibid. 107

²² Ibid. 304

over, they are again inspected. The commencement is made with the *khasa* falcons (*baz*) which are inspected in the order in which they have been bought. The precedence of *jurras* [tiercel] is determined by the number of game killed by them. Then come the *basha*, the [black] *shahin*, the *khelas* [perhaps tiercel *shahins*], the *chappak* [tiercel] *bashas*, the *bahris* [peregrines], the young *bahris*, the *shikarabs*, the *chapak shikarabs*, the *turumtis* [red-headed merlins], the *rekis* [tiercel red-headed merlins], the *besras*, the *dhotis* [tiercel *besras*], the *charghs* [sakers], the *charghelas* [tiercel sakers], the *lagars*, and the *jhagars*, (which His Majesty calls the *chappak* [tiercel] kind of the *lagar*).²³

The list doesn't end here but continues to include still other exotic species: "The *Molchins* [collared falconets] also are inspected – the *molchin* is an animal resembling the sparrow, of yellowish plumage, like the [black] *shahin*, it will kill a *kulang* crane [common crane]. People say that, whilst flying, it will break the wing of the *kulang*, and others maintain that it pierces its eyes; but this cannot be proved. *Odhpapars* [green magpie] also are brought from Kashmir. This bird has a bluish²⁴ (*sabz*) colour and is smaller than a parrot; its beak is red, straight, and long; its tail is rather elongated. It brings down small birds, and returns to the hand of the keeper. Many other birds can be trained for the chase, though I cannot specify all. Thus the crow, the sparrow, the *bodna* [common quail], and the *saru* [common myna] will learn to attack."²⁵

Interestingly, the hawks market during the Akbar's reign was more regulated than it is today. That is to say, there was no black market as such nor any kind of smuggling or illegal activity. The state policy was quite clear on the issue and everything was well-orchestrated to the minutest details: "From eagerness to purchase, and from inexperience, people pay high sums for falcons. His Majesty allows dealers every reasonable profit; but from motives of equity, he has limited the prices. The dealers are to get their gain, but buyers ought not to be cheated. In purchasing falcons people should see to which of the following three classes birds belong. First, *khana-kuriz*; they have moulted whilst in charge of experienced trainers, and have got new feathers. Second, *chuz* birds; they have not yet moulted. Third, *tarinak* birds; they have moulted before they were captured."²⁶

The writer then gives a long list of the hawks' prices the state had set for the open market. Later on, he mentions the allowances of food to the royal birds and says that in 'Kashmir and in the aviaries of Indian amateurs, the birds are generally fed once a day; but at Court they are fed twice'. Even here, Abul Fazl is very particular about the details and describes the amount and type of food given to the raptors. Not unmindful about the rewards and donations to the grand falconers, he writes: "His Majesty rewards the Mir Shikars (superintendents of the chase) according to their ranks, with suitable presents. There are also fixed donations for each game brought in, varying from 1 M. to 1 d.²⁷ If the falcons bring down the game alive or dead, attention is paid to the skill which it exhibited and to the size of the quarry. The man who keeps the falcon gets one-half of the allowance. If His Majesty hunts himself, fifty percent, of the donation is stopped. If birds are received by the Imperial aviary as *peshkash* (tribute), the *Qushbegi* (Superintendent of the Aviary) gets for every *baz* 1 ½ R. and the accountant 1 R."²⁸

²³ Ibid. 304, 305

²⁴ The translator wrongly renders the word 'sabz' as 'bluish.' Though, rarely used so, it actually means 'green.' The mistake in the translation led renowned falconry expert Col. D.C. Phillot to infer that *Odhpapar* meant Green Jay. Dr. Salim Ali, the illustrious Indian ornithologist who even knew the language, also mistook it for a Kingfisher, though, Abul Fazl clearly compares the bird with the parrot and makes a fair description of it.

²⁵ Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain i Akbari Vol. I*, trans. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: G.R. Rouse, 1873), 305

²⁶ Ibid. 306

²⁷ Here 'M' stands for the 'mehr' meaning gold coin, while 'd.' is for dirham. 'R' is perhaps for the 'rupee'.

²⁸ Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain i Akbari Vol. I*, trans. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: G.R. Rouse, 1873), 307

The usual number of birds of prey kept in the royal mews during Akbar's times is also given by the court chronicler. Says he: "The minimum number of *baz* and *shahin* falcons kept at the Court, is forty; of *jurras* [tiercels], thirty; of *bashas* one hundred; of *bahris*, *charghs*, twenty; of *lagars*, and *shikaras* ten."²⁹ Elsewhere he mentions the trapping method of sakers, which sounds not so different from the practices prevalent today in the region:



Prince Akbar and Noblemen Hawking by Syed Mir Ali,
c. 1555 © Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection

"They [*laggars*] resemble *charghs* [sakers]; in body they are as large as *jurras* [tiercel sakers]. They hang nets about the body of a trained *lagar* and put birds feathers into its claws. It is then allowed to fly up. The birds [sakers] think that it has got hold of prey, and when they get entangled in the nets, they commence to fight, and fall to the ground."³⁰

Abul Fazl also gives us a glimpse into the well-established department of the royal mews: "In this department many Mansandars [high-ranking officers], Ahadis [special forces], and other soldiers are employed. The footmen are mostly Kashmiris or Hindustanis."³¹ He then goes on to give details about the monthly salaries and allowances of the different posts and positions. It may be added in passing that the Kashmir Valley, which lies at the foothills of the Himalayas, serves as one of the major migration routes of hawks and gamebirds and was home to a great number of falconers until very recently. It also served as a summer resort for the Mughal kings.

Writing about the greyhounds, Abul Fazl says: "His Majesty likes this animal very much for his excellent qualities, and imports dogs from all countries. Excellent dogs come from Kabul, especially from the Hazara district [in Bamiyan, modern-day Afghanistan]. They even ornament dogs, and give them names. Dogs will attack every kind of animals, and more remarkably they will attack a tiger."³²

Hunting with trained cheetahs or leopards was also a big time passion with the sportsman king. Since there are many paintings included in this volume with their images, it's apt to quote a couple of references to this effect. Discussing the trapping methods, Abul Fazl notes: "Formerly, hunters used to make deep holes and cover them with grass. These pits were called *odi*. The leopards on coming near them, fell down to the bottom; but they often broke their feet or legs, or managed by jumping to get out again. Nor could you catch more than one in each pit. His Majesty therefore invented a new method, which has astonished the most experienced hunters. He made a pit only two or three *gaz* [roughly two or three meters] deep, and constructed a peculiar trapdoor, which closes when the leopard falls into the hole. The animal is thus never hurt. Sometimes more than one go into the trap. On one occasion no less than seven leopards were caught."³³

²⁹ Ibid. 307

³⁰ Ibid. 307

³¹ Ibid. 305

³² Ibid. 301

³³ Ibid. 296



Akbar assists in capturing a cheetah by Tulsi and Narayan, c. 1590-95 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Innovative and perfectionist in the art of hunting as Akbar was, he shortened the training duration of leopards to a great extent. So, "In former times people managed to train a newly caught leopard for the chase in the space of three months, or if they exerted themselves, in two months. From the attention which His Majesty pays to this animal, leopards are now trained in an excellent manner in the short space of eighteen days."³⁴ Another cat that the Mughals were fond of hunting with was the caracal. As elsewhere, here also new techniques were introduced by Akbar, who was "very fond of using this plucky little animal for hunting purposes. In former times it would attack a hare or a fox: but now it kills black deer."

Speaking of the deer, it's not out of place to mention that tame member of the species were used by the Mughals to capture the wild ones. The way it was done is as follows: "They put a net over his horns, and let it off against wild deer, which from fear will fight with them. During the struggle, the horn, or the foot, or the ears of the wild deer will get entangled in the net; the hunters who have been lying in ambush, will then run

up to it, and catch it. The deer thus caught passes through a course of instruction, and gets tame. If the net should break, or the deer get tired during the struggle, it will return to the keeper, who either puts a new net on it, or sends out a fresh deer."³⁵

Passionately fond of birds and animals, the Mughal king kept an extensive royal menagerie and aviary with entries from Kashmir, Persia, and Turkestan, according to his chronicler. He was also an avid pigeon fancier right from his childhood and at one point had about 20,000 rare and exotic pigeons, most of which were crossbred by him to obtain high-performing offspring. Not only that but the experimentalist king also crossbred army elephants, camels, and horses for the same purpose and was quite successful in his efforts. The horses thus produced, says Abul Fazl, were particularly of a high class and as tall and stout as the fabled Iraqi and Arabian steeds.

There are numerous dramatic accounts of emperor's tiger hunts and elephant catching as well in the *Ain i Akbari*. Above all, he was a phenomenal marksman. Nay, he was one of the earliest of snipers. The Siege of Chittor that happened in 1567-68, was one of Akbar's major military campaigns. It lasted for about four months and was concluded when one day he spotted a person in an elaborate tunic on the fort's rampart from a distance. The emperor's instincts told him it was some high-ranking officer. He aimed at him with his favorite gun, Sangram, and downed him with one single shot. It turned out that the man in question was Jaimal, the fort's commander. Soon the news of his death spread in the camp like wildfire and the fort fell to the Mughal army. After his death, his son, Jahangir, kept Sangram dearly and used it on many hunting expeditions.

Besides the above-mentioned hunting modes, there were also many other animals employed by the passionate sportsman in chasing game. It seems that everything that was novel and exotic thrilled Akbar. He was in a way a Mughal version of David Attenborough. Here is one last interesting reference with a couplet from the *Ain*: "Frogs also may be trained to catch sparrows. This looks very

³⁴ Ibid. 297

³⁵ Ibid. 301,302

funny. His Majesty, from curiosity, likes to see spiders fight and amuses himself in watching the attempts of the flies to escape, their jumps, and combats with their enemy.

I am in the power of love; and if I have thousands of wishes, it is no crime;
And if my passionate heart has an (unlawful) desire, it is no crime.³⁶

Akbar's golden era ended in 1605 with his death and his eldest son, Jahangir, ascended the throne. He not only inherited his father's vast empire, but also his valor, inquisitiveness, love for art, and passion for the field sports. In fact, the new emperor surpassed his father in certain areas including connoisseurship, love for nature, zoological research, and innovation in animal portraiture. He was extremely fond of each and everything that was out of the ordinary, be it a work of art, a precious stone, an antique artifact, an animal, or a bird. He was endowed with an exceptional power of observation, which is quite evident from the notes in his autobiography, *Jahangirnama*.

Jahangir's passion for the animal kingdom dwarfed everything else, and he goes down in history as the naturalist-sportsman. Dr. Salim Ali, the renowned Indian ornithologist, pays a glowing tribute to him in these words: "If Akbar was the greatest monarch of the Moghul dynasty, it cannot be denied that Jahangir was far and away its greatest naturalist. His profuse and engrossing memoirs are a veritable natural history of the animals that came under his notice, and a record of the most searching observations concerning them. It has rightly been said of Jahangir that had he been the head of a Natural History Museum he would have been a better and happier man."³⁷



Akbar with Falcon by Keshav Das,
c. 1589 © Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

The Mughal painting underwent a paradigm shift during Jahangir's reign and both the methodology and style were changed for the better. Instead of the collaborative compositions of the Akbari *tasvirkahana*, works by individual artists were encouraged by the new king. Portraiture art with a realist approach was also a pleasant addition and was made use of extensively in depicting different species of birds and animals. There were many master painters employed in the royal workshop of the era but three of them stood out: Mansur, Abul Hasan, and Bishandas. The first two were renowned for their extraordinary animal studies, while Bishandas was specialized in human portraits and was specifically sent as part of the diplomatic mission by Jahangir to Persia to paint the likeness of the Safavid monarch, Shah Abbas. Some of his portraits are included in this volume.

About the excellence of the other two artists, Jahangir says: "... Abu'l-Hasan the artist, who had been awarded the title of *Nadiruzzaman* [Rarity of the Age], presented a painting he had made for

³⁶ Ibid. 308

³⁷ Dr. Salim Ali, "The Moghul Emperors of India As Naturalists and Sportsmen, Part I," *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4 (1927): 840, 841



A Cameleon by Mansur, c. 1612 © Royal Collection Trust / Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017

the opening page of the *Jahangirnama*. Since it was worthy of praise, he was shown limitless favor. Without exaggeration, his work is perfect, and his depiction is a masterpiece of the age. In this era he has no equal or peer. Only if Master Abdul-Hayy³⁸ and Master Bihzad³⁹ were alive today would they be able to do him justice...I have always considered it my duty to give him much patronage, and from his youth until now I have patronized him so that his work has reached the level it has. He is truly a rarity of his age. So is Master Mansur the painter, who enjoys the title of *Nadirul'asr* [Wonder of the Age]. In painting he is unique in his time. During my father's reign and mine, there has been and is no one who could be mentioned along with these two.”⁴⁰

The connoisseurship of the keen-eyed emperor is evident from a statement that he makes about individual and collaborative works in his Memoirs: “I derive such enjoyment from painting,” says he, “and have such expertise in judging it that, even without the artist's name being mentioned, no work of past or present masters can be shown to me that I do not instantly recognize who did it. Even if it is a scene of several figures and each face is by a different master, I can tell who did which face. If in a single painting different persons have done the eyes and eyebrows, I can determine who drew the face and who made the eyes and eyebrows.”⁴¹

The chemistry between Jahangir and Mansur has been the subject of many a book and research paper published during the last one century. Together the two contributed significantly to the Indian fauna; Jahangir portraying his exotic birds and animals in writing, while Mansur depicting them in his microscopically detailed paintings. It must be noted the Mughal king was only making his observations of the local fauna as an amateur. That's to say, he was not a zoologist or an ornithologist in the strict sense of the word. Nor was he drawing upon the work earlier authorities in the field. In fact, he didn't study the area at all nor was he educated in it and still his output is of immense historical importance due to his empirical approach, keen observations and experiments.

While Jahangir has been dubbed as the naturalist-sportsman by experts, Mansur holds the title of a master hand and a most original one for that matter. S.P. Verma, who has researched Mansur's works for almost five decades, writes of him: “Mansur is an artistic phenomenon, a creative event of the highest order with the imposed limitations and conventions of the Mughal atelier. He, as a keen observer of nature, endowed with almost Euclidean intellect was also capable of lending certain emotional undertones wherever the opportunity ever was, to his purely objective studies, and thereby

³⁸ Abdul-Hayy was an illustrious painter of the Jalayirid court at Baghdad, who moved to Samarkand in the early 15th-century and worked on many royal commissions.

³⁹ Ustad Behzad enjoys a legendary status among the miniature artists and is considered the father of the technique. He first headed the royal workshop of the Timurid ruler, Sultan Hussain Mirza Bayqara, and later shifted to Tabriz in Iran to work for Shah Tahmasp – the same monarch who had given refuge to Jahangir's grandfather, Humayun, during his exile.

⁴⁰ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 268

⁴¹ Ibid. 268

produced an art that is at once an admiration of the zoologist, and the art lovers and critics simultaneously.”⁴²

Not much is known about the life of Mansur, but he is said to have started his career as an assistant collaborator of an Akbar-era Mughal painter named Kanha, with whom he worked as a colorist on many of the *Baburnama* illustrations. There are also many works in the *Akbarnama* as well in which he worked in the same capacity with another leading artist of the Akbar's atelier, Miskin. Later in his career when he proved his mettle in the wildlife portraiture art, he worked individually under Jahangir's directions and produced an oeuvre that makes him a pioneer of modern wildlife art. Unfortunately, many of his works have been lost to the ravages of time, but what exists is sufficient for his evaluation as a man with extraordinary skills and formidable power of observation. On one single visit to Kashmir, he is said to have executed more than a hundred works of the valley's flora, none of which survives today. Many of his birds studies are represented in the first section of the present book, two of which are of vital significance for their historical backgrounds: One is the depiction of the now extinct Dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*); the other of the highly endangered Siberian Crane (*Leucogeranus leucogeranus*).

Coming back to Jahangir, he, like his father, also maintained an extensive aviary and a menagerie, but while Akbar was only interested in the commonly found birds and animals and crossbred them, the son was passionate about that was out of the ordinary. In their book *Jahangir – The Naturalist* M.A. Alvi and A. Rahman describes the sovereign in such words: “A strong propensity for all that is wonderful, novel or phenomenal, underlies his interest in other natural and scientific phenomena; and as he follows it up in the Tuzuk we are treated to a number of observations which could well have been worked upon towards really useful and conclusive information. There is a detailed description of plague, suggestive of the conditions under which it spreads. He speaks of a pair of elephants dying of rabies. Lunar and solar eclipses are recorded. The appearance and shape of a comet is meticulously observed over the period of a whole week.”⁴³

At the same time, Jahangir was also superstitious at times in the typical Indian fashion and would take auguries from his astrologers when confronted with difficult situations or starting and halting on journeys. In so far as his observations concerning natural phenomena are concerned, however, his empirical side would dominate over his personal beliefs and he would not take a moment to opt for logic and reason. So, writing about the Vernal Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus vernailis*), he says: “During these days a bird was brought from the country of Zerabad [Sumatra]. The color of its body is like that of a parrot, but it is smaller. One of the characteristics of this bird is that it hooks its foot around the branch of a tree or post on which it has perched, hangs upside down, and murmurs to itself all night. When day comes it sits upright on the branch. Although they say that animals perform religious worship, the prevalent opinion is that this act is in its nature.”⁴⁴

Jahangir not only closely monitored the living habits of the birds and animals, but also dissected many of them to know about their anatomy and the kind of food they consumed, done tests and experiments, made measurements, while at the same time asking the royal artists to render them

⁴² S.P. Verma, *Mughal Painter of Flora and Fauna: Ustad Mansur* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1999), 8

⁴³ M.A. Alvi and A. Rahman, *Jahangir – The Naturalist* (New Delhi: Lakherwal Press, 1969), 7

⁴⁴ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 164

on paper so that the 'so that the astonishment one has at hearing of them would increase by seeing them'. Some of his research is a groundbreaking research both in the fields of zoology, for no such previous studies were ever done before. For instance, he recorded the exact gestation period of the Indian elephants, something that modern scientists would only find out well over two centuries later. His study of a pair of Sarus Cranes (*Grus antigone*) that he kept at his royal aviary for well over five years and dearly named them Laila and Majnun, is a pioneering work in every sense of the word, detailing the species living habits, their mating process, the hatching of eggs, raising of chicks, and the fabled love and affection between the male and female.

One of his other original contributions that has escaped the notice of ornithologists including the illustrious Dr. Salim Ali, is Jahangir's classification of the Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*) as a passerine with non-webbed or anisodactyl feet. Jahangir discovered the species on one of his annual trips to the valley of Kashmir and after describing the background of the event, he says: "I ordered two or three of them caught and brought to me so that I could see whether its feet were webbed like a duck's or open like other birds of the field. Two of them were caught and brought. One died immediately, and the other remained a day. Its feet were not webbed like a duck's. I ordered Master Mansur the painter to draw its likeness."⁴⁵

Jahangir would also dissect birds and animals to get acquainted with their anatomy and the type of food they consumed. One such dissection and weighing procedure was carried on the Lammergeyer (*Gypaetus barbatus*) in 1625. Whether there is any precedence of it in the scientific annals as far as this particular raptor is concerned, begs for question: "...it had been repeatedly reported to His Majesty that there was an animal known as the *humay* [lammergeyer] in the Pir Panjal Mountains [Inner Himalayan range], and the people of that region said that it fed on small bones. It could often be seen flying through the air, and it rarely alighted. Inasmuch as His Majesty was very much inclined to investigate the truth of this report, it was ordered that any of the scouts who shot such a bird would be rewarded with a thousand rupees. By chance, Jamal Khan Qaravul shot one with a musket and brought it to the emperor's presence. Since it had been wounded in the leg, it was brought to the emperor alive and healthy. He ordered its crop inspected to find out what it ate. When the crop was opened, small bones came out of its gullet, just as the people of the mountains had said that its food consisted of small bones and that it always flew in the air with its gaze upon the earth, and wherever it spotted a bone it would pick it up in its beak, fly away, and cast it onto a rock to break it into little pieces. Then it would pick at it and eat it. In this case the prevailing opinion was that this was the famous *humay*, as is said, 'The *humay* is superior to all birds because it eats bones and harms no creature.'

"Its head and beak looked like a buzzard's, but a buzzard's head has no feathers while this one had black feathers. It was weighed in the emperor's presence and weighed 415 tolas [4.84 kg], which is equivalent to 1,037 1/2 mithcals."⁴⁶

There is another curious account in his Memoirs of the dissection of a bustard species in which he differentiates its windpipe from other birds such as the Common Crane goes like this: "It is an

⁴⁵ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 339

⁴⁶ Ibid. 434, 435

amazing thing that in all birds the windpipe, which the Turks call *chanaq*, goes straight from the top of the neck to the crop, while in the bustard, unlike any other bird, there is a single windpipe from the top of the throat for a distance of four fingers, then it splits in two and goes to the crop. At the point at which it forks there is a blockage, like a knot, that can be felt with the hand. In the crane it is even stranger, for its windpipe twists like a snake through the bones of the chest and passes to the root of the tail, and then it turns around and comes back to the throat. There were thought to be two kinds of bustard, one black and spotted and the other dun colored. Recently it was learned that they are not two types: the spotted black one is male and the dun-colored one is female. The proof was that testicles were found in the spotted one and eggs in the dun-colored one. The experiment was made repeatedly.”⁴⁷



The Brown Dipper by Mansur, c. 1610-15
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Concerning breeding of birds and animals, where Akbar and others failed, Jahangir succeeded. So he would proudly announce: “Until now, breeding the wild bird called *tazaru* [pheasant] in captivity had never been heard of. During my exalted father's time much effort was expended to produce an egg, but it never happened. I ordered several males and females kept together, and little by little they produced eggs. I then ordered the eggs to be placed under chickens. Within two years sixty or seventy chicks had been hatched, and fifty or sixty of them grew to maturity. Everyone who heard of it was absolutely amazed and related the fact that my brother [Shah Abbas] in Persia had taken great pains, but absolutely no eggs were produced and therefore no chicks resulted.”⁴⁸

He would also make new experiments in interbreeding out of curiosity and with quite satisfactory results: “In Ahmadabad I had two markhor goats along with me. Since there was no female in the establishment to mate with them, I wondered what sort of offspring would be produced if they were mated to the Barbary goats that are brought from Arabia, particularly from the port of Dofar. In short, they were mated to seven Barbary females, and six months later in Fatehpur they all produced young, four females and three males. They were extremely good-looking, well formed, and nicely colored. Among the colors, the ones that more resembled the markhor males, like the dun-colored ones with black stripes down the back and the ones that were dark red, looked better than the others and the good breeding was more obvious in them. What can be written of their playfulness, the funny things they do, and their leaping and bounding about?...I enjoyed them so much I ordered them always to be kept nearby, and each of them was given a suitable name.”⁴⁹

In so far as falconry goes, the emperor was, like his Timurid ancestors, an ardent practitioner of the field sport. His Memoirs is replete with hunting expeditions and numerous accounts of hawks and falcons. Here are a few specimens: “On Thursday the fourteenth [November 25, 1619] we stopped beside the tank in the village of Sandhara and held a wine party at which my particular servants were

⁴⁷ Ibid. 416

⁴⁸ Ibid. 134

⁴⁹ Ibid. 302

made happy on goblets of joy. The hunting birds that had been left in Agra to molt were brought on this day and shown to me by Khwaja Abdul-Latif the head falcon keeper. The ones that were worthy of my personal establishment were chosen, and the rest were given away to the amirs and other servants.”⁵⁰ And, again: “On Sunday the twenty-sixth [March 6, 1619] I mounted to go partridge hunting. At the end of the day I honored Sultan-Husayn by accepting his invitation to his house. His Majesty Arsh-Ashyani [the late King Akbar] had also visited him here. He presented horses, daggers, hawks, and falcons. I gave him back the horses and daggers, but I ordered the hawks and falcons tied loosely so that I could see those that flew well.”⁵¹

A keen observer of birds and animals that he was, he would tell the difference between a wild-hacked and captive-bred hawk: “At the same time I viewed a white falcon raised in the wild that Khan Alam, who had gone as an ambassador to the ruler of Iran, had sent as a gift. It is called *ukna* in Persian. It doesn't have any external sign to distinguish it from a hawk bred in captivity, but after it is flown the difference is obvious.”⁵² Whether Jahangir meant by the 'white falcon' a gyr or an albino variety of some other *Falco* species, is not clear but the term is used on quite many occasions in his Memoirs e.g. in more than three places he talks of white falcons that he sent to his eldest son, Prince Khurram (later King Shah Jahan).

On other occasion, he says: “At this time (25 November 1621) Zaynal Beg, the emissary of the ruler of Iran, attained the felicity of paying homage... As an offering he presented twelve Abbasi coins as a vow and fourteen horses with trappings, three white falcons, five beasts of burden, five camels, nine bows, and nine swords.”⁵³ And: “...Aqa-Muhammad, Shah Abbas's emissary, was honored by prostrating himself before the emperor, and he presented the shah's friendly letter for the emperor's view along with gifts and presents, among which was a white falcon.”⁵⁴ Also, elsewhere in his Memoirs: “Along the way I continually enjoyed hunting. One day while hunting I had a hawk catch a white quail, something I hadn't seen before. By chance, the hawk that caught it was also white.”⁵⁵

The proper Persian word for the gyrfalcon is *shunqar* and for albino is *taighun*. Since albino hawks are prized for their rarity, it's very much possible that every time Jahangir uses the term in his Memoirs, he means an albino, as he notes: “...Raja Bir Singh Deo brought an albino leopard for me to see. Although albino specimens of other birds and animals, which are called *tuyghun*, are found, until now an albino leopard had not been seen. Its markings, which were black, were of an ugly color, and the white of its body was somewhat bluish in tint. Albino animals I have seen are the falcon, the sparrow hawk, the hawk that is called *bighu* in Persian, the sparrow, the crow, the partridge, the quail, and the peacock. There is usually an albino hawk in the aviary.”⁵⁶

This is further corroborated by a note that appears just before the paragraph in which he mentions the wild-hacked hawk. Says he: “Recently Khwaja Hashim Dahbedi had sent five albino

⁵⁰ Ibid. 286

⁵¹ Ibid. 323

⁵² Ibid. 262

⁵³ Ibid. 352

⁵⁴ Ibid. 435

⁵⁵ Ibid. 411

⁵⁶ Ibid. 92, 93

hawks from Transoxiana [old name of Central Asia] as a gift with one of his relatives. One had died along the way, but the other four arrived safely in Ujjain. I ordered five thousand rupees turned over to his man to purchase any commodities that would please the khwaja. Another thousand rupees were given the man as a gratuity.”⁵⁷ Falconry in Central Asia had strong roots during the medieval times. Lying on the crucial migration routes of the Central Asian Flyway, there was also no dearth of the hawk species and their corresponding albinos either. The Mughal-era Pashtun poet-falconer, Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689), also has a couple of couplets to this effect in his *Baznama*:

In China and Turkey hawks are mostly found
In Turkestan and Shirwan they also abound
That's one reason why albinos in Turkestan thrive
Caught in great numbers when from their habitats they arrive⁵⁸

Hawks and falcons, as it's now abundantly clear, were the mainstay of the long list of royal gifts exchanged between kings or paid as a tribute by the nobility to the royal figures to show their allegiance. Before, Jahangir, his father, King Akbar, and Shah Tahmasp also had such an exchange of presents in a bid to strengthen ties. Writing about a rare gyrfalcon Shah Abbas had sent, Jahangir says: “On Sunday the 18th [October 31, 1619], we marched. The ruler of Iran had recently sent a falcon of good color with Piri Beg the chief falconer. He had given another to Khan Alam, who had sent his falcon with the royal falcon destined for the court. Khan Alam's died along the way, and the royal falcon was clawed by a cat through the falconer's negligence. Although it was delivered alive, it didn't live more than a week. What can I write of the beauty of this bird's color? It had black markings, and every feather on its wings, back, and sides was extremely beautiful. Since it was rather unusual, I ordered Master Mansur the painter, who has been entitled *Nadirul'asr* [Wonder of the Age], to draw its likeness to be kept. I gave the falconer a bonus of two thousand rupees and let him return home.”⁵⁹



Jahangir with a White Falcon, c. 1605-27
© The British Museum, London

The list of animals exchanged between the two emperors wasn't limited only to high-breed hawks, hounds and horses by the way. Any rare and unusual item or animal that came along the one emperor's way, he'd send it the other as a goodwill gesture. Here's interesting note in the *Jahangirnama* about a zebra that had just arrived in the Mughal court and caused a great sensation: “At this time [around 1622] I was shown a wild ass. It was extremely strange, for it was for all the world exactly like a tiger. Tigers have black and yellow stripes, but this one was black and white. There were black stripes, large and small in proportion to where they were, from the tip of its nose to the end of its tail and from the tip of its ear to the top of its hoof. Around its eyes were black stripes of great fineness—you'd say the painter of destiny had produced a tour de force on the canvas of time with his wonderworking brush. It was so strange some thought it might have been painted, but after inspection

⁵⁷ Ibid. 262

⁵⁸ Khushal Khan Khattak, *The Book of Falconry*, trans. Sami ur Rahman (Islamabad: PanGraphics Press, 2014), 14

⁵⁹ Ibid. 314

it was clear that that was how God had made it. Since it was so rare it was included among the gifts for my brother Shah Abbas.”⁶⁰

It is worthwhile to note that the royal diplomatic missions consisted of an army of noblemen, guards, hunters, falconers, and retainers. They were more like the large official delegations that accompany the heads of powerful states today on foreign visits. A Persian writer, Iskandar Beg, who was a witness to the procession of the Mughal envoy, Khan Alam, says: “On the day that Khan Alam entered Qazwin [capital city of the Safavid dynasty], the writer of this book had remained in the city and witnessed his elaborate elegance. It has been heard from men who have seen much of the world that from the beginning of this dynasty until now no ambassador from India or Anatolia has ever come to Iran with so much pomp and circumstance. At the time that Khan Alam has set foot on Iranian territory he was accompanied by up to a thousand grand imperial servants. He had his own personal retinue, aside from his servants' servants and menials, of whom two hundred were falconers and huntsmen, and some of these he sent back from Herat. On the day he arrived in Qazwin he had seven or eight hundred imperial servants, his own retainers, his retainers' retainers and servants, and animal keepers. There were ten huge elephants furnished with golden platforms and seats and other various paraphernalia, and all sorts of animals—tigers, panthers, Indian antelope and deer, leopards, rhinoceros, birds that could speak, and water buffalo that drew palanquins and carts.”⁶¹

In the preceding paragraphs, Jahangir talked of an albino quail hunted by an albino hawk. Here he writes of a black francolin caught by a hawk, but as mere catching quarry wasn't enough for him, he dissected the animal for research purposes: “One day I was having a good time hunting. I had a hawk catch a black partridge and ordered its crop slip open in my presence. A mouse it had swallowed whole and hadn't yet digested came out of the crop. It was amazing how a throat so narrow could get down a whole mouse. Really, if anyone else had told the story it wouldn't have been possible to believe it, but since I saw it myself it has been recorded for its strangeness.”⁶²

Here is another hawking story by the prototype sportsman and quite instructing one: “On the third [January 12, 1617], we decamped and once again, as we had before, we got into boats and went two and an eighth kos [roughly sixteen miles] to the camp site in the village of Kawalhas. While I was hunting along the way, a quail flew into a bush. After a search had been made I ordered one of the scouts to surround the bush and get hold of the quail, and I went on. Just then another quail took off. No sooner had I sent a hawk after that one than the scout brought me the first one. I ordered the hawk fed on the latter quail, and I ordered the second one, which we had caught, kept because it was young. By the time this order arrived, the huntsmen had already let the hawk feed on the quail. After a time the scout said, “If we don't kill the quail, it will die.” I commanded it killed if that was the case. When the blade was placed on its throat, it squirmed out from under the blade and flew away. After that I moved from the boat to horseback, when suddenly a sparrow was blown by the wind and impaled itself on an arrow shaft one of the scouts ahead of me was holding. It died instantly. I marveled at the twist of fate. Back there, it protected a quail whose time had not come, and within an instant, saved it from danger, while here it made a swallow whose time had come the prisoner of an

⁶⁰ Ibid. 360

⁶¹ Ibid. 148, 149

⁶² King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 412

arrow of destiny in the hand of destruction.

If the blade of the world moves, it will not cut a vein until God so wills.⁶³

Unlike the modern times when state-of-the-art GPS systems are a vital part of a falconer's toolkit, losing a hawk was a routine among the falconers in antiquity. Kings were also not immune to this misfortune. Only an ardent falconer knows the grief of losing a favorite hawk and then the jubilation of finding it again: "On Sunday the third [November 14] we decamped from Kaliadeh and dismounted in the village of Qasimkhera. Along the way I occupied myself hunting with hawks and falcons. By chance a *karwanak* crane took flight. I sent a white hawk of which I am extremely fond after it. The crane escaped its clutches, and the hawk rose into the air and went so high that it disappeared from view. No matter how hard or far the scouts and falconers searched, they found no trace. It seemed absurd to think that the hawk could be recovered in such a plain. Lashkar Mir Kashmiri, the chief of the Kashmiri falconers, was in charge of the said bird. He was searching for it frantically all over the plain when suddenly it appeared far away in a tree. When he approached, he found the hawk sitting on the end of a branch. He showed it a chicken and summoned it. Not three gharis had passed before he had captured it and brought it to me. This was a gift from out of the blue that no one had expected, and it made me very happy. As a reward for this service I increased his rank and gave him a horse and a robe of honor."⁶⁴



Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings by Bichitre c. 1615
© Freer Gallery of Art, New York

Before winding up Jahangir's illustrious career as the archetype sportsman, one last quotation from the Memoirs would give the reader an idea about the passion he entertained for the field sports: "At night I told stories of former hunts and of the yearning and desire I had for this occupation to those who were in attendance. I then wondered whether or not it might be possible to make a list of all the animals hunted from my onset into the age of discrimination to the present. I therefore ordered the recorders and overseers of the hunt, scouts, and others employed in this service to investigate, make a list of all the animals of every sort that had been hunted, and report to me. It turned out that from the beginning of my twelfth year, A.H. 988 [1580-81], until the end of the present year [1616] the eleventh of my reign and fiftieth lunar year of my



Detail from the above painting showing
an artist with a wildlife portrait

⁶³ Ibid. 205

⁶⁴ Ibid. 285, 286

age [that is, during the 36 solar years], 28,532 animals were taken in my presence. Of this total I shot with my own hand 17,167 animals as follows: quadrupeds, 3,203: lion, 86, bear, cheetah, fox, otter, hyena, 9, nilgai, 889, maha, a species of deer as large and bulky as a nilgai, 35,- buck and doe antelope, chikara, spotted deer, mountain goat, et cetera, 1,672, ram and red deer, 215, wolf, 64, wild ox, 36, boar, 90, ibex, 26, mountain ram, 22; argali sheep, 32, wild ass, 6, hare, 23. Birds, 13,964 as follows: pigeon, 10,348, lagar-jhagar hawk, 3, eagle, 2, kite, 23, jughd [owl], 39, pelican, 12, mouse-eater, 5, sparrow, 41, dove, 25; bum [owl], 30,- duck, goose, heron, et cetera, 150, crow, 3,473. Aquatic animals: magarmach, which means crocodile, 10.”⁶⁵

A year after Jahangir's death in 1627, his son, Shah Jahan ascended the Mughal throne and ruled the Sub-continent for about three decades. Unlike his father, however, Shah Jahan, did not entertain much passion for the animal world, but that he was a born falconer, goes without saying. Unfortunately, the new king did not maintain a diary or wrote his autobiography in the fashion of Jahangir and Babur either. Although, the history of reign has been recorded by the two court scribes, Abdul Hamid Lahori and Muhammad Amin Kazvini, in their works called *Padshahnama* in great detail, they are mainly political and military histories of his reign.

All that we have about the builder of magnificent monuments are the scattered accounts in the *Jahangirnama* and miniature paintings that show his interest in the field sport. In his Memoirs, Jahangir would say on many occasions, as described earlier, that he sent albino hawks to Baba Khurram i.e. Shah Jahan. For instance: “On the twenty-ninth [November 8, 1616], we decamped from Deorani and stopped in the village of Dasawali, two and an eighth kos [roughly four miles] from Deorani. I gave Mu'tamad Khan an elephant. We stayed here for three more days, during which a nilgai [blue bull] was killed. I sent my son Baba Khurram two royal hawks.”⁶⁶ Likewise, elsewhere he'd say: “On the eve of Saturday the twenty-first [December 3, 1620] the forward camp set out under good auspices in the direction of Agra. Barqandaz Khan was assigned the post of supervisor of the arsenal of the Deccan army. Shaykh Ishaq was assigned to Kangra. Allahdad Khan Afghan's brothers were released from prison and given an award of a thousand rupees. I sent two white falcons as a gift to Khurram.”⁶⁷

The following account in the *Jahangirnama* establishes it without a shadow of doubt that Shah Jahan practiced the field sport right from his youth and with much gusto and enthusiasm than his father for that matter: “Common Cranes⁶⁸ had been hunted with hawks previously, but I hadn't seen hawks hunt Sarus Cranes. Since my son Shahjahan greatly loves hawking and his hawks were well trained, at his request I mounted early in the morning and got a Sarus myself. Another was brought down by the hawk my son held. Without exaggeration, it was a very, very fine hunt. I really, really enjoyed it. The Sarus may be a large bird, but it is very weak and ungainly at flying. There is no comparison with hunting a Common Crane. What a wonderful bird the hawk is to be able to catch such a massive bird and bring it down with its talons. Hasan Khan, my son's falcon keeper, was rewarded for this hunt with an elephant, a horse, and a robe of honor. His son was also given a horse

⁶⁵ Ibid. 216

⁶⁶ Ibid. 202

⁶⁷ Ibid. 353

⁶⁸ The translator has made a couple of mistakes in rendering this very paragraph. He has not only confused the common crane with the sarus, but also the sarus with the stork. The mistakes have been corrected here.

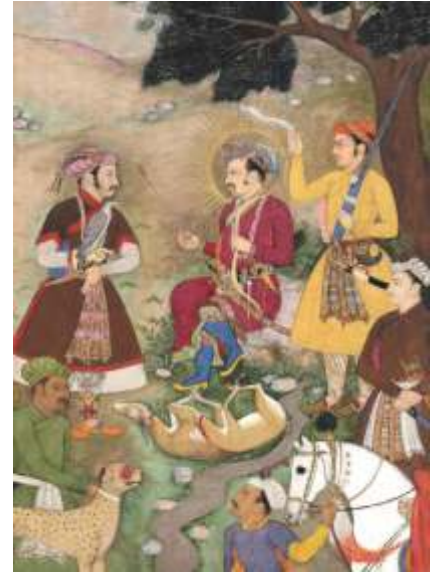
and a robe.”⁶⁹

So much for Shah Jahan's youthful fascination with hawks and falcons! Even when he was dethroned by his renegade son, Aurangzeb, in 1658 and confined in the Agra Fort, he was allowed to entertain his heart with these raptors, according to Francois Bernier, the court physician Aurangzeb. The famous Pashtun poet-falconer and leader of the Khattak tribe in northwest Pakistan, Khushal Khan Khattak, who lived during the reign of Shah Jahan, was all praise for the emperor's patronage of art and literature. While writing about the albino gyrfalcons in his poetical work, *Baznama*, Khushal refers to a joint hawking trip in which Shah Jahan witnessed the poet's one such rare bird's sport. Says he:

The gyrs are mostly captured in China and Turkestan
They are also seldom seen in this country, Hindustan
An albino gyr was caught during the Aurangzeb's reign
That was trapped in the land by a skilled sportsman
One such rare gyr was netted by my own netter
Whose sport King Shah Jahan also did monitor⁷⁰

Like any other field, the miniature painting also continued to flourish during the rule of Shah Jahan, but contrary to the Jahangir's golden period of birds' studies, more attention was paid to the court scenes or general hunting and hawking expeditions. It is interesting to note that some of Jahangir and Shah Jahan's era miniature paintings made their way to Europe and inspired great masters of the continent to copy them in their own style. There is a curious composite painting by the 17th-century Dutch artist, Willem Schellinks (1627-1678), in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, which was previously titled as *The Hawking Party*. The work was the subject of much controversy for a long period of time respecting the identifications of the human figures in it. Recent research claims the painting depicts King Shah Jahan's four sons, Shah Shuja, Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb, and Murad Bukhsh. It is now titled as the *Parade of the Sons of Shah Jahan on Composite Horses and Elephants*.

Looking at the principal figure, it resembles, however, more with Shah Jahan than his sons, He is riding on a composite elephant and is holding an impressive long-winged hawk on his fist. The



Jahangir and Prince Khurram after a Hunt, c. 1640-50
© The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford



Parade of the Sons of Shah Jahan on
Composite Horses and Elephants by Willem Schellinks,
c. mid-17th century © V&A Museum, London

⁶⁹ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 289

⁷⁰ Khushal Khan Khattak, *The Book of Falconry*, trans. Sami ur Rahman (Islamabad: PanGraphics Press, 2014) 53, 54



Shah Jahan and Dara Shikoh by Rembrandt, c. 1654-1656
© The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

procession-like scene is being watched by a potentate with female companions seated on a raised platform. Many other courtiers are watching it from the upper gallery. Several servants behind the potentate are standing there with flywhisks and handheld fans etc. Akbar and Jahangir are shown in a heavenly state in the upper center. The spiritually-minded Akbar is holding a rosary in his hand, while Jahangir a book, containing perhaps his favorite bird and animal illustrations.

Schellinks, in fact, executed three paintings of Shah Jahan. The second painting is housed in the Musee Guimet Collection, Paris, while the third was sold at the Southby's in 1983 and its whereabouts is a mystery. There is even a fourth painting ascribed to the same artist but its authenticity is not confirmed due to a difference in style. It is titled, *Oriental Horsemen Riding to a Hunt*, and is preserved in the British Museum, London, (Museum No. 1923,0113.20). Dated 1650-1660, in this particular work also, there is mounted man with a hawk.

Despite his amazing paintings of Shah Jahan,

Schellinks, however, was not the only Dutch artist, who was inspired by the Mughal painting technique. Another Dutch master, Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669) was, in fact, a big collector of the Mughal miniatures. The prolific master worked on a whole series of about twenty-four sketches, inspired by the Mughal works. One of these sketches also shows Shah Jahan with his favorite son, Dara Shikoh, who is carrying a hawk. Rembrandt's Mughal series is known 'Drawings from Surat' that are housed in different world museums. The port city of Surat in India served as the main trading post for the Dutch and Portuguese merchants in the late 16th and early 17th century. It is not out of place to point out that neither Schellinks nor Rembrandt had ever visited India.

Shah Jahan's glorious era came to an end, when his ultra-conservative son, Aurangzeb, usurped the power in 1658 through a series of court conspiracies and wars with his other brothers – more importantly, with the *heir apparent*, Dara Shikoh. Shah Jahan was incarcerated in the Agra Fort where he died in 1666, while and his three sons were killed by Aurangzeb one by one. After clearing his way for power, Aurangzeb would rule the Mughal empire for about half a century. During early in his life, Aurangzeb would also go out hunting and hawking like the rest of his ancestors. In contrast to the other Mughal rulers, there are very few paintings that portray him with hawks or in hunting scenes. There is a reason for it that will be discussed shortly, but let's first have a look at his initial keenness in the sports. The French surgeon, Francois Bernier (1620-1688), who first served in the court of Dara and later after his death that of Aurangzeb, writes in his *Travels in the Mogul Empire 1656-1668*: “Other animals are next introduced [for royal inspection]; tame antelopes, kept for the purpose of fighting with each other; Nilgaux or grey oxen, that appear to me to be a species of elk; rhinoceroses; large Bengale buffaloes with prodigious horns which enable them to contend against lions and tigers; tame leopards, or panthers, employed in hunting antelopes; some of the fine sporting dogs from Usbec, of every kind, and each dog with a small red covering; lastly, every species of the birds of prey used in field sports for catching partridges, cranes, hares, and even, it is said, for hunting antelopes, on which

they pounce with violence, beating their heads and blinding them with their wings and claws.”⁷¹

Bernier's description of deer hawking is unique in that neither Babur nor Jahangir and nor Akbar's chronicler, Abul Fazl, has mentioned it in their works. He also mentions crane hawking in his book and says: “It is curious enough to observe the manner in which cranes are caught. Their courageous defence in the air against the birds of prey affords much sport. Sometimes they kill their assailants; but from the slowness of their movements in wheeling round they are overcome as the number of their enemies increases.”⁷² The French surgeon also accompanied the Mughal emperor during one of his summer visits to the Kashmir Valley that had long served as a rich hunting ground for many a previous emperor, and says: “I shall relate elsewhere this expedition to Kachemire, and describe how the King, during that long journey, amused himself almost every day, with the sports of the field, sometimes letting his birds of prey loose against cranes; sometimes hunting the nilsgaus, or grey oxen (a species of elk); another day hunting antelopes with tame leopards; and then indulging in the exclusively royal hunt of the lion.”⁷³



Raja Balwant Singh on Horseback Holding a Hawk
by Nainsukh, c. 1750 © V&A Museum, London

Bernier also describes the mode of the Mughal hunting and says: “Whenever the Monarch is about to take the field, every gamekeeper [Gardes Chasses] near whose district the army is to pass is called upon to apprise the Grand Master of the Hunt of the various sorts of game under his particular charge, and of the places where they are in the greatest plenty. Sentries are then stationed at the different roads of that district, to guard the tract of ground selected, which extends sometimes four or five leagues; and while the army is on its march, on one side or the other, so as to avoid that tract, the King enters it with as many Omrahs [noblemen] and other persons as have liberty to do so, and enjoys, leisurely and uninterruptedly, the sports of the field, vaiying them according to the nature of the game.”⁷⁴

What Bernier is referring to here is called the *qamargah* or ringing-in mode of hunting – a typical Timurid invention. Being a powerful and rich of its time, almost everything the Mughals indulged in was on a grand and massive scale. It holds true for the royal hunting expeditions also in which thousands of beaters and soldiers would accompany the emperor, forming a large circle of about ten miles diameter. They would slowly work their way driving with them the game toward a pre-

⁷¹ Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable (London: Oxford University Press, 1916) 262

⁷² Ibid. 377

⁷³ Ibid. 218

⁷⁴ Ibid. 375

determined central point, where the whole action took place. During the south Russian military campaign, when Tamerlane's massive army was faced with starvation, he used this mode of hunting to feed his army. It was more like the army maneuvering and exercises of modern times. The same encircling technique was, in fact, applied by the Timurids and Mughals against their enemies in battles. In times of peace, hunting expeditions in a way would train soldiers in mass maneuvering and keep them in a state of preparedness. In one such *qamargah* hunt in 1567 in Akbar's times that spanned over a month and took place at a vast tract of territory near Lahore, 50,000 men and soldiers participated, according to Abul Fazl.

So much for Aurangzeb's early escapades! As he grew older in age, he indulged more in fighting internal discord and dissention that was in a way of his own making. He would also incline more toward the strict form of puritanical Islam and forbid painting. Jadunath Sarkar, an authority on the subject, writes in his monumental work, *History of Aurangzib*: "Painting he never appreciated. Indeed the portraiture of any living being impossible under an orthodox Islamic king, as an impious imitation of the Creator. Music he banished from his Court, in the outburst of devotion which marked the completion of the tenth year of his reign. Fine Chinaware he liked, and these were presented to him by nobles and traders. But he had none of his father's passion for building. No masterpiece of architecture, no superb or exquisite mosque hall, or tomb marks his reign. All that he built took the impress of his utilitarian mind. They were commonplace necessary things, piles of brick and mortar, which quickly decayed."⁷⁵

As for his dwindling interest in the field sports and his way of looking at it in old age, the writer quotes his grandson's account: "Of Aurangzib's life during this period we have his own reminiscences, written in old age to his grandson Bidar Bakht : 'The village of Sattarah near Aurangabad was my hunting ground...I used in my folly to ride about, and make forced marches under the instigations of Satan and of my own passions. I used to go far on horseback to hunt the nilgau [blue bull] and other kinds of game. Other idle deeds did I do.'"⁷⁶ The Mughal empire would start on a declining process during the Aurangzeb's reign and later kings of the dynasty would be unable to stop or reverse it. After his death in 1707, there would a couple of occasions when the Mughal art would show some signs of revival but on the whole it would never achieve the splendor and magnificence of its classical era.

After the Mughal decline, several local schools of art would give rise to. Among them, the Decanni, Pahari, and Rajasthani are noteworthy. During the 18th-century, a remarkable Pahari painter, Nainsukh, would produce works of immense beauty and refinement, depicting his local patrons in hawking scenes. His era may be termed as an important episode in the Indian miniature art. Nainsukh, in fact, was born into a family of painters in 1710. His father, Pundit Seu, was a notable artist, while his older brother, Manaku, has also left a mark on the Pahari-style painting. As far as falconry is concerned, his hawks are distinguishable by their particular geometric composition and are invariably all the time yellow-eyed (short-winged). The tail shows most of the times three broad horizontal stripes, the tips of the principal wings are always bent into an "x" shape, while the upperparts covers usually an interlocking pattern of the "v" letter.

⁷⁵ Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib Vol. I* (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1912) 8,9

⁷⁶ Ibid. 171, 172

Writing about the artist and his art, historian William Dalrymple observes: “It was in Jasrota [a Himalayan principedom] that Nainsukh—“Delight of the Eye”—began producing the work that led to him today being generally regarded as the greatest of eighteenth-century Indian painters. Nainsukh brought together all the precision and technically exquisite detail of the Mughal tradition, the bright colors of Rajasthani painting, and the bold beauty of early Pahari art—the art of the Punjab hills. To all this he added a humor and a humanism, a refinement, and above all a precise, sharply observant eye that was entirely his own.”⁷⁷

From the late 18th and early 19th century, the English would dominate the South Asian art scene and would give birth to a new style called as the Company school. This school would employ local artists who would blend the Western and Mughal elements in their work. The use of perspective and light tones of color would, however, incline these local artists more toward the European style.

From the late 18th and early 19th century, the English would dominate the South Asian art scene and give birth to a new school called as the Company style. This school would employ local artists who would blend the Western and Mughal elements in their works. The use of perspective and light color tones would, however, transform the actual technique more into the European style than the Mughal. Some notable artists of the Company school include Ghulam Ali Khan – who worked on the Frazier Album – Ghulam Murtaza Khan, Ram Das, Bhavani Das, and Sheikh Zain al-Din. The last three are famous for their joint work on the Impey Album that was specifically dedicated to the Indian wildlife portraits. And thus the movement of the Mughal miniature painting that was started around mid-16th century by King Humayun and culminated during the Jahangir era would finally end with the complete takeover of the Mughal empire by the British in 1857.



Company style painting, early 19th century © The British Museum, London

⁷⁷ William Dalrymple, “Visions of Indian Art”, *The New York Review of Books*, June 6, 2013 Issue.





Hawks and Gamebirds

The Raven Addresses the Animals

Single-page painting mounted on a detached album folio

Date c. 1590 – 1620

Artist Miskin

Museum Number 1920,9017,0.5

Dimensions 29.9 × 19.3 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © The British Museum, London



This masterpiece of the Mughal atelier is selected primarily as a demonstration to give the reader an idea about the highly subtle

and detailed nature of the miniature technique. Executed in mere 29.9 × 19.3 cm (11.7 × 7.5 in) dimensions, the painting depicts no less than seventy species of birds and animals, besides a few bees and the mythical *simurgh* (phoenix) and two dragons. Among the animals and birds there's the lion, tiger, caracal, bear, fox, cheetah, elephant, horse, cobra, viper, rattle snake, mongoose, scorpion, dolphin, a few fish species, crocodile, otter, crab, tortoise, frog, peafowl, crane, myna, see-see partridge, chukor partridge, grey francolin, bee-eater, stone curlew, hoopoe, duck, rose-ringed parakeet, raven, barn owl, eagle owl, red-headed vulture, and goshawk, among others.

Painted by Miskin (active 1570-1604), one of the leading Mughal artists of the royal atelier of Akbar the Great, this painting illustrates an animal fable mentioned in the ancient Indian classic, *Panchatantra*. The *Panchatantra* is a 2nd-century B.C. work and has been translated in different world languages at different stages of history. Hence, it is also known by various names, such as *Anwar-i Subaili*, *Kalilah wo Dimna*, and *The Fables of Bidpai*. The Mughal rulers were quite fond of such fables.

The painting has also been differently titled, like *The assembled animals complain to the raven of their mistreatment at the hands of man* and *The raven addresses an assembly of animals*. The raven, dubbed as the wisest of birds, sits on top of a precipitous cliff, while all the other animals are looking upwards at it and listening intently to its wise words. The whole atmosphere is one of dynamic exuberance that was characteristic of the classical Mughal era art.





Portrait of a Falcon

Date 1619

Artist Attributed to Mansur (active 1590 – 1625)

Accession Number 14.683

Dimensions 22.9 × 14.6 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

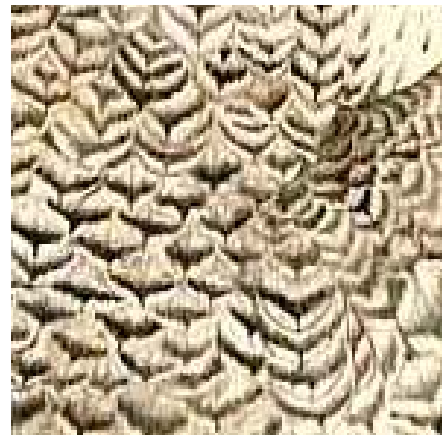


This study of the Gyrfalcon (*Falco Rusticolus*), though, is incomplete, yet is a beautiful specimen of the Mughal portraiture art. The detail of the head and upperparts is suggestive of a master hand like Mansur, to whom it

is attributed. The form and composition of the bird is simply perfect, while the plumage coloration true to life. It's most probably the gyr that King Jahangir received as a gift from the Persian emperor, Shah Abbas, in October 1619, but, which, unfortunately, couldn't live more than a week due to her mauling by a cat during the journey:

“The ruler of Iran had recently sent a falcon of good color with Piri Beg the chief falconer. He had given another to Khan Alam, who had sent his falcon with the royal falcon destined for the court. Khan Alam's died along the way, and the royal falcon was clawed by a cat through the falconer's negligence. Although it was delivered alive, it didn't live more than a week before dying. What can I write of the beauty of this bird's color? It had black markings, and every feather on its wings, back, and sides was extremely beautiful. Since it

was rather unusual, I ordered Master Mansur the painter, who has been entitled *Nadirul'asr* [Wonder of the Age], to draw its likeness to be kept. I gave the falconer a bonus of two thousand rupees and let him return home.”¹



¹ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 314



الحصري شاه منصور

Hawk on a Perch

Single-page painting mounted on a detached album folio

Date 1627 – 1658

Museum Number 1920,0917,0.10.1

Dimension 20.2 × 13.5 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

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This painting of a juvenile Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) is one of the most realist and detailed studies of a bird of prey of the entire Mughal oeuvre. The Gos is sitting on a red-colored T perch with round blue tips, looking right.

lines on both inner and outer edges.

The eyes, the cere, the frontal streaks, the beak, the wings, the feathers, the coverts, the tail, and the talons, are all executed with acute care and sensibility. The jesses are attached to two small varvels through which a beautiful leash is passed and then wound around the iron bar of the perch a couple of times, and tied to a golden weight on the ground. There's also a halsband or *jangoli* hanging from the hawk's neck with a small golden necklace. The Gos is the most frequently painted bird of



prey in the Mughal works and there are literally hundreds of paintings depicting the species.

The hawk is flanked by a plant with pink flowers on the upper left, while on the right there's another plant with star-like red flowers. The sky shows

broad sweeps of white and blue while the background is painted in the beautiful mint green. There are vegetal motifs in gold on the inner border, delineated by thin



Portrait of a Falcon

Date 1600s

Artist Attributed to Mansur

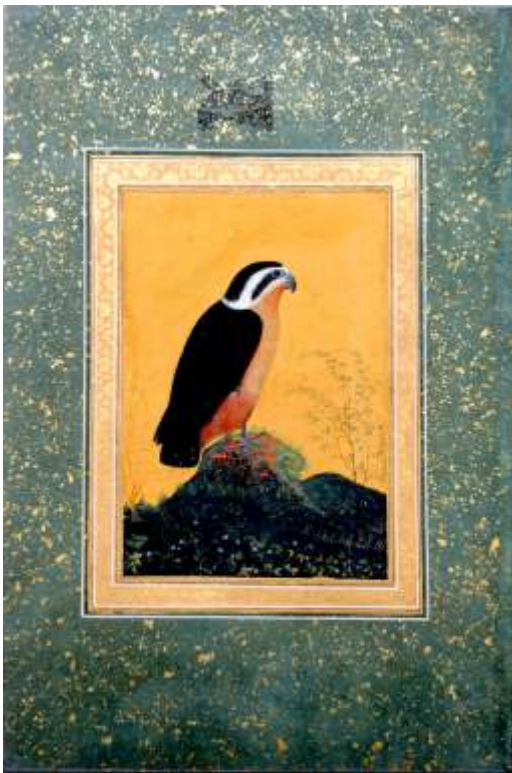
Museum Number 1969,0317,0.2

Dimensions 16.4 × 10.5 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

Copyright © The British Museum, London

The Red-napped Shaheen (*Falco pelegrinoides babylonicus*) was a prized bird of prey among the Eastern falconers just as it is today. Painted against a dull dun-hued background, the work lacks the vitality and minute detail of the preceding two. The Persian inscription in the lower right corner bear the name of Mansur, but obviously it's a later copy of a Mansur original by some unknown artist. The head and feathers show scanty detail, while the breast, underbelly, and boots broad brush strokes in light grey and brown, which certainly was not the style of the master painter.



Below are the portraits of the beautiful Collared Falconet (*Microhierax caerulescens*) and the Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*). The Collared Falconet was called *molchin* by the Mughals and was trained to strike the Common Crane, as mentioned in the *Ain I Akbari*. The Sparrowhawk, on the other hand, was the favorite bird of prey of King Akbar, as his chronicler, Abul Fazl, says: "Though he [Akbar] trains the *baz* [Goshawk], *shahin* [Peregrine], *shunqar* [Gyrfalcon], and *burkat* [Golden Eagle] falcons, and makes them perform wonderful deeds, His Majesty prefers the *basha* [Sparrowhawk], to which class of hawks he gives various names."²



² Abdul Fazl Allami, *The Ain i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann (Bengal: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), 293



چهارم
عمل سده و درگاه نادرا و
منصور

Red-Headed Vulture and Long-Billed Vulture

Folio from the Shah Jahan Album

Date 1620

Artist Mansur

Accession Number 55.121.10.12

Dimensions 29.1 x 25.6 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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This is an authentic Mansur work. The Red-Headed Vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*) and the Long-Billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) are old world raptors native to Pakistan, India, and Nepal etc. The work is both scientifically and artistically accurate. It

was owing to wildlife masterpieces like these that earned Mansur the title of *Nadir al-Asr* i.e. 'Wonder of the Age' by King Jahangir. The work has been termed as something 'more than avian specimens...evident in the subtle gradations of sooty hues and pearly beige and gray shades of the feathers.' The sketchy rock and the linear outline are not the natural habitat of the vultures but rather an invention of the artist's imagination.

There are Persian verses in the innermost border, encircled by floral motifs and birds in a golden background. It's followed by another inner border with vegetal designs in gold. The outer and larger border also bears numerous types of flowering plants, bees, and butterflies in gold.

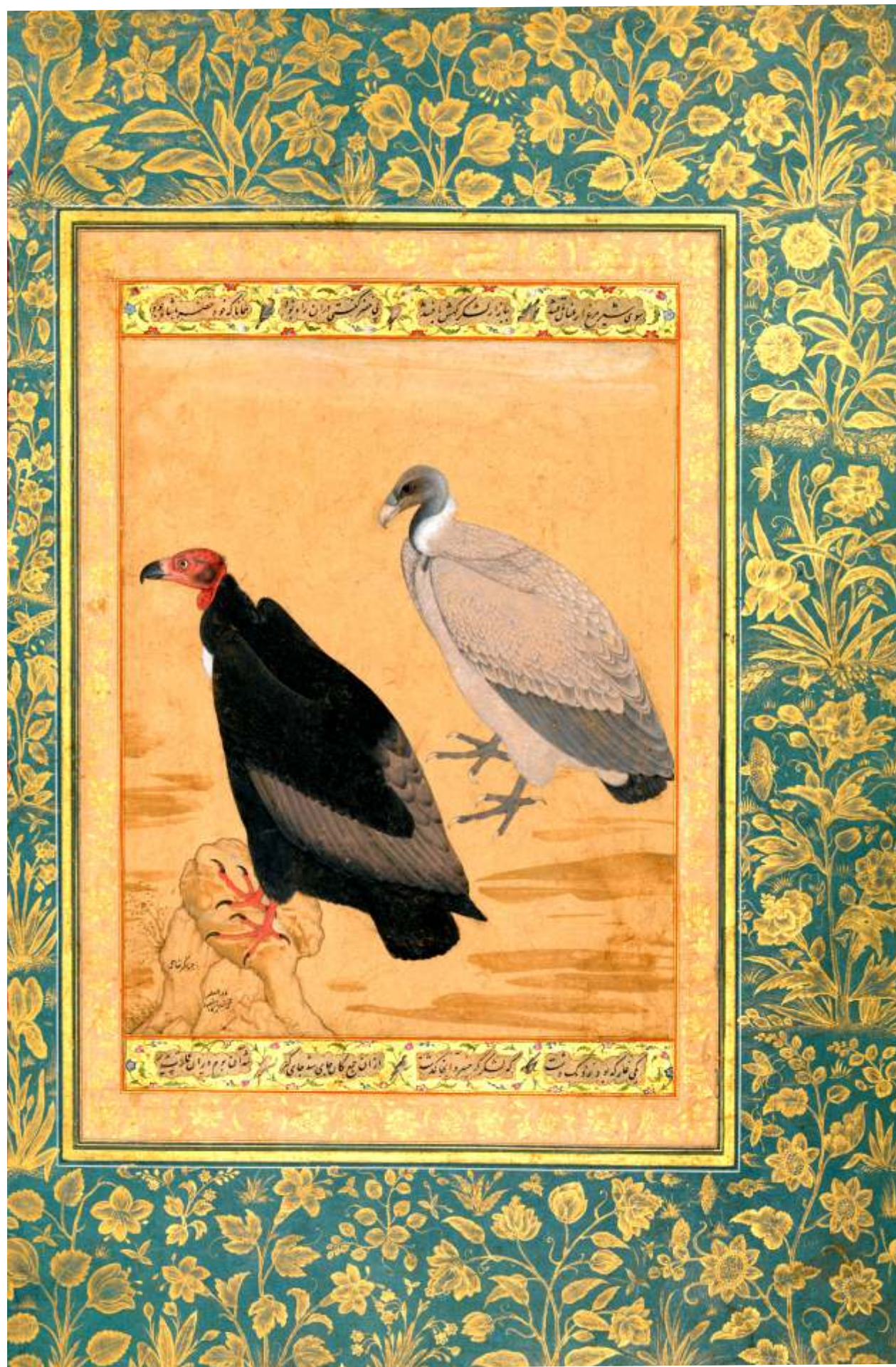
Found commonly in the Sub-continent, there's no specific mention of the two vultures in the *Memoirs of Jahangir* but a born naturalist that Jahangir was, we find a curious account of the bone-breaker Lammergeyer or Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) that is perhaps the first scientific study of the species involving proper dissection and measurements of weight: "...it had been

repeatedly reported to His Majesty that there was an animal known as the *humay* [lammergeyer] in the Pir Panjal Mountains [Inner Himalayan range], and the people of that region said that it fed on small bones. It could often be seen flying through the air, and it rarely alighted. Inasmuch as His Majesty was very much inclined to investigate the truth of this report, it was ordered that any of the scouts who shot such a bird would be rewarded with a thousand rupees. By chance, Jamal Khan Qaravul shot one with a musket and brought it to the emperor's presence. Since it had been wounded in the leg, it was brought to the emperor alive and healthy. He ordered its crop inspected to find out what it ate. When the crop was opened, small bones came out of its gullet, just as the people of the mountains had said that its food consisted of small bones and that it always flew in the air with its gaze upon the earth, and wherever it spotted a bone it would pick it up in its beak, fly away, and cast it onto a rock to break it into little pieces. Then it would pick at it and eat it. In this case the prevailing opinion was that this was the famous *humay*, as is said, 'The *humay* is superior to all birds because it eats bones and harms no creature.'



"Its head and beak looked like a buzzard's [vulture's], but a buzzard's head has no feathers while this one had black feathers. It was weighed in the emperor's presence and weighed 4 1 5 tolas [4.84 kg], which is equivalent to 1 ,037 ' /2 mithcals."³

³ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 314



Himalayan Cheer Pheasant

Date 1620

Artist Mansur

Museum Number IM135-1921

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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Mansur would accompany Jahangir during his annual summer visits to the scenic Kashmir Valley that was home to not only an amazing variety of flora and fauna but also a great number of falconers. He is said to have painted

more than a hundred studies of Kashmiri plants and flowers in one single visit, of which, unfortunately, none survives. The Himalayan Cheer Pheasant (*Catreus wallichii*) was probably seen by Mansur on one such visit, as the emperor notes in his autobiography:



“Baso the zamindar of Talwara [in Kashmir] brought for my inspection a bird the people of the hills call *Jan bahman*. Its tail is like that of a *qirqaṭvul* [ring-necked pheasant], which is also called *tazarv* [common pheasant]. In color it is exactly like a

female *qirqaṭvul*, but its body is larger by a ratio of ten to fifteen. Around this bird's eyes is red, while around a pheasant's eyes is white. Baso reported that this bird lives in snowy mountains and eats grass and herbs.”⁴

The Indian art historian Niharranjan Ray says of the work: “Mansur's acute observation and detailed and refined draftsmanship are noticeable in this study as well, as much as in his numerous other bird-studies. But what is striking is the seemingly casual but well-measured and balanced, flat and broad sweeps of the brush in a color tone which is deeper than that of the light background. These flat, broad sweeps throw the bird in relief to the fore, and despite its light and subtle color scheme, give it a vivid naturalness.”⁵

⁴ Ibid. 372

⁵ S.P. Verma, *Mughal Painter of Flora and Fauna: Ustad Mansur* (New Delhi: Abhivav Publications, 1999), 61



A Pair of Bengal Floricans

Folio from St. Petersburg Muraqqa

Date c. 1619

Artist Mansur

Dimensions 28.3 × 17.9 cm

Manuscript Number E-14

Folio Number f.81r

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The Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*) is a bustard species and is native to South Asia. This is one of Mansur's most beautiful birds' studies, with a color scheme that instantly catches the eye. The pair is rendered quite elegantly against a uniform pale background. There's an acacia-like plant with small dark green leaves and striking yellow flowers. Two insects are there to draw nectar from the flowers, while a white butterfly with dark-tinged tips on the wings is also flying toward the flowering plant. There's a black dragonfly on the left side too, just above the tail of the male Florican. It seems as if the study of the pair was executed on a small piece of paper and was later superimposed on a larger sheet, as is evident from the rectangular line around the subject matter. The artist has smartly tried to hide the line with the figures of the dragon, stems and flowers on three sides, while the base with dark pigment. The outer border with figures of plants and animals in landscape seems to be a later addition. Despite these minor drawbacks, the work is still an absolute treat to look at.

Mansur's patron, King Jahangir, who is famous

for the dissection of birds and animals to research their anatomies, writes in his Memoirs: "It is an amazing thing that in all birds the windpipe, which the Turks call *chanaq*, goes straight from the top of the neck to the crop, while in the bustard, unlike any other bird, there is a single windpipe from the top of the throat for a distance of four fingers, then it splits in two and goes to the crop. At the point at which it forks there is a blockage, like a knot, that can be felt with the hand. In the crane it is even stranger, for its windpipe twists like a snake through the bones of the chest and passes to the root of the tail, and then it turns around and comes back to the throat. There were thought to be two kinds of bustard, one black and spotted and the other dun colored. Recently it was learned that they are not two types: the spotted black one is male and the dun-colored one is female. The proof was that testicles were found in the spotted one and eggs in the dun-colored one. The experiment was made repeatedly."⁶

Following is the detail from an early Mansur painting in the *Baburnama* (c. 1594 – 1595), depicting the Great Indian Bustard (*Ardiotis nigriceps*).



⁶ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 416



Diving Dipper and Other Birds

Date 1610-15

Artist Mansur

Accession Number 55.121.10.16

Dimensions 39.1 x 26 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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This is yet another masterpiece by the master wildlife artist, Ustad Mansur, of a rare bird species known as the Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasi*). Its ability to dive and swim in cold and rapid currents of water in medium-

altitude regions is said to be quite unique among passerines. It can safely be assumed that Emperor Jahangir was not only the first naturalist to discover the species but also classified it as a passerine with non-webbed or anisodactyl feet.

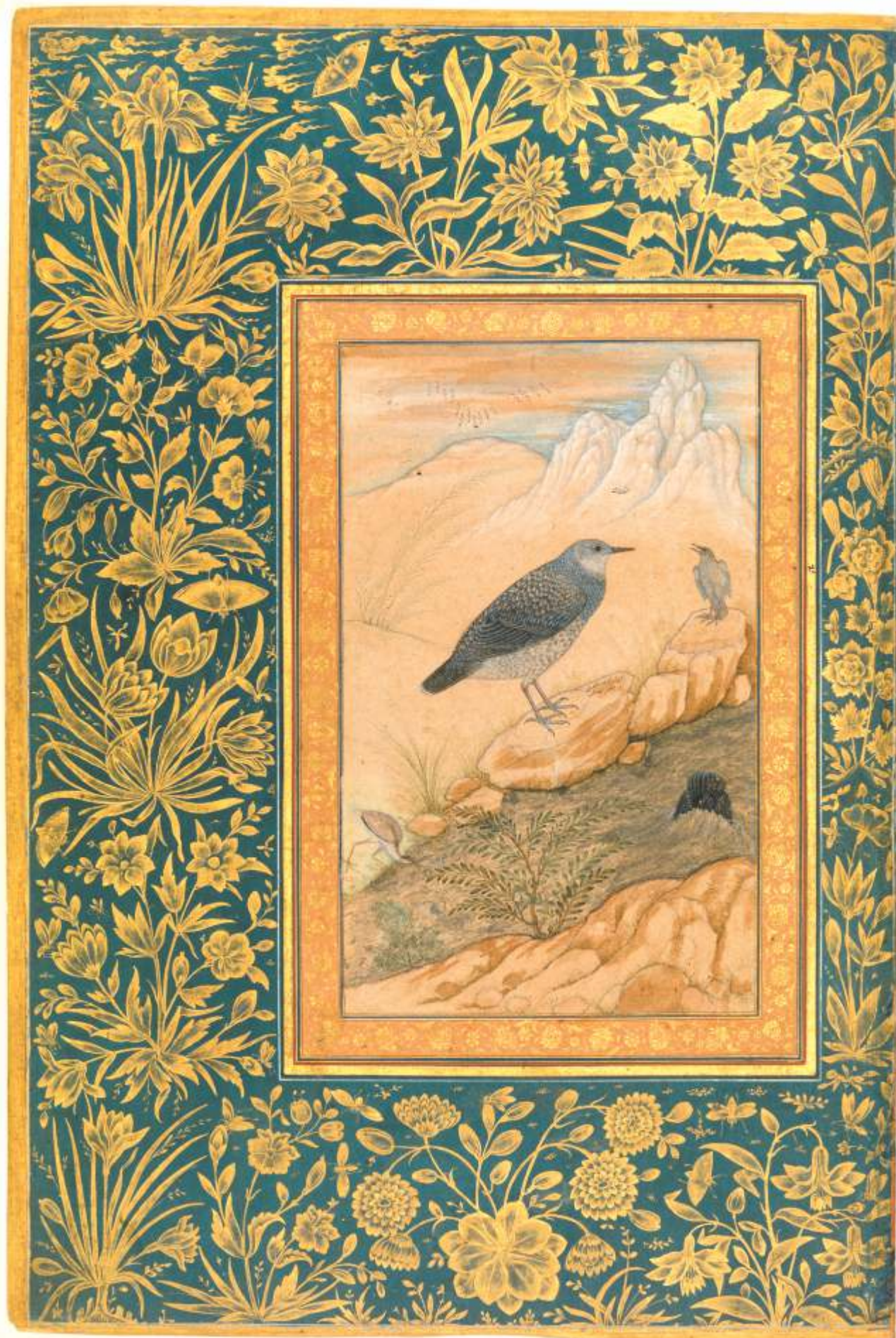


In the study, there are three dippers, in fact. There's the mother sitting on a boulder, looking at a fledgling with open mouth asking for food, while the male is in the act of diving in the fast-flowing stream. There's also a bittern in the lower left trying to catch

a small fish.

The story of Jahangir's discovery of the species goes as follows: "On the thirtieth of Urdibihisht [May 10, 1621] I rode out to see Sukh Nag [in the Kashmir Valley]. It is really a beautiful summer pasture. There is a waterfall in the middle of a valley that pours down from a great height. There was still snow around. The Thursday party was held in that flowered meadow, and I enjoyed drinking my accustomed goblets beside the water in the shade of the mountain. In the stream I saw a bird something like a starling. [A starling] is black in color and has white spots, while this one was the color of a nightingale with white spots. It dives under the water, stays under for a while, and comes up somewhere else. I ordered two or three of them caught and brought to me so that I could see whether its feet were webbed like a duck's or open like other birds of the field. Two of them were caught and brought. One died immediately, and the other remained a day. Its feet were not webbed like a duck's. I ordered Master Mansur the painter to draw its likeness. The Kashmiris call them *gil kar*, that is, 'water starlings.'⁷

⁷ Ibid. 339



Peafowl in a Landscape

Date c. 1615 – 1620

Artist Mansur

Dimensions 36.8 × 25.1 cm

Copyright © Cary Welch Family Collection



In this study, the peafowl pair has been just as majestically executed by Mansur as they are in real life. The species was quite new to the founder of the Mughal dynasty, King Babur, when he first set his foot on the Indian soil.

He describes the species in quite graphic detail in his autobiography, *Baburnama*: “The peacock is one [exotic bird]. It is a beautifully coloured and splendid animal. Its form is not equal to its colouring and beauty. Its body may be as large as the crane's but it is not so tall. On the head of both cock and hen are 20 to 30 feathers rising some 2 or 3 inches high. The hen has neither colour nor beauty. The head of the cock has an iridescent collar; its neck is of a beautiful blue; below the neck, its back is painted in yellow, parrot-green, blue and violet colours. The flowers [eyes] on its back are much the smaller; below the back as far as the tail-tips are [larger] flowers painted in the same colours.

“The tail of some peacocks grows to the length of a man's extended arms. It has a small tail under its flowered feathers, like the tail of other birds; this ordinary tail and its primaries are red. It is in Bajaur and Sawad [northwest Pakistan] and below them; it is not in Kunur and the Lamghanat [Afghan provinces] or any

place above them. Its flight is feebler than the pheasant's; it cannot do more than make one or two short flights. On account of its feeble flight, it frequents the hills or jungles, which is curious, since jackals bound in the jungles it frequents. What damage might these jackals not do to birds that trail from jungle to jungle, tails as long as a man's stretch! Hindustanis call the peacock *mor*. Its flesh is lawful food, according to the doctrine of Imam Abu Hanifa; it is like that of the partridge and not unsavoury, but is eaten with instinctive aversion, in the way camel-flesh is.”⁸

⁸ King Babur, *Memoirs of Babur*, trans. Annette Susannah Beveridge (London: Luzac & Co., 1922), 493



A Pair of Common Cranes

Date c. 1800

Artist Unknown

Museum Number IM.122-1921

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



This particular study of a pair of the Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) is a copy of a 17th-century original by Mansur, which is believed to be lost. All that exists is a rough sketch in ink by the artist, which is in the collection of Victoria and

Albert Museum, London (Museum No. IM.42-1925).

The giant Sarus Cranes (*Grus antigone*) that reach to a height of six feet were a favorite breed with Jahangir and there was one particular pair that he kept for more than five years in the royal aviary. They were just as dearly looked after as they were dearly named: Laila and Majnun i.e. Romeo and Juliet. There is a lengthy account of their living habits and breeding system in his Memoirs, which has been termed as a groundbreaking research by renowned ornithologists like Dr. Salim Ali.

Crane hawking was quite popular both in and after the Mughal era and there are many miniature paintings that depicts such hunting scenes. Jahangir's son, Shah Jahan, also loved the game and the two would often go together on hunting trips. One such story finds its place in the *Memoirs of Jahangir*: "Common Cranes"⁹ had been hunted with hawks previously, but I hadn't seen hawks hunt Sarus Cranes. Since my son Shahjahan

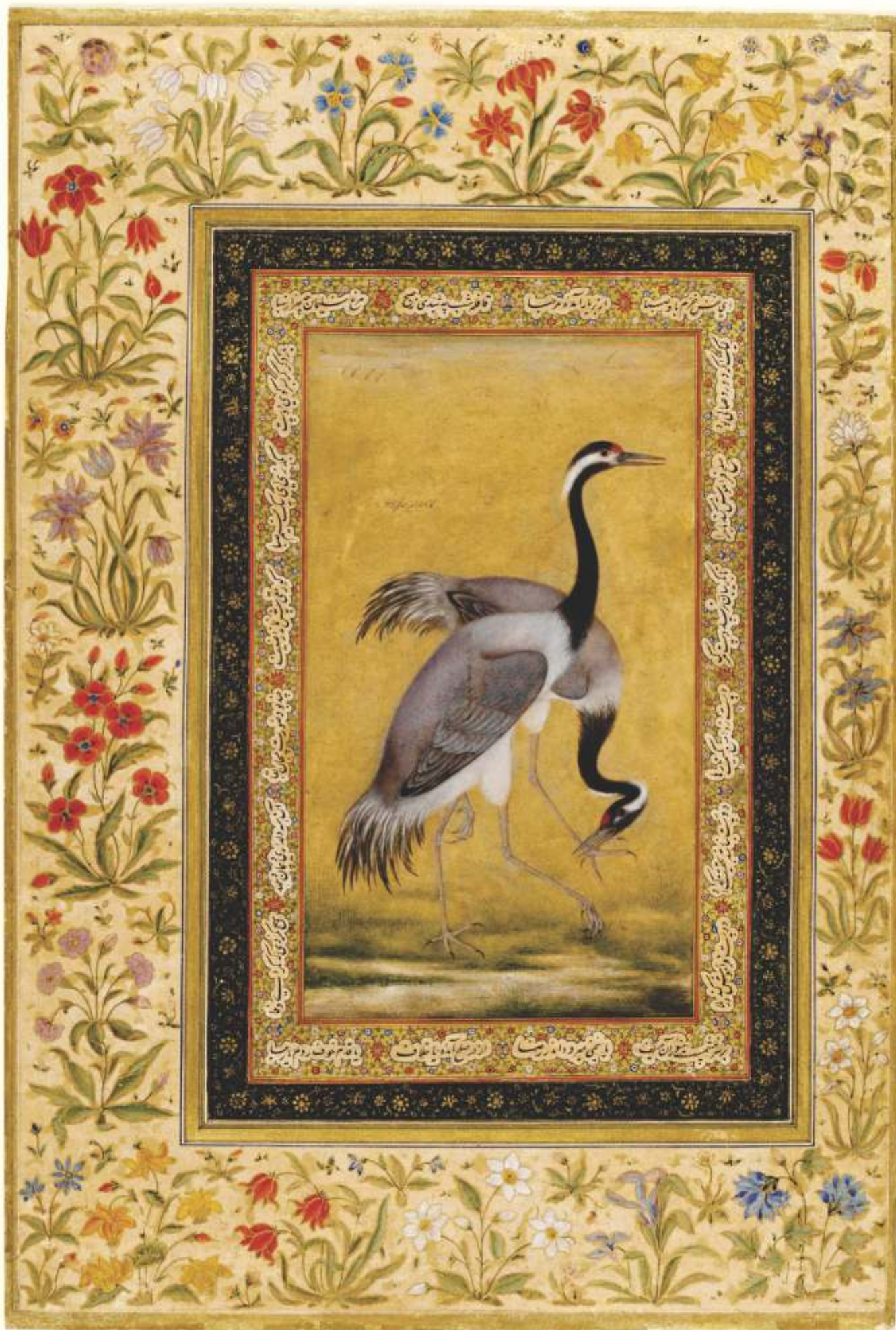
greatly loves hawking and his hawks were well trained, at his request I mounted early in the morning and got a Sarus myself. Another was brought down by the hawk my son held. Without exaggeration, it was a very, very fine hunt. I really, really enjoyed it. The Sarus may be a large bird, but it is very weak and ungainly at flying. There is no comparison with hunting a Common Crane. What a wonderful bird the hawk is to be able to catch such a massive bird and bring it down with its talons. Hasan Khan, my son's falcon keeper, was rewarded for this hunt with an elephant, a horse, and a robe of honor. His son was also given a horse and a robe."¹⁰



Mansur's sketch of the Common Cranes

⁹ The translator has made a couple of mistakes in rendering this very paragraph. He has not only confused the common crane with the sarus, but also the sarus with the stork. The mistakes have been corrected here.

¹⁰ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 289



Siberian Crane

Date c. 1625

Artist Mansur

Museum Number R32

Medium watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © Indian Museum, Kolkata



The Siberian Crane (*Grus leucogerannus*) is a rare variety of the species. It is also one of the most majestic and beautiful crane types. There were three separate groups of it. One flock flew more than 6000 km each

year through the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, and then onwards to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and further to the West African states like Ghana. This group numbered 200 in 1965 and hasn't been sighted since 1997 on their migration route. The second group follows somehow the same route and winters near the southern periphery of



the Caspian Sea in northern Iran. There were nine birds of this flock in 2000. The third group is a sizeable one, numbering 3,000 in 1980-81. They wintered in south-central China, however, after the construction of the world's largest Three Gorges Dam in the country, there's an

imminent threat to their natural habitat and in the words of Asok Kumar Das: "The day may not be far off when Mansur's study would be only a sad reminder of this beautiful bird."

Mansur's Siberian Crane bears all the hallmarks of his high art and is one of the earliest scientifically accurate portraits of the species. The minute detail is just jaw-dropping. The beak, the eye, the neck, every single feather on its rump and tail, and the feet, are all rendered with utmost minuteness and after keen observation of a live bird in its natural habitat. It's wading through a pond with occasional grass and plantation. The color of the blue sky seems to reflect in the pond water and the two merge in a mysterious way rendering it difficult to differentiate between the two. A flock of birds is flying in the upper right side – a signature of the master hand.

The inscription down below is in Jahangir's own handwriting, saying *amal-i Ustad Mansur* i.e. the 'work of Ustad Mansur' – *ustad* being a 'master' in the Persian language.

¹¹ Asok Kumar Das, *Wonders of Nature, Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court* (Mumbai: The Marg Foundation, 2012), 112





کافور در الزمان

طاهر سلطان محمدی خراسانی



جانور غیر مکرر که بندگان
شکار نموده شبیه آنرا بپند
مادران را می‌کشند

بقدر ابراست

Spotted Forktail

(Preceding Double-Page Painting)

Date Early 1600s

Artist Abu'l Hasan

Accession Number 55.121.10.15

Dimensions 38.6 x 26.3 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor, mica, and gold on silk

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The preceding double-page study of the Spotted Forktail (*Enicurus maculatus*) is by the master artist, Abul Hasan, upon whom Jahangir had bestowed the honorific title of *Nadir al-Zaman* i.e. the 'Rarity of the Time'. He and Ustad Mansur are the only

two artists of the royal *tasvirkhana* of Jahangir who enjoyed this high privilege. The Spotted Forktail with its hairsplitting detail is a testament to his mastery in wildlife portraiture. Despite the passage of more than four centuries, the work seems as fresh, lively, and dynamic as if it has been executed yesterday. Every hair and covert on the neck, back, and tail feathers seems crystal-clear on close scrutiny.



The Mughal artists used squirrel hairs as brushes and it is quite evident that the master painter has made the best use of them in this masterpiece. The bird is sitting in a stately style on a stone by a running stream – its natural habitat – while three flocks of birds are there in the

background. There are also beautiful plants around and

Black-crowned Night Heron

Folio from the Dara Shikoh Album

Date 1630-1640

Accession Number Add.Or.3129, f.9v

Medium Opaque watercolor on paper

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some grass and moss on the stones. The inscription on left stone states that the king's (Jahangir's) servants captured this bird. It's also worthwhile to point out that – unlike all the other paintings in the present volume – this particular work uses silk cloth instead of paper, which has added to its exceptional luster. The usage of reflective material like mica on the bird's bright eye is also there that has doubled the study's beauty.



The folio on the opposite page is from the Dara Shikoh Album, depicting the Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*). Prince Dara was Shah Jahan's eldest and favorite son, who was the *heir apparent* to the throne but was killed by his younger

brother, Aurangzeb, in 1659 in the tug-of-war. Dara entertained great love for art, poetry, and mysticism. The album was produced for him during 1630 – 1640 by his court artists and it contains many birds and flowers studies. In this work, the very lifelike night heron is shown as wading in a small pond. Next to it stands a pink lily plant with beautiful flowers and buds. The background is of uniform dun color, while the sky shows broad sweeps of blue.

¹¹ Asok Kumar Das, *Wonders of Nature, Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court* (Mumbai: The Marg Foundation, 2012), 112



Dodo and Other Birds

Folio from St. Petersburg Murraqa

Date c. 1626

Artist Mansur

Manuscript Number E-14

Folio Number f.80r

Dimensions 26.0 x 15.3 cm

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Historically, this is quite an important work by Mansur, depicting the now extinct bird species known as Dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*). The other four birds surrounding the Dodo are (clockwise) a male Blue-crowned

Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus galgulus*), a male Western Tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*), a pair of Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*), and a pair of Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*).

The painting formed the subject of a paper given by a Russian ornithologist, Dr. A. Ivanov at the XII International Ornithological Congress at Helsinki, Finland, in 1958. Dr. Ivanov had come across this work in the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg. The famous Indian ornithologist, Dr. Salim Ali, narrates the whole story in these words: “The painting created something of a sensation among the gathered ornithologists since it depicted the extinct Dodo which, judging by the very lifelike presentation of the better known bird species accompanying it on the same plate, must obviously have been painted from a living model. When and where did this live dodo come from?”

“The miniature, though unsigned and undated, is

clearly in the unmistakable Mansur style and leaves no doubt that it is one of the series depicting strange and exotic animals that Jahangir was wont to get illustrated by his court painters immediately they came to his notice. However, in this case it seemed strange that, contrary to his usual practice, there should be no mention or description of the bird in his Memoirs, or of when or how it had come to his notice. And yet it seemed unbelievable that the uniqueness of the bird could have escaped his incisive observation and comment....

“It may be recalled that Jahangir's Memoirs ended in 1624, three years before his death. All the evidence goes to suggest that the miniature of the dodo was most probably painted during this blank interval—between 1624 and 1627—and explains why the bird fails to find mention in the Emperor's chronicle. This portrait is considered by experts to be the most scientifically accurate one extant of the Mauritius Dodo (*Raphus cucullatus* L.). This flightless pigeon-like bird first became known to Europeans in 1598 and— thanks to the active gastronomic interest taken in it by visiting European sailors to Mauritius—became extinct in double quick time. The last living example was seen in 1681. The only other fairly accurate drawing of the bird, was made by a Flemish artist, Roelandt Savery, also from a live specimen that had reached Amsterdam almost exactly at the same period as the Indian miniature, i.e., between 1626 and 1628. All the other known drawings of the dodo by European artists are believed to be copied from, or inspired by Savery's original, varied and embellished to suit the taste and fancy of each artist.”¹²

¹² M. A. Alvi and A. Rahman, *Jahangir – The Naturalist* (New Delhi: Lakherwal Press, 1968), 16, 17



Turkey Cock

Date 1612

Artist Mansur

Museum Number IM.135-1921

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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In 1612, King Jahangir asked his long-time friend and confidante, Muqarrab Khan, to visit the port of Goa on the western coast of India and procure rarities of any sort from the Europeans at whatever price they asked for. Goa was

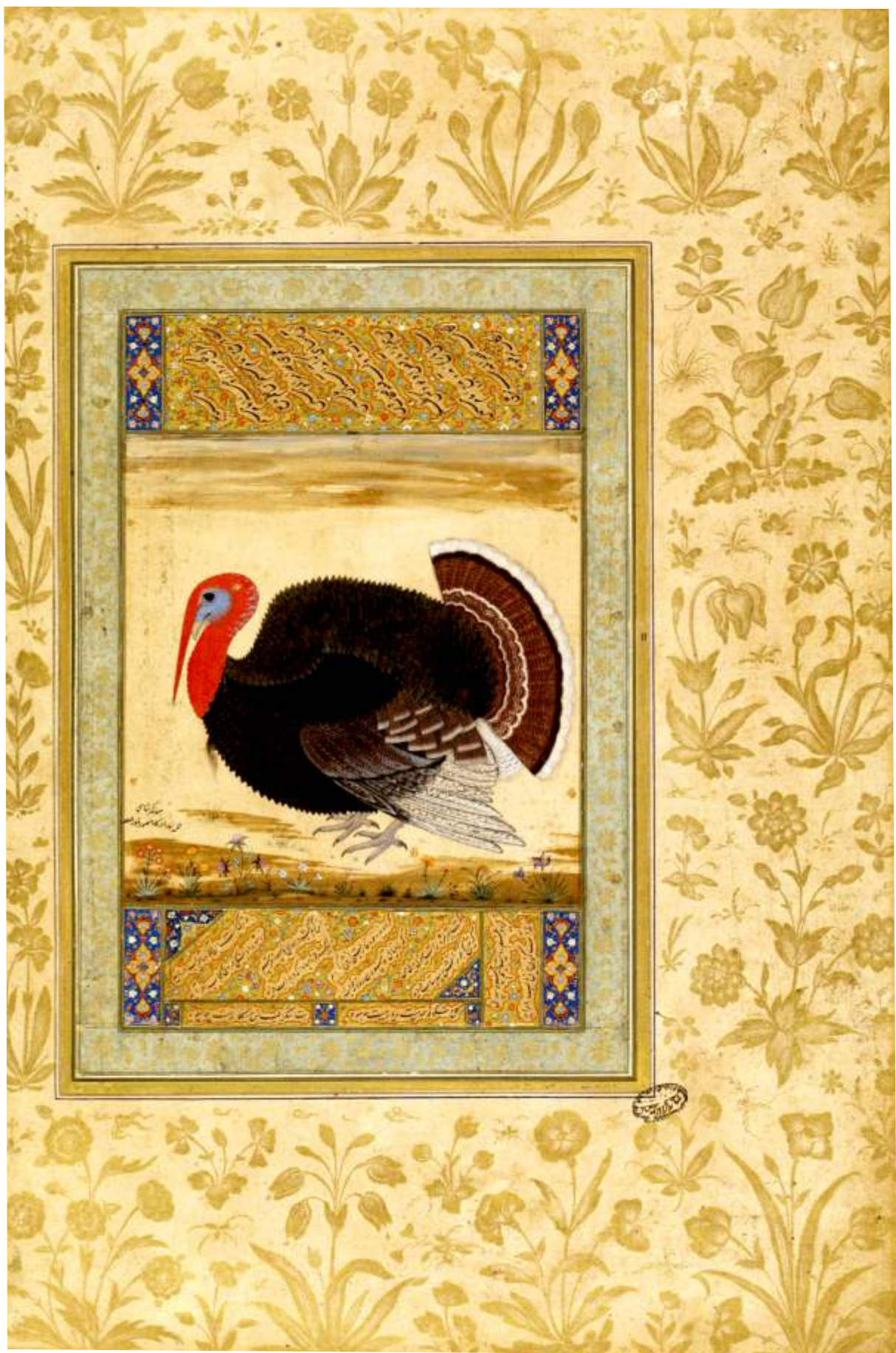
a Portuguese colony at the time and governed by an imperial viceroy since early 1600s. Muqarrab obliged the order and after a while came back with a large consignment containing rare foreign birds and animals. One of these rarities was the hitherto unknown Turkey Cock. Here's the full account of the story in the emperor's own words:

“On the sixteenth of Farvardin [March 25, 1612], Muqarrab Khan, one of the most important and long-serving Jahangirid servants, who had been promoted to the rank of 3000/2000, arrived from the port of Cambay to pay homage. I had ordered him to go to the port of Goa on several items of business and see the vice-rei, the governor of Goa, and to purchase any rarities he could get hold of there for the royal treasury. As ordered, he went to Goa with all preparedness and stayed there a while. Without consideration for cost, he paid any price the Franks asked for whatever rarities he could locate. When he returned from there to court, he presented the rarities he had brought for my inspection several times.

He had every sort of thing and object. He had brought several very strange and unusual animals I had not seen before. No one even knew what their names were. Although His Majesty Firdaws-Makani [Babur] wrote in his memoirs of the shapes and forms of some animals, apparently he did not order the artists to depict them. Since these animals looked so extremely strange to me, I both wrote of them and ordered the artists to draw their likenesses in the *Jahangirnama* so that the astonishment one has at hearing of them would increase by seeing them.

“One of the animals was larger in body than a peahen and significantly smaller than a peacock. Sometimes when it displays itself during mating it spreads its tail and its other feathers like a peacock and dances. Its beak and legs are like a rooster's. Its head, neck, and wattle constantly change color. When it is mating they are as red as can be—you'd think it had all been set with coral. After a while these same places become white and look like cotton. Sometimes they look turquoise. It keeps changing color like a chameleon. The piece of flesh it has on its head resembles a cock's comb. The strange part about it is that when it is mating, the piece of flesh hangs down a span from its head like an elephant's trunk, but then when it pulls it up it stands erect a distance of two fingers like a rhinoceros' horn. The area around its eyes is always turquoise-colored and never changes. Its feathers appear to be of different colors, unlike a peacock's feathers.”¹³

¹³ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 372, 373



A Pair of Ruddy Shelducks

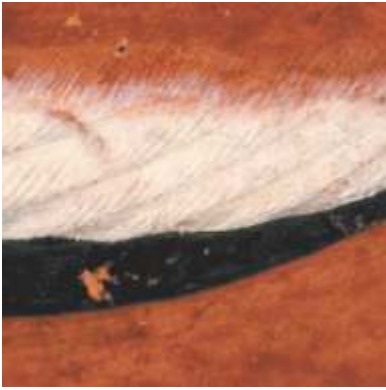
Date 1595

Accession Number 2013.299

Dimensions 28.3 x 19.8 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor on paper

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The Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), also known as the Brahminy Duck, can be found throughout South Asia and other parts of the world. The study precisely depicts the Shelducks in its true orange color with subtle patches of white

on wings, which are painstakingly detailed. The black spots on the webbed feet are also true to life. There are

beautiful blue and orange tulip-like flowers on the bank of the stream, in which small fish are swimming. In the background, there are flowering plants, bushes, and trees on the nearby hills, while flocks of birds fly in the sky, which's tinged light blue and purple.

Below are a couple of beautiful Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*). Dated about 1620 and preserved in the Museum Fine Arts, Boston (Accession No. 19.129), the work is attributed to Manur, but no authentic source support the claim. Both the style and technique and even the dimensions (13.0 x 17.8 cm) of the painting suggest that it is executed by some other artist of the Mughal *tasvirkhana*.





Himalayan Blue-throated Barbet

Date Early 1600s

Artist Mansur

Museum Number IM.137-1921

Dimensions 38.9 × 26.3 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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This authentic Mansur work carries an inscription in Jahangir's handwriting, saying '*amal-i Nadir al-Zaman Ustad Mansur*' i.e. 'Painted by the Wonder of the Age, Master Mansur.' The bird species depicted is the beautiful Blue-throated Barbet (*Psilopogon*

asiaticus), which is a small near passerine with

sky-blue throat, red forehead and crown, and dark green plumage.

Below are the portraits of the Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) and the White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon symrnesis*). The Kingfisher is dated 1620. It is stored in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, (Accession No. 14.682) and is attributed to Mansur. The Lapwing, on the other hand, is housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Museum No. IM.126A-1921) and is an 1800 copy of an original by Mansur, which is believed to be lost.





عمل در العبد استاد مصور نقاش

A Pair of Golden Orioles

Date 1700s

Museum Number D.397-1885

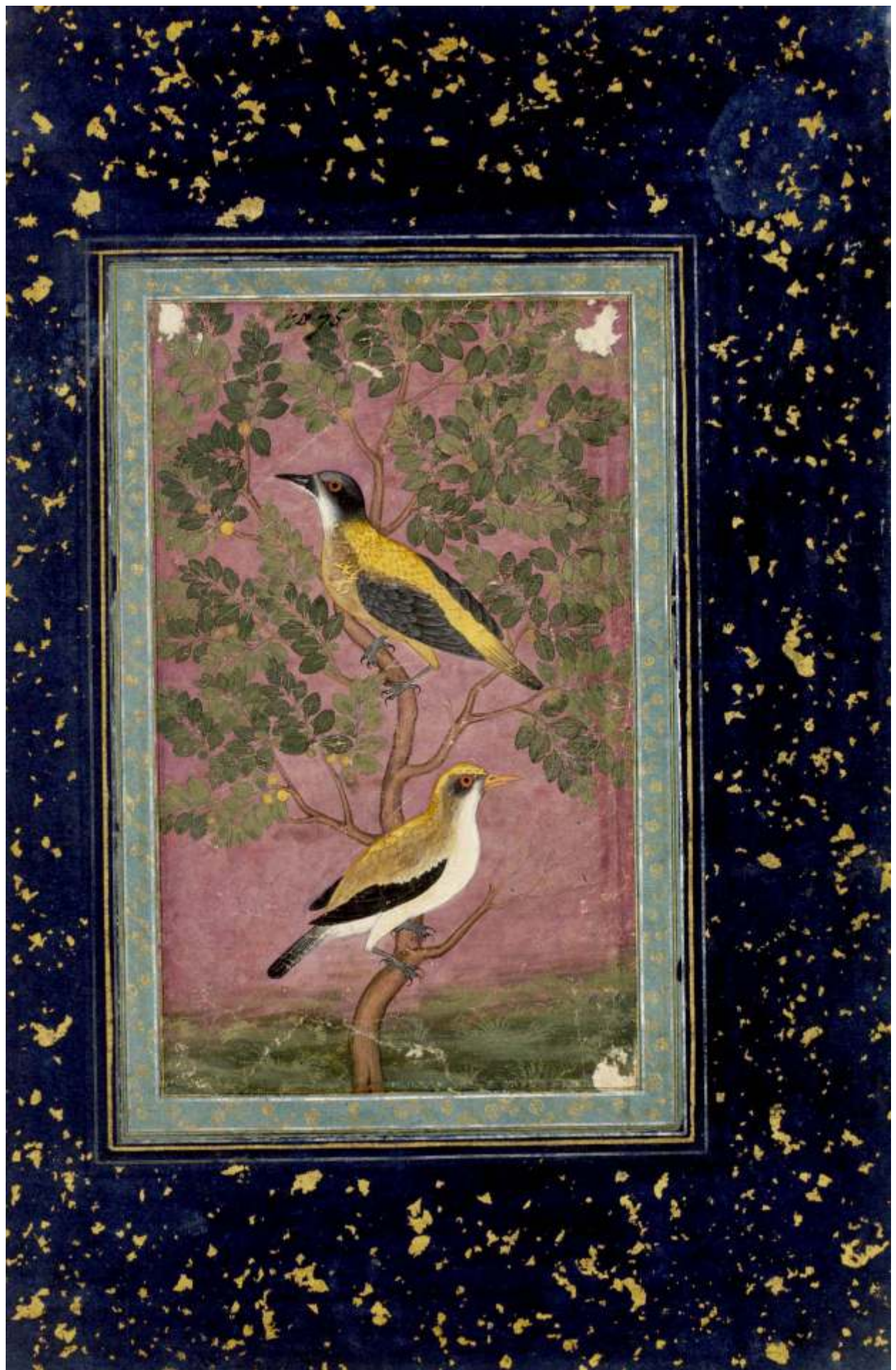
Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Found commonly in South Asia, the Golden Orioles (*Oriolus oriolus*) have frequently been depicted by the Mughal artist in their works. The beautiful birds in this painting are perching on a small shrub of yellow berry of sorts. The color combination between the plumage of the orioles and fruit of the plant is quite impressive, with additional support from the margin with dark base and golden spots.

The other painting is from the Deccani school of miniature painting, portraying a finch against the dun colored background. The finch is flanked by beautiful purple poppies, a dragonfly, and a honeybee. All the natural elements are rendered in intense colors of the Deccani tradition, in which 'the poppy and the dragonfly were often used as emblems of the seasons.'





Black Francolin

Date 1700-1750

Museum Number IM.294-1914

Dimensions 26.4 × 21.4 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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This is yet another copy of yet another original by the great Mansur that has not survived, showing a Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*). King Babur refers to this bird as the *Durraj* and says: "This is not peculiar to Hindustan but is also in the *Garm-sir* countries [perhaps southern Afghanistan]; as however some kinds are only in Hindustan, particulars of them are given here. The *durrdj* may be of the same bulk as the *kiklik* [Chukar Partridge]; the cock's back is the colour of the hen-pheasant; its throat and breast are black, with quite white spots. A red line comes down on both sides of both eyes. It is named from its cry which is something like *Shir daram shakrak* [I have milk and sugar]. It pronounces *shir* short; *daram shakrak* it says distinctly. Astarabad partridges are said to cry *Bat mini tutilar* (Quick! they have caught me). The partridge of Arabia and those parts is understood to cry, *Bi'l shaker tadawni al ni'ani* (with sugar pleasure endures)!"¹⁴

There's a curious account of a black francolin – which has erroneously been called as the black partridge by many writers – hunted by Jahangir with his hawk: "I got a black partridge caught by a falcon, and ordered its crop to be cut open in my presence. A mouse was found which it had swallowed whole and had not as yet undergone any change. It was astonishing to see how, its oesophagus, being so narrow, could have admitted a full mouse. Without exaggeration, if somebody else had said so, it was impossible to believe. Since I have personally witnessed it I record it as an unusual thing."¹⁵

Following is a 1620 Deccani work, depicting the Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus imejanus*) in somewhat

abstract form and shape. The Decanni artists were famous for the bold use of colors, which is quite obvious in this painting. About the species, the same naturalist-sportsman, Jahangir, says: "Another [local species] is the *zarrin* bird, which the inhabitants of Lahore call *sal* and the Kashmiris call *pulu*. In color it is something like a peacock's breast. It has a tuft on top of its head, and its tail is yellow the length of four or five fingers, like the long feathers of a peacock. Its body is equal in size to a goose, although a goose's neck is long and ill-proportioned, while the *zarrin*'s is short and elegant. My brother Shah Abbas had requested a *zarrin*. Several were sent with an emissary."¹⁶

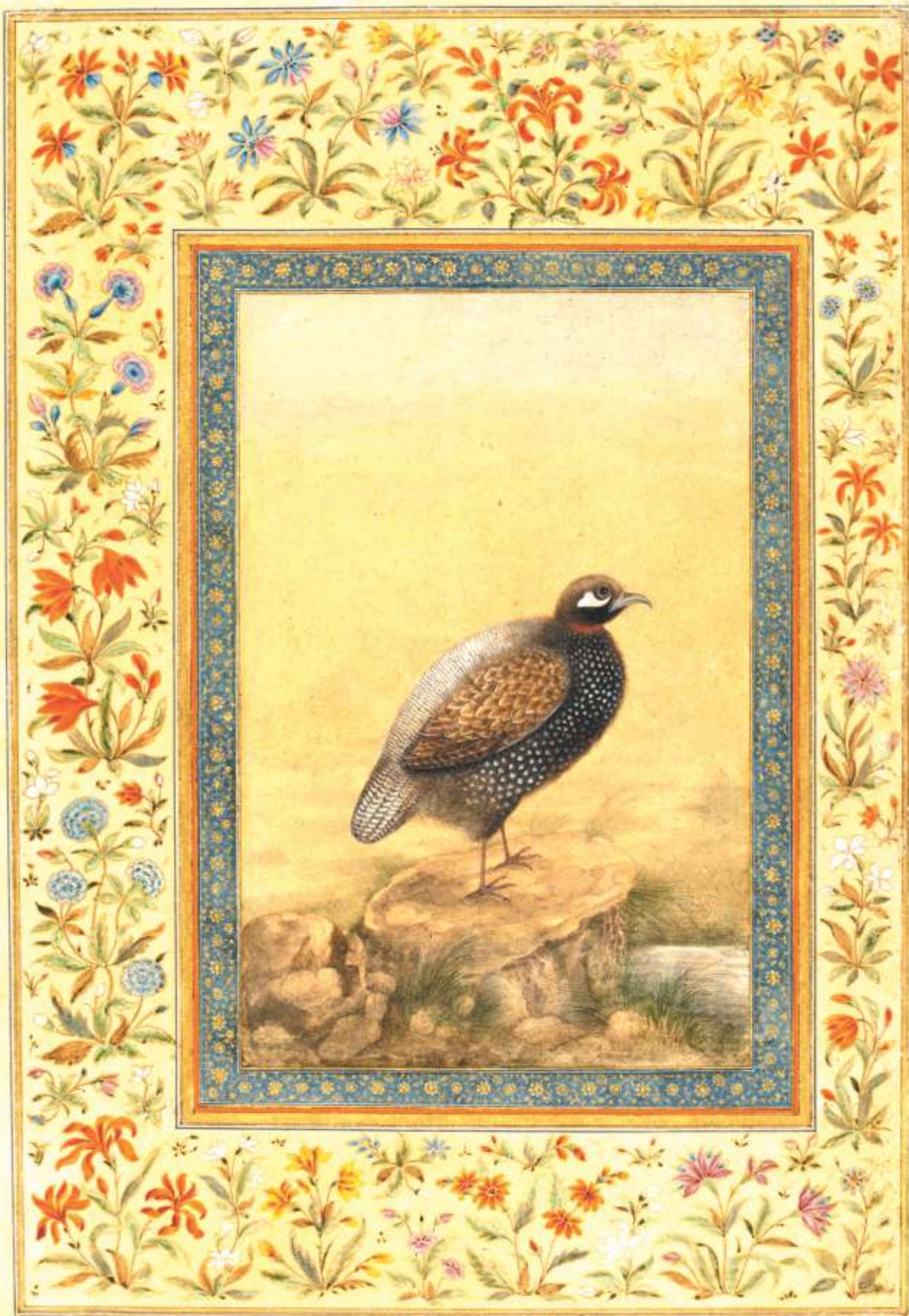
The work is preserved in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (Accession No. F1929.78).



¹⁴ King Babur, *Memoirs of Babur Vol II*, trans. Annette Susannah Beveridge (London: Luzac & Co. 1922), 496, 497

¹⁵ M. A. Alvi and A. Rahman, *Jahangir – The Naturalist* (New Delhi: Lakherwal Press, 1968), 54

¹⁶ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 372, 373



Green Magpie

Date First half of the 1700s

Museum Number IS.133:2/A-1964

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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A member of the crow family, the Green Magpie (*Cissa chinensis*) is a small size bird that is found in north eastern India, Sumatra, Malaysia, and Thailand etc. It boasts of a vivid green plumage. During Akbar's time it was trained to hunt small birds, as Abul Fazl says in his *Ain-i Akbari*: “*Odhpapars* [green magpie] also are brought from Kashmir. This bird has a green colour and is smaller than a parrot; its beak is red, straight, and long; its tail is rather elongated. It brings down small birds, and returns to the hand of the keeper.”¹⁷

There are also a couple of mynas in the painting, one of which is perched on the twig of the tree while the other is in the flying mode. A beautiful butterfly is also there just nearby.

Below is the detail of a painting from the *Baburnama* (c. 1594 – 1595), portraying a female Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*). The koel has been a favorite with the South Asian poets for to its heart-rending strains since olden times. The parasitic nature of

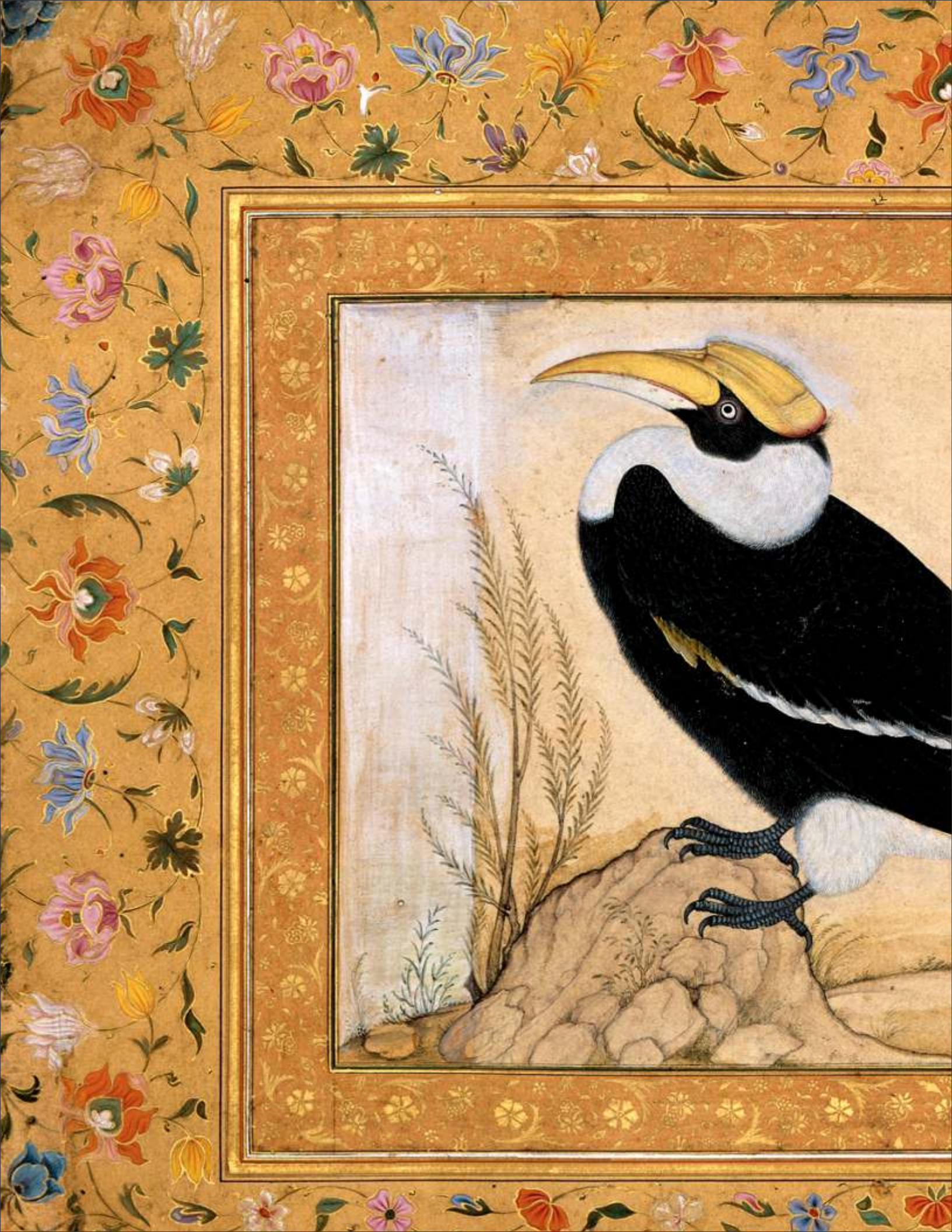
the Koel didn't escape the keen-eyed Jahangir, who says: “The [koil] cuckoo is a bird something like a raven, but it is smaller. A raven's eyes are black, but the cuckoo's are red. The female has white spots, and the male is totally black. The male has a very beautiful voice, completely beyond comparison with the female's. The cuckoo is really the nightingale of India, but whereas the nightingale is agitated in the spring, the cuckoo gets agitated at the beginning of the monsoon, which is the spring of Hindustan. Its cry is extremely pleasant. Its period of agitation coincides with the maturing of mangoes, and mostly the cuckoo sits on mango trees. It must enjoy the color and scent of the mangoes. One of the strange things about the cuckoo is that it doesn't hatch its own eggs. When it is ready to lay an egg it finds an unprotected raven's nest, breaks the raven's eggs with its beak and throws them out, and then lays its own eggs and flies away. The raven thinks they are its own eggs, hatches them, and rears them. I have seen this strange thing myself in Allahabad.”¹⁸



¹⁷ Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain i Akbari Vol. I*, trans. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: G.R. Rouse, 1873), 305

¹⁸ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 261







کار کاغذی

Great Hornbill

Folio from the Shah Jahan Album
(Preceding Double-Page Portrait)

Date 1615-1620

Artist Mansur

Accession Number 55.121.10.14

Dimensions 38.7 x 26.7 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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The sheer size and wingspan of up to five feet of the Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) was enough to attract the attraction of Jahangir and asking Mansur the master artist to render its picture on the paper. Concomitant

to its size is its droning sound that is audible a mile away. Mansur perhaps observed the bird in captivity and was unaware of its natural habitat, as the bird is shown sitting on an outcrop, instead of dense woods, where it is usually found. Still, the detail on the feet, beak, wings, and tail are all lifelike and carry Mansur's signature. So does the bold use of brush and pigment by him. The floral motifs in gold in the inner border and the colorful ones in the outer add to the overall beauty of the study.

A Shrike on a Branch

Date 1605-1627

Artist Hashim

Dimensions 22.2 x 13.5 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper

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The Northern Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) depicted in the painting is by an eminent Jahangir-era artist named Hashim. Apparently an innocent looking bird, the Shrike is a vicious killer of small birds and rodents. Unable to

hold the prey in their small and delicate feet, they would impale the victim on a thorny spike or something resembling it, and enjoy the dinner at their own convenience. In executing the study of the bird, Hashim has followed a minimalist approach, but with greater effect and clarity. Both the color and composition are true to life, and the beak, head, wings, and coverts under the tail show the necessary detail.



Squirrels in a Plane Tree

Date c. 1610

Artist Abul Hasan

Inventory Number Johnson Album 1, no.30

Dimensions 36.2 × 22.5 cm

Medium Gouache with gold on paper

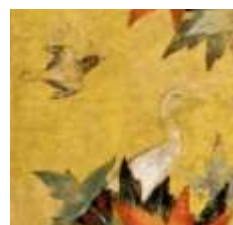
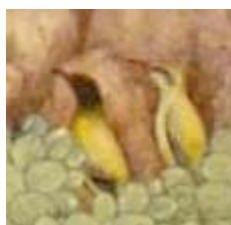
Copyright © India Office Library, London



This is yet another masterpiece by the versatile Jahangir-era court artist, Abul Hasan. It depicts a man climbing a *chenar* or plane tree with numerous squirrels and their babies. The work is truly the epitome of style, refinement, and subtlety of the Mughal

miniature art and it is quite evident why the naturalist emperor bestowed upon him the title of *nadiruzzaman*, that is 'Rarity of the Age.' The work exhibits utmost realism and dynamism. The golden and yellow *chenar* leaves are suggestive of the autumn season. The whole work is imbued with a poetical sensation and soft atmosphere.

On the surface, it's only a man with woolen cap climbing a tree full of squirrels, but there is more than meets the eye and if looked closely, the work reveals more than two dozen birds and animals. Among them, there is the grey francolin, the chakur partridge, the see-see partridge, the hoopoes, the myna, the common crane, the Indian roller, some song birds, the ibex, the does, and the deer etc.





Lady Smoking While Watching Pigeons

Date Late 1700s

Place of Origin Lucknow

Accession Number IS.97-1952

Medium Opaque watercolor on paper

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In this exquisite work, there is a lady smoking the traditional hookah, with two female musicians playing *tabla* and *sitar*. There are four maidservants standing behind the lady. In the courtyard there are a number of exquisitely colored pigeons, some picking

seeds, some in the act of mating, while one of them taking a bath in a water pot. Still others are sitting in the dovecote looking upwards.

Pigeon fancying is an old tradition among Muslims, who somehow consider the bird solemn and sacred. Large numbers of them are usually found not only around mosque complexes but also in the shrines and mausoleums of sufi mystics. King Akbar was, among many other things, also a passionate pigeon fancier. He called the occupation as *ishq-bazi* i.e. love-play. According to his biographer, Abul Fazl, the king had more than twenty thousand pigeons of high breeds in the royal quarters. He says: "This occupation affords the ordinary run of people a dull kind of amusement; but His Majesty, in his wisdom, makes it a study. He even uses the occupation as a way of reducing unsettled, worldly-minded men to obedience, and avails himself of it as a means productive of harmony and friendship. The amusement which His Majesty derives from the tumbling and flying of the pigeons reminds of the ecstasy and transport of enthusiastic [whirling] dervishes: he praises God for the wonders of creation. It is therefore

from higher motives that he pays so much attention to this amusement."¹⁹

Akbar was also very particular about the selection of different varieties of the bird. He would select the best available breeds and crossbreed them to produce high quality offspring. "It former times pigeons of all kinds were allowed to couple; but His Majesty thinks equality in gracefulness and performance a necessary condition in coupling, and has thus bred choice pigeons," writes his chronicler.²⁰

Jahangir also has an observation to share in his Memoirs regarding the carrier pigeons: "Much has been heard of the Baghdad pigeons that were called carrier pigeons during the time of the Ahbasid caliphs [r. 748 – 1258]," observes he, and continues, "Carrier pigeons are actually a third larger than wild pigeons. I ordered the pigeon raisers to teach them, and they trained several pairs so that when we let them fly from Mandu at the beginning of the day, if there was a lot of rain, they reached Burhanpur in a maximum of two and a half watches [7 hours and 30 minutes], or even one watch and a half [4 hours and 30 minutes]. If the weather was very clear, most arrived in a watch [3 hours] and others arrived in four gharis [1 hour 36 minutes]."²¹

Burhanpur is at a distance of around 100 miles from Mandu. According to experts 'a carrier pigeon can keep up 40 miles per hour for a considerable time, but this will be halved against the wind and nearly doubled with the wind in the bird's favor. It will be noted at once how very accurate Jahangir is on this very point.'

¹⁹ Abul Fazl Allami, *Ain i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), 299

²⁰ Ibid. 299

²¹ King Jahangir, *Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 255



Shah Jahan Receiving Artists or Scholars

Date 1650

File Name Oulis2006-akw0137

Collection Masterpieces of the non-Western Book

Dimensions 38.5 x 25.5 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gilt on paper

Copyright © The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford



Painting flowers, plants, birds, animals, and hunting scenes in the inner and outer borders and in panels of calligraphic works between lines, was a well-established practice in the Mughal miniature art right from the beginning. The practice had its roots in the Persian and Turkish traditions, on which the Mughals drew heavily. What's different, however, is the replacement of the mythical and imaginary with the real and natural. Taking a cue from the European works of art, the Mughal artists introduced portraiture form in their art and thus paved the way for an entirely different genre.

Coming back to the border decorations, there are hundreds of such specimens. In the work titled 'Shah



Jahan Receiving Artists or Scholars' we find the outer border filled with at least a dozen pairs of different bird species. Among them, the Rose-ringed Parakeets, Green Bee-eaters, White-throated Kingfishers, Hoopoes, Ruddy Shelducks, Wagtails, Indian

Rollers, Himalayan Snowcocks, Western Tragopans, Painted Sandgrouses, and Koklas Pheasants are clearly identifiable.

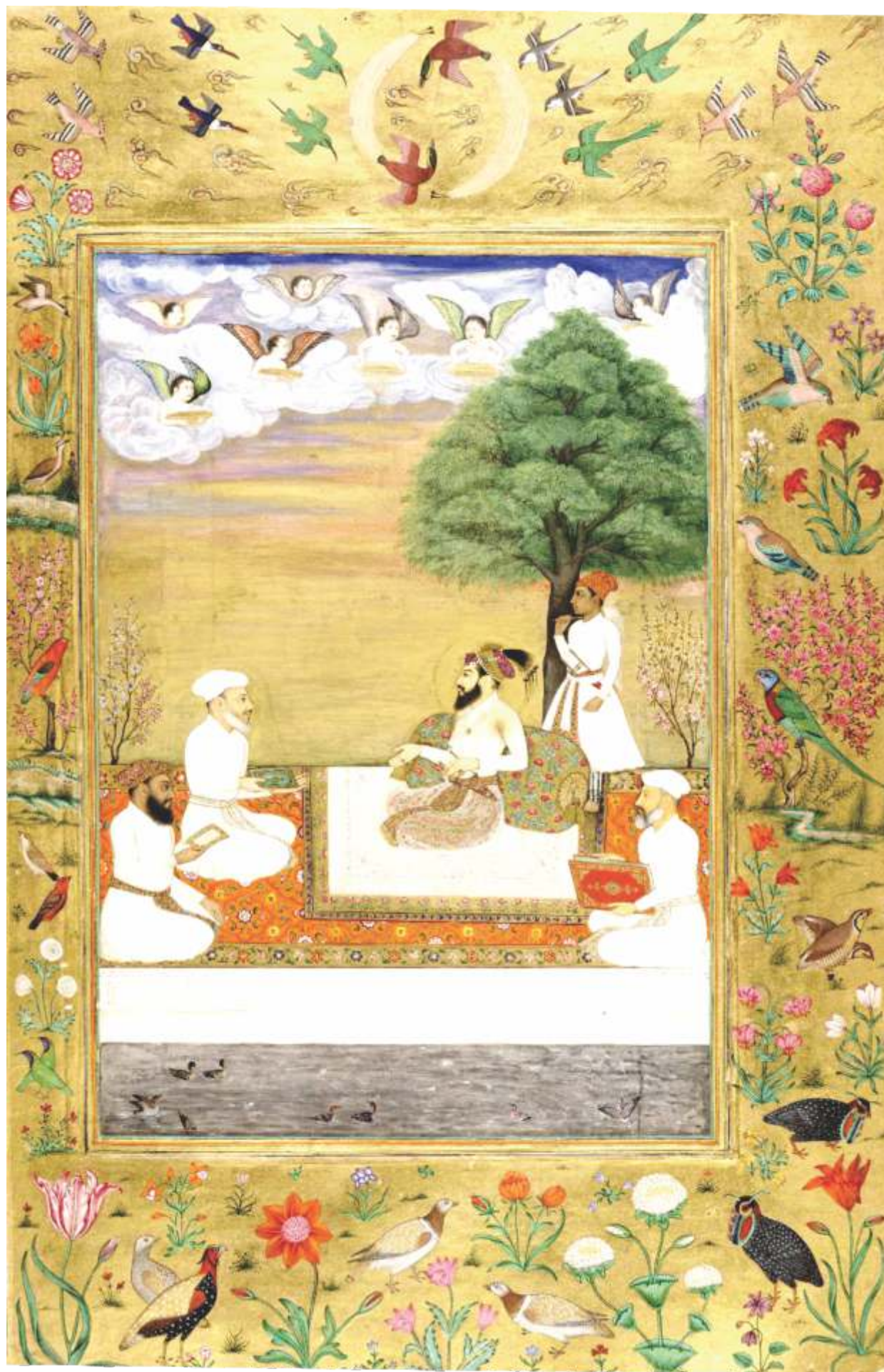
One curious bird that frequently occurs in the Mughal works is the Western Tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*). It's found in the north-eastern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, and in Uttarakhand

in India, and is a highly endangered and globally threatened species. Jahangir has made the following observation about it:

“One of the birds seen in the hill country is the horned pheasant, which the Kashmiris call *sunāl*. It is an eighth smaller than a peahen. The tail and both wings are blackish, rather like the wings of a bustard, and have white spots. The belly up to the breast is black with white spots, and in some places there are red spots too. The ends of the legs are a brilliant, beautiful fiery red. From the tip of its beak to the front of the neck is also shiny black, and on top of its head are two fleshy turquoise colored horns. Around its eyes and mouth the skin is red, and its crop is a piece of round skin about the size of two palms. In the middle of that skin is a violet-colored patch the size of a hand with turquoise-colored spots, and turquoise-colored spots around it too consisting of eight plumes, and around those is a line two fingers wide that is peach-blossom red. Around that is another turquoise-colored line. Its feet are also red. I ordered it weighed alive, and it was 152 tolas [1.72 kg]. After being killed and cleaned it weighed 139 tolas [1.57 kg].”²²



²² Ibid. 372





Royal Portraits

Shah Jahan Accepts a Falcon from Dara Shikoh

Date 1630

Artist Govardhan

Accession Number 1990.347

Dimensions 29 x 19.8 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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As elsewhere in the world, the art of falconry also transmitted from one generation to another among the Mughals. The founder of the dynasty, Zahir ul-Din Muhammad Babur, was a keen falconer and bird-

watcher, who had inherited the sport from his Timurid and Mongol forefathers. His son, Humayun, and Humayun's son, Akbar the Great, and later Mughal kings like Jahangir and Shah Jahan etc., practiced the kingly sport with the same zeal and gusto as their erstwhile ancestors.

The painting depicts King Shah Jahan (r. 1628 – 1658) receiving a falcon from his eldest son, Dara Shikoh. Dara, like his father, is wearing the glove on his right fist in the typical Eastern style and holds the end of the leash in his left hand. The dark blue upperparts, the light red belly, and black eyes of the bird suggest that the hawk offered is a *Falco*, most probably a peregrine – a favorite with Shah Jahan. The king is sitting on the golden throne with an embroidered pillow at one side and a sword and shield on the other. The golden halo around

the emperor's head – a feature borrowed from the European works – is suggestive of Shah Jahan's royal status. The throne itself rests on a raised marbled platform with vegetal and floral motifs. Four bamboo poles with polished gilt support the sumptuous awning that carries figures of two birds of paradise in the central sphere and hoopoes and Indian rollers in lateral ones. The painting is by one of the leading Mughal court artists, Govardhan.

Below is a painting from the Khalili collection, depicting the proud pedigree of the Mughal dynasty. There is many a work on the same theme with almost the same setting. Sitting at the head is Amir Timur or Tamerlane (1336 – 1405). He's followed by his son, Miran Shah, who's sitting on his knees in the traditional reverential position on the far left. He's then followed by his son, Sultan Muhammad, on the far right. This pedigree line continues successively from left to right and right to left and finally ends with Shah Jahan's son Aurangzeb in the right corner. Beside Aurangzeb is sitting the great naturalist-king, Jahangir, with an impressive gos on his fist.





Shah Jahan and an Elderly Courtier with a Hawk

A folio from the Shah Jahan Album

Date 1650

Artist Hashim

Accession Number In 62.4

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin



This folio is from an album compiled between 1650 and 1658 for Shah Jahan. An elderly courtier with white beard is offering Shah Jahan a superb bird of prey i.e. the Gos, for inspection. The courtier is wearing a white glove on the right hand with beautiful embroidery on the edging and holds a small tufted leash in the left. Shah Jahan, on the other hand, is

holding a scepter with inlaid gold and gems in his right hand and with the left is tenderly stroking the breast of the hawk.

An emerald stone is conspicuous by its presence in the hawk's halsband. She is also wearing bells on her tarsi. The pointed beak, the sharp eye, and the well-proportioned chest, feet, and tail all point toward a master hand. Both the king and the courtier have sheathed swords hanging from their sashes on the left side. Shah Jahan also has a punch dagger tucked tightly in his belt and is wearing an ornate turban and a long necklace of pearls, rubies, and emeralds. The grassy ground and flowering plants suggest they are out in the field hawking.



Jahangir Hawking

Date 1605 – 1627

Museum Number 1929,0917,0.110

Dimensions 32.2 × 29.0 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

Copyright © The British Museum, London



This is a full-length portrait of Jahangir with a sharp-beaked hawk on his right fist. In his left hand, he's holding the leash with style. The type of swivels used during the Mughal era is almost the same in vogue today. The front toes of the hawk with pointed talons are visible on the artichoke green glove. The

necklace worn by the hawk in her halsband seems to be no less valuable than the one worn by the emperor.

The void chocolate background is fairly in contrast to the subject matter that is generally in light tone. There is a sharp but sheathed knife suspended from the king's girdle. As for the brocade belt itself, there are some fantastic birds perched on equidistant vines. The inner border with scrolling vegetal designs is in gold, while the outer one with dark purple crosses and green dashes.





جهانگیر شاه

An Equestrian Portrait of Akbar

A folio from the Shah Jahan Album

Date 1650

Accession Number In 07B.21b

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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This folio is also from the Shah Jahan Album c. 1650 – 1658, portraying King Akbar (r. 1556 – 1605) in an equestrian pose, with a hawk – possibly his favorite sparrowhawk species – on his fist.

The detail of the main subject and marginal figures is striking to say the least. Akbar is wearing an avocado green glove with golden needlework on edges and is riding a sandy brown horse. The horse has a plume on its head and its forelock



is divided into two. Its mane is also skillfully braided into lovely tufts. It also has a beautiful saddlecloth on its back and other traditional trappings. A bow is partially visible at its side. There are marigolds, purple poppies, daisies, and other wild flowering plants on the ground. The old king has a sheathed punch dagger and sword in his sash.

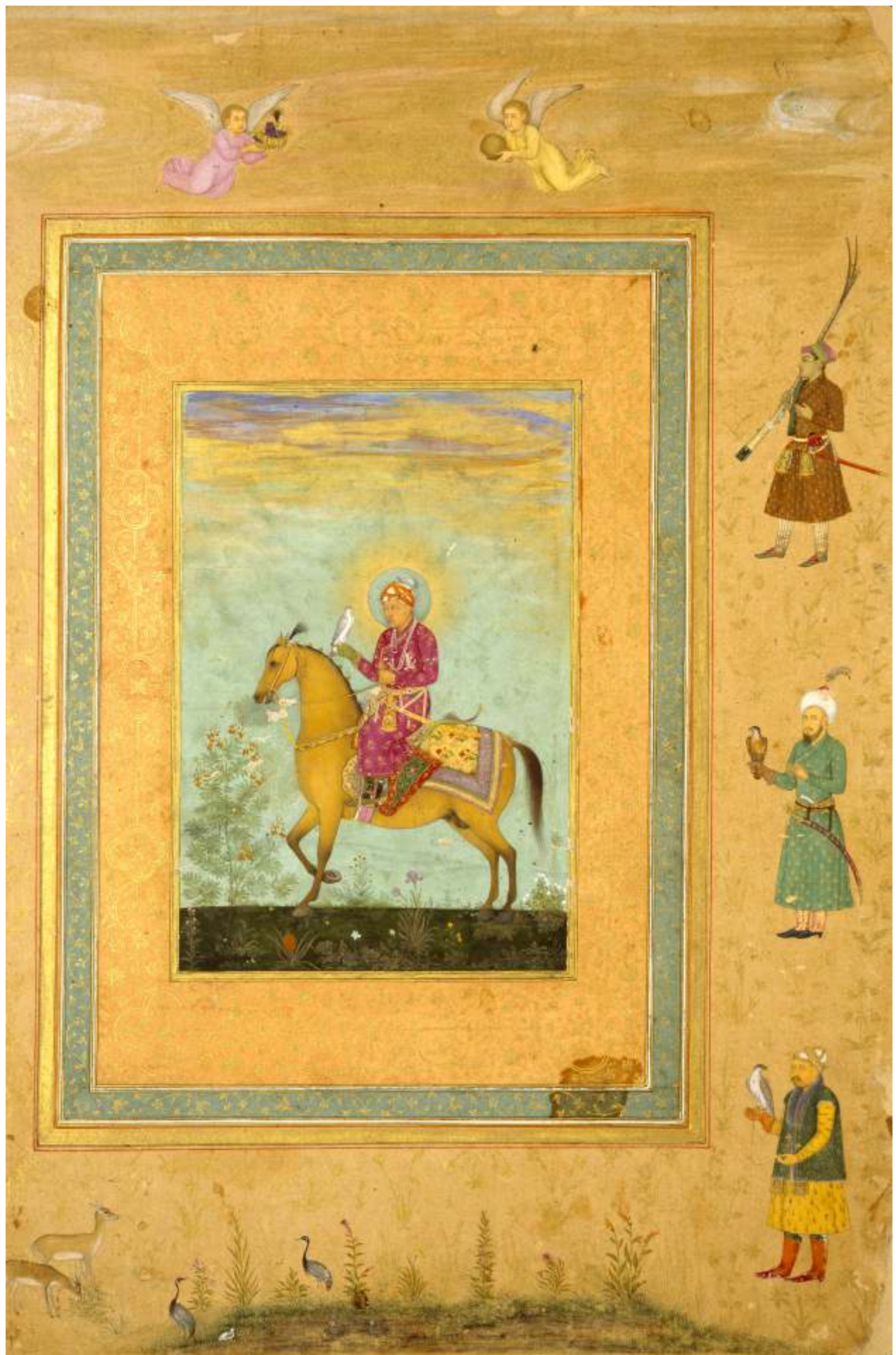
margin with a bipod musket is of a hunter. He, like the king, has a punch dagger and sword. The bearded man in the middle is of a falconer, carrying what appears to be a black shaheen (*F. peregrinus peregrinator*). The artist has painstakingly colored its chestnut chest, black eye, and blue toes. The end of the leash is tucked into the sash of the falconer.



The figure on the lower right margin is also of a falconer, holding a Gos on his fist. In contrast to the *Falco's* black eyes and blue feet, the artist has been careful enough to color the *Accipiter's* eyes and tarsi yellow. There is also a pair of the demoiselle cranes (*Grus virgo*), ducks, and deer on the bottom margin.



The figure of the young man on the upper right



Hawking Portrait of Emperor Jahangir and a Page

Date Figure of Jahangir 1615, Figure of the page 1625

Museum Number 1920,0917,0.286

Dimensions 20.1 × 13.3 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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One remarkable thing about this particular painting is that it's a composite work executed by two different hands at two different periods of time with an almost ten-year interval. There's a visible difference of style

and technique between the two portraits. There are plants at the page's feet, but none at the emperor's. The portrait of Jahangir has the realism of the Mughal school, while the page's facial features are typical of the Persian



style. Even the birds they're holding seem to be of different species. The one held by Jahangir, though partially blotted, looks like a gos, while the one carried by the page is the dark-eyed or long-winged, most likely a gyr.

Then there's this conspicuous perpendicularly line running

through the folio, which is a sufficient proof that two portraits have been executed separately and joined together at some later point in time. The brocade robe of the youth and his large bird are suggestive of a princely figure, most probably of Prince Khurram – who later became King Shah Jahan – as he and his father, Jahangir, would often go on the hawking trips together. This is something which Jahangir has also mentioned quite a few times in his Memoirs.



A Courtier with a Hawk on his Wrist

Date 1620

Museum Number 1955,1008,0.12

Dimensions 13.1 × 6.8 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor on paper

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The seemingly commonplace courtier in a transparent *jama* and yellow trousers is holding a goshawk of unusually large size and shape. Both the hawk and the courtier are looking intently in the same direction, as if they've found something of interest and are ready to go for it. The restlessness of the bird is evident from her left foot that's in the air. She is perched on the chocolate-colored glove and has the traditional *jangoli*

around her neck with a small locket - a feature that was quite in vogue during the Mughal era. Despite all the humble milieu of the work, the realism and raw beauty of both the hawk and her owner is unparalleled on many levels and there are very few Mughal paintings that have captured the spirit of falconry like this one does.



Shah Jahan Receives the Ruler of Chamba

Date 1650

Accession Number 2009.202.217

Dimensions 19.0 x 18.0 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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The partially-damaged painting shows the ruler of Chamba – a scenic and mountainous district in Himachal Pradesh in northern India – is paying the tribute of an

extra-large black shaheen to King Shah Jahan. Such tributes were the order of the day during in the medieval times that signified the nobility's allegiance to the sovereigns. Shah Jahan is examining the bird with his keen falconer's eye and seems to be holding in his fingers a small tidbit which the hawk is gazing at. In his right hand, he's holding a sheathed sword in a kingly style and has a punch dagger tucked in his sash. The Chamba ruler has a beautiful red-colored plumed hood in his left hand, fit for a royal hawk. The black shaheen is a medium size

hawk, but some members of it are said to be as large as the peregrine. This is attested by the Shah Jahan-era Pashtun poet-falconer, Khushal Khan Khattak, who says:

Black Shaheen is found mostly in Gorjestan
Or in the cotton tree mountains of Hindustan
They're heavier and more valuable than the others
Having red breasts, and black backs like the crow
feathers

The nestlings that come from Kabul and Kandahar
By the name of Khurasani they called are
Of the Khurasani origin a few members
Are as large as the Peregrine, having wide shoulders¹

¹ Khushal Khan Khattak, *The Book of Falconry*, trans. Sami ur Rahman (Islamabad: PanGraphics Press, 2014) 69, 70



Jahangir Entertains Shah Abbas

Date 1620

Artist Abul Hasan

Accession Number F1942.16a

Dimensions 25.0 × 18.3 cm

Medium Opaque water, gold and ink on paper

Copyright © Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Painted by the renowned artist of the royal atelier, Abul Hasan, this work is important in many ways. First of all, it portrays an imaginary meeting between the Mughal king, Jahangir, and King Abbas of Persia.

The two emperors never met in person and all that went between them was through the exchange of royal missions and emissaries. That was their only conduit of communication and interaction. Such diplomatic missions consisted of an army of men, including noblemen, merchants, huntsmen, falconers, and retainers etc., and the gifts they swapped included works of art, precious stones, jewelry, costumes, hawks, hounds, horses, and elephants etc. In most cases, Jahangir's trusted friend, Khan Alam, would serve as his ambassador to Persia and represent the Mughal Empire.

In this painting, Khan Alam is depicted with a very beautiful hawk on his fist. He is also holding a

golden antelope with a female rider in his left hand. Both the hawk and the antelope seem to be the gifts intended for King Abbas. The hawk's portrait has quite elegantly been executed and few Mughal works emulate the subtlety and refinement of this one. On the left is standing Jahangir's Grand Vizier and his brother-in-law, Asaf Khan, with a wine cup and flask, looking toward the Persian monarch. Both kings are sitting a raised platform, with large pillows at their backs. Jahangir has been more sumptuously portrayed by the Mughal artist and is commanding a domineering appearance for obvious reasons. He is wearing a long necklace with precious stones, an archer's ring on the thumb, a golden bracelet with rubies on his right wrist, and three rings on his fingers. In contrast, Abbas is clad in a plain orange tunic with blue collars.

On the table below, there are wine cups, jars, and flasks. There are also fresh and dry fruits of various kinds in trays and plates on the ground. The calligraphy and verses are in the *nastaliq* hand of the Persian script, exalting Jahangir's elevated status and his proud pedigree. The inscription just above Abbas' head is in Jahangir's own handwriting, saying, '*shabih birader Abbas*' i.e. 'Portrait of brother Abbas'.



پشاه جهانگیر و پشاه دو شاه و نجیب الملک
شاه کی و ملکیت عالم بدو نشیند پهلوی هم



جهانگیر و آباد از عرشان
بپاشند آیین جهان
جو یار و برادر هم در خور
الهی و است از هم نبرد

Jahangir and his Father, Akbar

Folio from the Shah Jahan Album

Date 1630

Artist Balchand

Accession Number 55.121.10.19

Dimensions 39.0 × 26.3 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

Copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Painted by the accomplished Jahangir-era artist, Balchand, the work illustrates Akbar in old age with a striking goshawk on fist, while his son is extending his two hands towards him as if he wants to

with pearls and beads, large necklace of gems, ostentatious trousers, brocade sash, and colorful shoes.

The inner border has a pinkish base with floral designs in gold. It's followed by two thin lines and then a broad one. A variety of flowering plants on the light brown margin add to the overall beauty of the work. .

receive the hawk – an emblem of the royal authority and status. The hawk's chest, underbelly, the head, and all the six front toes with sharp talons exhibit photographic detail. This is the high point of the Mughal draftsmanship and realism. The purple glove, on which the gos is perched, has a dark green edging with pink and light green floral motifs. Two knobs of gold or silver are also there on the glove's cleavage. Not to mention the leash, the jesses, and the *jangoli*.

The work has a very serious and solemn air to it. The subtle lines on the Akbar's forehead and his weak eyes add to his exceedingly thoughtful mood. A man who has seen, conquered, and ruled the world, seems to have a premonition of the impending doom and death. He's wearing a plain brown *jama*, a simple turban, and a small necklace in contrast to Jahangir's plumed turban



عليه السلام

Khan Alam, Emperor Jahangir's Falconer and His Ambassador to Persia

Date 1617

Artist Attributed to Govardhan

Object Number 1999.293

Dimensions 31.2 x 23.9 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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Khan Alam, as mentioned previously, served as King Jahangir's ambassador to Persia, and led enormous diplomatic missions to the Safavid court consisting of hundreds of falconers and huntsmen. Here he

is holding a humble sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) on his right fist and a sparrow in his left hand. He's wearing a wood brown tunic with beautiful white and red floral designs. The hawk is looking at Alam's left hand and seems to have already noticed her favorite prey. There are tufts of bushes on the ground indicating the good ambassador is out in the field training his hawk on the sparrow's live train.





Akbar in Old Age Attended by Prince Salim

Date 1615

Artist Manohar

File Name Ouls2006-akw0090

Collection Masterpieces of the non-Western Book

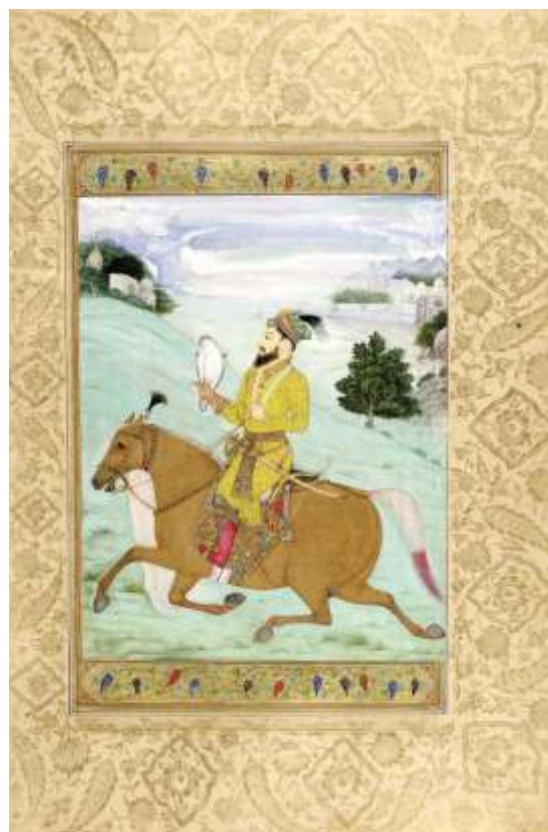
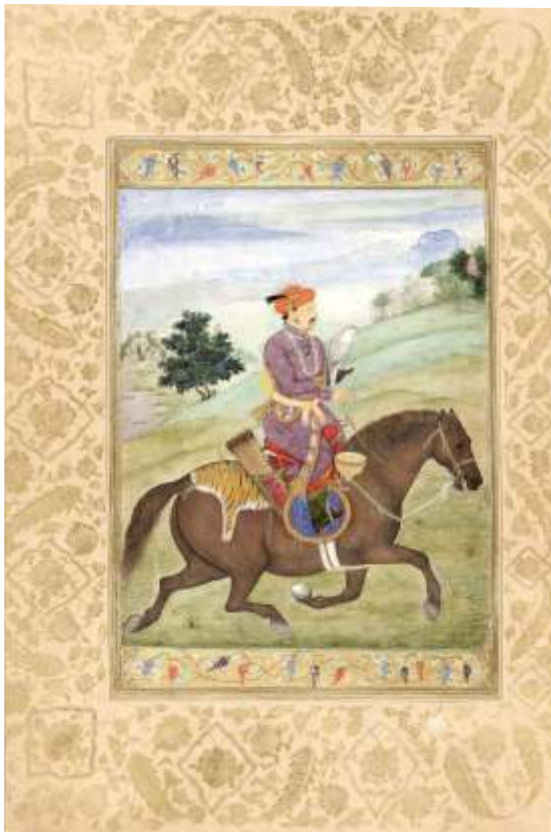
Dimensions 38.5 x 25.5 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gilt on paper

Copyright © The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

In this painting, old Akbar is offering a hawk with all the traditional trappings to his favorite son, Prince Salim (who later became Jahangir) – a symbolic gesture signifying the transfer of power. Clad in a purple tunic, Akbar is wearing two necklaces of pearls around his neck, while an attendant beside him is holding a brown-phased hawk that is either a juvenile gos or a saker. A couple of winged angels, a motif borrowed from the European works of art, is holding an object of royal import overhead among the gathering clouds. All the three figures have sheathed punch daggers in their sashes. Akbar is sitting on a raised platform in front of a fountain containing a few fish. The fountain's surrounded by purple roses on sides. The margin has interlocking floral and vegetal motifs drawn in single color.

Below are the equestrian portraits of Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Jahangir is facing right, while Shah Jahan left. Both are carrying hawks on their fists. Jahangir is also having the medieval hawker's drum at the side of his steed. All the three works seem to be executed by the illustrious Manohar. Dated around 1615, the two works are preserved in the The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.





Mirza Abu'l Hasan Hawking

Date 1605 – 1627

Artist Hunhar

Museum Number 1920,0917,0.13.23

Dimensions 20.1 × 13.0 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

Copyright © The British Museum, London



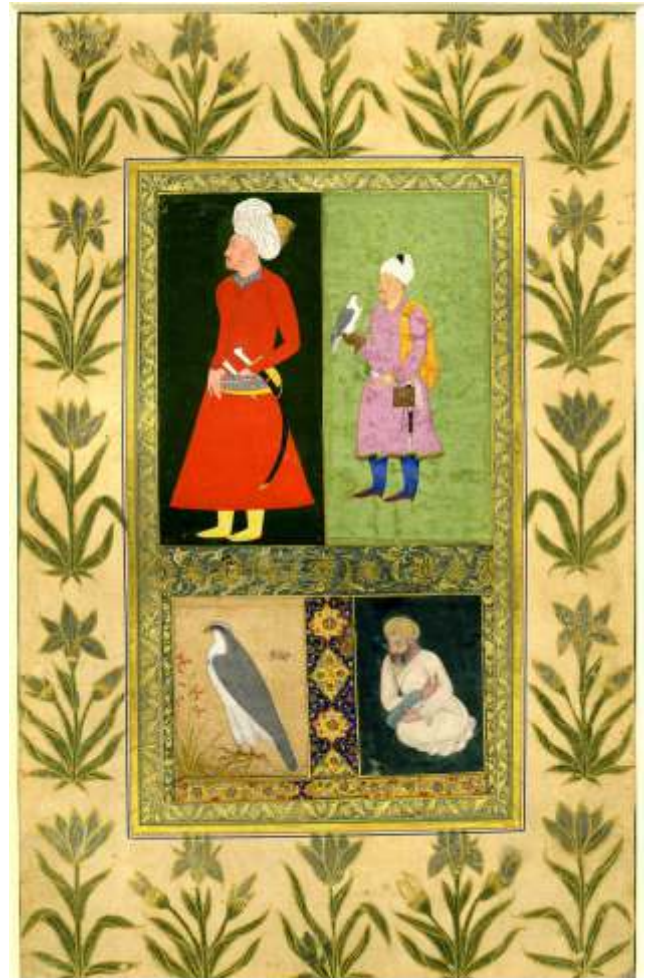
The folio belongs to a series of single-page miniature paintings and drawings of Indian rulers dating back to the early 17th-century. This full-length portrait by the famous artist, Hunhar, depicts a Mughal nobleman, Abul Hasan, with a hawk on fist against

a light sea green background. The hawk is perched on the beaver-brown glove in an excited state, as if perspiring from a flight. She is wearing red jesses and bells on her tarsi and also a dark-colored pendant in her halsband, while her owner is holding the end of the leash in his left hand. The plumed turban and cream-colored robe of Abul Hasan show beautiful floral embroidery on edges. The girdle is of golden hue with black, red, and green stripes and matches well with the robe. A sheathed knife is dangling from his sash, in which a punch dagger is also tucked. The painting is framed by light bands with floral motifs in gold on the pink border. The margin is embellished with alternating red and pink flowering plants.

The work on this page consists of four frames. The upper left one is the full-length portrait of a Mughal nobleman, Riza Khudabanda Mirza, by the famous portrait master, Bishandas. On his right is an unknown falconer with a hawk on his gloved fist. In the lower left-

hand corner is the portrait of a goshawk, by a painter named, Muhammad Nadir al-Samarkandi. The bird is comfortably perched on the ground and wears red jusees, a *jangoli* with a locket, a swivel, and a leash. On the right is a portrait of an unknown poet sitting on his knees as if presenting his work to some high authority.

The work is dated 1605-1627 and is preserved in the British Library, London (Museum No. 1920,0917,0.13.24).





مرزا ابوالحسن ابن عباس امف خان

Akbar with Falcon Receiving Itimam Khan

Date c. 1589

Artist Keshav Das (Active ca. 1570–1604/5)

Dimensions 21.6 x 15.0 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

Copyright © Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin



In this 1589 composite work, King Akbar is out in the field hawking with a large gos. The hawk has striking orange eyes. She's wearing a long halsband and is facing the emperor. Akbar is clad in a pink tunic and has a necklace with a

large ruby. He's holding one end of the leash in his left hand. A royal servant named Itimama Khan is standing behind him, reading from a petition in the Persian language. Below is another half-naked petitioner – old, stooped, and lean with age – holding a scroll of paper written in Hindi. A servant is driving him away from approaching the emperor. The old man is none other than the artist himself, the celebrated Keshav Dev, who is famous for inducting European elements in the local art form. The Mughal artists had a way to include self-portraits in their works, but usually in the crowded scenes. This work is unique in that it puts the artist at par with the royal figure and that too in quite a proactive manner.

Though, the work somehow creates the wrong impression of religious discrimination and a cultural divide between Hindus and Muslims, the truth is Akbar held all faiths and ethnicities in high esteem during his

rule and was a big advocate of religious tolerance and harmony. He invited Hindu, Jain, Muslim, and Jesuit scholars to his court and presided over long scholarly debates on physical and metaphysical topics. Hindus enjoyed highly influential posts during his reign and Sanskrit classics like the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and *Nal Daman* were translated in the official Persian language and richly decorated with illustrations on his orders. In a sense, Akbar's was the very first secular government in the Sub-continent. Such magnanimity of heart and openness earned him the title of Akbar the Great by historians and there are very few historical figures who emulate him on this score.



صورت استقام خان اخیسی

Painting of a Prince and Attendant with a Hawk

Date 1600

Museum Number 1955,1008,0.14

Dimensions 11.0 x 14.0 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor on paper

Copyright © The British Museum, London

The 1600 work on the opposite page with fading colors and in somewhat different dimensions than the usual Mughal paintings is another beautiful example of the level of interest in the field sport by the Mughals. The obese prince on the left, sitting comfortably cross-legged with a common green sash around his waist, is carefully examining a hawk with his index finger under her wing and the thumb on her breast, as if to gauge its condition. It was a traditional way to determine the bird's weight before the introduction of modern scales. The hawk is sitting on the gloved fist of the courtier, who has a dagger tucked into his belt. It seems they have laid out their carpet with cushions in an open pavilion, as the sky colors are visible in the background.

In the full-length portrait on this page a nobleman with a long moustache is also determining the hawk's condition in the same old fashion and in a more emphatic way. The bird has left her one foot in the air and is facing the nobleman. The Persian couplet in the upper and lower inner boxes is by the renowned 14th-century Persian poet, Hafiz, that says:

The polo club in the hand, and you don't strike
the ball

Such a handsome hawk in the hand, and you do
not hunt at all!

The work is dated 1610 and is preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Accession No. 14.658).





A Khan Receives the Gift of a Falcon

Date 1600s

File Name Oulis2006-aop0035

Collection Masterpieces of the non-Western Book

Dimensions 36.5 x 26.5 cm

Medium Watercolor and gilt on paper

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In this composite work, a Khan or a Pashtun from north-west Pakistan is receiving a black falcon as a gift from a prince, who is sitting cross-legged on a golden throne. The ethnic group of Pashtuns was, and still is, known as Khans in

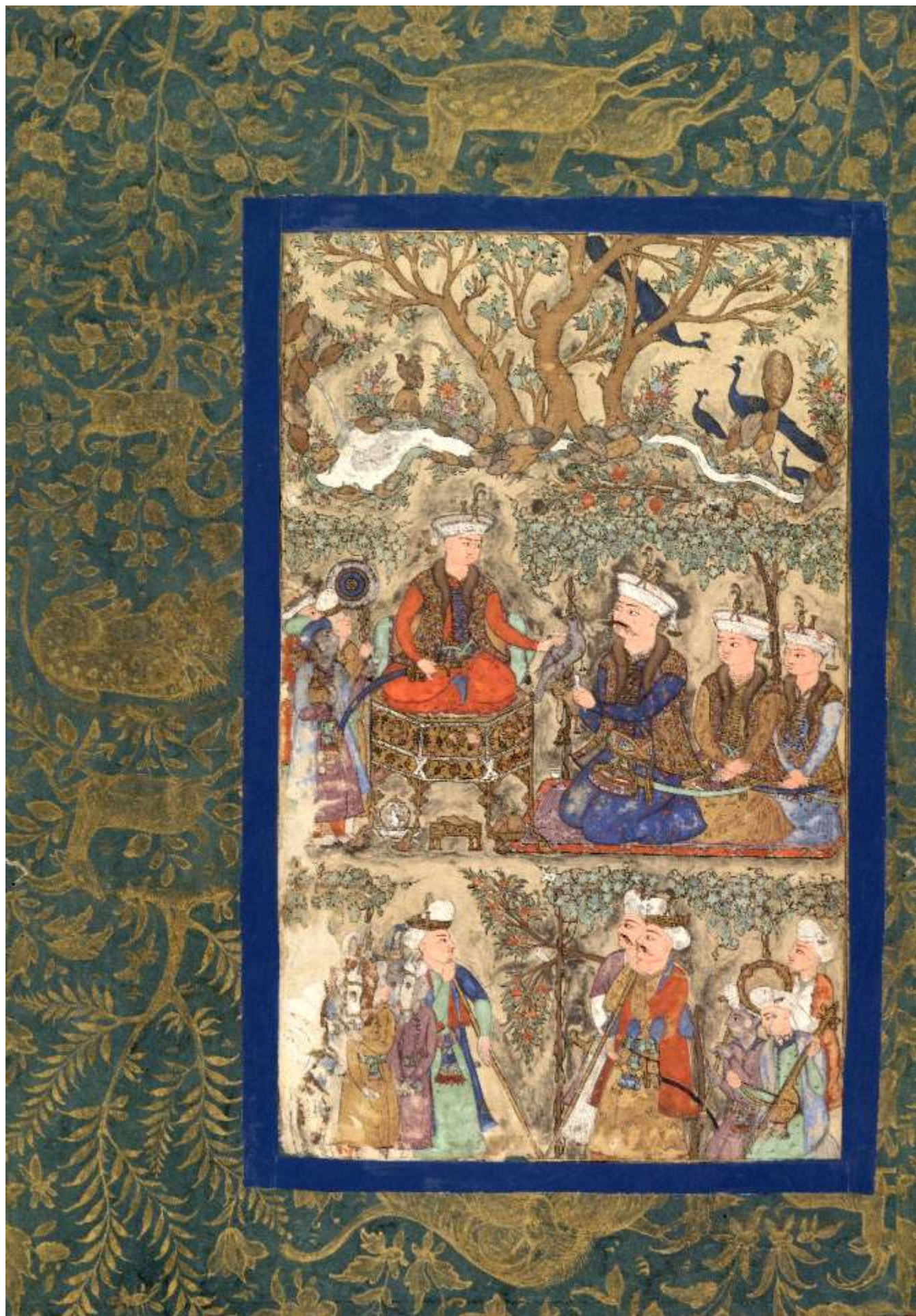
India and elsewhere. The fair-skinned Khan is sitting on bended knees, a traditional reverential position, along with his two adorable kids. The prince, the Khan, and two children are all wearing woolen sleeveless jackets and traditional caps with plumes and threaded tufts called *pakol*. The hawk is wearing, among other furniture, a

halsband. There are chukar partridges and peafowl in the thick woods beside a stream in the background, while there are three musicians and five travelers in the foreground.

In the delightful work below, Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-1748) is being carried in a golden palanquin by the eight royal servants in white *jamās* and orange overcoats. The king is carrying a hawk on his gloved fist. The work seems to have come from a master hand that is apparent from the mesmerizing color and composition of the work. There are different varieties of flowers and trees in the garden.

The painting is preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Accession No. 26.283).





Jahangir with a Juvenile Hawk

Date 1605-1627

Museum Number 1955,1008,0.11

Dimensions 13.6 × 8.2 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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In this early 1600s painting, King Jahangir is shown holding an impressive juvenile goshawk. She is wearing a halsband, while a tufted leash is hanging down from Jahangir's glove of black color. The king is gently stroking the hawk's breast with the forefinger of his left hand at which the hawk is gazing at.

In the work below (left), the same sovereign is carrying an albino hawk or falcon. Albinos were as much sought after and prized during the Mughal era as they are today. Such hawks were usually presented as tributes by the noblemen to the Mughal kings and were also

exchanged between the Persian and Mughal monarchs. The painting is dated 1610-1620 and is preserved in the Brooklyn Museum, New York (Accession No. 87.234.7).

The other painting depicts Jahangir, the naturalist-king, holding a hawk on his right hand and in the left a teal. The king is trying to hide the waterfowl from the hawk, but her sharp eyes have already noticed its presence and is looking downwards in an eager way with extended wings. The painting – dated 1700s – is stored in the V&A Museum, London (IS.181-1955).





Shah Abbas I Hawking

Date 1600s

Museum Number 1920,0917,0.44

Dimensions 17.1 × 9.6 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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This full-length portrait shows the Persian monarch, Shah Abbas, in European attire holding a hawk in a landscape. The king sports a long moustache and wears a Napoleon cap. His orange shirt and striped

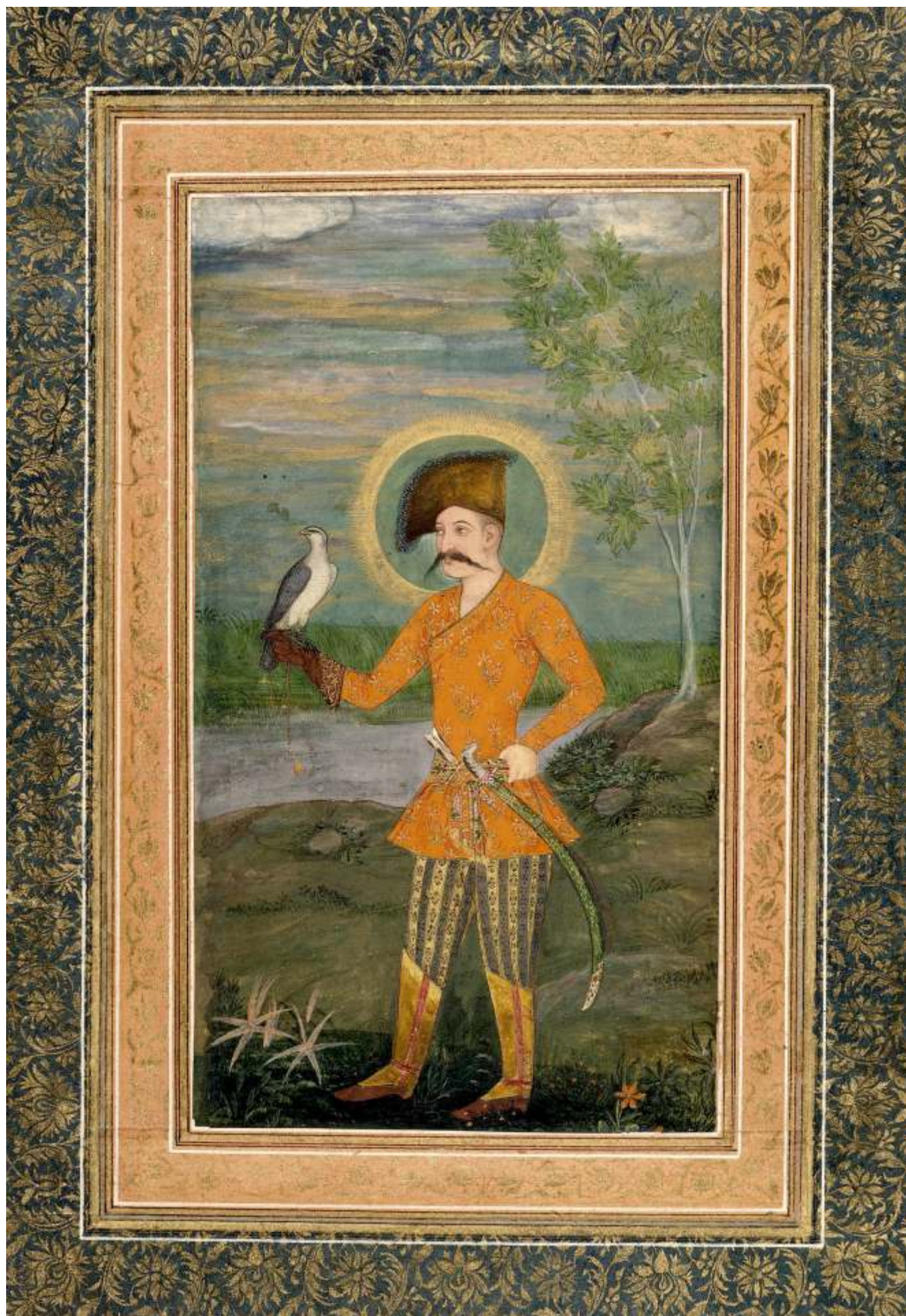
trousers carry floral designs. He has a sheathed dagger and a sword in his sash. The hilt of the sword has been carved in the shape of a horse's head. There is a halo around Abbas head, symbolizing his kingly stature. There is a canal and a graceful beautiful plane tree in the background. Overhead, there are gathering clouds with blue, white, and golden colors. There is reed like grass across the river, and star-shaped flowers and plants and bushes in the foreground. Both the hawk and king are looking to the left. A tufted leash is suspended from the chocolate-colored glove. The inner border with pink base shows vegetal motifs.

The work on this page portrays an imaginary scene where Shah Jahan is receiving a hawk - an emblem of authority - from his grandfather, Akbar. Jahangir is seated to the left with a *Falco* on his fist. The prince standing beside Shah Jahan is his eldest son, Dara Shikoh.

In the bottom left and right corners are I'timad -al Daula and Asaf Khan respectively, two influential Mughal ministers.

The work is dated 1630-1640 and is preserved in the Brooklyn Museum, New York (Accession No. 1994.42).





Portrait of Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur

Date 1620-1622

Artist Bichitr

Accession Number

Dimensions 19.1 × 11.6 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © The Cleveland Museum of Art



The work depicts a local Indian ruler who was first a friend, but later turned into an enemy of the Mughals, and then later in life turned into a friend again. His name is Raja Jagat Singh, who is holding a hawk with a fair amount of detail on his belly and underparts. The work is executed by one of foremost artists of the Mughal atelier, Bichitr. The raja had

killed Jehangir's brother-in-law, the influential Asaf Khan, in one of his battles with the Mughals. Asaf's daughter, Mumtaz Begum, was married to King Shah Jahan, in whose memory the Taj Mahal was built. Raja Jagat also put to death some of Shah Jahan's leading military commanders during his rebellion from 1640 to 1642, but finally surrendered to the Mughal emperor. He was given amnesty in the wake of his surrender and later afterwards played an important role during the Mughal military campaigns of Kabul and Kandahar.

The other half-length portrait shows a handsome prince with a bird of prey on his golden glove. The extremely refined execution and minute detail of the work is simply spellbinding. Look, for instance, at the complex detail on the sash, dagger, glove, the plumed turban, and the collar. The image is bordered by alternative motifs of vines in gold on a blue base. The painting is preserved in Cleveland Museum of Art.





Prince with a Hawk

Date 1600-1605

Accession Number M.83.1.4

Dimensions 14.29 x 8.57 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper

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This is a prototype of the Mughal miniature technique. The prince is most probably Salim (later King Jahangir), whose love for the natural world is well reflected in the golden robe he is wearing. There are

both real and imaginary birds rendered skillfully all over. There are a couple of hunting scenes as well. For



instance, a Marco Polo goat is chased by a lion, while an ibex has been stricken by another. There are pairs of caracals and foxes, and an antelope and a hare also. Among the birds, there's the mythical *simurgh* i.e. the phoenix on the left arm of Prince Salim. There are also ducks, cranes, chakurs, and other waterfowl, too. Not to mention, the king of

the birds' kingdom on the prince's gloved fist, the mighty and murderous gos with all the necessary paraphernalia.



Raja Devi Chand

Date c. 1750

Place of Origin Jammu

Museum Number IS.262-1953

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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Raja Devi Chand (1741 – 1778), the ruler of Uttarakhand state in India, is sitting on a terrace, smoking the traditional hookah. A hawk is sitting in a stately style at his side on a padded cushion-like perch. She is wearing brass bells on her tarsi and her jesses are attached to a swivel, which is further tied with a leash. A halsband with a small pendant is also on her neck. The handsome raja is wearing an elaborate headdress with

colorful strings of beads hanging down from it. He is wearing a dark orange *jama* with golden lining and there's a scabbard lying beside him. The servant behind the raja is waving a flywhisk made of peacock feathers and is wearing a light orange robe.

The work on this page depicts Prince Dara Shikoh (1615 – 1659), the eldest son of King Shah Jahan, and hence, the crown prince and an *heir apparent* to the throne. He was, however, defeated by his puritanical younger brother, Aurangzeb, and killed through a conspiracy. Dara was of a spiritual and literary bend of mind and was at the same time a statesman, a mystic, a poet, and a philosopher. There are many a book to his credit, such as *Majma-al-Bahrain*, *Safinat ul-Awliya*, and *Tariqat ul-Haqiqat*. Many scholars believe had he succeeded in the tug-of-war, the history of the Mughal rule in India would've gone on a different trajectory; that is, on the positive side.

The prince is sitting on a mound with a hawk on

fist and the leash in left hand. A bearded retainer is standing in front of him with folded hands. The painting is a beautiful sample of a special miniature technique called *siyah qalam* or 'black pen'. In this technique, there's a minimal use of colors and the work is, technically speaking, more of a drawing or sketching than a painting.

The work is dated 1700s and is preserved in the British Museum, London (Museum No. 1920,0917,0.218).





Raja Balwant Singh on Horseback Holding a Hawk

Date c. 1750 – 1760

Artist Nainsukh

Place of Origin Jasrota

Museum Number IS.141-1955

Medium Opaque watercolor with gold on paper

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Painted by the celebrated 18th century artist, Nainsukh, this half-damaged work depicts his patron, Raja Balwant Singh, in an equestrian pose, holding a hawk on his right fist. The hawk is sitting on a beautiful yellow-colored glove, and there's the traditional hawker's drum fastened to the side of the steed. The raja is holding the drum stick and reins in his left hand, and both he and the

hawk are looking to the right. Writing about the artist and his art, the Scottish historian William Dalrymple observes: "It was in Jasrota [a Himalayan principedom] that Nainsukh—"Delight of the Eye"—began producing the work that led to him today being generally regarded

as the greatest of eighteenth-century Indian painters. Nainsukh brought together all the precision and technically exquisite detail of the Mughal tradition, the bright colors of Rajasthani painting, and the bold beauty of early Pahari art—the art of the Punjab hills. To all this he added a humor and a humanism, a refinement, and above all a precise, sharply observant eye that was entirely his own."²

The painting below also has its origin in the Himalayan principedom of Jasrota and may have come from the Nainsukh's hand at an early stage. The raja has lifted his gloved hand backwards as if to throw his hawk at the cormorant-like waterfowl and two ducks in the nearby pond. The two servants on foot are carrying flywhisks of peacock feathers.

The work is dated 1750 and is housed in the V&A Museum, London (Museum No. IS.213-1951).



² William Dalrymple, "Visions of Indian Art", *The New York Review of Books*, June 6, 2013 Issue.



Chand Bibi Hawking

Date 1700s

Museum Number 1920,0917,0.25

Dimensions 29.0 × 20.6 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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Chand Bibi (1550 – 1599) was a famous Muslim queen of Ahmadnagar in the Deccan, who valiantly fought against the Mughal forces in 1595 and successfully defended her fortress, albeit for a short while. She served as a regent for her nephew Ibrahim Adil Shah II in Bijapur from 1580 to 1585, and during the second siege of her fortress in Ahmadnagar, she's said to have lost her heart and was killed by a mob who felt betrayed. Other sources claim that she fought to the very end and was killed by the Mughal forces.

Whatever might have befallen to the gallant queen, her image became a symbol of resistance and rebelliousness during the early 18th-century when the

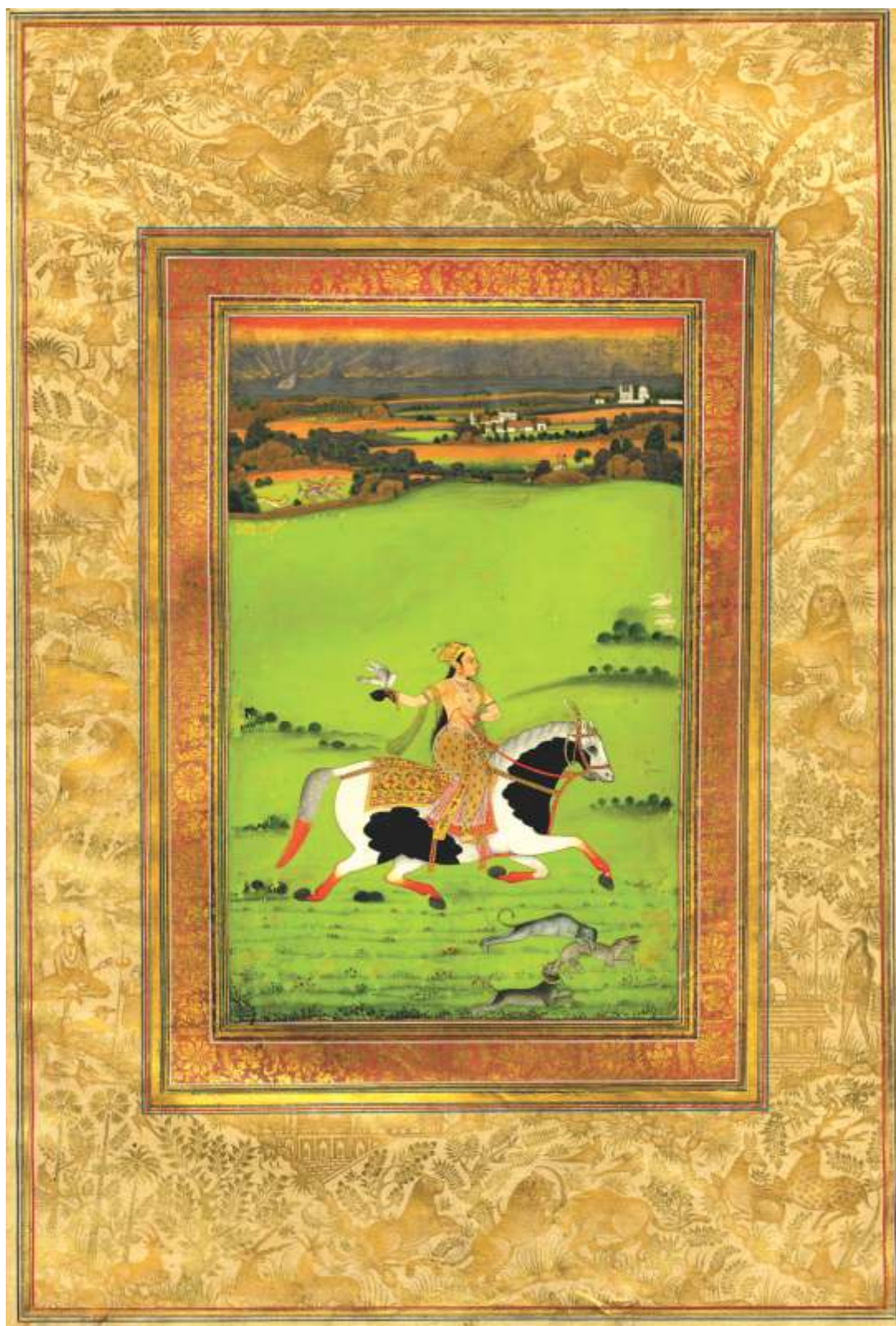


Mughal empire was in decline and the local rulers of independent states were trying to emulate the Mughals through art and military

might by promoting such icons. Curiously enough, Chand Bibi has most frequently been portrayed as hawking out in the field. Whether she actually practiced the field sport like the Mughal nobility is not known for sure. In the work at hand, she's riding a piebald steed whose lower half tail and limbs are henna-dyed, symbolizing that the queen is wading through blood. She is in the act of throwing her hawk at a pair of cranes. There are also a couple of pointers or hounds in the bottom right corner, one of which has just captured a hare.

The beautiful queen is attired in a transparent shirt somehow revealing her bosom. Both she and her steed are set against a contrasting lush green background. There are still darker green tufts of bushes and small red flowers on the undulating ground. It is sunset time and the last beams of the light have turned the horizon into crimson gold. In the distance, there is village scene with a mosque, date trees and houses. A farmer is ploughing the field with his two bulls; while a leopard is prowling a group of deer.

The sumptuous work is bordered by gilt floral patterning. The margin shows hunting scenes, flora and fauna specimens, and sadhu figures.



Chand Bibi Hawking on Horse

Date 1750

Artist Unknown

Museum Number 1951,0407,0.24

Medium Gouache painting on paper

Copyright © The British Museum, London

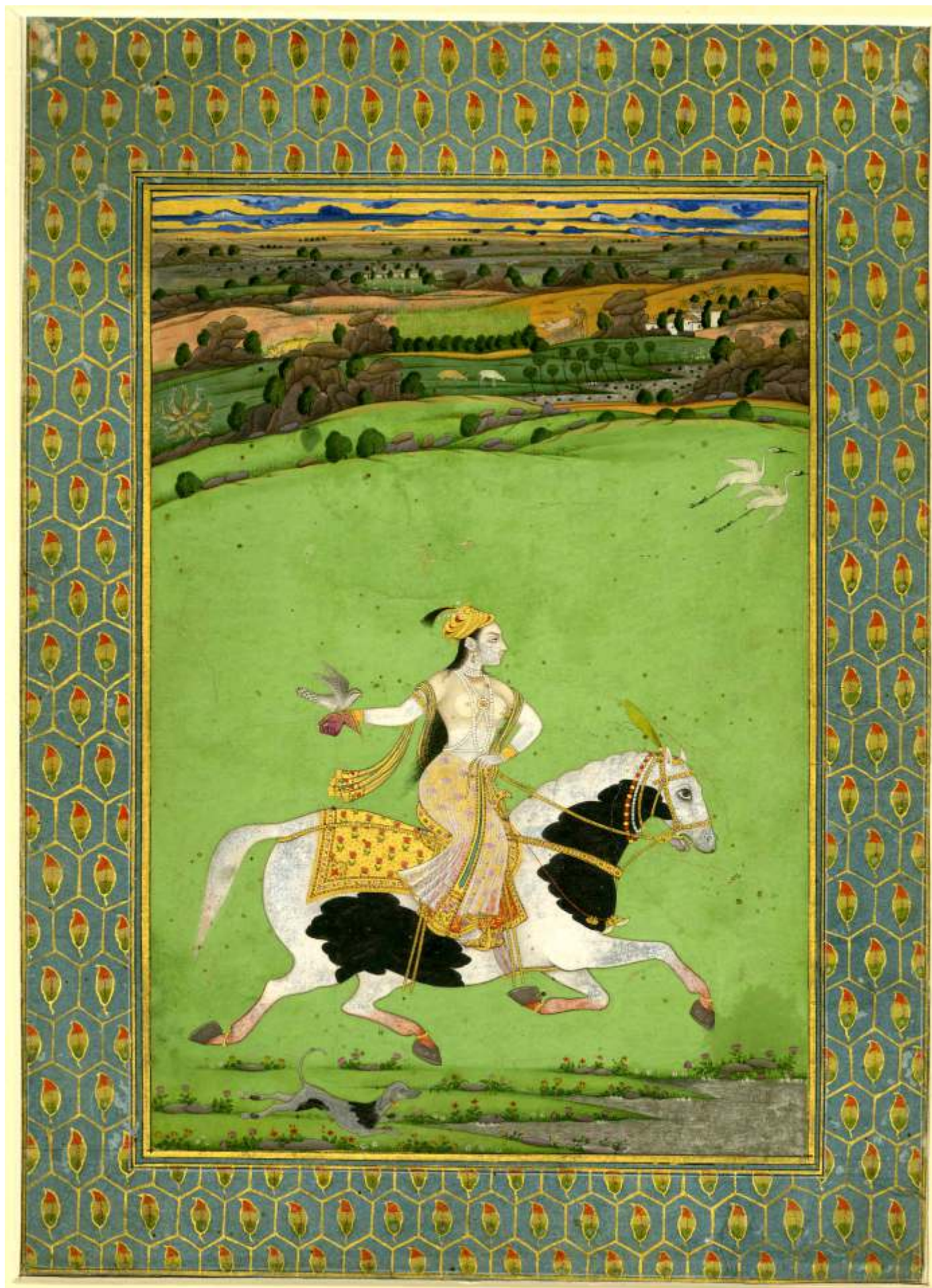


This is another dazzling example of the Deccani school painting on the same theme as the previous one. The pretty princess, Chand Bibi, is casting her hawk at the two cranes from her right hand and in the left is holding the reins. The colors used here in comparison to the preceding work are of lighter and softer tone and, hence, more pleasing to the eye. There are some minor alterations in detail also. Instead of the two dogs of previous work, there is only one here. There is no rabbit or hare, but instead a pond in its place with small



flowering plants. The village scene in the distance also has a pond on the bank of which some sadhus are sitting cross-legged. There's no mosque here. The farmer is tilling his field with the same two bulls, but there are also a couple of cows grazing nearby. Instead of the cheetah, there's a

tiger stalking the deer that have formed a circle in self-defense. The horizon reveals golden and azure colors in place of the crimson gold of the last one.



Lady with Hawk

Date c. 1750

Artist Possibly by Nainsukh

Place of Origin Guler

Museum Number IS.178-1950

Dimensions 25.5 × 15.8 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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This is perhaps one of the most voluptuous works in the entire series of royal portraits. Proper perspective and the bold use of colors make it an almost modern masterpiece. Attributed to Nainsukh – Delight of the Eye – it depicts a royal lady with a bird of prey on her fist. Curiously enough, the lady is holding the bird on her left fist in the Western fashion. The geometric shape of the

hawk, as mentioned earlier, is a Nainsukh signature. The principals intersect into the 'x' letter, the upperparts coverts are 'v' shaped, while the tail have the same three broad horizontal stripes. She is perched on a grey glove with beautiful floral motifs on sides. A red leash is hanging down from the glove.

The lady is holding the hookah hose in her delicate thumb and forefinger. She is seated on a wooden couch in a nonchalant style, with her right leg crossed over the left. There's also a pillow at the lady's back. Her shoeless foot reveals her sole and fingers hued with henna. Her palms are henna-dyed as well. The lady's wearing the traditional *khussa* slippers and there are anklets of stringed beads on her both feet. She's also having a plumed headdress and her long spiraling tresses reach to her bottom. Her breasts with dark nipples are most revealing despite her bodice and *dopatta*. She's also wearing earrings, a pearly double-necklace, an arm

bracelet, and a locket with a tear-shaped emerald. There's a maidservant behind her shown partially. Last but not the least, there are white and yellow marigolds on the bottom, neatly sown in the soil.

श्री गणेशाय नमः



Baz Bahadur and Rupmati Hunting

Date 1760

Accession Number M.81.271.11

Dimensions 24.4 x 15.2 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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The love story of Baz Bahadur and Rupmati is another legend that was popularized in the wake of the Mughal downfall in the Sub-continent and is the subject of many a miniature painting of local schools such as Kangra, Rajasthan, and the Punjab Hills. The romantic liaison of Baz and Rupmati – which some claim to be a legend and others to be true – goes like this: Baz Bahadur – who was a Pashtun by ethnicity – was the last independent ruler of the Malwa state in western Madhya Pradesh, India. He was Muslim by faith with a passion for music and art and ruled Malwa from 1555 to 1562. Once out hunting, he chanced upon a beautiful Hindu shepherdess who was singing in a melodious voice. The ruler was struck by both her beauty and her sonorous voice, and fell in love with her. The two tied the knot soon afterwards.

In 1561, Akbar's half-brother and his general, Adham Khan, attacked Malwa and vanquished the small force of Baz, who fled to the neighboring Chittorgarh to seek help from its rulers. Adham was enamored by Rupmati's beauty, but to avoid capture and disrepute she committed suicide by taking poison. Baz remained a

fugitive at different local courts and fought many fierce battles against the Mughals, but finally surrendered to Akbar in November 1570.

In this colorful work, dominated by different shades of blue, the two lovers are on a hawking expedition. Rupmati has kept her left hand affectionately on the shoulder of her lover, who's carrying a hawk on his gloved fist. (Baz Bahadur's actual name was Bahadur Khan. Baz was his title meaning a hawk). There are exotic birds in the dense woods in the background, while in the foreground there are monkeys as well.

In the all women work below, a female figure is holding a hawk, again like the Nainsukh's painting on the preceding page, on her left fist. A woman beater is pointing toward the waterfowls in the nearby pond, while four others are following behind the mounted princess. Dated 1775, the work is housed in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Accession No. M.79.191.25).





Baz Bahadur and Rupmati Riding at Night

Date 1730

File Name Oulis2006-baj0053

Collection Masterpieces of the non-Western Book

Dimensions 37.5 x 27.0 cm

Medium Watercolor and gilt on paper

Copyright © The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

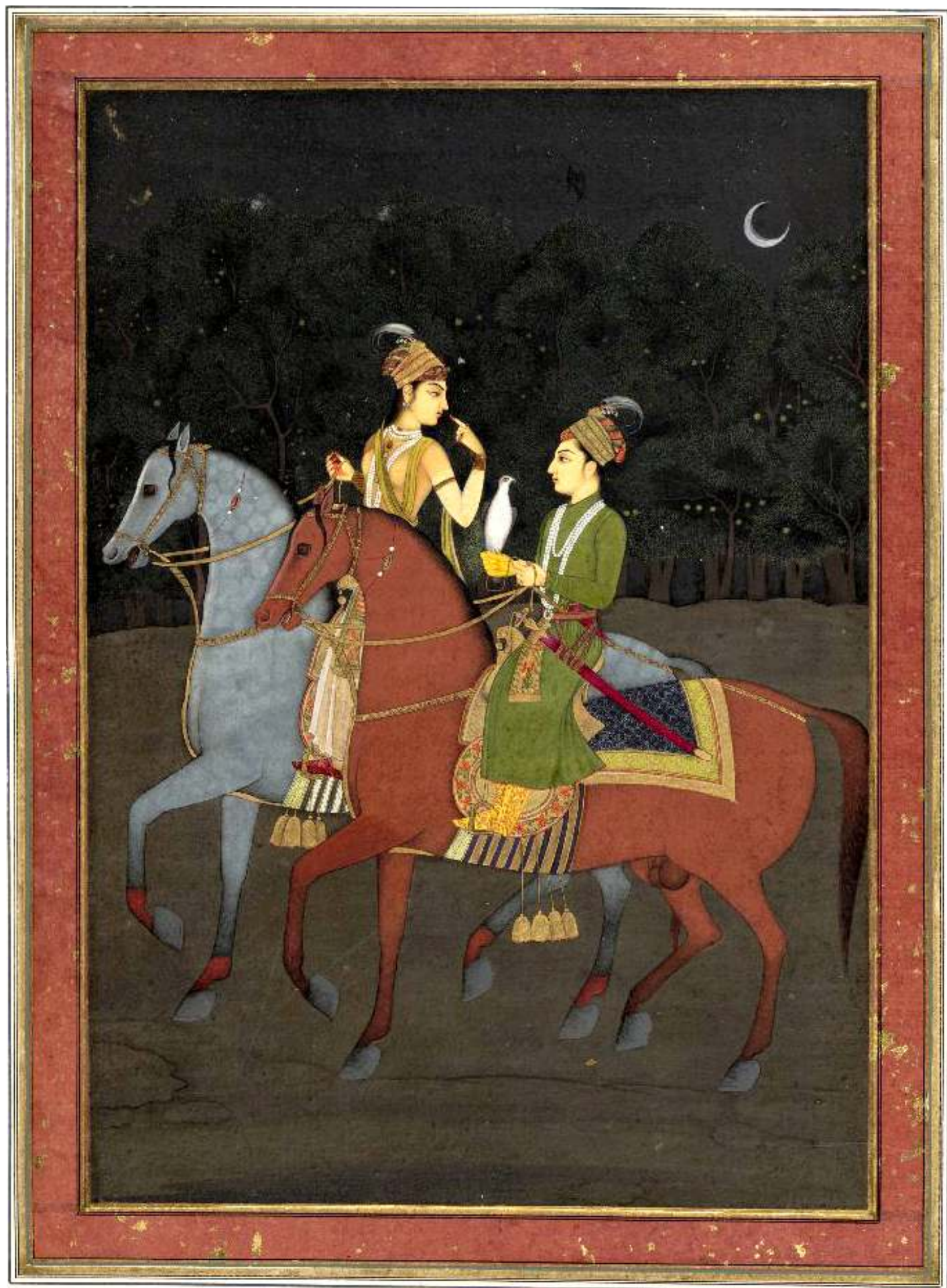
This painting also shows the two lovers, Baz Bahadur and Rupmati, riding on horsebacks side by side, sharing the secrets of love in the dim moonlight. Baz is attired in the green *jama* and is carrying a hawk on his right fist, while Rupmati is staring at her lover in wonderment. There is a dense jungle and the crescent over the horizon. Both the human and animal figures are rendered somehow realistically than the previous two works.

In the work below, contrary to the last two paintings, both the lover and beloved are carrying birds

of prey on fists. Interestingly, Rupmati is having her hawk on her right hand, while Baz on his left. There are pines and other trees on the horizon and the blue sky shows sweeping brush strokes in gold, suggestive of the evening time.

The work is housed in the Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge (Object No. 2009.202.218).





Princess Hawking

Date 1700s

Museum Number 1920,0917,0.26

Dimensions 45.7 × 31.6 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper

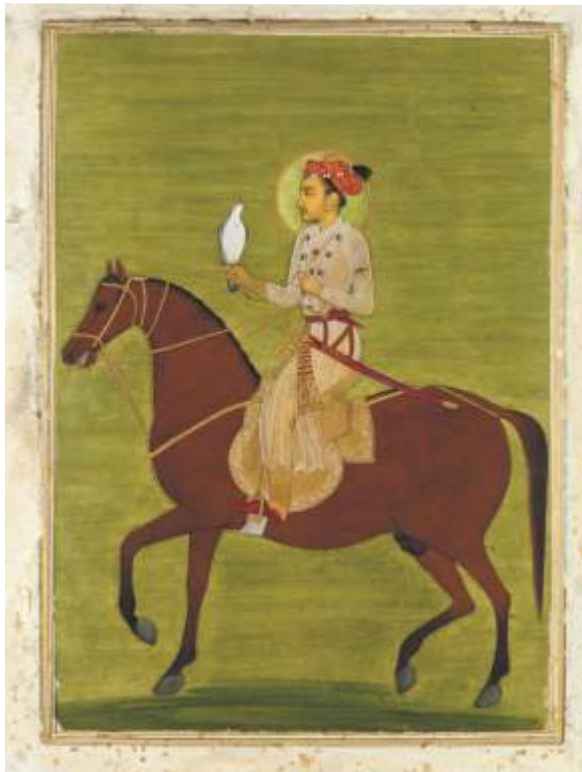
Copyright © The British Museum, London



A pretty princess is riding on horseback with a hawk on her fist. The half body of the horse is dyed with henna and is draped in all the necessary trappings. The princess is clad in a beautiful orange costume with golden flowers and is wearing

a plumed headdress. There are beautiful flowering plants on the ground. The margin of the painting is richly decorated with hunting scenes, involving real and mythical animals.

Following (right) is a young prince, who is holding a hawk on his right hand and the windpipe hose

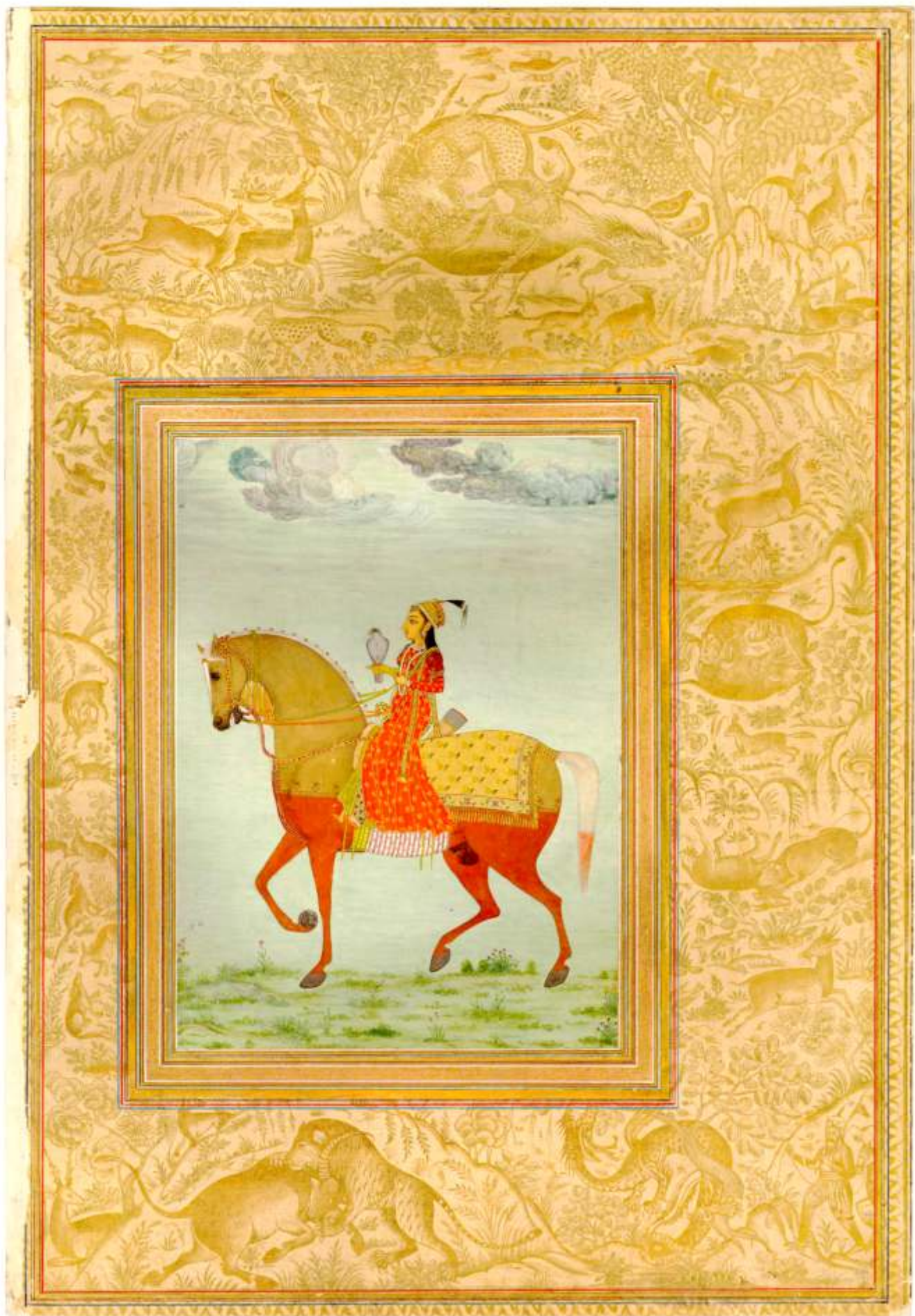


in his left. He is sitting in a pavilion with a scenic background. The prince is none other than Mir Phulwari, who was a titular Nawab of Bengal (1765 – 66), installed by the British. He died only at 16, possibly from poisoning at a party given in honor of the English Major General Robert Clive in Murshidabad. The work is dated 1775 and is housed in the V&A Museum, London (IM.80-1922).

The painting on the left shows a young prince with a hawk on his right fist. In his left hand, he is holding the leash and reins. The prince is not only wearing a turban with a string of beads but also earrings, many necklaces, a pendant, and an arm bracelet. The sash around his thin waist holds a punch dagger, while a sheathed sword is suspending from it.

The work is dated 1600s-1700s and is preserved in the V&A Museum, London (D.1174-1903).





Portrait of Amanat Khan

Date Early 1700s

Accession Number 15.48

Dimensions 27.5 x 18.1 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

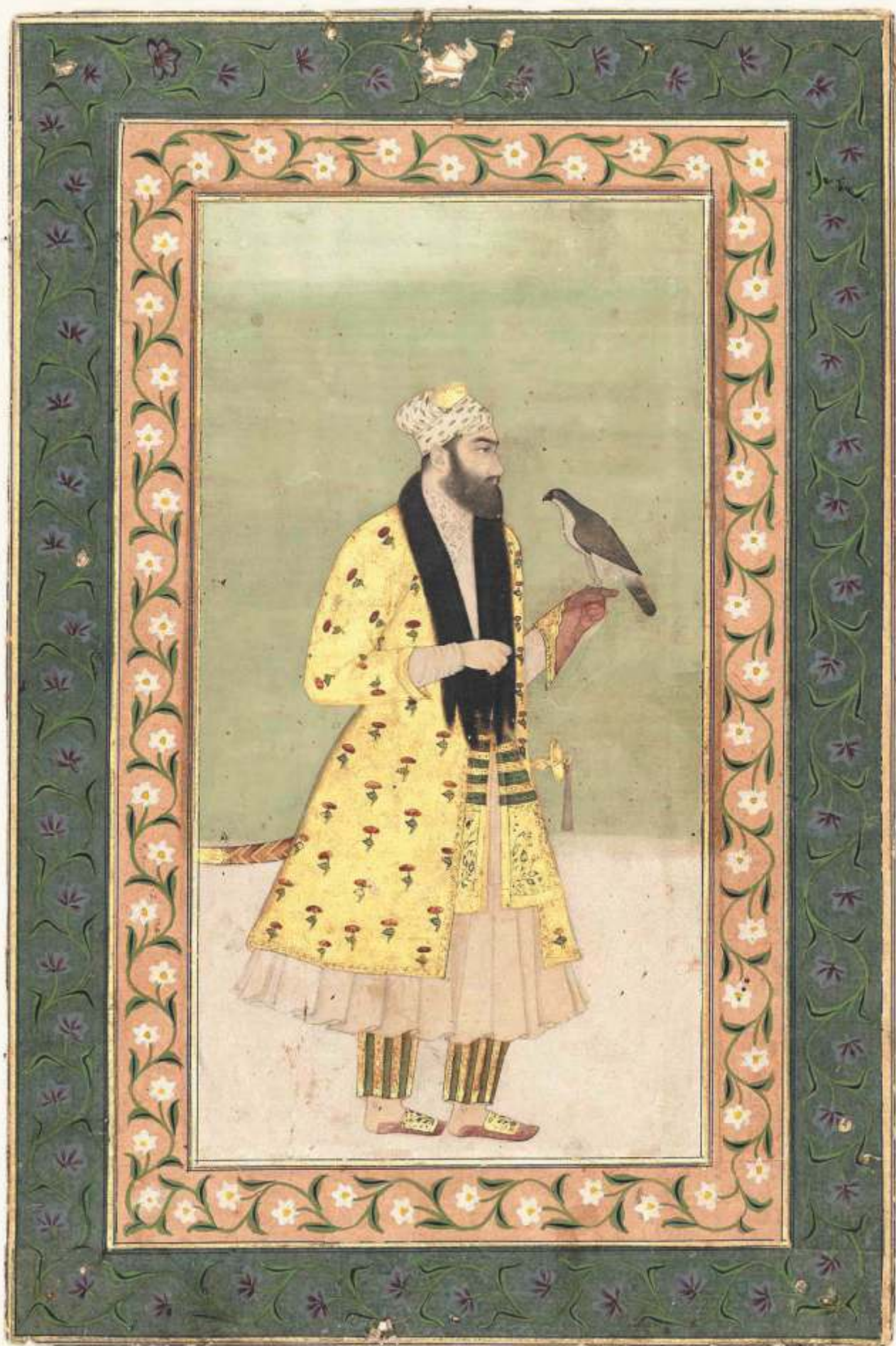
The work depicts Amanat Khan, who was appointed by King Shah Jahan to design and select the Quranic verses for his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal's tomb, the Taj Mahal. The use of gold in this painting outshines many other Mughal works. The master architect is attired in a sumptuous golden tunic with red flowers and green leaves on it, while the plume of his turban also carries the gold color. So are his sword hilt, the sheath, the sash, the *khussa* shoes, and trousers. Even the edging of the glove, on which the hawk is sitting, is hued in gold. Contrary to the Eastern tradition, Amanat has his hawk on his left gloved fist. In the inner border, there are beautiful white daisies and vine motifs on the pink base. There are purple floral motifs and green vines in the outer border as well.



Below (right) is the full-length portrait of Prince Sultan Muazzam, who later became King Bahadur Shah I (r. 1707-1712). He was the eldest son of the sixth Mughal king, Aurangzeb. The bearded Sultan is wearing all that behooves a Mughal prince. He is having his hawk on his right gloved fist.

In the other painting (left), Hasan Khan, who was a vizier to the ruler of Golconda (southern India), is carrying a hawk on his right fist, while in left hand, he's holding the leash. He is wearing a plain white turban over his shaved head. Both the vizier and the hawk are looking toward the left intently. Both works are preserved in the British Museum, London (Museum Nos. 1974,0617,02.19 and 1974,0617,02.48 respectively).





Muhammad Shah Holding a Hawk

Date 1764

Artists Muhammad Rizavi Hindi

Accession Number

Dimensions 14.4 × 10.3 cm

Medium Opaque water, ink, and gold on paper

Copyright © The Cleveland Museum of Art

Muhammad Shah was the Mughal king who ruled India from 1719 to 1748. His pen-name was 'Sada Rangila' meaning 'ever joyous'. Although, he was a great patron of art and literature, but the weakening and disintegration of the Mughal empire, which had its roots in the lopsided policies of Aurangzeb, continued during his reign. Hence, he goes as a weak and pleasure-seeking king in the Muslim history. Things were further deteriorated with the invasion of his kingdom by the Persian king, Nader Shah, who not only massacred the residents of Delhi on a mass scale but also plundered much part of its much-coveted treasures, including the fabled Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-Noor Diamond.

In this innovative work, the green tunic of the king is in quite a contrast with the dark background. The artist, Muhammd Rizavi, has executed the work with great effect, making bold use of colors. The ferocious nature of the gos is evident from its fearsome portrait. Her piercing eyes are set on the king's left hand with an archer's ring. She is wearing leather jesses that are attached to a swivel, and the swivel to a leash. The tarsi

and talons are true to life. The halsband has two small pearls and a ruby, making it clear she's a favorite with the emperor.

There's a halo with golden beams around Muhammad Shah's head. He's wearing a plumed turban with a string of pearls. There is a ruby not only at the base of the plume, but also in front of the turban's string, in his arm bracelet, his belt, and his necklace. A long punch dagger with inlaid rubies on handle is tucked tightly in his girdle, too.

In the painting below, Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, is offering a hawk to Gobind Singh, who was the tenth guru or spiritual leader. It is more like a symbolic work, signifying the transfer of religious authority by the founder of the religion to the Sikh guru. Two other figures are standing behind Guru Gobind, one of which is holding a lute. Dated 1700-1720, the painting is preserved in the V&A Museum, London (IS.40-1954)





رستم خان محمد رضا میرزا

Mian Mukand Dev

Date c. 1746

Artist Nainsukh

Place of Origin Jammu

Museum Number IS.185-1951

Material Opaque watercolor on paper

Copyright © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Painted by the celebrated Nainsukh, in this work, Mian Mukand Dev (1720 – 1770), the ruler of the small historical state of Jasrota, is holding a hawk on his gloved fist. The leash is tied to another khaki colored glove, hanging from the shoulder of Mukand Dev.

In the following work a hawk is comfortably sitting on a padded perch, while one end of the leash is attached to the swivel and the other to a red glove tucked under the leg of the nobleman, who is holding a lotus flower in his left hand. The maidservant behind him is holding a flywhisk and is looking upwards. The servant

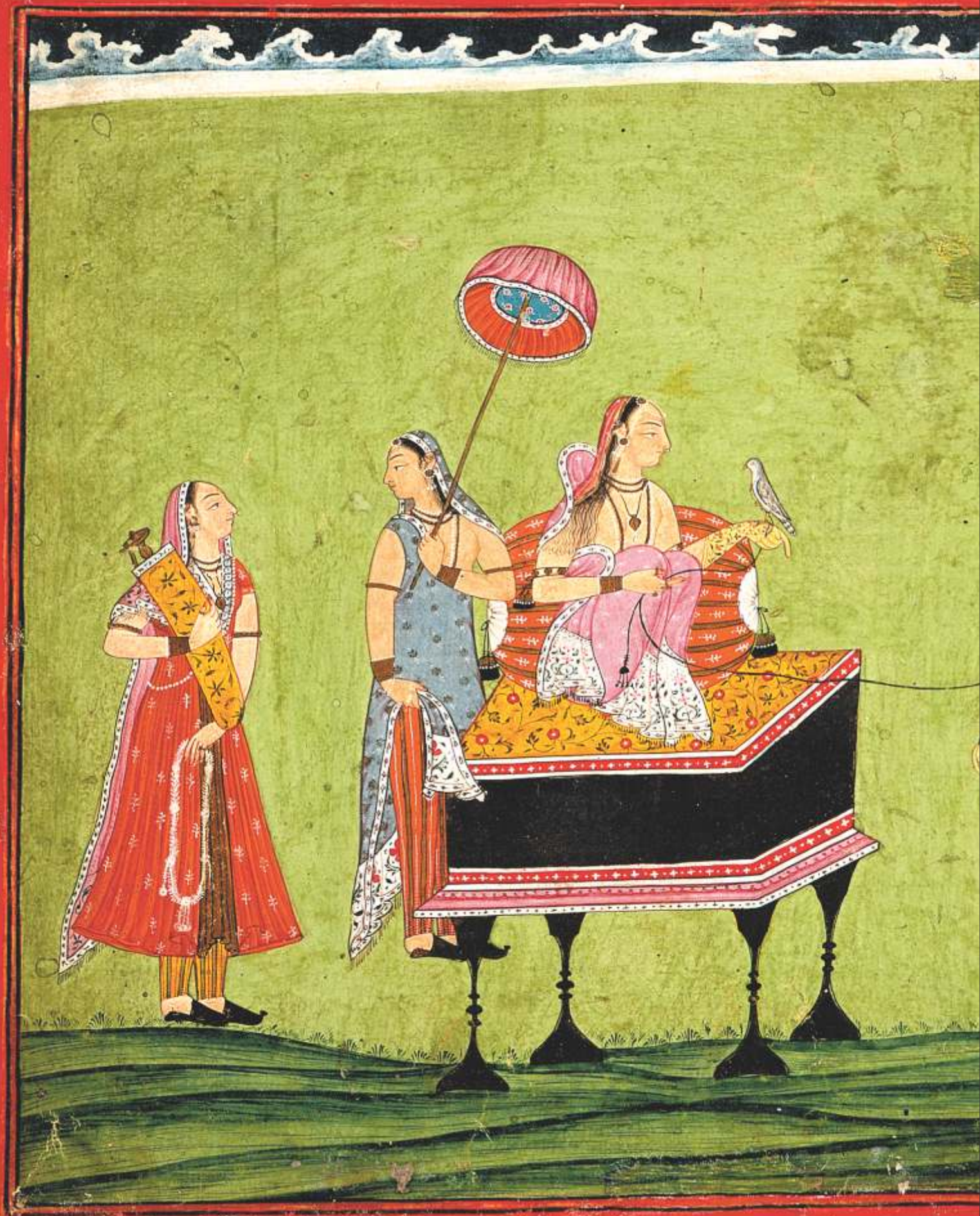
on the right is holding a standard and a piece of cloth in his hands. The painting was executed in 1710 and is preserved in the Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge (Object No. 1967.21).

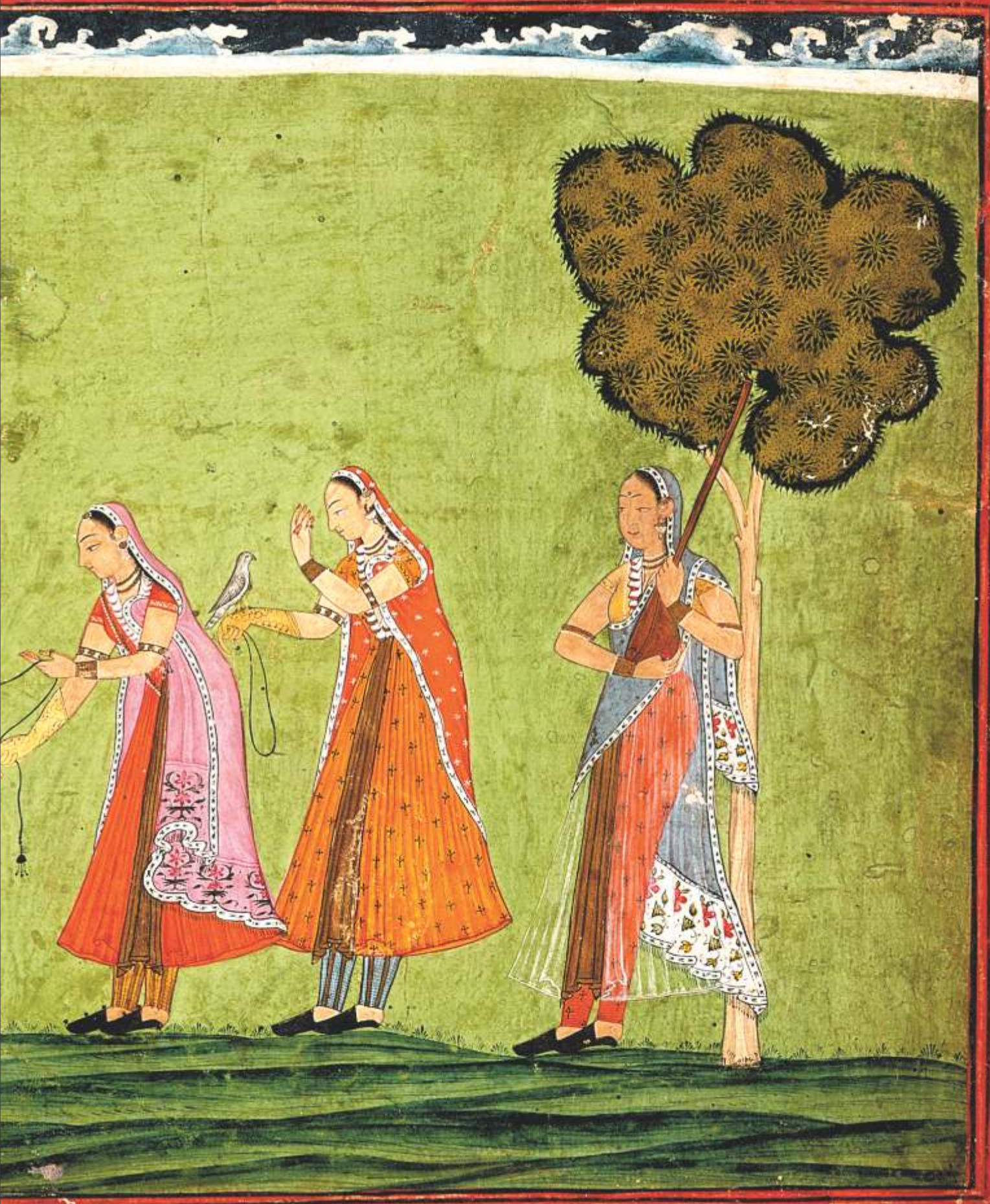


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15.185-1951





Princess with a Hawk

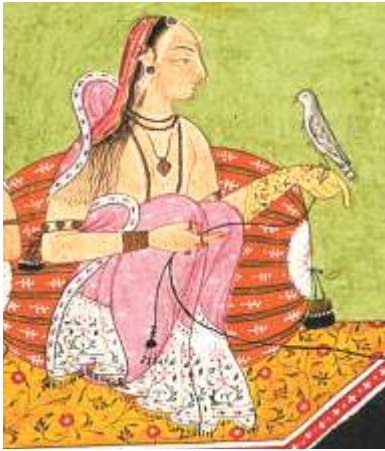
Date 1730-1740

Accession Number M.76.2.36

Dimensions 20.95 x 30.16 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper

Copyright © The Los Angeles County Museum of Art



In the all-women work on the previous double pages, a princess is having a hawk on her gloved left fist. She is sitting on a raised platform with motifs of flowers and vines on its top. The hawk is tied to a creance whose other end is held by a woman standing in front of the

princess. This woman is also wearing a golden-colored glove with floral embroidery. There's another woman standing behind her with yet another bird on her gloved fist. All the three are clearly busy in training their birds of prey. Unlike the princess, the two other women are wearing their gloves on their right hands. The maid behind the princess is holding a parasol.

In the Pahari painting on the opposite page, a nobleman is holding a hawk on his left gloved fist. The

A Portrait of a Nobleman Holding a Hawk

Pahari School

Date 1720

Museum Number 1948,1009,0.135

Dimensions 15.2 x 9.5 cm

Copyright © The British Museum, London

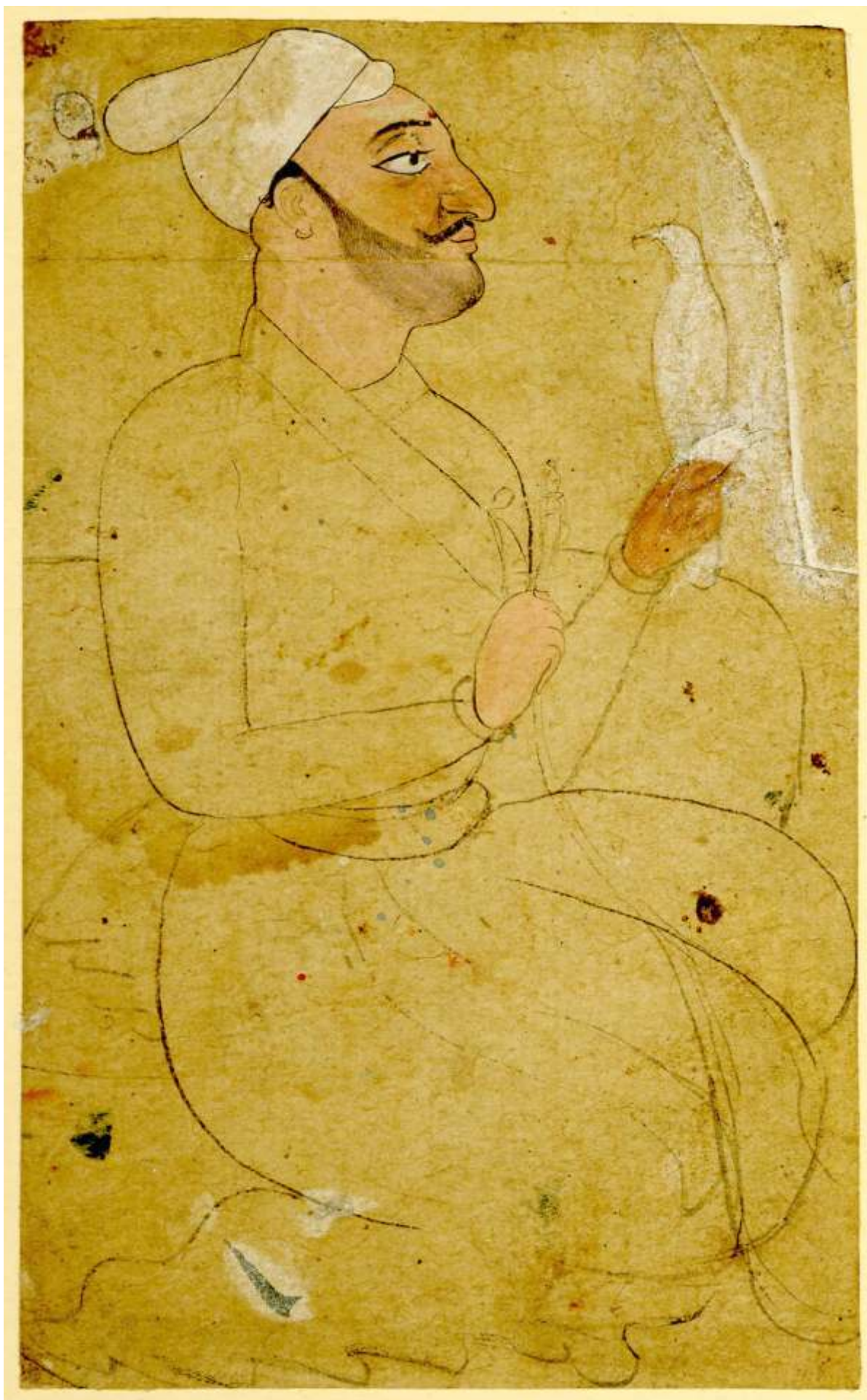
bird's delicate figure suggests she's a sparrowhawk. The nobleman is wearing a white turban and is sitting on his bended knees with a pillow at his side.

In the Pahari painting on the opposite page, a nobleman is holding a hawk on his left gloved fist. The bird's delicate figure suggests she's a sparrowhawk.



In the beautiful work below, the raja is sitting on bended knees and is holding a hawk on his left gloved fist, while in his right hand, he's having a quail. The hawk is intently looking intently at the quail. One end of the hawk's leash is tied to the swivel, while another to a glove, held by a servant. The young man in the dark green tunic with floral motifs is also carrying a hawk on his fisted glove and two quails in his left hand. The painting is dated 1725 and is stored in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Accession No. M.83.105.8)





Lady with Hawk

Date Late 1700s

Place of Origin Rajasthan

Museum Number IS.121-1949

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

In this highly idealized painting of the Rajasthani school, a lady is holding a bird of prey on her left gloved fist. The bird is wearing a halsband and is looking at the lady, who's affectionately stroking the hawk's wing with her right hand. The lady is clad in a traditional garment and is wearing a veil over her head in the Muslim fashion. She is also wearing a nostril ring, earrings, and *maang tikka*, a traditional Indian jewelry worn in the middle of parting of the hair.

In the work below a lady is carrying a hawk on her left fist, wearing no glove at all. In her right hand,

she's holding the reins of her beautiful horse that is looking keenly at the hawk. The work is dated 1700-1725 and is housed in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Accession No. M.83.105.36).





Sanveri Ragini

Page from a Ragamala Series (Garland of Musical Modes)

Date 1700–1710

Accession Number 2002.178

Dimensions 15.6 x 15.6 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

A lady is sitting on a raised platform, holding a hawk on her left fist, while the leg of a bird, perhaps a chicken, in her right hand. The hawk is perched on a golden-colored glove and is wearing a halsband of beads. There are two fantastic pine trees to the right and left of the lady and a weeping willow in the distance. The dark green background is suggestive of a lush pasture.

feet with henna and is wearing the traditional anklets and a long necklace. A maidservant is there holding a wine cup. Dated 1720, the work is preserved in the Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge (Object No. 1967.22).

Below is another lady reclining in a perfectly relaxed mood on a traditional cot with bed-sheet and pillows, while holding a hawk on her right fist and a tufted leash in her left hand. She has dyed her hands and



संवेदावगा ॥ १० ॥ अस्मिन् कृत्स्न





Hunting Expeditions

Alexander Resting on a Hunt

Date c. 1605

Museum Number 1913, 0415,0.4

Dimensions 19.5 × 11.9 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © The British Museum, London



Alexander the Great, whose military campaigns captured the imagination of Mughal rulers and artists, is the subject of many miniature paintings. Contrary to his Macedonian background, however, the Persian poets created a new image of him in their works and eulogized him as a

Muslim king. The *Iskandarnama* or 'Book of Alexander', by the 12th-century poet, Nizami Ganjavi, was held in high esteem by the medieval Muslims, and master miniature artists like Behzad worked on royal commissions to illustrate the work. The same practice continued during the Mughal era and when Nizami's *Khamsa* or 'Five Poetical Works' – that contained the long epic poem of Alexander – was commissioned by Akbar in the 1590s, the Mughal atelier produced a richly illustrated copy of it.



In this work, Alexander is seated under a canopy amidst a rocky landscape and is receiving the bag after a hawking expedition. He has a hawk on his gloved right fist and is looking at an elderly man, who's holding a duck in his hand. There

are also two hares lying in front of the king. Behind the

elderly man, there is another falconer, with a red plumed hood on his hawk's head. Several other servants and beaters are also part of them.

A blindfolded trained cheetah that has scored two antelopes is in the foreground to the left. One of the antelopes is lying on the ground, while the other is being carried by a bearded man on his shoulders. Another bearded huntsman is washing his hands in the stream water. The work is a fine specimen of the *siyah qalam* technique in which only touches of color are added to the drawing of the black pen.



Jahangir Kills a Lioness Salvaging a Huntsman

Masterpieces of the non-Western book (Folio 33a)

Date 1640-1650

File Name Oulis2006-akw0041

Dimensions 26.3 × 16.7 cm

Medium Watercolor and gold on paper

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In this dramatic and action-packed hunting scene, a royal servant, Anup Rai, has been mauled by a lioness. King Jahangir is mounted on an elephant and has targeted the attacking animal with his spear. A mahout is also sitting behind Jahangir and is holding the king's sword. A mounted member of the royal team has struck the neck of the lioness with his sword and made a deep



cut, from which blood is oozing out. The horse of the unfortunate victim is terrified by the assault and is fleeing the scene. In the background, a lion cub is chasing a man, who is making an all-effort to save his life by climbing a tree. A guy, who has

already taken shelter on the tree, is pointing his spear at the cub. In the upper left corner, a retainer in the green shirt is asking a group of mounted men for help and is pointing toward the cub. There is a hawker's drum fastened to the side of one of the mounted men, who is also holding a naked sword.

In the lower left corner, a falconer is watching his hawk that has stricken down a duck and is pecking at it. In the lower right corner, a man with a saluki is just about to release his dog at an ibex.

The painting depicts a real life event that happened during one of Jahangir's hunting expeditions and is mentioned by him in great detail in his Memoirs.



Prince Akbar and Noblemen Hawking

Date c. 1555 – 1558

Artist Mir Syed Ali (active 1530 – 1600)

Dimensions 21.6 × 13.0 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

Copyright © Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection



Another member of the hawking team has just caught a duck with his hawk and is sitting on the ground, helping his bird to peck at the prey. A servant is standing beside him holding the reins of the falconer's horse. Another falconer on the horseback with a plumed turban in the center is looking back at his colleague, who is also riding a horse and has a hooded hawk on his gloved fist. Both falconers have the hawker's drums at the sides of their steeds. Just a few steps ahead of them are two beaters, pointing toward the right at some quarry.

This is the earliest work of the Mughal atelier portraying an exclusively hawking scene. In the painting, Prince Akbar, who was only a teenager at the time, has been depicted along with his guardian, Bairam Khan, and other royal servants, by an artist named Mir Syed Ali, during the reign of King Humayun. The work was executed in Delhi in 1555. The Persian inscription in the upper right corner says: 'It's the work of the painter, Mir Syed Ali.' A year later, the prince's father died accidentally by falling from a staircase of his library, and the prince ascended the throne.

Prince Akbar is in the bottom left corner taking his hawk from a mounted man, who is perhaps Bairam Khan, in a rocky landscape with occasional foliage.





Emperor Jahangir Hunting with Hawks

Date Late 1600s

Museum Number 1920,0917,0.1

Dimensions 31.3 × 18.9 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

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In this early 1600s colorful work, King Jahangir, is shown in a boat on a hawking expedition with his attendants. He's seated under a canopy with a pillow at his back. In the distance, there are mountains with high peaks and a small island in the lake with a few

houses among the dense trees. Three falconers are carrying hawks on their fists in the royal fleet of five boats. All the sailors have red-colored oars in their hands and are slowly making their way through the lake water, on whose surface lotus-like flowers are floating.

The inscription under the king's canopy erroneously identifies the principal figure as King Akbar, and might be a later addition. The beautiful gold border is decorated with floral and vegetal motifs, and is framed by a broad red line.

Below is the detail from a painting of *Khamisa of Nizami*, which was commissioned by Akbar in the 1590s. It shows a couple of beaters with small axes, pointing toward the chakur partridges to the mounted princes with hawks.





Hunters in a Forest

Folio from the Gulshan Album

Date Late 1500s

Artists Govardhan, Sharif, and Abd al-Samad

Accession Number M.78.9.11

Dimensions 26.0 × 18.4 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

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This folio from the Gulshan Album, which's titled 'Hunters in a Forest,' is the result of a teamwork by three leading artists of the Akbar's workshop, Sharif, Govardhan, and Samad. During Akbar's times, a painting would go through a two-stage

process. A senior artist would first draw the sketch, and later junior artists would color it under the senior's supervision. The tiny human and animal figures and the very Persian character of the work suggest it was sketched by Abd al-Samad. Both he and Mir Syed Ali had accompanied Akbar's father, Humayun, from his exile in Persia, and were the earliest entrants into the royal Mughal atelier.

In this work, a beater in orange shirt is signaling the royal hunting team toward quarry that he has found in the bushes. Nearby a man is carrying firewood on his back. The prince is clad in the golden-colored dress with floral motifs and is having a hawker's drum at the side of his beautiful blue steed. He is followed by three mounted servants: One of them is holding a hawk on his gloved fist, another one a royal standard, while the third a bow and a quiver in his hand. The rocky landscape in the background shows sparse trees and tufts of bushes. There is also a black goose and flocks of birds in the air. In the foreground, a hunter is aiming with his musket at a fox that is drinking water from a stream. There are a couple of white geese and foxes also. In the margin, there are some imaginary birds on the light orange base with.

Below is the portrait of a mounted man – most probably King Muhammad Shah (r. 1719 – 1748) – hunting waterfowl with his hawk in a nearby pond. The legs, belly, and tip of the tail of his white horse are dyed with henna. The painting is stored in the collection of Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (Accession No. F1907.212).



خون و ان شاه پشور کن کام گاه
ار بر اشی سرش کشت بر اموسوار



کیتبا و ملکت کر نند کاس میری
رستمی اندر بھر کوری پندیا

Prince Salim at a Hunt

Date c. 1600 – 1604

Accession Number M.83.137

Dimensions 19.6 × 11.7 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

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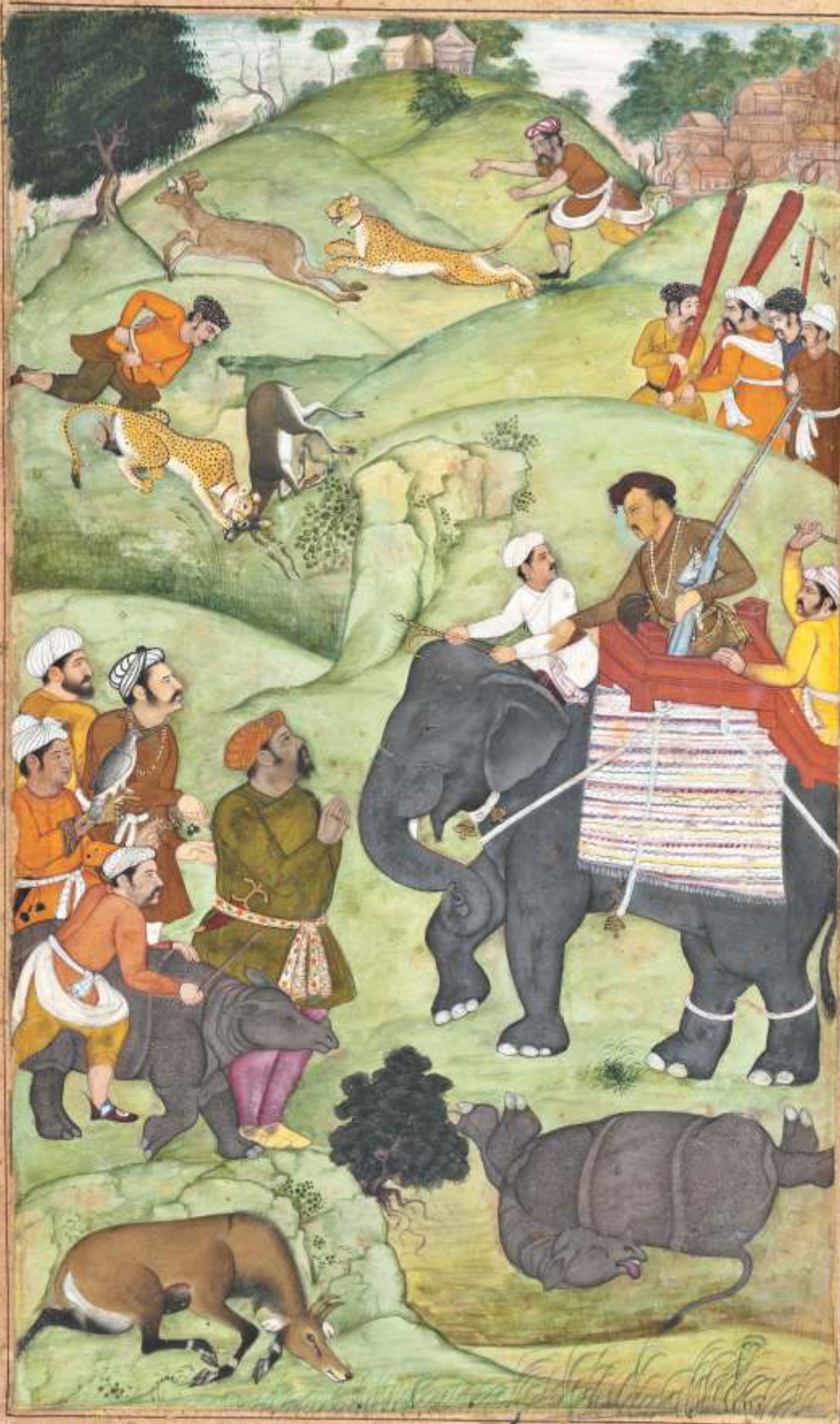
In this folio from the *Shikarnama* or *Hunting Album*, Prince Salim (later King Jahangir) orders the release of a baby rhinoceros. It's worthwhile to note that Jahangir had a certain code of conduct with respect to hunting

wild animals. It can somehow be identified with the modern concept of trophy hunting, in which certain members of a game are taken out, which have practically no effect on the overall population of a species. It was a rule with the emperor not to hunt the females and offspring, for instance, but only on rare occasions. There are numerous references to that effect in his memoirs.

Here, Jahangir's mounted on a royal elephant with a musket in his left hand. A mahout with a goad is looking towards the prince. There is a *nilgai* and an adult rhino, lying on the ground. A falconer with a hawk on his right fist is part of the hunting party. There are four royal servants with standards in the background. The scene also includes two men with the trained cheetahs. One has just released his cat to chase a hog deer, while another's has already caught a black buck. The undulated mounds show grass, occasional bushes and trees. In the distance, there are a few houses and hut-like structures.

Below is the detail from a painting in the *Khamisa of Nizami*, a collection of poems described earlier. The female figure is most probably of Queen Nur Jahan (1577 – 1645), the wise spouse of King Jahangir, who would often accompany her husband on the royal hunting expeditions. She is carrying a hawk with chestnut-colored underparts on her right gloved fist, and is pointing toward the huntsman in yellow *jama*, who's holding a beautiful saluki on a leash.





شاه جهان

Picnicking in the Course of a Hunt

Date c. 1615

Accession Number 1990.334

Dimensions 21.9 cm x 14 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor on paper

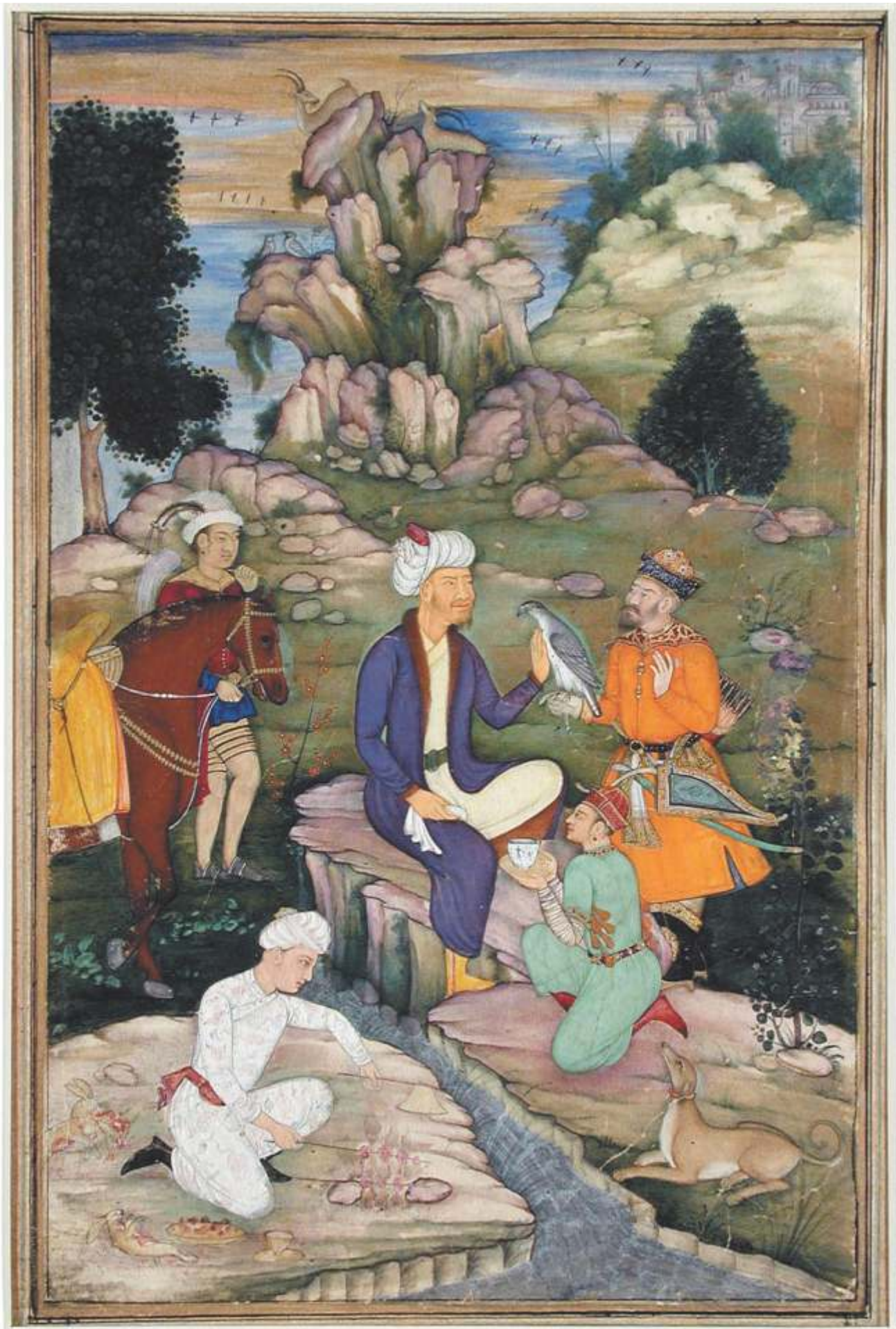
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porcelain cup. A handsome saluki with collar is sitting in the lower right corner looking at his master. On the left is a young man with fair complexion, roasting hare steaks for the king. There are a couple of disemboweled hares behind him and one at his side that seem to be a collective bag of Abdullah's hawk and hound. In the background, over the stylized outcrop there are a couple of ibexes and chakurs. There are also a few house buildings in the upper right corner.

This work shows the powerful ruler of Central Asia, Abdullah Khan Uzbek, picnicking in the course of a hawking expedition. Abdullah had displaced King Babur from his ancestral Ferghana, and later on, when Babur captured Kabul and moved onwards to India, the Uzbek leader tried to forge friendly ties with the neighboring empire and sent ambassadors and presents to the Mughal court.

Abdullah is said to be quite obese in real life, but in this work, the artist has bothered only to show his Uzbek features. He is gently stroking the chest of his hawk, held by a servant in the orange tunic. Interestingly, the servant is more luxuriously dressed than his powerful ruler. Unlike the ornate turban and sheathed bow and sword of the servant, Abdullah is clad in a casual dress and is wearing a plain turban. Another servant is offering him some soup or wine in a Chinese



Abdullah Khan Uzbek Hawking

Date c. 1618

Artist Abul Hasan

Museum Number IM.20-1925

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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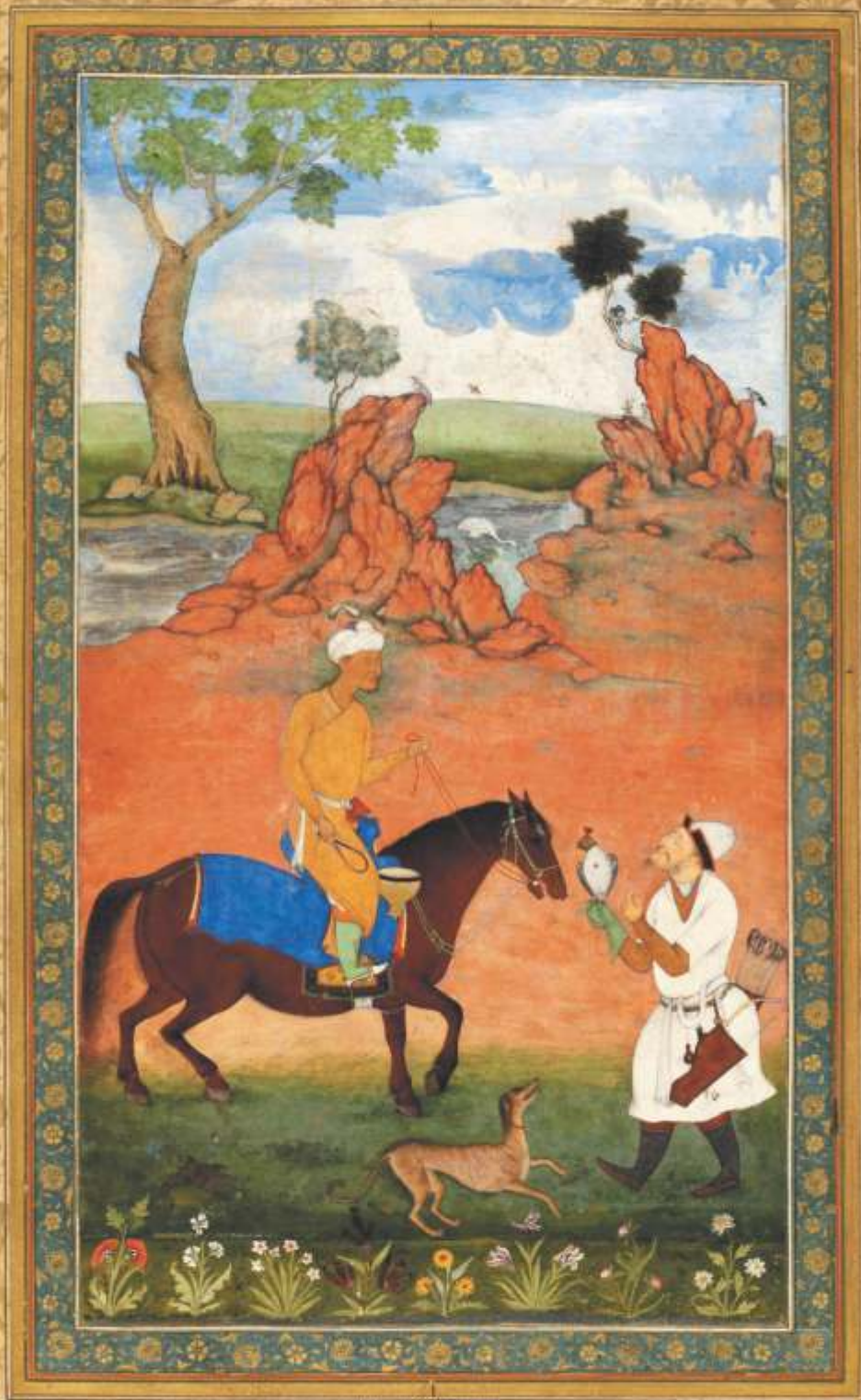
Inscribed as the work of the 'Unparalleled of the Age' i.e. Abul Hasan, this work on this page also depicts Abdullah Uzbek, in a somehow different setting. There is the hooded hawk on the right fist of his servant, who's wearing a partially-covered bow and a

quiver on his sash. The ruler is riding on a brown horse, with a hawker's drum at its side. There is also the saluki, in somehow excited state looking toward the servant.

The following work depicts Emperor Bahadur Shah (r. 1707 – 1712) with his two sons, Rafi'ush Shah

and Jahan Shah, on an elaborate hunting expedition. There are three falconers behind the sovereign's palanquin with hawks. There are also royal huntsmen with trained male and female blue bulls, a black buck, and a deer. There are also pairs of wild buffalos, foxes, blue bulls, hares, and black bucks to the right beside the tree, and a pond with waterfowls and fishes in the lower right corner. An army of royal escort is on the march over the horizon in the traditional ringing-in mode of hunting. The work is dated 1710 and is part of the collection of V&A Museum, London (Accession No. IS.454-1950).





سیرت ابراهیم از ابن کثیر

King Jahangir and Prince Khurram (Later Shah Jahan) After a Hunt

Date 1615 or 1640-50

File Name Oulis2006-akw0096

Collection Masterpieces of the non-Western Book

Dimensions Image 20 × 12.5 cm

Medium Watercolor and gilt on paper

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This work depicts King Jahangir and Prince Khurram – who later became King Shah Jahan – resting on a hunting expedition. Jahangir is holding an arrow in his right hand, while his head is surrounded by a royal halo. Prince Khurram is standing in front of Jahangir, carrying a hawk on his gloved fist. As mentioned earlier, both father and son frequently went on the hunting trips together. Shah Jahan, right from his youth, was an avid falconer. “Since my son Shahjahan greatly loves hawking and his hawks were well trained, at his request I mounted early in the morning and got a Sarus myself. Another was brought down by the hawk my son held. Without exaggeration, it was a very, very fine hunt. I really, really enjoyed it,” writes Jahangir in his memoirs.¹

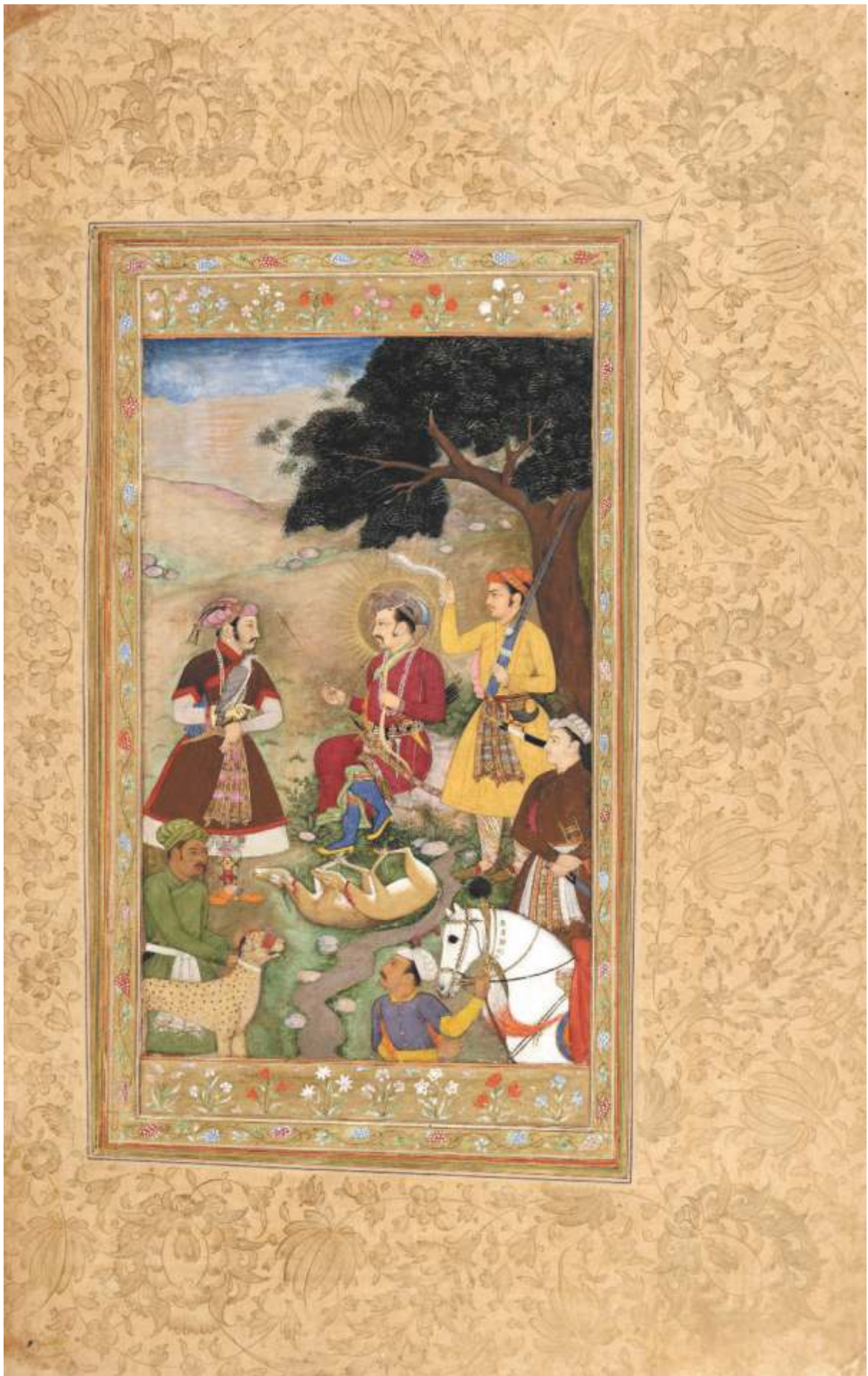
There is a blindfolded trained cheetah in the lower left corner that's hunted a deer. A servant behind Jahangir is holding a flywhisk in his right hand and a beautiful musket in his left one. Another servant in the dark brown *jama* and a punch dagger in his sash is

looking at Prince Khurram. There's also a horse and its keeper in the lower right corner, while a stream of water is running in the mountainous terrain.

Below is the detail from a painting of the late 1500s copy of *Baburnama*, portraying a royal hunting party that consists of two mounted princes with hawks on their fists.



¹ King Jahangir, *The Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler A. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 289



Khan Alam, Ambassador of Jahangir with Persian King Shah Abbas in a Landscape

Date c. 1650

Artist Bishandas (active 1590 – 1650)

Accession Number 14.165

Dimensions 36.8 × 25.4 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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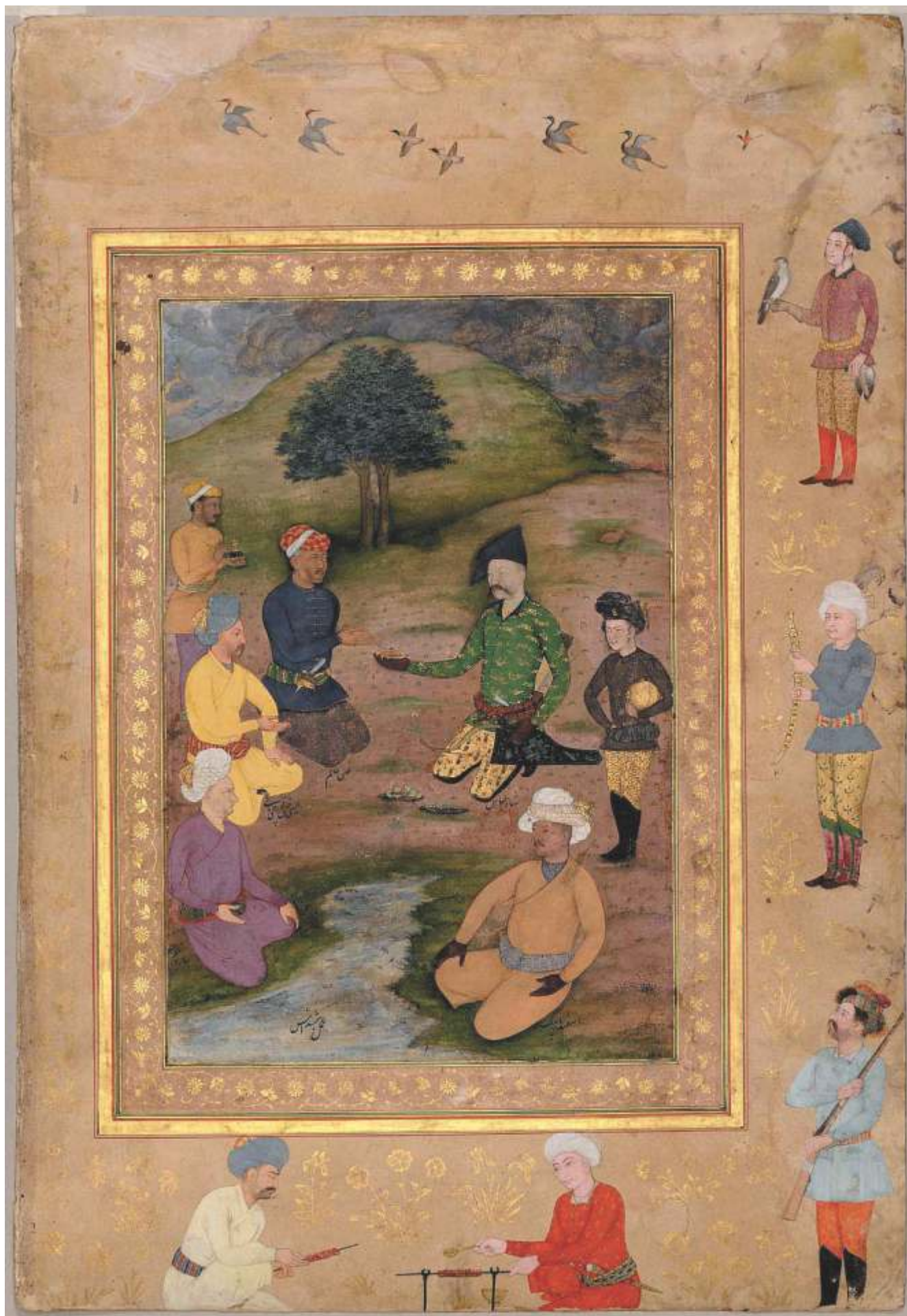
King Jahangir envoy to the Safavid court, Khan Alam, is shown here seated opposite to Shah Abbas. Executed by the celebrated portrait master, Bishandas, who was specifically sent by the Mughal emperor as part of the diplomatic mission to paint real-life portraits of Shah Abbas and his courtiers, the work portrays the Persian emperor and his noblemen along with the Mughal ambassador relaxing after a hunt in a scenic landscape. Shah Abbas has a half-covered bow and a quiver on his sash, and

offering Khan Alam wine in a golden cup. There are grapes and other fruit in the plates on the ground. A royal servant is standing behind the king holding a round flask. The party is sitting beside a pond.

In the margin, there is a falconer with a hawk on his right hand and a hunted duck in his left. Pairs of flying sarus and demoiselle cranes, wild ducks are seen in the upper part. Two other turbaned servants are also there, one holding a sheathed sword, and another a musket. On the bottom, two servants are preparing steaks over the fire for the royal party.

The work on this page is an 1800s copy of an original that has been lost. It shows Khan Alam and Shah Abbas along with some Persian noblemen, resting on a hawking trip. There are four falconers in the upper left corner, two of whom are carrying the hooded long-winged, while the others the short-winged. The painting is housed in the V&A Museum, London (Museum No. IS.219-1951).





King Jahangir Hunting Deer with a Hawk

Date 1600

Accession Number 32.1324

Dimensions 22.1 x 17.8 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor on paper

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The inscription in the upper right corner says: "King Jahangir in the desert hunting deer with a hawk." It, however, is very much possible that the inscription has been added to the painting at a later stage and might

somehow be misleading. The antelope might be a tamed one, used often by the early Mughals to catch the wild ones. One major reason for that is there is no mentioning of deer hawking in the autobiographical works of the early Mughal rulers.

the hawk and hound was a typical Eastern innovation and the technique was perhaps introduced into falconry by the medieval Persians. Unlike the Jahangir painting, the following work, which dates back to circa 1710 – 1720 and is preserved in the National Gallery of Art, Melbourne, shows a local Indian ruler hunting a male black buck with his hawk.

Having said that, hunting deer or antelopes with



شاه جهانگیر و شاه درویش
در حالت شکار ابو نزار



The Turkman Warrior Atachin Beg Bahadur Qalmaq Hawking on Horse with Attendants

Date Early 1700s

Museum Number 1937,0920,0.6

Dimensions 38.0 × 29.0 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Copyright © The British Museum, London



The exact identity of this particular Turkman warrior is unknown, however, the beauty and elegance with which the work has been executed is unparalleled in many ways. It's not only the animal and human figures that show jaw-dropping detail, but the whole landscape has a magical aura about it. Look, for instance, at the amazing color scheme of the steed's body, its head, the plume, the saddlecloth, and

above all, its unusually long mane that almost touches its hoofs and are braided into exotic shapes. Then witness the hairsplitting detail on the hawk's underparts, the plumed turban of the principal figure, his *jama*, sash, the

hawker's drum, and the quiver. Last but not the least, the picturesque landscape with all those waterfowls, the clumps of shrubs, trees, the pond, the pasture, the mounds or mountains, and the fiery horizon bear testimony to the mastery and draftsmanship of the unknown artist.





Raja Balwant Singh Hunting Partridges

Date c. 1753

Artist Nainsukh

Place of Origin Jammu

Accession Number IS.7-1960

Medium Opaque watercolor on paper

Copyright © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



In this masterpiece of a painting, the illustrious 18th century Pahari school artist, Nainsukh, has depicted his patron, Raja Balwant Singh, on a hawking trip in a most detailed and striking manner. The raja is

sitting in a traditional manual palanquin, holding a juvenile gos on his gloved right fist. He is wearing a dark green tunic and turban, while a knife is tucked into his comparatively light toned sash. The palanquin is shouldered by four servants. There are several retainers with peacock flywhisks and royal standards. In the lower right corner, there are six falconers with juvenile and haggard birds on their fists.

Innumerable other servants are also part of the hunting party in a military march-like forward movement in the Mughal fashion; some with muskets, others unarmed. Their well-detailed figures are partially

visible behind the foreground mound in the lower left corner. In the background, to



the upper right side, there are also royal retainers. Some of them are mounted on elephants, while others are on foot. There's also a pond among the undulating greenish mounds. The dimly-lit sun over the horizon in the upper right corner is suggestive of either dawn or dusk.

To the left are a couple of pointers, sniffing the ground for possible quarry. Full-length figures of five beaters can also be seen on the three mounds to the left. Two of them have taken their position on the next to the farthest small hill. Only heads and shoulders of other beaters are vaguely visible to the left.



ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ श्रीकृष्णार्जुनसंवादे ॥ श्रीकृष्ण उवाच ॥



Mian Mukund Dev

Date c. 1740 – 1745

Place of Origin Jastora

Artist Nainsukh

Accession Number IS.7-1973

Dimensions 27.5 × 42.5 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor on paper

Copyright © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



This is yet another masterpiece by Nainsukh. Here he has depicted another of his patrons, Mian Mukund Dev, the ruler of the small princely state of Jasrota. The principal figure, Mian Mukund, is in the yellow tunic with white flowers. He is wearing a

plumed turban of the yellow hue and is puffing away at the hookah, held by a handsome retainer on foot. Ahead of the ruler are the three mounted musicians; two males, one female. The male figure with the lute is a musician named Saddu, singing in a loud voice here. The female figure is of a dancing girl, Amal, wearing a dark pink *saari* and a *dopatta* or transparent veil of the same color over her flowing hair. She's looking back at Mian Mukund with the lover's eyes, for there's said to be a romantic liaison between the two. The third man is a drummer, who's wearing a yellow turban and a yellow sash.

There are also three mounted men behind the principal figure, one of whom is holding a hawk on his gloved fist. Both the glove and the turban of the foreground figure are yellow-hued. Apparently, it's a winter evening, with orange and yellow colors over the horizon. The courtly company is riding through a mustard field, which is again of the same beautiful tinge i.e. yellow.

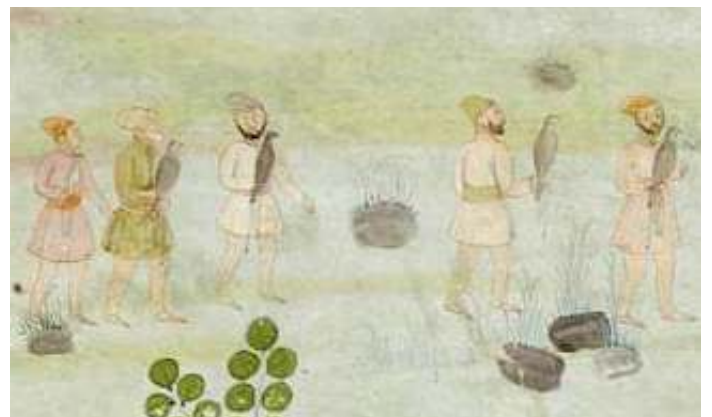
So much for the predominance of the yellow hue in this highly poetical and elegant work and its striking combination with the other color tones! As for theme, the party, though, has been termed as a leisurely ride by art critics, is actually out on a hawking trip. The

background holds the key for such a claim. There are a couple of beaters with two pointers and five falconers with hawks on their fists in the distance.



It was perhaps for a perfect pastime like this that the Mughal-era poet-falconer, Khushal Khan Khattak (1613 – 1689) wrote this poem:

Spring season on the one side
Nightingales' songs on the other
Some ride the Arab steeds
Others still other rides
Fine falcons on fists
And abundant game all around
Pointers leading the way
Friends with falcons
Strapped greyhounds
Unstrapped from time to time
Relaxed mood and milieu
Only the thought of the sweetheart
I, Khushal, sacrifice the whole world
For such a great pastime



ਮੀਰਜੀ ਕੁੰਵਰ ਸਰਸੰਗ ਕੁੰਵਰ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਂ ਨਾਲੋਂ ਭੱਜੇ ਪਏ। ਜਦੋਂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਂ ਨੇ ਮੁੜ ਪੁੱਛਿਆ



Ladies Hawking

Pahari School

Date Late 1700s

Accession Number S1986.456

Dimensions 20.0 × 17.0 cm

Medium Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

Copyright © Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C.



In this all-female hawking scene, a young princess is riding on horseback and is holding a hawk on her gloved fist. There is a golden-colored saddlecloth on the back of the horse and a quiver is fastened to its side. Two others

maidservants with hawks on their fists are following the princess on foot. All the three gloves are of the same yellow hue. There are two dogs in the foreground, one of which has already caught a rabbit. A couple of waterfowls can also be seen in the small pond close by.

Two other female retainers are carrying peacock flywhisks in their hands, while four young girls just behind the mound in the upper left corner seem to be part of the hawking party. There are rows of trees on the two mounds in the background.





Man and Woman with Hawk

Date c. 1750

Museum Number 1951,0407,0.23

Dimensions 13.8 × 19 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper

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The work is almost on the same theme as the previous one, with this difference only: the prince and princess are not riding on horses but are sitting beside a traditional palanquin called *dholi*. They look more like a newly-

wed couple, who are resting on a hawking trip. The prince is holding a large gos on his fist, while a young girl is roasting what looks like a hunted duck. The girl is fanning the fire with one hand and holding the hot stick with a piece of cloth in another. There is a cup with oil, a saucer, and a plate beside her. There are also two dark brown baskets or traditional hotpots, for keeping bread

and food warm.

An elderly woman with a brown veil around her head is napping behind the palanquin. There are two men nearby in white tunics, one of whom is puffing away at a small glassy wind-pipe.

Two other men are sitting at a distance with a horse at their side. There are seven hunters in the upper right corner with a dog, deer, and horses as well. The vast pasture fades into a range of high mountains, with trees and tufts of plants here and there.





Chand Bibi Hawking

Deccani School

Date 1750

Museum Number 1920,0917,0.0

Dimensions 35.9 × 22.6 cm

Medium Gouache painting on paper

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Like the Pahari School, the Deccani style also has its roots in the Mughal miniature painting and drew heavily upon it. As portrayed in the

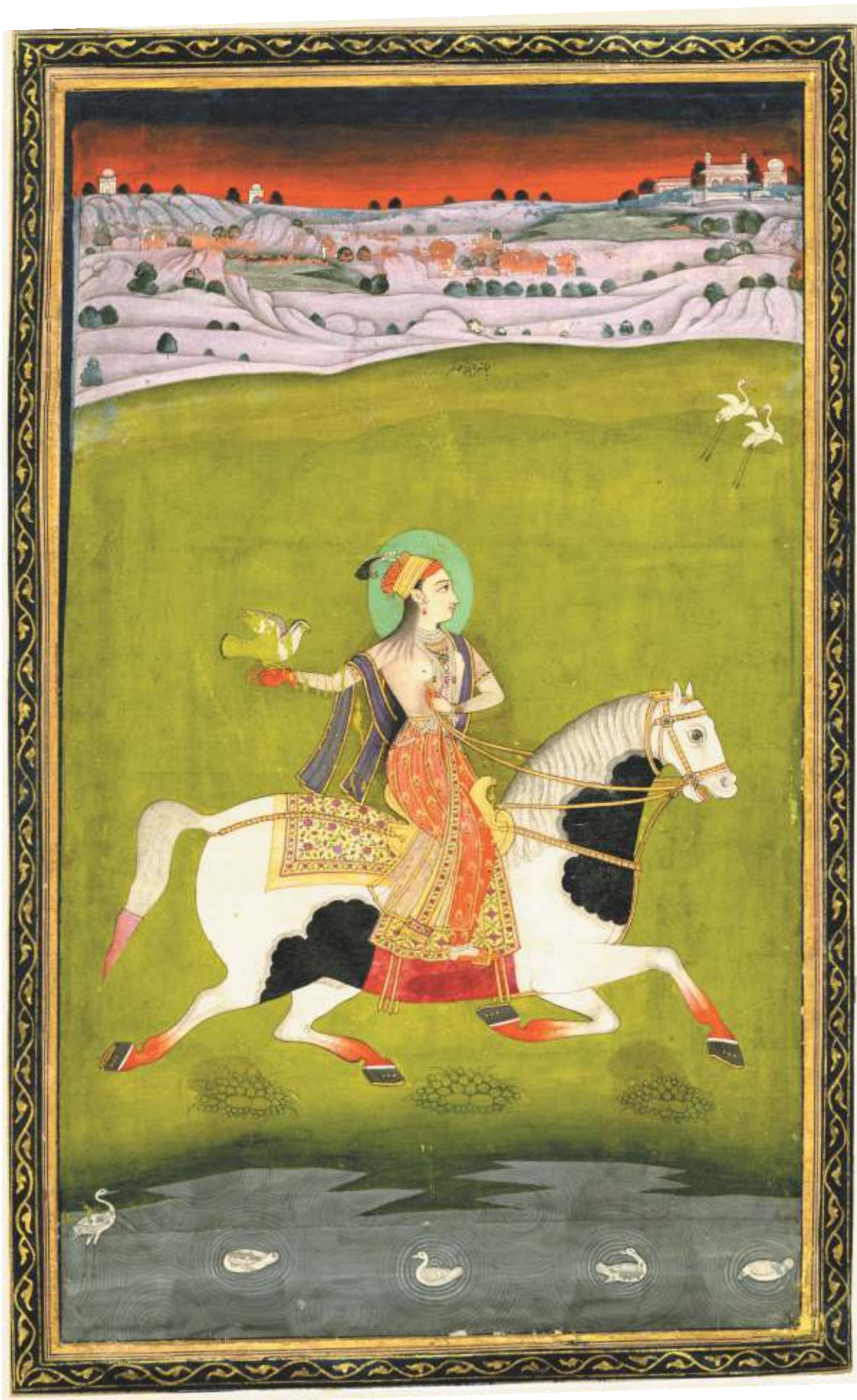
previous section, here also the rebellious and beautiful queen of Ahmednagar is hawking on the horse's back. Here again, she's riding a piebald horse with its lower limbs and tail tip dyed with henna. Also, she's throwing her peculiarly-shaped bird of prey at two cranes in the same fashion. Again, there are some minor changes with respect to the previous works. There are no pointers or hounds, for instance. There is a pond with white waterfowls with intersecting ripples of waters, creating a hypnotic effect. The village scene in the background and

the sky colors are altogether different as well.

In the landscape work below, Chand Bibi has rested his musket at the parting

point of a tree trunk and is taking aim at deer. A maidservant behind is there with a ready gun. The five female retainers further behind are members of the hunting party; two of whom are holding the peacock flywhisks; one a handheld fan; another is gently stroking the head of a saluki, while the last one is carrying a hawk on her fist. The work is preserved in the V&A Museum, London (Accession No. IS.157-1952).





Pleasures of the Hunt

Kangra School

Date c. 1800

Accession Number 2002.37

Dimensions 25.1 × 35.8 cm

Medium Ink, opaque watercolor, gold, and silver on paper

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It's a peculiar hunting scene in a tented enclosure perhaps in the fashion of the Mughal technique of a *gamargah*, intended for a royal party. The mounted king and her queen are holding hawks on their gloved fists. Two female retainers on foot are also there with their raptors. There also three hunting dogs as well. A pond to the left reveals numerous waterfowls. In the foreground, a mounted princess is taking aim at a black buck, while the same is happening in the background.

Following is a highly-detailed work by the 18th-century miniature painter, Mir Kalan Khan, who has been termed as 'a master of expansive panoramas and of tonality that verges on the strident'. The master painter has portrayed the two famous lovers – Baz Bahadur and

Rupmati – on a hawking expedition in a most exquisite landscape. Baz Bahadur has lifted his hand to cast his hawk at the waterfowls in a nearby pond, while Rupmati is holding her hawk still on her fist, looking backwards. A young female retainer is also carrying a hawk on her fist behind them. Yet another female falconer is also there behind the trees and is only partly visible. As if the hawking scene was not enough, two collared salukis are also all set to strike at the hares and deer beside the pond. The four maids ahead of Baz and Rupmati are serving as beaters and one of them is pointing toward the ducks and cranes in the pond. The painting is dated 1740 – 1750 and is housed in the private Eva and Konrad Seitz Collection.

