

Philosophy Behind Multi-Dimensional Architectural Perspective in Mughal Miniature

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How to cite this article:

Masood, N., (2024). Philosophy Behind Multi-Dimensional Architectural Perspective in Mughal Miniature. *Journal of Visionary Philosophers*. 2(2). 13–27.

Received: October 7, 2024/ Accepted: October 22, 2024/ Published: November 5, 2024.

Abstract

Representation of architecture in visual imagery is used to influence the viewers and to amplify the connotation of the painting. Architectural backgrounds are noticeable in art from the early civilizations but in their respective styles. Representation of architecture in Mughal art is based on the Islamic philosophy concentrating imitation and imagination. The two-dimensional presentation of architecture in Mughal miniatures denies the act of imitation and provokes the role of imagination in the style of representation. A comparative analysis is created with Western Renaissance art that is based on the empirical methods of achieving linear perspective in paintings. This paper draws attention to the fact that Mughals presented an alternative way of seeing in miniature. The research methodology employed to unveil comparisons and evaluations is based on quantitative and analytical research. The outcome of the research suggests that Mughals derived a specific style of depicting architecture in miniature painting that provokes imagination. The style of representation is flat, decorative, monumental and two-dimensional along with the portrayal of multiple view perspective in a single scene to record multiple events happening simultaneously at a time.

Keywords: Miniature, Imitation, Imagination, linear Perspective, Architecture, Eye Level, Horizon Line.

1. Introduction

Appearance of architecture in paintings can be regarded as descriptive for illustrating events. Multiple scenes can be portrayed taking place at diverse places within a single framework. Mughal miniature painting is an amalgamation of the indigenous Indian miniature and the foreign Persian school of Miniature (Srivastava, 2001). It reflects the social, political and cultural aspects of India. The purpose of the miniature painting was to record the actual events of the lives of emperors, so mostly court scenes, battle scenes, hunting scenes and individual portraits were painted (Ahmad,

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1995). Indian miniature painting was based on religious subjects and was highly symbolic, while Persian art also focuses on emblematic preferences. For the reason, Mughal style of representation remained antinaturalistic following the Islamic beliefs of representation rather than realistic. Although secular art, the style of representation has an idealistic quality, denying imitation rather than the depiction of naturalism (Srivastava, 2001).

Whereas Western style of painting at that time was highly realistic, following the rules of distance and depth, perspective, volume and space to create three-dimensional effect on the flat surface. During the Renaissance period, representation of architecture in paintings was based on scientific methods. An illusion of volume and space is generally created using a scientific linear perceptual system. Parallel lines in spatial recession appear to converge on a single vanishing point called one-point perspective. An artist may also use an angular or oblique outlook that employs two vanishing points. Perspective in their paintings had lens-based knowledge (Kleiner, 2001).

However, Mughal miniature employed a distinct style, and linear and tonal perspectives were rarely utilized in paintings. Style is abstract, vital and has expressive form value, unfamiliar to Western world. Conceptual means are used, and architectural details are depicted from two or three eye levels simultaneously on the same picture plane. The artist did not use a perspective-based method of representation. Grids were not created, and linear space was not constructed. Although Mughals were aware of the geometrical proportions and mathematical divisions, but their style of representation was not based on the scientific method of creating perspective in paintings or to create realistic architectural details (Papadopoulos, 1980). Although, Mughal miniature shows inspiration from different cultures but maintained its unique and intentional style of painting. The insistence of anti-naturalistic style or abandon the three-dimensional effect to avoid imitation can be taken in terms of to maintain their Islamic identity.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed for this research is qualitative and a comparative analysis is also carried out of Mughal style of painting with other miniature schools and with western style of painting. To record the history and style of work of different schools of art, numerous books on Indian art, Islamic art and Western school of painting are consulted. Related articles and magazines are also accessed.

3. Philosophy of Representation in Mughal Miniature Painting

Mughal miniature painting is secular and aristocratic, and purpose of these artistic creations was to record the events. Whereas, Pala or Rajput art, which was prevailing earlier, was highly symbolic and religious too but in divergence Mughal painting was a court art, used to make a visual record of the lifestyle of emperors in India. It can be called a new style of documentation as the main aim of the artists was to record the facts (Srivastava, 2001). Although theme of the Mughal art is not religious and symbolic like Indian art but influenced from the indigenous art trends and had strong Persian influence on style of representation. Mughals came through Persia and Humayun also brought artists with him who started miniature painting in India. So, one can observe strong Persian influence on flora and fauna, features and dresses of figures and illustration of architecture in the paintings, done under the supervision of these masters (Craven, 1976).

Mughal art under strong Persian and Indian influences developed a new aesthetic approach. Depicted scenes in miniature painting ignore the rules of perspective, modelling, light and elementary rules of composition. There is no representation of depth and volume and also ignored the proportions according to the distance and in relation to each other. Rejecting the rule of realistic aesthetics, their style of painting leads towards abstraction and individual harmony of line and colors lead towards a decorative quality. Natural forms and figures are flat, two-dimensional and

casts no shadows (Papadopoulos, 1980). Style of representation points towards the concern of the painter to avoid the rules of verisimilitude as all the elements in the miniatures are treated in the manner to create a world based on imagination and intangible forms. They were not imitating the outward forms but created an inward nature. The style is related to some unworldly idealism that is not possible in worldly reality (Chittick, 1991).

The concept behind following the Islamic rules of representation is comparable to Plato's philosophy according to which abstract forms are of a higher degree in representation of the creations of God. Realistic forms are inferior and mere copy of God's creations (Hergenahn, 2005). Ideal forms are unworldly and these miniatures with their small size, which again is an abstract quality, depicts an inner and deeper meaning with a Sufi idiom. Mughal Miniature paintings represent beauty, an essence attributed to God. God's beauty is manifested in man but never fully because man would never be able to stand it and would be annihilated by Allah's Nur (light) (Papadopoulos, 1980).

Whereas, western realistic aesthetics, especially developed during the Renaissance period, is totally based on empirical realities. Perspective is a technique of graphically depicting three dimensional objects and spatial relationships on a flat two-dimensional surface. As objects recede, they appear smaller. It is the procedure to create three-dimensional illusions seen through linear perspective; a perpetual method of representing space and volume as if a building is seen at a particular time and from a fixed position. All these methods are used to create a perfect view of the seen object, landscape or architecture (Powell, 1989).

Western art during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries is generally classified as Renaissance art. Renaissance artists portrayed perspective in their paintings by constructing a convincing illusion of space in two-dimensional imagery while unifying all objects within a single spatial system. Renaissance system of perspective included both linear and atmospheric perspective systems. Linear perspective was developed by Brunelleschi, mathematically related to the size of rendered objects with the visual recession into space that can be either one point or two-point perspective. In one-point perspective, the artist first identifies a horizontal line that marks the horizon line. The artists then select a vanishing point. By drawing diagonal lines from the edge of the picture to the vanishing point, a structural grid is created that determines the size of objects within the image's illusionistic space. One-point perspective examples are Masaccio's "Tribute Money and Holy Trinity," Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" and Raphael's "School of Athens." A two-point linear perspective also involves the establishment of a horizon line. In this system, two vanishing points are selected. The orthogonal that resulted from drawing lines from an object to each of the vanishing points again creates a grid that indicates the relative size of objects receding into space e.g. Titian's "Madonna of the Pesaro Family" (Kleiner, 2001).

In contrast, the miniature artists never intended to paint realistically and adopted anti-naturalistic style of painting for the arrangement of artworks. This style of representation is not only visible in figures but in the depiction of whole setting including landscape and architecture. All being distorted intentionally to achieve both purposes; firstly, abstract depiction of forms for a higher level of representation and secondly recording the history. Mughals in the sixteenth century, from the beginning of their rule, adopted the miniature style of painting following certain rules of depicting nature, figures, distance, depth and perspective (Craven, 1976). Whereas, at that time in the west, High Renaissance period was at its peak and their art was totally based on scientific findings regarding showing distance, depth and perspective (Kleiner, 2001). One can observe a strong contrast between the style of representation of east and west.

4. Strong Persian Influence during Humayun's Period

Baber was the founder of Mughal rule in India, but his son Humayun introduced the art of

miniature painting in India. He brought with him two artists from Persia, namely Mir Sayid 'Ali and Kawaja Abd al-Şamad of Şiraz to India who started miniature painting in India. In the beginning, Mughal art was greatly influenced by the Persian style of painting because of their profoundly embedded links with Persia (Craven, 1976).

“The Princes of House of Timur” (figure 1) was initially painted during Humayun’s period but later, it was repainted in Jahangir’s reign. Akbar, his son Jahangir and Prince Khurram, later known as Shahjahan were added to the side pavilions. It is the only painting in which work was done in the court of two different rulers at different times. This historical document belongs to the earliest phase of the Mughal miniature paintings. Persian influence is strong in the decorative landscape background, profile of the princes and their distinguished dressing. Babar and Humayun occupy a central place in the octagonal pavilion with Amir Timur. Its connecting pavements lead towards side pavilions, square in shape. At the rear of the left square pavilion is a second octagonal pavilion, which is inconspicuous. The Central open pavilion with slender pillars is shaded by an eave, above which rises a parapet edged with small battlements (Stronge, 2010). The roofs of the pavilions are portrayed from the bird’s eye view perspective as the artist was concerned in perceiving the upper view of the buildings through his imagination. Architectural features resemble the Persian style of depicting pavilions against natural background as seen in the Persian miniatures (Welch, 1976).

Main pavilion in the Mughal miniature represent angles, turns and volume with platform and above railing while the side square pavilions are flat, seemingly pasted against Persian setting. The architectural details are painted from two eye levels. Main area of the middle pavilion delineates the normal elevation of view whereas roof is painted from higher elevation. The roof is shown hexagon with such an angle that it gives the effect of perspective. In the center of the roof rises an additional small decorative octagonal pavilion with a conical roof, another peculiarity visible in Persian miniature specimen. This pavilion is the symbolic depiction of gathering of royal ancestry and legacy under one roof, thus enhancing the social perspective of the painting along with the multiple view perspective in the depiction of architectural details.

5. Stress on Art and Architecture during Akbar’s period

Art and architecture flourished during the Akbar’s region in India, although he himself was not a formally educated person but was very much interested in the patronage of art and architecture. Under his supervision, first school of miniature painting was founded where Persian masters and locally trained artists jointly worked on miniature paintings and book illustrations. Various artistic elements were blended like Persian calligraphic line, fine brushwork and Indian note of idealism, thus conveying realistic and stylistic approach. Structural details in paintings were rendered elaborately (Brown, 1932).

“Nighttime in a Palace” (figure 2) represents the use of various architectural compartments in single miniature, a style practiced in Indian art as well as in Persian miniature painting. The focus is on displaying the whole view of the building in one scene along with all details of interior and exterior. Mughal style of painting was influenced by the local style as many Hindu painters joined the Mughal court and brought their indigenous style of painting with them. In early Indian miniatures, architecture was painted in the form of brightly colored blocks without any feeling of depth and recession (Craven, 1976). Importance is given to the depiction of decorative architectural elements and this style is noticeable in Mughal miniatures. Here in this painting from Mughal folio, a Palace scene is portrayed along with its surroundings rendering strong Persian style details. This can be well compared with “The seduction of Yusuf” by Behzad, a Persian painter who worked under Hirat and Tabriz school (Blair, 1995). The painting comprised various floors of the interior in form of compartments with their distinctive architectural features and decoration, which is evident in the Mughal example also with addition of large number of figures

engaged in different actions. Building shown in varied compartments, seems like pasted on the picture. Perspective is nonexistent from the frame of reference of one-point aspect. Unlike the western use of linear perspective in the portrayal of the architecture, here in “Nighttime in Palace,” a distinct system known as parallel perspective is combined with various eye levels. Idealized forms rather than natural contour are painted, and parallel horizontal lines of construction are drafted. Collateral lines are drawn instead of converging as in linear perspective. All the rules of perspective seem to be desecrated here to achieve their purpose of screening the maximum information and each detail in one picture.

Conceptual abstract method is utilized for the portrayal of architectural details based on the philosophy of imitation and imagination. Each compartment is, though represented independent of one another, but all viewed at the same time showing various angles of vision. It seems as if they were intended to show each architectural detail, giving the best image with their most characteristic features. It is not producing any illusion of depth rather it seems that building and its connected structures have been compressed within a shallow space on the vertical side of the picture. The background mosque is enormous in size with its spherical dome and huge minaret. Middle compartment is secondary in size with its arched opening and shallow cup like dome while the entrance portion on the extreme right of the painting is minute with its opening. On the left corner, activity is shown in an open courtyard leading to an arched opening of an edifice, which leads to a second door in the center without any application of linear perspective. Rooftop of this building represents females engaged in some activity, pictured from a second eye level. Again, the background structures are tremendously painted, brimming with details. This miniature can be easily divided into three segments as painted from three different eye levels.

Visually, the artist has narrated comprehensive details of layout. One can observe the balance and rhythm in execution of details. This concept of multidimensional viewpoint was introduced by the Mongols and developed by the Jalayirid School and was at its peak during the Shiraz and Hirat School (Canby, 1993). Numerous figures and buildings are shown on various planes, one above the other, organizing the entire picture area. The juxtaposition of figures and elements of architecture on top of another produced the effect of one appearing at the back of the other. Although set rules of linear perspective have been totally ignored yet there is a feeling of rhythm and movement created with the help of color and diagonal lines. The scene is depicted from a narrative perspective and the artist seems to be determined to characterize the whole story in full detail.

Likewise, another example “The Floppish Derwish Rebuked” (figure 3) is an example of its own type as it shows architecture in close with full details. Colors used are balanced and fixed the huge buildings within the picture plane. This painting shows a wise man and a dervish sitting against an architectural background. The painting is designed into three well-defined spatial planes: a foreground with animals, tree and a well, a middle ground where two holy men are sitting within a large building and a background consisting of pavilion, two men and some trees (Zaid, 2002). The painting represents the Basawan’s mature style of work especially in the depiction of chambers and passageways of a massive Mughal building (Welch, 1978). Foreign influence is seen in color screening, feeling of depth and realism but the sizes in lower and upper block of architecture show no relation and again refer to the abstraction of forms.

On the extreme right of the painting is a chamber approached by stairs in an arched opening, which has a constricted angle and perspective lines in the stairs, eave and balcony are reverse. Angle of vision is also entirely different from the rest of the painting and seems to be painted from a higher level, which again enhances the anti-naturalistic quality. Importance is given to the portrayal of extrados and intrados portions of the arch. Through the span of the arch, the interior room is visible with vertical and diagonal lines, thus creating depth. Spandrels of the arch are plain while sidewalls

represent carved motifs on either side; Dado area is plain. Portion above the eave shows typical Mughal decorative motifs and over it is a decorative parapet. Small pavilions are visible on the upper fragment of building.

Two men are visible in the frontal passageway, made of red sandstone. Dados are decorated with geometrical patterns. The lower portion of the sidewalls is divided into squares with a star shaped motif in each division. Above is a smaller iwan with arch in the sidewall and uppermost area has rectangular niches. Atop are flat panels and decorative parapet. Inside the roof along with pillars is carved out of wood. Behind is a white marble building with doors and whose pavilion can be seen in the upper most portion of painting with its two sides with door openings and curved roof. Compositional movements and details of rooms, chambers and architectural settings with different angles suggest depth.

6. Foreign Influence during Jahangir's Period

Jahangir is known for his great aesthetic sense and was fond of flora and fauna. During his period, strong European influence along with Indian and Persian can be observed in the miniatures. Group portraits were made to record the actual events. Western influence is prominent in the use of symbols like cupids, angels, goblets, cross. Figures of Christ and Mary were painted in western style in their typical dresses (Brown, 1932). Even landscape became realistic but architectural details were painted in the same manner and flat two-dimensional effects were given importance by choice over the Western three-dimensional capacities created through linear perspective especially in the court paintings where every detail is painted meticulously without any feeling of depth and perspective. This shows that they followed set rules of their own for the depiction of emperors and their main motive was to preserve royal history and glory.

“The Birth of a Prince” (figure 4) is painted showing the scene of his birth for Jahangir Nama. It is a group portrait depicting haram scene with royal females of the Mughal court. A proud mother is shown with her infant, surrounded by fellow wives, servants and musicians. An old woman, probably an important member of the royal court is sitting on a chair. Royal attendants are bringing trays of presents and flowers are stringing on the entrance door. There is a similarity in structural details represented with the actual architecture. Bishan Das recorded the event of the birth of Prince Salim with exact particulars. In the foreground, astrologers are preparing the prince's horoscope seated against a red sandstone wall with niche typical of Fatah Pur Sikri (Welch, 1978). The city was built in 16th century by the Emperor Akbar enclosed within are many buildings like palaces, mosques, Dewan-e-Aam and Khas, all constructed with red sandstone. The architecture is combination of Indian and Persian style (Brown, 1968).

In the miniature, the architecture of haram is depicted, including Judah Bai's palace. Entrance is covered with a curtain while one can observe the arched entrance with Persian decorative patterns on the spandrels. The room with the mother and child accompanied by other court women is substantial in size and seems square in plan. Significant design element is the sloping eave and portion above the eave is the parapet comprised of blue glazed tiles. Above the decorative tiles are carved portions. In front of the main queen's compartment is a folded decorative canopy. The side wall's viewpoint lines show reverse perspective as seen in the arched openings with perforated grills having Islamic patterns. Behind is a marble building with arched openings showing seated female figures. The scene is represented by using two eye levels depicting both interior and exterior. In this painting, architecture is used as an environment where the event has taken place. Perspective as a visual representation of space as seen by human eyes from a fixed position characterized by parallel lines and converging to a 'vanishing point' is not implied at all. Instead, there is a clear sense of the foreground and background through overlapping and diagonally projecting parallel lines. As all the lines are parallel and no lines converge to a single point. The

illusion of depth is not created, and a sense of flattened space is introduced. The main objective was to make available as many details and information as possible at the same time within a picture plane.

As Jahangir was fond of recording facts and events of his reign like his ancestors and many group portraits were painted during his period. Only few illustrations from the Jahangir Nama manuscript survived and among them is “Celebrations on the Accession of Jahangir” (figure 5) signed by Abu al-Hasan (Stronge, 2010). The human figures and animals such as horses and elephant occupy more than half of the miniature. In the background, huge gateway of walled city is painted with elongated arch and three arched niches on either sidewall along with square niches at the top. The spandrels of the arch are plain with carved flowers in stone fixed in sockets. Whereas the wall is designed with geometrical patterns. Above the arch, in the center, there is some inscription in Persian calligraphy. Above is a parapet with battlements for gunfire. Behind is a kiosk with circular white dome. Architecture is arranged in flat horizontal and vertical lines. Side passages are depicted with doors and columns. Columns are painted with details of the base, shaft and capital that are in the form of brackets. Above the pavilion wall on the left side has embattlements while right side wall has windows. Architectural details are finely drawn, and emphasis is on the details and features of architecture instead of representing depth and distance. Miniature is painted from a narrative perspective and stress is on recording the incident on the location. For this reason, the scene is captured from two different eye levels as if the artist is painting both the frontal figures and background building from the unidentical eyelevel. This painting can be compared with the “Christ Delivering the Keys of Kingdom to Saint Peter” by Perugino for the arrangement of figures in front of city buildings. But in the western example, figures occupy the central stage of the outdoor space that extends into the distance to a point of convergence in the entrance of a dominant temple (Kleiner, 2001). Thus portraying the use pictorial linear perspective unlike the Mughal example.

7. Shahjahan’s Interest in Architecture

Shahjahan is famous for erecting white marble buildings rather than miniature paintings. The artworks produced at his court display the first signs of the decline of Mughal miniature. During his period although the quality of work was sustained yet their number decreased. Even in miniatures, architecture was depicted in the background with all the pomp and grandeur characteristics of his era (Craven, 1976).

“Jahangir Receives Prince Khurram on His Return from the Deccan” (figure 6) presents a complex composition with two levels of architecture. The focus of the painting is on the glorification of Shahjahan as prince. Eminent artist of this period Murar illustrated Jahangir welcoming his son to his court after returning from a military campaign (Stronge, 2010). The courtiers arranged in lines on either side occupy the frontal portion of the miniature. Wall behind them is built of red sandstone. Its panel shows carved decoration. Above is a grilled railing depicting intricate Jali work of Shahjahan’s period. Above is a pavilion with the king’s throne, supported by four elongated, cylindrical pillars. Base of the pillars are decorative, shaft shows flute lines whereas the capitals composed of decorative brackets, all gilded in gold. Behind is a marble wall with a design of Phulkari, another typical feature of Shahjahan’s style of architectural decoration. Above is decorative canopy and it shows perspective in line and design that was a rare feature found in Mughal miniature. Despite this linear perception, the effect is not realistic because of the large size of the figures as compared to the architectural setting they are resided in. This miniature demonstrates the social perspective, narrative perspective and multiple eye view perspective.

Decline of the Mughal Painting was started with the arrival of Aurangzeb to throne as he was an orthodox Muslim lacked interest in the patronage of miniature paintings (Craven, 1976). The

Mughal miniature painting had an inimitable style of its own. The difference between the depiction of architecture in paintings in the west during the Renaissance period and in east during Mughal period lies in the treatment of space. In Mughal miniatures by the addition of architectural elements, the artist tried to enhance the three-dimensional qualities. The kiosks, arches, columns and facades depicted in many miniatures function as conceptual forms regarding painting's narrative structure. By articulating space through architecture, painter used to create multi-dimensionality in the form of stories within stories. Multiple scenes are shown taking place at different moments within a single frame. Whereas in western paintings, distance and depth is achieved with the help of architecture as a pivotal structural element of the composition. Renaissance art is based on mathematical principles and divisions and flatness of surface is handled with the help of linear perspective and tonal perspective as an imitation of depth. One can compare the interior settings of any Mughal miniature with the "School of Athens" by Raphael and outdoor setting with the "Tribute Money" by Masaccio, it appears that painters of Mughal court employed an alternative means of representation disparate from a conventional lens-based Renaissance time.

8. Conclusion

Architecture is a significant component used in Mughal miniature paintings and helped in designating the historical and geographical context of the scene. The architecture painted in miniatures shows resemblance to the actual buildings representing typical arches, domes, columns, parapets etc. Architecture is represented using parallel lines and not perspective lines that seem to converge to a point in space. The attempt to depict reality within the represented space with the help of perspective is not visible in Mughal art. The early civilizations like Egyptian and Byzantine art disregarded perspective in favor of non-realistic representation for a more deep and symbolic meaning. Linear perspective, which was an integral part of Renaissance art, dominated western painting until the end of nineteenth century. Paul Cezanne: a post-impressionist painter flattened the picture space in search of new means of representation. The Cubist and other twentieth century modern or abstract painters abandoned the depiction of three-dimensional space altogether and linear perspective is not required for their conceptual artwork. Picasso introduced the fourth dimension in his paintings by depicting all the sides simultaneously on two-dimensional picture plane. Multiple perspective was introduced for the first time in modern art and artist started to play with the surface and two-dimensional canvas instead of creating three-dimensional distance and depth. This clearly testifies that the set rules of painting regarding the depiction of perspective varies in different parts of the world. It also represents that various artist follow diverse philosophies regarding the style of representation.

If the Mughal miniaturist is not focusing and portraying the linear perspective in its paintings, it does not mean that he is unaware of the use geometrical perspective. However, it means that the representation of linear perspective was his secondary concern. The intention of the artist was to fix the feeling of things along with the reproduction of its dimensions, outlines and material details. Images are simple but complicated through many objects. Simplicity is based on reductionism to create spirituality. These artworks reflect abstract, vital and expressive form value in a distinct style known as Mughal Style of miniature painting globally.



Figure 1. Mirak, Princes of the House of Timur, Opaque watercolor on cotton, 108.3 cm ×106.9 cm. Source: Made for Mughal emperors: royal treasures from Hindustan, p. 92.



Figure 2. Figure 2 Nighttime in a Palace. Illustration to the *Khamsah au- Nizami*. Attributed to Mir Sayid 'Ali. C. 1540. Source: Imperial Mughal Painting, p. 34.

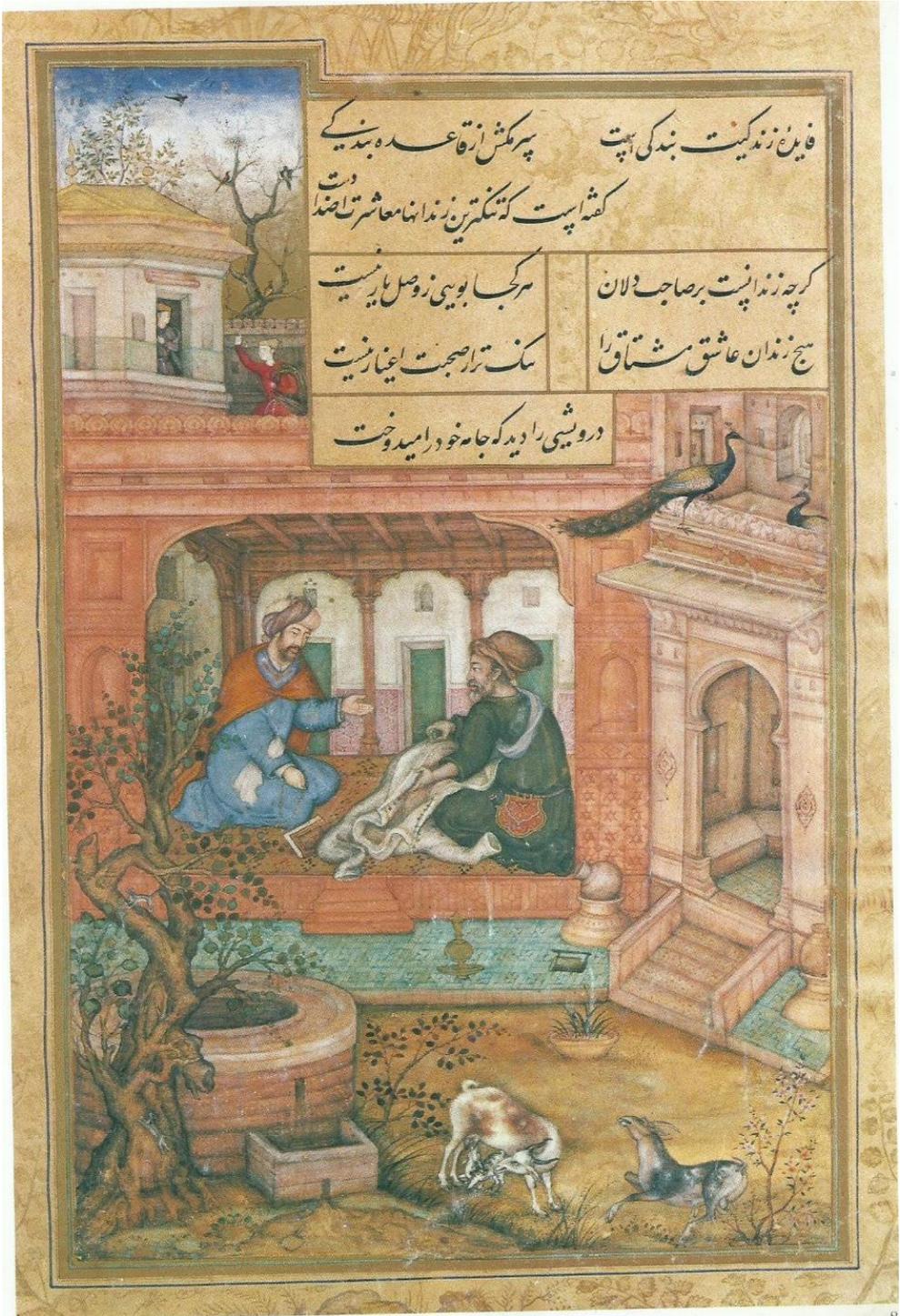


Figure 3. Basawan, The Floppish Dervish Rebuked. From the Baharistan ca. 1595, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. Source: The Magnificent Mughals, p 158.

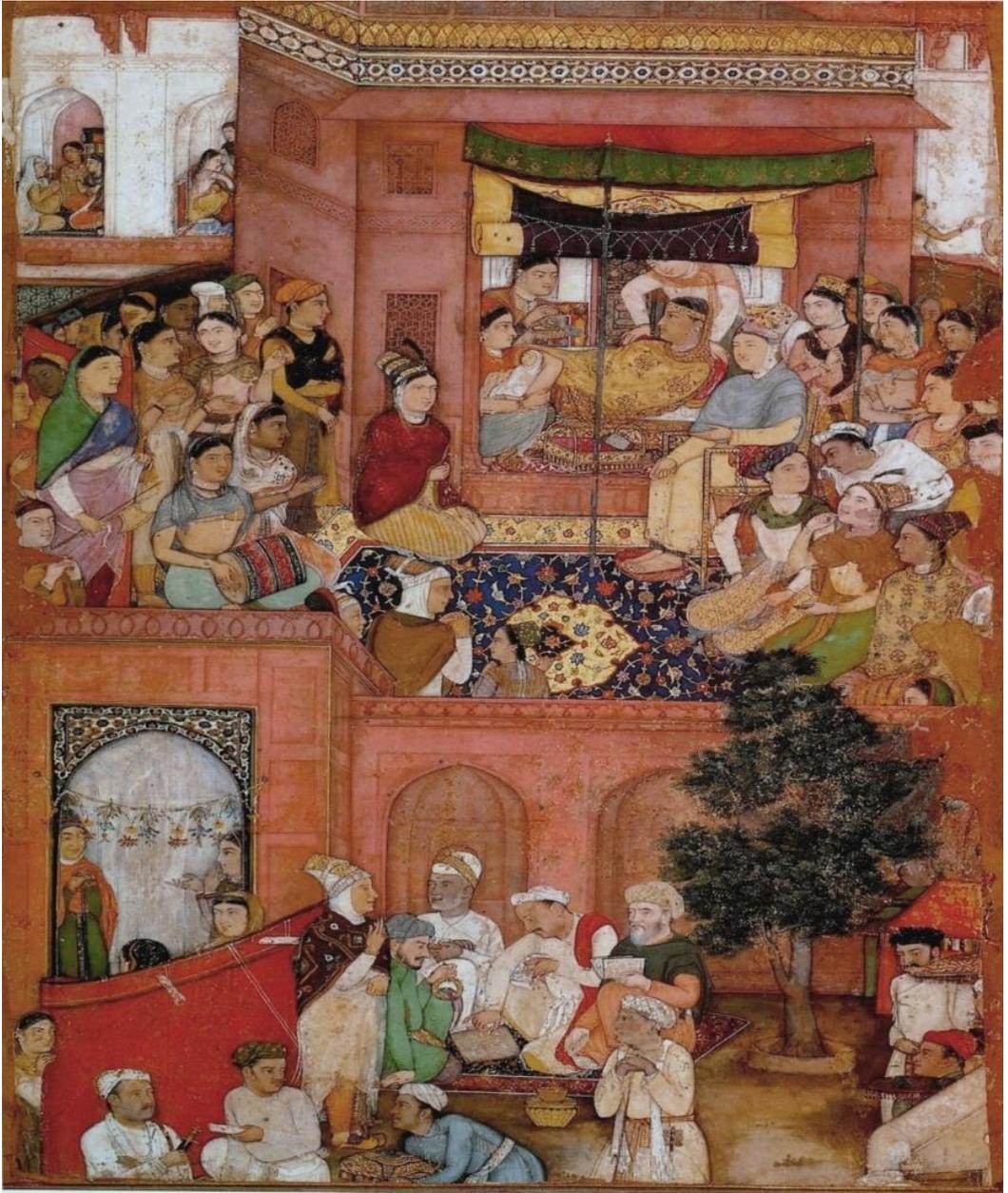


Figure 4. Bishan Dās, The Birth of a Prince from Jahangir Nama. Source: Imperial Mughal Painting, p. 183.

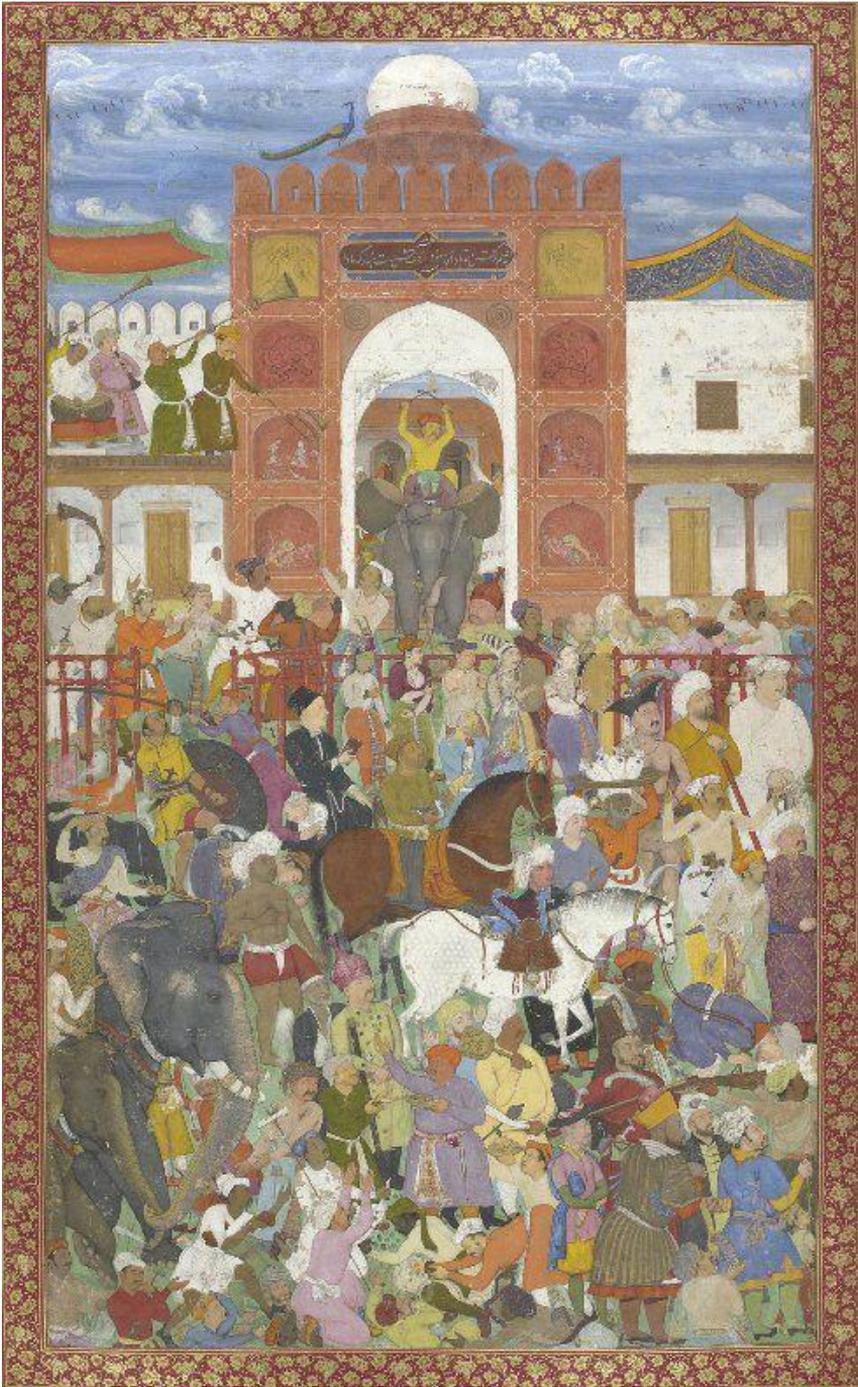


Figure 5. Celebrations on the Accession of Jahangir, Dated A.H. 1013/1605 A.D. with additional figures added 1616. Source: Made for Mughal emperors: royal treasures from Hindustan, p 131.



Figure 6. Jahāngir Receives Prince Khurram on His Return from the Deccan, 1617 signed by Murār c. 1640, illustration to the Pādshah Nāmah of ‘Abd al-Hamīd Lahori. Source: Made for Mughal emperors: royal treasures from Hindustan, p 149.

9. Conflict of interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

10. Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

11. Data availability

Data will be furnished upon request.

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