

INDIA'S
GREAT MUGHALS
Art, Power & Opulence

May 9–Aug 23, 2026

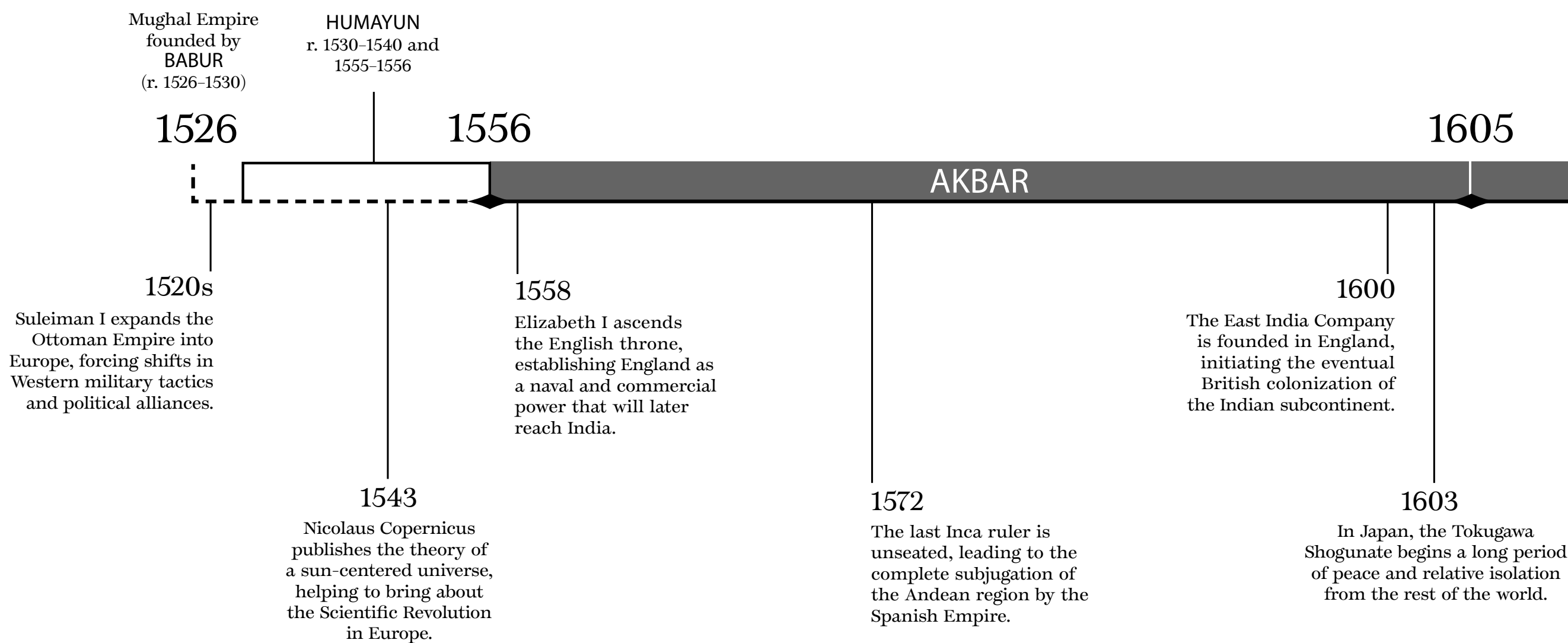
VMFA
VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Map

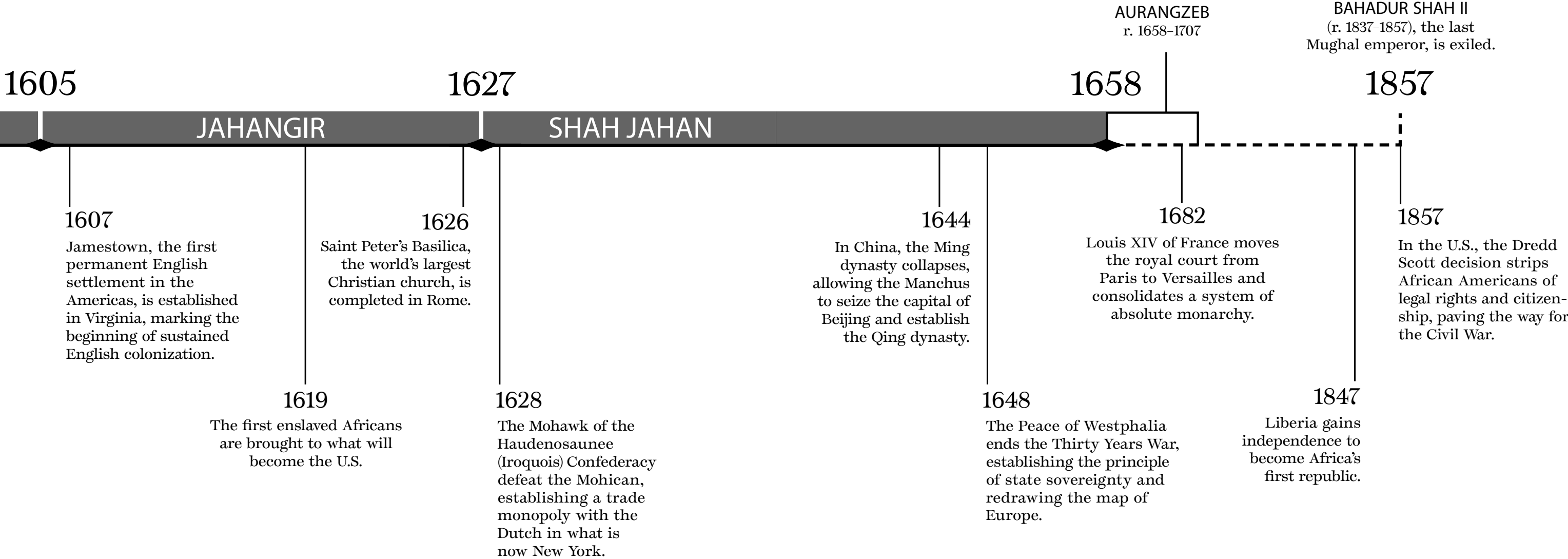
The period from 1526 to 1857 was marked by significant global changes, including the rise and collapse of powerful empires and the development of extensive trade networks. With the establishment of the Mughal Empire in 1526 and its rapid expansion during the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan (1556–1658), the Indian subcontinent became a hub for rich cultural and economic exchanges. The Ottoman and Safavid Empires ruled much of western Asia, while the Chinese and Japanese dominated eastern Asia, and European powers expanded their influence through colonization in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The era also witnessed the Enlightenment in Europe, which fostered ideas of democracy and individual rights that would later inspire political revolutions in the Americas, France, and beyond.



Timeline, part 1 of 2



Timeline, part 2 of 2



India's Great Mughals: Art, Power, and Opulence

The Mughal Empire, founded in 1526 by a Central Asian prince named Babur, would become one of South Asia's largest and most powerful polities. Babur's father was a great-great-grandson of the 14th-century conqueror Timur, but the dynasty he originated would become known as the Mughals—Persian for Mongol—after his mother's ancestral connections to Genghis Khan.

The height of the Mughals' territorial control, power, and wealth began during the reign of Babur's grandson Akbar (1556–1605) and continued under those of Akbar's son Jahangir (1605–1627) and grandson Shah Jahan (1628–1658). The Golden Age of Mughal art also coincided with the century-long rule of these three Great Mughals, when their empire was one of the early modern world's richest states.

These Muslim emperors ruled over a multiethnic population from a cosmopolitan court, at which Persian was the official language. Hindu and Muslim artists from across the conquered territories were joined by Iranian painters, calligraphers, and architects in the imperial Mughal workshops. There, the ferment of these artists' aesthetic interactions—infused further with imagery, techniques, and materials from around the world—led to the evolution of a radically new and distinctly Mughal art.



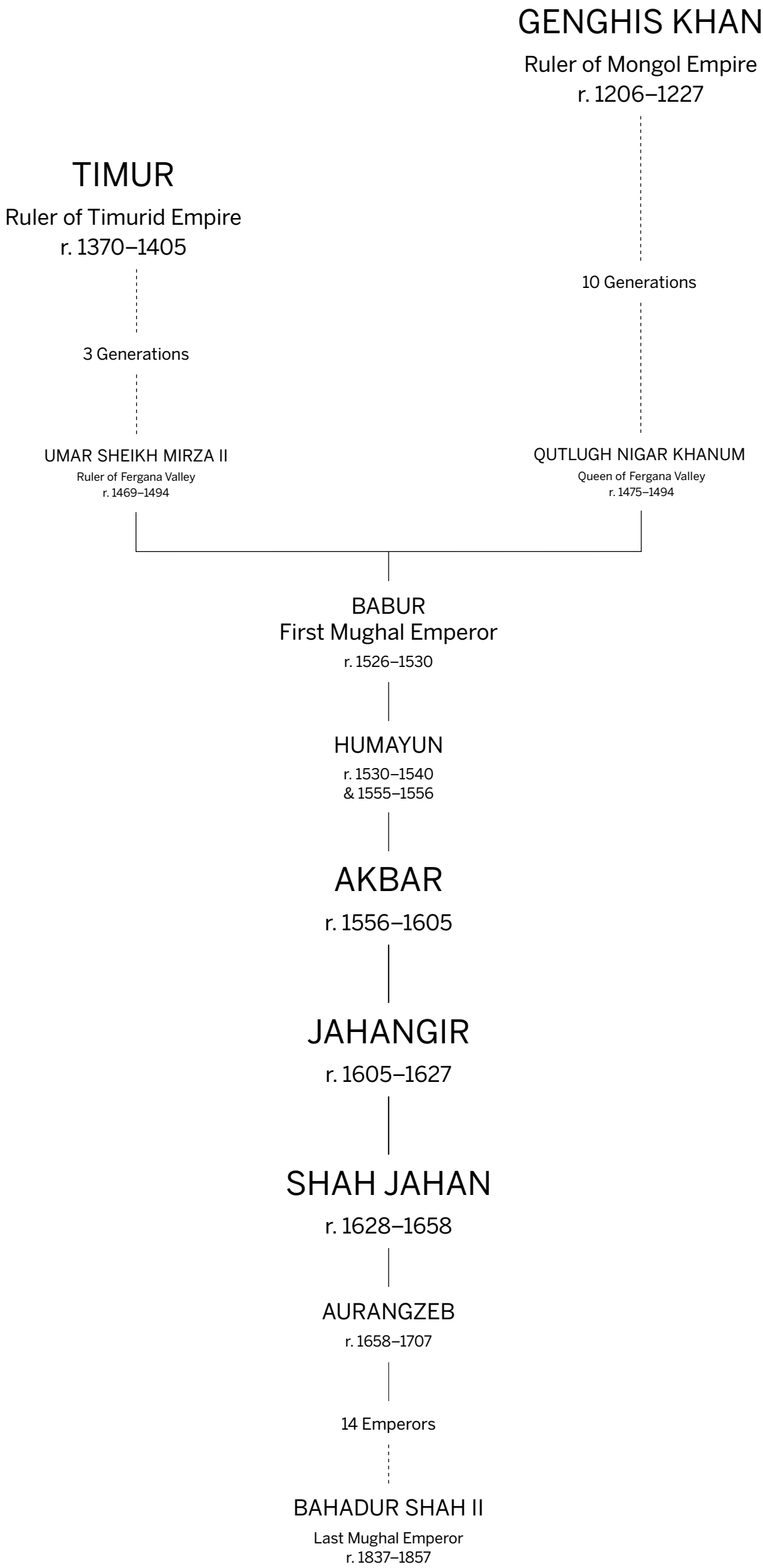
In this imagined scene, Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan are enthroned together, their respective prime ministers standing before them. Commissioned by Shah Jahan, the painting is also a bit of self-promotion. It envisions Akbar handing the imperial crown directly to him, skipping over his father, Jahangir.

Akbar Handing the Imperial Crown to Shah Jahan in the Presence of Jahangir, from the *Minto Album* (detail), ca. 1630–40, Bichitr (active ca. 1615–1650), ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. Chester Beatty Library, IN 07A.19A

Look, Explore, Connect . . .

As you move through the exhibition, look for the six additional labels that invite you to look closely at objects and consider how the art and architecture of the Mughals expressed their wealth, power, and creativity. Explore together, look closely, ask questions, share thoughts, and see what new insights you can uncover together.

Family Tree



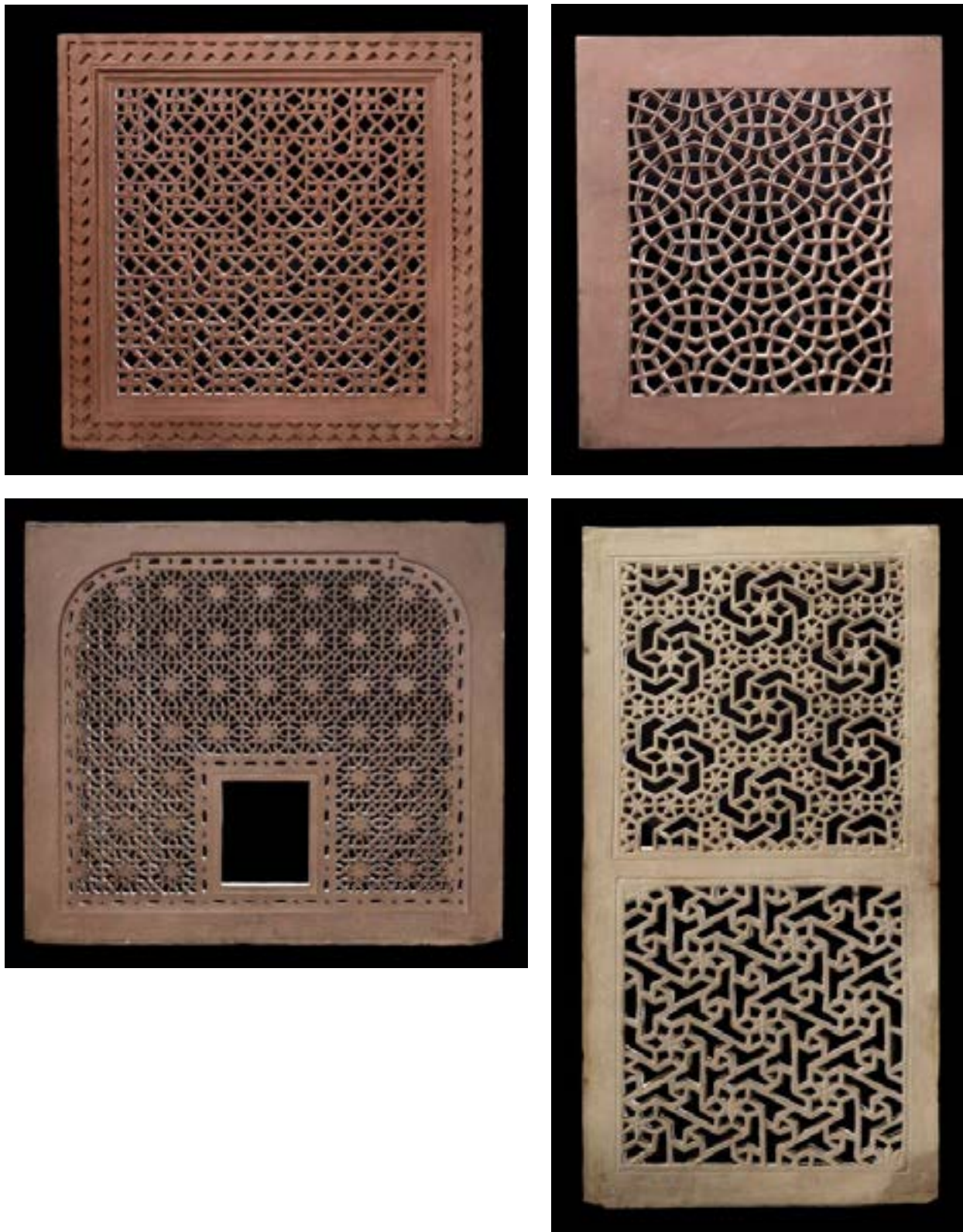
Family Tree

The Mughals claimed a dual ancestry, positioning themselves as inheritors of the legacies of two of world history's most famous conquerors. Through the father of Babur, the first Mughal ruler, they were descended from Timur—better known in the West as Tamerlane—whose late 14th-century empire stretched from eastern Turkey to the plains of the Indus Valley. Simultaneously, through Babur's mother, they could claim a direct connection to the Mongol Genghis Khan, who had built an even vaster empire around 150 years earlier.

The two objects in the center of this gallery—both 15th-century vessels—demonstrate the Mughal emperors' historical interest in their dual pedigree. The tiny jade cup formerly belonged to a Timurid prince who had asserted a claim to that dynasty's throne. Jahangir added his own name—along with that of his father, Akbar—to the cup, tangibly connecting the Mughals' rulership to that of the Timurids. Similarly, in marking the Chinese blue-and-white porcelain as his own, Shah Jahan drew a material connection between the shared Mongol inheritance of the Mughals and the plate's Ming-dynasty makers.

Look, Explore, Connect . . . Look closely at this wall—what do you see? There are names of members of a powerful family connected by lines, like the branches of a tree. Find the names Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan. This exhibition follows the story of this family when these three men—father, son, and grandson—ruled the Mughal Empire. Look for two small paintings on the wall to your left—they are pictures of these three leaders.

- Have you made a family tree before?
- Who are the important people you would include in your family tree?



Agra

Jalis, ca. 1860–80

Sandstone

Jalis are pierced stone screens and are widespread in Indian architecture. Often intricately patterned, they act as beautiful windows, filtering sunlight while allowing for the passage of cooling air. They also provide privacy, permitting persons inside a structure to see out, while shielding them from view. The examples around this room are 19th-century copies of 16th-century originals from Agra. They are fashioned from the same red sandstone so commonly utilized for that Mughal capital's monuments.

V&A: 02191(IS), IS.1-1993, 02174(IS), 02189(IS)



Jingdezhen, China
Ming dynasty

Plate with Grape Design, Inscribed with the Name of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, ca. 1426–35

Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration

Much as Jahangir asserted the Mughal emperors' Timurid pedigree with his inscription on the nearby jade cup, Shah Jahan referenced his family's other renowned lineage with this elegantly decorated plate. The celebrated blue-and-white porcelains from Jingdezhen's Ming-dynasty imperial kilns were a direct artistic inheritance from their Yuan—that is, Mongol—predecessors. When Shah Jahan collected this exquisite 15th-century vessel and had his name inscribed in minute red calligraphy on the edge of its base, he was both demonstrating his worldly sophistication and laying claim to his imperial legacy.

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage Collection, B65P6

شاه جهان بن جهانگیر شاه

Small inscription on the side of the foot, in Persian:
Shah Jahan, son of Shah Jahangir, AH 1054 [1644];
17 [17th year of Shah Jahan's reign].



سنت این درج بیستم حال سرور بعد از عیادت باشد. نشانه آبستره بعد از ناله و حقه طایف و روان بعد از جایگاه ماه و همان بعد

Small inscription around upper rim, in Persian: *This life-prolonging jade container belongs to Jahangir Shah, son of Akbar Shah. For as long as the angels' durj [the celestial sphere] revolves, may the world remember Jahangir Shah, AH 1030 [1620–21]; 16 [16th year of Jahangir's reign].*

السُّلْطَانُ الْمُسْلِمُ الْإِسْلَامِيُّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ عَبْدُهُ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ

Large inscription around the body, in Arabic: *The sultan son of the sultan, 'Ala' ud-Daulah Bahadur Khan (may God perpetuate his kingdom), ordered the completion of this durj [container].*

Uzbekistan, probably Samarqand

Cup with Calligraphic Inscriptions, probably 1447–49
Nephrite

This small cup, probably used for drinking wine or opium, connects the Mughal emperors directly to their Timurid ancestors. The elegant Arabic inscription running around its body notes that it was made for Timur's great-grandson 'Ala' ud-Daulah, likely when he briefly occupied the throne at Herat and controlled the Timurid imperial treasury. Nearly 175 years later, it made its way into the collections of Jahangir, whose own inscription, in Persian, was added—almost certainly by Sa'ida Gilani, the multitasking Iranian supervisor of the Mughal goldsmiths—in tiny calligraphy around its upper rim.

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage
Collection, B6oJ619



Mughal Court Workshops
Attributed to **Bichitr**

The Youthful Shah Jahan, from the Late Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1650

Opaque watercolor on paper

Though painted toward the end of his reign, this portrait depicts Shah Jahan as a young man, soon after his accession, and is from the same imperial album as the double portrait to the left. It is not surprising that the painting's patron is shown larger than his father and grandfather. As emperors, however, all three are haloed and afforded the same royal iconography in the surrounding borders. Above, flying angels—borrowed from European images circulating at the Mughal court—bestow symbols of imperial authority. Earthly attendants in the right margins carry additional regalia associated with kingship. At the bottom are large cats, symbols of domination and control.

Lent by The Art and History Collection; courtesy of the National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, LTS1995.2.95



Mughal Court Workshops

Akbar Giving a Sarpech to Jahangir, from the Late Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1650

Opaque watercolor on paper

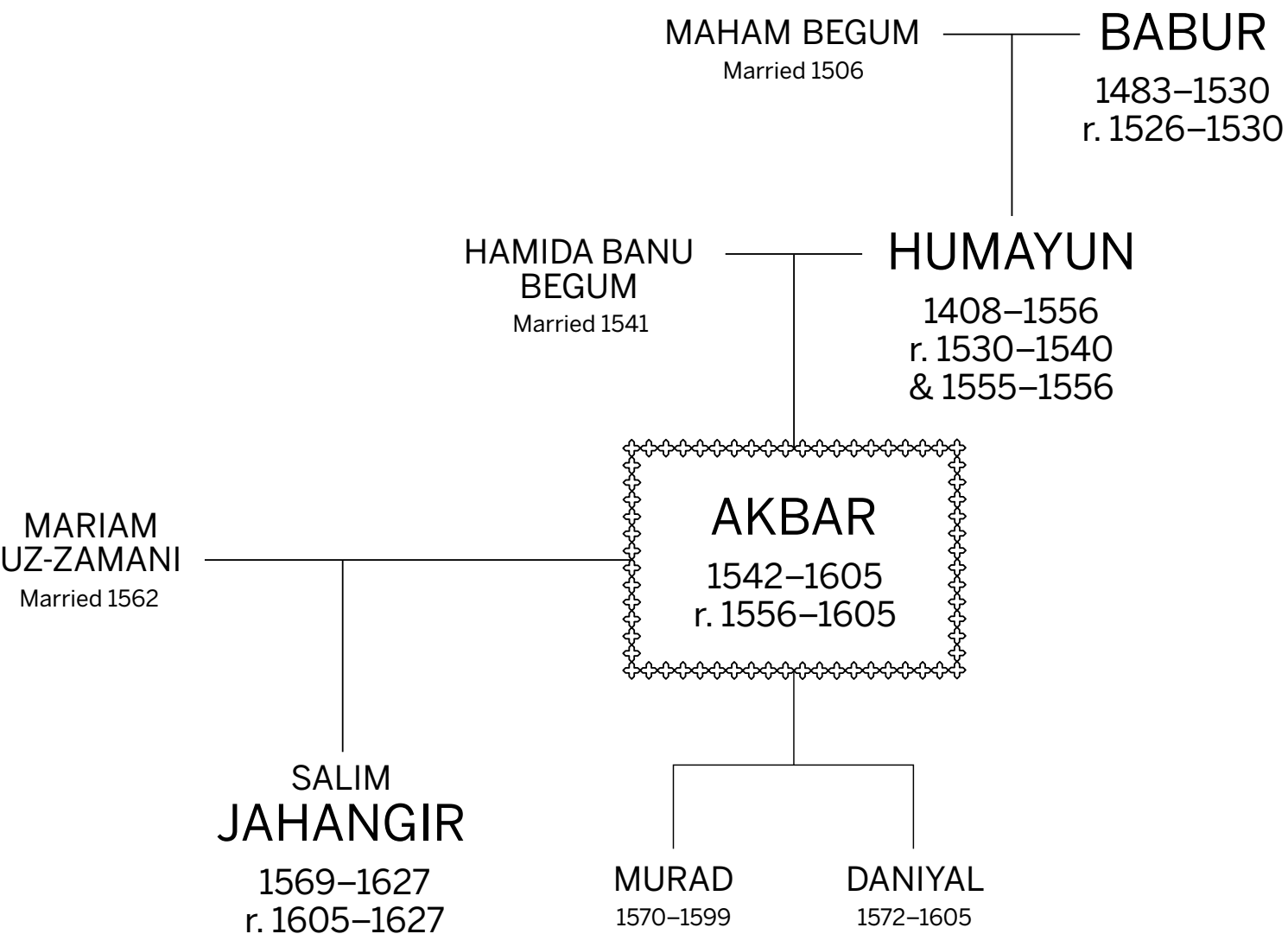
Both portraits on this wall come from a large imperial album produced under the direction of Shah Jahan in the final decade of his reign. When originally bound, its double-page spreads would have alternated between pairs of pictures—mostly portraits—and specimens of calligraphy, all surrounded by sumptuously decorated borders. Here, an elderly Akbar offers a jeweled turban ornament called a *sarpech*, a symbol of power and prestige, to his son Jahangir. Painted long after the death of both these emperors, this is an allegorical picture affirming the legitimacy of the dynastic succession that next passed to the painting's patron.

Lent by The Art and History Collection; courtesy of the National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, LTS2002.2.3

The Reign of Akbar (1556–1605)

Akbar was only 14 when he began his nearly half-century reign as Mughal emperor. He rapidly expanded his territory through conquest and alliances, and he fostered an atmosphere of religious tolerance to rule a diverse population, primarily made up of Hindus. Such enlightened policies, combined with administrative, economic, and political innovations, allowed his empire to thrive. The Mughal court’s great wealth, extracted from its vast domains, also created a climate in which the arts blossomed.

Artists from across the empire and from Iran, where Akbar’s father had lived in exile, collaborated in the imperial workshops to produce an enormous range of luxury goods for the court. Beyond the palace ateliers, craftsmen from artistic centers in every corner of the empire further supplied the Mughal imperial family and nobility. Beginning in the 1580s, the Mughal workshops also absorbed elements of European art, brought at first by Jesuit missionaries from the Portuguese territory of Goa. All these different aesthetic traditions combined to create a vibrant and innovative artistic atmosphere at the Mughal court.



World Events During Akbar's Reign

1558

As Akbar consolidates control over much of the Indian subcontinent, Elizabeth I ascends the English throne. Her reign will end only two years before Akbar's.

1572

Spain unseats the last Inca ruler in the Andes and floods global markets with American silver, which flows into South Asia.

1600

Prince Salim, the future Jahangir, rebels against Akbar and sets up a rival court in Allahabad as the East India Company is founded in England.

1603

As Japan's Tokugawa Shogunate begins a period of isolation to block foreign influence, global trade flows through India's west-coast ports, both those controlled by Akbar and by the Portuguese.



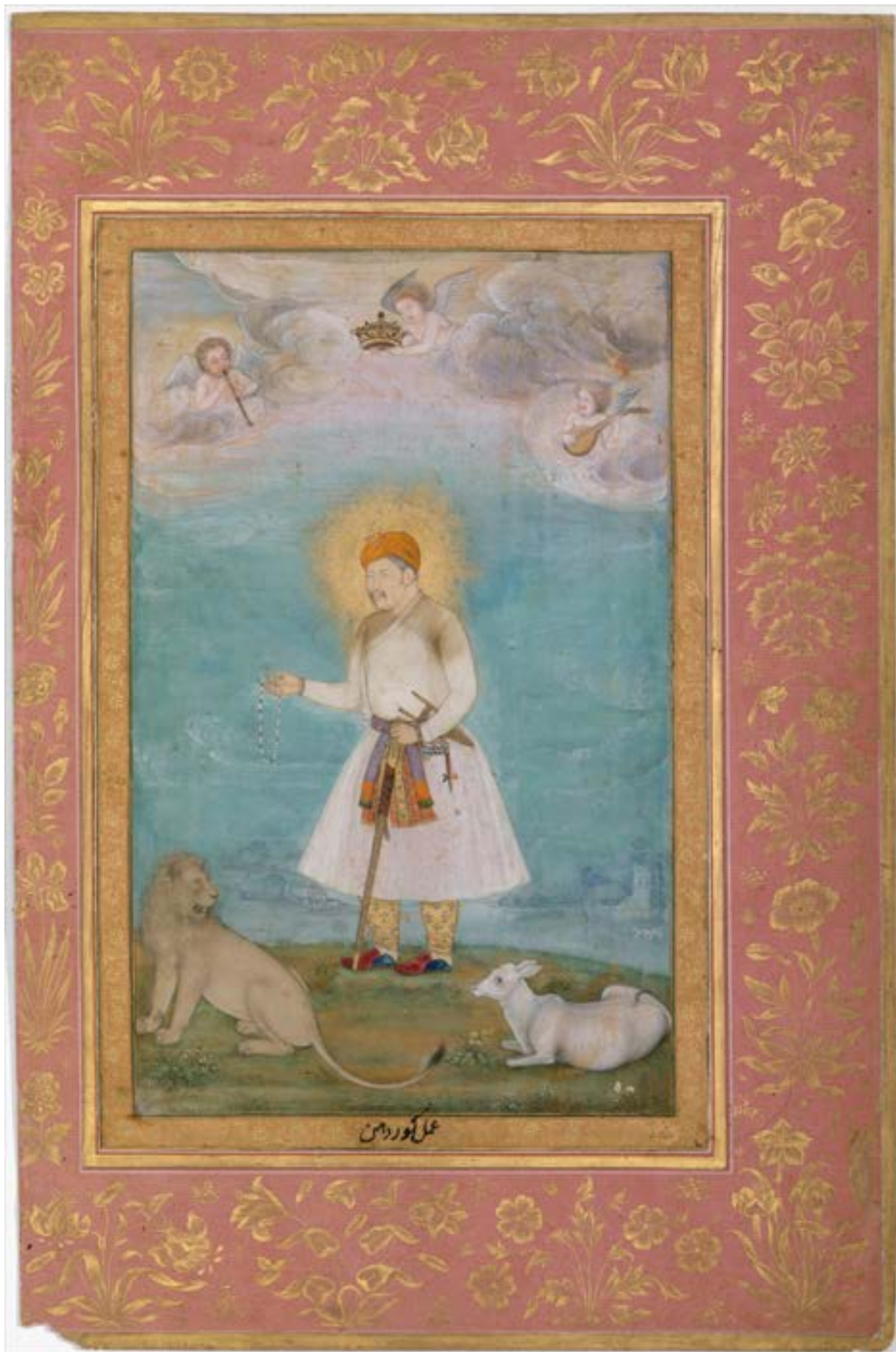
Mughal Court Workshops, probably Lahore
Composition by La'i
Coloring of right-hand page by Nand Gwaliori
Coloring of left-hand page by Ibrahim Kahar

Akbar Receives the Iranian Ambassador Sayyid Beg in 1562, from an Akbarnama, ca. 1590–95

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

The Mughals' wealth was legendary, and emissaries from around the world—seeking economic and political treaties—traveled to India to meet with the emperors. This double-page illustration from a royal copy of the *Akbarnama*, the official chronicle of Akbar's reign, depicts the arrival of the Iranian ambassador, Sayyid Beg, to the imperial court in Agra in 1562. The left-hand page shows his entourage bearing gifts sent by the Iranian ruler, Shah Tahmasp, including war horses, precious textiles, and small mountains of goods in covered vessels and trays. On the right side, Akbar, only 20 years old and seated on a golden throne, receives the ambassador, who reads Tahmasp's letter to his Mughal counterpart.

V&A: IS.2:27, 28-1896, Purchased from Mrs. Clarke, The Dingle, Sydenham Hill, S. E.



Mughal Court Workshops
Govardhan

Akbar with Lion and Calf, from the Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1630

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

This posthumous portrait of an aged Akbar is inscribed in Shah Jahan's hand as the work of Govardhan, a painter whose career in the imperial ateliers spanned the reigns of all three Great Mughals. Like many imperial portraits of its period, it is an allegory for divine rule and reflects the impact European imagery had on Mughal art. Above an atmospheric, Netherlandish background, winged cherubs emerge from clouds to serenade the haloed emperor and present him with a European-style crown. In the foreground are a lion and a calf—the latter a locally appropriate substitute for the lamb of Elizabethan imagery—whose peaceful cohabitation symbolizes the harmonious domain of a just, divinely appointed ruler.

Lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955 (55.121.10.22)

Mughal Court Workshops, probably Lahore
Composition by **Miskin**
Coloring of right-hand page by **Sarwan**
Coloring of left-hand page by **Tulsi the Younger**

The Construction of Agra Fort, from an Akbarnama,
ca. 1590–95

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

One of Akbar's most ambitious early building projects was his expansion of the fort at Agra, begun in 1565. Abu'l Fazl, author of the *Akbarnama*—from a royal copy of which this double-page illustration comes—recorded that 3,000 to 4,000 laborers worked every day for eight years on the construction of the fort's red-sandstone walls and structures, decorated with carved adornments, tiles, and white-marble inlays. These paintings illustrate materials being brought to the site—both overland and by boat—masons cleaving and chiseling stone, and supervisors directing teams of male and female workers.

V&A: IS.2:45, 46-1896, Purchased from Mrs. Clarke, The Dingle, Sydenham Hill, S. E.

Look, Explore, Connect . . . These images are from a book that tells the history of Emperor Akbar's rule and what he accomplished. Look at the hustle and bustle of people working, carrying big pieces of stone, hammering, even decorating the outsides of buildings in the Agra Fort—which still stands today! This painting captures the effort and teamwork it took to build a massive structure like this.

- Have you ever worked in a group or on a team to build or create something?
- What did you make?



Empire Builder

Akbar dramatically increased the size of the Mughal Empire from the relatively modest territories left to him by his father, Humayun. Through military conquest, political diplomacy, and economic domination, he unified a vast expanse of the Indian subcontinent—from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal, and from Kabul in present-day Afghanistan to Central India's Deccan Plateau—under a centralized system of administration. Akbar initiated major building projects in his capital cities of Agra, Delhi, and Lahore and even founded a new one, Fatehpur Sikri—the “City of Victory”—to celebrate the arrival of his long-awaited male heirs and his armies’ territorial conquests.





Mughal Court Workshops, probably Lahore

Composition by **Jagan**

Coloring of right-hand page by **Sur Das**

Portraits of right-hand page by **Madhav**

Coloring of left-hand page by **Asir**

Akbar and Azim Khan at Dipalpur, from an Akbarnama, ca. 1590–95

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

The Mughal court was highly mobile. The expansion and maintenance of the empire required the emperors—and much of the state apparatus—to be on the move, shifting between multiple capitals, accompanying military campaigns, and undertaking extended hunting trips to demonstrate authority over their territories. Vast, luxurious tented encampments served as their traveling headquarters. This double-page illustration shows Akbar enthroned in such a complex while on a 1571 visit to Dipalpur, located southwest of Lahore in present-day Pakistan. The left-hand page provides a sense of the complex logistics required for the court's movements. Servants carry a gold throne; attendants hold horses, musical instruments, and animals used in hunting; and amid the equipment carried by a group of elephants outside the enclosure is a mobile throne, perhaps ready to take the emperor to the next night's camp.

V&A: IS.2:94, 95-1896, Purchased from Mrs. Clarke, The Dingle, Sydenham Hill, S. E

The Imperial Workshops and Treasuries

Akbar established dedicated imperial workshops, called *karkhanas*, in which artists and craftsmen worked collaboratively to supply the court with objects for public and private use. The most important of these workshops was the *Kitabkhana* (House of Books), where manuscripts were made and stored, but an enormous range of other luxury artifacts, textiles, and carpets for the court were produced within the palace or in specialized centers across the empire.

Because Persian was the administrative language of the empire, these workshops attracted skilled Iranian migrants, including painters, calligraphers, weavers, and architects. These foreign masters brought with them artistic traditions that supplemented those of the local Hindu and Muslim artists. From the 1580s, these pluralistic ateliers also began to absorb elements of European art. All these rich aesthetic traditions combined in the Mughal workshops to create a vibrant, hybrid new style of art.

Akbar's court had 12 treasuries that stored coins, precious stones, gold, and jeweled artifacts. Very few gold objects survive from Akbar's reign, as the precious metal was melted down and reused as tastes and fashions changed. The survival of textiles from this period is also extremely rare due to the practice of recycling, as well as South Asia's climatic conditions.



Mughal Empire

Brazier, ca. 1580–1600

Bronze

At imperial banquets and other grand occasions, cooks often prepared meals in front of the royals. A brazier like this may have been used to cook meat skewered on spits over the fitted pan.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW3



This painting is on view in the gallery straight ahead.

The Birth of Prince Murad (detail), ca. 1590–95, Bhura (active late 16th century) and Basawan (active ca. 1565–1598). V&A: IS.2:80-1896. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Mughal Court Workshops

Thumb Ring, ca. 1615–20

Gold, rubies, emeralds, enamel

Originally used in archery to protect the fleshy part of the thumb while drawing the bowstring, thumb rings became emblems of Mughal royalty and were fashioned from precious materials. The exterior of this example is covered in rubies and emeralds, set using the same *kundan* method as the adjacent spoon. The enameling on the interior, however, is a foreign technique first introduced to the Mughal workshops during Akbar's reign. When the emperor sent an embassy to the Portuguese colony in Goa in 1601, he ordered its members to invite skilled European craftsmen to work at his court. By Jahangir's reign, when this ring was probably made, enameling on gold and silver was a well-established art in the imperial workshops.

V&A: IM.207-1920



Mughal Court Workshops

Ceremonial Spoon, ca. 1600

Gold, rubies, emeralds, diamonds

An example of the hybrid style of art created during Akbar's reign, this gem-encrusted spoon—the shape of which is influenced by European flatware—combines an Iranian floral scrolling design with a uniquely Indian technique of setting precious stones in gold. Jewelers filled tiny cavities in the spoon's intricately cast body with lac, a natural resin, into which shaped slivers of precious stones were set and then held in place by layers of highly refined, extremely soft gold foil (known as *kundan*) packed around them. Minute chased, or finely inscribed, floral details further enhance the raised gold surface around the gemstones.

V&A: IM.173-1910



Mughal Empire, probably Lahore

Ewer, 1550–1600

Brass

Across the empire, metalworkers made vessels demonstrating their extraordinary skill in casting bronze, copper, and other alloys. Aspects of this elegant ewer—its spiral fluting, tall, tapering neck, and stylized crocodile heads on handle and spout—relate to Indo-Islamic metal wares predating the Mughals. The creations of Mughal-period makers exhibit not only innovations, but also deeply embedded traditions that came before them and continued in the imperial workshops.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: EA1976.43



Mughal Empire, probably Lahore

Ablution Vessel, ca. 1580–1600

Bronze, black compound

The *lota* is a type of water vessel used in the Indian subcontinent since ancient times. This example combines the characteristically Indian vessel shape with a typically Iranian decorative scheme, suggesting the presence of Iranian metalworkers in the Mughal workshops. The calligraphic verses on its exterior invoke God and praise important historical figures. Qur'anic verses in the interior suggest that the water it held was used to wash one's body before going into combat.

V&A: IS.21-1889



Probably Mughal Court Workshops

Dagger, ca. 1580–1600

Watered steel, gold

This handsome—and formidable—weapon is a rare survivor of the vast supply of steel arms and armor produced for Akbar's court and armies. Its maker originally overlaid much of the dagger's hilt and the blade's chiseled decoration with gold, most of which has worn away. Its decorative scheme includes tigers and elephants, traditional symbols of royalty in South Asia. Similar daggers are depicted in Mughal paintings dating to about 1600.

V&A: IS.86-1981



Rustam Killing the White Demon, from an imperial Mughal manuscript of the *Shahnama of Ferdowsi* (detail), ca. 1600–10. British Museum, London: 1921,1011,o.1. © British Museum



Mughal Court Workshops, probably Fatehpur Sikri

Portion of a Carpet with Animals, Masks, and Vases,
ca. 1580–85

Cotton warp and weft, wool pile

The weaving of pile carpets in India predates the Mughals, but Akbar brought their production into the court workshops, establishing royal manufactories in Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, and Lahore. As with so many of the arts, carpets from this period reveal a significant debt to concurrent Iranian aesthetics. The original carpet from which this fragment comes—estimated to have been over 650 square feet in extent—combined real and fantastic animals, monster masks, vases, and flowering plants in a complex design based on an Iranian carpet pattern of entirely vegetal forms. The substitution of composite animals—each emerging from the mouth or forehead of another—for floral figuration shows the experimental energy of the early Mughal workshops.

Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase,
Edsel B. Ford Fund, 31.64



Mughal Empire

Ewer, 1583–84

Bronze

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW11



Mughal Empire

Mortar and Pestle, ca. 1600

Bronze

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW24a–b



Mughal Empire

Elephant Bell, ca. 1580–1600

Bronze

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW9

Copper and Bronze Vessels

The creations of Mughal metalworkers reflect entrenched traditions that existed long before the empire was founded. Few pieces are inscribed with dates or the names of owners, making this abundant art one of the most difficult to situate in place or time. Some forms can be dated from their careful depiction in paintings by Akbar's artists.

Mughal Empire

Cooking Vessel with Cover, ca. 1580–1600

Bronze

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW4

Mughal Empire

Water Jar, ca. 1580–1600

Bronze

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW6

Mughal Empire

Water Jar, ca. 1580–1600

Copper alloy

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW5





Mughal Empire

Ewer with Faceted Sides, late 16th century

Bronze

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW10

Mughal Empire

Divination Ring, ca. 1580–1600

Bronze

Muslim astrologers used inscribed metal rings to cast the horoscopes of newborns. The prayer on one side of this example calls for protection from Ali, the nephew of the Prophet Muhammad, while the other side has Persian verses of Sufi inspiration addressing the infant. Few divination rings have survived, but Mughal paintings reveal how they might have been used.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW12



See the painting from which this detail comes in the gallery to the right.

The Birth of Prince Murad (detail), ca. 1590–95, Bhura (active late 16th century) and Basawan (active ca. 1565–1598). V&A: IS.2:80-1896. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Mughal Empire

Dervish's Horn, ca. 1600

Bronze

Paintings from Akbar's reign depict horns or metal imitations of them slung over the shoulders of wandering Sufi ascetics known as dervishes, who would have used them for drinking wine and collecting alms. This rare bronze example may have been owned by a high-ranking member of a Sufi order.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW7



Akbar and a Dervish (detail), ca. 1586–87, signed by Abd al-Samad (active ca. 1530s–ca. 1600), ink and opaque watercolor on paper. The Aga Khan Museum, AKM141.
© The Aga Khan Museum



Mughal Empire

Parrot-Head Finial from a Dervish's Staff, ca. 1600–10
Bronze

Like the horn to the left, this bronze finial probably once belonged to a wandering Sufi ascetic, many of whom are depicted in paintings carrying staffs. According to the Iranian poet Hafez, in Sufism the parrot is “the speaker of secrets,” symbolizing the esoteric discourse of these followers of mystical Islam.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW8



A Dervish with a Crane-Headed Staff, ca. 1590, Basawan (active ca. 1565–98), ink on paper. Musée du Louvre, Paris, OA 3619 G Recto. © Musée du Louvre, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Raphaël Chipault



Mughal Empire

Folios from a Qur'an Formerly in the Imperial Mughal Library, ca. 1600–25

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

Calligraphy was regarded as the premier art form in the Mughal *Kitabkhana* (House of Books). The imperial family, librarians, and others attached to the court collected fine examples that were kept in the royal library. These pages, detached from a Qur'an copied in the early 1600s, are written in monumental *muhaqqaq*, one of the six main calligraphic scripts. Inscriptions and seals on the manuscript's endpapers show that the Qur'an entered the imperial library during Shah Jahan's reign.

The page in front of you is typical of the manuscript's running text and features the final verses of the Qur'an's ninth *sura* (chapter). The ornate folios to the left and right originally opened side by side in the holy book. They are the Qur'an's brief first *sura* on the right and the beginning of its second *sura* on the left. Behind these pages are the folios that formed the volume's double-page frontispiece. They feature *shamsas* (starbursts), the central medallions of which are inscribed with a verse from the 17th *sura* extolling the Qur'an's perfection:

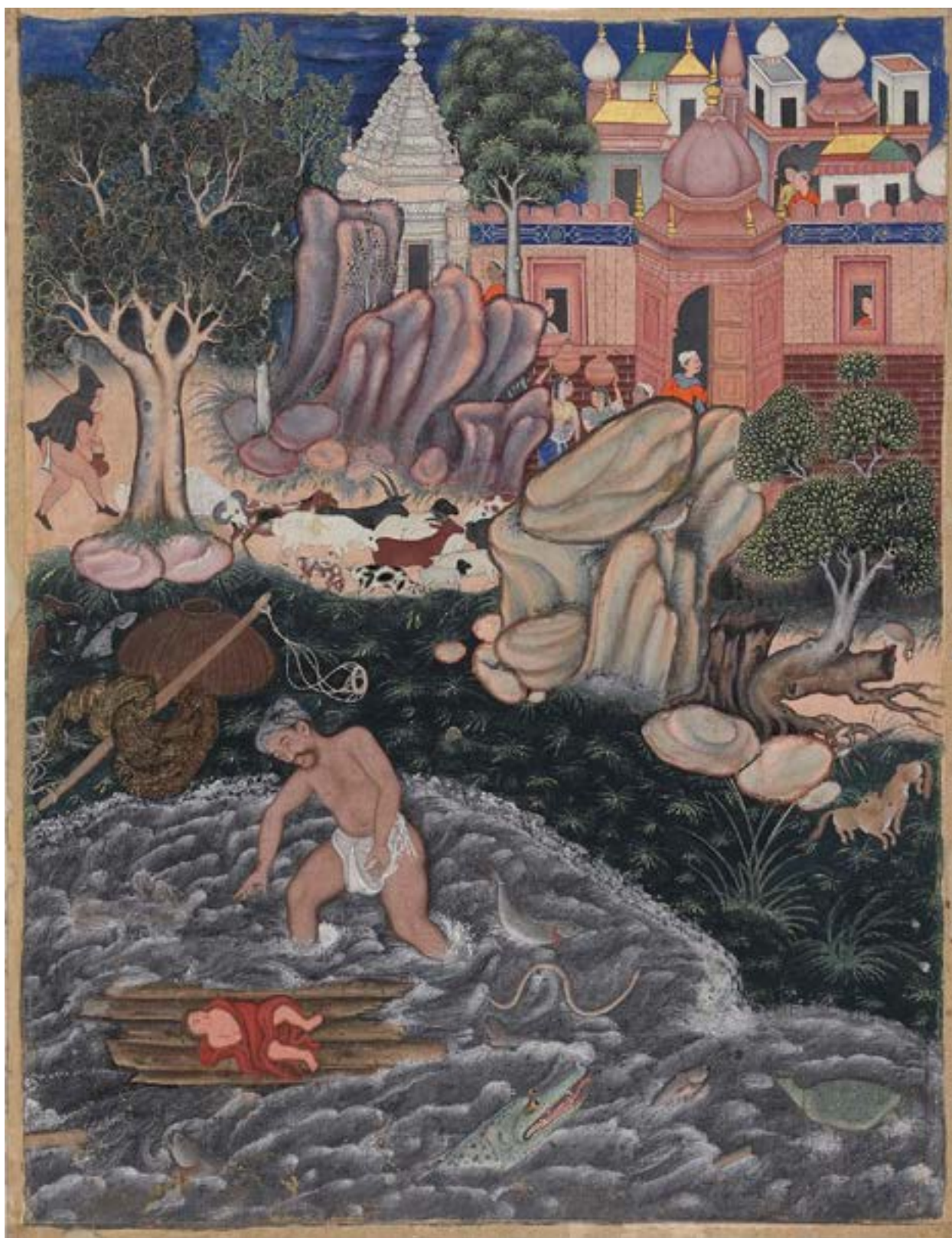
If all humans and jinn were to come together to produce the equivalent of this Qur'an, they could not produce its equal, no matter how they supported each other.

V&A: IM.2:3, 4, 5, 6-1915, Given by Sir F. Sandford, K.C.B.

Early Mughal Painting and the Hamzanama

The story of the rich painting tradition that would develop under the Mughal emperors' patronage begins with Akbar's father, Humayun, who brought master Iranian painters with him to India, following his exile in Iran. The two most famous of them, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd al-Samad, would become directors of Akbar's imperial painting workshop, in which the young emperor invested heavily, turning what had been a trickle of paintings produced for the Mughal court into a torrent.

The fusion of Iranian and Indian styles that would define Mughal painting was formed in the crucible of the imperial atelier, particularly over the course of the 15-year production of a massive, illustrated manuscript called the *Hamzanama*. The master Iranian artists hired more than 30 painters, most of them Indian, to fulfil Akbar's ambitious commission, which would eventually comprise 1,400 unusually large paintings on cloth, only about 150 of which have survived.



Mughal Court Workshops
Attributed to Kesava Dasa

Iskandar Finds the Infant Darab in the Water, from Akbar's Hamzanama, ca. 1570

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on a textile support mounted on paper

Akbar's *Hamzanama*, commenced around 1558, eventually comprised 14 volumes, each with 100 paintings. Illustrations from the earlier volumes are dominated by Iranian pictorial conventions, their figures stylized and their settings conceived as almost entirely flat planes, often covered in repetitive decorative patterning. Paintings from the later volumes—like this one depicting a fisherman rescuing Hamza's infant son after a shipwreck—show the emergence of a distinctly Mughal style. Its artist demonstrates an increased concern with volume and spatial recession, figures strike animated poses, and its composition is filled with naturalistically described details from the Indian environment.

Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Horace G. Tucker Memorial Fund and Seth Augustus Fowle Fund, 24.129



Mughal Court Workshops

**A Heroine Forcibly Enters a Jail to Liberate Heroes,
from Akbar's *Hamzanama*, ca. 1650–75**

Opaque watercolor on cloth

The *Hamzanama* recounts fictitious adventures of the Prophet Muhammad's uncle Hamza in his journeys to spread the Islamic faith. A sprawling epic, its fantastic tales are a rapid series of action stories and quests. The specific incident illustrated here is unclear, but the work depicts a female warrior who has slipped into a fortified compound, beyond sentries asleep at its gate. Her sword still sheathed, she threatens an inhabitant to keep quiet, before she and her armed companion will turn on three slumbering guards and free the prisoners shown shackled in a dungeon.

National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution;
Purchase — Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds,
Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M.
Sackler, S1986.399

House of Books

Among the imperial workshops Akbar established, the most important by far was the *Kitabhkhana* (House of Books). Highly cultivated, with a voracious appetite for knowledge, Akbar was nonetheless unable to read and write. Designated staff at court read to him from the volumes in his extensive library, and he was known for his prodigious memory. He patronized the production of books at an unprecedented scale, ordering luxury copies of Iranian classics, commissioning sweeping histories, and having important Hindu literature translated into Persian. Perhaps in part due to his illiteracy, Akbar had a particular interest in painting, and he invested heavily in artists, who worked in tandem with his scribes. Some of the finest illustrated Mughal manuscripts were made during his reign.



In this illustration from an Akbar-period manuscript, a prince receives a calligraphy lesson while artisans from the imperial House of Books work around him.

A Court Manuscript Workshop, folio from a manuscript of Nasir al-Din Tusi's *Ethics of Nasir* (*Akhlaq-i Nasiri*), ca. 1590–95, attributed to Sanju (active late 16th century), opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, The Aga Khan Museum, AKM288.12.
© The Aga Khan Museum

Mughal Court Workshops, Fatehpur Sikri
Calligraphy by **Muhammad Husayn al-Kashmiri**

A Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa'di, 1582–83

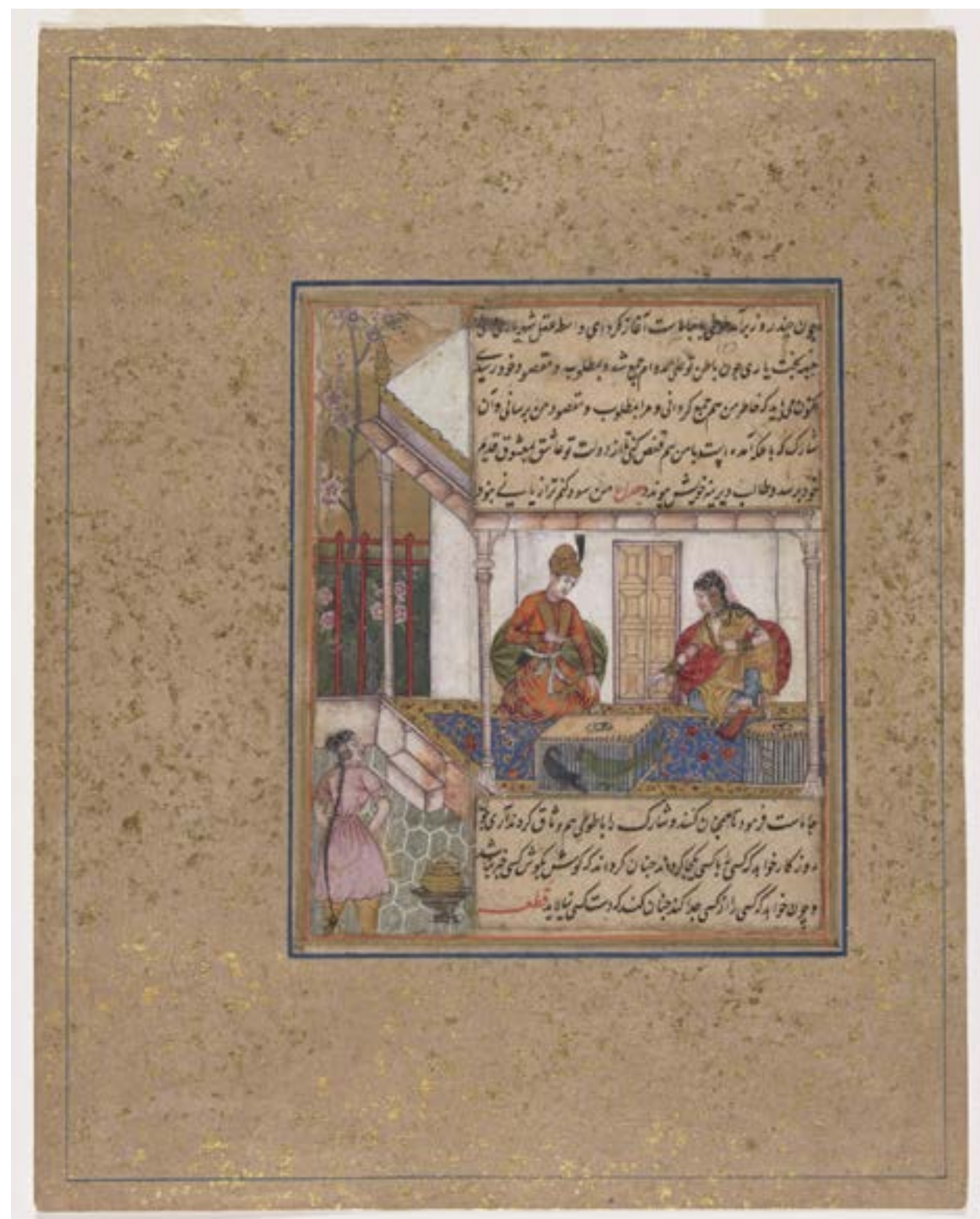
Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

Courts in the Indian subcontinent used Persian long before the arrival of the Mughals, but under Akbar it became the official administrative language of the empire. Classics of Persian literature, including Sa'di's *Gulistan*, were the key educational texts for members of the Mughal imperial family and nobility. This luxurious manuscript was written by one of Akbar's master calligraphers, Muhammad Husayn of Kashmir, to whom the emperor gave the title *Zarrin Qalam* (Golden Pen). Over 2,000 detailed depictions of birds and animals decorate its pages, and Muhammad Husayn's portrait is painted on the book's final leaf.

Courtesy of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. By permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library: RAS Persian 258. Bequeathed by Neil Benjamin Edmonstone



Portrait of Muhammad Husayn al-Kashmiri (detail), from the last page of a Gulistan of Sa'di, 1582–83. Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland



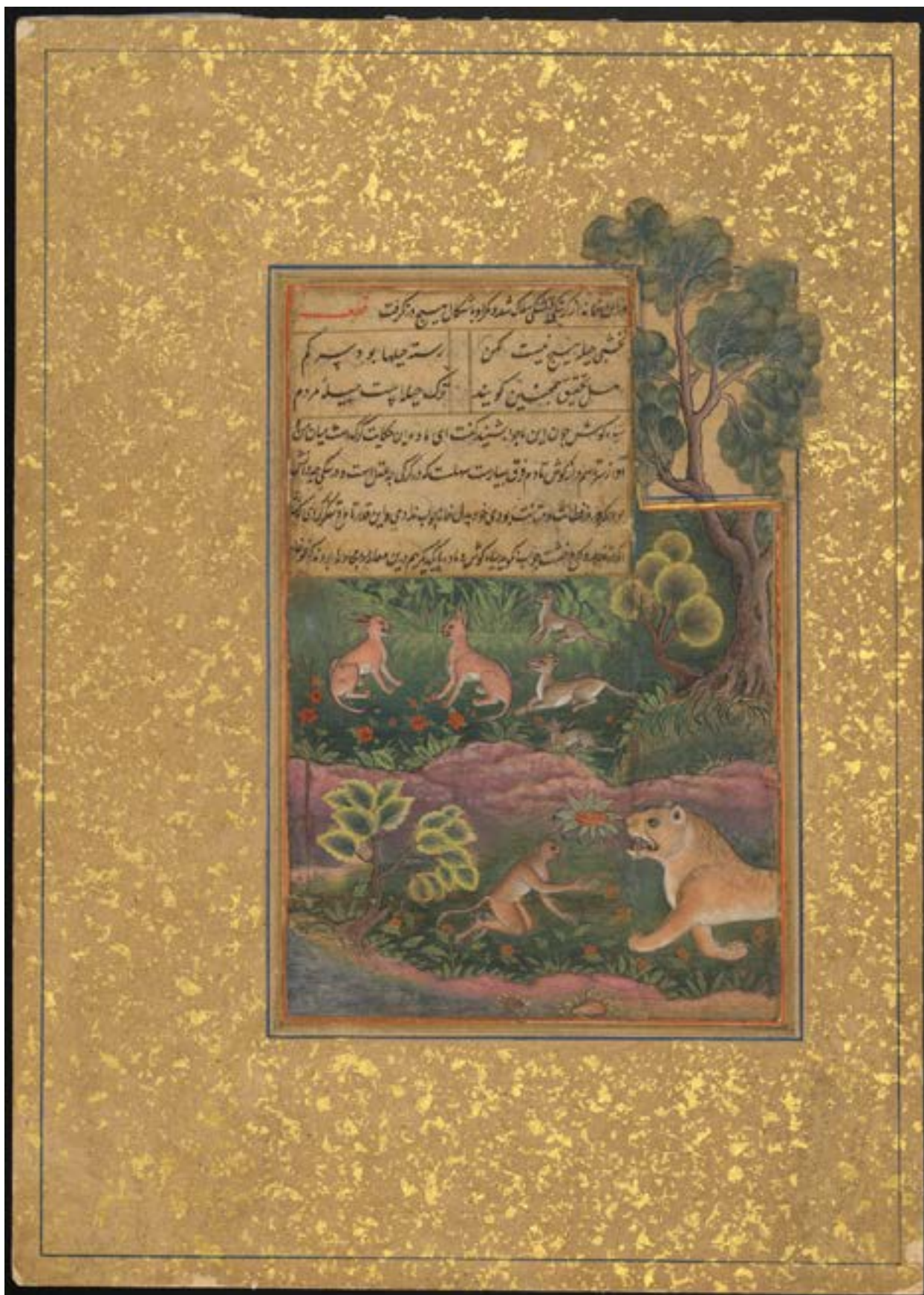
Mughal Court Workshops

**King Jamasp Unites the Parrot and the Myna,
from a Tutinama, ca. 1580**

Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

The earliest texts illustrated by Akbar's artists were largely poetic and romantic works. The *Tutinama* (Tales of a Parrot), composed in Persian around 1330 in North India, comprises 52 stories told over as many nights by a clever parrot to prevent his master's wife from visiting her lover while her husband is away. The young Akbar must have enjoyed these charming tales, for he commissioned two extensively illustrated *Tutinamas*, from one of which both pages on this wall originate. This page belongs to the 25th night's story, about another crafty parrot who helped his master, King Jamasp, find a bride and in so doing also engineered his own union with her myna bird. Both couples appear here in a palace pavilion.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.46



Mughal Court Workshops

**Episodes from the Story of the Lynx and the Lion,
from a *Tutinama*, ca. 1580**

Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

The paintings of the *Tutinama* manuscript from which this and the adjacent page come are rapidly executed in a simple but expressive style. The work of Akbar's artists had evolved considerably from the paintings created for another imperial copy of the romance, made some 20 years earlier. A commitment to unified pictorial spaces, dramatic compositions, fully modeled forms, and naturalistic rendering had coalesced by this period and would only continue to develop further in the court workshops. Illustrated here are scenes from the narrator's tale on the 28th night, in which a lion and his servant, a monkey, are outwitted by a lynx and his family.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.47



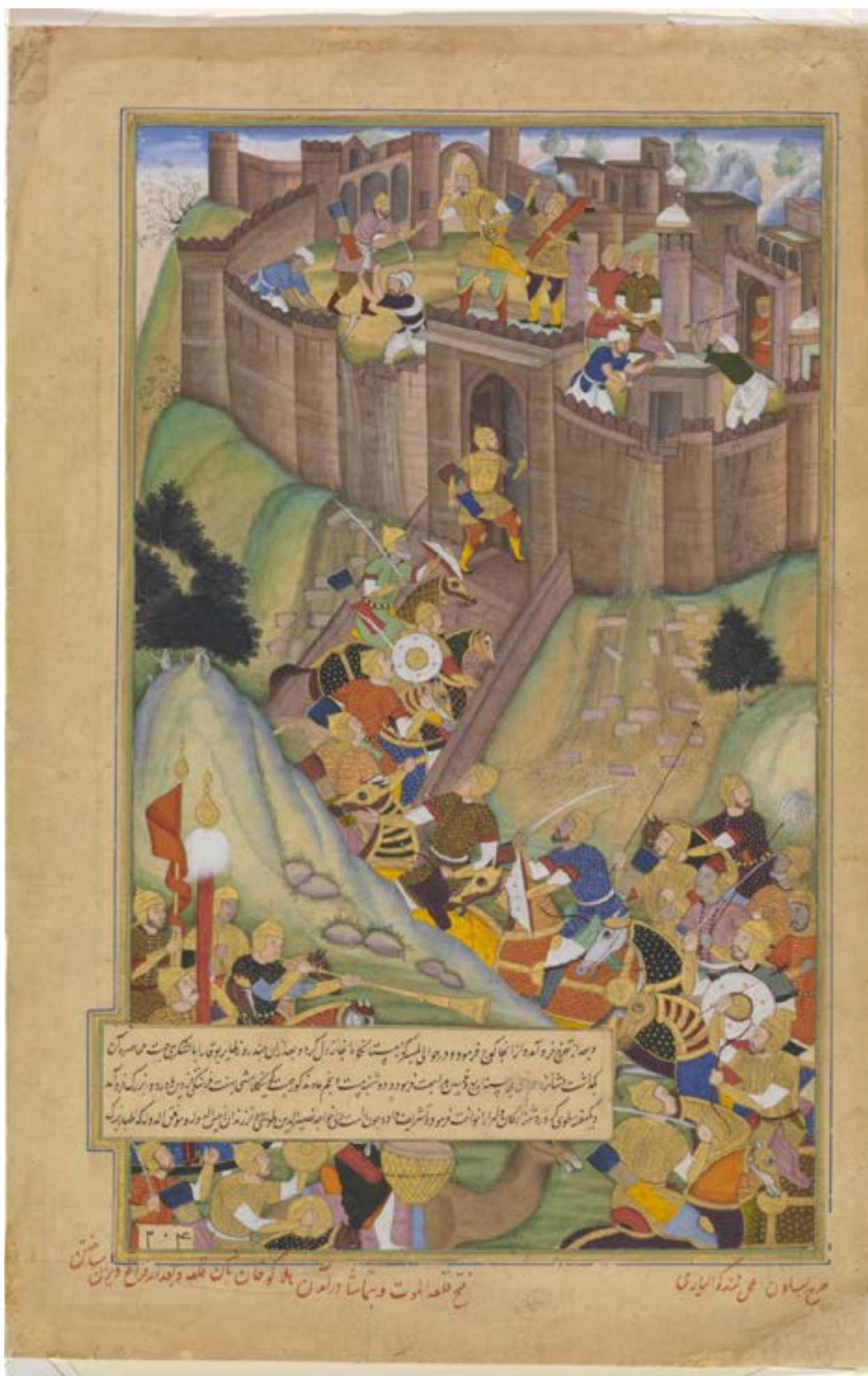
Mughal Court Workshops

Events During the Reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tasim, from a *Tarikh-i Alfi*, ca. 1592–94

Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

Akbar's early interest in myth and legend was gradually supplemented by an increasing concern for the rational. Beginning in the 1580s, the artists, scribes, and scholars of his *Kitabkhana* produced a series of great dynastic histories. The first was the *Tarikh-i Alfi* (History of a Thousand), commissioned by the emperor to chronicle the first millennium of Islamic world history. This page from the manuscript refers to events in AD 838–40, during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tasim in Baghdad. Its image depicts the punishment of conspirators who had plotted to overthrow the caliph. Though the events take place in Iraq, the architecture—including the Hindu temple in the far distance in the upper right corner—is from Mughal India.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.48



Mughal Court Workshops
Composition by Basawan
Coloring by Nand Gwaliori

**Hulagu Khan Destroys the Fort at Alamut,
from a Chingiznama, ca. 1596**

Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

Akbar's patronage of historical chronicles had an obvious political dimension. Among the illustrated manuscripts he commissioned to legitimize and glorify the Mughal dynasty were histories of his family's famous ancestors, Timur and Genghis Khan. This page comes from the latter book, the *Chingiznama* (History of Genghis), completed in 1596. It depicts Genghis's grandson Hulagu Khan—the painting's uppermost, central figure—directing the seizure and demolition of the Iranian fort of Alamut in 1256. The detailed rendering of these troops, their trappings, and the trees that punctuate the landscape reveal the Mughal interest in naturalism and precise visual observation.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.53



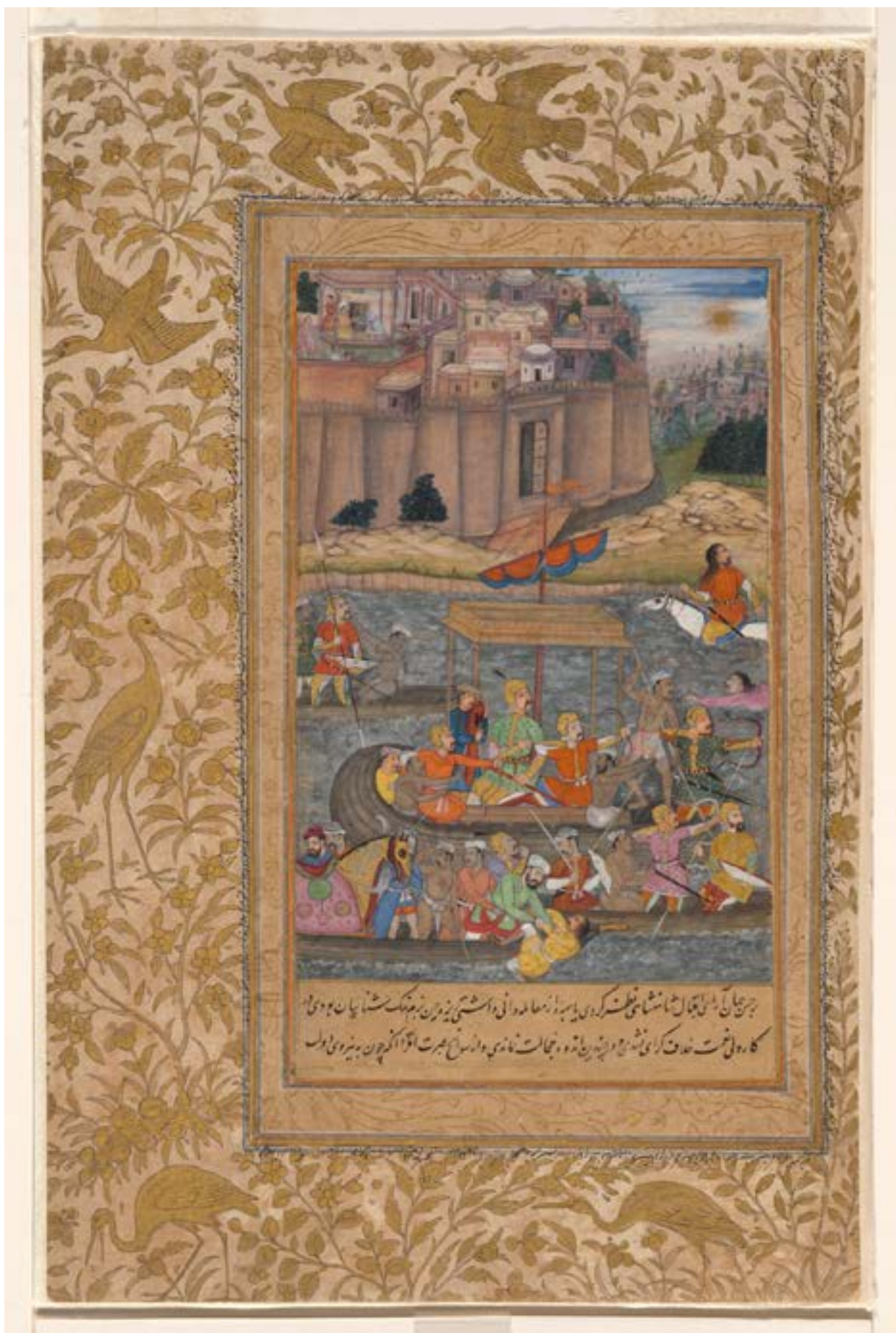
Mughal Court Workshops, probably Lahore
Composition and coloring by **Bhura**
Portraits by **Basawan**

The Birth of Prince Murad, from an Akbarnama,
ca. 1590–95

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Given Akbar's dynastic ambitions and interest in history, it is unsurprising that he commissioned one of his court's greatest scholars, Abu'l Fazl, to write the official account of his life. The *Akbarnama* (Story of Akbar) was copied by master calligraphers, and court painters illustrated its major events. This page depicts celebrations in 1570 upon the birth of Akbar's second son, Murad, at the village of Sikri, where the emperor would build a new capital. The intimate view into the women's quarters includes the mother and child at the top right along with myriad fascinating details, including a metal brazier, covered water vessel, and a divination ring used by astrologers to cast the infant's horoscope—all objects similar to examples in the small gallery to the right.

V&A: IS.2:80-1896



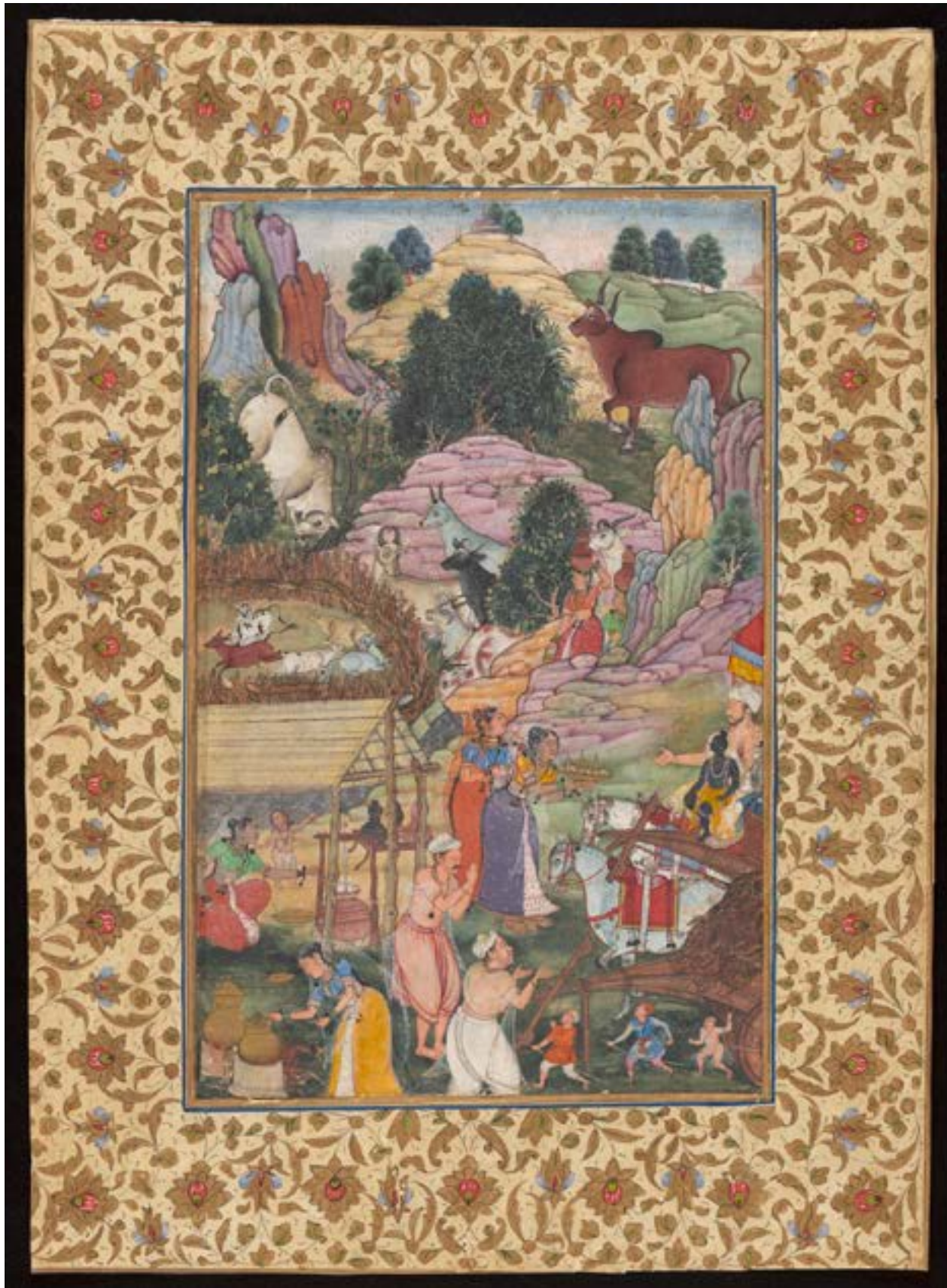
Mughal Court Workshops

Muzaffar Khan Quells a Revolt at Hajipur, from an Akbarnama, painting 1596–97, borders 1607–08

Opaque watercolor on paper

Akbar's calligraphers and painters produced at least two royal manuscripts of the *Akbarnama*. Unlike the page to the right and other examples in the previous gallery, this illustration—surrounded by borders from the reign of Jahangir—comes from a second, slightly later copy of the chronicle. The left half of a double-page composition (the right side is in Copenhagen), it describes a 1575 military assault, in which the Mughal officer Muzaffar Khan sent his troops across the Gandak River to retake the rebel city of Hajipur in Bihar. The use of atmospheric perspective to create spatial depth was a technique that Akbar's painters learned from European pictures circulating at court.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.49



Mughal Court Workshops

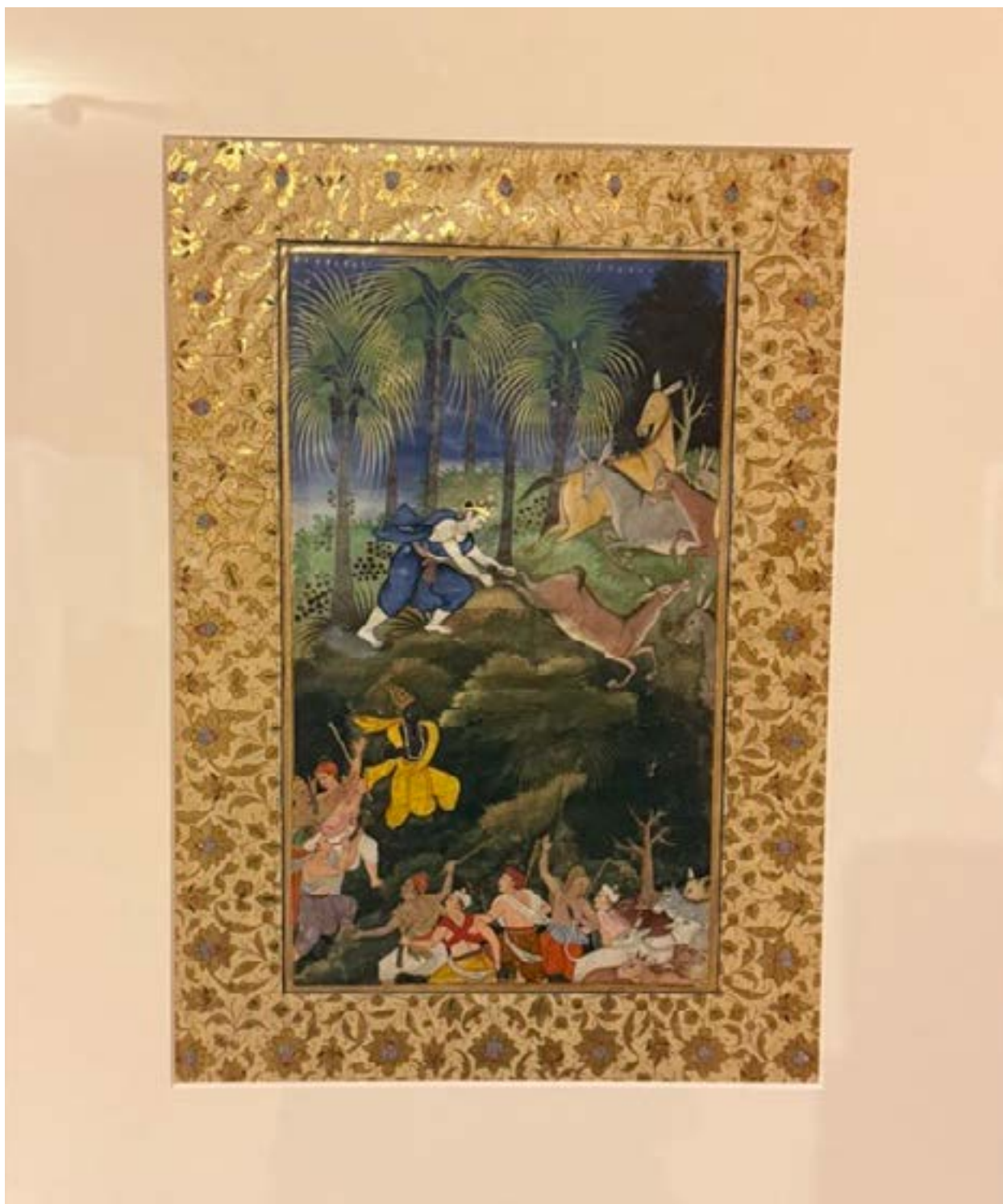
**The Arrival of Nanda and His Family in Vrindavan,
from a Persian Translation of the Harivamsha,**

painting ca. 1586–90, borders ca. 1700

Opaque watercolor on paper

Fascinated with India and eager to understand its people better, Akbar ordered the translation of important Sanskrit texts into Persian. Like the brahmins who assisted the scribes, many of the painters who illustrated the resulting manuscripts were Hindu and must have already been familiar with some of their stories. This page comes from a *Harivamsha*—a genealogy of the Hindu god Vishnu that emphasizes the life of Krishna—made for Akbar. The painting, set into later page borders, depicts the arrival of Krishna and his brother Balarama to their childhood home of Vrindavan. On the horse-drawn cart at the lower right, the two are accompanied by their foster father, Nanda. Almost every detail of the scene's bucolic landscape is mentioned in the Persian text on the back of the page.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.50



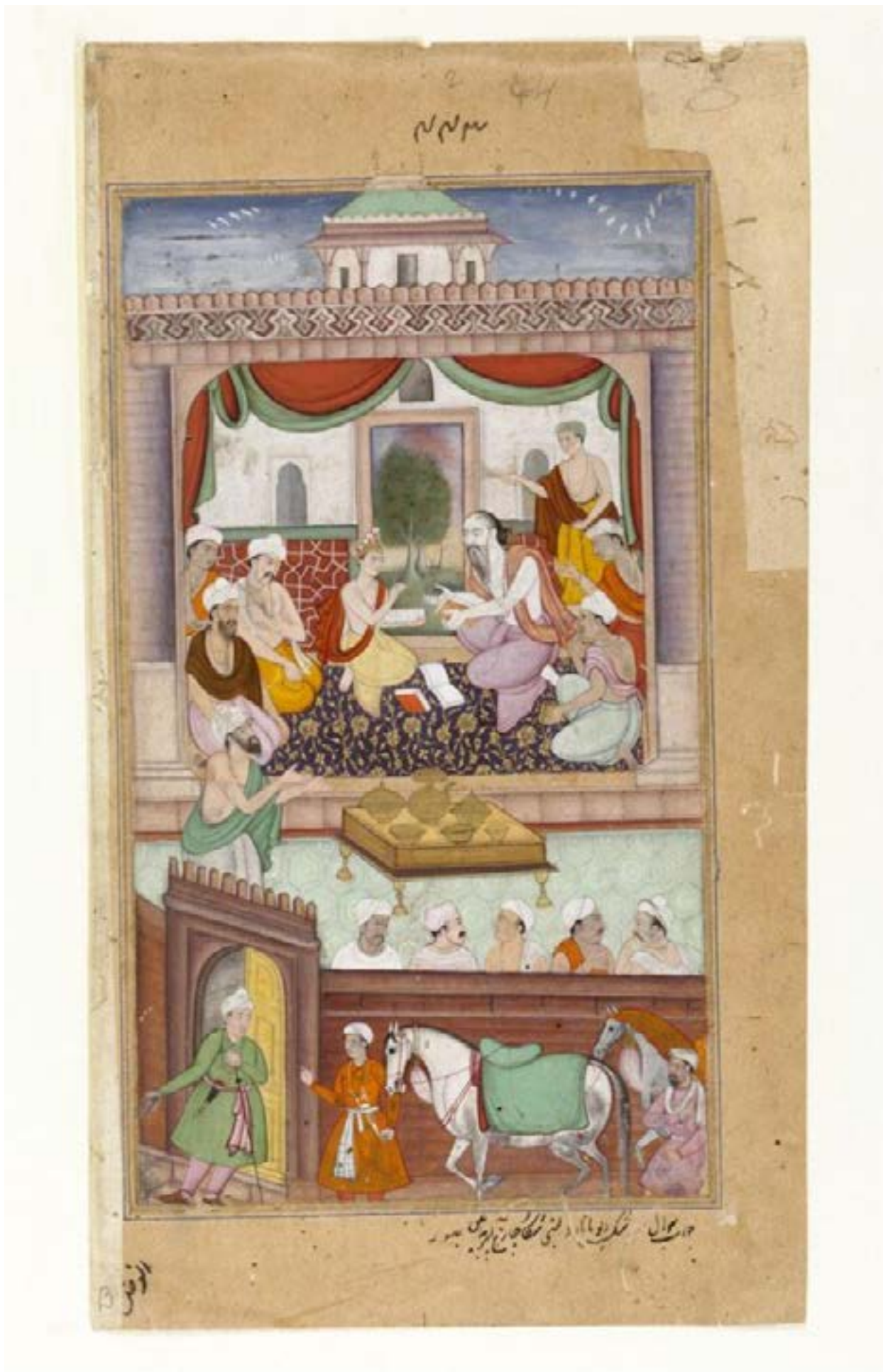
Mughal Court Workshops
Attributed to **Basawan**

Balarama Kills Dhenukasura, from a Persian Translation of the Harivamsha, painting ca. 1585, borders ca. 1700

Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper

From the same manuscript as the painting to the right, this page from Akbar's Persian translation of the *Harivamsha* shows the same deities—blue-skinned Krishna and white-complexioned Balarama—now fully grown. The illustration is from the story of the brothers, accompanied by their cowherd companions, wandering into a palm forest, unaware that it is ruled by the donkey-demon Dhenukasura. Attacked by the demon after shaking the trees to obtain their fruit, Balarama grabs him by the hind legs. He will hurl Dhenukasura against a tree, killing him and opening the forest to the cowherds. The painting is attributed to Basawan, one of Akbar's foremost painters, who also contributed to two paintings on the wall to the right and another in the small, distant gallery to the left.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase, M.78.9.10



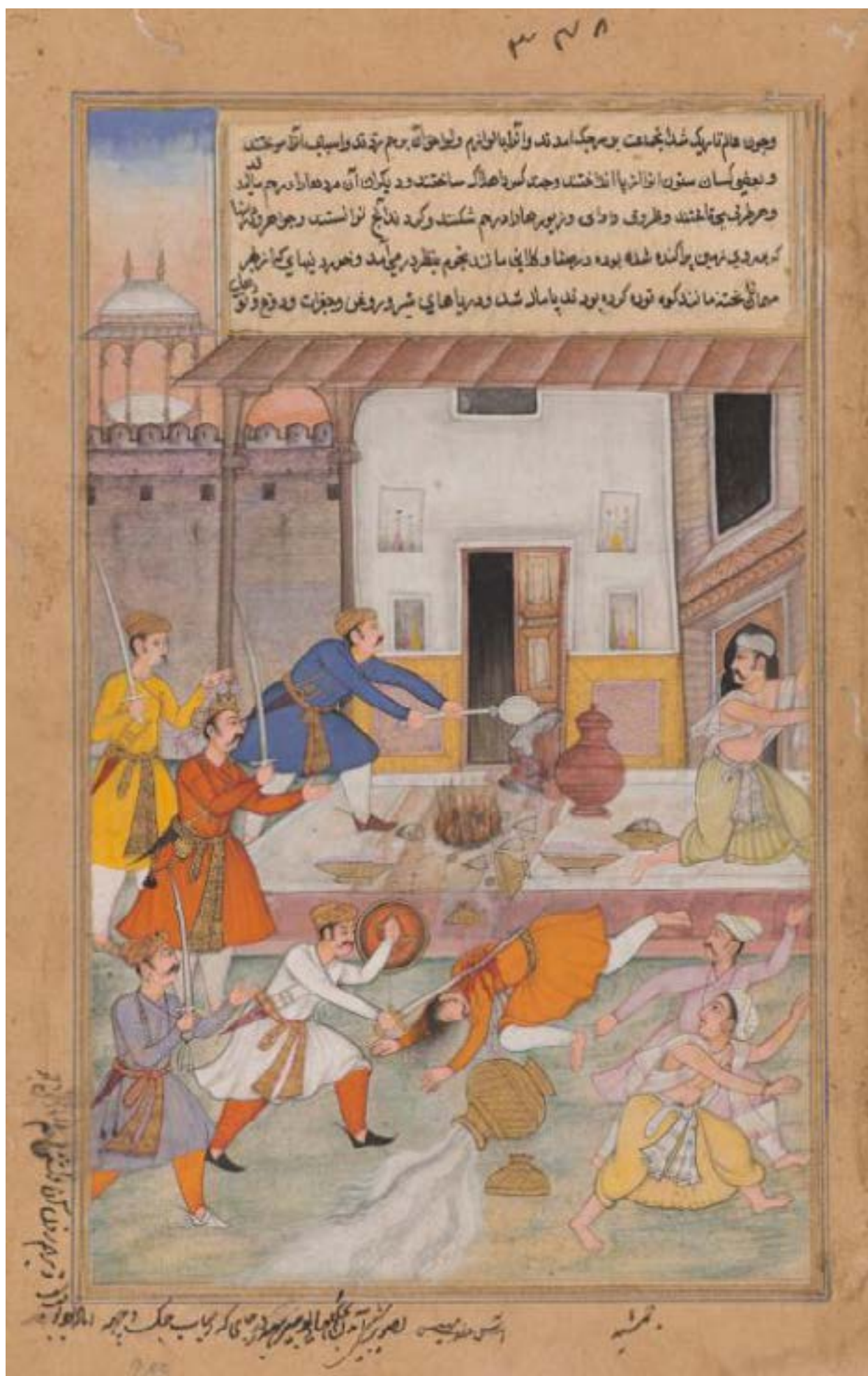
Mughal Court Workshops

Narada and Shuka, from a Razmnama, a Persian Translation of the Mahabharata, 1598

Opaque watercolor on paper

With his translations of Sanskrit literature, Akbar opened a window for his court not only on India's history but also on its wisdom. This painting—from the same Persian manuscript as the page to the right—depicts another passage from the *Mahabharata*'s twelfth book, in which the Great War's victorious king receives counsel on a vast range of subjects, from statecraft to philosophy. The story related to him—here again set in Mughal-period surroundings—is of the ancient sage Narada giving religious instruction to Shuka, son of the epic's reputed author. The teachings, exploring the illusory nature of earthly attachments, guide Shuka toward self-realization and spiritual liberation.

V&A: IS.457-1950



Mughal Court Workshops Jamshed

The Destruction of Daksha's Sacrifice, from a Razmnama, a Persian Translation of the Mahabharata, 1598–1600

Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

Akbar's Persian editions of Sanskrit texts were not only literary translations, but also visual ones. This page from the emperor's copy of the *Razmnama* (Book of War)—the Persian version of the *Mahabharata*—illustrates a well-known event in which the Hindu deity Shiva attacks a sacrificial ceremony hosted by his father-in-law, Daksha. The ancient Indian scene has been transformed into a modern-day tableau. Set within a Mughal-style palace, Shiva and his companions—dressed as contemporary courtiers—wreck the proceedings. In the Sanskrit text, Shiva is described as a wrathful, multi-armed warrior called Virabhadra; here he is a crowned prince decked out in period finery. Even the brahmins fleeing the ceremony wear turbans and the characteristic Mughal waist sash.

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Acquisition made possible by the George Hopper Fitch Bequest, 2007.12

Province of Gujarat

Every province of Akbar's empire had its own specialized craft industries, many of which were established long before the Mughal conquest. Little has survived from their vast and varied production as described in contemporary written sources. However, the distinctive products of Gujarat, the wealthy province conquered by Akbar in 1573, provide an exceptional glimpse of this lost heritage. Wooden artifacts inlaid with mother-of-pearl or ivory and objects made entirely of mother-of-pearl were produced in the capital of Ahmadabad and exported to the Mughal court and abroad. Similar items of lower quality were made in workshops in Khambhat, Surat, and neighboring Sindh for a wider market.



Mughal Court Workshops, probably Lahore
 Composition by **La'i**
 Coloring of right-hand page by **Sanwala**
 Coloring of left-hand page by **Babu Naqqash**

The Battle of Sarnal, Gujarat, in 1572, from an Akbarnama, ca. 1590–95

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Akbar's conquest of Gujarat secured the Mughal Empire's western flank and provided direct access to the Arabian Sea. The expansion resulted in a significant boost to the Mughal economy, giving the emperor control of important trading ports into which goods flowed and from which pilgrims embarked on ships for Mecca. It was also here that the emperor had his first significant encounter with Europeans, the Portuguese, who had first arrived on India's west coast in 1498. This double-page illustration from the *Akbarnama* depicts a pivotal battle in Akbar's Gujarati campaigns, when his forces faced the Mirzas, distant cousins who had rebelled against his father. Akbar appears on his armor-clad horse near the center of the right-hand page, leading his cavalry against the Gujarati horsemen on the left.

V&A: IS.2:106, 107-1896



Gujarat

Casket, ca. 1600

Teak, mother-of-pearl, black lac, brass

Since at least the early 16th century, Gujarat was a center of production for articles decorated with or fashioned out of mother-of-pearl. By 1600, such articles were being made for export markets, including Ottoman Turkey, the Middle East, and Europe, as well as for local consumption. Gujarati craftsmen decorated wooden objects—ranging from small pen cases, to portable caskets like this, to large architectural elements—with mother-of-pearl, held in place with a natural resin called lac. The decorative motifs used here are also found on large canopies in Sufi shrines made in and around the region's capital, Ahmadabad, between 1580 and 1610. The sophistication and quality of this casket's designs suggest it was intended for a luxury market.

V&A: 155-1866

Mother-of-Pearl Overlay

Running time: 3:02 minutes

This film contains no sound.

This film shows the replication of a historic mother-of-pearl canopy using principally traditional techniques. The original canopy, dated 1608–09, was made in Gujarat and sent by the Mughal governor of that region to Delhi for use in the shrine of the Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya.

Video courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum

Video footage courtesy of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture

Mother-of-Pearl

Mohammed Riyaz, Mohammed Al Faiz, Mohammed Ubais, Mohammed Niyaz ud Deen, Mohammed Imran Ansari

Wooden Structure

Noor Mohammed, Haseeb, Wasim, Shakeel

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture is engaged in a major conservation project at the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in New Delhi. Inside the shrine is a canopy richly decorated with mother-of-pearl, covered in textiles. Since the canopy is both fragile and not easily visible, the Trust commissioned a replica that is now on display at the Humayun's World Heritage Site Museum. Expert craftsmen shared their skills to revive the lost technique of ornamenting wood with mother-of-pearl and lac.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture Team

Ratish Nanda, Rajpal Singh, Archana Saad Akhtar, Ujwala Menon, Anam Sami, Imran Khan, Poornima Balakrishna, Narendra Swain



Mother-of-Pearl Objects

Mother-of-pearl is formed in thin layers on the inside of certain shells found in abundance in the Gulf of Kutch off the coast of Gujarat. Craftsmen in the region not only overlaid wooden objects with the luminescent material, but also constructed vessels, trays, and other artifacts entirely from pieces of mother-of-pearl, attached with metal pins to wire frameworks. The shapes of the displayed ewer and chalice might suggest that many such objects were made for Europeans, particularly those living in the Portuguese Indian territory of Goa. However, Mughal paintings depict similar vessels, perhaps made of mother-of-pearl, indicating they were probably also sent to the imperial court.

Gujarat

Ewer, ca. 1600–25

Mother-of-pearl plaques, metal wire frame, brass pins, metal foot ring

V&A: 4258-1857

Gujarat

Salver, ca. 1570–1630

Mother-of-pearl plaques, metal wire frame, brass pins

V&A: 4282-1857





Gujarat (mounts: European, probably English)

Priming Flask, ca. 1570–1630; silver mounts ca. 1600–90, oval silver plaque ca. 1800

Mother-of-pearl plaques, brass pins, silver mounts

V&A: M.22-1964, Purchased with funds from the Major V.A. Farquharson Bequest



Gujarat

Chalice and Cover, ca. 1600–25

Mother-of-pearl plaques, metal wire frame, brass pins

V&A: 4252-1857&A



Gujarat

Altar Frontal, ca. 1600

Teak, ivory, bone, black lac

Inscribed in Portuguese: *Blessed be the Holy Sacrament*

The same craftsmen who decorated wooden items with mother-of-pearl likely also created inlays with ivory. Christians in the Portuguese colony of Goa may have commissioned this altar frontal from a Gujarati workshop. At its center are winged angels kneeling before a sacred vessel used to display the consecrated Host of Holy Communion, the sacrament mentioned in the circular inscription. The surrounding designs—male and female figures in contemporary Mughal dress, elephants, mythical animals, and scrolling floral designs—are typical of Gujarati furniture decoration around this time.

V&A: IS.15-1882



Small flasks like these held the fine gunpowder used to load, or “prime,” the flashpan of a matchlock gun. Once lit, the priming powder would detonate the main charge, firing the weapon’s projectile. Typical of luxury Mughal primers, these ivory flasks were fashioned by their carvers with elaborate decoration featuring real and mythical birds and other animals. The motifs of predators and their prey suit these flasks’ use in armed combat or hunting.

Mughal Empire

Priming Flask, ca. 1590–1600

Ivory

V&A: 382&A-1896



Mughal Empire

Priming Flask, mid-17th century

Ivory, garnets, ruby, steel

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.142a–b



Gujarat or Sindh

Fall-Front Cabinet, ca. 1600–20 (lock added later)

Teak, ivory or bone, metal handles and lock

Workshops in Gujarat and Sindh produced cabinets like this one for European merchants and other travelers in the subcontinent, as well as for domestic markets. The maker inlaid the locally sourced wood with ivory or bone to create popular motifs, including tigers and hunters flanking stylized trees filled with birds, some of the trees topped with peacocks holding snakes in their beaks.

V&A: 122-1906



Gujarat, probably Ahmadabad (mounts probably Goa)

Fall-Front Cabinet, ca. 1570–90

Teak, black lac, ivory, wood, bone, metal; mounts: gilt copper, silver

Many of the inlaid wooden cabinets and other portable items produced in Gujarat were given a final layer of black lac, an insect-derived resin particularly abundant in the region. This was then partly scraped off to reveal and highlight the ivory or mother-of-pearl decoration. The high quality and intricacy of this cabinet's inlaid decoration suggest that it was produced in a major metropolitan center, almost certainly Ahmadabad.

V&A: IS.62-1884



Gujarat

Fall-Front Cabinet, ca. 1570–1630

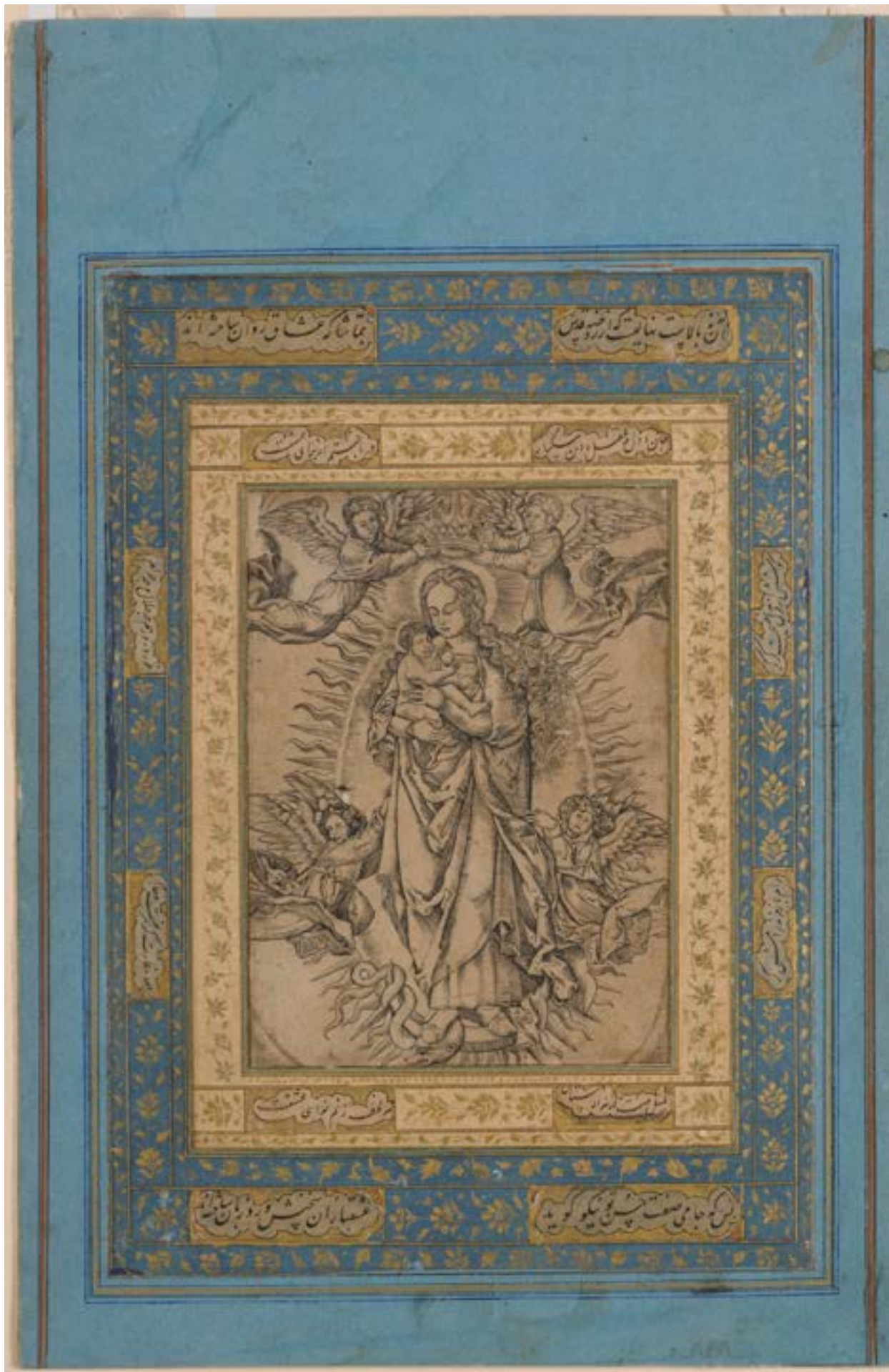
Teak, various woods, ivory

Fall-front cabinets of this design were based on a 16th-century European prototype. Used for storing documents and valuables, they were, in effect, the equivalent of the modern-day safe. Furniture makers in Gujarat and Sindh produced them in great quantities for European merchants and traders living and traveling in Asia.

V&A: 569-1890, Bequeathed by The Jodrell Collection

Mughal Painting and European Art

Perhaps the defining feature of the new painting style developed at the early Mughal court was its strong naturalism. The artists of the imperial workshops showed increasing concern with representing volume, spatial recession, and optical reality, but these pictorial conventions are practically unknown in either the Iranian or Indian painting traditions. Mughal artists learned about such illusionistic effects and the techniques used to create them from studying the many European prints, drawings, and paintings brought by foreign envoys as gifts to the imperial court. Together with Iranian elegance and Indian expressiveness, European realism was the third component of Mughal painting's stylistic synthesis conceived under Akbar and continued by his son Prince Salim, the future Emperor Jahangir.



Mughal Court Workshops, Agra or Allahabad

The Virgin of the Apocalypse, ca. 1600

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

This drawing reveals the closeness with which Mughal artists studied European source material and their eagerness to learn from its pictorial techniques. Though hand-drawn, the work carefully imitates the stippling and hatching of European engravings. Its subject is the so-called Virgin of the Apocalypse, from a description in the book of Revelation of "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet" that became conflated with the Virgin Mary and was frequently depicted in Renaissance art. The drawing most closely resembles a 15th-century print by the German artist Martin Schongauer.

National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution;
Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, S1990.57



Madonna on the Crescent, ca. 1470, Martin Schongauer
(German, ca. 1450–1491), engraving. National Gallery of Art,
Washington, Rosenwald Collection, 1943.5.50



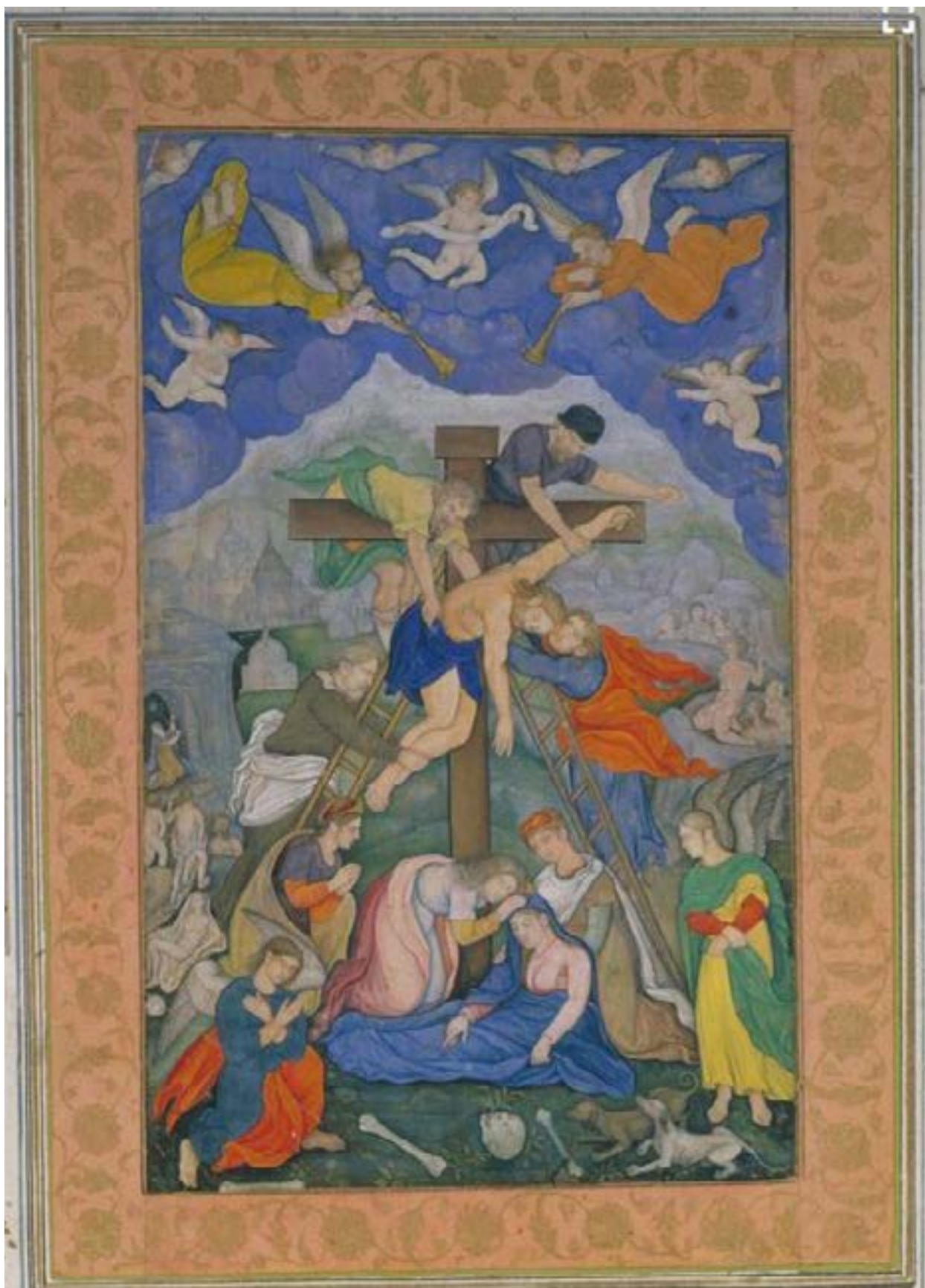
Mughal Court Workshops, Lahore
Attributed to **Basawan**

Allegorical Figure of Fortitude (?), ca. 1590

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

This small, sensitive figural study by one of Akbar's leading artists is an allegorical figure inspired by European prints. Probably drawn from a variety of sources, it demonstrates Mughal artists' creativity in imagining compositions that combined diverse elements, rather than copying foreign works indiscriminately. The inscription on the fluttering scroll in the figure's left hand is unintelligible, but her iconography most closely relates to European personifications of Fortitude. In her right hand is an oak branch symbolizing strength, and she leans against a lion, emblematic of courage. The snarling hare that has drawn the lion's attention may be an allegorical depiction of Cowardice, or perhaps it has its source in images of the Virgin's triumph over Lust, the latter symbolized by a rabbit.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase, M.81.8.8



Mughal Court Workshops, probably Lahore

Descent from the Cross, ca. 1590–1600

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

This painting was probably made for Prince Salim, Akbar's eventual heir, when he was living in the northern Mughal capital of Lahore in the 1590s. Jesuit priest Father Jerome Xavier, who was also in Lahore at this time, wrote in 1598 that the prince collected European paintings and prints and that he had seen the royal artists copying them. One image he mentions being copied was a *Descent from the Cross*, a relatively rare subject in Mughal painting. Whether or not this is the painting in question, it is from the same period. Its central composition is based on an engraving by the Italian printmaker Marcantonio Raimondi, after a lost original by Raphael.

V&A: IS.133:79/A-1964



Christ Taken Down from the Cross, ca. 1490–1534, Marcantonio Raimondi (Italian, ca. 1480–ca. 1534) after a design by Raphael (Italian, 1483–1520), print on paper. V&A: DYCE.1008.

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Mughal Court Workshops, probably Allahabad

The Sibyl Tells Caesar That the Child Jesus Will Be Greater than Him, from a *Mir'at al-quds* (Mirror of Holiness), ca. 1605

Ink, colors, gold, and silver on paper

The Jesuit priest Father Jerome Xavier spent 19 years at the Mughal court as a guest of Emperors Akbar and Jahangir. While there, he learned Persian and wrote a biography of Jesus for Akbar in the language, hoping to win the emperor's conversion to Christianity. This painting comes from an illustrated manuscript of that biography made for Crown Prince Salim. It relates a famous episode in which a pagan oracle, prophesying the future, showed Augustus Caesar a vision of Jesus and his mother. The scene was a popular one in medieval and Renaissance European art. While the Mughal painter seems not to have copied directly from such a source, he has outfitted the story's figures in his idea of contemporary European dress.

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Museum purchase, 2015.57



Mughal Court Workshops

Portrait of a European, ca. 1610–20

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

By the early 1600s, European merchants and travelers were an increasingly familiar sight in the major cities of the empire and began to be depicted in Mughal art. This painting is unlikely to be a contemporary portrait, as some details of the unidentified subject's clothing and his sword predate the period of its making. This suggests that, rather than making the painting from life, its Mughal artist was inspired by an older European portrait. The buildings in the deep, atmospheric landscape—itsself a technique borrowed from European models—are an odd mixture of Indian and Western types.

V&A: IM.386-1914



Mughal Court Workshops

European Scene, ca. 1600

Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper

The artists in Akbar and Jahangir's imperial workshops—and the emperors themselves—were endlessly fascinated by the subjects, visual effects, and techniques of the European illustrations they saw in books, prints, drawings, and paintings circulating at court. While some Mughal artists made full copies of these pictures, others combined visual quotations from several European sources to create pastiches like this tinted drawing. Set within a Mughal palace is a motley assortment of figures and objects loosely quoted from European sources or from earlier Mughal paintings that featured such references.

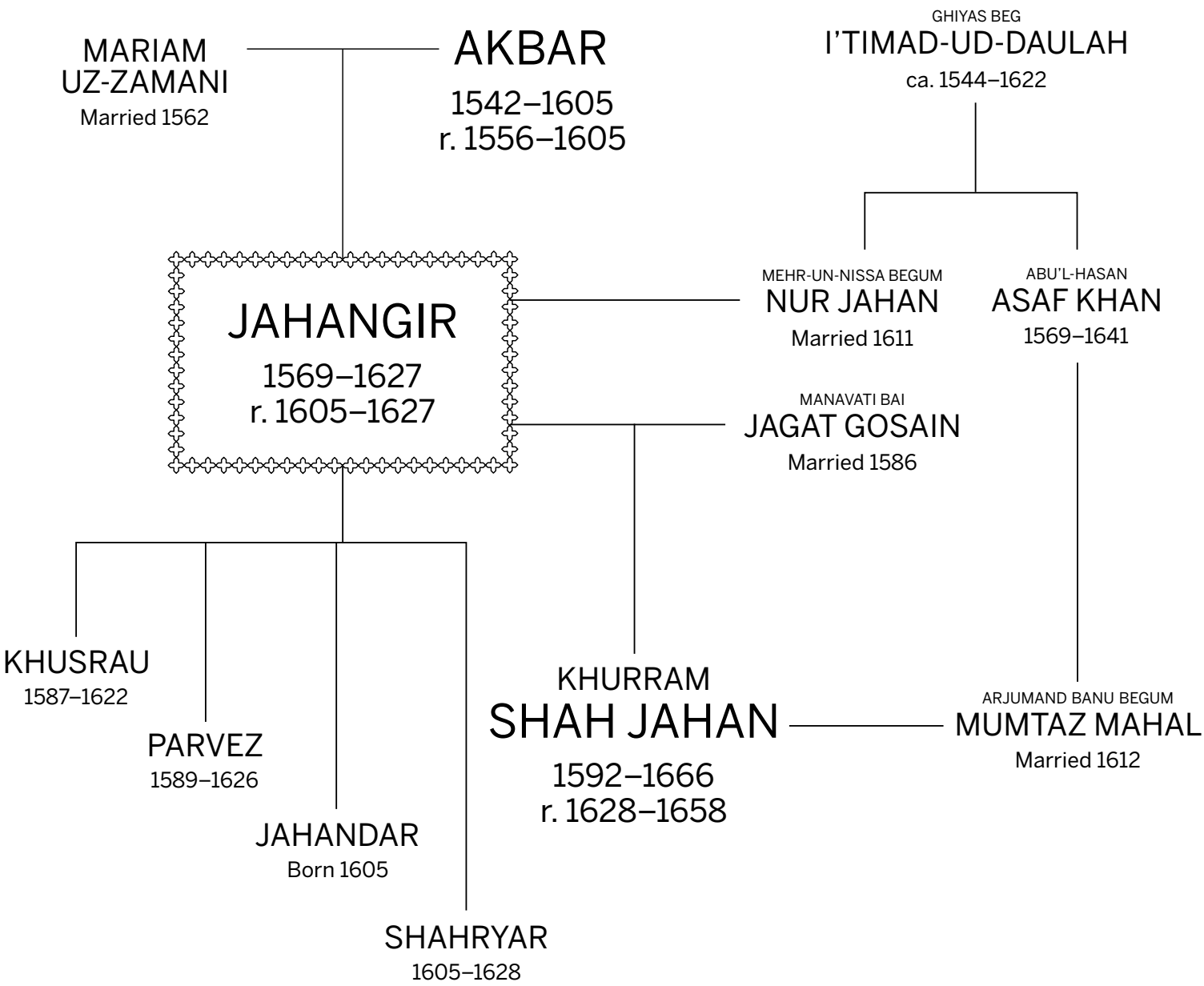
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.57

The Reign of Jahangir (1605–1627)

Jahangir, meaning “World Seizer,” was the name taken by Akbar’s son Salim upon his accession to the Mughal throne in 1605. The new emperor inherited an enormously wealthy and stable territory and continued his father's legacy of efficient administration and artistic patronage. We know from his memoirs that he paid close attention to the work of his artists, constantly encouraging innovation and refinement.

All the arts flourished under his sponsorship, but perhaps especially painting, of which Jahangir was a connoisseur. He had a keen interest in the natural world and encouraged his painters to record his observations of it with great fidelity. As the court continued to expand its global links, new influxes of artists, materials, and techniques also stimulated creativity in the royal workshops.

Along with artistic achievements, Jahangir’s reign was marked by considerable political intrigue. A lifetime of opium and alcohol use took its toll on the emperor’s health. For much of the second half of his relatively short reign, the levers of power at court were controlled less by him than by his last wife and chief consort, Nur Jahan, and her family.



World Events During Jahangir's Reign

1607

The Virginia Company establishes Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in the Americas.

Two years later, Englishman Captain William Hawkins arrives at Jahangir's court to negotiate a trade agreement on behalf of the East India Company.

1619

The arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Virginia links the Atlantic plantation system to South Asia. Indian textiles, among other currencies, are used by European merchants to buy enslaved individuals along the African coast.

1626

As St. Peter's Basilica is completed in Rome, Jahangir is finishing the tomb of his father-in-law, I'timad-ud-Daulah, the walls of which are decorated in a technique of colorful stone inlay much like that used for the Roman church.



Mughal Court Workshops, Allahabad

**Sultan Salim (Jahangir) with Bow and Arrow,
from the Salim Album, ca. 1603**

Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

The text above this delicate portrait of Akbar's son declares: "This is an image of *Padshah* (World Ruler) Salim, may God continue his kingdom forever." It was, however, almost certainly painted before Prince Salim had actually assumed the Mughal throne. From 1600 to 1604, in open rebellion against his father, Salim set up his own court in Allahabad. He styled himself ruler, an aspiration visible in this work in the golden nimbus that appears around his head. This image probably adorned the opening page of an album assembled during Salim's time in Allahabad, to which he had taken several of Akbar's leading artists. Still a young man, he is shown pursuing his lifelong passion of hunting. Wearing an archer's thumb ring on his right hand, he prepares to notch an arrow.

National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution;
Purchase — Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds,
Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and
Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.408



Mughal Court Workshops Manohar

Jahangir in a Garden, ca. 1610–15
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Seated on a low throne in a walled garden, Jahangir receives his son Prince Parviz, the pair surrounded by leading courtiers, most of whom are identified by minute Persian inscriptions. Just below and behind the young Parviz are I'timad-ud-Daulah and Asaf Khan, successive prime ministers to Jahangir. They also were, respectively, father and brother of the emperor's queen Nur Jahan, who wielded enormous influence at court. Once part of a royal album, this picture was painted by Manohar, son of the artist Basawan, who painted several works in the previous section. Born into imperial service, Manohar began his career in Akbar's painting workshop and by the time of Jahangir's reign had become one of the most important artists in the atelier.

V&A: IM.9-1925

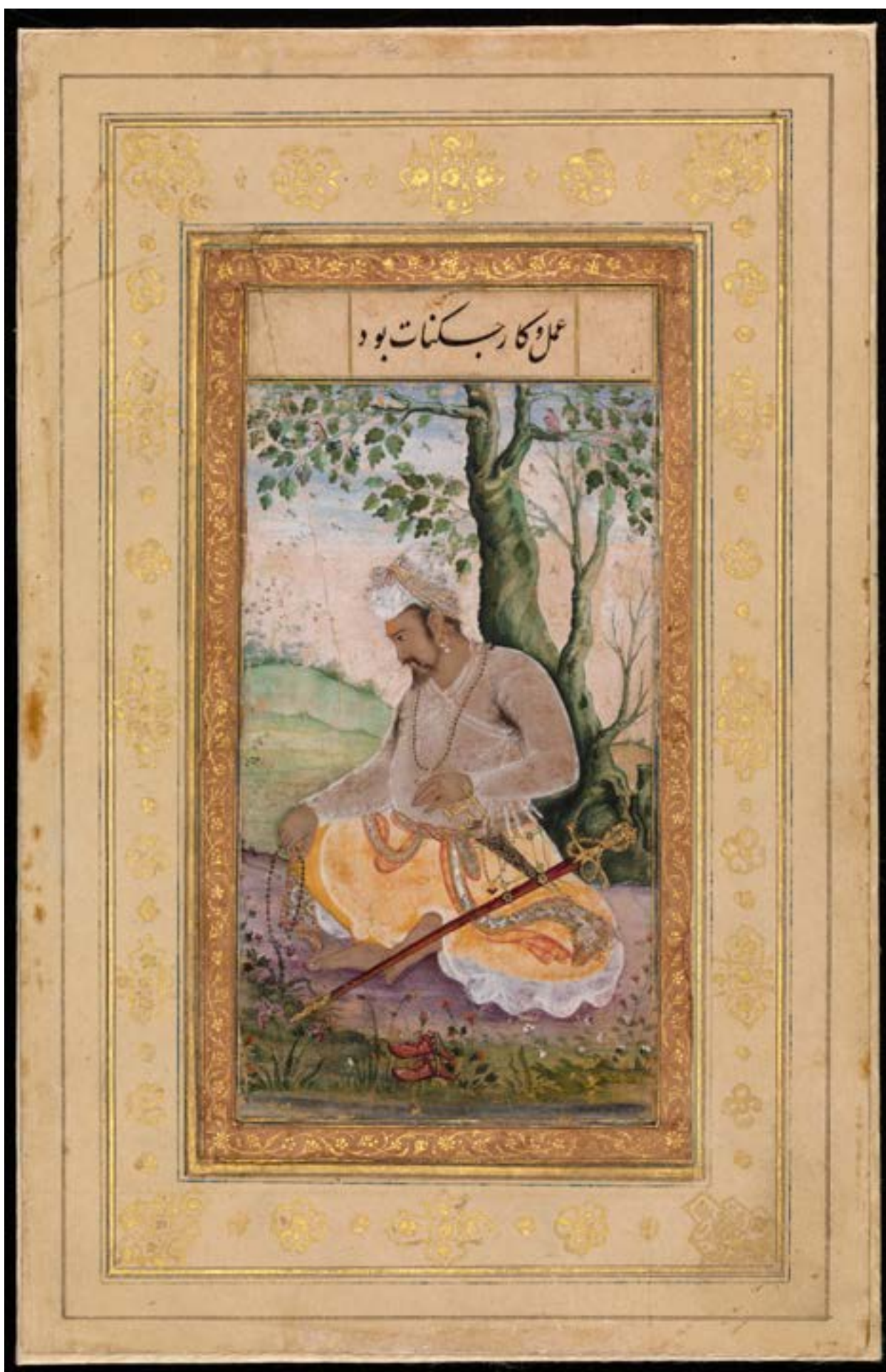


Mughal Court Workshops
Attributed to **Govardhan**

Emperor Jahangir Embracing Nur Jahan, ca. 1615–20
Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper

Jahangir married a widow named Mehr-un-Nissa in 1611, the same year he elevated her father to the position of prime minister. The emperor would give his new wife the name *Nur Jahan* (Light of the World). As he grew gradually less interested in running the routine affairs of government than in hunting, drinking, and delighting in his artists' creations, she would become the real power behind the throne. Despite her importance, though, Nur Jahan rarely appears in court portraits. Here she is shown embracing Jahangir, staring intently into his eyes. His gaze, however, does not quite meet hers. His slightly dulled focus might be attributed to the empty wine cup he holds behind her back, ready to be refilled by a nearby servant.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase, M.83.1.6



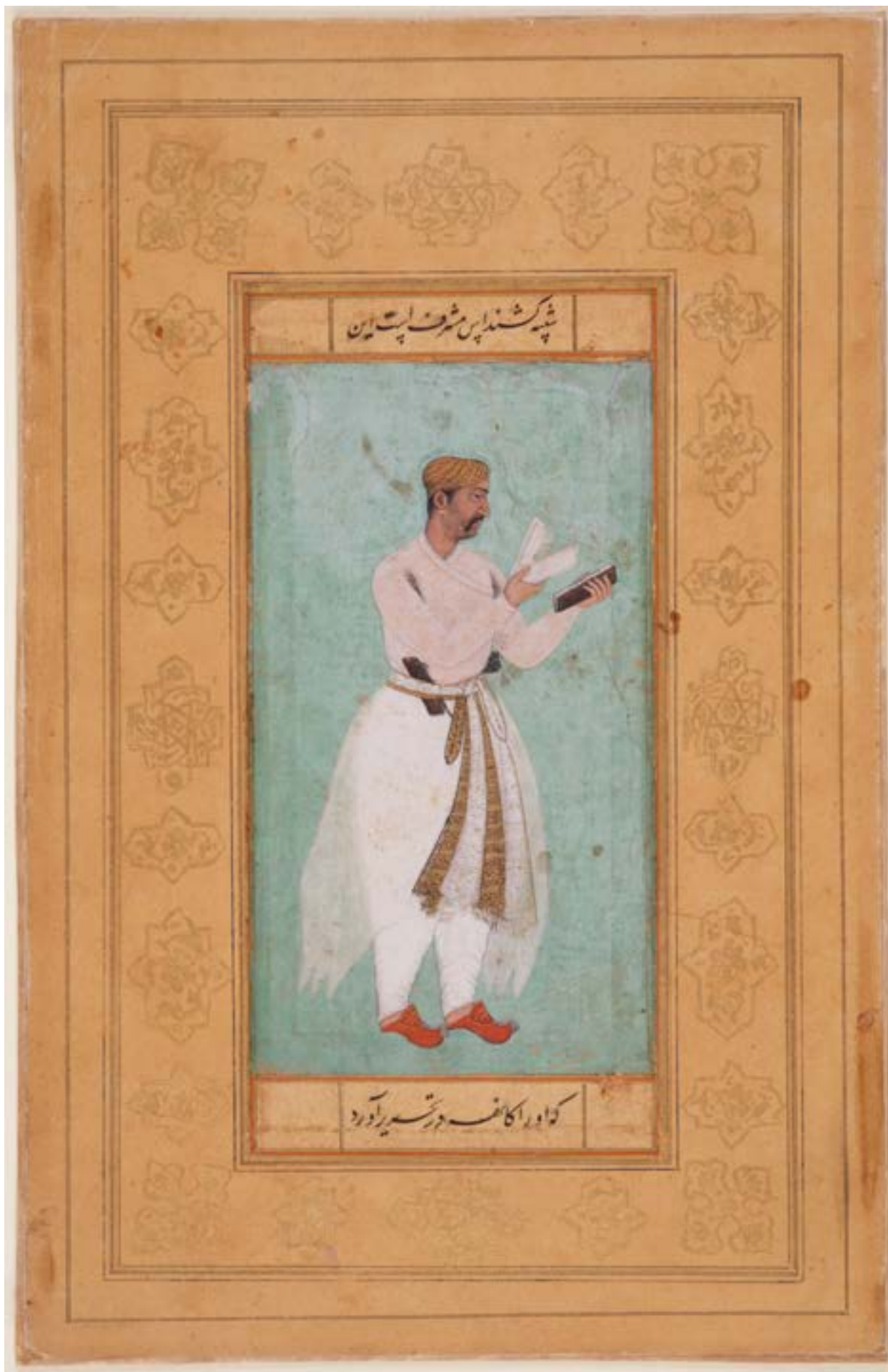
Mughal Court Workshops
Jagannath

A Nobleman with Prayer Beads Beneath a Tree,
from the Salim Album, painting ca. 1595–1602,
borders ca. 1600–05

Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

Whereas Akbar commissioned many grand illustrated manuscripts, Jahangir preferred royal albums, into which individual paintings—along with Persian calligraphies and European prints—were gathered. Three folios from one of the earliest albums he sponsored, created while he was still a prince and thus known as the *Salim Album*, are in this gallery. This delicate picture of a courtier seated beneath a tree was painted, the inscription indicates, by Jagannath, a well-known artist from Akbar's atelier. He borrows from western pictorial ideas: the composition was almost certainly derived from a European source, multiple planes are used to create a sense of spatial recession, and his skillful use of subtle washes and shading recalls European oil painting.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.60



Mughal Court Workshops
Kanha

Portrait of Kishan Das Tunwar, from the Salim Album, painting ca. 1590–1600, borders ca. 1600–05
Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper

Many paintings in the intimately scaled *Salim Album* are of identifiable courtiers and religious figures. The inscription above this portrait names its subject as Kishan Das Tunwar, accountant of the imperial elephant and horse stables under both Akbar and Jahangir. The solid green ground is free of distractions from the courtier's meticulously observed figure and distinctive facial features. He studies pages from a manuscript in his hands, an account book and writing implements tucked into his sash. The lower inscription names the work's painter as Kanha, an important artist during Akbar's reign. Not all pictures included in Mughal albums were new commissions. Both the painting's style and the clothing of its subject suggest that this portrait could be slightly older than the other two *Salim Album* paintings in this gallery.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.59



Mughal Court Workshops (borders: Uzbekistan)
Attributed to **Abu'l Hasan**

Emperor Jahangir Triumphant Over Poverty,

painting ca. 1620–25; borders 16th century

Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper

Inspired by the iconography and mythology of divinity and sovereignty in European prints, Jahangir commissioned a series of allegorical portraits that extol his imperial authority and virtue. The inscription below the two angels hovering with a crown explains that Jahangir, with his arrow of generosity, destroyed poverty—personified as an emaciated old man—and with his justice and charity laid the foundation for a new world. The globe on which he stands, featuring a lion lying peacefully with a lamb, symbolizes that new world order's harmony. The fringed chain of bells stretching from heaven to earth demonstrates the divine source of Jahangir's righteousness. It is an allusion to the "chain of justice" that hung from the imperial palace, which any subject suffering from injustice could ring to appeal directly to the emperor.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase, M.75.4.28



Mughal Court Workshops, Lahore
Qa'im Muhammad ibn 'Isa ibn Allahdad Asturlabi
Lahuri Humayuni

Celestial Globe, 1627

Lead-rich copper alloy, silver

Celestial globes show the apparent positions of the stars in the sky. Dating to the final year of Jahangir's rule, this hollow, seamless globe was cast in a single piece from a wax model. It is engraved with over 1,000 stars and 48 constellations inherited from Greek and Roman astronomy. Its inscription names its maker as Qa'im Muhammad from Lahore, the northern Mughal capital. His family was known for making celestial globes and other astronomical tools from bronze for several generations, perhaps beginning during Emperor Humayun's reign.

V&A: M.828-1928

Look, Explore, Connect . . . This is no ordinary globe! Look closely—we don't see the Earth's continents. Instead, do you see animals, human figures, and writing? This is a celestial globe, a 3D map of the stars and constellations. During this period, Jahangir was fascinated by astronomy. He collected objects similar to this one and supported astronomers studying the sky to better understand the world around them.

- Do we study or explore space today?
- What can the study of space tell us? How can it help us on Earth?



An allegorical portrait, similar in composition to the one to the right, shows Jahangir standing on a terrestrial globe.

Jahangir Shooting the Head of Malik Ambar, from the *Minto Album*, ca. 1616–18, Abu'l Hasan (active 1600–1630), opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library: In 07A.15, Chester Beatty, Dublin, CC BY- 4.0



Mughal Court Workshops
Attributed to **Sa'ida Gilani**

Jahangir's Wine Cup, 1613

Nephrite jade

Nephrite jade, from Khotan in far-western China, was an extremely rare and prized commodity at the Mughal court. This wine cup, made for Jahangir in the eighth year of his reign, is inscribed with Persian verses reading:

*Through the world-conquering Shah the world
found order, our age was filled with light by the
sun rays of his justice. By the reflection of this
wine of spinel color in it, may the jade bowl be
forever like a ruby.*

These lines were probably written—and the cup made—by Sa'ida Gilani, the Iranian superintendent of the imperial goldsmiths, renowned for his skill in working hardstones.

V&A: IM.152-1924



Mughal Court Workshops

Rock Crystal Wine Bowl, ca. 1620

Rock crystal, gold, rubies, emeralds, glass, paint

This wine bowl, carved from a large piece of rock crystal, is decorated with precious stones and colored glass set in the traditional Indian *kundan* technique. The backs of the gold mounts securing some of the stones are decorated with additional insets, some of which have minute faces painted on them.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 208 HS



Mughal Court Workshops

Pendant, ca. 1610–20

Nephrite jade, rubies, emeralds, gold

Inscribed on the back with a Qur'anic verse

This amulet—bejeweled using the *kundan* technique of setting precious stones with tiny strips of gold—would have been the central pendant of a necklace. Its decoration includes crowned hoopoes, birds that in Persian literature were associated with Solomon, with whom the Mughal emperors were often compared. The inclusion of these birds, as well as the pendant's exceptional quality, suggests that it may have been made for Jahangir.

V&A: 02535(IS)



Mughal Court Workshops

Thumb Ring, ca. 1650

Nephrite jade, emeralds, rubies, gold

As nephrite jade became available in greater quantities via trade routes to Khotan through Kashmir and Tibet, the fashion for jeweled jade objects introduced in Jahangir's reign continued under his successors. Originally used in archery, thumb rings made of precious materials became emblems of royalty at the Mughal court. The rubies and emeralds set into this ring's jade surface are carved to resemble petals and leaves.

V&A: 02522 (IS)



Mughal Court Workshops

Agate Cup, ca. 1610–20

Agate

The Iran-Zamin Collection: HS1



Mughal Court Workshops

Locket from a Scabbard of a Katar, ca. 1615–20

Gold, diamonds, rubies, emeralds

A locket is a wide, often triangular, metal fitting at a scabbard's opening. This bejeweled example once ornamented the sheath of a punch dagger (*katar*), a short thrusting knife commonly worn tucked into a Mughal courtier's waist sash. Whereas many of its rubies and emeralds have been meticulously shaped to create an intricate floral composition, the diamonds are—in characteristically Mughal fashion—left as large as possible. Some are essentially in their natural crystalline form, while the largest stones are cut into broad facets. Their asymmetry is the product of a desire to retain the maximum size.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 19 SH



Mughal Court Workshops

Jeweled Dagger and Scabbard, ca. 1610–20

Hilt: gold, iron, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, glass, ivory, agate; blade: watered steel; scabbard: wood, gold, rubies, emeralds, diamonds

Supremely skilled goldsmiths shaped more than 2,000 precious stones with meticulous care and set them into the hilt and scabbard of this dagger using highly refined gold (*kundan*). The emeralds and rubies are all perfectly matched in color, and the knuckle guard's diamonds, of natural crystalline form, diminish evenly in size towards its horse-head end. This spectacular weapon may be one that Jahangir described commissioning in 1619, writing, "It is so fine that I don't want to be separated from it for an instant. It is more valuable to me than all the expensive gems in the treasury."

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 25 J a, b

Kundan Setting

Running time: 2:23 minutes

Mughal goldsmiths used layers of highly refined, extremely soft gold (kundan) to set precious stones into jewelry and other objects. This film shows this process used in making an earring.

Video courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_HluttcJcw&t=1s

Treasury of the World

Jahangir's court was one of worldly sophistication, globally connected politically and commercially. His foreign policy included relations with the Safavids of Persia and the Ottoman Empire, as well as with the English East India Company. Precious materials and luxury goods from every corner of the world flowed into the Mughal domains, from Chinese porcelains, to Central Asian jades, to emeralds and silver from South America.

The Mughals' riches were legendary. Gold and jeweled objects were offered as gifts at times of celebration or as tribute. Textiles embroidered with gilt threads and luxurious carpets filled the royal palaces and tents. The court's dazzling appearance inspired Sir Thomas Roe, England's ambassador to Jahangir, to describe it in a 1616 letter to the future King Charles I as "the treasury of the world."



Jingdezhen, China
Ming dynasty

Dish, ca. 1488–1505
Porcelain, yellow glazed

Yellow-glazed wares were made in China from the 1460s until the 1800s. Originally intended for the exclusive use of the Ming emperors, some had reached Iran by the early 1600s. The Safavid ruler Shah Abbas I may have sent this dish to Jahangir in one of their frequent exchanges of rare artifacts. Along with its Ming-dynasty makers' marks, it is engraved on the back with Jahangir's titles, the date AH 1021 (1612–13), and a Mughal inventory inscription recording its exact weight.

V&A: 551-1878



Jingdezhen, China
Yuan dynasty

Dish with Peacock and Grape Vines, ca. 1350

Porcelain painted in underglaze blue

During the period of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), Chinese potters in Jingdezhen began to decorate the local white porcelain in cobalt blue. Large dishes such as this one were made for export to Iran, where the cobalt used for the underglaze painting originated. These exotic wares were also prized at the Mughal court and entered the royal collections. In addition to being beautiful and rare, they constituted a tangible link between the Mughal emperors and their Mongol ancestors.

V&A: C.24-1968



Mughal Empire

Rosewater Sprinkler, ca. 1630–60

Gilt silver

Jahangir's memoirs include descriptions of court gatherings where rosewater was dispensed from opulent sprinklers to scent the events. The two examples in this vitrine, intricately decorated with floral and animal motifs, date to the 17th century, when silver from Spanish colonial mines in the Americas was flowing around the world. The sprinkler on the left may have been brought to England by William Fielding, 1st Earl of Denbigh, who was in India from 1631 to 1632. His descendant's coat of arms is engraved on the base.

V&A: IS.46-1988, Gift in memory of Michael Jones



Detail of the engraved coat of arms of William Fielding's descendant, William, 2nd Earl of Desmond and 3rd Earl of Denbigh (1640–1685). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Mughal Court Workshops

Casket for a Miniature Qur'an, ca. 1615–25

Silver, enamel

This small box, made to hold a miniature Qur'an, is one of the earliest known examples of Mughal enameling. Its flowering plants and mythical and real animals are similar to those in the borders of Jahangir-period manuscripts. Its Arabic inscriptions include the Fatiha (fundamental profession of faith), invocations to God, a Qur'anic verse, and prayers.

The Bashir Mohamed Family Collection



Detail of the casket interior.

Courtesy of Shahnaz Gallery, photographer David Brunetti



Mughal Empire

Rosewater Sprinkler, ca. 1625–50

Silver alloy

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 89.80a–b



Mughal Court Workshops, probably Lahore

Floral Carpet, ca. 1610–25

Cotton warp and weft, wool pile

Large carpets made in the imperial workshops covered the floors of royal palaces and the mansions of the elite across the empire. They were also laid out within the traveling court's encampments. Inspired by Persian models, carpets like this one, with scrolling vine and blossom patterns, gained popularity in the period of Jahangir's reign as carpets with figural imagery increasingly fell from favor. Whereas Persian carpets usually had a single, fully symmetrical design, Indian examples, like this one, were often composed of repeated pattern units, a practice likely borrowed from the subcontinent's long tradition of woven textile production. Based on reports of East India Company agents and an important, well documented example in England, the premier production center for carpets in this period seems to have been the northern Mughal capital of Lahore.

Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Edsel B. Ford, 29.242



Probably Lahore

Four Tiles from a Mosque, 1615–16

Glazed earthenware

Buildings in the empire's northern provinces were made of brick, often embellished with glazed tiles. These fragmentary Persian inscriptions include a reference to the "Pole of the World," meaning the head of a Sufi order. Other inscriptions from the same set of tiles refer to a mosque. In 1615 or 1616, the emperor provided funds for the Sufi Mir Khalilullah to build a mosque in Lahore, and it seems likely these tiles were made for it.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: AC2 a, b, c, d



Mughal Court Workshops
Calligraphy by 'Abd al-Rahim

Calligraphic Album Page, 1606–07

Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

Calligraphy is one of the Islamic world's most refined and esteemed art forms. Once part of a Mughal album, this calligraphic panel invoking Allah and the Prophet Muhammad was penned by 'Abd al-Rahim, who left his native Iran at an early age and was employed by both Akbar and Jahangir. His signature at the lower left includes the title bestowed on him by the latter: '*Anbarin Qalam* (Ambergris Pen). The inscription in the small rectangle at the left states that the calligraphy was written in Lahore in AH 1015, equivalent to 1606–07. Given the richness of its decoration, it is highly likely that the page was made for the emperor.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 82.128



Lahore

Candlestick, 1617–18

Copper alloy, black compound

So many facets of the Mughal court—political, cultural, and artistic—reflected an Iranian cultural heritage. This candlestick in the elegant pillar form distinctive of Safavid Iran was made in the northern Mughal capital of Lahore, a major center of metalworking during Jahangir's reign. One of its inscriptions names its patron as Mirza Haidar al-Husaini, great-grandson of the second Safavid ruler, Shah Tahmasp. Mirza Haidar resided at the Mughal court and was a member of Jahangir's closest circle. Like its form, the candlestick's inscriptions—verses from 13th-century Persian poetry—are inspired by Iranian tradition, but some of its decorative motifs are recognizably Indian.

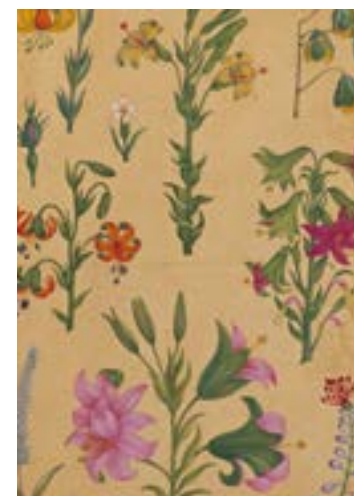
The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW13

Antwerp, Belgium
Adriaen Collaert
Published by **Philips Galle**

Lilies, Roses, and Columbine, from a Florilegium,
ca. 1587–89
Engravings on paper

European imagery provided a continual source of inspiration to the artists of the Mughal ateliers. Engravings by the Flemish designer and printmaker Adriaen Collaert, including botanically accurate flower studies from his *Florilegium* (Collection of Flowers), had reached the Mughal court by the early 1600s. Jahangir's artists both copied them exactly and creatively adapted them in designs for architectural decoration and manuscript illumination.

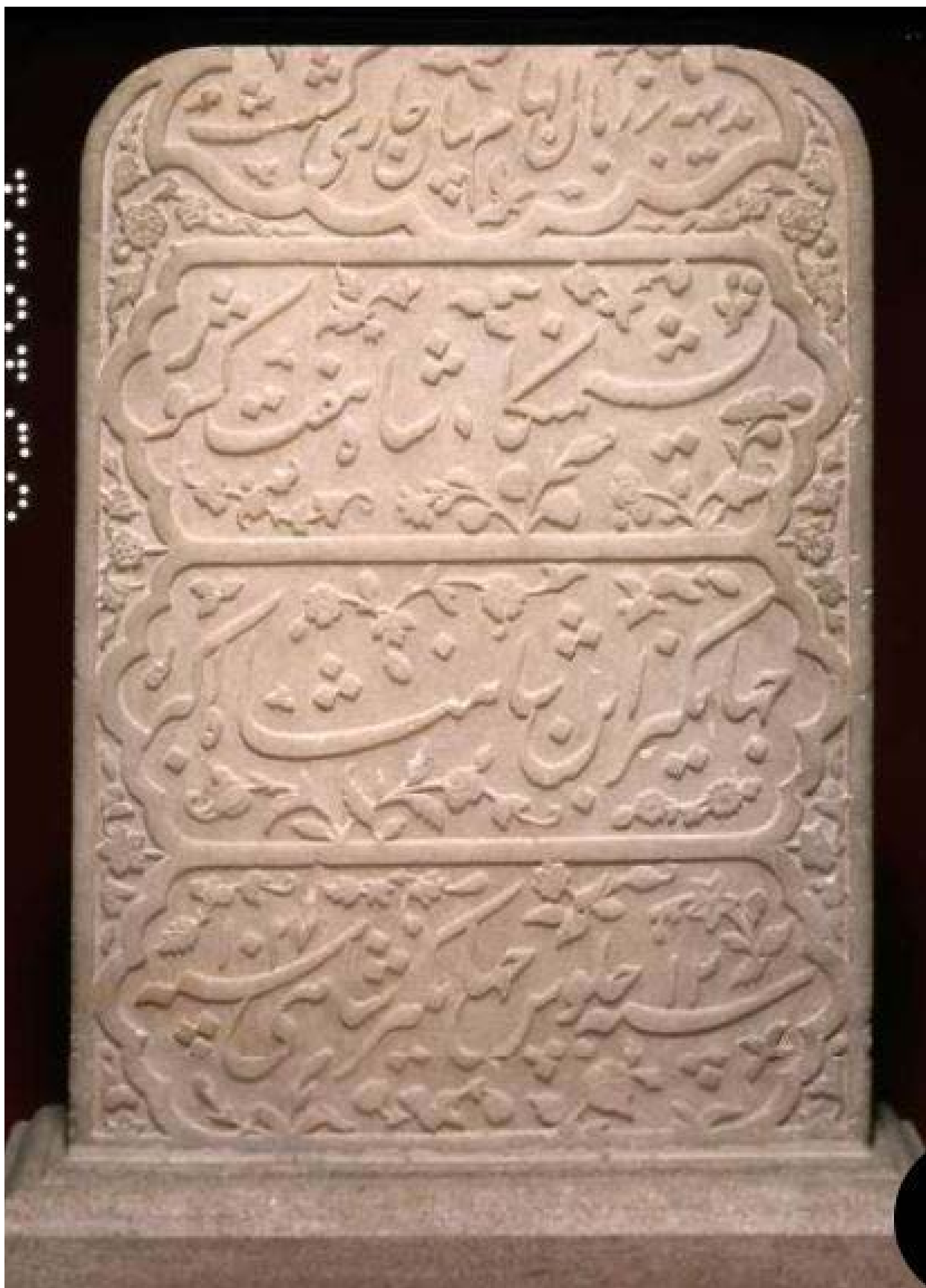
V&A: E.526, 524, 535-1991



Copy of Collaert's study of lilies (at the top of the frame) by the Mughal artist Mansur.

From the *Gulshan Album*, ca. 1610, Mansur (active ca. 1589–1626), opaque watercolor on paper. Golestan Palace Library, Tehran, Ms 1663, folio 103





Ahmadabad

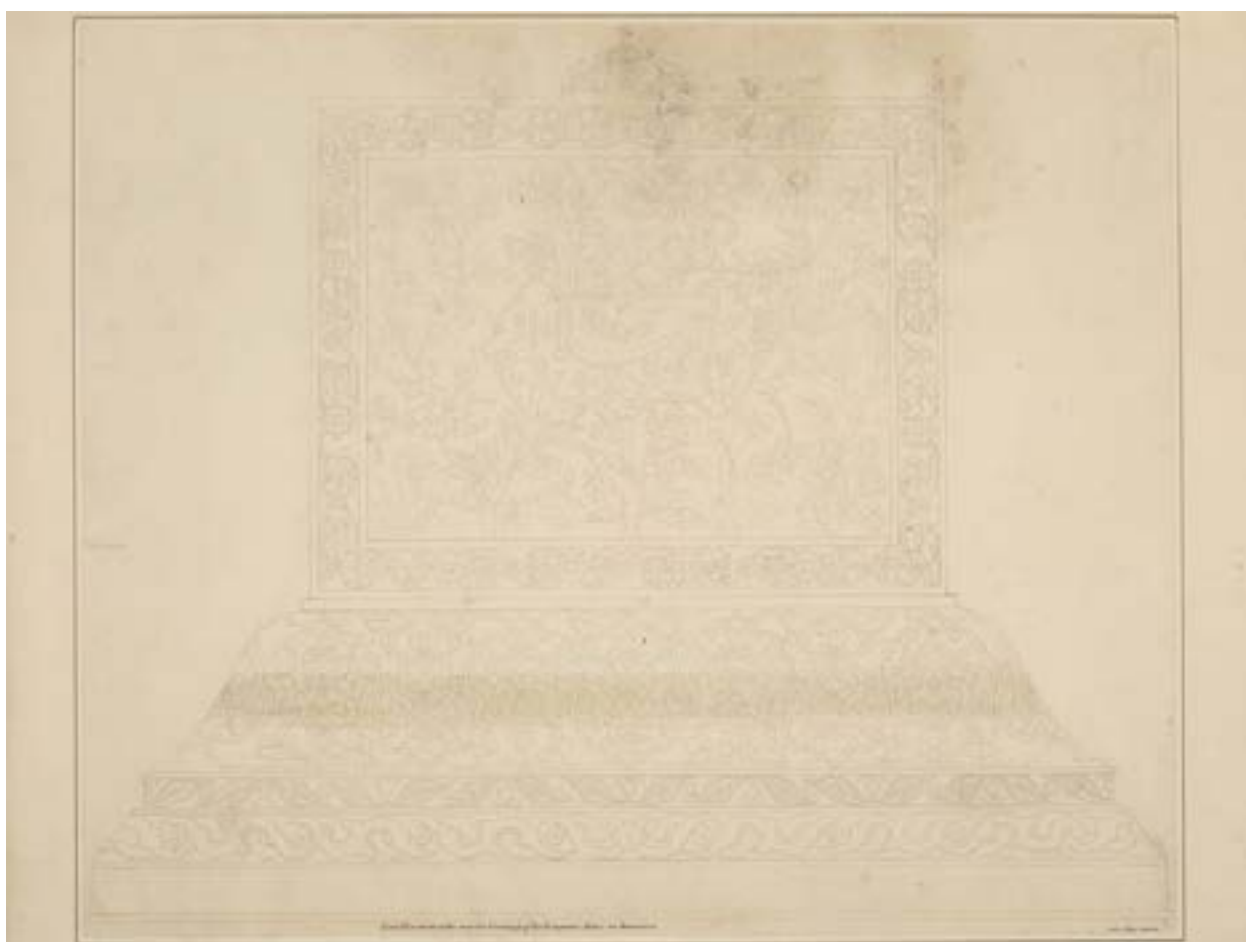
Panel Commissioned by Jahangir for Shah Jahan's Garden, 1618

Marble

In 1617, upon his return from a successful military campaign, Jahangir's son Prince Khurram was given the title *Shah Jahan* (King of the World). In the following year, during a visit to Shah Jahan's palace in Ahmadabad, Gujarat, Jahangir commissioned this marble panel to be made for his son's garden. In his memoirs, the emperor describes ordering it to be fixed to a tree behind a bench, so that one could sit and lean against it. The Persian couplet Jahangir composed and had carved into it would have reminded his son who was still in charge:

*Seat of the king of the seven climes, Jahangir,
son of Akbar, the King of Kings.*

Society of Antiquaries of London: LDSAL 944



Agra

**Elevation of the End Panel of the Cenotaph
in Akbar's Tomb, 1809–22**

Watercolor on European paper

Following Akbar's death in 1605, Jahangir commissioned his tomb. The massive, multi-story monument in Sikandra, outside Agra, took nearly a decade to complete. This 19th-century drawing depicts one end of the white-marble cenotaph on the tomb's uppermost level that indicates the location of Akbar's actual grave far below. Surrounding the central Arabic inscription—praising God while subtly evoking Akbar's name—are flowers carved in low relief. Mughal designers often copied such floral motifs from European botanical illustrations like those in the engravings on the wall to the left.

V&A: IM.190-1920, Given by Colonel Ramsay W. Phipps

The Wine Banquet

Although orthodox Islamic teachings forbade the consumption of alcohol, drinking wine was an important part of Mughal culture. An integral part of feasting—a custom inherited from their Timurid ancestors and influenced, as were so many Mughal traditions, by Iranian models—wine was at the center of social and political exchanges in which alliances were formed, loyalties expressed, and friendships fostered.

Descriptions of feasts and wine parties abound in Mughal textual and visual records. The earliest surviving Mughal painting, in fact, depicts a grand banquet organized by Akbar's father, Humayun, to commemorate his reconquest of India after returning from Iran. Banqueting was celebratory, but also political. With it, a ruler projected himself as provider and protector, and rivals—invited to eat and drink—were assimilated.

Jahangir is particularly remembered for his love of wine. His memoirs are filled with descriptions of wine parties he hosted, whether at his palaces or as he moved in his frequent travels. Bound by elaborate rules of etiquette, such banquets were not only arranged by the emperor to socialize with members of the nobility but also organized by other elites in honor of the ruler and their peers.



Mughal Court Workshops
Attributed to **Bishandas**

A Prince, Perhaps Parviz, with a Female Companion and Attendants, ca. 1605–10

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Formal wine banquets could take the form of expansive political events or far more intimate affairs like this one. Set outdoors—as prescribed by the *Mirzanama*, a 17th-century text describing the etiquette and activities of elite Mughal gentlemen—the party is hosted by a prince who may be Jahangir’s second son, Parviz. Seated in a covered garden pavilion, he takes a jeweled wine cup from a golden tray offered by his companion as a second cup is prepared below. Three female musicians serenade the couple, while additional servants bear jasmine garlands and a long-handled flywhisk. Paintings like this illustrate not only the Mughal court’s social customs, but also its material richness, from luxurious costumes and carpets, to opulent jewelry and gem-encrusted objects, to imported Chinese blue-and-white porcelains.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2025.118



Detail of *Jahangir in a Garden* (on view in the previous gallery), showing Prince Parviz.

Jahangir in a Garden (detail), ca. 1610–15, Manohar (active ca. 1582–1624), opaque watercolor and gold on paper. V&A: IM.9-1925. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Mughal Court Workshops

Wine Cup in the Shape of a Turban Gourd, 1625–50
Nephrite

This elegant bowl—inscribed in Persian along its rim, “Drink at the command of God”—is a vessel of the sort only those at the apex of Mughal society might possess. Conceived in the shape of a gourd cut in half, its workmanship, like many 17th-century Mughal jades, is extremely fine. Fashioning such delicate objects from hard nephrite was a difficult feat. The cup’s walls, between its well-defined ribs, are thinly crafted, allowing light to pass through its translucent body. Five overlapping leaves on its base act as a support.

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage Collection, B6oJ485



The Lahore School of Metalwork and the Wine Banquet
Metalwork illustrates the internationalism of the Mughal court and also helps to document the positions in society of its patrons. The northern Mughal capital of Lahore was a major center of metalworking, drawing on the expertise of both locally born metalworkers and immigrant Iranian masters. In Jahangir's reign, Lahori workshops made objects in the style of Safavid Iran but with distinctively Mughal details. The Persian verses inscribed on many of them celebrate wine, indicating that they were destined for formal wine banquets, a tradition also borrowed from Iran.

Lahore

Tray for a Wine Banquet, ca. 1600–10

Tinned copper

Among the many Iranian-style vessel types made in Lahore during the early years of Jahangir's reign were circular trays (*tabaq*). The inscriptions on this tray name its patron as Hatam, who was a notable Uzbek at Jahangir's Mughal court. The verses salute the emperor, who apparently was expected as a guest of honor at the banquet for which the vessel was intended. Hatam is also called a *murid* (disciple) of Jahangir, indicating that he belonged to the emperor's innermost circle.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW26



Mughal Empire, possibly Lahore

Decanter with Cover, ca. 1600

Bronze

Elegant decanters with spherical bodies and long, trumpet-shaped necks were used at banquets for pouring wine and other beverages. This covered example borrows its form from 13th-century eastern Iranian vessels.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW22

Mughal Empire, possibly Lahore

Decanter, ca. 1600

Bronze

While the general form of this decanter is derived from Iranian vessels, its lively twisted ribbing is the handiwork of a master Indian craftsman.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW23



Probably Lahore

Basin for Rinsing Fingers at a Wine Banquet,
ca. 1580–1600

Bronze, black compound

This basin (*lagan*) used for rinsing fingers at a wine banquet closely follows a Safavid model but is decorated with a Mughal-style roundel on the inside. An inscription on the side records that Abdullah Khan Uzbek, mentioned by Jahangir in his memoirs in 1606, was entrusted with transferring the basin to a shrine, in keeping with the wishes of an unnamed Safavid prince residing at the Mughal court.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW18



Probably Lahore

Miniature Ewer of Molla Borhan, early 17th century
Bronze

Metalwork reflects the various communities and traditions that coexisted and interacted in the Mughal Empire. The body of this small ewer relates to pre-Mughal Indian forms, while the profile of its mouth copies those of Safavid wine-pouring vessels of the early 1600s. A skilled calligrapher added the owner's name, Molla Borhan, now nearly erased by wear.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW25



Lahore

Wine Bowl, ca. 1610–20

Copper alloy, black compound

The upper border of this bowl (*badiyeh*) includes Persian couplets from a famous ode celebrating wine by the 14th-century Iranian poet Hafez that begins:

Cupbearer, illuminate our cup with the light of wine. Musician, say that the doings of the world complied with our wishes. We have seen the reflection of the Visage of the Beloved [God]. O you unaware of the delight of our drinking wine.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW19



Lahore

Wine Bowl, 1617

Tinned copper alloy, black compound

The most characteristic model of Safavid wine bowl, the *badiyeh*, with a deep hemispherical form and high sinuous sides, was made in large numbers in the Mughal domains. Khwajah Muhammad Sadiq, for whom this example was made in Jahangir's reign, was still at court following Shah Jahan's accession. In 1628, the emperor gave him a robe of honor and a jeweled dagger, indicating his high status.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW20



Mughal Empire

Footed Bowl, 17th century

Tinned copper alloy, black compound

So close is much 17th-century Mughal metalware to Persian examples that it is often hard to distinguish between them. Such is the case with this vessel, which closely follows the form of an Eastern Iranian wine bowl and is covered in elegant Safavid-inspired decoration including cartouches framing Persian inscriptions. Its recessed areas of decoration were originally inlaid with a black material, most of which is now lost, and its copper body was coated with a thin layer of tin, probably in the belief that this would make it safer for use in banqueting.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund, 90.123



Lahore

Footed Wine Basin, ca. 1600–10

Tinned copper, black compound, silvered in the late 19th century

This basin reproduces the large, footed bowls (*tas-e-sharab*) of Safavid Iran that were displayed at the center of banquet tables and used for holding wine, ready to be ladled into smaller drinking vessels. Its engraved decoration, however, is very Mughal, including lotus blossoms and pseudo-European buildings comparable to motifs in contemporary Indian painting. Its inscriptions identify its patron as Kazem, a member of the vast Iranian expatriate community in the Mughal Empire.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW1



Mughal Court Workshops

Canopy, ca. 1610–15

Silk velvet backed with cotton, gilt-silver thread embroidery

Opulent gold-embroidered textiles were signifiers of power, wealth, and prestige at the Mughal court. Canopies lined with such luxurious fabrics and set above the head of the ruler emphasized his role as “the Shadow of God” on earth. This example, densely embroidered with single strands of gold-wrapped silk thread (*zardozi*), is a rare survivor from Jahangir's reign. Its decorative vocabulary relates to architectural ornamentation of the period and demonstrates the close coordination between court-workshop artisans working in different media.

The Bashir Mohamed Family Collection

Mughal Court Workshops
Attributed to **Mansur**

Zebra, ca. 1621

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Novel animals had been offered as diplomatic gifts in Asia, Africa, and Europe for centuries. Jahangir was especially captivated by the arrival at court of such oddities. He describes in his memoirs a gift in March 1621 of a zebra: "It was so strange some thought it might have been painted, but after inspection it was clear that that was how God had made it." A painting by Mansur, reproduced below, is inscribed in Jahangir's hand detailing how the zebra was brought from Ethiopia. This portrait, presumably also by Mansur, may show the same animal from the other side.

Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and by contribution, 14.659



A Zebra, 1621, Mansur (active ca. 1589–1626), opaque watercolor and gold on paper. V&A: IM.23-1925. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Mughal Court Workshops
Mansur

A North American Turkey Cock, ca. 1612

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

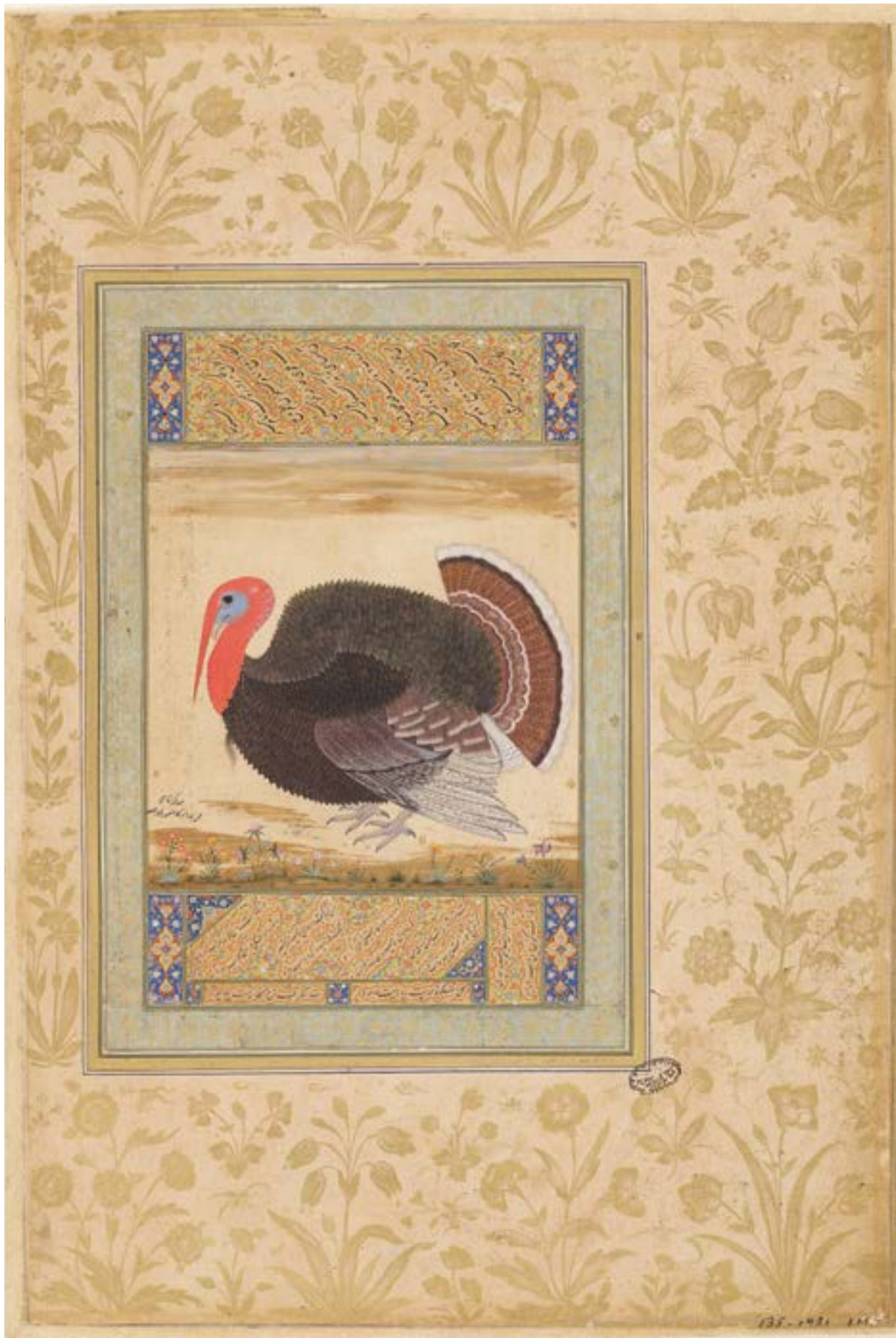
The presence of exotic animals at the Mughal court speaks to the international networks of trade that converged on the empire. In 1612, a consignment of unusual animals from Portuguese Goa arrived at Agra via the west-coast port city of Khambhat, in Gujarat. A delighted Jahangir recorded in his memoirs: “Since these animals looked so extremely strange to me, I both wrote of them and ordered the artists to draw their likenesses, so that the astonishment one has at hearing of them would increase by seeing them.” One of these animals, a North American turkey, was painted by the leading artist Mansur.

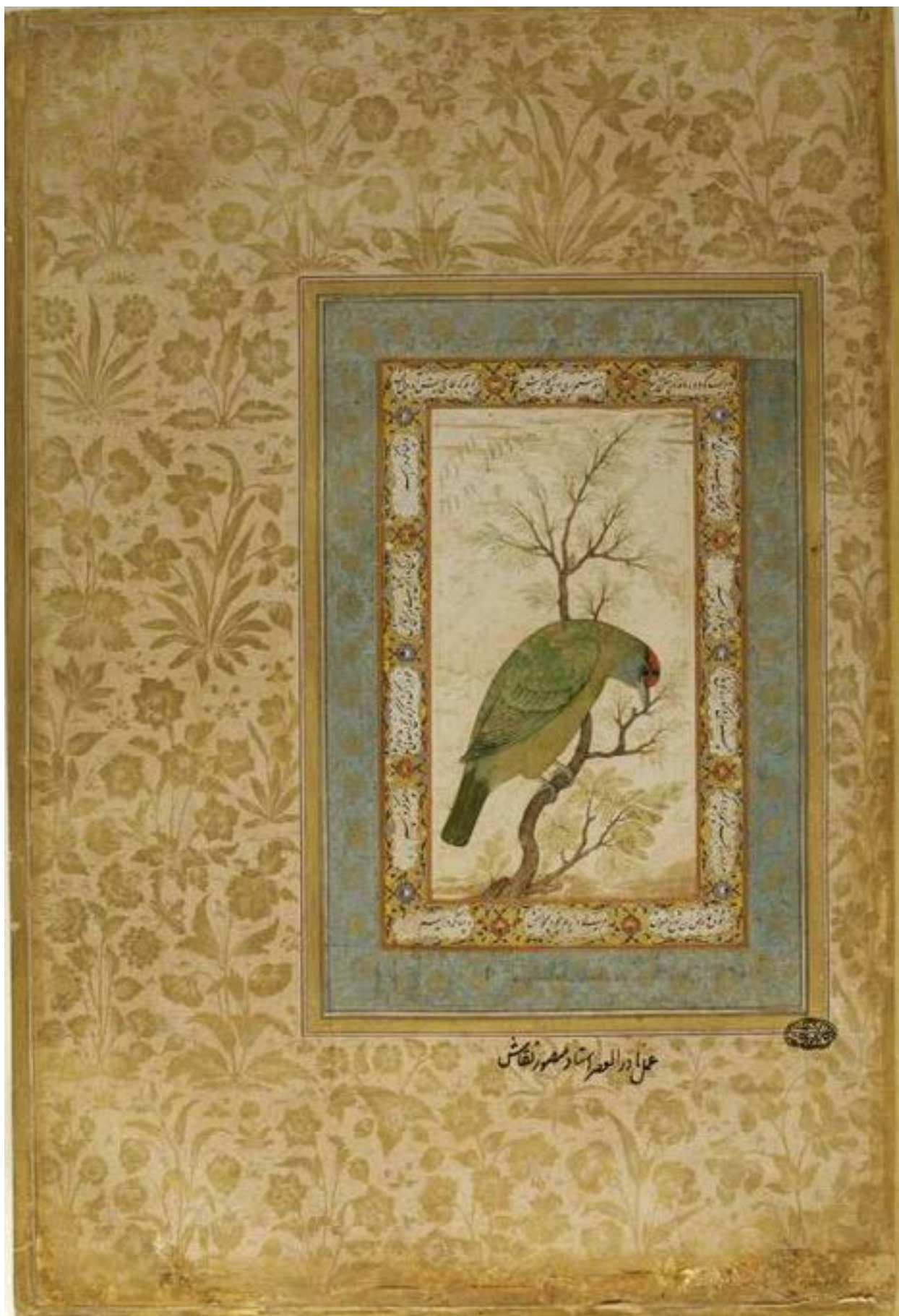
V&A: IM.135-1921, Bequeathed by Lady Wantage

Look, Explore, Connect . . . Imagine coming face-to-face with an animal you’d never seen before! Emperor Jahangir loved studying rare and unusual animals, and in 1612 a North American turkey was brought to him. He immediately asked one of his court painters to record what the bird looked like. Jahangir described it in writing as chameleon-like for its ability to change colors depending on mood.

The emperor’s curiosity and careful observation helped preserve this encounter with a species from across the world.

- When you have traveled, have you seen anything new? Anything unexpected?
- Where was the trip and what did you see?





Mughal Court Workshops
Mansur

A Blue-Throated Barbet, ca. 1610–25

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

The blue-throated barbet is found throughout the Himalayan foothills, including in Kashmir, which Jahangir visited several times during his reign. The inscription below this painting attributes it to the artist Mansur, who was renowned for his studies of birds, animals, and flowers. He is known, through Jahangir's memoirs, to have accompanied the emperor in Kashmir in 1620. In recognition of his unsurpassed skill in natural history paintings, Jahangir gave Mansur the title—used in the inscription—*Wonder of the Age*.

V&A: IM.137-1921, Bequeathed by Lady Wantage

Natural History Paintings

Inspired by European imagery, the innovative painters in Akbar's imperial workshops developed an increasing interest in pictorial realism. It was not until Jahangir's reign, however, that the Mughal style was refined into a tool capable of remarkably subtle observation.

Jahangir's memoirs reveal his scientific curiosity and keen interest in the natural world. On his frequent travels, and particularly while pursuing his favorite pastime of hunting, he recorded his observations on the Mughal Empire's plants and animals, ordering his painters to illustrate them with great accuracy. He also asked them to depict the exotic animals that reached the court through embassies, travelers, and trade.



Mughal Court Workshops
Attributed to **Mansur**

A Pair of Cranes, ca. 1618–20

Ink on paper

V&A: IM.42-1925, Given by Major Denzil Macaulay



Mughal Court Workshops

A Pair of Cranes, after a Lost Painting by Mansur,
ca. 1800

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

V&A: IM.122A-1921, Bequeathed by Lady Wantage

Jahangir kept a pair of cranes for at least five years, studying them carefully. He named them Layla and Majnun after the famous lovers from a Persian romance. In his memoirs, the emperor interspersed his accounts of courtly life with details about the birds' nesting habits. Though his memoirs do not mention him asking for Layla and Majnun to be painted, Jahangir's artists certainly studied similar species of cranes. The finished picture on the right is apparently a later copy of a painting by the celebrated master natural history artist Mansur. The drawing on the left may be the original study for the lost painting.



Mughal Empire
Calligraphy by 'Abd al-Rahim

**Manuscript of the Shahnama (Book of Kings)
by Ferdowsi, 1612, binding 18th century**

Ink, opaque watercolor, watercolor, and gold on paper

Hunting was one of Jahangir's favorite pastimes. These fine drawings with delicate washes of color show different hunting scenes, including a royal cheetah with its keeper and the capture of a lion. This manuscript of the *Shahnama*, a work of singular importance in Persian literature, was made for Jahangir in 1612.

V&A: IS.3-2019



Mughal Court Workshops

**Incense Burner in the Form of a Stylized Francolin,
ca. 1624**

Bronze, black compound

Jahangir's knowledge of animals was tested in 1624 during a hunt. Imam-Vardi, the imperial hunt-beater, challenged him to guess whether a captured bird, a francolin, was male or female. The emperor unhesitatingly identified it as female, which was confirmed when the francolin was dissected and eggs were found inside it. Jahangir described the event in his memoirs and probably gave this incense burner to Imam-Vardi, whose name is inscribed on the bird's breast.

The Iran-Zamin Collection: MW2

Arms and Armor of the Mughal Empire

Even the plainest arms and armor made in the Mughal Empire's multiple production centers are often remarkable for their workmanship. Artists supplied the designs that armorers chiseled onto the blades of swords and daggers. Within the Mughal palace workshops, skilled masters added beautiful gold calligraphy in Persian and Arabic to steel weapons and armor.



Shah Jahan, wearing both types of weapons on display in the nearby case: a short punch dagger (*katar*) tucked into his waist sash and a long curved-bladed sword (*talwar*) slung from a brocaded silk belt. This painting is on view in the exhibition's first gallery.

The Youthful Shah Jahan, from the *Late Shah Jahan Album* (detail), ca. 1650, attributed to Bichitr (active ca. 1615–1650), opaque watercolor on paper. The Art and History Collection; courtesy of the National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, LTS1995.2.95



Mughal Empire

Punch Dagger, ca. 1650–90

Steel, gold

Predating the arrival of the Mughals by centuries, the punch dagger (*katar*) is one of India's most distinctive weapons. Practically a required component of a Mughal courtier's costume, it was kept tucked into one's waist sash. Grasping the paired bars of its transverse grip, the user thrusts the dagger's triangular blade in a punching motion. The hilt of this example is finely decorated with gold overlay (*koftgari*).

The Bashir Mohamed Family Collection



Mughal Empire

Sword, ca. 1650–1700

Blade: watered steel, gold; hilt: gilt copper

Courtiers attending formal court assemblies often wore a curved sword (*talwar*) with a blade made of watered steel. Although chiefly ceremonial, they were still potentially lethal and were slung on belts that positioned the hilt so that the weapon could be quickly drawn.

V&A: IS.9-1968



Mughal Empire

Punch Dagger, ca. 1700–50

Steel, black compound, gold, silver, copper

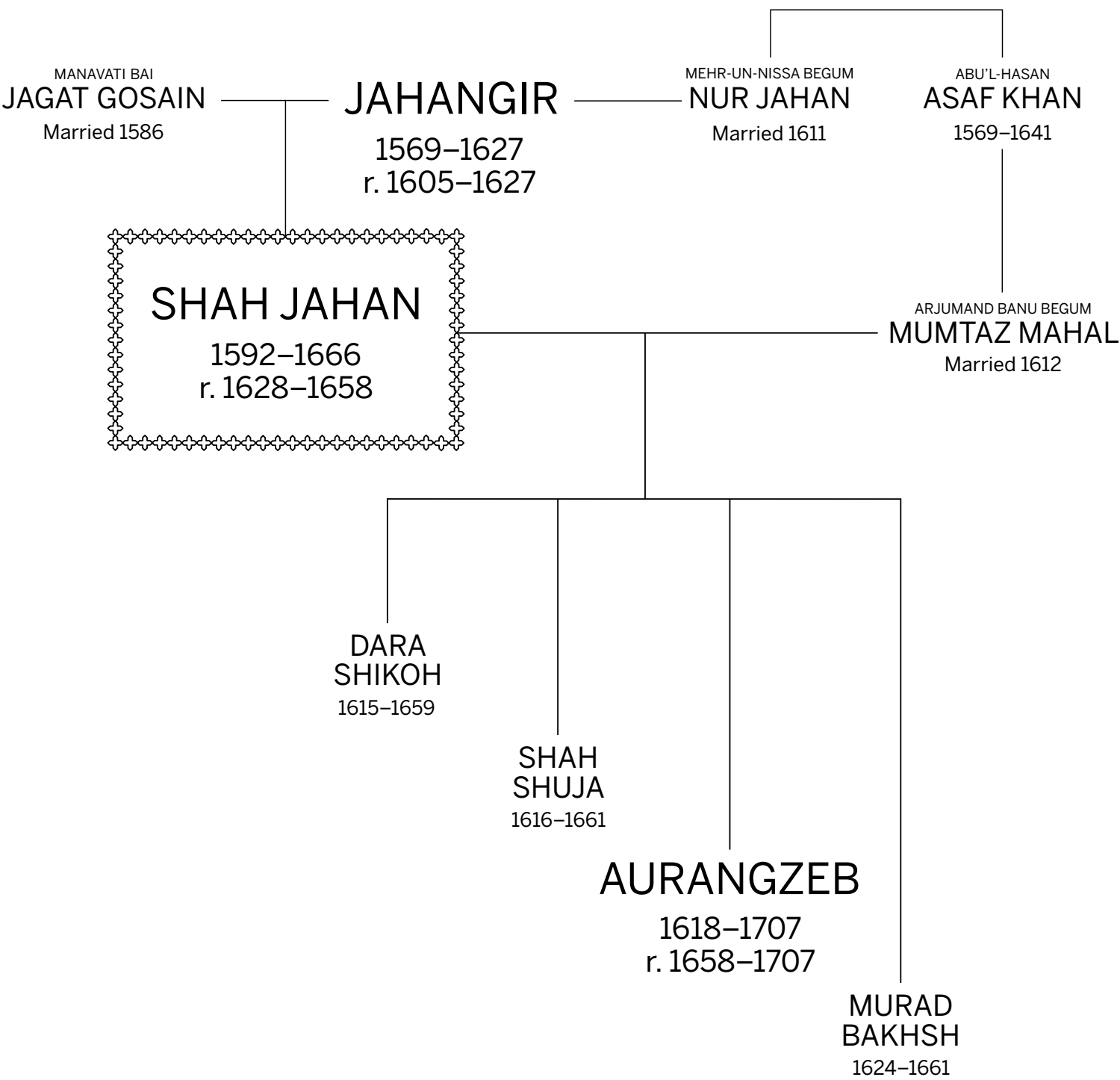
The hilt and sideguards of this punch dagger (*katar*) are decorated with minute scenes of varied architecture in a landscape filled with trees and flowers. The falcon chiseled on the blade perches on a stand atop a long slender pole amid floral designs. Falconry was a popular pursuit at the Mughal court.

V&A: 3452(IS)

The Reign of Shah Jahan (1628–1658)

Shah Jahan, meaning “King of the World,” was the name Jahangir gave to his third son, Khurram, designating the prince as his chosen successor. Nonetheless, following the emperor’s death in 1627, there ensued a brief succession crisis, in which Queen Nur Jahan backed Jahangir’s youngest son, Shahryar, for the throne. Her scheme was, however, foiled by her older brother, Jahangir’s prime minister Asaf Khan, and Shah Jahan was crowned emperor less than three months after his father’s demise.

Under Shah Jahan, the Mughal Empire’s territories were further expanded, and the vast wealth accumulated in its treasuries increased. With that fortune, the emperor’s court became one of ever-increasing magnificence. From small, extravagantly jeweled objects to vast building projects, opulence was ubiquitous. Shah Jahan had a particular passion for architecture, and his most famous construction, the Taj Mahal, is perhaps India’s most dazzling monument. His artists carefully contrived their work to project an image of Shah Jahan as a just world conqueror and of his empire as a garden of paradise.



World Events During Shah Jahan's Reign

1628

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, in what is now New York, establishes a trade monopoly with the Dutch. At the same time, Shah Jahan is negotiating with the Dutch East India Company as it expands its factories in the Indian subcontinent.

1644

In China, the Ming dynasty collapses, giving rise to the Qing dynasty. Political chaos causes a disruption to Chinese exports, particularly silk, a void the Mughals help to fill, further enriching their treasuries.

1648

The Peace of Westphalia ends the Thirty Years War, establishing the principle of state sovereignty and redrawing the map of Europe.



Mughal Court Workshops

The Elderly Shah Jahan, from the Late Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1650

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper mounted on paperboard

This portrait of Shah Jahan depicts him in the last decade of his reign, when the album from which this folio comes was being assembled in the royal workshops. In the upper border, above the graying emperor's head, is a plumed crown flanked by two European-style angels, signifying the divine sanction of his imperial authority. Three learned men along the right border—the bottom one perhaps a Portuguese priest—speak to the emperor's wisdom, just as a pair of lions below suggests his might. In the original album, this page faced a practically symmetrical composition on the left, featuring an elderly Jahangir. A pair of antelopes below the posthumous portrait complemented Shah Jahan's lions, together forming the visual allegory of a just ruler's kingdom, in which predators and prey serenely cohabitate.

National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution; Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, \$1986.405



This is the folio that once formed a pair with the displayed page.

Jahangir in Old Age, from the *Late Shah Jahan Album*, ca. 1650, location unknown. Reproduced from Richard Ettinghausen, "The Emperor's Choice," in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss, (New York University Press, 1962), 2:32, fig. 11.



Mughal Court Workshops
Possibly a European Craftsman

Cameo, ca. 1640–50

Sardonyx

This oval cameo presents a profile portrait of Shah Jahan in middle age. Its unidentified craftsman has skillfully used the stone's natural, banded layers in his composition. The emperor's turban, pearls, and background are carved from the creamy white layer, while the thickest layer of brown has been used for the clothes and the narrow, raised oval frame. A thinner layer of brown has been used for the emperor's face. The model for the portrait was likely a contemporary Mughal painting.

V&A: IS.14-1974



Mughal Court Workshops

**Jahangir with Asaf Khan and Shayista Khan,
from the Late Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1650**

Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper mounted
on paperboard

National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution;
Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian
Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler,
S1986.407



Mughal Court Workshops

**Emperor Shah Jahan Receiving Prince Dara Shikoh,
from the Late Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1650**

Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, From the Nasli and Alice
Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase,
M.83.105.21

Like the nearby portrait of Shah Jahan, these pages come from a large imperial album made in the final decade of the emperor's reign. Originally facing each other in the album, these pages—both their main paintings and their flower-and-bird-filled borders—are practically symmetrical. On the right, the enthroned Shah Jahan receives his eldest son and heir apparent, Dara Shikoh. An aide to the prince and a royal attendant with a fly whisk complete the ensemble. In the mirror image on the left, a posthumously depicted Jahangir receives the pivotal noble Asaf Khan, brother of his queen Nur Jahan and father of Mumtaz Mahal, for whom Shah Jahan would build the Taj Mahal.



Mughal Court Workshops
Bichitr

Portrait of Asaf Khan, painting 1630–31,
borders ca. 1650

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

Asaf Khan, Nur Jahan's brother, was instrumental in ensuring Shah Jahan's succession following Jahangir's death, a service for which the new emperor made him commander-in-chief of his armies. His family came from Iran in Akbar's reign and rose to the highest positions in the Mughal court. Both he and his father had served as prime minister under Jahangir, and his daughter Mumtaz Mahal married Shah Jahan in 1612. This painting comes from a dispersed royal album, and the Persian inscription directly below the picture, in Shah Jahan's hand, names its subject and artist. One of the European-style cherubs hovering above Asaf Khan holds a scroll citing the painting's date as Shah Jahan's third regnal year, corresponding to 1630–31.

V&A: IM.26-1925

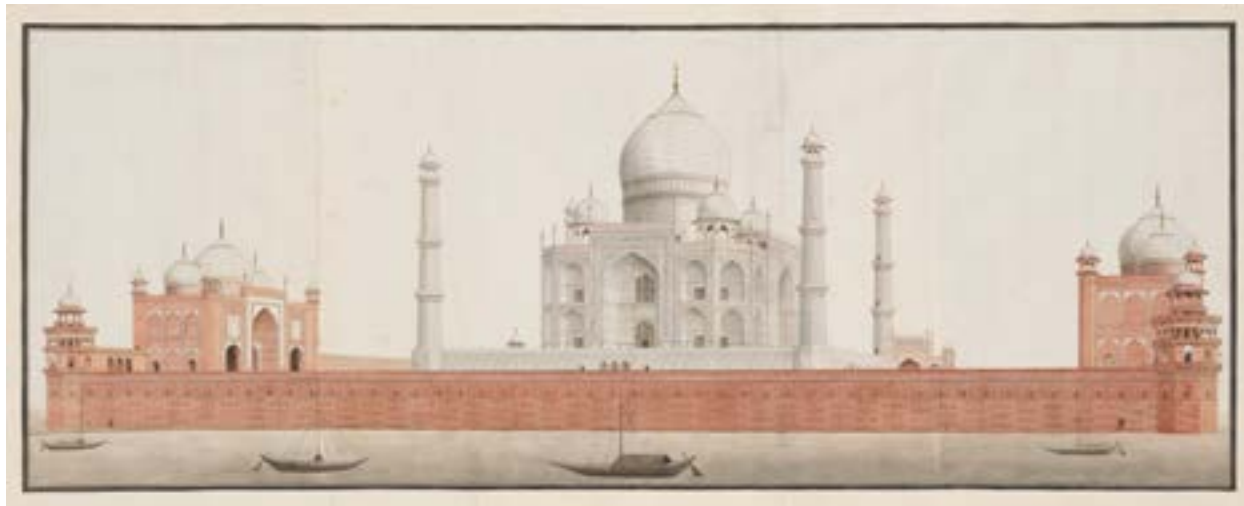
Agra

Northern View of the Taj Mahal from across the Yamuna River, ca. 1809–17

Ink and watercolor on European paper

This panoramic view of the Taj Mahal from the north side of the Yamuna River captures the project's enormous scale. The white-marble tomb sits on a high red-sandstone platform, between a mosque on the right and a matching structure on the left. Walls around the platform, punctuated by turrets, stretch away from the river, enclosing a vast formal garden. In the far distance, beyond the tomb's rightmost minaret, is the walled complex's towering southern gateway. Celebrated as a monument to undying love, the Taj Mahal is also an unambiguous statement of Shah Jahan's unparalleled wealth and power.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2025.316



Look, Explore, Connect . . . This painting shows one of the most recognizable buildings in the world—the Taj Mahal, located in Agra, India. This structure was built by the Emperor Shah Jahan as the burial place for his wife. You can see a video nearby that shows you the outside and inside of this grand structure.

The large size and opulent details of the building were meant to reflect Shah Jahan's love for his wife and the power and wealth of his empire. The building is made from expensive materials like marble and precious stones including jade and sapphire.

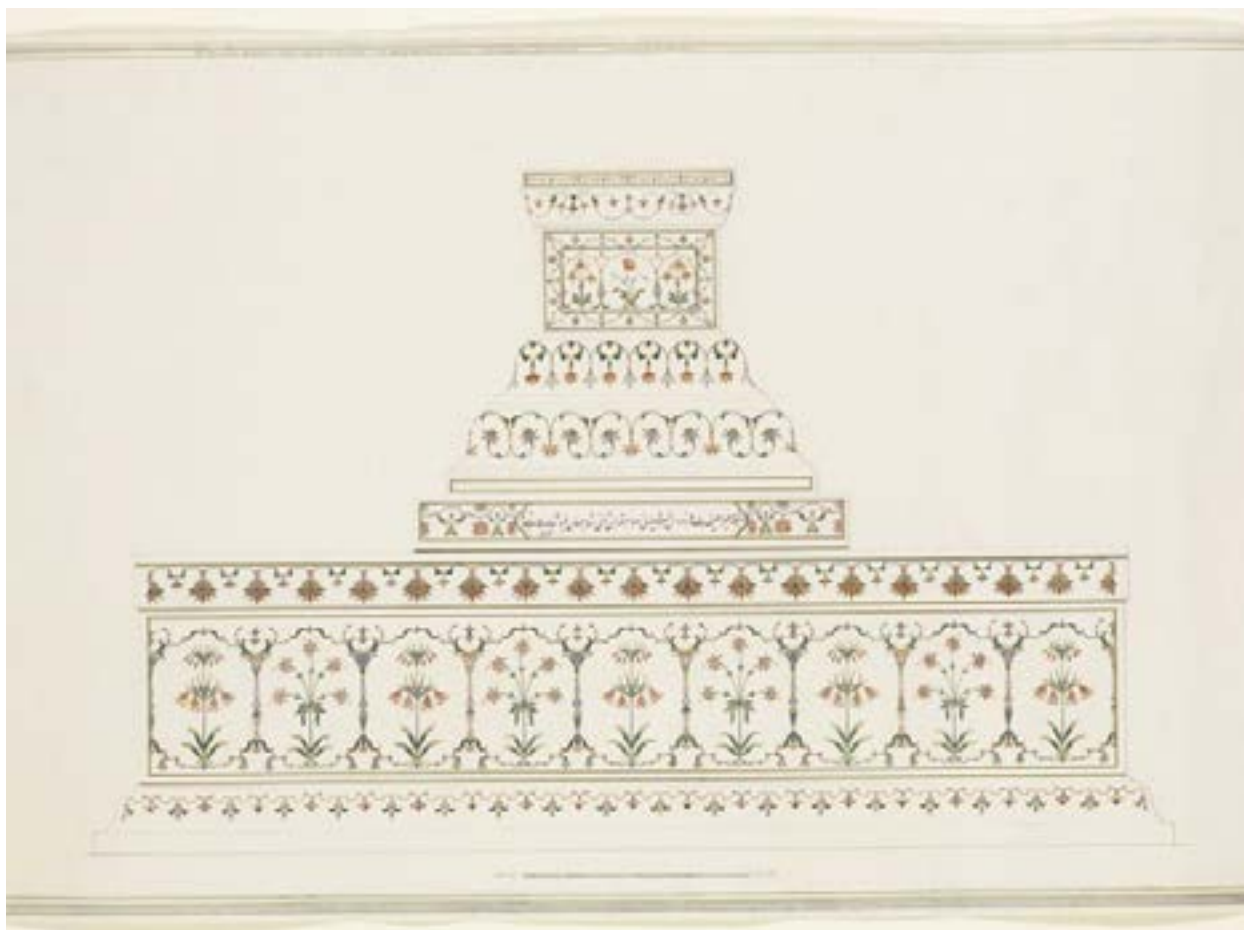
- How would you describe this building to someone who has never seen it?
- If you were designing a building for someone you love, what design choices would you make and what materials would you use?

The Illumined Tomb

In 1631, Shah Jahan's wife Arjumand Banu Begum—known as *Mumtaz Mahal* (Exalted One of the Palace)—died during the birth of their 14th child. Within days, the grief-stricken emperor began planning a grand mausoleum for her in Agra, set within a large formal garden on the banks of the Yamuna River.

Jai Singh, the Hindu ruler of Amber and a close ally of the Mughals, provided the land, exchanging his ancestral property by the river for other estates in Agra. Renowned builder Ustad Ahmad Lahori was appointed principal architect for the project, and skilled artisans were brought from across the subcontinent to construct the elegant monument.

The Taj Mahal—known in the Mughal period as the Illumined Tomb—was formally completed on the 12th anniversary of Mumtaz Mahal's death, though work on its sprawling complex continued for another decade. Its elegant carved and inlaid floral decoration became the aesthetic hallmark for the arts during Shah Jahan's reign.



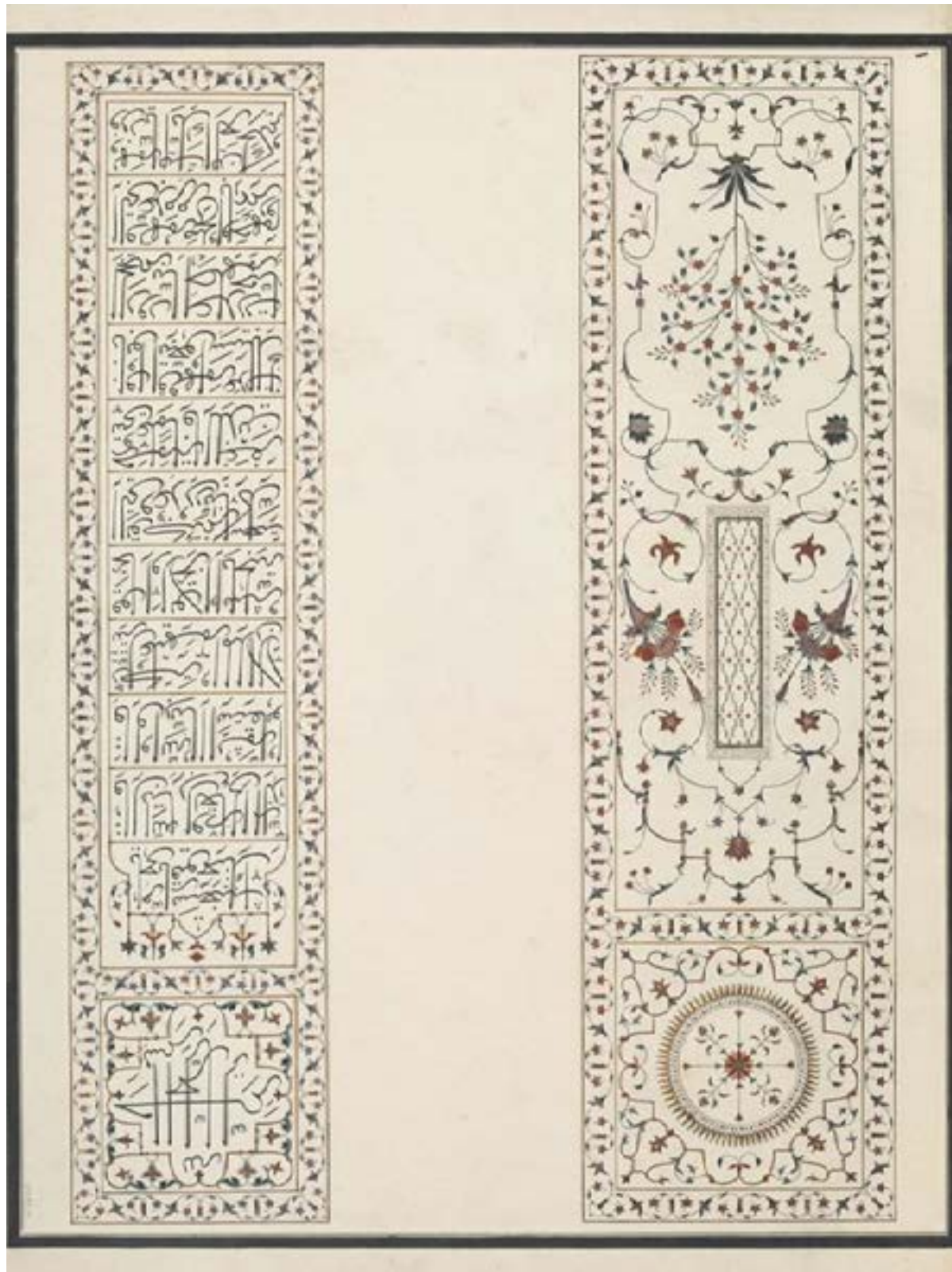
Agra

End Elevation of Shah Jahan's Cenotaph, 1782–93

Watercolor on European paper

Strict symmetry governs nearly every element of the Taj Mahal complex, except for the placement of Shah Jahan's cenotaph, a marker of where he is interred far below. After the emperor's death in January 1666, his body was laid to rest beside that of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. Because she had been buried at the tomb's center, Shah Jahan's cenotaph is offset to one side.

V&A: LOAN: SSEA.17-2024, Lent by the Trustees of the Catherine Ruck 1987 Trust



Agra

Drawing of the Tops of the Cenotaphs of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, 1813–25

Watercolor on European paper

The inscriptions on Mumtaz Mahal's cenotaph include Qur'anic verses providing reassurances to the living and describing the promise of admittance to the Garden of Paradise for those who follow the right path. Shah Jahan's cenotaph has no calligraphy apart from his epitaph giving his titles and the year of his death, visible in the drawing to the left.

V&A: AL.92320



Delhi or Agra

Drawing of a Dado Panel in the Tomb Chamber of the Taj Mahal, ca. 1820–30

Watercolor on European paper

The white-marble wall panels of the upper chamber of Mumtaz Mahal's tomb were completed by 1638. As in the reign of Jahangir, court artists continued to borrow floral motifs from European botanical prints, refashioning them in Mughal style. Symmetrical floral compositions like this were also carved on the red-sandstone walls of the structures outside the main tomb building.

V&A: IS.254-1961, Given by R.H.O.B. Robinson, Esq.



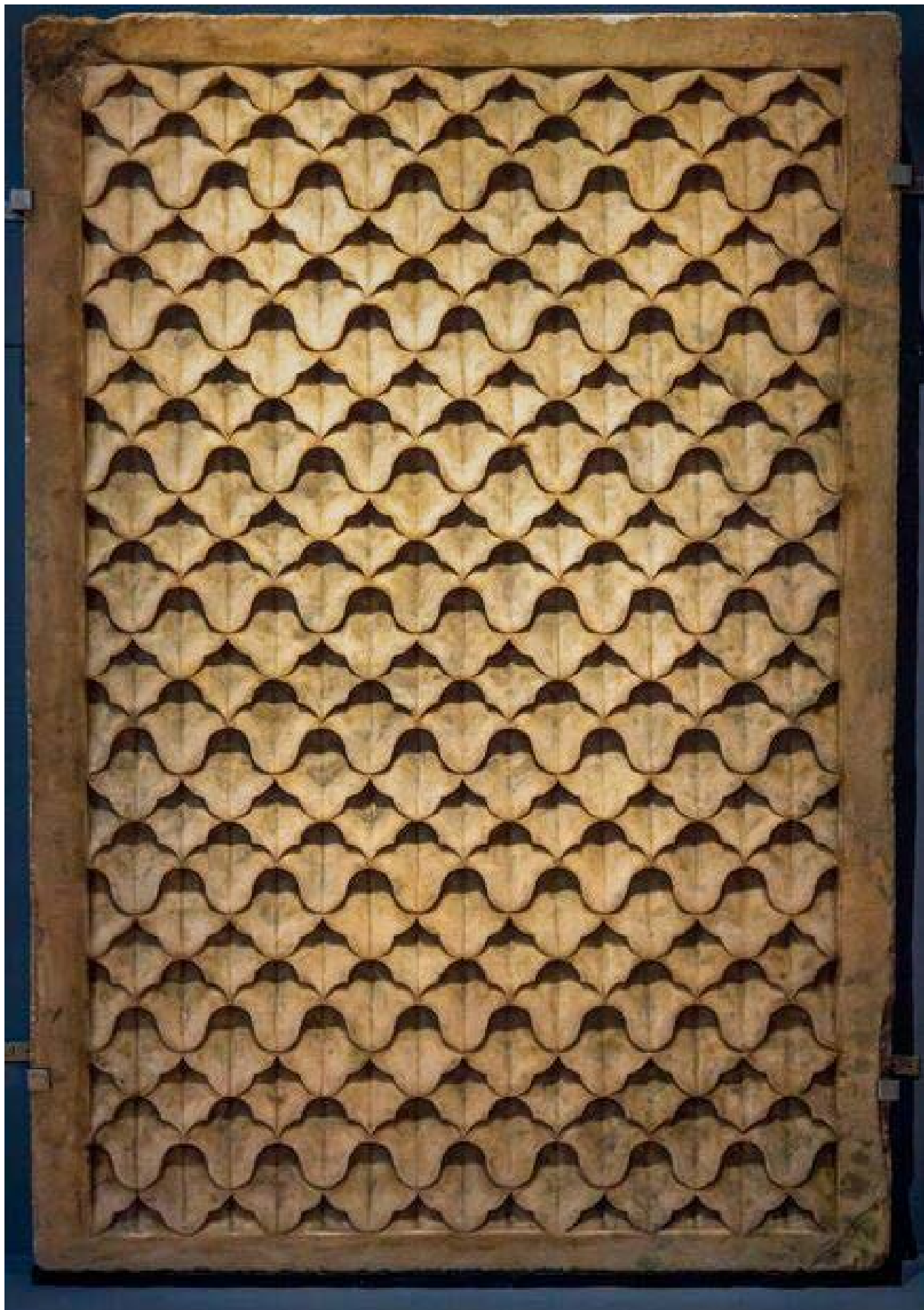
Mughal Court Workshops, Agra

Fragments from an Inlaid Marble Frieze, ca. 1640

Marble, black marble, carnelian, lapis lazuli, other hardstones

In the early years of Shah Jahan's reign, a new style of inlaid marble came into fashion, one that used dexterously shaped, colorful hardstones inserted into deep cavities in the white marble. This traditional stone-inlay technique called *parchin kari* predates the Mughals but was transformed in this period and used on Shah Jahan's most important monuments, including the Taj Mahal. The inspiration for the color combinations may have been the white nephrite jade artifacts inlaid with precious stones that had been made for Jahangir.

V&A: 1129, 1130, 1131-1868



Probably Agra or Delhi

Water Chute, ca. 1650

Marble

Gardens were an important component of Mughal architecture—beautifying palaces and serving as settings for important monuments—and water played a crucial part in their design. Channels of flowing water divided formal gardens into four sections, an allusion to the four rivers and four gardens of Paradise. Along these routes, water was sometimes directed over sloping, carved stone chutes, where it would make a pleasing cascading sound. Such a chute is called a *chadar*, literally a shawl, after the visual effect it created, as if the water were transformed into a shimmering sheet.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 232 S



Probably Agra

Marble Panel from a Dado, ca. 1628–37

Marble, jasper, black marble

The geometric designs on this panel are similar to those seen on the Taj Mahal and in the architectural alterations made to Agra Fort by Shah Jahan early in his reign. Some of the original inlay has been lost, revealing the deep cavities masterfully carved into the white marble.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 39 S

Views of the Taj Mahal

Running time: 1:24 minutes

This film contains no sound.

Video courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum

Credits

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Mughal Court Workshops, probably Agra

Jali, ca. 1640–1700

Marble

Jalis are pierced stone screens that serve multiple functions. They act as beautiful windows that filter sunlight and provide ventilation while also offering privacy. The intricate, floral design of this example bears some resemblance to the large marble screens encircling the cenotaphs of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan within the Taj Mahal.

V&A: 07071(IS)

The Garden of Paradise

The decoration of the Taj Mahal codified a new, floral style that spread to all the arts during Shah Jahan's reign. Blossoming plants and flowers were carved in stone, woven and embroidered on textiles, painted in the borders of albums, and enameled in gold on objects made for the court. Across the empire, artisans in specialized workshops replaced traditional patterns with blossoms in this new court style.

These stylized blossoms, regularly dispersed across an uncluttered ground, evoke an ideal world in which everything would live forever, untouched by decay, disease, famine, or poverty. This unified style proclaimed the empire as a garden of paradise under the emperor's just rule. As the verses by the Persian poet Amir Khusrow—inscribed in Shah Jahan's palace in Delhi—announce:

*If there is Paradise on earth, it is this, it is this,
it is this.*



Possibly Burhanpur

Floor Spread with Poppy Design, ca. 1650

Cotton, dyes

Cotton spreads covered the floors of Mughal palaces in the hot months of the year. This magnificent example was probably made in the central Indian city of Burhanpur, which was famous for its printed cotton textiles of very high quality. Wall paintings in the city's buildings depict similar poppies, and the region was a center of poppy cultivation and the opium trade.

V&A: IM.77-1938

Look, Explore, Connect . . . Look closely at this large floor spread—how is it decorated? The repeating red flowers you see are poppies, a blossom commonly occurring in Mughal art. During Emperor Shah Jahan's reign, this flower was featured in books, paintings, and textiles like this one. By grouping the poppies together, the weavers created the feeling that when you sat on this carpet you were actually resting in a beautiful garden of flowers.

Imagine you are sitting or lying down on a carpet like this one.

- Would you feel like you were sitting outside in a peaceful, beautiful garden?
- What other flowers or patterns would you use to make your own indoor garden?



Probably Agra

Weight for a Floor Covering, 18th century

Calcite alabaster, glass, carnelian, agate, lapis lazuli, resinous material, bedding material

Large summer carpets like the monumental example to the right were secured by heavy weights at their corners, keeping the textiles from blowing away or moving when someone stepped or sat on them. Such weights were also used to hold down thin textiles traditionally draped over the cenotaphs of revered people. This alabaster example is inlaid with thin slivers of precisely carved hardstones reminiscent of the Taj Mahal's decoration. Its primary design motif—flowering plants arranged at regular intervals against a plain ground—is characteristic of Shah Jahan's reign.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.141



Probably Gujarat

Fragment from the Border of a Floor Spread, ca. 1650

Silk velvet, silver-wrapped thread

This elegant strip of woven silk velvet and silver-wrapped thread is a border from a large floor spread. Its design is the classic Shah Jahan-period motif of flowering plants repeated on a plain ground. Traditionally, looms in the subcontinent could only produce four colors of pile in velvet at a time. Iranian weavers in the imperial workshops introduced new techniques that allowed more colors to be painstakingly incorporated. This example has six.

V&A: 320-1898



Gujarat or Sindh

Cabinet with Floral Motifs, ca. 1650

Wood, ivory, metal

Before Shah Jahan's reign, the craftsmen of Gujarat and Sindh made cabinets inlaid with distinctive regional motifs and generalized depictions of figures in period dress. By the 1650s, these local characteristics had almost completely disappeared, replaced by the repeated floral decoration so fashionable across the arts of the Mughal court.

V&A: 2410-1876



Probably Gujarat

Fragments from a Floor Spread, ca. 1650–1700

Silk velvet

Opulent textiles were lavishly draped throughout Mughal palaces and decorated the court during important events. Soft velvet hangings and floor spreads brought warmth and color to hard stone architecture. Velvet-making was probably introduced into India by Iranian weavers, renowned for their superb velvet textiles. Gujarat especially became known for its expensive velvets and beautiful brocades.

V&A: 281:1, 2, 3-1893



Mughal Court Workshops, Agra or Delhi

Wine Cup, ca. 1640–50

Rock crystal

The design of this cup highlights the inventiveness of court craftsmen working with hardstones. Seen from the side, the handle is simply a stem bearing naturalistically rendered flowers. Peering down into the cup reveals the stem as part of the multi-petaled flower on the bottom, visible to the drinker through transparent wine.

V&A: 1664-1882, Wells Bequest



Mughal Court Workshops, Agra or Delhi

Wine Bowl, ca. 1640–50

Rock crystal

The outer surface of this bowl is intricately faceted, perhaps to conceal flaws in the rock crystal. Acanthus leaves, carved in low relief, rise from either side of the vessel's foot before emerging into three dimensions to form small handles of scrolling stems with flower buds.

V&A: 1662-1882, Wells Bequest



Mughal Court Workshops, Agra or Delhi

Wine Bowl, ca. 1650

Rock crystal

This bowl's restrained ornamentation emphasizes the purity of the rock crystal. Blossoms around its rim are supported by long, slender stems that create narrow ribs around the vessel's body. Similar flowers appear on the velvet fragment with ivory ground displayed on the wall to the left.

V&A: 986-1875



Mughal Court Workshops, probably Agra or Delhi

Dagger Hilt, ca. 1650

Rock crystal

The delicately inscribed floral decoration on this dagger hilt is restrained, highlighting the remarkable transparency of the rock crystal. Its curved pistol-grip form derived from European gun handles and traditional weaponry from Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Iran. From the mid-17th century onward, such hilts were widely employed for a type of curved, double-edged Mughal dagger known as a *khanjar*.

V&A: IS.232-1964, Given by the Right Hon. the Earl Kitchener of Khartoum



Probably Lahore

Carpet, ca. 1650–75

Cotton warp, cotton and silk weft, wool pile

This lavish carpet, now slightly cut down from its original size, came from the palace collections of the Hindu rulers of Amber in Rajasthan. They had been allies of the Mughal imperial family since Akbar's reign and held prestigious positions at court. Their palaces were built in Mughal style and would have been similarly furnished. Drawing on the ubiquitous floral style of mid-17th-century Mughal art across all media, both the main red field and the greenish-blue border of this carpet are filled with parallel rows of flowering plants.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 15 R



Mughal Court Workshops

Pen Box and Utensils, 17th century

Nephrite jade, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, gold

This pen box contains two small inkpots and utensils necessary for the preparation of pens and ink. Such an opulent piece, set with rubies, emeralds, and diamonds of good quality and shaped with considerable skill, must have been made for a high-ranking member of the court, possibly one from the imperial family.

V&A: 02549(IS)



Mughal Court Workshops

Pen Rest, 17th century

Nephrite jade, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, gold

This pen rest may have been part of a suite with the nearby pen box. It has been expertly fashioned from a single piece of nephrite jade imported from Khotan and inlaid with jewels in the *kundan* technique.

V&A: 02543(IS)



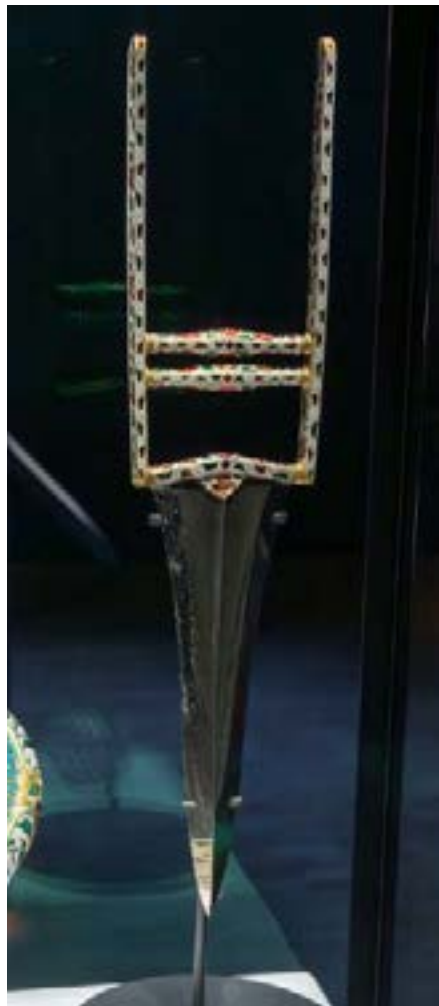
Mughal Court Workshops

Ring to Support a Spherical Huqqa, ca. 1640–50

Gold, enamel

Tobacco was first brought to the Mughal court in the early 1600s, but Jahangir strongly discouraged its consumption. By Shah Jahan's reign, however, smoking it through water pipes (*huqqas*) became more common. Prior to the late 18th century, most Indian *huqqas* had a spherical base and sat on a ring for stability. The exquisite enameling of this ring includes minute insects that hover above its vividly colored flowers.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 2 J



Mughal Court Workshops

Punch Dagger, ca. 1640–60

Hilt: iron, gold, enamel; blade: watered steel

Shah Jahan's goldsmiths perfected the technique of enameling and used it on a wide range of objects. The emperor frequently presented enameled weapons to his sons, visiting dignitaries, and individuals being appointed to high office. The typical color scheme—translucent enamels glowing against a white ground—echoes the semiprecious stones inlaid into the white marble of the emperor's palaces.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 222 M a,b



Mughal Court Workshops

Priming Flask, ca. 1650–1700

Nephrite jade, gold, enamel

The body of this small flask—used to dispense fine gunpowder to prime a matchlock gun—is fashioned from a single piece of nephrite jade. Only the small plug in the top is a separate piece. Its dome-shaped exterior is inset with gold wire and panels filled with green and red enamels in a floral pattern. Its underside, incised with a flowering plant design, is fashioned with two small loops through which a strap, likely the sling of a gun, could be threaded.

V&A: 02547(IS)

Jades

The art of fashioning and polishing hardstones at the Mughal court reached its peak during the reign of Shah Jahan. Jade is a particularly challenging material to work. Due to its hardness, it cannot be carved but instead must be painstakingly shaped using abrasive materials. Like all the arts of the period, the decoration of jade objects was dominated by floral shapes and patterns.

Mughal Court Workshops

Wine Cup, ca. 1650–1700

Nephrite jade

Repeated around each of this vessel's eight lobes, the lone, blooming flower is the archetypal decorative motif of the Shah Jahan period. The cup's single handle takes the form of an acanthus leaf curling into a projecting volute.

V&A: 02600 (IS)

Mughal Court Workshops

Wine Bowl, ca. 1650–1700

Nephrite jade

Resembling half of an opening flower bud, this elegant bowl clearly illustrates the skill of Mughal craftsmen working with hardstones. While jade is an extremely hard material, it can become very fragile when worked into shapes as thin as these.

V&A: IS.19-1997, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Schwaiger Bequest





Mughal Court Workshops

Wine Bowl, ca. 1650–1700

Nephrite jade, gold, rubies

This shallow, lobed bowl is exquisitely fashioned with flowering plants in low relief around its exterior and a pair of handles in the shape of birds' heads—with gold-set ruby eyes—emerging from its scalloped rim. An oval foot in the shape of a flower supports the delicate, thin-walled vessel.

V&A: 1641-1882, Wells Bequest



Mughal Court Workshops

Wand of Office, ca. 1650

Nephrite jade, enamel, silver, glass

This unusual object may be a staff of office. A cylindrical shaft of light-green jade connects—via later enameled silver fittings—two white jade terminals. One is in the form of an open flower set with a reddish glass jewel. At the other end, two buds emerge from a curled leaf frond.

V&A: o26o6(IS)



Mughal Court Workshops

Opium Spoon, ca. 1650–1700

Nephrite jade, silver, ruby

The gently tapering twist of this spoon's contorted handle would have required great skill to fashion from a block of nephrite jade. Spiraling ribs are emphasized by silver wire, which is also applied to the handle's flower-bud finial, set with a small ruby.

V&A: IS.38-1968



Mughal Court Workshops

Box and Cover, ca. 1650–1700

Nephrite jade, silver

The blossoming plants ornamenting this small, hinged box look as if they might have been lifted directly out of a book of European botanical drawings. The container's silver mounts, complete with a tiny padlock, were probably added around 1800.

V&A: C.1947A-1910



Timurid, Safavid, and Mughal Court Workshops

Spinel, 15th century

Carved spinel, 249.3 carats

Inscribed with the titles of Ulugh Beg, Shah Abbas, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, and Ahmad Shah Durrani

This large red spinel was given to Jahangir in 1621 by Shah Abbas, the Safavid ruler of Iran. It had once belonged to the Mughals' dynastic ancestor, the 15th-century Timurid ruler Ulugh Beg. Jahangir had Sa'ida Gilani, head of the imperial goldsmiths, add his name to the stone (joining those of its previous owners) and then gave it to Shah Jahan. Immediately after his accession, Shah Jahan ordered Gilani to supervise the construction of a new, lavish throne. Court historians record that this spinel was among the gems set into that famous furnishing, known later as the Peacock Throne.

The Al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 166o J



Mughal Court Workshops

Sapphire Bead, 1600–1700

Drilled sapphire, 106.6 carats

Tribute sent to the Mughal emperors by the sultans of the Deccan usually included enormous precious stones. In 1628, gifts sent for Shah Jahan's coronation included a pure sapphire equivalent in weight to this one, then valued at 30,000 rupees. That stone, like this one, would almost certainly have been left uncut to preserve its size and natural beauty.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 2107 JB



Mughal Court Workshops

Diamond Pendant, probably 17th century

Yellow diamond, 28.3 carats

The main global source of diamonds during the reigns of the Great Mughals were mines within the sultanate of Golconda, on the Deccan Plateau to the south of the Mughal territories. The largest diamonds were probably never commercially traded but instead reserved for royal treasuries and circulated as tribute or diplomatic gifts.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 1804 J



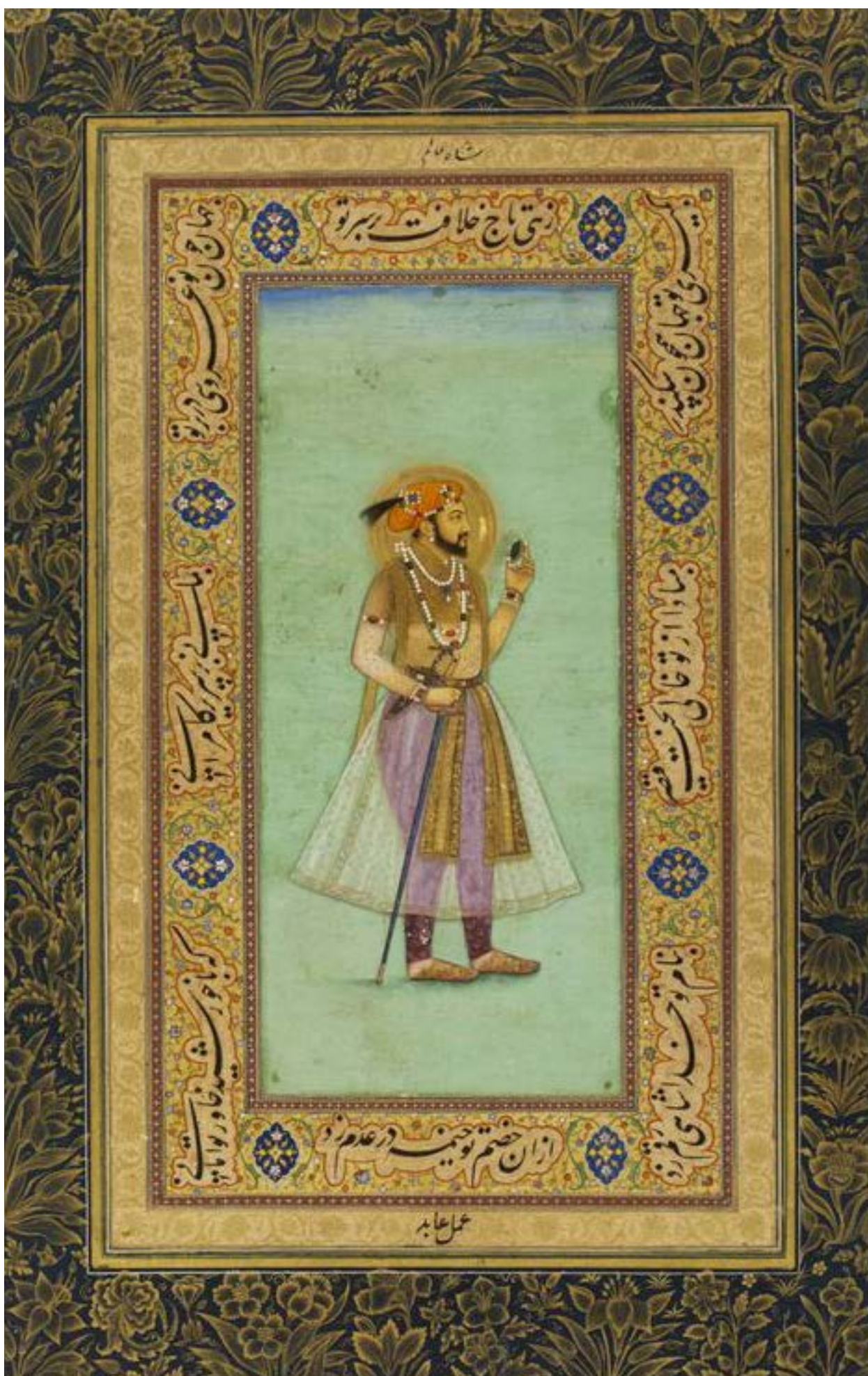
Mughal or Deccani Court Workshops

Diamond Pendant, 17th century or earlier

"Fancy light pink" diamond, 56.7 carats

Mughal diamond cutters followed long-established conventions in which the treatment of each stone was guided by a desire to retain the largest size possible and reveal its unique, resplendent qualities, described as "fire." Although only three millimeters thick, this diamond has shallow faceting on both sides meant to reveal this inner attribute.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 2156 J



Mughal Court Workshops

'Abid

Borders by Harif

Shah Jahan Holding a Carved Emerald, 1628–29

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper with indigo-dyed borders

Huge quantities of gems filled the Mughal treasury, bought from merchants or presented to the emperor and amassed over several generations. Shah Jahan was a particularly discerning connoisseur of precious stones and collected beautiful examples for his personal collection. This painting demonstrates the enormous size of the Colombian emeralds that reached the Mughal court. The signature in gold beneath Shah Jahan's feet specifies that it was painted in the first year of his reign by 'Abid, the brother of Abu'l Hasan, the artist of a portrait of Jahangir in the exhibition's previous section.

V&A: IM.233-1921, Given by Sir Robert Nathan, K.C.S.I., C.I.E.



Mughal Court Workshops

Aquamarine Bead, ca. 1600–1700

Drilled, river-worn stone, 87.7 carats

Aquamarines are from the same family of gemstones as emeralds. This large example of exceptional clarity and delicate color has been drilled from either end, like others of the same period, enabling it to be strung on a necklace or displayed prominently as a turban jewel.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 2107 JC



Mughal or Deccani Court Workshops

Diamond, ca. 1600–50

Faceted diamond, 24.8 carats

Diamonds cut in Mughal and Deccani court workshops have complicated faceting designed to reveal the specific luster of each stone rather than to produce a regular form. Such large stones would be prominently set in jewelry, vessels, or presentation weapons.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 2223 J



Mughal Court Workshops

Emerald, ca. 1650–1700

Carved and drilled Colombian emerald, 90.4 carats

Pierced emeralds and spinels were strung on the pearl necklaces worn by emperors and their sons, wives, and daughters as emblems of royalty. Very large emeralds might be engraved with inscriptions or decorated with floral or abstract motifs. The long stem and curling leaves carved on this example are characteristic of Shah Jahan's reign.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 2214 J



Mughal Court Workshops

Emerald, 1600–1700

Carved and drilled Colombian emerald, 110.1 carats

Portuguese Goa, on India's west coast, was a cosmopolitan hub where luxury goods were traded, particularly gemstones. Goldsmiths, jewelers, and gem cutters from across Asia and Europe traveled there to trade in precious stones from all over the world. Among the exotic gems that passed through Goa on their way to the Mughal court were large emeralds from Colombia.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 35 HS



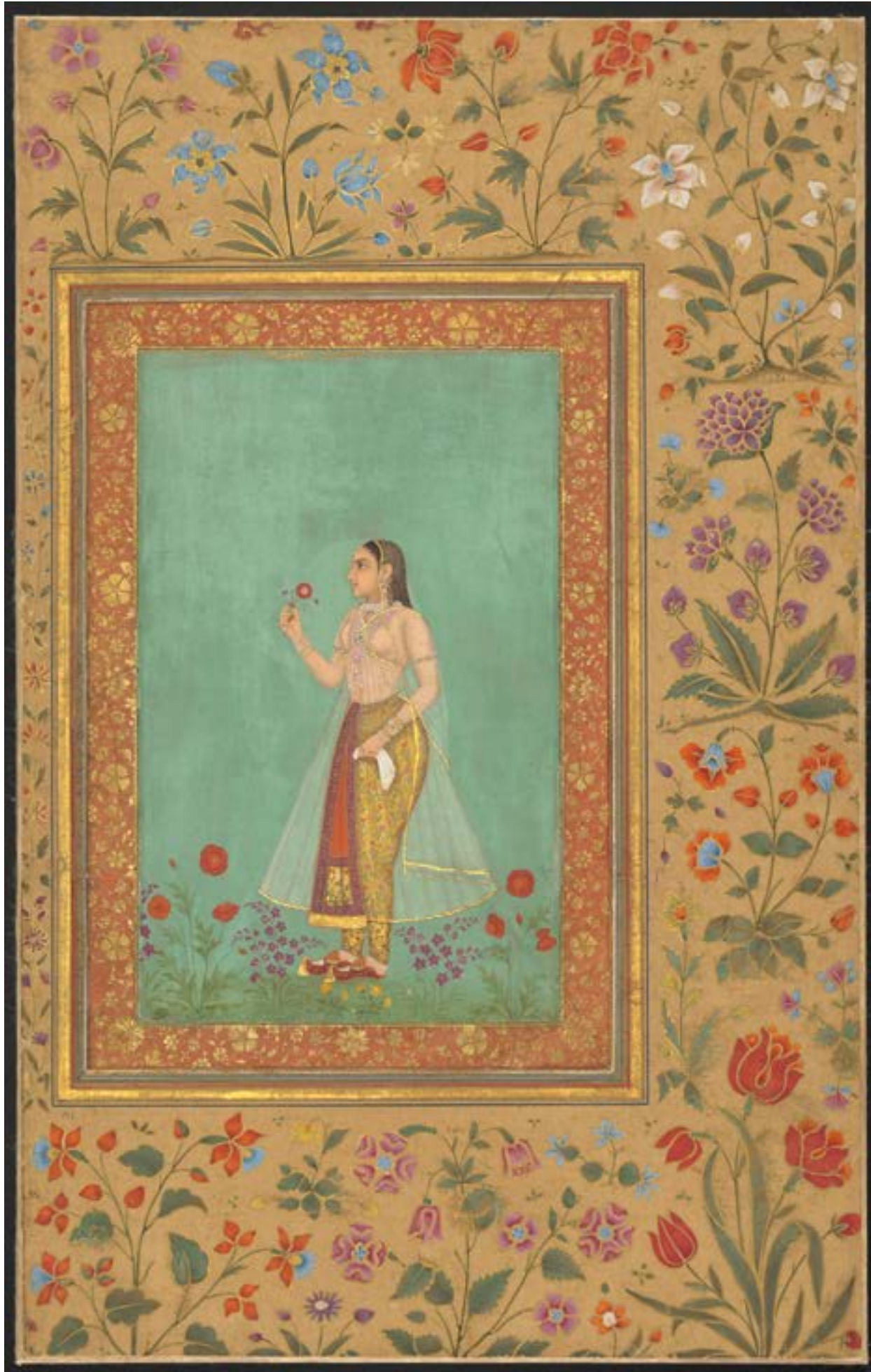
Mughal Court Workshops

Ram Singh of Amber, from the Late Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1650–58

Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

The *Late Shah Jahan Album*, produced in the final decade of the emperor's reign, is largely an illustrated register of the noblemen who administered and protected his empire. The subject of this portrait is Ram Singh, heir apparent to the Rajput kingdom of Amber and a commander in Shah Jahan's army. His father, Jai Singh, had provided the land for the Taj Mahal. Shown at about the age of 20, Ram Singh stands in a grassy field, originally facing a portrait of another courtier on a page to the right. The figures in the margins allude to his military prestige, wealth, and cultivation. The large carpet on display to the right—made about the same time as this painting—came from the palace in Amber. Perhaps this prince once walked on it.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.64



Mughal Court Workshops

Portrait of a Mughal Woman, from the Nasir al-Din Shah Album, ca. 1630–45

Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

Royal Mughal women were politically influential and were active patrons of the arts, yet relatively few paintings of identifiable court women seem to have been produced. This is partly because Mughal women lived in *purdah*, female seclusion from all men except their male relatives. Their portraits, intended only for family members, were probably painted from descriptions rather than from life. This opulent folio from an album assembled during the first part of Shah Jahan's rule shows a fashionably attired lady standing in a grassy field of flowers. The painter dwells on her sumptuous garments, especially their delicate figuration and the transparency of her outer robe and long scarf. The floral studies—both decorating the borders and within the painting itself—are quintessentially of Shah Jahan's era.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.62

Cuerda Seca Tiles

In regions where stone was scarce, Mughal buildings were made of brick and enlivened with glazed tilework, often in vibrant colors. A new technique that appeared in Jahangir's reign, probably introduced from Iran, became the height of fashion under Shah Jahan. Palaces, mosques, tombs, and the gateways to gardens, particularly in the empire's northern provinces, were decorated with tiles bearing multicolored floral and calligraphic designs. The tiles' colors were prevented from running together by fine lines of a greasy substance used to separate the water-soluble glazes. The technique, known as *cuerda seca* (dry cord), produces thin, dark outlines around the colors.



Probably Lahore

Wall Tiles, ca. 1630–50

Glazed earthenware

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 561 C a–f



Probably Lahore or Kabul

Tile, ca. 1630–50

Glazed earthenware

The Iran-Zamin Collection: AC1



Probably Lahore

**Tile Probably from the Tomb of Dara Shikoh's Sufi
Master Mian Mir in Lahore**, ca. 1630–50

Glazed earthenware

V&A: IS.68-1898



Probably Kashmir

Green Tiles with a Vase Motif and White Flowers,
ca. 1650

Glazed earthenware

V&A: Circ.1295-1923; IM.263, 265, 266-1923



Lahore

Square Tile from the Tomb of Asaf Khan in Lahore,
ca. 1641–45

Glazed earthenware

V&A: IS.63-1898



Delhi or Lahore

Tile, 1625–50

Glazed earthenware

V&A: IS.305-1890

The Legacy of the Great Mughals

Shah Jahan's reign ended suddenly in 1658 when he became seriously ill and his third son, Aurangzeb, seized power. The new emperor hugely expanded the empire and in that process irreversibly weakened it. Within decades of his death in 1707, the Mughals exerted little power beyond the walls of Delhi. In contrast to the relative stability and long reigns of the Great Mughals, the next 150 years saw rapid turnover—15 further emperors sat on the Mughal throne before the dynasty's final ruler was deposed in 1857.

The artistic splendor of the Mughal Empire's golden age, however, was not forgotten. As the empire declined, court artists and craftsmen moved to other centers of patronage, disseminating not only the skills and techniques practiced in the Mughal workshops but also the aesthetic language that had become synonymous with power and prestige. The rulers and chiefs of new courts emulated the architectural forms and ubiquitous floral decoration of Shah Jahan's reign in local styles across the Indian subcontinent.

The Great Mughals' legacy endures to this day. The Taj Mahal remains one of the world's most famous and praised monuments, and the memory of the Mughals' unsurpassed wealth and power is evoked whenever a titan of business or industry is called a "mogul."



Probably Delhi

Emperor Jahangir Receives Members of His Court,
ca. 1790–1810

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper

The Great Mughals continued to be glorified long after their dynasty lost its real power. At first glance, this painting seems to belong to the reign of Jahangir, who, haloed, sits under the canopy at its center. Upon closer inspection, however, details betray that it is not a contemporary historical record but rather a nostalgic pastiche, probably painted in Delhi around the turn of the 19th century. The scene's architecture postdates Jahangir's reign; Prince Dara Shikoh, who stands behind the dark-bearded Shah Jahan and holds a covered candle, was still a child upon Jahangir's death; and the odd change between the proportions of the courtiers on the left and those on the right is uncharacteristic of Jahangir-period high naturalism.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.63



Mughal Court Workshops, probably Lahore

Sword of Aurangzeb, ca. 1680–81

Watered steel, gold

When Shah Jahan fell ill in 1658, his third son, Aurangzeb, usurped the throne, killing his older brother Dara Shikoh and declaring himself emperor with the title '*Alamgir* (World Conqueror). A Persian inscription in overlaid gold on this sword's blade suggests that it was made for '*Alamgir* in the 24th year of his reign. While the superior chiseled Arabic calligraphy closest to the hilt and the very fine watering of the steel do suggest that the sword was made in a 17th-century workshop supplying the Mughal court, the lower quality of the '*Alamgir* inscription suggests it may have been added later to enhance the weapon's value.

V&A: IS.218-1964, Given by Lord Kitchener



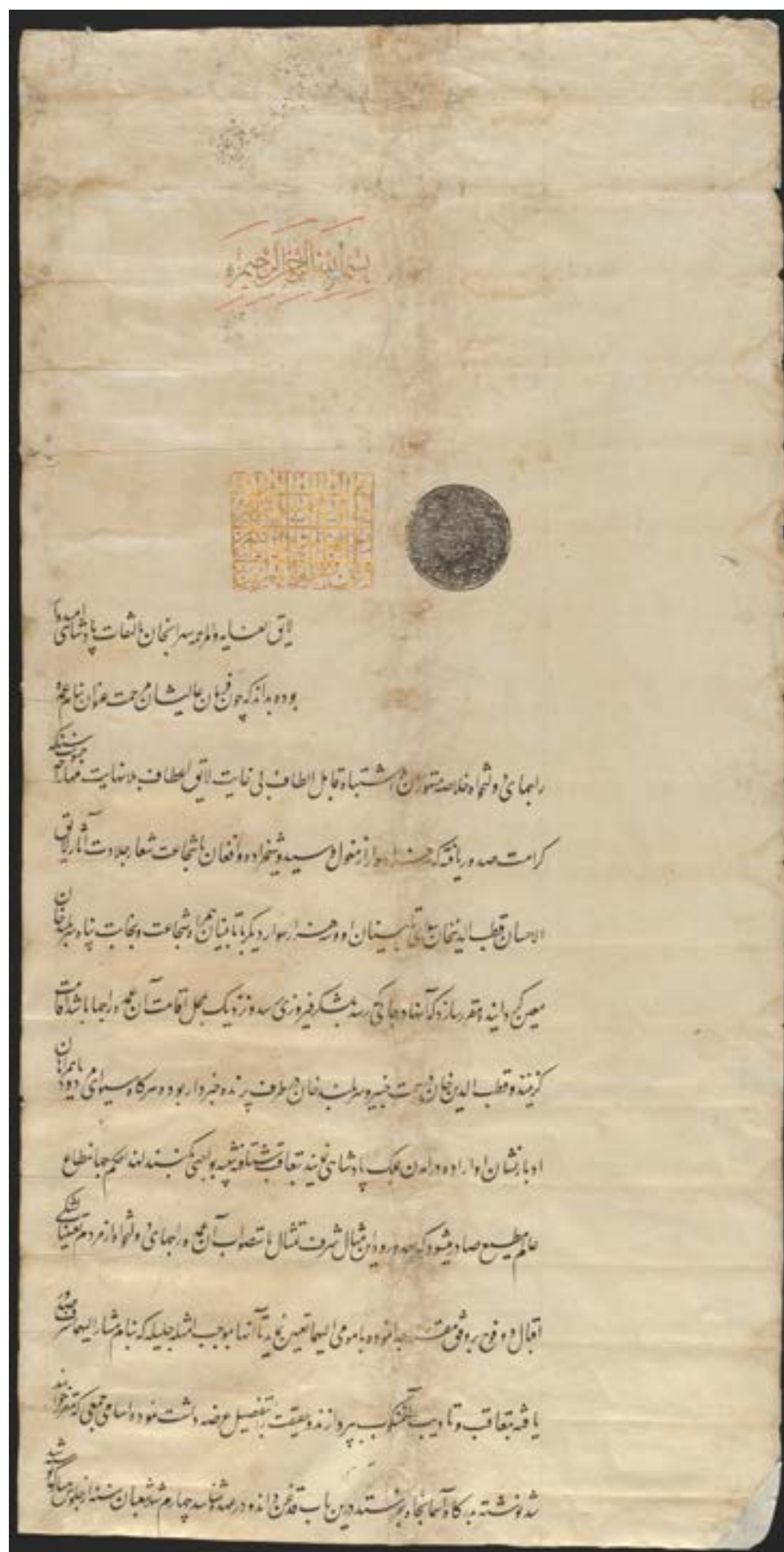
Mughal Court Workshops, probably Lahore

Sword of Dara Shikoh, ca. 1640–41

Watered steel, gold

The fine, watered steel blade of this sword carries a Persian inscription on its spine, stating that it belonged to the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh (1615–1659), eldest son and preferred successor of Shah Jahan. The couplet may be translated as: “This sword of the prince called Dara Shikoh / Takes care of a thousand enemies at one go.” The blade is also marked on the back with a gold parasol, signifying its royal ownership. The sword must have been made in a court workshop, perhaps in Lahore, which was a traditional center of weapons production. A date stamped on the blade near the hilt reads AH 1050, equivalent to 1640–41.

V&A: IS.214-1964, Given by the Right Hon. the Earl Kitchener of Khartoum



Mughal Court Workshops

Imperial Firman of the Emperor Aurangzeb, 1661

Ink and opaque watercolor on paper

For much of his long rule, Emperor Aurangzeb was preoccupied with territorial wars against a number of adversaries. The most provoking was the Maratha leader Shivaji, who slowed Aurangzeb's conquest of peninsular India's vast central region called the Deccan. This imperial *firman*, or written decree, from Aurangzeb instructs one of his officers in the Deccan to prepare the Mughal forces in the region against attacks by Shivaji. Its fine Persian calligraphy, written by royal scribes, includes an invocatory dedication line (*basmala*) at the top, a stylized monogram (*tughra*) of Aurangzeb's name, and the decree's twelve lines of text. The emperor's seal, to the right of the *tughra*, was designed by craftsmen from the imperial mint.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Asiatic Art Acquisition Fund and the Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 89.74



Probably North or West India

Tent Panel with Vase Motif, ca. 1700–50

Quilted cotton, silk embroidery

As the Mughal court moved between multiple capitals, visited the provinces, and followed war campaigns, it was housed in grand tent cities. The various precincts of these encampments were demarcated by fabric walls, known as *qanats*, made up of panels like this one, joined together in a series. Traditionally, the tents of the imperial family were red, the color of royalty. This hanging may have been made in one of the regional courts that rose to power as the emperors' influence declined, many of which appropriated imagery previously reserved for the imperial family. Its blossom-filled vases reinterpret earlier designs.

V&A: IM.62-1936



Alternating fabric panels of this royal Mughal encampment's perimeter wall are decorated with vases and flowers.

Akbar and Hamid Bakari, from an *Akbarnama* (detail), ca. 1590–95, Miskin (active late 1570s–ca. 1604) and Sarwan (active late 16th century), opaque watercolor and gold on paper. V&A: IS.2:55-1896. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Waist Sashes (Patkas)

An essential component of Mughal court costume was the elegant cloth waist sash called a *patka*. Folded along its length and tied over the long, tailored robe known as the *jama*, the sash's often elaborately decorated ends would be left to hang in front. Personal effects, including daggers and pen cases, could be secured by this belt. *Patkas* were frequently given by rulers as emblems of courtly favor. Like so many features of Mughal courtly culture, its costume—including the *patka*—outlived the dynasty's supremacy, appropriated widely as symbolic of wealth and power. The examples on display demonstrate the range of techniques and materials used by weavers to create these garments. All of them employ repeated floral motifs on their end panels, reminiscent of the decorative theme par excellence of Shah Jahan's reign.



The stylish Mughal-period dress of this young man, possibly a court page or attendant, includes a *patka*.

Youth Bearing a Sword (detail), ca. 1600–10, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.58



UPPER LEFT
Probably Gujarat

Waist Sash, ca. 1700
Silk, gilt silver–wrapped thread

V&A: 317-1907

UPPER RIGHT
Probably Burhanpur

Waist Sash, ca. 1700
Cotton, paint, dyes

V&A: IS.100-1948, Bequeathed by Sir Michael Sadler



LOWER
Possibly Delhi or Ahmedabad

Waist Sash, late 17th–early 18th century
Silk, cotton, silver- and gilt silver–wrapped thread, dyes

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck
Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.155



Gujarat

Embroidered Wall Hanging, ca. 1650–1700

Cotton, silk embroidery

Much of the decoration in Mughal and other Indian courts was provided by patterned textiles. This elegant embroidered panel may have been hung on a wall or used as a curtain over a window. It was made by Gujarati craftsmen, who used a chain-stitching technique adapted from their community's traditional methods for decorating leather shoes and horse tack. Their work was so fine that it was sought after by the Mughals and traded to Europe through the East India Company in the 17th and 18th centuries. The design of this hanging, of a flowering plant placed within an arched niche, is quintessentially Mughal.

V&A: IS.168-1950, Given by Miss F. J. Lefroy



Possibly vicinity of Jaipur

Tent Panel, 18th century

Cotton, dyes

Much like the red embroidered textile at the far end of the wall to the left, this block-printed and hand-dyed cotton panel was once a section of a tent wall known as a *qanat*. A series of such panels would have been sewn together, and the fabric screen would have appeared as a running arcade of large, flower-filled niches. Other pieces from the same set of tents may have once been in the royal collections of Jaipur, where there is still a thriving industry of artisans producing block-printed cotton textiles.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.153



Akbar, enthroned in a royal tent enclosure, accepting the submission of the ruler of Ranthambore in 1569.

Rai Surjan Hada Making Submission to Akbar, from an *Akbarnama*, 1590–95, Mukund (active late 16th century) and Shankar (active late 16th century), opaque watercolor and gold on paper. V&A: IS.2:75-1896. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Probably Jaipur

Dagger and Scabbard, 18th century

Gilt silver, brass, steel, niello

This straight, single-edged dagger is of a type known by the Persian term *kard* (knife), frequently worn by Mughal courtiers. While such weapons with horse-, antelope-, and lion-headed pommels were widespread, few examples with elephant heads are known. Perhaps a noble at one of Rajasthan's semi-independent Rajput courts requested the use of this particularly Indian animal. Its handle and scabbard feature coordinated designs of a lotus pond on one side and assorted flowers on the other. A whimsical parrot decorates the scabbard's gilt tip.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2003.55a–b



Jaipur

Covered Box, 19th century

Enamel, gold alloy

The jewel-like enameling of Jaipur is a direct descendant of the art practiced in the Mughal court workshops. This octagonal box's repeated floral motifs and its palette recall the decoration of luxury enameled articles from the period of Shah Jahan's rule. Like many Mughal enamels, its ruby-red, bright green, and deep blue designs are surrounded by a solid ground of white. Lustrous, high-carat gold completes the object's opulent effect.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of the Estate of Ailsa Mellon Bruce, 70.9.44a–b

Probably Lucknow

Scabbard for a Punch Dagger, 18th century

Gilt silver, velvet, wood

The elegantly restrained decorative style of Shah Jahan's reign was transformed by artists in the 18th century into lighter, lusher, and more extravagant forms. This intricate gilt-silver scabbard for a triangular-bladed punch dagger (*katar*) is a superb example of the resulting, almost rococo, aesthetic. Floral motifs—the mainstay of Mughal decoration—are multiplied and interlaced into a lively openwork tracery over the scabbard's velvet-clad wooden interior.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2003.49



Mughal Court Workshops

Huqqa Base, ca. 1700

Glass, enamel, gold

Huqqa Mouthpiece, ca. 1700

Nephrite jade, enamel, gold, cabochons

Tobacco from the Americas arrived in India with the Portuguese in the early 16th century. Before long, it had reached the Mughal court, and its conspicuous consumption—smoked through opulently crafted *huqqas*—became a sign of worldly sophistication. Filled with water, *huqqa* bases were fitted with two pipes emerging from their tops. One led to a bowl in which tobacco, sometimes mixed with other substances, burned. The other ran to a mouthpiece through which these products' smoke was drawn. The decoration of this base is typically Mughal, with a series of lone irises, in colorful enamel and gold paint, encircling its spherical body.

V&A: IS.90-1948, Bequeathed by Sir Michael Sadler; V&A: 02538(IS)





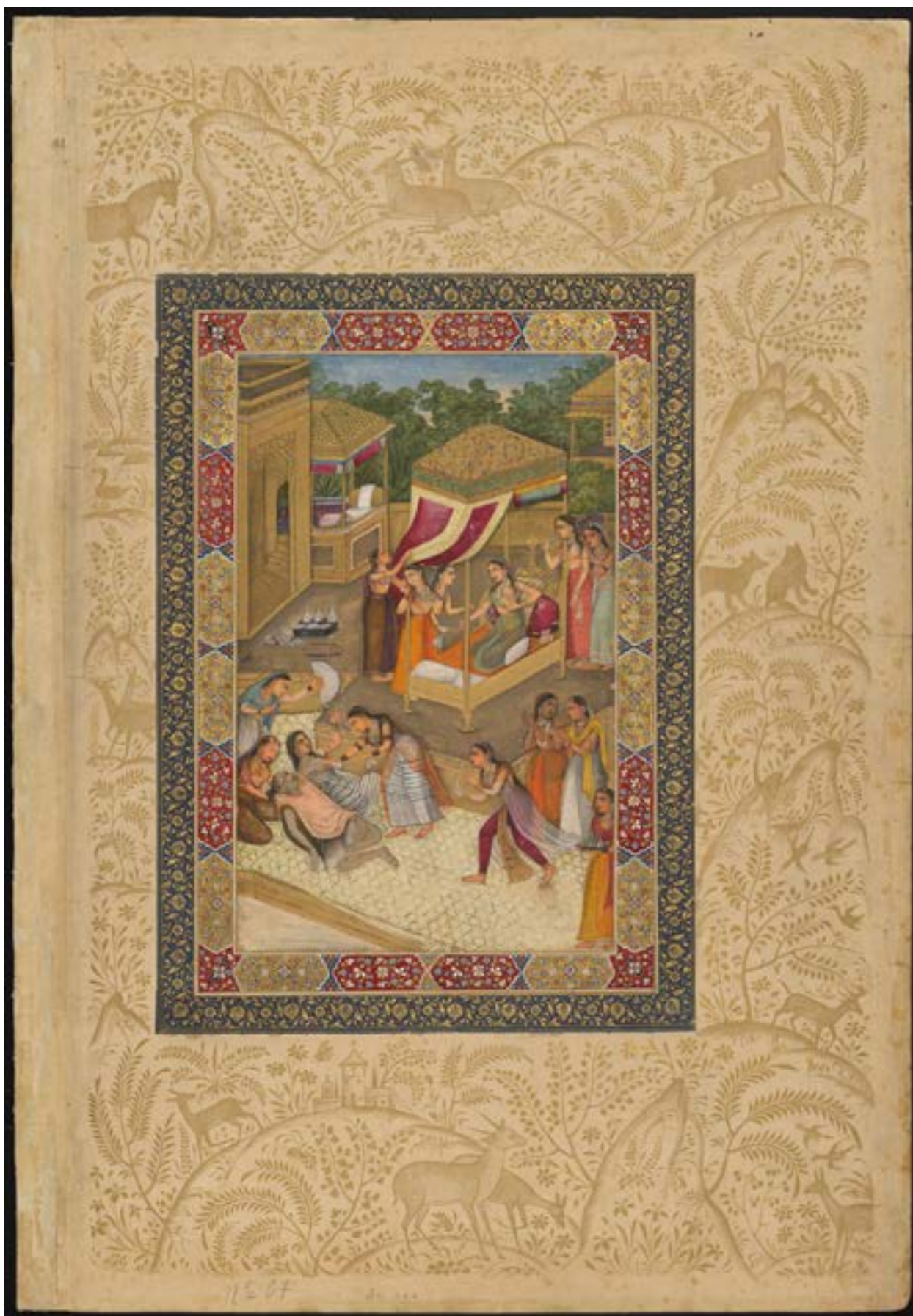
Awadh or Bengal

Huqqa Base, 1725–75

Glass, gold, paint

Early Indian *huqqas* were fashioned in metalwork, porcelain, and even jade, but glass soon became their primary medium. Though glass had been made in India for millennia, few locally produced blown objects predate the later 17th century, when European glass was introduced to the region. Copper compounds give this example's glass its rich, emerald-green color. Its ornamentation follows the familiar Mughal-style pattern of repeated vegetal motifs. The overall design is executed in reverse gilding, whereby elements appear in green against a luminous gold background. Within the stylized cypress trees running around the body are gold-on-green floral sprays, given visual depth by additional paint applied to the inside of the glass.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment and Dr. Joseph M. Dye III Fund for South Asian Art, 2024.313



Iran

Mir 'Imad al-Husayni of Qazvin

Page from the St. Petersburg Album, late 16th–early 17th century (calligraphies); 1831–32 (borders)

Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper

The production of Mughal-style albums was emulated well beyond the period of the Great Mughals, sometimes employing actual materials from their workshops.

This folio is from the *St. Petersburg Album*, which was assembled in Iran beginning in the mid-18th century and most of which ended up in the Russian Imperial Collection. A Mughal painting that was likely taken to Iran after Nadir Shah's 1739 sack of Delhi is on the back of this page. The Persian and Arabic calligraphies on this side—penned by Mir 'Imad al-Husayni of Qazvin during the reigns of Akbar or Jahangir—were probably also part of those spoils from the Mughal palaces. A minute inscription at the upper left corner indicates that the borders were painted in Iran in the early 19th century.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Gift of Paul Mellon, 68.8.65



Agra

Balustrades from a Palace, ca. 18th century

Marble, semiprecious hardstones

Ever since Shah Jahan's reign, Agra has been the primary center for the highly skilled craft of inlaying white marble with colorful semiprecious stones. In the 1700s and 1800s, regional rulers commissioned Agra artisans to make components such as inlaid marble panels, floors, and furniture for their palaces and other monuments. Rare surviving examples like these demonstrate the inventiveness of their floral designs.

The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait:
LNS 70 S b-e