

The art of the Mughals is both well documented and renowned for its splendid illustrated manuscripts and album leaves. However, scholarship on the art of the book from the preceding centuries of Muslim rule in India is still a relatively recent field of study. Brac de la Perrière's recent book provides a long-overdue and landmark survey that acts as a solid introduction to this material.

For the first half of the twentieth century it was generally accepted that illustrated manuscripts in the Arabic script were not produced during the Sultanate period (1192–1526). This view changed in 1954 with Robert Skelton's discovery and publication of the *Nimatnāma* (British Library, IO Islamic 149) and Ettinghausen's of a *Būstān* of Sa'di (National Museum, New Delhi, 48.6/4), both produced in Mandu.<sup>1</sup> Other manuscripts produced during the Sultanate period came to light in the 1960s and 1970s. Simultaneously, certain scholars proposed that a few early fifteenth-century manuscripts previously seen as 'provincial Persian' might in fact be from Sultanate India.

Brac de la Perrière has collated a substantial corpus of 48 manuscripts: 30 illustrated manuscripts, 17 Qur'ans and one illuminated Compendium. The corpus is defined as all manuscripts of Indian provenance written in Arabic script; that is Arabic itself, Persian and Avadhi, a local dialect from Uttar Pradesh. There remain no extant illustrated manuscripts from before Timur's sack of Delhi in 1398, all those remaining date to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Unfortunately many of these manuscripts are incomplete and folios are dispersed in collections worldwide.

The only other author to have published a partial survey of this material was Losty in his *Art of the Book in India* of 1982<sup>2</sup> where he devotes a chapter to the subject of Sultanate manuscripts. Like Losty, Brac de la Perrière studies all aspects of the book, including the paper and pigments used rather than just the illustrations. In Chapter 1 she reviews the scant documentary evidence of place of production, patrons and artists. She then introduces the manuscripts themselves in Chapter 2 and sets out a new system of categorisation based on style, subject matter and chronology. This is a sensible way to order the material given that most of the manuscripts lack a colophon, and that there are many disparate styles. Brac de la Perrière finds Losty's method of categorising the manuscripts according to their style and levels of patronage as ineffective, as we cannot be certain of who the patrons were. Although she sets out a new method for grouping these manuscripts, the groups can still loosely be related to Losty's groups.

The first two groups date to the fifteenth century. Group 1 comprises manuscripts of traditional Persian texts with outmoded styles of illustration. Group 2 includes a combination of Persian texts with one Avadhi text, a sufi romance the *Cāndāyan*, of 781 AH /1389 AD by Maulana Da'ud. Although archaic Persian elements can be detected in the paintings within this group, they are more heavily influenced by non-Islamic Indian elements, for example certain figures are shown in profile, and many

<sup>1</sup>R. Skelton, "The Nimatnama: a Landmark in Malwa Painting", *Marg*, no. 3, (1959) pp. 44–48; R. Ettinghausen "The Bustan Manuscript of Sultan Nasir-Shah Khalji", *Marg*, no. 3, (1959) pp. 40–43.

<sup>2</sup>J. P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India*, British Library Reference Division Publications (London, 1982).

wear Indian dress. Group 3 manuscripts are largely influenced by Persian Timurid and Turkman styles, and mostly date to the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They include four manuscripts produced in the court of Mandu, one from Bengal and others from the Deccan. Some of these are the only ones among the corpus that mention the date and place of production. Group 4 includes just two sixteenth century copies of the *Cāndāyan*. Indeed, these manuscripts whose original and striking illustrations synthesise Indian and Persian traits deserve a category of their own. Group 5 comprises illuminated Qur'ans. The manuscripts mentioned in these five groups are listed in Appendix I. They then appear again in Appendix II, along with many others that she attributes to Sultanate India.

Persian manuscripts whose provenance remains disputed but which may have been produced in India or Persia have been omitted from the five groups outlined above. These manuscripts were labelled provincial Persian; they do not fit with contemporary models in either page layout or style of illumination and illustration, even though they are loosely based on developments from Shiraz. Among these manuscripts are the so-called Mohl *Shāhnāma* of 1438 AD (British Library, Or.1403) and a *Shāhnāma* in New Delhi of 1427–8 AD (National Museum, 54.60). Some appear in Appendix II, but Brac de la Perrière does not make clear why they do not appear in the main corpus in Appendix I. They are included in the main body of her PhD thesis of 2003 but are presumably excluded from the book as they are not certifiably Sultanate Indian. Arguably they should remain part of the study of Sultanate manuscripts whilst their provenance remains under review.

The study of Sultanate Qur'ans constitutes a major part of this book. To date there has not been a single focused work on this subject, which constitutes a major part of this book. Although 16 Qur'ans are listed, the study essentially focuses on five of these, namely Gwalior 1399 AD (Aga Khan Collection, Ms.32), Bighara 1488 AD (British Library, Add.18163), Bijapur 1483 AD (Archaeological Museum of Bijapur, Inv.912), Fogg (location unknown, sold in 2000) and Jaunpur c. 1500 A.D. (British Library, Add.5548–51). Brac de la Perrière finds commonalities in this group's page format, chromatic scheme and decorative motifs. This gives the Qur'ans some coherence, unlike the illustrated texts that are characterized by their diversity. She suggests that these Qur'ans could perhaps provide evidence of mass production undertaken by madrasas or Sufi colleges, as opposed to a commercial enterprise. The majority of Qur'ans are written in the distinctive *behari* script. The origins and development of this script remain somewhat obscure. However, her overview of the subject does not refer to the *behari* script's influence on the development of Qur'anic calligraphy in the Yemen.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Brac de la Perrière notes the use of the *muhaqqaq* script for certain Sultanate Qur'ans, but without further commentary on its presence. This leaves the possibility of Mamluk influence as a subject ripe for further study. She acknowledges the need for a systematic study on Qur'ans and introduces new ideas that merit further research.

The physical characteristics of the manuscripts are discussed in some detail. Over a third of the book analyses the material, such as paper, pigments, and inks; techniques; page layout; scripts; illumination; and illustration. Brac de la Perrière brings together for the first time all aspects of the codicology of the chosen corpus of Sultanate manuscripts. The types of materials used in order to produce a manuscript are often ignored by art historians who tend to focus primarily on the painting. She neatly summarises all existing scholarships on these areas and then tackles variations in pictorial format, the layout of folios (columns, frames etc) and rate of illustration. One of her findings is the fact that the rate of illustration is not indicative of patronage as some of the courtly manuscripts have the least number of illustrations.

The author provides observations on the thickness, colour and grain of the papers. It might perhaps have been germane to discuss also how paper is primed, paint is applied or which instruments were

<sup>3</sup>S. S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 389.

used. The composition of commonly used pigments and inks are discussed and she concludes that the palette employed in a manuscript is not necessarily indicative of provenance. Brac de la Perrière points out the need for some chemical and scientific testing of manuscripts. These tests should include a detailed analysis of the pigments incorporating a microscopic observation and ultra-violet (see Porter 1994).<sup>4</sup> The findings from these tests may provide crucial regional and chronological information, particularly pertinent for those manuscripts whose provenance is still disputed.

Brac de la Perrière achieves her objective of writing a study of the arts of the book during the Sultanate period. Useful reference tools include dynastic table, maps and the list of calligraphers and copyists of manuscripts and epigraphy in Appendix III. As so many of these manuscripts are unknown it is a shame that the book is not better illustrated. The manuscripts are clearly laid out in Appendix I and II. From this list the dearth of scholarly research on most of the manuscripts can clearly be seen. A study of contemporary cultural influences, providing a necessary backdrop to these manuscripts, remains outstanding.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between treatises on painting techniques and illustrations in Sultanate manuscripts could also be an avenue to explore. This book will be an essential reference book for all scholars of this field, that will hopefully inspire further research on each individual manuscript. It is also a clear and informative overview of the subject for the general reader.

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