

THE KHAN KHANAN AND HIS PAINTERS, ILLUMINATORS AND CALLIGRAPHISTS

WE know so little about the life-history of the artists of the period of Akbar and Jahângîr—nay, of the Mughal artists in general—that even a scrap of paper, which may throw light on the biography of these artists, is of value to a student of Mughal art. Writers on Mughal painting have ordinarily made use of only such material as has been available to them in printed Texts and Translations, but, it must be admitted, that there is still a mass of material in Persian manuscripts which, if examined and published, will no doubt throw much light on the subject. There is another point which also deserves consideration. It has been supposed so long that all the Mughal artists were attached to the court of the Emperor only,—but the fact is that some of the Mughal grandees also had well-equipped studios in which talented artists embellished and illuminated for them manuscripts of rare grace and beauty. Among such grandees was the Khân Khânân ('Abdur Rahîm) the great general of Akbar and a son of the famous Bayrâm Khân (the Regent), who had gathered round him a galaxy of some of the most talented artists of the age. In our historical works the Khân Khânân appears in the rôle of a great commander and a capable administrator but, in fact, he was equally great as a poet, a scholar and a *connoisseur*. He was a generous patron of savants, poets, painters and penmen. Almost all the great poets of Akbar were formerly attached to his court. In fact, they served their term of apprenticeship under him, before joining the service of the Emperor.

The Khân Khânân's library has been described as a 'Wonder of the Age'. It was a meeting-place of the best scholars and men of letters of the age. His biographer, 'Abdul Bâqî Nahâwandî, who has written the excellent *Ma'athir-i-Rahimi** (or the history of 'Abdur Rahîm,

* A very fine copy of the book, comprising 756 folios, and bearing additions and emendations in the author's own hand, is preserved in the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (No. D. 268). The book is being edited by Shams-ul-'Ulamâ Dr. M. Hidâyat Husain, Khân Bahâdur, in the *Bibliotheca Indica Series* and is nearing completion. Another copy, containing the *Khatima* (or conclusion) only, is also preserved in the same library (No. D. 269). I have used both the MSS. in preparing notes.

Khân Khânân), tells us that the Khân Khânân's library was visited by nearly a hundred scholars daily, who met there 'to have their doubts settled, their difficulties solved and their frontier of knowledge enlarged and extended'. The library was in the charge of a Superintendent, who was himself a scholar. His function was twofold: first, the custody of the manuscripts and, secondly, the supervision of the work of the calligraphists, painters, gilders and book-binders, who were engaged in copying and illuminating the manuscripts. The *Ma'athir* gives us the names of five persons who at some time or other, acted as librarians of the Khân Khânân, namely, Shaikh 'Abdus Salâm (fol. 749b), Mawlânâ Baqâ'î (fol. 625b), Mîr Bâqî of Transoxiana (fol. 753a), Mawlânâ Ibrâhîm (fol. 745b) and Shujâ'â (fol. 752a), besides Mawlânâ Kâmî, Ghanî Hamadânî and a few others who were also employed there.

Besides ancient manuscripts, the library contained a very large collection of autograph copies of the works of contemporary poets. But, alas, none of those autograph copies is known to exist to-day; and, of the older manuscripts, only a dozen have been traced so far.¹ All these copies are the finest specimens of the penman's and the illuminator's art,² and some even contain excellent miniatures in the finest Persian and Mughal styles. The interest which the Khân Khânân took in the manuscripts of his library is proved by the fact that all the extant copies of his library bear his autograph notes also. I may mention here, in passing, that a beautiful copy of the *Tadhkirat-ul Awliya*, or the 'Memoirs of the Saints', which formerly belonged to the library of the Khân Khânân and bears his autograph note on the fly-leaf, has recently been added to my humble collection of Persian manuscripts.

I have already said that the Khân Khânân was a very good *connoisseur*. An instance only will prove my point. The author of *Kalimat-ush-Shu'ara* narrates the following story of a painter who came to the Khân Khânân, with a picture and received a reward of five thousand rupees from him. He says:—

“ When the Khân Khânân was going to the court of the Emperor, a painter came to him and handed over to him

(1) See Shams-ul-'Ulamâ Hâfidh Nazîr Ahmad's article in the *Ma'arif* (Vol. 14, No. 5, pp. 415-430).

(2) In the fifth Regnal year (1610, A.D.), of Jahângîr the Khân Khânân presented a beautiful, illustrated copy of Jâmî's *Yusuf Zulaikha* which was transcribed by the famous calligraphist Mîr 'Alî. The MS. was appraised at 1,000 Mohurs. (See *Memoirs*, Rogers and Beveridge, i, p. 168). According to K.B. 'Abdul Muqtadir, the MS. is now preserved in the Bankipore Library, (*Catalogue*, ii, pp. 76-80).

one of his pictures. The scene depicted therein was of a lady who was taking her bath and that a maid-servant was rubbing the sole of her foot with a pumice-stone. The Khân Khânân looked at the picture for a moment and then, putting it in his palanquin went away to pay homage to the Emperor. When he returned, the painter re-appeared. He ordered that a sum of rupees five thousand be paid to him. The painter said, 'My picture is hardly worth more than five rupees, but there is one artistic skill which I have employed in it. If your Honour has marked that, then I shall be glad to accept your reward, for then I shall have the satisfaction that your Honour has really appreciated my work'. The Khân Khânân said, 'Your skill lies in that you have expressed in the lady's face the feeling which is produced by the rubbing of the sole with a pumice-stone'. The painter was much delighted and he went round the *palki* of that *connoisseur*."¹

This much for painting. The interest which the Khân Khânân took in calligraphy may be proved from the following two instances. When 'Abdul Bâqî Nahâwandî first came to his court and presented to him a 'Poem', which was transcribed by the celebrated calligraphist, Mîr 'Imâd of Qazwîn, the Khân Khânân was so pleased with him that he at once appointed him to a high post and later commissioned him to compile the *Ma'athir-i-Rahimi*.² Again, when Khwâja Mûhammad of Gîlân sent to the Khân Khânân a Persian Poem, which was copied by the well-known calligraphist Amîr Mu'izzuddîn Muhammad of Kâshân, he sent him a *lac of rupees*.³

The author of the *Ma'ahir-ul-Umara* has truly remarked that 'the Khân Khânân's court, which was the centre of the 'masters' of all branches of art and letters, was reminiscent of the days of Sultân Husain Mîrzâ and Mîr 'Alî Shir of Herât'. Like these two great bibliophiles—probably the greatest that Persia has ever known—the Khân Khânân also had (as appears from the *Ma'athir-i-Rahimi*), a regular staff of painters, gilders, illuminators and calligraphists. The *Ma'athir* gives us the names of *five* painters, *two* gilders and illuminators and *three* calligraphists only but, besides them, there must have been many more artists of lesser fame who were also engaged in illustrating and illuminating the manuscripts of the Khân Khânân.

(1) *K limat-ush-Shu'ara* (my MS. copy), fol. 22b.

(2) *Ma'athir-i-Rahimi*, (A.S.B. MS., D, 269), fol. 360.

(3) *Ibid*, (D, 268), fol. 549b.

Among the painters, we get the names of Miyân Nadîm, Bahbûd, Mushfiq, Mâdhu and Ibrâhîm; and among the gilders and illuminators we find Mullâ Muhammed Amîn and Mullâ Muhammad Husain; and among the calligraphists we have Mullâ Abdur Rahîm, *Ambarin Qalam*, Mullâ Muhammad Mu'min, Mawlânâ Muhammad Darwîsh and Mullâ Muhammad Bâqir. The only specimen of the art of some of the above-named painters is in a copy of the *Khamsa*, or the 'Five Poems', of Amir Khusraw of Delhi, which is preserved in the *Staatsbibliothec*, Berlin (MS. Orient. Fol. 1278). Dr. Goetz, who has examined the manuscript, says, "According to an extensive note inserted in 1617 by the Khân Khânân 'Abdur Rahîm Khân (one of the highest grandees of the Emperor Akbar and son of his guardian Bairâm Khan) it was purchased by the latter in Gujarat, and is said to have been a masterpiece jointly executed by the calligrapher Sultân 'Alî and the most renowned of Muslim painters, Bihzâd. Its miniatures which are framed by charming illuminated borders, are, nevertheless, actually signed by three less known, painters of Akbar's reign, Qâsim, Nadîm and Mish Kish. Originally it had no illustrations; subsequently many miniatures of very different origin were pasted over the text and were adapted to its size by various disfiguring additions. Among these, however, is a quantity of bad miniatures, but nevertheless some very fine paintings of the Akbari School."¹

Of the above three painters, Nadîm and Mushfiq² (and not Mish Kish, as stated by Dr. Goetz) are mentioned in the *Ma'athir*; while the third, Qâsim is not referred to in the book. There is, however, one Muhammad Qâsim whose illustrations can be seen in the British Museum copy of the *Shahnama*,³ Add. 5600. He may be identical with the aforesaid Qâsim who illustrated the *Khamsa* for the Khân Khânân but, unless further evidence is forthcoming, no final decision can be made. It is also difficult to identify the Mâdhu of the *Ma'athir* with the Mâdhu mentioned by Abu'l Fazl in the '*A'in*', as has been done by Blochmänn,⁴

(1) *Eastern Art* (Annual), Vol. II, 1930, article on "Indian miniatures in the German Museums and Private Collections".

(2) The signature of Mushfiq is quite clear. See the reproduction in Arnold and Grohmann's *The Islamic Book*, Plate. 87.

(3) Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian MSS.*, Vol. ii. p. 537a. A miniature, bearing Qâsim's signature has been reproduced by Arnold and Binyon in the *Court Painters of the Grand Moghuls*, Plate viii.

(4) '*A'in-i-Akbari*, (Blochmänn), Vol. i, p. 10841.

Martin¹ and Brown.² The last named author mentions three Mâdhus of Akbar's period: Mâdhu Khânazâd, Mâdhu Kalân (or senior) and Mâdhu Khurd (or Junior). He has identified the first, *i.e.*, Mâdhu Khânazâd, with the Mâdhu of the *Ma'athir*. But I fear he has overlooked the fact that Mâdhu Khânazâd's pictures are to be found in the British Museum copy of the *Darabnama*, which, as he himself says, was completed about 1575, while the Mâdhu of the *Ma'athir* was still working in the library of the Khân Khânân in 1617 A.D. Did he really resign his service under the Emperor and join that of the Khân Khânân? Probably not, for had this been a fact the author of the *Ma'athir* must have referred to this in his book. In view of these considerations, I am inclined to keep his identity separate from that of the Mâdhu of the '*A'in*' and also from the two other Mâdhus whose names appear in the "Akbar Manuscripts".

Let me here refer to the Khân Khânân's interest in 'paper'. It is on record that he was keenly interested in '*Aks* (or tracing) paper and that Mullâ Muhammad Amîn and Mullâ Muhammad Husain invented '*Aks* paper of 'seven colours'. *Abri* paper was also invented under his patronage.³

Now, I append an English translation of the notices of painters, gilders and calligraphists, which are given in the *Ma'athir-i-Rahimi*. I should like to make it clear, however, that my translation is not always literal as, in that case, some of the passages would have hardly been intelligible to the English reader.

A. PAINTERS..

1. Miyân Nadîm (fol. 753a). He was one of the *Khasa Khail* and a slave of this Commander-in-Chief. He was the brother of Miyan Fahîm⁴ whose account we have

(1) *Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey*, p. 130.

(2) *Indian Painting under the Mughals*, p. 197.

(3) It is stated in *Farhang-i-'Anand Raj*, (p. 1024) that "*Abri* is a coloured paper". Shiblî Nu'mânî, a renowned Indian scholar who for the first time drew attention to the importance of *Ma'athir-i-Rahimi*, says that "*Abri* paper was used in binding manuscripts" (*Maqalat*, p. 149), but this assertion does not seem to be correct.

(4) Miyân Fahîm was the son of Barbunâjî, a Râthor Râjpût of Saruhî, who was killed in an engagement with the Khân Khânân. Fahîm (whose original Hindu name is not known to us) fell a prisoner into the hands of the Khân Khânân, who took a fancy for him and brought him up as a son. Fahîm gave his life for his master, while fighting Mahâbat Khân who had interned the Khân Khânân. He was pious and brave (see *Ma'athir-i-Rahimi*, fol. 748b,—and *Ma'athir-ul-Umara*, Vol. i, p. 712).

already given. The service which the latter rendered to India, in general, and to the Khân Khânân, in particular, is too well-known to need repetition here. He (*i.e.*, Nadîm) was so skilled in drawing and painting that, since the days of Mânî and Bihzâd, none has been born who can rival him. He acquired this proficiency in the library, and in the service, of this Commander-in-Chief. In fact, the exalted Khân Khânân himself instructed and raised him to this high level. Thus, under the training of the Khân Khânân, he became a peerless master in his art. He breathed his last in the service of his master. He led a comfortable and care-free life, as he was handsomely paid by the Khân Khânân.

2. Bahbûd (foll. 753*a*, *b*). He was a *Khasa Khail* of the Khân Khânân. Formerly he was a slave of Mîrzâ Bâqir, the illustrious son of *Qiblat-ul-Kutub*, Mîr 'Alî, the famous calligraphist. The aforesaid Mîrzâ (Bâqir) was skilled in calligraphy and wrote such beautiful *Nasta'liq*, after the style of his father, that his writings find a place in the Albums of the *connoisseurs*, and excite much admiration. When he came to India and joined the service of the Khân Khânân, he handed over Bahbûd, who is unrivalled in painting and *Nasta'liq* calligraphy, to the Khân Khânân. He is still alive and passes his time in the Library. He is engaged in adorning, embellishing and copying the manuscripts of the Khân Khânân. In fact, he is peerless in these two arts, in his age. The writer has seen specimens of his painting and calligraphy and is of opinion that undoubtedly he is a 'Marvel of the Age'.

3. Mawlânâ Mushfiq (fol. 753*b*). He is also one of the *Khasa Khails*. He is an unrivalled painter of his age. He has passed his life, from an early age down to the present day, in the library (of the Khân Khânân). Here, he acquired proficiency and obtained this exalted position under the care and in the training of this Chief. He has no rival or equal (in his art). He leads a life of comfort, under the patronage of the Khân Khânân. He works in the library.

4. Mâdhu (fol. 753*b*). He is a Hindu painter. In portraiture, drawing, painting and arabesque-design (*tarrahi*) he is the Mânî and the Bihzâd of his age. He has illustrated most of the manuscripts of this court; he has drawn several court-scenes and painted excellent miniatures. He is employed in the library and holds, besides an allowance, *Jagirs* also. The writer has met

him and has also seen his pictures in the presence of this Commander-in-Chief. Verily, he is peerless (in his art).

5. Mawlânâ Ibrâhîm, *Naqqash* (fol. 754*b*). He was unrivalled in calligraphy, gilding, book-binding and was skilled as engraver on precious stones. He was much skilled in various arts, and was proficient and unsurpassed in other branches as well. He met the Commander-in-Chief at Ahmadnagar, in the Decān, and entered his service there. He held the post of a librarian for a number of years. There are many specimens of his painting and gilding in this 'school of wise men' *i.e.*, the library. It may be said, without the least exaggeration, that each one of his excellences would have been an embellishment and an adornment for the people of the world. At times, he composed verses also. He had a good aptitude for poetry and was unrivalled among the exponents of this art in India. For reasons, which are not known to the writer, he was deprived of the honour of the service of the Khân Khânân. He travelled, during the remaining period of his life, throughout India, in search of a master and patron like the Khân Khânân, but he did not get any. He was always sorry, and regretted his mistake. At last the messenger of Death rolled the carpet of his existence (*i.e.*, he died)..... (Verses quoted).

B. GILDERS AND ILLUMINATORS.

1. Mullâ Muhammad Amîn, (fol. 752 *b*), the *jadwal*-maker. He is one of the famous gilders of Khurâsân. For a long time, he was employed in the library attached to the shrine of Imâm Rizâ, the eighth Imâm, at Mashhad, and was engaged in embellishing the manuscripts of that exalted shrine. When the Uzbegs became masters of Khurâsân and they plundered, pillaged and destroyed many of its districts, and more particularly Mashhad, the aforesaid Mawlânâ came, with his sons and grandsons, to India. He took shelter in the library of the Commander-in-Chief and here he removed from his face—through the kindness of the Khân Khânân—the dust of the woes and the sufferings of Khurâsân. He was appointed on a salary of Rs. 4,000 and his sons also were appointed on high salaries. He was unrivalled in his age in gilding, *jadwal*-work and '*aks*' (*i.e.*, tracing) work. He has adorned and embellished most of the manuscripts of this library. As the Khân Khânân was particularly interested in '*aks*' paper, he invented '*aks*' paper of seven colours. He made such improvements in '*aks*' that none of the ancient or modern

masters can even approach him. He obtained so many favours and rewards from his master, during his long service at his court, that it is hardly possible to enumerate them all. He had a fine taste for poetry. He is the inventor of *Abri* paper also. (Verses quoted).

2. Mullâ Muhammad Husain (fol. 753a) of Herât, was the brother of Mullâ Muhammad Amîn. He was an excellent *sahhaf*, or book-binder. In 'aks work, he even excelled Mullâ Muhammad Amîn. He has been serving in this library since thirty-five years. No one has surpassed him in *dirham burd*¹ 'Aks work of seven colours. He has no peer in this art. Besides his salary, he has been given *jagir* also. To-day, he is the pivot of the library.

C. CALLIGRAPHISTS.

1. Mullâ 'Abdur Rahîm, *Ambarin Qalam* (fol. 752b) of Herât. He is one of the celebrated calligraphists of the age, and writes a very fine *Nasta'liq* hand. In his early age when he came from Khurâsân to India, he attached himself to the court of this Commander-in-Chief. He made such improvement in calligraphy, under the able guidance of his master, that the fame of his penmanship spread all over India. Most of the manuscripts in the Sarkâr (of the Khân Khânân) were in the handwriting of this 'Wonder of the Age'. He remained in the service of the Khân Khânân for a number of years and was always engaged in acquiring proficiency (in his art). The Khân Khânân, then, presented him before the Vicegerent of God (*i.e.*, Emperor Akbar) and had him appointed in the Royal Court. At present no one excels him, except Mullâ Muhammad Husain of Kashmîr. He received many favours and rewards from the Khân Khânân, during his service under him, and to-day also he prays for his (*i.e.*, the Khân Khânân's) good fortune and prosperity.²

2. Mullâ Muhammad Mu'min (fol. 753a). He is the brother of Mullâ Muhammad Husain of Herât. These two brothers have not, since their arrival in India, gone to any other court or library, except that of this Commander-in-Chief. He wrote very beautiful *Nasta'liq*. He was the master of his age in *jali* (bold) calligraphy. There

(1) I have been unable to understand the exact significance of *dirham burd*. Several Persian scholars, whom I consulted, were also unable to enlighten me on the point.

(2) An account of the life of this calligraphist and a list of the extant specimens of his calligraphy will be found in my *Specimens of Muslim Calligraphy in the Ghose Collections, Calcutta*, pp. 11, 12.

are many bulky volumes in this library which have been transcribed by him. He received an allowance befitting his status. So long as he was alive, he was engaged in the service of the Commander-in-Chief and left it only when he passed away from this transitory world.

3. Mawlânâ Darwîsh (753*b* margin) of Turbat. He was the illustrious son of Mullâ 'Abdus Samad of Turbat. He is known as Darwîsh 'Abdus Samad. He wrote a beautiful *Ta'liq* hand. In fact, he had acquired such proficiency in his art that *connoisseurs* placed the specimens of his calligraphy in their Albums, mistaking them to be the work of the celebrated Mullâ Darwîsh. The Mullâ worked for a long time as a scribe in the *Daru'l Insha* of the Eighth Imâm at Mashhad. But the desire of kissing the threshold of this Commander-in-Chief, brought him to India. He acted as a Munshî in this Court, for a number of years. He combined in him the qualities of a good penman with that of a man of refined taste. So long as he was in the service of the Khân Khânân, he was always honoured with rewards, but, when he became old and infirm, he sought the permission of the Commander-in-Chief and retired to Kâshân—the abode of the Faithful. But he left his son, Khwâja Muhammad Qâsim, at the Court. He was employed on the same work.

The writer met the Mawlânâ at Kâshân, where he was living in comfort, with the money which he had received from this Ka'ba of generosity (*i.e.*, the Khân Khânân), and was engaged in praying for (the welfare of) his expatron. He breathed his last at Kâshân. So long as he was alive, he always prayed for the Khân Khânân.

4. Shujâ'â (fol. 752*a*). He belonged to Shîrâz. He wrote very fine *Naskh* and *Thulth* hands, and was the master of his age in that art. At the time when this Commander-in-Chief was engaged in the conquest of Sind, he came from Shîrâz to India, in 999 A.H., in company of Aqâ Muhammad Shîrâzî, (who is at present the Mîr Bakshî of this Commander-in-Chief) and of Hâfidh Tâj Shîrâzî. He got his appointment at the court on the recommendation of Mawlânâ Shakibî of Isfâhân. Shujâ'â was soon raised to the exalted position of the Superintendent of the library—a library which is the meeting-place of savants, scholars and poets. While in the service, he became such a confidant of the Commander-in-Chief that his associates and companions became jealous of him.....He obtained the title of Shujâ' Bahâdur. Now-a-days many talented scholars of this country are

convinced of his excellence and ability. So long as he lived in India, he was attached to this Court. He departed to the next world while still in the service of the Khân Khânân. May God pardon his shortcomings!

5. Mawlânâ Muhammad Bâqir (fol. 610b). He is the younger brother of Mawlânâ Maqsûd, a mercer of Kâshân. In *Nasta'liq* calligraphy he not only excelled all his contemporaries in that noble art, but even surpassed the 'ancient masters of calligraphy'. In calligraphy he was a pupil of that skilled 'Master of the Age' and the 'Wonder of the time' Amîr Mu'iz-ud-Dîn, the famous penman of Kâshân. In calligraphy he imitated the style of the ancient masters so perfectly that specimens of his penmanship found a place in the Albums of the experts of calligraphy. He was imprisoned for a year by Shâh 'Abbâs. When Shâh 'Abbâs came from Qazwîn to Kâshân, he was released from the prison on the intercession of the writer of these lines. After visiting the Ka'ba and Najaf, he returned to Kâshân. Next, he came to India and entered the service of Ibrâhîm 'Adil Shâh (987-1035/1579-1626) at Bijâpûr. As that exalted ruler is keenly interested in *Naskh* and *Thulth* calligraphy, he gave him encouragement and raised his position and status befitting his attainments. He came to 'Adil Shâh in 1006 A.H. and since then, he has been employed there during the last twenty years. In these days, he has, on account of my friendship with him (*i.e.*, the writer), joined the band of the panegyrists of this Commander-in-Chief.

M. MAHFUZUL HAQ.



A Miniature bearing the Signature of Mushfiq, a Painter of the Khan