

Reading a painting:- Safavid artists their relationship with their Patron and their contribution to the early development of Mughal painting



Princes of the House of Timur, Kabul ca 1549: attributed to artists from the Safavid court - Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd al Samad, British Museum.
Dimensions:- Height 108.05 centimetres,(3ft 6") width 108 centimetres

Outline of Presentation

- **Questions – Reading a painting:** *What can a painting tell us about its purpose, patron and the value placed upon it by its subsequent owners?*
- *What can the subtle changes of the style and composition of Safavid artists in their work for Humayun tell us about their relationship with him?*
- 1) “**Princes of the House of Timur**” (British museum painting) – explore - Over painting in the 16th /17th century – additional portraits of Mughal emperors – demonstrates the role of painting as a symbol of Timurid legitimacy.
- 2) Individual paintings by the Safavid artists Mir Sayyid Ali, Abd al Samad –**template of idealised portrayal of courtly figures**
- 3) Evidence of compositional transference and changes to the Mughal style in work for the patron Akbar.



Mughal emperor Humayun, surrounded by his Timurid ancestors, receives his descendants Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. This **Timurid-Mughal** genealogy emphasises the great regard in which the Mughals held their ancestors.

Additions were made in India about 1605 and 1628. **Persian stylistic contribution:** Gold sky, Chenar tree, fine rocky high horizon, division into multiple planes of action foreground, middle ground, far distance. Stream bordered by flowering plants, Arrangement of figures Portraiture $\frac{3}{4}$ view of faces Gesture and delicacy of line.

Historical context -Humayun

- **Timur** b.1336 - 1405 ruled from Samarkand (Central Asia)
- **Babur** r.1513 – 1526 (Kabul and Agra)
- **Humayun** r.1530 – 1556 (Delhi, Kabul, Delhi)

- Humayun succeeded to the throne of an unstable kingdom. His realm stretched from Kabul to the borders of Bengal. In 1539 he was defeated by Sher Shah one of his governors in Bihar.

- Humayun sought asylum in Persia arriving at the court of Shah Tahmasp in 1542. Humayun was reputed to have been impressed with the work of the Safavid artist Mir Musavvir (would offer 1000 tomans for him to join his atelier). Humayun with Tahmasp's help regained his court in Kabul. He initially invited Persian artists Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd al Samad to work for him they arrived there in 1548.

- **Akbar** r.1556 – 1605 (Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Lahore, Agra)

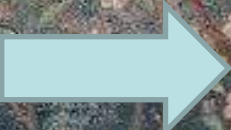


later additions

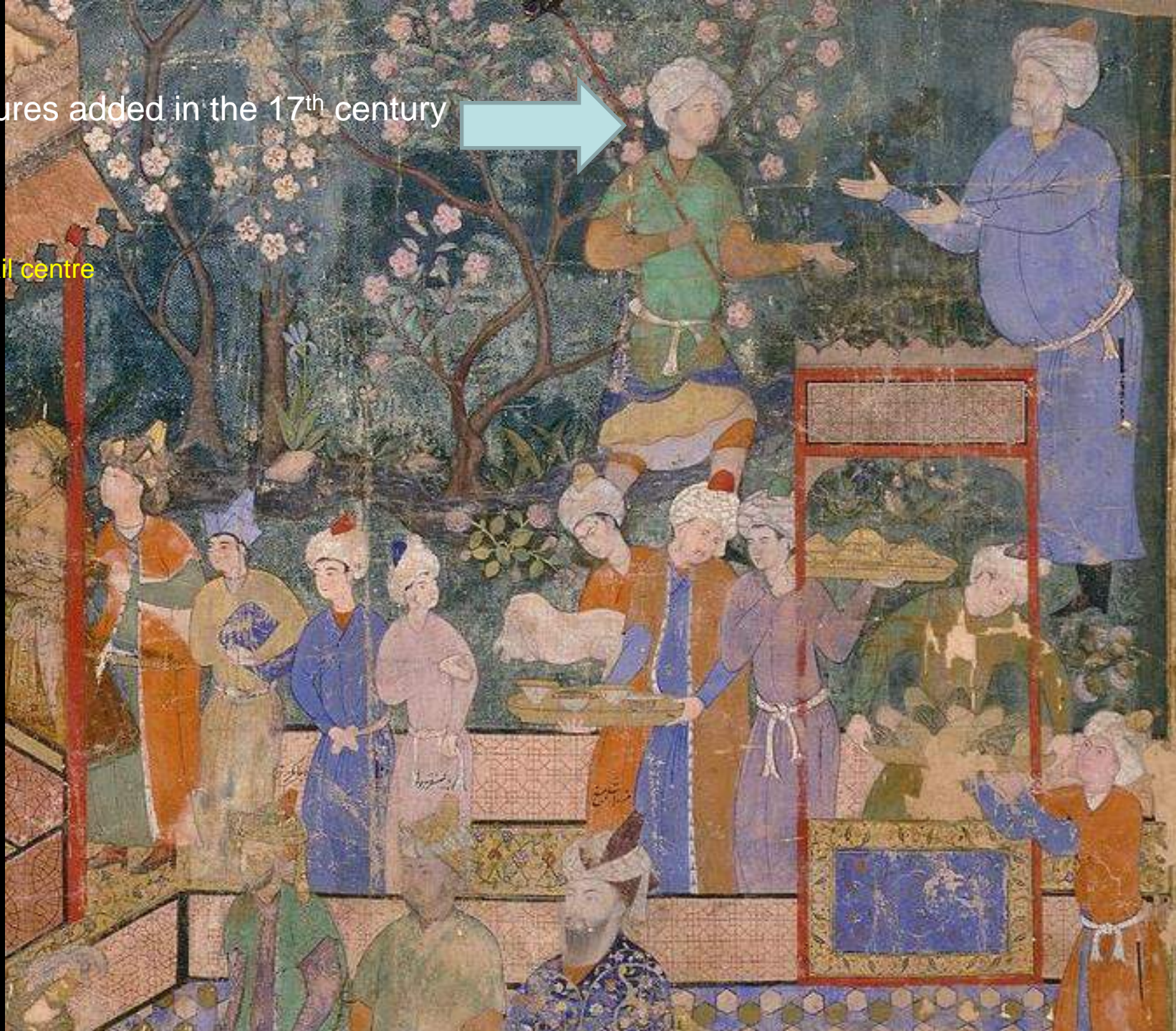
Contemporary with painting

Who were the artists? Humayun and composition Mir Sayyid Ali, attendant
Figures Abd al Samad
Detail: Centre

Figures added in the 17th century



Detail centre
right



Elegant mannerism to a more subtle in idealised realism



Portrait of Shah Tahmasp 1530



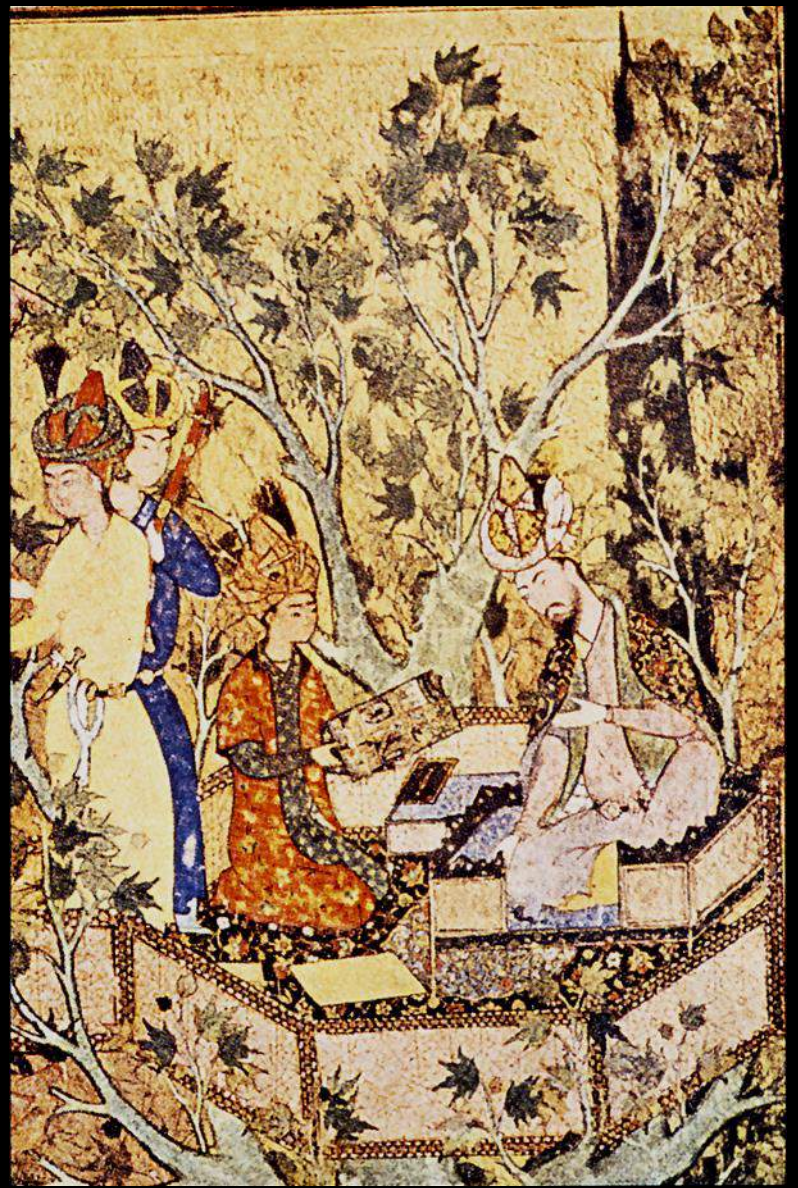
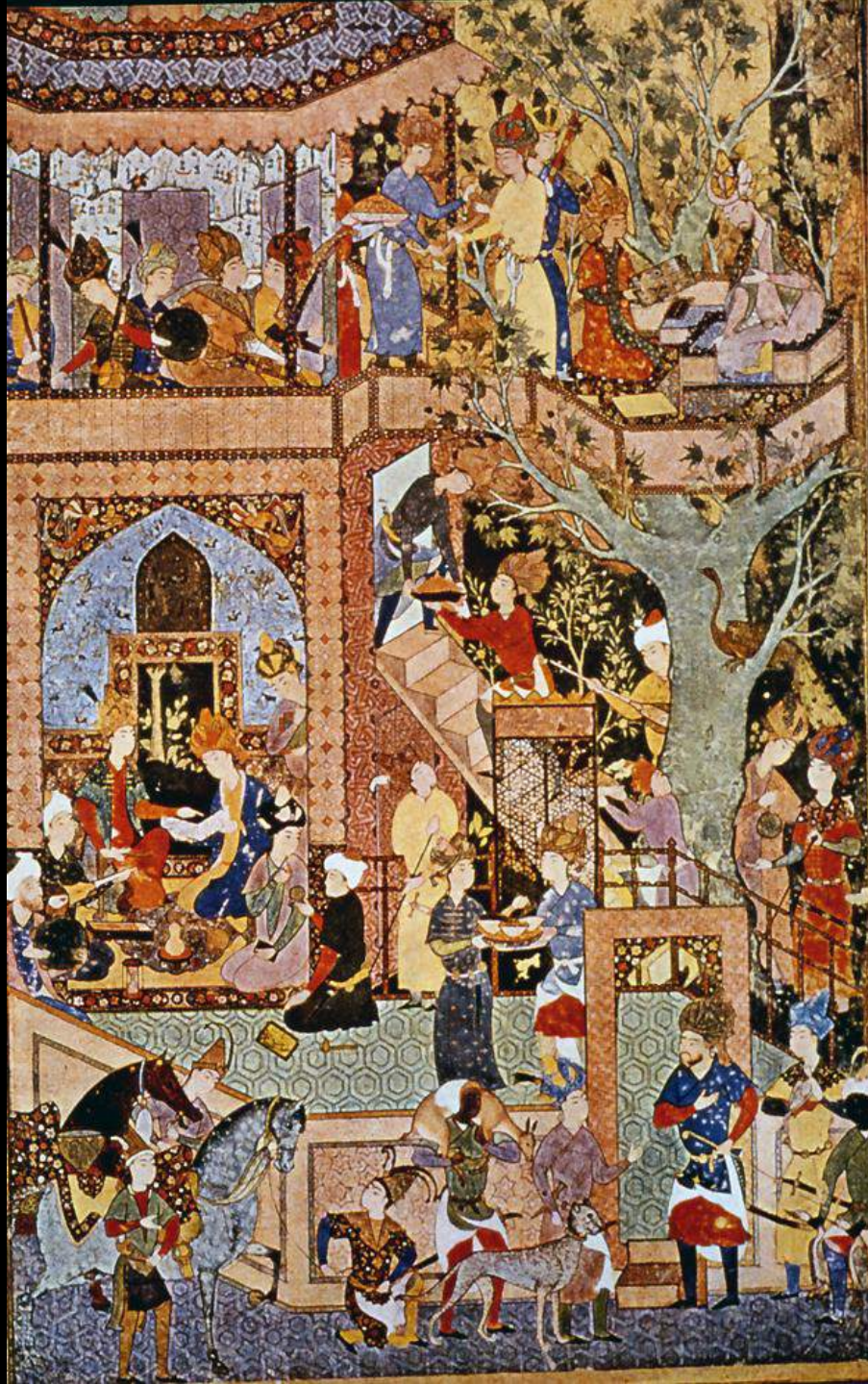
Portrait Humayun in "Princes..."



Two figures in a landscape – Mir Sayyid Ali 1535
British museum 1930-11-12-01



Portrait of scholar signed "Nadir Al Mulk Humayun
Shahi" 1550 Collection Ed Binney 3rd



Akbar and Humayun in tree house Signed by Abd al Samad ca 1550 Gulshan album Gulistan Palace Library Tehran (no. 1663)

Two Painters at Work,
detail,

Gulshan Album, Court of
Jehangir, early 17th
century.

Staatsbibliothek,
Berlin.

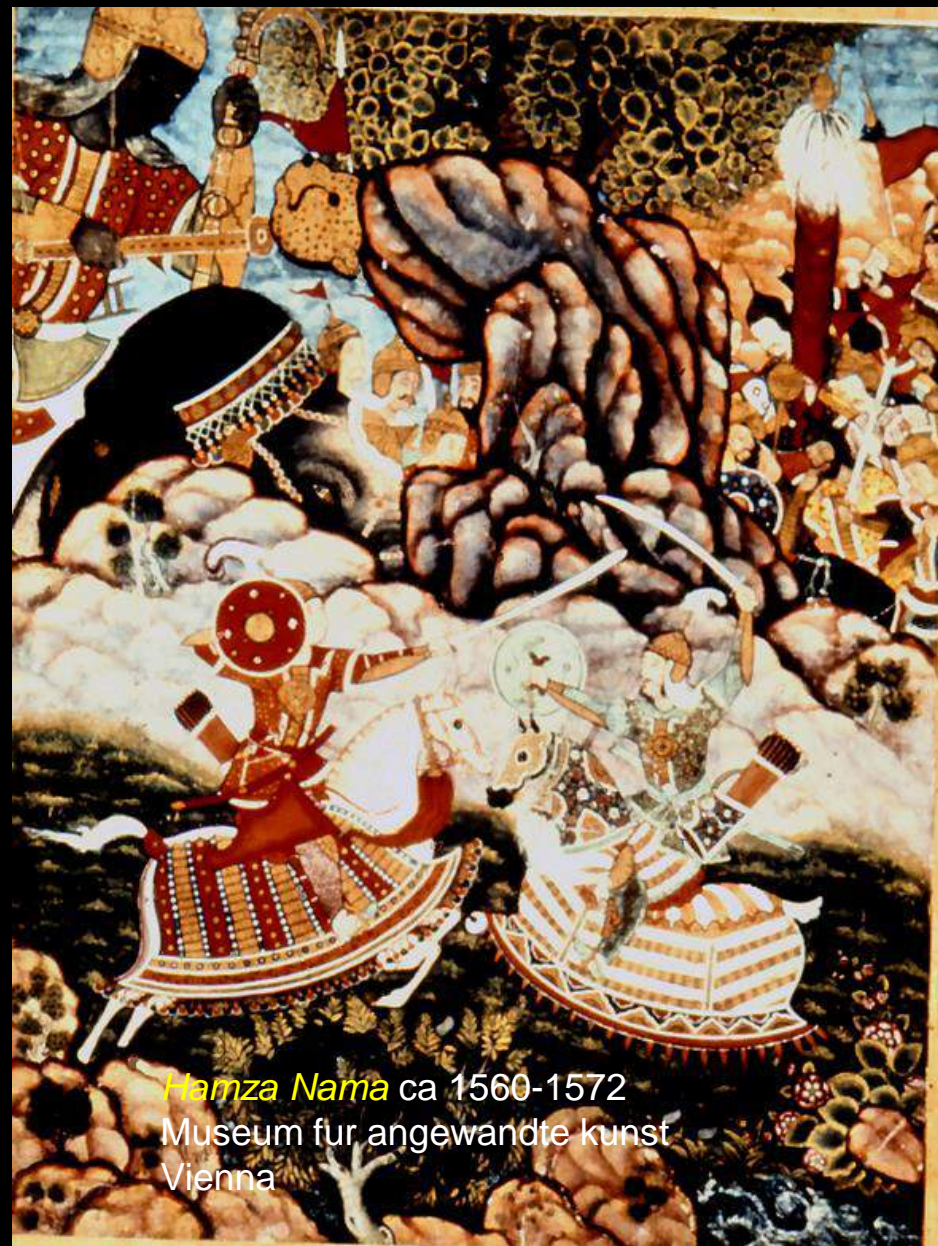
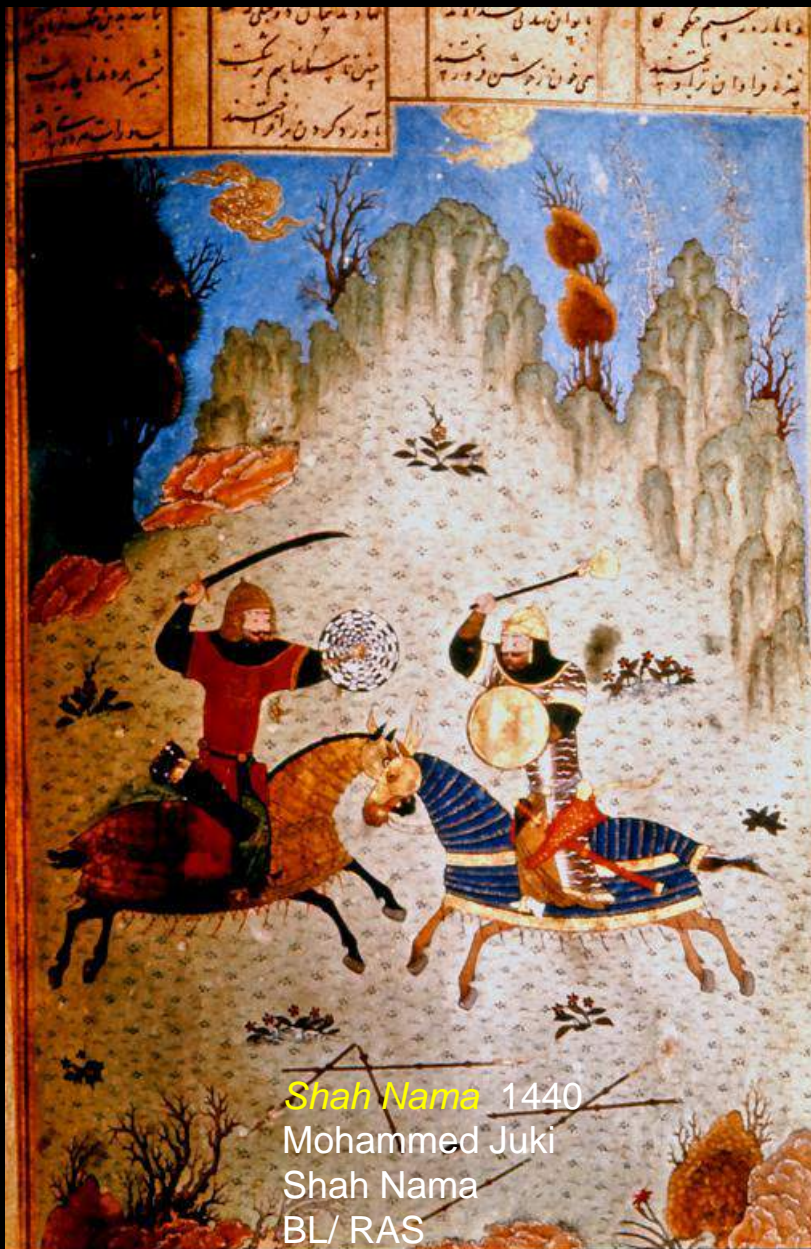
The tarh by one artist could
serve as a model for the
work of several others,
thereby disseminating
compositions, a method
used in some Iranian
workshops.

Charbas (tracings)

Were also used made of
Animal skin and pouncing
Of charcoal



Influence of Persian painting on the Mughal Hamza nama



Transference of figure types from the Persian 15th century manuscript to the Mughal Khamsa



Khamsa of Nizami by Bihzad 1485
British Library



Khamsa of Nizami 1585 fol 73b
Keir collection (Dallas Museum) Texas

Conclusion

Reading a painting- What do these early paintings tell us about Humayun? Humayun inherited a pride in his Timurid ancestry. The scale and later portrait additions of his descendants in the “Princes of the House of Timur” - demonstrates the significance of this painting. Contemporary memoirs speak of Humayun’s interest in Safavid painters and his friendship with Safavid princes.

Safavid artists such as **Mir Sayyid Ali** and **Abd al Samad**, while conservative modify an elegant mannerism to reveal an idealised but less extravagant portrayal of the Emperor Humayun. Persian artists brought a compositional formula and most important the use of charbas (tracings) and detailed preparatory sketches for popular scenes from well known Persian epics.

One senses an intimacy in Humayun’s small atelier and evidence from contemporary 16th century memoirs of a superstitious aesthete with genuine love for his manuscripts and respect for the more Timurid style of painting that he witnessed in the work of the artist Mir Musavvir while in Tahmasp’s court. Reflected in the elegance of his portrait.

On Humayun’s arrival in Delhi in 1555 the inclusion of Indian artists brought a new dialogue. Dynamism replaces delicacy. **Akbar** Humayun’s successor develops a greater realism in the portrayal of himself while using painting to reinforce his political legitimacy.