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THE ICONOGRAPHY OF A CAMEL FIGHT

The frequent depictions of camel fights over a period of more than four hundred years in Persian and Mughal painting¹ are generally traced back to a miniature in the *Muraqqaʿ-i Gulshan* in the Gulistan Library in Tehran² (fig. 1). It bears a lengthy inscription in a cartouche in the upper right-hand corner, to the effect that this “miraculous creation” (*khalqat-i badīʿ*) alludes to the Qurʾanic verse (88:17): “Do they not look at the camels, how they are made?” It further states that it is the work of the master Bihzad, who turned to the subject when he was more than seventy years old and had attained “the wealth of experience.”³ Bihzad’s name is

accompanied by the formulae of humiliation (*qalam-i shikasta, faqīr, nāmurād*) characteristic of authentic signatures of Persian painters and concludes with a prayer for pardon from Allah.⁴

Since Bihzad died in 942 (1535–36), according to a chronogram in Dust Muhammad’s preface to the Bahram Mirza album, this painting has conventionally been dated “circa 1525.” Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray wrote in 1931 that “there is no reason to reject the attribution to Bihzad,” noting only that “the drawing of the two fighting camels from Tehran does, perhaps, contain a suggestion of decline.”⁵ Most scholars, however, have

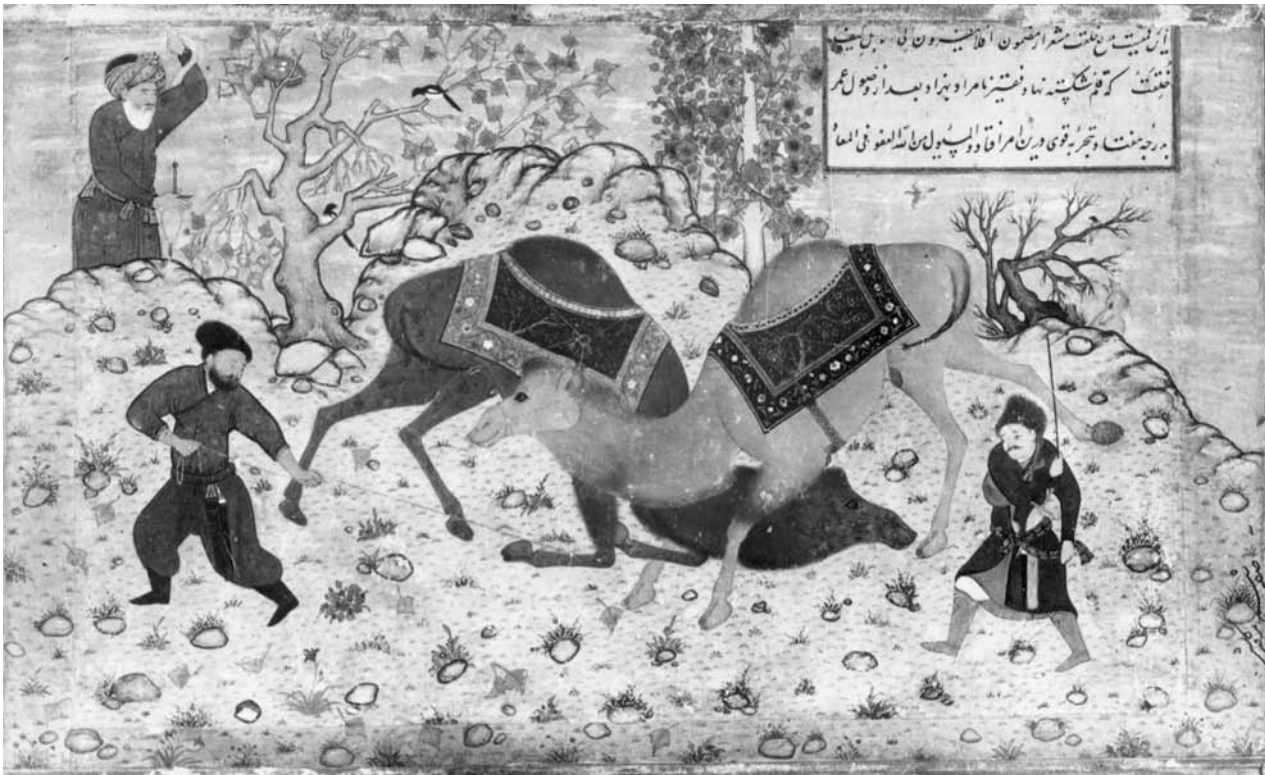


Fig. 1. Miniature, with an attribution to Bihzad, Herat, 1540s. Tehran, Gulistan Library, *Muraqqaʿ-i Gulshan*. (After Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, pl. 87a)

treated the attribution with some reserve,⁶ while Ivan Stchoukine has decisively rejected it as apocryphal and identifies the painting as a work of the Tabriz school of the 1550s.⁷ In his review of Stchoukine's *Les peintures des manuscrits safavids de 1502 à 1587*, S. C. Welch has also adhered to this view.⁸

Various features of the miniature in the Tehran album indicate, moreover, that it is a copy, not the original. It shows a paler camel in combat with a darker adversary, with onlookers trying to separate them, one on the left with a rope attached to the camel's foreleg, and one on the right with a stick he holds in his upraised hand. In the background is an elderly man with a spindle and, over his arm, a skein of wool that he is spinning into thread. There is also a spindle in the girdle of the man with the stick. In contrast to other versions of this subject, details have obviously been suppressed: For example, not all the necessary fastenings for the saddlecloths and the camels harness have been drawn in; the drawing of the hind legs of the darker camel lacks conviction; and the inexpressive figure of the right-hand camel driver, weakly brandishing his stick, holds no rope, even though the position of his hands, as on the other versions of the scene, shows that he should have held one. It should also be noted that, in the light of our present knowledge, Persian painters only began to give prominence to their signatures in the later sixteenth century; previously signatures are rare and are always "concealed" in inconspicuous places. This miniature needs thorough examination to determine whether it has been subsequently retouched or partly repainted and also whether the inscription panel has been pasted on or is written on the same paper.

The question of Bihzad's authorship is not the subject of this article. However, I should like to draw attention to two single sheets showing a couched lion, belled and chained, in the album compiled by Dust Muhammad in 951 (1544–45) for the Safavid prince Bahram Mirza (Topkapı Saray Library H. 2154).⁹ One is a tinted drawing with an attribution to Bihzad in Dust Muhammad's hand; the other is a painted version of the same image. Unlike the drawing, which shows the lion against a background of plain paper, the miniature shows him in a landscape strikingly similar to that of the camel fight in the Tehran album: the same valley covered with rocks and small tufts of grass, the same hillside and trees. Especially interesting is the fact that, exactly as in the Tehran miniature showing the camel fight, the drawing of the hind legs of the lion also

lacks conviction. All this suggests that the miniature from the *Muraqqa'-i Gulshan* may have been executed by the same painter after a still-undiscovered original by Bihzad and may similarly be dated to before 1544–45.

In the present article I intend to focus on the actual theme, describing and classifying the known depictions of camel fights and attempting to interpret them.

There seem to be some versions of this subject datable earlier than the Tehran miniature attributed to Bihzad, one of them noted as long ago as 1954 by Richard Ettinghausen.¹⁰ This is in an album in the Topkapı Saray Library, H. 2153, on folio 82b (fig. 2), and it is considerably larger than the Tehran miniature attributed to Bihzad (23.7 x 33.3 cm, as opposed to 16.5 x 26 cm). In this version the two camels are in violent combat, while their drivers endeavor to separate them with ropes attached to their bridles. A figure with a spindle is shown as dark-skinned, and in the lower right-hand corner appears a man leaning on a stick who is omitted from other versions. These two figures show no interest in the proceedings and are instead looking towards somebody or something beyond the scene.

Ettinghausen writes that the author of the painting in the *Muraqqa'-i Gulshan*, "Bihzad or a painter of his school," must have seen a miniature close to the iconographic type of the Istanbul drawing. He also notes a significant difference in the treatment of the two scenes: whereas the latter depicts a vigorous combat between two furious beasts, the miniature attributed to Bihzad seems more like a slow dance or a peaceful scene of two animals at play. As he says, the miniature, compared to the drawing, looks tame and decorative.

Unlike the one-humped camels in combat in the miniature ascribed to Bihzad, the camels in the drawing are two-humped, though the humps of only one of them are clearly shown, the other's being only partially visible. In this connection, P. A. Andrews interestingly observes of the camels represented in various drawings (including the present one) in the Istanbul albums: "The camels shown are the type known as *ner* (male) or *maya* (female) among the Turkman, and by related terms elsewhere. They are the result of a first cross between a Bactrian, or two-humped, male and a dromedary, or one-humped, female. They therefore have the shagginess of the Bactrian in front, but some of the slenderness of a dromedary, and what sometimes looks like one-and-a-half humps! ... Unfortunately they are widespread throughout Central Asia, from Turkey to Qirghizstan, and since the dromedary was already

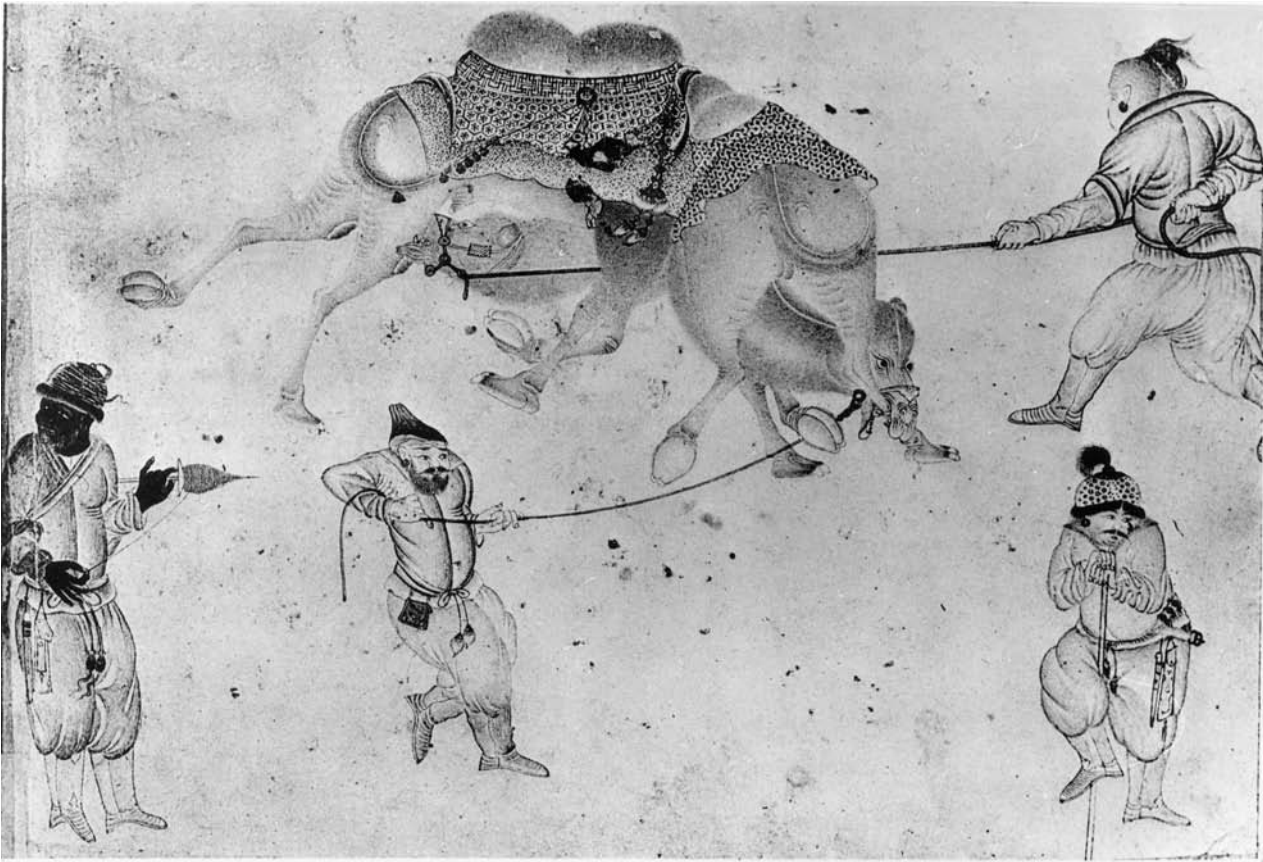


Fig. 2. Drawing, second half of the fifteenth century. Istanbul, Topkapı Saray Library, H. 2153, fol. 82b. (After *Ars Orientalis* 1 [1954], pl. 2, fig. 3)

known in the time of the Yueqin (about 200 BC) I am afraid the identification is of no help to us, either in place or time."¹¹ Nevertheless, it should be noted here that among many depictions of camels in Persian miniatures, only this and a few related drawings (see below) show two-humped or one-and-a-half-humped camels.

We should also note that in the Istanbul drawing the camels are shown foreshortened, one of them from the side and the other from the side in rear view, each biting the other. In the Tehran miniature the camels are both depicted in strict profile, and their entwined necks conform to the laws of symmetry. The whole scene is represented against a landscape, while the ground of the drawing is left blank.

On folio 46a of H. 2153 is another scene of a camel fight (fig. 3), evidently a miniature,¹² which has not so far attracted the attention of scholars, though it shows a symmetrical variant of a fight between two

single-humped camels that is closer to the miniature attributed to Bihzad. Here also a pale-colored camel has forced the head of a darker camel to the ground, though its head is barely higher than its opponent's; the bodies of the two are shown symmetrically, and they are not biting one another. Unfortunately, this miniature, as is clearly visible from the reproduction, has not survived intact, having been cut down on all sides and subsequently filled out at the bottom and sides to fit the dimensions of the album page, with the camels' legs and the neck of one of them added.¹³ Thus we have no idea whether the composition originally included human figures.

Later copies are known of the two variants—the one with complex foreshortening and the other with a symmetrical disposition—each with a different chain of transmission. In the course of time, however, elements from one variant appear in copies of the other,

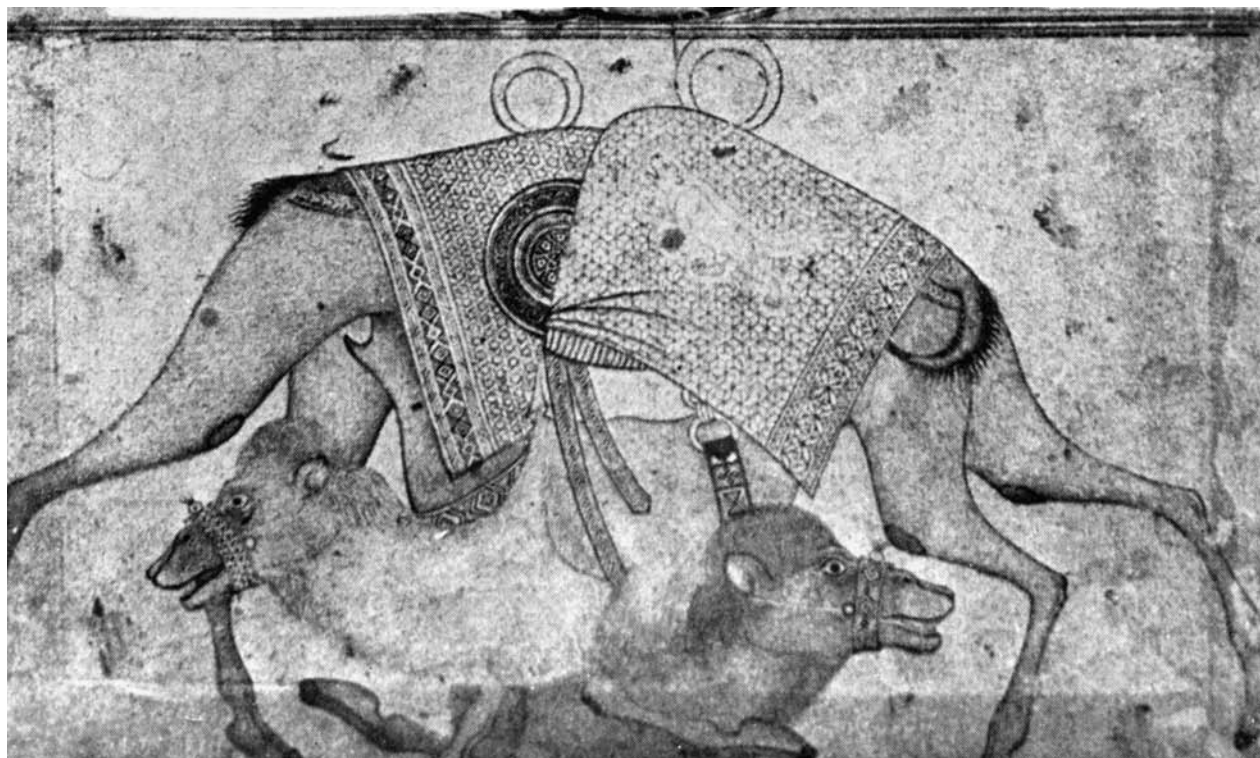


Fig. 3. Miniature, second half of the fifteenth century. Istanbul, Topkapı Saray Library, H. 2153, fol. 46a.

showing that some painters were familiar with both.

To the first type, represented by the drawing with its complex foreshortening (H. 2153, folio 82b), can be assigned three compositions in which, although the scene is cut down and the human figures suppressed, the central section with the fighting camels is exactly reproduced. One of these is a miniature formerly in the Kraus collection in New York, which has been published by E. J. Grube¹⁴ as a work of the seventeenth-century Isfahan school (fig. 4). A miniature in the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay (fig. 5) is, in Moti Chandra's view, a Mughal work of ca. 1620.¹⁵ And on the basis of its Qajar style, a page in the Pozzi collection in Geneva has been attributed by B. W. Robinson to nineteenth-century Iran.¹⁶

In these three works, as in the drawing in H. 2153, the darker camel is gnawing at the haunch of the paler one, which has the other's leg in its jaws. The former is shown in rear view with its legs wide apart, and the forelegs of the animals are similarly intertwined. The sheets from Bombay and the Kraus collection even share a significant detail with the drawing: the head

of the darker camel gnawing at its adversary's haunch is turned so that only its lower jaw with its pointed teeth is visible. This indicates an indisputable connection with the drawing in H. 2153, as does the fact that in the drawing the lighter camel is shown, although somewhat ineptly, as two-humped. In all these works the saddlecloths on the camels' backs have rounded edges and drape in soft folds.

Only the Pozzi sheet follows the Istanbul drawing in leaving the background blank. On the Kraus sheet the background is a landscape, with flowering bushes and clouds painted in gold ink in the style of the Isfahan school. Similar bushes appear in the Mughal miniature in Bombay, which shows that the motifs were borrowed from Persian painting, and indeed this may well be a Persian, not a Mughal, work. It is also relevant to note that these two miniatures, from the Kraus collection and from Bombay, are mirror images of the Istanbul drawing, which points to the idea of their execution as facing pages in a *muraqqa'*, where they had to observe the accepted law of symmetry, the facing images "looking" at each other.¹⁷



Fig. 4. Tinted drawing, Isfahan, seventeenth century. Khalili collection, MSS 651.



Fig. 5. Tinted drawing, Mughal or Persian. Bombay, Prince of Wales Museum of Western India. (After Chandra, *Indian Art*, pl. 35)



Fig. 6. Miniature by Nanha, 1608, Mughal India. Tehran, Gulistan Library, *Muraqqa'-i Gulshan*. (After Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, pl. 87b)

Regarding the second, symmetrical type of composition, it should be noted that in addition to the miniature described above on folio 46a of H. 2153 (fig. 3), there is a drawing enhanced with gold wash on folio 91a of the so-called Baysunghur album (Topkapı Saray Library H. 2152), which contains material mainly from the first four decades of the fifteenth century. This unpublished drawing shows a symmetrical variant of the two one-humped camels in combat that is very close in composition to H. 2153, folio 46a. In both drawings the camels have saddlecloths edged with rings.

The second, symmetrical type includes a series of compositions with human figures—even though, as has been remarked, only the central section of the earliest of them, H. 2153 folio 46a, has been preserved. To this series belongs the miniature attributed to Bihzad discussed above (fig. 1), as well as the miniature facing it in the *Muraqqa'-i Gulshan* (fig. 6), which is signed by the Mughal painter Nanha,¹⁸ who worked for both Akbar and Jahangir, and similarly bears a cartouche in the upper right-hand corner: “This work of the mas-

ter Bihzad was seen and copied by Nanha-i Musavvir according to my orders. Written by Jahangir b. Akbar Padshah Ghazi. The year 1017 [1608–9].” Nanha’s painting was evidently copied—and very exactly at that—from the miniature attributed to Bihzad, for it reproduces all the features of the prototype. We can only suppose that the miniature ascribed to Bihzad came into the possession of Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and was inherited by Jahangir from his father’s library. As for Jahangir’s words, *in kār-i ustād Bihzād ki ū dīda*, they may be understood to mean that he knew the author of the drawing to be Bihzad.

Although in the *Muraqqa'-i Gulshan* the two paintings are on facing pages (wrongly numbered: folio 8 precedes folio 7), they can scarcely have been intended for the same album, because the facing image on a double-page spread is normally reversed. They were thus most probably mounted in the later nineteenth century when, from the mostly Indian material brought back from India by Nadir Shah, a new album was made up for Nasir al-Din Shah. The two drawings have been

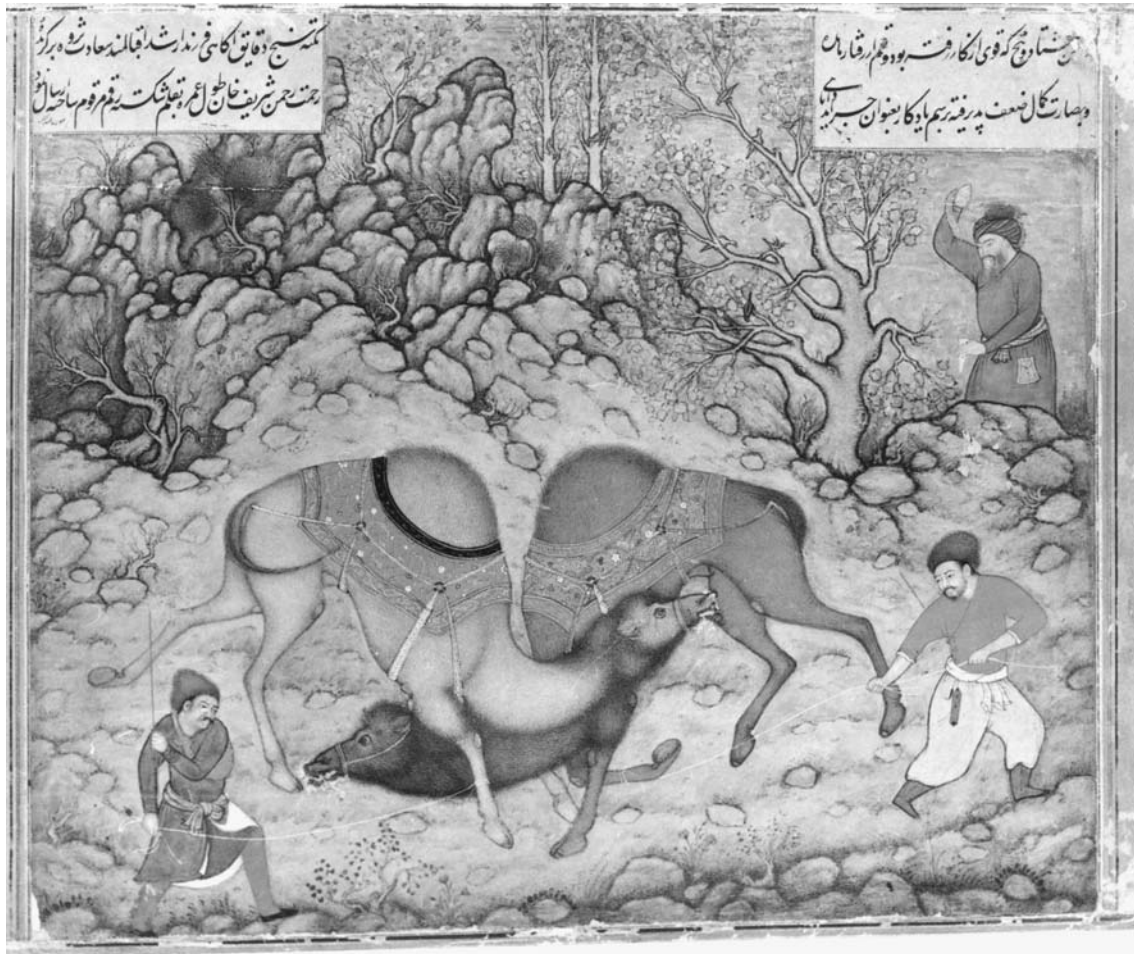


Fig. 7. Miniature by 'Abd al-Samad, ca. 1585. Formerly Hashem Khosrovani collection. (After *Treasures of Islam*, no. 121)

expanded at the bottom and on each side to suit the format of the new album.

Yet another embodiment of this second type is the work of 'Abd al-Samad,¹⁹ the Persian painter in Shah Tahmasp's court atelier at Tabriz who in the 1540s was taken into Humayun's service and accompanied him to Kabul and thence to India, where he worked with two of his sons, Sharif Khan and Bihzad. 'Abd al-Samad's miniature (fig. 7) was clearly executed after he reached India, as the "Mughal" faces of the two camel drivers testify, while the background landscape, although close to that of the miniature in the Tehran album, is also Mughal in style. Lentz and Lowry assert that the source of this miniature is "a painting by Bihzad of two camels fighting (c. 1525), which had belonged to Akbar... [and which] was copied around 1585."²⁰

The miniature also bears an inscription above in a pair of cartouches. In it the name of Bihzad does not occur, though its content closely corresponds to that on the Tehran miniature attributed to him. It states that it was executed by 'Abd al-Samad at the age of eighty-five for his elder son Sharif Khan, though, in contrast to the inscription on the Tehran miniature, it adds that "the artist was infirm at the time of its execution."²¹ The iconographic type is that of the two miniatures in the *Muraqqa'-i Gulshan*; but it is, first, reversed and, second, more detailed and complete: all the fastenings of the back-cloths are shown, and both the ropes are attached to the camels' legs. The light-colored camel falls with its full weight on the darker camel, putting its leg over the latter's neck and biting its haunch, a detail taken from the first iconographic

version. Whereas the two paintings in the *Muraqqa'-i Gulshan* show differences only of detail, the work of 'Abd al-Samad, though including all the basic elements of the composition, shows more radical differences—in the forms of the back-cloths, and in details of dress and landscape. The darker camel is still on its feet, but one of its forelegs is half-bent, whereas in the miniature attributed to Bihzad both legs are bent. 'Abd al-Samad must therefore have been copying some lost or hitherto undiscovered prototype, perhaps actually a work of Bihzad's. The man spinning wool in 'Abd al-Samad's miniature has a skein of wool wrapped around his right wrist and holds the spindle in his left hand, unlike most of the depictions of the camel drivers, and one of the drivers is holding a stick in his left hand: these details doubtless point to the reversed copying of a prototype.²²

Two tinted drawings—one, of the late sixteenth century, in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the other, of the seventeenth century, in the collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan in Geneva²³—belong to the second type. In these, as in the 'Abd al-Samad painting, the left-hand camel is forcing the head of the

other to the ground, though only one camel driver is shown. In the Metropolitan painting he is shown to the left, pulling on a rope attached to the muzzle of the left-hand camel (another detail from the first iconographic type), whereas in the other miniature he is to the right and tugs at a rope attached to the leg of the left-hand beast.

In the second iconographic type, taken as a whole, the painters regularly separate the camels. The miniature on folio 46a of H. 2153 (fig. 3) depicts their bodies twisted into a single oval mass. Evidently, intricately intertwined contours of the camels' bodies were beyond many painters. Moreover, the painter of folio 46a was not able to depict convincingly the mass of the camel being forced to the ground. It is therefore probable that because of the complexity of the composition (or perhaps for the sake of greater clarity and harmoniousness) the camels came to be shown so that their bodies were distinct and only their necks were intertwined.

Interestingly, among the material in the Diez albums in Berlin, which are related to the contents of H. 2152, H. 2153, and H. 2160, there is an ink drawing (fig. 8)

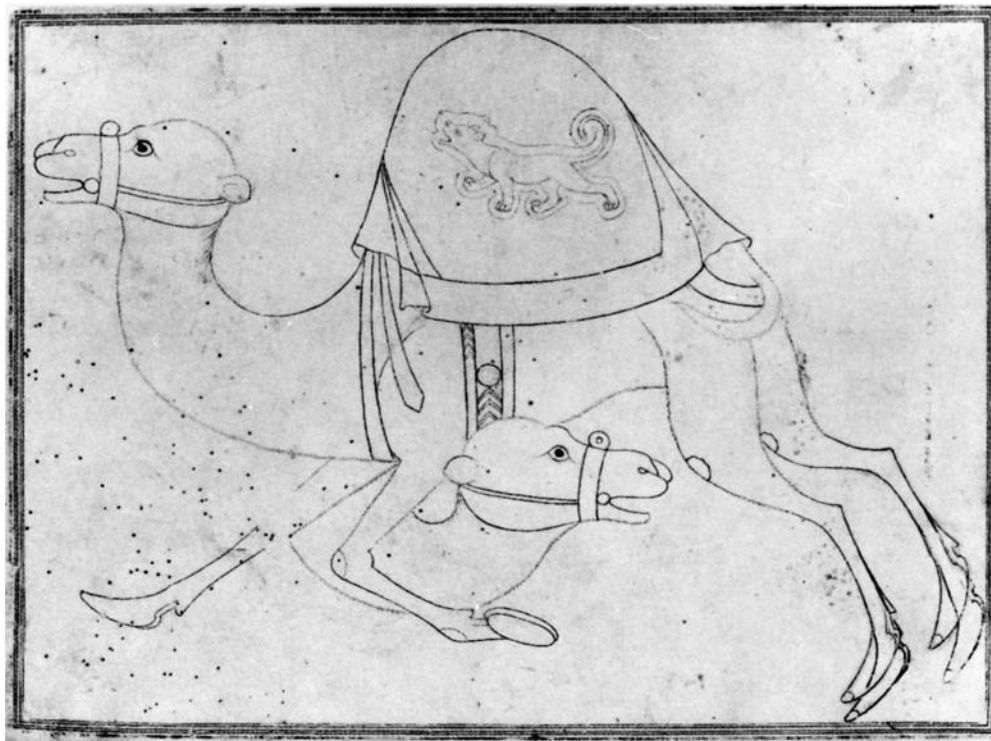


Fig. 8. Drawing, fifteenth century. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Diez albums. (After Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, cat. no. 68, ill. p. 180)



Fig. 9. Drawing, sixteenth century. Goloubew collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. (After Marteau and Vever, *Miniatures persanes exposées au Musée des Arts Décoratifs*, vol. 2, pl. 54)

that is a clear attempt to reproduce yet another version of the theme—one camel trampling the other—possibly by means of a pounced drawing, the traces of which are visible on the photograph.²⁴ The drawing is unfinished, however, for the draftsman muddled up the lines and abandoned it. This is the only known representation of this compact, non-symmetrical compositional type in miniature painting. The connection of H. 2153 folio 46a (fig. 3) with this drawing is shown by the fact that the saddlecloth of the right-hand camel in each work is identically decorated with an animal.²⁵

The theme therefore had at least three distinct iconographic types, all going back to drawings in the Istanbul albums H. 2152 and H. 2153 and to the Diez albums in Berlin. One further detail supports the connection of these drawings with the later versions: the clothing of one of the camel drivers—a shirt and baggy trousers that are pushed into his boots.²⁶ This costume is a conspicuous feature of all the figures in H. 2153, folio 82b, the two miniatures in the *Muraqqa'-i Gulshan*, the 'Abd al-Samad miniature, and even the two seven-

teenth-century tinted drawings, although here this old motif is treated rather more freely.

There are, however, other variants that have no direct prototypes in the Istanbul and Berlin albums. A drawing from the Goloubew collection now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 9), which was published in the early twentieth century and has not subsequently attracted scholarly attention,²⁷ is of the symmetrical type, but the camels are shown savagely biting one another's haunch and leg. Marteau and Vever dated this drawing to the seventeenth century, following the fashion at the time to assign drawings executed in a lively, energetic manner to that period; but this drawing is at least a hundred years earlier.

One further type of camel fight without an earlier model appears on a few seventeenth-to-nineteenth-century drawings. An example formerly in the Kraus collection (fig. 10) is identified by Grube as the work of a late-seventeenth-century Persian painter; the other, in the Archaeological Museum in Tehran, has been attributed by Hajek to the later-seventeenth-century

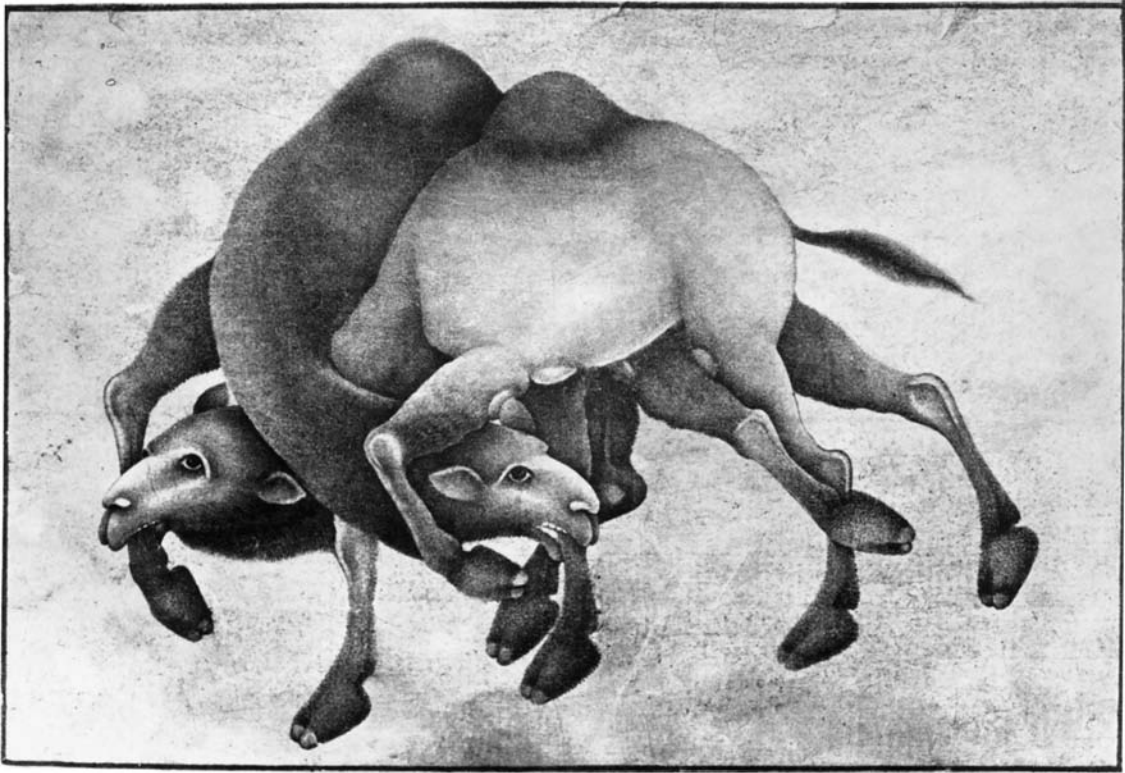


Fig. 10. Tinted drawing, Isfahan, late seventeenth century. (After Grube, *Islamic Paintings from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century in the Collection of Hans P. Kraus*, pp. 195–96, no. 174)

Mughal school.²⁸ Here the animals' bodies are shown parallel, with both of their heads appearing in the left half of the composition; each bites the other's foreleg. The most substantial difference from the other types discussed is that the camels have no saddlecloths or bridles, and their tails hang free: that is, they are shown as wild. As the earliest of these drawings seems to be the one in the Archaeological Museum in Tehran, ascribed to a Mughal artist, the type possibly originated in Mughal India. It is no wonder that it became popular among the masters of the later-seventeenth-century Isfahan school, when European and Indianizing tendencies became distinctive features and when both Persian and Mughal painters were concerned with depicting gradations of shading and foreshortening. This version of the camel fight was also very popular in the Zand and Qajar periods, which inherited and developed the tendencies of the late Isfahan school.

There were, furthermore, predecessors of the miniatures hitherto ascribed to Bihzad to which the numer-

ous versions of camel fights have been traced back: namely, miniatures and drawings of the fifteenth century executed for Timurid and Turkmen rulers. But in fact the theme goes far back into antiquity. The fighting camels (invariably two-humped) appear frequently in art of the Scythian and Sarmatian periods, or, to use the now-standard term, the art of the Eurasian steppes.²⁹ The most surprising thing, therefore, is that some of the compositions of the drawings and miniatures described above go back to representational types that evolved in the second and first millennia BC. Although there is a gap of almost two thousand years between these and the drawings we have been discussing, the connection between them is evident.

To judge from the surviving material, the most ancient version is the camels symmetrically disposed, biting one another. This is how they appear on a fragmentary stone amulet from Margiana datable to the second millennium BC, as E. F. Korol'kova has conclusively shown.³⁰ The same symmetrical variant appears

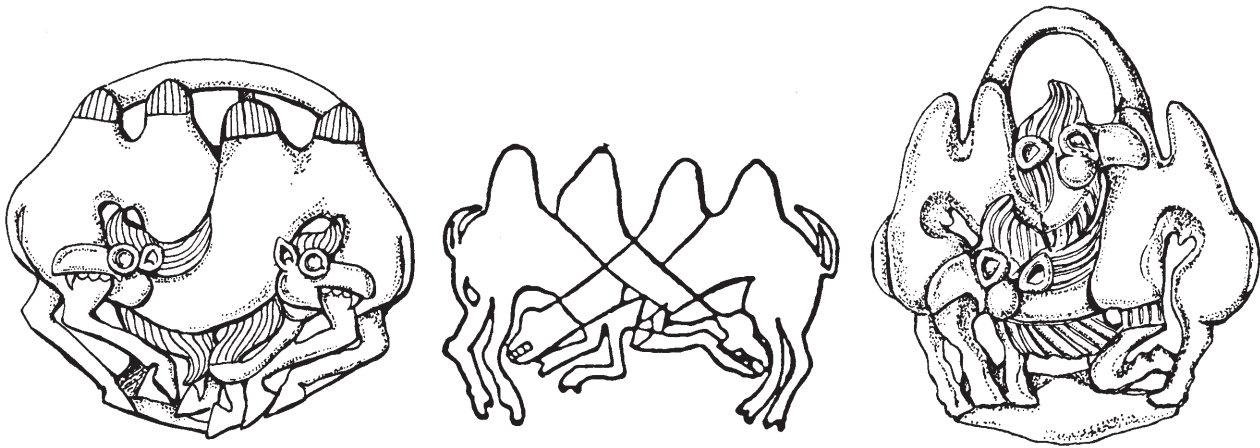


Fig. 11. Left: bronze plaque, fifth or fourth century BC, Filippovka kurgan, southern Urals. Archaeological Museum, Ufa. Center: rock-drawing, Sulekskaya in Khakasiya. Right: bronze plaque, sixth or fifth century BC, Besoba kurgan, western Kazakhstan. Archaeological Museum, Ufa. (After Korol'kova, "Obrazy," ills. 3:6, 1:7, and 3:4 respectively)

on a fine bronze plaque from the fifth- or fourth-century BC barrow burial at Filippovka (fig. 11, left). Thus, the drawing in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 9), which almost exactly reproduces these ancient compositions, possibly represents the earliest type of camel fight in the mediaeval figural art of Iran. Camels disposed symmetrically with their necks intertwined though they are not biting one another, which appear in a series of miniatures (figs. 1, 3, and 6), go back to a variant represented on medieval rock drawings in Khakasiya (fig. 11, center). Finally, there are plaques of the mid-first millennium BC from western Kazakhstan and the southern Urals that show the heads of the camels at different heights, with one of them biting the hump of its adversary (fig. 11, right). It was evidently this version that the artist of the drawing in the Diez albums (fig. 8) was attempting to reproduce. I have already observed that this type was to have no further development.

The foreshortened version (figs. 2, 4, and 5) has no ancient prototype, and its creation is evidently to be seen as a stylistic evolution of the fifteenth century.³¹ Here J. M. Rogers's essay on Muhammad Siyah Qalam, to whom are ascribed many of the drawings in the three Topkapı albums (H. 2152, H. 2153, and H. 2160) is of interest. He drew attention to the striking use of *contrapposto* in many of the works ascribed to that painter and suggested that it was the result of European influence.³² In that case one might see the version represented by the drawing on folio 82b of

H. 2153 (fig. 2) as an evolution or transformation, in accord with the aesthetics of the period, of a pre-existent symmetrical version of the fight with the camels biting one another.

Rogers describes another case of *contrapposto*: "a camel rider, evidently in conversation with another, with a scrawled attribution to Muhammad Siyah Qalam."³³ Interestingly, the pose of the camel in this drawing, foreshortened from the rear and with its head in profile turned to the left, is repeated in a drawing by the well-known seventeenth-century Isfahan painter, Mu'in Musavvir.³⁴ In the latter drawing, as in the miniature attributed to Bihzad, the camel is shown with a turbaned figure standing behind a hillock; in the Mu'in drawing he turns with an energetic gesture to an invisible interlocutor on the left. Evidently only part of Mu'in's original two-camel composition has survived, since an inscription by the artist now appears in the upper left-hand corner but was originally between the two figures, as is often the case in his works. The inscription states that "these two camels" were drawn by Mu'in Musavvir after the composition (*tarh*) of the master Bihzad Sultani on the night of Wednesday, 28 Shawwal, 1089 (November 25, 1678).

Scholars of Indian and Persian painting have followed the tradition associating the theme of the camel fight with the name of Bihzad. It is difficult, however, to explain Bihzad's connection with it, or with the material in H. 2153 and other Istanbul albums. Lowry and Lentz have observed that a monk seated under a tree

in one of the miniatures of a manuscript of ‘Attar’s *Mantiq al-Tayr*, acknowledged by most scholars to be the work of Bihzad, is after a miniature in the album H. 2160,³⁵ which contains material similar to the contents of H. 2153. The camel fight is yet another strand connecting later works of Persian painting (and Bihzad’s activity as well) with material in the Istanbul albums.

The numerous illustrations of camel fights and their chronological span from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century testify to the popularity of the subject. The coexistence of versions that are reversed and the right way round also shows that they were executed for albums (*muraqqaʿs*). It is quite possible that those who ordered these albums stipulated the range of compositions and subjects for them. This resulted in a sort of “print run” for works by the most outstanding or most highly regarded masters and for favorite or significant subjects, corresponding to the role of prints in contemporary Western Europe. As in Western Europe, moreover, these copies preserved the memory of their famous originals. Camel fights also appear in the applied arts, for example on ceramics and textiles.³⁶ The appearance of identical subjects on such diverse works of Iranian art and the consistent representation of their basic traditional characteristics over almost three millennia also strongly suggest that they had a particular symbolic importance.

It has sometimes been suggested, unconvincingly, that these depictions of camel fights, like bull or elephant fights, represent traditional court spectacles.³⁷ If they are spectacles, however, why are the onlookers in the paintings trying to separate the beasts? Why is the scene set in a natural landscape? How do we explain the presence of figures with spindles? And why, if the fight represents a mere diversion, does a Qur’anic verse appear on the miniature in Tehran attributed to Bihzad?

Lentz and Lowry have suggested *à propos* the drawing from the Diez albums in Berlin (fig. 8) that “the motif of fighting camels illustrates in its most elemental form what the artist Sadiqi Beg described at the end of the sixteenth century in his *Qānūn al-Ṣuvar* (The Canons of Painting) as *girift-ū gīr*, the ‘give and take’ of animals locked in combat.”³⁸ Why then are the saddle-cloths so richly decorated, and why do the camels often bear loads on their backs? Moreover, these drawings certainly were not a mere exercise to demonstrate the artist’s skill in depicting the difficult poses and movements of the animals interlocked in combat. It seems the time has not yet come to give a definite answer on

the meaning of such representations of camel fights. What follows is a mere suggestion.

The treatment of the content of camel fights in Eurasian art is still a matter of dispute, but authors have often noted the frequent mention of camels in the Avesta, where they are described as “possessing exceptional strength and power,” “violent,” and “evil,” which explains the marked “rapacity” of images of camels with teeth bared and the fangs of a beast of prey.³⁹ In Islam, however, this traditional motif, while retaining the iconography for the camel as laid down in the Avesta, was rethought and given a new content. If we assume that in Islamic art any representation of a creature should in one way or another remind one of God and His creation, the Qur’anic verse in the cartouche of the miniature attributed to Bihzad becomes crucial for the comprehension of the sense of the motif. In Qu’ran 88:17–20, the camels exemplify the miracles of God’s creation:

Do they not look at the Camels, how they are made?
And at the Sky, how it is raised high?
And at the Mountains, how they are fixed firm?
And at the Earth, how it is spread out?

A camel also appears in conjunction with a Qur’anic verse on a gold coin struck in Baghdad in 304 (916–17), now in the Hermitage collections. On its obverse is displayed an eagle with a circular legend in the name of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir, while on the reverse is a saddled, two-humped camel with a circular legend bearing Qur’an 9:33 (or 61:9):

It is He who hath sent
His Messenger with Guidance
And the Religion of Truth,
To prevail
Over all Religion,
Even though the Pagans
May detest [it].⁴⁰

The coin of al-Mutawakkil of 241 (855–56), with an image of the caliph on one side and a one-humped camel with its driver on the other, is well known.⁴¹ Numismatists, however, have not yet decided on the reasons for the appearance of these camels on Abbasid coinage. For our purposes, it is interesting that the camel with its driver is also very widespread in medieval Persian painting, with a long chain of representations, though these have not yet been studied iconographically. One miniature on this theme, in the opinion of some scholars, has a religious subtext—humility

before God. Signed by Shaykh Muhammad and dated 964 (1556–57), it has a frame of verses in cartouches directly relevant to its subject: “If we have tamed the haughty camel within we may lead our mount from the stable, ready to ride in the caravan to the House of God.”⁴² Clearly this refers not to the camel but to its rider and the humble faith that should lead him to God. In Shaykh Muhammad’s miniature the rich saddle is decorated with winged angels amid clouds, and the saddlecloth with a sun-face and *vaqvāq* ornament.

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NOTES

1. The present article is an expanded version, with additional material, of a lecture I gave to the Oriental Department of the Hermitage in 1993, with an abstract in *Ermītazhniye chteniya 1986–1994 godov pamyati V. G. Lukonina* (Sankt-Peterburg: Gosudarstvennyy Ermītazh, 1995), pp. 200–205.
2. L. Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson, and B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (Oxford, 1933), pl. 87a.
3. It is worth noting that the age of seventy is often mentioned in signatures and attributions found in the works of Persian painters and poets. Cf. R. Skelton, “Farrokh Beg,” *Ars Orientalis* 2 (1957): 397 and 406, note 25. The inscription on the *Muraqqaʿ-i Gulshan* page is especially interesting for the association of the age of seventy with “the age of experience.”
4. For the Persian text and a translation, see E. Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London, 1996), pp. 215–16.
5. Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, no. 132 (p. 130) and p. 115. See also C. Adle, “Les artistes nommés Dust Muhammad au XVI^e siècle,” *Studia Iranica* 22 (1993): 240, note 83.
6. B. W. Robinson, “Bihzad and His School: The Materials,” *Marg* 30, 2 (1977): 75: “probably authentic.”
7. I. Stchoukine, *Les peintures des manuscrits safavides de 1502 à 1587* (Paris, 1959), no. 38.
8. *Journal of Oriental and African Studies* 80, 3 (1960): 272.
9. D. J. Roxburgh, “Kamal al-Din Bihzad and Authorship in Persianate Painting,” *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 131, figs. 9–10.
10. R. Ettinghausen, “Some Paintings in Four Istanbul Albums,” *Ars Orientalis* 1 (1954): 102 and fig. 3. The drawing is also reproduced in E. J. Grube and E. Sims, *Between China and Iran: Paintings from Four Istanbul Albums* (London: Percival David Foundation, 1985), fig. 20.
11. P. A. Andrews, “The Turco-Mongol Context of Some Objects Shown in the Istanbul Album Pictures,” in Grube and Sims, *Between China and Iran*, pp. 117–18.
12. Grube and Sims, *Between China and Iran*, fig. 28.
13. On this album leaf, see J. Raby, “Mehmed II and the Fatih Album,” in Grube and Sims, *Between China and Iran*, p. 47.
14. E. J. Grube, *Islamic Paintings from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century in the Collection of Hans P. Kraus* (New York, n.d.), pp. 179–80, no. 158.
15. M. Chandra, *Indian Art: Prince of Wales Museum of Western India* (Bombay, 1954), pl. 35.
16. B. W. Robinson, *Collection Jean Pozzi* (Geneva, 1992), p. 187, fig. 469. My notes, taken years ago in the libraries of Istanbul, suggest that it is this version that is represented in the so-called Shah Tahmasp Album (Istanbul University Library, F. 1422, fol. 45b) and an album in the Topkapı Saray Library, H. 2137, fol. 28a (both unpublished).
17. A. Adamova, “The Repetition of Compositions and the Problem of the Identification of Artists in Persian Painting,” in *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia*, ed. V. S. Curtis, R. Hillenbrand, and J. M. Rogers (London, 1998), p. 178. See, for example, images of camel fights in an album in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Smith-Lesouef 247, fols. 30b–31a), and the images of a camel and its keeper in H. 2162, fols. 18b–19a.
18. Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, pl. 87b; color reproduction in *Golestan Palace Library: A Portfolio of Miniature Paintings and Calligraphy* (Tehran, 2000), pl. 188.
19. *Treasures of Islam*, exh. cat. (Geneva: Musée Rath, 1985), cat. no. 121.
20. T. Lentz and G. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, 1989), p. 321, fig. 109.
21. P. Soucek, “Persian Artists in Mughal India: Influences and Transformations,” *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 172.
22. In the Shaykh Muhammad version (see M. S. Simpson, “Shaykh Muhammad,” in *Persian Masters: Five Centuries of Painting*, ed. Sheila R. Canby [Marg Publications, 1990], p. 108 and no. 24 on p. 112), the wool is wrapped around the camel driver’s left hand and the spindle is in his right. See also a relief from Susa, now in the Louvre, of an Elamite lady spinning, illustrated in R. W. Ferrier, ed., *The Arts of Persia* (New Haven: Yale, 1989), p. 19. There is an interesting comparison to be made between the following depictions: that in H. 2154 of the camel and its keeper, bearing Dust Muhammad’s attribution to Bihzad; that of the keeper holding a spindle in his right hand, illustrated in D. J. Roxburgh, “Disorderly conduct? F. R. Martin and the Bahram Mirza Album,” *Muqarnas* 15 (1998): fig. 2; that in a miniature in the Khalili collection (MSS 673, unpublished); and that in H. 2162 (fol. 13r), illustrated in Bahari, *Bihzad*, fig. 19 on p. 57. In the latter two the spindle is in the keeper’s left hand, which suggests that these are both mirror-reversed copies. It should be noted, however, that in the drawings from H. 2153 (Grube and Sims, *Between China and Iran*, figs. 19–20), the drivers also have spindles in their left hands. Does this imply that these are also mirror images of earlier works? See fig. 2, above.
23. M. L. Swietochowski and S. Babaie, *Persian Drawings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1989), no. 18; A. Welch, *The Collection of Islamic Art of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan*, 4 vols. (Geneva, 1972–1978), vol. 1, Ir. M. 36, p. 184. There is a third example of this type in Istanbul: Topkapı Saray Library, H. 2160, folio 64a, unpublished.
24. Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, pp. 180 and 343, cat. no. 68.
25. The same animal decorates the saddlecloth of yet another camel in a study of a camel and its driver attributed to Muhammad Siyah Qalam. Cf. Grube and Sims, *Between China and Iran*, fig. 19.
26. The boots decorated with felt appliqués worn by the driver

- with the stick have other analogies in the Istanbul albums. Cf. Grube and Sims, *Between China and Iran*, fig. 69.
27. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 14.627. Published in G. Marteau and H. Vever, *Miniatures persanes exposées au Musée des Arts Décoratifs II* (Paris, 1913), no. 218, pl. 54; A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Les miniatures orientales de la collection Goloubew au Museum of Fine Arts de Boston* (Paris, 1929), no. 65, pl. 35.
 28. Grube, *Islamic Paintings*, pp. 195–96, no. 174; L. Hajek, *Indische Miniaturen* (Prague: Artia, 1960), no. 39. See also the following auction catalogues: Sotheby's London, April 23, 1997, lots 93, 94; and Sotheby's London, July 8, 1980, lot 234.
 29. J. Aruz, A. Farkas, A. Alexeev, and E. F. Korol'kova, *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes: The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, and the Archaeological Museum, Ufa*, exh. cat. (New York, 2000).
 30. E. F. Korol'kova, "Obrazy verblyudov i puti ikh razvitiya v iskusstve rannikh kochevnikov Evrazii," *Arkheologichesky Sbornik* 34 (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennyy Ermitazh, 1999), ill. 3/1 and p. 90.
 31. Nor, incidentally, does the iconographic type shown in fig. 10 have any ancient prototype. As I have already observed, this evolved no earlier than the seventeenth century, most probably in Mughal India.
 32. J. M. Rogers, "Siyah Qalam," in Canby, *Persian Masters*, p. 37.
 33. *Ibid.*, fig. 10.
 34. E. Grube, *Muslim Miniature Painting from the XIII to XIX Century from Collections in the United States and Canada* (Venice, 1962), no. 120. This drawing is now in the Harvard University Art Museums, 273.1983, promised gift of Stuart Cary Welch, Jr.
 35. Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, p. 280, fig. 96, cat. no. 154.
 36. E.g., a seventeenth-century green-glazed bottle in the Hermitage, inv. no. VG 2355; and a late-sixteenth-century Persian animal carpet: see A. U. Pope and P. Ackerman, eds., *A Survey of Persian Art*, 6 vols. (New York, 1938–39), vol. 6, pl. 1213.
 37. Swietochowski and Babaie, *Persian Drawings in the Metropolitan Museum*, no. 18.
 38. Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, cat. no. 68, p. 343.
 39. Korol'kova, "Obrazy," p. 92.
 40. G. I. Dzhaparidze and I. G. Dobrovol'sky, "O nekotorykh abbasidskikh monetakh s izobrazheniyem zhivnykh sushchestv v sobranii Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha," *Blizhni Vostok i Gruziya*, ed. O. Tskitishvili (Tbilisi, 1991), pp. 150–52, fig. 6.
 41. T. Arnold, *Painting in Islam* (London, 1928), p. 125, pl. 59.
 42. M. B. Dickson and S. C. Welch, *The Houghton Shahnama*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1981), vol. 1, p. 166; Simpson, "Shaykh-Muhammad," p. 107, fig. 1; Adle, "Les artistes," p. 243.