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THE MAKING OF THE ARTIST IN LATE TIMURID PAINTING

LAMIA BALAFREJ

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TIMURID PAINTING

Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art
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Series Editor's Foreword

'Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art' is a venture that offers readers easy access to the most up-to-date research across the whole range of Islamic art. Building on the long and distinguished tradition of Edinburgh University Press in publishing books on the Islamic world, it is a forum for studies that, while closely focused, also open wide horizons. Books in the series, for example, concentrate in an accessible way, and in clear, plain English, on the art of a single century, dynasty or geographical area; on the meaning of works of art; on a given medium in a restricted time frame; or on analyses of key works in their wider contexts. A balance is maintained as far as possible between successive titles, so that various parts of the Islamic world and various media and approaches are represented.

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Professor Robert Hillenbrand

INTRODUCTION

Painting about Painting

WHAT FOLLOWS FOCUSES on Persian manuscript paintings produced in late fifteenth-century Herat, in today's Afghanistan, during the reign of the late Timurid ruler Sultan Husayn Bayqara (r. c. 1470–1506). Studies of Persian manuscript paintings are often concerned with their illustrative function – how the paintings visually translate the texts they accompany – as well as the role that court-sponsored manuscripts played in reflecting royal authority. By contrast, this book argues that late Timurid painting also served as a medium for artistic performance and self-representation, linking painting to painter and raising questions about authorship, medium and representation.

By juxtaposing the images with contemporary sources that illuminate the setting and the terms for their reception, I show that pictures could function as the painter's delegate, charged with the task of centring and defining artistic work. Visual richness and linear exactitude, for example, were designed to highlight the artists' 'powerful minds and precision of execution' in the words of the Timurid historian Ghiyath al-Din Khwandamir (c. 1475–1534).¹ Instead of connecting painting to patron, or seeing through the image into a pre-existing, external text, the late Timurid beholder was invited to observe pictures as invented worlds and manual fabrications.

Late Timurid painting, then, was not simply the passive residue of a past artistic performance. Rather, it actively shaped its reception as a trace of the artist's work. Profusion of details and excessive attention to form functioned to produce this effect of self-reflection, focusing the viewer's attention on the painter's imagination and craftsmanship. Such pictures also participated in a theory of authorship, one that emphasised the artist's creative power and manual dexterity. As the genitive – both subjective and objective – of the title 'The Making of the Artist in Late Timurid Painting' suggests, late Timurid painting defined authorship as making, at once an imaginative process and a manual endeavour.

While this inquiry considers a wide range of visual and textual materials, from calligraphy to metalwork to poetry, it is centred on the close, microhistorical analysis of the Cairo *Bustan*, a manuscript copy of the *Bustan* (The Orchard) of Sa'di made around 1488 in Herat

for the late Timurid ruler Sultan Husayn Bayqara and now kept in the National Library of Cairo (hence its appellation as the *Cairo Bustan*).² The *Cairo Bustan* is one of the most important manuscripts in the history of Persian book arts. Its paintings are signed in the name of Bihzad, perennially considered a paragon of excellence in painting. In addition to providing the first complete analysis of this manuscript and its pictures, this study demonstrates that the *Cairo Bustan's* paintings constitute an example of artistic self-reflection. Using visual, material and verbal means, including visual abundance, linear precision, inscriptions on the image and signature, Bihzad shifted painting from an illustrative device and an attribute of royal power to a self-reflective image, designed to convey discourses about its making and its authorship.

As such, this study requires a double shift in the modern understanding of self-reflection. First, it implies that self-reflection did not necessarily manifest itself through iconic means. Bihzad did not use self-portraiture nor did he represent images within images. He did not use indexical modes of self-representation either. Brushstrokes are often impossible to detect. The painting's surface is so polished that it seems almost self-made. The painter left no personal traces of manual labour. Instead of using his likeness, or allowing his paintings to display individualised marks, the artist, as I demonstrate in this study, engaged with authorship in aspects of colour, line and composition. In doing so, he explored the symbolic potentialities of the picture's material and visual configurations – the idea, for example, that visual density points to a maker's 'powerful mind', to use Khwandamir's expression.

Self-reflection, moreover, did not necessarily proclaim late Timurid painting's autonomy from social and political considerations. It was neither simply a tool of self-reference, pointing back at an artist, nor a purely self-contained phenomenon, turning the medium onto itself. Rather, self-reflection invested painting with social and political agency, moving the painter from marginality to centrality. In fact, it was bound up with the painter's access to cultural representation at the late Timurid court. As paintings circulated, the artist's 'skill and rank increased', as the memorialist and poet Zayn al-Din Mahmud Wasifi (1485–1551 or 1566) wrote about the painter Bihzad, and 'with every new miniature he painted, the countenance of victory and attainment showed itself from behind the veil of the Unknown'.³ Painting was an agent of empowerment, a process by which artistic authority was shaped and discussed.

This introduction first provides information on the historical context of late Timurid Herat, underscoring the cultural and institutional circumstances that might have influenced the emergence of self-reflection in painting. I then turn to late Timurid painting's visual characteristics, examining ways in which they define an aesthetics of self-reflection and considering how such an argument both

draws upon and departs from previous scholarship. The third section contains a description of the Cairo *Bustan* as well as an outline of this book. The introduction ends with a summary of my argument and the methodological principles that underlie it.

The Power of Intricacy at the Late Timurid *Majlis*

The turn toward pictorial self-reflection in late Timurid painting did not take place all at once, nor did it affect the whole manuscript production of Iran and Central Asia. As I will suggest throughout this book, this shift unfolded progressively from the late fourteenth century onward, mainly in court-sponsored manuscripts produced and circulated at the Jalayirid, Turkmen and Timurid courts, before crystallising in late Timurid Herat. Several factors account for the intensification of painting's self-reflective quality in the late Timurid period, including the expansion of the bases of patronage, late Timurid poetry's taste for technical sophistication, and the institution of the *majlis* and its emphasis on performance and virtuosity.

Forged by the Turco-Mongol conqueror Timur (1336–1405) around 1400, the Timurid empire initially stretched from Syria to Uzbekistan.⁴ It began disintegrating in the middle of the fifteenth century under the strain of internecine struggles and western Iran's Turkmen dynasties.⁵ By the end of the century, the empire had shrunk to parts of Khurasan, a region of eastern Iran.⁶ The Timurid dynasty did not survive Sultan Husayn's reign, quickly coming to an end with the Uzbek invasion of Herat in 1507.⁷

But despite the dynasty's political decline, late Timurid Herat was at least until the 1490s a major economic and trade centre. Agricultural productivity and trade of luxury commodities such as silk provided its elite with major financial resources.⁸ Late Timurid Herat was also known for its brilliant cultural scene. Along with other members of the court, Sultan Husayn continued the Timurid tradition of patronage, supporting artists, poets and scholars. According to Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur (1483–1530), a cousin of Sultan Husayn and founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, Sultan Husayn's sons 'were good enough as company and in social matters, in conversation and in parties', but 'were strangers to war, strategy, equipment, bold fight, and encounter'.⁹ The late Timurids shifted 'the focus of their energies from the battlefield to the arts', as Thomas Lentz and Glenn Lowry summarised.¹⁰

There may have been a correlation between political decline and the surge of cultural activity, as Maria Subtelny has suggested. A form of privilege called the *suyūrghāl* encouraged the decentralisation of economic and political power, which itself allowed, in Subtelny's terms, a 'broadening of the bases of patronage'.¹¹ The *suyūrghāl* was a land grant carrying with it full fiscal immunity.¹²

Allotted exclusively to relatives and military commanders under Timur and his son Shah Rukh, it was extended to other dignitaries under Sultan Husayn as a means to maintain the support of the elites. As a result, by the end of the fifteenth century, almost the whole territory of eastern Iran had been turned into *suyūrghāls*.¹³

The fragmentation of the land resulted in the dispersal of political authority, which in turn stimulated patronage. One of the most powerful patrons was Sultan Husayn's vizier, Mir 'Ali Shir Nawa'i (1441–1501), also a poet and statesman.¹⁴ According to a contemporary source, 'so many matchless and excellent calligraphers, singers, musicians, painters, gilders, artists, writers, composers of enigmas, and poets thrived under his patronage that it is not known whether as many have ever been in evidence at any other time'.¹⁵ Other patrons included members of the Turkic military elite and Tajik (sedentary Iranian) representatives.¹⁶ Intellectuals themselves were granted privileges and acquired tremendous wealth. The Sufi shaykh of Samarqand Khwaja 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar (1404–90) is said to have owned almost 300,000 pieces of land.¹⁷ The poet and spiritual guide 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414–92) was given several property and tax privileges. In addition to his many *suyūrghāls*, he enjoyed immunity for all personal taxes.¹⁸

Personal incomes grew and cultural activity flourished. Contemporary writers describe a unique atmosphere of intellectual and artistic emulation. According to Babur, '[Sultan Husayn]'s time was a wonderful age; in it Khurasan, and Herat above all, was full of learned and matchless men. Whatever the work a man took up, he aimed and aspired at bringing that work to perfection.'¹⁹ Hundreds of poets from all social backgrounds lived in late Timurid Herat.²⁰ Many belonged to the category of the commoners, *mard-i 'ammī*, and included potters, bakers and drapers.²¹

Professional and non-professional poets would come together in the *majlis*, a form of social gathering and a site of literary competition, where poets, literati and patrons tested each other's verbal dexterity.²² Although it has mainly been studied in its most formal manifestation – the *majlis-i 'ālī* of the ruler – the *majlis* could in fact be held at all levels of society and in different settings, from bazaar shops to private houses. In his memoirs *Badāyi' al-waqāyi'* (Wondrous Events), Zayn al-Din Mahmud Wasifi (1485–1551 or 1566), a non-elite, middle-class poet from Herat, recalls gathering with friends in the shop of Amani, a seller of chickpeas and a non-professional poet.²³ Another time, a similar meeting was organised in the shop of a bookbinder, Mulla Zada.²⁴ According to the same source, literary assemblies could also take place after the Friday prayer in the Friday mosque of Herat.²⁵

Poetry was a means of social promotion. The mastery of difficult poetic forms allowed poets to climb to higher, elite gatherings. Technical sophistication, in fact, defined late Timurid poetry.

Literary historians have noted the epoch's obsession for verbal intricacy, conveyed 'through the use of difficult meters, rhymes or words, or internally by means of unusual images, comparisons and other rhetorical devices',²⁶ as Maria Subtelny summarised. The command of difficult poetic forms was a means of social promotion. 'At that time,' Wasifi wrote in his memoirs, 'the ultimate goal and highest aim of all accomplished people was to come to the attention of Mir 'Ali Shir,'²⁷ the influential patron of the period. The grasp of sophisticated verbal games was the surest way to achieve this goal. Wasifi himself managed to gain access to Mir 'Ali Shir's *majlis* by fashioning a reputation as an expert solver of *mu'amma*, or poetic riddle (he practised a lot, read poetic treatises and sought advice from confirmed poets).²⁸

The art of *mu'amma* consists of encrypting a hidden meaning, usually a proper name, into a couplet of lyrical or panegyric verses.²⁹ These can be rather conventional, as in this example, dedicated by the Timurid historian Sharaf al-Din Yazdi to his friend Taj al-Din: 'As long as it is captivated by the beloved's face, / this heart is dishevelled and confused' (*tā giriftār-i rū-yi jānān ast / in dal āshufta va parīshān ast*).³⁰ The verses treat of a common theme of lyrical poetry – the alienation caused by love. The riddle, though, is not easy to decode. Numerous treatises were devoted to the deciphering of *mu'amma*. Here the first hemistich gives away the word *Tāj*. The first two letters of the name open the poem, while the word *rū* (face) indicates that the following letter, 'j', also belongs to the solution. In the second part, the last two words 'dishevelled' (*āshufta*) and 'confused' (*parīshān*) enjoin the reader to scramble the hemistich's opening words, '*in dal*', to discover the word *al-Dīn*, which completes 'Taj al-Din' – the name of the poem's recipient, a dear friend of the author.

Conflating the riddle's solution with the name of the poem's dedicatee, Yazdi's *mu'amma* was not simply a play of form. The poem acted as a gift, a testimony to the author's affection for his friend Taj al-Din. This example encapsulates the pragmatic value of late Timurid poetry – its role in mediating and fostering social relationships. Shared and discussed at the *majlis*, riddles, moreover, served to intensify the collective dynamic of the gathering, fuelling literary pleasure, interest and competition.

This book argues that late Timurid painting, as exemplified by the Cairo *Bustan*, had a *mu'amma*-like quality: the painter used content and form to encode himself into the fabric of his own work, therefore allowing his emergence, if not as a powerful figure in the social networks of late Timurid Herat, then at least as the subject of painting. The picture's overall effect of sophistication disengaged painting from the illustrative purpose usually associated with it, turning it instead into a means of empowerment and self-representation. Influenced by the late Timurid culture of intricacy, artists transformed manuscript

painting into a self-reflective object, embodying and mediating ideas about medium, image and authorship, and enabling the painter to enter the field of pictorial representation.

The *majlis* played a major role in this shift.³¹ By the late fifteenth century, it became the main cultural institution of the Timurids, encapsulating and fostering cultural and intellectual emulation in late Timurid Herat. Mainly studied as a courtly literary assembly, the late Timurid *majlis*, I argue in this book, had formative effects on painting as well. The circulation of the painted page at the *majlis* reinforced its quality as object – instead of its function as a means of representation. It subjected pictures to the orators' sagacity, turning the image into an object of exchange and evaluation. And it exposed painting to the notion of performance – both the orator's and the painter's – understood in the sense of virtuosity. Foreseeing painting's presence at the *majlis* where visual artists could be, like poets, gauged for their skills, artists emphasised visual and material elements that could be linked to the painting's production, instead of the exterior text that images were supposed to illustrate.³²

Examining the image as an object that circulated in the context of the *majlis* and beyond, this research links representation and materiality, the painting's inherent features, with the conditions of its visibility. Self-reflection marked the painting's engagement with its social function, shifting the medium from a network of signs to a 'system of action'; to borrow Alfred Gell's words, a system 'intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it'.³³ Painting was endowed with a 'practical mediatory role':³⁴ it became a vehicle of upward mobility, a form of social currency, circulated at the *majlis* to enhance the painter's authority.³⁵ In the late Timurid period, artistic self-reflection emerged at the intersection of picture theory and material history, relating the object's internal qualities to its external effects of social distinction.³⁶

Aesthetics of Self-reflection

Late Timurid paintings were still enclosed within a manuscript, but they became much less numerous. They also spread vertically across the page, thereby reducing the space allocated to text.³⁷ As Lisa Golombek pointed out, these changes reflected 'the growing independence and importance of the paintings'.³⁸

While the picture expanded laterally, taking over the manuscript page, it was also filled with extra-textual figures, to use Chad Kia's recent expression,³⁹ with motifs that bear no apparent relationship to the surrounding text. All images exceed any verbal substrate, but here the painting's illustrative structure seems deliberately challenged.

Late Timurid painting further developed in depth, through a process of miniaturisation. As a result, it 'takes longer to see': visual density introduces duration in the beholder's experience, as David

Roxburgh noted about the visual complexity of Jalayirid and Timurid paintings.⁴⁰ Details draw the eye in. They require a mode of perception that Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen), the tenth-century Iraqi scholar and author of *Kitāb al-manāẓir* (Book of Optics), would have called 'contemplative', their features appearing 'only after they have been scrutinized'.⁴¹ As a combination of spatial contraction and temporal expansion, a proliferation of details makes us pause and think, creating a distance from both text and reality.⁴² This is not to say that these paintings did not engage with meaning; rather, it is to stress that they tested the limits of the illustrative approach.

The paintings convey abundance but also regularity, perfection and minuteness. The 'new style of miniature' is characterised by 'the perfection of techniques of color and composition', as Maria Subtelny has noted.⁴³ Compositions are constructed like diagrams: motifs are depicted frontally and on the same scale. Their finish erases the signs of their making: we behold a set of seemingly enamelled, brilliant blocks of colour, each outlined by an impeccable line of black ink. The pictorial plane is so abstractly constructed, raised beyond the contingencies of human observation, and its surface so polished, that the painting seems autonomous, almost self-made.

As every chapter of this book will further attest, this visual mode constitutes a shift from earlier Timurid artworks which served as examples of conspicuous consumption, meant to distinguish the patron.⁴⁴ 'If you have doubts about our grandeur,' a Timurid historiography enjoins its readers, 'look at our edifice.'⁴⁵ Through large-scale objects and historiographical illustrations, early Timurid art and architecture emblematised the Timurid ruler.⁴⁶ Within manuscripts of Persian poetry, Timurid painting served to highlight the patron by illustrating courtly themes.⁴⁷ Late Timurid painting reversed this paradigm. 'Pictorial reality' was 'no longer consciously manipulated for dynastic purposes', as Thomas Lentz and Glenn Lowry wrote in their landmark 1989 exhibition catalogue on the Timurids.⁴⁸

Although this turn has been widely recognised, we still lack a holistic analysis of its material and visual aspects, and an interpretation of its historical significance. Noting late Timurid painters' 'search for technical perfection, with an emphasis on purely formal qualities that overwhelmed all other concerns', Lentz and Lowry have proposed a formalist interpretation: retreating 'from the iconic façade of earlier imperial works', late Timurid painting 'was treated more inwardly as a purely sensory illusion with no overt political agenda, a fleeting moment in time'.⁴⁹ While this analysis does acknowledge that late Timurid painting shifted away from the royal patron, it also denies the medium any social stakes. Focusing solely on visual analysis, this interpretation, moreover, obscures the question of how Timurid viewers might have engaged with the new style of painting.

The most recent scholarly work on late Timurid painting has focused on the extra-textual figures. For Thomas Lentz, this phenomenon signals a painting geared towards realism.⁵⁰ For Chad Kia, extra-textual figures correspond to Sufi symbols, inflecting our reception of the image towards a mystical reading.⁵¹ These interpretations will be examined in Chapter 3; suffice it to say for now that neither reflects historical modes of spectatorship. Contemporary sources prove indifferent to realism.⁵² They do not seem to have developed an interest in mystical iconology either.⁵³ What, then, did late Timurid viewers see? How did they engage with visual plenitude, perfection of execution and linear precision?

Signatures and inscriptions addressing aspects of the paintings could also be embedded in the compositions, insisting that viewers approach the pictures in relation to their making, that paintings be seen as 'what remains from the painter', to quote one such inscription.⁵⁴ Following the paintings' verbal indications and using contemporaneous sources that reveal the terms for the paintings' reception, I show how visual density and technical refinement formed an aesthetics of self-reflection, pulling the viewer away from the story illustrated in the picture and instead inviting them to interrogate the painting's production.

At the *majlis*, 'spectators with a critical eye'⁵⁵ (*nāqidān-i baṣīr*), to use the fifteenth-century writer Dawlatshah Samarqandi's expression, who were 'viewers with a subtle eye'⁵⁶ (*mubaṣṣirān-i nuqtidān*), in Khwandamir's phrase, saw through content to form and craft. For late Timurid viewers, as I propose in Chapter 3, visual profusion enriched the painting's range of reference beyond the necessities of illustration, destabilising its mimetic qualities in order to heighten the painter's talent in *taṣwīr* (the activity of image making). Linear exactitude, meanwhile, demonstrated the artist's command of *tahrīr* (the art of the line), as I suggest in Chapter 4.⁵⁷ Abundance of details and precise contour decoupled the image from its representational operations, pointing instead to the painter's imagination and manual control.

For late Timurid observers, intense workmanship and superfluous detail called attention to the formation of painting as both object and image. Artists, in turn, seem to have anticipated this reception, using density and fineness to emphasise their skill. Showcasing the painter's ability to imagine and materialise a multiplicity of forms, the picture emphasised artistic process in both its perceptual and physical dimensions. As I argue in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5, Bihzad and other artists also added poetic inscriptions as well as signature to ensure that medium and maker occupy the centre of any description.

Late Timurid painting's self-reflection has thus far escaped the attention of Islamic art historians. That paintings appeared mostly within manuscripts makes it difficult to recognise their self-referential quality. Manuscript culture was crucial to the

development of Persian painting: pictures were used from the mid-1250s as visual translations of Persian texts, including poetic and literary materials. The juxtaposition of text and image within the manuscript has thus led modern scholars to define Persian painting as illustrative.⁵⁸ Hence the number of studies devoted to the emergence, development and alteration across time and in various contexts of the illustrative cycles of major literary works such as the *Shahnama* of Firdawsi⁵⁹ or the *Khamasa* of Nizami.⁶⁰

Scholars of Islamic art, moreover, have developed few means to detect self-reflection in art. Although there are many publications on painters, these have focused largely on stylistic and biographical considerations. An example directly relevant to this project is Ebadollah Bahari's monograph on the life and works of the painter Bihzad.⁶¹ Such research has primarily aimed to link paintings to individual artists. It has not addressed the representation of authorship within pictures. Scholars such as Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom have noted the presence of signatures in the paintings' details, thus laying the ground for my own inquiry.⁶² I propose to take their studies on signature further, by examining signatures not only in their referential value but also in their visual, descriptive qualities and their ability to fashion an artist's image.

In the field of Islamic art more generally, scholars have most often addressed image and object theories in Islam through text. Gülru Necipoğlu and David Roxburgh have done foundational work on aesthetics in medieval and early modern Islamic sources, and I am deeply indebted to their studies.⁶³ But while emphasising textual documents, these inquiries do not explore the question of how artworks could convey, visually and materially, discourses about artistic process. One exception has been the study of prosopopoeia (a figure of speech in which an inanimate thing is represented as speaking) in Islamic art, notably by Avinoam Shalem and Olga Bush.⁶⁴ Inscriptions that make objects and monuments speak about themselves often emphasised the artefact's function and played an important role in fashioning the object's reception.⁶⁵ Prosopopoeia, though, remains a textual device. No study in the field of Islamic art has so far attempted to engage the question of how objects themselves, in their visual and material structures, reflected upon their purpose. But self-reflection, I argue in this study, manifested itself inside the pictures as well, in aspects of execution, composition and representational content.

The Cairo *Bustan*

There are several reasons for choosing the Cairo *Bustan* as this project's centrepiece. The Cairo *Bustan* is the only surviving illustrated manuscript that can be attributed with certainty and in its entirety to Sultan Husayn Bayqara's patronage.⁶⁶ In fact, as I show below,

it displays and centres its historical context with rare, astounding precision, not only in the colophon but in the paintings themselves. Naming patron, painter and calligrapher, and alluding to the contemporary poet 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, no other Persian illustrated manuscript contains as much information on the circumstances of its making and viewing as the Cairo *Bustan*. It is also the earliest manuscript I know of that brings together all the strategies developed in Persian painting from the 1390s onward to emphasise artistic performance, and which will be successively analysed in this study – the presence of a double-page painting opening the manuscript that challenges the conventions of the royal frontispiece (Chapter 1), the depiction of epigraphs addressing aspects of the paintings (Chapter 2), extra-textual figures (Chapter 3), linear exactitude (Chapter 4) and the artist's signature (Chapter 5).

The Cairo *Bustan* is a long-admired and yet under-studied manuscript, primarily known for containing the only surviving genuine signatures of the painter Bihzad. The earliest mentions of the Cairo *Bustan* in modern scholarship include brief remarks by F. R. Martin in 1909 and 1912.⁶⁷ The manuscript was then shown in 1931 in the international exhibition of Persian art at Burlington House in London.⁶⁸ This event provoked a surge of scholarly interest, more specifically in the signatures of the painter Bihzad. Since then, the Cairo *Bustan*'s paintings have mainly been used to illustrate Bihzad's life and work.⁶⁹ This research, by contrast, illuminates many other, hitherto unexamined aspects, each explored in a different chapter – the marginalisation of the patron in the opening paintings, the use of pictorial inscriptions, the multiplicity of extra-textual figures and the calligraphic treatment of the line – all employed by the painter to foreground his work and assert his authority.

If the Cairo *Bustan* constitutes an example of pictorial self-reflection, it does not, however, constitute the pivot around which the history of Persian painting turned. Pictorial self-reflection did not emerge all at once, nor did it develop in a linear way. Many of the strategies used to foreground artistic process, including the painting's evenness, the steadiness of the line and the artist's signature, can be found from the late fourteenth century onward in court-sponsored manuscripts. Each feature appearing in the Cairo *Bustan* will thus be placed in a chain of examples, starting with Jalayirid specimens produced at the turn of the fifteenth century and including early Timurid manuscripts and albums, paintings made for the Turkmens and later examples produced in Safavid Iran and Uzbek Bukhara. This chain not only provides a genealogy for the Cairo *Bustan* but also reflects the displacement of manuscripts from one courtly context to another, a movement that prompted several distinctive stylistic elements to appear and reappear in different historical periods.

Persian painting cannot be subsumed into a homogeneous category or a single linear narrative. Even within the tradition of

court-sponsored painting to which the Cairo *Bustan* belonged, multiple styles coexisted at the same time and could be reused in different periods. This is true for the Jalayirid period, and for any Timurid or Turkmen production of the fifteenth century. Stylistic heterogeneity could exist within the same manuscript, where highly wrought images could alternate with much simpler illustrations.⁷⁰ Instead of a vertical, successive model, the stylistic history of Persian illustrated manuscripts suggests a horizontal, polycentric map, with no fixed origins but multiple beginning and exit points, and several possible trajectories, as collections were formed, dismantled and circulated.

The Cairo *Bustan*, then, does not represent the only example of pictorial self-reflection nor the only way to arrive at an understanding of that phenomenon. It is neither a turning point nor a climactic moment but a case within a complex social and artistic history. The integration of the artist into pictorial representation was indeed a process. In the title of this book, the word 'making' calls attention, through the present participle, to the open-ended, dynamic aspect of this development. By contrast with 'rise' or 'emergence', 'making' designates an ongoing activity, a process of artisanal fabrication, embedded in a network of makers and models, with neither a clear beginning nor an end.

Centring the analysis on a single manuscript, my aim is also to move away from the systematising impulse that has characterised the study of Persian painting, the tendency to knit together large corpora of manuscripts and paintings into unified stylistic categories such as 'Timurid painting', often using dynastic periods as the basis for such classifications. To broad histories and sweeping textual enquiries, this work opposes a focused description of late Timurid painting, emphasising its local, singular and idiosyncratic aspects, while also relying on a large array of historical documents to re-imagine its reception.⁷¹ To focus on one object is to resist generalising, while acknowledging that sustained, scrupulous attention to the details of a limited set of artefacts can shed light on subtle, elusive moments of change. By concentrating on the Cairo *Bustan*, I hope to offer a glimpse of how artists have attempted to destabilise dominant paradigms.

With only fifty-five folios, each measuring 30.5 × 21.5 cm, the Cairo *Bustan* is a reasonably sized, convivial volume, easy to handle and leaf through. Given its manageable size and weight, it could undoubtedly be viewed at the *majlis*, passed from hand to hand. The manuscript could sit, splayed open, atop a reader's upturned palms. It is also possible that loose folios were passed around, before the quires were bound together into a complete manuscript. As we will see in Chapter 3, Wasifi does mention that Bihzad once brought to the *majlis* of Mir 'Ali Shir Nawa'i 'a painted page' (*ṣahīfa-ī muṣavvar*) representing a garden.⁷² He does not mention a codex, only an

individual painting. In any event, both scenarios allow for an experience of close examination.

Closed, the Cairo *Bustan* appears tightly encased in a leather binding that was added later (the movements and transformation of the codex over time are addressed in the epilogue) (Plates I and II). The transition from cover to text is extraordinarily elaborate and unusually long. After two blank pages, the reader-viewer discovers a series of lavishly decorated frontispieces, deployed across the first four folios, elongating and dramatising the reader's entrance into the text (Plates III to VIII).

The first frontispiece depicts a royal gathering in a palace's courtyard (folios 1b–2a, Plates IV and III). At the centre of the left page is the manuscript's patron, the Timurid ruler Sultan Husayn Bayqara (folio 2a, Plate III). Before the king, members of the court form a lively circle. They are playing music and drinking alcohol. One of them is holding an open manuscript. On the right page, the beholder is invited to the feast's backstage, where servants are preparing the beverages (folio 1b, Plate IV). At the upper left, a man stands out. He is wearing a fur-trimmed hat. Placed alone on a carpet and surrounded with blue and white porcelain and gold dishes, he might be Sultan Husayn's son and successor, Badi' al-Zaman.⁷³

Then appears a double illuminated page displaying the same composition on each half (folios 2b–3a, Plates VI and V). Blue and gold interlacing cartouches unfold around a gilded, central lobed medallion. Each cartouche contains scrolls of flowers and stylised half-palmettes, sometimes also birds. Framing both pages, the frieze of lobed, dome-like patterns creates a mirroring effect, adding an element of axial symmetry. Just as the opening painting does, this frontispiece produces a double effect. With its lavish use of gold and lapis lazuli, it is an example of 'conspicuous consumption', a means of social distinction, emphasising the royal patronage of the book.⁷⁴ But the double page is also a work of intricacy, one that highlights the precision of the illuminator's hand and his capacity to include a great array of motifs.

One last, richly illuminated frontispiece follows (folios 3b–4a, Plates VIII and VII). In the middle of each page, text can be read: the *Bustan* of Sa'di finally starts, with eleven verses laid out in *nasta'liq* script. The *Bustan* continues on the verso of the frontispiece's second leaf (folio 4b, Plate IX). The 21 × 17 cm *jadwal* (known as 'rule-borders' or 'rulings' in the field of codicology)⁷⁵ contains forty-six verses written over twenty-three lines and four columns. A fine line in gold ink outlined in black separates the columns of text. The parallel lines framing the *jadwal* were added later, when the text was remargined in gold-sprinkled paper.

The *Bustan* (Orchard) of Sa'di Shirazi (d. c. 1292) is a didactic poem.⁷⁶ A long *mathnawi* (poem written in rhyming couplets)⁷⁷ of approximately 4,000 verses, it consists of a preface and ten chapters,

each deploying a succession of short stories interspersed with moral advice.⁷⁸ Generally labelled as literature of advice or didactic literature, this poem is a multifaceted, polyvalent text.⁷⁹ Mixing different patterns of speech, styles and literary genres, it interweaves epic tales with humorous anecdotes, narrative poems with proverbs and mythical stories with philosophical statements.

Although Sa'di's works were widely diffused and circulated,⁸⁰ the Cairo *Bustan* is the earliest surviving illustrated copy of the *Bustan* of Sa'di to have been produced in a courtly context.⁸¹ This is not so surprising. The *Bustan* is a peculiar choice for a kingly manuscript. While several stories deal with government, more than half the poem ignores royal history, focusing instead on themes such as love, education, speech and the life of dervishes. Courtly manuscripts usually expressed, both in text and painting, kingly concerns, often as a means to underscore the relation of art to patronage. Copies of the *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Firdawsi, an eleventh-century epic poem about the lives and deeds of the pre-Islamic kings of Iran, were thus preferred. The focal point of courtly production, they often fulfilled a twofold task: to illustrate the *Shahnama* and to reflect the power of their royal patrons by amalgamating, in the image, the stories of past kings with contemporary events.⁸²

In the Cairo *Bustan*, only the first painting bears a royal theme. It represents the king Darius and his encounter with a herdsman (folio 10a, Plate X).⁸³ In the second painting, 'The Beggar at the Mosque', a true dervish, mistaken for a beggar, is forbidden entrance to the sacred precinct (folio 26a, Plate XI).⁸⁴ The third picture, 'The Poet at the Judge's Court', is about a poet who was once excluded from the court of a judge, again on the basis of his poor appearance (folio 30b, Plate XII).⁸⁵ The fourth and last painting, 'Yusuf and Zulaykha', is about the desire of Zulaykha for Yusuf (the story derives from the biblical tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife), and her rejection by the prophet (folio 52b, Plate XIII).⁸⁶ Each painting stages an encounter between a powerful character – the king, the mosque's guardian, the judge and the prophet Yusuf – and a marginal character – the herdsman, the beggar, the poet and Zulaykha. Instead of privileging royal figures, the stories foreground power imbalance.

Sa'di's *Bustan* is, moreover, known for its literariness or self-reflective quality. Many passages comment upon the structure and function of the *Bustan*, pointing to its multilayered, duplicitous ethics – for example when the poem is compared to a date whose sweet first layer protects a more central, enigmatic kernel.⁸⁷ A few stories stage a character named Sa'di, and this is in fact the case in 'The Poet at the Judge's Court', where the poet is revealed at the end of story to be the *Bustan*'s author himself. By choosing the *Bustan* and by depicting its author in the third painting, the Cairo *Bustan* emphasises the theme of artistic self-reflection. And self-reflection

is clearly paired with social concerns, since the author is portrayed as a marginal figure.

The paintings are also remarkable for the sheer amount of contextual information they present. Two of them bear a *hijri* date of completion: 894 in the third painting (from the last three weeks of December 1488 to the end of November 1489), and 893 in the last one (from the last two weeks of 1487 to early December 1488). All four paintings contain the signature of the painter Bihzad, subsumed into the pictorial field as a visual motif. In the first painting, for instance, it is inscribed in gold on the black velvet quiver of the horse rider (Figure 5.1). Integrated within the image, dates and signatures frame the paintings as the achievement of a historical artist. They affirm that painting cannot be separated from painter. As I argue in Chapter 5, the signature's placement and form construct an idealised image of its maker, at once historicising and glorifying the artist, and announcing the reception of Bihzad as the paragon of excellence in Persian painting.

Even more surprising than the painter's declaration of authorship is the implicit reference within two paintings to the contemporary poet 'Abd al-Rahman Jami. Although the text copied in the manuscript is the *Bustan* of Sa'di, the last painting illustrates another text: *Yusuf wa Zulaykha*, written by Jami in 1484–5, slightly before the Cairo *Bustan* was produced.⁸⁸ In two paintings, representations of epigraphs further draw on Jami's poetry, as we shall see in Chapter 2. Jami was a giant of Persian literature, a writer and spiritual guide who was closely associated with late Timurid Herat.⁸⁹ His literary work was known for its intertextuality. Often quoting and imitating past authors, Jami looked back at canonical works and poetic conventions, rewriting them into new versions and through this gesture of reuse portraying himself as 'the seal of the poets',⁹⁰ as Qajar critics later wrote. The inclusion of his work in the Cairo *Bustan* thus constitutes a prolongation of Jami's own poetics of reuse and emulates his interest in historicity and intertextuality.

The Cairo *Bustan* is strikingly enmeshed in the late Timurid cultural scene. At the other end of the manuscript, following the last verses of the *Bustan*, the colophon gives the name of the calligrapher and a date of completion (Plate XIV):

تمت على يد العبد الفقير المذنب سلطان على الكاتب غفر ذنوبه و ستر عيوبه فى اواخر رجب
المرجب سنة ثلاث و تسعين و ثمانماية

Completed by the hand of the poor, sinning slave Sultan 'Ali al-Katib, may [God] forgive his sins and cover his faults, at the end of Rajab in the year 893 [end of June or early July 1488]

Sultan 'Ali al-Katib, also known as Sultan 'Ali Mashhadi (d. 1520),⁹¹ was one of the most famous calligraphers of the period, as well

as a poet and writer.⁹² A ubiquitous figure in both contemporary and later historiographical sources, he was considered the best calligrapher of all time, 'attain[ing] such a perfect level of expertise', in Khwandamir's words, 'that he abrogated the calligraphy of masters past and present'.⁹³

Preserving Sultan Husayn's portrait and name, Bihzad's paintings, Sultan 'Ali Mashhadi's calligraphy and Jami's words, through a wide array of visual and verbal marks, the manuscript gathers the most prestigious members of late Timurid Herat. All four personalities lived in Herat when the manuscript was made and were active members of Sultan Husayn's court.⁹⁴ In a letter to Sultan 'Ali Mashhadi, Sultan Husayn praised the talent of his addressee: 'We have written the page of his hopes with the pen of affection, drawn the pen of abrogation through the calligraphy of former masters, and consider him above all others in that art.'⁹⁵ Sultan Husayn was also close to Bihzad, whom he chose as the main painter of his court, according to the memorialist Wasifi.⁹⁶ He granted Jami many privileges, as earlier noted, and Jami, in turn, dedicated several poems to him.⁹⁷

A microcosmic replication of late Timurid Herat, the Cairo *Bustan*, especially in its paintings, points to its possible reception in the context of a *majlis*, where calligrapher, painter, poet and patron would be present. As suggested by the manuscript's illustrated frontispiece representing a royal gathering (Plates III and IV), Sultan Husayn would preside over the assembly. Probably meant to be read or spoken by the historical beholder, Jami's inscriptions further anchor the paintings in their surroundings. In both form and content, they mimic how a contemporary viewer, perhaps the poet Jami himself, might respond to the image. Addressing aspects of the artistic process, they exemplify a way of seeing that focuses on the painter.

In the following chapters, I examine the strategies used in the Cairo *Bustan* to shift our attention to the artist. Chapter 1 focuses on the royal frontispiece. While court-sponsored manuscripts often began with a courtly image praising the ruler, here the frontispiece marginalises the king. By challenging some of the genre's conventions, it starts undoing the link between painting and patron. In the second chapter, I describe and analyse the epigraphs represented in the paintings. While inscriptions had customarily emphasised the patron, in the Cairo *Bustan* they highlight aspects of the paintings and announce their reception by the contemporary poet. Chapter 3 turns to the issue of illustration, examining how the paintings depart from Sa'di's text. Extra-textual figures, together with aspects of composition and execution, work to heighten the painter's creativity, while suggesting a form of ideal mimesis, raising the painting and its maker above worldly status. In Chapter 4, I move from image to medium, to consider the linear qualities of the paintings. I argue that

contours work to foreground the artist's calligraphic talent and to inflect a relationship between line and painter. Chapter 5 addresses Bihzad's signatures and how they construct artistic authority. The epilogue addresses the Cairo *Bustan's* later history, showing how it was circulated and transformed over time, and how its visual features were adopted and adapted in various contexts, from Safavid Tabriz to Uzbek Bukhara to Khalji Mandu.

Poetics and Politics of Self-reflection

One of the methodological principles underlying this study is that pictorial self-reflection is not necessarily achieved through pictorial illusion or indexical means. Art historians such as W. T. J. Mitchell have used the word 'metapicture' to refer to an image that can 'provid[e] a second-order discourse that tells us something about [itself]'.⁹⁸ Although crucial for my research, studies of metapictoriality have generally focused on iconic modes of self-referentiality. My research, by contrast, explores symbolic means of self-reflection.

In late Timurid painting, artists did not depict paintings within paintings nor did they represent themselves in self-portraits. Traces of their gestural efforts are, moreover, often hard to discern. The pictorial surface is so brilliant and smooth that no matter how close one looks, the painting shows no visible brushstrokes. All man-made artefacts bear traces of their makers but in the late Timurid era, the painting was conspicuously depersonalised, manipulated in such a way as to look almost machine-made.

Yet painting was meant to convey a portrait of the painter. This is a problem of semiotics. How can a sign represent a figure without showing a face or a bodily trace? Verbal elements such as the signature can easily fulfil that role, and indeed they were used in the Cairo *Bustan* to secure the relation of painting to the artist Bihzad, but this study is also concerned with visual and material elements. How might line, colour or composition express something about their maker if they cannot be traced back to an individual hand? If in fact they strive to do the exact opposite, elevating the artist into a metaphysical, ideal entity?

An essential argument of the present study is that late Timurid painting explores what one might call the symbolic possibilities of the medium. Form describes the artist through visual and material characteristics – the regularity of the composition, the fluidity of the line, the opacity of the colours – and this inference can only be drawn from cultural conventions, from the knowledge, for example, that the line's steadiness is a sign of its maker's morality. As I propose in Chapter 4, the artist is not portrayed using the figurative, a mode of signification in which meaning is recognised or produced through resemblance. Rather, the figure of the painter is conveyed through material, sensory configurations.⁹⁹

The analysis of self-reflection in the absence of 'obvious' modes of self-representation such as self-portraiture can thus only be contextual – this book's second methodological statement. Persian painting took on a self-reflective quality not just on its own or with textual inscriptions but within an elaborate system that included a wide range of materials from architecture to calligraphy to poetry, historical modes of spectatorship at the *majlis* and contemporary discourses of authorship. The study of pictorial self-reflection requires a mode of close examination,¹⁰⁰ but in the case of Persian painting, self-reflection was a relational notion: neither entirely inscribed in the painting nor completely exterior to it, it did not precede the viewer's engagement with the painting but rather was induced by it. In a way, any painting embodies a discourse about its making as long as there are beholders who can make it speak about itself. Persian painting anticipated the relational quality of self-reflection by translating contemporary discussions of authorship into formal and compositional decisions.

I also argue that self-reflection was a means of social promotion, that its essential purpose was to insert the artist in the social and cultural rituals of the *majlis*. Circulated in courtly gatherings, and emphasising artistic process instead of illustrative content, painting allowed the artist to emerge in the field of representation. But this development, I further suggest, does not necessarily manifest an actual subversive force. It would be tempting to analyse the focus on the artist as a form of political contestation, reversing the hierarchy of patron and painter. This shift, however, was limited to courtly context. Taking place within the confines of the *majlis*, the emphasis on the artist was authorised and sanctioned by the patron. Even as it seemed to depart from the order of patronage and the tradition of illustration, late Timurid painting, while achieving a form of symbolic reversal, remained an integral part of courtly culture.

Late Timurid painting, in fact, glorified the artist's work. Because the painting's finish effaces the signs of manual fabrication, the painted page appears as a gem-like object, a set of precious stones. As I argue in Chapter 3, painting was motivated by a paradoxical goal: to attest to the artist's accomplishment but also to appear miraculous, inimitable. The making process was both enhanced and confounded. Challenging our ability to fully grasp its causality, painting, as I propose in Chapter 5, functioned to produce '*ajab*, 'a state of bewilderment that comes to people as a result of their incapacity of knowing the cause of something' according to the thirteenth-century writer al-Qazwini.¹⁰¹

Painters were often praised for the 'sheer wizardry and miracle' of their work, to quote the sixteenth-century poet and artist Sadiqi Beg Afshar.¹⁰² And, according to Zayn al-Din Mahmud Wasifi (1485–1551 or 1566), the most 'enchanted and marvellous' painter in late Timurid Herat was the author of the Cairo *Bustan's* paintings,

Bihzad, who was chosen by Sultan Husayn as the main artist of his court 'from among the artisans of this craft and the magicians of this profession'.¹⁰³ Defying efforts at comprehension and emulation, painting turned artist (*hunarmand*) into magician (*siḥr-āfarīn*), and craftsmanship (*ṣan'at*) into mastery (*ustādī*). Pictorial self-reflection was a means of empowerment, not simply providing the artist with visibility but imbuing him with authority, both worldly and transcendental.

Notes

1. Khwandamir, 1989, 205. The Persian text reads: قوت ذهن و دقت طبع (Khwandamir, 1954, 4:84).
2. Cairo, Dar al-kutub, Adab fārisī 22. The manuscript contains fifty-five folios, measuring 30.5 × 21.5 cm. A regular text page contains a written surface measuring 21 × 17 cm, with four columns of twenty-three lines penned in a single hand in *nasta'liq* on a white polished paper. The rectangular panels of text are set within gold-sprinkled margins and outlined in a set of rulings. Margins and rulings were added later.
3. Wasifi, 1970–2, 2:149; English translation by Subtelny, 1979, 208.
4. On Timur's conquests, see Manz, 1989. For an overview of the Timurids, see Manz, 2007; Subtelny, 2010. It is worth noting that the Timurids commissioned several historiographical texts about their own history (Woods, 1987; Bernardini, 2008).
5. On the Turkmen dynasties, see Woods, 1976.
6. On Sultan Husayn and late Timurid Herat, see Subtelny, 2007. For a general introduction to the political and cultural context of this period, see Lentz and Lowry, 1989, 239–301.
7. On the early sixteenth century and the transition to Uzbek and Safavid rules in Herat, see Szuppe, 1992.
8. Subtelny, 1988, 488.
9. Quoted in Lentz and Lowry, 1989, 298.
10. Lentz and Lowry, 1989, 299.
11. Subtelny, 1988, 480.
12. Lambton, 1997.
13. Subtelny, 1988; Szuppe, 1992, 65.
14. Subtelny, 1980; Subtelny, 1993.
15. Quoted in Subtelny, 1988, 492.
16. Subtelny, 1988, 492–3.
17. Szuppe, 1992, 65.
18. Subtelny, 1988, 484.
19. Babur, 1996, 221.
20. Subtelny, 1983, 124.
21. Subtelny, 1979, 78; Losensky, 1998, 137.
22. On the *majlis* in late Timurid Herat, see Subtelny, 1979, 162; Roxburgh, 2001b, 67; Ergin, 2013, 72–5. For the *majlis* between the tenth and the fourteenth centuries, see Brookshaw, 2003. I return to the *majlis* in the Introduction as well as in Chapter 2.
23. Wasifi, 1970–2, 2:291.
24. Wasifi, 1970–2, 1:138–9; quoted in English in Kia, 2012, 6.

25. Subtelny, 1983, 135.
26. Subtelny, 1986, 60.
27. Wasifi, 1970–2, 1:373–4.
28. Wasifi devoted several pages to this episode, in fact the entirety of chapter 13 (Wasifi, 1970–2, 1:372–90).
29. As such, the *mu'amma* has 'both a surface meaning (the literal sense of the verse) and an encoded meaning (the name)', as Paul Losensky wrote (Losensky, 1998, 158).
30. Losensky, 1998, 158. For other examples, see Subtelny, 1986, 75–6.
31. On the *majlis*, see note 22.
32. Artists imbued painting with artistic reflexivity, to use a notion that has been mobilised by cultural historians to define texts and images that emphasise 'their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their textual processes, or their reception'. A convenient summary of the ways in which the notion of 'artistic reflexivity' has been used in visual studies can be found in Stam et al., 1992, 204.
33. Gell, 1998, 6.
34. *Ibid.*, 6.
35. On art as an instrument of social distinction and 'a misrecognized form of social difference', see Bourdieu, 1979.
36. Painting served as an 'actant', to use Bruno Latour's concept, as an object to which action was delegated. An actant 'stands in for an actor and creates an asymmetry between absent makers and occasional users' (Latour, 1999, 189). On this notion, also see Latour, 2005, esp. 70–1. By examining painting as an agent of social distinction, my research combines Pierre Bourdieu's sociologism (Bourdieu, 1979, analyses the social function of art but does not consider the role played by the object's materiality in the production of social distinction) with Bruno Latour's materialism (which concentrates on objects as circulatory agents, enmeshed in horizontal, hybrid networks of humans and nonhumans, but generally does not take into account the power dynamics that shape and control those networks).
37. Painting can also take over the margins. Margins had been used for painting and drawing for at least a hundred years (Brend, 2000).
38. Golombek, 1972, 23.
39. Kia, 2006; Kia, 2009; Kia, 2012.
40. Roxburgh, 2003, 27.
41. Quoted in Necipoğlu, 1995, 203.
42. As such, it displays 'the inadequacy of the verbal', to use Susan Stewart's characterisation of the miniature (Stewart, 1993, 52).
43. Subtelny, 1983, 126. As Yves Porter has demonstrated, one major change is the use for the painting's composition of the *mastar*, the grid employed by calligraphers for the text's layout (Porter, 2009). The *mastar* will be explored in Chapter 3.
44. 'Conspicuous consumption', a notion that equates wasteful spending with social and political prestige, is borrowed from Veblen, 1899.
45. This is a quotation from the *Maṭla' al-sa'dayn wa majma' al-baḥrayn* (The Rising of the Two Stars and the Meeting of the Two Seas) by Kamal al-Din 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi (1413–82); quoted in Roxburgh, 2005, 74.
46. This view has dominated the art-historical scholarship on the Timurids (see for instance Lentz, 1985; Lentz and Lowry, 1989; Sims, 1992). It has informed the study of court-sponsored literature too. 'Every ruler

of Central Asian Islamic history,' Maria Subtelny wrote, 'sought to make his court a cultural showplace through patronage, especially of literary activity' (Subtelny, 1983, 130).

47. Sims, 1992; Hillenbrand, 2010.
48. Lentz and Lowry, 1989, 298–9.
49. *Ibid.*, 298–9.
50. Lentz, 1990, 40.
51. Kia, 2006; Kia, 2009; Kia, 2012. The mystical inflection had already been explored in Milstein, 1977 (Rachel Milstein, however, analysed mysticism only in the stories illustrated and did not consider the extra-textual forms).
52. The point was already noted in Roxburgh, 2000b, 122–3.
53. Iconology, the pairing of images with texts and discourses, works well for Renaissance painting (it goes back to the sixteenth century and was explained in works such as Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, published in 1593), but might not so easily apply to other pictorial traditions. The classic study of this method is Panofsky, 1995. On the applicability of this method to non-Western art, see Blier, 1988.
54. This is one of the inscriptions appearing in Plate XII, a painting dated 894/December 1488–November 1489. Transcription, translation and further analysis are provided in Chapter 2.
55. Dawlatshah Samarqandi, 1901, 380.
56. Khwandamir, 1954, 4:19.
57. In a well-known ekphrastic passage, the sixteenth-century artist and writer Dust Muhammad used both *tahrīr* and *taṣwīr* as parameters to define and evaluate a painter's talent. The passage describes a famous painting, 'The Court of Gayumars', by the Safavid artist Sultan Muhammad: the painting is such 'that the lion-hearted of the jungle of depiction (*taṣwīr*) and the leopards and crocodiles of the workshop of drawing (*tahrīr*) quail at the fangs of [Sultan Muhammad's] pen and bend their necks before the bewilderment (*hayrat*) of his picture' (Dust Muhammad, 2001, 16). Dust Muhammad further emphasised visual abundance and variety in the description's closing verse: 'with the pen of his fingertips, on the tablet of vision, [Sultan Muhammad] has drawn a different form at each and every instant'.
58. For concise histories of the early development of Persian painting and its illustrative function, see Golombek, 1972; Swietochowski, 1974; Ettinghausen, 1981; Blair, 1993; Grabar, 2006; Roxburgh, 2017.
59. For the earliest illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnama* of Firdawsi, see Simpson, 1979; for an overview of *Shahnama* illustrations, see Simpson, 2004. For Timurid illustrations of the *Shahnama*, see Sims, 1992; Hillenbrand, 2010.
60. See, for example, Soucek, 1971.
61. Bahari, 1996.
62. Such studies include Blair and Bloom, 1999; Blair, 2015. I examine the issue of the artist's signature in Chapter 5.
63. Roxburgh, 2001b; Necipoğlu, 2015. See also Rabbat, 2006.
64. Shalem, 2010; Bush, 2015; Bush, 2017.
65. Shalem, 2010; Bush, 2015; Bush, 2017.
66. An illustrated copy of the *Zafarnama* of Sharaf al-Din 'Ali does contain a dedication page assigning the manuscript to Sultan Husayn Bayqara's library: *Zafarnama* of Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, 1467–8, attributed to Herat, copied by Shir 'Ali, 539 folios, 23.5 × 15.2 cm (folio) (Sims,

- 1973; Lentz and Lowry, 1989, no. 147). However, the manuscript might have been made in several stages. As scholars have argued, the six double paintings it contains might have been added around 1480 (Sims, 1973). Moreover, Herat is not mentioned in the colophon and the calligrapher's identity remains unclear. A copy of the *Khamasa* of Jami might also have been produced in the royal workshop of Herat. I have not examined it, however, and it is not clear from the main publication referencing it whether it bears any explicit reference to Sultan Husayn: Tehran, Gulistan Palace Library, no. 709, dated 1481–2, with two paintings (Godard and Gray, 1956).
67. Early mentions in modern scholarship include Martin, 1909, 4 and Martin, 1912, 1:113. For entries about the Cairo *Bustan* in catalogues of the National Library of Egypt, see al-Tarāzi, 1968, 21–7; Barakat, 2008, 46–53.
 68. Wilson, 1931, 236, case no. 543, manuscript B.
 69. Wilkinson, 1931, plates II, III and IV; Sakisian, 1931, 169, plates XXXIV and XXXV no. 2; Binyon et al., 1933, 85–6, no. 83, plates LXVIII–LXXI; Anand, 1977; Lentz and Lowry, 1989, no. 146; Bahari, 1996; Shukurov, 2009. Bihzad occupies a central place in Barry, 2004. This book has, however, been criticised for its lack of scholarly rigour and its orientalist inclination. See Barbara Brend's review (Brend, 2007). For a recent discussion of Bihzad's importance in the history of Persian painting (also framed as a critique of Barry's book), see Shukurov, 2009. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for sharing this reference.
 70. This was the case with masterpieces as well, including the celebrated *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp (Canby, 2011).
 71. A 'thick description' would be another way to characterise this study's approach. The expression is borrowed from Geertz, 1973.
 72. The full passage is in Wasifi, 1970–2, 2:149–50; English translation by Subtelny, 1979, 208.
 73. Brend, 2005, 83.
 74. This is Thorstein Veblen's phrase. See note 44.
 75. Gacek, 2009, 229.
 76. Sa'di is one of the most celebrated poets of Persian literature. Most biographical information about him has been collected from his own writings, in particular from the *Bustan* and the *Gulistan* (Rose Garden). Several stories stage a character named Sa'di. From the *Bustan*, we learn that Sa'di was born in Shiraz, that he lost his father when he was still very young and that as a teenager he left for Baghdad to study at the school founded by the Seljuq vizir Nizam al-Mulk, the *madrassa* Nizamiyya (for the English translation, see Sa'di, 1974, chapter 7, story 121; for the Persian text, see Sa'di, 1981, chapter 7, 153). Most stories, though, seem imbued with legend. For a quick overview of his life and works, see Losensky, 2012. Recent biographies include Yohannan, 1987; Diya', 1994; Katouzian, 2006. Less critical is Massé, 1919. On the issue of autobiography in Sa'di's writings, see Keshavarz, 1994. On the famous and probably fictional episode of Sa'di's visit to the Hindu temple of Somnath in India (for the English translation, see Sa'di, 1974, chapter 8, story 140; for the Persian text, see Sa'di, 1981, chapter 8, 176 sq.), see Akhtar, 1934; Homerin, 1983.
 77. On the poetic form of the *mathnawi*, see Bruijn, 2000b.
 78. I use the Persian edition of the *Bustan* established by Ghulam-Husayn

- Yusufi (Sa'di, 1981) and the English translation by G. M. Wickens (Sa'di, 1974). On the *Bustan*, see Wickens, 1990.
79. One of the most compelling analyses of the *Bustan* is Fouchécour, 1986, 311–48.
 80. According to Ahmad Monzavi, more than 1,000 copies of Sa'di's works have survived, including 140 copies of the *Kulliyat* (Complete Works) (Monzavi, 1969–71, 3:1861 sq.), 400 copies of the *Bustan* (Monzavi, 1969–71, 4:3347 sq.) and 322 copies of the *Gulistan* (Monzavi, 1969–71, 5:3602 sq.). According to Fouchécour, copies of the *Bustan* and the *Gulistan* of Sa'di are more numerous than copies of the *Shahnama* of Firdawsi or the *Khamsa* of Nizami (Fouchécour, 1986, 328). One can also measure the popularity of Sa'di from the abundance of translations and imitations of his works. On a translation of the *Gulistan* in Turkish Chagatay, see Erkinov, 2002. Quotations from Sa'di's poetry were widely used from Ottoman Turkey to Central Asia. From the fourteenth century onward, rulers from Shiraz left epigraphic inscriptions on the ruins of the palace of Darius in Persepolis, many of which were verses from the *Bustan* of Sa'di (although he fails to identify the source as the *Bustan*, see Melikian-Chirvani, 1971). In Turkey, a verse from the *Bustan* can be found in the mosque of Mehmed I in Bursa (Taeschner, 1932, 144; I would like to thank Khalida Mahi for this reference). In Central Asia, the use of verses by Sa'di was widespread, for example as funerary inscriptions (on cenotaphs dating to the fifteenth century in the necropolis of Châr Bakr near Bukhara, see Babajanov and Szuppe, 2002, 37–9 and 47–50).
 81. One must signal, however, that the Cairo *Bustan* was preceded by several court-sponsored copies of the *Bustan* that were not illustrated, and by a few illustrated copies of the *Gulistan*. A copy of the *Kulliyat* (Complete Works) of Sa'di dated 1409 has been attributed by Francis Richard to Muzaffarid patronage (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan 816; Richard, 2013). An illustrated copy of the *Gulistan* (Rose Garden) of Sa'di was made for the Timurid prince Baysunghur in 1426–7 (Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Per. 119; on this manuscript and its paintings, see Lentz, 1985, 314–27; Lentz and Lowry, 1989, no. 41; Hillenbrand, 1996; Roxburgh, 2005, 66–8). The *Gulistan* was composed shortly after the *Bustan* (Sa'di, 2008). It consists of a *prosimum*, a text mixing prose and poetry, with eight chapters addressing a wide variety of themes, including secular, religious and courtly topics. Illustrated extracts from the *Gulistan* appear in one of the anthologies made for the Timurid prince Iskandar Sultan (r. 1409–14) in 1411 (Lisbon, Gulbenkian Museum, L. A. 161; Soucek, 1992). One should note, moreover, that an unillustrated copy of the *Bustan* was included in the margins of the anthology made for Baysunghur in Shiraz in 1420 (Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst, I. 4628; Enderlein, 1991). Beyond the Timurid realm, three other princely copies must be mentioned. An unillustrated manuscript containing both *Bustan* and *Gulistan* was made in 1467 for the library of the Ottoman ruler Mehmet II (London, British Library, Add. 17330; Rieu, 1879–83, 2:601–2). A compilation of 150 verses from the *Bustan* was started in 1478 for the Turkmen prince Sultan Khalil. Its two paintings were completed at the Safavid court (Houston, Art History Trust Collection, nos 48 and 71; Soudavar, 1992, nos 48 and 71). Finally, an unillustrated copy of the *Gulistan* was finished in

- 1481–2 in Shamakhi, Shirvanshah, for Farrukh Yasar (London, British Library, Or. 4120; Rieu, 1895, no. 249).
82. A well-known example is the Great Mongol *Shahnama* usually dated to around 1330. Fifty-eight paintings have survived. They are now scattered among public and private collections (Blair and Grabar, 1980). As Abolala Soudavar has demonstrated, the paintings work at once to illustrate the *Shahnama* and to chronicle events from the life of the Ilkhanids (Soudavar, 1996). The Timurids picked up on this idea for their own copies of the *Shahnama* (Sims, 1992).
 83. Sa'di, 1981, chapter 1, 25–6; English translation in Sa'di, 1974, chapter 1, story 2.
 84. Sa'di, 1981, chapter 3, 88–9; English translation in Sa'di, 1974, chapter 3, story 47.
 85. Sa'di, 1981, chapter 4, 104–7; English translation in Sa'di, 1974, chapter 4, story 66.
 86. Sa'di, 1981, chapter 9, 195–6; English translation in Sa'di, 1974, chapter 9, story 154.
 87. The verse reads: 'Like dates, the skin is incrustated with sweetness, / But open it up, and there's a kernel inside!' (Sa'di, 1974, verse 128).
 88. Jami, 1997–9, 2:17–209. *Yusuf wa Zulaykha* is sometimes dated 1483. Another date, 1484–5, appears in the form of a chronogram at the end of the text. This poem is a *mathnawi* and it belongs to Jami's *Haft awrang* (The Seven Thrones), a collection of seven long *mathnawis*. For a brief overview of Jami's life and works, see Losensky, 2008.
 89. In the last two decades of his life, Jami mainly lived in Herat. He was a faithful supporter of Sultan Husayn, standing by his side when members of another Timurid branch threatened to reclaim Khurasan. He was also the spiritual counsellor of Sultan Husayn's vizier, Mir 'Ali Shir Nawa'i. Jami was a member of the Naqshbandiya, a Sufi order that was particularly powerful in Khurasan and Transoxiana, and a pupil of the influential Naqshbandi leader Khwaja 'Ubayd Allah Ahrar. Jami, Sultan Husayn and 'Ali Shir 'constituted a religious, military, and administrative "triumvirate" governing Khorasan' (Losensky, 2008).
 90. Losensky, 1998, 171.
 91. According to the Timurid historian Khwandamir, he died in Mashhad in 1513–14 (Khwandamir, 1954, 3:1523–4).
 92. For a list of manuscripts signed by or attributed to him and a list of primary sources, see Bayāni, 1944, 1:241–66. For a recent overview of his life and time, see Roxburgh, 2015.
 93. Khwandamir, 1989, 225–6.
 94. They all knew each other. Sultan 'Ali and Bihzad were colleagues and friends. A quatrain by Sultan 'Ali attests to the calligrapher's affection and longing for Bihzad, who seemed to have missed Sultan Ali's gatherings all too often: 'My dear, cherished son Bihzad used to visit me from time to time. He is my life personified, but for a lifetime now he has not thought of me' (quoted in Roxburgh, 2015, 115).
 95. Thackston, 2001, 51.
 96. Wasifi, 1970–2, 2:144–5; English translation by Subtelny, 1979, 170.
 97. Losensky, 2008.
 98. Mitchell, 1994, 38. A metapicture is characterised by a 'poietic of self-reflection' to refer to another important work on self-reflection in painting (Stoichita, 1993). For a study of metapictoriality outside the

Western tradition of art, see Hung, 1996, esp. 'Coda: Metapictures', 237–59.

99. This is what Jean-François Lyotard has called the figural, as opposed to the figurative (Lyotard, 2010).
100. As W. T. J. Mitchell argued about metapictoriality, when it comes to studying how images reflect upon their ontological status and the process of their making, description must be an important tool of investigation (Mitchell, 1994, 38).
101. Al-Qazwini, 1977, 31.
102. English translation in Dickson and Welch, 1981, 1:261.
103. Wasifi, 1970–2, 2:144–5; English translation by Subtelny, 1979, 170. It is worth quoting the full passage here:

سلاطین روزگار و خواقین عالی مقدار از برای تحشید طبع و تقریح خاطر که جمعیت حضور باطن عامه رعایا و رفاهیت و سرور خواطر کافهء برابرا بدان منوط و مربوط است، همواره جمعی از مصوران سحر آفرین و نقاشان بدایع آیین را در پایهء سریر اعلیٰ باز داشته، [...] و لهذا پادشاه مغفور میرو نور الله مرقدہ از میان هنرمندان این صنعت و سحر آفرینان این حرفت استاد بهزاد نقاش را که مصوران هفت اقلیم سر تسلیم پیش او فرود آورده بودند و صورت دعوی مسلمی را علی العموم بدو سپرده بودند، اختیار فرموده بود

The sultans of the age and the mighty khaqans have always retained a group of enchanting and marvellous miniaturists in the service of the Lofty Throne in order to sharpen their wit and recreate their minds – something on which the peace of mind and tranquillity of heart of all their subjects is dependent – and they have always shown them favour [...] And it is for this reason that the late Padishah [Sultan Husayn Bayqara] – May God illumine his tomb – chose Ustad Bihzad, the miniaturist, before whom the painters of the Seven Climes bowed their heads in submission and to whom they, without exception, entrusted (the image of) the claim of acquiescence, from among the artisans of this craft and the magicians of this profession.