

Three Albums of Seigneur Gentil and Colonel Polier: Cultural Exchanges in Late Eighteenth-Century India

Susan Stronge

1 The Gentil *Recueil* in the Victoria and Albert Museum

A volume compiled by Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil (1726–1799) was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1980. Its place and date of completion are recorded on the title page:

Recueil de toutes sortes de Dessins sur les Usages et coutumes des Peuples de l'indoustan ou Empire Mogol d'après plusieurs peintres Indiens Névasilal, Mounsingue &c au service du Nabab Visir Soudjaatdaula Gouverneur général des provinces d'Eléabad et d'Avad. lequel recueil a été fait par les soins du Sr Gentil Colonel d'Infanterie; en 1774 a Faisabad.¹

The seal impression next to it provides Gentil's Persian titles and the Hijri date 1182 (1768/69). None

of the fifty-eight illustrations bound between worn leather covers is signed by the artists named in Gentil's notice but the contents, date and provenance make the volume a significant document for the study of the political and cultural history of Awadh in the early 1770s.²

Gentil was born in the Languedoc in 1726 and arrived in India in 1752 to join the army of the French Compagnie des Indes before serving various Indian princes in their campaigns against the

² The album is no. 9. 1 in the 'Liste Gentil'. See Roselyne Hurel, *Miniatures et peintures indiennes: collection du département des Estampes et de la photographie de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010), vol. 1, p. 245. The author reproduces (pp. 243–246) the complete list held in the print department of the Bibliothèque nationale (Estampes, Réserve Ye 62 4°). A brief notice of the volume was written soon after its acquisition (Andrew Topsfield, 'Two early Company albums', in *The V&A Album 2* [London: V&A publications, 1983], pp. 57–62); Mildred Archer provided a short introduction to Gentil's Indian career, brief mention of some of the illustrated manuscripts he commissioned and whereabouts of some not in French collections, as well as a summary list in English of the subject of each drawing (Mildred Archer and Graham Parlett, *Company Paintings: Indian Paintings of the British Period* [London: Victoria and Albert Museum in association with Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 1992], cat.no. 89, pp. 117–122). See also Susan Gole, *Maps of Mughal India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), pp. 4–5. Chanchal Dadlani, 'Transporting India: The *Gentil Album* and Mughal Manuscript Culture', *Art History* 38 (2015), pp. 749–761 points out the correspondences with Abu'l Fazl's *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (Institutes of Akbar) that go beyond those mentioned in Gentil's annotations. For a discussion of the depictions of Shah 'Alam II in the album, see Yuthika Sharma, 'From Miniatures to Monuments: Picturing Shah Alam's Delhi', first published in *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition*, ed. Alka Patel and Karen Leonard (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 120–125.

¹ 'Album of all kinds of drawings concerning the habits and customs of the peoples of Hindustan or Mughal Empire, after several Indian painters, Nevasi Lal, Mohan Singh etc in the service of the Nawab Wazir Shuja' al-Dawla, Governor-General of the provinces of Allahabad and Awadh. The said album has been made through the efforts of the Sieur Gentil, Colonel of Infantry, in 1774 in Faizabad'; translation by the author. The album, 1s.25-1980, was bought for £11,000 in 1980 from Robert G. Sawers, Rare Books and Oriental Art, London. He brought it from Paris on approval without disclosing where he acquired it (V&A archives: Registered File number 79/1630). The covers of the volume measure 38.2×55.5 cm; it contains one painting on Indian paper and 57 drawings on European paper (watermarks are visible on the last few sheets in the album where the paper is not covered by texts tipped in later). All the drawings are on the right side of each opening with explanatory text opposite.

English. In 1763, the year the French were forced by the British to withdraw their military forces from India, he became military advisor to Nawab Shuja' al-Dawla (r. 1754–1775) in the politically important and wealthy province of Awadh, living in the capital, Faizabad, and retaining his position until the nawab's death in 1775. The main source for his life is his own memoirs that were published posthumously by his son.³

These demonstrate the respect that he and the nawab had for each other. The title page of the V&A volume implies that Gentil was sufficiently regarded to be able to use the nawab's artists for his own projects.⁴ His loyalty to Shuja' al-Dawla is equally evident in his memoirs, but they also demonstrate his profound allegiance to the French nation throughout his Indian career. This is a significant theme of the V&A *Receuil*.

The stern warnings that would have been seen immediately by anyone opening the volume leave

no doubt that Gentil intended it to be scrutinised by a French-speaking, educated audience: 'Les personnes qui parcourront ce recueil sont priées de ne pas toucher les peintures avec les doigts' (Those who will run through this album are begged not to touch the paintings with their fingers); and 'Sint tibi mille oculi; Sit tibi nulla manus ...' (You may use a thousand eyes but not your hand). Annotations in black ink on the paintings are in French and would have been written by Gentil in India; others, providing more extensive explanations and again exclusively in French, are in Gentil's hand and one other, written on paper pasted on to the pages opposite the paintings. All this suggests the volume was intended to be studied in France, as were the many other paintings he collected for presentation to the French king, Louis XVI, and to selected scholars.⁵

Parallels between the choice of subjects in the album and Gentil's memoirs indicate that the illustrations were made to complement the writing, as first suggested by Jean-Marie Lafont.⁶ The illustrated maps he commissioned in Awadh likewise had a written counterpart; both were presented to Louis XVI in 1785.⁷

3 [Jean-Baptiste-Joseph] Gentil, *Mémoires sur l'indoustan ou Empire Mogol* (Paris: Petit, Palais-Royal, Galeries de Bois, no. 257, 1822). A succinct outline of Gentil's life in English is provided by Gole, *Maps of Mughal India*, pp. 3–4 and Archer, *Company Painting*, pp. 117–118. Additional details are provided by Hurel, *Miniatures et peintures indiennes*, pp. 32–38. For his collecting, see Francis Richard, 'Jean-Baptiste Gentil, collectionneur de manuscrits persans', *Dix-huitième siècle: L'Orient* 28 (1996), pp. 91–110.

4 The lives of Nevasi Lal (active c. 1760–1775) and Mohan Singh (active c. 1763–1782) remain tantalisingly obscure and few paintings that can be firmly attributed to them are known. See Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, 'Painting in Lucknow 1775–1800', in William Dalrymple et al, *Forgotten Masters. Indian Painting for the East India Company* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2020), pp. 26–33, p. 28 for mention of their 'large fold-out panoramas of prominent buildings in Delhi, Agra and Faizabad' done for Gentil; similarly brief mention is made of them in Chanchal B. Dadlani, *From Stone to Paper: Architecture as History in the Late Mughal Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 130. Nevasi Lal copied at least one painting by the English artist Tilly Kettle in Faizabad, but most published works are simply attributed to him for reasons that are not always clear: e.g. a painting of court ladies playing chess (Musée Guimet, Paris, MA12112.) <https://www.photo.rmn.fr/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&IID=2C6NU073G3G3> (last accessed July 2023).

5 For his collection see Richard, 'Jean-Baptiste Gentil'; Jean-Marie Lafont, *Indika: Essays in Indo-French Relations, 1630–1976* (New Delhi: Manohar and Centre des Sciences Humaines, 2002), pp. 98–99; and Hurel, *Miniatures et peintures indiennes*, pp. 24 and 32–38. Hurel draws attention to the ulterior motives behind the donation (p. 38) and describes the dispersal of his collection, including coins and arms and armour, pp. 33–36. S.P. Sen credits the beginning of Indological studies in France to Gentil's donations to French institutions (S.P. Sen, *The French in India 1763–1816* [Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1958] quoted by Lafont, *Indika*, p. 138).

6 Jean-Marie Lafont, *Indika*, p. 102. This was echoed more recently by Dhir Sarangi, Jawaharlal Nehru University Delhi: 'Peintures indiennes et transferts culturels', *Synergies Inde* 7 (2016), pp. 57–68; see pp. 61 and 62 in particular. Gentil's son who published his father's memoirs posthumously was probably responsible for the additional text in the V&A volume, some of which is copied verbatim from the *Mémoires*.

7 Richard, 'Jean-Baptiste Gentil', p. 96. Similarly, the series of architectural drawings commissioned by Gentil (*Palais*

In 1774 when the V&A volume was completed, Gentil was in his late forties, had a considerable income derived from his employment by the nawab, and had recently married. That year, he had taken part in Shuja's last military campaign when the nawab supported the English in a war against the Rohillas (as did Major Antoine-Louis-Henri Polier, see below). Shuja, ill and probably worn out by the campaign, retired first to Lucknow at the end of 1774 and then to Faizabad where he died on 26 January 1775 aged only forty-five.⁸ English pressure on Shuja's son and successor Asaf al-Dawla (r. 1775–1797) to expel from his court foreigners in general and Gentil in particular led to the Frenchman's departure the following month with his wife, children, mother- and brother-in-law.⁹ They accompanied him to France when he left India for good in 1777.

Under Shuja al-Dawla's twenty-year rule, Faizabad had been the cosmopolitan capital of one of the most prosperous provinces of the rapidly collapsing Mughal empire. The Europeans living there included Gentil and (from April 1773) Polier, both of whom moved easily between cultures, visiting each other's houses and the dwellings of the nawab and his nobles. Gentil's marriage in 1772 to the aristocratic Teresa Velho (d. 1778) at Faizabad also hints at his comfort within the courtly Muslim environment that surrounded him. Like Gentil, his wife was a Catholic. She was a grand-niece of Juliana Dias da Costa, a woman of Portuguese descent born in 1658, had supervised the imperial zanana of the emperor 'Alamgir (r. 1658–1707) and later exerted great influence at the court of Shah 'Alam I (r. 1707–1712).¹⁰

indiens) was intended for a French audience: see Dadlani, *From Stone to Paper*, pp. 145–147.

8 Gentil, *Mémoires*, pp. 286–290.

9 Hurel, *Miniatures et peintures indiennes*, p. 33.

10 Gentil, *Mémoires*, 'Juliana', pp. 367–380. Juliana's high position is indicated by the fact that Shah 'Alam I gave her the mid-seventeenth-century palace of Dara Shikoh (1615–1659), the favourite son of Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), to live in. She died in 1732 and was buried in the Christian cemetery in Agra.

Gentil's *Receuil* surveys some of the salient aspects of the history and culture of northern India from the late sixteenth century to his own time there and opens with a series of depictions and descriptions of institutions of the Mughal court. The first lightly coloured drawing portrays the various ranks of the imperial Mughal hierarchy, from the (unnamed) emperor and his vizier to the supervisors of the different offices of state, ending with the supervisor of gardens (fig. 6.1). The minuscule figures typical of the volume are arranged here in a grid with emblems of royalty in the lower register. Some hold attributes associated with their role: the librarian holds a book, the master of the wardrobe holds a turban, the supervisor of the kitchens holds a covered vessel and salver, and so on. Each is identified by short descriptive lines written in black ink by Gentil; some have numbers that correspond to the explanatory key opposite.¹¹ Faint pencil notations in French identifying each figure indicate that Gentil supervised the layout of the page, clearly working side by side with his artists. Previously unnoticed, equally faint inscriptions above each individual written in a very neat, minute *kaithi* script transcribing the Persian title also identify each figure. For example, the 'grand maître des Elephants' or Supervisor of the Elephants is captioned *darogha fil khana* (fig. 6.2), and the 'bibliotecaire' or librarian is identified as the *darogha ketabkhana* (fig. 6.3).¹²

11 For the explanatory key opposite the first drawing (fig. 1), see <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405319/the-mughal-emperor-and-his-album-page/?carousel-image=2011FD2175> (last accessed April 2023); and <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1242208/album-page/> for the key to the depiction of the women of the court of Muhammad Shah (18.25:6-198; fig. 6), discussed below (last accessed April 2023).

12 My colleague Revati Mann tentatively identified the script and Francesca Orsini confirmed it. Komal Pande of the National Museum of India read a small selection of the inscriptions, confirming that they follow the French designations. I am grateful to them all, and to Adriana Concin for taking these micro photographs. *Kaithi* was used across northern India, and particularly in Awadh and Bihar, from at least the eighteenth cen-

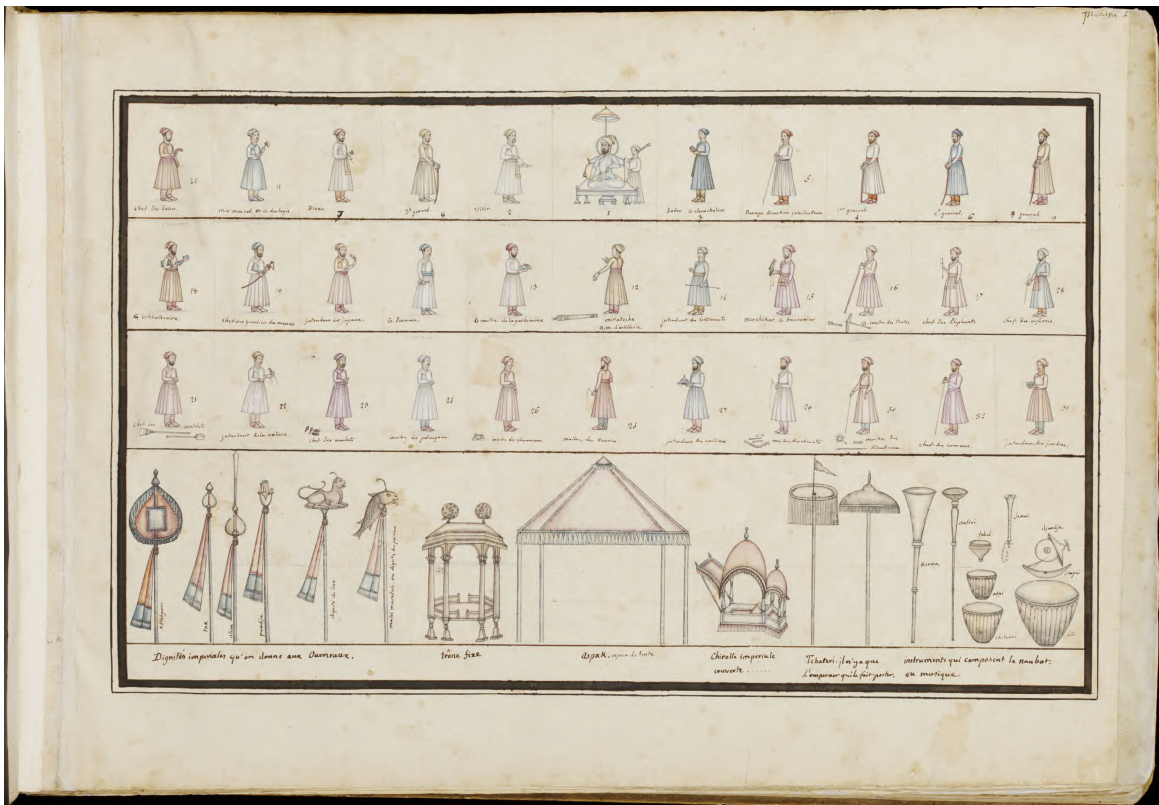


FIGURE 6.1 The Mughal emperor and the office holders of his court, from a volume assembled by Gentil with illustrations by Nevasi Lal, Mohan Singh and other unidentified artists, annotated by Gentil in French, Awadh (Uttar Pradesh), Faizabad, 1774

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON, IS.25:1-1980

The second drawing depicts the coronation and birthday weighing ceremonies of the Mughal emperor. The array of nobles, servants and musicians arranged hierarchically around him are again all numbered and identified on the page opposite.¹³

tury to the early twentieth, to write legal records, administrative accounts, etc. The name is derived from the Sanskrit *kāyastha*, the name of the scribal caste of North India. See the commentary by Anshuman Pandey *Proposal to Encode the Kaithi Script in Plane 1 of ISO/IEC 10646*, October 25, 2005, p. 4 (<https://www.unicode.org/L2/L2005/05343-kaithi.pdf> [last accessed April 2023]). I am extremely grateful to Ursula Sims-Williams for providing me with this reference.

13 IS.25:2-1980 (<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405318/the-mughal-emperor-and-his-album-page/> [last accessed July 2023]). Sharma ('From Miniatures to Monuments', pp. 122–123) suggests this specifically de-

The sparseness of the composition contrasts sharply with the richly coloured scene with touches of gold that follows (fig. 6.4). Here, Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658) is shown sitting on the spectacular Jewelled Throne that he commissioned on his accession from Sa'ida Gilani (active c. 1605–1658), the remarkable Iranian supervisor of the imperial goldsmiths' department who had held the same position under Jahangir (r. 1605–1627). The emperor's features are recognisable from portraits of his reign and the many later stock images of him. The tent canopies and carpet are rendered with unusual attention to detail and depth of

picts the coronation of Shah 'Alam II, which is likely but not explicitly stated.



FIGURE 6.2
‘Chef des elephants’ (*Darogha fil khana*) from a volume assembled by Gentil with illustrations by Nevasi Lal, Mohan Singh and other unidentified artists, annotated by Gentil in French and here by one of the artists in *kaithi* script, Awadh (Uttar Pradesh), Faizabad, 1774

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON, IS.25:1-1980, DETAIL



FIGURE 6.3
‘Bibliotcaire’ (*Darogha ketabhana*) from a volume assembled by Gentil with illustrations by Nevasi Lal, Mohan Singh and other unidentified artists, annotated by Gentil in French and here by one of the artists in *kaithi* script, Awadh (Uttar Pradesh), Faizabad, 1774

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON, IS.25:1-1980, DETAIL

colour compared with the other illustrations. The text opposite describes the history of the throne, paraphrasing or copying verbatim passages from Gentil’s *Mémoires*.¹⁴ Its accuracy shows that Gentil drew on the Persian histories of Shah Jahan’s reign where, as here, Sa’ida Gilani is referred to as Bibadal Khan, the honorific meaning ‘the incomparable’ that was bestowed on him by Jahangir.¹⁵

Gentil would have taken from these sources the details concerning the exact quantities and types of stones set into the throne, including the famous dynastic spinel Shah Jahan was given by his father that was engraved with the titles of their Timurid ancestor Ulugh Beg.¹⁶ He also follows seventeenth-

14 <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O20005/the-mughal-emperor-and-his-album-page-unknown/?carousel-image=2011FD2171> (last accessed July 2023). For comparison, see Gentil, *Mémoires* pp. 188–192.

15 For details of the life and career under Jahangir and Shah Jahan see A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, ‘Sa’idā-ye Gilāni

and the Iranian Style Jades of Hindustan’, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 13 (1999), pp. 83–140.

16 Gentil, *Mémoires*, p. 191. The spinel was first published in Manuel Keene and Salam Kaoukji, *Treasury of the World. Jewelled Arts of India in the Age of the Mughals* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), cat.no. 12.1, p. 135. The inscriptions are fully translated and discussed in Melikian-Chirvani, ‘Sa’idā-ye Gilāni’, pp. 86–88.

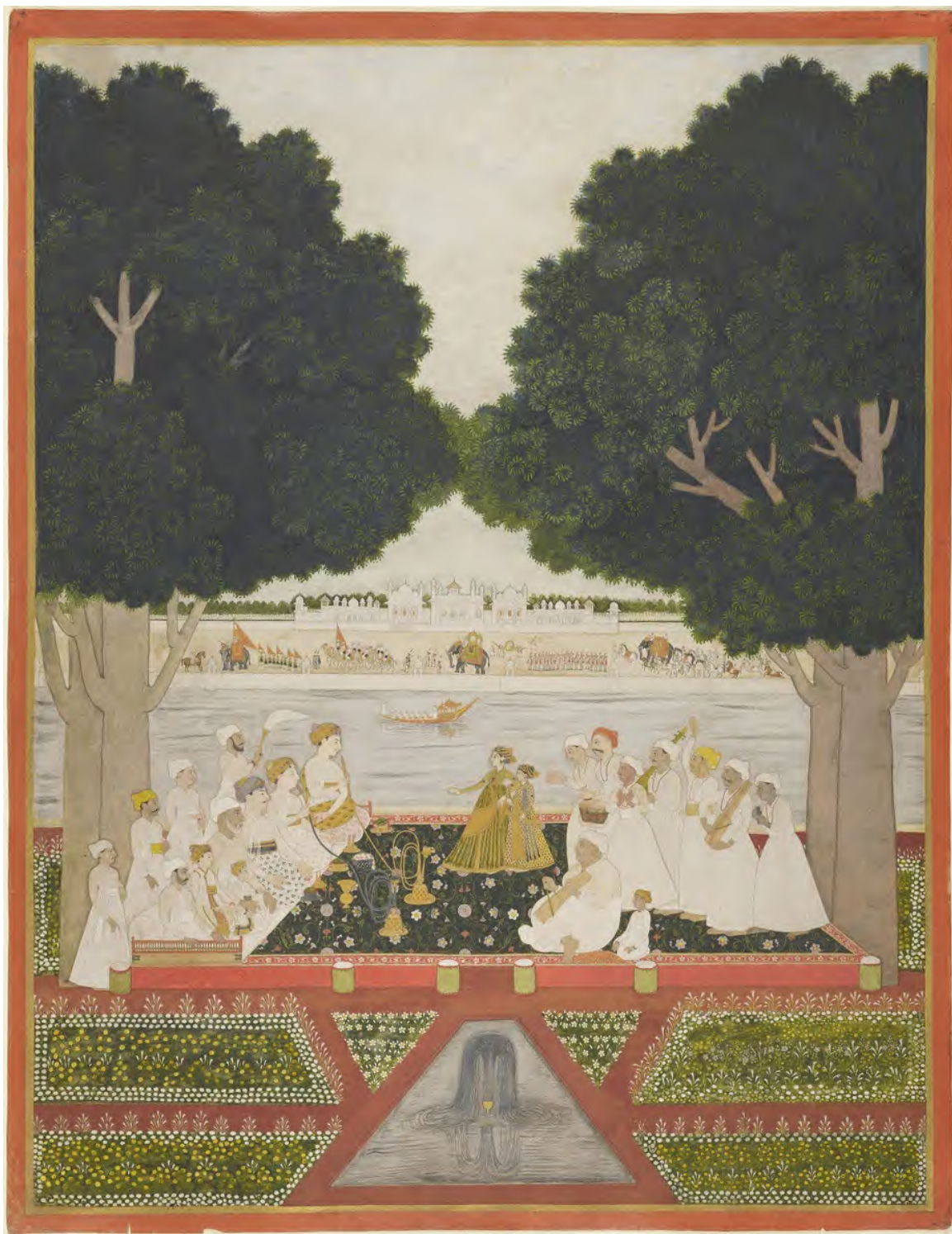


FIGURE 6.5 Princes watching a nautch, Faizabad, c. 1760–1765
BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON, 2000,1208,0.1



FIGURE 6.6 'Serail de Mahmetcha à la campagne' (Muhammad Shah's seraglio in the countryside), probably Delhi, c. 1740–1748, from a volume assembled by Gentil with illustrations by Nevasi Lal, Mohan Singh and other unidentified artists, Faizabad, 1774

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON, IS.25:6-1980

1770,¹⁹ may be seen in paintings done earlier in Delhi under Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–1748) or later in Awadh for Indian patrons. A courtly entertainment on a river terrace plausibly dated by Jeremiah Losty to around 1768 depicts princely figures smoking *huqqas* attended by servants as musicians and dancers perform (fig. 6.5).²⁰ On the op-

posite bank of the river, a procession of elephants and rows of Bengal Army sepoy have the reduced scale and tight arrangement of figures done for Gentil.

One painting in the V&A volume with Gentil's caption 'promenade des femmes du Serail de Mahommadcha' stands out for its thick paper and traditional Indian painting technique in which opaque water colour is applied in layers and burnished to provide vivid, saturated tones (fig. 6.6). The women of the harem of Muhammad Shah are shown enjoying various pursuits in the countryside outside a palace. In the foreground, an imposing woman is depicted in a slightly larger scale, riding a white bullock: the numerical key identifies her as the emperor's mother without naming her. Other women are depicted dancing and singing, some

19 British Library, London, Add Or 4039. All the maps are reproduced in Gole, *Maps of Mughal India*. Several details illustrated in the maps are repeated in the *Recueil*, as noted by Gole and other later authors, e.g. Sharma, 'From Miniatures to Monuments', pp. 122–124.

20 J.P. Losty, 'Painting at Lucknow 1775–1850', in *Lucknow Then and Now*, Marg Publications, vol. 55/1, ed. Rosie Llewellyn-Jones (Mumbai: Marg, 2003), fig. 1, pp. 118–133, here p. 119 (British Museum, London, 2000,1208,0.1.).

play with children or ride in boats on the river; one holds a matchlock gun as if about to set out to hunt. In the background, women are setting up the red screens (*qanāts*) to conceal them from public view, with a woman smoking a *huqqa* surrounded by emblems of royalty nearby: the text identifies her as Muhammad Shah's wife. Stylistically, the painting appears to belong to his reign, considerably predating the rest of the illustrations in the volume.

The connection between Mohan Singh (active c. 1763–1782), one of the artists working for Gentil, and Muhammad Shah's court has been noted in studies of the *Receuil*.²¹ His father Govardhan was in the imperial atelier in the 1730s.²² Could this bucolic scene be the work of the eighteenth-century Govardhan, which would explain its anachronistic presence here as well as its minimal relevance to the themes of the rest of the album? Or, given the close connections between Gentil's wife and the Mughal royal family, could Teresa Velho have given it to her husband?

The drawings that follow may be interpreted as generic types of hunt inspired by the model of the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, the third volume of the history commissioned by the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) from the great historian Abu'l Fazl (1551–1602) in 1589. Gentil would have had the text very much in mind, having completed one partial translation of it in 1769 and another in 1773, the year before the V&A album was compiled.²³ His illustrated atlas, *Empire Mogol divisé en 21 soubas ou gouvernements tiré de differens ecrivains du pais a Faisabad en MDCCLXX*, made four years earlier is heavily dependent on the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* and its survey of the *šūbahs*, or provinces.²⁴ It is therefore highly likely that the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* was a 'point of departure' for the choice of some of the subjects depicted in Gentil's volume.²⁵ However, the seemingly generic types of hunt that are illustrated also match passages in his memoirs. Others depict specific events in which he took part.²⁶

The first of these took place near Daulatabad in 1753, before Gentil moved to Awadh.²⁷ The next was organised at Faizabad in honour of the Mughal emperor Shah 'Alam II when he visited Awadh during a period of rapprochement in the complicated relationship between him and the nawab.²⁸ The minute figure identified in the key as 'le Sieur Gen-

21 Sharma, 'Miniatures to Monuments', p. 124 and Dadlani, 'The Gentil Album', p. 750.

22 For brief details of Govardhan (often styled 'Govardhan II' by art historians in order to avoid confusion with the seventeenth century court artist of the same name), see Terence McInerney in Schmitz (ed.), *After the Great Mughals*, pp. 19–20, who states that he 'specialized in the so-called "harem" genre, which depicted life in the imperial zenana when the emperor was not present.' The artist's most significant known work is preserved in the *Kārnāma-i Ishq* (The Book of Affairs of Love) composed by Rai Anand Ram, whose pen name was Mukhlis, and copied in 1148 (1735). See Jeremiah P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: British Library, 1982), cat.no. 106, pp. 133–134, who identified it as the presentation copy made by the author to Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–1748). The paintings by Govardhan were completed in 1151 (1738/39), therefore precisely at the time of Nadir Shah's devastating invasion. For a recent study of the manuscript, see Malini Roy's 2013 blog (<https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2013/07/book-of-affairs-of-love.html> [last accessed August 2023]). See also Jeremiah P. Losty and Malini Roy, *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire. Manuscripts and Paintings in the British Library* (London: British Library, 2012), pp. 196–201.

23 Chanchal Dadlani draws attention to Gentil's partial translation of the Persian text now preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Fr. 12217), and to his own copy of the manuscript that would become part of the French Royal Library (Dadlani, 'The Gentil Album', p. 752 and notes 11 and 12).

24 Gole, *Maps of Mughal India*, p. 5. See also Archer and Parlett, *Company Paintings*, pp. 41–45.

25 Dadlani, 'The Gentil Album', p. 751.

26 Gentil, *Mémoires*, pp. 265–271. Here he surveys the kinds of animals including rhinoceros, elephants, tigers etc. that are hunted, all of which are illustrated, and mentions the hunt given for Shah 'Alam.

27 1S.25:7-1980, titled 'chasse du nabob Salabet Djangué près d'aurengabad', see <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405316/royal-hunts-album-page-unknown/> (last accessed July 2023). Gentil, *Mémoires*, pp. 69–70.

28 1S.25:8-1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405315/royal-hunts-album-page-unknown/> (last accessed July 2023). Gentil, *Mémoires*, p. 265.



FIGURE 6.7 'Chasse du tigre' (tiger hunt), from a volume assembled by Gentil with illustrations by Nevasi Lal, Mohan Singh and other unidentified artists, Faizabad, 1774
VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON, IS.25:10-1980

til' wears European garb and stands close to the emperor, immediately in front of the imperial emblems carried by servants.

Two forms of the 'chasses du nabob' follow. In the depiction of the second hunt, Gentil and Shuja' al-Dawla are depicted seated together in the howdah of the nawab's elephant (fig. 6.7). The small scale of the figures makes it easy to miss the moment of high drama that is briefly noted in the accompanying text and in the *Mémoires*: the elephant bearing the English Captain Gabriel Harper who was stationed in Faizabad as the Company's representative is attacked by a tiger (transformed into a lion in the drawing) which is shot dead by the nawab.²⁹ Illustrations of hunting ex-

peditions made by the nawab in 1768 and 1769 follow, with annotations specifying that Gentil took part in these as well.³⁰

The illustrated narrative then moves away from the stated intention to describe the manners and customs of the peoples of Hindustan. It mirrors the text of the *Mémoires* in returning to politics ('revenons aux affaires politiques') though slightly rearranges the chronological sequence.³¹ The draw-

as a Colonel, inscribed with his Persian titles and dated 1199/1784–1785, is in the British Museum, London (1996.0325.1).

30 IS.25:12-1980 and IS.25:13-1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405313/royal-hunts-album-page-unknown/> and <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405312/royal-hunts-album-page-unknown/> (last accessed July 2023).

31 Gentil, *Mémoires*, p. 271.

29 Gentil, *Mémoires*, p. 268. A silver seal made for Harper

ings focus on Gentil's political activities in Awadh in support of the nawab while simultaneously furthering French interests in India.

The decisive battle that would ultimately determine whether the British or French would ultimately win their struggle for ascendancy in the subcontinent had taken place at Plassey in 1757. The victory won by the East India Company forces under Robert Clive (1725–1774) and their destruction of the French city of Pondicherry in 1761 effectively ended French power in India. The British Company would go on to defeat the nawab of Awadh, beginning the inexorable process of English encroachment on his territories that he was ultimately unable to prevent. On 3 October 1764, after a prolonged period of conflict involving many shifting alliances, Shuja's army was decisively defeated by the English at Baksar (Buxar). Shuja' was forced into temporary exile and sent Gentil as his emissary to negotiate with General John Carnac. The long text opposite the drawing of their encounter has a laudatory tone concerning Gentil and was probably written by his son. However, Gentil's own account describes his pivotal role in settling the terms of what would become the Treaty of Buxar.³² He is depicted in the painting (no. 2) on an elephant dressed in Indian clothes in order, he explained in the *Mémoires*, to be able to cross the country with greater ease.

Gentil describes his immediate rapport with the general on arriving at the English encampment and claims that he provided invaluable advice about how the Company could end the wars between the different Indian factions. The illustra-

tion of their encounter shows Gentil, now wearing European clothes, making a gesture implying he was giving advice to Carnac.³³

Letters were soon exchanged between the general and the nawab who now gave Gentil a string of titles to enhance his importance: he became *Bahādur* (the Valiant), *Nāẓim-i Jang* (Leader in War), *Tadbīr al-Mulk* (Counsel of Kings), *Rafī' al-Dawla* (Uplifter of the State), the titles on his seal.³⁴ Shuja' was then persuaded to meet Carnac, and is depicted arriving at his encampment and embracing the East India Company officer in the same drawing. Gentil had urged the nawab to insist on the restitution of his lost territories: his *Mémoires* note 'La paix seule pouvait sauver cet ami des Français d'une perte inévitable' (only peace could save this friend of the French from unavoidable losses)³⁵ and the draft terms of the treaty were soon agreed between Carnac and Shuja'. The exiled nawab then returned to Allahabad to await the arrival of Robert Clive to whom Carnac gave precedence in ratifying and then signing the final treaty.

Days before the ratification, another significant agreement was made between the similarly exiled, but almost powerless emperor and the East India Company: on 12 August 1765, Shah 'Alam II issued a farman which handed over to the Company the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Only then, following several meetings between the emperor, Robert Clive and Shuja' at Benares, were the terms of Carnac's agreement accepted. The Treaty of Buxar was signed on 16 August 1765 with Carnac's aide-de camp, Archibald Swinton, as witness. However, Shuja's former province of Allahabad was given by Clive to Shah 'Alam II and would not be restored to the nawab until Warren Hastings (1732–1818) became the Company's governor. The signing of that new treaty in the presence of

32 1S.25:17–1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405309/royal-hunts-album-page-unknown/> (last accessed July 2023). Gentil, *Mémoires*, Chapter III, pp. 237–259. Compare the account of the same period in Richard B. Barnett, *North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals and the British 1720–1801* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1987), pp. 90–91, where Gentil's role is not mentioned. Sarangi ('Peintures indiennes', p. 63) states that his participation is not mentioned in any colonial history dealing with the period.

33 1S.25:19—1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405307/royal-hunts-album-page-unknown/> (last accessed July 2023).

34 Gentil, *Mémoires*, p. 244; Dadlani, *From Stone to Paper*, p. 135.

35 Gentil, *Mémoires*, p. 246.

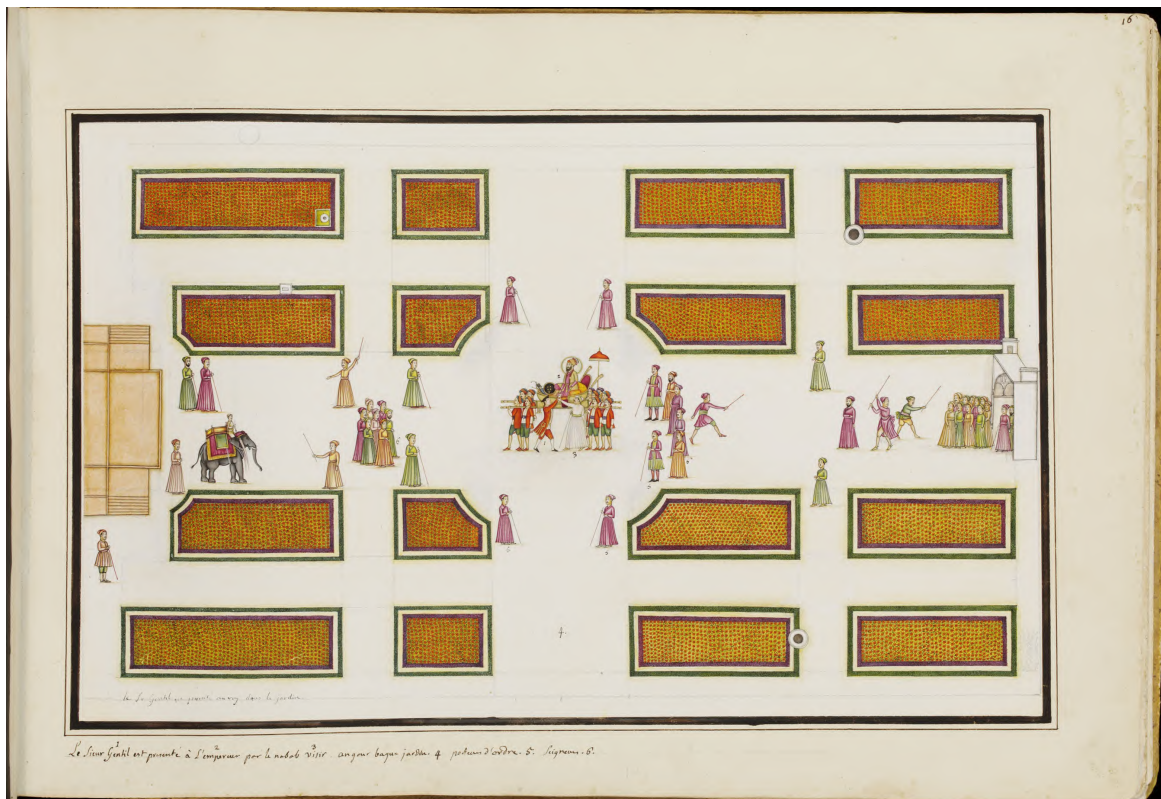


FIGURE 6.8 'Le Sieur Gentil est présenté à l'empereur par le nabob Vizir' (The honourable Gentil is presented to the emperor by the nawab vizier), from a volume assembled by Gentil with illustrations by Nevasi Lal, Mohan Singh and other unidentified artists, Faizabad, 1774

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON, IS.25:16-1980

Gentil at Benares in September 1773 follows in the album.³⁶

The Treaty of Buxar allowed Shuja' al-Dawla to return to Faizabad and Gentil accompanied him. By now, the amicable acquaintance between the two seems to have developed into a deeper friendship. As Gentil recounts in the *Mémoires*, he knew the nawab's language well enough not to need an

interpreter when they met, giving him one more opportunity to further his nation's interests.³⁷

Meanwhile, the collapse of French power in India meant large numbers of French soldiers were unemployed and in danger of starvation, leaving them no alternative but to join the East India Company's army. Thus, Gentil noted, they were contributing to the success of 'nos ennemis'.³⁸ But the nawab had confided to Gentil his desire to have a force of 400 French soldiers, reflecting the general awareness of Indian rulers that superior European military discipline and technology were essential to allow them to resist the existential threat posed

36 IS.25:20-1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O20004/gentil-album-album-page/> (last accessed July 2023). Gentil, *Mémoires*, p. 280. Barnett, *North India Between Empires*, p. 73. Ambiguously captioned 'Traité du nabob avec les anglais à Benares', the text opposite the drawing suggests that it is more likely to depict the second treaty signed at Benares which restored Allahabad to Shuja' (cf. Archer and Parlett, *Company Paintings*, who assumed it depicted the first).

37 Gentil, *Mémoires*, pp. 236, 262-263.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 263.

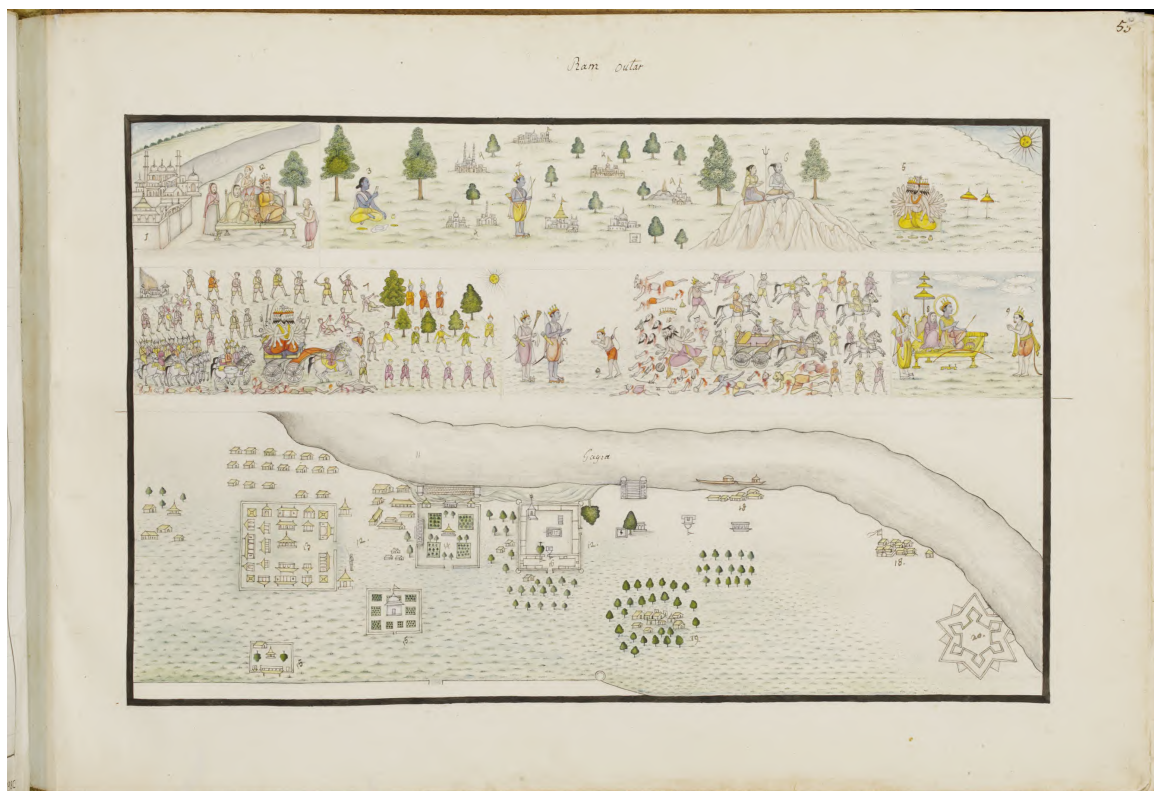


FIGURE 6.9 'Ram outar' (Ram avatar), from a volume assembled by Gentil with illustrations by Nevasi Lal, Mohan Singh and other unidentified artists, Faizabad, 1774

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON, IS.25:56-1980

by the English.³⁹ Gentil provided a neat solution to the nawab's wishes: 200 French deserters from the Company's army were currently sheltering with the governor of Allahabad. Discreet negotiations took place and Gentil was soon able to present them to his new master, as illustrated.⁴⁰

Shortly after this, the Mughal emperor paid a visit to Faizabad and asked to meet Gentil. His travelling throne paused outside Gentil's house, the size of its gateway (gateway = no. 6) suggesting his dwelling was rather splendid.⁴¹ In the following il-

lustration depicting their meeting, Gentil's clothes are noticeably finer than in other scenes and the central part of the composition is highlighted with gold, emphasising the importance of the occasion (fig. 6.8).

The remaining illustrations return to the theme stated on the title page of the volume. The practices and beliefs of the Hindus and Muslims of India are described in multiple pages that include depictions of the jewellery and arms and armour of the region that again recall the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*.⁴²

39 See Barnett, *North India Between Empires*, p. 76.

40 IS.25:13-1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405312/royal-hunts-album-page-unknown/> (last accessed July 2023). Gentil presents French forces to support the nawab. Gentil, *Mémoires*, p. 264.

41 IS.25:15-1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/>

O405310/gentils-own-involvement-with-the-album-page-unknown/ (last accessed July 2023); Gentil, *Mémoires*, p. 264.

42 IS.25:34-1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O402774/rites-and-festivals-of-muslims-album-page-unknown/> (last accessed July 2023): 'armes indiennes'

The series dealing with Hinduism is accompanied by extensive texts by Gentil explicitly recording his debt to Abu'l Fazl. However, even here contemporary local details are included.

On the page describing 'Ram outar [avatar]' the upper part of the composition includes episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* (fig. 6.9). The lower part reflects the real landscape of Ayodhya near Faizabad, regarded as the birthplace of Lord Rama. The numerical key identifies the English encampment and the fort on the south side of the river Ghaghara built 'à la vauban'⁴³ which follows the star-shaped form of the fortifications developed by Louis XIV's famous military architect Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban (1633–1707). According to the accompanying text, construction of the fort was begun by Nawab Shuja' al-Dawla but not finished.⁴⁴ Not far away are a village, the English encampment, and two gardens owned respectively by a Muslim and the Hindu guardian of one of the sacred spaces.

Seven illustrations describe various aspects of Islamic religious practice, including some specific to the Shi'i court of the Awadhi nawabs: the Muharram procession was one that had taken place in 1772 in Faizabad.⁴⁵

2 The Polier Album I. 4599 in the Museum für Islamische Kunst

Less than three years after the *Receuil* had been completed, a very different volume was assembled for another French-speaking European in India whose time in Awadh briefly coincided with that of Gentil.

Antoine-Louis-Henri Polier (1741–1795) was born in Lausanne to French Protestant emigrés in 1741 and set off for India in 1757, intending to join his uncle in Madras. When the young man arrived, his uncle had died and without any other connections Polier joined the British East India Company. By the 1770s he had fought in significant military campaigns, reached the rank of major and been an engineer in Calcutta working on the construction of Fort William. Here, he met Warren Hastings, holder of the Company's highest office as governor-general of Bengal. Hastings would become one of Polier's most important patrons in India; the two were friends, it seems that Polier was also his spy, and it was Hastings who appointed Polier as chief surveyor of Awadh in April 1773.⁴⁶

Like Gentil, Polier was multilingual and moved easily between cultures, wearing Indian or European clothes depending on circumstances, and taking two Indian wives who bore him six children.⁴⁷ He soon availed himself of the many opportunities open to Europeans in Awadh to earn large sums of money, but his affluent life in Faizabad was disturbed when he became caught up in hostilities

and 'bijoux pour les dames [...] pour les hommes' and 1S.25:48-1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O19994/rites-and-beliefs-of-the-album-page-unknown/> (last accessed July 2023); 'offrandes pour diverses maladies'. See Hurel *Miniatures et peintures indiennes*, p. 33 for mention of Gentil's collection of arms and armour presented to the Musée d'histoire naturelle on his return to France.

43 For Shuja' al-Dawla's interest in Vauban-type fortresses (such as the one built for him in Faizabad), see also Banmali Tandan, *The Architecture of Lucknow and Oudh: Its Evolution in an Aesthetic and Social Context* (Cambridge: Zophorus, 2008), pp. 90–91.

44 <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405277/rites-and-beliefs-of-the-album-page-unknown/> (last accessed July 2023).

45 1S.25:30-1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O19989/rites-and-festivals-of-muslims-album-page/> (last accessed July 2023).

46 See Seema Alavi, 'Polier, Antoine Louis Henri' in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/63533>; Sanjay Subrahmanyam 'The Career of Colonel Polier and Late Eighteenth-Century Orientalism', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Third Series) 10/1 (2000), pp. 43–60; and Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *A Very Ingenious Man: Claude Martin in Early Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 55–57 for Polier's appointment and failure to complete the required surveys for the East India Company.

47 Alavi, 'Polier', also mentions two other 'women of Polier' who were left pensions by Polier's friend Claude Martin in his will.

between the British and French in India on the one hand, and conflicts between his patron Hastings and members of the ruling council in Calcutta on the other. Against the wishes of Hastings, the majority of the council decreed in 1775 that Polier should leave Awadh.⁴⁸ He was reluctant to leave his lucrative business interests and a number of uncollected large debts owed to him, but Hastings was unable to help. Polier consequently resigned from his East India Company post and in 1776, the experienced military man entered the service of Shah 'Alam II in Delhi.⁴⁹ Coincidentally, he lived in the former residence of Gentil's wife's ancestor Juliana, the mansion having been bought by Safdar Jang (r. 1739–1754) and inherited by the nawabs of Awadh.⁵⁰ It was here that Berlin album I. 4599 was assembled.

The contents are significantly more complex than those of the two other volumes discussed here and deserve to be analysed by art historians and specialists in calligraphy able to examine all the folios in person. In the meantime, some general remarks may be made about the paintings and some of the highly decorated borders.

Like Polier's other albums, it could be perused by a European who knew no Persian and who would therefore turn the pages as if it were a Western volume.⁵¹ The 'first' page according to the current Western foliation has a rectangular frame

with characteristic floral margins enclosing a blank space bearing only the words 'Volume Septieme'. The paintings that follow are numbered from 1 to 40, while the calligraphies are numbered in Persian ciphers and numerals in the upper left corners of the margins and could be ignored by a European audience. Readers familiar with Persian would automatically begin at the other end of the volume where the minuscule word *avval*, 'first', is written at top left with the following folios numbered in correct sequence.

The title page bears a Persian inscription in five lines of *nasta'liq* on gold-flecked paper, set within a rectangular frame and floral margins matching those at the end of the volume (fig. 6.10). It reads:

This *muraqqa'* of forty folios in *nasta'liq*, *shikasta*, *thuluth* and other scripts by the unique calligraphers of the age commissioned by His Eminence dispenser of favour [*fayz-āsār*], pride of the kingdom [*iftikhār al-mulk*], privilege of the state/good fortune [*imtiyāz al-dawla*] Major *Pūlir Bahādūr Arsalān Jang*, may his success endure—came to completion in the city of the Caliphate [*Dār al-Khilāfat*] *Shāh-jahānabād* [= Delhi] on the 29th of Rajab al-Murajjab of the *hijrī* year 1190 [12 September 1776] corresponding to the year 18 from the blessed ascent to the throne of the *Pādishāh Shāh-i 'Ālam*, the Fighter of the Faith [*ghāzī*] may God perpetuate his Kingship.⁵²

The subjects of the paintings vary considerably and have little thematic connection. They include many stock subjects found in other albums compiled for Europeans in northern India at the time. None are signed; some have brief annotations identifying the person or scene depicted. The volume opens at the 'European' end with one of several different kinds of assemblies: a gath-

48 See Subrahmanyam, 'The Career of Colonel Polier', pp. 51–52 quoting from Polier's statement to the Bengal council of February 1775.

49 Antoine Louis Henri Polier, *Shah Alam II and his Court: A Narrative of the Transactions at the Court of Delhy from the Year 1771 to the Present Time*, ed. Pratul C. Gupta (Calcutta: S.C. Sarkar and Sons Ltd, 1947).

50 Jean-Marie Lafont, *Chitra: Cities and Monuments of Eighteenth-century India from French Archives* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 103, drawing on the *Mémoires*.

51 A characteristic of some of Polier's albums first noted by Friederike Weis, 'Von zwei Seiten betrachtbar: Indische Alben für Antoine-Louis Polier', in *Ordnen—Vergleichen—Erzählen: Materialität, kennerschaftliche Praxis und Wissensvermittlung in Klebebänden des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Elisabeth Oy-Marra and

Annkatrin Kaul-Trivolis (Merzhausen: ad picturam, 2024), pp. 125–153.

52 I am extremely grateful to A.S. Melikian-Chirvani for his translation.



FIGURE 6.10
Shamsa with Persian inscription identifying the volume as
 one compiled for Polier, Delhi, 1776
 STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, MUSEUM FÜR IS-
 LAMISCHE KUNST, I. 4599, FOL. 40^v

ering of men in various stages of intoxication (*majlis-i pūstiyān*: fol. 40^r). Others in the album are simply described as an ‘assembly of women’ (*majlis-i zanān*: fol. 12^r) or depict women at the night-time *shab-i barat* (night of atonement) celebrations (fol. 37^v).

Eighteenth-century portraits of renowned historical figures include the ancestor of the Mughals, ‘Amir Teymur’ (fol. 14^r), the emperors Akbar and Jahangir (fol. 19^r), ‘Alamgir (fol. 33^r), and Muhammad Shah. Polier collected similar Mughal portraits for other Europeans within his extensive network.⁵³

Other famous figures of the past include Malik Ambar (1548–1626), *de facto* ruler of Ahmadnagar in the Deccan (fol. 31^r), the high-ranking Mughal courtier Raja Man Singh (1550–1614) (fol. 24^r), and

an unconvincing likeness of Jahangir’s brother-in-law, Asaf Khan (c. 1569–1641) (fol. 29^r).

Standard subjects of eighteenth-century Delhi or Awadhi painting include two scenes of a Bhil tribal couple engaged in hunting (*shikār-i bhīl*) at night by torchlight derived from earlier Mughal models (fol. 34^r and fol. 26^r);⁵⁴ a noble figure visiting holy men (fol. 23^r); a prince with women at a well (fol. 9^r) and emaciated animals (a camel, fol. 36^r and horse, fol. 8^r). Various studies of animals include a nilgai (fol. 30^r) probably deriving ultimately from a work done by Mansur or another great master of the Mughal court during the reign of Jahangir.

53 Llewellyn-Jones, *A Very Ingenious Man*, p. 93.

54 See Adeela Qureshi de Unger, *The Hunt as Metaphor in Mughal Painting (1556–1707)* (Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, Supplement 56, 2022), pp. 137–170 and especially figs. 109–113.



FIGURE 6.11
Burhan al-Mulk Sa'adat Khan Bahadur, from an album assembled for Polier, Delhi, 1776
STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, MUSEUM FÜR ISLAMISCHE KUNST, I. 4599, FOL. 3^R

Some of the best paintings have a direct connection with the contemporary courts of Delhi and Awadh. Burhan al-Mulk Sa'adat Khan Bahadur (r. 1722–1739) (fig. 6.11) belonged to an Iranian family, was at one point in service to the Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar and became the first nawab of Awadh in 1722.⁵⁵ He died in 1739 during the cataclysmic invasion of Delhi by Nadir Shah (r. 1736–1747) of Iran. All the later nawabs were descended from him and his high status is apparent from his fine clothes, jewels and jade-hilted dagger, all in contemporary Indian fashion.

In another portrait the emperor Ahmad Shah (r. 1748–1754) is shown offering a turban jewel to the richly dressed standing figure of Safdar Jang who succeeded Sa'adat Khan as nawab of Awadh

and was also the emperor's vizier.⁵⁶ Ahmad Shah was deposed by the Marathas, an act in which Safdar Jang was complicit, and remained a prisoner in Delhi until his death in 1775, the year before the album was compiled. Another figure of contemporary Awadhi relevance is Raja Nawal Rai, Safdar Jang's influential *munshī* (secretary) who was killed in battle in 1750 (fig. 6.12).⁵⁷ He is shown adorned with opulent jewellery, sitting in a balcony beneath an arch anachronistically ornamen-

55 For the family of Burhan al-Mulk, see 18.25:21-1980, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405306/album-page/> (last accessed July 2023).

56 Reproduced in Almut von Gladiß, *Albumblätter: Miniaturen aus den Sammlungen indo-islamischer Herrscherhöfe* (Berlin: Edition Minerva, 2010), fig. 58, p. 96.

57 For a biographical note on Raja Nawal Rai, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Witnesses and Agents of Empire: Eighteenth-Century Historiography and the World of the Mughal *Munshī*', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53/1–2 (2010), pp. 393–423 (see pp. 396–397).

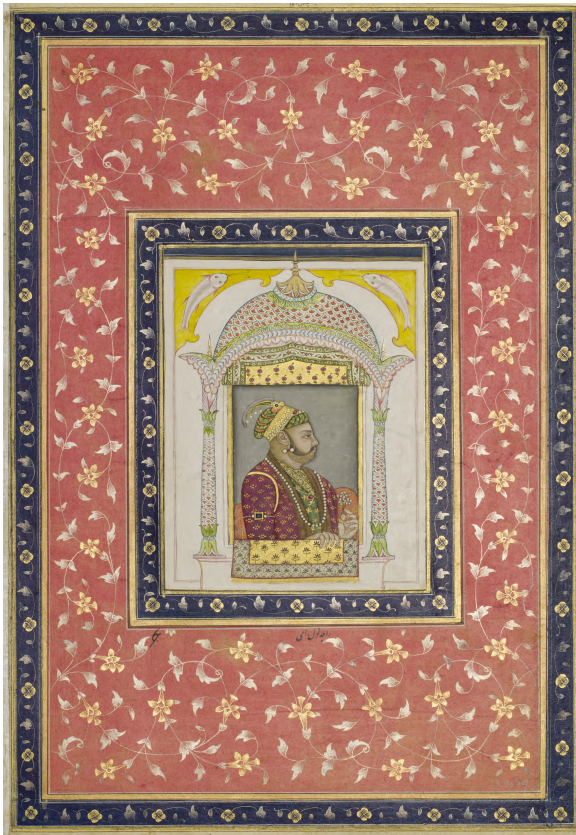


FIGURE 6.12
Raja Nawal Rai, from an album assembled for Polier, Delhi,
1776
STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, MUSEUM FÜR IS-
LAMISCHE KUNST, I. 4599, FOL. 6^R

ted with the fish motifs that characterised nawabi architecture in Lucknow under Asaf al-Dawla.

Letters sent from Delhi by Polier to his artist Mihr Chand in 1776 leave no doubt that his well-established passion for assembling albums continued in this new chapter of his life. His command that Mihr Chand join him, and bring with him two other unnamed artists, another individual identified only as *naqqāsh* (painter), and calligraphic fragments and albums from Polier's library, is repeatedly quoted,⁵⁸ emphasising the current lack of information about the artists who worked for European patrons. This contrasts with the abundance of sources concerning calligraphers, as may be seen from Will Kwiatkowski's study in this

volume. Examples of fine calligraphy in different styles by contemporary masters including some attached to the Mughal court could easily be acquired or commissioned in Delhi and Awadh by Polier (fol. 33^v).

There is no consistency in the designs of the margins framing most of the paintings and calligraphies, but the similarity of the motifs in the narrower framing borders on indigo or pink grounds throughout the volume demonstrates that all the folios were prepared at the same time and give it a sense of unity despite the disparate contents.

The designs of the most ornate margins could have been used to provide models for the ornamentation of objects in a range of media, in line with traditional practice in court workshops. Several of these are versions of the highly distinctive margins of Polier's albums assembled in Awadh, though done here with considerably more care. The motifs on a glass *huqqa* base now in the Los

58 Muzaffar Alam and Seema Alavi (eds.), *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient. The I'jaz-i Arsalani (Persian Letters, 1773–1779) of Antoine-Louis Henri Polier*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 23–25.



FIGURE 6.13
Calligraphy from an album assembled for Polier, Delhi, 1776
STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, MUSEUM FÜR ISLAMISCHE KUNST, I. 4599, FOL. 7^v



FIGURE 6.14
Huqqa base, gilded glass, probably Lucknow, c. 1775–1800
LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM, M.76.2.28

Angeles County Museum are in a similar style and may conceivably have been done by Polier's unnamed *naqqāsh* (fig. 6.13 and fig. 6.14).

A few margins stand out for their considerably more sophisticated designs and are likely to have been painted by designers attached to the court in Delhi. Some of their motifs could have been replicated in enamel on gold: there is a close similarity for instance between the red blossoms and green foliage in the border of folio 37^v (fig. 6.15) and those on a gold salver taken from the Delhi treasury by Nadir Shah which was sent from Iran to Russia as a diplomatic gift in 1741.⁵⁹ Such designs could equally have been copied by artists decorating leather, as

exemplified by the leather covering of the scabbard made for a sword now in the Royal Collection. The enamelled gold mounts on the hilt and scabbard are original and in the same style (fig. 6.16). Datable to about the same time the album was compiled, it was bought by George IV (r. 1820–1830) when Prince of Wales from 'Mr Jackson' on 15 October 1809 and may well have come from the court armoury in Delhi or Lucknow: the Royal Collection inventory note states that it belonged to 'Shere Af Khun' (Sher Afghan), implying that it had been valued as a weapon with a significant provenance.⁶⁰

Iskusstvo, 1984), cat. [102] 166, p. 37 with full page colour illustration (unpaginated).

59 A. Ivanov, V.G. Lukonin and L. Smesova, *Oriental Jewellery from the Collection of the Special Treasury, the State Hermitage Oriental Department* (Moscow:

60 I am extremely grateful to Francesca Levey, Arms and Armour Conservator at the Royal Collection Trust, for drawing my attention to this sword and supplying the provenance information.



FIGURE 6.15
Calligraphic page from an album assembled for Polier,
Delhi, 1776
STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, MUSEUM FÜR IS-
LAMISCHE KUNST, I. 4599, FOL. 37^v



FIGURE 6.16 Sword and scabbard, probably Delhi, Faizabad or Lucknow, third quarter of the eighteenth century
ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST, RCIN 62880 A AND B

Two portraits of unidentified Mughal nobles are surrounded by particularly fine margins (fig. 6.17 and fig. 6.18). The margins framing the first one are densely filled with repeating motifs of stylised flowers in vases connected to each other by very fine black scrolling lines bearing flowers and leaves, all precisely drawn and with touches of

gold. Similar designs, minus the flower-filled vases, frame the other portrait and are seen filling much narrower margins on three more folios (fol. 7^r; fol. 9^r; fol. 37^v). They could have inspired a master engraver working on silver or gold: such ornamentation is found on the hilt of a sword probably made in Lucknow in the late eighteenth-century



FIGURE 6.17

Portrait of an unidentified Mughal nobleman, from an album assembled for Polier, Delhi, 1776

STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, MUSEUM FÜR ISLAMISCHE KUNST, I. 4599, FOL. 10^r



FIGURE 6.18

Portrait of an unidentified Mughal nobleman, from an album assembled for Polier, Delhi, 1776

STAATLICHE MUSEEN ZU BERLIN, MUSEUM FÜR ISLAMISCHE KUNST, I. 4599, FOL. 18^r

(fig. 6.19) and on a dagger of similar date perhaps also made there or Delhi at the same time.⁶¹

3 The Polier Album in the Victoria and Albert Museum

Polier stayed in Delhi until 1780 and then returned to Awadh. By then, Shuja' al-Dawla's son Asaf al-Dawla had moved the capital to Lucknow, where Polier now lived. An album bought in 1858 by the

South Kensington Museum Library was commissioned by him in that city, though this was not known at the time of its acquisition. The slim volume of calligraphic specimens in Persian and Arabic was misleadingly described as:

Book. In manuscript. Persian. Consisting of twenty-nine pages, with ornamental borders of flowers. Written by Mohammad Alee, in the year of the Flight, 1195 (A.D. 1817 [sic]). In binding of leather, stamped and gilt. 14 in. by 10 ³/₄ in. Bought. 4765–1858.

61 Wallace Collection, London, OA1986: dagger, the hilt covered with silver and with black enamel, the scabbard decorated en suite.

There is no reference to the golden *shamsa* on the opening page that encloses a Persian inscription in *nasta'liq*:



FIGURE 6.19
Sword hilt, Delhi, Faizabad or Lucknow, c. 1750–1770
WALLACE COLLECTION, LONDON, OAI990

Huwa Allahu Akbar
Īn jārida bīst u hasht varaq
ba khatt-i nasta'liq u thuluth u naskh
wa-ghayruhu az khushnavīsān-i rūzigār

Him! God is Greatest. This album [contains] 28 leaves in *nasta'liq*, *thuluth* and *naskh* and other [styles] by the calligraphers of the age.

The illumination of the *shamsa* had been noticed by the influential commentator Owen Jones before the museum accessioned the volume; he included a detail of it in his seminal book of 1856, *The Grammar of Ornament*, as an example of 'Persian' design.⁶² However, the inscription was not repro-

duced and the volume remained in peaceful obscurity for the next 160 years until Victoria and Albert Museum curator Behnaz Atighi Moghaddam came across it during her survey of Iranian material in the National Art Library. Aware that it was not 'Persian' as listed, she supposed it to be Indian and showed it to me. The distinctive margins of the album bound in concertina form made it instantly obvious that it must have been made for

and Son, 1856), 'Persian No. 5, pl. XLVIII', caption 75: 'Plate XLVIII. From a Persian ms. South Kensington Museum'. This connection was first made by Moya Carey, to whom I am grateful for drawing it to my attention. For her discussion of Jones' engagement with 'Persian' and 'Indian' ornament, see Moya Carey, *Persian Art: Collecting the Arts of Iran in the 19th Century* (London: V&A Publishing, 2017), p. 34.

62 Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Day

Polier even though he is not named.⁶³ A faint pencil note at the end of the album was the clue to discovering the history of the volume:

An illuminated specimen of Oriental calligraphy, written by Mohammad Alee in the year of the Hegira 1195

Purchased from the Library of the late Rt Honbl Warren Hastings at the Sale at Daylesford House in 1853

Warren Hastings had first travelled to India in 1750 to take a junior position within the East India Company. He moved back to England in 1765, returning to India four years later and eventually becoming the Company's first governor-general in Calcutta. Here he met Polier and as noted above, the two became firm friends. When Polier moved to Faizabad and then Delhi, they corresponded regularly.

In 1780, when Asaf al-Dawla needed an architect and engineer in Lucknow, Hastings gave permission for Polier to return to Awadh. Two years later he awarded Polier the rank of lieutenant colonel in the East India Company with an exemption from military service. Polier therefore had the time and considerable means to indulge his collecting passions.

His research interests put him in touch with William Jones (1746–1794) who had arrived in Calcutta in 1783. The lawyer's whirlwind intellectual activities led him to found the Asiatick Society 'for the purpose of enquiring into the History, civil and natural, the Antiquities, Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia'. Hastings and Polier were founding members and the Society's network soon expanded far beyond Calcutta, with distant members like

Polier sending papers to be read at meetings. As Jones' interests widened to include the study of Sanskrit, he sought Polier's help in obtaining rare manuscripts.⁶⁴ Their friendship and shared scholarly interests led to the creation of the album of calligraphy at Daylesford, Hastings' country house, though Hastings was not the intended recipient.

In 1778, the English governor had demanded a war subsidy of 500,000 rupees from Raja Chait Singh (r. 1770–1781) of Benares on the basis that this was necessary payment for protection provided by East India Company troops. The Second Anglo-Mysore war against Haydar 'Ali's (r. 1761–1782) formidable army from 1780 to 1781 had overstretched the Company's resources and when Chait Singh fell behind with his payments, Hastings aggressively chased the supposed debt, going personally to Benares to arrest him. Simmering resentment against the Company's increasing control and excessive financial demands now erupted into open rebellion. Riots broke out and Hastings' life was briefly in danger. The uprising was supported by Bahu Begum (d. 1816), Asaf al-Dawla's mother, who had enormous wealth derived from her control of the state treasury after the death of her husband Shuja' al-Dawla. This was naturally resented by her son when he became nawab and a power struggle broke out. Asaf called on Warren Hastings to help, and with the support of the Company's army was able to seize lands owned by the Begum and her daughter. This would be dubbed the 'robbery of the Oudh begums' in the later trial of Hastings on his return to England.

Ultimately, in order to tighten the Company's grip on the region, Hastings installed a new Company resident in Lucknow and forced Asaf to relinquish his official seal. When the nawab retaliated by effectively abdicating, meaning the administration could no longer function, Hastings had to

63 For the full history of the album and an introduction to the calligraphic specimens with summary descriptions, see Susan Stronge and Behnaz Atighi Moghadam, 'An Unrecorded Polier Muraqqa' (c. 1785): New Insights into British-Hindustani Cultural Interaction', in *Adle Nāneh: Studies in Memory of Chahriyar Adle*, ed. Alireza Anisi (Tehran: Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism, 2018), pp. 195–228. The article is summarised here.

64 Letter to Polier from William Jones in Calcutta, dated 9 January 1787: see G. Channon, *The Letters of William Jones* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), vol. 2, pp. 731–732.

recall his resident but decided to go to Lucknow to restore relations with Asaf and ensure that the Company's interests in the province were maintained. His presence in Lucknow therefore derived not from disinterested scholarly curiosity but from the infinitely less civilised world of East India Company power politics.

As Hastings neared Lucknow in March 1784, the nawab honoured him by riding out to meet him at some distance from the city. Mir Muhammad Taqi, one of the great Delhi poets to have settled in Lucknow and whose pen name was Mir, later described in his *Zikr-i Mir* (Account of Mir) the splendid reception given by the nawab to Hastings.⁶⁵ The English governor stayed until the end of August, residing at first in a house of Claude Martin before moving in May to 'Bowlee ke Mohana', identified by Rosie Llewellyn-Jones as the Ba'oli Palace next to the Great Imambara.⁶⁶ Hastings' diary mentions his many social encounters with the nawab and other members of his family, and his frequent attendance at gatherings held in the houses of Martin and other Europeans in the city. He witnessed at least one of Colonel Mordaunt's famous cock fights and accompanied the visiting artist Johan Zoffany (1733–1810) when he painted portraits of leading members of the Awadhi court. He also spent a considerable amount of time with Polier, providing occasional intriguing glimpses of the household, such as the occasion when he saw artist Mihr Chand finishing a seal 'with his machinery'.⁶⁷

65 As mentioned by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam in 'Of Princes and Poets in Eighteenth-Century Lucknow', in *India's Fabled City: The Art of Courty Lucknow*, ed. Stephen Markel and Tushara Bindu Gude (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2010), pp. 187–197, here p. 188.

66 Personal communication of 6 December 2022. See British Library, Add MS 39879: *Warren Hastings papers*, supplement vol. 9, *Diary A*, p. 24b; see p. 18 for his earlier residence in a house of Claude Martin.

67 'Mohrcund w his Machinery fin.d a Seal before me', *Warren Hastings papers ... Diary A*, p. 32, 'Lucnow [*sic*]. July 1784'.

Hastings finally left for Calcutta on the evening of the 27th August after spending the day with his friend. A letter written to him by Polier on 15 July 1786 states:

While you was last at Lacknow, I took the liberty of troubling you with a Moracka of fine Oriental writings for Sir Wm Jones—in the hurry occasioned by your departure you forgot to send it, and he on his side omitted to remind you. I have since replaced this book with another I have given to sir Wm and I have now to request you'll accept of the one you have by you, as a small token of my gratitude & regard.⁶⁸

The album contains a range of calligraphic models for individual letters of the alphabet or combinations of letters, as well as religious texts, poetic quotations and extracts of prose narratives.⁶⁹ One calligraphy is signed by Dirayat Khan, a calligrapher of the late seventeenth century who belonged to a family of Iranian descent and whose father had been in the service of Shah Jahan.⁷⁰ Seven calligraphies are signed by Muhammad 'Ali, a master closely connected to the court of Awadh.⁷¹

68 British Library, Add MS 29170, fol. 129.

69 For a summary of the contents see Atighi Moghaddam in Stronge and Atighi Moghaddam, 'An Unrecorded Polier Muraqqa', pp. 204–214. Not all the prose texts have been identified.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 207.

71 As noted by Atighi Moghaddam, *ibid.*, pp. 206–207. Other verses written by Muhammad 'Ali and dated 1195 (28 December 1780–16 December 1781) are preserved in an album of paintings and calligraphies presented by Polier to Lady Coote, the wife of friend Sir Eyre Coote (of which seventeen pages are preserved in the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1982.2.70.1-16 and 1983.2.12) and in the recently discovered calligraphy album (John Rylands Research Institute and Library, Manchester, Persian MS 10) presented by Polier to Jones as a substitute of the V&A album MSL/1858/4765 given to Hastings. For a thorough description of Persian MS 10 and a comparison of its contents with the V&A album, see Jake Benson's article in the present volume.

Calligraphies signed and dated by him and with Polier-style margins also appear from time to time



FIGURE 6.20 Calligraphy by Muhammad 'Ali, from an album assembled for Polier, Lucknow, c. 1784
VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, NATIONAL ART LIBRARY, 4765-1858, FOL. 29 [NO. 28]

Four are dated between 1195 (28 December 1780–16 December 1781) and 1198 (26 November 1783–13 November 1784), and the final one, on folio 29

(fig. 6.20) includes a mildly ironic verse in *nasta'liq* that implies the calligrapher compiled the album, as suggested by A.S. Melikian-Chirvani.⁷² It reads: *Bā tu hamṣuḥbatī az bū'l-'ajabihā-yi manast. Bū'l-'ajabī* is used here pejoratively with the meaning 'trick', 'sleight of hand' and can be understood to mean 'Keeping company with you/friendliness with you is one of my trickster's accomplishments', and to be addressed by the calligrapher to Polier as the person who commissioned the album. It

on the art market: see for example, Pundoles' online catalogue of 2011, lot 131, 'Two Calligraphic Panels, from an album associated with Antoine Polier, Delhi or Lucknow, India, dated 1197/1783AD' (<https://auctions.pundoles.com/lots/view/1-4TJB/two-calligraphic-panels-from-an-album-associated-with-antoine-polier> [last accessed August 2023]); see also Joachim K. Bautze, *Interaction of Cultures: Indian and Western Painting, 1780–1910: The Ehrenfeld Collection* (Alexandria, Virginia: Art Services International, 1998), cat.no. 68, pp. 252–254.

72 Stronge and Atighi Moghaddam, 'An Unrecorded Polier Muraqqa', p. 214.

follows that the scribe who wrote the verses, and who contributed so many examples of his work to the album, was the compiler. The latest dated calligraphy, 1198 (26 November 1783–12 November 1784), suggests that it was compiled during Hastings' sojourn in Lucknow and that the English governor must have met Muhammad 'Ali. The album was assembled quickly and was easily replaced: by July 1786 Polier had already commissioned another for Jones. That volume has now been discovered by Jake Benson in the John Rylands Library and is discussed in his contribution to the present volume.

4 Conclusion

The Gentil album of 1774 was created by a French patron working closely with artists who were formally in service to the nawab but permitted to work for a man who was clearly his friend. Nevasi Lal, Mohan Singh and one or more others bring their distinctive character to the drawings, rendering in miniature scale features of Awadhi painting seen as early as the 1760s and deriving from Delhi conventions. They are predominantly tinted with delicately toned water colour washes, and the album is wholly in European style. It seems to have been made as the visual complement to Gentil's memoirs, both intended for an audience in France. The purpose of the *Receuil* was to explain to scholars in France the religions and cultures of the people among whom Gentil had lived, while highlighting his own political importance and the role he played in defending French interests in the subcontinent.

Polier's album of 1190 (1776) was compiled in Delhi where the traditions of the royal *kitābkhāna* or 'house of books' seem to have persisted despite the devastation of Nadir Shah's raid of the city in the years 1738 to 1739. In Delhi, Polier the avid collector would have had ample opportunity to acquire paintings and calligraphies of earlier and recent periods, either through his court connections or from other collectors, to add to his own commissions of both. The very high quality of some of

the margins of paintings that are datable to within a few years of Polier's residence implies that his closeness to Shah 'Alam II permitted some interaction with his *kitābkhāna*. The traditional role of the painter/designer supplying designs for use in other media clearly continued in Delhi and by extension in Awadh.

Polier's album of 1784 was compiled for the specific purpose of providing his learned friend William Jones with examples of calligraphy in Persian and Arabic, though chance circumstances meant that it was kept by Warren Hastings. Internal evidence suggests it was assembled by Muhammad 'Ali who included dated examples of his own calligraphy. It therefore belongs to the long *muraqqa'* tradition in Hindustan that was inspired by Iran and Central Asia, but the late eighteenth-century world of literati in northern India now included foreigners like those who established the Asiatic Society in Calcutta.

The three albums together demonstrate the complexity of cultural exchanges between the Mughal elite in Delhi and Awadh, and European scholars.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Friederike Weis for her helpful comments and revisions, to Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani for his translations of key Persian sources, to Francesca Orsini and Revati Mann for their help in identifying the kaithi inscriptions and especially to Komal Pande for translating some of them, and to Rosie Llewellyn-Jones for scrutinising this essay.