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PERSIAN MINIATURE

Lent by WILLIAM MILNE GRINNELL

XVIth cen.

EXHIBITION OF PERSIAN ART.

“**W**HEN they ceased to observe the strict precepts of their religion, and the disposition for dominion and luxurious living overcame them, the Arabs employed the Persian nation to serve them, and acquired from them the arts and architecture.”

The above acknowledgment by the greatest native Arab historian Ibn-Khaldoon, in speaking about the Arabic art in Egypt, reveals something of the very great part which Persia played in the history and the arts of the East. Not only did its wares find a ready market in the Mediterranean world but its influence is also felt in both India and China. Nor was this influence one of short duration, for Persia is one of the oldest monarchies now existing, and repeatedly in its history has this active force been felt in the art world. At the same time it has, up to very recent years, been comparatively difficult to see Persian objects of art of the finest type. The result of recent excavations has been that a new world of unusual beauty is being revealed to us by degrees. The museums of the world are hastening to secure and preserve the relatively small number of objects which have as yet rewarded the spade of the native excavator. It is indeed fortunate that so many objects of artistic merit from the Orient have passed into the hands of collectors and museums in America.

The tendency to-day in art towards realism has to a certain degree blinded us to the beauty or appropriateness of symbolism. This in a way accounts for the difficulty often felt by the Occidental mind in understanding the Oriental expression of the idea. What is true of China and Japan is also true of Persia. But the visitor to an exhibition of the arts of the Iranian peoples soon finds a ready sympathy with the spirit there expressed.

Such has indeed been true in the case of the exhibition of Persian art which has graced the galleries of the School of Design since January fourteenth. This

ready and constant interest was in part awakened as a result of the illuminating and comprehensive lecture given on the opening evening by Mirza Ali Kuli Khan, the Persian Chargé d'Affairs at Washington. Not only was the speaker unusually well fitted to discuss his subject because of his nationality, but his long study of the arts of his native land, and his acknowledged position as a connoisseur, all tended to call especial attention to the unusual opportunity thus afforded to see some of the objects which reflect the glories of the ancient Shahs.

The student of the arts of the East is already familiar with the fact that the general size of objects is fairly small, and hence they might be easily transported in the caravans, to adorn the tents or palaces. Architectural pieces, aside from decorative tiles, may not be seen outside of the land of the Mohammedan. Therefore any exhibition which can show the superb lustrous glazed pottery for which Persia was famous for centuries, the illuminations from the books, the rich textiles, the lacquered mirror-backs and the book bindings would give a fairly comprehensive idea of the high art-standards of Iran.

Among those who so kindly loaned objects of unusual interest are Mr. William Milne Grinnell of New York, the Honorable Nelson W. Aldrich, and Mirza Ali Kuli Khan of Washington. Mr. Grinnell is well-known as a connoisseur and collector of Persian miniatures and faïences. His collection contains many unique examples, and has been especially chosen in the East to show the varied character of the unexcelled faïence of Iran. A part of his collection is on exhibition this winter at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and about half of the finest examples have been seen in the Persian exhibition of the School of Design. In the case where Mr. Grinnell's faïences are shown one may see the lusted pottery of Rhages and Sultanabad, the polychrome figured pottery on a light-cream ground of Rhages, and the reflét metallique of Veramin and Rhages. An unusual opportunity is af-

forded to study the Mongol influence following A. D. 1221, as evidenced in the drawing of the figures.

The loan from Mr. Aldrich also contains several unusual examples of great merit. There are two superb Koubatcha



"Rhodian" plate DAMASCUS XVIth cen.
Lent by Hon. NELSON W. ALDRICH

plates of the XVI and XVII centuries, with the ivory tone, the large crackle and the polychrome design which give distinction to that type of pottery. A most unusual Asia Minor plate of the type called "Rhodian," is also a valuable addition to the collection. Sultanabad ware of the XIII century and Kashan pottery of the XVII century are also to be seen.

The friends of the museum have doubtless been interested in the exhibition of pottery and textiles from the permanent collection of the institution. This choice group of Persian ceramics has been made possible through recent gifts on the part of interested friends, and calls especial attention to the unusual beauty of Sultanabad pottery not only in its shape and glaze, but in its decoration.

Another feature of the exhibition was the choice collection of the miniature paintings of the XVI and XVII centuries. The eight examples shown from the collection of Mr. W. M. Grinnell were representative of some of the best traditions

of the period which marks the height of the art of miniature painting in the Near East. In the treatment of harmonious color, of facile line, and of decorative values, these illuminations as well as those from the collection of Mirza Ali Kuli Khan only increased our sense of indebtedness to such national feeling and artistic genius. Few of the works by known masters have survived in the form of signed examples, but the high standard set for those who interpreted the expression of the master deserves especial attention. Well might a Persian connoisseur in his book, the *Manaqib*, hold that "the painter has to possess a delicate hand, a sharp-seeing eye, a pure mind, and superior intelligence," in order to produce with his marvellous pencil such masterpieces of line.*

The objects especially noted above comprised only a small part of the general exhibition, which doubtless laid the foundation for a lasting interest in the

*F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painters of Persia, India and Turkey*, vol. 1, p. 103.



Vase

SULTANABAD
Anonymous Gift

XIIIth cen.

arts of Persia, an increasing sense of interest in further studies along the same line, and a source of satisfaction to realize that a nucleus of a representative and illustrative exhibition of Persian objects has become the property of the Museum.

L. E. R.

VARNISH.

PIGMENT ground in oil and used to produce a picture will not endure unless it is protected from the destructive action of the air, especially that of our modern cities. Excessive moisture, gases and dust all contribute to the deterioration of pigment, therefore a protective coating must be used.

Varnish as used on pictures serves several purposes. First it is a more or less air and moisture-proof coating which is a protective surface, and secondly it is a transparent glaze which reveals and enhances the colors. In many of the older methods of painting varnish served in combination with transparent colors to build the whole outer part of the painting. In the hands of the forger and restorer it accomplishes all of these purposes and others, as for instance that of medium for a coat of stain which imitates the effects of age. This stain if applied thickly enough also obscures the ravages of natural decay and the ruin caused by solvents used to remove varnish previously applied and disintegrated.

The craze for antiques has perverted the public taste till it insists that the antiquity of pictures shall be plainly visible. Therefore we have the grotesque spectacle of fine old paintings, in really good repair, furnished with a modern false "antique" surface. There seems to be a curious belief that no painting can be really old unless it is stained and dirty. This is quite convenient for the falsifier of pictures, and makes forgery vastly easier.

To return to varnish. The dictionary definition is "a solution of resinous matter forming a clear limpid fluid capa-

ble of hardening without losing its transparency." The more common gums or resins used to make varnish are mastic, damar (a supposed secret combination), several varieties of copal, amber and shellac. The last is a truly villainous substance for picture work, though widely used. It forms a part of the so called retouching varnishes.

The solvents used to make the gums fluid are fixed and volatile oils in the first group, and alcohols and spirits in the second group. Benzole is also freely used for the sake of speed and economy.

Oil varnish properly mixed and properly applied forms a flexible coating, enduring under changes of temperature and humidity according to the hardness of the gum used. Spirit varnishes (second group) are harsh, brittle and subject to changes of color but are often used, as they are quick drying. Many people seeking repairs to their pictures, refuse to wait a sufficient time for work to be properly done, therefore quick drying varnishes are used to speed up the work.

Mastic is very satisfactory if used as a base combined with harder gums and oil in the right proportions. This varnish will give a soft satin-like finish without excessive surface glitter, is fairly enduring and absolutely safe, since it may be readily removed without endangering the picture in the process. Harder gums alone carry an element of danger, since their removal, to be safely accomplished, demands skill, patience, and considerable time. Mastic alone is subject to "bloom," that is, a fog-like discoloration is apt to appear on the surface in unusually damp weather or during the changes caused by starting or discontinuing the artificial heating of our houses. This bloom is not a symptom of danger and is most easily removed, but naturally the picture owner feels he has been badly used if it appears. The same person will be perfectly happy with a hard resisting copal varnish once the surface glitter is dulled. Ten chances to one however, the picture suffers damage when the hard varnish is

removed, as it must be in time. Our modern painters have so neglected the technical side of their art that there is scarcely one capable of properly surfacing his own pictures or judging when any picture is properly surfaced. The picture owner therefore may be excused for ignorance of this vital subject. Vital, because more ruin is accomplished in the removal of varnish than in any other way.

Let a picture pass through a process of harsh cleaning, repainting and surface staining with shellac as a medium and it becomes anything but a masterpiece.

The picture owner usually demands an enduring surface with very little or no glitter or shine, and of course he wishes no harm to his picture. This is almost impossible by the use of proper, honest, non-dangerous surfacing material; but since it is demanded an attempt will be made to please by one method or another. So we see pictures treated to combinations which would make a furniture faker decidedly envious. Shellac, wax, glue, talc and bitumen are among the substances used to please the man who wishes a fine dull yet permanent finish upon his pictures to match that upon his furniture.

There is great indignation over the practices of dealers and restorers, but some small amount of consideration should be undergone before definitely placing the blame.

The absurdity of the whole business lies in the fact that pictures could be kept in good repair and not be endangered in the process, if the collectors and museums would sincerely study the subject of care and preservation of pictures, and adopt means to eliminate the commercial side.

This commercial side of the subject may be summarized as follows. The owner of a painting which shows evidence of deterioration hastens to the dealer or critic in whom he has the greatest confidence. It goes without saying that repairs are advised, and the picture passes into the hands of the dealer or

critic who in turn passes it over to a restorer with the advice to hurry it along as fast as possible since the owner is impatient. The inevitable result is that the restorer is chiefly concerned with putting as little time and effort as possible upon the work, his aim being to satisfy his customer. The picture naturally becomes purely so much business and its possible value as a work of art is not largely dwelt upon. It may be readily understood that paintings often suffer from such a method of procedure.

The public realizes that real estate must be looked after, many are knowing as to the needs of horses, dogs and automobiles, but pictures being part of an Art with a capital A seems to be considered beyond the reach of regular care, so they are allowed to suffer inevitable changes until it becomes obvious that something radical must be done, and that at once.

There is no reason why the Museums should not use a certain amount of care to establish bureaus where reliable information on pictures and their needs could be obtained, since the patrons and supporters of Museums are often themselves in need of just that information.

If some concerted intelligent effort is not made to check the wholesale falsifying of picture surfaces, we will soon look in vain for an example of the past greatness of painting.

It is a curious fact that although the old methods are "lost arts" as far as our painters are concerned, many parts of the old systems survive and are to-day used in the trades though often in a debased way. It is not impossible that these should be studied and some knowledge of their value be imparted to the budding artist.

H. E. T.

DUTCH SCENT BOTTLES.

SCENT bottles, when they are Dutch, are not mere bottles more or less ornamental in character, and made to hold cologne and smelling salts, but they are also an important adjunct to the



DUTCH SCENT BOTTLES

Lent by Mrs. ARTHUR P. HUNT

XVI-XIXth cen.

costume of each peasant in the districts where the costume is still worn, and are as full of variety and significance as the buckles, silver buttons and other essential pieces of jewelry. One difference, however, may be noted for the bottles varied only according to the fashion of periods, while the jewelry was also indicative of localities. Each fishing village for instance had its individual type of button, worn not for decoration only, but for the very practical purpose of identification in case a man was drowned in the treacherous North Sea. The bottles, as far as I have been able to make out, were used indiscriminately in all parts of Holland as the different styles were in fashion.

According to tradition perfumes were introduced into Spain by the Moors, and certainly the first Spanish perfume bottles were distinctly Moorish in shape. There are several bottles in this collection that resemble the long narrow ones still used for attar of roses, and those made in Spain always retained traces of Oriental influence. At the time when the Spaniards occupied Flanders and the Netherlands, besides inaugurating the Inquisition, they

introduced the solace of perfumes to the Dutch Protestants. The odor of cologne was destined to become inseparably connected with religion in the minds of the peasants from that day to the present time, for scent bottles became as inevitable a part of the paraphernalia of the church-goer as the clasped Bible and the silver box filled with anise-seed.

When the stranger goes to church in any small country town in Holland, he is greatly entertained as he watches the women of the congregation, during the long sermon, unclasp their bead bags and take out the slender perfume bottles they have brought with them, very deliberately open the silver tops and then sniff luxuriously during the rest of the sermon, interrupting themselves occasionally by nibbling an anise-seed. One sees whole families engaged in this way, for each man, woman and child has brought his or her own bottle, appropriate for the particular age and sex.

The men's bottles are as a rule heavy in shape and cutting, rather round and solid in effect, with very simple tops made of gold or silver, either perfectly plain or

decorated with a series of bands or rope-like engraving. There is another very rare type which is curved like a cigarette case to fit into a breast pocket. Both kinds are represented in the collection. There are also two bottles made for small boys, miniatures of the round flat masculine type, which is especially interesting because the bottles used by little girls are not at all like those made for their mothers, and are even more unlike the intermediate "maiden bottles." The little girls' are chunky and round or barrel shaped, made small to fit the size of their hands, quite in character in every way with their wholesome, chubby, much be-petticoated owners. In the collection there is one that is very tiny, made to be part of a baby's outfit, for to the Dutch mind, no one can be too young to enjoy cologne.

The "maiden bottles" are tall, with long slender necks decorated with engraved collars and bands of silver, very dainty and elaborate, instinctive with a grace of shape and workmanship that is essentially maidenly in character. Many of those for women are also very graceful, but in a more solid and substantial way, heavier in shape and less trimmed with silver, what there is being massed together and ornamented by a greater richness of design in the repoussé and engraving.

The bottles are all made with such human sympathy that the most casual observer seeing one for the first time would know at once whether it was made for man, woman or child. They assuredly deserve to rank as works of art on the strength of this human quality quite aside from the beautiful workmanship, for they are always designed to suit the hand. All the shapes, from the early flat, slender type, made without a base, through the heavy, deeply cut oblong bottles, through the round vase-like ones down to the latest oval pattern, all are comfortable to hold. They seem to nestle into ones hand and lie there contentedly. It is quite extraordinary, this personal element, that one feels in all of them.

Dutch glass and Dutch silver have

always been famous, and in these bottles the two are most happily combined, the feeling of the true artist being expressed by the way in which the designs on the silver, however simple or intricate they may be, always harmonize with the general character and cutting of the glass.

All of the periods and types are represented in this collection, and the historical evolution can be clearly traced from the Spanish to the purely Dutch bottles, with a distinct English influence shown particularly in those made of colored glass that came into fashion at the time of William and Mary. Many of the patterns engraved on the silver are the emblems of old families or are taken from the coats-of-arms of towns, reflecting in this way bits of the history of Holland and showing clearly how all peasant art is bound up with the heart of the community.

U. C. H.

ACTIVITIES OF THE SCHOOL.

The registration in the institution for the first twenty-four weeks of the present school year totals 1068, a figure which emphasizes the eagerness of students to avail themselves of the opportunities thus presented by the School of Design.

Mr. Henry Hunt Clark, now of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has been giving a most interesting series of eight lectures on the "Arts of Design."

A feature of the present year will be the issuing of a school book by the student-body. It is to be named the "Risod." The contributors and artists have labored very hard to prepare a book worthy of the School of Design.

The School has accepted a limited number of prize competitions to enable students to become familiar with practical conditions. These are incorporated into the regular work so far as possible. This school year there have been nine of these competitions with prizes totaling two hundred and eighty-seven dollars, which amount was divided among seventeen students.

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ADMISSIONS.

HOURS OF OPENING.—The galleries are open to the public on every day of the year, with the exception of Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and the Fourth of July. From July 1st to September 15th the hours are from 1 to 5 P. M. on week days and from 2 to 5 P. M. Sundays; from September 15th to July 1st the hours are from 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. week days and

from 2 to 5 P. M. Sundays. The Pendleton Collection is open from 2 to 5 P. M. daily.

Twenty-five cents admission to the museum is charged on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and the museum is free on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Free transferable tickets admitting four persons on pay-days are sent to all members and artists, on application to the authorities, may obtain free tickets of admission for pay-day. Teachers with pupils of both public and private schools will be admitted without payment upon application.

PHOTOGRAPHS ON SALE.

Photographic copies of many of the objects belonging to the museum, including photographs of the Pendleton Collection of furniture, are on sale at the entrance to the museum.

PUBLICATIONS.

Four quarterly bulletins and a year-book are to be issued and are sent free of charge to the members, and, on written request, to alumni of the institution.

The "Catalogue of the Memorial Exhibition of Works of Art given by Isaac Comstock Bates" will be forwarded to any address for twenty-five cents. A copy will gladly be sent on application to any of the subscribers of the School of Design who have not as yet received their copy.

COPYING.

Permission to copy or photograph in the galleries of the museum may be obtained in the office. Such permits will not be issued for Sundays or legal holidays.

LIBRARY.

The Library contains 2,461 volumes, 13,500 mounted photographs and reproductions, 800 lantern slides, and about 940 postcards. During the months of June, July and August the library is closed.