

**INNOVATIVE APPROACH OF KAMĀL AL-DĪN BIHZĀD IN
PERSIAN MINIATURE PAINTING**

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
List of Figures	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	4
Herāt School of Persian Miniature Painting	5
A Brief Introduction of Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād	7
Literature Review	8
First Phase of Bihzād’s Miniature Painting	10
Study of Expressionism	10
Second Phase of Bihzād’s Miniature Painting	12
Study of Perspective	12
Third Phase of Bihzād’s Miniature Painting	15
Study of Unusual Subject Matter	15
Conclusion	17
Bibliography	20

List of Figures

- Figure 1: *Portrait of a Dervīsh*, signed by Bihzad c. 1480, 25 x 17 cm, Timurid Herat, Reference: (Bahari 1997) *Portrait of a Dervīsh*, signed by Bihzad 11
- Figure 2: *Seduction of Yūsuf*, signed by Bihzād, from *Būstān of S’ādī*, c. 1488, Ink and color on paper, 11 30 x 21 cm, f. 52 v. Herāt, Afghānistān. National Library, Cairo..... 13
- Figure 3: *Two Camels Fighting* signed by Bihzād from the *Muraqq‘a-i Gulshan*, c. 1530; 19 x 24 cm, ink, transparent colors and gold on paper, Safavid Tabrīz, Gulistan Museum Library, Tehran. Reference: (Bahari 1997)..... 15
- Figure 4: *Formation of spiral in Yūsuf o Zuleykhā* Reference: (Lar 2006)..... 19

Abstract

This specific research is a literature review-based study which is primarily intended to explore the innovative approaches of Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād in Persian miniature painting. In this research, without focusing on historical features, it is tried to study the Herāt School and its features as well as introducing Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād, who is undoubtedly among the important agents of the growth and promotion of Herāt School. Various medieval Persian and modern European scholars are considered to study their researches regarding Bihzād and his art. This historical research is analytical and descriptive in nature. After giving a brief introduction of Herāt School and Bihzād, study is further developed by discussing some major works of Bihzād. The sample of the study is consisted upon three paintings showing evolving phases of Bihzād's work. Each painting is discussed in the light of reviews of different scholars. At the end of the paper conclusion is drawn that Bihzād's matchless style played an important role in flourishing the Persian art of miniature painting.

Key terms: Bihzād, Herāt, Persian miniature

Introduction

Painting is one of the arts patronized by the Persian rulers to represent their history, culture and power. The outstanding examples of this art may be found in

Persepolis, the paintings illustrated on walls of Bishapur palace, and Manichaean works. Although after gaining power by Muslims, the progress of this art was interrupted for a while, but after the revival of the Persian culture and civilization since the thirteen century, painting art was flourished again.¹

The political stability, the rulers' power and wealth in the next eras, especially in Tīmūrid era, prepared the ground for flourishing this art in all aspects more than before under the names of artistic schools such as Baghdād School, Tabrīz School, and Shirāz school. There is no doubt that Tīmūrid era has been considered as a special period of art flourishing because of the Herāt School in Persia which may be called as the Golden Age of the Persian art and culture. Surely, Kamāl al-Din Bihzād is among the leading painters of this school in that era. The Herāt School began in the 15th century, in Tīmūrid era. Bihzād, under the patronage of art-advocating rulers in Tīmūrid era, took initiatives which are considered as innovations not only in Herāt School but also in the Persian art history.²

In this research paper, it is tried to analyze the Herāt School briefly, and the role played by Bihzād in the growth and promotion of this art has been examined. Some of the major innovations introduced by Bihzād as a painter during Tīmūrid period and as a teacher / head of atelier during Safavid era are also highlighted.

Usually scholars divide Bihzād's work in three different period. One is the blooming period of his style which prolonged from 1480 to 1487. The second is the mature period under Tīmūrid Herāt which continued from 1488-1510. While the third phase is when he worked as a head of atelier during the Safavid rule from 1510-1535.³ From these three phases, three different miniature paintings are selected. Every miniature is studied in different manner.

¹ . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 15.

² . W. M. Thackston, *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989), 237.

³ . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997).

From the first phase, a portrait painting is selected to study expressionistic quality in the work of Bihzād. This portrait is selected because of the reason that portrait painting prior to Bihzād was not so common in Persian painting. So, the role of Bihzād in promoting this genre is emphasized. The literature review of this painting comprised upon the description given by only one author. The researcher was unable to find any other scholar who have discussed this miniature because it is not a very famous painting by the artist. But the expressionistic quality of the portrait compelled the researcher to select this painting for the discussion.

While from the second phase which is the mature period of Bihzād's art, a famous miniature painting on the subject matter of Yūsuf o Zuleykhā is selected. The perspective, spatial quality, movement and geometrical patterns in architecture are studied in this specific miniature. This is one of a best painting by Bihzād and so many scholars have discussed this painting in detail. So the literature review of this miniature includes various analysis by different scholars.

The most difficult task for the researcher was to select the miniature from the third and last phase of Bihzād's artistic genius. The reason was the doubtful authorship of paintings of the artists from the last phase. At this time, Bihzād was working as the head of atelier. So, the practice of miniature painting was carried out as a group activity under the supervision of Bihzād. Many of his students were also working in his style. So, to attribute a painting to Bihzād from this time period was a bit challenging task. After much research and brain storming researcher was finally able to pick a miniature painting, which holds Bihzād's signature. This specific painting is selected because of its unusual subject matter. The miniature is depicting a camel fight which was a unique subject matter in Persian painting introduced by Bihzād and then this theme was practiced by many artists in the coming years. A few of scholars have discussed this painting and their reviews are included.

The main objectives which are developed for the study are as follows:

- To study expressionistic quality in the portrait painting by Bihzād.
- To study perspective, spatial character, movement and architectural details in *Yūsuf o Zuleika*.
- To highlight an unusual subject introduced by Bihzād in Persian miniature painting.

This historical research is analytical and descriptive in nature, which is build up by reviewing literature. The data is collected through books and journals. Pictorial data is collected from online database of various museums where these paintings are reserved. Data is presented in the form of literature review. Then it is analyzed and conclusions are derived. The study can be concluded as; Bihzād was an innovative genius of his time which had a strong influence on the Persian miniature painting of the coming generations.

Herāt School of Persian Miniature Painting

In the late 14th century, a new Islamic empire arose in Central Asia under the leadership of Tīmūr (r. 1370–1405); a successor of the Mongol Genghis Khān. Tīmūr quickly extended his territories to include Persia and parts of Asia Minor, Irāq and India. The Tīmūrids were great patrons of art and architecture.⁴

Herāt School (1452-1510) was a style of miniature painting that flourished in

⁴ . Sheila R. Canby, *Persian Painting* (London: The British Museum Press, 1993), 49.

Herāt, (western Afghānistān), under the patronage of the Tīmūrīds. Shāhrukh (r. 1405-47), the son of Tīmūr founded the school, but it was his son Baysunghur Mirzā who developed it into an important centre of painting. The school grew in importance until 1507, when Herāt was sacked by the Uzbeks.⁵

Herāt school can evidently be divided in two periods: the first period begins from Tīmūrīd era and continues to Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bāyḡarā era. Tīmūr gathered the leading artists, craftsmen, skillful men from different cities thus the result of which was the growth of culture and civilization and a new artistic combination in the works of this era.⁶

Artists working in Herāt followed traditions established by the Ilkhānīds, the Jalayirīds and Iskander⁷ Sulṭān. Renowned artists and calligraphers associated with these courts joined the Tīmūrīd court in Herāt after it became the capital of the Tīmūrīd Empire in 1405. Despite these diverse origins, illuminated manuscripts produced in Herāt exhibit artistic continuity over a period of two centuries.⁸

Manuscripts created during the first major phase of production in Herāt usually have only a few full-page illustrations with delicate, carefully modulated colors. In these compositions, figures are depicted on various planes, one above the other and are juxtaposed with elements of landscape or architectural features, producing the effect of one appearing behind the other. This technique of developing perspective was inherited from the Mongols and had previously been developed by artists associated with the Jalayirīd court. In these early compositions, strong diagonal elements also help to create a sense of balance, and highly stylized individual figures are executed with tall and thin bodies with oblong heads and pointed beards. Patterns or models were used to finish compositions. The consistency of these works points to the efforts of a unified group with a strong leader.⁹

The second period of Herāt School which may be called as the Golden Age includes 38-year period of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bāyḡarā's rule (r. 1468–1506) in Herāt. Because of a large number of the court's artists and educated persons, this era is considered as the reason for flourishing Herāt school.¹⁰ Under the patronage of Sulṭān Ḥusayn, Herāt became a leading center for the production of lavish illustrated manuscripts ever created in the Muslim world. In addition to the king, the role of his minister, Mīr 'Alī Shīr Nawā'ī, in artistic promotion in Herāt is significant.¹¹ These patronizations resulted in a significant flourishing in art and literature and through creating new styles prepared the ground for emerging the leading characters such as Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād.

Manuscripts from the second phase devote more attention to personal and subjective details, and action takes place in ever more elaborate architectural and spatial structures.¹² The subject matter of these works is based on certain types of literature, especially poetry that was popular at the time including *Shāhnāmāh* by the poet Firdūsī the works of Neẓāmī,

⁵ . *ibid.*

⁶ . Ernst J. Grube and Eleanor Sims, "The School of Herat from 1400 to 1450" in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia*, ed. Basil Gray (London: Serindia, 1979): 1588.

⁷ . A Timurid prince who lived in Shiraz, Persia

⁸ . Basil Gray, *Persian Painting* (Geneva: Booking International, 1995), 109.

⁹ . Basil Gray, *Persian Painting* (Geneva: Booking International, 1995); Sheila R. Canby, *Persian Painting* (London: The British Museum Press, 1993).

¹⁰ . Khwandamir, *Habib al-Siyar* (Bombay, 1857), 310.

¹¹ . Richard Ettinghausen, "Bihzad", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 1211-1214.

¹² . Both of these characteristics can be seen in *The Seduction of Yusuf*, shown with its elaborate setting and focus on the figures of Yusuf (Joseph) and Potiphar's wife.

Sā' dī, and Jāmī. Subject matter also expanded to include panoramic landscapes and figures doing such everyday activities as eating, drinking, and building.¹³

These innovations are usually attributed to Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād. He executed illustrations in jewel-like, carefully controlled colors. These new themes and techniques introduced in Herāt at the end of the 15th century later became important ingredients of the Tabrīz School under the Safavids. After the death of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bāykarā, Bihzād eventually moved to Tabrīz, Persia, where he became the head of the royal library of the Safavid dynasty. Manuscripts produced in the 16th and 17th centuries after Herāt was conquered by the Safavids demonstrate a strong continuity with the second phase of the Herāt School.¹⁴

A Brief Introduction of Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād

Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād was a famous painter and artist of Tīmūrid period. Many well-known historians such as Wāṣifī and Khwāndamīr have written about him, admiring his artistic style and inspiring status. But in certain original manuscripts including *Ḥabīb al-Siyār* and *Badayī al-Wagayī*, no indication comes about his birth date and life.¹⁵ He was a major Persian painter whose style as a miniaturist and work as a teacher were vital influences on Persian painting.

According to Ebadollah, Bihzād was born in c. 1455 in Herāt, Khurasān. Orphaned at an early age, he was raised in the city of Herāt by the painter Mīrak Naqqāsh.¹⁶ According to *Ḥabīb al-Siyār*, Mīrak was unparalleled in image drawing, painting and illumination. He was also incomparable in writing inscriptions. Mīrak and Syed Aḥmad Tabrīzī are known as Bihzād's masters.¹⁷

Bihzād was trained in the association of an art supporting minister, Mīr 'Alī Shīr Nawā'ī. Then he was sent into Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bāykarā's service about c. 1486. After Uzbek's conquest of Herāt, he remained in the city for some years and continued his activity at the court. In c. 1506 Shāh Ismā'īl I, founder of Irān's Ṣafavid dynasty, conquered the city. He was assigned as the head of the *kitābkhāna* and the atelier at the court of Shāh Ismā'īl I in c. 1521. He probably remained at this position until the beginning of Shāh Tahmasp (r. 1525-76).¹⁸

In c. 1514, Ismā'īl's son Ṭahmasp was made governor of Herāt, and, when he returned to Tabrīz in c. 1522, Bihzād joined him. At Tabrīz, he continued to enjoy royal patronage and was named director of the royal library and placed in charge of the production of the elaborate illuminated and illustrated manuscripts. He held the post until his death. Under his direction, the academy became a greater center of art than ever. He trained some of the brilliant students such as Kāsim 'Alī, Mīr Sayyid 'Alī, Āḳā Mīrak, and Muḫafar 'Alī. Bihzād died in c. 1535/36 in Tabrīz, Āzerbaijān.¹⁹

¹³ . F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting And Painters of Persia India and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century*, Vol. 1, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1912), 41.

¹⁴ . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997).

¹⁵ . Richard Ettinghausen, "Bihzad", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 1211-1214.

¹⁶ . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 40.

¹⁷ . Ghamar Arian, *Kamal al-Din Behzad*, (Tehran: Hirmand Publications, 2003), 29.

¹⁸ . Basil Gray, *Persian Painting* (Geneva: Booking International, 1995), 65.

¹⁹ . Richard Ettinghausen, "Bihzad", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 1211-1214.

A major problem in assessing Bihzād's work because several miniatures have been attributed to him. His pupils worked closely to imitate his style. In addition, he became the most celebrated artist of his time, and collectors of the time would identify works of excellence as being by Bihzād with little or no supporting evidence. Bihzād signed few of his paintings, and only 32 have been definitively attributed to him, all executed between c. 1486 and c. 1495.²⁰ Pupils of Bihzād such as Kāsim 'Alī, and Aḳā Mirak were reached nearly the same mastering rank as Bihzād's. It seems that Bihzād has designed many of the paintings but his pupils have completed them.²¹

Two of his earliest surviving works are signed illustrations for a manuscript of the *Sā'dī's Gulistān*. Five miniatures he contributed to a manuscript of *Sā'dī's Būstān*, copied in 1488 are considered by many scholars to be the best surviving examples of his work.²²

Bihzād's work represents no drastic departure from earlier styles. While his technical skill, combined with his originality in composition and dramatic presentations and his superb knowledge of colour, made him the master painter of his time. In a style marked by harmony, humanism, and grace, he was able to free the miniature from stiffness in presentation and excessive concern with detail. Bihzād added new energy and realism into Persian painting. In his flourishing years, Bihzād enriched the art of miniature making in the field of portrait and genre-painting and also used themes connected with the life of the common people. However, he was attracted mostly by lyrical and dramatic motives where delicate, glorious and complicated feelings were to be dealt with.²³ Both as a teacher and painter Bihzād was a leading force in the development of Tabrīz as a centre of art.

Literature Review

The art of Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād (1455- 1535), the great miniaturist of the medieval Persia respected by his contemporaries as well as by the connoisseurs of our day, has always aroused interest in scholars. Because of his immense popularity many intellectuals have mentioned his work and style of painting in their studies. Some of these literary works are mentioned below.

Persian historian, Khwāndamīr²⁴ wrote, "Ustād Kamāl ad-Din Bihzād: He sets before us amazing forms and rarities of art; his draughtmanship, which is like the brush of Mānī, and his fingers gifted with amazing abilities. A hair of his brush, through its mastery, has given life to the lifeless form".²⁵

Bābur speaks of him in his memoirs as "the most distinguished of all painters", adding that Bihzād was a very fine artist but he did not paint beardless young faces well, as he made the necks too large ; bearded faces, however, he painted extremely well.²⁶

²⁰ . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 71.

²¹ . Thomas Arnold, *Painting in Islam* (New York: Dover Publications, 1965).

²² . Richard Ettinghausen, "Bihzad", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 1211-1214.

²³ . Olympiade Galerkina, 'On Some Miniatures Attributed to Bihzād from Leningrad Collections', *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 8, (Michigan: Freer Gallery of Art, The Smithsonian Institution and Department of the History of Art, University of Michigan, 1970), 121-138.

²⁴ . Born in Herāt about 1475

²⁵ . Thomas Arnold, *Painting in Islam* (New York: Dover Publications, 1965), 140.

²⁶ . F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting And Painters of Persia India and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century*, Vol. 1, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1912), 42.

Abū al-Faḍl, the court historian of the Emperor Akbar, in his biography states that: Most excellent painters are now to be found [at the Court of Akbar], and their masterpieces are worthy of a Bihzād”.²⁷

Other than Mughal emperors, renowned western scholars like Laurence Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson, M. S. Dimand, F. R. Martin, and Basil Gray have also discussed his work and praised his style. On Bihzād, the most complete information is the one gathered by Richard Ettinghausen in “Behzād”, *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

Up to the middle of 15th century, Mongolian influence was strong in Persia. It began to fade when Bihzād, the greatest of all Persian artists, started to paint. His work was so splendid that his fame spread far, and many tried to follow in his footsteps. Thus was a school established that had decided features of its own.²⁸

Dimand says this last and greatest painter of the Tīmūrid period freed himself from all the conventions of the Mongolian style. The faces of his figures are not conventional types but show individuality outstanding that achieved by any previous artist. Notable is the realistic rendering of the faces. The variety of facial expressions, emphasized by the many different colors used for the flesh tints, adds great interest to his paintings.²⁹

According to Binyon, in the latter part of the 15th century, we come to an artist who has been universally acclaimed as the greatest of Persian painters. This is Bihzād. I ought to say that his many paintings are genuine, quiet, and reposeful. The delicacy we have noted rather than the vigor is what impressive.³⁰

Commenting on Bihzād’s miniatures of *Būstān-i Sā’idī*, Wilkinson has of the view that, Bihzād had a keener eye for character, a superior mastery of movement; his compositions are more aspiring and elegant; their variety is much greater. All three manuscripts are so full of rich and varied colour combinations. The reds, prominently, are used rather sparingly, though very effectively, but various shades of pink are fairly common, and there are a wide range browns, greens, and blues. In the *Būstān*, the sky is always golden. Perhaps one misses that special affection for cold colours that one had thought to be one of Bihzād’s individualities.³¹ Thackston is of the view that Bihzād has been universally recognized as incomparable, the ‘pride of the ancients in illumination and outlining, the rarity of age’.³²

Bihzād as a painter he is a master, though he does not come up to Shāh Muḥafar in delicacy of touch, but his brush is firmer and he exceeds him in his initial sketches and his

²⁷ . Pierre Du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits: An Account of the Jesuit Missions to the Court of Akbar* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1996), 272.

²⁸ . F. K. W. ‘Persian and Indian Miniatures’, in *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum*, Vol. 19, No. 84 (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1924), 108-112.

²⁹ . M. S. Dimand, *A Handbook of Mohammedan Decorative Arts* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum Of Art, 1930), 32.

³⁰ . Laurence Binyon, ‘Persian Painting’ in *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 79, No. 4071, (Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce 1930), 51-65.

³¹ . J. V. S. Wilkinson, ‘Fresh Light on the Herat Painters’ in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, vol. 58, no. 335, 1931, 62, 67.

³² . W. M. Thackston, *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989), 347.

grouping of his figures. After Shāh Muḏafar and Bihzād, up to our own times there has been no one like them. Both of them enjoyed the patronage of Mīr ‘Alī Shīr.³³

The most famous and the highest praised of all Iranian painters is Bihzād. He although somewhat more realistic than his predecessors, infused old themes with new life, mainly with the help of refined but strong drawing, an extraordinary sense of spacing and composition, and a lightness of touch that was not too remote to be taken seriously.³⁴

But it was as a portrait painter that Bihzād rose to the level of a great master, worthy to be placed by the side of Memling, Durer, and Holbein. It is difficult to say who is greater, Bihzād or Memling, Mīrak or Jean Fouquet. They stand all on the same level, — perfection.³⁵

After giving a brief review of literature on Bihzād’s overall work and life, researcher will move further to explore innovative qualities of Bihzād’s miniatures. For this purpose, three paintings are selected in a chronological order. Each painting is provided with the available literature review. Each painting is discussed with a different objective and in conclusion, answers to these objectives will be observe.

First Phase of Bihzād’s Miniature Painting Study of Expressionism

From the first phase of Bihzād’s work, a portrait is selected to study the expressionism in the miniature created by him. Portraits are comparatively rare in Persian art. The people in Persian paintings were usually types rather than individual characters. But here is an example of portrait of an individual character, a *dervīsh*. The reason behind picking this specific miniature is that there is an intuitional and emotional expressionism in this portrait created by Bihzād. The title of the miniature is *Portrait of a Dervīsh*.

The evidence of Wāṣifī about Bihzād’s practice of painting portraits of his contemporaries is very significant.³⁶ Researcher was able to find the scholarly works of only two authors discussing this portrait; one is Ebadollah Bahari and other is F. R. Martian.

Ebadollah Bahari in his book discusses this portrait in these word. From the Album H2162 in the Topkāpī Palace Museum, this miniature shows a bare headed *dervīsh* kneeling on the floor, facing to the left and wearing a shaped leather apron and a fur mental. It is inscribed ‘Bihzād’ at the bottom right. This fine expressive and delicate painting could well be a portrait done by Bihzād at an early age but it is enclosed within a finely illuminated sixteen century border.³⁷

Bahari has provided only formal analysis of the portrait. He confirms that this portrait belongs to the early days of Bihzād’s work. But he has not provided the stylistic analysis of miniature.

³³ . T. W. Arnold, ‘Mirza Muhammad Haydar Dughlat On The Herat School Of Painters’, in *Bulletin of The School of Oriental Studies London Institution*, Vol. 5, No. 4, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 671-674.

³⁴ . Howard Hollis, Three Iranian Miniatures, *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 32, No. 4, (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1935), 35-39, 41.

³⁵ . F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting And Painters of Persia India and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century*, Vol. 1 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1912), 42.

³⁶ . Olympiade Galerik, ‘On Some Miniatures Attributed to Bihzād from Leningrad Collections’, *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 8, (Freer Gallery of Art, The Smithsonian Institution and Department of the History of Art, University of Michigan, 1970), 121-138.

³⁷ . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 56.



Figure 1: *Portrait of a Dervish*, signed by Bihzad c. 1480, 25 x 17 cm, Timurid Herat, Reference: (Bahari 1997) *Portrait of a Dervish*, signed by Bihzad

Although Martin is giving a detailed analysis of the portrait. He says that it is painted on brown yellow paper in a brownish tone. Brown is the colour of the order of *dervishes*. Only the border is in blue, the lips and the face have light red tones harmonizing with the brown. Very few masters have so fully concentrated the whole expression of a portrait on the eyes and the lips. He has made everything simple, and everything that might distract the eyes of the spectator from the eyes of the portrait is suppressed. Everyone who has been in the East will recognize this man; I have seen him hundreds of times sitting and dreaming in the mosques, in the bazaars, in the cafés. He is always the same, and never less interesting.³⁸

Martin also giving a justification for this theme in these words, Bihzād was not the depicter of grand warlike events. He loved the calm and peaceful contemplation of life, and it will be observed that he preferred to paint *dervish* and teachers.³⁹

³⁸ . F. R. Martin, F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting And Painters of Persia India and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century*, Vol. 1, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1912), 47.

³⁹ . F. R. Martin, F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting And Painters of Persia India and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century*, Vol. 1, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1912), 47.

Second Phase of Bihzād's Miniature Painting Study of Perspective

Another innovative technique which was used by Bihzād was the use of perspective. This effect was achieved by applying a layering technique in perspectives with elements and rich details overlaid on each other which enables the viewer to experience a sense of three dimensional space and giving him the ability to focus on certain aspects of the piece simultaneously. One more innovation by him was he took geometric compositions common to Persian art and opened them up to be more spacious to allow action and movement into his pieces. He also was skilled at guiding the viewer's eye around the composition in a gradual manner, creating natural expressions, and figures within his work. These techniques can be studied best in the miniature of *Yūsuf o Zuleykhā*. Many scholars discuss this miniature.

According to Blair and Bloom, maybe the most beautiful configuration of Bihzād's works is illustrated in the painting of *Seduction of Yūsuf* extracted from a copy of *Būstān* kept in Cairo. In this painting, the decorated palace and locked doors have been painted in details. The sense of isolation and captivity of Josef in the trap plotted by Zuleykhā has been depicted well. The palace has been illustrated in the same style as the

painting in Tīmūrid's era with baked bricks ornamented with tiles, grids, wooden windows, and carpets. This brilliant picture precedes the poem and has also expressed the mystic concepts the same as depicted by the literature and community of that period.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ . Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 150.



Figure 2: Seduction of Yūsuf, signed by Bihzād, from Būstān of S'ādī, c. 1488, Ink and color on paper, 11 30 x 21 cm, f. 52 v. Herāt, Afghānistān. National Library, Cairo.

Wilkinson highlights the date of the miniature by using these words. *Yūsuf, tempted by Zuleykhā*, escapes from her presence. The painting is dated in Arabic words, 893. The signature, in calligraphy, is in white letters on a blue ground, between the two windows. It is about an inch to the left of Yūsuf's extended hand.⁴¹

The detailed description of the story and painting is given in *Art through the Ages*. The most famous Persian painter of his age was Bihzād, who worked at the Herāt court and illustrated the Sultān's copy of S'ādī's *Būstān*. One page represents a story in both the Bible and the Quran; the seduction of Yūsuf (Joseph) by Potiphar's wife Zuleykhā. S'ādī's text is spread throughout the page in Arabic script in a series of beige panels. According to the tale as told by Jāmī⁴², Zuleykhā tempted Yūsuf into her palace and led him through seven rooms, locking each door behind him. In the last room, she threw herself at Yūsuf, but he resisted and was able to flee when the seven doors opened miraculously. Vivid color and intricate decorative detailing suggesting luxurious textiles and tiled walls characterize

⁴¹ . J. V. S. Wilkinson, 'Fresh Light on the Herat Painters' in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 58, No. 335, 1931, 60-69.

⁴² . (1414–1492), an influential mystic theologian and poet whose Persian text appears in blue in the white pointed arch at the lower center of the composition

Bihzād's painting of the story. There is a brilliant balance between two-dimensional patterning and depictions of balconies and staircases in perspective.⁴³

Pakbaz reviewing the architecture depicted in painting in these words, in this picture the architecture has an important role. Indeed, Bihzād has converted the nature and architecture into the human actions and has allocated a suitable position for figures.⁴⁴

Hillenbrand had briefly investigated the multi-portray architectural features in the Bihzād's works.⁴⁵ The style for composing an image on several levels is often reflected on the architectural forms themselves and those forms would allow many stories to happen at the same time, involving depth both in form and meaning. As Hillenbrand stated, a more dramatic version of this idea is found in the sharp zigzag movement of successive flights of stairs especially in *The Seduction of Yūsuf*. The celebrated scene of Yūsuf pursued by Zuleykhā *S'ādī's Būstān* of 893, painted in 1488. This is a painting which indicates the passage of time as well as a sequence of spaces.

According to Blair, 'S'ādī's text does not require Bihzād's elaborate architectural setting. Instead, this setting is described in the mystical poem "Yūsuf and Zuleykhā", written by the Tīmūrid poet Jāmī five years earlier'.⁴⁶ S'ādī's text merely refers to the attempts of seduction of Yūsuf by Zuleykhā, but Jāmī describes at some length Zuleykhā's useless efforts to influence Yūsuf to give in to her wishes. He concludes this part of the story with the description of an architectural construct that is rich and laden with mystical overtones. In the words of Sims, that 'Jami's palace should be a *ṣūfī* metaphor for the spiritual journey of both Yūsuf and Zuleykhā is hardly to be questioned, for a poet who was also the leader of the *ṣūfī* order of the Naqshbandiya in Herāt'.⁴⁷

According to Lar, the miniature painting shows the seven doors of the palace locked by Zuleykhā to stop Yūsuf from escaping as described in the narrative and the maze like positioning of the doors. In Persian literature, the opening of these doors is seen as the seven levels of purification that Yūsuf goes through. The depiction of the characters and the space in the painting shows that the artist is not trying to show space as if it has stopped in time but rather as a sequence of unfolding events in time.⁴⁸

Stated by the Lisa Golombek, Bihzād's painting is an imaginary on the theme that is exposed in the visual language of Tīmūrid architecture and its decoration. The architectural forms are exceedingly rich, but also empty. In the midst of this patterned elaboration, colour and the absence of pattern draw the eye to the two figures and their relationship. Notice here, once more, the perfectly-designed page with the columns where the text has been written being the ones that decide the final composition of the painting with a grid layout. The correspondence of text and painting in detail and in emphasis are

⁴³ . Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardener's Art Through The Ages: A Global History* (London: Cengage Learning, 2008), 358-359.

⁴⁴ . Roieen Pakbaz, *Iranian Art from Ancient to Present* (Tehran: Zarrin and Simin Publication House, 2008), 82.

⁴⁵ . Robert Hillenbrand, "The Uses of Space in Timurid Painting", in *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the 15th Century*, Lisa Golombek and Maria Subtelny eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 83.

⁴⁶ . Sheila Blair and Bloom, Jonathan, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), 63.

⁴⁷ . Eleanor Sims, *Peerless Images: Persian painting and its sources* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), 247.

⁴⁸ . Ashraf Mousavi Lar, "Coincidental Features in the Thoughts of Two Artistic Geniuses at the Golden Eras of the Eastern and Western Art", *J. Humanities* 13, no. 3 (2006), 95-113.

static levels of relationship. There is yet in Bihzād's painting a dynamic level in which the formal composition actively conveys meaning'.⁴⁹ Note the perspective approach to suggest three-dimensional space. For instance, the balcony on the right top corner of the miniature shows clearly the parallel lines in each space direction and the same holds true for any other part of the structure of the building. The vertical composition is also clearly shown here.

Persian miniaturists have always been fond of using solid blocks of form and colour. Often these blocks are created by the structure of the building where the scene is happening, at other occasions blocks may be created by rectilinear doors, balconies, floors, etc. In the words of Hillenbrand, it is essential of their compositional role that they should be as monochrome as is consistent with their nature. Thus, they establish a presence in the picture, something that is much more than mere decorative infill or background. They have an obvious spatial significance.⁵⁰

Third Phase of Bihzād's Miniature Painting Study of Unusual Subject Matter



Figure 3: Two Camels Fighting signed by Bihzād from the Muraqq' a-i Gulshan, c. 1530; 19 x 24 cm, ink, transparent colors and gold on paper, Safavid Tabrīz, Gulistan Museum Library, Tehran. Reference: (Bahari 1997)

Watching combat between domesticated animals, from oxen to elephants to camels was a traditional pastime of the court. Persian artists were particularly drawn to camel fights, probably because of the artistic possibilities inherent in their naturally undulating

⁴⁹ . Lisa Golombek, "Toward a Classification of Islamic Painting", in *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum*, Richard Ettinghausen eds. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972), pp. 23-43, p. 28. ⁵⁰. Robert Hillenbrand, "The Uses of Space in Timurid Painting", in *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the 15th Century*, Lisa Golombek and Maria Subtelny eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 84.

shapes. The depiction of a camel fight by Bihzād seems to have been the precursor of a series of such pictures produced in the 16th and 17th centuries.⁵⁰

Priscilla Soucek gives a very brief description of this painting. According to her, this painting shows two fighting camels and their keepers in a broadly conceived hillside covered with stones, a detail that becomes a characteristic in painters active in Herāt and

Bukhāra during the first half of the 16th century. An old man watches the scene from the upper left. An inscription on the painting states that Bihzād executed it during his seventieth year. The painting's execution places it within the 16th century but the circumstances that led to its creation are unknown.⁵¹

Wilkinson and Gray give a detailed view of the whole scene but they do not give the historical context of the miniature. According to them in this miniature, two camels with intertwined necks are thrusting against each other. The richly designed saddle covers indicate that these are highly prized animals. Their keepers struggle to pull them away. The keeper on the left has the rope attached to the foreleg of the camel rather than to its rein. The keeper on the right carries a raised switch. The encounter has been placed in a wild landscape, hardly the appropriate setting for a staged combat, but forming a framing device that surround the precisely observed camels. A desert setting has been provided and an old man is also present. The head and upper torso of the old man in an elaborately tied turban (apparently observing the camel fight) appears to the left of the rocks. A jackal is also peeping through the rocks in the right corner. The delicacy of the drawing of the figures contrasts with the rough contours of the rocks. The landscape is missing details while the camels are elaborately detailed.⁵²

Wilkinson and Gray wrote, "There is no reason to reject the attribution to Bihzād," noting only that "the drawing of the two fighting camels from Tehran does, perhaps, contain a suggestion of decline".⁵³ Most scholars, however, have treated the attribution with some reserve,⁵⁴ while Stchoukine has definitively rejected it as questioning and identify the painting as a work of the Tabriz school of the 1550s.⁵⁵

Ebadollah Bahari gives an elaborate historical narrative of this miniature painting. According to him, The *Muraqq'a-i Gulshan* in the Gulistan Palace Museum Library, Tehran, is an important work because it carries an interesting inscription in Bihzād's own hand. It reads this is a work about the wonder of creation, in verification of the text, "will they not regard the camels, and how they were created?" [Qur'ān, 88.17], that the brush of the poor, broken and unfulfilled Bihzād, after reaching the age of seventy and with a wealth of experience, entered upon this matter [the illustration], as a seeker of forgiveness from God on the day of resurrection.' Here the pious Bihzād refers to the Muslim concept that on the Day of Resurrection all those who have created images will be asked to give life to

⁵⁰ . Marie Lukens Swietochowski and Sussan Babaie, *Persian Drawings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 46.

⁵¹ . Priscilla Soucek, 'B', *Encyclopedia Iranica*

⁵² Laurence Binyon, J.V.S. Wilkinson and Basil Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London: Dover Publications, 1933), pl. LXXXVII, A. 132.

⁵³ . Laurence Binyon, J.V.S. Wilkinson and Basil Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London: Dover Publications, 1933), no. 132, p. 130, 115.

⁵⁴ . B. W. Robinson, "Bihzād and His School: The Materials," *Marg* 30, no. 2 (1977): 75: "probably authentic".

⁵⁵ . I. Stchoukine, "Les peintures des manuscrits Safavides (1502-1587)", no. 38 (Paris, 1959): 26-51.

their creation, and as verily, they will fail, so they will be condemned. The artist first quotes a chapter of Qur‘ān in explanation of the illustration, and ends by asking forgiveness on the Day of Judgment.⁵⁶

This work can be dated to about 1530, and clearly shows the power of the artist even at the age of seventy, it is masterfully composed, and vigorously illustrates the drama of the situation. The brushwork is fine and delicate another setting and background in harmony with the subject. The detached old man spinning at the top left, the trees, the magpies, the jackal observing the fight from behind the hill on the right, and the hilly background all are Bihzādian in essence.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Bihzād, an innovative artist and master, has opened a way in the field of Persian painting and made a large impact on later artists in Irān, India and Turkey. After reviewing works of different scholars on Bihzād, it can be concluded, as Bihzād was a reformer, and an innovator. His work carefully preserves all the basic conventions that give Persian painting its special character and charm.

First objective of the research was to study expressionism in the portrait painting by Bihzād. In reviewing the portrait under the light of researches done by other scholars, it can be concluded that Bihzād’s work was naturally spirited and expressive, which was uncommon to Persian miniature before him. He introduced naturalism to Persian miniature, utilizing realistic gestures and expressions in his figures, and focusing more on the individual within a composition rather than filling up space with design and patterns.

While looking closely at the selected portrait, one can clearly observe Bihzād’s power of hands and his great skill in giving expression to the portrait. The expressionistic quality in miniatures was a major innovation by Bihzād.

Bihzād has studied every detail in the face; he has observed the difference of the nostrils of the *dervīsh*’s nose. In an extraordinary ornamental way he has made the fur of the coat. How correct and well drawn is every part of the body under the heavy woollen coat. How wonderfully are these eyes drawn, these looks which are absorbed by thoughts and directed inside without missing what happens around him. The whole figure is of quite monumental character. It is built up as strongly and firmly. Only one thing is not up to the mark in this portrait, are the hands, they lack details.

If one looks more carefully into the face of *dervīsh*, one can get a feel that there is still a state of liveliness predominant over the painting. “Long ago in the distant past, people had looked at portraits with awe, because they had thought that in preserving the likeness, the artist could somehow preserve the soul of the person he portrayed.”⁵⁸

Similarly, Bihzād has also successfully preserved the soul of the *dervīsh* in the portrait. So in short, in Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād’s work, expressionism is one of the most significant factors.

The second objective of the paper was to study perspective, spatial character, movement and architectural details in *Yūsuf o Zuleykhā*. Bihzād’s work reflects the essence of famous story of *Yūsuf o Zuleykhā*. Bihzād has selected the Qur‘ān story, focusing on the most critical point of climax of the story and has designed it according to the content of the story. In this painting, Yūsuf flees the advances of Zuleykhā running through an intricate

⁵⁶ . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997),

⁵⁷ . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997),

⁵⁸ . E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (Hong Kong: Phaidon, 1995), 229.

space in which the viewer is given a simultaneous interior and exterior view. Bricks, patterned tiles, Persian rugs, and steep stairwells are at once amazing and puzzling, perhaps conveying Yūsuf's own feelings as he seeks to escape from Zuleykhā. The artist allows towers and balconies to again break out of the rectangular space while also uniting the text throughout the image in the most sophisticated manner. The emphasis of the composition is on the complex architecture of the palace.

This painting has a contrasting tone; all of the rooms have different colors and patterns within them. The texture seems to be smooth. One thing that stuck out to the researcher the most was the shape of the picture; it is very geometric. Throughout the picture, there are squares, triangles, and rectangles that basically build the whole painting. The painting can be called as a Cubist masterwork centuries before Cubism.

Architecture is represented using parallel lines not by perspective lines⁵⁹ that seem to converge to a point in the space. Still there is a clear sense of the foreground and background through overlapping and diagonally projecting parallel lines. As all lines are parallel and no lines converge to a single point the illusion of depth is not created and a sense of unfolded or layered, flattened space is introduced. The lines in this painting are subtle but straight.

Movement is created by using color and positioning of the figures which leads the eye to the central drama and then around the picture. Researcher would describe the movement of this art piece to be flowing because when you look at it your eyes are automatically drawn to look through the rooms as if the figures were moving through them. The colors of this painting are quite vibrant and multiple color combinations are used. Most interesting part about this painting is the visual variety it contains. Each rooms have their own detail, some with beautiful patterns, and others with elegant calligraphy. Every room is like its own individual piece and then all put together making a very elaborate painting.

If examine the basic geometry of painting, one can see that Bihzād has placed Yūsuf and Zuleykhā at the ideal point on the right. In the miniature, figures have a relationship with the background. Before Bihzād in most miniatures, the characters were drawn in the way that no space was felt for movement or settlement in the painting. The figures were not mixed with the background as if a curtain or wall is artificially arranged behind a row of figures. In fact, the natural relation between the figures requires the creation of essential spaces for settlement and interaction. One of the significant characteristic in Bihzād's work is the development of appropriate architectural and natural spaces for interaction of figures with the background.

⁵⁹ . In the Persian Islamic miniature, perspective as a visual representation of space as seen by the human eyes from a fixed position, characterized by parallel lines seemingly converging to a "vanishing point" is not implied.

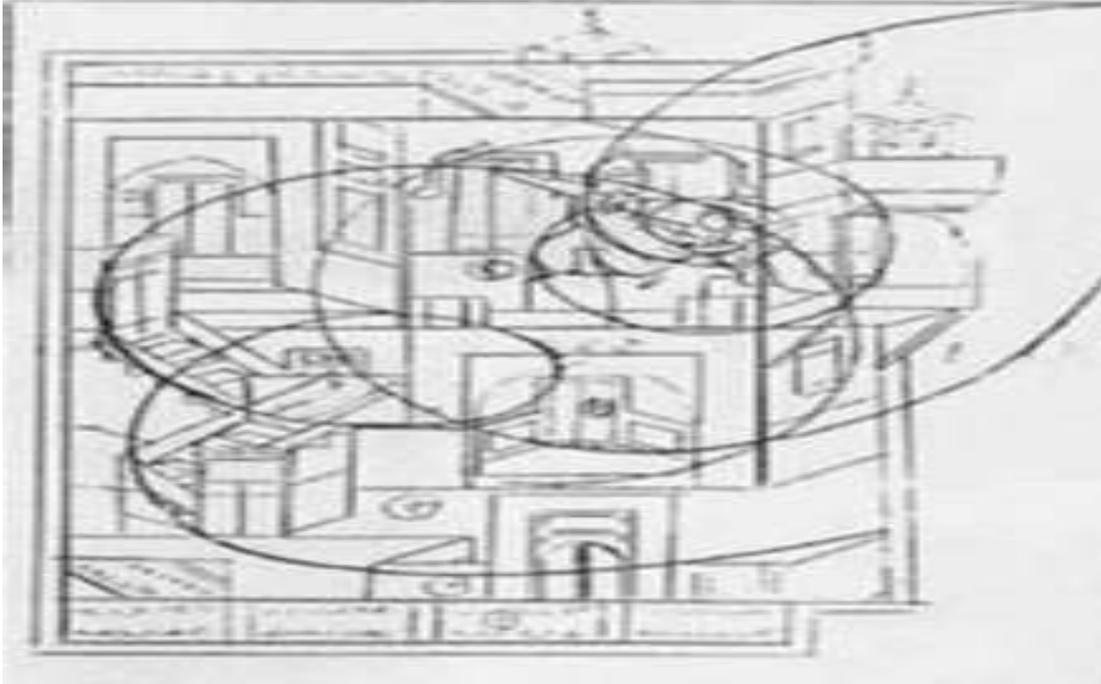


Figure 4: Formation of spiral in Yūsuf o Zuleykhā Reference: (Lar 2006)

The basic geometry and visual structure of the miniature regarding the composition of figures, the circulation of color, light and darkness are completely conformed on the spiral. The lines of composition are clearly displayed. One of the main factors which has given life, dynamism and movement to the work of Bihzād is the use of such methods and styles for creating a relationship between the architectural spaces and figures, gestures and movements. Conforming infrastructure of composition on the spiral is among the common feature in Bihzād's work, which turn the audience's eyes from outside into inside and all across the work.

Bihzād's composition, space making and stage designing in his miniature is really wonderful as compared to the ordinary methods followed in that period. The composition of the scene is placed over one and other instead of moving in depth behind each other, having a rising process. However, symbolic descriptions and in relation to the Islamic mysticism could also be given in this respect but is beyond discussion of this paper.

The third miniature *Two Camels Fighting* depicts a camel fight based upon an interesting and unusual theme. Both camels in the miniature are depicted in strict profile, and their entangled necks follow the rules of symmetry. The whole scene is represented against a landscape, while the ground of the drawing is left blank. After going through all the scholarly works related to this miniature and deeply analyzing the painting researcher will adhered to Ivan Stchoukine's view. Various features of the miniature indicate that may be it is a copy, not the original. In contrast to other versions of this subject, details have obviously been suppressed. For example not all the necessary fastenings for the saddlecloths and the camels harness have been drawn in. The drawing of the hind legs of the darker camel lacks conviction; and the inexpressive figure of the right-hand camel driver, weakly waving his stick, holds no rope, even though the position of his hands, as on the other versions of the scene, shows that he should have held one. It should also be noted that, in the light of present knowledge, Persian painters only began to give prominence to their signatures in the later sixteenth century; previously signatures are rare and are always

hidden in unnoticeable places. This miniature needs thorough examination to determine whether it has been subsequently retouched or partly repainted and also whether the inscription panel has been pasted on or is written on the same paper. Although the question of Bihzad's authorship is not the subject of this paper but the stimulus which this subject matter created was the objective to discuss this miniature.

From Bihari's book, it is evident that the frequent depictions of camel fights over a period of more than four hundred years in Persian and Mughal painting⁶⁰ is generally traced back to Bihzād's miniature of *Camels Fight*.⁶¹ The miniature may have been taken to India by Humāyūn or by one of the artists he took with him from Tabrīz; Mīr Sayyid 'Alī or 'Abd al-Šamad. As there is a copy of it made by the latter at the age of eightyfive, the copy is a mirror image of the original, with some minor changes. Nanha repeats this subject under order of Jahāngīr, and it influenced Muḥammad Sharīf (Sharīf Khān), the son of 'Abd al-Šamad.⁶² In short, the novel idea of this miniature influenced a lot of artists throughout the history to render miniatures based upon this theme.

So it can be concluded as Bihzād being an innovator gave a special attention to portraying human feelings and passions. In general, stiffness disappears, originality of composition, treatment and colour scheme returned, and naturalism increased. In particular, the human figures become individualized and a number of modifications all with a realistic trend were introduced. New themes were added to the vocabulary of Persian miniature painting. All these characteristics helped Herāt School to touch its zenith.

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⁶⁰ . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 212.

⁶¹ . Laurence Binyon, J.V.S. Wilkinson and Basil Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London: Dover Publications, 1933), pl. 87a

⁶² . Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 213.

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