

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MUGHAL FURNITURE? THE ROLE OF THE IMPERIAL WORKSHOPS, THE DECORATIVE MOTIFS USED, AND THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN MODELS

The imperial Mughal artistic ateliers were among the most productive of their time. Relatively large numbers of illustrated manuscripts, textiles, jewels, arms, and more fragile objects in glass and jade have survived and are the subjects of an increasing number of studies. Mughal woodwork, however, is not known,¹ or has yet to be identified. The same is true of Mughal furniture. Other than a few pieces classified as such in the 1930s,² and two others in 1982,³ no wooden furniture has been identified.⁴ This apparent lack of surviving furniture cannot be explained by the damaging monsoon climate of the subcontinent or by the Islamic traditions followed by the Mughals, for there is documentary and material evidence indicating that not only did their workshops produce woodwork, but at their court they used furniture both Western and Islamic. Furthermore, Mughal woodworkers also made use of the rich Mughal decorative repertoire to embellish their products, in the same fashion as did their colleagues working in other artistic industries. The purpose of this essay is to discuss the basis for these claims and to identify types of furniture and decorative motifs that may have been created or reproduced at the Mughal court.

It is commonly thought that the Islamic world has little in the way of furniture because timber was not widely available in many regions and had to be imported.⁵ In the nomadic traditions of the area, there was indeed little use for furniture in the Western sense. Nevertheless, the Islamic world did make use of furniture, especially at the privileged levels of society. Various styles of thrones and footstools, low tables, and boxes and caskets of several types were employed in the different Islamic courts. Such pieces were often produced in a variety of media, but their study has been widely neglected.⁶ One reason for this may be the scarcity of extant examples. Only a few well-known secular pieces, such as thrones⁷ and boxes or caskets,⁸ as well as various pieces of “religious” woodwork including *rahlas*⁹ and minbars,¹⁰ have also survived.

Like other Islamic dynasties, the Mughals made use of different types of wooden furniture for religious and secular purposes, but these were very seldom described. One exception is a type of cabinet in the tent of Aurangzeb, seen in 1665 by François Bernier.

They also contain what are called *karguais* or cabinets, the little doors of which are secured with silver padlocks. You may form some idea of them by picturing to yourself two small squares of our folding screens, the one placed on the other, and both tied round with a silken cord in such a manner that the extremities of the sides of the upper square incline towards each other so as to form a kind of dome. There is this difference, however, between the *karguais* and our screens, that all their sides are composed of very thin and light deal boards painted and gilt on the outside, and embellished around with gold and silk fringe. The inside is lined with scarlet, flowered satin, or brocade.¹¹

According to Brand and Lowry, during Akbar’s reign “works of wood...were produced in the imperial ateliers.”¹² One can assume, for obvious reasons, the correctness of this statement. It is well known that a great number of workshops, or *kārkhānas*, were created and maintained by Akbar. Abu ’l-Fazl is clear in this respect:

There are more than one hundred offices and workshops, each resembling a city, or rather a little kingdom; and by the unremitting attention of His Majesty, they are conducted with regularity, and are constantly increasing, their improvement being accompanied by additional care and supervision on the part of His Majesty.¹³

Regrettably, Abu ’l Fazl is less clear as to the exact purpose of these many offices and workshops. Furthermore, although a great deal has now been written about most fields of artistic production, notably those related to the arts of the book, information concerning the probable existence of imperial workshops dealing with woodwork¹⁴ is still extremely scarce.

Another author who also wrote about the royal ateliers of the Mughals was Father Antonio Monserrate, a Jesuit who lived in Fatehpur Sikri. According to him, "Studios and work-rooms for the finer and more reputable arts, such as painting, goldsmith work, tapestry-making, carpet- and curtain-making, and the manufacture of arms" were located not far from Akbar's palace at Fatehpur Sikri.¹⁵ Other ateliers that produced objects considered "less noble" also existed and possibly included one for woodwork. These must have been located in outlying parts of the city or in other areas of the country.¹⁶ The absence of explicit references to such workshops does not necessarily mean that they did not exist in this and later periods. There are, on the contrary, strong indications that they existed and indeed were responsible for the production of prized pieces of furniture, as those made for the Mughal emperors certainly would have been.

It must have been from one of these workshops that the emperor Akbar ordered a "velvet throne of the Portuguese type carried with him on a journey, [which he] very frequently uses," as noted by Monserrate in about 1580.¹⁷ It was most probably from the same workshop that Akbar also "ordered a rich cabinet to be made," in which to keep the "volumes of the Royal Bible, in four languages,"¹⁸ i.e., the Plantin Polyglot Bible, presented to him by the first Jesuit mission to the Mughal court in 1580. Records such as these reveal that Akbar had surrounded himself with artisans capable of satisfying his demands in the different artistic fields. His heir, Jahangir, also invested vast resources in the royal ateliers, which were capable of copying works in different media, including wood.¹⁹ According to Edward Terry, chaplain of Sir Thomas Roe, the coach given by the English East Indies Company to Jahangir—described by the emperor as a "Frankish carriage, which had four horses attached to it"²⁰—was "to be taken all to pieces, and to have another made by it, for they are a people that will make any new thing by a pattern."²¹

These are examples of European types of woodwork reproduced at the court, but others must have existed, as a number of miniatures reveal. The love of realism, a characteristic of the Mughal scriptorium, meant that the most diverse objects, whether common or precious, were depicted as naturalistically as possible. Among the objects often illustrated many are intrinsically Mughal, while others are clearly alien, including Chinese porcelain, Venetian glass, and often Persian rugs; they are, again, the best proof of the Mughals' cosmopolitan taste and their genuine interest in exotic

rarities, which also extended to Western furniture, as is possible to observe in contemporary miniatures.

One of the most interesting consequences of the conquest of Surat in 1573 by Akbar was the encounter of two cultures, European and Mughal. This episode began a lengthy cross-cultural relationship that first included the Portuguese and, later on, various Western powers. In fact, soon after this—around 1580—a piece of furniture of European origin appears in a miniature entitled *Birth of a Prince*, now in the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg.²² This has the same basic composition as another painting in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *Birth of Jahangir*.²³ Most relevant to the present discussion is the chair in which the highest-ranking person, possibly the queen mother, sits in the two compositions.²⁴ In each case the chair depicted, which must be understood as a throne, shows a distinctly European form²⁵ similar to examples surviving in Western and Goan collections.²⁶ It is probable that the chair-throne commissioned by Akbar had the same basic structure as these examples.

Chairs are not the only Western furniture that reached the Mughal court. Another intrinsically European type is the cabinet, widely used in Europe during the High Renaissance to store precious documents, objects, or money. By the seventeenth century cabinets had become standard items of furniture in well-to-do houses. This fashion was also observed in the *Estado da Índia*, the Portuguese State of India,²⁷ and a conspicuously large number of these cabinets have survived.

Some no doubt became the property of Mughal patrons, as at least three miniatures in the so-called *Late Shah Jahan Album* attest. In these examples, cabinets are depicted in the borders of miniatures, while the central compositions are portraits of the noblemen who apparently owned them. In the earliest miniature (ca. 1640–50), a cabinet²⁸ is used to store daggers (fig. 1),²⁹ while in the latest miniature (ca. 1650–58), also in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, a servant is depicted storing the jewelry of his master.³⁰ The two pieces reproduced present distinct features, and can be related to contemporary models. Similarly, the cabinet seen in the border of Shah Jahan's portrait in the Los Angeles County Museum is being used to store precious objects, such as jewels and daggers.³¹ These three miniatures are further proof that the upper classes of the Mughal hierarchy made use of European types of furniture, including cabinets, which stood on the floor because of the customary absence of tables.

However, Mughal rulers occasionally used tables of

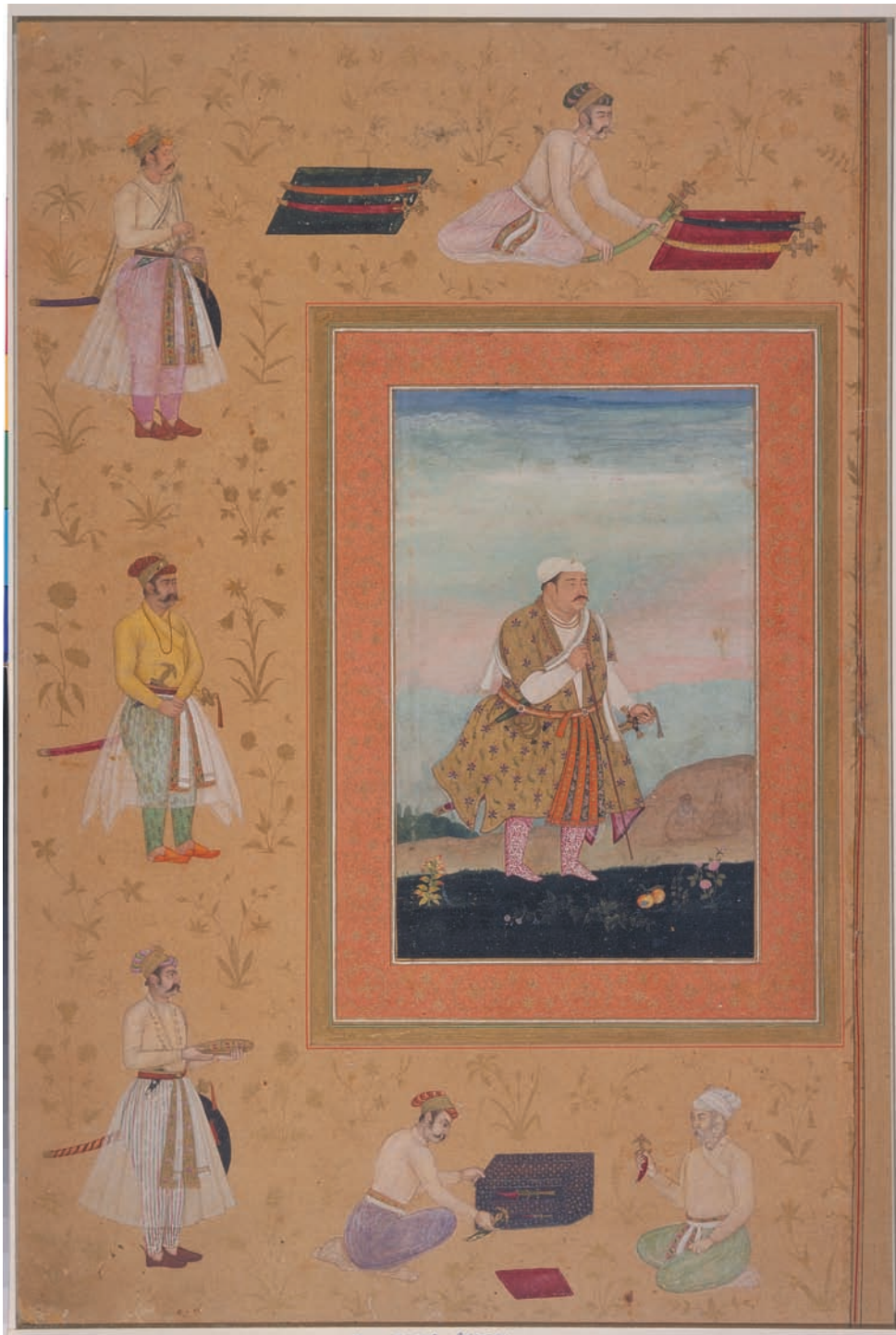


Fig. 1. Portrait of Mota Raja. Border figures attributed to Payag. From the *Late Shah Jahan Album*, ca. 1640–50. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, 7B.34. (Photo: courtesy of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin)



Fig. 2. Jahangir welcoming Shah 'Abbas. Possibly by Abu 'l Hasan, ca. 1618. From the *St. Petersburg Album*. Freer Gallery of Art. (Photo: courtesy of Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase F1942.16a)

an unambiguously European type, as two well-known miniatures show. In the earlier, *Jahangir Welcoming Shah 'Abbas* (fig. 2),³² datable to ca. 1618 and now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, a table with a square top and a central support in the form of a baluster vase is reproduced, while the slightly later (ca. 1630) *Young Prince with Sages in a Garden*, in Dublin, depicts a second table with a similar top but a more curious central column (fig. 3).³³ This type of table was in use

mainly in Italy and other European countries from the late sixteenth century onwards.³⁴

No surviving pieces of furniture from Akbar's imperial workshops have been identified. When Abu 'l-Fazl discusses thrones as insignia of royalty, he states that they were "made of gold, silver, etc.,"³⁵ and makes no specific reference to wood. However, it can be assumed that the frames of these and later thrones were made of wood,³⁶ although probably not of very high quality,



Fig. 3. A young prince with sages in a garden. Inscribed, “the work of Bichitr,” ca. 1630. From the *Minto Album*. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, ms. 7, no. 7. (Photo: courtesy of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin)

as they were intended to be plated with precious metal. As Upton and Ackerman stated in 1938, “The wooden substructures are quite ordinary and will hardly bear a critical close inspection. They [the imperial Persian and Indo-Persian thrones] are rather achievements of the jeweller’s art.”³⁷ The best example of these jeweled pieces of furniture must have been the so-called Peacock Throne, made for Shah Jahan.

The presence of foreigners at the court influenced the Mughal arts at different levels. Often the foreigners presented emperors with artifacts and novelties. Although European commodities offered by Europeans tend to be given more attention by Western scholars, the Mughal emperors also received a vast range of furniture from other regions. This was particularly the case in later periods, especially during the reign



Fig. 4. Canopy, mother-of-pearl and ebony marquetry. Interior of the tomb of Shaykh Salim al-Din Chishti, Fatehpur Sikri, ca. 1606. (Photo: P. Moura Carvalho)

of Aurangzeb. According to Manucci, the emperor received, for instance, “a small throne in appearance like a litter, a piece of Japanese work” from the Dutch ambassador,³⁸ while Bernier states that an Uzbek ambassador presented him with a palanquin and a traveling throne of Chinese or Japanese origin.³⁹ Nevertheless, from contemporary accounts, it seems that Western offerings were among the most appreciated. It is well known that occasionally the emperors received European artifacts from their officials; Jahangir, for instance, records that a “little crystal box of Frank work, made with great taste” was given to him by a local.⁴⁰ Interestingly, Western artists were also engaged in the production of pieces of furniture for the Mughals. Jahangir describes in his *Memoirs* the moment when he received from one of his officials, “a throne of gold and silver, much ornamented and decorated.... This throne had been made by a skilful European of the name of Hunarmand (skilful),⁴¹ who had no rival in the arts of a goldsmith and a jeweller, and in all sorts of skill.”⁴²

Despite the apparent lack of specific documentary sources and material evidence, one of the most splendid early Mughal buildings provides the best proof of the superior technical skills of Akbar’s woodworkers and decorators. The remarkable canopy in the interior of the white marble tomb of Shaykh Salim al-Din Chishti (d. 1571–72), located in the courtyard of the Jami’ Masjid at Fatehpur Sikri and thought to have been finished in the early years of Jahangir’s reign, ca. 1606, has survived to this day in remarkable condition. Its columns and canopy are decorated with mother-of-pearl and ebony marquetry (fig. 4), but its structure is of wood. This particular decorative technique has its origins in Gujarat.⁴³ Akbar, who in his *kitābkhāna* had artists of various origins working together, is likely to have employed specialized workmen from that region in



Fig. 5. Abu Bakr escapes from the prison to Khurasan after killing his guards (detail). Sketched and painted by Diaw Jeu Gujarati, *Timūrnāma*, late 16th c., Library of Bankipore. (Photo: after Bakhsh, *Descriptive List*, vol. 1, p. 9)

order to produce the internal decoration of the tomb of this highly revered figure. That the material that decorates the exterior of the tomb is white marble—traditionally employed on Gujarati Jain monuments—also serves to confirm the craftsmen’s origin. If this assumption is correct, then it is also probable that the same artisans produced at the court pieces of furniture decorated in this technique.

It seems unquestionable that this type of decoration was highly appreciated at the Mughal court, given the importance of Shaykh Salim al-Din Chishti. Furthermore, pieces decorated in this fashion were also used as gifts at the highest levels. In 1528–29, for instance, Babur (r. 1526–30), the founder of the Mughal empire, presented to one of his sons a “stool worked in mother-o’pearl.”⁴⁴ Decades later, in 1595, Father Pierre du Jar-



Fig. 6. Chest of wood, mother-of-pearl, and silver. Gujarat, 16th c. Museu do Tesouro da Sé, Lisbon. (Photo: courtesy of Instituto Português de Museus)

ric states that Sultan Murad when in Gujarat sent his father, the emperor Akbar, “some beautiful ornaments made of nacre.”⁴⁵

Miniatures further link this type of production with the Mughals. Visible in a little-known illustration of a *Ṭīmūr-nāma* of the Akbar period, now in the Library of Bankipore, India, is a chest decorated with what is probably a multitude of mother-of-pearl scales (fig. 5).⁴⁶ Its artist, one “Diaw Jeu Gujarati,”⁴⁷ took great care in the context in which he placed it: in a scene where a noble person, Abu Bakr, is leaving his prison in a great hurry while some of his servants pack his baggage and others carry it. In the upper right corner of the miniature, a man on his knees passes what must be a mother-of-pearl chest to another servant; meanwhile a third, who has previously taken it from the interior of the palace, watches apprehensively. The author of the miniature was, as his name indicates, from Gujarat, a region known for producing objects decorated with mother-of-pearl, which explains the inclusion of a valuable chest in a manuscript illustration.

This type of box, rectangular and with a gabled lid,⁴⁸ must have been quite prized, for similarly shaped boxes

of different sizes were exported to Europe, where relatively numerous examples datable from the early sixteenth century onwards survive. Many of them were used as reliquaries, like the large example in the Cathedral of Lisbon containing the relics of St. Vincent, the patron saint of Lisbon (fig. 6),⁴⁹ the proportions and dimensions of which are comparable to those of the chest depicted in the Bankipore miniature, suggesting that they were of the same type. The Lisbon piece, like many others, was enriched, possibly in Goa, with Renaissance silver mounts, thus accounting for its European appearance.

A final link permits us to establish that this type of furniture was indeed used by the Mughals. The interiors of many of these chests⁵⁰ are decorated, over red (lac?) backgrounds, with gilt arabesques forming medallions, similar to those reproduced, for example, on the external surfaces of several chests in a miniature, datable to about 1570 and now in the Freer Gallery of Art, from the *Ḥamzanāma*.⁵¹

THE SHARING OF IMAGERY

Relations between the artists of the *kitābhāna* and the artisans of the Mughal *kārkhanas* have yet to be fully studied. The sharing of imagery was a popular practice in Mughal India, with the same decorative motifs often inspiring the embellishment of manuscripts, textiles, and other types of art. The examination of specific pieces allows us to conclude that the furniture industry was also influenced by courtly fashions. Indeed, certain pieces invite extensive comparisons with royal works of art, thus indicating a connection between courtly models and specific production centers.

The sharing of imagery occurs not only with long-established decorative themes but also with others rather more complex and unusual. The motif of a simurgh attacking a *gaja-simha* is an excellent example of this. It has been reproduced practically unmodified⁵² in the Boston Akbari pictorial carpet,⁵³ in two miniatures—one in the British Museum and the other in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London⁵⁴—and on at least one cabinet—a large example in a Portuguese private collection.⁵⁵ The *gaja-simha* (literally, elephant-lion) is a composite winged creature with the body of a lion and the head of an elephant,⁵⁶ beasts that in Hindu mythology are synonymous with strength and sovereignty.⁵⁷ The reason for the attack by the simurgh—also known as a *rukh*, a bird of Islamic origin that supposedly could also carry an elephant while flying⁵⁸—must be connected with some sort of competition between it and the composite creature, which is depicted holding seven elephants in its claws, tail, trunk, and teeth.⁵⁹ Vaughan sees it as an “allegory of Mughal rule, symbolized by the simurgh through which good manifestly triumphs....”⁶⁰ It is unknown why the same motif appears in such distinct media, but this clearly points to a close relationship between Mughal imperial arts and other art forms such as ivory-inlaid furniture. This particular subject appears to have been reproduced only during the reigns of Akbar and Jahangir.

Less unusual is a group consisting mostly of cabinets of various forms, the decoration of which includes traditional themes of the Mughal repertoire, including mythical beasts such as the simurgh and human figures dressed after the Mughal and Portuguese fashions. The latter are mostly depicted hunting, engaged in conversation, dancing, or playing musical instruments. Color is frequently used; different woods as well as ivory inlays are often stained with red or green pigment.⁶¹

The fact that some of these pieces are also deco-

rated with *khātām-bandī* work⁶² has led several authors to attribute them to Sind.⁶³ Although this origin is widely accepted, the sources for the figural decoration available to the craftsmen are usually not discussed. The relatively large number of extant examples and the variable quality of the inlay work suggest that the models must have been widely available and were not exclusive to the Mughal court craftsmen. A large number were exported to Europe, where many survive, especially in Portugal.

In fact, their probable models were accessible to a rather large audience, as they still are. The panels in mosaics of cut glazed tiles that decorate some of the walls of the Fort of Lahore (and possibly other contemporary public buildings) may have been the inspiration behind the inlaid motifs employed in this type of furniture. These tile mosaics were first published in 1920 by Vogel,⁶⁴ who reproduced, with numbers, over a hundred panels; since then scholars have largely ignored them. The (re)construction of the fort, originally from the Ghurid period, was begun by Akbar and completed by Shah Jahan. The early phase of the work, however, was concluded in about 1625 under Jahangir; the architect was ‘Abd al-Karim Ma‘mur Khan, who is also thought to have been responsible for the mosaic panels.⁶⁵

Among the main decorative themes are scenes with humans hunting various animals (Vogel’s no. 30); felines chasing deer (nos. 41, 43, 93, 95); birds of prey pursuing other birds (no. 79); processions of humans and animals (nos. 28, 46, 94); elephant fights (nos. 1, 7, 13, 35, 47) and elephant riders (no. 14); riders on horseback (no. 29); confronted horsemen (nos. 3, 11); winged cherubs’ heads (no. 86); flying cranes (nos. 16, 22, 61, 96, 100); a figure of a European (?) wearing a short jacket, wide trousers, and a hat with a plume (no. 78), and of foreigners in other costumes (nos. 76, 77); two gladiators fighting with swords and shields (no. 37); a huqqa-smoker (no. 113); servants with fly whisks (no. 101), with an added dish of pomegranates and vase of flowers (no. 50), or candlestick (no. 53).

These panels relate to popular entertainments at the Mughal court—animal fights and hunts—often described by Abu ‘l-Fazl and European travelers. Many of these subjects also inspired the decoration of furniture. The largest known piece decorated in such fashion (fig. 7),⁶⁶ a cabinet-on-stand now in the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, perfectly illustrates this consonance in decorative themes. It is made up of two rectangular sections of similar dimensions, the top a cabinet appearing



Fig. 7. Cabinet-on-stand of wood, ivory, and metal. Northern India, early 17th c., Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, inv. no. 1312. (Photo: courtesy of Instituto Português de Museus)

to have sixteen drawers,⁶⁷ and the lower an armoire with two hinged doors. The fronts of the drawers and doors are inlaid with similar subjects: scenes of humans hunting various animals (drawers 9, 12, 14, and 15 and the lower parts of the doors); felines hunting deer (lower areas of the doors); elephant fights (drawer 10); riders (drawers 5 and 8 and lower areas of the doors); confronted horsemen (drawers 5 and 8); confronted animals (drawers 10, 11, 13, and 16 and doors); flying birds (doors); figures of Europeans (lower areas of the

doors) and locals (drawers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7); and servants holding various objects (drawers 1 and 4).

Other decorative themes observed on the Lahore tile mosaics that are not reproduced on the Lisbon cabinet but appear on related pieces include winged cherubs' heads, gladiators, birds of prey pursuing other birds, etc.⁶⁸

Besides the main consonance of decorative themes, other factors permit us to relate the Lahore tiles to this type of inlaid furniture. Notably, both are mosaics, pre-



Fig. 8. Tile mosaics, Fort of Lahore, ca. 1625. (Photo: after Vogel, *Tile-Mosaics of the Lahore Fort*, no. 11, pl. 15)

senting a fragmented surface. Both also convey a feeling of *horror vacui*; the empty spaces are always filled with stems and flowers.

Another important shared aspect is the spatial organization, which tends to symmetry, often resulting in the creation of mirror images with an imaginary central axis. This is commonly observed within single mosaic panels (e.g., fig. 8)⁶⁹ and on drawers and doors alike (fig. 7).⁷⁰ Whenever a scene is asymmetrical, the craftsmen responsible for both the furniture and the mosaics made use of a studied stratagem, thus guaranteeing an essential harmony. They achieved this balance through the creation of pendants, the scenes of which are reversed in relation to each other. The two mirror images are then placed side-by-side on the wall⁷¹ or, in the case of the furniture, following a previously established plan (fig. 7).⁷² A few pieces of furniture are decorated with asymmetrical scenes: a rare example, now in the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait,⁷³ reveals a lack of balance that has been avoided in the majority.

Another relevant link between the two types of work is the use of color. Like the Lisbon cabinet-on-stand and the Kuwait cabinet, many other pieces ornamented in this way are inlaid with stained woods and

ivory. The colors used—red and green—do not correspond to those of the mosaics—mostly blues and yellows, but also greens and reds—but they account for the livelier appearance of these pieces.⁷⁴

A final link between the decoration on the tilework and that on the inlaid furniture is a rather bizarre loss of proportion in the depiction of the motifs, visible in only a small number of cases. While in most examples the motifs are reproduced to scale—a human figure is smaller than a horse, and a horse is smaller than an elephant—craftsmen occasionally appear to have forgotten this simple principle. Panel no. 34 (fig. 9),⁷⁵ depicting two human figures of different sizes, one as tall as the elephant, is an example. The same happens in a few pieces of furniture: the pendant scenes that decorate drawers 9 and 12 of the Lisbon cabinet-on-stand are the only ones where this irregularity is observable; in this case, the hunters are taller than the elephants.

The tile mosaics therefore provide a unique and hitherto unnoticed link between Mughal art and furniture usually classified as Indo-Portuguese.⁷⁶ It is thus probable that such furniture was in fact produced both for Mughal and for export markets, as is the case with furniture decorated with mother-of-pearl.



Fig. 9. Tile mosaics, Fort of Lahore, ca. 1625. (Photo: after Vogel, *Tile-Mosaics of the Lahore Fort*, no. 34, pl. 33)

The absence of inscriptions on Mughal art objects makes it more difficult to assign them specifically to either an artist or a production center. As suggested here, it is probable that some pieces of furniture were decorated with motifs borrowed from other media; in fact, the maker of a cabinet does not necessarily have to be its designer. This is particularly relevant to furniture decorated in the so-called floral style used by craftsmen working in the various court industries. Observing the design differences and inlay work in various pieces, one can conclude that this intrinsically Mughal style was current in various production centers. When discussing a chest decorated in this style now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art,⁷⁷ Markel suggested that “wooden chests and writing cabinets were made in Western India and the Deccan...[and] their conception was influenced by the demands of Portuguese traders.” He adds that this particular piece, dated by him to the second half of the seventeenth century, “was probably intended for the Mogul court.”⁷⁸ The decoration of its upper section and sides may be directly compared with, for instance, that of inlaid or carved marble dados⁷⁹ at the Red Fort at Agra, as well as of carpets:⁸⁰ several rows of alternating flowering plants are symmetrically arranged, and all are oriented in the same direction and are within a border with a complex design of blossoms and scrolling vines.

The decoration of an extremely small group of cabinets, including one now in the Khalili Collection, London (fig. 10),⁸¹ epitomizes what must be considered the highest achievements of the Indian inlay workers.

These pieces usually have large dimensions and feature either two vertically hinged doors or fall fronts;⁸² both types open to reveal several tiers of drawers, the fronts of which are decorated with inlaid repeats consisting of one or two floral sprays of different kinds. Surprisingly, nothing of the design fluency, contours, or expressiveness of Shah Jahan-period flowers has been lost in the transfer of these motifs to ivory inlays.

As mentioned before, there is no documentary evidence for court cabinet-makers, but considering the high quality of the inlay work and the complexity of the decorative motifs on this and similarly decorated pieces made by craftsmen of superior technical skill, one wonders whether pieces such as these were not produced at the court. The small number of examples that constitute this particular group and their close affinity to one another suggest that they may all have been made in the same workshop during a limited period of time not much later than the death of Shah Jahan in 1666.

In conclusion, documentary and material evidence shows that the Mughals did make use of furniture, of not only traditional Islamic but also Western forms, including chair-thrones and cabinets. Furthermore, there are reasons to believe that the imperial workshops were also engaged in the production of wood furniture, which was often embellished using the same decorative repertoire employed in courtly art. Motifs like the simurgh attacking a *gaja-simha* and others in the “floral style” strongly suggest that woodworkers had close contacts with other, more prestigious, artistic industries. Much



Fig. 10. Cabinet of wood, ivory, and iron. Mughal India, ca. 1640. The Nasser D Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London, MXD 219. (Photo: courtesy of the Nour Foundation)

of the ivory-inlaid decoration found in furniture usually classified as Indo-Portuguese is inspired by traditional Mughal themes, such as hunting and courtly activities. Not surprisingly, the likely models for these were Mughal; the tile mosaics of the Fort in Lahore may well be their prototypes.

It seems that the supposed paucity of extant Mughal furniture is related to prejudice—for instance, the belief that Muslims do not use furniture—and to overly general classification. The Mughals definitely appreciated pieces decorated with mother-of-pearl, as well as those inlaid with ivory, as much as the Europeans did. Although most such pieces are now classified as Indo-Portuguese, it is possible that some were made as a result of Mughal commissions, substantiating once again Mughal taste for novelties of foreign origin.

The Nasser D Khalili Collection of Islamic Art
London

NOTES

1. An exception is a carved panel exhibited as having possibly belonged to a Mughal or Rajput throne. See R. Skelton et al., *The Indian Heritage: Court Life and Arts under Mughal Rule*, cat. of an exh. at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Apr. 21–Aug. 22, 1982 (London, 1982), cat. no. 543.
2. K. B. Codrington, “Mughal Marquetry,” *The Burlington Magazine* 58, 335 (Feb. 1931): 79–85.
3. Both are decorated with “Gujarati lacquer” inlaid with mother-of-pearl. For illustrations and comments, see Skelton, *The Indian Heritage*, cat. nos. 549 and 550. However, in 1985 a related piece, a *qalamdān* dated to 1587, was classified as “sultanate” (S. C. Welch, *India: Art and Culture, 1300–1900*, cat. of an exh. at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York [New York, 1985], cat. no. 82).
4. A chair on loan to the Nationalmuseum, inv. no. UU sn, and a chest in the Nationalmuseum, NM KvH 277/1907, both in Stockholm, are classified since the 1930s as late-sixteenth-century Mughal works (V. Slomann, “The Indian Period of European Furniture,” *The Burlington Magazine*, pt. 1, 65, 378 [Sept. 1934]: 113–26), but there does not appear to be any basis to this assumption. Its author made several other doubtful attributions in a series of articles that were hotly disputed at the time; lamentably these pieces—of possible German origin—are still considered to be “among the few wooden objects of

- Akbar's reign still extant" (M. Brand and G. Lowry, *Akbar's India: Art from the Mughal City of Victory*, cat. of an exh. at the Asia Society Galleries, New York [New York, 1985], pp. 116–17). More recently, in *La route des Indes: les Indes et l'Europe, échanges artistiques et héritage commun, 1650–1850*, cat. of an exh. at Musée d'Aquitaine and Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Bordeaux, Dec. 11, 1998–Mar. 14, 1999 (Paris, 1998), cat. nos. 39 and 41, both pieces were published as North Indian products made for the Swedish market. The reason for such misunderstandings appears to be based exclusively on Slomann's assumptions, for none of the authors have added any new information or attempted to justify their attributions. Slomann compared the inlaid motifs observed on both pieces to *pietra dura* work at the *hammām* of the Red Fort, Delhi. According to him, the pieces of furniture should be dated to around 1580, yet the *hammām* dates to the Shah Jahan period.
5. J. M. Rogers, "Furniture in Islam," in G. Herrmann, ed., *The Furniture of Western Asia, Ancient and Traditional: Papers of the Conference Held at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, June 28 to 30, 1993* (Mainz, 1996), p. 246.
 6. Two exceptions are the essays, "Furniture" by J. M. Upton and P. Ackerman, in A. U. Pope and P. Ackerman, eds., *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, 6 vols. (London and New York, 1939), vol. 3, pp. 2628–58; and "Furniture in Islam" by Rogers, pp. 245–51. More recently, inscribed Islamic woodwork has been analyzed in S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (New York, 1998), pp. 129–47.
 7. Including, for example, the throne presented by Shah 'Abbas to Tsar Boris Godunov in 1604, now in the Armory of the Kremlin, Moscow; or the so-called Peacock Throne of the early nineteenth century, in the Treasury of National Jewels, Tehran.
 8. Such as the carved sandalwood box made for Ulugh Beg, ca. 1420–49, in the Topkapı Saray Museum, Istanbul, inv. no. 2/1846, and the wooden casket made for Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz, ca. 970, in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, inv. no. 887.
 9. Such as that made by Hasan b. Sulayman al-Isfahani, 1360, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 10.218.
 10. Among the several surviving and dated examples is the minbar of Qarasunqur, 1299–1300, in the Great Mosque of Aleppo.
 11. F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, 1656–1668*, rev. A. Constable (London, 1891; repr. New Delhi, 1996), p. 362.
 12. Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, p. 116.
 13. Abū al-Faḍl, *The Ā'in-i Akbarī of Abū al-Faḍl*, 3 vols., trans. H. Blochmann (1873), ed. D. C. Phillott (Calcutta, 1927; repr. New Delhi, 1989), vol. 1, p. 12.
 14. Abū 'l-Faḍl lists eight kinds of wood generally used as building material but makes no references to their specific uses (*Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. 1, pp. 232–33).
 15. Antonio Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate, S. J., on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*, trans. J. S. Hoyland, annot. S. N. Banerjee, (London and Bombay, 1922; repr. Jalandhar, 1993), p. 201.
 16. Apparently during Akbar's reign the number of workshops was increased to thirty-six, located in different parts of the empire. (See J. Mittal, "Indian Painters as Designers of Decorative Art Objects in the Mughal Period," in *Facets of Indian Art, a Symposium Held at the Victoria and Albert Museum on 26, 27, 28 April and 1 May 1982*, ed. R. Skelton et al. [London, 1986], pp. 243–52, n. 21.)
 17. Monserrate, *Commentary*, p. 199.
 18. P. Du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits; an Encounter of the Jesuit Missions to the Court of Akbar by Father Pierre Du Jarric*, trans. C. H. Payne (London, 1926; repr. New Delhi, 1997), p. 19.
 19. There are several known cases of the emperors themselves urging their craftsmen and artists to copy European works of art as accurately as possible; Jahangir even boasted to Sir Thomas Roe of his subjects' skill in copying European paintings (W. Foster, ed., *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615–1619, as Narrated in His Journal and Correspondence* [London, 1899; repr. Nendelm, 1967], p. 214). This desire to imitate was not restricted to miniature paintings, but was extended to other fields. In 1580, when Akbar received the first Jesuit mission in Fatehpur Sikri, he had some of the objects that the fathers had brought from Goa, such as gold and ivory crucifixes and a gold reliquary, copied for his own personal use (Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, p. 99). This talent for copying seems to have continued in later periods; Bernier, in 1663, also praises it: "Sometimes they imitate so perfectly articles of European manufacture that the difference between the original and the copy can hardly be discerned" (*Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 254).
 20. Jahāngīr, *The Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī or Memoirs of Jahāngīr*, 2 vols., trans. A. Rogers; ed. H. Beveridge (London 1909–14; repr. New Delhi, 1978), vol. 1, p. 340.
 21. E. Terry, *A Voyage to East-India* (London, 1777), p. 367.
 22. Former Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library, Album Dorn–489. Illustrated in P. Moura Carvalho, "Goa's Pioneering Role in Transmitting European Traditions to the Mughal and Safavid Courts," in *Exotica: the Portuguese Discoveries and the Renaissance Kunstkammer*, ed. N. Vassalo e Silva and H. Trnek, cat. of an exh. at the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon (Lisbon, 2001), p. 76.
 23. *The Birth of Jahangir*, attributed to Bishandas, ca. 1620, from the *Jahāngīr-nāma*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 14.657. Illustrated in M. C. Beach, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India, 1600–1660*, cat. of an exh. at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, etc., 1978–79 (Williamstown, 1978), cat. no. 15.
 24. Beach, *Grand Mogul*, p. 63, suggested that the enthroned woman could be Hamida Banu Begum, Akbar's mother.
 25. Forms of chairs were of an importance that is now beyond our grasp (for more on the subject, see Moura Carvalho, "Goa's Pioneering Role," p. 72) and were often used as official gifts. In 1605, for example, the Portuguese offered to Shah 'Abbas a chair described as "made of gold and enamel" (P. Moura Carvalho, "A Safavid Cope for the Augustinians: Their Role as Political Ambassadors and in the Diffusion of Western Art Models in Persia," *Oriental Art* 47, 5: 18–26, p. 24).
 26. An example is illustrated in Moura Carvalho, "Goa's Pioneering Role," p. 77.
 27. *The Estado da Índia* consisted of every territory under Portuguese control, not only in Asia but also on the East African Coast, and included a network of establishments located along the coasts of the Indian subcontinent, the Bay of Bengal, Macao, and countries such as Persia, Japan, and Ceylon. From 1530 until 1961, its capital was in Goa, the seat of the viceroy/governor and the archbishop.
 28. Apparently inlaid with interlaced circles, the most common pattern in Indo-Portuguese furniture.
 29. *Portrait of Mota Raja*, ca. 1640–50, border figures attributed to

- Payag, from the *Late Shah Jahan Album*, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, lib. no. 7B.34.
30. *Portrait of Rustam Khan*, ca. 1650–58, border figures attributed to Payag, from the *Late Shah Jahan Album*, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, lib. no. 7B.35. Illustrated in L. Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, 2 vols. (London, 1995), vol. 1, p. 437. In the same border is also visible a second servant using a chest to store weapons.
 31. *Shah Jahan Holding a Jewel*, ca. 1635, from the *Late Shah Jahan Album*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, L.69.24.224. Illustrated in Beach, *Grand Mogul*, cat. no. 23.
 32. *Jahangir Welcoming Shah 'Abbas*, possibly by Abu 'l Hasan, ca. 1618, from the *St. Petersburg Album*, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 42.16A.
 33. *A Young Prince with Sages in a Garden*, inscribed "the work of Bichitr," ca. 1630, from the *Minto Album*, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, ms. 7, no. 7.
 34. For a late-sixteenth-century Tuscan example, see W. T. Gregory, *Vecchi Mobili Italiani* (Milan, 1953; repr. 1985), fig. 54.
 35. Abū al-Fazl, *Ā'im-i Akbarī*, vol. 1, p. 52.
 36. Mughal emperors, following a Timurid tradition, also made use of stone thrones, the best extant example of which is Shah Jahan's throne in the Red Fort, Delhi. But these are wide, low platforms without arms.
 37. Upton and Ackerman, "Furniture," p. 2658.
 38. Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor or Mogul India, 1653–1708*, 4 vols., trans. W. Irvine (London, 1907; repr. New Delhi, 1981), vol. 2, p. 57.
 39. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 128.
 40. Jahāngīr, *Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, vol. 1, p. 286.
 41. Thought to be "Augustin of Bordeaux" (Mittal, "Indian Painters," n. 6).
 42. Jahāngīr, *Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, vol. 2, p. 80.
 43. See S. Digby, "The Mother-of-Pearl Overlaid Furniture of Gujarat: The Holdings of the Victoria and Albert Museum" in R. Skelton, ed., *Facets of Indian Art*, pp. 213–22.
 44. Bābur, *Bābur-Nāma, Memoirs of Bābur*, trans. A. S. Beveridge (London, 1921; repr. New Delhi, 1990), p. 642.
 45. Du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits*, p. 65.
 46. *Abu Bakr Escapes from Prison to Khurasan after Killing His Guards*, sketched and painted by Diaw Jeu Gujarati, *Tīmūrnāma*, late sixteenth century, Library of Bankipore.
 47. Wali al-Dīn Khudā Bakhsh, *Descriptive List of the Photographic Reproductions of Illustrations from Three Persian Manuscripts in the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore, India*, 2 vols. (n.p., 1920), vol. 1, p. 9.
 48. The exact origin of this particular form is unknown, but by the tenth and eleventh centuries, under the Liao dynasty (907–1125), it was already being reproduced in China. Later, during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), boxes of this type continued to be produced as sutra containers. High-quality lacquered and inlaid boxes were made in Korea during the Koryo period (918–1392) for the same purpose. The form also traveled to Islamic lands, as illustrated by the carved wooden box made in Central Asia for Ulugh Beg between ca. 1420 and 1449, now in the Topkapı Saray Museum, Istanbul, inv. no. 2/1846.
 49. Museu do Tesouro da Sé, Lisbon, no inventory number.
 50. Seen, for example, in the small casket in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, F30c10.
 51. *Baba Junayd is Rude to 'Umar and Turns Him Away from the Caravanserai despite Nu'man's Entreaties*, ca. 1570, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, F.1981.11, illustrated in J. Seyller, *The Adventures of Hamza*, cat. of an exh. at the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2002 (Washington, DC, 2002), cat. no. 37.
 52. Not only are they shown holding the same number of animals, but the position of the figures and their proportions and general characteristics present a striking resemblance, indicating that they probably had a common source, which may have been the royal workshops.
 53. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 93.1480. Illustrated in D. Walker, *Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era*, cat. of an exh. at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Nov. 20, 1997–Mar. 1, 1998 (New York: 1997), fig. 29.
 54. Album leaf, 17th c., British Museum, London, inv. no. 1920.9–17.0216. A second example, *The Simurgh Attacks a Gaja-Simha Carrying off Seven Elephants*, ca. 1600–20, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IM 155-1914, and is illustrated in Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, fig. 30.
 55. Illustrated in F. H. Raposo, "O encanto dos contadores Indoportugueses," in *Indo-Portuguesemente, Oceanos* 19/20 (Sept.–Dec., 1994): 16–32, p. 24.
 56. Although the origin of the motif is unknown, it was clearly acknowledged by the Indians before the arrival of the Mughals. A composite creature with the head of an elephant and the body of a lion (without wings) is now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 07.8; carved from a single elephant tusk in Orissa during the thirteenth century, it is supposedly one of the four legs of a throne.
 57. Margaret Stutley, *The Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography* (London, 1985), p. 45.
 58. *Encyclopædia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden, 1960–), vol. 8, p. 595.
 59. An even more complex interpretation of the theme consists of a simurgh holding four other elephants while catching a *gaja-simha*. This latter motif does not appear on furniture, and it is also less frequently reproduced in other materials. It can be seen, for example, in a Patna school (?) miniature of the eighteenth century, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 26.51.
 60. Philippa Vaughan, "Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions," in *Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art*, ed. S. P. Verma (Mumbai, 1999), pp. 55–68, pp. 63, 66.
 61. The technique for staining ivory used by the Mughals is known to us through the *Majmū'at al-ṣanā'iyi*, a "Collection of Recipes" copied several times. According to its unknown author, the ivory pieces "should be immersed in a solution of the dye dissolved in curd"; to stain ivory in green and red, the two colors normally employed in the decoration of furniture, artisans used, respectively, verdigris and lac. (Y. Porter, "A Curious Book of Recipes," *Marg* 47, 1 (1995): 81–83, pp. 81–82).
 62. A micro-mosaic work of Iranian origin, known in India as *sadeli*.
 63. See, for example, *Art and the East India Trade*, exhibition booklet, Victoria and Albert Museum (London, 1970), no. 10; and J. Guy and D. Swallow, eds., *Arts of India: 1550–1900* (London, 1990), fig. 35.
 64. J. Vogel, *Tile-Mosaics of the Lahore Fort* (Karachi, 1920).

65. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 5, p. 600.
66. Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, inv. no. 1312 Mov.
67. Although the decoration suggests sixteen drawers, there are, in fact, only twelve, for some are double: the fronts of four drawers are decorated as if they were two. In order to facilitate this discussion, however, they are referred to as if there were sixteen (counted from 1 to 16, left to right and top to bottom).
68. More unusual are pieces decorated with peris, or Persian fairies/angels, which appear on several panels at the fort (nos. 15, 40, 42, 58, 80) and are also reproduced in at least one cabinet, a small example attributed to a seventeenth-century Sind workshop, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. no. 1598–1903. In contrast, single dragons or dragons fighting with simurghs, also depicted on the tiles (nos. 26, 92), are rarely employed in the decoration of furniture.
69. Vogel, *Tile-Mosaics*, no. 11, pl. 15.
70. Besides the decoration of the doors, this organization is observed on drawers 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 16.
71. For an example of two panels of elephants forming a mirror image, see B. Gascoigne, *The Great Moghuls* (London, 1971; repr. 1985), pp. 172–73.
72. Comparison of drawer 1 with 4, 2 with 3, and 9 with 12 shows how non-symmetrical scenes become balanced and form mirror images with their pendants. There is a single and inexplicable exception to this rule: drawers 10 with 11. (The drawers cannot be arranged in a different way because some of them are either horizontally or vertically double.)
73. National Museum, Kuwait, inv. no. LNSI. Illustrated in M. Jenkins, *Islamic Art in the Kuwait National Museum, the Al-Sabah Collection* (London, 1983), p. 123.
74. Possibly because of technical problems in staining woods and ivory with colors other than red and green.
75. Vogel, *Tile-Mosaics*, no. 34, pl. 33.
76. Designated as such for their shapes, mounts and/or decorative motifs showing strong European influence, introduced initially by the Portuguese.
77. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1976.176.1. Illustrated in S. Markel, "Jades, Jewels, and Objets d'art," in P. Pal et al., *Romance of the Taj Mahal*, cat. of an exh. at Los Angeles County Museum of Art (London and Los Angeles, 1989), pp. 128–69, cat. no. 161.
78. Markel, "Jades," pp. 152, 154.
79. Ca. 1628–35. For an illustration see, for instance, R. Nath, "Flora and Fauna in Mughal Architecture," in Verva, *Flora and Fauna*, pp. 149–60, fig. 9.
80. Such as a carpet with a floral pattern, ca. 1650, made in northern India (Lahore or Kashmir). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1970.321. For an illustration, see Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, fig. 93.
81. The Nasser D Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London, MXD 219.
82. Another example is in the Museu de Arte Sacra, Funchal, inv. no. 1418.