

West-östlich diplomacy and connoisseurship in the late Habsburg Empire: Baron Albert Eperjesy and his dispersed collection of Persian art

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Introduction

This study aims to introduce the connoisseurship of a man who has hardly ever been discussed in the context of Persian art collecting (and very rarely in any other context), yet whose activities deserve attention on several accounts. Firstly, the Eurasian breadth of his dispersed collection finds few parallels in late nineteenth-century Austria-Hungary. Moreover, to narrow down this comprehensive ensemble to its Persian component, one finds it to have been an early instance of a Central European private collection in which the taxonomical distribution of the branches of Persian art foreshadows twentieth-century scholarly concepts. Thirdly, the collector typifies the social behaviour of a small and little-known, yet significant elite group of Austro-Hungarian collector-diplomats at the crossroads of public representation and private grandeur.

Albert – or Béla – Eperjesy von Szászváros und Tóti (1848, Nagyszeben/Herrmannstadt [now Sibiu, Romania]–1916, Vienna) was one of several Hungarian bureaucrats whose career paths commenced with the establishment of the Joint Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867) and remained inseparable from it almost until the collapse of the Empire and its ministries in 1918.¹ Hailing from a Transylvanian noble family (and eventually elevated to the rank of a Hungarian baron for his thirty years in service), he was a representative of Habsburg courtiers who did not regard their service at court merely as a prerogative but put a premium on professional training as well. His training took place in the Imperial-Royal Oriental Academy (K. k. Akademie für Orientalische Sprachen), the curriculum of which traditionally included Arabic,

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¹ The branch of the Eperjesy family to which Albert Eperjesy belonged was granted landed property at Szászváros/Broos (now Orăștie, Romania) and Tótfalu (now Sârbi, Romania) in the sixteenth century. For a summary of his professional career, see Zsolt Szabó, *Der Anteil des ungarischen Adels an der gemeinsamen österreich-ungarischen Außendienst, 1867–1895*, doctoral dissertation, University of Innsbruck, 1967, 308–318. See also the essays in Oliver Rathkolb (ed.), *Festschrift 250 Jahre. Von der Orientalischen zur Diplomatischen Akademie in Wien*. Innsbruck, Bozen, Vienna and Munich: Studien Verlag, 2004.

Ottoman Turkish, and Persian, beyond the standard European languages.² Eperjesy's diplomatic skills earned him a series of prestigious diplomatic postings in Constantinople (1872–1878), Berlin (1878–1882), Rome (1882–1887), Brussels (1890–1894), prior to his stay in Tehran between 1895 and 1901, followed by Lisbon (1902–1905) and Stockholm (1905–1909). During these tenures, he amassed an impressive collection of artworks. Although the range of works of art available to him was largely determined by his constant mobility, while his sudden death at the age of sixty-eight did not allow him to enjoy retirement and become a specialist in a given artistic period, school, or region, yet the few publications about highlights of his collection and his efforts to document his holdings show Eperjesy to have had scholarly ambitions.³ More importantly, his versatile connoisseurship enhanced his ability to act as a worthy representative of the Dual Monarchy at whichever legation he appeared.

Apart from a few diplomatic almanacs and inventory entries, Albert Eperjesy's name was barely mentioned until, in 2015, a compelling and highly informative personal account about the Eperjesy family's nineteenth-century opulence and twentieth-century tragedy was published in the Netherlands.⁴ Albert Eperjesy is but one of the many characters in the book, but it sheds light on him and his interest in art, with an emphasis on his European Renaissance connoisseurship. It recounts his marrying the daughter of an already deceased Prussian royal lieutenant general of partial Portuguese origin, Armgard / Irmgard Lobo da Silveira, Countess Oriola (1856–1938). This marriage earned Eperjesy a solid financial position and important court relations with Berlin. A foreign spouse did not cause problems for the young would-be diplomat: it was no less a figure than Count Gyula Andrassy, the minister of foreign affairs of the Dual Monarchy (in office 1871–1878) and an architect of the Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich*, who assisted in the arrangement of the marriage and appointed his young underling Eperjesy as ambassadorial secretary before the Berlin Congress of 1878.⁵ The couple met there for the first time at a ball under the auspices of Andrassy and they married three years later. From Berlin, they moved to Rome, Eperjesy's next post and his first ambassadorial assignment, where their son was born in 1882. The boy's very 'Magyar' and even Orientalist, name, Árpád, defies his Prussian lineage and evokes his father's patriotism.⁶

² Heinrich Barb, *Über die Zwecke der k. u. k. Orientalische Akademie*, Vienna, 1876; for its principles, foundation, and early history, see: Karl Roeder, 'The Oriental Academy in the Theresienzeit', *Topic*, 34, Autumn 1980, 19–28.

³ Robert Cust, 'A bronze crucifix attributed to Benvenuto Cellini in the collection of H. E. le Baron A. Eperjesy de Szászváros et Toti', *Burlington Magazine*, 17: 89, August 1910, 298–299.

⁴ Olga Majeau, *Een schitterend isolement: Een familiegeschiedenis*, Amsterdam: Querido, 2015 (German version: *Brosamen für den blauen Vogel: Bettina von Arnim und ihre Nachfahren: Eine europäische Familiengeschichte*, Munich: Btb, 2016).

⁵ Éva Somogyi, *Magyarok a bécsi hivatanokvilágban: A közös külügyminisztérium magyar tisztviselői, 1867–1914*, Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Történettudományi Intézet, 2017, 124; Majeau, *Een schitterend isolement*, 187.

⁶ The name of Árpád, the Mediaeval Hungarian conqueror of the Carpathian Basin (r. ca. 1895–907), suddenly regained popularity in the decades leading up to the Millennial

Rome was followed by Brussels and Madrid, after which he was posted to Tehran as minister plenipotentiary between 1895 and 1901.⁷ From there the family moved to Lisbon between 1902 and 1905, and then, until his retirement, to Sweden between 1905 and 1909.

An Austro-Hungarian connoisseur of Persian Art in Tehran

Established in 1872, the permanent Austro-Hungarian legation in Persia had seen ambassadors and consuls of Hungarian ethnicity before Eperjesy. Between 1890 and 1893 Sigismund (or Zsigmond) Rosty (1843–1893) filled the position: he died during his tenure in Vienna where he travelled from his post to seek medical treatment.⁸ The consulship of his compatriot Béla Rakovszky (1860–1916) overlapped Rosty's ambassadorship, lasting between 1888 and 1892.⁹ All three men were notable collectors, yet Rakovszky was the most strongly dedicated to Persian art.¹⁰ He differs from other career diplomats in that his interest in Persian culture preceded his professional life by decades: at 13, he wrote a letter to a notable linguist asking for help with his plans to learn Arabic, Turkish and Persian.¹¹ Once his Tehran assignment finished, he would return to Persia two more times, including once for a special art collecting expedition (1894–1895) during which his nonchalant attitude in Kirman made a strong impression on British consul Percy Sykes (1867–1945) and his wife Ella (1863–1939), the only other Europeans in the remote south-east of Persia.¹²

Regarding Rosty's lesser-known collecting activities, there is data which shows that he was granted by the ministry a stunning amount of 13,700 Gulden under the title 'resettlement and operating allowance' on top of his regular ambassadorial salary (6,300 Gulden) to facilitate his relocation from his previous station in Cairo.¹³ The rationale behind this generosity can be explained by the pressure on both the ambassador and his sending country to display adequate representation commensurate with the shah's court and the pomp of the more

festivities of the Hungarian conquest in 1896. Another sign of Árpád Eperjesy's patriotic upbringing is that he completed his intercontinental studies in Budapest. Somogyi, *Magyarok*, 187.

⁷ He arrived in Persia in 1896.

⁸ Somogyi, *Magyarok*, 99. Somogyi's claim that he died in Tehran is erroneous (cf. *Vasárnapi Ujság* 40: 32, 6 August 1893, 545).

⁹ Somogyi, *Magyarok*, 158.

¹⁰ Iván Szántó, 'Béla Rakovszky and the Import of Islamic Arts in Bosnia and Herzegovina', in Haris Dervišević and Kenan Šurković, *Radovi s međunarodnog simpozija Islamska umjetnost u Bosni i Hercegovini održanog u Sarajevu, 25. oktobra 2017*, 97–108, Sarajevo: el-Kalem, 2021; Iván Szántó, 'Rakovszky Béla perzsiái fényképei a Hansági Múzeumban', *Moson Megyei Múhely*, 21, 2018 (= 2019), 117–138; Iván Szántó, 'Persian Art for the Balkans in Austro-Hungarian Cultural Policies', in Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó (eds.), *The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, 130–154.

¹¹ This precocious and highly untypical interest might have been part of a plan to make him a desirable candidate for the Oriental Academy and diplomatic service. Szántó, 'Rakovszky Béla perzsiái fényképei', 118.

¹² Iván Szántó, 'Béla Rakovszky and the Import of Islamic Arts', 100–102.

¹³ Somogyi, *Magyarok*, 244.

established great powers. Solid financial standing, noble descent, and appropriate spouse were thus almost mandatory but not sufficient requirements for an ambassador and from this viewpoint collecting, too, was less an individual pastime than an obligation for the envoy.¹⁴ It cannot be excluded that Eperjesy, at least partly, 'inherited' the personal effects of Rosty which he left behind at the embassy; at any rate, it is evident that the boundary between personal estates and official representation could be quite blurred at times of staff reshuffling. During the short interim period between Rosty and Eperjesy, Franz Freiherr Schießl von Perstorff (1844–1932) was appointed as ambassador (1894–1895) who had been overseeing the opening of the embassy two decades earlier (in 1872) as secretary: he may also have contributed to the fluctuation of objects between the Qajar and Habsburg Empires.¹⁵

Some details about the Eperjesys' life in Persia are known from two kinds of sources. The first is his correspondence with the Joint Ministry of Foreign Affairs (now at the Archives of the Imperial House, Court, and State in Vienna), as well as a few private letters.¹⁶ These official documents say next to nothing about his collecting activity. More relevant are the published letters of the young Árpád Eperjesy's private tutor, Michael Fuss (1870–?), who accompanied the family to Tehran.¹⁷ Sent to his mother in Transylvania, these letters allow a glimpse of the life at the residence. We know from Fuss that in 1897 Eperjesy decided to move from the crammed and dusty ambassadorial residence in Qulhak to the mid nineteenth-century garden complex of Bagh-i Firdaws in the village of Tajrish, north of Tehran. The main edifice in the garden, the Europeanizing villa in its centre was entirely refurbished in the late Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–1896) period by Mu'ayyir al-

¹⁴ Collector diplomats and dragomans in the Habsburg Empire and German states who specialised themselves in Islamic arts are known at least since the seventeenth century, although they would become more common in the second half of the 1700s. It should be noted, however, that there are numerous examples of diplomats who do not seem to have left behind significant collections. Christoph Rauch, 'The Oriental Manuscripts and Albums of Heinrich Friedrich von Diez and the Perception of Persian Painting in His Time', in Julia Gonnella, Friederike Weis, and Christoph Rauch (eds.), *The Diez Albums: Contexts and Contents*. Brill: Leiden, 2017, 74–117; Anna Contadini, 'Changing Perceptions of Middle Eastern Objects and Cultures in Eighteenth-Century Europe', in Isabelle Dolezalek and Mattia Guidetti (eds.), *Rediscovering Objects from Islamic Lands in Enlightenment Europe*, New York and London: Routledge, 2022, 23–54.

¹⁵ *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon, 1815–1950*, Vienna: Institut Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon vol. 10: 47, 1991, 118.

¹⁶ Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Administrative Registratur, Fach 4, Karton 83; the private correspondence is discussed in Majeau, *Een schitterend isolement*, 120–121 and plates between pages 184 and 185.

¹⁷ Paul Brusanowski, 'Ein Hermannstädter Theologieprofessor als Privatlehrer der Kinder des österreichisch-ungarischen Botschafters in Teheran, Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde*, 51, 2008, 133–150; Árpád's Hungarian tutor, Béla Mihalovits (1875–1904), also provides some information about the family in his travelogue; see Béla Mihalovits, *Egy év Perziában, Úti és néprajzi vázlatok tizenkét fölvetelben*, Székelyudvarhely: Becsek D. Fia, 1903.

Mamalik [Mirza Dust-‘Ali Khan Nizam al-Dawla, died 1890].¹⁸ As architectural supervisor of the capital, Mu‘ayyir al-Mamalik was also instrumental in the establishment of the Shams al-‘Imara, the most ‘European-looking’ palace of the shah. Mu‘ayyir al-Mamalik was not only an important builder but he, along with other members of his eponymous lineage, was counted among the leading art patrons and collectors in Qajar Tehran.¹⁹ According to Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin (1837–1914), the first US Minister in Iran (in office 1883–1885), Mu‘ayyir al-Mamalik was ‘a patron of the arts, with a feeling for the beautiful akin to a genius. He constructed one of the most magnificent country-seats of the world in the suburbs of Teherân, and collected some of the finest examples of the pictorial, glyptic, and calligraphic arts of ancient Persia’.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, Fuss was also spellbound by the Mu‘ayyir al-Mamalik complex, as he described it in paradisiacal terms in a letter dated September 1897, outlining its splendid terraces, plane trees, brooks, meadows, and refined, semi-rural parklands, in addition to the splendid views towards the snow-capped mountains northwards, and the wide plain dotted with villages in the south, towards the hills around Shah ‘Abd al-‘Azim.²¹ He also gave a detailed account of the layout of the central edifice, including its plan, the carpet-like stucco decoration of its ceiling, and the gilt wallpapers throughout the interior. Fuss stayed in a one-room private house inside the compound, overlooking the palace. He believed it to have been built for a favourite.

We know from Fuss that Persia’s new strongman, Sardar-i Akram (Minister of War) ‘Abd al-Husayn Mirza Farmanfarma (1857–1939), who was both a nephew and a son-in-law of Muzaffar al-Din Shah (r. 1896–1907), used to frequent the legation as well as the villa for lunch and dinner with Eperjesy.²² For instance, on Christmas Day 1896, he was the guest of the Austrian legation, while his three well-educated sons were brought by their French governess (Madame Lumousin) to play with Árpád. Prince Farmanfarma, a protagonist in Persian politics during the waning decades of the Qajar Dynasty, was described by Colonel Vladimir A. Kosogovskiy (1857–1918), the extremely spiteful commander of the shah’s private Cossack Brigade, as a man ‘short of stature, (...) short sighted [and wearing] thick glasses and (...) the navy-coloured uniform of the Hungarian cavalry which has

¹⁸ On the dynasty and its summer and winter residences in Tehran, see Manoutchehr M. Eskandari-Qajar, ‘Dust ‘Ali Khan “Mo‘ayyer al-Mamalek”: Scion of a once powerful family; witness to the end of an era’, *Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia*, 5–6, 2021, 175–213.

¹⁹ Dust-‘Ali Khan Mu‘ayyir al-Mamalik, ‘Rijal-i ‘asr-i nasiri,’ *Yaghma* 10 (1957), 168–175, concerning the painters’ atelier which was established at the Bagh-i Firdaws, and which could probably have been the home of Fuss.

²⁰ Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin, *Persia and the Persians*, London: John Murray, 1887, 206–207.

²¹ Brusanowski, ‘Ein Hermannstädter Theologieprofessor’, 138.

²² Brusanowski, ‘Ein Hermannstädter Theologieprofessor’, 148.

been customary since 1858 for Iranian officers (...); badly tailored (...), and a medallion of the shah's portrait.'²³

A photograph of Eperjesy shows him wearing the same order, the *Nishan-i timthal-i humayuni*, an insignia with the royal effigy of Muzaffar al-Din Shah (tied with a blue velvet ribbon) (fig. 1).²⁴



Figure 1. Albert Eperjesy wearing the *Nishan-i Timsal-i Humayuni* with the first class of the *Shir u Khurshid*. Photograph, ca. 1910, private collection, from Olga Majeau, *Een schitterend isolement: Een familiegeschiedenis*. Amsterdam: Querido, 2015, 184.

Studded with diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, this order was intended for the highest local and foreign dignitaries and was awarded with the sash (*hamayil*). Eperjesy also seems to have received the first-class insignia of the Lion and Sun: a large eight-pointed plate of the Grand Cross in cast, chiselled and faceted silver. We know that these were deposited, among many of his most valued treasures, in the vault of the Anglo-Österreichische Bank (Anglobank) in Vienna on 2 November 1916 after his sudden death on 18 August that same year.²⁵ Their current whereabouts are unknown.

During most of Eperjesy's tenure, a precarious calm reigned over Persia. The new ambassador's first task was to condole with Muzaffar al-Din Shah over the death of his father who was assassinated while Eperjesy was already on his way to Tehran. Still, the Muzaffar al-Din Shah period was a decade of relative calm, except for its last year, by which time Eperjesy had left not only Persia but also Portugal and he had been in Stockholm. The unrest of the so-called constitutional movement

²³ Mansoureh Ettehadieh, *The Lion of Persia. A Political Biography of Prince Farmān-Farmā*, Cambridge, MA: Ty Aur Press, 2012.

²⁴ Majeau, *Een schitterend isolement*, plates between pages 184 and 185.

²⁵ Elfriede Zöggeler Gabrieli, "'Das Schönste von allem': Albert Eperjesy und die Wehrburgsammlung', *Der Schlern*, 90: 9, September 2015, 9–11.

was yet to begin. In the royal library, Mirza ‘Ali Lisan al-Dawla (c. 1862–c. 1920) was already the all-powerful chief librarian, having arrived from Tabriz with the new shah. It is unclear, however, whether he had already embarked on his notorious smuggling of manuscripts and paintings which would become the subject of the first official investigation of heritage mismanagement in Iran, launched by the Majlis in 1909.²⁶ But this trade seems to have gained momentum in the last years of Muzaffar al-Din Shah by which time Eperjesy had left the country. In other words, Eperjesy’s collection was formed just *before* the first major outflow of Persian artifacts to Europe. Although there is no material evidence that links specific items with the royal library or princely collections comparable to the Mu‘ayyir al-Mamalik collection, there is reason to assume that the finest objects, especially book art, probably originated from one of these libraries.

Eperjesy’s collection included Persian carpets and textiles, metalwork, ceramics, arms and armour, and the arts of the book, amid his even larger set of European Old Masters and antique sculpture which included paintings by Giovanni Santi (1435–1494), Guercino (1591–1666), and a crucifix attributed to Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571) which he himself arranged for publication in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1910.²⁷

According to his estate inventories and the old photographs depicting the castle interiors, he owned numerous Persian and Turkish carpets as well as textiles, including one ‘from the Isfahan palace of Shah ‘Abbas the Great 1590’.²⁸ A photograph of Eperjesy’s son, Árpád, shows him in Tehran wearing a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Persian steel helmet (*kulah khud*).²⁹ Three similar but not identical items have found their way to the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (inv. nos. 6134–6136), besides some old Iranian firearms, powder horns, and other weaponry, via the widow of Geheimrat (privy councillor) Carl Mügge (d. 1935) who had acquired lots of artworks from cash-strapped Armgard Eperjesy.³⁰ Some Persian arms are still preserved at Wehrburg castle in South Tyrol, attesting to the retired

²⁶ Nader Nasiri-Moghaddam, ‘L’affaire du vol de la Bibliothèque royale du Palais du Golestan à Téhéran, ca. 1907’, *Studia Iranica*, 32, 2003, 137–147; Fatima Qaziha, ‘Mirza ‘Ali Lisan al-Dawla, Taraj-i Mirat-i Maktub’, *Bukhara*, 14: 82, 1390 / 2011, 138–155.

²⁷ For a transcript of various estate inventories taken after his death and preserved in the Südtiroler Landesarchiv, Bozen, in a dossier Eperjesy, see Zöggeler Gabrieli, ‘“Das Schönste von allem”’, 21–43; for the crucifix, see Cust, ‘A Bronze Crucifix’, 298–299. This short note, quoting a description of the object written by Eperjesy in French, finds it ‘difficult to deny that the attribution to Cellini is not altogether unreasonable.’

²⁸ Zöggeler Gabrieli, ‘“Das Schönste von allem”’, 30, inv. no. 134; Majeau, *Een schitterend isolement*, plate between pages 184–185. It is unclear whether this attribution and date were inscribed on the object or derived from elsewhere. Spurious attributions of artifacts to the most popular ruler of Persia are known since the seventeenth century.

²⁹ Majeau, *Een schitterend isolement*, plate between pages 184–185.

³⁰ Objects from the Eperjesy collection in Berlin are between inv. nos. 6134 and 6162. They were acquired from the widow of ‘Geheimrat Mügge’ in 1935 (I am grateful for Martina Müller-Wiener for this information); for details about the Mügge acquisition and its links to Wehrburg, see Zöggeler Gabrieli, ‘“Das Schönste von allem”’, 18–20, 47 n. 54, see also figs. 15–17b.

former ambassador's short overlordship there. Another surviving item is a lacquered mirror case that was donated by Eperjesy to the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest in 1898 when he was imperial minister in Tehran.³¹ This modest object is the only Persian artwork known to have been sent by him to a public collection.

Perhaps the most significant part of the former Eperjesy collection is the section of book paintings. A single painting was published as early as 1914 by Philipp Walter Schulz (1864–1920) in his seminal *Die persisch-islamische Miniaturmalerei*.³² Schulz reproduced this illustration as a cut-out devoid of text, and mistakenly described it as a 'Herat School' painting from the fifteenth century. An archival photograph preserved in Trento proves that Eperjesy possessed other, unpublished, paintings from the same manuscript (fig. 2).³³ This photograph depicts a composite artwork which was created by combining five illustrated folios, two text pages, and two sections of illuminated margins, mounted on a carved and painted wooden frame.



Figure 2. Photograph depicting an enframed set of detached folios from a manuscript of the *Khamsa* of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi, 1910s. Trento, Museo Castello del Buonconsiglio, Archivio fotografico, Runkelstein album no. 2, photograph no. 400. Photograph © Museo Castello del Buonconsiglio.

³¹ Inv. no. 27701. Béla Kelényi and Iván Szántó (eds.), *Artisans at the Crossroads: Persian Arts of the Qajar Period (1796–1925)*, Budapest: Museum of Applied Arts, 2010, cat. no. C.2.2.2..

³² Philipp Walter Schulz, *Die persisch-islamische Miniaturmalerei*, Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1914, plate N, fig. 2.

³³ Trento, Castello del Buonconsiglio, Archivio fotografico, Runkelstein album no. 2 (dal 302 al 603), photograph no. 400; these may be identical with inv. no. 359 („6 persische Miniaturen unter Glas“) of a 1921 inventory in Bozen, see Zöggeler Gabrieli, “Das Schönste von allem“, 40, as well as the miniatures that were still in Bozen in 1922, Zöggeler Gabrieli, “Das Schönste von allem“, 16.

The *misra* 's (hemstitches) from a *ghazal* of Hafiz that are running along the nineteenth-century frame have little apparent connection to the manuscript fragments inside the frame.³⁴ These folios derive from an unknown manuscript of the *Hasht Bihisht*, i. e., one of the five *mathnavis* (narrative poems) which constitute the *Khamsa* of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi (1253–1325).³⁵ Representing a transitional style between earlier Timurid traditions and an emerging Safavid idiom, the paintings are datable to the early sixteenth century. One scene depicts the ancient king Bahram Gur in the Third (or Za'farani) Pavilion with the princess of Nimruz. With the help of this painting, the unnamed scene in Schulz's book can be ascribed to the same manuscript. Two remarks are to be made here: firstly, the existence of published items from the former Eperjesy collection, such as this one or the Cellini crucifix in the *Burlington Magazine*, demonstrates Eperjesy's keenness to promote his collection and document it via photographs already before WW1. This complicates the supposition that all photographs were ordered by his heirs towards the end of the war when (in 1917) they prepared an inventory for precautionary reasons.³⁶ Secondly, the inscribed late-Qajar wooden frame requires attention: it was made to display the folios like an easel painting, providing a rare visual proof for the existence of a practice in late nineteenth-century Persia that is usually associated with twentieth-century European dealers and connoisseurs. Although the neat *nasta'liq* script on the frame strongly suggests the conclusion that the rearrangement was made in Persia, the idea of putting detached manuscript folios on a wall might have been less compatible with Persian tastes. Thus, the framed composition might well have been custom-made in Persia for a European. Given that both text-only folios in this composite artwork (containing the opening verses of the *Matla'-'i Anvar*, another *mathnavi* from the same *Khamsa*) appear to have been damaged, the mutilation could have occurred in order to prop up marketable portions of a manuscript which was already falling apart. A somewhat similar *Khamsa* of Amir Khusraw was probably copied in Balkh in 1503 or 1504 and its Safavid-style paintings completed in Western Iran after the Safavid capture of Balkh (1510). This manuscript reached Europe in the first years of the twentieth century: acquired by the French collector and historian Arthur Sambon (1867–1947), it would disintegrate into unframed bits soon thereafter.³⁷

³⁴ *Niyazmand-i bala gu rukh az ghubar mashuy, ki kimiya-yi murad ast khak-i kuy-i niyaz. Bi yak-du qatra ki ithar kardi, ay dida, bisa bar rukh-i dawlat kuni kirishma-yi naz* (To the indigent man of calamity, say: 'From dust, wash not thy face.' For the dust of the street of indigency is the alchemy of thy desire. O eye! With drops one or two that thou scatteredest, O many the glance and the look that, on the face of fortune, thou castedest). Translation by Henry Wilberforce Clarke. It cannot be ruled out, however, that the reference to 'dust' may subtly allude to the fate of material wealth. I am grateful to Paul Babinski for this suggestion.

³⁵ Barbara Brend, *Perspectives on Persian Painting: Illustrations of Amir Khusrau's Khamsah*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

³⁶ Majeau, *Een schitterend isolement*, 177–182.

³⁷ Brend, *Perspectives*, 2003, 187–194; 303–304; Ivan Stchoukine, *Les peintures des manuscrits Safavis de 1502 à 1587*, Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1959, 56; Ernst J. Grube, *The Classical Style in*

The Philipp Walter Schulz connection deserves a further note. Leipzig-born Schulz also came from a family of consuls and diplomats.³⁸ Their acquaintance might have grown stronger in Persia. Schulz happened to arrive in the country in the autumn of 1897 and stayed there for two years; although he chiefly resided in Isfahan, he might well have found time to meet the Eperjesys in their splendid home at the Bagh-i Firdaws.³⁹ Their coincidental stay in Persia, along with the first visit of Friedrich Sarre (1865–1945) at exactly the same time (1897–1898), signals the importance of the late 1890s in the growth of Central European interest towards Persian art.⁴⁰ It can be said that the nucleus of the Schulz and Sarre collections developed in parallel with Eperjesy's tenure in Tehran and that he must have been a close observer of their scholarly maturation in Persia.

Unlike numerous early collectors of Persian art, Eperjesy studied Persian at the Oriental Academy; this explains his interest in unillustrated manuscripts and text-only folios. Among such text-pages, a sheet with the opening verses of the *Mathnavi-yi ma'navi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi (also known as the 'Nay-nama') might be mentioned.⁴¹ Until the final phase of the completion of the present study, this folio was known from a black and white photograph only. Then, in December 2022, it was found in a cache at Buonconsiglio Castle in Trento.⁴² Eperjesy's collection included other important Persian or Persianate artworks, as well, which were also rediscovered in late 2022 (fig. 3). These include two Mughal paintings, one of which bearing a plausible attribution to the great Jahangiri-era artist Govardhan (active c. 1595–1640).⁴³

Islamic Painting: The Early School of Herat and its Impact on Islamic Painting of the later 15th, 16th and 17th Centuries, Venice: Edizioni Oriens, 1968, 195.

³⁸ Joachim Gierlichs, 'Philipp Walter Schulz and Friedrich Sarre: Two German Pioneers in the Development of Persian Art Studies', in Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, *The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013, (213–236) 216. For an extensive analysis of Schulz's international network of collectors and dealers, see Yuka Kadoi, *Aesthetica Persica: The History and Historiography of Persian Art, 1900–1935*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming.

³⁹ Gierlichs, 'Philipp Walter Schulz and Friedrich Sarre', 217.

⁴⁰ Gierlichs, 'Philipp Walter Schulz and Friedrich Sarre', 2013, 218.

⁴¹ Trento, Castello del Buonconsiglio, Archivio fotografico, Runkelstein album no. 2 (dal 302 al 603), photograph no. 399; about this particular verse and its visual aspects, see Chad Kia, 'Sufi Orthopraxis: Visual Language and Verbal Imagery in Medieval Afghanistan', *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 28: 1, 2012, (1–18) 5.

⁴² I am grateful to Roberta Zuech for the information.

⁴³ These can be traced back to Eperjesy through the following photographs: Trento, Castello del Buonconsiglio, Archivio fotografico, Runkelstein album no. 2 (dal 302 al 603), photograph no. 398.

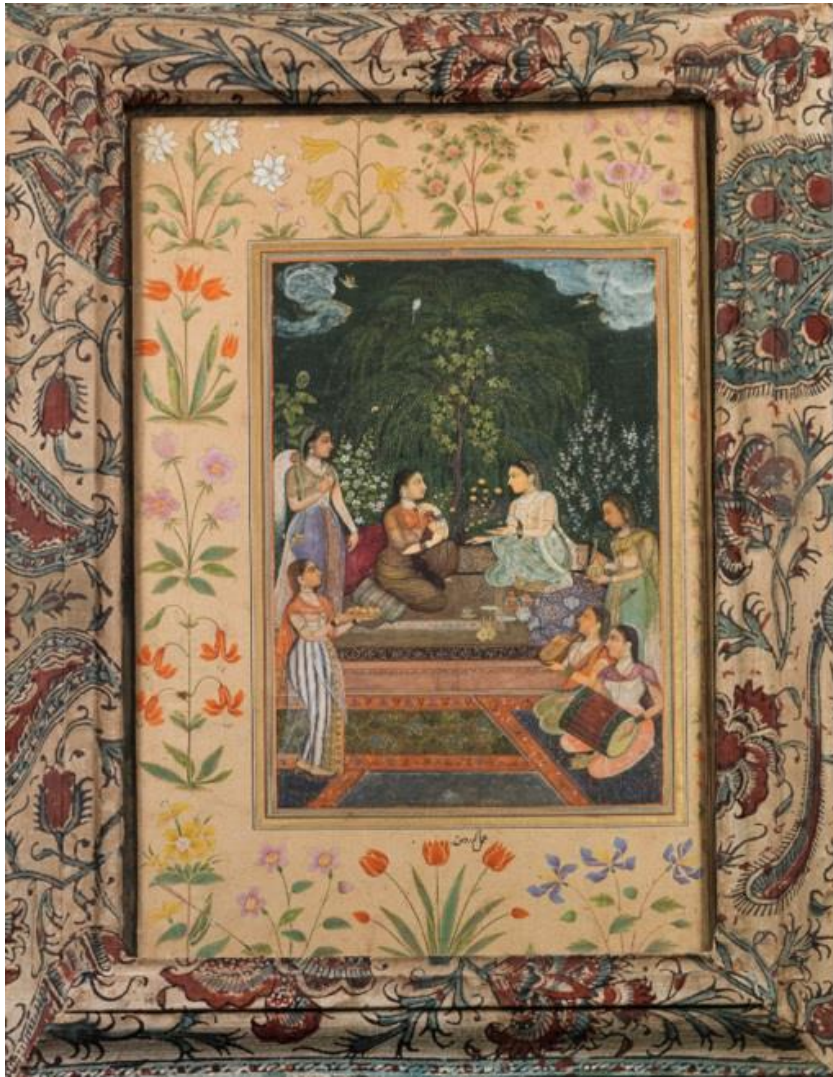


Fig. 3. Ascribed to Govardhan, *Assembly of Indian Ladies*, ca. 1630–40. Enframed folio from an album. Opaque watercolour on paper. Trento, Museo Castello del Buonconsiglio. Photograph © Museo Castello del Buonconsiglio.

The Gulistan Palace Library still preserves albums with paintings attributed to the same painter.⁴⁴ Until the early twentieth century, it preserved even more: for example, the album now known as the *St. Petersburg muraqqa*, which was assembled, using plundered material from Delhi, by Nadir Shah's (r. 1736–1747) secretary Mirza Mahdi Khan Astarabadi (d. before 1768) in the 1740s. It left Persia in 1909 alongside the fleeing Muhammad 'Ali Shah (r. 1907–1909) who was expelled by the Persian constitutionalists.⁴⁵ Another famous *muraqqa*, the *Gulshan album*, assembled during the reign of Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) and Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658)

⁴⁴ Muhammad 'Ali Rajabi, *Shahkarha-yi nigargari-yi Iran / Masterpieces of Persian Painting*, Tehran: Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005, 471.

⁴⁵ Oleg Akimushkin, *The St. Petersburg Muraqqa: Album of Indian and Persian Miniatures of the 16th–18th Centuries and Specimens of Persian Calligraphy of 'Imād al-Ḥasanī*, Lugano and Milan: ARCH Foundation – Electa 1994, 23, 59, 105.

and reached Persia about the same time as the St. Petersburg codex, would start dispersing as early as the 1860s when Heinrich Karl Brugsch (1827–1894) brought twenty-five folios from Tehran to Berlin, and would continue decomposing into leaves which are now in Los Angeles, Washington, Dublin, and elsewhere.⁴⁶

Epilogue

The Habsburg Empire and the Eperjesy collection fell apart in the same moment. South Tyrol, where Eperjesy's residence at Wehrburg castle was located, was popular among retired diplomats and other high officials of the Habsburg Empire. As early as 1597, a predecessor of Eperjesy, fellow-Hungarian ambassador to Persia István Kakas von Zalánkemény (1565–1603) acquired Maretsch castle, only a few miles from Wehrburg, through marriage with the heiress of the estate, Susanna Römer (d. after 1603). His and his wife's double portrait has recently emerged in Milan from a Turinese private collection.⁴⁷ Although it is impossible to claim that Eperjesy owned the paintings at one time, the fact that they lost their original context while related paintings are still preserved in Tyrol points to sudden twists in their provenance.⁴⁸

Eperjesy purchased Wehrburg in 1898, while still serving in Tehran and he would spend a fortune on its reconstruction over the entire next decade. On his retirement in 1909, he could finally move there, enjoying, besides the views, his newly won baronial title and his *West-östlich* collection. But he could not enjoy them for long. After Italy's entering the war on the Entente side in May 1915, the idyllic landscape suddenly turned into a volatile frontier. Albert Eperjesy died a year later: thus, it was his widow and son who had to face the consequences of his mistaken investment. Having returned to the castle in 1917, they found it in a partially looted state. Soon they had to go back to the capital where they were staying until the armistice; sealing the gates was all they could do before they left. For the family, the end of the war meant a long and hopeless struggle for their heritage: they lost not only the castle but nearly everything which Albert Eperjesy amassed in it. Meanwhile in Paris, the widow of Béla Rakovszky was fighting another unwinnable

⁴⁶ Yael Rice, 'The Global Aspirations of the Mughal Album', in Stephanie Schrader, *Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2018, (61–77) 69.

⁴⁷ The paintings are now in the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest. Enikő Buzási, 'Kakas István és felesége portréi: Adalék a XVI–XVII. századi portrémecenatúra történetéhez', in János Orbán, *Stílusok, művek mesterek. Erdély művészete 1690–1848 között: Tanulmányok B. Nagy Margit emlékére*, Marosvásárhely and Kolozsvár (Târgu Mureș and Cluj-Napoca): Maros Megyei Múzeum, 2011, 29–40.

⁴⁸ On the Tyrolean background of these paintings, see Armin Torggler, 'Non sine causa: Lukas Römer von Maretsch und andere Tiroler Kryptoprottestanten', in Helmut Rizzolli, *Die Tiroler Gesellschaft im Sturm der Reformation / Il turbine della riforma protestante sulla società tirolese*, Bozen (Bolzano): Stiftung Bozner Schlösser, 2019, 13–80; for a possibly related portrait depicting the father of Susanna Römer, see Federico Pigozzo, 'Da Cittadella a Bolzano: la figura storica di Pietro Speziale, un personaggio oscuro', in Helmut Rizzolli, *Die Tiroler Gesellschaft im Sturm der Reformation / Il turbine della riforma protestante sulla società tirolese*, Bozen (Bolzano): Stiftung Bozner Schlösser, 2019, (209–220) 218, fig. 4a-b.

battle for her inheritance.⁴⁹ A chapter of the history of Persian art collecting in Central Europe has ended with its folios torn out of the chronicle.

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⁴⁹ Szántó, 'Persian Art for the Balkans', 144–145.