

The 'Iran' Curtain: the historiography of Abu'l-Khairid (Shaybanid) arts of the book and the 'Bukhara School' during the Cold War

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Manuscripts are difficult objects to classify with conventional art historical methods. These books can be revisited, reread, reworked, added onto, painted over, and illustrated much later than when the textual components were penned. These interventions can cross many centuries and outlive the lifespans of their owners, and their classification then proves to confound more than it does to clarify. There is ease affixing provenance when illustrative programmes are uniform and styles distinctive. Classifying intact manuscripts as products of one dynasty or one time period is more difficult when the productions are not from royal workshops and often resist single attributions of style or location. With regard to their typologies based on major regional powers, what then are we to make of manuscripts scribed in one locale but illustrated in another, or those which contain paintings by multiple artists in a variety of styles? How do we classify illustrated objects that slip in between dynasties and bear traces of reworking and overpainting?

Recent decades have witnessed more sophistication in studies of illustrated manuscripts from the historical Persian-speaking world.¹ Moreover, the quantity of materials now open to scrutiny has metastasised. Surveying the field toward the end of his long and productive career, B.W. Robinson (1912–2005) wrote in an article from 1991: 'The difficulty of placing and dating Persian miniatures is always in inverse proportion to their quality.'² In other words, the ugly ones make life very difficult for the scholar. Researchers have disbanded with aesthetics and elitism to examine compositionally simpler works that attest to broadened patronage bases outside the courts.³ How a manuscript looks is not as important as to what its significance might have been to its owner(s), and why some books were held onto

¹ For a relevant discussion of the term 'Persianate' in relation to 'Persian', consult Nile Green, ed., 'Introduction: The Frontiers of the Persianate World', in *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, California: University of California Press, 2019, 1-71.

² B.W. Robinson, 'Book-Painting in Transoxiana during the Timurid Period', *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 5, 1991, 78.

³ See Section IV on commercial manuscript production in Khurasan theorised to be for export to Bukhara and India in B.W. Robinson, 'Muhammadi and the Khurasan Style', *Iran* 30 (1992): 26-28.

and reworked across centuries. Instead of offering certainty and fixity of attributions, which has been the pursuit of earlier scholarship, investigations are looking at manuscripts originating in border regions between empires where monolithic, dynastic artistic styles –not as sharply defined– strain classification.⁴ It is now possible to confront obstacles posed by stylistic ambiguity and illustrations embodying multiple styles from different centres or time periods. These further expand our knowledge of materials and eras, revealing transregional and cross-dynastic exchanges that the 'pretty' codices attributed to one courtly centre do not.

Within current scholarship on sixteenth- through seventeenth-century Persian-language manuscripts, there remain challenges, among them: illustrations probably of Ottoman origin but attributed to the Safavids; illustrations of probably Indian derivation but attributed to the Safavids; the problem of attributions to the 'Bukhara School'; and the problem of manuscripts with heterogeneous (implying differently styled) paintings, such as those with illustrations produced after the text was written or in a different atelier.⁵ With dynasties more associated with medieval and early-modern Iran and their art forms labelled 'Persian' and 'Iranian' having received extensive scholarly attention, such as the Timurids and the Safavids, sixteenth-century Central Asia/Transoxiana has received far less: this implies the Abu'l-Khairid dynasty (in power between 1500–1599) that administered many centres now in Uzbekistan today. To understand how art historical classifications have crafted and perpetuated associations between historical dynasty and current nation-state, I will explain why labelling these productions Abu'l-Khairid –rather than Shaybanid or Bukharan– reflects greater accuracy, but also obfuscates other contributing production practices when a manuscript contains interactions from different times and places. Following this, I will adopt a historiographical approach and offer 'a study of their study'. I will analyse how English and Russian-speaking academicians during the last century have situated sixteenth-century arts of the book originating in Transoxiana –the so-called 'Bukhara School' –in the trajectory of Persian-language manuscript production, as an independent or subsidiary entry.

Historical and political context of the Abu'l-Khairids: some key terms

Scholars in recent decades have noted that the utility of the descriptor 'Persian miniature' has lost its substantive significance in unduly emphasising a small-sized painting associated with the modern nation-state of Iran without any mention of the

⁴ For a recent study of the short-lived market which adopted Ottoman and Safavid stylistic elements for the production of illustrated Persian texts in the frontier province of Baghdad, see Melis Taner, *Caught in a Whirlwind: A Cultural History of Ottoman Baghdad as Reflected in Its Illustrated Manuscripts*, Leiden: Brill, 2020.

⁵ Most of these points are listed by Marianne Barrucand, 'Considerations sur les Miniatures Sefevides de la Bibliotheque Nationale', in Jean Calmard, ed., *Etudes Safavides*, Paris-Tehran: IFRI, 1993, 28-29.

original surrounding text and codex from which it derives.⁶ For reasons that will be justified in this article, so too might scholarship from here on out refrain from using the reductive terms 'Uzbek', 'Bukharan', and 'Shaybanid/Shibanid' to categorise sixteenth-century illustrated manuscripts and their makers from Transoxiana. Early-modern empires of the eastern Islamic world – implying Ottoman, Safavid, Abu'l-Khairid, Mughal – were indebted to the Timurids and Turkomans to refashion and formulate unique identities from four main constituents: Persian and Turkic literary and linguistic traditions, Islamic cultural and religious forms, and Mongol customs. The amounts of each of these ingredients led to dynastic differentiation that became markedly pronounced in the second half of the sixteenth century.⁷ Yet the Abu'l-Khairids have been overlooked thus far in Anglophone (as well as French and German-language) studies of the 'Gunpowder Empires', as have Abu'l-Khairid visual forms. Their neglect has origins in the nineteenth and twentieth century's political division between British-controlled and post-colonial South Asia on the one hand, and Romanov (Imperial Russian) and Soviet-administered Central Asia on the other.⁸

A dynastic descriptor for the group here scrutinised warrants clarification. The appellation 'Shaybanid/Shibanid' has frequented scholarly literature to refer to the sixteenth-century Abu'l-Khairid dynasty in Transoxiana, but Martin Dickson (1924–91) has spelled out what is erroneous about this designation, with Yuri Bregel (1925–2016) offering further clarification. The latter asserts that Shibanid technically applies to all the Mongol descendants of Shiban, a grandson of Chinggis Khan through his son Juchi, and not the later Muhammad Shiban Khan born nearly three centuries later.⁹ By the late fifteenth century, separate strains of these Shibanids held

⁶ Explanations for this are found in Eleanor Sims, 'The Timurid Book: *golshan-e naqsh-o tazhib* A Garden of Painting and Illumination', in Charles Melville, ed., *The Timurid Century: The Idea of Iran*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2020, ftn. 9, 148.

⁷ Gülru Necipoğlu, 'From International Timūrid to Ottoman: A Change of Taste in Sixteenth-Century Ceramic Tiles', *Muqarnas*, 7, 1990, 136-70.

⁸ Florian Schwarz, 'Safavids and Ozbeks', in Charles Melville, ed., *Safavid Persia in the Age of Empires: The Idea of Iran*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2021, 357–74.

⁹ Yuri Bregel, 'Abu'l-Khairids', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bukhara-iv> (accessed on 18 February 2015). The moniker Shiban Khan was actually a pen-name for Muhammad Shiban Khan. Informative concise accounts of the dynasty are found in: R.D. McChesney, 'CENTRAL ASIA vi. in the 16th-18th Centuries', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/central-asia-vi> (accessed on 15 January 2015); O. Akimushkin, et al., 'The Shaybanids (Bukhara, 1500–98) and the Janids (Astarkhanids) (Bukhara, 1599–1753)', in Chahryar Adle and Karl M. Baipakov, eds., *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Vol. V*, Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2003, 580-84.

power in Siberia (Taibughids),¹⁰ Khwarazm ('Arabshahids),¹¹ and Transoxiana (Abu'l-Khairids). Thus, 'Shibanid' is an imprecise and overly broad label that refers to the rulers of the Golden Horde (1242–1502) in the northwestern sector of the Mongol Empire, through to its offshoots administering various domains across the sixteenth century. Narrowing our focus, the Abu'l-Khairids took root under Abu al-Khair Khan (d. 1467) who united various nomads of the Qipchaq steppe under the name 'Uzbek' in the mid fifteenth century. Joining together Juchid and Chaghataid lines through intermarriages, these (proto-)Abu'l-Khairids persisted in Transoxiana as allies-cum-adversaries of the Timurid princes who grew weaker as the fifteenth century passed.¹² Upon Abu al-Khair Khan's death four decades prior to the Timurids' downfall, his grandson Muhammad Shah-Bakht (1451–1510), better known as Muhammad Shibani Khan, took control and surpassed his grandfather's territorial gains.¹³

The Abu'l-Khairid state in its initial form under Muhammad Shibani's direction and up until the middle of the sixteenth century was not a typical dynasty in terms of primogeniture and power transmitted from father to son. Samarqand was the seat of the *khaqan* (great khan), usually the oldest member of the ruling house, but with power also dispersed across the appanages (governing centres) of Balkh, Bukhara, and Tashkent overseen by the *khaqan*. When Khurasan was periodically under Abu'l-Khairid rule (notably 1507–10, 1528–29, 1588–98), Herat and its environs also comprised a significant political and artistic hub.¹⁴ The Abu'l-

¹⁰ See D.N. Maslyuzhenko, 'The Siberian Branch of the Shibanid Dynasty in Sh. Marjani's Studies', *Zolotoordynskoe obozrenie/ Golden Horde Review*, 7(3), 2019, 485–96; Allen J. Frank, 'The western steppe: Volga-Ural region, Siberia and the Crimea', in Nicola di Cosmo, Allen J. Frank, and Peter B. Golden, eds., *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 250-53.

¹¹ Also referred to as Yadigarid, named after Yadigar Sultan, descended from his great-grandfather 'Arabshah, who ruled to the north of the Aral Sea ca. 1458. Yuri Bregel, *An Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, 48.

¹² Maria Subtelny notes Shibani Khan's strategic marriages into the Chaghataid line of Timurid royals, including female relatives of Babur and Sultan Mahmud: the Timurid governor of Tashkent between 1487-1508. 'Art and Politics in Early 16th Century Central Asia', *Central Asia Journal*, 27(1-2), 1983, 132, fn. 42.

¹³ McChesney lists his various names: 'Mohammad Šibānī, (aka Šāhī Beg, Šaybaq, Šaybak, and Šahbakt)' in 'CENTRAL ASIA vi. in the 16th-18th Centuries.' Being a poet himself, Shibani was the pen name he used. Among his contemporaries, Babur in the *Baburnama* refers to him as Shibaq (wormwood) Khan, alluding to a component to make hallucinogenic drugs. Muhammad Haidar calls him Shahi Beg Khan in *Tarikh-i Rashidi*; Abu'l Ghazi in the *Shajara-yi Turk* calls him Muhammad Shah-Bakht (reported in Maria Subtelny, 'Art and Politics', 121, fn. 1).

¹⁴ Joo-Yup Lee, *Qazaqliq, or Ambitious Brigandage, and the Formation of the Qazaqs: State and Identity in Post-Mongol Central Eurasia*, Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2016, 118. A helpful

Khairid administrators' cultural and political aspirations and expressions of these followed those in the other contemporaneous realms with Persian-language administrations. Manuscripts and their makers came from all the appanages, and some codices and staff originated from Timurid and Safavid workshops.

Deploying the term 'Uzbek' to indiscriminately refer to the Central Asian enemies and rivals of the Timurids and Safavids across multiple centuries denies the Abu'l-Khairids of their dynastic autonomy and specificity. Upon the establishment of the khanate by Muhammad Shibani Khan in 1500, the Abu'l-Khairids initially used the designation *mughul* (Mongol). This connection to their non-Muslim and nomadic roots however proved problematic and an impediment to legitimising their rulership over settled, Muslim populations.¹⁵ 'Uzbek' originally referred to nomadic groups and tribal elites, gradually acquiring ethnic, cultural, and political nuances to imply Islamicised Mongols. Still later it became connected to a modern nation-state delineated by different borders and containing within it different peoples than those of half a millennium ago. Period Persian-language sources used 'Uzbek' to refer to a tribal confederation from the Qipchaq steppe descended from Juchi, the eldest son of Chinggis Khan. The group definition was wielded in Safavid chronicles as a term of abuse akin to the pejorative labels 'Turk' or *qizilbash* (red-headed, implying Safavid partisans based on their headwear, also deployed by Ottoman chroniclers to refer to a tribal elite).¹⁶ It was applied to 'an unlettered person, a bumpkin or a rustic'.¹⁷ To the Ottomans, the classifications of Tatar, Turk, Uzbek, Mongol, and Abu'l-Khairid denoted the same peoples.¹⁸ However in his Turkic-language biography the *Shibani-nama* commissioned early in the sixteenth century, Muhammad Shibani Khan implored of its poet Muhammad Salih: 'Let the Chaghatay (Timurids) not call me an Uzbek.'¹⁹ He wished to downplay his association with his nomadic predecessors and present himself as culturally refined and on par with his counterparts in other courts. A later Persian-language prose chronicle composed in 1541 by Kuhistani connects the figurehead Abu al-Khair to his Chinggisid and earlier pre-Islamic forefathers. Titled *Tarikh-i Abu al-Khair Khani*

schematic of Abu'l-Khairid appanage divisions is in McChesney, 'CENTRAL ASIA vi. in the 16th-18th Centuries.'

¹⁵ Lee, *Qazaqliq*, 134.

¹⁶ Schwarz, 'Safavids and Ozbeks', 359-60.

¹⁷ R.D. McChesney, 'Islamic culture and the Chinggisid restoration: Central Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid, eds., *The New Cambridge History of Islam. Vol. 3: The Eastern Islamic World Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 241. See also Edward Allworth, 'Chapter 3: Names and Tribes', in *The Modern Uzbeks: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present: A Cultural History*, Stanford: Hoover Press Publications, 1990, 39.

¹⁸ Lee, *Qazaqliq*, 74, fn. 2.

¹⁹ Subtelny, 'Art and Politics in Early 16th Century Central Asia', 137.

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(Abu al-Khair [Khanid] History), in it, the Abu'l-Khairids themselves articulate their own dynasty as direct descendants of this individual.

In sum, although the terms Uzbek, Mongol, and Shibanid were used in period sources, 'Abu'l-Khairid' most accurately refers to the group with regard to self-designation and actual blood lineage. It is for these reasons that I use the term to refer to the administration that reconstituted and resurrected Chinggisid rule in Central Asia and its margins initially under Abu al-Khair Khan, but was successfully carried out by his grandson Shibani Khan. The extent of my research allows me to assert that only the Juchid branch of Shibanids in Transoxiana — the Abu'l-Khairids of the sixteenth century — produced illustrated manuscripts. We can then credit these dynastic patrons, and the staff working in various *kitabkhana* within their political control, with this proper nomenclature.

Bukhara School

Museums and libraries in the world today often eclipse and elide the nuances of Abu'l-Khairid book arts in Transoxiana by ascribing them to Bukhara, or labelling them as '16th-century Central Asia'. This is a result of single-school attributions, derived from the earliest art historical analysis on Italian Renaissance artworks, applied to these materials from a different time and place. Bukhara has become shorthand for the totality of Abu'l-Khairid manuscript production without examining the era and materials fully. However, my proposition to remedy their classification with the dynastic substitution of Abu'l-Khairid is not without its own shortcomings. Reluctant to wed art completely with politics, I begrudgingly acknowledge that labelling a manuscript 'Abu'l-Khairid' implies the copyists and illustrators were at one point agents of or adherents to the Abu'l-Khairid state. This poses several challenges since proof of political persuasion from the era is limited and artists and scribes were very much migratory and completed projects in one centre then would go to another if the offer was good. What is more, the illustrated manuscripts are not often the result of unified workshop practices carrying out creations from start to finish, and the staff of a previous dynasty frequently stayed on in the region to carry out the projects of new overlords.

The written word and the painted image were privileged art forms in societies embracing Persian linguistic and cultural forms. The union of text and image in manuscript became gifts for rulers and governors; markers of status and legitimacy; and sources of wisdom, entertainment, and knowledge. Given their importance, it is then natural that several of these manuscripts would continue to be reworked and revisited, and precious pages were not to be wasted. Manuscripts containing a complete text but with empty spaces for illustrations invited completion (perhaps akin to the concept of a colouring book today). Sometimes but a few illustrations were added to existing ones, which preserved the sensibility of the previous material, but also 'refreshed' the work. Overpainted pages added to manuscripts maintaining original compositions and figural types adhered to

tradition and convention, but the artists added elements to 'revamp' and bring the manuscript up to date, which suggests the artists had notions of what was in style and what was out of fashion.²⁰ This accretion did not always herald indebtedness and respect for the previous material; indeed, it can point to specific courts and dynasties out of favour by the power painting over it.²¹

Accounting for the delegation of tasks and the components necessary for a manuscript's completion breaks up existing typological frameworks used in library and museum catalogues that only include one dynasty or named production site (such as 'Bukhara'). Some examples clarify this point. Artisans serving the early Abu'l-Khairids frequently filled in illustration spaces left empty in manuscripts written out during the reign of the Timurid dynasty preceding them in Herat. In this scenario the manuscript stayed stationary; the dynasty and artistic style in the region changed. In another example of processual production, different pictorial modes with different stylistic characteristics coexist within a common centre and workshop. In the 1580s and 1590s, facing a reduction in courtly patronage, painters formerly trained in the Safavid workshops of Qazvin and Mashhad headed eastwards to produce commercial manuscripts alongside Abu'l-Khairid artisans who had ventured south to converge in Khurasan. These movements are ascertainable through visual analysis of the added illustrations that indicate where stylistic training may have originally taken place. Colophons, when present, refer to the moment at which point the text was completed or where, but not the entire project or the efforts of all the practitioners. Scholarship should not place too much emphasis on the colophons to manuscripts wherein information about *a* time and place of transcription is used to classify an *entire* manuscript; this privileges text over image. If illustrations were not soon added then they could be filled in decades later in workshops and dynasties far apart, or by artisans formerly working in these separate locations later converging in a single site.

²⁰ John Seyller, 'A Mughal Manuscript of the "Diwan" of Nawa'i', *Artibus Asiae*, 71(2), 2011, 327.

²¹ Perhaps with some vengeance, the Mughal emperors ordered the artists of the *tasvir-khana* to paint over illustrations of Bukharan origin due to their aesthetic differences, but also likely a result of bitterness at their ancestors having been kicked out of power in Transoxiana by the Abu'l-Khairid rulers who forced them south into present-day India. John Seyller comments on the Mughal distaste for Bukharan material but does not speculate on the reasons why ('Overpainting in the Cleveland *Tuḡīnāma*', *Artibus Asiae*, 52(3/4), 1992, 272). For Mika Natif, Mughal over-paintings or additions to Bukharan-style illustrations were not vindictive but 'should be seen as both the expression and the continuation of the Bukharan intellectual legacy in Mughal India' by connecting the latter with the former 'esteemed centre of religious learning' ('The SOAS *Anvār-i Suhaylī*: The Journey of a "Reincarnated" Manuscript', *Muqarnas*, 25, 2008, 355). It was more important to preserve styles from different regions and time periods than to maintain aesthetic unity.

Currently in manuscript studies, we are altering ways of thinking that expect illustrated manuscripts to be 'entities planned in advance and meticulously executed as uniform, complete objects.'²² John Seyller has looked at examples of 'eclectic manuscripts' in the Mughal world, Mika Natif has referred to illustrated manuscripts undergoing several stages of production extending over time and multiple places as 'manuscript reincarnation'.²³ Unity of style does not seem to have been a component of aesthetic judgment in the Persian-speaking world during the early-modern age.

Within distinct periods of Abu'l-Khairid manuscript production, we frequently encounter cross-dynastic transfers of textual and visual materials, artistic styles, and personnel moving across and through Timurid, Abu'l-Khairid, Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman spheres in different decades and occasionally in the same one. It is worth remembering that wars were waged and embassies exchanged between and across dynasties which accelerated the migration of artisans and illustrated manuscripts. Natif reminds us how calligraphers and artists 'in their movements from one place to another...brought with them albums, paintings, and illustrated manuscripts, probably not all in finished condition'.²⁴ The categorising of Abu'l-Khairid arts of the book in relation to other dynasties (such as Safavid or Timurid) might therefore be forgiven when administrators in Transoxiana employed these actual artisans who had worked for other rival patrons, or refurbished older materials in later decades. Rather than looking at individual folios or being satisfied with attributing one site of production, I implore researchers to emphasise a manuscript's totality, with cautious reliance on stylistic and formal

²² Natif, 'The SOAS *Anvār-i Suhaylī*', 354.

²³ Natif includes some Bukharan material in her analysis: a Sa'di *Bustan* dated 1531-32 copied in Bukhara (illustrated by Shaikhzada around 1540 and retouched and repainted by Bishandas ca. 1620); Jami's *Tuhfat al-ahrar* copied in Bukhara 1515-16 with three paintings probably added in Bukhara ca. 1560; and a Nizami *Khamasa* copied in Bukhara in 1557-58 with illustrations added in India fifteen years later ('The SOAS *Anvār-i Suhaylī*', 347). Other scholars have unpacked the layers to individual manuscripts: Priscilla Soucek and Filiz Çağman, 'A Royal Manuscript and its Transformation: The Life History of A Book', in George N. Atiyeh, ed., *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 179-208; Zeren Tanandi, 'Additions to Illustrated Manuscripts in Ottoman Workshops', *Muqarnas*, 17, 2000, 147-61; Bernard O'Kane, 'Reconciliation or estrangement? Colophon and paintings in the TIEM *Zafarnama* and some other controversial manuscripts', *Muqarnas*, 26, 2009, 205-27. Also consult the many explorations by John Seyller to get an overview of Mughal practices, among them: 'The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library', *Artibus Asiae*, 57(3/4), 1997, 243-349. Marianne Shreve Simpson and Massumeh Farhad examine 'peripatetic projects' that might have been illustrated in Sabzivar after having been transcribed in Qazvin (*Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's 'Haft Awrang': A Princely Manuscript from Sixteenth-Century Iran*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, 244).

²⁴ Natif, 'The SOAS *Anvār-i Suhaylī*', 347.

analysis through manuscript comparisons when colophons are lacking or limited. This tactic is to determine which processes (not always identifiable or definitive) contributed to the overall outcome. Every cohesive cultural group deserves to be treated as a distinct unit contributing to the broader Persian-speaking realm as much as it receives artistic inspiration from it; the Abu'l-Khairids are no exception.

Turan/Iran, Turkish/Persian, Soviet/Bourgeois

Abu'l-Khairid manuscript arts occupy a curious position in scholarship, trapped between ethnic and linguistic labels. They are at times considered 'too Turkish' to be categorised alongside other dynasties with Persian-speaking administrators. For example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art website refers to the group as Turco-Mongol;²⁵ the Austrian scholar Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856) writing in 1828 called them 'die türkische Dynastie Scheibani';²⁶ Svat Soucek characterises them as 'Turks like the Timurids'.²⁷ I mentioned in the section above that even period Ottoman records in the late sixteenth century referred to the Chinggisid Abu'l-Khairids as 'Turks' and 'Tatars', although the Persian language remained the lingua franca in Central Asia until the imperial Russian armies forced their way into the region during the 1860s.²⁸ The arts of the dynasty have more often been considered 'too Persian' to be grouped with art forms from dynasties associated with Turkic speakers, such as the Ottomans or Turkmen. Several art historical models swallow up Abu'l-Khairid materials within chapters on contemporaneous Safavid arts, or interpret them as the last gasp of the Herat school of the Timurid epoch.³⁰ Rarely do Abu'l-Khairid materials stand on their own; instead they are frequently treated in comparison to Timurid and Safavid traditions.³¹

²⁵ 'Central and North Asia, 1400–1600 A.D.', in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/?period=08®ion=nc>> (2000).

²⁶ Joseph Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches: Grossentheils aus bisher unbenützten Handschriften und Archiven*, Pesth [Budapest]: C.A. Hartleben, 1840, 351.

²⁷ Svat Soucek, *A History of Inner Asia*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 149.

²⁸ Aftandil Erkinov, 'The Poetry of Nomads and Shaybani Rulers in the Process of Transition to a Settled Society', in Gabriele Rasuly-Palczek and Julia Katschnig, eds., *Central Asia on Display: Proceedings of the VII. Conference of the European Society for Central Asian Studies*, Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2004, 145.

²⁹ There is no mention of the Abu'l-Khairids in the expansive museum exhibition catalogue edited by David Roxburgh, *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600-1600*, London: Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2005.

³⁰ Sheila Canby subsumes Abu'l-Khairid materials within her chapter on Safavid art 'A Glorious Synthesis', in *Persian Painting*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993.

³¹ The Ilkhanids have recently joined the Timurids and Safavids as an 'elite' group of culturally and artistically idealised 'Persian' book painting. See Yuka Kadoi, 'The (re-)birth

In the span of the Timurid dynasty and during the brief periods of Abu'l-Khairid occupation of Khurasan, the core part of Transoxiana—implying the cities and environs of Bukhara and Samarqand—was connected to and integrated with Iran. But those would be the last times parts of Iran and Transoxiana were concurrently administered by the same ruler.³² The geo-political and scholarly divisions that exist between them today have their origins in the sixteenth-century tensions between the Abu'l-Khairids and the Safavids; the Great Game of the nineteenth century waged between Russia and Britain; and the later Socialist-Capitalist, and politico-economic rivalries of the twentieth.

Focussing on Safavid and Abu'l-Khairid dynastic distinctions, early-modern Iran has been typified as more Perso-Islamic and centralised in its (centripetal) system of monarchical governance, while early-modern Transoxiana gets labelled Turco-Mongol in its (centrifugal) political structure dispersing power across several appanages overseen by a leader who is decided upon by group consensus.³³ Both Abu'l-Khairid and Safavid polities in fact ultimately succeeded in concurrently restructuring their systems of governance later in the sixteenth century to promote dynastic centralisation and political consolidation away from Mongol models. In 1588 the Safavid Shah 'Abbas I curtailed qizilbash administrative and military power and unified it under his direct control.³⁴ Scholars interpret the culmination of the shah's centralizing policies to be his moving the capital from Qazvin to Isfahan in 1598. Significantly, however, the Abu'l-Khairid leader 'Abdullah Khan's own policies to unify the state, involving the defeat of his last blood rival in 1579, and establishment of Bukhara as the new official dynastic capital in 1583, predate these Safavid reforms. If we define dynastic centralisation as the establishment of an imperial capital, stimulation of trade to fund the state, patronage of shrines and religious architecture to support ideology, and obstruction of male relatives from seizing power through imprisonment or death, then the Perso-Islamic shift from Turco-Mongol customs actually took place in Transoxiana before it did in Iran.³⁵

of Ilkhanid art', in Anne Dunlop, ed., *The Mongol Empire in Global History and Art History*, Milan: Officina Libraria / Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022, 239-63.

³² Yuri Bregel notes: 'the first distinctive political separation of Transoxania from Persia took place in 873/1469 when the Timurid empire was finally divided into two independent states, Transoxania and Khorasan' in 'BUKHARA iv. Khanate of Bukhara and Khorasan', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2015, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bukhara-iv> (accessed on 18 February 2015).

³³ The concepts of centripetal and centrifugal formations to describe Safavid and Abu'l-Khairid political structures were mentioned by Maria Subtelny in the SOAS conference *The Idea of Iran: The Turko-Timurid Intermezzo*, held 18-19 November 2017 in London.

³⁴ Sussan Babaie, et al., *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004, 13.

³⁵ These distinguishing features of dynastic centralisation are listed in Liesbeth Geevers, 'Safavid Cousins on the Verge of Extinction: Dynastic Centralisation in Central Asia and the

The perceived factionalism between Iran and Turan/Transoxiana recurs in all historical periods. Degrees of 'Iranian' influence—political and artistic—over Central Asia have long been contested, and vice versa; even in pre-Islamic polities and visual forms. Although seemingly outside our present interest in Persian manuscript arts, the archaeologist and art historian Boris I. Marshak (1933–2006) identified this as problematic. His paper offering a 'Comparative Study of Sasanian and Sogdian Art' articulates the differing analytical perspectives on the visual cultures of these two realms.³⁶ Soviet scholars considered Sogdian painting to be an independent and local tradition, exerting 'some westward influence from Central Asia' onto 'medieval Iranian miniatures'.³⁷ In contrast, 'Western colleagues...thought that Sogdian mural paintings are the samples of the late Sasanian provincial art production, which show...the previously unknown pre-Islamic stage in the development of Iranian paintings', and thus absorb Sogdian material culture within a dominating Sasanian sea.³⁸

Although the regions were linked in several capacities, some different and separate historical and cultural factors took place in Iran and Central Asia which in turn shaped these regions and their art forms. Marshak stresses regional distinctions that were present in the sixth and seventh centuries; others have also noted the 'two different political contexts: the powerful, centralised organisation of the Sasanian Empire, with its need for a homogeneous and strong figurative ideology, and the "archipelago" of scattered Sogdian City-States, with no real need for such an assertive and aggressive political syntax.'³⁹ One can easily substitute 'Safavid' for Sasanian, and 'Abu'l-Khairid' for Sogdian and imagine they are reading conflictive Anglophone and Soviet-period scholarship on sixteenth-century manuscript arts. It

Bahrami Collateral Line (1517-1593)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 58, 2015, 293-326.

³⁶ Boris I. Marshak, 'New Discoveries in Pendjikent and a Problem of Comparative Study of Sasanian and Sogdian art', in *La Persia e l'Asia centrale da Alessandro al x secolo* («Atti dei Convegni Lincei», 127), Rome, 425-38.

³⁷ Marshak, 'New Discoveries in Pendjikent and a Problem of Comparative Study of Sasanian and Sogdian art', 425.

³⁸ To Marshak, Soviet and Western comparative analysis on royal and imperial carved silver objects from pre-Islamic palaces in Iran alongside non-royal painted interiors of homes in Central Asia is flawed. He arbitrates the two views as each 'partly wrong and partly correct' based on the incommensurate types of objects examined in the two regions, as well as the status of the original patrons differing which challenge the validity of the comparisons ('New Discoveries in Pendjikent and a Problem of Comparative Study of Sasanian and Sogdian art', 425).

³⁹ Davide Cialfoni and Geri Della Rocca de Candal, 'Sasanian Traditions in Sogdian Paintings: Hunting and Fighting Scenes', *Parthica: Incontri di Culture nel Mondo Antico*, 13, 2011, 111.

can be simplistic to affix rigid political and linguistic divisions onto scholarly viewpoints, given that perspectives differ based on the time period in which they were written, the individual writing them, and the academic training shaping both the thinker and the thought. Essentially, however, historians writing in English have opted to group Abu'l-Khairid manuscript arts under a broader Safavid heading, while Russian-speaking scholars have more stridently championed Central Asian artistic variants as local innovations independent of Iranian influence. Both reflect the politicisation and ideological dictates of the Academ(ies).

When sixteenth-century arts of the book from Central Asia are mentioned at all, many surveys published in English have forced Abu'l-Khairid materials into classificatory schema divided by periods and schools that privilege the arts of Safavid and Timurid Iran, marginalising the Abu'l-Khairids by placing their artistic productions under Timurid and Safavid labels. As an early case in point, *Persian Miniature Painting* by the British scholars Laurence Binyon, J.V.S. Wilkinson, and Basil Gray was published in 1933 in conjunction with the largest exhibition of Persian-language book arts that had ever been held. These objects were displayed in London's Burlington House two years before with the sponsorship of King George V and Reza Shah Pahlavi.⁴⁰ The subset 'Bukhara Miniatures' comes within their chapter titled 'The Early Safawi Period'. This publication and the exhibition instigated the Anglophone 'Iranisation' of Central Asian works on paper. Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray's 'canonical set of attributions, nomenclature, and classifications established [in their publication] has survived with only slight modifications to the present day...[as has their] "taxonomic" approach to Persian painting'.⁴¹ Robert Hillenbrand explains the 1930s Western interest in 'Persian Islamic art' with 'Persian' being the favoured designation, 'feeding as it did into the romantic resonances of that term in the English tongue'.⁴² At this time, the national, political, and cultural aspirations of Iran's Pahlavi dynasty were merging with the personal and professional ambitions of British and European scholars, as well as Americans such as Arthur Upham Pope (1881–1969), to bring mutual benefit.

His Majesty Reza Pahlavi headed the list of sponsors to Pope's original 1939 *Survey of Persian Art* edition, and scholars have since critiqued the ways in which this project was 'linked with the Iranian government's quest to use art and architecture to build a case for nationalism'.⁴³ With the shah keen to exaggerate

⁴⁰ Laurence Binyon, J.V.S. Wilkinson, and Basil Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

⁴¹ Barry Wood, "'A Great Symphony of Pure Form": The 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art and Its Influence', *Ars Orientalis*, 30, 2000, 125.

⁴² Robert Hillenbrand, 'The Scramble for Persian Art: Pope and His Rivals', in Yuka Kadoi, ed., *Arthur Upham Pope and a New Survey of Persian Art*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, 16.

⁴³ Sheila S. Blair, 'Surveying Persian Art in Light of *A Survey of Persian Art*', in Yuka Kadoi, ed., *Arthur Upham Pope and a New Survey of Persian Art*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, 375.

Iranian power and territorial control throughout the ages and concurrently promote interest in Persian art, the Iranian nation-state at the time was partly responsible in crafting the analytical framework adopted by European and English-speaking scholars of Persian-language manuscript arts. Within the *Survey*, the contributor of the chapter 'History of Miniature Painting and Drawing' Ernst Kühnel included a discussion of the Abu'l-Khairid *kitabkhana* not in a Safavid context, but phrased as a workshop in Bukhara overseen by Shaybanid patrons within a section on the Timurid Period. Kühnel titled his subheading: 'The Bihzad School at Bukhara'.⁴⁴ Thus, the *Survey* project included the Timurids, Bihzad, and production centre of Bukhara within the fold of Iran.

The London-based B.W. Robinson visited the Burlington Exhibition repeatedly which left a lasting effect.⁴⁵ Writing two through three decades later after the display and Pope's edited series, it is no wonder he took the approach of Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray in classifying select Abu'l-Khairid manuscripts as those done in 'The Bukhara Style'. These were a subset to the bigger section 'The Safavid Period' in various descriptive catalogues Robinson compiled.⁴⁶ Elsewhere, he categorised Abu'l-Khairid artistic productions within a larger section on 'Provincial Styles'. He additionally produced a nuanced typological rubric of 'Persian Painting' that placed these sixteenth-century Bukhara-style arts within the Safavid period, in turn spawning Khurasan and Mughal styles beneath it (fig. 1).⁴⁷ Although Robinson acknowledged 'the importance of including second- and third-rate material in [his] researches',⁴⁸ the loaded term 'provincial' — as with 'classical' — in the taxonomy of Persian-language arts of the book has already been addressed as in need of cautious

⁴⁴ Ernst Kühnel, 'History of Miniature Painting and Drawing', in eds. Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, *A Survey of Persian Art* Vol. 3, London: Oxford University Press, 1939, 1868-72.

⁴⁵ B.W. Robinson, 'The Burlington House Exhibition of 1931: A Milestone in Islamic Art History', in S. Vernoit, ed., *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections*, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000, 147-55.

⁴⁶ See Robinson's 'The Kevorkian Collection: Islamic and Indian Illustrated Manuscripts, Miniature Paintings and Drawings', Trustees of the Kevorkian Foundation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1953 [unpublished]; *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Paintings in the Bodleian Library*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958; *Persian Paintings: Victoria and Albert Museum*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1965; *Persian Paintings in the India Office Library: A Descriptive Catalogue*, London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1976; *Persian Paintings in the John Rylands Library: A Descriptive Catalogue*, London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1980.

⁴⁷ Classification scheme is in the opening to B.W. Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting from Collections in the British Isles*, London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1967.

⁴⁸ B.W. Robinson, 'Chapter 3: Transoxiana', in *Fifteenth-century Persian Painting: Problems and Issues*, New York: New York University Press, 1991, 46.

Jaimee K. Comstock-Skipp The 'Iran' Curtain: the historiography of Abu'l-Khairid (Shaybanid) arts of the book and the 'Bukhara School' during the Cold War

application.⁴⁹ He relegated Bukharan productions to the provinces and margins in his analysis, and affirmed Iran as the heart and centre of a larger tradition.

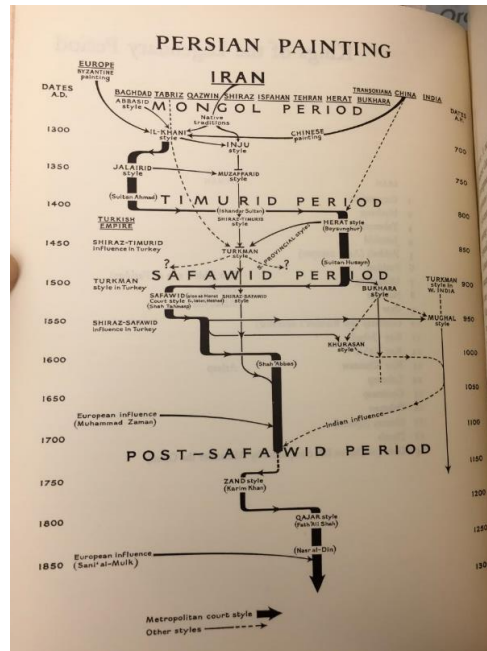


Figure 1: Diagram of 'Persian Painting' in B.W. Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting from Collections in the British Isles*, London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1967.

In analysing early Abu'l-Khairid manuscripts, Robinson's eyes were attuned to their stylistic commonalities and emulations of courtly Herati traditions associated with the tastes of the late-Timurid ruler Sultan Husain Mirza Baiqara. To him, early Abu'l-Khairid manuscript productions were 'echoes of Bihzad's style, strong and true at first, [that] grow fainter and more distorted as the century proceeds'.⁵⁰ Emphasising their ferocity, Robinson phrased the Abu'l-Khairids as 'warlike Uzbeks',⁵¹ responsible for uprooting 'Persian [Safavid] artists' and 'carr[y]ing them] off to service'.⁵² Robinson remarked on what he termed 'Proto-

⁴⁹ Regarding the term 'provincial', see Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, 'Why Persian Art Needs to be Studied and Collected', in *The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, 13-14; for a discussion of the term 'classical', read Christiane Gruber, 'Questioning the 'classical' in Persian painting: models and problems of definition', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 6, 2012, 1-25.

⁵⁰ Robinson, *Collections in the British Isles*, 106.

⁵¹ B.W. Robinson, *Persian Drawings from the 14th through the 19th Century*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976, 30.

⁵² Robinson, *Collections in the British Isles*, 106.

Bukhara' painting, characterising it as 'unskilled and untutored efforts to imitate [Bihzad's] Herat style of the time, executed shortly before the Herat painters themselves arrived in Bukhara to teach it correctly' in 1529.⁵³ Thus to him, in different periods Abu'l-Khairid manuscripts were in thrall to the more dominant Timurids and Safavids.

Robinson's summation of painting in Bukhara across his publications frequently remarks on negative qualities. There are 'signs of decay'; they are 'done by ... less skilled Uzbek pupils' of 'imported Persian artists'; 'the drawing becomes increasingly lifeless and stereotyped, and the standard of execution in many cases leaves much to be desired'; 'the colours are still good but the drawing is often inept, and the landscape is arbitrarily covered with meaningless patterns of tiles and scrollwork'.⁵⁴ Uzbek artisans 'had not the talent to maintain, far less advance, the high standards with which the school had been launched'; 'with such a complete lack of fresh inspiration, either native or imported, it is not surprising that the Bukhara style went completely to seed[,]...reduced to ...sterile formalities'.⁵⁵ He followed British, European, and American typological conventions privileging Timurid and Safavid arts over Abu'l-Khairid; scholars in the Soviet Union found these problematic and promoted what they saw as unique, regional, and local particularities, a view that will soon be discussed.

While the art historical models noted above grouped Abu'l-Khairid materials within chapters on Safavid arts, this is not to say that all European examinations of manuscript arts subsumed Central Asian materials under Iranian headings. Soviet-era historians Mukaddima Ashrafi (1936–2013) and Galina Pugachenkova (1915–2007) excluded the Frenchman Edgar Blochet (1870–1937) from criticism for his singling out Bukharan works as a special school, not under an Iranian category.⁵⁶ So did they and later art historians writing in Russian spare Blochet's contemporary, the Swede Frederik Robert Martin (1868–1933), from negative criticism.⁵⁷ Martin had roamed the bazaars and libraries of Istanbul and Bukhara in search of objects to purchase (and purloin), and wrote *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century* in

⁵³ B.W. Robinson, 'Two Illustrated Manuscripts in the Malek Library, Tehran', in Priscilla Soucek and Richard Ettinghausen, eds., *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988, 95-96.

⁵⁴ Robinson, *Persian Drawings*, 96.

⁵⁵ Robinson, *Bodleian Library*, 127.

⁵⁶ Blochet's *Musulman Painting: XII-XVII Century*, London: Mathuen & Co., 1929, is mentioned in passim in their works. More recently, Zukhra Rakhimova has acknowledged Blochet's nuanced approach in Zukhra Rakhimova, Mavliuda Abbasova-Yusupova, and Gulabza Qarshieva, *Movarounnahr Miniatiura San'atini O'rganish Aspektlari [Aspects of Studying the Miniature of Mawarannahr: Collective Monograph]*, Tashkent: Muxr Press, 2020, 13-14.

⁵⁷ M.M. Ashrafi, *Iz istorii razvoitia miniatiury irana XVI v.*, Dushanbe: Donish, 1978, 6.

1912.⁵⁸ The mixed historiographical utility of this volume has been well analysed with most passing unfavourable judgment, but it is notable that Martin devotes a stand-alone chapter to 'Mirak and the Bukhara School'. He places it in between Timurid and Safavid subjects, enumerating its quintessential features and characteristics that differ from these other two dynasties.

Turning to the Russian-speaking sphere: In articles written in the 1950s, academicians in the Academies of Sciences in the Soviet Socialist Republics used the terms *sredneaziatskii* (Central Asian) and *maverannakhrskii* (Transoxianan; Mawarannahr implies the lands beyond the Oxus River) when treating Abu'l-Khairid along with Timurid materials.⁵⁹ Many criticised the placement of these arts under Iranian headings, with Pugachenkova writing at the time and accusing 'foreign scholars' (implying inhabitants outside of the USSR; specifically English-speaking 'capitalist' scholars) of not understanding schools of manuscript painting in Transoxiana and instead articulating their own 'bourgeois point of view'.⁶⁰ Her and others' adamant assertions of independence from Iranian forms and their delineation of cultural borders paralleled state messaging.

Soviet scientists had an interest in promoting a rhetoric of indigeneness and regional character in their scholarship, demarcating cultural forms 'through difference, which meant the ability to point out distinctions[.] ...Linguistic differences, for instance, were deemed to separate (Turkic) Uzbeks from (Persian) Tajiks.'⁶¹ Border creation in newly Sovietised Central Asia—called Turkestan prior

⁵⁸ The work has been most recently analysed by Robert Hillenbrand, 'Western Scholarship on Persian Painting before 1914: Collectors, Exhibitions and Franco-German Rivalry', in A. Lerner and A. Shalem, eds., *After One Hundred Years: the 1910 Exhibition 'Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst' Reconsidered*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, 206.

⁵⁹ Rakhimova explains how the term 'Mawarannahr' came to be the preferred historical and geographic classification and provides an overview of the historiography of Mawarannahr manuscript research in *Movarounnahr Miniatiura San'atini O'rganish Aspektlari*, 62-75. Another summation of scholars and their research on Abu'l-Khairid materials is in O.V. Vasilyeva and O.M. Yastrebova, *Arts of the Book in the 15th-17th-Century Mawarannahr: From the Collection of the National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg, Russia*, Tashkent: Zamon Press, 2019, 58-59.

⁶⁰ G.A. Pugachenkova, 'Miniatiury 'Fatkh-name' —khroniki pobed Sheibani-khana iz sobrania instituta po izuchenniiu vostochnykh rukopisei Akademiii Nauk UzSSR', *Trudy: Sredneaziatskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Arkheologia Srednei Azii*, 11(3), 1950, 121. Pugachenkova directly calls out Arthur Upham Pope for placing Central Asian arts under Iranian headings in 'Sadovo-Parkovoe Iskusstvo Srednei Azii v epokhu timura i timuridov', *Urta Osio Davlat Universitetining, Ilmii Asarlari. Trudy Sredneaziatskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, 23, 1951, 143-68.

⁶¹ Douglas Northrop, 'Nationalizing Backwardness: Gender, Empire, and Uzbek Identity', in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 199.

to 1924—went beyond language and 'took a "complex" ethnographic approach...studying local cultures, religions, kinship structures, *byt* [way of life], physical type'.⁶² Alfrid Bustanov explains the purpose of this: 'The Bolsheviks moved away from the encompassing concept of Turkestan because they feared the creation of a united Muslim state with a large population and vast economic potential'.⁶³ Despite this interest in specificity and differentiation, the Soviet Union throughout the entirety of its existence emphasised that it was the collective sum of constituent parts whereas the earlier Russian Empire of the tsar maintained a very colonial distinction between metropole and colony.⁶⁴

Akin to the threat of pan-Turkism, Persian-language manuscripts produced in Transoxiana also posed a similar problem of 'pan-Persianism/Iranism' to the Soviets. Hence, scholars' emphasis on an Iranian—Central Asian divide to break up Persian-speaking fraternity.⁶⁵ Lest we picture a detached, heavy-handed imposition of Moscow 'Sovietness' demanding this framework, local elites also played a role in shaping the narrative when it suited their own cosmopolitan purposes and access to resources and power.⁶⁶ Codices of Persian poetry that had been written out before national lines were etched onto a map were ambivalent and ambiguous in that they were from 'communities possessing Persian cultural features or with historic links to Iranian cities (e.g. Bukhara and Samarqand)'⁶⁷ so could be conceptualised as part of a broader, shared pan-Persian tradition; yet another 'sum of its parts', a viewpoint which British scholars emphasised. Or, regionalism could—and, to Soviet thinkers, did—prevail to separate Central from Western Asia. Adopting this approach, rather than unravelling Tajik from Uzbek in historical materials, not only impossible and purposeless but risking upset in two rather tenuously-delineated national republics,⁶⁸ Soviet scientists referred to the manuscripts by the geographic

⁶² Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge & the Making of the Soviet Union*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005, 163.

⁶³ Alfrid K. Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism and the Creation of Central Asian Nations*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014, 37-38.

⁶⁴ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 164.

⁶⁵ As early as the 1930s, the Soviets pursued strengthening 'Iranian sympathies toward Soviet culture and scholarship (Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, 13) yet acknowledged that a desired sovietisation of Persia had proved a failure (Denis V. Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia: Orientalism in Diplomacy and Intelligence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 127). Later in that decade, Soviet-Iranian economic and cultural relations may have declined, but 'political and intelligence activities highly intensified' (Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, 131).

⁶⁶ For the situation in Tajikistan, read Matthias Batts, 'Soviet Orientalism and Nationalism in Central Asia: Aleksandr Semenov's Vision of Tajik National Identity', *Iranian Studies*, 48 (5), 2015, 729-45.

⁶⁷ Stephanie Cronin and Edmund Herzig, 'Guest Editors' Preface and Acknowledgements', *Iranian Studies*, 48(5), 2015, 646.

⁶⁸ See Hirsch's section 'Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of Tajikistan', in *Empire of Nations*, 175-186.

region —Mawarannahr (Transoxiana)— in which they were produced. They thus erected the following distinction: on the one hand, were the Soviet nation-states that possessed a heritage of illuminated manuscript production, and the scholars located in them (such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) as well as outside in Leningrad and Moscow.⁶⁹ On the other hand, were non-USSR Iran and the western scholars who interpreted the materials once produced there, but resided in Tehran, London, and Boston, for example.

It is worth questioning: What was the overarching Soviet viewpoint of Transoxiana administered by the Abu'l-Khairids? Pre-1991 Moscow was reticent to valorise the past rulers, instead writing them off as nomadic, feudal, and backwards and downplaying any positive contributions to the region they had overseen centuries ago.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, the Abu'l-Khairids were not altogether ignored and were indeed quite useful for Soviet determinations of ethnic group formations. The Soviet agenda sought and then mobilised historical figures to craft a past narrative for each Central Asian republic so as to divide up a formerly interconnected cultural heritage and produce segmented and sectioned national histories that justified and legitimised national border demarcations of individual republics.⁷¹ In their analysis on modern and national Uzbek identity formation, Soviet scholars spearheaded by Aleksandr Semënov (1873–1958) claimed the conquest of Transoxiana by the confederation of Uzbek tribes under Abu al-Khair Khan, truly fulfilled by Muhammad Shibani, marked an important moment in Uzbek history and ethnogenesis.⁷² It is then understandable that Abu al-Khair's dynasty and its arts had to be represented as unique and independent from developments in Iran, but scholars could not be too laudatory of the dynasty due to its Mongol roots in the Golden Horde that had attacked the historical lands of the Rus. To do so would breach a Soviet prohibition of scholarship on historical conflicts between Soviet nationalities. The state aim was to present 'a conflict-free historical background to the relationship between the people of Turkistan and Russia' to perpetuate their perceived continued coexistence.⁷³

⁶⁹ Although outside the focus of this present article, if we solely consider the medium of illuminated manuscripts, the other Soviet republics of Georgia and Armenia also possessed this heritage.

⁷⁰ Laura Adams, *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 39-40.

⁷¹ Conversely, the Soviet concept of friendship between peoples was used to curb too much nationalism in the individual republics (Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, 54).

⁷² A. Ilkhamov, 'Archeology of Uzbek Identity: Initial ethnohistorical assumptions for the formation of modern Uzbeks', *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*, 44(4), Spring 2006, 10.

⁷³ Laura Adams, *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, 40. Adams cites Alisher Ilkhamov who explains how Tamerlane came to be viewed 'as a natural ally of Moscow Rus in resisting the Golden Horde' beginning in the Soviet period.

Given the imbrication of the state and academy in the heyday of the USSR, scientific thought and nation-building projects served the central government's 'interests to draw such sharp distinctions between Uzbeks and their neighbors...as a means of forestalling pan-Islamic or pan-Turkic loyalties'.⁷⁴ But just as I expressed my reluctance to align art with politics in the sixteenth century, implying that artisans were operatives of some type of Abu'l-Khairid state, I am equally hesitant to fully associate researchers in Soviet institutions with state authorities. Seeking to gauge the intellectual freedom of Soviet scholars and the level of politicisation in their work, Bustanov's own critique of their research projects on Central Asia takes an intermediary position. The 'intelligentsia's involvement in politics was unavoidable'⁷⁵ 'after the "Sovietization" of the Academy[, and] scholarly work was put under close political control'.⁷⁶ He avows that scholars in the Soviet period had a measured degree of autonomy in expressing their views, and were 'compromised by political motivations but [had] some degree of individual agency unaffected by the political setting'.⁷⁷ Their training and upbringing were undoubtedly inflected by the political environment in which they lived, but their propagating the party line in asserting an early-modern Transoxiana independent of Iranian influence and control could have reflected a genuine belief in regional exceptionalism, and not complicity with the regime.

That being said, in articles published in Russian between the 1950s through the 1980s, some art historians reveal their Soviet partisanship and adherence to communism as they laud details in illustrations from early-modern Central Asia. Galerkina's published papers frequently betray her political persuasion. She contrasts an Abu'l-Khairid Nava'i manuscript produced for Kildi Muhammad—the Abu'l-Khairid governor of Tashkent in the 1520s—with a Timurid Nizami copy illustrated earlier in the Herati court of Sultan Husain Mirza Baiqara.⁷⁸ Within the former, she sees the glorification of working people and democratic tendencies as opposed to the despotic monarchy of the latter.⁷⁹ Without pandering to the demands of aristocrats or a reigning shah, to her the sixteenth-century Central Asian artisans worked in accordance with Soviet interests and pursuits, as opposed to the repeated

⁷⁴ Northrop, 'Nationalizing Backwardness', 200.

⁷⁵ Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, 1.

⁷⁶ Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, 4.

⁷⁷ Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism*, xi.

⁷⁸ Russian National Library ms. Dorn 559.

⁷⁹ O.I. Galerkina's viewpoints are expressed in *Mawarannahr Book Painting*, Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1980, 12; and 'Rukopis' sochinenii Navoi 1521-1522 gg. iz sobraniya GPB im Saltykova-Shchedrina v Leningrade: k voprosu o sredneaziatskoi shkole miniatyur [A manuscript of the works of 'Ali Shir Nava'i written in the years 1521-22, in the collection of the Leningrad Public Library: a study of the Central Asian school of miniature painting', in *Majmuai Maqolaho Bakhshida ba San'ati Khalqi Tojik*, *Asarho*, 11(2), Stalinabad [Dushanbe]: Nashrioti Akademiai Fanhoi RSS Tojikiston, 1956, 231.

glorification of monarchical excess and courtly life 'in Iranian miniatures'.⁸⁰ Incidentally, the 'Iranian' centres are listed by Mukaddima Ashrafi (1936–2013) as the well-known Safavid painting sites Tabriz, Qazvin, Mashhad, and Shiraz in her work *Iz istorii razvitiia miniatiury irana XVI v.* (The History of the Development of the Iranian Miniature in the 16th Century).⁸¹ In Soviet scholarship, Safavid artworks sat comfortably on the Iranian side, Abu'l-Khairid ones on the Central Asian. Timurid objects were more interstitial, thematically and ideologically linked to Iran while geographically connected to both regions. Only after independence and the fall of the Soviet Union would the Timurid dynasty be fully co-opted by the Uzbek state; prior to this, Timur's legacies were associated more with Iran.

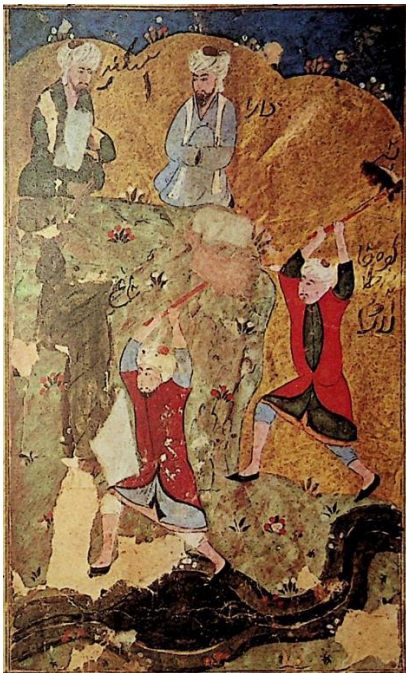


Figure 2. Iskandar by the ford of the Syr Darya. Kuhistani, *Tarikh-i Abu al-Khair Khani* (Abu al-Khair [Khanid] History), colophon stating Samarqand, 1541, dedicated to 'Abd al-Latif Khan. Beruni Institute, Tashkent, ms. 9989, folio 66r.

Praising a particular illustration to Nava'i's tale of Farhad and Shirin depicting labourers toiling and digging a trench for irrigation, Galerkina writes: 'the miniaturist was attracted not by the line of the poem, but by the people's ideals of a strong, just state power, protecting the peace and prosperity of the country'.⁸² Galerkina posits that in commissioning the manuscript in the 1520s, the original patron Kildi Muhammad advocated democracy in society and was against corruption. She commends the imagery of this manuscript and repeated compositions in the *Tarikh-i Abu al-Khair Khani* (fig. 2) that contain humanistic ideals,

⁸⁰ Galerkina, 'Rukopis' sochinenii Navoi 1521-1522'.

⁸¹ Ashrafi, *Iz istorii razvitiia miniatiury irana XVI v.*, 5.

⁸² Pugachenkova, 'Miniatiury 'Fatkh-name' '.

and which focus on social crises, disputes between dynasties, and battles against tyranny. Calling them 'non-capitalist miniatures', she extols the painters' appeals to human values and virtues of loyalty, self-sacrifice, struggles against oppression, and rebellion.⁸³ Compared to the emphasis on regal elites and monarchy and the perceived decadence of Timurid and Safavid arts, Galerkina admires Abu'l-Khairid Mawarannahr paintings for the prevalence of secondary characters in their compositions, their attentiveness to depicting regular people, and their inclusion of workers and soldiers in particular. Never mind that several of these very secondary characters derive from late-Timurid models, or that of Abu'l-Khairid manuscripts feature a plethora of courtly enthronements privileging a singular and central ruler. An illustration in an esteemed *Shahnama* copy (Beruni Institute ms. no. 1811) – with signed paintings by the artist Muhammad Murad Samarqandi executed a half century after its text was written out in Khiva in 1556 – contains a group of Kava's artisans rising up against the oppressive Zahhak. To Galerkina, the depicted subjects and Muhammad Murad's own style to render them embody the unity and steadfastness of the people.⁸⁴ In claiming to observe pro-Socialist tendencies directly in the illustrations, one wonders if Soviet scholars' pronouncements were made to counter much of the earlier British and European scholarship distinguished by its Iranocentrism and promotion of Safavid courtly arts over other dynasties and centres.⁸⁵

Having looked at subject matter in Abu'l-Khairid manuscripts through the lens of art historical rhetoric from the 1950s through 80s, Safavid, Timurid, and Abu'l-Khairid painting styles have also been curiously gendered while at the same being politicised in this period. To A.M. Ismailova writing in Tashkent, 'the Central Asian miniature expresses a manly austerity of design'.⁸⁶ To the London-based Robinson, late sixteenth-century Safavid folios are carried out in the 'decadent and effeminate manner of Isfahan under Shah Abbas'.⁸⁷ Galerkina comments on the lyrical and emotional style of late-Timurid Herat in a manuscript of Dihlavi's *Laili u Majnun* illustrated by Bihzad for the ruler Badi' al-Zaman. She contrasts these with the 'masculinity' of visual representations of extraction and production carried out

⁸³ O. Galerkina, 'Zur Charakteristik der Miniaturenmalerei Mawarannahrs im 16. Jahrhundert', in Klaus Kreiser, ed., *Ars Turcica: Akten des VI. internationalen Kongresses für türkische Kunst, München vom 3. bis 7. September 1979*, Munich: Editio Maris, 1987, 529.

⁸⁴ Galerkina, 'Zur Charakteristik der Miniaturenmalerei', 529.

⁸⁵ Stephanie Cronin explains how Soviet Orientology and Iranology was never intended 'to be independent of ideology and class interest' ('Introduction: Edward Said, Russian Orientalism and Soviet Iranology', *Iranian Studies*, 48(5), 2015, 657).

⁸⁶ A.M. Ismailova, *Oriental Miniatures of Abu Raihon Beruni Institute of Orientology of the USSR Academy of Sciences*, Tashkent: Gafur Gulyam Literature and Art Publishing House, Tashkent, 1980, 17.

⁸⁷ Robinson, *India Office Library*, 43.

in the following century in Transoxiana.⁸⁸ Although this rhetoric is by our present standards outdated, it permeated the art-historical realms of English and Russian-language academia.

Credit goes to Mukaddima Ashrafi-Aini for her thorough exposition of sixteenth-century manuscripts from Central Asia in her work from 1987, evident in her table of contents and classificatory breakdown (fig. 3).⁸⁹ Although I find her repeated referral to Abu'l-Khairid manuscript production as the 'Bukhara School' to be imprecise, her inclusion of artistic developments elsewhere in Samarqand, Shahrukhiya, and Tashkent is commendable.⁹⁰ Other scholars have since adopted her periodisation and methodology in selecting a few key manuscripts to make their points about stylistic transfers and features within the arts of the dynasty.⁹¹ Rather than dividing the span of the sixteenth century into neat and succinct decades-long subsets (as does Ashrafi-Aini), political events, specific battle outcomes, and the accessions of rulers might better motivate artistic divisions. After all, art is not separate from political, religious, economic, or intellectual matters, but is very much interconnected with them.

⁸⁸ Galerkina, 'Rukopis' sochinenii Navoi 1521-1522', 227, 232.

⁸⁹ M.M. Ashrafi, *Bekhzaḍ i razvoitie bukharskoi shkoly miniatiury XVI v.* [Bihzad and the development of the Bukhara school of miniatures in the 16th century], Dushanbe: Donish, 1987. Interestingly, this work has been translated into Persian and published in Iran: Nastaran Zandī, *Bihzād va shikl' gīrī-yi maktab-i mīniatūr-i Bukhārā dar qarn-i 16 milādī*, Sāzmañ-i Čāp va Intishārāt-i Vizārat-i Farhang va Irshād-i Islāmī, Tehran, 1382 [2003].

⁹⁰ Read Mukaddima Ashrafi's synopsis 'The School of Bukhara to c. 1550', in B. Gray, ed., *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia*, Colorado: Shambhala UNESCO, 1979, 249-72; and her posthumous compilation *Bukharskaia Shkola Miniatiury XVI-XVII vekov* [*The Tajik Miniature: Bukhara School XVI-XVII-th Centuries*], Dushanbe: Tajikistan Academy of Sciences, 2011. Be mindful though, that her over-reliance on colophon information causes her to mistakenly attribute manuscripts—such as the *Shibani-nama's* Ottoman illustrations (Austrian National Library cod. mixt. 188)—fully to the Abu'l-Khairid sphere, or she accepts the written year as the overall date of manufacture despite the illustrations having been added decades later.

⁹¹ The approach is used by the following scholars: O. Akimushkin, 'Biblioteka Shibanidov v Bukhare XVI veka', in Ingeborg Baldauf and Michael Friederich, eds., *Bamberger Zentralasienstudien. Konferenzakten ESCAS IV Bamberg 8.-12. Oktober 1991*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1994, 325-41; Yves Porter, 'Remarques sur la peinture à Boukhara au XVIe siècle', *Cahiers d'Asie centrale*, 5/6, 1998, 147-67; Karin Rührdanz, 'The Arts of The Book in Central Asia', in J. Kalter and M. Pavalio, eds., *Uzbekistan Heirs to Silk Road*, London & New York, 1997, 101-19; Karin Rührdanz, 'Die Entwicklung der mittelasiatischen Buchmalerei vom 15. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert', in *Eothen: Jahreshefte der Gesellschaft der Freunde Islamischer Kunst und Kultur*, 1998, 109-22; Barbara Schmitz, 'BUKHARA vi. Bukharan School of Miniature Painting', in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, available at <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/bukhara-vi> (accessed on 16 January 2015); Rakhimova, et al., *Movarounnahr Miniatiura San'atini O'rganish Aspektlari*; Vasilyeva and Yastrebova, *Arts of the Book in the 15th-17th-Century Mawarannahr*.

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Translation to Chapter 3—The Bukhara School and its Place in the Artistic Traditions of Miniatures:

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Figure 3: Contents page to M.M Ashrafi, *Behzad i razvitie bukharskoi shkoly miniatiury XVI v.* [Behzad and the development of the Bukhara school of miniatures in the 16th century], Dushanbe: Donish, 1987, 240.

Conclusion: folio versus codex

The shared iconographic features of Timurid, Safavid, and Abu'l-Khairid manuscripts are undeniable. Different scribes living under various dynastic administrations wrote out the same titles of Persian and Turkic poetry. Anglophone scholars were keen to promote these commonalities as components of a broader unified culture, but Soviet art historians identified distinct regional identities distinguishing and isolating sixteenth-century Central Asia from Iran. These English and Russian-speaking researchers were writing in parallel on the same Abu'l-Khairid dynastic arts at the same time in the mid twentieth century. However, due to impediments of language or politics, they do not seem to have been communicating with each other at this time.⁹² This is in spite of several international

⁹² The obituary to Mukaddima Ashrafi however notes she gave presentations in the USSR, USA, and Europe in the 1970s. 'M. Ashrafi, who revealed to the world the beauty of medieval Tajik miniatures, has passed away', *Asia-Plus*, July 2, 2013.

congresses bringing them into contact with each other, with the third held at the Hermitage Museum in 1935 originally conceived as 'Persian Art and Archaeology' but renamed 'Iranian Art and Archaeology' with pressure from the Iranian government.⁹³

It was only after the breakup of the Soviet Union did Robinson in his 1991 publication acknowledge Pugachenkova's *Miniatures of Central Asia* book originally from 1979. Robinson allowed 'a measure of admirable local patriotism in her thesis' and respected her scholarship.⁹⁴ Having operated in two different geo-political zones (USSR and UK) with limited porousness over the previous decades, it is understandable that these scholars came up with different classificatory schema to treat Abu'l-Khairid painted arts. They might have reached their separate conclusions based on the materials available to them.

Writing on the historiography of Persian cultural arts by European authors at the start of the twentieth century, Robert Hillenbrand calls it 'the age of the collector' which impacted what both scholars and the general public could observe.⁹⁵ The accessible materials that could be examined were often derived from courtly manuscripts and those with uniform illustrative programmes, or dispersed album pages in private collections. Their study became 'a self-sustaining project from which scholars found it well nigh impossible to break free'.⁹⁶ The same illustrations appeared in many of the English, French, and German monographs reinforcing the erected categories. Thus in European and British scholarship, there was a reliance on selected pages — 'miniatures' — to produce clear-cut dynastic divisions. Quite truly, manuscripts and albums were ripped apart to extract visual material that could be sold off separately at fine prices, in the process destroying the original context for the illustrations. Specimens identified as products of the 'Bukhara School' were more often loose folios and dispersed paintings in private and public French and British collections.⁹⁷ These may have invited the Anglophones to group them under a Safavid category due to their placement

<<https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/life/person/20130702/iz-zhizni-ushla-m-ashrafi-otkryvshaya-miru-krasotu-srednevekovoi-tadzhikskoi-miniatyury>>

⁹³ Yuka Kadoi, 'The Study of Persian Art on the Eve of World War II: The Third Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology in 1935', in Iván Szántó and Yuka Kadoi, eds., *The Reshaping of Persian Art: Art Histories of Islamic Iran and Beyond*, Piliscsaba, Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2019, 117-34.

⁹⁴ Robinson, 'Transoxiana' in *Fifteenth-Century Persian Painting*, 46. Although he doesn't mention it, Pugachenkova collaborated with Galerkina on *Miniatiury Srednei Azii*. Pugachenkova's personal papers have been archived and digitised.

<<https://pugachenkova.net/>>

⁹⁵ Hillenbrand, 'Western Scholarship on Persian Painting before 1914', 216.

⁹⁶ David J. Roxburgh, 'The Study of Painting and the Arts of the Book', *Muqarnas*, 17, 2000, 3.

⁹⁷ Several folios were likely taken from the Ottoman and Mughal imperial libraries in the decades prior to their sale.

alongside other Safavid single-page paintings in period albums, or their compositional similarities to other Safavid illustrations. Although finely attuned to stylistic details within the paintings and capable of connecting them to preceding and contemporary works, the analysis was impaired by a lack of colophons, contextualisation, and comparanda of complete manuscripts.

In contrast, choice specimens of intact manuscripts produced across the Abu'l-Khairid period had been collected in the region even before the Russian imperial armies marched into Turkestan in the late nineteenth century. These include important historical chronicles personally commissioned by Muhammad Shibani and the subsequent great khans in Samarqand, several manuscripts made for Kildi Muhammad in Tashkent, and the output of the early Bukhara scriptorium compiling titles for 'Ubaidullah's son 'Abd al-'Aziz in Bukhara. Deposited into Saint Petersburg and Moscow libraries and museums with some remaining in Tashkent and fewer in Dushanbe, the later Soviet art historians benefitted from direct examination of these complete works within their borders. In sum: despite the politicised tone in their writing, Soviet analysis of broader manuscript production outside Bukhara had greater historical and contextual nuance than their British counterparts writing at the same time, though the latter—generally speaking—possessed finer skills in formal readings and comparative approaches.

Recent scholarship in a variety of languages (Russian, English, and French among others) is indebted to these intellectual predecessors, referring more neutrally to Mawarannahr manuscript painting and grouping together centres in Central Asia between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries to objectively examine continuities and ruptures. Current events in the world may threaten to return us to the rigid geo-political spheres of the 1950s, but studies can continue to progress through collegial dialogue and accessing publications and materials in all corners of academia and the globe.

Although dynastic borders take forms that differ from current nation-states, some dynasties get associated with national narratives more than others. Art is frequently co-opted to make nationalist and political claims of sovereignty, group affiliation, and exceptionalism. Manuscript arts of the early-modern period become charged with the concerns of the modern present. All scholarship is grounded in time and place, and reflects the cultural milieu and the intellectual climate when it was written. The Islamic Republic of Iran has largely embraced the Safavid past for its promotion of Shi'ite Islam as state ideology. At the same time, Uzbekistan extols the refinement of the Timurids and its literary and cultural legacies. The Abu'l-Khairids continue to peer from the margins of history, not quite forgotten or

Jaimee K. Comstock-Skipp The 'Iran' Curtain: the historiography of Abu'l-Khairid (Shaybanid) arts of the book and the 'Bukhara School' during the Cold War

harnessed to promote nationalistic concerns, but awaiting their day of full recognition.⁹⁸

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⁹⁸ In a remarkable discovery, Adams reports: 'Talk of the Shaibanids was beginning to enter the public sphere in 2002, whereas six years earlier, in a meeting of the President's Council with historians, the policy makers had decided that the Uzbek people just "weren't ready" to learn about the Shaibanids' (Adams, *The Spectacular State*, ftn 35, 208).