Art Appreciation Lecture Series 2018
The hidden language of art: symbol and allusion

Gardens and pavilions: politics and symbolism in the Mughal landscape

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31 January and 1 February 2018

Lecture summary:

The Mughal emperors of India considered themselves Timurids, descendants of the Central Asian ruler Timur (also known in European literature as “Tamerlane”) who ruled from 1370 until 1405. This legacy had a major impact on how they ruled in India. This lecture will discuss their relationship to the landscape, how this can be read through Mughal painting, and how this affects the depictions of the Mughal emperors themselves. I will focus on three of the first five Mughal emperors: Babur, who ruled from 1526 until 1530; his grandson, Akbar, who ruled from 1556 until 1605; and his grandson, Shah Jahan, who ruled from 1628 until 1659.

Slide list:

1. Sydney Modern Project by SANAA:

2. ‘The Mughal Emperor Babur outside Agra,’ by Ramdas from a manuscript of the Baburnama, Mughal India c1589 (V&A, London)

3. Map of Mughal India and Timurid Central Asia (from Ebba Koch, Mughal Architecture); and RIGHT: Prince Babur arriving at Andijan by Bishan Das from a manuscript of the Baburnama [The History of Babur], Mughal India c1590 (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)

4. LEFT: Map of Mughal India and Timurid Central Asia (from Ebba Koch, Mughal Architecture?); and RIGHT: ‘Timur celebrates his conquest of Delhi in 1398’ from a manuscript of the Zafarnama, Timurid Shiraz, Iran 1436 (Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge MA)

5. ‘Timur granting an audience in Balkh on the occasion of his accession to power in 1370’ from a manuscript of the Zafarnama, Herat, Afghanistan 1467-68 (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore)

6. LEFT: ‘Timur hands his crown to Babur’ by Govardhan, India c1630 (V&A, London) and RIGHT: ‘Akbar hands his crown to Shah Jahan’ by Bichitr, Mughal India 1631 (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin)

7. Sura 45: 13-16, folio from a partially dispersed Koran, Central Asia c1400-25, 177 x 101cm (A Soudavar Collection)

8. Illuminated colophon from a manuscript of the Gulistan [Rose Garden] of Sa’di with a painting by Manohar depicting the calligrapher Muhammad Husayn Kashmiri ‘Zarin Qalam’ and a self-portrait of the artist, Mughal India 1582-83 (Royal Asiatic Society, London)

9. ‘The princess of the blue pavilion: the youth of Rum is entertained in a garden by a fairy and her maidens’ by Manohar from a manuscript of the Khamsa [Quintet] of Amir Khusraw of Delhi, India, 1597-98 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

10. LEFT: Ferghana landscape (anonymous photo from web); and RIGHT: Agra, India, with Taj Mahal seen in the distance from the Agra Fort (photograph: Michael Brand)
11. ‘Prince Babur inspecting construction at the Bagh-i-Wafa [Garden of Fidelity near Kabul; Afghanistan]’ by Bishan Das with important faces by Nanha from a manuscript of the Baburnama [The History of Babur], Mughal India c1590 (V&A, London)

12. Double-page illustration ‘Prince Babur oversees the making of the garden at Istalif garden [near Kabul, Afghanistan]’ designed by Miskin and painted by Nand Gwaliori (L) and Sanwala (R) from a manuscript of the Baburnama [The History of Babur], India c1590 (private collection)

13. ‘The Hindu god Krishna lifting Mt Govardhan’ attributed to Miskin from a manuscript of the Harivamsa [The Genealogy of Hari], Mughal India c1590-95 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

14. LEFT: ‘Mango trees and peafowl’ by Miskin from a manuscript of the Baburnama [The History of Babur], Mughal India c1590 (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin) and RIGHT: ‘Two peafowl’ attributed to Mansur, Mughal India c1610 (Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge MA)

15. Double-page illustration ‘Akbar hunts near Lahore, while Hamid Bakshi is punished by having his head shaved’ (left half) design and portraits by Miskin and painting by Sarwan (right half) design by Miskin and painting by Mansur from a manuscript of the Akbarnama [The History of Akbar], Mughal India, c1590 (V&A, London)

16. LEFT: ‘Akbar on pilgrimage by foot to Ajmer to give thanks for the birth of Prince Salim’ by Basawan and Nand Gwaliori and RIGHT: ‘Akbar Akbar inspecting the construction of Fatehpur-Sikri’ design by Tulsi, painting by Bandi and faces by Madhu the Younger from a manuscript of the Akbarnama [The History of Akbar], Mughal India, c1590 (V&A, London)

17. LEFT: Plan of Fatehpur-Sikri and RIGHT: axonometric drawing of part of a water system at Fatehpur-Sikri (from Attlio Petruccioli, Fatehpur Sikri)

18. LEFT: Fatehpur-Sikri, c1569-78 (photograph: Michael Brand); and RIGHT: Hypothetical reconstruction of part of the palace zone of Fatehpur-Sikri (from Attilio Petruccioli, Fatehpur Sikri)

19. ‘Akbar in discussion with religious leaders in the Ibadat Khana at Fatehpur-Sikri’ by Nar Singh from a manuscript of the Akbarnama, Mughal India, 1597 (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin)

20. Right hand image from Slide 6

21. Shalimar Garden, Kashmir, 1620s from the air (photographs: Michael Brand)

22. Pavilion at Shalimar Garden, Kashmir, India 1620s (photograph: Michael Brand)

23. Shalamar Garden, Lahore, Pakistan 1641-42 (photograph: Michael Brand)

24. Humayun’s Tomb, Delhi, India 1562-71 (photographs: Michael Brand)

25. LEFT: Jahangir’s Tomb, Shahdara, Lahore, Pakistan 1628-38 (photograph: Michael Brand) and RIGHT: Jahangir’s Tomb (photograph: W Baker, 1870)

26. Perspective reconstruction of Agra riverfront based on a map for the Maharaja of Jaipur, India c1720s (from Ebba Koch, Complete Taj Mahal)

27. Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-43 (photograph: Michael Brand)

28. Closer up view, Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-43 (photograph: Michael Brand)

29. Cenotaph of Mumtaz Mahal and relief carved marble dado panel at Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1632-43 (photographs: Michael Brand)

30. Right hand image from Slide 5

31. Repeat of Slide 2

For access to all past lecture notes visit:
32. Details from Slide 16

33. ‘The Emperor Shah Jahan on the Peacock Throne’ attributed to Govardhan, Mughal India c1636 (Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge MA)

References:


