

caring protector of a nation where the individual has been submerged in the collective (p. 161).

This last theme—or, a concrete example, Pahlavi-era stamps depicting allegoric figures of justitia or the Majles and Senate—raises the question whether stamps simply serve to propagandistically influence public opinion propagandistically. Iranians knew perfectly well that Pahlavi autocracy and democracy were mutually exclusive. Why, then, try to convince them of the opposite? Depicting symbols of democratic life—or of reforms like land reform, although that may stretch my point—could be understood as a way to subvert society by forcing it into a silent pact of mutual make-belief with the ruler. It recalls Lisa Wedeen's analysis of "Acting as if" in Baathist Syria, where "the regime(s) demand(s) that people provide external evidence of their allegiance to a cult whose rituals of obeisance are often transparently phony."¹

Related questions concern the real impact of propaganda (Siebertz consciously and, given the lack of sources, wisely abstains from analysis): the way support for a regime (or its lack) affects propaganda, and the only real theoretical lacuna of the book: how did Iran's "ruling class" and the state interact? Although the former is mentioned as an independent actor in the introduction, it is neglected in the book. A benign neglect; after all, there was no one socio-culturally hegemonic class dominating the twentieth century. And politically, the autocratic shahs excluded any class from sharing power between 1921–41 and 1962–78.

Such questions notwithstanding, this well-researched, fascinating book is a valuable contribution to the cultural and political history of modern Iran and should find its way into libraries and private collections.

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The Persian Album, 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection, David Roxburgh, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005; ISBN 978–0300103250, 399 pp. including bibliography and index, 171 figures.

In a land where natural disasters, looting, and neglect destroyed much of its cultural heritage, it was—in retrospect—an act of providence that the Safavid Shah Tahmasb set a precedent for sending masterpieces of his treasury to the Ottomans. For, while successive Safavid gift-bearing embassies to the Porte almost emptied the Safavid royal libraries, on the receiving end the Ottomans stored the gifts in palaces to which very few had access (i.e., a boon for the preservation of works of art). On the other hand, even though these palaces have now become Turkish museums, they nevertheless remain impenetrable fortresses for

¹Lisa Wedeen, "Acting 'As If': Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 3 (1998): 504.

most scholars. It was thus a second act of providence that during his student years, David Roxburgh found his way into these fortresses and accumulated a wealth of information that he now uses in one study after another.

In this book, his goal is to shed a new light on the Persian album, a compendium of calligraphy and paintings bound in a book-like format, whose true value as a mirror for princely education and courtly erudition had hitherto not attracted the recognition that it deserves. As he notes on p. 15, even the usually thorough Ivan Stchoukine saw the Topkapi albums as an “oriental collector’s fantasy,” a disorderly and hodgepodge collection of works art. Stchoukine—like most other western art-historians—had been interested in painting and had looked upon the album as a repository of images. He thus analyzed its paintings but neglected its calligraphy and textual content.

Roxburgh, on the other hand, understands the importance of calligraphy and devotes a substantial number of pages to show their relevance in the creation of the album genre and its subsequent evolution over the course of two centuries. His aim is to present a comprehensive image by providing as much information as possible. He had already set the tone for this task in his previous publication, *Prefacing the Image, The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (*Muqarnas* Supplement XI) 2001, in which he overwhelmed the reader with a vast amount of information tucked in footnotes more extensive than the text itself. The same attention to details and informative approach is continued in this volume. For instance, when exploring the content of a calligraphy album made for the celebrated bibliophile and Timurid art patron, Prince Baysonghor, Roxburgh does not contend himself with giving a summary listing of the pieces therein, but explains their relevancy as belonging to the standard educational corpus of the learned in those days. Not only does he describe the calligraphy of each piece, but he also gives a brief historical biography of the author of its text (be it as-Sabi, as-Suli, al-Hajjaj, or Ebn-e Zayyat), provides translations of the text, and shows how the choice of its subject matter followed the mirror for the Prince’s tradition of providing worldly advice to despotic princes and rulers at every possible occasion (pp. 62–4).

As it is customary for academia today, Roxburgh’s writing is studded with post-modern expressions which tend to obscure the language without adding any precision to it. But once that post-modern veneer is set aside, what appears underneath is the work of an erudite scholar who has tackled a very complex multi-layered art-form that resonates differently when looked upon as a whole or completely dissected, whether its structural content is being analyzed or its aesthetic beauty is being contemplated, whether one evaluates the merits of its initial patron or the perception of subsequent owners. And he succeeds at it admirably, by thoroughly studying all important aspects of some five albums.

The theoretical framework of the study is set by recognizing that in respect to albums the whole is greater than the sum of its components and that the appreciation of each varies according to changing social, political, and cultural values; values which constitute “the cultural biography of things” (p. 6). The meaning

of each collected item may then vary according to the function envisaged for it by its collector. Ottomans for example, valued the Timurid heritage more than the Safavid one and, therefore, tried to emphasize the former through the addition of illuminations. Thus, Roxburgh sheds light on the later addition of Ottoman illuminations around the seal of a previous Timurid owner, namely Ebn-e Hosayn, son Soltan Hosayn Bayqara (p. 77), and around calligraphy pieces of the aforementioned Baysonghor album. And through an autopsy by codicology, he even finds how some pages of this album had been dispersed and rearranged in other albums.

Similarly, he argues that an album page is more than calligraphy and illumination on paper, for it conveys a mood evoked by a poem or piece of literature, written in an appropriate script (e.g., *nast'aliq* for poetry, and the more angular scripts such as *muhaggaq* for Qoranic or religious texts), with a *mise en page* and decorative illumination to enhance that mood. And in the same way that Persian poetry makes oblique references to a variety of subjects, an album such as Baysonghor's involves a complex layering of meanings (p. 75). Even when there is an explanatory introduction, as for instance Dust Muhammad's preface to Bahram Mirza's album, deciphering it does not come easy since it invokes a multitude of ideas (poetry, astrology, religious sciences, etc.), the comprehension of which necessitates a vast knowledge and must rely on "the viewer's faculty of memory" (p. 34).

Given the Iranian reverence for master-pupil relationship, and the constant endeavor of the pupil to emulate his master, Roxburgh shows how, like the Sufis whose statures were linked to that of their *selseleb* or the chain of transmission, the fame of a calligrapher or painter was also linked to the chain of calligraphers and painters that he was emulating. Thus, many albums contain work specimens of previous masters—at times mere scrap work—to emphasize the chain of transmission.

An important contribution of Roxburgh in this book is to explain how and why albums came into existence: mainly as the extension of the format of poetry anthologies to a collection of calligraphy and paintings. Scientific and philosophical anthologies, such as the *Dorrat ot-tāj lel-Amira Dobbāj* (written by Qotboddin-e Shirazi for a prince of Gilan) were already in circulation in early fourteenth century and reflected its recipient's erudition. Princely education, or *farhang-e shābaneh*, became dependant upon it, and Timurid princes who took the Mongol princes as models and wanted to surpass them in erudition extended the creation of this type of compendiums to poetry. Timur's grandson, Eskandar Soltan, in particular initiated the production of a vast array of anthologies, scientific as well as literary. As Roxburgh explains (p. 150–1), the anthologies of Eskandar Soltan "began to take apart the notion of the book as a stable object" and brought changes "in a format driven initially by the requirements of the anthology," such as the shape of the oblong *safineh*, or the use of new material such as Chinese papers. These changes in format inevitably led to the creation of the Persian album (*moraqqā*), eventually standardized as a collection of

calligraphies and paintings in which two facing pages of calligraphy alternate with two facing pages of painting with similar decorative border adorning the pair of facing pages.

Even though Roxburgh mentions that the practice of album making extended to the non-courtly milieu and sub-royal social groups (p. 8), the fact is that his study pertains to courtly and not popular art. It was courtly to begin with and essentially remained so afterwards. It is precisely for this reason that the consciousness about the history of album making must have greatly suffered in its native land of Iran, when most albums left the royal Safavid treasury and disappeared behind Topkapi walls or immigrated as export commodity to India. Roxburgh's study brings back to life the rich and colorful past of the forgotten art of Persian album making.

Conspicuously absent in this very thorough study is not only an attempt to identify and attribute unsigned paintings but to even acknowledge previously made attributions such as those for the paintings reproduced in fig. 151, and published by S.C. Welch as the works of Aqa Mirak (*The Houghton Shahnama*, 1981, vol.1, p.114). In a not too distant past, the main endeavor of art historians was to describe works of art and identify their painters. But it seems that since Welch achieved the monumental task of identifying the bulk of the painters of the royal-library of Shah Tahmasb in the 1960s and 70s, those who could not see or follow his explanations preferred to shun this practice and almost succeeded in rendering it inadmissible for academia. Granted that the task of identifying each and every painting in these albums was perhaps beyond the scope that Roxburgh had set for himself, but whereas the thorough explanation of the albums that he investigates was an implicit target of his, a few obvious attributions would have greatly enhanced the reader's understanding of his subject matter. The attribution of fig. 108 to Shah Tahmasb for instance, should have been detected and discussed. After all, it doesn't require much imagination to attribute a page of four awkwardly figures—drawn by an inferior hand, with close affinities to a work signed by Shah Tahmasb (fig. 131) and another one attributed to him (fig. 134)—to Shah Tahmasb himself, especially when placed in an album bearing his name. Clearly, such an attribution adds much to our perception of Tahmasb as a patron and what really interested him: besides his master in painting, Behzad, the subjects that he chose are funny and/or distorted people as well as entertainers and boon companions with a religious tint (e.g., two of them, Hafez Mahicheh and Hafez Qasem, were Qoran-reciters as well as court jesters). Tahmasb, who rode donkeys instead of horses, and who went fishing instead of hunting, also preferred the company of simple and entertaining servants to sophisticated courtiers.

Such a criticism should in no way diminish the merit of Roxburgh's work and the huge amount of encyclopedic information that he delivers with it. His book will be used as a reference for years to come. One should note, however, that a century ago, through the study of mostly black and white photos, Stchoukine proposed a vast number of attributions (albeit not always correct) that provided

a great impetus for the study of Persian paintings. Today, with the advent of scanners, image processors, and other devices, attributions and more generally pattern recognition are not only easier but can be more scientific and less subjective. One only hopes that academia, especially at Harvard, would stop shunning this very essence of art-history in the future and stimulate the study of works of art by discussing the hands that created them.

Additional remarks: (p. 134), Soltan `Ali's mistakes in the copying of Soltan Hosayn Mirza's poems arose because they were written in Chaghatay Turkish and he could not understand them; (p. 206), the verses, کاتب و نقاش و قزوینی و خر بی تکلف خوش ترقی کرده اند refer not to Qazvinis in general but to Qāzi-ye Jahan; (p. 334, n. 5) should read *arbab-i tamā*; (p. 336, n. 65) manuscript H1653 of the Topkapı is still referred to as the *Majma' ot-tavārikh* of Hafez-e Abru, although as I had discussed in *Art of the Persian Courts* (1992, p. 64), it is a combination of this text with *the Jāmeh ot-tavārikh* of Rashid-od-din and prepared as a replacement for a lost volume of Rashid's work in the library of Shāhrokh; (p. 345, n. 75) should read *Allābūma kballid* (instead of *kballada*).

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La République islamique d'Iran: De la maison du Guide à la raison d'État, Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud, Paris: Éditions Michalon, 2005, ISBN 2-84186-250-X, pp. 120.

The three parts of this short introduction to the Islamic Republic of Iran successively treat Iran's domestic politics, political economy, and foreign policy.

In the first part, the author discusses the evolution of Iranian politics against the background of changes in Iranian society since the Revolution. She argues that the revolutionary regime owes its survival to, on the one hand, rising oil prices in the 1990s which have allowed it to postpone necessary but painful structural reforms in the economy, and, on the other hand, to its capacity to institutionalize itself to the point where many groups in society have a stake in the status quo. Moreover, beginning in the early 1990s, expertise and know-how came to be valued again, leading to a reintegration of the previously-shunned secular middle class into Iranian society. Thanks to an expanded educational system, the middle class has kept growing, as a result of which demands for the rule of law, civil society, and more personal freedom have been kept alive and are now espoused by many non-secular Iranians. The author then summarizes the power struggle between reformers and conservatives, arguing that after the stifling of electoral competition in the wake of the elections to the seventh majles (2004), citizens' participation has been redirected from the political arena to society, there being close to 30,000 associations in which ordinary people engage in cultural, humanitarian, and environmental activities independently of the state.