



Abstracta Iranica

Revue bibliographique pour le domaine irano-aryen

Volume 26 | 2005

Comptes rendus des publications de 2003

Perspectives on Persian Painting. Illustrations to Amir Khusrau's Khamsa. London - New York, Routledge Curzon, 2003, XXVII+324 p.

Karin Rührdanz



Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/2491>

ISSN : 1961-960X

Éditeur :

CNRS (UMR 7528 Mondes iraniens et indiens), Éditions de l'IFRI

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 15 mai 2005

ISSN : 0240-8910

Référence électronique

Karin Rührdanz, « *Perspectives on Persian Painting. Illustrations to Amir Khusrau's Khamsa.* London - New York, Routledge Curzon, 2003, XXVII+324 p. », *Abstracta Iranica* [En ligne], Volume 26 | 2005, document 277, mis en ligne le 07 décembre 2005, consulté le 01 mai 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/abstractairanica/2491>

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- 1 Dealing with one of the most frequently illustrated Persian works Brend presents some thirty-three manuscripts mainly produced during the 15th century, and analyses the different ways the manuscripts were provided with miniatures. In the introduction she records life and time of Amīr Ḥusraw. This is followed, in the first chapter, by summaries of the five poems constituting his *Ḥamsa* and emphasising illustrated episodes. Chapters 2 – 7 are dedicated to the analysis of “Manuscripts of western Iran prior to the death of Shah Rukh”, “Sultanate manuscripts”, “Manuscripts in Turkman styles”, “Ottoman manuscripts under Bayezid II”, “Classical and sub-classical styles of Herat” and “Mughal manuscripts to the period of Jahangir”. Appendix A contains a list of illustrated subjects mentioning in each case the manuscripts comprising such a miniature. Appendix B presents the cycles of illustration in the individual copies. The book is provided with 23 coloured and 104 black and white plates.
- 2 The manuscripts and their miniatures are described in detail. Their stylistic background is illuminated, and attributions to known artists are suggested. In general, this gives a clear idea of the place of an individual miniature within the frame of the stylistic development in a certain period and of connections to earlier models. The author tentatively explains unusual selection of subjects and compositional elements. This is mostly done by recourse to ideas of artists and personal decisions of patrons, sometimes connected to dynastic history. The historical background is, therefore, explained at some length. A manuscript's cycle of illustration, however, does not receive the same attention as the individual miniature, and lacks the embedding into the context of cultural history in a given period/region. This may in part be due to flaws in the material which complicate comparisons between manuscripts: of the thirty-three items some contain

only one or two of the five poems, some have lost illustrations, others are dispersed. If the cycles are part of anthologies their visual interpretation of Amīr Ḥusraw's work can only be understood by taking into account the complete volume. Probably, the potential of the material presented by Brend can only be exhausted when comparisons with analogous studies of other frequently illustrated Persian works will be possible in the future.

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Thèmes : 5.1. Monde iranophone

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