

Eric Schroeder: maverick polymath

Robert Hillenbrand



Figure 1. Photograph of Eric Schroeder in profile with pipe, taken in Prescott Street. Eric Schroeder Papers, Archives Box 178. Harvard Art Museum Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge MA (photograph: Imaging Department, © President and Fellows of Harvard College)

Eric Schroeder was an outstanding art historian who made a particularly significant contribution to the study of medieval Persian architecture and book painting in the 1930s and 1940s, a time when these subjects were finding their feet in academe. He therefore played a significant role in the early historiography of the discipline of Islamic art history – for he did not confine his interests to Iran. His charismatic personality made a deep impression on his contemporaries, which included some of the great and the good of the literary world. His reputation depends largely on his writings; he never made his mark on a more than local stage either as a teacher or as a museum curator. Thus it is indeed a pity that his two major books were published in such limited editions¹ that they failed to have the impact that they deserved; and this was all the more unfortunate since his output was characterised by quality

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¹ *Persian Miniatures in the Fogg Museum of Art* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1942) had a print run of 150; see S. Cary Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', *Acquisitions (Fogg Art Museum) (1969 - 1970)*, 15. The print run of *Muhammad's People* was also very small. Basil Gray noted that 'Unfortunately for students in Britain, both these books were published in very small editions and are hardly to be found here, even in University libraries' ('Obituary. Eric Schroeder', *Iran*, IX, 1971, viii).

rather than quantity. He operated on the periphery of the academic world, for he did not have a university post, nor did he seek fame, and he virtually never taught undergraduates, let alone doctoral students.² So he became something of a recluse, surrounded by an aura of mystery. Accordingly he has never received due recognition for his achievements as a historian of Persian art. The present article is a modest attempt to rectify this situation. Its point of departure is not to resuscitate a forgotten but now largely irrelevant figure, but on the contrary to celebrate Schroeder's work as prophetic in certain respects and, above all, as attaining a star quality that is timeless. Three of his supreme achievements should be required reading for any serious student of Islamic art, and the earlier a student reads them the better. They are his analyses of: the Fogg's early Timurid image of Tahmina entering Rustam's chamber; the north dome of the Isfahan Friday Mosque; and the Ilkhanid stucco *mihrab* in that mosque. Each of these is an absolute masterpiece of art-historical analysis and profound insight. Each is unsurpassed by later scholarship. And it is worth underscoring that the first concerns a book painting, the second an architectural monument and the third a decorative design. In other words, the analyses of these works do not overlap. Thus they illustrate Schroeder's status as one of the very rare Renaissance men in Islamic art history.

Schroeder's life has yet to find its biographer, and the nearest approach to such a study is the appreciation by Stuart Cary Welch produced near the end of Schroeder's life. It is somewhat over-written and has an uneasily hagiographic flavour; it teeters on the brink of hero-worship.³ Happily it is supplemented by a judicious obituary written by Basil Gray.⁴ Information on Schroeder's early life and upbringing is hard to come by. He was a son of the manse and grew up in a loving family with several siblings.⁵ Already in his time as an undergraduate at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he was a Scholar, he had begun to make his mark as a poet, becoming an active figure on the Oxford literary scene; his poems achieved publication in the annual volumes of *Oxford Poetry* every year from 1924 to 1927. In

² In his article on Schroeder, Welch refers to him as a born teacher and bewails the fact that he never gave regular courses to students (Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 28); in fact he did give lectures on Islamic art at the Iranian Institute in New York, though the possibility of his teaching at Harvard was raised in 1938, and he turned down an offer in 1955 to give lectures there (Benedict Cuddon, 'A field pioneered by amateurs: the collecting and display of Islamic art in early twentieth-century Boston', *Muqarnas*, 30, 2013, 33, n. 114; cf. 31, n. 76).

³ Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 9-30. Like Schroeder, Welch worked for many years as an honorary curator at the Fogg, one of a network of cultivated amateurs who enriched the university's cultural life.

⁴ Gray, 'Obituary', vii-viii.

⁵ For further information on his domestic background see Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 12 and 19, although he sheds no light on the probable German origins of the family; in his opinion Schroeder's pro-German sentiments barred him from obtaining a teaching job, presumably at Harvard (Cuddon, 'Field', 31, n. 76).

1926⁶ and 1927⁷ he also contributed, alongside Wystan H. Auden, Harold Acton and others, to *The Oxford Outlook*, which published poems by undergraduates. His circle of friends there included Harold Acton, Robert Byron, David Talbot Rice, Edwin Muir, Ellis Waterhouse, Peter Quenell and Gerald Reitlinger; and Wystan H. Auden expressed interest in his poetry. A lifelong friend was Basil Gray; they exchanged letters throughout Schroeder's life.⁸

Even before he graduated from Oxford (fig. 1), and as he was casting around in search of a suitable career, he displayed a yen for adventure that was never to leave him. He decided impulsively to take up an invitation that took him to Kish in southern Iraq to help in the Oxford and Chicago excavation of a Sasanian site at the urging of, and partly in the company of, David Talbot Rice. Both men were rank amateurs as archaeologists, but that was not rare at the time. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that in the first season (1926-27) Schroeder was still an undergraduate. He took the opportunity to survey a series of ruins in the desert between North Arabia and Syria with Henry Field of Chicago, and it was here that he cut his teeth as a surveyor and recorder of late antique and medieval buildings. This survey achieved publication over thirty years later.⁹ The somewhat random move to the Kish excavations for two seasons proved decisive for his future career, for the early training as a budding Near Eastern archaeologist that it gave him was accompanied by the experience of living in the Arab world for months on end. Typically enough he undertook a hazardous, indeed foolhardy, expedition into a forbidden area of Turkish Kurdistan which left him in bad odour with the British mandate authorities in Iraq.

It was at this juncture in his life that chance took him quite unexpectedly to America. Friends there had sent cables urging him to take up a vacant post at Milton Academy in Massachusetts, which he accepted. He taught archaeology there for two years. It was here that he met, fell in love with and ultimately married Margaret Forbes of Boston, in 1930. Their wedding journey took them to Scotland, where he worked in a cottage on a book on Shakespeare's villains, a project he later discarded. It was when the newly-weds went to London and visited the great Persian

⁶ *The Oxford Outlook*, VIII: no. 39, June 1926, ed. Donald A. Stauffer; other contributors included Wystan H. Auden and Harold Acton.

⁷ *The Oxford Outlook*, VIII: no. 43, June 1927; other contributors included Ronald McNair Scott, Donald Stauffer and John Hilton. For further anecdotal material on Schroeder's poetry, see Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 21.

⁸ Ralph H. Pinder-Wilson, 'Basil Gray, 1904-89', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 105, 2000, 442.

⁹ 'North Arabian Desert Archaeological Survey', *Peabody Museum Papers*, XLV:2, 1960, Chapters V (with Henry Field) and VI, 49-104. Soon after their collaboration, Field tried to get a substantial fee of \$1000 paid to Schroeder for his initial survey work for Pope, a clear indication of the *ad hoc* financial backing for this kind of work; cf. Jay Gluck and Noël Siver, eds, Sumi H. Gluck, assistant editor, *Surveyors of Persian Art. A Documentary Biography of Arthur Upham Pope & Phyllis Ackerman*, Ashiya: The Arts of Asia Foundation and SoPA, 1996, 227, quoting a letter from Pope to Field (2 February 1932), with the added comment 'I would like enormously to get Schroeder a little more freedom and peace of mind to do satisfactory exploring this spring'.

exhibition in 1931 that the next roll of the dice sent the Schroeders in a totally new direction. Schroeder's godmother was staying at the same hotel as Arthur Upham Pope, who had conceived and orchestrated this exhibition,¹⁰ and she effected an introduction. Schroeder was able to show Pope some of the drawings of buildings that he had recorded in the Arabian desert, and the result was an invitation to join Pope's team, which was being formed to explore the art and architecture of Iran. The Schroeders duly travelled to Isfahan via Venice, Istanbul and the Black Sea, and Eric set about making a plan of the great Masjid-i Jum'a there, one of the key monuments of Asia. He duly achieved this massive feat, which took four months. To this day it is the plan universally adopted by scholars working on this building.¹¹ Like the Kish experience, Pope's enterprise was characterised by a marked informality, but alongside the archaeological work it gave Schroeder his first extensive spell of living in Persia and encountering its people, landscapes, languages and culture. He had extended stays in Shiraz and Kirman¹² to study and record the buildings in those regions (fig. 2). It was a priceless experience, and its impact on him personally and on his later work is incalculable. Becoming part of Pope's ever-expanding empire also had the valuable side effect of introducing Schroeder into the workings of the American university system. Schroeder became, along with Donald Wilber, whom Pope also drew into his orbit, a core member of Pope's team engaged in the architectural survey of Persian buildings, and he was among the very first scholars to be allowed entry into that country's mosques and shrines. The 1930s was the decade in which Pope and his team played a major part in establishing the entire field of medieval Iranian art on a much more solid foundation than had previously existed.¹³ Schroeder was assiduous in recording, photographing, drawing and analysing these buildings, and in all of these tasks he proved his mettle. He was able to capture the essence of a building in a very few strokes of the pencil.¹⁴

¹⁰ See Barry Wood, "'A Great Symphony of Pure Form": The 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art and Its Influence', *Ars Orientalis*, XXX, 2000, 113-30.

¹¹ I am obliged to the late and great Chahriyar Adle for his account of a meeting in a Paris hotel during which Myron Smith, Schroeder's great rival in the field of Saljuq architecture, showed Adle his own much more detailed plan whose many sheets covered the entire floor of the room. But sadly this plan, like so much of the work that Smith undertook, was never published. For Schroeder's work on this building, see Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 14 and Yuka Kadoi, 'The Myth-making of the Masjid-i Jami' of Isfahan. Arthur Upham Pope, architectural photographs, and the Persian-Gothic thesis in the 1930s' in Mohammad Gharipour, *The Historiography of Persian Architecture*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge 2016, (80-111) 88 and 104, n. 34. See also Robert Hillenbrand, 'The Scramble for Persian Art: Pope and His Rivals' in Yuka Kadoi, *Arthur Upham Pope and a New Survey of Persian Art*, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2016, (13-45) 20-3, 34, and 39-40 and Bernard O'Kane, 'Arthur Upham Pope and the Study of Persian Islamic Architecture' in Kadoi, *New Survey*, 116 and 120.

¹² Eric Schroeder, 'Muzaffarid Buildings in Kirman' in Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, Oxford and London: Oxford University Press 1939, 1099-1102.

¹³ See Yuka Kadoi, *New Survey*, throughout.

¹⁴ E.g. the mosque of Sidih and the Zavan mausoleum, significant monuments which his drawings alone have rescued from oblivion (Pope and Ackerman, *Survey*, figs. 339 and 349);



Figure 2. Eric Schroeder aged c.31 at Alteoli's house, Kirman. Eric Schroeder Papers, Archives Box 178. Harvard Art Museum Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge MA (photograph: Imaging Department, © President and Fellows of Harvard College)

Returning to America, he had a two-year spell at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts as a volunteer assistant to the legendary Ananda Coomaraswamy, a charismatic, wise and inspiring teacher from whose guidance Schroeder learned much and to whose *Festschrift* he was later to contribute one of his most probing articles.¹⁵ In the following decade other opportunities beckoned. In October 1938, still at an early stage of his life (one should not use the word 'career' in his case), he took on the largely honorary post of Islamic curator of the Fogg Museum of Art at Harvard (at \$500 per annum), initially a temporary and part-time post but one which in the event he held until his death in 1971, though in later years he accepted

while his comments on the squinches of Khwaja Sa'd and Zavan identify an unusual technical innovation in their transition zones (Pope and Ackerman, *Survey*, 1011-13 and figs. 348-51). His drawings of the Na'in vaults and of the ancient vaulting in the Shiraz Masjid-i Jami' (Pope and Ackerman, *Survey*, figs. 318a-b and 320-21 respectively) bear witness to his capacity to explain structural features by lucid, economical sketches, while yet other drawings demonstrate his eye for pattern (Pope and Ackerman, *Survey*, figs. 371a-c, 372a-c, 374a-d, 375a-b and 376a-b). Further unpublished drawings can be found in his archived papers in the Harvard Art Museum Archives.

¹⁵ Eric Schroeder, 'The Troubled Image. An Essay upon Mughal Painting' in Krishna B. Iyer, *Art and Thought. Issued in Honour of Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, London: Luzac 1947, 73-86.

no salary, despite building up the collection with signal success and putting on numerous choice exhibitions.¹⁶

Schroeder's fieldwork in Iran had extended over several years, and he quickly made the substantial extra commitment of coming to grips with its language and culture. In the end he turned himself into a Persianist of no mean attainment, as is shown by an ambitious article on the pitfalls of translating the poetry of Hafiz,¹⁷ a theme to which he returned a few years later in his critical analysis of a many-layered poem by the same poet, 'The Wild Deer Mathnawi', which is packed with literary allusions but shot through with the passionate sorrow occasioned by a bereavement. Schroeder himself at such a time in his own life turned to this very poem for consolation.¹⁸ His searching and erudite analysis of this formidably complex poem reveals Schroeder as a man with a pronounced taste for conundrums, ambivalent metaphors, disguised quotations and hidden meanings. His prolonged meditation on this poem is a challenging read in itself. In it he stands revealed as a detective who delights in tracking down these puzzles, not just for their own sake but with the aim of defining the aesthetic that informs medieval Persian poetry. And the means he chooses for this purpose is the verdict that Hafiz, a supreme lyricist, delivers as a poet on poetry in this particular *mathnawi*.

It is typical of Schroeder the polymath that these two substantial and formidable contributions to literary criticism did not lead to further work in this rich vein. But in them he was drawing on experiences which had begun in his childhood, when his family recognised his abilities as a poet, and which continued in his early twenties at Oxford. Poetry remained central to his life and work. His love of the English language (and of other languages) lasted throughout his life and animates every page of his monumental work *Muhammad's People*, a book that bears testimony to his skill in using Arabic and other languages and in turning base metal into gold. No wonder that William G. Archer noted as one of the ingredients of his high scholarly reputation that he had 'an unusual literary sensibility';¹⁹ his old friend Basil Gray noted in his obituary of Schroeder that 'he was essentially a craftsman, in words and also in thought';²⁰ and Julian Raby commented that he was 'a master of purple prose'.²¹ His work is a consistent pleasure to read, and even his

¹⁶ Gray, 'Obituary', viii; Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 9 and 18. See Pope's comment on the Exhibition of Persian Art in New York in 1940: 'Mr. Eric Schroeder selected, arranged and displayed one of the most beautiful exhibitions of Persian miniatures and manuscripts that has yet been seen. Schroeder is also primarily responsible for the gold tree' (Gluck, Siver and Gluck, *Surveyors*, 320).

¹⁷ Eric Schroeder, 'Verse Translation and Hafiz', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, VII, 1948, 209-22.

¹⁸ Eric Schroeder, 'The Wild Deer Mathnawi', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, II, 1952, 118-34.

¹⁹ Dust jacket of Eric Schroeder, *Visions of Element and other poems*, Freeport, Maine: The Bond Wheelwright Company, 1963.

²⁰ Gray, 'Eric Schroeder', vi.

²¹ Julian Raby, 'Reviewing the Reviewers', *Muqarnas*, 8, 1991, 6.

short encyclopaedia entries are worth tracking down for their combination of piercing insight and pithy, luminous phrase.²²

For all his marked individuality, his originality and his curious erudition, Schroeder was still (as is only to be expected) a man of his time, and he willingly subscribed to several fashions that were current in his day but have since been discredited. They included an ethno-racial bias that placed the art of Iran on a higher plane than that of the Arabs and the Turks, for in the scholarship of the early twentieth-century Aryans were held to be superior to Semites and Turks. Hence Persian art was widely regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of Islamic art. This same attitude is a leitmotif of Pope's contributions to the *Survey of Persian Art*. Another popular view saw the characteristic strengths of Persian art as its decorative quality and its use of colour. This approach demoted the importance of the historical and social context of a work of art, and effectively denied it any intellectual content.²³ Accordingly, scholars of the time saw no need to search within it for deeper meanings.²⁴ A brief glance at a couple of ground-breaking articles, published in 2006 and 2012 respectively and devoted to two late Timurid paintings that are probably the work of Bihzad, is enough to dispose of this uncharacteristically shallow generalisation.²⁵ But what Gray termed 'his independence of judgment and freshness of treatment', and the way 'he sought the essential behind the work of art or rather within it'²⁶ triumphed over the prejudices that Schroeder inherited from and shared with his contemporaries.

At the time of his initial temporary and part-time appointment as curator of Islamic and Persian art at the Fogg Museum of Art attached to Harvard University, a catalogue of the small but choice collection of Islamic paintings was certainly envisaged as one of the duties of the post. He seems to have produced this important work at commendable speed. The collection comprised a remarkably varied set of Arab, Persian, Turkish and Indian paintings covering a period of more than half a millennium. The challenges presented by this sheer variety, far from daunting Schroeder, suited him down to the ground. Its tiny print run gave this book only limited circulation, so it never had the impact that it deserved.

It is repeatedly the case that his comments on a work of art plainly rest on solidly based knowledge, like the tip of the iceberg that does not reveal its great bulk out of sight under water (e.g., his comments on the prefatory '*unwan* to the

²² For example, 'Alhambra'; 'Cordoba'; 'Cathedral'; 'Minaret'; 'Mohammedan Architecture'; and 'Stalactite Work' in *Colliers' Encyclopedia*, New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corp. 1948.

²³ These issues are thoroughly explored and contextualised by Cuddon, 'Field', 22-3.

²⁴ 'Muslims [...] have never looked to artists for special insights or meanings. They regarded the arts as we regard the decorative arts' (Eric Schroeder in Dagobert D. Runes and Harry G. Schrickel, eds, *Encyclopaedia of the Arts*, New York: Peter Owen, London 1946, s.v. 'Islamic Art', cited in Cuddon, 'Field', 23 and 31).

²⁵ Chad Kia, 'Is the Bearded Man Drowning? Picturing the Figurative in a Late-Fifteenth-Century Painting from Herat', *Muqarnas*, 23, 2006, 85-105; Chad Kia, 'Sufi orthopraxis: visual language and verbal imagery in medieval Afghanistan', *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 28:1, 2012, 1-18.

²⁶ Gray, 'Obituary', vii.

second volume of the Great Mongol *Shahnama*,²⁷ or indeed his detailed comments on individual leaves from that manuscript).²⁸ When he embarked on a topic, he gave it his all, digging deep and never failing to highlight unexpected insights or felicities. His concise study of Bihzad can claim to be the most penetrating and original treatment of its contentious subject for the next 70 years,²⁹ though it is interesting that he believed the great sixteenth-century painters rather than their Timurid predecessors to represent the finest achievement of Persian painting.

Schroeder made his share of bad mistakes, but there was something heroic about his failures. Thus the elementary error pointed out by Minovi³⁰ in Schroeder's article on the *badi'* script³¹ (and which Schroeder swiftly acknowledged in print³²) did not invalidate the numerous cogent arguments and flashes of insight in that same article. Nor did his misdating of the Gilan *Shahnama* invalidate his comments on its style. Finally, the fact that his dating of the Great Mongol *Shahnama* to c.1375 in his article of 1939³³ has been almost universally rejected does not affect its status as the single best account of the manuscript.

His interest in bringing Islamic art to a much wider public was well demonstrated by a project he initiated with Richard Ettinghausen. Entitled *University Prints*, this was an attempt to bring the core achievements of Islamic art and architecture to college students cheaply in the form of a set of postcards with images accompanied by minimal annotation, in a sturdy cloth binding and theoretically capable of indefinite expansion. It can be seen as an early predecessor of Talbot Rice's *Islamic Art*, published by Thames and Hudson a generation later in 1965. Crucially, it lacked a continuous narrative text; but at least it made available a set of high-quality black and white images of Islamic art at an affordable price. The obvious inspiration for this idea was the contemporary habit of many museums and other public institutions to sell sets of postcards of certain genres of their holdings. The British Library, the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum all did this, and as an Englishman Schroeder would have been well aware of this practice.

It is plain from this project and the flood of short articles that Schroeder produced in the period from 1935 to 1942 that he was well on track for a post in a university or museum as an Islamic art historian. His long association with Arthur Upham Pope, as well as his connection with Richard Ettinghausen, who was also once in Pope's circle, had familiarised Schroeder with the American academic scene.

²⁷ Schroeder, *Persian Miniatures*, 37-8.

²⁸ Schroeder, *Persian Miniatures*, 35-50.

²⁹ Eric Schroeder, 'The Persian Exhibition and the Bihzad Problem', *Bulletin of the Fogg Museum of Art*, VII, 1937, 3-6. These few pages are absolutely packed with penetratingly original observations.

³⁰ Mojtaba Minovi, 'The so-called Badi' Script', *Bulletin of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology*, V, 1937, 143-6.

³¹ Eric Schroeder, 'What was the Badi' Script?', *Ars Islamica*, IV, 1937, 232-48.

³² Eric Schroeder, 'The so-called Badi' Script: A Mistaken Identification', *Bulletin of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology*, V, 1937, 146-7; cf. editorial note on 148.

³³ Already by 1944 he had modified this dating to the middle of the 14th century (Richard Ettinghausen and Eric Schroeder, *Oriental Art. Series O. Section IV. Iranian and Islamic Art*, Newton, Mass.: The University Prints, 1944, nos. 0524-7).

In the event Ettinghausen found a permanent position at the University of Michigan, which gave him a base to serve as editor of the field's premier journal, *Islamic Art*. As early as 1930, as noted above, Schroeder had taken the decisive step of marrying an American, Margaret (Marnie) Forbes, the niece of the renowned collector Edward Forbes; the latter eventually donated four leaves of the Great Mongol *Shahnama* to the Fogg. Perhaps his marriage ensured that Schroeder would seek his fortune on the east coast. But there is no record that he was offered a university post, or indeed that he actively sought one, and it may be that his temperament and his fastidious taste inclined him to the life of a curator. The prolonged difficulties encountered by another non-American, Mehmet Ağa-Oğlu, in finding a permanent university post in the United States³⁴ may have served as an exemplary warning. One cannot help feeling that Schroeder's stellar talents deserved a wider stage of action than an honorary curatorship at a university museum could offer.

The curious stasis in Schroeder's professional life after the end of World War II could conceivably be attributed to anti-German feeling in the United States. But other explanations, such as his increasing interest in museum work, might be entertained. His intense individuality might have rendered some of the practical duties and responsibilities of a university professor irksome to him. An honorary curatorship ensured that he could live as he wished without externally imposed constraints.³⁵ And the intensity of his engagement with the zodiac (of which more anon), which seems to have bordered on obsession, clearly took him away from those areas in which he had made his most original contributions, namely Persian architecture and Persian book painting. He never wrote a general history or survey of the latter subject although his 1942 book demonstrated the width of his sympathies and the depth of his erudition, and thus made it clear that such a book was well within his powers. His *Iranian Book Painting. An Introduction* (New York, 1940) gives a tantalising short glimpse of what might have been. As for Persian architecture, he never returned to it after 1942, possibly because he never returned to Iran. His swansong in that field is a detailed response to an ill-natured review by André Godard (who should have known better, but displayed a rancorous professional jealousy) of his own architectural contribution to *A Survey of Persian Art*.³⁶ Using the rapier rather than the broadsword, Schroeder skewers several logical fallacies and factual errors in his colleague's review, and takes the opportunity to make some incisive and far-reaching comments on his own work, for

³⁴ Cuddon, 'Field', 19, 21-2 and 27.

³⁵ Provided that there were no financial problems (I have come across no information on this crucial score).

³⁶ Eric Schroeder, 'M. Godard's Review of the Architectural Section of A Survey of Persian Art', *Ars Islamica*, IX, 1942, 211-7. Yet in 1935, in Schroeder's own words, 'M. André Godard rendered most generous help out of his store of material and of erudition' (Eric Schroeder, 'Preliminary Note on Work in Persia and Afghanistan, April-December 1935', *Bulletin of the American Institute for Persian Art and Archaeology*, 4:3, 1936, 135). For Pope's response to Godard's review, see Arthur Upham Pope, 'The Survey of Persian Art and Its Critics', *Ars Islamica*, IX, 1942, 171-3.

example on the importance of colour in Saljuq architecture, a feature which he believed he had underestimated.

As it turned out, this publication marked a crossroads in his career, and from then until his death his published contributions in the field of Islamic art dwindled to a degree that is nothing short of distressing to contemplate for a scholar of his attainments. It was in the spring of 1942³⁷ that he began to collect material for what proved to be his biggest book, and it gobbled up his energies for at least a decade in his scholarly prime, to the virtual exclusion of other projects. Its lengthy title, which recalls the grandiloquence and the whimsical typography of many an eighteenth-century work of scholarship, gives the full flavour of the vaulting ambition of the whole enterprise: *A TALE BY ANTHOLOGY Muhammad's People the Religion and Politics, Poetry and Violence, Science, Ribaldry and Finance of the Muslims from the Age of Ignorance and the Mission of God's Prophet to Sophistication in the Eleventh Century A MOSAIC TRANSLATION BY ERIC SCHROEDER*. In retrospect, it is an astonishing work for an art historian to contemplate, let alone bring to term. And yet this wonderful book, like his Fogg catalogue, has very sadly never had the success that it deserved, and it is worth asking why. After all, at the time that Schroeder was meditating it, nothing even vaguely comparable was available on either the English or, more to the point, the American market. Yet the lessons of World War II, the new world order after 1945 and the cold war had made successive American governments much more aware of their global responsibilities. That new awareness had percolated down into tertiary education, and the American university system saw *inter alia* an immense quickening of interest in the Islamic world, with a commensurate expansion of academic posts and undergraduate courses. Schroeder's book should have been the textbook of choice for courses on Islamic religion, culture and history. But three factors worked to its disadvantage. The first was that it was far too long – a fat octavo hardback, bound in black with gold stamping, of 838 pages – and the daunting title did not recommend it as an easy read. The second was the way that the book was organised, which (like the title itself) was idiosyncratic to a fault. This may have been because Schroeder wanted his readers to plunge in for the long haul. But the result is that it is unreasonably difficult to find one's way around the text, and neither the list of contents nor the index are helpful in this respect. Schroeder's text makes for fascinating reading and is delightful to dip into, but the reader looking for a concise summary of any given topic – the Prophet's life, Islamic dogma, the history of the Umayyads, Arab poetry, economic history – is doomed to disappointment. So although ample material on all these and many other topics is there in the book, it is not presented in a user-friendly way. One must reluctantly conclude that Schroeder was disastrously self-indulgent in the way that he organised the material he had taken such pains to assemble. In sum, its scope was quite simply too diverse. The third disadvantage is that it was originally published in a small edition by the tiny Bond Wheelwright Press in Portland, Maine, rather than by one of the big publishing houses that specialised in the college market. It may well be that these houses evinced no interest in the book so that he was constrained to find whatever publisher he could.

³⁷ Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 17.

At all events, his choice of publisher ensured that his achievement would be shrouded in obscurity. Now it is easily available as a cheap paperback reprint, but the loss of two generations of readers can no longer be made good and this has ensured that the book has never made its way to the forefront of student reading lists. Its publication date of 1955 may be enough these days to stigmatise it (most unfairly) as out of date.

This book is an outstanding example of a genre which is all too rare in Islamic studies, namely the anthology. Its major rivals are Kritzeck (a robotic performance, too short to be of more than marginal use),³⁸ Arberry (also too short and overwhelmingly based on literature, although it has many virtues)³⁹ and, most seriously, Lewis, which combines comprehensive coverage (based on very disparate genres of sources) with very clear structure, brief explanatory introductions, easy readability and an efficient system of references.⁴⁰ Even though the Lewis anthology runs to two volumes, it is very much shorter than Schroeder's work and is simply not such fun to read. Thus Schroeder's account of the long and passionate love affair with money conducted by successive 'Abbasid viziers makes riveting reading and testifies to the sureness of his choices of original texts. This book found some notable supporters. It was chosen by Jacques Barzun, Wystan H. Auden and Lionel Trilling for *The Reader's Subscription Book Club*. T.S. Eliot described it as 'a fascinating and original work' while in the opinion of Ian A. Richards it was 'a *world* as well as a beautiful book'. Gustave von Grunebaum praised it enthusiastically, and no less an Arabist than Sir Hamilton Gibb wrote 'Whether one reads through it steadily or browses where it happens to open, the critical faculties are numbed by sheer delight in the work of art'.⁴¹

It is nothing short of a tragedy that so much of Schroeder's scholarly energy, and indeed his scholarship for almost the last thirty years of his life – and he died long before his allotted span, in his sixties, of cancer – was effectively diverted to his unfinished and perhaps unfinishable work on the zodiac, no portion of which achieved published form in his lifetime despite the urgent entreaties of his friends and colleagues. It seems that there was always another mountain to climb. According to Schroeder himself, he began serious study of the subject in 1951, but its genesis can be traced to 1948 and to his promise to Arthur Young to read a book on the zodiac in lieu of giving him a Christmas present.⁴² By 1956 he had solved one major problem ('the complex coordination system between degrees'), and another by 1959 ('the concept of positive number as [...] the generative principle in nature

³⁸ James Kritzeck, *An Anthology of Islamic Literature*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964.

³⁹ Arthur J. Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilization As Depicted in the Original Texts*, repr. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1971; this book has appeared under various titles.

⁴⁰ Bernard Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople, Vol I: Politics and War; Vol. II: Religion and Society*, London: Macmillan, 1976 (there are several editions).

⁴¹ See the dustjacket of Schroeder, *Visions of Element*, for these quotations. This book was dedicated to the notable literary critic Ian A. Richards; it was published by the Bond Wheelwright Company, which also brought out *Muhammad's People*.

⁴² Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 18.

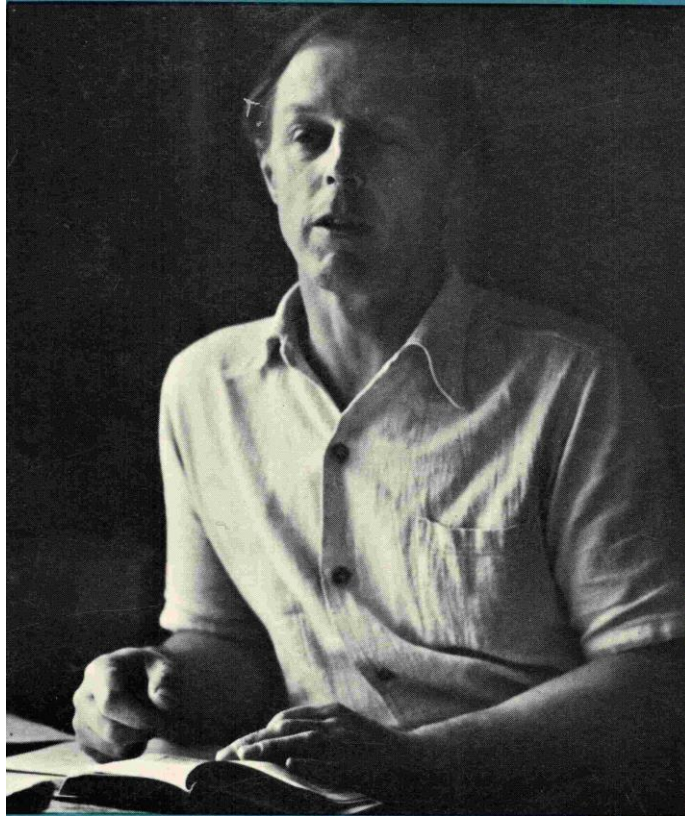


Figure 3. Eric Schroeder in his prime (undated photograph courtesy of Robert Briggs Associates, San Francisco)

that is at work in the zodiac. It took me nine years to know what I was about.’) (fig. 3).⁴³ But how many more such mountains loomed in the distance? His posthumous work on the zodiac, edited by that same Arthur Young⁴⁴ and published in 1982, eleven years after his death, is very far from presenting the full range of his lengthy researches on this subject.⁴⁵ It is a torso in more senses than one, for it reveals not only that the accumulation of basic data was incomplete, but also that he had not made enough progress in transforming that data into a connected narrative which could be read with profit by those unfamiliar with the finer details of astrology, or indeed those suspicious of it – as he himself had formerly been. The magic of his prose would assuredly have transformed the dry technical details and calculations which are the meat and drink of astrological scholarship⁴⁶ into a rich cultural

⁴³ Welch, ‘Eric Schroeder’, 19.

⁴⁴ Who married Schroeder’s wife’s sister Ruth in 1948 and was thus a member of the family.

⁴⁵ Arthur M. Young, ed, *Zodiac. An analysis of symbolic degrees*, Mill Valley, CA: Robert Briggs Associates, 1982. Basil Gray notes with regret in his obituary of Schroeder that his obsession with astrology effectively put an end to his publications on Islamic art (‘Eric Schroeder’, viii). For an account of what he discovered between 1950 and 1970, see Young, *Zodiac*, 1-6 and Welch, ‘Eric Schroeder’, 19. Young notes that shortly before Schroeder’s death ‘I asked him what he wanted done with the work. He said not to do anything; he had lost interest in it’ (*Zodiac*, 6). That is a bitter postscript to a couple of decades of intense labour.

⁴⁶ For an overview of Islamic astrology, see Taufiq Fahd, ‘Ahkam al-Nudjum’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*² VIII, Leiden, 1995, cols. 105b-108b; for astrology in Islamic Iran, see David Pingree, ‘Astrology in Islamic times’ in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* II/8, London, 1987, cols.

tapestry. The opportunity cost to Islamic art and culture of his extended foray into this now somewhat peripheral topic was indeed severe. Nobody would seriously challenge the proposition that astrology mattered greatly in medieval Islamic culture, but it is precisely this width of cultural reference, which Schroeder was so well equipped to elucidate, that is missing from the raw data presented in his posthumous book on the zodiac. That book is so specialised, recondite and gnostic that it will deter most readers. Yet the references to astrology in Schroeder's published work, which appear already quite early on,⁴⁷ show that he was entirely capable of making aspects of Islamic astrology intelligible to the general reader.

Opinions will inevitably differ about what is Schroeder's finest achievement in his published work. For the general public as well as for the field of Islamic studies as whole there is no question: it has to be *Muhammad's People*. It is a sad paradox that this richly gifted art historian should be remembered by most of the people who come across his work not by his contributions to that field but by a monument to the work of scores of others which he managed by some mysterious alchemy to turn into an endlessly fascinating narrative. For some, his best work is perhaps his account of Saljuq architecture, for he unerringly finds the correct balance between Pope's airy dithyrambs, which leave the reader in an adjectival fog, and Smith's painstaking literalism, which nonetheless constantly teeters on the brink of an astute insight of general importance. Schroeder cuts to the very core and lays bare the way that small details reveal the grand underlying design. Like Smith, he was a meticulous photographer and draftsman; like Pope, he was drawn to identifying immanent characteristics; and to a much greater degree than either of them, he was able to present his insights in the most engaging, terse, subtle and allusive prose. A late example of his most unusual capacities as an architectural historian is an article he published as a response to his colleague Wilber's great book on Ilkhanid architecture.⁴⁸ Thanks to its somewhat obscure title ('Scientific description of art'), it too, like so much of his work, has not had the attention it deserves. After detailing the significant achievements of Wilber's study, and suggesting ways in which it might have been improved, the article turns to a gripping analysis of one of the greatest masterpieces of the period, the *mihrab* of Öljeitü in the Friday Mosque of Isfahan. Building on the conceit that the inspiration of its design was triggered by floating waterlilies, he rigorously and meticulously deconstructs the finished product and the way it handles the interface of decoration and epigraphy.

Schroeder was in essence an amateur, but by no means a dilettante. He belonged to a species that is now all but extinct: the gentleman scholar. Indeed, his

868b-871b. See also Willy Hartner, *Oriens Occidens*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1968, I, 208-507 (items 8-24) and II, 166-250 (items 13-18).

⁴⁷ Schroeder, *Persian Miniatures*, 102 and Schroeder, *Muhammad's People*, 278, 294, 359 and 628-3.

⁴⁸ Eric Schroeder, 'Scientific Description of Art', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XV, 1956, 93-102. The same article, now shorn of its specific Islamic references so that its value as a theoretical approach to aesthetics would stand out more clearly, was reprinted posthumously: 'Scientific Description of Art', *Aperture*, 16/3, 63, 1972, *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24471021>. Accessed 4 July 2022.

Harvard colleague, the polymath Richard Frye, used exactly that phrase to describe him.⁴⁹ It is worth pausing briefly to consider the implications of that term, and the ideal that it implies. It carries connotations of art for art's sake, of a disinterested commitment to scholarship, of a certain freedom of spirit that makes such scholars indifferent to worldly success. James Cuno described him as 'omnitalented. An accomplished painter,⁵⁰ poet, archaeologist, historian, linguist, musician, shepherd, and conversationalist, he was of the generation and circle at Oxford associated with Evelyn Waugh'.⁵¹ Cary Welch noted with awe his 'almost terrifying literacy'.⁵² So his ambitions were intellectual rather than professional, and throughout his life he took no part in the academic rat-race.⁵³ This might have been just as well, for the German connection revealed by his surname might have told against him in the crucial decade of 1935-1945. He was a man of parts with a powerful creative urge, who could have made his mark in a variety of professions. He toyed with the idea of becoming a literary critic, but decided against that option because he felt that Wyndham Lewis was his superior in that field.⁵⁴ In later life he designed a pavilion 'in a tiled Persian style' for an exhibition⁵⁵ and published a book of his poems.⁵⁶

To survey the career of Eric Schroeder is an exciting but also melancholy exercise. Exciting because his best work, which spanned several quite disparate fields, was full of unexpected insights and opened promising new perspectives; melancholy because his awesome erudition was never harnessed to a major original art-historical study that achieved publication. He published by fits and starts but, for all his undoubted originality, seemingly lacked the stamina that is required for any *magnum opus*. A further cause for disappointment as one attempts to assess his impact on the field of Islamic art is that he never consistently taught students, despite his long-term association with Harvard University, and this robbed his talents of much of the impact that they deserved. He had little appetite for self-promotion, and, it seems, equally little ambition to achieve academic success.

And in the extensive field of Islamic art one could never tell what he would light on next: a piece of early Mamluk glass,⁵⁷ Mughal painting,⁵⁸ a brass aquamanile

⁴⁹ Richard N. Frye, *Greater Iran: A 20th-Century Odyssey*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2005, 149.

⁵⁰ <https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/308222>

⁵¹ James B. Cuno, ed, *Harvard's Art Museums: 100 Years of Collecting*, Cambridge, Mass. and New York: Harvard University Museums and H.N. Abrams, 1996, 123. His love of music (he was a violinist and madrigal singer) is revealed in several of his analyses of works of art.

⁵² Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 9.

⁵³ Unlike, for example, Mehmet Ağa-Oğlu, who for years was angling for a position in a prestigious American university; see note 31 above.

⁵⁴ Welch, 'Eric Schroeder', 14.

⁵⁵ Frye, *Greater Iran*, 149.

⁵⁶ My own copy bears his dedication to Graham Hough, who became Professor of English at Cambridge.

⁵⁷ Eric Schroeder, 'The Lamp of Karim al-Din. An Arab Enamelled Glass of the Early Fourteenth Century', *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, XXXVI, 1938, 1-4.

⁵⁸ Schroeder, 'The Troubled Image', 73-86.

in the shape of a strutting gander,⁵⁹ a majestic Persian mausoleum,⁶⁰ and a breakthrough in Kufic calligraphy.⁶¹ To each of these diverse topics he brought his own distinctive powers of observation and analysis, allied to a thorough grasp of its historical context and the happy gift of unfolding wider and surprising perspectives. These five searching studies in fields unrelated to each other – though all of them belong under the capacious umbrella of Islamic art – give the measure of his capacities as an art historian of extraordinary range, depth and originality. And all were produced within a single decade, a decade that also saw his major contributions on pre-Mongol architecture to *A Survey of Persian Art*, his catalogue of the Fogg collection of Islamic paintings and his ground-breaking article on fourteenth-century Persian painting, not to mention a clutch of other articles produced in these years.⁶² Nor should one forget his two meaty reviews of Creswell's *Early Muslim Architecture*, which are packed with original insights and cogent observations. These latter pieces could claim to be the most valuable of the many reviews of Creswell's epochal work.⁶³

And there, effectively, in the high summer of his powers and when he was still in his early forties, his activity as an Islamic art historian came to a premature end, for his interests turned in quite other directions, the most complex of which were destined not to reach fruition. In his prolonged exploration of Islamic astrology he simply bit off more than he could chew. After 1955, as already noted, he devoted most of his energies to that project, whose very ambition helps to explain why he was never able to finish it. His later but frustratingly brief periodic returns to Islamic art merely served to remind his fellow Islamic art historians of

⁵⁹ Eric Schroeder, 'An Aquamanile and some Implications', *Ars Islamica*, V, 1938, 9-20.

⁶⁰ Eric Schroeder, 'The Jabal-i-Sang, Kerman' in *III. International Congrès d'Art et d'Archéologie Iraniens. Leningrad 1935: Mémoires*, Moscow and Leningrad: Académie des Sciences de l'URSS 1939, 230-6. He makes a powerful argument for this unfinished building to have been planned to have a double dome (233-4).

⁶¹ Schroeder, 'What was the Badi' Script', 232-48.

⁶² These include a series of short articles in encyclopaedias; he also provided key material for an article by Corinna Lindon Smith on an intricately carved Ilkhanid wood sarcophagus ('Carved Wooden Panels (Said to Be from Madina) Persian, Fourteenth Century', *BMFA*, XXXVI, 1938, 48-52).

⁶³ Eric Schroeder, 'An Appreciation' [of K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture II*], *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, XXXV, 1948, 282-4 and Eric Schroeder, review of the same work in *The Art Bulletin* 23:3, 1941, 233-7; in the latter review, note especially the important role that Schroeder ascribes to curtains and to ceremonial (235), and his ground-breaking comments on the walls of the round city of Baghdad (236). His trenchant criticism of the 'ridiculously loose' comments by Pope and Talbot Rice in their reviews of the same work is noteworthy, given that they were his friends (234). Creswell had the last word, however; in his great bibliography he duly notes Schroeder's article 'The Iranian Mosque form as a survival', *Proceedings of the Iran Society*, I, 1936-1938, 82-92, but adds the withering comment 'Include (*sic*) a fantastic explanation of the cylindrical Persian minaret' (K.A.C. Creswell, *A bibliography of the architecture, arts and crafts of Islam*, Cairo: The American University at Cairo Press, 1961, 287).

what that change of direction had cost their field.⁶⁴ It is a pity that his careful dissection of the styles of the Great Mongol *Shahnama* and of the great fourteenth-century *Kalila wa Dimna*, packed as it is with stimulating insights and pregnant suggestions, should have been attached to datings that have not stood the test of time and have indeed been overturned decisively by the common consent of subsequent scholarship. Thus much of value in his commentary has been neglected.

The full flavour of his method, with its forensic attention to detail, its concentration on essentials and its rigorous logic, all deployed within a small compass, is best sampled not in his longer pieces but in a trio of widely disparate essays: his account of the north dome of the Isfahan Friday Mosque;⁶⁵ the mihrab in that mosque;⁶⁶ and the early Timurid painting of Rustam and Tahmina now in the Fogg Museum of Art.⁶⁷ His analysis of the north dome, like his survey of pre-Mongol Islamic architecture in Iran⁶⁸ of which it is part, has yet to be superseded. It combines in a truly breath-taking way the most precise calculation, a mastery of geometrical and structural principles, and an instinctive awareness of the animating spirit and aesthetic and emotional impact of that architecture. The discussion of the Isfahan *mihrab* is incorporated into an enthusiastic but judicious review of Wilber's great book on Ilkhanid architecture, and emerges from a discussion of how a proper

⁶⁴ Such as 'Two Persian Drawings', *Bulletin of the Fogg Museum*, XI, 1950, 69-72; his assessment of Coomaraswamy, who had been a key figure in his formation as a scholar ('Memories of the Person (A. K. Coomaraswamy)' in S. Durai Raja Singam, *Homage to Ananda Coomaraswamy*, Kuantan 1952, 118-34); 'Mrs Rockefeller's Miniatures at the Fogg', *The Connoisseur*, CXLVIII, 1961, 70-5, with a scintillating assessment of his own favourite image from the Great Mongol *Shahnama*, Bahram Gur and the wolf monster; and finally his review of Mohindar S. Randhawa's *Basohli Painting* (*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XXII, 1963, 137-40). Here he eviscerates, with a lethal, feline delicacy of touch, the lazy and pompous waffle of Mulk Raj Anand (admittedly a soft target), whose loose would-be art-historical jargon he summed up as 'the phrase-salad treatment of art' (139). That review pinpoints in memorable fashion the importance of colour and rigidity in Basohli painting.

⁶⁵ Eric Schroeder, 'Islamic Architecture. F. Seljuq Period. The small dome of the Masjid-i Jami', Isfahan' in Pope and Ackerman, *Survey*, 1004-09. But note a letter from Phyllis Ackerman to Arthur Upham Pope dated 9 October 1937: 'I have got Eric's first chapter into page proof, with all the cuts identified and labelled, no small job, and he did nothing whatever about it [...] Had you actually read and taken in this flight of fancy that he has added in typescript into his otherwise excellent discussion of the small dome chamber [Masjed-i Jami, Isfahan]? Creswell's numerology is as nothing to this and Schapiro will have a field day on it. I am sending a copy to Monneret [de Villard] so that he can fulminate, and I hope that you will have properly agonized sensations' (Gluck, Siver and Gluck, *Surveyors*, 305). Cf. her further letter to Pope dated 22 October 1937: 'I sent Monneret a copy of Eric's passage on the Pythagorean influence in the small dome chamber. His only comment was a single sentence at the end of a longish letter about other things: "Schroeder's text on the Isfahan dome is simply stupidity"' (Gluck, Siver and Gluck, *Surveyors*, 305). In the published text there is duly no mention of Pythagoras, but his shadow broods over it.

⁶⁶ Schroeder, 'Scientific description', 97-99.

⁶⁷ Schroeder, *Persian Paintings*, 51-74. This masterpiece was bought either by him or by Edward Forbes at his recommendation, and later donated to the Museum.

⁶⁸ Eric Schroeder, 'Islamic Architecture. C. First Period' and 'Islamic Architecture. F. Seljuq Period', in Pope and Ackerman, *Survey*, 930-66 and 981-1045 respectively.

evaluation of a work of art has to take account not only of technical, structural and stylistic factors but of 'psychological, emotional, intellectual and transcendent terms'.⁶⁹ His analysis of the *mihrab* is barely three pages long, but it is profound, personal and perceptive, and it is a pity that there is no description of Iranian stucco that takes anything like this approach. It never degenerates into sentimentalism, a danger of which he is explicitly aware. One particular sentence resonates because of its wide applicability: 'if we want to treat of what the artist was doing, we have to catch him, through the window of ourselves, at work in a realm of shape and emotion where even oblique light is better than total darkness'.⁷⁰ This analysis is followed by several other examples of the power of a building to influence the emotions of those looking at it (he cites Robert Byron and Arthur Upham Pope), and culminates in an appeal to architectural historians to leave their minds open to approaches that are not narrowly 'scientific', however one chooses to interpret that word.

As for the third example just cited, which tackles one of the very finest Timurid paintings, this can claim to be the most complete interpretation of any one Persian painting ever to be published. It is a master class in critical analysis. Here are deployed his delicate eye for technical prowess, his rare capacity to identify the subtleties of the visual language of Persian painting at its peak, his eloquence in nailing down its character with unfailing finesse and eloquence and finally his extensive and assured command of the historical milieu within which a work of art was created. As William G. Archer wrote, 'his scholarship, taste and boldness of thought, combined with unusual literary sensibility, have given him international note in the field of Muslim art and culture'.⁷¹

And his roving eye and unsparing critique could extend in the most unpredictable directions – for instance, to what makes Mughal painting tick.⁷² That essay, despite its intriguing title, is a bold and erudite meditation on the immanent characteristics of Indian art as a whole and across the ages, shot through with references to a wide range of sacred Indian texts. His aim throughout is to situate Mughal painting within a quintessentially Indian context rather than a Perso-Islamic one;⁷³ but his complex argument to that end is not easy to follow. In the event, he

⁶⁹ E. Schroeder, 'Scientific description' (possibly a mischievous title, as if the word scientific should be in quotation marks), 97.

⁷⁰ Schroeder, 'Scientific description', 99.

⁷¹ Dustjacket of Schroeder, *Visions of Element*.

⁷² Schroeder, 'Troubled image'.

⁷³ Schroeder notes ('Troubled Image', 73) that for Indian critics 'Mughal painting is somehow external to the main trend of Indian culture, that it is an island in the stream, that it did not express the eternal and essential India, but something else' and he singles out ('Troubled Image', 75) 'a feeling that convex volume is expressive, or "truthful", and that convex form is practically irrelevant'. He goes on to note ('Troubled Image', 76) that at Ajanta the mural of the Riding of the Boddhisatva 'is too well-known to need reproduction; but it is significant that the same principles of composition: the organization of the whole in compartments, the grouping of figures which fill these compartments with the unity of a curious introspective attention, the all-pervading lateral and diagonal rhythms which pass like waves from compartment to compartment over the whole painting, and, we are made to feel, beyond it –

says remarkably little about Mughal painting in general, although as usual his insights into the individual paintings he cites are characteristically laser-sharp.⁷⁴ The deep interest in pre-Muslim India that runs through this article is already evident about a decade earlier in his study of a brass gander that functioned as an aquamanile and that he attributes to the Delhi sultanate.⁷⁵ Like the later article on Mughal painting it is deeply indebted to Coomaraswamy, a debt which Schroeder generously acknowledges and which is again evident in his pen-portrait of his revered guru.⁷⁶

He knew how to contextualise his insights with gobbets of history, of revealing and entertaining anecdote; and his aim, seemingly an uncommon one for so many art historians, was not to parade a choice nugget of information which proved a date, patron or provenance, but to make the object speak and (no less important) to make the reader turn the page. Both those skills are rare enough in themselves; but they are rarer still when practised by a single scholar. Thus his presentation of a Mamluk enamelled glass mosque lamp in the name of the Christian vizier Karim al-Din combines an assured grasp of form, decoration and artistic context with an arresting mini-biography of the patron drawn from a variety of sometimes obscure primary and secondary sources, whose collection of random facts he manages to weave into an absorbing and vibrant narrative.⁷⁷ All in all, students, scholars and amateurs of Islamic art all have cause to be grateful that this complex, gifted, many-sided man devoted what time he did to that field rather than repining that it was only briefly at the centre of his creative life.

It is perhaps worth putting alongside the assessments of Schroeder by those who knew him well⁷⁸ the impression that he made on the students that came his way, though he did not engage in regular teaching. Renata Holod recalls how she was introduced to him at the Fogg by Cary Welch soon after her arrival in Harvard as a graduate student in the late 1960s.⁷⁹ He struck her, she recalls, as a strange, even weird man, whose conversation jumped unpredictably from one topic to another

all these pictorial methods reappear in a Mughal manuscript-illumination painted a thousand years later, in which we see Humayun watching some dancing women (reproduced by F. R. Martin, *Miniature Painting ...*, Vol. II, pl. 183).

⁷⁴ For further evidence on this score, see his analysis of a Mughal image of Kali drinking a cup of blood, a study which at times makes one shudder ('Troubled Image', 82-3 and fig.7).

⁷⁵ Schroeder, 'Aquamanile', 11.

⁷⁶ Schroeder, 'Memories'.

⁷⁷ Schroeder, 'Lamp'.

⁷⁸ For example, Rosamond Forbes Pickhardt, who in an interview recorded in 1995, when she was in her high eighties, reminisced about Schroeder, who had married her cousin, that 'he had a very exciting mind, and he listened, more than most people do, to things anyone said, and he answered. And I always went to him to test out anything I was thinking about or excited about, and he open[ed] doors. I hardly ever agreed with him because [...] he had very definite ideas about everything. But somehow, I saw other points of view by what he said, and it opened doors into whole other realms of thoughts, so to speak. And I just — he was electricity for me.' That last phrase pinpoints his charisma (<https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-rosamond-forbes-pickhardt-12965>).

⁷⁹ I am grateful to Renata Holod for discussing these memories with me in May 2022.

but who warmly encouraged her plan to study the architecture of fourteenth-century Yazd by drawing on the medieval source material alongside detailed fieldwork on the monuments themselves. He was generous in giving her offprints of material useful for her studies as a budding Iranist; and he also wanted to know her exact birth date. Clearly, then, his fascination with astrology had not ebbed. But her overall impression was of a man who was disappointed with himself (fig. 4). A sad epitaph for a man of such brilliance; but it has the ring of truth.



Eric Schroeder at the "Gropo Fest," a costume party honoring Walter Gropius, given by The Architects Collaborative and the Harvard Graduate School of Design, May 8, 1970.

Figure 4. Eric Schroeder in May 1970. From Stuart Cary Welch, 'Eric Schroeder' [obituary], *Acquisitions (Fogg Art Museum)*, 1969/1970, 11. (Photo: courtesy of the Harvard Art Museum Archives and the President and Fellows of Harvard College)

Robert Hillenbrand, FBA, FRSE, Professor Emeritus of Islamic Art, Edinburgh University, and currently Professorial Fellow at St Andrews University, has published 12 books and over 200 articles, and edited or co-edited 13 books. He has been Slade Professor at Cambridge and has held visiting professorships at seven universities. His books include *Islamic Architecture. Form, Function and Meaning* (1994), *The Holy Ark of Isfahan* (2019), *Islamic Art and Architecture* (expanded edition 2021) and *The Great Mongol Shahnama* (2022).

r.hillenbrand@ed.ac.uk



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