

Mughal Art

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Mughal art. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, briefly explain the rise of the Mughal Empire in India, explain the role of miniature paintings in Mughal society, and identify examples of miniature paintings. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

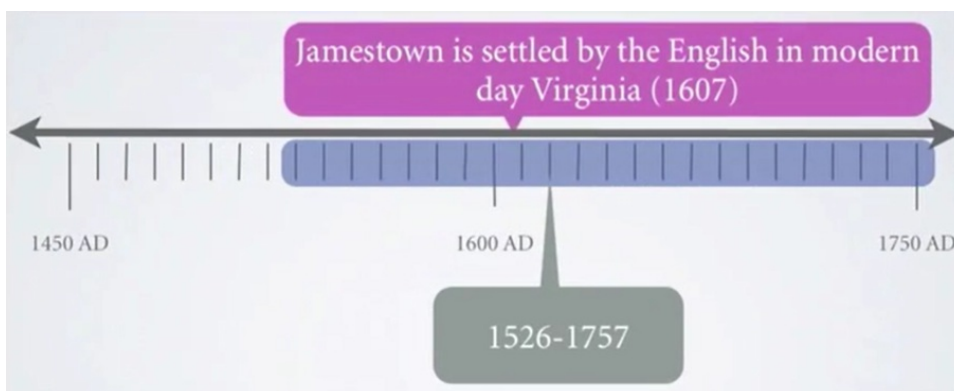


BIG IDEA

Miniature paintings were one of the most important forms of art in Mughal India.

1. Period and Location: Mughal Art

The Mughal Empire lasted from its founding by Babur in 1526 to its official end in 1757, although its influence lasted well into the 19th century. The artwork that you will be looking at today comes from Delhi, India.



2. The Rise of the Mughal Empire

The map below shows the extent of the Mughal Empire around 1700. However, its origins were a bit more modest.



The conqueror Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur, known more commonly as Babur, originated from central Asia.



Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur



DID YOU KNOW

Babur actually has a direct ancestry to Genghis Khan. In fact, the term **Mughal** derives from the word Mongol, referring to the Mongols who originated from the steppes of Central Asia.

Babur, a Muslim, made his way from his home in modern-day Uzbekistan. After several military campaigns in surrounding territories, including in what is now modern-day Afghanistan, Babur turned his attention to the Delhi sultanate in northern India. Upon his victory there in 1526, he established himself as the new ruler of Delhi.



TERM TO KNOW

Mughal

A Muslim dynasty that ruled parts of India from the 16th to the 18th centuries.

3. The Role of Miniature Paintings in Mughal Society

The miniature is an art form that was popular for creating works of Islamic art in Mughal India. It was almost exclusively the primary form of artwork in which the use of human images was permitted or even commonplace. The Persian influence is clearly evident in Mughal art, and the Persian tradition never totally

forbade the use of human images, given that they are small images, roughly the size of a textbook page.

It was a private form of artwork, usually kept in a book and only shown to select individuals—very rarely would the miniatures have been displayed on the wall. This lack of publicity meant that there were fewer rules imposed on **miniature paintings** than there were on religious art and architecture. The exception, of course, was the universal prohibition within all Islamic art on showing the image of Muhammad or Allah.



DID YOU KNOW

In scenes in which Muhammad was a subject, he would be portrayed with a blank in place of his face.



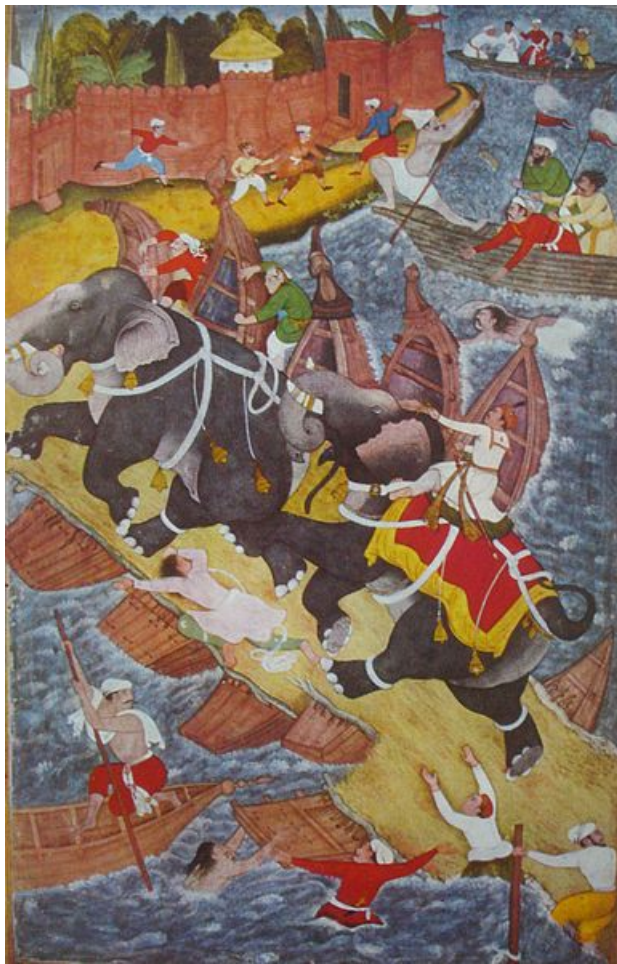
TERM TO KNOW

Miniature Painting

A type of small, elaborately painted image common in India and parts of the Muslim world.

4. Examples of Miniature Paintings

The subject matter of miniatures was typically that of well-known historical or religious stories, such as this image titled “Akbar and the Elephant Hawa'i.”



Akbar and the Elephant Hawa'i by Basawan and Chatar Muni

1590-1595

Watercolor and gold on paper

It shows the third ruler, Akbar The Great, bringing a runaway elephant—known as Hawa'i—under control (greater detail below). This image is intended to function as an allegory of Akbar's ability to govern his people effectively and skillfully.



Civilizations such as the Mughal Empire didn't exist in a vacuum. They would have been familiar with other

cultural movements, such as the artistic movements of Western and Northern Europe. This next image, titled “Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaykh to Kings,” is another allegorical painting that shows the influence of European painting. Two clothed cupids flutter around the base of an hourglass upon which sits the figure of Jahangir, the fourth Mughal ruler. Two naked cupids can be seen above his head.



Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaykh to Kings by Bichitr

1615-1618

Watercolor, gold, and ink on paper

Notice the four figures on the left. Starting from the bottom, the first figure (in a red turban) is an image of the artist himself. Above him is James I of England, and above James I is a Turkish sultan. Lastly, above the sultan is an image of a Muslim Sufi saint, or **shaykh**, handing over divine wisdom to the emperor. Jahangir makes his preferences clear by accepting this gift over the other earthly gifts available below.



TERM TO KNOW

Shaykh

A religious official and leader of an Arab family or village.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **Mughal art**, which comes from a Muslim dynasty that ruled parts of India from the 16th to 18th centuries. In addition to learning how to identify and define today's key terms, you also learned how to briefly explain **the rise of the Mughal Empire** in India. You learned how to explain **the role of miniature paintings in Mughal society**, and learned how to identify **examples of miniature paintings** by exploring artwork from this period.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



TERMS TO KNOW

Miniature Painting

A type of small, elaborately painted image common in India and parts of the Muslim world.

Mughal

A Muslim dynasty that ruled parts of India from the 16th to the 18th centuries.

Shaykh

A religious official and leader of an Arab family or village.