

Bridging Aesthetics and Narrative in the Hamida Banu Ramayana: An Exploration of Style, Technique, and Composition

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Abstract

This research explores the aesthetic and narrative elements of the Hamida Banu Ramayana manuscript, focusing on the portrayal of animals and birds, plants and vegetal elements, buildings and architectural elements, the sky, and the overall composition and layout. The manuscript exhibits a sense of precision and delicacy, enhancing the scenes' visual appeal, amplifying narrative subtlety, and reflecting a distinct style. Particular attention is given to the usage of gradient colors and contour lines, not forgetting the unique detailing in depicting landscape elements. Consequentially, varying the narrative flow, a comparison is drawn with the Akbar copy and Abd al-Rahim's version distinguishing the layouts and compositional strategies. The manuscript signifies a well-informed division of pictorial elements and figures, embodying an illustrative richness within its narrative, contributing to its romantic ambiance.

1. Introduction

Understanding the profound impact of Hindu religious texts, including the Mahabharata and Ramayana on his predominantly Hindu subjects, Akbar – the Great Mughal Emperor in the late 16th Century - fervently sought their translation into Persian, the official language of the Mughal court. This bold step epitomized Akbar's inclusive ethos and demonstrated his commitment to cultural exchange, assimilation, and understanding. This pioneering effort resulted in the creation of the first translated-illustrated Persian edition of the Ramayana, crafted meticulously in Akbar's atelier. A testament to the creative genius of the era, the exquisite translation not only yielded a literary marvel, but bridged two diverse, yet interconnected, cultural and religious spheres. However, Akbar's endeavor did not stop with just one translation. His dedication to this cultural endeavor is further evidenced by another translated copy of the Ramayana, produced under his patronage, though adorned with fewer illustrations. This unique work was specially crafted for his mother, Hamida Banu Begum, thus personalizing his broader project of cultural synthesis within the sphere of his own family. This expansion on the initial period elucidates the significance of this multi-cultural endeavor spearheaded by Akbar and situates Hamida Banu Ramayana within a broader narrative of cultural exchange, integration, and understanding during the Mughal era.

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2. Hamida Banu Begum

Hamida Banu Begum (1527-1604) was an influential figure in the Mughal empire. She was married to Humayun at the young age of fourteen and shared a prominent parentage--her father was a Persian Shi'a named Mir Baba Dost. Known for her unwavering loyalty, she stood by Humayun's side in both prosperity and adversity, lending him steadfast support in the royal palace and during their exile. During their period of exile in 1542, she birthed their son, Akbar. The reign of Humayun saw many periods of separation from Akbar, which ended after Humayun's death and from the commencement of Akbar's reign in 1557 A.D. From this point onward, she lived in close proximity to her son, and until her demise in 1604, exerted significant influence over the state's policy and artistic pursuits. Her intellectual streak was evident in her possession of manuscripts like Gulistan-i-Sa'di and Mir 'Ali Shir-iNawa'i's Khamsah, as well as the specific version of Ramayana, examined in detail later. Various folk stories surround the Hamida Banu Ramayana, owing to its connection to this dynamic historical figure. Hamida's life narrative echoes the story of Sita, the wife of Rama from Ramayana, revered for her loyalty and faithfulness. Like Sita, who accompanied Rama during their arduous exile, Hamida too shared an exhausting sojourn in Iran with her husband, Humayun. Drawing parallels between these two women, one real, one divine, accentuates the rich tapestry of Hamida Banu Begum's life, imbued with loyalty, fortitude, and steadfastness.

3. The Ramayana Manuscript of Hamida Banu Begum

The Ramayana manuscript attributed to Hamida Banu Begum's library is a fascinating artifact of the late 16th century, specifically dated to 1594. Existing records suggest that these 56 miniatures were likely commissioned by Emperor Akbar as a thoughtful gift to his mother.

Size-wise, these paintings closely parallel those present in the Ramayana manuscript produced for Akbar himself, known as the Jaipur Ramayana. These, however, are slightly elongated - approximately five centimeters longer, albeit a bit narrower.

A distinct feature of the Hamida Banu manuscript is that the block of text does not interfere much with the miniatures. This layout design promotes a more immersive visual appeal of the paintings as they remain largely uninterrupted by the textual segments. The narrower frame of the paintings allows fewer figures to be depicted within each scene, thereby reducing the elaborate ceremonial aspect.

When evaluated against the Abd al-Rahim version, the miniatures from Hamida Banu's manuscript stand out as broader and more dynamic. This comparative analysis highlights the uniqueness of each version and informs us about the different stylistic practices employed in each manuscript.

Seylleret al. present the view that the Akbari Ramayana, pertaining to the trio of Ramayana manuscripts produced during Akbar's reign at the Mughal court, retains significant fidelity to its original Sanskrit version in the translation to Persian(Seyller, 2021)

4. Forms and Contents

the paintings of this manuscript exhibit considerable refinement and meticulousness. The artists have masterful control over the aesthetic details, rendering ornamental elements of the scenes with precision and accuracy. There is a clear, vivid balance between straight and curvilinear lines, underscoring the deft craftsmanship employed.

Dominant across these works is a mood best described as romantic, serving as the emotional backdrop of the carefully staged dramatic tableaux that unfold the narrative. This ambiance is enhanced by the liberal use of curvy lines and lustrous color palettes. Consequently, these stylistic choices augment the story's resonance, ensuring the viewer's deep emotional engagement with its content.

4.1 Themes

We observe contrasting narrative trends between Akbar's and Hamida Banu's manuscripts. Referencing academic sources such as Leach (1988: 43), we find that the former leans towards a more profound Hindu impression, which seems to be influenced directly by the accompanying text.

On the other hand, Hamida Banu's copy tends to focus primarily on unfolding the narrative itself. This approach does not adhere so closely to the text but instead seeks to base its interpretation on the inherent drama of the story. The result is a manuscript that visually communicates a more dramatic rendition of the Ramayana, free from the constraints of textual commentaries.

4.2 Script

A deeper examination reveals that these manuscripts wield the elegant Nasta'liq calligraphic style. Artfully woven into the design, the text is nestled within distinct blocks, accentuating the precision and aesthetics of this traditional writing form.

A noteworthy feature of these manuscripts is the harmonious integration of text and images. These text blocks are meticulously designed such that they seamlessly blend with the visual narrative without counteracting the pictorial elements. Thus, the written content and the imagery coexist gracefully within the page's layout, creating a cohesive and visually pleasing manuscript.

4.3 Pictorial Elements

It's evident that the representation of faces and bodies are marked by graceful dynamism. Characterized by the implementation of 's-shaped' bodies and subtly expressive glances, these figures are the epitome of elegance.

Equally impressive is the exquisite rendition of geometric patterns within architectural features and clothing details. Their precise execution illustrates a keen eye for design and attention to detail.

The color palette is vibrant and bold, displaying flat and luminous shades. Rather geometrically applied, without much attention to the nuances of shading and tonal differences in the middle and foregrounds, a distinct use of blue hues is noted in the backgrounds, often juxtaposed with white cloud elements.

Noticeably, there is a pronounced presence of Persian elements. Such stylized depictions include the whimsically curved hills, pine trees, and the inclusion of various animals, all portrayed in a decorative style. These Persian features lend an intriguing cultural context to the visual narrative.

4.3.1 Lines

The contours or drawing lines are executed with finesse using fine brushes. These meticulously created lines envelop the subjects with a delicate aura of dark shades, enhancing the visual aesthetic of the paintings.

The variation between the thickness and thinness of these contour lines breathes life into the artworks, adding an element of elegance and visual coherence. These carefully drawn, clearly visible contour lines serve a critical function — they underline the emotional context of the figures, aiding significantly in conveying the narrative's relative emotions.

4.3.2 Colours

The colour scheme predominantly features flat tones, contributing to its unique visual identity. However, certain instances showcase the inclusion of colour tonalities and shading, specifically in the depiction of background skies, verdant hills, and fabric folds. This subtly intricate use of shading recalls techniques prevalent in contemporary European miniature paintings, thereby enriching the narrative with a hint of cultural crossover.

4.3.3 Human Figures/ Clothing

It is evident that the artists have given considerable attention to capturing the essence of each individual. They employ varying postures alongside finely detailed and meticulously proportioned depictions of human anatomy. The brushwork in these renderings does more than physically represent the figures; it serves as a conduit to express their hidden, internal characteristics.

The portrayal of clothing also displays a significant degree of variation by the artists. For instance, Rama's attire changes depending on the circumstances - sometimes he appears in *uttariya* and *dhoti*, sometimes draped in animal hides, and at times without any upper body coverage.

A notable aspect of clothing representation is the depiction of folds. The folds in the garments showcase exceptional skill and high-level mastery, demonstrating the proficiency of the artists.

4.3.4 Animals and Birds

The animals and birds are depicted with undeniable precision and delicacy, which engenders a romantically pleasing ambiance suitable for the manuscript's female patronage. The recurrent appearances of cats and peacocks throughout the paintings contribute to the tenderness and fineness of numerous scenes. Their presence in the artworks not only heightens the aesthetic charm but also serves the function of amplifying the narrative's innate subtlety and nuanced elegance.

4.3.5 Plants and Vegetal Elements

The portrayal of plants and other vegetal elements is marked by exceptional precision and delicacy, contributing to a harmonious composition. The deliberate use of contour lines to depict trees, leaves, and shrubs is noteworthy. The intrinsic details, such as the undulating, delicate form of the cypress tree, are tactfully rendered to soften the scenes, enhancing the visual appeal within each frame.

4.3.6 Buildings and Architectural Elements

The depiction of landscape elements forms an integral part of the composition, enhancing the symmetrical and balanced layout of the narrative. The artistry is particularly evident in the intricate contours and patterns utilized to depict the natural environment. This is further brought to life by the calculated application of vibrant hues, adding depth to the renderings and providing a captivating backdrop for the narrative. The phenomenon of the ripple effect in the rendering of water bodies stands out as a distinctive feature, providing an artistic interpretation of nature's dynamism.

4.3.7 Sky

The horizon appears populated with varied animal and vegetal motifs, intricately scattered throughout the scenery, and contributing to an enhanced aesthetic appeal. Notably, the sky is commonly depicted in a gradient of blue shades, interspersed with white clusters intended to represent clouds. Such color use is characteristic of the distinct style embraced in these paintings, adding a surreal ambiance to the overall narrative and contributing to its illustrative richness.

4.3.8 Composition and Layout

An interesting distinction arises when comparing the Akbar copy to this manuscript and Abd al-Rahim's version. Remarkably, the Akbar manuscript tends to highlight significant themes through double-page spreads. This illustrative approach, however, isn't observed in the latter two versions according to Leach (1998: 43). This dichotomy in layout strategy introduces variation in the narrative flow across the different manuscripts. The available paintings of this manuscript demonstrate that the artists were well informed of determining the divisions and arrangement of the figures and other pictorial elements.

4.4 Assessment of Illustrations

This section selects a few paintings from this manuscript that best illustrate the formal and conceptual stance used in its production and discusses and analyses them in detail.

4.4.1 Figure 1: Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana bid farewell to Dasharatha

Figure 1 portrays a notable episode from Hamida Banu's manuscript, specifically, the departure of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana from Ayodhya. The work's predominant thematic sphere leans substantially towards Persian norms, particularly regarding the meticulous detailing of decorative elements and a conscious effort to maintain symmetry. This scene presents a characteristic sensitivity with meticulous architectural features and endearing animal renderings, intended "possibly to please the female recipient of the work" (Leach, 1998: 49). The influence of Persian and Islamic traditions is markedly observed in the portrayal of the dome, cypress tree, and individual animals.



Figure 1: Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana bid farewell, a page from Hamida Banu Begum's Ramayana, watercolour, gold and ink on smooth, light brown, lightly burnished laid paper. 32.2×21.9cm

Table 1: Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana bid farewell to Dasharatha

Figure 1: Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana Bid Farewell to Dasharatha		
Theme		In an embodiment of humility, Rama adhered to his father’s command, renouncing the throne destined for him, and prepared to depart the city. Rama, his brother Lakshmana, and his wife Sita swapped their princely garments for an ascetic's attire. Before vacating Ayodhya, the trio made their way to Dasharatha to offer their reverence and bid him farewell. This court scene portrays the central figures within a pavilion, where Dasharatha is depicted occupying his throne.
Script		The manuscript's script is elegantly rendered in an easily legible form of Nasta'liq calligraphy and neatly arranged within two distinct text boxes. These boxes are strategically positioned so as not to distract from the primary artwork, creating an effective balance between textual and graphic elements. For instance, the frieze of the pavilion appears to incorporate the two-line upper epigraph seamlessly into its architectural construct, subtly merging the calligraphy with the visual narrative. Meanwhile, the lower section of the manuscript, featuring a single line of text, exists in isolation yet maintains this non-intrusive blueprint which, in turn, preserves the integrity of the surrounding pictorial components.
Pictorial Elements	Lines	The manuscript's figurative elements—be they human, animal, or vegetal—are rendered with an artful interplay of curved and vibrant contour lines. This infuses a sense of vitality and movement into the depicted personages and natural elements. Architectural elements, contrastingly, are represented using straight lines. These aren't merely used for delineating the layout of elegant buildings, but they also serve a dual purpose in the creation of intricate geometric ornaments, adding visually striking elements that enhance the overall composition.
	Colours	The colour palette of the painting is meticulously curated, bringing a harmonic unity to the entire tableau without any disruptive tones stealing focus. This thoughtful coordination of hues distinguishes the piece from its contemporaries and conventional works. It resembles a well-conducted symphony, where all parts serve to enhance the overall narrative. For example, more intense shades like reds and yellows are tempered and skilfully contrasted with cooler colours, preventing them from detracting from the overall chromatic harmony.

<p>Human Figures/ Clothing</p>	<p>A total of thirty-one individual faces are detailed in the painting, each showcasing a unique blend of artistic subtlety and refinement. Noteworthy among these are the visages of the king and the main protagonist, where considerable detail has been devoted to both realistic portrayal and the vivid articulation of their respective emotions. Women, particularly those depicted in three-quarter view, are, in contrast, rendered less meticulously.</p> <p>Distinguishing this painting is the depiction of costumes, fashioned notably from animal hides. Contradicting the typical interpretations seen in provincial copies, which depict bark clothing, the subjects here are portrayed in animal skin attire. This choice also diverges from Abd al-Rahim’s manuscript, where the characters are dressed in woven fabric.</p> <p>Interesting discrepancies also surface when comparing this scene to a similar one in a local manuscript. In this comparable version, the duo of brothers is illustrated in formal outfits rather than the ascetic wear depicted here.</p>
<p>Animals and Birds</p>	<p>The inclusion of playful cats elicits an ambiance of tranquility and charm, specifically catering to the reputed tastes of the painting's female patron. Equally as engaging are the two peacocks elegantly perched on the roof and an aloof white bird residing on the farthest edge, these ornate creatures enrich the aesthetic appeal of the artwork. Added to this charming stage are a handful of birds dotting the distant horizon, their small figures enhancing the depth and perspective of the painting.</p>
<p>Plants</p>	<p>Keeping in line with traditional Persian miniatures, the painting provides an elegant portrayal of a cypress tree, its characteristic lean and protrusion from the margin adding to the aesthetic appeal. Complementing the cypress is a lavishly florid tree encasing it. Featured on the top right of the painting, there stands a robust, intricately twisted foliate tree. Its strategic placement contributes to a harmonious balance, perfectly counterweighing the other top section of the painting.</p>

Architectural Elements	<p>The intricately adorned pavilion showcased in this painting serves as a focal point, providing the setting for the unfolding narrative. Emphasizing three-dimensionality through the application of angular side lines, the architecture imparts depth and visual intrigue. This multidimensional aspect is further highlighted against the flat, two-dimensional foreground mosaic, accentuating the richness and complexity of the pavilion's construction. On top of the dome, the pinnacle has projected from the top frame, an approach common in Persian miniatures.</p> <p>The use of black juxtaposed with gold in different parts of the building adds to its elegance and attractiveness.</p> <p>The thickness of the columns has decreased to the lowest degree so as not to intrude the appearance and importance of the persons in it and the event taking place.</p> <p>The steel fencing in red with its ornamental studs separate the main part of the scene from the background, as well as showing a sense of three dimensionality with its inclination in the left side of the building.</p> <p>The ornamental works on the dome, transom, throne, and eaves have been applied with considerable delicacy and nicety and have important role in inducing a romantic and whimsical mood to the work.</p>
Sky	<p>Sweeping the backdrop of this painting is a sky, resplendent in an array of intense blue hues. The sky plays host to diminutive birds in flight, their scattered dispersal adding to the whimsical quality of the piece. The use of darker blue shades in the distant horizon invokes a sense of capricious beauty. Dancing gently in the breeze, the delicate leaves of the trees seem to perform an airy ballet, perfecting the illusion of movement and life within this exquisite work.</p>
Composition and Layout	<p>The composition and layout of this painting ingeniously spotlight Rama as the central focus. A discernable circular arrangement of attendees further reinforces this focus, hinting at influences from the renowned master of Timurid school of miniature painting, Kamalal-DinBihzad.</p> <p>The symmetry within this work is beautifully exemplified by the prominent pavilion. Strikingly, two key elements - a pine tree and a pinnacle - are projected beyond the margins, a distinctive stylistic device frequently seen in Persian miniature paintings. This conscious</p>

		framing technique further accentuates the balance and harmony within the painting.
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4.4.2 Figure 2: Hanuman meets Sita in her exile for the first time

Figure 2 portrays a significant episode where Hanuman encounters Sita in her exile, an event etched in the annals of the Ramayana. The painting is instantly captivating, thanks to the discerning use of the primary colours – radiant red and soft blue hues enveloping the vivacious curtain and carpet, coupled with an irresistible vibrant yellow cloth draping Sita. Together, they vividly bring out the painting's emotional depth, while accentuating its delicate charm.

The artist's use of planar geometric designs bespeaks their inspiration from traditional Persian art. The detailed flourishes seen in the diminutive flowerbeds and the quaint pool housing five ducks showcase a classic two-dimensional style reminiscent of specific ancient Egyptian art forms.

The central figure, Sita, is ingeniously highlighted through the juxtaposition of warm red and golden hues against a cold, ultramarine blue backdrop. A similar striking contrast is achieved in the drapery folds above Sita, rendered in alternating blues and reds, thus serving as a viewer's draw. These artful techniques enlighten the painting's focal points, elevating its overall aesthetic appeal.



Figure 2: Miniature from a copy of the Ramayana, Sita Shies Away from Hanuman, Believing He is Ravanain Disguise, India, Mughal; 1594, Leaf: 37.8 × 25.6 cm” (David Collection, Copenhagen).

Table 2: Hanumanmeets Sita in her exile for the first time

Figure 2: Hanuman Meets Sita in Her Exile for the First Time	
Theme	<p>The artist has demonstrated exceptional skills in encapsulating the crux of the episode, convincingly conveying the characters' emotions through their facial expressions, body language, and overall demeanour.</p> <p>During their initial engagement, Sita is unaware of Hanuman's identity, suspecting him to be Ravanain disguise. This uncertainty and fear lead her to shy away, refusing to confront him directly. The artist has masterfully portrayed this state of anxiety through the delicate execution of an 'S' form in her body's posture, signifying her apprehension and fear. This subtle detail highlights the painter's meticulous approach in visualising complex emotions, offering a depth of understanding for viewers.</p>
Script	<p>The primary manuscript text resides within two separate, strategically positioned blocks to ensure an optimal balance and harmony between the textual and pictorial elements. There is also a distinct word situated within a smaller block situated in the lower left section. This careful and considered layout facilitates an undisturbed appreciation of both the narrative and visual components of the manuscript.</p>
Pictorial Elements	<p>Lines</p> <p>In this work, straight lines - both vertical and horizontal - play a significant role. Vertical lines abound in several elements, including the edifice's columns, the structure of the chhatra - a pavilion - crowning the building, and the tree stem positioned in the top-right corner, along with the vertical facets of the hexagonal geometric patterns present in the gardens.</p> <p>Horizontal lines are also noticeable at the carpet and platform edges, garden borders, and the orientation of the text blocks. This usage of straight lines harmonizes seamlessly with the curvilinear lines utilized in rendering the bodies of the two central characters - Sita and Hanuman, establishing a visually pleasing balance in the composition.</p>

Colours	<p>The application of colors, particularly primary ones, exhibits a high degree of mastery. Evidently, the undulating red and blue hues in the drapery above Sita and the carpet beneath her, illustrate this artistic prowess. Skillful dabs of white and black meticulously capture the folds of the drapery, consequently evoking its soft texture.</p> <p>In the garden, the green shade contrasted against the geometric blocks provides a compelling juxtaposition of rigid geometry with the fluidity of color. This approach of using shades, achieved by careful application of white and black, is also discernible in the petite pool in the foreground.</p> <p>The diverse tones of green used in the grass surrounding the upper-right tree earn their place in the viewer’s attention. Crucially, the captivating yellow color of Sita’s skirt emerges as a central point in the painting due to its strategic positioning and chromatic prominence.</p>
Human Figures/ Clothing	<p>Among depictions of Sita in this and other canonical Ramayana manuscripts, this rendition is exceptionally elegant and delicate. Her distinguished facial features and distinctively rendered S-shaped figure bestow upon the artwork a certain grandeur and chaste beauty, coupled with an artistic finesse. Hanuman’s presentation, his body posing in humble reverence, further amplifies the magnificence of the scene.</p> <p>Sita is depicted in an Indian yellow maxi skirt and a gossamer blouse, hinting at her feminine form. In a study in contrast, Hanuman wears traditional garb of a dhoti and uttariya. The careful detailing of their attire adds a layer of authenticity and cultural specificity to the painting.</p>
Animals and Birds	<p>The presence of paired birds symbolically intensifies the romantic ambiance of the scene. Doves nestled amongst the tree branches and on the rooftop, along with storks perched high in the trees, all coupled, contribute to the sentiment of love and partnership. Intriguingly, a lone duck, separate from its pairing in the foreground pool, could potentially exemplify Sita’s emotional pain of separation from her husband, Rama.</p> <p>The artistic portrayal of the ducks in the quaint pool, as described above, echoes ancient Eastern artistic conventions, particularly those common in the ancient Egyptian frescoes. This stylistic resonance</p>

	imparts a sense of cross-cultural richness and historical depth to the piece.
Plants	<p>There are scattered bushes in the foreground blocks with red petals on top of their stems. The plane tree in the right is tall and aggregated, full of green leaves with a thick stem and very well coloured with shades of dark brown and gray.</p> <p>There is a shrub beside the tree with orange-red petals and bright green leaves. The orange-red petals play a nice harmony with the bright yellowish green colour of its background.</p>
Architectural Elements	<p>The elevated entrance, featuring the two main characters, is distinct in this artwork. The construction appears to be of sandstone, and the pole depicted in the scene evenly bisects the page vertically. Geometric patterns adorn the platform's brink and the ewer etched on the recess above Sita.</p> <p>Two diverse flowerbed designs - the octagonal and the hexagonal - are visible. The aggregation of octagonal sections forms eight-pointed stars in the center, while the collection of hexagonal blocks yields six-pointed stars in the mid-region.</p> <p>In terms of ornamentation, the artist appears to uphold Persian traditions, with detailed, two-dimensional framework infusing the piece with cultural authenticity. The chhatri atop the structure plays a key role in contrasting against this bidimensional representation, lending a smidgen of three-dimensionality to the overall creation.</p>
Sky	<p>Despite the bidimensionality evident in the middle and foreground, the painting's background introduces an element of depth, predominantly due to the turbulent sky portrayed in shades of blue mingled with white clouds. There exists a certain disparity in realism between the rich, dark blue painted at the top left corner and the rest of the sky. The latter part, featuring heavy strokes of white, appears more realistic, reflecting the painter's adeptness in artfully balancing subjective interpretation and realistic representation.</p>
Composition and Layout	<p>Like many Persian miniatures from the same era, the artist navigates between two contradictory orientations of perspective. One approach is exhibited in the context of the architectural representation of the building, where a raw inclination towards three-dimensionality is evident, particularly in the depiction of the chhatri, or pavilion, perched atop of the structure. In contrast, the artist adopts a flat</p>

	<p>representation in rendering the geometrically landscaped area and the petite fishpond occupying the foreground, demonstrating a dichotomous approach in perspective.</p> <p>Another interesting facet of the painting is the executional excellence, heavily contingent on the strategic use of vibrant, luminous colors, making the overall composition aesthetically pleasing.</p> <p>Furthermore, the incorporation of two gently curved cedar trees hovering in the background, coupled with the absolute plane quality of foreground entities, serve as potent reminiscences of Persian art. The painter seamlessly merges differing perspectives and stylistic directions, creating a unique depiction that echoes traditional Persian painting techniques whilst infusing a sense of depth. The overall division of the painting seems to be arranged based on horizontal lines dividing the work into four main areas. In the lower part, there exist flowerbeds and a small pool, in the middle part the body of the two figures as well as other flowerbeds; carpet and some other elements, above it there exist the heads of the figures; curtain; and in the upper part there exist the main building, trees and background elements.</p>
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4.4.3 Figure 3 a: Rama and Lakshmana Hear of the Completion of the Bridge to Lanka from Sugriva

In the story of the Ramayana, an episode of significance is the notification of Rama and Lakshmana by Sugriva, the monkey king, about the successful completion of the bridge to Lanka. The bridge, Setu, is a marvel built by an army of monkeys and bears under Sugriva's and Hanuman's leadership for Rama's expedition to Lanka, where his wife Sita is held captive by the demon king Ravana.

Rama and Lakshmana are the main protagonists who, upon hearing the news, express their gratefulness for the unfaltering support and loyalty of Sugriva and Hanuman. This engenders a sense of relief and renewed hope as they brace themselves to cross the bridge, confront Ravana's forces, and rescue Sita.

Artistically, this scene is rendered with vibrant birds and deer, as well as skilfully juxtaposed flat and shaded colours. These shades - accentuated across the hills and the sky - fortify a sense of colour variations. The scene is further animated through swirling blue and white lines in the foreground stream, alongside tumbling fish, in contrast with the serene demeanor of storks.

Outstandingly, there is a deliberate use of intense black for the ascetic-style hair plait of Rama and Lakshmana, highlighting their significant roles. The completion of the bridge in this episode marks

a major milestone in the Ramayana, symbolizing determination, unity, and strength and indicating an impending confrontation with Ravana. This critical narrative pivot is realised through the artist's deft use of colour and composition, ensuring both its cultural and aesthetic appeal.



Figure 3:“Rama and Lakshmana Hear of the Completion of the Bridge to Lanka from Sugriva, King of the Monkeys (The David Collection)

Table 3: Rama and Lakshmana Hear of the Completion of the Bridge to Lanka from Sugriva

Figure 3: Rama and Lakshmana Hear of The Completion of the Bridge to Lanka from Sugriva	
Theme	In this scene from the epic tale of the Ramayana, the protagonists Rama and Lakshmana, clad in their ascetic attire, welcome the monkey king Sugriva, guided to them by Hanuman. Here, Sugriva delivers the crucial announcement - the successful completion of the bridge, constructed to provide a pathway to the island kingdom of Lanka.
Script	<p>In this scene, Rama and Lakshmana, garbed in their ascetic attire, receive the Monkey King Sugriva, who has been led to them by Hanuman. Here, Sugriva delivers pivotal news - the successful completion of the assembled bridge, the key link to the island kingdom of Lanka.</p> <p>For the script, the narration of the episode is articulated in pristine Nasta'liq script, designated within two primary areas of text and an additional smaller segment positioned at the lower left quadrant of the painting. Each primary block of text consists of two distinct lines. The upper text block displays a meticulous arrangement in word separation compared to its</p>

		lower counterpart, which exhibits a more haphazardly applied approach.
Pictorial Elements	Lines	The use of contour lines in this painting is notable for its variety in color selection, creating a harmonious blend between certain pictorial elements and their respective contours. For instance, the medium hill in the background, painted in hues of pink and blue, features contour lines drawn in shades of dark pink and lilac, aligning with the hill's primary colors. Similarly, a small rock on the left side, rendered in a maroon shade, also sports the contour lines of the same hue, demonstrating the colorist's careful choice in unifying the color elements.
	Colours	<p>The color distribution in the painting is heterogenous, showcasing a vibrant array of hues across different regions. In the backdrop, four hills are depicted, each displaying distinct colors - two shades of green adorn the hill on the right and its immediate neighbor on the left side of the tree; the middle hill features a blend of pink and blue; whilst the left-most hill is imbued with yellow.</p> <p>This palette extends towards the middle and foreground, presenting an assortment of assertive shades such as radiant reds, blues, and yellows, contributing to the painting's overall chromatic variety and depth.</p>
	Human Figures/ Clothing	<p>Rama and Lakshmana are depicted distinctively in their facial representations, one adopting a three-quarter profile view while the other is drawn in a profile view. The scenes capture the reverential and cordial gestures of Sugriva and a high-ranking monkey to his right, their hands folded evocatively in a gesture of respect.</p> <p>Additionally, other fauna including lower-ranking monkeys, storks, fish, birds, and two gazelles are rendered with graceful delicacy and fineness. All figures in the painting don traditional dhoti and uttariya, with monkey leaders distinguished by their diadems. Notably, a monkey general located to the left sports a helmet, setting him apart from the other common monkey soldiers.</p>

<p>Animals and Birds</p>	<p>The trio of standing monkey chiefs appear alike, with no significant disparities in their facial features. The foreground plays host to twin storks, ducks, fish, and deer. Additionally, four birds perch on the tree behind Rama and Lakshmana, with two further birds situated atop the hills near the upper center of the painting. Mirroring a common theme in Persian miniature art, the pair of quadruped deer on the right are only partially visible, with half of their bodies excluded from the depiction.</p>
<p>Plants</p>	<p>Flora and vegetal aspects pervade the entirety of the painting. A range of plants, both leafy and leafless, along with various shrubs are depicted. In the right foreground, a bush bearing orange fruits is noticeable, with a monkey shown holding one of the fruits.</p> <p>The incorporation of these plant elements in the foreground brings equilibrium to the composition in this section. A similar balance is noticeable in the background, with numerous isolated plants in the left half of the painting providing a counterbalance to the grand, verdant tree situated on the right.</p>
<p>Architectural Elements</p>	<p>Distinct structures, complete with pointed towers and a central pagoda, can be seen in the top right background at a great distance. A chhatri, clearly visible in the far distance, emerges from the hill's apex, marking the peak of the implied triangle formed by the overall composition. Another pointed tower rises from behind a hill situated on the painting's top left. These miniaturized structures contribute significantly to the painting's depiction of depth.</p>
<p>Sky</p>	<p>The intermingling of blue and white hues represents the artist's attempt at realism, though the utilization of dark blue introduces an element of complexity into achieving this objective.</p>
<p>Composition and Layout</p>	<p>The artist's use of foreshortening helps to convey spatial depth by reducing the size of distant objects. The application of varied color shades in this painting, as well as others in the manuscript, is notable. Compared to Abd al-Rahim's copy, there is a clear use of linear arrangement of these color shades, visible on the pink foreground rocks, the middle-ground's</p>

		<p>green and yellow tones, and the green, purple, and yellow tones of the background hills. Even the blue and white hues of the distant sky show this linear approach.</p> <p>Abd al-Rahim's work, conversely, more frequently employs twisted patterns for color shading, although this technique isn't consistently apparent across all the manuscript's paintings.</p> <p>The figures are ordered in a pronounced oval layout, further accentuated by a V-shaped area formed by the winding hills at the bottom. A dominant triangular formation is also evident in the painting, with the apex located in the far distance, topped by a chhatri. The two main characters' heads are positioned along a line predicated on the concept of a golden ratio.</p>
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4.4.4 Figure4RamaSlays the Demon Trishiras

The episode of the battle between Rama and the tri-headed demon Trishiras stands out in Hamida Banu's Ramayana, especially as presented in Figure 4. Despite Trishiras often being denoted in mythology by his three heads, here he is depicted with only one. Yet, the true turbulence and strife of the episode are captured in the blood-spattered scene of the battle, with an interesting juxtaposition of peaceful white birds occupying the tree nearby.

In this episode from the iconic Hindu epic, Rama, a protagonist who is an embodiment of the god Vishnu, has a confrontational battle with Trishiras, one of the key commanders in the demon king Ravana's army. Ravana is the central antagonist who has kidnapped Rama's wife, Sita, relocating her to his kingdom in Lanka.

Rama, his brother Lakshmana, and their allied forces reach this island after building the Rama Setu bridge, marking a significant advancement towards challenging Ravana. As they navigate through the journey, they come face-to-face with numerous powerful demons, Trishiras included, who is known for his remarkable strength and multi-headedness.

Their encounter with Trishiras witnesses Rama's extraordinary combat abilities and supreme power. The rigorous interaction involves Rama taking on Trishiras with his celestial bow, Sharanga, and other heavenly weapons, balancing the demon's potent energy with Rama's courage and technique. Eventually, Rama strategically lowers Trishiras' defenses, beheading each of his heads and, thus, thwarting the menace.

Rama's victory over Trishiras reinforces his heroic character and his capability of vanquishing powerful opponents. It delineates his unwavering commitment to save his wife Sita, readiness

to challenge Ravana, and it feeds into the primary narrative of the Ramayana. This episode manifests Rama's divine mission, the continuous chase for virtuousness, the victory of good over evil, and foreshadows Rama's impending success in rescuing Sita and restoring peace and fairness worldwide.



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Figure 4: A page from HamidaBanu Begum’s Ramayana, Rama slays the demon Trishiras Mughal India, water colour and gold on paper, 33×20.5cm, Private collection.

Table 4: Rama slays the demon Trishiras

Figure 4: RamaSlays the Demon Trishiras	
Theme	<p>After numerous futile attempts to overpower Rama and his army, a desperate Ravana resorts to unleashing his sons onto the battlefield. Prominent among those dispatched is Trishira, notable for his ornate chariot and an arsenal of formidable weapons.</p> <p>In a direct confrontation with Rama, Trishira appears adversarial as ever. Neglected corpses laid under their feet foretell a grim ending. These could be the remains of Trishira's brethren, earlier entrants who met their defeat at the hands of Rama’s resilient army. This gruesome sight amplifies the severity of the situation and underscores the fate that potentially awaits Trishira.</p>

Script	<p>The pertinent narration of the episode is neatly encapsulated within two text blocks, each consisting of two lines. Perhaps deliberately or inadvertently, these text blocks prominently frame the principal occurrence of the episode – the contentious engagement between the hero and the demon.</p> <p>While the blocks do not obstruct the figures, they do interact with the setting in a symbiotic manner, floating subtly over the vegetal and terrain details, creating an interesting interplay between text and visual elements.</p>	
	Pictorial Elements	<p>Lines</p> <p>The verticality underscored by elements such as the standing figures and trees is tempered by the horizontal green streaks, portraying furrows and breaks within the hills. There is an identifiable rhythm to the vertical lines, created by the array of trees in the background, eliciting a certain order within the scene.</p> <p>Similar to other illustrations in the manuscript, contour lines emerge prominently, substantially influencing the final rendering and overall visual appeal of the representation.</p>
		<p>Colours</p> <p>In the right portion of the artwork, cold hues take precedence while in the opposing half, warm tones reign supreme. This vivid dichotomy presents a compelling contrast, delineating cool and warm color associations between the two halves.</p> <p>There's an interesting variation in color attribution to the demons, ranging from greys and browns to yellows and light blues, avoiding monotony and creating a diverse palette.</p> <p>The illustrative technique of employing various shades of the same color is evident, particularly in the depiction of the verdant trees in the backdrop. This strategic use of different shades of green. A kind of unrealistic approach to colour is obvious in representing rocks. For instance, the rocks laid out in the foreground are depicted in purple, a trend reminiscent of Fauvism art movement common amongst some modern French painters of the early 20th century.</p>
		<p>Human Figures/ Clothing</p> <p>Unlike many traditional depictions, Rama is not characterized here with blue skin, but is presented in a more human-like form. Each figure in the scene is differentiated with unique colors, underscoring their individuality.</p>

	<p>One notable deviation from common portrayals is found in the treatment of Rama’s torso - it's uncovered, a distinction seldom seen in other canonical pages. This brings about an explorative nuance to the revered figure, veering away from typical aesthetics and norms.</p>
Animals and Birds	<p>In this artwork, reminiscent of many Mughal and Persian battle scenes, the inclusion of placid and relaxed birds is noteworthy. One can observe a pair of serene white doves nestled in the central towering tree, and another pair of greyish-white birds perched on the spiraling petite rock located almost in the middle right section of the painting. This juxtaposition of a tumultuous war scene with tranquil wildlife adds depth to its storytelling, creating an intriguing harmony amidst chaos.</p> <p>The painting teems with mythical creatures, adding dimension to its narrative. A multitude of demons, depicted in an array of colors, make a vivid visual statement. We find nine of them squaring off with the protagonist, Rama, who stands alone. A notable feature recurring in at least two of the demons is the Persian miniature-inspired motif of spotted skin.</p> <p>With regard to their appearances, horns are a prevailing characteristic, appearing on at least seven out of the nine demons. This distinctive trait reinforces their otherworldly origin, creating a stark contrast to the more human-like Rama.</p>
Plants	<p>The vegetation, specifically the trees, figures prominently in this painting. The robust central tree serves a crucial role in dividing the composition vertically into two equal halves, creating harmony in its spatial distribution.</p> <p>A noteworthy smaller tree occupies the middle-right segment of the ground. This tree significantly contributes to the overall circular layout formed by the battling figures, effectively filling an otherwise unoccupied space, and offering visual balance. It thus completes the war circle, bridging the gap that might have been left by the absence of other characters.</p> <p>Additionally, several scattered bushes punctuate the scene. Distinctively, two of these are highlighted with a striking color contrast. One stands to the right of the massive central tree, providing perch to a pair of doves, while the other is strategically placed between Rama and Trishiras. The use of a darker hue in these two bushes</p>

	creates a compelling color contrast against their light-yellow backdrop.
Architectural Elements	In the remote upper right corner of the painting, a cluster of structures is visible, likely representing a fortress. This architectural element is most notably marked by a prominent, pointed spire that stretches across three stories, contributing an element of depth to the composition.
Sky	The sky presents a stunning backdrop, with an interplay of dark blue and white hues creating a palpable sense of shadow and depth. The background bustles with life, featuring a wealth of elements like trees, buildings, and hills, all rendered in shortened dimensions. This effective utilization of diminution techniques lends a powerful three-dimensional quality to the painting, enhancing the viewer's perception of depth and distance.
Composition and Layout	In this piece, the artist skillfully manipulates perspective to communicate a sense of depth and space. By strategically scaling down the background elements, an illusion of distance is established. The general orientation of the composition primarily follows a vertical format, save for the horizontally placed text boxes. This vertical emphasis is delicately balanced by the occasional usage of horizontally aligned figures and vegetation in the foreground and middle ground. These horizontal elements provide a compelling contrast to the dominant vertical arrangement of the piece. The substantial trunk of the central tree effectively bisects the artwork into two symmetrical halves visually, underscoring the vertical organization. The artist's expert handling of perspective and layout serves to enhance the overall dynamic tension and visual coherence of the composition.

4.4.5 Figure 5: Rama and His Allies Arrive at the Shores of the Ocean

Upon completion of the bridge to Lanka, paving a path to the location of Sita's capture, Rama makes his way towards the island, ready to challenge the adversary. This painting vividly illustrates this narrative event, showcasing Rama and Lakshmana being transported on the shoulders of the simian leaders, Hanuman and Angada (Topsfield, 2004: 367).

The illustration embodies a kinetic scene teeming with figures, each displaying a different expression and gesture. The ubiquitous presence of the monkey troops energizes the canvas,

infusing it with a vivid aura of dynamic activity. Their interaction with the environment and with each other brings a sense of bustling liveliness and urgency to the composition.



Figure 5: Rama and his allies arrive at the shores of the ocean, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, 38× 26.5 cm

Table 5: Rama and his allies arrive at the shores of the ocean

Figure 5: Rama and His Allies Arrive at the Shores of the Ocean	
Theme	Rama's colossal army forges its path through the forests, ultimately emerging at the ocean's edge. This critical juncture presents them with a novel challenge requiring astute strategic acumen. In this moment, Rama, portrayed mounted on Hanuman's back, is depicted with his right hand elegantly poised in the Prana Mudra gesture. This is a

		<p>deeply symbolic and potent gesture, signifying a connection to life force and the heightening of energy. It embodies a spirit of vitality, perseverance, and the unyielding resolve towards achieving their mission, reflecting Rama's leadership and heroism in this seminal moment within the narrative. It symbolizes a moment of reflection and planning before leaping into action - demonstrating strength, courage, and determination to overcome adversities.</p>
Script		<p>Two text blocks encapsulate the narrative corresponding to this episode. Rendered in the elegant and legible Nasta'liq script, each block carries two lines of text, culminating to a total of four. Of noteworthy mention is the presence of the letter 'Gaf' (گ), signifying the "g" sound, prevalent in modern Persian writing. Interestingly, this document does not exhibit the additional inclined line atop the letter 'kaf' (ک), thus implying the concurrent use of both “k” and “g”, or ک and گ. This not only exemplifies the stylistic choices of the scribe, but also sheds light on the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the time when the text was produced.</p>
Pictorial Elements	Lines	<p>The dominance of curved lines throughout the scene contributes to an overall fluid aesthetic. Specifically, the undulating hill situated in the top-right corner of the illustration lends a sense of dynamism and intrigue to the artwork. The interplay between lines not only shapes the form of each figure but also imparts them with an individual identity and essence. Delicate contouring not only adds stability to figures but also bestows personality and depth, thereby enhancing the narrative story-telling quality of the illustration.</p>
	Colours	<p>The painting employs a distinct dichotomy in color palette, creating two unique identities within the artwork. The primary protagonists, centrally placed, are rendered in vibrant, warm hues, their attire immediately catching viewers' attention. These radiant colors distinguish them from the remaining elements, which primarily feature a troop of monkeys depicted in more subdued tones, serving as a muted backdrop and further highlighting the central figures.</p> <p>The eye-catching yellow attire of Rama creates an instant focal point, enhanced by the contrasting maroon dhoti of Hanuman. This central composition celebrates warm hues throughout, except for an area in the lower left quadrant. Here, two bears are depicted in stark black,</p>

	offering a stark contrast against the pale background, potentially a strategy to restore balance in terms of color.
Human Figures/ Clothing	Rama is illustrated in a three-quarter profile view. He is adorned in a yellow uttariya and dhotī, presenting a vibrant appearance. Similarly, Lakshmana is outfitted with a yellow uttariya, but features distinct contrast with his maroon dhoti. Both characters are unified through their white belts cinched around their waists, consolidating their visual identity.
Animals and Birds	<p>The painting only features animals from Rama's army, specifically monkeys and bears, illustrated in profile view. Three bears are depicted in dark shades. There's a clear distinction in monkey ranks; the higher-ranking primates are larger, wearing diadems, and in some cases clothed in uttariyas and dhotis, while lower-rank monkeys are illustrated smaller.</p> <p>The depiction of the seated monkey beneath Lakshmana, its front paw raised, and bodies arched, suggests motion, infusing the scene with dynamism.</p> <p>Unique among the primate depictions are two monkeys with unusual attire. One, in the bottom right, is shown in three-quarter profile wearing an orange topi. The other, centrally positioned next to the bears, is uniquely sporting a vest. This individuality in representation adds a layer of complexity to the scene.</p>
Plants	<p>Vegetation and botanical elements in the painting serve a primarily ornamental purpose rather than being in the foreground of the composition. These elements are scattered, playing a supplemental role to the central figures. Minor details such as modest vegetation, stones, and rocks invoked in the foreground add an element of environment without diverting attention from the main narrative.</p> <p>In the backdrop, sparsely illustrated trees serve more as props than landscape elements, providing a device for depicting monkeys hanging or swinging from them, further illustrating the dynamism and movement in the scene.</p>
Architectural Elements	N/A

	Sky	In the representation of the sky, the painting utilizes a distinct two-tone approach. The upper portion is filled with a deep, dark blue, while the lower part is rendered in a lighter, brighter hue. This demarcation creates a unique visual element in the artwork. Notably, the expected textual details, such as wavy touches of white and blue often used to depict the sky in other paintings, are absent in this piece. This adds to the distinct style and aesthetic value of the artwork.
	Composition and Layout	<p>The compositional layout of the figures works in three tiers of implied circles from top to bottom. The central axis of the painting is marked by the dark scarious tree at the top, which can bifurcate the work into two distinct halves. Each half presents almost an equal number of figures, promoting a sense of visual balance, albeit not perfectly symmetrical.</p> <p>In the previous analysis of color applications in the painting, a noteworthy deviation is observed in the middle-right side of the central circle. Here, a gap in color use is evident. The established pattern of warm colors, organized in a clockwise manner, is disrupted. This disruption is due to the dominance of the dark colors used in rendering the bears, that seem to break the consistent color harmony in this specific area.</p>

4.4.6 Figure 6: The Siege of Ravana’s Palace at Lanka

This painting can be demarcated into two distinct zones, representing the inside and outside of the city, respectively. Despite being a single-episode piece, it showcases various groups that include high-ranking individuals, monkey troops, and rakshasas, all intricately engaged in distinct activities.

The piece's visual elements exhibit a wide spectrum ranging from human to mythical figures, all captured in a myriad of gestures and actions. Notably featured on the left side of the painting are the twisted hills, while the right side of the composition spotlights the fort and its various structures. A significant detail, situated towards the top left of the painting, depicts a collective of troop leaders and masters congregated in a circular arrangement.

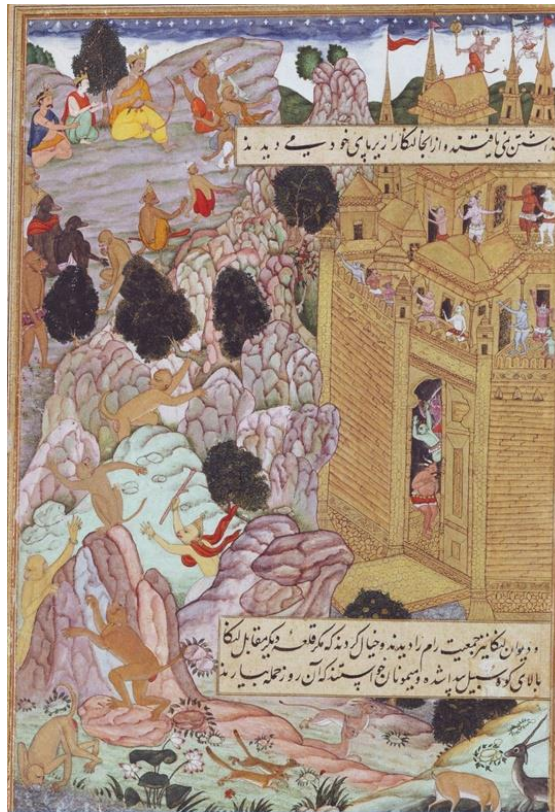


Figure 6: The Siege of Ravana's Palace at Lanka, 1594, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, 38× 26.5 cm

Table 6: The Siege of Ravana's Palace at Lanka

Figure 6: The Siege of Ravana's Palace at Lanka	
Theme	<p>The painting vividly illustrates a battle scene where Rama's army has the city of Lanka under siege. Some monkeys can be seen attempting to breach the towering city walls while Rama's advisors, gathered around him, occupy the upper-left portion of the canvas.</p> <p>The painting, rich in its narrative, depicts a range of scenes, from the counsellors conferring on the top, the frantic demons within the imprisoned fort, to the tranquil deer setting in the foreground. The variety of action adds a dynamic quality to the artwork, encapsulating both conflict and calm within a single frame.</p>

Pictorial Elements	<i>Script</i>	<p>The painting features two text blocks: one positioned at the top with a singular line and a lower block containing two lines. These are penned in the elegant black Nasta'liq script.</p> <p>The top text block exhibits a somewhat irregular spacing form. Particularly, the last word "mididand" (می-دیدند), translating to "they were watching," is stretched out to occupy expansive and uneven space. This disarray is not observed in the lower block. Indeed, the text alignment in the lower segment appears to be managed more efficiently, consequentially offering readers a more harmonious viewing experience.</p>
	Lines	<p>This painting showcases an assortment of line work, from the curvaceous and convoluted lines that form the hills to the precise, straight lines of the buildings. The angular, diagonal lines used in constructing the fort's walls lend a tangible sense of three-dimensionality to the composition, effectively bringing the scene to life.</p>
	Colours	<p>The story's main protagonist, Rama, is dramatically portrayed in his vibrant yellow dhoti. His clothing, alongside those of his entourage in the top left circle, offers a stark contrast against the more subdued hues of the pale, cooler-colored hills and foreground objects.</p> <p>The painting also distinguishes the left side and foreground with splashes of both bright and dark colors. In contrast, the right side designated for the architectural aspects veers towards a flat, almost neutral palette, barring the small human and mythical figures' warm hues.</p> <p>Rama's vividly colored dhoti stands out in the painting, a likely deliberate artistic choice to immediately draw the viewer's attention to his critical presence within the drama unfolding on canvas.</p>
Human Figures/ Clothing	<p>Human figures in the painting are confined to Rama and two additional men seated beside him. Their presence is emphasized not just by their strategic placement but also by the eye-catching warm colors of their attire. There's a readily discernible hierarchical perspective in the representation of Rama. In this depiction, his figure is noticeably larger than the others, thus underscoring his prominence and importance within the depicted scenario.</p> <p>The painting also features mythical entities, the rakshasas, inside the city walls. Scattered around and poised to defend their city, these</p>	

	<p>beings are depicted as demons with two distinct facial styles - some bearing grotesquely distorted human faces, others having animalistic features. A common trait is their extended ears and horns crowning their heads, adding to their menacing depiction.</p>
Animals and Birds	<p>Aside from the numerous monkey troops rendered in various sizes and postures, the inclusion of two antelopes, two foxes, and two wild cats in the foreground is particularly striking. The hurried movements of the foxes and cats align with the overall tumultuous ambiance of the narrative, while the tranquil antelopes evoke traditional Persian and Mughal scenes. At the painting's topmost section, a string of small white birds appears almost as an ornamental border, embellishing the overall composition.</p>
Plants	<p>Flora is generously strewn throughout the painting, except within the fort area. This includes various forms of trees, some devoid of leaves while others are lush with foliage depicted in either dark or bright green hues. A particularly intriguing instance occurs when the trees with dark green leaves form a compositional layout that shapes the figural arrangement based on their positioning. This is especially evident in the configuration of five such trees around the top left circle where the army's key figures gather. They stand within a circle that is itself enclosed by another circle, formed by the dark green trees.</p> <p>In the section under the main painting, a variety of shrubs and bushes flank the riverside, with some even bearing flowers. Surrounding several stone slabs, grass patches are arranged in a circular pattern, executed with an almost pure planar approach.</p>
Architectural Elements	<p>The influence of Mughal cultural elements on the representation of this fundamentally Hindu narrative is evident. The architectural features, including the buildings and pavilions, draw inspiration from Mughal norms and echo the design of Akbar's palace at Fatehpour Sikri. The spires, distinctly reminiscent of those found in European paintings and prints, suggest a fusion of cultures, as these were historically imported from Europe to the Mughal ateliers.</p>
Sky	<p>The sky, though relegated to a somewhat narrow strip at the painting's top, captivatingly plays with different shades of color. Its uppermost portion is bathed in a deep blue hue that gradually maps downward into a softer white. In the transitional space between the two hues, an</p>

		intriguing gradient of color emerges, a mix of blue and white that showcases a beautiful blend of the sky's chromatic elements.
	Composition and Layout	<p>The arrangement of this painting strongly reflects the dominant Islamic and Persian style, characterized by groups of subjects organized in a meticulous and structured manner. The scene features several groups; for instance, the primary group, located to the top left, represents the main protagonist of the story arranged in a circular layout.</p> <p>The depiction of demons within the building follows a semi-circular alignment, suggesting that an off-page group could potentially create a complete circular arrangement if included. Other figural elements like the monkeys and quadrupeds follow a geometric approach in their structuring – one triangular and two elliptical arrangements can be discerned.</p> <p>A notable aspect of the composition is the presence of two parallel vertical lines in the painting's middle, delineating a space before the fort and between the building and the monkeys on the left. This leaves an empty space in the central and upper portions of the painting, perhaps intentionally designed by the artist to showcase the safe distance between Rama's army and the fort's inhabitants during the conference and before the ultimate attack.</p>

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Hamida Banu Ramayana manuscript offers innovative insights into narrative depiction, combining a precise and delicate aesthetic with a dynamic narrative flow. The manuscript's exquisite details, from animals and birds to buildings and architectonic characteristics, demonstrate the finesse of the artists. Utilizing gradient colors and contour lines, they managed to simmer a unique charm into every scene. A comparative analysis with the Akbar copy and Abd al-Rahim's version further underscores the unique compositional strategies employed here. Ultimately, the manuscript affirms its significance in the field of art and literature, showcasing an illustrative richness that extends beyond its romantic ambiance and in the breadth of its narrative, thus leaving an inexhaustible legacy for future explorations.

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