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Renaissance as Refreshment in the Mughal Empire The Floral Carpets of Lahore and the Tarz-i Taza (Fresh Style) in Seventeenth-Century South Asia

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5.1

RENAISSANCE AS REFRESHMENT IN THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The Floral Carpets of Lahore and the *Tarz-i Taza* (Fresh Style) in Seventeenth-Century South Asia

Sylvia Houghteling

With their depictions of springtime vines, short-lived blooms, and flitting butterflies, monumental floral carpets made or sourced in the mid-seventeenth-century metropolis of Lahore (present-day Pakistan) contributed to an aesthetics of "freshness" that flourished in the early modern Mughal Empire (1526–1858). The concept of a "fresh style" (*tarz-i taza*) emerged in the writings of late sixteenth-century Mughal poets who lived or passed through South Asia, and was used to refer to a new form of Persian-language poetry rich with complex metaphors and vivid imagery.[1] The poets were described as *taza-gui* ("fresh speaking") and they likened their poetic practice to the cultivation of a garden with slips of green plants and growing seedlings. At a time when poetry conjured freshness and flowers, visual references to gardens also abounded in Mughal floral carpets that depicted species of lilies, irises, and tulips that were cultivated in the imperial gardens of Lahore and further north in Kashmir. When their weaving was complete, the floral carpets spanned outward from Lahore to courts throughout South Asia, meaning that the freshness of Lahore, the "city of gardens," continually inspired and renewed the environment of drier, hotter regional courts.[2]

The carpets preserved in stable form the verdant landscapes that the Mughal emperors and their court poets praised in a specific geography: Lahore, where the carpets were likely woven, and the renowned summer refuge of Kashmir, whose meadows of flowers inspired both the visual arts and poetic texts of the period. In a further connection to the northern regions, the plush pile of the finest of the floral carpets, including one now in the Frick Collection, was actually made from pashmina, or "cashmere" wool, given its English-language name because the fiber was sourced from Kashmiri merchants (Figure 5.1.1).

Both the quality of carpets woven with pashmina fibers and the floral aesthetic of the carpets reached their height during the long reign of Emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58), when, in part through contact with European botanical illustrations, artists began rendering

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Figure 5.1.1 South Asian, Lahore or Kashmir (Mughal). Carpet with flowers. c. 1650. Silk (warp and weft) and pashmina (pile), 193 × 116.8 cm. New York: The Frick Collection, Henry Clay Frick Bequest. 1916.10.08, Copyright The Frick Collection.

rows of flowering plants in naturalistic detail. By the mid-seventeenth century, this form of ornamentation had spread among various media, ranging from velvets and carpets to the flowers carved of semi-precious stones on the walls of the Taj Mahal (completed c. 1653), or painted on palace walls, as seen in Shah Jahan's accession ceremonies (Figure 5.1.2). Instead of focusing on the European antecedents for the Mughal floral style, this chapter connects the carpets with flowering plants to the poetic metaphors of freshness, bodily comfort, and floral abundance from Persian-language poetry written within the Mughal Empire and the greater Persianate ecumene.

A theme of mobility pervades *taza-gui* poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and the idea of coming to a new place, particularly arriving in Hindustan, is often presented as a process of artistic renewal and refreshment. Similarly, the techniques of making knotted-pile carpets resulted from exchanges between mobile artisans, many of whom came to South Asia from Iran. This flow of artisans and poets, verses and carpets throughout the interlinked Persianate spheres of the Safavid and Mughal Empires provides a convincing illustration of the fact that exchanges in the early modern period were often most intensive and extensive on the regional scale, while European input into the style of the carpets, for instance, remained a significant but relatively limited factor. Drawing upon the unique early modern idea of the fresh and refreshment from the Persophone world of letters, this essay posits a form of "renaissance" that derived not from a return to a shared

Figure 5.1.2 South Asian (Mughal), painting by Bichitr, *Shah-Jahan Receives His Three Eldest Sons and Asaf Khan during His Accession Ceremonies (8 March 1628)*, from the *Padshahnama*. c. 1630–50. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. Image: 30.6 cm × 21.3 cm. Windsor, Royal Library at Windsor Castle. RCIN 1005025.k fol. 50b. Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023.

past, but from conditions of mobility, cultural diversity, and cross-pollination that led artists in the Mughal Empire to believe that they were living in a period of epochal change. In doing so, I seek to show that the art of weaving floral carpets in a regional center in South Asia contributes to a distinctive conception of the "renaissance" as organic "refreshment" and illuminates alternative, non-European instances of cultural interweaving by which the early modern period became more global.

A Fresh Style

In the sixteenth century, the Mughal Empire (r. 1526–1858), led by Sunni Muslim rulers who had descended from Mongol and Timurid royalty, came to rule over much of present-day Pakistan, Bangladesh, and northern India. In a period of instability in Central and West Asia, the Mughal Empire provided a safe haven for those fleeing political strife and a site of economic opportunity for patronage.[3] Courtly arts thrived not only at the imperial level but also among the sub-imperial elite of regions such as Rajasthan, the Deccan, and Punjab, where Lahore is located. With its prosperous marketplaces and strategic location, the northwestern administrative region (*suba*) and city of Lahore, which was one of three Mughal imperial capitals until 1648 (the others were Delhi and Agra), emerged as what Purnima Dhavan describes as an, "economic, political and literary hub" that was well-known as a "meeting ground of home-grown and émigré talent in Persian circles."[4] Lahore was also on the route northwest to Kashmir, which had long been a favored retreat of the emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan, and was a site that became a "fad" in the pastoral poetry of the mid-seventeenth-century Mughal Empire.[5] Both Lahore and Kashmir are territories of the Mughal Empire that were once central to Mughal imperial life but that have historically been marginalized within accounts of South Asian art and history, beginning even in the seventeenth century.[6] Yet historical evidence attests that this northwestern frontier region flourished as a cosmopolitan center of the early modern period.

The Mughal emperors, and the intelligentsia of Persian realms, including the writers who identified as *taza-gui* (fresh speaking), saw their moment as extraordinary, partly because it coincided with the new millennium in the Islamic calendar (1591 CE), but also because of the sense of cosmopolitanism and change.[7] As Rajeev Kinra has written, the idea of a *taza-gui* movement signaled "both an epochal transition and an unprecedented—albeit somewhat ambiguous—esthetic claim: the new age demanded a new, 'refreshed' poetic sensibility, one that was, moreover, not merely the product of any individual genius, but the product of a collective, 'fresh' world view."[8] Despite being known in later scholarship as the "*sabk-i hindi*" (the style of Hind, or India), this form of poetry was not exclusively shaped by South Asia's climate, linguistic diversity, and culture.[9] Instead, the *taza-gui* poets self-consciously initiated a rethinking and revision of classical Persian precedents that the relative freedom and prosperity of the Mughal Empire facilitated. In the centuries that followed, this style has been cast as decadent for its abstruse metaphors and excessive complexity and Kinra has explored striking parallels between the skepticism with which European mannerism and *taza-gui* poetry were treated in later literary scholarship.[10]

While the adjective *taza*, for "fresh" or "new," can be found regularly in Mughal-era documents in a variety of contexts: replacement soldiers ("fresh troops"); the heir to the throne ("fresh life"); and restored belief ("fresh hope"), the *taza-gui* poets often used the language of *tazagi* (freshness) in the context of crafted objects (poems, architecture, and even textiles) and in reference to organic matter and the flourishing of springtime gardens.

The most prominent late sixteenth-century Mughal court poet, Faizi, used textile metaphors of silk spinning and embroidery to describe the "fresh techniques" of a great Safavid poet: "The silk-spinner of expression is a great man (*muḥtasham*) in Kashan,/Who embroiders his eloquence with a fresh technique (*ṭarz-i tāza*)."[11] Here, the poet is a skilled "spinner" of silken poems who further embellishes "his eloquence" with an innovative, "fresh" mode of embroidery. The poet could also be both the soil and its tender gardener. As Talib Amuli, a Persian émigré poet and the poet laureate of Jahangir's court wrote: "Like the garden of time,/I am an old rosebed, Tālib./My fresh spring (*bahār-i tāza*)/is my new meaning."[12] The poet first identifies himself with the barren flowerbed; his restoration, his "fresh spring," arrives with his new poetic meanings. Kinra notes that the *taza-gui* poets viewed their "fresh" verses as a departure from the "stale" (*afsurda*) and simple traditional poetry. Talib Amuli wrote that he was "ashamed" of the "stale simple-speak" (*sāda-gū'i-yi afsurda*) of the past; his poetry provided new metaphors of its own.[13]

Beyond the imagery of textile crafts and planting new gardens, what makes the *taza-gui* movement relevant for the flowering garden carpets of the Mughal Empire is that the poets themselves—particularly those writing in the first half of the seventeenth century—developed a particular focus on pastoral landscapes, buildings, cities, and the gardens that ornamented them.[14] Given that many of the poems were written for the patrons of garden building projects or the rulers of cities, the poets tended toward praise and architectural ekphrasis. These descriptions of the gardens and landscapes that were prevalent in *taza-gui* poetry can aid in the interpretation of carpets whose meanings and broader significance can be difficult to place. In metaphor and affect, the poetry and carpets feature a blending of nature and artifice; both have origins in mobility and bear the effects of cultural transfer; and they share a connection to a sense of place and climate, particularly in the gardens of Lahore and the landscape of Kashmir.

Carpets and the Forging of a New Craft

Carpet weaving in early modern South Asia resulted from cosmopolitan contacts, courtly patronage, and the immigration of artisans from the Safavid Empire. Although there is textual evidence for knotted-pile carpets in South Asia well before the sixteenth century, the rulers of the Mughal Empire, and particularly Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), introduced imperial patronage that allowed the carpet-weaving industry to expand and flourish in the mid-to-late sixteenth century.[15] In the 1590s, Abu'l Fazl, Akbar's court historian and chronicler of his reign, reported upon Akbar's efforts in the carpet industry: "His Majesty has caused carpets to be made of wonderful varieties and charming textures; he has appointed experienced workmen, who have produced many master-pieces. The carpets of Iran and Turan are no more thought of. … All kinds of carpet weavers have settled here, and drive a flourishing trade."[16] Abu'l Fazl then described the huge dimensions of the carpets made at the imperial workshops, some measuring up to 55 feet in length.[17] His report is telling for the immediate comparison that he draws between the carpets of the Mughal Empire and those made in the Safavid Empire ("Iran") and Central Asian lands ("Turan"). As newly established sites of manufacturing in the Mughal Empire, he mentions the city of Fatehpur Sikri, a short-lived capital city under Akbar, and Agra, one of the enduring imperial capitals. In other Mughal documents, carpets are also cited as coming from Multan and Gujarat; a reference to a carpet from Kashmir appears in a 1640 letter to the grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire.[18] Yet, in historical accounts,

inventory records, and extant object labels, it is Lahore that surfaces most frequently as the principal site of production or at least the major marketplace for carpets in the Mughal Empire.[19]

It was with great pride that Abu'l Fazl reported the advancements in carpet weaving, and the earliest surviving carpets from the sixteenth century show evidence of this high quality of design, material value, workmanship, and skill. The designs attributed to this period share many commonalities with Persian carpets, particularly of the "Herat class" of carpets, in that they are symmetrical in organization and bear palmettes with flaming edges, swirling vines, and blossoms rendered in a cross-section cut.[20] Stylistically, other carpets from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century departed from the Persian models, sharing more in common with manuscript painting with their non-repeating pictorial scenes of the hunt and men riding atop elephants.[21] Like the poetry of the Persianate world, the early Mughal carpets have their own distinctive motifs and themes but speak in a language familiar to anyone in the Persian cities of Herat or Khurasan.

The carpets' construction is distinctive from those made in Iran, however, allowing researchers to distinguish between Safavid and Mughal (specifically Lahore) production.[22] The sturdy warp threads undergirding knotted-pile carpets known to have been woven in Lahore were made of cotton threads often dyed pink or rust red and plied from six to twelve strands (whereas Persian warp threads were made up of four strands of cotton).[23] Mughal carpets are distinctive for their very subtle techniques of applying color and shading. Daniel Walker describes the skill of this "color mixing" as "approaching painting," as the carpets exhibit the "juxtaposition of knots of different colors, usually in checkerboard fashion, to yield a third color."[24] In the outlining of shapes, Mughal weavers did not separate the different colors using the dark outlines or borders found in Persian carpets, but instead placed two colors alongside each other, yielding a "*ton-sur-ton* effect," the name given to the tonal juxtaposition between areas of color.[25]

The carpets were woven in workshops on a fixed upright loom. Yet the artistry of weaving a knotted-pile carpet comes not only from the movement of a weft through the warp, as it does for flat-woven textiles, but also through the tying on of small slips of wool using asymmetrical knots to create the raised pile that makes the texture of carpets so distinctive.[26] It is deft handiwork, less reliant upon the mechanics or predetermined setup of a loom, and more dependent upon the individual ability of the weaver to keep track of the knot-by-knot pattern, likely laid out ahead of time in a *ta'lim* or cartoon. For this reason, the movement of skilled artisans to produce carpets may have been more significant than the transfer of technology. Like poets, carpet-weavers and designers had to carry their skills in their heads and hands.

The materials used to dye and weave Mughal carpets also differed from those for Persian carpets. While the dyers all used some form of madder dye (*Rubia tinctorum*) for the red wool, they also combined it with more precious red dyes: the Persian carpets incorporated the Old World kermes dye (*Kermes vermilion* Planchon), while the Mughal carpets utilized the red lac dye (*Kerria lacca* Kerr).[27] The carpets made in the early seventeenth century can also be distinguished from their Persian counterparts in terms of their fibers. While Rajasthani sheep's wool was employed in many Mughal carpets, weavers in South Asia also began to use pashmina (a word from the Persian *pashm*, for wool) for the knotted pile of the highest-grade carpets (Figure 5.1.1).[28] This material was sourced from the fine undercoat of mountain goats that ranged on the high-altitude plateaus of southeastern Ladakh and western Tibet.[29] It was then traded to Kashmir, where it was woven into shawls or

further distributed to Lahore for carpet and textile weaving. Analysis of the relative fineness of these fibers has shown that the pashmina goat hair could be up to twice as fine as sheep's wool, leading to the creation of carpets with some of the highest knot counts ever produced, the standard measure for the fineness of a carpet.[30] Abd al-Hamid Lahori, a primary historian of Shah Jahan's reign, wrote with pride of Lahore's carpet industry in 1634: "So soft and delicate are these carpets that compared with them, the carpets made in the manufactory of the King of Persia look like coarse canvas."[31]

From the use of pashmina to a shift to different red dyes, these innovations in South Asian carpet weaving distinguished it from Persian production but did not constitute a break from traditions. The textile and carpet designers who had come from Safavid lands may have been prominent, as suggested by the named experts recorded to have produced "wondrous" designs for block-printing for one of Akbar's highest-ranking courtly officials.[32] And yet the carpet weavers themselves were not treated with the same respect nor recompensed as highly as other artists, including poets. Abu'l Fazl gives the cost of an imperial carpet at 1810 rupees.[33] The numbers are not extraordinarily high. Although a carpet was sixty times the value of an elephant keeper's monthly salary, the most treasured elephants would be worth between 5000 and 10,000 rupees. A carpet was two hundred times the price of a cow, but a small fraction of the 50,000 rupees for a dagger topped with precious gemstones. Perhaps most relevant for this study: Akbar gave the poet, Haidari, a payment of 2000 rupees and a horse for writing an ode about an elephant, even though Abu'l Fazl later described Haidari's verses as insipid.[34]

This difference in remuneration between carpet-weaving and poetry has bearing on the lives and livelihoods of those who produced artistic works, whether written or knotted with the hands. At the same time, the metaphorical language of artistic and artisanal production in early modern South Asia was shaped and conceptualized by poets themselves, meaning that cultural materials like carpets could be invested with poetic meaning. Poets deployed a language of dyes and color to describe cultural transformations, like those experienced through the mobility of a poet to new lands. In this way, the Persian émigré poet ʿAli Quli Salim's words about his move to Hindustan, and his metaphor of the enlivening effect on the henna color, hold resonance for carpet production as well:

> The means of acquiring perfection do not exist in the land of Iran
>
> Henna has no color, until it comes to Hindustan.[35]

In a period when poets extolled the refreshment found in a relocation eastward, the crafts of Iran—including the art of carpet weaving—may have experienced a similar renewal when they came from Safavid Iran to Mughal Hindustan.

Lahore, the Mixing of Styles, and the Freshness of Landscape

The city of Lahore in the northwestern region of Punjab in Mughal Hindustan witnessed a flourishing of artistic, religious, cultural, and horticultural life in the seventeenth century. Through the city's gates streamed traders, Sufi spiritual leaders, pilgrims, poets, and travelers from throughout Hindustan, as well as Central and West Asia.[36] In part to secure the vast territory of their empire, the Mughal emperors spent much of each year moving between their three primary capitals, as well as regional sites that were becoming restive.[37] Lahore's fortifications served as the staging base from which the Mughal armies

sought to secure the territories of the northwestern border, particularly the city of Qandahar. By the mid-1580s, Emperor Akbar left his capital city at Fatehpur Sikri and made Lahore his primary capital until 1599. There, he built the thirteen principal gates of the city, and began construction on what would become the Lahore Fort. The city was never exclusively oriented around the imperial constructions, however. The suburbs of Lahore incorporated more local, vernacular forms of Punjabi architecture and ornamentation, and noblemen and merchants were encouraged to build their own palaces and gardens along the Ravi River.[38]

In this way, Lahore also became a center of artistic production and prodigious patronage at the sub-imperial level. While the imperial administration only allowed Mughal governors to hold their position in one province for a short period of time (on average, for three years) in order to discourage regional factionalism, the powerful, Iranian-born father and then brothers and brothers-in-law of Nur Jahan, wife of Jahangir, ruled Lahore for a combined sixteen years, from 1616 to 1632.[39] During this time, Nur Jahan's family constructed gardens, *havelis* (mansions), and funerary structures throughout the city, including the tomb for Emperor Jahangir who died on his way to Kashmir in 1627.[40] James Wescoat, a historian of landscape architecture, uses textile metaphors to describe how Nur Jahan and her family transformed Lahore's city landscape:

> The family of Nur Jahan effectively knit together the suburban garden tradition of Babur [r. 1526–1530], exemplified at Agra, and the fortress architecture of Akbar with a network of garden-residences in the walled city and nearby suburbs of Lahore. They situated gardens, and the culture of gardens, within the fabric of an urbanizing landscape. Akbar had laid out the initial forms of the citadel, walled perimeter, and major routes within the city. Nur Jahan's family then threaded the residential palace garden concept from the citadel, through the walled city, out into the nearby suburban *mahallahs* of Lahore.[41]

As Wescoat suggests, Lahore became a city whose "fabric" was textured by gardens.

Although the family of Nur Jahan receded in prominence after Emperor Jahangir's death, his successor, Emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), visited Lahore ten times between 1634 and 1649, often staying not in the Lahore Fort within the walled city but in the gardens that he himself built.[42] His most extensive building project took place in the eastern suburbs of Lahore where, after a riverbank flood, a piece of land overlooking the river provided an ideal site for a "terraced garden of the Kashmiri type in the vicinity of Lahore."[43] Since Lahore did not have the rainfall of Kashmir, the site required irrigation and Shah Jahan entrusted the Persian nobleman and governor of Kashmir, ʿAli Mardan Khan, to oversee construction of a canal. The renowned Shalamar gardens of Lahore were completed in 1637.[44]

In this period when poets took to describing the landscape in their work, the climate, air, water, and gardens of Lahore and Kashmir became recurrent subjects in poetry. For instance, the poet Talib Amuli, cited earlier, remarked on the particular features of Lahore's "pleasant atmosphere and abundant water."[45] Talib's poetry on Kashmir describes a place, "whose mild weather keeps the inhabitants from getting old." Talib also recounted the delicious fruits grown in Kashmir—cherries, figs, pomegranates, apples, and grapes, and delivered them fresh in poetry to his reader.[46] In a similar vein, Chandar Bhan Brahman, the court secretary for Shah Jahan and an accomplished poet and writer of prose who hailed

from Lahore, extolled the climate, fruits, and flowers using an emerging trope of the period in describing the city as a "paradise on earth":

> Lahore is like a paradise on earth. It is a strong and important city as well as capital of the empire. Due to its excellent climate it has some good qualities compared with its contemporary cities. It has lofty and beautiful buildings, fruits and vegetables are abundant and water is excellent. It is like a mole and increases the beauty of the earth. … It has fragrance in the air along with an abundance of flowers, moderate climate, beautiful landscape and elegant buildings. If someone visits this place, he will forget all his worries.[47]

The language of the letters and poetry sent from Lahore and Kashmir to other locations throughout the empire reveals a desire to convey this cooler, fragrant climate via epistolary means. Shah Jahan's son and eventual successor, Prince Aurangzeb (who ruled as Emperor ʿAlamgir, r. 1658–1707), wrote to his father in December 1650 likely from the Shalamar garden outside of Lahore:

> It was not the time of the garden's [greatest] luxuriance, or the full greenness of the trees; but the trefoils…and narcissus flowers were flourishing; the fountain and the cascade were playing splendidly, and the pleasure-embodying buildings looked brilliantly white; it was not less [beautiful] than [at the time of] the bounties of spring. Near the auspicious royal bedroom…mandarins and oranges were growing in profusion, and there was a riot of colour on the left and right sides of the two raised walks.[48]

Although his father could not be there in the pleasure garden he had built, Aurangzeb sought to conjure the sounds, scents, and textures of the experience through the words of his letter.

It should be noted that the period of construction for these verdant, cooling sites coincided with conditions of drought and famine experienced throughout South Asia in the 1630s, particularly in Gujarat and the Deccan.[49] Between 1630 and 1632, three million people died from famine in Gujarat alone. Even the poet, Kalim, who so effusively praised Kashmir, took time to note the suffering of these famines.[50] Despite the fact that Lahore and Kashmir both also experienced years of low rainfall and sparse harvests in this period as well, the fresh air and pleasant waters of Lahore and Kashmir were typically contrasted with the sandy and dusty climate of regions further south, particularly in Gujarat.[51] Lahore and Kashmir were places to come to be refreshed. As Sunil Sharma notes, the city found an early place "in the Mughal poetic imagination as a place of pleasure and spirituality, even before any similar poems were written on the other older capital cities of Agra or Delhi."[52]

The Fresh Floral Carpets of Lahore

It was not just letters and poems that could convey the freshness of Lahore and Kashmir; decorative arts may have carried these sensations as well. In the period when Shah Jahan's court poets were extolling the "fresh" architectural style of his buildings, and the pleasant

air and gardens in Lahore and Kashmir, a naturalistic floral style of ornamentation emerged not only on carpets but also woven textiles, huqqa bases, wall paintings, dagger sheaths, and tiles (see Figure 5.1.2). This style has been consistently linked to the court of Emperor Shah Jahan for whom the garden was, in Ebba Koch's words: "the main metaphor of … imperial symbolism: it stood not only for the emperor himself and his good government but also for his court and his family."[53] On a conceptual level, the garden evoked paradise and a flourishing realm.

From a stylistic perspective, scholars have pointed to European botanical illustrations as another generator of the floral style.[54] Starting in the early seventeenth century, Jahangir's favored virtuosic court artist, Ustad Mansur, began to cite European botanical engravings in his paintings, bringing the black-and-white printed models into full color gouache illuminations. The tender twists of the petals carved in the marble and sandstone of the Taj Mahal, and the flowers pacing through their different stages of bloom, bear reference to these same floral illustrations.[55]

Yet the beds of flowers that covered Mughal carpets in the mid-seventeenth century may have held a more specific, regional reference to the period's famed gardens of Lahore and Kashmir. The floral carpets from Lahore, typically dated to the 1650s, display rows of frontal-facing, naturalistic flowers as though they had been planted in a garden. The carpets continue the dialogue with European naturalism through the arching stalks of the chrysanthemums, the draping, drooping petals of a lily, and the erratic heaviness of a poppy flower. Yet the weavers have achieved further naturalism in the medium of carpet weaving by their use of color shading applied with tiny knots of jade green or pale peach wool (see Figure 5.1.1, lower left). Recent research has identified that many of the flowers on the carpets came from abroad in the Americas and East Asia, showing the wide reach of the early modern circulation of bulbs, seeds, and actual living plants.[56] If some of the flowers resulted from the worldwide trade, however, others would have served as reminders of garden visits to Kashmir. The crown imperial flower (*Fritillaria imperialis*), which appears in repeat on some of the carpets, was "one strange flower" that Emperor Jahangir specifically recalled from his visit to Kashmir with "five or six orange-colored flowers blooming with their heads down … like a pineapple." Jahangir wrote that "the flowers of Kashmir are beyond counting or enumeration."[57] The carpets could contain abundance in a way that surpassed the limits of textual description or the margins of the manuscript page. Moreover, their soft, dense surface evoked the feeling of sitting in a flower-studded field of grass, like the meadows in Kashmir that Jahangir himself referred to as "flower carpets."[58]

Carpets were not the only decorative art of Lahore and Kashmir with abundant floral themes. In this period, the glazed tilework (known as *kashi kari*) for which the city of Lahore was famous, came to feature sensitively drawn imagery of blossoms and two-toned foliage (Figure 5.1.3). *Kashi kari* tiles covered the walls of the Lahore Fort, the gates of the city, the mosque of Wazir Khan (1634), and the tomb of Asaf Khan (completed 1647), as well as sites connected to Prince Dara Shukoh (governor of Lahore from 1646 to 1657).[59] Susan Stronge has noted that the tombs, gateways, and mosques with these floral tiles appear along the principal, southeastern route from Kashmir to Lahore, passing through Nakodar, on the way to Delhi.[60]

More than fifty extant floral Mughal carpets have a secure provenance in the royal collections of Amber-Jaipur, a Rajput polity led by the Hindu Kachhwaha dynasty

Figure 5.1.3 South Asian, Lahore (Mughal). Tile, possibly from the tomb of Asaf Khan. c. 1640. Glazed earthenware, 18.3 cm × 19.4 cm × 2.4 cm. IS. London, The Victoria and Albert Museum, 57-1898 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

whose rulers were closely allied with the Mughal Empire.[61] The Amber-Jaipur court held one of the largest and best-documented collections of both carpets and textiles well into the twentieth century.[62] Many of the Amber-Jaipur carpets retained labels that listed information including the place of purchase, which is most frequently Lahore, the year of purchase, and, in some cases, even the name of the merchant and the price of the carpet.[63] While some of the carpets may have been purchased in Lahore, but were originally made elsewhere, the recurrent naming of Lahore in the records must have linked these carpets to this city of famous gardens when they reached what was known in the seventeenth century as Amber.

The rulers of Amber were well aware of the landscapes further north, having traveled with the imperial entourage to Lahore and Kashmir. In the late sixteenth century, their predecessor, Raja Bhagwant Das Kachhwaha, had served as governor of Lahore and had built a lavish *haveli* with famed gardens.[64] As I have argued elsewhere, the household of the Amber court seems to have consciously used imported textiles as a way to convey coolness and to capture the climate of more temperate regions in their semi-arid palace settings.[65] The court purchased diaphanous cotton muslin cloth to bring a sense of humid air; painted cotton textiles with scenes of verdant plant life; and floral carpets that transported a garden meadow home. Some of the floral-style carpets imported into Amber were woven in unusual shapes—hexagons, archways, and circles—leading scholars to speculate that they were made to fit within the particular architectural spaces of a palace, perhaps in Agra, or within a monumental pavilion tent (Figure 5.1.4).[66] The specific shapes also suggest a desire to entirely cover the existing floors, creating a continuous garden landscape made of plush woolen pile.

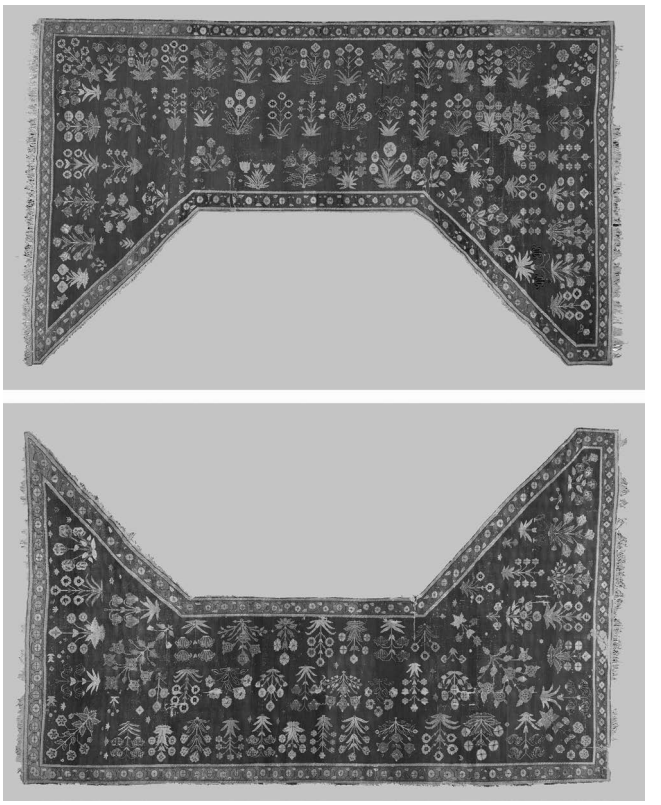

Figure 5.1.4 South Asian, Lahore (Mughal). Pair of shaped carpets from the collections of Amber-Jaipur. c. 1650. Wool (pile) and cotton (warp and weft). Each carpet (approximately): 455 cm × 275 cm. Honolulu, Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, Shangri La Museum, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 81.49–50.

Conclusion

In the elite imaginary of the Mughal Empire, enormous textiles like carpets and tents could transform a space from one thing to another and could even bring about a whole new aspect to the sky. In the early seventeenth century, a great imperial tent apparatus was under preparation in Kashmir. This tent structure's given name, "Dal Badal," as Peter Andrews notes, can be translated in Persian as "generous heart" or, in Hindi, as "mass of clouds." When it was finally erected after the labor of a thousand workers in approximately 1629, the writer Khafi Khan described how the Dal Badal tent "adorned heaven and earth with fresh (*tāza*) beauty."[67] As we have seen within the period poetics, something "fresh" could refer to a new and original metaphor, or a poetic image of impressive sophistication. But something could also be "fresh" by virtue of arriving in the midst of a hot day, like the "mass of clouds" tent whose very name signaled cooling rains or a welcome breeze. Scholars such as Sugata Ray and Dipti Khera have argued that material artifacts from early modern South Asia addressed not only lived experiences of the pleasures of abundant

rain but also the fears of drought and famine that recurred in the period.[68] Likewise, the floral carpets of Lahore could transport the imagination from a parched, hot place to an elsewhere with plentiful water and sweet cherries. That carpets could achieve a sensory and climatic renewal suggests that pleasure, memory, and, indeed, weather were factors that informed aesthetic choices.

It is important to highlight sites like Lahore as generators of poetic signification and artistic creativity not in spite of the fact, but precisely because Lahore is not currently a capital city or a major site of international heritage tourism, in contrast to Delhi (New Delhi, capital of India) and Agra, the site of the Taj Mahal. Lahore has often been excluded or given shorter space in Mughal histories and heritage guidebooks than these better-known centers of tourism and travel. Moreover, focusing on this regional metropolis in Punjab gestures to an important, and often overlooked, concept in "global" studies of historical periods, and particularly of the early modern world: the relativity and flexibility of what was foreign, exotic, "transcultural," and, by extension, what was "fresh" and "novel."

For a consumer in seventeenth-century South Asia, perhaps in Amber or Agra, the carpets from Lahore, adorned with imagery of flowers and trees not only from the Americas and Europe but also from Afghanistan, Samarqand, and Kashmir, carried with them something new and something faraway, but also something to be relied upon, to be trusted, to be enjoyed. The regional exchanges represented by the trade from Lahore to Rajasthan or Delhi are valuable to recover in their own right because colonial and national narratives and the legacies of the Partition of India and Pakistan have too often ruptured the actual continuity of these cultural, artistic, and humanistic connections. Yet tracing regional relationships also makes us confront how foreignness could exist on a more intimate scale. In searching for the global, we as historians often seek the furthest-flung connections, which are fascinating, but also continually yield up evidence of incomprehension, misinterpretation, and epistemic (and physical) violence. These are important encounters to reckon with, contributing, as they did, to the terrors of enslavement, colonialism, and dispossession on a staggering scale. But these narratives can also overwhelm the historiography, yielding the misleading impression, particularly for accounts by Europeans of the non-European world, that regional idioms, intricacies, and meanings were so localized that it was reasonable or understandable for these misinterpretations to occur. This risks overlooking the rich complexities of the partially familiar.[69] Objects and movements at the regional scale carry meaning—snippets of poetry, hearsay about the gardens of Shalamar, memories of tasting a Kashmiri grape—that, though muffled or dampened like the soft pile of the carpet underfoot, still reveal to us the gentler, multidimensional histories that might be found in studying not the encounters of strangers but the concourse of neighborly trade.

Notes

1 Rajeev Kinra, "Fresh Words for a Fresh World: Tāza-Gū'ī and the Poetics of Newness in Early Modern Indo-Persian Poetry" *Sikh Formations* 3 (2007): 125–49.

2 On the idea of the "city of gardens," see James L. Wescoat, Jr., "Gardens, Urbanization, and Urbanism in Mughal Lahore," in *Mughal Gardens: Sources, Places, Representations, and Prospects*, ed. James L. Wescoat, Jr. and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996), 138–69.

3 Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020).

4 Purnima Dhavan, "Persian Scholarly Networks in Mughal Punjab" in *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, ed. Nile Green (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 159–73 (159).
5 Sunil Sharma "Kashmir and the Mughal Fad of Persian Pastoral Poetry," *Eurasiatica: Quaderni di Studi su Balcani, Anatolia, Iran, Caucaso e Asia Centrale* 5 (2016): 183–202.
6 Mehreen Chida-Razvi, "Where is the 'Greatest City in the East'? The Mughal City of Lahore in European Travel Accounts (1556–1648)" in *The City in the Muslim World: Depictions by Western Travel Writers*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and Nilay Özlü (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 79–100.
7 On millennialism in the early modern Mughal and Safavid Empires, see A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
8 Rajeev Kinra, "Make It Fresh: Time, Tradition, and Indo-Persian Literary Modernity," in *Time, History and the Literary Imaginary in South Asia*, ed. Anne Murphy (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 12–39 (21).
9 Kinra, "Fresh Words for a Fresh World," 129–33.
10 Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 237–38.
11 Quoted in Kinra, "Make It Fresh," 24.
12 Quoted in Kinra, "Make It Fresh," 26.
13 Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 212–13.
14 Sunil Sharma, "The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24 (2004): 73–81.
15 Daniel Walker, *Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 5–6.
16 Abu'l Fazl, *The Ain i Akbari*, trans. Henry Blochmann, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), 55.
17 Dimensions calculated in Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 7.
18 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 12.
19 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 13; 21.
20 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 33.
21 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 29–30; 37–44.
22 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 21.
23 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 21.
24 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 24–26.
25 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 26.
26 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 27.
27 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 27, 155–57. The red colors produced by these dyes are similar and have a slightly blueish hue over time. See Steven Cohen and Nobuko Kajitani, *Gardens of Eternal Spring: Two Newly Conserved Seventeenth-Century Mughal Carpets in the Frick Collection* (New York: The Frick Collection, 2006), 9; on the bluish hue of kermes, see Judith H. Hofenk de Graff, *The Colourful Past: Origins, Chemistry and Identification of Natural Dyestuffs* (London and Riggisberg: Archetype Publications and Abegg-Stiftung, 2004), 58.
28 Steven Cohen, "The Shaped Carpets of Amer," *Hali* 203 (2020): 50–61 (60).
29 Janet Rizvi and Monisha Ahmed, *Pashmina: The Kashmir Shawl and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Mumbai: Marg, 2017), 28–35.
30 Yumiko Kamada, "Doris's Choice: Indian Carpets and Textiles at Shangri La" *Shangri La Working Papers in Islamic Art* No. 6 (March 2014): 9 (1–28).
31 From the *Padshahnama* of Abd Al-Hamid Lahori. Quoted in Syad Muhammad Latif, *Lahore: Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities with an Account of Its Modern Institutions, Inhabitants, Their Trade, Customs, &c* (Lahore: New Imperial Press, 1892), 51.
32 Irfan Habib, "Akbar and Technology," in *Akbar and His India*, Irfan Habib, ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 133.
33 Abu'l Fazl, *The Ain i Akbari*, 155.
34 For valuations, see Abu'l Fazl, *The Ain i Akbari*, 118, 126, 451, 149, 603.
35 Kinra, "Fresh Words for a Fresh World," 128.

36 Rajeev Kinra, "Fresh Words for a Fresh World," 136.
37 Carla Sinopoli, "Monumentality and Mobility in Mughal Capitals," *Asian Perspectives* 33 (1994): 293–308.
38 William J. Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 7–8.
39 Wescoat, "Gardens, Urbanization, and Urbanism in Mughal Lahore," 158.
40 On the value of these estates and their ultimate fate as property of the imperial crown, see Ebba Koch, "Palaces, Gardens and Property Rights under Shah Jahan: Architecture as a Window into Mughal Legal Custom and Practice" in *The Mughal Empire from Jahangir to Shah Jahan*, ed. Ebba Koch in collaboration with Ali Anooshahr (Mumbai: Marg, 2019), 196–219 (203).
41 Wescoat, "Gardens, Urbanization, and Urbanism in Mughal Lahore," 159.
42 Paul Losensky, "Square Like a Bubble: Architecture, Power, and Poetics in Two Inscriptions by Kalim Kāshāni," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 8 (2015): 42–70 (52).
43 Wescoat, "Gardens, Urbanization, and Urbanism in Mughal Lahore," 162.
44 Wescoat, "Gardens, Urbanization, and Urbanism in Mughal Lahore," 162.
45 Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, 122.
46 Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, 85.
47 Quoted in Chida-Razvi, "Where is the 'Greatest City in the East?,'" 87–88.
48 Translated in Vincent John Adams Flynn, "An English Translation of the Ādāb-i-'Ālamgīrī: The Period before the War of Succession" PhD Diss.: Australian National University, 1974, 16.
49 Irfan Habin and Tapan Raychaudhuri, eds. *The Cambridge Economic History of India, c. 1200–c. 1750*. Vol. 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 224.
50 Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, 110.
51 Emperor Jahangir wrote of Ahmedabad, Gujarat: "Since this entire land is sandy, the slightest movement stirs up so much dust that you can scarcely see a person's face. It occurred to me that henceforth Ahmadabad should be called Gardabad [Dustburg], not Ahmadabad." Nur-al-Din Muhammad Jahangir, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. and ed. Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1999), 240.
52 Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, 122.
53 Ebba Koch, *The Complete Taj Mahal and the Riverfront Gardens of Agra*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006, revised paperback edition 2012), 224. Quoted in Sunil Sharma, "The Death of the Last Mughal Poet Laureate: Court Poetry under Shah Jahan" in *The Mughal Empire from Jahangir to Shah Jahan*, 168–83.
54 Robert Skelton, "A Decorative Motif in Mughal Art" in *Aspects of Indian Art: Papers Presented in a Symposium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Oct. 1970*, Pratapaditya Pal, ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 147–52; Ebba Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 19 (2009): 293–338 (see 306–313).
55 Koch, "The Taj Mahal: Architecture, Symbolism, and Urban Significance," *Muqarnas* 22 (2005): 128–49.
56 Clara Serra and Teresa Nobre de Carvalho, *The Emperor's Flowers: From Bulb to Carpet* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, 2018).
57 Quoted in Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal," 313.
58 Quoted in Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, v.
59 Susan Stronge, "The Tomb of Madani at Srinagar, Kashmir: A Case Study of Tile Revetments in the Reign of Shah Jahan," in *The Mughal Empire from Jahangir to Shah Jahan*, 220–43 (220); Subhash Parihar, *Islamic Architecture of Punjab (1206–1707)* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2015).
60 Stronge, "The Tomb of Madani at Srinagar, Kashmir," 222.
61 This figure derives from my analysis of the photographs of over 200 carpets inventoried and photographed by A.J.D. Campbell in 1929. "Carpets in the Collection of the Maharaja of Jaipur, 1929." Photocopies held in the Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
62 Chandramani Singh, *Textiles and Costumes from the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum* (Jaipur: Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum Trust, 1979); Rahul Jain, *Textiles and Garments at the Jaipur Court* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2016); Ellen S. Smart, "A Preliminary Report on a Group of Important Mughal Textiles," *Textile Museum Journal* (1986): 5–23.

63 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 13.
64 Wescoat, "Gardens, Urbanization, and Urbanism in Mughal Lahore," 162. On Ram Das Kachhwaha's garden, see Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 123–27.
65 Sylvia Houghteling, *The Art of Cloth in Mughal India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 137–46.
66 Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, 103–5; Cohen, "Shaped Carpets of Amer," 60; Jon Thompson, "Shaped Carpets Found in the Jaipur Treasury" in *In Quest of Themes and Skills: Asian Textiles*, ed. Krishna Riboud (Bombay: Marg, 1989) 48–51.
67 Quoted in Peter Alford Andrews, "The Generous Heart or the Mass of Clouds: The Court Tents of Shah Jahan," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 149–65 (154). For the Persian, see Khafi Khan, *Muntakhab al-Lubab*, Maulavi Kabir al Din Ahmad, ed. Vol. 1 (Biblioteca Indica, Calcutta: College Press, 1869), 399. Khafi Khan uses the term *tāza rū*, which Andrews translates as "fresh beauty," but the words also suggest a "fresh face" to the world.
68 See Dipti Khera, *The Place of Many Moods: Udaipur's Painted Lands and India's Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 61–87 and Sugata Ray, *Climate Change and the Art of Devotion: Geoaesthetics in the Land of Krishna, 1550–1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).
69 See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Mughals and Franks: Explorations in Connected History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154–58.

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