
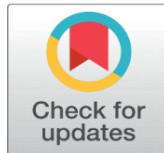
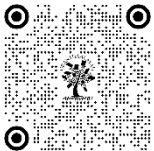


# UNVEILING MUGHAL MINIATURES: TREASURES OF PUDUCHERRY'S ECOLE FRANCAISE D'EXTRÊME-ORIENT

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## ABSTRACT

Puducherry, one of India's storied historic cities, is the custodian of a vast collection of ancient paintings, miniatures, sculptures, historical artifacts and more. These treasures are meticulously preserved within government offices, museums, art galleries and hotels. This research project narrows its focus to a select group of Mughal period miniatures drawn from this rich and diverse cultural reservoir.

The Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient, a renowned French research institute, is located on Rue Dumas Street in Puducherry and is fully dedicated to the thorough investigation of Indian culture, history and society. The institution was established in Puducherry in 1950 and it houses paintings, miniatures, sculptures and antiques in its basement. It is believed to contain about 35 priceless paintings. This amazing collection includes a wide range of artistic genres and materials, from paper and ivory to wooden frames, metal plates and even terracotta surfaces. Among these artworks, the most notable are the ivory miniatures dating back to the Mughal period.

"The researcher's objective is to examine five specific portraits featuring three-quarter busts of women and love scenes within these ivory Mughal miniature paintings. These artworks offer a concise yet profound glimpse into the rich tapestry of Indian culture and heritage. The depiction of women's attire showcases the diversity and elegance inherent in Indian fashion, while the portrayal of love scenes celebrates the cultural significance of romance and emotional connections, thus emphasizing India's deep-rooted cultural traditions. The meticulous detailing within these works underscores the exceptional artistry of Indian artisans, while the expressions and postures of the depicted characters provide valuable insights into the societal norms and values of the era. In essence, these miniature paintings encapsulate the multifaceted essence of Indian heritage."

Employing a rigorous combination of fieldwork and historical research methodologies, this research endeavor seeks to illuminate the origins, historical contexts, aesthetic attributes, stylistic intricacies and technical craftsmanship inherent in these Mughal era miniatures. Additionally, this study aspires to unveil the intricate tradition, dynamic evolution and profound cultural significance embodied by this cherished art form.

**Keywords:** Puducherry, Mughal Miniature, Origin, Historical Background, Ivory Paintings, Painting Aesthetics, Colour, Style, Techniques

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In India, a rich blend of history, art and heritage comes to life. Mughal miniatures from the past serve as living proof of extraordinary art and history. In the historic city of Puducherry, there's a treasure trove of ancient paintings, sculptures and more. The Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient on Rue Dumas Street stands as a guardian of Indian culture and history.

Established in 1950, this institution is more than just a research center; it's a dedicated hub for understanding India's history, society and art.

[Ramaswamy@Babu. N, Personal Communication \(2023\)](#). Within its walls, approximately 34 priceless artworks are on display, crafted using various styles and materials, including ivory, paper, wood, metal and terracotta. Among these treasures, the ivory miniatures from the Mughal era shine brightly, providing a window into a time of exceptional artistry and cultural significance.

This research project embarks on a journey of discovery and appreciation, guided by fieldwork and historical research. Its aim is to illuminate the origins, historical contexts, aesthetic allure, stylistic intricacies and technical finesse inherent in these Mughal era miniatures. Yet, beyond the brushstrokes and pigments, this study seeks to unveil the profound cultural significance, the enduring tradition and the evolving narrative encapsulated within these cherished works of art.

In this exploration of Mughal miniatures at the Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient, Puducherry, we delve into a world where history and art converge. This journey transports us to a time when emperors, empresses, poets and scholars converged to create masterpieces that continue to captivate the imagination and resonate with the soul. It's a journey into the heart of India's artistic heritage, one that promises to uncover the secrets hidden within each stroke of the miniature painter's brush.

## **2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The primary objective of this research is to delve into the specific five Mughal period miniatures housed within the Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient in Puducherry. Through an exacting blend of fieldwork and historical research methodologies, this study aims to elucidate the miniatures' origins, historical contexts, aesthetic characteristics, stylistic nuances and technical intricacies. Furthermore, this research endeavor seeks to unravel the profound cultural significance, enduring tradition and evolving narrative encapsulated by these treasured artworks.

## **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This research aims to investigate specific Mughal miniatures at the Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient in Puducherry. It seeks to:

- Uncover historical origins.
- Analyze aesthetics and style.
- Explore technical aspects.
- Understand cultural significance.
- Contribute to education.
- Engage communities.
- Enable museum exhibitions.

In essence, this study preserves heritage, enhances art history knowledge and fosters interdisciplinary connections, benefiting education and cultural appreciation.

#### 4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The research study holds significance by preserving cultural heritage, deepening art historical knowledge and fostering interdisciplinary understanding. It also engages communities and contributes to education and museum exhibitions.

#### 5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the exploration of Mughal miniature paintings on ivory, various scholarly works and resources converge to provide a nuanced understanding of their cultural and historical significance. [Sharma \(2018\)](#) work, "Mughal Delhi on my lapel: The charmed life of the painted ivory miniature in Delhi, 1827-1880," unfolds a captivating narrative that delves into the intricate world of painted ivory miniatures. Through meticulous research, Sharma not only sheds light on the artistic elements of these miniatures but also places them within the broader historical context of Delhi from 1827 to 1880. This contribution serves as a cornerstone, offering valuable insights into the cultural fabric that these miniature paintings were woven into during that period.

A significant complement to Sharma's exploration is found in the "Minassian Collection of Persian, Mughal and Indian Miniature Paintings," accessible through [library.brown.edu](http://library.brown.edu). This collection, through its detailed documentation, unveils the characteristics inherent in Mughal miniature paintings. By delving into this repository, scholars gain a more profound understanding of the artistic nuances embedded in these miniatures, enriching their exploration of this distinctive art form.

Contextualizing the study further, "Hamida Banu Begum" [Wikipedia Contributors. \(2019\)](#) emerges as a valuable source providing information about key figures in Mughal history. The inclusion of prominent historical figures adds depth to the narrative, offering a glimpse into the social and political milieu that influenced the creation and patronage of Mughal miniature paintings.

The conservation and preservation of Mughal miniatures on ivory emerge as critical facets of their study. The "Art conservation and restoration - Paintings on ivory" from Encyclopedia Britannica outlines the intricate processes involved in conserving these delicate artworks. Understanding these conservation efforts becomes paramount in ensuring the continued existence and appreciation of Mughal miniature paintings, emphasizing their significance in the broader artistic heritage.

In the quest for preservation, the "Care of Paintings on Ivory, Metal, and Glass – CCI Notes 10/14" from the Canadian Conservation Institute (2017) offers essential guidance. This resource underscores the importance of safeguarding India's artistic heritage, highlighting the delicate nature of these miniatures and the imperative role conservation plays in maintaining their integrity.

Together, this collection of sources weaves a narrative that not only elucidates the artistic intricacies of Mughal miniature paintings on ivory but also places them within the dynamic tapestry of historical, cultural, and conservation contexts. Through these lenses, the exploration of Mughal miniatures becomes a multidimensional journey that enhances our appreciation for the rich heritage encapsulated in these exquisite artworks.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

The research utilizes a structured approach, incorporating specific historical research methods. Here's a brief overview of the methods chosen and their rationale:

- **Archival Research-** To access primary and secondary historical sources for establishing historical context and accuracy.
- **Field Study and Interviews:** The five miniatures were discovered within the collections of [The Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient]. Interviews were conducted with two experts: [Ramaswamy Babu], Photo Archiver at EFEO, Puducherry, provided detailed information about the provenance, explaining where and when these five paintings were found. [Dr. Madhan], an Art Conservator based in Chennai, discussed ivory painting conservation and offered insights into the color techniques employed in these miniatures. These interviews collectively offered invaluable insights into the historical significance, artistic characteristics, conservation, and color techniques of the specific artworks under study."
- **Comparative Analysis-** To trace stylistic evolution and place the miniatures within the broader Mughal art tradition.

These methods ensure a comprehensive exploration of the Mughal era miniatures, enriching the research's depth and reliability.

## 7. MUGHAL MINIATURES

From the early 16th century to the late 19th century, a distinctive style of painting known as "Mughal miniature painting" [Google arts and culture \(n.d.\)](#) flourished in India. This artistic tradition, deeply rooted in the cultural tapestry of the Mughal Empire, is celebrated for its intricate details and vibrant colors. Mughal miniatures are typically characterized by their small-scale format, as they were primarily employed as illustrations in manuscripts and books. [Wikipedia \(2023\)](#) In the following sections, the origins and historical context of these remarkable works of art will be explored.

## 8. ORIGIN OF MUGHAL MINIATURES

The genesis of Mughal miniatures can be traced back to the early years of the Mughal Empire. Babur, the first Mughal emperor (1526–1530), was captivated by the art of painting during his visit to Heerat. His appreciation for art continued with his successor, Humayun (1530–1556), who spent time in Persia and developed a fascination for Persian paintings. [Wadsawa \(1967\)](#).

Upon his return to India in 1545 AD, Humayun brought with him two accomplished Persian painters, Mir Syed Ali and Khwaja Abdul Samad, [NCERT \(n.d.\)](#) whose mastery of the Persian style of painting laid the foundation for what would later be known as "Mughal painting."

The true flourishing of this art form occurred during the reign of Akbar in AD 1560. Akbar introduced elements of Mongolian and Chinese painting to India during this period. [Annamalai University. \(n.d.\)](#) Over time, Persian and Indian painting styles began to merge, culminating in a distinctive Mughal style.

Akbar's passion for painting was so profound that he established a dedicated department for it, appointing Khwaja Abdul Samad as its head and closely

supervising its activities. The excellence of Mughal painting during his rule earned accolades, even from Abul Bazal, a political advisor in Akbar's court. [Annamalai University. \(n.d.\)](#)

Mughal miniatures often depicted scenes from love life, events at the Mughal court and battlefields, utilizing natural materials such as gold and stone pigments, which have come to define the essence of Mughal painting.

The "Golden Age" of Mughal painting unfolded during the reign of Jahangir (1605–1627). During this period, the production of paintings reached its zenith. Artists transitioned from two-dimensional to three-dimensional techniques, incorporating foreshortening and ornate borders. The emphasis on capturing the essence of nature in portrait painting became a hallmark, influenced by European techniques. [Culturopedia \(2020\)](#)

Jahangir's reign saw a profusion of portrait paintings, depictions of birds, flowers, animals and scenes from the king's life. [Self study history \(2022\)](#). His keen interest in iconography was noted by foreign observers, such as Sir Thomas Roe, the English ambassador. Renowned British artist Sir Joshua Reynolds also lauded the rare portraits of this era. [Sivaramamurthy \(1974\)](#)

Jahangir's patronage extended to Indian and Islamic painters alike, fostering a diverse and vibrant artistic community. Notable painters of the time included Bisantas, Kesava Manohar, Vardhang, Tulsi, Farooq Beg Mohammad Nadir, Mohammad, Mansur and Vishnu gas. [Sivaramamurthy \(1974\)](#)

As the Mughal Empire progressed into the 17th century, European influences began to shape Mughal painting, introducing techniques such as the play of light and shadow. This dynamic interplay between cultures further enriched the Mughal artistic tradition.

The journey of Mughal miniatures represents not only a splendid artistic legacy but also a reflection of the evolving cultural dynamics of the Mughal Empire. "The following section presents an examination of the ivory miniatures."

## **9. MUGHAL MINIATURES ON IVORY**

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Mughal artists ventured into the realm of ivory as a medium for their exquisite paintings [Britannica \(n.d.\)](#). Ivory gained favor due to its near-white tone resembling human skin, making it an ideal surface for depicting figures. In the forthcoming section, the focus shifts to the materials essential for crafting these ivory miniatures.

### **9.1. IVORY RAW MATERIALS**

Ivory, as a material, comprises a combination of organic and inorganic substances sourced from the tusks of elephants, walruses and certain whale species.

### **9.2. PAINTS**

The paints employed in ivory miniatures were derived from natural sources, including vegetables, indigo plants, precious stones, gold and silver. These natural watercolors were delicately applied to the thin and hygroscopic ivory surface. Each color within the spectrum served a distinct purpose: black conveyed depth, white was for blending with other hues to achieve lighter tones, red adorned festive occasions, green mirrored elements from nature, blue embellished intricate details and gold graced designs with its opulence [Artattheheartcic \(2021\)](#).

### 9.3. BINDER

To ensure impeccable adhesion to the drawing surface, natural colors were amalgamated with a binder. Persian and Indian artists commonly turned to vegetable-based Arabic resin, esteemed for its hydrophilic properties and its viscosity when blended with paints [Asiasociety \(n.d.\)](#).

### 9.4. TEMPERA AND GOUACHE METHODS

In the process of painting on ivory, artists first executed meticulous line drawings, which were subsequently adorned with colors. The favored choice was water-based paints, encompassing watercolors, tempera and gouache, all expertly applied directly to the ivory's surface Canada [\(2017\)](#).

Mughal painters harnessed the "tempera" technique, adeptly mixing water-soluble paints with the aforementioned resin to yield a versatile color palette for their ivory compositions.

On the contrary, "gouache" entailed the application of denser colors while maintaining opacity.

### 9.5. BRUSHES

Brushes were indispensable tools for crafting miniatures on ivory. These brushes were often crafted from the undercoat of squirrels, enabling the delicate precision required for intricate brushwork. Moreover, a single-haired brush proved indispensable for rendering fine lines within these paintings. Persian artists ingeniously crafted brushes from materials such as white cat hair, goat's ear hair and fibers from specific plants. These components were meticulously assembled into a feathered tube, finely trimmed and set into a handle, all tailored to the artist's preferences. With such brushes, artisans achieved the precision essential for creating intricate patterns on ivory [library.brown.edu \(n.d.\)](#).

### 9.6. CRAFTING MUGHAL MINIATURES ON IVORY: ARTISTRY AND TECHNIQUE

Creating Mughal portrait miniatures on ivory involved intricate and delicate work, often requiring a high level of artistic skill and precision. Here's a general overview of the steps involved in creating Mughal portrait miniatures on ivory during that era:

- 1) Preparation of Ivory:** Begin with a smooth, clean and properly prepared ivory surface. Ivory was a commonly used material for miniature painting due to its smooth texture and durability.
- 2) Selection of Colors:** Traditional pigments and dyes were used for painting. These pigments were often made from natural sources, such as minerals, plants and insects. Popular colors included red, blue, green, yellow and gold. [Parsey \(1831\)](#).
- 3) Surface Priming:** Apply a thin layer of a fine-grained, adhesive substance (often gum Arabic or egg white) to prime the ivory surface. This creates a stable base for the pigments.



- 4) **Sketching and Composition:** Begin by creating a detailed sketch of the portrait on the primed ivory surface. Pay close attention to proportions, facial features and clothing.
- 5) **Painting Techniques:** Miniature paintings are known for their intricate details. Use fine brushes made from animal hair or soft fibers to apply the pigments. Techniques like stippling, hatching and layering were often used to achieve depth and detail.
- 6) **Layering Colors:** Build up the colors gradually by applying multiple thin layers. This technique allows for smooth blending and a more realistic appearance.
- 7) **Facial Features and Clothing:** Focus on capturing the subject's facial expression, including the eyes, lips and skin tone. Pay attention to the intricacies of clothing, jewelry and accessories.
- 8) **Gold and Metallic Highlights:** Add gold or other metallic highlights to jewelry, clothing embellishments and backgrounds to create a sense of opulence and luxury.
- 9) **Background and Context:** Consider the background and context in which the portrait will be placed. Mughal miniature portraits often included elements like architectural details or natural landscapes.
- 10) **Finishing Touches:** After finishing the painting, ensure it dries thoroughly. Preserve the completed work by applying a clear varnish to protect the colors and prevent any potential damage.

## 10. UTILIZATION OF MUGHAL IVORY MINIATURES

Mughal ivory miniatures, celebrated for their exquisite craftsmanship and artistic finesse, served diverse purposes during the Mughal period:

- **Economic Transactions:** Ivory miniatures played a pivotal role in the Mughal economy, serving as a valuable means of exchange [Sharma \(2018\)](#).
- **Ornaments and Seals:** These delicate artworks adorned various forms of personal adornment and served as seals due to their ornamental appeal and functional utility.
- **Ceremonial Souvenirs:** During the Mughal era, these miniatures held ceremonial significance and were exchanged as souvenirs during rituals and ceremonies as tokens of respect and appreciation for esteemed individuals [Sharma \(2018\)](#).

## 11. EXPLORING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MUGHAL IVORY MINIATURES AT THE ECOLE FRANCAISE D' EXTRÊME-ORIENT

The following sections will delve into a detailed examination of five specific Mughal ivory miniatures housed within the Ecole Francaise d' 'Extrême-Orient, shedding light on their individual historical and cultural significance.

During the renovation of the French School of Asian Studies in Puducherry in 2009, a remarkable discovery was made in the form of miniature paintings found within a box. [Ramaswamy@Babu. N, Personal Communication \(2023\)](#). The titles and details of the paintings are sourced from the records of the Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient:

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** The Ecole Francaise d' Extrême-Orient, Puducherry

- 1) Antique\_022 (EFEO I\_PG 626, p. 786)**  
**Dimensions:** Height - 6.7 inches; Length - 5.2 inches  
**Date of Exposure:** 2009  
**Description:** Painted ivory medallion
- 2) Antique\_025 (EFEO I\_PG 625, p. 785)**  
**Dimensions:** Height - 6.7 inches; Length - 5.2 inches  
**Date of Exposure:** 2009  
**Description:** Painted ivory medallion
- 3) Antique\_028 (EFEO I\_PG 627, p. 787)**  
**Dimensions:** Height - 6.7 inches; Length - 5.2 inches  
**Date of Exposure:** 2009  
**Description:** Painted ivory medallion
- 4) Antique\_015 (EFEO I\_PG 624, p. 784)**  
**Dimensions:** Height - 7.5 inches; Length - 6.2 inches  
**Description:** Painted ivory plaque
- 5) Antique\_011 (EFEO I\_PG 623, p. 782)**  
**Dimensions:** Height - 9.6 inches; Length - 6.8 inches  
**Description:** Painted ivory plaque

These paintings represent a valuable and intriguing part of the Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient's collection, shedding light on the rich artistic heritage of the Mughal period.



**Figure 2**

**Figure 2** Antique \_ 022 (EFE0 I\_PG 626, p. 786), (H-6.7; L.5.2"), Exposed (2009), Painted ivory Medallion.

**Figure 2** This Mughal ivory miniature portrays a royal lady in a three-quarter bust. She's elegantly dressed, her face slightly turned right, revealing a portion of her visage. Her captivating eyes, framed by gracefully arched eyebrows, display rich brown irises. She has a slender, straight nose and delicate lips curve into a subtle smile. Neatly parted hair cascades over her shoulders in an early Victorian style, complementing her diaphanous "salwar kameez," a traditional Mughal attire.

Soft brush strokes are masterfully used to render her face with a light skin tone and subtle brown shadows. Adorned in a white and skin-toned garment, she wears a veil gracefully draped over her head and chest, adorned with intricate dots in vibrant colors. The background carries a subtle bluish-gray tint. Elaborate jewelry graces her forehead, ears and neck, suggesting her royal status, possibly as a princess. This painting is believed to depict one of Mughal Emperor Akbar's wives. While visually intact, rust around the oblong metal ring encircling it raises preservation concerns. Likely portraying "Sharabat al-Mahal," a wife of Bahadur Shah, the Mughal Empire's final ruler, it dates back to the 19th century [blogs.bl.uk](https://blogs.bl.uk/), (n.d.).

On the reverse side of the painting, there is an inscription in pencil, possibly reading "A..ra... Jamani," and Arabic calligraphy in black ink below. Although the painting remains in good visual condition, there is some rust around the oblong metal ring encircling it, which may pose a threat to the artwork's preservation.

This painting is thought to depict "Sharabat al-Mahal," one of the wives of Bahadur Shah, the last ruler of the Mughal Empire. A comparison of this painting with the woman in [Figure 2](#) reveals striking similarities in facial and bodily features, as well as the hair accessories and clothing worn by "Sharabat al-Mahal." As a result, it is probable that this painting dates from the 19th century and depicting "Sharabat al-Mahal" [blogs.bl.uk](https://blogs.bl.uk/), (n.d.).

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3** Antique \_ 025 (EFE0 L\_PG 625, p. 785), (H-6.7; L.5.2"), Exposed (2009), Painted ivory Medallion.

**Figure 3** This ivory miniature portrays a three-quarter bust of a regal woman, unmistakably identified as a Mughal queen by her resplendent attire and the crown gracing her head. She is seated gracefully on an intricately decorated chair, her crown bedecked with precious gemstones befitting royalty. Similar to the previous painting, her figure is slightly inclined to the left, revealing approximately one-third of her countenance. Her face exudes a serene expression, adorned with a gentle, almost imperceptible smile. Early Victorian-style curls frame her visage, cascading delicately in front of her ears.

The queen is lavishly adorned with opulent jewelry, including long earrings, a choker and an elaborate necklace. Her attire comprises a reddish-orange salwar kameez adorned with white and blue motifs, overlaid with a blue overcoat featuring intricate golden designs and white embellishments along its edges. The background assumes a muted bluish-grey hue.

On the reverse of this painting, the name "Ami..na Jamani" is inscribed in pencil in Arabic calligraphy, providing potential clues about the subject. This artwork likely originates from the 19th or 20th centuries [Flick \(2011\)](#). Notably, the background color of the painting has slightly faded over time and there is discoloration in the depiction of her hair. Regrettably, the oblong metal ring surrounding the painting exhibits signs of rust, which could mar its beauty in the future.

The subject of this painting is believed to be Nur Jahan, the twentieth wife of Jahangir. A comparative analysis of this ivory miniature [Figure 3](#) with a full-length portrait of Nur Jahan reveals striking similarities. It is noteworthy that the artist chose to focus solely on her bust in this particular rendition. The facial features, along with the composition of the body, crown, jewelry, clothing, designs and ornate chair on which she is seated, all align remarkably with the full-figure portrait of Nur Jahan. Therefore, it is highly likely that the figure in this painting represents Nur Jahan [Agefotostock \(n.d.\)](#).

**Figure 4**

**Figure 4** Antique \_ 028 (EFEO I\_PG 627, p. 787), (H-6.7; L.5.2"), Exposed (2009), Painted ivory Medallion.

**Figure 4** This ivory miniature presents a unique portrayal, distinct from conventional depictions, characterized by a whimsical composition. The subject dons a

crown resplendent with precious gemstones and adorned with soft fabrics reminiscent of cotton. A delicate veil (shawl) gracefully drapes below the crown, concealing her hair. Her hairstyle features long, curled ends, evoking early Victorian fashion.

In profile view, her reddish-brown eyes stand out, complemented by a slightly pronounced nose. Her lips are curved, forming a sideways smile. Notably, her skin tone appears exceptionally pale. The earrings and necklace adorning her ears and neck exhibit intricate designs, while she wears a stone-studded halo and a chain. Her attire consists of an orange salwar kameez with yellow accents, topped with a golden-yellow upper robe adorned with a vibrant, multicolored design studded with various colored stones.

The backdrop of the painting showcases a curtain with an opulent golden design, enriched with shades of crimson and captivating red. The curtain exhibits exquisite pleats and subtle shading, creating a contrast with the lighter foreground.

On the reverse of the painting, Arabic calligraphy is rendered in black ink, with "Hasan" inscribed in pencil below. "Hasan" means "beautiful" or "handsome" in Arabic. In the context of a Mughal miniature painting, it is likely a name, either of the subject or the artist. This artwork likely hails from the 19th or 20th centuries (Yuthika Sharma, 1827–1880). It is worth noting that while the painting appears to be in good condition, rust has accumulated around the oblong metal ring on the periphery, posing potential long-term risks to the artwork's preservation.

**Figure 4** When compared to the portrait of Akbar's wife, "Maryam us Zamani," similarities emerge in the eyes, nose and lips, particularly in the facial structure. Hence, it is plausible that the figure in this painting **Figure 4** represents Maryam Us Zamani [Angel \(1900, 2018\)](#).

## 12. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THREE MUGHAL IVORY MINIATURE MEDALLIONS

The three paintings discussed above [Figure 2](#), [Figure 3](#), [Figure 4](#) exhibit distinct Western influences, evident in their artistic techniques. The artist has employed colors, a delicate brush and soft, graceful brushstrokes to create these miniature medallions, focusing their intricacy on facial features. The intricate details of the clothing and ornaments are delicately rendered, utilizing meticulous attachment methods. Notably, the interplay of light and shadow within the medallions is executed with exceptional skill, enhancing their visual appeal. The anatomical accuracy of the subjects is striking. These three ivory miniature medallions are encased in delicate paper, secured within an oblong metal ring and protected by a glass plate.

These medallions are remarkably detailed, as if they were executed on a grand surface. The proficiency of the artist becomes evident when observing the fine lines meticulously depicting the eyebrows and eyelids. While the identity of the specific artists behind these medallions remains unknown, analyzing the style and techniques suggests that they might have been the work of disciples influenced by renowned painters like Mansur or Vishnu Gas, who were celebrated during the Jahangir period.

On the reverse side of each medallion, you can find a combination of English words and Arabic calligraphy. These inscriptions are thought to be related to the sale and authentication of the original artworks. Among these inscriptions, [Figure 2](#), [Figure 3](#) are discernible, and it's possible that they represent the name "Jamani," although it's also interpreted as "Zamani." Both "Jamani" and "Zamani" are Muslim names that can be used for individuals of any gender.

These inscriptions in English and Arabic on the reverse side of the medallions may serve various purposes. They could potentially signify the name of the artist responsible for creating the artwork or the name of the person depicted in the painting. In the field of art history, artists commonly sign their works, and these signatures or inscriptions can provide valuable insights into the identity of the artist or the subject matter of the painting. Furthermore, these inscriptions may also offer clues about the time period when the artwork was created, providing historical context to the pieces.

**Figure 5**



**Figure 5 Antique \_ 015 (EFEO I\_PG 624, LI. 784), (H-7.5; L.6.2"), Painted Ivory Plaque.**



**Figure 5** This artwork stands apart from the previously mentioned three ivory miniature medallions, as it is categorized as a "Painted ivory plaque" In the background of this painting, the artist has employed sap green as the initial layer, followed by brushstrokes resembling fine lines in a secondary layer. Similar line techniques are evident on the subject's face and hands, executed in shades of brown.

On the reverse side of the painting, Arabic calligraphy in pencil is present, with "Hammeda La B" inscribed below. This artwork is believed to depict "Hamida Banu Begum," the queen consort of the second Mughal Emperor, Humayun and the mother of Akbar [Wikipedia Contributors. \(2019\)](#). A compelling connection arises when comparing the facial features and name to the depicted woman in [Figure 5](#).

While the painting is generally well preserved, traces of water droplets are sporadically visible. To ensure their long-term preservation, placing them within a glass medallion for added protection is advisable.

**Figure 5.** A closer examination of this painting reveals that the two eyes on the subject's face are not perfectly aligned and exhibit slight asymmetry. Additionally, the artwork might have benefited from slightly larger hand proportions when considering the relationship between the face, hands and body within the composition. Despite these minor observations, the overall composition remains harmonious. It is worth noting that this painting appears to have been derived from another original work, suggesting a slightly lower level of professionalism on the part of the artist.

**Figure 5**



**Figure 6** Antique \_ 011 (EFEO I\_PG 623, p. 782), (H-9.6; L.6.8"), Painted ivory Plaque.

**Figure 6** This exquisite artwork is also executed on an ivory plaque. The painting portrays a captivating scene where a beautiful woman reclines on a pillow, holding the left hand of a nearby man with her left hand, while the man kneels and embraces her with both arms. The composition suggests an intimate, eye-to-eye love scene. To their left, a maid stands, carrying a peacock in her right hand. They are all situated on a dark blue carpet adorned with a leaf-like design. An open casket and a



smaller box are placed in front of them. Behind this ensemble is a parapet in yellow ochre, creating a harmonious setting under a shared roof. The roof itself is semi-white, featuring shades of yellow ochre and sky blue, adorned with white flowers branching on both its left and right sides, along with bluish-green foliage.

To the side stands a man, seemingly a turbaned king, adopting a regal posture. His attire consists of a half-white jacket and pants, complemented by a yellow-ochre upper coat embellished with speckled designs. He wears earrings in his ears and necklaces around his neck.

Within this painting, the central focus is on a beautiful Mughal young woman, characterized by her side-shaped face, a voluminous hairdo, forehead bangs, earrings in her ears and exquisite beadwork adorning her neck. She wears bangles on her hands and anklets on her feet. Her salwar kameez is form-fitting and off-white in color, with a thin shawl draped over it. These garments are translucent, allowing the contours of the body to subtly show through. The painter's skill is evident in the meticulous rendering of the clothing. The attire of the maid in the painting resembles that of the central figure, featuring a red shawl and a blue dress.

Over time, the colors in this painting have somewhat faded and experienced flaking. Upon comparing this painting [Figure 6](#) with a painting dating back to 1624 depicting Jahangir and Prince Khurram with Nur Jahan, several elements align, including the colors, male and female figures, clothing and ornaments. Thus, it is suggested that this painting [Figure 6](#), originally rendered on paper in the 16th century, may have been subsequently recreated on ivory in the early 18th century [Commons.wikimedia.org \(2023\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org).

### **13. PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF MUGHAL IVORY MINIATURES**

Preserving Mughal ivory miniatures is a meticulous endeavor, requiring careful consideration of environmental conditions and handling procedures. Much like wood, these delicate artworks are sensitive to changes in humidity and temperature. To ensure their longevity, it's essential to maintain an environment with a controlled relative humidity of 50 to 60 percent and a temperature below 70°F (21°C) [Britannica.com \(n.d.\)](https://www.britannica.com).

Low humidity levels can lead to the drying and cracking of paint colors on ivory, while excessive humidity (above 68 percent) may cause colors to expand and distort, potentially damaging the artwork. Additionally, protecting these miniatures from excessive light exposure is crucial, as it can bleach the surface of ivory paintings. When handling ivory miniatures, care must be exercised to prevent staining and the retention of unwanted oils. Using neutral materials like soft cotton linens or acid-free tissue paper during handling is advisable.

Furthermore, caution should be exercised when using cleaning agents, especially aqueous solutions, as they can damage the artwork and remove the patina. To enhance protection, a secondary layer of paper or board is often applied to the thin ivory miniatures. Artists may paint the reverse side of translucent ivory or insert metal foil between the ivory and the secondary protective layer for visual enhancement. These miniatures are usually stored within hard metal locks or boxes, some of which feature glass lids or crystals. In certain cases, a lock of braided hair is attached to the inside of the lid for added security and provenance. These conservation practices are widely employed to safeguard these exquisite Mughal ivory miniatures [Canada \(2017\)](#).

## **14. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUGHAL MINIATURES**

The Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient in Puducherry has diligently preserved these invaluable Mughal miniatures, showcasing them within glass cases in their gallery. However, to ensure the continued safety and longevity of these artworks, it is essential to maintain an environment conducive to their preservation, as discussed earlier.

Recognizing the significance of these miniatures, which are small in size, crafted from rare materials like ivory, and replete with intricate artistic details, it is imperative for both the French research institution and the government of Puducherry, especially the Department of Art and Culture, to collaborate in establishing a dedicated research team. This team can undertake the task of identifying and restoring other notable Mughal paintings in Puducherry.

This endeavor presents a unique opportunity to not only protect and showcase the art but also elevate the prominence of Mughal paintings on a global scale. Initiatives such as exhibitions, seminars and the distribution of informative pamphlets can directly introduce the distinctiveness of these renowned paintings to the public and tourists hailing from diverse corners of the world who visit Puducherry. By doing so, the rich heritage of Mughal art can be celebrated and shared with a broader audience, ensuring its enduring legacy.

## **15. CONCLUSION**

The central government, the French government and the Puducherry government have collaborated to promote Puducherry as a tourist destination while simultaneously preserving historical miniatures, paintings and artifacts as valuable treasures. The Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient in Puducherry has meticulously preserved these ivory paintings, showcasing the magnificence of Mughal Empire art and thus paying homage to Puducherry's rich heritage.

Mughal paintings represent a unique fusion of Western artistic influences with the cultural richness of India. This synthesis not only introduced European artistic elements into Indian art but also had a reciprocal cultural impact, influencing Indian art in Western countries. Initially, Mughal paintings were primarily created for book illustrations. However, during Jahangir's reign, the influence of Western painting gained prominence, leading to the global recognition of these artworks.

Many questions surround the origin of these world-renowned miniatures in Puducherry. The specifics regarding who brought them, when they were brought and the purpose behind their arrival—whether they are part of an individual's or a group's collection or received as a gift—remain unanswered. The lack of available historical documents and the passage of time contribute to this ambiguity.

The information and documents presented above aim to serve as a catalyst for future research endeavors, potentially shedding light on the mysteries surrounding these artworks. By sharing these famous paintings with the world, there undoubtedly exists an opportunity for future artists and researchers to appreciate their excellence and delve deeper into their cultural significance.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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