3.1. THE MINIATURES OF THE CLEVELAND MIR’ĀT AL-QUDS

As with most Mughal illustrated manuscripts, the miniatures in the Cleveland Mir’āt al-quds were painted by an unknown number of artists with different backgrounds, skills, experience, and types of creativity. A brief examination of the various ways Christ’s face is depicted in these images is enough to substantiate this view. Some follow idealized contemporary models of Western origin (cat. nos. XIII, XIX, and XXIV), while others are less sophisticated in aesthetic terms (cat. nos. XIV, XX, XXI, XXV, and XXVI). Regrettably, only one miniature (cat. no. XIII) is signed by an artist, Muhammad Sharif. The absence of signatures and notes ascribing other paintings to their authors makes their identification difficult, but through a comparison with other works it is possible to attribute three miniatures with some confidence to Salim Quli (cat. nos. V, XV, and XIX). Other possible identifications have been omitted because they are highly tentative. Differences of style and quality within a single miniature indicate that sometimes various artists were involved in the making of one painting. That is the case with Mary and Joseph Travel to Bethlehem (cat. no. V), attributed here to Salim Quli. With its strong shading, the face of Mary does not seem to be by this painter but by the author of The Birth of Mary (cat. no. I). It is also clear that some miniatures have been partially repainted.¹ The figures of Mary and Jesus in The Marriage at Cana (cat. no. XIV), for example, when compared with the other figures surrounding them, seem to be floating above the platform, and are stylistically different and of inferior quality.²

It is also clear that the illustration work was never completed. Although most of the miniatures were finished, some with an enormous amount of detail (cat. nos. I, IV, and XXVII), as well as elements in others, such as the decoration of the carpets, were often never begun (cat. nos. VII, XII, and XXIII). In one miniature (cat. no. XXIV), the border of the carpet was left incomplete. One might speculate that the manuscript was left unfinished because the painters were suddenly ordered to abandon it, perhaps in order to start working on something else or to move elsewhere. Such an assumption is supported by the absence of rulings in one miniature (cat. no. VII), something that does not require special skills or a significant amount of time.

With a single possible exception, Western prints, which were avidly collected by Akbar long before the arrival of the third Jesuit mission,³ were not used as models for the compositions.⁴ This is perhaps surprising, since, in light of the constant demands made by Akbar and Salim/Jahangir, Father Jerome regularly requested religious prints from his counterparts in both Goa and Rome⁵ and became a major provider of such images.⁶ One of the letters⁷ by Father Jerome mentioned above indicates that Salim, who commissioned an illustrated copy of the Mir’āt al-quds, was not completely satisfied with the illustrations based on Nadal’s Imagines, and ordered others. This implies that he might have preferred local versions, which were better suited to Mughal sensibilities.

The only composition that might reflect influence from a Western print is Jesus Being Awakened during a Tempest on the Sea of Galilee (cat. no. XIX), which shares a number of similarities with an almost contemporary work on the same subject (fig. 3.1) from Jerome Nadal’s illustrated Gospel Stories, a copy of which is known to have reached the Mughal court before 1603.⁸ The artists involved in the illustration of the Cleveland
Mir’āt al-quds were nevertheless inspired by other prints, or to be more precise, selected parts of them. Some of the angels in cat. no. XIII, Angels Bring Food to Jesus in the Wilderness, are similar to the ones in Nadal’s Nativity (cf. figs. 3.2 and 3.3). In both works, the central angel is also portrayed in a similar frontal view.

The figure of Simeon kneeling and with his arms crossed over his chest (fig. 3.4) in Simeon Kneels in front of Mary and Jesus after Recognizing Them (cat. no. X) is closely related to the figure of a sick man being cured by Jesus in Jesus Cures Ten Lepers, a print also found in Nadal’s book (fig. 3.5). Copying certain elements of a work in a more or less faithful way into new and different contexts was particularly popular in the late Akbar and early Jahangir periods. In this same miniature, the figures of the Madonna and Child (fig. 3.6) ultimately derive from a celebrated painting in Rome, the Salus Populi Romani, particularly treasured by the