



# An Iranian Youth in an Album from Zwolle

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Regrettably, we can't ask him, but how would this elegant Iranian youth feel (fig. 1), wedged between the defecating children, middle-class girls and men skating in Gesina ter Borch's (1631-1690) family scrapbook (fig. 2)? This scrapbook is part of the Ter Borch family's studio estate, which has been in the Rijksmuseum since 1890.<sup>1</sup> It contains work by at least seven members of the family: Gerard ter Borch Sr (1582/83-1661), his children Gerard Jr (1617-1681), Anna (1638-1677), Gesina (1631-1690), Harmen (1638-1677) and Mozes (1645-1667), and his nephew Jan (active 1624-46). Gesina ter Borch, the compiler and owner of the scrapbook, was a woman of many talents.<sup>2</sup> She practised the arts throughout her life: calligraphy at first, before concentrating on drawing and painting. She was undoubtedly taught by her

< Fig. 1  
ISFAHAN SCHOOL and  
GESINA TER BORCH,  
*Iranian Youth*,  
c. 1650-70, from  
Gesina ter Borch's  
family scrapbook,  
fol. 40r.  
Black and coloured  
opaque watercolour  
on paper heightened  
with gold and silver  
paints, 243 x 360 mm  
(sheet).  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.  
BI-1887-1463-40;  
purchased with  
the support of  
the Vereniging  
Rembrandt.

father and her brothers, but as a woman she could not expect a career as a professional artist.

Gesina started her scrapbook in 1660. She originally intended to fill the blank pages of the album with her own watercolour drawings of everyday scenes in Zwolle, a provincial town in the eastern part of the Netherlands where she was born. This was a genre in which she had specialized over the

Fig. 2  
GESINA TER BORCH,  
*Four Children  
Defecating and Three  
Women*, c. 1646-54,  
from Gesina ter  
Borch's family  
scrapbook, fol. 157r.  
Paper, pen, ink,  
watercolour,  
243 x 360 mm.

Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.  
BI-1887-1463-157;  
purchased with  
the support of  
the Vereniging  
Rembrandt.



years. As time went by, however, she changed the concept of her book. She stopped drawing straight on to the album pages, and began pasting in separate drawings instead – her own work, and that of her father and brothers as well. In the end a gallimaufry of other items appeared in the album: examples of calligraphy, children's drawings by nephews and nieces, work by other artists and copies after other masters. And, among them, this solitary Iranian.

In 1988 the scrapbook was described in detail by Alison McNeil Kettering in her catalogue raisonné *Drawings from the Ter Borch Studio Estate in the Rijksmuseum*, which included a black-and-white photograph of the Iranian youth,<sup>3</sup> but the sheet is never mentioned in later literature. There is no reference to this drawing in any study about the artistic relationships between the Netherlands and Iran and it has never been reproduced again.

### The Original: a Safavid Miniature

The subject and composition of the young man in Gesina's scrapbook are entirely in the seventeenth-century tradition of Safavid painting. The Safavids, a dynasty with its roots in Azerbaijan, a region in north-western Iran, ruled Iran from 1501 to 1722. The Safavid Empire reached its peak under Shah Abbas the Great (1571-1629), who in 1598 moved the capital to Isfahan, which he developed into a centre of art and culture. As in the preceding centuries, Safavid miniatures were initially part of costly manuscripts worked on by various artists. They usually took literary themes as their subjects and were made in court workshops (libraries), where calligraphers and painters worked closely together on often very large manuscripts. This changed, however, over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> Iranian painters no longer worked exclusively for monarchs and

princes, but increasingly produced works for the open market of the urban elite. This change in clientele had consequences for the form as well as the content. Instead of expensive manuscripts, Iranian artists more often made loose sheets, which could be put into an album later. These loose sheets were not only cheaper, and therefore within the reach of a much larger circle of clients, they also had new subjects that appealed to the tastes of the emerging urban elite of merchants and officials: scenes from urban life, visitors from Europe,<sup>5</sup>

Fig. 3  
RIZA ABBASI,  
*Young Man with  
Three Cups*, 1629.  
Pigments on paper,  
181 x 92 mm.  
Prince and Princess  
Sadruddin Aga Khan  
Collection.



Fig. 4  
FOLLOWER OF  
RIZA ABBASI,  
Cupbearer, mid-  
seventeenth century,  
from the album  
containing works  
by Riza Abbasi.  
Pigments on paper,  
288 x 133 mm.  
Paris, Bibliothèque  
nationale de France,  
Département des  
Manuscrits,  
Supplément Persan  
1572, folio 7r.

travelling dervishes and, above all, illustrations of elegant young men and women relaxing with music, wine and one another's company. One of the best-known artists to specialize in loose sheets like these, showing attractive youths in a gracious style, was Riza Abbasi (1565-1635), Shah Abbas's favourite artist (fig 3). This artist was attached to the royal workshop for the greater part of his career, but he also worked for an elite clientele outside the palace walls.<sup>6</sup> He and his followers of the Isfahan School made these paintings of Iranian



*jeunesse dorée* extremely popular. The Iranian youth in Gesina's album, with his opulent clothes and a wine dish in his hand, is a perfect example.

The composition of Gesina's young man is not unknown in Safavid painting. There is, for example, a somewhat similar miniature in the Bibliothèque nationale de France that was previously attributed to Riza Abbasi, but is now regarded as the work of a mid-seventeenth-century follower (fig. 4). More interesting is the *Youth in a Red Coat* in the collection of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto (fig. 5).<sup>7</sup> This drawing is dated a little earlier: c. 1630-50. The youth's elegance and his gracious pose, with slightly bowed head, make it closer to the work of Riza Abbasi. Like the sheet in Paris, this miniature differs quite strikingly in several details from the drawing in Gesina's scrapbook. For instance, the man in the miniature in Toronto has side whiskers, his pose is slightly different and he carries a pouch. The most striking difference, though, is the plain red coat instead of the gold coat with the bird pattern in Gesina's scrapbook. In 2019, a miniature that was much closer to the composition in Gesina's scrapbook was offered at a sale at Christie's in London (fig. 6). On stylistic grounds this painting can probably be dated to the sixteen-fifties or sixteen-sixties.<sup>8</sup> The figure differs only slightly from the young man in Gesina's album, for example in the shape of his coat (an extra fold on the left which is not present in Gesina's picture) and the pattern on the garment (the position of the birds' heads on the sleeves). The similarities, however, are far more noticeable. Both men wear robes with bird patterns and neither has side whiskers – uncommon in Safavid art of that period.

Yet to be mentioned, but clearly different from all Iranian examples are the plain background and the colourful sashes in the drawing in



Fig. 5

SAFAVID IRAN,  
*Youth in a Red Coat*,  
c. 1630–50.  
Opaque watercolour  
and gold on paper,  
108 x 188 mm (sheet),  
183 x 83 mm  
(illustration).  
© Toronto,  
Aga Khan Museum,  
inv. no. AKM 436.



Fig. 6

ISFAHAN SCHOOL,  
*A Youth Holding a  
Wine Cup*, c. 1650–70.  
Opaque pigments  
heightened with gold  
on paper, 173 x 90 mm  
(painting),  
330 x 223 mm (folio).  
Private collection.  
Photograph:  
© Christie's Images/  
Bridgeman Images.

Gesina's scrapbook. There is a very specific reason for this, however: they are later additions.

### Changes and Additions

As a rule, the backgrounds in contemporary Iranian miniatures are simple, stylized landscapes in gold or sepia. Even with the naked eye, it is immediately clear that the solid black background in Gesina's miniature is a later addition. The original background was over-painted when the drawing was mounted in the scrapbook. The drawing now appears to be rectangular, but close examination reveals that it actually has a rounded top and bottom and there is a large lacuna lower right (fig. 7). It must have been Gesina herself who blackened the background when she pasted in the damaged drawing, as she continued the background on to the album page to give it a rectangular

frame (fig. 1). She evidently found this composition more attractive – other works she mounted were also given drawn frames on album pages later – and at the same time she could cover up the unsightly hole lower right and other areas of damage.

Fig. 7

Figure indicating the original shape of the Iranian miniature (fig. 1). The red lines delineate the format of the original drawing pasted on to the book page; the blue lines define the piece of paper added at the lower right corner.





The colourful sashes around the young man's waist, the feather on the turban and the white collar are also conspicuous. These details are very different from the rest of the drawing: they were painted much more loosely, with a clearly visible brushstroke and strikingly white highlights. Their three-dimensional effects contrast sharply with the much flatter rendering of the rest of the figure. When Gesina overpainted the background in black, she probably followed the rough outlines of the body and the clothes and so also covered the feather and a part of the fluttering sash with black paint. She then added the feather and the white sash again on the black paint and touched up and heightened the rest of the sashes, the collar, part of the turban and the sword.

We tried to look at the composition under the added sashes using the traditional infrared imaging system, but the results were not very satisfying. However, by using a recently developed analytical tool, macro-X-ray fluorescence (MA-XRF) analysis, which provides elemental distribution images of the elements present, we were able to see the original sashes.<sup>9</sup> The distribution of the element gold (Au\_L) revealed that these original sashes are painted in a more linear way, consistent with the style of the rest of the clothes, and that the sashes have a pattern of gold lines (figs. 8, 10). Analysis of the

pigments revealed that the blue and orange of the later sashes contain the same pigments as the colours that Gesina used in her own drawings elsewhere in the scrapbook (see appendix).<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the Iranian youth's sashes are stylistically close to the sashes Gesina painted on other drawings in the scrapbook and even the characteristic blue and orange with white highlights reappear (fig. 9). This reinforces the assumption that Gesina herself was responsible for these later overpaints. The fact that Gesina often made changes to the drawings of other artists in her scrapbook makes this even more plausible. She clearly did not hesitate to liven up this work in accordance with her own views. As in the drawing of the Iranian youth, her interventions primarily involved the addition of bright colours and white highlights.<sup>11</sup>

Macro-XRF delivered another surprise. The gold map (Au\_L) also revealed a landscape in gold paint hidden under the black background (fig. 10). The stylized vegetation is similar to that found in the simple landscapes in sepia or gold in contemporary Iranian miniatures (figs. 3, 4, 5, 6, 29, 30, 31). It also showed that there was a gold pattern under the gleaming black paint Gesina applied to the sword, a pattern that is identical to the pattern in the Christie's miniature (figs. 11, 12a, b).

Fig. 8  
Detail with the present picturesque sashes (fig. 1).

Fig. 9  
GESINA TER BORCH,  
*Portrait of Moses ter Borch* (detail), c. 1670, from Gesina ter Borch's family scrapbook, fol. 84r. Opaque water-colour on paper, 243 x 360 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. BI-1887-1463-84; purchased with the support of the Vereniging Rembrandt.

Fig. 10  
MA-XRF gold map (Au\_L) of fig. 1.



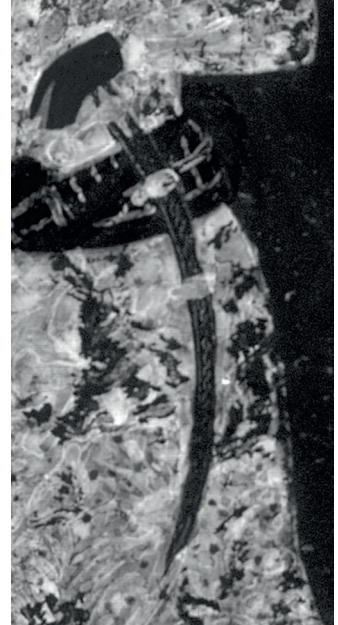




Fig. 11  
Visible incident  
light photograph  
(detail of fig. 6).



Figs. 12 a, b  
a) Visible incident light  
photograph (detail of fig. 1);  
b) MA-XRF gold (Au\_L) map  
(detail of fig. 10).

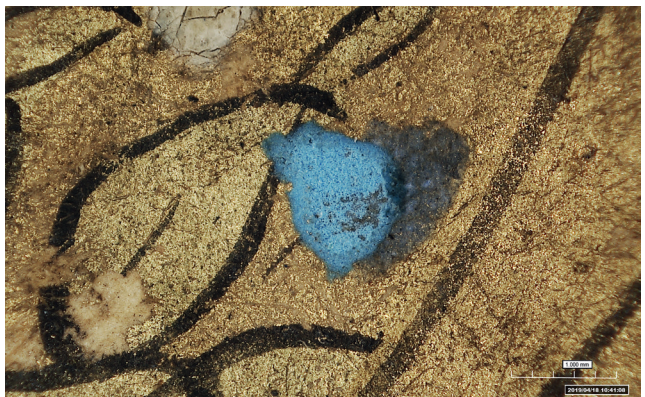


> Fig. 14  
MA-XRF silver map  
(Ag\_L) of fig. 1.

Furthermore, the MA-XRF maps provided additional information about the reasons behind the later overpaints.<sup>12</sup> The gold map (Au\_L) showed that there were large areas of loss in the gold of the robe (black pixel regions on either side of the sword): the robe was apparently already severely damaged here when Gesina mounted the miniature in her album. Most probably Gesina herself filled these lacunae later with, among other things, gold paint containing copper. These additions are easy to see with the naked eye because they are brighter in colour than the original gold paint, which appears greyish. It was most likely in the same campaign that Gesina added the blue, red and pink dots. They were partially painted over the old dots, which were a more subtle colour (fig. 13). In any case the robe must originally have looked much more attractive. The silver map shows that the birds and a part of the

leaves and rocks had been carefully coloured with silver, which made the pattern far easier to make out than it is now (fig. 14). The silver has blackened over time and was partially over-painted so that it is hardly noticeable now. The original effect must have been similar to the pattern on the robe in the Christie's miniature, which

v Fig. 13  
Micrograph, 50X  
(fig. 1), showing the  
overlapping of two  
blue dots made of  
different pigments.  
The upper dot has  
been identified as  
azurite and can be  
attributed to Gesina.



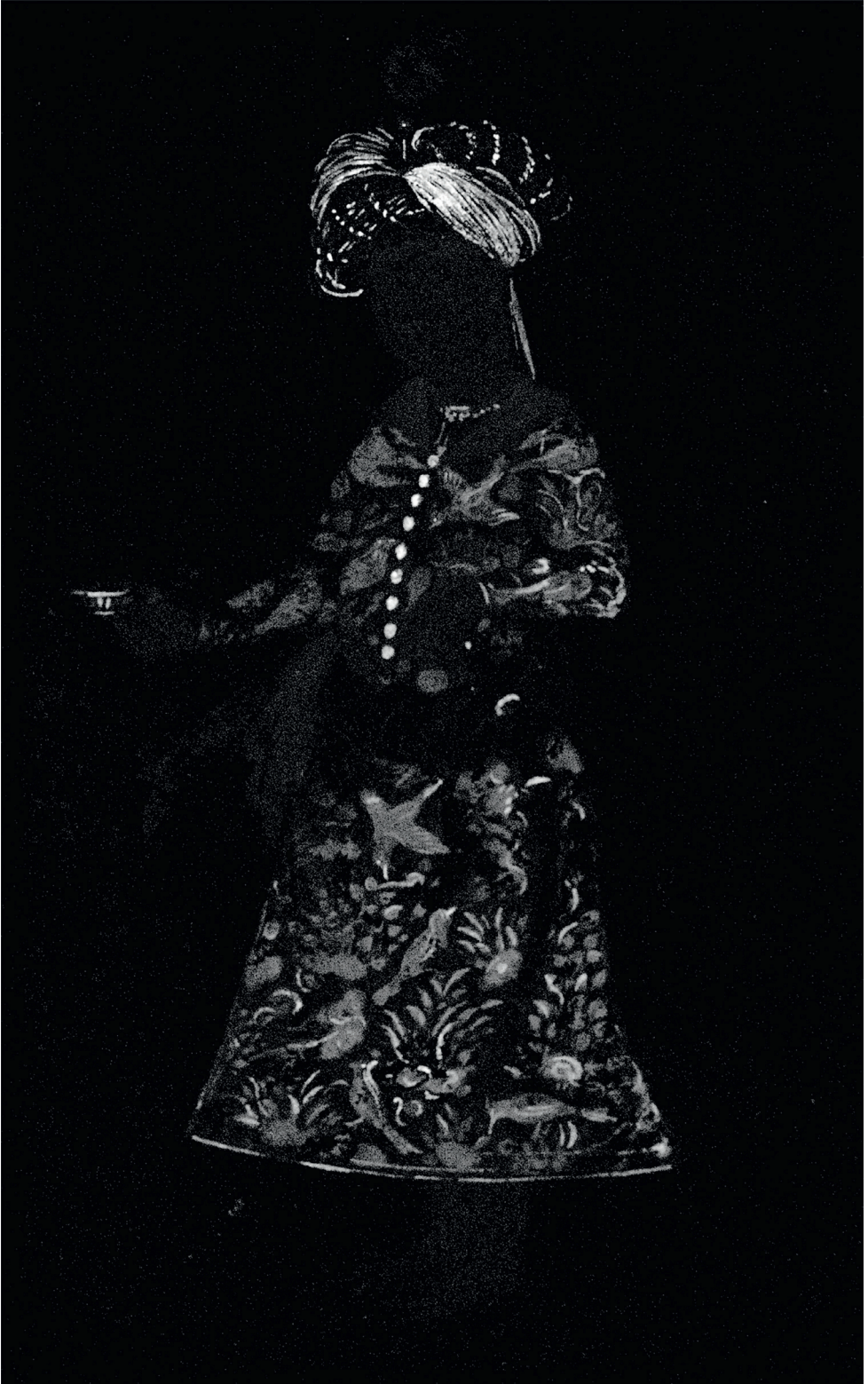




Fig. 15  
MA-XRF lead map  
(Pb\_M) of fig. 1  
(detail), featuring  
the lead white areas  
painted by the  
original painter.

contrasts much more strongly with the gold background, or the pattern on the trousers of Riza Abbasi's *Standing Youth with Cup and Bottle*, which also appears to consist of silver birds against a gold background (figs. 6, 29).

In addition, Gesina also touched up the youth's hands and face. Originally, lead-based white was used for the skin, which certainly had unsightly areas of damage in the face (fig. 15). Gesina filled them in with the calcium-based white she used for the sash, the collar and the feather (fig. 16). This meant that she also had to retouch the eyes, nose and lips. Apart from the anomalous sashes, it is striking that Gesina tried to keep the style of the original. She tried to stay as close as possible to the original, not only in the facial features (the almond-shaped eyes and small mouth) but also in the textile patterns.

Finally, we should add that the scientific analyses leave open the possibility that the overpaints on the robe, the face and the hands were done at a different time and even by a painter other than Gesina. However, this seems to be a very hypothetical possibility. We have shown that when the miniature was pasted into the scrapbook, the background was made black and that this also resulted in the need to repaint 'protruding' parts such as the sash and the feather. Furthermore, we have also established that large parts of the robe and the face were severely damaged and therefore needed restoration. It is consequently obvious to us that all these overpaints were carried out at the same time, when the miniature was added to the scrapbook. Why would someone repaint only the background, the feather and



*Fig. 16*  
MA-XRF calcium map  
(Ca\_K) of fig. 1  
(detail), featuring  
the calcite white  
areas and overpaints  
made by Gesina.

sashes when the rest of the miniature is also badly damaged? An earlier repainting, that is to say before the miniature was added to the scrapbook, also seems unlikely, because the miniature was probably made in the years 1650-70 and was pasted into the scrapbook between 1660 and 1680. This means there was remarkably little time between its manufacture in Iran and Gesina's acquisition of it. As for the possibility that someone other than Gesina was responsible for these overpaints, that also seems very improbable. Gesina was the owner of the scrapbook, and the newly drawn frame of the miniature is consistent with the other frames she painted in her album. More importantly, the added sashes are similar in style and colour to the sashes Gesina painted elsewhere in the scrapbook, and she is known to have

regularly painted additions to the work of other painters in her album.

### **The Original Painter**

We return to the question of who made the original drawing, before Gesina made her additions. To begin with, we considered the possibility that it had been a European painter who had copied an Iranian original. Instead of the graceful, almost calligraphic outlines that Iranian artists use to give the body an elegant, flowing shape, they are much stiffer here, the face is coarser and the pose is rather static. In short, the figure looks less refined and more mechanical, which seems to indicate the work of a copyist. The stronger effect of shade around the folds near the arm and the upper body in the Zwolle drawing is also striking: it gives the sketch a three-dimensionality



Fig. 17  
Detail with the cup  
(fig. 1).

Fig. 18  
Detail with the cup  
(fig. 6).



that is absent in the Iranian originals. Lastly, there is something odd about the drinking bowl in the youth's right hand. This bowl has a handle through which the youth has placed his thumb. However, drinking bowls with handles do not exist in Iranian art of that period. The young man in the Christie's miniature holds a bowl without a handle and wears a striking thumb ring. It would appear that the (Dutch) copyist misunderstood these details and turned the thumb ring into a handle (figs. 17, 18).

However, on closer inspection, the above observations, which could point to a European/Dutch artist, do not convince. Our technical and art historical research showed that the background as well as large areas of the clothes and the face were overpainted, and we came to the conclusion that Gesina herself was responsible for these alterations. Admittedly she followed the original composition, but it did mean that the overall feeling of the work was radically changed. The main reasons why we suspected that the original drawing was the work of a western copyist – the lack of sophistication, the stiff finish and the poorly refined face – are now no longer valid: they are the consequences of Gesina's later additions. Even the 'misunderstood' handle proved to be the result of her interventions. Thanks to digital microscopy (Hirox RH-2000) and

MA-XRF analysis, we were able to establish that Gesina overpainted this area later, and used the same gold paint (with copper) for the ring and the drinking bowl, which means that the ring and the bowl now seem to belong together.<sup>13</sup> This led to the conclusion that the drawing was not necessarily done by a western copyist, and that there is no reason to assume that it cannot have been the work of an Iranian artist.

To put an end to all doubt, we conducted lead isotope analysis to determine the origin of the lead white pigment, used by the artist of the original to paint the hands, the hilt of the sword and the face. The results showed that the isotope values do not correspond with the values we find in the lead white used in seventeenth-century Netherlandish paintings; in other words, the lead white in the miniature cannot be identified as Dutch.<sup>14</sup> Lead white was one of the most used white pigments in Iranian miniature painting because of its excellent covering properties, low costs and easy manufacturing. Unfortunately, no isotope research has been conducted into the lead white of Safavid miniatures so we have no material for direct comparison. It is therefore not yet possible to determine whether the lead white used is of Iranian origin, but thanks to the Pb isotopes analysis

we can conclude that the original composition was in all probability painted outside the Netherlands and only later came to the Low Countries.

It is therefore logical to look for an Iranian artist. The many overpaints make it extremely hard to comment on the quality of the original drawing. Was it the work of a second- or third-rate Iranian copyist who offered his products for sale in the bazaar in Isfahan? The problem is that we know virtually nothing about the Iranian bazaar painters who produced work for the lower end of the market. We do know that in the seventeenth century artists from India and Istanbul painted specifically for western customers.<sup>15</sup> We assume that this must have been the case in Iran as well. When the German physician Engelbert Kaempfer visited Isfahan in 1683-84, he commissioned the artist Jani to paint everyday people and animals for him (fig. 19).

This otherwise unknown Jani, who was more than a mediocre artist, called himself a *farangi saz* (a painter in the European style). In its intention and design, the album of his drawings now in the British Museum is reminiscent of Ottoman costume or souvenir albums made for European travellers who were more interested in the informative character, rather than the aesthetic aspects of the drawings. However, the drawing in the scrapbook does not fit in this tradition. As we have seen, Gesina's miniature appears to be a faithful copy of a composition by an artist of the Isfahan School who worked for the court or another important client. In spite of the later overpaints, there are details which indicate that the work was made by a far more competent hand. For example, the drawing of the pattern on the clothes was painted fluently and attractively and the right hand and the

Fig. 19  
JANI, *Two Story-tellers*, 1684-85, from the Kaempfer album. Ink and opaque watercolour on paper, 299 x 214 mm. London, British Museum, inv. no. 1974,0617,0.1.13.



*Figs. 20a-d*  
Details of the bird  
patterns of the  
trousers and robes  
(figs. 1, 3, 29, 30).



non-overpainted passages in the face, like the neck with the meticulous hatching lines, are strikingly refined.<sup>16</sup> Even the original stylized landscape fits seamlessly into the tradition of the known court painters of the Safavid capital. It is therefore quite possible that the original miniature in Gesina's scrapbook was painted by a more important artist, who was very close to the painter of the Christie's drawing. It may even have been the same artist: a painter of the Isfahan School who was active around 1650-70.<sup>17</sup>

This artist was probably inspired by an older miniature. We have already established that older variations of this composition exist, such as the version in the Aga Khan Collection (fig. 5). The pattern on the clothes in the miniature in the scrapbook alludes to paintings from the sixteen-twenties. It was none other than Riza Abbasi, Shah Abbas's favourite court painter, who used this pattern of birds facing one another in a landscape with rocks, plants and clouds,

in the trousers and robes of his elegant young men (figs. 20a-d). In her monograph on Riza Abbasi, Sheila Canby suggests that this pattern is not an imitation of an existing fabric, but was the invention of the artist himself.<sup>18</sup> In that case, we can regard it as a 'trademark' that he used in several miniatures. Compositions were frequently repeated in seventeenth-century Safavid painting. Abbasi's compositions were also widely adopted by his followers. The sheets of elegant youths in the Christie's sale and in Gesina's scrapbook may also derive directly from an as yet unknown composition by Abbasi in which he used his favourite clothes pattern.

### **Prints in Johannes de Laet's *Persia***

Recent research into a number of costume prints in an early seventeenth-century publication has revealed that knowledge of Riza Abbasi's work had already reached the Republic quite early on. It came through the publica-



tion *Persia seu Regni Persici Status* (1633). This book was written by Johannes de Laet (1581-1649), a Dutch geographer and linguist, and one of the founders and directors of the West India Company.<sup>19</sup> He was also a prolific writer with more than forty titles to his name. For example, he wrote twelve of the thirty-three country descriptions in the *Respublicae* series that Elsevier published between 1628 and 1649.<sup>20</sup> As well as the volumes on France, Italy, Denmark and Poland, De Laet was also responsible for those on non-European countries such as India and Iran. His *Persia* consists of two parts. The first is a description of the country which De Laet – who had never actually been to Asia himself – compiled from the major travelogues of Iran. *Persia* was illustrated with a title page and eight woodcuts by Cornelis Claeszoon Duyssend, who frequently worked for Elsevier from 1630 onwards. The series shows five men and three women in local costumes (figs. 21-28). They are

depicted in accordance with western conventions, figural modelling, cast shadows and European features. The quality of these woodcuts is rather poor and they are also quite small: the booklets in the *Respublicae* series were published in vicesimo-quarto (11.8 x 6.5 cm) – pocket size. This is probably why most recent authors overlooked the woodcuts or assumed that the originals on which they were based were not really worth their attention.<sup>21</sup> The fact that De Laet names the source of the woodcuts is interesting: he obtained his examples from a certain ‘Nicolaus Hemmius’.<sup>22</sup> De Laet also credits his descriptions of Hormuz and Isfahan to this Hemmius. In the second volume of *Persia* we moreover find the brief travel notes that Hemmius made in 1624 on his journey from Hormuz to Isfahan. Unfortunately, De Laet gives no further information about Hemmius, other than that he stayed in Isfahan in 1623 and 1624.<sup>23</sup>



Figs. 21-28  
 Woodcuts by  
 CORNELIS CLAESZON  
 DUYSEND, from  
 Johannes de Laet,  
*Persia seu Regni Persici  
 Status*, Leiden 1633.  
 Regensburg,  
 Staatliche Bibliothek,  
 sign. 999/  
 Hist.pol.1788.  
 Photograph:  
 Bayerische  
 Staatsbibliothek,  
 Munich, <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11096754-1>.



Fig. 21, p. 41



Fig. 22, p. 43



Fig. 23, p. 149



Fig. 24, p. 148



Fig. 25, p. 83



Fig. 26, p. 45



Fig. 27, p. 130



Fig. 28, p. 131

### Niclaes Hem, Jan van Hasselt and Riza Abbasi

Nicolaus Hemmius proves to be the Latinized name of Niclaes Hem, a junior merchant in the VOC who accompanied Huybert Visnich when he sailed on board the *Heusden* from Surat to Gamron by way of Hormuz in 1623. He was also part of the small official delegation, probably fewer than ten merchants and their assistants, that went ashore to make contact with the Iranian court.<sup>24</sup> Visnich and his men travelled to Isfahan on the VOC's behalf to sign a trade agreement with Shah Abbas the Great.<sup>25</sup> It was a successful mission. In 1623, the Shah and the VOC agreed that the Company would from then on buy a specific quantity of silk annually from the court for a fixed price, that it could trade freely in other goods and that it could open trading posts in Bandar Abbas, Shiraz and Isfahan. Hem's precise role in the trade mission can unfortunately no longer be ascertained, but as one of the merchants he would certainly have been intensively involved in the treaty negotiations and trade. From February to at least September 1624, he kept track of the mission's daily expenses.<sup>26</sup> After September 1624 Hem is no longer traceable in the archives. Presumably he left Iran the same year.

Visnich was helped in his negotiations by a fellow countryman who had been working in Isfahan for a long time: the painter Jan Lucasz van Hasselt (before 1600-after 1653).<sup>27</sup> By that time, this Dutch painter had already had a very adventurous career. He had journeyed to Iran in the wake of the Italian world traveller Pietro della Valle (1586-1652). Along with this nobleman, he had visited Italy, Istanbul, Egypt, Aleppo – where Visnich had already met him earlier – and Babylon, before finally settling in Isfahan around 1617. There he worked his way up to become Shah Abbas's court painter. Regrettably, not a single work that can be attributed to him with certainty has

survived, but while he was working at the Iranian court he was paid a princely salary and was held in high regard.<sup>28</sup> When a delegation of Carmelites had an audience with the Shah in 1621, there was surprise that the Dutch painter was also present at the official reception.<sup>29</sup> Needless to say, Visnich renewed his contact with this influential Dutchman as soon as he arrived in Isfahan. The painter was indispensable in the establishment of the 1623 Dutch-Iranian trade agreement, and Visnich could not praise him highly enough during those early years. Van Hasselt regularly received gifts and was also paid by the VOC for his efforts.<sup>30</sup> His special status is also evident from the fact that the Shah included him in a diplomatic mission led by Musa Beg that was sent to the Dutch Republic in 1625.<sup>31</sup> This mission was unsuccessful, and a year later Van Hasselt returned to Isfahan. In 1629 he again went to the Republic on a diplomatic mission.<sup>32</sup> Once in the Netherlands, however, he found that he no longer had the support of Shah Safi, who had succeeded Shah Abbas on his death in that same year. This time, Van Hasselt did not go back to Iran. We do not know anything about the activities of the former court painter in the Republic afterwards, only that he maintained contact with his second homeland for a long time. In 1642 he received a letter from the Shah's painter and in 1654 he sent a letter to the States-General from which it emerges that he was still involved with Armenian merchants who traded in the Netherlands from Iran.<sup>33</sup> We do not know when he died.

Niclaes Hem, who stayed in Isfahan with Visnich in 1623-24 and would therefore have been closely involved with the trade agreement negotiations, must have known Van Hasselt well.<sup>34</sup> If Hem, as De Laet informs us, acquired a set of Iranian miniatures during his stay in Isfahan, some of which were used later as the example for the woodcuts in *Persia*, it seems more than likely that

Van Hasselt had been involved in this transaction. After all, he was court painter and thus extremely well connected with his Iranian colleagues with whom he worked in the royal workshops. We do not know if Hem stayed in touch with Van Hasselt after his return to the Dutch Republic, probably around 1624.

In the knowledge that Hem probably came by his miniatures through the intermediary of Jan van Hasselt, let us look again at the woodcuts in De Laet's book. It is obviously difficult to comment on the artistic qualities of the original miniatures that inspired them on the basis of these 'westernized' prints. But we do now recognize certain motifs and attributes: they are the elegantly dressed Safavid young men and women with striking headdresses, standing or kneeling, and often holding a wine bottle, bowl or goblet. We previously established that such figures were the specialty of Riza Abbasi and his followers. Riza was the most famous artist working at the court of Shah Abbas, and in the sixteen-twenties he made his best-known series of elegant youths – in other words, at exactly the same time that Van Hasselt was also working at the court in Isfahan and exactly when Hem acquired his Iranian miniatures there.

We have not as yet been able to find the originals of the woodcuts, but we are coming very close. The print of the man in the fur cap, coat and trousers (fig. 25) has striking similarities to Riza's *Standing Youth with Cup and Bottle*, which is signed and dated 1624, and which we discussed earlier with regard to the motif of the birds in the trouser fabric (fig. 29). The trousers in the woodcut have no pattern, but the rest of the clothes are exactly the same as those in Riza's miniature. Even the dagger, thrust through the knot of the sash around the man's waist, and the pose, with his right arm clasping a wine bottle to his body and his left arm hanging at his side, are identical.

There are also a number of small differences: the man in the miniature holds a cup, whereas in the woodcut the protagonist holds two twigs or flowers. The most obvious difference is the headdress. However, the type of fur cap worn by the man in the woodcut is again very similar to the cap of one of Riza's other cupbearers from this period, now in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (fig. 30).

Fig. 29  
RIZA ABBASI,  
*Standing Youth with  
Cup and Bottle*, 1624.  
Pigments on paper,  
194 x 96 mm.  
Prince and Princess  
Sadruddin Aga Khan  
Collection.



Fig. 30  
RIZA ABBASI (?),  
*Youth in a Fur-  
Trimmed Cap*, c. 1625.  
Pigments and gold on  
paper, 191 x 88 mm.  
Dublin, Chester  
Beatty Library,  
inv. no. CBL Per 260.2.  
© The Trustees of  
the Chester Beatty  
Library, Dublin.

The woodcut of the youth with the wine bottle and cup also looks very close to a miniature previously attributed to Riza but now regarded as the work of a follower (figs. 26, 31).<sup>35</sup> Again there are small differences, such as the neck of the wine bottle, the head and the shape of the hat, but the pose and the clothes are almost the same and the strands of long hair that reach down to the back of the knee are extremely striking.



This hair is not so obvious in the Iranian drawing, but it is accentuated in the woodcut, probably because the Dutch woodcutter thought it was a fascinating detail.

These compelling resemblances suggest that in 1623-24 Nicolaes Hem acquired, presumably through the intermediary of Van Hasselt, a set of miniatures in Isfahan painted by Riza Abbasi or someone in his immediate circle. These sheets were later used as examples for Duysend's woodcuts in *De Laet's Persia*.

The question remains as to whether the miniature in Gesina's scrapbook has anything to do with the drawings Hem brought to the Netherlands around 1624. Both Gesina's drawing and Hem's drawings probably hark back to compositions by Riza Abbasi. One might argue that this cannot be a coincidence, given that few, if any, people were collecting Iranian miniatures in the Low Countries in the seventeenth century.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, that does appear to be the case. Gesina's drawing was made by an artist who lived a generation after Riza Abbasi. The almost identical Christie's miniature, which is very close to Gesina's drawing, is dated to 1650-70, some decades after Riza's death and Hem's acquisition of miniatures in Isfahan.

It is consequently safe to assume that knowledge of Riza's compositions reached the Republic through two channels and in two different periods: around 1625 Nicolaes Hem brought a set of drawings by or after Riza Abbasi to the Republic, which were published in the form of woodcuts in 1633; and between 1650 and 1670 another Iranian miniature arrived there. The latter was likely after an as yet unknown, older composition by Riza Abbasi; this is the miniature that ultimately ended up with Gesina ter Borch.

We do not know how or why this last drawing found its way to Zwolle. It cannot be proved, but could Van Hasselt also have been involved in this

second shipment? We know that Van Hasselt kept in touch with the Shah's court painters after his return to the Dutch Republic – in 1642 he received a letter from the Shah's painter – and that in the sixteen-fifties he was still involved with the trade between Iran and the Netherlands. And there were, after all, very few Dutchmen in the seventeenth century with artistic and economic connections to Iran.

### Conclusion

For various reasons, the drawing of the Iranian youth in Gesina ter Borch's scrapbook is unique. To begin with, it is the earliest surviving example of an Iranian miniature in a seventeenth-century Dutch collection. It was very probably painted between 1650 and 1670 by an artist of the Isfahan School, who may have been inspired by an older composition by Riza Abbasi.



*Fig. 31*  
FOLLOWER OF RIZA  
ABBASI, *Cupbearer*,  
c. 1650, from the  
album containing  
works by Riza Abbasi.  
Pigments on paper,  
288 x 133 mm.  
Paris, Bibliothèque  
nationale de France,  
Département des  
Manuscrits, Supplé-  
ment Persan 1572,  
fol 6r.

This drawing was already badly damaged when Gesina ter Borch acquired it. Gesina gave the drawing a black background when she mounted it in her scrapbook, added a number of sashes and the feather on the turban and overpainted large parts of the face and the clothes. Her interventions have made the original Iranian drawing difficult to interpret.

It further emerged that this miniature had not been the first Iranian drawing to have reached the Republic in the seventeenth century. In 1623-24 the VOC merchant Nicolaes Hem managed to acquire a set of miniatures in Isfahan, some of which were published as woodcuts in De Laet's *Persia* of 1633. Hem's drawings can also be linked to Riza Abbasi: if they were not made by him, they were made by someone in his immediate circle who had access to his recent compositions.

The Iranian drawings in the collections of Nicolaes Hem and Gesina ter Borch indicate that there was interest in Iranian painting in the Republic in the seventeenth century. This interest was, of course, limited to a few amateurs and there seem to have been far fewer Iranian miniatures in Dutch collections than Indian miniatures. Nevertheless, the attention and care Gesina devoted to the treatment of her miniature is striking. A present-day observer may have doubts about her alterations, but the fact remains that Gesina took the trouble to include a badly damaged Iranian miniature in her scrapbook, to embellish it with a number of additions and carefully restore the rest. Apart from the clearly recognizable changes in the background, the sashes and the turban, it is remarkable that she quite deliberately tried to remain as close as possible to the original style when she restored the clothes and the face. It was only after extensive technical analysis that we were able to distinguish between the original parts and Gesina's later additions. Evidently this artist from

Zwolle had an aesthetic appreciation of Iranian painting – why otherwise would she have taken so much trouble to imitate the Safavid style?

Finally, it is remarkable that this Iranian miniature was not found in a well-known collection in a major Dutch city, such as Amsterdam, Haarlem or Leiden. Gesina lived and worked her whole life in the provincial town of Zwolle in the province of Overijssel, where she put together her scrapbook. It is true that she came from a family of artists with national and international contacts, but there are no indications that she spent a lot of time in the intellectual and artistic milieu of collectors in Holland, the most important, wealthy and cosmopolitan province of the Dutch Republic. Nonetheless, she managed to acquire this Iranian miniature. It tells us that the interest in exotic objects in the seventeenth-century Republic was not necessarily confined to the elite in the major cities of Holland.

## ABSTRACT

In the family scrapbook compiled by Gesina ter Borch (1633-1690), there is a remarkable drawing of an Iranian youth. Art-historical and scientific research has revealed that although the drawing has areas of later overpainting, there is an original Safavid miniature from the sixteen-fifties or sixties underneath them. It is likely that Gesina herself was responsible for these overpaints, when she mounted the badly damaged miniature in her album at some time between 1660 and 1680. Interestingly, aside from the blackened background and the colourful feather and sashes she added, she attempted to follow the original Iranian style in her restorations. The original was made in the sixteen-fifties or sixties by a painter of the Isfahan School, who probably took his inspiration from an older composition by the famous court artist, Riza Abbasi. The article goes on to show that Riza Abbasi's work was known in the Dutch Republic before then. In 1623 the junior merchant Nicolaes Hem travelled to Iran. He was a member of a Dutch East India Company delegation seeking to negotiate a trade agreement with the Shah. Hem acquired a series of drawings by or after Riza Abbasi while he was in Isfahan. He was probably helped in this acquisition by his fellow countryman, Jan van Hasselt. A number of the original miniatures that Hem took back to the Republic were published as woodcuts in Johannes de Laet's *Persia* (1634).

## NOTES

- \* With thanks to Sheila Canby, Massumeh Farhad, Willem Floor, Axel Langer, Arnoud Vrolijk, Petria Nobel, Ige Verslype, Victor Gonzalez, Simone Gaisbauer, Matthias Alfeld and Gary Schwartz.
- 1 Alison McNeil Kettering, *Drawings from the Ter Borch Studio Estate in the Rijksmuseum*, cat. Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 1988, 2 vols. (*Catalogue of the Dutch and Flemish Drawings in the Print Room*, vol. 5), vol. 2.
  - 2 About Gesina, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 362-64.
  - 3 All the pages of the family scrapbook are described and illustrated in *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 615-760. For the drawing of the Iranian youth, fol. 40r in the family scrapbook, see p. 632.
  - 4 For the changes in Iranian miniature painting in the second half of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century, see Sheila R. Canby, *The Rebellious Reformer: The Drawings and Paintings of Riza-yi Abbasi of Isfahan*, London 1996, pp. 9-18; Jon Thompson and Sheila R. Canby (eds.), *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501-76*, Milan 2003, pp. 122-23; Emine Fetvacı and Christiane Gruber, 'Painting, from Royal to Urban Patronage', in Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (eds.), *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, Somerset 2017, pp. 874-902.
  - 5 Axel Langer, 'European Influences on Seventeenth-Century Persian Painting: Of Handsome Europeans, Naked Ladies, and Parisian Timepieces', in *ibid.* (ed.), *The Fascination of Persia: The Persian-European Dialogue in Seventeenth-Century Art & Contemporary Art from Teheran*, exh. cat. Zürich (Museum Rietberg) 2013, pp. 170-237.
  - 6 Canby 1996 (note 4).
  - 7 Margaret S. Graves and Benoit Junod (eds.), *Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum: Arts of the Book and Calligraphy*, cat. Istanbul (Sakıp Sabancı Museum) 2010, pp. 332-33, no. 146.
  - 8 With thanks to Massumeh Farhad for the revised dating and identification. In *Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds*, sale cat. London (Christie's), 24 October 2019, no. 54 the miniature is dated to the end of the sixteenth century, but this was revised to the mid-seventeenth century during the sale.
  - 9 Brüker, M6 Jetstream, Rhodium-target micro-focus-X-ray tube, 50kV, 150 uA, spot size 100 um, step size 110 um, dwell time 80 ms/pixel, 30 mm<sup>2</sup> silicon drift Detector (SDD). Data processed using PYMCA and Data-muncher software, following a fitting method developed by Matthias Alfeld. In all the images provided, the white pixels indicate that the element is strongly detected, while black pixels mean that the element is not detected.
  - 10 To do this, two complementary analytical methods were used: X-ray Fluorescence (XRF Artax 2.0, polycarpellary lens, Model MCBM 50-0.6, molybdenum tube, focus 0.05 x 0.005 mm<sup>2</sup>) and Fibre Optics Reflectance Spectroscopy (FORS ASD FieldSpec®4 standard resolution, Spectral range 350-2500 nm (3 detectors)). The pigments, such as the blue, orange and red, were analysed and



- compared to similar pigments encountered in other paintings from the album by Gesina herself. The blue pigment used to paint the sash was identified as azurite, and was also found in Gesina's paintings in folios 45r and 90r. The orange colour from the second sash was compared with visually similar paint found in Gesina's portrait of her brother Mozes in folio 84r. In both cases, the presence of orpiment, mixed with other components, was confirmed. For a more extensive technical analysis of the miniature: Amélie Couvrat-Desvergnés, Leila Sauvage, Paolo d'Imporzano and Jan de Hond, article focusing on the technical research of the drawing of the Iranian youth in Gesina ter Borch's scrapbook, to be published in 2021. The fact that the pigments in the blue and orange sashes are the same as the pigments Gesina uses elsewhere in the scrapbook is in itself not enough proof to conclude Gesina must have been the author of the sashes (the pigments used in the blue and orange are not uncommon in Dutch seventeenth-century art), but combined with the other (art) historical arguments given in the text, we think it is highly likely Gesina has painted these sashes. The pigment analysis at least shows it is not impossible, from a scientific point of view, that Gesina was the author.
- 11 For examples of drawings by other artists which Gesina adapted later, see Kettering 1988 (note 1), vol. 2, pp. 632, 633 (fols. 42, 44, 45).
  - 12 For more details about the technical research, see Couvrat-Desvergnés, Sauvage, D'Imporzano and De Hond forthcoming (note 10).
  - 13 Ibid.
  - 14 For more details about the lead isotope analysis, see *ibid.*
  - 15 See Jan de Hond, "Utterly Artless" or "Wondrously Noble". Ottoman, Moghul and Safavid Art in the Netherlands in the 17th and 18th Centuries', in Ortrud Westheider, Josef Helfenstein, Bodo Brinkmann and Michael Philipp (eds.), *Rembrandt's Orient: West Meets East in Dutch Art of the 17th Century*, Munich 2020 (forthcoming).
  - 16 The MA-XRF calcium map (Ca\_K) shows that part of the neck was overpainted with calcium white, but not the area with the hatching lines (fig. 16).
  - 17 A possible candidate could be a painter lose to Muin Mussavir. See, for example, the miniatures by Muin Mussavir in Firdawsi's *Shahnama* in the David Collection, Copenhagen, inv. no. 217/2006 (especially the faces and the delicate hatchings).
  - 18 Canby 1996 (note 4), pp. 151-58. See also Jennifer M. Scarce, 'Safavid Dress and Europe', in Langer 2013 (note 5), pp. 58-77.
  - 19 On Johannes de Laet, see Rolf H. Bremmer and Paul Hoftijzer (eds.), *Johannes de Laet (1581-1649): A Leiden Polymath* (special issue of *Lias* 25 (1998), no. 2), Leiden 1998.
  - 20 J.A. Gruys, 'De reeks "Republieken" van de Elzeviers en Joannes de Laet', in B.P.M. Dongelmans, P.G. Hoftijzer and O.S. Lankhorst (eds.), *Boekverkopers van Europa. Het 17de-eeuwse Nederlandse uitgevershuis Elzevier*, Zutphen 2000, pp. 77-114.
  - 21 Gary Schwartz did notice the woodcuts but was not very enthusiastic: 'The original drawings, simple depictions of individual figures in typical dress, have never surfaced.' Gary Schwartz, 'Terms of Reception. Europeans and Persians and Each Other's Art', in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Michael North (eds.), *Mediating Netherlandish Art and Material Culture in Asia*, Amsterdam 2014, pp. 25-64, esp. p. 29.
  - 22 Johannes de Laet, *Persia seu Regni Persici Status*, Leiden 1633, p. 119: 'Accepimus a Nicolao Hemmio nostrate icones duas, quarum prima exprimitur habitus Tartari Uzbequii. Altera habitus & cultus filiae Uzbequii Tartari'. De Laet writes only that he received the two images of a Tartar Uzbek man and woman through Hemmius, but it is obvious that the other six woodcuts are based on examples from the same series and therefore also came from Hemmius.
  - 23 On Hemmius: *ibid.*, pp. 13, 23, 100, 279-82.
  - 24 The instruction (21 March 1629) to Francois Lemmes, commander of the *Leusden*, states that as soon as permission was obtained from the Iranian authorities, Huybert Visnich, together with the merchants Jan Greijnier, Hendrik Put, Gerrit van Elserack and Niclaes Hem and the assistants Isack Diert, Theunis Willemsz Trompart and Abraham Classen, had to go ashore to start the trade negotiations. H. Terpstra, *De opkomst der Westerkwartieren van de Oost-Indische Compagnie*, The Hague 1918, pp. 149, 292, 293.
  - 25 For the early diplomatic relationships between Holland and Iran, see *ibid.*; Peter Rietbergen, 'Upon a Silk Thread? Relations between the Safavid Court of Persia and the Dutch East Indies Company, 1623-1722', in E. Locher-Scholten and P. Rietbergen (eds.), *Hof en handel. Aziatische vorsten en de VOC, 1620-1720*, Leiden 2004, pp. 159-82; Willem M. Floor, 'Dutch-Persian Relations', in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (available online: [www.iranicaonline.org](http://www.iranicaonline.org), consulted 28 December 2018); Willem Floor, 'Dutch-

- Persian Relations 1608 to Date', in Martine Gosselink and Dirk J. Tang, *Iran and the Netherlands: Interwoven through the Ages*, Gronsveld/Rotterdam 2009, pp. 52-72.
- 26 H. Dunlop, *Bronnen tot de Oostindische Compagnie in Perzië*, vol. 1: 1611-1638, The Hague 1930, pp. 76-80, 82, 86.
- 27 For Jan van Hasselt and other Dutch painters in Iran in the seventeenth century, see P.A. Leupe, 'Nederlandsche schilders in Persië en Hindostan, in de eerste helft der 17de eeuw', *De Nederlandsche Spectator* (1873), pp. 260-66; Willem Floor, 'Dutch Painters in Iran During the First Half of the 17th Century', *Persica: Jaarboek voor het Genootschap Nederland-Iran* 8 (1979), pp. 145-61; Gary Schwartz, 'Safavid Favour and Company Scorn: The Fortunes of Dutch Painters to the Shah', in Gosselink and Tang 2009 (note 25), pp. 133-54; Schwartz 2014 (note 21); Gary Schwartz, 'Between Court and Company: Dutch Artists in Persia', in Langer 2013 (note 5), pp. 152-96; Willem Floor and Forough Sajadi, 'Jan Luicassen Hasselt: A Dutch Painter in Isfahan', to be published in *Iranian Studies Journal*.
- 28 In their upcoming article Floor and Sajadi discuss three pictures that may have been done by Jan van Hasselt: Floor and Sajadi forthcoming (note 27).
- 29 Floor 1979 (note 27), p. 147.
- 30 Floor and Sajadi, forthcoming (note 27); Dunlop 1930 (note 26), p. 75. For Van Hasselt's status at the Iranian court, see also Urbain Vermeulen, 'La mission de Jan L. van Hasselt comme agent du Shah de Perse aux Provinces-Unies (1629-1631)', *Persica: Jaarboek voor het Genootschap Nederland-Iran* 8 (1979), pp. 133-43, esp. pp. 133-35.
- 31 Urbain Vermeulen, 'L'ambassade persane de Musa Beg aux Province-Unies (1625-1628)', *Persica: Jaarboek voor het Genootschap Nederland-Iran* 7 (1975-78), pp. 145-54; Floor and Sajadi forthcoming (note 27).
- 32 Vermeulen 1979 (note 30).
- 33 Floor and Sajadi forthcoming (note 27), with a reproduction of the full letter of 1654. See further also W.P. Coolhaas (ed.), *Generale Missiven der VOC*, vol. 2: 1639-1655 (R.G.P., *Large Series*, no. 112), The Hague 1964, p. 167; Leupe 1873 (note 27), p. 4.
- 34 In 1623-24 Nicolaes Hem is regularly mentioned in the accounts of the VOC in Iran: Dunlop 1930 (note 26), pp. 55, 73, 76-80, 82, 86.
- 35 With thanks to Sheila Canby. She suggests that the person portrayed in the Iranian miniature is probably a man. This would mean that he underwent a sex change in the woodcut.
- 36 De Hond 2020 (note 15).

## APPENDIX

## List of Pigments Identified with FORS and Macro-XRF Scanning

REGION/COLOUR	FORS	
	SPECTRUM FEATURES	POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENT
White: face, hilt of the dagger, hands and tights. Few white dots in the dress.	Not tested.	
White: feather turban, collar and sash. Retouching in the forehead, cheeks, chin, ear and hands. Highlights in the orange and the blue sashes. Dots in the dress.	Not tested.	
Tin probably used as opacifier or extender. Blue: sash, dots in the dress, undershirt. Dots in the dress.	Reflectance peak at around 450-480 nm, a broad absorption band between 600-900 nm, and three characteristic absorption bands in the near infra-red at 1495, 2285, 2350 nm.	Azurite
Orange: sash, cup handle and undershirt.	First derivative spectrum: Inflection points at 554 nm and 564 nm.	Orpiment
Gold I (greyish): background of the dress. Landscape overpainted with the black paint. Highlights in the cup and the turban.	Not tested.	
Gold II (shiny): highlights in the turban, the sword, the dress and in the cup and handle.	Not tested.	
Silver: buttons, highlights in the turban cup and the dress.	Not tested.	
Black background.	Tested because not relevant.	

MACRO-XRF SCANNING		
ELEMENTS	POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENT/INTERPRETATION	ATTRIBUTION
Pb	Lead white. Ba (trace elements).	Original painter. Barium is present in earth pigments.
Ca, Sn	Calcite white.	Gesina or 17th-century Dutch artist.
Cu, Co Ni, Ba (trace elements).	Azurite, smalt for highlights. Nickel and barium are present in the cobalt ore hence, are part of the smalt composition.	Gesina or 17th-century Dutch artist.
As, S	Orpiment.	Gesina or 17th-century Dutch artist.
Au	Gold-based paint.	Original painter.
Au, Cu	Gold alloy with copper.	Gesina or 17th-century Dutch artist.
Ag, Cl	Silver-based pigment. Chlorine might come from the preparation of the silver paint.	Gesina or 17th-century Dutch artist.
Ca, K, Co, Fe, Ni	Probably carbon black.	Gesina or 17th-century Dutch artist.