
BOOK REVIEWS

William Dalrymple, *White Mughals. Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*. Viking, Penguin Books, 2002. xliii + 580 pp. + colour and b/w plates.

Regular readers of our journal have asked me on more than one occasion when they can expect the promised continuation of the series *Oriental Manuscripts of Karl Fabergé*¹. The nearly year-long delay is primarily the result of the production of the film *The Eastern Fabergé: love stories*, which was shot last year in Paris and India (Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Hyderabad). The film was conceived as a video supplement to my monograph on the oriental manuscript collection that once belonged to the famous jeweller.

I realized long ago that to understand a particular manuscript or miniature one often must travel to the place where it was created. This is how I found myself in Hyderabad. The album of miniatures and calligraphy that formed the pearl of Fabergé's oriental collection was created there in the mid- to late 18th century. Other manuscripts from this collection must also have begun their journey to Europe in Hyderabad. The romance that brought these oriental manuscripts to a St. Petersburg jeweller and which provided the subject for the first part of our film drew our attention to a tragic love story that began in Hyderabad at virtually the same time as the album's creation. The story is that of the love between James Achilles Kirkpatrick, British East India Company Resident at the court of the Hyderabad Nizam, and a young Persian girl from the Indo-Persian aristocracy. The great niece of the Nizam's Prime Minister and a *Šī'a* of Sayyid stock, she was said to be descended from the Prophet himself. The lovers belonged to two entirely different worlds. It seemed as though they faced insurmountable obstacles: religion and politics, traditions and prejudices.

During the very short time, I managed to spend in Hyderabad I attempted to collect what materials I could find about this story. At the very last minute, on my way to the airport, I dropped into a small bookshop. The first thing I saw when I entered the shop was a book with a white cover that bore the image of a young black-eyed woman and the title *White Mughals*. This is how I discovered the book that not only elucidated for me the details of this story but also helped to answer a number of questions about the Fabergé collection.

The book's author was William Dalrymple, a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Asiatic Society. It was his fifth book. His book *In Xanadu: A Quest* (1989) won the 1990 Yorkshire Post Best First Work Award and a Scottish Arts Council Spring Book Award; it was also short-listed for the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize. Another book, *City of Djinn, A Year in Delhi* (1993) won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award in 1994 and the Sunday Times Young British Writer of the Year Award². His television series *Stories of the Raj* and *Indian Journeys* received the Grierson Award for Best Documentary Series from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts in 2002. In the same year, the Royal Scottish Geographical Society awarded William Dalrymple the Mungo Park Medal for his "outstanding contribution to travel literature".

The book under review here has been beautifully published. The author's wife, the painter Olivia Frazer, has further enriched it with 30 colour and 20 black-and-white illustrations, maps, and elegant miniatures. It also contains thorough footnotes for scholars, genealogical charts, a list of dramatis personae, a glossary, and a useful bibliography. The book's reader-friendly organization helps non-specialist readers to orient themselves among a mass of unfamiliar names, terms and concepts.

The incredible plot turns of the true-life love story, the narrator's skill, and the book's readable style all betoken a work intended for a broad readership. At the same time, the book also fits in with the concept of "total history" — it fills in the gaps between the "partitions of the historical object" and borrows from historical anthropology the idea of studying culture as a sphere that man creates and uses to comprehend the essence of being. One notes that cultural source-study is part of the study of human intentions. It puts into practice the ideas of "new historical science" in the form of a deliberate attempt to return to history the "common meanings" that so easily slip away. This is a basic tool in the creative quest of the individual historian, who apprehends the world and shares his knowledge with the world.

The book is the result of five years of research among a variety of unpublished primary sources in many languages that the author unearthed in various libraries and archives both in Europe and India (the British Library and National Army Museum Library in London, Bodleian Library in Oxford, Devon Records Office and West Country Studies Library in Exeter, the National Library of Scotland, Scottish

¹ E. Rezvan, "Oriental manuscripts of Karl Fabergé. I: The Qur'ān", *Manuscripta Orientalia*, VII/1 (2001), pp. 42–3; *ibid.*, pp. 40–61; *idem*, "Oriental manuscripts of Karl Fabergé. II: *ragamala* miniatures of the Album (*muraqqa'*) (part 1)", *ibid.*, VII/2 (2001), pp. 23–37; *idem*, "Oriental manuscripts of Karl Fabergé. II: *ragamala* miniatures of the Album (*muraqqa'*) (part 2)", *ibid.*, VII/3 (2001), pp. 16–25; *idem*, "Oriental manuscripts of Karl Fabergé. III: biographical works and portraits (part 1)", *ibid.*, VII/4 (2001), pp. 48–54; *idem*, "Oriental manuscripts of Karl Fabergé. III: biographical works and portraits (part 2)", *ibid.*, VIII/1 (2002), pp. 39–48; *idem*, "Oriental manuscripts of Karl Fabergé. IV: poetry and miniatures (part 1)", *ibid.*, VIII/2 (2002), pp. 52–60; *idem*, "Oriental manuscripts of Karl Fabergé. IV: poetry and miniatures (part 2)", *ibid.*, VIII/3 (2002), pp. 46–52. Series to be continued.

² Two other books by the same author: *From the Holy Mountain: a Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* (1997) and *The Age of Kali: Indian Travels and Encounters* (1998).