

ILLUSTRATION AND ILLUMINATION IN SIKH SCRIPTURAL MANUSCRIPTS

Jeevan Singh Deol



1. Illuminated Adi Granth folio with *nisan* of Guru Gobind Singh. The manuscript is of the Lahore recension, late 17th to early 18th century. Gold and colours on paper; folio size 360 x 283 mm, illumination size 256 x 193 mm. Collection of Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib, Patna. Photograph: Jeevan

The study of art depicting Sikh themes or patronized by Sikhs has in the last forty years moved far beyond Ananda Coomaraswamy's claim that Sikh painting is "decadent" in comparison to its Mughal and Rajput predecessors.¹ In recent years, Sikh painting has been studied on its own terms and with increasing sophistication. This has particularly been the case with miniature painting, but some notice has also been taken of other forms of painting such as murals and manuscript illustration. At the same time, art-historical scholarship in general has begun to set out the broader contexts and frameworks within which we can begin to understand Sikh art. One particularly important contribution has been work on the patronage and production of illustrated and illuminated texts in the Kashmiri style, which was popular in Panjab from the late 18th century onward. Although it has proven impossible so far to isolate stylistic or chronological developments within the broad Kashmiri style of manuscript illustration, recent writing has emphasized the distinction between hastily finished "bazaar" illustrations produced by itinerant artists of varying skill and those carried out under elite patronage.² Other studies have outlined the presence of two broad substyles, one based on Persianate models and the other on Indian ones.³ The contexts outlined by these studies are invaluable for the understanding of a number of key aspects of Sikh manuscript illustration, ranging from patronage and collecting at 19th-century royal courts to popular styles such as those represented by the illustrated *Janamsakhis* of Guru Nanak's life.⁴ The importance of further research is increased by the remarkably broad geographical diffusion of extant illustrated texts depicting Sikh themes or commissioned by Sikh patrons, ranging from central Asia and Afghanistan in the west to Patna in the east and Burhanpur in the south.

One type of manuscript that has received only sporadic attention in art-historical scholarship is illuminated and illustrated texts of the *Adi Granth*, the Sikh scripture. While textual work on manuscripts of the *Adi Granth* has gained increasing momentum during the last sixty years, the study of the manuscripts as cultural productions or as objects in themselves has tended to lag behind. Only in passing has the subject received some attention from art historians: Ananda Coomaraswamy mentions an illustrated manuscript of Kashmiri origin, Karuna Goswamy cites illuminated texts, and recent exhibitions have presented detached folios associated with illustrated volumes.⁵ This article attempts a tentative reconstruction of the genre as a whole. The enterprise is not without its problems: the vastly reduced extant corpus of *Adi Granth* manuscripts in the 20th century and the often limited information available about texts in institutional collections render generalization difficult. Using available material, we shall deal here with three types of adorned and illustrated manuscripts: early manuscripts bearing pieces of paper with the handwriting of a Guru (*nisans*) on their opening folios, those with illumination or decoration (usually called *minakari* or *belbuta* in Panjabi), and illustrated manuscripts proper. Both

adornment and illustration are usually found at the beginning of manuscripts before *Japu*, the first composition in the Adi Granth text, although illumination is occasionally also found at the beginning of each *raga* section of a manuscript.⁶ Illuminated manuscripts of all the known Adi Granth recensions exist,⁷ while the known corpus of illustrated texts consists of 19th-century manuscripts of the Damdami and Banno recensions, the most popular versions of the text during the period.

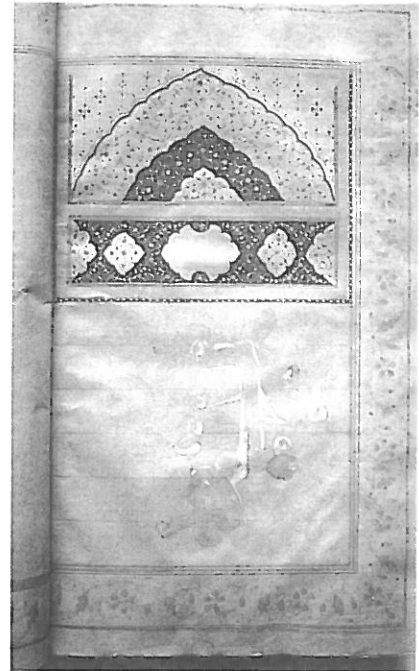
MANUSCRIPTS WITH *NISANS*

Pieces of paper bearing the handwriting of the Gurus (*nisans*) are found as a form of adornment exclusively in early Adi Granth manuscripts and other volumes of the Gurus' compositions. Most *nisans* (lit. seal or banner) occur at the beginning of the text before *Japu*, and extant *nisans* almost invariably consist of separate pieces of paper pasted onto a folio of the manuscript proper.⁸ It would appear that the *nisans* were placed in the manuscripts both to act as "blessings" that increase the sanctity of the volumes and to protect the *nisans* themselves from loss or damage. Such *nisans* normally consist of the *mulmantar* (the invocation that is found at the beginning of the Adi Granth and at the head of most *raga* sections and major compositions in the text) or of a *saloka* (couplet) from the body of the text. Most extant *nisans* are attributed to the ninth and tenth Gurus, although two are said to be in the hand of Guru Arjan, three in

the hand of Guru Hargobind, and one in the hand of Guru Har Rai. Most manuscripts bearing *nisans* date from the 17th century, although there are isolated examples of *nisans* pasted into later texts and at least two examples of forged *nisans* placed in manuscripts sought to be dated to the 17th century.⁹ Two early 17th-century compilations of the *banī*¹⁰ that appear to be from independent textual traditions separate from the Adi Granth also contain *nisans*.¹¹ A number of extant 17th-century Adi Granth manuscripts combine *nisans* with illumination; illumination is used here to frame the *nisan* and enhance its presence in the manuscript. The folio illustrated here (figure 1), from a manuscript from Patna bearing the *nisan* of Guru Gobind Singh (third quarter of the 17th century) differs from most 17th-century exemplars in that it eschews the more usual Islamicate blue and gold geometric patterns of illumination in favour of floral decoration in yellow, gold, and blue. Most other early texts, on the other hand, use a version of the Islamicate *sarlah* to frame their *nisans*. Figure 2 shows a typical *sarlah* and frame adorning a blank folio facing the opening page of a Banno manuscript:¹² these were presumably intended to frame a *nisan* that for some reason was not included in the final manuscript.

ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

The second major technique for adorning Adi Granth manuscripts is illumination by itself, found in texts



2. Illuminated Adi Granth folio. The manuscript is of the Banno recension, north Indian, Islamicate style, dated 1736 VS/1679. Gold and colours on paper; folio size 140 x 95 mm, illumination size 105 x 68 mm. Dr Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra, Dehra Dun Acc. no. 4982. Photograph: Jeevan Singh Deol.

ranging from early manuscripts written in the 17th century to those completed during the final years of manuscript production in the second half of the 19th. In addition to being used in Adi Granth manuscripts, illumination was also a feature of 17th-century non-Adi Granth compilations of the works of the Gurus.¹³ for instance, the two volumes known as the Goindval *pothis* begin with illuminated folios. An Adi Granth manuscript in the British Library¹⁴ probably dating from the period 1660–80 is adorned with a typical Islamicate blue and gold '*unvan*, while one of the decorated folios of Guru Nanak Dev University ms. 1245 bore a *shamsa* that had unmistakable links with high Islamicate traditions of manuscript decoration.¹⁵ It is likely that these illuminations, like those in other early texts with clearly Islamicate stylistic precedents, were carried out by artists who had prior experience of illuminating Arabic and Persian manuscripts. This would appear to suggest that the manner in which early texts are decorated is at least partially a function of the availability of artists trained in Islamicate styles in Panjab in the 17th century. It probably also represents an attempt to appropriate to early Sikh scriptural volumes the cultural prestige of the Islamicate book. Both explanations apply equally to the physical form of early manuscripts: they take the shape of the Islamicate book rather than the Indic *pothi* (which is shorter and wider in form), and are bound in the stamped leather bindings with

protective flap characteristic of Islamicate manuscript production. In the mid-18th century, a shift occurs and manuscripts adopt the shape of the Indic *pothi*, at the same time admitting a wider range of decorative forms and motifs in the Kashmiri style, while retaining the Islamicate form of binding.

The fact that most extant illuminated Adi Granth texts are both undated and unprovenanced renders a detailed chronological understanding of the genre almost impossible. In broad outline, though, it is clear that illumination moves away from purely Islamicate models through the course of the 18th century. By the early decades of the 19th century, illumination in Adi Granth manuscripts is almost exclusively in the Kashmiri style. At one level, this shift is presumably the result of a conjunction between the ready availability of a pool of itinerant Kashmiri artists and the resources for patronage created by new Sikh political formations. At another level, it seems to be part of a wider shift in models of cultural prestige away from Islamicate templates toward Indic ones, a transformation encouraged by the collapse of Mughal political power in the region. Most illuminated manuscripts produced in the mid to late 18th century already exhibit the vine and floral decorations characteristic of Kashmiri illumination work rather than the geometric patterns of the Islamicate *sarlauh* and '*unvan*. Extant examples include a text at the National Museum, New Delhi

that retains the traditional Islamicate blue and gold colour scheme and another at Punjabi University, Patiala that introduces fine floral decoration in a wider palette of colours. Some of the Kashmiri styles of the 19th century reached a high degree of standardization: one template characterized by intricate vine and floral decorations is represented in a number of volumes, including a Damdami recension manuscript presented to the District Commissioner of Jalandhar by Sodhi Sadhu Singh of Kartarpur in 1859 (figure 3) and a contemporaneous Banno text from Pind Dadan Khan in Pakistan.¹⁶ While we cannot trace the geographical diffusion of styles of illumination in the present state of

research, the evidence that we do have points to a wide geographical diffusion: manuscripts have been reported from Akhnur in Jammu and districts of Panjab now in Pakistan, while extant texts are from locations as diverse as the Malwa region of Indian Panjab, Pind Dadan Khan, and Patna. Such a wide dispersion reflects the general pattern of the production of illustrated and illuminated manuscripts in the Kashmiri style in general.

In addition to more widely available manuscripts in standardized styles, a small number of lavishly illuminated manuscripts was produced as a result of courtly patronage. Among these is a manuscript of the Damdami recension presented by



3. One page of the illuminated opening bifolio of an Adi Granth manuscript. The manuscript is of the Damdami recension, produced for Sodhi Sadhu Singh of Kartarpur, district Jalandhar, Panjab, Kashmiri style, circa 1859. Gold and colours on paper; 330 x 390 mm. India Office Library, London ms. Panj E2. Reproduced courtesy of the British Library.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh to Baba Sahib Singh Bedi of Una, a major recipient of land grants from the Lahore court, in the 1820s or 1830s. The first two folios of the text are illuminated in blue, gold, and red, the invocations and interlining throughout are in gold ink, there is a painting of Guru Nanak with Bala and Mardana before the beginning of the text proper, and a single painting of *raginis* occurs at the beginning of the Sri *raga* section. According to tradition, the maharaja had three such manuscripts written, one of which may have been presented to the Hazur Sahib shrine in Nanded.¹⁷ The third may well have been the lavishly illuminated volume that was at the main gurudwara in Dera Baba Nanak until at least the late 1970s: like the Una manuscript, the text had invocations and interlining in gold ink, although it is said to have had a differently patterned margin on every folio.¹⁸ A manuscript of a similar standard of decoration was created in Dhaka in the late 18th century for Lala Nand Lal, the brother of a *munshi* of Navab 'Alivardi Khan, although it is unclear whether the text is still extant.¹⁹ Perhaps the most lavishly illuminated manuscript that has been reported was a volume prepared for Maharaja Ranjit Singh by a scribe named Sudh Singh: one of a pair, the text was written entirely in an ink mixed with gold, diamonds, and emeralds, and the scribe was given the revenue of two villages as a reward for his labours. It is unclear whether the manuscript still exists.²⁰

ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS

The final category of manuscripts to be considered here is those in which painted folios appear, again usually at the beginning of the text of *Japu*. The reduced size of the corpus of extant Adi Granth manuscripts renders almost impossible any judgement on when the first illustrated texts were produced, although all known examples date from the 19th century. As with illuminated manuscripts, the limited information that we have confirms the broad geographical spread of illustrated texts: a scholar working in the 1960s noted an illustrated volume from Gujarkhan in Pakistan,²¹ while extant manuscripts are from locations as diverse as Dina Kangar in Indian Panjab and Jhelum district in Pakistan. It is worth noting as well the existence of manuscripts in which independent paintings of the Gurus have been pasted onto the initial folios, presumably for much the same reasons as *nisans* in earlier texts: a painting of Guru Nanak with Bala and Mardana has been pasted into a 19th-century Damdami manuscript in Patna, and one depicting the same three figures now faces the final index folio in a Banno manuscript dated 1833 VS/1776.²²

Currently known extant illustrated Adi Granth manuscripts were produced by Kashmiri artists, and the corpus as a whole displays the expected variation in quality between popular and elite productions. There is also an important thematic distinction between the manuscripts: some of them depict only

the ten Gurus on their opening folios, while others add Indic gods and goddesses (usually Devi, Sarasvati, or Ganesh). Since most of the manuscripts are unprovenanced, it is difficult to generalize about the meaning of this distinction. Some of the manuscripts depicting gods and goddesses may have been created for Hindu patrons²³ or for use at Hindu or folk shrines, but one significant extant example discussed below is known to have been commissioned by a member of a Sikh religious lineage. A further complicating factor is the practice of Kashmiri artists themselves, who often seem to have followed set templates for illustrating texts even when the content of manuscripts was altered by scribes or patrons. What we do know with certainty, though, is that there were readers and patrons who were opposed to the presence of Indic deities in Sikh texts: 18th-century manuscripts of at least two Sikh texts excise narrative references to Indic deities, as do some manuscripts of a 19th-century chronicle of the life of the sixth Guru, Hargobind.²⁴ As the case of the *Adi Granth* manuscripts presented here shows, the same situation holds for illustrations in Sikh texts. While only the discovery of further provenanced manuscripts will allow us to discuss the presence or absence of Indic deities in *Adi Granth* manuscripts with any nuance, it is at least clear at present that those who excluded them did so with deliberate intent.

Two illustrated 19th-century opening bifolios will represent here the class of texts in which illustrations

of the ten Gurus alone appear. A Lahore-Banno manuscript from Dina Kangar in the Malwa region of Panjab presumably completed during the period 1820–40 moves somewhat away from the stereotypical Kashmiri template of a circular or lotus-petal arrangement of figures around a central roundel (figure 4). Instead, sequential panels of illustrations are grouped around a central scallop-shaped text area, proceeding from left to right and downward. The illustration fills most of the central rectangular area of the folio and is surrounded by a border composed of intricate vine decorations in blue, gold, and red. Many of the iconographic features in the illustrations make individual Gurus instantly recognizable: Guru Nanak is shown with his musician companion

4. Opening bifolio of an *Adi Granth* manuscript. The manuscript is of a mixed Lahore-Banno recension, originally from Dina Kangar, Panjab, Kashmiri style, circa 1820–40. Gold and colours on paper; folio size 264 x 340 mm, painting size 215 x 255 mm. Reproduced courtesy Punjabi University, Patiala ms. PUM 4. Photographs: Jeevan Singh Deol.



Mardana, Guru Arjan with a scriptural volume, Guru Har Krishan as a beardless child, and both Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh on horseback. In addition to this illustrated bifolio at the beginning of the text, the manuscript contains decoration on each of the folios of *Japu* and illumination at the beginning of each *raga* section. A detached bifolio from roughly the same period in the Spencer Collection, New York Public Library is a more typically Kashmiri composition with a series of figures grouped around a central text roundel and a ground of vine and floral decorations (figure 5). While the illustration of the human figures is of roughly the same standard as in the Dina Kangar volume, the execution of the illumination and decoration of the central roundel is of a slightly less

accomplished quality. The order of the Gurus is more haphazard than in the previous manuscript, but Guru Nanak is instantly identifiable on the left-hand folio and Guru Arjan, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Krishan, and Guru Gobind Singh on the right-hand page.

A number of 19th-century manuscripts include depictions of Indic deities along with the Sikh Gurus on their opening folios. Figure 6 shows a manuscript of the Damdami text, probably completed in the period 1820–40, and now at Punjabi University, Patiala. It arranges each of the leaves of the bifolio in a typically Kashmiri lotus-leaf pattern with the text in alternating lines of black and gold ink in the central roundel. The illustration on the left-hand folio places Ganesh and Sarasvati at the top and the first four Gurus around the lower portion of the central roundel; the painting on the right-hand folio depicts the remaining six Gurus. The sequence of figures on both folios proceeds from left to right and downward. The figures are carefully composed, with many displaying the iconographic characteristics usually associated with them: Guru Nanak appears with Mardana, Guru Arjan with a scriptural volume, Guru Har Krishan as a beardless child, and Guru Gobind Singh on horseback. Somewhat uncharacteristically for Sikh iconography, Guru Tegh Bahadur is also shown armed and on horseback. The ground displays fine floral decoration in a vine pattern with four small examples of the cone-shaped





5. Detached opening bifolio of an Adi Granth manuscript, left-hand folio above, right-hand folio below. Kashmiri style, circa 1820–40. Gold and colours on paper; folio size 334 x 350 mm, painting size 228 x 245 mm. Spencer Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Spencer Collection ms. Indic 66.





6. Opening bifolio of an Adi Granth manuscript. The manuscript is of the Damdami recension, Kashmiri style, circa 1820–40. Gold and colours on paper; folio size 305 x 340 mm, painting size 220 x 245 mm. Reproduced courtesy Punjabi University, Patiala ms. 115593. Photographs: Jeevan Singh Deol.

decorations characteristic of Kashmiri shawl embroidery.

By far the most lavishly illustrated Adi Granth manuscript in a public collection is one of the rare volumes about which we know a fair amount. A text of the Damdami recension, it was produced between the years 1839–43 for Sodhi Bhan Singh of Haranpur, district Jhelum by the Kashmiri artist Miha Singh and the Kashmiri scribe Misar Prakas. The manuscript is in the National Museum, New Delhi (see figure 8). It has 29 folios of index and 895 of text, and is a lavish production with a number of full-page paintings and profuse illumination at the beginning of each *raga* section. It also contains minor illuminations at the beginning of subsections of the text and a number of small paintings depicting contributors to the Granth, the later Gurus, and the text's patron. The text of the manuscript begins with an illustrated bifolio consisting of two *dvadashakamalas* (twelve-petalled

lotuses) on a blue and gold ground, the first with *oankar*, Sarasvati, and the ten avatars of Vishnu in the petals, and the second with Shiva and Parvati, Narayana, Brahma, and the ten Gurus surrounding the central roundel. The image of the symbol *oankar* on the first folio subsumes within itself Devi, Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu-Lakshmi: it therefore simultaneously contains and supersedes the classical *panchadeva* in a representation of the formless Sikh deity. The image is of great importance to the text, appearing at the top of the index folio, at the beginning of the text proper, and at the beginning of each *raga* section. Four extant detached painted folios are also usually assumed to belong to Sodhi Bhan Singh's Adi Granth. The first three of these refer extensively to the universe of classical Indic myth and tradition: a lavishly illuminated folio with a *dvadashakamala* whose petals contain images of Kashyap, Surajvanshi, and the ten Gurus with

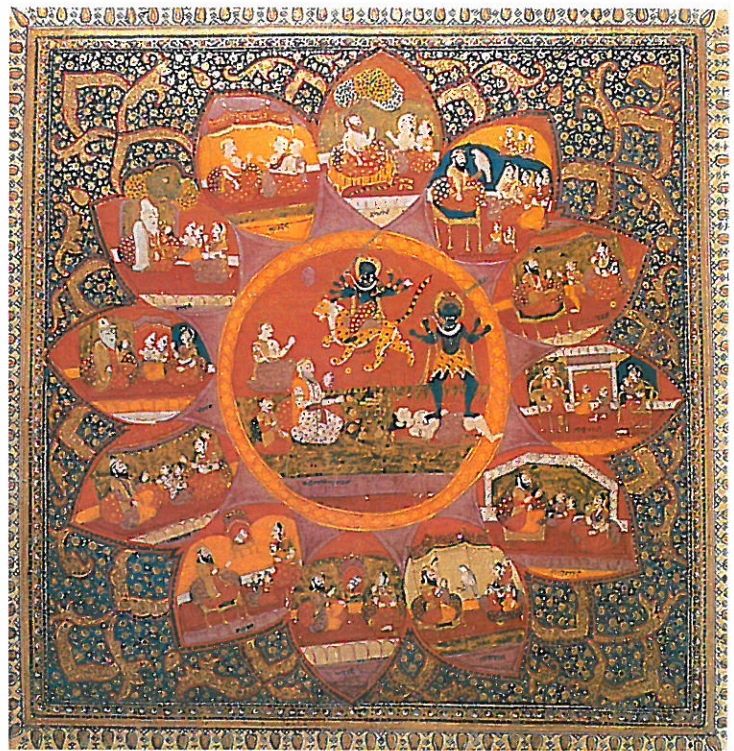
Bhan Singh offering oblations to Mahakal and Kali in the central roundel (figure 7); an illustrated folio depicting Arjuna and a figure identified as “Sodhi bans” (representative of “the Sodhi clan”) worshipping the Viratarupa form of Vishnu-Krishna; and an illuminated folio depicting ten gods and goddesses in a lotus-petal arrangement around a central figure of Vishnu Sheshashayi with the 24 avatars of Vishnu shown in the margins. The fourth detached folio depicts a number of *ragas* and was most probably originally appended to the Ragamala composition that ends the text of the Adi Granth.²⁵ It is unclear where in the manuscript the other three painted folios were intended to be placed. The volume ends with a number of illuminated folios and at least one illustrated folio depicting a number of *ragas*.

The colophon, appearing on two blank folios at the end of the text, is worth quoting in full for the information it provides on the manuscript’s patron and the artist and scribe who produced it:

Sodhi Bhan Singh, resident of Haranpur, had the Granth Sahib begun in 1896 VS [1839]. The glory of working on it [was obtained by] Miha Singh of Kashmir and the scribe Misar Prakas of Katra Ganpatyar, near Basant Bagh, Kashmir. It was completed after four years.

Only the writer of [this] manuscript knows how much effort has been expended –

[Just as] only Hanuman knows how difficult it was to cross the ocean.²⁶



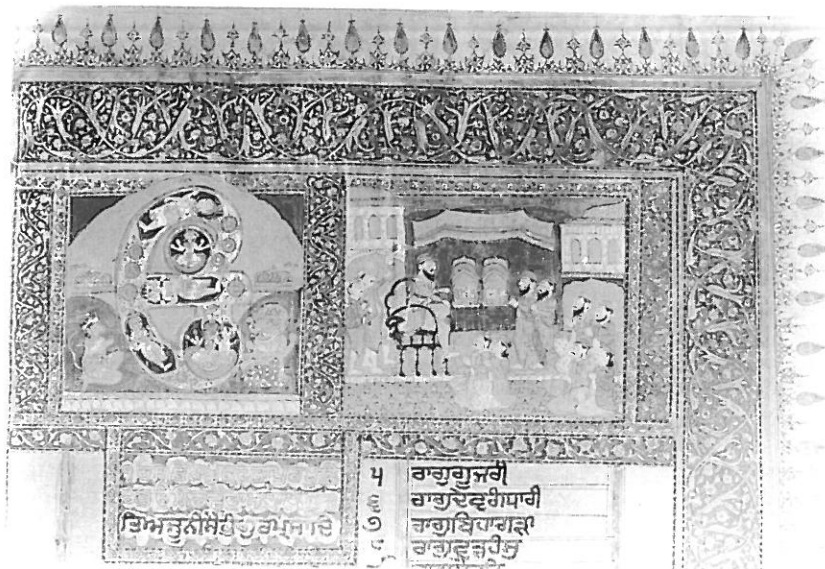
The Sodhis of Haranpur were descendants of Prithi Chand, the eldest son of the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das. Prithi Chand and his descendants were stigmatized as “Minas” by the mainstream Sikh community due to the family’s contention that they constituted a separate lineage of gurus. In the 18th century, the family and their followers were included in the list of “five reprobates” (*panj mel*) to be spurned by initiate members of the Khalsa.²⁷ During the 18th and 19th centuries, many Mina lineages regained a measure of social status due to patronage by Sikh rulers, who sought prestige and legitimation through patronage of descendants of the

7. Sodhi Bhan Singh worships Mahakal and Mahakali. Associated with an Adi Granth manuscript of the Damdami recension, painted by Miha Singh of Kashmir for Sodhi Bhan Singh of Haranpur, Panjab, Kashmiri style, 1839–43. Gold and colours on paper; folio size 470 x 520 mm. National Museum, New Delhi Acc. no. NM 59.155/2.

Gurus. As part of this process, the Haranpur lineage received extensive land grants from Sikh Sardars in the 18th century and from Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the 19th.²⁸ The senior member of the lineage in his generation, Bhan Singh seems to have been a keen patron of manuscripts, since an illustrated anthology of texts commissioned by him in 1838 is also extant.²⁹ Mina writing and scriptural exegesis displays a strong affinity with classical Indic tradition and mythology, and 17th-century sources indicate that texts such as the *Bhagavatapurana*, *Bhagavadgita*, and *Mahabharata* were regularly expounded at Mina centres.³⁰ It is perhaps this strong leaning toward classical texts and traditions that is reflected in the repeated depiction of Hindu deities and themes in Bhan Singh's *Adi Granth*.

The size and sumptuousness of the present manuscript seem to imply that it was intended for public display. Such a ceremonial use would be in

consonance with long established Mina traditions of publicly exhibiting scriptural volumes, a practice referred to in accounts of the lives of the 17th-century Mina gurus.³¹ Sodhi Bhan Singh seems to have continued these traditions, deploying the illustrations in his *Adi Granth* to project a number of messages about his lineage and position. The painting at the head of the manuscript's table of contents (figure 8), for example, clearly aims to bolster the manuscript's textual legitimacy. It depicts the denouement of the traditional story of the compilation of the first manuscript of the *Adi Granth*, written by Bhai Gurdas at the dictation of Guru Arjan. According to the story, Bhai Gurdas's volume was copied with the addition of a number of apocryphal compositions by a Sikh named Banno. In the illustration under discussion, both scribes present their copies to Guru Arjan for his approval: the Guru points to Bhai Gurdas's volume, indicating his acceptance of it. By



8. Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Banno present their *Adi Granth* manuscripts to Guru Arjan. From the first folio of the index of an *Adi Granth* manuscript of the Damdami recension, painted by Miha Singh of Kashmir for Sodhi Bhan Singh of Haranpur, Panjab, Kashmiri style, 1839–43. Gold and colours on paper; folio size 510 x 540 mm. National Museum, New Delhi Acc. no. NM 61.1006.

extension, the illustration also legitimizes the Damdami recension, seen by tradition as the linear descendant of the Bhai Gurdas text.³² Since the Bhan Singh manuscript is of the Damdami recension, the painting serves as a visual testament to the volume's authority and that of its patron.

Some of the illustrations in the text testify more directly to the prestige that Sodhi Bhan Singh wished to secure for himself and his newly elevated lineage. The depiction of the ten Gurus in the opening bifolio of the text and in the detached folio usually associated with the manuscript (see figure 7) both show Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan with scriptural volumes in front of them. Since mainstream Sikh tradition assigns the compilation of the *Adi Granth* to Guru Arjan and does not associate a scriptural manuscript with Guru Ram Das, it is clear that Sodhi Bhan Singh is trying to convey a specific message

through these images. His aim is presumably to add to his family's prestige and standing by showing its own lineal ancestor to be the possessor of a scriptural volume in the same way as Guru Arjan was.³³ In doing so, he draws on Mina tradition, according to which Guru Ram Das possessed a volume belonging to the earlier Gurus that was passed down to and publicly displayed by Prithi Chand and the later Mina gurus. (This is said to have been the manuscript in the possession of the Sodhi lineage of Guru Har Sahai, district Ferozepur until its theft from a train compartment in 1970.) Depictions of Sodhi Bhan Singh himself elsewhere in the manuscript convey a message about his own status as a religious figure: they portray him as a classical Indic ritual patron (*yajamana*), who gains merit and religious prestige through his ritual acts. The central roundel of one of the folios associated with the *Adi Granth* manuscript shows Bhan Singh



9. Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh Guru, and Sodhi Bhan Singh carrying out a *havan*. From an *Adi Granth* manuscript of the Damdami recension, painted by Miha Singh of Kashmir for Sodhi Bhan Singh of Haranpur, Panjab, Kashmiri style, 1839–43. Gold and colours on paper; folio size 510 x 540 mm. National Museum, New Delhi Acc. no. NM 61.1006.

offering oblations to Mahakal and Kali (see figure 7), while an illustration in the body of the text itself depicts him offering ritual oblations to a fire (figure 9). Both are clearly intended to represent Bhan Singh as a *yajamana* at the same time as they restate and reinforce his association with the manuscript. By having himself depicted as the classical Indic ritual patron, Sodhi Bhan Singh attempts to equate his act of commissioning a religious manuscript with traditional ritual sacrifice, thereby appropriating to himself the resulting merit and prestige. Clearly then, Bhan Singh uses his Adi Granth manuscript to convey a public image of himself that bolsters his authority and legitimacy, demonstrating a sophisticated and direct relationship with the product of his patronage and the artists who created it.

CONCLUSION

The close of the 19th century brought an abrupt end to the production of Adi Granth manuscripts. Traditions of illuminating and illustrating scriptural texts also fell into a fatal decline. Although the practice of decorating the margins of Adi Granth volumes has continued into modern printed editions, figural illustration is found at the beginning of only a very few early lithographed or printed Adi Granth texts.³⁴ Most printed and lithographed volumes are completely devoid of illustration or major adornment. This move away from decoration is most probably the result of a number of concurrent social

and cultural shifts. The most salient of these was the reduction in the pool of available artists and illustrators caused by the end of manuscript production in the second half of the 19th century. To this must be added the new economy of scale created by lithograph and type printing in the second half of the 19th century, which fostered a new high-volume, low-cost context in which elite patronage of illumination and illustration was unable to sustain itself. These factors combined to spur a general abandonment of many features of manuscripts – including illustration – in Panjabi printing at the tail end of the 19th century. In temporal terms, these changes in the nature of the Panjabi book and its production coincide with the beginnings of the wider cultural and religious shifts that dominated the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century in Panjab.

In a very real sense, then, illustrated and illuminated Adi Granth manuscripts are a window into a lost Sikh cultural universe. Their disappearance marks a major change in notions of cultural prestige and attitudes toward the physical form of scripture. At this stage of research, we know regrettably little about the geographical, temporal, and social distribution of adorned manuscripts and even less about the patrons, scribes, and artists who created them. Until this changes, it will remain extremely difficult to understand the multiple meanings and intentions that lay behind their creation and use. As

future research expands our knowledge of these vitally important manuscripts, it will also ensure once and for all their place in the social history of Sikhism and Panjab and the history of Indian art.

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NOTES

- 1 Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting: being an account of the Hindu paintings of Rajasthan and the Panjab Himalayas from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century described in their relation to contemporary thought with texts and translations*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), p. 25.
- 2 Karuna Goswamy, *Kashmiri Painting: Assimilation and Diffusion; Production and Patronage* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1998), particularly pp. 54, 56, 44–45, 28.
- 3 A. Adamova and T. Greck, *Miniatures from Kashmirian Manuscripts*, trans. Y.E. Borshchevsky (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1976).
- 4 For published paintings from *Janamsakhis*, see S.S. Hans, ed., *B-40 Janamsakhi Guru Baba Nanak Paintings* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1980); R.P. Srivastava, *Punjab Painting: Study in Art and Culture* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1983), figs. 71, 73–75, and plate 11; Suwarcha Paul, *Sikh Miniatures in the Chandigarh Museum* (Chandigarh: Government Museum and Art Gallery, n.d.),

between pp. 38–39; Susan Stronge, *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms* (London: V&A Publications, 1999), p. 34; B.N. Goswamy, *Piety and Splendour: Sikh Heritage in Art* (New Delhi: National Museum, 2000), pp. 15–29; Seema Bharadia, *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms: The Canadian Collections* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 2000), pp. 12–23.

5 Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting*, p. 25; Karuna Goswamy, *Kashmiri Painting*, p. 99. Goswamy claims that illustrated texts “are not known”. For leaves presented in exhibitions see note 25 below. A paper by Dalbir Singh entitled “Development of Illustration on the Sikh Sacred Writings” actually deals with *Janamsakhi* paintings. See *Punjab History Conference, Sixteenth Session, March 12–14, 1982, Proceedings* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1982), pp. 156–61.

6 Special decoration or painting is sometimes found at the beginnings of the Sri and Ramakali *raga* sections of the text. While the reasons for illuminating Ramakali are somewhat obscure, Sri may have been decorated both because it is the first of the *raga* sections in the text and because of Guru Amardas’s pronouncement “*raga vichi sriragu hai je sachi dhare piaru / sada hari sachu mani vasai nihachala mati aparu*” (“Siri *raga* is the best of *ragas* if you love the Truth / The True, Boundless Hari always lives in your unmoving mind”, *Siri raga ki vara* M4, *saloku* M3 1:1, *Adi Granth*, p. 83).

7 There are four chief recensions of the *Adi Granth*. The first is the Kartarpur Bir, the manuscript in the possession of the Sodhi lineage of Kartarpur. This manuscript is revered as the original manuscript written by Bhai Gurdas at the dictation of Guru Arjan. The second recension is called the Banno version, after a Sikh named Bhai Banno who borrowed the original *Granth* and made a copy of it. This version is believed to include a hymn each by Mira Bai, Surdas, and Guru Arjan which are not found in the Kartarpur text. The third is the Lahore recension, chiefly distinguished by a different order of the final compositions in the text. The fourth version is the Damdami recension, revered as the text compiled by Guru Gobind Singh, in which he added hymns by his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, to the Kartarpur text. The Damdami recension forms the basis of the modern printed edition of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. For further information on the manuscript recensions of the *Adi Granth*, see Jeevan Deol, “Text and lineage in early Sikh tradition: issues in the study of the *Adi Granth*”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 64 (2001), pp. 34–58.

8 A *pothi* (volume) formerly in the Sikh

Reference Library had a *nisan* of Guru Tegh Bahadur on an original folio of the text and the Central Sikh Museum manuscript discussed in note 9 bears a *nisan* written on a text folio. A *gutka* with the Bhai lineage of Bagrian has a *nisan* attributed by tradition to Guru Gobind Singh on an original folio of the text.

9 The manuscript at Kartarpur, district Jalandhar understood to be Guru Arjan's original has a *nisan* each attributed to Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind (the second placed at the beginning of Ramakali *raga*) and the Banno manuscript traditionally said to be its first copy (originally dated 1699 VS/1642 and subsequently redated to 1659 VS/1602) contains *nisans* with the same attributions at the same places in the text. For a description of the first manuscript, see Bhai Jodh Singh, *Sri Kartarpuri bir de darshan* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1968); for a description of the second, see Pritam Singh, "Bhai Banno's copy of the Sikh scripture", *Journal of Sikh Studies* 11 (1984). A manuscript at the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar that may be the second part of a complete Adi Granth text contains a *nisan* attributed to Guru Hargobind in the Prabhati *raga* section [photograph published in Shamsheer Singh "Ashok", *Gur Khalse de nisan te hukamname* (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1967), between pp. 12–13]. The *nisan* of Guru Har Rai has been published as "Ashok", *Nisan te hukamname*, between pp. 18–19 and Trilochan Singh, *Life of Guru Hari Krishan: a biography and history* (Delhi: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, 1981), between pp. 104–05. For a manuscript formerly at Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib, Patna with a *nisan* attributed to Guru Har Krishan, see the photograph published in Shamsheer Singh "Ashok", *Gur Khalse de nisan te hukamname*, between pp. 18–19; I was unable to locate the manuscript during a visit to Patna in November 1998. One of the manuscripts with a forged *nisan* is Panjab University, Chandigarh ms. 1192, which bears a colophon claiming that it was completed in 1731 VS/1674: the *nisan* is claimed to be that of Guru Tegh Bahadur. It is, however, in a very rough hand and has clearly been traced over blue marking pencil, which is still visible at points. The second is a manuscript created in the first half of the 18th century for Hathi Singh, the son of Mata Sundari's adopted son the second Ajit Singh, who lived in Burhanpur. It bore a forged *nisan* claimed to belong to Guru Gobind Singh, framed with illumination. The present location of the manuscript is unknown.

10 A term used to describe both individual

compositions in the Adi Granth and the compositions in the Adi Granth as a whole.

11 The manuscripts are a *pothi* from Bahoval, district Gujrat presently at the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi; and Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU), Amritsar ms. 1245. The GNDU manuscript contained two *nisans* at the beginning of the text, neither of which was present in the volume when I saw it in 1998. For a brief notice of the GNDU *nisans*, see Piar Singh, *Gatha Sri Adi Granth (prachin biran te pothian de adhar te)* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1991), p. 136.

12 The manuscript, dated Assu sudi 3. 1736 VS/September 27, 1679, is in the Dr Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra, Dehra Dun Acc. no. 4982.

13 For a brief discussion of these manuscript traditions, see Deol, "Text and lineage", pp. 43–44. The Goindval *pothis* are said to have been compiled for Guru Amardas and used by Guru Arjan for compiling the Adi Granth. The first four folios of the GNDU manuscript were illuminated, and the first two also bore *nisans*. All the illuminations and *nisans* were missing when I saw the manuscript in 1998.

14 The British Library manuscript is ms. Or. 2748. Although the Museum's catalogue dates the text to the 19th century, it actually comprises two distinct sections, a mid-17th-century portion on Kashmiri paper and a 19th-century completion on Sialkoti paper most probably necessitated by damage to the original volume; for the catalogue description, see J.F. Blumhardt, *Catalogue of the Hindi, Panjabi and Hindustani Manuscripts in the Library of the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1899), p. 7.

15 Piar Singh refers to the *shamsa* as an "eight-pointed *chakra*" (*Gatha*, p. 136).

16 The manuscripts are India Office, London ms. Panj E2 and Dr Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra, Dehra Dun ms. 288/4987. The Dehra Dun manuscript was brought to India from Pind Dadan Khan after Partition by the Sevapanthi Mahant Hira Singh.

17 The manuscript is also cited in M.S. Randhawa, "Sikh Painting", *Roopa-Lekha* XXXIX:1 (1970), pp. 25, 30–31.

18 Interview with Prof. Pritam Singh, Patiala, December 1998. See also Pritam Singh, *Panjab, Panjabi, Panjabiat* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1998), p. 231. The manuscript was apparently kept in a sack in the gurudwara's firewood storage room before its rediscovery, after which it was sent to the Sikh Reference Library in the Golden Temple complex, Amritsar. It was

presumably destroyed in the Indian Army's attack on the complex in 1984.

19 G.B. Singh, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib dian prachin biran* (Lahore: Modern Publications, 1944), pp. 289–90.

20 The manuscript was extant until the 1960s. According to Svami Harinam Das Udasin, the manuscript was at a Bairagi *mandir* in Moga for a number of years before being bought by a jeweller; see his *Adi Shri Guru Granth Sahib ji dian puratani biran te vichar*, vol. 1 (Kapurthala: Ramesh Chandra Suri, 1969), pp. 158–62. Its present location is unknown.

21 The text was a Damdami manuscript formerly kept in a gurudwara in Gujarkhan that had paintings of Guru Nanak and of Ganesh and other deities on the opening folio of its text, see Harinam Das, *Puratani biran*, vol. 2, pp. 70–71.

22 The 1776 manuscript is in the Dr Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra, Dehra Dun ms. 285/4993. See also the folio reproduced in Seema Bharadia, *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms: The Canadian Collections*, p. 23. Another manuscript from Kabul dated 1904 VS/1847 with a painting of Guru Nanak, Bala, and Mardana is also known; it is unclear in this case whether the illustration was a painted folio or was pasted into the text, see Ganda Singh, *Afghanistan da safar*, 3rd edn. (New Delhi: Parkash and Co., 1960), p. 61. One account of a manuscript from Pindi Lala, district Gujrat, dated 23 Poh 1732 VS/December 22, 1675 claims that the manuscript had a painting of Guru Tegh Bahadur facing a folio with a *nisan* attributed to him on the next folio (Piar Singh, *Gatha*, p. 310). Similarly, Harinam Das refers to a Banno manuscript dated Phagan vadi 13, 1751 VS/February 1, 1695 that had a painting of the ten Gurus, the Adi Granth and Mardana before the first folio of the text, although he does not indicate whether the painting had been pasted into the manuscript or was an integral part of the manuscript itself (*Puratani biran*, vol. 2, pp. 80–81).

23 A *Dasam Granth* manuscript created for Divan Mulraj of Multan during the period 1820–40 depicts Ganesh and Sarasvati along with the Sikh Gurus on its opening bifolio (British Museum ms. Or. 6298, briefly described by Jeevan Deol in Stronge, *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms*, p. 209).

24 The first 18th-century manuscript is a no longer extant copy of the *Rahitnama* attributed to Chaupa Singh dated 1765 that excises a lengthy narrative sequence linking Devi to the foundation of the Khalsa [see W.H. McLeod, ed., *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-*

nama (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 1987)]. The second is an illustrated copy of Sant Das Chhibbar's *Janamsakhi* finished at the *dharamsala* of Bhai Mansa Singh in Kabul on 4 Assu 1853 VS/September 16, 1796 that excises a narrative sequence which sees Guru Nanak pass through the realms of various deities on his way to the court of the Formless One. It retains the relevant illustrations, though, indicating the importance of established patterns and models for the artist even when the contents of a manuscript were altered. For a brief account of the manuscript based on an unpublished identification and description by Jeevan Deol, see *Indian Paintings and Manuscripts* (London: Sam Fogg, 1999), p. 128. Although not as such acknowledged, the description forms the basis of the remarks in Robert J. del Bonta, "An illustrated life: Guru Nanak in narrative art" in Kerry Brown, ed., *Sikh Art and Literature* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 52–71. For the 19th-century *Gurbilas patsahi chhevin* chronicle account of the life of Guru Hargobind, see Bhagat Singh, *Gurbilas patsahi-6 krit Bhagat Singh*, ed. Gurmukh Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1997) and Giani Jogindar Singh Vedanti and Amarjit Singh, eds., *Gur bilas patshahi 6* (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1998).

25 The folios are National Museum, New Delhi NM 59.155/1–4. They have been variously published and described in B.N. Goswamy, *Piety and Splendour*, pp. 50–52; Karuna Goswamy, *Kashmiri Painting*, pp. 99–101, 153–54, 158–59, plates P38 and P52; Stronge, *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms*, pp. 12, 172; P. Banerjee, *The Life of Krishna in Indian Art* (New Delhi: National Museum, 1978), p. 305; see also figure 7 in this article. The published measurements of some of the folios are different from the measurements of the Adi Granth manuscript: it is unclear whether the folios have been cropped or actually come from another text or texts patronized by Sodhi Bhan Singh.

26 This colophon appears on the two blank folios after f. 895 of the text. The verse at the end of the colophon is Sanskrit transcribed in Gurmukhi script; I would like to thank Dr Satya Vrata Tripathi of the National Museum, New Delhi for his assistance in translating it. The phrase which I have rendered as Basant Bagh is given as "*basanta bhaga*" in the text. A notation on the next folio notes the death of Ranjit Singh on the full-moon day of Har 1896 VS/July 26, 1839, indicating that the manuscript was most probably begun before that date. The names of the scribe and painter appear as

"miha singh kasmir da sobha tahal kita mesar prakas likhari", which raises the possibility either that the gender of the word *tahal* has been incorrectly understood as masculine rather than feminine or that the scribe's name is actually Tamesar Prakas.

27 For the Minas, see Jeevan Deol, "The Minas and their literature", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118 (1998), pp. 172–84.

28 Bhan Singh's grandfather Khivan Shah was the recipient of land grants from Sardar Ram Singh, Sardar Milkhi Singh, and Sardar Mahan Singh Sukarchakia (Ranjit Singh's father), and two of Bhan Singh's uncles received *jagirs* for their service in the army of Ranjit Singh. For accounts of the history of the family, see Lepel H. Griffin, *The Panjab chiefs: historical and biographical notices of the principal families in the territory under the Punjab Government* (Lahore: Chronicle Press, 1865), pp. 599–601; Lepel Griffin, *The Panjab chiefs: historical and biographical notices of the principal families in the Lahore and Rawalpindi divisions of the Punjab*, ed. Charles Francis Massy, vol. 2 (Lahore: "Civil and Military Gazette" Press, 1890), pp. 251–54; and Lepel H. Griffin and Francis Massy, *Chiefs and families of note in the Punjab*, revised by W.L. Conran and H.D. Craik, vol. 2 (Lahore: "Civil and Military Gazette" Press, 1910), pp. 206–07. The family is the subject of Nanak Singh's Panjabi novel *Ikk mian do talvaran*, which makes interesting comment on their social and religious position in the early decades of the 20th century; see Nanak Singh, *Ikk mian do talvaran*, 2nd edn. (Delhi: Navyug, 1962), esp. pp. 37–48. According to Griffin and Massy, Bhan Singh's family was involved in the succession disputes after Ranjit Singh's death and joined the anti-British faction in the 1848–49 war. The family later fled to Jammu, from where they attempted to return to Haranpur in 1877; they were not permitted to do so by the members of the lineage that had remained there. The family seems, however, to have gained some status in Jammu, since Bhan Singh's son Gurbachan Singh is recorded in the *panda vahi* of Ram Krishan, Allahabad as having come there with Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Jammu in Maghar 1932 VS/November 1875 (Madanjit Kaur, "Study of the bhatt and panda *vahis* as source material for the history of the Sikh Gurus", unpublished report for the University Grants Commission, 1978, pp. 173–74). Gurbachan Singh is recorded as such in Gurmukhi script in the *vahi* entry but signs the register in Nagari script as "Gurbhajan Singh".

29 The manuscript contains Hirdai Ram

Bhalla's *Hanuman Natak*, Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, the anonymous *Makke di gosati* and *Gosati Madine ki*, see G.A. Zograf, *Opisanie Rukopisei Khindi i Pandzhabi Instituta Vostokovedeniya* (Moscow: Izdatelystvo Vostochnoi Literatury, 1960), pp. 25–27, 70–72.

30 See Deol, "The Minas", pp. 175, 180–81; and Hariji, *Gosati Guru Miharavanu*, ed. Govindnath Rajguru (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1974), pp. 65, 171–72, 352.

31 Deol, "The Minas", pp. 175–81.

32 It would seem that the main emphasis of the illustration is to stress the legitimacy accorded to the Bhai Gurdas volume by the Guru's acceptance of it. Viewers of the manuscript would have known the story and would probably have associated its central message with the theme of textual legitimacy and correctness. The story of the creation of the Damdami recension usually focuses on the expansion of the volume by the addition of the compositions of the ninth Guru, with notions of the prestige of the text and its purity comprising a secondary theme. For some comment on 19th-century textual debates, see Deol, "Text and lineage", p. 48.

33 The Kartarpur manuscript and many manuscripts of the Banno recension have a notice in the index that *Japu* "is copied from the handwriting of Guru Ramdas", which would seem to indicate that there was an early text of *Japu* written by him. It is also possible that the painting intends to refer to this tradition.

34 A text published in 1925 VS/1868–69 has a decorated first folio and a small picture of Guru Nanak and Guru Angad in the text of *Japu* (India Office Library, London, Panj H26); a volume lithographed in 1893 depicts European-style cherubs, lions, elephants, and peacocks on its first folio and has a full-page image of the ten Gurus before the beginning of the text (Dr Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra, Dehra Dun Acc. no. 4989); and another undated lithographed text has a series of ten full-page images depicting each of the Gurus before the beginning of the text and the ten Gurus and the Harmandir around the margins of the opening page (Panjab State Archives, Patiala Acc. no. M/1067).