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„King, Sufi and Messiah: The Tomb of Mughal Emperor Akbar (r.1556-1605)“

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Introduction

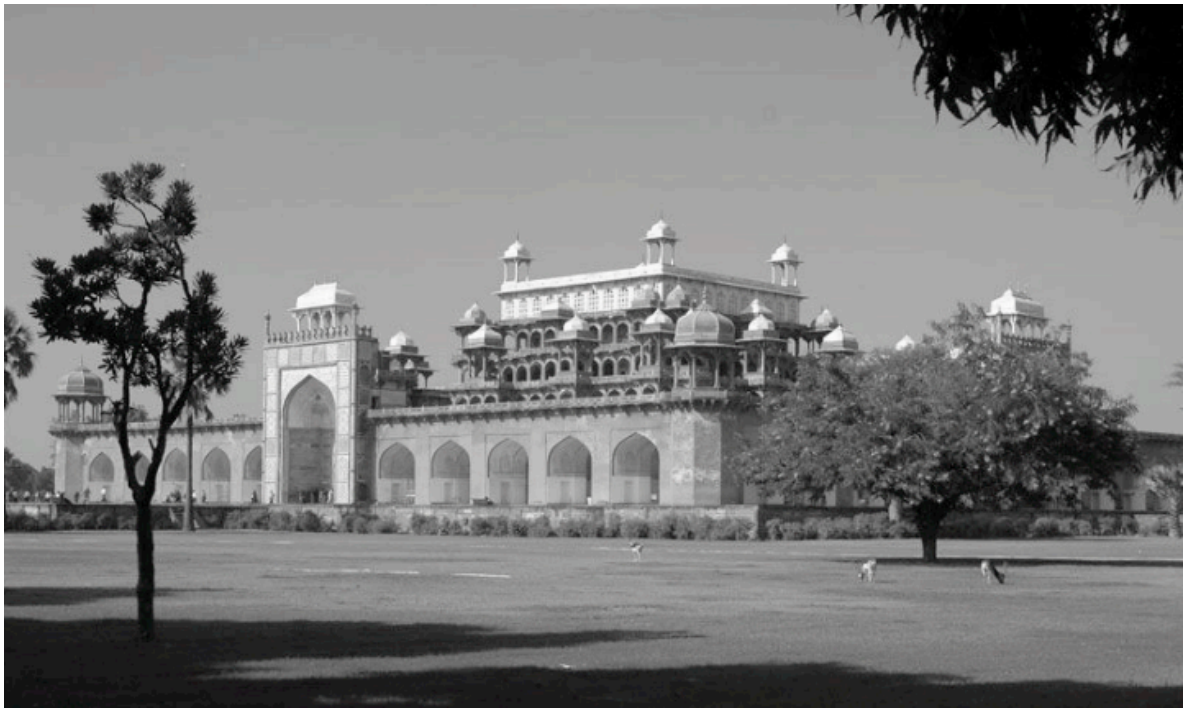


Illustration 1: Akbar's tomb. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

The Problem

Among the architectural masterpieces that stand as a testament to the legacy of the Mughal Empire, the tomb of the dynasty's most celebrated ruler, Jalaluddin Akbar (r. 1556-1605), endures as one of the most enigmatic. Its brazenly unconventional form, marked by five diminishing floors of arcaded terraces, giving the monument a palatial rather than sepulchral appearance; its unbridled stylistic and ornamental syncretism, drawing on models as distant as Europe; and, above all, the absence of the archetypal crowning dome, have bewildered witnesses and commentators for over four centuries. Consequently, they have regarded the monument as either radically innovative or, more often, as an architectural failure marked by an incongruity of styles and an appearance

of incompleteness.

Such a failure would appear at odds with the Mughals' well-established use of architecture and associated ceremony and ritual to project a carefully crafted ideology of rulership. No Mughal building of imperial significance appears to have been built without a distinct ideological program or intention, manifested on a monumental scale in the architecture. The political and religious practices on the one hand, and the corresponding imperial architecture on the other, appear to have been but two corollaries – one philosophical, the other visual – of a common ideological idiom. An imperial tomb therefore yields a unique insight into the prevailing imperial ideology of its time, as visualised in the architecture.

Akbar's reign is commonly regarded as the dynasty's most transformative, both in terms of territorial expansion and consolidation of power, as well as the forging of a new imperial identity that famously promoted rationalism, sectarian non-discrimination as well as cultural and artistic innovation and syncretism. In many ways, the rule of subsequent Mughal emperors, and especially his successor Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), unfolded in the long shadow cast by Akbar's achievements. However, in terms of historical analysis, much hinges on Jahangir's innovative and eclectic appropriation and adaptation of his father's imperial heritage. In addition to his preservation of many of Akbar's political and religious ideas, Jahangir's intense interest in natural history and philosophy as well as European visual art, for example, deployed the father's intellectual legacy in novel ways that laid the ground for what is considered the empire's artistic and architectural climax under Jahangir's successor Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658), the builder of the Taj Mahal.

Akbar's tomb, constructed by Jahangir in the immediate aftermath of his father's reign, thus beckons our attention not merely by virtue of the semantic puzzle posed by its unorthodox design, but also its potential to illuminate our understanding of an important period in the formation and evolution of Mughal political culture and visual practice, and their global connections.

The central question – whence and why the tomb's unusual design – highlights a range of problems in its own right. Foremost among these is whether there is indeed a

coherent iconographical program that underlies the architectural, ornamental and epigraphic innovations; and if so, what is it, and what may be its meaning? Furthermore, how was the monument received and used by contemporaries and in subsequent decades, and what can be inferred regarding its underlying ideological premises? And finally, what can Akbar's tomb tell us about the role of dynastic commemoration in Mughal ideals of rulership and their claims to universal rule over India and indeed the world?

Literature Review

Although previous attempts to explain Akbar's mausoleum place have started in a number of different directions, an interpretative monograph remains a desideratum. Following the pioneering, if mostly descriptive work in the late nineteenth century (Fergusson 1876) and the first and still only survey of the monument three decades later (Smith 1909), most scholars have dismissed the unconventional design as a relative failure. The cause for this has almost invariably been the perceived incompatibility among the disparate styles used in the design, and a general dissatisfaction over the missing dome, a hallmark of the archetypal Mughal tomb. Speculations have ranged from premature abandonment to subsequent removal (Nath 1976; Parodi 2001a).

Another interpretation has been that the building is a symbolic replica of the heavenly Throne of God, set, as it is, in a paradisiacal garden (Nath 1972, Nath 1994). This common Islamic architectural iconography had been famously applied to the Taj Mahal (Begley 1979, 1989), and even though its relevance in that instance has since been rejected (Koch 2006), it is readily called upon as an answer for any Mughal tomb that calls for explaining. Nuance has since been added to this reading, by using work on the role of Solomon's celebrated throne in Mughal art and architecture (Koch 2010). According to this view, Akbar's tomb is a replica of Solomon's throne, symbolizing Akbar's ideal rule as promoter and guarantor of a Golden Age (Parodi 2000, Parodi 2001).

An alternative reading has placed stronger emphasis on the tomb's palatial design, leading some to understand its symbolism primarily as a Heavenly Palace

(Klingelhofer 1980, Koch 1991, Asher 1992). This understanding is rooted in the tomb's undeniable resemblance to Akbar's innovative residential architecture – syncretistic, open, layered – brought here on to the grand scale of imperial tombs (Koch 1992). The tomb's rich inscriptional program, which has been translated and published (Smith 1909), also features some references to palaces that lend credence to the idea of a palatial theme (Smith 1909, Begley 1978).

Akbar's architecture as a lithic representaiton of his policies – bringing the regional styles on to a new, supra-regional, imperial level – has been well established (Koch 1992, Koch 2002). The representation of a wide array of regional styles at the centre could appeal to subjects regardless of sectarian affiliation or geographical provenance, putting indigenous Indian population, be it Hindu or Muslim, on equal footing with the traditionally more favoured and influential Central Asian and Persian nobility (Khan, 1968).

Conjecture about the important place occupied by Christian iconography – images of Mary, Jesus and a cross – at the tomb remains inconclusive, in part because these were whitewashed by Jahangir's grandson Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707), but also because of the ambiguity of individual contemporary sources, which need closer scrutiny and comparison. The phenomenon is commonly understood as no more than part of the familiar Mughal tendency to appropriate new idioms to fit their own iconographical purposes (Koch 1991, Asher 1992, Parodi 2001, Lefèvre forthcoming), though it is unclear what these purposes are in this case.

The tomb's crown, a resplendent rooftop-courtyard made entirely of white marble, features Akbar's delicately carved white marble cenotaph exposed to the open sky. It has been noted this is in keeping with the orthodox-Islamic injunction against structures covering graves (Klingelhofer 1980, Koch 1991, Asher 1992, Parodi 2001), but the attempt to memorialise an individual in a monumental way while still adhering to the orthodox notion of open-air burial, has been described as a radical innovation (Brand 1993, Koch 2006).

The tomb's reception has received less attention, save for a visit of an Iranian delegation to the tomb in 1622, which reveals the ritual of commemoration associated

with the tomb extended beyond the Mughal Empire (Desai 1999, Koch, 2006, Lefèvre forthcoming). In this account, the tomb is portrayed as a personification of its deceased occupant receiving, as it were, his guests. This, and the connections made elsewhere to Mughal visions of illuminated kingship and associated sun-worshipping rituals (Asher 2004), as well as the possible relevance of Gujarati saintly and secular tombs as prototypes for Akbar's mausoleum (Parodi 2000), begs the question of whether the tomb might not be an embodiment of the deceased emperor as a Living Saint (Pir-i Zinda).

The overarching goal of the this thesis will be to draw together for the important work that has been undertaken on isolated aspects of the tomb over the past century. By combining it with a fresh look at the contemporary written and material sources, and the secondary literature on Mughal art and ideology and related fields, I intend to deliver a comprehensive assessment of the monument's iconographical significance.

Structure

The thesis is divided into three chapters, corresponding to the three central elements of the Mughals' composite imperial identity, as manifested in Akbar's tomb. The first chapter, The World-Seizer and World-Holder, deals with the visual representation of the Mughals' attitudes toward held or desired territories, as well as their imperial ideology of Universal Peace and its concomitant policies and practices. It explores the tomb's location as well as the symbolic meaning of its organization, its multifarious style, and its emphatic naturalism. The second chapter, The Living Saint, looks at the Mughal emperor's sacred pretensions by assembling an architectural genealogy of one of its most controversial features, the absence of a dome. This exercise unfolds in the broader context of Mughal dynastic commemoration and the growing sanctification of the sovereign and sites associated with him. The exploration of the tomb's possible prototypes evaluates the early Mughal links to three different Sufi saints or orders, before turning to the tomb's representation of the Mughal emperor as a saint in his own right. The final chapter, Lord of Conjunction and Messiah, investigates the reasons for the reported presence of Christian iconography at the tomb and the possible confluence

of dynastic and millenarian ideologies in forging a renewed Mughal imperial identity at the height of Akbar's power and in the aftermath of his death.

Chapter One: The World-Seizer and World-Holder

Sikandra and the Territorial Claim to Hindustan

The conception of our monument begins with its location and setting. Just as the design of the building is the result of careful preparation and thought, so is the positioning of the edifice within the immediate and wider geography. It is, after all, at least in part relative to this landscape that its features take shape, and thus the building's effectiveness depends on the profitable interplay with its surroundings and concomitant connotations.

Before settling upon Sikandra as Akbar's final resting place, the Mughals had buried their first two emperors in equally significant, one could say strategically located, places. Akbar's grandfather and founder of the Mughal empire, Babur (r. 1526-1530), was buried in Kabul, the historical starting point of the Mughal empire. This was the city where following the humiliation of being forced from his ancestral Samarkand and into discipleship of the Safavid Emperor-Saint Ismail I, Babur after 1504 finally became an independent king of importance in his own right. As the “main passageway from Turan to India” and “the most northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent” (Gommans 2002, 23), Kabul opened new possibilities. Though still longing for his ancestral lands in Central Asia, now controlled by the all too powerful Uzbeks, Babur in 1516 used Kabul to launch the Timurid reconquest of northern India, with The History of Timur (Sharaf Al-Din Yazdi's Zafarnama) in his hand (Koch 2001a, 174). After famously defeating the Afghan-Lodi Sultan of Delhi at the battle of Panipat, he founded the Mughal empire in 1526.

The second Mughal emperor, Humayun (r. 1530-1540 and 1555-1556), suffered a fate in some ways similar to that of his father. Having been driven from India by the usurping Afghan house of Sur in 1540, he was only able to attempt a reconquest of Hindustan following fifteen years of sheltered existence at the court of the Safavid Emperor Tahmasp I, son of Ismail I, in Isfahan. When he finally did make a bid to repossess the Indian domains in 1555, he did so, unsurprisingly, from Kabul. Humayun's tomb, however, was built in Delhi, fittingly lodged between the Lodi Gardens and the river Jumna, whose waterfront would remain the preferred site for Mughal imperial building in Delhi and Agra.

Drawing 1: Dynastic group portrait of Emperors Babur, Humayun, Akbar and Jahangir at Timur's throne. Hashim, c. 1620. Johnson Album. British Library.

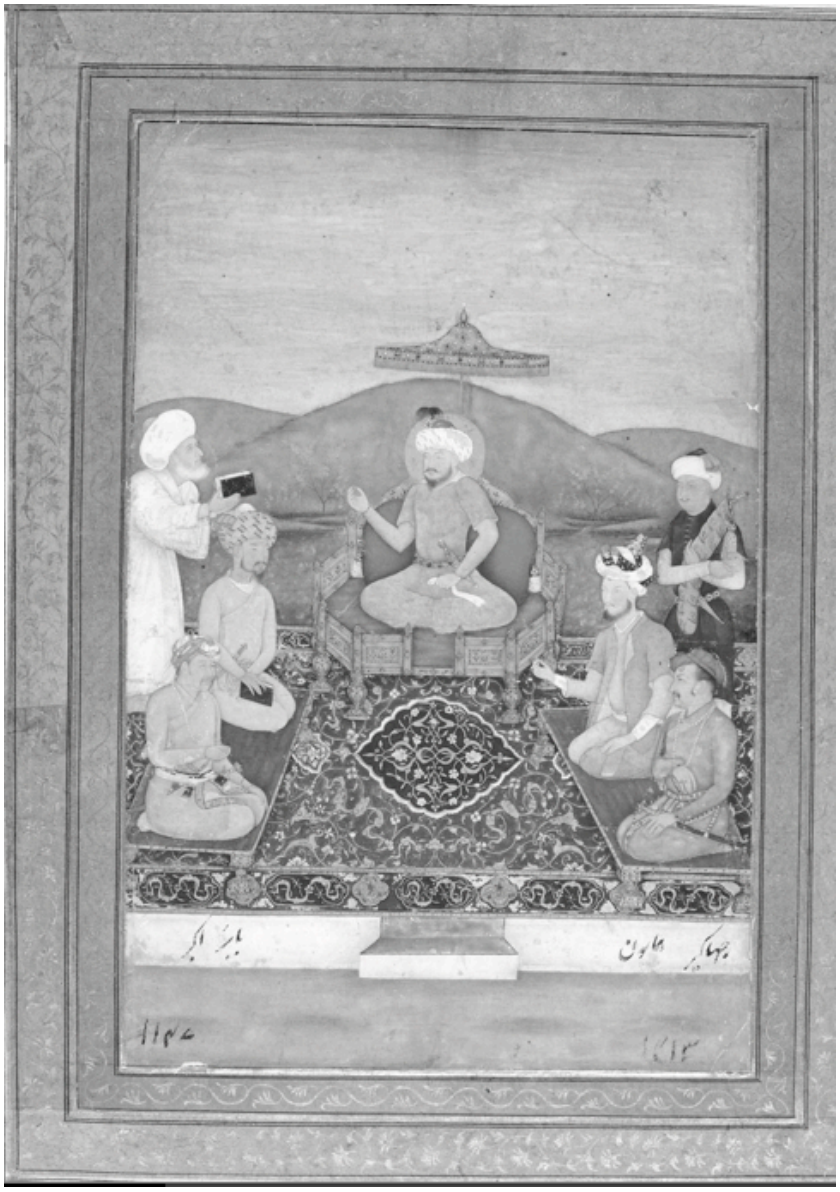
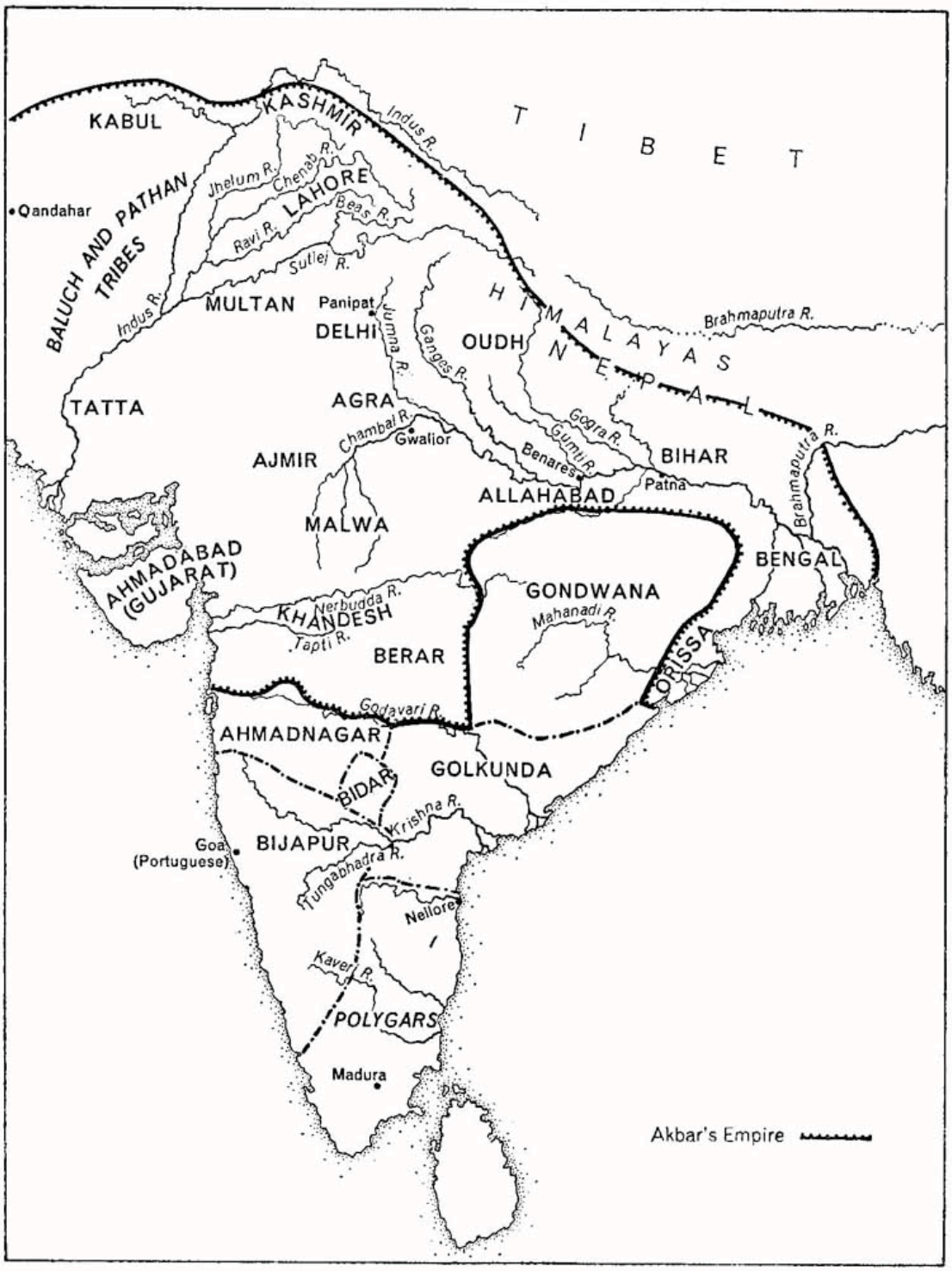


Illustration 2: Humayun's tomb, Delhi. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

Significantly, the Lodi Gardens house the tomb of Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489-1517), the first Sultan of Delhi to rule over Hindustan not from Delhi, but from his Agra fort. It has been observed that the "sheer size and … well thought out conception" of Humayun's tomb, "which amalgamates Timurid traditions with those of the Delhi Sultanate, leave no doubt that it was built as an architectural manifesto of the Mughals as descendants of Timur taking over Hindustan." (Koch 2001a, 165, 174)

The choice of Sikandra, near Agra, as Akbar's final resting place can be understood as the visual symbol of the Mughal claim to Agra, the second capital of imperial Hindustan. The Agra Fort of the Lodis had first been taken by Babur and was later the site of Humayun's crowning. Perched on the banks of the Jumna river, its appeal was not lost on Akbar, who died at the fort, in 1605 once again the seat of his empire.



THE MUGHAL EMPIRE AT THE DEATH OF AKBAR IN 1605

From: *An Historical Atlas of the Indian Peninsula* (Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1961).

Illustration 3: The Jumna River and the Taj Mahal (Photo: Saca Sonrisas, 2003)

Illustration 4: Satellite photo of Akbar's tomb (quadripartite square, bottom center) and the river Jumna, Google Maps, 2013

Although Sikandra has since been swallowed by the expanding perimeter of Agra, at the time of the construction of Akbar's tomb (1605-1613) it lay some ten kilometers to the northwest of Agra proper. The choice of this somewhat removed site may at first appear surprising, given the flourishing waterfront garden city taking shape along the Jumna in the immediate vicinity of the Agra Fort. After all, in the years to come, important imperial and sub-imperial tombs were to be erected here, including that most famous, the Taj Mahal. Why, then, not Akbar's mausoleum?

It appears that Sikandra had a distinctive appeal of its own. For one, it was at the time of Akbar's death known as the site of a "sacred garden … known as Bihishtabad ["Abode of Paradise"]" and after his passing "was fixed upon" to serve as his burial ground (Abu'l-Fazl 1993, 1262). In an effort to reconcile conflicting claims of scholars about the origin of the garden, it has been proposed that this paradisiacal garden's enclosing wall was built in two stages, at different periods, and that tradition has it that the lower section of the enclosure was built by Akbar and subsequently elevated by Jahangir to provide shelter from the overlooking gaze of passers-by on elephants or camels (Smith 1909, 7; Klingelhofer 1980, 8).

It is easily conceivable that what may have been appropriate for a pleasure garden was insufficient for a shrine, where the sacred nature of the garden required special protection from the casual gaze. However, the claims about the wall having been built in two stages have not been archeologically substantiated; which is not to say that the conjecture is false, for a "sacred garden" is likely to have been walled-in. Moreover, the apocryphal nature of the garden's history leaves open the possibility that it may have been built even before Akbar's reign. The name Bihishtabad ("The Abode of Paradise") immediately evokes that of the waterfront garden built by Babur upon his arrival in Agra, the Hasht Bihisht ("The Garden of Eight Paradises"), but the Lodi Sultans could also have had a hand in its construction and subsequent use.

Three decades before his son Ibrahim Lodi lost Hindustan to Babur, Sikandar Lodi used the site which was to bear his name (Sikandra) as the setting for a twelve-door pleasure pavilion (baradari) (Klingelhofer 1980, 9). This is hardly surprising if we suppose, as others have, that "the Agra of the earlier period of the Lodi dynasty," that is

before the transfer of their capital from Delhi, “was at Sikandra.” (Führer 1891, 76 cited in Klingelhofer 1980, 8). Akbar's son Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) converted Sikandar Lodi's pavilion in Sikandra into a tomb for his mother, i.e. Akbar's wife.

In a 1613 entry from his autobiography, Jahangir describes returning to the Agra Fort from a visit to Akbar's tomb garden by boat (Jahangir 1999, 149), a practice common in visiting waterfront gardens along the Jumna since the time of Babur. The Mughals had transformed Agra into a veritable waterfront garden city, its banks lined with gardens and palaces built by members of the imperial family and court nobility (Koch 1997a, 140–60). Babur tells us that “the people of Hind, who had never seen grounds planned so symmetrically and thus laid out, called the side of the Jun [Jumna] where [the Mughals'] residences were, Kabul.” (Babur 1996, 359–60). Akbar's tomb today lies at a distance of more than a kilometer from the waterfront, and since the riverbank of the Jumna – a river that connects the Mughal imperial capitals of Delhi and Agra – had been a preferred site for Mughal forts and tombs, one might rightly ask if proximity to the river was greater at the time.

It has been suggested that the tomb must have been located closer to the river in order to provide the garden and waterworks with adequate water supply (Parodi 2001a, 127). Indeed, it is not unthinkable that over time, the lateral shift of the riverbed's sharply curling bends may have moved the waterfront substantially eastward, away from the tomb. But although small shifts of this kind are discernible on satellite images, it is difficult to speculate on their cumulative effect over four centuries. Moreover, the only extant survey of the complex ascribes the provision of water to two water tanks, reportedly dug for this purpose at the considerable distance of half a mile to the west and east of the enclosure (Smith 1909). This would seem to suggests that immediate access to water may have been limited after all. Unfortunately, the area where these water tanks would have stood has since been built up with residential homes and no remnants could be discovered during a visit to the site in 2011.

Nonetheless, a gouache from 1790 shows the tomb directly on the waterfront. One can not help but notice, however, that the depiction is highly schematic and rather inaccurate in rendering some of the tomb's other, still observable features, such as the

number of floors and water canals, which could hardly escape any waking visitor. This suggests the picture may have been based on hearsay, which due to the tomb's unusual design was often not only inaccurate, but indefinite and conflicting. Indeed, nowhere in the extant sources do we find a reference to the tomb's waterfront location, a silence which is compounded by the high wall separating the garden from its northern vista, which would have faced the river. This is in contrast to the typical waterfront garden of Agra, which ends in a terrace or platform, sometimes featuring pavilions, and is always oriented toward the passing river as the definitive feature of its setting (Koch 1997a, 140–160). In this respect, Akbar's tomb is closer in conception to Humayun's tomb in Delhi – similarly set back on a slight elevation about a kilometer from the waterfront – than to the Agra riverside tombs it prefigures, such as the tomb of Itimad ud-Daula or the Taj Mahal.

Jahangir's positioning of imperial tomb gardens in Sikandra stands firmly in the Mughal tradition since Babur's time of building gardens across the empire, from Lahore to Agra, as visual vehicles for the appropriation of the Hindustani landscape, as “royal emblems of territorial control” (Westcoat 1989 cited in Koch 1997, 143). His innovation lies in the novel deployment of what has been called the “funerary-dynastic and religious associations [of gardens]” for the purpose of the reaffirmation, indeed the reenactment, of of a defeated rival dynasty's displacement. The Mughal tomb, the medium used in this ritual “seizing” of cherished land, harnesses and appropriates the remnants of the Surs' sovereign charisma. Thus Sikandra's tomb-gardens become a “visual metaphor” for the Mughal's unique legitimacy and “ability to control and order” India's land and population (Asher 1992, 37; Koch 1997b, 143).

The significance of Jahangir's symbolic placement of Akbar's tomb goes beyond the meaningful continuation of a series of imperial grave-sites, and is part of a wider effort to erect a new style of impressive imperial buildings and monuments throughout the empire to mark the unified imperial culture propounded by the Mughal court. In this regard, the great funerary complexes were particularly effective: “because of their greater accessibility compared to residential ones, [they] functioned as 'large-scale spatial emblems' of Mughal authority over the conquered lands (Wescoat 1994, 339; Parodi 2001a). What is crucial for our purpose is that this effort was not limited to mere strategic positioning, or a sort of flag-

planting exercise in demarcation. By incorporating significant references to distinct regions of the empire, the buildings' innovative design embodied the territorial dimension of the Mughal imperial project. In doing so, it reflected a concurrent political effort on behalf of the monarch to rule as a universal sovereign over widely differing groups of subjects, ensuring justice and prosperity to all.

Mughal Territoriality under Akbar and Jahangir

Upon taking the throne, Akbar embarked on conquests and institutional innovations that transformed a modest, insecure north Indian state he inherited from his father Humayun, to bequeath to his successor a stable, populous empire, whose wealth dwarfed that of nearly all contemporaries, and cemented the rule of the Timurid dynasty on the Indian subcontinent for years to come (Dale 2009).

The annexation of several major Rajput kingdoms to his empire, including, in 1573, the strategically vital Gujarat on the Arabian Sea, opened the door to the Deccan Sultanates of central India, traditional allies of the Safavids in Iran. Akbar's conquests, however, went beyond matters of territorial control, constituting “a remarkably successful campaign to recruit participants in a long-term project of empire-building that remapped the political geography of South Asia” (Moin 2012, 132).

In the final years of his reign, Akbar was forced to devote much of his attention to preserving control over his rebellious son, prince Salim, future emperor Jahangir (Gladwin 1930, 1–19). In 1599, Akbar had instructed Salim to deal with the recalcitrant Rana of Mewar, while Akbar himself would head south toward the Deccan in an effort to expand the empire. While his father was away, the prince turned back from his assignment and took possession of the rich coffins and fertile fields of Bihar province (Moin 2012, 172), and set up court in the city of Allahabad.

The Deccan Sultanates, which occupied the vast central-Indian plateau, lay beyond the empire's southern frontier. The stability, if not direct control of these territories, was crucial to the preservation of the Mughal empire. The Deccan was also of considerable importance to Mughal relations with their Safavid rivals of Persia, due to the latter's “ties of sentiment, kinship, religion, prestige and trade” to the Deccan Sultanates' Muslim rulers.

Illustration 5: Akbar's Triumphal Entry into Surat. By Farrukh Beg. Akbarnama, 1590-95, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

These ties were reversed in the case of the Central-Asian kingdoms of Balkh, Badakhshan and Transoxania – the ancestral homelands (watan) of the Timurids – captured by the Shaibani Uzbeks in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, but remaining a wellspring of Mughal dynastic identity and the object of their territorial claims (Richards 1972, 198; Lefèvre 2007, 467).

Akbar's grandson, Shah Jahan (r.1628-1658), famously launched a campaign with "an army of fifty thousand horse and ten thousand musketeers, rocketmen and gunners" to reconquer Blakh and Badakhshan, "the hereditary territories of the House and the keys to the acquisition of Samarkand, the home and capital of his great ancestor, Timur Sahib Qiran

["Timur, the Lord of Conjunction"]" (Lahauri 1966, 70). The reason Shah Jahan was not able to maintain control of the region, was partly due to the "overextension of Mughal forces, committed as they were to the simultaneous Mughal conquest of the Deccan" (Balabanlilar 2012, 44–5).

The tension between the Deccan and Transoxanian ambitions had been a lasting feature of Akbar's and Jahangir's reigns as well. Akbar's biography recounts his intentions for the reclaiming of Turan:

> Should the wide country of India be civilized by means of his obedient vassals he [Akbar] would proceed to Turan … and would get possession of the lands of his ancestors. In this the various classes of mankind would experience the joys of concord. (Abu'l-Fazl 1993, III: 616)

In other words, the reconquest of the ancestral lands of the Timurids could only proceed if and when sufficient stability and control was established over the subcontinent, the key to which was considered to be the Deccan. When in 1587 Akbar's trusted advisor and biographer Abu'l-Fazl reiterates that "his majesty [Akbar] has turned his attention to the conquest of Turan," he immediately adds that a Mughal return to the ancestral domains could only occur "after Akbar's pacification of Hindustan and possession of the Deccan were complete." (Islam 1982, 207; Samarqandi 1998, 8)

Jahangir's affirms Akbar's interest, stating that "the conquest of Transoxania was always in the pure mind of my father, although every time he determined on it things occurred to prevent it" (Jahangir 1999, 16). Although the ambition would remain forever unrealized, Jahangir's determination to reclaim the Mughal homelands appears considerable:

> As I had made up my mind to the conquest of Transoxania, which was the hereditary kingdom of my ancestors, I desired to … go myself with a valiant army in due array, with elephants of mountainous dignity and of lightning speed, and taking ample treasure with me, to undertake the conquest of my ancestral dominions (Jahangir 1999, 53).

Casting ones territorial claims in terms of reconquest of hereditary Timurid domains underscores the centrality of Mughal identification as the rightful heirs of Timur. These claims, however, concern not only Central Asian territories, but extend to those of

Hindustan. Jahangir's insistence in his autobiography on the “antiquity of Timurid establishment in India,” serves to present “the Mughal presence in the region as the outcome, not of sheer conquest, but of a rightful recovery of the territories lost after Timur's death.” (Lefèvre 2007, 467)

The final decade of Akbar's rule saw a dent in the territories of the Deccan Sultanates with the taking of the frontier province of Berar, in 1596, no doubt emboldening the Mughals in their Deccan plans as it put them within striking distance of the Sultanate of Golconda, a prize that nonetheless would elude them for almost another century. The previous conquest of Gujarat had opened up the way to another Deccan Sultanate, namely that of Ahmednagar, which was gradually taken between 1616 and 1636. Ironically, the painstaking southern expansion is typically viewed as the Empire's ultimate unmaking. When the vast plateau was finally conquered at the end of the seventeenth century, the resulting overextension is thought to have precipitated the Empire's irreversible decline.

The picture that emerges of Mughal territorial vision at the time of Akbar's death is one of a relatively stable core surrounding the imperial heartland of Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Delhi, buttressed by the extended control of neighboring provinces such as Gujarat and Bihar. This equilibrium is notably strained by the competing ambitions for Deccan and Transoxanian conquests. In other words, the Mughals find themselves torn between a quest for reaffirmation of their Timurid dynastic heritage on the one hand, and the consolidation of control over their new, subcontinental empire, on the other.

Ideology of Rulership and Architecture of Universal Peace

The relative stability of the North-Indian territories had in part been achieved through a successful policy of political cooptation of regional Rajput and Muslim rulers. This political socialization was based not only on conquest, but on intermarriage with regional landholders, a unified system of imperial rank, the abolition of unchallenged inheritance of land – which now was subject to redistribution at the imperial level – and a revenue system that transformed “armed, often-truculent, parochial warrior-aristocrats, into quasi-officials.” This political entanglement, along with the Mughals' close attachment to local Sufis – revered across these territories by Muslims and Hindus alike – engaged the regional

Illustration 6: Fatehpur Sikri. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

aristocrats in "a broadly shared imperial culture" (Dale 2009, 284). It was in the innovative unifying architecture of Akbar's new imperial capital at Fatehpur Sikri that this supra-regional culture first received an emphatic visual expression (Koch 2002a, 28).

The possibility of understanding Akbar's architecture as a "lithic representation of his policies," marked by religious tolerance and co-optation of regional powers, has been well established:

> When we want to regard Akbari architecture as a testimony of his rule, it seems more likely that its intention was to bring 'the regional' on to a supra-regional, imperial level. Selected styles and forms of Hindustan were merged with building principles and forms of Timurid Central Asia, and these components were given new emphasis by magnified proportions, by a new approach to structural logic, reflected in décor and detail, and, at least in the heartland of Mughal building activities at Delhi, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, by the unifying medium of the red sandstone which had a high symbolic value (Koch 2002a, 28).

The employment of different regional styles at the imperial level meant these were buildings that could now…

> … appeal to all subjects, regardless of sectarian affiliation or geographical provenance … and plac[ed] indigenous Indian population, be it Hindu or Muslim, on an equal footing with the traditionally more favored and powerful Central Asian and Persian nobility (Khan 1968, 31–3).

The most important political corollary of this accommodative visual attitude was Akbar's

Illustration 7: A king riding a composite elephant and led by a Sufi guide. The elephant is constituted by a diversity of living beings, reflecting the diverse populace of Hindustan. Mughal workshop (ca. 1600-1640)

so-called policy of Universal Peace (Sulh-i Kul), aimed at promoting diversity and sectarian non-discrimination. Although the elevation of the principle from "the status of a mystic notion" to that of an actual policy – "promoting amity among divergent groups in a culturally pluralistic situation" – is typically attributed to the inü uence of the pantheistic philosophy of Ibn al-Arabi and Akbar's biographer and main ideologue Abu'l-Fazl (Khan 1997, 88), the dynastic precedents probably deserve more recognition. The Chengisid kingship manual, the Yasa-i Chingezi, required the ruler "to consider all sects as one and not to distinguish them from one another," and it was in accordance with this principle that Chengis Khan, "eschewed bigotry and preference of one faith over another, placing some above others" (Juwaini 1958, 26). The religious tolerance of the Mongols – marked "not so much by high-mindedness as by indifference" – led to the gradual adoption of regional religions (Balabanlilar 2012, 8). Similarly, Timur is reported to have respected all religions alike (Khan 1997, 81–2), an attitude still manifest in Babur, who "had also been a tolerant

Illustration 8: Akbar's interreligious assembly in the Ibadat Khana (House of Worship) in Fatehpur Sikri. By Nar Singh, ca. 1605. The Akbarnama.

ruler who kept his religion to himself and did not impose it upon his subjects in India" (Moin 2012, 87; Dale 2004; Anooshahr 2009). Humayun's "induction of a large number of Irani Shias in [his] service" continued this tradition, for "in no other state ruled by a Muslim dynasty did the Shias and Sunnis coexist in the nobility in such remarkable amity" (Khan 1997, 81; Khan 1973, IX–XIV). Following in the steps of his father, Jahangir in his autobiography would articulate "his role as a monarch" not in terms of the enforcement of Islamic laws, but in terms of "a total dedication to justice," regardless of religious prescription (Lefèvre 2007, 466).

One of the central Akbari innovations was to place at the heart of this policy a rejection of tradition and a pursuit of rational thought, as the way to justice and harmony.

> When he is free from the affairs of state and administration, on the night of every Friday he invites men of all classes and of high rank and convenes an assembly in the house of worship (eb!dat-kh!na) and makes them sit in four-rows… sayyeds, nobles, men of letters, scholars and righteous persons of all sects and beliefs, engage in debate or discussion. Thus they discuss religious beliefs (aq!"ed-e shari"a) and rules of reason (qav!"ed-e "aqliya) and every one of them is given prizes in cash and kind and is made happy. During these debates whenever acute and knotty problems crop up, His Majesty puts them on the right path (Quinn 2010, 152; Muhammad Arif Qandhari 1993, 58)

Akbar's chief ideologue, Abu al-Fazl, suggests that all social strife in India could be explained by the absence of Absolute Peace among the people, “a situation caused by the preponderance of an attitude of imitation and by the suppression of intellect and reason” (Khan 1997, 81). It did not, in other words, suffice to perpetuate existing modes. The diversity of India required a “new era of research and enquiry” (Abu’l-Fazl 1981, 4), an “emergence from haughtiness and conceit, and [begining] the search anew” (Abu’l-Fazl 1993, 252–3). To safeguard the legitimacy of regional traditions, these needed a rational reformulation as constitutive members of a new and universal imperial culture.

The artistic corollary of this concept is the emerging “outspoken spirit of innovation in Safavid-Mughal poetics and visual aesthetics, with its 'aesthetics of the new,'” which differed from the “consolidating and systematizing impulse of the largely conservative outlook of the Timurid-Turkmen period.” This idea of a reconfiguration of the old to produce somehting novel is the subject of a verse by Akbar's poet laureate, Abu'l Fayzi:

> So that poetry might be adorned by
> you, there must be new meanings
> and old words.
> Advance on the path of your heart and
> don’t turn back -- don’t go circling
> around someone else’s poetry . . . .
> Abandon others’ imaginations, for

> calling an adopted “son” does not
> make him one.
> Be happy with what God has given:
> Be a seeker of God-given meaning. (Necipo!lu 1995, 239–241)

This ideal is also evident in Jahangir's “deliberate use of [Hindustani poetry and imagery],” which “endows [his] Persian with a kind of “Indianness””(Lefèvre 2007, 461). A new and distinctly 'Indian' style is notably also the outcome of the architectural experiment at Fatehpur Sikri, where the interest in redefining Timurid and regional styles of Hindustan as part of a new, universal visual language, is manifest. Regional idioms were here not merely 'adopted,' they were redefined within a newly forged and broadly shared imperial culture. One example could be the the importation of serpentine brackets to support the roofs, previously used in Hindu, Jain and Sultanate architecture of Gujarat and Bengal. Nor is this melding limited to Sikri. As Abul Fazl remarks, the Agra fort was built in the fine styles of Bengal and Gujarat, the eastern and western borders of the empire, brought together in Agra, which he terms “the center of Hindustan.”

The rational effort to order and systematize, finds visual expression in Fatehpur Sikri's “clearly planned” complex, where “the palace buildings are axially and geometrically related to the khanqah [simple structure for religious discussion and sleeping]” (Petruccioli 1987, 50–64). Abu al-Fazl described Akbar's architects and designers as “lofty-minded mathematicians” (Abu’l-Fazl 1993, II: 372); even the emperor, one chronicler stated, had a “geometry decoding mind,” (Qandahari 1993, 36) and his architecture was described by the court biographer as understandable to “the minds of the mathematical.” (Abu’l-Fazl 1993, II: 372). Geometry here serves as a metaphor for Akbar's control and power (Petruccioli 1987, 58–60), while being “a builder” is defined as a “general kingly attribute” (Quinn 2010, 148).

The rational ordering and empirical interest in the empire's constituent parts acquired ...

> … a scientiü c quality in [the Mughals'] afü rmative attitude towards nature; [their] keen observation of the natural world became a feature of the dynastic personality. It began with Babur’s … vivid descriptions of natural phenomena, of the ü ora and

Illustration 9: Babur directing his gardeners and his garden architect at the Garden of Fidelity, near Kabul. By Bishndas ca. 1590. The Baburnama.

> fauna of Hindustan in his autobiography, the Baburnama, and it culminated in Jahangir … who emerges from his own Jahangirnama, by virtue of his observations and the investigations and experiments he describes there, as an acknowledged naturalist if ever one sat on a throne. (Koch 2009, 295)

Akbar's experiments on natural language, involving new-born infants (Khan 1997, 84; Abu'l-Fazl 1993, 393), are a case in point, as is Jahangir's autobiography, in which he reveals himself, for instance, as "not only remarkably observant but also as an extraordinarily rational student of birds" (Ali 1996, 19).

The Mughal paradisiacal garden was the ultimate symbol of the order and harmony established among nature's diverse members by the Emperor's justice-dispensing mind. This is reflected in a letter sent by Akbar to his Persian contemporary, the Safavid Emperor Shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629), in which he warns the Iranian king against religious and cultural intolerance. Akbar claimed that his own policy of Universal Peace (Sulh-i Kul), had

allowed him to rule over all of them, in a Hindustan that his ordering mind had effectively turned into a harmonious terrestrial garden-paradise:

> As in the rules of sovereignty and the religion of humanity, concord is preferable to opposition and peace better than war, especially as it has been our disposition from the beginning of our attaining discretion to this day not to pay attention to differences of religion and variety of manners and to regards the tribes of mankind as servants of God, we have endeavoured to regulate mankind in general … It must be considered that Divine mercy attaches itself to every form of creed, and supreme exertions must be made to bring oneself into the every vernal [i.e. eternally blossoming] flower-garden of 'Peace with all' [i.e. Universal Peace]. (Abu'l-Fazl in Koch 2012, 194–5)

An Akbari court chronicle describes Akbar's love of fairness, which lies at the heart of his efforts to have different communities learn about the "truth and truthfulness" of one another to overcome prejudice. Casting irrationality as the obstacle to a harmonious paradise, he instructs that "the main rational sciences of various religions and nations be translated by linguists into one another's languages and that the rose garden of the reported sciences be pruned of the implanted thorns of bigots." (Tattavi and Qazvini 2004, 4243–4248; Anooshahr 2012, 229)

The role of imperial gardens as "visual metaphors" of the Mughal's unique legitimacy and "ability to control and order" India's land and population (Asher 1992, 37; Koch 1997b, 143), culminates in the dedicated naturalism of Jahangir, which has lead to comparisons to his European contemporary Francis Bacon's ideal of "the king as an observer and investigator of nature" (Koch 2009). In a parallel to Jahangir's naturalism as a kingly attribute and symbol of rulership, Bacon's reform of natural philosophy has likewise been interpreted as "part of a grand programme to strengthen the crown by placing the control of knowledge in the hands of royal institutions" (Thomas 2013, 9).

The imperial effort to appropriate disparate territorial and cultural elements extended beyond empirical science, to include official historiography. Akbar's highly innovative Millennial History, for example, was organized so as to …

Illustration 10: Jahangir Holding a Globe. By Abu'l Hasan, 1617.

> … [allow] as many competing voices (or sources) as possible to speak in order to discover a higher truth, while territoriality implied reifying geographical space as an autonomous political and historical subject … This pan-Indian vision of political sovereignty—of an all-India "state"—was itself new and involved projecting cultural and historical unity onto the diverse past and population of South Asia. (Anooshahr 2012, 221–2)

The impulse of territorial appropriation was visualized using the globe, in which Jahangir took a great interest, as an imperial attribute in portraits:

> As a symbol of rule, his artists made the ter restr ial globe "his own" and rendered it Mughal, and it became a leitmotif of his portraits, where he quite literally appears as world-gripper, world-seizer, world-holder, the worldking. (Koch 2009, 330) (Ramaswamy 2007)


Illustration 11: The South Gateway, Akbar's Tomb (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

Akbar's Tomb as a Blueprint of Mughal Territoriality and Ideology of Rulership

The first impression the approaching visitor receives of the complex of Akbar's tomb, is of the monumental South Gateway which provides access to the garden housing the tomb. Here the styles of the two most contentious territories in the Mughal imagination at the time of Akbar's death, the elusive Deccan and Timurid Central-Asian, are joined in a revealing way. Like the Mughal's imperial identity, the base of the building is marked by a distinct Timurid character with its chamfered corners, a high, centrally situated portal (pishtaq) flanked by superimposed niches, as well as the geometric intarsia and arabesque spandrels . However, “the substitution of stone for ceramic in the revetments, and the superstructure composed of minarets and domed pavilions lend the building an unmistakably Indian flavour.” (Parodi 2001b, 86–7)

Closely mirroring the contemporary priority accorded to the Deccan frontier, the style of that region here receives its first reference in Mughal architecture, and that in monumental fashion. The four white marble minarets towering above the roof of the Gateway are the mark of the visual annexation of Deccan to the Mughal imperial style, and

prefigure those of the most famous Mughal building, the Taj Mahal. It has been suggested that the minarts might themselves constitute “a kind of Timurid revival,” yet these are more likely originally modeled upon a Deccani prototype, the Chand Minar in Daulatabad (1435); and their composition in Akbar’s tomb’s gateway appears in its turn derived from another Deccani building: the Char Minar, built in the year of the first Islamic Millenium (1591).” (Parodi 2001b, 87) The entrance gate not only contaminates Timurid and Indo-islamic elements, but arranges them in a hierarchical relationship where the architecture of the ancestral lands is subordinate to that of the most immediate territorial desire. This relationship is established by placing one above the other, as well as by the use of the symbolic white with its universal connotations sacrality (one which more below) for the minarets and domed pavilions, as distinguished from the red of the Mughals' profane

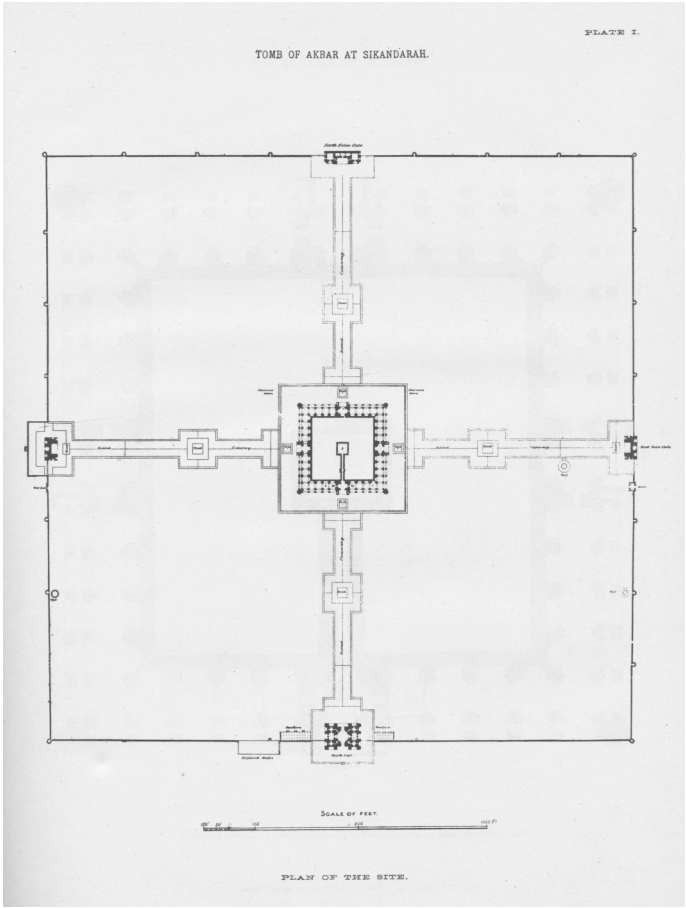


Illustration 20: Plan of Enclosed Garden, Akbar's Tomb. (Edmund Smith, 1909)

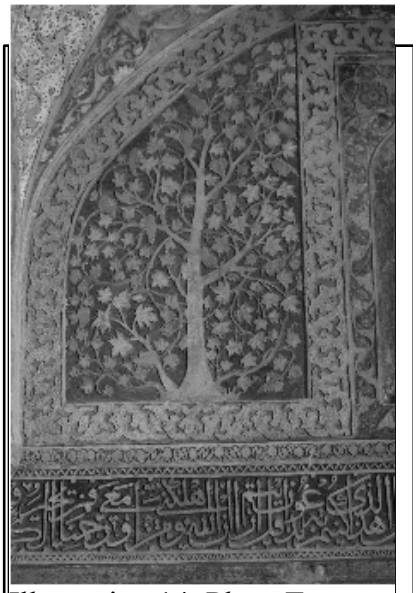


Illustration 14: Plane Tree and Grape Vines (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

Illustration 16: Poppy. North Gateway, Akbar's Tomb. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

Illustration 12: Martagon lily. Chatri, Akbar's tomb. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

Illustration 17: Cherry Trees, Marigolds and Bees. Rooftop Cenotaph. Akbar's Tomb. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

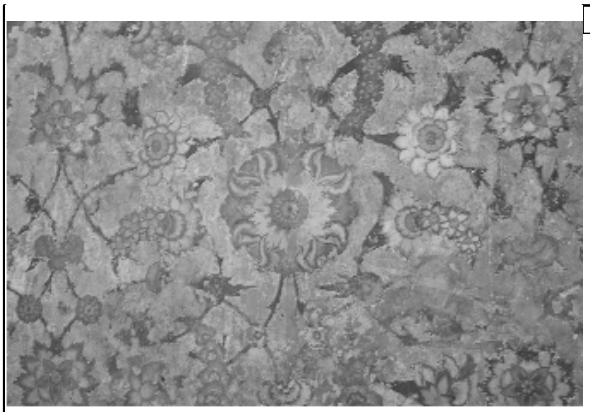


Illustration 13: Rose-like floral ornamentation. Vestibule, Akbar's Tomb. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

Illustration 18: Purna Ghata. West Gateway, Akbar's Tomb. (Photo: Uros Zver,

Illustration 19: Panch Mahal (on the left). Fatehpur SIkri. (Photo: Larry Speck, 2012)

imperial tents, which dominates the Gateway itself. The Gateway's inscriptional program claims the stature of Timurid, Persian, Turkish, Mongol and Greek kings and conquerors for Akbar and Jahangir, extending the symbolic reach of Mughal authority to wherever the auspicious bird Huma casts its shadow, that is “over the whole horizon” (Smith 1909, 32–4).The Gateway leads into a large enclosed garden of the “cannonical cross-axial” type (Koch 2006, 24), divided into four equal parts by elevated walkways (khiyabans). The tomb stands at the center of the garden, reflective of the Mughal conception of mausoleums as a funerary form of garden pavilions (Koch 1991, 45–50). In the Mughal context, the garden setting is charged with powerful dynastic implications. The genealogy of the Mughal garden traces its roots to the Persian Timurid garden tradition of Central and Western Asia, where it had the role of a “sequestered, psychologically suggestive place” for the pursuit of personal and dynastic interests (Lentz 1996, 39; Balabanlilar 2012, 79), a setting which Babur had sought to recreate in Hindustan (Babur 1996, 112–3; Koch 2006, 24). The garden therefore served as a reference to the pined-for natural treasures of the ancestral lands, with their water streams and fruit trees, in an attempt to imprint this paradisiacal vision on the arid Indian landscape, “as a territorial marker to demonstrate the new Mughal presence in Hindustan” (Wescoat 1989, 76; Koch 2006, 24). Beyond these aspects of territoriality, the garden functions as a metaphor for the flourishing and harmonious empire

made possible by the emperor's rational, and therefore just, arbitration. The ordering of nature is accentuated by particularly elevated walkways, dividing the teeming nature in equal, systematized parts. Down the middle of these walkways flow sunk channels (nahr) leading to pools (hauz) midway and at the doorstep of the actual tomb. Cascades with carved fish-scale relief, evoking the precocious streams of Transoxania, allow for the flow of excess water from the channels to the garden floor. Nothing is known of the original vegetation in the garden, except that it included tulips, but these were likely joined by a variety of other flower sorts, as well as trees, including fruit trees. What withering nature has effaced, however, remains present in the architecture, where the effect of the garden is embellished with extensive floral and faunal motifs, unprecedented in their variety in the Mughal context, and prefiguring the famous vegetalizing architecture of Shah Jahan.

The South Gateway has its counterparts in three monumental blind gates in the East, West and North walls of the enclosure, each in like fashion connected to the tomb by an elevated walkway. Their tall pishtaqs, flanked by superimposed niches, again evoke the Mughals' Timurid heritage. Turned inwards towards the enclosed garden, they also echo the vaulted portals facing the courtyard of the classical Iranian mosque or madrasa (Parodi 2001b, 83). Equally significant, however, is the allusion to Paradise, which is “the most immediate implication of [their] figural motifs … : cypress and fruit trees, standing for immortality and the abundance of fruit promised to the believers; bottles alluding to the purified wine drunk by paradise-dwellers (Sura 47:15); birds like the peacock (the Paradise bird par excellence).”(Parodi 2001a, 129) The floral and faunal program includes delicate carvings elephants, which during his lifetime had been something of an obsession of Akbar's. The also firmly locate the newly established, or reestablished paradise, in Hindustan. The West Gateway boasts an extensive range of somewhat fantastical paintings of palm trees and crypress trees enveloped by flowers, as well as a large, centrally placed painting of a purna-ghata, a “pot with overflowing plants … the ancient symbol of prosperity and wellbeing” (Koch 2006, 219). The paintings in the West Gateway of niches containing vases some with with flowers (chini khana) are transfered to the red sandstone relief at the North Gateway. The latter also features realistic wall-paintings of grape-vines wrapped around crypresses red flowers with black centers, most likely poppies, which

along with the tulips in the garden would have symbolized the “suffering heart and death” and the “mystical quest of the soul for God.” (Koch 2006, 140) They were a fitting visual counterpart to the verse by Akbar's favorite poet Sa'di, carved on the tomb's rooftop-courtyard: “The world, O brother, remains with no one: cling with thy soul to the Creator, and that is enough.” (Smith 1909, 31) The tomb itself features panoply of painting and relief of butterflies or bees, cypress trees and grape vines, plane trees, cherry trees, hazelnut trees, rose-like flower blossoms, Martagon lilies, as well as vases with flowers echoing the purna-ghata of the West Gateway.

This 'kingdom of flowers' drawn from diverse territories and rendered in varying regional styles, from realistic painting reminiscent of European naturalism, to the naïve vegetal depiction of the purna-ghata in an autochtonous mode, from the fruit trees of Transoxania to the Mertagon lilies on painted tiles reminiscent of the Deccan, relate to the Mughals' far-reaching territorial claims, as well as the harmonious coexistence of their domains under the universal and unifying authority of the naturalist Mughal emperor, in a paradisiacal garden of Universal Peace.

The receding arcaded terraces that give Akbar's tomb its elevated and unusually open and outward-facing design, proceed directly from the Fatehpur Sikri experience. Made almost entirely of red sandstone, they are a symbolic reflection of the open and unfettered attitude of enquiry and tolerance, and exemplify “the eclectic and composite character typical of the mature phase of Akbari architecture” Koch 1987; Parodi 2001b, 75-6).

Their structure is a visual reference to the regional mode of superimposing one or more pillared terraces upon a plinth, as in Daulatabad in the Deccan, whence the Mughals would later lead campaigns to Bijapur and Golconda, as well as superimposed terraces Muhammad's pavilion in Rajasthan. These prototypes were magnified in the direct precedent for Akbar's tomb, namely the Five-Storied Palace (Panch Mahal) at Fatehpur Sikri (ca. 1573-80). At the Panch Mahal, the open terraces supported by pillars and flat-lying beams, rather than the more common Islamic arches, also incorporated the deep eaves typical of Gujarat.

The Gujarati dimension is amplified by the structure's horizontal accent, “typical of Gujarati architecture...” but the proportion of width to height in the terraced composition is 3:1, not counting the plinth, which is even broader... “In the Panch Mahal, on the other hand, the proportion is 1:1”(Parodi 2001b, 78)

The small domed pavilions with which the elevated structure of terraces is adorned – and to which at Fatehpur Sikri the medium of red sandstone was extended – have here been revetted in white marble or painted tiles, combining the materials associates with the sacred architecture of India (white marble) and the revetment of blue and green tiles covering the domes of Timurid mausoleums. The multitude of small domed pavilions include elegant oblong marble ones – an element typical of Fatehpur Sikri’s palatial architecture, here translated into white marble, Jahangir’s favourite material. (Parodi 2001b, 81) The whole is crowned with an open rooftop-courtyard, entirely made of white marble, reminiscent of the saintly and secular shrines of Gujarat, such as that of the Tomb of Queens (Rani-ki Hazira) in Ahmedabad. In discussing the similarities of the rooftop-courtyard with the Rani-ki Hazira, it has been observed that both structures have forty bays surrounding a courtyard, broad slanting eaves (chajja) projecting from the top of facades within and without, and perforated stone screens with ornamental design (jali) set “into the outer faces of the building.” Like those of the Rani-ki Hazira, the genuinely Timurid designs of the jalis in Akbar’s tomb ‘‘would alone fill a portfolio” (Parodi 2001b, 84).

It has been observed that the indented perimeter of the upper terraced floors is also “clearly borrowed from Gujarat” and ultimately derived from the porch-like structures (mandapas) in Hindu temples. However the horizontal extension is also “typical of late- and post-Timurid architecture, with especially close parallels … in 16th century Bukhara” of the Shaybanids (Parodi 2001b, 78) who had driven the Mughals from their hereditary lands.

At least one other building emerges as a likely prototypes for the terraced composition set upon a plinth, namely that of the Sufi mystic Muhammad Ghaus (d. 1563) Gwalior, south of Agra (Parodi 2001b, 76–7). In territorial terms Gwalior's significance is limited to that of the frontiers, so the reference requires a different explanation. The Mughal

Illustration 21: Hindu Temple at Modhera in Gujarat. Solanki dynasty, 1026 AD. Photo: Uday Parmar, 2007.

Illustration 22: Tomb of Shaykh Muhammad Ghaus, Gwalior. (Photo: Bourne and Shepherd, 1883)

Illustration 24: Vestibule, Akbar's tomb. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

Illustration 23: Zarnigar Khana, Abdullah Ansari Shrine Complex. Herat. (Photo by Christian Richters, 2009)

relation and possible reasons for this reference will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

The pishtaq on the southern front of the building leads to a vestibule that stuns with its ornate painted stucco decoration in blue, turquoise and orange, possibly once having been gold, and an elaborate floral program including flowers in vases, cypress trees and plane trees wrapped with grape vines. Its rich decorations are evocative of the Gilded Room (Zarnigar Khana) at a Sufi shrine built by the Timurid ruler of Herat. It has been observed that the striking similarity suggests “common repertoires of motifs, if not the activity of a Khorasanian artist in Agra” (Parodi 2001a, 129). The notion is not inconceivable considering that Humayun's tomb had been designed by an architect from Herat and Bukhara (M. E. Subtelny 1997).

Having entered though the imposing pishtaq to behold perhaps the most richly decorated room in Mughal architecture, we now follow a long and narrow corridor leading to the very heart of the building. It leads to a chamber housing Akbar's grave, placed directly below the cenotaph of the rooftop-courtyard twenty-five meters above. At least two things are surprising here. First, the chamber takes the form of an enormous domed structure, rising through the core of the composition of the tomb's four terraced floors, making it a 'hidden surprise,' completely invisible from the exterior. The second puzzling aspect is that following the elaborate overture of the vestibule, one is faced with the anticlimax of an enormous, completely undecorated space, the only one in the entire complex. Indeed, the domed chamber was previously decorated, but due to the sacreligious nature of the paintings these were ordered to be whitewashed by Jahangir's grandson, the

Illustration 25: Central domed chamber and grave, Akbar's tomb. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

pious Aurangzeb (Asher 1992). At the beginning of the last century limited traces of floral motifs could be observed, but these have since tragically been painted over as part of routine maintenance works at the tomb. The original whitewashing of the wall-paintings becomes more understandable, when one considers that the images are reported to have included “a Crucifix delineated on the wall: on its right hand the image of Our Lady with the Infant Jesus in her arms, and on the left S. Ignatius – 'the whole delineated' – while on the ceiling of the 'dome' were great Angels and Cherubim and many other painted figures.” (Manucci 1907, 1:141, 4:419; Maclagan 1972, 237–8).

In spite of Akbar's and Jahangir's cosmopolitan attitudes, the presence of European-Christian subjects at the sacred, religiously charged site of a Muslim ruler's actual grave, is astounding. In the context of this chapter, which has interpreted the architectural program from the perspective of territorial and kingly symbolism, little can be said that would explain the use of these images. Surely, one may consider them as a testimony to yet

another source among a diverse set of foreign inspirations on which the Mughals drew …

> to develop a symbolic and allegorical "multilingualism" as a means to address the widest possible audience in a cosmopolitan discourse in its own terms and, as a consequence, to legitimate themselves in the widest possible context as ideal and universal kings. (Koch 2010, 277)

However, that leaves unaddressed the question of why they were accorded such extraordinary importance in the context of this carefully designed memorial, standing closest to the body of the deceased emperor, as though the they were his vital attributes. This is a question that will be addressed in the third and final chapter.

Chapter Two: The Living Saint

An Audience With a Tomb

The symbolic submission of Babur and Humayun to the Sufi-king of Iran hung like a cloud over the Mughals for years to come. If this dimension has remained relatively understated, it is because "later Mughal history reconfigured this embarrassing memory." This reconfiguration included both geographic and religious redefinition. Ostensibly, it "required more than an act of negation, elision, or distortion in a set of texts. It also called for an act of production, a grand performance of sacrality." It was for Humayun's successors, beginning with Akbar and Jahangir, to meet this challenge (Moin 2012, 130). The performative aspect of imperial architecture would assume a central role in the effort to project a new, universal sacrality of the Mughal emperor, and it is in this light that we turn to the following episode.

On the morning of Monday 5 February 1621, sixteen years after the death of Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605), tulips were in bloom in the garden of his mausoleum, built at Sikandra, Agra, by his son and reining emperor Jahangir, and "carpets, canopies and decorative spreads" were laid out "in perfect order" in anticipation of high arrival. (Desai 1999, 197)

Needless to say, the deceased occupant of the tomb was unfit to rouse himself to receive his guests in person. Yet, the usual etiquette of an imperial audience was observed, and the worthy guests, envoys of the Safavid emperor Shah Abbas, were honoured with a ceremonial that had all the trappings of a presentation before a living emperor. In the event, their host was not merely an inanimate corpse, but took the form of the awe-inspiring building, Akbar's final resting place, a lithic representation of his enduring qualities.

The 'reception' was replete with the usual flattery an emissary would shower upon the emperor-host during an audience at his court. This English report of a Persian ambassador's visit to the Mughal court gives some idea what the usual proceedings might have been:

> Hee deliuered the Presentes with his owne handes, which the king with smiles and Cheerfull Countenance and many woordes of Contentment receiued. His toong was

Illustration 26: Akbar Receives the Iranian Ambassador Sayyid Beg in 1562. By La'l (1590-1595)

> a great aduantage to deliuer his owne business, which hee did with so much flattery and obsequiousness that it Pleased as much as his Guift: ever calling his Maiestie King and Commander of the world, forgetting his owne master had a share in yt; and on euery little occasion of good acceptation hee made his Tezelims [taslims, i.e. salutations of peace ending the prayer]. When all was deliuered for that day hee prostrated himselfe on the ground, and knocked with his head as if he would enter in. (Roe 1993, 300–1)

Similarly, at the tomb, the Persians praised Akbar's generosity, his greatness, and his conquests. Of Jahangir they spoke as "His Majesty, the qibla and Ka'ba of the world," eulogising his "supernatural powers" and deferentially conceding the expanse of Mughal power covering lands as distant as Iraq – as if their allegiance was not to the Safavid, but the Mughal throne (Desai 1999, 193–4).

Meanwhile, the tomb attendants were instructed that the visitors were to be paid "due respect and reverence … by way of the offering … on behalf of the lofty threshold (i.e. the mausoleum)" of a special khil'at (robe of honour), in the way, and of the kind, bestowed by a living emperor upon worthy visitors appearing before him (Desai 1999, 191).

The three Iranian envoys were made to remove their shoes and offer taslims at the threshold and at appropriate places as they progressed toward the heart of the mausoleum (Desai 1999, 192). Upon reaching the rooftop-courtyard containing the emperor's cenotaph, the ambassador, in a gesture of respect and submission usually performed when appearing before the Mughal emperor, kissed the platform bearing Akbar's cenotaph in a form of sijda (prostration) (Desai 1999, 195).

This anecdote, recounted in detail by the scholar-official Abdul Latif Abbasi, the protocol officer and main interlocutor of the Persians on this occasion, is found in a private letter Abbasi sent to a friend. As such, it describes the sacred ritual observed in much greater detail, and perhaps with greater veracity, than the rather formulaic official chronicles (Desai 1999, 191). The account is of great interest to the diplomatic history of Shah Abbas I and Jahangir, but more relevant to our purpose here is what it reveals about the building, which not only provides the setting, but as a lithic representation of the late

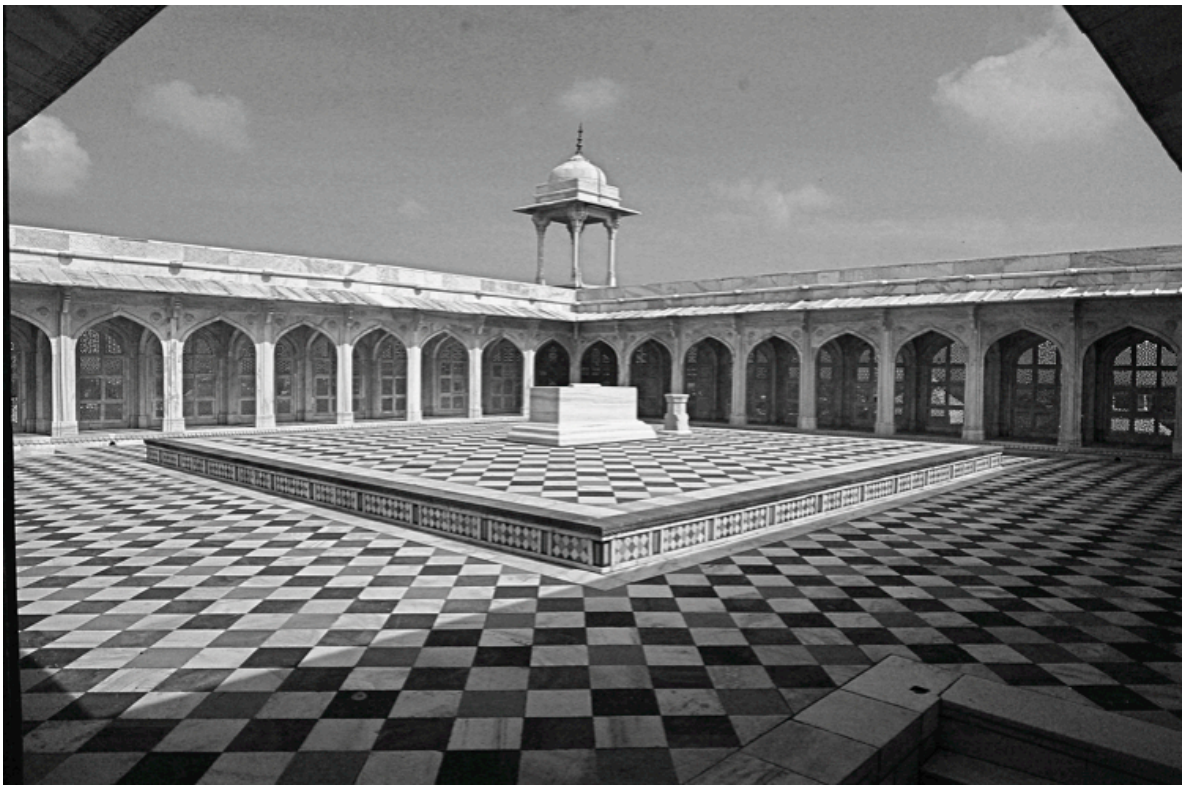


Illustration 27: Rooftop courtyard, Akbar's tomb. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

emperor, occupies the role of the event's main protagonist as “symbol for the presence of the deceased” (Parodi 2001a, 87).

Just what was the projected image of this protagonist, who now commanded the reverence even of the Mughals' erstwhile spiritual superiors? And how could this reversal have been accomplished? The secular or worldly policies of Akbar and Jahangir, and their expression in building projects were discussed at some length in the previous chapter, but the architectural manifestations of their religious or spiritual roles, a comparatively neglected element in extant analyses of Mughal imperial architecture, is considered below.

The Absence of a Dome: Orthodoxy or Innovation?

The aspect of the tomb that has already seen some discussion of its religious implications, is the tomb's crown in the absence of a dome: the resplendent rooftop-courtyard, made entirely of white marble.

At its center stands Akbar's delicately carved white marble cenotaph on a plinth, exposed to the open sky, in accordance with the orthodox Islamic injunction against structures

Illustration 28: Rooftop cenotaph depicting the Akbar's emblematic salutation 'Allah-u Akbar' embedded in a paradisiacal garden carved in white marble. (Photo: Uros Zver, 2011)

covering graves. This open tomb type, known as hazira, has been traced back to the Prophet's own tomb at Medina, as "a set of walls used to surround a place of burial," composed of a grillwork screen enclosing an elevated funerary platform, "a structure which was never to bear a roof." (Golombek 1969, 107)

As puzzling it may be considering the ambivalence, mildly put, of both Akbar and Jahangir toward orthodox Islam, it has been observed that this "attempt to memorialise an individual in a monumental way while still adhering to the orthodox notion of open-air burial, is not a failure but a radical innovation." (Brand 2012, 332)

Nonetheless, the covering of graves with structures bearing a roof, usually in the form of a dome, had become a distinct tradition within Islamic tomb architecture, which in the Mughal case was seen as "a funerary form of garden pavilion" (Koch 1991, 45–50). The meeting of these two ideas – of entombment, and of floral paradise – is nicely illustrated in an account of the death of the Mehdavi Shaykh Alai, leader of an influential

messianic cult in the Gujarat of Akbar's time. When in 1550 Alai and his followers took up arms to advance their religious vision, Alai was killed by the Sur king Islam Shah. This is the same Islam Shah who six years later would fall victim to Humayun's reconquest of his Indian kingdom. Islam Shah prohibited the corpse of the shaikh to be covered, and enforced the ban with watchmen. However, "these orders [were] countermanded by divine providence" (Moin 2012, 157)":

> At that very time a vehement whirlwind arose and blew with so great violence, that people thought that the last day had arrived, and great lamentation and mourning was heard throughout the whole camp, and men were in expectation of the early downfall of the power of Islam Shah. And they say that in the course of the night such a wealth of flowers was scattered over the body of the Shaikh that he was completely hidden beneath then and was so to speak entombed in flowers (Badauni 1924, 1:524).

The scene is evocative of the rich floral decoration covering Akbar's own mausoleum, culminating in the white marble cenotaph displaying a paradisiacal garden, his son and successor as it were entombing Akbar in divinely sanctioned flowers. The idea that providing a monument to one's father was a sacred duty is shown by Jahangir's reaction upon seeing the tomb produced with "Genius and the help of God" for a leading officer of Gujarat, by his son: "A thousand blessings on a son" says Jahangir, "who has made such a tomb for his father," adding the verse "That there may remain a memorial of him upon earth." (Jahangir 1999, 436; Koch 2006, 85; Ruggles 1997)

The Sanctification of Imperial Tombs

The importance of imperial tombs for dynastic commemoration had taken a decisive turn with Humayun's tomb, which was said to emanate the "king's share of divine effulgence," (Abu Talib Kalim in Koch 2001a, 174) in that the Mughal imperial mausoleum would assume an increasingly saintly aura, so much so that in time it would overshadow the nearby famous tomb of the Chishti saint Nizamuddin Auliya, the proximity of which presumably had once been the reason for the imperial tomb's location:

> … [Humayun's tomb was] treated linguistically and ceremonially like the tomb of a Muslim saint. The visit to it was termed ziyarat and included its ritual

Illustration 29: Rani Ki Hazira or Tombs of the Queens, Ahmadabad.
(Photo: Henry Cousens, 1885)

> circumambulation (tawaf) and the distributions of donations and alms. These religious overtones were here directed to the memory of the dynasty. That the cult of dynsatic commemoration was eventually to supercede the religious one was already presaged in the time of Akbar. From 1568 onwards, even before the completion of Humayun's mausoleum, Akbar's historians refer explicitly to the emperor's visits to it and even describe it as 'the site of the holiest of tombs' (Koch 2001a, 176).

Visiting holy sites as a part of the exercise of kingship had been a running practice of Timur (Moin 2012, 54) as well as Babur, who would circumambulate the shrines of famous mystics (Babur 1996, 158, 164). These visits were conducted not out of mere curiosity or political expediency, but rather formed part of a “policy to investigate the sacred topography of [their] new [kingdoms]” (Moin 2012, 65).

The sanctification of the Mughal emperor, which assumes a ritual character in dynastic commemoration at Humayun's tomb, is foreshadowed by a story concerning his father, Babur. It is recorded by Babur's daughter, Gulbadan Banu in a history of Humayun's reign, written some decades after Babur's death (Gulbadan 2002, 31). In it, Humayun's sister recounts how Babur had performed the miracle of saving her brother's life. While the youthful Humayun was bedridden with a seemingly fatal illness, his father circumambulated him and prayed to Ali that his own life be taken in stead of that of his son

and successor. Soon enough, Humayun got better, while Babur became ill and died. The way in which Babur's miracle was "remembered" ensured that "in Mughal dynastic memory, Babur possessed a spark of saintliness, a sacred link with the divine, which gave him the ability to perform miracles with succour from Ali" (Moin 2012, 59).

The Mughals took great care to preserve such links, for which the design and ritual function of architecture proved highly effective. At Akbar's tomb, the rooftop-courtyard hosting his cenotaph bears witness to the creative dialogue of Timurid and Indian traditions in Mughal architecture, taking here its cue from a Gujarati prototype, the so-called Tomb of the Queens (Rani-ki Hazira) of Ahmadabad (fifteenth century): a porticoed court, screened by jalis on the outside – like the one crowning Akbar's tomb – and raised on a tall plinth, hosting numerous cenotaphs (Parodi 2001b, 100). Unlike the Tomb of the Queens however, Akbar's rooftop-courtyard is completely made of white marble. Previously, white marble had been reserved for the shrines of saints, but as the distinction between Mughal royalty and saints had been progressively blurred, the white marble crowning Humayun's tomb in the shape of a dome is here reconfigured into a more elaborate crowning structure in the form of a court-yard, set atop four subordinate floors in red sandstone.

Red had originally been reserved for the Mughal imperial tent (Andrews 2009, 914, 938, 944, 952, 982–3), but gained an integrative faculty in the red sandstone's absorbing of "stylistic clashes between the various building traditions that were brought together in the grat Akbari architectural synthesis," and it therefore came to express "imperial unification" (Koch 1991, 43; Koch 2002b, 28–9). The "hierarchically graded colour dualism" of red sandstone and white marble had become a distinctive feature of Mughal architecture under Akbar. Its juxtaposition with white marble symbolized the composite nature of ruler and saint, but in doing so it effectively coopted not only Sufic, but also ancient Hindu ideas concerning art and building, which "recommended white stones for buildings of Brahmins, the priestly caste, and red ones for those of the kshatriyas, the warrior caste" (Shah 1990, 268, 271): "White, it would seem, is opposed to red as the purity of the Brahmin is opposed to the ruling power of the Kshatriya" (Beck 1969, 559). The positive reaction of the Hindu population to Akbar's symbolic overtures was sufficient to yield criticism from the orthodox Muslim historian Badauni, who castigated Akbar for allowing himself to be

Illustration 30: Shaikh Ahmad Khattri Ganj Baksh's Tomb at Sarkhej, near Ahmadabad in Gujarat. (Photo: Henry Cousens, 1885)

conflated with “Rama, Krishna and other infidel Kings” (Badauni in Koch 2002a, 22).

In both Humayun's and Akbar's tombs, the saintly white assumes an elevated position over the secular red, giving added emphasis to the Emperor's sanctification. In addition to the white marble courtyard crowning the actual tomb, the four monumental minarets on top of the main gateway, ostensibly are also made of white marble. These prefigure their more famous counterparts at the Taj Mahal, where the contemporary historian Lahawri described the four minarets as the four Awtad, the four terrestrial "poles" in the Sufi hierarchy of saints (Begley 1979, 20).

The perforated marble screens and the multi-colored flooring of the rooftop courtyard are similar to another Gujarati tomb, that of Sufi Shaikh Ahmad Khattu in Sarkhej, built by the Sultans of Gujarat at the site of their palace – in yet another example of the merging of the saintly and secular in the architecture of a regional king. At any rate, that tomb had already served as an “important model for the palace located at the site of a Chishti khanqah (simple structure for religious discussion and sleeping) that Akbar was building at Fatehpur Sikri between 1570 and 1585” (Asher 2004, 164). That the tomb at Sarkhej was

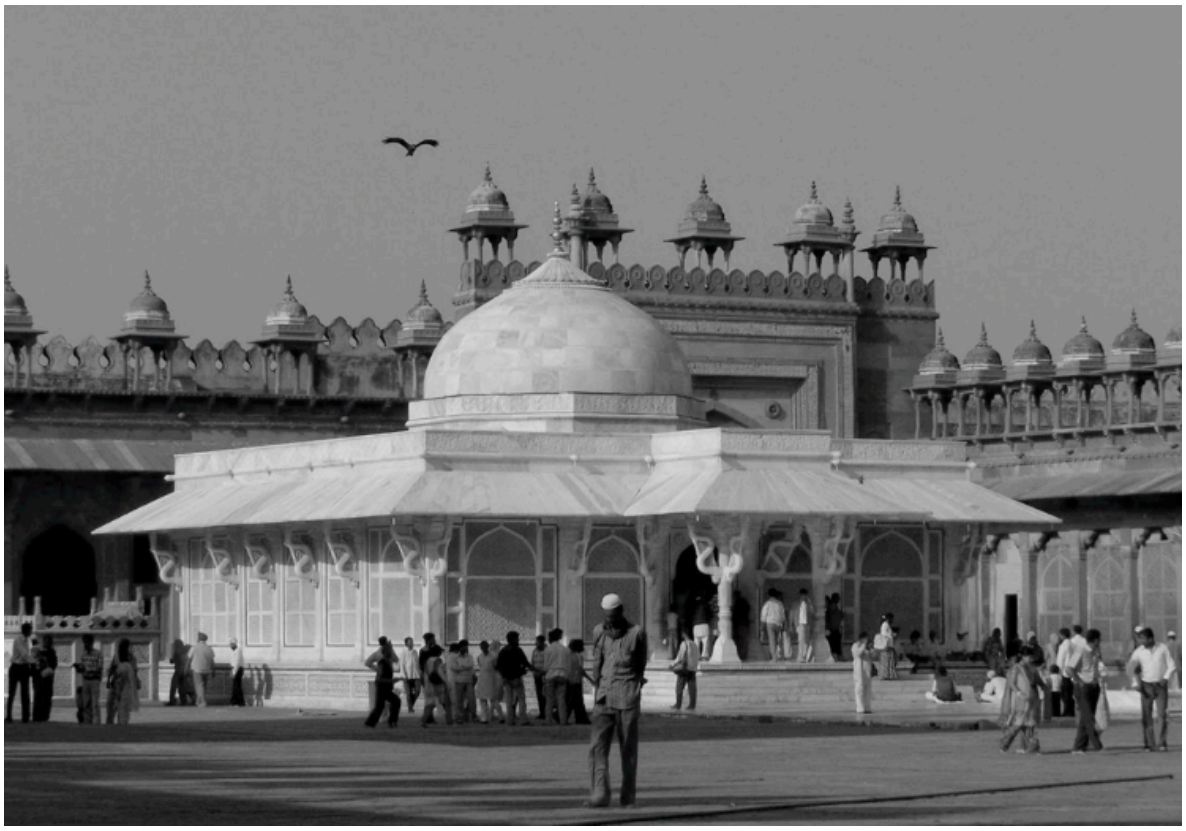


Illustration 31: Tomb of Salim Chishti, Fatehpur Sikri. (Photo: Larry Speck, 2012)

still considered an important prototype can also be seen in the tomb of Mirza Aziz Koka which is modeled on it: “The links with Sarkhej are not accidental, for Mirza Aziz Koka served several times as Jahangir's governor of Gujarat. He died there and was temporarily buried at Sarkhej” (Asher 1992, 142).

The crossover from the strictly sacred to wider, including secular uses for the khanqah was already taking place at Fatehpur Sikri, as the courtyard that had traditionally served as a shaikh’s khanqah was used as a model for the building of a rather more versatile dargah, in Persian 'palace', “but in the Indian context the structural tomb built over the grave of a major saint and its surrounding complex.” (Asher 1992, 28) Akbar's attachment to the Chishti saints played a defining role in the development of his religious views, but also provided his imperial charisma a saintly aura. His pilgrimages to the shrine of Shaikh Mu'inuddin Chishti at Ajmer acquired the character of public acts. (Koch 2001a, 176)

The year Jahangir was born (1569), Akbar commenced construction at the Chishti khanqah in Sikri as a sign of his esteem for the Chishti saint Shaikh Salim, who had

predicted the birth of his son, and shifted his capital from Agra to the new imperial capital which he erected here. Situated on the highest place on the ridge, the khanqah is the site's focal point. Notably, the religious compound also contains the tomb of Shaikh Salim Chishti, made entirely of white marble. Twenty years earlier, the tomb of Nizamuddin Chishti near Humayun's tomb in Delhi had already been renewed in white marble. At the tomb of Salim Chishti, the translucent marble, “a fabric that absorbs and reflects light” functions as a metaphor for God, here a “reference to the divine, … [i.e.] the divine as manifested by light.” (Asher 2004, 167) The “exquisitely carved serpentine brackets of Mandu, Gujarat and Chanderi traditions” that grace Chisti's tomb, are “supported by deep eaves (chajja) that encircle the entire tomb,” a feature reflected in the deep inward-facing eaves of the rooftop courtyard at Akbar's tomb, which provide shade for the carved Sufic verses extolling Akbar's illuminated kingship.

The Mughals' interest in the communicative power of light in tomb architecture was already apparent in Humayun's tomb, where the mihrab, that is the interior prayer niche, is composed of carved screens allowing for the entrance of light. It has been suggested that “any Muslim would immediately recognize the visual reference to the famous chapter, Nur, or Light, in the Quran, where God’s presence is likened to a light in a niche” (Asher 2004, 158). The symbolism of the Mughal emperor's light-filled, sacred status finds its epitome in the luminous qualities of the white marble courtyard crowning Akbar's tomb, whose khanqah-like design could be a more general reference to saintly tombs (and sanctified palaces) of Sikri, Delhi Ajmer, and especially Gujerat, aimed at underlining the emperor’s supernatural charisma; and the dynasty's own pretensions to sainthood.

The Chishti Prophecy

Akbar took the throne at twelve, and although he was at first controlled by nobles, by 1560 he was an independent thinker, and as early as 1562 showed an interest in Sufism, especially that of the Chishtiyya order, revered by Hindus and Muslims alike. After the death of the legendary Chishti Nizamuddin Auliya in 1325, verses were produced to the effect that “Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Magians crowned their heads with the dust of the door of his tomb” (Mir Khurd 1985, 155).

The associations of rulers with Sufis and vice versa was not new. Back in their ancestral domains Babur did not believe he could take Samarqand without the support from the saintly Khwaja Qazi and urban notables, who drew their status from an association with regional Sufi orders (Moin 2012, 71).

At the rival court of the Safavids, the Sufi order of the Nimatullahis was able to prove that their founder had foretold "the rise of the Safavids as the expected messianic order." This meant that the order maintained control of their their major shrine complex, that its members were promoted to high-ranking positions within the imperial religious administration, married into the imperial household, and even gave them influence over dynastic politics (Aubin 1982, 7–8; Moin 2012, 83).

The story of the Chishti's success as a Sufi order in India and their alliance with the Mughals is well known (Richards 1998; Currie 1989). Early in his reign, long before he had found and articulated his own religious talents, Akbar already became beholden to the Chishtis. Being at the time still without a son and successor, he requested the Shaykh Salim to intercede with the heavens on his behalf. As Babur's prayers had once been granted to ensure the survival of his heir, so now the Sufi Shaykh's supplications seemed to have been heard, for soon a son was born, fittingly named Prince Salim (the future Jahangir), to honor the service and strengthen the bond with the saint who predicted and hosted his birth. Akbar gave Salim the nickname Shaykhu Baba (Little Shaykh), so that from the very beginning the future Jahangir was was part Timurid, part Rajput (on account of his Hindu mother), and part Chishti, "with the body of a king and the soul of a saint" (Moin 2012, 169). Akbar then went even further, moving his capital from Agra to the site of the Chishti khanqah in Sikri, naming it Fatehpur Sikri (City of Victory). During the remaining decades of Akbar's reign, the order grew into a "key spiritual and political ally of the dynasty" (Moin 2012, 168–9) and proclaimed him "Caliph of the Age," casting Akbar in the role of a divinely-inspired saintly sovereign. (Alam 2009, 166; Alam 2011, 148)

That the relationship between the Chishti saints and Mughal emperors changed from one of patronage and mutual support to one where the dynastic quality of the Mughal emperors subsumed that of the Sufi lineage, can be seen in the twin paintings depicting separate portraits of Muinuddin Chishti and Jahangir, facing each other. Usually Jahangir's

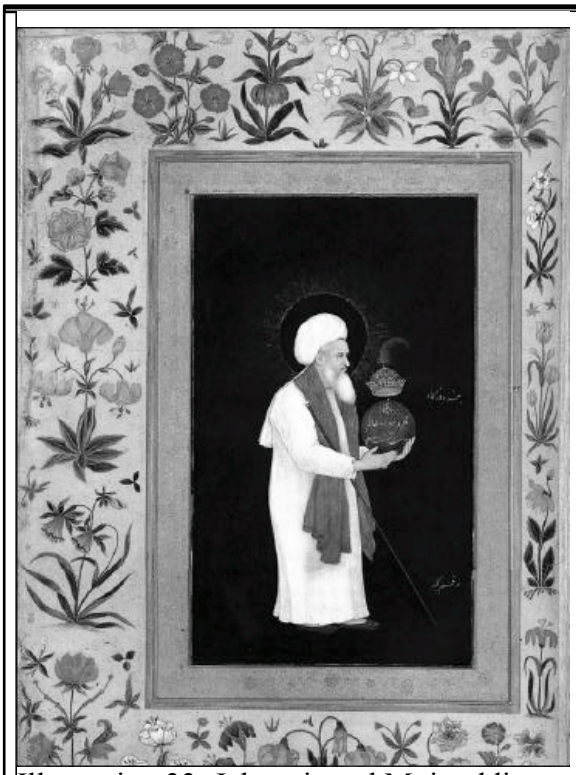


Illustration 33: Jahangir and Muinuddin Chishti holding globes, first of 2 folios. By Bichitr (c. 1620)

Illustration 32: Jahangir and Muinuddin Chishti holding globes, second of 2 folios.

interactions with holy men depicted actual encounters with Sufis (Jahangir 1999, 252, 312), but in this case the saint had lived five centuries before Jahangir, and the meeting is symbolic.

> It is notable that in these paintings the saint and the monarch do not appear on the same page. This compositional technique serves to avoid the question of hierarchy. Both sovereigns are rendered independently, each master of his domain. That they are equivalent figures is also indicated by how they appear suspended in a similar sacred space, silhouette against a solemn darkness pierced only by the light of the respective halos. Finally, what the saint offers Jahangir is not a prayer of token of grace. Rather, it is a key to the mastery of two worlds, the material and the
>
> spiritual. The word used to explain this transaction, musallam, means to entrust, to give custody, to give up possession, to make whole. It coveys a sense of permanency. Thus, the most eminent Sufi saint of India gives up his position as a master of two worlds to Jahangir. In essence, this pair of images does not merely

> depict a Sufi blessing a king. Rather, it constitutes and act of succession from Muinuddin Chishti to Jahangir: the substitution of one saintly being by another (Moin 2012, 192).

The author of this passage goes on to observe that these artistic techniques were later used to depict the transferal of dynastic legitimacy from Timur to his Mughal successors (Moin 2012, 192; Milo C. Beach, Koch, and Thackston 1997, 26–7), a matter that will be taken up in the third chapter.

The Mughal ambition of embodying regionally shared conceptions of the sacred and establishing themselves as a legitimate spiritual force on the subcontinent, did not end with their alliance with the Chishtis, but formed attachments to other mystics to complement their sacred persona.

The Shattari Promise

In the previous chapter it was observed that one of the most striking prototypes for Akbar's tomb was that of Shaykh Muhammad Ghaus Shattari (d. 1562) at Gwalior. That monument's two-story stepped terrace structure is marked by a composition of domed pentagonal and square pavilions (chatris), and incorporates deep eaves and horizontal-beams to produce an amalgamation of regional styles worthy of Akbari architecture. The geography of Gwalior, a fort city at a short distance south of Agra, does not in itself present a clear answer to reasons for the possible use of this prototype. The question may therefore fairly be posed, who was Shaykh Muhammad Ghaus Shattari and what reason could there have existed for a reference to his tomb?

The final entry in Babur's autobiography, noted down shortly before he died, reports a visit from the Shaykh Muhammad Ghaus of Gwalior, the place of the Sufi's residence and ministration (Babur 1996, 807). Babur apparently had great esteem for the holy man's counsel, which helped him prevent the Gwalior fort from falling into hostile Afghan possession. The Sufi had previously provided Babur with the kind of assistance the nascent Mughal had lacked years earlier when trying to take Samarqand. As the attacking Mughals tried to broker a deal with the occupying forces, Muhammad Ghaus, who was within the fort, of his own accord smuggled a secret message alerting the Mughals of the enemy's

deceptive plans. This allowed them to take the fort. Babur remembers the event with a description of the Sufi as a "dervish-like man, not only very learned but with a large following of students and disciples" (Babur 1996, 653).

At an early age, Muhammad Ghaus had retreated into the Himalayan mountains for a life of contemplation and fasting, stretched over twelve years (Kugle 2003). At this time, he composed a work that would remain an important Sufi manual throughout South, Central and Western Asia and would include an extended discourse on astrology and ways of harnessing its powers (Ernst 2009). His title, Ghaus (helper, provider of spiritual assistance) was reserved for the axial saint of the age, a prophetic figure with the ability to secure God's succour for his followers, demonstrated by an extraordinary display of sanctity in 1526: a miraculous, Prophet-like ascension to heaven, mirroring Babur's concurrent ascension of the Mughal throne (Kugle 2003, 25; Moin 2012, 103).

The Mughal task of forging regional alliances and articulating a new imperial and saintly identity with widespread appeal, required local intermediaries like Muhammad Ghaus, "whose claims to universal sacrality were firmly grounded in local social structures and the knowledges and memories they sustained" (Moin 2012, 105). Besides his role as a Sufi, Muhammad Ghaus was a scholar of both Islamic and Hindu learned traditions, who served as Humayun's teacher (Yasin 1988, 42). His work was distinguished by translations of Sanskrit texts from the Arabic into Persian, the integrative drawing on astrological knowledge from all these traditions, and his syncretistic use of "yogic formulas in his text on the invocation of 'divine names'" (Ernst 2005, 14–43; Moin 2012, 105).

In spite of the mutual affinities and shared interests of the early Mughal emperors and the Shattari Sufi order, it is said that when Muhammad Ghaus returned to the Mughal court in the reign of Akbar, he did not retain his previous standing and that by the 1590s "the political and spiritual landscape had changed so much that the Shattari brothers were given but brief mentions and ridiculed by Akbar's chroniclers as magicians and sellers of sainthood" (Abu'l-Fazl 1993, 1:642; Moin 2012, 104). Other reports, even by the same chronicler, indicate that Akbar continued to attach considerable importance to the Shattaris. Such was his fascination with Shaykh Ghaus's famous bulls and cows, that when the Sufi returned from his exile in Gujarat, Akbar travelled to Gwalior to see them (Abu'l-Fazl

Illustration 34: A mohur from Jahangir's reign depicting a bull superimposed on the sun. Agra mint. (1618/19).

1993, 1:641–2). Akbar had taken measures to restrict the slaughter of cows to accommodate sensitivities of the Hindu population, going even so far as to become a vegetarian in his final years. Following initial flirtations with the more orthodox factions at court upon taking the throne, Jahangir soon followed his fathers example not only in preserving the Din-i Ilahi religious order, with its focus on the Mughal emperor as the earthly embodiment of his celestial counterpart, the sun, but also by extending accommodative religious policies such as those protecting cows and bulls, sacred to the Hindus.

When one considers Jahangir's elaboration of the emperor's image as the millennial messiah, as the astrologically auspicious second coming of Timur, who had himself been titled the Lord of (a planetary) Conjunction – a subject discussed in more detail in the next chapter – the relevance of Shaykh Ghaus's ideas and social significance becomes more apparent. The Sufi drew universal sacred authority from a skillful fusion of a variety of sacred traditions including Arabic and subcontinental astrology and claimed that by enlisting the favor of the planets, he could make a person "the guide and messiah of his age." This was a promise most likely made to his pupil Humanyun (Moin 2012, 109), and one in which Akbar and Jahangir, as heirs to Timur's kingly aura and earthly counterparts to the sun and moon in their own right, would have taken an even more intense interest.

To the Sufi saintly connotations, which meet the eye at Akbar's tomb, another can be added. The Timurid shrine at Gazurgah, whose possible function as a prototype for the vestibule at Akbar's tomb was discussed in the first chapter, piques one's curiosity for the

Illustration 35: Tomb of Khwaja Abdullah Ansari, Herat. (Photo: Sven Dirks, 2004)

added reason that its occupant is a famous Sufi mystic and saint, known as the Pir (Sufi guide) of Herat. The reference to the tomb of such a person is unlikely to have been coincidental, or limited merely to its symbolic territorial connotations, to which the discussion was limited in the first chapter.

The Ansari Advice

A direct link between either Akbar or Jahangir and Khwaja Abdullah Ansari, the famous Sufi of eleventh century Herat, is not immediately obvious. However, we do know that Ansari was revered by the Timurids and that the tomb enclosing his grave was commissioned by Timur's son, Shahrukh Mirza, more than three hundred years after the Sufi's death. Shahrukh Mirza ruled what remained of the Timurid Empire in Persia and Transoxania and established his capital in Herat, which would become the region's political and cultural epicenter, along with Samarqand. Indeed, of all the Sufi shrines the Timurids partonized over the course of the fifteenth century, “none was accorded the attention lavished on the Ansari shrine” in Herat (M. Subtelny 2007, 203). The Timurid Sultan-Hussain, who ruled Herat during the second half of fifteenth century, even sought to appropriate Abdullah Ansari's sacred aura by building a plinth upon which he set cenotaphs of his male relatives, and even claimed to be a descendant of the Sufi himself (Golombek 1969, 7:85; M. Subtelny 2007, 203).

The Mughals inherited this attachment to the city and its dynastic and sacred connotations:

> Herat, beloved capital of Timur's son and successor Shahrukh, with its origins in ancient Persian culture, its rich dynastic history and monuments to Timurid glory, its gardens resonant with poetry and the sophisticated banter of the age's greatest intellects and artists, would remain for Babur – along with Timur's capital city of Samarqand – a symbol of Timurid imperial culture and grandeur at its most admirable pinnacle. It is no wonder that in the decades after Shaibani Khan's conquest Babur would remember the great cities of Timurid Transoxania with such nostalgia-heightened detail and remain unforgiving in his condemnation of the ineffectual response of the extended Timurid dynasty (Balabanlilar 2012, 21).

When Babur in his autobiography describes his impressions of Herat and lists its most important sites, Ansari's tomb is the first to be mentioned (Babur 1996, 305; Golombek 1969, 7:84).

However, the fame of Ansari's shrine did not have to wait for Babur's conquest of Hindustan to reach the Gangetic Plain. Fittingly, news of its miraculous properties had been transmitted by a Sufi saint in his own right, for the shrine had been the place visited by Muinuddin Chishti shortly before the fateful dream in which the Prophet appeared to him and "sent him to India to convert non-believers" (Suvorova 2004, 1:1:62). It is only fitting that the so-called Gilded Room, after which the vestibule at Akbar's tomb may have been styled, was built for use as a khanqah, the place where the Sufi Pir would congregate with and offer guidance to his disciples (Golombek 1969, 7:7:87) – a recurring crossing of pastoral and sepulchral functions.

The Pir's descendants were prominently represented at Akbar's court. One of them, Nizamuddin Ahmad (d. 1594), was a historian and wrote the famous History of Emperor Akbar (!abakat-i Akbarshahi). His father had been Babur's major-domo, while Nizamuddin eventually made it to the post of Bakshi, overseeing the military and intelligence of the empire at large (Ansari 2003, 391). That the Pir of Herat may have had a special place with Akbar is suggested by one of the earliest extant Mughal paintings, and probably the earliest one depicting Akbar, still as young prince. It was probably painted in Kabul, the

Illustration 36: A Young Prince Riding. Mughal workshop, reign of Humayun, c. 1550-55.

gateway to the Mughals' ancestral lands, during a period of uncertainty for the future of the Mughal dynasty, between Humayun's return from the Safavid court in 1549 and his son's accession to the throne in 1556. Produced in the style of Bukhara, archaic in comparison to the Mughal refinements of subsequent decades, the image nonetheless bears a Mughal-style face. The reason for this is that the old painting for whatever reason must have been preserved well into the 1560s when the face was updated to reflect the new, contemporary style – and self-image of the emperor. (Seyller 1994, 69–76) In the image, Akbar is mounted on a horse, wearing a turban in the style of his father. His status is confirmed by the book in his hand, revealing an inscription referring to auspicious planetary conjunction and sanctification of his impending rule: “May the world grant you success and the celestial sphere befriend you. May the world-creator protect and preserve you.” Humayun is passing on the dynastic torch, but not without a warning, in the writing above and below the image: “I’ll give you some good advice. Listen and do not make excuses. Accept whatever the

Illustration 37: Drawing of Akbar. Mughal workshop, c. 1595

compassionate advisor tells you." (Seyller 2001, 145)

The preservation of his dynastic token indicates that Akbar may have held it particularly close to his heart, as only a handful of similar images survive. That it was subsequently retouched, shows that it received preference in a busy imperial workshop, where commissions abounded. The advisor Humayun refers to, is no other than the Khwaja Abdullah Ansari. The backside of the folio bears the following fine example of Nasta'liq calligraphy: "The Pir of Herat says: 'Make the most of your life, and know that obedience to God is a golden opportunity. Whoever makes ten good qualities [of the Prophet] his watchword has done his job in this life and the next.'" (Seyller 2001, 145). On the eve of a last hurrah to redeem Mughal imperial ambitions in Hindustan, sacred dynastic sovereignty is here transmitted from emperor father to future-emperor son, through the wisdom of a

longstanding Timurid favorite, the Saint and Pir of their erstwhile cultural capital. If Akbar cherished this gift, and admired Abdullah Ansari, is only fitting that the vestibule Jahangir had built at Akbar's tomb, should celebrate this sanctified transmission from father to son.

Akbar as a Living Saint

Akbar ultimately did begin casting himself as a saint; a Pir, or spiritual guide in Sufic tradition, and his closest nobles as murids, or students. His private sect, known as Din-i-Illahi, fused symbolism of the the Sufi saints discussed above with Jain, Zoroastrian and Hindu concepts of worship, especially darshan (auspicious sight), as well as concepts of divine illumination as set forth by the Iranian philosopher and mystic Shihab al-Din Yaya Suhrawardi in the twelfth century, and introduced to the Mughal court by Persian scholars. The most influential among these was Abu'l-Fazl, Akbar's chief ideologue, who wrote the following:

> Royalty is a light emanating from God, and a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the universe. Modern language calls this light farr-i izad-i (the divine light), and the tongue of antiquity called it kiyan khura (the sublime halo). It is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of anyone, and men, in the presence of it, bend the forehead of praise towards the ground of submission.(Abu'l-Fazl 1993, 1:3)

Akbar "even went so far as to pray to the sun, as his heavenly counter part," (Koch 2002a, 14) and adopted the custom, later carried on as part of dynastic ceremonial by Jahangir, who even named himself Nuruddin (Light of Religion), of presenting himself to the public at the jharoka-i darshan, the public viewing balcony or throne, in the role of a Pir-i Zinda , or Living Saint, full of God's light. It comes as no surprise, that the red sandstone jharoka-i darshan at Fatehpur Sikri was replaced at his new capital at Agra with one made of white marble, reflecting his saintly status. As the emperor stood framed by the jharoka-i darshan that overlooked the river Jamuna, his gaze emanating from above assured the multitudes gathered below of his continuing existence, without which they feared the universe might collapse, while their upward gaze convinced him of the adoring devotion of his subjects. (Necipo!lu 1993, 211) Disciples of the Saint-King within the Din-i Ilahi were given a seal

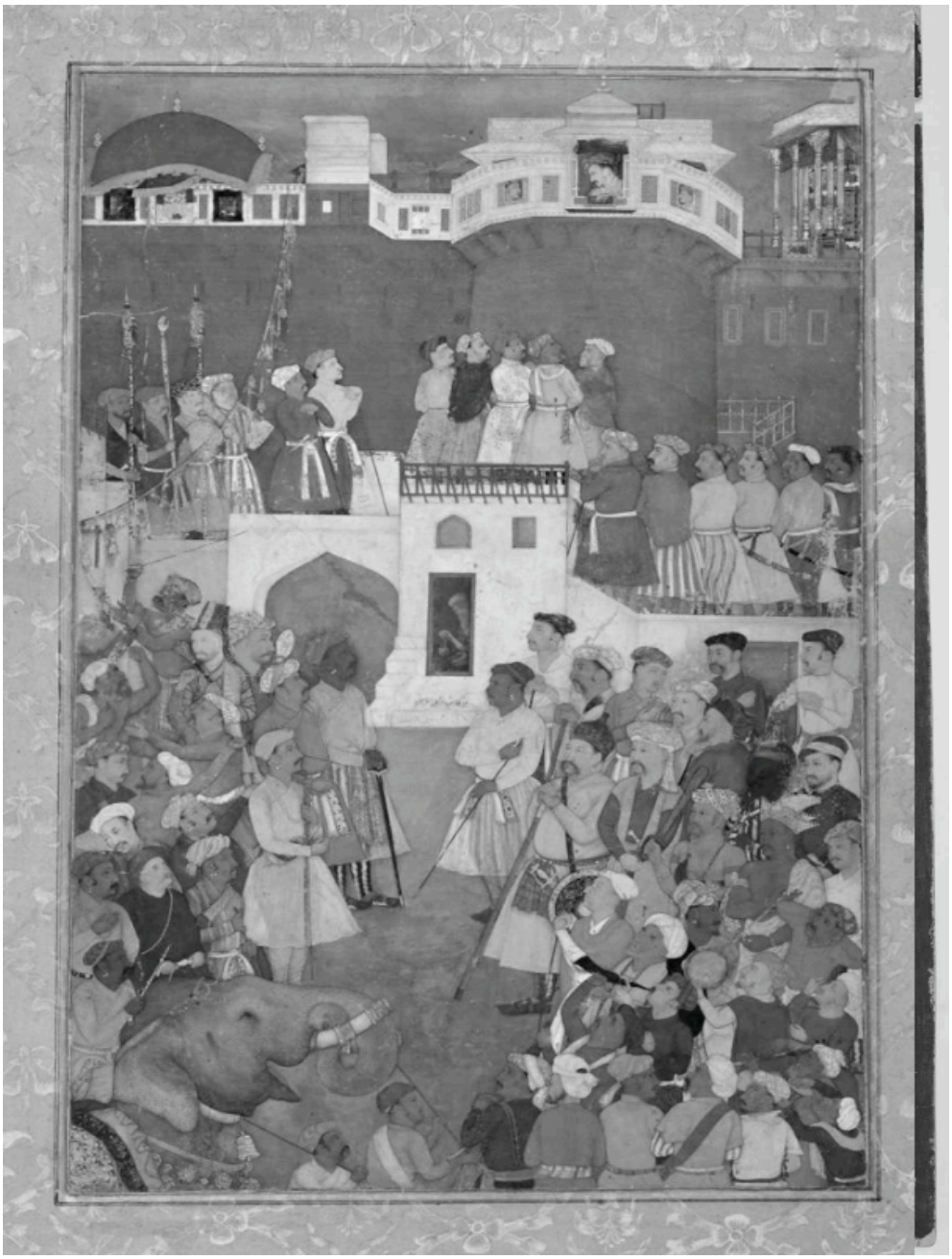


Illustration 38: Jahangir at the Jharoka window in Agra Fort. Mughal studio, c.1620

with the emperor's image and bore the inscription of “that 'greatest of names' and 'holiest of talismans', 'Allah Akbar,'” an iconic greeting and “key emblem” for the disciples. (Abu’l-Fazl 1997, 160; Moin 2012, 143)

The Mughal embodiment of the sacred idiom of Hindustan shows that the Timurids

maintained control over their new empire in ways similar to those they had adopted in their ancestral homelands, directed here at existing systems of saintly authority and coopting regional ritual knowledge. While in Transoxania they had established a mutually beneficial relaitonship with the Naqshbandi Sufis, and thereafter for a short while one of subjection with the Sufi kings of Iran, in Hindustan they worked together with powerful Sufi dynasties such as the Chishtis, and Shattaris, while maintaining links with erstwhile attachments such of Khwaja Abdullah Ansari. This allowed them to garner political and spiritual legitimacy in their new domains, and ultimately, to assume the role of saintly guides themselves.

At Akbar's tomb, the styling of the Mughal imperial tomb as the shrine of a saint, or Pir, which emerges from the ceremonial surrounding Humayun's tomb, receives explicit visual recognition in references to the tombs of established networks of Sufic spiritual authority, including the white marble khanqah that crowns Akbar's tomb. Its 'open roof' corresponds to the orthodox Islamic injunction against erecting structures over graves, but only partly so, as the real grave lies in a central domed chamber on the ground floor. Rather, the design of the structure appears to symbolise a connection to the saintly tomb architecture that developed in various parts of north India from the simple courtyard where the spiritual leader would guide his murids, as indeed Akbar had sought to do during his lifetime.

The emperor's cenotaph lies exposed to the sun, moon and stars, the true objects of his worship. Fittingly, the cenotaph bears the inscriptions Allahu-Akbar and Jalle Jalalhu, which correspond to the modes of salutaiton under Akbar’s Din-i-Ilahi, but would also have been chanted by the subjects receiving darshan under his jharoka. The latter is echoed by the luminous quality of the courtyard's white marble, reflecting Akbar's own light-filled status as Pir-i Zinda, beaming over the approaching visitor from up on high, as if to grant him the auspicious sight of the light of God. By combining these elements and giving them new meaning, Jahangir and his architects thus translated religious experience into material form for the purpose of ceremonial dynastic commemoration of the deceased emperor. The adaptation of these iconographies allows Akbar to maintain an earthly presence in the form of the tomb, a lithic representation of the ruler as living saint, who can receive and reward envoys and pilgrims, even in death.

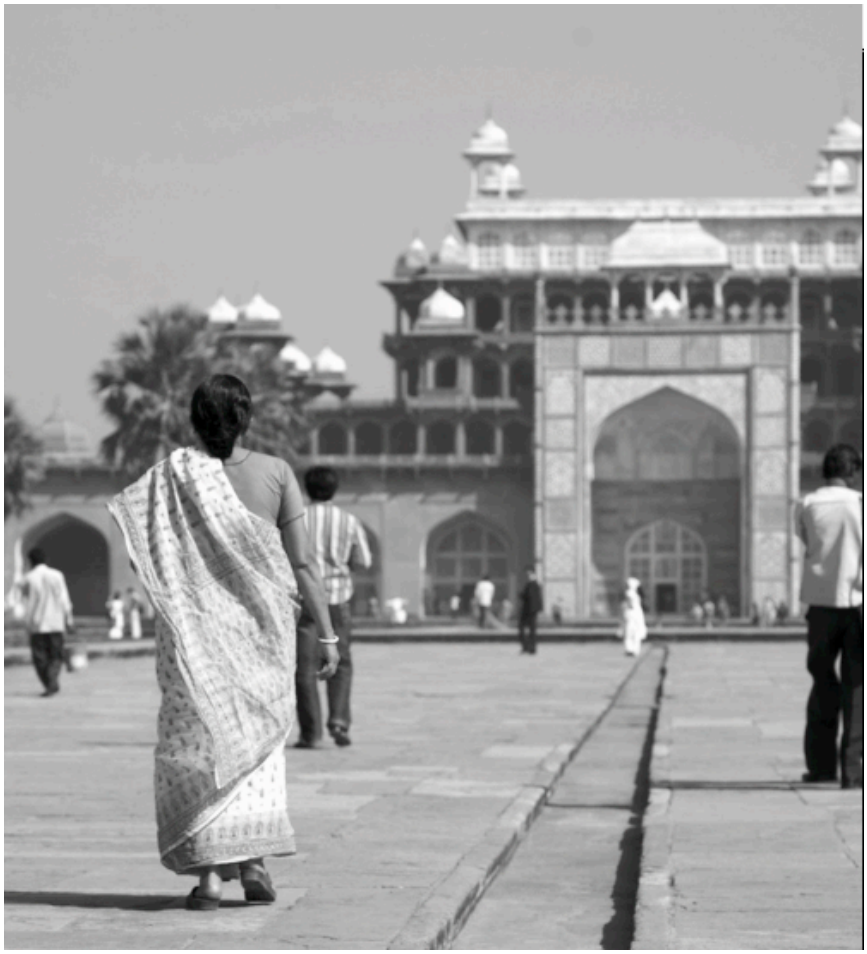


Illustration 39: Approaching Akbar's tomb from the South Gateway. (Photo: Andrew Turner, 2010)

This interpretation, however, fails to encompass the reported Christian iconography at the heart of the tomb. Showing its role in the unified semantic program of the tomb is a task taken up in the final chapter.

Chapter Three: Lord of Conjunction and Messiah

The Christian Paintings of Sikandra

European visitors during Shah Jahan's reign report that adorning the walls of this central space, watching over the grave of what was perhaps the most illustrious Islamic ruler of the early-modern world, were painted Christian subjects including the Virgin Mary, the infant Jesus, a crucifix, as well as angels and a Jesuit identified as St. Ignatius de Loyola. (Manucci 1907, 141, 419; Maclagan 1972, 237–8) In 1641 the Spanish priest Fra Sebastian Manrique gave a first-hand account of the interior of the portico as "covered from the summit of the dome to the base with cunning paintings, the most remarkable being one of the Virgin" (Manrique 1967, 168; Maclagan 1972, 237–8).

These and other murals at the tomb were later whitewashed by Akbar's great-grandson Aurangzeb (r.1658-1707) on account of their idolatry (Asher 1992, 108), and thus have hitherto received limited attention. Murals of Christian subjects at various buildings had been observed by a series of European visitors including the Jesuit Jerome Xavier, the British traveller William Finch, British Ambassador to the court of Jahangir Sir Thomas Roe and the French traveller Jean de Thevenot. (Maclagan 1972, 237–40; Foster 1968, 168; Roe 1993, 211)

Some Mughal wall-paintings have survived, albeit in less than pristine state, into our day. From the reign of Akbar, there are for example wall-paintings remaining at Maryam's House at Fatehpur Sikri and from the reign of Jahangir there are, among others, those at Nur Jahan's Pavilion in the Ram Bagh at Agra, the western gateway of the Arab sarai near the shrine of Nizamuddin Chishti in Delhi, as well as paintings at the Kala Burj in the Lahore Fort, and the tomb of Sultan Khusrau at Allahabad (Smith 1973, 3; Koch 1986; Asher 1992; Koch 1983; Milo Cleveland Beach 1992a). Incidentally, both Lahore and Allahabad served as major centers of Jahangir's artistic endeavors of Prince Salim (future Jahangir), as he developed a veritable obsession with European Christian art.

Notably, the only preserved wall paintings with European-Chrsitian influences have been dated – based on the vault's design, Jahangir's comments in his autobiography and

Illustration 40: Jahangir presents Prince Khurram (future Shah Jahan) with a turban ornamnent, illustration from the Padshahnama, (c.1630-40) Images of Jesus and Mary adorn Jahangir's throne.

comments by English traveller William Finch – between 1605 and 1611 (Jahangir 1909, 183; Purchas 1905, 53–6; Koch 2001b, 19; Lefèvre 2007, 458). This very closely corresponds to the construction of Akbar's tomb between 1605 and 1613. Finch's account is remarkably accurate in its description of the surviving murals (Parodi 2001a, 136; Koch 1983, 33), but it also includes mention of Christian paintings no longer preserved, which are supposed to have flanked the emperor's throne (Subrahmanyam 1997, 738–9), and closely echo the descriptions of the wall-paintings at Akbar's tomb: “On the right-hand of the King over the doore is the picture of our Saviour; opposite on this left-hand, of the Virgin Mary.” (Purchas 1905, 163).

These types of wall-paintings are also recorded in the Mughals' own paintings of court scenes, where Chrisitian themes can be observed on the walls. A miniature from around 1617 shows Nur Jahan receiving Jahangir and Shah Jahan at a pavilion, bearing the images of Jesus and the Virgin (Das 1986, pl. X). The Windsor Castle manuscript of the Padshahnama contains three paintings showing murals of Christ and the Virgin adorning Jahangir's throne (Milo C. Beach, Koch, and Thackston 1997, pls. 38, 39, 44). Notably, these are not present in the paintings depicting Shah Jahan's own throne. This means that by the time of his reign, Christian subjects in court scenes were something associated specifically with the bygone era of his father, Jahangir. It also shows that a point was made to depict this dimension of Jahangir's emblematic kingship in a work dedicated to glorify

Shah Jahan as Mughal emperor.

As concerns the reported inclusion of a Jesuit among the subjects portrayed at Akbar's grave, such a depiction would not be entirely without precedent in the Mughal context, as:

> The integration of Jesuits into New Testament scenes by Mughal painters was certainly favored at the court. In a letter from 1608, Father Jerome noted that Jahangir had had a picture painted on a wall near the public audience hall in Agra showing jesus Christ together with a Jesuit holding a book in one hand. … For the Mughals, a Jesuit was synonymous with a teacher; this apparently explains why John the Baptist [in a Mughal miniature] is dressed in the Jesuits' customary black attire, including the hat. (Carvalho and Thackston 2011, 2011:55, 96)

To form an understanding of why these subjects may have been given such a central role in Akbar's tomb, the occurrence of Christian subjects in the Mughal context must first be considered more broadly.

Christian Art at the Mughal Court

The second half of the 16 th century saw a series of Jesuit missions to the Mughal court. By their own accounts, they started off with much aplomb, with the Mughal emperor forever on the verge of converting. In the absence of a proper counterweight in Mughal chronicles, the Jesuit accounts for a long time were given free reign in the interpretation of this question. The evidence for a religious basis for the Mughal interest in depicting Christian subjects was sought in Akbar's and Jahangir's profound interest in other religions, which were the subject of regular debates at court, featuring representatives of every imaginable creed. Yet the thing that most confused the Jesuits was the emperors' taste for and in the case of Jahangir a veritable obsession with European paintings, and a particular attachment to the Virgin Mary.

Akbar and Jahangir kept paintings of the virgin and Christ on the inner walls of some palaces and chambers, but also in his private chambers, apparently even to be exhibited at his jharoka, or public viewing window. Mughal art included even carved images such as that of “Christ on the cross with two thieves hanging on either side” (Flores and Vassallo e Silva 2004, 165), as well as statues in ivory, of which a Virgin and Child from around 1600 has been preserved (Vassallo e Silva 2010, 119–22). It is not unthinkable that this is the

Illustration 42: Father Jerome Xavier and Emperor Akbar in an Interfaith Debate. In Cornelius Hazart, S.J., Kerkelycke Historie vande Gheheele Wereldt, (Antwerp, 1667-71)

ivory copy of an “image of the little infant Jesus” that Prince Salim (future Jahangir) is said to have ordered to be made after seeing it in the Jesuits' chapel (Carvalho and Thackston 2011, 2011:53).

Why, the Jesuits may have wondered, if the Mughal emperors were able to recognize the sacred nature of these images, did they not convert? And conversely, if they did not care for their sacred nature, why did they surround themselves with these images? After all, the artistic dimension of the Mughal interest did not stand in isolation. In 1602, Akbar issued a decree “extending imperial protection to all those, who, following their 'own free will,

should become Christian'" (Carvalho and Thackston 2011, 2011:3). And in that same year, he was presented with a Life of Christ ("The Mirror of Holiness") which he had commissioned, and which was co-written especially for him by the Jesuit Jerome Xavier and the distinguished Mughal scribe Abdus Sattar, who had been instructed to learn Latin and gain expertise in the Christian doctrine to act as a go-between in the debates held at court (Alam and Subrahmanyam 2009; Carvalho and Thackston 2011). These interests notwithstanding, there is no indication that the Mughals considered themselves in any way Christians, or that the visual appropriation of Christian subjects had religious reasons.

The reaction in later historiography has been to explain this use in formal or aesthetic terms, dismissing the importance of any meaning the images conveyed. It is argued that "it was not the narrative content of the images that the Jesuits brought with them which accounted for their success, but their formal innovation"(Subrahmanyam 2010, 13). The view that Mughal depictions of Christian subjects had no religious, but merely a formal function is not new. As far back as 1839 it was observed that "some have concluded that he [Akbar] died a Christian, from the circumstance of the images of the Virgin Mary and Ignatius being found in his mausoleum: but the more probable conjecture is, that they were placed there, as European curiosities, to decorate the tomb, without regard to the persons represented, or as any intimation of what religion he died (Hough 1860, 2:284). Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that the interest in Christian subjects spans several decades and is expressed in widely varying modes, in many cases not attributable to formal innovation alone, and often revealing the Mughal emperor's intense attachment to the identity of those depicted and the images' iconic powers.

A copy of the Salus Populi Romani, an iconic painting of the Virgin with the Infant Jesus, arrived at Fatehpur Sikri with the first Jesuit mission in 1580 (Du Jarric 1926, 19–20). Numerous reproductions were subsequently painted in the royal studio (Okada 1992, 141; Habsburg 1996, 2:pl.90). Jahangir's interest in this version of the Virgin and Child was undiminished and "after seeing the Salus Populi Romani in the local Jesuit chapel [in 1608], Jahangir ordered his artists to reproduce it 'ao natural' on the wall near 'the veranda where he [showed] himself to the people' … over another [existing] portrait of the Virgin classified in the same document as 'very well done.'" Along with the countless paintings of

Christian subjects he commissioned as Prince Salim in Lahore and Allahabad, Jahangir also had a copy in ivory made of a crucifix that he had seen at a Jesuit chapel in Lahore (Carvalho and Thackston 2011, 2011:50–2).

The unprecedented intensity with which this visual practice was pursued during the final years of Akbar's reign and during that of his successor Jahangir, does not mean that Christian subjects had been unknown to Mughals artists prior to their Jesuit encounter. Not only do many of the Biblical protagonists have a central role in the Quran – "[Mary] is "the only woman identified by name in the Koran" – but even their special visual status is something that "extends back to the period of Muhammad, who, according to Ibn Sa'd and other authors, upon entering the Ka'ba, ordered the destruction of all paintings, except one portraying [Jesus and Mary]" (Arnold 1965, 7; Carvalho and Thackston 2011, 2011:62). The extensive physical descriptions of the facial features of Mary and Jesus, in the Life of Christ commissioned by Akbar, point to his interest in the portraiture and naturalistic depiction of the pair (Carvalho and Thackston 2011).

If Mughal depictions of Christian subjects had assumed a visible role in the emperor's ritual of sacred kingship by virtue of their placement at his public viewing window and above his throne, their place in in the sanctum sanctorum of Akbar's tomb elevates and integrates them into the sacred domain of dynastic commemoration. The question is what this tells us about their function in the context of Mughal imperial identity and more specifically, how do they shape the iconographical program of Akbar's tomb.

The Second Lords of Conjunction

We know that in order to buttress their legitimacy, the Mughal emperors styled themselves as the second Timurs, adopting his astrological concept of Lord of Conjunction, which signifies a savior-conqueror marked by planets, a prophetic Renewer who would inaugurate a new era on earth (Moin 2012, 172). Following both Babur's and Humayun's humiliating subjection to Safavid authority, the Mughals' independent imperial project in Hindustan had to redeem Timurid historical sovereignty, and thus much effort was exerted to appropriate rituals of sacred kingship that drew their strength from local social and religious networks as well as belief systems. These included the Sufi connections discussed in the previous

chapter, but were fused with a powerful revival of Timurid rituals and symbols of kingship that mobilized the illustrious dynastic heritage for the benefit of the Mughal emperor in Hindustan.

To strengthen their imperial claims, the Safavids themselves had fabricated far-fetched accounts that would link them to Timur and allow them to falsely claim his blessing of the Safavid imperial project. This included the forging of an endowment that Timur was to have dedicated to the Safavid family, of which Shah Abbas sent a copy to his Mughal peer Jahangir, "to emphasize the historical connection between the Timurid and Safavid houses" (Balabanlilar 2012, 33).

The Mughals' own Astrologers were put to work to find planetary conjunctions that would corroborate the auspiciousness of Akbar's person, and they did not disappoint. Akbar's crohronicler recorded that upon seeing the horoscope of his newborn son, Humayun "fell a'dancing in exultation and whirled around in ecstatic joy" because the "horoscope of this Light of Fortune [Akbar] was superior, in several respects and by sundry degrees, to that of His Majesty, the Lord of Conjunction [Timur]." (Abu'l-Fazl 1993, 1–2:111) Akbar's would later stake his imperial legitimacy on the invocation of his Timurid origins, designing an imperial seal "on which [were] engraved his sublime titles and the names of his exalted ancestors as far as Amir Timur, the Lord of the (Auspicious) Conjunction." (Abu'l-Fazl 1993, 3:1033; Gallop 1999, 77; Balabanlilar 2012, 50)

Jahangir engaged in similar emblematic assertions of himself as a manifestation of Timurid dynastic sovereignty. It is often speculated that he may have been influenced by his visit to Babur's tomb in his ordering of the reconstruction of Akbar's tomb shortly thereafter, the reason typically cited being the echo in Akbar's tomb of the domeless hazira-style of Babur's grave. However, a second dimension of Jahangir's pilgrimage should be considered. During his visit, Jahangir sought out a favourite site of Babur's on the mountainside overlooking the city, where he had the following words engraved: "The seat of the king, the asylum of the world, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, son of Umar Shaykh Gurgan, may God perpetuate his kingdom, 914 [1508-9)." Next to it, Jahangir "in his passion for lineage" had another platform carved and inscribed with "his own name and that of their [Babur's and Jahangir's] common ancestor, Timur" (Koch 2007, 162).

Jahangir reports on the favourite poem composed for him at his accession to the throne, which accords to him the title of the Second Lord of Conjunction (Timur having been the first):

> King of kings Jahangir, a second Timur
> Sat in justice on the victorious throne
> Success, fortune, victory, pomp and triumph
> Are wrapped around him to serve with joy
> This is the date of his accession,
> When fortune puts its head at the feet of sahib qiran-i sani [Second Sahibqiran].
> (Jahangir 1909, 3)

The inscription on the north front of the South Gateway at Akbar's tomb gives an impression of Akbar's greatness by likening him to a list of the greatest kings of the past. Notably, it begins by calling him "a Sahibqiran [Lord of Auspicious Conjunction]" (Smith 1909, 32). The south front, on the other side of the Gateway, is dedicated to his successor and builder of the tomb, Jahangir. To reach it, one must pass through an octagonal hall which bears a fitting inscription. After extolling the greatness of Akbar, it observes that "when that shadow [Akbar] disappears from the world, another shadow [Jahangir] falls on the world." (Smith 1909, 35) The description of Jahangir on the south front then accords to Jhangir, as Akbar's heir, the concomitant titles, including that of Timur:

> He [Jahangir] possesses the world; he is a Lord of Auspicious Conjunction … in respect of sovereignty and eminence, he is the best of the fortunate dynasty of Sahibqiran [Timur] and Chingez Khan. (Smith 1909, 34)

Thus Jahangir proclaims both his father and himself Lords of Auspicious Conjunction, as if this was a dynastic quality that passed from one Mughal emperor to the next. Nonetheless, he places himself above his father in a line of rulers that trace their origin and legitimacy to two of Asia's greatest conquerors, Timur and Chengis Khan.

Indeed, the Mughals would continue to refer to themselves not as such, but as Silsilah-i Guregen or Guregeniyya, that is "the dynasty of the son-in-law." In this way the Mughals kept the name which defined their identity not only as Timur's descendents, but specifically in terms of Timur's marriage into the family of Chengis Khan (Balabanlilar

Illustration 43: Timur's mausoleum Gur-e Amir, Samarqand

2012, 44–5). Notably, however, the Timurid-Chenggisid connection was believed to predate Timur's wedding to a Chenggisid princes, on account of an ancient, common ancestor.

The Timurid Myth of Origin

Jahangir showed great favor to visitors from Samarqand who could provide information on the the tomb of Timur, more precisely his black nephrite-jade tombstone, where an inscription traced his origins to the Mongol princess Alanquva (Samarqandi 1998, 23). For years, both Jahangir and Shah Jahan would continue to send money for the upkeep of the tomb. What is unique in the inscription is the assertion – in Arabic – about the miraculous birth of Alanquva's son, Timur and Chinggis Khan's common ancestor:

> And no father was known to this glorious ancestor, but his mother was Alanquva. It is said that her character was righteous and chaste, and that “she was not an adulteress” [Quran 19:20]. She conceived her son through a light which came into her from the upper part of a door and “it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man” [Quran 19:17]. And [the light] said that it was one of the sons of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali son of Abu Talib.(Moin 2012, 173)

The Quranic verses used to describe Alanquva's chaste condition, and the miraculous birth of her progeny, not only bear a remarkable similarity to the Biblical Mary's virginal conception, but are in fact taken from the Quranic chapter on Mary, which relates the story of the birth of Jesus (Carvalho and Thackston 2011, 2011:39).

In the Akbar Nama, Akbar's chief ideologue presents Alanquva as having existed for the notable purpose of providing for the birth of Akbar at the right time and place:

> That day [of Alanqoa's conception] … was the beginning of the manifestation of his Majesty [Akbar], the king of kings, who after passing through diverse stages was revealed to the world from the holy womb of her Majesty Miriyam-makani for the accomplishment of things visible and invisible."(Abu'l-Fazl 1993, 1:180)

This dynastic source of legitimacy converges with another sacred force, namely that of the End of the First Millennium of Islam that occurred at the end of the sixteenth century, expected by many to usher in a new era or even the end of the world.

Millenial Sovereigns

Seizing the religiously charged moment of the end of the Islamic Millenium (1591/1592 AD), Akbar styled himself as a prophetic messiah, a Renewer born to usher in a new age. In his court biography, he was portrayed as the final manifestation of the unchanging divine light which had impregnated Alanquva "in the same way it had [impregnated] Mary." After being transmitted through the holy bodies of Akbar's successive Timurid ancestors, "in order to arrive at perfection," the divine light came forth – or rather returned! – in the form of Akbar, at the moment of an auspicious planetary conjunction, sanctified by the climactic arrival of the millennium (Abu'l-Fazl 1993, 1:508–517). Akbar minted imperial millennial coins, debated the concept of Messianism with local and even European counterparts (Subrahmanyam 1997, 748–9), and commissioned a monumental Millennial History (Tarikh-i Alfi). Its account begins with the death of the Prophet and thus "sets up an expectation of a new beginning and a new being, that is, a new cycle of time" (Moin 2012, 134).

> Since the chronicle ended with Akbar, one can surmise that it was the Mughal emperor who had filed this absence and fulfilled this expectation by inaugurating

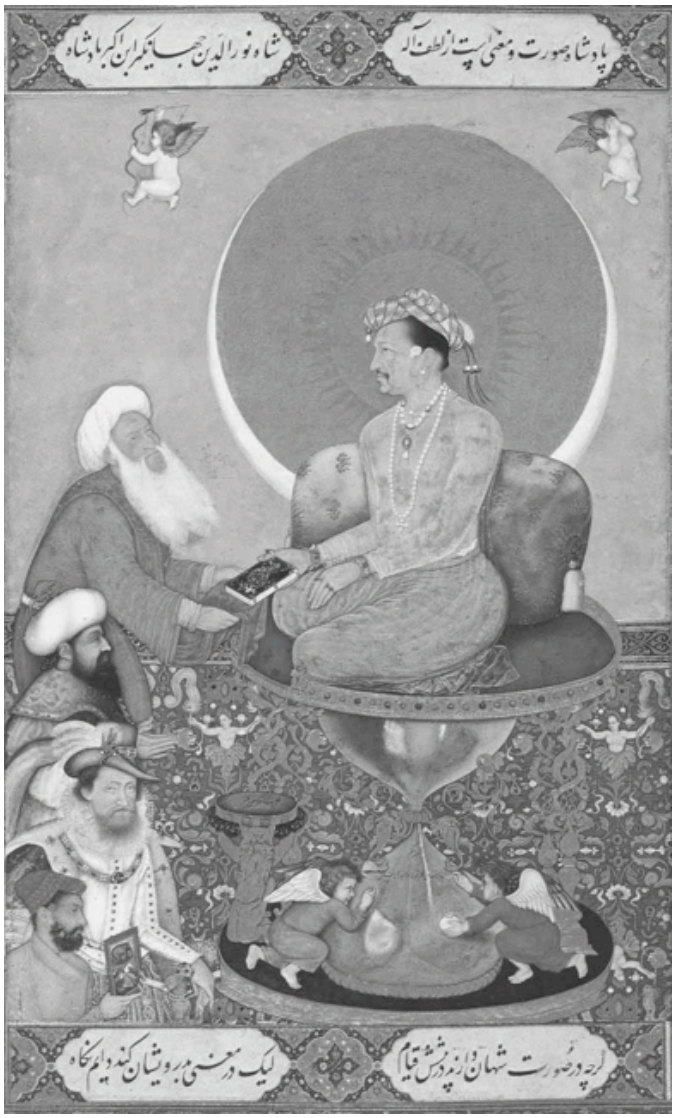


Illustration 44: Jahangir preferring Sufi shaikh over King James I of England. By Bichitr (earlier 1620's)

the new millenium. This observation is supported by the fact that in this work Akbar was declared to be the Renewer of the Second Millennium (Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thani). (Tattavi and Qazvini 2004, 1:241; Moin 2012, 134)

Akbar's millennial ideology was taken up by Jahangir, who preferred a visual medium for his messianic claims. In a famous painting of Jahangir preferring a Sufi Pir over the worldly kings of Rum and England, the millennial sovereign sits enthroned upon a giant hourglass. The inscription on the hourglass marks the Mughal emperor as the heir to Akbar

in a dynastic succession of Pirs, addressing him with the talismanic salutation of Akbar'sDin-i Ilahi, “Allah-u Akbar!” It is this sacred inheritance that provides the basis for the wish “may [your] reign may endure a thousand years!” Is this not reminiscent of the message transmitted from father to son in the painting of the young Akbar discussed in the previous chapter? At any rate, the hourglass shows that the new millennium, the thousand-year age of Jahangir, has already begun (Moin 2012, 208). Elsewhere, Jahangir is depicted with a lamb and lion resting calmly at his feet, an image which had adorned the bible brought to the Mughal court by the Jesuits, and which represented peace among living beings under the rule of the Messiah (Koch 2001b, 2–5).

The Mughal Jesus

In Islamic eschatology the messiah expected to appear at the end of the world, is Jesus. In some cases he is identified with the mahdi, and in others he is thought to descend upon the earth only after the latter, and help him defeat the Antichrist. Hence, in the religious and literary world known to the Mughals, Jesus figured prominently in conceptions of messianism. The famous fifteenth-century Sufi Pir Sayyid Muhammad Nurbakhsh in his rituals had linked the descent of the messianic soul into his body to the sacred qualities of divine light, Jesus and the heavenly bodies (Amoretti 2001, 616). The Safavid Shah Ismail bolstered his sovereignty by claiming to be the embodiment of a series of sacred beings, among them Jesus (Minorsky 1942, 3). Salar Ghazi (d.1032), another important Islamic saint, revered by Muslims and Hindus alike, has been described as the “first saintly conqueror of Hindustan.” Notably, in a later Sufic hagiography aimed to bolster his saintly credentials, Salazar Ghazi “was cast in a messianic image … his visage and attributes compared to those of Jesus” (Amin 2002; Moin 2012, 106). The poets Rumi and Sa'di also regularly used Jesus in their writings (Rumi 1993, 43–4; Sa’di 1974, 124–7), something Akbar must have appreciated as he had at least one such story illustrated (Milo Cleveland Beach 1992b, 346). The Akbari chronicler Badauni suggested that “soul projection” was the reason many advanced mystics, including the aforementioned Muhammad Nurbakhsh and the Mahdavis discussed in the previous chapter, claimed be the messiah or “to be Jesus” (Badauni 1924; Moin 2012, 159).

Illustration 45: The Deposition from the Cross.
Mughal Dynasty. (Lahore, c. 1598)

In the Mughal context, Jesus was most often referred to as the Son of Mary and it appears that his sacredness was especially attributable to his birth of a virgin, which connected him to the Timurid myth of origin. In a debate on the divine nature of Jesus at the Mughal court, Jahangir intervened in the discussion, settling the matter: “On what concerns Christ being called the Son of God, it is because he has no earthly father, and was born from the Virgin Mary in such a wonderful manner.” (Guerreiro 1611, 12b; Carvalho and Thackston 2011, 2011:38) Akbar's chief ideologue also was not oblivious to the Mughal messianic connotations when, in “comparing the Mongol successors to Jesus,” he composed a simple verse: “If you believe the tale of Mary, believe the same of Alanqua.” (Abu’l-Fazl 1993, 167; Balabanlilar 2012, 54)

The Mughal emperors used Christian iconography to cast themselves as Messiahs

by “[appearing] on allegorical portraits standing on globes populated with pacified animals, surrounded by Christian paraphernalia such as haloes” (Koch 2010, 286) or holding the globe in the style of a Salvator Mundi. In architecture, as previously discussed, wall-paintings were used to adorn prominent sites, such as the imperial throne or the public viewing window, both central to the rituals of sacred kingship. Akbar's attraction to the mystical dimension of Christ appears to have also led to an inscription on the Buland Darwarza, the monumental gateway of Fatehpur Sikri. It is “almost certainly selected by the emperor himself” (Carvalho and Thackston 2011, 2011:6) and would have appealed to his mystical affinities: “Jesus, peace upon him, has said: 'The world is a bridge; pass over it, and do not inhabit it.'” (Desai 2002, 228; Allieri 2000, 226; Khalidi 2001)

The Mughal Marys

The dynastic and messianic implications of reported wall-paintings of Mary and her son Jesus at Akbar's tomb come full circle when we consider a further circumstance. Akbar's own mother had been given the name Maryam-Makani, meaning she who dwells with Mary, is of the household of Mary, and is of equal rank of Mary. Furthermore, the mother of future Emperor Jahangir was similarly named Maryam uz-Zamani, meaning Mary of the Age, no doubt referring to the impending thousand-year Age of Jahangir. As was the case with most other high-born women, portraits of these Mughal Marys were never made (Begley 1979, 8). It is not unthinkable, however, that the depictions of the Christian Mary in some cases served as a visual proxy for her virginal colleague Alanquva, as well as the emperor's more immediate mothers. Like their messianic prototype Jesus, Akbar and Jahangir owed their sacred nature to a miraculous conception (by the Mary-like Alanquva), but they were also, in fact, the sons of Marys. The reported depiction at the tomb of Jesus as an infant, that is a Son of Mary, underscores this genealogical dimension. The implication that his depiction likely also symbolizes the Mughal emperor's own messianic claims, juxtaposed here with elaborate Timurid dynastic iconography of the tomb, is certainly conceivable. As has been observed for the case of the image of Orpheus in Mughal art, an alien image could be “literally integrated into the Mughal context” by virtue of its being “joined with, or, more precisely, enclosed by” their existing iconography (Koch

Illustration 47: Jahangir with portrait of Akbar, (c.1614)
2010, 295).

Illustration 46: Jahangir holding a picture of the Madonna, (c.1614)

This use of resourceful visual juxtapositions to convey messianic genealogy is also manifest in two pairs of portraits from around 1614 (Bailey 1998, 37; Moin 2012, 209), the year immediately following, the completion of Akbar's tomb. The first pair shows Jahangir with a portrait of his father; the second with “a portrait of his 'mother,' the Virgin Mary.” Like Mughal architecture with its symbolic and ritual functions, these types of images were “not only expressive but also operative – not only allegorical but also talismanic.” They were at once “a record of and a medium for the emperor's miraculous self” (Moin 2012, 209).

Conclusion

The complexity of the design of Akbar's tomb defies explanation based on a single aspect, or a narrowly defined scope of aspects, of Mughal kingship. By the latter stages of Akbar's rule, and increasingly so as Jahangir took power, the impulse to unify competing claims on imperial identity, was no longer merely a survival strategy, but an ideal that redefined and heightened the emperor's appeal as a ruler and spiritual leader. Akbar thrived in the assumption of seemingly different identities, drawn from disparate territorial and cultural environments, but deployed concurrently and with a common purpose: the bolstering of a 'multilingual' imperial identity.

This realization is necessary for the interpretation of the building's seemingly incongruent and incomplete iconographic program. Indeed, the latter reveals itself as a remarkably eloquent visual testimony to the emperor's territorial, dynastic, and sacred pretensions. The substance of the representation stems from Akbar's imperial persona, but is complemented with Jahangir's own innovations, enabled by his superior cross-cultural iconographic talents and artistic affinities.

One could say the tomb connects the past and present as a testament to the greatness of both father and son. It marks the transmission of Mughal dynastic kingship by manifesting a wide array of elements of Akbar's imperial identity, which Jahangir seized upon and elaborated. For the representation of a new and improved form of rulership, Jahangir invented new forms of expression, using an enigmatic medium much better suited for recording talismanic and potentially heretic qualities, and conveying spiritual status – that is his father's and his shared nature as sacred kings. The tomb's architectural program can be understood as a lithic manifestation of this nature.

By locating the tomb in its territorial, political, religious and artistic context, I have tried to show its effective portrayal of the two men's aspirations in each of these spheres. Akbar and Jahangir are represented in the monument as rulers with near-universal territorial claims, reflected in the selection of regional styles from both near and far. However, these styles are combined and reconfigured, producing a new representational idiom, which

incorporates the diversity of the imperial territories and their traditions in a single, polyharmonious imperial idiom. This aesthetic attitude reflects the impartial position of the Mughal emperor as judicious arbiter: by preferring none, he is elevated above all. From the conservative and consolidating Timurid base, to the permissive meeting of diverse regional styles of Hindustan in the superimposed terraces, and ending with the immaculate white-marble abode of the adjudicating saintly king, the ascending structure of the tomb acts as a blueprint of the Turko-Mongol-inspired policy of Universal Peace, promoting sectarian non-discrimination among the diverse social groups of India, under the elevated rational guidance of the Mughal emperor. The enquiring and systematizing mind of the emperor is expressed in his naturalist affinities. The tomb's garden-setting and extensive floral and faunal ornamentation recreates a paradisiacal garden which serves as a metaphor for the harmonious coexistence of humanity under Akbar and Jahangir.

The Mughal sovereigns' appropriation of established Sufi networks and local sacred knowledge, imbues him with a legitimacy rooted in the social reality of the domains he seeks to govern. The astrological wisdom of the Shaykhs is deployed to harness the celestial motions and conjunctions that assure divine sanction to his glory, while sanctifying the dynastic transmission of Mughal sovereign authority. His ultimate ascendance to the saintly throne as a Pir-i Zinda transmutes the puzzling domeless crown into his most natural abode, symbolizing the continued existence of his order and luminous quality in new Golden Age embodied in his son Jahangir.

Once the connective dynastic, artistic, and religious threads are unraveled, the eccentricity of the Christian subjects is likewise resolved. As the tomb's design affirms, the father and son are more than the possessors of the world and its luminous Sufic guides. As the Sons of Mary, the Kings of Kings, and Jesus-like messiahs, they drink from a shared pool of imperial charisma, and are the original purpose of the sacred Timurid lineage, indeed Second Timurs, Lords of Auspicious Conjunction, sanctioned by God to usher in a Golden Age for Hindustan and beyond.

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Anhang 1: Summary/Zusammenfassung

Among the architectural masterpieces that stand as a testament to the legacy of the Mughal Empire, the tomb of the dynasty's most celebrated ruler, Jalaluddin Akbar (r. 1556-1605), endures as one of the most enigmatic. Its brazenly unconventional form, marked by five diminishing floors of arcaded terraces, giving the monument a palatial rather than sepulchral appearance; its unbridled stylistic and ornamental syncretism, drawing on models as distant as Europe; and, above all, the absence of the archetypal crowning dome, have bewildered witnesses and commentators for over four centuries.

Consequently, they have regarded the monument as either radically innovative or, more often, as an architectural failure marked by an incongruity of styles and an appearance of incompleteness. Such a failure would appear at odds with the Mughals' well-established use of architecture and associated ceremony and ritual to project a carefully crafted ideology of rulership.

This MA thesis tries to retrace the artistic, political and religious ideas that may have determined the design of this transformative ruler's grave.

Unter den architektonischen Meisterwerken, die das Erbe des Mogulreiches darstellen, ist das Grab des größten Herrschers der Dynastie, Jalaluddin Akbar (r. 1556–1605), eines der rätselhaftesten. Seine unkonventionelle Bauart, sein ornamentaler Synkretismus, der auch europäische Bilder umfasst, sowie das Fehlen einer krönenden Kuppel haben Zeugen und Kommentatoren seit mehr als vier Jahrhunderten verblüfft.

Folglich haben sie das Denkmal entweder als radikal innovativ oder, häufiger, als architektonisches Versagen bezeichnet, das von einer Inkongruenz der Stile und einem unvollständigen Erscheinungsbild charakterisiert wird. Allerdings steht dies im Widerspruch zu dem anspruchsvollen Einsatz von Architektur zur Projektion einer Ideologie der Herrschaft des Großmoguls.

In dieser Masterarbeit wird versucht, die künstlerischen, politischen und religiösen Ideen zu rekonstruieren, die die Gestaltung des Grabes dieses transformativen Herrschers bestimmt haben.

Anhang 2: Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

University of Vienna
- MA Global History, expected 2013. Thesis: The Tomb of Akbar, Mughal Emperor of India (r. 1556-1605). Supervisors: Peer Vries and Ebba Koch.

Harvard University
- AB Government, 2006. Coursework included European intellectual history & political thought.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

- Recovery of Mughal Murals at Akbar's Tomb Using Scanning Macro X-ray – Fluorescence Spectometry. With Joris Dik, TU Delft; pending approval from the Archeological Survey of India (2011-present)
- Handling Diversity in Medieval Europe and India 1300-1800. Project assistant to Thomas Ertl, University of Vienna (2012)

INVITED PAPERS (since 2012)

- Dynastic Commemoration and Sacred Kingship in the Mughal Empire of India. Munich Research Center 'Foundations of Modernity' at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität. Munich, 11 July 2013 (forthcoming)
- King, Sufi, Messiah: A Mughal Emperor and his Tomb – The Case of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (r. 1556-1605). Guest-lecture at Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies. Erfurt, 21 May 2013
- The Tomb of Akbar – Its Form and Meaning. Austrian Academy of Sciences & Austrian Oriental Society Lecture Series on 'Persianate India'. Vienna, 21 January 2013
- A Divine Ray of Light – The Tomb of Akbar and the Mughal Ideology of Illuminated Kingship. Presented at Summer School on 'Integration Processes and Identity Formations in Eurasian Empires'. University of Amsterdam, 29-31 August 2012