

THE AGE OF AKBAR:
STATECRAFT AND POLITICAL AMBITIONS

by

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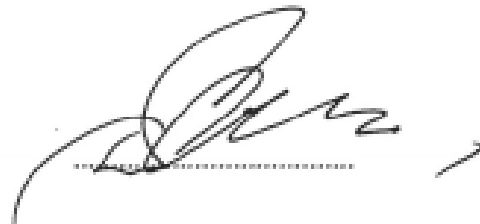
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ABSTRACT

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Tülay Artan, Thesis Supervisor

Keywords: Akbar, Akbarnama, political discourse, symbolism, politics, 16th century

This thesis focuses on the political discourse of Mughal Emperor Akbar Shah (r.1556-1605) and its application to his history, *Akbarnāma*, which was prepared by his statesman and ideologue Abu'l-Fazl. Through the family line designed for him, the sacredness attributes and light symbolism, the book covers a wide range of points which makes it more than just history and gives it a unique position in terms of its understanding of history. A new Mughal ideology of kingship is formulated throughout Akbar's reign and gradually shaped in accordance with conjunctures.

Akbar's reign needs to be examined in the context of the 16th century and according to his sources of legitimization, policies, religiosity and ceremonial. It should also be considered in comparison with other empires of the time, all of which played a part in the formation of his rulership theory. Since one of the hallmarks of the Mughal Empire is its multiplicity, Akbar and Abu'l-Fazl use a wide range of notions from different traditions, philosophical ideas combining different cultures, symbols and ceremonies which have different religious backgrounds in order to provide one common discourse i.e. sacred and divine kingship ideology. This is an attempt to make sense of Akbar's political discourse within a wider context while taking into consideration the different and common understandings of notions in Mughal India. It analyses the reign in terms of the challenges, concerns and expectations it faces and tries to see how they are resolved or whether they are resolved with the end-product i.e. Akbarnama.

ÖZET

EKBER DÖNEMİ: DEVLET İDARESİ VE SİYASİ İHTİRASLAR

NACİYE ZEYNEP ÇAVUŞOĞLU

Tarih, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Mayıs 2016

Tez Danışmanı: Tülay Artan

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekber Şah, Ekbername, sembolizm, 16. yüzyıl, meşruiyet, siyaset

Araştırma, Babür İmparatoru Ekber Şah'ın (1542-1605) siyasi söylemi ve bu söylemin saltanatının son zamanlarında devlet adamı ve danışmanı Ebu'l-Fazl'a hazırlattığı Ekbername isimli eserde ne şekilde tezahür ettiğini konu almıştır. Ekbername, Ekber için çizilen soy ağacından başlayarak, kutsallık atıfları üzerinden kendine has bir üslup ile söylemini oluşturmuş, bir tarih kitabı olmasının yanısıra, kendi içinde padişahın hükümlerini esnasında şekillenen yeni bir yöneticilik anlayışının da son şeklini aldığı yer olmuştur. Ekber'in tahta çıktığı andan itibaren, meşruiyet sağlama çabaları, güttüğü politikadaki değişiklikler, dini söylemler, törenler ve semboller anlaşılardan tüm bunların sonunda ortaya çıkmış Ekbername'nin anlaşılabilirliği de mümkün olmayacaktır.

Ayrıca, bütün bu durumların özellikle dönemin diğer İslam devletleriyle karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınması farklılık ve benzerlikleri görmek açısından önemlidir. Babürlü Devleti'nde diğer İslam devletlerinden farklı olarak gayri müslim nüfus daha fazladır. Bu sebepten Ekber ve Abu'l-Fazl siyasi söylemlerini geliştirirken birçok kültür ve inançtan faydalanmış, sembollerini toplumun her kesiminde kendisine yer bulacak şekilde seçmişlerdir. Bu çalışma Ekber Şah'ın siyasi söylemini daha geniş bir bağlamda ele almaya çalışmıştır. Ekber'in meşruiyet endişeleri, binyılcı beklentileri, sosyal uyumu sağlamaya yönelik politikalar bağlamında ürettiği söylemin varılan son noktada aldığı hal ve geçirdiği değişim anlaşılmalı çalışılmıştır.

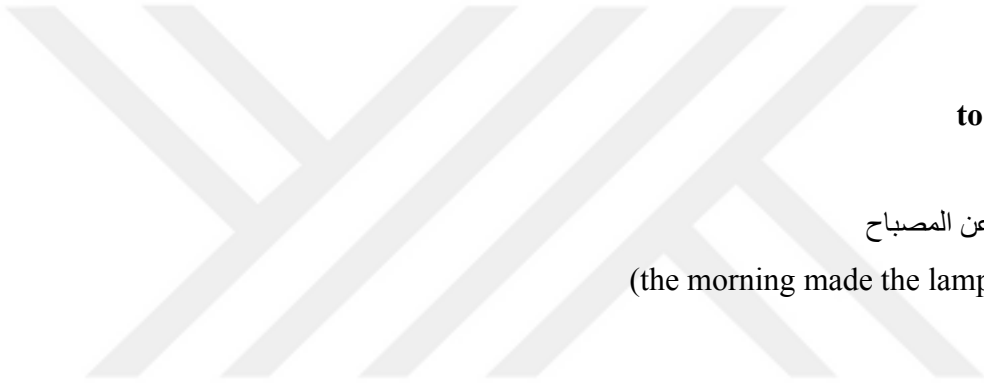
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to my father,

أغنى الصباح عن المصباح

(the morning made the lamp irrelevant)

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This research primarily focuses on questioning the religiosity and religious terminology as used, presented and constructed in the Book of Akbar, *Akbarnāma*, in pursuance of a political discourse and ideology. Akbar Shah is the third emperor of the Mughal dynasty in India whose reign lasted almost half a century from 1556 to 1605.¹ It is not a detailed analysis of the three volume manuscript but rather a study of the “rulership discourse” as it was fashioned through the book. In particular, the chapters in the first volume that engage in the character and genealogy of Akbar provide the main material.

In order to properly set the context, especially for the sake of comprehending the terms and what they meant for that moment of time, for that specific usage, it is significant to be aware of the discourses of the time. That is why this study does not confine itself to the geographical area in which Akbar established his rule. In the interest of seeing things within the bigger picture, the Mughal experience and understanding will be considered and compared to the other important states of the time, namely the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Holy Roman Empire along with its predecessors and ancestors in India and Central Asia, namely the Ghaznavids, dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate and the Timurids.

Akbarnāma is an interesting book. Even if the translation of the title is The Book of Akbar; it cannot readily be classified. It can fall under the categories of a *Tarikh* (History), a *Siyasatnāma* (also called, book of government, mirrors-for-princes or lat. *specula*

¹The term Mughal is not used by the Mughals. Normally the term is an Arabized Persian version of the word Mongol. Yet Mughals referred to themselves as *Silsilah-i Guregen* or *Guregeniyya*, which means the dynasty of the son-in-law, an attribution to Timur’s imperial title choice as a husband to a princess in the line of Chingis Khan. See. Lisa Balabanlilar, *Imperial identity in the Mughal Empire: Memory and Dynastic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 47.

principum, and ger. *Fürstenspiegel*), a *Nasihāt-nāma* (also called advice literature) and even a *Menakīb-nāma* or *Velayat-nāma* (Muslim hagiography). The content of these genres are not divided into clear boundaries but are intertwined and complementary of each other. Abu'l-Fazl refers to The Book of Akbar as “*mahmidet-nāme-i īzedī*”² i.e. the book of divine praise, which can be counted as a more sweeping category. Along with many other things, it is not possible to figure out completely but only speculate who the audience of this book was and upon which aims it was written. One of the possible reasons can be to create a memory for the future, not only for an audience but also for the dynasty.

The theory of kingship that is formulated through the reign of Akbar and presented in the *Akbarnāma* was given shape by the emperor and his famous statesman who is also the author of the book, Abu'l-Fazl ibn Mubarak. Akbar, as the ideal ruler, is fashioned with respect to the multifaceted environment in Mughal India. Without a question *Akbarnāma* provides the sacralization of the emperor. As a result, during the formulation of this “sacred king” image, the reliance on social memory, devotional practices and popular myths played significant roles. Actually, what is interesting in Akbar’s case is that this multifaceted environment is both the reason and the solution to create such an imagery for the emperor.

Due to their ethnical, religious and cultural background as the Timurid dynasty of Gurkhanids, Mughal tradition formed itself as the fusion of Turkic, Mongol and Islamic elements which later absorbed Persian and Hindu cultural notions and came up with its own classical tradition. That is why, while trying to understand the meaning of terms, it is necessary to consider both the accumulated knowledge and culture that the Mughals inherited through their line and the ones that they used and applied because of their audience. Also, even though Akbar was the third ruler of the dynasty, it was during his time that the Mughal polity institutionalized and formed its political and cultural style.

There were two main sources for this project. The first was what his forefathers had brought from Central Asia and the second was what he found in India.³ Therefore, Akbar’s actions and ideology building process were influenced via picking indigenous notions for legitimacy, along with widely shared Islamic traditional ones. It was very much formed with the interplay of pantheistic understanding of the world in relation with Sufi tendencies,

² Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 36-37 & 238-239.

³ Douglas E. Streusand, *The Formation of the Mughal Empire* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23.

traditional notions and mythical symbols. Most importantly those were all arranged at a time when there was the millenarianist, universal and confessional concerns. The “devotional sovereign cult” created and formulated by Akbar and Abu’l-Fazl, which later would famously be called as *Din-e Ilahi* (divine faith); as will be discussed in the following chapters, owes its existence to the Indian context.

1.1. The Book of Akbar

The *Akbarnāma* was commissioned by the emperor around the 1590’s to his statesmen Abu’l-Fazl and was continued until the author’s death in 1602.⁴ Therefore, it is important to underline the fact that *Akbarnāma* and its third and last volume titled *Ā-īn-i Akbarī* depict the ideas that were shaped throughout his reign and achieved their completed state. The first book starts with praising the creator. Abu’l-Fazl explains the reason for composing his book. After that, there goes the panegyric for Akbar. There is a huge part which explains the interpretations of Akbar’s horoscope with Indian, Greek and Ilkhanid astrological tables and calculations. Following that, Abu’l-Fazl draws the genealogy of Akbar mentioning fifty-two of his ancestors’ names starting with Adam. He further gives some information about every one of those names. Just before starting to talk about the chain of events from the life of Babur Shah, the grandfather of Akbar, he briefly mentions the auspicious visions before the birth of Akbar. The rest of the first book and the entire second volume contain the detailed narration of historical events with the author’s explanations. The third book is named *Ā-īn-i Akbarī* and considered to be a separate work since it is not in the narrative style as the first and second volumes and has a different content which includes the descriptions of the geography, state functions, regulations, financial matters, military, provincial administration and socio-cultural history. At this point, it is also significant to note that Abu’l-Fazl claims Akbar heard the content of these volumes first hand and gave his approval to what was written.⁵

⁴ Like many preparation dates given for literary production in the court, these dates are not very certain but an approximation.

⁵ Abu’l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. I*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1897); Abu’l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. II*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1902); Abu’l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1939); Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015); Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume II*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016); Abu’l-Fazl Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, trans. H. Blochmann (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2006); Abu’l-Fazl Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. II & III*, trans. Colonel H. S. Jarrett (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2006).

Akbarnāma was composed in Persian and there are several surviving manuscripts in a number of libraries. There are also two main English translations. The first one is by Henry Beveridge. The first volume was printed in 1897 by the Asiatic Society. It is the translation that has been used by the Mughal historians up until this time, along with the original surviving texts and sometimes with their own translations for the sections that are of interest to them. The second translation is by Wheeler M. Thackston, published by Harvard University Press in early 2015.⁶ Here, for the first volume, Thackston's translation is used as the main source but Beveridge's work is also consulted on many occasions for comparison and explicitness. Anything that belongs to the second and third volumes is taken from Beveridge's translation.⁷ I also checked with the Persian text in order to have a better understanding of the discourse. Thackston's translation is useful for that since the book is published as the Persian on the left and English on the right. However, this only gave me the Persian as it was read by Thackston because it was not the facsimile. For instance:

“So long as the spiritual supremacy over the recluse which is called Holiness and the sway over laymen which is called Sovereignty, were distinct, there was strife and confusion among the children of Noah.”⁸ Beveridge explains this usage as “mankind” because Noah is called by Muhammadans, the second Adam. However, the translation in Thackston goes as “So long as the leadership of people of isolation (which is called sainthood) and leadership of the world (which is called sovereignty) were separate in the world, inner struggle was rife among the human beings.”⁹ In Thackston the Persian version is (بنی نوع) which indicates that Beveridge probably read it as (بنی نوح). In the former the word means “kind, type” and the latter “Noah” the Abrahamic prophet.

1.2. Contemporary Sources Composed During Akbar's Reign¹⁰

Interestingly enough, the second half of the 16th century seems to be a very fruitful era for historical and literary sources for Muslim empires such as Ottomans and Safavids.

⁶ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, ix-x.

⁷ In 2016, the second volume of Thackston's translation was published however it does not exactly coincide with the second volume of Beveridge because the content of Thackston's first volume was completed earlier. Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume II*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016)

⁸ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Volume I*, 16.

⁹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 18-19.

¹⁰ For some significant works that have been done on Mughal historiography see H. H. Elliot and J. Dowson, *History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, 8 Volumes (London, 1867-77); Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India* (London, 1960); Harbans Mukhia, *Historians and Historiography During the Reign of Akbar* (New Delhi, 1976).

The intellectual and artistic production at the court, which was always fostered by Akbar either via his commissioning or support, produced a considerable number of literary works. Histories, chronicles, literature, genealogies and political books were produced. The architect of the Akbarian ideology, Abu'l-Fazl, was part of the ideology building process. Aside from his own works, many other translations and original works were prepared.

The production started at a very early point in Akbar's reign when he issued an order for the people who knew about the workings of his ancestors' reign to write down their knowledge about *Firdaus Makani* (dwelling in paradise, post-humous title of Akbar's grandfather Babur Shah) and *Jannat Ashyani* (nestling in paradise, post-humous title of Akbar's father Humayun Shah).¹¹ This resulted in the production of important historical sources such as Akbar's aunt and Humayun's sister Gulbadan Begum's *Humayunnama* about the reign of Humayun, or the statesman Jauhar Aftabchi's record called *Tazkirat al-waqiat*. Another work dealing with Humayun's reign belongs to Bayazit Bayat called *Tarikh-i Humayun*. He also wrote *Tazkira-yi Humayun wa Akbar*. There is a book called *Tarikh-i Akbari* also known as *Tarikh-i Qandahari* by Hajji Muhammad 'Arif Qandahari. These sources however, are written under official patronage by people serving in the court or to the important court members' households.

Nizamuddin Ahmad's *Tabaqat-i Akbari* was prepared from 1593-1594. Its content is designed to be a history of India, rather than being a dynastic history. It includes the annals of nine regions in India, namely Delhi, Deccan, Gujarat, Malwa, Bengal, Jaunpur, Kashmir, Sind and Multan.¹² He gives the list of 29 sources that he used for the composition of his history. There is also a source that contains many diplomatic and political letters, imperial orders and administrative materials called *Munshat-i Namkin* (ca.1594). It was collected by Abu Qasim Khan Namkin.¹³

There is yet another body of important sources that in some respect can be included under a category called alternative literature. There are three works that need to be mentioned due to their significance for providing a different outlook from diverse perspectives. The first one is an unofficial history written by someone who had relations with the court. The second one consists of the thoughts and teachings of a Sufi philosopher

¹¹ Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57.

¹² M. Athar Ali, *Mughal India: Studies in Polity, Ideas, Society, and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 112.

¹³ Abul Qasim Khan Namkin, *The Mughal State and Culture 1556-1598: Selected Letters and Documents from Munshaat-i Namakin*, ed. Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2007); Ali, *Mughal India*, 374.

and rival of Akbar. The third one is composed of the letters written by Jesuit missionaries who visited the court of Akbar and carried information as correspondence to their countries.

For an orthodox Muslim who relies on the scripture and avoids any doubtful, cultic act, Akbar could only be perceived as a heretic and accused of apostasy as it was the case, both during and after his reign. One of the outcomes of the body of literature produced in relation to this is the famous chronicle of ‘Abd al-Qādir Badā’ūnī called ‘*Muntaḥab al-tavārīḥ*’ (Selections from Histories, completed around 1595-1596).¹⁴ Even though he takes much of the information from Nizamuddin Ahmad’s work, this history is significant, especially for the sake of a comparative and critical approach. Nevertheless, because it is a source written without patronage, the views are independent from any fear or need for favor with an intellectual perspective. That provides the uniqueness and significance of the source for Akbar’s reign. It is also supplementary to Abu’l-Fazl’s account in many places.¹⁵

Badā’ūnī’s history provides us some important sources such as the text of *mahzar* (petition) famously known as Infallibility Decree.¹⁶ The entire text can only be found in his *Muntaḥab al-tavārīḥ* and *Tabaqat-i Akbari* of Nizam’ud-din Ahmad. Thus, Badā’ūnī’s importance for the Mughal court cannot be undermined. It is also because he plays a significant role throughout Akbar’s translation process. He worked in the rendering of *Sighasan Battisi*, and gave its title, *Nama-i Khirad Afza*, the Wisdom-Enhancing Book. An even more significant example would be the process of the translation for Indian epic *Mahabharata*. It is translated in the utmost sophisticated manner due to its importance for Hindu belief systems. It was titled *Razmnāma*, the book of war (1584-86).¹⁷ However, it also caused a lot of discussion thanks to the concepts that were adapted into a more Islamicate culture by Badā’ūnī.¹⁸ Actually this also leads the reader to question the reliability of Badā’ūnī as a source. His main allegations concerning Akbar are in regard to

¹⁴ ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Mulūk Shāh Badā’ūnī, *Muntaḥabu-t-tawārīḥ*, trans. and ed. T. W. Haig, George S. A. Ranking and W. H. Lowe (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1884-1925).

¹⁵ Streusand, *The Formation*, 19.

¹⁶ This is a petition prepared by Abu’l-Fazl in 1579 and played a crucial role for Akbar’s religious discourse. For more information on this document please see its title below.

¹⁷ For a very interesting examination of this translation process see. Audrey Truschke, "The Mughal Book of War: A Persian Translation of the Sanskrit Mahabharata," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, 2 (2011): 506-520.

¹⁸ It is necessary to elaborate what is meant by the term Islamicate since I will use this term throughout the thesis. According to Marshall G. Hodgson "Islamicate" is "the culture, centered on a lettered tradition which has been naturally shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate fully in the society of Islamdom. It does not directly refer to the religion, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even among non-Muslims." Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Conscience and History in a World Civilization: Volume I, The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 58-59.

his detraction of theologians from the court and his surroundings. Then, he criticizes the effect the Rajputs have on Akbar whether via marriage alliances or their rise through the ranks in the court, which can be attributed to his policies. The third one is about Shaikh Mubarak and his son Abu'l-Fazl. Badā'ūnī states that these people have pantheistic and heterodox ideologies which are against his orthodox stand. He believes they got inside Akbar's head, changed his mind and turned him against his real beliefs.¹⁹ Yet, Badā'ūnī's critique of Akbar cannot be considered without his personal affiliations, which makes some historians take a critical stand towards "Badā'ūnī's effective rhetoric against Akbar."²⁰ From another view, Badā'ūnī's work depicts the ideas of an intellectual from the court who thinks himself and his colleagues have been deprived by the regime of which he had high hopes.²¹ However, the work is still important especially in its "de-divinization" of the rulers whose representation would generally be based on sacred-kingship and divine nature.²²

Secondly, it is Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624) and his opposition which later turned into a larger phenomenon.²³ His opposition to Akbar's policies and declaring his duty of being the "*Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thānī*" (renewer of the second millennium) contributed to the discussions from a Sufi and also theosophical perspective. His opposition was not only against Akbar, but for the Sufi ideologies that Akbar and Abu'l-Fazl, along with many others based their thoughts on i.e. the Sufi term called "*wahdat al-wujud*" (the unity of being) that belongs to Ibn Arabi thought. Sirhindī criticized this ideology and disregarded the term by using a new one called "*wahdat al-shudud*" (unity of appearance). Since it is not the intended purpose of this thesis to bring out an events-centered political history piece, except for some points, and acknowledging their importance as the sources of that time, this debate and related literature won't be central sources for this study.

Thirdly, in 1578, Akbar invited Jesuits from Goa to the court to teach their religion. Three priests called Rodolfo Acquaviva, Francis Henriques and Antoni di Montserrat were sent by the provincial Rui Vicente. This incident will later become known as the first Jesuit

¹⁹ Ali, *Mughal India*, 149.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, esp. 166-170 and 379-380.

²¹ Streusand, *The Formation*, 19.

²² On a nice and comparative study about Badauni's history and his sources see. Ali Anooshahr, "Mughal Historians and the Memory of the Islamic Conquest of India," *Indian Economic Social History Review* 43:3 (2006), 275-300.

²³ Yohannan Friedmann, *Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Arthur Buehler, *Revealed Grace: The Juristic Sufism of Aḥmad Sirhindī, 1564-1624* (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2011); Arthur Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and The Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh* (Columbia, S.C USA: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).

mission. When they arrived the court at Akbar's newly established capital *Fathpur-Sikri*, they wrote reports about their experiences and observations to Goa and Europe. The letters they wrote were in Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Latin. These letters were written between 1580 and 1583 and were rendered into English by John Correia-Alfonso with a prologue that provides Akbar's invitation letter for the Jesuits in Goa.²⁴ The content is crucial because they provide the earliest information about European impressions of the Mughals. There are twelve letters along with two appendixes that includes Pope Gregory XIII's letter to Akbar and Akbar's letter to the Jesuit Provincial. Without doubt, the work done by Correia-Alfonso on these Jesuit primary sources contributes highly to Akbar's reign.²⁵ There is also the account of Father Antoni di Montserrat on his mission to the court written in Latin and translated into English.²⁶ Another important source which may fall under this category is a book prepared on the order of Akbar regarding the life of Jesus. However, he ordered the book to be written by a Jesuit Father, Jerome Xavier. It is called *Mir'at al-Quds* (Mirror of Holiness).²⁷

The cognizance of already existing important materials of Turco-Mongol and Islamic heritage caused the reproduction of some of those as Mughal atelier's products. This desire can also be explained as part of the legitimization process considering the fact that significant works as *Zafarnāma* (History of the Timur by Sharifuddin Yazdi, 1584) and *Chengīznāma* (History of Chengīz, c.1596) were among the materials representing the lives and reigns of two main ancestors of Gurkhanids and provided the powerful line for the dynasty. One of the noteworthy literary works that were prepared in the court would be *Tutinama* (Tales of a Parrot c.1560) and *Hamzanāma* (Tales of Hamza, the uncle of the Prophet of Islam, 1562-1577).²⁸ Around the beginning of the 1580s, due to the upcoming Islamic millennium, in another command, Akbar asked for the commission of a millennial

²⁴ John Correia-Afonso, ed., *Letters from the Mughal Court: The First Jesuit Mission to Akbar, 1580-1583* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources; Anand, India: G.S. Prakash, c1981).

²⁵ For some important secondary literature on the Jesuit Mission see. Edward MacLagan, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul* (New Delhi, 1990); E. Denison Ross and Eileen Power, ed., *Akbar and the Jesuits*, trans. C. H. Payne (New Delhi: Tulsi Publishing House, 1979); Fuat Sezgin, ed., *Mughal India According to European Travel Accounts: Texts and Studies* (Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1997); E. A. Rehatsek, 'Letter of the Emperor Akbar Asking for the Christian Scriptures', *The Indian Antiquary*, Vol. 16 (1887): 135 no. 139.

²⁶ Father Anthony S. J. Monserrate, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate*, trans. J.S. Hoyland and S.N. Banerjee (Oxford, 1922).

²⁷ Pedro Moura Carvalho, ed., *Mir'at al-Quds (Mirror of holiness): A Life of Christ for Emperor Akbar: A Commentary on Father Jerome Xavier's Text and the Miniatures of Cleveland Museum of Art*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012)

²⁸ For a nice research on the Hamzanama see. John Seyller, ed., *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution in association with Azimuth Editions, London, c2002).

history which eventually would be called *Tarikh-i Alfī*, History of a Thousand Years (c.1592-1594).²⁹ *Shahnāma*, *Abu Muslimnāma*, *Jami al-Tawarikh* (c.1596), *Anwar-e Suhayli* (1570), *Darabnāma* (c.1580), *Gulistan* (1581) are among the books prepared under the patronage of Akbar.³⁰

An outcome of Akbar's special interests and the obvious incorporation of Hindu people and elements to his court was an increased interest and use of Hindu cultural accumulation. In order to provide availability of its knowledge, there was a *maktabkhana* (translation bureau) where according to Abu'l-Fazl, many translations and adaptations of books in languages such as Sanskrit, Greek, Arabic and Persian were made into other languages.³¹ Curiously enough the memoirs of Babur which was written in Chaghatai Turkish, the mother tongue of Gurkhanids, is translated into Persian (ca. 1589-1590).

It is also worthy to note that geographically it was among the lands that hosted one of the earliest civilizations i.e. Indus, was an ancient culture and learning center. Therefore, it had its own traditional ways of intellectual production. For this reason, the interaction with especially the Rajput clans had been very affective on characterizing the artistic and literary production within and outside the court in the time of Akbar. The translation and adaptation of materials from different cultures is significant in terms of understanding the political and intellectual nature of the state. Luckily, the detailed information about the literary production at the court is given by Abu'l-Fazl in *Ā-īn-i Akbarī*.

“A part of the *Zich i Jadid i Mirzai* was translated under the superintendence of Amir Fathullah of Shiraz, and also the *Kishnjoshi*, the *Gangadhar*, the *Mohesh Mahanand*, from Hindi (Sanskrit) into Persian. The *Mahabharata* which belongs to the ancient books of Hindustan has likewise been translated, from Hindi into Persian, under the superintendence of Naqib Khan, Maulana ‘Abdul Qadir of Badaon, and Shaikh Sultan of T’hanesar. His Majesty calls this ancient history *Razmnamah*, the book of Wars.³² The same learned men translated also into Persian the *Ramayana*³³, likewise a book of ancient Hindustan, which contains the life of Ram Chandra, but is full of interesting points of Philosophy. Haji Ibrahim of Sarhind translated into Persian the *Atharban* which, according to the Hindus, is one of the four divine books. The *Lilawati*, which is one of the most excellent works written by Indian Mathematicians on Arithmetic, lost its

²⁹For a rare and interesting interpretation of this book see. Ali Anooshahr, "Dialogism and Territoriality in a Mughal History of the Islamic Millennium," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55 (2012).

³⁰ A. Azfar Moin, "Peering Through the Cracks in the Baburnama: The textured Lives of Mughal Sovereigns," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 49:4 (2012), 514.

³¹Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 110.

³² c. 1582-1586.

³³ c. 1584-1589.

Hindu veil, and received a Persian garb from the hand of my elder brother, Shaikh ‘Abdul Faiz i Faizi. At the command of His Majesty, Mukammal Khan of Gujrat translated into Persian the *Tajak*, a well-known work on Astronomy. The Memoirs of Babur, the Conqueror of the world, which may be called a Code of practical wisdom, have been translated from Turkish into Persian by Mirza ‘Abdurrahim Khan, the present Khan Khanan (Commander-in-Chief). The History of Kashmir, which extends over the last four thousand years, has been translated from Kashmirian into Persian by Maulana Shah Muhammad of Shahabad. The *Mu’jam ul Buldan*, an excellent work on towns and countries, has been translated from Arabic into Persian by several Arabic scholars, as Mulla Ahmad of Thathah, Qasim Beg, Shaikh Munawwar, and others. The *Haribans*, a book containing the life of Krishna, was translated into Persian by Maulana Sheri. By order of His Majesty, the author of this volume composed a new version of the *Kalilah Dimnah*, and published it under the title of ‘*Ayar Danish*.³⁴ The Hindi story of the Love of Nal and Daman, which melts the heart of feeling readers, has been metrically translated by my brother Shaikh Faizi i Fayyazi, in the masnawi metre of the *Laili Majnun*, and is now everywhere known under the title of *Nal Daman*. ”³⁵

These translations should be considered as political quests of Mughals in order to promote their rule in terms of their desire to find a similarity with the courtly needs in discourse or legitimization. They might also be perceived as opportunities to reflect the story of Akbar and Mughal dynasty.³⁶ Despite their different contents and relation to different religions and cultures, the books commissioned at the time of Akbar are linked via the theme of sovereignty. *Shahnāma* depicts a Zoroastrian context in which “miraculously conceived” rulers establish a righteous order upon the world. In the *Ramayana* of Hindu tradition, there is the manifestation of a divinity to earth in the form of a king Rama who fights evil and establishes peace and justice.³⁷

1.3. The Potential Sources of *Akbarnāma*

It is also significant to mention the underlying or internal sources that feed the primary source, *Akbarnāma*. Even though Abu’l-Fazl does not mention the names of his sources, he talks about some history and geography books. We are also aware of the existence of books

³⁴ Anwar-e Suhayli is also the rendition of the fables of Kalila wa Dimna and composed by Kamal al-Din Kashifi, a theologian and orator. Iyar-e Danish is the Mughal version of the stories prepared by Abu’l-Fazl. Mika Natif, “What the Fox Told the Snake: Illustrated Animal Fables from Akbar’s Age,” *Artibus Asiae* 67:1 (2007): 55.

³⁵ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 110-112.

³⁶ Truschke, *The Mughal Book*, 518-520.

³⁷ Moin, *Peering Through*, 515.

and other literary works in languages such as Hindi, Persian, Greek, Kashmiri and Arabic which are found in the library of Akbar but originated from different parts of the world. The possible influence of those books on Mughal ideology formulated during Akbar's reign cannot be disregarded. That is why, it is crucial to keep those titles in mind as the possible derivations for the physical things, such as policies or the intellectual notions, such as the formation of the kingship theory.³⁸ In his attempt to identify the possible sources for *Akbarnāma*, according to Thackston the information about Chengīz Khan and the Timurids could have come from Rashiduddin Fazlullah's *Jāmi' u't-tawārīkh* (ca.1310), which is a history of Chengīzids written for the Ilkhanids. For Tamerlane's ancestors and career, he claims that he must have used Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi's *Zafarnāma*, a history completed in 1425 that he cites by name several times and is also known to have been reproduced at the imperial atelier. Also, as it is understood via the illustrative poetry between the lines of prose narrative, Sa'di's *Gulistān* might be a model. Furthermore, he underlines the fact that Rajput chronicles and oral traditions are also used for the first time to present a complete picture of Akbar's reign.³⁹ In *Ā-in-i Akbarī*, Abu'l-Fazl mentions some books which he claims that Akbar loves and always wanted to be read to him again and again.

“He does not get tired of hearing a book over again, but listens to the reading of it with more interest. The *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, the *Kimiya-i Sa'adat*, the *Qabusnamah*, the works of Sharaf of Munair, the *Gulistan*, the *Hadiqah* of Hakim Sanai, the *Masnawi* of Ma'nawi, the *Jam-i Jam*, the *Bustan*, the *Shahnamah*, the collected *Masnawis* of Shaikh Nizami, the works of Khusrau and Maulana Jami, the *Diwans* of Khaqani, Anwari, and several works on History, are continually read out to His Majesty.”⁴⁰

On the political thought of the Abu'l-Fazl, Thackston names the plausible influences from the great political philosophers of the earlier Islamic period such as al-Ghazali, Nasir al-Din Tusi, and Dawwani, (who also had a treatise on *Ishraqi* philosophy) as well as by Firdausi, the author of the *Shahnāma*. He further adds, works of these authors are all part of “the curriculum of learning” in Persephone societies, whether in Turkish

³⁸ Although he does not mention his sources, Rizvi categorizes sources that shaped and provided a basis for Abu'l-Fazl's political thinking as the following: “1. Mirrors for Princes, the *Shahnama* of Firdausi and the books of counsel written by Ghazali, Nizamu'l Mulk Tusi and their imitators. 2. Works of Avicenna and his interpreters such as Nasir al-Din Tusi and Jalal al-Din Dawwani. 3. Histories of the Mongols, elaborating concepts of the divine origin of imperial power. 4. Ancient Indian political thought based mainly on the *Dharmasgastra* (The Laws of Manu), the *Mahabharata* and the *Kalila wa Dimna*.” S.A.A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1975), 221.

³⁹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, x-xi.

⁴⁰ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 110.

Central Asia or India.⁴¹ This can easily be seen, especially while making a comparative reading of gun-powder empires in 16th century Islamdom.⁴²

1.4. The Secondary Literature

The age of Akbar is abundantly studied in the secondary literature thanks to its unusual feature. It is possible to divide the works which provided information for this study under three categories. There are several biographical studies prepared on Akbar's reign. Then, there are art historical studies and historical (politic and social) studies. However, their interests are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

1.4.1. Art History

For someone studying Mughal political history, it is unavoidable to do research without focusing on artistic works. Similar to other court histories, artistic products especially composed in the court can reveal many things about the ideology and they had their own subtexts. However, for Mughals, it always had extreme importance due to their special interest in allegory and unique techniques for artistic production. Also, *Akbarnāma* is an illustrated book and it has another language for those depictions.⁴³ It is another way which the Mughals used to convey knowledge and create discourse which cannot be ruled out. However, a detailed analysis of visuals goes beyond the limits of this research thus only some examples are picked in order to provide an inkling.

In particular, the works of art historian Ebba Koch provide the most significant information for this research due to her interest in the context of the artistic work, historicizing the content and making sense of the symbols and concepts.⁴⁴ Aside from

⁴¹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, xi.

⁴² Again, I follow Marshall G. Hodgson's terminology here, "Islamdom" is the society in which the Muslims and their faith are recognized as prevalent and socially dominant. It is a society in which non-Muslims have always formed an integral, if subordinate element. It does not refer to an area as such, but to a complex of social relations, and is territorially more or less well-defined. It does not duplicate the essentially juridical and territorial term, 'Dar al-Islam'; yet, in contrast to 'Muslim lands.' Therefore, 'Islamdom' does not designate in itself a 'civilization', a specific culture, but only the society that carries that culture. Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume I*, 58.

⁴³ About the illustrated copy at the Victoria and Albert Museum see. John Seyller, "Codicological Aspects of the Victoria and Albert Museum *Akbarnāma* and Their Historical Implications" in *Art Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 4, New Approaches to South Asian Art (Winter, 1990), 379-387; Ahmad Nabi Khan, "An Illustrated *Akbarnāma* Manuscript in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London" in *East and West*, Vol. 19, No. 3/4 (September-December 1969), 424-429.

⁴⁴ Ebba Koch, *Mughal Art and Imperial Ideology: Collected Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); "The Intellectual and Artistic Climate at Akbar's Court", in John Seyller, ed., *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India*

Koch, when it comes to the Mughals, there is a humongous amount of academic material the researcher can get via the well-celebrated and well-studied area of Mughal Art history. The artistic nature of Mughals is analyzed especially with regard to its distinctive and allegorical manner, by the art historians Richard Ettinghausen, Amina Okada, Milo Cleveland Beach and Stuart Cary Welch. Their works also greatly benefited this study.⁴⁵ Since Okada's work focuses on the continuities, it was most fruitful in the interest of a deeper examination of notions.

Yet, thanks to Gülru Necipoğlu's comparative studies,⁴⁶ which included Ottomans, Safavids, Habsburgs and Mughals, it was possible to see the wider context and distinguish between the similarities and differences. Her work made it easier to understand the symbols of kingship in terms of art and architecture. Another interesting work that is used as a mind-opener for my research is by Sinem Eryılmaz. Her PhD dissertation along with other studies focused on the volumes the *Shahnama*, which was prepared by the Ottoman dynasty after the order of Süleyman I (r.1520-1556). It provides venues for comparison with *Akbarnāma*, which was its contemporary. It has been especially useful for the section that discusses the prophets chosen for the genealogy of the empire.

Even though more attention will be paid to Mughal artistic symbolism in the court miniatures, Mughal architecture also cannot be neglected. Its consideration and examination especially in terms of the syncretic and multi-cultural environment of the state is vital for Mughal studies. However, again, due to the limitations of this research, only some small references will be made in regard to the architectural elements.⁴⁷

(London and Washington D.C.:2002); "How the Mughals Referenced Iran in Their Visual Construction of Universal Rule," in *Universal Empire: A comparative approach to imperial culture and representation in Eurasian history*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang & Dariusz Kolodziejczyk (Cambridge University Press 2012), 194-209.

⁴⁵Amina Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court*, trans. D. Dusenberre, (New York, 1992), 45-59; Robert Skelton, 'Imperial Symbolism in Mughal Painting', in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World, papers from a colloquium in memory of Richard Ettinghausen*, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, ed. by P. Soucek (University Park/London: 1988), 177-87.

⁴⁶For some important ones for this research see. Gülru Necipoğlu, "Word and Image in Portraits of the Ottoman Sultans: A Comparative Perspective" in *Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman* (Istanbul, 2000), 22-59, 202-207; "Religious Inscriptions on the Great Mosques of the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal Empires," *Hadeeth Ad-Dar* 25 (2008), 34-40; "Framing the Gaze in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Palaces," in *Ars Orientalis*, 23 (1993); "Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry," *The Art Bulletin*, 71 (September 1989): 401-27; "A Kanun for the State, a Canon for the Arts: The Classical Synthesis in Ottoman Art and Architecture during the Age of Süleyman," in *Soliman le Magnifique et son temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein, (Rencontres de l'école du Louvre, 1992), 195-216.

⁴⁷For some important architectural studies on Mughals see. Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture: An Outline of Its History and Development, 1526-1858* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); C. B. Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India, The New Cambridge History of India, 1,4* (Cambridge, New York, Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 1992); B. M. Alfieri, *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent* (London 2000); E. W. Smith, *The Moghul Architecture of Fatehpur-Sikri, Archaeological Survey of India New Imperial Series (ASINIS)*, 4 vols., 1894-98; reprinted Delhi 1985).

1.4.2. Political History

In order to set the historical context, there are the studies which cover first and foremost the Indian history. This is because the political and cultural accumulation on the Indian soil, both Muslim and non-Muslim, would be collected, learned and used by the Mughals when they rose to power. In addition to general historical studies on India, we may list works on the history of the Timurids because the Mughals claimed to have descended from the Gurkhanid dynasty of Timurids Mughals claimed their heritage from. This history is more connected to Turco-Mongol Central Asia.⁴⁸ The political history of the Mughals from its earlier times up until the end of Akbar's age is also necessary to make sense of his actions. All of these are significant in order to have a better understanding of the mindset that lead the state to apply its policies. Lisa Balabanlilar's studies of the imperial identity of Mughals,⁴⁹ with a specific focus on the legitimacy in relation to cultural inheritance of the dynasty deserves mention. In her book, she deals with the issue of imperial identity, underlining especially the complex nature of Mughal claims. The fact that they applied Perso-Islamic and Turco-Mongol traditions into their administration proves that Mughal history should not be limited to Timurid past. She perceives the situation as the inherited complex of religious and ethical understandings of the Perso-Islamic and Chengīzid system of morality, ethics and law, cautiously annotated by the Mughals.⁵⁰

The historical research of Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam need to be highlighted. Their individual or collaborated studies and the books they edited together played a significant role to create a better understanding of the Mughal context.⁵¹ Muzaffar Alam's "The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800" covers the Mughal understanding of state political tradition as it was inherited, formulated and applied, gives

⁴⁸In order to understand the dynastic claims and the continuation with the geography the main sources were Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Peter A. Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Especially in terms of capturing the Timurid identity for the legitimization claims, Manz's work was the most useful. Also, in order to find a valuable list on the primary sources for Indo-Muslim History see. Ali, *Mughal India*, 363-369.

⁴⁹ Lisa Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*.

⁵⁰Ibid., 42.

⁵¹Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *The Mughal State, 1526-1750* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Writing the Mughal World: studies on culture and politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400-1800* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800* (London: Hurst & Co., 2004); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly encounters: translating courtliness and violence in early modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); *From the Tagus to the Ganges: Explorations in connected history* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2005); *Three ways to be alien : travails and encounters in the early modern world* (Waltham, Mass. : Brandeis University Press, c2011).

the basis for thinking about the Mughal state's functioning. Subrahmanyam's studies are more concentrated on the bigger picture which situates the Mughals as part of a wider world that provides insights into the knowledge as it was carried through travel and commerce. Also, there are two important scholars who contributed to the research on the political history of the Mughal Empire, namely Irfan Habib and M. Athar Ali.⁵²

There are several ideas about the impact of Akbar's policies on the formation of the Mughal Empire. His policy of toleration is perceived as the foundation of Mughals up until the time of Aurangzeb when it was abandoned.⁵³ Another debate worth mentioning is about the changing of power relations in the court. There are many sides in the power-play. There are the Chaghatai nobles who were there since the time of Humayun, Akbar's father. They are nobles from nomad confederations in Central Asia. There are the Persians, bureaucrats from Persian tradition. Most of them fled from the Safavid lands due to the religious pressure. Also, there were the Turkmens. They were nomadic Turks, again from the Safavid Empire. On top of these ethnic distinctions, there is also the religious side of the debate in terms of Shi'i and Sunni identities. Besides all these factors, there were the external players such as the Uzbek Shaybanids and Turkic Safavids who had their own connections within the Mughal court.

Moreover, Akbar followed a policy that included the Indo-Muslims, the Muslims who were already in India before the rise of Mughal power, members of the earlier Muslim dynasties, Afghans and the Rajputs who were the Hindu nobles ruling over their own territories, under the Mughal authority and appointed by them to the higher posts. The reason behind this attitude is a matter of debate for Mughal historians. When it is considered under Akbar's tolerance policy, this move only sounds logical. Nevertheless, it gets more complicated when Akbar's desire for centralization of power and the power share that the Chaghatai nobles wanted, clash.⁵⁴ At one point Abu'l-Fazl also claims that due to his favorable treatment of *sayyids* (descendants of the prophet) and the choice to appoint Iranians, many of whom are Shi'is, in the court, Akbar is condemned to be a Shi'i by Sunnis. Thanks to his patronage of Brahmins and employment of Hindus, he is considered

⁵² Irfan Habib, ed., *Akbar and His India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Ali, *Mughal India*.

⁵³ For a brief discussion on the thoughts of different Mughal Historians see. Streusand, *The Formation*, 2-10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7. Also Iqtidar Alam Khan, *The Political Biography of a Mughal Noble, Mun'im Khan, Khan-i Khanan, 1497-1575* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1973), xvi.

to be a Hindu sympathizer.⁵⁵ Therefore, Akbar's political moves and his attempts to constitute a new structure and function of government is due to his concern for centralization that would allow him to be accepted as imperial sovereign by all members of his court and society.

1.4.3. Religion and Religiosity

The scholarship that is concerned with the utilization of Islamic history and Islamicate notions for the state policies deals mainly with Sufism. One of the most significant policies for Muslim rulers is to conduct a relationship with diverse religious orders and pious personalities.⁵⁶ These relations may change according to the needs of their specific contexts. Considering their neighbors, Mughal's relations with Sufism might change depending upon their rivalry with Uzbek's or the early Safavi encounters they had. For the age of Akbar, the ones that played significant roles were *Chistiyya* and *Naqshibandiya*. Akbar's relations with *Chishti* saints and how and why there was a shift from the *Naqshibandiya* to *Chistiyya* will be questioned. The main source that is mentioned for religious understanding of the Mughals is Sri Ram Sharma's "The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors" which has separate chapters for each ruler and his politics on religious matters.⁵⁷ Also, the *Ishraqi* theosophy which played a critical role in the process of constructing a kingship theory around the symbol of light is studied through the works of Sayyid Husayn Nasr and for the light symbolism; Catherine Asher's studies can be counted as the most mind-opening and significant for the course of this research.⁵⁸

a. Millennial and Messianic History

The *mahdi* (awaited messiah) idea was used by Akbar just like his contemporaries. In the context of the upcoming millennium, the claim over the "universal throne" was made and depicted the sovereign as the ruler of the material and spiritual world, clearly

⁵⁵ Streusand, *The Formation*, 119-120.

⁵⁶ Muzaffar Alam, "The Mughals, The Sufi Sheikhs and the Formation of the Akbari Dispensation," *Modern Asia Studies*, 43:1 (January, 2009), 136.

⁵⁷ Sri Ram Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal emperors* (New York: Asia Pub. House, c1972).

⁵⁸ Catherine. B. Asher, "A Ray from the Sun: Mughal Ideology and the Visual Construction of the Divine," in *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, ed. Mathew T. Kapstein (Chicago and London: 2004), 161-94; "Sub-Imperial Palaces: Power and Authority in Mughal India," *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 23, Pre-Modern Islamic Palaces (1993).

reminiscent of the *mahdi*. Moreover, *Akbarnāma* represents the king as the “*Insan-e Kamil*” (the perfect, complete man) of Sufism with an attribution to all necessary ingredients provided by the context.

In that respect, Azfar Moin’s dissertation which is later published as a book provided the insight for understanding the millenarianist thought and how it was applied to the policies of Akbar with respect to the Indian, Iranian (Persian) and Timurid cultural understanding of kingship.⁵⁹ The research includes Timurid, Safavid and Mughal experiences and practices of sacred sovereignty. His aim was to understand the sacred authority via social dimension as he came up with the term “context-sensitive model of sacred authority.”⁶⁰ Also the work contains a chapter on Akbar and his image as a millennial sovereign. His main claim was that the syncretic environment in Mughal India could be accomplished due to what had been culturally brought over from Timurid heritage and Iranian culture. As a result, the formulation of sacred kingship ideology was an end product of evolving social and popular notions from Timurid Central Asia and Safavid Iran. For Safavid experience, the main work to consult was Kathryn Babayan⁶¹ who happened to work on the messianic and mystical understandings within the Safavid Empire. For the Ottoman case and again a more contextualized outlook on the messianic thought in gunpowder empires, Cornell Fleischer’s studies will be referred to.⁶²

b. Universalism and Kingship Theory

Starting from the late 1570s, Akbar picked a universalist discourse and accentuated an all-embracing rulership for himself.⁶³ In order to get a historical sense for political claims, it was necessary for me to look at the sources about the idea of kingship, from a classic such as Ernst H. Kantorowicz’s “King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval

⁵⁹Ahmad Azfar Moin, “*Islam and the Millennium: Sacred Kingship and Popular Imagination in Early Modern India and Iran*” (PhD Diss., The University of Michigan, 2010); *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

⁶¹Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, Mass.: Distributed for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press, c2002).

⁶² Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli, 1541-1600* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); “The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymân,” in *Soliman le magnifique et son temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), pp. 159–77; “From Şeyhzade Korkud to Mustafa Âli: Cultural Origins of the Ottoman Nasihatname,” in *IIIrd Congress on the Social and Political History of Turkey. Princeton University 24–26 August 1983*, ed. Heath W. Lowry and Ralph S. Hattox (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1990), pp. 67–77.

⁶³ Alam, *The Mughals, The Sufi Sheikhs*, 160.

Political Theology” to Hüseyin Yılmaz’s PhD. dissertation on the Ottoman Sultan and the Sultanate.⁶⁴ As a consequence of the self-representational policies and millennial concerns, imperial desires increased and the Mughal emperor’s claim on the empire had become a universal one. A very rewarding book edited by Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk called “Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History” incorporates a collection of essays on the historical claim of universal rule at different times and in different geographies.

1.5.The Thesis

This thesis is divided into two chapters, the first chapter as its title suggests, deals with “the age of Akbar” and the second one is about the “*Akbarnāma*.” Even though the main desire is to follow a chronological order, it does not seem to be achievable since many of the terms and titles are interrelated and the political events of a particular time, could be a part of another political claim in another context.

In the first chapter, the aim is to set the context that resulted with the production of *Akbarnāma*. Under the heading of claims and titles, the content includes the assertions Akbar made and the corresponding titles for them. The title terms like *Ghazi, Sultan, Shah, Caliph, Khalifatullah, Zillallah, Shahenshah, mahdi, mujaddid, mujtehid, sahibkiran* will be examined with respect to their importance in history and in the Mughal context. There is the general need of religious support because in many ways religion is the biggest part of any legitimization process. That is because those titles occupy crucial parts and carry symbolic meanings in their usages which depict their value via politicization. Significant policies such as infallibility decree, collection of taxes, emergence of the divine faith, construction of religious buildings, *sulh-e kull*, court rituals, relations with Sufis will be scrutinized referring to the multi-religious and multi-cultural nature of Mughal India.

The reign of Akbar as it is told in the *Akbarnāma* differs since it is not only concerned with the ethical and internal characteristics of a great ruler but it also covers in a great deal a ruler’s physical perception and fashioning by the populous. As a result, physical symbols, proceedings, ritualistic matters and ceremonial behavior occupy a vital

⁶⁴Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Hüseyin Yılmaz, “*The Sultan and the Sultanate: Envisioning Rulership in the Age of Süleymān the Lawgiver (1520-1566)*” (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2005).

place both for the theory and the practice. That is why, the ceremonials, celebrations, spectacles, parades and holy days will also be analyzed in the context of geography and religiosity.

Sufism and the neo-platonic thought act as a mediatory figure which opens a way to consolidate the integration of different cultures. It is a fact that Sufi orders especially in relation with the neo-platonic ideologies which can be considered heretical in their philosophies, captured more attention for the emperors who have universalistic claims in comparison to orthodox and “safe” ideas. For the era this research is concerned with, one of the “heterodox” orders, *Chistiyya*, played an important role in implementing the process of religious synthesis. Since Sufism occupies a central place in the political discourse, it will be one of the determining parts of this thesis. In particular, the shifting relations with different *tariqahs* (Sufi orders) will be discussed for the sake of understanding the conditions and necessities of the time.

It is possible to consider Akbar’s policies about the upcoming millennium as a project which includes the preparation of a thousand-year history, creating an outlook of a messiah which is formulated through attributes of his saint-like nature, and his legitimization as *Khalifatullah* (the deputy of God), rather than being the head of the Muslim community as the *Khalifatu Rasulallah* (the deputy of the prophet). The concept of God’s government, literary materials that depict the ideal ruler, beliefs that created the syncretic environment, changes in the organization of the court and religious and cultural motifs in the multi-religious society which included a Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Christian and Muslim population, will be discussed.

In the second chapter titled the *Akbarnāma*, the information from the book of Akbar will be used for the sake of seeking out the notions that created the imperial authority envisioned by Abu’l-Fazl for Akbar. Starting with the content about the *Akbarnāma*, the main chapters and episodes that will be discussed here are: the auspicious birth of the emperor and what it says about his nature, the dream narratives that are given in relation to the importance of dreams in the Islamic culture and as a legitimizing factor, the miracles he performed throughout his reign and their similarities with other miracles and their place in social memory. The genealogy of Akbar constructed by Abu’l-Fazl by questioning the

importance of the names, the things they symbolize and the possible reasons for their usage, will also be discussed.

Then finally there will be a part separated for the symbol of light as a project itself. The concept of light is considered to be the symbol of the Divine or God. Thus it perfectly fits Abu'l-Fazl's ideology of sovereignty being a "ray of God." That is why it is perceived to be the most defining symbol that is used throughout the formulation of Akbarian theory of kingship which is closely related to his pantheistic ideology. Its examination will be made via the words used in the book, the ceremony called *Jharoha-i Darshan*, the female member of Akbar's line Alanqoa, the 35th verse of the Qur'an in the chapter of light and its formulation in the *Ishraqi* theosophy of Suhrawardi, the *Nur-e Muhammadi* (the light of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, also the Zoroastrian concept for the ancient Persian emperors called *Farr-i Izadi*).

CHAPTER II: THE CONTEXT: POLICIES AND MEANS OF DISCOURSE

Mughal Emperor Akbar I's reign (1542–1605) was a time of an intense transition in all social, intellectual and religious areas, both in the society and at the court. There were vital changes in the assessment and collection of taxes, the organization of court, ranking of the nobility, governing and religious policies.⁶⁵ It is valid to question Akbar's personal religious ideology or sincerity in relation to his policies. However, all that can be said is that his religious beliefs were and could only be known to him. Also, as a result of being a ruler, just like his contemporaries, his rule was charged with deep political considerations.⁶⁶

At the end of 16th century, his counselor Abu'l-Fazl prepared the history of Akbar's reign, *Akbarnāma*. Through the work, it is possible to see that, during Akbar's rule, a theory of kingship was formulated which combined Turco-Mongol, Perso-Islamic and Hindu traditions.⁶⁷ However, before looking at the end product of the reign, it would be useful to try to get into the context in which this new theory of kingship is shaped. It is because in order to understand the logic of his actions, it is vital to get a clearer picture of the context. Since Akbar reigned for almost half a century, it would be interesting to see how the political discourse changed through time or how the policies gradually took a different route in relation to the political environment, not only in Mughal lands but also in neighboring lands and in the 16th century world as a whole.

⁶⁵ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, ix-x.

⁶⁶ For a claim that he did not lack sincerity in his actions see. Istiaq Husain Qureshi, *Akbar: The Architect of the Mughal Empire* (Delhi: Jayyed Press, 2009), 268.

⁶⁷ Gülru Necipoğlu, "Framing the Gaze in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Palaces," *Ars Orientalis*, 23, (1993), 313.

There are a few facts Akbar needed to take into consideration when he ascended to the throne. First, even though Mughals were a Muslim state, unlike the other Muslim states of the time, only a quarter of the subjects under their rule were Muslim. Although Mughals were the highest authority in their ruling territories, they needed to regulate a successful relationship with their largely Hindu subjects. This was possible despite the carefully balanced and constantly fluctuating relationship between the ruler and the nobles, due to the significance of Hindu noble families and their power in their lands.⁶⁸ In accordance with the ‘authority concern’ over the vast non-Muslim population, during Akbar’s reign we see adaptation of “syncretic” and “heterodox” practices that were controversial to Islamic tradition.⁶⁹ Subsequently, the contradictory policies became a distinguishing feature of Akbar’s reign.

The second fact was concerned with stability and continuity. The geographical difficulties such as the vastness of the territory or natural obstacles aside, it was not easy to provide the continuity of rule in India as an “outsider” who belongs to another religion and culture. Starting from the early Islamic state after the death of the Prophet, Muslims established states in India. Some of them were very well known like the Ghaznavids and different dynasties in Delhi Sultanate; Khaljis, Tughluqs, Sayyids and Lodis. However, none of those dynasties lasted long and that is very much related to the localized Hindu culture and civilization. Another reason behind this is identified as their lack of establishing a lasting political idea. Their absence of a doctrine of kingship, administrative and military structures based on economy, society and geography which would provide a loyalty for the ruler and government would cause their inefficiency.⁷⁰ Another fact would be a proof for the same danger before Akbar. Not long after his ascension to the throne, he witnessed the expulsion of his father, Humāyūn I, from India. A ruler’s expulsion from his land evinces the lack of authority as a dynasty against other powers over the huge territory.

For Akbar, the young, new ruler of the Mughal dynasty, all these situations indicate that for the Hindu population, the names of their Muslim rulers, their ruling houses, their places of origin, or their sub-castes did not really matter. According to them, all are

⁶⁸ Asher, *Sub-Imperial Palaces*, 281.

⁶⁹ Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 312.

⁷⁰ Streusand, *The Formation*, 35.

foreigners, non-Hindus and unholy and they are not interested in the changes of dynasty.⁷¹ Once his actions and policies are considered, it might be possible to see that this is what Akbar also realized and presumably shaped his government in accordance with. It is all these complexities of India which Akbar uses to strengthen his rule.

By virtue of above-mentioned realities and realizations, the system Akbar and Abu'l-Fazl tried to construct was heavily concerned and charged with the multi-layered (multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic) nature of the geography of the state. In that respect, what I'll be trying to do in this chapter is based on the claims and acts of Akbar Shah, some of which were recorded in *Akbarnāma* and depict the imperial ideology of his reign. I will make an attempt to interpret the reasons behind the usage of signs and symbols and their meaning according to their contexts.

Throughout his reign, there are certain critical moves which might stand out as declarations. On the other hand, it is crucial to take those moves into account in consideration with their dates and growing into an ongoing basis.⁷² However, it does not necessarily mean that Akbar had a political agenda in mind when he ascended to the throne and he gradually revealed it. On the contrary, only when considered with their contexts, the evolution of his policies would indicate a meaning that would later complement his ideology. Among his significant policies, there was the abolishment of pilgrimage tax and *jizya* taken from non-Muslims, the change in the nobility and opening the way for a meritocratic court which caused many Hindus and Shi'i Muslims to be court members and hold important positions. This resulted in Chaghatai nobles losing favor.

Unlike the Ottoman kul system, the Mughal elite was composed of free men, not slaves, whether Rajputs, Afghans, Indian Muslims, Arabs, Persians, Uzbeks or Chaghatais. They could be native Indians or not. Most were Sunni Muslims; many were either Shi'ite or Hindu in religion.⁷³ Akbar was able to constitute a court that was full of loyal courtiers in

⁷¹ Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 32.

⁷² According to a rather explanatory analysis by Subrahmanyam, it is possible to divide Akbar's reign into four phases: at first he was under the apprenticeship of the Shi'i-oriented Bairam Khan and then the second phase spanned the second half of the 1560s and the 1570s, with huge territorial expansion and fiscal tightening along with a relatively orthodox politico-religious outlook that includes hostility in the late 1560s to both Shi'i and Mahdawi practices. The Third phase begins in the late 1570s and was marked by the famous *mahzar* (petition) of 1579, when Akbar's own messianic pretensions; and the fourth and final phase starts in the late 1580s, which saw the flowering of the mature Akbarian ideology' as defined by Abu'l-Fazl. In this last phase the canonical texts that are often wrongly taken to define Akbar's ideology over his entire reign, like the chronicle *Akbarnāma* is produced. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *From Tagus to the Ganges*, 124.

⁷³ John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60.

an intimate relationship with him, regardless of ethnic or hereditary service loyalties.⁷⁴ On the other hand, consequently, thanks to this heterogeneous nobility, no single ethnic or sectarian group could be large enough to challenge the emperor and there could not be any distant factions in the nobility.⁷⁵ Moreover, this new nobility's loyalty can be understood through their acceptance of a discipleship-like relationship with their emperor. When the Mughal's policy of meritocracy is compared with the Ottoman Empire court system's meritocracy, even though both of their statesmen could rise in rank according to their talents and the emperor's favor, for Mughal nobility it is possible without conversion. For Ottomans, however, meritocracy was only possible for converted Muslims.

The idea of a "philosopher king" was a well-established one formulated by important Muslim scholars and theorists which mainly claims political empowerment of a ruler is possible when his authority is associated with spiritual authority.⁷⁶ For Abu'l-Fazl, *Akbarnāma* which is the outcome of his kingship theory for Akbar's reign, was like a manifestation of his king's rightfulness for being a universal ruler via being a philosopher king. What distinguishes the case of Akbar is the geography. Mughal India's culture is fashioned by Persian, Turkic, Mongol and Indian traditions.⁷⁷ These categories are not necessarily distinctive and are also very much affected by the religions they were affiliated with in the past and in their present 16th century. It gave both Akbar and Abu'l Fazl a vast cultural ground to feed from while composing the ceremonial and new representation for the ruler.

Also, the culture related notions Mughals adapted to rule over people from a variety of religious beliefs and practices are not only related to the syncretistic environment of India but also to the heterogeneous conditions of Timurid and Safavid Iran, both of which played a significant role in their administrative ideology.⁷⁸ To understand the continuity and accumulation more logically, it is necessary to follow chronology. However, since the meaning of the claims and titles were also subjected to change during the reign of Akbar, here, the events will be given in an order that depicts both the chronology and gradualism.

⁷⁴ Lisa Balabanlilar, "Lords of the Auspicious Conjunction: Turco-Mongol Imperial Identity on the Subcontinent," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Mar., 2007), 26.

⁷⁵ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 60.

⁷⁶ Cornell H. Fleischer, *The Lawgiver*, 160.

⁷⁷ Throughout the thesis when the term Mughal India is used, it specifically denotes Akbar's domains in the South Asian geography during his reign. It includes the Ganges plain, Punjab, Malwa, Gujarat, Bihar, Bengal, Kabul, Kashmir, Qandahar and North Deccan. see. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume III*, 63.

⁷⁸ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 20.



Figure I: *Akbarnāma*, Akbar greeting Rajput rulers and other nobles at court, probably in 1577. by Sarwan, Madhav & Miskin ca. 1586 - ca. 1589. Victoria & Albert Museum.

2.1. Titles and Discourse

The titles used by rulers may communicate many things such as their claims on the throne, their ideas, their religious views, their dreams, their ambitions, their understanding of the world, their intellectual level, and essentially who they are. However, the usages of those titles vary depending on the people or culture that uses them. There are the religious titles such as *Amiru'l Mu'minin* indicating that the Caliph is “the head of all believers.” The original idea that the Caliph should be unifying one ruler, or the person from the Holy lineage of the Prophet, i.e. Quraishi descent is therefore changed or rather modified. The historian of Mehmed II's age, Tursun Bey tells the story of the Fall of Constantinople in his book *Tarikh'ul Abu'l-Fath* and refers to Mehmed II as *Amiru'l Mu'minin*. It is before the Ottoman capture of Mamluks when they connected their line to the line of Caliphate. This indicates that Mehmet II's had the claim before.⁷⁹

The Muslim empires of the 16th century followed the example set by historical Islamic rulers, especially by those who were also prophets in Abrahamic tradition such as Yusuf (Joseph), Davud (David), and Süleyman (Solomon).⁸⁰ According to the Qur'an, rulership is a gift given by Allah: “So they defeated them by the permission of Allah, and David killed Goliath, and Allah gave him the kingship and prophethood and taught him as He willed. And if it were not for Allah checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted, but Allah is full of bounty to all the worlds.”⁸¹ In *Akbarnāma*, there is a close relationship between Akbar and God. God also symbolizes the Most Perfect. He is considered to be the divine source of light and knowledge. Akbar's sovereignty is not only approved by God but Akbar is also picked by Him to rule as the universal emperor of the time.⁸²

Another figure from the Qur'an is *Dhu'l-Qarnayn*, described as a great commander of armies who conquered the biggest territories with his army, and the very courageous “sultan of the seven climates”. In the eastern culture this prophet is somehow associated

⁷⁹ Tursun Bey, *Tarih-i Ebu'l Feth*, ed. Mertol Tulum (İstanbul: 1977), 33. Also there are three other instances given by Gibb as examples for Ottoman usage of the title Amir al-Muminin before the conquest of Egypt by Selim I. See. Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, ed. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk (New York: Routledge, 2008), 146.

⁸⁰ On a very nice outlook of the meanings attributed to Islamic characters for the legitimization of symbolization of kings see Loise Marlow, “Kings, Prophets and the Ulama in Medieval Islamic Advice Literature,” *Studia Islamica*, 81 (1995).

⁸¹ Qur'an 2:251.

⁸² Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 170-171.

with Alexander the Great, and even though he seems to fit the description above, clearly it is not something one can be sure of. Yet Alexander was also traditionally addressed as *Iskender-i Zülkarneyn*, which leads us to the title “*sahibkiran*” (Lord of the auspicious conjunction). *Sahibkiran* is depicted as Hamza, the uncle of Prophet Muhammed, as Alexander, as Timur and as Chengīz Khan. It is possible to question whether *sahibkiran* is an Islamic title, a title taken from Eastern tradition or from an entirely different tradition, and I will discuss this question below. Another title to take note of is the Central Turkic title *Khan* showing Chengīz Khan’s and Oghuz line’s prestige and indicating the universal ruler in steppe tradition.⁸³ This is not a title however that everyone can use aside from the people from Chengīzid origin, which makes it legitimate for Mughals to use it.

In the Ottoman context, the Sultanate is regarded to be a grace from God. This idea is modeled on prophetic rulership. In that respect, 16th century Ottoman writers tried to build a discourse that would provide further legitimacy to the ruler besides merit, which was the sole and rather weak basis of legitimacy up until that point.⁸⁴ They therefore placed the Ottoman ruler in the same category with Alexander and Chengīz, emphasizing his quality of being a “universal conqueror.”⁸⁵ For Akbar, both Alexander and Chengīz were important. Also as Mughals were able to officially make claims to two important bloodlines, the Chengīzid and Timurid, they made a point of promoting the bloodline as a legitimizing quality besides the idea of “sacred kingship.”

2.1.1. Titles based on the Claims of Sacred Kingship

In order to provide a political legitimacy, in different cultures and civilizations, there is a “divinity” or “divine” aspect attributed to the ruler or a sovereign. In many cases it is projected as a right bestowed by a sublime being and destined the king to rule. This ideology takes peculiar names and varies in some of their features in different cultures and civilizations. However, throughout history, it is possible to track the ‘divine rights of kings’ in different parts of the world. Since religion is of uttermost importance to provide

⁸³ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 278.

⁸⁴ Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 235.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 263-264.

legitimacy for the king, a right to rule given by the Divine can function as an ultimate explanation. All these notions can be counted among political theology discussions.

For ancient, medieval and early modern kingship theories, the importance of the ruler's charisma cannot be neglected. Even though the terms differ according to the variance of ideologies, populations, cultural notions and geographies; the representation and self-fashioning of a monarch or sovereign as a reflection of the divine, can be found in different civilizations. In order to create this kind of an ideology, the symbols and concepts were created.⁸⁶ For Ancient Near Eastern tradition, it is possible to categorize kingship forms into two. They are the divine and sacred kingship. The former is when the king is considered to be a god. This can be associated with the Pharaohs in Egypt. In the latter, the king is a mortal being who acquires a divine mandate to rule. This can be seen in Mesopotamia.

The sovereign rules on earth like a single or dominant divine being in the universe providing God's rule, whether through claiming to be “the God” or “the representative of God.” For Islamicate civilization, due to their early encounters, one of the biggest influences on their culture was Sassanid Iran.⁸⁷ The two necessary attributes of kingship, namely power and good fortune, which are bestowed by the holy men for the Persian culture was called *khwarenah* which falls under the second category. Sitting upon God's throne on earth, God's deputy on earth (*Khalifatullah*), the shadow of the God on earth (*zillullah fi'l arz*) are the ones used in Islamic tradition. Another one underlines the heavenly sanction of the king. It is the Chinese understanding of the Mandate of Heaven. There is also *chakravartin*, the wheel-turning ruler, which is an outcome of the concept of wheel and circulating time in Indian philosophy. There is also the idea of being beforementioned *sahibkiran*. It is part of Central Asian discourse and explained through celestial movements.⁸⁸ In Akbar's time, the divine sanction shaped the kingship theory in its core and evolved into an assertion of a “divinely illumined right” of the Emperor to rule mortals with lesser qualities that is projected in *Akbarnāma*.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ For a very nice study on the significance of charisma see. Clifford Geertz, “Centers, Kings and Charisma: Symbolics of Power,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 121-146.

⁸⁷ Douglas E. Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Westview Press, 2011), 13.

⁸⁸ For a very nice work on the European understanding of sacred kingship see. Kantorowicz, *The King's two Bodies*.

⁸⁹ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 7.

The point here is the fact that all these terms are related to the idea of universal kingship. Their inclinations do not narrow themselves to being the ruler of a certain group but rather being chosen by God to rule them all. The astonishing thing is, Akbarian ideology makes use of all these concepts, namely mandate of heaven, *chakravartin*, *farr* and *sahibkaran*. It is possible only because all these terms and ideologies are part of Perso-Islamic, Turco-Mongol and Hindu culture upon which Mughals modeled their sources, tools, means of legitimization and established their rule.

a. Mandate of Heaven

According to Chinese philosophy, Heaven is defined by the word *tian*. It has all of the powers of the Lord on High. It is also able to task a human representative on earth with the “mandate” (ming 命) to rule. Ming is generally translated as Fate, Destiny or Decree. Confucius used it as the Decree of Heaven or Will of Heaven.⁹⁰ For him, only someone who is selfless and sincere will receive Virtue from the Heaven, and that political order is properly brought about only through the charismatic, non-coercive power of Virtue. Ming refers in a metaphorical and religious sense, to Heaven’s command to its deputy on Earth, the king, to rule the human world. It is thought that Heaven grants the Mandate to the ruler who would affirm ritual correctness. The ruler’s motivation to conquer comes from their desire to apply Heaven’s will rather than a personal wish to show his power. This might be explained with the belief that the holder of the Mandate also receives Virtue from Heaven as a sign of its favor.⁹¹

The concept of the Mandate of Heaven is often traced back to the conquest of the Shang by the Zhou (c. 1122 B.C). When the Zhou conquered the Shang, they presented a different theory of political legitimacy. Heaven, a deity, determined the ruling house. The founder of the Zhou dynasty claimed that the last Shang ruler had displeased Heaven. That is why the Mandate is transferred to the Zhou. The thought that the Mandate was conditional upon benevolent rule is developed by the Confucian philosopher Mencius

⁹⁰ From Analects. Quoted in, Fung Yulan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Derk Bodde (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 45.

⁹¹ Bo Mou, ed., *Routledge History of Chinese Philosophy* (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2009), 111.

(372–289 B.C.).⁹² Hence, Heaven’s mandate can be changed through human effort and virtue, and divinity has the virtue of all-embracing compassionate love, which became the model for human excellence.⁹³ It is not far away from the ideology in Hindu culture which perceives the king as a father figure for his populous or to depict the ruler as *insan-e kamil* in Islamicate empires.⁹⁴

It is perceived that there is a hierarchical order in the world and the centre is the capital city where the “Son of Heaven” who has the Mandate to rule “all under Heaven” (the empire) received the heads of tribal groups and states.⁹⁵ The concept is also used to fashion the Ming emperor as “Son of Heaven”. In a letter to King Injo dated 11 February 1637, he argued that the Manchu victories were proof that the Mandate was passing from the Ming to the Qing. ‘... if Heaven favors a man, he can be the Son of Heaven; if Heaven heaps disaster on him, he is a commoner.’⁹⁶ Mandate of Heaven is a concept related to the model of an idealized world order.⁹⁷ It denotes the power to rule over the world’s people with a virtue that comes as a result of the Mandate which basically makes the ruler a supreme being.

Akbar’s ancestors Chengīz Khan and Timur embraced this for political legitimacy. Chengīz Khan believed that God designated him the sole legitimate ruler of the world. In order to underline his Mongol imperial ideology, Timur claimed possession of a Heavenly Mandate. He makes this annotation in terms of the resemblance of his huge military success with Chengīz Khan’s power and success.⁹⁸ In *Akbarnāma*, there is an account which talks about a pact that defines the line of Chaghatai. While mentioning the members of the line and the power they establish upon earth, Abu’l-Fazl says: “God wanted to remove the metaphorical garb of military command, which Tumina Khan⁹⁹ had established, and which

⁹² Evelyn S. Rawski, “Sons of Heaven: The Qing Appropriation of the Chinese Model of Universal Empire,” in *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 234.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 550.

⁹⁴ Stephen Blake bases “the rulers are touched by God and given the throne” theme of Abu’l-Fazl and his portrayal of Akbar as a “divinely aided” father to his populous in his “patrimonial-bureaucratic empire” theory for Mughals. Stephen P. Blake, “The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 39, 1 (Nov., 1979).

⁹⁵ Rawski, *Sons of Heaven*, 236.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁹⁸ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 9.

⁹⁹ Tumina Khan is the 37th name among 52 names of the line of Akbar Shah given in *Akbarnama*. For the account of his life see. Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 226-227.

spiritually the laborers of creation used to fashion his Imperial Majesty's collective seed"¹⁰⁰ indicating that God wanted to end His favor on Tumina Khan, the favor reflected through his military commandership. Also, according to the biographers of Timur, whenever God exalts any person to the throne of sovereignty, He bestows him with special dignity and wisdom through which mankind obeys him. Therefore, even though every son of Timur had the right to sovereignty, only those with the heavenly support would ascend to the throne and the proof of such support would be their victory over their brothers. Their success is evidence to the legitimacy of their claim.¹⁰¹

Akbar, just like his grandfather and father, articulated his "noble" line as much as possible. References to Chengīz Khan and Timur are carried out through the Turco-Mongol traditions which are practiced or depicted at the court. Since the Chinese understanding of having the favor of Heaven and being the designated ruler was part of Chengizid discourse and then later used by Timur, it is not surprising to see that the Gurkhanid dynasty of Timurids also applied it in their ideology of a ruler. Also, in Akbarnama, under the list of his ancestors, Timur is depicted as a chosen one by Heaven. "He went to Syria and the lights of heaven-sent victory (*anwar-e futukhat-e asmani*) shone on him" also "with heaven's assistance (*te'yidat-e ḡaybi*)."¹⁰²

b. Chakravartin

*"Supreme wheel of the Absolute flows out from the Heart through the spaces of the eyes, and so forth, and ranges over the various objects of the senses. The rays of this wheel of light, systematically create the Fire [of the knowing subject], the Moon [of the known object], and the Sun [of the process of knowing], in [each moment] of the manifestation, maintenance, and reabsorption [of the external world]. In this way, as this wheel falls on the various objects of the senses [such as sound] by way of the sense capacity openings, one should recognize that sensory object as identical with the wheel. Thus, wherever the universal wheel falls, by this methodical practice it falls in its entirety like the universal monarch."*¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 248-249. In Beveridge: "It appears as if the world-adorning Deity desired to remove from the frame of this lofty lineage, the disguise of the Commander-in-Chiefship which Tūmana Khān had imposed but which had really been fashioned by the Divine artificers while completing the evolution of his Majesty, the king of kings."

¹⁰¹ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 138.

¹⁰² Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 262-263. "The lights of celestial victories illumined that world-conqueror" and "by the secret aids" in Beveridge, 124-125. In his translation, Thackston used the same term heaven for these two different words.

¹⁰³ Paul Muller-Ortega, "Luminous Consciousness: Light in the Tantric Mysticism of Abhinavagupta," in *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 67.

In Buddhism, model of leadership is defined as the *dharmaraja* or righteous king, also known as a *chakravarti* (p. *chakkavatti*).¹⁰⁴ Regarded as an act of powerful universal implications, the legitimacy of imperial rule and the king is represented with the concept of a *chakravartin*, a wheel turning ruler, who through conquest and alliance obliged the minor ruler of each circle to acquiesce as subordinates in his self-centered world order in an earthly hierarch of power.¹⁰⁵ The concept is mentioned in older books also, but is fully elaborated in the “Questions of King Milinda” as an account of the conversations between the Greek king Menander and a Buddhist sage of the name of Nagasena. When Milinda went to see Nagasena, the sage talked about the doctrine of no-self; but finding him unconvinced said: “*Great king, hast thou come on foot or on a chariot?*” “*I do not travel on foot, sire: I have come on a chariot.*” “*If thou hast come on a chariot, great king, then define the chariot. Is the pole the chariot? Are the wheels the chariot?*” Similar questions continued to be asked. The prince understood that when examined carefully, none of its component parts is the chariot and that the word is just used to define for those parts “assembled” or placed together in a particular way. Then the sage added: “*In the same way, the word “self” also is only a label for the aggregate of certain physical and psychical factors. Not one of the objects of experience stands for an entity apart from the constituent parts. The important thing to bear in mind here is the sameness of the explanation given of both the self and the material world. Both soul and matter exist only as complexes and neither is a single self-contained entity.*”¹⁰⁶ From there, the notion of *chakravartin*, a ruler who helps the chariot to move is derived. It is also very much related to Indian understanding of perceiving things within the concept of a wheel.¹⁰⁷

Under the Maurya dynasty (c. 320-185 BCE), the great Indian Emperor Ashoka (c. 274–32 B.C.) converted to Buddhism and renounced all warfare after a cruel war which he himself fought.¹⁰⁸ Ashoka fashioned himself as a universal lord, the Buddhist wheel-turning sage king and protector of godly, moral order i.e. *dharmaraja*. After the fall of the dynasty, his

¹⁰⁴ Peggy Morgan and Clive A. Lawton, ed., *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 97.

¹⁰⁵ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 97.

¹⁰⁶ M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2005), 140-141.

¹⁰⁷ For an informative study on different usages of the concept of wheel see. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vols. I & II (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1948)

¹⁰⁸ Morgan and Lawton, *Ethical Issues*, 79.

model retained its allure.¹⁰⁹ He gained a place within Buddhist traditions. His life is mythologized through narratives and he has come to typify the ideal Buddhist universal ruler, the wheel turning lord. Then by constructing a complex genealogy of himself, he represents a model for the Qing emperors, roughly two millennia later.¹¹⁰ Buddhist philosophers of succeeding generations amplified Ashoka's rule into the theory of *cakravartin*, the universal emperor turning the wheel of law. This wondrous lord of the entire world would gain the submission of people by his upright moral example.¹¹¹

Buddhists believe that good rulers uphold law as the ultimate ideal. They are called *dharma-rajās*, kings of righteousness. With a desire to be considered as one, Ashoka prepared edicts and appointed *dharma* ministers to read these edicts to his people, which is significant when considered along with Akbar's policies. Here some extractions: '*Ashoka now teaches you to respect the value and sacredness of life, to abstain from killing animals*¹¹² *and from cruelty to living things, kindness in human relationships and respect for mothers, fathers and elders, for the poor and the distressed and for slaves and servants*'¹¹³ and '*All men are my children. Just as I seek the welfare and happiness of my own children in this world and the next birth, I seek the same things for all men*'¹¹⁴ Tolerance is an important Buddhist virtue that is specifically underlined in Ashoka's policies and in his twelfth edict:

“One should not honor only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honor others' religions for this or that reason. So doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to

¹⁰⁹ Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, "Elephant of India: Universal Empire Through Time and Across Cultures," in *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹¹ Peter Fibiger Bang, "Between Asoka & Antiochos: An Essay in World History on Universal Kingship and Cosmopolitan Culture in the Hellenistic Ecumene," in *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 65.

¹¹² "In these days (991) new orders were given. The killing of animals on certain days was forbidden, as on Sundays, because this day is sacred to the Sun; during the first eighteen days of the month of Farwardīn; the whole month of A'bān (the month in which His Majesty was born); and on several other days, to please the Hindus. This order was extended over the whole realm, and capital punishment was inflicted on every one who acted against the command. Many a family was ruined. During the time of these fasts, His Majesty abstained altogether from meat, as a religious penance, gradually extending the several fasts during a year over six months and even more, with the view of eventually discontinuing the use of meat altogether." Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 321. "He prohibited the slaughter of cows, and the eating of their flesh, because the Hindus devoutly worship them, and esteem their dung as pure. Instead of cows they sacrifice fine men. This reason was also assigned, that physicians have represented the flesh of cows to be productive of sundry kinds of sickness, and to be difficult to digest." Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 260-61.

¹¹³ Morgan and Lawton, *Ethical Issues*, 123.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

other religions. Whosoever honors his own religion and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking ‘I will glorify my own religion’ so concord is good: Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others.”¹¹⁵

Akbar has been compared to the Buddhist Emperor Ashoka.¹¹⁶ This comparison means a lot for the ‘father figure’ imagery. They were both considered to be visionaries for they dared to pursue the ideal of perfection beyond the ordinary limits perceived to be possible.¹¹⁷ This comparison is significant because Ashoka is one of the greatest emperors of India and a prominent figure for Buddhist, Jain and Hindu beliefs. His sacred kingship theory, once it is compared with Akbar’s desire to represent himself as a sacred king becomes more important for the Mughal case and it also addresses an audience which happens to be a huge population. Even more interestingly, Ashoka, at the peak of his military and political power and success, an emperor “Beloved by Gods,” declared that he won’t be drawing his sword for any other conquest again, declaring that “only the conquest by piety is good for this world and the world beyond.”¹¹⁸ This is similar to the idea in Akbarnama and it is also the idea of Ghaza. In the book Abu’l-Fazl underlines that the main and more important meaning of “conquest” is not that of the physical war but that of a spiritual one against oneself.¹¹⁹ As such, a Buddhist understanding adopted by a very famous Indian ruler coincided with Akbar’s understanding, which was further expressed through an Islamic perspective, used a lot by Sufis.

c. *Khwarenah* and/or *Farr*

Farr or *khwarenah* (ancient Avestan language: *xʷarənah*) in its most accepted meaning is understood as “glory.” However, it is also a concept related to fortune, dignity, splendor, luminosity and also considered to have a royal and divine aspect. Etymologically, its most commonly recognized root is “the sun” from the word “*xuuar*.” The main definition for *khwarenah* derived from the Avesta is like a magical force or power which has a

¹¹⁵ Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1974), 4-5.

¹¹⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art and Culture*, trans. Corinne Atwood; ed. Burzine K. Waghmar. (London: Reaktion, 2004), 32.

¹¹⁷ Abraham Early, *The Mughal Throne: The Saga of India’s Great Emperors* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), 163.

¹¹⁸ Rahula, *What the Buddha*, 88.

¹¹⁹ In the panegyric of Akbar, Abu’l-Fazl refers to him as “striver in the field of the “Greater Struggle” (*mocahed-e meydan-e cehad-e akbar*) Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 22-23.

luminous and fiery nature. According to the Zoroastrian belief it is a concept associated with the stars and great luminaries. For ancient Persian kingship it indicates the luminous charisma of a monarch, or each individual sovereign's fire and was used as a tool of legitimacy for the Achaemenid sovereigns. The *khvarnah* ensures the authority of the ruler, which is granted by the Divine. However, it has a fluctuating nature. It is available to all mortals and its recipient may lose it through defeat or could see it flourish through victory and success.¹²⁰

For Sassanid rulers, the concept is royal *farr* and the term *farr-e elahi* or *farr-e izadi* meant the divine force and power upon a sovereign for he is appointed by God to rule.¹²¹ Basically, for ancient Persian culture, the indication of the term *khvarenah* and the epithet *Shahanshah* is not exactly “the emperor” but rather the custodian of mystical glory and charisma.¹²² It is incorporated into the Islamic civilization through the Sassanians. In relation to the Islamization process, Persian terminology of divine legitimization came into use. In particular, after the decentralization of the Abbasid caliphate in the eleventh century, concepts such as *farr* (effulgence) and *tāli* (fortune) came into wider circulation among the independent dynasties as a principle means of legitimization with pre-Islamic conceptions of divine grace or light.¹²³

Its incorporation to the Islamicate civilization happened thanks to the *magnum opus* of the famous Iranian poet Ferdowsi called *Shāhnāma* (the Book of Kings) written in the early 11th century. It was a direct reference book for the courts of Islamdom which identified themselves with Persianate culture. The work provides the history of ancient Persian kings, especially the Sassanians and Achaemenids. Those kings also appear as exemplary figures in the *adab* literature, advice books or mirrors-for-princes produced in Islamdom. Since *Shāhnāma* occupied an important place at Muslim courts, the characters and concepts within the book played vital roles while creating the political discourse and literature.

¹²⁰ Abolala Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 122.

¹²¹ Gherardo Gnoli, “Farr” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, IX:315. Also, you can find the discussions about the term, its root and meanings in detail in the entry.

¹²² S.A.A. Rizvi, *A Wonder That Was India Vol. II* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1987), 155.

¹²³ Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 222.

In *Shāhnāma*, Zoroastrian understanding of sun rulership idea known as *khwarenah* transformed into *farr* and carried into the Islamic culture.¹²⁴ It underlines the monarch as an instrument in the execution of God's will. The God of the *Shāhnāma* is omnipotent and omniscient. He endows Kayūmars (the founder of the ceremonial of throne and crown) with *farr*. In Ferdowsi's explanation it is perceived to be a supernatural effulgence or radiance and indicates the true kingship. Another great king Jamshid also legitimizes his rule through claiming that he is endowed with the divine *farr*. He also fashions himself to be the king and the priest and claims both worldly and spiritual authority. His aim is to save people from taking the wrong path and guide their souls towards the light.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, to possess *farr* or *khvarnah* is not something permanent. For the *khvarnah* may increase in victory and decrease in defeat, or ultimately lost which was the case for Jamshid in *Shāhnāma*.¹²⁶ This is very similar to Heaven's Mandate.

After its re-introduction into the Islamic intellectual world with *Shāhnāma*, the term is altered or adapted in many other works. For instance, famous Muslim philosopher and theologian Ghazali (1058-1126) states in his *Nasihatu'l-mulūk* (advice for the kings, ca.1109) that kingship and *farr-i izadī* have been granted by God. Therefore, the kings must be obeyed, loved and followed. To dispute with them is improper; for God on High has commanded, "Obey God and obey the Prophet and those among you who hold authority."¹²⁷ This Qur'anic verse basically becomes one of the most used by Muslim intellectuals and rulers to justify and legitimize the power of a ruler. Ghazālī also notes Aristotle's claim that kings owe their greatness to divine effulgence.¹²⁸ In the post-Caliphate period, the Mongol Il-Khānids used the term as *farr-e izadī* for the first time in order to provide legitimization for their rule.¹²⁹ It is known that the Ottomans used this in their political treatises. It is not surprising to see its application for the Mughal theory of

¹²⁴ Bang and Kolodziejczyk, *Universal Empire*, 199.

¹²⁵ Rizvi, *A Wonder*, 155. Historians describe Shah 'Abbas himself in traditionally exalted pre-Islamic Iranian imperial rhetorical terms, both as one who possessed *farr*.

¹²⁶ Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings*, 14.

¹²⁷ "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result." Qur'an, 4:59.

¹²⁸ Yilmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 223. Ghazali also related this idea with being the shadow of God on earth but since that is beyond the limits of this title, I won't be talking about that.

¹²⁹ Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings*, xi.

kingship. In *Akbarnāma*, the panegyric for Akbar puts “possessor of *farr*”¹³⁰ among emperor’s features and this idea repeats itself in many different parts of the book.

Based on the idea of “a sacred sovereign picked or appointed by God/Heaven,” Akbar and Abu’l-Fazl used different philosophical understandings of different civilizations and traditions related to their audience. The crucial point is, the main idea remains the same but the terminology or the way it is presented varies according to the culture. Yet, Akbar manages to fashion himself as one through Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Persian philosophy. However, it doesn’t seem possible to separate them from one another and find a valid definition for what is Greek, Persian or Islamic. Obviously, this also proves the fact that religious legitimacy works as the uttermost important part of self-fashioning for rulers. However, it is also interesting to see that being chosen by God, whether depicted via a light or in the horoscope, is something that makes the sovereign the ultimate ruler, not only of a specific cast or creed but universally. It is still striking to see the significance of the comparability of these notions and understanding more about the similarities and differences.

2.1.2. Titles suggested through Khutbah and Mahzar

It is possible to differentiate between the nature of Akbar’s policies. Once those policies or actions are taken into account in a cumulative way, it also can help to see the changes in his attitude especially towards religious matters. Many of Akbar’s actions have their own processes of development. One of those came up with the famous *mahzar* (edict) of September 2nd 1579. The edict plays a significant role in representing Akbar as a Muslim monarch. Prior to *mahzar*, Akbar made some symbolic moves about his religious leadership. On 26th June 1579, (the first Friday of Jumada-al Awwal 987 AH) a Friday, which also happened to be the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad, Akbar read the *khutbah*, the Friday sermon at the noon prayer in Jama Masjid of Fatehpur Sikri. This is something unusual since it is expected to be delivered by the imam of the Masjid in the name of the Caliph of the time.

Badā’ūnī describes this act as following the footsteps of great rulers. “As [Akbar]

¹³⁰ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 20, 22.

had heard that the prophet, his lawful successors, and some of the most powerful kings, as Amir Timur *sahibkiran*, and Mirza Ulugh Beg-i Gurgan, and several others, had themselves read the *khutbah* (the Friday sermon), he resolved to do the same, apparently in order to imitate their example, but in reality to appear in public as the Mujtahid of the age.”¹³¹ He continues to explain the situation with Akbar’s desire to unite the powers of state and religion in his person underlining that it is something that is also done by significant rulers of his line. However, his description of the event might give an idea about its symbolic nature, “...all at once he stammered and trembled, and though assisted by others, he could scarcely read three verses of a poem, which Shaikh Faizi (famous court poet and brother of Abu’l-Fazl) had composed, came quickly down from the pulpit, and handed over the duties of the Imam (leader of the prayer) to Hafiz Muhammad Amín, the Court *Khaṭīb*. These are the verses—

*“The Lord has given me the empire,
And a wise heart, and a strong arm,
He has guided me in righteousness and justice,
And has removed from my thoughts everything but justice.
His praise surpasses man's understanding,
Great is His power, Allahu Akbar!”*¹³²

It is important to note that, after the Islamic Prophet, Friday sermons took also a political shape. According to Ibn Khaldun, the first Caliph who started the tradition that the *khutbah* be read in the name of Caliph is the fourth Caliph Ali ibn Talib.¹³³ After him, it became a symbolic sign of the Caliphate that the *khutbah* be read by an appointed *khatib* (preacher), in the name of the Caliph of the time. Also, in order to legitimize his rule, the reign of Muslim rulers should be affirmed by the Caliph of the time. One of the most significant requirements for that is to read the *khutbah* in the name of the Caliph in your lands. For Sunni Muslim states, the tradition went on with using the name of the Abbasid Caliph in sermons. However, the usage of the title Caliph started to change and politicized. Still, it is important to distinguish between the religious and political side of reading a *khutbah*. When the prophet preaches, it is because he is entitled to do so. Being his Caliphs (representatives), the rightly guided Caliphs continued this tradition, to preach to the

¹³¹ Badā’ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 268.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 268.

¹³³ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History Vol II*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 68-69.

ummah (muslim community) in the Friday prayer. However, along with the expansion of the Islamic state and the institutionalization, the term “leader” or the “representative” of the *ummah* also evolved and politicized. A few months after this attempt, the famous “infallibility decree” was issued in the form of a *mahzar* (petition).¹³⁴

“Whereas Hindustan is now become the centre of security and peace, and the land of justice and beneficence, a large number of people, especially learned men and lawyers, have immigrated and chosen this country for their home. Now we, the principal ‘Ulama, who are not only well-versed in the several departments of the Law and in the principles of jurisprudence, and well acquainted with the edicts which rest on reason or testimony, but are also known for our piety and honest intentions, have duly considered the deep meaning, *first*, of the verse of the Qur’an: “Obey God, and obey the prophet, and those who have authority among you,” and, *secondly*, of the genuine tradition: “Surely the man who is dearest to God on the day of judgment is the *Imam-i-‘adil*; whosoever obeys the Amir, obeys Thee; and whosoever rebels against him, rebels against thee¹³⁵, and, *thirdly*, of several other proofs based on reasoning or testimony; and we have agreed that the rank of *Sulṭan-i-‘adil* (just ruler) is higher in the eyes of God than the rank of a *Mujtahid* (authority on points of law). Further we declare that the king of the Islam, Amir of the Faithful, shadow of God in the world, *Abu-l-Faṭḥ Jalal-ud-dīn Muḥammad Akbar Padshah Ghazi* (whose kingdom God perpetuate!) is a most just, a most wise, and a most God-fearing king. Should therefore in future a religious question come up, regarding which the opinions of the Mujtahids are at variance, and His Majesty in his penetrating understanding and clear wisdom be inclined to adopt, for the benefit of the nation, and as a political expedient, any of the conflicting opinions, which exist on that point, and issue a decree to that effect, we do hereby agree that such a decree shall be binding on us and on the whole nation.

Further, we declare that, should His Majesty think fit to issue a new order, we and the nation shall likewise be bound by it, provided always that such order be not only in accordance with some verse of the Qur’an, but also of real benefit to the nation; and further, that any opposition on the part of his subjects to such an order passed by His Majesty shall involve damnation in the world to come, and loss of property and religious privileges in this. This document has been written with honest intentions, for the glory of God, and the propagation of the Islam, and is signed by

¹³⁴ Because the term “infallibility decree” is not the real expression used for the document but a term given later, I will not be using it but rather simply use *mahzar* which means petition.

¹³⁵ The tradition used in the *mahzar* have similarities with some other traditions such as: “O mankind, obey God, even though He set over you as your ruler a mutilated Abyssinian slave” or “Obey your rulers whatever may happen, for if they bid you do anything different from what I have taught you, they shall be punished for it and you will be rewarded for your obedience; and if they bid you do anything different from what I have taught you, the responsibility is theirs and you are free of it. When you meet God (on the day of Judgement say, ‘O Lord, Thou didst send us Prophets and we obeyed them by Thy permission, and You set over us Caliphs and we obeyed them by Thy permission, and our rulers gave us orders and we obeyed them for Thy sake.” Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual*, 148.

us, the principal ‘ulama and lawyers, in the month of Rajab (the seventh month) of the year nine hundred and eighty-seven (987).”¹³⁶

Both reading the *khutbah* and mahzar were attempts by Akbar to underline his power in the Islamic tradition. This petition is particularly significant because it depicts the titles which Akbar associated himself with, i.e. *Imām-ı ‘ādil* (the just Imam), *Pādshāh*, *Abu’l Fath* (Son of Conquest), *Ghāzi*, *Amir’ul Muminin* (Commander of the Faithful), *Zillullah fi’l arz* (Shadow of God on earth). Also, the document starts with the Qur’anic verse, “Obey God, and obey the Prophet, and those who have authority among you” and continues with a *hadith* (prophetic tradition) that goes, “surely the man who is dearest to God on the Day of Judgment is the *Imām-ı ‘ādil*; whosoever obeys the Amir, obeys Thee; and whosoever rebels against him, rebels against Thee.” The 59th verse from the surah *an-nisa*, the fourth surah of Qur’an is a famous one and used in many occasions for legitimization. However, it is worth mentioning that Akbar and Abu’l-Fazl used a *hadith*, which is a Sunni attitude to strengthen their argument. This is important since more than anything, they are accused of being non-Sunni, if not heretic. Also, *Akbarnāma* is known for the absence of the Muslim prophet’s name. Even the religion of Islam is called *Ahmedi-kesh* in the book.¹³⁷ That is why the use of a hadith in *mahzar* is a point to highlight.

a. Amir al-Muminin, Just Imam, Zillullah fi’l Arz and Caliph

As far as the leadership of the Muslim community is considered, Caliph can be counted as the most significant epithet for a ruler since the term “khalīfa” or its seat “khilāfat” is derived from a Qur’anic understanding. However, it indicates different things in assorted intellectual, cultural and political traditions based on the author and the context it is used.¹³⁸ Therefore, it is crucial to take the context it has been used into account since its meaning may vary. For Infallibility Decree, it is not used directly but indicated via two other titles i.e. *Imām-ı ‘ādil* (the just imam) and *Amir al- Muminin* (commander of the faithful). The former is in the hadith that is quoted and the latter is used as a title before Akbar’s name. The title ‘Amir is also used in the second part of the *hadith*. Also, in a verse

¹³⁶ Badā’ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 271-272.

¹³⁷ “Consistently, Abu’l-Fazl refers to Islam as ‘Muhammad’s religion’, as one among many; apparently the term ‘Islam’ is reserved for its original use, submission to God, which may be entered upon in every tradition but is rarely fully achieved in any.” Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume III*, 77.

¹³⁸ Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 176.

from the Qur'an there is a line "those in authority among you" (*uli'l amr-i minkum*) where the word *al-Amr* (authority) is used. The difference here can be identified as the following: the word *Amir* signifies authority, rulership, a leading figure like a commander. When it is used with the "al" which is the definite article in Arabic (*ma'rife*), it denotes "the ruler." In the case of *Amir al-Muminin* it denotes "commander of the faithful."¹³⁹ In the first example, the emphasis is the ruler, without any other specification; whereas in the second one, it is ruler of the faithful (believers), ruler of the Muslim community. The point is the title *Amir al-Muminin* is a reference directly to the idea of *Khalifatu Rasulallah*. However, for "the ruler" there is no such direct indication. For some historians the use of the term Amir al-Muminin which refers to Caliph means that Akbar uses it in the sense of a universal Islamic emperor, not only a ruler who enforces Shari'ah.¹⁴⁰

It was not uncommon for the Muslim rulers of the time to use this title. Akbar and his successors are also described as the Caliph of God, particularly by official historians.¹⁴¹ The claim can also be seen in the most significant signs for a ruler, i.e. the coins. The inscriptions on some of the coins from Akbar's reign show the epithet *dār al-khilāfa* (seat of sovereignty)¹⁴² whereas the Mughal court is also known as the *astan-i-khilāfa* (the threshold of Caliphate).¹⁴³ Also the cities Delhi and Agra are designated respectively as *dār al-khilāfa* and *mustaqarr al-khilāfa*.¹⁴⁴

For the reign of Akbar, it is possible to say that meaning of the term does not necessarily indicate the same "Caliph." First there is the Khalifa which is close to the "orthodox" understanding of *Khalifatu Rasulallah*. In early Islam, Caliphate was understood as the vicegerency of the prophet Muhammad, and the term *Khalifatu Rasulallah* denoted the successor of the prophet. The basic duty of the owner of this title was to establish justice and equity on earth and lead the population to act according to the religious laws. The Caliph was therefore the head of the Muslim community. His religious function was to conduct the public prayer, making him an Imam, and he was addressed as

¹³⁹ I preferred commander of the faithful for "*Amir al-Muminin*" since it is the commonly translated usage in reference to early Islamic times.

¹⁴⁰ Streusand, *The Formation*, 117.

¹⁴¹ Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 217.

¹⁴² Blake, *The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic*, 93.

¹⁴³ N. R. Farooqi, *Mughal Ottoman Relations: A Study of Political and Diplomatic Relations between Mughal India and the Ottoman Empire, 1556-1748* (Delhi, 1989), 200.

¹⁴⁴ Alam, *The Languages*, 14

Amir al-Muminin. Here the title indicated a person who united the ummah and ensured the supremacy of *Sharia*.¹⁴⁵

This usage coincides with Akbar calling himself the Khalifa of the time in using the title *Amir al-Muminin* in the *mahzar*. Also, Akbar decided to deliver the *khutba* on the Friday prayers after the tradition of “the earlier Caliphs.”¹⁴⁶ Both of these moves, which happened at rather early times of his reign, are solely Islamic and that is why the title offers its ruler of the *ummah* meaning with respect to being the representative of the prophet.

Aside from those, in some instances it is possible to say that Akbar acted like the *Khalifatu Rasulullah*.¹⁴⁷ It is known that in 1576 he started organizing annual Hajj caravans to Mecca. Four more were arranged by Akbar between 1577 and 1580 along with gifts and *sadaqat* (religious alms).¹⁴⁸ It is a duty assigned by the Muslim jurist to the Caliph due to the claim that he is the ruler of *ummah*.¹⁴⁹ Also, he took precautions for securing of the roads. Suffice to say, these were the actions attributed to the duties of a Caliph, yet, from another perspective, Akbar, the universal ruler, was only continuing to help his subjects with their lives. For instance, as early as 1562, long before organizing Hajj caravans, he

¹⁴⁵ Farooqi, *Mughal Ottoman Relations*, 174.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁴⁷ As the Commander of the Faithful, the Caliph is charged with the protection of the Islamic lands through waging jihad (holy war) against the unbelievers, and converting the Darul Harb (lands without Islamic rule) into the Darul Islam. For instance, he uses the title Ghazi in *mahzar* which is part of Islamic discourse since the holy war is termed as Ghaza. Also he takes pride in his conquests in terms of making ordinances of Islam known far and wide and spreading the authority of the Prophet to territories where even his name had not been heard of before. In the letters he sent to ‘Abdullah Khān Uzbek in 1586, Akbar presents himself as a Muslim and brags about his conquests in terms of spreading Islam to territories where it had never been heard of before and also the temples of non-believers had been converted into mosques. Farooqi, *Mughal Ottoman Relations*, 175; Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 222. For the summary of that letter see. Riazul Islam, *A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations (1500-1750) Vol II* (Lahore: Mirza Muhammad Sadiq & Sons, 1982), 207, 211. In one of the Jesuit accounts, the priest mentions that Akbar held many disputations with the Fathers of the first mission in defense of Islam. When the Mullās could not defend the Muslim conception of paradise Akbar came to their help and tried to defend it. Similarly, he tried to defend his Mullās on another occasion where the Fathers were reluctantly compelled to conclude that they had no chance whatsoever of converting him to Christianity. Peruschi writing in 1595 mentions rumours about Akbar’s current religious beliefs. He comes to the conclusion that the more intelligent think him to be a Muhammadan who outwardly conforms to all religions in order to obtain popularity. Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 57. An interesting instance is noted in A-in: “Belonged to the Salami Sayyids of Shiraz, Abū Turáb was a highly respected man...Akbar sent him to Makkah as Mír Hajj, in which capacity he commanded a large party of courtiers and begums. On his return, he brought a large stone from Makkah, which bore the footprint of the prophet (*qadam i sharif, or qadam i mubárak*). Akbar looked upon the whole as a pious farce, and though the stone was received with great eclat, Abu Turab was graciously allowed to keep it in his house. Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 569-570.

¹⁴⁸ Farooqi, *Six Ottoman Documents*, 44. For instance, in 1582 Akbar sends a letter to “the *Shurafa-i Kiram-i Makka* (the Sharifs of Mecca). In the later he states that due to the Uzbek rebellion he could not send the annual bounty to Mecca. Now that the revolt is dealt with and “the government of Kabul is entrusted to Mirza Hakim on condition of restoring the observances of Shari’at (*ihya-i marasim-i Shari’at*) and promoting public welfare”, he will continue to send it and hopes that there won’t be any interruption in the future. This letter suggests that Akbar wishes to maintain his contact and relation with the officials of Mecca and also he underlines that his delegate in Kabul will act according to Shari’at. see. Islam, *A Calendar*, 302-303. “After 1574 the conquest of Gujarat permitted direct access to the Holy Cities from the west coast port of Surat across the Arabian Sea to Jiddah. The emperor enlarged the pious trust (waqf) established by the last Sultan of Gujarat which sent the revenues of several coastal villages as donations to Mecca and Medina.” Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 30-31.

¹⁴⁹ Farooqi, *Mughal Ottoman Relations*, 191.

abolished the pilgrimage tax that had been collected from Hindus before his reign. Yet, this act can also be explained as an act of a justice-loving ruler since execution of justice was also among Caliph's principal functions. On the other hand, the power play cannot be disregarded. Especially with the Ottomans, there was the problem related to dealing with Hajj caravans. At the time, Hijaz was under the rule of the Ottomans, who also considered the Caliphate to be theirs.¹⁵⁰ Protecting pilgrims, patronizing the Hajj caravans, sponsoring the building of hospices for people were all part of the efforts to legitimize the ruler's power over the Muslim community. It is not surprising to see that this is a time when Akbar was trying to depict himself as Caliph in the sense of the *Amir al-Muminin*.¹⁵¹

In the late Abbasid period, the use of *Khalifatu Rasulallah* gradually disappeared from political literature while *imām* started to be used more frequently. The use of *Khalifatu Rasulallah* to refer to the caliph marked a distinction from earlier periods when the Caliph only meant the Caliph of the Prophet.¹⁵² With this change the ruler was now perceived as the "vicegerent of God" rather than the successor of the Prophet.¹⁵³ This change in the meaning of caliph caused a change in the duties of the person as well. Following *Khulafa-i Rashidin*, the first four Caliphs selected by a council as well as through election, the "Caliphate" in the sense of the successor of the prophet ended. Nevertheless, the term Caliph continued to be assumed by the Umayyad rulers, the first monarchical family to rule in Islamic history. By the end of the fourteenth century it was possible to see the new formulation as expressed by Ibn Khaldun: "Government and kingship are a caliphate of God amongst men, for the execution of His ordinances amongst them."¹⁵⁴ There is a distinction between secular kingship and the Caliphate, and only the

¹⁵⁰ In Akbarnama there is a part where the arrangements of these caravans are given in detail titled as "Visit of the Hijaz by the Veiled Ladies of the Caliphate" see. Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, 205-206.

There is a study of six documents issued by the Ottoman Sultan Murad III (r.1574-1595) that are concerned with Mughals. Five of them are about the Indian pilgrims and Mughal Hajj caravans in Mecca that includes the imperial female members written between 1577-1580. This study also relates Akbar's changing attitudes both towards Khilafat, pilgrimage and Ottomans. He stopped sending alms and caravans after 1581. Farooqi, *Six Ottoman Documents*, 32-48. Also, for another research on the matter see. Naim R. Farooqi, "Mughals, Ottomans and Pilgrims: Protecting the Routes to Mecca in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century," *The International History Review* 10:2 (May, 1988), 198-220.

¹⁵¹ Farooqi, *Six Ottoman Documents*, 43-44.

¹⁵² Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 188. There is a famous treatise prepared by Lütfi Pāşā, important grand vizier of 16th century called *Khalāṣ al-Umma fī Ma'rifa al-A'imma*. It is a defense of the legitimization of the Ottoman caliphate or, more specifically, the Ottoman sultan's right to bear the title khalīfa and imām. Its main argument is to oppose the twelfth century theologian Nasafi's (d. 536/1141) statement that Qureishī descent is a condition for a legitimate caliphate. Ibid., 117-118.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 190. "Rule of the material and spiritual and absolute authority over the external and internal are given (tafwiz) to him. The word "tafwiz" means "to delegate" Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 14-15.

¹⁵⁴ Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization*, 145.

righteous ruler who governs with justice and who enforces *shari'a* as the law of the community is entitled to the style of Caliph or Imam.¹⁵⁵

Another usage of Caliph is its direct translation from Arabic, “the rightful heir.” This conception of the term was summed up in the more general form *Khalifatu'l-zaman*, the Caliph of the Age.¹⁵⁶ “The principal term that defined the historical Caliphate as the successor of the Prophet was rarely used. Yet the caliphate remained one of the most defining designations in use during this period. The defining designation for this concept of the caliphate was God’s vicegerent (*Khalifatullāh*). This status of the Caliphate could be attained not through a contract with, or subjection of the Muslim community, but through learning, piety, morality, and spiritual perfection.”¹⁵⁷

Then there is the understanding of a Caliphate which Hüseyin Yılmaz highlights in the 16th century Ottoman context, for the age of Süleyman I. According to Yılmaz, during the Ottoman ruler’s reign, the perception of rulership as a continuation of the historical Caliphate with the claim of presenting the sultan as the universal head of the Muslim community lost its appeal. The Caliphate was rather defined as a cosmic rank between man and God, attaining the spiritual sphere and implying an authority over both temporal and spiritual realms of creation.¹⁵⁸ This understanding coincides with Akbarnama’s defining of Akbar Shah being the “unique pearl of the Caliphate,” underlining the fact that he is the ruler of both realms.

There is also the use of Caliph as conceived by Sufis: a person directly inspired by God.¹⁵⁹ According to Sufi belief, friends of God (*awliya*), along with their spiritual powers, are endowed with worldly powers and are organized in a hierarchy to govern the world. They are responsible for the order of the world, and for guiding human beings, though their presence is not necessarily manifest.¹⁶⁰ As indicated by Abu'l-Fazl in both *Akbarnama* and *'Ain-e Akbari*, humans need authority and guidance in order to strive for happiness and perfection. That is why, he fashions a perfect man (*insān-i kāmil*) i.e. Akbar,

¹⁵⁵ Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization*, 145.

¹⁵⁶ F. W. Buckler, "A New Interpretation of Akbar's "Infallibility" Decree of 1579," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 4 (Oct., 1924), 606.

¹⁵⁷ Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 389-390.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Buckler, *A New Interpretation*, 606.

¹⁶⁰ Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 193.

who has every right to claim such status with his God-given task to lead humanity.¹⁶¹ “Attaining the status of the caliphate as a human being was not the same thing as acquiring the position of Caliphate among human beings, for it was a spiritual realization rather than a sociological manifestation.”¹⁶²

Imam-ı Adil is also an indication for a claim over Caliphate. Even though the titles Imam, Caliph and *Amir al-Muminin* were used interchangeably, pointing out the leader of an Islamic state, their meanings started to evolve into something different in different contexts through time. That is why one needs to be careful in order to understand the meaning it denotes for a specific usage. There is a nuance between the titles *Imam* and *Amir’ul Muminin* especially for the political atmosphere of the 16th century. Even though both of them indicate the title Caliph, the title Imam through time was shaped into the Shi’i equivalent of Caliph. Therefore, for Sunni Muslim rulers the title of the leader is Caliph, whereas for Shi’ite it is the Imam.

This distinction does not concern the *hadith* since the change in the meaning or its use as a term in Shi’i belief occurred after the death of the Muslim prophet. “*Imamat*” (Imamate) is the succession of prophet Muhammad according to Shi’i belief. They think the right to be the successor belongs to the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet, ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib and his descendants from his wife Fatima, also the daughter of the prophet. This is believed to be proclaimed by the Prophet himself in an instance called *Ghadir-Khumm* while he was returning back from his farewell pilgrimage.¹⁶³

In 1533, in a decree issued during Shah Tahmasb’s reign, Shi’i *mujtahid* Shaykh Ali Karaki ascribed the title *imam al-adil* for Shah Ismail. It carries two meanings here, namely the hidden Imam and the just temporal ruler. It confirms Ismail’s role as religious arbiter since according to Shi’a belief, the Imam articulates sacred law himself and does not need the intermediary of religious scholars to interpret the law for him. It is because the Imam embodies the Divine Law.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 194-195. “Abu’l-Fazl, after blending different political philosophies comes up with the conclusion that Akbar conforms to the features set by Ibn ‘Arabi for the Perfect Man. According to this understanding, since man is the only “existent” in the world of Being in whom all the Attributes and Names of the Absolute are manifested, the one nearest to God is the Perfect man.” Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual*, 357. “Safavid Shah Ismail associated himself with the hidden Imam (messiah) and appropriated a term that blends different roles into a title: *Imam al-adil al-kamil* (just and perfect Imam).” Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, 300.

¹⁶² Yilmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 157.

¹⁶³ For *Ghadir-Khumm* see. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual*, 2.

¹⁶⁴ Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, 306.

The 16th century is a time of increasing Sunni - Shi'i rivalry. In particular, the emergence of the Safavid dynasty in Iran with a strict Shi'i discourse made their neighboring rival Ottoman Empire's discourse lean towards a Sunni state ideology. As the other big Muslim power, when Akbar uses both of these titles in his imperial decree, it is possible he indicates his intentions to claim the leadership of both Shi'ites and Sunnis and declare himself as a unifying force and leader over both communities. His image is shaped around his intentions to reconcile Shi'ites and Sunnis, as is demonstrated in the decree.¹⁶⁵

b. Mujtahid

However, the title that is the main reason for the preparation of this document and also considered to be over the edge by scholars of his time is *mujtahid*. According to *mahzar*, in the future when a religious matter arises and the assessments of the *Mujtahids* contradict one another, with his "intelligence and wisdom" Akbar would make the final decision "to facilitate the livelihood of people" (*tehsil-i ma'ishet-i beni adem*) and "for the interest of the world order" (*maslahat-i nizam-e 'alem*).¹⁶⁶ According to Badauni, this is an attempt to combine the temporal and spiritual authority that Prophet Muhammad and Timur Sahib Qiran had in one's person. This is curious because Badauni is the opposing voice for especially the religious policies of Akbar and it is expected from him to criticize *mahzar* as a "heretic" decree. However, he does not do that.

Mujtahid is an atypical title indicating the authority to decide on religious matters which is normally used for a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence qualified "to use reasoned judgment or *ijtihad* to resolve thorny questions of law that had no obvious solution in scripture or legal precedent."¹⁶⁷ *Akbarnāma* is also designed as a source that defends Akbar's ability to be considered a *mujtahid*. According to the books, in order to become a *mujtahid*, one does not have to be like a "paper-worshipping scholiast" who blindly imitates the tradition (*taqlid*). For Abu'l-Fazl, the main requirement to be *mujtahid* is to have innate

¹⁶⁵ Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought from the Prophet to the Present* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 245.

¹⁶⁶ Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 49.

¹⁶⁷ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 139.

intelligence and supreme spiritual potential.¹⁶⁸ Akbar's legitimization as a *mujtahid* in his chronicle is in reference to his divine nature. Abu'l-Fazl claims that the rank of a *mujtahid* is lower than a holy soul. Due to Akbar's holiness, it won't be surprising that wise and learned men would approach him for their questions about religious matters and this is a perfect solution since it ends the "confusion of religions and creeds."¹⁶⁹

Starting from the time of Umar from *Khulafa-i Rashidin*, Caliph is considered to be the servant of *shari'a* and a unifying ruler for the *ummah*; so it is a religious title. However, the Caliph is not entitled to alter, modify, or make the law. It is the role of a *mujtahid*, the interpreter of the law. The Caliph is obliged to accept the interpretation of law and in that way, his authority is taken under control.¹⁷⁰ At this point, the *mahzar* attracts more attention since it bestows upon Akbar the right of *ijtihad*. It means that in case of disagreement among the scholars about the interpretation of any part of the Qur'an, the final decision on the matter would belong to Akbar Shah. In order to have the authority to decide on that, the person is supposed to have knowledge of the *shari'a*, which Akbar was believed to have lacked. However, it seems Makhdum-ul-mulk, "a leading 'alim of the time"; Shaikh 'Abd al-Nabi, "*sadr-us-sudur*"¹⁷¹; Qazi Jalal-ud-din Multani, "*qadi-e-quzat*"; Sadr Jahan, "the *mufti* of the empire"; Shaikh Mubarak "the deepest writer of the age", and Ghazi Khan Badakhshani, "who stood unrivalled in the transcendental sciences of *kalam* and medicine"¹⁷² signed the decree, agreeing that Akbar is capable of being a *mujtahid*. Obviously, their affirmation and support would make it seem more reliable and trusted even though it is a point of discussion whether they were forced into doing it. According to Badauni, the decree which is drafted and presented to the Emperor in the handwriting of Shaikh Mubarak; even though signed by Shaikh Abu'l Fazl most willingly since it was a matter he had in mind for several years, is signed by the others against their will.¹⁷³

Furthermore, Akbar decides to go on a pilgrimage to the famous Chisti shaikh Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti's tomb in Ajmer. It is his last to that particular shrine on the

¹⁶⁸ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 139. This is a matter of debate among scholars. "While Badauni recommends *ijtihad* only for theologians and 'ulamā of high calibre, Shustari makes a plea not only for the accomplished 'ulamā' but also for the king, nobles and state officials to be given permission to engage in *ijtihad* in political administrative matters." Alam, *The Languages*, 80.

¹⁶⁹ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 140.

¹⁷⁰ Farooqi, *Mughal Ottoman Relations*, 175.

¹⁷¹ It is the post of *shaikh al-Islam* in the Mughal Empire.

¹⁷² Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 270. Streusand, *The Formation*, 116.

¹⁷³ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 37. Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 272.

16th of Rajab of the same year, not much after the declaration of *mahzar*. The timing of this pilgrimage, especially since it is taking place fourteen years after he took his last journey, is curious.¹⁷⁴ This does not seem like a coincidence and might give some indications about the reception of the *mahzar*. Abu'l Fazl also confirms the negative reactions it received: "When it appeared that an expedition in that direction (Ajmer) would be *a means of calming the public and enhance the submission of the recalcitrant*, he (Akbar), on 26 Shahrīyūr, Divine month, 8 September 1579, placed the foot of fortune in the stirrup of world conquest and set off thither."¹⁷⁵

Following their ancestors, the Timurids, Mughal rulers also appoint a scholar from the Indo-Muslim elite whose duty is to deal with religious affairs, namely, the *sadr* (religious administrator) and *qadi* (shari'ah judge). *Sadr* is the highest religious dignity and even more significantly he has the duty of controlling the allotment of revenue grants to religious figures like *ulama* and *pirs* for their maintenance.¹⁷⁶ Due to the increase in central power, the *sadr* also acquired greater authority over more official-religious personnel of the empire. Therefore, Akbar makes a critical move to ensure his personal control over the activities of the *sadr*. He dismissed a powerful *sadr* whose activities were controversial and showed his ability to do so. Then, he ordered the redistribution of the grants that had been given to religious figures.¹⁷⁷ A political interpretation of the decree suggests that it might have had two purposes. First, an attempt to justify Akbar's abandonment of the *shar'i* element of Islamic kingship and second, to demonstrate his right to control revenue grants to the ulema.¹⁷⁸ His intention for the claims he makes in *mahzar* can be related to the practical necessity of providing an authoritative interpretation of the Law and also concerned with his own ambition to avoid any rival authority in the state.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, on the applicability of the title, Hodgson claims that the *shar'i* structure was already too

¹⁷⁴ Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 272.

¹⁷⁵ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, 402. For instance, Ottoman Sultan Selīm I visited Ibn 'Arabī's tomb after his campaign to Syria and Egypt which was a debated campaign and ordered the restoration of the tomb and the building of a new lodge. Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 177.

¹⁷⁶ Streusand, *The Formation*, 117.

¹⁷⁷ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Vol. III*, 65.

¹⁷⁸ Streusand, *The Formation*, 119. Also, the decree indicates that Akbar was turning into the supreme ruler, someone whose decisions cannot be challenged and now also has the veto power over jurists. In that respect, Bada'uni writes a work named "Najat al-Rashid" in which he references a hadith that goes "the disagreement of my (the prophet's) community is the munificence of God" depicting the historian's disapproval of Akbar's policies and invoking the attention of the community against him. Ali Anooshahr, "Mughal Historians and the Memory of the Islamic Conquest of India," *Indian Economic Social History Review* 43:3 (2006), 295.

¹⁷⁹ Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 49

independent to make it possible, and in any case Akbar soon became disillusioned with the ‘ulama and lost much of his interest in *shar’i* legitimation.¹⁸⁰

c. Padishah

16th century universalist discourse plays a significant role in the changing understanding of “the ruler of a community.” Since the universalist understanding coincides with the imperial approach, epithets the rulers pick would be serving to that intention. The Persian title *padishah* means emperor and is used to indicate the meaning “the world-conquering mission of the messiah.”¹⁸¹ The title is also used for the heroic Mazdean and Zoroastrian kings in *Shahnama*. Akbar used the title as *Badshah-e Islam*. His grandfather Babur preferred to use the title *Padishah* for the first time as the ruler of Kabul in 1507, unlike earlier Timurids using the title Mirza. It is suggested that Babur made this move to place his sovereignty on the same level with his rivals Shah Ismail Safavi and Shaybani Khan Uzbek.¹⁸²

At the beginning of *A’in-e Akbari*, Abu’l-Fazl relates this term with royalty and underlines its meaning as the provider of stability and possession: “No dignity is higher in the eyes of God than royalty; and those who are wise, drink from its auspicious fountain. A sufficient proof of this, for those who require one, is the fact that royalty is a remedy for the spirit of rebellion, and the reason why subjects obey. Even the meaning of the word Padishah shews this; for *pad* signifies stability and possession, and *shah* means origin, lord. A king is therefore the origin of stability and possession.”¹⁸³ *Shahenshah* and *Shah* comes from the same tradition traditions of kingship and universal rule and used for the Sasanian and Achaemenid emperors.¹⁸⁴ For Akbar, *Padishah* and *Shahenshah* remained the two titles he was most referred to.

¹⁸⁰ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Vol. III*, 66. Akbar sent a letter of request to the Jesuit Father Provincial in February 1583 which begins with “Firman of Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar Padshah Ghazi, Lord of the sciences of all the books of the law and of the interpretations, to whom nothing pertaining to the law of Christ is hidden, but to whom rather the divine secrets are manifest.” Here the term “interpretations” seems to be a reference to Akbar’s claim to be the mujtahid i.e. final interpreter of the Qur’an. It is possible to claim that four years after the decree, Akbar was still embracing the title. See. Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 121.

¹⁸¹ Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, 299.

¹⁸² Streusand, *The Formation*, 36. Similarly, it is suggested by Farooqi that probably the reason why Mughals give the Ottoman imperial title “Sultan” to their sons and grandsons from the time of Akbar onwards is in order to convey a sense of Mughal superiority over the Ottomans. Farooqi, *Mughal Ottoman Relations*, 200.

¹⁸³ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I, 2*.

¹⁸⁴ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 278.

2.1.3. Titles for the discourse of Millenarianism and Messianic expectations

“Some shameless and ill-starred wretches also asked His Majesty why, since a thousand years from the Hijrah were passed, he did not bring forward, like Shah Isma'il the First, some convincing proof. But His Majesty was at last convinced, that confidence in him as a leader was a matter of time, and good counsel, and did not require the sword. And indeed, if His Majesty, in setting up his claims, and making his innovations, had spent a little money, he would easily have got most of his courtiers, and much more the vulgar, into his devilish nets: “I see in 990 two conjunctions, I see the sign of Mahdí and that of Antichrist; Either politics or religion must change, I clearly see the hidden secret.” At a council held for the renovating of the religion of the empire Rajah Bhagwan Das said: “I would willingly believe that Hindus and Musalmans have each a bad religion, but only tell us what the new sect is, and what opinion they hold, so that I may believe.” His Majesty reflected a little, and ceased to urge the Rajah. But the alteration of the decisions of our glorious Faith was continued. And “the innovation of heresy” was found to give the date.”¹⁸⁵

Akbar's policies were highly concerned with creating an image of an 'ideal ruler.' Therefore, there are basic claims he would make following the footsteps of any well-known ruler from the cultural context he lives. Among them, there is one that his times and context provide Akbar with the perfect opportunity to make messianic claims due to its correspondence with a special occasion. The year 1591-2 of the Christian era was the year 1000 of the Hegiran calendar, and the tenth century for Muslims began in 1495 (901 AH). That is to say, the very end of 16th century Christian era coincides with the 10th century of the Hegiran calendar. That is why in the second half of the sixteenth century, the Islamic world had discussions about the different interpretations of the situation, one of which was the chiliastic expectations.¹⁸⁶

The end of each epoch is especially significant both due to the expectation of huge scale catastrophic events and also disclosing the highest level of knowledge and consciousness of the age.¹⁸⁷ Like other Muslim states, Muslims in India were also subjected to the rising chiliastic emotions as the millennium drew closer.¹⁸⁸ These expectations were not necessarily apocalyptic but also there was the idea of a renewal and the possibility of a reordering of the known world.¹⁸⁹ This situation gave the Muslim rulers an opportunity to follow a discourse which would empower their leading features. Akbar's actions and policies are highly effected by this and should be evaluated under this millenarian context both in his ruling territory and in the Islamic world in comparison with other imperial rulers as part of all these reflections and annotations.

¹⁸⁵ Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 314.

¹⁸⁶ Subrahmanyam, *From Tagus to the Ganges*, 109.

¹⁸⁷ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 3.

¹⁸⁸ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 38.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

On the eve of the upcoming millennium, the political discourse of Muslim empires is centered around concepts with millenerianist indications such as *mahdi* (messiah), *mujaddid* (renewer) *sahibkiran* (lord of the auspicious conjunction), all connotating the sacred and holy. Regardless of their religious background, rulers manipulated messianic expectation in order to consolidate their power and gain support from the people for their state-making projects.¹⁹⁰

The political perceptions of early Muslim scholars, philosophers, and Sufis like Māwardī, Fārābī, Ghazālī, Tūsi, Ibn‘Arabī and Suhrawardi, are not foreign to the intellectuals of early modern Muslim empires.¹⁹¹ Therefore, these concepts are not new terms for 16th century courtly society and they all had a meaning derived from earlier Islamic thinking and philosophy. However, their scope or the context they were used for had been in rapid change. Here, these titles and terms claimed and used for 16th century Muslim dynasts by the intellectuals of the time will be discussed in order to see the influence of early Islamic thought on the age of empires and what has been changing since the formative period.

In some way, all these terms are all related to the idea of universal kingship. For instance, it is believed that once the awaited messiah arrives he would dominate the entire realms of the earth, establishing a universal kingdom. *Sahibkiran* is identified mostly with Alexander the Great, Cengiz Khan and Timur due to their conquests all over the world and the possibility to rule all the lands of the world. Therefore, the most important characteristic of a *sahibkiran* is that he should be a world conqueror of the epoch he is living in.¹⁹² *Mujaddid*, as the definition suggests, means a renewal that would be provided, in this case, by a ruler. He is expected to revive the imminent century.

Another point to underline is their relation to order. According to the discourse of messianism, a savior will come and set things in their right order. In the scripture, the individuals referred to as the *Mahdi* and the *mujaddid*, or in the mystic culture the ones called *qutb* (pole or axis mundi) and *insan-i kamil*; the attributions for sovereigns such as

¹⁹⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Turning the Stones Over: Sixteenth-Century Millenarianism from the Tagus to the Ganges," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 40, 2 (2003): 129–61; Tijana Krstic, "Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2009;51(1), 39.

¹⁹¹ Yilmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 33.

¹⁹² Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, Special Issue: The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400-1800 (Jul., 1997), 755.

farr-i izadi and *sahib-qiran*, all attest to someone who would be like a guide and maintain the religious and political order of a certain historical era with justice. Moreover, this duty of balancing the cosmos is considered to be of uttermost importance and it is given to the prophets, saints, kings and other savior heroes in Islamicate cultures.¹⁹³

a. Commission of *Tarikh-i Alfī* (History of the Millenium)

The millennial discourse can be seen especially in the literary and artistic projects of the emperors which provide knowledge and consciousness about the epoch. Their patronage for the production of universal histories, chronicles and the state projects they are engaged in, gives some hints on the sub-contexts they have. For instance, new coins were issued with the word “thousand” (*alf*) stamped on them. One of these mentioned under the title of millenerianism is Akbar’s commissioning of the *Ta’rīkh-i alfī* (Millennial History or The Thousand-Year History) which he issued in 1585. Its aim was to record the history of Muslim kingdoms from the death of the prophet up until Akbar’s reign, commemorating the first millennium of Islam.¹⁹⁴ What’s more, it would also serve as a document of lineage which establishes him as ‘an exemplary historical truth’. From the beginning, the work is carried out by different authors to compose this comprehensive history.¹⁹⁵

The author of the third volume of the book is called Ja‘far Beg. In his introduction of the book Akbar is presented as the sublime seeker of truth and as a ruler who outstrips ‘partisan and sectarian bickering.’ These notions reflect the emperor’s ideals of a new ‘Islamic universalism’.¹⁹⁶ Curiously, although the reason behind the commissioning of the book is to provide a millenarian Islamic consciousness, the chronicle does not start from the beginning of the Hegiran calendar, the *hijra*. Instead, it starts with the prophet’s death, which corresponds ten years after the Hegira. It is claimed that this is due to the clear instructions of Akbar and this tendency may demonstrate the Mughal drive towards grandeur after the 1570s.¹⁹⁷ In these kinds of chronicles, the tendency is to imagine the past beginning with the advent of a sacred being. The Millennial History, however, commences

¹⁹³ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 9.

¹⁹⁴ Anooshahr, *Dialogism and Territoriality*, 223.

¹⁹⁵ Ebba Koch, *The Intellectual and Artistic*, 27. Also, in 1591, at the start of the year 1000 of the Hegiran calendar, famous Ottoman historian Mustafa 'Ali started to write his well-known work *Kūnhū'l-Ahbar* (The Essence of History). It is designed to be a history of the Ottoman Empire and the world. It is considered to be a time for retrospection and perhaps introspection, when the expected apocalypse of the year 1000 of the Hegiran calendar had not come. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "On World Historians in the Sixteenth Century," *Representations*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (Summer 2005), 30-31.

¹⁹⁶ Anooshahr, *Dialogism and Territoriality*, 229.

¹⁹⁷ Alam and Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State*, 25.

with the end of a sacred being which creates an expectation of a new beginning with a new being. Similarly the chronicle ends with Akbar's reign to communicate the idea that it was Akbar who filled the void and did so by setting up the new millennium, which is underlined in the book through referring to Akbar as the Renewer of the Second Millennium (*Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thani*) as well.¹⁹⁸

The ideas in the *Tarikh-e Alfī* can be read as the earlier draft for Akbar's policy of *sulh-e kull* (universal peace). In the book, there is the term *āsāyish-i 'āmm*, which indicates similar things with *ṣulḥ-i kull*. *Asāyish* means tranquility; whereas *ṣulḥ* means the absence of war. *Amm* refers to "universal, general," whereas *kull* implies absoluteness.¹⁹⁹ Also, the book's discourse coincides with the basic ideology of *ṣulḥ-i kull*. "The gates of the safe house of his [Akbar's] fairness (*inṣāf*) are open to the practitioners of all religions... [The emperor's] all-inclusive mercy (*shafīqat-i shāmil*) strives to benefit the masses and the elite with his perfect knowledge (*'ilm-i kāmil*). His heart, which loves fairness, intends that the communities of various religions learn about the truth and truthfulness (*haqīqat va haqqiyyat*) of one another."²⁰⁰

Akbar's project might be compared with the commissioning of the *Şāhnāme-yi Āl-i 'Osmān* by the order of Süleyman I. It is a project which can also be counted as part of the millennial venture. It is a five-volume universal history that starts with Adam and ends in 1555.²⁰¹ The last volume is titled *Süleymānnāme*, and just as in the case of Akbarnama, it narrates Süleyman's reign. At the same time, it projects an ideal world order constructed ideologically and technically during the reign of Süleyman, both in word and in image. Not only is it presented as the last stop in the chain of events but is also made to conjure a perfect ending, the final revelation of an order that was meant to be achieved since the beginning of creation.²⁰²

There is a book called *Latā'if al-Afkār wa Kāshif al-Asrār* (Fine Thoughts and Revealer of Secrets) written by Hüseyin b. Hasan el-Semerkindī. It is dedicated it to the Grand

¹⁹⁸ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 134.

¹⁹⁹ Anooshahr, *Dialogism and Territoriality*, 227.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 227-228.

²⁰¹ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 50.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 52.

Vizier of Süleyman I, İbrâhîm Pâşâ in 1529 and was written at a time of millenarian discussions. The universal history part of the book begins with the creation of Adam. According to his account, the history of caliphs starts from the first man and caliph Adam, continuing all the way to the Ottomans. In doing so, he designs the Ottoman caliphate in a single lineage starting with Adam and continuing through various dynasties.²⁰³ In Akbarnama, the “single lineage” is also provided, however, the “caliphate” refers to *Khalifatullah* rather than *Khalifatu Rasulallah*. In a sense, Akbar’s line depicts the same thing. His right to the throne comes from the light God first bestowed upon Adam, also “his first caliph,” then continues through generations up until Akbar. Samarkandi’s line of caliphate, on the other hand, remains faithful to the idea of “*Amir’ul Mu’minin*” as it starts with Adam and continues until the Mamluks, later connecting with the Ottoman line at the time of Selim I, following his conquest of Mamluk lands.

b. Akbar as Mahdi/ Mesih

Another notion which coincides with the idea of millenarianism is the messianism. According to Nile Green, with the upcoming millennium, a ‘crisis of conscience’ has occurred.²⁰⁴ While the end of the first millennium of Islam was approaching, there was an expectation of the *mahdi* by the devout Muslims. That belief invoked various religious disputations, even a certain legitimacy to heterodoxy.²⁰⁵ The notion of *mahdi* means the concealed or expected one who is believed to emerge in order to reform the Muslim world in a radical way. The Messiah could have been a figure in the past or one manifest in the present. Also, there were many ways to invoke the power of this myth, using divine knowledge such as scriptural interpretation, apocalyptic lore, dream visions, numerology and astrological predictions.²⁰⁶ Canonical texts describe *mahdi* as a descendant of the Prophet and hence a member of the Quraishi clan. It is believed that when he appears, Christ (*Isa Masih*), too, would appear. All men will be led to Islam after his intervention and then the Day of Judgment would commence.²⁰⁷ That is why; he is expected at a supposedly catastrophic time, i.e. millennium.

²⁰³ Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 68-70.

²⁰⁴ Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 128.

²⁰⁵ Early, *The Mughal Throne*, 185.

²⁰⁶ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 11.

²⁰⁷ Subrahmanyam, *Connected Histories*, 751.

It is vital to note that before establishing their empire, the Safavids were a sufi order which evolved into a messianic movement. Shah Ismail considered himself as the first *pir* (spiritual guide) of the Safavid order to assume the political role of Shah and he claimed to be a reincarnation of a host of prophets and kingly heroes from Persian past.²⁰⁸ The Persian title of kingship called *padishah* is also evoked in the context of the world-conquering mission of the messiah. Shah Isma'il' s understanding of sovereignty is situated within the Irano-Islamic idiom of the messiah king. Shah depicted himself as the promised messiah in his poetry. The analogue of the title messiah was “the Lord of the Age” (*sahib-i zaman*).²⁰⁹

Lütfi Pasha, the Ottoman statesmen and short-time grand-vizier of Suleiman describes Selim I as the Messiah of the Last Age (*mahdi-yi âhir-i zamân*). There is the process of fitting Ottoman sovereignty to a messianic model.²¹⁰ After Selim and his ministers and generals at the war council came to decide marching against Isma'il, while addressing his viziers Selim I says: Oh my devoted disciples! (*ey benim can u gönülden müridlerim*), calling his viziers as his spiritual followers (*mürid*), and using the same ideology applied by Safavids.²¹¹

Akbar Shah also assumed the role of spiritual leader, the long-awaited *mahdi* whose reign marked the beginning of a “divine era.” He established a new solar calendar which announced the end of Islam's first millennium and marked his reign as “divine-era”. At that time Akbar also instituted the so-called “divine faith,” a form of imperial discipleship that turned loyalty to the person of the emperor into a master- disciple (*pir-murid*) relationship just like the Safavid example for the time of Shah Isma'il.²¹² In a way it might be possible to compare Akbar's millennial project in India with Shah Isma'il's militant messianism in Iran. They indicate similarities in discourse of Muslim empires. This similarity in messianic and saintly discourse of sovereignty is not a coincidence but the result of a shared history.²¹³

²⁰⁸ Kathryn Babayan, “The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamate Shiism,” *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994), 135.

²⁰⁹ Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, 299.

²¹⁰ Fleischer, *The Lawgiver as Messiah*, 163-164.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

²¹² Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 314.

²¹³ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 4.

c. Akbar as Mujaddid (Renewer)

Under the context of the millennium, there were some apocalyptic expectations but there were also some optimistic thoughts circled around concentrating on ‘the possibility of the reordering of the known world, via the agency of a *mujaddid*.²¹⁴ It is a well-known religious discourse addressing religious “renewal” (*tajdid*) and “renewers”.²¹⁵ It is derived from a prophetic tradition which goes: “*Inne’llāhe yeb’asu fi ra’si kulli mi’eti senetin men yucedidu*”²¹⁶ and indicates that at the beginning of each century, God will send a man, a descendant of his family, who will explain the matters of religion.²¹⁷ The idea of a renewer emerges from the fact that there will not be a new prophet, revelation or holy book after the death of Prophet Muhammad. At least from the 8th century A.D. onwards, the concept of *tajdid* became a term that defines the actions done in order to overcome the loosening connection between religion and life without harming the religion itself.²¹⁸ Even though the word “re’s” means both the beginning and end, the common understanding is that it denotes the beginning of a century. The term *mujaddid* has similarities but cannot be replaced by the notion of a messiah exactly. Also, it is significant to distinguish between the religious and political discussions and understandings based on this prophetic tradition.

The first known political fashioning of the term is seen in a letter sent by Seyyid Şerîf el-Cürçânî to Timur which includes a list of *mujaddids*. Yet, the understanding of *tajdid* is quite different according to el-Cürçani. Other scholars considered *tajdid* as a scholarly matter whereas according to Cürçani, the renewer is a ruler who brings worldly affairs with religion. In the list, all the renewers are statesmen and the first of them is Ömer b. Abdülazîz - the only name shared in common with the lists before him - whereas the last one is Amir Timur. The duty of these statesmen is to deal with the problematic disruption in religiosity in favor of religion and law and care about the members of the house of prophet and the scholars.

“The holy men of all ages have agreed that in every century from the days of the prophet, almighty god hath sent forth a propagator of the faith for the purpose of promulgating the religion of Mahummud (God’s peace be upon him): and since in the

²¹⁴ Subrahmanyam, *From Tagus to the Ganges*, 110.

²¹⁵ Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 128.

²¹⁶ Aşık Çelebi, *Meşâ’irü’ş-Şu’arâ*, Vol. I, ed. Filiz Kılıç (İstanbul: İstanbul Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 2010), 201.

²¹⁷ E. Van Donzel, *Mudjaddid*, EP², Vol. 7, 290.

²¹⁸ Tahsin Görgün, “Teccid”, *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol.40. (İstanbul: 2002), 234.

beginning of this the eight century, Ameer Sauhiba Kurraun²¹⁹ hath propagated the laws of the holy prophet and the true religion hath been diffused throughout the different cities and kingdoms of the earth; it is apparent that Ameer Sauhiba Kurraun is the true promoter and supporter of the faith.”²²⁰

15th century Aqqoyunlu Ruler Uzun Hasan also uses the concept mujaddid. 16th century Ottoman bureaucrat and intellectual Mustafa ‘Ali sees Osman I, the first member of Ottoman dynasty as the mujaddid of 8th/14th century in his book the essence of history.²²¹ Again Lütfi Pasha credits Selim I as the *mujaddid* of the 10th century A.H. Being the renewer of religion divinely enables the ruler to set right the world of Islam.²²² The idea of a renewer, used in connection with the ordering of the world is a notion that was quite popular for 16th century discourse, since the 10th century A.H. was approaching.

The preservation of rational and revealed law requires the existence of a sovereign. For Muslim empires, there might not be a need for a prophet yet it is sufficient and necessary that there be a sovereign at all times to institute and implement necessary measures in accordance with the public interest.²²³ According to Nasirean ethics, written by Nasiruddin Tusi and used as a significant main source for later generations of political theorists, the ideal king is also the philosopher-king and his noble aim is to help his subjects to reach potential wisdom by the use of their mental powers. In his discussion on the categories of social order, Tusi followed the classification of the noted Islamic philosopher Farabi.²²⁴

The key point here is to provide his legitimacy and fashion him with a charismatic authority that would be accepted by the populous. Thus, notions and terms from earlier Islamic conceptions are used to acquire a sacred sovereign imagery. Many other examples can be given for the usage of the earlier terms in order to provide a political legitimization for the emperors. For instance, Kınalızade ‘Ali, 16th century Ottoman intellectual and political theorist describes Süleyman I as a philosopher-king who integrated rational and revealed law, the prime examples of which he depicts as Chengīz Khanid *yasa* and *şeri’at*. He invokes the philosophical principles as a tool to affect the intellectual synthesis of

²¹⁹ [sic] Amir Sahibkiran.

²²⁰ Timur, *Tüzükat-ı Timuri: Institutes political and military*. trans. Major Davy. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1783), 181.

²²¹ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 281.

²²² Fleischer, *The Lawgiver*, 163.

²²³ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 292. Tursun Bey, *Tarih-i Ebu'l Feth*, 12-13.

²²⁴ Alam, *The Languages*, 47-48.

steppe and Islam. Kınalızade acknowledges Süleyman I for establishing the virtuous city (*medine-i fazila*) under his rule, the utopic place that is formulated by Farabi, 10th century Muslim philosopher and scientist.²²⁵

Abu'l Fazl used *mujaddid* in its Sufi sense for his theory of kingship in order to attribute a sacredness to Akbar. Even though he does not name a specific scriptural source for the understandings he formulated, it is possible to say that he was very familiar with Ibn 'Arabi, Ghazali and Suhrawardi. He fashions Akbar as “*al-insān al-kāmil*,” the universal man who occupies an important place in Ibn 'Arabi's works. Also, the famous philosophy of *wahdat al-wujūd* laid the foundation for the famous ideology of Akbar's reign called *sulh-e kull* (the ultimate peace, peace for all). From Islamic ideology he created the policy to protect and tolerate all religions and to protect reason and rationality. It might be crucial to note that the ideal ruler in the Nasirean tradition is the one who ensured the well-being of the people of diverse religious groups, and not Muslims alone.²²⁶ Another important discussion was the use of sciences. It was necessary to provide a reasonable explanation for messianic and saintly claims. The *tafsir* (scriptural interpretation), dream visions, numerology (*abjad*) and astrological predictions play crucial roles in understanding these concepts and earlier works from Islamic thought.

As can be understood, the claim to be the “universal” sovereign at the time of the upcoming Islamic millennium is not unique to a single Muslim empire. Ottomans (Selim I and Süleyman I), Safavids (Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasb) and Mughals (Akbar Shah) competed for the titles like *mahdi*, *mujaddid* and *sahibkiran* even though some of the messianic and saintly claims were more obvious than others due to their political contexts. For instance, while Ottoman Sultan Süleyman seemed to be influenced by the millenarianist concepts and designated himself as *sahibkiran* and *mujaddid*, mainly during the early times of his reign,²²⁷ In *Şāhnāme-yi Āl-i 'Osmān* Ottoman ruler is projected as the last reformer of the true religion (*müceddid*) and after the Prophet Muḥammed, Sulṭān Süleymān is the embodiment of the Perfect Man (*Insān al-Kāmil*).²²⁸ Another author of the time, Mevlānā 'Īsā (d. 1543) in his Ottoman history *Cāmī'ül-Meknūnāt* (The Compendium of Hidden Things) supports this argument and underlines Süleymān's special role as the

²²⁵ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 291.

²²⁶ Alam, *The Languages*, 49.

²²⁷ Subrahmanyam, *From Tagus to the Ganges*, 111.

²²⁸ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 270.

temporal and spiritual leader who will guide humans to the new Millennium as the Master of the Conjunction (*ṣaḥīb ḵırān*) and the renewer of religion (*müceddid*).²²⁹ Akbar was more careful not to attach himself with unorthodox ideas early in his reign. However, gradually, his policies turned out to be more and more millenerianist and universalist. This situation cannot be absent from the conjunctures of the time.

As a result of the ongoing rivalry between the Ottomans and Safavids, the former adopted a more Sunni identity since the latter's *raison d'être* was its Shi'ism. Also, it is possible to say that the "heretical" themes provided a more expansive ground for the sacredness discourse. That is why they attracted the attentions of Muslim rulers. To acquire a "charismatic" identity for themselves, they used the heterodox concepts and ideas.²³⁰ Even at the time of Süleyman I when there was an ongoing sunnitization process, the historical, intellectual and artistic works of the time continued to include and mention such themes.

It is possible to see how concepts have become part of political discourse in search of a legitimization in the 16th century, thanks to the upcoming Islamic millenium. The theories of Islamic philosophy and Sufism are also used and reformulated in accordance with the political context. That is why it is possible to see reactionary or counter movements in defense of a more "Sunni" or "pure" Islam as the Kadızadeli Movement in Ottoman lands or Ahmad Sirhindi's *mujaddidi* movement in India. Both of them claimed that Islamic notions have been misinterpreted and the religion is corrupted by leaders and their intellectuals. Thus, there needs to be purification and a return to the ways of the times of the Prophet. However, since they are also reactions, it would be wrong to consider them as apolitical.

Mujaddid is a more restrained way of making a claim of sacrality than that afforded by the more openly messianic category of *mahdi*. Akbar was not alone in having laid claim to it. In fact, the label of "Renewer of the Second Millennium" became widely applied to one of Akbar's most significant critics, Naqshbandi Sufi, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624).²³¹ Sirhindi was a theosopher and established his own theories as a counter argument

²²⁹ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 171.

²³⁰ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 6.

²³¹ It is notable that Sirhindi's own name was Ahmad, a fact that opened the possibility that he was in fact the awaited millennial being but he was not part of this discourse and only referred to the possibility. He stated that with the millennial transformation of

to those of Ibn ‘Arabi who happened to be influential on the Mughal court. His critique of ‘Ibn ‘Arabi was based on the understanding of *wahdat al-wujud*. Whereas ‘Arabi’s followers proclaimed *hama ust*, (everything is He), Ahmad Sirhindi established the idea that *hama az ust*, (everything is from Him). Therefore, instead of *wahdat al-wujud*, the (unity of being), he used the term *wahdat ash-shuhud*, (unity of appearance).²³²

d. Alexander

In another interpretation, the expectation of a messianic figure might also be linked to dreams of a universal kingdom. In order to make a claim of a universal conquest -of hearts and lands- almost inevitably the legend of Alexander, one of the ultimate world conqueror figures for the Islamic world is revived. Even better, the rendition of the legend of Alexander in the East usually recognizes Alexander not only as a World Conqueror but also as a Prophet, Iskender-i Dhu’l-Qarnayn²³³ This makes its usage more crucial since it relates with the idea of a prophet-like king or the king being the caliph in the absence of a Prophet, since he was chosen by God and was also the spiritual leader. Even though there is no indication whatsoever in the Qur’an about the incredible commander Dhu’l-Qarnayn (the Horned one) being a prophet, aside from the deductions made by *mufasssirs* (the interpreters of Qur’an), the communality and extensity of this idea made the use of the title an indication of a holy character along with world-conquering emperor. For the 16th century, all Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal rulers made claims to be the Alexander of the age.

In the Eastern tradition; the story of Iskender was first mentioned by Ferdowsi in his *Shahnama*, a source reported to be one of Akbar’s favorites. There, Alexander is presented among the main body of millennium-old Iranian traditions and legends of kingship. Iskender was depicted as the son of Iranian king *Dara* (Darius I), who was victorious over the Emperor of Rum *Filip* (Feylekos, the father of Alexander according to the western sources), and was a flawless and ultimate human type of a king. His only concern was to become the emperor of the world and he was a just and wise king. His philosophic side was

the Prophet into a purely spiritual being, Muslims were in need of a new spiritual mediator. The millennial Renewer would reestablish its link with divinity for the next thousand years, the final historical era before the end of time. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 134-135.

²³² Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 132.

²³³ Subrahmanyam, *From Tagus to the Ganges*, 118.

underlined.²³⁴ It was not a strange pattern for Eastern readers that Iskender had a dream of getting a sword which was sent from the skies. It was declared to him that the sword had been sent by Allah and through that the seven climates (heft-iklim) had been delivered to him. After having that dream, being the one and only Padishah of the world became his only purpose.²³⁵

Among all other Arabic, Persian, Urdu and European sources, *Shahnama* also fed from the Qur'an. Iskender is one of the characters that is actually subjected to a Qur'anic *kıssa* (short story).²³⁶ There is an account of a pre-Islamic ruler in the Qur'an identified as Dhu'l-Qarnayn in Sura 18, "The Cave", verses 83-99. He is often identified as Alexander. The name Dhu'l-Qarnayn is rather considered to be a title which means "two-horned" and thus its meaning is discussed a lot among historians and interpreters of the Qur'an, *mufessirs*.²³⁷ The reason that generally it was thought to be Alexander is that his empire included the East and the West, the two horns. Yet, also in the Qur'an Dhu'l-Qarnayn is said to be a commander which fits Alexander's character perfectly. The verse that goes "Indeed, We established him upon the earth, and gave him to everything a way"²³⁸ is explained as the power and sovereignty given to Alexander.

In order to understand the symbolic importance Alexander has in the Islamic tradition better, it is enough to take a look at the literature composed around his life, the *Iskendernames* (the histories of Alexander). They are prepared so that Alexander's kingship, court and exploits would be a model for rulers from Istanbul to Delhi and beyond.²³⁹ Alexander's vita has a great place in Persian sources. It is not very surprising to see that many of the famous *Iskendername* authors are the same as Abu'l-Fazl's list of authors, which Akbar loved to listen to. The most notable author is Ferdowsi and his account on Alexander's life in *Shahnama*. Then, Nizami's *Haft Peyker* has an account on Alexander. It was the first time that his life was composed as a separate *mathnavi*. He

²³⁴ İsmail Ünver, "İskender" *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 22 (İstanbul: 2000), 558.

²³⁵ Bekir Şişman & Muhammet Kuzubaş, *Şehname'nin Türk Kültür ve Edebiyatına Etkileri* (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2012), 72.

²³⁶ It was Avicenna who brought it up in his book eş-Şifa first. see. İskender Türe, *Zülkarneyn* (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2010). Also see. Ebu'l-Kelam Azad, *Zülkarneyn Kimdir?* (İstanbul: iz, 2000), 32.

²³⁷ One of those Qur'an commentaries belongs to the famous historian Al-Tabari. Among the reasons why Qur'an commentary writers identified Iskender with Dhu'l-Qarnayn was due to the existence of the quranic verses related to him. It was when Prophet Muhammad was questioned by a Jew about the Dhu'l-Qarnayn that is mentioned in the Torah and was identified as Iskender in their interpretations. For more, see. Melike Gökcan Türkođan, "Klasik Türk Edebiyatında Kur'an Kıssalarını Konu Alan Mesneviler," *The Journal of International Social Research*, 3:15, 79.

²³⁸ Qur'an, 18:85.

²³⁹ Dimitris Kastritsis, "The Trebizond Alexander Romance (Venice Hellenistic Institute Codex Gr.5): The Ottoman Fate of a Fourteenth Century Illustrated Byzantine Manuscript," *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 36 (2011), 105.

separated it into two parts titled *Şerefname* and *İkbalname*. In *Şerefname*, Iskender is depicted as a king, warrior and master of the world and in *İkbalname*; Nizami particularly focused on his character as a wise man and prophet. He explains his usage of different sources like Judaic, Christian and Pahlavi which made him construct his version of Alexander's life.²⁴⁰ There is a part in Jami's *Khamsa* on his life and there is the story of *Ayine-i Iskenderi*²⁴¹ by Amir Khusrau Dihlavi. There is also Ali Shir Nevai's famous *Sedd-i Iskender* which was written in Chaghatai Turkish titled as *Sedd-i Iskenderi*²⁴² and Ahmedi's *Iskendername* which was written in Ottoman Turkish in the late 14th century. This situation is pretty amazing given the fact three different literati in three different parts of the Islamic world and Eastern Islamic tradition, provided literary works on Alexander. This shows his extreme importance in the eyes of Easterners, both as the ruler and on his style of government.

Aside from the Islamic garbing of the story, Alexander is also known through Western sources as a triumphant Greek king and commander in the Ottoman culture.²⁴³ That is why, Mehmed II's desire to be a world-ruling emperor is something that put him, at least in theory, alongside with Alexander the Great. Like his historian depicted him to be: "...while you, so great and powerful a man, possessing almost all the lands under the sun, and glorious in your great and brilliant exploits..."²⁴⁴ Also, it is known that there was a copy of Anabasis prepared for Mehmed II in Greek and also he had a copy of Quintus

²⁴⁰ Serpil Bağcı, *Osmanlı Dünyasında Efsanevi Yönetici İmgesi Olarak Büyük İskender ve Osmanlı İskendernamesi* (Humana: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1994), 114.

²⁴¹ According to the story, after establishing the city Alexandria, Alexander constructed the famous Lighthouse. And there was this mirror (ayine) given as a gift to Alexander from the Chinese Emperor's philosopher. He put that mirror on the top of the minaret of the lighthouse since it had a feature to show the good and bad things happening in the world. The mirror was called "*cam-ı cihanbin*" (the mirror that shows the world/ayine-i İskender). See. Şişman & Kuzubaş, *Şehname'nin Türk*, 74. Also for the content of the works see. Serpil Bağcı, "*Minyatürlü Ahmedi İskendernameleri: İkonografik Bir Deneme*" (PhD Diss., Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 1989), 17-18.

²⁴² For a brief explanation with some examples from those works see. Türkdoğan, *Klasik Türk Edebiyatında*, 81-86.

²⁴³ Bağcı, *Osmanlı Dünyasında*, 122. Interestingly enough, Bağcı talks about a shift from Iskender to Solomon, in the time of Bayezid II, as his character was different from his father who was concerned with the West more than the East. Unlike him, Bayezid II who was more interested in the East, asked Uzun Firdewsi to write the history of the Prophet King Solomon, who is actually identified in Qur'an with his own name and one of the most important characters in Islamic history. Furthermore, there are commonalities between Iskendername and Süleymanname, yet the former one's hero is a Western king/scholar/prophet while the latter's had turned into an Eastern personality, Süleyman. I think even if this is a vital detail that should be considered, I would like to add, it can only be about a claim on "Solomon's throne". Also, it is worth noting that Solomon is also among the Old testament prophets as a king, for Bayezid II, aside from being more loyal to the Holy book in the sense that Iskender could not be a prophet at all while Süleyman certainly was, according to Qur'an, the fact that he was a strong ruler and the sultan of seven climates looks like something intended to be more underlined with his action.

²⁴⁴ Krivotolous, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, trans. Charles Riggs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 3.

Curtius Rufus' Life of Alexander in his library²⁴⁵ which can provide some clues to his interests, aspirations and perceptions.

Alexander fits the 'ultimate universal ruler' idea who conquers the east and west. It is indicated in the history of Kritovoulos, the Greek historian of Mehmed II, who wrote in the history of the Sultan's reign that Mehmed II wanted to be identified as Alexander with his personality and actions and also go beyond him.²⁴⁶ "...while your accomplishments, vast as they are, and in no way inferior to those of Alexander the Macedonian, or of the generals and kings of his rank, should not be set forth in Greek to the Greeks..."²⁴⁷ When Pope Pius II and Georgios of Trebizond asked Mehmed II to convert into Christianity, they tried to attract the Sultan's attention with the suggestion that if he gathers his country under the umbrella of Christianity; he would have fame like Alexander, Ceasar and Konstantin which would last through eternity. They thought the idea to be known until eternity like the names given would allure the mind of the Emperor.²⁴⁸ In different sources, this identification of Mehmed II, the ruler of the two worlds, conqueror of the East and the West, with Alexander the Great / Iskender-i Dhu'l-Qarnayn, is conveyed through a language of images, indirect and allusive. For instance, an Ottoman painter in his portrayal of Iskender in a miniature from Iskendername, replaces it with Mehmed II's bust.²⁴⁹

For some of the important rulers of Muslim empires, it was essential to be depicted as a world-ruling powerful king whose name would remain in peoples' minds for eternity. Therefore, just like Alexander's life story narrated in *Iskendername*, which might be called a part of Shahnama tradition, there are *Selimnames* (the histories of Selim I and Selim II of Ottomans) or *Suleynamnames* (the histories of Süleyman I), *Shahname-i Ali Osman* (the world history project prepared in the *Shahnama* style) and there are also *Akbarnama* and

²⁴⁵ Bağcı, *Minyatürlü Ahmedi*, 27.

²⁴⁶ Bağcı, *Osmanlı Dünyasında*, 120.

²⁴⁷ Krivotolous, *History of Mehmed*, 3.

²⁴⁸ For a detailed outlook on this issue see. Gülrü Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapı Palace in Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Mass-London, The MIT Press: 1991), 12-13.

²⁴⁹ Serpil Bağcı, "From Iskender to Mehmed II: Change in Royal Imagery," in *Art Turc / Turkish Art. 10th International Congress of Turkish Art. 10e Congrès international d'art turc, Genève-Geneva, 17-23 Sept. 1995 Actes-Proceedings* (Genève: 1999), 117. In this very interesting article Bağcı focuses on images of Iskender in the manuscripts of Shahnama and Khamsa produced in the Ottoman times especially in the late 16th and early 17th centuries that looked exactly like Mehmed II. She tracks the linkages and speculates on the possible reasons behind such attempts. One of the most interesting things is an incident in the life of Iskender at Khamsa that Iskender's portrait was shown to the woman ruler Qaydafa, and the illustrations depict Iskender's appearance to be the same as Mehmed II, totally ignoring the fact that he was a Greek and lived in ancient times. For detailed information on the account; see. pages 111-112. For the illustrations; see. pages 118-125. Also, for an interesting insight into the character Qaydafa see. Melike Gökcan Türkdoğan, "Ahmedi'nin Iskendernamesinde Kadın Hükümdar Modeli ve Kraliçe Kaydafa," *Turkish Studies*, Vol.4:7, (2009), 760-773.

Jahangirnama. These manuscripts are also illustrated with miniatures which are of great importance since they can catch the eye and remain as a picture. That is why the stories selected to be depicted, since only a small amount of the instances could actually be drawn, should be picked very carefully. The content of these works are fruitful for their ideas of a ruler, the image of an emperor, and the symbolic notions they might provide via depicting the basic scenes such as the coronation, the feast, the punishment, a war scene or hunting experiments.²⁵⁰

Another Alexander reference worth mentioning here comes from the letters Ottoman Sultan Selim I and Safavid Shah Ismail I sent each other before the Battle of Chaldiran. In those letters there are many titles used to reinforce the power and divinity of their rule. In a letter that Selim sent Shah Ismail, Selim defines himself, “the Solomon of splendor, the Alexander of eminence; haloed in victory, Faridun triumphant; slayer of the wicked and the infidel, guardian of the noble and pious; the warrior in the Path, the defender of the Faith; the champion, the conqueror; the lion, son and grandson of the lion; standard-bearer of justice and righteousness, Sultan Selim Shah...”²⁵¹ Thus, he sees himself as the prophet Solomon, a common claim by both of the rulers since he is famous for the domains he had and his mighty rule, that is described both in the Qur’an and The Old Testament. Also, he represents himself as the Alexander of the time through being the conqueror and haloed in victory. Shah Ismail also refers to him in his poems. “I am the Alexander of (my) contemporaries.”²⁵² When he says “I shall conquer Asia Minor and Syria and then think of the Franks”²⁵³ he probably takes the position of Alexander who tries to create a world empire which the eastern and western world could co-habit. It also idealizes being the Sultan of seven climates, ruling over each part of the world which is believed to be divided into seven.

The last case which will be examined here is an encounter between the Mughal Emperor Humayun, Akbar’s father, and the Ottoman Admiral, Seydi Ali Reis, who arrived in Delhi in late October 1555. He remained there for three months, witnessed events such

²⁵⁰ Bağcı, *Minyatırlı Ahmedî*, 174.

²⁵¹ William H. McNeill and Marilyn R. Waldman ed. “Letters from Selim to Ismail,” in *The Islamic World* (University of Chicago Press, 1973), 339.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 1042a.

²⁵³ *Ibid.* 1051a.

as Humayun's death and became part of the chain of events.²⁵⁴ He was the admiral²⁵⁵ of Süleyman I and his "reluctant" travels to India might give some insights. He has a book called *Mirat'ul Memalik* (the mirror of countries) which he finished after his return to Ottoman soil. On his encounter with Humayun he writes:

"One day the Padishah asked this humble servant: "Which is greater, the Vilayet-i Rum or that of Hindustan?" This servant responded: "O Padishah! When one says Rum, if one means Rum proper, that is the vilayet-i Sivas, then, Hindustan is larger than it. But if one means those lands that have submitted to the Padishah-i Rum, then the Hint is not even a tenth of it." The Padishah said, for his part: "What one means is the whole", and I responded: "O Padishah! What is evident to the spirit of this humble servant is the fact that certainly the Padishah-i Rum is equal of Alexander who ruled over the world and was the master of the seven climes."²⁵⁶

After many other explanations by Seydi Ali Reis, supported by his astrological knowledge, Humayun ended up saying to the nobles of his court: "It is true that on Earth, the fortunate (Ottoman) sovereign alone has the right to be called Padishah, he, no other."²⁵⁷ Even though there is no other evidence that supports this really happened, in the 16th century world of Muslim empires, a common indication of a universal ruler is determined when he is called Alexander or sultan of seven climates.

The title Alexander or Iskender-i Dhu'l-Qarnayn is very much related to two other epithets. The first one is "the Sultan of the Seven Climates." The second one is sahib-kiran. It signifies a world conqueror who establishes a universal dominion. At Humayun's court, while talking about the magnificence of the Ottoman Padishah Süleyman, the Ottoman admiral Seydi Ali Reis describes him as Alexander since he is the Sultan of the seven climes, also making him the sahib-kiran. When Humayun asks him whether he is sure that the Sultan has *hisse* in all seven climes, we encounter an explanation on the idea of "seven climates" as "There is first Yemen, which is in the first clime, sacred Mecca, which is in the second, Egypt, which is in the third, Aleppo, which is in the fourth, the capital of the

²⁵⁴ Muzaffer Alam & Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries: 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 100.

²⁵⁵ Kapudan-ı Derya. Seydi Ali Reis had been designated admiral by the Grand vizier Rüstem Pasha in late November 1553. See. Alam & Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 97.

²⁵⁶ Seydi Ali Reis, *Mir'atü'l-Memalik* (Ankara: TDK, 1999), 107. Alam & Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 115-116; 112-113.

²⁵⁷ Reis, *Mir'atü'l-Memalik*, 107. Alam & Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 114-117.

kingdom, well-guarded Constantinople, which is in the fifth, Küfe, which is the sixth, Buda and Pecs, which are in the seventh.”²⁵⁸

e. Sahip-Qiran

Sahibkiran could be regarded as both sacred kingship and millennial pretensions. It is a concept less philosophical and more scientific since it is mostly related to astrological events. The title can be understood as the lord of the fortunate (planetary) conduction which basically signifies a specific celestial movement that provides the cosmic dimension of the legitimization.²⁵⁹ The word “*kiran*” means getting closer, closeness in Arabic. It signifies a situation when two or more planets get closer to each other more than ever. The famous 13th century Persian philosopher and astrologer, Nasirüddin Tusi, writes on the matter scientifically. He uses “*kiran*” as a term to define the time when Jupiter and Saturn are at the same zodiac sign. That instance is called “*kiran-ı ulviyyan.*” According to the astrologers, those movements affect the life and events happening in the world. There are auspicious planets and inauspicious ones. Jupiter and Venus are considered to represent auspiciousness and good fortune. It is called *kiran-ı sa'deyn, sa'd-i kiran*. That is why their movements are significant. *Sahibkiran* (lord of the auspicious conjunction) is used as an epithet for rulers who are born while that celestial event was happening. It indicates the “world conqueror” and “good fortune” nature of that person.²⁶⁰ Also this epithet is very much related to 12th century Iranian theosopher Suhrawardi’s cosmological explanations and theory called illuminations. It is a part of Universalist discourse which represents the ruler as the conqueror of the epoch, enfolding his peoples of all castes and creeds and above religious boundaries.²⁶¹

According to 16th century Ottoman intellectual Mustafa ‘Ali, there have been only three of those and they are Alexander, Chengiz Khan and Timur. He further adds that if Selim I had lived to rule longer, he might have been a *sahibkiran*.²⁶² In order to provide a legitimization and have the charismatic authority, the epithet *sahibkiran* is highly used to

²⁵⁸ Reis, “*Mir’atü’l-Memalik*, 107. Alam & Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 116 and 113. We also see that Lütü Paşa, who was the grand vizier of Süleyman I, on his book of government, defines Selim I as a *sahip-kiran*. See. Lütü Paşa, *Asafname* (Ankara: Yurdocağı, 1977), 18.

²⁵⁹ Bang and Kolodziejczyk, *Universal Empire*, 181.

²⁶⁰ Yavuz Unat, “Kıranat,” *Diyanet İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol.25. (İstanbul: 2002), 437.

²⁶¹ Fleischer, *The Lawgiver*, 163.

²⁶² Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 280.

fashion the ruler as a world conqueror who is destined to be one due to his astrological signs deduced from celestial events. It is also because of its direct reference to Chengīzid and Timurid line which is believed to be blessed and full of conquests. Therefore, Mughals, as the Gurkhanid dynasty, legitimately traced their lines to Chengīz and Timur in their *silsilenames* (genealogies) which would help them to prove the nature of emperors as the lord of the conjunction of planets (*sahibkiran*).²⁶³

Political legitimacy for Chengīz Khan is the idea that he is fashioned by God as the sole legitimate ruler of the world. Also in the Timurid biographies and histories it is depicted that whenever God Almighty exalts any person to the throne of sovereignty, he confers on him a special dignity and wisdom, by means of which he renders mankind obedient to him.²⁶⁴ The line of Chengīz and later Timurids expressed Mughal's personal and dynastic connections through using the notions of divine and sacred. That is why the imagery of divine kingship is applied to their rule via this title.²⁶⁵ It can also be related to the title of "the Sultan (Ruler) of the Seven Climates", who will be called *sahib-kiran* and who is also someone that is identified as Iskender-i Dhu'l-Qarnayn.²⁶⁶

Ibrahim Pasha, the famous grand vizier of Süleyman I, refers to the Sultan in his correspondence with him, as *şâhib-ķırân-i âlem-penâh* (universal ruler and refuge of the world) or *şâhib-ķırân-i rub'-i meskûn* (universal ruler of the inhabited world).²⁶⁷ Süleyman I, like his contemporaries was strongly influenced by the millenarian concerns and discussions and tried to designate himself as *sahibkiran*. Utilization of this discourse in the reigns of Selim I and Süleyman I can be better understood in the context of developments in the east of the Ottoman Empire, i.e. their rivalry with the Safavids, a dynasty with a huge amount of messianistic pretensions.²⁶⁸ Safavid historians also tried to promote the Safavid legitimacy in Timurid terms through using Timur's name and the symbols associated with his rule. For instance, a Safavid chronicler lists a number of phrases and names which contain twelve letters representing twelve Imams. In addition to the phrase *Muhammad Rasulallah* and the name Ali b. Abi Talib, he also mentions *sahib-kiran-ı a'la* and associates Safavid ruler Shah Abbas with the *sahib-kiran-ı a'la* via *abjad* calculations. He

²⁶³ Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 314.

²⁶⁴ Balabanlılar, *Imperial Identity*, 138.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 143.

²⁶⁶ Dhu'l-Qarnayn is a commander mentioned in Qur'an and identified as Alexander by some müfessirs.

²⁶⁷ Fleischer, *The Lawgiver*, 166.

²⁶⁸ Subrahmanyam, *Connected Histories*, 752.

further refers to Shah Abbas as *sahib-kiran-i a'la* throughout his work after proving the names can be used interchangeably.²⁶⁹

However, among the three big Muslim empires of the 16th century, Mughals are the ones that actually descended from Timur's blood line. Akbar Shah is called the lamp of the *sahibkiran*'s house in *Akbarnāma*.²⁷⁰ Interestingly enough, a huge part of the first volume of the book is allocated to evaluate his horoscope according to Greek, Zoroastrian, Indian and Ilkhanid astrological tables. All the movements of the planets are explained in detail just to clarify his auspiciousness. The conclusion is that he is the *sahibkiran*.

“The horoscope of this Light of Fortune was superior, in several respects and by sundry degrees, to that of his Majesty, the Lord of Conjunction (Tīmūr) as indeed clearly appears to the scrutinizing students of the prognostications. And when these two auspicious documents are compared, and the gifts of the planets and the blessings of the heavens are weighed in the balance of reflection, it will be seen what are the communications of the horoscope of the Lord of Conjunction, and what are those of the holy horoscope.”²⁷¹

Therefore, the millennial title of *sahibkiran*, highlights the change in religio-political order on a global scale and possibly the end of the world. As a result of astrological calculations, the time of conjunction is used with a symbolic importance that might expand and change color to match the social situation and audience, like indicating to a lucky general, a fortunate king, a world conqueror with a lasting dispensation, a prophet with a law, a messiah or all of the above rolled into one.²⁷² More significantly, it is based on the cosmology and theory of kingship set up by early Muslim thinkers which fed the 16th century ideology at the eve of a new era and a new kingship theory marked by Akbar Shah's reign.

2.2. Policies

It is hard to imagine that maintaining rule through force alone in a vast empire such as the Mughal Empire was possible. As mentioned before, the majority of the population were non-muslim and the institutions that existed in the different regions were also very

²⁶⁹ Sholeh A. Quinn, “Notes on Timurid Legitimacy in Three Safavid Chronicles,” *Iranian Studies*, 31:2 (1998), 155.

²⁷⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 19.

²⁷¹ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. I*, 119-120.

²⁷² Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 31.

varied.²⁷³ Thus, it should always be kept in mind that Akbar's religious policies, similar to those of other emperors of the time, were issued mainly with political rather than religious concerns. In order to rise in rank in the imperial court, the important thing is merit and accordingly, men of every religion are welcomed and allowed to serve the state.²⁷⁴ Akbar and his statesmen also patronized literature, art, and science without theological considerations. Court ceremonies, religious holidays, celebrations were enriched by many Hindu and Ancient Persian customs.²⁷⁵

2.2.1. Tax Collection: The abolition of pilgrimage tax and *jizya*

Two important policies related to Akbar's ideology are the abolition of pilgrimage tax and *jizya*, both of which were collected from non-Muslims. First, Akbar abolished the pilgrimage tax in the 8th year of his reign. Then, in the 9th year, in 1564, he did the same thing to the *jizya* (poll tax). These moves were a part of the state's application of religious tolerance. *Jizya* is a tax collected in Muslim states from their non-Muslim populations in exchange for allowing them to practice their religion freely on their territories. It can be applied only to the people who have the status of *dhimmis*; 'protected persons' and *ahl-i kitab*, 'people of the book' according to the Qur'an.²⁷⁶ This narrows the possibility down to Abrahamic religions. However, due to the multi-religious situation in India, this category is extended without looking for textual consistency to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and other non-Muslims.²⁷⁷ This is not an unusual decision since for Earlier Muslim states as well as the Ottomans, the category included Zoroastrians due to the population under their control. For the pilgrimage tax, Akbar decided to abolish it during a tiger-hunting expedition in Mathura.

“In the same hunt he joined worship with pleasure and became a distributor of justice. It was brought to his notice that for a long time it was the custom in India for the rulers to take sums from the people who came to sacred spots to worship,

²⁷³ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A Tale of Three Empires: Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs in a Comparative Context," *Common Knowledge*, 12,1 (Winter 2006), 84.

²⁷⁴ This is part of the political discourse of Akbar's reign however it should also be noted that this attitude serves also the distancing of Chaghatai Nobles from state affairs.

²⁷⁵ Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 81.

²⁷⁶ Qur'an, 9:29: "Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture - [fight] until they give the *jizyah* willingly while they are humbled."

²⁷⁷ Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 26.

proportionate to their rank and wealth. This (worship) was called Karma. The Shāhin-shāh in his wisdom and tolerance remitted all these taxes which amounted to *crores*. He looked upon such grasping of property as blameable and issued orders forbidding the levy thereof throughout his dominions. In former times, from the unworthiness of some, and from cupidity and bigotry, men showed such an evil desire towards the worshippers of God. H.M. often said that although the folly of a sect might be clear, yet as they had no conviction that they were on the wrong path, to demand money from them, and to put a stumbling-block in the way of what they had made a means of approach to the sublime threshold of Unity and considered as the worship of the Creator, was disapproved by the discriminating intellect and was a mark of not doing the will of God.”²⁷⁸

The second is defined as an imperial gift from Akbar to his subjects.

“One of the great *gifts* which H.M. the Shāhinshāh made at the beginning of this year was the remission of the *Jizya* throughout India. As the far-seeing glance of the Shāhinshāh looked to the administration of the world, he paid great attention to the issuing of this edict, which might be regarded as the foundation of the arrangement of mankind. In spite of *the disapproval of statesmen*, and of the great revenue, and of much chatter on the part of the ignorant, this sublime decree was issued. When this tax was imposed in former times by those who held outward sway, the reason for it was that they on account of heart-rooted enmity were girded up for the contempt and *destruction of opposite factions*, but for political purposes and for their own advantage, they fixed a sum of money as an equivalent therefor, and gave it the name of *jiziya*. At the present day, when owing to the blessing of the abundant good-will and graciousness of the lord of the age, those who belong to other religions have, like those of one mind and one religion, bound up the waist of devotion and service, and exert themselves for the advancement of the dominion, how should those dissenters, whose separation is founded merely on habit and imitation, and whose zeal and devotion are the real things, be classed with that old faction which cherished mortal enmity, and be the subjects of contempt and slaughter? At this day, when there are thousands of treasures in the store-chambers of the world-wide administration, and when every one of the servants of the threshold of fortune is rich and prosperous, why should a just and discriminating mind apply itself to collecting this tax?”²⁷⁹

The collection of *jizya* is a theocratic obligation of the Muslim state. In that sense, its formal abolition by Akbar is considered to be a radical attempt since it is a hallmark of Muslim rule.²⁸⁰ The idea behind its abolition is basically the claim that *jizya* is a sign and

²⁷⁸ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. II*, Chapter XLVII

²⁷⁹ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. II*, Chapter LI

²⁸⁰ Early. *The Mughal Throne*, 216. It is suggested by Recep Şentürk that the understanding of *jizya* differs in Islamic legal schools. There are two approaches, Hanafite and Sha'afi. He sees the former as Universalist school and the latter as the communalist school. “Scholars disagreed on why such a tax was imposed on non-Muslims. The Communalist School sees the *jizya* as a fee for the security provided by the state to its non-Muslim subjects. Yet the Universalistic School objects to this view. According to the Universalistic school, the *jizya* is merely a tax on non-Muslim citizens, comparable to *zakat* which Muslim citizens are required to pay. For them *jizya* cannot be seen as a fee for security, because security is the natural right of all human

emblem of inferiority. Therefore, with its abolition Akbar created some kind of a “common citizenship” for the population. According to him, all his subjects are equal and he would not discriminate between them based on their religions. This is interesting because as it was put by Khan, these were “exigencies of state policy rather than consideration of religious tolerance or intellectual influences.”²⁸¹

2.2.2. *Dīn-e Ilāhī* (The Divine Faith)

The peak point of Akbar’s religious self-fashioning is his attempt to unite the leadership of the *Shi’a* and *Sunni* communities and to bring Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and Jain together in one faith in his own person.²⁸² It is the so-called “new religion” known as *dīn-e ilāhī* (the divine faith).²⁸³ It has been argued for a long time that rather than a religion, it is like a Sufi order in which Akbar declared himself as *pir*. For many historians it resembles *pir-murid* relationship practiced in the Safavid example with the ruler Shah Ismail (r. 1501-1524) and his Qizilbash supporters. Just as in the Safavid case, its intention is to bind the highest ranking nobles in complete loyalty to the emperor.

Dīn-e ilāhī is a view based on mistranslations of Abu al-Fazl's writings about Akbar. The term used for it in *Akbarnāma* and *Ā-īn-i Akbarī* is *Tauhid-e ilāhī* which is translated first as “divine faith” and assumed to be called as *dīn-e ilāhī*, a religion. The highest-ranking nobles answered directly to Akbar just as these nobles' officers answered directly to them, thus guaranteeing downward and upward flows of loyalty.” It would be more appropriate to claim Akbar’s *dīn-e ilāhī* tried to achieve for the monarch the same degree of loyalty from his disciples as the Safavid emperors received from their followers.

²⁸⁴ From another perspective, Nile Green defines *dīn-e ilāhī* as an imperial cult. He says

beings regardless of their citizenship, who they are and where they live. Ottomans abolished *jizya* as part of the late nineteenth century reforms in Islamic law because of its discriminatory approach.” Recep Şentürk, "Sociology of Rights: "I Am Therefore I Have Rights": Human Rights in Islam between Universalistic and Communalistic Perspectives," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 2:1 (2005), 23. It is worthy to note that Mughals mostly affiliated with the Hanafī school. See. Rizvī, *Religious and Intellectual*, 121, 143-144.

²⁸¹ Khan, *The Nobility*, 32.

²⁸² Buckler, *A New Interpretation*, 605.

²⁸³ In the official Mughal sources, it is not named but referred to as *muridi* (discipleship). In other sources it is called by different names such as *Din-i Ilahi* (Divine Religion), *Tawhid-i Ilahi* (Divine Monism), or *Ikhlās-i Chahargana* (Four Degrees of Devotion). Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 131.

²⁸⁴ Balabanlilar, *Lords of the Auspicious*, 25. Also see. Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 314. And also: Qureshi, *Akbar: The Architect*, 166. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam. Vol. III*, 73.

“the long-established idioms of the Sufis were co-opted for the emperor himself who was designated as *insan-e kamil* and *murshid* (spiritual director) of a circle of loyal *murids* (Sufi disciples) who were none other than his courtiers.”²⁸⁵

It is considered to be something like a fraternity, not a religion, and never intended to be one. Its primary concerns were socio-political rather than religious. Akbar himself was the nucleus of the creed. It is doubtful that any large number of people outside the court circle knew about such a thing. Another question is would it have sounded appealing to them if they had come to know about it? This makes one think Akbar desired to keep *dīn-e ilāhī* exclusive to a small, closed “fraternity” of intimates and true adherents. It is designed to be a group which is not divided by conflicting religious loyalties, but united in their devotion to the emperor. The devotion requires the sacrifice of Property, Life, Honour and Religion.²⁸⁶ According to Zaidi, the translation of the term *dīn-e ilāhī* is wrong and that is why it is believed to be a new religion propagated by Akbar. He further adds that Akbar initiated a neutral ideology and therefore suggested the meaning of the term as “ordinances of divine faith” (*a’īn-i irādat guzinān*), or “regulations for those privileged to be (His Majesty's) disciples.”²⁸⁷ *Ordinances of the Divine Faith:*

“The members of the Divine Faith, on seeing each other, observe the following custom. One says, “*Allāhu Akbar;*” and the other responds, “*Jalla Jalāluhu.*” The motive of His Majesty, in laying down this mode of salutation, is to remind men to think of the origin of their existence, and to keep the Deity in fresh, lively, and grateful remembrance. It is also ordered by His Majesty that, instead of the dinner usually given in remembrance of a man after his death, each member should pre-prepare a dinner during his lifetime, and thus gather provisions for his last journey. Each member is to give a party on the anniversary of his birthday, and arrange a sumptuous feast. He is to bestow alms, and thus prepare provisions for the long journey. His Majesty has also ordered that members should endeavour to abstain from eating flesh. They may allow others to eat flesh, without touching it themselves; but during the month of their birth they are not even to approach meat. Nor shall members go near anything that they have themselves slain; nor eat of it. Neither shall they make use of the same vessels with butchers, fishers, and birdcatchers. Members should not cohabit with pregnant, old, and barren women; nor with girls under the age of puberty.²⁸⁸ “Why should I claim to guide men, before I myself am guided?”

²⁸⁵ Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 142.

²⁸⁶ Early, *The Mughal Throne*, 207-211.

²⁸⁷ S. Inayet. A. Zaidi, "Akbar's Relations with Rajput Chiefs and Their Role in the Expansion of the Empire", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 22, No. 7/8 (Jul. - Aug., 1994), 82. Blake, *The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic*, 83.

²⁸⁸ Allami, *Ai'n-i Akbari*, 175-176.

The initiation ceremony of selected disciples:

“His Majesty accepts him, and admits him on a Sunday, when the world-illuminating sun is in its highest splendour. Notwithstanding every strictness and reluctance shewn by His Majesty in admitting novices, there are many thousands, men of all classes, who have cast over their shoulders the mantel of belief, and look upon their con-version to the New Faith as the means of obtaining every blessing. At the above-mentioned time of everlasting auspiciousness, the novice with his turban in his hands, puts his head on the feet of His Majesty. This is symbolical (*zaban-e hal*), and expresses that the novice, guided by good fortune and the assistance of his good star, has cast aside conceit and selfishness, the root of so many evils, offers his heart in worship, and now comes to enquire as to the means of obtaining everlasting life. His Majesty, the chosen one of God, then stretches out the hand of favour, raises up the suppliant, and replaces the turban on his head, meaning by these symbolical actions that he has raised up a man of pure intentions, who from seeming existence has now entered into real life. His Majesty then gives the novice the *Shast*, upon which is engraved ‘the Great Name,’²⁸⁹ and His Majesty's symbolical motto, ‘*Allahu Akbar.*’ This teaches the novice the truth that “*the pure Shast and the pure sight never err.*”

The candidate had to swear an oath stating he will remain loyal to the ruler under any circumstances and be ready to sacrifice his life, property, honor and faith to him. As part of the ceremony, “followers” have to wear a token on which there is the portrait of Akbar surrounded with the Timurid dynastic genealogy.²⁹⁰ It is perceived as the standard of loyal friendship and the advance guard of righteousness and happiness. They put it wrapped up in a small jeweled case, on the top of their turbans.²⁹¹

Members greet each other with the salutation “*Allahu Akbar*” (God is Great / God is Akbar). The response to this would be *Jalla Jalaluhu* (Glorious is His Glory / Glorious is His *Jalal*). It is a play with the name and title of the Emperors. Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar. *Jalal al-Din* means glory of the religion whereas *Akbar* means Great. Both are present in the Muslim salutation of God: *Allahu Akbar, Jalla Jalallahu.*²⁹² The rituals

²⁸⁹ Allami, *Ai'n-i Akbari*, 174-175.

²⁹⁰ Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 314. However, aside from “din-e ilahi membership” as a desire for the devotion to the Mughal ruler, many of the court rituals and norms of conduct with the notion of a visible imperial majesty and grandeur are of Iranian provenance, traceable to the Sasanid court. Among those replicated were: prostration before the Emperor or his throne; kissing his feet or any other limb, the hand in particular. Harbans Mukhia, *The Mughals of India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 78.

²⁹¹ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 50. For instance, just like Akbar's token, there is a symbol to carry for followers of Shah Ismail. It is the *taj* (crown) called as *Taj-i Haydari* (Crown of Haydar). This consisted of a hat topped by a tall red baton with twelve facets (tark) around which a turban could be tied. People of the Safavid order who wear this crown are called *Qizilbash* (red heads) It is a mark of devotion to Ali and to his heir incarnate the Safavid perfect guide (murshid-i kamil) i.e. Shah Ismail. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 81.

²⁹² Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 144. In 1584, five years after mahzar, Akbar ordered a new coinage. Those coins are significant because they mirror the undergoing ideological and political changes of the reign. On the coinage, there is the single legend: ‘God is great, splendid is His Glory.’

necessary for Din-e Ilahi are selected from some other religions. For instance, the reason why the initiation ceremony is on Sundays is because it is the day for Zoroastrian and Hindu reverence of the sun.²⁹³ Members also prostrate before the ‘master’ which is something that without question caused opposition and one of the main things that made “*dīn-e ilāhī*” so problematic, even though it seems unlikely that it was designed and presented as a “religion” that is going to replace Islam. It does not have a theology or obvious doctrine but mainly based on Akbar’s saintly outlook.²⁹⁴ It is worth noting that Akbar had opposition throughout his reign while applying new policies, creating his imperial discourse, and establishing *din-e ilahi*. However, this opposition was not from a certain religious creed. Therefore, in many ways it legitimizes Akbar’s desire to create a rule above differences. Abu’l-Fazl claims that Akbar is accused of different things.

“A set of squint-eyed, wicked people taxed him with Sh’iism; and so led astray simple-minded Sunnīs. The cause of the stumbling of this set was that in the sublime assemblies the proofs of those two sects, like those of other sects, were discussed, and that the Shāhinshāh from equity selected what was preferable... The favour shown to Persians, most of whom belonged to that sect (the Sh’iā), increased the evil thoughts of the turbulent... An impure faction reproached the caravan-leader of God-knowers with being of the Hindu (Brahman) religion. The ground for this improper notion was that the prince out of his wide tolerance received Hindu sages into his intimacy, and increased for administrative reasons the rank of Hindus, and for the good of the country showed them kindness.”²⁹⁵

He further adds that there are three things caused this gossip.

“First—The sages of different religions assembled at court, and as every religion has some good in it, each received some praise. From a spirit of justice, the badness of any sect could not weave a veil over its merits. Second—The season of “Peace with all” was honoured at the court of the Caliphate, and various tribes of mankind of various natures obtained spiritual and material success. Third—The evil nature and crooked ways of the base ones of the age. By the right-thinking and truthful conduct of the world’s lord, they were soon put to shame for their ignorance, and set about endeavouring to amend the days of their ignorance, but many as a

²⁹³ Early. *The Mughal Throne*, 209.

²⁹⁴ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 144-145.

²⁹⁵ Abu’l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, 399. In a letter Jesuit Father Rodolf Acquaviva sent in 1581, there is an interesting paragraph related to this: “Among the people here there are still different opinions about the King, for some think he is a Christian, others that he is a Hindu, and others a Muslim. Others, with a better judgment, think he is neither a Christian, nor a Hindu, nor a Muslim. I consider this to be true, or perhaps that he is a Muslim, but confirms himself to all to win the goodwill of all.” Correia-Afonso ed., *Letters from the Mughal*, 96.

retribution for their evil deeds descended into the tortures of failure.”²⁹⁶

Also, it seems that as a result of the reactions, he gave up on the prostration ceremony due to criticisms but continued only private assemblies. Abu'l-Fazl explains the situation through underlining the difference between “people” and “elect.”

“But as some perverse and dark-minded men look upon prostration as blasphemous man-worship, His Majesty, from his practical wisdom, has ordered it to be discontinued by the ignorant, and remitted it to all ranks, forbidding even his private attendants from using it in the Darbar-i 'A'mm (general court-days). However, in the private assembly, when any of those are in waiting, upon whom the star of good fortune shines, and they receive the order of seating themselves, they certainly perform the prostration of gratitude by bowing down their foreheads to the earth, and thus participate in the halo of good fortune. In this manner, by forbidding the people at large to prostrate, but allowing the Elect to do so, His Majesty fulfills the wishes of both, and shows the world a fitting example of practical wisdom.”²⁹⁷

The Mughal court system was pyramidal. Akbar was at the peak, and there was a small group of elites around him. These people were loyally bound to their “divinely illuminated” ruler. That is why, it is possible to understand the requirements of *dīn-e ilāhī* in the light of a disciple or a devotee. It requires being ready to sacrifice their lives, properties, honor and religion for the interest of their master. Akbar’s main aim for establishing *dīn-e ilāhī* was not to challenge or substitute the existing creeds and sects, but to enact a central point of confluence and harmony, to which all could participate while remaining true to their own faiths.²⁹⁸ He only wanted that their religion, whatever it might be, should not be an obstacle for their justification of imperial policies.²⁹⁹ Even Badāyūnī, the main critical voice of the time, accepted that Akbar never used persuasion, force or bribery for gaining adherence to his opinions. Also it would not be something that would raise their rank and Akbar made it sure to his ‘disciples’ that they should expect no favors from him.³⁰⁰

It was rather an attempt to establish a central point that merges the court. Akbar continued his “religious reform” in a cautious manner, taking one wary step at a time. Through the Infallibility decree, he first established his authority over Islam. Then with *dīn-*

²⁹⁶ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, 399.

²⁹⁷ Allami, *Ai'n-i Akbari*, 167-168.

²⁹⁸ Early, *The Mughal Throne*, 202.

²⁹⁹ Rizvi, *A Wonder That*, 110.

³⁰⁰ Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 61.

e ilāhī he distanced himself from that discourse (but not exactly renounce it) to offer himself as the nucleus of a religious synthesis.³⁰¹ Also, considering Akbar's millenarian concerns, it is also possible to relate his formulation of the *din-e ilahi* with the turning of the Islamic millennium in the middle of his reign. While some other Muslims perceive the upcoming millennium as an occasion to return to the Prophetic example, for the universal emperor of the age, it can be understood as an occasion to create an altogether new religious synthesis.³⁰² This synthesis had found its way in the public and popular level with a discourse of peace with all, that is Akbar's policy of *sulh-e kull*.³⁰³

2.2.3. The World Is Not Destroyed by Unbelief, But by Injustice³⁰⁴: *Sulh-i Kull* (Universal Peace) and *Nizamu'l Alem*

“It is not concealed and veiled from the minds of intelligent persons, who have received the light of divine aid and are illuminated by the rays of wisdom and knowledge that in this terrestrial world, which is the mirror of the celestial, there is nothing that excels love and no propensity so worthy of cultivation as philanthropy, because the peace of the world and harmony of existence are based upon friendship and association, and in each heart, illuminated by the rays of the sun of love, the world of the soul or the faculties of the mind, are by them purged by human darkness; and much more is this the case, when they subsist between monarchs, peace among whom implies the peace of the world and the denizens thereof.”

From the Persian copy of the letter Akbar sent to Jesuit Father in Goa.³⁰⁵

As it is mentioned, Akbar and Abu'l-Fazl used a selected rhetoric that refers to many different things from Qur'anic terminology such as *mahdi*, *mujaddid*, Sufi understandings like *qutb* and *insan-i kamil* or royal ideas of *farr-i Izadi* and *sahibkiran*. They all had the main idea of a person who can alter the existing situation and establish a just order at a specific time.³⁰⁶ Abu-l Fazl also believed that “if royalty did not exist, the storm of strife would never subside, nor selfish ambition disappear. Mankind, being under the burden of lawlessness and lust, would sink in to the pit of destruction, would lose its prosperity, and the whole earth become a barren waste.”³⁰⁷ It is the outcome of the idea that a ruler is the ultimate guide of the community having the duty of representing God's

³⁰¹ Early. *The Mughal Throne*, 202.

³⁰² Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 142.

³⁰³ See in detail at the title below.

³⁰⁴ “*Al-mulk yabqa ma'a l kufi wa la yabqa ma'a l-zulm*”

³⁰⁵ see. E. Rehatsek, “A Letter of the Emperor Akbar Asking for the Christian Scriptures,” *The Indian Antiquary* (April, 1887), 136.

³⁰⁶ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 9.

³⁰⁷ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 2-3.

will on earth.³⁰⁸ According to the Sufi dimension of Mughal theory of kingship, Akbar is defined to be the *insan al-kamil* who establishes *sulh-e kull* between Muslims and non-Muslims to provide a social harmony mediated by royal power.³⁰⁹ *Sulh-e kull* refers to having the same attitude towards all religious beliefs. It is commonly translated as “peace with all” but a more appropriate translation would be “total peace” or “universal peace” where *kull* means total or universal.³¹⁰ In order to discard any possible religious enmity between his subjects, Akbar designed a policy which didn’t affect their religious practices.³¹¹ As part of this attitude, according to his understanding of kingship, it is more important for the ruler to achieve social peace than to enforce the Shari’a.³¹² Abu’l-Fazl even composed a manual (*dastur al-amal*) for officials advising them about protecting the principles of justice and equity (*itidal*) and not to interfere in the matters of faith.³¹³

In *Akbarnāma*, Abu’l-Fazl points out Akbar’s role as a father to his subjects. This understanding is borrowed from ancient Indian concepts of kingship. According to classical texts of Hindus, the ruler or king (*raja*) is perceived as necessary to maintain social order and his primary duty is to protect the populous against outside aggression and internal chaos. The happiness of the king lies in the happiness of the subjects, and he should act like a father towards all people and even be accepted as a deity.³¹⁴ This was useful to create an image that depicts Akbar’s dedication to “communal harmony,” an idea which prepares the basis for the institution of the policy *sulh-e kull*.³¹⁵ It is important to underline that even though he used his blood line effectively and added many “Islamic” titles before his name or created a discourse based on Timurid identity and Islamic notions, Akbar’s self-designation did not present him as a Timurid or a Muslim ruler. Throughout his reign, the emperor and Abu’l-Fazl try to underline Akbar’s non-sectarian piety, both in action through policies and also by recording it in many parts of *Akbarnāma*. In that sense, he would rather be perceived as an “Indian” monarch in a broader sense which sits right with the “father

³⁰⁸ Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 151.

³⁰⁹ Alam, *Writing the Mughal*, 223.

³¹⁰ Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, "Dimensions of Sulh-i Kull (Universal Peace) in Akbar's Reign and the Sufi Theory of Perfect Man," in *Akbar and His Age*, ed. Iqtidar Alam Khan (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999).

³¹¹ However, he supported these kind of discussions among the intellectuals and religious scholars of the time via the famous Ibadat-Khana discussions he initiated.

³¹² Black, *The History of Islamic*, 245.

³¹³ Muzaffar Alam, "Shari’a and Governance in Indo-Islamic Context," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 236.

³¹⁴ Morgan and Lawton, *Ethical Issues*, 8.

³¹⁵ Catherine B. Asher & Cynthia Talbot, *India Before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 129-130.

figure” ideology. Moreover, the policy *sulh-e kull* connects him with universality and his desire to be the *alempenah* i.e. refuge of all the people.³¹⁶ His abolition of the *jizya* is another stage in his ongoing policies which are meant to promote the idea of a universal peace. Being categorized as *dhimmis* (protected people) gives the non-Muslims the right not to serve in the military in return for the tax they pay. However, the Rajputs were fighting in wars alongside the Muslims so it was possible to consider it unnecessary to make them pay *jizya* and also in some way it creates the idea of togetherness that serves the desire for communal harmony.

According to his understanding, his policies of toleration prove his superiority over other Muslim rulers. He thinks that what makes him a universal emperor is his acceptance and respect of all the differences in religion, language and culture and in providing a peaceful environment for all. In March 1594, Akbar sent a letter to Safavid ruler Shah Abbas I (r.1587-1629) in which Akbar criticizes him for his intolerance in his religious policies and underlines the fact that only through his idea of *sulh-e kull* that he could rightly rule over his population.³¹⁷ Akbar wrote to the Safavid Shah advising him to practice the policy of *sulh-e kull*. The Shah was asked to show more tolerance towards those of different faiths, even if they are believed to be in the wrong, and to exercise supreme caution before putting anyone to death.

“We hope that knowing that our loving heart is disposed towards every kind of subject and enterprise, you will tread the beautiful path of correspondence and cause the arrival of truthful, diurnal reports. At the present day, when there are very few wise and acute men who look to the future in Persia, it behoves that cream of lofty ancestors (Shah 'Abbās) to exert himself greatly in the management of the country and in the conciliation of all the inhabitants. In every undertaking he must regard caution and have a thought of the final result, and he must not let his heart be perplexed by the fictions of interested people and the lies of intriguing weavers of tales. He must practice endurance of burdens and the ignoring of the mistakes of hereditary servants and new employees, and advance the sincere, and by the light of gracious-ness cleanse the rust of darkness from off the hypocritical. He must also exercise supreme caution before putting any one to death and destroying what is an edifice of God.... It must be considered that the Divine mercy attaches itself to every form of creed, and supreme exertions must be made to bring oneself into the every vernal flower-garden of “Peace with all.” The increase of one's good fortune

³¹⁶ Dale, *The Muslim Empires*, 80.

³¹⁷ Ebba Koch, “How the Mughal Pādsāhs Referenced Iran in Their Visual Construction of Universal Rule,” in *Universal Empire: A comparative approach to imperial culture and representation in Eurasian history*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang & Dariusz Kolodziejczyk (Cambridge University Press 2012), 194.

must always be kept in full view, for the eternal God is bounteous to all souls and conditions of men. Hence it is fitting that kings, who are the shadow of Divinity, should not cast away this principle. For, the Creator has given this sublime order (that of kings) for the discipline and guardianship of all mankind, so that they may watch over the honour and reputation of every class.”³¹⁸

In my opinion, the idea of *sulh-e kull* is very much related to the Ottoman idea of “world order” (*nizam-ı ‘âlem*). First of all, both of them are powerful legitimating arguments and have an important place in the rulership discourse with justice, theories of caliphate and charismatic and eschatological kingship.³¹⁹ For instance, in the famous *mahzar* of Akbar, there is the term *nizam-ı ‘âlem* which stands as a “legitimating argument” for declaring Akbar the *mujtahid* of the time. Also, in Akbarnāma, the term is used in many places. According to Tursun Beg, an Ottoman historian at the time of Mehmed II, government is a ‘divine grace’ and kingship is responsible for the endurance of the ‘world order’ as a divine remedy.³²⁰ This idea is also very much related to the basic understanding of *sulh-e kull*, which is providing balance and harmony, for it is the necessity of the God-given sovereignty. Furthermore, Tursun Beg refers to two kinds of rule. There is the Sultanic rule (*siyaset-i sultani*) which is acceptable as legitimate, however it is inferior to “divinely inspired government” (*siyaset-i ilahi*) because the latter indicates a “universal order both social and spiritual” (*nizam-ı ‘âlem-i zahir ü batın*), which is more comprehensive.³²¹

“World order” is at the heart of political and ethical notions among the Ottoman ruling elite. Even though they differ in some parts, especially when it serves to legitimize some of the most questionable practices of Ottoman rulers such as fratricide, both of them

³¹⁸ Abu’l-Fazl, *The Akbarname Vol. III*, 1012.

³¹⁹ Gottfried Hagen, “Legitimacy and World Order,” in *Legitimizing the Order: Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Maurus Reinkowski and Hakan Karateke. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 56.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61. and Tursun Beg, *Tarih-i Ebu’l-Feth*, 12.

³²¹ Hagen, *Legitimacy and World*, 69. In my opinion this is the part where this ideology, even though it derives from a basic notion like “tolerance” in order to provide peace, should be examined through the classical texts. In all its complexity, it is possible to say that the commonalities in different religions or cosmologies would only be provided through those basic notions or terminology such as *adl* (justice) and it is easier to legitimize. Ruling with justice is an umbrella theme and it is quite significant in universality claims but more bounding because of its large scope and for a wanna-be universal ruler, it is crucial to create a discourse based on that. For Akbar and his ideologue Abu’l-Fazl, the symbols, ceremonials and literary products can be counted as outcomes of this discourse. However, the sources that they use to compose the ideology seem like a composition of books of government and mirrors-for-princes. Some of the names in that respect can be Islamic theorists such as Farabi, Avicenna and Turtushi, mystics such as Ibn al-Arabi and Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi or the authors of the akhlaq texts such as Nasir al-Din Tusi, Jalal al-Din Dawwani (1427-1501). Rizvi, Religious and Intellectual. & Iqtidar Alam Khan, “Tracing Sources of Principles of Mughal Governance: A Critique of Recent Historiography,” *Social Scientist*, 37, 5/6 (May-June, 2009), 47-48.

are crucial in their political ambition i.e. to justify political rule.³²² This is because the Ottomans also have a tolerant policy for heterodox religious practices and beliefs. However, their main condition is that they would not be promoted in public and not challenge the Ottoman authority.³²³ Through his policy of “peace with all” or “universal peace” Akbar highlights his tolerance in the largest sense. It empowers him with the “moral authority” to take care of all humans in order to be considered as a universal ruler.³²⁴

2.3. Multi Religiosity and Religious Ceremonial

“He (Akbar) came twice to our oratory, which we have here well arranged. Once he came alone and removing his cap or Turban, kneeling on the ground with great devotion, he prayed before the picture of Christ and of the Virgin, venerating thrice, once in our manner, the other in that of the Muslims and the third in the Hindu fashion, that is to say, prostrate, saying that God should be adored with every form of adoration.”³²⁵

Father Rodolfo Acquaviva, 18 July 1580

The main belief systems that the Mughals were engaging with in their court, ceremonial and symbolic were Islam and Christianity from Abrahamic religions, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism from Indian beliefs and Zoroastrianism from Persia. These are also the beliefs that played the most significant role in Akbar’s kingship discourse. Even though the discussion about the religious differences and religious policy cannot possibly be explained in all its complexity and importance, I will briefly mention some of the crucial points in order to at least draw a framework.

Akbar showed keen interest in local cultures and mystic traditions and their influence could be seen in his governing policies. He invited Hindu scholars to his court and asked them about their religions and philosophy. In Agra, he was reported to have organized a separate quarter for *yogis*, which was called Jogipura. Also, his studies in Sanskrit led him to Vedanta and Yoga philosophy, to Hindu ritual and mythology. He spent time in Banaras, talking with learned pandits and holy men. Akbar commented that ‘the wisdom of Vedanta is the wisdom of Sufism’. In fact there is a strong accord between

³²² Hagen, *Legitimacy and World*, 80-81.

³²³ Markus Dressler, “Inventing Orthodoxy: Competing Claims for authority and Legitimacy in the Ottoman Safavid Conflict,” in *Legitimizing the Order: Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Maurus Reinkowski & Hakan Karateke (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 154.

³²⁴ Koch, *How the Mughal*, 195.

³²⁵ Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 58.

Vedanta and Sufism, especially in the form developed by Ibn'Arabi.³²⁶ This was part of Akbar's syncretism but utterly devoid of political motive.³²⁷

During Akbar's reign the position of Hindus underwent a change. Before, there were hardly any Hindus in higher state offices.³²⁸ However, under Akbar's rule, Rajas were not autonomous rulers. The Emperor approves their successors and gives them the office by presenting them with a ceremonial dress and putting the *tika*, the vermilion mark, on their foreheads.³²⁹ Whilst on a pilgrimage to Ajmer, Akbar received the homage of Raja Bhara Mal of Amber, a significant Rajput chieftain. Akbar accepted the raja's offer of his eldest daughter's hand. One of the examples indicating Akbar's evolving policy on "religious eclecticism" is his marriage to the princess of Amber since marriage alliances with Rajputs is part of Mughal ruling policy. In contrast with the usual practice of the sultans, he let the princess remain a Hindu and constructed a Hindu shrine in the imperial palace, occasionally participating in the puja she performed.³³⁰ Rajput wives enjoyed full freedom in the Mughal harem practicing their own religion. Due to their influence in the court, Hindu festivals like Dusshera, Diwali, Holi, Rakhi, etc., were celebrated with carnival and Mughal splendor.³³¹

In accepting Akbar's service Rajputs accepted him as a Muslim Rajput who possessed greater power and sovereignty than the greatest of Rajput masters. The poetic traditions often equate [Akbar] with Ram, the pre-eminent Ksatriya cultural hero of the Hindu Rajput.³³² The story of Rama and its importance for Indic kingship was well-known to the Mughals. Rama was a god-king, an avatar of Vishnu, who inaugurated a new cycle of time by ridding the world of demons, corruption, and disorder. It is for this reason that Akbar, at time of his millennial claim, was declared to be a reincarnation of Rama.³³³

³²⁶ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 113.

³²⁷ Waldemar Hansen, *The Peacock Throne: The Drama of Mogul India* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 153; Alam, *The Languages of*, 93-94. "Badauni informs us that Akbar would go to these yogīs, along with his close companions, and acquaint himself with Hindu beliefs, their methods of murāqaba (meditation), mashāghils (spiritual practices), āsan (postures), and preparation of kīmiyā (alchemy) and sīmiyā (the exercise of magical powers)."

³²⁸ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 111.

³²⁹ Early, *The Mughal throne*, 145.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

³³¹ Zaidi, *Akbar's Relations*, 79.

³³² Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 23. There is a class which is composed of heterogeneous social and religious groups. They cherished the universalist human values as it was promoted by Akbarian policies. According to this form of an alliance, Akbar is perceived to be *dūhū dīn ko sahib* (the master of both religions) as put by a well-known Braj poet Keshav Das. It is also believed that he possesses the attributes of the Hindu God Vishnu. In the sixteenth-century Sanskrit work *Bhanuchandra-charita*, Sahi Srimad-Akabbara (Akbar) projected Akbar as Rama. Badauni claims that the emperor lent an open ear to such associations. Alam, *The Languages*, 139.

³³³ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 200. Like Ali and Chengiz Khan in Iran, in India it was Rama whom kings emulated and claimed to be embodiments of. It is not surprising that the story of Rama, the Ramayana, was rendered into Persian and



Figure II: Hanuman carrying the mountain Illustration for a Persian translation of the Hindu epic the Ramayana, 1597-1605.

elaborately illustrated during Akbar's reign under his order. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 167-168. Also, since both Hindu and Muslim mystics, scholars, intellectuals and more ordinary folk were actively trying to find some forms of synthesis, poet-saints in the popular devotional bhakti tradition of Hinduism offered a middle ground where Ram/Rahim could be worshipped freely in a rejection of the formalism of both religions. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 34.

Another significant example of multi-religiosity is the translations from the Sanskrit language commissioned by Akbar. He patronized these translations to encourage a mutual understanding for Hindus and Muslims. One of those text included the Persian epic Mahabharata titled as *Razmnamah* (Book of War). Due to linguistic boundaries, it was a collaborative effort of Sanskrit and Persian intellectuals including the famous historian Badā'ūnī. The way it was rendered into Persian is quite interesting since it was an important religious text for Hindus. The translators added Islamic notions and a monotheistic God while keeping Indic Gods and spiritual things remain in the text. It recasts Brahma as God and then praises his name with starting with divine praise “*jalla jalaluhu wa 'amma nawaluhu*” (great be his glory and magnificent his bounty). There are also many Persian verses from classical Persian poets such as Nizami, Hafiz and Sa'di incorporated into the text in consideration of the Persian-speaking audience. Mughals treat the Sanskrit terminology within the Islamicate tradition.³³⁴

Akbar was interested in Sikhs' mystically inclined thinking as well. In 1565, he visited Guru Amardas and gave the city of Amritsar as a fief to his successor Guru Ramdas. From that time onwards, the town, with his Golden Temple completed in 1601, has remained the religious center of the Sikhs. In 1598, Akbar visited the prolific Guru Arjan, who compiled the holy book of the Sikhs named *Adi Granth*. It is a collection of prayers, religious texts and poems not only by Sikh poets but also Muslims, written in an early form of Punjabi language.³³⁵

Jains from the Svetambra creed and other Jain hermits attended the religious discussions after they became open to other religions. In 1582, Akbar sent an invitation to Hirvijaya Suri, a Jain scholar of the Svetembra sect from Gujarat who then arrived at the court in 1583 along with sixty-seven monks. Abu'l-Fazl studied a treatise about the systems of Ancient Indian philosophy. He stayed until 1585 and left a Jaina sage named Shanti

³³⁴ Truschke, *The Mughal Book*, 511-514. Abu'l-Fazl wrote a preface for the Persian translation of the Hindu religious epic text called Razmnama. In there, he describes the text as a book of advice, guidance, stories and descriptions of war and feasting, that is to say, a book of kingship. Even though it is a book of theology according to Hindu tradition, its Persian translation presents itself as a story reshaped for an Islamic audience. This is not a surprising attempt considering the interest of Persian intellectuals to the nature of kingship and use of different Indic text for political advice. Ibid., 515 & 518. Also, Truschke published a book recently about these Sanskrit translations in Mughal court when I finished this research so I could not manage to include details but for more on Snaskrit translation see. Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

³³⁵ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 118.

Chandra at the court. Then, he sent another scholar called Bhanu Cahndra.³³⁶ Some of the scholars were rewarded by Akbar for preparing works in Sanskrit. One of them wrote 128 verses in Sanskrit in praise of the ruler. Another was honoured for his services to knowledge by being dubbed *jagat guru*, ‘teacher of the world.’³³⁷ In Islamic states it is allowed to preserve and if necessary restore the already existing religious places such as churches or temples. However, Akbar granted the non-Muslims the right to construct places of public worship.³³⁸ This ‘permit’ caused the construction of numerous public temples in the famous places of Hindu pilgrimage. In December in the year 1578, a year before the infallibility decree, the emperor requested the participation of scholars from other religions to join *Ibadat Khana* discussions. Akbar made a request from the viceroy of Goa.

“I send thither Abdullah my ambassador and Dominic Pires to ask you to send me two learned priests, who should bring with them the principal books of the Law (tawrat/pentateuch and zabor/psalms)³³⁹ and the Gospel (injil), so that I may learn the Law and what is the most perfect in it. And I earnestly request that they should not fail to come with the said ambassadors as soon as these arrive there, and that they should bring along the books of the Law: and let the Fathers who come know that they will be received with all possible honours, and I shall be greatly pleased with their coming. And when I shall know about the Law and its perfection as I desire, they may go whenever they like, and I shall send them with many honours and favours; and they should have no fear to come, because I take them under my protection.”³⁴⁰

The value of bringing such a great ruler into the Christian religion was definitely an exciting idea for the devout Jesuits.³⁴¹ In 1580, the first Jesuit mission reached the Mughal court. The three priests were Antoni Monserrate, Francis Henriquez, who was of Persian descent and had converted to Christianity as a child and was given the duty of translating, and Rodolfo Acquaviva. They brought the latest and most prestigious edition of the Bible then available in Europe called “the Royal Polyglot Bible.”³⁴² According to their reports, when they gave the book to Akbar, “he caught hold of each individual tome and after

³³⁶ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual*, 137.

³³⁷ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 115.

³³⁸ Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 81.

³³⁹ Rehatsek, *A Letter of the Emperor*, 137 & 139.

³⁴⁰ Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 1. There is another translation for this letter and on top of that there is the Persian version of this letter which is written in a quite elaborate manner and studied by E. Rehatsek. See. Rehatsek, *A Letter of the Emperor*.

³⁴¹ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 146.

³⁴² Koch, *The Intellectual and Artistic*, 24. “This is the famous Bible printed in Hebrew, Chaldee, Latin and Greek by Plantyn for Philip II in Antwerp between 1569-1572.” Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 29; Asher & Talbot, *India Before*, 138.

kissing it, placed it on the head with great reverence in front of all his grandees and captains and the rest of the people gathered in the vast courtyard of the palace.”³⁴³

The Jesuit fathers also joined the religious scholars in Akbar's court when Akbar gave them hope of converting him into Christianity. They also brought a translation of the Qur'an along with them which according to the priests would give them an advantage to be prepared for the questions by Muslim scholars.³⁴⁴ Akbar, in a private encounter only wanted them to explain to him “the mysteries of the Holy Trinity, and How God had a son and how he became man, as he had great difficulty in understanding these two things.”³⁴⁵

“He said that he wished that we should begin to teach his son, that they used to teach first af. be. te. ce., how did we begin? We said that likewise by the ABC. He said moreover that then they made them read something from the Mosapho (*mushaf*), that we could teach the Tawrat (Torah, Law) and Ingil (Gospel). He said further that among them, when they wished to begin something, it was the custom to pray, that we should pray in our manner... The forth day he sent to say through his son that in the beginning of the a.b.c., where I had put “In the Name of God, Amen,” I should also put “In the name of Jesus Christ”, which was also the name of God, which I did, and at the end I put: ‘Praised be God and his Son Jesus Christ.’”³⁴⁶

The Emperor “told us that he desired to have Christians and churches in his lands in the same manner as the Turk had in his; and besides, none could object to it, since there were also Hindus who had their own temples and rituals.”³⁴⁷ In Akbar's lands, non-Muslims were allowed to construct their places of worship and even received a revenue-free grant from the state for some of them.³⁴⁸ Furthermore, a *farman* of 1603 granted the

³⁴³ Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 29-30. The Bible and its illustrations apparently had some influence on Mughal painting, for soon afterwards biblical scenes began to appear in Mughal albums. Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 120. During another Jesuit mission, Akbar made a request to one of the priests in the court named Jerome Xavier, to write a book about the life of Christ. The book was rendered into Persian with the help of experts. It is called *Mir'āt-u'l-quds* (Mirror of Holiness). It's also known as *Dāstān-i-Masīh* (story of Messiah). Qureshi, *Akbar: The Architect*, 231. “This respected work and its fortunate introduction which I, the slave, Padre Jeronimo Xavier, a Frank, who belongs to the community of Hazrat 'Isa, am writing, has been set down under the command of Jalal-ud-Din Akbar Padshah, the illumination of the heart of the people of his time, may his power and Sultanate remain forever. Whatever I am writing is derived from the *Injīl-i-Muqaddas* [Gospel] and other books of the Prophets which were brought to the Seat of the Caliphate in Agra. This slave made this translation in Agra in collaboration with Maulana 'Abdus Sattar ibn Qasim Lahauri, and it was completed in the year 1602 of the birth of Hazrat 'Isa Masih, the 47th Ilahi year. This [manuscript] is written on Wednesday, 8 Ramazan 1027 AH.” Alam, *Writing the Mughal*, 266.

³⁴⁴ Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 43.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁴⁶ This is, then about eight years old Prince Murad. Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 84. There is an account in Bada'uni about this change: “His Majesty firmly believed in the truth of the Christian religion, and wishing to spread the doctrines of Jesus, ordered Prince Murad to take a few lessons in Christianity by way of auspiciousness and charged Abu'l-Fazl to translate the Gospel. Instead of the usual *Bismillah-irrahman-irrahim* the following lines were used: ‘Ai nam i tu Jesus o Kiristo’ (O thou whose names are Jesus and Christ).” Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 192.

³⁴⁷ Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 45.

³⁴⁸ Iqtidar Alam Khan, “Tracing Sources of Principles of Mughal Governance: A Critique of Recent Historiography,” *Social Scientist*, 37,5/6 (May-June, 2009), 46.

Christians the right to preach and gain converts, and to erect churches not only in Agra and Lahore but also in Bombay and Thatta. Three sons of Akbar's youngest son Danyal, who died in 1605, were even Christened, although they soon reverted to Islam. This had in fact been a political ruse, to prevent the youngsters from contending for succession to the throne.³⁴⁹

Akbar's receiving of Jesuits into his court might also be considered as a political move to make sure that his image could be transmitted wherever the Jesuits had a voice. According to the text of the Italian Jesuit Giovanni Battista Peruschi, *Informatione del regno et stato del Gran Re di Mogor* the conversion of Akbar to Christianity might well be imminent, an idea that he in turn derived from his Jesuit sources. The contrast to the Ottoman Empire is an interesting one. In the Ottoman case, it was rarely if ever imagined that the sultan himself might convert.³⁵⁰ This is an interesting issue especially when it is considered in the context of other Muslim empires. Even though the effectiveness of the missionary work done in India, which was centered in Goa, was obvious and even increased through Akbar's personal interest, the idea that those priests were likely to convert him to Christianity is something worth underlining.

³⁴⁹ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 121.

³⁵⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien: Travails & Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 134.



Figure III: Madonna and Child, Mughal, ca. 1580.³⁵¹

³⁵¹ Stuart Cary Welch, *India: Art and Culture, 1300-1900* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), 164.

There is a letter sent by the Pope Gregory XIII to Akbar dated 18th February 1582. “You summoned to your court our dear sons, priests of the society of Jesus and ministers of the true faith, you received them graciously and heard them discussing on the kingdom of God. All these are clear indications of your zeal and useful steps to receive the truth, but in such an important matter no delay should be admitted lest this movement of your spirit, which undoubtedly comes from God, be frustrated by tardiness in deliberation.”³⁵² For life is short and human condition is uncertain. The letter is written in a language that both encourages and urges the emperor since even though he is very interested in the religion and accepts many of its doctrines, he still does not convert.

It is easily understood through their letters that the Jesuits were disappointed when they realized that Akbar’s desire to learn about Christianity was part of his “search for the truth” and motivated by his mystical leanings, not a desire to convert to another religion.³⁵³ In his letter sent in September 1582 to the Father Provincial Rui Vicente, Rodolfo Acquaviva goes: “Frankly I am unable to understand him myself, because on the one hand he is very friendly with us and continues to inquire about our faith, as he did in great detail through this winter, etc., and on the other hand he seems to be entangled with other things, and he admitted to me one day that he was so bewildered as to be unable to establish the truth.”³⁵⁴ Monserrate wrote in his commentary: “It may be suspected that Jalal-ud-din Akbar was moved to summon the Christian priests, not by any divine inspiration, but by a certain curiosity, and excessive eagerness to hear some new thing, or a design to devise something novel for the destruction of souls.” It is also claimed that Akbar’s interest in Christianity was limited to the desire to find out good points in that religion as might be included in the Din-e Ilahi³⁵⁵ I actually find it quite possible that his formulation “*Allahu Akbar, Jalla Jalallahu*” might be derived from his understanding that the name of Jesus Christ should be put alongside with the name of God for it was also the name of God.

Doctrines of Zoroastrianism and its ceremonial are also significant both at intellectual level and ceremonial with a specific interest in the worship of fire and light. Akbar was also fascinated by the dualistic nature of Zoroastrianism, and emphasis on the

³⁵² Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 119.120.

³⁵³ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 120.

³⁵⁴ Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 115.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

eternal struggle between Good and Evil. It is certainly possible that a few aspects of the *din-i ilahi* were influenced by Zoroastrianism. The concept of *farr*, ‘divine glory’, is derived from the ancient Iranian concept *khwarena* i.e. divinely sanctioned kingship.³⁵⁶ While the siege of Surat, in 1573, Akbar had come in contact with the Zoroastrian priest Dastur Mihrji Rana. The priest had come from far away to meet Akbar. As in the case of other religions he wanted to learn further about the belief. In 1578, along with some other *mobeds* (Zoroastrian priests), in response to the emperor’s invitation, he visited the Court and participated in the discussions of ‘*ibādat-khāna*’.³⁵⁷

The presence of the priests also affected the fire worship. Under their supervision, a fire was kept burning in the palace, a tradition of ancient Iranian emperors.³⁵⁸ Akbar believed that fire, along with the sun, is one of the signs of the Creator³⁵⁹ since it is one of the signs of God, and one light from His Lights. Ishraqi influence and the imperial symbolism provided with the notion of light, along with Abu’l-Fazl’s specific interest and after the arrival of the Zoroastrian priests, brought Akbar’s veneration of light to the boundaries of worship. It was part of Akbar’s religious devotions and ceremonials at sunrise, midday, in the evening and at midnight. “A second order was given that the Sun should be worshipped four times a day, in the morning and evening, and at noon and midnight. His Majesty had also one thousand and one Sanskrit names of the Sun collected, and read them daily, devoutly turning towards the sun.”³⁶⁰ Badā’ūnī indicated that Akbar started to worship the sun in public and the entire court had to pay respect when the candles and lamps were lighted. This ceremonial light and fire were designed to evoke God's presence and underline Akbar's status as an emanation of Divine light.³⁶¹ Whilst Badā’ūnī may have indeed been correct, it is also possible that Akbar did not worship the Sun but perceived it as the most powerful manifestation of God, similar to the importance of fire.³⁶²

³⁵⁶ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 116.

³⁵⁷ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual*, 130. Ibadat-Khana is a building constructed by Akbar for religious debates. see title below.

³⁵⁸ This is actually mentioned in a Jesuit letter. “Three days after the beginning of their Lent, he instituted a new festival called Merjan and commanded that all captains should appear in festive attire, and there was music and dancing. I inquired from the King’s astrologers and they told me that it was a festival that the ancient fire-worshipping kings of Persia used to perform.” Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 115.

³⁵⁹ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual*, 130.

³⁶⁰ Badā’ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 321.

³⁶¹ Catherine B. Asher, "A Ray from the Sun: Mughal Ideology and the Visual Construction of the Divine," in *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2004), 172.

³⁶² Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 59; Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 172.

“His Majesty maintains that it is a religious duty and divine praise to worship fire and light; surly, ignorant men consider it forgetfulness of the Almighty, and fire worship. But the deep-sighted know better. As the external form of the worship of “the select” is based upon propriety, and as people think the neglect of some sort of worship abominable, there can be nothing improper in the veneration of that exalted element which is the source of man's existence, and of the duration of his life; nor should base thoughts enter such a matter. How beautifully has Shaikh Sharafuddīn Munyarī said, “What can be done with a man who is not satisfied with the lamp, when the sun is down?” Every flame is derived from that fountain of divine light, (the sun), and bears the impression of its holy essence. If light and fire did not exist, we should be destitute of food and medicines; the power of sight would be of no avail to the eyes. The fire of the sun is the torch of God's sovereignty.”³⁶³

“Fire-worshippers also came from Nousarī in Gujrat, proclaimed the religion of Zardusht as the true one, and declared reverence to fire to be superior to every other kind of worship. They also attracted the Emperor's regard, and taught him the peculiar terms, the ordi-nances, the rites and ceremonies of the Kaianians. At last he ordered that the sacred fire should be made over to the charge of Abu-l-Fazl, and that after the manner of the kings of Persia, in whose temples blazed perpetual fires, he should take care it was never extinguished night or day, for that it is one of the signs of God, and one light from the many lights of His creation.”³⁶⁴

Mughals are categorized as a Sunni empire just like their Timurid ancestors and Ottoman contemporaries. It was the Safavids who proudly followed a Shi'i policy and identity. However, considering the 16th century, unlike the Ottomans, the Mughals did not acquire a Sunni identity in reaction to Safavid Shi'i discourse and did not follow a policy of social disciplining for their Muslim population. This, however, does not mean that there was no sectarian identity in the Mughal court or among nobles. Also, it is indicated that the Mughal position on the matter could be understood and even though there was an increasing influx of Shi'is in the nobility after Humayun's return from exile in the Safavid lands in 1545, there was no serious tension between Shiis and Sunnis in the earlier times.³⁶⁵

At a time of famous rivalry between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires with sects being included in the identification process of those empires, the Mughals took a different stance through remaining indifferent. For instance, Akbar's first Prime Minister and regent, Bairam Khān, was a Shi'a and therefore to a majority of Muslims in India he was considered to be a heretic. He also appointed 'Abdul Latīf as his tutor. He appointed the

³⁶³ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 50.

³⁶⁴ Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 261.

³⁶⁵ Iqtidar Alam Khan, “Akbar's Personality Traits and World Outlook: A Critical Reappraisal,” *Social Scientist*, 20, 9/10 (September – October, 1992), 18.

Shi'a intellectual Nurullah Shushtari as the chief *qadi* of Lahore. However, even Badā'ūnī, with his desire for a Sunni rule, praised the pious *qadi*, who was the author of a number of interesting works.³⁶⁶

It is worth mentioning that *'ibādat-khāna* was also instrumental in collaborating discussions between the Muslim sects. As a result of this open debate environment, during the reign of Akbar, members of heterodox groups like *Shia* were confident in their assertions and did not have to perform *taqiyya* (dissimulation of sectarian identity). This can be counted among the outcomes of the open debate atmosphere in *'ibādat-khāna* discussions and the confident assertion of the ideas of heterodox groups.³⁶⁷ Even though Akbar is accused of being a Shi'a by many Muslim scholars, in the famous letter he sent to Safavid Ruler Shah Abbas I, he criticized him for his sectarian policies and for making distinctions among his populous based on their sects. He cites his policy of *sulh-e kull* and underlines the importance of being a just ruler. Furthermore, Akbar welcomed many scholars, artists and intellectuals fleeing from Safavid lands due to the sectarian policies of the empire. He himself invited some of them and offered protection.³⁶⁸

2.3.1. Ibadat-Khana (House of Worship) Gatherings

In his new city *Fathpūr-Sīkrī*, Akbar asked for the construction of a special structure called the *'ibādat-khāna* (House of Worship) in 1575.³⁶⁹ It is a place where religious debates are held on Thursday evenings. The main aim of the place is to provide a chance to bring Muslim men of learning, mystics and nobles together and discuss.³⁷⁰ Initially, the

³⁶⁶ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 127.

³⁶⁷ Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, "Religious Disputations and Imperial Ideology: The Purpose and Location of Akbar's Ibadatkhana," *Studies in History*, 24, 2 (2008), 201-202.

³⁶⁸ For some of the letters Akbar made personal invitations see. Riazul Islam, *A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations (1500-1750) Vol II*. (Lahore: Mirza Muhammad Sadiq & Sons, 1982), 101-102, 106-107 & 119-120.

³⁶⁹ Rizvi, *A Wonder That*, 107. "At this time when the capital (Fathpūr Sīkrī) was illuminated by his glorious advent, H.M. ordered that a house of worship (Ibādatkhāna) should be built in order for the adornment of the spiritual kingdom and that it should have four verandahs (aiwān). Though the Divine bounty always has an open door and searches for the fit person, and the inquirer, yet as the lord of the universe, from his general benevolence, conducts his measures according to the rules of the superficial, he chose the eve of Friday, which bears on its face the colouring (ghāza) of the announcement of auspiciousness, for the out-pouring (ifāzat). A general proclamation was issued that, on that night of illumination, all orders and sects of mankind—those who searched after spiritual and physical truth, and those of the common public who sought for an awakening, and the inquirers of every sect—should assemble in the precincts of the holy edifice, and bring forward their spiritual experiences, and their degrees of knowledge of the truth in various and contradictory forms in the bridal chamber of manifestation." Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, 157-158.

³⁷⁰ Qureshi, *Akbar: The Architect*, 145. also Rezavi, *Religious Disputations*, 200. and Asher & Talbot, *India Before*, 129.

debates were between Muslim scholars and theologians about religious matters.³⁷¹ The directions of participants' seats were organized according to their rank. Nobles sit towards the East, *sayyids* towards the West, Sufis towards the south, and the *'ulama* and the philosophers were required to sit towards the North.³⁷² From 1578 onwards, months before the declaration of the *mahzar*, scholars from other religions started to join these discussions.³⁷³ This is related to an incident during his visit of Ajmer in 1577. Whilst on his way back, he organized a hunting expedition. During this hunt, he experienced a *jazba* (state of ecstasy) under a tree, which revolutionized his spiritual life. He became deeply interested in learning about other religions. After his return to Fathpūr-Sīkrī, he resumed the theological debates with representatives of all religious groups.³⁷⁴

“On 20 Mihr, Divine month, 3 October 1578, and in that house of worship, the lamp of the privy chamber of detachment was kindled in the banqueting-hall of social life. The coin of the hivers of wisdom in colleges and cells was brought to the test. The clear wine was separated from the lees, and good coin from the adulterated. The wide capacity and the²⁵³ toleration of the Shadow of God were unveiled. Šūfī, philosopher, orator, jurist, Sunnī, Shīā, Brahman, Jatī,³⁷⁵ Sīūrā,³⁷⁶ Cārbāk,³⁷⁷ Nazarene,³⁷⁸ Jew, Šābī (Sabīān),³⁷⁹ Zoroastrian, and others enjoyed exquisite pleasure by beholding the calmness of the assembly, the sitting of the world-lord in the lofty pulpit (*mimbar*), and the adornment of the pleasant abode of impartiality. The treasures of secrets were opened out without fear of hostile seekers after battle.”³⁸⁰

³⁷¹ I am not sure whether there is a sectarian identity and it was only Sunni Muslims back then.

³⁷² Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual*, 113.

³⁷³ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 35.

³⁷⁴ Rizvi, *A Wonder That*, 108. “That seeker after truth (Akbar) was putting forth the foot of search in that wide wilderness, and was holding self-conflicts in the pleasant place where the quarry had fallen. The glory of unity was bestowed by him on the pure spots and pleasant precincts of the temple of his supplications. As attainment follows upon search, the lamp of vision became brilliant. A sublime joy took possession of his bodily frame. The attraction (*jazaba*) of cognition of God cast its ray. The description of it cannot be comprehended by the feeble intellect of common-place people. Nor can every enlightened sage attain to an understanding of it.... When he had for a long time received the Divine rays, the blissful servants came and in proportion to their capacity carried off the fragments of the feast. When the stewards of the hidden chamber of the Divine decrees had for the sake of the government of the world brought down again him who had obtained his desire in the spiritual kingdom, he in thanksgiving for this great boon set free many thousands of animals...In obedience to the orders of Wisdom -the Shāhīnshāh- he passed from this desire, but conformed somewhat to the practices (of the ascetics). He shortened his hair which was long and beautiful and entrancing, and many of the lovers of the order voluntarily imitated him.” Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, 348.

³⁷⁵ Clergy or ascetics among the Jains.

³⁷⁶ A general name for the Jains.

³⁷⁷ (charvaka) They are the Nastiks or infidels of Hindu philosophy. This is I think an important category and their existence in those discussions sounds interesting. Charvaka is an ancient school of Indian materialism. It is an alternative to orthodox Hindu pro-Vedic schools. It rejects God, soul and anything supernatural, other-worldly. For more information, see, Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian*; Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*.

³⁷⁸ This can indicate two things, the first is Saint Thomas Christians known as Nasranis. They established themselves in India along with the Portuguese power based on Goa.

³⁷⁹ Christians.

³⁸⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, 365. Even though it is translated as Thursday, Abu'l-Fazl uses the word Friday. It is because the discussions are held on Thursday nights which according to Muslim tradition indicates the commencement of Friday, the holy day for Muslims, and called Friday night. Also, the meetings sometimes last until mid-day Friday. This is also mentioned

Abu'l-Fazl associates the role of the *'ibādat-khāna* discussions with the ultimate transformation of the emperor into the *mujtahid* of the age. He associates Akbar's worthiness of the title with his desire to spend time with religious issues even though he is already swamped with state matters. Fazl perceived these discussions as an opportunity for the intellectuals to realize Akbar's worthiness to be called a *mujtahid*.³⁸¹ He would listen to everything that a representative of any religious belief might tell him about spirituality and in defense of their positions against other traditions.³⁸²

“His sole and sublime idea was that, as in the external administration of the dominion, which is conjoined with eternity, the merits of the knowers of the things of this world had by profundity of vision, and observance of justice, been made conspicuous, and there had ceased to be a brisk market for pretense and favouritism, so might the masters of science and ethics, and the devotees of piety and contemplation, be tested, the principles of faiths and creeds be examined, religions be investigated, the proofs and evidences for each be considered, and the pure gold and the alloy be separated from evil commixture. In a short space of time a beautiful, detached building was erected, and the fraudulent vendors of impostures put to sleep in the privy chamber of contempt.”³⁸³

“My sole object, O wise men and Mullahs, is to ascertain the truth, to find out and discover the Reality. Take care, therefore, that you are not induced to conceal the truth, or to say anything contrary to the truth because of your human passions. If you do, you are responsible before the God for the consequence of your impiety.”³⁸⁴

Monserrate recorded this speech of Akbar in his Commentary:

“I perceive that there are varying customs and beliefs of varying religious paths. For the teachings of the Hindus, the Mussalmans, the Jazdini (Parsis), the Jews and the Christians are all different. But the followers of each religion regard the institution of their own religion as better than those of any other...I desire that on appointed days the books of all religious laws be brought forward, and the doctors meet together and hold discussions, so that I may hear them, and that each one may determine which is the truest and mightiest religion.”³⁸⁵

After 1581, there is no mention of *'ibādat-khāna* discussions even though religious discussions might have continued after shifting the capital back to Agra.³⁸⁶

in Jesuit letters: “We had another discussion on the following Thursday. Friday being his Sabbath day, the kings usually keeps vigil on Thursdays, in the course of which he attends to religious matters and gives alms to the mullahs...” Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 44.

³⁸¹ Rezavi, *Religious Disputations*, 198.

³⁸² Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Vol. III*, 72.

³⁸³ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, 364.

³⁸⁴ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual*, 114. This speech is excerpted from the *Zubdatu't Tawarikh* of Nuru'l Haq.

³⁸⁵ Monserrate, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate* (English Translation by J.S. Hoyland and S.N. Banerjee (Oxford, 1922), 182.

³⁸⁶ Rezavi, *Religious Disputations*, 202.



Figure IV: Akbar presiding over a religious debate in the 'ibadatkhana with the Jesuit Fathers in the city of Fatehpur Sikri. Nar Singh. ca. 1578-9.

2.3.2.Sufism and Syncretism

What brings Islam and Indic religious thought together might be a universalistic approach. Sufism plays a key role in creating an area where the boundaries are refined. The common component can be acquired through “mystical” practices that belong to Sufism. According to Sufi belief, all different religious forms represent various ways to the one Truth. This idea also has the ability to provide a common ground with other religions since it counts different ways valid at any level. This kind of universalism can also be seen in many Sufi ideologies. Within the context of India, thanks to the complexities it has, the practical ground for interpreting relations among different religious communities was provided.³⁸⁷

The effect of Sufi orders and leaders, especially in local areas and peripheral regions of such a vast empire cannot be omitted. It is possible to consider Akbar’s encounter with Sufism in two different ways. First is Akbar’s personal relations with the Sheikhs and the second one is his political attitude for the state’s interest. The latter can be understood better once it is perceived within a broader outlook. Sufi masters and their shrines act as means of social integration. They bring together members of different ethnic and religious groups.³⁸⁸ There is a list of Sufi shrines and holy men in Mughal territories given in *A’in-e Akbari*, alongside with the other categories of imperial possession indicating their significance.³⁸⁹ The words used in *Akbar-nāma* are also derived from the vocabulary of Sufism more than their regular meanings. This is an important collaboration considering his intentions of putting an “un-worldly” and “hagiographic” outlook to the reign of Akbar.³⁹⁰

Akbar’s relations with Sufism and Sufi sheikhs are quite understandable since ‘*taṣawwuf*’ was not very much restricted by the bonds of the codified law and offers a larger ground³⁹¹ that might create a syncretic environment. The *sufi* doctrine could function as ‘an enabler’ for social unity in the sense that Muslims and Hindus would recognize their

³⁸⁷ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Vol. III*, 68.

³⁸⁸ Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 145.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 142. “In 1570 Akbar, believing the dargah was mismanaged, banished the tomb's chief attendant and assumed the right to make this appointment himself, thus achieving political control over, not only spiritual involvement with, the Chishtiyya.” Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 162.

³⁸⁹ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual*, 61.

³⁹⁰ For an interesting deduction and detailed analysis of some of the words used in that respect within the book see Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, xiv-xvi.

³⁹¹ Alam, *The Languages*, 192.

different gods and practices as part of a greater cosmic unity.³⁹² In the Indian context, the *sufi* doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being) functioned to create that ground with state support.³⁹³

The Sufi world, mixed most intimately in the workings of Indian society, founded local functions and adopted local forms of expression.³⁹⁴ Akbar's close connection with the significant Chishti saint Nur-al-Din Chishti's shrine in Ajmer aside, mystics, scholars, intellectuals and more ordinary folk were actively seeking some form of synthesis between Islam and Hinduism on the popular level. In particular, the folk literature in Gujarat includes many incredible examples of religious synthesis and sufi understandings. For instance, in the mid-sixteenth century 'Abd al-Wahid Bilgrami (1510-1608), in his *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* (Indian Truths) tried to reconcile Vaishnava symbols, along with the terms and ideas used in Hindu devotional songs, with orthodox Muslim beliefs. Hindu hymns were given Islamic meanings so as to render them fit for Sufi musical concerts.³⁹⁵

There were two main orders at the time of Akbar. The Naqshibandiya and Chistiyya were both important Sufi orders for Central Asia and India and existed before the Mughals. The former is known to have had close relations with the Mughal's ancestors, the Timurids. The latter is significant due to its connection with the policies of Abu'l-Fazl and Akbar.³⁹⁶ Uzbeks are another variable that effect the changing relations since they also had their own encounters with both of the orders. Both Babur and Humayun had changing attitudes towards Naqshibandiya and Chistiyya. They showed their respect to the sheikhs of both of the orders. Visiting a tomb, paying homage to a saint, constructing the shrine of a saint are all considered to be some sort of a declaration of devotion to that sheikh or order.

³⁹² Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 145.

³⁹³ According to Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy of unity of being "wahdat al-wujud" everything in this world is a reflection of his divine mind which is centered around the idea that All is He. This poses the question, then how is it possible to determine between manifestation of God's grace in Hinduism and Islam? In that sense, "wahdat al-wujud" offers a ground for contact between Islamic and Hindu traditions. Francis Robinson, "Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8:2 (1997), 165-167. Also another case of state support can be observed in another multi-religious empire, i.e. Ottomans. It has been speculated that the Ottoman rulers had encouraged the spread of the Bektashi dervishes among the Janissaries because the syncretistic beliefs and practices of the former were found to be a particularly effective way to Islamize these Christian-born soldiers. Derin Terzioğlu, "Sufis in the Age of State-Building and Confessionalization," in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (Routledge, 2012), 86-99.

³⁹⁴ Robert L. Canfield, ed. *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 111.

³⁹⁵ Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 163; Alam, *The Languages of*, 93.

³⁹⁶ At this point it is crucial to note that not only the tendency of the rulers but also the orders may change through time according to context. The content mentioned for these orders here is only limited to the discourse at the time of Akbar if not otherwise mentioned.



Figure V: Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings. The Sufi is identified both as Salim Chisti and Sa'di of Shiraz. Bichitr. ca. 1615-1618.

a. Naqshibandiya.

It was in the 15th century with Khwaja Ubaid-Allah Ahrar (d.1490), that Naqshibandis broadened their area of influence, took a political framework and started to participate in politics through giving their support to a ruler of the age.³⁹⁷ Mughal connection with Naqshibandiya had its roots from their Timurid ancestors. In the late fourteenth century, Timur is known to have had close relations with Naqshbandiya. According to Naqshibandi belief, it is the sheikh's duty to have relations with the kings in order to "conquer their souls" and save the Muslims from possible oppression.³⁹⁸ To achieve that aim, the sheikhs were not only the spiritual guides but also providers of political insights for Timurid rulers.³⁹⁹

Earlier in the reign of Akbar, he had had close connections with Naqshibandis. Up until the late 1570s, Nakshibandi sheikhs were appointed as *amir-i hajj* and in some instances they worked as *sadrs*. He also continued the tradition of forging relations through marriage alliances. But in accordance with the changing policies and discourse of Akbar's reign and the shift in the influential characters of the court, this relationship declined. As part of Akbar's centralization attempts, the ranking in the court had changed. There was the risk that the Nakshibandi's close connection with the state might create a claim on power as well. With that in mind, Akbar started to keep them away from his court and establish policies in context of his new views. Naqshibandis on the other hand, were disturbed by Akbar's attempts to incorporate non-Muslim notions and ceremonials into the court culture since Naqshibandi understanding of Sufism is rather composed of orthodox Islam, which considers non-Muslim practices as evil.⁴⁰⁰

In the consolidation of his empire and with respect to his centralization attempts, Akbar marginalized the Central Asian elite that came to India with Bābur. He began to recruit Persian nobles and Indian Rajputs for the sake of keeping the power and effectiveness of Chagatai and Uzbek nobles under control within the imperial elite.⁴⁰¹ He preferred the 'Hindu' Rajputs to the 'Muslim' Afghans because the Mughals had seized

³⁹⁷ Alam, *The Mughals, The Sufi Sheikhs*, 143.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 160.

³⁹⁹ Ibid, 143. For Timurid Connections see. Richard Foltz, "The Central Asian Naqshbandi Connections of the Mughal Emperors," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7:2 (1996) 229-239.

⁴⁰⁰ Alam, *The Mughals, The Sufi Sheikhs*, 153-158.

⁴⁰¹ Taymiya R. Zaman, "Instructive Memory: An Analysis of Auto/Biographical Writing in Early Mughal India," in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54 (2011), 684. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 17-19 and 41.

political power from them. He was also aware of the fact that his father, Humayun, had been expelled from India by the Surs, the Afghan dynasty.⁴⁰² These relations also were very much related to Akbar's distancing of Naqshbandiyya. In another perspective, it is argued that inclusion of Rajputs and Indo-Muslims in the Mughal system and the increase in the number of Persians in high posts caused 'the gradual fading away of the Turani complexion of the nobility as well as the erosion of the Chaghatai traditions and customs of state organization.' He sees it as a move from a Mongol 'tribal' political theory to a Turkish absolutism." Therefore, according to Khan it is the Chaghatais not the 'orthodox' Muslims who lost importance during the political transformation in Akbar's reign.⁴⁰³ In any case, earlier in the new millennium, there was a strong Naqshbandi critique of the society.

The Naqshbandi Shaikh, Ahmad Sirhindi wrote hundreds of letters to lay disciples, members of Naqshbandi order and sometimes to Mughal nobles and the emperor. The letters addressed to Mughal nobles often denounced the participation of Hindus in the regime. Several years of service as a protégé of Abul Fazl at Akbar's court, Sirhindi is convinced that the emperor was opposed to the true path of Islam.⁴⁰⁴ In his writings he says that Islam had failed against Hinduism and expressed a fear for Hindu domination. That is partly an outcome of the Sufi tradition. In some of his letters he depicts a hostility towards the Hindu belief. It is interesting because this fear occurs at a time when Muslim political power is at its zenith. He points out that if Hindus share political power, they would try to abolish Islamic laws, the Muslim community, and Islam.⁴⁰⁵ According to Sirhindi, what created the environment for Akbar is the corruption of the 'ulama.⁴⁰⁶ He perceives the age as a time in which people became negligent of morals due to the abandoning of the Sunnah and Shari'a. A renewer is necessary to bring Muslims back to salvation.⁴⁰⁷ Later, his followers would refer him as the *mujaddid al-alf al-thani*, even though he did not directly make such a claim himself.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰² Zaidi, *Akbar's Relations*, 76.

⁴⁰³ Iqtidar Alam Khan, *The Political Biography of a Mughal Noble, Mu'nim Khan Khan-i Khanan, 1497-1575* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1973), xvi. Streusand, *The Formation*, 6-7.

⁴⁰⁴ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 99.

⁴⁰⁵ Alam, *The Languages*, 162 also see. Annemarie Schimmel "The Sufi Ideas of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindii" *Die Welt des Islams, New Series*, 14:1/4 (1973), 199-203.

⁴⁰⁶ Black, *The History of Islamic*, 248.

⁴⁰⁷ Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 164. For the Mughal context see. David W. Damrel, "The 'Naqshbandi Reaction' Reconsidered," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 176-198.

⁴⁰⁸ Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 164.

b. Chistiyya.

“I went to the church of the Christian and of the Jew
And saw that both were facing You
The desire to meet You took me to the temple of idols
And I heard the idols singing your love songs.”⁴⁰⁹

Corresponding to his changing politics, Akbar started to have close relations with the Chisti order. Their sufi understanding is more ascetic and based on Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*. This can be considered as a political move to provide the religious synthesis Akbar desired to create, based on his belief that there is no superiority of any religion.⁴¹⁰ Also, for instance, the shrines of Chishti saints in India were popular among both Hindus and Muslims and received courtly patronage. The patronage of shrines was also part of a policy to appeal to the religious sensibilities of groups who valued those places.⁴¹¹ There is an account in *Akbarnāma* that gives the reason as to why the emperor desired to visit the shrine of Shaikh Mu‘īn al-Dīn Chishtī (d. 633/1236) early in his reign, in 969/1562. This visit resulted in creating a deep spiritual connection with the sheikh and Chishtiyya order. While he was out hunting at night and heard a group of Indian minstrels reciting songs about the glories and virtues of the saint:

“One night His Majesty went off to Fathpūr to hunt and passed near by Mandhākār which is a village on the way from Agra to Fathpūr. A number of Indian minstrels were singing enchanting ditties about the glories and virtues of the great Khwāja, Khwāja M'uīnu-d-dīn,⁴¹² may his grave be hallowed! who sleeps in Ḥazrat Ajmīr. Often had his perfections and miracles been the theme of discourse in the holy assemblies. His Majesty who was a seeker after Truth and who in his zealous quests sought for union with travellers on the road of holiness, and showed a desire for enlightenment, conceived a strong inclination to visit the Khwāja's shrine. The attraction of a pilgrimage thither seized his collar.”⁴¹³

Due to his desire to seek saintly assistance on the battlefield and in private matters, he made his first visit to Khwaja Mu'in al-Din's *dargah*. In 1568, he made another pilgrimage on foot, traveling for 365 kilometers. By 1579, Akbar had paid homage to the

⁴⁰⁹ From Amir Khusrau Dihlawi who were closely associated with the Chishti Sufi hospice of Shaikh Nizam al-Din Auliya. Alam, *The Languages of*, 119.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 162.

⁴¹¹ Zeynep Yürekli, "Writing Down the Feats and Setting Up the Scene: Hagiographers and Architectural Patrons in the Age of Empires", in *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World 1200-1800*, ed. John J. Curry and Erik S. Ohlander (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 104.

⁴¹² The founder of the Chisti Silsilah in India.

⁴¹³ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. II*, 237.

Ajmer shrine for the annual celebration of Khwaja Mu'in ud-Din's 'urs, that is, the commemoration of the saint's death or literally, his marriage with God and undertook at least fourteen pilgrimages within two decades.⁴¹⁴ The reason why Abu'l-Fazl included this incident in *Akbarnama* might be understood in the context of his desire to make a faithful connection with the order to promote Akbarian ideology. It is mainly due to his knowledge of the necessity to attach the king with some groups of dervishes and the ones who fit Abu'l-Fazl's discourse would be the Chistis not the Naqshibandis.⁴¹⁵

Aside from the visits to the Ajmer shrine of Mu'in al-Din Chishti, when his twins died, following the Muslim custom of consulting a friend of Allah, he visited a living saint from the same order named Salim Chishti. He was a holy man living near Agra. He heralded the good news to the emperor that he will soon have a son. On 31 August 1569, this prediction came true and Akbar had a son. Due to his enormous gratitude to the sheikh, Akbar named him Salim (Nur'ud-din Mohammad Salim, a.k.a Jahangir), after Salim Chishti.⁴¹⁶

One of the most striking attempts of Akbar that channels Sufism to his imperial discourse is the *Fatehpur Sikri* project he embarked on in 1571, out of his respect for Shaikh Salim Chishti.⁴¹⁷ His decision to construct his imperial city around the tomb of the saint, was a direct sign of the elevated status which he had accorded to the Sufis.⁴¹⁸ This incorporation of the Chishti "mystical aura" into his newly established city called *Fatehpur Sikri* and the order's relation with the Emperor is an essential part of the religiosity Akbar claimed for the regime. However, he underlines the fact that Akbar made this appeal cloaked in the symbols of the broadest sense.⁴¹⁹ There was the dual nature of Fatehpur Sikri; imperial capital and spiritual center.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁴ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 162. Safavid and Mughal emperors made pilgrimages on foot to the shrines they cherished and swept their floors to demonstrate their servitude. Yürekli, *Writing Down*, 104. and 100.

⁴¹⁵ Alam, *The Mughals, The Sufi Sheikhs*, 165.

⁴¹⁶ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 35.

⁴¹⁷ Asher & Talbot, *India Before*, 132.

⁴¹⁸ In *A-in-i Akbari*, Sufi shrines and holy men in the territories of the Mughals were catalogued alongside every other category of imperial possession. Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, 142. But also it is worthy noting that Akbar did not permit Shaikh Salim's sons to succeed him, nor even to retain control over or manage the newly established dargah and its enormous potential for secular profit and spiritual status. Early. *The Mughal Throne*, 133.

⁴¹⁹ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 30.

⁴²⁰ Ed Rothfarb, *In the Land of the Taj Mahal: The World of the Fabulous Mughals* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998), 123.

2.3.3. Festivals and Books

In order to fulfill his desire to be an “Indian ruler” or “Ruler of India”, Akbar blended Hindu social practices and Rajput court rituals with Islam at the Mughal court. It was not only in the state policy that he tries to disengage the differences based on religious affiliation. He also transgresses the boundaries in his court rituals and imperial ideology.⁴²¹ This was designed for leading the society to a more ‘syncretic’ environment at every level and promoted Akbar’s ‘universal sovereign’ outlook and well known desire of *sulh-e kull*. In addition, Akbar allowed public celebrations of religious fairs and festivals of non-Muslim adopted ceremonials. The public weighing of the ruler on his birthday according to both the lunar and solar calendar was borrowed from Hindu kingship tradition. He was weighed against various precious materials, which were then distributed to the poor, embodied in his person, the political center of the empire.⁴²² This is significant because it would also serve the emperor’s image as a father figure, a charitable and kind person for the people and also depicted him as embracing his Indian side.

“From reasons of auspiciousness, and as an opportunity of bestowing presents upon the poor, His Majesty is weighed twice a year. Various articles are put into the scales. On the first day of the month of A’ban [15th October], which is the solar anniversary of the emperor, His Majesty is weighed twelve times against the following articles: gold, quicksilver, silk, perfumes, copper, ruh i tutiya, drugs, g’hi, iron, rice-milk, seven kinds of grain, salt; the order of these articles being determined by their costliness. According to the number of years His Majesty has lived, there is given away an equal number of sheep, goats, fowls, to people that breed these animals. A great number of small animals are also set at liberty. His Majesty is weighed a second time on the 5th of Rajab, against eight articles, viz., silver, tin, cloth, lead, fruits, mustard oil, and vegetables. On both occasions the festival of Salgiri (birthday) is celebrated, when donations, or grants of pardon, are bestowed upon people of all ranks. The Imperial princes, sons, and grandsons of His Majesty, are weighed once in every solar year. They are for the first time weighed, when two years old, but only against one thing. Every year, however, a new additional thing is put on the scales. When grown up, they are generally weighed against seven or eight things, but not against more than twelve. Animals are set free as usual. A separate treasurer and an accountant are appointed for this purpose, so that the expenditure may be made with every propriety.”⁴²³

⁴²¹ Asher & Talbot, *India Before*, 131.

⁴²² Susan Stronge, “Imperial Gifts at the Court of Hindustan”, in *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, ed. Linda Komaroff (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2011), 176. Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 313.

⁴²³ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 276.

The celebration of the New Year, *navruz* comes from the Zoroastrian tradition. This festival, considered to be the feast of great ancient Iranian kings, is celebrated with great pomp in the palace.

“When His Majesty was informed of the feasts of the Jamsheds, and the festivals of the Parsi priests, he adopted them, and used them as opportunities of conferring benefits. The following are the most important feasts. 1. The New Year's day feast. It commences on the day when the Sun in his splendour moves to Aries, and lasts till the nineteenth day of the month [Farwardín]. Two days of this period are considered great festivals, when much money and numerous other things are given away as presents: the first day of the month of Farwardín, and the nineteenth, which is the time of the Sharaf.”⁴²⁴

Nawruz celebration took the interest of the Jesuit priests as well. Father Monserrate writes about the festival of Nawruz of March 1582: “To mark the occasion, walls and cannonades of the palace were decorated with hangings of gold and silk. Games were held and pageants were conducted everyday. Akbar himself sat on the golden throne and wore his crown and the insignia of royalty. Instructions were issued that all citizens should enjoy the festival by singing and dancing.”⁴²⁵ Akbar started celebrating in the *Dīpāvalī*, the festival of lamps. His participation herein was more than likely confined to its festive side as there is no clear evidence to suggest that he participated in the worship of the goddess of wealth, which forms part of the festival.”⁴²⁶ “The Diwali festival was celebrated,” writes Abul Fazl, “and by order the boats, the river banks and the roofs were adorned with lamps.”

For the Muslim population there are two great religious festivals. The first one is the breaking of the fast at the end of the holy month of *Ramadan* known as *īd al-Fiṭr*, and the second one is *īd al-aḍḥā*, the sacrificial rite during the time of *hajj* (pilgrimages). The latter festival might be a problematic one in the Indian context since the slaughter of any kind of animal is strictly prohibited by the Jains, and although the Hindus are not in general opposed to the festival, the sacrifice of cows is displeasing for them.⁴²⁷ Circumcisions are also celebrated. Akbar had his three sons circumcised on 22 January 1573 amidst great

⁴²⁴ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 285.

⁴²⁵ Excerpted from the “Commentary” of Father Monserrate, one of the Jesuit priests at the court of Akbar between 1580-1582. Mohammad Azhar Ansari, *European Travellers Under the Mughals, 1580-1627* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 2009), 9.

⁴²⁶ Sharma, *The Religious Policy*, 42

⁴²⁷ Schimmel, *The empire of*, 137.

festivities with lavish musical entertainment, as was the custom in the courts of other Muslim states.

“The accursed Birbar tried to persuade the Emperor, that since the sun gives light to all, and ripens all grain, fruits and products of the earth, and supports the life of mankind, therefore that luminary should be the object of worship and veneration; that the face should be turned towards the rising and not towards the setting sun, which is the west; that man should venerate fire, water, stones, and trees, and all natural objects, even down to cows and their dung; that he should adopt the sectarial mark, and Brahmanical thread. Several wisemen at Court confirmed what he said, by representing that the sun was “the greater light” of the world, and the benefactor of its inhabitants, the patron of kings, and that kings are but his vicegerents. This was the cause of the worship paid to the sun on the *Nou-roz-i-Jaláli*, and of his being induced to adopt that festival for the celebration of his accession to the throne. Every day he used to put on clothes of that particular colour which accords with that of the regent-planet of the day. He began also, at midnight and early dawn, to mutter the spells, which Hindus taught him, for the purpose of subduing the sun to his wishes.⁴²⁸

Akbar was illiterate but he was surrounded by books. According to the accounts of three to the Mughal court, De Laet, Manrique, and Mandelslo, Agra Library (*kitabkhana*) included 24,000 manuscripts when Akbar died in 1605. They have an estimated worth of Rs. 6,463,731. In the inventory of Akbar’s treasure translated by European traveler Manrique, they are recorded as “books, written by great men, and adorned with extremely valuable bindings, mostly by very ancient and serious authors.”⁴²⁹

The value of books cannot be underestimated. For instance, the envoy sent by Safavid Shah Tahmasb to the Ottoman lands in 1567 to the new Sultan Selim II (r.1566-1574) gifted a Qur’an which was said to be from the hands of ‘Ali and The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp. Both of them signified Safavid legitimization through ancient-Persia and Shi’a identity.⁴³⁰ Here, the manuscript of the Shahnama of Shah Tahmasb is such a valuable gift that it is used as a sign of royalty, so much so that the presentation ceremony held is depicted in Selimnama (History of Selim) as a double-page illustration.⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ Badā’ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 260-61.

⁴²⁹ Vincent A. Smith, “The Treasure of Akbar,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (April, 1915), 242-243.

⁴³⁰ Linda Komaroff, ed., *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 19.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 17. Also for further information of Ottoman book culture see. Filiz Çağman, Zeren Tanındı and J. M. Rogers, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi: The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986); Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Indiana University Press, 2013); Emine Fetvacı and Erdem Çıpa, ed., *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future* (Indiana University Press, 2013).

The importance of books might also be understood in a miniature depicting Jahangir and a Sufi (identified both the Persian poet and mystic Sa'di of Shiraz and the Sheikh Mu'inuddin from Chistiyya order), presenting his book to the Mughal emperor. Also, in a miniature from the time of Akbar, a courtier (identified as Abu'l-Fazl) is depicted while presenting his book (identified as Abu'l-Fazl). A significant amount of books are produced at Akbar's court with their illustration processes. Miniatures composition for manuscripts is the main occupation of Akbar's court atelier.⁴³²

The books in the library are clearly a proof of Akbar's personal curiosity and his knowledge of them can even be understood from Jesuit accounts: "He can give his opinion on any question so shrewdly and keenly that no one who did not know that he is not literate would suppose him to be anything but very learned and erudite. He excelled many most learned subjects in eloquence."⁴³³ He took another step further in his quest to harmonize spirituality with his desire of rationalism and wanted to "explore beyond the interpretations of the preachers and decided to have the source books of different religions translated into Persian, causing the establishment of the translation bureau (*maktabkhana*)."⁴³⁴

⁴³² Koch, *The Intellectual and Artistic*, 30.

⁴³³ Excerpted from the "Commentary" of Father Monserrate, one of the Jesuit priests at the court of Akbar between 1580-1582. Ansari, *European Travellers*, 5.

⁴³⁴ Koch, *The Intellectual and Artistic*, 23.



Figure VI: Emperor Jahangir weighs prince Khurram. From a manuscript of the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (The Memoirs of Jahangir) Attributed to Manohar Mughal, ca. 1610-15.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁵ Stuart Cary Welch, *India: Art and Culture, 1300-1900* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985), 188.



Figure VII: The Weighing of Shah Jahan on his 42nd Lunar Birthday, an illustration from Shah Jahan's Padshahnama (Chronicle of the King of the World)



Figure VIII: Selim II receiving Safavid Ambassador and Gifts sent by Shah Tahmasb.



Figure IX: *Akbarnama*, The arrival of the Iranian ambassador, Sayyid Beg, in 1562 at the royal court of Akbar in Agra depicts the entourage of the ambassador gifts sent by Shah Tahmasp, Lal and Ibrahim.

CHAPTER III: AKBARNAMA

3.1. Akbar's Sacred Line

The image of a “universal ruler” or “ideal king” is drawn with the attribution of sacredness and divinity to his character. This makes the king both the worldly and spiritual leader of his peoples (*padishah-e suret wa ma'ni*).⁴³⁶ This ideology is at the center of Abu'l-Fazl's understanding and right from the beginning of the book of Akbar, he never ceases to refer to the king's sacred character. This chapter deals with the things Abu'l-Fazl uses in order to build the “sacredness” of the ruler in *Akbarnāma*. In the book, Akbar is portrayed as a divine monarch who combined the qualities of a political and spiritual leader. His role is depicted in the panegyric of Abu'l-Fazl written for him.⁴³⁷ In order to create the Sultan's saintly figure with respect to the messianic expectations centered around him, Abu'l-Fazl created the idea of Akbar's predestination from his creation, as a political and spiritual leader of humankind.⁴³⁸ Therefore, one of the very early chapters of the book is devoted to Akbar's family tree, a list of fifty-two names. These names are chosen to legitimize the nobility and rightfulness of the Mughal Empire. Fifty-two people were selected as testimonies of the past. He says:

⁴³⁶ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 30-31.

⁴³⁷ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 4.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

“Eternal will placed thousands of wise reasons in everything when it created the world, and that is why there is a lesson for the intelligent to learn in the fifty-two persons who form this exalted imperial line. God the most high endowed the unique pearl of the Imperial caliphate (*gevher-i yekta-i hilafet-i shahenshahi*) with leadership (*riyasat*), wisdom (*hiqmat*), sovereignty (*saltanat*), munificence (*hedayat*), clemency (*‘atufat*), commiseration (*ra’fat*), and other noble characteristics.”⁴³⁹

The beginning of *Akbarnāma* which presents a list of the members of his holy line provides the “gist” of the chronicle.⁴⁴⁰ The characters selected for Akbar’s *silsila* can be considered as a prologue for the Gürkhanid dynasty. There are names of prophets, famous historical figures such as Turkic Oghuz Khans and then it connects to the line of the Mongols and Timurids. Here, it is crucial to understand the shared characteristics of the names mentioned in the line. They are markers of eras, founders of civilizations for their communities and saviors.⁴⁴¹ They exercise this role through teaching knowledge that originated from God and through their building projects. It begins with the father of all mankind, the prophet Adam. After the line of prophets, there is the Mongol and Timurid line which confirms their relevance to the universal rulers and Akbar’s worthiness to rule. After nineteen generations, there is a name that shifts the line to a Mongol daughter of the lineage called Alanqoa. This character is famous in Mongol histories. She gives birth to three sons and those sons would father the Mongol nobility.⁴⁴²

What is necessary is to seek the interrelation of the protagonists of the line along with trying to realize the importance of those individuals in terms of Akbar’s policies and ideology. In relation to that, there might be a common element linking those names to Akbar since according to Abu’l-Fazl “the divine light” that is bestowed by the Creator is transmitted to Akbar from Adam through these fifty-two generations and ⁴⁴³ he is depicted

⁴³⁹ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 256-257. This is the beginning of the part which Abu’l-Fazl gives the life account of Timur. The curious thing in this paragraph is its reference to idioms used in the Quran repeatedly, in different variations: “Indeed, in that is a sign for people who give thought (*yütefekkerun*) (16:11,69); there are signs for people who reason (*ya’kilun*) (16:12,67) The key words might be, lessons (signs), intelligence (to think). I think it is also possible to do a reading of *Akbarnama* based on these kinds of references. Because normally it is expected as in the cases of many other books, when there is a reference to a verse in the Qur’an, even though the book is in Persian, the quotation is made in Arabic. Here, however, it is rendered or paraphrased in Persian.

⁴⁴⁰ İlker Evrim Binbaş, “Structure and Function of the Genealogical Tree in Islamic Historiography (1200-1500)” in *Horizons of the World. Festschrift for Isenbike Togan* ed. İlker Evrim Binbaş and Nurten Kılıç-Schubel (İstanbul: İthaki, 2011), 523.

⁴⁴¹ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 111.

⁴⁴² Balabanlılar, *Imperial Identity*, 54. For Ottoman examples see. Colin Imber, “The Ottoman Dynastic Myth,” *Turcica 19* (1987): 7-27; Barbara Flemming, “The Political Genealogies in the Sixteenth Century,” *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 7-8 (1988): 198-220.

⁴⁴³ Black, *The History of Islamic*, 247.

as the ultimate goal of this line. When one thinks about the “holy line” of Akbar as a whole, it begins with the first man, caliph of God and prophet i.e. Adam and ends with the reign of Akbar. Once the names are considered within their relationship to some of the themes of the time, its composition becomes clearer. Therefore, the choice of the prophets, kings and names, the things included and excluded in their accounts, depict the concerns and the political agenda of Abu’l-Fazl.⁴⁴⁴

Akbar is the chosen one and Abu’-Fazl states that all these people came into existence to nurture his being, to provide the foundation of Akbar’s manifestation: “Through the guidance of a lucky star (*sitare-e saadat*) that was nurtured for thousands of years, generation after generation, and then it brought forth Alanqoa as a vessel worthy of the world-illuminating light (*nur-e ‘alem afruz*), as is described in ancient legends.” “The very same light that appeared in Alanqoa’s holy womb without human intermediary is manifested today in the pure elements of the unique theosoph who worships the Giver of all, after having traversed many more generations in the sacred garb of others in order to attain perfection.”⁴⁴⁵ It is also worth noting that the idea of creating the genealogical tree goes together with a universalist outlook that merges the entire world history in a single line.⁴⁴⁶

3.1.1. Significant Prophets

According to Tāşköprizāde, 16th century Ottoman historian, the first man that came into existence was the first prophet and the first ruler. It depicts the powerful correlation between humanity, prophethood and rulership. This relation indicates the continuity between what prophets did and what the rulers are expected to do. Therefore, prophethood is perceived as a model for rulership and the rulers, as in the case of Akbar, and they are

⁴⁴⁴ Another interesting formulation indicating the “already decided nature of sovereignty” comes from the Ottoman Empire. In his formulation Ottoman historian Kemalpashazade claims that “sovereignty was Osman’s destined fortune (*naşib*). In the invisible world, when the world’s property was divided among groups of rulers (*ümerā*), ‘Osmān was given that lot sovereignty.” Here he means the meeting of eternity (*bezm-i ezel*). There is a meeting believed to have taken place between God and the souls of people before they were created where God asked mankind “am I not your lord? (*a-last-tu bi-rabbi-kum?*)” and the people affirmed him. It is believed that mankind’s destiny was set in this meeting. Therefore, “when nobles and commoners as well as governors and subjects got drunken with the wine of e-lest, ‘Osmān was served the cup of leadership (*serverlik*). The belt of happiness was destined for his waist, and the crown of state was assigned to his head.” Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 232. And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] - lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware." Qur’an 7:172.

⁴⁴⁵ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 40-42.

⁴⁴⁶ Binbaş, *Structure and Function*, 503.

inturn placed in the line of the prophets. In doing so, besides coming from a lineage of world-conquering rulers such as Chengīz Khan and Timur, he is depicted as an inheritor of the prophetic mission.⁴⁴⁷

The sources for the accounts of prophets may come from *Kiṣāṣ al-anbiyā* (Stories of Prophets) literature. This literature, even though it forms the basis for the Islamic discourse on the lives of these prophets, is not composed solely from the Qur'an and Sunnah (traditions of the Islamic prophet). It also includes Jewish and Christian Scriptures and literature along with Islamicate history and literary tradition such as History of Al-Tabari and *Shahnama*. Through all these sources an account of a prophet can be constructed.⁴⁴⁸ Here, I would like to mention the prophets from Akbar's line whose existence in the line is crucial for Abu'l-Fazl's kingship discourse and Akbar's claims.

a. Adam

Adam is the first man, the father of all. However, according to his story (*qissa*) in the Old Testament and the Qur'an, he is not only the "father" of humans. God creates Adam as his viceroy (*ḥalīfe*) on earth.⁴⁴⁹ After creating Adam's body from clay, God breathes His spirit into him. In other words, the first human Adam embodies the Divine Spirit in his essence.⁴⁵⁰ It is this Divine trait of Adam and his marking a new beginning which is truly significant and provides the connection with Akbar's 'holy' nature. In doing so, Akbar's political discourse coincides with his descent from Adam. He was not a "Muslim" ruler who rules on behalf of one creed of humanity; but the ruler of all humanity.

The account of Adam starts with underlining his birth: "by sheer divine power and without the medium of a father's loins or a mother's womb."⁴⁵¹ This highlights his divine nature. Then, Abu'l Fazl discusses the situation of planets, which is of course related to his attempts to highlight the importance of the exaltation of planets during his nativity.

⁴⁴⁷ Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 149-150.

⁴⁴⁸ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 86.

⁴⁴⁹ "And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." Qur'an, 2:30.

⁴⁵⁰ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 91. "[So mention] when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I am going to create a human being from clay. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My [created] soul, then fall down to him in prostration." Qur'an, 38:71-72.

⁴⁵¹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 176-177.

According to Muslim tradition, upon his creation, Adam is taught all names. He is then ordered by God to teach these names to the angels. This “knowledge” taught to him by God raised Adam to a higher status. He designates Adam as his Caliph to rule over the world. His act of sharing the knowledge that is given to him by the “Divine Source” creates his supremacy over the angels, celestial beings.⁴⁵² In *Akbarnāma*, Abu’l-Fazl also mentions a book by Shahrazuri called History of the Sages (*Tarikh’ul Hukema*), which claims that Adam wrote books on tinctures and other strange sciences. Abu’l-Fazl’s account also touches upon the importance of geography. He says: “It is said that Adam’s death took place in India and he was buried on a mountain in Ceylon. It is now known as Adam’s footprint (*qademgah-e adem*).”⁴⁵³ He then adds another report claiming Adam and Eve are buried in Jerusalem or Najaf. However, his indication of a possibility that the first human being, the first Caliph left his mark in this geography is worth mentioning.⁴⁵⁴

b. Seth (Sit)

“When Adam was a thousand years old, he made Seth his heir and successor (*veli’ahd*) and charged all his offspring to obey him. After Adam, the regulation of the world (*intizam-e alam*) stayed in Seth’s mind and he constantly focused on external harmony and inner rectitude.”⁴⁵⁵ Here, Abu’l Fazl indicates Seth’s importance in terms of providing harmony among his peoples. The terminology is very much related to Akbar’s discourse for his policy of *sulh-e kull*.

Furthermore, when Adam’s son and possible inheritor Abel, is murdered by Cain, Seth becomes the remaining hope for passing on the knowledge and “divine essence” given by God to humanity. His significance can also be understood in the context of Noah’s flood in the Judeo-Christian tradition. As Abu’l-Fazl underlines, after the great flood of Noah, only the offspring of Seth remained. As a result of his inheritance of Adam’s secret

⁴⁵² Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 92.

⁴⁵³ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 178-179.

⁴⁵⁴ It is also worthy to note that “Eighteenth-century scholar Ghulam ‘Ali Azad Bilgrami proclaims that ‘India was the site of the first revelation, the first mosque on Earth, and the place from which pilgrimage was first performed.’ Using the Sufi concept of the Prophet Muhammad’s primordial prophetic nature, Azad describes India as the place where the eternal light of Muhammad first manifest in Adam, while Arabia was where it found final expression in the physical form of the Prophet: ‘The black stone of the Mecca descended with Adam, the staff of Moses grew from a myrtle that Adan planted on the peak, and all perfumes and craft tools drive from Adam’s descent to India.’ Alam, *The Languages*, 168-169. Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany, 1992), 29.

⁴⁵⁵ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 180-181.

knowledge, his transmission of his father's spiritual essence and his procreation, Seth is the new beginning for the human race. Due to the knowledge that was passed onto him, in the Islamic literature, he is referred to as "the first *ūriyā* (a Syriac word signifying "teacher"). In *Akbarnāma*, Abu'l-Fazl also gives this information: "They call him the first Orya (*orya-e evvel*) Orya means teacher (*mu'allim*) in Syriac). He was always preoccupied with the natural sciences, mathematics, and theology (*ulum-e tab'i, riyazi, ilahi*)."⁴⁵⁶

c. Enosh

He is the third name in Akbar's line. Enos is depicted as someone whose mother is from a divine lineage (*kudsi nejadi*) and was born, like Adam, without a mother or father, according to the belief of "some reporters." After his father's death and in accordance with his wishes, he succeeded to the throne (*khilafat*). He was the first person in this era to lay the foundations of sovereignty.⁴⁵⁷ In addition, he is considered to be the first monarch. While providing information on the discussion of Enos's age, the four sources Abu'l-Fazl mentions are the Jews (*yahud*), the Christians (*nusari*), Ibn Jawzi and Qazi Baizawi.⁴⁵⁸

d. Enoch (Idris)

The seventh on the line is Enoch. He is also known as Idris. Although he was the youngest of his brothers, he was the greatest in wisdom (*farhang*) and intelligence (*rayi*) and the eldest in terms of felicity and knowledge (*baht ve danesh*).⁴⁵⁹ Abu'l-Fazl states that: "After Seth it was he who renewed the law (*tajdid-e nevamis*)."⁴⁶⁰ While defining his identity, Abu'l-Fazl asserts that among his epithets are *Harmasu-l-harāmasa* (Hermes of Hermes or Trismegistus) and the Third Orya (third teacher). Even though sciences and crafts are attributed to Adam, many other sources indicate that he introduced astronomy, writing, spinning, weaving, and sewing. He reached a high level in theology (*khodashenasi*), and he called people to worship God in seventy-two languages.⁴⁶¹ Idris is

⁴⁵⁶ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 180-181.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 181-182.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 184-185.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 184-185. In Beveridge: He is the first lawgiver since the time of Seth.

⁴⁶¹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 185-186. "There are two miniatures depicting Idris in *Shahnama-i Ali Osman*. One is titled 'Idris Teaching Writing and Tailoring' and 'Idris Teaching Tailoring and Use of Weights' which show him teaching fair commerce by introducing to mankind scales, weights, and various measuring devices. He shows the art of tailoring to humans who, until his teaching, knew only to cover themselves with animal skins. Both of them display an individual case where the different titles and responsibilities of a civilized teacher, a political leader, and a spiritual guide were held by one person: Idris. On the other, both the differences in these images and the distinct symbols used (the crown, the prophetic nimbus, and the courtly

an important figure since he depicts a leader of a community symbolized with his introduction of weights and measures (justice) and writing and tailoring (civilization).⁴⁶²

As part of his establishment of a civilization and the process of being a teacher and father to his peoples, Enosh built 100 cities. The smallest of these is Edessa (*madina-i roha*), a city in Mesopotamia (*jaza'ir*), although some considered it to be in the Hejaz.⁴⁶³ Aside from increasing the welfare level in many cities, this might also be a reference to Akbar's establishment of a new imperial city, Fathpur Sikri. Abu'l Fazl further adds that Enosh also initiated the construction of the pyramids in Egypt and depicted all crafts and tools (*cami' sana'i wa alat*) on them, so if people lost their knowledge about them they could be reminded.⁴⁶⁴ He led every group of people and every class of humanity (*har guruh-ez mardom wa har tabaqa az adamiyanra*) onto the right path in a different manner, in accordance with their ability to comprehend.⁴⁶⁵ This is basically what Akbar considers as his duty with the multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural population he has.

“It is said that he guided people to the veneration of the greater luminary (*neyyir-i azim*), the bestower of the light upon the world,⁴⁶⁶ for most of them were deprived of his power of understanding and were not grateful for the great Light of Lights (*nur'ul envar*). He considered it the source of spiritual and material wealth (*sarmaya-i dawlat-e sura'i ve ma'ni*) and established a great festival every time the Sun's glory moved from zodiacal sign to zodiacal sign which is a time of special glory (*fayz-e khas*), particularly when it moves to Aries.”⁴⁶⁷

This is an indicator of Akbar's relationship with light during his reign. It plays a significant symbolic part in Akbar's religious devotions and is part of his ceremonials at sunrise, midday, in the evening and at midnight. Some of them are indicators of the Zoroastrian tradition and very much related with what is depicted as the understanding of Enoch.

“His Majesty maintains that it is a religious duty and divine praise to worship fire and light; surly, ignorant men consider it forgetfulness of the Almighty, and fire worship. But the deep-sighted know better. As the external form of the worship of “the select” is based upon propriety, and as people think the neglect of some sort of

dress in one, and the turban and the teacher's garb in the other miniature) to represent Idris' various titles bear witness to the possibility of the separate existence of political, cultural, and spiritual leadership.” Eryilmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 104.

⁴⁶² Eryilmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 83.

⁴⁶³ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 184-185.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 185-187.

⁴⁶⁶ Beveridge identifies it with the Sun.

⁴⁶⁷ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 186-187. Also this indication correlates with Enoch's identification with Hushang since the ancient Persian king also established a festival marking the importance of light coming from God.

worship abominable, there can be nothing improper in the veneration of that exalted element which is the source of man's existence, and of the duration of his life; nor should base thoughts enter such a matter. How beautifully has Shaikh Sharafuddin Munyari⁴⁶⁸ said, "What can be done with a man who is not satisfied with the lamp, when the sun is down?" Every flame is derived from that fountain of divine light, (the sun), and bears the impression of its holy essence. If light and fire did not exist, we should be destitute of food and medicines; the power of sight would be of no avail to the eyes. The fire of the sun is the torch of God's sovereignty. At noon of the day, when the sun enters the 19th degree of Aries, the whole world being then surrounded by his light, they expose a round piece of a white and shining stone, called in Hindí Surajkrant, to the rays of the sun. A piece of cotton is then held near it, which catches fire from the heat of the stone. This celestial fire is committed to the care of proper persons. The lamp-lighters, torch-bearers and cooks of the household use it for their offices; and when the year has passed away in happiness, they renew the fire. The vessel in which this fire is preserved, is called Agingir, i. e., fire-pot."⁴⁶⁹

When Abu'l-Fazl underlines the fact that Enoch spent his entire life serving the celestial spirits and sacred bodies (*ervah-i ulviyye wa ecram-i mukaddese*), his personal interest of Ishraqi philosophy plays a significant role because prophet Enoch is a central figure in Suhrawardi's philosophy of illumination. Furthermore, Abu'l Fazl gives the astrologer Abu Ma'shar of Balkh as his source for identifying the three Hermes. The first one is Hermes Trismegistus (*Hermes-e Heramise*), who was Idris and whom Persians believe to be Gayomarth (*ahl-e fars bar anand ke*).⁴⁷⁰ Thackston explains Gayomarth to be the king of the primordial golden age who taught humankind useful crafts according to Iranian tradition.⁴⁷¹ The interesting thing is Beveridge translated the same part as "whom the Persians call the grandson of Kayumar" and then he notes that the person is called Hushang.⁴⁷² According to Tabari and Shahnama the grandson of Gayomarth is Hushang. However, this seems unlikely because according to Tabari, most Persian scholars assume that Gayomarth is Adam. None of the scholars from different nations dispute that he was the father of non-Arab Persians⁴⁷³ and Hushang is identified with Mahalaleel.⁴⁷⁴ Even though in Akbarnama, Mahalaleel's name is mentioned fifth in Akbar's line, Abu'l-Fazl

⁴⁶⁸ He is a fourteen century Indian Sufi. Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 171.

⁴⁶⁹ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 50.

⁴⁷⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 186-187.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 583.

⁴⁷² Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. I*, 163.

⁴⁷³ Al-Tabari, *The History of Al-Tabari Vol I: General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood* trans., Franz Rosenthal (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 318-319.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 341.

does not make such a claim for Mahalaleel. Nevertheless, he does add all those notions attributed to civilization and teaching to Enoch and claims that he is identified as either Gayomarth or Hushang. Still, Hushang has many commonalities with Enoch with regard to things such as establishing cities and usage of tools and crafts.⁴⁷⁵ Therefore, Beveridge's translation seems more likely and the source, if any, Abu'l-Fazl's drawing this conclusion from is also curious.

This kind of a connection with Persian line cannot be disregarded due to the attempt to create a common line. For instance, in the *Shahnama-i Al-i Osman*, Eryılmaz points out the fact that in the volume that includes the life of the prophets, there is the Indio-Persian hero king, Cemşîd, though he is not a prophet.⁴⁷⁶ Eryılmaz questions why this is. Both in the History of Ṭaberī and *Shahnama*, Cemşîd, grandson of Hushang, is perceived to be the first man to reign throughout the first millennium, a marker of an era. Moreover, *Shāhnāma* and Iranian mythology underline his role as the founder and teacher of civilization.⁴⁷⁷

The second identification of Hermes is with the Hermes of Babylon.⁴⁷⁸ He built the city of Babylon after the Deluge and according to a report he is considered to be the Hermes by whom all the knowledge lost during Noah's flood was reestablished. The third one is Hermes of Egypt, the master of Asclepius. He was also a master of all sciences especially medicine and alchemy.⁴⁷⁹ The author of *Shahnama-i Ali Osman*, 'Ārif, also mentions that "Īdris wrote many books on the occult sciences. He gave information on the rotation of the heavenly skies and made divinations about the state of matters in the world through his knowledge of arithmomancy. Moreover, in order that this knowledge may be preserved, he put it down on stone."⁴⁸⁰ Akbar's claim and desire to lead the "divine era" is established, among many other ways, through things that relate him to the prophets named

⁴⁷⁵“The first to cut trees and build buildings and the first to produce minerals and make people understand their use. He commanded the people of his time to use mosques. He built two cities, the first to be built on earth. They are called the city of Babil (Babylon) and the city of al-Sus (Susa). It was during his rule that iron was first produced. He made it into tools for crafts. He assessed the available water in localities with a stagnant water supply. He urged people to till the soil, sow, harvest and engage in all kinds of agricultural activities. He commanded people to kill the beasts of prey and use clothing made from their skins as well as mats...” According to Persians he was a born king. Due to his praiseworthy attributes he is given the surname “feshdadh” which means the first to judge in justice. It is also mentioned that he went down to India at some point. After establishing his rule, he wears a crown and claims that he had inherited the realm from his grandfather Kayumars.” Al-Tabari, *The History*, 341-342.

⁴⁷⁶ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 85.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 94. Very much like Hushang, he introduces many things to his people. “He originated the manufacture of swords and weaponry. He also showed people how to make brocade, silk and other textile threads. He ordered garments woven and dyed, and saddles with pommels carved to make the mounts more manageable.” Al-Tabari, *The History*, 349.

⁴⁷⁸ Again it is believed that Hushang established the city of Babylon.

⁴⁷⁹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 186-187.

⁴⁸⁰ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 93.

in his line. The things he perceives divine such as God, celestial movements, sun, fire, light, his attempts to establish a society beyond differences and a unifying political discourse above the multi-layered position of the Mughal Empire, his “civilizing mission” to provide harmony and justice among his subjects, re-ordering of his court and state apparatus, can all be derived from the main themes provided via this line.

e. Noah (Nuh)

Noah is the last prophet and tenth name mentioned in the “holy lineage” of Akbar. According to Fazl, historians mention three floods. The first one is before the time of Adam. He is born in the first epoch after this flood destroyed the world. The second one is the flood of Noah, which according to the author began in Kufa from an oven in Noah’s house. It lasted six months and there were eighty people in the arch that Noah built.⁴⁸¹ The third one is during the age of Moses but limited only to Egypt. Abu’l Fazl thinks that since there is no trace of either of these floods in the “several thousand years old books” in India, the idea that the first two floods affected the entire world cannot be true.⁴⁸² However, according to Beveridge, there is a mention of a flood. According to the story, the God Matsya, an avatar of Vishnu, saves the first man Manu from a great deluge. This story is narrated in important texts such as Mahabharata, Shatapatha Brahmana and Puranas. Manu builds an ark and with the help of Matsya saves himself and seven sages.⁴⁸³ Also, in a translation of Mahabharata ordered by Akbar in 1582, there is this passage including the life of Manu which further links him with Akbar in his kingly qualities.⁴⁸⁴

Abu’l Fazl then gives information about how the descendants of Noah, his three sons Japheth, Ham and Shem, after the Deluge, settled around the world. Noah’s story is significant because due to his “enlightened” and “chosen” attribute, he is given divine knowledge about the upcoming flood which he uses to save mankind.⁴⁸⁵ This notion fits perfectly with the discourse of the “savior of mankind” and a common characteristic for the names in Akbar’s genealogy.

⁴⁸¹ Quranic tradition. Surah al-Noah

⁴⁸² Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 190-191.

⁴⁸³ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m03/m03186.htm> (last modified April 27, 2016)

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbr/sbe12/sbe1234.htm> (last modified April 27, 2016)

⁴⁸⁴ Truschke, *The Mughal Book*, 519.

⁴⁸⁵ Eryilmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 94.



Figure X: Noah's Ark ca. 1590 Miskin.

3.1.2. Significant People

a. Japheth (Yafes)

Eleventh in the lineage, he is the eldest son of Noah. His main importance, as Abu'l-Fazl states, is that the lineage of all the Khans of the east (*bilad-e mashriq*) and Turkestan go back to him. He is known as the father of Turks and some historians (*muwarrihan*) refer to him as Alunja Khan. He is the name in the line that provides the Turco-Mongol connection and also underlines it with “the father” image. In a story told about his life, he asks his father Noah to teach him the prayer to bring rain whenever he wants it to rain. Noah gives him a stone which had the power to do so. Abu'l-Fazl claims that there are many stones among the Turks that are identified as *jada tash*. Persians call them *sang-i yada* and Arabs refer to them as *hajar al-matar*.⁴⁸⁶

b. Oghuz Khan

The 19th name, Oghuz Khan, provides the information for the Turkic line and how it is divided into branches. Abu'l Fazl claims that as “a wisdom-loving ruler and justice-minded worshipper of God, he established good laws and customs for the people so as to bring order to a disturbed world. (*intezam-e ahval-e alem*). Among the kings of the Turks, he is like Jamshed among the Persians.⁴⁸⁷ This of course creates the connection with Jamshed, both for his “lawgiving” and “civilizing” features and also due to God’s support of him to become the ruler of seven climates, an idea derived upon khwareah (*farr*).⁴⁸⁸ His six famous sons are Gun (Day), Ay (Moon), Yulduz (Star), Gök (Sky-Heaven), Taq (Mountain) and Tangiz (Sea). The first three would later be known as Bozoq⁴⁸⁹ and the second three as Üchoq.⁴⁹⁰

c. Qiyān

Qiyān’s name is the 26th in the line and significant because of his experiences. Abu'l Fazl starts by stating that he suffered difficulties necessitated by divine wisdom (*hiqmat-e*

⁴⁸⁶ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 195.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 202-203.

⁴⁸⁸ Al-Tabari, *The History*, 348.

⁴⁸⁹ Buzmaq (Broken) by Beveridge

⁴⁹⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 202-203.

izdi) and then makes an explanation and justification of his situation as God desiring to bring the jewel of human (*cevher-e insani*) to perfection, “he first brings about several desired things in the folds of undesirability and sacrifices several pure ones for the sake of that one person before bringing him into existence.”⁴⁹¹

He gives the brief story of the legend, Ergeneqon which is a depiction of the intellect, courage and power of the Turks. When their way was blocked by a mountain containing iron mines, the wise people managed to get out by melting the mountain and retaking their kingdom with swords and a good strategy.⁴⁹² “Of course a wise person realizes that in this fabulous story, lies a plan for the creation of His Imperial Majesty’s essence. This is so that both the trait of self-sacrifice and the characteristics of exile, isolation, and difficulty (*gurbat wa ‘uzlet wa mashaqqat*) are combined in this marvelous manner in order that the unique pearl (*gawhar yektai*) that is His Imperial Majesty, (*hazrat shahanshahi*) which is the original aim (*maqsud-e asli*) of the creation of this nation (*az afrenash in tabaqa-i garami*)⁴⁹³ and also the raw material of this divine book of splendor (*mahimedetname-i izdi*), might combine all stages of existence and appreciate all classes of humanity.”⁴⁹⁴ Another stage is accomplished with Qiyān’s struggle in leading his peoples and proving the worthiness of the line for “royalty” and “rule.” Abu’l-Fazl makes his statement even clearer when he highlights the fact that Akbarnama is prepared to depict the life of “the original aim of creation.”

d. Chengizid-Mongol Line and Alanqoa

Through Babur Shah’s mother, the Gürkhanid dynasty’s line connects with Chengīz Khan. This is a significant aspect for legitimization and even though the primary discourse is based on the Timurid line, it is a well-known fact that the Mughals appreciate the Chengīzid-Mongol ancestry. Starting from Babur, this line is valued and highlighted as part of their tradition. For instance in his autobiography, Babur claims that for him *Tura-i Chengizi* (Law of Chengīz Khan) is an important part of his heritage.⁴⁹⁵ The Mongols

⁴⁹¹ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 208-209.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 210-211.

⁴⁹³ Here the translation “nation” does not seem appropriate, in Beveridge it goes: “who is the final cause of the creation of the glorious series...” Abu’l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. I*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1897), Chapter 39.

⁴⁹⁴ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 210-211.

⁴⁹⁵ For that account see. Babur, *Baburnama*, trans. John Layden and William Erskine, Vol.II (Oxford: 1921), 7.

created their own understanding of universalist ideology that took the place of the universal caliphate ideal. According to their belief, divine dispensation to rule the world is given to Chengīz Khan and his descendants.⁴⁹⁶

In the list of Akbar's line, there are names related to the line of the Mongols and the 31st in this line is a woman called Alanqoa, who with her legendary story contributes to the sacredness and divinity discourse of the Mughals after the prophets.⁴⁹⁷ According to Abu'l-Fazl's narrative From her childhood on, she grows up to be physically and spiritually beautiful. She is also a wise, intelligent and God-fearing (*khodaperest*) lady. "The lights of piety (*envar-e khodashinasi*) shone from her countenance and divine mysteries (*esrar-e ilahi*) could be read on her forehead. She dwelt in the seclusion of chastity, a manifestation of holy emanations and a focus of heavenly effulgence."⁴⁹⁸

In the Qur'an, the story of Maryam (Mary) begins with: "And mention, in the Book [the story of] Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place towards the east (*makanen sharkiyya*). And she took, in seclusion from them, a screen (*khijaben*)."⁴⁹⁹ Abu'l-Fazl's account continues: "When she reached the level of perfection (*kemal*), she was given in marriage, as was the custom of the rulers of the world and great figures in religion. Since he was unequal to her, he died. One night while she was in her bed, a magnificent light (*nurperved-e ilahi*) shed its rays into her tent, entered her mouth and impregnated her."⁵⁰⁰

The verses from Surah Al-Maryam go on: "Then We sent to her Our Angel, and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man (*basharan sawiyya*). She said, "Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of Allah (*taqiyya*)." He said, "I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [news of] a pure boy (*ghulamān zaqiyya*)." She said, "How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste (*baghiyya*)?" He said, "Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us (*rahmatan*). And it is a matter [already] decreed'."⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁶ Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 273.

⁴⁹⁷ For a study on Chengizid - Timurid genealogies and Alanqoa's story within them, see. Binbaş, *Structure and Function*, 512-514.

⁴⁹⁸ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 215-217.

⁴⁹⁹ Qur'an 19:16-17.

⁵⁰⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 216-217.

⁵⁰¹ Qur'an, 19:16-21. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 38.

Abu'l-Fazl makes a similar claim when he says: “From Adam until her, holy human souls had been nurtured stage by stage through all contradictory degrees – luxury and deprivation, expanse and contraction, victory and defeat, kindness and wrath – to be made ready to receive the emanation of holy light, and before this holy light descended from heaven.”⁵⁰² He further concludes that everything that happened through the generations until Alanqoa, such as what happened with Qiyan and Yulduz Khan and their peoples, was a process of purification which generates the ultimate ruler. Generation after generation this process continued. All those processes were considered to be part of the transformation of their human stages. It was required for their spiritual nurturing. Once it was done, their “exile” ended and those people turned into monarchs and that is when the “sacred line” (*silsile-i mukaddes*) reached Alanqoa.⁵⁰³

At the moment of Alanqoa’s conception, “it was the beginning of the appearance (*zuhur*) of His Imperial Majesty (*hazret shahenshahi*).”⁵⁰⁴ However, the divine light (*nur-e ilahi*) appeared in the external world (*alem-e zahir*) through so many great ones of religion and state without human intermediary (*wasila-yi bashari*) and were reincarnated through the ages in different sovereign bodies in order to arrive at perfection (*istikmal*) in the holy bodily coverings of other holy manifestations (*malabis-i qudsi-yi mazahir-i digaran*). It manifested itself in the pure entity of this unique God-knower and God-worshipper (Akbar),⁵⁰⁵ appearing in the world through the pure vessel of Her Highness Maryam-Makani.⁵⁰⁶ It is also mentioned in *Akbarnāma* that a light was emanating from Akbar’s mother Hamida Banu Begum’s face during her pregnancy. This proves Akbar’s existence as the light which was mentioned in the example of Alanqoa. This is also related to the “divine glory” a.k.a. *farr-i Izadi*, which surrounded and permeated him.⁵⁰⁷

Abu'l-Fazl explains this situation as: “It would take someone as able as Plato to comprehend the abstract notion that the lord of the age (*khidiw az-zaman*) remains hidden behind a veil (*parda-ara'i*) while mortals (*zamāniyān*) rend the veil (*parda-dar*) with outer

⁵⁰² Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 216-217.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 217-219. Qiyan and Yulduz Khan are 26th and 29th names in Akbar’s line respectively. See the title “Others” below.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 218-219.

⁵⁰⁵ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 137.

⁵⁰⁶ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 218-219.

⁵⁰⁷ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 33. For Hamida Banu Begum’s incident and for *farr-i izadi*’s connection with light see the titles below.

sorrow and inner anguish.”⁵⁰⁸ This might be related to the messianic idea of “occultation.” Akbar was expected to come at the perfect time, as the renewer. Abu’l-Fazl further defends this story and argues against “scientific computations” in the place of “auspicious guidance.” He uses two prophets in his defense as reminders.⁵⁰⁹ He asks: “When they accept the existence of a child without a mother or father, that is, the first Adam, and they accept the existence of a child without a mother, which they call Eve, how can they not accept the existence of a child without a father? Are they not absolutely certain that such a thing happened in the story of Jesus and Mary?”⁵¹⁰

More interestingly, in the Hindu religious epic Mahabharata there is the story of the birth of Karna who is the son of Kunti and Surya, the sun God. Before getting married, Kunti takes a spell from a sage that would allow her to call on any god to make her pregnant. She is curious so she calls on Surya and as a result she gives birth to Karna. Then she leaves her due to shame. In the epic it is underlined that before going back to Heaven Surya gives Kunti’s virginity back. As it is mentioned before, Mahabharata is rendered into Persian as Razmnama during the reign of Akbar. In the Persian “adaptation,” the story changes and Kunti conceives through “a ray of light” and that is why she does not lose her virginity anyway. This is done in order to provide a direct reference to the story of Alanqoa in a Hindu religious text and to link Akbar’s political identity with Hindu tradition.⁵¹¹

Then, Alanqoa gave birth to triplets. Her three sons are called Buqun Qataqi⁵¹², the father of Qataqin, the second is Bughutu Salji,⁵¹³ from whom the tribe of the Salji’ut descends and the third is called Bodhonchar Qa’an.⁵¹⁴ This is the “exalted lineage” known to be Niru’un.⁵¹⁵ It means “born of light” (*amide ez nur*). The third line is perceived as the greatest of the Mongols and is the ancestor of Chengīz Khan from nine generations earlier and also from whom the Mughals descend.⁵¹⁶ In Akbar’s genealogy, Chengīz Khan does not have a specific account because it represents the Timurid heritage which does not come

⁵⁰⁸ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 218-219.

⁵⁰⁹ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 54. For Ottoman examples see. Imber, “The Ottoman Dynastic, 7-27; Barbara Flemming, “The Political Geneologies in the Sixteenth Century,” *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 7-8 (1988): 198-220.

⁵¹⁰ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 218-219.

⁵¹¹ Truschke, *The Mughal Book*, 518-519.

⁵¹² Buqun Qanqi in Beveridge. (probably due to ب and ق)

⁵¹³ Yusuqi Salji in Beveridge. However, there is a problem in Thackston since in Persian transcription on the next page the letters are also ی and ق

⁵¹⁴ Buzanjar Qaan in Beveridge.

⁵¹⁵ Nairun i.e. light produced.

⁵¹⁶ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 222-223.

from Chengīz, but defined as *silsila-yi Guregen*, the line of son-in-law. Abu'l-Fazl explains this situation under the title of Sughuchijin, 41st in the line, claiming that there is no need to give his account of Tamujin in Akbar's "exalted lineage" (*silsila-yi 'aliyya*) in this *mahimadat-nama-e izdi* because it is one of the branches of the "sacred tree" (*shacarat'ul kudsiyya*). Nonetheless, since he is "a ray of Alanqoa's holy light" (*nur-e muqaddas-e Alanqoa*), a summary of his life is given like a reminder of its existence,⁵¹⁷ with a brief mention of his sign and some information about his life under the life account of Qarachar Noyan, who is the 42nd name in Akbar's lineage.

e. Qachulai Bahadur

He was Timur's ancestor in the eighth degree, 38th name in Akbarnama. According to Abu'l Fazl, "he was carrying the "lights of fortune" (*anwar-e dawlat wa murad*) and "traces of felicity" (*asar-e saadet*). Also he had an "aura of greatness" (*farr-e bozorgi*) and from his forehead, the "glory of fortune" (*shekve-i bahtiyari*) shines.⁵¹⁸ All these divine attributes show him to be a "pious" and "illuminated" being, which makes his dream account powerful.

"One night he dreamed that from Qabul Khan's loins a shining star (*sitare-i rahshan*) rose to the pinnacle of heaven and then went out. Then the same thing happened for three times. The fourth time, a star of such brilliance rose that the horizons went illuminated and its rays extended to several other stars, by each of which a region was lit. When the brilliant star disappeared, the ends of the earth remained illuminated. When he awoke he wondered about its interpretation. Suddenly he fell asleep again and saw a bright star rise and set from his own loins seven times. The light time a great star rose and lit the whole world, and several other smaller stars sprang from it, each of which lit a corner of the world. When the great star disappeared the world remained illuminated, and the other stars retained their brilliance."⁵¹⁹

When he woke up, he went to his father Tumina Khan (37th in Akbar's line) for the interpretation. Tumina Khan said:

"Three princes (*shahzada*) from the lineage of Qabul Khan will sit on the throne of the Khanate (*takht-e khani*) and rule the land, but the fourth in succession will be an emperor who will bring most of the world under his sway, and he will have sons each of whom will rule a region. From Qachulai there will appear seven lucky sons who will wear the crown of leadership and rule, and the eighth time, a child will appear who

⁵¹⁷ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 238-239.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 228-229.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 228-229.

will conquer the world and lead everyone in the world (cihangiri).⁵²⁰ From him, will come sons, each of whom will rule a region and govern a kingdom.”⁵²¹

Although some people identify the first seven stars with the descendants of Qaculi Bahadur and the eighth star with Timur, Abu al-Fazl rejects this notion. He claims that non-ruling descendants could not be counted amongst the favored kings. According to him, the first of the stars indicating kingship represented Timur and his celestial descendants reach the true culmination of the prophecy in Akbar’s person. In this way, he manages to position him even above Timur, as the eighth star and ‘possessor of worldwide sovereignty’.⁵²²

f. Timur: The Most Magnificent Sahib-Qiran, The Third Axis of the World⁵²³

Babur and Humayun married Persian and Afghan women along with Turks and Mongols. Akbar and his descendants made marriage alliances with royal Rajput families. Thus, it is possible to say that by the time of Aurangzeb, the Mughal rulers had become more Persian and Rajput than Turkish. Even though Babur referred to himself as a Turk, ethnic identity was not a significant element for Mughal imperial identity. However, right from their establishment, the Mughals identified themselves as descendants of the House of

⁵²⁰ World-wide sovereignty in Beveridge.

⁵²¹ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 228-229. In his memories, Safavid Shah Tahmasb (r. 1524- 1576) gives his dream accounts. One of them he had in 7th Rajab 957 (1550) is quite interesting. He sees three moons in the sky. One is in the middle and the other two standing by on the west and east. The western moon is very big, while the eastern moon is small. An illuminated person (shakhs-i nurani) informs Tahmasb that the western moon represents Ottoman ruler Sulaiman (Hunkar), the eastern moon is ‘Ubaydullah the Uzbek, and the one in the middle is himself. Gradually, the eastern moon moves to the middle of the sky, is torn out of the sky, falls onto the earth, and disappears. Afterward, the western moon likewise falls to the earth and vanishes: “And the middle moon like a fluttering piece of paper in the sky, slowly descends until it arrives on top of the raised floor (suffah) of the throne (shahnishin) that is in Qazvin where they had laid out my place, on top of the pillows on which I sit.” Curiously, there is no mention of Mughal neighbors among the “threatening” Muslim Emperors in the dream. I think it might be due to the political context. At that point in time, Humayun was a refugee at Tahmasb’s court and trying to stay alive. Most probably Tahmasb did not even consider him as competition. This also denotes how the dream narrative is part of the conjecture. Shah Tahmasb, *Tazkire-yi Shah Tahmasb*, ed. D.C. Phillott (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1912), 67. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs*, 333. Another thing is the celestial symbolism as is the case with Qaculi Bahadur but even more importantly the famous dream of the Abrahamic Prophet Joseph: “When Joseph said to his father, “O my father, indeed I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me.” Qur’an, 12:4.

⁵²² Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 54-55.

⁵²³ “qutb and mahdī, were made suitable for envisioning the ruler in the sultanate. The Pole, or rather the Pole of Poles (qutb al-aqtāb or ghaws), was way superior to any authority in the world. An anonymous work, dedicated to the ruling sultan Süleymān, stated that the ruler (khalīfa) could be a Pole (qutb) provided that he was pious (ṣāliḥ). ‘Ārifī, a Sufi-minded author, used the term more specifically and referred to the same sultan as the Pole of time (qutb al-waqt) in the preface of this work.” Yilmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 138-139. “soldiers had a bond with Timur much like a Sufi disciple had with his pir or master. In their eyes, he was already a qutb (axis mundi) around whom the world revolved, and a qibla (model) upon whose image they would meditate. The devotion of these men towards Timur was tinged with ghuluww (exaggeration), i.e., a tendency to treat the spiritual guide as divine.” Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 34.

Timur.⁵²⁴ It was their most significant source of dynastic legitimization. Timur is not a descendant of Chingis Khan. When he took power by force, through his military conquests, he ruled with a Chinggisid puppet Khan on the throne and married strategically into the Chinggisid family. As a result of this marriage, he took the regnal title of Guregen, son-in-law for himself and his successors and also found Chinggisid wives for his sons and grandsons. This made his line an “in-law dynasty.”⁵²⁵ Following Timur’s footsteps, Mughals referred to themselves as the Gurkhanid dynasty of Timurids and from Babur onwards, the main ambition of Mughals was to illuminate the “lamp of the Timurid family” and to recreate the Timurid Empire in South Asia.⁵²⁶ The Mughals were the principal inheritors of the Central Asian Turco-Persian legacy of Timur and their imperial culture must be based on acknowledging the influence of their Timurid past.⁵²⁷ This makes Timur’s account in Akbarnama more special than others.

47th in the line, he is defined as the unique pearl of the Caliphate (*gevher yekta-e khilafat*), like Akbar. His main features are: leadership (*riyasat*), wisdom (*hikmat*), sovereignty (*saltanat*), munificence (*hidayat*), clemency (*‘atufat*), commiseration (*ra’fet*), and other noble characteristics.⁵²⁸ Timur, as the “axis of the circle of the caliphate” (*kutb-e da’ire-e khifalat- e uzma*)⁵²⁹ and “center of the circumference of sovereignty” (*merkez-e muhit-e saltanat-e kubra*) is the “star fortunated” ruler who rose eight generations after Qachulai Bahadur.⁵³⁰ Abu’l-Fazl, without naming his source, says that “according to one historian, Qachulai Bahadur’s vision came true” and names it as the beginning of the rise of the first star.⁵³¹ His court is called “the court of the champion of justice” (*siyasatgah-e kahraman-e ‘adalet*)⁵³² by the author. His conquests in Iran are compared to the famous ancient Persian rulers, Rostam and Afrasiab. More significantly, these victories are

⁵²⁴ Lisa Balabanlilar, "The Begins of the Mystic Feast: Turco-Mongol Tradition in the Mughal Harem," *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 69, No. 1 (February, 2010), 144-145.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 126-127.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 130. Also, Hodgson avoids calling the empire “Mughals” for similar reasons and refers to them as “Timurid-Empire in India”

⁵²⁷ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 4.

⁵²⁸ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 256-257.

⁵²⁹ According to Kayseri, who builds on the theory of Ibn ‘Arabi, the true caliphate (*khilāfat-i haqīqī*), which represents the reality of Muḥammad (*haqīqat-i Muḥammadī*) and it is the absolute deputyship of God, without excess or deficiency (*ziyāda* or *nuqsān*) in manifesting all His attributes. Such a caliphate, dubbed the grand caliphate (*khilāfat-i ‘uzmā*) or great caliphate (*khilāfat-i kubrā*) that rules both the exterior (*zāhir*) and interior (*bātin*) halves of creation, never ceases to exist. see. Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 214.

⁵³⁰ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 258-259.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 259.

⁵³² Ibid., 260-261.

considered to be “heaven-sent” (*futuhāt-e asmani*).⁵³³ This idea is very much related to Timur’s desire of a Chengizid type of kingship in which his right to rule is bestowed by Heaven, the divine source through which he makes his conquests and becomes victorious.⁵³⁴ Timur is known for conferring favor upon the descendants of the Prophet, the Sayyids. After his death, his successors also emphasized their closeness to Ali. His grandson Ulugh Beg (d. 1449) put an engraving on Timur’s tomb in Samarkand. The inscription on this stone, which dates around 1425 and some twenty years after Timur’s death when the revised chronicles of Timur’s reign were being finalized, traces Timur’s genealogy all the way to Buzunchar, the son of Alanqoa.⁵³⁵ Through this relation the Timurids created kinship with the Chengīzids.⁵³⁶

Even though the Mughals were the real genealogical descendants of post-Mongol line, other great empires of the period, the Ottomans and Safavids also claimed some sort of Timurid inheritance which indicates the shared aesthetic, political and ethical vision they held.⁵³⁷ Despite this, the Mughals always felt superior to the Ottomans because of the “humiliation of Bayezid” in the Battle of Ankara. According to a historical rumor, after Timur captured him, he was put in a cage on his way back to Samarkand.⁵³⁸ This famous battle of Ankara between Timur and Yıldırım Bayezid is mentioned in Akbarnama. Abu’l-Fazl calls Bayezid I “Ceaser of Rome” (*kayser-e Rum*) and claims that “with heaven’s assistance (*te’yīdat-e ġaybi*), which was always with that cavalier of the field of glory, triumph and success attended him, and the proclamation of victory was adorned with the name of that world-conquering monarch (*khīdv-e memalik-e keshversitani*).”⁵³⁹ The term “Ceasar” is noteworthy since it is unlikely that this title was used for Ottoman Rulers at the time of Bayezid, who reigned from 1389-1402. Actually, it sounds more like a title used for Ottoman rulers in Akbar’s time.

⁵³³ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 262-263.

⁵³⁴ See title above: Mandate of Heaven.

⁵³⁵ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 37.

⁵³⁶ Thus, there is no father for Bodhonchar Qa’an, however, there is another interesting line created which makes it even more “divine” through connecting it to Ali ibn Abu Talib. However, since it is not mentioned by Abu’l-Fazl, I will not go further with this claim. For an investigation of this issue, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 38-39.

⁵³⁷ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 38.

⁵³⁸ Koch, *The Intellectual and Artistic*, 20.

⁵³⁹ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 262-263.



Figure XI: Timur handing the imperial crown to Babur in the presence of Humayun, a leaf from a dispersed album made for Shah Jahan, Govardhan, c.1630.



Figure XII: Timur enthroned with his descendants from Babur to Jahangir. A portrait of the great conquerer Timur sitting on his throne, with the Mughal emperors Humayun, Jahangir, Babur, Akbar, the poet Sa'di on the left and an attendant on the right. Hashim, ca. 1620.

Mughals were conscious of the achievements of Timur and claimed Central Asia and even Rum (Turkey) as their patrimony. Humayun, like the others, were obsessed with the Timurid supremacy and cherished the memory of Timur's triumph over Bayezid.⁵⁴⁰ This made them view themselves as superior to other Muslim Emperors due to their "noble blood." Safavid historians were also interested in promoting Safavid legitimacy in Timurid terms by invoking Timur's name and the symbols associated with his rule. For instance, in his history of Safavid Shah Abbas I's campaign to Khurasan titled *Futuhāt-i Humayun* (1598-99), the author Siyaqi Nizam compares Shah Abbas and Timur due to their auspicious reigns and comes up with a complicated explanation. He uses the number of Imams which is twelve, the phrase *Muhammad Rasul Allah* and the name of 'Ali b. Abu Talib in his *abjad* calculation and concludes with Shah Abbas' worthiness of being *sahib-qiran-e a'la* and refers to him with this title throughout the work.⁵⁴¹ This states the significance of the title as well as using another scientific explanation of *abjad* calculation in comparison with Abu'l-Fazl's deep and rather sophisticated explanation with astrology.

Ottoman bureaucrat and historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600), names his third volume of *Künhu'l Ahbar* (essence of history) as "History of the Turks and Tatars" and demonstrates an awareness of the importance of especially the Mongol and more generally, the Central Asian legacy to the sixteenth century Islamic world noting that Timurid Jalal al-din Akbar, fifth (sic) in his line, holds sway in India, and is famed for his generosity. The Timurids had possessed dynastic legitimacy for two hundred years. According to his categorization and from a historical perspective, the Ottomans, in terms of origins and political identity, must be classed with the Turks and Mongols.⁵⁴² Ottoman sensitivity to the dynasty's lack of charismatic lineage had inspired a variety of strategies. While addressing the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid's crushing defeat at the hands of Timur at the battle of Ankara in 1402, Mustafa Ali provocatively asserted that the title *sahibkiran* gave Timur's rulership universal implications, thus rendering him 'superior in status to the Sultan of Rum.'⁵⁴³

Furthermore, there is another part which mentions his relationship with Egypt. Abu'l-Fazl says that the rule (*khutba-i farmanrava'i*) over Mecca and Madina (*emakin-e*

⁵⁴⁰ Farooqi, *Mughal Ottoman Relations*, 187- 188. This ideology also can be seen in a miniature prepared by the order of Jahangir.

⁵⁴¹ Sholeh A. Quinn, "Notes on Timurid Legitimacy in Three Safavid Chronicles," *Iranian Studies*, 31:2 (Spring, 1998), 154-155.

⁵⁴² Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 276-278.

⁵⁴³ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 39.

sharifa) and other holy places (*mesha'ir-e kudsiyya*), is proclaimed in Timur's name.⁵⁴⁴ During the reign of Akbar, *khutbas* contained the names of Akbar and his ancestors which were traced up to Amir Timur.⁵⁴⁵

g. Others: "...the great ancestors of His Imperial Majesty who is the ultimate goal of this line, were chosen for absolute leadership and independent sovereignty, and they gave stability to the throne of justice."⁵⁴⁶

The names in this holy line are chosen for specific reasons and depict a characteristic of Akbar. For instance, Abu'l-Fazl mentions Turk, who is the eldest son of Yapheth and aside from his intelligence, he has the ability to shepherd his people (*r'aiyyet perveri*). He builds dwellings from wood and plants, comes up with inventions and sews clothes from animal skins. He is depicted as an "Orya" continuing the "civilizing mission." Furthermore, Abu'l-Fazl mentions that in some sources he is known to be a contemporary of Gayomarth, the first king of the Persians (*muluk-e Ajam*). Turk was similar to him in that he was the first of the rulers of Turkestan (*selatin-e Turkestan*)⁵⁴⁷ following the discourse of a "savior."

With regard to Yulduz Khan, the grandson of Temurtash and son of Mangli Khwaja, Abu-l Fazl makes the statement that, "among the Mongols (*ulus-e Moğul*), only he who is undoubtedly descended (*dorost neseb*) from Yulduz Khan is worthy of ruling as Khan."⁵⁴⁸ By adding the name of Yulduz Khan to the line, once again Abu'l-Fazl underlines the Mughal's right to use that title, which is quite important for Turco-Mongol culture.

Another thing worth mentioning is the notion that a ruler ascends to the throne either in his father's will or with his permission. Starting from Adam's son Seth, this is a common occurrence throughout the entire line. Adam made Seth his heir (*wali'ahd*).⁵⁴⁹ When Seth died, in accordance with his wishes (*vasiyat*), Enos succeeded the throne (*masandarai khilafat*).⁵⁵⁰ Here, the term khilafat denotes the Khilafatullah that is bestowed upon Adam by the Creator. This continues with Cainan who then makes Mahalaleel his

⁵⁴⁴ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 264-265.

⁵⁴⁵ Namkin, *The Mughal State*, 80.

⁵⁴⁶ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 230-231.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 196-197.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 212-213. The meaning of this translation differs in Beveridge: "He was powerful and magnanimous and among the Mughul families, he is counted of good blood and fashion who can trace his origin up to Yuldūz Khān."

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

successor. This practice continues and in my opinion it is crucial when considered along with what happened during the later years of Akbar's reign. Akbar's son Jahangir desired the throne and rebelled against his father, which led to ongoing wars between them. Therefore, Abu'l-Fazl's emphasis of the "with father's will" idea for successors, gains as much importance as the power of the line.

As far as Umar Shah Mirza is concerned, he is praised for his love of poetry and eloquence. According to Abu'Fazl, "he spent most of his time reading books of poetry and histories and the *Shahnāma* was often recited in his presence."⁵⁵¹ Moreover, he defines Mirza as "dervish-like" and someone who liked to seek assistance from Nasiruddin Khawaja Ubaidullah, also known as Khawaja Ahrar.⁵⁵² Through this family tree, Akbar becomes part of a "holy line" of the greatest kings of the Islamic and Turco-Mongol worlds. What's more, one of the most significant features of Akbar's imperial genealogy is his placement at the pinnacle of this line of world-conquerors and kings.

Mughal emperors perpetuated the Timurid tradition of genealogical scrolls without texts and portrait medallions to support their claim to be the legitimate descendants of the Chingizid-Timurid line.⁵⁵³ There is also the culture of expressing legitimization through royal portraiture. Ottomans use serial royal portraits to highlight the longevity and continuity of their dynasty. However, as a relatively new dynasty, the Mughals preferred imagined group scenes that collapsed historical time by bringing together in familial reunion royal ancestors, either to show off their dynastic lineage or to settle disputes over the legitimacy of their succession.⁵⁵⁴

3.2. Reading Akbarnama as a Hagiography: "And they found a servant from among Our servants to whom we had given mercy from us and had taught him from Us a [certain] knowledge."⁵⁵⁵

Hagiography literally means the writing of the holy.⁵⁵⁶ Hagiographies depict the life and deeds of the saints in Islamic culture. Saints have two main features; they are

⁵⁵¹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 276-277.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 276-277.

⁵⁵³ Gülru Necipoğlu, "Word and Image in Portraits of the Ottoman Sultans: A Comparative Perspective" in *Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman* (Istanbul, 2000), 55.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 59. As an incredible example, a dynastic group portrait of Emperors Babur, Humayun, Akbar and Jahangir with the poet Sa'di on the left and an attendant on the right.

⁵⁵⁵ Qur'an, 18:65.

divine and friends of God. In Akbarnama, it is possible to see the main features of a hagiography because the book is an attempt to “apotheosize” the ruler since Abu’l-Fazl perceives him as “the latest and most perfect manifestation of the divine light” and depicts the “perfect man” in mentioning his characteristics. There is also Sufi vocabulary in *Akbarnāma* which points out Abu’l-Fazl’s intentions to give an unworldly and hagiographic outlook to the reign of Akbar.⁵⁵⁷ Therefore, reading *Akbarnāma* as the “Hagiography of Akbar” is another way to appreciate and understand it.⁵⁵⁸

Everything related to Akbar is considered to be auspicious. This is not very surprising since it is part of the imperial discourse. Yet, there are some instances included in Akbarnama that sound quite interesting, such as the events that happened before and during the “auspicious birth” and the *karamat* (miracles) Akbar performed during his reign. Both of them are counted as parts of a typical hagiography and signify the divine nature of the person and indicate his closeness to God.⁵⁵⁹ Akbar is a superior being and he is somewhere between this world and the spiritual world which makes him closer to God. He is the recipient of the hidden light and only superior men could see the “inexpressible radiance emanating from his forehead.”⁵⁶⁰ Abu’l Fazl portrays Akbar as someone in possession of ‘*ilm laduni*, ‘knowledge directly from God.’⁵⁶¹

Even the illiteracy of the emperor is depicted as an “auspicious” sign because the prophets were all illiterate. Akbar’s saintly outlook within *Akbarnāma* is also provided with the patronage and protection he provided. Because saints were close to God, they provided protection and were known to be a “*velinimet*” (blessing) upon the community.⁵⁶² This could be obtained through the attitude and policies of the person. When Akbar’s imperial

⁵⁵⁶ Yürekli, *Writing Down*, 94.

⁵⁵⁷ For an interesting deduction and detailed analysis of some of the words used in that respect within the book see Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, xiv-xvi.

⁵⁵⁸ What Abu’l-Fazl was trying to do in Akbarnama is not something uncommon for the Islamic culture. In Ottoman chronicles as well, there are some instances that resemble this attitude. For instance, Murad I has a famous story which he displays a “*keramet*.” This is considered another way of legitimizing and giving the ruler a saint-like character. “Shortly before Murād I decided to rest, he had made a curse and wished that God put the castle in ruins. When the news of the castle’s fall reached the sultan, he attributed a special power to the great tree under which he was resting and named it the Great Auspicious Tree or the Auspicious Poplar according to Sa’ādeddīn Efendi (*devletlü kaba ağaç or devletlü kavak*). The realization of Murād’s curse appears to have inspired the name (*Tanrıykadı / Godruined*) given to this castle by the Ottomans. Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 161.

⁵⁵⁹ Blake, *The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic*, 82-83.

⁵⁶⁰ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 45-46.

⁵⁶¹ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 33. “And they found a servant from among Our servants to whom we had given mercy from us and had taught him from Us a knowledge (*ladunna ‘ilmen*).” Quran 18:65.

⁵⁶² For instance, Ottoman ruler Bayezid II (r.1481-1512) was called Bayezid-i Veli by the populous with respect to the removal of his father Mehmed II’s harsh taxing policies and also his pious character along with his known pious character.

discourse and ideas are considered along with the society's perception of him as a "just" ruler, it is not unreasonable to claim that he is a blessing for his people.

Muslims are born into a society in which oneiric visions are considered an integral part of the experience of being and there is a well-formed and legitimized cultural apparatus for decoding them.⁵⁶³ Dreams and visions play a significant role through common symbols within the Islamic culture that come from different veins, such as the Qur'anic tradition (especially the symbol of Prophet Joseph and the centrality of dreams in his account), the theory of Plato and Sufi understandings. All these are used as sources for Abu'l-Fazl's ideology of kingship. Nile Green mentions three different types of dreams. The first happens with bodily sensations like heat, discomfort etc. In Akbarnama, there are many accounts like these such as the famous hunting experience when Akbar decides to change his policy. Then there are the dreams which give glimpses of future incidents and the third one, also considered to be the most blessed, happens to form the veridical dream that is a special class of personalized divine message.⁵⁶⁴

Interestingly enough, Ibn-i Sina (d.1037), an important figure in Suhrawardi's theosophy and Abu'l-Fazl's sources, defines the prophetic dream as an act of providence (*'inayah*) from the divine which is distributed to all humans in different degrees and not as something specific to prophets, which fits the discourse in Akbarnama perfectly.⁵⁶⁵ Also, another important source of Abu'l-Fazl, al-Ghazali, used dream accounts in order to explain his arguments and even though he was a harsh critic of Islamic philosophers who had been greatly affected by ancient-Greek sources, in his "rational proof of prophecy" Greek-inspired oneirology played a crucial role.⁵⁶⁶ Dreams and visions are part of human experience both in a state of sleep and wakefulness. Another point to make is that all pious Muslims dream, since dreams are perceived as palpable experiences that depicts the God's favor on that individual.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶³ A. Azfar Moin, "Prophetic Visions: Shi'i Critique in al-Mas'udi's History of the Abbasids," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 127:14 (Oct.-Dec., 2007), 421. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs*, 315.

⁵⁶⁴ Nile Green, "The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13,3 (2003): 291. Also Ibn Khaldun mentions different kinds of dreams in his Muqaddima. See. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 74-78.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁵⁶⁶ Moin, *Prophetic Visions*, 420.

⁵⁶⁷ Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs*, 315. Also, for a study of personal dream accounts of an Ottoman ruler see. Özgen Felek, "(Re)creating Image and Identity: Dreams and Visions as a Means of Murad III's Self-Fashioning" in *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies* ed. Özgen Felek and Alexander Knysh (SUNY Press, 2012), 249-272.

Dream accounts are useful to construct a narrative. The features and details of visions are often designed for specific purposes in the hagiographic accounts, histories or autobiographies and take a literary shape. Some signs become culturally more privileged than others. This gives the reader or the audience the opportunity to derive some important social, political and religious indications, which are their main purposes. The structure of a dream is designed to function as an indicator. They somehow reveal the discourse on a certain idea or agenda in the mind of the author once taken into account within its historical context. That is why, the dream accounts in Akbarnama cannot be neglected.

3.2.1. Prenatal Visions and The Nativity

Dreams are taken seriously by the Mughals, as they are in the rest of the Islamic world. In Babur's time, dreams served as emotive metaphors and powerful propaganda tools. Dreams implied a prophetic connection with the invisible world and were considered a highly regarded source of truth. The ability to see clear, unambiguous dreams indicated a refined intellect and a pure soul. Babur even had a nobleman called Khwabbin (Dream Seer).⁵⁶⁸ The Islamic conception of dreams is based on Plato's theory of the intellect. It was only when the physical senses were at rest during sleep and could not interfere with the perceptive power of the intellect that it could perceive the noblest truths of the world of being. Supported by high philosophy, dreaming was also grounded in social discourse.⁵⁶⁹ Abu'l-Fazl's description of Akbar's birth is associated with supernatural occurrences and evokes the birth of a prophet or deity.⁵⁷⁰ Only the ones capable of real perception might have the ability to see Akbar in visions.

a. Khan Ataka's Vision (Ru'ya)

Muhammad Khan Ataga (Akbar's foster-father), as can be understood from the "ataka" coming from Turkish "ata" i.e. father, became a minister (wakil) but was later assassinated.⁵⁷¹ He had had a dream. "He dreamed that the moon (mah) entered his

⁵⁶⁸ They are used for determining a course of action. For instance, when Jahangir dreamed that his father asked him to pardon Mirza 'Aziz Koka, who was imprisoned in Gwalior, he immediately released Koka. Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 140.

⁵⁶⁹ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 73. Also see A. Azfar Moin, "Partisan Dreams and Prophetic Visions: Shi'i Critique in al-Mas'udi's History of the Abbasids," *Journal of the Oriental American Society* 127:4 (2007).

⁵⁷⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, ix.

⁵⁷¹ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. I*, 43.

embrace, and he related this vision to his father, Mir Yar Muhammad Ghaznavi, who was a dervish-like elder. The father was gladdened by the vision and interpreted it by saying, ‘God, the Almighty will grant you a great fortune (*dawlat-e azim*) that will result in the elevation of your family.’ And thus happened that through the blessings of the light of this mighty full moon (*badr-e asman*), i.e. Akbar, the family rose from the dust to the apogee of the heavens.’⁵⁷² Salamah, the mother of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (254-775), while still pregnant dreamt of a lion emerging from her side. Crouching, and then roaring with its tail beating ominously on the ground, it was surrounded by other lions who bowed their heads before it in reverence.⁵⁷³

b. Maryam-Makani’s Luminescence (Rushani)

During her pregnancy with “his imperial majesty’s holy essence (*‘unsur-e muqaddas*), a strange light (*rushani-ya ġarib*) shone from her forehead. Many times the quasi-divine apparition (*mandhara-e Rabbani*) appeared to observers like a mirror” since it was a custom among the women in harem to wear mirrored sequins on their foreheads.⁵⁷⁴ One day when her brother Khawaja Mu’azzam brought mangoes that she had asked for, the reflections caught his eye and he asked if she had put a mirror on her forehead. She replied that she hadn’t and did not quite understand what he was referring to. “When he looked closely he saw that it was her bright forehead (*payshan-e nurani*) shining with divine light (*nur-e izdi*).” Astonished by what he experienced, he told this to his close friends at the court mentioning that “rays of the divine light” (*sha’sha-e envar-e ilahi*) so streamed from her shining brows (*cebhe-i anwar*) that he was not able to gaze upon her directly.⁵⁷⁵

There is a literary tradition called *Siyar-i Nabi*, which is the biography of the prophet, first written in 1388 in Anatolian Turkish by al-Darir and prepared for the Mamluk Sultan. It was also reproduced in the Ottoman Empire during the 16th century as a result of increasing Sunni consciousness. In this text, the author al-Darir mentions the transference

⁵⁷² Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 47-49.

⁵⁷³ Green, *The Religious and Cultural*, 291. Also Ibn Khaldun mentions different kinds of dreams in his *Muqaddima*. See. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 302.

⁵⁷⁴ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 48-49. Translation differs a little in Beveridge. “The Khwāja brought some, and was giving them into her blessed hand when he saw a light upon her glorious brows like that from a mirror. He said, “Have you put a mirror on your forehead?” She replied, “I have not attached any mirror. What are you referring to?” Then the Khwāja looked narrowly and saw that her Highness' shining fore-head was lighted by the light of God.” Abu’l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. I*, 44.

⁵⁷⁵ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 48-49.

of the prophet's primordial *nur* (light) from his father 'Abdallah to his mother Amina until she became radiant while pregnant with Muhammad. Al-Darir defines the Prophet's luminosity as the "light of prophethood" (*peygamberlik nuru*) in a separate section on this subject.⁵⁷⁶ This indicates that the light which is identified with the holy personality, the Muslim prophet, manifested itself while in existence within his mother's body, just like the situation with Akbar.

c. Bicha Jan Anaka's Vision (Ru'ya)

She is the wet-nurse of Akbar and Abu'l-Fazl tells her experience from her voice:

"One morning before I had this great fortune, suddenly a great light came to me and settled on my lap. I thought the sun itself had fallen into my lap. I felt strange and experienced such great astonishment that all the limbs of my body trembled in ecstasy and joy. An aftertaste of that pleasure still pervades me. From that moment on, I was in expectation of the dawn of magnificence and might, the flower of the bud of fortune and felicity. I wondered what the result of that amazing condition would be, until I was honored with this exalted service and prostrated myself in thanks and gratitude. Praise God! What fortune was it that fell into my lap? What felicity had I embraced? Although outwardly I was engaged in raising that child, in reality fortune had come to me and was nurturing me and my tribe. Every time I took his majesty on my shoulders, fortune raised me from the dust, and through the blessings of that service, to which I was destined, good fortune and great happiness placed me under obligation and made me and my tribe known throughout the seven climes."⁵⁷⁷

d. Humayun's Vision

"Suddenly he saw on the stage of dream, which is the private quarters of the unseen realm, that God would grant him a renowned offspring, from whose felicitous forehead would shine rays of magnificence, by whose guidance dark minds would be enlightened, and by the splendor of whose justice the pages of the night and day would be brightened."⁵⁷⁸

In the history of Timur, written by Ibn Arab Shah, Timur himself gives a dream account of his grandmother that envisions his birth: "My grandmother, who was skilled in augury and divination, saw in sleep a vision, which she expounded as foreshadowing to her that one among her sons and grandsons would conquer territories and bring men into

⁵⁷⁶ Christiane Gruber, "Between Logos (Kalima) and Light (Nur): Representations of the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Painting," *Muqarnas* XXVI (2009), 251.

⁵⁷⁷ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 50-51.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

subjection and be the Lord of the Stars and master of the Kings of the age. And I am that man and now the fit time is at hand and has come near.”⁵⁷⁹

In preparation for this holy birth, Humayun is depicted as bequeathing a rich legacy of omens and sacred premonitions to his heir. It was Humayun who first recognized that his son’s astrological status was greater than that of Timur Lord of Conjunction. It was invented to create a hagiographical picture of the saint king’s birth.⁵⁸⁰

3.2.2. The Miracles

Another element that makes the book a ‘hagiography-like’ account are the occasions when Akbar performs supernatural acts. There are different ways to read these events in order to see possible sub-texts, attributions and references. Since Mughals claim a Muslim identity, they take examples among Islamic rulers, especially from those who were also depicted as prophets.⁵⁸¹ In the Qur’an, there are prophets who were successful rulers and famous for their power and justice. For instance, prophet Yusuf (Joseph), Davud (David) and most famously, Süleyman (Solomon).⁵⁸² They were all rulers who were known to have been given rulership as a gift from God. Thus, like every Islamic ruler, Akbar wanted to be compared to those prophets who would create the ultimate ground for invoking his sacred nature. It is done through references in Akbarnama.⁵⁸³ Akbar’s identification with the prophets in Akbarnama is often related to some supernatural things he experienced.

For instance, the illiteracy of Akbar which was well-known is regarded as a sign of divinity because many of the prophets were also unlettered.⁵⁸⁴ According to Abu’l-Fazl, Akbar died on the 15th of October 1605. This is one day after attaining the age of sixty-three. It is the age Prophet Muhammad passed away and this is considered to be an important distinction for Akbar. However, this reference is interesting due to Akbarnama’s tendency not to mention the Islamic prophet.

⁵⁷⁹ Ahmad Ibn Arab Shah, *Tamerlane or Timur the Great Amir*, trans. J. H. Sanders (London: The Burleigh Press), 4-5.

⁵⁸⁰ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 137.

⁵⁸¹ For a very nice outlook of the meanings attributed to Islamic characters for the legitimization of the symbolization of kings see. Loise Marlow, “Kings, Prophets and the Ulama in Medieval Islamic Advice Literature,” *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995).

⁵⁸² Those prophets are present in the Old Testament. Although their stories are not exactly the same, they are all described as rulers.

⁵⁸³ Koch, *Mughal Art*, 32.

⁵⁸⁴ Taymiya R. Zaman, “Instructive Memory: An Analysis of Auto/Biographical Writing in Early Mughal India,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54 (2011), 682-683.

The most striking *keramets* of Akbar are the ones related with two significant Abrahamic prophets i.e. Jesus and Moses. Considering their symbolic importance for Christianity and Judaism as well as Islam, it is not illogical to assume that the miracles they performed could be known to the general public. They are also divine personalities respected by three religions. All these may provide some sub-textual deduction for Akbar's sacred nature. What's more, Abu'l Fazl perceived Akbar as the most elevated of human beings and most likely believed that he had supernatural powers.⁵⁸⁵ "It has been inscribed on the pages of eternal divine knowledge that (*sahifa-i alam-e izdi lavh-e mahfuz-e azal wa abad*) when a material and spiritual crown of superiority is placed on an individual's head, even from the time of his birth rays of his miracles will shine from within the folds of his actions, each of which is a harbinger from the other world loudly announcing his exalted position."⁵⁸⁶ Even though there are countless miracles performed by Akbar in Akbarnama, these three events will be noted here.

a. Akbar speaks in his cradle like Jesus

"When seven months had past since His Imperial Majesty's felicitous birth and he had begun his eighth month, a miraculous thing happened. One evening, when Jiji Anaka was giving milk to the babe, she was vexed and distressed by opposition from Mahim Anaka and others, who had said to the emperor, 'Mir Ghaznavi's wife is working sorcery so that His Highness the prince will take milk only from her.' At this point, with no one else present, His Imperial Majesty, realizing that they were alone, began to speak (*mutakallam*) and soothe Jiji Anaka's troubled mind, saying, 'Be glad, for the luminary of the heaven of the Caliphate (*nayyir-e asman khilafat*)⁵⁸⁷ will be next to you and shed the light of joy (*nur-e shadmani khahed bakhshid*) on the night of distress. Do not reveal this secret of ours (*esrar-e kudret-e ilahi*), for great otherworldly interests (*hekmatha-e ġaybi*) are involved."⁵⁸⁸

Along with other events that correlate the ruler with a prophet, specifically choosing a miracle that was believed to be performed by Jesus in Islamic tradition, could also count as evidence towards the messianic claims for Akbar. It was also a miracle that belongs to a prophet well respected by Abrahamic religions.

b. Serpent and Akbar's Hand as in the story of Moses

"One day he left Delhi to hunt in Palam. There appeared in his path a huge, terrifying snake that would cause the boldest men to quail. His Imperial Majesty

⁵⁸⁵ Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 141.

⁵⁸⁶ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 567.

⁵⁸⁷ I think the term "mandate of heaven" might be translated as "*asman khilafat*"

⁵⁸⁸ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 567-568.

performed Moses' miracle (*'icaz-e musevi*) and, without even pausing to think, reached out to the snake (*mar*), grabbed it by the tail with his blessed hand (*be-dast-e akdes*), and threw it down. Mirza Aziz Kükaltash's brother Yusuf Muhammad Khan witnessed it with his own eyes."⁵⁸⁹

"One day he had gone forth from Dihlī to hunt in the district of Pālam, and there an enormous and terrific serpent, such as might move the heart of the daring, appeared on the line of road. On this occasion his Majesty exhibited the miracle of Moses, and without the hesitation which comes even to generous hearts, put forth his white hand and approaching the serpent, courageously and in the strength of a sacred intimation, seized its tail with his holy hand and quelled it. Yūsuf Muḥammad Khān, brother of Mīrzā 'Azīz Kōkaltāsh beheld this token of power."⁵⁹⁰

"And what is that in your right hand, O Moses? He said, "It is my staff; I lean upon it, and I bring down leaves for my sheep and I have therein other uses. [Allah] said, "Throw it down, O Moses." So he threw it down, and thereupon it was a snake, moving swiftly. [Allah] said, "Seize it and fear not; We will return it to its former condition. And draw in your hand to your side; it will come out white without disease - another sign, that We may show you [some] of Our greater signs."⁵⁹¹

Beveridge provides a footnote to "white hand" and explains: "An allusion to the Muhammadan story of the white hand of Moses. The miracle of Moses referred to above seems to be the conversion of Moses' rod into a serpent." This is interesting because the white hand of Moses is known as "*yed-i beyza*" in Arabic and since it is a "term", it is not necessary to translate it into Persian. Even if it was, the possible translation would be *dast-e safed*. Thackston read it as *dast-e akdes* and translated accordingly as "blessed hand" whereas Beveridge directly translated it as white hand. Here, the account of Jiji Anaka declares that it is the miracle of Moses but which miracle –since both the hand and the staff turning into serpent are miracles- is not determined.

It is also worth noting that Abu'l-Fazl presented these two accounts in the same chapter, even though the latter one happened many years later. It is given in a way that depicts Akbar's similarity with two significant Abrahamic prophets. The continuum is acquired through the narrative. When the first miracle happened, since Akbar made Jiji Anaka promise not to tell anyone about it, she didn't, until the day Yusuf Muhammad Khan told her what he witnessed. Then she explains: "Now that I have heard the story of the snake

⁵⁸⁹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 568-569.

⁵⁹⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. I*, 385.

⁵⁹¹ Qur'an, 20:17-23. Also Exodus 4:2-4.

from you, my son, I have revealed the secret, which was a sign during childhood while yours is a sign in the adulthood.”⁵⁹²

c. Akbar stops an excessive rain like Jesus saved people from an excessive storm

“One of the occurrences was the cessation of clouds and rain. The account of this marvel is that for some days there was constant and unseasonable rain. The campmen and the generality of the subjects were distressed and complained. The wonder worker emitted his glorious breathings on a mirror and then put it into a fire. From the wondrous effect of the breath of him whom the spheres obey the celestial turbulence ceased.”⁵⁹³

3.3. Light Symbolism

And he to whom Allah has not granted light - for him there is no light.⁵⁹⁴

It is in Akbar’s reign that a new theory of sacred kingship is acquired and is based on the idea which Abu’l-Fazl commences the book with: “Royalty is a light emanating from God” which is “communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of any one” and “no dignity is higher in the eyes of God than royalty.” His understanding of a king is to be the spiritual guide of his peoples because as “the light emanating from God” he is also “the ray of Divine wisdom.”⁵⁹⁵ As part of this, in his kingship theory Akbar combined various religious figures, patterns and motifs related with the concept of light which would make it apprehensible for the entire audience in order to depict his universal rule, or his God-given sovereignty and right to ascend the Mughal throne.

The main concern for the dynasty is to prove its legitimacy. The alluring part is Akbar’s policy of adapting different religious symbols from different religions.⁵⁹⁶ Notions

⁵⁹² Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 570-571.

⁵⁹³ Abu’l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Vol. III*, 341-342.

⁵⁹⁴ Qur’an, 24:40.

⁵⁹⁵ Qureshi, *Akbar: The Architect*, 173 - 174.

⁵⁹⁶ Even before Akbar, his father Humayun had some tendencies to represent himself with symbols that are related to light. He used astrology and the occult sciences and designed his royal court as a place for performances of imperial sacredness. He had tents and pavilions constructed to imitate the structure of the heavens. He used to cast a veil over his crown (taj), and when he removed it the people say: ‘manifestation [of the Divine Light]’ and so he imposed upon the populace the requirement to prostrate before him with their foreheads touching the ground. Like the Sun, his character reflects "beauty," "light," and "purity." According to the thirteenth-century author of the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, writing of the first Sultans of Delhi, the court was like heaven, with the Sultan as the Sun, and, of course, this notion goes back to Sasanian times. Since Humayun also associated himself with Indian and Iranian practices of sun-rulership and with the old Iranian concept of the divine effulgence of the king, he most probably thought of the legendary carpets and throne of the Sasanian Khushraws when he designed a large cosmological carpet of concentric rings on which his court had to sit according to origin and rank, with the emperor ‘like the Sun’ in the center. He believed that just as the sun was the center of the material world, similarly the King, whose destiny was closely associated with that great luminary, was the center of the human world. He constituted the servants of the state in 12 orders, of which he himself was the center. A tent with 12 divisions corresponding to the signs of the zodiac was constructed to symbolize the lattices through

associated with light and auspicious sight are the most significant examples of symbolism and iconography of royalty for the Mughals. This is provided through symbols and understanding of their devotion to the Chishtiyya, the eagerness to create a syncretic ground by choosing concepts from Hindu, Jain and Zoroastrian ways of worship which are related to auspicious sight and fire veneration. Another important thing is the intimate relation of scholars in the court, especially Abu'l-Fazl himself, with the concepts of philosophy illumination (Ishraqi philosophy) theorized by Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi. Throughout Akbar's reign and in his works, in order to create the sacred outlook of Akbar, Abu'l-Fazl benefits from these ideologies and combines their elements to give them new meanings. In doing so, he transformed the religious experience into material form for royal ceremonial.⁵⁹⁷

In this way he appeals to the entire populous coexisting under Akbar's rule. Religion is also the most effective and powerful tool for attracting attention. Moreover, in doing so, Akbar's desire to portray himself as the "universal emperor" above all religious limitations is clearly seen. Akbar's royal persona is associated with the symbolic usage of "the light" along with the stylized representations of charismatic/sacred light.⁵⁹⁸ In this part, the concept of light (*nūr*) in Akbarnama and Akbar's reign will be investigated as a symbol of religiosity and ceremonial. For the Mughal Empire, elements associated with light and auspicious sight are always used to depict their royalty in iconography.

That's why, specifically for Akbarnama, the places where light is mentioned can be read from different veins. First, there is the Islamic line, which is related to the understanding of *nur-e Muhammadi*. In relation to Islam, the second one is derived from the 35th verse of the 24th *surah* of Qur'an called *an-Noor* (the light). From there, Persian philosopher and Sufi Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi later put forth a theory called illumination. This theory, along with other concepts from Sufi thought, were used a lot by the Chishtiyya order which had close affiliations with Akbar. The third one is the Hindu

which the light of Empire shone. Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 143; Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 109-110.; Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 313; Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 446: "Light has shined forth!" Skelton, "Imperial Symbolism in Mughal Painting," in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World, Papers from a Colloquium in Memory of Richard Ettinghausen, 2nd-4th April 1980*, ed. Priscilla P. Soucek (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 180. Koch, *The Intellectual and Artistic*, 21; Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 123.

⁵⁹⁷ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 161.

⁵⁹⁸ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 166.

and Jain notion of *darshan*, auspicious sight.⁵⁹⁹ The fourth is the Zoroastrian link. The religious association is provided through fire worship and an ancient Persian concept that depicts the divine rights of kings called *khwarenah*. This will be used later as *farr-i izadi*. The fifth one is the Christian connection provided through the lineage with someone called Alanqoa, who is believed to have been impregnated by a light. Therefore, under this title, different notions that all have light in common called *nur-e Muhammadi*, *jharoha-i darshan*, the Mongol princess Alanqoa, theory of illumination and *khwarenah* or *farr-i izadi* will be examined.

3.3.1 *Jharoha-i Darshan*

Darshan literally means sight, seeing, beholding. It is a basic encounter between Hindu spiritual teachers and their disciples⁶⁰⁰ and part of Hindu religious practices of viewing the images of the gods. It can be described as ‘the visual perception of the sacred.’ One sees the deity while being seen by the deity, which is a central idea for Hindu worship. It is derived from the understanding that beholding a deity's image bestows an auspicious blessing on the beholder. At some point, this act became a feature of Hindu kingship and extended to the monarch. Therefore, the act of offering *darshan* indicates imperial claims of sacral kingship. This is an intentional display to provide a “ceremonial” for political discourse of sacredness.⁶⁰¹ The act of *darshan* provided the emperor an active and public dispensation of justice. It became part of the ideal of legitimate kingship to such a level that his absence from the window of *darshan* for more than a day or two was perceived as a reason for public unrest.⁶⁰²

It is a daily ritual in which Akbar appears before the gaze of the people after sunrise. For the Hindu population, the “divinely illumined kingship” plays a central role thanks to the significance of the rising sun in Hindu belief. Moreover, some of the semi-divine Hindu kings are perceived as incarnations of the sun.⁶⁰³ In that respect, this act creates the idea of a “sun king” and displays a Hindu practice in order to satisfy the Hindu population and contribute to the Turko-Mongol understanding of kingship. In *‘A’in-i Akbari*, Abu’l-Fazl

⁵⁹⁹ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 161.

⁶⁰⁰ Streusand, *The Formation*, 124.

⁶⁰¹ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 177; Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 142.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶⁰³ Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 314.

states that Akbar appears at *darshan* window after his morning prayers.⁶⁰⁴ He was enacting the role of an enlightened father to his children or a spiritual master to his students. From the window he is gazed upon as a deity and saint figure combined into one. He was seen as a *pir-i zinda*, a living saint, touched by God's light.⁶⁰⁵ Thus in a way it also had a Sufi connotation.

This ceremony takes place at *jharoka-i darshan* (public viewing window). It is opened from an exterior wall in the palace to a public spot which anyone could enter. The earliest surviving *jharoka-i darshan* is at Fatehpur Sikri. At Fatehpur Sikri the *jharoka* is aligned with Akbar's sleeping chamber and his private audience hall.⁶⁰⁶ Due to the influence of Zoroastrian priests, a constant fire was kept burning in the palace as one of the signs of God and one light from His Lights. This fire kept burning as the emperor sat in the *jharoka darshan*. As another part of this ritual, someone counts one thousand and more names of the Sun in Sanskrit. Obviously, Akbar had a particular regard for the Sun and fire.

This ritual created its own disciples, a sect of emperor-worshippers known as 'darshaniyya'. They offered prayers for the emperor's health and safety and also prostrated themselves before him in order to receive his blessings.⁶⁰⁷ Many would fast until they had gazed upon the emperor's face⁶⁰⁸ which makes them witness the appearance of the sky-adorning sun.⁶⁰⁹ To them the emperor is not only a charismatic figure, but an incarnate God.⁶¹⁰ *Darshan* is also mentioned in the chronicles and accounts of foreign travelers. Even though *A'in-i Akbari* mentions the details of this practice and ceremony, it is not known how or when this practice came into existence.⁶¹¹ The detailed information about *darshan* ceremony comes from Bada'uni:

“His Majesty gave his religious system the name of Tauhid i Ilahi, or ‘Divine Monotheism.’ He also called, according to the manner of the Jogis, a number of special disciples Chelahs (slaves). A lot of vile, swindling, wicked birds, who were not admitted to the palace, stood every morning opposite to the window, near which His Majesty used to pray to the sun, and declared, they had made vows

⁶⁰⁴ Catherine B. Asher, "Sub-Imperial Palaces: Power and Authority in Mughal India," *Ars Orientalis*, 23 (1993), 290. The Jesuit Father in Akbar's court Fr. Rudolf mentions this in one of his letters to the provincial father in Goa. "The King appeared in a balcony from where he can be seen by everyone in the vast courtyard below." Correia-Afonso, ed., *Letters from the Mughal*, 35.

⁶⁰⁵ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 178.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 176-177 and 172.

⁶⁰⁷ Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 314.

⁶⁰⁸ Asher, *Sub-Imperial Palaces*, 282.

⁶⁰⁹ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 144.

⁶¹⁰ Rizvi, *A Wonder That*, 169.

⁶¹¹ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 177.

not to rinse their mouths, nor to eat and drink, before they had seen the blessed countenance of the emperor; and every evening, there was a regular court assembly of needy Hindus and Muhammadans, all sorts of people, men and women, healthy and sick, a queer gathering, and a most terrible crowd. No sooner had His Majesty finished saying the 1001 names of the 'Greater Luminary', and stepped out into the balcony, than the whole crowd prostrated themselves. Cheating, thieving Brahmins collected another set of 1001 names of 'His Majesty the Sun,' and told the emperor that he was an incarnation, like Ram, Kishn, and other infidel kings; and though Lord of the world, he had assumed his shape, in order to play with the people of our planet. In order to flatter him, they also brought Sanscrit verses, said to have been taken from the sayings of ancient sages, in which it was predicted that a great conqueror would rise up in India, who would honor Brahmins and cows, and govern the earth with justice. They also wrote this nonsense on old looking paper, and showed it to the emperor, who believed every word of it."⁶¹²

It is worth noting that the *jharoka* was a hallmark of the Mughal court ceremonial. It is a ceremony that distinguished Mughals from other Islamic states and may have given the court an Indian character.⁶¹³ In the Ottoman case, the ruler's gaze is something "architecturally framed by grilled windows, view-commanding private kiosks, and belvedere towers, signifying his power to see without being seen or to be seen only as a shadowy silhouette."⁶¹⁴ This depicts the distance between the ruler and the ruled even though it aims to serve the notion of sacredness as in the Mughal case. Akbar's appearance in *jharoka* at sunrise indicates his relationship with the sky. It is the simultaneous appearance of the sky-adorning sun and the world-conquering Emperor which is an opportunity to get the blessings of both luminaries.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹² Badā'ūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-tawārīkh*, 327.

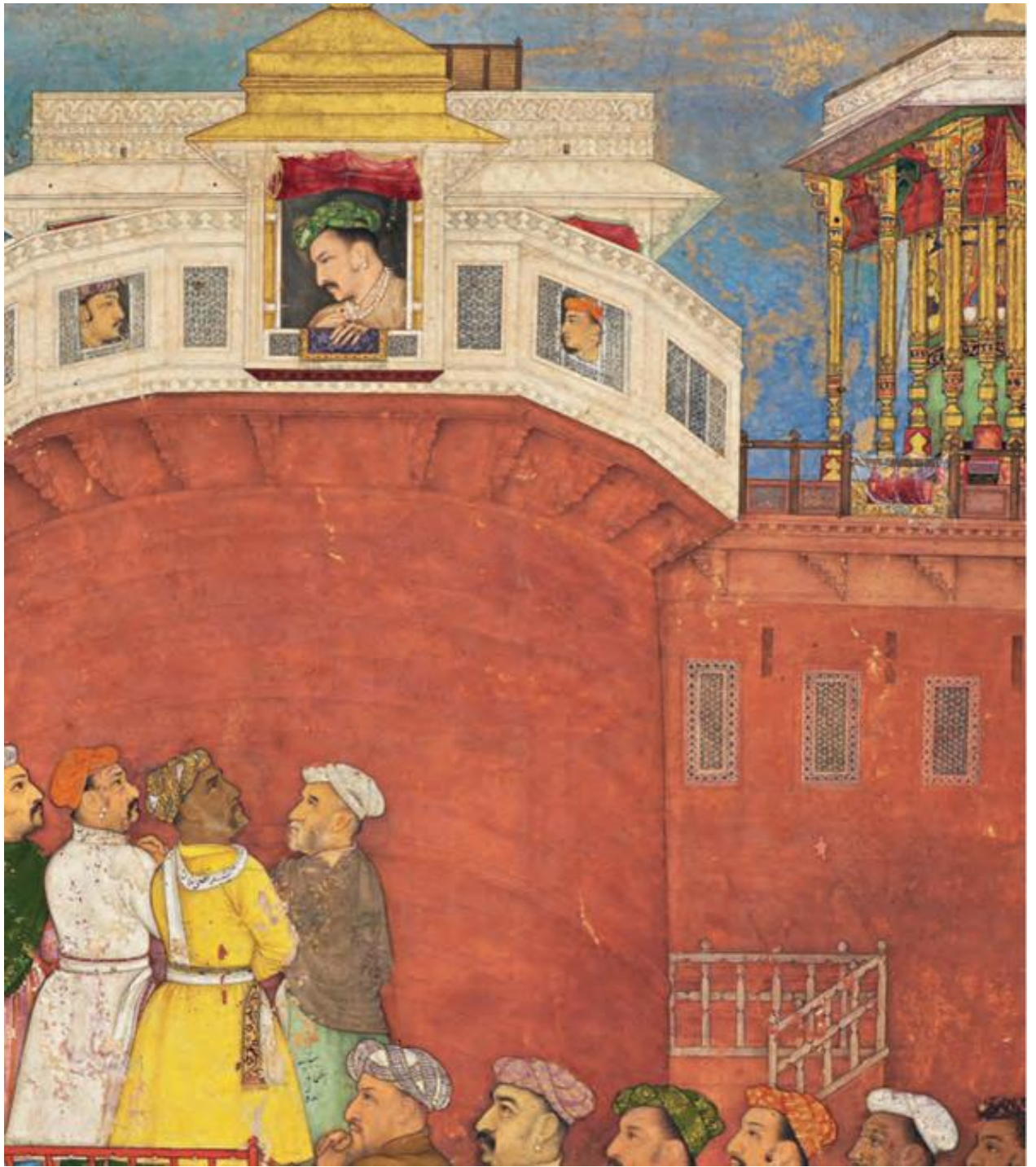
⁶¹³ Asher, *Sub-Imperial Palaces*, 286.

⁶¹⁴ Necipoğlu, *Framing the Gaze*, 305.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 314.



Figure XIII: Jahangir at a jharokha window in Agra Fort, c.1620.



Detail.

3.3.2. Alanqoa

Even though, the name is touched upon above, it is also necessary to mention Alanqoa under this title since she is a huge part of the light rhetoric of Abu'l-Fazl. From the beginning of her account, Abu'l-Fazl focuses on the “veil” (*parda*). It symbolizes God’s hiding of “the marvels of his power from the eyes of the mortals”⁶¹⁶ Only when He finds it necessary, he lifts that veil. One of times that he lifts that veil slightly and creates amazement is the marvelous story of Alanqoa.⁶¹⁷ Abu'l-Fazl concludes Alanqoa’s account by mentioning the veil yet again, “It would take someone as able as Plato to comprehend the abstract notion that the lord of the age (*khidiw az-zaman*) remains hidden behind a veil (*parda-ara’i*) while mortals (*zamāniyān*) rend the veil (*parda-dar*) with outer sorrow and inner anguish.”⁶¹⁸

Then he begins telling the story of Alanqoa. Here, the language is full of words which are related to light and gaze, such as the lights of piety (*anwar Khudā shināsī*) shone from her countenance”⁶¹⁹ “She dwelt in the seclusion of chastity (*perdenishin*)⁶²⁰ a manifestation of holy emanations (*mazhar-e tacliyat-e kudsī*) and a focus of heavenly effulgence (*fayudhat-e kuddusi*).”⁶²¹ “One night while she, who had been nourished by divine light (*nurperverd-e ilahī*), was resting in her bed, when suddenly a magnificent light (*nur-e shagarf*) shed its rays (*parto andakhti*) into her tent. The light (*nur*) entered her mouth and she became pregnant by the light (*nur*), just like Mary, the daughter of Amran”⁶²² “From Adam until her (*nurparvand*)⁶²³, holy human souls had been nurtured stage by stage through all contradictory degrees.... to be made ready to receive the emanation of holy light (*faydhan-e nur-e mukaddas*), and before this holy light descended

⁶¹⁶ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 214-215.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 215-217.

⁶²⁰ Here, even though it might not be a direct attribution or relation, I find it necessary to mention that in Surah al-Maryam which Alanqoa’s account has many similarities with, there is also the word “hejab” which is the Arabic word for *parda*. attesting her choice of seclusion from people around her: “And she took, in seclusion from them, a veil.” 19:17. The veil or curtain is Hejab and means that choosing seclusion, she put a veil between her and other people. Once it is considered with the sacred personality and chastity ascribed to Maryam and Abu'l-Fazl’s desire to connect her story with Alanqoa’s, this might provide another clue about his rhetoric.

⁶²¹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 215-217.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 216-217.

⁶²³ Thackston did not translate it and Beveridge says its “child of light”

from heaven (*nur-e akdes az asman taqaddus-e nuzul iqbak nemayad*).⁶²⁴ “The chaste lady’s abode was always bright with the splendor of that light (*be-furuğ an nur-e rüşan meshod*), and from time to time it illuminated upon her externally and internally (*zaher wa baten e an kudsi najad*).”⁶²⁵ “Darkness is always coupled with light (*zulmat ba nur*), ill omens with good portents, and reversals with progress.”⁶²⁶ “... the darkness in their hearts (*sawda-i dil*) may be illuminated by the light of divine sendings and the sight of otherworldly lights.”⁶²⁷

When the moment of Alanqoa’s conception happened, “it was the beginning of the appearance (*zuhur*) of His Imperial Majesty (*hazret shahenshahi*).”⁶²⁸ When she gives birth to three babies, they would be known as “*nairun*” i.e. light-produced. The divine illumination in the body of Alanqoa is transferred to her sons as the “first manifestation” (*aqhāz zahūr*) of the divine origin of Akbar. From the eldest of the three brothers, who is believed to be in possession of the highest degree of his mother’s illumination, the light passes through each generation and remains hidden in the bodies of Akbar’s ancestors until he is born.⁶²⁹ Due to the similarity of the two stories, Mary is equated with Alanqoa. This can also be observed when Akbar ordered his mother Hamida Banu Begum to be called *Maryam Makhani* (occupying the place of Mary), after her death. As a consequence of this incident, Akbar is equated with Jesus, which again puts Akbar in a prophet-like position. It is claimed by Talbot and Asher that when the Jesuits were on their mission at the Mughal court, seeing Akbar’s interest and hoping he will convert, he was probably considering his own semi-divine image.⁶³⁰ The ceilings of the Mughal imperial palaces included images of angels, Jesus and Mary in order to indicate the Emperors’ descent from the divine light via Alanqoa. This was also like their tendency to do so through the titles of queen mothers.⁶³¹ Aside from his mother, Akbar’s wife Manmati, who is a Rajput from the Amber family is

⁶²⁴ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 216-217.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 218-219. Beveridge: “the holy abode of that cupola of chastity was continually at auspicious times and seasons, made resplendent by the brilliance of that light and from time to time, her moral and material nature bright-ened by its effulgence.”

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 220-221.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 220-221. This term is in reference to a hadith: “When the believer commits a sin, a black spot appears on his heart. If he repents and gives up that sin and seeks forgiveness, his heart will be polished. But if (the sin) increases, (the black spot) increases. That is the Ran that Allah mentions in His Book: “Nay! But on their hearts is the Ran (covering of sins and evil deeds) which they used to earn.” [83:14] (*muqtatun sawda fi kalbihi*)

⁶²⁸ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 218-219.

⁶²⁹ Alam & Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State*, 143-144.

⁶³⁰ Asher & Talbot, *India Before*, 138.

⁶³¹ Necipoğlu, *Word and Image*, 54-55.

called *Maryam-i zamani* i.e. Mary of her time.⁶³² This title was used for Jahangir's mother as well. Abu al-Fazl is probably aware of the messianic implication when he evokes the name of Jesus to make a comparison with the Mongol successors.⁶³³

3.3.3. Surah an-Noor (Surah of Light)

In Akbarnama, Abu'l-Fazl developed a textual rhetoric of light imagery associated with Akbar throughout the book.⁶³⁴ One of the veins that this symbolism provided is derived from the famous 35th verse of Surah an-Noor (the light) in Qur'an. This verse is significant because of many different things. It has a central role in Ishraqi philosophy (philosophy of illumination) of the 12th century Iranian theosopher Shihab al-Din Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191). It is also significant in Ibn 'Arabi's relation of God with Light. Abu'l-Fazl is known to have been deeply influenced by the theory of *ishraq* (illumination). It combines classical Greek and Roman thought with pre-Islamic Zoroastrian concepts as well as Sufi mystical treatises like those of al-Hallaj and al-Ghazzali.⁶³⁵

“Allah is the Light of the heavens (*samavat*) and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp (*misbah*) is within glass (*zūcace*), the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil (*zayt*) would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things.”⁶³⁶

In *Akbarnāma*, Abu'l-Fazl's description of Akbar goes as: “(he) is the fruit of the garden of life and flame of a heavenly oil (*misbah-e zūcace-i asmanist ke ez zayt-e 'inayat-e izdi mustadhi goshta*) and has burned through generation after generation of ancestors and forefathers on the throne of fortune, casting a mantle of justice over the heads of the people of the world.”⁶³⁷ Here, Abu'l-Fazl describes Akbar's features with a parable. The wording,

⁶³² Schimmel, *The Empire of*, 143-144. Abu al-Fazl's use of light to reflect Akbar's status as a semi-divine ruler is also adapted by Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Jahangir not only entitled himself Nur al-Din (Light of the Faith), but also first gave his favorite wife the title Nur Mahal (Light of the Palace) at their wedding and then later bestowed the title Nur Jahan (Light of the World) on his formidable queen. Shah Jahan also adopted titles that evoke an image of light, calling himself Shihab al-Din, "Meteor of the Faith." Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 180.

⁶³³ Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity*, 54.

⁶³⁴ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 178.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁶³⁶ Surah an-Noor, 24:35. <http://quran.com/24/35>

⁶³⁷ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 44-45. Beveridge: “He is the fruit of life's garden and a celestial lantern, fed from the oil of the Divine bounty. He kindles the family lamp of the whole line of ancestors and fixes it firmly on the throne of fortune. He lengthens and broadens the shades of justice and glory over the heads of mortals.”

along with the example itself, quite resembles the Qur'anic verse from the Surah of Light. I don't think that this is a coincidence but rather something Abu'l-Fazl makes a reference to without actually mentioning anything about it.

Playing on this passage as well as one of God's ninety-nine names *al-Nur*, which means the Light, a well-known Sufic poetic imagery defined God as the sun, the full moon or the stars. Amir Khusrau, a fourteenth-century Indian Persian poet who has special veneration for the Chishti saints, composed verses employing similar light imagery.⁶³⁸ Due to Abu al-Fazl's personal interest in *Ishraqi* philosophy, *al-Nur*, one of God's ninety-nine names, is among his favorites for recitation.⁶³⁹

3.3.4. *Farr-i Izadi* and *Ishraqi* Philosophy (Illuminations)

“Royalty is a light emanating from God, and a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the universe, the argument of the book of perfection, the receptacle of all virtues. Modern language calls this light *farr-i izidi* (the divine light - glory), and the tongue of antiquity called it *kiyan khwarah* (the sublime halo, Kayanid Glory). It is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of any one, and men, in the presence of it, bend the forehead of praise towards the ground of submission.”⁶⁴⁰

As it is mentioned above, the term *farr* is part of God-given kingship ideology. However, it is also very much related to the light symbolism and here it will be investigated in that framework. Abu'l-Fazl explains the importance of *farr* in *A'in-e Akbari* with the idea at the very core of his kingship theory quoted above. He is very much influenced by Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi's theory of *ishraq* (illumination), which argues that all existence is a reflection of God's brilliant blinding light. Abu'l-Fazl applied Suhrawardi's notion of an illumined being who is the master of an age.⁶⁴¹ There are two notions that are evoked under this title i.e. *farr-i izadi* and illumination philosophy.

Khvarenah, a notion that defines kingly and divine glory in ancient Iran, takes another shape in the Muslim Persian context with its new rendition *farr*. This occurs firstly with Ferdowsi in *Shahnama* and then in the works of Ghazālī, who gives privilege to the ruler for receiving divine light. Pointing to philosophical expositions of the idea, Ghazālī underlines Aristotle's claim that kings owe their greatness to divine effulgence.⁶⁴² About *Farr-i Izadi* Ghazali writes: “As you will hear in the traditions, ‘the Sultan is God's shadow

⁶³⁸ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 163.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 169.

⁶⁴⁰ Abu'l-Fazl Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. 1*, 3.

⁶⁴¹ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 169.

⁶⁴² Yılmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 223.

on earth,' which means that he is high-ranking and the Lord's delegate over his creatures. It must be recognized that this kingship and the divine effulgence have been granted to them by God, and they must accordingly be obeyed, loved and followed."⁶⁴³ Then this idea gains an even more theosophical meaning and more complicated formulation through Suhrawardi's *ishraqi* philosophy. Suhrawardī refers to the term *khvarnah* together with divine light. He is aware of the ancient understandings of divine light and perceives those notions as earlier depictions of his illuminationist philosophy.

“The procedure of the master of philosophy, the divine Plato was the same, and the sages who preceded Plato in time, like Hermes, the father of philosophy, followed the same path. Since sages of the past, because of the ignorance of the masses expressed their sayings in secret symbols (*rumuz*), the refutations offered against them have concerned the exterior of these sayings and not their real intentions. And the *ishraqi* wisdom, the foundation and the basis of which are the two principles of light and darkness as established by the Persian sages like Jamasp, Farshadshur, and Buzurjmihir, are among these hidden, secret symbols. One must never think that the light and darkness which appear in our expressions are the same as those used by the infidel Magi or the heretical Manicheans, for they finally involve us in idolatry (*shirk*) and dualism.”⁶⁴⁴

Finally, when it reached India and is applied to Akbar's reign by Abu'l-Fazl, it is designed to make the statement that he is the custodian of this mystical glory and charisma which carries the inheritance of all the Persian, Zoroastrian, Sufi and philosophical levels.⁶⁴⁵ Concepts like *farr* (effulgence) and *tāli'* (fortune) began to be used more and more among Muslim dynasties as a means of legitimization after the decentralization of the Abbasid caliphate.⁶⁴⁶ According to Moin, the attraction of the theory of illumination might be related to its comprehensive cosmology and angelology based on ancient Iranian traditions. It gives utmost importance to the sun and its illuminating powers and looks favorably on the transmigration of the soul. This makes Suhrawardi's philosophy sound custom made for millenarianism.⁶⁴⁷ Abu'l-Fazl claims that the institution of kingship, rather than the person, is endowed with *farr-i īzadī*. In that respect, in the 1590s when Akbarian ideology matures and is depicted in the understanding of *tauhid-i ilāhi*, it is also

⁶⁴³ Al-Ghazali, *Counsel For Kings*, 45.

⁶⁴⁴ Hiqmat al-Ishraq, Suhrawardi. quoted in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Shihabu'd-Din Suhrawardi Maqtul,” in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M.M Sharif, I (Wiesbaden, 1963).

⁶⁴⁵ Rizvi, *A Wonder That*, 155.

⁶⁴⁶ Yilmaz, *The Sultan and the Sultanate*, 222.

⁶⁴⁷ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 50.

grounded in the elements of *farr-i izadī*.⁶⁴⁸ In the chapter of *A'in-e Akbari* titled 'The ensigns of royalty' he says: "The Shamsah of the arch of royalty is a divine light which God directly transfers to kings without the assistance of men; and kings are fond of external splendour because they consider it an image of the Divine glory."⁶⁴⁹ In Akbarnama, in his praise of Akbar, Abu'l-Fazl refers to him as *sahib-e farr* (possessor of an exalted aura)⁶⁵⁰ and claims that *zahiresh farr-e jamshidi* (his exterior has the splendor of Jamshid).⁶⁵¹

The concept of *farr* and the theory of illuminations are related and even though they are composed through accumulation of many different ideologies and philosophies, the main formulation and information for Abu'l-Fazl could have possibly come from Suhrawardi. It is also known that the sources Suhrawardi uses to compose his Ishraqi theosophy include Sufi works like Ghazali's *Mishkat al-anwar*, which shows the relationship between light and Imam. There is also Avicenna with the Muslim Peripatetic philosophy. Suhrawardi mainly uses the ancient Persian wisdom since it is their doctrines he wanted to revive. He also believes that Persian sages are the real inheritors of the wisdom that was revealed to the prophet Idris, or Ukhnukh, the Hebrew Enoch, whom many Muslim authors identified as Hermes. He also relied upon Zoroastrianism, especially in the use of the symbolism of light and darkness and in angelology as well.⁶⁵² Among the pre-Islamic sources there are symbols from Late antique, pagan Neoplatonist philosophy. The Mughals used all of them to strengthen the idea that they are august, perfect men (*insan-e kamil*) and recipients of divine light.⁶⁵³

Ishraki thought considers beings and knowledge as irradiations of the Pure Light which rises from the East. Suhrawardi's 'East' is the east of the origin of light and the metaphorical 'East of Thought'. All life and reality in the world is a light given existence by the constant illumination of the Light of Lights (*nūr-al anwār*) i.e. God. He claimed that the ontological status of any being or object depends on the degree of its illumination. Only the ones that are completely permeated with "divine light" could be true masters of the age.

⁶⁴⁸ Subrahmanyam, *From Tagus to the Ganges*, 126.

⁶⁴⁹ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 52. "The Shamsah is a picture of the sun affixed to the gates or walls of the palaces of kings. At night, these pictures are illuminated.

⁶⁵⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 20-21.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁶⁵² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1997), 60.

⁶⁵³ Bang and Kołodziejczyk, *Elephant of India*, 35.

The one who is in possession of this light will have power and wisdom and the ability to rule justly.⁶⁵⁴ Following Suhrawardī's ishraqi theory, Akbar is declared to be more illumined than others which makes him the master of the age. Fusing these ideas with Indian concepts and practices, Akbar appeared at sunrise like a traditional Indian king or a Hindu deity for public viewing (*darshan*) and his subjects prostrated themselves before him. He even went so far as to pray to the sun as his heavenly counterpart so it seems, enraging his Muslim orthodox critics.⁶⁵⁵ Aside from the ideology itself, the terminology includes many words related to the different aspects of light since Akbarnama is written in the language of Suhrawardi's *ishraqi* thought.⁶⁵⁶ Suhrawardi's magnum opus that incorporates his ishraqi doctrine is called Hikmat al-ishraq (the theosophy of the orient of light). The term *ishraq* in Arabic is related both to the east (orient) and the world of light or illumination. Orient here means the world of pure lights or archangels absent of all dark matter. Occident or west means the world of dark matter. The Occident is considered to be the earthly existence, whereas the true orient is above and beyond the visible sky and therefore hidden from mortal eyes. For instance, Suhrawardi has a book titled *Al-Ghurbat al-gharbiyah* (the Occidental exile) which refers to being in the exile of darkness. Suhrawardi derives many of these terms from the "the light verse" and Zoroastrian discourse for their respect of the sun and moon. In Akbarnama, without directly referencing, Abu'l-Fazl uses many terms from Ishraqi thought indicating the light.

According to Suhrawardi, visions and dreams take place in a world mediating between concrete reality and the realm of pure intellectual abstraction. He calls this intermediary world "*'alam al-mithal*" (the world of likeness). He relates this with the foundation of Islam and mentions it via the term *barzakh* (isthmus). This realm of existence plays a significant role in his cosmological model that underpins Suhrawardi's wider mystical epistemology. In this way, dreams and visions are not merely considered as simple messages but rather perceived as "actual events existentially undergone at a different level of our being."⁶⁵⁷ In Akbarnama, this discourse exists in many places. In particular, there is a part in the chapter related to the portents of Akbar's felicitous birth which reads as follows "Therefore, before the actualization of the event, the heralds open a portal into the

⁶⁵⁴ Alam & Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State*, 148-150.

⁶⁵⁵ Koch, *How the Mughal*, 200-201.

⁶⁵⁶ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 170.

⁶⁵⁷ Green, *The Religious and Cultural*, 295.

unseen world (*'alam-e ġayb*) for the understanding of some. Sometimes they appear in the physical world (*'alem-e shuhud*), and sometimes they come in the world of ideals (*'alam-e mithal*), which is a likeness of the world of humanity (*ke timthalist az 'alam-e nasut*).⁶⁵⁸ Just like Abu'l-Fazl and Akbar, Suhrawardi was trying to find some kind of an eclecticism derived from a variety of traditions. He perceived himself as “the reunifier of what he calls *al-hikmat al-laduniyah*, or Divine Wisdom, and *al-hikmat al-'atiqah*, or ancient wisdom. He believed that this wisdom is universal and perennial, the *philosophia perennis* and *universalis*, which existed in various forms among the ancient Hindus, Persians, Babylonians and Egyptians. It also existed among the Greeks up to the time of Aristotle, who terminated this tradition of wisdom by limiting it to its rationalistic aspect.”⁶⁵⁹ Following this discourse, Abu'l-Fazl refers to Akbar as a “source of divine knowledge and revelatory mysteries” (*mavrid-e 'ulum-e ladunni wa rumuz-e ilhami*) in his panegyric.⁶⁶⁰

In the same panegyric, Akbar is also defined as heir apparent of the greater luminary (*wali'ahd-e nayyir-e a'zam*).⁶⁶¹ This discourse and terminology exists in other examples. For instance, in his memoir Jahangir refers to the sun as “His Holiness the Greater Luminary” (*Hazrat Nayyir-i A'zam*) and to the moon as “His Holiness the Lesser Luminary” (*Hazrat Nayyir-i Asghar*), which proves the fact that he perceives them as holy beings, two heavenly bodies worthy of veneration.⁶⁶² This notion also comes from *Ishraqi* philosophy which includes prayers written by Suhrawardi in Arabic to ask the sun for knowledge and salvation. Another significant figure in this respect is Abu Ma'shar (d. 886). Like Suhrawardi, he was a Persian philosopher. He was also a mathematician of the Abbasid period and the most famous astrologer of medieval times. Interestingly, his prayers in Arabic invoking the sun are quoted in the first volume of the *Tarikh-i Alfi* (Millennial

⁶⁵⁸ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 42-43.

⁶⁵⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1997), 61.

⁶⁶⁰ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 20-21.

⁶⁶¹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 18-21. Sharaf al-Din Yazdi, author of the most common Timurid chronicle, *Zafarnama*, which was also reproduced during the reign of Akbar, has an account of Timur's cosmological position as Lord of Conjunction. “Two individuals have come who by the strength of their arms, bravery and courage...have strengthened the religion of Islam...and brought the entire world under their dominion. The first one is *Sikandar Zulqarnayn* [Alexander, the Two Horned One], who is mentioned thus in the holy book. His manifestation (*zuhur*) and campaigns (*khuruj*) occurred in the cycle of the Greater Luminary (*Nayyir-i 'Azam*) [the Sun]. The second is *Hazrat Sahib Qiran*... *Amir Timur Guregan*...His manifestation and campaigns occurred in the time of the Lesser Luminary (*Nayyir-i Asghar*), that is to say the cycle of the Moon.” This Zoroastrian understanding related to the Sun and Moon are applied in Islamicate tradition in various philosophical and occult forms but of course mainly through the Illuminationist (*Ishraqi*) metaphysics of Suhrawardi. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 36.

⁶⁶² In the Jesuit accounts this respect is also mentioned. “The court is much perplexed over the novelties introduced by the King each day, because among other things he seems to pay homage to creatures like the sun and the moon.” Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal*, 114.

History). It is not really surprising that Akbar is declared to be the Renewer of the Second Millennium (*Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thani*) in this work.⁶⁶³

3.3.5. Nur-e Muhammadi

In Akbarnama, the Islamic prophet is not mentioned by name. After praising God, the book then continues with the panegyric of Akbar, thereby distancing itself from the tradition. One would expect to see praise for the prophet and also the rightly-guided caliphs after praising God, as part of Sunni tradition. Moreover, in the book, Islam is referred to as “Muhammadan nation.” When Abu’l Fazl mentions the conversion of Amir Elangar Khan, one of the ancestors of Akbar, he says: He also entered into the glorious Muhammadan nation (*millet-e zehra-i ahmedi deramed*).⁶⁶⁴ However, curiously, there are many instances which resemble prophetic traditions and references denoting the prophet of Islam. One of them is also related to light symbolism, which is the idea of Nur-e Muhammadi. There are two hadiths related to the Prophet’s light. “The first thing God created was my light” (*awwal ma khalaqa Allah nuri*), “I am (made) of Allah’s light and all created beings (are made) of my light” (*ana min nuri Allahi wa’l-khalqu kulluhum min nuri*).⁶⁶⁵ Both understandings of these hadith find their place in Akbarian discourse, especially while tracing back Akbar’s lineage to Adam in *Akbarnāma*.

The relationship of the Prophet to light also finds its way into the Qur’an. There are verses which can be interpreted as God creating the prophet as a source of light. For instance, in the Qur’anic verse: “O People of the Scripture, there has come to you Our Messenger making clear to you much of what you used to conceal of the Scripture and overlooking much. There has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book.”⁶⁶⁶ Here it is stated that God sent a light (*nur*) and a book (*kitab*) to his people to lead them out of darkness. Here, the prophet is identified with light. Also in another verse: O Prophet, indeed We have sent you as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner. And one

⁶⁶³ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 209. Abu Ma ‘shar is also an authority on the ancient cosmology and knowledge of Hermes Trismegistus who Akbarnama considers to be Hermes, also known in the Qur’an as Idris and in the Bible as Enoch. It is indicated in Akbarnama that he guided men to the reverence of the Great Light (the Sun). see the title “Enoch” above.

⁶⁶⁴ Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 254-255. In Beveridge: He embraced the glorious Muhammadan religion.

⁶⁶⁵ Gruber, *Between Logos*, 259. Note 61.

⁶⁶⁶ Qur’an, 5:15

who invites to Allah, by His permission, and an illuminating lamp.⁶⁶⁷ The “illuminating lamp” (*sirajan muniran*) symbolizes the prophet.⁶⁶⁸

According to some Sufi interpretations, the verse of light of in the Qur’an also refers to Prophet Muhammad. The tabernacle/niche is perceived to symbolize the prophet and the torch/lamp contained within it is depicting the light of Muhammad.⁶⁶⁹ For writers as Ibn ‘Arabi, who greatly affected Akbarian ideology, the prophet symbolizes the prime matter of light from which all beings emerge. Thus, he links pre-existence or creation with manifestation. The idea of Muhammadan light comes from God referring to himself as light, which then manifested itself as the light of Muhammad. This is the light from which the entire universe comes into existence before the Prophet’s physical manifestation on earth.⁶⁷⁰ The idea of the Transmigration of the soul from body to body is used in order to explain the reincarnation of the messianic being from one era to another. This concept is often considered to be part of Indic religions and contrary to Islam.⁶⁷¹ However, many early modern Muslims thought that “it was through transmigration that the messianic soul appeared as a reincarnation of a past savior in the present or the future. Not only deviant Sufi groups espoused this idea but metaphysicians and philosophers did so as well.”⁶⁷² In Akbarnama it is indicated that the line of creation continues for the sake of reaching Akbar.

‘Arif in the *Süleymānnāme* fashioned the Ottoman Sultan into the seal of kingship and faith. This is the last point of the discourse which grows throughout the first volume of *Şāhnāme-yi Āl-i ‘Osmān*. The Ottoman Sultan is both the last of the great kings of universal dominion and the last of the saints with Muḥammedan light.⁶⁷³ Just like Abu’l-Fazl’s attempts with Akbar, according to the court history prepared by Arifi, the idea was to fashion ‘saintly’ Sultān Süleymān whose universal rule is already determined at the moment of creation and who uniquely possessed and radiated the Muḥammedan light.⁶⁷⁴ The main difference between Süleyman and Akbar, according to Abu’l-Fazl, is that Akbar carries the light that was bestowed upon Adam by God and also the holy light that

⁶⁶⁷ Qur’an, 33:45-46.

⁶⁶⁸ Gruber, *Between Logos*, 247.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 260, Note 87. Also for further information on the matter see. M. K. Hermansen, “The Prophet Muhammad in Sufi Interpretations of the Light Verse (24:35),” *Islamic Quarterly* 42,2 (1998): 218-227.

⁶⁷⁰ Christiane Gruber, *Between Logos*, 247.

⁶⁷¹ Ahmad Azfar Moin, “Challenging the Mughal Emperor: The Islamic Millennium according to ‘Abd al-Qadir Badayuni,” in *Islam in South Asia in Practice* ed. Barbara Metcalf (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶⁷² Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 10.

⁶⁷³ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 207.

⁶⁷⁴ Eryılmaz, *The Shehnamecis*, 5.

emanated from God and was sent to Alanqoa. Another thing indicating the light comes from the Prophet's illustrations. This artistic tradition expanded during the Ilkhanid (1256-1353), Timurid (1370-1506) and Safavid (1501-1722) periods.⁶⁷⁵ In paintings the metaphor of the golden aura to depict the Prophet's sacred, primordial and creative light i.e. the "light of Muhammad" was used. Golden blazes and halos are used to represent the prophet as a cosmic entity.⁶⁷⁶ In the Mughal miniatures, there is a central medallion known as *shamsa*, a sun motif, behind the emperors' heads. It is considered to be a reminder that Akbar is permeated with God's light.⁶⁷⁷ Lastly, there are two examples given by Gruber within the context of Akbar that are worth mentioning here. In a poem by Sa'di Shirazi, he refers to Prophet Muhammad as God's light in creation:

"You from the first become existence's continuance
All else existent is a branch of you."

"The source of the sun, dependent on him
Is but half the crescent moon on the night of his ascension."⁶⁷⁸

He uses the term *tawasul-i wujud* (existence's continuance) to describe the light of Muhammad and indicate its primordial and productive flux.⁶⁷⁹ In the mathnavi of Nizami called *Makhzan al-Asrar*, the prophet is defined as the source of the Sun. Both are signifying the light, the sun and the moon in order to explain the Muslim prophet's importance to existence. Both Sa'di and Nizami are often quoted by Abu'l-Fazl in *Akbarnama*. Also *Gulistan* and the *Bustan* of Sa'di, the collected *Masnawis* of Shaikh Nizami and the works of Khusrau are among the books which Akbar loves and they are continually read out to the Emperor.⁶⁸⁰ This shows that both Abu'l-Fazl and Akbar were most probably aware of the idea of the light of Muhammad and the symbols used to define it. It seems plausible that the formulation of the kingship theory, even though it lacks the name of the prophet, took many notions from the ideology based on his light.

⁶⁷⁵ Christiane Gruber, *Between Logos*, 229.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶⁷⁷ Asher, *A Ray from the Sun*, 173-176. Mughal emperors tracing their lineage to Mongol princess Alanqoa is also represented in the royal portraits with a golden halo as an aura radiating from behind the head. It is in reference to their "miraculous descending from sunlight" and signified the legitimizing concept of divine glory, some kind of 'superhuman' status as a divinely illuminated being. Necipoğlu, *Word and Image*, 55.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁶⁷⁹ Gruber, *Between Logos*, 239.

⁶⁸⁰ Allami, *The A-in-i Akbari Vol. I*, 110.

Conclusion

“The number of subjects, for the more they are, the greater the differences among them and the greater the magnificence of the lord of the age, who shoulders the burden, with divine assistance, of warding off corruption from the people of the world and maintaining order in the world and among its inhabitants through his awareness.”⁶⁸¹

In the context of Mughal India, the ideal king is designated to be a universal one. He is like an umbrella encompassing whatever is underneath it and is above anything, whether it be religious belief, sect, culture or race. This could be the summary of what Akbar tried to achieve throughout his reign. However, like many other historians, I do not believe that this was a project. The policies are not necessarily cumulative or pre-planned. It is rather something that happened gradually and took a rational shape along the way in accordance with the requirements of the time and the personal concerns and curiosities of both Akbar Shah and Abu'l-Fazl. Furthermore, it would be naive to think of Abu'l-Fazl and Akbar separately. One of the curious things about this situation is that it is not possible to make a clear distinction between the voice of Abu'l-Fazl and Akbar.

It is crucial to point out that *Akbarnāma* is the end-product of a half century long reign. It would not be wise to assess Akbar's reign based on *Akbarnāma* since history as a genre, can be written within other genres and not without an agenda, whether political or not. That is why it is possible to say that among many other things, *Akbarnāma* is a book of history which is commissioned for a ruler who wanted to leave a mark of his reign in the circle of time. However, according to the construction of Abu'l-Fazl, there is a spiritual meaning for everything related to Akbar which forms the mystical and mythical dimension of *Akbarnāma*. For me, the most crucial aspect of the book is its language. It proves Abu'l-Fazl's genius. Its rendering into another language is quite difficult since many words lose their meaning and the discourse does not present itself as it was originally intended to do.

The translation is never enough and makes it possible to underrate or not to realize important notions. This problem manifests itself from two different angles. The first is when the terms Abu'l-Fazl uses in *Akbarnāma* have a specific reference, such as the terminology of Ishraqi philosophy or the Qur'an. Even though the book is in Persian, there are many Arabic words along with some Turkish, supporting the broadness of the

⁶⁸¹ Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar Volume I*, 40-41.

terminology. This is the part of this research in which the book sort of reveals itself. It was only possible once the discourses of the reign became clearer in my mind. I believe Abu'l-Fazl constructed a literary language that fits his constant emphasis on the importance of “knowledge” and “farsightedness.”

Akbarnāma's difference stems from its discourse, references and intentions of Abu'l-Fazl. It is possible to say that he makes many attributions without necessarily using references. What is more, he uses a language that indicates his references but in such a way that only once the reader is familiar with those notions, can it be understood. This may be because it is assumed that the desired audience of this book would be familiar with, know or understand the attributions or like many other aspects of Akbar's reign. A juxtaposition of different things is desired in order to create a new “discourse” and “language” in a sense which is unique and above the things it contains.

The second significant problem with the translation is related to the famously known terms such as infallibility decree, *din-e ilahi* and even the word Mughal. What I have come to realize is that they also carry certain political inklings since they do not present the original Mughal discourse, at least for the age of Akbar. Another problem is with the dates. During the research, I came up with different dates, especially for the preparation of the books. There is a great deal of inconsistency with the secondary sources, even with the books about Mughal historians and historiography. On that note, I think it is worth noting that *Akbarnāma* is not highly regarded due to it being an “official history” book and therefore not historically accurate enough. For this reason, *Muntaḥab al-tavārīḥ* of ‘Abd al-Qādir Badā’ūnī is used as the most crucial critique of Akbar. However, in doing so the “imperial language” which is for me the hallmark of *Akbarnāma*, is in some way disregarded or remains unquestioned.

From the late 1570s until the early 1580s, Akbar continued on his journey of gaining more and more knowledge of different beliefs. His eagerness and particular interest in Law and Truth cannot be undermined. It seems that after this intense questioning and learning process, Akbar and Abu'l-Fazl preferred to put forward theories for legitimization and kingship based on notions derived more from philosophy than a specific religious belief because they viewed it as more sophisticated and open. On that note, in order to understand or penetrate the ideology constructed by Akbar and Abu'l-Fazl, the most

important thing is to read the works that were available to them and the ones that were part of the translation project. The latter is not only for the content but also for the ways in which they were rendered and became part of Mughal culture. The kingship theory is not a product of a certain understanding but a blend of many different discourses. Different layers, theologies, philosophies and theosophies are hidden in the essence of the book and are easier to grasp, especially when read comparatively with other contemporary sources such as the Ottoman and Safavid examples.

One of the most vital things that is lacking about the “Age of Muslim Empires” is a comparative study of their cultures both on the popular and imperial levels so as to get a better and clearer picture about their communalities and differences in accordance with their contexts. Also, it is not possible to ignore the Islamic background that affects most of the culture, language and legitimacy process. The Mughal Empire is part of the History of Islam and that is why it should also be taken into consideration along this line, again in order to see the changes and continuities. In particular, the second half of the 16th century is quite interesting for Islamic studies with the millennial expectation and different Muslim empires. However, it also provides an opportunity to see how people who were all experiencing similar events and concerns, had Islam in common and were exposed to the same kind of philosophical and political knowledge, reacted and reflected differently on the same things and on different notions that were specific for each of their own contexts. In this work, I have made small attempts to include both Islamic discourse and comparisons with the Mughal’s contemporary Muslim Empires in order to have a better understanding of some terms.

Starting from the death of the Prophet of Islam, the discussions on rationality shaped the formation of new schools of thought or groups in Islamdom and created the Islamicate culture. At the time of the Abbasids, there was the famous translation movement where many books from ancient Greece were rendered into Arabic. This opened the way for new discussions by Islamic philosophers. Neo-Platonism, one of the crucial philosophies that shape the Akbarian ideology, is a product of these translations. I don’t think it is easy to comprehend the essence of the rise of Sirhindi and why he felt the need to form his thought without understanding the connection between Ibn ‘Arabi and Akbarian ideology or how notions of *insan-e kamil* and *wahdat-e wujud* are represented and used by

Abu'l-Fazl and Akbar in service of their theory and their political ambitions without digging deep, thinking widely in comparing and considering the context.

The astonishing thing about the policies of Akbar is the complexity of simplicity which is the perk of multiplicity. Abu'l-Fazl, via only the symbol of light, created an imperial ideology that could be appreciated or at least understood by the entire Mughal population. The variety of ideas that depict itself through one notion are complicated but also convey the main idea that provide the legitimacy of the ruler in a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual empire.

It is known that the curriculum for the education of Mughal rulers and elite included materials from *Akhlaq* literature and even though Akbarian ideology or Abu'l-Fazl's theory of kingship is fashioned for both courtly and popular level, in its root, the main source is the culture. The source for the mindset of both the intellectual and common level is derived from the environment, culture and traditions. That is why even though a seller in the bazaar might not read Nasir al-Din Tusi or Avicenna and discuss their theories or write about them, it does not mean that the person is not familiar with the ideas. Cultural memory is also one of the crucial things that is conveyed via *adab* literature. Storytelling, fables, story of the prophets and love stories are part of the oral tradition that appeals to wider audiences and creates the basis of ethics.

What I realized throughout this study is the number of commonalities rather than the differences. Even though the audiences, the geographies and the religious orientations differ, the rulership discourse remains very similar in the case of Islamic rulers of the 16th century due to the common notions and intellectual sources they used and composed. However, the differences are manifested mainly at the ceremonial. The literary corpus and artistic productions make sense and reveal their inner meaning more when we do justice to their complexity, linguistic value and intertextuality. In that sense, this study makes an attempt to reflect on *Akbarnāma* after having read about the main features and context of the Age of Akbar.

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