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The Key to Power?

The Culture of Access in Princely Courts, 1400–1750

Edited by

Dries Raeymaekers and Sebastiaan Derks



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Raeymaekers, Dries, editor of compilation. | Derks, Sebastiaan, editor of compilation.

Title: The key to power?: the culture of access in princely courts, 1400-1750 / edited by Dries Raeymaekers and Sebastiaan Derks.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2016] | Series: Rulers & elites : comparative studies in governance, ISSN 2211-4610 ; volume 8 | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016020477 (print) | LCCN 2016027987 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004274839 (hardback : acid-free paper) |

ISBN 9789004304246 (e-book) | ISBN 9789004304246 (E-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Europe—History—1492-1648. | Europe—History—1648-1789. | Europe—Court and courtiers—History.

| Europe—Kings and rulers—History. | Political culture—Europe—History. | Power (Social sciences)—Europe—

History. | Asia—Court and courtiers—History. | Asia—Kings and rulers—History. | Political culture—Asia—History.

| Power (Social sciences)—Asia—History.

Classification: LCC D231 .K38 2016 (print) | LCC D231 (ebook) | DDC 940.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016020477>



The work reported on in this publication has been financially supported by the European Science Foundation (ESF), in the framework of the Research Networking Programme Court Residences as Places of Exchange in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (1400–1700)—PALATIUM

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Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2211-4610

ISBN 978-90-04-27483-9 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-30424-6 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

Contents

Acknowledgements	VII
List of Figures and Tables	VIII
Notes on Contributors	X

Introduction: Repertoires of Access in Princely Courts	1
<i>Dries Raeymaekers and Sebastiaan Derks</i>	

PART 1

Articulating Access

- 1 Access to the Prince's Court in Late Medieval Paris 19
Florence Berland
- 2 The Court on the Move: Ceremonial Entries, Gift-Giving and Access to the Monarch in France, c.1440–c.1570 40
Neil Murphy
- 3 Deceptive Familiarity: European Perceptions of Access at the Mughal Court 65
Audrey Truschke

PART 2

Regulating Access

- 4 Accessing the Shadow of God: Spatial and Performative Ceremonial at the Ottoman Court 103
Michael Talbot
- 5 Access at the Court of the Austrian Habsburg Dynasty (Mid-Sixteenth to Mid-Eighteenth Century): A Highway from Presence to Politics? 124
Mark Hengerer

PART 3

Monopolizing Access

- 6 **Holders of the Keys: The Grand Chamberlain, the Grand Equerry and Monopolies of Access at the Early Modern French Court** 155
Jonathan Spangler
- 7 **Patronage, Friendship and the Politics of Access: The Role of the Early Modern Favourite Revisited** 178
Ronald G. Asch
- 8 **The Struggle for Access: Participation and Distance During a Royal Swedish Minority** 202
Fabian Persson

PART 4

Visualizing Access

- 9 **Meeting the Prince between the City and the Family: The Resignification of Castello San Giorgio in Mantua (Fourteenth–Sixteenth Centuries)** 235
Christina Antenhofer
- 10 **Forging Dynasty: The Politics of Dynastic Affinity in Burgundian-Habsburg Birth and Baptism Ceremonial (1430–1505)** 268
Steven Thiry

Bibliography 297

Index 337

Acknowledgements

The idea for this book originated as long ago as the autumn of 2005, at a time when we were both conducting research in the Vatican Archives. Inspired by new approaches in scholarship on princely courts, we had come to Rome to investigate the lives and careers of two courtiers who—according to papal agents—had been powerful favourites at the Habsburg court of Brussels in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. During a well-deserved break in the Archives' delightful coffee bar, we struck up a long conversation on the significance of having access at court, and more importantly, of gaining access to the ruler himself. It seemed to us at the time that, whereas most specialists of late medieval and early modern politics tend to agree that the study of access is the key to understanding power relations in this period, opinions seemed to differ as to exactly how the concept should be approached. For want of a clear definition, access remained a rather vague category, the importance of which was often assumed rather than thoroughly explained. Similarly, the association between access and power was usually taken for granted, whereas the mechanisms behind it remained obscure.

Our conversation in Rome became the first of many in an ongoing dialogue in which we tried to unravel the politics of access at the Brussels court—and in princely courts in general—and which several years later would result in the organization of an international conference, held at the University of Antwerp on 8–9 November 2012. Graciously funded by the European Science Foundation Research Networking Programme PALATIUM and the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), the conference aimed to re-evaluate the notion of access and to discuss its significance for late medieval and early modern court politics. It featured 21 papers by as many scholars, ten of which were selected for publication in this volume. We would like to use this opportunity to thank all speakers for participating in the conference, and the scholars in the audience for contributing to the discussion. In addition, we express our sincere gratitude to the members of the PALATIUM Committee, headed by Prof. Krista De Jonge (KU Leuven), for their generous support of both the conference and this volume, and to Dr. Pieter Martens for guiding us through the administrative process involved. Our translator John Eyck deserves a special thank you for copy-editing several essays and/or translating them into English. Thanks are also due to Arjan van Dijk and Ivo Romein, our editors at Brill, and to Prof. Jeroen Duindam for giving us the opportunity to publish this volume in the *Rulers and Elites* series. Finally, we wish to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful comments.

The editors

access to his lodgings while he was on progress.⁹⁵ The methods taken by the French monarchy in the mid-sixteenth century to limit contact between the king and his urban subjects were finalized by Henry III, who avoided making ceremonial entries after 1576, and had provincial governors act in his place instead.⁹⁶

95 Françoise Boudon and Monique Chatenet, "Les logis du roi de France au XVI^e siècle", in *Architecture et vie sociale. L'organisation intérieure des grandes demeures à la fin du Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance*, ed. Jean Guillaume (Paris: Picard, 1994), 75–76.

96 Most importantly, Henry never made a ceremonial entry into Paris. This was of great significance, as, from the later Middle Ages, the post-coronation entry into the capital was one of the three elements which comprised the king-making process in France: Mark Greengrass, "Henri III, Festival Culture and the Rhetoric of Royalty," in Mulryne, *Europa Triumphans*, 1:109. For the entries of Henry III's provincial governors see: Le Roux, "Rites of Monarchy," 117.

Deceptive Familiarity: European Perceptions of Access at the Mughal Court

Audrey Truschke

Europeans traveled to the Indian subcontinent in increasing numbers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These visitors came from a variety of Western states, chief among them Portugal, France, Italy, and England. They sought different things in their voyages, including commerce, diplomacy, Christian evangelism, and employment. In the ensuing cross-cultural encounters, Europeans and Indians were often shocked by one another's practices and beliefs. Europeans frequently condemned Indians as polytheists, polygamists, and economic dupes. Indians were a bit more charitable towards Europeans. But as Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal Emperor (r. 1628–1658), put it:

Truly, the Farangis (i.e., Europeans) would be a great people but for their having three very bad aspects: first, they are Kafirs (i.e., Infidels), secondly, they eat pork, and thirdly, they do not wash those parts from which replete Nature expels the superfluous from the belly of the body.¹

Personal hygiene aside,² Indians and Europeans repeatedly interacted and often believed that they understood one another. In some cases, their exchanges were facilitated by what Phillip Wagoner has dubbed "fortuitous convergences" where certain ideas and assumptions happen to be shared by

* I thank Chanchal Dadlani, Sebastiaan Derks, and Dries Raeymaekers for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1 Shah Jahan as quoted by Sebastien Manrique. Translation adapted from Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Taking Stock of the Franks: South Asian Views of Europeans and Europe, 1500–1800," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 42, no. 1 (2005): 69; also see Sebastião Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique, 1629–1643; a Translation of the Itinerario De Las Misiones Orientales*, eds. Charles Eckford Luard and Henry Hosten (Oxford: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1927), 2:219.

2 Bathing (or the lack thereof) on the part of Europeans was a recurrent topic of complaint among Indians (e.g., see the comments of Tahir Muhammad Sabzavari quoted in Subrahmanyam, "Taking Stock of the Franks," 86–87).

both communities involved.³ In courtly contexts, however, apparent points of confluence often proved spurious, especially regarding royal access, and individuals were compelled to construct their own cultural bridges.⁴ Europeans found the Mughal courts a convoluted mix of the familiar and the strange as they struggled to identify and create aspects of a shared court culture with their Indian interlocutors.

The Mughal Empire controlled major portions of the north and central Indian subcontinent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Mughals first rose to power in 1526 but only began to conquer substantial areas of land in the 1560s.⁵ Europeans, especially the Portuguese, encountered the Mughals from the beginning of the dynasty, but relations accelerated as the kingdom expanded and European interests in India overall grew. By 1600 the Mughals were one of the largest and most populous polities in the world, and their wealth far exceeded the financial resources of their European counterparts.⁶ Sustained European-Mughal relations began during this period of rapid expansion, under the auspices of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Contacts continued to assume new forms and dimensions under Akbar's successors: Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), and Aurangzeb 'Alamgir (r. 1658–1707). European associations with the Mughals never ceased and continued until the very end of the dynasty at British hands in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷ The initial period of relations provide a remarkably rich picture of how Europeans perceived and tried to interpret Mughal courts, often drawing perilously upon their own assumptions concerning royal practices.

The Mughals hosted an assortment of European visitors, including Jesuits, ambassadors, and independent travelers. Many of these meetings have been

3 Phillip B. Wagoner, "Fortuitous Convergences and Essential Ambiguities: Transcultural Political Elites in the Medieval Deccan," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, no. 3 (1999): 241–64.

4 On the idea of early moderns from different backgrounds formulating modes of approximate and improvised understanding, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 29–30.

5 The standard account of the Mughal rise to power remains John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

6 The population of the Indian subcontinent c. 1600 was somewhere between 100 and 150 million. John F. Richards, "Early Modern India and World History," *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (1997): 207.

7 Mughal rule came to a formal end in 1857–1858 with the Sepoy Rebellion, the trial and exile of Bahadur Shah Zafar, and the establishment of the British Raj.

written about at some length by scholars interested in cross-cultural understandings, travel narratives, artistic exchanges, and other areas.⁸ Here my goal is to investigate how these encounters can shed light on European expectations and representations of royal access. Europeans approached the Mughals armed with a host of presumptions concerning how to advance their interests through royal meetings. But their predictions rarely matched the realities of early modern India, a world defined by seemingly similar royal rituals but ultimately governed by differently calibrated sensibilities. As a result Europeans did not always correctly recognize the points of different (and common) cultural norms. The resulting tangled encounters usefully bring into focus operative European cultural assumptions and allow us to explore how those entrenched suppositions shaped behavior concerning cross-cultural relations.

European travelers generally viewed their Mughal negotiations as unfolding under the gaze of an important audience: their financial backers back at home. Europeans wrote a variety of letters, memoirs, and journals that recount their Indian journeys. While such works generally claim to be historically accurate, the perceived audience(s) often dictated the sorts of information that travelers elected to share and the value judgments that shadowed a given work.⁹ Europeans also often misunderstood and (intentionally or not) misrepresented aspects of Mughal court life, especially their success in navigating these foreign environs. While such muddled accounts pose significant obstacles to reconstructing the historical course of a given encounter, points of confusion are often incredibly valuable for teasing out European assumptions about the workings of royal courts and the value of meeting with kings.

Indian texts constitute a second important body of materials on European-Mughal interactions but are generally brief on the topic. An oft-cited example that is also pertinent to my case studies here is that Sir Thomas Roe was present at Jahangir's court for three years but yet is not mentioned even once in the king's memoirs.¹⁰ There are exceptions to these lacuna. For instance, the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* (Jahangir's Assemblies) of 'Abdus Sattar contains detailed

8 In comparison to most aspects of Mughal India, the literature on European travelers is vast. In particular, see the work of Muzaffar Alam, Gauvin Bailey, Michael Fisher, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam.

9 An additional difficulty is the "fractures" or inconsistencies within a given author's work, as Peter Burke discusses in reference to Francois Bernier. Peter Burke, "The Philosopher as Traveller: Bernier's Orient," in *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel*, ed. Jaś Elsner and Joan Pau Rubiés (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 131–32.

10 I refer to the Mughal rulers as both kings and emperors, which reflects the variety of titles that they employed including *shah* and *shahinshah*.

information about one of the Jesuit missions to the Mughals.¹¹ Moreover, Mughals and Europeans jointly translated Western works, both secular and religious, into Persian.¹² Despite such efforts, however, it is challenging to balance the infrequent appearances of Europeans in Indian texts with the voluminous writings of Europeans on the Mughals. Last, Mughal art provides a considerable resource for seeing how the Mughals responded to European culture, and many travelers also commented on the Mughal fascination with Western art. In their differing approaches to images, we can often reconstruct a mismatched conversation where cultural engagements and access to both individuals and practices had distinct meanings for the two communities.

In this essay, I explore European understandings of royal access by looking at three sets of meetings with members of the Mughal elite. I have deliberately chosen cross-cultural exchanges that feature three distinct types of Western travelers: religious missionaries, imperial representatives, and independent itinerants. The encounters discussed below span roughly one-hundred years and are spread across the reigns of four Mughal emperors. Each group of visitors engaged in their own dense navigation of practices and meanings across a cultural divide. Together they demonstrate that while Europeans were often stymied by a significant gulf of cultural understanding concerning Mughal court dynamics, they nonetheless correctly identified access to ruling elites as a key means of convincing European readers of their courtly sophistication.

Jesuit Callers: Mistaking Cultural Motives for Religious Interests

The Jesuits were among the earliest European callers at the court of Akbar and his successor, Jahangir. A team of three missionaries—Rudolf Acquaviva, Antoni Montserrat, and Francisco Henriques—arrived from Goa in February 1580, and Acquaviva and Montserrat stayed for three years.¹³ Two subsequent

11 On this work, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations: Catholics and Muslims in the Court of Jahangir (1608–11)," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 46, no. 4 (2009): 457–511.

12 The most well studied work to date is the *Mir'at al-Quds* (Mirror of Holiness), which has recently been translated by Wheeler Thackston and extensively discussed by Pedro Carvalho. Pedro Moura Carvalho, *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, Acc. No. 2005.145*, with trans. by Wheeler Thackston (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

13 Francisco Henriques, a convert from Hurmuz, returned to Goa in 1581 (Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 464). Note that Persian and Jesuit sources conflict

missions followed in 1591 and 1594, respectively.¹⁴ The head of the 1594 venture, Jerome Xavier, remained at the Mughal court for twenty years, and members of the Jesuit order maintained a continual presence at the imperial court until the late eighteenth century, when Rome suppressed the order. The first of these three missions is by far the most well-documented and analyzed in modern scholarship, and the letters and translation activities of Jerome Xavier have recently garnered renewed attention.¹⁵ All three missions were explicitly invited by Akbar, who first encountered a Catholic priest when Gil Eanes Pereira made his way from Goa to Fatehpur Sikri in 1578. Pereira, who humbled himself as "not lettered or anything," suggested that the king send for more erudite priests from Goa, the headquarters of the Portuguese Estado da Índia, and Akbar followed his advice.¹⁶ An encounter with a Greek father provided the impetus for Akbar to propose a second contingent of priests.¹⁷ By the time the king requested Goa to send a third mission, the viceroy of the Estado da Índia had realized the political value of having Jesuit eyes at the Mughal court.¹⁸

The Catholic priests involved in the Mughal missions all professed similar ambitions and disappointments, most of which revolved around convincing the Mughals to adopt Christianity. Upon receiving their first invitation from

concerning the exact dates of the first mission; the Jesuit sources are likely correct according to Beveridge cited in A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 288n66.

14 Little is known about the intermediary Jesuit mission, which remained in Lahore for less than one year.

15 The standard account of the first Jesuit mission is John Correia-Afonso, ed., *Letters from the Mughal Court: The First Jesuit Mission to Akbar, 1580–1583* (Bombay: Published for the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture by Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1980). For recent scholarship on the third mission, led by Jerome Xavier, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations" and Carvalho, *Mir'at al-Quds*. Scholars have devoted far less attention to the third Jesuit mission after Jahangir's reign, although it appears that the Jesuits experienced some trouble in the early years of Shah Jahan's rule. H. Hosten, "The Jesuits at Agra in 1635–37," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. Letters* 4 (1938): 479–501.

16 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 463.

17 Edward Maclagan, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1932), 46–49 and Pierre du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits, an Account of the Jesuit Missions to the Court of Akbar*, ed. Sir E. Denison Ross and Eileen Power, and trans. C. H. Payne (New York, London: Harper & Brothers, 1926), 44–50.

18 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 465–66. Indeed, Jerome Xavier funneled pertinent political information back to his superiors, such as when he alerted Claudio Acquaviva of Akbar's plan to capture Goa and other Portuguese coastal holdings (Carvalho, *Mir'at al-Quds*, 7n20).

Akbar, the Jesuits were attracted by the possibility of gaining such prominent converts but were nonetheless wary of Mughal intentions. In fact, Goa's viceroy suspected that the initial imperial invite, which was brought by a Mughal ambassador in 1579, might have concealed malevolent aims and referred the matter to the archbishop. Only after consulting a council of bishops did the archbishop conclude that the risk was acceptable. He then dispatched a group headed by Rudolf Acquaviva to the Mughal capital of Fatehpur Sikri.¹⁹

Upon the Jesuits' arrival at the Mughal court, they quickly began to imagine Akbar to be on the verge of becoming Christian. Jesuits on the 1580 mission repeatedly wrote about Akbar's imminent conversion in letters addressed to their church compatriots in Goa and Europe. They seemed to think that once the basic obstacle of language was overcome, Akbar would quickly transform into a member of the Christian faithful. For example, all three members of the first mission wrote in a letter to a captain of Daman: "If we were able to speak their language fluently, only a little learning would suffice to convince them."²⁰ Montserrat, the most prolific member of the mission, also composed a series of texts discussing Akbar's impending change of heart. In his *Commentary*, he described Akbar as "saying things which might have been uttered by some pious Christian King" and records public reports that "[Akbar] wished to become a Christian."²¹ Another of Montserrat's works served as the basis for a 1597 Italian text by the Jesuit Giovanni Battista Peruschi, which was quickly translated into other European languages and disseminated the notion of Akbar's high conversion throughout Europe.²² Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have recently pointed out that the Mughal rulers were often contrasted to the Ottoman sultans in this regard, the latter of whom were virtually never imagined as realistic potential converts.²³

19 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 8; Antonio Monserrate, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S. J., on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*, ed. S. N. Banerjee and trans. John S. Hoyland (London: H. Milford and Oxford University Press, 1922), 3.

20 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 29. At times Akbar seems to have stoked Jesuit hopes that he was interested in converting (perhaps inadvertently), pending better communication. For instance, he advised Jerome Xavier and his companions in 1595 to learn Persian "in order that themes such as salvation might be treated [debated] between ourselves without the interference of third parties" (cited in Carvalho, *Mir'at al-Quds*, 11).

21 Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, 173 and 64. This work languished unpublished until the twentieth century.

22 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 464 and Maclagan, *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, 370.

23 "Frank Disputations," 464. Also see the similar point in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 134.

There is evidence that many of these hopeful pronouncements were empty boasts designed to placate a Christian public. Some of the early Jesuit letters were published in Europe, and were accordingly designed largely to manage the image of the Jesuit mission in India.²⁴ In letters not meant for public consumption, the priests were often more pessimistic. For example, writing in 1580 to Everard Mercurian, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Rudolf Acquaviva listed four reasons to doubt the authenticity of Akbar's interest in Christianity.²⁵ In 1581, he likewise admitted in a letter to Claudio Acquaviva, Rudolf's uncle and Mercurian's successor, that "hope that this king be converted is slender."²⁶ Nonetheless, the Jesuits were not the only group to suspect Akbar of Christian leanings. Bada'uni, a court secretary who is best known for his critical and clandestinely-written history of Akbar's reign, confessed with clear dismay, "[Akbar] gave credence to Christianity and ordered Prince Murad to take a few propitious lessons on [the Gospels] and commissioned Abu al-Fazl to translate them."²⁷ Along similar lines, the Jesuits noted that opinions were divided among the Mughals' subjects as to whether Akbar was a Muslim, Hindu, Christian, or none of the three.²⁸

The second and third missions likewise vacillated between anticipation of a Christian Mughal Empire and cynicism about such a prospect. Little is known about the second group of Jesuits, who appear to have embarked for the Mughal court with renewed dreams of gaining Akbar as a Christian devotee. But they departed from Lahore not long after their arrival precisely because they sensed no movement on the conversion front.²⁹ In a third stab at winning over the Mughals to Christianity, Jerome Xavier spent twenty years of his life at the imperial court, accompanied by at least four other priests at different times.³⁰ Jerome Xavier is perhaps most well-known for his translation of

24 Maclagan lists numerous relevant publications in *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, 12–15.

25 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 59–60.

26 *Ibid.*, 94.

27 'Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tavarikh*, ed. Captain W. N. Lees and Munshi Ahmad Ali (Calcutta: College Press, 1865), 2:260.

28 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 96.

29 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 465.

30 Emmanuel Pinheiro and Benedict de Goes accompanied Jerome Xavier to the Mughal court in 1594. Pinheiro remained in Mughal domains until 1615 and devoted much of his attention to the people, often soliciting local Mughal governors rather than the king (Maclagan, *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, 51–53 and 56). Benedict de Goes briefly returned to Goa in the early 1600s and then departed India for China in 1603 (51–53). Francisco Corsi joined the mission in 1600 and remained at court after Xavier's departure (75–76). Joseph de Castro arrived in Agra in 1610 and was affiliated with the Mughal court on-and-off through the early 1640s (76–77).

Christian texts into Persian, such as the *Mir'at al-Quds* (Mirror of Holiness) that tells the story of Christ's life, often with an eye to making the Gospel narrative palatable to Muslim views regarding Jesus.³¹ In his *A'ina-yi Haqq-numa* (Truth-showing Mirror), a polemical treatise, he similarly drew upon Sufi imagery and Aristotelian ideas known in the Islamic world.³² Jerome Xavier also pursued other methods of garnering Mughal attention, including putting on theatrical displays during Christian festivals, such as tightrope walkers, jugglers, and mechanical toys.³³ Xavier admitted that before Jahangir ascended the throne in 1605, the Jesuits had "believed from what had preceded that a great conversion might be accomplished for until then he almost claimed to be a secret Christian."³⁴ Nonetheless, by the end of his time at court Xavier had lost any optimism about a possible change of imperial religious loyalties. Even speaking of the cause of gaining Christian souls more generally, he wrote sullenly in a letter dated to 1613, "after 18 years of presence here [at the Mughal court] we did not make a single Christian by conviction. All were converted on reasons related to human rights, sustenance, or love for another Christian."³⁵ After Xavier's departure, however, other Jesuits took his place and some of them held out renewed hope that Jahangir was on the verge of adopting Christianity.³⁶

While it took the Jesuits decades to decisively conclude that the Mughals were unlikely to abandon Islam, it is highly instructive to consider the reasons behind this persistent miscalculation. Three types of experiences seem to have seduced the Jesuits into overestimating their chances at an imperial

31 On Xavier's careful attention to rendering the Christian story of Jesus acceptable to Muslims, see Carvalho, *Mir'at al-Quds*, 4–6 and 36–39. Alam and Subrahmanyam discuss the crucial role of 'Abdus Sattar in this translation ("Frank Disputation").

32 Gauvin A. Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542–1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 127–28. As Alam and Subrahmanyam note, we are uncertain to what extent the *A'ina-yi Haqq-numa* circulated in Mughal India ("Frank Disputations," 506). Jerome Xavier also translated and composed other works, which Camps lists and discusses in Arnulf Camps, *Studies in Asian Mission History, 1956–1998* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000), 35–46.

33 Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 123.

34 Letter of Jerome Xavier, cited in Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 476.

35 Cited in Carvalho, *Mir'at al-quds*, 12. In earlier letters, Xavier professed the value of advancing the Christian cause among common people, such as baptizing near-starving infants in Kashmir before they died. See the Akbar-period letter quoted in H. Hosten, "Eulogy of Father Jerome Xavier, S. J., a Missionary in Mogor (1549–1617)," *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 23 (1927): 116–17.

36 E.g., Joseph de Castro wrote of Jahangir's pending conversion in his mid-1620s letters. H. Hosten, "Three Letters of Fr. Joseph De Castro, S.J., and the Last Year of Jahāngīr," *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 23 (1927): 161.

conversion: confusions about the meaning of royal access, the nature of religious debates at the Mughal court, and the imperial interest in European art. In trying to make sense of these experiences, the Jesuits drew upon prior encounters with other Indian rulers in the Deccan and, above all, their knowledge of European courts. But, as they discovered, points of illusory cultural similarity too often shrouded almost unimaginable differences.

First, the Jesuits misconstrued the implications of their friendly reception by the Mughals. Upon reaching Fatehpur Sikri, the members of the initial mission were greeted by Akbar personally who insisted on seeing them before they met with anybody else, including their fellow priest Gil Eanes Pereira.³⁷ Francisco Henriques even boasted that Akbar had been so eagerly awaiting the Jesuits' arrival that he counted down the days.³⁸ As the priests settled in at court, they met with Akbar in a variety of public and private settings. They attended public presentations of the king, such as the *jharoka darshan*, a Hindu-inspired ritual where Akbar showed himself to his people.³⁹ Montserrat even claimed that Akbar singled out the Jesuits in such gatherings, such as by acknowledging them alone with a head nod.⁴⁰ Montserrat also attested that the fathers frequently enjoyed private audiences during which the emperor sometimes amicably wrapped his arms around Acquaviva's shoulders.⁴¹ Often the Jesuits took such repeated meetings as positive signs, as Rudolf Acquaviva wrote in a letter:

We speak to [Akbar] almost every day and have been permitted free access to him at our will. Whatever we ask of him is readily granted, and he treats us with great respect and kindness. His talk, the much light he receives from God, and his great liking for things of our holy faith are very gratifying.⁴²

37 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 20–21.

38 *Ibid.*, 26–27.

39 Catherine Asher discusses Akbar's *jharoka* and its associations with divine imagery at the court in 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: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 176–78. Also see her discussion of the *jharoka* at Fatehpur Sikri in particular, complete with a photograph in Catherine B. Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 62.

40 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 35.

41 Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, 64.

42 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 34.

The later missions also enjoyed royal attention. Jerome Xavier and those who initially accompanied him, Emmanuel Pinheiro and Benedict de Goes, frequently traveled with the king.⁴³ A painting of Jahangir's court features a Jesuit priest among the imperial elite.⁴⁴ Other Europeans who visited the Mughals confirm that Jahangir often conversed with the Jesuit priests and that as a result they had a relatively free hand to advance the cause of their faith.⁴⁵

In addition to having the ear of the emperor, the Jesuits also gained access to the royal princes, both to tutor and baptize them. In September 1580 Montserrat was appointed to instruct Murad, Akbar's second son, and a handpicked selection of his schoolmates. Montserrat's pedagogical tactics included having the children make the sign of the cross, revere images of Christ, and invoke the names of Jesus and Mary.⁴⁶ This instruction lasted at least a few years. A letter dated July 1581, nine months after the schooling had begun, referred to the ongoing task of Montserrat to teach Portuguese to one of the royal princes.⁴⁷ In April 1582, Rudolf Acquaviva wrote that he had taken over this job.⁴⁸ Instruction must have ceased after the Jesuits departed for Goa in 1583, but it was briefly resumed by the priests on the 1591 mission.⁴⁹ In their role as teachers, some of the Jesuits optimistically saw Christian values reflected in their pupils. As Montserrat put it: "The young prince [Murad] was an ideal pupil as regards natural ability, good conduct and intellectual capacity. In all these respects it would have been hard to find any Christian youth, let alone a prince, surpassing him."⁵⁰

The Jesuits thought they had received an even more promising indication of Mughal Christian leanings when they were asked to baptize some of Jahangir's nephews in the early seventeenth century. Father Corsi, who had

43 Maclagan, *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, 53–64.

44 Reproduced in Maclagan, *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, between pp. 84–85.

45 For example, see the testimony of Captain Robert Coverte, a shipwreck in 1609. Robert Coverte, *A True and Almost Incredible Report of an Englishman, That (being Cast Away in the Good Ship Called the Assention in Cambaya the Farthest Part of the East Indies) Trauelled by Land Through Many Unknowne Kingdomes, and Great Cities (...) With a Discovery of a Great Emperour Called the Great Mogoll, a Prince Not till Now Knowne to Our English Nation* (London, 1612), 40, 55, and 60.

46 Montserrat discusses his instruction of a Mughal prince in a letter and his commentary (Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 83–85 and Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, 52–53).

47 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 97.

48 *Ibid.*, 103.

49 Maclagan, *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, 48.

50 Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, 52.

joined the third Jesuit mission in 1600, was first requested to teach Prince Daniyal's three sons. Less than two months later, all three were baptized in a public ceremony.⁵¹ The Jesuits had some doubts at the time about Mughal intentions, although they held out hope for an authentic commitment.⁵² The Mughal princes practiced their new faith for a few years and received ongoing instruction from Corsi, but they eventually renounced Christianity. Thereafter, the Jesuits and other European observers typically held the opinion that the conversion had been prompted by ulterior motives. Edward Terry, Sir Thomas Roe's chaplain who accompanied him to Jahangir's court in the 1610s, bluntly attested:

[The Jesuits] had these conjectures upon this [the princes'] revolt, that either the King their uncle caused them to be baptized, to make them more odious to the Mahometans, being so near of his blood; or else it was his plot to get them beautiful wives out of Europe which himself meant to take if he had liked them.⁵³

Modern scholars have clarified Jahangir's sharp political interest in ordering a conversion that crushed any imperial aspirations on the part of his nephews by drastically reducing their support among the nobility. Crucial here is that under the Mughals' inherited Timurid practices, all collateral branches of the royal family had a legitimate claim to rule at least part of the kingdom. Under Akbar, the Mughals began moving away from this system to a more direct line of descent from father to son. But the threat of extended family was vivid enough still in the early seventeenth century for Jahangir to take aggressive

51 As Maclagan notes, European writers of the day were divided on whether two or three of Daniyal's sons were baptized, but Jerome Xavier's letters leave no doubt that all three were baptized (*Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, 93n16).

52 Other Europeans at the court, such as William Hawkins, took a more incisive view. *The Hawkins' Voyages During the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I*, ed. Clements R. Markham (London: Printed for the Hakluyt society, 1878), 448.

53 Edward Terry, *A Voyage to East-India. Wherein Some Things Are Taken Notice of in Our Passage Thither; but Many More in Our Abode There, Within That Rich and Most Spacious Empire of the Great Mogol. Mix't with Some Parallel Observations and Inferences Upon the Storie, to Profit as Well as Delight the Reader* (London: Printed by T. W. for J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, at the Bell in St. Pauls Chutch-Yard [sic], 1655), 425. Also see Francisco Pelsaert's comments in Francisco Pelsaert, *A Dutch Chronicle of Mughal India*, trans. and ed. Brij Narain and Sri Ram Sharma (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1978), 74.

measures against numerous male relatives.⁵⁴ Largely ignorant of such dynamics, the Jesuits mistook physical access and even *prima facie* devotion as signifiers of an internal change of heart.

Second, the Jesuits mistook the nature of religious discussions and theological queries among the imperial elite. Shortly before the Jesuits arrived at court, Akbar had established the *‘ibadat-khanah*, a house of religious debate. The *‘ibadat-khanah* discussions initially featured different Islamic groups, but by the late 1570s they had been opened up to include Hindus and Parsees (Zoroastrians). The Jesuits were asked to join in these dialogues and were also subjected to religious inquiries in other contexts.⁵⁵ Both Eastern and Western sources attest that Akbar asked the Jesuits many theological questions, including about the trinity, the divinity of Christ, and marriage. While the specific queries were generally clear enough to all parties involved, the stakes and purposes of these interfaith conversations were understood in wildly different ways by the Jesuits and the Mughals.

For the Mughals, these exchanges provided a fertile opportunity to prove the strength of Islam over Christianity. However, the Jesuits consistently took imperial probing about their faith to indicate the Mughals' receptiveness to Christian ideas and even a final obstacle to imperial conversion. For example, Rudolf Acquaviva reported that Akbar told him in the early 1580s, "God well knows how favourable my mind is to the Christian Law, and how earnestly I desire thoroughly to learn it. But I cannot follow your teaching about there being three Gods."⁵⁶ Whereas the Jesuits thought that this accusation of polytheism was a correctable misconstrual, the Mughals were aware of nearly 1,000 years of Muslim criticism of the Christian trinity. About his conversations with

54 Munis D. Faruqi, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33–34.

55 A folio from a manuscript of the *Akbarnamah*, an imperially-sponsored history of Akbar's reign, depicts the *‘ibadat-khanah* with two Jesuit priests, most likely Rudolf Acquaviva and Antoni Montserrat (Chester Beatty Library, ms. 3, fol. 263b). The *‘ibadat-khanah* debates were suspended in 1581, and it is uncertain whether they were ever resumed. Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, "Religious Disputations and Imperial Ideology: The Purpose and Location of Akbar's *Ibadatkhana*," *Studies in History* 24, no. 2 (2008): 202–3. Nonetheless, in 1582, Rudolf Acquaviva attested to religious debates once a week until midnight or later that sound comparable to the *‘ibadat-khanah* conversations (Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 110). Writing in the mid-1620s, Joseph de Castro also reported to have participated in similar conversations (Hosten, "Three Letters of Fr. Joseph de Castro," 146 and 151). Whether held in the *‘ibadat-khanah* or elsewhere, religious discussions were a staple of Mughal court life throughout the period I discuss here.

56 Recorded by Montserrat (*Commentary of Father Monserrate*, 171–72).

Jahangir, Jerome Xavier similarly declared that while the king returned to the problematic prescription of monogamy many times, he approved of basic Christian theology, describing the veneration of images depicting the Virgin Mary or the crucified Christ as "correct and reasonable" against the more skeptical view of such practices advanced by many Islamic scholars of the day.⁵⁷ At times Jahangir also defended the padres against attacks by other Muslims at court, such as when 'Abdus Sattar proclaimed Christianity even more unreasonable than Hinduism (*din-i hunud*).⁵⁸

The Jesuits persistently failed to grasp the larger contexts of Mughal religious debates and periodic defenses of Christianity for several reasons. In part, they likely considered the content of these discussions far more serious and productive than earlier interactions with Indo-Muslim kings. For example, some priests had visited the ruler of Bijapur in the early 1560s and faced a series of "fatuous questions" concerning matters such as ingesting elephant meat and human urine.⁵⁹ In contrast, in their specificity and topic matter, Mughal inquiries about Christ's divinity must have seemed promising.

Additionally, the Jesuits came from a rather different world regarding toleration of other faiths that ill-equipped them to understand the relative religious freedom enjoyed within the Mughal dispensation. During the first few decades of Jesuit visits to the Mughals, Europe experienced peace from the religious wars that raged for much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But the idea of faith-based conflict ran deep, and Europe generally abided by the principle that the king decided the religion of his domains. In contrast, India had always been a place where multiple religions existed side-by-side and even overlapped in terms of practices and beliefs. Following the approaches of all Indian monarchs before them, the Mughals did not try to force their religious beliefs on their subjects. Instead Akbar went to some lengths to ensure all people under his rule the freedom to practice their own religion, including Christians.⁶⁰ The Mughals, although Muslim, also partook in the rituals of numerous other traditions, including celebrating Diwali (the Hindu festival of light), participating in Jain rites on occasion, and even observing Christmas and Epiphany.⁶¹ The Jesuits, however, often interpreted the Mughal

57 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 481 and 480.

58 Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 165–67.

59 See the discussion of this episode in Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 460–62.

60 Maclagan, *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, 59.

61 On Mughal participation in Jain religious rites, see Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 43–45.

tolerance of and participation in Christian holidays as a sign of partiality and mental openness. Joseph de Castro wrote in 1627, "It is a great favour that he should give us freedom to publish, preach and prove with (every kind of ?) reasonings our holy faith, and to refute their false sect."⁶² Despite enjoying Mughal toleration, the Jesuits did not adopt a similar stance towards others and occasionally described their severe distaste at watching Muslim prayers.⁶³

The Jesuits also overlooked the value that Akbar and Jahangir identified in Christian beliefs as partial truths. At the same time as the Jesuit missions, Akbar and Jahangir both repeatedly engaged with texts and ideas from other traditions, most notably Hindu works. Akbar ordered the rendering of numerous Sanskrit texts into Persian, and Jahangir read these earlier works and sponsored additional translations.⁶⁴ As I have argued elsewhere, the Mughals recognized Sanskrit texts as containing great nuggets of wisdom that had to be sorted out from their reams of exaggerations and tall tales.⁶⁵ Akbar's vision in translating the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*, for example, was that: "There is a part that the wise will examine and throw out of circulation. There is part that the intellect will not be able to understand. And there is a portion of it that the wise will agree to accept or consent to after much study and a penetrating glance."⁶⁶ After scrutinizing such works, thinkers at Akbar's court hoped, readers would find ways to perfect, but not abandon, their own beliefs.

Joseph de Castro describes two celebrations of the twelve days of Christmas and Epiphany in the mid-1620 under Jahangir (Hosten, "Three Letters of Fr. Joseph de Castro," 154–56 and 161–63).

62 Hosten, "Three Letters of Fr. Joseph de Castro," 160.

63 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 89–90. However, as Stevens and Sapra have suggested, Mughal religious toleration appealed to the European principle of civility espoused by other travelers to Mughal India, such as Sir Thomas Roe and Thomas Coryat. Rahul Sapra and Paul Stevens, "Akbar's Dream: Mogul Toleration and English/British Orientalism," *Modern Philology* 104, no. 3 (2007): 402–10.

64 For a recent discussion, see Najaf Haider, "Translating Texts and Straddling Worlds: Intercultural Communication in Mughal India," in *The Varied Facets of History: Essays in Honour of Aniruddha Ray*, ed. Ishrat Alam and Syed Ejaz Hussain (Kundli, Haryana: Primus Books, 2011), 115–24. The most comprehensive list of Persian translations of Sanskrit works to date remains N. S. Shukla, "Persian Translations of Sanskrit Works," *Indological Studies* 3, no. 1–2 (1974): 175–91.

65 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 126–33.

66 Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak. "Muqaddamah," in *Mahābhārata: The Oldest and Longest Sanskrit Epic. Translated by Mir Ghayasuddin Ali Qazvini Known As Naqib Khan (D. 1023 AH)*, ed. S. M. Reza Jalali Naini and Dr. N. S. Shukla (Tehran: Kitabkhanah-i Tahuri, 1979), 1:20–21.

The Jesuits reported a parallel imperial attitude to Christian ideas, although they do not seem to have understood this aspect of Mughal intellectual life. For instance, the members of the first mission wrote:

During the discussions and talks about God and our holy faith, whatever he hears from our interpreters he conveys to his people, not only by repeating what he said but also by emphasizing that which in his opinion they can profit by, constantly endeavouring to get his people to appreciate our holy faith.⁶⁷

In another letter, Acquaviva attested that Akbar often mixed Christian practices with Islamic and Hindu rituals.⁶⁸ But he does not seem to have grasped the social and intellectual contexts that enabled such religious fusions.

In a bizarre episode that has yet to find a solid scholarly analysis, the Mughals challenged the Jesuits to prove the veracity of their faith by entering a fire and coming out unscathed.⁶⁹ The Jesuits were understandably loath to comply and considered this a sign that the Mughals demanded miracles above logic as a basis for conversion.⁷⁰ More likely Akbar was here drawing upon his long-standing interest in spectacles, which also came out in events such as the battle between warrior-ascetics (*sanyasins*) in the late 1560s that inspired a fantastic double-page illustration in a manuscript of the *Akbarnamah*.⁷¹ Regardless of the reasons behind the Mughal desire to see the Jesuits escape fire, it is highly dubious that overcoming this physical obstacle would have led to a conversion.

In addition to their access to the king and welcomed participation in religious debates and spectacles, the Jesuits were also stunned by the Mughal enthrallment with European material culture, particularly Christian books and art. Akbar invited the first Jesuits precisely because he sought "the foremost books of the Law and the Gospels" and again wrote to Philip II in 1582 requesting copies of the Pentateuch, Gospels, and Psalms.⁷² All three Jesuit missions introduced Western paintings, prints, and illustrated books to the Mughals, and such items also found their way to Mughal India via other European

67 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 34.

68 Ibid., 58.

69 The most recent discussion of the Jesuit fire ordeal is Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 146–52.

70 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 44 and 59.

71 On this event, see William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 28–32.

72 Carvalho, *Mir'at al-Quds*, 3.

travelers and trade networks.⁷³ For example, the initial Jesuit mission brought engravings by Albrecht Durer and a copy of Plantin's Royal Polyglot Bible, printed in Antwerp.⁷⁴ Jerome Xavier's mission included a Portuguese painter, and other European artists visited the Mughals in the following decades.⁷⁵ Writing in the early seventeenth century, Xavier indicated that Jahangir had accumulated a substantial collection of Western texts, which he often viewed for their images.⁷⁶ Mughal princes, nobles, and even merchants also displayed a keen interest in European art and frequently passed paintings and drawings along to the royal court.⁷⁷ Other European visitors likewise took note of the Mughal attraction to Christian images, recording that representations of Jesus and Mary were positioned in places of prominence.⁷⁸

The Mughals not only appreciated Western art but also had their own painters copy many images and produce original compositions of Christian themes. Mary and Jesus, including the crucifixion (fig. 3.1), numbered among the most popular subjects, along with numerous saints and the occasional depiction of God the Father.⁷⁹ Persian translations of Christian texts were

73 Akbar had seen a number of European art pieces before the first Jesuits arrived at court, and his father, Humayun, had also been exposed to Western art (Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 114).

74 Ania Loomba, "Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats: Diplomacy, Exchange, and Difference in Early Modern India," in *Emissaries in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Mediation, Transmission, Traffic, 1550-1700*, ed. Brinda Chary and Gitanjali Shahani (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 55. Koch discusses the influence of the Polyglot Bible's illustrations on Mughal art in Ebba Koch, "Jahangir and the Angels: Recently Discovered Wall Paintings Under European Influence in the Fort of Lahore," in *India and the West: Proceedings of a Seminar Dedicated to the Memory of Hermann Goetz*, ed. Joachim Deppert (New Delhi: Manohar, 1983), 173-195. Also see the paintings and prints mentioned in Bailey, *Arts of the Jesuit Missions*, 115-16.

75 Maclagan translates this letter of Jerome Xavier, dated 1595, in Edward Maclagan, "The Jesuit Missions to the Emperor Akbar," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 65 (1896): 67. Bailey has identified two further letters that mention this anonymous Portuguese painter (*Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 232n78). Koch and Subrahmanyam mention European artists visiting the Mughals and other Indo-Persian rulers in the seventeenth century. Ebba Koch, "Netherlandish Naturalism in Imperial Mughal Painting," *Apollo* 152 (2000): 30-32; Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 170-71.

76 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 478.

77 A. Jan Qaisar, "The Profane and the Sacred: 'Judgement of Paris' and 'God the Father' in the Mughal School of Art," in *Felicitation Volume in Honour of Professor S. Nurul Hasan*, ed. Ahsan Jan Qaisar and Som Prakash Verma (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 1993), 81-82.

78 Coverté, *A true and almost incredible report of an Englishman*, 40.

79 On Mughal images of God the Father, see Qaisar, "The profane and the sacred," 84-88. Hindu artists, such as Kesu Das and Basawan, were among some of the most prominent in

sometimes illuminated, often based on the text rather than existing Western imagery.⁸⁰ The royal atelier also reproduced moments from the history of Christianity, such as a Christian knight (depicted with Central Asian features) fighting a Saracen soldier.⁸¹ Even women in the harem explored Christian themes, such as the martyrdom of St. Cecilia copied from a Jerome Wierix print.⁸² Non-Christian scenes were likewise prevalent Mughal choices, such as Diana, goddess of the hunt, and portraits of ordinary Europeans.⁸³ Jesuits noted with delight that Christian and other European images adorned the walls of Mughal palaces and tombs in Fatehpur Sikri, Mandu, Agra, and Lahore.⁸⁴ Mughal miniature paintings of courtly scenes confirm the existence of these murals, which are mainly lost now.⁸⁵ Analyzing the few such images that survive in the Lahore Fort, Ebba Koch has drawn attention to how Mughal artists often reimagined Christian imagery with striking versatility and interspersed Persianate allusions.⁸⁶

painting European scenes. Gauvin A. Bailey, *The Jesuits and the Grand Mogul: Renaissance Art at the Imperial Court of India, 1580-1630* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1998), 19-26; Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 118-22.

80 Carvalho, *Mir'at al-Quds*, 1. Although, as Bailey points out, the Persian translation of the *Mir'at al-Quds* often contains near instructions for illustration (*Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 129-30). There is another illuminated manuscript of the same work now in Lahore. M. Abdullah Chaghatai, "Mirat al-Quds: An Illustrated Manuscript of Akbar's Period About Christ's Life," *Lahore Museum Heritage* (1994): 179-88.

81 Image 2.9 in Loomba, "Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats."

82 Ms. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IM.139A1291; Loomba, "Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats," 69. There are also many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Indian images of Christian themes that built upon the earlier Mughal engagements (e.g., ms. Princeton University, Garrett no. 102G, fol. 33a).

83 For the image of Diana, see Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Acc. No. 30.95.174.25. Qaisar discusses some additional paintings of classical themes copied by the Mughals in "The profane and the sacred," 81-84. Examples of ordinary Europeans include images 2.10 and 2.11 in Loomba, "Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats" and plate 106 in Susan Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor: The Art of the Book 1560-1660* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2002), 139.

84 Gauvin A. Bailey, "The Indian Conquest of Catholic Art: The Mughals, the Jesuits, and Imperial Mural Painting," *Art Journal* 57, no. 1 (1998): 26-28; Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 134-37; Koch, "Jahangir and the Angels." Parihar gives a brief list of European travelers who commented on these wall paintings. Subhash Parihar, "Mughal Wall-Paintings at Doraha," *Marg: A Magazine of the Arts* 63, no. 3 (2012): 58-59.

85 Parihar lists some examples in "Mughal Wall-Paintings at Doraha."

86 Koch, "Jahangir and the Angels," 177-86.



FIGURE 3.1 *The Deposition from the Cross* (ca. 1590–1600), based on an engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi after a lost original by Raphael. Victoria and Albert Museum, IS. 133:79–1964.

COURTESY OF THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON.

Mughal artists frequently took liberties with European imagery, often mixing it with ideas and traditions current at the imperial court. For example, Farrukh Beg copied a Netherlandish print that portrayed melancholy, although in his version the figure personifying sorrow appears to be a Sufi and the indoor background has partly transmorphed into an outdoors scene with animals (fig. 3.2).⁸⁷

In another creative image, Basawan illustrated a European-looking robed woman clasping her hands in reverence towards the sun, a composition that suggests Akbar's practice of sun veneration based largely on Brahmanical traditions (fig. 3.3).⁸⁸ Some elements of Western iconography became staples of Mughal art more generally, such as angels adapted from European images that are strewn throughout Mughal paintings. Jahangir even appropriated an image of Jesus and Mary for one of his royal seals.⁸⁹

The Mughal captivation with Christian art was unprecedented in Jesuit experiences elsewhere in Asia, and the priests often counted it as a mark of devotion. Rather than indicating a proclivity towards Christianity, however, Akbar's motivations were probably sheer curiosity and aesthetic appreciation intermingled with a desire to incorporate Western images into his ongoing program to proclaim universal sovereignty. Nonetheless, the Jesuits reported: "On entering [the chapel] [Akbar] admonished his children to pay reverence to the altar-piece and he himself and all the rest paid much reverence and respect to the picture. We were overjoyed with the hopes this raised in our hearts."⁹⁰ On another occasion, the priests thought it encouraging that the first time Akbar visited a church he was so seduced by its beauty that he brought back artisans to copy the pictures and the ivory and gold carvings.⁹¹ Even after several decades, however, the Jesuits appear to have not fully conceded to the reality that the Mughals were more interested in Christian art than Christian conversion. Writing in 1527, Father Joseph de Castro mentioned that Jahangir sent painters to copy the inside of a church. The priest then immediately proceeded

87 The image is held by the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar. It was printed recently in John Guy and Jorrit Britschgi, *Wonder of the Age: Master Painters of India, 1100–1900* (New York and New Haven, CT: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Distributed by Yale University Press, 2011), 66.

88 Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar (ms. 157); printed and discussed in Guy and Britschgi, *Wonder of the Age*, 49.

89 Bailey, "Indian Conquest of Catholic Art," 28.

90 Correia-Afonso, *Letters from the Mughal Court*, 48.

91 *Ibid.*, 30–31 and 33.

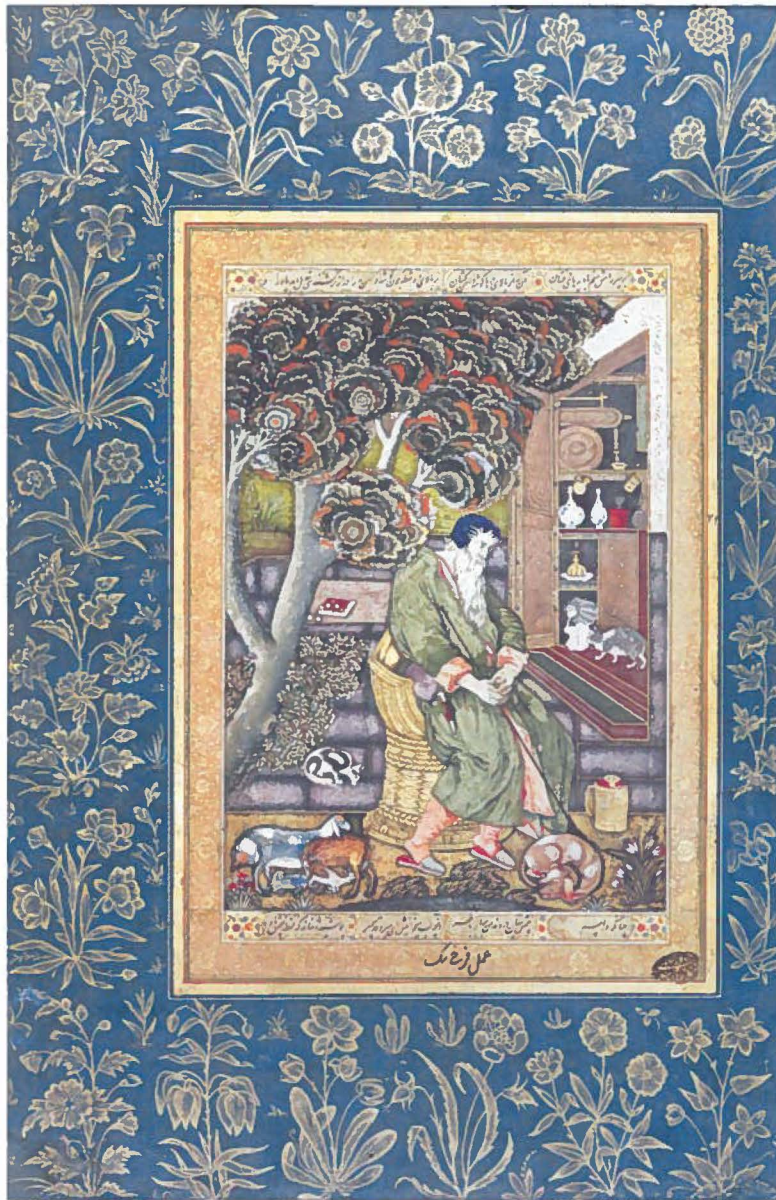


FIGURE 3.2 *A Sufi sage* (1615), after the European personification of melancholia (*Dolor*).
COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, DOHA, QATAR.

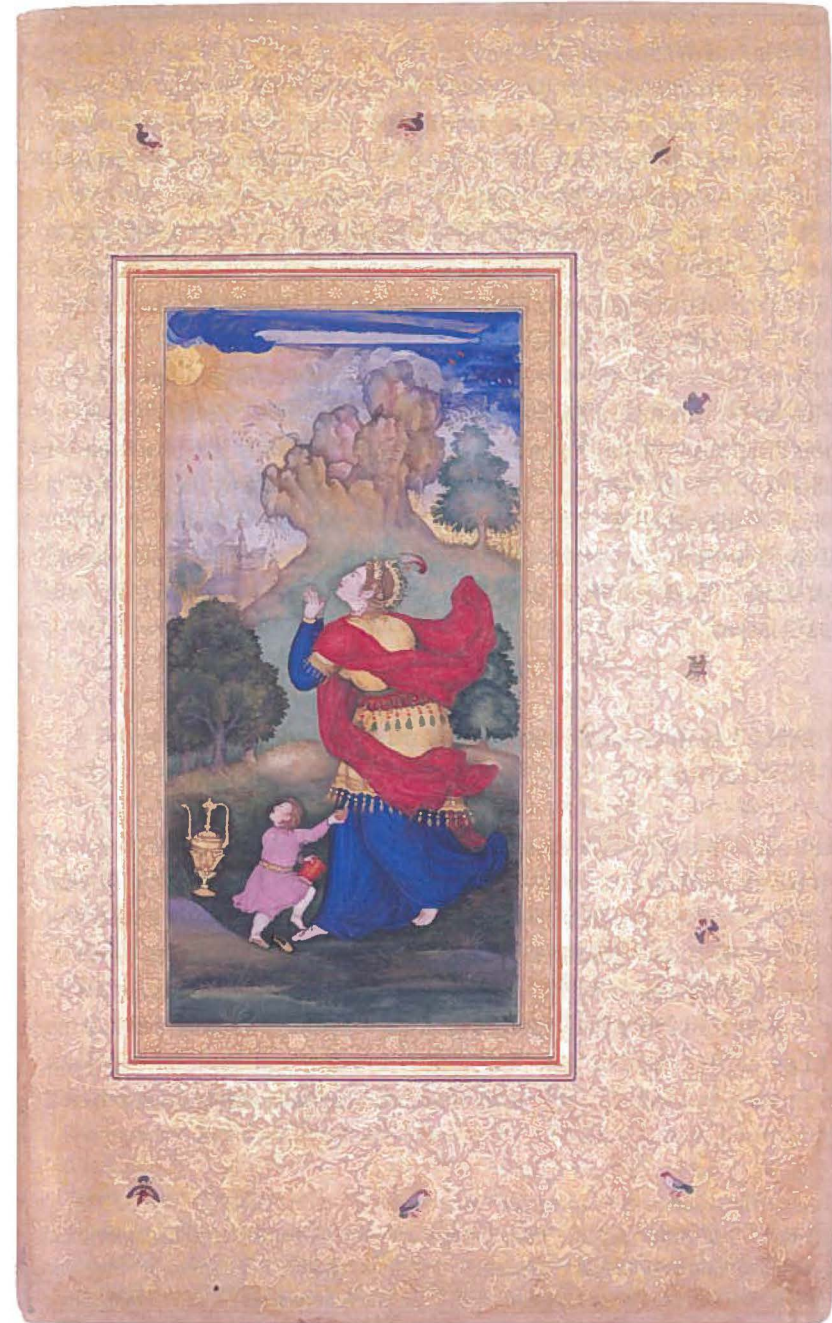


FIGURE 3.3 *Woman worshipping the sun* (c. 1590–95), page from a *Jahangirnama*
manuscript, ms. 157.
COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, DOHA, QATAR.

to discuss what he hoped would be the “chief fruit” of the mission: “the conversion and salvation of their souls.”⁹²

In part, the Jesuits erroneously projected a religious component onto Mughal aesthetic interests. Contrary to popular beliefs, figurative traditions had long flourished in Muslim societies, in spite of the theological debates regarding images. But images were rarely used for religious devotion. In this vein, one scholar has compellingly argued that the Mughals viewed European prints as connected with the Islamic tradition of calligraphy.⁹³ More generally, the Jesuits erred in not distinguishing Mughal interests in Western culture(s) from a theological leaning towards the Christian faith. In this regard, royal access indeed paved the way for western ideas to become powerful and pervasive in Mughal India but primarily for their imperial and aesthetic potentials rather than their religious appeal. Despite dim prospects, however, the Jesuits never fully abandoned their hopes that proximity and dedication would lead to the conversion of the Mughal rulers. Jesuit priests remained in residence at the Mughal court until the late eighteenth century, decades after the Mughals had lost most of their land holdings. Nonetheless, the Jesuits never gained any willing royal converts.

Official Ambassadors: Balancing European and Indian Courtly Expectations

Diplomatic and independent European visitors also came to India, some of whom were marginally more successful than the Jesuits in navigating Mughal court culture. One much-discussed diplomat was Sir Thomas Roe, an English ambassador to Emperor Jahangir from 1615 to 1618.⁹⁴ Roe aimed to advance British trading interests, primarily by securing Mughal permission and protection for an East India Company factory at Surat on India's western coast. King James I had earlier tried to gain this concession through William Hawkins, another English ambassador, who arrived at the Mughal court in 1609 and left

92 Hosten, “Three Letters of Fr. Joseph de Castro,” 152–53.

93 Yael Rice, “The Brush and the Burin: Mogul Encounters with European Engravings,” in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence: Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of the History of Art*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Carlton, Vic: Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Publishing, 2009), 305–310.

94 For a brief overview of Roe's biography, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals Between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris,” in *The Worlds of the East India Company*, ed. H. V. Bowen, Margaret Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (Woodbridge: Boydell Press), 71–74.

empty-handed a few years later. Hawkins failed to gain Jahangir's trust and also perhaps fell prey to Portuguese opposition to British interests at court.⁹⁵ Roe proved at least slightly more adept than his predecessor at imperial politics and after two years returned to England bearing a royal order (*farman*).⁹⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam has questioned Roe's alleged success as an emissary.⁹⁷ But regardless Roe convincingly presented himself to his English contemporaries as wildly effective within the constraints of the Mughal Empire. After returning to England proclaiming triumph, Roe enjoyed a long diplomatic career that featured the negotiation of peace accords and travel to the Ottoman Empire and Poland. Nonetheless, Roe's time in India has proved enigmatic for modern scholars who are often sharply divided over whether Roe intuited Mughal imperial dynamics or remained an outsider who blithely judged the Mughals according to inapplicable European standards.⁹⁸ Both views contain more than a grain of truth, and Sir Thomas Roe is perhaps most interesting because he persuaded his fellow Europeans of his ability to use royal access in order to navigate Mughal court dynamics, even if the result was only modest gains.

When Sir Thomas Roe first reached the Mughal court he was stunned by the lavish surroundings and formal hierarchies. This is how he portrayed his initial approach to Jahangir in the public audience hall at Agra:

In the Inward Court [Jahangir] sat, high in a Gallerie that went round, with a canopy over him and a carpet before him, in great but barberous state. Coming toward him through a lane of People . . . I passed on, till I came to a place railed in, right under him, with an assent of 3 steps, where I made him reverence, and he bowed his body; and so went within it, where stood round by the side all the great men of the town with their hands before them like slaves. The place was covered overhead with a Rich canopy, and underneath all Carpets. To describe it rightly, it was like a great stage, and the Prince sat above as the Mock kings do there.⁹⁹

95 Alam and Subrahmanyam, “Frank Disputations,” 504.

96 Roe wanted a more formal trade agreement with the Mughals but made no headway on that front.

97 “Frank Submissions,” 77–79.

98 E.g., see the arguments made by Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), chapter 2 and their enthusiastic repudiation by William R. Pinch, “Same Difference in India and Europe,” *History and Theory* 38, no. 3 (1999): 389–407.

99 Thomas Roe, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615–1619, as Narrated in His Journal and Correspondence*, ed. William Foster, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society (London: Printed for the Hakluyt society, 1899), 1:91–92. I have modernized some of the language here and in future quotes.

Roe again underscored the Mughals' material wealth and the affinity between their court and the theatre in narrating his presentation to Emperor Jahangir:

At the Durbar I was led right before him, at the entrance of an outward rayle, where met me two Principall Noble slaves to conduct me nearer. I had required before my going leave to use the Customes of my Country, which was freely granted, so that I would perform them Punctually. When I entered within the first rayle I made a reverence; entering in the inward rayle a Nother; and when I came under the king a third. The Place is a great Court, whither resort all sorts of people. The king sits in a little Gallery over head; Ambassadors, the great men and strangers of quality within the inmost rayle under him, raised from the ground, covered with canopies of velvet and silk, under foot laid with good Carpetts; the Meaner men representing gentry within the first rayle, the people without in a base Court, but so that all may see the king. This sitting out hath so much affinitye with a Theatre—the manner of the king in his gallery; The great men lifted on a stage as actors; the vulgar below gazing on—that an easy description will inform of the place and fashion.¹⁰⁰

In reading these passages, scholars have often ruminated about Roe's invocation of the stage as critical to parsing his interpretation of the Mughal court. Some scholars have suggested that he perceived the Mughals as play acting rather than conducting serious political business in a manner comparable to an English sovereign. But Subrahmanyam hits closer to the mark when he characterizes Roe's view of Mughal official proceedings as "repetitive theatre that must be played out again and again, where no one—not even the king—can change the rules."¹⁰¹ There is no denying that Roe's remarks have a caustic edge that deliberately invoke the bawdry overtones of theatre in seventeenth-century England. More generally, Roe exhibited a highly pejorative attitude throughout his memoirs, frequently depicting the Mughals as a despotic and backwards (if powerful) empire. Nonetheless, the metaphor of the stage captures something of the scripted formalism of the Mughal court that was carefully cultivated with an eye to perception.

In another mention of the stage in his memoirs, Roe again showed a nuanced grasp of the Mughal imperial system even while maintaining a certain respectable distance from his Eastern interlocutors. During his time in India, Jahangir

¹⁰⁰ *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, 1:108–9.

¹⁰¹ "Frank Submissions," 75.

bestowed on Roe a *khil'at*, a robe of honor that was thought to carry the charisma and authority of its giver (fig. 3.4). Following the practices of Islamicate rulers for hundreds of years before them, the Mughals performed this ritual on many occasions to a wide variety of ends. Roe narrated his receiving of a robe thus:

By and by came out a Cloth of gold cloak of his own, once or twice worn, which he Caused to be put on my back, and I made reverence, very unwillingly. When his Ancester Tamerlane was represented at the Theatre the Garment would well have become the actor; but it is here reputed the highest of favour to give a garment worn by the Prince, or, being New, once laid on his shoulder.¹⁰²

Roe referred here to Christopher Marlowe's 1587/88 play *Tamburlaine* that focuses on Timur, one of the Mughals' most illustrious ancestors. In making sense of this allusion, one scholar has suggested "[Roe's] observation that the robe of honour he received was more appropriate to a stage actor shows that he did not accept Mughal values and aesthetics."¹⁰³ Such a surface-level reading misses two crucial points. First, the fact that Roe was unhappy about donning a *khil'at* indicates that he likely understood the claims of authority and subordination that often accompanied such a gifting.¹⁰⁴ Second, while Roe certainly intended a jibe at the Mughals by invoking Marlowe's play in which Tamurlane is a lowborn upstart, whether he embraced Mughal aesthetics or not was largely irrelevant.¹⁰⁵ Roe's goal as an ambassador was not to internalize Mughal imperial ideals but rather to learn how to negotiate them just enough to achieve specific aims. In fact, maintaining a clear distance from the opulence and political clout of Jahangir's court was likely important to Roe's reputation with his British employers.

¹⁰² *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, 2:334.

¹⁰³ Donald Clay Johnson, "Seventeenth-century Perceptions of Textile Trade as Evidenced in the Writings of the Emperor Jahangir and Sir Thomas Roe," in *Textiles from India: The Global Trade: Papers Presented at a Conference on the Indian Textile Trade, Kolkata, 12–14 October 2003*, ed. Rosemary Crill (Calcutta and New York: Seagull Books, 2006), 243.

¹⁰⁴ Gordon discusses the wide range of perceived meanings in a *khil'at* from the perspective of recipients, including many negative connotations. Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes of Honour: Khil'at in Pre-colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14–20.

¹⁰⁵ Loomba ("Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats," 45) notes the lowly association with Tamurlane.



FIGURE 3.4 *Jahangir investing a courtier with a robe of honour watched by Sir Thomas Roe, English ambassador to the court of Jahangir at Agra from 1615–18, no. 1933,0610,0.1.*
COURTESY OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

After his initial introduction to Jahangir, Roe wished to gain regular access to the king. He recorded his movements in his memoirs, celebrating when he was given a place “above all other men” in open court.¹⁰⁶ Roe next sought out Jahangir in a more intimate setting and soon became a regular drinking buddy of the emperor. Jahangir enjoyed wine and opium throughout his life, and even confessed his struggles with addiction and excess in his royal memoirs.¹⁰⁷ As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has noted, Roe was sometimes admitted to Jahangir’s drinking parties without his interpreter, and so communication was presumably fragmentary at best.¹⁰⁸ Roe’s inability to speak directly to Jahangir may largely explain why the king does not mention Sir Thomas Roe in his memoirs. Nonetheless, even the Jesuits at court reluctantly observed that Roe was “much favoured” by Jahangir.¹⁰⁹ Despite spending time with the king, however, Roe was still unable to persuade Jahangir or other Mughal officials to talk seriously about British manufacturing rights. Roe’s predecessor, William Hawkins, had also been a drinking companion for two years to the Mughal king, which had done nil to advance English interests.¹¹⁰ Roe quickly found that he had worked himself into a similarly powerless relationship with the emperor and sought other means of influencing Mughal policy.

Roe turned to gifts as a possible way of prompting Jahangir into action regarding sanctioning a British factory in Gujarat and was unsuccessful at first. Along with other European travelers, Roe was racked with anxiety about the inferiority of his gifts compared to the overawing wealth of the Mughals and the luxurious presents brought by other ambassadors.¹¹¹ He wrote about how the early items he presented, such as telescopes and cloth, were despised by Jahangir.¹¹² Asaf Khan, an influential noble, actually returned a gift sent by Roe because of its paltry value.¹¹³ Even gifts accepted by the Mughals, such as a British coach, were only rarely brought out at court and only after being subjected to extensive improvements by imperial artisans.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, gift giving was an essential part of preparing for commerce negotiations in both

106 *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, 1:115.

107 *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, ed. and trans. W. M. Thackston (Washington, DC and New York: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, and Oxford University Press, 1999), 184–85.

108 “Frank Submissions,” 83.

109 A 1615 letter from Jerome Xavier quoted in Hosten, “Eulogy of Father Jerome Xavier,” 125.

110 *Hawkins’ Voyages*, 437.

111 Loomba, “Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats,” 43–45.

112 A 1615 letter to the East India Company reproduced in *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, 1:97.

113 Introduction to *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, 1:xvii, n. 2.

114 Loomba, “Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats,” 41.

European and Indian cultures of the day, and so Roe persisted in offering materials goods to Jahangir throughout his time in Mughal India.¹¹⁵

Bernard Cohn has argued that Roe's early failure to present suitable gifts to Jahangir was due to his fundamental misunderstanding of the Mughal scale of value. According to Cohn, "Europeans of the seventeenth century lived in a world of signs and correspondences, whereas Indians lived in a world of substances."¹¹⁶ This view is unsupported by the extant evidence. In fact, as Ania Loomba has pointed out, Roe's well-received offerings at Jahangir's court suggest that the Mughals often emphasized the symbolism of gifts above their raw economic worth.¹¹⁷ To this thoughtful point I would add that Jahangir had a well-known penchant for oddities and items that displayed unfamiliar craftsmanship.¹¹⁸

Roe offered Jahangir a series of small presents that appealed to Jahangir's taste for the exotic. For example, in March 1616 Roe imparted a small box of crystal that delighted Jahangir more than a diamond he had received earlier the same day.¹¹⁹ When Roe saw Jahangir later in a more private setting, he fielded a series of questions from the king concerning the gift.¹²⁰ Several months later, acting on the recommendation of Asaf Khan, Roe gave Jahangir a finely crafted pendant from England. Delighted with the item, Jahangir boasted that his artists could reproduce it. Indeed three weeks later Roe could tell apart his original pendant from five copies only with great difficulty.¹²¹ A mere ten days after this artistic encounter, Roe was inducted into Jahangir's inner circle with a proper ceremony that featured Jahangir gifting Roe a small royal painting that he was to wear.¹²² Within a month Roe began negotiations over the terms of an imperial order pertaining to British trade in Surat.

In this sequence of events, Roe successfully enticed Jahangir on the king's own terms and thereby gained a particular type of access to Mughal elites. Meeting the king at public court allowed Roe no opportunity for productive

115 Loomba, "Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats," 51–52.

116 *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge*, 18.

117 Loomba, "Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats," 49–51. William Pinch also criticizes Bernard Cohn's reading of Roe ("Same Difference").

118 Corinne Lefèvre, "Recovering a Missing Voice from Mughal India: The Imperial Discourse of Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) in His Memoirs," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 4 (2007): 478–84.

119 *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, 1:144. Loomba also discusses this episode in "Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats," 50.

120 *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, 1:145.

121 Pinch recounts these events, based on Roe's Memoirs, in "Same Difference," 402–3.

122 *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, 1:244–45.

conversation. Jahangir's late night gatherings to drink and ingest opium also proved non-conducive to business. But becoming part of the king's inner circle, a sort of discipleship program, afforded Roe the opportunities and credibility he needed to advance British commercial interests. It remains an open question whether Roe fully understood the dynamics at play in offering a small pendant that spoke to Jahangir's fondness for European images and displays of artisan skills. This suggestion came from Asaf Khan, who also acted as an intermediary and advisor for other European visitors to the Mughals.¹²³ Even presuming that Roe did grasp something of the persuasive power of his gift, however, he and Jahangir still did not see eye-to-eye in many respects. Thus, characterizing their haphazard exchanges as based on "mutual understanding," as one scholar has done, glosses over the chasms of culture and language that separated the two men.¹²⁴

For Sir Thomas Roe, imperial access to the Mughals was also a potent aspect of negotiating his own position in Britain. On the one hand, he required admission into Jahangir's court and repeated contact with influential officials in order to advance the ambitions of King James I. Roe often felt that he did not have the required means to pursue his enterprise, both in terms of linguistic and material resources. At the same time, however, he was equally restrained by a wish to maintain some distance from Mughal culture in the eyes of his compatriots and, perhaps equally importantly, in his own self-conception. Sir Thomas Roe seems to have walked this tightrope rather well. He ultimately failed to gain any crucial ground in British trade interests on the subcontinent. Nonetheless Roe used stories about access to the Mughal king, peppered with attestations about his own hardships and criticisms of the Mughal court, to convince a European audience of his great success in difficult circumstances.

Independent Travelers: Claims of Special and Sexualized Access

Alongside the official visits of missionaries and statesmen, independent European travelers also made their way to Mughal India, often seeking better fortunes than they found at home. One of the liveliest of such figures was the Italian traveler Nicolo Manucci (also spelled Manuzzi) who lived in India

123 E.g., see Joseph de Castro letter from Agra in the mid-1630s that refers to speaking with Asaf Khan regarding Shah Jahan's order to persecute Christians (Hosten, "Jesuits at Agra in 1635–37," 486–88).

124 Pinch, "Same Difference," 407. For criticisms of Pinch's argument, see Loomba, "Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats," 73–74 and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Submissions," 76–79.

for over sixty years from the mid-seventeenth through the early eighteenth centuries. Manucci first landed at the port of Surat in 1656 and was quickly hired as an artilleryman by the Mughal prince and soon-to-be-routed heir apparent Dara Shikuh (his son, Sulayman Shikuh, featured in fig. 3.5). He remained in Mughal service, partly as a physician, for much of the next thirty-odd years. In 1686, he took up employment with the East India

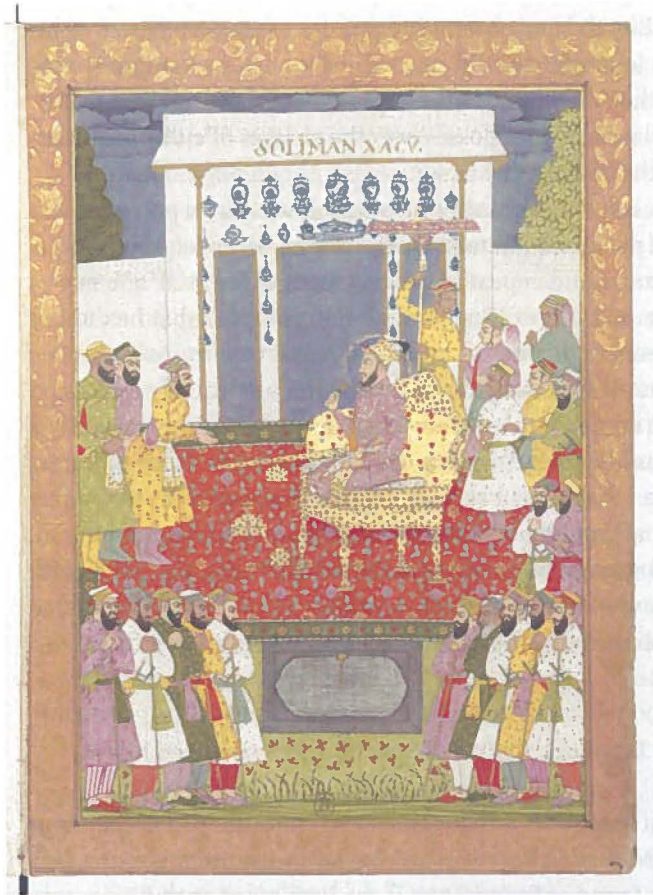


FIGURE 3.5 *Mughal Prince Sulayman Shikuh*, image commissioned by Nicolo Manucci to accompany *Histoire de l'Inde depuis Tamerlank jusqu'à Orangzeb*, 1678–1686. COURTESY OF THE BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE.

Company and moved to South India, where he died around 1720.¹²⁵ Manucci's Indian travels have been well studied, largely because his multi-volume history of Mughal India (*Storia do Mogor*) is available in an early twentieth century colonial English translation.¹²⁶ Manucci wrote the work over the course of a few decades in a mix of European languages, and a heavily redacted French version of the first few sections was published during his lifetime.¹²⁷ Manucci's text holds limited value as a historical work, which recent scholarship has revealed by debunking many of its allegations about the rule of Aurangzeb 'Alamgir (r. 1658–1707).¹²⁸ Nonetheless, Manucci offers a compelling take on how European ideas about access shaped how travelers sought to present an authentic, authoritative account of Mughal India.

Manucci wrote his history of the Mughals in conscious competition with other European travel writers on India, particularly François Bernier. Bernier spent around a decade (1658–1668) on the subcontinent. He worked as Aurangzeb's personal physician and was also attached for a time to Dara Shikuh's court and the retinue of the noble Danishmand Khan.¹²⁹ Bernier had his work on the Mughals published in Paris in 1670.¹³⁰ Manucci wrote a few decades later than Bernier (although he also covered the years when Bernier was in India) and compared his account favorably to that of his rival and predecessor at several points.¹³¹ In a notably invective passage, he proclaimed:

[Bernier knew the Mughal empire] only in a fugitive manner, and superficially, and all that he recounts in his book are all relations that he has had from one or the other person, and above all acquired by him in the

- 125 For an overview of Manucci's career in India, see Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien*, 141–42.
- 126 Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor; or, Mogul India, 1653–1708*, trans. William Irvine, 4 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1906–1908).
- 127 François Catrou's *Histoire Generale de l'empire du Mongol depuis sa fondation, sur les memoires portugais de M. Manouchi*. Subrahmanyam sketches out the writing and publication history of Manucci's work (*Three Ways to be Alien*, chap. 4).
- 128 E.g., see the discussion of Manucci's misleading comments on Indian music under Aurangzeb in Katherine Butler Brown, "Did Aurangzeb Ban Music? Questions for the Historiography of His Reign," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 01 (2007): 77–120.
- 129 On Bernier's time in India, see Burke, "Philosopher as Traveller."
- 130 Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien*, 144.
- 131 E.g., see references in Pompa Banerjee, "Postcards from the Harem: The Cultural Translation of Niccolao Manucci's Book of Travels," in *The "Book" of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250–1700*, ed. Palmira Brummett (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 255.

marketplaces [*nelle botteghe*] of India, but not believed in the courts of the princes and *grandees* of the kingdom. The reader will pardon me if I tell the truth and speak freely in this manner but it is true that the greater part of the relations that he recounts were heard by him from me, but as time did not permit him enough space to make the required annotations, or written memoirs, on account of the continuous tasks and forced service that he did for his patron Danismandkan [Danishmand Khan], who did not allow him to rest a great deal, but occupied him continuously in various matters, and among other things in comprehending Roman and Greek histories, it is likely that he did not [properly] recall the accounts that I recounted to him.¹³²

Here Manucci directly spoke about the importance of placement within a court and access to historical sources as ways of upholding himself as a more reliable informant about Mughal India than Bernier. He repeated his alleged access to Mughal texts elsewhere in his *Storia do Mogor*, such as:

Finding myself established in India, I now set to work to learn the Indian tongue. Furthermore, as I was desirous of knowing about matters in the Mogul kingdom, I found an aged man of letters, who offered to read to me the 'Royal Chronicles of the Mogul kings and princes.' Therefore, I am of opinion that the reader will be glad to listen to me, seeing that I have special information.¹³³

In his 1705 French rewriting of Manucci's history, Catrou echoed Manucci's claims about reading Mughal works.¹³⁴ In reality Manucci's history belies any pretense of a textual basis and is drawn from common oral knowledge rather than identifiable chronicles.¹³⁵ Nonetheless, Manucci identified access to imperial Persian works as a crucial foundation for his credibility with European readers. Along similar lines, he emphasized the amount of time he spent in India as compared to other travelers.¹³⁶ Last, he commissioned a series of paintings of Mughal kings and nobles and "ethnographic

132 Cited in Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien*, 145–46.

133 Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, 1:96, also see 1:115.

134 Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien*, 146–47.

135 *Ibid.*, 170. Also see Irvine's note in Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, 1:96n1.

136 Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, 1:115.

representations" of Indian figures that he intended to accompany his work.¹³⁷ These images would have authenticated Manucci's claims to specialized knowledge about the Mughals.

Manucci's most outrageous claim concerning his unparalleled access to the Mughals concerned the royal harem. Mughal rulers had multiple wives and dozens more mistresses, all of whom kept *pardah*, meaning that they were not allowed to be seen by unrelated men. Entire portions of Mughal palaces were set aside for the women, who also often traveled as part of the royal entourage but never appeared unveiled in public.¹³⁸ The Eastern harem had long been a subject of Western fascination and erotic imagination.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, through the early seventeenth century, European travelers to India remained largely uninterested in the Mughal harem, and women tended to occur in earlier travel accounts only intermittently.¹⁴⁰ During the seventeenth century, Europeans grew increasingly intrigued by women in the Mughal imperial order. But Manucci elevated the importance of the harem to an entirely new level.

Manucci frequently trumpeted his knowledge of events in the Mughal harem and his unique connections to this hidden part of royal life. This portion of Manucci's story has to be taken as provisional, at best, and it is most fruitfully read against Bernier's travelogue. Bernier had openly admitted that the living quarters for Mughal ladies were closed to outsiders, but he claimed to be escorted inside with a shawl obscuring his vision on rare occasions to treat ill women.¹⁴¹ Manucci supported Bernier's account of the harem as off-limits except in dire circumstances when an unrelated physician could enter veiled.¹⁴² But Manucci alleged to have been deemed an exception to this rule and so able to come and go from the women's' quarters as he pleased.¹⁴³ In this way, Manucci positioned himself as having unprecedented freedom to enter part of the Mughal palace that even Bernier had been unable to see.

Manucci further portrayed himself as deeply integrated into harem life, highlighting his purported access. He reported on the drinking habits of the

137 Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien*, 151–54 and 163–68.

138 The best account of the Mughal harem through Akbar's reign is Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

139 Banerjee, "Postcards from the Harem," 245–46.

140 Lal, *Domesticity and Power*, 37–39.

141 François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire AD 1656–1668*, ed. Archibald Constable and Vincent A. Smith (London and New York: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1914), 267.

142 Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, 2:352.

143 *Ibid.*, 2:400.

Mughal princesses, which he allegedly learned about from both the women themselves and their eunuch guards.¹⁴⁴ He listed the names of the main players in the harem, including princesses, concubines, matrons, singers, dancers, servants, and eunuchs.¹⁴⁵ He also claimed intimate knowledge of the female inhabitants. He reported that sexual longing and promiscuity ran rampant behind the harem walls, even repeating the European trope of Eastern women enamored with cucumbers.¹⁴⁶ Manucci's most sensuous report featured himself of course. He attested that he often examined ill ladies through a cloth, but then:

[The physician] stretches out his hand inside the curtain; [the women] lay hold of it, kiss it, and softly bite it. Some, out of curiosity, apply it to their breast, which has happened to me several times; but I pretended not to notice, in order to conceal what was passing from the matrons and eunuchs then present, and not arouse their suspicions.¹⁴⁷

Such stories no doubt played into all kinds of European male fantasies. But, on a political note, it is important that Manucci allegedly did not report the women's behavior to anybody else. This is another way of claiming (whether accurately or not) that he possessed an exceptional type of knowledge about the Mughals that was enabled by a special sort of imperial access.

Conclusion: Controlling Perceptions of Access

Europeans found themselves constantly in need of the right kind of access to the Mughal court. Some visitors, such as the Jesuits, misread their good relations with the king as a sign of near conversion. Ambassadors such as Sir Thomas Roe ascertained that official business would only advance within particular sorts of meetings. Independent explorers sometimes turned to claims of unique and even sexualized access in order to assert themselves as authorities on Mughal India. These varying encounters reveal the different ways that European travelers navigated a court that appeared utterly foreign to them and

144 Ibid., 1:219–20.

145 Ibid., 2:333–38 and 2:350–51.

146 Ibid., 2:351. This idea also appears in European accounts of the Ottoman harem (Banerjee, "Postcards from the Harem," 271n44).

147 Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, 2:353.

their fellow Europeans in some respects while deceitfully similar to European royal arenas in others.

More broadly, these case studies highlight that ideas about imperial spaces and access were very much at the forefront of European attempts to parse any sort of courtly environment. Both the Jesuits and ambassadors relied upon their entrée into different facets of court life as signals to ascertaining Mughal intentions. All three types of travelers used stories and claims about access in order to present themselves favorably to readers and financial backers at home. In this sense, we often cannot distinguish the truth of what European visitors experienced at the Mughal court from their careful reconfigurations of such events in written works, but this is sometimes beside the point. The Jesuits, ambassadors, and independent travelers all interacted with the Mughals and wrote about such events knowing that a key value of such exercises lay in the perceptions of their European audiences.