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Faces of God: Images of Devotion in Indo-Muslim Painting, 1500–1800

Murad Khan Mumtaz

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Faces of God: Images of Devotion in Indo-Muslim Painting, 1500–1800

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وَلِلَّهِ ٱلْمَشْرِقُ وَٱلْمَغْرِبُ ۚ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا۟ فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Unto God belong the East and the West, and wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God. Lo! God is All-Embracing, All-Knowing

To Hadi and Jahanara

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations from Persian and Urdu are my own, unless noted otherwise.

For Arabic and Persian, I have adopted the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES) system of transliteration. For key philosophical and religious terms that are used in both Arabic and Persian, I have opted to use the Arabic-standard rather than the Persian, since the Arabic will be more readily recognized by a wider readership. For instance, I use the Arabic-standard "*wujūd*" rather than the modern Persian "*vujūd*" or "*vojūd*." I have included accents for names and book titles. With the exception of *ʿayn* (ع) and *hamzaʾ* (ء), I have preferred not to include accents in proper nouns.

MAP 1 Map of South Asia

CREDIT: JOE FAVINI, VISUAL RESOURCE CENTER, WILLIAMS COLLEGE

Introduction: The Need for an Ontology of Art

Surrounded by enemies, his small empire crumbling around him, the last independent ruler of the South Indian state of Mysore, Tipu Sultan, ordered the compilation of an album of saints. Assembled in 1796, three years before his defeat and death at the hands of the British, the ninety-seven-folio album includes nearly a hundred paintings of Muslim holy men. Compared to most other albums made for the early modern Indo-Muslim elite, Tipu Sultan's album is rather modest. It lacks the characteristic borders and calligraphic examples that typically adorn imperial albums, and was evidently completed in a hurry. It opens with an effusive album preface, succeeded by two elliptical and seemingly incongruous paintings. These are followed by representations of saints, beginning with a seated portrait of the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, the fourth caliph of Islam, ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (Fig. 1).

Why did Tipu Sultan, who commanded a reputation as a fierce "anti-colonial" fighter and posed a formidable threat to British imperial ambitions, find it necessary to have an album of saints assembled at a time of political crisis—a crisis that saw half his kingdom annexed and his sons taken hostage? Why did he feel compelled to align his grand but teetering political claims and ambitions with painted depictions of Muslim holy men? The answer, as this book explains, lies in the power of the devotional image for South Asian Muslims. Tipu Sultan's engagement with depictions of saints is one late iteration in a long history of Indo-Muslim interactions with iconic representation.

Assumptions regarding iconophobia in Islam have meant that scholarship has largely failed to situate figural artwork made for South Asian Muslims within Islamic intellectual and religious history. *Faces of God* remedies this oversight by focusing on the intersection of religious devotion and Muslim cultural expression as witnessed through Indo-Muslim painting. By highlighting one specific region and its history, an overarching aim of this survey is to question our expectations about Islamic piety, thereby moving beyond the fields of only South Asian or only Islamic art. Scholarly—and also more public—prejudices have created serious blind spots that prevent us from witnessing the fact of Muslim devotion as it was and is *in practice*. By identifying and discussing the layered meaning of devotional images, this book provides key insights into Islamic practice in early modern South Asia (ca. 1500–1800). I discuss how figurative painting, particularly images of ascetics, were intimately linked to a unique Indo-Muslim religious expression that had a wide circulation across the subcontinent. Such images not only reflected Indo-Muslim beliefs and practices but also helped to shape and define them. I argue that

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FIGURE 1
ʿAli ibn Abi Talib, from the *Tipu Sultan Album of Saints*, 1796 CE. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 38.30 × 21.60 cm. British Museum, London (1936.411.0.31, f. 94)
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the image of devotion is at once representational, material, embodied, and affective. I situate the artworks in their devotional context by combining an art historical survey with an analysis of primary Indo-Persian literature written by the very patrons and subjects of the artworks. Philosophical, autobiographical, and devotional writings from early modern Muslim India provide the conceptual framework for this representation. Through this process the book brings to light a rich literary archive that has not yet been fully read or translated in Euro-American scholarship.

Just as saints and ascetics were—and still are—vital catalysts of Muslim culture, performing roles ranging from spiritual guidance to political counsel, devotional figures in Indo-Muslim painting were a common theme in almost every major album and illustrated text of the early modern period. *Faces of God* demonstrates how these figures of devotion acted as an isthmus between material and heavenly realms through their very presence on the painted page. Lived Islam examined through the field of visual culture shows the ways in which shared philosophical ideas common to the Muslim world were internalized by South Asians and translated into a local visual and conceptual

language, one important expression of which is figural depiction as an object of devotion.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century saints' portraits, found in albums or as loose folios, map how local artistic traditions of North India persisted and adapted during the British colonial period (1858–1947). Yet most of these artworks are based on models established much earlier, in seventeenth-century Mughal India. Although *Faces of God* highlights earlier precedents, mostly between the sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries, visual and literary metaphors found in the preface to Tipu Sultan's *Album* and its opening paintings have provided a framework to understand the importance that figures of devotion had for Muslims in South Asia. The preface (*dībācha*), written in Persian, uses a metaphorical program—rooted in Islamic metaphysics—that had circulated widely across the Persianate world in the early modern period and become a staple for most imperial albums:[1]

> In the name of God, the supremely merciful, the beneficent. He—may he be glorified—himself arranged with abundant beneficence all of creation as a bound book. He did not leave a single individual from the assembly of creation dispersed. He painted the fixed and moving images [stars and moon] onto the pages of the skies. He decorated the pages of day and night in the most beautiful way. His majesty Tipu Sultan—the emperor of the celestial sphere, the court of the exalted sky, sun-stationed, the arranger of the compendium of justice and world-conquering, the binder of the manuscript of compassion and world-adornment, the waterer of the garden of everlasting spring of the Mohammedan religion, the gardener of the springtime orchard of the eternal nation, the ray of God's grace—arranged the image of the sun in the sky, ʿAli—may God have Mercy on his countenance—and [the images of] ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Hazrat Muʿin al-Din Chishti, and the other Friends of God—may God sanctify their secrets—that lay scattered, and instructed them to be bound in a volume, completed in the first month of Ahmadi, 1225 [1796 CE].[2]

1 I use "Persianate" and "Persian Cosmopolis" as interchangeable terms that refer to, in Emma Flatt's words, a "transregional Persian-speaking milieu, stretching from the Balkans to Bengal." For a complete discussion of these terms and their historiography, see Emma Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 17–24.

2 London, British Museum, 1936.411.0.31, *Tipu Sultan Album* [hereafter *Album*], 1796, f. 97v. Unless noted otherwise, all translations are my own.

In this preface, the writer describes God-the-creator using the terminology of bookbinding, thereby linking God's act of creation with the intimate process of creating an album, while also simultaneously expressing shared Islamic ontological ideas through very specific metaphors.

1 What Is Islamic Ontology?

Anchored in Islamic thought in general and Sufism in particular is the idea that human nature, similar to the cosmos, reflects God's qualities. The Persianate *dībācha* writing tradition—which the *Tipu Sultan Album* preface follows—was steeped in ideas sourced from the Sufic *waḥdat al-wujūd* ["Unity of Being"] tradition made famous by the Andalusian mystic Ibn al-ʿArabi (1165–1240), in which God's Reality pervades all levels of creation. This discourse codified the longstanding Islamic science of ontology, or the study of the nature of being/existence, and is best summed up by the Arabic word "*wujūd*." Prior to Ibn al-ʿArabi, Ibn Sina (980–1037) had already outlined an enduring model for Islamic metaphysics in which he used "*wujūd*" as his primary definition for "being."[3] *Wujūd* was not the only term used to explain "existence" or "being" in early peripatetic philosophy, but was one among several, such as "*annīyya*" that also means "being," but in a more essential way. Early metaphysicians, such as al-Farabi, who translated Greek philosophical treatises, took on Aristotle's definition of metaphysics (lit. "after-physics") which also encompasses ontology, and translated it using terms such as "*al-ilāhiyyāt*" [divinity] and "*al-falsafah al-ūlā*" [the first philosophy]. What is important to keep in mind is that words such as "*wujūd*," "*annīyya*," and "*ilāhiyyāt*," among others that were used by Islamic thinkers, collapsed ontology, metaphysics, and cosmology. This is a philosophical/metaphysical tradition that did not make sharp distinctions between names: it essentially meditates on "Being," which is at the root of what "ontology" means and does. Rather than hermetically sealed, Islamic disciplines such as philosophy, physics, metaphysics, and astronomy were all suffused with the notion of God's active presence through His Being.[4]

Following earlier prefaces made for Timurid, Safavid, and Mughal patrons, the author of the *Tipu Sultan Album* draws an analogy between the macrocosm

3 Herbert A. Davidson, "Avicenna's Proof of the Existence of God as a Necessarily Existent Being," in *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 165–87.

4 Damien Janos, *Method, Structure, and Development in Al-Farabi's Cosmology* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 73–82.

of God's created universe and the microcosm of the intimate album.[5] Just as God brings together the diversity of His creation into order and unity through His very presence (*wujūd*), the album ties disparate folios across space and time into a single bound volume. The interlinked relationship between the human microcosm and the outer macrocosm is expressed in the Quran in the words, "We shall show them our signs (*āyāt*) on the horizons and in themselves until it be clear to them that He is the Truth."[6] Another central Quranic utterance that forms the bedrock for *wujūdī* metaphysics is "Wheresoever you turn there is the Face of God," from which this book takes its title.[7] The *wujūdī* tradition represents a large swathe of intersecting South Asian Islamicate and Persianate intellectual cultures.[8] A key belief, one that was deeply embedded in medieval and early modern Islamic epistemology and structured everyday life as well as literary and intellectual discourse, was that there exists a mirror-like correlation between the human being and the world.[9] Thus, when the preface author heralds the theme of the album, he draws an analogical (and ontological) link between the sun of the sky and the Prophet's favorite disciple, ʿAli, and between the other great luminaries in the firmament of Islamic spirituality and the stars in the night sky. Similar to the "fixed and moving" satellites, the saints in Islam are believed to be eternally active in our world. Functioning as ontological doorways, they enact God's will and give His creation a sense of balance and purpose. Harnessing the power of these saints in a bound volume can, therefore, be seen as an attempt to imbibe their sacrosanct presences within the human microcosm as an aid to personal spiritual transformation, and in the case of the beleaguered sultan, as a way out of his dire predicament.

The first painted folio of the album hints at this intimate purpose for the album of saints. It is a drawing with red and black Persian inscriptions of a figure that is based on visual and textual depictions found in Sufi manuals of the archetypal or perfect human being (*al-insān al-azalī* or *al-insān al-kāmil*)

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5 For examples of earlier album prefaces from the Persianate world that use similar figures of speech, see Wheeler Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

6 Quran 41:53. Throughout the book, I have used Marmaduke Pickthall's translation, available at https://quran.com/ (accessed November 23, 2022). In explaining the relationship between the world and human beings according to Sufi thought, William Chittick writes that "human beings are microcosms containing within themselves all the worlds" ("The World of Imagination and Poetic Imagery According to Ibn al-ʿArabi," *Temenos* 10 [1989]: 108).

7 Quran 2:115.

8 See Chapter 1 for my discussion of South Asian voices.

9 David Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 160–79.

(Fig. 2).[10] It also has affinities with yogic representations of the cosmic-man found in various Indic traditions, and shows the hierarchy of the worlds reflected in the archetypal human being.[11] In Islam, the eternal archetype of *al-insān al-kāmil* is reflected first and foremost in Muhammad and then in the great saints. In the album figure, which operates like a cosmic map, creation unfolds between the head and the feet. The inscriptions tell us that the feet and legs represent the plane of the lower senses, which parallels the material realm in the macrocosm. Above the head lies a region labeled "Beyond-Being, Essence of God." The rest of the body is divided into ontological regions whose topography echoes Quranic descriptions of the cosmos as well as the famous ascent, or *miʿrāj*, made by the Prophet, in which he journeyed through each sphere of creation to a direct vision of God. This includes the tree in paradise Tuba, shown here emerging from the moon situated at the navel.[12] The pre-eternal tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), which contains all the predetermined deeds of creation, is located in the heart.[13] The breast is the station of God's throne, and the head is the place of God's "light upon light."[14] The figure thus provides a visual parallel to the opening of the album preface, which states that God created "all of creation as a bound book," leaving nothing "from the assembly of creation dispersed."[15] The album serves as a simulacrum of the perfect human being that in turn is a microcosmic mirror of the hierarchy of creation—a creation that arises out of God's absolute reality and, after traversing all the levels of existence, finds its lowest manifestation in the world of sense perception (Fig. 3).[16] In addition to operating as an interpretive tool to uncover a central meaning of the album, as a diagram of the perfect human the figure also operates as an inner portrait of the archetypal Muslim saint. It

10 For examples of diagrams of the *Insān al-azalī* in Sufi manuals, see Muhammad Ghaus Gwalyari, *Aslī jawāhar khamsah kāmil*, trans. Mirza Muhammad Beg (Delhi: Naz Publications, 1988), 402, and Syed Muhammad Pir Shah, *Nizami-i tawhid* (Lahore: Allahwale ki Qaumi Dukan, 1918), 18.

11 For examples of yogic drawings of the cosmic-man, see Debra Diamond and Molly Emma Aitken, eds., *Yoga: The Art of Transformation* (Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2013), 162, fig. 10b, and 165, fig. 10d. For examples of Jain cosmic figures, see Daniel J. Ehnbom and Krista Gulbransen, *Realms of Earth and Sky: Indian Painting from the 15th to the 19th Century* (Charlottesville: The Fralin Museum of Art, University of Virginia, 2014), 43, fig. 11, and 81, fig. 29.

12 Quran 13:29.

13 Quran 85:22.

14 Quran 24:35.

15 *Album*, f. 97v.

16 For a detailed survey of the cosmic hierarchy based on Sufi thought, see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

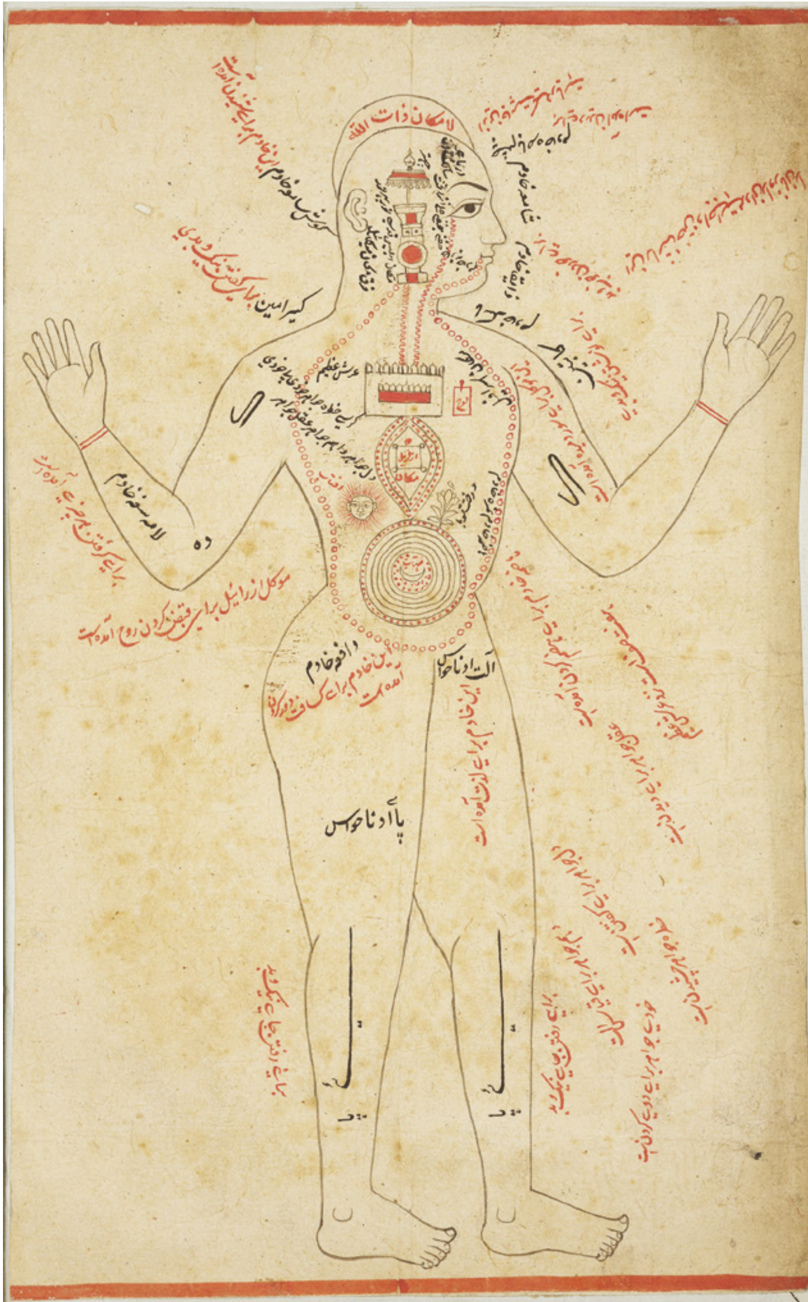

FIGURE 2 Al-insān al-kāmil, from the *Tipu Sultan Album of Saints*, 1796 CE. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. 38.30 × 21.60 cm. British Museum, London (1936.411.0.31, f. 96)

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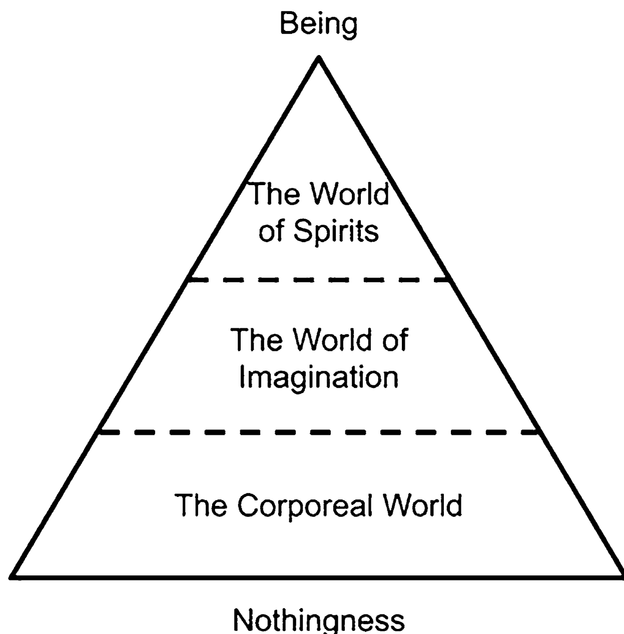

FIGURE 3 Hierarchy of Being in Sufi cosmology as outlined by Ibn al-ʿArabi

is therefore appropriate that it is placed at the very beginning of Tipu Sultan's album of saints.

The folio immediately after the *al-insān al-kāmil* drawing further emphasizes the main theme of the preface, but this time through the depiction of a composite animal, a trope popular in both Persian and Hindustani painting (Fig. 4). Most likely an earlier painting from Rajasthan, heavily restored at Tipu Sultan's court using lacquer, it shows the figure of a horse given shape with a composite of acrobatic women being led by a groom and ridden by a hunter shooting two birds with his bow and arrow. According to Sheila Canby, "the composite aspect of the animals alludes to the mystical idea of the unity of all creatures within God, while the animals themselves represent base instincts that must be overcome to achieve spiritual purity."[17]

17 Sheila S. Canby, "Art of the Ottoman Court," in *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Maryam Ekhtiar et al. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), 214–15. For an early example from Iran, see New York, MET Museum, 25.83.6, *Composite Animal*. While there is evidence to suggest that such acrobatics were performed by court acrobats as part of pageantry, the album cleverly uses this convention for a very specific, esoteric purpose.

FIGURE 4 Composite horse, from the *Tipu Sultan Album of Saints*. circa 1750. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. 38.30 × 21.60 cm. British Museum, London (1936.411.0.31, f. 95)
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After introducing its theme and purpose via the preface and two metaphorical portraits, the album proceeds to depict Muslim saints.[18] Iconographically, the portraits are a collection of saintly types whose models can be traced back to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mughal India. Similarly, the preface as well as the two opening images are based in some way or the other on earlier precedents. As mentioned, the preface follows the Persianate *dībācha* writing convention in which God's act of creation is mirrored in the act of compiling the album; the cosmic-figure is rooted in discourses on the microcosm found in numerous medieval and early modern Sufi treatises; and the composite animal painting is part of a longstanding visual convention that goes back to fifteenth-century Persia and Central Asia. Given how the album repurposes preexisting models but is unique in binding these disparate visual and literary elements together in one volume, we can use it as a valuable key to understand the various roles and meanings of earlier Indo-Muslim devotional

18 Throughout the book I have intentionally kept the terminology to describe images flexible. The Arabic-Persian term *ṣūrat* can be used to mean "form," "portrait," "image," "depiction," "likeness," etc. It is not a fixed term. With that in mind, I have used words such as "portrait," "depiction," "figure," and "image" interchangeably.

paintings, particularly in the genre's formative phase in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Why were saintly depictions so common in early modern South Asia? What do their representations—in particular the specific modes of depictions—tell us about the cultural values that produced these images? While the answers to these questions are layered and multiform, what becomes clear is that compilers of albums and painters of devotional subjects presupposed that their audience—in most cases an elite audience—lived and participated in the same ontological space in which saints and other historic and mythic beings acted as key interlocuters between different levels of reality.[19] These lived ontological realities, that most courtly cultures participated in, are often lost to modern and contemporary audiences and scholarship, trained to view history through disciplinarian boundaries and geopolitical divisions.[20]

Keeping recent geopolitical divisions in mind, it is necessary to address the question of terminology used to label paintings from this region. Although historiographically "Indian painting" is the term that art historians have employed to describe pre-partition—and specifically precolonial—painting from the subcontinent, I have been struggling with the limitations and evocations inherent in the term.[21] Today when we say "Indian," we unconsciously exclude entire regions that are no longer part of modern India but were important cultural and artistic centers before partition, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. On the other hand, "South Asian" as a classification is primarily used for modern and contemporary painting, and does not quite describe the way pre-moderns would have viewed their own regions and cultures. In his recent book, historian Manan Ahmad has suggested reclaiming the local word "Hindustan" as a term for precolonial South Asia, a name that was used by all denominations to describe themselves before being gradually erased from memory during the British colonial period. According to Ahmad, "When as scholars, we make an implicit or explicit spatial argument for 'India' or 'South Asia' (for the precolonial subcontinent) without focusing on the role of language and sectarian temporalities, we participate

19 As Alfred Gell has said, "To appreciate the art of a particular period we should try to recapture the 'way of seeing' which artists of the period implicitly assumed their public would bring to their work." Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 2.

20 Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 107–43.

21 Molly Aitken brings to light the limitations of historiographical terminologies in her discussion of early and "pre-Mughal" painting. Molly Aitken, "The Laud Rāgamālā Album, Bikaner, and the Sociability of Subimperial Painting," *Archives of Asian Art* 63, no. 1 (2013): 36.

in this erasure of 'Hindustan' as a decidedly attendant precolonial geography of the subcontinent."[22] Importantly, the Mughals saw themselves not as Persian-speaking Central Asians but as "Hindustani." I therefore find it appropriate to use the term "Hindustani painting," which encompasses the entire region and peoples of Hindustan as it stood up until the colonial period. When discussing artworks specifically made for Muslims from the region, I refer to them as "Indo-Muslim."[23] This does not mean that I completely eschew the word "Indian" in this book, since it is so much part of our imagination, and completely shunning it would be quite absurd. The intention is to introduce a parallel local term used during the very period that this book highlights.

2 Can "Indian Painting" Be Islamic Painting?

Museums, particularly storied Western repositories, unquestioningly persist with orientalist taxonomies. I often begin my "Islam and the Image" seminar by taking my students through the online collection page of one of these museums. I ask them to see what is odd about collection classifications. Students invariably realize that among mostly regional categories such as "Arts from the Himalayas," "South Asia," "Americas," etc., "Islamic Art" stands out as an anomaly. What does it tell us about modern collecting practices and biases when a religious classification is thrown in with regional labels? By retaining "Islamic Art" as a separate entity from "Southeast Asian Art," for instance, the region that has the largest Muslim population in the world, what message are we advertising to a museum-going audience?[24] Delving deeper into these taxonomies, students are often surprised to see that "Islamic Collections" habitually consist of utilitarian, non-figurative artworks, such as architectural fragments, ceramics, textiles, and manuscripts. Figural art is often consigned to regional categories and is detached from its Islamic or Muslim identity. Narrow definitions of religion and region—biases emerging from orientalist and colonial perspectives in which India equals Hindu, Middle East equals Islamic, and

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22 Manan Ahmad, *The Loss of Hindustan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 32.

23 I am deeply grateful to Molly Aitken for brainstorming possible terms, and for bringing me to Ahmad's book.

24 In the early 2000s, the Metropolitan Museum acknowledged this bias and re-labeled their "Islamic" arts collection "Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia," in order to make it more taxonomically consistent with the other permanent galleries. However, similar to most major museums, they continue to have an Islamic Department that is distinct from the South Asian and Himalayan Department.

Himalayas and Southeast Asia equal Buddhist—are not only out of touch with lived histories but also create severe historiographical fissures. In art history, it has meant that figural representation has seldom been seriously considered as an Islamic art form. This is even more true for paintings made for Muslims in pre-modern South Asia. What happens when we shift our focus to reengage with artworks made for Muslims by using an Islamic lens? We quickly realize that there is a vast body of material—so important for the civilization that produced it—that has been either entirely overlooked or cursorily discussed. Depictions of saints in Indo-Muslim painting is one such genre.

Although series of saints' portraits, such as the album made for Tipu Sultan, became part of a defined genre only after the late seventeenth century, individual folios containing single portraits or gatherings of saints were already ubiquitous in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century albums and manuscripts. In museums and libraries across the world, there are hundreds of paintings depicting Muslims saints and other figures linked to Sufism—the path of Islamic mysticism. Despite the profusion of these images, the theme of devotional painting has not, until now, been recognized as an independent category worthy of comprehensive study. Rather than delving deeper into questions of the meaning and purpose of these artworks, the majority of scholarly engagement with this subject has been connoisseurial, done in service of exhibition and auction catalogues and limited to brief discussions related to stylistic issues in order to identify individual hands of artists or schools of painting.[25]

Focused studies that consider devotional portraiture made for the Indo-Muslim elite seldom acknowledge the multivalence of meaning, preferring instead to use these images as a one-dimensional backdrop for discussing dynastic history and political ideology.[26] For instance, the much-loved

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25 For notable examples, see Stuart C. Welch, *The Art of Mughal India: Painting & Precious Objects* (New York: Asia Society, 1963), 102–03; Linda York Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, 2 vols. (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995); Barbara Schmitz et al., *Islamic and Indian Manuscripts and Paintings in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1997); Elaine Wright and Susan Stronge, *Muraqqaʾ Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2008); Milo C. Beach, *The Imperial Image: Paintings for the Mughal Court* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2012), 126–28, 162, 164.

26 Over a period of almost a hundred years of scholarship, the number of studies highlighting devotional Muslim images in South Asian painting is appallingly small. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Khwaja Khadir and the Fountain of Life in the Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art," in *"What is Civilisation" and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Golgonooza Press, 1989), 157–67; Almut Gladiss, "Ibrahim Ibn Adham—Darling of the Angels," in *Facts and Artefacts: Art in the Islamic World: Festschrift for Jens Kröger on His 65th Birthday*, ed. Jens Kröger, Annette Hagedorn, and Avinoam Shalem (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 305–12; Elinor W. Gadon, "Dara Shikuh's Mystical Vision of Hindu-Muslim

scholarly focus on Mughal royalty and political power hardly ever considers the possibility that royal patronage of painting could be at least partly devotional, despite the primary visual and textual evidence stacked against a politics-only interpretation. Images of devotion—which include saints, ascetics, mythic figures, angels, and prophets—are presented as the patrons' symbols or "strategies" for "promoting an image of piety."[27] Gregory Minissale also points to this historiographical oversimplification of Mughal art history when he explains how Shah Jahani painting has been used to prove "a pictorial political program" while overlooking "other more complex organizing principles."[28]

This longstanding historiographical trend of analyzing paintings made for the Mughals through the lens of politics at the expense of other parallel avenues has also meant that Mughal patronage has predominantly been assessed through its entanglement with early modern Europe.[29] Overemphasizing the European-Mughal confluence has led scholars to overlook the importance of Hindustani and pan-Islamic intellectual traditions that had a greater hand in shaping Indo-Muslim art than, say, Dutch prints.[30] Is it not possible

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Synthesis," in *Facets of Indian Art*, ed. Robert Skelton et al. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986), 153–57.

27 Rochelle Kessler, "In the Company of the Enlightened: Portraits of Mughal Rulers and Holy Men," in *Studies in Islamic and Later Indian Art from the Arthur M. Sackler Museum Harvard University Art Museums* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 2002), 28. For other art historical studies on this subject, see Ebba Koch, "The Mughal Emperor as Solomon, Majnun, and Orpheus, or the Album as a Think Tank for Allegory," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 277–311; Afshan Bokhari, "The 'Light' of the Timuria: Jahan Ara Begum's Patronage, Piety, and Poetry in 17th-century Mughal India," *Marg* 60, no. 1 (2008): 52–62; Heike Franke, "Emperors of Surat and Ma ni; Jahangir and Shah Jahan as Temporal and Spiritual Rulers," *Muqarnas, An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World* 31 (2014): 123–49.

28 Gregory Minissale, *Images of Thought: Visuality in Islamic India, 1550–1750* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 76. Or, as religious studies scholar Shankar Nair has put it, a serious survey of Mughal courtly translations of Sanskrit literature "reveals a pronounced religious or theological dimension that might coexist with political intentions, but cannot be readily reduced to them." Shankar Nair, *Translating Wisdom: Hindu-Muslim Intellectual Interactions in Early Modern South Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 9.

29 This is not to say that scholars entering Mughal history from their own specific areas have not included Mughal culture in wider discussions of, for instance, the Persianate world. For one insightful study that connects Mughal and Rajasthani painting using a Persianate theme, see Molly Aitken, "Repetition and Response: The Case of Layla and Majnun," in *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 155–209.

30 Important recent studies highlighting the entanglement between European art and Mughal painting include Ebba Koch, "Jahangir as Publius Scipio Maior: The Commensurability of Mughal Political Portraiture," in *Portraiture in South Asia since the Mughals*, ed. Crispin Branfoot (London: I.B. Taurus, 2018), 73–98; Mika Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism: Artistic Encounters between Europe and Asia at the Courts of India, 1580–1630*

that depictions of nobility could be political portraits while simultaneously embodying devotional metaphors? In this book, I attempt to go a step further and suggest that for the Hindustani Muslim elite, the political sphere found meaning and relevance first and foremost through its engagement with Islamic ontology. Rather than simply reducing interactions between Islamic spirituality and the Indo-Muslim elite to politics, *Faces of God* sheds light on an important genre in Hindustani painting by highlighting its polyvalence. Additionally, this book assesses how saintly depictions answer key questions related to the image in Islam as seen through the particular case study of early modern South Asia. Taking a cue from recent scholars working in the fields of Islamic art history and religious studies, I rely on primary voices—specifically from Muslim North India—to argue that images of devotion drew many of their conceptual premises from within the framework of Islam. Through this inquiry, *Faces of God* examines how three cultural spheres, the Islamicate, the Persianate, and the Indic, overlapped in the representations of saints and other figures of devotion in Indo-Muslim painting.

3 *Ṣūrat* and *Maʿnī*: islam and Islam

Relevant literature contemporaneous with the artworks provides multiple sources through which the Indo-Islamic devotional milieu circumscribes itself. These voices, which include autobiographical and hagiographical accounts, mystical treatises, devotional love poetry, Sufi romances, and imperial histories, also offer a network of methodologies for the interpretation of artworks. The literature defines and articulates its own unique cultural and devotional ethos, and suggests new avenues for the study of art history, in particular Islamic art history—a field that has been going through a period of soul-searching, even to the point of questioning the very term "Islamic art" and its epistemological parameters.

For most of its history, Islamic art has been studied, like many disciplines in the humanities, through an Orientalist lens, one that is, in Avinoam Shalem's words, accompanied by "deep-rooted perceptions and prejudices concerning the East," and that creates a definitive divide between the West and the other.[31] Shalem reminds us that "academia is still far from any final emancipa-

(Leiden: Brill, 2018); Valerie Gonzalez, *Aesthetic Hybridity in Mughal Painting, 1526–1658* (London: Routledge, 2016).

31 Avinoam Shalem, "What Do We Mean When We Say 'Islamic Art'? A Plea for a Critical Rewriting of the History of the Arts of Islam," *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012): 2.

tion" from this perspective that continues to generalize and essentialize our understanding of Islamic art and material culture. He adds that, owing to these preconceptions, "one of the most harmful ideas developed by historians of Islamic art is the myth of the unity of Islamic art."[32] Over the last few decades scholars have come to recognize how damaging the unconditional adoption of the idea of unity that suppresses cultural difference can be.[33] Scholarly literature provides a welcome corrective to this longstanding bias, reexamining the arts of the Islamic world using several new avenues. However, this realization has led to a reassessment that has taken the field to another extreme, one which sees difference as the only viable possibility. Shalem himself acknowledges that "since the idea of unity can no longer be taken for granted, they [Islamic art historians] have been left only with the notion of diversity. This means that the whole field of Islamic art history is now deconstructed, as if in a postmodern manner."[34] On the one hand, the Orientalizing gaze only acknowledges the arts that appear to reflect the idea of unity in Islam—such as the arts of the Quran, mosque architecture, geometry, etc.—at the expense of other aspects of material culture. On the other hand, the postmodern narrative represents a fractured world of Islam consisting of disconnected, splintered histories.[35] Barring important exceptions, in both cases lived Islamic values that can be accessed through autobiographical and hagiographical literature and through the visual archive continue to be ignored. Contemporary trends in the field discount the relevance of internal, ontological hierarchies and conceptions of essential metaphysical realities that remain intrinsic to the everyday expression of Islam wherever the religion has spread.[36] An engagement with these principles can be seen both at the everyday level, where the underlying Truth-Reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of Islam is expressed through localized expressions,

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32 Shalem, "What Do We Mean," 9.

33 "There never was, nor is, a single Islam, and so any attempt to define the essence of a single Islamic art is doomed to failure." Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwanted Field," *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (2003): 153.

34 Shalem, "What Do We Mean," 13.

35 "We might say that the proponents of this view have blinked at the kaleidoscope of human and historical Islam and concluded that it has no template or mechanism or spokesperson, but at best only an assortment of local patterns and voices." Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 116.

36 For important recent exceptions to this trend, see Wendy Shaw, *What Is "Islamic" Art?: Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), and Margaret Graves, *Arts of Allusion: Object, Ornament, and Architecture in Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

but also on a philosophical, metaphysical, and conceptual level, the very level where Islamic ontological spheres—or spheres of Being—are witnessed and articulated. I would argue that without these ontological hierarchies, there would be no Muslim culture or artistic expression to speak of.

Voices from within Islam identify two essential natures of divinity. One is the aspect of transcendence (*tanzīh*), the other is similitude (*tashbīh*).[37] All manifestation plays out between these two poles of reality. Everything in creation is said to have these two basic attributes, which can also be equated with the terms "inner meaning" (*maʿnī*) and "outer form" (*ṣūrat*), and can be linked to two of God's Quranic names, *al-bāṭin* [the inwardly hidden] and *al-ẓāhir* [the outwardly manifest]. Similarly, we can speak of two interweaving realities of Islam: one is the outer form of lived Islamic expression that changes according to locale, language, and culture. This can, and perhaps should, be seen as "islams," since it varies from region to region and epoch to epoch.[38] The other is the Islam that, for a majority of practicing Muslims, is immutable, infallible, and absolute and can be equated with the world of inner meaning (*maʿnī*).[39] An example of this double-reality is the concept of two Qurans present in the holy book itself: one is the Mother of the Book (*ʾumm-ul kitāb*), that exists in the pre-eternal reality of God and is considered to be unchanging and absolute; the other is the historical Quran, which is its temporal expression in a particular human language sent down to an Arab in the seventh century.[40] According to Quranic exegesis, the Mother of the Book coincides with the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) in which all creation is predestined—the same tablet situated in the heart of the perfect human being depicted in the *Tipu Sultan Album* from Mysore.[41]

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37 Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ʿArabi and ʿIraqi*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 26–30.

38 For a discussion on the historiography of the term "islams" and an incisive critique of the term's use as an analytic model for the study of Muslim societies, see Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 130–40. For a deeper confrontation with the realist versus nominalist division of "Islam" and "islams," see Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 1–30.

39 It goes without saying that philosophical and religious schools in Islam differ in their terminology for describing Islam. But they do all agree on the absoluteness of the Truth-Reality that Islam is an expression of.

40 Quran 43:4. For a discussion of the ontological framework of the Quran, see Shaw, *What Is "Islamic" Art?*, 105–08.

41 "Everything which has been decreed by God (Exalted is He!) from the beginning of the world's creation until its close has been written and maintained in something He created, which He at times calls the *Tablet*, and at others the *Clear Book* or the *Clear Example*, as has been mentioned in the Qur'ān. All that has passed in the world, together with all that is to come, is inscribed as an inscription invisible to our eyes." Al-Ghazālī, *The*

From al-Farabi in the ninth century down to Shah Waliullah and his disciples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Islamic thought across the Muslim world has been infused with the reality of the unity of Being. Rather than altogether rejecting the idea of unity at the cost of discarding basic Islamic truth-claims dear to almost every Muslim society through history, we need to reinject it with meaning as expounded by voices from within Islam. What we need is not an engagement with orientalist discourses that spread the myth of unity, but engagement with Islamic discourses on the reality of unity as lived, understood, and expressed by and for living Muslims. In his historiographical essay, Shalem asks, "Should we not rewrite and critically discuss the history of the thesis of unity in Islamic art?"[42] To this I would respond by asking, should we not first investigate why the concept of unity is so integral for Muslims in the first place, and how the multifaceted Muslim expressions across history find meaning through it? Building on the work of a group of recent scholars who have in their own fields and regions of inquiry found alternatives to the existing state of the field of Islamic art, I would argue for a third discourse that sidesteps the orientalist and postmodern polemic: one that instead privileges voices from within the tradition that grapple with key truths, principles, and realities of Islam.[43]

Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife: Book 40 of the Revival of the Religious Sciences = Kitāb Dhikr Al-Mawt Wa-Mā Baʿdahu: Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm Al-Dīn (Cambridge, England: Islamic Texts Society, 1989), 151–152.

42 Shalem, "What Do We Mean," 9.

43 In the field of Islamic art, the work of Christiane Gruber, and more recently Wendy Shaw, have been the most influential due to their taking primary sources seriously as a methodological tool of inquiry. See Christiane Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension: A Persian-Sunni Devotional Tale* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010), and Shaw, *What Is "Islamic" Art?* Other important studies that use specific regional examples of art-making and connect them with a shared Islamicate worldview include Priscilla Soucek, "Niẓāmī on Painters and Painting," in *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Richard Ettinghausen (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972), 9–21; David Roxburgh, "Concepts of the Portrait in the Islamic Lands, c. 1300–1600," *Studies in the History of Art* 74 (2009): 119–38; Yael Rice, "Cosmic Sympathies and Painting at Akbar's Court," in *A Magic World: New Visions of Indian Painting*, ed. Molly Aitken (Mumbai: Marg Foundation, 2016), 88–99; Sylvia Houghteling, "Sentiment in Silks: Safavid Figural Textiles in Mughal Courtly Culture," in *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires: New Studies in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Art and Culture*, ed. Kishwar Rizvi (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 124–47. In the field of religious studies, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*; Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*. In the fields of Persian and South Asian history, for studies that use the concepts of *ikhlaq* [ethics] and *adab* [etiquette] to connect local histories to a greater Persianate understanding of court culture, see Flatt, *The Courts of Deccan Sultanates*, and Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

Since this is a book about images of devotion, the primary sources it relies on come from Islamic speculative metaphysics. This discourse, often aligned with Sufism, impacted most facets of medieval and early modern Muslim life.[44] It outlines the hierarchy of realities in existence and provides multiple methods of accessing knowledge of Truth-Reality (*ḥaqīqa*) by navigating the individual through these very realities. Its language and metaphors not only influenced devotional and religious literature but also courtly production. Album prefaces, such as the one from the Tipu Sultan album, are one such instance that show how the hierarchy of creation as understood through Islamic Peripatetic philosophy and speculative Sufism, and as outlined by the likes of Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Ibn al-ʿArabi, and later South Asian thinkers, seeped into the very language and imagination of local courtly culture.[45] Even royal histories and administrative records are suffused with these ideas. Although the cosmological descriptions given by Muslim thinkers become extremely complex and diverge in their details, all agree on the aforementioned distinction between two levels of reality, worlds of outer form and inner meaning. As Jamal Elias explains, "Whether through scripture and theology or through scientific, philosophical, or metaphysical writings, Muslim scholars have maintained that the suprasensible world has an ontological status that is more real and more perfect than the one we perceive through our senses."[46] In Persianate poetic parlance, the outer form, perceived through sense-perception, is conceived of as metaphorical (*majāzī*) because it is a reflection in a lower world of higher truths. The world of meaning is known as *ḥaqīqī* [Truth-Reality]. The two worlds—formal manifestation and supra-formal abstraction—exist both in the macrocosm of the outer world and within the microcosm of the human individual. They are accessed through an intermediary realm called the Imaginal World or the World of Ideal Forms (*ʿālam al-khiyāl* or *ʿālam al-mīthāl*) which is understood

44 It also has a robust history in Shiʾi thought. For an art historical study on this theme, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Icon and Meditation: Between Popular Art and Sufism in Imami Shiʾism," in *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shiʿism: Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shiʿi Islam*, ed. Pedram Khosronejad (London: I.B. Taurus, 2010), 25–45.

45 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for Its Study by the Ikhwān Al-Ṣafāʾ, Al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 177–274; Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*.

46 Jamal J. Elias, *Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 198–99.

to be an isthmus (*barzakh*).[47] Even in as late a period as nineteenth-century colonial India, the Urdu poet Ghalib expressed this ontology of creation when describing his own process of creative expression: "These themes come into the mind/the imaginal (*khiyāl*) from the hidden realm/Ghalib, the scratching of the pen is the voice of the angel."[48]

An important example of how this essential Islamic truth-claim influenced the making and interpretation of painting in Muslim South Asia comes from the *A-ʾin-i akbari*, the administrative record of the institutes of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), written by the court chronicler Abu'l Fazl.[49] The ontological framework provided by this short section—which seeks to describe how multiple levels of existence are connected to each other—informs my methodology for discussing the role of images in this book. The chapter on the institute of the painting workshop, *Āʾīn-i taṣvīrkhāna*, situates the role of depiction and calligraphy within a metaphysical understanding of the Islamic creational hierarchy. According to Abu'l Fazl, depiction has the dual function of manifesting meaning (*maʿnī*) in outer form (*ṣūrat*), while also leading the insightful viewer to God's *ḥaqīqa*. The *Āʾīn -i taṣvīrkhāna*, particularly its opening, is frequently cited by art historians, who until recently relied mostly on an inadequate colonial period translation.[50] Scholars select the opening lines to magnify the centrality of Western art for the Mughal workshop, often overlooking the subsequent passage that very consciously positions the arts of depiction and calligraphy in an Islamic discourse.[51] Before launching into a lengthier discussion, it is therefore important to provide a full translation of the passage:

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47 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 18. Also see Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 189.

48 Ghalib, "Ghazal 169," A Desertful of Roses: The Urdu Ghazals of Mirza Asadullha Khan "Ghalib," trans. Frances W. Pritchett, accessed January 11, 2023, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ghalib/169/index_169.html.

49 Abu al-Fazl, *A'in-i Akbari* [*Annals of Akbar*], ed. Henry Blochmann, 2 vols. (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1985).

50 See for example, Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jariwala, *The Indian Portrait, 1560–1860* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, National Portrait Gallery, 2010), 27. In the twenty-first century, Ebba Koch has made a reliable, literal translation, although only containing the opening of the section. See Koch, "The Mughal Emperor," 277. The lengthier passage that I will discuss here is my own translation.

51 One important exception to this is Yael Rice's essay, in which she uses the role of calligraphy and painting as outlined by Abu'l Fazl to discuss the meaning of Mughal colophon paintings. See Yael Rice, "Between the Brush and the Pen: On the Intertwined Histories of Mughal Painting and Calligraphy," in *Envisioning Islamic Art and Architecture: Essays in Honor of Renata Holod*, ed. David Roxburgh (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 148–74.

A picture (*ṣūrat*) leads to that which it represents [lit. its own master] and this [leads] to the meaning (*maʿnī*), just as the shape of a line leads one to letters and words, and from there the sense can be found out. Although in general they make pictures (*taṣvīr*) of material resemblances, the European masters (*kārbardazān-i firang*) express with wondrous forms many meanings of the created world and [thus] they lead those who see only the outside of things to a place abounding with Truth-Reality (*ḥaqīqat-zar*). However, the line [writing] provides us with the experiences of the ancients and thus becomes a means to intellectual progress. For this reason, first of all, [the line] passes through the library, of which it is a part. The lord of the world [Emperor Akbar] pays much attention, and looks profoundly at form and meaning (*ṣūrat o maʿnī*). In truth, according to the eyes of the lovers of beauty, forms are the loci for the manifestation of light [lit. the place of manifestation where light is captured]. For the farsighted ones, this cup of Jamshid [locus of manifestation] leads to the transcendent.[52] The magic (*ṭilism*) of the line is a sacred geometry that comes forth from the pen of creativity; it is a heavenly book from the hands of destiny; it is the secret-keeper of discourse; it is the tongue of the hand. It gives the language of those who are present heartfelt power/agency. The line enlightens those who are near and far. If there were no line, speech would not have found life, and the heart would have received no gift from the past. Viewers of outer form (*ṣūrat-bīnān*) think that the shape (*paykar*) is mere soot, but the worshippers of inner meaning see it as the lamp of understanding. [The shape] is a darkness containing a thousand lights. It is a flickering light with a mole (*khāl*) that evades the eye.[53] The design (*naqsh*) is self-disclosing (*nigār-i āgahī*). [It makes] legible the city of meaning. It is a dark night that gives birth to the sun. It is a dark cloud that rains down wisdom. In the treasure house of seeing, it is a marvelous magic that speaks while remaining silent. It flows while being static. It soars while fallen/self-effaced.

52 The proverbial cup of Jamshid in Persian mythology is a cup that ancient kings of Iran had in their possession, through which they could observe all the seven heavens of creation. It was said to be filled with the elixir of immortality. It is a favorite proverb used often in Persian literature.

53 The mole on the cheeks of the beloved is a sign of immense beauty and often used as a positive attribute in classical Persian poetry. In this case the mole is equated with the calligraphy and the image made with black ink, which mysteriously contains Truth/Reality within it.

> From the station of God's abundant knowledge, a ray of light descends on the speaking soul. [This ray of light] leads his heart to the city of imagination/the imaginal (*khiyāl*)—which is an isthmus between the abstract [realm] and the material [realm]—so that an abstraction can become contingent [the abstract can take a particular form], and the unconditional attains a conditional nature. From there it [the light] steps onto the tongue, and travels through air into the threshold of the ear [of the listener]. And then, step by step, it unloads the burden of contingency from its shoulders and returns back to its original station. Sometimes, that heavenly traveler [the light] by the help of the fingertips traipses gracefully, and passing through the land and ocean of pen and ink (*qalam-o mīdād*) travels to the land of happiness, where it puts down its burden, and from the highway of the eyes returns to its source.[54]

In this short section, packed with poetic allusion and mystical symbolism, Abu'l Fazl shows how, for an Indo-Perso-Islamicate audience, depiction and calligraphy are intrinsically tied to the most important Islamic ideal: God-knowledge. As was customary for the Mughals, God-knowledge is represented here by the symbolism of light. It descends from its heavenly source, through the intermediary station of the imaginal, down into formal manifestation. For those seeking God's Truth-Reality, the outer form is, paradoxically, resplendent with inner meaning. The transfigured material leads the person of understanding to a higher Truth.[55] "Those who see only the outside of things," the "lovers of beauty," the "viewers of outer form," fail to go beyond form, taking it "as mere soot." Koch, in her translation of the opening few sentences, rushes to describe Abu'l Fazl's passage in "postmodern philosophical terms, anticipating Saussure's notions of 'sign' and 'signifier.'"[56] I would argue that, on the contrary, the notion of representation has been flipped on its head. Whereas in Saussurean semiotics, the material signifier may represent an essential and intangible signified, here materiality *is* the image of immaterial reality.

Using Persianate precedents, Abu'l Fazl appears to deliberately blur the distinction between calligraphy and depiction, thereby giving them an equal status. Ostensibly, the author opens the chapter with a discussion on the meaning of painting, then moves to a discussion of calligraphy and finally returns once

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54 Abu al-Fazl, *A'in-i Akbari*, 111–12.

55 Similar to how the Quran also functions. "The Quran indicates materiality as a structure through which to comprehend essential immateriality" (Shaw, *What Is "Islamic" Art?*, 118).

56 Koch, "The Mughal Emperor," 277.

FIGURE 5
A mounted prince hunting lion in a rocky landscape, ca. 1600, by Khem Karan. Opaque watercolor on paper. 33 × 22.2 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, gift in honor of Madeline Neves Clapp; gift of Mrs. Henry White Cannon by exchange; bequest of Louise T. Cooper; Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund; from the Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection (2013.310)
CREATIVE COMMONS PUBLIC DOMAIN, CCO 1.0 UNIVERSAL (CCO 1.0)

again to painting. However, *khaṭ*, or line, was an essential part of both calligraphy as well as the popular technique of painting called *siyāh qalam*, which primarily uses line to delineate form. There are several Akbar and Jahangir period *siyāh qalam* drawings that attest to their formal kinship with the calligraphic line (Fig. 5).

Historically, the *siyāh qalam* practice is traceable to fifteenth-century Central Asian courts. Furthermore, as Yael Rice convincingly shows, under the Mughals the art of painterly depiction achieved a status equal to calligraphy. Taking her cue from Abu'l Fazl's *taṣvīrkhāna*, she discusses how this notion was depicted through a series of Akbar and Jahangir period colophon paintings, or "pictorial colophons," that each show a painter and a calligrapher inhabiting the same space and using the same ink-well to make their respective artworks (Fig. 6).[57]

57 "Writing and painting, in other words, have unique and even complementary functions" (Rice, "Between the Brush," 149). For colophon depictions, see ibid., 164, fig. 8.10, and 173, fig. 8.15.

FIGURE 6 Colophon portrait from the 1595–6 *Khamsa of Nizami*, by Daulat, ca. 1610, British Library, London

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In fact, the Persian word *qalam* itself is used for both pen and brush. A slightly earlier Persian album preface written by Mir Syed Ahmad in 1564–65 opens with a poem that states this double-meaning:

> Art is known as the key to wisdom.
> What is the key to art? The nib of the pen (*qalam*).
> The pen is a designer of patterns, an "unveiler of faces."
> Two types of pen were created by God:
> One comes from vegetal matter:
> the reed turns agreeable for the writer.
> The other type is animal:
> it scatters pearls from the Fountain of Life.[58]

Building on this ambiguity of the two artforms, in the final paragraph Abu'l Fazl shows how God's light communicates with "the speaking soul" simultaneously through the written word and through the painted image. In the first instance, the word that assumes a written shape can be pronounced by the tongue and imbibed by the ear. In the second instance, the light of God can shine through the traipsing fingers of the painter and travel via "the highway of the eyes." The written word and the painted image are therefore both essential media for accessing the divine.

In articulating the role of vision and its relation to outer form and inner meaning, Abu'l Fazl is not presenting a new theory but is summing up debates on optics, the imagination, and sense perception that had been circulating in Muslim philosophical and Sufic literature for centuries. For example, Mu'ayyid al-Din Jandi (d. ca. 1300), a scholar and interpreter of Ibn al-ʿArabi, "describes a process of visual interpretation that begins with physical sensory perception and ends with witnessing the Oneness of Being."[59] This ontology of perception animated Persian love poetry and Sufi treatises on metaphysics and was shared across the medieval and early modern Muslim world.[60] Abu'l Fazl's *taṣvīrkhāna* and the preface to Tipu Sultan's *Album* both indicate that the multivalent relationality between levels of existence was also communicated through writing about art. Persianate album prefaces have a long history of expressing this relationship, and the album from Mysore is one, late iteration of that. To give just one example among many of how the terms "*ṣūrat*" and "*maʿnī*" are used in this discussion, the Safavid writer Dost Muhammad, in his

58 Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 24.
59 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 23.
60 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 31–44.

famous *Bahram Mirza Album* preface written in 1544, explains, “the most subtle picture (*laṭīftarīn ṣūratī*) with which the depictors of the gallery of intrinsic meaning (*maʿnī*) decorate the assemblies of creativity and invention, is praise of the Creator, by whose pen are scriven sublime letters and exalted forms.”[61] This statement links the act of the painter to the act of God-the-Creator, who, according to the Quran, creates through the pen.[62] Dost Muhammad further explains this ontological relationship by adding, “[Praise to] the Maker who made the totality of human form (*ṣūrat*), which includes the forms and intrinsic meanings (*ṣūrat o maʿnī*) of the next world, in the workshop called ‘he created Adam in his form’ on the page of creation in the most beautiful way [...] he made the mirror of creation a locus of manifestation for names and traces.”[63]

Analyzing the *taṣvīrkhāna* makes it clear that, for the sake of a deeper understanding of medieval and early modern Islamic image making, we need to engage with literary sources that directly informed the arts, such as philosophy, speculative Sufism, and poetry. When critiquing how the Western-centric concept of mimesis evaluates arts of other cultures, Shalem also hints at this methodology as a beneficial way forward in the study of Islamic art history. He suggests, “Perhaps the widespread use of poetic metaphors might help one to rethink mimesis.”[64] He proceeds to show how an object of daily use, the mosque lamp, employs text from the Quranic Verse of Light to describe itself. He interprets the object using the theory of optics presented by the twelfth-century Muslim philosopher Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in his *Mishkāt al-anwār*:

> Ghazali goes on to develop an entire theoretical structure built on the contradiction between the “eye” and the “intelligent eye” for characterizing modes of seeing. This method enables him to classify the idea of light into several categories of hierarchical order, from a phenomenological level to a spiritual and mystical one. Operating in two different worlds, the “sensual” and the “intelligential,” as defined by Ghazali, provide another way of understanding the phenomenological world and its relation to the sacred.[65]

61 Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 4.

62 Quran 31:37, 68:1, 96:4.

63 Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 4. For a detailed discussion of Persian album prefaces, their meaning and context, particularly Dost Muhammad’s preface, see Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, 160–208.

64 Shalem, “What Do We Mean,” 15.

65 Shalem, “What Do We Mean,” 16.

A meaningful engagement with the term "Islamic" in Islamic art should make a definition such as this its basis for revising the discourse around our discipline. This approach would help discard the long-held binary between "sacred" and "profane" when discussing Muslim culture and allow studies to fully embrace the panoply of literary and visual sources engaged in meaningful conversation with Islam.

In two recent studies, scholars Shahab Ahmed and Wendy Shaw provide a more systematic, methodical way of understanding Islamic art and culture and its relation to the sacred.[66] Ahmed's work has greatly helped me frame my own arguments. He argues for abandoning the binary of religion versus secularism within modern scholarship on Islam and proposes "an epistemological agenda where one puts aside the concept 'religion' when conceptualizing Islam/Islamic."[67] According to him, Muslims view Islam more holistically, not just as "religion" strictly speaking but rather as a way of living and understanding life. Equating Islam "with some sort of restricted and *restricting* element" allows scholars to privilege the notion of "orthodoxy" and scriptural legalism over lived experience.[68] *What Is Islam?* is a retort to scholarship that refuses to acknowledge what Ahmed calls the internal contradiction within Islam. A typical historiographical convention analyzes Islamic cultural expression in relation to Islamic law. Following that logic, many scholars conclude that because making human likeness is looked down upon by legalistic and theological interpreters, portraiture made for Muslim patrons must therefore be a syncretistic borrowing from outside sources and can never be explained from within the framework of Islamic thought. It is no wonder, then, that museums continue to segregate images made for Muslims from their Islamic context. Rather than fall into the trap of pitting "orthodoxy" against "heterodoxy," Ahmed embraces the inherent contradictions of Islam. In his words, "the contradiction, the complimentary opposition, the paradox, *is Islam*."[69] In the *taṣvīrkhāna*, Abu'l Fazl uses this internal paradox to show the enigmatic existence of an absolute reality manifested in something relative.

Wendy Shaw builds on this methodology in the field of Islamic art history, and as a way to overcome historiographical binaries, she proposes that we conceive of "Islam not through the modern distinction between religion and culture, but as a self-referential interplay of interwoven discourses, rituals, and beliefs moving across space and time."[70]

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66 Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*; Shaw, *What Is "Islamic" Art?*

67 Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 431.

68 Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 115.

69 Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 430; original emphasis.

70 Shaw, *What Is "Islamic" Art?*, 2.

Both Ahmed and Shaw explain that the underlying goal of Islamic philosophical and speculative thought—much of which has been the driving engine behind the various artistic expressions in Muslim history—is to seek knowledge, and ultimately, union with God/Truth-Reality (*ḥaqīqa*). Muslim philosophers, Sufis, and legal scholars all agree that Revelation links the divine and the human, and is the means for people to actively seek knowledge of the Truth. In his book, Ahmed proposes three facets of Revelation. The scripture, which he labels as the "text," is one limited expression of Revelation that has been given to Muslims in the Arabic language. The "Pre-text" is the timeless, original message of Truth, of which the "text" is just one particular articulation. The "Con-Text" is the lived, historical engagement with it and through it, as seen in the arts, philosophy, and metaphysics, and includes both "proscriptive" and "explorative" historical unfolding. "Con-Text is that whole lexicon of meanings that is the product and outcome of previous hermeneutical engagement with Revelation which are already present in the context of a given time and place *as Islam*."[71]

Such a perspective simultaneously expands our understanding of Islam to embrace cultural variance and difference and discards syncretism as a useful means of inquiry. As Ahmed explains, "we are now able to move beyond the lens of 'syncretism' to a more capacious understanding. We have seen repeatedly that the idea that the Truth of Pre-Text exists beyond the Text has enabled Muslims routinely *to find Pre-Textual meaning in extra-Textual form*."[72] It is thus that an explorative inquiry into other religious traditions—such as that made by Emperor Shah Jahan's son and heir apparent to the Mughal throne, Dara Shikoh, in his commentaries on the *Upaniṣads*—can be understood, paradoxical as it may seem, as a truly Islamic and *Islamizing* pursuit for Truth-Reality. Similarly, in the Indo-Persianate context, figural depiction, an expression considered by many to be un-Islamic, has long been seen as a medium for accessing Islamic truths, even when on a parallel level it reflects political ideals that might appear disconnected from ontology.

Through their unique surveys, both Ahmad and Shaw expose the limits of art history as a field. Afterall, art history as it is studied and understood in the academy is a child of the Enlightenment, and makes its profession through disenchanting and secularizing objects that were originally endowed with

71 Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 435; original emphasis.
72 Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 451; original emphasis.

meaning and presence. The drive to study artefacts through a secular lens has made it difficult for the field to recall the religious roots of much art-making.[73]

Conversely, *Faces of God* argues that inserting symbolic markers and metaphors into even the most obviously politically themed artworks transports them into an ontologically active zone, placing them in conversation with other levels of reality. In this respect, by outlining local forms of thought and presenting them respectfully, without exoticizing or anthropologizing them, the book is an attempt at writing a decolonial history of Indo-Muslim painting.[74]

For example, a painting from the late-Akbar period is a clear display of imperial prestige (Fig. 7). Most likely a portrait of Prince Salim, the future Emperor Jahangir, it shows the prince holding a falcon as a sign of royalty.[75] And yet, there are hidden meanings in the painting that would have been accessible to audiences steeped in an Indo-Persian devotional ethos.[76] Starting with Akbar, Mughal royalty couched their political claims within a Sufi language and assumed the role of the *insān al-kāmil*, projecting themselves as rulers of both the kingdoms of *ṣūrat* and *maʿnī*.[77] The prince in the painting, standing against a malachite green background, is shown wearing an ornate, golden coat that is at once symbolic of imperial power and a vision of the cosmic hierarchy embodied in the archetypal king-as-cosmic-man. Houghteling suggests in her study on Mughal period fabrics that the "textile's power to unsettle the naturalism of a painting" also "permits a portrait to move between the earthly and

73 Critiquing post-Enlightenment empiricism, Shaw adds that the history of such objects "was not necessarily understood as the only or most meaningful way of situating them in a cosmology in which our mundane physical world is but a small cross-section of creation" (*What Is "Islamic" Art?*, 28–29). For a lengthier critique, see Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 76.

74 For a recent volume that reevaluates the theme of decolonization in the humanities—in particular ethnography—see Luiz Costa et al., eds., "Fernando Ortiz: Caribbean and Mediterranean Counterpoints," special issue, *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 11, no. 1 (2021): 246–318.

75 Falcons were a symbol of royalty and were associated with the light of the sun in Timurid tradition, which was later also assumed by the Mughals. See Anna Malecka, "Solar Symbolism of the Mughal Thrones: A Preliminary Note," *Arts Asiatiques* 54 (1999): 28. For a discussion of this painting, see Pratapaditya Pal, *Indian Painting: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1993), 244–45, no. 64. For a discussion about the identity of the prince, see Krista Gulbransen, "From the Court of Akbar to the Courts of Rajasthan: North Indian Portraiture, 1570–1630" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2013), 96–97.

76 Houghteling, "Sentiment in Silks," 132.

77 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 144–82.

FIGURE 7 Prince Salim with a falcon, ca. 1600–1605. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 14.92 × 9.53 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, from the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase (M.83.1.4), artwork in the public domain

the heavenly."[78] In painting, depictions on fabric allowed painters "to experiment with ideas of absence and presence" and to "unify figures from different realms."[79] In the Akbar-period painting, the artist uses this creative flexibility to represent different levels of existence on the prince's coat through the animal kingdom. In the region that covers the legs and thighs, members of the cat family hunt for prey. This is the material realm, where the symbol of the hunt reflects a ruler's control and dominion over his subjects. The waist marks a clear scission between the worlds of land and sky, represented by the waistband. The coat is teeming with birds from the waist up—reflecting the intermediate heavens that connect the material with the transcendent. An orange *sīmurgh* [phoenix] with a long, fluttering tail emerges from the prince's shoulder. As a mythic bird that resides on top of the cosmic mountain Koh Qaf in Islamic mythology, it heralds the world of abstraction that lies above the *ʿālam al-khiyāl* or Imaginal Plane.[80]

In the Tipu Sultan album, the *al-insān al-kāmil* drawing placed right at the beginning helps transport the entire volume to a cosmic plane. In the *Prince holding a Falcon* portrait, the depiction of the hierarchy of creation on the apparel of a prince makes the painting coexist at once in the realm of *ṣūrat* and in the realm of *maʿnī*. It is simultaneously a political portrait and a devotional metaphor.

In a similar vein, a small constellation of paintings from the Mughal era collapses worldly and otherworldly signifiers through allegorical representations of the animal kingdom. Often completed in the half-tint technique of *nīm qalam*, they depict a congregation of earthly and mythic animals in a landscape.[81] Multivalent in their significance, the technique and theme of the paintings gave master artists from the Mughal *taṣvīrkhāna* a platform to display their rendering and drawing skills, while at the same time presenting an aniconic, composite symbol of *al-insān al-kāmil* who, for the Mughal elite in particular, was at once a spiritual and political ideal. The most exquisite example comes from the Freer Gallery of Art, from ca. 1600, ascribed to the artist Miskin (Fig. 8). It shows close to a hundred birds and beasts turning, twisting, and swooping dynamically toward a tree in the top center whose emerald green branches are the only place where Miskin used opaque pigment expansively. The rest of the painting is made from thin, transparent washes that have

78 Houghteling, "Sentiment in Silks," 134.

79 Houghteling, "Sentiment in Silks," 134.

80 Johann Christoph Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh: The "Licit Magic" of the Arts in Medieval Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 5–7.

81 For a list of notable paintings focusing on this theme from the early Mughal court, see Beach, *The Imperial Image*, 192.

FIGURE 8 The world of animals, ca. 1600, Miskin. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 33.8 × 21.7 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1945.29

been built up using a stippling technique called *pardākht*, which gives the overall composition a dreamy, ethereal aura. While the animal kingdom on Prince Salim's robe contains scenes of hunting dotting a landscape, the Miskin *nīm qalam* orchestrates an energetic yet nonviolent congregation of animals, where the tree acts as an axis that connects different spatial zones, as opposed to the figure of a prince. There are three main worlds depicted through the animal kingdom: those of water, earth, and sky. The presence of a dragon in the center-left of the painting and a phoenix at the top-right transposes this idyllic animal-scape into mythic, allegorical territory. Snaking up toward the tree, the dragon bridges the realms of water and earth, and the phoenix swooping down with a host of smaller birds connects earth with sky.

But how do we know that the Freer painting is a symbolic portrait of the ideal human? Although the exact subject or text associated with it remains unidentified, visually, the theme connects with contemporaneous paintings showing the lover Majnun in the wilderness. Part of the Layla and Majnun romance, immortalized in Persian poetry by Nizami in the twelfth century, depictions of the lover in the wilderness became a favorite theme for Persianate patrons across Hindustan and Iran. Driven to the point of madness by his unfulfilled love for Layla, Majnun wanders into the wild half-naked and starved, singing songs of separation and union. He therefore represents an ideal ascetic who renounces all worldly attachments for the sake of his beloved. Layla in this case stands for the Divine Beloved. In the poem, once Majnun has emptied himself of all desires and worldly attachments, he becomes a ruler over the natural world. Nizami explains:

> Every wild animal that was in the desert rushed to his service
> [...]
> All of them became obedient slaves
> He ruled over all of them like Solomon ...
> His kingship was so powerful that
> The beasts of prey lost their beastly nature
> [...]
> He [Majnun] had taken his life in his hands,
> And the beasts lined up around him
> [...]
> Like kings, he was together with his guard.
> He sat there like a place for the beasts to pray to [*qibla-gāh*][82]

82 Translation from Koch, "The Mughal Emperor," 291.

As I discuss in Chapter 3, Mughal emperors, in particular Emperor Akbar, identified with the renunciant ideals of antinomian—or subversive—ascetics. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, at a time when he was fashioning himself as an *insān al-kāmil*, the emperor used the figure of the renunciate in the wilderness—whose power over his dominion is activated by his very rejection of the world—as a metonym for himself.[83] Mughal emperors, their courts and their artists were already using the imagery of lambs and lions as well as other beasts living harmoniously to great effect both as literary and visual metaphors for Mughal rule. One artwork, now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, stitches all of these allegories together. Also completed in the *nīm qalam* technique ca. 1600 and attributed to Miskin, it combines imperial aspirations with Sufi ideals, while principally illustrating the Nizami passage quoted above (Fig. 9). Using animal studies and composition similar to the Freer painting, the *nīm qalam* depicts an emaciated Majnun surrounded by animals.[84] As the ideal ascetic, he is shown in communion with nature. Instead of the tree as seen in the Freer painting, the figure of Majnun is placed centrally with all the beasts facing him. In the Boston painting, the tree acts more as a marker for his sanctity and his otherworldly station. In addition to performing an illustrative role for an epic poem, the painting at its deepest level of meaning depicts the inner state of the sanctified soul, in which all the elements, from the lower realms represented by elephants, fish, and a crocodile to the highest zone depicted by birds in the tree, coexist in union. While the Boston *nīm qalam* is still anchored to a text, the Freer painting without the figure of Majnun is freed from such narrative associations and can be interpreted simultaneously as an allegory of the harmonized soul and a depiction of the cosmos. It is at once a portrait of the microcosm and the macrocosm. The tree, rather than the figure of an emaciated Majnun, is the signifier for the ideal human being. In addition to presenting a vision of the cosmic hierarchy, the beasts signal the ontological expanse of the realized individual, while the dragon marks lower possibilities and the phoenix heavenly ones. The tiny inscription written in the upper-left

83 For a more politics-centered analysis of images of Majnun and their connection to Mughal self-fashioning, see Koch, "The Mughal Emperor."

84 Joan Cummins, *Indian Painting: From Cave Temples to the Colonial Period* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2006), 45–48; see Plate 17. Some other examples include *Layli Visiting Majnun in the Desert*, British Museum (1974,0617,0.21.25), *Layla Visiting Majnun in the Desert*, British Museum (1974,0617,0.10.52), and *Layla and Majnun in the Wilderness with Animals*, Cleveland Museum of Art (2013.301). One Majnun in the desert painting that utilizes the fantastical elements of the Freer paintings and the overall composition of the Boston painting, also from ca. 1600 is *Laila and Majnun and the Animal Kingdom*, published in Pratapaditya Pal, *Court Paintings of India, 16th–19th Centuries* (New York: Navin Kumar, 1983), fig. M38.

FIGURE 9 Attributed to: Miskin, Indian, active about 1580–1610, *Majnun in the Wilderness*, Indian, Mughal, Mughal period, about 1600. Ink, watercolor and gold on paper. 40.5 × 28.7 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Frederick L. Jack Fund, 1981.81

FIGURE 10 The world of animals (detail), ca. 1600, Miskin. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 33.8 × 21.7 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1945.29

margins appears to enhance the inner symbolism of this painting, linking it to the theme of the ascetic and his detached state (Fig. 10).

The inscription includes two unconnected couplets from the twelfth-century Persian poet from Azerbaijan, Khaqani, who is famous for his obscure style. It is unclear whether the inscription was added later or was written to accompany the painting when it was bound into an album. In either case, it shows that whoever inscribed it was conscious of a culturally shared symbolic meaning associated with animals congregating in the wilderness, as well as its possible connections with the story of Majnun. The second verse reads, "This material wealth that people sing praises of / Is nothing but a seven-headed dragon."[85] Clearly, Miskin's dragon reminded the scribe of this particular couplet. But might it not also refer, obliquely, to the ideal, Majnun-like renunciant who is impervious to the trickeries of the material world? According to Sufi thought, turning away from the world is the first step toward the final alchemical transformation that transfigures the individual's state, uniting him or her with God. In the same vein, the first Khaqani verse from the Freer folio states, "Look at that wine and cup, it is as if a sleight of hand / Has turned silver into a purse full of pure gold."[86]

85 The Persian word used by Khaqani, that I have translated as "material wealth" is "*shish sarī*," which literally means "six-headed" and resonates with the "seven-headed" dragon of the second hemistich. It is a favorite term of this poet and refers to coinage that was traded between the Mediterranean and Black Sea cultures. The coins, made of pure gold, displayed six figures, three on either side, due to which they began to be referred to as "six-headed." For Khaqani, it means "something valuable," "pure gold," or "material wealth," depending on the context. He uses *shish sarī* again in the second poem included in the Freer folio to refer to pure gold. I would like to thank Sourena Parham for bringing this to my attention, and going over my translation.

86 Khaqani and A. ʿAbd al-Rasuli, *Dīvān-i Ḥassān Al-Aʿjam Afẓal Al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Ibn ʿalī Khāqānī Shirvānī* (Tehran: Kitabkhanah-ʾi Khayyam, 1978), 435. From the subsequent

4 Presence

Thus far I have discussed how the image in Indo-Muslim painting has the potential to lead the knowing viewer from one level of reality to another. Or, in Abu'l Fazl's words, "A picture (*ṣūrat*) leads to that which it represents and this [leads] to the meaning (*maʿnī*)."[87] If we continue to use Abu'l Fazl's passage quoted earlier as an interpretive tool, we find that he alludes to another concurrent function of the image: that of presence. When a ray of light passing through the imaginal plane descends into a work of art, it undergoes an alchemical process by which "an abstraction can become contingent, and the unconditional attains a conditional nature."[88] This means that if an image, or outer form, leads to that which it represents—i.e., its inner meaning—it is also a locus for the presence of that particular reality which is represented. Evidence given by recent scholarship working in religious studies and art history suggests that for Persianate cultures portraits were believed to contain the actual presence of the subject depicted.[89] Christiane Gruber argues that it is precisely for this reason that viewers in the Islamic lands often had a haptic relationship with devotional images. "Ardent rubbing and kissing" of saints and prophets and "the destruction of strategic parts of the image" that depicted idols or adversaries could only have taken place if there was a sound faith in the active presence of the subject itself.[90]

"Presence" as a methodology for the study of religion and its related material culture is a nascent field put forward by Robert Orsi, who calls for an "approach to history and culture with the gods fully present to humans."[91] He urges scholarship to reclaim this presence that was banished when a Protestant-centric humanities in Europe and America created a dichotomy between presence and absence, "which then became the metric for mapping the religious worlds

couplets of this *ghazal*, it becomes clear that the sleight of hand belongs to the cupbearer (*sāqī*), who in devotional poetry represents the spiritual guide.

87 Abu al-Fazl, *A'in-i Akbari*, 111.

88 Abu al-Fazl, *A'in-i Akbari*, 112.

89 Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 201; Christiane Gruber, "In Defense and Devotion: Affective Approaches in Early Modern Turco-Persian Manuscript Painting," in *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires: New Studies in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Art and Culture*, ed. Kishwar Rizvi (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 95–123; Finbarr Barry Flood, "Bodies and Becoming: Mimesis, Mediation and the Ingestion of the Sacred in Christianity and Islam," in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally M. Promey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 459–93.

90 Gruber, "In Defense of Devotion," 109, 98.

91 Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 8.

of the planet."[92] According to this metric absence of the gods from cultures equaled a European, Enlightenment-era idea of rationality and reason, which was pitted against the irrational, superstitious worlds of other faiths. This deeply rooted colonial and orientalist bias, which has skewed the way academia approaches other histories through today, fails to acknowledge the real presence of gods, saints, demons, and angels, that has activated faith-based cultures throughout history. As Orsi puts it, "In time, as modernity evolved, the gods were severed from the media of their representation, which became signs and symbols, not embodied presences."[93] Here, I argue that it is this "embodied presence" that made living and dead saints—and other beings that interact with our world—sacred. And that very sacrality is prolonged in their representations in artworks. As I explain in Chapter 1, by embodying presence, which in Arabic and Persian is called *ḥużūr*, saints became interlocuters between different ontological realities. It is no coincidence, therefore, that saints and prophets in Islam are respectfully addressed as "*ḥażrat*" so-and-so, which literally acknowledges their ever-living presence in divinity.

My proposal for an ontology of art for the study of Islamic devotional image-making in the subcontinent intersects with Orsi's "presence," in that it acknowledges the coexistence of multiverses that Muslim societies believed in and inhabited, which in turn were then represented and even embodied in certain artworks. It also builds on Alfred Gell's "social relations" theory, which awards agency or presence to the art object via social interaction, but expands it to include an ontological relation.[94] This proposal has the potential to embrace social, individual, and institutional spheres. In the context of this book, it includes social relations between saints and their patrons; the individual lives of saints, disciples, and benefactors; and institutions such as the *khānqa* (the Sufi hospice), the court, and the tomb. It also recognizes the interconnectivity of various artworks and media, such as the overlap of calligraphy and depiction in Indo-Islamic manuscripts and albums.[95]

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92 Orsi, *History and Presence*, 249.

93 Orsi, *History and Presence*, 250.

94 Gell, *Art and Agency*, 12–27.

95 I would be hesitant to apply this methodology wholesale for a modern and contemporary devotional context, whether Islamic or otherwise, even though it is true that in the contemporary digital age we use mediators, such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets, that are also animated with a presence. They move and communicate with us, alter the way we see the world and each other, and modify the way we create art. However, their function is very different from pre-modern objects embodying "presence," because these are products of a materialist ontology. They reflect a paradigm shift compared to the values of most premodern cultures. For many Muslim societies, there was a violent displacement of the frame of reference after the colonial turn, which in many cases resulted in the

5 Organization of the Book

Faces of God brings South Asian artistic expression into a larger discussion of Islamic art: what it means and how it works. The historiography of Islamic Art leans heavily toward the "central regions" of North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, and Iran. When discussing Islamic devotion in South Asia, art historical scholarship tends to focus on mosques and shrines, both architecturally and culturally. When images are included in this discussion, there is a tendency to highlight modern and contemporary popular artforms such as posters and truck art from Pakistan. This book views the theme of devotion in South Asian Islam through the lens of the painted image between ca. 1500 and 1800 in order to establish important themes and precedents, not only placing South Asia in a discourse with other Muslim regions but also potentially providing avenues for engaging with later artworks from the colonial, modern, and contemporary periods.

In order to create some parameters around the theme of Indo-Muslim devotional painting, I have deliberately kept the focus of the book on the Islamicate-Persianate connection. This does not mean that the Indic sources were less important, and I deal with them at length in Chapter 2. Similarly, I have limited the scope of this survey by focusing mostly on Mughal imperial painting. Although there are several South Indian as well as other regional and non-elite artworks that are part of this survey, concentrating primarily on artworks made within the Mughal milieu allows me to delve deeper into one case study that has implications for a wider discussion about Muslim devotion in Hindustan. Rather than taking on the nearly impossible task of compiling an exhaustive list of known representations of saints and other figures of devotion, I instead highlight prevalent themes and motivations by presenting a relevant selection of artworks that contributed to the development of devotional imagery. Lastly, since this is essentially a survey outlining specific cultural practices as seen through art-making, most of the book's focus is on belief systems, shared values, and patrons' choices. I have not focused as much on the lives, practices, and ethos of artists and their workshops. This does not by any means

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corrosion of systems that had been developing on the basis of internal dialogues. Before, a traveler in the Persianate world would carry a rosary, the Quran, or a copy of the *Divan* of Hafiz as an object of mediation between intra-subjective spheres of reality. People still do, but now the smartphone takes center stage. Ours is a sort of post-human, digital animism whose objects of devotion first and foremost provide instant sensual gratification, which is very different from, say, medieval and early modern Muslim cultures. See Nathan Jurgenson, *The Social Photo: On Photography and Social Media* (London: Verso Books, 2019).

imply that artists working for Indo-Muslim patrons were not living, thinking, creative beings. However, delving into this theme would take me far off course from the main subject of the book.[96]

With these intentions in mind, I begin the book with a brief overview of Islamic intellectual traditions that helped shape Indo-Muslim devotional expressions. Chapter 1 discusses how saints, who feature regularly in Hindustani painting, embodied sacred presence. By using Indo-Persian literature written by the very patrons and subjects of the artworks, as well as the voices that informed them, this chapter unpacks the foundational concept of devotional viewing and its subsequent artistic expression in the form of saints' portraits. I contend that this practice was native to Islamic philosophical and metaphysical thought, even if the form that this artistic expression assumed was uniquely Indic.

The remainder of the book loosely follows a chronological progression. Chapter 2 opens by examining illustrated Sufi-romances from the early sixteenth century. Thematically, the chapter highlights the image of the yogi and his importance as a metonym for the archetypal Sufi in Muslim devotional literature and paintings in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. I argue that this particular theme had a great impact on Mughal princely patronage. The chapter offers a unique window into the negotiations between Islamic and Hindu spiritualities in Hindustan as seen through a medieval and early modern literary and visual framework. Most importantly, it shows how the visual language for representing Sufis in later paintings was based on examples from this early stage of devotional artworks.

Chapter 3 addresses the concept of presence in Mughal painting, specifically highlighting the role of ascetics, angels, and kings as mediators between heavenly and worldly authority. It analyzes these depictions from albums and manuscripts made for three of the most influential Mughal emperors, Akbar (r. 1556–1605), Jahangir (r. 1605–27) and Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58).

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on a pivotal moment in the history of devotional painting in India. Spanning the period between 1530 and 1560, the chapters discuss the impact of two children of Shah Jahan, Princess Jahanara Begum (1614–81) and Prince Dara Shikoh (1615–59), on the genre of saints' portraiture. As the only members of Mughal royalty to be initiated into a Sufi order, Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum were in the unique position of being both practitioners and patrons of Sufism. Chapter 4 highlights the early patronage of Dara

96 Rice's forthcoming book on Mughal painting deals with precisely the theme of artistic agency. Yael Rice, *The Brush of Insight: Artists and Agency at the Mughal Court* (University of Washington Press, forthcoming 2023).

Shikoh, specifically the presence of Sufis in the *Dara Shikoh Album* (1630–35) and other related artworks. Through a stylistic and iconographic analysis of the paintings, I show how Dara Shikoh continued longstanding Persianate and Indic princely practices, particularly the fashioning of the prince as a locus for manifesting Divinity. Chapter 5 considers the role of one of the most powerful women of her time, Jahanara Begum, by using images of spiritual guides as supports for esoteric practices of ritualistic visualization. I argue that in the long history of devotional paintings for Indo-Muslim patrons, this was the first instance when images took on an expressly ritualistic function, moving away from ideas of self-fashioning and expressions of political personae. The chapter frames these elements within a focused analysis of portraits made of Jahanara's Sufi shaikh, Mulla Shah. Chapter 6 explores important artworks linked to the two imperial siblings from ca. 1640 to 1660, a time when they reached full maturity both in the political arena and the spiritual realm. The chapter concludes with a look at how the genre of saintly portraiture, whose iconography and role were refined under Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh's patronage, spread across regional Muslim centers in South Asia.

Images in the early modern Indo-Muslim world had a vast spectrum of meaning, and often themes and values intersected. By highlighting the genre of portraiture, or figural depiction, *Faces of God* brings into sharp focus one major theme of these artworks: religious devotion. Specifically, the role of historical, mythical, and imaginal figures considered sacred by that particular culture, as mediators between different realms of reality.

CHAPTER 1

Viewing the Face of a God's Friend: Conceptual and Literary Premises

> There is a secret within this hidden servant (of God),
> and if it were to be unveiled,
> Without doubt, the very face of the Lord would be revealed
>
> SHAH DILRUBA[1]

In an eighteenth-century painting from the Deccan in the collection of the British Library, a symmetrical arrangement of six vases of narcissus blooms frames an armed mendicant in a yogic posture seated on a raised marble platform (Fig. 11).[2] With a thick beard and black, matted locks, his eyes gaze into the distance, hands resting gracefully on his folded leg. His detailed garb—large iron bangles, a beaded anklet, a multi-stringed black cord looping down over his right shoulder and his patched orange robe—suggests that he is a wandering ascetic, an ever-present figure in the medieval and early modern Indian landscape. His accessories recall those shared by yogis, dervishes, and renunciants of other denominations. Burn marks on his arms, a small pouch, and a wooden begging bowl next to his foot further identify him as a member of the Qalandariyya: a distinct dervish community that ostentatiously spurned obligatory religious practices and often consumed alcohol and smoked hemp; as a result, the Qalandariyya received the epithet of *bī sharʿ*, or those not bound to the *sharīʿa*.[3] Despite these associations, this particular Qalandar is depicted as a legitimately sanctified ascetic. His halo—a dazzling golden crescent—marks his status, as do the pedestal on which he sits and the large shade-giving tree behind him. The sword slung across his shoulder and the dagger placed on

1 Dara Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt al-ʿārifīn*, ed. Makhdum Rahin (Tehran: Muʾassasah-i Taḥqīqāt va Intishārāt-i Vīsman, 1352/1973), 74.

2 Toby Falk and Mildred Archer, *Indian Miniatures in the India Office Library* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1981), 90.

3 Ahmet Karamustafa calls the actions and beliefs of this group "socially deviant." See Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period 1200–1550* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

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FIGURE 11 A Qalandar, ca. 1720–40. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 19 × 14.3 cm. British Library, London
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, J.19.2

the tiger skin beneath him also hint at his chivalry. Two male attendants holding peacock fans flank him. Opposite them, six women enter the composition from the left playing instruments and singing songs of devotion. In contrast to the spectral background figures rendered in half tints, the regal Qalandar, painted in opaque tones and on a much larger scale, projects an iconic presence. The space occupied by the Qalandar also differs from the upper register inhabited by the devotees shown emerging from the foliage. The two spaces represent distinct ontological spheres: the worldly and the spiritual. Only the left hand of one of the attendants, resting casually on the ascetic's platform, breaks an otherwise definitive divide between the two compositional and symbolic registers, allowing the viewer a subtle point of entry into the esoteric realm of sanctity, prayer, and devotion.

Explaining the various yogic manifestations in India, Debra Diamond points out that yoga is "not a unified construct or the domain of any single religion, but rather decentralized and plural."[4] This observation resonates with other aspects of spirituality in the subcontinent. The phenomenon of trans-sectarian sharing—where different South Asian religious expressions borrow from each other—is equally true for the uniquely Indic concept of the act of "religious 'seeing,' or the visual perception of the sacred."[5] In the Indic world this act is known as *darśan*, while in the Persianate context it is known as *naẓar* or *dīdār*. Considered in this light, the painting of the Qalandar can be viewed as an expression of religious seeing.[6] But for what audience?

There are hundreds of similar paintings found in albums made for Muslim patrons that show devotees engaged in the act of witnessing a sanctified person. In the British Library example, the ascetic is adorned by all the necessary accoutrements that identify him as a gnostic deep in meditation. Like the onlookers depicted in the background of the painting, the viewer peering at the album page witnesses the holy figure sitting in a garden before a stream. Before him is a leather-bound book, suggesting his other vocation as a poet or author. Next to the book lies a yogi crutch whose two ivory handles end in lion-heads. The crutch, another shared Indic emblem of devotional practice,

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4 Debra Diamond, "Yoga: The Art of Transformation," in Diamond and Aitken, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, 24.

5 Diana Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 3.

6 For an alternate discussion of this image see David Gordon White, "Yoga in Transformation," in Diamond and Aitken, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, 42. White suggests that the figure represents a Shaivite ascetic, citing the presence of the crescent moon halo, which is an attribute of the yogi-god.

was typically used by adepts to rest the arms during long vigils that often lasted for days.

Despite its obvious interreligious awareness, in which meditative techniques, ritual paraphernalia, and dress were shared across Indic spiritualities, the image nonetheless addresses a particular audience: an educated, elite Muslim milieu well-versed in Sufi thought. The painting of the Qalandar and similar representations of holy men and women give us invaluable insight into Muslim devotional culture in Hindustan as a living, breathing reality, and not one encased in juridical, text-based literalism. How do we understand these artworks as truly Islamic in their intentions and purposes? Can we even call these artworks *Islamic*? To find answers to these questions, we must begin by understanding the central role played by saints—both living and dead—in Indo-Muslim society as mediators between earth and heaven, between devotee and God.

Literary sources such as biographies of saints, personal anecdotes, religious treatises, and poetry, written mostly in Persian by patrons of artworks as well as by the saintly subjects of those artworks, provide a conceptual framework through which images of Muslim saints can be recognized as objects of devotion endowed with presence, particularly beginning in the seventeenth century when these artworks became increasingly connected to ritualistic remembrance.

In medieval and early modern devotional literature, themes of religious seeing and the transforming gaze of the spiritual guide are all-pervasive. A survey of this theme as expressed in the subcontinent alone would fill volumes. Using a small sample of relevant sources, this chapter navigates the discussion around this subject through the voices that were attached to some of the most influential Sufi groups in Hindustan: the Qadiri, the Chishti, and the Naqshbandi orders. Royal patrons, Sufi practitioners, and prolific authors of biographies, memoirs, religious treatises, and devotional poetry left behind a treasure trove of written and visual sources that communicate a rare historical convergence of devotion and elite cultural production. It was, in particular, under Mughal patronage that devotional artworks began to be used as objects of ritualistic viewing, thereby adding a new branch to an evergreen Hindustani genre. Many of the authors cited here, such as ʿAbd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dehlavi and Prince Dara Shikoh, comprise part of this cultural context.

It is worth noting that in other Muslim regions, the practice of conjuring interior, mental, or imaginal visions of spiritual preceptors seldom translated into devotional viewing in the form of the painted image. As Christiane Gruber has shown, in the early modern period, images of the Prophet Muhammad were common in manuscript illustrations produced by the Ottoman and

Safavid empires.[7] However, it is very rare for such art to work systematically as images of devotion separate from their texts. It is only in more recent times, with the introduction of print technologies and photography during the colonial period, that certain images of saints have taken on otherworldly meanings. The case of the Mouride saint from Senegal, Amadou Bamba, specifically comes to mind.[8] Perhaps, given South Asia's deep rooted iconophilia, the practice of devotional viewing extended organically onto the painted image.

1 Sufism

Sufism, known locally by many names including *taṣavvuf* and *ṭarīqat*, is the mystical dimension of Islam that guides the seeker toward union with God. Traditionally, scholars and metaphysicians alike have understood Islam to consist of three, often overlapping, hierarchical stations: namely, the Law (*sharīʿat*); the Way or Path (*ṭarīqat*); and the Truth-Reality (*ḥaqīqat*). Sufism is seen as synonymous with the Way that guides practitioners to the Reality of God. However, Sufis also widely acknowledge that, with the exception of the *bī sharʾ* mystics such as the Qalandars, there is no *ṭarīqat* without the building blocks of *sharīʿat*. The tripartite hierarchical division of the underlying function of religion is best summed up by one of the most widely read Sufi poets in the Persianate world, Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi:

> The Religious Law [*sharīʿat*] is like a candle showing the way. Unless you gain possession of the candle, there is no wayfaring; and when you have come on to the way, your wayfaring is the Path [the Way: *ṭarīqat*]; and when you have reached the journey's end, that is the Truth-Reality [*ḥaqīqat*]. Hence it has been said, "If the truths (realities) [*ḥaqāiq*] were manifest, the religious laws would be naught."[9]

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7 Christiane Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Texts and Images* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

8 Giulia Paoletti, "Searching for the Origin(al): On the Photographic Portrait of the Mouride Sufi Saint Amadou Bamba," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 230, no. 2 (2018): 323–48.

9 Jalal al-Din Rumi, *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, trans. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, 5 vols. (London: Messrs. E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1925), V:1. Also see Ahmad, *What is Islam?*, 21. It is apt to quote from Rumi, as he was widely read in medieval and early modern Muslim India. Emperor Akbar regularly listened to Rumi's *Masnavī*, and several critical editions of the work were prepared in South Asia. See Muzaffar Alam, "The Debate within: A Sufi Critique of Religious Law, *Tasawwuf* and Politics in Mughal India," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 154n18.

Rumi goes on to equate this tripartite division of religion with the process of alchemy. The entire *raison d'être* of alchemy is to turn base metal into gold, and once that has been achieved, alchemy, "which is the law," is no longer required. Only those travelers upon the Path that arrive at Reality and have "become gold" are considered to be *awliyāʾ*, or Friends of God (singular: *valī*).[10] Even though they are necessarily striving to understand the nature of God, not all Sufis are saints, and are thus called travelers on the path, *sālikūn*.

In South Asia, the history of sainthood in Islam unfolds primarily within the domain of Sufism, *taṣavvuf*, which is viewed as an aid to the deepening of one's faith, rather than constituting a separate religious path or sect. *Taṣavvuf* is woven into the very fabric of Muslim culture, and religious devotion is intrinsically linked to Sufi saints and their shrines. For those practicing Sufism, the archetype of the spiritual guide is the Prophet Muhammad himself. All branches of Sufism trace their origins back to him. In fact, Sufis believe the prophetic substance to be the first creation of God, sometimes even equating it with Hindu notions of divinity. For example, a Tamil Muslim biography of the Prophet from the seventeenth century, the *Cīrāppurāṇam*, written in the Indic convention of a Purana, describes the Prophet as an avatar (or, an incarnation).[11] Known as the *nūr-i muḥammadī*, it is the light from which all other creation was generated. Muslim saints are believed to share that light of the Prophet, allowing for the almost ritualistic worship awarded to certain individuals. For instance, the twelfth-century Isma'ili saint from Multan, Shah Shams, describes the Prophet's spiritual successor and son-in-law, ʿAli, as the tenth incarnation of Vishnu in the form of the Kalki avatar, encouraging his followers to worship ʿAli as the light of God.[12] This Indic reverence for ʿAli might also explain his portrait in the album of saints compiled for Tipu Sultan (Fig. 1). As these examples demonstrate, Muslims in the subcontinent absorbed many local devotional practices and terminologies unique to the region that expanded the complex structure of devotion to the saints.

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10 "Friends of God" is the most common and literal translation of the Arabic term for saints, *awliyāʾ Allah*. The "Friends" are also given many other epithets. For a detailed history of Muslim hagiographies and a discussion of the names of saints in Islam, see John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 8–9.

11 Vasudha Narayanan, "Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity: A Study of the Tamil *Cīrāppurāṇam* ('Life of the Prophet')," in *India's Islamic Traditions: 711–1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 393–410.

12 Tazim R. Kassam, *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance: Hymns of the Satpanthī Ismāʿīlī Muslim Saint, Pīr Shams* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 168.

Although significantly localized and rehabilitated, South Asian Sufism was greatly influenced by the language and symbols laid out by the pan-Islamic *waḥdat al-wujūd* tradition and its most influential spokesperson, Ibn al-ʿArabi.[13] For example, during the 1640s, a major literary influence on the spiritual lives of two royal siblings and the children of Emperor Shah Jahan, Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum, was the verse and prose of the contemporary saint (and their spiritual guide) Mulla Shah Badakhshi. Both Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum's writings are replete with references to the Mulla's literary work. Mulla Shah's own metaphysical language was formed in Ibn al-ʿArabi's philosophical mold, known as Akbarian philosophy. As discussed in the Introduction, the specific aspect of this philosophy that emphasizes the presence of God in every atom of creation is best summed up in the famous Quranic saying: "Wheresoever you turn there is the face of God."[14] According to Akbarian thought, all created things are, to some degree or the other, manifestations of God's reality and are thus ontologically connected. Herein lies the paradoxical nature of all existence: outwardly, each created being is nothing but illusion, a husk, yet its kernel contains the Reality or Truth (*haqīqat*) of the Creator. In the words of the Quran, "All that are here are perishing. There remains but the face of your Lord of Might and Glory."[15]

For Ibn al-ʿArabi and other followers of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* tradition, the hierarchy of creation is ranked according to its degree of manifesting God. After the prophets, the saints have the highest degree. A large corpus connected to this school of speculative Sufism is dedicated to explaining the complex hierarchical degrees and spiritual stations of saints. One author linked to this tradition, who had a huge impact on South Asian hagiographical literature in particular, was the fifteenth-century poet, philosopher, and Naqshbandi Sufi ʿAbd al-Rahman Jami (1414–92). An important courtier in the Timurid court at Herat, his biography of saints, *Nafaḥāt al-uns* [*Breaths of Intimacy*] became extremely popular in India. Jahanara Begum owned a copy of his book, and before her, Emperor Akbar had his *taṣvīrkhāna* create an illustrated version

13 For general discussions of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in South Asian culture, including literature, religion, and politics, see Nair, *Translating Wisdom*; Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978); and Muzaffar Alam, *Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 81–114. The popular seventeenth-century Indian Chishti Sufi and hagiographer Abd al-Rahman also frequently cites Ibn al-ʿArabi from his *Fusūs al-Hikam*. See Alam, "The Debate within," 141.

14 Quran 2:115.

15 Quran 55:26–27.

of the manuscript.[16] In the *Nafaḥāt*, Jami provides a clear description of the term "*valī*" (saint, lit. "Friend of God") while also linking the essence of sanctity to divine origins. He explains that "*vilāyat* (sanctity) is derived from *valī*, and there are two kinds of *vilāyat*.[17] One is the *vilāyat* of the common people. The other is of the elect."[18] The sanctity of the elect is bestowed upon those spiritual travelers who become saints when they find extinction (*fanā*) in the essence of God and find their subsistence (*baqā*) through God:

> *Fanā* means that the traveler finds the journey's end in God. *Baqā* means that the [new] journey begins in the essence of God. The journey to God is completed as soon as the traveler severs [his connection with] the forest of *wujūd* (being) with the help of veracity. And the journey in God is established after extinction in the Absolute [Reality of God] after which the traveler (lit. the slave of God, *bandah*) receives an existence that is pure from the contamination of contingency.[19]

This description indicates that for most Muslim societies, only those individuals who had completed the cyclical spiritual journey of first extinguishing their own lower or egoistical selves in God and then returned to the world to work the will of God were considered sanctified. Once perfected, the *awliyāʾ* become "the cause for the continuing manifestation of the proof of prophethood, so that the signs of Truth (*Ḥaq*) and the true love of the Prophet Muhammad may continue to manifest."[20] And it is precisely such an individual that Ibn al-ʿArabi calls *al-insān al-kāmil*, or the perfect human being. Owing to this proximity with God, the *valī* is usually recognized by a community of followers or by larger society as a gnostic through the *barkat*, or divine grace, that he or she is believed to emanate. Saints in Islam are also known for working miracles (*karāmāt*). As the copious literary evidence avows, anyone who has gazed upon an *insān al-kāmil* has experienced a concentrated dose of God's

16 ʿAbd al-Raḥman Jami, *Nafaḥāt ʾal-ʾuns* (Lakhnaw: Nuval Kashawr, 1915).

17 The word "*vilāyat*" has several connected meanings. According to the Steingass dictionary, it means "helping, assisting; governing;—*walāyat, wilāyat* (v.n. of وليّ), Being master of, controlling; government, jurisdiction, dominion, power, authority; guardianship, tutelage, patronage; sanctity, holiness; mystical union with God effected by self-denial; a province;—*wilāyat*, An inhabited country, dominion, district." Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, available at Digital Dictionaries of South Asia, accessed January 3, 2023, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/steingass_query.py?qs=%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A9&matchtype=default.

18 Jami, *Nafaḥāt ʾal-ʾuns*, 4.

19 Jami, *Nafaḥāt ʾal-ʾuns*, 4.

20 Jami, *Nafaḥāt ʾal-ʾuns*, 17.

emanation. Thereafter, all of creation is viewed through that "sign of Truth," which is the very presence of the saint. It is precisely in this context that an Indian Sufi saint such as Mulla Shah can refer to the Quranic saying, "wheresoever you turn there is the face of God,"[21] and utter, "Anyone who gazed with honest devotion upon the face of [Mulla] Shah / Wheresoever he looked, he saw the face of God."[22]

This concept of gazing upon an acknowledged *valī* as a means of entering the locus of divine immanence overlaps with the Indic concept of *darśan* (sacred viewing). In Sufi literature, it even comes close to the idea of avataric descent, in which God makes himself present in human form. Diana Eck, describing *darśan* from an Indic perspective, says:

> *darśan* is sometimes translated as the "auspicious sight" of the divine, and its importance in the Hindu ritual complex reminds us that for Hindus "worship" is not only a matter of prayers and offerings and the devotional disposition of the heart. Since, in the Hindu understanding, the deity is present in the image, the visual apprehension of the image is charged with religious meaning. Beholding the image is an act of worship; and through the eyes one gains the blessings of the divine.[23]

It is important to point out that Sufi authors of metaphysical treatises, hagiographies, and historical biographies of saints never use the Sanskrit word "*darśan*." Instead, they use linguistic parallels from Arabic and Persian. The closest and most often used analog is the Arabic word "*naẓar*," or glance. The infinitive Persian verb "*dīdan*," to see, is another common word used to describe this spiritual viewing. Devotees acknowledge that viewing the saint gives spiritual insight, *feż*, to the disciple, at times even sending the viewer into ecstatic raptures. Mulla Shah repeatedly evokes the act of looking at the beloved in his divan. His poetry is part of the larger genre of Persian Sufi poetry in which the beloved is thought to signify the guide or God—and in most cases, both at once.

21 Quran 2:115. The complete verse reads, "And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing." A hadith of the Prophet says that the "best among you [often understood to be the Friends of God] are those who when seen God is remembered." Ibn Majah et al., *English Translation of Sunan Ibn Mâjah*, 5 vols. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), V: Book 37, hadith 4119.

22 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," ed. Muhammad Aslam, *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 16, no. 4 (1979): 88.

23 Eck, *Darśan*, 3.

Within the mystical dimension of Islam, sainthood acts as a link between the devotee and God. In Islamic devotional practice, the devotee has access to the saint's presence and transformative guidance even when the saint is physically absent. It is commonly acknowledged that a true *valī*, having achieved intimate union with God, remains alive even long after the physical body has died. A central term attached to the concept of sacred viewing is "*barkat*" (derived from *baraka*, which means "divine grace" in Arabic), which the devotee receives either through the act of viewing and being viewed by the saint, or through entering space once occupied by the saint. By this logic, *barkat* can also be accessed by touching the relics of saints.[24] As I will discuss in Chapter Five, there is evidence that Jahanara Begum herself collected objects that belonged to Mulla Shah or were blessed by him.

The phenomenon of sacred viewing—either through the direct presence of the saint or through the medium of relics—rings true, to varying degrees, for all Hindustani religious traditions, including Islam as practiced in South Asia. Viewing saints or prophets through what Eck calls "auspicious sight"[25] allows the devotee to witness the transcendent divinity—which in its essential reality is beyond physical representation or likeness—residing in the perfected human being, the *insān al-kāmil*. In this respect, the Indic concept of *darśan* and the Sufi notion of beholding the divine in human form are very similar. However, rather than the image of the deity, the presence of the saint becomes central. The popularity of the theme of the human receptacle becoming an agent for God's manifestation is so prevalent in South Asian Muslim devotional expression that it is regularly found in *qawwālī*, or devotional music sung during Sufi ritual gatherings, to this day. A much-loved Urdu *qawwālī* with the refrain *ādmī ban āyā re mōlā* translates both as "God became man" and "man became God."[26] I argue that it is precisely the belief in this intermediary presence (*ḥużūr*) of the saintly preceptor that gave Sufi adherents the conceptual reasoning from within Islamic thought for patronizing representations of known saints.

The concept of devotional viewing represents more than just a literal meeting of the eyes. It includes the act of participating in the *barkat* that a sanctified person radiates. In the domain of painting, most images of saints made for devotional viewing show their subjects in profile, looking away from the

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24 For a discussion of the tactile practices of Muslims centered on objects, see Gruber, "In Defense and Devotion," 111. Also see Flood, "Bodies and Becoming," 461, 468–71.

25 Eck, *Darśan*, 3.

26 The Qawwali Channel, "'Kaisa Naach Nachaaya' by Bahauddin Khan Qawwal," YouTube video, 12:51, September 16, 2020, accessed May 4, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wg-oJqe7YzM.

FIGURE 12 Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah, ca. 1645. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. 6.7 × 10.3 cm. Yale Art Gallery, New Haven. The Vera M. and John D. MacDonald, B.A. 1927, Collection, gift of Mrs. John D. MacDonald, 2001.138.59, artwork in the public domain
PHOTO CREDIT: YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

viewer. But this does not in any way diminish their role as receptacles and conferrers of divine presence. In many instances, portraits of individuals are derived from earlier compositions that included two or more saints absorbed in their own acts of mutual viewing. A Shah Jahan-period painting shows Mulla Shah seated before his own spiritual guide, Miyan Mir (1550–1635), whom he would travel to visit annually in the winter, making the trek down from the mountains of Kashmir to the heart of the Punjab plains in Lahore (Fig. 12). Both share the same carpet placed on a white platform. Both are seated under the shade of trees. Miyan Mir, positioned slightly higher than his disciple on the right to show his elevated status, is shaded by the local *nīm* tree, known for its medicinal qualities and abundant growth in the saint's native Punjab. Mulla Shah sits under the lighter-colored plane tree known as the *chanār*, which was common in the Northwestern mountain region. The two trees, one from Central Asian and Persian stock and the other from the searing heat of the Indus plains, are connected by a broad stream coursing through the meadow in the background. The profiled heads of the saints, their eyes locked in a mutual gaze, are also framed by the same stream, its dark waters creating

a stark contrast against the portraits. The theme of pairs is echoed a third time in the form of two ducks swimming into the composition from the left. The stream—linking the figures, the trees, and the ducks—acts as a metaphor for the Qadiri order of Sufism to which both individuals belonged.

In paintings of this type, the implied depiction of mutual viewing, spiritual radiation, and the exchange of blessings between subjects mirrors the devoted viewer's engagement with the image, which, I contend, was made to prolong the saints' presence and was thus used in various roles. Moreover, in some of the more explicitly icon-like paintings that first emerged during the Shah Jahan era, the portraits utilized simple, centralized compositions, framing devices, and other pictorial conventions that present the saint as an object of exclusive contemplation (Fig. 1).

A passage from Jahanara Begum's *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya* offers a particularly direct example of the transformative presence of the saint explained through the act of *naẓar*:

> Shah! You are he who, through the purity
> Of the blessing of your *naẓar*, brings seekers to God.
> Everyone that you glance upon arrives at their desired destination,
> The light of your *naẓar* is but the Light of God.[27]

The verse also reflects the already discussed Sufi belief that once the saint has been perfected through the denial of his own self, it is not he but God who acts and speaks through him. Jahanara Begum concludes the key passage by describing her initiation and the ritualistic viewing of portraits of her guide Mulla Shah with the quatrain quoted above, which she joyously recites after emerging from a trance-like state.

It is no surprise that among the many epithets given to or assumed by Mulla Shah, one of the most important ones was *lisān al'Lah*, or the Tongue of God. The title also pays homage to the most popular poet in the Persian-speaking world, Hafiz, who was known as *lisān al-ghayb*, Tongue of the Unseen.

2 *Taẕkira* Literature

The earliest and most longstanding form of saint devotion in Islam is the literary depiction of the lives of saints, known as the *taẕkira*, or remembrance. It constitutes one of the most prolific genres in the history of Muslim literature.

27 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 103.

Starting with traditions related to the life of Muhammad and the first four caliphs, the genre was standardized in the tenth century by the Malamati Sufi ʿAbd al-Rahman Sulami in his *Ṭabaqāt al-sufiyya* and popularized in Persian by the twelfth-century mystic Farid al-Din ʿAttar with his *Taẕkirāt al-awliyāʾ* [*Remembrances of the Friends of God*].[28] This genre quickly took root and flourished in India from the fourteenth century onward. By the seventeenth century, it became common to find *taẕkirāt* written by Hindustani Sufis that focused primarily on the lives of local saints and their genealogies. Both Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh contributed important anthologies to this genre in the subcontinent.

Very often, the visual iconography of Sufi saints in Indo-Muslim painting draws directly from these hagiographical "portraits," which serve as prototypes for the later visual iterations. One of the principal functions of the portraits becomes clearer when we understand the motivations of the authors of the *taẕkira* genre. The first complete anthology focusing primarily on Hindustani Sufis, titled *Akhbār al-akhyār* [*Accounts of the Virtuous Ones*], was written in 1590–91 by ʿAbd al-Haqq Muhaddith-i Dehlavi. The Qadiri Sufi, one of the greatest scholars of hadith literature in the Muslim world in his time, explained his intentions in the introduction:

> He who fails to recognize the perfection of the *awliyāʾ*
> Fails to recognize the value of these special blessings
> Since he is ungrateful, and fails to choose the love of the saints
> Know, that surely he has failed to find God

> Remembering the Friends and beloveds of God causes the descent of mercy, and is the means for attaining nearness to Him. Because the lover enjoys remembering his beloved, the beloved also in turn adores remembering the lover.[29] Therefore, remembering [the Friends of God] is a form of worship (*ʿibādat*) that anyone can practice without great effort in any state, and can thus achieve nearness to God [...] it is necessary to engender that kind of relationship and ardor between the invoker and the Invoked that causes invocation. By listening to anecdotes from the lives of the elders the heart acquires this discerning relationship. And it

28 See Muḥammad ibn al-Husayn Sulami and Johannes Pedersen, *Kitab tabaqat al-Sufiyya* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), and Farid al-Din ʿAttar and Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *Tadhkiratu ʾl-Awliya* [*Memoirs of the Saints*] (London: Luzac, 1905). For a detailed list of early *taẕkirās* from India, see Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, 4–17.

29 Here reference is made to the Quranic line, "Remember Me and I will remember you" (2:152).

> is natural that upon hearing these anecdotes a person should think in his heart that the elders only attained their everlasting joy through beautiful deeds and purity of character. In such a person's heart an enduring attraction for moving towards beautiful deeds will surely be produced. It is also possible that those pure and sacred spirits are pleased by our remembrance, and in exchange they also remember us in the hereafter and open their doors to help the seeker.[30]

The author's primary intention is to stimulate in his reader the desire to achieve nearness to God by remembering the saints who have become perfected through beautiful deeds. For Dehlavi, it is through emulating the "beautiful deeds," the *ḥusn-i ʿamal*, which makes his audience partake in the actions of the saints and keeps their presence alive in them. Through this active participation in the virtues the devotee can, in turn, aspire to become the very beautified soul that attracts and radiates the divine presence through its beauty. Secondly, since the Friends of God are believed to have found union with God and are therefore the true *shuhudā* (plural of *shahīd*, which means both martyr and witness of God's Reality), they are said to be ever living.[31] And it is precisely because of their ever-lasting union in God that they are said to hear the heartfelt prayers of the believers and act as a timeless bridge for the devotee. Dara Shikoh's own birth, for instance, was considered a miracle that transpired through the intercession of a saint. Like his grandfather before him, Emperor Shah Jahan is said to have prayed for an heir at the shrine of Khwaja Muʿin al-Din Chishti (1143–1236), the patron saint of Muslim South Asia, at Ajmer.[32]

The Mughal court patronized Dehlavi, and his work circulated widely in the seventeenth-century Indo-Persian world, influencing the early writings of Dara Shikoh as well as other biographers of saints. According to Muzaffar Alam, the Sufi theologian, along with the hagiographer Abd-al Rahman Chishti, "dominate[d] the history of seventeenth-century Muslim religious culture in India."[33] As an extension to Dehlavi's introduction, Dara Shikoh also elaborated on the value of remembering the *awliyāʾ* in the introduction to his own

30 ʿAbd al-Haqq Muhaddith-i Dehlavi, *Akhbār al-Akhyār fī asrār al-abrār*, ed. Alim Ashraf Khan (Tehran: Anjuman-i Athar-o Mufakhir-i Farangi, 2005), 11.

31 Quran 2:154.

32 Craig Davis, "The Yogic Exercises of the 17th century Sufis," in *Theory and Practice of Yoga: Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 304.

33 Alam, "The Debate within," 139. Other important sources for Dehlavi include K.A. Nizami, *Hayat-i Shaikh ʿAbd al-Haqq Muhaddis Dehlavı* (Delhi: Nadvat al-Musannifin, 1964); Bruce Lawrence, "Biography and the 17th Century Qadiriya of North India," in *Islam and Indian Regions*, ed. Anna Dallapiccola and Stephanie Lallemant, 399–415 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993); Scott Kugle, "ʿAbd al-Haqq Dihlawi, an Accidental Revivalist: Knowledge and Power in the Passage from Delhi to Makka," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2008):

biography of saints, *Safīnat al-awliyāʾ* [*The Ship of the Friends of God*], written in the year of his initiation, 1640:

> This humble servant considers himself to be a firm follower of the company of the Friends (*awliyāʾ*). Which is why he considers it his good fortune to write about their lives and deeds in this book. He who does not obtain union or viewing of the beloved has to pacify the fire of love with the remembrance of the beloved [...]. Being in their presence awards closeness with God; seeking them out is akin to yearning for God; association with them is association and proximity to God.[34]

Jahanara Begum echoes a sentiment similar to the one presented by Dehlavi in her introduction to *Mūʾnis al-arwāḥ* (1639), her biography of Chishti saints, in which she writes:

> God has made the Friends the stability and subsistence of all the world and its inhabitants, and from their blessed actions all the world and its inhabitants receive endurance and equilibrium. Devotion and love for this group leads to salvation. Each believing man and woman who is attached to any of the branches or groups of these [Sufi] orders will receive freedom and deliverance in the hereafter.[35]

The intention of remembering or evoking saints for the sake of internalizing their presence and imbibing their virtues—a concern clearly proclaimed by authors writing *taẕkirāt*—is also suggested by some patrons who commissioned portraits of saints. In the album preface to a late seventeenth-century Kashmiri compilation of paintings, the unidentified patron explains that "since I have the means and capacity, I should endeavor to preserve/protect (*ḥifẓ*) the names of the saints and elders"[36] (Fig. 13). The Arabic word *ḥifẓ*, which literally means to protect something, is commonly used for the act of memorizing the Quran. A *ḥāfiẓ*, like the famous Persian poet of Shiraz, is one who has committed the entire Quran to memory. The patron's use of this specific word for

196–246; and Alim Ashraf Khan, *Shaikh ʿAbd al-Haqq Muhaddis Dehlavi: Hayat wa ʿIlmı Khidmat* (Delhi: Islamic Wonders Bureau, 2001).

34 Dara Shikoh, *Safīnat ul-awliyāʾ*, trans. Muhammad ʿAli Lutfi (Karachi: Nafīs Academy, 1959), 17–19.

35 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fraser 229, Jahanara Begum, *Mūʾnis al-arwāḥ*, ff. 3b–4a.

36 For a detailed discussion on the Kashmiri album, its preface, and its painter, refer to Murad Khan Mumtaz, "'Patch by Patch': Devotional Culture in the Himalayas as Seen through Early Modern Kashmiri Paintings of Muslim Saints," *South Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2018): 114–36.

FIGURE 13 Album preface, 1699–1702. *Kashmiri Album*. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 35.9 × 23.8 cm. Lahore Museum, Lahore (1552, verso)
PHOTO CREDIT: MURAD KHAN MUMTAZ

memorializing saints' images situates his act within a sacred sphere, while also connecting it to the larger *taẕkira* tradition. Just as reading or hearing about the beautiful deeds of the *awliyāʾ*, according to Dehlavi, inspires the follower to act virtuously, visualizing the image of the *valī* can also activate latent piety within the devotee. In both visual and literary representations, the saint acts as an archetype that can be mirrored in the individual microcosm.

Another similarity between *taẕkira* literature and devotional portraiture is the way in which they both collapse the very notion of time by including saints from different eras within a single space. Owing to the idea of their immortality in God, the *awliyāʾ* are a living reminder of God's eternal reality that transcends spatial and temporal limitations. Contemporary saints cohabitate with ones long past, and those from earlier times radiate potency equal to that of those who are still alive in the worldly sense. In *taẕkira* literature, it is very common for deceased saints to visit or communicate with living Sufis. Various anecdotes describe sacred gatherings in which the author or narrator witnesses saints across time and space. Similarly, in an important sub-genre of saints' portraits, preeminent members of South Asian Sufi orders are shown congregated in a circle. The earliest known painted representations of this sub-genre come from the Shah Jahan period (see Chapter Six).

3 Looking at the Face of ʿAli Is Worship

> O [Shah], on your face glows a Light from God
> Keep that Light on your face open for all
> Your friends [disciples] are the *awliyāʾ* of this time
> I am proud of you, O Shah of *awliyāʾ*, Mulla Shah!
>
> JAHANARA BEGUM[37]

The visual and literary representation of saints was also linked to an esoteric religious concept: visualization of the spiritual guide during prescribed ritual practice.[38] Visualization has long served as a method of meditation in Sufi orders across the world. In addition to the daily repetition of litanies and certain names of God that are given to the new initiate when entering a Sufi order, the novice is also taught how to visualize the image of the guide in the mind. This technique is called *taṣavvur-i shaikh* and its ultimate aim is self-annihilation in the spiritual substance of the master. Saiyid Athar Abbas

37 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 94.

38 Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive survey of one such instance from Mughal India.

Rizvi explains that "generally dervishes meditated on some particular verse of the Qur'an, and at the same time an image of the *pir* (guide) was recalled to mind."[39] In a fourteenth-century collection of the spiritual utterances of Nasir al-Din Mahmud Chiragh-i Dehlavi, the revered poet and saint recalls his shaikh, Nizam al-Din Awliya of the Chishti order, saying that "*zikr* (remembrance of God) should be continually recited at the same time as a recollection in the heart of the presence of one's guide."[40] This practice of recalling the presence of the spiritual master while in meditation is common to the two most influential Sufi orders of India, the Qadiriya and the Chishtiyya. According to Rizvi, "the preliminary requirement for the *zikr* of a Chishti disciple was to imagine that his Shaikh was personally present before him, directing his contemplation. The practice amounted to a belief that the Shaikh's spirit was divine both in its emanation and power."[41] Another medieval-period Chishti account confirming the practice of visualizing the presence of the guide describes how one of Nizam al-Din Awliya's representatives asked him, "should contemplation of God's essence be in tandem with contemplation of the Prophet and one's guide or separate?" Nizam al-Din answered, "both are permissible. If one contemplates all the presences together, then keep God in front, the Prophet on His right and the guide on His left."[42]

In most hagiographical and philosophical Sufi literature that refers to the act of viewing the saint, the focus is on the face, which is equated with God's light (*nūr*). In the important biography of Indo-Muslim saints, *Mir'āt ul-asrār*, the author ʿAbd al-Rahman Chishti records an anecdote about the influential fifteenth-century saint from Uttar Pradesh, Shah Madar, who famously emanated so much divine majesty that he kept his face hidden behind a veil. On one occasion a Sufi, Shah Husain bin Mu'iz, was granted permission to view his face. As soon as Shah Madar lifted his veil, Husain prostrated himself before the great saint and exclaimed spontaneously: "Who says that Truth does not have a portrait? / I behold, right now, the very being of the image-maker."[43]

The notion that a saint's face is a manifestation of God's splendor is a widely accepted phenomenon in Muslim culture. Moreover, the paradox of a mortal form manifesting the absolute has been part of the Muslim imagination throughout its history. Abu Hurayra, one of the main transmitters of Prophetic utterances, proclaimed: "I have memorized two kinds of teachings from God's

39 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, 102.

40 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, 181.

41 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, 218.

42 Dehlavi, *Akhbār al-Akhyār*, 218.

43 London, British Library (hereafter BL), MS Or. 216, ʿAbd al-Rahman Chishti, *Mir'āt ul-asrār*, f. 500a.

Apostle. I have transmitted one of them to you, but if I transmitted the second, my throat would be cut."[44] It is this second group of utterances that the Sufis claim were transmitted to them by word of mouth, from master to disciple. These esoteric teachings, known as *shaṭḥiyāt*, contain *koan*-like paradoxical statements meant to assist the spiritual traveler in overcoming the limitations of mind and logic.[45] Such sayings initiated a tradition of seemingly subversive, ecstatic utterances, the most well-known and contentious of them being the statement of the eleventh-century Sufi Mansur al-Hallaj: "I am the Truth!" *Shaṭḥiyāt* were frequently, though not always, associated with the *bī shar'* group often linked to the Malamati and Qalandari Sufi orders. The twelfth-century Persian mystic Ruzbihan Baqli was the first to compile them in a volume.[46]

Following this literary convention Dara Shikoh, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, also compiled a collection of *shaṭḥiyāt* in his *Ḥasanāt ul-ʿārifīn*. The book begins with paradoxical Quranic sayings, many of which, though clearly not considered to be *shaṭḥiyāt*, are favorites among Sufis. Also included are sayings of contemporary Indian sages recorded by the prince himself. Like all compilations of mystical sayings and *taẕkirāt* his volume begins with prayers and blessings on the Prophet, with hadith and Quranic verses woven into its very fabric. These verses perform a dual function: first and foremost, they consecrate the text with divine and Prophetic *barakah*; secondarily, they seal the arguments and opinions contained in the volume with Prophetic authority, thereby legitimizing the text. The main intention of the *Ḥasanāt* was to counter mounting accusations of unorthodoxy coming from the more exoteric quarters of Indo-Islamic religious scholarship.[47] These were the very accusations that allowed Dara's younger brother Aurangzeb to execute him on charges of heresy in 1659. However, *Ḥasanāt* also recapitulates conceptions of sanctity and devotion as they circulated in early modern Muslim South Asia.

Recent studies on Dara Shikoh's oeuvre have shown that the prince's spiritual perspective was in continuity with a certain convention of Indo-Islamic

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44 Muhammad ibn Ismaʿil Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 9 vols. (Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1994), 1: Section 3, hadith 121.

45 "In Islamic mysticism, a *shat'h* is an outrageous or paradoxical utterance intended to jolt the mind of the disciple and force him to awaken from the torpor of routine ritual observance to a higher state of spiritual awareness." Michael A. Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam and the Riddle of Bihzâd of Herât (1465–1535)* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), 16.

46 Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 85–96.

47 Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 2.

metaphysical writing, even as his outlook changed over time.[48] In the 1640s his primary focus was the Akbarian school of Sufi thought, as shown by his own devotional poetry and biographies of saints. In the 1650s, leading up to his death in 1659, he was increasingly attracted to Hindu mystical traditions, and his writings included translations of the Upanisads and commentaries on the Vedas. The *Ḥasanāt* bridges these two great interests. Beginning with classical Sufi utterances, the treatise goes on to include anecdotes from the lives of both Muslim and non-Muslim saints, including Kabir and La'l Das. Despite accusations of "heterodoxy," claims that were used as a political ruse for his execution, scholars have recently argued that Dara Shikoh was in fact not unique in his belief in the unity of religions. "Dara Shukoh's arguments about Hindu-Muslim resonances were not entirely unprecedented or novel in the Indian context. Very similar arguments had already been made by other scholars including Saiyid ʿAbdul Quddus Gangohi (d. 1537), Saiyid Muhammad Ghaus Gwaliori (d. 1563), and Mir ʿAbd al-Wahid Bilgrami (d. 1608)."[49] By including sayings from the Quran and utterances of the Prophet as well as notable companions and renowned saints, Dara Shikoh follows the longstanding convention of couching his beliefs in Islamic orthopraxy. Even when his interests became increasingly wide-ranging, his writings continued to be part of a continuum rather than an isolated aberration. One of the chief aims of the *Ḥasanāt*—to show that God's reality is present in realized saints—conforms to the norms of Islamic orthopraxy.

Using the already mentioned idea of Prophetic light, Dara Shikoh's accounts are replete with notions of God's immanence in creation, and since the best of creation is *al-insān al-kāmil*, or the perfected human being, the light is reflected most directly in him or her. Owing to this, there are numerous justifications for the act of viewing a saint. The concept of the Prophetic light animating all of existence comes across through the words of an Egyptian Qalandari saint named Suleyman Misri (Fig. 14), whom Dara Shikoh met in Lahore in 1653:

> he said that one of the exegetists wrote in a treatise that the Light of Muhammad (*Nūr-i muḥammadī*)—on him be prayers and peace—was placed in a candelabra. All those who viewed his head became kings; those who saw Muhammad's eyes became mystics; those who looked

48 Munis D. Faruqui, "Dara Shukoh, Vedanta, and Imperial Succession in Mughal India," in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 30–64, and Supriya Gandhi, "Mughal Self-Fashioning, Indic Self-Realization: Dārā Shikoh and Persian Textual Cultures in Early Modern South Asia" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2011).

49 Faruqui, "Dara Shukoh," 40.

FIGURE 14
An Egyptian Qalandar (an African lyre player), ca. 1640–60, Deccan. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper (recto). 18.7 × 12.4 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, gift in honor of Madeline Neves Clapp; gift of Mrs. Henry White Cannon by exchange; bequest of Louise T. Cooper; Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund; from the Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection (2013.289)
CREATIVE COMMONS PUBLIC DOMAIN, CCO 1.0 UNIVERSAL (CCO 1.0)

> at his chest became the group of holy-lovers; those who witnessed his mouth became scholars; and those who lay their eyes on his lower body became Christians, Jews and infidels.[50]

In a similar vein, Mulla Shah praises the Prophet in this poem:

> Within the Hidden Treasure, Truth was veiled
> For the Love of Muhammad it became manifest
> If Ahmad had not been,
> The Light of the One would not have manifested
> Until there was One, all was One
> The eye of [the letter] *mīm* caused this abundance [of existence]
> He who gains a single *naẓar* (sight) from Ahmad,
> On his head glows the sun of Mercy[51]

50 Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 77–78.
51 BL, MS Or. 3203, Mirza Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥwāl-i shāhī*, f. 4a.

Ahmad is another name of the Prophet of Islam. Mulla Shah is here referring to the oft-quoted hadith attributed to the Prophet in which he said, "I am Ahmad without the letter Mīm." If the letter "m" is taken out of "Ahmad" it becomes "Ahad," which is one of names of God meaning "The One." The "Hidden Treasure" alludes to an utterance in which God is said to have spoken on the tongue of the Prophet, that "I was a Hidden Treasure, and loved to be known, so I created the world, so that I may be known."[52]

In the section on Sufism in the *Dabistān-i maẕāhib*, the anonymous seventeenth-century author summarizes the aforementioned concept of divinity embodied in the human being by quoting established, traditional Sufi voices.[53] The author, who personally knew Jahanara Begum, Mulla Shah, and their Sufi circle, explains how Sufis understood a popular saying attributed to the Prophet, that God created man in His own image: "The Sufis say that in the command [of God], 'God created Adam in His own image,' the association is that the sovereignty of [God's] act [passes down] to us [humans], and it is also linked with [the fact that] the face [of Adam] is the mirror of [God's] Essence."[54] He follows this with a lengthy exposition on the ontological hierarchy of creation using principles outlined by Ibn al-ʿArabi, Ruzbihan Baqli, and other Sufis. Briefly put, his treatise echoes the same Islamic metaphysical sentiment of seventeenth-century Hindustan that produced the writings of Dara Shikoh. This principle of seeing God everywhere, namely, the immanence of God in His creation, is one of the foundations of Dara Shikoh's *Ḥasanāt*.

Ḥasanāt begins with the Quranic, "He is the First and the Last, the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden."[55] It is immediately followed by, "Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God." Dara Shikoh takes it to mean that, "wherever you look, it is My [God's] face. Which means that your [the saint's] face is My face."[56] This is a direct reference to the well-known Prophetic hadith that is found in both Shi'ite and Sunni sources which states that "looking at the face of ʿAli is worship."[57] Many traditional exegetes link this utterance

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52 For a detailed discussion of Muslim ontology and the concept of divine immanence, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*. For an exquisite example of the concept of divinity witnessing its own beauty in Islamic painting, see f. 23 of the sixteenth-century Ottoman illustration to a collection of mystical poems titled *Rawzat-ul ʿUshshaq*, in the Harvard University Art Museums (1985.216.3).

53 Kaykhusraw Isfandyar, Muhsin Fani, and Rahim Rizazadah-'i Malik, *Dabistān-i mazāhib* (Tehran: Kitbkhanah-'i Tahuri, 1983).

54 Isfandyar, Fani, and Malik, *Dabistān-i mazāhib*, 346.

55 Quran 57:3.

56 Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 4.

57 Al-Hakim al-Nisaburi, *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā'l-ṣaḥīḥayn* (Beirut, 2002), 938, no. 4736. A slightly different version of this is one of the sayings of the Prophet transmitted on the authority

with Quran 5:55, which says, "Your guardian-friend (*valī*) can be only God; and His messenger and those who have faith, who establish worship and pay the poor due, and bow down (in prayer)." God not only calls Himself by the word *valī*, but also includes the Prophet and the faithful (*mu'minūn*), hence the title *awliyā'*, which is the plural of *valī*, for Muslim saints. According to this verse, the exemplars among the faithful are those who give while bowed down during ritual prayer. This is seen as a Quranic allusion to ʿAli, who once gave his ring while bowed in prayer when a beggar came petitioning for alms in the mosque. Following this Quranic allusion as well as many other utterances, Sufis have traditionally seen ʿAli as the essence of sainthood, a direct link between the spiritual traveler and the Prophet of Islam, and, consequently, to direct identity with God. In Islamic metaphysics, all the great Sufi brotherhoods trace themselves through an unbroken chain of masters, back to the Prophet's son-in-law ʿAli. Every saint, or *valī*, owing to their self-effacement and extinction in God, shares this function awarded to the prince of saints: namely, becoming a locus for the manifestation of God.

An influential *taẕkira* written in the reign of Jahangir by the Chishti Sufi Allah Diya, titled *Siyr al-aqṭāb*, mentions another key saying attributed to the Prophet regarding ʿAli: "Whoever wishes to see the knowledge of Adam, the purity of Joseph, the excellence of Moses, and the majesty of Muhammad, may look upon ʿAli ibn Abu Talib."[58] Sayings such as this provide evidence that the conceptual premises for viewing the face of a "God-Man" originated within Islamic tradition, rather than being merely a syncretistic borrowing from other systems of belief. Representations of ʿAli in Hindustani painting, such as his portrait from the opening of the Tipu Sultan album, find a parallel devotional expression in the form of *qawwālī* singing. One of the most enduring *qawwālīs*, popularized by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, is titled "Ali *maulā*." Its Urdu and Persian verses prize out the layered meanings and allusions embedded in the Prophetic utterance regarding the face of ʿAli.[59]

While discussing the Sufic sources for the idea of God's presence residing in the face of a human being, William Chittick quotes a hadith that, although disputed, was used by Ibn al-ʿArabi. The saying expands the scope of divine manifestation beyond the locus of saints to include other Perso-Arabic conceptions

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of Abu Bakr: "Gazing upon the face of ʿAlī is an act of worship (*al-naẓar ilā wajḥi ʿAlī ʿibāda*)," in Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Ta'rīkh al-khulafā'*, trans. H.S. Jarrett, *History of the Caliphs* (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1970), 97.

58 BL, MS Or. 214, Allah Diya Chishti, *Siyr al-aqṭāb* (1612), f. 5–6.

59 Medhi Ali, "Ali Mola Ali COMPLETE 30 MINT) ORIGINAL Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan YouTube flv," YouTube video, 31:31, June 23, 2013, accessed January 13, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okMLhj4b_Vg&t=723s.

of beauty. It provides a possible metaphysical context for the convention of representing beardless youths in Persian and Hindustani painting: "I saw my Lord in the form of a beardless youth, wearing a cloak of gold, upon his head a crown of gold, and upon his feet sandals of gold."[60]

Dara Shikoh's *Ḥasanāt* is part of a long tradition of South Asian Sufi literature that highlights the transformative power of viewing a saint through *darśan* or *naẓar*. One *naẓar* can send the disciple into ecstatic rapture. An early Indo-Muslim example comes from a hagiographical account of the beloved South Asian saint, Nizam al-Din Awliya' of Delhi, purportedly written by his Hindu disciple Rajkumar Hardev in the fourteenth century.[61] Although of doubted authenticity, the popularity of its Urdu translation in the twentieth century speaks of its importance for Chishti Sufis in South Asia to this day. In the account, Rajkumar Hardev explains:

> *Ḥażrat* [Nizam al-Din] lifted his gaze toward me. His eyes were wet with tears, and in those tears, it seemed as if I could see the entire cosmos swaying to and fro. *Ḥażrat* only looked at me, he didn't utter a word, and I started trembling. Within his tears I saw everything and in a state of selflessness I got up to kiss his feet. But as soon as I got up, something within me started to whirl. Instead of going to place my head at *Ḥażrat's* feet I started dancing in the center of the gathering. Every moment I wanted to restrain myself and abstain from this rudeness and insolence, but I no longer had any power or control over myself. I could see the sky and earth dancing and whirling before me. I was not unconscious, I could understand and see everything, but I could not explain what was happening within me and why I was dancing […] *Ḥażrat* was weeping profusely and my gaze was fixed on his face. In each tear there were such wondrous depths that I cannot express them in words. In his tears I could see my country, my parents, the statue of Krishna Ji playing the reed.[62]

60 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 396n3. See also Annemarie Schimmel, *As through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 67–68. In Chapter 4, I will discuss this conception of divinity and its relation to allegorical representations associated with Dara Shikoh's early patronage.

61 The only existing copy of the Persian original, titled *Chehel Roze*, is in the library of Bharatpur, Rajasthan. For an Urdu translation, see Rajkumar Hardev, *Niẓāmī Bansarī*, trans. Khwaja Hasan Nizami, ed. Mahmud ul-Rahman (Islamabad: Dost Publications, 2000).

62 Hardev, *Niẓāmī Bansarī*, 68–69.

The episode provides a revealing account of Hindu-Muslim spiritual symbiosis in the devotional expression of India. For Hardev, the concept of *darśan* unexpectedly becomes a spiritually rewarding experience given to him by "one of the most lovable and charismatic of Indian Sufi Shaykhs, perhaps the most historically influential of them all"[63] (Fig. 15).

Dehlavi mentions how another thirteenth-century Chishti saint from Delhi, Nur al-Din Ghaznavi, "gained the entire *feż* [spiritual knowledge passed from master to disciple] from his shaikh as a newborn, from one *naẓar* of his guide."[64] In mentioning some miracles associated with Mulla Shah, Jahanara Begum in the *Ṣāḥibiyya* adds that "the simplest of *Ḥażrat*'s miracles is that whatever lies in the conscience of a seeker he reveals it with one *naẓar*."[65] She ends her treatise with ten disconnected couplets composed in praise of her guide. In the seventh couplet she says: "O Shah! With one *naẓar* you have completed my work / Bravo! With good focus you turned me into your beloved."[66]

FIGURE 15
Nizam al-Din Awliya', ca. 1780–1800. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. 7.9 × 6.8 cm. Lahore Museum, Lahore (f-11)
PHOTO CREDIT: MURAD KHAN MUMTAZ

63 Simon Digby, "Preface," in Nizamuddin Auliya and Hasan Dihlavi, *Morals for the Heart: Conversations of Shaykh Nizam Ad-Din Awliya Recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi*, trans. Bruce B. Lawrence (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 1.

64 Dehlavi, *Akhbār al-akhyār*, 70.

65 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 92.

66 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 109.

In order to fully comprehend the multivalent function of Muslim devotional images in early modern South Asia, one must delve deeply into the religious mindset that informs the various literary sources discussed in this chapter. An important branch of this literary output consists of writings associated with many of the saints depicted in Indo-Muslim paintings. When one looks into the sayings of the saints, the deep significance of the notion of sacred viewing becomes much clearer. A key goal in Sufism is the previously discussed station known as *fanā*, which is understood as the extinction of the ego-self. Having achieved *fanā*, the saint becomes an empty vessel attracting divine grace and presence. It is only after reaching this station, in which the ego is broken, that the outward *naẓar* of the saint becomes a portal that links God with the seeker. Through this threshold of reciprocal viewing God acts via the vehicle of the saint, removing veils of ignorance from the hearts of seekers. A couplet written in gold atop a late seventeenth-century Mughal painting of the Shah Jahan-era saint from Gujarat, Shah Daula (Fig. 16), explains the paradox of a mortal human embodying divinity in these words: "The state of the dervish should always be in affliction / Just as a house that is a broken ruin is filled with sunlight."

It is in this context that heretical-sounding utterances of Sufis appear to make claims to self-divinization. For example, Dara Shikoh quotes the fifteenth-century Naqshbandi saint from Central Asia, Khwaja ʿAbd Allah Ahrar (1404–90): "And Khwaja Ahrar also said to his own people, 'now while I am living, if you don't see God then when will you see Him?' This means that anyone who looks at me with sincere devotion verily sees God."[67] The Naqshbandi saint, who has been represented in an early seventeenth-century Deccani painting (Fig. 17), came to India with the Mughals and popularized his branch of Sufism in North India.

In the *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya*, Jahanara Begum provides a selection of quatrains from Mulla Shah's divan that specifically highlights this paradox. In the verse below, Mulla Shah describes himself as a "devoted friend" while also appearing to make a claim for Godhood:

> For twenty years we searched [for God]
> So we could outwardly acquire His perfume,
> We realized that the inquiry was a pursuit for oneself
> [and in that process] we found this secret: that we ourselves are He.[68]

67 Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 48–49.
68 Jahānārā Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 86.

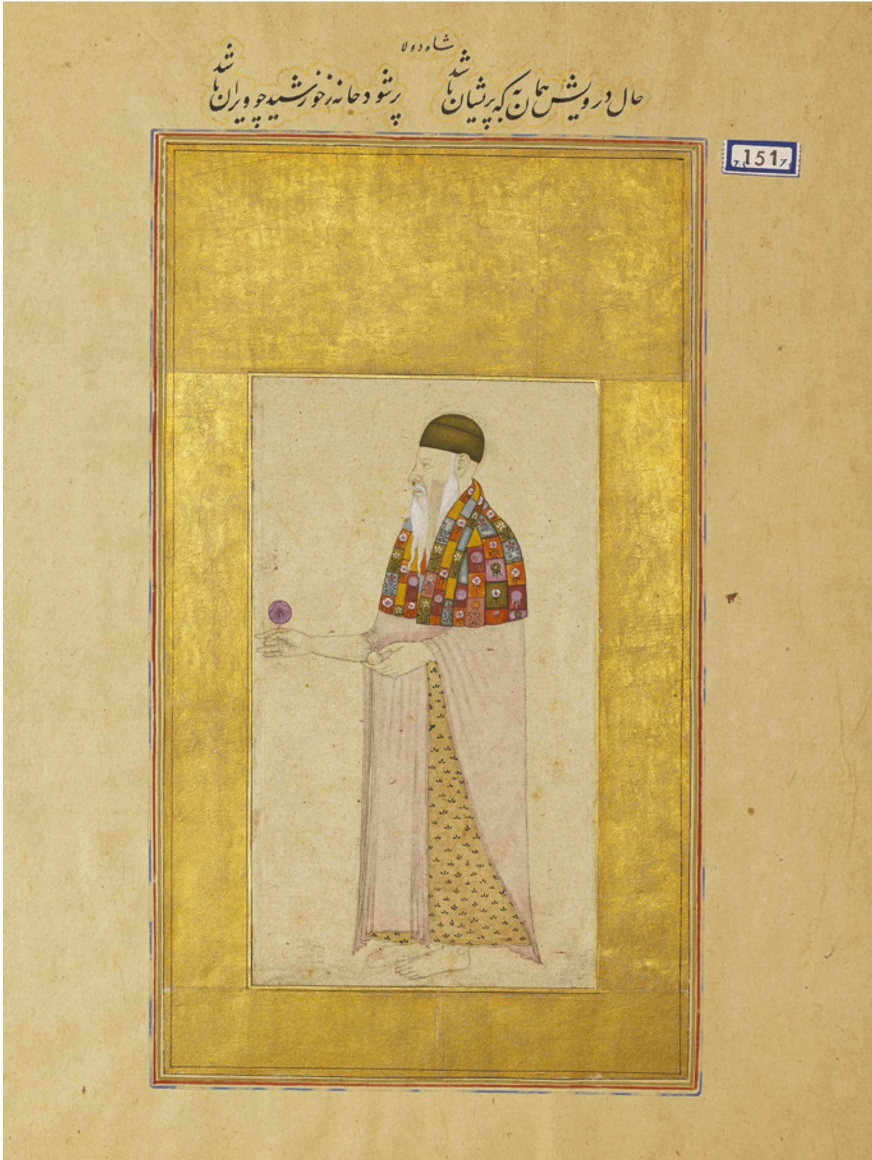

FIGURE 16 Portrait of the Sufi mystic Shah Daula, Mughal, late 17th century. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 43 × 30.3 cm
IMAGE COURTESY OF FRANCESCA GALLOWAY, LONDON

FIGURE 17
Khwaja ʿAbd Allah Ahrar, ca. 1620. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 22 × 16.7 cm. British Museum, London (1974.617.10, f. 2) © THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

In a *ghazal* from his collected *Muṣannifāt*, the Mulla deals with this paradox in an even more subtle, ambiguous way, wrestling with this contradiction by stretching the very bounds of language:

> If you are a *faqīr*, then one's speech becomes entirely God, Mustafa
> If you kill that *faqīr* then you kill God
> O Shah! If you say "I am the Truth," then the Truth is his condition/state
> We do not die even if you kill us a hundred times.[69]

As mentioned earlier, "I am the Truth" (*an al-ḥaq*) is the ecstatic utterance famously made by the Sufi Al-Hallaj, thereby disclosing the great, paradoxical reality of the servant's union with God.

For spiritual travelers, the quest for viewing a guide who was regarded as embodying divinity gained the utmost importance. At times, in the case of figures like Shah Madar, the *naẓar* of a living sage would be so sought after

69 BL, MS Delhi Collection 1420, Mulla Shah, *Muṣannifāt-i mullā shāh*, f. 65b.

by disciples that the saint would intentionally hide his countenance behind a veil, magnifying the aura of mystery and grandeur. Dara Shikoh explains that "Shah Madar at the end of his life, became veiled, and wouldn't show his face to anyone."[70] Another Friend of God, Shah Muhammad Dilruba, also went into seclusion. A member of the close circle of Mulla Shah's shaikh, Miyan Mir, Shah Dilruba appears to have been a major influence on Dara Shikoh, who considered him to be one of his guides:[71]

> He is among my teachers, and in this age he is unique in spiritual poverty, *malāmat*, ascetic practices, abstention, and seclusion.[72] Currently he is in seclusion, and shows his face to no one. Anyone who goes to him, he speaks to him through a screen. A few years ago he said to me that, "I don't want to show my face to anyone." I replied, "Looking at your face is a mercy for all creation." He retorted, "I only want to show my countenance to someone who is a perfected gnostic, the world (which is lacking of such gnostics) doesn't come to me for this reason. What do they wish to gain from looking at me?"
>
> […]
>
> There is a secret within this hidden servant [of God],
> and if it were to be unveiled,
> Without doubt, the very face of the Lord would be revealed.[73]

Perhaps the fact that he went into seclusion explains the importance of his portrait included in the late Shah Jahan album (Fig. 18). In the passage above, Dilruba suggests that the secret of his face hidden behind the mysteries of the veil is not for everyone to understand. Laymen with misguided devotional enthusiasm could easily confuse outward form for inner reality, resulting in idolatry. In the examples of Shah Madar and Shah Dilruba, the concept of veiling or obscuring viewing of the saint heightens the importance of the saint's image. This act of veiling also gives precedence to the inner/spiritual reality (*maʿnī*) over outer form (*ṣūrat*). The outer form is seen as a support that leads toward the inward, underlying meaning.

For a majority of Sufi practitioners, the beatific outward forms of saints serve as portals that lead to the inner reality of God, the *ḥaqīqa*, and their

70 Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 73.

71 From six letters written by Dara Shikoh to Shah Dilruba. BL, MS Or. 9617, *Fayyāż al-qawānīn*.

72 The *malāmatīs* take their name from the Arabic word *malāmah*, which means to attract blame upon oneself.

73 Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 72–74.

FIGURE 18 Shah Dilruba, ca. 1645, *Late Shah Jahan Album*. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 16.5 × 10.4 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 07B.23r)
© THE TRUSTEES OF THE CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY, DUBLIN

ontological relation is often described as that of color and colorlessness. Both color and colorlessness are two attributes of the same Beloved, two faces at once manifest and hidden. The aim of all *taṣavvuf*, then, is to journey from the colored-ness of outer form to the colorlessness of God's inner meaning. In the words of Rumi, "a blue glass shows the sun as blue, a red glass as red, when the glass escapes from color, it becomes white, it is more truthful than all other glasses and is the Imam."[74]

While many of the passages quoted in this chapter appear to challenge notions of religious "orthodoxy," I have attempted to explain them in light of precedents found within Islamic tradition. With the exception of a small minority associated with antinomian paths, followers of Sufism considered themselves to be participants in mainstream Islam. Dilruba's contemporaries would have easily understood his poetic utterance quoted above as a typically Muslim spiritual expression. Seen from this perspective, the genre of Sufi portraiture emerges as a medium intertwined with the preexisting *taẕkira* literature utilized for expressions of devotion to the saints. While the history of the *taẕkira* can be traced back to the formative period of Islam, the visualization of saints through painting required the suitable devotional climate of early modern India in order to flower. This ambiance supported a developed artistic culture steeped in the concepts of *darśan* and *naẓar*, as well as an enthusiastic network of patronage. As will become clear from the following chapters, under the influence of Sufism as well as other aspects of Indic spirituality, patronage patterns established during the late-Sultanate period grew, taking on new meanings under Mughal royalty. Moreover, the very saints who were the subjects of many of the portraits, and who were in open dialogue with Muslim nobility, were steeped in the school of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, a metaphysical perspective that further contextualized the increasingly devotional function of saints' images.

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74 Rumi, *Mathnawí*, 1:152.

CHAPTER 2

Sufi in the Garb of a Yogi: Visual and Literary Articulations of Sanctity

O, I want to go with the *jōgī*
With earrings in my ears

I want to go with the *jōgī*
This *jōgī* entered my heart
Truth be told, I swear by the Quran

O, I want to go with the *jōgī*
And the bridal mark on my forehead
I want to go with the *jōgī*
This *jōgī* braided my hair
This *jōgī* is my religion and my faith

BULLEH SHAH[1]

In one of the most popular Pakistani music programs in recent television history—Coke Studio—Punjabi pop singer Fariha Pervez sings these lines from a song titled "Jōgī."[2] Arranged with a jazz and orchestra ensemble from Serbia, the song is a pop-fusion rendition of a much-loved eighteenth-century Punjabi mystical poem, traditionally sung as a *qawwālī*, a form of devotional music unique to Muslim South Asia. In one *qawwālī* version, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan includes the verse, "O this is no *jōgī* but an aspect of God, the guise of the *jōgī* suits Him well."[3]

Qawwālīs are typically sung in Sufi gatherings and their main theme is passionate love (*ʿishq*) for God, the Prophet Muhammad, and the saints of Islam. Since at least the fourteenth century, *qawwālī* has been used as an aid in inducing mystical states within seekers and to open pathways toward union with God. Only more recently, in the twentieth century, has the genre become

1 Rohail Hyatt, "Jogi | Fariha Pervez & Muazzam Ali Khan | Season 6 | Coke Studio Pakistan," YouTube video, 7:03, October 20, 2013, accessed January 13, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6StD5G12vjM.

2 Hyatt, "Jogi."

3 EMI Pakistan, "Ni Main Jana Jogi De Naal | Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan | Showcase South Asia—Vol.16," YouTube video, 29:01, February 8, 2016, accessed January 13, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G92_K5xdGk, starting at 6:44.

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part of popular music. An audience steeped in local folklore and expressions of devotional piety would immediately understand the context and literary background of the verses discussed above. The audience would know that the eighteenth-century poem is referring to the Punjabi folk romance of the lovers Hir and Ranjha, in which Ranjha becomes a Nath yogi, follower of the Hindu god Shiva. In the romance, Ranjha represents God or an aspect of God. Hir is the seeking soul yearning for union with the beloved. In the verses sung by Fariha Pervez and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, it is Hir's voice that longs to go with the beloved who has become a *jōgī*. For the informed audience, all of humanity is contained in that one, seeking soul. This particular Punjabi poem, while reminding the listener of a popular tragic romance, triggers a deeper collective memory in which the figure of the yogi performs a central role, one expressed through literature, painting, and devotional practice alike.

By the eighteenth century, the yogi was a recurring figure in the Indo-Muslim cultural imagination. The story of Hir-Ranjha, composed as a Sufi romance in 1766 by Waris Shah, is one relatively late example of a work of Muslim devotional literature incorporating Indic tropes, in a history that stretches back centuries. How did it come to be that Muslims in India saw the image of the yogi as an emblem of the divine beloved: a motif so deeply imbedded in their imagination that even in the contemporary context, it continues to reverberate with otherworldly longing in the form of song, poetry, and romance?

Jōgī is the Persian way of saying yogi. A yogi or yogini is someone who practices yoga and is historically associated with Hindu paths of renunciation. In Carl Ernst's words, the idea of the yogi "is perhaps the most successful Indian export in the global marketplace of spirituality."[4] Throughout history there have been instances of different cultural, racial, or religious denominations taking on the garb, or another aspect, of the Hindu yogi. Today we see more self-identified "yogis" in the West than perhaps in South Asia itself. In this chapter, I will discuss one of the earliest visual articulations of this adoption, examining how court artists between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries employed the image of the yogi as a symbol for a uniquely Islamic mystical ideal. In other words, this chapter inquires into how the devotional figure of the yogi, taken from outside the pale of Islam proper, enabled Muslims to engage with their own ontologies. Since illustrated Sufi romances in which yogis played key roles were the first platforms for the visual articulation of Muslim devotional expression in South Asian painting, it is befitting to begin

4 Carl Ernst, "Muslim Interpreters of Yoga," in Diamon and Aitken, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, 59.

this chapter with a discussion of the meaning of the yogi for an early modern Muslim audience as found in these romances.

The presence of yogis and yoginis in paintings made for Muslim patrons with a specifically Islamic objective is a ubiquitous theme that has received very little attention in the context of art historical scholarship. The premise of incorporating images of Hindu ascetics into the iconography of Muslim devotion provides a unique window into larger networks of Hindu-Muslim interaction: phenomena that persisted and developed over time.

Focusing on depictions of yogis in paintings made between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, the present chapter discusses two streams of representation that show the persistence of an important subject across eras. The first section of the chapter focuses on the presence of the yogi in romance literature written in local Hindustani languages by Sufi authors between the fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Two illustrated Sufi romances that are key for understanding thematic continuities and coalescences are *Chandāyan* and *Mṛigāvatī*. The second section highlights examples from some early Mughal-period albums, particularly paintings made or assembled in the early seventeenth century for Prince Salim, the future emperor Jahangir (1569–1627). Analyzing artwork from this period of transition helps us map the growth of devotional themes and their accompanying iconography from the sixteenth into the seventeenth century. As I discussed in the Introduction, one of the aims of this book is to show how influences and sources from early Indo-Muslim painting helped develop a new subgenre of Hindustani painting under the patronage of Jahangir's two grandchildren, Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum, in the mid-seventeenth century. Pictorial conventions that were used to illustrate yogis in early Sufi romances and during the time of Emperor Akbar and Prince Salim were later adapted for the representation of known Sufi saints.

Instances of interaction between Muslim and Hindu spiritualities have a thousand-year-old history that traverses social hierarchies. This interaction is most frequently expressed through literature, and after the fifteenth century, in paintings. There are numerous seventeenth and eighteenth-century paintings showing Sufis and yogis congregating together, either around shrines or in the countryside, often listening to devotional musical gatherings or silently meditating (Fig. 19). Beginning around the late eleventh century, when Muslim rule began to stamp its political authority on the subcontinent, many philosophers, theologians, and Sufis became enamored with yogic teachings and found various practical uses for them. Although this chapter primarily addresses the importance of yogis for Islamic spirituality and its subsequent artistic expression, it must be clarified that this particular aspect of yogis was not the only mode of reception for a Muslim audience. In many fantasy tales such as the *Hamzanāma* [*The Story of Hamza*] and the *Kathasaritsāgara* [*Ocean*

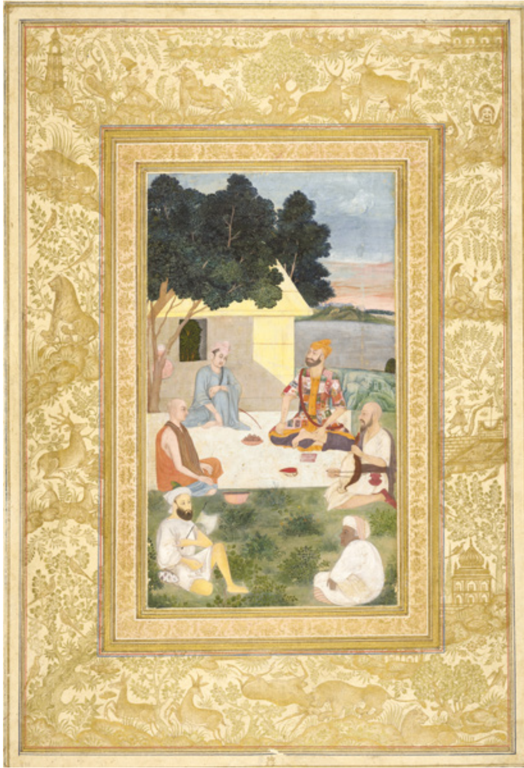

FIGURE 19
A congregation of Indian ascetics, ca. 1700. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 44.8 × 31.4 cm. British Museum, London (1920,0917,0.30)
© THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

of Rivers of Stories]—both illustrated for Akbar—tantric yogis are identified as wizards accruing boundless power. They are seen as exotic, fear-inducing sorcerers with access to formidable magic.[5] Additionally, rulers used the art of yogic magic to summon powerful yoginis during warfare.[6] Nobility also frequently visited yogis and yoginis for guidance and for their blessings. Early Sufis entering India were so impressed by yogic spiritual practices that they appropriated many breathing techniques and meditation postures that are used to this day.[7] It is also possible that in order to assert their own authority in a largely Hindu population, Sufi masters began using a yogic vocabulary, couching their teachings in a language familiar to the vast majority. In short,

5 For a detailed discussion on yogis in the Indian literary imagination, see Diamond and Aitken, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, 202–09.

6 Carl Ernst, “Being Careful with the Goddess: Yoginis in Persian and Arabic Texts,” in *Performing Ecstasy: The Poetics and Politics of Religion in India*, ed. Pallabi Chakrovorty and Scott Kugle (Delhi: Manohar, 2009), 199.

7 Carl Ernst, “Two Versions of a Persian Text on Yoga and Cosmology, Attributed to Shaikh Muʿīn al-Dīn Chishtī,” *Elixir* 2 (2006): 69–76.

for Muslim settlers entering South Asia in the medieval period, the yogi had a multilayered significance.

1 The Yogi in Medieval Sufi Romances

Since the medieval period, Sufis have freely traversed diverse social strata and inhabited multifaceted communal roles. Composers of romances such as Amir Khusro (d. 1325), Mulla Da'ud (active during the fourteenth century) and Qutban (active during the early sixteenth century) were representatives of imperial courts as well as Sufi orders. Aditya Behl has shown in his work on *Madhumālatī* and *Mṛigāvatī* how Sultanate-period epic romances written in local *Hindavi* languages simultaneously functioned as morality tales, performances for court and public entertainment, and, perhaps most intriguingly, as provocative yet deeply allegorical instructional manuals written by Sufi guides for their acolytes.[8] All of the major epics, beginning with the Chishti Sufi Mulla Da'ud's *Chandāyan* (completed in 1379), are located in a mythic India where Hindu rajas hold sway and yogis, necromancers, fairies, and demons roam the land. It is against this backdrop that the protagonist, often portrayed as a prince, falls in love with a beautiful princess. In these "hero's quest" stories, the lovers are parted after a brief and unfulfilled initial union, leaving the hero distraught and in desperate search of his lost beloved. No one seems to know the way to the princess's city—except for the *jōgī*.

1.1 *Chandāyan*

Medieval Sufi romances, known locally as *prema-kahānīs*, or love stories, often derived from indigenous folk tales. The *Chandāyan*, for instance, was a popular folk story and part of the oral tradition of the Ahir community, a Hindu caste of cow-herders from north and central India.[9] Sultanate-period Sufi authors who wrote first and foremost for a Muslim audience reworked and modified

8 Aditya Behl, Simon Weightman, and Manjhana, *Madhumālatī: An Indian Sufi Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Aditya Behl, Wendy Doniger, and Suhravardi, *The Magic Doe, Qutbban Suhravardī's Mirigāvatī: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a detailed study on the *Chandāyana*, see Qamar Adamjee, "Strategies for Visual Narration in the Illustrated *Chandayan* Manuscript" (PhD diss., New York University, 2011).

9 For a brief historical background of the *Chandāyan*, see Sonya Rhie Mace, "The Chandayana and Early Mughal Painting," in *Themes, Histories, Interpretations: Essays in Honour of B.N. Goswamy*, ed. Padma Kaimal (Ahmedabad: Published by Mapin Publishers in association with Osianama.com, 2013), 105–24.

local narratives by charging them with Islamic symbolism. In the *Chandāyan*, the figure of the beautiful princess Chanda signifies the divine beloved. The narrative opens with a long ode to the city of Govar, where she was born.[10] Govar is an Edenic paradise. The fruits and gardens of the city remind us of the Quranic fruits of paradise as reflected in the bounty of South Asia. Similarly, the Quranic vision of paradise populated with the *muqarrabūn* (those people whom God brings near to Himself, often understood within Sufi thought as the saints) is reimagined as the *but khāna*, or temple complex. The section of the narrative titled "The Description of the Temple Complex Next to the Tank, and the Resident Men and Women *Jōgīs*" is simultaneously a symbolic representation of the perfect Sufi lodge (*khānqāh*) as well as the ideal Edenic human condition. The *jōgī* and his *āshram*—replete with a central pool, singing birds, and fruits from all seasons—at once signify the ideal community, the archetypal human being, and the paradisiacal inner state.

Textual analysis shows how these Sufi authors writing for a Muslim audience adopted Indic motifs and endowed them with Sufi symbolism. The process of negotiation between Indic and Persianate patterns of thought, which were used for the localization of Islamic religious expression, is apparent not only in the language and literary structure of romances like the *Chandāyan*, but also in the visual format of their accompanying illustrations. Starting around the tenth century, before the introduction of paper, the earliest surviving examples of Indian illustrations were made on unbound, horizontal strips of palm-leaf. Even after the Muslims introduced paper around the twelfth century, this convention continued, as seen in illustrations of Jain and Buddhist sacred literature (Fig. 20). The format remained horizontal. With the introduction of the Islamic codex, which is the bound, vertical manuscript, local artists modified their compositions to fit into the newly emerging format. They stacked horizontal registers on top of each other to fit into the vertical design of the page. Composing an image through horizontal registers is a key Indic visual element that persisted throughout the development of Hindustani painting, even after the introduction of Persianate and European pictorial conventions.[11] Early Hindustani painting was also characterized by the distinctive Indic palette

10 The dispersed texts and fragments of the *Chandāyan* were collated and translated into Urdu by Muhammad Ansarullah. For the description of the city of Govar, see Muhammad Ansarullah, *Chandayan* (Patna: Idārā-i Taḥqīqāt-i Urdu, 1996), 52–62.

11 For a detailed art historical analysis on different South Asian page formats, see Daniel J. Ehnbom, "Ways of Seeing in Indian Painting: The Importance of Format," in *2006 Annual Arts Journal* (New Delhi: Visual Arts Gallery, Habitat Centre, 2006), 6–13.

FIGURE 20 The interpretation of dreams, ca. 1480, from a *Kalpasutra* manuscript. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 11.7 × 29.5 cm. Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA: bequest of Mrs. Horace W. Frost (91.15.12)

and graphic sensibility: highly saturated pigments were applied in flat, broad washes contained within a wiry, black outline.[12]

Figure 21, an illustration from a *Chandāyan* manuscript divided between the collections of the Lahore Museum and the Government Museum, Chandigarh (therefore known as the Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan*), is an excellent early example of the use of stacked registers and bright, flat colors. Moreover, it depicts the very chapter discussed above, describing the temple complex. In the folio, done in one of the characteristic styles of Hindustani painting from the first half of the sixteenth century, the figure of the poet-saint Mulla Da'ud is shown narrating his own tale to a disciple or courtier in a chamber with a red background, with black prayer beads hanging from his right arm. The jutting trefoil-arched building, in which the two figures sit around an open book, is inserted into the right corner of the bottom register and connects the two main sections of the page. The composition of the entire page is a balance between red and blue. In the center of the top register, we see a courtyard with a temple and tank. A double-storied monastery with meditation chambers surrounds the courtyard. On the second floor of the building, *jōginīs* chant mantras with prayer beads. The bottom register is a flat expanse of blue punctuated by three

12 There are several studies that discuss early styles of Hindustani painting in detail. Some important studies include Ziya' al-Din Nakshabi and Pramod Chandra, *Ṭūṭī-nāma = Tales of a Parrot: Complete Colour Facsimile Edition in Original Size of the Manuscript in Possession of the Cleveland Museum of Art / Das Papageienbuch: vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat der Handschrift aus dem Besitz des Cleveland Museum of Art* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1976), 31–48, 161–64; Jeremiah Losty, "Indian Painting from 1500–1575," in *Masters of Indian Painting*, ed. M.C. Beach, E. Fischer, and B.N. Goswamy (Zurich: Artibus Asiae, 2011), 67–76; and Mace, "The *Chandayana*."

FIGURE 21 The temple complex, ca. 1500–1550, Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan*. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper
COURTESY: GOVERNMENT MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, CHANDIGARH (K-7-30-H)

FIGURE 22 The temple complex (detail), ca. 1500–1550, Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan*. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper
COURTESY: GOVERNMENT MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, CHANDIGARH (K-7-30-H)

distinct types of *jōgīs*: lean, ash-smeared ascetics, those wearing the patched garb more commonly associated with wandering Sufis, and naked *jōgīs* with loincloths (Fig. 22). Without corresponding to them exactly, the *jōgīs* stand in for the three types mentioned in the text—the *khūna*, *tapassī*, and *bhagwant jōgīs*.[13] More importantly, the image provides a vignette into an early modern Saiva *āshram*. Thus, while performing a literal illustrative function, the folio also offers a relatable context for a contemporary sixteenth-century audience. The large earrings—which after the eighteenth century gave the Nath *jōgīs* the

13 Ansarullah, *Chandāyan*, 53. I have not been able to find any information on the *Khūna* yogis. The *tapassī* are those who perform acts of extreme asceticism and self-mortification. *Bhagwant* could refer to followers of a *saguṇa* god (personal deity), such as the majority of Vaiṣnava devotees of Rama and Krishna.

pejorative epithet *kānphaṭā*, or split-eared—and the small black deer horns on threads, known as *siṅgīs*, around the necks of all the holy men suggest that they are followers of Goraksa, or Gorakhnath, a figure shrouded in legend. He is believed to be an eleventh-century Saiva master yogi commonly regarded as the founder of the Nath yogis, an order well-known for its focus on the spiritual discipline of Hatha Yoga.[14]

Nath yogis were similar to several other communities of Indic mystics in that they believed in a formless, unconditioned (or in Sanskrit, *nirguṇa*) Godhead. Many Sufis entering the subcontinent from western Islamic lands saw this as synonymous with the Islamic conception of an absolute (or in Arabic, *muṭlaq*) God. For this reason, Sufis in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries readily mingled with *jōgīs*, sharing practices and ideas freely. As James Mallinson has explained, "This theological openness—which manifested in, among other things, a disdain for the purity laws adhered to by more orthodox Hindu ascetics—allowed them to mix freely with those such as the Muslim(s)."[15]

In the Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan* folio, the garb shared by both Sufis and *jōgīs* includes the patched cloak, the *muraqqaʿ* or *khirqa*. Additional items include the animal skin rug on which the naked figure on the top left of the lower register sits while blowing a long horn, as well as iron bangles and large earrings. Curiously, a companion dog is also present. In fact, but for his *siṅgī* necklace and topknot, the figure with the large white dog entering the page at the bottom of the lower register, followed by two younger *jōgīs*, could easily be mistaken for a dervish, with his long wispy beard, bangles, and bulky patched cloak. By the late-medieval period, yogic and Sufi expressions of asceticism had grown so enmeshed that it became increasingly difficult to separate their identities. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that visiting Europeans would often confuse the two. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, traveling in the seventeenth century, saw armed yogis and identified them as "dervishes."[16]

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14 "In the Panjab, in the Himālayas, in Bombay, and elsewhere they [Gorakhnāthīs] are called *Nāth*, which is a general term meaning 'master.'" See George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnat and the Kanphata Yogis* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1980), 1.

15 James Mallinson, "Yogic Identities: Tradition and Transformation," Essays, Freer Gallery of Art, accessed January 13, 2023, https://www.freersackler.si.edu/essays/yogic-identities-tradition-and-transformation/#footnote24. Mallinson also points out that the Persianate term "jōgī" could be used to refer to ascetics from a variety of traditions, but usually designated Nath yogis.

16 William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 68 and n19. This confusion between the two denominations of ascetics continued into the colonial period and has also led to many misidentifications in museum collections.

With these characteristics in common, the *jōgīs* shown congregating in the *āshram* are interchangeable with Muslim holy men. They are participants in a shared Indic devotional world inhabited by Naths, Vaisnava *sants*, and Sufis, who all shared a common notion of divinity: namely, a *nirguṇa* or *muṭlaq* deity. *Prema-kahānīs* such as the *Chandāyan* and their corresponding images remind us that the rigid sectarian boundaries of today were inconceivable in pre-colonial India.

How exactly does the yogi function as surrogate for the Sufi? Having established the conceptual and literal interchangeability between the two, we can now examine the yogi's unique role in Sufi romances. As in the story of Radha and Krishna, in most Indic tales the soul is identified as a young woman while the divine takes the form of an idealized man. In Arabic and Persian literary traditions, those roles are usually reversed, as seen in the story of Layla and Majnun.[17] In the South Asian medieval Sufi romances, the Perso-Arabic convention of gendering is continued. While in Indic romances it is often the *sakhī*, the intimate female confidant, who acts as the guide or bridge carrying messages between the divine lovers, in the *Chandāyan* a *jōgī* named Bājir plays the mediator between the heavenly beloved and the earthly seeker.[18]

As the story goes, Bājir providentially catches a glimpse of Chanda while wandering door to door asking for alms and singing songs of separation. The *jōgī* in the street sees her just as she opens her balcony window, poking her head out. Upon seeing her, "it was as if he found a new life," and he falls unconscious.[19] The scene is a symbolic enactment of the yogic moment of *mokśa*, or liberation from the ego, and the Sufi concept of *fanā*, spiritual extinction, most famously depicted in the Quranic anecdote of Moses's encounter with God.[20] It is the moment when, in Sufism, the spiritual traveler finds "a new life" as an intimate friend of God, a *valī*. Not only does the *jōgī* Bājir stand in for the *valī*, he also represents the ideal ascetic who holds the key to the mystery of God-knowledge, *ʿirfān*.

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17 Most famously composed as an epic poem by the twelfth-century poet Nizami Ganjavi. See Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness, and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

18 Qamar Adamjee considers Bājir to be a wandering minstrel. See Adamjee, "Strategies for Visual Narration," 178. Ansarullah translates the word *bājir* as *jōgī*, and explains that *bājirs* were a type of yogis. See Ansarullah, *Chandāyan*, 80n1.

19 Ansarullah, *Chandāyan*, 80.

20 "And when his Lord revealed (His) glory to the mountain He sent it crashing down. And Moses fell down senseless. And when he woke he said: Glory unto Thee!" Quran 7:143.

FIGURE 23
Description of Chanda's beauty, ca. 1500–1550, Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan*. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper
COURTESY: GOVERNMENT MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, CHANDIGARH (K-7-30-I)

After the encounter, Bājir arrives at the neighboring kingdom where its ruler, Rupchand, hears his love songs describing Chanda's beauty. Following the traditional literary conventions of the *sarāpā*—the Persianate head-to-toe description of the beloved, also known as the *nakh-sikh* in Sanskrit—verses praising Chanda's beauty were regularly illustrated in regional workshops during the first half of the sixteenth century.

In a Lahore-Chandigarh folio (Fig. 23), the *jōgī* can be seen sitting cross-legged on a leopard skin opposite the enthroned Rupchand. He is shown in the typical gesture of narrating with his right hand, which is resting on a meditation crutch (Fig. 24). Similar to the Nath *jōgīs* from the temple complex, he has a *siṅgī* necklace, a topknot, and large white earrings.[21] In a page from the

21 For another discussion of this and related folios from the *Chandāyan*, see Qamar Adamjee, "Artistic Agency in Painted Narratives: The Case of the *Chandayan* Manuscripts," in *A Magic World: New Visions of Indian Painting*, ed. Molly Aitken (Mumbai: Marg Foundation, 2016), 116–29.

FIGURE 24 Description of Chanda's beauty (detail), ca. 1500–1550, Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan*. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper
COURTESY: GOVERNMENT MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, CHANDIGARH (K-7-30-I)

Mumbai *Chandāyan*, another sixteenth-century manuscript depicting the same story, the orange-skinned ascetic is once again shown seated on a leopard skin narrating the heroine's beauty to a swooning Rupchand (Fig. 25).

After hearing Bājir's description of her, the king falls in love with Chanda, and vows to attack Govar and capture the beauty for himself. The famous warrior Lorak is chosen for the task. Needless to say, as soon as Lorak sees Chanda for himself, he falls in love with her as well, and they elope, escaping the city of Govar—where the beauty has been married against her will to a lame, impotent older man—as well as the desirous clutches of Rupchand. Hence begins the story of Lorak and Chanda.

The widespread popularity of Sufi romances and their supporting illustrations in North India attest to how deeply integrated the figure of the yogi had become by the sixteenth century. The theme was continually popular well into

FIGURE 25
Description of Chanda's beauty, ca. 1500–1550, Mumbai *Chandāyan*. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. CSMVS, Mumbai (57.1/4)
COURTESY OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI MAHARAJ VASTU SANGRAHALAYA. NOT TO BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT PRIOR PERMISSION OF THE TRUSTEES

the seventeenth century. The yogi-Sufi nexus played such an important role in the formation of a uniquely South Asian manifestation of Islamic literary and visual culture that its transmission contributed to patterns of thought that greatly influenced elites. For example, Sufi romances transmitted moral and religious ideals to princes and princesses, such as Prince Salim (the future emperor Jahangir) and his progeny.

1.2 *Mṛigāvatī*

The *jōgī* plays an even more central role in another Hindavi *prema-kahānī*, the *Mṛigāvatī*, composed in 1503 by Qutban, a shaikh of the Suhrawardi Sufi order. The story, involving the protagonist Rajkunwar's quest to find his beloved, the shape-shifting doe-woman Mrigavati, is crucial for understanding the visual and literary mapping of the *jōgī* onto the early Mughal cultural consciousness, particularly in the case of Prince Salim.

In 1600, Prince Salim, impatient to succeed his father who had ruled for almost fifty years, rebelled against Akbar and established a rival court in Allahabad. His coterie included some of the best artists of the empire.

Attempting to make his mark as a ruler in his own right, he recreated the intellectual environment that had fostered him at his father's court. Manuscripts were written and collected, and albums were compiled. The image of the yogi was central to the painting and scribal workshops at Allahabad.[22] One reason for the enthusiasm with which the yogi featured in courtly artworks and texts of this period could be the locale itself. Allahabad, originally an ancient town called Prayag, was a sacred gathering place for yogis. It provided the perfect soil for Salim's own attraction to the yogi and yogic teachings, acquired through local tales, legends, and personal encounters, to grow and flower. From the artworks themselves, it appears that his artists found direct inspiration from the hundreds of Hindu ascetics wandering in the streets and along the riverbanks.

It was at Allahabad, in a courtly climate that reinvigorated older topoi with new ways of expressing them, that the Hindavi *prema-kahānī Mṛigāvatī* was translated into Persian and illustrated for Salim in 1603/4. The romance revolves around Rajkunwar's seven-tier quest to find the doe-princess after an initially unfulfilled union in which the princess admonishes him for not understanding the true meaning of *prema-rasa*, the essence of real love. The epic is understood as an allegory for the inner journey in which the traveler-prince, who represents the spiritual seeker, has to dominate his carnal soul, the Quranic *nafs al-ammāra*, through ascetic practices while gaining nearness to God through the Sufi methods of remembrance, known as *ẕikr*.[23] The underlying moral of the story is that union with the beloved is not something that can be demanded or forcefully obtained—something which Rajkunwar foolishly attempts in the first part of the tale—but is instead a state of being that must be arrived at through severe ascetic practices and trust in the remembrance of God. In the book, written primarily for an Indo-Muslim audience familiar with Sufi mores, this spiritual ideal of renunciation is channeled through the path and practices of the yogi. After Mrigavati chastises the prince and flees from his palace, he embarks on his long adventure by first donning the garb of a wandering *jōgī*. As the text elaborates:

22 Several local texts illustrated at Salim's behest were part of the Allahabad collection, including a treatise on Hatha Yoga, titled *Baḥr al-ḥayāt*, and the conversations between Rama and his teacher, known as the *Yogavāsistha*. See Heike Franke, "Akbar's *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in the Chester Beatty Library," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 161, no. 2 (2011): 359–75, and Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:556–64.

23 Behl, Doniger, and Suhravardi, *The Magic Doe*, 12–14.

> The prince took the guise of a *Gorakhpanthī*.
> He donned the sandals, the girdle, and patched cloak.
> His locks became matted. He assumed the discus,
> the yogi's earrings, the necklace for telling his prayers,
> the staff, the begging bowl, and the lionskin.
> He wore the clothes of a yogi, the basil beads,
> took up the armrest and the trident,
> and rubbed his body all over with ashes.
> He blew the horn whistle and went on the path,
> reciting that divinely beautiful one's name as his support.
> He took the ascetic's viol in his hand,
> and applied his mind to the practices of solitude,
> playing its strings all alone at night.
> He was now yoked to asceticism, at play on the road to perfection.[24]

It is only when he meets his guide, a senior wandering *jōgī* who has seen the city of his beloved, that his journey truly begins. Upon meeting him, "he ran to fall at the ascetic's feet. 'Show me that fortunate, blessed path!'"[25] As we shall see below, the act of submission before a spiritual authority is a key literary and historical trope that was regularly enacted by Persian and Indian royalty.

In the illustrations of the Chester Beatty Library manuscript made for Prince Salim, numerous artists who contributed to the paintings have shown Rajkunwar as a Nath *jōgī* in different ways. In folio 23v (Fig. 26) we see him with matted hair and prayer beads around his neck, wearing wooden clogs and the stitched robe shared by Sufis and *jōgīs*.[26] He is also carrying a *vīnā*, the Indian viol, to indicate that he has become a wandering *jōgī* minstrel, singing laments of love and separation. He has just left his father's kingdom—a narrative detail that may have resonated with the rebellious Prince Salim. Rajkunwar wistfully lifts his gaze towards the faraway city of his beloved which lies beyond the winding stream that divides the entire composition into two distinct halves. Having just left his worldly attachments behind he stands on the long and arduous path below the dividing waters. His aspirations lie above, and in the distance. A large *pīpal* tree, the *ficus religiosa*, rises from the center of the folio and breaks through the border of the painting. As it winds its way out of the

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24 Behl, Doniger, and Suhravardi, *The Magic Doe*, 81.
25 Behl, Doniger, and Suhravardi, *The Magic Doe*, 84. See also Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:201 and 208 (fig. 2.55).
26 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:206.

FIGURE 26 Rajkunwar begins his journey, from the *Rājkuṇwar Romance*, ca. 1603–4. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 28.3 × 17.5 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 37.23v) © THE TRUSTEES OF THE CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY, DUBLIN

picture plane, the sacred tree simultaneously reflects the prince's spiritual aspirations and acts as a vertical marker dividing two of his main goals: on the top left, on a low hill under two towering palms is an ashram, home of the renunciants, and on the top right is the paradisiacal abode of Mrigavati.

The dual aspirations, represented by the two architectural spaces on either side of the tree, point to a crucial difference between the mainstream Sufi *Weltanschauung* and the renunciate perspective of most Saiva *jōgīs*. For the Sufis following the Prophetic model of the "philosopher-king," the central intention of the spiritual path is to balance inward detachment with worldly responsibility. These are the stages of *fanā*, negation of the carnal soul and extinction in the divine—as represented by the ashram—, followed by *baqā*, subsistence in the world through God—as represented by the city. In Sufi epic romances such as the *Mṛigāvatī*, after the prince has united with his beloved in her city of gold, he takes off his yogi garb and eventually returns to assume leadership of his own kingdom. Striking the ideal balance between the spiritual realm and the world is also represented through the protagonist's efforts to care for and placate two wives whom he must convince to live together in harmony. In most romances of this kind, one wife represents the spiritual sphere of the individual and the other the worldly sphere of their life in the community.

In the same image, a series of paired creatures—ducks in a lotus pond, foxes outside their craggy furrow and, most noticeably, deer next to a flowing stream—offer the viewer a foretaste of the eventual union between Rajkunwar and Mrigavati. These visual details enhance the literary narrative's "impulse toward consummation through a series of episodes that delay the satisfaction of desire."[27] This would have been clear to the painting's original audience as the artist relies on familiar painterly conventions that were shared by the larger Persianate world but localized during the Akbar period. The distant city—a motif established in the Akbar atelier—, the paired animals, the stream, and the animated tree of life are all markers that are freely used in illustrating Sufi devotional literature in the medieval and early modern periods across what Shahab Ahmed has described as the "Balkans-to-Bengal-complex."[28]

In Figure 27, for example, which is a slightly earlier Akbar-period painting made by the court artist Mukund illustrating a folio of Nizami Ganjavi's (1141–1209) *Khamsa* [*Quintet*], the tree—in this instance the more Persianate plane tree—occupies exactly the same compositional space as the tree in the

27 Behl, Doniger, and Suhravardi, *The Magic Doe*, 10.
28 Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 32.

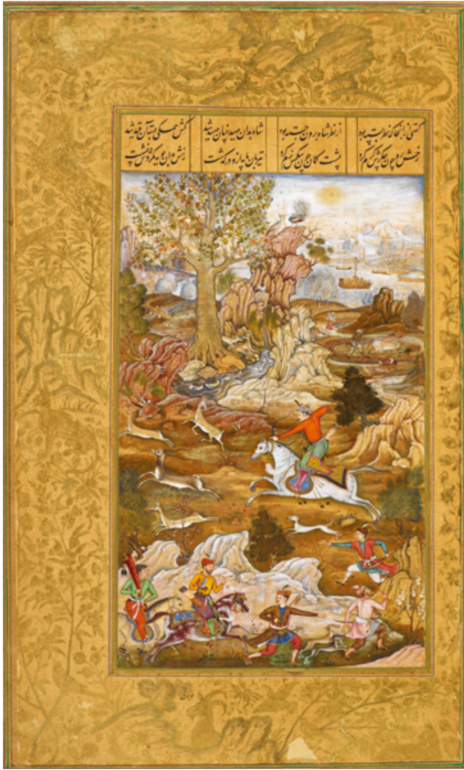

FIGURE 27
Prince Faridun shoots an arrow at a gazelle, from Nizami's *Khamsa*, by Mukund, 1595. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 31.8 × 19.6 cm. British Library, London
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Rajkunwar folio.[29] In Persianate literature and painting, the tree is a visual marker that symbolizes the world-axis or tree of life. The paired animals gathering around the tree, the flowing stream—which refers to the fountain of life—, and the city disappearing into the distance are all shared symbols that move freely across geographies and narratives, transporting any given image into an ontological space in which time stands still. They are thus evidence of a shared Muslim cultural imagination in the medieval and early modern periods.[30]

The painting immediately following folio 23v shows the first place that the *jōgī* prince passes through on his journey. In that kingdom the ruler is so moved by his song that he attempts to persuade him to stay, offering him wealth and

29 For a discussion focusing on the manuscript's illustrations, see Barbara Brend, *The Emperor Akbar's Khamsa of Niẓāmī* (London: British Library, 1995).

30 "Traditional Islamic culture no more intended to separate its 'secular' and 'religious' domains than did the other great sacral civilizations of the past […] where every painted or graven image was made to carry a telling allusion to this or that given aspect of holy order of being" (Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 134).

a beautiful wife (Fig. 28). In this painting the semi-naked *jōgī* prince is shown in a typically Indic iconographic convention: seated under the shade of a tall, slender tree, on a naturally raised platform, next to a large lotus tank.[31] Deep in discussion with the coaxing king, he wears a leopard skin draped over his right shoulder. The skin's use as attire is common to both Sufis and yogis.

In Figure 29, Emperor Akbar's chief court artist ʿAbd al-Samad depicts a typical wandering mendicant approaching the young king.[32] The dervish, who carries a horn similar to those of the *jōgīs* from the *Chandāyan* folio and wears comparable earrings and bangles, also has a leopard skin clasped around him like a cape. Paintings such as these echo one another because they accurately portray the garb and everyday practices of ascetics in medieval and early modern South Asia, Central Asia, and Persia. Seventeenth-century images of one of Dara Shikoh's spiritual guides, Shah Dilruba of the Qadiri Sufi order, always show him wearing a leopard-skin cap and tunic (Fig. 18).[33] Just as sitting on an animal-skin rug signifies the ascetic's ability to dominate the carnal soul, the leopard attire also suggests that the ascetic has imbibed the qualities of the animal as a sign of intimacy with God.[34]

The aforementioned scene of Rajkunwar in conversation with the neighboring king (Fig. 28) offers insight into another important Indo-Persian narrative convention connected to the representation of *jōgīs*: depictions of the contrasting spheres of the ascetic and the imperial retinue. In the background of the Rajkunwar painting, the king's palace is once again shown separated from the foreground by water, in this instance a surrounding moat with a bridge. In the farthest distance we see a high hilltop capped with a shrine or temple, alluding to the ultimate, and as yet unfulfilled, goal of the *jōgī* prince. In the middle foreground the *jōgī* and king converse, cordoned off by the imperial retinue. Although recurrently featured in Persian and Mughal paintings of royalty, scholars have tended to neglect the symbolic significance of this retinue. Michael Barry, drawing extensively from literary parallels, has convincingly argued for a deeper reading of the king's entourage, which frequently includes courtiers, banner bearers, and royal horses.[35] Citing a treatise by Ibn Tufayl, a twelfth-century philosopher and follower of Ibn Sina whose writings helped to

31 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:201, 207, fig. 2.54.

32 For another discussion of this painting, see Sheila R. Canby, *Princes, Poets and Paladins: Islamic and Indian Painting from the Collection of Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan* (London: British Museum, 1998), 110–11.

33 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:442–445, fig. 3.56.

34 One of the most popular epithets of ʿAli, the prince of saints, is *asad al-Lah*, "the lion of God."

35 Barry, *Figurative Art in Islam*, 300.

FIGURE 28 Rajkunwar with a king, *Rājkuṇwar Romance*, attributed to Haribans, ca. 1603–4. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 28.3 × 17.5 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 37.25r)
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FIGURE 29 Akbar and a Dervish, signed by ʾAbd al-Samad, India, ca. 1586–87. Opaque watercolor, ink, and silver on paper. 39.1 cm × 25.4 cm
© THE AGA KHAN MUSEUM, AKM141

FIGURE 30 Alexander and the Hermit, from Nizami's *Iskandarnāma*, 1494/95, by Behzad. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 24.3 × 17 cm. British Library, London © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, OR.6810, FOL. 273R

disseminate his cosmology across the Islamic world, Barry demonstrates how the horse symbolizes the prince's or king's physical body, which needs to be tethered or reined in through domination by higher reasoning.[36] The courtiers holding the king's weapons represent other faculties such as wrath, lust, and extravagance, which run amok when unbridled but can be rewarding when controlled. As Ibn Tufayl explains, "since until such exile [life on earth], you shall never be quit of them, you must curb them under your grip and overrule them with your authority."[37] The king's retinue in the foreground and his palace in the background therefore represent the corporeal realm, whereas Rajkunwar—as the renunciate *jōgī* seated under a sacred tree on a raised platform—defines the otherworldly precinct of the spirit.

One of the great genre-defining paintings from Herat (Fig. 30), made in 1494/5 by Kamal al-Din Behzad (ca. 1450–1535), the legendary master of the late Timurid and early Safavid courts of Persia, illustrates an anecdote from Nizami's twelfth-century *Iskandarnāma* [*Story of Alexander*], which is a part of his famous *Khamsa*. In the British Library manuscript folio, the kingly figure of Alexander, shown in a green tunic kneeling before a gnostic, is based, like so many early modern illustrations of devotional epics, on the patron himself: in this instance the Timurid ruler, Sultan Husain Mirza Bayqara (1438–1506). The holy man, described by Nizami as an Indian ascetic living near the Indus River, sits before a cave in the wilderness of the mountains. Alexander has come to petition the ascetic's prayer for success as he prepares to attack the city shown in the background of the painting, bedecked with web-like brickwork and soldiers scurrying visibly on its ramparts. The sage is shaded by the familiar autumnal plane tree from which a stream—representing the fountain of life—can be seen flowing downward toward a guard holding a lantern. In Quranic terms, the fountain or stream refers to the place where Moses met al-Khizr, the evergreen prophet who leads souls to the waters of immortality. The fountain of life also refers to the place where the sweet sea of the afterlife meets the salt sea of this world, and is thus known as "the meeting place of the two oceans," the *majma' al-baḥrayn*.[38] Similarly, the threshold of the cave symbolizes the liminal space here occupied by the saint.[39] The cave itself

36 The treatise is *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzan*, which Barry mistakenly quotes as a work by Avicenna.

37 Barry, *Figurative Art in Islam*, 301. Also see Ibn Tufayl, *Ibn Tufayl's* Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: *A Philosophical Tale*, trans. Lenn Goodman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

38 Quran 18:60–82.

39 Every realized saint in Islam is thought to have an aspect of al-Khizr, since sanctity is synonymous with immortality: the only means of attaining union with God is through extinguishing the lower self. True knowledge of God is beyond time and space, and thus through the very act of participating in God-knowledge the saint becomes ever-living.

simultaneously recalls the place where the Prophet Muhammad went for his spiritual retreats and received the first Quranic revelation, as well as the *ghayb*, the Unknown or Beyond-Being womb chamber where the lower soul and body are left behind and the secret of God's hidden mystery is revealed to the mystic. The practice of making spiritual retreats in caves is another phenomenon found across the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and South Asia.[40] This folio, made by *the* archetypal painter, Behzad, contains several key symbols that help us understand the symbolic framework of paintings that function at once as illustrations for particular narratives and as pedagogical devices animated with religious meaning.

In Behzad's reimagining of the literary and historical theme of rulers visiting ascetics in the wilderness, the king's corporeal faculties are not only held in check but are depicted literally behind him: the horse is shown reined in by the groom holding the bridle; the archer, who looks away from the saint, has his arrows safely in the quiver; and the king's sword is sheathed in the page's hand. None of the retinue, including the king's own horse, are allowed to enter the hallowed vicinity of the saint's cave. The message of the painting is that the emperor must leave behind his worldly emblems of power in order to humble himself before a spiritual authority.

A similar attitude is repeated in the *Mṛigāvatī* anecdote illustrated in the folio in Figure 28. Even though these symbols are unrelated to the textual narrative of the particular passage in which the uninitiated prince does not yet embody the perfected human being, *al-insān al-kāmil* of the Sufis, and the king shown in the image only appears briefly, primarily to introduce Rajkunwar to his *jōgī*-guide, it is nonetheless important to point them out in order to reveal the repeated use of devotional symbols that were deeply rooted in the Indo-Persian cultural imagination. The insertion of these narrative devices helped inculcate princely ideals in the very princes who commissioned these luxurious manuscripts.

It was thus that romances primarily written by Sufis for spiritual instruction also acted as morality tales, educating young patrons in courtly comportment and etiquette, while at the same time instilling a sense of religious hierarchy in which the gnostic of God (the *ʿārif bi'Llah*)—owing to his spiritual independence from social hierarchies—was believed to hold the highest status. Nizami uses the same theme in his *Khamsa* by placing the dervish-like Majnun, Layla's

40 For a detailed analysis of the symbolism of the cave and its use in Persian painting, see Barry, "Alexander's Cave," in *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 253–384. The use of the cave symbolism also coincides with its use in Neo-Platonism, whose language was readily accepted and incorporated into medieval Islamic philosophy and Sufism.

lover, in a cave where he lives with wild beasts. Majnun's uncle, upon seeing his spiritual state in the cave, remembers a tale about a dervish who was visited by a king in the Arabian Desert. At seeing the dervish, the king said, "'The dervish is a wise man, and he is superior even to me. He knows well the worth of what he has and is satisfied.' Then the king went into the hut and kissed the dervish's feet."[41]

In the *Mṛigāvatī*, Rajkunwar completes several quests in the garb of a yogi, from escaping man-eating serpents to defeating an Odyssey-inspired cyclops, before finally arriving at his beloved's city. It is only when he meets Mrigavati that he removes his yogic attire and reveals his true identity. Symbolically, the story of Rajkunwar-the-yogi is an allegory for the Sufi path of *fanā*, and ends with his union with Mrigavati. The remainder of the epic romance in which Rajkunwar assumes his role as prince unfolds as an allegory for *baqā*, the Sufi concept of subsistence in the world through God. Rajkunwar returns home with his two wives to rule over his realm as king. In these *prema-kahānīs*, the ideals of the perfect yogi and the perfect prince converge in the role of the monarch.

2 Yogis in Princely Albums

Before entering a lengthy discussion on the yogi and his function in Mughal albums, it is important to briefly outline the visual transmission of the yogi figure from Emperor Akbar to Prince Salim.

2.1 *Yogis from Akbar to Jahangir*

It is clear from the *Bāburnāma*, the autobiography of the first Mughal emperor, Babur (1483–1530), that the Mughals from the very beginning of their presence in India were interested in interacting with *jōgīs*. Although Babur himself was disappointed by his visit to Gurkhattri, a Nath *maṭh* (cloister or monastery) near Peshawar, Akbar-period illustrations of the text reimagine the royal visit as populated with *jōgīs*, thereby reflecting Akbar's own enthusiasm for Indic knowledge (Fig. 31).[42] Babur only managed to rule over his newly conquered territory for four years. As he states in his autobiography, he saw himself as a

41 Peter J. Chekowski, *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the* Khamseh of *Nizami* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), 63. The *naṣīḥatnāme* (advice to princes) tradition in epic as well as romantic texts was also extremely popular in the Ottoman world, which was very much part of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex.

42 Diamond and Aitken, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, 180–81, 184: fig. 14d. For introductory surveys on yogis in Mughal painting, see Walter Smith, "Hindu Ascetics in Mughal

FIGURE 31
Babur visiting Gurkhattri, from the *Bāburnāma*, ca. 1590. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 32 × 21 cm. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (W.596.22B)
CREATIVE COMMONS PUBLIC DOMAIN, CC0 1.0 UNIVERSAL (CC0 1.0)

foreigner in an unpleasant land. By contrast, his grandson Akbar (r. 1550–1605), who consolidated and expanded the empire, did not see himself as an outsider, but as completely Hindustani. Akbar's architectural projects, such as the vast royal complex at Fatehpur Sikri, demonstrate how he consciously utilized earlier Indo-Muslim models in an attempt to align himself with Sultanate-period rulers. These included elements such as screen carvings and finials that were also found in Hindu temples and local urban dwellings (Fig. 32). The cultural overlapping apparent in the architecture from this period parallels the shared garb of South Asian ascetics.

Scholars of art history often assume that Akbar was the first Muslim ruler in India to show enthusiasm for the representation of yogis.[43] However, as we have seen from the *Chandāyan*, which was written at the court of a local Muslim ruler and copied and illustrated for other regional courts, there was already

Painting under Akbar," *Oriental Art* 27 (1981): 67–75, and Rachel Parikh, "Yoga under the Mughals: From Practice to Paintings," *South Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (2015): 215–36.

43 See for example Smith, "Hindu Ascetics in Mughal Painting," 67.

FIGURE 32 Fatehpur Sikri, 1572–1585
PHOTO COURTESY ARCHNET (IAA15438)

a vibrant visual precedent established before the Mughal period. Akbar did, however, revolutionize the way yogis were integrated into his empire.[44] This is also reflected in the artworks made under his patronage. In a *Hamzanāma* folio (Fig. 33), illustrated for the young Emperor Akbar sometime between 1562 and 1577, a spy is shown sitting in his den on the top left dressed in the garb of a yogi, with matted locks, tiger-skin thrown over one shoulder, and a large horn slung over his back.[45] When compared to the illustrations from the earlier *Chandāyan* manuscripts, we notice how, despite the iconographic similarity, a major stylistic shift has taken place: in the Akbar period there is an attention to individualistic detail, each figure coursing with movement and energy. It is this Indo-Muslim legacy, transfigured under the Mughals, that Akbar's son Salim continued through his own patronage.[46]

44 Akbar gave several yogi groups, particularly those belonging to the Nath sect, land grants. He would also go to their holy places and meet senior ascetics personally, receiving blessings from them and awarding them gifts in return. See William Pinch, "Nāth Yogīs, Akbar, and the 'Bālnāth Ṭillā,'" in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 273–88.

45 For a catalogue entry and image, see John Seyller, *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 2002), 168.

46 For a slightly earlier Akbar period example of a yogi in an illustrated manuscript, see the folio from the *Ṭūṭīnāma*, forty-sixth night: the Raja of Ujjain, who is traveling in the guise of a yogi, meets two brothers who ask him to equitably partition their father's possessions, ca. 1560, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland (1962.279.293.b).

FIGURE 33
Misbah the Grocer brings the spy Parran to his house, from the *Hamzanāma*, ca. 1570, attributed to Dasavanta. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on cloth; mounted on paper. 70.8 × 54.9 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (24.48.1). Rogers Fund, 1924
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2.2 *Yogis in Salim/Jahangir Period Albums*

The recurrence of the highly developed visual language of Muslim devotion made for nobility, dealing with a wide variety of themes, helped bring even the most secular images into a sacred orbit, including historical scenes and representations of courtly life. Historical events transmitted enduring conventions on the illustrated page, which became transfigured by these emblems into an ontological space. The artist Govardhan's painting of *Jahangir Visiting Jadrup* (ca. 1620), made for an album during the latter half of Emperor Jahangir's reign, is an historical reflection of precisely this atemporal convention in which a worldly king submits, almost ritually, to a king of the spiritual realm (Fig. 34).[47]

47 See Amina Okada, *Indian Miniatures of the Mughal Court* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 39–40, fig. 40. For a slightly earlier Jahangir period example of a prince visiting a saint, see the border decoration from Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, MS 117, *Berlin Album* (ca. 1610), f. 22a, in which Prince Salim pays a visit to Shaikh Salim, the saint who famously prayed for Akbar to have a male heir.

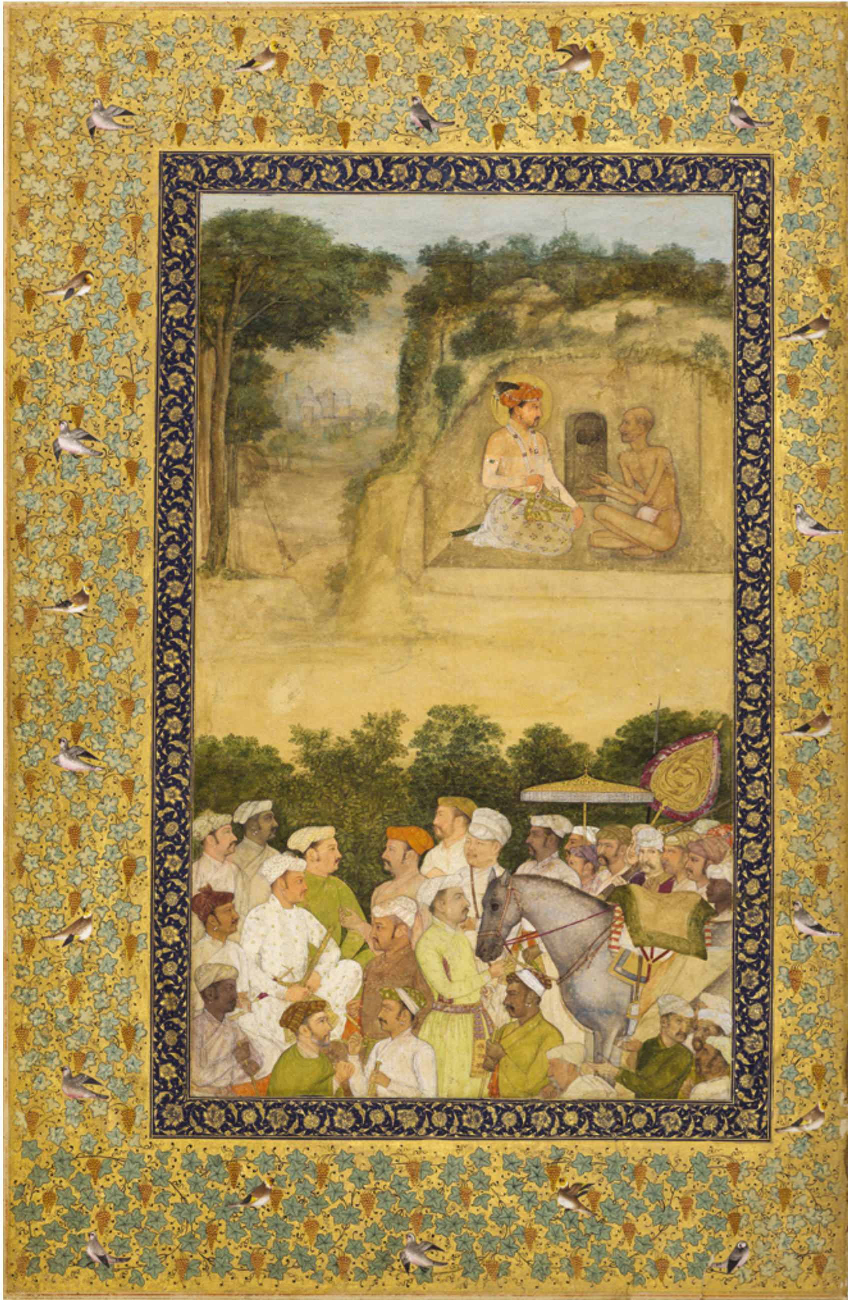

FIGURE 34 The visit of the emperor Jahangir to the ascetic Jadrûp, by Govardhan, ca. 1620. Page from the *Saint-Petersburg Album*. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 35.4 × 22 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris (OA7171)
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It echoes an *Akbarnāma* painting made for Emperor Akbar around 1587, in which the king is shown as a young prince visiting the famed yogi Baba Bilas of Ghazni (Fig. 35).[48] In the *Akbarnāma* (completed in 1594), the court historian Abu'l Fazl describes how on one visit, the ascetic predicted Akbar's future greatness. For this reason, the anecdote and its corresponding painting were included in the official chronicle of the emperor's life. Following this historical, literary, and visual precedent, the artist Govardhan, in his painting depicting Jahangir visiting Jadrup, carefully divides his depiction of an actual event into two registers. In this case the spatial division is more definite. The world below bears the insignia of worldly power: the golden parasol, the enormous fan, the reined-in horse and the matchlock resting on the shoulder of a courtier. Meanwhile, above it all, Jahangir sits facing the great Vedantin saint Jadrup in his cave-like hovel. The diffusion of golden light that we see in the atmosphere of the painting is one of the signature elements of Govardhan's style. Above the dark green hedge that divides the two registers, this ethereal light seems somehow distinct from the implied cacophony of the lower world. As is common in nearly all representations of saints in Hindustani painting, the two figures converse sitting on a raised platform near a tree. The distractions of urban life fade into the distance, as symbolized by the Renaissance-style town receding into the background. Govardhan ingeniously uses the Indic painterly convention of stacking horizontal registers on top of each other to create a symbolic space.

Vedantins such as Jadrup are yogis who adhere strictly to the Vedas and believe in a non-formal absolute godhead Brahma.[49] Like the many South Asian Sufis who saw similarities between a *nirguṇa* God and a *muṭlaq* God, Jahangir had no problems viewing the Vedantin *sadhu* as a dervish. Just as late medieval Sufi authors such as Mulla Da'ud and Qutban repurposed earlier Indian folk tales for a distinctly Islamic function, Emperor Jahangir—the princely patron of the *Mṛigāvatī* epic—situated his meeting with Jadrup within an Islamic fold. In his memoirs, he describes his first meeting with the Vedantin saint thus:

> The place he had chosen for his abode was a pit dug out in the middle of a hill. The entrance was *shaped like a mihrab* [the mosque prayer niche] [...] He had neither mat nor straw strewn underfoot as *other dervishes do* [...] although he is absolutely naked and has no clothing except a piece of rag with which he covers himself in front and behind, he never lights

48 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1: 131–133, fig. 1.228.

49 Jahangir describes Jadrup as a "Vedantin," from Ujjain. The contemporaneous *Dabistān-i-mazāhib* describes him as a follower of the great Advaita Vedantin saint Shankarachariya.

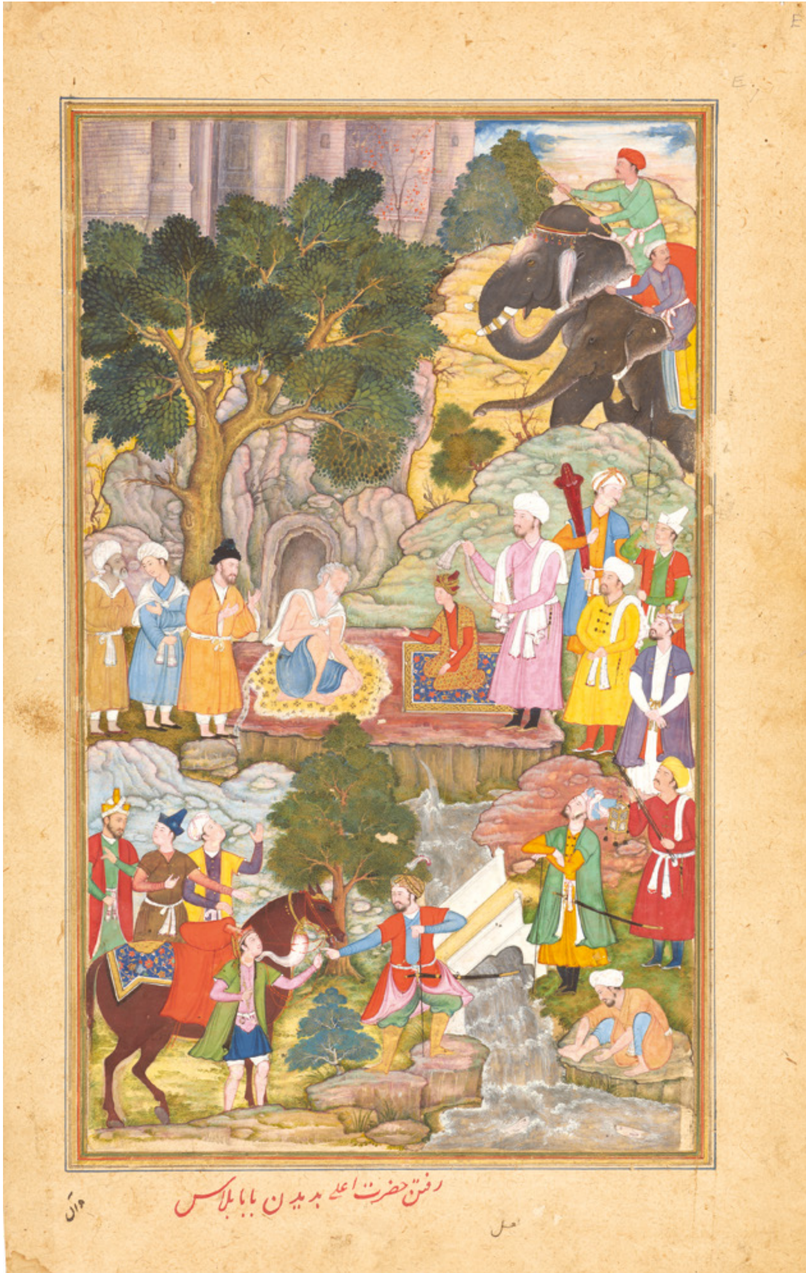

FIGURE 35 Akbar visits Baba Bilas, by La'l, from the *Akbarnāma*, ca. 1587. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 28.9 × 17.2 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 11A.26)

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> a fire. *As Mulla Rumi says, speaking in the idiom of dervishes*: "Our clothing is the heat of the sun by day, and moonlight is our pillow and quilt by night" [...] He is not devoid of learning and has studied well the science of the Vedanta, *which is the science of Sufism*.[50]

It is crucial not to interpret these interactions as evidence of Hindu-Muslim syncretism, as many scholars have suggested. Nor should we reduce them solely to the field of politics, as we understand it in the twenty-first century, where such images are studied—sadly, far too often—only as examples of rulers attempting to self-fashion their political identities. Imagining such interactions as "syncretic" fails to acknowledge the agency of a given patron, artist, or culture. It tends to blur the lines between distinct belief systems, rather than recognizing the specific negotiations that take place during cultural engagements. Likewise, seeing these engagements merely as a means of seeking political power is flatly simplistic. Furthermore, this point of view diminishes or denies the very beliefs that the culture under study considered as its bedrock. The reductive use of this lens imposes contemporary values and hierarchies onto a society's past, while largely ignoring the local context that shaped its means of expressing itself. We need to acknowledge that the Muslim patrons viewed and internalized such encounters through a clearly Islamic and *Islamizing* lens.[51] These are the very sentiments, deeply rooted in the larger Mughal elite culture, that were to influence Prince Dara Shikoh four decades later, propelling him into the serious intellectual endeavor of proving that the "science of the Vedanta" is none other than "the science of Sufism."

It should be clarified that in this chapter, I give one particular example of how an Indic element was used for an Islamic or Sufi purpose: the theme of the yogi. By showing this, I do not intend to downplay the well-known fact that Muslims—in particular, the Mughal rulers—were interested in specific Hindu figures and yogic texts; not just to Islamize them, but also to participate in their Indic-ness. Afterall, the coexistence and multivalence of religious traditions is well embodied by the artists themselves, many of whom were Hindus working for Muslim patrons.

The practice of reconstituting the theme of the *jōgī* for a specifically Islamized devotional scheme is most vividly on display in the now dispersed

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50 Jahangir, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler Thackston (New York: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in association with Oxford University Press, 1999), 209; my italics.

51 When using the term "Islamic," I follow Shahab Ahmad's definition, in which Islam is viewed more holistically, not just as "religion" strictly speaking but as a lived culture (Ahmad, *What Is Islam?*, 6).

Salim Album (assembled ca. 1600–05).[52] Apart from standing portraits of individuals from Akbar and Salim-period *darbārs*, the most prominent theme of the album is devotional, including representations of *jōgīs* and dervishes. Pages also include Christian themes of Mary and Jesus, as well as one folio showing a Jesuit priest. These themes were imitated, in a remarkably similar compositional scheme, first by Salim's son Prince Khurram—the future Emperor Shah Jahan—in the first decade of the seventeenth century, and three decades later by the teenage Dara Shikoh in his famous British Library album.[53] Each image is accompanied by Persian verses written in horizontal bands framing the figures on the top, and occasionally below as well.[54] Two striking representations of *jōgīs* in the *Salim Album* and their accompanying texts reveal the Sufic identification with Nath spirituality (Fig. 36 and 37). It has been suggested that the two pages, one in the Harvard Museums and the other in the Chester Beatty Library, would have originally faced each other.[55] The album pages were made for Prince Salim around the same time as the illustrated *Baḥr al-ḥayāt* [*The Ocean of Life*]—a Persian translation of the Sanskrit manual on Hatha yoga—in which there are multiple representations of Saiva *jōgīs*.[56] Curiously, similar to the holy men in the *Baḥr al-ḥayāt*, the *jōgīs* in the *Salim Album* are also shown with dogs.

In Figure 36 from the Harvard Museums, the *jōgī* sitting on his haunches with his legs folded up is wearing the familiar stitched orange robe of *saṇyāsīs* and

52 Dispersed in the early twentieth century, the known folios of the album are all in European and American collections. The largest number of folios are in the Chester Beatty Album. There are around thirty-one pages that have been accounted for. For a detailed discussion on the *Salim Album*, see Wright, "The Salim Album, c. 1600–1605," in Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, 54–67. Also see Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:300–07, and Yael Rice, "The Emperor's Eye and the Painter's Brush: The Rise of the Mughal Court Artist, c. 1546–1627" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011), 26–46.

53 The Prince Khurram album was tragically dispersed in a Sotheby's auction on June 15, 1959. For a note on the *Khurram Album*, see Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, Appendix 7, 473.

54 The use of poetry plays a crucial role for identifying the subjects of the paintings in the *Salim Album*. Rice has convincingly shown that there was "a clear division between specific and nonspecific images." Using the example of a painting of Mary, Rice explains that the devotional paintings in the album are supported with more abstract poetic text. These folios do not have a literal correspondence between text and image, but a metaphorical one (Rice, "The Emperor's Eye," 36–37).

55 Sunil Sharma, "The Sati and the Yogi: Safavid and Mughal Imperial Self-Representation in Two Album Pages," in *In Harmony: The Norma Jean Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art*, ed. Mary McWilliams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Art Museums, 2013), 152. Wright has convincingly suggested that, although pages might have been viewed in a certain sequence, they were probably never bound into an album. See Wright, "The Salim Album," 55. Also see Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:303, fig. 2.164.

56 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, II:556–64.

FIGURE 36 A Nath Yogi with Two White Dogs, folio from the *Salim Album*. ca. 1600. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 23.3 × 15 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, the Norma Jean Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art
PHOTO ©PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, 2002.50.29

FIGURE 37 Yogi, from the *Salim Album*, ca. 1599–1604. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 19.8 × 12.3 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 44.3)
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wandering dervishes. A few decades later, artists working for Shah Jahan and Dara Shikoh painted known Sufi saints close to the two in a similar posture. In an otherwise barren landscape, the mendicant is surrounded by a grassy halo, perhaps hinting at his evergreen inner state. In the further background a blue lake merges with the sky, which is lined with a miniscule flock of birds. His left hand, which holds a short, thin meditation crutch, is resting on his upturned black hat, while his other hand clasps his legs. The *jōgī* with his *siṅgī* necklace and large earrings looks with contentment at the two wild-eyed dogs playing around him. In Figure 37 from the Chester Beatty Library, a sterner looking *jōgī* in a black stitched robe similar to the one worn by Rajkunwar sits framed against the opening to his hovel in the wilderness, with his right hand assertively resting on the dog's head, perhaps even pressing its ear as an admonition.

Ample visual evidence shows that wandering *jōgīs* and dervishes alike kept companion animals. Contemporaneous literary references suggest that in addition to acting as loyal companions for mendicants journeying alone in the wilderness, dogs also served an important symbolic function. The animal is a regularly occurring motif used by all of the great classical Persian poets from Rumi to Amir Khusro. In their poetry, the dog reflects a dual nature that converges in the image of the dyadic human soul. It is both reviled and eulogized. In mainstream Muslim culture, dogs are considered inherently impure, but in the Quran, they are awarded a higher status among animals by virtue of being included in the story of the sleepers.[57] A cursory survey of Rumi's *Mathnavī* reveals the figure of the dog as both loved and hated:

> Thy friends are catching onagers in the desert; thou art catching a blind man in the street; this is bad.
> Thy friends seek onagers by hunting (them); thou in (mere) malice seekest a blind man in the street.
> The knowing dog has made the onager his prey, while this worthless dog has attacked a blind man.
> When the dog has learned the knowledge (imparted to him), he has escaped from error: he hunts lawful prey in the jungles.
> When the dog has become knowing (*'álim*), he marches briskly; when the dog has become a knower of God (*'árif*), he becomes (as) the Men of the Cave.[58]

57 Quran 18:18.

58 Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jaláluʾddín Rúmí*, 1:ll. 2630–34.

As is evident from these lines, the dog represents the volatile human soul, and just like the king's attendants and the horse, needs to be kept in check. It must be tamed if the spiritual traveler is to succeed in attaining the ultimate goal: union with God. Elsewhere Rumi says:

> Know that your only means of hunting is the dog (the animal soul): throw bones to the dog but seldom,
> Because when the dog has eaten its fill, it becomes rebellious: how should it run to the goodly chase and hunt?[59]

Over time the very word "dog" came to be associated with the self-deprecating "self," so much so that poets would often refer to themselves, humbly, as "this dog." This is wonderfully echoed in the four verses framing the central image in Figure 37, in which the impassioned poet/lover calls out proclaiming:

> I am the *jōgī* of love, and am passionate for you,
> With every hair I desire you.
> My shirt is made with the dust of his lane,
> And that too has blood from (my) eyes and is ripped to its hem.
>
> I am one with all the nations,
> I should have a rosary and a girdle.
> Your dog is better than the entire world of fidelity,
> If I am not your dog, the dog is better than me.[60]

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59 Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, 1:ll. 2874–79.

60 Sharma, "The Sati and the Yogi," 153; I have slightly modified Sharma's translation. For an alternate translation by Thackston, see Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, 270. Thackston has preferred to read *chūkī* rather than the more obvious *jōgī* in the first line of the first couplet. In the traditional *Nasta'līq* script, it is common to drop the extra dots that would otherwise confirm the specific letter. In this case it could be "j" or "ch" depending on the context and meaning. Similarly, it is common to drop the extra dash on top of the "k" stroke, which would otherwise confirm the letter "g." The word *chūkī* means "watchman," and in this context makes less sense than *jōgī*, which is the actual subject of the painting itself. However, we must assume that the calligrapher and the poet originally intended to instill this ambiguity, since double meaning (*ihām*) is a major convention in Persian and Urdu poetry.

They echo the sentiments from another Rumi poem in which he says:

> The Turcoman dogs fawn at the tent-door before the guest,
> But if anyone having the face of a stranger pass by the tent,
> he will see the dogs rushing at him like lions.
> I am not less than a dog in devotion,
> nor is God less than a Turcoman in life (living power).[61]

The poem from the *Salim Album* folio ends with the speaking protagonist of the verse identifying not with the *jōgī* but with the dog. The *jōgī* in the painting acts as the initiator and guide on the path to salvation. This sentiment is repeated in another folio from the *Salim Album*, made by Basawan (Fig. 38), in which we actually witness an aspirant kissing the feet of the guide, who in this case is a Muslim dervish.[62] The wispy, barefooted dervish stands beneath the tree of life with an open book, signifying guidance. On a branch directly above the guide sits a lightly sketched, mischievous monkey mimicking the dervish's posture. The serene dog below has already come under the care of the guide and is shown as superior to the uninitiated devotee making his plea. As if to confirm the desperation of the seeker, the verse above the painting proclaims: "I have fallen at his feet from helplessness, would it be that he would take my hand."

By the mid-seventeenth century the dog-as-self motif was embedded so deeply in the Indo-Muslim cultural consciousness that in a letter written to Shah Dilruba, Dara Shikoh implores the saint by referring to himself as a lowly, wretched dog (Fig. 39):

> I hope that they [Shah Dilruba] do not forget this lowest of dogs of their threshold [Dara Shikoh],
> What worth do I have, since only a dog am I?
> How can I even desire to be among your dogs?[63]

61 Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, I:ll. 831–34.

62 See Sonya Rhie Mace, Dominique DeLuca, and Mohsen Ashtiany, *Mughal Paintings: Art and Stories: The Cleveland Museum of Art* (London: D. Giles, 2016), 196–97, fig. 4.57, and Howard Hodgkin and Terence McInerney, *Indian Drawing: An Exhibition* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1983), fig. 52.

63 BL, MS Or. 9617, Shikoh, *Fayyāż al-qawānīn*, f. 40.

FIGURE 38 A mendicant bowing before a holy man, from the *Salim Album*, by Basavan, circa 1585; inner border added in Allahabad ca. 1602; outer border added probably 1900s. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. 32.7 × 21.1 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, gift in honor of Madeline Neves Clapp; gift of Mrs. Henry White Cannon by exchange; bequest of Louise T. Cooper; Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund; from the Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection (2013.296)
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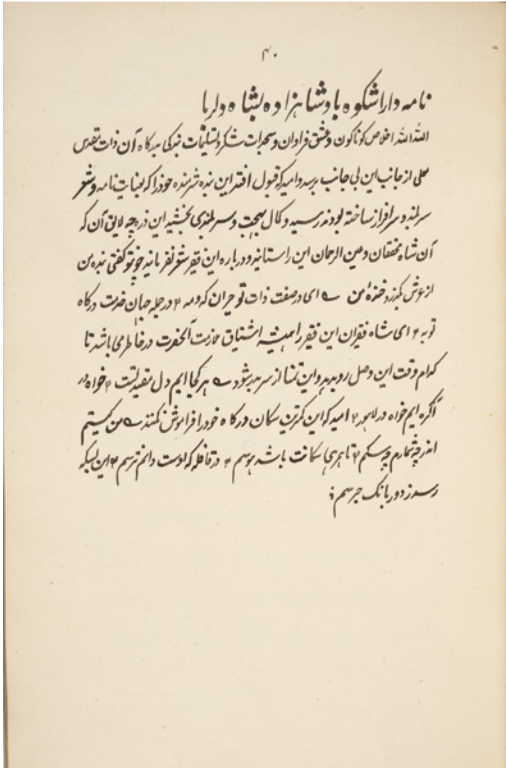

۴۰

نامه داراشکوه بادشاهزاده بشاه دلربا

الله الله اخلاص گوناگون و عشق فراوان و تحیات شکر و تسلیمات نیکی بدرگاه آن ذات مقدس
علی از جانب این بی جانب برسد و امید که قبول افتد این بنده شرمنده خود را که بعنایات نامه و شعر
سربلند و سرافراز ساخته بودند رسید و کمال بهجت و سرفرازی بخشید این ذره چه لایق آن که
آن شاه محققان و عین الرحمان این را ستایند و درباره این فقیر شعر فرمایند چو تو گفتی بنده من
از عرش بگذرد خنده من ای در صفت ذات تو حیران که و مه در جمله جهان خدمت درگاه
تو به ای شاه فقیران این فقیر را همیشه اشتیاق ملازمت آنحضرت در خاطر می باشد تا
کدام وقت این وصل رو دهد و این تمنا از سر بدر شود هر کجا ایم دل بنقیدیت خواه در
آگره ایم خواه در لاهور امید که این کمترین سگان درگاه خود را فراموش نکنند من کیستم
اندر چه شمارم چه سگم تا همرهی سگانت باشد هوسم در قافله که اوست دانم نرسم این بس که
رسد ز دور بانگ جرسم

FIGURE 39
A letter from Dara Shikoh to Shah Dilruba, from the *Fayyāż al-qawānīn*. Ink on paper. 31.4 × 18.8 cm. British Library, London
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The other folio from the *Salim Album*, described earlier (Fig. 36), also shares the dog and *jōgī* theme, but with a slightly different connotation. The verses read:

> Separated from my Beloved, I have become a *jōgī*,
> For that dear one I have become a *jōgī*
>
> My Shah is fond of the *jōgīs*,
> Thus, helpless, I have become a *jōgī*.

When the painting is examined with its associated verses, it mirrors the exact theme of the *Rājkuṇwar Romance*, in which the hero must become a *jōgī* in order to find his beloved and achieve union with God. In this instance the beloved is referred to as the "Shah," which could simultaneously signify a worldly king or God. The happy, tame dogs would then reflect the *jōgī* hero's submitted inner self.

For medieval Sufis and poets entering the subcontinent, it must have been a curious but common sight to see *jōgīs* wandering with their companion dogs. For the uniquely unruly branch of Sufis typically aligned to the Qalandari order "whom we know as antinomian (*bī-shar'*) for their flagrant and deliberate transgression against legal norms," keeping stray dogs was one of many typically subversive acts that they engaged in.[64] Both visual and literary references confirm that wandering dervishes such as Qalandars adopted the practice of the *jōgīs* and kept not only pet dogs, but in some cases rams, wild bears, and even lions.[65]

By the time the *Salim Album* was assembled in the early seventeenth century, the figures of the *jōgī* and the Qalandar had become more or less synonymous. Rizvi suggests that as early as the fourteenth century, *jōgīs* and Qalandars wandered together, from ashram to ashram and *khānqāh* to *khānqāh*.[66] This mingling of two oceans of South Asian mysticism is on display in a painting from the *Rājkuṇwar Romance* (Fig. 40). It shows the prince with attendants distributing bread to mendicants in a courtyard.[67] At first glance all the ascetics appear to be *jōgīs* in their familiar attire. A more careful examination reveals that the figure in the lower left corner wearing a black, half-sleeved robe is in fact a Qalandari Sufi (Fig. 41). The most immediate sign of his affiliation is his right arm marked by a row of burns, a form of ritualistic self-mortification most commonly associated with this particular community. A red leather pouch hanging from his girdle is another object regularly seen with wandering Qalandars. His black, floppy, fur hat also sets him apart from the *jōgīs* in the painting. It is possible that the figure in front of him, in a grey skirt and a large

64 Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 182.

65 For an example of Qalandars with a dog see, Stuart C. Welch et al., *From Mind, Heart, and Hand: Persian, Turkish, and Indian Drawings from the Stuart Cary Welch Collection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 208, fig. 75, and Andrew Topsfield, *In the Realm of Gods and Kings: Arts of India* (London: Philip Wilson, 2004), 198–99, fig. 81. One cannot help but think of the great Persian tragic hero Majnun, who also roamed in the desert with wild animals while yearning for his beloved.

For a young Qalandar with a bear see, Stuart C. Welch et al., *The Emperors' Album: Images of Mughal India* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 234, 238, ill., verso pl. 75 (b/w); recto pl. 76 (color). For a Qalandar with a lion, see Navina Haidar, "Visual Splendour: Embellished Pages from the Metropolitan Museum's Collection of Islamic and Indian Manuscripts," *Arts of Asia* 42 (2012): 111–12, fig. 8 (color). For an example of Indian ascetics with dogs from the *Gulshan Album*, see Diamond and Aitken, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, 224–25, fig. 19a–b.

66 Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, 216.

67 See Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, I205, 214, fig. 2.64 (b/w).

FIGURE 40 The prince distributing bread, from the *Rājkuṇwar Romance*, ca. 1603–4. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 28.3 × 17.5 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 37.44b) © THE TRUSTEES OF THE CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY, DUBLIN

FIGURE 41 The prince distributing bread (detail), from the *Rājkuṇwar Romance*, ca. 1603–4. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 28.3 × 17.5 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 37.44b)
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white *chādar*, carrying a clay pot, is also a fellow dervish. He too has a leather pouch peeping out from under his *chādar*.

Another folio from the *Salim Album* shows a Qalandar so similar to the *jōgīs* that he has been mistaken for a Nath (Fig. 42).[68] However, the couplet in the top band of the border, a popular verse of the Persian poet Hafiz, clearly identifies him as a Qalandar. This is further affirmed by the fact that Qalandars are known from various historical and biographical accounts to have shaved their heads as a rite of initiation. The couplet praises the Qalandar thus: "A thousand points finer than a strand of hair are here, / Anyone who shaves his head does not get to know the Qalandar's way."[69] The dervish, with his large earrings, beaded necklaces, and iron bracelets, is blowing a large, curved horn strikingly similar to those of the *jōgīs* from the Lahore-Chandigarh *Chandāyan* folio (Fig. 21). A red leather pouch, a gold-tipped conch, a wooden begging

68 This folio was formerly in the Sven Gahlin collection, but sold in a Sotheby's auction in London on October 6, 2015. For more details see, "A dervish of the Qalandari order with a pet sheep, by Mukund, Mughal, circa 1585–95," The Sven Gahlin Collection, Sotheby's, http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/sven-gahlin-collection-l15224/lot.8.html.

69 Hafiz, *The Complete Ghazals of Hafez*, ed. Muhammad Qazvini and Qasim Ghani (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2018), 177.

FIGURE 42 A Qalandar, from the *Salim Album* by Mukund, ca. 1595, formerly the Sven Gahlin Collection. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 23.3 × 14.9 cm. Sotheby's London, 6 October 2015, lot 8
© PHOTO COURTESY SOTHEBY'S, 2023

FIGURE 43
A Qalandar with a dog (museum title is "Nath yogi and dog"), attributed to Basavan, ca. 1590. Ink, opaque watercolor on paper. 26.2 × 26.6 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, the Stuart Cary Welch Collection, gift of Edith I. Welch in memory of Stuart Cary Welch
PHOTO © PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, 2009.202.255

bowl, and a slender knife hang from the belt that fastens his tunic. Another short blade is wedged into the belt. A pet ram with a collar of golden bells dutifully accompanies him. A close counterpart to the present drawing, also from the late Akbar period, is a *nīm qalam*, or half-tinted drawing, of a wandering ascetic from the collection of the Harvard Art Museums (Fig. 43). Attributed to Basavan, this figure has also been incorrectly identified as a *kānphaṭā* (Nath *jōgī*).[70] Bearing exactly the same accouterments as the dervish in the *Salim Album* folio, this Qalandar is accompanied by a dog.

Just like *jōgīs*, Qalandars were ubiquitous in the South Asian religious landscape. From visual and hagiographical accounts, it appears that both groups occupied the liminal space between urban, civilized society and the untamed wilderness. Qalandari poet-ascetics such as the fifteenth-century Shah Sharaf Bu ʿAli Qalandar and the sixteenth-century Shah Husain were extremely

70 Welch et al., *From Mind, Heart, and Hand*, 88, fig. 21. Another example of a Qalandar walking with his dog, also by Basavan, is in Paris, Museé Guimet, No. 3619 Gb. See Okada, *Indian Miniatures*, 92.

popular among the masses, transcending sectarian identifications. As wandering mendicants with little or no regard for rigid social hierarchies, they were viewed with awe by the urban Muslim elite. In literature and in painting, Qalandars were similar to yogis in that they functioned as gateways to another world. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the theme of the Qalandar was taken up far more programmatically by Jahangir's grandson Prince Dara Shikoh, in albums compiled for him. His fascination with this unruly group in his formative years was to leave an indelible mark on his later spiritual formation, as was his attraction to Hindu yogis.

By the time of the *Salim Album*, an image of a yogi or a Qalandar embodied the entire ethos surrounding renunciate culture and what it represented to the South Asian imagination. For elite patrons, this otherworldly ideal was at the same time entangled with princely virtues and nurtured the prince-par-excellence into projecting the persona of the archetypal lover, the archetypal mystic, and the archetypal future king.

2.3 Yogis in the *Dara Shikoh Album*

Following Jahangir's example, Dara Shikoh included images of yogis in an album that he commissioned for his fiancé, Nadira Banu Begum, in the mid-1630s. Folios 12 and 11 (Fig. 44 and 45) each show a yogi with matted locks seated in three-quarter profile. The folios are arranged so that the two yogis face each other across the album's central gutter. From their markings and scant paraphernalia, they appear to be Vaishnavites. Both artworks are likely from the late-Akbar period but were reused in Dara Shikoh's album in the 1630s. Folio 11 is the more intricately drawn, complex composition of the two and is attributed to Basavan, painter of some of the finest individual portraits of yogis and Sufis in the Akbar and Jahangir periods. In both *Dara Shikoh Album* folios, established conventions marking sanctity are immediately recognizable. Both yogis are seated on raised platforms in front of flowing water. The yogi in folio 12 is seated under the shade of a large tree that emerges behind him. Both have animal skins as mats. In folio 11, the receding city in the background enhances the wilderness of the yogi's surroundings. The cloudlike rock formations accentuate that distance. The yogi himself, with a trailing, wispy beard and long locks wound around his head like a turban, sits in the lotus position reading from a sacred Hindu book, or a *pothī*, shown in the typical horizontal format. Directly under the slender tree next to the yogi is a lion-head spout and a pair of ducks gazing at each other in the channel gushing from the mouth.

Symbols of devotion—some persisting from earlier periods—were perpetuated, developed, and refined during the Akbar and Jahangir eras. They

FIGURE 44 A Vaishnava yogi, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 15 × 8.3. British Library, London
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FIGURE 45 A Vaishnava yogi, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 14.9 by 8.2 cm. British Library, London
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provided the ideal format for the expression of Dara Shikoh's own interests in spirituality. Apart from iconography, the stylistic and compositional innovations of the early Mughal period also greatly contributed to the articulation of seventeenth-century representations of Muslim saints. These innovations included the mingling of earlier pictorial conventions with newer ones: for example, the stacked compositional registers, bright color palette, and figural profiles seen in the *Chandāyan* folios of the early-sixteenth century (Fig. 21) merged with visual devices like spatial recession, illusionistic volume, and the detailed rendering derived from European styles. The Persian artists who had trained local painters in Akbar's court also injected into this new artistic milieu the refinement of the Iranian style of the Safavid period. Folio 23v (Fig. 26) from the *Mṛigāvatī* is a very clear example of this stylistic collaboration at the

FIGURE 46
Rajkunwar begins his journey (with added division lines), from the *Rājkuṇwar Romance*, ca. 1603–4. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 28.3 × 17.5 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 37.23v)
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turn of the century. Following the earlier practice, the vertical page is divided into three horizontal registers, evident although in a more understated composition (Fig. 46). The bottom register includes the stream, the foxes, and the pair of ducks, while the top register contains the large tree and the expansive background. The figure of Rajkunwar is sandwiched in the central register. The strict profile of the protagonist and the use of bright red pigment on his veena and sandals are echoes of earlier painting paradigms. Meanwhile, the pastel greens, pinks, and ochres of the landscape and the knobby rock formations are typical of the Persian school, although made here with a slightly bolder, heavier brush. The spatial recession and naturalism of the figure and the animals suggests European influence. Through this evolving aesthetic language, artists found new ways to introduce visual metaphors that enhanced and deepened the narrative rather than strictly plotting it.

It is important to note that under the patronage of Salim/Jahangir, the artworks, detached from their traditional illustrative function, could stand alone as loaded symbols in the form of album folios. In the *Salim Album*, for example, the image took on as much importance as the word. In these folios, verses and paintings illustrate and complement each other; the image itself carries as much narrative as the text.[71]

71 Rice suggests that "the prose and the poetic inscriptions, of course, are responses to the images, and not the reverse" ("The Emperor's Eye," 45).

In this chapter, by discussing a small selection of key images of yogis in painting from around 1500 to around 1630, I have explored the formation and development of an Indo-Muslim devotional vocabulary. A survey of artworks from this time studied in direct relation to religious literature also provides clear evidence of the phenomenon of interreligious exchange over a period that traverses dynastic divisions. Despite great stylistic innovations of the Mughal era, there were key thematic and iconographic continuities linking the painting of the period with a longer tradition. The figure of the yogi, both in literature and in painting, is a fascinating example of this continuity; one that became a narrative counterpart for the Indian Sufi. By exploring some formative depictions of devotion in Indo-Muslim painting, this chapter provides an important building block to discuss later artworks from the Shah Jahan period and beyond. The visual language established through depictions of Yogis was pivotal for the representation of saints and ascetics in later periods.

Sufis borrowed the garb of the yogi—both literally and metaphorically—because they identified with the ideals of the yogi. They inhabited the same environment, spoke the same language and in some cases even shared practices. Deeply rooted in the larger Mughal elite culture, these are the very sentiments that significantly influenced later patrons, such as Prince Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum, and their religious and intellectual personalities in the mid-seventeenth century. Over time, the idea of the renunciate yogi became so deeply embedded in the Indo-Muslim fold that today, in a post-colonial, post-partition, acutely sectarian and politicized era of an "Islamized" Pakistan at perpetual loggerheads with a "Hindutva" India, the yogi continues to resonate in the popular imagination, evoking a deep sense of nostalgia steeped in both spiritual aspiration and a longing for unfettered love and reunion.

CHAPTER 3

Allegories, Symbols, and the "Marvelous Magic" of Imperial Mughal Painting

In the first year of his reign, young Emperor Akbar's fragile kingdom faced a major threat. A Hindu rebel by the name of Hemu had made allies with important Afghan and Rajput generals and was leading a major uprising against the Mughals. After a fierce battle, the thirteen-year-old emperor's forces defeated and captured Hemu. When he was brought to Akbar's feet, his regent Bayram Khan urged him to behead the rebel. Akbar refused, giving a mysterious reason for his actions. In Abu'l Fazl's version of this anecdote given in the *Akbarnāma*, the author describes a miracle attributed to the emperor that stopped him from the beheading:

> One day in H.M. Jahanbani's [Emperor Humayun's] library, the divine compendium, i.e., the prince [Akbar], had turned his attention to drawing in order to sharpen his mind, and with his inspired brush (*qalam-i ilhami*) he drew the picture of a man whose limbs were all scattered apart. One of those lucky enough to be in his presence saw the marvelous drawing and asked about it. He replied, "This is a picture of Hemu." (At that time neither the name nor anything else about Hemu was known.) Those who heard did not understand, but they refrained from asking further. Then, on the day that Bayram Khan asked and urged him to put Hemu to the sword with his own hand, he said, "I took care of this conceited person back on the day when I took him limb from limb." He was referring to the time of the drawing.[1]

We will never know if Akbar the artist ever had this mystical intuition about a future rebel while making a drawing of a dismembered man, or if the royal mouthpiece Abu'l Fazl conjured this anecdote to increase his patron's sacrosanct aura. What is undeniable is that for Akbar and his historian, images had what Azfar Moin calls a "talismanic effect."[2] And even though Abu'l Fazl had a vested interest in attributing this effect to the emperor so as to magnify

1 Abu al-Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, ed. Wheeler Thackston, 8 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), III:129.
2 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 188.

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his exceptionality and elevate his saintly status, the Mughal court was by no means unique in putting its faith in the image. Providing ample historical and literary evidence, recent studies in Islamic art history have shown that for many medieval and early modern Muslim societies, figural depictions embodied a real presence. Images acted as gateways that linked depiction with the person depicted. Portraits of the Prophet, his family, and other important Muslims including saints were kissed, rubbed, and prayed over. Images showing idols, portraits of infamous enemies, and rivals were attacked, rubbed out, or scratched out. Furthermore, in Persian and Hindavi romances, the portrait of the beloved became a gateway of communication between estranged lovers. In all such examples, figural depiction embodies a liminal space, like an ontological mirror that reflects the higher reality of *maʿnī* in the outer form of *ṣūrat*. The same word *ṣūrat* is used in Persian to describe the term "portrait." The Hemu anecdote aligns with Abu'l Fazl's explanation of depiction in the *Taṣvīrkhāna*, in which he says that the outer image—*ṣūrat*—has the ability to lead the viewer to the "possessor of the form," that is, to the real or essential reality of the person depicted.[3]

In addition to employing this magical role, artists also used images as visual allegories in the Mughal atelier. Beginning with the last Timurid prince, Husain Bayqara's court (r. 1469–1506) in Herat, manuscript paintings began to convey meanings detached from the immediate story being illustrated. By the time that Jahangir had his artists depict his dreams in the form of visual metaphors in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the convention of the visual allegory had become part of the greater Persianate culture.[4] Rather than evoking shared, familiar Sufi morals and ethics, Jahangiri artists broke with tradition and used this device to creatively express subjective ideals connected to one specific monarch and his place in a cosmic history.

In this chapter, I explore the various ontological roles of figural depiction as witnessed in the Mughal court. In particular, I focus on the three most influential emperors, Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan. Various conventions explored

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3 This idea is linked to what Ibn al-ʿArabi termed *al-aʿyān al-thābita*, or immutable entities. Each thing or being in creation has its own ideal residing in the supra-temporal sphere of God-knowledge. That is its essential or inner reality that is beyond existence as such. "The immutable entities are the things themselves 'before' they are given existence in the world" (Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 84). See also Krista Gulbransen, "Inscribing and Circumscribing the Portrait: A Study in Mughal-Rajput Cultural Translation," in *Bridging Heaven and Earth: Art and Architecture in South Asia, 3rd Century* BCE*–21st Century*, ed. Rose Laxshmi (New Delhi: Dev Publishers, 2016), 262.

4 For a survey focusing on visual allegories in Persian painting, their emergence and meaning, and the role of Sufism in shaping these metaphors, see Chad Kia, *Art Allegory and the Rise of Shiism in Iran, 1487–1565* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 21–46.

and established in their workshops were foundational for later images of devotion, not only within the Mughal sphere but also regionally across South Asia. By focusing on the most significant Mughal rulers, this chapter offers an opportunity to discuss familiar artworks in a new light. My central aim is to demonstrate how indispensable the role of Sufism, and devotion in general, was for Hindustani painting. An ancillary goal is to present new interpretations of well-known paintings, thereby redressing some entrenched ideas about these artworks espoused by earlier scholarship.

1 Akbar: The Saint-King

From early in his reign, Akbar's court gave central importance to the art of painting as a conveyor of meaning. Perhaps having practical knowledge of the artform coupled with an inability to read or write increased the significance of figural depiction for the emperor as well as for those around him.[5] This training was passed on to him by two masters of the Mughal atelier, Mir Syed ʿAli and Khwaja ʿAbd al-Samad, who came to India from the Safavid court in Iran via Kabul with Akbar's father Humayun (r. 1530–40 and 1555–56). Abu'l Fazl explains that when Akbar as a prince started to learn painting in Delhi, both master artists "were in attendance to explain the techniques of this marvelous craft."[6] As attested by one late-Humayun period painting, in which the prince is depicted presenting his own artwork to his father, Akbar learned Persian techniques practiced in the Safavid court (Fig. 47). Along with technique, he would also have learned the metaphysical significance of depiction, what Abu'l Fazl in the *Taṣvīrkhāna* chapter calls the "marvelous magic," from the two Persian masters. Numerous album prefaces testify to the ontological role of painting that was well-established by the mid-sixteenth century in Persian and Central Asian centers. This "matrix of presence" is reflected in images of devotion from the late-Humayun/early-Akbar period as well.

An important yet understudied album from the late-Humayun or early-Akbar period is the *Fitzwilliam Album* (assembled ca. 1555–60), of which only

5 There are several surveys, often accompanying museum catalogues, focusing on Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan period painting. Some recent, influential surveys include Susan Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor: The Art of the Book, 1560–1660* (London: V&A Publications, 2002); Jeremiah Losty and Malini Roy, *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire: Manuscripts and Paintings in the British Library* (London: British Library, 2012); and Mace, DeLuca, and Ashtiany, *Mughal Paintings*.

6 Abu'l-Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, III:127–29.

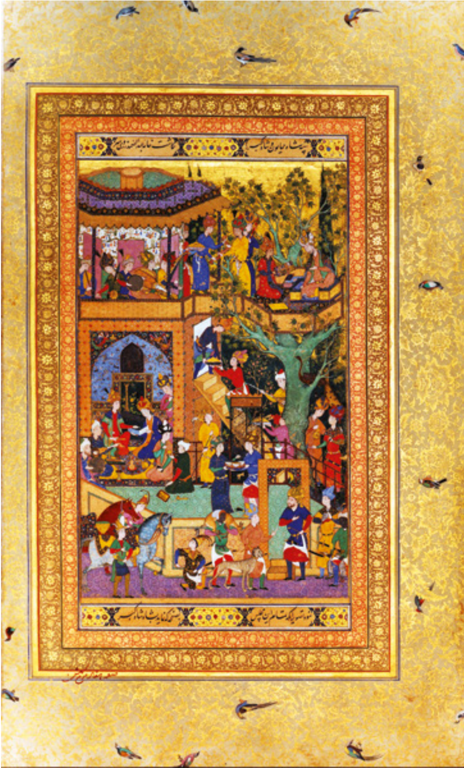

FIGURE 47
Prince Akbar presenting a painting to Humayun, by ʿAbd al-Samad, ca. 1550–1556, from the *Gulshan Album*. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Golestan Palace Library, Tehran, Ms. 1668, fol. 70a
PHOTO: AFTER *IRANIAN MASTERPIECES OF PERSIAN PAINTING* (TEHRAN MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE INSTITUTE FOR THE PROMOTION OF VISUAL ARTS, TEHRAN: 2005), 452

a handful folios survive.[7] The album consisted of bifolios that had matching representations. Most are accompanied by couplets from Persian *ghazals* or by quatrains. One double spread includes portraits of kneeling angels facing each other (Fig. 48 and 49).[8] The angel on the right-hand page (Fig. 49) is framed by a quatrain from a famous Persian medieval Sufi poet, Abu Saʿid Abu'l Khair (967–1049), which reads:

7 Milo C. Beach, *Early Mughal Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 17–49.

8 Including thematically related compositions across two facing album pages was by no means unique to the Mughals. This was a standard compositional scheme practiced by Ottoman, Central Asian, and Persian album compilers. See Emine Fetvacı, *The Album of the World Emperor: Cross-Cultural Collecting and the Art of Album-Making in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 67, plates 34 and 35.

FIGURE 48 Angel, from the *Fitzwilliam Album*, ca. 1550. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 29 × 19 cm. British Museum, London (1948,1009,0.54)
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FIGURE 49 Angel, from the *Fitzwilliam Album*, ca. 1550. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 29 × 18.7 cm. British Museum, London (1948,1009,0.53)
© THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

God, in whose power's grasp (*qabẓa-i qudrat*) is the world,
has given you two things, both of which are good:
A character with which you can love someone
and an outer form (*ṣūrat*) through which someone can love you.[9]

On the opposite folio, the angel is accompanied by a variation of a couplet from the renowned Sufi poet of Shiraz, Shaikh Saʿdi (b. 1210): "Tell the Chinese silk painter to look at the portrait (*ṣūrat*) of his [the beloved's] face / Either make a portrait like this, or abstain from painting!"[10] The portraits were likely made by a Mughal artist working for Emperor Humayun or Emperor Akbar in a Central Asian style. Iconographic features, such as the headgear of the angel on the right-hand folio that bears a resemblance with the Humayun-period crown called the *tāj-i ʿizzat*, suggest Mughal innovations.[11] Additionally, there are subtle stylistic innovations that move away from contemporaneous Central Asian and Persian painting conventions and herald what would soon become the trademark of a burgeoning Mughal visual language. However, despite these formal developments, thematically the two folios represent an Islamicate cultural consciousness expressed through widely circulated Persianate metaphors.

In Islamic cosmology, angels play a central role as divine agents. As attested by popular medieval cosmographical treatises such as the *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt* [*Wonders of Creation*] of Qazwini (ca. 1203–83), the world of angels (*ʿālam-i malakūt*) was believed to be closer to the world of absolute truth-reality (*ʿālam-i hāhūt* or *ḥaqīqat*) than our material realm (Fig. 50).[12] As Chittick explains, "the imaginal world is more real than the corporeal world, since it is situated closer to the World of Light, though it is less real than the spiritual and luminous realm of the angels"[13] (Fig. 3). Rooted in Quranic and hadith literature, and popularized in the medieval world by Ibn Sina, Muslim angelology saw each created world in the cosmic hierarchy as governed by a specific angel. According to this system, it is the angels who activate God's power, *qudrat*, in

9 Abu Saʿid Abu'l-Khair, *rubaʾi* number 108, https://ganjoor.net/abusaeed/robaee-aa/sh108/.

10 Shaikh Saʿdi Shirazi, ghazal number 542, verse 3, https://ganjoor.net/saadi/divan/ghazals/sh542/.

11 For a discussion on the *tāj-i ʿizzat*, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 123–27, and Laura Parody, "Tracing the Rise of Mughal Portraiture: The Kabul Corpus, c. 1545–55," in *Portraiture in South Asia since the Mughals: Art, Representation and History*, ed. Crispin Branfoot (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 51–61.

12 There are numerous illustrated manuscripts from all across the Muslim world. For an early modern South Asian example, see the *ʿAjaʾib al-makhluqat* of Qazwini from the Harvard Museums (1972.3).

13 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 14–15.

FIGURE 50
Angel Ruh holding the celestial spheres, from *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt* of Qazwini, Iran, ca. 1550. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 30.4 × 21.2 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (EA1978.2573)
© ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

the cosmos and maintain its balance and harmony.[14] In both the microcosm of the inner human being and the macrocosm of the outer world, angelic perfection is reflected through their outer beauty as well. According to a hadith, the archangel Gabriel used to assume the outer form of Dihya Kalbi, who was known as the most beautiful contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad.[15] Ibn al-ʿArabi describes this phenomenon, in which Gabriel assumed the form of a beautiful man for both Muhammad and Mary, as a "sound ontological presence which possesses embodied forms worn by meanings (*maʿnī*) and spirits."[16]

Whether the medieval Sufi poets had angels in mind when composing the verses added to the *Fitzwilliam Album* or not, their juxtaposition with portraits of angels imbues this early Mughal album and its sixteenth-century viewer with an "ontological presence." The devotional Sufi theme highlighting the

14 In Islamic eschatology, two angels, *nakīr* and *munkar*, test the faith of the deceased after they have been lowered into their graves.

15 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 396; Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 20.

16 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 355.

role of *ṣūrat* further establishes this connection. The compiler of the album intended all the accompanying verses to be read in confluence with the paintings, as an aid to enhancing the depiction's meaning. There is a clear relation between word and image throughout the existing pages of the *Fitzwilliam Album*. For instance, one folio, now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, shows a prince, possibly a young Akbar himself, riding on a horse with an open book of poetry in his hands (Fig. 51).[17] The two supporting verses are from a Hafiz *ghazal*, and clearly expand on the subject of the painting:

> I give you council, listen! Don't make excuses
> Accept whatever the compassionate friend tells you
> Take delight from conjugating with the faces of the youthful ones
> For life is ambushed by the trickery of the aging world.[18]

Yet again the album evokes the theme of beauty, but in this case, it uses a different culturally and spiritually charged metaphor, that of viewing "the faces of the youthful ones."[19]

In addition to the poetry, stylistic and compositional choices also help elevate the ontological status of the two angels. In his brief survey of the two folios, Beach notices that their representation is "antithetical to the spatial interests developed in even the earliest of Akbar's known commissions."[20] The overall flattened surface, with minimal sense of depth, takes the figures out of a world of human interaction and elevates them into an abstract or supra-corporeal realm. The arabesques from the background crawl onto the robe of the angel in Figure 49, fixing him into his two-dimensional surface. As if to completely shatter the illusion of depth, the angel holds with both his hands a purple flower that is part of the floral design. By this gesture, he inhabits two different spaces or dimensions at once. The fluttering sash and the twisting wings introduce a dynamic axiality to the composition, magnifying his identity as an agent of divine power. The whirring angel wings in particular had an established Persianate iconographic precedent that Mughal artists continued to employ for a long time (Fig. 52). Eventually, by the Jahangir period, the Persianate angel was replaced by the Renaissance cherub. The role and

17 For a brief stylistic discussion of the painting, see Gulbransen, "From the Court of Akbar," 28–29.
18 Hafiz, *The Complete Ghazals of Hafez*, 256.
19 See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of this theme.
20 Beach, *Early Mughal Painting*, 39.

FIGURE 51 Prince on horseback, from the *Fitzwilliam Album*, ca. 1550. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 32.1 × 22.9 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art: 125th anniversary acquisition. Alvin O. Bellak Collection, 2004-149-12r

FIGURE 52
Seated Angel, by Muhammadi Bek, Safavid, ca. 1535. Ink and gold on paper. 9.3 × 6.9 cm. Boston Museum of Fine Art, Bartlett Collection—Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund, 14.568

meaning of these celestial messengers, however, remained deeply rooted in a shared Islamicate ontology.

Despite iconographic continuities, stylistic differences between contemporaneous artworks could signal different registers of meaning. The hieratic composition of the *Fitzwilliam Album* folios stands in contrast to Mughal depictions of other angelic beings made in or around the same time period. In the illustrated *Ṭūṭīnāma* [*Tales of the Parrot*] manuscript, widely considered to be the first large undertaking of the Akbar atelier, a wicked fairy (*perī*) is shown in a remarkably similar iconography as the *Fitzwilliam Album* angels (Fig. 53). Yet, the heavier modeling of the body, careful rendering of the wings and face, and a distinctly human facial expression speak of a being "acting in the world of men, whereas in the *Fitzwilliam Album* they exist in a flattened, exclusively pictorial space."[21] Kavita Singh has convincingly shown how Mughal artists represented different levels of meaning, sometimes even in the same painting, by alternating between more archaic Persianate styles and the newly formed Mughal vocabulary.[22] Often, the flatter pictorial space signaled the world of supra-formal reality. As we will see in subsequent chapters, this compositional

21 Beach, *Early Mughal Painting*, 38–39.
22 Kavita Singh, *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens: Mughal Painting between Persia and Europe* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2017).

FIGURE 53
The third suitor, who is an archer, shoots the wicked fairy who has imprisoned Zuhra. He rides on a magic horse prepared by the second suitor and is led to the spot by the divining prowess of the first, from a *Tuti-nama* (*Tales of a Parrot*): thirty-fourth night, ca. 1560. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 20.3 × 14 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. A. Dean Perry 1962.279.226.a
CREATIVE COMMONS PUBLIC DOMAIN, CCO 1.0 UNIVERSAL (CCO 1.0)

device became integral for depicting saints in mid-seventeenth century Mughal painting.

In both folios, the poetry indicates that the angels are possessors of beauty. Since outer form is inherently a manifestation of inner meaning, the beauty of their depiction leads to their inner reality. It is precisely in this connotation that the anecdote of Hemu's portrait should be read as well: outer form magically contains the real or inner presence of the person depicted. In some special cases that inner presence can even be manipulated through the person's *ṣūrat*. Hemu's dismemberment on the flattened space of the page was a foreshadowing, perhaps the supernatural cause, for his eventual defeat and capture. After all, this is exactly how the science of magic works in the Indo-Muslim world.[23]

The two angels from the *Fitzwilliam Album* are an example of how the early Mughal atelier inherited devotional themes and motifs from a Persianate literary and visual lexicon during the first decade of Akbar's reign. Another motif in Akbar period painting—discussed at length in Chapter Two—that was

23 Emma Flatt, "Spices, Smells and Spells: The Use of Olfactory Substances in the Conjuring of Spirits," *South Asian Studies* 21, no. 1 (2016): 3–21; Flatt, *Courts of the Deccan Sultanates*, 210–67; David Freedberg, *The Power of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 166–67, 272–76, 396, and 422–23.

part of the greater Persianate imagination was of the saint or ascetic, often tied to the theme of a prince or king visiting a sage in the wilderness (Fig. 35). Over time, as this theme developed under the Mughal emperor's supervision, its meaning morphed. This change reflects Akbar coming into his own as a ruler. The image of the emperor, both in court and in painting, began to gradually replace the saint as the nexus between earthly and divine power. Local Indic ideals of kingship also started to influence the court. By the late 1570s, Akbar had assumed the role of the emperor of two worlds, *maʿnī* and *ṣūrat*, while court chronicles projected him as the worker of miracles and the sanctified spokesperson of God on earth.[24] Abu'l Fazl goes so far as to say that, given Akbar's status as a reflection of God's divine light (*farr-i izadī*), he has no need for intermediaries.[25] In the introduction to the *Akbarnāma*, Abu'l Fazl uses analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) coupled with a flowery rhetoric to construct Akbar's dual persona as saint and king of the world (*pādshāh*):

> So long as the leadership of people of isolation (which is called sainthood) and leadership of the worldly (which is called sovereignty) were separate in the world, inner struggle was rife among human beings. Today, however, by virtue of high-mindedness, prescience, great patience, all-encompassing kindness, appreciation of everyone, and perfect recognition of God, these two lofty ranks, which are the foundations of material [*ṣūrat*] and spiritual [*maʿnī*] order, have been bestowed upon this opener of the storehouses of wisdom, this keeper of the keys to divine treasuries [Akbar].[26]

Abu'l Fazl's repeated use of these terms in relation to the emperor as ruler over the two worlds—inner meaning (spiritual) and outward form (material)—elevates the king to the status of *al-insān al-kāmil*, thus bypassing the need for saintly intercession.

This shift in focus came when on one occasion in 1578 the emperor, separated from his hunting party, was overcome with heat and exhaustion and entered into a *hāl*, or a trance-like state, in which he felt God communicating with him directly.[27] A *hāl* is typically associated with practitioners of Sufism and is thought of as a temporary state in which the mystic loses himself in the

24 For a detailed discussion of this theme and its connection to the emperors' political personae, see Franke, "Emperors of Surat and Ma'ni," 123–49.

25 Abu'l Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, 1:20–21.

26 Abu'l Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, 1:19.

27 Abu al-Fazl, *Akbarnama*, ed. Henry Beveridge, 3 vols. (Calcutta: Calcutta Baptist Mission Press, 1897–1939), II:520–24.

presence of the divine. Muslim culture considers many antinomian dervishes to be perpetually drowned in a *ḥāl*, or spiritual drunkenness, and they are thus sometimes known as mad (*majnūn*) or intoxicated (*majẕūb*). The Victoria and Albert Museum's *Akbarnāma* (1586–87) page illustrating Abu'l Fazl's passage situates Akbar in a setting that was usually the haunt of wandering dervishes (Fig. 54).[28] The emperor, sitting cross-legged under the shade of a tree, is shown at a fair distance from the city, isolated from the chaos of the hunting party. The strong diagonals and swirling compositional format of the painting converge upon the swooning Akbar. By transposing the emperor into a landscape and *hāl* typically associated with images of holy men—particularly the antinomian, wandering ascetics—the painting appropriates Sufi ideals to affirm the king's identity as *al-insān al-kāmil*.

Having taken the intermediary saintly presence out of the picture, in the mature phase of Akbar's reign, court artists projected the emperor's sanctity through two overlapping devotional motifs. Importantly, neither were part of mainstream Sufism. One was the presence of Akbar himself in manuscript illustrations as a sacred nexus. The other theme was the depiction of a particular breed of antinomian ascetics, often associated with groups such as the already mentioned Qalandars. Moin demonstrates how antinomian, or "socially deviant" Sufis, had an enigmatic entanglement with several Persianate courts in the early modern period, and the court of Akbar was no exception. "While rulers boasted in proclamations and edicts how they had put an end to such groups, in practice they deftly accommodated these spectacular deviants and used their gripping displays of religiosity to enhance their own charisma."[29] The visual and literary material suggests that Akbar went a step further and appropriated key aspects of these spectacular deviants to forge his own persona as spiritual guide.

One example of Akbar's presence in images of devotion is from the previously mentioned *Akbarnāma* folio (ca. 1586–87) in the Chester Beatty Library collection (Fig. 35), in which an adolescent Akbar pays a visit to the Hindu sage Baba Bilas who lived on the outskirts of Ghazni.[30] The representation of this historical meeting clearly contributed to the creation of a kingly persona that embodied both heavenly and worldly prestige.

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28 Gian Carlo Calza, ed., *Akbar: The Great Emperor of India* (Rome: Fondazione, Roma Museo, 2012), 266, cat. no.v.1. For a discussion on the re-dating of the *Akbarnāma*, see John Seyller, "Codicological Aspects of the Victoria and Albert Museum *Akbarnāma* and Their Historical Implications," *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (1990): 379–87.

29 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 93.

30 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:131–33, color plate 14.

FIGURE 54 Akbar lost in the desert while hunting wild asses, from the *Akbarnāma*, by Kesav and Mahesh, ca. 1587. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 33.4 × 20.1 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum, London (IS.2-1986, folio 84)
© VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

Another painting from the same period, made by ʿAbd al-Samad, shows a prince visiting a hermit in his cave (Fig. 55). All the visual markers would seem to place the painting within the long-established Persianate convention of a prince or king visiting a gnostic. And yet in this artwork—which Sheila Canby suggests represents a young Emperor Akbar—the roles are reversed.[31] It is Akbar who is depicted seated under the symbolic plane tree, elevated slightly higher than the hermit in the cave. The fountain of immortality replete with swimming fish also flows from under *his* seat. The fact that Akbar had the master of the imperial workshop reconfigure this theme strongly suggests that he was deeply invested in forging a new imperial identity that consciously set him apart from his predecessors. According to Carl Ernst, "the symbolism of world-domination inherent in the Mongol political tradition was given an ingenious philosophical and mystical twist in the writings of Akbar's minister Abu L-Fadl, who interpreted Akbar's role in terms of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of Ishrāqī Illuminationism and the Sufi doctrine of the Perfect Human."[32] This newly forged role of the saint-king was also evident in daily court rituals. For instance, starting with Akbar, it became common practice for emperors to present themselves almost ritualistically on the palace balcony, known as the *darśanī jharokā*, for public veneration.[33] The Mughal polity positioned the emperor as the seat of divine splendor, *farr*, a concept taken directly from both Indic and Persianate ideas of sanctity, in which the avatar or saint is the locus of otherworldly presence.

In a second artwork by ʿAbd al-Samad, the image of Akbar as a sacred center converges with the figure of the Qalandar (Fig. 29). As considered briefly in Chapter 2, a mendicant is shown approaching the king carrying a horn similar to those of the *jōgīs* from the *Chandāyan* folio, also discussed in Chapter Two (Fig. 22) and wearing comparable earrings and bangles. He also dons a leopard skin clasped around him like a cape. Additionally, his short tunic, begging bowl, leather pouch, and small daggers reveals the familiar trappings of a Qalandar. The ascetic also has a slash mark on his right arm, hinting at the common practice among Qalandars of inflicting burns and gashes on themselves as a ritual of self-control (Fig. 56).

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31 Sheila R. Canby, "Mughal Painting: Princes and Potentates," *Arts of Asia* 28, no. 2 (1998): 111.

32 Carl Ernst, "The Limits of Universalism in Islamic Thought: The Case of Indian Religions," *The Muslim World* 101, no. 1 (2011): 1–19.

33 "One of the customs of the Mughals adopted from their Hindu subjects was *darshan*, the king's appearance to his subjects at the special palace window known as *jharoka*" (Schmitz, *Islamic and Indian Manuscripts*, 165–66). Also see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 233.

FIGURE 55 A prince visits a hermit, attributed to ʿAbd al-Samad, India, ca. 1585–90. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 39.7 cm × 31.4 cm
© THE AGA KHAN MUSEUM, AKM122

FIGURE 56
Akbar and a Dervish (detail), signed by 'Abd al-Samad, India, ca. 1586–87. Opaque watercolor, ink and silver on paper. 39.1 cm × 25.4 cm
© THE AGA KHAN MUSEUM, AKM141

The *nīm qalam* drawing uses familiar tropes associated with scenes of devotion. The encounter between the emperor and the ascetic is staged in the wilderness, away from the distant city seen at the top right fading behind the rising hills. The fountain of life, coursing out of the recognizable plane tree, encircles the lower half of the drawing. The usual imperial retinue stands in check. The leashed dog held by the falconer at the lower right corner is possibly the dervish's companion animal, but is not considered pure enough to enter the emperor's presence. The paired animals in the background and the bird perched on the branch add to the tranquil natural setting. By contrast, the groom with his head cocked at an angle, the horse whinnying and stamping its feet, the large ram jutting into the scene to the right of the Qalandar, and the scurrying squirrel on the tree trunk add an undercurrent of frenetic energy to a composition that is typical of Akbar-period painting. Schematically speaking, there is one central feature of the composition that shatters the longstanding hierarchy found in representations of royalty visiting sages. Instead of the ascetic, who traditionally takes center stage, it is the young Akbar who is shown as the focal figure and the implied locus of God's immanence. Unlike the countless examples that serve to illustrate popular Sufi stories in both Persian and Mughal manuscripts, such as the already discussed *Iskandarnāma* (Fig. 30), the antinomian dervish is actually shown standing below the prince, on a smaller platform. It is as if the young Akbar has stolen the dervish's spiritual aura for himself.

The enthusiasm for depicting wandering dervishes in the Akbar period presents a contrast to representations of mainstream Sufis. Given its popularity

FIGURE 57
Jalal al-Din Rumi visiting ʾAttar at Nishapur when ʾAttar presented him with a copy of Asrarnama (Book of Secrets), *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, 1603. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 26.2 × 15.2 cm
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, OR.1362, F. 287R

across the Persian cosmopolis, Akbar also had a copy made of ʿAbd al-Rahman Jami's *Nafaḥāt*, the fifteenth-century biography of Muslim saints. Now in the British Library, it is possible that this is the same copy that Dara Shikoh gave to Jahanara Begum in 1639, when she started showing interest in Sufism.[34] Although generously illustrated, the paintings are devoid of the animated linework, attention to iconographic details, or inventive compositions found in representations of antinomian ascetics. Instead, the compositions are staid and lack what Linda Leach calls, "sensitivity to human life and dramatic situations"[35] (Fig. 57). In an imperial framework in which the ruler fashioned himself as the spokesperson for the spiritual, there was little excitement for the development of devotional portraiture dedicated to known saints.

Instead, the Akbar period saw a surge in depictions of antinomian Sufis. In the last two decades of his reign, individual figural portraits often made in the

34 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 96.
35 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:159.

FIGURE 58
Begtashi dervish, ca. 1590, British Museum, London (1983,0727,0.1). Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 19 × 12.8 cm
© THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

siāh qalam (black ink) or *nim qalam* techniques by some of his favorite artists such as Basavan, became common. These folios were incorporated into later Mughal albums, including the previously discussed drawing of a Qalandar from the *Salim Album* (Fig. 42). Another isolated album folio made in the 1590s, now in the British Museum, portrays a deviant mystic (Fig. 58). He is shown with an animated, billowing red wrap, walking across the picture plane from right to left, carrying a golden staff that snakes into the head of a dragon. The staff, along with the circular, gold belt buckle fastening his tunic suggests that he is a member of a particular antinomian lineage popular throughout Turkey and Central Asia called the Begtashis. The figure is identifiable as a Begtashi dervish from an Ottoman ethnographic study in the British Museum, *The Habits of the Grand Signor's Court*, made in ca. 1620 for a British traveler, that contains examples of Muslim social groups (including drawings of dervishes) from across the greater Balkans-to-Bengal-complex (Fig. 59).[36]

36 Fetvacı, *Album of the World Emperor*, 70–71.

FIGURE 59
Begtashi dervish, from *The Habits of the Grand Signor's Court*, 1620. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 20.7 × 13.7 cm. British Museum, London (1928,0323,0.46.90)
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Additional portraits also include "Hindu" and Persian dervishes. Examples such as these hailing from the Mughal and Ottoman worlds indicate how widely these wandering dervishes traveled in the Persian cosmopolis, freely traversing political boundaries and becoming key agents of transculturation. It should be noted that depictions of antinomian ascetics, both Hindu and Muslim, were not exclusively allegorical. In the late Akbar period, master artists such as Govardhan and Basavan captured the daily practices and rituals of dervishes and *jōgīs*. Some outstanding early examples are found collated together in the *Gulshan Album* made for Emperor Jahangir in 1610/11, toward the beginning of his reign.[37]

37 Most of the album folios are in Tehran. The entire album has never been published in its entirety. Milo Beach has done the most extensive study of the folios. See, for example, Beach's lecture, "The *Gulshan Album*—Jahangir as Collector and Patron," from the Al Thani Lecture Series on the Art of the Mughal World, October 18, 2016, which can be found here: https://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/lectures/gulshan-album. Once the folios are made available for scholarly research, the album will provide crucial insight into Jahangir's burgeoning patronage of devotional painting. The first known grand album, *Gulshan Album* serves as a prototype for later deluxe albums, such as the *Shah Jahan Album* and the *Dara Shikoh Album*. Also see Diamond and Aitken, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, 227.

When deviant dervishes from the Akbar period are compared to contemporaneous representations from the Ottoman Empire or Iran, certain stylistic differences do become apparent. Figure 60, which is most likely a late-sixteenth-century Persian or Ottoman painting, shows a mystic with common attributes and in a remarkably similar posture to the *Salim Album* dervish (Fig. 42). They are both walking, with one foot in front of the other, from the left to the right. They also share many of the familiar trappings of Qalandars, including the companion animal. However, the Safavid or Ottoman-period mendicant busy tying his turban around a tall conical hat is rendered in flat washes of color with hardly any attention to three-dimensional form or volume, other than in his face, which has a delicately shaded beard and mustache. The flattened and forward stooping figure—contained within a swooping black calligraphic outline—is an idealized rendition of the Qalandar compared to the Mughal example, which reveals a subtle awareness of three-dimensional perspective. The relative naturalism of the Akbar period is well known for blending illusionistic rendering techniques derived from European influence with the comparatively flat and calligraphic visual sensibility typical of Ottoman, Safavid, and local South Asian schools of painting. The stylistic innovations made by Akbar's *taṣvīrkhāna* reflect innovations made by the court in the political arena.

Rather than challenging the powerful mainstream Sufi orders of the Chishtis, Qadiris, Naqshbandis, and others, Akbar chose to align his persona with antinomian Sufis. He "openly acknowledged his patronage of radical and antinomian Sufi groups who venerated him as divine."[38] This helped him sidestep intermediaries as well as elaborate prescribed prayers and ritualistic observances that are part and parcel of mainstream Sufism. By identifying with the antinomian mystic, Akbar could openly incorporate non-Muslim practices into his daily routine of ritual, such as Indic ceremonies of venerating the sun, and yet still remain—even if contentiously—within the sphere of Islam. Living on the margins of society, antinomians "cut a figure that was awesome and jarring, eye catching and repulsive, sacred and dangerous."[39] Most importantly, this figure was considered to be in a constant state of inspiration, his subversive acts seen as divinely inspired.

38 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 158.
39 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 92.

FIGURE 60 A Herevi Dervish and his dog. Ottoman Turkey, ca. 1590. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 27 × 19 cm (MAO1219)
© RMN-GRAND PALAIS / ART RESOURCE, NY. PHOTO: JEAN-GILLES BERIZZI

2 Jahangir: The King of Universal Manifestation

Emperor Jahangir had a complicated relationship with his father's legacy. As Salim, he rebelled and established his own court in Allahabad. Once crowned as emperor, he embraced key aspects of devotion introduced by Akbar as part of his kingly persona. He continued to embody the saintly status that Akbar had crafted for himself, in which the emperor-as-guide (*pīr*) would initiate disciples (*murīd*). In painting and literature alike, he was seen as the king of two worlds, *ṣūrat* and *maʿnī*. By the Jahangir period, the appropriated Sufi practice of spiritual discipleship, *pīrī-murīdī*, had become symbolic of guiding individuals—mostly nobles, generals, and other royals—into the protection of and subservience to the Mughal emperor. "Thus among the Mughals, Jahangir was the first to inherit a fully functional system of sacred kingship, in which the sovereign was both the political leader and spiritual chief of the realm."[40] To impress his sacrosanct image on to his court, Jahangir often referred to himself as a "Universal Manifestation" (*maẓhar-i kull*) of God.[41]

And yet, at the same time, he also distanced himself from his father's antinomian legacy by reintroducing important mainstream Indo-Islamic features into his life and court. The most significant of these was to at least partially rehabilitate the role of the saint as an intermediary. Two important Jahangir-period sources—the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* [*The Assemblies of Jahangir*] recorded by the courtier ʿAbd al-Sattar, and the emperor's own autobiography, the *Jahāngīrnāma*—attest to the emperor regularly beseeching the intervention of both Hindu and Muslim saints, going great distances to visit them, and reciting their verses in private assemblies. He once rewarded the Naqshbandi Sufi Shaikh Husain Jami handsomely for having accurately predicted his accession to the throne. He was also very fond of the Qadiri saint Miyan Mir of Lahore. But the *ṭarīqa* he remained closest to was the Chishti order. On at least two occasions, while out hunting, Jahangir made a vow in the name of the founder of the Chishti order in India, Muʿin al-Din Chishti (d. 1236), that if successful in the hunt he would distribute the meat to the poor in the saint's name.[42] This is the same saint whose mausoleum Akbar famously walked to as a barefoot pilgrim early in his reign. During his three-year stay in the city of Ajmer, between 1615 and 1618, Jahangir visited Muʿin al-Din's shrine nine times,

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40 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 177.

41 ʿAbd al-Sattar ibn Qasim Lahuri, Riza Allah Shah Arif Nawshahi, and Muin Nizami, *Majalis-i Jahangiri: Majlisha-i Shabanah-i Darbar-i Nur al-Din Jahangir* (Tehran: Markaz-i Pizhuhishi-i Miras-i Maktub, 1385), 34 and 71.

42 ʿAbd al-Sattar, Nawshahi, and Nizami, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, 160–64; Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 199.

on one occasion donating a gigantic cauldron made in Agra that could feed 5,000 people.[43] He also held regular *samāʿ* gatherings, popular among Chishti Sufis in which Qawwals would sing Sufi devotional verses during spiritual gatherings. For his own musical evenings, Jahangir most favored the poetry of the famous Chishti Sufi, Amir Khusro (1253–1325).[44]

To further validate his close affiliation with Sufis, there is evidence to suggest that the emperor used a rosary to recite daily litanies given to him by a Sufi master. In the epilogue to his hagiography *Mirʾāt ul-asrār* [*Mirror of Secrets*] (1654), written during the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, ʿAbd al-Rahman Chishti (d. 1683) makes it clear that Jahangir's retinue included a number of Sufis from different orders. On one occasion, when the Chishti Sufi author was accompanying the emperor on a trip back to the capital Agra from Ajmer, he heard that the emperor had summoned a Suharwardi shaikh by the name of Mir Syed Muhammad Gujarati for a private audience in the evening. Jahangir, portrayed in a confessional mood by ʿAbd al-Rahman Chishti, reiterated his faith in Islam before the Guajarati shaikh, attempting to dispel any doubts about his faith by adding, "the rosary that I recite in the morning and evening, God knows that I recite it not to worship the sun, but to conquer the sun, so that by the [power of the] names of God, it comes under my command."[45] According to this passage, Jahangir wanted to demonstrate to the Sufis that he had forsaken some of the questionable practices instigated by his father, such as worshipping the sun in the morning, that had caused much anxiety among Muslim religious scholars and mainstream Sufis. In fact, according to him, he had reversed the practice in such a way that he was using litanies that typically include the various names of God in order to subjugate nature. In the same passage, Jahangir goes on to confess that he has two sinful habits which he cannot overcome and asks Mir Syed Muhammad for guidance. One is his love for wine, the other is his inability to say the prescribed five daily prayers. After gently admonishing the emperor, the Sufi shaikh lauds him for his good intentions and for fulfilling his God-given duty as a just king. Importantly, he reminds Jahangir to "keep remembering God always, regarding Him as ever present and overseeing." In the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, ʿAbd al-Sattar regularly mentions Jahangir's evening ritual of counting the rosary. On one occasion he observes, "An hour of the night had passed. Since he arrived at the throne counting the

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43 Catherine Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), IV:118.

44 ʿAbd al-Sattar, Nawshahi, and Nizami, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, 155–56, 185; Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 109.

45 BL, MS Or. 216, ʿAbd al-Rahman Chishti, *Mirʾāt ul-asrār*, f. 507b.

rosary (*tasbīḥ*), a wondrous compassion and a wonderous generosity could be seen [radiating] from the One chosen by God [Jahangir]."[46]

His bringing the Sufi figure back into the Mughal cultural and courtly fold does not by any stretch of the imagination mean that Jahangir shed any of the saintly trappings he had inherited from his father. In fact, it can be argued that his use of a rosary could be another way to appropriate important symbols of the Sufi-saint for himself. By referring to himself as the *maẓhar-i kull*, or Universal Manifestation, he projected the saint-king ideal of the *insān al-kāmil* as fashioned by Akbar and his court. What becomes apparent is that Jahangir was a multilayered personality, and a far more complex figure than we acknowledge. Paintings made by his atelier also depict this ambivalent devotional timbre.

Under Jahangir, saints were cast as endorsers of imperial power and were framed within an allegorical visual language that was unprecedented. Performing their role in some of the most iconic paintings of the period, saints affirm the emperor's divine right to rule. This view of sovereignty was visualized through a new set of pictorial conventions that expanded the landscape of devotional representation and persisted into the reigns of the later Mughal kings of the eighteenth century as well. Dreamlike in their composition and astonishingly refined in terms of skill and execution, this group of paintings was most likely completed during or right after Jahangir's three-year sojourn at Ajmer, the city of the patron saint of the Mughal empire, Muʿin al-Din Chishti.[47]

As some of the most frequently discussed artworks from Mughal India, scholars have speculated on their possible meaning at length. Most scholars tend to see these depictions as overcompensating for Jahangir's growing political and physical frailties. Instead of a historically accurate portrait of an aging emperor weakened by opium and alcohol addiction and beginning to loosen his grip over his court, the paintings project him as a virile world-conqueror. Amina Okada echoes the dominant scholarly sentiment, deeply entrenched in a politico-centered art historical approach, when she concludes in her discussion of the famous painting showing Jahangir embracing Shah Abbas that "the scene, completely devoid of historical fact, is the brilliant if naïve expression of Jahangir's anxiety and insecurity."[48] What we often overlook in these discussions is the ontologically active role of the king in a multilayered cosmos.

46 ʿAbd al-Sattar, Nawshahi, and Nizami, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, 273. For other instances see pages 79, 121, 182, 241, and 255.

47 Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqaʿ*, 292.

48 Okada, *Indian Miniatures*, 55.

Rather than reducing these paintings to only reflect the anxieties of a powerful individual as interpreted through the lens of modern psychology or postmodern political theory, these artworks can at the same time be understood through an Indo-Muslim premodern cosmological worldview. In his discussion of this group of paintings, Moin has convincingly suggested that they should not be seen merely as historical, symbolic, or psychological representations, but instead as the staging of actions and events that unfold on a metaphysical plane.[49] Importantly, as I discuss below, on this plane of reality the Imaginal Realm of the macrocosm overlaps with the Imaginal Sphere of the microcosm through the medium of the dream-vision (*ru'yā*). An important recent study of this group of paintings done by Yael Rice in her forthcoming book, *The Brush of Insight: Artists and Agency at the Mughal Court*, has in particular been central for my own understanding of these artworks. In her chapter on Jahangir's "dream paintings," she provides a crucial context to the artworks by discussing the importance of dream interpretation in Muslim culture and the role of dream-visions in Islamic cosmology.[50] In addition to this insight, I should also point out that allegory, first as a literary device and then later as a visual convention, has been central for expressing practical moral, philosophical, and metaphysical ideas in Muslim culture from the earliest times.[51] As stated earlier in this chapter, Jahangir's artists added a new layer—albeit a uniquely subjective one, revolving around the emperor's own persona—to a rich tradition with a long history.

Whereas the Akbar period is best remembered for its illustrated manuscripts, the Jahangir and Shah Jahan periods are known for the production of *muraqqa*ʿs, albums bringing together disparate folios of calligraphy and paintings. One exquisite page from the *Minto Album* (ca. 1618) depicts a sage who is believed to be the twelfth-century saint Muʿin al-Din Chishti, painted by the

49 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 189–210.

50 Rice, *Brush of Insight*, Chapter 1. I am extremely grateful to Rice for sharing chapters from her forthcoming book with me.

51 "Composers of allegories were eminently aware that they participated in a unified literary tradition. They were intimately versed in the major contributions of their predecessors and frequently were influenced by, reacted against, or interacted with earlier works. As a result, the tradition as a whole displays a high measure of literary and intellectual self-consciousness and intertextual reference." Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna* (*Ibn Sînâ*)*: With a Translation of* The Book of the Prophet Muhammad's Ascent to Heaven (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 3. For an important source on allegory and storytelling in Sufism, see Cyrus Ali Zargar, *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2017).

artist Bichitr (Fig. 61).[52] In the *Minto Album* page, the figure is painted in profile wearing a white robe and turban and standing against a dark green background punctuated by a striking green halo illuminated with gold. Though imaginary, the representational language of the portrait stands in stark contrast to the more generalized depictions that characterize the Akbar-period representations of saints, such as the ones made for the *Nafaḥāt* manuscript. The striking naturalism of the figure, with its slightly stooped stance, painstakingly rendered beard, and wrinkled yet keenly alert face, evokes a living individual standing before the viewer. With a staff resting against his arm, Muʿin al-Din is shown presenting a globe mounted with a crown. At the top of the globe, just below the crown, is a golden key—the symbolic "key to both worlds" that the saints are said to possess. According to Susan Stronge, the page with the figure of the great Chishti saint would have been bound opposite a folio showing the figure of Jahangir also holding a globe (Fig. 62).[53]

In Jahangir's hand, the key is firmly fastened into the globe, as if unlocking the world. If we imagine the two figures facing each other as originally intended, spiritual authority appears to be crossing space and time to invest the emperor with dominion over both the temporal and spiritual worlds: the worlds of *ṣūrat* and *maʿnī*.[54] The minute gold inscription on the globe in the saint's hands affirms: "The key to the conquest of the two worlds is entrusted to your hands." Moin suggests that, given the emperor's self-avowed stature as a saint-king, the painting shows the Chishti saint handing the reign of his own domain—that is, the domain of the world of *maʿnī*—over to Jahangir, who is thus not only the king of the world of *ṣūrat*, but of both worlds.[55] The separate folios divided by the central gutter of the bound album would then represent the two distinct ontological realms.

Muʿin al-Din's portrait also bears a striking iconographic resemblance to several later Mughal and Pahari depictions of the enigmatic Quranic prophet-saint al-Khizr, whose name literally means "the Green One." Regarded as the

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52 Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqaʾ*, 288. Although the identity of the saint has been the subject of debate, Stronge and Okada are convinced that this is an imaginary portrait of Muʿin Chishti.

53 Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqaʾ*, 88–92.

54 "The subject of the painting is obviously the presentation of temporal and spiritual sovereignty by the saint Mu'in al-Din Chishti to Jahangir, as Robert Skelton, Linda Leach, and others have already observed. However, the painter Bichitr seems to have also made recourse to a metaphorical expression used by Abu'l-Fazl, who wrote, 'the shahanshah is the key to all temporal and spiritual locks.' Hence, the 'two worlds' mentioned on the double page are again the spheres of *surat* and *ma'ni*" (Franke, "Emperors of Surat and Ma'ni," 133).

55 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 192.

FIGURE 61 Mu'in al-Din Chishti, from the *Minto Album*, by Bichitr, ca. 1610–18. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 21.8 × 13 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 07A.14r)

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FIGURE 62 Jahangir holding the globe of the two worlds, from the *Minto Album*, by Bichitr, ca. 1610–18. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 25.8 × 16.5 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 07A.5v)

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hidden guide of all Sufi masters, al-Khizr is pre-eminent as a spiritual initiator, and features regularly in hagiographic literature.[56] In most accounts he never reveals his name and is described in cryptic terms. In the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, in the twenty-third nightly gathering, the emperor relates a dream-vision in which he encountered "a green colored man dressed in white."[57] He was sitting in his place while people came seeking his blessings and asking for his advice. Jahangir also went to him for advice. The "green one" refused, saying that "God Most High has given everything to you." Jahangir then asked for his name, but the holy man declined to reveal his identity, further increasing the mysterious aura typically associated with al-Khizr. It is conceivable that the *Minto Album* portrait is a simultaneous embodiment of both al-Khizr and Chishti, adding another layer to the initiatic subtext of Jahangir's acceptance of the crowned globe. The painting's dark green background and halo attest to the figure's multivalence, as do the distinctive bright red shoes, which are frequently seen in representations of al-Khizr. The account from Jahangir's evening gatherings also hints at this additional identification. In the dream-vision, it is enough for Jahangir to have met al-Khizr to be symbolically endowed with saintly status.

Throughout Islamic history, dreams have played a crucial role as liminal spaces where the worlds of *ṣūrat* and *maʿnī* converge. In dream-visions, higher realities are relayed into the individual person's subjective understanding through the faculty of imagination, which "transforms spiritual or metaphysical truths into symbols."[58] The Prophet has even described the true dream of the believer—not to be confused with the arbitrary dreams that everyone has—as "one of forty-six parts of prophecy."[59] Abu'l Fazl describes dreams as "the private quarters of the unseen realm."[60] It is therefore not surprising that Muslim societies pay serious attention to dreams and their interpretation to this day. Mughal royalty was no different. Jamal Elias explains that in Islamic culture, dreams can be divided into two categories: "dreams as they appear in dream manuals," and "a broader, less easily defined variety of literature in

56 A.J. Wensinck, "al-Khadir (al-Khidr)," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Brill Online, 2012), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-khadir-al-khidr-COM_0483?lang=fr.

57 ʿAbd al-Sattar, Nawshahi, and Nizami, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, 58. Also see Anna Kollatz, "The Creation of a Saint Emperor: Retracing Narrative Strategies of Mughal Legitimation and Representation in *Majalis-i Jahangiri* by ʿAbd al-Sattar ibn Qasim Lahori (ca. 1608–11)," in *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing: Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*, ed. Stephen Conermann and Jim Rheingans (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014), 247–48.

58 Elias, *Aisha's Cushion*, 199.

59 Bukhari, *Sahih*, IX:98.

60 Abu'l-Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, I:47.

which dreams serve a variety of functions including conferring status, providing evidence, and symbolizing interpersonal relationships."[61] In Mughal royal textual sources such as the *Akbarnāma* and the *Jahāngīrnāma*, dreams play an important role to authenticate kingly status.[62] It can therefore be argued that Jahangir's artists utilized the culturally sanctioned stage of the dream-vision to reify the emperor's sacred persona. If the allegorical paintings made for Jahangir are interpreted through this culturally relevant lens, then we can see them depicting events taking place in the Imaginal Realm or the Realm of Images (*ʿālam-i khiyāl* or *ʿālam-i mithāl*).[63]

In the previously mentioned artwork by Abu'l Hasan, from the group of allegorical paintings made for the emperor, Jahangir is shown embracing his rival ruler from the Safavid court, Shah Abbas (Fig. 63). The inscriptions on the artwork suggest that the obvious political overtones of the painting—the large globe, Shah Abbas's small stature, and the overpowering embrace of a gigantic Jahangir astride a lion—are unfolding in a dream-sphere. At the top, on either side of the large sun-halo, the inscription explains that the theme of the painting is "a dream that His Highness saw with his enlightened eyes/in a wellspring of light." And at that time "he recited these verses with his miraculous tongue." On the halo, directly above Jahangir's head are the verses that the king composed: "Our Shah came in a dream and gave us joy / The enemy of my dream is the one who woke me up."

Another painting from around 1620 depicts Jahangir entertaining Shah Abbas in an Imaginal garden setting (Fig. 64). The two rulers never met in the terrestrial sphere, but in this miraculous assembly, sitting on a floating throne hovering against an ethereal malachite green background flanked by his two powerful nobles in the foreground and two putti in the sky, Jahangir can be seen impressing his might over the feeble looking Shah Abbas. Along with Malik Ambar of the Deccan region, Shah Abbas of Iran was one of the greatest threats to the Mughal borderlands. Is it possible, then, that by staging the emperor's dream-visions and political aspirations through the medium of painting, Mughal artists were creating a "wondrous magic" that sought to change events in the terrestrial realm by altering them first in the Imaginal Realm? As I discuss

61 Elias, *Aisha's Cushion*, 200.

62 Abu'l-Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, 1:44–49; Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 162.

63 Here the impact of the artist's own imagination and creativity must be pointed out. Rice has this to say about the role of the artist: "In his capacity as interceder between God and Jahangir, royal and divine realms, and earthly and celestial spheres, the Mughal painter superseded the function of the court chronicler and the poet, becoming something more akin to the *muʿabbir* (dream interpreter), who crosses over from the dream's sensory form (*surat*) to its inner meaning (*ma'ni*)" (*Brush of Insight*, Chapter 1).

FIGURE 63 Allegorical representation of Emperor Jahangir and Shah Abbas of Persia, from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, by Abu'l Hasan / Muhammad Sadiq, ca. 1618. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 23.8 × 15.4 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1945.9a

FIGURE 64
Jahangir entertains Shah Abbas, from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqa*ʿ, attributed to Bishandas / Muhammad Sadiq, ca. 1620. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 25 × 18.3 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1942.16a

throughout this book, the Imaginal or Figural World is where the archetypes of all created things exist. The famous eighteenth-century Indian theologian and Naqshbandi Sufi Shah Waliullah summed up this long-established Islamic belief when he explained that both personal transformation and history can be altered in the Figural World through human intervention.[64] It was precisely this belief of altering historical events in the realm of the Imaginal that made a young Akbar paint a mutilated Hemu. Needless to say, in the case of Jahangir, his material ambitions did not always come to fruition. Shah Abbas captured the contentious region of Qandahar on the western border of the Mughal empire in 1622, only two years after the painting in which Jahangir is shown entertaining him.

64 Marcia K. Hermansen, "Shāh Walī Allāh's Theory of the Subtle Spiritual Centers (*Laṭāʾif*): A Sufi Model of Personhood and Self-Transformation," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 1988): 10.

FIGURE 65
Jahangir shooting the head of Malik Ambar, attributed to Abu'l Hasan, ca. 1620. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 38 × 26 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1948.19a

Failures in the material sphere did not prevent Jahangir and his court artists from projecting alternate histories. Another painting from the allegorical series can be interpreted as an extravagant parallel to Akbar's dismemberment of Hemu (Fig. 65). Once again standing on a globe, Jahangir shoots an arrow through the dismembered head of his Deccani rival Malik Ambar. This famous and frequently published painting has the emperor standing on a globe that rests on top of a large fish and a bull, symbols that have long been part of Perso-Islamicate creational mythology.[65] Placing Jahangir on this cosmic world-axis while overcoming his arch-enemy not only actualizes his status as ruler of the material and spiritual realms, but also makes his shooting the arrow all the more charged with ontological potency.

65 Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, 344–48; Ebba Koch, "The Symbolic Possession of the World: European Cartography in Mughal Allegorical and History Painting," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55, no. 2 (2012): 547–80; Robert Skelton, "Imperial Symbolism in Mughal Painting," in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, ed. Priscilla Soucek (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 177–87.

Jahangir as the world-axis and king of the two worlds is best represented in one of the most famous allegorical paintings made for the king. Commonly titled "Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings" (ca. 1615–18) and part of the *St. Petersburg Album*, this painting from the Freer-Sackler collection is ascribed to Bichitr (Fig. 66). In this instance, Bichitr makes it clear that the saint-king, despite his cosmic claims, always has eyes toward the Sufi shaikhs. It shows Jahangir seated on an hourglass and haloed by a large sun and a new moon, presenting a book to Shaikh Husain Chishti, who had been reinstated as the caretaker of the shrine of Muʿin al-Din Chishti in Ajmer late in Akbar's reign (1601). The quatrain in the cartouches framing the painting points out not only Jahangir's rule over the worlds of form and meaning but also his preference for spiritual leaders over worldly ones:

> The emperor of *ṣūrat* and *maʿnī* is, by the grace of God
> Shah Nur al-Din Jahangir son of Emperor Akbar
>
> Even though in [the world of] *ṣūrat* kings stand before him,
> In [the world of] *maʿnī* he always turns his gaze towards the dervishes.[66]

And yet, the Akbar-era theme of placing the emperor above the Sufi is taken one step further in this painting; the emperor is actually shown bestowing the sage with a book, which according to Heike Franke signifies sovereignty.[67] Shaikh Husain benignly spreads out his *chādar* to accept the gift. Given that the putto on the top left of the composition carries a broken arrow suggesting a reign of peace, the gift could also symbolize the emperor's bestowal of protection upon the sage. This reading hints at a subtly reciprocal relationship between the emperor and the sage, whose presence legitimizes imperial claims to divinely ordained kingship. The division of space into two distinct horizontal registers also creates a symbolic division between the realms of *ṣūrat* and *maʿnī*. Which figure inhabits what space helps reveal his spiritual status, or

66 For a slightly different translation as well as a lengthy discussion, see Richard Ettinghausen, "The Emperor's Choice," in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 98–120. The painting is one of the most regularly discussed paintings in all of Mughal India and a list of all the citations would be far too lengthy. For a succinct analysis, see Beach, *The Imperial Image*, 168–69. For a religious studies perspective, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 206–09.

67 "We may rather suppose that just as in the presentation of the globe the gift is not the ball itself but temporal power, here the book is not meant to be merely a special edition [...] but a symbol of spiritual authority complementing Jahangir's secular might" (Franke, "Emperors of Surat and Ma'ni," 137).

FIGURE 66 Jahangir preferring Shaikh Husain to monarchs, from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, by Bichitr / Muhammad Sadiq, ca. 1615–18. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 46.9 × 30.7 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1942.15a

lack thereof. The European monarch, who is not even given the privilege of looking directly at the glory of the Mughal king, is squarely placed in the lower register, which has the fantasmic carpet for its background. Given that he is a fellow Muslim, the Ottoman ruler's turban is allowed to break into the blue space of *maʿnī*, but his figure is still in the lower world. The Sufi shaikh's upper body inhabits the higher region, but it is Jahangir himself who has the honor of inhabiting the upper realm, with only his legs shown against the lower background. The deliberately flattened blue background signals a higher spiritual space. Jahangir sitting on the symbolic hourglass is the world-axis that holds the two ontological zones together.

The elaborate allegorical paintings of the Jahangir period beg the question, why did the long-established tradition of viewing saints as intercessors need a new pictorial language? One possible explanation could be connected to the new persona that the Mughal emperor had constructed for himself as a global and millennial sovereign. His interaction with Iranians, Ottomans and Europeans placed him squarely within a globalizing world of mega-monarchies. Apart from economic and military might, another way to establish political and spiritual domination was to fashion himself as a rightfully ordained ruler emanating God's own majesty and light (*farr*). In the context of painting, the careful deployment of European-inspired naturalism became a novel visual device that illusionistically localized God's majesty in the visage of Emperor Jahangir.[68] These images went hand-in-hand with court histories, biographies and memoirs. In these texts Jahangir followed Akbar's tradition of portraying himself as a millennial sovereign: steward of the second Islamic millennium that began during Akbar's reign in 1591. Because he perceived himself as poised at the epicenter of a majestic historical moment, he required an equally grand, allegorical, and devotionally charged visual program.

Grand allegories were not restricted to devotional representations of Jahangir-as-saint-king alone. An earlier painting, that has long remained an enigma for art historians, shows how the theme of the antinomian dervish continued into the Jahangir period, but with obvious compositional and thematic developments. In Jahangir-period painting, figures became more naturalistic, but continued to be juxtaposed with earlier conventions of multiple perspectives and flattened surfaces.[69] The selective naturalism witnessed in paintings from this

68 Singh importantly shows how European stylistic and iconographic choices were localized for a specifically Indo-Persianate use (Singh, *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens*, 35–37).

69 Curiously, while Jahangir encouraged a more controlled naturalism, he was simultaneously extremely fond of the classical Safavid style of painting, quite unlike his father Akbar. Artists such as Farrukh Beg were highly prized for their archaic Persian style.

period contributed to their allegorical role. Thematically, the figure of the antinomian wandering dervish persisted as a symbol for otherworldly aspiration, even after Salim became Emperor Jahangir. The painting in question, often titled "Squirrels in a Plane Tree" (ca. 1608), is most likely an allegorical depiction of one such dervish (Fig. 67).

Widely thought to be the work of Jahangir's favorite artist Abu'l Hasan—who was granted the title *Nādir al-zamān* [peerless of the age]—the painting, now in the British Library collection, was probably once part of an early Jahangir-period album. It shows a barefooted figure in a coarse tunic and woolen hat climbing a large plane tree. The autumnal tree, which dominates the composition, teems with large squirrels scurrying on its branches. Scholars have analyzed the work in terms of its stylistic peculiarities and how they reveal the artistic evolution of one of the greatest Mughal painters. The enigmatic central theme of the painting has seldom been discussed beyond briefly mentioned speculations.[70]

In discussing Jahangir period artworks, and Mughal painting in general, scholarship continues to privilege European canons of mimetic art making and judge Hindustani art according to those standards.[71] Scholars have written extensively about "Squirrels in a Plane Tree," and not without bias, marveling at the European-inspired "mastery of volume and of movement" achieved by the painter and the Renaissance-inspired "naturalistic" plane tree that—according to one author—"breathes life into what would otherwise be an unexciting painting."[72] This sentiment echoes earlier scholarly fixation on borrowing from European models. For instance, a catalogue from the British Library discusses Abu'l Hasan's painting thus:

> The hunter himself is not an Indian figure, but would be quite at home in a sixteenth-century engraving by Peter Brueghel the Elder, or a hunting scene by Philipp Galle [...] The most probable explanation is that the picture was built up from European sources which have not yet been identified [...] The message of the picture must be of a more subtle and less explicit nature, and could itself have been borrowed from Europe.[73]

Perhaps that is a reason why distinctly Persian devotional themes were also encouraged under his patronage.

70 For example, see Losty's entry in Leach, *Mughal Paintings*, cat. 4. Also see Losty and Roy, *Mughal India*, 97–99.

71 Minissale, "Chapter One: Reading Anti-Illusionism," in *Images of Thought*. For another critique of this scholarly bias, see Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism*, 6–10.

72 Losty and Roy, *Mughal India*, 99.

73 Falk and Archer, *Indian Miniatures*, 60.

FIGURE 67 A dervish climbing the Tree of Life, attributed to Abu'l Hasan, ca. 1608. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 36.2 × 22.5 cm. British Library, London © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, J.1.30

What this deeply entrenched bias overlooks is the greater Indo-Muslim cultural worldview. Such provincial conclusions speak volumes about the limitations of the scholarship itself, which is more at ease in the familiar surroundings of European art, and at sea when attempting to locate an artwork within the alien context of Islamic culture.

Having already examined examples from the Persianate world earlier in this chapter, the symbols in the Abu'l Hasan painting are immediately recognizable and reveal their deep-rootedness within a Muslim context. They reflect the layered complexity of the Indo-Muslim visual imagination, in this instance localized within an evolving Mughal style in which newer techniques were becoming part of the pictorial lexicon. In fact, the Renaissance-inspired naturalistic figure and the masterfully animated squirrels heighten the aura of an otherworldly allegory, especially when these carefully selected elements are placed against the flattened gold sky, the Safavid-inspired rock formations with their bold outlines, and the curiously giant scale of the squirrels. Additionally, on a more intimate level, it appears that Abu'l Hasan, the master of Jahangir's atelier, is paying tribute to Khwaja ʿAbd al-Samad, the master artist of the emperor's father.

I offer the following interpretation of the painting. The plane tree is the oft-repeated Tree of Life regularly associated with sanctity in painting across the Persian cosmopolis. The stream, synonymous with the fountain of life to which the Prophet al-Khizr guides seekers in Persian literature, curls around the tree and winds up into the landscape.[74] It acts as a divider between our world—which is literally outside the frame—and the Imaginal Realm/Figural Realm, the *ālam-i-mithāl*, believed to exist above the terrestrial world. The cosmological symbolism of the Tree of Life in Islamic theology is most clearly explained in the well-circulated thirteenth-century treatise by Ibn Ghanim al-Maqdisi (d. 1280), titled *Shajarat al-kawn* [*The Cosmic Tree*]. The treatise was so popular across the Islamic world that until recently, scholars assumed it was authored by Ibn al-ʿArabi.[75] It uses Quranic descriptions of the Tree of Life as well as the *Akbarian* ontological division of creation, transposing it onto the tree that is symbolic of the Logos and associated with the Light of Muhammad (Fig. 3).[76] The tree acts as an *axis mundi*, piercing through the three main

74 I. K. Poonawala, "Āb ii. Water in Muslim Iranian culture," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1:27–28, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ab-ii-water-in-muslim-iranian-culture.

75 Younes Alaoui Mdaghri, "Critical Study of the Erroneous Attribution of the Book *Shajarat al-Kawn* to Ibn ʿArabī Instead of to Ibn Ghānim al-Maqdisī," *The Journal of Rotterdam Islamic and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1–16.

76 "God has set forth a parable: A good word is like a good tree whose roots are firmly fixed, and whose branches (reach up) into heaven," Quran 14:24–29.

FIGURE 68 A dervish climbing the Tree of Life (detail), attributed to Abu'l Hasan, ca. 1608. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 36.2 × 22.5 cm. British Library, London
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, J.1.30

realms of existence: the terrestrial realm, the imaginal sphere, and the heavens. The angelic beings who have been assigned specific duties for maintaining the balance in the cosmos are said to hover, similar to the numerous birds in the Abu'l Hasan painting, around the tree's branches.[77]

Directly above the climbing dervish, at the top center of the composition, are two Indian silverbills vigilantly guarding their nest with two eggs (Fig. 68). The presence of paired birds in the Tree of Life, with one pair guarding its eggs, is another common motif repeated across Persian and Hindustani painting (see the tree in the previously discussed painting with a young Akbar meeting a dervish in the wilderness, Fig. 55). Often, a snake hidden in the leaves of the branches is shown greedily slithering towards the nest. In the famous Persian painting by Habiballah, illustrating the twelfth-century Sufi allegorical tale *Manṭiq al-ṭair* [*Conference of the Birds*] written by Farid al-Din ʿAttar, birds, symbolizing individual souls searching for spiritual liberation, congregate under the shade of a large plane tree (Fig. 69).[78] Although the serpent shown

77 A. Jeffrey, *Ibn al-ʿArabi's* Shajarat al-Kawn (Lahore: Aziz Publishers, 1908), 33.

78 For another example, see the Safavid-period illustration of Jami's *Ṣuḥbat-ul abrār*, Freer Gallery of Art, F1946.12.153v, accessed May 9, 2023, https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/edanmdm:fsg_F1946.12.153/.

FIGURE 69
Folio from ʿAttar's *Conference of the Birds*, by Habiballah of Sava, Iran, ca. 1600. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 33 × 20.8 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (63.210.11). Fletcher Fund, 1963
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climbing the Tree of Life does not feature in the story, according to Michael Barry, in the painting it represents the devil trying to catch unwary souls.[79] In his *Mathnavī*, Rumi explains how actions and their fruit are like the eggs and the bird. Their repeated presence in artworks could refer, among other meanings, to the pregnant potential of human actions: good actions hatch into birds that take angelic flight while bad actions, represented by the devilish serpent, swallow the potential good.[80]

Abu'l Hasan's homage to the master artist Khwaja ʿAbd al-Samad becomes evident when we compare "Squirrels in a Plane Tree" with the already discussed *nīm qalam* showing a dervish visiting Akbar (Fig. 29). The Safavid-inspired rock

79 Michael A. Barry, "Illustrating ʿAttar," in *Attar and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and Christopher Shackle (I.B. Tauris, 2006), 160.

80 Rumi, *Mathnawi of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, II:l. 982. Barry suggests that it was the great late-Timurid era master Behzad who created these visual conceits that later spread into Hindustan as well (*Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 15, 372–73).

FIGURE 70
A dervish climbing the Tree of Life (detail), attributed to Abu'l Hasan, ca. 1608. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 36.2 × 22.5 cm. British Library, London
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formations and carefully rendered tree are evocative of ʿAbd al-Samad's drawing, which depicts a similar spatial hierarchy. The winding stream divides the space into worldly and imaginal realms. In both artworks the imaginal realm behind the tree lurches up, ending in dreamlike rock formations. The ram seen at an angle on the top right is also a feature shared by both artworks. Most peculiarly, the ʿAbd al-Samad drawing also includes an animal resident in the tree trunk. In this case, it is the local Indian squirrel and not the large European kind preferred by Abu'l Hasan.

Abu'l Hasan's painting shows a climber, with both hands holding on to holes in the trunk, preparing for the seemingly impossible task of scaling the Tree of Life. Could this be an allegory for the spiritual path? One major element that favors this interpretation is the figure of the climber himself. He is wearing a coarse woolen tunic and a Central Asian fur hat. His rolled up right sleeve reveals a line of miniscule dots on his arm: burn marks from the antinomian practice of self-mortification (Fig. 70). He is also wearing a band made of several cords joined together that loops around his left shoulder. Intriguingly, this

FIGURE 71
A gathering of holy men of different faiths, by Mir Kalan Khan, ca. 1770–75. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 26.7 × 19.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2009.318). Purchase, Friends of Islamic Art Gifts, 2009
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is a piece of gear shared with members of the larger Indic community of monist mystics. Nath yogis, followers of Kabir, and Guru Nanak are regularly shown wearing a black band of threads in a similar fashion (Fig. 71). Many other paintings of Qalandars show their subjects wearing the same type of band (Fig. 72). Since Qalandars, Kabir Panthis, Gorakhnathis, and other antinomian groups in South Asia consciously distanced themselves from mainstream Hinduism and Islam, they scoffed at caste distinctions, false piety, and the rigidity of social hierarchies. Is it possible that the black thread worn on top of their garments is a symbolic inversion of the sacred thread (*jāneu*) worn by upper-caste Hindus? By this logic, the black cord could be a wry sign of the Qalandar's rejection of conventional hierarchical religious identity.

Although there is no textual evidence on the folio that could confirm the theme of Abu'l Hasan's painting, its dervish protagonist and the devotional markers in the artwork—references found across the Muslim world but localized here in a Mughal context—strongly suggest that the painting is, among other things, an allegory for the spiritual path of Sufism. Perhaps renaming

FIGURE 72
Shah Husain Qalandar, ca. 1770. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 30.4 × 20.1cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Od 60 pet. f. 30)

it "A Dervish Climbing the Tree of Life" would more easily situate it within its own cultural and historical context.

3 Shah Jahan and the Army of Prayer

On November 7, 1627, on his way back from Kashmir, Emperor Jahangir died at the age of sixty. Outwardly, his demise can be easily explained. Assaulted by years of opium and alcohol addiction, Jahangir's constitution had been weakening steadily and his death was only a matter of time. For Indian Sufis viewing historical events from a metaphysically transparent lens, however, his weakening health leading to his death had an ontological cause. In his succinct epilogue to the *Mir'āt ul-asrār*, 'Abd al-Rahman offers a brief but alternate view of imperial Mughal history, one that undulates according to the commands of a higher power working through specifically chosen Sufi masters. Most Sufi hagiographies, particularly those written in South Asia, begin with a detailed

discussion of a group of Sufis known as *abdāl* who represent a chosen elite, usually numbering forty, tasked with maintaining balance and order in the world. Acting as intercessors between different ontological spheres, they ensure political stability as well as spiritual wellbeing. When one of them leaves the material world, he is replaced by another, by God's command. Occasionally, there is a time lapse between appointments that could last for years. Chishti explains that Jahangir's health began deteriorating as early as 1622, five years before his death. At this time, two of God's appointed Sufi masters had the task of overseeing the wellbeing of the sultanate. Shaikh Pir of the Shattari order took care of overall affairs of the state, while ʿAbd al-Rahman's own spiritual guide Shaikh Hamid Chishti was responsible for the spiritual protection of the emperor himself. As it so happened, Shaikh Hamid passed away in 1622 and no other *abdāl* was appointed to replace him in his duty. "Which is why the emperor fell terribly ill," leading to his eventual death.[81] Owing to this absence—this ontological disconnect between the material and spiritual realms—the kingdom descended into a five-year period of chaos. It was only when Shah Jahan took over the reins in 1628 that the kingdom found its balance again.

ʿAbd al-Rahman tells us that Shah Jahan was trained from an early age by Sufis and always had immense respect for them and their advice. As a prince he learned *taṣavvuf* (Sufism), theology, and other religious sciences from a certain Shaikh Sufi who was known in India as an interpreter of Ibn al-ʿArabi and was also an author in his own right. After ascending the throne, Shah Jahan awarded the *shaikh* with land, revenue, and a high rank in court. Two decades later, it was Shaikh Sufi's Persian translation of a sacred Hindu text that triggered an important dream-vision for Shah Jahan's Sufi-minded son Dara Shikoh, in which he had a visitation by Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu.[82] Suffice to say, Shah Jahan very consciously chose to highlight the sacred status of the *valī*, even as he inherited Akbar's self-fashioned image of the saint-king from his father Jahangir.

In addition to Shaikh Sufi, another shaikh whom the emperor brought under his patronage was the Kashmiri saint Mulla Shah. All Sufis who came under his umbrella received lavish gifts, land grants, and other favors, either directly or through his children. In return, the Sufis gave him supernatural assistance. They were his army of prayer, his *lashkar-i duʿā*.[83] For instance, a

81 BL, MS Or. 216, ʿAbd al-Rahman Chishti, *Mirʾāt ul-asrār*, f. 508a.

82 Supriya Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 72, 194–95; Alam, "The Debate within," 149.

83 Jahangir mentions offering land and revenue to his "army of prayer" in the *Jahangirnama*. See Corinne Lefèvre, "Recovering a Missing Voice from Mughal India: The Imperial

Sufi by the name of Shaikh Nazir, who was also frequently armed, belonged to Shah Jahan's immediate retinue and stood watch outside the emperor's bedchamber, guarding it with both the armor of prayer and armor of steel.[84] As we shall see below, he features regularly as a personal guard in paintings depicting Shah Jahan and his court.

The elevated status of Sufi saints is apparent in paintings from the Shah Jahan period as well. The emperor no longer jostles for authority with the saint, as could be argued for Akbar- and Jahangir-period painting. There are many court portraits that show Sufi shaikhs blessing important events, such as a folio from a dispersed *Pādshāhnāma* manuscript now in the Sackler Gallery of Art (Fig. 73). Made by the court artist ʿAbid in 1629/30, the painting depicts a ceremony in which the king is appointing the noble Mahabat Khan to the position of commander-in-chief. A shaikh positioned directly under the king and standing on a draped step can be seen making a *duʿā* (prayer or blessing). Visual inclusions such as this sanctify scenes that would otherwise be understood as exclusively political. They draw worldly commemorations into a sacred sphere. This otherworldly aura is enhanced by the spiraling golden arabesque design against a malachite ground that forms the backdrop for the entire scene. Though far more intricate and subtly drawn, this deliberate flattening of the composition by using a single-colored floral backdrop is reminiscent of the *Fitzwilliam Album* angels (Fig. 49).

Below the shaikh, across the vertical line of golden trays, is another figure with his hands raised in a gesture of making a *duʿā*. Rather than a turban worn in the Mughal courtly fashion, donned by most figures in the painting, he wears a prominent red cap with blue ear-flaps and a gold sash tied around it. He is armed like a guard, with a shield, spear, and sword, but with a small rosary in one of his supplicating hands. The same figure features again in the emperor's inner circle in the slightly later illustration from the Windsor *Pādshāhnāma* in a folio representing the submission of Rana Amar Singh of Mewar to Prince Khurram (Fig. 74).[85] Dressed in similar gear but in a salmon pink *jāma*, he mysteriously holds a fish in his right hand while gazing intently at the emperor. Easy to recognize in his distinct apparel and arms, the guard is found in several *Pādshāhnāma* illustrations. In one such folio, which depicts Shah Jahan

Discourse of Jahāngīr (r. 1605–1627) in His Memoirs," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 4 (2007): 463.

84 ʿAbd al-Hamid Lahawri, *Lahori's Padshahnamah*, trans. H. A. Qureshi (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 2010), 294.

85 Milo C. Beach, Ebba Koch, and Wheeler Thackston, *King of the World: The* Padshahnama: *An Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle* (London: Azimuth Editions, 1997), 31–34, fig. 6.

FIGURE 73 Shah Jahan appointing the noble Mahabat Khan to the position of commander in chief from the Pādshāhnāma, by Abid, ca. 1629–30. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 37 × 25.2 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.: Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.406

FIGURE 74 Submission of Rana Amar Singh of Mewar to Prince Khurram, from the *Windsor Padshahnama*, by Lalchand, ca. 1640. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 58.2 × 36.8 cm. Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (RCIN 1005025 f. 46v) ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST / © HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III 2023

receiving his three eldest sons and Asaf Khan during his accession ceremony, the guard, now in brown clothes and shown a little aged with a greying beard, has a minute inscription on his collar giving his identity (Fig. 75).[86] It is none other than the Sufi, Shaikh Nazir, armed with both the armor of prayer and armor of steel. There are other Sufi warriors who feature in the *Pādshāhnāma*, as well as more ascetical Sufis, that add a devotional multivalence to scenes that would otherwise be perceived only from a political perspective.[87]

Another painting that might appear to be purely political at first glance should also be viewed through an ontological lens. In this example spatial division and hierarchical perspective are used ingeniously to magnify its meaning. A portrait of the Mughal *vakīl* Asif Khan, it commemorates his appointment as the commander of the Mughal army in the Deccan in 1631 (Fig. 76).[88] Made by Bichitr and part of the *Minto Album*, it shows the king's most trusted confidante towering over the royal army, with a city sprawling in the background. Had it not been for the two angels emerging from clouds at the top, the painting would appear to only be a visual reminder of Asif Khan's pivotal role in securing the Mughal crown for Shah Jahan, when he first duped and then imprisoned rival princes to the throne. As a sign of his victory in the war of succession, Asif Khan is shown gesturing at three miniscule prisoners at his feet, who are probably the rival Prince Shahryar and his supporters, being taken away in shackles. The two angels, one on either side of the axial Asif Khan, bring a message straight from heaven. Although made following European Renaissance conventions that by now had become staples in Mughal painting, the angels nonetheless function within an Islamicate framework. The cherub on the left holds an open scroll on which is written, "God is great," followed by the Quranic promise that God makes to the believers regarding two things that they love: "victory from God and an immanent conquest."[89] Just as the Sufis saw the crumbling of worldly order following Jahangir's illness as resulting from a cosmic interruption between two ontological spheres, the Mughal court saw Asif Khan's ruthless, yet inspired maneuver to place Shah Jahan on the throne as a sign of cosmic mediation, one that can only occur through angelic intervention.

86 Beach, Koch, and Thackston, *King of the World*, 38, fig. 10.

87 Beach, Koch, and Thackston, *King of the World*, fig. 13, 14, 26. Discussing this renewed fervor for Sufism during Shah Jahan's rule, Gandhi states, "We cannot rule out that Shah Jahan […] was undergoing his own parallel form of pious self-fashioning […] in a process that also took the form of engaging with Sufi authorities" (*The Emperor Who Never Was*, 106).

88 Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor*, 154–57.

89 Quran 61:13.

FIGURE 75 Shah Jahan receives his three eldest sons and Asaf Khan, from the *Windsor Padshahnama*, by Bichitr, ca. 1630. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 58.4 × 37 cm. Royal Collection Trust, Winsor Castle (RCIN 1005025 f. 50b)
ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST / © HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III 2023

FIGURE 76
Portrait of the Mughal vakīl Asaf Khan, from the *Minto Album*, by Bichitr, ca. 1631. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 38.9 × 26.5 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum, London (IM.26-1925) © VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

Starting from around this time, more and more paintings were spatially divided into three clear registers stacked on top of each other. They would include a foreground, a middle-ground and finally the sky at the top. As I will discuss in later chapters, in subsequent artworks from the seventeenth century, particularly in devotional paintings, this tripartite division of space—one that was not necessarily perspectival but definitely hierarchical—was effectively used to demarcate the three main ontological zones of creation: the terrestrial world (*ṣūrat*), the Imaginal World (*khiyāl*/*mithāl*), and the World of Meaning or Truth (*maʿnī*/*ḥaqīqat*).

Shah Jahan-period albums were also unique in including individual portraits of renowned living Sufis for the first time in spaces that were traditionally reserved for portraits of royalty and nobility. Such portraits comingled with the finest examples of calligraphy, European prints, and idyllic genre scenes, to generate a particular aura of imperial luster. During Akbar's time, single portraits of dervishes and *jōgīs* tended to represent generic types rather than known individuals. In the Jahangir period, historical and mythic sages began to be included in albums, but they were primarily valued as allegorical

figures and were shown interacting either with royalty or with each other. In Shah Jahani albums, however, we see isolated, single portraits of known saints, many of which follow conventions used to depict nobility.

One important double folio is from the British Library's Johnson collection and includes a portrait of Miyan Mir (d. 1635) (Fig. 77).[90] Judging from the keenly observed features of the aged saint, shown in the final years of his life, and his resemblance to other known works of the same era, the painting can be dated to around 1635. Perhaps it was made to commemorate his death, which occurred in the same year. Miyan Mir, the famous Qadiri saint from Lahore, is shown standing facing to the left in a flowering field against a dull background. The extraordinarily detailed portrait's presence in an imperial album speaks of a subtle shift in Mughal patronage of Sufi orders. After around 1635, Shah Jahan and his two eldest children, Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh, became increasingly close to the Qadiri order, preferring it over the previously favored Chishti *ṭarīqa*.

With a large malachite-colored shawl covering his stooped body, Miyan Mir gazes across the folio, offering a leather-bound book to a Sufi on what would originally have been the facing page (Fig. 78). Usually, the gesture of gifting a volume to another ascetic is a sign of bestowing blessings or successorship. Many eighteenth-century paintings show Miyan Mir giving his deputy, Mulla Shah, a book in a similar fashion.[91] The verses bordering the Miyan Mir folio are from the first two lines of a quatrain by the medieval Persian Sufi poet Abu Saʿid Abu'l Khair (967–1049): "I have sins that exceed the drops of rain / I bow down my head, ashamed of my sins."[92] The last two lines of Abu'l Khair's quatrain border what would originally have been the facing page, in which the unidentified Sufi faces to the right with his hands raised in a gesture of receiving the book from Miyan Mir. The lines read: "A voice came (and said) 'go easy Dervish, / You do what is appropriate for you [dervishes], and we [God] will do what is appropriate for us.'" Taken as a whole, the quatrain expresses a particular Sufi sentiment that highlights the self-deprecating, repentant soul of the mystic before God. It is precisely this persistent self-negation that is believed to polish the heart of the believer and turn him or her into a saint. It is said to reflect the mystic's complete trust in God's mercy. In the last two lines of the poem, God's voice is heard from the unseen, asking the dervish to go

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90 Falk and Archer, *Indian Miniatures*, 87–88, fig. 96ii.

91 See for example, BL, "Mian Mir and Mulla Shah" made in the style of Bahadur Singh, circa 1775 in Falk and Archer, *Indian Miniatures*, 253, J.1.19.

92 Abu'l Khair, *rubaʿī* number 375, accessed January 10, 2023, https://ganjoor.net/abusaeed/robaee-aa/sh375/.

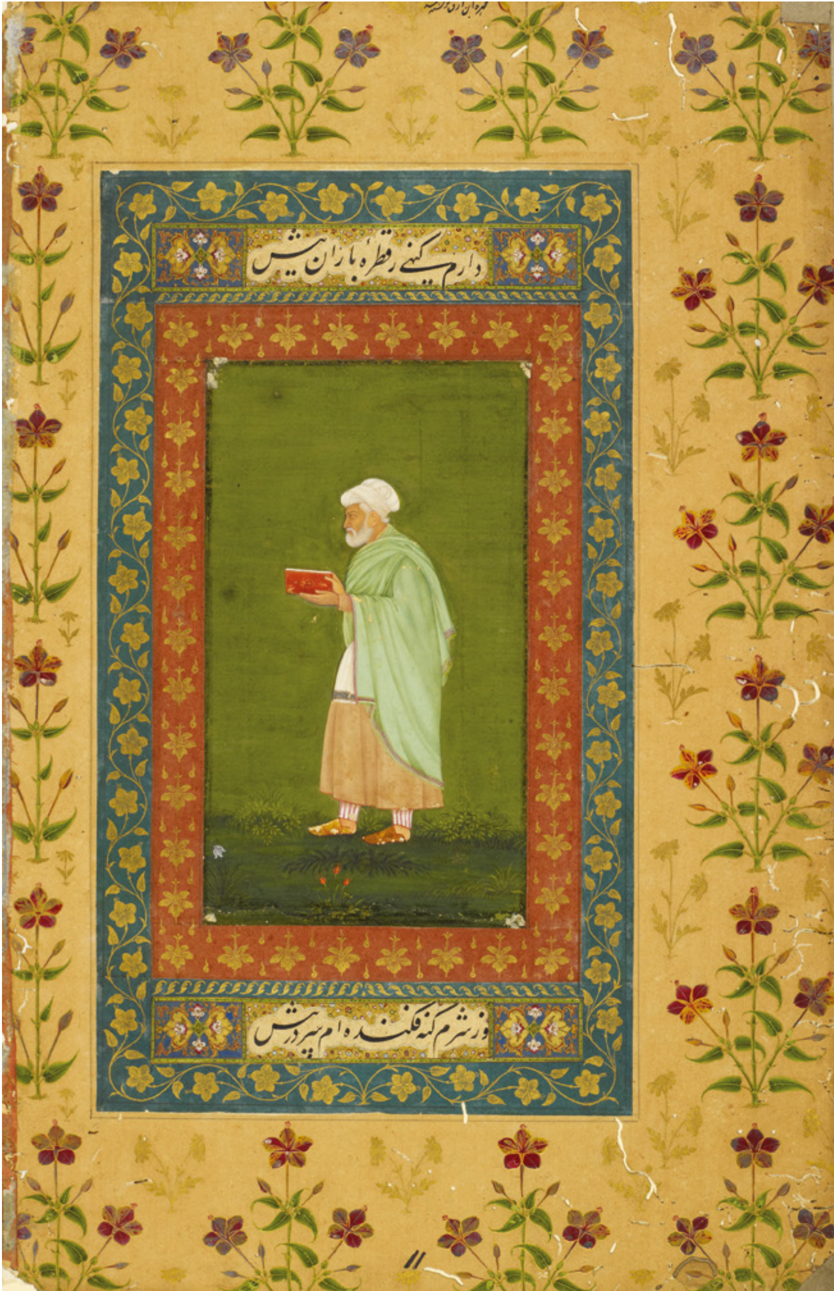

FIGURE 77 Miyan Mir, ca. 1635. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 40.5 × 26.9 cm. British Library, London
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, J.7.11

FIGURE 78 An unidentified Sufi, ca. 1635. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 40.5 × 26.8 cm. British Library, London
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, J.7.10

easy on himself and to continue asking forgiveness from God, since that is the best of acts, while God will continue doing what befits Him, which is to award forgiveness.[93]

Although unidentified, the tall frame and domed red cap of the Sufi on the left folio is instantly recognizable in another portrait of his in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Fig. 79). It also shows him making exactly the same gesture as the *Johnson Album* example. Although there are some minor differences in apparel, in both paintings the Sufi is shown wearing a belt with a geometric buckle. In the Boston Museum example, a strap that most likely loops around his left shoulder is just visible under his white fur coat. Both the belt buckle and looping strap are commonly found in representations of antinomian dervishes (Fig. 60, 42–43). By the early modern period, it was very common for mainstream Sufis to also have affiliations with Qalandari orders. It could be possible that this particular Sufi was a Qadiri contemporary or follower of Miyan Mir with an additional antinomian lineage. After all, Miyan Mir had several other disciples, including Shah Dilruba who was close to Dara Shikoh, that were of an antinomian bent. On two occasions in 1634 when Shah Jahan and Dara Shikoh visited Miyan Mir on their trips to Lahore, they also visited another Qadiri Sufi, Shah Bilawal.[94] Given that both he and Miyan Mir were Qadiris, lived in Lahore, and were visited by the emperor on the same trips, it is highly possible that Shah Bilawal is the saint represented in the *Johnson Album* and the folio from Boston.

There are other examples of single portraits of saints in Shah Jahani albums, but most seem to have been made after 1640/1, the year of Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum's initiation into Sufism.[95]

The inclusion of known, contemporaneous Sufi saints such as Miyan Mir, Shah Daula, Shah Dilruba, and Mulla Shah, in royal albums did not diminish the inherited role of the Mughal king as a divine nexus, at least within the realm of the court. Following his ancestor Timur's title, Shah Jahan fashioned himself as the second Lord of Planetary Conjunction, while also projecting Solomonic ideals of the just king who had control over the kingdoms of men, animals, and jinn.[96] Artists showing Shah Jahan as saint-king standardized

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93 I would like to thank Sourena Parham for helping me translate the final line of the poem and for also contextualizing its meaning.

94 Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 88.

95 In Chapter 6 I will discuss some of these portraits in detail, suggesting that the siblings might have played an active role in the development of later Shah Jahan-period albums. The possibility of imperial albums having multiple patrons has yet to be seriously considered by scholars.

96 Koch, "The Mughal Emperor as Solomon," 277–311; Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 225–47.

FIGURE 79
Portrait of an unidentified Sufi, attributed to Abu'l Hasan, ca. 1620–30. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 10.4 × 4.9 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bartlett Collection—Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund, 14.653

many of the symbols and allegories inherited from the Jahangir period. One of the most spectacular expressions of Shah Jahan as emperor of the worlds of form and meaning comes from a painting made soon after his accession by the artist Chitarman in 1628 (Fig. 80). The artist would later become one of Dara Shikoh's favorite painters. Part of the *Shah Jahan Album*, it shows the newly crowned emperor holding a pendant with a tiny, jeweled portrait of himself, as if presenting it to someone across the folio. This was a courtly custom initiated by Akbar in which the emperor would gift a portrait of himself to favored courtiers to place on their turbans or around their necks, as an initiation into the emperor's inner circle.[97] This royal gesture once again shows the power of the image as inhabiting a real presence within Indo-Muslim culture. Through

97 For a detailed discussion of the jewel-portraits, see Gulbransen, "From the Court of Akbar," 81–83. For an example of a courtier wearing a pendant portrait from the Jahangir period, see "Asif Khan Wearing a Portrait Miniature," Chester Beatty Library, CBL In 45.2. (Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqaʿ*, 436–37, fig. 83). For a discussion of the Shah Jahan painting, see Welch et al., *The Emperor's Album*, 198–201, ill., verso pl. 57 (b/w); recto pl. 58 (color).

FIGURE 80
Shah Jahan on a terrace holding a pendant set with his portrait, from the *Shah Jahan Album*, by Chitarman, ca. 1628. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 38.9 × 25.7 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (55.121.10.24). Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation Gift, 1955
CREATIVE COMMONS PUBLIC DOMAIN, CC0 1.0 UNIVERSAL (CC0 1.0)

this particular ritual, the royal portrait was used to prolong, sustain, and multiply the sacrosanct presence of the emperor.

In the *Shah Jahan Album* painting, the emperor stands on a low platform in a composition that is once again divided into three distinct registers: the balcony where Shah Jahan stands, the middle ground showing boats gliding along the river Jumna, and the skies where clouds are pulled apart like curtains on a stage to reveal a radiant sun that haloes the emperor's profile. He is shown here, to use Abu'l Fazl's words from his *taṣvīrkhāna* chapter, as a locus "for the manifestation of light [...] that leads to the transcendent."[98] Four angels at the top, emerging from the clouds, shower gifts and blessings. The symbol of the king as world axis is further enhanced by his sword that stands erect between his feet, dissecting the lower half of his body into two.

98 Abu al-Fazl, *A'in-i Akbari*, 111.

One important innovation in images of royalty in Shah Jahan painting that breaks away from Jahangir-period conventions is the introduction of Sufis representing an army of prayer. In a painting from the *Minto Album* ascribed to Bichitr, Shah Jahan, following paintings done for his father, is shown standing on a globe holding a turban pendant, while a Rajput ruler, significantly smaller in scale, kneels before him (Fig. 81).[99] As a symbol of his just and peaceful rule, a lamb can be seen licking a lion's face on the globe. With his feet firmly rooted in/on the world (*duniyā*), the emperor rises as an axis or cosmic pole (*quṭb*) into the heavens, where angles descend bearing a European crown as a symbol of his God-given destiny. Staying consistent with the tripartite compositional division of space, the intermediary realm—synonymous with the Imaginal World or World of Ideal Forms (*ʿālam-i khiyāl* or *mithāl*)—has a host of saints emerging from either side of the king astride clouds. Made in transparent washes, these ghost-like apparitions all have their hands cupped in the gesture of making a *duʿā*.

In another compositionally similar painting from the Freer Gallery of Art, Shah Jahan is once again standing on a globe representing the world of *ṣūrat* (Fig. 82). Although ascribed to the court painter Hashim and dated to the second year of Shah Jahan's reign (1630), Beach argues that the clunky halo, crudely painted cherubs in the sky, and lack of subtlety in the rendering of the transparent skirt shows that the painting might be a later copy, or perhaps made in the mid-seventeenth century with later additions.[100] In either case, the importance of the army of prayer is again underlined by the spectral presence of Sufis, made in light transparent washes, with their hands raised in prayer. In this painting they are included on the globe, on either side of the golden scales of justice. They hold scrolls on which are written prayers:

> Oh God, keep this king, the friend of the dervishes
> under whose shadow people's peaceful existence is maintained
> keep him for a long time [established over the people]
> keep his heart alive by the succor of obedience.[101]

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99 Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqa'*, 349–52, fig. 51.

100 Beach, *The Imperial Image*, 188.

101 "The Emperor Shah Jahan Standing on a Globe," Freer Gallery of Art, accessed January 10, 2023, https://asia.si.edu/object/F1939.49a/.

FIGURE 81 Shah Jahan standing on a globe, circa 1630, by Bichitr. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 24.6 × 16.3 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 07A.16r)
© THE TRUSTEES OF THE CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY, DUBLIN

FIGURE 82
The Emperor Shah Jahan standing on a globe, from the *Minto Album*, by Hashim, ca. 1630. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 25.1 × 15.8 cm.Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1939.49a

Sufis as ethereal markers signaling the Imaginal World that connects the spheres of *ṣūrat* and *maʿnī* are most prominent in paintings made to illustrate the imperial chronicle of Shah Jahan, the *Pādshāhnāma*. In several folios from the Windsor *Pādshāhnāma* (with paintings dating from circa 1635–57) depicting assemblies in the Mughal court, Sufis are once again seen in apparitional, transparent washes, but this time on wall paintings within architectural spaces—or what Moin calls "the graffiti under the throne."[102] Rather than viewing these paintings within paintings merely as literal portrayals of imperial spaces, as some art historians have done, we need to acknowledge them as conveyors of hidden meaning.[103] Always displayed in the blank wall space directly under the throne, the graffiti is not only liminal in its execution, hovering between opacity and transparency, but also in its positioning in the composition. For instance, in the folio illustrating Jahangir presenting Prince Khurram (the future Emperor Shah Jahan) with a turban ornament, the

102 Moin, *The Millenial Sovereign*, 240.
103 Beach, Koch, and Thackston, *King of the World*, 137.

wall painting under the throne represents the middle register in a composition clearly divided into three horizontal segments (Fig. 83). The figures in the row below the black carpet constitute the lowest register. The balcony where Jahangir gifts his son with the ornament is the upper register. The carpet and the large horizontal wall make up the middle zone. It is therefore only apt that the spectral visions of Sufi saints as well as other allegorical subjects unfold within this register. In the graffiti, two Sufis emerge from behind a large globe, one carrying a sheathed sword, the other an open book. The open book contains a tiny inscription that reads, "May the kingdom remain everlasting."

This notion of an everlasting kingdom or an emperor's rule appears, at least in the visual program, to be connected with the legendary saintly figure, the immortal prophet al-Khizr. Earlier in the chapter, I suggested that the figures of Muʿin al-Din Chishti and al-Khizr converged in a single portrait made for the emperor Jahangir (Fig. 61). For Shah Jahan, the image of al-Khizr seems to have gained even more importance. In fact, it is possible to map the emperor's devotional intentions by following known representations of the evergreen prophet made during his reign. Paintings of al-Khizr in the Shah Jahan period closely follow the iconography of the Jahangir-era portrait of Chishti. In paintings illustrating the Windsor *Pādshāhnāma*, the presence of al-Khizr, or Khizr-like saintly figures, inject key historical events with devotional significance, elevating them into a supra-temporal sphere.

In Folio 192b made by the artist ʿAbid ca. 1635—a painting that yet again is divided into three distinct horizontal registers—a holy man made in light, transparent washes hovers on a green wall at the center of the scene, surrounded by recognizable figures from the Mughal court (Fig. 84).[104] The painting depicts an episode that occurred in November 1616, when Emperor Jahangir awarded Shah Jahan (then known as Prince Khurram) the title of Shah, thereby making him the official heir apparent. We see Shah Jahan bowing before the emperor, taking his leave as he prepares to depart for a campaign in the Deccan. Two modes of painting, in which the historical figures are painted in opaque pigment and the saintly figure in transparent washes, delineate two distinct spheres of reality coexisting in one shared space: the worldly and the sacred.[105] The ghostly figure flanked by hovering angels bears a striking resemblance to the figure of Muʿin al-Din Chishti handing over the metaphorical globe and key to Jahangir (Fig. 61 and 62). Here too, the saintly

104 Beach, Koch, and Thackston, *King of the World*, 92, 198, fig. 37.

105 I must thank Yael Rice for pointing out this possible difference, where saints are sometimes represented in the tinted technique, as if they were transparent, compared to the more "material" figures.

FIGURE 83 Jahangir presenting Prince Khurram (the future Emperor Shah Jahan) with a turban ornament, from the *Windsor Padshahnama*, by Payag, ca. 1657. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 30.6 × 21.3 cm. Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (RCIN 1005025 f195a)

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FIGURE 84 Jahangir awards Shah Jahan the title of Shah, from the *Windsor Padshahnama*, by Abid, ca. 1635. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 35.6 × 24.2 cm. Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (RCIN 1005025 f192b)
ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST / © HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III 2023

figure, facing left, is offering a golden globe, presumably to the future Shah Jahan. While the worldly emperor bestows kingship in a bounded time and space—Ajmer, November 1616—the Real (*ḥaqīqī*), supra-temporal agent is God made present through the spectral figure of the *valī*. It is no coincidence that the space inhabited by the saint is green, further hinting at the identity of the bearded sage. The figure is an almost exact mirror-image of the Sufi shown blessing the ceremony in which Shah Jahan is appointing the noble Mahabat Khan to the position of commander-in-chief (Fig. 73). Both paintings are made by ʿAbid. It would thus suggest that the artist kept a drawing and tracing collection of stock figures which he could use to build new figures when required.

It becomes easier to identify the figure in folio 192b as al-Khizr when the portrait is compared to another representation of the prophet on folio 205b (Fig. 85). Although the page, made ca. 1656, is placed next to a text narrating Shah Jahan's visit to Muʿin al-Din's shrine in Ajmer in 1636, Ebba Koch has suggested that, given the ages of the emperor and Dara Shikoh, who rides with him, it is clear "that what is actually illustrated is the Emperor's last visit to Ajmer" in November 1654.[106] In the scene, the aging emperor, accompanied by the heir-apparent suddenly encounters the ahistorical, mythic Khwaja Khizr floating on the river at the entrance of the sacred city of Ajmer. It is easy to identify him as the immortal prophet because he wears green robes and is shown emerging from the waters of life. Even though Lahori's text of the *Pādshāhnāma* makes no reference to this encounter, the hovering green figure in the visual narrative yet again locates the historical event in a mythic moment. Al-Khizr's apparition has alarmed the horses, who come to a sudden halt with their ears tilted back. With the holy city and *dargāh* visible behind him, the nimbused emperor is shown hovering between two worlds. His horse wades partially into the stream while its rear legs remain on the other bank. Al-Khizr's presence transforms the stream into the waters of life, marking the space as the isthmus between this terrestrial world and the heavenly world beyond.

Koch and Beach have suggested that the painting is a representation of worldly conquest, with the figure of al-Khizr and the city of the patron saint of South Asia merely playing second fiddle to the "real" event of the conquest of Udaipur.[107] The painting, however, indicates exactly the opposite. I have already shown that historical and ahistorical events are repeatedly presented

106 Beach, Koch, and Thackston, *King of the World*, 205.

107 "This pilgrimage was—as the historians tell us—not entirely motivated by religious piety but was seen as an occasion to suppress the unauthorized activities of Rana Raj Singh of Udaipur" (Beach, Koch, and Thackston, *King of the World*, 205).

FIGURE 85 Shah Jahan visiting Ajmer, from the *Windsor Padshahnama*, attributed to Jalal Quli, ca. 1656. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 35.1 × 22.5 cm. Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle (RCIN 1005025, f. 205b)
ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST / © HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III 2023

FIGURE 86
Shah Jahan receives the elixir of life from the Prophet al-Khizr, from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, by Bal Chand, ca. 1625–1630. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 27.5 × 17 cm. Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg (MS.E-14, fol. 33r)
PHOTO: AFTER *THE ST. PETERSBURG MURAQQAʿ: ALBUM OF INDIAN AND PERSIAN MINIATURES FROM THE 16TH THROUGH THE 18TH CENTURY AND SPECIMENS OF PERSIAN CALLIGRAPHY BY ʿIMĀD AL-ḤASANĪ* (MILAN: LEONARDO ARTE, 1996), PLATE 69

within one space throughout Mughal painting. In this instance, the presence of al-Khizr—appearing mysteriously before an aging emperor whose horse precariously hangs between two worlds—gives precedence to the ahistorical significance of the imaginal encounter, rather than the worldly, historical event. The falcon of royalty, a sign of kingship, is comfortably perched on Dara Shikoh's hand. Meanwhile the aged king is shown leaving the corporeal realm behind and entering the otherworldly realm. Perhaps the bestowal of the globe by al-Khizr in this case directly refers to the immortal world, or paradise.

This reading is all the more plausible when the *Pādshāhnāma* folio is compared to a much earlier, simpler composition of the same theme from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ* (Fig. 86).[108] This allegorical painting from around 1630, with later additions, shows a much younger Shah Jahan in the middle of an ocean, standing on a magnificent white horse, receiving the cup of immortality

108 Elena Kostioukovitch, ed., *The St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ: Album of Indian and Persian Miniatures From the 16th through the 18th Century and Specimens of Persian Calligraphy by ʿImād al-Ḥasanī* (Milan: Leonardo Arte, 1996).

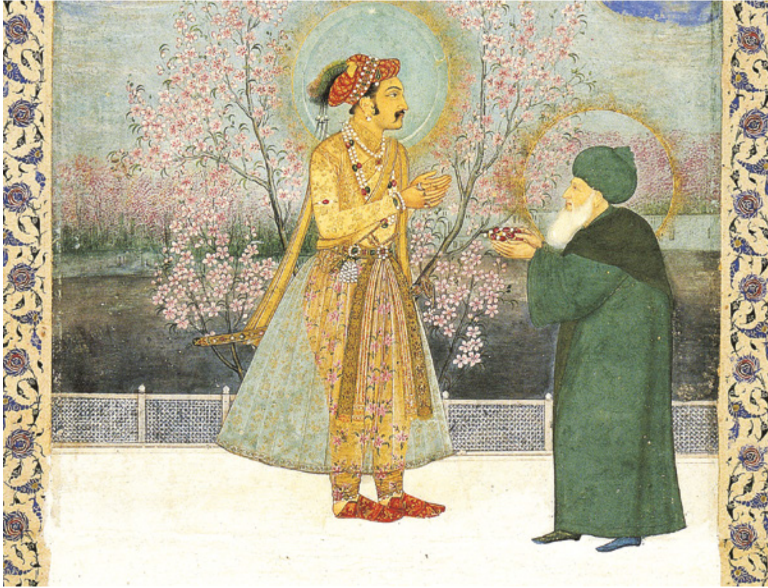

FIGURE 87 Prince Khurram receives a gift from the Prophet al-Khizr (detail), from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, ca. 1615. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 27.6 × 16.5 cm. Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg (MS.E-14, fol. 18r)
PHOTO: AFTER *THE ST. PETERSBURG MURAQQAʿ: ALBUM OF INDIAN AND PERSIAN MINIATURES FROM THE 16TH THROUGH THE 18TH CENTURY AND SPECIMENS OF PERSIAN CALLIGRAPHY BY ʿIMĀD AL-ḤASANĪ* (MILAN: LEONARDO ARTE, 1996), PLATE 68

from al-Khizr. This depiction would have been unimaginable under Akbar or Jahangir's patronage, even though its spiritual allegory owes much to Jahangir's pictorial innovations. In this instance, there is no trace of the retinue or other conventional emblems of royal status. The emperor is shown alone, in al-Khizr's territory rather than in the material realm. The ocean here is unmistakably the ocean of immortality. On the facing folio from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, al-Khizr is shown again, but in an even earlier painting, dateable to around 1615 (Fig. 87). This time he gifts pearls and rubies to Prince Khurram, soon to be Emperor Shah Jahan, perhaps as a sign of conferring kingship. Perhaps it was made after Jahangir gave him the title "Shah Jahan" in 1616. These and other similar paintings depicting the meeting of Shah Jahan with al-Khizr link Mughal aspirations of perpetuity with notions of heavenly immortality.[109] Images that show al-Khizr offering Shah Jahan the cup of immortality or the

109 For a discussion of these paintings, see Franke, "Emperors of Surat and Ma'ni," 141–44.

globe appear to simultaneously bless the emperor's command over the kingdom of *ṣūrat* while granting him a place in God's kingdom of *maʿnī*.

The case of the particularly complex, multivalent and oft-represented figure of al-Khizr perfectly demonstrates the way in which the meaning of devotional paintings could fluctuate or expand according to the agenda of a given patron. Originally a Quranic figure with a rich history of representation in Persian literature, the prophet was also mysteriously incorporated into the local pantheon of Indic deities as a ruler of rivers and oceans.[110] This localization of an Islamic mythic figure needs to be kept in mind when discussing depictions of al-Khizr made for the Mughal royalty. As his iconography developed, first in the Jahangir and Shah Jahan periods and later in eighteenth-century courts, it accrued new roles that continued to coexist with earlier ones.

In one eighteenth-century coronation painting (Fig. 88) from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, a Mughal court artist has prolonged Shah Jahan-period iconographic conventions in which al-Khizr is shown as an ontological link between heavenly and earthly kingship, investing Emperor ʿAzim ush-Shan (r. 1712) with divine authority to rule. The newly crowned emperor holds a golden key in his right hand, which is a direct reference to the Jahangir-period painting of Muʿin al-Din Chishti. By contrast, in another eighteenth-century painting al-Khizr is shown alone, independent of imperial personages or signifiers. Much like a Hindu deity, he stands atop a fish that serves as his vehicle (Fig. 89).[111] Repeated in many similar eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings of varying levels of patronage, this mythic trope is evidence of his fluid significance and popularity as a figure of cultic worship.

Similarly, other themes of devotion in Mughal painting had an analogous range of meaning that continued to morph and develop over time. Many historical saints such as Mulla Shah, Shah Sharaf Bu ʿAli Qalandar, and ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani have a long history of representation that remains relevant down to our times. One key instance during which images of saints gained a new layer of meaning, and influenced their representation for the next three centuries, occurred in the mid-seventeenth century under the patronage of two imperial siblings of the Mughal court, Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum. At this time, the two eldest children of Shah Jahan entered an Islamic mystical order of Sufism. As the first in the Mughal imperial line to be formally initiated

110 Coomaraswamy, "Khwaja Khadir," 157–67.

111 Roselyne Hurel, *Miniatures & peintures indiennes: Collection du Département des estampes et de la photographie de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2010), 86, fig. 72.

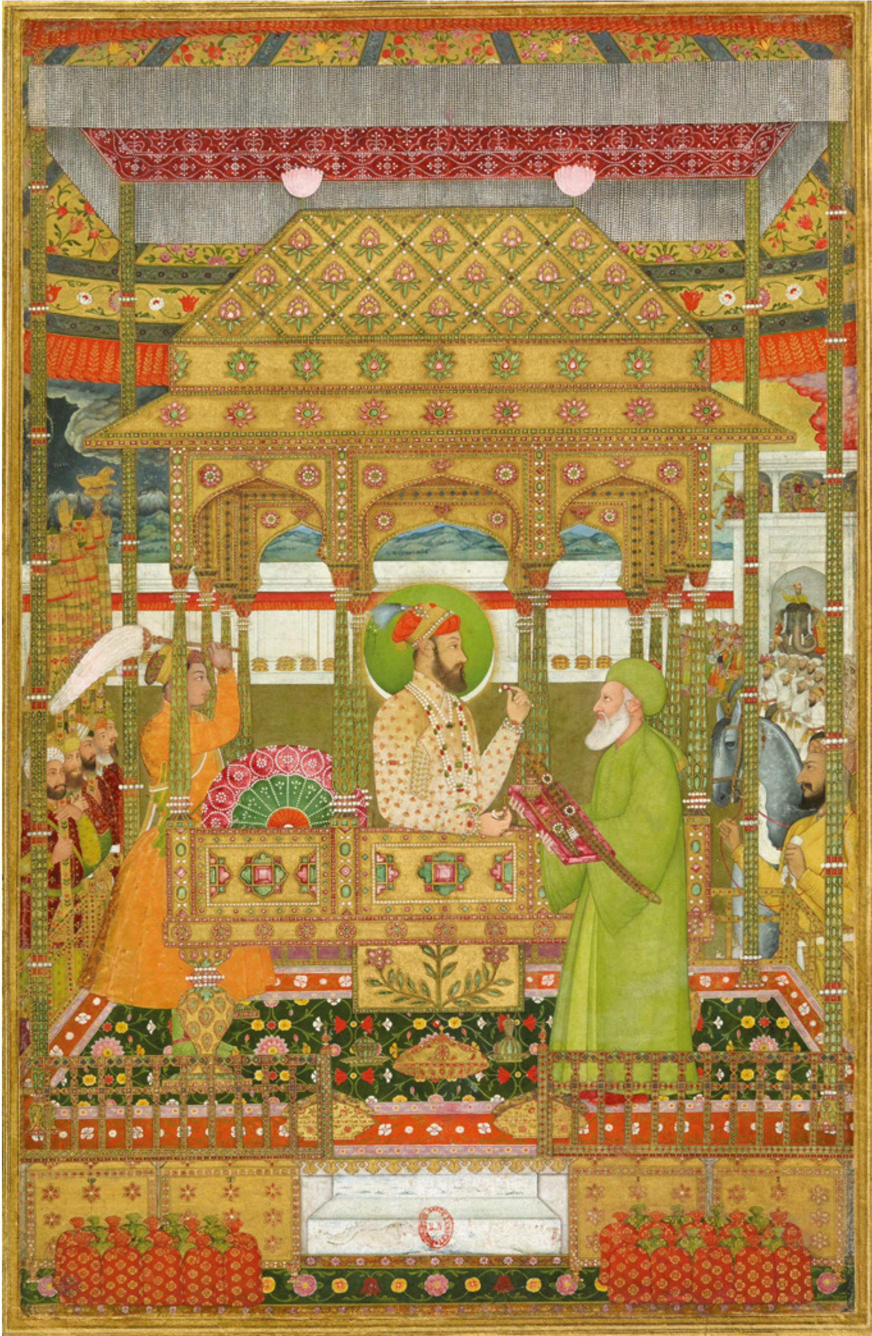

FIGURE 88 ʿAzim ush-Shan receiving investiture from al-Khizr, 1712. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 31 × 24.4 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Manuscrits, Paris (Smith-Lesouëf 249, pièce 6557)

FIGURE 89
al-Khizr, ca. 1720. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 30.7 × 21.2 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Od 60 pet. Fol. f. 19)

into Sufism, the heir apparent to the Mughal throne, Dara Shikoh, and his elder sister Jahanara Begum became central patrons of devotional painting in North India. Under them, the stylistic language of the representation of saints shifted and some of the images acquired a new meaning. According to Jahanara and Dara Shikoh's own memoirs, a subset of the images that they commissioned were used for an expressly devotional purpose during prescribed spiritual exercises.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six highlight the role of the two siblings in developing the genre of devotional painting in Muslim South Asia. The next chapter in particular discusses paintings made for Dara Shikoh between the years 1630 and 1640, when he was still an uninitiated, teenage prince searching for his own patronly expression. These artworks represent the convergence of two distinct uses of figural depiction: paintings as didactic tools to transmit deeply rooted princely values shared across the Indic and Persianate worlds, and paintings in which the portrait of the prince acts as a locus of divine manifestation.

CHAPTER 4

"I Saw My Lord in the Form of a Beardless Youth"

> Praise—which the pen is incapable of writing and the imagination unable to visualize—to the [the calligrapher who] brings forth the down of the adolescent beards (*naw-khaṭān*) and the painter of the portraits of idols [beloveds/beauties].[1] For, the master-artist of His [God's] power decorated the page of the sun with golden lines/borders, and the designer of His handicraft fashioned the side-faced/half-faced moon into a portrait. Creatures of the earth in every corner of the land sing His praises, and heavenly beings of every form (*ṣūrat*) chant His name with their tongues.[2]

So writes Prince Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Emperor Shah Jahan and heir apparent to the richest empire in the world, in a preface that would have accompanied an album that he assembled for his fiancée Nadira Banu Begum. The prince compiled the *Dara Shikoh Album* somewhere between 1630 and 1634, while still a teenager, eventually gifting it to Nadira Banu in 1641/2, a few years after their marriage. From the onset, the preface announces one of the major themes of the album: portraits of adolescents as symbols of beauty.[3] Scholars have recently suggested that folios depicting a teenage prince alone in a landscape are portraits of Dara Shikoh himself (Fig. 90).[4] Often, the facing page shows a dervish gazing at the young prince. In some instances, a similar interaction is shown across double folios but between a dervish and a princess. In fact, the overarching theme of the album is love as seen through the coming together of pairs, either in the same folio or across facing pages. The pairings include European couples in western dress, as well as birds, butterflies, and portraits of court ladies. The question remains, however, that in an album

1 *Naw-khaṭān* could also refer to the new student of calligraphy.

2 The album preface is printed in Dara Shikoh, "Muraqqa-i Dara Shikoh aur uska Muqaddima," ed. Muhammad Abdullah Chaghtai, *Oriental College Magazine* 13, no. 3 (1937): 97–103.

3 For another discussion of this preface, see Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 75.

4 Jeremiah Losty, "The *Dara Shikoh Album*: A Reinterpretation," paper given at the workshop *The Mughal Empire under Shah Jahan* (Vienna, May 26–27, 2014); Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 77.

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FIGURE 90
Dara Shikoh, ca. 1634, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 16.3 × 9.5 cm. British Library, London
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made for his beloved, clearly celebrating their impending union through various metaphors, why did Dara Shikoh feel the need to highlight images of Sufis? And what role does the repeated presence of the prince engaging with these Sufis imply?

Some answers can be found in the opening of the album preface. Dara Shikoh follows the Persianate preface-writing convention of acknowledging the act of artistic creation as God's prerogative. In the Quran He is called *al-khāliq*, the creator, and *al-muṣawwir*, the painter, artist, or fashioner of forms. The human artist's vocation is thus an extension or reflection of the divine act. It is God who shapes divine archetypes of beauty and gives them the form (*ṣūrat*) of human beloveds, who paradoxically become idols of worship. Those who regard their outward beauty for its own sake become idolaters, but those who take their beauty as divine manifestation comprehend God's Truth-Reality as witnessed through outer form. In Persian literature, particularly romantic and devotional poetry, the beloved is usually represented as an adolescent boy, too young to don a beard, with only the down emerging on his face. Poets relish playing with the word *khaṭ*, a double-entendre meaning both calligraphy and the fuzzy down on the face of a handsome youth. By opening

FIGURE 91
Dara Shikoh (detail), ca. 1634, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 16.3 × 9.5 cm. British Library, London
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his album preface with this theme, in which God, the master artist, creates the adolescent's down as an archetype of beauty, Prince Dara Shikoh appears to align his own teenage persona with this specific form of divine manifestation. Idealized/idolized depictions of adolescent princes in the album folios, all beardless with only hints of newly emerging facial hair, also point to this interpretation (Fig. 91). In paintings made for the prince, Dara Shikoh is shown in two distinct ways, both of which were rooted in earlier Mughal painterly conventions. One is to show him with Sufis, and the other is to show him alone, as a clear symbol of archetypal beauty. In some cases, the album format of the double folio allows for an ingenious overlap of both themes.

In the first section of this chapter, I highlight some important precedents from the earlier Mughal periods that show princes interacting with Sufis. In the second section I discuss examples of single portraits where a young prince or king is shown alone, as a manifestation of God's beauty. In the third section I discuss how the *Dara Shikoh Album* repeats, develops, and cleverly reconfigures both these themes, and how the album preface provides further keys for their interpretation. In the fourth and final section, I place the convention of depicting adolescents within a larger visual context by examining some Central Asian and Persian parallels. I conclude the chapter by briefly discussing how this convention survived beyond the Dara Shikoh period.[5]

5 Art history is largely silent on the homosocial aspect of elite Indo-Muslim culture. More work has been done in the sphere of comparative literature. For example, see Ruth Vanita

1 In the Company of Dervishes

Folios showing older men viewing adolescents illustrate a classic Sufi theme found across the Persianate world. Both historically as well as in poetry, it is often the antinomian Qalandar who becomes infatuated by a much younger beloved. In the *Dara Shikoh Album* [hereafter DSA] as well, the Qalandar features prominently, and his representation is intrinsically linked to the devotional motif with which Dara Shikoh's preface began: the young prince cast as the locus of God's manifestation.

By the early modern period, in addition to denoting a Sufi lineage, the term "Qalandar," the most popular branch of antinomian dervishes in the Persianate world, had become synonymous with a particular state of being and way of life. This way of life was typified by the famous example of Maulana Rumi's own master, Shams-i Tabriz (d. ca. 1250), who was regularly depicted dressed as an antinomian. In a mid-sixteenth-century Ottoman folio from the Topkapı Sarayı Museum illustrating a hagiography of Rumi, Shams is shown as a dervish with pierced ears in front of the prideful Maulana who approaches riding on a mule (Fig. 92).[6] Among Shams's coterie is a Qalandar—shown on the lower left of the page—holding a large animal horn, with the familiar burn marks lining his forearm. The famed lover-beloved and disciple-guide relationship that existed between Rumi and Shams deepened an already established cultural precedent, in which the scholarly, exoteric, and often proud disciple is finally freed from his pietistic shackles by an otherworldly Qalandar type: a guide who, having already united with God, is no longer fettered by conventional acts of religiosity. Another antinomian, who was not only a contemporary of Dara Shikoh but one whom the prince considered as one of his spiritual guides, Sarmad (ca. 1590–1660), also famously fell in love with a Hindu boy from Sindh, and is even depicted in seventeenth-century paintings viewing his beloved (Fig. 93).[7]

The ennobled Qalandari way of life was permanently etched into the Muslim cultural imagination in numerous *ghazals* by a poet recited even more widely in the Persian cosmopolis than Rumi: Hafiz Shirazi (d. 1389). Hafiz makes his high opinion of the Qalandars evident when he says, "The Qalandars of Truth-Reality (*ḥaqīqat*) don't buy even half a penny's worth / Of a

and Saleem Kidwai, *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

6 Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, 279.

7 For a discussion of Sarmad's identity and details about his life, see Nathan Katz, "The Identity of a Mystic: The Case of Sa'id Sarmad, a Jewish-Yogi-Sufi Courtier of the Mughals," *Numen* 47, no. 2 (2000): 142–60.

FIGURE 92
Rumi comes riding on a mule, illustration to a hagiography of Rumi, ca. 1550. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. Library of the Topkapì Sarayì Museum, Istanbul
PHOTO: AFTER *FIGURATIVE ART IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM, AND THE RIDDLE OF BIHZÂD OF HERÂT* (*1465–1535*) (PARIS: FLAMMARION, 2004), 279

silken robe from the one who doesn't have any skills."[8] Hafiz suggests that the Qalandars are truly one with God, and do not need to strut around in fancy robes made by unskilled people. Through this metaphor, the poet also suggests that Qalandars do not depend on acquiring spiritual merit from incompetent people. In typical Hafiz fashion, he is ridiculing mainstream Sufi shaikhs, who by this time were gaining in cultural and political currency, and would march around with their disciples in extravagant attire, literally wearing their piety on their sleeves. With Hafiz, the figure of the rakish antinomian who consciously deviated from social norms in order to negate his lower ego while also presenting a moral mirror to other Sufis became widespread, and would often be pitted against the figure of the socially upright, God-fearing, but egotistical Sufi shaikh. The wisdom of romantic medieval Sufi poets such as Hafiz was imparted to the children of nobility across the Persian-speaking Muslim world, and Prince Dara Shikoh was no exception. In the introduction to his biography of saints, *Safīnat ul-awliyā'* (completed in 1640), Dara Shikoh includes an entire

8 Hafiz, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 66.

FIGURE 93
Sarmad with Abhai Chand, ca. 1640, Deccan. Ink and watercolor on paper. 30.5 × 21.4 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Od 60 pet. Fol., f. 8)

section on this antinomian group. He concludes the section by quoting from a medieval Sufi, Ibrahim Qassar, who said that "there are two things most loved in the world: the first is the company of the dervishes, and the second to serve and love the Friends of God."[9]

Two paintings from the *DSA* show the prince as an adolescent facing an elderly Sufi who is reciting the poetry of Hafiz. In folio 18 of the *DSA* (Fig. 94), he appears to be busy in a lesson with his tutor, who is reading out from the *Divan* of Hafiz.[10] The open pages facing the viewer include a couplet that reads: "When God bound the form (*ṣūrat*) of your heartwarming eyebrows / He enclosed the solutions to my problems in their playful movement."[11] Similar to artworks discussed in the preceding chapter, this painting must also be read on multiple levels, in tandem with its supporting text. In the most literal sense,

9 Dara Shikoh, *Safīnat ul-awliyā'*, 22.
10 Losty and Roy, *Mughal India*, 130, fig. 79.
11 Hafiz, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 32.

FIGURE 94
Dara Shikoh in a lesson, ca. 1634, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 16.1 × 11 cm. British Library, London
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the painting depicts a royal poetry or calligraphy lesson.[12] However, given what we know about the poet being recited as well as the preface written by the young patron, the subtext of witnessing the divine in human form, in particular as a beardless youth, becomes evident.

Cyrus Zargar, in his seminal work on Sufi aesthetics, explains that:

> a movement within Sufism increasingly began to associate the *shahid* [a beautiful youth/literally the locus of witnessing] with the human form, especially that of a beardless young man, and resulted in not only one of the most important poetic images in Sufi literature but also one of the most controversial practices of certain Sufis, namely, gazing at beautiful faces.[13]

12 The inkwell with a *qalam* in the painting could hint at a depiction of a calligraphy lesson. Additionally, the compound *naw-khaṭān*, from the beginning of Dara Shikoh's album preface, can also refer to a new student of calligraphy.

13 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 85.

One could add that this act, known in the Persianate world as *shāhidbāzī*, also contributed to one of the most enduring visual tropes in Persian and Hindustani devotional painting.[14] Scott Kugle, in discussing the term in relation to South Asian Sufi poetry, describes *shāhidbāzī* as "playing the witness game: worshipping to the beauty of God as it might manifest in any created form."[15] He explains that most "medieval Sufis in the Persian-speaking realm found such manifestations of divine beauty most clearly and consistently in the form of young men."[16] Culturally, the term *shāhidbāzī* has always walked the line between socially censured practices—often linked in this context to homoeroticism—and the devotionally acceptable act of viewing outer beauty. Popularized by Persian poets, *shāhidbāzī* was legitimized within Sufi circles when medieval practitioners such as Ahmad al-Ghazali (1059–1111), ʿAyn al-Qudat Hamdani (1098–1131), and Awhad al-Din al-Kirmani (1163–1238) linked it to several apocryphal Prophetic sayings. One contested *Hadith*, cited by none other than Ibn al-ʿArabi, says: "I saw my Lord in the form of a beardless youth, wearing a cloak of gold, upon his head a crown of gold, and upon his feet sandals of gold."[17] Other sayings attributed to the Prophet and popularized by Sufis who sought to justify the act of witnessing God's beauty in human form include, "Beware of gazing at beardless youths, for truly theirs is a color like the color of God," and, "I saw my Lord on the Night of Mi'raj in the form of a beardless adolescent with short, curly hair."[18] Medieval poets such as Farid al-Din ʿAttar, Hafiz, Fakhruddin ʿIraqi, Amir Khusro, and Ruzbihan Baqli regularly alluded to these Prophetic sayings and contributed to the act of *shāhidbāzī* becoming a popular convention in both literature and painting. In an essay, Jim Wafer elaborates on Ruzbihan's vision of God in the form of a beardless youth thus:

> In a state of ecstasy the great shaykh Ruzbihān Baqli of Shiraz said: I saw God in the form of a Turk, with a silk cap, which he wore awry. I gripped the hem of His robe and spoke: By the unity of Your [God's] being! In

14 The fundamental function of *shāhidbāzī* is to gaze at form "with the physical 'head's eye,' and seeing meaning *only* through form" (Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 103).

15 Scott Kugle, "Dancing with Khusro: Gender Ambiguities and Poetic Performances in a Delhi Dargah," in *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Richard Martin and Carl Ernst (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 260.

16 Kugle, "Dancing with Khusro," 260.

17 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 396n3. See also Schimmel, *As through a Veil*, 67–68. For a Safavid-period Persian depiction of a beardless youth with a golden cap, see Canby, *Princes, Poets and Paladins*, 65–66, fig. 40.

18 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 93.

> whatever form You appear and in whatever form You show yourself to the loving eye, I will recognize You behind it.[19]

It should be added that in Sufi circles the act of *shāhidbāzī*, though culturally transgressive in a Persianate context, was for the most part a "platonic appreciation of divine beauty in human forms, one affected by a preexisting cultural appreciation for the beauty of beardless young men," and not necessarily a sexual act.[20] The practice is intrinsically linked to the superiority given by both antinomians and *Akbarian* Sufis to God's love—love which is reciprocated by the lover with passionate ardor known as *ʿishq*. Even before Ibn al-ʿArabi, love was described as the essence of God and the vehicle of all creation by the great Suhrawardi Sufi Ahmad al-Ghazali.[21] In fact, it was al-Ghazali who first emphasized that the starting point of love between the human lover and divine beloved begins with vision, and its resulting act of viewing, *naẓar*. Thus, for many Sufis, the act of viewing a beautiful face became the spark that lit the heart with the fire of longing for God: "an outlook in which Love is the axis of all creation and witnessing or gazing at beauty allows one entry into the presence of Love."[22] Or as Dara Shikoh himself explains in *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ*, "he who has seen a chivalrous man (*javānmard*; literally, a young, "manly" man) has not seen him but has seen God."[23] In Ottoman and Persian literature, the beardless boy is celebrated in the language of love poetry as a more earthly type and there is indeed an erotic element, though it may not imply consummation but rather longing. This is also the case with romantic Persian poetry written in India. Usually, the spiritual and carnal meanings are interwoven, leaving the audience to prize out whichever meaning they prefer.[24]

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19 Jim Wafer, "Vision and Passion: The Symbolism of Male Love in Islamic Mystical Literature," in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, ed. Stephen O. Murray, and Will Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 123. For another translation of this anecdote, see Hellmut Ritter, John O'Kane, and Bernd Radtke, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farīd Al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 462.

20 "Nevertheless, there is nothing to suggest that the gnostics discussed were insincere in their claims that it was for them a practice devoid of licentiousness. In fact, never do the texts [...] refer to *shāhidbāzī* as pederasty" (Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 119). He continues: "the complimentary ideals of sincerity and adventure, rooted in the image of the Qalandar, helped render the censurable vice of enjoying the company of beautiful young men into an antinomian virtue" (114).

21 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 88.

22 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 89.

23 Dara Shikoh, *Sakīnat-ul awliyāʾ* [Urdu translation] (Lahore: Al-Faisal Nashran, 2005), 18.

24 For a discussion of this theme in sixteenth century Ottoman Turkey, see Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

The popular Indian Sufi poet Amir Khusro gave the awry-capped beloved evoked by Ruzbihan Baqli a new twist, as a metaphor for the *qibla* (direction toward the Kaʿba; place of worship) of the devotee. Jahangir in his memoirs mentions a recital in his court in which this verse of Khusro was performed: "Every tribe has a rightly guided path, a religion, and a *qibla* / I straighten my *qibla* in the direction of the one with his cap awry."[25]After Khusro, Hafiz further popularized this theme across the Persian-speaking world. In his poetry he often identifies himself with the rakish, Qalandar-like libertine, known as the *rend*. In one couplet he mischievously pronounces: "Behold the insistent breeze, like the rakish *shāhidbāz*, / Sometimes grabbing the rose's lips, and sometimes the grass's hair."[26] Poems such as these also suggest that the proverbial garden itself, with its flowers, trees, and grass, is a mirror of the beautiful human figure. Seen through this lens, the DSA folio (Fig. 94) becomes far more narratively nuanced than a mere school lesson. The sage-like tutor sits in a meditative posture with a scarf wrapped around his knees to prop him up. The stage which the two figures share is further demarcated by the aged scholar's positioning on a white, embroidered spread (*chāndinī*). Similar to the *jōgī* in the *Salim Album* (Fig. 36), the saintly figure is haloed by a green bush. A slender tree that extends into the upper border provides him with shade while some plucked roses, perhaps a gift from the youth—and representing an aniconic mirror of the youth's beauty—lie scattered at his feet. Curled up below the prince is a content-looking white cat. The scene takes place by an idyllic riverbank, with a nearby town receding into the misty background. The blue skies are tinted with golden clouds, suggesting that the imagined moment is early morning. Meanwhile the presumably Sufi tutor holds the open *Divan* of Hafiz in his left hand and counts a rosary with his right. While the green bush haloing the figure and the black rosary hint at the devotional undercurrent of the painting, the clearest signifier is the already quoted couplet itself, in particular the first hemistich: "When God bound the form (*ṣūrat*) of your heartwarming eyebrows." The beardless princely youth, through the beauty of his form, thus becomes the old ascetic's *qibla* for the manifestation of God. The mutual gaze, which is precisely the act of *naẓar*, allows the Sufi to drink in this revelation of God's beauty. As the second hemistich proclaims, God has enclosed all the solutions to his worries in the twitching, arching, playful eyebrows of the

25 Jahangir, *The Jahangirnama*, 109. Also see ʿAbd al-Sattar, Nawshahi, and Nizami, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, 185. For a lengthier discussion on this theme, see Ahmad, *What Is Islam?*, 202–06, and Kugle, "Dancing with Khusro," 259–61.

26 Hafiz Shirazi, *Qaṣīda number 3, In Praise of Shah Shaikh Abu Ishaq*, accessed January 10, 2023, https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghaside/sh3/.

beloved.[27] In addition to being a portrait of the young heir apparent engaged in a lesson, the painting is an illustration of the Hafiz couplet, and recapitulates a favorite devotional motif regularly found in both literary and visual examples.

There are two other instances from the same period, possibly by the same artist, Chitarman, in which a young Dara Shikoh is shown in the company of Sufis gathered during a recital or lesson for the prince. The examples come from a Shah Jahan-period album in the collection of the Bodleian Library, altered or repaired sometime in the eighteenth century, (Fig. 95 and 96).[28] They form a double folio in the album, possibly made for the young heir apparent. The two paintings share a similar setting, with the raised platform also seen in the DSA folio. The central figures in both folios sit on *chāndinīs* atop black paradisiacal carpets seething with energy. A central, axial mulberry tree, flanked by birds, gives shade to both groups. Similar to the DSA folio, the prince wears white attire and gestures to the central figure with his hands. Figure 95 in particular focuses on the young prince. The scholar-dervishes are seated around him, in contrast to the facing folio, in which he is shown to one side. The prince's hands are cupped in a prayer gesture, and he beseeches the main figure of the painting in the light-colored *jāma* seen placing a green leather book by his side. With his left hand he gestures back to the prince, while their interlocked gaze creates an invisible diagonal that cuts across the center of the composition. In the middle where their eyes meet, right below the pillar-like tree, a *sārus* crane comes to life on the black carpet, as if an extension of the Sufi's open hand. The teeming carpet with animals and birds in the wilderness adds an imaginal dimension to the painting, helping to transport the artwork into the *ʿālam-i khyāl*. If we acknowledge that in Mughal painting textiles often mark the introduction of an otherworldly presence or other realities, then we can think of the entire raised platform where the action unfolds as a symbolic, transitional space, an isthmus that hangs between earth and sky.[29] The marble platform with its large step in the foreground, then, would represent the material realm, and the golden hued sky with soaring birds would be the world of the absolute. It is unclear in this painting whether the object of devotional

27 Describing the importance of the face, including the eyebrows in Persian poetry, Schimmel explains, "The friend's beautiful face could be compared to the Koran, for like every drop of the Holy Book it was of perfect, flawless beauty and contained the manifestation of God's words and actions; the eyebrows, due to their shape, could then form the prayer niche for the lover" (*As through a Veil*, 73).

28 Eduard Sachau and Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1889–1953), II:2381.

29 See Chapter 1 for a lengthier discussion.

FIGURE 95 Dara Shikoh with dervishes, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 38.2 × 22.5 cm. Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Douce Or.a.1, fol. 35a)
PHOTO: © BODLEIAN LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD. NONCOMMERCIAL 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY-NC 4.0)

FIGURE 96 Dara Shikoh with dervishes, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 38.2 × 22.5 cm. Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Douce Or.a.1, fol. 34b)
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viewing is the prince, in his bright orange turban, or the Sufi-scholar. Most likely, as with so many other artworks on this theme, the viewing is mutual.[30]

The visual evidence, that extends beyond just the *Dara Shikoh Album*, suggests that God's self-disclosure is deliberately represented in the person of the young prince. This seems all the more likely for folios in which he is shown facing a Sufi elder. Rather than thinking of this as an innovation by artists working for Dara Shikoh, we should situate this visual convention in a larger Persianate context, one that Mughal male royalty further expanded. The motif of the prince as locus of divine radiance appeared during the Salim/Jahangir periods, with precedents that can be traced back to Akbar's atelier and possibly even earlier. One painting from the Chester Beatty Library that acts as a precursor to the Dara Shikoh-period paintings is a Jahangir-era painting made by Govardhan showing two princes in a garden, surrounded by dervishes (Fig. 97). There are several iconographic and stylistic elements in this ca. 1615 painting that prefigure the later artworks from the mid-1630s. In this instance the central figure is a prince, probably Jahangir's second son Parviz, who shares his white *chāndinī* with three rakish dervishes, two of whom gaze longingly at the prince.[31] A younger prince in an orange *chādar* reads to him from an open book. The senior dervish sitting behind Parviz, in a large, banded hat and with two arching cypresses flanking him in the background, gestures to a beardless boy on his right who also holds a volume in his hand. A snug cat sleeps on the edge of the *chāndinī* to complete the group. In the painting's foreground is another group showing a musician singing to an old Sufi seated across a duck pond, with long sleeves and with eyes lost in contemplation. A beardless boy who alluringly looks out of the page at the viewer, accompanies him. Similarly, in both Bodleian folios an aged Sufi, possibly the same person in both paintings, also sitting in the lower left corner, looks directly at the viewer.[32] In these paintings, the central, carpeted platform is deliberately

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30 Another artwork from the same period and also clearly part of the group of paintings that show a teenage Dara Shikoh in the company of sages is from the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, titled *A Young Prince with Mystics* (AKM498). Consistent with the theme, it shows a group of aged Sufis seated under the shade of a large tree, facing the young prince. One mystic wears coarse clothes and has a disheveled turban loosely tied around his head, clearly attesting to his antinomian lineage. I would like to thank Supriya Gandhi for bringing this painting to my attention.

31 For a stylistic discussion of this painting, see Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:392, color plate 60, and image 3.18, page 1:383.

32 For a Rajasthani example of the beloved staring back at the viewer, see *Page from a Ragamala Series: Patamanjari Ragini*, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (97.98), in Joseph M. Dye, *The Arts of India: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts* (London: Philipp Wilson, 2001), 300–01, 501, cat. no. 115. Aitken suggests that the beloved looks seductively at the

FIGURE 97 Two princes in a garden, from the *Minto Album*, by Govardhan, ca. 1615. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 20.9 × 11.9 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 07A.8v)

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flattened against an otherwise receding, more naturalistic space. This compositional strategy immediately leads the viewer to focus on the central action. It also creates a spatial disjuncture that wrenches us out of historical reality and places us in an imaginal reality, where time and space are suspended. Such symbolic spatial markers were introduced into Mughal painting by artists working in Akbar's atelier, such as Basavan, who were fascinated by European conventions of three-dimensionality but were also trained in Persian styles.[33] In the Chester Beatty painting, the three figures in the lower foreground clearly occupy a space that recedes three-dimensionally, in contrast to the central assembly gathered around the figure of the prince on a flattened carpet shown on a completely vertical plane. Is that a subtle hint at different groups inhabiting distinctive ontological realities? Is this why the boy seated next to the old dervish is the one who communicates with the viewer outside of the picture frame, since he symbolically shares the same three-dimensional space as ours? It is as if the figures in the foreground are completely disconnected or oblivious to the group surrounding the prince. The only object that connects the two ontological spheres is an open book with yellow and orange leaves resting in front of the beardless youth. One corner of the book, placed on the border of the large, flat carpet, touches the blue border of the lower carpet occupied by the boy and the aged Sufi. One cannot help but think of Abu'l Fazl's description from the *taṣvīrkhāna*, where he explains how the written word or the painted image forms an isthmus where the worlds of *ṣūrat* and *maʿnī* overlap. For images such as these, both the saintly type and the royal figure, in their own spheres of influence, connect the heavenly with the earthly.

There are also visual elements that bridge the two zones. In her discussion of this painting, Leach shows her frustration at Govardhan for his "rather arbitrarily distributed" color palette. But if we pay close attention to the color scheme, in particular the more Indic, brighter colors, we realize that there is nothing arbitrary to their placement. The brilliant, flat red of Parviz's bolster forms a diagonal relationship with the carpet in the lower left. The thin green pillow behind the boy peering out of the painting is the same bright green of the bolster that the bald dervish next to the prince is hugging. And the orange of the musician's turban is the same as the orange shawl draped around the

viewer "with a slight smile and occupies the center of the page—conventionally the space of amorous resolution" (*The Intelligence of Tradition*, 29).

33 For an example of this spatial break signifying two distinct symbolic registers, see Basavan's ca. 1595 painting "Poet Being Spurned from a Drinking Party," in Stuart C. Welch, "Early Mughal Miniature Paintings from Two Private Collections Shown at the Fogg Art Museum," *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959): 137, fig. 5.

FIGURE 98
Dara Shikoh with dervishes (detail), ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 38.2 × 22.5 cm. Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Douce Or.a.1, fol. 34b)
PHOTO: © BODLEIAN LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD. NONCOMMERCIAL 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY-NC 4.0)

younger prince reciting from a book, once again creating a subliminal visual diagonal that helps connect the two groups.

Wandering dervishes often, but not always, affiliated to antinomian orders, are regularly shown in Persianate painting either with disheveled headgear or no headgear at all. In the Govardhan painting, it is this group of dervishes that surrounds Parviz, whereas the more mainstream Sufi with his striped robe sits separated from them in the foreground. Curiously, in Figure 96, in which Dara Shikoh converses with elderly Sufis, the attendant figure wearing pale orange, in the top left, can also be identified as a wandering antinomian. Upon closer inspection, we notice that the dervish, shown smoking a pipe, is draped in a patched cloak and has burn marks associated with Qalandari rites of self-immolation (Fig. 98). Could it be that the Sufis responsible for the education of young princes, including Dara Shikoh, had affiliations with antinomian orders as well? Or is the presence of Qalandars and other deviant dervishes purely allegorical, taken from literary figures of speech?

Another painting from the Jahangir period, from ca. 1610, also most likely made by Govardhan, firmly establishes the early precedent of depicting young, beardless princes as objects of devotional viewing within Sufi circles;

FIGURE 99
Hafiz greets a youth, from the *Divan of Hafiz*, attributed to Govardhan, ca. 1610. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 10.2 × 5.8 cm. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In 15.7r)
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a precedent that was simultaneously rooted in Persianate cultural practices and in poetic metaphor (Fig. 99). It was by no means an innovation of painters working for Dara Shikoh.[34] The artwork is the ninth and final painting illustrating a Mughal copy of the *Divan of Hafiz*, written in 1582 by Akbar's chief artist and calligrapher ʿAbd al-Samad. The paintings were added for Jahangir sometime around 1610 or 1611. The other eight illustrated folios are at the British Library.[35] The verses accompanying the Chester Beatty painting are from Hafiz's *ghazal* number 484, although the first hemistich in the couplet at the top is not included in standardized copies of his *Divan*. The couplet reads: "I can't bear that you strut gracefully viewing the garden / For you are more pleasant than the rose and fresher than the wild-rose." In the standardized *Divan*, the first hemistich reads, "The morning breeze arises from the orchard because of your affection/wind/mind (*hawā*)." The couplet in the lower band reads:

34 For a stylistic discussion of this painting, see Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:330–31, Color plate 47, and image 2.201, page 1:338.
35 Losty and Roy, *Mughal India*, 101–09.

"Courtesy and modesty made you a sovereign of the moon-faced ones / Praise to you! For you are purer than a hundred of these."[36] Since the painting was originally placed near the end of the *Divan*, with only eleven more *ghazals* to follow, it is likely that the old Sufi standing across from the gracefully strutting youth is an imaginary portrait of the poet Hafiz, shown holding his own collection of verses. The open page in his hands repeats the opening hemistich, "I can't bear that you strut gracefully viewing the garden."[37]

Many elements in this painting, including the text, clearly foreshadow themes explored in the DSA. Dara Shikoh in his album preface writes how the designer of God's handicraft "fashioned the side-faced/half-faced moon into a portrait." The metaphor of the youthful moon-faced beauty used for both genders was a favorite trope among classical Persian poets. This is perhaps why the beardless youth in the ca. 1610 Govardhan painting is shown with a round, moonlike face. In several folios of the DSA, the interaction between two individuals unfolds across two facing folios. In the painting from Hafiz's *Divan*, instead of the album gutter, it is the water channel coursing through a *hisht bihisht* paradisiacal garden that divides the two distinct spatial zones. Hafiz stands with his open book on the left, gazing longingly at the youth, shown holding a small narcissus flower and placed slightly above the aging poet. The narcissus is a longstanding symbol of youthful beauties in Persian poetry. Even though Govardhan was known for making startlingly observational paintings, here he deliberately idealizes the princely youth, giving him an archetypal moonlike face and an attenuated body with long arms. His flowing, rose-pink *jāma* heightens his petal-like appearance, in a garden strewn with flowers. In this painting, there is no doubt that the object of devotional or romantic viewing is the boy. The two figures meet in the proverbial garden in which the poem itself is set. The metaphorical walled garden in Muslim tradition, particularly in Sufi poetry, alludes to paradise or a paradisiacal state, and was thus also recreated in real life by the nobility who planned their gardens according to Quranic descriptions of *jannat*. Here the painter makes that association very clear. The poet and the youth congregate around the central fountain, *chashma* in Persian and *ʿayn* in Arabic. In both languages, the words simultaneously refer to a water fountain and to the eye. It alludes to the Quranic fountain in Paradise where, symbolically, God's reality is to be witnessed in its most concentrated form. To further detach this painting from any worldly

36 Hafiz, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 484.

37 Leach reads it incorrectly in her discussion of the painting and mistakes it for a different verse.

or materialistic links, Govardhan places the garden on a completely vertical plane, as if seen from above. The entire composition is thus situated in the imaginal realm, the realm where higher realities are witnessed in the shape of visions. For the poet, lost in the act of *shāhidbāzī*, God has appeared in the form of a beardless youth.

Paintings accompanying important literature such as the *Divan* of Hafiz, assist the reader—in this case the royal Mughal reader—on how to savor poetry that was deliberately polyvalent. Both the image and the text propagated deeply rooted cultural norms that were simultaneously enacted in everyday life and were also aspirational ideals that potentially opened up to spiritual experiences. In three of the other eight paintings of the Mughal *Divan* of Hafiz, the beardless youth again plays a key role. While two are metaphorical in nature, the third appears more historical and has striking parallels with the much later Bodleian album folio depicting Dara Shikoh in an assembly of dervishes (Fig. 96). Both artworks feature Mughal princes contemporary to the paintings. The painting from the British Library *Divan* shows Prince Parviz, beardless and seated in the lower-right, accompanying an assembly of four aged Sufis deep in discussion (Fig. 100). That same format is repeated in the Bodleian example. In both cases there is an attendant figure on the left who is separate from the group of older Sufis. As with so many paintings of this type, it is an open book, placed here before two Sufis on the left, that triggers the conversation. The accompanying opening lines from Hafiz's *ghazal* 187, located in a band abruptly overlapping the kneeling Parviz, read: "Burn O heart, for your burning accomplishes much / A midnight supplication repels a hundred afflictions." Given that this early Jahangir-period painting supports this particular couplet, the literary theme could provide a possible context for later compositions showing a young prince in the company of ascetics, even when there is no supporting text. Typically, the heart, which is the seat of God-knowledge in Islamic mysticism, burns out of longing for the divine beloved. A standard Sufi practice is the repeated, intense invocation of one of God's names during long, nightly vigils, that helps keep that burning ardor, *ʿishq*, alive in the devotee. It is precisely this "midnight supplication" that wards off evil and aids in finding union with God that Hafiz is referring to. Is it then possible that young Mughal princes, who can easily be identified in these paintings, were allowed to participate in evening Sufi gatherings? Or were these assemblies in which the children of royalty were also present, only to discuss spiritual matters through the recitations and commentaries of classical devotional poets such as Hafiz? Or is the artist, by placing a notable young prince in an imagined gathering of Sufis, indicating that these verses and their moral, religious, romantic, and spiritual

FIGURE 100 Sufis in discussion watched by a prince, from the *Divan of Hafiz*, attributed to Govardhan, ca. 1610. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. 15.1 × 10.5 cm. British Library, London

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lessons are to be understood and followed by elite patrons? After all, princes and emperors inherited their fathers' libraries that would include both illustrated manuscripts and album folios featuring young royalty in Sufi gatherings. We know from Dara Shikoh's autobiographical references that he sought out such gatherings. But perhaps he was not the first Mughal prince to do so, and was only building on a precedent established by earlier nobility such as Parviz, Salim, and others. A major departure from this reenactment of imperial devotionalism would happen a few years later when, as an adult, Dara Shikoh would become initiated into a Sufi order, not just as a passive devotee but as an active seeker of God.

2 The Princely Youth, Alone

In as early as the Akbar period, there are artworks showing a young prince either visiting or being visited by ascetics. The *nīm qalam* in which a Qalandari Sufi visits the princely Akbar, made by ʿAbd al-Samad (Fig. 29) and discussed at length in previous chapters, is one of the prototypes for this subject as seen in Mughal painting. However, no other painting from the Akbar period better sums up the devotional timbre associated with depictions of princes than a *siyāh qalam* drawing from ca. 1585 depicting a Qalandar dervish prostrated before a beardless prince (Fig. 101).[38] As if gripped by a sudden flash of inspiration, the antinomian has fallen suddenly at the feet of the youth, who looks down at him in surprise. The dervish's billowing scarf behind him suggests the impulsiveness of his gesture. Even his wooden staff lying horizontally in the foreground curls longingly towards the youth's feet.

Although it is unclear if the drawing depicts a portrait of a specific prince or a generic type, it was during the Akbar period that the premise of witnessing God's beauty in the form of a beardless youth corresponded most clearly with the reign of a youthful prince or king in Mughal India.[39] One late-Akbar period painting, from the *Salim Album*, signed by Mirza Ghulam, shows a drunken

38 Mace, *Mughal Paintings*, 199, cat. 11.

39 In a much later example, Mulla Shah, in a panegyric poem, praises Emperor Shah Jahan thus:
"Your heart is (itself) such an illumination of Paradise
That it has laid to waste the Garden of Paradise
Your heart is the exceptional seat for God's manifestation
You, the Sun, are both the Sun and the lamp"
(BL, Delhi Collection MS 1420, Mulla Shah, *Muṣannifāt-i mullā shāh*, f. 20v).

FIGURE 101 A Holy Man Prostrating Himself Before a Learned Prince, ca. 1585; border added probably 1700s. Attributed to Manohar, and Basavan. Ink on paper, laid down with borders of gold-decorated blue paper; page: 31.5 × 19.7 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, gift in honor of Madeline Neves Clapp; gift of Mrs. Henry White Cannon by exchange; bequest of Louise T. Cooper; Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund; from the Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection 2013.297

beardless youth as an ideal of beauty and elegance (Fig. 102).[40] The tiny Persian inscription above the figure's head reads "Shah Salim." In this example the young prince dons a disheveled turban as a sign of his drunkenness, a direct allusion to the awry cap of Ruzbihan's beloved.[41] A couplet from a Hafiz *ghazal* frames the image: "We have seen the reflection of the cheek of our friend in the cup / Oh! The enjoyment of drinking has made us eternally heedless."[42] Here, as in so many other examples in Persian devotional poetry, imbibing the beauty of the beloved makes the lover heedless to the world. Additionally, wine-drinking is akin to *shāhidbāzī* in that it opens up higher pathways to God-knowledge.

An even clearer example of Prince Salim assuming the function of God's *tajallī* [self-disclosure] comes from a *Gulshan Album* (1610/1) folio (Fig. 103). In this instance the prince, with short mustache and pouting lips, is once again unmistakably Salim. He is shown seated on a rocky dais, reading from an open book. His right foot is folded underneath him while his left foot rests on a rocky "foot stool" that acts as a pedestal. Most importantly, a bubbling spring—the proverbial water of life—emerges from under the pedestal, watched intently by a submissive dog with a collar.[43] A tree also shades Salim: in this case, a slender sapling gently arching over the figure, a tree repeated several times in the *DSA*. Many of the familiar devotional symbols are present in this one image. The poem in the frame is a quatrain by the twelfth-century panegyrist Rashid al-Din Vatvat (d. 1182), and reads:

> I hear of your scent from the breeze, and I faint
> I hear your name from the cosmos, and I swoon
> When I speak, the first word is "You,"
> You are my very thoughts; thus, I remain silent.[44]

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40 See Wright, *Muraqqa'*, 56. Also see Pal, *Indian Painting*, vol. 1.

41 Okada has preferred to call it a "portrait of a courtier" without giving any explanation for her choice. However, she also takes the representation to depict "divine beauty as glimpsed—or sensed—through the earthly beauty of a handsome youth" (Okada, *Indian Miniatures*, 113).

42 Hafiz, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 11.

43 For another discussion of "thronelike knolls" in Mughal painting, see Aitken, *Intelligence of Tradition*, 164–66.

44 Rashid ul-Din Vatvat's Ruba'i number 34 from his *Taghazzul*, accessed December 12, 2021, https://ganjoor.net/vatvat/robv/sh34/.

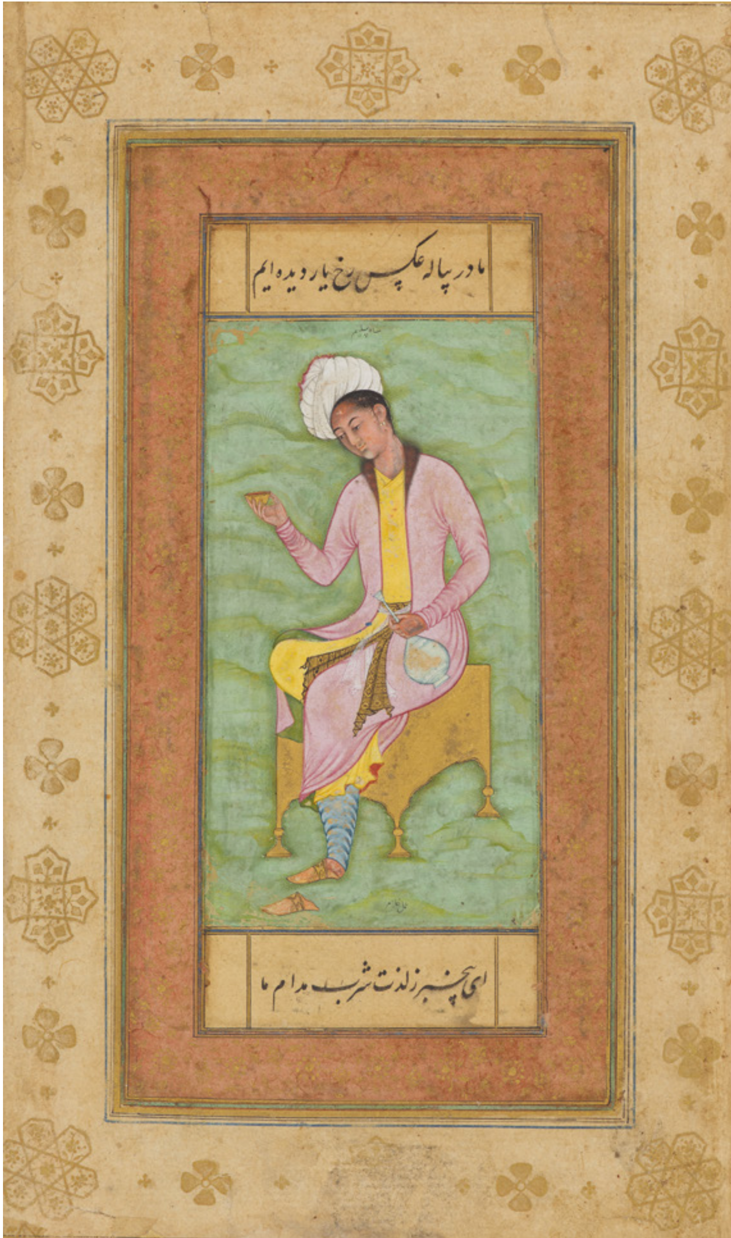

FIGURE 102 Prince Salim with an awry turban, from the *Salim Album*, by Mirza Ghulam, ca. 1600–1605, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, L.A. Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper. 23.34 × 14.92 cm. From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase (M.81.8.12). Artwork in the public domain

FIGURE 103 Prince Salim reciting poetry (A young man reading), from the *Gulshan Album,* attributed to Muhammad ʿAli Musawwir, ca. 1610. Ink, watercolor and gold on paper. 40 × 24.6 cm. OA 7154. Musée du Louvre © RMN-GRAND PALAIS / ART RESOURCE, NY. PHOTO: MATHIEU RABEAU

We are left wondering whom the verses refer to. Is the pining lover the prince reading out from the open book, remembering the name of his separated beloved? Or is the lover the beholder of the folio peering at the young beardless beloved who sits posing on his rocky throne while the fountain of life gushes from his feet? I would argue that in the two Salim-period examples given above, the circular relationship between text and image makes the subject and object mirror each other, most clearly witnessed in the previously discussed *Salim Album* folio containing these lines: "We have seen the reflection of the cheek of our friend in the cup / Oh! The enjoyment of drinking has made us eternally heedless."

Is the Narcissus-like lover witnessing the beloved by looking at his own reflection in the cup? In these circular visual narratives, the separated lover becomes the locus for the divine beloved through his own presence as the beardless prince who is gazed at, in turn, by the beholder of the album, or in the case of paintings made for a young Dara Shikoh, by a Sufi or Sufis sitting across from him. Two other paintings representing this theme are in the Bodleian Library album. The two folios, from seventeenth-century Mughal India, are placed facing each other and show youths seated alone in a landscape. One, from ca. 1610, holds a narcissus and is seated on a chair that is placed on a raised, carpeted platform (Fig. 104). The other beardless prince, most likely from ca. 1630–40, holds a *safīna*—a vertical book of poems—reciting a couplet while seated, similar to earlier depictions of Prince Salim, on a natural rock formation shaped like a dais (Fig. 105).[45]

Gazing upon princely representations of heavenly disclosure, the Sufi/viewer has the potential to realize God-knowledge within himself, thereby becoming in turn a focal point for the staging of mystical emanation. Or as al-Ghazali exclaims in his *Sawānih*: "Oh idol! I thought you were my beloved / Now, as I keep looking, I see that you are none but my soul."[46]

45 Günay Kut and Hermann Ethé, *Supplementary Catalogue of Turkish Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library: With Reprint of the 1930 Catalogue by H. Ethé* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2381.

46 Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 89. "There is the confusion between the beautiful beloved and the poet's own soul [...] This alludes to the true unity of lover and beloved, and intimates that the soul exists only to witness and love" (Priscilla Soucek, "The Theory and Practice of Portraiture in the Persian Tradition," *Muqarnas* 17 [2000]: 102). Priscilla Soucek has also discussed al-Ghazali's possible role in establishing the function of portraiture in Islamic culture: "He discusses several types of beauty and the manner in which they are perceived by the senses, in an ascending progression that moves from the beauty of man to that of the creation and finally focuses on how to define God's beauty. The faculty of sight and the related skill of visual imagination are important aspects of this process. The eye is attracted to beauty and takes pleasure from its perception. Only the weak focus

FIGURE 104 Princely youth in a landscape, ca. 1610. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 38.2 × 22.5 cm. Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Douce Or.a.1, fol. 45b)
PHOTO: © BODLEIAN LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD. NONCOMMERCIAL 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY-NC 4.0)

FIGURE 105 Princely youth in a landscape, ca. 1610. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 38.2 × 22.5 cm. Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Douce Or.a.1, fol. 46a)
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3 Interpreting the *Dara Shikoh Album*

Since most examples of Persian poetry accompanying paintings discussed so far in this chapter illustrate distiches from Persian *ghazals*, another way to interpret the compositional scheme of the album folios is through the symbolic lexicon of classical poetry. This enquiry is particularly useful when surveying albums that appear to have an overarching theme, even if as vague a theme as love or royalty. *Ghazal*—the most popular genre of classical poetry—is a lyric poem with a fixed number of verses and repeated rhyme, often set to music. The individual verses are understood to exist independently of each other, without necessarily having any unifying thematic element apart from the formal structure. Within the Persian and Urdu *ghazal* framework, the object of desire—usually possessing an unspecified gender—is understood to embody both the metaphorical (*majāzī*) and real (*ḥaqīqī*) beloved. Both meanings coexist, with the metaphorical leading to the archetypal. A highly skilled poet such as Hafiz maintained this ambiguity between the levels of meaning consistently throughout his oeuvre, much to the thrill of his audience. The synchronicity of dual meanings can be likened to a viewer in a chamber looking through a latticed screen into a garden. If one concentrates on the screen the intricacies of the carving come into focus and the garden beyond becomes a blur; conversely, if one looks *through* the screen the garden suddenly becomes clear, and the screen disappears. It is what Ibn al-ʿArabi famously called "seeing with both eyes," the eye of *tashbīh* (similitude; likeness) and the eye of *tanzīh* (abstraction; transcendence).[47]

In fact, the Persian and Mughal album as a whole can be thought of as a visual *ghazal* or collection of *ghazals*. If we follow Daryush Shayegan's clear and succinct description of the structure of the *ghazal*, but replace the words "*ghazal*" and "distich" with "album" and "folio," we have a functional description of the Persianate *muraqqaʿ*:

exclusively on external appearances because the essential beauty of man's creations such as poetry, painting (*al-naqsh*), and architecture reflect the inner qualities of the poet, painter (*al-naqqāsh*), and builder. The degree of the pleasure derived from the contemplation of beauty is proportional to the love it arouses. Thus the more attractive a face, the greater one's pleasure in contemplating it. Given the superiority of sight over smell, it is logical that examining a handsome face (or portrait) (*ṣūrat jamīla*) is more pleasurable than the scent of perfume" (102).

47 "The writings of Ibn ʿArabi consistently emphasize perceiving two realities at once: The cosmos and all in it is he, but it is also not he. God has appointed for each person two eyes, with which each person should be cognizant of God as cosmos, on the one hand, and cosmos as cosmos, on the other" (Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 27).

> Each *folio* is a complete whole, a world; within the *album* one *folio* is not joined chronologically to the next, but is synchronically consubstantial with it. It is like a world within a larger world [...] from one *folio* to the next, the same tonalities are amplified on extended registers, calling forth magical correspondences at every level.[48]

As with the classical *ghazal*, the DSA has various "tonalities" under the overarching theme of love, witnessing, and union. One particular timbre is "amplified on extended registers" by repeating it thrice.[49] In these double page compositions, a Sufi on the left-hand folio is shown meditating on a beardless, Dara Shikoh-esque youth situated on the facing folio. Two of the three double pages clearly depict Qalandars. In folio 48r (Fig. 106), the Qalandar seated on a raised dais is shown holding an open book in his left hand, which once again provides the key to unlocking the underlying theme of the double pages.

The dervish can be identified as a Qalandar from the three burn marks on his exposed right arm. He also has a wooden begging bowl (*kashkūl*) hanging from his belt, and is dressed as a *rend*, the familiar wandering ecstatics who wore rough woolen clothes and roamed around barefoot. He has a floppy woolen cap with flowers attached to a rakishly wound white turban and a coarse meditation stick carved in the shape of a deer. With his right hand, he points to the figure across the page while his beseeching eyes gaze in his direction. The open book has a minute couplet—by none other than Hafiz—scribbled on the pages:

> God is Great:
> O That they (the Beloved) would turn their alchemical gaze towards this [speck of] dust,
> O that they would turn a corner of their eye towards us.[50]

The verse is addressed to a figure across the page, on folio 47v (Fig. 107)—a youthful prince dressed in a flashing gold *jāma* and red turban, daintily holding a blue iris. He too is seated on a similar dais as the Qalandar, but with an intricate blue carpet with yellow borders. One cannot help but think of the boy "with a cloak of gold" mentioned earlier in the Hadith of the Prophet. In this

48 Daryush Shayegan, "The Visionary Topography of Ḥafiẓ," in *The Green Sea of Heaven: Fifty Ghazals from the Díwán of Ḥáfiẓ*, trans. Elizabeth T. Gray (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1995), 17; my substitutions.

49 BL, MS Add. Or. 3129, *Dara Shikoh Album*, ff. 43–48.

50 Hafiz, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, 196.

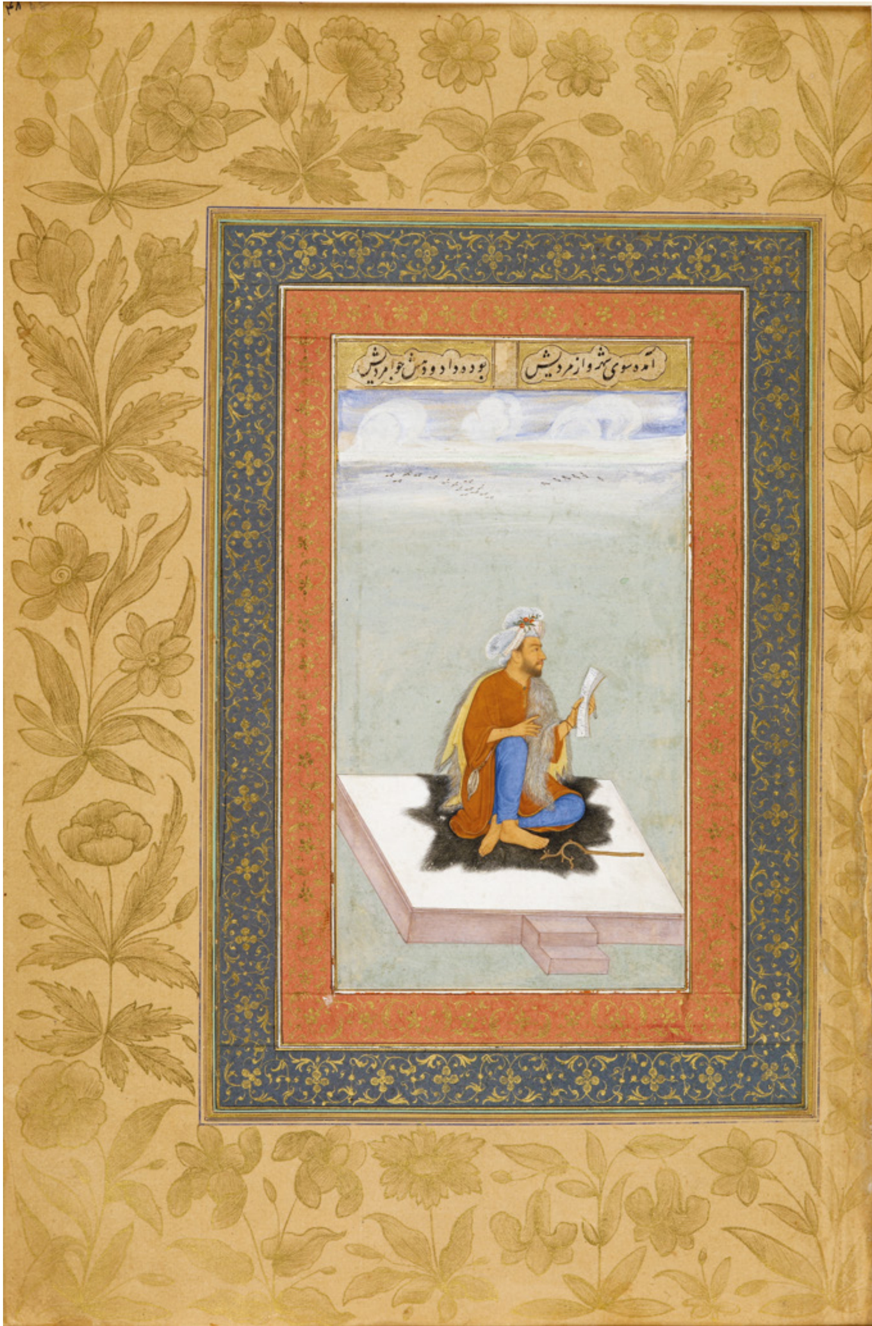

FIGURE 106 A Qalandar Sufi reciting a poem, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 14 × 8.1 cm. British Library, London
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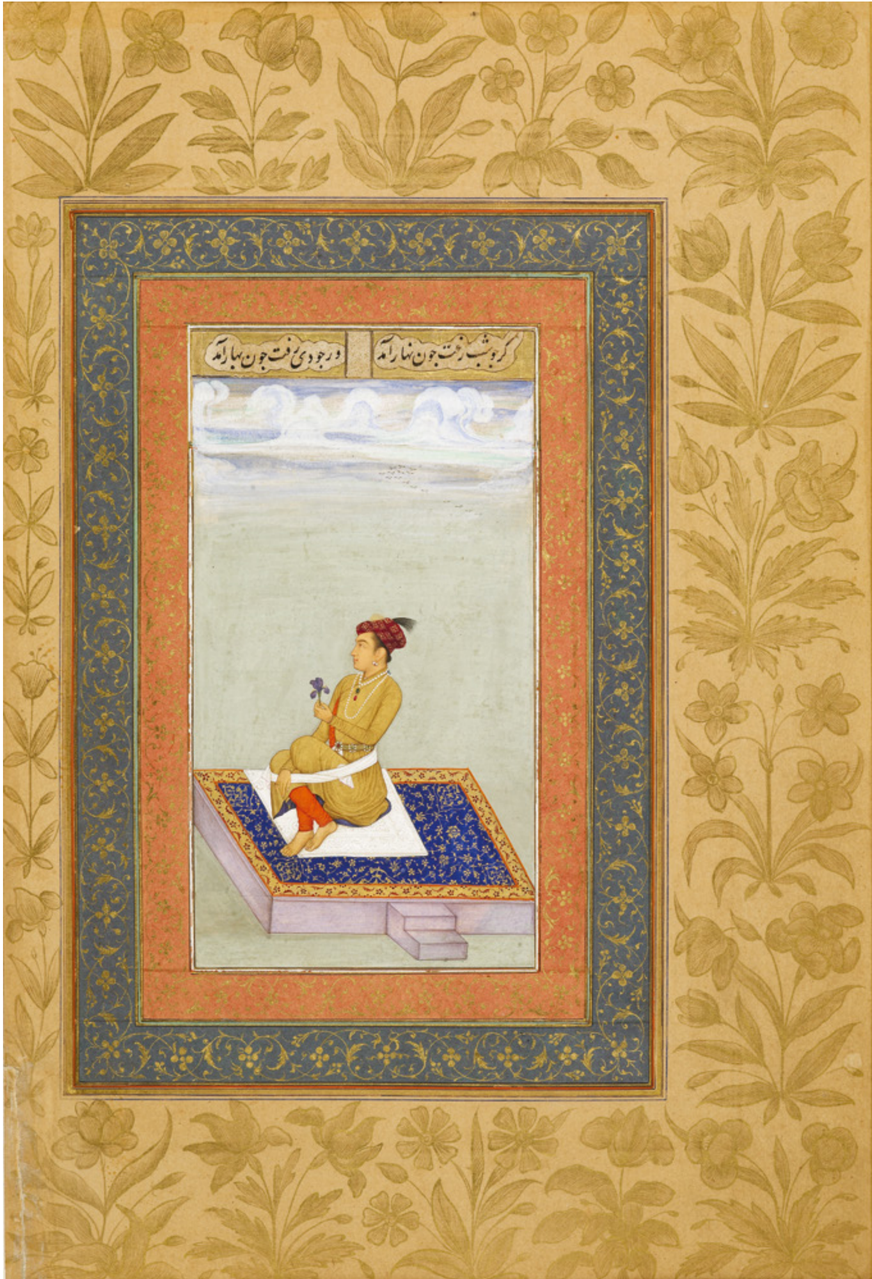

FIGURE 107 A prince possibly Dara Shikoh holding a narcissus, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 13.8 × 8 cm. British Library, London

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double page the devotional intent is far more transparent. A dervish deep in the act of *shāhidbāzī* is imploring the beloved to reciprocate his gaze, and in that process to transform the proverbial lowly speck of dust into gold: the very gold embodied by the prince's garb. On another register of meaning, the two figures together could also represent two aspects of God. The dervish, with his stark black animal skin rug on a white platform devoid of any decoration, could manifest an aspect of abstraction or transcendence, and the prince seated on an embroidered white *chāndinī* atop a resplendent carpet, could represent the divine attribute of likeness or manifestation.

In the other two double folios, the same motif is repeated with subtle variations. In folio 43v, a prince is seated on a rocky, pink dais and smaller rocky footstool in a composition evoking the previously discussed portrait of Prince Salim (Fig. 103).[51] Even the stream swirling around Dara Shikoh is reminiscent of the earlier painting. In this instance, it visually connects the folio with the adjacent page (Fig. 108 and 109), where a dervish stands holding a golden wine bottle studded with rubies. He announces his antinomian lineage with his begging bowl hanging from his belt and the large, golden hat tilted at an angle. In this double folio, the prince, who is holding a cup made of the same material as the wine bottle, has received, or is about to receive, wine from the dervish. This exchange opens up the possibility of understanding this composition as one depicting mutual viewing. While the prince is the most obvious object of reverence, the dervish also has something to offer. Among other things, wine in Islamic spirituality symbolizes God-knowledge, passionate love, and direct experience. The possessor of wine is thus a knower of Truth-Reality. The couplet on the inner border above the mystic hints at the important role that Sufis culturally embodied as agents of sanctification.

All the double pages in the album that depict Sufis gazing at beardless youths contain couplets in the borders. All of them are part of a single passage from the first mystical-didactic *mathnavī* written in Persian, *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa*, by the twelfth-century Sufi poet Sana'i (d. 1131). The sections used in the *DSA* pages come from the beginning of the eighth chapter, which is a eulogy for the Afghan ruler Bahram Shah, to whom the opus is dedicated, and deal with the early phase of the ruler's kingship. In this didactic section, the young shah is compared to the Quranic Yusuf (Joseph), who is the archetype of all human beauty in Islam. The careful selection of this passage, and its dispersal across pages that specifically represent a young prince being gazed upon by Sufi dervishes, together show beyond any doubt that Mughal royalty—and in particular the heirs apparent—were cultivated to believe in their own aura as

51 The other *DSA* double spread spans ff. 45v–46.

FIGURE 108 A Qalandar Sufi with a wine bottle, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 14.1 × 7.9 cm. British Library, London

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FIGURE 109 A prince possibly Dara Shikoh holding a cup, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 14.1 × 8.1 cm. British Library, London
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God-manifesting vehicles.[52] However, in Figure 108, the couplet adds another symbolic layer of meaning to paintings where sanctity encounters royalty. The couplet reads: "Because of him every head came to be desirous for a crown [everyone became a powerful monarch because of him] / Just like a candle that donned a fiery cap." Is this why the dervish's arcing, golden headgear with a red top resembles a flame? As a composition pregnant with multivalent meaning, the virtue of beholding a locus of divine manifestation is mutual for both figures. One presents a mirror to the other. As I discuss in Chapter 3, for most Muslim rulers, saints acted as an isthmus between heaven and earth or *ṣūrat* and *maʿnī*, and bestowed otherworldly graces on royalty. Through the blessings of these intermediaries, men came to don the crown of kingship. The wine cup in the prince's hand alludes to this bestowal. By juxtaposing this verse with a portrait of an ascetic, this ontological role attaches itself onto the antinomian, while simultaneously, the antinomian standing at the edge of the waters quaffs the beauty of God localized in the form of a prince. These double folios play a similar role to the *Jahangirnama* pages discussed in the previous chapter, in which the emperor receives the key to unlock sovereignty of both worlds from the medieval Indian saint Muʿin al-Din Chishti (Fig. 61 and 62). Facing folios thus represent two metaphysically distinct realities, both reflecting an aspect of God.[53]

Two sets of facing folios in the *DSA* show a dervish gazing at a noblewoman from across the page (Fig. 110 and 111), and offer a slightly different inflection or "tonality" to the theme of dervishes witnessing a manifestation of God in the form of a youth. In folios 26r and 25v, an ascetic and a princess gaze at each other across folios, both holding a *safīna*, or elongated book, a format usually associated with collections of poems. It is through the medium of the written word that the two—again embodying different ontological registers—meet. According to J.P. Losty, the figure on folio 25v is a portrait of Dara Shikoh's elder sister Jahanara Begum.[54] He hinges his argument on the "magnificent jewels" that she wears, but provides no other evidence, stylistic, iconographic, or inscriptional, for his attribution. The near complete absence of elite

52 There are countless examples of this theme throughout Mughal and Mughal-influenced painting in India. For a discussion of Qalandars in India in the medieval period, see Simon Digby, "Qalandars and Related Groups: Elements of Social Deviance in the Religious Life of the Delhi Sultanate of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," in *Islam in Asia*, ed. Yohanan Friedmann, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), 1:60–108.

53 Aitken has shown how spatial division that helped demarcate distinct ontological zones was also used as a convention in Rajasthani paintings. She connects these conventions to earlier Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu manuscript painting traditions (Aitken, *The Intelligence of Tradition*, 18 and 20, fig. 1.4).

54 Losty and Roy, *Mughal India*, 132.

FIGURE 110 A Qalandar Sufi with a book, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 17 × 9.7 cm. British Library, London
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, ADD.OR.3129 F. 26R

FIGURE 111 A princess with a book, from the *Dara Shikoh Album*, ca. 1630–34. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 17 × 9.7 cm. British Library, London
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, ADD.OR.3129 F. 25V

women's portraits in pre-modern South Asia, in addition to the known cultural boundaries preventing women from presenting themselves outside the family circle, makes it highly unlikely that male artists from the Mughal court would be encouraged or even allowed to make portraits of princesses.[55] It is safer to assume that portraits of royal women in the DSA represent types or ideals, rather than known historical personages. An elite woman—such as Nadira Banu Begum, to whom Dara Shikoh gifted the album—might have seen herself in any one of these ideals of Indo-Muslim beauty, but a male outsider's gaze would only have seen generic types rather than known individuals. Once detached from our own scholarly desire to lock depictions down in prisons of attribution and historical literalism, the folios can be allowed to perform multiple roles within the album, from inhabiting literary tropes to displaying courtly virtues.

One such role is hinted at in Dara Shikoh's album preface, and can be applied to all double folios that show two figures gazing at each other. In addition to the meanings evoked by the polyvocal word *khaṭ*—calligraphy, line, adolescent's down—which is the leitmotif of the *dībācha*, another theme that the beginning of the preface in particular emphasizes is that of contrasting pairs. The sun contrasts with the moon, creatures of the earth are set against heavenly beings, and of course *maʿnī* contrasts with *ṣūrat*. Most importantly, the two sides of the moon itself are used as a metaphor for the sets of two facing portraits in the album. In the opening section Dara Shikoh hints at this meaning when he describes how God's painter fashioned the half-faced moon into a portrait. In the second section that follows a five-verse *masnavī*, he expands on this theme. This section initiates the customary praise of the Prophet that in pre-modern Persian texts always follows the praise of God. However, just as in the section praising God, this passage also uses the metaphor of artistic creation, in particular the painter fashioning figures in the album:

55 For one of the few exceptions, see John Seyller, "Two Mughal Mirror Cases," in *Journal of the David Collection* 3 (2010): 130–59, where Seyller makes a compelling argument for the portrait of Mumtaz Mahal, the mother of Jahanara Begum, on an imperial mirror case. Scholars have also argued that likenesses were made of Jahangir's influential wife Nur Jahan, although concrete evidence is lacking. For a survey of Nur Jahan's life and times, see Ruby Lal, *Empress: The Astonishing Reign of Nur Jahan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018).

> Praise [to the Prophet], that is beyond the tongue of the brush/pen (*qalam*), is imprinted on the page of the heart. The very first letter of the preface [...] and the very last image of the album [...] on every page a line (*khaṭ*) splits the moon into two with the brush of the idols/beauties and transforms the moon into two figures (*dū-paykar*).[56]

Ostensibly, the moon here refers to the famous miracle associated with the Prophet, when he split the luminous satellite into two. However, knowing what we know about the layout of the album and its obsession with interacting double folios, we could apply the split moon image to the repeated trope of two facing figures. After all, the preface makes it clear that it is the painter's brush that creates two distinct figures out of the moon. If we use this imagery as an interpretation for the album, then the concept of the reciprocal gaze becomes even more evident. In facing pages such as the one depicting the princess interacting with the antinomian, in which both hold books of poetry, or the double folio in which Dara Shikoh receives wine from a Qalandar, Truth-Reality takes on two complimentary forms. The full moon, which in Islam represents human perfection, is also associated with the Prophet.[57] And in the case of the album, that perfection—in Sufism the marriage of the two poles of majesty and beauty, or *jalāl* and *jamāl*—has split into two distinct figural forms.[58]

Dara Shikoh's five-verse *masnavī* further enriches metaphors of creation, at once Godly and human, as they interweave with one another, adding additional layers of meaning to the album:

> The Painter [God] of the page of the rose-garden,
> The maker of portraits of the beautiful ones
>
> From the handiwork of his pen (*kalk*),
> the down (*khaṭ*) on the faces of the beauties—the golden ray of sunlight—is immortalized
>
> He adorns meaning (*maʿnī*) with form (*ṣūrat*)
> From that [meaning] each form (*ṣūrat*) becomes manifest

56 Dara Shikoh, "Muraqqa-i Dara Shikoh," 101.

57 See Schimmel, *As through a Veil*, 173, 186.

58 "The use of daring hyperboles is part of the *qaṣīda* tradition and is appropriate for the praise of God's marvelous works, in which the aspects of *jalāl* (Majesty), and *jamāl* (Beauty), work together to create the patterns of the mysterious yet meaningful carpet of life" (Schimmel, *As through a Veil*, 56).

His masterful *qalam*, from the bubble,
Created a dazzling dot on the line of water

From Him the world became apparent
Just as paintings [are made manifest] by the painter.

4 Persianate Antecedents for the *Dara Shikoh Album*

The folio showing a beardless prince riding a horse from the *Fitzwilliam Album*, mentioned briefly in Chapter 3 (Fig. 51), is one of the earliest depictions of a youth as an object of devotion in Mughal painting. In this mid-sixteenth-century painting, the theme is confirmed by the supporting Hafiz verse which enjoins the viewer to participate in the act of *shāhidbāzī*. Several key features of the folio, such as the garden setting, the *safīna* in the prince's hands, and poetry in the inner borders are all integral to paintings in the much later *DSA*. The style of the Fitzwilliam painting suggests the hand of a Bukhara artist, perhaps an émigré who came to India with the itinerant Humayun, firmly linking this visual tradition of representing adolescent princes as manifestations of Godly beauty to earlier Persian and Central Asian practices.[59]

Shared conceptual and iconographical elements link Persianate artworks made in diverse regions. We can constellate one painting from Isfahan, from around the mid-sixteenth century, into this theme as well (Fig. 112). A princely youth wistfully holds an album page which has a poem written inside its large green and gold borders. The verses are from a *ghazal* by the famous Amir Khusro:

Passionate love (*ʿishq*) trampled me to death
A creature captured me by his tongue

I was not content with well-being
Now I realize the truth of that.[60]

---

59 Paintings on ff. 39v and 40 from the *DSA* are made in the Bukhara style, and likely date from the first half of the sixteenth century, again suggesting how elite albums in the Mughal period were in ongoing conversation with parallel and earlier artistic traditions. Any innovation that took place in the Mughal atelier was done with a consciousness of these precedents.

60 Ghazal number 80 from Amir Khuro's *Divan*. Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī, *Dīvān-i Kāmil-i Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī*, ed. Saʿīd Nafīsī and M. Darvīsh (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Jāvīdān, 1965), 31.

FIGURE 112
A youth holding a folio, Isfahan, circa 1550. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 24 × 15.9 cm. British Museum, London (1974,0617,0.3.100)
© THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Is the folio in the boy's hand a gift from the lovelorn poet who is only now, belatedly, realizing how he spurned a chance for union with the beloved? Typical of this genre, the poem plays on the theme of unrequited love.[61] The theme is visually enhanced by the illuminated folio in the hands of the beloved, which stands in for the absent lover. A slightly later Irani painting from the 1590s, made in the Khurasan style as practiced in Herat, unmistakably shows a mystic witnessing God's beauty in the form of an iconic, beardless noble youth (Fig. 113).

The youth with a large turban sits on a branch of a slender flowering tree, stooping over a small *safīna*. Sitting cross-legged, his right foot rests on a small rock, while a stream swirls around him. The two devotional symbols—the tree as world axis and the stream as the waters of immortality—situate him in an ontologically activated zone. Across the narrow stream, gazing from the grassy

61 There are several Persian paintings on this theme. For a particularly exquisite example from Safavid Isfahan, see Sheila Canby, *The Golden Age of Persian Art, 1501–1722* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 107, fig. 95.

FIGURE 113 A prince and a dervish by a blossomed tree, Khurasan, late 16th–early 17th century. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 32 cm × 20.4 cm © THE AGA KHAN MUSEUM, AKM74

banks is a young dervish. His shaved head, the leopard skin tossed over one shoulder, his short knife and a wooden begging bowl dangling from his belt all gesture toward his antinomian lineage. With his right hand he appears to be offering something to the beardless youth.[62]

Occasionally, the theme of the old man, shaikh, or mystic falling head-over-heels in love with a beardless boy also poked fun at the elderly lover, and was often represented in Persian painting.[63] One folio from the Metropolitan Museum of Art painted by Riza-yi ʿAbbasi around 1630 could reflect this trope. It shows an aged Sufi gazing at a youthful man who is running away from him with a wine bottle in his hands, tauntingly looking back (Fig. 114).[64] The large text in the band above reads, "your green (new) down (*khaṭ*), that is a sign of beauty/excellence." An empty vertical band splits the two figures, containing them in their own distinct ontological zones. It is likely that Riza-yi ʿAbbasi made the two figures on separate occasions, and they were placed together on one folio by a later compiler of the album. In this way the folio shares a basic compositional device with the *DSA*, in which different existential or cosmic zones are demarcated by interruptions in the album. The only difference is that in the *DSA*, these distinct regions are separated not only by putting borders around the figures, but by placing them on facing folios.

Another means of placing the old man and the youth into two distinct spaces, but within one cohesive artwork, is by including a tree as a symbolic marker of separation in the center of the composition.[65] Occasionally, a stream

62 "One wonders [...] whether the pictorial representation of some young dervishes was not intended as a metaphor for the fine qualities associated with dervishes rather than a depiction of an actual dervish" (Canby, *Princes, Poets and Paladins*, 69, fig. 41). If this were indeed true, then both figures, the noble youth and the dervish, might be depicting ideal types or metaphors and thus presenting a mirror for the other. Also see Anthony Welch, *Collection of Islamic Art: Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan* (Geneva: Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan [Château de Bellerive], 1972), 184–85. For another Persian example, see *Seated Youth and Young Dervish*, British Library, London (J.56.14), in B. W. Robinson, *Persian Paintings in the India Office Library: A Descriptive Catalogue* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1976), 65–66, fig. 208.

63 See for example the Safavid painting illustrating Jami's *Subḥat al-abrār*, in which a fickle old lover is knocked off the rooftop by the youthful beloved (Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. [F1946.12.162]). Marianna Shreve Simpson, *Persian Poetry, Painting & Patronage: Illustrations in a Sixteenth-Century Masterpiece* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1998), 48–49.

64 Marie Swietochowski and Sussan Babaie, *Persian Drawings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 74–75, ill. pl. 32 (b/w).

65 For Persian examples, see S1986.292 and F1947.23 from the Freer|Sackler Galleries, and 11.84.13 from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Sheila Canby, *Persian Masters: Five Centuries of Paintings* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1990), 80, fig. 11; Esin Atıl, *The Brush*

FIGURE 114
The old man and the youth, by Riza-yi 'Abbasi, ca. 1665, Safavid. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 12.7 × 5.4 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (25.68.5). Fletcher Fund, 1925
CREATIVE COMMONS PUBLIC DOMAIN, CC0 1.0 UNIVERSAL (CC0 1.0)

coursing from the tree's roots enhances the difference between these two ontological realities. This compositional maneuver is used to great effect in a Shah Jahan period painting from the Ackland Art Museum showing a prince, presumably Dara Shikoh, facing an aged Sufi, who might be an imagined depiction of his spiritual guide Mulla Shah (Fig. 115). On this occasion, a tumbling purple mountain-scape creates another partition that separates the intimate gathering in a garden from the sprawling city in the background. A slightly earlier painting from the Harvard Museums, possibly from the late-Jahangir period with later Shah Jahan-period additions, uses the stream and tree motif to divide the composition into three distinct registers (Fig. 116). In the topmost register, shaded by a tree, sits a sage lost in meditation as he listens to music provided by two musicians who sit facing him. A stream courses from beneath

of the Masters: Drawings from Iran and India (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 62, cat. 25; Ladan Akbarnia and Francesca Leoni, "The Mystical Arts of Islam," in *Light of the Sufis* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2010), 34–35.

FIGURE 115 Possibly Prince Dara Shikoh and Mulla Shah accompanied by five retainers in Kashmir, by Jalal Quli Khan, ca. 1640. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper, mounted on an 18th-century album page. 27.5 × 17.3 cm. Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Gift of the Tyche Foundation (2009.21)

FIGURE 116 A prince visiting a sage listening to music, ca. 1635. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 46.7 × 30.7 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, gift of Grenville L. Winthrop, class of 1886
PHOTO © PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, 1937.19

the grassy platform where the sage is seated, dividing the lower half of the painting into two further space cells. On the right is a beardless prince accompanied by a guard. Opposite him, across the stream, are two elderly ascetics, presumably disciples of the saint. In her discussion of this painting, Rochelle Kessler mistakes the mustachioed singer on the topmost register for Prince Khurram (future Emperor Shah Jahan), thus dating the painting to much earlier than its style suggests. She also assumes that the sage is a Nath yogi because of his "long hair," when in fact his hair is covered by a brown shawl. Given his clean, long beard and coarse woolen shawl, it is more likely that the figure depicted is a Sufi mystic. Kessler also mistakes the dervishes in the bottom left register for the prince's attendants.[66]

In Indo-Muslim painting, many Persianate themes that involved depictions of princely youths attached themselves to the figure of Dara Shikoh after the mid-seventeenth century. There are hundreds of artworks, especially popular in eighteenth-century painting, that show a Dara Shikoh-esque youth visiting a sage.[67] Similarly, there are later Mughal paintings that show a dervish doting on a princely type, clearly building on visual tropes localized in the *DSA*. One late-seventeenth century example, from the Victoria & Albert Museum's *Small Clive Album*, shows a bearded Qalandar in a coarse white shirt reading from an open book while gazing up toward a Dara Shikoh-like prince in a dazzling orange *jāma* (Fig. 117). The beardless youth sits on a rocky dais, shaded by an arching tree. Two yellow birds face each other, but from a distance on either side of the tree trunk, heightening the sense of ontological separation between the dervish and his object of devotion. The exact meaning of the verse inscribed on the open page of the book is difficult to decipher, but it focuses on the theme of viewing the face of the beloved.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the visual language of this unique theme of devotion had seeped deeply into the cultural imagination, so much so that other historically verified interactions between a mystic and a youth were recast using preexisting visual topoi. A mid-nineteenth century painting from the Lahore Museum, made for the Muslim governors of Lahore

66 Kessler, "Company of the Enlightened," 29, 37, fig. 5 and 8b. https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/216626. For an important painting showing a beardless Dara Shikoh in the company of discoursing Sufis, see Milo C. Beach and Stuart Cary Welch, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India, 1600–1660*, exh. cat. (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1978), 166–67, fig. 63, https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/299918?position=0.

67 For some examples, see Daniel Ehnbom et al., *Indian Miniatures: The Ehrenfeld Collection* (New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with the American Federation of Arts, 1985), cat. no. 24; *Prince Dara Shikoh Visits a Sage*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, L.A. (M.71.49.5); *Mughal Prince Visiting a Dervish at Night*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS.93-1960).

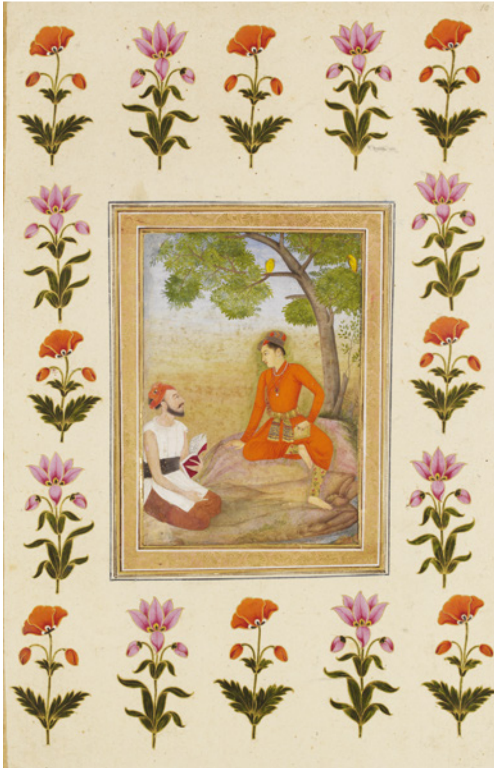

FIGURE 117
Qalandar and a princely youth, from the *Small Clive Album*, ca. 1680. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. 35.5 × 23.5 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum, London (IS.48:10/A-1956)
© VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON. GIFT OF MR. JOHN GOELET

under Ranjit Singh, shows the popular Punjabi Qadiri-Qalandar poet Shah Husain (d. 1599) facing his beloved, the young Hindu boy from a Brahmin family, Madhu Lal (Fig. 118).

The beardless Madhu wears orange garb similar to what Dara Shikoh and later princely youths were regularly shown wearing in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings. In this particular case the color also plays with Madhu Lal's name; the Hindi word *lāl*, in addition to meaning "beloved" and "ruby," also means the color red. When compared to the *Small Clive Album* painting, the composition of the figures in the Lahore Museum example has been reversed. Shah Husain carries a prayer bead in one hand and a yogi-crutch in the other, as *he* sits on a hillock with an arching tree giving *him* shade. Given that both figures are at an equal height, the viewing is symbolically mutual.

In this brief survey of one specific devotional theme from Mughal Hindustan I have attempted to highlight the role of princes in the development and dissemination of cultural values as expressed through painting. The visual evidence suggests that Mughal princes cultivated a particular persona which coincided with preexisting Persianate ideals of homosocial love and beauty; in

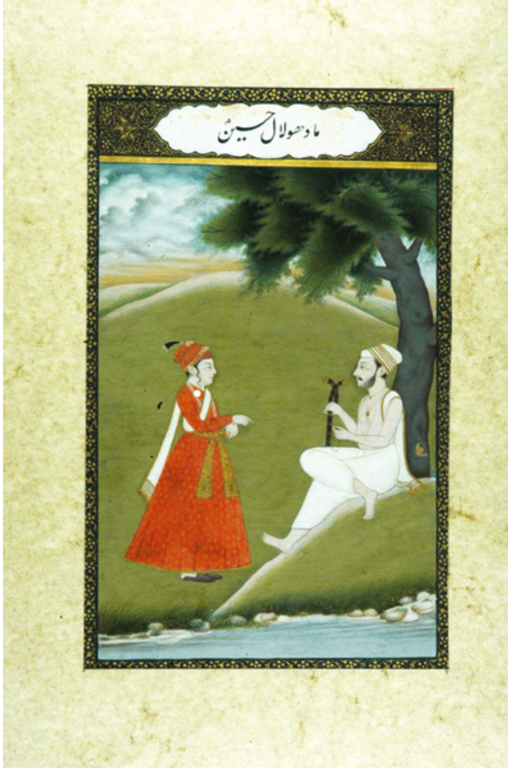

FIGURE 118
Madho Lal and Shah Husain, ca. 1840. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Faqir Khana Collection, on permanent loan to the Lahore Museum, Lahore (292.D-1)
PHOTO: LAHORE MUSEUM

particular, the Sufi ideal of a beautiful youth seen as an embodiment of divine beauty and excellence, which was then projected onto Mughal princes. One of the key observations in this chapter is that in this spiritual interaction between the princely youth and the sage, mutual gazing is considered to be beneficial to both. This specific lens of inquiry also helps contextualize Prince Dara Shikoh within his own history, rather than inserting him in a dialectic that pits the "liberally unorthodox" Dara against his Islamically "orthodox" brother Aurangzeb.[68] He was in fact continuing practices that were expected of young princes. As Rosalind O'Hanlon has shown in her study on Mughal princely etiquette (known as *ādāb*), the cultivation of a moral self was inextricably linked with received attitudes toward Islamic spirituality as well as sensuality.[69] We already have examples of Prince Parviz and Prince Salim who enacted these

68 For a rebuttal of this scholarly dialectic, see Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 2–5.

69 Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42, no. 1 (1999): 47–93.

ideals, associated with mystics, and read devotional poetry—poetry that was at once sensual and spiritual. Dara Shikoh again followed his predecessors when he assembled his *muraqqaʿ* since Prince Salim and Prince Khurram (the future emperor Shah Jahan) both commissioned princely albums. For Dara, the major break from princely tradition came in 1639, incidentally a time when he first began to don a full-on mustache (Fig. 119). This was a pivotal period for the prince. As a 24-year-old, he transformed his nascent interests in devotion into an active pursuit of God-knowledge when he became, along with his sister Jahanara Begum, the first Mughal royalty to enter a Sufi order. Paintings made soon after this period always show Dara Shikoh with a beard. From this moment on, his devotional choices clearly set him and his princely vision apart from his predecessors. Court artists, rather than showing him as an object of devotion, now depicted him venerating known saints. This shift also steered the genre of Indo-Muslim devotional depiction onto new avenues.

However, Dara Shikoh was not alone in patronizing new possibilities within devotional image making. In the next chapter, I will focus primarily on his elder sister Jahanara Begum, whose position as an elite Muslim noblewoman who was also deeply engaged with Islamic mysticism allowed for the emergence of a uniquely iconic representation of Muslim saints; a representation that would have a lasting effect on devotional portraiture in Hindustani painting for the next three centuries.

FIGURE 119 A portrait of Prince Dara Shikoh within a mandorla, by Chitarman, 1639. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 41.2 × 29.9 cm. The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.458.9
PURCHASED BY J. PIERPONT MORGAN

CHAPTER 5

The Face of Shah … the Face of God

In the year 1634, a group of incensed Muslim religious scholars and clerics in Kashmir signed a *maḥżar* [legal document] declaring Mulla Shah (1585–1661)—a senior disciple of one of India's most prominent living Sufi masters, Miyan Mir of Lahore—deserving of death for allegedly having composed heretical poetry.[1] The petition made its way to the court of Emperor Shah Jahan in Delhi. Along with his eldest son and heir apparent, Dara Shikoh, the emperor was an avowed supporter and devotee of Miyan Mir, who belonged to the Qadiri order of Islamic mysticism. With the help of Dara Shikoh, Miyan Mir himself intervened before the emperor, vouching for Mulla Shah's integrity as a pious and upright Muslim gnostic. Utterly convinced, Shah Jahan immediately stopped the petition from becoming a legal command.[2]

The controversy surrounding Mulla Shah's verses piqued Dara Shikoh's curiosity immensely. As we saw in the previous chapter, he was already attracted to Sufi devotional ideals and regularly sought the company of dervishes. In his late teens and early twenties, he channeled his metaphysical aspirations through the Qadiri circle of Miyan Mir in Lahore. After Miyan Mir's death in 1635, Mulla Shah became his spiritual successor. By early 1640, at a time when the emperor's attention was fixed on his kingdom's volatile northwestern border, Dara Shikoh had resolved to become the sage's disciple. In his biography of the saint, titled *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī* [*The Biography of Mulla Shah*], Tavakkul Beg, a senior disciple of Mulla Shah, provides a vivid account of Dara Shikoh's first meeting with the shaikh.[3] By now the prince had heard of Mulla Shah's sanctity both from his father—who had recently met with Mulla Shah—and from other court officials, thereby increasing his eagerness to see the saint in person. Initially, the Mulla refused to entertain any such possibility and declined to meet the prince. However, Dara Shikoh persisted.

1 For a detailed discussion of the legal history of *maḥżars* in Muslim India, see Chatterjee, "Mahzar-Namas."

2 For a complete account, see BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī* (1666), ff. 29a–30a. For a secondary source that cites this controversy, see Fatima Zehra Bilgrami, "A Controversial Verse of Mulla Shah Badakhshi (A Mahdar in Shahjahan's Court)," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 34, no. 1 (1986): 26–32.

3 I have given a brief summary of the event as described by Tavakkul Beg. For a complete account, see BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, ff. 37b–40b.

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It was customary for the Mulla to hold short audiences once a day, passing the rest of his time alone in meditation. One evening, Dara Shikoh quietly slipped out of the royal quarters with one trusted servant and made his way toward Mulla Shah's abode. He found the Sufi seated alone in the courtyard, on a raised platform under the shade of a plane (*chinār*) tree. Ordering his servant to wait outside, the prince boldly entered the precinct and silently stood next to the platform. Knowing well the intruder's identity, the Mulla ignored him for a long while. Finally, he broke the silence and asked his visitor's name and the reason for his intrusion. The prince implored Mulla Shah to accept him as a disciple. Showing indifference to his request, Mulla Shah ordered Dara Shikoh to leave at once, stating that men of God have nothing to do with men of the world. The next evening, the prince visited him again and was met with the same response. Eventually, after the intervention of some of Mulla Shah's followers who were also nobles attached to the Mughal court, the sage agreed to accept Dara Shikoh as his disciple.[4]

One intriguing painting of the saint, from the British Museum, provides a visual parallel to Tavakkul Beg's description of Mulla Shah (Fig. 120).[5] Similar to Figure 12, in which the Mulla converses with Miyan Mir, the British Museum painting shows the saint seated under a plane tree, wearing his customary white Afghan turban. Unlike the painting discussed in Chapter One, which has a mythic setting, the location in this instance is Mulla Shah's Sufi lodge, or *khānqāh*, which was situated on the outskirts of Srinagar. As Dara Shikoh explains in his *Sakīnat-ul awliyā'* [*The Tranquillity of the Saints*],

> At present your blessed abode, which is the *Kaʿba* of seekers and the *qibla* [place of prayer facing the *Kaʿba*] for the needy, is located in the middle of the Kashmir Fort on Koh-Hari Hill, which is a very pleasant place with a view of most of the city below.[6]

In the background, the crowded city sprawls on the banks of Lake Dal, under the shadows of the towering Himalayas. Depicted far from the hubbub of the world, Mulla Shah is shown seated with his legs drawn up, counting beads.

4 Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 107–08.

5 The painting is mounted on a detached album folio. The verso includes a much later seal with a probable date of 1221 AH/1806 CE. Therefore, it is difficult to identify from which album this painting originally came.

6 Dara Shikoh, *Sakīnat-ul awliyā'*, 128.

FIGURE 120 Mulla Shah, ca. 1645. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 17.2 × 10.9 cm. British Museum (1949,0212,0.5)
© THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

The plane tree signifies his spiritual status (Fig. 56).[7] Another painting from the late Shah Jahan period—discussed briefly in the preceding chapter—showing a prince visiting an ascetic, again depicts the central figure seated beneath a plane tree (Fig. 115). Terence McInerney has suggested that the latter painting represents Prince Dara Shikoh in audience with Mulla Shah in the Kashmiri mountains.[8] Following these examples, it appears that in the British Museum painting of Mulla Shah, the visual metaphor of the plane tree was historically specific as well as symbolic; Tavakkul Beg mentions that when Dara Shikoh saw the saint for the first time, he was sitting under a plane tree. In both visual and literary accounts that memorialize Mulla Shah, the use of devotional metaphors and signifiers, familiar across the Persianate world, enhances the aura of the saint.

Around the time of his initiation, Dara Shikoh introduced Jahanara Begum to Mulla Shah, sparking a twenty-year affiliation of discipleship and collaboration. This relationship between a Sufi—revered by his peers and disciples as a saint, or "Friend of God"—and two of the most influential members of the Mughal court contributed to the flowering of a multifaceted network of artistic patronage. Working in close association with Mulla Shah, the royal siblings spearheaded projects ranging from pleasure gardens and mosque architecture to devotional literature and painting. Some well-known endeavors include the Peri Mahal garden, from the second quarter of the seventeenth century, and the Mulla Akhund Mosque, completed in 1650.[9] In a poetical tract titled "In Praise of the Homes, Gardens, and Buildings of the Heart-Warming Kashmir," Mulla Shah includes a list of gardens and buildings he was involved in building under the patronage of Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum.[10]

7 Because the plane tree is one of the most ubiquitous motifs in Persianate painting, there are numerous extant examples in museum and library collections around the world. For some exquisite examples in North American collections, see, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, *Youthful Falconers in a Landscape* (45.174.27), folio 11r from the Safavid manuscript of the Sufi tale *Mantiq al-tair* (63.210.11), and *A Youth Fallen from a Tree*, from the *Shah Jahan Album* (55.121.10.20); and, in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., *Musicians and Dancers* (07.157), *Dervish and His Disciple* (47.23), and *Sultan Parvis with an Ascetic* (29.3). For details about the plane tree and its importance for Persianate cultures, see Hūšang Aʿlam, "Čenār," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 16 vols., v.2: 129-33, accessed May 10, 2023, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cenar-the-oriental-plane-tree-platanus-orientalis-l.

8 Terence McInerney, "The Mughal Artist Jalal Quli, Also Entitled the 'Kashmiri Painter,'" *Artibus Asiae* 73, no. 2 (2013): 479–501.

9 For the architectural patronage of Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum, see Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture: An Outline of Its History and Development, 1526–1858* (Munich: Prestel, 1991), 96–117; Bokhari, "The 'Light' of the Timuria," 52–61.

10 BL, IO Islamic 578, Mulla Shah, *Mathnawiyāt-i mullā shāh*, ff. 51b–61a.

When her mother Mumtaz Mahal died in 1631, Jahanara, at the age of seventeen, was given the title "Padshah Begum," or Lady Empress, effectively making her the first lady of the empire. She also had the "privilege and prestige of issuing royal edicts […] at the tender age of seventeen."[11] The emperor gave her the royal seal, enabling her to carry out important political and commercial transactions, and also awarded her the lucrative territory of Surat and its busy international port. She owned her own fleet and, in addition to trading with powerful European companies, would send family members and ladies of the harem to Mecca for Hajj. She was also no stranger to the complexity of imperial politics. Jahanara Begum maintained her loyalty to Shah Jahan throughout the turbulent years of the war of succession, staunchly supporting Dara Shikoh's bid for kingship. In 1657, after Shah Jahan had taken ill and the war between his four sons was in full swing, Jahanara attempted to broker a truce, acting as an interlocutor between her brothers and the emperor.[12] In short, during the mid-seventeenth century there was arguably no other woman in the world who wielded more wealth, power, and influence than Jahanara. Furthermore, her own writings are proof of her being a widely read and learned woman of the court who collected manuscripts and paintings and was an active patron of mosques and gardens. As part of her library, an important illustrated manuscript that Shah Jahan gifted to Jahanara Begum was Sa'di's *Gulistan*, copied in 1468 by the great Persian calligrapher Sultan Ali Mashhadi in Timurid Herat.[13] Several paintings were added during the Shah Jahan period, most likely for Jahanara Begum, after the manuscript had received damaged.[14]

This chapter highlights one aspect of her patronage: paintings of Mulla Shah made by Mughal court artists for Jahanara Begum as aids to meditation.[15] Specifically, I concentrate on two key artworks that both suggest subtly different applications of saintly images. The chapter situates this particular case

11 Afshan Bokhari, "Imperial Transgressions and Spiritual Investitures: A Begam's 'Ascension' in Seventeenth-Century Mughal India," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 4 (2011), 95–96.

12 "When Aurangzeb and Murad together prevailed over the imperial forces in the battles of Dharmat (April 1658) and Samugarh (May 1658), their sister Jahan Ara offered another proposal. Working on behalf of Shah Jahan, she broached the possibility of dividing the empire five ways." Munis Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 40.

13 Abolala Soudavar and Milo C. Beach, *Art of the Persian Courts: Selections from the Art and History Trust Collection* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), cat. 136, 332–38.

14 The manuscript is in the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution (F1998.5).

15 Selections from this chapter have appeared in my essay, "Contemplating the Face of the Master: Portraits of Sufi Saints as Aids to Meditation in Seventeenth-Century Mughal India," *Ars Orientalis* 50 (2020): 106–28, accessed, May 10, 2023, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/ars/13441566.0050.015?view=text;rgn=main.

study from seventeenth-century Mughal India within a growing art-historical discourse on the role of images in devotional practice across the Muslim world. South Asia presents one specific example in which the association between Sufism and imperial patronage engendered a vast corpus of devotional imagery that scholars are only now beginning to consider in light of its own cultural and historical nuances. Following a similar methodology, I use devotional texts written in Persian by the very patrons of the artworks to explain ways in which some portraits served as visual tools that supported their patrons' search for otherworldly, spiritual experiences, even, on occasion, becoming channels of communication between guide and disciple. These artworks became models for the way Muslim saints were represented in miniature painting for the next three centuries. By connecting underlying roles of saints' portraits with the values of one important Mughal woman patron who made these artworks possible, I hope to shift the scholarly lens away from the purely connoisseurial focus that has dominated the study of Mughal painting over the last century, thereby responding to recent calls from art historians to modify our driving question from "how do Mughal images look?" to "what do Mughal images do?"[16]

I begin by demonstrating the ways in which Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum's attitude toward images of saints differed from those of previous patrons. I then describe Mulla Shah's particular method of guiding his disciples, which lays the foundation for a lengthy discussion of related artworks that were made for Jahanara Begum.

I refer directly to the princess's autobiographical account of her discipleship under Mulla Shah, the *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya* [*The Treatise of Jahanara*], and Dara Shikoh's biography of the sage, *Sakīnat-ul awliyāʾ* [*The Tranquility of the Friends of God*], both of which were completed in 1642.[17] Jahanara Begum wrote her *Risāla* a few years after her entry into the Qadiri order. The short treatise is divided into two parts. The first section gives a detailed biography of Mulla Shah, his spiritual exercises, and the lives of his close disciples. The second half focuses on the princess's own search for a Sufi master, culminating with her initiation by Mulla Shah. The treatise closes with Persian couplets

16 Rice, "Cosmic Sympathies," 96. In her essay, Rice demonstrates that paintings from an illustrated astrological manuscript made for Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) were conceived of as "objects that could mediate between the terrestrial and heavenly realms" (96). Other recent publications that have moved away from a purely connoisseurial discussion of Mughal painting include Singh, *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens*; Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism*; and Crispin Branfoot, ed., *Portraiture in South Asia Since the Mughals: Art, Representation and History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

17 Jahanara Begum was given the title Begum Sahib by her father; she used it in the title of her autobiography, *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya*.

FIGURE 121
Album folio with a page from Jahanara Begum's *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya*, Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, City Palace, Jaipur (AG 777)
PHOTO: THE TRUSTEES, MAHARAJA SAWAI MAN SINGH II MUSEUM, THE CITY PALACE, JAIPUR

that she composed in praise of her guide. The *Risāla* appears to have circulated among elite Indo-Muslim circles in the second half of the seventeenth century. Tavakkul Beg includes excerpts from it in his Mulla Shah biography. Additionally, there is an exquisitely calligraphed folio from a dispersed Mughal album in the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, City Palace, Jaipur, that includes an extract from it as well (Fig. 121).

I have also used Dara Shikoh's manual of Sufi practices, *Risāla-i ḥaqnumā* [*The Truth-Directing Treatise*], completed in 1647, which forms the basis for understanding key methods and techniques of Mulla Shah's spiritual teachings. The most important primary textual source for this essay is the above-mentioned Persian biography detailing the life of the Kashmiri saint, titled *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, completed in 1666 by Mirza Tavakkul Beg, a close disciple of Mulla Shah who spent more than a decade with him in Kashmir, and was also employed by Dara Shikoh at the Mughal court.[18]

18 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 77–110; Dara Shikoh, *Sakīnat-ul awliyā'*; Dara Shikoh, *Risāla-i ḥaqnumā* (Lucknow: Munshi Nuval Kishur, 1896); BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*. A detailed history of Dara Shikoh, Jahanara Begum, and their interactions with Mulla Shah that also highlights the role of Tavakkul Beg in the Mughal court is given in Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*.

1 Jahanara Begum: Sufi Patron and Practitioner

Highlighting Jahanara Begum's involvement with Sufism brings into focus an important facet of Mughal engagement with Islamic piety. It also reveals how the elite female experience differed from male expressions of devotion. For example, while it was important for Dara Shikoh to commission paintings commemorating meaningful events related to his association with saints, portraits gained a unique significance for his elder sister. As a woman of the royal house observing *parda* (the seclusion of noblewomen), Jahanara was not permitted to have face-to-face contact with men outside of her immediate family, including her own guide. As I discuss in this section, her autobiography reveals that representations of her guide acted as objects of concentration and as surrogates for the physical presence of Mulla Shah.

As Mughal royalty, Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum inherited a rich courtly legacy in which saints held prestige as figures of veneration. As we have seen in Chapter Three, for the great Mughal emperors Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, images of saints were instrumental to imperial self-fashioning in the context of royal manuscripts and albums. Each emperor employed devotional images according to his own programmatic needs and temperament. Akbar gradually appropriated for himself the saint's function as the bridge between the two worlds. Jahangir used saints' images to sanction the king's role as pontiff of God on earth. For Shah Jahan, saints played a far more personal role, as advisors and intercessors, both in his daily affairs and in commemorative paintings marking important moments in his life. Despite their differences, for these patrons the painted surface embodied an ontological space where different levels of existence in the hierarchy of creation could overlap and even impact lives on earth. This orientation was inherited by Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh.

However, in her autobiography, Jahanara Begum emphasizes that she and Dara Shikoh were the first in their royal line to be officially initiated into an Islamic spiritual order, making them unique in their roles as both patrons and practitioners.[19] This affiliation with a specific Sufi order, which links the practitioner to an initiatic chain (*silsila*) from master to disciple stretching back to the Prophet of Islam, should not be confused with Emperor Akbar's Tawḥīd-i Ilāhī/Dīn-i Ilāhī, an esoteric cult of the emperor in which only select members of the court participated. Although Akbar, Jahangir, and even Shah Jahan couched ideas of sacred kingship within the language of Sufism and visited holy men to receive blessings and guidance, none had been initiated into any

19 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 104.

particular order of Islamic mysticism, and were thus outside the pale of Sufism proper. As Azfar Moin has shown, the Mughal emperor functioned as a representative of God on earth primarily within the domain of politics, sometimes even at odds with mainstream Sufism.[20] For Jahangir and Shah Jahan, mystical aspirations as practiced through the widely accepted and culturally normative channels of Sufism appear to have remained dormant. By contrast, devotional ideals assumed deep, existential significance for Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum. As initiates they were actively engaged in the avowed aim of Sufism: to attain intimate knowledge of—and, ultimately, union with—God, through the intercession of a spiritual master.

1.1 *The Transformative Presence of Mulla Shah and His Qadiri Order*

Before embarking on a discussion of the artworks that resulted in Jahanara Begum's disciple-guide relationship with her shaikh, it is important to provide an outline of the Qadiri order as practiced by Mulla Shah and his disciples.[21]

Muslim saints in South Asia have long been vital catalysts of Indo-Islamic culture, performing roles that range from spiritual guide to political counsel. Images of saints, a common theme in almost every major album and illustrated text of the greater Mughal world, bear witness to their sustained popularity. Their significance among patrons of painting only increased after Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum contributed a new layer of meaning to the genre in the mid-seventeenth century. Their relationship with their spiritual guide, Mulla Shah Badakhshi, brings into sharp focus a unique moment of intersection between religious and imperial spheres in early modern North India.

The role of a guide as mediator, described by Jahanara Begum as the elixir that turns base metals into gold, is a fundamental component common to all branches of Islamic spirituality, including the Qadiri order.[22] As a bridge, the guide is traditionally acknowledged to have acquired intimate union with God and is therefore also a vehicle of divine manifestation himself. It is in this context that Mulla Shah's couplet, also quoted in Chapter One, makes the

20 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 78–79, 92–93.

21 For a lengthier discussion of Indian Sufism and the importance of ritualistic viewing of the spiritual guide, refer to Chapter 1. For a study of the Qadiri order in South Asia, with a detailed discussion of Mulla Shah's branch, see Fatima Zehra Bilgrami, *History of the Qadiri Order in India: 16th–18th Century* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 2005).

22 "His holiness, the guidance giving refuge [Mulla Shah] is the spiritual pole and support of his age, and is like elixir that turns the copper-like being of his students into gold" (Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 89).

most sense: "Anyone who gazed with honest devotion upon the face of Shah / Wheresoever he looked, he saw the face of God."[23]

In order to access this divine presence through the sanctifying radiance of the saint, the siblings actively sought the blessings of both living and departed sages, going to great lengths to cultivate contact with them. In two of her treatises on Muslim saints of Hindustan—the *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya* and the *Mūʾnis al-arvāḥ* [*Confidante of the Souls*], which was completed in 1640—Jahanara Begum describes her journeys to visit Sufi saints and their shrines. In an epilogue to *Mūʾnis al-arvāḥ*, added in 1643, she includes a long personal account of her visit to the shrine of Muʿin al-Din Chishti.[24] The *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya* also discusses maintaining regular contact with several Sufi shaikhs via letters and intermediaries. The act of viewing features as a key aspiration in all of these accounts. In fact, she states in her autobiography that, despite royal and cultural taboos, her desire to view her spiritual master, Mulla Shah, in person reached such a fevered pitch that the saint eventually agreed to a short, clandestine meeting on the day of the princess's departure from Kashmir. As she rode out of the city on her elephant, accompanied by her eunuch, Pran, she saw her guide on the roadside, seated on a red scarf under a fig tree. Jahanara Begum makes a point to mention the "blinding rays of light emanating from his illuminated forehead." She ends the description of this meeting with a quatrain that she composed for the occasion, in which she says, "your face is the mirror that reveals the Truth (*ḥaq*)."[25]

Unlike Dara Shikoh, who would visit Mulla Shah regularly during his visits to Kashmir, Jahanara Begum saw her guide with her own eyes only twice: on the day of her initiation, and, as mentioned above, on the day of her departure from Kashmir. This gendered difference played a major role in the way devotional images operated for the princess, particularly when we understand the central role that the real presence of the guide played for a follower of Mulla Shah.[26]

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23 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 88. Mulla Shah is clearly referring to the Quranic verse "wheresoever you turn there is the face of God" (Quran 2:115). The complete verse reads, "And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So, wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing."

24 Bodleian, MS Fraser 229, Jahanara Begum, *Mūʾnis al-arvāḥ*, ff. 80b–83a.

25 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 106–07.

26 The writing of a gender-specific and feminist Mughal art history has yet to fully take place. For some discussions of women in Mughal painting and the role of women in the Mughal court, see Ruby Lal, "From the Inside Out: Spaces of Pleasure and Authority," in *Mughal Paintings: Art and Stories: The Cleveland Museum of Art*, ed. Sonya Rhie Mace, Dominique DeLuca, and Mohsen Ashtiany (London: D Giles Limited, 2016), 285–305; Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Following the tradition of the Qadiri order, the spiritual method employed by Mulla Shah emphasized either being in the direct presence of the guide or visualizing him. This aspect of his method was a crucial first step toward what he called "the untying of knots in the heart of the seeker."[27] Dara Shikoh's treatise, *Risāla-i ḥaqnumā*, offers a detailed account of Mulla Shah's way of guiding the souls of his disciples.

Written as a Sufi manual, *Risāla-i ḥaqnumā* outlines the three major stages of reality that the seeker's soul must traverse before entering the final realm, the realm of Beyond-Being, or Absolute Reality (*ḥaqīqa*).[28] Each station along the spiritual traveler's path is part of the ontological hierarchy most famously outlined by Ibn al-ʿArabi. These divisions coexist in the macrocosm of the outer world and the microcosm of the inner human domain. Dara Shikoh describes the particular method required to ascend through each stage or realm. He explains that the first step for the novice on the spiritual path is to meditate on the image of his or her guide by picturing the guide's face in the heart.[29] This visualization gives the spiritual traveler access to the worlds above the earthly plane. Similarly, in his biography of Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah, Dara Shikoh mentions that he once sent a servant to visit Miyan Mir on his behalf. When the saint was asked to teach him something for his spiritual practice, Miyan Mir said, "you should contemplate the face of your guide."[30]

Dara Shikoh's *Risāla-i ḥaqnumā* presents a clear picture of the creational hierarchy as envisioned by practitioners of the Qadiri order, the most prevalent branch of Sufism in North India at the time, and the initial methods that they prescribed to guide acolytes through these ontological regions. According to this framework, the Sensorial World is the lowest rung on the ladder leading to union with God (Fig. 122). Above it is the World of Ideal Forms, followed by the World of Angelic Forms. The first step toward the larger spiritual goal involves harnessing the senses in order to visualize the "beloved," or spiritual guide. Once the image of the guide is firmly established in the devotee's heart, the

Press, 2005); Anne Marie Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art and Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 143–66.

27 BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, f. 21a.

28 The first realm is the world of the senses and includes the corporeal and psychic regions. The second realm is the world of ideal forms and most closely relates to the Platonic ideals, in which the reality of all things in our world, both good and evil, resides. The final realm in the creational hierarchy is the angelic world, or the world of divine qualities.

29 Dara Shikoh, *Risāla-i ḥaqnumā*, 6. Dara Shikoh says that the person who thirsts for God in this world should first visualize the face of "that *faqīr* whom he holds in high regard, or one whom he is connected to through *ʿishq*." In Sufi language both the *faqīr*, literally the one who is poor before God, and the beloved are allusions to the spiritual master.

30 Dara Shikoh, *Sakīnat-ul awliyāʾ*, 44.

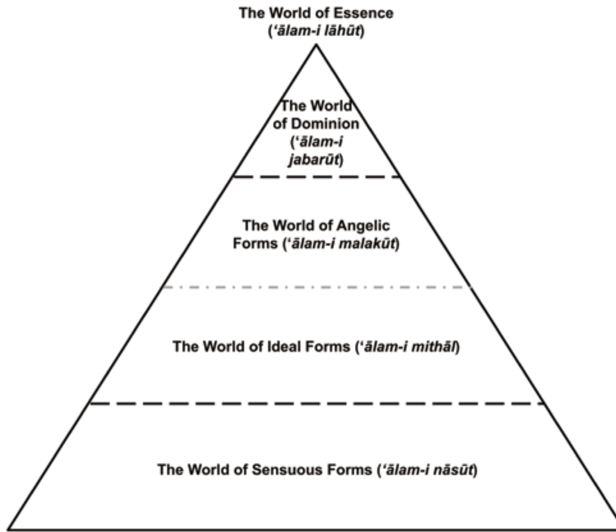

FIGURE 122 Creational hierarchy as describe by Dara Shikoh in the *Risāla-i ḥaqnumā*

World of Ideal or Imaginal Forms is conquered. This step helps open the doors to the upper realm, the World of Angelic Forms, giving access to entities—such as angelic beings, saints from bygone eras, and prophets—that were not previously perceivable by the initiate. In the second chapter of his treatise, Dara Shikoh describes the World of Angelic Forms, linking the initial visualization of the guide to the eventual viewing of the Prophet of Islam himself:

> Hence when you have toiled and labored on the aforementioned practices, the rust on your heart will be removed, and the mirror of your heart will be illuminated. And the images of the prophets, the friends of God, and the angels will reflect therein. *The image of your guide will reveal to you the image of the Prophet, his great companions, and the exalted friends of God.*[31]

It was common practice for Mulla Shah to lead his male followers through the first stage of training in his own presence. The penultimate aim in this path, without which unitive knowledge of God is considered impossible, was to witness the face of the Prophet of Islam, considered in Sufism to be the human

31 Dara Shikoh, *Risāla-i ḥaqnumā*, 8; my emphasis.

Logos and the archetype for human perfection.[32] In the examples given by Tavakkul Beg in his *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, Mulla Shah was able to successfully lead his disciples to this inner vision of the face of the Prophet. The starting point for this vision was always contemplation of the face of Mulla Shah himself. As Tavakkul Beg explains:

> Mulla Shah's gaze (*naẓar*) and concentration (*tavajjuh*) had so much effectiveness and quality that anyone whom he would ask to sit before him [...] would immediately have his heart opened and the World of Form and Ideals would become manifest in the heart. And he would witness the face of the Prophet with his own eye [of the heart].[33]

1.2 *Spiritual Unveiling*

In order to appreciate the meaning of the artworks made for Jahanara Begum, it is vital to understand how her inner journey unfolded. Tavakkul Beg's account of his own spiritual unveiling reveals the importance of the guide, whose very presence acts in the manner of a miraculous image: a gateway and catalyst for unlocking otherworldly mysteries in the disciple's soul.

After a few years under Mulla Shah's guidance, Tavakkul Beg was finally instructed to go into solitude (*khalwa*) and practice specific litanies and invocations that would aid him in what is known in Sufism as "removing the rust from the heart."[34] In Sufism, the heart is considered the center of the human cosmos, the seat of God-knowledge. Having seen Tavakkul Beg struggle for four nights with little spiritual benefit, Mulla Shah called him into his own presence and began the process of "untying the knot" of the soul. After rebuking him for having a heart so full of rust that it had become black, Mulla Shah told Tavakkul Beg to close his eyes and fix the master's image in his heart; all the while, the Mulla kept his concentration (*tawajjuh*) on his disciple. In Tavakkul Beg's words, "immediately, by the grace of God and by the concentration of Shah, my heart opened."[35] The sage then asked him to open his eyes and look at him. When the Mulla asked him to close his eyes once more, according to Tavakkul Beg, "I closed my eyes and saw Haẓrat [Mulla Shah] with my inner eye. I exclaimed, 'O Haẓrat! You are outside and at the same time within me

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32 For a detailed discussion of depictions of Muhammad, see Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One*.

33 BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, f. 16a.

34 The metaphor for cleansing the soul of impurities is rooted in a Prophetic saying in which Muhammad proclaims, "For everything there is a polish, and the polish for the heart is the remembrance of God." Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Khurasānī Bayhaqi, *Shuʿab al-iman*, 12 vols. (al-Riyāḍ: Markaz al-Turāth lil-Barmajīyāt, 2012), I: Hadith 392.

35 BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, f. 26b.

as well.'"[36] This inner vision of the guide led to a further vision—in the inner realm of the soul—in which Tavakkul Beg saw ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166), the founding father of the Qadiri order. After a few days of staying in this inner state of heightened awareness, in which he experienced all sorts of wonderous visions, he arrived at the station where he witnessed the face of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as those of the great Friends of God. Eventually, after three months, he ascended to the next spiritual station, which Mulla Shah called the "World of Colorlessness," which corresponds to the World of Essence, as explained in Dara Shikoh's manual.[37]

This anecdote reveals how intimately Mulla Shah guided his male disciples. For his female disciples, however, the situation was quite different. The Mulla emphatically refused to see them in person. Once, when a group of women came to his *khānqāh* wishing to benefit from viewing his face, he replied that he did not like to see women but would instruct them via letters or through intercessors. As Tavakkul Beg explains, "he guided men in his own presence, and instructed women disciples in absence."[38] An elite woman such as Jahanara Begum, who was already bound to strict rules of *parda*, would therefore have had no regular access to the presence of her guide. As I will discuss, her autobiographical account makes clear that she relied on paintings of Mulla Shah that served as surrogates for his physical presence.

1.3 *Portraits of Mulla Shah*

Most female followers of Mulla Shah, many of whom were family members of migrant Afghan disciples, would not have had the means to commission portraits of the master that could serve as surrogates. As the most powerful lady of the empire, Jahanara Begum was in the unique position of having the royal painting atelier at her disposal. In her *Risāla*, she states:

> Even before I had seen the beauty of the guide's [Mulla Shah] perfection outwardly with my own eyes, my brother had given me a blessed portrait (*shabīh*) of Haẓrat [Mulla Shah] made on paper by one of his painters. And I would gaze at his revered *shabīh* all the time with a pure and faithful viewing, and during certain prescribed times I would visualize (*taṣavvur*) Haẓrat's [Mulla Shah's] blessed face while meditating.[39]

36 BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, f. 27a.

37 BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, f. 29b; Dara Shikoh, *Risāla-i ḥaqnumā*, 15.

38 BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥvāl-i shāhī*, f. 20a.

39 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 101. In *Empire of the Great Mughals*, Schimmel also refers to this passage (151). However, she mis-translates the passage and also cites an

Jahanara Begum's passage cited above, particularly her choice of words, makes clear that the princess used a painting of Mulla Shah as a means for visualizing his face while performing the prescribed invocatory practices. Before the time of the Mughals, the general term for a painted portrait in the Persianate world was "*ṣūrat*," which literally means "outward form"; from Akbar's time, the Persian word "*shabīh*," which means "likeness," became popular in Mughal India.[40]

I have located numerous artworks that could have served this purpose in the early years of Jahanara Begum's discipleship. As is true for Figure 120, which records a historical moment but is also an iconic representation of Mulla Shah, the meanings of these works would have been multivalent. In addition to recording important historical moments, they could simultaneously also have been included in royal albums, while additionally serving the needs of devotees as images of remembrance. Some artworks that can be stylistically dated between the late 1630s and early 1640s appear to have acted first and foremost as objects of ritualistic contemplation—as aids to visualizing (*taṣavvur*) the face of the master while meditating.

A small portrait of Mulla Shah—with a later inscription misidentifying him as Rumi—from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, could well have served the purpose of contemplative viewing during Jahanara Begum's early discipleship (Fig. 123). The simple painting, on untreated blank *vaslī* paper, shows the Mulla seated on a reed mat with his knees drawn up close to him and his arms wrapped around his legs.[41] He is shown in profile, in his customary large white turban, facing right. He wears a stark, blood red *jāma* with an olive green cord and tassels. A black meditation stick, used to prop up his arms during long vigils, lies on one side while a black leather-bound volume rests in front of him. The two objects declare his two primary vocations: saintly contemplative and author of mystical prose. Although shown with a graying beard, Mulla Shah has younger features, including a black mustache and eyebrows, and his physique is less portly than it tends to appear in later paintings.

The overall compositional simplicity of the Boston portrait suggests that the painting was not intended to be included in a royal album: a few quick, controlled strokes with very little rendering give form to Mulla Shah's beard,

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incorrect reference. She gives the citation as Jahanara's *Mu'nis al-arvāḥ*, rather than the *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya*. Unfortunately, her mis-citation has created some confusion for scholars in the field.

40 For a discussion of this semantic shift from the Persian to the Mughal concept of portraiture, see Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism*, 208.

41 *Vaslī* (the local name for the medium on which miniature painting is executed) is made by gluing multiple sheets of paper together.

FIGURE 123 Mulla Shah, ca. 1639. Ink and paque watercolor on paper, 14.4 × 10.3 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bartlett Collection—museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund (14.664)

turban, and eyes; apart from the quickly drawn reed mat, no attention is given to the background. It could be argued that it is simply an unfinished work. However, in the opaque watercolor technique of Hindustani painting, after completing the initial drawing in black ink, it is common to begin filling in flat washes of color in the background before moving on to the foreground.[42] Typically, the figure is rendered last.[43] Because the main figure in the Boston painting is made in opaque washes, with deliberate attention given to his physical features, it is unlikely that it was left incomplete. For this reason, the artwork also does not resemble studies or sketches that master artists are known to have made, in which the drawing dominates and occasional colors appear as light washes.[44]

In 1639, while searching for a spiritual guide, Jahanara Begum first learned of Mulla Shah from her brother. The following year, the sage officially initiated her into his Sufi order. In her autobiography, the princess mentions receiving a portrait of her guide prior to her initiation. Given the profusion of images of Mulla Shah from this period, it is likely that a number of portraits were made for her around the time of her initiation and throughout the 1640s. It is therefore conceivable that the Boston portrait is one of these artworks. The fact that it was completed swiftly, without any background composition, suggests that its primary function was to promptly provide the princess with an image of the saint so that she could begin the devotional practices that were customary for Mulla Shah's order—and thus it was made sometime in 1639. This conclusion is all the more plausible given that another painting of Mulla Shah, from the same period—which I discuss in greater length below—was executed in a

42 As a practicing artist, I was trained in Mughal painting by *Ustād* Bashir Ahmad at the National College of Arts, Lahore, and later in Pahari painting by Susana Marin, a student of Manish Soni of Bhilwara, Rajasthan. In both schools, we were taught to develop an opaque watercolor painting, or *gadrang*, by first applying flat washes and then filling in background details, before moving on to the foreground and the figures.

43 For examples of unfinished Persian and Hindustani paintings, see 1948.1009.0.125 from the British Museum, in Rodha Ahluwalia, *Rajput Painting: Romantic, Divine and Courtly Art from India* (London: British Museum Press, 2008), 90, fig. 52; 1933.1014.0.7 from the British Museum, accessed January 11, 2023, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1933-1014-0-7; 1944.490.a from the Cleveland Museum of Art in *Handbook of the Cleveland Museum of Art/1978* (Cleveland, OH: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 279; and 17.2618 from the Boston Museum of Fine Art in Cummins, *Indian Painting*, 219, plate 118.

44 For examples of studies that painting workshops at the Mughal courts were known to possess, see *Six Spiritual Teachers*, Walters Art Museum (W696) (the drawing also includes a portrait of Mulla Shah); *Madonna and Child*, Williams College Museum of Art (81.10.8); and *Dying Inayat Khan*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (14.679).

FIGURE 124
Mulla Shah, ca. 1640–41. Opaque watercolor on paper, 18.2 × 8.8 cm. British Library, London (J.60.10)
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similar way, with a spare, untreated background (Fig. 124). The only completed feature is the figure of the saint himself, made in the opaque technique.

In the same section of the *Risāla* in which Jahanara Begum mentions the portrait (*shabīh*) made for her prior to her initiation, she vividly describes the ritual of her initiation and the first night that she spent in seclusion (*khalwa*) while engrossed in litanies. After months of exchanging letters and gifts with the princess, the Mulla, at the official invitation of Shah Jahan, visited Jahanara Begum's quarters in Kashmir, and, in the company of Dara Shikoh, initiated her into the Qadiri order.[45] Jahanara Begum's fascinating account of these events sheds light on an aspect of spiritual practice that is directly linked with images of saints. The following passage, in which the word "*shabīh*" [painted portrait] is used twice, establishes without a doubt the central use of these paintings:

45 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 101–03.

> I would gaze at his revered *shabīh* all the time with a pure and faithful viewing, and during certain prescribed times I would visualize (*taṣavvur*) Ḥażrat's blessed face while meditating. And on the first day [of my initiation], my learned brother, according to the method of Our Guide, which is the way of the noble Qadiri order, engaged me in the technique of concentrating (*tavajjuh*) on the face of the Guide and visualizing (*taṣavvur*) the faces of the Prophet and the four honorable friends [the first four caliphs] and the other Friends of God (*awliyā' Allah*). The next day, I made my ablution, put on purified clothes, and kept a fast. At dinnertime I broke my fast with quinces sent to me by Our Guide […] Then I sat until midnight in the mosque that I have in my quarters. After performing the pre-dawn prayer, I came to my room and sat in a corner, facing the *qibla*, and concentrated my mind on the *shabīh* of the master, while at the same time visualizing the company of our holy Prophet, his companions, and the Friends of God, may God be pleased with them all.
>
> This thought crossed my mind: since I am a follower of the Chishtiya order and now am come to the Qadiriya, will I receive any spiritual openings or not?[46] And will I benefit from the guidance and instruction of Ḥażrat-i Shāhī [Mulla Shah]? While lost in this thought, I entered a state in which I was neither asleep nor awake. I saw the Holy Prophet seated with his companions and the great saints in a sacred gathering. Ḥażrat-i Akhund [Mulla Shah], who was also present sitting close to the Prophet, had placed his head on his grace's blessed feet. And the Prophet, peace be upon him, spoke, saying, "O Mulla Shah! You have lit the Timurid lamp."[47] At that moment I returned from that state, joyous and ecstatic, and thanked the Lord with many prostrations.[48]

During her first night as a Qadiri *murīdā* [spiritual disciple], the princess placed a *shabīh* of Mulla Shah in a niche in her prayer chamber while practicing the prescribed litanies. Rather than the actual presence of the guide, to whom most male initiates had access, a painted image became the focal point and portal for Jahanara Begum's entry into higher ontological realms. Her own experience has intriguing parallels to Tavakkul Beg's personal anecdote and thus suggests that an image could function as a surrogate for the real presence

46 This suggests that she was informally part of the Chishti order so as to gain blessings without being initiated, as many people in the subcontinent are to this day.

47 "Timurid" refers to the royal lineage of the house of Emperor Timur, which was carried forward by the Mughal rulers in India.

48 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 101–03.

FIGURE 125 Mulla Shah (detail), ca. 1640–41. Opaque watercolor on paper, 18.2 × 8.8 cm. British Library, London (J.60.10) © BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

of the guide. For both disciples, the inner experience, eventually culminating with a vision of Prophet Muhammad, was attained through the agency of the guide. It seems that Jahanara Begum initially had doubts about the efficacy of the Qadiri techniques. In her earlier book, *Mu'nis al-arvāḥ*, she mentions that she had long aspired to be formally initiated into the Chishti order but could not find a willing guide. According to her memoir, her vision of the great, otherworldly spiritual gathering (*majlis*) laid to rest all lingering doubts about her Qadiri path.

The small painting from the Johnson collection at the British Library (Fig. 125), mentioned briefly above, needs to be considered in light of Jahanara Begum's account.[49] Similar in format to the Boston painting (Fig. 123), the work depicts Mulla Shah standing against a ground of bare *vaslī* paper. Mulla Shah

49 See Falk and Archer, *Indian Miniatures*, 85, fig. 86. Richard Johnson (1753–1807) was a well-known collector of manuscripts and miniature paintings who worked for the East India Company. He is known for compiling his own albums of miniatures. His collection

wears a white *jāma* loosely tied with an opaque white sash. His hands are folded behind his back, and he has a white *chādar* draped over his left shoulder. His face is painted far more meticulously than in the earlier painting. Each hair of his greying beard is carefully rendered, as are the eyebrows above his keen, sparkling eyes—even the hairs sticking out of his right ear have been included in this tiny portrait. Unless it was drastically cut down to fit into the Johnson album, it appears that the folio was not intended for a manuscript or album, as it shows no sign of margins or borders along the edges. Reading Jahanara Begum's descriptions of paintings as miraculous aids during prescribed Sufi rituals, it is easy to imagine the loose leaf propped against a wall niche in the princess's prayer room, where she would spend her time in nightly vigils. Given this proposed purpose of the artwork, it is possible to date it to around 1639–41.

Jahanara Begum also states another way in which she used portraits of her guide—as a portal for direct communication with Mulla Shah. Following the detailed account of her initiation, the princess explains that, one evening, a few days prior to her departure from Kashmir, she began concentrating and meditating on Mulla Shah's face. In that state, Jahanara asked the Mulla to give her the shawl that he habitually wore over his shoulders. Miraculously, in the morning, while she was in the process of writing this request in the form of a letter, her eunuch, Pran, came carrying the very shawl she had desired. According to Pran, Mulla Shah had been inspired the evening before to send this gift to Jahanara Begum, who wrote, "I rubbed that blessed shawl over my eyes and placed it on my head. I received joy and many graces from this."[50] Is it possible, then, that the British Library painting that shows the Mulla with a shawl draped over one shoulder was used for this thaumaturgical communication?[51]

The painting appears to have been damaged at some point, with a prominent dark patch on the saint's forehead (Fig. 124). Similar marks appear around the legs and shoes, and the shoes in particular seem to have been repainted or restored at a later date. It is difficult to identify exactly when or how the painting incurred this damage. One possibility is that over the course of centuries

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was purchased by the British Library in 1807, and forms a major part of the Library's South Asian and Persian acquisitions.

50 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 105–06.

51 In addition to the British Library example, a number of portraits show Mulla Shah standing with a shawl draped over one shoulder. Another painting, from the royal collection at Windsor Castle, is on a folio that eventually became part of an eighteenth-century album, most likely assembled at Avadh (1005038.bb). For a later example, see *Miyan Mir Presenting a Book to Mulla Shah*, attributed to Bahadur Singh, ca. 1775–80, from the *Johnson Album*, British Library (J.1.19). It is likely that the British Library painting set the precedent for these later artworks.

certain areas of the work were in contact with an oily or damp surface, causing smears to appear. However, other paintings from the Johnson album do not show this particular type of damage. Mold also seems an unlikely possibility, as the damaged regions are confined and specific. In a recent study, Christiane Gruber has shown that medieval portraits in Turco-Persian illustrated manuscripts suffered deterioration through "repeated pious handling," which included rubbing and kissing.[52] The evidence at hand thus strongly suggests that someone venerated the painting, most likely Jahanara Begum herself. As we have seen, Jahanara Begum followed typical Muslim conventions of piety related to the veneration of relics—objects that have been blessed by or belonged to saints and prophets—by rubbing Mulla Shah's shawl over her face and head to receive grace. A little later in her autobiography, she venerates a perfume bottle that her guide blessed and gave to her.[53] Could we argue, then, that she awarded a similar ardor and devotional zeal to this portrait of her guide, which led to its deterioration in certain areas? In describing the two occasions on which she saw her guide with her own eyes, she pays special attention to the forehead, from which she sees rays of divine light shooting out.[54] Traditionally in Islam, the forehead of a spiritually realized person is believed to be the place where God's light shines most directly, as that part of the body touches the ground when in prostration.[55] In this painting, the forehead of Mulla Shah has a distinct dark patch, suggesting that the princess habitually touched the portrait's forehead with her hand as a gesture of veneration.

As alluded to by Jahanara Begum, drawings and paintings of Mulla Shah were made as single, loose folios that could be propped up on stands or placed in a niche. This use of a single folio portrait is depicted in several Mughal-era artworks. One striking example from the late 1620s depicts a noblewoman holding a loose folio of a portrait of Emperor Jahangir (Fig. 126). In a similar vein, an early eighteenth-century Mughal painting shows a nobleman sitting in a courtyard next to a lake, viewing a portrait of his beloved (Fig. 127).[56] He has prepared two *pān* [betel leaves], one for himself, which he holds in his left hand, and the other presumably for his indirectly represented beloved, calling

52 Gruber, "In Defense and Devotion," 109.

53 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 107.

54 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 102, 107.

55 For a lengthy discussion of the light on the forehead in Islamic literature and its connection to Muhammad, see Daniel C. Peterson, "A Prophet Emerging: Fetal Narratives in Islamic Literature," in *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Vanessa Sasson and Jane M. Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 203–22.

56 For another Mughal example, see *Portrait of Emperor Jahangir Holding a Portrait of His Father Akbar*, Musée du Louvre, Paris (OA3676b).

FIGURE 126
A noblewoman, possibly Nur Jahan, holding a portrait of Jahangir, ca. 1627. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 30 × 22.1 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland (2013.325)
CREATIVE COMMONS PUBLIC DOMAIN, CC0 1.0 UNIVERSAL (CC0 1.0)

FIGURE 127
Nobleman gazing at the portrait of his beloved, ca. 1725. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 19.8 × 14.4 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum (D-1171-1903)
© VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

to mind ritual offerings of food made before deities. Through this image of an image, the absent woman is made present. Furthermore, one can infer that the portrait poetically suggests a means of communication—an ontological means of connection—, or a mode of remembrance between the lover and the beloved.

These two paintings, each depicting an image that serves as a kind of portal, are products of the South Asian literary and figural imagination. In Indic and Persianate literature, and particularly that which was written for Muslim audiences, the trope of the beloved's image acting as a means of communication has a long history stretching back into the early medieval period.[57] In most cases, the composers of the epic romances that frequently included this trope were themselves practicing Sufis. Their allegories, which fluctuate between human and divine love, are laced with Sufi symbols. One popular and regularly illustrated Persian poem is *Humay and Humayun* by Khwaju al-Kirmani (1281–1361), in which the hero Humay falls in love with Princess Humayun upon looking at her portrait.[58] Having fallen in love with the princess through the medium of a painting, he has a vision in which he sees the "real" Humayun in a garden. He tells his beloved, "I am so in contemplation of the image of your face, that figure-worship shall become my profession."[59] The theme of a painting serving as a catalyst for a vision has a striking parallel with Jahanara Begum's personal account, in which the image of her guide leads to a vision that takes place in the Imaginal realm.

In the Indic world, the 1605 Sufi romance *Mṛigāvatī* [*The Magic Doe*], written by Qutban Suhrawardi in a local Hindavi dialect, uses painting as a medium of remembrance. The forlorn Prince Rajkunwar, who has lost his beloved shape-shifting princess, has a majestic, seven-storied pavilion built in her honor. On the uppermost level is a picture pavilion that includes portraits of Mrigavati: "There they [the artists] drew pictures of the magic doe that had so afflicted their prince / He'd look at her again and again, weep, then collect himself, for she was his life's support."[60]

57 For examples of painted images of lovers in the Persian literary world, see Soucek, "Niẓāmī." For an example in Indo-Muslim literature from the Mughal period, see Stefani Pello, "Portraits in the Mirror: Living Images in Nasir ʿAli Sirhindi and Mirza ʿAbd al-Qadir Bidil," in *Portraits in South Asia since the Mughals: Art, Representation and History*, ed. Crispin Branfoot (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 99–116.

58 For one exquisite illustrated manuscript of the story, see BL, Add. MS 18113.

59 Ahmad, *What Is Islam?*, 413.

60 Behl, *The Magic Doe*, 10, 54.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Jahangir ordered this romance translated into Persian and illustrated while still a prince in Allahabad, in the early seventeenth century. Because these stories circulated among different social strata, including royal courts, bazaars, and Sufi lodges, the "beloved" of Persianate and Indic romances is widely recognized by South Asian audiences to have a multifaceted symbolism. On the highest plane, the beloved represents divine love (*ishq-i ḥaqīqī*). In this aspect, the figure of the spiritual guide and the literary persona of the beloved coincide. Both have the potential to lead the devotee (or audience) from outside form (*ṣūrat*) to inner meaning (*maʿnī*).[61]

There are many anecdotes from hagiographies and disciples' memoirs in which gazing upon the face of a Sufi master allows the seeker to enter an altered state of consciousness. In Jahanara Begum's case, this necessarily took place through the medium of painting. Her personal account echoes earlier hagiographical records, reflecting a larger Indo-Muslim culture in which literary and visual tropes mirror lived spiritual experiences. In the story of *Humay and Humayun*, a fairy who acts as the guide instructs the hero on how to contemplate the image of his beloved: "Pass from the figure, and go to the meaning! Make yourself Majnun and reach Layla!"[62] Echoing this sentiment, Jahanara Begum, in a couplet near the end of her *Risāla*, gives a wittily paradoxical interpretation for the act of viewing the beloved through the image: "The image [*naqsh*] of extinction is subsistent without the color of the Beloved / Become colorless! Don't reckon with colors."[63] The symbolic dichotomy of color and colorlessness is a favorite Sufi theme regularly used in Persian devotional poetry.[64] In this couplet, Jahanara Begum explains the real aim of witnessing God in the perishable form of a picture, which is to trace the path back to God, who is beyond manifestation and thus "colorless." The word also refers to the realm of colorlessness as explained by Mulla Shah and his disciples, the penultimate station on the spiritual journey to final union with God. In this journey from outward form (*ṣūrat*) to inner meaning (*maʿnī*), the guide acts as a crucial bridge.

In paintings made for an Indo-Muslim audience, the figure of Mulla Shah was understood to be part of a larger constellation of saintly and prophetic images. Like images of the Kashmiri sage, representations of ʿAbd al-Qadir

61 For an in-depth study of viewing the human form as a meditative aid to God-knowledge in Sufism, particularly the divine beloved in a human face, see Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 85–119.

62 Ahmad, *What Is Islam?*, 413.

63 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 108.

64 See page 71.

al-Jilani, the twelfth-century founder of the Qadiri order, Muʿin al-Din Chishti, the thirteenth-century founder of the Chishti order in India, and the Quranic prophet Al-Khizr signified divine mediation between worldly and spiritual spheres.[65] Furthermore, multivalent images of saints contributed to the dissemination of well-established Persian pictorial conventions, validating the Mughal claim of divinely ordained kingship, and, in the case of prodigious Mughal court painters, documenting the daily practices and rituals of dervishes. Paintings of Mulla Shah commissioned by Jahanara Begum added a new layer to this constellation of images and meanings. Her patronage introduced a Sufi practitioner's perspective that was precipitated by gender-specific conventions.

In the final chapter I discuss another important sub-genre within the larger theme of Indo-Muslim devotional paintings, one that I believe was popularized by Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh: artworks depicting sacred gatherings of Sufi saints, and that I have labelled "*majlis* paintings."

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65 Coomaraswamy, "Khwaja Khadir," 157–67.

CHAPTER 6

Sacred Viewing: Miraculous Gatherings and Iconic Portraits

> If it was possible for me to attain that Sun-like face
> What is kingship, I would claim godhood![1]
>
> JAHANARA BEGUM

In a folio from the *Late Shah Jahan Album* (compiled 1650–58), a Sufi saint dressed in a crisp white *jāma* is shown sitting under the shade of a tree on a high marble platform giving a sermon to a group of disciples (Fig. 128). The large, intricate border surrounding the scene depicts a cohort of seven holy men of diverse lineages framed against a backdrop of magnificently illuminated plant life. The border figure on the top right reads from an open book to the Sufi companion sitting across from him (Fig. 129). Minutely scribbled on the open pages of this tiny book is a Persian couplet, simple at first glance, but in fact linking the central subject of the painting to its imperial patrons.[2] So miniscule as to be nearly hidden in plain view, the verse can be translated as follows: "O king of the world (*shāh-jahān*), you the possessor (*dārā*) / You the possessor (*dārā*), you the world adorner (*jahān-ārā*)."

On the face of it, this couplet appears to address Shah Jahan by three of his royal epithets: King, Possessor, and Adorner of the World. However, through a clever play on words, the verse also simultaneously addresses his two most beloved and influential children, Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum. The bearded Sufi saint preaching to his disciples is none other than their guide, Mulla Shah. The couplet written on the tiny book in the margins of the folio is the opening to Mulla Shah's *Risāla-i shāhiya* [*Treatise of Shah*], completed in 1645.[3] Included in *the* royal album of its time, the verse—in which the two siblings

1 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 101. This couplet is attributed to Abu Bakr Shibli, a ninth-century Sufi from Baghdad in the line of Junayd al-Baghdadi. Dara Shikoh also quotes it in *Ḥasanāt al-ʿārifīn*, 23.

2 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings*, 1:447.

3 BL, Delhi Collection, MS 1420, Mulla Shah, *Mathnawiyāt-i mullā shāh*, f. 226b.

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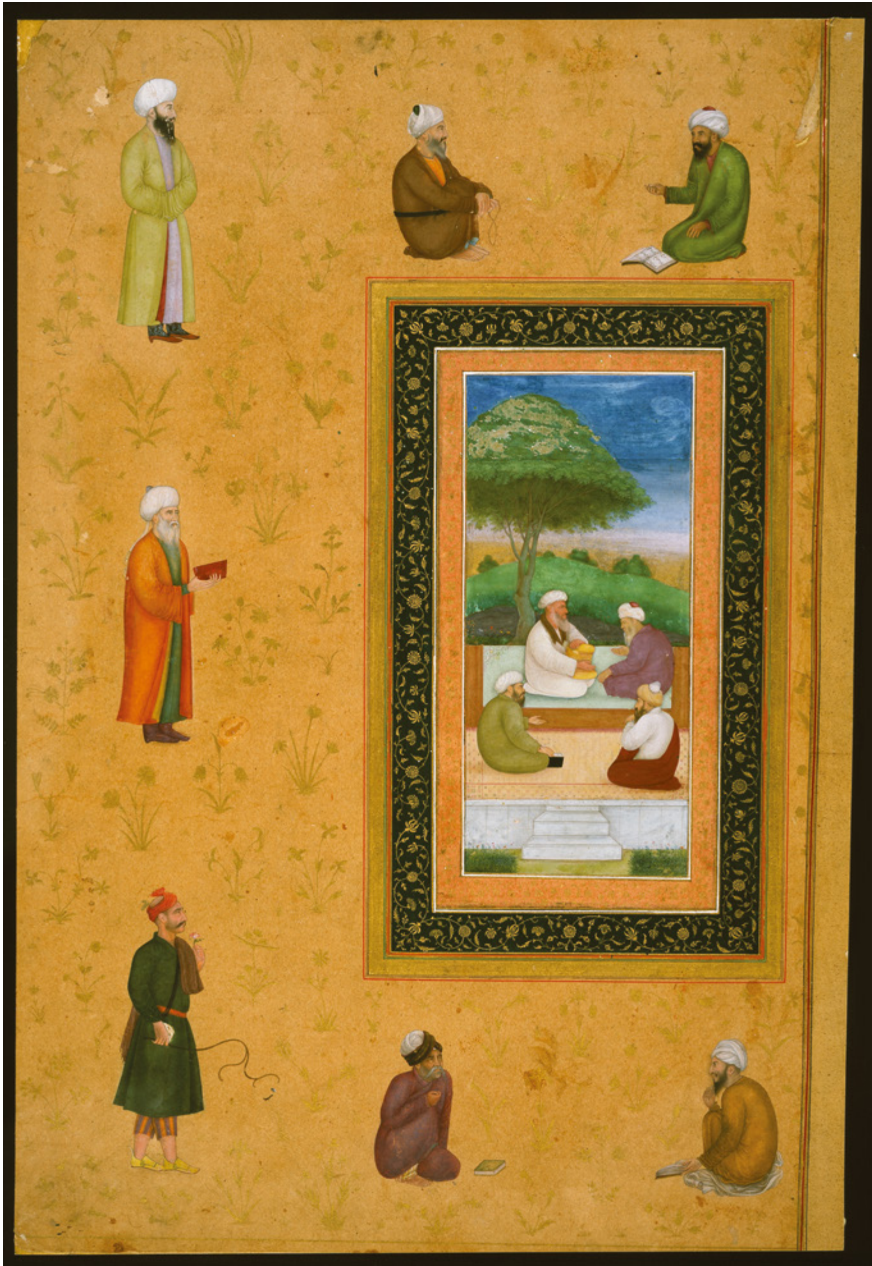

FIGURE 128 Mulla Shah with disciples, from the Late-Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1640–60. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 15.4 × 7 cm. Chester Beatty Album (In 07B.39r)
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FIGURE 129
Mulla Shah with disciples (detail), from the Late-Shah Jahan Album, ca. 1640–60. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 15.4 × 7 cm. Chester Beatty Album (In 07B.39r)
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are indirectly named as metaphorical extensions of the emperor—attests to the privileged status of Dara, Jahanara, and their spiritual guide.

The present chapter identifies the involvement of the two siblings with the genre of saints' portraits during the late-Shah Jahan period. After introducing artworks made for the teenage prince Dara Shikoh and the newly initiated Jahanara Begum in the previous two chapters—spanning a period from ca. 1630 to 1640—I now shift my attention to discussing images of devotion associated with the siblings from the following two decades. Most of these artworks were executed by artists working in the emperor's own *taṣvīrkhāna*, and project royal aspirations, both worldly and otherworldly. I begin this chapter picking up from a theme introduced in the very beginning of Chapter Five, one that warrants a more thorough investigation: paintings linked to Dara Shikoh's induction into the Qadiri lineage. I argue that these paintings were stylistically and iconographically fundamental in establishing the format of devotional portraiture, which was copied, reinterpreted, and transformed over subsequent decades across India. A discussion of these artworks incorporates earlier iconographic precedents. It also introduces a unique sub-genre, linked to the patronage of Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum that focuses on the theme of miraculous gatherings of saints. I conclude by briefly investigating key drawings and paintings of Mulla Shah made between 1640 and 1700 in order to map the genre's spread across the subcontinent in the early modern period. Key agents of the spread of these images and ideas were the artists themselves, whose itinerancy—particularly in the second half of the seventeenth century—meant that images created by royal artists in the Mughal atelier spread rapidly across the subcontinent.

> Being in the presence of the Friends of God awards closeness with God; seeking them out is akin to yearning for God; association with them is association and proximity to God.[4]
>
> DARA SHIKOH

• • •

In early 1634, the 20-year-old Dara Shikoh fell gravely ill. For over four months no doctor could find a cure. Eventually, his father took him to Lahore to visit the greatest Sufi authority of the time in India, Miyan Mir. According to Dara Shikoh, the saint prayed and breathed over a cup of water, offering it for him to drink. Within a week he had recovered.[5] This brief contact with Miyan Mir left a deep mark on Dara Shikoh's life.[6] Less than a year later, in August 1635, the great sage passed away, but his final year proved to be a major turning point for the young prince. The latent devotional sensibility inherited through his royal upbringing and glimpsed in his early years found focus via the lineage and legacy of Miyan Mir and his Qadiri order of Sufism. As Gandhi explains, "Upon impressing the aged Sufi with his devotion, Dara dived headlong into the company of the Lahore Qadiris. Though he was not yet formally inducted into the order, he became Miyan Mir's *de facto* disciple for a brief but intense period."[7] This is the period when the prince plunged himself into hagiographic literature and began compiling a seminal biography of Muslim saints in the longstanding Persian *taẕkira* tradition. To this day, his *Safīnat al-awliyāʾ* [*The Ship of the Friends of God*] (1640), is considered to be one of the most important *taẕkirāt* written in Muslim India. At the same time he began an even more focused literary project: an account of the lives of Miyan Mir and his own guide Mulla Shah, titled *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ* [*Repose of the Friends of God*] (1642). Miyan Mir's passing away led Dara Shikoh to the guidance of his successor, Mulla Shah, who was based in Kashmir. Dara was officially inducted into the Qadiri order on April 21, 1640 (Ḏu'l Ḥijjah, 29, 1049 AH). From this point onward, he used the pen name Dara Shikoh Hanafi Qadiri.[8]

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4 Dara Shikoh, *Safīnat al-awliyāʾ*, 17–18.

5 Dara Shikoh, *Safīnat al-awliyāʾ*, 104; Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 86–89.

6 In *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ*, Dara Shikoh mentions one more visit that he made with Shah Jahan to Miyan Mir's abode. By this time, he explains, his ardor for the great saint had increased. He took his shoes off before entering the precinct, and placed his head at Miyan Mir's feet, asking for his prayers (43–44).

7 Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 95.

8 "Hanafi" is one of the four schools of Sunni Islam. Most South Asian Muslims follow the Hanafi creed.

In his two biographical volumes, written during this crucial period of personal transition, the prince's self-projection as a future philosopher-king comes to the fore. As we have seen, princes—and the heirs apparent in particular—were taught to view themselves as divinely chosen vehicles of God. Similarly, Dara, the burgeoning mystic, sincerely believed that his path was ordained by heaven. In his introduction to *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, he explains how a few months prior to his initiation, an angel came to him in a dream and pronounced four times: "God most high will grant you such a gift as has not been given to any emperor on the face of this earth."[9] The gift, as he understood it, was the path of *taṣawwuf*.

The prince's transition from a spiritual seeker to an actual traveler (*sālik*) is reflected in drawings and paintings court artists made for him from this time as well. They also provide keys for understanding the formation of the genre of Sufi portraiture in Indo-Muslim South Asia. In particular, two paintings made between 1635 and 1640 were fundamental for establishing the iconography of *dīdār*, the Sufi equivalent of the Sanskrit term *darśan*, or sacred viewing. In the *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, Dara includes a short passage that narrates the importance of this sacred viewing in Sufism. To support his argument, he quotes from the medieval Sufi master of Herat, Khwaja ʿAbd Allah Ansari (d. 1088), who says, "viewing (*dīdār*) of the saints is obligatory for this group (the Sufis), because only from this viewing can they acquire that which cannot be acquired by any other means."[10] During this germinal phase of devotional portraiture, figures of saints and their followers are shown facing each other, engrossed in the act of viewing.

One *siyāh qalam* drawing that is critical for understanding the motivational shift in royal patronage for devotional portraiture is also one of the earliest known representations of Miyan Mir and his close circle of disciples (Fig. 130). In this group portrait from the Walters Museum, the Qadiri shaikh and his five prominent disciples are shown facing each other and are all clearly identified with Persian inscriptions. The identity of most of the figures can be further verified through contemporary biographical sources, including Dara Shikoh's biographies and Jahanara Begum's *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya*. The figures, clockwise from the top-right, are identified as Hazrat Miyan Shah Mir, Hazrat Mulla Khwaja, Shah Muḥammad Dilruba, Shah Khiyali, Miyan Abu'l Muʿali, and Mulla Shah. Since Miyan Mir was known as Shah Mir or Miyan Jiv during his lifetime, the inscriptions are likely contemporaneous with the production of the drawing. They have been instrumental in helping me identify later individual portraits of Miyan Mir's disciples.

9 Dara Shikoh, *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, 7.
10 Dara Shikōh, *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, 18.

FIGURE 130 Six spiritual teachers (counterclockwise from top-right) Miyan Mir, Mulla Shah, Miyan Abu'l Mu‘ali, Shah Khiyali, Shah Dilruba, Hazrat Mulla Khwaja, ca. 1638–40. Ink on paper. 25.7 × 19.7 cm. Walters Art Museum. Henry Walters bequest, W.696

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The artist who made the six portraits worked in a style that is immediately recognizable for its bold draftsmanship (Fig. 130 and 131). All of the faces are delineated with quick, deft brushstrokes. Instead of utilizing the more common stippling technique known as *pardākht*, the artist has rendered the drawing with minute swirling lines. Darker areas are given form with crosshatching. Every curl and tuft of hair is executed with swift, animated marks. It is probable that one of the artists who worked on the *Dara Shikoh Album* (DSA) was responsible for this drawing, which bears some stylistic resemblance to Figure 94, the folio on which the teenage prince is paired with his Sufi tutor. Although it was made with opaque watercolors, a technique that requires a far more subtle approach to rendering, a detail of the tutor's portrait shows linework and crosshatching similar to that seen in the drawing of Miyan Mir's circle (Fig. 132). The unique detail of the tufts of hair sneaking out from under the tutor's turban can also be seen in the portrait of Shah Dilruba from the Walters Museum drawing (Fig. 131). Given the possibility that an artist contributing to the DSA was responsible for the Walters Museum drawing, and the fact that Mulla Shah is shown at his youngest when compared to other known portraits, the Walters drawing can be confidently dated between 1634—the year in which Dara Shikoh first met Miyan Mir and his Qadiri circle—and 1640—the year of his initiation.

Textual evidence has helped me further refine the dating for the group portrait. In *Ḥasanāt al-ʿārifīn*, completed in 1652, Dara Shikoh mentions that Shah Dilruba, with whom he kept up a regular correspondence through letters, went into seclusion, refusing to show his face to anyone.[11] According to Dara, the sage expressed this desire a few years prior to his writing the book. Artists could therefore only have captured his likeness prior to his seclusion. Shah Dilruba is depicted among the circle of Miyan Mir's disciples gathered in the Walters Museum drawing, further supporting my claim of an earlier date for the origin of the work.

Furthermore, in *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ*, Dara includes a letter written by Mulla Shah to one of his disciples in which it becomes clear that Shah Abu'l Muʿali, another one of the five disciples of Miyan Mir in the Walters Museum drawing, had a falling out with Mulla Shah and was no longer a member of his inner circle.[12] Since *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ* was completed in 1642 and the letter included preceded it, a drawing in which Mulla Shah is shown seated next to Abu'l Muʿali

11 Dara Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 73: "these days he is in seclusion, and does not see anyone's face. Anyone who goes to see him, he speaks to them from behind a veil. A few years prior to this he told me that he wishes to never show his face to anyone."

12 Dara Shikoh, *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ*, 145.

FIGURE 131
Six spiritual teachers (detail), ca. 1638–40. Ink on paper. 25.7 × 19.7 cm. Walters Art Museum. Henry Walters bequest, W.696
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FIGURE 132
Dara Shikoh in a lesson (detail), ca. 1634, from the *Dara Sh*ikoh Album. Ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper. 16.1 × 11 cm. British Library, London
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, ADD.OR.3129, F. 18

would most likely have been made for the royal patron at an earlier moment, when the two sages were still companions. Lastly, we know that after Miyan Mir's death in 1635, Mulla Shah, who was his successor, gradually stopped making his annual trips to Lahore. By the 1640s he was completely stationed in Kashmir, where he would remain until the last, brief phase of his life.

It is very likely that during Shah Jahan and Dara Shikoh's visits to Miyan Mir's *khānqāh* in Lahore in 1634–35, artists also accompanied the entourage. As evidenced by Mughal-period paintings in which the artist can be seen sketching in an assembly, this appears to have been a routine occurrence.[13] The Walters Museum drawing was probably synthesized from various individual sketches into a final composition closer to the time of Dara's initiation in 1640. This is more likely, given that the drawing was used as a template for a stately painting showing Dara Shikoh in the circle of Miyan Mir and his Qadiri followers, which can be dated to around 1640.[14] Based on the evidence at hand, the Walters Museum drawing's date can be pinpointed to circa 1638–40.

In both the drawing and the ca. 1640 painting, the figures are deliberately staged, a trend more often seen in album folios depicting portraits of the nobility. In previous paintings of Sufis, such as those made for Jahangir and for the young Dara Shikoh, figures are shown both in profile and in three-quarter views, often in a more relaxed manner, placed in a natural setting. In drawings and paintings focusing on Miyan Mir, Mulla Shah, and other disciples, the main characters are almost always shown in profile. Rather than inhabiting a believable, naturalistic space—as was increasingly the case from the Salim period onward—the saints hover, silently meditating upon their companions' countenances in a static space and time.

This sense of timelessness is wonderfully captured in the "initiation painting," more commonly known as "Dara Shikoh with Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah" (Fig. 133), which Milo Beach has attributed to the court artist Lalchand.[15] The painting from the Smithsonian Institution's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery follows the basic format of the Walters Museum drawing, with some modifications. The figures form a far more intimate circle reminiscent of a Sufi gathering known variously as a *majlis*, *meḥfil*, *ḥalqa*, or *dāʾira*. To this day, all over the world Sufis gather in *ḥalqās* around a shaikh or one of his representatives while performing prescribed communal invocatory rituals. The *majlis* usually begins

13 Catherine Glynn, "Mughal Masterworks in Rembrandt's Hand," in *Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India*, ed. Stephanie Schrader (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2018), 31–33. For examples, see City, Royal Asiatic Society, RAS Persian 310, *Kitāb-i-Masnavīyyāt-i-Zafar Khan*, f. 19v, and a folio from the *Jahangirnama, Amar Singh of Mewar and Prince Khurram*, Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.185-1984).

14 Later in this chapter I will discuss the painting's purpose, suggesting that it was made to commemorate Dara Shikoh's initiation into the Qadiriya.

15 Abolala Soudavar and Milo Cleveland Beach, *Art of the Persian Courts: Selections from the Art and History Trust Collection* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 362, cat. 42; Beach, *The Imperial Image*, 164, cat. 36.

FIGURE 133 Painting commemorating Dara Shikoh's initiation, attributed to Lalchand, ca. 1640. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper, mounted on paperboard. 33.7 × 26.2 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase—Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.432

with either a sermon by the leader of the gathering or a question-and-answer session concerning some aspect of the spiritual path. In the painting, Mulla Shah addresses Miyan Mir with a raised finger. Next to him, in a bright orange *jāma*, blood red turban with a green sash, and a thin, diaphanous muslin scarf draped around his shoulders is Dara Shikoh, seated obediently with his hands folded on his lap. Along with the master and disciple, the prince shares the central stage-like space—demarcated by the white carpet—with Mulla Khwaja, one of the closest companions of Miyan Mir. In the Walters Museum drawing, Abu'l Muʿali is shown sitting next to Mulla Shah; in the initiation painting he has shifted below, with Dara inserted between them. Shah Khyali now sits on the other side of the circle, immediately across from Abu'l Muʿali. Shah Dilruba, whom Dara considered as one of his guides, is absent from the scene. Three other as yet unidentified disciples now occupy the lower register of the composition, which was left empty in the earlier drawing. Another addition to the painting is a servant shown at the top right fanning Miyan Mir with a *morchhal* peacock fan.

Although the painting may take references from individual portraits of saints that were originally drawn from direct observation, as a whole it can be interpreted as an imagined representation of an ahistorical gathering. A meeting between Dara Shikoh, Miyan Mir, and his disciples, where Mulla Shah was also present, never actually took place. Court histories record that the prince visited the *khānqāh* with his father the emperor Shah Jahan in 1634 and 1635 on two occasions. It is unclear if the prince visited the Lahori saint separately or not during this time. Shortly after these visits, Miyan Mir passed away. It was four years after his death that Dara Shikoh met Mulla Shah for the first time. Furthermore, the scene depicted here cannot be a historical event because in all portraits prior to 1640, Dara Shikoh is shown beardless. This is one of the first instances in which he is shown with a beard, representing his entry into full maturity. The artist carefully positions Dara next to the prince's own guide and initiator, Mulla Shah, who is shown introducing the young aspirant to the great saint; deceased in the worldly sense, but, owing to his union with God, immortal in the Imaginal and Angelic planes (Fig. 122). Of all the figures gathered, only Miyan Mir, Mulla Shah, and Dara Shikoh appear with haloes.

Taking the historical, symbolic, and contextual evidence into account, the Sackler painting can be interpreted as a commemoration of Dara Shikoh's entry into the Qadiri *ṭarīqa*. Beach dates the painting to ca. 1640, the period of Dara and Jahanara entering the Sufi path, further suggesting that it is a representation of the rite of initiation. Dara's refined apparel highlights his royal status, while the red and green turban and the henna-like vermillion of his

jāma subtly evoke traditional Indian bridal colors. In Indian Sufi literature and folk culture, the rite of initiation into a brotherhood is often described as a spiritual marriage. An identical painting from the same period is included in the *Nasir al-Din Shah Album* in Tehran.[16] The existence of the second painting bears witness to the importance of this supra-temporal visualization of the initiatic rite of passage, where figures from multiple realms—the worldly and the Angelic—congregate. Typically, as discussed in previous chapters, these meetings occur in the Imaginal World, and the two-dimensional surface of the painted folio stands in for, represents, or embodies that liminal sphere.

In addition to providing a platform for manifesting supra-formal realities through the Imaginal surface of the album page, Lalchand's initiation painting also marks a major shift in the role of the patron-Sufi Dara Shikoh. In the 1630s the teenage prince, as the beardless archetype of beauty, was portrayed as a locus of Divine-manifestation for the mystic. After around 1640, the roles reversed. Now, as an initiate, it is the prince who acquires grace and blessings by viewing saints, in particular, the two authorities he considered as his primary guides. One wonders if the compilers of the album in which the Sackler painting was originally included had this meaning in mind when they added seven cartouches with two unrelated Persian quatrains to the large border framing the central image. It is unclear whether the quatrains were paired with the painting as part of the overall compositional program or added at some point later. It is also unclear if the rather abstruse verses—one of which is by Hafiz—correlate with the painting. However, since the image and text share the same space, it is worth discussing them together. The top quatrain reads:

> In your street tear-pearls rain down from the eyes,
> And from every eyelash spills forth the blood of passion
>
> When the dove carries my message over there,
> It is a goblet [of wine] that Gabriel pours over his wings.

This conventional sounding poem uses the image of the street where the beloved resides. In love poetry it is understood to be the street where a thousand impassioned lovers give their lives, thirsting for a single glimpse from the beloved. Are we to assume that a medieval poem with a generic, romantic theme is being reused for an expressly sacred purpose? Is the "street" where

16 Yedda Godard, "Un Album de portraits des princes timurides de l'Inde," *Athar-é Īrān: Annales du service archéologique de l'Irān*, no. 2 (1937): 201–04.

the angelic dove carries the message "over there" referring to the World of Symbolic/Angelic Forms, the eternal realm of angels and saints?

The equally opaque verse in the lower half of the border contains the first three lines from Hafiz's quatrain number 39. The complete poem reads:

> With a sassy beauty and with a lute and a flute,
> A quiet corner, leisure and a bottle of wine
>
> Since our veins have become hot with wine,
> Not a single grain do we require from Hatim Tay [the exemplar of generosity].[17]

In Persian Sufi poetry, wine is used as a metaphor for God-knowledge. The "beauty" usually represents either the guide figure or, as seen in the DSA, the locus for God's manifestation. In this context, then, is the quatrain reimagined as narrating the "quiet corner" of the *majlis*, in the company of the beloved, where the wine of God-knowledge runs through all the participants' veins?

As a multivalent artwork, the Sackler painting was also pivotal for the expansion of the genre of Sufi portraiture. There are several paintings from the mid-seventeenth century to the nineteenth century that depict Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah together. Most of them are based on the composition of the initiation painting, preserving some of its highly specific personal details. For example, Miyan Mir is repeatedly shown holding his left shoulder with the other hand on his knee (Fig. 134), indication of the severe arthritis that he developed in his hands and knees toward the end of his life, a biographical detail that Dara points out in *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ*.[18]

Along with the Walters Museum drawing, the Sackler painting is an early instance where a Sufi guide and his disciple are shown in the act of *dīdār*. Through this intimate mutual viewing in which Mulla Shah and Miyan Mir are engrossed, the disciple receives grace from the master. This is the visual language that became popular for depicting Sufis in an iconic manner beginning in the 1640s. However, this idealized representation had precedents rooted in depictions of Sufi gatherings that can be traced to the early Shah Jahan period. One painting, more famous for providing inspiration for a Rembrandt drawing,

17 Hafiz, Ruba'i number 39, accessed January 11, 2023, https://ganjoor.net/hafez/robaee2/sh39/.

18 Dara Shikoh, *Sakīnat al-awliyāʾ*, 47. Jahangir also hints at this (Jahangir and Thackston, *Jahangirnama*, 320).

FIGURE 134
Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah, ca. 1750. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. British Museum, London (1974,0617,0.3.32)
© THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

shows four seventeenth-century saints, all linked directly or indirectly to the Mughal court (Fig. 135).

It was taken to Vienna where it was cut up, repainted in places, and pasted into the Rococo wall decorations of the Millionenzimmer in Schloss Schönbrunn in the eighteenth century for a Habsburg empress.[19] The figure on the extreme right, with arms wrapped around his raised knees, is none other than Miyan Mir of the Qadiri order. Next to Miyan Mir is Shaikh Muhammad Mazandarani, who might be the same as the Sufi poet from Allahabad mentioned in Abu'l Fazl's *A'in-i Akbari*.[20] Wearing a tall, red, conical cap, he is described as a "dervish" in the minute identifying inscription given in the book in his hand. To his left is Shaikh Husain Ajmeri, the same Chishti ascetic and

19 Stephanie Schrader, *Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2018), 106, Plate 30; Glynn, "Mughal Masterworks in Rembrandt's Hand," 36; and Ebba Koch, "The Moghuleries of the Millionenzimmer, Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna," in *Arts of Mughal India*, ed. Rosemary Crill, Susan Stronge, and Andrew Topsfield (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2004), 153–67.

20 Abu al-Fazl, *A'in-i Akbari*, 1:254. Also see Glynn, "Mughal Masterworks in Rembrandt's Hand," 41n32.

FIGURE 135 Seated Sufis (counterclockwise from top-right) Shaikh Husain Jami, Shaikh Husain Ajmeri, Shaikh Muhammad Mazandarani, and Shaikh Miyan Mir seated under a tree, 1627–28, from a panel of miniatures from the Millionenzimmer, Schloss Schönbrunn, Vienna (SKB002606)
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FIGURE 136
Four Mughal elders seated under a tree (Shaikh Husain Jami, Shaikh Husain Ajmeri, Shaikh Muhammad Mazandarani, and Shaikh Miyan Mir), Rembrandt van Rijn, ca. 1656–1661. 19.4 × 12.4 cm. British Museum, London (1895,0915.1275)
© THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

direct descendant of Salim Chishti shown in the Jahangir-period painting by Bichitr in which the emperor is presenting him with a book (Fig. 66).[21] Next to him is a Naqshbandi Sufi, Shaikh Husain Jami, who Jahangir mentions in his memoir for having predicted his accession to the Mughal throne six months prior to the event.[22] This miraculous intervention allowed the Naqshbandi Sufis from the line of Khwaja ʿAbd Allah Ahrar, that were once patronized by Babur and Humayun, to receive royal favor once again. As can be gauged by the Rembrandt drawing, the original painting would have had the four Sufis shaded by a large central tree (Fig. 136).

In addition to providing an early example of Sufis engaging in the act of mutual viewing, the painting also represents the imperial restoration of major ascetical orders back into the Mughal fold. As discussed in Chapter Four, Akbar's reign prompted a gradual weakening of the saints' role as heavenly intercessor. Emperor Jahangir began to selectively reinstate saints into the

21 Jahangir and Thackston, *Jahangirnama*, 108.
22 Jahangir and Thackston, *Jahangirnama*, 35; Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 186–87.

engines of Mughal polity—including Miyan Mir, Husain Chishti, and Husain Jami—but it was really in the time of Shah Jahan that the thaumaturgical trappings of power were fully reinvested in saints and their Sufi orders. The Vienna painting is dated 1037 AH (1627–28 CE), the very year that Emperor Shah Jahan ascended the throne. Apart from Mazandarani, whose affiliation is unclear, all the Sufis in the painting are associated with the major spiritual orders of South Asia: the Qadiri, the Chishti, and the Naqshbandi *ṭuruq*. Thus, it would not be surprising if Mazandarani represents the fourth major order, the Suhrawardi *ṭarīqa*. It is entirely possible, then, that by grouping leaders of the foremost Sufi orders from seventeenth-century South Asia—individuals who might never have congregated in this manner in the material realm—this painting projects a clear imperial intention on the part of Shah Jahan and his court to reestablish the central role of Sufis—or Sufism as such—as interlocuters between heaven and earth.

Furthermore, such early examples of congregating saints paved the way for the later, more iconic, representations in the late-Shah Jahan period. For instance, a later painting by the court artist Chitarman uses the theme of congregation, but for a distinctly devotional purpose linked to Dara Shikoh, in a composition that is far simpler than the examples discussed above (Fig. 137). In the painting, from around 1655, the prince has arrived at Miyan Mir's abode and is humbly seated with joined hands in a gesture of receiving grace and blessings from the great Sufi shaikh. Mulla Shah is seated next to Miyan Mir and acts as the ontological bridge between the shaikh and Dara. As the elegantly calligraphed couplet bordering the painting suggests, the *dīdār* takes place at dawn in an enclosed garden complex. Most of the usual Indo-Muslim devotional signifiers are present, including the raised platform and shade-giving tree. The figure of Miyan Mir is framed in the center of the open doorway leading into his dark, empty abode. The accompanying couplet suggests that the entire composition, including the natural surroundings, should be understood at once as a representation of the inner state of the initiate in the process of receiving divine illumination and as a meeting that occurs in a supra-terrestrial realm, one that the devotee can access only through an awakened heart. The verse reads: "I found the dawn charged with the wonderment of grace (*feż*), / From the heart I became aware of the Beloved of the Spirit."

The Chitarman painting, when paired with the verse, appears to echo a peculiar vision that Dara Shikoh describes at great length in *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*. The vision came to him on the night of the 27th of Ramzan, 1050 AH (December 1641), the *laylat al-qadr*, or Night of Power, which in Muslim tradition commemorates the night on which the first verses of the Quran were miraculously revealed to the Prophet. As one of the most auspicious annual

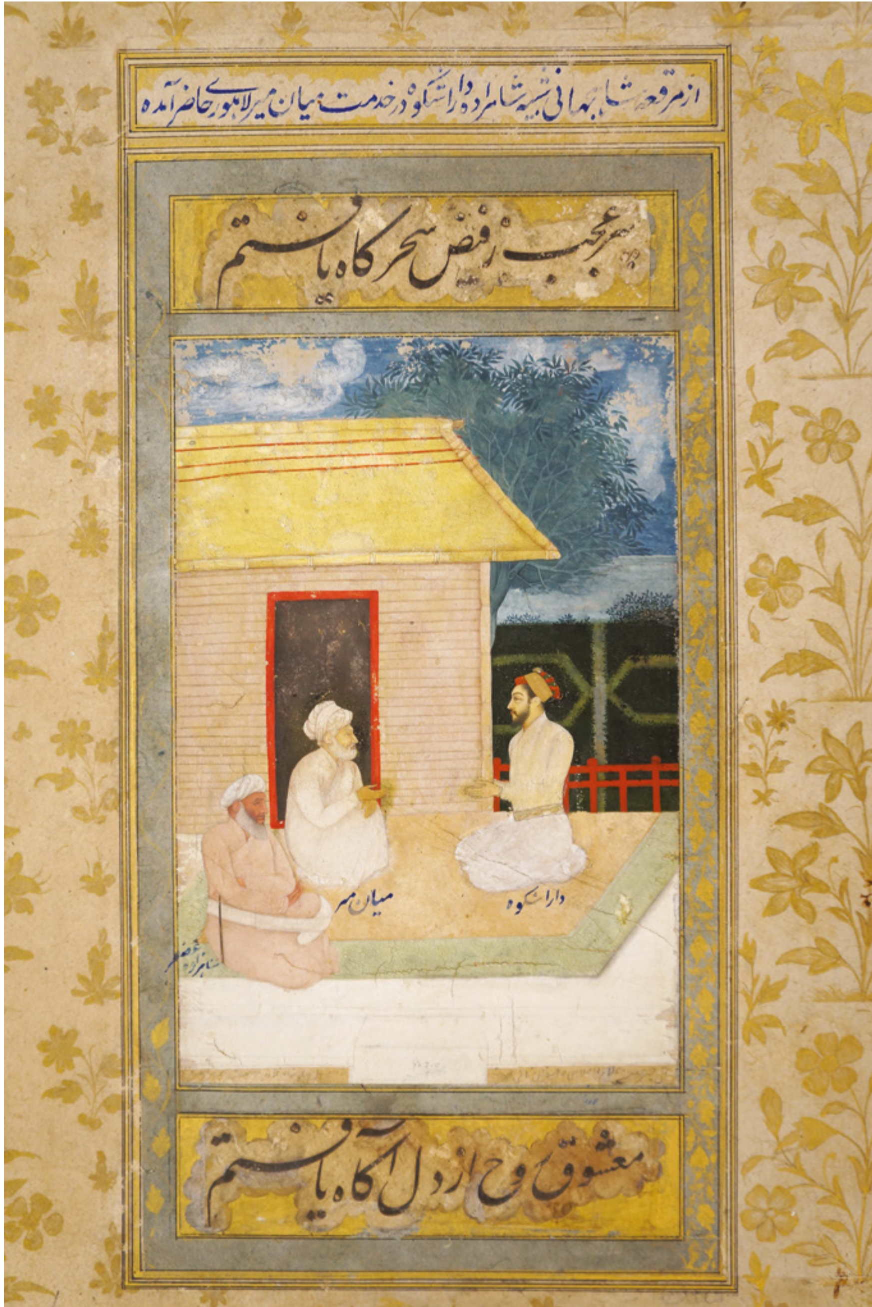

FIGURE 137 Prince Dara Shikoh visiting Miyan Mir, ascribed to Chitarman, ca. 1655. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper
© VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON (IM.250-1921). GIVEN BY SIR ROBERT NATHAN, K.C.S.I., C.I.E.

events in the Islamic calendar, it is a night in which Muslims make nightly vigils that typically last until dawn. The prince explains that while seated in prayer, facing the *Kaʿba*, he was transported to a place where he saw a tall, beautiful building surrounded by a garden. He intuited that it was Miyan Mir's mausoleum, and inside the building was his tomb. Suddenly, he saw Miyan Mir emerge from his tomb in fine apparel, seating himself in the courtyard. His eyes fell on Dara Shikoh and he beckoned him to come close. By Dara's own account, the intimate exchange that followed in which Miyan Mir tightly embraced the prince, was a kind of initiation in which the deceased saint transmitted esoteric knowledge to him directly.[23]

There are other instances in both Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum's memoirs in which they encounter eminent Sufi masters from different times and locations. Jahanara Begum entered the Imaginal World on the night of her initiation where she witnessed a large gathering of mystics. Similarly, Dara also mentions joining such eternal gatherings through visions. For instance, he describes one occasion when:

> one night this *faqīr* [Dara Shikoh] saw the Prophet—prayers and peace be upon him—sitting on a dais. Abu Bakr and ʿUmar were sitting on his right, with Junayd next to them. ʿUthman and ʿAli were on his left, and my Pir Ghawth al-thaqalayn [ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani] was next to them. Dhun-nun al-Misri, Bashr Hafi, and many of the great shaikhs including Mawlana ʿAbd al-Rahman Jami and my teacher, Shaikh Mir [Miyan Mir], were also present in the gathering.[24]

Artworks such as the Lalchand initiation scene and the Chitarman painting, therefore, almost certainly evoked multiple levels of meaning for their intended audience. In addition to acting as a practitioner's visual support during the common Sufi practice of cultivating the memory and image of the guides in the heart—as Dara Shikoh explains in the *Risāla-i ḥaqqnumā*—the paintings also invested the young royals with supernatural power. Furthermore, the artworks recall visions that disciples had of their guides. Supra-temporal, ahistorical meetings between saints and disciples are among the most familiar types of episodes scattered across every Sufi hagiography, biography, and memoir. It is thus no coincidence that, from the 1640s onward, these miraculous gatherings found visual expression as well. The individuals depicted in these imperial Mughal paintings strongly hint at Jahanara Begum and Dara

23 Dara Shikoh, *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, 45–46; Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 97.

24 Dara Shikoh, *Ḥasanāt*, 16.

Shikoh's patronage. Some important early examples come from the *Shah Jahan* and *St. Petersburg Albums*.

1 The *Majlis* Paintings

Foundational artworks such as the Vienna fragment, the Walters Museum drawing, and the Sackler painting provided the language required to visualize these gatherings. In a painting from around 1645 added to the *Late Shah Jahan Album*, six sages are shown seated in a courtyard next to a flowing river (Fig. 138).[25] The figure on the top right seated under the shade of a large tree is easily recognizable as Shaikh Husain Chishti, the same early seventeenth-century shaikh seen in both the famous Jahangir-period painting by Bichitr and the Vienna gathering. Unlike the other *Late Shah Jahan Album* folio discussed at the very beginning of this chapter (Fig. 128), which shows Mulla Shah giving a sermon to his disciples, this page—from the San Diego Museum of Art—represents a supra-temporal *majlis*. Shaikh Husain, again shown counting beads with both hands, sits facing Khwaja Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1235), the successor to the founding father of the Chishti order in India, Muʿin al-Din Chishti. Bakhtiyar Kaki was also regarded as the first Sufi to popularize the Chishti order in the Sultanate capital of Delhi. In this painting he is shown gesturing with his right hand, addressing Shaikh Husain, while holding a book with his left hand. He can be identified as Kaki because a second painting from the late Shah Jahan period, housed in St. Petersburg (Fig. 139), shows the same figure in another spiritual gathering.[26]

Since all of the figures in the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ* example are labeled, it becomes clear in the San Diego Museum painting that two leaders of the Chishti order from different eras are shown leading a Sufi gathering at dawn or sunset. In the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ* painting, the figure of al-Jilani seated in the top right is clearly based on Shaikh Husain from the San Diego composition. Both are shown sitting on their haunches, wearing stark white *jāmas* and brown woolen shawls, counting beads with both hands. Bakhtiyar Kaki is seated directly below his guide, Muʿin al-Din. In hundreds of subsequent paintings showing the exact same composition, Kaki can always be recognized by his profile portrait, full black beard, and the shawl draped around him like a cape (Fig. 140). Similarly, the portrait of ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani was used as a

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25 Okada, *Indian Miniatures*, 170, fig. 207; B. N. Goswamy, *Domains of Wonder: San Diego Museum of Art* (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Art, 2005), 148–49, fig. 58.

26 Kostioukovitch, *The St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, I:74–75, and II: Plate 71.

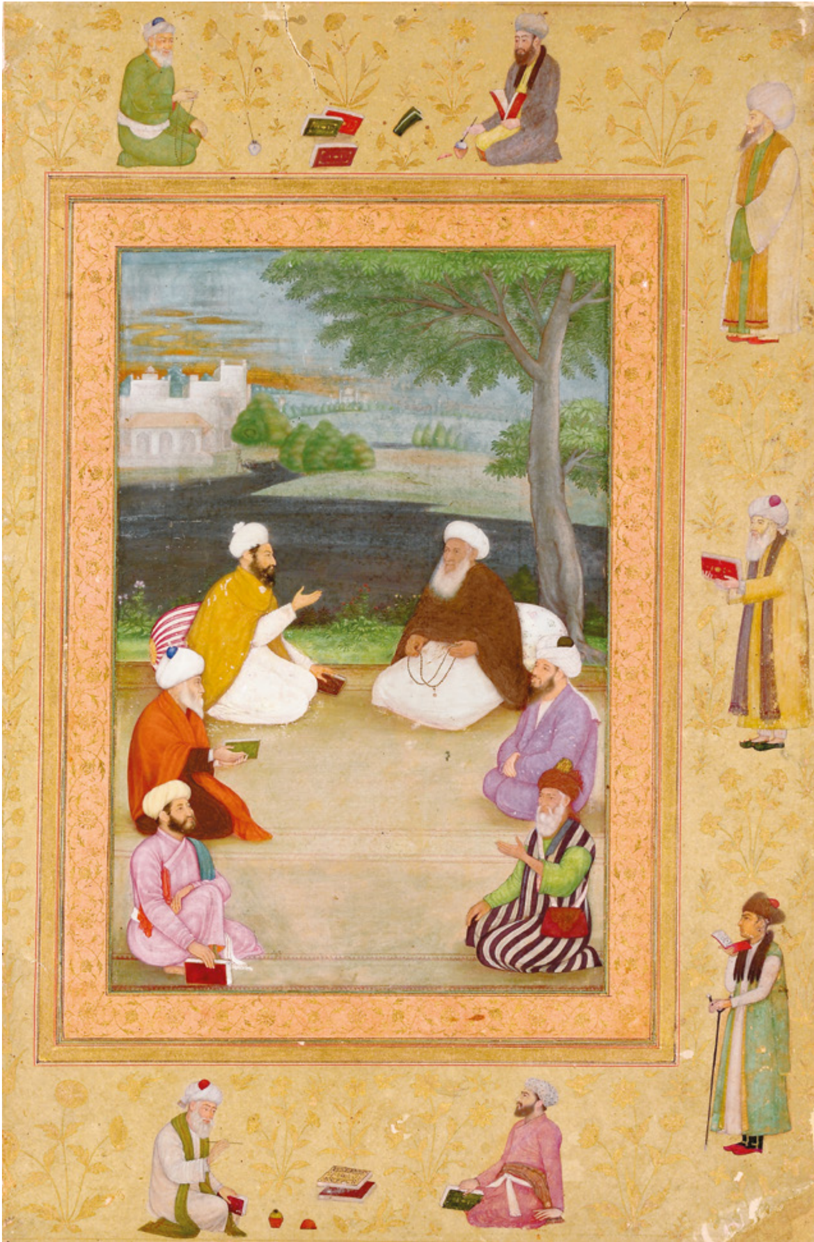

FIGURE 138 Shaikh Husain Chishti, Khwaja Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki and disciples (An assembly of poets and Sufis), from the *Late Shah Jahan Album*, by Bichitr, ca. 1640. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 22.8 × 12.7 cm. The San Diego Museum of Art: Bequest of Edwin Binney 3rd Collection (1990.353)
HTTP://WWW.THESANDIEGOMUSEUMOFART.ORG

FIGURE 139
(Counterclockwise from the top-right) ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Muʿin al-Din Chishti, Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid, Nizam al-Din Awliyaʾ, and Shah Sharaf Bu ʿAli Qalandar (detail), from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, ca. 1650 (with 18th century additions in Isfahan). Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 14.5 × 22.3 cm. Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg (MS. E-14, fol. 48r)
PHOTO: AFTER *THE ST. PETERSBURG MURAQQAʿ: ALBUM OF INDIAN AND PERSIAN MINIATURES FROM THE 16TH THROUGH THE 18TH CENTURY AND SPECIMENS OF PERSIAN CALLIGRAPHY BY ʿIMĀD AL-ḤASANĪ* (MILAN: LEONARDO ARTE, 1996), PLATE 71

FIGURE 140
(Counterclockwise from the top-right) ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Muʿin al-Din Chishti, Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid, Nizam al-Din Awliyaʾ, and Shah Sharaf Bu ʿAli Qalandar, ca. 1710. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 21.5 × 17 cm. British Library, London
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model for many individual portraits in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Fig. 141).

Through the literary and visual evidence at hand, we realize that in this Indo-Islamic milieu, time and history are not imagined as being solely linear. They do not always progress temporally from point A to point B. In contrast to prevailing modern Western conceptions, Islamic thought conceives of time as a multivalent reality. It is a progression that can turn back on itself, and is constantly pierced by interventions from higher and lower realms.[27] Immortal personages, not just prophets such as Muhammad and Khizr, but also saints from "bygone" eras, continue to interact with people of different periods, collapsing all sense of linear time and material space. It is thus easier to envision Islamic time as spherical, where any given moment has the potential to become a center, or stage, for the witnessing of the eternal. In this way, time can be perforated

27 It is important to remember that our material realm, according to the Islamic ontological framework, not only has worlds above it, but also below it, whence come demonic presences into our lives.

FIGURE 141 ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani, ca. 1730. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper.
38.9 × 27.1 cm
© VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON (IM.295-1914)

with ontologically charged experiences of higher realities. This conception is best summed up in a popular Sufi couplet, sung regularly in Qawwali music, attributed to the popular medieval Central Asian saint, Ahmad-i-Jam, who also happened to be the grandfather of the Naqshbandi Sufi Husain Jami included in the Vienna painting: "The ones who are slain on the dagger of submission, / Every moment they receive a new life from the Unseen."[28]

Both the San Diego and the St. Petersburg *majlis* paintings share distinct compositional traits with Dara Shikoh's initiation painting. The figures are seated in a circle, reminiscent of a Sufi *majlis*. The two senior figures are placed at the top of the group and directly in the center of the overall composition. They are both engrossed in the act of *dīdār*. In the San Diego example, Shaikh Husain receives teachings and blessings from his predecessor, while in the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ* example, the founding father of the Qadiri order, Shaikh Muhyi al-Din ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani, blesses Muʿin al-Din, founder of the Chishti order in India.

Compositionally, both paintings are divided into three clearly defined horizontal registers that reflect a symbolic hierarchy, a uniquely Indic compositional format first used in medieval-period illustrations. The most important personages occupy the central space. Figures of secondary significance are relegated to the bottom register, while the background dominates the top register. This basic tripartite division of space is true for the Sackler initiation painting as well. Importantly, in all three paintings (including the Sackler example), the hierarchical division of the page culminates in the sky, hinting perhaps at the heavenly abode of the Unseen. In this ontological scheme, the space where saints congregate, then, represents the Imaginal plane. This sacred precinct occupied by the Sufis is consciously flattened, most visibly in the initiation painting. The carpet and the reed mat on which the figures sit is seen from a bird's eye view. I would argue that the flattening and abstraction of the space transposes the scene into an otherworldly reality that is no longer bound to the illusionistic rules of naturalism. The portraits, however, are characterized by a hyper-reality, perhaps keeping in mind the ritualistic function of remembering and meditating on the faces of the saints. The artists responsible for these paintings clearly possessed multiple representational tools: they show their mastery over naturalism when required but also thoughtfully avoid it when representing a sanctified space.

The St. Petersburg *majlis* painting has an idiosyncratic background, added in Isfahan when several Shah Jahan period paintings were taken there in the eighteenth century. Despite this later intervention, the dour background

28 Jahanara Begum, *Mūʾnis al-arvāh*, 30.

landscape with its European seaport and looming dark skies continues to perform its role as part of the painting's symbolic program. The arrangement of the figures suggests that the conceptual framework of the artwork is rooted in South Asian hagiographical literature that narrates the convergence of the two most popular Sufi *ṭuruq* (orders) of the region, the Qadiriya and the Chishtiyya. In the painting, ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani faces Muʿin al-Din Chishti. Following the long tradition of Chishti hagiographical literature—including ʿAbd al-Haq Muhaddith-i Dehlavi's *Akhbār al-akhiyār*—in her *Mū'nis al-arvāh*, Jahanara Begum includes the legendary account of a young Muʿin al-Din going to Iraq to visit al-Jilani. There he is said to have spent five months in the company of the Qadiri saint, receiving blessings and spiritual graces.[29]

Given the affiliations of both Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh, it makes sense that visual and literary accounts associated with them establish the preeminence of the Qadiri order in Indian Sufism. However, when the writings of the two siblings are compared, it is evident that Jahanara was more closely attached to the Chishti order than her brother. In the epilogue of her biography of the Chishti saints, *Mū'nis al-arvāh*, which was added in 1643, she includes a long personal account of her own visit to the shrine of Muʿin al-Din Chishti.[30] In the months of Sha'ban and Ramazan, she accompanied her father to Ajmer, where she stayed in a building next to the shrine. During the day she would spend her time sitting under the shade of trees and at night she would recite the Quran in her quarters. She participated in the grand arrangements for the saint's birthday. On the night of the full moon, during which Jahanara kept a fast, she was given permission to enter the sacred precinct of the shrine. By her own account, she crawled barefoot from the gateway of the entrance to the shrine itself, kissing the earth with every movement. Following a cycle similar to the circumambulation around the *Kaʿba*, she circled the cenotaph seven times.[31] She reports that the unique sensation of receiving blessings was beyond what she could ever express in words. As a sign of gratitude, she rubbed perfume on the cenotaph and on the pulpit of the mosque with her own hands. In the *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya*, she calls herself "a follower of the Chishtiyya order."[32] Even today, it is very common for Sufis to have affiliations with more than one spiritual order, often taking multiple initiations to receive the blessings of as

29 BL, MS Or. 5637, Jahanara Begum, *Mū'nis al-arvāh*, f. 11a–11b. Dara Shikoh also mentions this in his biography (*Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, 17).

30 Bodleian, MS Fraser 229, Jahanara Begum, *Mū'nis al-arvāh*, ff. 80b–83a.

31 Equating a saint's shrine to the *Kaʿba* is a favorite trope in Muslim devotional literature. Dara Shikoh also uses this theme in poems praising Miyan Mir's Lahore and Mulla Shah's Kashmir as the *Kaʿba* of the seeker. See Gandhi, "Mughal Self-Fashioning," 75–76.

32 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 102.

many *ṭuruq* as possible. Even if, as a Qadiri initiate, Jahanara's affiliation with the Chishtiyya was nominal, her detailed description of the visit to Ajmer makes it clear that her devotion was sincere.[33]

Recalling the *Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya*, when Jahanara describes the night vigil that followed her initiation, she mentions her affiliation with both orders: "This thought crossed my mind, that since I am a follower of the Chishtiyya order and now am come to the Qadiriya, will I receive any spiritual openings or not? And will I benefit from the guidance and instruction of Ḥażrat-i Shahi (Mulla Shah) or not?" It was in precisely this moment that she entered a spiritual state where she witnessed a sacred gathering of the great saints with the Prophet himself as their leader. Given Jahanara Begum's personal visionary experiences and her continued contact with two of the greatest Sufi orders in India, it is highly likely that *majlis* paintings showing the founding fathers of the two *ṭuruq* pictured together, such as the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ* example, were first made for her.

Another folio from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, made around 1650, depicts a gathering of saints that is even more closely tied to the royal siblings. It shows an unidentified Sufi, clearly an ascetical dignitary—given the remnants of a halo behind his head—visiting Miyan Mir (Fig. 142).[34] Both are seated on a *chāndinī*, while a mulberry tree gives shade to the Qadiri shaikh. He is surrounded by his now familiar coterie of disciples, whose figures have been sourced from the earlier Sackler painting. Mulla Shah, still gesturing with his hand, is seated in the bottom-right corner opposite Shah Khiyali. The figures of Shah Abu'l Muʿali and Mulla Khwaja are unchanged, except for the color of their clothing. The background, with its winding river, buildings tucked to one side, and rolling hills disappearing into the hazy distance all recall other compositions of saints from the Shah Jahan-period, including folios from the DSA (Fig. 94). In fact, the background of the *St. Petersburg Muraqqa*'s Miyan Mir gathering is almost identical to the Chishti-Qadiri gathering from the San Diego Museum (Fig. 138).

The facing folio of the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ* shows another Sufi congregation in a similar setting. In this instance, Shaikh Farid Ganj Shakar (d. 1266), who was the third—after Muʿin al-Din and Bakhtiyar Kaki—in the line of the great South Asian Chishti saints, has come to visit a scantily dressed older mystic smoking a hookah (Fig. 143).[35] The only other sage I have successfully

33 Jahanara is interred within the precinct of the Nizam al-Din Awliya' shrine in Delhi, one of the major centers for Chishti devotion in North India.

34 Kostioukovitch, *The St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, 75, Plate 74.

35 Kostioukovitch, *The St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, 75, Plate 75.

FIGURE 142
Miyan Mir and disciples (detail), from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, ca. 1650. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 13.2 × 20.2 cm. Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg (MS. E-14, fol. 49r)
PHOTO: AFTER *THE ST. PETERSBURG MURAQQAʿ: ALBUM OF INDIAN AND PERSIAN MINIATURES FROM THE 16TH THROUGH THE 18TH CENTURY AND SPECIMENS OF PERSIAN CALLIGRAPHY BY ʿIMĀD AL-ḤASANĪ* (MILAN: LEONARDO ARTE, 1996), PLATE 74

FIGURE 143
Shaikh Farid and Shah Dilruba in a gathering of saints (detail), from the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ*, ca. 1650. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 24.1 × 13 cm. Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg (MS. E-14, fol. 51r)
PHOTO: AFTER *THE ST. PETERSBURG MURAQQAʿ: ALBUM OF INDIAN AND PERSIAN MINIATURES FROM THE 16TH THROUGH THE 18TH CENTURY AND SPECIMENS OF PERSIAN CALLIGRAPHY BY ʿIMĀD AL-ḤASANĪ* (MILAN: LEONARDO ARTE, 1996), PLATE 75

FIGURE 144
A gathering of Sufis from the Rishi order, attributed to Muhammad Musa, Kashmiri region, ca. 1700. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper
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identified in this artwork is Miyan Mir's disciple, the Qadiri Sufi Shah Dilruba. Yet again, the presence of a Chishti Sufi, in this instance one of the most beloved saints from medieval South Asia, and a Qadiri Sufi, who was one of Dara Shikoh's guides, suggests the patronage of either the heir apparent to the Mughal throne or Jahanara Begum—and most likely, both.

These and many other artworks from around 1640–55 showing worldly and supernatural gatherings form a constellation of compositions that share portraits, settings, and other iconographical and stylistic features. Within a few decades, this particular sub-genre within the larger theme of devotional images spread across the subcontinent. Different regions used the same essential symbolic markers and figural compositions established under the patronage of Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh to depict their own Sufi networks and hierarchies. One painting from ca. 1700 shows a gathering of major saints from the Rishi Sufi order, historically tied to the Kashmiri region (Fig. 144). Elsewhere, I have identified the artist of the painting as Muhammad Musa, from Kashmir, who was active in the region between around 1690 and 1725, and

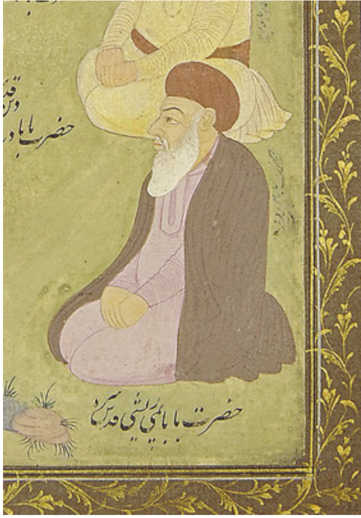

FIGURE 145
A gathering of Sufis from the Rishi order (detail), attributed to Muhammad Musa, Kashmiri region, ca. 1700. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper
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was known for his representations of Sufi saints.[36] He made several portraits of Mulla Shah using earlier Mughal artworks as his source. In this particular painting, he used the figure of the Mulla to depict a Rishi Sufi by the name of Baba Yamini, shown here seated in the lower-right corner donning the familiar bulbous turban, pastel colored robe, and brown *chādar* draped over both shoulders (Fig. 145).

By the time the *Tipu Sultan Album* was assembled in Mysore, a good century after Muhammad Musa's Kashmiri paintings, the visual vocabulary for depicting gatherings of saints had become canonical across a vast geographical expanse. In addition to single portraits, the South Indian album includes several depictions of saintly gatherings. Despite the broader handling of figures and simpler compositions that lack a sense of space or depth, the basic arrangement of saints is the same as the mid-seventeenth century *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ* painting (Fig. 139). On folio 33 for example, Mughal-period elements have either been eschewed or paired down to their most essential (Fig. 146). The entire composition focuses on the large white carpet where the saints are seated, with the background now a horizontal strip of green at the top. In terms of style there is very little in common with the imperial Mughal school, echoing the historical and geographical distance between the two centers of production. However, the six figures, with al-Jilani and Chishti at the top, are the same as the *St. Petersburg Muraqqaʿ* example, and are also arranged in exactly

36 Mumtaz, "Patch by Patch."

FIGURE 146 (Counterclockwise from the top-right) ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Mu‘in al-Din Chishti, Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid, Nizam al-Din Awliya’, and Shah Sharaf Bu ‘Ali Qalandar, from the *Tipu Sultan Album of Saints*, 1796 CE. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 38.3 × 21.6 cm. British Museum, London (1936.411.0.31, f. 33)

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FIGURE 147
Fragment of a tracing showing Muʿin al-Din Chishti, Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, and Baba Farid. Ink on vellum. ca. 1780. 16 × 5.7 cm
COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR

the same way. Decades of circulation, via itinerant artists, tracings, and copies, meant that an iconography developed in Mughal centers in the 1640s had become firmly established outside the imperial sphere (Fig. 147). The sheer number of paintings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries representing the Chishti-Qadiri gathering theme suggests that this sub-genre was also popular among sub-imperial audiences.[37]

Similar to other themes of Muslim devotion in South Asia, the tradition of representing sacred gatherings has persisted down to our times, despite the major cultural, political, and intellectual ruptures experienced during the colonial period. Today, these Imaginal congregations can be seen in heavily photoshopped, multicolored posters hanging in shops outside popular Sufi shrines

37 For some notable examples see, BL, MS Add. Or. 4473, *Gathering of Mystics*; *Shah ʿAbd al-Qadir and Khwaja Muʿin al-din Chishti with Other Divines*, Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.133:86/A-1964); *A Group of Indian Saints and Holy Men*, San Diego Museum of Art (1990.375).

FIGURE 148 ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani presiding over an assembly of Chishti saints, by H.R. Raja, 1988. Print. 27.6 × 34.6. Private collection (Inv.-No.89-312 069)
PHOTO: *THE FRIENDS OF GOD: SUFI SAINTS IN ISLAM: POPULAR POSTER ART FROM PAKISTAN* (OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY, 2006), 40, PLATE 11

in Pakistan (Fig. 148).[38] Depictions of the Qadiri and Chishti founders, sharing space with a revolving caste of local saints, remains an important theme.

2 An Iconography of Devotion

The figures of Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah shown in gatherings with close disciples not only played a major role in forming and disseminating the language of the *majlis*-painting genre, but also aided in establishing the iconography and style for individual portraits of saints for centuries to come. This sub-genre within the larger umbrella of devotional painting also rapidly gained in popularity across the subcontinent after the mid-seventeenth century and can be mapped through representations of Mulla Shah himself. Images of Mulla Shah

38 Jürgen W. Frembgen, *The Friends of God: Sufi Saints in Islam: Popular Poster Art from Pakistan* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), fig. 11.

discussed in relation to Jahanara Begum's patronage in the preceding chapter should be viewed in this context. If we trace the development and spread of this unique visual trope, we can examine how the prototype established by artists working for Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh was copied and transmitted into other regional workshops throughout North India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some of the first singular portraits of Mulla Shah, such as Figures 123 and 124, were quick, informal studies in which the saint is placed against an unpainted surface or a simple background. By the late 1640s and early 1650s, the visual language became formal, with more single-figure portraits of the Mulla produced for inclusion in imperial albums.

In paintings where the saint appears in gatherings, I have shown how artists mixed the formal conventions of flattened, abstracted space with minutely rendered, hyper-real portraiture in order to depict an otherworldly realm. Later portraits, particularly those made posthumously, move even further into an iconic representational language, gradually rejecting the naturalism seen in the earlier figures. One painting that is an excellent example of this shift also reflects the growing importance of the saint in the late-Shah Jahan court (Fig. 149).[39] It shows Mulla Shah in a resplendent yellow *jāma* with an olive green *chādar* tied around him to help secure his legs in his favorite posture of meditation. In the *Sakīnat al-awliyā'*, Dara Shikoh mentions how his spiritual preceptor would sit for hours, lost in deep meditation, in this very pose. The white embroidered *chāndinī* cloth spread out over the reed mat on which the Mulla sits is shown in a flattened perspective, as if seen from above. A muslin scarf lies twisted to one side on the *chāndinī*, along with a black *tasbīḥ* [rosary], leather-bound books, a penholder, and a meditation crutch. The crutch, with an ivory handle ending in two lion heads, is similar to the crutch from the Boston drawing in that it is also shown flattened, rather than lying at a naturalistic angle on top of the carpet (Fig. 123). The books and penholder, on the other hand, are shown in perspective. The outline of the figure of the saint is drawn in bold, stark strokes that separate him from his surroundings. The barely perceivable shadow that runs under him and along the large decorated bolster enhances the seeming weightlessness of the figure. Throughout the painting there is a subtle tension between highly rendered naturalism, as seen in his clothes and beard, and a more graphic sensibility. The background is a light wash of malachite green tinted with hues of yellow and purple, suggesting a quiet evening sky. Overall, the ornate border, the bold outlines framing the figure, and the conscious flattening of certain objects and spaces contribute to a formal, icon-like portrait of Mulla Shah.

39 Soudavar and Beach, *Art of the Persian Courts*, 318, fig. 129f.

FIGURE 149 Mulla Shah, ca. 1655. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 36.5 × 24.6 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: The Art and History Collection, LTS2002.2.4

The carefully staged objects also point to the saint's inner qualities and vocations. The prayer beads and meditation crutch draw attention to his contemplative calling. The books and penholder allude to his prolific literary works. In most paintings made during and after the 1650s, Mulla Shah is shown in pastel-colored apparel. In this particular painting, the hem of his pale yellow robe cascades down from his knees to reveal a blood red inner lining. Is this a subtle symbolic allusion to his inner state? In Indic devotional language, the color red is a familiar topos representing the station of spiritual love and intoxication.

Even more so than the objects, it is the saint's face that should be understood as the locus of the painting's iconicity (Fig. 150). Mulla Shah is framed by a large golden halo with emanating rays. Although he is ostensibly elderly, with a completely white beard and mustache and wrinkled forehead, he has a clear, smooth face with healthy, round features, giving him an ageless appearance. His stern, unsmiling expression adds to the formal staging of the portrait. This detail is in contrast to other images of him in which he is shown smiling, echoing the descriptions of his countenance given by Jahanara Begum and Dara Shikoh. As Jahanara explains: "he was always cheerful, expansive and smiling. His way was not of dryness and constriction. Sometimes he would laugh joyously, and following the tradition of the Prophet, occasionally joke with his close disciples."[40]

The painting was made to fit into a late Shah Jahan-period album by adding thin cartouche strips around the inner border that contain lines from a poem written by the famous medieval Persian poet and saint Saʿdi Shirazi. The calligraphy appears to have been recycled from an earlier manuscript, probably from sixteenth-century Persia. The portion of the verse composed in the central border comes from Saʿdi's *Būstān* [*The Orchard*], a Persian classical text containing prose and poetry narrating short allegorical tales for moral and ethical teaching. The seven verses in the cartouches are from the first chapter of the book, "On Justice, Wisdom, and Government," from a section titled, "On Dealing with Enemies." The reader imagines a wise old man giving sage advice to a king or prince after the enemy has been defeated and taken captive:

40 Jahanara Begum, "Risāla-i ṣāḥibiyya," 90.

FIGURE 150 Mulla Shah (detail), ca. 1655. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 36.5 × 24.6 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: The Art and History Collection, LTS2002.2.4

When he asks for protection, treat him with kindness
Pardon him, but be aware of his trickery
From the council of a wise old man turn not away
For the timeworn [elder] has experience
And they uproot the stronghold from its roots
The youth with their strength, and the wise men with their council.[41]

41 Sadi, *Būstān*, Chapter 1, Section 33, accessed January 11, 2023, https://ganjoor.net/saadi/boostan/bab1/sh33/, my emphasis.

The painting, which can be dated to around 1650–55, is similar in one aspect to the *Late Shah Jahan Album* folio in which Mulla Shah is shown preaching to his disciples from his own treatise (Fig. 128). That folio also reflects the growing prominence that a living saint could hold in the context of the Mughal court. Both paintings were made after 1646, when Mulla Shah completed his *Risāla-i shāhiyya*, the opening of which is included in the border of Figure 128. By this time, Dara Shikoh had far outstripped his other brothers in courtly titles and privileges. Shah Jahan preferred to send his other sons to battle while keeping Dara by his side. In 1642 the emperor elevated him further by giving him the title of *Buland Iqbāl* [August Fortune], "an epithet that till then had been solely reserved for addressing Shah Jahan."[42] It is no surprise, then, that Dara, as the favored son who was constantly by the emperor's side as advisor, successor, and confidante, was able to gain support for his own spiritual guide at court. Saʿdi's poem describes a sage who is wise because of his old age. It is entirely possible that the artist exaggerated the whiteness of Mulla Shah's beard to more appropriately mirror the literary description, thereby making him a more suitable emblem of wisdom for the court. In other, more naturalistic artworks, when the Mulla is shown even more aged, he always retains his greying hair. It is therefore likely that the artist responsible for this portrait was working from a template or drawing, rather than a portrait drawn from life.

Another incident that might have given Mulla Shah further privilege and status as the central spiritual authority for Mughal royalty occurred in 1644. One evening, Jahanara Begum, who was wearing thin muslin garments and covered head to toe in oil-based *ʿaṭar*, caught fire in her quarters. Two of her handmaids perished while attempting to save her.[43] The princess herself was badly charred. According to Shah Jahan's historians, the critical burns nearly killed her and it took her a full seven months to recover. The official court history states that her recovery was made possible by her trip to Nizam al-Din's shrine at Delhi. However, according to Mulla Shah's own writings and Tavakkul Beg's biography, the saint was the spiritual agent that aided in her cure. In his *Muṣannifāt*, there is a long panegyric poem in praise of Shah Jahan and by extension Jahanara Begum, with a prologue written in prose that explains that the poem is "in answer to Emperor Shah Jahan and his request to this *faqīr* [Mulla Shah] to pray in favor of his child whose hands had been burnt by a

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42 Gandhi, "Mughal Self-Fashioning," 31.

43 For a detailed account of her burning and her recovery, see Muhammad Salih Kamboh, *ʾAmal-i-Salih, or Shah Jahan Namah: A Complete History of the Emperor Shah Jahan*, ed. Ghulam Yazdani, 4 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1923), II:415–17, and Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 124–25.

flame. And the Emperor wrote back saying that the prayers of the *fuqarā* have been answered."[44]

Scholars have written extensively on how Islamic spirituality was used by both Shah Jahan and Dara Shikoh as a tool for political self-fashioning. It is evident from the two Shah Jahan-period album folios depicting Mulla Shah that the image of the saint was employed to stage a particular political persona by Mughal royalty, in which their pietistic aspirations became attached to a particular saint. But rather than assuming that such encounters between spiritual and worldly authorities *only* served to politicize sanctity, we should also consider the notion that, conversely, such interactions had the effect of sanctifying courtly politics.

Another artwork of Mulla Shah, made by an artist working in the imperial atelier, is a finely rendered drawing from the British Library that can be dated between 1655 and 1658 (Fig. 151).[45] From his own writings, it is well known that Dara Shikoh frequently sought the company of living sages, traveling far and wide to seek advice on spiritual matters. Artists probably accompanied him on his visits to Mulla Shah and other saints, and were tasked with making portrait drawings. For court artists such as Lalchand and Chitarman, who were already well versed in depicting living royals and courtiers for the imperial atelier, rendering individualized portraits of living saints must have come easily. The delicate British Library drawing, one of the most exquisite *siyāh qalams* from the late-Shah Jahan era, shows an aged Mulla Shah in a three-quarter view, consoling a weeping elderly man. It is one of only two portraits that I have located in which the saint is not shown in full profile. Next to him sits a stoic, younger disciple with a sensitively rendered, thick, black beard (Fig. 152). Below him is a delicately rendered doe. Given the advanced age of the Mulla—visible from his wrinkling eyes and creased forehead—the painting is probably one of the last made during his lifetime. In contrast to the Sackler portrait in which he is shown in a stiff profile, the artist has made no attempt to stylize the figures in the drawing. Judging from its high level of skill and graphic sophistication, it is possible that an artist of the imperial retinue made the drawing during one of Dara Shikoh or Jahanara's visits to Kashmir. It is also possible that it is a study for an as yet unidentified or lost painting. The aged, worried looking figure, perhaps a disciple, seated to Mulla Shah's right features again in a later

44 Bodleian, Delhi Collection, MS 1420, Mulla Shah, *Muṣannifāt*, f. 20b. Also see BL, MS Or. 3203, Tavakkul Beg, *Nuskha-i aḥwāl-i shāhī*, ff. 51a–53a.

45 Falk and Archer, *Miniature Paintings*, 85, fig. 87.

FIGURE 151 Mulla Shah with an old man, a disciple and a deer, ca. 1655–58. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. 14.7 × 10.8. British Library, London
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FIGURE 152
Mulla Shah with an old man, a disciple and a deer (detail), ca. 1655–58. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. 14.7 × 10.8. British Library, London
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, J.7.6.2

painting showing him in a large gathering of Sufis in the wilderness, led by Miyan Mir himself (Fig. 153).

In nearly all of the representations of Mulla Shah that I have located, he is shown either as a solitary figure deep in meditation or as someone receiving or bestowing spiritual blessings. An important exception to these two modes of depiction is a painting from the Bharat Kala Bhavan, in which the saint is conversing with a mystic whose iconography fails to fit into known Sufi norms (Fig. 154). Mulla Shah sits next to a river under the shade of a stooping tree, with a small town nestled in the hills in the background. With his black meditation stick resting at a diagonal next to him, he faces his guest. His position directly under the tree's canopy identifies him as the one being visited. The visitor, in a coarse brown cloak, has two braids of hair hanging down from under his elegantly wound turban, an unusual trait that I have as yet failed to link with any known group of ascetics. The younger mystic's importance for Dara Shikoh and Mulla Shah's Qadiri order in Kashmir is evident from the fact that another painting, also from around 1655, shows him seated in a similar posture, but instead of Mulla Shah, he is now conversing with Dara Shikoh (Fig. 155).

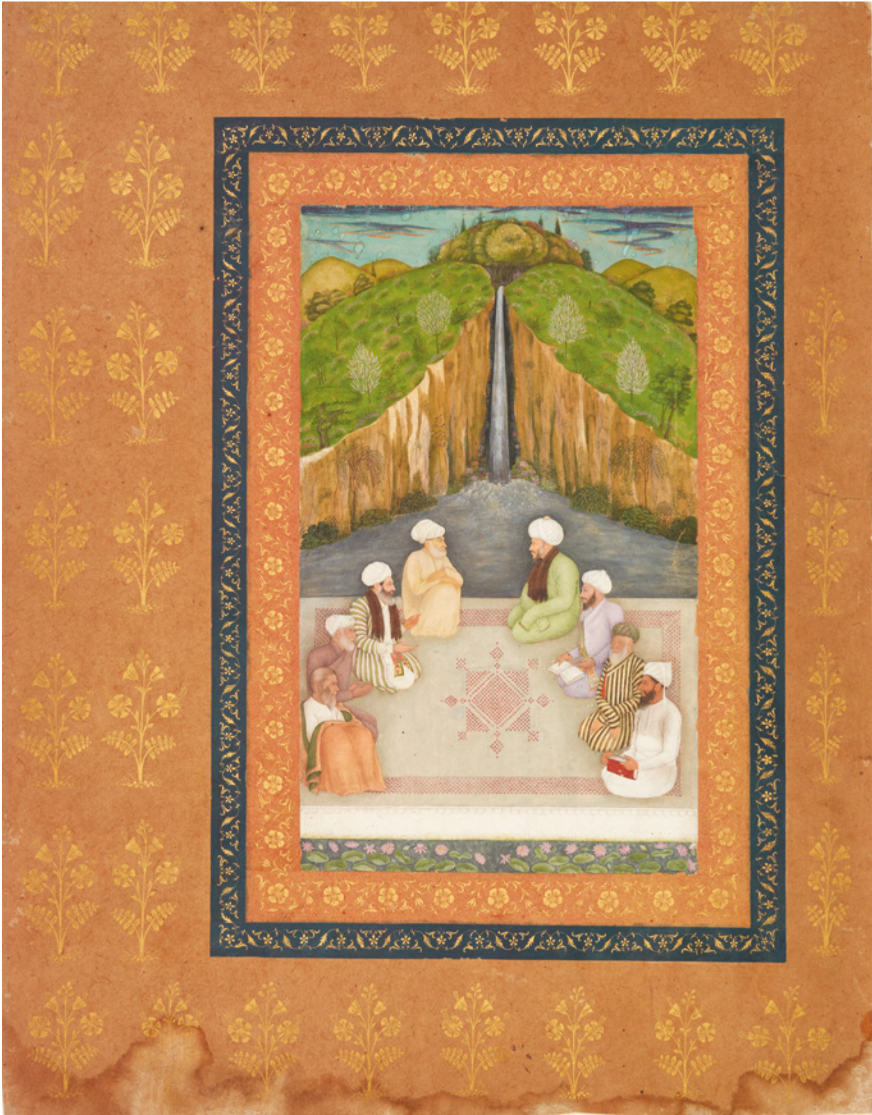

FIGURE 153 Sages in Discussion, ca. 1650–1700. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 44.2 × 34.3 cm
© THE AGA KHAN MUSEUM, AKM172

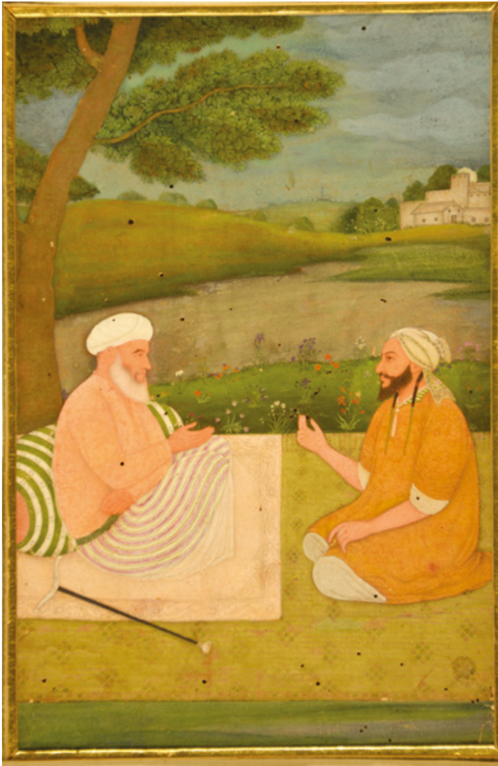

FIGURE 154
Mulla Shah with an unidentified mystic in Kashmir, ca. 1650–55, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi (BKB 695)

In both paintings, the mystic makes a distinct gesture with two fingers of his extended right hand. On the verso of Figure 155—a painting that recently sold at an auction—the saint is labeled as "Shaikh Sulayman."[46] An eighteenth-century drawing from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, speaks of this mystic's importance, as it uses the same figures and composition (Fig. 156). In the auction painting and the Boston drawing, the tree, now right in the center of the composition, symbolically shades both the prince and the mystic. While in the Mulla Shah painting it was the braided ascetic who had approached the Qadiri saint, in the other two artworks it is now he who is holding court, sitting on a tiger skin rug. In the Boston drawing, the two figures have

46 "Lot 52: Prince Sulayman Shikuh in Conversation with a Scholar," Bonhams, accessed January 13, 2023, https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/26589/lot/52/?category=list&length=96&page=2#/!.

FIGURE 155
Dara Shikoh and an unidentified mystic in Kashmir, ca. 1650–55. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 24.1 × 16.7 cm. Bonhams (lot 52, sold at Asia Week, New York, 30 March, 2021) HTTPS://WWW.BONHAMS.COM/AUCTIONS/26589/LOT/52/?CATEGORY=LIST&LENGTH=96&PAGE=2#/!

been misidentified by a later hand as Nawab ʿAli Vardi Khan and Faqir Amjad ʿAli Shah.[47]

By the end of the seventeenth century, the genre of Sufi portraiture was spreading rapidly into Muslim centers across the subcontinent. Through a survey of the dissemination of Mulla Shah's portraits, we can see the process of transformation of a devotional genre into regional styles. Portraits of the Qadiri saint from the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were made in centers as diverse as Delhi, Avadh, Kashmir, and Lahore. For instance, a now-dispersed album made for Suhrab Khan, who was a nobleman in Aurangzeb's court, shows several paintings of important saints close to Dara Shikoh and Jahanara Begum.[48] Probably made sometime in the 1690s, the album was gifted to the

47 ʿAli Vardi Khan was the ruler of Bengal from 1740 to 1756. He is a key figure in the history of eighteenth-century politics.

48 Shāh-nawāz Khān Aurangābādī and ʿAbd-al-Ḥaiy Ibn-Shāhnawāz, *The Maāthir-Ul-Umarā: Being Biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu Officers of the Timurid Sovereigns of India from 1500 to About 1789 A.D.*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1952), 1:652.

FIGURE 156
Dara Shikoh visits with ascetic, ca. 1725. Ink and light wash on paper. 18 × 14 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Denman Waldo Ross Collection (15.89)

Raja of Mewar in Rajasthan in the early eighteenth century. One folio, showing Mulla Shah conversing with Miyan Mir under the shade of a large tree, is now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Fig. 157).[49] Although clearly copied from earlier examples, the crisp outlines of the figures and their clothes, the overall simplicity of composition, and a restrained color palette all declare stylistic changes within Mughal painting taking place during the turn of the century. The couplet included at the top of the folio is a Rumi poem that Miyan Mir often quoted, particularly on one notable occasion as a subtle rebuke to the Emperor Shah Jahan: "You wish for God, as well as the material world / This is mere fancy, impossible, insanity."[50]

49 A folio with a portrait of Shah Daula of Gujarat was recently on sale in London at Francesca Galloway Gallery. On the verso, Suhrab Khan's seal is clearly visible; it reads, "Suhrab Khan Khanazad Badshah 'Alamgir." On the recto, there are several Mewari inventory marks in red ink. On the Ashmolean folio, the seal appears on the back.

50 Translation from Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was*, 87–88.

FIGURE 157 Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah, ca. 1690–95, *Suhrab Khan Album*. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 42 × 31 cm

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FIGURE 158
Mulla Shah with disciples, from the *Large Clive Album*, ca. 1665–80. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 21.4 × 16.7 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum (IS.133:85/B-1964) © VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

Similar to the Aurangzeb-period Ashmolean painting, other centers in the late seventeenth century, such as Kashmir, also eschewed the selective naturalism witnessed in Shah Jahan-period examples in favor of a flattened representation of figures and space. The subtle interplay between a graphic sensibility and three-dimensionality, popular in the Jahangir and Shah Jahan periods, gives way to flat blocks of color that resist being read as naturalistic spaces or forms. The viewer is placed in an otherworldly, hieratic space. As the Ashmolean painting shows, images of Sufi saints shifted away from complex compositional schema in favor of direct and iconic visions of sacred personages. The imagery was reduced to the most essential symbolic signifiers—elements that were chosen to help identify the saint in question.

A group portrait at the Victoria and Albert Museum containing a previously unidentified image of Mulla Shah reflects the process through which the Mughal genre of saints' portraiture became localized (Fig. 158). In the Victoria and Albert example, there is little resemblance to the saint's portraits made by imperial court artists, apart from the color palette and certain iconographic

FIGURE 159
Mulla Shah, from the *Kashmiri Album*, by Muhammad Musa, 1699–1701. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. 35.9 × 23.8 cm. Lahore Museum (LM1552)
PHOTO: MURAD KHAN MUMTAZ

elements. Given the painting's marked difference in style, skill, and imagery, and the fact that it served as a direct source for later portraits of Mulla Shah made in Kashmir, I believe that it was made by a regional workshop removed from the imperial sphere. It is also likely that it was made after the death of the saint in 1661, when an exact likeness of the historical figure was less immediately available. I was able to identify Mulla Shah in this image because of an almost completely intact *muraqqa'* from Kashmir in the collection of the Lahore Museum dated 1699–1702. The *Kashmiri Album*, painted by the artist Muhammad Musa, begins with a portrait of Mulla Shah, identified by his name inscribed in gold at the top (Fig. 159). It is an exact copy of the Victoria and Albert portrait. Both feature some of the trademarks of earlier, more direct representations of the saint: namely, his bulbous Afghani turban, portly stature, and smiling countenance.

In 1657, the emperor Shah Jahan fell seriously ill and a war of succession broke out among his sons. Within a year, Aurangzeb 'Alamgir emerged victorious and proclaimed himself the Mughal emperor. A year later, in 1659, he executed Dara

Shikoh. At a time when the new emperor put all of his attention into expanding the Mughal territories, shrinking resources forced royal artists to look for patronage elsewhere, thereby enabling the spread of seventeenth-century Mughal style and iconography into regional courts throughout the subcontinent. The Victoria and Albert painting could have been made during this early period of dissemination. Compositionally, this painting belongs to the sub-genre of *majlis* works and echoes the many images showing Miyan Mir in conversation with Mulla Shah. Similar to the Lalchand painting (Fig. 133) commemorating Dara Shikoh's initiation, the leader of the order is seated on the right, addressing his senior disciple. In the Victoria and Albert example, the hierarchy is made even more evident by the enlarged scale of Mulla Shah's figure and his placement slightly higher than the disciple opposite him.

I recently identified another painting by Muhammad Musa that is an even closer, yet simpler, study of the Victoria and Albert image (Fig. 160). It shows the Mulla in the same setting as the aforementioned painting, but situated in a hieratic space rendered with large flat washes of pale color. Instead of Mulla Shah giving *feż* to one of his Kashmiri disciples, it is now Miyan Mir who faces the Mulla. Along with the color palette and the flattened, simplified landscape, the figures of the two servants behind the saints are made in a typical eighteenth-century Kashmiri style, an aesthetic that dominates the *Kashmiri Album* from the Lahore Museum as well. The abstracted, flattened spaces inhabited by the sages reinforce the fact that these images are intended as axiological symbols, rather than as merely historical portraits. There is no attempt to follow any rules of naturalism, and the negotiation between Renaissance-inspired elements and local painterly conventions—as seen in earlier Mughal artworks—is completely absent here. The images very clearly represent an otherworldly space.

Mirroring the changing language of devotional portraiture in Islamic South Asia beginning with the turn of the century, there are several eighteenth-century paintings of Mulla Shah made in the increasingly independent state of Avadh, in Uttar Pradesh. One intriguing example is of Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah sitting in a garden pavilion, absorbed in the act of devotional gazing (Fig. 161). The painting is ascribed to the artist Muhammad Miskin, who was active in Avadhi courts between ca. 1760 and 1790. Most importantly, the artwork is pasted in the opening folio of the British Library's *Mathnawiyyāt-i mullā shāh*, one of the two compilations of Mulla Shah's writings. Richard Johnson, the East India Company employee at the court of Avadh, acquired the manuscript in June 1782 at the capital, Lucknow. Given that the artist was working in the same region at the same time, it is likely that Muhammad Miskin made the

FIGURE 160 Miyan Mir and Mulla Shah with disciples, attributed to Muhammad Musa, ca. 1695–1705. Ink and opaque watercolor on paper. 42.2 × 30.2 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (09.227.4). Gift of Dr. Julius Hoffman, 1909

OPEN ACCESS, CREATIVE COMMONS ZERO (CC0)

FIGURE 161
Mulla Shah with Miyan Mir, by Miskin Muhammad, ca. 1780–82, *Mathnawiyyāt-i mullā shāh*, British Library, London
© THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, IO ISLAMIC 578, FRONTISPIECE

painting for Richard Johnson, who placed it into the anthology when he had the manuscript rebound and restored.

By the nineteenth century, Mulla Shah's popularity seems to have waned. There are fewer portraits of him, perhaps because artists did not always have access to earlier depictions. One collection of preparatory drawings of Muslim saints made in Lahore in around 1800 includes a Mulla Shah portrait, but the representation is of a generic Sufi figure that has no resemblance with standard depictions of the Mulla (Fig. 162). His only identification is through the Persian and Nagari inscriptions. Perhaps this waning of interest also reflects the nineteenth-century collapse of earlier networks—both material and spiritual—across the subcontinent. Artists were no longer moving easily, and patterns of local patronage were disrupted, never to be restored. The British colonial polity was rapidly replacing the longstanding Mughal ethos. It thus makes sense that one of the last portraits of Mulla Shah was made in Lahore, the place where he spent his final years and where he was buried in 1662. It is clear that the nineteenth-century Lahori artist was no longer part of a larger

FIGURE 162
Mulla Shah, circa 1780. Ink and light opaque watercolor washes on paper. 9.5 × 6.9 cm. Lahore Museum, Lahore (A-762)
PHOTO: MURAD KHAN MUMTAZ

network of exchange and had to create the saint's portrait from his own imagination. Yet, despite these upheavals, saintly portraiture continued to be relevant for local audiences. The iconography that developed through depictions of Mulla Shah, members of his Qadiri order, and other devotional figures tied to that spiritual milieu during the mid-seventeenth century continued to dictate later visual conventions, and were so popular that they even made it into eighteenth-century European prints (Fig. 163).

The figure of Mulla Shah is part of a larger constellation of saintly and prophetic images in paintings made for an Indo-Muslim audience. Like images of the Kashmiri sage, representations of ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Muʿin al-Din Chishti, and the Quranic prophet Al-Khizr signified divine mediation between worldly and spiritual spheres, each with their own nuanced meaning. There are numerous other devotional figures—sometimes from other times and other regions—who served important roles for Indo-Muslim audiences. By focusing on one instance of collaboration between Mughal-era patrons and practitioners of Sufism, the current chapter is a first step toward understanding the

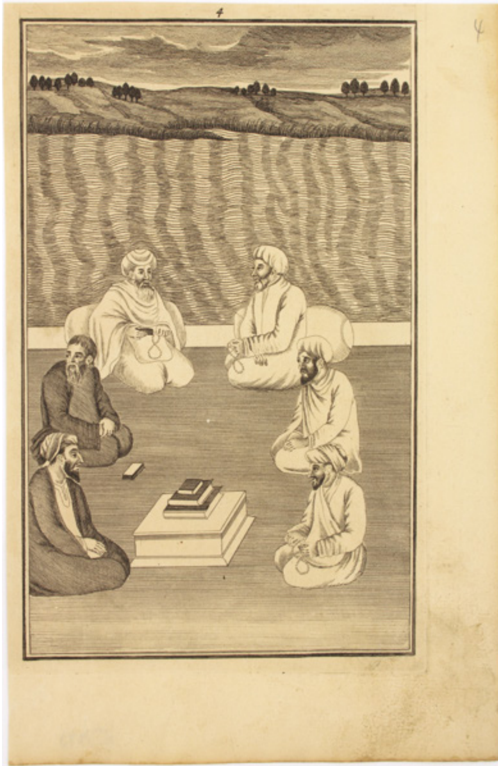

FIGURE 163
Plate 4, six Muslim saints, from *Chatelain's Atlas Historique*, Vol. no. 42, page 116, 1705–1720. Print on paper. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. Gift of Robert J. Del Bonta, 2015 and 2015. James Ricalton, Underwood and Underwood (FSA_A2014.06 2.058.E1243)

conceptual underpinnings of Muslim devotional portraiture in South Asia. Studying other similar convergences promises to deepen our understanding of Indo-Muslim spirituality, the visual culture associated with it, and its continuing presence down to our times. A comprehensive survey of the genre also promises to shed light on important confluences between *taṣavvuf* and other forms of Indic spirituality, thereby unveiling as yet undiscovered instances of trans-sectarian sharing.

Conclusion

In this book, I have introduced readers to an important genre of Indo-Muslim devotional expression that was widespread. In the previous chapter, we saw how images that were so ubiquitous between ca. 1500 and 1800 also persisted through the subsequent societal disruptions of the colonial era, and continue to play a role in the present day in the form of posters in shrines and their surrounding neighborhoods across Muslim South Asia (Fig. 148). In fact, figures of devotion, replete with ontological meaning, that were so dear to the Persianate world in the medieval and early modern periods continue to resonate in popular culture throughout the larger contemporary Islamic world.

The wildly popular Turkish historical drama *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (2014–19), that recently took the Muslim world by storm, is an excellent example of the continuing resonance of devotional signifiers. Episode 50 from season 1 opens with Ibn al-ʿArabi shown leading a spiritual gathering (Fig. 164).[1] With a waterfall pooling in the background, he and his fellow dervishes assemble in a circle in the wilderness. As in so many early modern paintings of mystics, the figures sit on animal skins, using the natural rock formations as their seats. In addition to the setting, the creators of the show employ mysterious music and a golden glow emanating from the figures to consciously transport the group into an Imaginal space. An antagonist spies on the gathering from the other side of the river, magnifying the ontological difference between our world and theirs. As fate would have it, the spy slips and falls into the pool behind the group, and instantly the music stops and the golden filter disappears. With a splash, we are dragged back to earth.

There are uncanny similarities between the Sufi gathering from *Ertuğrul* and a late-seventeenth century Mughal painting, briefly discussed in the preceding chapter, that shows Miyan Mir in the company of sages (Fig. 153). Specifically, they both share the waterfall and large pool backdrop. Divided into four horizontal registers, the Miyan Mir painting is even more otherworldly in its composition. The sages gather before a lotus pond, while in the background above the waterfall is a paradisal garden, evocative of Quranic descriptions of *jannat*: a garden with deep green foliage, with a river gushing forth.[2] The painting is a

1 Mehmet Bozdağ, *Diriliş Ertuğrul*, season 1, episode 50, dir. Metin Günay, [airdate of the episode is not clear since I took it from Netflix], 2015, on Netflix.

2 “And below them both are two gardens—So which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?—dark green [in color]” (Quran 55:62–64).

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FIGURE 164 Ibn al-ʿArabi leading a gathering of mystics, Episode 50 [Netflix], *Diriliş Ertuğrul*

captivating confluence of the Indic, the Islamicate, and the Persianate: only a Hindustani artist could have created the profiled figures, the lotus pond, and the mandala-like pattern in the center of the carpet; the background conjures Islamic notions of paradise, while the convention of placing Sufis in nature is in line with Persianate visual practices. It is unlikely that the makers of *Ertuğrul* would have been aware of the Miyan Mir painting, tucked away in storage at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. Instead, similarities between the *Ertuğrul* scene and the Mughal painting show how the thaumaturgical space where Sufis congregate continues to be deeply imprinted in the Muslim imagination. It is a window into a shared Imaginal reality. It is also no coincidence that outside of Turkey, the country where *Diriliş Ertuğrul* has been most popular is Pakistan, a place where the visualization of the sacred continues to be part of everyday devotional expression.

Images of devotion are an open invitation to the field of art history to embrace multivalence. They are part of a vast landscape that traversed many geographies and many periods. While this book primarily highlights artworks

made for Muslims of South Asia, it opens up avenues for investigating larger Persianate and Islamicate networks. For instance, what was the role of antinomian dervishes as agents of interculturation in this landscape? How does album culture across the Persianate sphere frame images of devotion?

I started this book with Tipu Sultan's album, using its preface as an interpretive tool to investigate underlying motivations of artworks as they were originally intended for an Indo-Muslim audience. When literary evidence is paired with artworks, it becomes clear that both forms of cultural expressions shared and articulated a distinct ethos, one in which images, just like figures of speech, contained the real presence of spaces, ideas, and personalities evoked. The artworks discussed in this book embodied and shaped aspects of lived Islam in early modern India. They also provided patrons and subjects of those artworks with a visual lexicon to fashion themselves as figures of devotion. Thus, by framing my argument within scholarly discussions on the nature and scope of Islamic art, I connect Muslim devotional paintings to the larger sphere of cultural history, a history in which sacred cosmology and a hierarchical view of creation played a central role.

As a foundational project, *Faces of God* first and foremost highlights and contextualizes a neglected yet historically significant theme of study in South Asian art. Since there is very little focus on Muslim devotional imagery in Hindustani painting, in order to map thematic and iconographic developments, I constructed my theoretical frameworks relying on the adjacent fields of religious studies and comparative literature that touch upon this theme, thereby building a network of sources for my project.

Using a thematic lens to study the art history of the subcontinent also destabilizes entrenched historiographical biases. By examining the continuity of this theme over a wide temporal expanse, we can question the modern periodization of history. This approach also allows for a more nuanced investigation of history in terms of continuity, coalescence and adaptability. It has allowed me to examine South Asian art history detached from its connoisseurial trappings, giving more context to the artworks.

It is my hope that by shedding light on an important theme in Indo-Muslim painting, I have also provided promising avenues for further exploration in South Asian art history. The genre of devotional painting overlaps with other possible areas of study, and one of the most important of those is the *muraqqaʿ*, or the album, one of the main receptacles for painting made in the subcontinent. While the album has received attention in relation to seventeenth-century Mughal patronage, the field of art history is surprisingly silent in terms of

examining larger networks of album production across South Asia, its history of connoisseurship, collecting habits, and themes.[3] An expansive history of the album in South Asia, one that also encompasses the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is entirely missing. In fact, a study of eighteenth-century album culture promises to reveal much about this time of transition, a surprisingly busy period of collecting and compiling. In my research on devotional painting, I have found several eighteenth-century albums, often dispersed, that shed light on the meaning and role of the *muraqqaʿ*, both as a complete object and as an art form. One album from Kashmir that has a partial preface still intact, concludes with these words:

> It came into this poor one's (*faqīr*) mind that, since he has the means and capacity, he should endeavor to preserve/protect the names of the saints and elders. However, due to the many concerns regarding worldly matters and owing to various calamities and misfortunes, he could never accomplish this. Until, in the year 1111 AH [1699] a lover and follower of the dervishes, Muhammad Musa, a great painter, brought some pictures of these shaikhs that he had made with his own hands and showed them to this lowly one [the patron]. Because the pictures of these saints facilitate the protection/preserving of their names, they gradually began to be collected, patch by patch. In the year 1114 AH [1702] this lowly one [the patron] sewed them [the pages] together. May those who contemplate on these pages remember this *faqīr* with a prayer of well-being.[4]

Now in the Lahore Museum, this particular album is a compilation that opens with several folios depicting notable Sufi saints. Written in 1702, the preface gives important insights into eighteenth-century motivations behind collecting images of saints and sewing them together "patch by patch" into an album. Unlike the preface to Tipu Sultan's album—discussed in the Introduction—that persists with Persianate cosmological metaphors, the preface of the Kashmiri album uses a personal, yet formal, tone. Rather than the fluid Persianate *nastaʾlīq* script, the album utilizes the Quranic *naskh* (Fig. 13). In this unique preface, the patron describes how the images served as mnemonic

3 A notable exception is Wright and Stronge, *Muraqqaʾ*. However, the volume only surveys albums made up until the Shah Jahan period. The only serious survey of later South Asian album cultures is Yael Rice, "Painters, Albums, and Pandits: Agents of Image Reproduction in Early Modern South Asia." *Ars Orientalis* 51(2022): 27–64, accessed, May 11, 2023, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/ars/13441566.0051.002?view=text;rgn=main.

4 *Kashmiri Album*, Lahore Museum (LM1552) [LM1552 is the folio number. Each folio has a separate accession number].

FIGURE 165
Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (detail), 1699–1702, *Kashmiri Album*, Lahore Museum (LM 1553)
PHOTO: MURAD KHAN MUMTAZ

devices, differing slightly from the function mentioned by Jahanara Begum in Chapter 5, for whom portraits of Mulla Shah served as aids to meditation. The album begins with a figure of Jahanara Begum's shaikh, followed by an image of the founder of the Qadiri order, ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani (Fig. 165). This inclusion suggests that the patron was attached to the Qadiri order and might even have been a follower of Mulla Shah's branch. Given the unassuming quality of the artworks and the patron's own intimate account, he appears to either be a minor nobleman or someone, perhaps a Sufi elder, who could not afford a lavish album. He seems to have been engaged in a close dialogue with the artist, and describes himself as sewing the pages with his own hands. The metaphor of sewing the album pages together poetically evokes itinerant ascetics' practice of patching together their own tattered robes, piece by piece. Embedded in the multivalence of the very word *muraqqaʿ*, these allusions point to the patron's—and perhaps also the artist Muhammad Musa's—identification with Sufism.

Two eighteenth-century album prefaces, one made for a sultan from Southern India in Mysore, the other for a local patron from the mountain region in the north, give two distinct reasons for collecting depictions of Sufi saints. In many ways, Tipu Sultan's album is a very late iteration of Persianate painting, writing, and collecting habits in India. It is unprecedented in that the subject matter consists solely of saints' portraits. The album from Kashmir is unique for its preface, and for placing saints at the front and center of the volume. The rest of the album follows Mughal conventions by including dynastic portraits going back to Timurid royals and concluding with generic scenes showing

noblemen and women congregating in gardens. Overall, these albums disclose the rapidly changing visual and cultural landscape of eighteenth-century Muslim India. In the midst of political upheaval, each region had to contend with change according to local dynamics. Larger networks, held tight by the Mughal polity for nearly a century and a half, were no longer sustainable. The albums betray an anxiety with aligning patronly motivations with the past. However, key elements such as devotional themes, iconography, and artistic style continue to persevere and interact across regions.

Even a cursory survey of saintly albums from this period reveals a fascinating interplay between continuity and innovation. It gives insights into how artists, patrons, and compilers of albums negotiated with the history of image-making in the Indo-Muslim world. Going forward, more in-depth studies promise to reveal further negotiations between shared, pan-Islamicate patterns of thought and habits of depiction, and regional dynamics that initiated innovations.

Another untapped facet of Hindustani painting that a survey of devotional artworks touches upon is the role of women, both as subjects and patrons. There are hundreds of paintings in major collections all over the world that depict women devotees, yoginis, and Sufis (Fig. 166). Was Jahanara Begum's patronage a remarkable anomaly, possibly linked to the sub-genre of images of female devotees, or were there other female patrons who contributed to its popularity? Was her niece, Zebunnisa, daughter of Aurangzeb and a well-known poet and Sufi, also a patron of painting? Surprisingly little scholarly attention has been given to this highly cultivated princess, even though—very much like Jahanara—she is known to have been a patron of gardens and architectural projects, and wrote a *divan* of devotional poetry.

In order to do justice to the sprawling field of devotional painting in Indo-Muslim South Asia, I have focused the present research on identifying the phenomenon, including the role of its key patrons. A logical next step forward would be to examine the reception of this genre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including the British colonial period. In the historiography of British-period Indian art, the primary scholarly focus has been to highlight hybrid networks of interaction between South Asians and the British.[5] Frequently ignored in both colonial and postcolonial historical discourses of the subcontinent are the intrinsic values of local patrons, rulers, and populaces that quietly subsisted despite the pressures of change and dislocation.

5 For a recent example of this methodology applied to South Asian art history, see Natasha Eaton, *Mimesis across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India, 1765–1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

FIGURE 166 A female ascetic pacifying a lioness with two cubs in a grove, by Faizullah, ca. 1760. Ink, opaque watercolor on paper. 30.4 × 24 cm
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Images of Sufi saints, abundant in shrines across South Asia to this day, are a key instance of one form of what Christopher Pinney calls "autonomous" image-making.[6] Although they have clearly transformed over time, they are an example of the iconographic continuity manifested by indigenous systems of cultural production. Research into the continued visualization of saints in contemporary India and Pakistan would provide an intriguing framework for considering the autonomy of devotional representation and its persistence into the present day.

Faces of God has endeavored to initiate new dialogues about an important and widespread theme in South Asian painting. Through this process I have shown how devotion was deeply embedded in the very fabric of Muslim culture. Most importantly, I have identified the ways in which practitioners and elite patrons established the conceptual premises for visualizing devotion by drawing from a rich well of Islamic thought. The book is a small offering toward what I hope will become a more extensive map of this complex and fascinating nexus of South Asian religion, history, and culture.

6 Christopher Pinney, "The Material and Visual Culture of British India," in *India and the British Empire*, ed. Douglas M. Peers and Nandini Gooptu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 232.

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Index

NOTE: Page numbers in italics refer to illustrations. Names of the following individuals and albums found in subheadings are indicated by abbreviations:

DS = Dara Shikoh
JB = Jahanara Begum
MM = Miyan Mir
MS = Mulla Shah
SJ = Shah Jahan
DSA = Dara Shikoh Album
LSJA = Late Shah Jahan Album
TSA = Tipu Sultan Album

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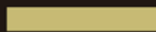

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