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The *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* (1608-11): Dialogue and Asiatic Otherness at the Mughal Court

Corinne Lefèvre*

Abstract

Building on the literary traditions of *munāẓara* (disputation) and *malfūẓāt* (teachings of a Sufi master), the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* (Assemblies of Jahāngīr) constitute a fundamentally dialogical work, in form as well as function. An account of the night-time sessions presided over by Emperor Jahāngīr from 1608 to 1611, this source highlights the Mughals' will to assert their power on a Eurasian scale and the central role played by Iran, Central Asia, and Hindustan in the elaboration of imperial ideology and identity. It thus opens a new window into the mental representations and hierarchies that underlay the much celebrated Mughal cosmopolitanism.

S'ancrant dans la double tradition littéraire des *munāẓara* (disputation) et des *malfūẓāt* (conversations d'un maître soufi), les *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* (Assemblée de Jahāngīr) constituent une œuvre fondamentalement dialogique, tant dans sa forme que dans son fonctionnement. Récit des séances nocturnes présidées par l'empereur Jahāngīr entre 1608 et 1611, ce texte donne à voir la volonté des Moghols d'affirmer leur pouvoir à une échelle eurasiatique et le rôle central joué par l'Iran, l'Asie centrale et l'Hindustan dans l'élaboration de l'idéologie et de l'identité impériale. Il permet, ce faisant, de mettre à jour les représentations mentales et les hiérarchies sous-tendant le cosmopolitisme tant célébré des Moghols.

Keywords

dialogue, xenology, cosmopolitanism, Mughal empire, Asia

It has been established that whoever—be he an Iranian, Tūrānī, Westerner (*gharbī*), or Easterner (*sharqī*), a merchant, soldier, poet, man of letters, musician, or craftsman—enters the capital and is a master of his profession must pass under the most sacred

*) Corinne Lefèvre, CNRS, Paris, co.lefevre@gmail.com. I am grateful to Maria Szuppe, Ines Županov, and the anonymous peer reviewers at the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this article.

gaze [of the emperor], enjoy the universal benevolence and generous disposition of His Majesty according to his skill and knowledge, and carry the good name (*nām-i nik*) [of the emperor] to the corners of the world.¹

These few lines of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*² indirectly echo the reflection the emperor Jahāngīr (r. 1605-27) shared with the readers of his memoirs not long after his accession to the throne:

When I became emperor it occurred to me that I should change my name [Salīm] lest it be confused with the caesars of Rūm (*qayāshirat-i rūm*). An inspiration from the beyond suggested to me that the labour of the emperor is world domination (*jahāngīrī*), so I named myself Jahāngīr.³

Taken together, these passages reveal two important characteristics of Mughal domination: first, the assumption (at least on a metaphorical level) of the idea of world empire that had underlain the achievements of the dynasty's most prestigious ancestors—Chingis Khan (d. 1227) and Timur (d. 1405)—and second, the highly cosmopolitan profile that the Mughal court and state apparatus acquired in the second half of the sixteenth century. Both aspects were intimately linked, as the court, and by extension the realm, were considered a microcosm representing the macrocosm over which the imperial will prevailed. While the universalist bent of Mughal ideology has long been recognized and commented upon (particularly by

¹ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* (*Report of Night Assemblies at the Court of Nūr al-Dīn Jahāngīr from 24 Rajab 1017 to 19 Ramaḍān 1020 AH/24 October 1608 to 15 November 1611 AD*), ed. A. Nawshāhī and M. Niẓāmī (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 1385sh/2006): 234 (citation) and 263 (for a similar passage). For a more developed and bombastic assertion of the Mughal court's cosmopolitanism, see Chandar Bhān Brahman, *Chahār chaman*, ed. Y. Ja'fari (Delhi: Office of the Cultural Counselor, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2003): 53-8, as translated in R.K. Kinra, *Secretary-poets in Mughal India and the Ethos of Persian: The Case of Chandar Bhān Brahman*, PhD diss. (University of Chicago, 2008): 259-60.

² Although *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* is a twenty-first-century title (the only extant manuscript being untitled), it will be referred to here as such for greater convenience.

³ Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr, Emperor of India*, trans. W.M. Thackston (Washington DC: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, and New York: Smithsonian Institution and Oxford University Press, 1999): 22; Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīrnāma: Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, ed. M. Hashim (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Irān, 1980): 2. The reference here is to the Ottoman sultans Selim I (r. 1512-20) and Selim II (r. 1566-74).

art historians),⁴ imperial cosmopolitanism has, until recently, been the object of less sophisticated analysis. True, almost every general history of the Mughals treats their successful incorporation of a wide range of religious and ethnic groups from all over the subcontinent and the rest of the Asian-Islamic world. Such inclusiveness is generally connected to the liberal views held by the dynasty in religious matters, in particular, the famous *ṣulḥ-i kull* (universal peace), which has often been deemed a remarkable, even unique, achievement by pre-modern and modern-day standards. Yet, few historians have attempted to overcome the mesmerizing effect of the Mughals' relentlessly self-proclaimed cosmopolitanism and ecumenism, in order to scrutinize the pair more closely.⁵ What, for instance, are the implications for the Mughal world view and xenology (a term which I use here to mean the discourse on the foreign)? What do they tell us about the political and cultural geography of the dynasty and about the mental representations that underlay the relations of the empire with those parts of the world over which it claimed effective rule or symbolic dominance? These complex questions are addressed from different perspectives in two other essays in the present volume: Ali Anooshahr's analysis of the *Ta'rikh-i alfi* allows us to peer into Mughal metageography⁶ before the formulation of the *ṣulḥ-i kull* policy and Ebba Koch shows how the universal ambitions of the dynasty were astutely translated into painting, with the help of elements taken from European cartography. In this contribution, I call attention to the new lines of inquiry made possible by the recently discovered

⁴ See, e.g., E. Koch, *Mughal Art and Imperial Ideology: Collected Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); S. Ramaswamy, "Conceit of the Globe in Mughal Visual Practice," *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 49/4 (2007): 751-82; R. Skelton, "Imperial Symbolism in Mughal Painting," in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, ed. P. Soucek (London and University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988): 24-30.

⁵ For recent exceptions to this generalization, see: M. Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200-1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); Kinra, "Secretary-poets"; and A. Behl, "Pages from the Book of Religions: Comparing Self and Other in Mughal India," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of Indian and Tibet, 1500-1800*, ed. S. Pollock (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 312-67.

⁶ Following the definition proposed by M.W. Lewis and K.E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): ix, "metageography" is here used in the sense of "the set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world."

Majālis-i Jahāngīrī (1608-11), a text that offers a far more vivid picture of Mughal cosmopolitanism than do most contemporary chronicles.

This richness stems from two main factors. One is the role of cultural broker that the author of the text—‘Abd al-Sattār b. Qāsim Lāhawrī (d. after 1619)—seems to have assumed at the Mughal court during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Best known in this respect are his association (c. 1595-1607) with Jerónimo Xavier (d. 1617), the head of the third Jesuit mission to the court (1595-1615), and the two men’s joint production of a series of Persian works that purported to familiarize the imperial elite with the Greco-Roman and Christian foundations of contemporary European culture.⁷ ‘Abd al-Sattār’s abilities as a cultural go-between were not, however, channeled entirely into fostering a dialogue between West and East. The scholar also participated in at least the initial stages of the composition of the *Jāwidān khīrad* (*Eternal Wisdom*)—the first translation into Persian of Ibn Miskawayh’s celebrated *al-Ḥikmat al-khālīda* (986-92), itself an Arabic rendition of a Middle Persian collection of Greek, Iranian, Indian, and Arabic maxims that had previously been attributed to Taqī al-Dīn Muḥammad Shūshtarī alone.⁸ ‘Abd al-Sattār is also known to have written an abridgment of Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī’s *Zafarnāma* (*Book of Victory*), a Persian biography of Timur completed in 1427-8. Entitled *Guzīda-yi zafarnāma* (1615), the new version was purged of Qur’anic verses, Hadith, and anything written in Arabic, in order to

⁷ For a thorough reconsideration of the nature of ‘Abd al-Sattār’s collaboration with Xavier, as well as of Muslim-Christian discussions at the Mughal court, see M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, “Frank Disputations: Catholics and Muslims in the Court of Jahangir (1608-11),” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46/4 (2009): 457-511. For further insight into Xavier’s *Ādāb al-saltānat* (*The Duties of Kingship*, 1609) and ‘Abd al-Sattār’s *Thamarat al-falāsifa* (*The Fruit of Philosophers*, 1603)—two little-known texts dealing with secular rather than religious subjects—see A. Sidarus, “O espelho de príncipes de Jerónimo Xavier SJ dedicado ao imperador mogol (1609),” in *Caminhos Cruzados em História e Antropologia. Ensaios de Homenagem a Jill Dias*, ed. P.J. Havik, C. Saraiva, and J.A. Tavim (Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2010): 37-50; and C. Lefèvre, “Mughal India—Muslim Asia—Europe: Circulation of Political Ideas and Instruments in Early Modern Times,” in *Structures on the Move. Technologies of Governance in Transcultural Encounter*, ed. A. Flüchter and S. Richter (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2012): 131-7.

⁸ See ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 90, 127, for his contribution. On Ibn Miskawayh’s work and the various Persian renditions commissioned in Mughal circles, see C.-H. de Fouchécour, *Moralia. Les notions morales dans la littérature persane du 3^e/9^e siècle au 7^e/13^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986): 34-7, and M. Alam, “*Akblāqi* Norms and Mughal Governance,” in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture. Indian and French Studies*, ed. M. Alam, F.N. Delvoye, and M. Gaborieau (Delhi: Manohar, 2000): 87.

make the text easier to read.⁹ The *Jāwidān khirad* and the *Guzīda-yi zafarnāma* were commissioned by Jahāngīr himself, and the fact that they were entrusted to a man who had so far been known for his deep involvement in Western culture may point to a slackening of imperial curiosity about the latter, at least in the textual domain.¹⁰ Another (by no means exclusive) explanation may be ‘Abd al-Sattār’s gradual estrangement from the Jesuits from the mid-1600s on.¹¹ Obviously then, the cultural dialogue promoted by the Mughals with the West—and, as we shall see in the course of the present article, with much closer neighbors—was not carried on without tensions, particularly for those who, like ‘Abd al-Sattār, were on the front lines of the encounter, as mediators.

Whatever the importance of ‘Abd al-Sattār’s role as a cultural broker, it does not alone explain the abundance of xenological references in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*. Such a profusion was also due, in large part, to the dialogic quality of the text—which may be described, on one level, as a record of the night sessions held at Jahāngīr’s court between 1608 and 1611. Here we find written down—in indirect speech or, most often, in dialogues reported in direct speech¹²—contemporary imperial discussions on a vast variety of topics, to the almost complete exclusion of the major political events of the reign. It is thus a highly oral work, which gives pride of place to literary (especially poetic), religious, historical, and scientific subjects, in accordance with the emperor’s well-known multifaceted curiosity. Jahāngīr’s interlocutors, for their part, reflect the cosmopolitanism of the Mughal court: besides members of the composite imperial elite, the sessions included ambassadors, poets, and dignitaries who had recently arrived from Iran and Central Asia, as well as a range of religious specialists, from Brahmins and Muslim ‘*ulamā*’ to Jesuit and Jewish scholars.

⁹ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: xlv.

¹⁰ As shown by several art historians—e.g., G.A. Bailey, *The Jesuits and the Grand Mogul: Renaissance Art at the Imperial Court of India, 1580-1630* (Washington DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Smithsonian Institution, 1998), and Koch, *Mughal Art—Mughal borrowings of European art continued unabated until at least the 1650s*.

¹¹ See Alam and Subrahmanyam, “Frank Disputations,” for a global assessment of the evolution of ‘Abd al-Sattār’s relation with the Jesuits; and ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 34-6, for a sharp statement by the author of his disappointment with the Catholic priests.

¹² The author’s appearance in his own text takes various forms: he either refers to himself in the third person, using his name, ‘Abd al-Sattār, or the circumlocution “this most humble disciple” (*in kamtarīn-i murīdān*), or speaks directly in the first person. In any case, his authorial presence is palpable.

Moreover, two other factors must be taken into account in order to make sense of the fundamentally dialogic character of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*—an attribute not often met with in Mughal historical literature.

In the first place, ‘Abd al-Sattār opens for his readers the doors of one of the key institutions of intellectual life in pre-modern Islamic societies, that is, the *majlis*—a place of meeting and the sessions held there, under the patronage of members of the elite, first among them the sultan.¹³ In Islamic court culture, these *majālis* were conceived of as an essential attribute of sovereignty and functioned simultaneously as a channel and stage for royal patronage, as an instrument for the acquisition of knowledge, and as entertainment. More specifically, ‘Abd al-Sattār presents us with some selections from the favorite “pastime” of the participants in these exclusive salons—debates (sing., *jadal*) and disputations (sing., *munāzara*) in a wide range of fields. As shown by the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* and by treatises written from the eighth century on, detailing the rules according to which debates should be conducted (*adab al-jadal*), these discussions were highly codified dialogues: the audience was not supposed to intervene, except when requested to do so by the monarch, who acted as the ultimate arbiter of the *majlis*.¹⁴ Such a rigid codification should not, however, obscure the entertainment aspect of these sessions: appearing frequently in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, the *shikuftagī* (smile) of the Mughal is evidence of the *majlis* as a source of amusement, at least for those who were not the target of the sovereign’s wittiness. Even though the courtly tradition of the *majlis* and the literary genre of the *munāzara* explain, to a large extent, the essentially dialogical architecture of ‘Abd al-Sattār’s text, they are not the only factors to be taken into account.¹⁵

¹³ For a discussion of the ancient background of this institution, see S.M. Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages. Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010): 13-32. The term *mahfil* was also widely used in the South Asian context, but it seems to have applied more specifically to poetry and music gatherings. For an analysis of the *mahfil* as a “liminal space” where hierarchy and gender codes were regularly transgressed, see K. Butler Brown, “If Music Be Food of Love: Masculinity and Eroticism in the Mughal *Mehfil*,” in *Love in South Asia. A Cultural History*, ed. F. Orsini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 61-86.

¹⁴ E. Wagner, “Munāzara,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1992): 7: 565. For a detailed analysis of the impact of *adab* principles on artistic speech in assembly, see S.M. Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons*: 33-74.

¹⁵ The inter-religious debates of the Mongol era were a precedent, in both general policy and courtly practice, for those held in Mughal times, but the writing down of such exchanges in the form of a literary text seems to have been alien to the Mongols. This is, at

Another possible influence is that of the catechistical dialogues with which ‘Abd al-Sattār had become familiar through his association with the Jesuits and their missionary literature. Attractive as this hypothesis may appear to the proponents of transcultural encounters, it is not one that ‘Abd al-Sattār would willingly have endorsed. At several points in his *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, the author makes clear that his text was to be read as the *malḥūzāt* of Jahāngīr.¹⁶ Meaning literally “utterances,” the word refers more specifically to a genre of Sufi literature that recorded the teachings of *pīrs* (spiritual masters). Although *malḥūzāt* were already popular in thirteenth-century North India, it was Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī who really established a reputation for the genre, with the composition in 1322 of his *Fawā’id al-ḥuḥūd* (*Morals for the Heart*), an account of the conversations of his own *pīr*, the renowned Chishtī *shaykh* Niẓām al-Dīn Auliya’ (d. 1325). The key to the book’s success lay principally in the new literary dynamics introduced by its author: whereas spiritual teachings had heretofore been written down as lengthy and off-putting monologues, Sijzī chose to record them as lively dialogues between master and disciples (sing., *murīd*).¹⁷ Interestingly enough, it is precisely the same *Fawā’id al-ḥuḥūd* that ‘Abd al-Sattār explicitly acknowledges as a model for his own *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, which he considered a spiritual handbook (*dastūr al-‘amal*) for the newly enrolled disciples of the emperor.¹⁸ Although a parallel reading of the *Majālis* and the *Fawā’id* does not reveal any significant concordance between the texts, the affiliation between the *Majālis* and the genre of *malḥūzāt* is crucial in at least three respects: at the level of literary form, it lies at the root of the dialogical structure and modus operandi of the text; ideologically, it propels Jahāngīr to the forefront of spirituality as the ultimate *pīr*; lastly,

least, what we gather from extant accounts, most of which were written by Christian participants in the discussions (most famously, William of Rubrouck [d. c. 1293]) or later summarized by Ilkhānid chroniclers such as Juwaynī (d. 1283). For further details, see e.g., B.Z. Kedar, “The Multilateral Disputation at the Court of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1254,” in *The Majlis. Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. H. Lazarus-Yafeh et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999): 162-83.

¹⁶ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 1-2, 113-4.

¹⁷ S. Kumar, *The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate, 1192-1286* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007): 373-5.

¹⁸ As shown by contemporary textual and visual evidence, Jahāngīr followed his predecessors in presenting himself as a *pīr* and appointing disciples from among the amirs. For a reconsideration of Mughal imperial discipleship in the light of Safavid developments, see A.A. Moin, *Islam and the Millennium: Sacred Kingship and Popular Imagination in Early Modern India and Iran*, PhD diss. (University of Michigan, 2010).

it also means that the audience of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, a work that had been designed by ‘Abd al-Sattār specifically for the use of the emperor’s disciples, must have been restricted to a very small circle, as otherwise revealed by the one extant manuscript. From this perspective, the text’s very openness to the wider world appears all the more striking and shows the importance of that world in the elaboration of Mughal ideology.

Both the *munāzara* and *malfūzāt* literary traditions were remarkably well suited to the expression of the hegemonic cosmopolitanism propounded by the dynasty. What better form than dialogue was there to convey the atmosphere of vibrant inter-cultural exchange that had become the hallmark of the Mughal court and in which ‘Abd al-Sattār himself had been so deeply enmeshed? Because the dialogical structure of *munāzara* and *malfūzāt* literature was generally used to assert the eminence of the convener of the encounter (be he sultan or *shaykh*), ‘Abd al-Sattār’s point in deploying these genres in favour of Jahāngīr would hardly have been missed by the readers: in the hands of the emperor, dialogue was a powerful didactic tool that aimed to convince his interlocutors of his superiority, both temporal and spiritual. This stands out particularly clearly from the numerous discussions evoking the three poles around which Mughal mental geography has long been known to revolve: Iran, Central Asia, and India.¹⁹ For if, by the middle of the sixteenth century, “Īrān, Tūrān,²⁰ va Hindūstān” were still commonly referred to, respectively, as the head, the breast, and the feet of the world,²¹ a close analysis of ‘Abd al-Sattār’s xenological references is evidence of a significant shift in these representations.

¹⁹ See, e.g., R.C. Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001): 7-8. When viewed from the vantage point of the area of circulation formed by the early modern Asian-Islamic ecumene, several regions are conspicuous by their absence from the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: the nearest being the independent Deccan sultanates—Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Golconda are mentioned only once, in connection with the Mughal campaigns launched in their direction—and the most remote being the Ottoman empire and the Indonesian polities.

²⁰ Although Tūrān referred originally to the “lands of Tūr,” the rebel son of the Iranian king Farīdūn, the term later came to designate the “lands of the Turks,” through a corruption of “Tūr” into “Turk,” as a consequence of the Turkicization of the region. In Mughal use, however, “Tūrān” was the name commonly given to the lands north of the Oxus River, which were then under Uzbek control.

²¹ See, e.g., Abū l-Faḍl, *Akbar Nāma*, trans. H. Beveridge (Kolkata: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 2000): 3: 612-3.

Iran

The countless amirs, scholars, and poets of Iranian origin who populate the ranks of the imperial elite appear, in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīr*, as the most tangible manifestation of the importance of Iran in the Mughal world. More fundamentally, however, Iran emerges as a constant point of cultural, political, and religious reference. The cultural competition between India and Iran largely predated the Mughal and Safavid dynasties and affected the relations between the two polities. Akbar's promotion of Persian as an imperial lingua franca is evidence of the dynasty's eagerness to establish Mughal India as the new leading pole of the Persianate ecumene, at the expense of the ancient Iranian centre.²² 'Abd al-Sattār's work allows us to scrutinize the concrete expressions of such an assertion of supremacy and the way that that assertion permeated the daily life of the court and the mentalities of its participants.

Royal patronage of poetry was the principal battlefield of Indo-Iranian cultural rivalry, as exemplified by Jahāngīr's dealings with the celebrated Iranian poet Shakībī Iṣfahānī:

When, on the preceding night, the aforementioned Mawlānā [Shakībī Iṣfahānī] had asked for the permission to go to Iran, His Majesty answered him jokingly, "*shakībī* means "patient" (*sabrī*), and you are being impatient. Can't you wait two or three days before hurrying away from us"? On account of the impropriety of his ill-timed desire [for permission], he today presented a quatrain by way of excuse.²³

Poetry could, at times, also become a medium through which the monarchs conveyed their respective claims to superiority, as reflected in 'Abd al-Sattār's relation of Jahāngīr's reaction to the reception of a letter from Shāh 'Abbās (r. 1587-1629): delivered to the emperor in March 1611 by Yādgar Sulṭān 'Alī Tālish, the first of a series of ambassadors the Safavid would send to Akbar's successor,²⁴ the epistle was immediately read in public and thereafter copied in extenso in both the *Jahāngīrnāma* (the

²² M. Alam, "The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan," in *Literary Cultures in History. Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. S. Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 131-98.

²³ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 51; and see 43, 49, for the episodes preceding this exchange.

²⁴ For a classic account of the diplomatic relations between the two monarchs, see R. Islam, *Indo-Persian Relations: A Study of the Political and Diplomatic Relations between the Mughal Empire and Iran* (Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation, 1970).

emperor's memoirs) and the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*.²⁵ In addition to receiving such marks of honour, the letter henceforth became a recurrent subject of discussion between Jahāngīr and his courtiers. Two elements seem to have attracted the emperor's special attention. The first concerned not the epistle itself but the inscriptions on Shāh 'Abbās's seal which, as Jahāngīr pointed out with surprise, did not mention the name of imams Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. The second pertained to a couplet on royal friendship dedicated by the Safavid to the Mughal in his missive: "I sit together with your image and my heart is at rest. / This is a union that is not followed by the grief of separation." Jahāngīr had apparently no respite from the moment he read the couplet until he found the adequate versified answer: according to 'Abd al-Sattār, no fewer than four *majālis* were thereafter devoted (partly or entirely) to this perilous quest.²⁶ It was indeed perilous (the monarch's favour was at stake) for the Iranian poets (Shakībī Iṣfahānī, Naẓīrī Nishāpūrī, and Sa'idā Gilānī) whom Jahāngīr convened around him in order to help in the enterprise. None of them, however, gave satisfaction to the emperor, who was especially displeased with Naẓīrī's verses, the latter being deemed unsuitable to "the nature of the sultanate and to the magnificence of the empire" because they referred to love (*ishq*) and desire (*shauq*): as Jahāngīr took pains to explain to the poet, an elder brother (*barādar-i buzurḡ*, i.e., Jahāngīr himself) did not write such things to his younger brother (*barādar-i khurd*, i.e., Shāh 'Abbās).²⁷ Interestingly enough, the monarch also teased Naẓīrī on his lack of sensitivity for Indian aesthetics.²⁸ Although the latter remark was meant to be taken jokingly, it is significant that the couplet that finally won the approbation of Jahāngīr was written not by an Iranian but by an Indian Muslim, Shaykh Jamīlī, the son of a Shaṭṭārī Sufi from Kalpi.²⁹

The episode is instructive in two respects. First, it points out the unique position held by Shāh 'Abbās (and Iran) in Jahāngīr's geopolitical imagination. In the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, as in the *Jahāngīrnāma*, the Safavid is the only contemporary monarch to emerge from the shadows to which

²⁵ But see Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīrnāma: Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*: 111-2, and 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 195-7, for variations between the two versions.

²⁶ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 198-9, 204-5, 223-4, 232-3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 205.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 199.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 232-3.

his Ottoman and Uzbek counterparts remained confined.³⁰ The shah is also the only one with whom Jahāngīr engages in a real dialogue: directly, through the reading out, discussion, and reproduction of his letters, and indirectly, through the peppering of official chronicles with comments on Shāh ‘Abbās’s kingly decisions or actions (on which, more below). The Safavid is similarly over-represented in the paintings commissioned by the Mughal: contrary to the conspicuously absent Ashtarkhānids of Central Asia and the stereotyped Ottoman sultans, the shah is not only the object of several realistic portraits but is also depicted, on two occasions, in the company of his “elder brother,” Jahāngīr.³¹ Second, and most importantly, the letter episode—along with the shah’s treatment in the aforementioned sources—signals a turn in the Mughal discourse on the Safavids, who had heretofore been credited, albeit reluctantly, with a certain amount of superiority.

The Mughals’ complex of inferiority did not pertain only to the politico-religious sphere but extended also to the cultural domain. As is well known, Bābur’s (r. 1526-30) and Humāyūn’s (r. 1530-40; 1555-6) acceptance of Safavid assistance for the recovery of Samarqand and then of Hindustan resulted in a humiliating ideological subordination to Iran, both rulers having been forced into the circle of the shah’s disciples, the celebrated Qizilbāshs. As argued almost a century ago by Francis Buckler and, more recently, by Azfar Moin, Bābur’s successors had no rest until they

³⁰ For further analysis of the relationship between Jahāngīr and Shāh ‘Abbās, see C. Lefèvre, “Jahāngīr et son frère Šāh ‘Abbās: compétition et circulation entre deux puissances de l’Asie musulmane de la première modernité,” in *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World during the Early-Modern and Modern Periods*, ed. D. Hermann and F. Speziale (Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, and Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2010): 23-56.

³¹ The most famous Mughal portraits of Shāh ‘Abbās are two works dated to respectively c. 1618 and c. 1620: “Jahāngīr Embracing Shāh ‘Abbās” by Abū l-Ḥasan (on which more below) and “Jahāngīr Entertaining Shāh ‘Abbās” by Bishan Dās, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC (F1945.9a and F1942.16a), reproduced in M.C. Beach, E. Fischer, and B.N. Goswamy, ed., *Masters of Indian Painting, I: 1100-1650* (Zürich: Artibus Asiae, 2011): fig. 16 p. 226 and fig. 10 p. 272. The artist Bishan Dās was also ordered to join Khān ‘Ālam on his official embassy to Iran (1613), where he painted a series of portraits from life of the shah and his dignitaries (Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 319; A.K. Das, “Bishandas,” in *Masters of Indian Painting, I: 1100-1650*, ed. M.C. Beach, E. Fischer, and B.N. Goswamy (Zürich: Artibus Asiae, 2011): 259-78; S.C. Welch, “The Emperor’s Shah: Emperor Jahangir’s Two Portraits from Life of Shah ‘Abbas,” in *Shop Talk: Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive*, ed. A.I. Davies, W.W. Robinson, and C.P. Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 1995): 260-3.

succeeded in equipping the Timurid *pāds̄hāh* with a juridico-religious authority and an aura of sainthood that surpassed those of the Safavids (as well as those of other contemporary Islamic rulers, such as the Ottomans). The metamorphosis was finally achieved under Akbar: the promulgation of the 1579 *maḥḍar* (edict) and the completion of the *Akbarnāma* in the 1590s signalled the end of the efforts made, since the time of Bābur's submission to Shāh Isma'īl (r. 1501-24), to repair the dynasty's damaged legitimacy.³² Jahāngīr was therefore the first among the Mughals to inherit "a fully functioning system of sacred kingship,"³³ as well as a claim to religious leadership over both Shī'is and Sunnis. Jahāngīr was also the first to witness the effective transformation of the Safavids from saint-kings into staunch upholders of Imami Shī'ism.³⁴ Such a contrast in the evolution of the ideological paradigms at work in Iran and South Asia explains to a large extent the aforementioned shift in the Mughal discourse on the Safavids.

Resonating in the new leading role the Indian dynasty claimed in the cultural sphere, Mughal assertiveness vis-à-vis Iran is also discernible in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, in the criticisms directed at Shī'ism in general and the Safavids' Imami reorientation and religious exclusivism in particular. While the former criticisms took a rather straightforward form,³⁵ the latter unfolded with more circumspection. Such, for instance, is the case with an anecdote relating how Shāh Ṭahmāsp (r. 1524-76) ordered the destruction of the garden where his father, Shāh Isma'īl, used to hold drinking parties.³⁶ Whereas the anecdote was apparently meant by its narrator (Naqīb Khān) to praise Ṭahmāsp's orthopraxy, Jahāngīr strongly disapproved of the latter's disrespect for his father, as well as his bigotry (*ta'assub*). Moreover, if one reads the mention of Shāh Isma'īl's consumption of alcohol as a reference to his *ghulūw* (exaggeration),³⁷ Jahāngīr's reaction may be interpreted

³² F.W. Buckler, "A New Interpretation of Akbar's 'Infallibility' Decree of 1579," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, new ser. 56/4 (1924): 591-608; and Moin, *Islam and the Millennium*.

³³ Moin, *Islam and the Millennium*: 270.

³⁴ For a thorough analysis of this process, see K. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁵ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 54, 131.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 15.

³⁷ Such an "exaggeration" included the belief "in the human potential to transcend matter and access the divine while on earth"—an access which Shāh Isma'īl clearly claimed for

as a condemnation of Ṭahmāsp's departure from the model of sacred kingship inaugurated by his father.³⁸ That the Mughal emperor had a poor opinion of the Safavid Imami creed is further demonstrated by the irony with which he remarked on the inscriptions engraved on Shāh 'Abbās's seal.³⁹ Nowhere, however, is the difference between Mughal and Safavid religious views more forcefully portrayed than in the twenty-eighth *majlis*. Held in April 1611, the *majlis* was devoted entirely to Jahāngīr's recommendations to Nūr Qulīch, an amir of Central Asian origin and Sunni persuasion, who had been chosen to lead the return embassy to the Iranian court.⁴⁰ The emperor opened his admonition by asking, "Do you consider the office of ambassador (*ilchī-garī*) to Iran with dread and terror (*harās va tars*) or with extreme Sunni bigotry (*ta'aṣṣub-i sunnī-garī*)?" Jahāngīr added that such bigotry would be most inappropriate to the subject of an emperor who, as a "universal manifestation" (*maḥḍar-i kull*) and the "lieutenant and shadow of God on earth," was meant to be the emperor of all people, without discrimination. And if Nūr Qulīch dreaded the fact that "the shah and the whole population of this region were Shi'is," how would his brother, Shāh 'Abbās, consider the subjects of the Mughal empire?⁴¹ Such a display by Jahāngīr of the inclusive policy of the dynasty reveals the hierarchical principles underlying it: whereas the sacred essence of the Mughals had entitled them to dominion over all mankind, the Safavids' self-redefinition as mere Imami supporters restricted their sovereignty to Shi'i adherents. Deriving from the dynasty's accession to sacred kingship in the late sixteenth century, *ṣulḥ-i kull* at once became a pillar of the superior status claimed by the Mughals and a criterion by which they evaluated alternative religious views. For, if Mughal ecumenism is here contrasted to the exclusive Shi'ism of the Safavids, it is elsewhere valued over Sunni or Christian sectarianism.⁴² Such proclamations also highlight the persistence of religious tensions within the empire, particularly between Sunnis and Shi'is.

himself. For an in-depth study of *ghulūw* movements in early modern Iran, see Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs* (citation p. xvi).

³⁸ See also 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 17, for another stern condemnation of Ṭahmāsp as heretic (*rafḍa*).

³⁹ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 193-4.

⁴⁰ Jahāngīr later changed his mind and entrusted Khān 'Ālam with the charge of the embassy in 1613 (Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 148).

⁴¹ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 201.

⁴² *Ibid.*: 3, 34, 78, 184.

Returning to the analysis of the Mughal discourse on the Safavids, we have seen so far how the Imami reorientation of the Iranian dynasty provided Jahāngīr with a unique opportunity to discredit his rival. Nor were the Safavids' old pretensions to sacred kingship spared by Mughal criticism. This emerges clearly in the eighty-third *majlis*, where Jahāngīr is shown mocking the Safavid *tāj*⁴³ in general and the new model of crown introduced by Shāh 'Abbās in particular: the latter, the emperor noted mischievously, was much sought after by the 'ulamā' of Mā Warā' al-Nahr (Central Asia, Transoxiana), who used it to clean their teeth!⁴⁴ Besides its comic dimension, the anecdote is instructive for two reasons. On one hand, it indicates that, even if Shāh 'Abbās had distanced himself from the millenarian brand of Sufism that had brought his ancestors to power, he had not rid himself of all his attributes of *pīr-u-murshid* (master and guide) and had even reintroduced some of them, such as the *tāj*.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it shows that Jahāngīr considered those same attributes a thing of the past, relics made obsolete by the coming of the new Mughal order. From this perspective, the new interpretation of "Jahāngīr Embracing Shāh 'Abbās" put forward by Azfar Moin is particularly appealing. Officially dictated in a royal dream, whose substance the Mughal recorded on the margin of the painting ("Our shah came in a dream, and so made us happy"), Abū l-Ḥasan's work represents Jahāngīr and Shāh 'Abbās standing respectively on a lion and a lamb, lying side by side on the top of terrestrial globe.⁴⁶ Basing his argument on the Mughal's dream inscription and the Safavid's deferential posture, Moin proposes to read the painting as a reversal of the balance of spiritual power between the two dynasties: a century

⁴³ The *tāj* (crown) was as an emblem of affiliation to the Safavid Sufi order and was worn by the disciples of the shah. It was introduced by Shaykh Ḥaydar in 1487 and is therefore known more generally as *tāj-i Ḥaydarī*.

⁴⁴ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 203.

⁴⁵ For other examples, see Moin, *Islam and the Millennium*: 248. On the new *tāj* reintroduced by Shāh 'Abbās in the 1590s—Safavid disciples had stopped wearing it shortly after Shāh Ṭahmāsp's death—see B. Schmitz, "On a Special Hat Introduced during the Reign of Shāh 'Abbās the Great." *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 22 (1994): 103-12.

⁴⁶ For other recent analyses of this painting, see Ramaswamy, "Conceit of the Globe"; H. Franke, *Akbar und Ġahāngīr. Untersuchungen zur politischen und religiösen Legitimation in Text und Bild* (Schenefeld: EB-Verlag, 2005): 308-12; and J.R.I. Cole, "The Imagined Embrace: Gender, Identity, and Iranian Ethnicity in Jahangiri Paintings," in *Safavid Iran and her Neighbors*, ed. M.M. Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2003): 49-61.

after Bābur's submission to Shāh Isma'īl, the saint-king Jahāngīr had performed the "oneiric miracle" of turning the Safavid into his disciple.⁴⁷

Depicted, textually and visually, with a spiritual authority far exceeding that of his Safavid competitor, Jahāngīr was also eager to publicize his pre-eminence in temporal matters, as suggested by several anecdotes evoking Shāh 'Abbās's injustice and his sometimes cruel excesses.⁴⁸ Even though the latter's propensity to cruelty is well attested by both Safavid and European sources,⁴⁹ the emphasis it was given in contemporary Mughal chronicles was undoubtedly meant to stress, by contrast, Jahāngīr's equity and magnanimity.

Taken together, the numerous discussions involving Iran were obviously meant to impart one lesson to the readers of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: once the axis of the Persianate ecumene, Iran had been provincialized by the phoenix-like rise of the Mughals, who were now to be considered the new holders of the cultural, religious, and political prestige formerly enjoyed by the shahs. According to the discursive representations promoted by 'Abd al-Sattār and his royal patron, Hindustan, as the seat of Mughal power, had no doubt succeeded Iran as head of the world.

Turan

Compared with the near ubiquity of Iran in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, the presence of Central Asia appears considerably fainter. Equally striking is the contrast in references to the region: some match contemporary topoi, but others open new windows on Mughal perceptions of Mā Warā' al-Nahr. Such is the case, for instance, with the region's lofty reputation in matters of Islamic law. Considering the many sessions devoted to questions of jurisprudence (on which more below), the fact that Transoxiana is mentioned only once in this regard is puzzling,⁵⁰ especially when connected

⁴⁷ Moin, *Islam and the Millennium*: 311-2. That Shāh 'Abbās is here represented wearing his new *tāj* highlights the mystical dimension of his subordination and lends additional weight to the interpretation.

⁴⁸ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 8, 55-6; Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 178, 201.

⁴⁹ On which, see S. Bashir, "Shah Isma'īl and the Qizilbash: Cannibalism in the Religious History of Early Safavid Iran," *History of Religions* 45/3 (2006): 248-50; and W. Floor, "The Khalīfeh al-kholafā of the Safavid Sufi Order," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 153/1 (2003): 63-4.

⁵⁰ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 149-52.

with the disparaging comments showered on Bukhara later on in the text: instead of being praised as a major centre of Islamic learning, as was traditionally the case, the city becomes, under the always facetious tongue of Jahāngīr, the home of blind and lame creatures.⁵¹

Less surprising is the absence of references to the contemporary Ashtarkhānid (or Jānid) rulers of Bukhara and Balkh.⁵² Walī Muḥammad (r. 1605-11), as well as Imām Qulī Khān and Nadhr Muḥammad Khān, who together succeeded him in 1611, fare little better in the *Jahāngīrnāma*.⁵³ Such a faint presence in contemporary Mughal chronicles reflects Jahāngīr's lack of interest in establishing diplomatic relations with the Uzbek polity—at least until 1622, when the capture of Qandahar by Shāh 'Abbās finally enticed him to strike an alliance with the ruler of Bukhara. Yet, even after this political rapprochement, Jahāngīr continued to consider Imām Qulī Khān with contempt, an attitude he made no effort to hide, even in the presence of visitors from Transoxiana. The account the poet Muṭribī of Samarqand has left of the twenty-four conversations he had with the Mughal emperor in late 1626 and early 1627 is illuminating in this respect: Jahāngīr inquired about Imām Qulī Khān only once, and then only to complain about his attitude.⁵⁴ Even if the Uzbek khanates of Bukhara and Balkh constituted a major regional power the Mughals had to reckon with, the Ashtarkhānids (in contrast to Shāh 'Abbās) were obviously not a relevant reference for Jahāngīr, where the elaboration of his imperial identity was concerned.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 158.

⁵² On the Ashtarkhānids of Jahāngīr's time, see A. Burton, *The Bukharans. A Dynastic, Diplomatic and Commercial History, 1550-1702* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997): 123-211.

⁵³ Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 33, 82, 86, 363.

⁵⁴ Muṭribī I-Asamm Samarqandī, *Khāṭirāt-i Muṭribī*, ed. A.G. Mirzoyef (Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, 1977): 65; Muṭribī I-Asamm Samarqandī, *Khāṭirāt-i Muṭribī*, trans. R.C. Foltz, *Conversations with Emperor Jahāngīr* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1998): 82. Muṭribī's *Khāṭirāt* are another important source for the study of Mughal-Central Asian mutual perceptions. Documenting the last moments of Jahāngīr's reign, they provide an interesting counterpoint to the picture that emerges from the *Majālis-i Jahāngīri* and will therefore be regularly referred to in the present analysis. For recent studies of Muṭribī and his *Khāṭirāt*, see M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 120-9; M. Szuppe, "Circulation des lettrés et cercles littéraires. Entre Asie centrale, Iran et Inde du Nord (XV^e-XVIII^e siècle)," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 59/5-6 (2004): 997-1018; Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*: 106-23.

The Central Asia that appears significant in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* is one of the past—a recent past, in the first place, with several mentions of the great Uzbek leader ‘Abdallāh Khān Shaybānī (r. 1583-98). Even though the latter had been one of Akbar’s fiercest enemies, he is not vilified in the text. There is an anecdote associating his court with the rusticity traditionally ascribed to the Uzbeks, in the guise of a man wolfing down a whole mare before swallowing an equivalent amount of alcohol,⁵⁵ but, overall, ‘Abdallāh Khān was shown due respect by the participants in the Mughal *majālis*. Rather than his Ashtarkhānid successors, it is he (and his son ‘Abd al-Mu’min), for instance, whom Jahāngīr chose to be depicted alongside Shāh ‘Abbās in some *majlis taṣwīr* (assembly painting).⁵⁶ Such respect did not derive solely from ‘Abdallāh Khān’s stature as a formidable opponent to the Mughals. In the last assembly recorded by ‘Abd al-Sattār, the courtier Diyānat Khān describes approvingly the humility of the Uzbek’s attitude whenever he visited Samarqand, the former capital city of the world-conqueror Timur: resisting the sycophantic suggestions of his entourage,

⁵⁵ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 180. Since their appearance on the Transoxianan political scene, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Uzbeks had been looked down upon by their rivals for their lack of refinement and, more particularly, their ignorance of the Iranian Islamic court culture which the Timurids of Herat and later of India conversely personified. Despite a rapid assimilation of the “Timurid civilization” that culminated in the rule of ‘Ubaydallāh Khān Shaybānī (r. 1512-39) (M.E. Subtelny, “Art and Politics in Early Sixteenth Century Central Asia,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 27/1-2 [1983]: 121-48), the Uzbeks continued to be described, in seventeenth-century Mughal literature, as uncouth.

⁵⁶ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 53-4. For other portraits of ‘Abdallāh Khān and his son commissioned by Jahāngīr and discussed during court sessions, see Samarqandī, *Khāṭirāt-i Muṭribī*: 61-3, and Samarqandī, *Conversations with Emperor Jahāngīr*: 76-8. While the album painting mentioned in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* has yet to be identified, the ones referred to by Muṭribī are likely to be the portrait of ‘Abdallāh Khān painted in 1618 by Abū l-Ḥasan (S. Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor. The Art of the book, 1560-1660* [London: V&A Publications, 2002]: pl. 96 and p. 133) and the portrait of ‘Abd al-Mu’min, preserved at the Gulistan Palace Library of Tehran and bearing an autograph inscription by Jahāngīr identifying its subject (M. A. Rajabi, *Iranian Masterpieces of Persian Painting* [Tehran: Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in association with the Institute for Promotion of Visual Arts, 2005]: 474). Finally, we also know from literary sources that the mural decoration of Mughal palaces and pavilions often included portraits of past and present rulers of Europe and Islamic Asia. See, e.g.: F. Guerreiro, *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, trans. C.H. Payne (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997): 63-5; T. Roe, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India, 1615-1619, as Narrated in his Journal and Correspondence*, ed. W. Foster (London: Hakluyt Society, 1899): 1:240; Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 335, 341.

‘Abdallāh Khān refused to appropriate the latter’s throne (*masnad*), preferring instead to sit on a carpet on the ground. The demonstration of such humility toward Jahāngīr’s prestigious ancestor, especially by a man who had just taken possession of Mā Warā’ al-Nahr and Khorasan, could not but elicit the highest praise on the part of the emperor: “If ‘Abdallāh Khān has acted this way,” he said, “it shows his greatness and equity (*buzurgī va inṣāf*).”⁵⁷

This anecdote is the only place in the text in which Timur is mentioned. Contrary to expectation, the Mughals’ well-known pride in their Timurid origins hardly surfaces here, and only two other sessions allude, briefly, to another Timurid ruler, Timur’s grandson Ulugh Beg (d. 1449).⁵⁸ The same is true of Chingis Khan, the other celebrated ancestor of the dynasty, and of the Mongols more generally. The latter appear in three of the table-talks recorded by ‘Abd al-Sattār,⁵⁹ but they are not the main object of the discussions, which focus instead on the last two Khwārazm Shāhs—‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad (r. 1200-20) and his son Jalāl al-Dīn Mingburnu (r. 1220-31)—and their ousting from power by the Mongols. Furthermore, the loss of their domains by the Khwārazm Shāhs is not taken up by ‘Abd al-Sattār in order to lavish praise on Mongol might; it is instead explained by ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad’s irreverence towards Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 1221), the founding father of the Kubrāwiyya Sufi order. With respect to Central Asia as the land of the Mughals’ forefathers, then, the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* differ somewhat from other contemporary literary and visual sources, in which the Chingisid and Timurid legacies of the dynasty loom much larger.⁶⁰ The fact that ‘Abd al-Sattār’s work purported to legitimate Jahāngīr’s rule on a spiritual rather than dynastic basis accounts, at least partly, for this difference.

Whatever facets they may have emphasized, the anecdotes ‘Abd al-Sattār recorded concerning Mā Warā’ al-Nahr presented the Mughal court as a place where Turkish history was still very much alive. Because approximately half of the conversations bearing on Central Asia were conducted

⁵⁷ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 257-8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 111-2, 237.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 171-3, 183, 221-2.

⁶⁰ C. Lefèvre, “Recovering a Missing Voice from Mughal India: The Imperial Discourse of Jahāngīr (r. 1605-1627),” *JESHO* 50/4 (2007): 466-8; C. Lefèvre, “In the Name of the Fathers: Mughal Genealogical Strategies from Bābur to Shāh Jahān,” *Religions of South Asia (Genealogy and History in South Asia)*, ed. S. Brodbeck and J. Hegarty) 5/1-2 (2011): 409-42.

in Turkish (*ba zabān-i turkī*), they give additional evidence of the continued use of that language by some groups, at least, of the Mughal elite.⁶¹ The emphasis on Turkish is interesting particularly for two reasons. Together with reference to the use of “Hindī” in the imperial *majālis*,⁶² it reminds us of the linguistic dimension of Mughal cosmopolitanism. This is illustrated not only by the diversity of the languages spoken at court and throughout the empire, but also by the multilingual practices of a substantial part of the elite, including the monarch.⁶³ While, for many of the elite, multilingualism amounted merely to the daily use of a variety of languages, it became for others a prominent feature of their politics of patronage or of their own literary compositions.⁶⁴ Mughal domination thus promoted a true “dialogue across linguistic boundaries” which ran parallel to the continuous Persianization of Hindu scribes.⁶⁵ The latter’s acculturation remained, however, a relatively gentle process that left the Mughal *munshīs* (chancery scribes) free to voice their own worldviews in the Persianate literary genres they perforce adopted.⁶⁶

⁶¹ For a recent overview of the role of Turkish in Mughal India, see B. Péri, “‘He has Excellent Command of Turki Since It Is the Language of His Forefathers’: Turki in Mughal India,” a lecture presented at the Royal Asiatic Society, London, 10 February 2011. For other evidence dating from Jahāngīr’s reign, see, e.g., Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 77; ‘Abd al-Bāqī Nahāwandī, *Ma’āthir-i Raḥīmī*, ed. M.H. Ḥusayn (Kolkata: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1910-31): 3: 591; W. Foster, ed., *Early Travels in India, 1583-1619* (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1999): 80-1.

⁶² ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 191.

⁶³ See, e.g., Nahāwandī, *Ma’āthir-i Raḥīmī*: 2:590-3 for a powerful evocation of the multilinguality of his patron, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān, whom he refers to significantly as a *zabān-dān* (linguist).

⁶⁴ I. Bangha, “Rekhta: Poetry in Mixed Language. The Emergence of Khari Boli Literature in North India,” in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, ed. F. Orsini (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010): 21-83; A. Busch, “Riti and Register. Lexical Variation in Courtly Braj Bhasha Texts,” in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, ed. F. Orsini (Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010): 84-120; and A. Busch, “Hidden in Plain View: Brajbhasha Poets at the Mughal Court,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44/2 (2010): 267-309.

⁶⁵ Bangha, “Rekhta”: 46.

⁶⁶ M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, “The Making of a Munshi,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24/2 (2004): 61-72; M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, “Witnesses and Agents of Empire: Eighteenth-Century Historiography and the World of the Mughal *Munshī*,” *JESHO* 53 (2010): 393-423; Kinra, “Secretary-poets”; R.K. Kinra, “Master and *Munshī*: A Brahman Secretary’s Guide to Mughal Governance,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47/4 (2010): 527-61.

The use of Turkish in the royal assemblies recorded by ‘Abd al-Sattār was but one aspect of the multilinguality of Mughal India, but it had a specific resonance with the imperial identity of the dynasty. The fact that all the conversations held in Turkish featured Jahāngīr and one ‘Abd al-Razzāq Bīrdī Uzbek (d. 1616) deserves special attention.⁶⁷ Little is known about ‘Abd al-Razzāq, except that he was among the Uzbek amirs who, having opposed the Ashtarkhānid ruler Walī Muḥammad, settled in India in order to escape his wrath.⁶⁸ After his arrival at the Mughal court in January 1611, ‘Abd al-Razzāq probably stayed there for a year, before being sent to fight in the Deccan, where he died in 1616.⁶⁹ His use of Turkish is natural, but his systematic recourse to that language to the exclusion of any other is significant. Like many dignitaries from Central Asia, ‘Abd al-Razzāq probably also knew Persian, so it appears that he *chose* to use Turkish over Persian—but why? Let us remind here that Turkish was the dynastic idiom of the Mughals: by speaking that language, ‘Abd al-Razzāq gave Jahāngīr a marvelous opportunity to emphasize the Central Asian origins of his lineage, which the emperor did not fail to do, as he ostensibly set himself up as an intermediary for those members of his court who did not know Turkish. When conversing in Turkish, Jahāngīr also displayed his own imperial omniscience, the symbolic significance of which was not lost on his entourage. Concluding the relation of Jalāl al-Dīn Mingburnu’s flight from the armies of Chingis Khan, ‘Abd al-Sattār says,

As these words concerned the affairs of the Turks (*aḥwāl-i turkān*), ‘Abd al-Razzāq Bīrdī Uzbek was asked for confirmation. The relation of the affairs of the Turks had astounded him, and he said, “We would never have thought that the emperor of Hindustan thus narrated the affairs of the Turks.” He added, “Although he is the king of Hindustan (*mālik-i Hindūstān*) in outward appearance (*ba zāḥir*), inwardly (*dar bāṭin*) he is the emperor of the world (*pādshāh-i ‘ālam*) by right and by heritage (*ba istihqāq va mīrāth*).⁷⁰

⁶⁷ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 149-51, 180, 183, 209-10, 230. This contrasts with the *Khāṭirāt-i Muṭribī*, where Persian rather than Turkish was the preferred language of communication between monarch and poet.

⁶⁸ Burton, *The Bukharans*: 125, 127-8.

⁶⁹ See Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 121, 136, 193, where he is called Razzāq Vīrdī Uzbek.

⁷⁰ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 183.

'Abd al-Razzāq had thus understood perfectly the Mughals' position on Central Asia: they were entitled, by their Turco-Mongol origins *and* their status as world-emperors, to rule its territories. The continued use of Turkish at the imperial court was only one of the many elements preserving the Central Asian identity of the dynasty. Better known elements included the pride the Mughals took in their prestigious genealogy, as well as their lavish patronage of the elites from Mā Warā' al-Nahr. Although not a salient feature of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, Jahāngīr's relentless efforts to attract those elites to his court run through the pages of the *Khāṭirāt-i Muṭribī* and, to a lesser extent, the *Jahāngīrnāma*.⁷¹ By doing so, the monarch crafted a powerful image of his dominions as an empire governed by a rightful heir of Timur and populated by countless men of the sword and the pen, who came from all of Transoxiana. Such an image was aimed especially at the would-be immigrants from Mā Warā' al-Nahr and at the Central Asian elements of the empire, who were thereby encouraged to see Delhi or Agra as a new Samarqand. Incidentally, it also added legitimacy to the dynasty's persistent claims on Transoxiana, which were to take a far more concrete form after Jahāngīr's death.⁷² In Firdawsī's terms then, Mughals achieved world-domination by uniting Iran and Turan, but the fact that this union took place under an Indian umbrella gave an interesting twist to the traditional Firdawsian schema.

Hindustan

In the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, Hindustan appears as a multifaceted otherness, whose diverse manifestations elicited equally varied responses from the Mughals. Unsurprisingly, it is Indian religious traditions—especially those of Hindus, though Jains are referred to twice in the text⁷³—that are the object of most of the discussions concerning India. These traditions are

⁷¹ Samarqandī, *Khāṭirāt-i Muṭribī*: 25-6, 28-31, 33-4, 48-9, 59, 63-5, 69; Samarqandī, *Conversations with Emperor Jahāngīr*: 29, 33-5, 40-1, 60-1, 73, 79, 81, 86; Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 33-4, 82-3, 86, 126.

⁷² While such claims remained largely rhetorical during Jahāngīr's time (Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 33), they became military operations under the leadership of Shāh Jahān (r. 1628-58) during the 1640s.

⁷³ 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 110-1, 272.

not, on the whole, discussed in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* as a set of metaphysical beliefs,⁷⁴ unlike the debates with the Jesuits on Christianity in which doctrinal and scriptural questions were foremost,⁷⁵ but consistent with what we know otherwise of the Mughal emperors' rather pragmatic approach to Indic lore. While it has long been held that the Mughals'—especially Akbar's—sponsorship of the translation of Sanskrit works, such as the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, reflected the dynasty's liberal views in religious matters, Carl Ernst has called attention to the “primarily political significance” of the process.⁷⁶ As indicated by the title given to the Persian version of the *Mahābhārata*—*Razmnāma* (*Book of War*)—Akbar does not seem to have seen these texts as overly religious, and the translations he commissioned were intended primarily to access and publicize India's historical, political, and military traditions. Unlike his father, Jahāngīr, as ruler, sponsored no translation from Sanskrit; the only two such works that may, with any certainty, be attributed to his patronage dated from his days as a rebel prince (then known as Salīm) in Allahabad. The less well-known thereof is the *Dvādaśa Bhāva* (Twelve Existences), a now lost Sanskrit work that has come down to us through the only existing copy of the Persian translation made in Allahabad.⁷⁷ In addition, in 1597, Niẓām al-Dīn Pānīpatī presented Salīm with a Persian rendition of the *Yōgavāśīṣṭha*, a twelfth-thirteenth-century treatise on Vedantic metaphysics constructed as a dialogue between the prince Rāmā and his Brahman advisor Vāśīṣṭha. In the note he appended to the translation, Jahāngīr declares the text a work of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) especially valuable for the advice it contained. It may therefore be considered a transitional text, bridging the gap between the political translations commissioned by Akbar and the mystical ones sponsored by the latter's great-grandson Dārā Shikūh (d. 1659).⁷⁸ Jahāngīr's interest in a text such as the *Yōgavāśīṣṭha* also accords well with what the monarch writes in his memoirs about his relationship with the Hindu

⁷⁴ For one exception, see 'Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 72, where Jahāngīr refers to the faith of the Hindus (*dīn-i Hunūd*) as fanciful beliefs, emphasizing the impassable barrier that separated revealed religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) from others.

⁷⁵ M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, “Frank Disputations”: 489-504.

⁷⁶ C.W. Ernst, “Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages,” *Iranian Studies* 36/2 (2003): 174.

⁷⁷ M.C. Beach, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India (1600-1660)* (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1978): 40-1.

⁷⁸ Ernst, “Muslim Studies of Hinduism?”: 185. On this manuscript, see also Franke, *Akbar und Ġahāngīr*: 257-8.

saṁnyāsī (ascetic) Jadrūp. The passages describing his successive visits to the *saṁnyāsī*—which constitute the most detailed account of the emperor's relations with a Hindu religious figure—show that Jahāngīr's attraction to Jadrūp lay in the mystical qualities of the latter, whose knowledge of the “science of the Vedānta (*‘ilm-i bedānat*), which is the science of Sufism (*‘ilm-i taṣawwuf*),” could also prove helpful in the business of kingship.⁷⁹ The monarch's interest in Vedantic metaphysics does not appear, however, anywhere in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, which is especially surprising in a text that purported to be a spiritual handbook. Instead, the debates with Hindu figures focus consistently on the normative aspects of their religious traditions. In the course of the thirty-ninth assembly, Jahāngīr thus inquired of a learned Hindu about the origins of the worship (*parastish*) of the cow and of the ban on eating its meat.⁸⁰ On another occasion, the emperor stepped into a debate between Rājput̄s who were trying to decide whether the antelope (*nīl-gāw*) belonged to the species (*nau*) of deer (*āhū*) or of bovid (*gāw*), in order to know whether the consumption of its meat was lawful (*ḥalāl*) or unlawful (*ḥarām*).⁸¹ In these instances and more generally, Jahāngīr's position vis-à-vis the Hindu faith and the social practices derived from it appears remarkably neutral, except in those rare cases in which Hindus were seen as diverting Muslims from the path of Islam.⁸² What seems to have mattered most to the Mughal was to gain knowledge of those social practices in order to regulate them and, if necessary, to act as an arbiter, as he did in the second case mentioned. Jahāngīr's numerous discussions with the *‘ulamā* of his court as recorded in the *Majālis* reveal a similar eagerness on the part of the monarch to set himself up as the highest authority in juridical matters, a claim which his father Akbar had already made for himself with the promulgation of the well-known *maḥḍar* of 1579.⁸³ Even though Jahāngīr may have considered some aspects of the

⁷⁹ Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 209-10 (citation), 283, 285, 313-4.

⁸⁰ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 96-8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*: 64-5.

⁸² *Ibid.*: 22-4; Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīr Nāma: Memoirs of Jahāngīr*: 111, 374.

⁸³ Jahāngīr's desire to know all the rules governing the Islamic diet (*dābiṭa-i kullīya barā-yi ānchi bāyad khwurd*) is a recurrent feature of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, where the emperor may be seen badgering the *‘ulamā* on the lawfulness of, among other things, drinking grape and sugar-cane wine, and eating fish (with and without scales) or the flesh of an animal killed by musket (‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 47, 117-8, 143-4, 149-52). While an in-depth analysis of the monarch's obsession with such aspects of Islamic law falls outside the scope of the present article, it is clear that Jahāngīr's need to identify and make an

Hindu faith as radically alien to his own, he was bound—as the emperor of *all* his subjects—to know and regulate its social implications. Throughout ‘Abd al-Sattār’s work, the difference in faith between ruler and ruled is thus acknowledged but never presented as something problematic per se, or as an abnormality that should be eradicated. On the contrary, the peaceful management of the empire’s religious diversity was publicized by its rulers as one of the greatest achievements of the dynasty.

Although the religious dimension of Indian otherness was not a domain in which the Mughals interfered much, the dynasty was keener on erasing other aspects of the difference. Among those aspects is what the Mughals seem, upon their arrival in the subcontinent, to have considered the “cultural backwardness” of the Indian military elites—elites whose martial qualities they nonetheless highly valued.⁸⁴ Particularly significant in this respect are the proceedings of the twenty-seventh *majlis*:

At that moment, letters from the amirs of the Deccan were presented to that most holy one [Jahāngīr]. Rājā Manohar Kachhwāha’s letter was read [aloud]. He complained of his luck and fortune and wrote the following couplet: “You try so hard to find excuses [for yourself] that, if you were to forget my name, it would also be my fault.” That august one [Jahāngīr] immediately said, “Such a misfortune is also due to your name.” He said so because, in writing that couplet, the raja had stepped out of the circle of proper conduct (*dā’ira-i adab*). Rājā Manohar hails from the Kachhwāha tribe (*qawm*). In Hindūstān, this tribe is the wildest and the most rustic (*vaḥshī va rūstātārīn*) among the Indians who dwell in the mountains and in the desert. But, thanks to the education (*tarbiyat*) His Majesty ‘Arsh Āstānī [Akbar] gave him, he [the raja] now acquiesces in [the judgment] of those who approve of delicacy in the writing and knowledge of poetry.⁸⁵

This passage shows that the Mughals conceived of themselves as civilizing heroes, who successfully domesticated the wild tribes of Hindustan to which their many valuable Rājput allies belonged. The underlying standard of this cultural hierarchy was naturally the urban Iranian Islamic court culture the Mughals had come to personify in North India. Although Jahāngīr

inventory of every practice sanctioned by Islamic law presages the standardization pursued by emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) in this domain, through his commissioning of the massive *Fatāwā-yi Ālamgīrī* (1667-75).

⁸⁴ For the topos of Rājput bravery as illustrated in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, see ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 140-1, 174-7, 218, 259.

⁸⁵ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 66-7.

was the first member of the dynasty to be born of a Rājput mother, he refrained here, as elsewhere, from publicizing this aspect of his identity.⁸⁶

Contrary to what the above analysis may suggest, the otherness of Hindustan was not something that had merely to be tolerated (the religious traditions) or domesticated (the wilderness of its inhabitants): it was also an element that merged into the dynasty's already composite identity as "Turco-Iranians" (in the cultural sense of the term) and that eventually became a source of great pride. This is clear from the evocation, in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*, of a series of Indian particularities from a wide range of domains, such as the fauna—including the description by Jahāngīr (communicated to an Iranian poet) of the mynah bird which, the emperor insisted, could be found only in Hind⁸⁷—and the customs, such as wedding ceremonies, which 'Abd al-Sattār describes:

It was the night of the wedding of Tātār Khān's son, which took place in the most holy presence [of Jahāngīr]. . . . According to the custom of Hind (*rasm-i Hind*), a *sebra* was placed on the face-covering veil (*rūy miqnā'a*) that adorned the head of the son of Tātār Khān. Common people hang all kinds of flowers strung on threads on the [groom's] forehead, while the wealthy arrange rubies, pearls, and other jewels on it, and this is called *sebra* in the idiom of Hind (*iṣṭilāḥ-i hind*). And, because there is no such custom (*rawish*) in Iran and Turan, Riṣā ['Abd al-Razzāq] Birdī Uzbek, who had recently arrived from [his] homeland, was astonished by this custom of binding the *sebra* and said: "May God protect His Majesty! Why do they hang this on the face?"⁸⁸

This passage points to the well-known adoption by the Mughal elite of various Indian customs and festivals⁸⁹ and illustrates an equally well-known phenomenon, the exotic character that seventeenth-century India retained in the eyes of foreign visitors, even those from neighbouring regions such as Transoxiana.⁹⁰ Perhaps more interesting is the position of mediator or interpreter that the Mughal emperor claimed for himself with respect to this Indian exoticism: the supreme authority he exercised over the region

⁸⁶ For further development of this point, see Lefèvre, "In the Name of the Fathers": 427-9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: 169.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*: 230.

⁸⁹ Diwali is the only Hindu festival mentioned in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* ('Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 271), but the *Jahāngīrnāma* abounds in references to court celebrations of Diwali, Dasehra, and Rakhi, as well as the solar and lunar festivals of the weighing of the ruler. For an overview of the festivals celebrated at the Mughal court, see P.N. Chopra, *Life and Letters Under the Mughals* (Delhi: Ashajanak Publications, 1978): 83-107.

⁹⁰ For other examples, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*.

entitled him to act as the official translator of Indian peculiarities, to the benefit of the travellers visiting his court from around the world. Ironically, such a lofty claim is partly belied by the tentative explanations that Jahāngīr proposes to ‘Abd al-Razzāq Bīrdī Uzbek of the origins of the *sehra*: the imperial answer owes more to improvisation than to the “ethnographic” knowledge the monarch is otherwise known to have cultivated.

Conclusion

I would like to mention briefly another—perhaps the most radical—expression of Indian otherness that is to be found in ‘Abd al-Sattār’s book. Three of the *majālis* actually set the subcontinent in a Mughal geography of wonder, a category known as *‘ajā’ib-u-gharā’ib* in the mediaeval Islamic world and as *mirabilia* in the contemporary West. The first of these wonders is related by one Fīruz Khān:

He said that there is a place in Bengal, in the country of Sylhet, where Indians (*Hinduwān*) go to perform ablutions. A woman (*zanī*) [once] went to that reservoir for that purpose. After she had performed her ablutions and come out [of the reservoir], her appearance (*sūrat*) changed to that of a man, and she bore all the signs and marks of manliness (*ābhār va ‘alāmāt-i mardī*). Before that, she had had several children, and, after she had turned into a man, she also became a master of family (*kad-khudā*) and had several children: she became the father of some after having been their mother for a while! He [Fīruz Khān] said, “I have seen this person with my own eyes: she is still alive and has become a Muslim (*musulmān*).”⁹¹

The moment Jahāngīr heard the story, he had a message dispatched to the governor of Bengal, enjoining him to check the truth of the report and to send that person to the court. Indian marvels appear in two different guises elsewhere in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: a monkey from Bengal able to expose thieves and diagnose illnesses; and an Indian woman, whose body evacuated no excrement and who had therefore become an object of worship (*parastish*) among the Indians.⁹² These anecdotes provide food for thought about the circulation of wondrous figures within the Asian-Islamic ecumene

⁹¹ ‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 141.

⁹² *Ibid.*: 191, 241-2. The only example of a non-Indian marvel present in the *Majālis* is an Iranian man able to state the number of words contained in a book after having read it once, an ability that did not rank very high compared to the marvels of Hindustan (‘Abd al-Sattār, *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*: 263-4).

and between South Asia and the West,⁹³ and they certainly deserve further exploration in gender studies. Here, however, I want to focus on what they tell us of the Mughals' relationship to India, for which the geographical setting of these anecdotes is particularly significant: that two of the stories take place in Bengal corroborates the construction of these Eastern borderlands of the empire as the "oniric horizon" of Mughal India.⁹⁴ In addition, in two of the three cases under review, the court is a place where the marvels from all over the empire—whether they have already been transported there (the woman with no excrement) or are about to be (the woman turned man)—have to be deposited and inventoried. Once brought to the court, these wonders were transformed into objects of study for the benefit of Jahāngīr, who, following his constitutional empiricism and obstinacy, sought to unravel their mysteries.⁹⁵ When, after six days under the scrutiny of the court physicians, the body of the woman with no excrement had not revealed its secrets, the emperor unhesitatingly extended the inquiry for another five days.

Instead of rejecting what they considered the exoticism of Hindustan as something so radically different that it prevented assimilation, the Mughals appropriated it with the pride of the landowner putting the marvels of his domain on display for his guests. Such an attitude must be interpreted in the light of the universal claims of the dynasty: Jahāngīr's determination to describe and make sense of—and thereby classify—everything he observed in his empire was a strong assertion of his rule over the territories he had come to regard as the world in miniature. For all that, the Mughals' feelings towards Hindustan should not be reduced to a sense of pride in ownership. There are many passages in the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* that illustrate

⁹³ A similar story of thief-identifying monkeys is found a couple of decades later, in the account of a Central Asian traveller to the subcontinent: Maḥmūd b. Amīr Walī Balkhī, *Baḥr al-asrār*, ed. R. Islam (Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, 1980): 79-80. For a stimulating foray into the dissemination of marvels originating in Mughal India, see J. Flores, "Distant Wonders: The Strange and the Marvelous between Mughal India and Habsburg Iberia in the Early Seventeenth Century." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49/3 (2007): 553-81.

⁹⁴ See Flores ("Distant Wonders": 571), who was himself borrowing from the title of an article by J. Le Goff, "The Medieval West and the Indian Ocean: An Oniric Horizon," in *Facing Each Other: The World's Perception of Europe and Europe's Perception of the World*, ed. A. Pagden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000): 1-19.

⁹⁵ For further development of this point, see Lefèvre, "Recovering a Missing Voice": 474-8.

what one might call, following Christopher Bayly's work, some form of "old patriotism."⁹⁶

The Akbarī chronicler Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad had been the first to introduce a notion of territorial identity in the Persianate historiography of North India—a move that was soon to be emulated by his protégé 'Abd al-Qādir Badā'ūnī and that is also to be seen in the contemporary *Tā'rikh-i alfī*.⁹⁷ In the writing of 'Abd al-Sattār, such a regional enthusiasm appears deeply intertwined with the Mughals' celebration of their own cosmopolitanism, the two not being seen as mutually exclusive.⁹⁸ Albeit the Mughals conceived of themselves as world-emperors, their sovereignty took root in Hindustan, and although, by the time of the composition of the *Tā'rikh-i alfī*, this geographical location may have been perceived as the very source of the dynasty's preeminence, that was no longer the case by the first decade of the seventeenth century. On the contrary, in the eyes of Jahāngīr and 'Abd al-Sattār, it was Mughal dominance that had allowed Hindustan to thrive to the extent of becoming the new centre of the early modern world—or at least of the Persianate ecumene—a transformation in which the dynasty took no small pride. In both cases, however, it is the successful and intricate combination of localism and cosmopolitanism promoted by the Mughals that seems to have constituted the ultimate standard of the dynasty's xenology, as it developed from the late sixteenth century onwards.

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⁹⁶ C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia. Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁹⁷ M. Athar Ali, "The Perception of India in Akbar and Abū'l Faḍl," in *Akbar and his India*, ed. I. Habib (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997): 218-9; A. Anooshahr, "Mughal Historians and the Memory of the Islamic Conquest of India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 43/3 (2006): 275-300, and his contribution in the present volume; Kumar, *The Emergence of the Delhi Sultanate*: 355-7.

⁹⁸ Strong echoes of this aspect of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīri* may be found in the later work of the celebrated *munshī* Chandar Bhān Brahmaṇ (d. 1662-3), which has recently been the object of a thoughtful and stimulating reconsideration by Kinra, "Secretary-poets."

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