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# *The Emperor Jahangir and the Pursuit of Pleasure*

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The Mughal emperors of India were remarkably mobile kings, inspiring modern historians to describe their imperial court culture as ‘peripatetic’.<sup>1</sup> While the Mughals were not immune to the impulse to construct massive urban architect, no Mughal city, no matter how splendid, innovative, accessible or enlightened, remained the imperial centre for long. Through generations of Mughal rule in India, the political relevance of Mughal imperial cities continued to be very limited; it was physical mobility which remained at the centre of Mughal imperial court life and, for much of the Mughal period, the imperial court was encapsulated in the physical presence of the king.

Yet even in the context of this dynastic tradition of mobility, the fourth Mughal emperor, Jahangir, who ruled India from 1605 to 1627, maintained a remarkably itinerant royal court which traversed the empire for over half of his reign. Jahangir’s court progress had a very different character than those of his predecessors for he rarely led imperial armies; often Jahangir followed behind armies led by his sons or, even more usually, wandered in a seemingly aimless pursuit of personal pleasure. Yet what could be described as the feckless mobility of the Jahangiri court, his obsession with the hunt, his open use of intoxicants and above all his insistence on a near continuous court progress, found a degree of at least grudging acceptance within the royal retinue and imperial nobility— in the twenty-two years of his rule, the only serious threats to Jahangir’s sovereignty came from his restless and ambitious sons. As this study will explore, it was fortuitous that, as a Timurid king of Hindustan, Jahangir benefited from a convergence in the imperial traditions of Turco-Mongol Central Asia and Hindu India. Entrenched customs of governance, divergent in origin but in agreement with regards to practice, granted Jahangir’s wandering royal court legitimacy and even encouragement.

There was of course dynastic precedent for the Mughal royal court progress. The Mughals of India were the direct descendents of Timur (Tamerlane) and Chingis Khan, and inherited the legacy of these Central Asian semi-nomadic builders of empire. It has been suggested that the mobility of Timur’s court, and that of his immediate successors, can be attributed to their ancestry and even be considered a ‘transitional phase’ between true nomadism and the sedentary life.<sup>2</sup> Yet if this were true, it was a transitional phase of enormous duration, for the

\*For my parents, Richard and Jocelyn Fanning, who understand the impulse to wander.

<sup>1</sup>Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, (New York, Cambridge, 2005).

<sup>2</sup>Monika Gronke, “The Persian Court Between Palace and Tent: From Timur to ‘Abbas I,’” *Timurid Art and Culture*, ed. by Lisa Golombek and Maria Subtelney, (Leiden, 1992) pp. 18–22.

peripatetic court remained into the eighteenth century as a key feature of Timurid-Mughal royal culture— until the collapse of Mughal imperial fortunes quite literally immobilised the dynasty in the eighteenth century.

It is critically important, too, to differentiate between the very different forms of nomadism. The distant ancestors of the Timurid-Mughals had engaged in transhumance but from the time of their earliest imperial successes in Central Asia their movements came to be directed less by pastoral herding and more often by a life of warring and raiding. Timurid mobility, in other words, was almost entirely necessitated by near-constant military campaigning. Even the sixteenth-century founders of the Mughal Empire, Babur and his immediate successor Humayun, lived the lives of peripatetic warring chieftains, completely without the stable courts of other rulers. In search of booty or in flight from invading Uzbeks, Afghans or rapacious Mongol and Timurid relatives, throughout their lifetimes both lost and gained kingdoms with remarkable frequency and were at regular intervals completely homeless. At one point Babur had but a single tent to his name, in which he housed his intrepid mother, who as he wrote, remained with him “through much of my vagabondage and the interregnum (*qazaqliqlarda u fatratlarda*)”.<sup>3</sup> This, then, was the nomadic mobility of neither choice nor pleasure but that which was demanded by a life of constant warfare and regular exile.

Having inherited Babur’s reluctantly founded kingdom in India, his successors remained relentlessly expansionist, and therefore mobile; but now the travelling imperial camp (*ordu-i humayun* or *ordu-i mu’alla*) served as the capital of a prosperous empire. As the empire grew in size and complexity, the Mughal kings continued to retain their peripatetic royal court as a classic Turco-Mongol strategy for political control and centralisation, a reminder and a threat of imperial power and dynastic control. Wavering loyalties in far-flung provinces could be bolstered, and thoughts of rebellion quenched, by the public spectacle of the mobile Mughal court, a vast and vivid illustration of Mughal power.

Moving ponderously through imperial territories, matching duplicate imperial camps leapfrogged across each other’s path, housing the emperor and his enormous retinue on alternate nights. The emperor was protected by a personal body guard of eight thousand horsemen on either side, followed by perhaps as many as 100,000 horsemen, more than 250,000 animals and up to 500,000 persons in a procession stretching for a mile and a half.<sup>4</sup> Since such a huge concentration of humans and animals could not long sustain itself, either by carrying its own provisions or by living off the countryside, the emperor carried a large part of the imperial treasury and arranged for bankers travelling with the army to transfer revenues from outlying territories to the royal camp, allowing his troops to buy the food they needed from the merchants and camp followers who set up bazaars, as many as two hundred and fifty within the great travelling camp, at every halt.<sup>5</sup> “All I can confidently

<sup>3</sup>Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama (Vekayi)*, Critical Edition Based on Four Chaghatay Texts, Eiji Mano, ed., (Kyoto, 1995), v. 1 (Chaghatay text) p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>François Bernier, *Travel in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656-1668*, Archibald Constable, tr., (London, 1934); (New Delhi, Oriental Reprint, 1983), pp. 380–381; and see Montserrat, *The Commentary of Father Montserrat, SJ, On His Journey to the Court of Akbar*, tr. J.S. Hoyland, ed., S.N. Bannerjee, (Oxford, 1922) p. 79.

<sup>5</sup>Bernier, p. 108.

assert," wrote a witness to Shah Jahan's royal procession "is that the multitude is prodigious and almost incredible".<sup>6</sup>

As pure political theatre, the grandeur on display and the sheer volume of the imperial retinue, the tens of thousands of military men marching in rank after rank, countless camp followers, horses and livestock, bullock carts loaded with artillery and supplies, dozens of elephants hung with tapestry, hunting cheetahs in golden collars wheeled in carts— had a staggering affect on bystanders. A European merchant described the massive migration of the Mughal royal progress; "All the face of the earth, so far as we could see, was covered with people. . . . All this moving in one, on so many huge elephants, seemed like a fleet of ships with flags and streamers. . . so that all together it made a most majestic warlike and delightful sight".<sup>7</sup>

Not incidentally, the absence of a single capital city in which Mughal imperial identity would be centred and deeply invested, in the sense that Istanbul had long served as the undisputed centre of Ottoman power,<sup>8</sup> reduced their military vulnerability. Even in their loyal adherence to Turco-Mongol laws of succession which asserted a shared legitimacy among male members of the family and resulted in near generational wars among contestants for the throne, the control of any particular city by a rebellious prince never offered a serious threat to the sovereignty of the emperor.<sup>9</sup> And in these frequent wars of succession and princely mutinies, the emperor's constant movement often allowed for battle to be joined at a place of the emperor's choosing rather than dangerously near the vulnerable imperial household and central treasury.

Even the fabulous Fatehpur Sikri, built in the late sixteenth century by the emperor Akbar, remained the Mughal's imperial capital for only fourteen years, before the restless king shifted his court to Lahore and eventually to Agra. And why not? While military concerns temporarily drew Akbar's attention north, the peripatetic court so successfully served the expansionist emperor that even when the immediate danger had passed there was no incentive to forgo the life of elegant tents and well-provided caravans.<sup>10</sup> One hundred and fifty years later, in 1682, his descendant, the last of the "great" Mughal emperors, Aurangzeb, in pursuing the most nagging and near un-winnable of Mughal wars of expansion, that against the Marathas of the Deccan, moved his entire imperial court south, nearly emptying Delhi and condemning the vast royal household to a lengthy exile from the (then) imperial

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, 2:188ff, as quoted in Wheeler Thackston, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, (Oxford, New York, 1999) p. xix.

<sup>8</sup> Apart from a period in the seventeenth century during which the sultans moved to Edirne in an effort to escape the political factionalism of Istanbul, from the time of Sultan Mehmet Fatih's conquest of the city in 1453, Istanbul remained the economic, political and spiritual centre of Ottoman identity until the complete collapse of empire in the twentieth century.

<sup>9</sup> Of course when Aurangzeb seized control of Delhi in 1658 he essentially took control of the empire but this was not because he took the capital city, but rather because he simultaneously seized his father, the emperor Shah Jahan, who afterwards remained a prisoner of his son, housed in Agra for eight years, until his death in 1666.

<sup>10</sup> When Akbar left Sikri and moved to the Mughal capital of Lahore, it was most immediately to position himself more closely to contested territory in Kabul, ruled by his rebellious half-brother, and Khurasan, claimed by the Safavid shahs of Iran. Even when the threats to Mughal security passed, Akbar did not return to Sikri. Modern scholarship suggests that Sikri lacked adequate water to support the imperial Mughal court but this has never been definitively confirmed.

capital.<sup>11</sup> Aurangzeb and his royal court moved into a tent city, complete with bazaars, cantonments, administrative offices and imperial quarters, from which the empire was ruled for 26 years.

Aurangzeb died in 1707, having never returned to the Mughal imperial capital built by his father, Shah Jahan. He left a will which contained an advisory for his descendants: “As far as possible”, he wrote, “the ruler of a kingdom should not spare himself from moving about; he should avoid staying in one place, which outwardly gives him repose but in effect brings on a thousand calamities and troubles”.<sup>12</sup> In advice to his son Bahadur Shah, Aurangzeb further confirmed, in verse, the need for constant mobility:

It is bad for both emperors and water to remain at the same place  
The water grows putrid and the king’s power slips out of his control  
In *touring* lie the honour, ease and splendor of kings. . . .<sup>13</sup>

### A Life Out of Doors

Yet apart from the obvious military and strategic necessity, the mobility of Jahangir’s Timurid–Mughal court was reinforced by the dynasty’s cultural affinity for a life lived out of doors, in a natural setting—or at least in a carefully modified and artfully constructed natural setting. Even their revered ancestor Timur, who had developed Samarqand into a glorious imperial capital worthy of his success, forcibly importing from every corner of his conquered territories artisans whose sole purpose was to embellish and aggrandise the city, and thereby Timur himself, chose to live out of doors. Returning to his capital between campaigns, Timur resided in luxurious tent compounds in the series of gardens which surrounded the magnificent palaces he had had built – palaces which functioned more often as prisons and treasure house rather than the residences they were designed to be.<sup>14</sup> An ambassador to Timur’s court, Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, who had made the lengthy journey from the Royal court of Henry III of Castille and Leon, reported that Timur granted audiences in a series of classic Perso–Timurid gardens, complete with artificial waterways, orchards of fruit and shade trees, raised paths, and herds of imported deer.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the gardens numerous pavilions of silk and embroidered tapestry were erected, and “all of these enclosures aforesaid were occupied either by the wives of Timur, or by the wives of his grandsons, and these princes and princesses have their abode therein, *as does also his Highness likewise*, both summer and winter”.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup>In self-imposed exile Aurangzeb did express nostalgia for Delhi. When, after conquering Bijapur and Hyderabad, an official suggested that the war in the south had been successfully completed and requested that the royal court return to the north, the emperor answered sympathetically in verse, “It is hard that my runaway heart longs for home, The dew has so passed away and yet it remembers the garden”. He then refused the request and returned to his pursuit of the Deccan. Hamid ud-Din Bahadur, *Ahkam-i Alangir*, trans. by Jadunath Sarkar as *Anecdotes of Aurangzeb*, (London, 1988) (1st and 2nd ed. 1925; 3rd 1949), p. 74.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41. My thanks to Geoffrey Parker of the Ohio State University for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>14</sup>Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403–1406*, trans. by Guy le Strange, (New York, London, 1928) pp. 2215–2217; Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, *Zafamama*, trans. by Wheeler M. Thackston, *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, (Cambridge, Mass., 1989) pp. 85–87; and Ahmed ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane or Timur the Great Amir*, trans. by J.H. Sanders, (London, 1936) pp. 309–310.

<sup>15</sup>Clavijo, p. 216.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 243.

In the later Timurid period, their nomadic heritage was in seeming retreat, the pampered descendants of Timur retained a passion for an outdoors life. But rather than mobilise a court progress, the late Timurids placed the princely prerogatives of hunting, poetry, parties and courtly life in the setting of the classic Timurid garden. The gardens of fifteenth-century Timurid Transoxiana were admired for their sophisticated geometric form and physical beauty, but it is possible that the enormous cultural prestige, even reverence, they acquired in late Timurid Transoxiana was due in some measure to the function of the garden as a popular site of artistic and social expression. “Timurid personal and dynastic interests. . . were pursued outside the city behind garden walls, and. . . the garden became a sequestered, psychologically suggestive space”,<sup>17</sup> notorious for aristocratic gatherings in which the recitation of poetry was coupled with heavy consumption of alcohol and the regular use of mild intoxicants. By the time of the Uzbek rout of the Timurids, in the closing years of the fifteenth century, the princely capitals of Kabul and Harat had come to rival Samarqand in the numbers and grandeur of their suburban gardens, in which the use of luxurious tents and canopies often superseded permanent construction of palaces, pavilions and kiosks.

In his failed attempts to recreate a Timurid empire, Babur had visited Samarqand and Harat, expressing his enormous admiration for the classic Timurid garden and its accompanying literary-elite culture. Shortly after, as the last independent Timurid prince and *padshah* of the refugee Timurid community of Kabul, Babur enthusiastically threw himself into constructing his own imperial gardens, glorying in this most aristocratic of pastimes which resonated deeply in the increasingly nostalgic Timurid psyche as a material representation of Timurid cultural prowess, supremacy and power.

Having successfully defeated the Lodi sultans of Delhi in 1526, as the new ruler of northern Hindustan, Babur expressed profound disappointment in the Indian landscape, which he complained was not only completely lacking in gardens but was in fact “unpleasant and unwelcoming (*karahat u nakhoshluk*)”.<sup>18</sup> Babur’s obsession with the recreation of a neo-Timurid royal court required that it contain a succession of imperial gardens, within which social gatherings could ease the Timurid sense of exile and affirm the cultural and political power of the Timurid dynasts. India’s perceived limitations, its lack of running water or geometric spaces, while initially disappointing, could not suppress Babur’s desire for a Timurid life out of doors. “There was nothing to do”, he wrote, “but, of necessity, work with the space we had”. Based on the water supplied by a pre-existing well, Babur’s first Agra garden included a bathhouse, a great courtyard and an octagonal pool, a private garden and outbuildings. “Thus in unpleasant and unpolished Hindustan (*bisafa u bisiyaq Hind*), linear and geometric gardens were produced”.<sup>19</sup> Eventually Babur would build a garden in every site he conquered, a tradition maintained by many of his descendants, who

<sup>17</sup>Thomas W. Lentz, “Memory and Ideology in the Timurid Garden”, in *Mughal Gardens: Sources, Places, Representations and Prospects*, James L. Westcoat, Jr. and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1996) p. 39.

<sup>18</sup>*Baburnama*, Mano, v. 1, p. 482. As Anthony Welch has shown, there were gardens in northern India at the time of Babur’s arrival that the Timurid prince must have been aware of but because they lacked the particular attributes of a Timurid garden (running water and the classic Persian geometric *chahar bagh* structure) and perhaps even more importantly, because they were the aesthetic and imperial remains of preceding dynasties, Babur was dismissive of them. See Welch, “Gardens That Babur Did Not Like: Landscape, Water and Architecture for the Sultans of Delhi”, *Mughal Gardens*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1996).

<sup>19</sup>Mano, v. 1, p. 482.

continued to glorify landscape over urban spaces. As Stephen Dale has written, in contrast to their Ottoman contemporaries the Mughal's conquest of India "came to be expressed hardly at all in religious monuments but pervasively as the imperialism of landscape architecture, the civilised ideal of the Timurid period".<sup>20</sup> By the mid-seventeenth century, Lahore, considered the second city of the empire, contained over fifty classic Timurid gardens of such magnificence and magnitude that entire suburban communities had to be constructed within which to house the enormous gardening labour force.<sup>21</sup>

### Elegant Nomad

During the twenty-two years of his reign, from 1605–1627, Babur's great grandson, Jahangir, spent more than half of his time away from the official capital at Agra. He led few major military campaigns and his reign was not marked by any serious accretion of territory. In contrast to his predecessors—conquest driven leaders of armies, warriors bent on domination and strategic displays of power—Jahangir often simply wandered, north in the hot season, south in the cold, comfortably combining his own minimalist interpretation of imperial duties with life in a garden setting and the pursuit of pleasure. On one occasion he remained away from his capital, then at Agra, for a total of five years and seven months while ponderously moving at an elephant's pace through the provinces of his empire.

The most mobile of Mughal kings meandered through the Indian countryside, making regular stops to view sights of curiosity and renown, distribute alms, offer the public dispensation of imperial justice and, avidly and daily, to hunt. In the emperor's eleventh regnal year, he travelled from Ajmer to Mandu, taking four months and four days to complete the journey. The blissful Jahangir wrote, "We wandered forty-six days on the march and seventy-eight halting. In these forty-six marches, with good fortune all of the rest stops were pleasant places on the banks of ponds or irrigation canals and magnificent rivers edged by trees, greenery, and fields of blooming poppies, and not a day passed, marching or stopping, without hunting. We came the whole way by horseback or elephant, seeing the sights and hunting". As if in affirmation of the dynastic passion for landscapes, the emperor added, "The arduousness of a journey (*mishqat-i sefer*) was never apparent. It was as if we were moving from garden to garden".<sup>22</sup>

Contrast this enraptured commentary to the complaints of a companion on the very same journey, Sir Thomas Roe, the first English ambassador to the Mughal court, who had attached himself to the imperial court in hopes of attaining trade concessions. In a letter to friends, Roe wrote bitterly, "I am yet following this wandering King, over Mountagnes and through woodes, so strange and unused in ways that his own people, who almost know no other god, blaspheme his name".<sup>23</sup> Although Roe was, to his relief, given permission to part ways with the king not long after, the oblivious Jahangir continued his blissful meandering journey for another few years before wending his way back to Agra.

<sup>20</sup>Stephen F. Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483- 1530)*, (Leiden, 2004) p. 186.

<sup>21</sup>Abdul Rehman, "Garden Types in Mughal Lahore", in *Gardens in the Time of the Great Muslim Empires*, Attilio Petruccioli, ed., (Leiden, 1997) p. 166.

<sup>22</sup>Nur al-Din Muhammad Jahangir, *Jahangirnama (Tuzuk-i Jahangiri)*, (Tehran, Buny adi Farhangi Iran, 1359 (1980)) p. 207.

<sup>23</sup>Sir Thomas Roe, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615–1619*, ed. by William Foster, (Hakluyt Society, 1899), (Kraus Reprint, 1967) p. 375.

### Religious Pilgrimage

While the Mughal kings did not hesitate to define themselves in classic terms of Perso-Islamic kingship, this dynastic presentation was coupled with a seemingly careless disregard for conservative Islamic jurisprudence, as the Mughal court continued to display varying degrees of disinterest in proponents of conservative Islamic legalism. As Sunni Muslim rulers of India, with a subject population claiming wildly diverse religious loyalties the Mughals resolved the question of coordination of Islamic law, the *shari'a*, with the realities of rule by marginalising the conservative Muslim legalists and religious law. A conservative 'alim at Akbar's royal court wrote in outrage that Hindus were encouraged, yet the emperor offered to loyal Muslims like himself "nothing but kicks and blows, and utterly disregarded all their devotion and zeal and complaisance".<sup>24</sup> While Hindus had long participated, to varying degrees, in governance under the Delhi sultans, the Mughals opened their military bureaucracy to an unprecedented level of non-Muslim involvement, leading a conservative Muslim scholar at the court to complain of "Hindu infidels who are indispensable and of whom half the army, and the country, will soon consist, and as whom there is not among the Moghuls or Hindustanis [native Muslims] a tribe so powerful".<sup>25</sup>

The emperor Jahangir celebrated his dynasty's acceptance of diversity and rejection of narrower political codes, patronising political writings which emphasised the independent nature of justice and desirability of religious tolerance. Describing his father's and his own imperial court, Jahangir proudly wrote, "Followers of diverse sects (*irbab-i milal-i mukhtalafa*) are given a place in his broad and matchless empire—unlike other countries in the world, like Iran, where there is none but Shi'ites (*Shi'i ra begir Iran*), and in Rum, Turan, and Hindustan, where there is no place for other than Sunnis (*Sunni ra dar Rum u Turan u Hindustan ja nist*). Just as in the spacious sphere of God's mercy all peoples and all sects have a place. . . in my father's realm that borders on the salt sea, a place can be found for all religious sects and beliefs, conflicting and skeptical, and oppression (*ta'riz*) is not allowed".<sup>26</sup>

The mobility of the royal court played an important role in the confirming for the Mughals a dynastic religious legitimacy which could successfully cross the diverse continuum of religious loyalties in medieval and early modern India. The Chishti order of Sufis was a particularly South Asian spiritual community that enjoyed broad popular appeal. In an effort to tie his dynastic political ambitions to Chishti spiritual Charisma, Akbar performed his first pilgrimage to the shrine of the founder of the Indian branch of the Chishti order, Mu'in al-Din Chishti, in Ajmer in 1564, eight years after taking the throne. Akbar went on to make annual journeys to Ajmer, at times barefoot, for fifteen years, at which point his youngest son, Danyal, took on the duty of the imperial pilgrimage. In an act presented as part of Akbar's well-documented search for spiritual enlightenment, as "a supplicant (*niyazmand budan*) of dervishes", he offered royal patronage to the Chishti Shaykh Salim (d. 1571), who was said to have predicted the births of Akbar's three sons at a time in which the emperor was in despair over his lack of male progeny.<sup>27</sup> Akbar's ceremonial capital of Fatehpur Sikri was carefully positioned next to the shrine of Shaykh Salim, with whom he had established

<sup>24</sup> Abdul Qadir Ibn Muluk Shah. al-Badauni (Badaoni), *Muntakhabat al-Tawarikh*. W.H. Lowe, tr. and ed. (Patna, India, 1973), v. 2, p. 350.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>26</sup> *Jahangirnama*, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.



a close relationship, attributing the birth of his first son, Salim, the future emperor Jahangir, to the power of the prayers of the Chishti Shaykh after whom the child was named.

The Mughals carefully rejected an intimate relationship with traditional Sunni legalists making their routine and habitual public patronage of sincere piety in all of its incarnations, Muslim or non-Muslim, particularly valuable. Jahangir and Akbar were known for their respectful patronage of Hindu ascetics who seemed to the kings to be sincere in their piety. Pilgrimage to the dwellings of Hindu holy men became a common feature of the Mughal court progress. Akbar had visited a famed sanyasi, Jadrup Gosain of Ujjain, an event his son claims he “always recalled fondly”.<sup>28</sup> Jahangir’s description of Jadrup indicates enormous respect on the part of the emperor; who made a great effort to reach “a barren corner far from cultivated lands” where he found the “narrow, dark hole” in which the *sanyasi murtazi* lived.<sup>29</sup> The emperor had long “wanted to call him [Jadrup] to the court at Agra”, yet he avoided summoning the ascetic, acknowledging the difficulty of the request.<sup>30</sup> When Jadrup later moved to Mathura, an important Hindu temple site on the Yamuna River, Jahangir and his royal retinue made the journey again. “Since I was anxious to talk to him”, he wrote, “I went to see him and spent a long time alone with him without interruption. He is infinitely valuable and from his company one can gain great contentment and strength”.<sup>31</sup>

Full of admiration, Jahangir draws a remarkable connection between Islamic and Hindu scriptural study: “He really has more than a little learning”, wrote the Muslim Mughal emperor, “and has studied well the science of the Vedanta (*ilm-i bidanat*) which is the science of Sufism (*ilm-i tasawwuf*)”.<sup>32</sup> On another occasion, Jahangir mentions visiting yet another Hindu ascetic with whom he “spent a long time conversing. He was not devoid of intelligence or understanding (*khayli az aqahi u ma’qulit nist*),” wrote the emperor, “and knew all about the principles of Sufism (*muqadamat-i Sufiya*) in his religion. . . It can be strongly said that no one of this type (*az in ta’ifa*) better than he has been seen”. Here too Jahangir seems to conflate Hindu and Muslim ascetic spirituality by explaining his interest in the sanyasi, “. . . as I was always ready to receive advice from dervishes (*Chun khatir hamuwara be nasihat-i darwishan ragib ast*)”.<sup>33</sup>

Jahangir sought out and enjoyed debating the relative merits of religion with Hindu pundits (*punditan*) and seeking out “a real fakir from whose conversation some great bounty might derive”.<sup>34</sup> The emperor modelled himself on his father, who “conversed with the good of every religion and every sect (*ba nikan u khuban har ta’ifa, u har din u a’in suhbat mi dashtand*) and gave his attentions to each according to his station and ability to understand (*baqadar halat u fahmidi*)”.<sup>35</sup> Jahangir’s respect, and subsequent financial generosity, was based on his sense of an individual’s sincerity, and when visiting the major temple sites along the

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>29</sup> In describing Jadrup Gosain, Jahangir uses the Sanskrit term *sanyasi* rather than the Persian *darwish*, then couples it with the Persian term *murtazi*, stressing ascetic discipline. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.



route of his court progress, “alms of cash and goods [were given] to each one according to his merits (*istihqaq*)”.<sup>36</sup>

Yet Jahangir was not blindly susceptible to the spiritual claims of those Hindu or Muslim religious leaders who seemed, to him at least, to lack real personal piety. Just as the famed Naqshbandi Shaykh Sirhindi was declared by Jahangir to be a charlatan, so too did Hindu mystics face the judgment of the emperor. On one of his many tours of temple sites, Jahangir wrote contemptuously of the rarity of true spirituality, comparing the truly pious to the phoenix (*‘anqa*) and the philosopher’s stone (*kimiya*).<sup>37</sup> “All I saw”, he wrote, “was a flock of petty fools (*bi ma‘rafat*), and the result of my seeing them was nothing but mental confusion and obfuscation (*tiragi khatir*)”. The emperor remained uncritical of the Hindu worship of God “according to their religion”,<sup>38</sup> but when Jahangir found what seemed to him to be a false guru, manipulating a gullible public, he ordered “the place destroyed, the yogi driven away and the idol . . . smashed”.<sup>39</sup> All along the path of his progress, Jahangir publicly affirmed his own religious zeal while performing the role of spiritual protector of his subjects, supporting through imperial patronage those spiritual leaders whose piety was above reproach, while discrediting, destroying and driving out those false spiritualists who preyed on the emperor’s innocent subjects.

### The Wine of Loyalty

The court culture of the meandering Jahangir was centered on not only a reverence for gardens and public performance of spiritual pilgrimage, but also a steady diet of intoxicants. The Timurid courts of his Central Asian ancestors had been known for the vast quantities of alcohol consumed; the openly horrified Ambassador Clavijo explained that at Timur’s court, “no feast . . . is a real festival unless the guests have drunk themselves sot”.<sup>40</sup> The political aspirations of Timur’s grandson Mirza Pir Muhammad ibn Jahangir were said to have been destroyed because “he spent most of his time quaffing fire-coloured liquid and listening to the sound of the lute and harp. The enchanting voice of the harp told of the passing of his rule. . .”.<sup>41</sup> Babur’s contemporary, Sultan Sa’id Khan, had given up the use of intoxicants in a fit of religious sentiment but when during a desperate escape from a lost battle he was offered by his rescuers a goblet of *kumis*, the fermented milk drink of the steppes, he felt it necessary to accept the generous hospitality of his hosts. His biographer explained that, “He expanded his religion to allow for drinking”, proceeding to spend the next eight days in a drunken revel with his Mongol companions.<sup>42</sup>

Babur’s father, Umar Shaykh, was described by his son as a “great drinker”; Babur, as his memoirs demonstrate, indulged regularly and often; his eldest son, Humayun, freely admitted to opium addiction;<sup>43</sup> and, according to contemporary reports, Humayun’s son, the emperor

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60. The ‘*anga*’ is also commonly known in Persian literature as the *simurgh*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>40</sup> Clavijo, p. 231.

<sup>41</sup> Khwandamir, *Habib al-Siyar*, in *Century of Princes*, ed. and tr. Wheeler M. Thackston, (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. 118.

<sup>42</sup> Mirza Haydar Dughlat, *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, trans. Wheeler Thackston, (Cambridge, Mass., 1996) vol. 1, p. 179.

<sup>43</sup> Gulbadan Begum, *Humayunnama*, Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyar-i Delhi, 1972, Persian text, p. 131.

Akbar, too, was an opium user; on learning of the murder of his close friend and biographer, Abu'l Fazl, Akbar was said to have "neither shaved nor used opium" in his grief.<sup>44</sup> In the year 1621 the emperor Jahangir, both of whose brothers had died of alcoholism, regretfully recorded the death of "an old and trusted servant", whose sole charge at the Jahangiri royal court seems to have been the care and keeping of the imperial intoxicants. Immediately after this servant's death Jahangir replaced him with two new appointees, one a steward for opium and a second whose responsibility became the care of the royal wine.<sup>45</sup> Jahangir openly acknowledged his struggles with alcoholism, remaining a committed drinker and drug user—his court poet composed the couplet for him:

*Du lab daram yeki dar miparsati*  
*Yeki dar 'uzr khwahi hay masti*  
 I have two lips, one devoted [to wine] and  
 The other apologising for drunkenness.<sup>46</sup>

Babur offered posterity a political justification and defense for the ruler's participation in regular drinking and drug taking garden parties; chiding his eldest son for remaining aloof, he directed Humayun to socialise regularly with his followers. For Babur, the garden party served as an effective device through which to establish personal ties with the imperial elite, affirm the loyalty of the ruler's retinue, and develop social cohesion and camaraderie.<sup>47</sup> Jahangir used a similar justification in his own memoirs, describing regular wine parties (*majlis-i sharab-i tertib*) in which his courtiers were expected to drink with him, becoming "intoxicated with the wine of loyalty" (*sharab-i marhamat*).<sup>48</sup> Jahangir's memoirs contain several references to "regular Thursday night parties", and describe court events in which "wine bowls and intoxicants were given to whoever wished",<sup>49</sup> and his servants "made happy on goblets of joy".<sup>50</sup> At Nauruz the emperor decreed that the royal revellers could consume whatever "intoxicants or exhilarants (*makfiyat u mugirat*)" they chose, without concern for "prohibition or impediment (*mana' u mani*)".<sup>51</sup>

### The Hunt

Perhaps most importantly, the constant mobility of his royal court offered Jahangir the opportunity to satisfy his passion for the hunt, which he did almost daily. Totalling up the game killed from the age of twelve through his eleventh regnal year, at age fifty, Jahangir listed 28, 532 animals "killed in my presence", including mountain goat, sheep and deer, wolves, wild fox and boar, pigeons, hawks, pelicans, a total of eighty-six lions, 3,473 crows and ten crocodiles.<sup>52</sup> Yet even his passion for hunting comfortably found near universal

<sup>44</sup> Asad Beg Kaswini, *Wikaya*, Elliot and Dowson, ed. and tr., (New York, 1966), VI, p.155.

<sup>45</sup> *Jahangirnama*, p. 360.

<sup>46</sup> *Jahangirnama*, p. 324. Translated by Wheeler Thackston, *The Jahangirnama*, p. 320. The couplet was composed by Taleb Amuli, a Persian immigrant to the Mughal court, appointed poet laureate in 1618 and the author of the *Kulliyat*.

<sup>47</sup> *Baburnama*, Mano, vol. 1, p. 560. For discussion of this point, see also Dale, *Garden of Eight Paradises*, p. 148.

<sup>48</sup> *Jahangirnama*, p. 212.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

justification at the Timurid–Mughal court. Just as royal drinking parties were described as political strategy, the hunt was presented as a royal duty – an act of arbitration between the ruler and the forces of nature only the king was competent to control. In the origin myths of the pre-modern world it is the model rulers and cultural heroes who hold the wild in check, allowing the land to be cultivated and agriculture to flourish; the royal hunt was seen as the first line of defense against the encroachment of a threatening nature.<sup>53</sup> In the ancient Indian tradition, the “rulers had to interact with the wilderness, placate, contain and appropriate its raw power”,<sup>54</sup> whereby the king gained religious merit, and the hunting ground became a ceremonial seat of royalty. Anxious to portray his constant hunting trips as a “disinterested service to his subjects”, Jahangir extolled his own role as imperial exterminator, describing explicit invitations from his subjects to have the emperor rid them of a tiger or lion which threatened their village.

Jahangir’s beloved wife Nur Jahan, who was often described as a wily pre-emptor of imperial power, must have horrified her critics when she too took on the role of imperial hunter and protector of the people. Hunting with her husband the emperor, on one occasion she killed four lions with six shots, “from atop an elephant and from inside a howdah”.<sup>55</sup> The doting Jahangir showered her with gold *ashrafis* and gifts of pearl and diamonds. When, near the end of his reign, Jahangir was briefly taken hostage by a disgruntled noble, Mahabat Khan, it was, of all his following, his wife Nur Jahan who attempted a rescue. Her reputation as a highly skilled hunter preceded her, and caused a “disruption and agitation [among her enemies] on account of the fiery shots of the queen’s gun, which could overthrow even lions”.<sup>56</sup>

Apart from their common passion for the hunt, strategically organised hunting trips offered the Mughal kings their best excuse for well-armed and warlike excursions – what began under the guise of a hunting trip could suddenly be transformed into a military campaign. Men in the tens of thousands participated in the Mughal’s performance of the classic Turco–Mongol *qamargha* circle hunt, which was itself considered preparation and practice for a military campaign. During Akbar’s campaign against Malwa, the emperor and his retinue presented their errand as a seemingly peaceful hunting excursion but as the enormous imperial cavalcade edged closer to the enemy fortress, it quickly converted into a military operation, flaring up into a menacing affirmation of might and statement of central control. Of course, the opposite could also occur; without loss of face a military campaign could subside into an innocent royal outing. In 1617 the not-usually-very-predatory emperor Jahangir moved his enormous imperial camp towards the Deccan in an attempt to intimidate local rulers into submission. When his advisors warned him that the Deccanis did not seem liable to back down and had, in fact, “attended the borders with 50,000 horse resolved to fight”, they advised the emperor to avoid the humiliation of public defeat and “convert [his approach] into a hunting journey”.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup>Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History*, (Philadelphia, 2006) p. 183

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>55</sup>*Jahangirnama*, p. 219.

<sup>56</sup>Kami Shirazi, *Waqa-i-uz-Zaman (Fath Nama-i-Nur Jahan Begam)*, W.H. Siddiqi, ed., (Rampur, Uttar Pradesh, 2003) p. 156.

<sup>57</sup>Roe, *Embassy*, p. 377.

### The Wheel-Turning Ruler

For all his justifications, more often than not Jahangir's personal itinerancy seems rarely to reflect more than his simple desire to live a life of constant movement spent in the princely pleasures of hunting, pilgrimage, garden parties and alcoholic or drug induced pleasure — yet the mobility of the Jahangiri court was not seriously criticised nor was the emperor's essential sovereignty questioned. Much of Jahangir's nobility was, after all, descended from Persian or Turco-Mongol semi-nomadic warriors and empire builders, for whom the peripatetic court (even mobilised, as was Jahangir's, for the carefully justified pursuit of an endless round of hunts and drinking parties) was a well established and respected tradition. But as the overlord of India, the performance of politically legitimising actions which would resonate with the Rajput nobility and the majority Hindu population would have been of great value to Jahangir. In this the pleasure-seeking emperor was extremely fortunate, for there existed in India ancient and respected precedent for his peripatetic court.

In Brahmanical cosmology the *mandala* design is considered the visual representation of a sanctified space, and was used as a model to articulate and define imperial territories.<sup>58</sup> The *Arthashastra*, a governing manual generally attributed to Kautilya, advisor of the Mauryan kings of the fourth century BCE, described a *raja mandala*, or circle of kingship, which articulated concentric circles of alternating political enemies and friends, spreading outward from the central kingdom.<sup>59</sup> In this sacred cosmology the centre takes the place of the holy Mount Meru and the wheel of concentric circles is split into four quadrants, representing the four quarters of the world.<sup>60</sup> Although the earliest Vedic texts describe a king as “fixed” within the broad confines of his realm, he is further advised to traverse that territory and add to it, to “stride out unto the great quarters”, and “let all directions call thee”.<sup>61</sup> This geometric-cosmology of empire required ambitious Hindu rulers to perform a near-constant perambulation of their domain, leading imperial courts on regular “ritual journeys in which they displayed their royal power and commemorated the military campaign(s) which had established their rule”.<sup>62</sup>

The most famous of ritual royal court progresses across the king's territories, known as the *digvijaya* or “conquest of the quarters”, has been described as “the most important Indian concept with regard to sovereignty”, and “the key event of greatest import in ancient India”.<sup>63</sup> Circumambulating his imperial territories, touching on and affirming the kingdom's borders, a king illustrated his own ability to centralise power in his own person through *visuva-jit* (subjugation).<sup>64</sup> Through the highly ritualised performance of the *digvijaya* an ambitious king would display his “paramount overlordship. . . gain the submission

<sup>58</sup>Elizabeth ten Grotenhaus, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography*, (Honolulu, 1998).

<sup>59</sup>Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, L.N. Rangarajan, ed. and tr., (New Delhi and New York, 1992). See also, *Kautilya's Arthashastra*, R. Shamasastri, tr., (Mysore, 1967).

<sup>60</sup>Bharati Mukherjee, *Kautilya's Concept of Diplomacy, A New Interpretation*, (Calcutta, 1976), pp. 24–26.

<sup>61</sup>J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship From the Religious Point of View*, (Leiden, 1969) p. 104.

<sup>62</sup>William S. Sax, “The Ramnagar Ramlila: Text, Performance, Pilgrimage,” *History of Religions*, 30/2, Nov. 1990, pp. 129–153, p. 143.

<sup>63</sup>Respectively, D. Devahuti, *Harsha, A Political Study*, (Oxford, 1970), p. 230 and Ronald Inden, “Ritual, Authority and Cyclic Time in Hindu Kingship,” in *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, ed. J.F. Richards, (Madison, 1978) p. 28.

<sup>64</sup>Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “The Hindu Theory of International Relations,” *American Political Science Review*, 1919.

of neighbouring rulers, or re-establish fallen or collateral lines, rather than expand the boundaries of his own territory".<sup>65</sup> Regarded as an act of powerful universal implications, the *digvijaya* affirmed the legitimacy of imperial rule and the king as a *cakravartin*, a wheel turning ruler, who through conquest and alliance obliged the minor rulers of each circle to acquiesce as subordinates in his self-centred world order in an earthly hierarchy of power.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, rulers were advised to repeat the formal royal court progress annually in a ritual journey called the *vijayayatra*, the performance of which would result in the "renewal and reconstitution of cosmos, society and kingdom".<sup>67</sup> These royal progresses were in part military campaigns but by the medieval period they had become a deliberate act of political-religious theatre which continually defined and articulated territorial control and the limits of power. Rooted as they were in ancient rituals of kingship, the court progress was carefully performed at various Hindu courts across the subcontinent well into the Mughal period. In 1674 the Maratha leader Shivaji, who was to become the arch-nemesis of the Mughals in the Deccan, seems to have performed a formal ritualised *digvijaya* at the time of his assumption of rule, most likely because in the absence of a *kshatriya* (warrior) caste lineage, Shivaji actively sought publicly accepted rituals of consecration in order to substantiate his legitimacy.<sup>68</sup>

We can only speculate as to the degree to which this ancient South Asian tradition of a court progress may have offered Mughal kings some legitimising resonance within the subject population, who may have seen the wanderings of Jahangir's royal court as nothing less than the appropriate actions of a legitimising emperor. As for Jahangir's own awareness of local traditions of kingship, his writings lack any reference to them but it is noteworthy that his mother was a princess of Rajasthan, where the royal ritual of the *digvijaya* had traditionally been performed.<sup>69</sup> More importantly, this confluence of imperial traditions could increase a ruler's appeal across a widely diverse imperial court, which included Rajput nobles, Persian intellectuals, Turkish and Uzbek military men, local lineage chiefs and caste leaders, and would surely have benefited the claims of the Mughal kings.

It was not, therefore, only the Turco-Mongol royal court tradition of mobility that made generous allowance for a king with a passion for hunting, a heartfelt appreciation for beautiful landscapes, spiritual piety, a lifelong addiction to drugs and alcohol, and a dramatic lack of real imperial ambition—all of which Jahangir, Mughal emperor of India, comfortably indulged—but he also received the generous sanction of indigenous ruling traditions, in

<sup>65</sup>Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, (Cambridge, 2004) p. 35.

<sup>66</sup>Literary references to the *digvijaya* are numerous, including the earliest in the Mahabharata, in which four of the five Pandava brothers perform a ritualised *digvijaya* simultaneously. See Sax, "Ramnagar Ramlila", p. 143.

<sup>67</sup>Ronald Inden, "Cultural and Symbolic Constitutions in Ancient India", (Princeton, 1978), typescript, pp. 26, 59–60, as in Sax, "Ramnagar Ramlila", p. 143.

<sup>68</sup>Shivaji's *digvijaya* was only one part of a large and complex effort to assert and defend his claims to *kshatriya* caste, including lengthy purification rites, a coronation carefully contrived in reference to ancient Hindu texts, a thread ceremony for himself and his son, and remarriage, now under *Kshatriya* custom, to each of his wives. Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600-1818*, (Cambridge, 1993) pp. 87–90. See also John Keay, *India: A History*, (New York, 2000) p. 354.

It has been suggested that the Vedic tradition of the *digvijaya* continues to resonate in South Asian society, remaining a common point of reference in modern performances of political theatre an example being Advani's *rath yatra*, or "chariot procession", from Somnatha to Ayodhya in 1990. See William S. Sax, "Conquering the Quarters: Religion and Politics in Hinduism", *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 4/1, April 2000, pp. 39–60.

<sup>69</sup>It was the twelfth-century Rajput king Prithviraj who, having succeeded in uniting some of the Rajput princes and cordoning off the Muslim Panjab, was probably performing a ritual *digvijaya* when he was attacked by the eventually victorious Muhammad of Ghori, who established what became known as the Delhi sultanate.

which the *digvijaya* is expressed as a permanent court progress and the peripatetic court, a requirement of Hindu kingship.

At the end of his life, after years of excessive drug and alcohol abuse, exhausted from the successful effort to crush yet another filial rebellion, Jahangir was an invalid, too ill to walk or even to take opium, managing only a few sips of wine. Yet still he travelled relentlessly, turning north to his beloved Kashmir and pausing occasionally to hunt. When, in chasing a deer wounded by the emperor, one of Jahangir's foot soldiers fell from a cliff to his death, observers describe the emperor as very deeply affected: "It seemed he had seen the angel of death".<sup>70</sup> Jahangir insisted on continuing his journey but died shortly thereafter at the age of fifty-eight, having reigned and roamed as emperor for twenty-two years. The Mughal kings who followed after Jahangir continued the itinerant ways of their ancestors for as long as they had the economic and political power to do so, for almost another hundred years, although none before or after seems to have indulged quite so determinedly as Jahangir in a peripatetic pursuit of pleasure.

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<sup>70</sup>Muhammad Sharif Mu'tamid Khan, *Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri*, Elliot and Dowson, ed. and tr., (New York, 1966) vol. 6, p. 292.