



JAHĀNGIR

JAHĀNGIR, SĀLEM MOḤAMMAD NUR-AL-DIN, the fourth Mughal emperor, and the first of his dynasty to have been born in India (b. 17 Rabi' I 977/30 August 1569; d. 28 Šafar 1037/7 November 1627). His court remained strongly influenced by the Persianate political, cultural, and aesthetic traditions of the refugee Timurid elite who had fled the Uzbek invasion of Transoxiana to found the Mughal Empire. Jahāngir's glittering peripatetic court maintained a tolerant and eclectic character, welcoming merchants, artists, poets, and political refugees from across the Subcontinent, Central Asia, Persia, and Europe. His palace ateliers produced the finest examples of Mughal miniature painting, while he himself authored an intimate personal memoir in the tradition of his great grandfather, Ṣāḥir-al-Din Moḥammad Bābor (q.v.; d. 1530). Although Jahāngir's reign began and ended in princely rebellion, he ruled the Subcontinent for twenty-two years in relative peace and stability.

Born in the rocky hills of Sikri, near the Mughal capital of Agra, Jahāngir was the first son of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (q.v.; d. 1605). The child was named Sālem after the Sufi Shaikh Sālem Čišṭi, who had foretold his birth and whose hermitage had housed Akbar's Rajput wife during her pregnancy, in order that the long awaited birth might take place under the auspices of the revered holy man. Prince Sālem was raised in the new capital city of Fathpur Sikri which had been built in part to commemorate his birth. In a break with Timurid dynastic tradition, Sālem and his brothers were not sent out as children to govern imperial appanages but were educated and remained at the imperial court well into adulthood.



In later years, an uneasy relationship developed between father and son. Prince Sālem rebelled in 1600, proclaiming his virtual independence in Allahabad, where he assembled his own army, distributed *jagirs* (*jāgirs*; land grants) to members of his personal retinue and had the *khutba* (*koṭba*; bidding prayers) read in his name. Two years later, Sālem, who resented and feared his father's closest friend and advisor, Abu'l-Faẓl, arranged to have him assassinated as Abu'l-Faẓl made his way from the Deccan to Akbar's court. Akbar was horrified by the murder, but his pool of possible successors had become dramatically narrowed by the early deaths of Sālem's two younger brothers, related to excessive drinking. Still, Sālem remained in drugged dissipation in Allahabad until the death in 1603 of his grandmother, the venerable dowager Ḥamida Bānō Begum, induced him to return to his father's court. The errant prince was publicly welcomed but immediately afterwards imprisoned by his father for ten days in an effort to break his addiction to wine and opium. The abrupt treatment proved temporarily effective and Sālem, publicly acknowledged as his father's successor, settled down quietly at his father's side. Before his death, Akbar had Sālem formally invested with the robes of imperial office. He ascended the Mughal throne at the age of 36, on Jomādā II 1014/October 23, 1605, taking the regnal name of Nur-al-Din Moḥammad Jahāngir (Conqueror of the World).

Less than a year later, Jahāngir's eldest son, Ẹosrow, rebelled. Fleeing westward, his undisciplined army of the disaffected passed through the Punjab, where Ẹosrow begged for financial assistance from the Sikh patriarch, Guru Arjun Singh (d. 1606). The guru finally offered the desperate prince a charitable gift of 5,000 rupees. Jahān-gir would later interpret this act as support for the princely rebellion and order the guru's execution, in what would prove to be a disastrous and divisive moment in the history of Mughal-Sikh relations.

Jahāngir was able to rapidly quell his son's rebellion. Three hundred of the captured soldiers of his son's army were impaled alive, forming an avenue through which Ẹosrow was led on an elephant to review the anguish of his followers. Only one year later Ẹosrow was again involved in a plot to overthrow his father's rule, but in this instance a member of the cabal informed Jahāngir of the conspiracy and it was easily crushed, and the ringleaders executed. Ẹosrow was imprisoned and partially blinded, eventually dying under somewhat mysterious circumstances in 1622 in Burhanpur while in the custody of his younger brother, Ẹorram, the future



Emperor Shah Jahān.

Jahāngir inherited a relatively stable empire. His father had managed to centralize imperial control across most of the Subcontinent, successfully recruiting a diverse aristocracy of Persian nobles, Uzbek and Turāni Begs, indigenous Indian Muslims, Afghans, and Hindu Rajput chieftains. The relative tolerance displayed and encouraged by the Emperor Akbar resulted in the creation of a stable and unified nobility, which was respectfully maintained by Jahāngir even as he added his own followers to the imperial service.

In his sixth regnal year, Jahāngir married a thirty-four year old Persian widow, Mehr-al-Nesā. Her father, Mirzā Ġiāt-al-Din, an immigrant from Safavid Persia, had risen to the rank of 1,000 at the court of Emperor Akbar and, as E'temād-al-Dawla, became Jahāngir's most important advisor. Mehr-al-Nesā was the last of Jahāngir's several wives; they had no children together. Given the title Nur-Jahān (light of the world), she displayed exceptional political and administrative acumen, quickly earning the admiration and trust of her husband. Jahāngir went so far as to grant her the right of sovereignty, allowing coins to be minted in her name and drums beaten at her advance. Although the emperor is seen by some commentators to have abdicated imperial authority to his wife, Jahāngir remained deeply involved in the political affairs of his realm until the last five years of his reign. Nur-Jahān served as co-regent to a king who did not so much neglect as delegate authority to a trusted and able partner.

The imperial court of Jahāngir and Nur-Jahān was, even by the standards of his nomadic ancestors, remarkably mobile. On the move during more than half of his reign, Jahāngir's court operated out of duplicate imperial camps that leapfrogged across the countryside. Lacking the drive and ambition of his father, Jahāngir managed to combine imperial duties with life in a garden setting as the court wove slowly through magnificent countryside, pausing for pleasure trips to famous sights, visits to local mystics, personal distribution of alms, dispensation of imperial justice, and the daily hunt. Jahāngir was a passionate sportsman and Nur-Jahān regularly accompanied him on these expeditions, during one of which she killed four lions with six shots. Her proud husband showered a thousand *ašrafī* coins over her head and gave her a pair of pearls and a diamond worth a lac of rupees (*Jahāngir-nāma*, p. 214, tr. Thackston, p. 219). Yet even in the golden middle years of his reign, when no princely rebellion marred the emperor's peace, Jahāngir remained deeply dependent on drugs and alcohol, even retaining a court official whose sole



charge seems to have been the care and keeping of the imperial intoxicants. The emperor held regular wine parties at court at which, he claimed, his courtiers became “intoxicated with the wine of loyalty” (*Jahāngir-nāma*, p. 212, tr. Thackston, p. 218).

Jahāngir was fascinated by the classic Perso-Islamic model of sovereignty and its demands for imperial justice and royal charity. His first legislation, the Twelve Decrees, eliminated non-Islamic taxes, such as the Mongol customs impost, the *tamḡā* and port duties, the *mirbahri*, as well as locally improvised taxes imposed by village headmen and governors. He also banned non-Islamic punishments, such as the disfigurement of a convicted criminal by the removal of his ear or nose. In a deliberately symbolic act, following the celebrated exemplar of royal justice, the pre-Islamic Persian monarch Anušīrvān, Jahāngir’s first act as sovereign was to order a golden “Chain of Justice” (*zanjir-e ‘adl*) strung with bells and hung between the banks of the river and the peak of the citadel at Agra. This would enable petitioners to gain direct access to the royal court, bypassing those public servants who “were slack or negligent in rendering justice to the downtrodden” and appealing directly to the imperial court in times of need (*Jahāngir-nāma*, p. 5; tr. Thackston, p. 24).

Jahāngir’s regular public acts of piety and religious patronage, in both Muslim and Hindu communities, may have been particularly valuable to the emperor who, although ostensibly a Sunni Muslim, denied the ulema substantial influence at his court. On the other hand, he regularly referred to the *yāsā* and *tamḡā* of his ancestor, Čengiz Khan (q.v.), and seems to have had no more qualms or concerns over the awkward reconciliation of Islamic and Mongol legal systems than had his Timurid predecessors, whose religious beliefs his most closely resembled: pragmatic, informal and statist. Jahāngir remained loyal to the Čišīya Order of Sufis, maintaining a close relationship with Shaikh Sālem Čišī’s sons, his childhood playmates at Sikri. He also nurtured the historical Timurid alliance with the Naqšbandis, exchanging rich gifts and lines of poetry with the Transoxiana-based Sufi Order, and described his relationship with the hereditary leader of the Order in Transoxiana as “one of his devotees and his sincere servant” (Moṭrebi; tr. Folz, p. 40). His imprisonment in 1619 of the Naqšbandi Shaikh Aḥmad Serhendi, known as *Mojadded-e alf-e tāni* (Renewer of the Second Millennium), was not a rejection of his family’s alliance with the Naqšbandi Order but a reflection of the emperor’s personal religious skepticism, mistrust of insincere piety, and fear



of public disturbance. No evidence exists of a late conversion to Serhendi's spiritual path by Jahāngir.

Jahāngir was deeply influenced by his Timurid imperial legacy, which expressed itself in a nostalgic yearning for Transoxiana, referred to by the emperor as “my ancestral dominions” and “my hereditary territories” (*Jahāngir-nāma*, p. 14; tr. Thackson, p. 33). His court artists produced a series of dynastic portraits showing Jahāngir in the company of his illustrious Turco-Mongol ancestors; his genealogical charts linked him back to Alanqoa, the mythical mother goddess of the Mongols. In the middle of his reign Jahāngir made a pilgrimage to Kabul, Bābor's long-time capital, which he described in his memoirs as “like a home to us” (*Jahāngir-nāma*, p. 53; tr. Thackston, p. 68).

The highly cultivated Jahāngir encouraged poets and literary figures at his court, where Persian predominated as the language of high culture. He was well read in the medieval classics of Persian literature and quoted widely from the works of Sa'di, Hafez and Rumi. Although his own poetic compositions were rather mediocre, much more significant a legacy is that of his extraordinarily intimate imperial memoir, modeled on the diary of his Timurid great-grandfather Bābor, but written in the court Persian of Mughal India. The *Jahāngir-nāma* constitutes the most significant record of his reign.

Jahāngir emulated and replicated the Persianized cultural and aesthetic understandings of the late Timurid milieu, resulting in munificent and enthusiastic imperial patronage of the arts. The emperor was intimately involved in the artistic output of his palace ateliers and it was during his reign that Mughal miniature painting reached its apogee. Priding himself on his knowledge of individual painters and their styles, he personally directed the production of illustrations for his memoir. Jahāngir's beneficence and relative benevolence made the Mughal court a refuge for those in search of wealthy benefactors, including the Isfahan trained Āqā Reżā Heravi (q.v.) and his son Abu'l Ḥasan, who painted the frontispiece of the *Jahāngir-nāma* and was given the title of Nāder-al-Zamān (The Rarity of His Time) by his patron, the Emperor Jahāngir. Other noted examples include the painter Bišn Dās, who accompanied a diplomatic mission to Persia with the commission to paint a portrait of Shah 'Abbās for Jahāngir; the miniaturist Maṣṣūr, known as Nāder-al-'Aṣr (The Rarity of the Age), famous for his detailed studies of birds and animals, and Jahāngir's calligraphers from Persia, Solṭān 'Alī Maṣḥadi and Mir 'Alī Heravi. Thousands of Persian and Central Asian artists and intellectuals found patrons at court and among the Mughal nobility, adding to an artistic



and literary efflorescence in Mughal India that has been described as a Timurid renaissance.

Jahāngir's reign ended much as it had begun, with princely rebellion. In 1622, the Safavid Shah 'Abbās took Kandahar (Qandahār), a territory much disputed between the royal families of India and Persia since his grandfather, the Emperor Homāyun, had conquered it for Shah Ṭah-māsp in 1545. Jahāngir, who throughout his reign had maintained very cordial relations with the Shah, ordered Kōrram, entitled Shah Jahān, to command a Mughal army against the Safavids. Instead, the prince dallied in India, seizing territories assigned to his brother Šahriār and Nur-Jahān. An outraged Jahāngir cancelled the military campaign against the Safavids and spitefully renamed his former favorite *bi-dawlat*, "wretched." The thirty-year old Shah Jahān was quickly cowed by his father's response and sent apologies to the court, but Jahāngir did not accept his son's emissary. The rebellion grew in military scope with Jahāngir's implacability, and Shah Jahān was forced to flee, eventually seeking help from the Safavid Shah who, still occupying Kandahar, advised filial obedience. After three years, a defeated Shah Jahān surrendered and was grudgingly welcomed back to his father's court though forced to leave his sons behind as hostages when he returned to military duties in the Deccan.

Mahābat Khan, the general who had successfully pursued Shah Jahān, was accused by Āṣaf Khan, the ambitious brother of Nur-Jahān, of not reporting the entire spoils of the campaign. Recalled from Bengal to account for his alleged misdeeds, he arrived at the imperial encampment on the Jhelum River on Jomādā II 1035/ March 1626, accompanied by 5,000 Rajput soldiers. The court had begun a leisurely shift towards its next destination, leaving the imperial household isolated on the eastern bank alone with the indignant Mahābat Khan, who impulsively captured the emperor. Nur-Jahān's attempt to rescue her husband failed disastrously in the river crossing and Āṣaf Khan, who had most to fear from a Mahābat Khan ascendancy, deserted, leaving Nur-Jahān to join her husband in captivity. Over time, however, the acquiescence of the royal couple lulled Mahābat Khan into lowering his guard. On returning from Kabul in late 1626, the imperial household managed to become separated from Mahābat Khan's forces. Realizing that control had been irretrievably lost, he fled with 2,000 Rajput troops, eventually joining forces with the still rebellious Shah Jahān.

Although no longer captive, Jahāngir, after years of excessive drug and alcohol abuse, was an invalid. Turning north to his beloved Kashmir, the emperor



became too ill even for opium, his life-long companion, managing only to take a few sips of wine. In Bairamkala, on the road to Lahore, they paused for a hunt. When a foot soldier, chasing a deer wounded by the emperor, fell from a cliff to his death, the emperor was very deeply affected. “It seemed he had seen the angel of death” (*Eqbāl-nāma*, p. 292). Jahāngir, the peripatetic king, continued his journey but at Čengiz Hatli, near Bhimbar, soon after sunrise on Sunday, 28 Safar 1037/7 November 1627, he died. He was fifty- eight years old and had reigned as emperor for twenty-two years. Shah Jahān was enthroned in Agra on 22 Jomādā I, 1037/23 January 1628.

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