

DYING INAYAT KHAN NATURE, SPIRITUALITY, AND MORTALITY IN THE *JAHANGIRNAMA*

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ABSTRACT - Representations of death and dying are rare in Mughal miniature painting. Two images titled Dying Inayat Khan stand apart and hold unique positions in the Mughal miniature tradition. A 1618 preparatory drawing and finished painting depict the Mughal emperor Jahangir's close court official, Inayat Khan, as a dying man. His likeness was recorded after he was summoned to the imperial court. Although these images have been discussed in many studies of Mughal painting, scholars have failed to fully explain how they fit within the tradition of Mughal miniature painting and why Jahangir would order the creation of the images. This paper contends that the images of the spectacular demise of Inayat Khan resonated with Jahangir's scientifically- and spiritually-informed perceptions of his own (im)mortality and political potency. Like many of the nature studies and scientific inquiries commissioned or conducted by the emperor at court, Inayat Khan's death was commemorated as a unique preternatural event fraught with personal and political implications for Jahangir and his reign.

INTRODUCTION

In 1605, Prince Salim took the throne as the fourth emperor of the Mughal Empire, anointing himself Nur-ur-din Muhammad Jahangir Padshah Ghazi – *Nur-ur-din* meaning “light of the faith” and *Jahangir* meaning “world-seizer.” Jahangir’s reign was one of general political stability and remarkable advancement in the arts, particularly painting. Supporting the painting schools established by his predecessor and father Akbar, Jahangir commissioned many of

the finest Mughal miniature paintings yet created. Although intended mainly for inclusion in *muraqqas* or illuminated books, a small number of miniatures were executed specifically for Jahangir’s memoirs, the *Jahangirnama*.¹ Unlike Akbar, who commissioned a court-appointed historian to memorialize activities at court and abroad, Jahangir wrote his own memoirs, which meticulously recorded royal births, deaths, decrees, court assemblages, gift exchanges, diplomatic visits, imperial hunting expeditions, and other momentous events.² Curiously, in addition to recording court affairs, Jahangir took great care to describe, with scientific precision, the flora and fauna that he observed at court, and commissioned artists to portray these subjects. Diverging considerably from the *Jahangirnama*’s conventional images of imperial audiences, spiritual pilgrimages, royal family members, and court officials, these meticulously detailed nature studies spark modern scholars’ characterizations of Jahangir as a scientific observer and naturalist.³

This article examines two remarkably naturalistic images of a rare pictorial subject – death – in the *Jahangirnama*. Both titled *Dying Inayat Khan* (1618), the preparatory drawing and finished watercolour painting (Figs. 1 and 2)

1. The *Jahangirnama* has been translated into English multiple times. This paper relies on the most recent translation, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. W. M. Thackston (Washington D. C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1999). For a history of the *Jahangirnama* see *The Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, ix-xi and n.1.

2. The first Mughal emperor, Babur, also wrote his own memoirs. See *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, trans. W. M. Thackston (New York: Random House, 2002).

3. For this characterization, see M. A. Alvi and Abdur Rahman, *Jahangir the Naturalist* (National Institute of



Fig. 1
Dying Inayat Khan
1618
Ink and light wash on paper
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Fig. 2
Balchand
Dying Inayat Khan
1618
Watercolour and gilt on paper
Bodleian Library, Oxford



Sciences of India, 1968); Sanjeev Prasad Srivastave, "Jahangir as Naturalist Art Lover," in *Jahangir: a Connoisseur of Mughal Art* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2000); Som Prakash Verma, *Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999); Ebba Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (2009), 336-338; and Wilfrid Blunt, "The Mughal Painters of Natural History," *The Burlington Magazine* 90 (February 1, 1948), 49-50.

4. Ellen Smart, "The Death of Inayat Khan by the Mughal Artist Balchand," *Artibus Asiae* 58 (January 1, 1999), 10, 275. Smart provides a comprehensive list of publications in which *Dying Inayat Khan* appears.

depict an adult male, Inayat Khan, who was a close court official of emperor Jahangir. Inayat Khan's body, emaciated by years of alcohol and opium use, rests on a *charpoy*. Large bolsters support his torso and ample pillows steady his head and hands. The loose *jama* that Inayat Khan wears falls open to reveal the courtier's sickly pallor, skeletal ribcage, and extraordinarily weakened condition. Although these rare images of death are routinely included in studies of Mughal painting, scholars fail to account for their place within the tradition of Mughal miniature painting, or for the motivations underlying their commission.⁴ This paper examines *Dying Inayat Khan's* resonances with Jahangir's personal and political interests through three lenses. The first considers the images in light of Jahangir's scientific inquiries into nature and natural life-and-death processes, which are evident in Jahangir's commissions of depictions of flora and fauna. The second investigates ways in which *Dying Inayat Khan* abides by and challenges conventions and functions of traditional Mughal court portraiture. Finally, the third critical lens reveals how *Dying Inayat Khan* evokes spiritual concerns that resonate with an allegorical mode of Mughal portraiture and with Jahangir's spiritually-guided perceptions of his own mortality and political potency. Ultimately, the reality and represen-

tations of Inayat Khan's death foretell formidable personal and political troubles for Jahangir and his reign.

DEATH IN THE *JAHANGIRNAMA*

In the *Jahangirnama* there are numerous textual accounts and descriptions of death. Mughal emperors customarily recorded the deaths of relatives, nobles, court officials, and other associates who figured importantly in royal family lineages and court social groups, or who facilitated imperial relations with various power structures in South Asia and the Middle East. The majority of accounts in the *Jahangirnama* are second-hand, ranging from brief descriptions to extensive narratives. The length of each account seems to reflect the status of the deceased and his or her relationship with Jahangir. Lesser nobles or courtiers might receive only brief mention, while relatives or close court officials typically earned extensive commemoration, often under separate headings within Jahangir's text.⁵ For example, on the occasion of the death of Qutbuddin Khan Koka, who acted as a foster brother to Jahangir, Jahangir conveyed his personal grief and compared the loss to that of his own father.⁶ Although the majority of passages concerning death in the *Jahangirnama* perfunctorily record the loss of an individual, some accounts evidently reflect Jahangir's interest in unique circumstances and strange ailments that resulted in death. Such records draw on first- as well as second-hand reports. In late 1612, for example, Jahangir learned that the courtier Shaja'at Khan died after stubbing his toe. In his memoirs, the emperor remarked that he was "astonished" at the news, as Shaja'at Khan was one of the strongest and most able men in his service.⁷

When Inayat Khan lay dying as a result of opium and alcohol addiction, Jahangir likewise conveyed astonishment in his memoirs and composed a lengthy entry on the strangeness of the manner of his passing, which he witnessed first-hand. Unique to the account of Inayat Khan's demise is its detailed description of the physical appearance of the dying man's body and documentation of Jahangir's demand for a portrait, to record the courtier's remarkable death for posterity. Written in Ajmer in 1618, it reads:

5. Examples of brief death records include those of Asaf Khan and Mirza Ghazi Tarkhan in *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 136-141.

6. Ibid. 79-80.

7. Ibid. 138.

On this date news came of the death of Inayat Khan. He was one of my closest servants and subjects. In addition to eating opium he also drank wine when he had the chance. Little by little he became obsessed with wine, and since he had a weak frame, he drank more than his body could tolerate and was afflicted with diarrhea. While so weakened he was overcome two or three times by something like epileptic fits. By my order Kakim Rukna treated him, but no matter what he did it was to no avail. In addition, Inayat Khan developed a ravenous appetite, and although the doctor insisted that he not eat more than once a day, he couldn't restrain himself and raged like a madman. Finally he developed cachexia and dropsy and grew terribly thin and weak. Several days prior to this he requested that he be taken ahead to Agra. I ordered him brought to me to be given leave to depart. He was put in a palanquin and brought. He looked incredibly weak and thin. "Skin stretched over bone." Even his bones had begun to disintegrate. Whereas painters employ great exaggeration when they depict skinny people, nothing remotely resembling him had ever been seen. Good God! How can a human being remain alive in this shape? [...] It was so strange I ordered the artist to draw his likeness.⁸

The textual and visual portrayals of Inayat Khan's death, both remarkably concerned with the physical manifestations of the dying process, illuminate how the emaciated body of an addict became a subject of the emperor's interest and inquiry in its own right.

THE HEALTH OF THE EMPEROR

In the *Jahangirnama*, Jahangir's unmistakable fascination with Inayat Khan's dying body likely arose in part from the emperor's own experience with opium and alcohol addiction. Jahangir had a great love of wine and opium, and his memoirs include numerous accounts of large drinking parties where wine and opium were openly consumed.⁹ That Jahangir was dependent on these substances is evidenced by the emperor's appointment of a courtier

8. Ibid. 279-281.

9. Ibid. 184-85, 212, 224, 286; Lisa Balabanlilar, "The Emperor Jahangir and the Pursuit of Pleasure," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19 (2009), 181-182.

whose sole responsibility was the care of royal intoxicants. When that courtier died, Jahangir replaced him with two new courtiers, one for wine and one for opium, who perhaps afforded Jahangir better access to and larger supplies of both substances.¹⁰ Jahangir was well aware of the repercussions of addiction, as his younger brothers Shah-Murad and Danyal had died from overindulging in alcohol before his ascension to the throne.¹¹ Moreover, the *Jahangirnama* records numerous episodes of the negative effects that addiction appears to have had on the emperor himself, including fevers and shortness of breath. For example, in July 1614 in Ajmer, Jahangir had tried to hide a fever and headaches from his courtiers, doctors, and harem, fearing that the revelation of his poor health might be detrimental to his country and subjects. Even with the help of doctors, Jahangir's fever did not abate until, one night, the emperor went to the shrine of Sufi Saint Mu'in al-Din Chishti and prayed to God for "the mantle of health."¹² Having suffered and recovered from his own overindulgences, Jahangir may have found something of a reflection of himself in the dying body of Inayat Khan.

MUGHAL NATURE STUDIES

Resonating with Jahangir on a deeply personal level, Inayat Khan's illness naturally occasioned considerable contemplation in the emperor's memoirs. However, the near-scientific precision of the *Jahangirnama's* textual and visual record of the courtier's demise reflects a broader imperial interest in the processes of nature, which is also witnessed in the records of unusual flora and fauna that Jahangir commissioned throughout his reign. In *The Indian Portrait, 1560-1860*, Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jariwala maintain that the emperor's fascination with the physical deterioration of Inayat Khan's body paralleled his interest in unusual animals and plants that were presented to him at court. Inayat Khan became "just such a curiosity, comparable in the Emperor's mind to the zebra, the chameleon or the encounter with the giant spider that he ordered his artist to record for him."¹³ When gifts of exotic animals were presented to Jahangir by foreign ambassadors, he frequently commissioned court artists to paint them from life "so that the aston-

10. The ingestion of intoxicants was firmly imbedded in the culture and courtly proceedings at the Mughal courts. Balabanlilar, "The Emperor Jahangir and the Pursuit of Pleasure," 173-186; Lisa Balabanlilar, "Lords of the Auspicious Conjunction: Turco-Mongol Imperial Identity on the Subcontinent," *Journal of World History* 18 (March 2007), 33-35.

11. *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 37-39.

12. *Ibid.* 161.

13. Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jariwala, *The Indian Portrait, 1560-1860* (Ahmedabad, India: Mapin Publishing, 2010), 82.

14. *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 133.

ishment one has at hearing of them would increase by seeing them.”¹⁴ Plants and animals depicted by Jahangir’s artists were typically not indigenous to the Indian subcontinent and were described as unique by the emperor. According to Som Prakash Verma, the emperor regarded the nature studies as a “source of amazement and pleasure, and accepted the importance of the documentation of rarities for later generations.”¹⁵

Jahangir was renowned not only for his efforts to document the living world but also for his support of knowledge-seeking in the fields of botany and biology. Paintings of flora and fauna produced during his reign provided scientific information with seeming objectivity. For example *Iris Plant with Bird and Dragonfly* (c. 1620) by Mansur illustrates the life cycle of the iris.¹⁶ The plant’s three opening flowers and two closed buds demonstrate how it appears at different stages of its flowering. Flat and folded leaves of various lengths add visual interest to Mansur’s composition, making it both aesthetically pleasing and revelatory of nature’s processes of growth and decay. The inclusion of a dragonfly, pursued by a predatory bird, reinforces themes of life and death, nourishment and deterioration, in the composition.

The *Jahangirnama* also features lengthy textual descriptions of scientific observations and experiments conducted by Jahangir to advance knowledge of animal biology. In his memoirs, the emperor not only commented on the mating and nesting habits of Sarus cranes and on the rate of decay of a sheep’s carcass, but also remarked on strange and curious natural anomalies that defied contemporary scientific understanding, including instances of predatory animals cohabitating with their natural prey.¹⁷ In one such account, Prince Dawarbaksh presented Jahangir with a lion that was evidently in love with a goat. Having never seen or heard of such behaviour before, the emperor ordered that the goat be taken away from the lion and that another goat and oxen be housed with the lion, in order to see what might transpire. The lion killed the new goat and oxen instantly. When the original goat was reunited with the lion, Jahangir observed that the lion rolled on its back and took the goat on its chest and licked its muzzle.¹⁸

15. Som Prakash Verma, *Painting the Mughal Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 89.

16. *Ibid.* 149.

17. *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 266-267, 269-270, 274, 277-279.

18. *Ibid.* 435.

Importantly, such observations attest to an imperial fascination with pre-natural processes, which could be interpreted as signs from God “that related to the health of the body politic and consequentially to the health and power of the sovereign.”¹⁹

The images of the dying body of Inayat Khan echo Jahangir’s pictorial strategies for recording unusual plants, animals, and events in the *Jahangirnama*. In particular, *Dying Inayat Khan* and the nature studies share an unmistakable focus on the physical manifestations of life-and-death processes. The preparatory drawing reveals how the artist initially positioned the body of the courtier in order to display as much of his emaciated body as possible. The *charpoy* is set at a slight angle and the torso of Inayat Khan is turned towards the viewer. The artist has purposefully opened the *jama* to fully display Inayat Khan’s skeletal frame. In the finished painting, the artist Balchand employs the same pictorial strategies in subdued colours that are characteristic of nature studies.²⁰ The painting generally lacks the opulence and intricacies of pattern-work characteristic of Mughal miniatures. However, the *charpoy*’s placement in a room amidst some luxury furnishings contrasts with the drawing’s singular focus on the figure. The positioning of Inayat Khan in a well-appointed interior space, with a woven rug and coloured glass vessels set in niches in the background, elicits a sense of the courtier’s high social status and recalls conventions and functions of traditional Mughal court portraiture, which served to preserve privileged social identities of royals, nobles, and courtiers for posterity.

TRADITIONAL MUGHAL COURT PORTRAITURE

Comparative analysis of *Dying Inayat Khan* and exemplars of traditional Mughal court portraiture further illuminates conceptualizations of health and mortality at the imperial court. Akbar, Jahangir’s father, was the first Mughal emperor to commission portraits of his court officials for the immortalization and “memorialization of the dynasty and its servants.”²¹ In the *Akbarnama*, Akbar’s court historian Abu’l Fazl explains that the portraits

19. A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 202.

20. See Mansur, *Chameleon*, brush and ink with green body colour on discoloured paper, The Royal Collection, Royal Library, Windsor Castle, and *A Zebra*, 1621, opaque watercolour and gold on paper, Victoria and Albert Collection. Both of these fauna studies have muted colour palettes and simple backgrounds that are broadly suggestive of the animals’ habitat.

21. Som Prakash Verma, “Elements of Historicity in the Portraits of the Mughal School,” *Indian Historical Review* 9 (1982), 63; Lisa Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire: Memory and Dynastic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia* (New York: I. B. Tauris; Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 64.

were made so that “those who have passed away receive new life and those who are still alive have immortality promised to them.”²² Though only individual folia and no complete albums of the court portraits of Akbar’s reign have survived, lifelike accuracy was evidently the standard for court portraiture.²³ Akbar’s memoirs relate that the emperor sat for his own portraits, and thereby suggest that accuracy was also a concern in portraits of the emperor himself.²⁴

Although Jahangir did not write about the function of court portraiture or the significance of naturalistic portrayals, the portraits commissioned by Jahangir demonstrate that he shared his father’s interests in lifelike accuracy and dynastic memorialization. Jahangir not only continued the tradition of commissioning portraits of court officials but also memorialized Safavid and Uzbek nobles, saints, scribes, artists, and musicians in portraits. As these portraits often served as models for subsequent paintings of court affairs, capturing the sitter’s likeness was essential.²⁵ Acquaintances of the sitter would authenticate the portrait’s accuracy if Jahangir did not know the sitter personally. Accurate likenesses assured that nobles and court officials, alive and dead, could be forever virtually ‘present’ in visual records of significant events. Unsurprisingly, when Inayatullah was awarded the court title of Inayat Khan in 1610, a traditional official court portrait was produced that appears to memorialize and immortalize his promotion (Fig. 3).²⁶ In the image, Inayat Khan’s portrait occupies the upper right and is accompanied by the portraits of three other servants of the Mughal court. A Raja’s portrait occupies the upper left, while portraits of two courtiers, labelled Abdul’l Khaliq and Jamal Khan, occupy the lower left and lower right respectively.²⁷ Recording the identity and high rank of the court officials, these naturalistic portrayals unquestionably adhere to the conventions of Mughal court portraiture established by Akbar and continued by Jahangir. Against a dark background, Inayat Khan’s brightly coloured, intricately patterned court attire includes a green and yellow-striped turban, a white *jama* decorated with orange and green flowers, orange patterned pants (*pyjamas*), and black and blue slippers with gold embellishments (Fig. 4). He wears two gold rings, a double pearl earring, and a gold-tipped green-scabbarded

22. Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire*, 64.

23. Verma, “Elements of Historicity in the Portraits of the Mughal School”, 63.

24. Ibid. 64; *A’in-i Akbari*, vol 1, trans. H. Blochmann, (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1965), 115.

25. Verma, “Elements of Historicity in the Portraits of the Mughal School”, 65.

26. *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 104.

27. The Raja’s name, written in Jahangir’s handwriting, is illegible. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Daulat Balchand, “Murad: Four Portraits: Leaf from the Shah Jahan Album (55.121.10.29)”. In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000 – <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/55.121.10.29> (November 2013). Accessed November 11, 2014.

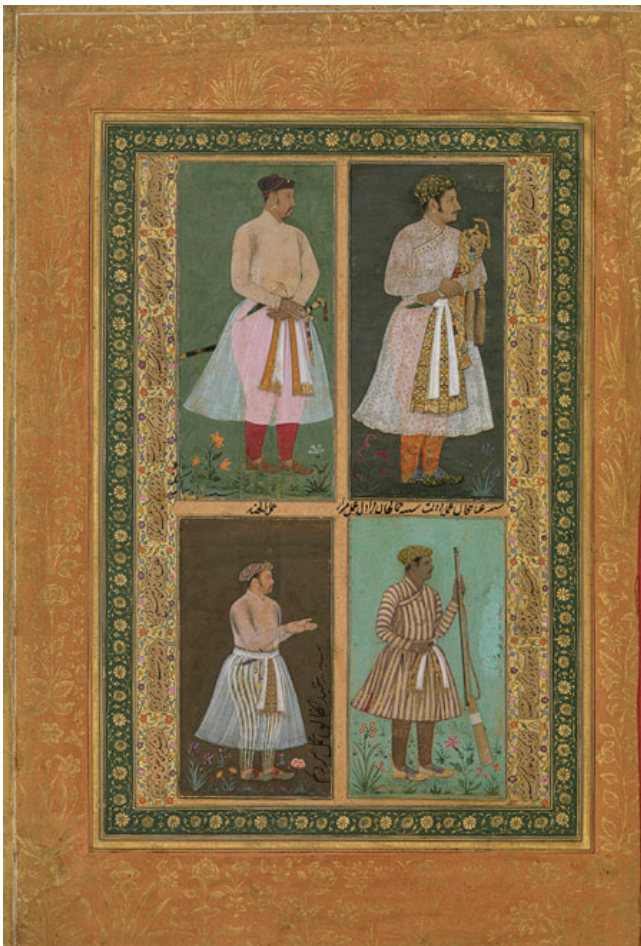


Fig. 3
Balchand, Daulat, Murad
Four Portraits: Leaf from the Shah Jahan Album
1610-1615
Ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian Foundation
Gift, 1955



Fig. 4
Detail of Inayat Khan Portrait
Balchand, Daulat, Murad
Four Portraits: Leaf from the Shah Jahan Album
1610-1615
Ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Purchase, Rogers Fund and The Kevorkian
Foundation Gift, 1955

dagger at his waist. Importantly, Inayat Khan holds an opulent state sword, a symbol of imperial authority and power, close to his chest.

The painting of *Dying Inayat Khan* (1618) differs considerably from the official court portrait of 1610. The passage of eight years and the effects of opium and alcohol use drastically changed the courtier's physical appearance. In the *Jahangirnama*, Jahangir followed the account of his initial shock at the sight of Inayat Khan's dying body with a reflection on God, mortality, and concerns of the soul, writing:

I found him so changed that I said, "At this time you mustn't draw a single breath without remembrance of God, and don't despair of His graciousness. If death grants you quarter, it should be regarded as a reprieve and means for atonement. If your term of life is up, every breath taken with remembrance of Him is a golden opportunity. Do not occupy your mind or worry about those you leave behind, for with us the slightest claim through service is much."²⁸

These last recorded words from Jahangir to his courtier are not concerned with his physical appearance or bodily ailments but are rather focused on the courtier's spiritual preparation for death. It may be argued that the shift from corporeal to spiritual concerns in the text is echoed in the transformation of the preparatory drawing into the finished painting of *Dying Inayat Khan*. While the preparatory drawing depicts only the courtier's skeletal frame on a *charpoy* with the meticulous detail of a nature study, the painting partly resonates with the status-conscious genre of portraiture by positioning the courtier in a decorated interior space.²⁹ The *charpoy* is centred in a room in which a costly carpet is spread on the floor and coloured glass vessels inhabit small wall niches. The visual opulence of the furnishings – a reference to the worldliness of Inayat Khan's corporeal life – is tempered by a dark, narrow, rectangular shape suggestive of a doorway in the background, which elicits a sense of a space beyond the visible world. Although the skeletal figure remains central in the finished painting, the

28. *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 281.

29. There is evidence that preparatory sketches may also include a background. See J.P. Losty and Malini Roy, *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire* (London: British Library, 2012), 137-139.

articulation of space around the body prompts consideration of spiritual as well as corporeal concerns. These textual and pictorial shifts from corporeality to spirituality in the records of Inayat Khan's death may relate to contemporary geographical and spiritual shifts of the imperial court and its self-representation.

SUFISM AND ALLEGORICAL PORTRAIT PAINTINGS

In 1615, three years prior to the creation of *Dying Inayat Khan*, Jahangir moved his court to Ajmer to continue the imperial patronage of Chishti Sufism established by his father Akbar. As discussed above, it was at the shrine of Sufi Saint Mu'in al-Din Chishti in Ajmer that Jahangir, racked with fever, had prayed to God for "the mantle of health" and was, in fact, restored to health in twenty-two days' time.³⁰ With the momentous geographical and spiritual shift of the imperial court, the mode of production of imperial portraiture changed as well. The portraits created in the year of the court's relocation and for five years after (1615-1620) highlight Jahangir's engagement with Sufism and emphasize qualities of divine Muslim kingship.

Jahangir's understanding of his position in both worldly and spiritual orders is revealed in allegorical portrait paintings. The eight known allegorical portraits of Jahangir (1615-1620) are contemporaneous with the transfer of the court to Ajmer and with *Dying Inayat Khan*. In Jahangir's allegorical portraits, Jahangir presents himself as a "millennial being": a prophesied saviour, spiritual guide, and material lord whose rule may last as long as one thousand years. A concept rooted in traditions and beliefs of sacred kingship and Sufi sainthood, a "millennial being" is one who bears a direct relationship with God that is often prophesied and affirmed by visions of local *shaykhs* and sages.³¹ Jahangir's birth had been prophesied by the Chishti *shaykh* Salim, after whom Jahangir was named. Because sages foretold that the "one named Nur-ur-din (light of religion) would succeed to power" at the end of Akbar's reign, Jahangir adopted the name "Nur-ur-din" when he took the imperial throne in order to fulfil the prophecy of a divine emperor.³²

30. *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 161.

31. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 1. A *shaykh* is "A man of the greatest learning and spirituality, who guided his disciples along the mystical path and dispensed help and advice to all who came to his *khanqah*." P.M. Currie, *The shrine and cult of Mu'in al-Din Chishti of Ajmer* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.

32. *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 22.

Rather than documenting actual events, allegorical portraits depict the prophetic visions of spiritual elites. In traditions of sacred kingship and Sufi sainthood, only those who have a close proximity to God, such as sages, *shaykhs*, and divine emperors, receive dreams and visions. According to Azfar Moin, Jahangir's self-representations as a divine emperor and "millennial being" in allegorical portraits not only recorded the emperor's visions but were also thought to possess "talismanic qualities."³³ In Mughal art, depictions of events that had not (yet) taken place, such as those seen in dreams, were created and understood as forecasters of the future.³⁴ By representing his visions in allegorical portraiture, the emperor Jahangir might will them into existence.³⁵

33. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 187.

34. *Ibid.* 188.

35. *Ibid.* 185-189. Moin examines the sacred role of painting in Mughal kingship from the Chest of Witness and the image of the Prophet to the images created by the Iranian "false prophet" Mani. Two instances in the *Jahangirnama* show the use of images and text to divine the future. Akbar refuses to behead his enemy Hemu because he had already drawn a picture of Hemu with disjointed limbs. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 185, and *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 41. There is also a notation in the *Jahangirnama* about Jahangir using text to divine the future. *Jahangirnama*, trans. Thackston, 132.

36. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 208.

37. *Ibid.* 208.

An allegorical portrait that portrays Jahangir as a "millennial being" capable of prophetic visions is *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaykh to Kings* (1615-1618, Fig. 5). In the composition, the emperor's vision is related as follows. Distinguished by an immense halo, Jahangir is seated upon an hourglass, handing a book to a Sufi *shaykh*. To the right of the *shaykh* is an Ottoman Sultan (possibly Ahmet I) and King James I of England. Although in reality Jahangir never met the two rulers, the striking naturalism and accuracy of their likenesses supports the illusion that the Sultan and King are 'present' at Jahangir's court. In the decorative framework above the painting, the poetry reads, "The King of the outer and inner domains is by the grace of God, Nur al-Din Jahangir ibn Akbar Padi-shah. Although outwardly kings stand before him, inwardly he always turns his gaze towards dervishes."³⁶ Hovering above Jahangir, one of two *putti* holds a broken arrow and bow, while the other covers its face, seemingly in deference to Jahangir. At the base of Jahangir's hourglass throne two angels write, "Allah Akbar! Oh King, may your age endure a thousand years."³⁷

The painting is an allegorical representation of Jahangir ringing in the new millennium of Islam as a "millennial being", which is signified by the time-piece of the hourglass and in the angels' inscription. At the turn of the Islamic millennium, a new leader was supposed to bring peace to the world. Jahangir



Fig. 5
 Bichitr, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaykh to Kings*, 1615-1618, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 180 x 253cm (Freer Sackler Gallery: The Smithsonian's Museums of Asian Art)

is here presented as that divine saviour, whose life and reign could extend for a thousand years if his gaze was always turned towards God. Kings of the world stand at his feet, and arrows, broken in the hands of the *putto*, are no longer needed. During the celebration of the new millennium, the emperor traditionally blesses the coming thousand years by patronizing holy men.³⁸ In *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaykh to Kings*, this holy patronage is signified by Jahangir's gift of a book to the Sufi *shaykh*, who is the focus of the emperor's gaze. The sand in the hourglass has begun to fall, signalling that the millennium – and Jahangir's era as a saint of the age – has begun.³⁹

Evidently concerned with time, (im)mortality, and the possibility of everlasting rule, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaykh to Kings* appears to also presage the future of Jahangir's reign, particularly with regard to his continued and future patronage of Chisti Sufism. The painting may precede and foretell his

38. Ibid. 208.

39. Ibid. 193.

visit to Ajmer in 1615, which he described as a pilgrimage taken as a student of the *shaykh*. Befitting the talismanic expectations of allegorical portraiture that, much like Jahangir’s records of preternatural events, could portend “the health of the body politic and [...] the health and power of the sovereign,” the holy patronage depicted in the painting was actuated by Jahangir’s visit to Ajmer.⁴⁰ Importantly, the production of allegorical portraits, nature studies, and *Dying Inayat Khan* was not merely contemporaneous but was rather constitutive of the layered visual culture, founded on omens, dreams, and visions, which reflected and informed Jahangir’s perceptions of his health, mortality and political potency.

Contemporaneous production of the allegorical portraits, nature studies, and *Dying Inayat Khan* prompts an inquiry into overlapping motivations for their production. Though self-styled as a potentially immortal “millennial being”, Jahangir came face-to-face with his own mortality when he experienced the deaths of his brothers and, particularly, when he observed the shocking deterioration of Inayat Khan and preserved the event in a visual record. Like the nature studies, experiments, and strange occurrences discussed in the *Jahangirnama*, Inayat Khan’s death was not only a unique and curious natural event worthy of commemoration but also a harbinger of the demise of the emperor and the body politic.⁴¹ *Dying Inayat Khan* has in common with allegorical portraits a foundation in prophetic visions. Rather than forecasting peaceful millennial rule, however, it warns of the emperor’s and the empire’s demise.

40. Ibid. 202.

41. Ibid. 202.

42. Corinne Lefèvre, “Recovering a Missing Voice from Mughal India: The Imperial Discourse of Jahāngīr (r. 1605-1627) in His Memoirs,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50 (2007): 452-489.

43. Ellison Banks Findly, *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 220-221.

CONCLUSION

Scholars have proposed that Jahangir’s own addiction was one cause of his ineffectual rule during the last years of his reign.⁴² Often cited as evidence is the increased administrative role played by Jahangir’s wife, Nur Jahan.⁴³ For Jahangir, it was the spectacle of Inayat Khan’s emaciated body, just prior to death, that likely spoke volumes about the health of his own body and of the body politic. Like the paintings of unusual flora and fauna and the records

of strange occurrences at Jahangir's court, Inayat Khan's death was both a curiosity and warning.

In the nature studies and portraiture discussed in this paper, scientific intrigue, religious devotion, and imperial politics are subtly combined. This is particularly the case with *Dying Inayat Khan*, now demonstrated to be representative, rather than anomalous, in the corpus of artworks commissioned by Jahangir for the *Jahangirnama*. The text and image of *Dying Inayat Khan* are, on the one hand, nature studies that facilitated understanding of nature's processes of death and decay. Corporeal concerns give way to spiritual ones, however, in both the text and the finished painting in the *Jahangirnama*. The shift broadly parallels the emperor's own transformation from mere mortal to millennial being in allegorical portraiture commissioned during his Ajmer period. *Dying Inayat Khan* therefore stands as evidence that the potency of Jahangir's visions of millennial dominion do not run unchecked. Visual and textual representations of portentous, preternatural events such as the death of Inayat Khan can be potent – and deeply personal – warnings of an emperor's impending demise.

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