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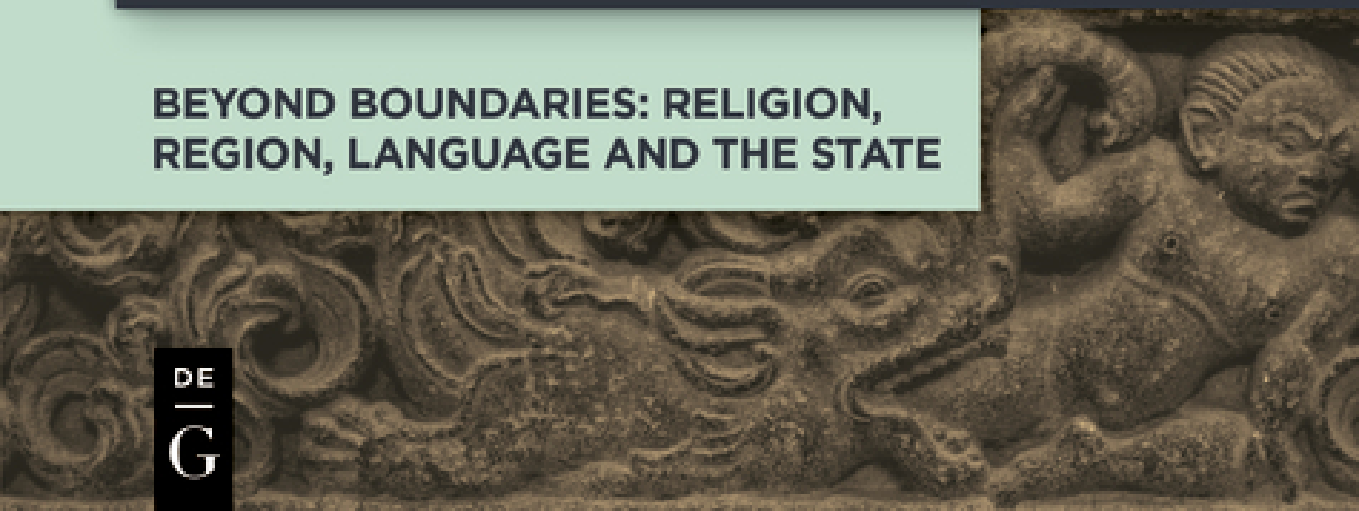
TRANSLATION AND STATE

THE MAHĀBHĀRATA AT THE MUGHAL COURT

Edited by Michael Willis

BEYOND BOUNDARIES: RELIGION, REGION, LANGUAGE AND THE STATE



Translation and State

Beyond Boundaries

Religion, Region, Language and the State

Edited by
Michael Willis, Sam van Schaik
and Lewis Doney

Volume 1

Translation and State

The Mahābhārata at the Mughal Court

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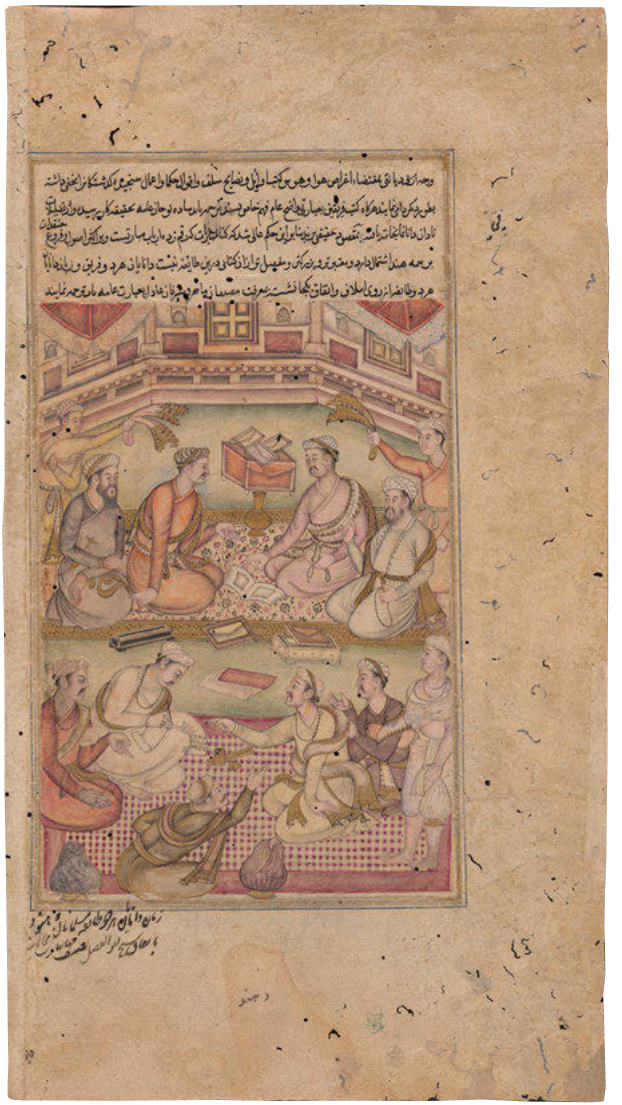

Figure 1: *Razmnāmah*. Free Library, Lewis M18, single folio from a dispersed copy prepared at the end of the sixteenth century, showing the Translation Bureau with Naqīb Khān discussing the *Mahābhārata* with Akbar while Hindu scholars debate the text. Above the painting is part of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*, corresponding to Chapter 2, page 18 in the translation. Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia.

Introduction

This book emerged from *Beyond Boundaries: Religion, Region, Language and the State*, a project funded by the European Research Council (No. 609823). The project has been hosted in London by the British Museum, the British Library, and the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London). The authors of this book would like to thank the European Research Council for funding our research and the Trustees of the British Museum for giving the project an administrative base. The work was completed at the Royal Asiatic Society where the editor is a Research Fellow.

Transmission networks and translation practices have been a key part of the project. Our ambition from the start was to develop methods that can be applied across disciplines, periods and historiographies. The translation of the *Mahābhārata* from the Sanskrit into Persian in the 1580s provides a useful test case and one that is especially attractive as a subject in view of the surviving documentation and number of manuscripts.

After the Persian translation was finished and emperor Akbar named it the *Razmnāmah* or 'Book of War', he ordered his advisor and courtier Abū al-Faẓl to write a *Preface*. This book is a study of that *Preface*.

Razieh B. Koshtely – one of the co-authors of this book – prepared a study of the *Preface* as part of her work at Simon Fraser University, but feeling that detailed knowledge of the Indian side was needed before going to publication, approached others to develop the context from the South Asian perspective. The collaboration that emerged as this process went forward is now placed before the reader. With the pre-modern Persian of India offering its own special challenges, the editor of this volume asked Hajnalka Kovacs at Harvard University to examine the *Preface* and prepare a fresh translation with further comments. We are grateful to Csaba Dezső for suggesting Hajnalka; her input has been invaluable. Vafa Movahedian, with her knowledge of Arabic, Persian and English, has worked through many problems posed by the manuscripts and their readings, and also prepared the Bibliography and Index.

Along the way, we have been helped by many friends and colleagues and it would be impossible to name them all. Apologising for inadvertent omissions, we wish to mention Audrey Truschke who offered her candid opinion at many points, and Bruce Sullivan who applied his extensive knowledge of the *Mahābhārata* to help us understand some of Abū al-Faẓl's comments, particularly his account of the verse numbers in each section. John Seyller contributed an invaluable appendix on the colophon of the British Library *Razmnāmah*. It is fair to say that his skill in reading and understanding Mughal library notations has transformed our understanding the *Razmnāmah* manuscript that sits at the heart of

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110501520-203

this study. Muntazir Ali in India has contributed in a similar way across the text and in the appendices. In England, Emily Hannam helped us locate relevant portraits of individuals involved in the translation while Saarthak Singh brought his knowledge of art history and the Mughal context into significant play. Finally, we are grateful to the staff at De Gruyter who attended to every detail with regard to the book's publication and circulation.

Comments need to be made about the conventions used and the position we see our book occupying in Asian studies. The conventions are easily dealt with: for Persian and Arabic we have followed the Library of Congress and applied the library's name authority files and uniform title system, with very slight modifications. This may not be to everyone's taste, a problem we hope is addressed in the Index where words are given in Arabic and Persian along with their transcription. Sanskrit follows long-established conventions. Some words that have become accepted parts of the English language (such as Singh) are not transliterated.

The task of placing a book in one's field of study is part of the prevalent apparatus of humanistic research. In a specialist sense, the position of our work is clear: as noted in Chapter 1, this is the first translation and detailed study of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*. As such, a case for publication does not need to be made, particularly when we think of the relatively small number of works on Mughal literature that have appeared over the last decade. But apart from the specialist niche which our work occupies, there is the question of describing how this book resonates with wider issues. This problem is normally addressed by relating a book to the prevailing theoretical environment and current political trends. Looking at older works in a different context gives some insight into this practice. Under communist rule, scholars in the eastern bloc were obliged to open with references to socialist theory, ideally supplemented with quotes from Marx and Lenin. In Hungary, this was known as the vörös farok or red tail.[1] The need for such irrelevant citations have faded with time, but the red tail has not disappeared from the academy. Authors often appeal to powerful theories and influential authors in order to justify their undertaking and show they are credible academic players. Accordingly, we find introductions that make reference to recent writing on legitimacy, power, identity, literary aesthetics and so forth. The theories are adapted or borrowed from the western context and the Asian material juxtaposed to that in an attempt to show its interest and 'relevance'. This sort of signalling tells us something about the political sociology of knowledge, but it does little to advance our understanding of Asian civilisation *per se*. An aware-

1 Ludomir R. Lozny, *Archaeology of the Communist Era: A Political History of Archaeology of the 20th Century* (Cham: Springer, 2017), 233 for which reference we are grateful to Csaba Dezső.

ness of new theories may alert us to unwarranted assumptions and unconscious biases on our part, but they hardly need elaboration as a validating device. As a consequence, we have taken a different tack and will use the rest of this introduction to reflect on the ways we have worked with Indo-Persian and Sanskrit texts.

The work we have selected – Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah* – is usually studied through the edition that was printed in Tehran between 1979 and 1981.[2] Although this was a landmark publication, we soon found problems that led us back to the oldest manuscripts – a line of investigation encouraged by the availability of these manuscripts in the British Library. These manuscripts gave fresh insights into the composition and structure of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* and a better understanding of how writers and translators worked in sixteenth-century India. Our detailed findings are given in the chapters that follow, but one example may be taken as illustrative of our method. The colophon of the *Razmnāmah* records the names of the leading lights – Hindu and Muslim – who converted the Sanskrit into Persian in the 1580s. The individuals have been known since the colophon was first published by Charles Rieu at the end of the nineteenth century.[3] It is fair to say that this colophon – and the fact that it records inter-communal interactions with the translation – has prompted a wide range of publications, including our own. Yet there has been no attempt to compare the manuscripts and determine if Rieu's reading of the colophon was correct. Our comparison of several manuscripts in the British Library confirms Rieu in his understanding, but shows that the text of the colophon is rather more complicated as a document than it first appears to be. Similarly, the manuscripts of the Mughal translations show that there were multiple versions of each text, and that these were copied, redacted and transmitted in a variety of ways. As a result – and not surprisingly – the historical sources of the sixteenth century give different accounts of the translation process based on how those involved perceived the activity and the distance at which they stood from the activity itself. Throughout this book, we have attempted to maintain this variation and texture.

Already in Rieu's catalogue of the Persian collections in the British Museum, and Ethé's companion catalogue of the India Office Library, the plural and sometimes contradictory voices in the sources are acknowledged.[4] These catalogues are in dialogue with each other, and within themselves as well, in that the authors commented on their work as it went forward and as their understanding

2 See Chapter 1 for citation and discussion of the edition.

3 Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum, London,* 3 vols (London: British Museum, 1879-83), 1: 57.

4 Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 2 vols (Oxford: University Press, 1903-37).

developed. These publications are difficult to read as books in the ordinary way, however, and their structure as catalogues often obscures the contributions they make. In this work, we return repeatedly to the catalogues as sources of interpretation and through them to the manuscripts. We have gone back to the manuscripts cited in every case and hope that this method will be taken up by those who follow. No doubt an insistence on codicology is a rather old-fashioned note on which to close, but it is inspired by a desire to return to the originals in all their complexity and by the wider realisation that the legacy of the Mughal literary tradition is no longer in Delhi or Hyderabad but in London at the British Library.

Michael Willis
23 April 2022
London

Abbreviations

AA	*Āīn-i Akbarī*, published as H. Blochmann and H. S. Jarrett, *The Aín i Akbari by Abul Fazl Allámi*, 3 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1873–1907); more recently W. M. Thackston, *The History of Akbar*, 8 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015–2022).
ABORI	*Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*
AN	*Akbarnāmah*, published as Henry Beveridge, *The Akbarnama of Abu-l-Fazl*, 3 vols. Biblioteca Indica no. 138 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1897–1939)
BL	British Library
BM	British Museum
BMQ	*British Museum Quarterly*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
IHQ	*Indian Historical Quarterly*
IIJ	*Indo-Iran Journal*
IO	India Office (collections now part of BL)
IESR	*Indian Economic and Social History Review*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JIH	*Journal of Indian History*
JIP	*Journal of Indian Philosophy*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
MT	*Muntakhab al-Tavārīkh, published as* George S. A. Ranking, Wolseley Haig and W. H. Lowe, trans., *Muntak̲h̲abu-t-Tawārīk̲h̲ by 'Abdu-'l-Qādir Ibn-i-Mulūk Shāh known as Al-Badāoni*, 3 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1884–1925)
RAS	*Royal Asiatic Society*

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Razieh B. Koshtely, Saarthak Singh, Vafa Movahedian,
Muntazir Ali, Michael Willis

Chapter 1
Translation and State

If you seek your heart's satisfaction, submit to dissatisfaction,
So that this very pain becomes a remedy for you.
Abū al-Faẓl, *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*.[1]

The multiplicity of texts produced in South Asia over the *longue durée* embody the cultural life of more than one quarter of the world's population and remain key to the preservation and dissemination of knowledge in all its forms. Unparalleled for complexity and linguistic variety, many elements of India's textual corpus have been translated, the best-known case being the migration of the Buddhist canon – and much ancillary literature – into Chinese and Tibetan.[2] Much less studied is the translation of Indic texts into Persian. Thanks mainly to state patronage, a vast number of texts were translated into different forms of Persian between the sixth and the nineteenth centuries. Stepping beyond ethnicity, religion and region, Persian became the prevailing *lingua franca* in Eurasia by the fifteenth century, with the Persophone population of South Asia being substantially larger than that in Iran itself.[3] Perhaps the most poignant example of this widening use of Persian is the stele from Galle, now in the National Museum in Colombo, with its trilingual inscription in Chinese, Tamil and Persian (Figure 2). It was set up in 1409 to register gifts from the Chinese emperor to Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim shrines in Sri Lanka.[4] In India, kindred interactions across linguistic, cultural and religious divides transformed the relationship of the Persian-speaking elites with the peoples they ruled. From the seventeenth century until the twentieth, increasing numbers of manuscripts were written, copied and read in Persian by Hindus,

1 Chapter 2, 29 (printed text). Page numbers in the 'printed text' refer to the edition published in Tehran, for which see below.

2 For recent insights, Dorji Wangchuk, *Cross-cultural Transmission of Buddhist Texts: Theories and Practices of Translation* (Hamburg: Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2016).

3 Juan R. Cole, "Iranian Culture and South Asia, 1500–1900," in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, ed. N. R. Keddie and R. Matthee (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2002), 15–35.

4 Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 121; for the inscription, M. Willis and Saarthak Singh, Galle Trilingual Stele – Persian Inscription, SIDDHAM (2020), retrieved March 2022.

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and from the eighteenth century by Europeans living in India.[5] The importance of this corpus as a monument of social, cultural and political exchange has been largely excised from historical memory due to aggressive colonial interventions and the ascendency of English in the twentieth century.

Figure 2: Galle, Sri Lanka. Trilingual Stele of Zheng He (鄭和) dated 1409 CE. Detail of the Persian portion. National Museum of Sri Lanka. Courtesy SIDDHAM (OB03125).

The earliest known Indic text rendered into Persian was the *Pañcatantra*, a book of wisdom in fable form that was translated into Pahlavi (Middle Persian) at the behest of the Sassanian ruler Anūshīrvān (reg. 531–79). This was undertaken in a period of significant cultural and technical exchange under the Maukhari rulers of north India.[6] The Pahlavi version is lost (unlike the game of chess which came from India at the same time), but it has survived in Syriac and Arabic translations from the Pahlavi. The *Kalīlah wa Dimnah* – as the Arabic version is known – was widely circulated.[7] Slightly later, in 773, the astronomical text *Brāhmasphuṭasiddhānta* was brought to Baghdad by an embassy sent from Sindh to the Abbasid court. This was translated by al-Fazārī into Arabic (rather than Persian) and it was through this vehicle that Indian numerals were transmitted to the middle

5 Examples are many and will be cited in this book in the appropriate place; as an indicative example we note Richard Johnson's personal copy of Mīr Qamar al-Dīn Minnat's *Dīvān*, *circa* 1782. British Library Or. 6633.

6 Hans T. Bakker, *The World of the Skandapurāṇa* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 64–66.

7 François de Blois, *Burzoy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalilah wa Dimnah* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1990). At the time of writing, the text is the focus of a project led by Beatrice Gruendler.

east and the west.[8] The next significant moment of exchange came with Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bīrūnī (*circa* 943–1048). A gifted polymath, he served as a court astrologer to Maḥmūd of Ghazna and travelled to India with Ghaznavid patronage. There Bīrūnī studied religion, science and society, producing *Researches on India* in about 1040. Edward Sachau's translation has instigated much secondary literature.[9] Another historian and official who flourished under Maḥmūd was Gardīzī who provides some glimpses of India in his *Kitāb Zayn al-Akhbār*.[10] Yet others have been noted by Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi in his monumental *ʿArab va Hind ke taʿalluqāt*, a work that, we may note in passing, has not received the attention it deserves.[11]

The subsequent establishment of the Sultanate in Delhi initiated a sustained period of engagement with Indian knowledge. Under the Tughluq kings, manuscripts were collected and translations undertaken in fields as diverse as astronomy, music and medicine.[12] The interests of Fīroz Shāh (reg. 1351–88) extended even to antiquities as evidenced by the Mauryan pillars he brought to Delhi, events recorded in the much-studied *Tārīkh-i Fīroz Shāhī*.[13] Texts were translated in fifteenth-century courts as well and embraced works on music, poetics, medi-

8 Sharīf H. Qāsmī, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Persian Translations of Indian Works* (New Delhi: National Mission for Manuscripts, 2014); David Pingree, "The Fragments of the Works of al-Fazārī," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1970): 103–23.

9 Edward Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910). Some further studies among many are Yohanan Friedmann, "Medieval Muslim Views of Indian Religions," *JAOS* 95, no. 2 (1975): 214–21; David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999): 630–59.

10 C. Edmund Bosworth, "Gardīzī, Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd-al-Ḥayy ibn Żaḥḥāk b. Maḥmūd," *Encyclopædia Iranica* X, no. 3 (2012): 314–15, retrieved January 2022; also Bosworth, "Gardīzī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, ed. Kate Fleet et al (2013), s.v., retrieved January 2022.

11 Sayyid Sulaimān Nadvī, عرب و ہند کے تعلّقات (Allāhābād: Hindūstānī Academy, 1930), translated as Nadvi and M. Salahuddin, *Indo-Arab Relations: An English Rendering of Arab O' Hind Ke Ta'llugat* (Hyderabad: Institute of Indo-Middle East Cultural Studies, 1962), summarised in Nadvi, "The Early Relations between Arabia and India," *Islamic Culture* 11 (1937), 172–79.

12 For example, Fabrizio Speziale, "Majmūʻa-yi Šamsī," *Perso-Indica* (2013), retrieved January 2022; Eva Orthmann, "Tarjuma-yi kitāb-i Bārāhī (occult sciences)," *Perso-Indica* (2017), retrieved January 2022. More generally, Saiyid A. A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975), 204.

13 For example, Vasileios Syros, "State Failure and Successful Leadership in Medieval India," *Studies in History* 37, no. 1 (2021): 7–25. The Indian pundits assigned to read the ancient edict inscribed on the pillar failed in the task however, see Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 199. The issue revisited in Finbarr Barry Flood, "Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices: Translating the past in Sultanate Delhi," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 95–116.

cine and farriery.[14] These important translations, still only studied in a formative way, were harbingers of many produced from the sixteenth century under Mughal patronage, beginning with emperor Akbar (reg. 1556–1605).

While earlier Muslim rulers had engaged with their non-Muslims subjects in substantial ways, Akbar is remembered as the first king to cross the social and religious borders of his kingdom in a sustained manner. He aimed to resolve some of the most complex and troubling issues surrounding the interactions of the peoples in the Mughal domain. Under Akbar's influence, the court developed a lively literary culture that explored the indigenous traditions of the Indian people, albeit through a Persianate lens. The stage was set when Persian was declared the official language of court: members of the imperial bureaucracy were required to learn Persian, including a large number of Hindus who sought employment in the administration.[15]

The royal library of the Mughals, now dispersed apart from the residue preserved as the 'Delhi collection' in London, had books in many languages including Turkish, Arabic and Persian.[16] Sanskrit manuscripts were also present.[17] This implies that all these languages were read, at least by some. And there can be little doubt that most people had speaking abilities in the local vernaculars. Of course Persian speakers and authors had been in India from an early time, perhaps the most famous among them being Amīr Khusraw of Delhi (d. 1325).[18] Over the centuries, a vibrant form of the Persian language developed and Indo-Persian culture – with a number of Turkic elements – flourished during the period of the Delhi Sultans (1206–1526).[19] At the same time there was contact with the Persian

14 Puyan Mahmudian and Stefan Reichmuth, "Ḥikmat-i Sulaymān-Šāhī," *Perso-Indica* (2020), retrieved January 2022; Eva Orthmann and Fabrizio Speziale, "Qurrat al-mulk," *Perso-Indica* (2021), retrieved January 2022.

15 Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1998): 317–49; Arthur Dudney, *Delhi: Pages from a Forgotten History* (Delhi: Hay House Publishing, 2015).

16 A starting point is John Seyller, "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library," *Artibus Asiae* 57, nos. 3/4 (1997): 243–349. A useful account of the the 'Delhi collection' is found in Bink Hallum, "New Light on Early Arabic *Awfāq* Literature," in *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice*, ed. Liana Saif et al (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 115–16.

17 Abū al-Faẓl mentions that Akbar's library held Sanskrit texts, see *AA* 1: 103.

18 Amīr Khusraw was practised in the styles of Persian poetry developed in medieval Persia and he became an iconic figure, Sunil Sharma, *Amir Khusraw: The Poet of Sufis and Sulṭāns* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005). Amīr Khusraw also famously composed in local vernaculars. For an early survey: N. S. Gorekar, "Persian Poets of India," *Indo-Iranica* 16, no. 2 (1963): 66–85.

19 Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 119; earlier A. Rashid, *Society and Culture in Medieval India, 1206–1556 AD* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969); Stefano Pellò, "Local Lexis? Provincializing Persian in

of Iran, especially Safavid Iran during Humāyūn's period of exile there.[20] Turkish had come to India with the medieval Turkic dynasties (the Tughluqs being the most prominent) and the first Mughal emperor Bābur (1483–1530) wrote his memoirs, the *Bāburnāmah*, in Çağatayca.[21] Despite this, and the ongoing contacts with central Asia, dialects of Turkish did not thrive in India. A working knowledge was maintained nonetheless, as shown by a Turkish grammar and vocabulary, explained in Persian, with a panegyric in prose and verse to Muḥammad Shāh (1702–48), to whom the work is dedicated.[22]

While Persian did not come to dominate the linguistic scene until the fourteenth century, the turn away from Sanskrit toward local vernaculars had began to develop from the twelfth century. The most telling evidence of this trend in north India is the *Rāüla vela*, a poetic work composed by the poet Roḍa. Preserved in an inscription from Dhār, Madhya Pradesh, it is now kept in the museum in Mumbai (Figure 3).[23] Paleographically speaking, the record shows similarity to the famous Dhār inscription of Arjunavarman (*circa* 1210–15) which takes the form of play called the *Vijayaśrīnāṭikā*.[24] The *Rāüla vela* belongs to a poetic type known as *Nakhaśikha*, well known from Sanskrit, Prakrit and the later literary tradition. The aim of works in this genre was to present a poetic description of the glory, charms and beauty of the Nāyaka or Nāyīkā – from head to toe – along with an account of their costume, coiffure and ornaments. The long history of *Nakhaśikha*

Fifteenth-Century North India," in *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-century North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 166–85.

20 For Humāyūn's reign the sources are given in W. M. Thackston, *Three Memoirs of Humayun* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2009).

21 Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Bābur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

22 Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts*, 2: 512, BL Add. 16759. The dictionary dedicated to Muḥammad Shāh is not alone; for other dictionaries and a philological study of fifteenth-century material: Dilorom Karomat, "Turki and Hindavi in the World of Persian: Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Dictionaries," in *After Timur Left*, ed. Orsini and Sheikh, 130–65.

23 Collected by John Malcolm and held in the Asiatic Society until transferred to the museum where it bears number SI 9, see Michael Willis, "Dhār, Bhoja and Sarasvatī: From Indology to Political Ideology and Back," *JRAS* 22, no. 1 (2012): 136; Harivallabh Chunilal Bhayani, *Rāula-vela of Roḍa: a rare poem of c. twelfth century in early Indo-Aryan* (Ahmedabad: Parshva Prakashan, 1994); study of the language in Mātāprasāda Gupta, *Rāula Vela aura usakī bhāṣā* (Ilāhābāda: Mitra Prakāśana, 1965) and Kailāśa Candra Bhāṭiyā, *Rāulavela: prārambhika Hindī kā pahalā śilāṅkita kāvya* (Naī Dillī: Takshaśilā Prakāśana, 1983); online resouces: M. Willis, Dhār stone slab of with the Rāüla vela of Roḍa, SIDDHAM (2022), retrieved April 2022.

24 Bhayani, *Rāula-vela of Roḍa*, v; S. K. Dikshit, ed., *Pārijātamañjarī alias Vijayaśrī by Rāja-Guru Madana alias Bāla-Sarasvatī* (Bhopal, 1968).

begins with the description of Umā in the *Kumārasaṃbhava* and is elaborated in later languages, especially in the Vaiṣṇava tradition. The *Rāüla vela* is unique as the earliest *Nakhaśikha* in early new Indo-Aryan literature.[25] The language of the poem imitates the characteristics of various contemporary dialects, but the underlying dialect represents a transitional stage between Apabhraṃśa and the earliest forms of Hindi.[26] The point here is that a work of this sophistication and conscious artistry does not emerge as a single product without precedent. Rather, it is indicative of a linguistic ground swell of which we know little apart from the increasing use of Apabhraṃśa as a transregional language.[27]

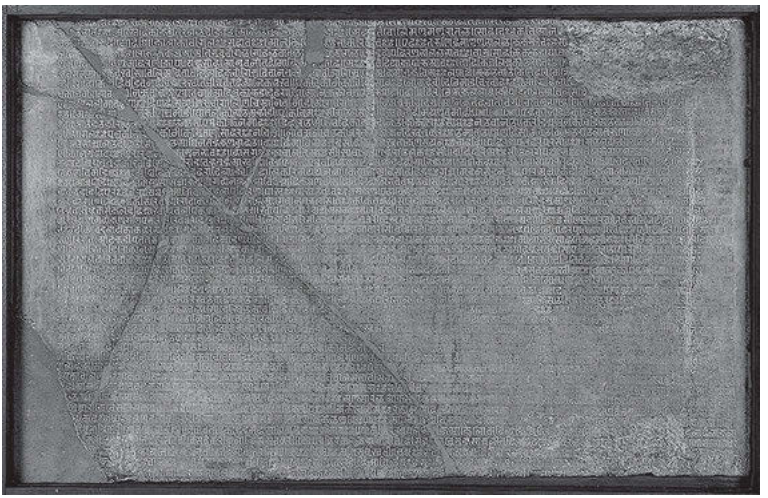

Figure 3: Dhār, Madhya Pradesh. Inscription containing the *Rāüla vela* of Roḍa, late twelfth or early thirteenth century. CSMVS, Mumbai. Courtesy SIDDHAM (OB06001).

25 Bhayani, *Rāula-vela of Roḍa*, xxxiv.

26 Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy*, 103.

27 Eva De Clercq, "Apabhramsha as a Literary Medium in Fifteenth-Century North India," in *After Timur Left*, 339–64; Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit, and the Language of Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017). Non-literary registers of language are still uncharted: Salomon, "British Museum Stone Inscription of the Tripurī Kalacuri Prince Valleka," *IIJ* (1996): 133–61, appendix in an undeciphered middle Indo-Aryan language; Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate, 1191–1526* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 170, the purport of the text is unclear due to the dialect being undeciphered, but we have now a clear photograph: Muzaffar Ansari and M. Willis, Lalitpur (Uttar Pradesh), Bansa, inscription dated VS 1415, ZENODO (2021), retrieved January 2022. Other examples could be cited. The best overview of the transformations of this period is Simon Digby, "Before Timur Came: Provincialization of the Delhi Sultanate through the Fourteenth Century," *JESHO* 47 (2004): 298–356.

As this movement accelerated it sometimes assumed an aggressive tone, as we read in the Jain text *Vajjālagga* of Jayavallaha.[28]

डज्झउ सक्कअकव्वं सक्कअकव्वं अ णिम्मिअं जेण ।
वंसहरं व पलित्तं तडअडतट्टत्तणं कुणइ ॥
[दह्यतां संस्कृतकाव्यं संस्कृतकाव्यं च निर्मितं येन ।
वंशगृहमिव प्रदीप्तं तटतटतट्टत्वं करोति ॥]

A pox upon Sanskrit
And those who write poems in it.
It sounds like a house of bamboo on fire –
Crackling, popping and spluttering.

Concurrently, vernacular commentaries on older texts increased the currency of spoken language.[29] The devotional movement that began to sweep through central and northern India shortly before the Mughals came to power also sought expression in the spoken. This religious development – to which we will return later in this book – used Hindi, notably the Braj dialect, and culminated in texts by Tulsī Dās that are still sung and regarded as inspired.[30] This literature was not, however, the focus of reproduction and translation into Persian at the Mughal court in the time of Akbar.[31] Rather, the desire was for a rendering of a special

28 M. V. Patwardhan, *Jayavallaha's Vajjālaggam with the Sanskrit Commentary of Ratnadeva* (Ahmedabad: Prakrit Text Society, 1969), 217 (31: 3). The *Vajjālagga* is not dated but has a Sanskrit *chāyā* of Ratnadeva dated 1393 (1336–37 CE); quotations are found in works of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (ibid., xxi), making this the likely chronological horizon.

29 Deven M. Patel, "Source, Exegesis, and Translation: Sanskrit Commentary and Regional Language Translation in South Asia," *JAOS* 131, no. 2 (2011): 256–66, and more recently Patel, *Text to Tradition: the* Naiṣādhiyacarita *and Literary Community in South Asia* (Columbia: University Press, 2016).

30 A useful introduction is Heidi Pauwels, *In Praise of Holy Men* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2002), more recently Busch, "Hidden in Plain View: Brajbhasha Poets at the Mughal Court," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010): 267–309 and Imre Bangha, "Early Hindi Epic Poetry in Gwalior: Beginnings and Continuities in the Ramayan of Vishnudas," in *After Timur Left*, ed. Orsini and Sheikh, 365–402.

31 Busch, "Hidden in Plain View," provides an innovative exploration of Hindi, which was present at court but here we are concerned with translation in Akbar's time. Girdhar Dās composed a 5,900-verse adaption of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsī Dās in AH 1033/1623-24 CE and dedicated it to Jahāngīr. There are copies in the British Library, one Or. 1251, for which Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 56. This copy, dated 1804 CE, belonged to Charles Stuart and was acquired by John Bridge, for whom see Willis, "Sculpture of India," in *A. W. Franks: Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, ed. Marjorie Cargill and John F. Cherry (London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press, 1997), 252. Two more copies are IOL no. 1965 and 1966 (IO Islamic 803 and 1694), see Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1095–99; further discussion in Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 77,

sort, namely, the creation of a unique Indo-Persian literature, drawing on the Sanskrit classics, most notably the *Mahābhārata*.

The translation of the *Mahābhārata* was commissioned by Akbar and named the *Razmnāmah* by him. The king then ordered Abū al-Faẓl, one of his most prominent courtiers, to write a *Preface* to the translation. The goal of the present volume is to explore Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*. This is termed a *khuṭbah* by Abū al-Faẓl, a word that often refers to the Friday sermon, but more generally means any speech, oration, treatise, introduction or preface. In this book we use the term *Preface* throughout.

Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* is a unique document in the literary history of Mughal India. Its importance lies in the fact that it is the only Akbar-period introduction that is an integral part the translation to which it refers.[32] As the author of the *Preface*, Abū al-Faẓl documents the reasons why the translation was undertaken and discusses the potential readers of the translation along with their likely criticisms. Abū al-Faẓl also describes the difficulties of dealing with textual sources and their interpretation. Finally, Abū al-Faẓl uses the *Preface* to reflect on the challenges he faced when charged with writing an introduction to a large work that was of particular interest to the king. Because of the king's interest, Abū al-Faẓl built his *Preface* around his vision of kingship, embodied in the person of emperor Akbar. This gives the *Preface* historical and political interest beyond its literary scope.

1.1 Abū al-Faẓl ibn Mubārak

Abū al-Faẓl is well known to historians as one of the leading figures at Akbar's court. In addition to Saiyid A. A. Rizvi's *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* – effectively a study of Abū al-Faẓl and his times – we have biographies by Nurul Hasan in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and Richard M.

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n. 5. Direct translations of Tulsī Dās come later: Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts* 1: 56, no. Or. 1249, dated 1804 CE, is the oldest copy we have traced. An abridged version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki and Tulsī Dās in Persian was published in the late nineteenth century: Parameshri Sahaya Masrur and Lalah Chanda Mal Chand, *Vazifah-yi Faiẓ* (Agra: Matba'-yi Mufid-i Am, 1893).

32 Introductions merit comprehensive exploration and our search has not been so, but we located a translation with introduction in E. Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale [etc.], 1905): 182, no. 222. The translation is by كوتال بن سترى which should likely be گوپال; the last name Satri is found in Andhra and probably represents Śastri. The manuscript is dated AH 1095/1683 CE but has a year in the Kollam era according to Blochet; this points to Kerala, see Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy*, 189–90.

Eaton in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.[33] These publications obviate the need here for a detailed account of Abū al-Faẓl's life. Yet for the individual who is the *de facto* protagonist of this book, a brief outline will not be out of place.

Abū al-Faẓl was born in Agra, but his family came from the Yemen and first settled in Sind. Abū al-Faẓl's grandfather shifted to Nāgawr and it was there that Abū al-Faẓl's father, Shaykh Mubārak, was born in 1506. Moving to Agra in 1543, Shaykh Mubārak established himself as a teacher of philosophy, developing expertise in the thought of Ibn Sīnā and the Ishrāqi wisdom tradition.[34] This school attracted notable scholars, among them ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī – an individual whose name will appear repeatedly in the pages that follow. Shaykh Mubārak's two sons, Abū al-Faẓl and Fayẓī, were well educated by their father thanks to the unique atmosphere of the household. Abū al-Faẓl, the younger son, was born in 1551. His devotion to learning became legendary: by fifteen he is reputed to have acquired an understanding of the Ishrāqis, Sufi thought and the subtleties of the Greek philosophers whose works had been translated into Arabic.[35]

Entering royal service, Shaykh Mubārak realised that the court was the best place to introduce reforms and strengthen the cause of the faith as he saw it. Abū al-Faẓl himself was introduced at court by his brother Fayẓī in 1574. Although enjoying favour, the Mubārak family had difficulty when faced with their traditionally-minded contemporaries. Shaykh Mubārak – who once expressed views in favour of the Mahdawi teachings of Muḥammad Jawnpūrī – was castigated by the *ʿulamāʾ* as a heretic. It may have been this personal attack that made Abū al-Faẓl see the need for toleration and the peaceful coexistence of religious ideas. According to Badāʾūnī and other learned men at the court, "Shaykh Mubārak, in as far as he pretended to be a Mahdawi, belonged to the class of innovator, and was not only himself damned, but led others to damnation."[36] This harsh attitude among the orthodox jurists and their allies continued until a senior noble came

33 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, published in 1975; Richard M. Eaton, "Abu'l-Faẓl ʿAllāmī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* I, no. 3 (2011): 287–89 and Nurul Hasan, "Abu'l Faḍl (Faẓl) ʿAllāmī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., from both of which we have drawn for the present sketch.

34 A school of philosophical and mystical thought, founded by Suhrawardī (1155–91 CE), with Graeco-Oriental roots built on a critique of Aristotelianism and advocating a Neo-platonic method that considered philosophy more than rational inquiry. Ishrāq is commonly used to refer to the 'internal illumination' or acquisition of knowledge based on a mystical unveiling. See Mehdi Amin Razavi, *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997).

35 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 91. More recently and more generally see Tahera Qutbuddin, "Arabic in India: A Survey and Classification of Its Uses, Compared with Persian," *JAOS* 127, no. 3 (2007): 315–38.

36 Badāʾūnī, *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, 2: 266 (hereinafter cited as *MT*).

out to support Mubārak and asked: "Has the world come to an end or is the Day of Resurrection at hand that in his court malicious fanatics have their way and good men are confounded?"[37]

The capacities of Abū al-Faẓl and Fayẓī were brought to Akbar's direct attention through Mīrzā ʿAzīz Koka.[38] Abū al-Faẓl subsequently presented the king with commentaries on the *Āyāt al-Kursī* and *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* and gained Akbar's appreciation.[39] An active participant in the well-known debates at the *ʿIbādat khānah* or House of Worship, Abū al-Faẓl came into contact with Hindu philosophers who influenced his thought. He particularly refers to Madhusūdana, about whom we give further details below.[40] Abū al-Faẓl also conversed with Zoroastrian religious leaders, Jesuit missionaries and developed links with the Jains. It was with an air of contempt after hearing the discussions in *ʿIbādat khānah* and the disparity of views among the *ʿulamāʾ* about their own faith that Akbar decided to be free of their influence. He was quoted as saying to Shaykh Mubārak "Since you are my teacher why do you not free me from dependence on these Mullās?"[41] It is in this light that Abū al-Faẓl mentions in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* that justice was the way to establish peace and prosperity in the empire.[42] As Blochmann remarked many years ago: "Abū al-Faẓl led his sovereign to a true appreciation of his duties and from the moment that he entered the court, the problem of successfully ruling over mixed races . . . was carefully considered, and the policy of tolerance was the result."[43] In Rizvi's estimation, Abū al-Faẓl was an outstanding intellectual figure and a versatile scholar who was cosmopolitan in his outlook and even-handed in his dealings with the religious communities of India.[44] Rizvi did recognise Abū al-Faẓl's limitations as a political philosopher, however, and we will return to this in Chapter 4.

During his time at Akbar's court, Abū al-Faẓl composed the *Akbarnāmah*, his most important work. This is a comprehensive source for the history of Akbar's time and consists of a three-volume record of Akbar's ancestors to the reign of to Humāyūn. It continues to Akbar's 46th regnal year (1602). The *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, the third volume of the *Akbarnāmah,* is itself three volumes and contains an administrative account of the empire and the apparatus of the court. It was completed in

37 See *AA* 3: 505.

38 The epithet Koka from Turkish *kokaltaṣ*, foster-brother. He was the foster-brother of Akbar and one of the leading nobles at the court.

39 See *MT* 2: 198. Badāʾūnī adds the rumour that the commentary was actually written by Abū al-Faẓl's father. It was completed in AH 983.

40 See below, 1.5 Translation Team and its Documentation.

41 See *MT* 3: 127 mentioned under X. Shaikh 'Abdu-'n-Nabī.

42 See *AA* 1: 12.

43 See *AA* 1: xxix.

44 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 123.

the 42nd year of Akbar's reign (1597–98), with an addition being made in the 43rd year (1598–99) on account of the conquest of Berar. As well as the *Akbarnāmah*, Abū al-Faẓl's works include translations from the Bible, the *ʿIyār-i Dānish* (a revision of the *Anvāri Suhaylī*) and a preface to the *Tārīkh-i Alfī* (now lost). His letters and refined prose writing inspired collections, one being the *Mukātabāt-i ʿAllāmī*.[45]

Abū al-Faẓl's close links to Akbar ultimately led to his death in 1602. Prince Salim – later emperor Jahāngīr – was impatient for the throne and conspired with the Bundelā ruler of Orrchā to assassinate him. This happened at Antri, near Orcchā, as Abū al-Faẓl was returning from a tour of duty in the Deccan. For such a distinguished Mughal writer, his tomb is a non-descript platform, without ornaments or a dome. We have not traced a separate portrait miniature of Abū al-Faẓl, but he does appear in the *Akbarnāmah* preserved in the Chester Beatty Library.[46] In this double page miniature, Abū al-Faẓl is shown presenting the king with a volume of his work.

1.2 Translation Bureau (*maktab khānah*)

To produce translations from Sanskrit and other languages, Akbar established a house of writing (*maktab khānah*) where court historians and scholars were instructed to translate works into Persian.[47] This Translation Bureau – as it has come to be called – was part of Akbar's policy of 'peace for all' and the implementation of Persian as the 'language of state' from 1582.[48] The Bureau produced a series of translations of works on astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, folklore and other subjects.[49]

45 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 108, IOL no. 271 (IO Islamic 2985).

46 Linda Y. Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, 2 vols (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 1: 217 and colour plate 39–40, for which reference we are grateful to Emily Hannam.

47 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History,* all of chapter 6 is relevant and is seminal historiographically.

48 Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*; M. Athar Ali, "Ṣulḥ-i kull," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved January 2022, more recently and importantly, Rajeev Kinra, "Handling Diversity with Absolute Civility: The Global Historical Legacy of Mughal Sulh-i Kull," *The Medieval History Journal* 16, no. 2 (2014): 251–95.

49 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 206; Qāsmī, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Persian Translations*. The online listing in *Perso-Indica*, ed. Carl Ernst, Fabrizio Speziale and Eva Orthmann is an essential source for translation literature in all periods.

An indicative example of the translation programme and its impact is the *Yogavāsiṣṭḥa*, a version of the Rāma story that was composed in Sanskrit some time before the thirteenth century.[50] First translated as the *Jūg Bāsisht* for Akbar, it was retranslated for Jahāngīr and then again for Prince Dārā in mid-seventeenth century.[51] The sublime philosophical and religious reflections in the *Jūg Bāsisht* drew the attention of Mīr Findiriskī, who visited India in the 1600s and through whose agency copies are found in Iran.[52] The most ambitious projects under Akbar in the 1580s were thematically related and focussed on the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, taken up in detail below.

From an early age, Akbar had spent his time learning how to become a skilful ruler and – with less-than-diligent tutors by some reports – he had little opportunity to develop his reading and writing skills. Although this led Akbar to being functionally illiterate (a point addressed by Abū al-Faẓl, as we shall see in Chapter 2), he was always on a quest for knowledge and had books regularly read out to him.[53] Among the works that caught his interest were legends and works of history.[54] He also had the verses of Persian poets such as Rūmī, Ḥāfiẓ and Firdawsī read aloud.[55] Among his known favourites was the *Ḥamzanāmah*, an Arabic collection of tales narrating the heroic exploits of Amīr Ḥamza, the uncle of the Prophet Muḥammad. He enjoyed the book sufficiently to commission a grand illustrated series of it. Now dispersed across collections world-wide, the *Ḥamzanāmah* is a unique monument of story-telling in the visual arts of Mughal India.[56]

50 Shankar Nair, *Translating Wisdom: Hindu-Muslim Intellectual Interactions in Early Modern South Asia* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020) outlines and updates the scholarship on the text.

51 Heike Franke, "Akbar's *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in the Chester Beatty Library," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 161, no. 2 (2011): 359–75; Alam "In Search of a Sacred King: Dārā Shukoh and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*s of Mughal India," *History of Religions* 55, no. 4 (2016): 429–59.

52 Nair, *Translating Wisdom*.

53 Akbar's illiteracy discussed in Ellen Smart, "Akbar, Illiterate Genius," in *Kaladarsana*, ed. J. G. Williams (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 99–107, an opposing view in Annemarie Schimmel, Corinne Attwood and Burzine K. Waghmar, *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art, and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 33.

54 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 205.

55 Despite Akbar's love of Rūmī, and an appreciation of him also by Abū al-Faẓl, a complete *Mathnawī* was not available in India at the time: Alam, "Mughal Philology and Rumi's *Mathnavi*," in *World Philology*, ed. Sheldon Pollock et al (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 178–200.

56 Seyller and W. M. Thackston, *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, 2002); Seyller, "A Dated Ḥamzanāma Illustration," *Artibus Asiae* 53, no. 3–4 (1993): 501–05.

Akbar's broad interests led him to appoint ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī as a translator and historian. Among the many tasks assigned to him, Akbar asked Badāʾūnī to translate the *Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne* (*Siṃhāsana Dvātriṃśikā*). This was a thirteenth-century Sanskrit story that took the throne of king Vikramāditya as its focus.[57] According to the legend, there were thirty-two little statues round the base of the throne and when king Bhoja of Mālwa attempted to sit on it, each statue posed a difficult question. After answering all the questions correctly, Bhoja was finally able to take his place on the throne.[58] After *Tales of the Throne*, Akbar ordered Badāʾūnī and Shaykh Bhāvan to translate the *Atharva Veda* (*Bed Atharban*), an anthology of hymns, incantations, and magical spells of great antiquity. Its translation went on until 1583 when it was abandoned.[59]

Around the same time, Akbar's widening concerns led him to create the *ʿIbādat khānah* at his new capital Fatehpur Sikri. This became a meeting place where spiritual leaders and people of different faiths – including Hindus, Jains and even Catholic Jesuits – gathered for discussion, creating an opportunity for an exchange of views in theological and philosophical matters.[60] The debates seem to have encouraged Akbar to see tolerance as means of resolving the problems generated by religious diversity in the empire. This was coupled with the creation of a new elite association, the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* or 'Faith of the Divine.' That was in 1581. Related to *Alfī* movements as Islam approached the end of its first millennium, the *Dīn-i Ilāhī* was an eclectic amalgam of practices and ideas drawing on Sufism, Hinduism,

57 The key work on the Sanskrit text is Franklin Edgerton, *Vikrama's Adventures: Or, The Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne, a Collection of Stories About King Vikrama, As Told by the Thirty-Two Statuettes That Supported His Throne, Edited in Four Different Recensions of the Sanskrit Original (Vikrama-Charita or Sinhasana-Dvatrinçaka)*. (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1926). A relatively recent translation is A. N. D. Haksar, *Simhāsana Dvātriṃśikā: Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne of Vikramaditya* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998).

58 There was a long interest in Bhoja and his legacy, see R. Babagolzadeh, "On Becoming Muslim in the City of Swords: Bhoja and Shaykh Changal at Dhār," *JRAS* 22, no. 1 (2012): 115–27; for an entry into this problem, Daud Ali, "Bhoja's Mechanical Garden: Translating Wonder across the Indian Ocean, circa 800–1100 CE," *History of Religions* 55, no. 4 (2016): 460–93.

59 See *MT*: 212–13 and M. Athar Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works at Akbar's Court," *Social Scientist* 20, no. 232–33 (1992): 39 where the problems encountered by the translators are explained.

60 An early study is Vincent Smith, "Akbar's 'House of Worship', or 'Ibadat-Khana'," *JRAS* (1917): 715–22, but more recently see Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, "Religious Disputations and Imperial Ideology: The Purpose and Location of Akbar's *ʿIbādat khāna*," *Studies in History* 24 (2008): 195–209. On the Jesuits there is much literature; a starting point is Audrey Truschke, "Deceptive Familiarity: European Perceptions of Access at the Mughal Court," in *The Key to Power?: The Culture of Access in Princely Courts, 1400–1750*, ed. Dries Raeymaekers and S. C. Derks (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 65–99.

Christianity, Jainism and Zoroastrianism.[61] In this context and at this time, Akbar became interested in the Sanskrit epics and related works, ordering translations of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* and the *Kathāsaritsāgara*.[62] These works allow for an understanding of the Mughal milieu, especially the translations of Hindu works from Sanskrit. They were built out of the linguistic and textual materials of both traditions and document the exchanges between them. As something new – at least in terms of the scale of resources devoted to their preparation – the translated Sanskrit texts are part of the dynamic literary and artistic landscape that was emerging at the time in northern India.

An insight into the Translation Bureau is provided by an illustrated folio in the Free Library, Philadelphia (Figure 1). This comes from a dispersed *Razmnāmah* that had a large number of illustrations and was completed in 1598–99.[63] The painting bears an attribution to Dhanu, an artist from the imperial atelier whose work appears in a number of books such as the *Dārābnāmah* (British Library Or. 4615) and several versions of the *Razmnāmah*, including the portion in the British Library of which the Philadelphia page was once a part.[64] The colophon is discussed separately and illustrated below. Dhanu worked in a sub-imperial style for which various explanations have been put forward.[65] Losty stated the work

61 The foundational study is Makhanlal Roychoudhury, *The Din-i-Ilahi; Or, The Religion of Akbar* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1952), often reprinted and now in a fourth edition. For a more recent assessment, see Heinrich von Stietencron, "Planned Syncretism: Emperor Akbar's Religious Policy," in *Hindu Myth, Hindu History, Religion, Art, and Politics* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 173–93 and Aziz Ahmad, "Dīn-i Ilāhī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved January 2022. Insight into how the later Mughals regarded the new cult is found in Z. U. Malik, "The Eighteenth Century View of Akbar," in *Akbar and His Age*, ed. Iqtidar Alam Khan (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999), 249–53.

62 For the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 65–66; for the *Harivaṃśa*, Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1090, no. 1951 (IO Islamic 1777); for the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, see the fragment in Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1105, no. 1987 (IO Islamic 2410), but note the imperial copy and information about the translation in Heike Franke, "Akbar's 'Kathāsaritsāgara': the Translator and Illustrations of an Imperial Manuscript," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 313–56.

63 Seyller, "Model and Copy: The Illustration of Three "Razmnāma" Manuscripts," *Archives of Asian Art* 38 (1985): 37–66. Other publications of the Philadelphia page include Stella Kramrisch, *Painted Delight: Indian Paintings from Philadelphia Collections: Philadelphia Museum of Art, January 26 to April 20, 1986* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1986), 156; Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 105 and figure 3.1.

64 J. P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: British Library, 1982), 123. Seyller, "Model and Copy," see Appendix A for a reconstruction of the miniature sequence.

65 Pramod Chandra, "Ustād Sālivāhana and the Development of Popular Mughal Art," *Lalit Kalā* 8 (1960): 24–46 proposed calling this a "popular Mughal style," a misnomer that has not helped

was "rarely of imperial calibre, and it must be assumed that they [the artists of the dispersed *Razmnāmah*] had left the court studio or were allowed to take on work from other patrons."[66] However that might be, after a disquisition on the styles of the pictures, Losty gave the manuscript to the nobleman ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān (1556–1627) on the basis of the names of the artists involved, a not implausible if so far unprovable attribution.[67]

The page in Philadelphia from this *Razmnāmah* seems to have been the first illustration in the manuscript and carries text that is part of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*.[68] The corresponding translation can be found in this volume in Chapter 2 where Abū al-Faẓl tells us that "the sublime decree went forth concerning the *Mahābhārata*" and that, as per the king's command, "the learned ones of both factions and the experts of language in both groups, by way of friendship and agreement, should sit down in one place, and should translate it into a popular expression."[69] Following this cue, the artist Dhanu has captured the interaction, showing two groups seated in the courtyard of a pavilion. The doors are shut, indicating this is a closed interaction. The scholars in the foreground are seated on a chequered floorspread in red and white, while those above sit on an arabesque carpet in the Persian style. The floor coverings not only make a distinction been Indian and Persian, they frame each group visually and define their spheres of communication – each is self-contained. The visual conventions of Mughal painting mean that 'higher up' is 'further back', but hierarchy is implied nonetheless with the Muslims at the top and the Hindus at the bottom. The Muslims are accorded attendants who fan them with gold-edged sashes. The representation of the books in the picture also follows established convention. Those at the top are of the Islamic type, in a vertical format with guard flaps. A storage box for books has three such volumes on its lid. Below, in the middle of the painting, is an Indian-style book in a rectangular format with a red cover, the loose folios evidently

explain the manuscript production and has had, consequently, no historiographical traction. Conclusions based on subjective assessments of style have often led to erroneous conclusions, for example see, Franke, "Akbar's *Yogavāsiṣṭha*."

66 Losty, *Art of the Book*, 124.

67 Ibid., 124. On the individual, Corinne Lefèvre, "The Court of ʿAbd-ur-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān as a Bridge between Iranian and Indian Cultural Traditions," in *Culture and Circulation*, ed. Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 75–106.

68 Following Seyller, "Model and Copy," Appendix A. Earlier pictures from the *Preface*, if indeed any were made, would have had Akbar as their theme, so perhaps this first picture is signalling what was was most significant in the translation project for the patron of this manuscript.

69 Chapter 2, 18 (printed text). Also see appendix 3 in this volume for the text from the Philadelphia page.

showing that it has just been flipped through in the course of the discussion. Two of the men in the lower group have further volumes of this type tucked under their arms. Indian books are often kept in cloth wrappers which may explain the bulging cloth bundles in the lower part, one of these held by the standing figure dressed in white who may be a Jain monk.

In clothing and physiognomy, the two groups seem indistinguishable at first glance. They are all shown seated on their knees, wearing a plain long tunic fastened diagonally and girdled by a richly decorated sash. Each member of the learned gathering wears a characteristic turban favoured under Akbar, formed by loops of plain cloth held in place by a band.[70] There is, however, a telling distinction between Indic and Persianate attires presented by an outlier in both groups: in the foreground, a standing figure dressed in a simple loincloth with a scarf over his bare torso and, right above him, a seated figure in a buttoned overcoat. There are also clear sectarian markers. In the group below, figures have sandalwood paste on their foreheads and necks, the two vertical stripes showing they are Vaiṣṇavas. As noted in our discussion of the translation team below, the Indic side was dominated by Vaiṣṇavas, so the painting conforms to the known facts in this respect. In the group above, two individuals wear beards as a marker of Muslim identity. A more subtle distinction is made by the rosaries which, though common to both Indic and Islamic traditions, are worn around the neck as garlands (*mālā*) by the Hindus and held in hand as prayer beads (*misbaḥah*) by the Muslims. Rather noticeably, the Hindus wear finger rings while the Muslims do not.

The awareness of difference in the otherwise unified assembly maps onto the 'proto-ethnography' seen in Abū al-Faẓl's writing, but we must be wary of reading the miniature as a straightforward 'document' of social, religious or ethnic identities. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the artist has followed the pictorial cue in the text of *Preface* in order to represent the "Brahmins of India". The translation of the *Mahābhārata* from Sanskrit proceeded through the intermediary language of Hindi, which was then rendered into Persian by Naqīb Khān. This important figure sits on the carpet to the left, recognisable from the portrait discussed in the relevant section below.[71] This means, of course, that the figure opposite Naqīb Khān is Akbar. The likeness may not be as compelling as other known portraits, but the text above makes the identity explicit: Akbar issued a decree that skilled

70 Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, "Representation of Middle Class Professionals in Mughal Visual Art," in *The Varied Facets of History: Essays in Honour of Aniruddha Ray*, ed. Ishrat Alam and Syed Ejaz Hussain (Delhi: Primus Books), 159–93, also Sylvia Houghteling, *The Art of Cloth in Mughal India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

71 See 1.5 Translation Team and its Documentation, section devoted to Naqīb Khān.

experts of 'both factions' should be assembled to translate the *Mahābhārata*. The Hindus with the necessary command of Sanskrit are shown with attitudes ranging from the reserved to the outspoken, emphasising that the translation was a matter of extensive debate and deliberation with consensus only emerging in Naqīb Khān's final Persian rendering. The artist has chosen to portray an unresolved moment of clamorous exchange, animated by gestures of objection, interruption and disagreement. Meanwhile, a scribe diligently makes notes about the proceedings on a scroll. This carries a Hindi sentence written in *nāgarī* that appears to say: "wisdom from a group of good people is great indeed."[72] By thus making the vernacular visible and legible to the viewer, Dhanu has provided a tangible sense of the intermediary language that stood between the Sanskrit source and Persian product.

1.3 The *Mahābhārata*

The translation of the *Mahābhārata* was part of a large cultural project and the most ambitious undertaking of the Translation Bureau. As India's celebrated 'national epic', the *Mahābhārata* was named after Bharata, the legendary emperor who founded the Bhārata dynasty and established a mighty kingdom. His realm was called Bhāratavarṣa, the 'country of Bharata', a term that became a name for India itself from at least the sixth century.[73] The Bhārata story is known to have existed in about the first century CE, but a number of stories and poems were added to it over time, until it became the great story – the word *mahā* means 'great' – in the fifth century.[74] As it stands now, the *Mahābhārata* is a vast work, filling nineteen

72 Read: *satvia* (understand: *sāttvika*) *gane* (read: *gaṇe*) *se jñana* (read: *jñāna*) *mahāmahat*. We are grateful especially to Dániel Balogh for help with the reading. The Persian notation on the lower left of the painting is discussed below.

73 The oldest epigraphic testimony for the *Bhāratavarṣa* seems to be in Aulikara records, Salomon, "New Inscriptional Evidence for the History of the Aulikaras of Mandasor," *IIJ* 32 (1989): 1–36, Dániel Balogh, *Inscriptions of the Aulikaras and Their Associates* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 151, inscription A9, verse 22: *lakṣma bhāratavarṣasya nideśāt tasya bhūkṣitaḥ | akārayad daśapure prakāśeśvarasadmayaḥ||*.

74 Dieter Schlingloff, "The Oldest Extant Parvan-List of the Mahābhārata," *JAOS* 89, no. 2 (1969): 334–38, reappraised in John Brockington, "The Spitzer Manuscript and the *Mahābhārata*," in *From Turfan to Ajanta: Festschrift for Dietrich Schlingloff*, ed. Eli Franco and Monika Zin, (Rupandehi [Nepal]: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2010), 75–87. From this document and the overall texture of the epic we reject Hiltebeitel's ahistorical perspective, despite the currency it unjustly enjoys, see Bruce M. Sullivan, "An Overview of Mahābhārata Scholarship: A Perspective on the State of the Field," *Religion Compass* 10, no. 7 (2016): 165–75. The shorter

volumes in the printed Sanskrit edition.[75] For this reason and for its content too, the *Mahābhārata* is rightly deemed an epic. It shares this term with its sister text, the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Regional variants of both are many, and commentaries and derivative stories are found all over Asia. The secondary literature on the epics is vast and written in several Indian and European languages.[76]

Like any text that is big, old and complex, there has been a long history of engagement, commentary and translation. The most well-known extract from the *Mahābhārata* is the *Bhagavad Gītā*. This is a poetic and philosophical work of great importance that has circulated separately for many centuries. In a popularising book, Richard Davis has explored the history of the *Gītā*, charting how it came to be composed, how it was transmitted and what it meant to successive generations of readers.[77] How the understanding of the *Gītā* has evolved, and how the text has prompted response, also holds true for the *Mahābhārata*, the container in which the *Gītā* was often transmitted down the ages. The key point for this book is that like the *Gītā*, the *Mahābhārata* was an active text in the Mughal period, sufficiently known to draw attention at the royal court and to inspire translation.

James Fitzgerald, who has devoted much scholarship to the *Mahābhārata*, has outlined how the epic justifies itself in three ways: (a) as a work providing a vision of the ultimate reality as the supreme god Viṣṇu, (b) as a sacred scripture – one of the Vedas – that was endorsed, possessed and supported by Brahmins, the priestly class, and (c) as a law-book or *śāstra* that supported royal action

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Bhārata is cited in the text itself, J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahābhārata: 1. Book of the Beginning* (Chicago: University Press, 1973): 22, "First he composed the collection of *The Bhārata* in twenty-four thousand verses, without the minor narratives; this much the learned call *The Bhārata* proper."

75 V. S. Sukthankar et al, eds., *The Mahābhārata*, 19 vols (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 1933–66). A long project of translation into English was started by J. A. B. van Buitenen and continues under James L. Fitzgerald and others.

76 A useful starting point is John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics: A Comprehensive Guide to the Mahābhārata (and the Rāmāyaṇa) and Scholarship on them* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) and J. L Brockington, Greg Bailey and Mary Brockington, *Epic threads: John Brockington on the Sanskrit epics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); more recently Sullivan, "An Overview of Mahābhārata Scholarship."

77 Richard H. Davis, *The Bhagavad Gītā: A Biography* (Princeton: University Press, 2015). There were, of course, medieval commentaries as well, an exemplary study being J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā: a condensed rendering of his Gītābhāṣya with copious notes and an introduction*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968); for other commentaries, Sukthankar, "Epic Studies: V. Notes on Mahābhārata Commentators," *ABORI* 17, no. 2 (1935): 185–202 and P. V. Kane, "The Mahābhārata and Ancient Commentators," *ABORI* 19, no. 2 (1938): 161–72.

after the example of Kṛṣṇa – himself an incarnation of Viṣṇu.[78] This places the work in theological terms: it is the ultimate point of reference. The narrative frame for this vision is rather more ordinary: the story itself is about two sides of a family that came to blows over who was the rightful heir to the kingdom. After many twists and turns, the conflict builds to such an extent that all the peoples of India are allied with one side or the other. In the end, two huge armies meet on the battlefield of Kuru, a location near Thānesar, north of Delhi. The result is a bloodbath of such awful proportions that it ushers in a 'dark age'. The protagonists consist of five brothers, the sons of king Pāṇḍu – known by their patronymic as the Pāṇḍavas. They were opposed by the hundred sons of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The sons of Pāṇḍu were each the children of a god as well and the gods play heavily in the story. The most important is Viṣṇu, who comes to earth incarnated as Kṛṣṇa, as just noted. He attempted to mediate between the sides but ultimately became the special advisor to Arjuna, one of the Pāṇḍava princes. Kṛṣṇa's advice to Arjuna is found in the *Gītā*, a discourse delivered just before the start of the great war.

After the first book – the Ādi Parvan – has set the scene, the story proper begins with the exile of the Pāṇḍavas to the forest for a period of twelve years. This comes about because Yudhiṣṭhira gambles away the kingdom in a complex game of dice, an essential part of the king's coronation rites or *rājasūya*.[79] The game is normally rigged – by the deployment of expiatory rites – so the king will win and then be crowned. In the *Mahābhārata*, however, Yudhiṣṭhira rolls the dice and loses everything.[80] He agrees to go into exile with his brothers and let Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons rule. After twelve years (and an additional year in hiding), the understanding was that half of the kingdom would be returned to them. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his cohort – the Kauravas – refuse to honour the agreement, the two sides are put on a collision course. The war that follows com-

78 James L. Fitzgerald, "India's Fifth Veda: the Mahābhārata's Presentation of Itself," in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 150–70; for the application of these ideas in specific contexts, see Michael Willis, *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 150–51.

79 J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahābhārata*: *Book 2: The Book of the Assembly Hall*; *Book 3: The Book of the Forest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 27–30; the issue and indeed the whole *Mahābhārata* narrative is outlined with skill in van Buitenen, "On the Structure of the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata," in *India Maior: Congratulatory Volume Presented to J. Gonda*, ed. Jacob Ensink and Hans Peter Theodor Gaeffke (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 68–84. The *rājasūya* features prominently in the Persian summary of the text, see translation in Chapter 2.

80 The *prāyaścittīyaṃ karma* or expiatory rites are among several ritual duties of the *purohita*, see Willis, *Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, 169.

prises the bulk of the *Mahābhārata* and explains why the Persian translation is called *Razmnāmah*, the 'Book of War'.

The *Mahābhārata* is not a happy tale. The Pāṇḍavas win the war but abandon all principles, slaying their relatives, father figures and many distinguished heroes. In the aftermath, Kṛṣṇa meets an unhappy end with his clan, while the mother of the Pāṇḍavas turns away from her offspring to become a recluse. The Pāṇḍavas themselves die off one by one as they travel north to the Himālayas. Only Yudhiṣṭhira is left in the end, with a dog as a companion. He makes it to the heavenly gate in the mountains but is asked to drive the dog away because it is unclean. He refuses because the dog is loyal. This turns out to be a test: the dog is, in fact, Dharma, his divine father. Yudhiṣṭhira is then ushered in but finds that heaven is inhabited by his old enemies, the Kauravas! The Pāṇḍavas are in hell, at which point Yudhiṣṭhira insists on being sent to hell to join his brothers. This also turns out to be a test: the Pāṇḍavas are actually in heaven. Having passed his last trial, Yudhiṣṭhira is allowed to enter.

The summary given here represents the overarching narrative and reflects the analysis of the story (and frame stories) favoured in Indological discourse. The work itself, however, is divided into eighteen books or Parvans and summaries of the *Mahābhārata* generally provide a Parvan-by-Parvan synopsis of the complex and varied contents of each section. This is true of ancient summaries and it is found also in the Persian version, given here in Chapter 2.

The word *Mahābhārata* is easy to use – as a title and label. It is quite another matter to determine what sort of manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* found their way to the Mughal court and were used to produce the *Razmnāmah*. While this problem has received preliminary attention from Audrey Truschke, much philological work remains to be done.[81] Not surprisingly, the translation follows the northern recension, but departs from it in a number of ways. The fourteenth book is based on the *Jaiminīyāśvamedha*, a twelfth-century work, rather than the Aśvamedha Parvan of the northern recension.[82] The *Anugītā* – a retelling of the *Bhagavad Gītā* – was excused in the process, not a particularly surprising decision considering the *Gītā* itself is given short shrift in the *Razmnāmah*.[83]

81 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 107–09; Truschke, "A Padshah like Manu: Political Advice for Akbar in the Persian Mahābhārata," *Philological Encounters* 5, no. 2 (2020): 112–33.

82 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 109, n. 45, citing J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Greece and India again: the *Jaimini-Asvamedha*, the Alexander-romance and the Gospels," *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 22, no. 1 (1970): 19–44. This Parvan has a separate literary life as evidenced by the copy dated 1761 CE in the time of Shāh ʿĀlam, see Rieu, *Supplement*, 14 (Or. 4561).

83 The distillation of the *Gītā* already in Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 59 (under Add. 7676), reiterated in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 285, n. 82. This treatment in the Persian

A major problem rests in the fact that the Sanskrit manuscripts are rarely as old as the Persian translation. In the first volume of the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, V. S. Sukthankar gave an instructive account of the manuscripts used to construct the *editio princeps:* "The oldest dated manuscript of our critical apparatus is a Nepali manuscript (Ñs) which bears a date corresponding to A.D. 1511. The other dates are: A.D. 1519 (K3), 1528 (V1), 1598 (D2), 1620 (Da2), 1638 (K2), 1694 (K4), 1701 (DR3), 1739 (K0), 1740 (B1), 1759 (B3), 1786 (B5), 1802 (D5), 1808 (Dn2), 1838 (M3), and 1842 (M8)."[84] The Mughals were unlikely to have had access to manuscripts from Nepal, so the copies of interest to our concerns are those from the northern recension that are dated 1519 and 1598. The point here is not which manuscripts give us the most ancient or authentic version – a separate Indological matter – but rather those that might have been available to the Mughals. The manuscript of 1519 is from Gujarat and the copy dated 1598 was written in Benares.[85] The *maktab khānah* was rather far from Gujarat geographically and while connections with Gujarat cannot be ruled out given Mughal the conquest of the region in the 1570s, the procurement of manuscripts there for the translation project seems unlikely. The manuscript of 1598 looks more promising, but the copy should be removed from account because it can be understood as having been copied during the revival of Sanskrit studies at Benares under the Mughals and so produced in the context generated by Akbar's translation projects in the 1580s.[86] On the face of the evidence, therefore, examples of the kind of manuscript that might have been used by the Mughals – never mind copies with notations or seals that show they were actually used – are non-existent. What we have are subsequent copies of copies, the number seeming to increase in the

has a direct bearing on the controversy about the insertion or not of the *Gītā* into the text: Oliver Hellwig, "Stratifying the Mahābhārata: The Textual Position of the Bhagavadgītā," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 60, no. 2 (2017): 132–69.

84 Sukthankar, *Prologomena* [to the critical edition of the Ādiparvan, Book 1 of the Mahābhārata] (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 1933), vi. Aside from the problems posed here, there is a developed historiography (and attendant controversy) about the critical edition, from Sukthankar "Epic Studies: III: Dr. Ruben on the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 11, no. 3 (1930): 259–83 (to give an early citation), to M. A. Mehendale, "The Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata: Its Achievement and Limitations," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 88 (2007): 1–16 (to cite something more recent). The substantial problems that need to be addressed are noted in Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *Philology and Criticism: A Guide to Mahābhārata Textual Criticism* (London: Anthem Press, 2018).

85 Sukthankar, *Prologomena* Ibid., xii and xvii.

86 Nair, *Translating Wisdom*, chapter 2 outlines the context in Benares.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[87] Manuscripts were certainly there to be had, but their assumed availability needs to be tempered with Badāʾūnī's remark about the *Mahābhārata*: ". . . the Hindu unbelievers consider it a great religious merit to read and to copy it. And they keep it hid from Musalmāns."[88] So manuscripts were known to be around, but they were kept under wraps. And however the Mughals managed to put their hand on copies, none of these are available to us now.

Whatever the obstacles may have been, the Mughals secured manuscripts and the translation was made. In the painting of the *maktab khānah* from the dispersed *Razmnāmah* discussed above, we see those involved with their books (Figure 1). At the top, four individuals discuss the translation, an open copy to hand. Those at the bottom are engaged in a lively discussion, while a scribe makes notes on a scroll. Directly in the middle, between the two groups, is a partially open Sanskrit manuscript. It is rectangular in format and has the usual red cover. This is surely part of the *Mahābhārata*, a picture of the very text used by the translation team. That book taunts us mercilessly: we can see it but we cannot reach out and turn the pages – it is in plain sight but forever beyond our reach. Abū al-Faẓl was wont to enrich his *Preface* with borrowed verses, as we shall soon see. His example and this miniature painting prompt our own quotation from the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (translation by Agha Shahid Ali).

جس نے آفاق پر پھیلایا ہے یوں سحر کا دام
دامن وقت سے پیوست ہے یوں دامنِ شام
اب کبھی شام بجھے گی نہ اندھیرا ہوگا
اب کبھی رات ڈھلے گی نہ سویرا ہوگا۔

آسمان آس لئے ہے کہ یہ جادو ٹوٹے
چپ کی زنجیر کٹے، وقت کا دامن چھوٹے۔
دے کوئی سنکھ دہائی، کوئی پایل بولے۔
کوئی بت جاگے، کوئی سانولی گھونگھٹ کھولے۔

Some terrible magician,
hidden behind curtains,
has hypnotized Time
so this evening is a net
in which twilight is caught.

87 Sukthankar, *Prologomena*, viii lists the MSS of the northern recension. It is difficult to speak of a "widespread currency" of the northern recension, as in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 108, because it is difficult to gauge whether copying was as prolific in the sixteenth century as it became later.

88 See *MT* 2: 219. The passage is given in full below.

Now darkness will never come–
and there will never be morning.

The sky waits for this spell to be broken,
for History to tear itself from this net,
for Silence to break its chains
so that a symphony of conch shells
may wake up the statues
and a beautiful, dark goddess,
her anklets echoing, may unveil herself.

A shadowy proto-history of the *Mahābhārata* – hidden behind the curtain of time if you will – can be traced archaeologically and epigraphically. The earliest representations in terracotta and stone sculpture belong to the Gupta period and the distribution of these remains are an important indication of where the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* took shape in north India.[89] The oldest textual references come from concurrent copper-plate charters. The Katni plates state: "And it is said in the *Mahābhārata* by Lord Veda Vyāsa (*uktañ ca mahābhārate bhagavatā vedavyāsena*)." There follows an imprecation defending the grant of land registered in the document.[90] As noted in an earlier study, the verses that appear in the plates are found only in late Malayalam copies of the *Mahābhārata* in the southern recension of the Āśvamedhika Parvan; in the critical edition the material is relegated to an appendix.[91] So, do we have texts from the fifth and sixth centuries? In some ways, yes, in other ways, no. The copper-plates charters belong to the genre of legal documents pertaining to land ownership. They were buried in

89 Laxshmi Greaves, "Pawāyā: An Early Terraced Brick Temple," *South Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2014): 181–205; Greaves, "Locating the Lost Gupta Period *Rāmāyaṇa* Reliefs from Katingara, Uttar Pradesh," *Religions of South Asia* 12, no. 2 (2019): 117–53; Greaves, "The Enigma of the Centauress and Her Lover: Investigating a Fifth-century Terracotta Panel from Ahichhatrā," in *Framing Intellectual and Lived Spaces in Early South Asia: Sources and Boundaries*, ed. Lucas den Boer and Elizabeth A. Cecil (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 13–50; Greaves, "Śiva Dakṣiṇāmūrti or Sage Nārāyaṇa? Reconsidering an Early Terracotta Panel from Ahichhatrā," *Papers Presented at the Twenty-Second International Conference of the European Association for South Asian Archaeology and Art held at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities/National Museums of World Culture, Stockholm*, ed. E. Myrdal and S. A. Abraham (New Delhi: Dev Publishers & Distributors, 2020), 135–52; Greaves, "The 'best abode of virtue': Sattra represented on a Gupta-Period Frieze from Gaṛhwa, Uttar Pradesh," in *Primary Sources and Asian Pasts. Beyond Boundaries*, ed. P. C. Bisschop and E. A. Cecil (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 64–105.

90 For text and illustration, see Dániel Balogh et al, Katni Plates of Jayanātha, SIDDHAM (2019), retrieved January 2022.

91 Willis, *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, 86. The argument here appears also in Muntazir Ali et al, "The oldest manuscripts from India and their histories: a re-assessment of IO Loth 4 in the British Library," in press.

the ground and entirely forgotten until modern times, at which point they passed to museums and Sanskrit scholars. Texts otherwise – literary, scientific and religious works – are much later copies, as the perusal of the introduction to any printed edition will show.

We happily examine the available edition of the *Mahābhārata* thinking we have access to an ancient work and the minds that created it. But we have no such thing or experience. What we are reading is a redacted text that has passed through innumerable hands and copies until, finally, it reached the desks of the modern editors. This edition contains bits and pieces from many periods assembled around an old core – effectively it is an assemblage built by many individuals over the *longue durée*. This rather spoils the fun, but critical historicism tends to do that: as Johannes Bronkhorst has pointed out, the historian will, sooner or later, fall out with pious orthodoxies and received wisdoms.[92] So while people have got used to the idea of Indian Sanskrit texts being 'ancient', there is a distortion on two sides. Firstly, texts like the *Mahābhārata* may be set in hoary antiquity and recount the interactions of gods and men, but there is no actual trace of the *Mahābhārata* before the fifth century CE, as the epigraphic and artistic evidence shows. The manuscripts themselves are a thousand years later, their date telling us just as much about the sixteenth century as the sixth (CE or BCE, depending on your disposition). By the time we reach the eighteenth century, there are many copies of both the Persian and Sanskrit versions. It is indicative and ironic that the oldest complete copy of the *Mahābhārata* in the British Library is dated 1776 and was collected by Nathaniel Halhed, the same individual who owned the sixteenth-century *Razmnāmah* that is at the heart of this study. Written in a vertical format following the precedent of Mughal books, this *Mahābhārata* is not actually a coherent single copy, but rather a bundle of Parvans by different scribes.[93] The earliest printed versions of the whole epic, the first of which appeared from 1834 as far as we are aware, were based on anthologies like this, and perhaps also on complete manuscripts with all the Parvans, but the history of the later transmission of the epic, in parts or in whole, and its entry into the early print culture of India, are subjects that await exploration.[94]

92 Johannes Bronkhorst, "Indology, What Is It Good For?" *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 161, no. 1 (2011): 115–22.

93 Cecil Bendall, *Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1902), 22 (Add. 5569–76).

94 Anindita Ghosh, "An Uncertain 'Coming of the Book': Early Print Cultures in Colonial India," *Book History* 6 (2003): 23–55.

1.4 Sources and Dates for the Translation and *Preface*

The translation of the *Mahābhārata* was commissioned by Akbar in 1582 and finished in 1584.[95] Badāʾūnī informs us that Akbar bestowed the title *Razmnāmah* or 'Book of Wars' on the translation and that "Shaykh Abū al-Faẓl . . . wrote a preface of the length of two quires (*juzv*) for that work."[96] With his usual acerbity, Badāʾūnī could not help adding that this was "contrary to the dictates of the commentary on the *Āyāt al-Kursī* that he had composed."[97] The tone of this remark adds weight to Badāʾūnī's testimony that Abū al-Faẓl composed the *Preface*. Any doubt in the matter is removed by Abū al-Faẓl own statement that the task was assigned to him by the king:[98]

> they made me – who has lost the thread of speech – the trustee of the keys of discourse. I received permission from the audience-hall of the source of overflowing bounty to say a few words appropriate to this subject.

Aside from the *Preface*, the business of writing down the translation of the *Razmnāmah* was entrusted to Naqīb Khān. According to several manuscripts, he took one and a half years and finished the task in Ramaḍān or Shaʿbān 992/ September 1584 CE.[99] He was helped in the matter by several scholars. The account of this team and the translation process in our sources are not as consistent as we

95 This according to the calculations of Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 41, citing the account and dates given by Badāʾūnī. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 210 says the project started in AH 990 without citing his source; Yael Rice, "A Persian Mahābhārata: The 1598–1599 Razmnama," *Manoa* 22, no.1 (2010): 126 says the process took four years to complete, from 1584–88 but also does cites no source for this information.

96 See *MT* 2: 321.

97 See *MT* 2: 321. Rizvi, "Abu'l Fazl's Preface to the Persian Translation," 198 sheds useful light on Badāʾūnī's critical remark.

98 See translation in Chapter 2, 2 (printed text). The word "they" refers to Akbar, the plural used in deference.

99 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1087, no. 1944 (IO Islamic 1702) also mentions Naqīb Khān and the time he took. As Ethé notes, this manuscript is almost identical to IO Islamic 2926 which dates to 1737 so it is likely that IO Islamic 1702 is also of the mid-eighteenth century. Rizvi, "Abu'l Fazl's Preface to the Persian Translation of the Mahabharat," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 13 (1950): 198 gives completion as "Monday 27 Shaʿbān 992H/September 4, 1584" following an early-nineteenth century manuscript in the Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh. (The calculators we have used give the date 3 September 1584). The Aligarh MSS are catalogued in Shailesh Zaidi, *Hinduism in Aligarh Manuscripts: Descriptive Catalogue of Persian Mss. of Maulana Azad Library, A.M.U., Aligarh* (Delhi: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna, 1994). BL Or. 12076, a six-

might like. Avoiding the temptation to explain away the differences – in a modern version of the old Hindu doctrine of *ekavākyatā* – and avoiding also the hopeful assumption that a factual core can be located somewhere in the evidence, we are obliged to accept that our sources are sometimes removed from the events they describe and were written by people who perceived or understood events in different ways. Equally important is the subsequent transmission of the information: the evidence may have been distorted, misunderstood or redacted. Acknowledging all these possibilities, we look here at what is known about the translation from the Persian side, reserving an examination of how the Persian intersected with Sanskrit and Hindi for the next section.

In his account of the life of Ḥājī Sulṭān Thānesarī, Badāʾūnī says that "he was employed for four years, alone and without any co-adjudicator, on the translation of the *Mahābhārata*, which is known as the *Razmnāmah*, and what was begun by him was finished by Naqīb Khān."[100] Somewhat later in his work, Badāʾūnī gives an account of the *Mahābhārata* translation, a passage that provides useful documentation of the process outside the *Preface* of Abū al-Faẓl. We give his text here in full.[101]

> Among the remarkable events of this year is the translation of the *Mahābhārata*, which is the most famous of the Hindu books, and contains all sorts of stories, and moral reflections, and advice, and matters relating to conduct and manners, and religion and science, and accounts of their sects, and mode of worship, under the form of a history of the wars between the tribes of the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, who were rulers in Hind, according to some more than 4,000 years ago, and according to the common account more than 80,000. And clearly this makes it before the time of Adam: Peace be upon him! And the Hindu unbelievers consider it a great religious merit to read and to copy it. And they keep it hid from Musalmāns.
>
> The following considerations disposed the Emperor to the work. When he had had the *Shāhnāmah*, and the story of ʾAmīr Ḥamza, in seventeen volumes transcribed in fifteen years, and had spent much gold in illuminating it, he also heard the story of Abū Muslim and the *Jāmiʿ al-Ḥikāyāt* repeated, and it suddenly came into his mind that most of these books were nothing but poetry and fiction; but that, since they were first related in a lucky hour, and when their star was in the act of passing over the sky, they obtained great fame. But now he ordered those Hindu books, which holy and sober sages had written, and were all clear and convincing proofs, and which were the very pivot on which all their religion, and faith, and holiness turned, to be translated from the Indian into the Persian language, and thought to himself, "Why should I not have them done in my name? For they are by no means trite, but

teenth-century manuscript with paintings by artists from the royal studio, gives the month as 9 Ramaḍān, so Friday 14 September 1584. The discrepancy is taken up in Chapter 4.

100 See *MT* 1: 173, under XXXVII Ḥājī Sulṭān of Thānesar. This noted in Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 3: 1078. Rizvi, "Abu'l Fazl's Preface to the Persian Translation," 198, n. 8 notes that Badāʾūnī corrects himself in his memoir with regard to the completion date.

101 See *MT* 2: 219–21, under events for year AH 990/1582-83 CE, here with part of the translation following the revisions offered in Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 40.

> quite fresh, and they will produce all kinds of fruits of felicity both temporal and spiritual, and will be the cause of circumstance and pomp, and will ensure an abundance of children and wealth, as is written in the preface of these books."
>
> Accordingly, he became much interested in the work, and having assembled the learned men of India, His Majesty directed that the book *Mahābhārata* should be translated. For some nights, His Majesty personally explained it to Naqīb Khān.[102] On the third night His Majesty summoned me, and ordered me to translate it, in collaboration with Naqīb Khān. In three or four months, I translated two out of the eighteen chapters (*fan*) of that stock of useless fables, at which the eighteen worlds may remain in wonderment.[103] I wrote out two chapters. And what censures I did not hear (from Akbar), so that the accusations that I am 'an unlawful earner' or 'a turnip eater' [apparently expressions used by Akbar] meant as if my destiny from these books was just this. Destiny is Destiny!
>
> Thereafter Mullā Shīrī and Naqīb Khān completed a section, and one section Sulṭān Ḥājī of Thānesar brought to completion by himself. Shaykh Fayẓī was then appointed to write it in verse and prose, but he too did not complete more than two chapters (*fan*). Again, the said Ḥājī wrote out two sections and rectified the errors which were committed in the first round, and fitting one part with another, compiled a hundred fasciculi. The direction was to establish exactitude in a minute manner so that nothing of the original should be lost. In the end upon some fault, His Majesty ordered him to be dismissed and sent him away to Bhakkar, his native city, where he still is. Most of the interpreters and translators are in hell along with the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, as for the remaining ones, may God save them, and mercifully destine them to repent . . . His Majesty named the work *Razmnāmah*, and had it illustrated and transcribed in many copies, and the nobles too were ordered to have it transcribed by way of obtaining blessings.[104]

In essence, Badāʾūnī records here that Akbar became interested in a translation of the *Mahābhārata* because he thought it would produce temporal and spiritual benefit, as indeed the text itself says. Accordingly, he directed a group of learned men to undertake a translation and then reviewed the text with Naqīb Khān. Badāʾūnī was then called on to translate the *Mahābhārata* "in collaboration with Naqīb Khān." In three or four months Badāʾūnī managed to translate two of the eighteen Parvans. After that, Mullā Shīrī and Naqīb Khān finished a portion. Meanwhile Sulṭān Ḥājī Thānesarī completed another portion by himself, and turned his hand to a round of corrections. While we cannot reconcile all these

102 Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 40 extrapolates and inserts "had it" in this sentence, thus: "His Majesty personally (had it) explained . . ." but we have removed this. Our point, explored in Chapter 4, is that Akbar already knew the story.

103 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 208 notes a counterpoint in this sentence with Abū al-Faẓl's opening verses in the *Preface*.

104 The comments at the end of the passage show that Badāʾūnī was writing after the event: most of the team are dead, and copies were being made, a horizon that suggests the 1590s, as discussed in Chapter 4.

details with what Badāʾūnī says earlier on the matter, it would at least seem safe to say that some of the parts by Sulṭān Ḥājī Thānesarī represent those portions on which he worked alone for several years.

Abū al-Faẓl offers a slightly different version of events. In his account of the royal library and its contents he says:[105]

> The *Mahābhārata* which belongs to the ancient books of Hindūstān has likewise been translated, from Hindi into Persian, under the superintendence of Naqīb Khān, Mawlānā ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī and Shaykh Sulṭān Thānesarī. The book contains nearly one hundred thousand verses: His Majesty calls this ancient history *Razmnāmah*, the 'Book of War'. The same learned men translated also into Persian the *Rāmāyaṇa*, likewise a book of ancient Hindūstān, which contains the life of Rām Candra, but is full of interesting points of philosophy.

As can be seen from this quote, Abū al-Faẓl excuses Mullā Shīrī from the project and passes over the solo enterprise of Sulṭān Ḥājī Thānesarī. Mullā Shīrī's disappearance may be due to the fact that Abū al-Faẓl credits him with a translation of the *Harivaṃśa*, a poetic appendix to the *Mahābhārata*.[106] But Badāʾūnī, in his summary of Mullā Shīrī's life, reiterates that he participated in the *Mahābhārata* translation.[107] The differences can be rationalised by saying that the *Harivaṃśa* is integral to the *Mahābhārata* according to some, while others see it as an appendix and separate work. While it is possible to harmonise the accounts in this way, we are more inclined to accept Badāʾūnī's report. He was closer to the actualities and the actual translation. Abū al-Faẓl's omission of Thānesarī was probably due to the simple fact that he did not want to invoke the name of a person who had fallen from royal favour.

It is worth touching on the complexities of the Persian rendering of the *Mahābhārata* and the manuscript copies because they show that the translation was not a stable text. Just as the *Rāmāyaṇa* completed by Badāʾūnī did not acquire absolute authority, so too the *Mahābhārata* translation was subject to adaptation, simplification, versification and abridgement.[108] For example, British Library Or.

105 See *AA* 1: 96–7 under *Āʾīn* 34.

106 See *AA* 1: 106.

107 See *MT* 3: 345, under LXVI Shīrī

108 Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 77, n. 3 summarises the discussion surrounding the completion of the *Rāmāyaṇa* translation. Fathullah Mujtabai, *Aspects of Hindu Muslim Cultural Relations* (New Delhi: National Book Bureau, 1978), 68–71 gives a useful listing of the Persian versions. Badāʾūnī (*MT* 2: 346–47) says he started in AH 992/1584 CE and later (*MT* 2: 278) reports he finished in Jumādā I 997/March-April, 1589 CE. But Seyller reports that a photograph of the colophon of the Jaipur manuscript which he studied clearly shows the date as (Dhū al-Ḥijjah) 996. So either there is a scribal error in the Jaipur manuscript (unlikely) or Badāʾūnī is (a) not remembering correctly, (b) the edition of the *MT* is faulty, (c) Badāʾūnī continued to tinker with

4561, dated 1761 CE, follows part of the version prepared for Akbar but is shorter and couched in a simpler style.[109] Another manuscript – prepared at Akbar's request in AH 1011/1602-03 CE – combines abridged prose translations in Persian of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* (called the *Ācārya Parvan*).[110] In a subsequent translation by Prince Dārā, the *Bhagavad Gītā* was interpolated as an episode in the sixth Parvan (Bhiṣma Parvan) of the *Mahābhārata*.[111] The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsī Dās and *Mahābhārata* were even combined, as in British Library Or. 1249, which has four folios added at the end containing an abridged Persian version of the episode of Duryodhana and Durvāsas from the *Mahābhārata*.[112] Ethé commented on subsequent variations, a significant case being the metrical re-working of all eighteen Parvans of the *Mahābhārata* by Badīʿ al-ʿAṣr, a prolific author who wrote under the poetic name Anjab.[113]

Setting aside the fluid nature of the translated text, we return to the sixteenth century and the first royal copy. This is the *Razmnāmah* kept in the palace at Jaipur, made with many miniature paintings.[114] Internal evidence from the paintings shows that it was well underway by 1584, the year in which Daswant, a gifted artist and court favourite, committed suicide.[115] Scribal notes in the margins, studied by art historians, indicate paintings continued to be made for the manuscript until

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the translation after the Jaipur copy was made, or (d) a combination of all or any of these possibilities.

109 See Rieu, *Supplement of the Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1895), 14.

110 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1092, no. 1955 (IO Islamic 753). Prepared by Ṭāhir Muḥammad bin Iʿmād al-Dīn Bakhsh (or al-Dīn Sabzwārī), for whom see Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 137–39.

111 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1089, no. 1949 (IO Islamic 1358). This manuscript came into the hands of Richard Johnson in July 1778 as noted on the first folio. The text is the same as BL Add. 7676, Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 59.

112 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 56. The manuscript is dated 1804 CE. The paper and hand of the added folios are different, but our point here is that the texts were seen as kindred. As an aside, we find also abstracts made of Fayẓī's version: Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 3: 1042 (folios 112–18).

113 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 2: 711; Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1081. Anjab flourished in the mid-eighteenth century.

114 For which see Ashok Kumar Das, *Paintings of the Razmnama: The Book of War* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2005).

115 Ibid, 12. As Das notes, the death of the artist is reported by Abū al-Faẓl. See further, Das, "Daswant: His Last Drawing in the *Razmnama*," in *Mughal Masters: Further Studies* (Bombay: Marg, 1998), 52–67. The passage dealing with this, and *Āʾīn* 34 as a whole, were studied and retranslated by C. M. Naim in Pramod Chandra, *Ṭūṭī-nāma of the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Origins of Mughal Painting* (Graz: Akad. Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1976), appendix C.

December 1586.[116] The *Preface* came at this time or slightly later, as shown by several remarks embedded in the *Preface* itself. The most precise statement about the date comes where Abū al-Faẓl refers to regnal year 32 and states the equivalent is AH 995.[117] The Hijrī year 995 ran from 12 December 1586 to 2 November 1587. As a consequence, there can be little doubt that the *Preface* dates to the final month of 1586 or the first ten months of 1587. The year 32 is confirmed by another remark from Abū al-Faẓl:[118]

> He is favoured by fortune to such an extent that from the start of his kingship and accession to the throne of the caliphate – since which thirty-two solar years have elapsed – whoever from among the nobles, Sufis and theologians, or other classes of people, out of inner blindness, challenged him, or thought of opposing him, [divine] will resulted in the immediate nullification [of their plotting] and their disgrace in front of the elite and the common folk.

The final chronological clue is less precise. In the section where Abū al-Faẓl praises Akbar's stellar qualities he states:[119]

> He possesses such an intelligence that he has complete awareness [of everything], as it befits him, from the age of one year old to the present when his exalted age is in the middle of forty and fifty years – and God (glory to Him!) willing, having fully enjoyed physical life for the sake of the order of the world, he will attain eternal life.

If we take "the middle of forty and fifty years," to means Akbar's forty-fifth year exactly, then this would be toward the end of 1587.[120] But the foregoing considerations show that this statement has to be understood in a general way. With the last confirmed date for work on the royal *Razmnāmah* being December 1586, and the *Preface* itself giving a timeframe between 12 December 1586 to 2 November 1587, it seems likely that Abū al-Faẓl finished his script at the end of 1586 or the early part of 1587.

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116 Das, *Paintings of the Razmnama*, 13. The colophon, taken up in an appendix in this volume, is discussed in M. A. Chagatai, "The Illustrated Edition of the Razm Nama (Persian Version of the Mahābhārata) at Akbar's Court," *BDCRI* 5 (1943): 281–329.

117 Chapter 2, 22 (printed text), appearing in the BL manuscript on folio 22v. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 212 notes Abū al-Faẓl wrote the *Preface* "in 995/1587," but does not cite his source. The year is already mentioned in Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1081.

118 Chapter 2, 16 (printed text).

119 Chapter 2, 14 (printed text).

120 Vincent Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), 11 (retained in 2nd revised edition), corrected in S. K. Banerji, "The Birth of Akbar, the Prince, October 15, 1542 AD," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 3 (1939): 1002–12; Banerji's date already given in Thomas William Beale and H. G. Keene, *An Oriental Biographical Dictionary: Founded on Materials Collected by the Late Thomas William Beale* (London: W. H. Allen, 1894), 46.

After it was finished, the *Preface* was then transmitted with copies of the *Razmnāmah*, some of which were being illustrated by court artists into the 1590s and beyond.[121] The royal copy in Jaipur is out of reach, however, and the text-proper of that manuscript has not been available for more than a century. As a consequence, scholars have depended on other copies. Rizvi used the lithograph *Tarjumah-i Mahābhārat*, published by Nawal Kishore Press, Lucknow.[122] As this work is not accessible to us, we do not know which manuscripts were used to shape the edition. More recently, the most important work was undertaken by Muḥammad Riżā Jalālī Nā'īnī and N. S. Shukla who drew on five manuscripts to prepare an edition that was printed in Tehran between 1979 and 1981.[123]

1) A manuscript in two volumes dated Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1023 [i.e. January 1615 CE] in the British Museum [now British Library], based on a copy of AH 1007. [There is no manuscript with these particulars in the British Library and we assume the authors mean BL Add. 5641–5642 which is indeed dated Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1007 as noted before. The source of year 1023 may be the death date of Naqīb Khān.[124]]
2) A manuscript with miniatures in the British Museum [now British Library] in three volumes dated AH 1177. [This is British Library Add. 5638–5640, dated between AH 1175 and AH 1177/1761-63 CE.[125]]
3) A manuscript belonging to the National Museum library in Delhi from the year AH 1233/1817-18 CE. [According to the published hand list there are two *Razmnāmah* MSS in the National Museum, accession numbers 683 and 63.47, but it is not known which one is dated and which was consulted.[126]]
4) A microfilm of a manuscript in the collection of the late A. Shadravan, written in *shikastah* by one 'Dr Tarachand' but without a date.

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121 Truschke, "The Mughal Book of War: A Persian Translation of the Sanskrit Mahābhārata," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31 (2011): 507; Das, *Paintings of the Razmnama*, 16 deals with the paintings, some as late as 1617 CE.

122 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 210. He does not give the date of the publication but a copy of it is held in the University of Chicago and catalogued as *Mahābhārat-i Fārsī* from the same press [between 1880–1910?], also noted in Truschke, "Naqīb Ḫān, Razm-nāma," *Perso-Indica*, retrieved January 2022.

123 Muḥammad Riżā Jalālī Nā'īnī and N. S. Shukla, *Mahābhārat* (Tihrān: Kitābkhānah-'i Ṭahūrī, 1979–81), 32–33, the listing here with our comments in brackets.

124 Mentioned at Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57. It is fruitless otherwise to investigate the cited date of AH 1023.

125 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57–58, also discussed below.

126 Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, *Persian Manuscripts of National Museum, New Delhi* (IGNCA: New Delhi, 2021). It may have been 63.47 given that MS is cited in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 281, n. 27.

5) A manuscript dated 1871 in Nā'īnī's personal library with the *Bhagavad Gītā* included. [Prince Dārā's *Gītā* was included accordingly in the printed edition, displacing the truncated treatment of the *Gītā* that this is given in the 1580s translation, as noted above.]

Nā'īnī and Shukla's printed text is disappointing to the extent that it lacks the sort of apparatus we might expect in a work of this type. The editors made use of the sources just listed but there are no comments on or justifications for the readings. This led us to suspect that the text printed in the Tehran edition and the British Library manuscript dated 1599 might diverge, the 1599 copy giving us a clearer picture of the *Preface* as it stood in Akbar's time. These suspicions were allayed by a comparison that showed no substantial differences in terms of general content and the order of the composition. The printed text thus gives us a reasonable working version of the *Preface* as it was in the sixteenth century. As a consequence, our translation of the *Preface* in Chapter 2 uses the Tehran edition and throughout we refer to this as the 'printed text'. In addition to the printed text, we have referred to the British Library manuscript at each step and have signalled in the footnotes where the differences lie. The *Preface* in the British Library manuscript is illustrated at the end of the volume.

A comparison of the manuscript and the printed text – restricted to the *Preface* itself – also allows us to see if copyists brought in material from elsewhere to elaborate the work, adding what they thought might be helpful or necessary for readers. The approach was prompted by the British Library copy which was given a summary of contents in the 1680s. At the end of this summary, the author Basant Rāe (more on whom below) makes an instructive comment about his effort. Here we give Halhed's translation of the passage:[127]

> Whereas the Mahabharet is of prodigious length, & it contents are not quickly to be discovered without an Index to clear it up, therefore the Humblest of the Slaves of the Court, Vesent Ray, some of Kāshee Rām, son Ray Mal Kait . . . in the time of his service with the Excellent Nevāb Shaisteh Khān took great pains to arrange this Summary of contents which he finished on the first day of the month of Rāmāzān in the 31th Year of the prosperous reign of Mohee ed deen Muhammad Aurangzeeb Alemgeer – the King and Defender of the Faith. The composer hopes that those who shall discover errors herein, will have the Good sense to correct them.

This shows that the text was circulating without a synopsis and that there was a need – in some minds at least – for an introduction to deal with the "prodigious length" of the work. Moreover, we know that an abridged version of Abū al-Faẓl's

127 Halhed, *Translations from the Sanskrit* (BL Add. 5657), folio 4.

Preface was being transmitted in the eighteenth century, as evidenced by a copy with parts dated 1734, 1735 and 1742.[128] A number of manuscripts also give the *Preface* in an incomplete form, while others omit it entirely. These differences show that while the *Preface* was not subject to intense reworking like the translations proper, changes were made nonetheless. These changes are indicative of the concerns of readers over time.[129] Our interests being the sixteenth-century shape of the work, it will be for others to chart the reading and understanding of the *Preface* in the late Mughal and colonial periods.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the organisation and content of the *Preface*, a few observations on the British Library manuscript will not be out of place. Nathaniel Halhed (1751–1830), an employee in the East India Company, acquired the manuscript in India sometime before 1785 when he returned to England. Halhed had a good working knowledge of Persian and wrote *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776) and *A Grammar of the Bengal Language* (1778). The British Museum purchased Halhed's collection of manuscripts on his death in 1830. The *Razmnāmah* was then registered under the numbers Add. 5641–5642.[130] With the separation of the British Museum and British Library in the 1970s, the *Razmnāmah* went to the British Library but kept the same numbers.

The manuscript is in a western binding in two volumes and is dated Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1007/June-July 1599 CE. The first volume has Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* and Parvans 1–11 of the Persian translation. The second volume has the remaining text, with the date 1007 appearing at the end of several Parvans (Figure 4).[131] The location of this manuscript in the Mughal library from 1599 to 1609 is shown by the notations on the closing folio (Figure 5).[132] A reading of these notations was generously provided by John Seyller and is given here in an appendix by him. In addition to showing that this copy was in the royal library – the names of the librarians are known – the notations record that the whole text was copied by Nāṣir al-Dīn Lāhawrī.

128 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1083 no. 1931 (IO Islamic 762). See appendix 2 in this volume.

129 The issue of changing concerns of readers, and so texts, are discussed in Michael Willis and Tsering Gonkatsang, "An Archaeology of the *Dba' bzhed* Manuscript," in *Bringing Buddhism to Tibet: History and Narrative in the DBA' BZHED Manuscript*, ed. Lewis Doney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 42–43.

130 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 58.

131 The date is also written in the colophon, see below.

132 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 3: 1078 corrects the date to AH 1107. The notations in the MS, for which see appendix 1 in this book, suggest that the date AH 1007 should be retained.

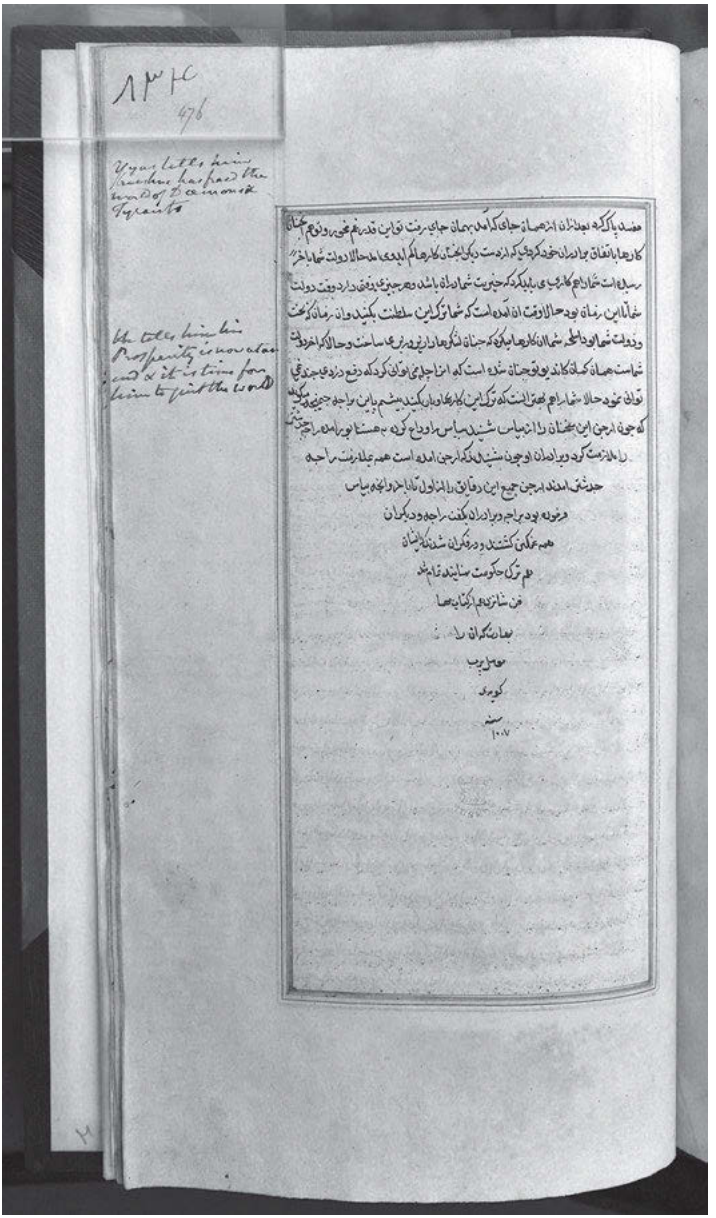

Figure 4: *Razmnāmah*. BL Add. 5641-5642, folio 476r, showing Parvan ending and the date AH 1007 with notations of Nathaniel Halhed. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

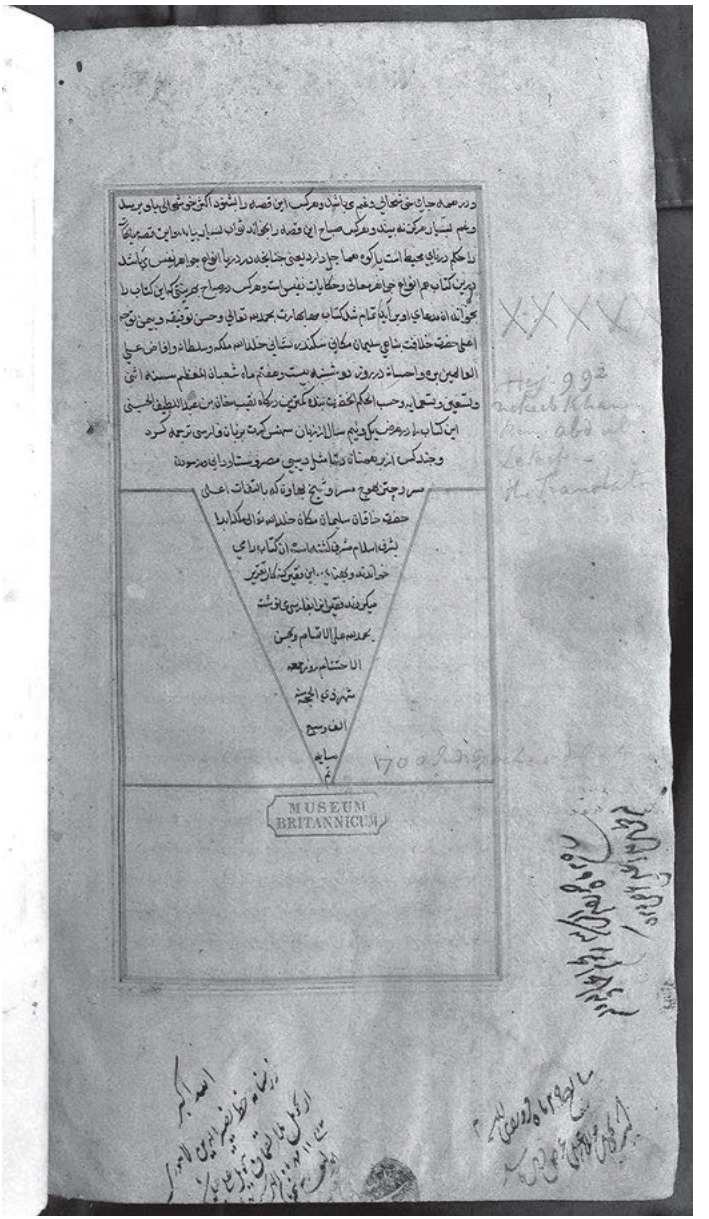

Figure 5: *Razmnāmah*. BL Add. 5641-5642, folio 481v, showing colophon mentioning Naqīb Khān, his collaborators in the translation and the date 27 Shaʿbān AH 992, with notations of Nathaniel Halhed and Mughal librarians, for which see Appendix 1. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

Sometime after 1609, the manuscript left the royal library and passed to Mīrzā Abū Ṭālib, more generally known as Shā'istah Khān (d. 16 Shawwāl 1105/10 June 1694 CE).[133] He was the grandson of I'timād al-Dawlāh and governor of the Deccan and then Bengal under Aurangzeb (Figure 6). His possession of the manuscript while in Bengal is shown by a synopsis of the work in Persian, already mentioned above. This contains cross-references to folios in the self-same copy. According to the colophon of this part, the synopsis was prepared by Basant Rāe, son of Kāsīrām, son of Rāemal, a Kāyasth in the service of Shā'istah Khān in AH 1098/1686-87 CE.[134] The synopsis is important because it shows that readers of the *Razmnāmah* valued the work sufficiently to commission guides to its content in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Readership subsequently burgeoned in the eighteenth century, the date of many copies, as noted before.[135]

As the library inspection notes show, the British Library *Razmnāmah* of 1599 was a royal manuscript, made at a time when the dissemination of the text was a concern of emperor Akbar. The making of multiple copies in the last decade of the sixteenth century is documented directly by a letter from Akbar to his son Murād – preserved in a version of the *Akbarnāmah* in the British Library – that states a copy would be sent to the prince for his edification.[136] The copying and distribution of the *Razmnāmah* in the 1590s is further shown by an

133 Beale, *An Oriental Biographical Dictionary*, 372.

134 This data given in Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 58.

135 Peter Hardy has warned about drawing decisive conclusions given how little is known about how Abū al-Faẓl was received after his time, see Hardy, "Abu'l-Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah: A Political Philosophy for Mughal India – or a Personal Puff for a Pal?," in *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries*, 2 vols., ed. Christian W. Troll (New Delhi: Vikas, 1985), 136. Since Hardy wrote, a start has been made in Malik, "The Eighteenth Century View of Akbar," in *Akbar and His Age*, 249–53 and Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). Also note Arthur Dudney, *A Desire for Meaning: Khān-i Ārzū's Philology and the Place of India in the Eighteenth-Century Persianate World*, Thesis (Ph.D.)--Columbia University, 2013. In this context, we note that Basant Rāe's synopsis was used to make a further copy in the India Office collections which is based on British Library Add. 5641–5642. It has Basant Rāe's text entire and was finished in 1774 by a scribe working for the East India Company. See Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1082, no. 1929 (IO Islamic 2517). This manuscript belonged to Sir Charles Wilkins, the Sanskrit scholar. The circumstance shows that BL Add. 5641–5642 was in the collection of Halhed by the time IO Islamic 2517 was made. The exemplar, as Ethé noted, is shown by the date AH 1007 which has been taken from the original and appears at the end of several Parvans.

136 The letter to Murād was written in 1591 when he was appointed to Mālwa (for which *AN* 3: 911) but mention of the *Razmnāmah* is found only in *Akbarnāmah*, BL Add. 27247, folio 403r-403v (last line of the recto and first lines of the verso); the passage is taken up in Chapter 4.

Figure 6: Shā'istah Khān (d. 1694). BM 1920,0917,0. 230, detail of Mirzā Abū Ṭālib, maternal uncle of Aurangzeb and governor of Bengal, one time owner of *Razmnāmah* BL Add. 5641-5642 during whose time a synopsis was added by Basant Rāe Kāyasth in AH 1098. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

illuminated version, also dated 1599 and also preserved in the British Library. We will return to this copy in the appropriate place (*see* 1.5 Translation Team and its Documention).

Turning back to the content and order of the composition, Abū al-Faẓl has interspersed his text with numerous poetic quotes, some drawn from earlier poets and some apparently composed by himself. He has used these to illuminate his argument and elevate the tone of the work. The *Preface* also displays breaks and discrepancies that point to parts being written by different hands and assembled to complete the essay. A number of sutures are visible. The first comes at the point where Abū al-Faẓl introduces the four great ages of traditional Indian cosmology. He opens this section with the phrase: "The transmitters of sayings declare . . ."[137] Even without Abū al-Faẓl flagging up that this is a report that he has collected and inserted, the matter-of-fact style of the passage departs from what he has written earlier. The subject then shifts from the Indian ages to equivalents in a range of

137 Chapter 2, 21 (printed text); such attributions appear elsewhere and are noted below.

other calendars, including Akbar's regnal year 32, a subject analysed above in our discussion of the date of the *Preface*.

The next suture comes at the beginning of the summary of the epic story.[138] After a poem – which seems to be the work of Abū al-Faẓl – the synopsis of the story starts with a description of how the throne passed for six generations from Bharata to Vicitravīrya. As before, this too is signalled as reported speech: "The narrators of this story and the transmitters of this tradition . . . relate . . .". The eldest son of Vicitravīrya was Dhṛtarāṣṭra but he did not come to the throne on account of his blindness and Pāṇḍu became king in his place. The narration of these particulars is once more in a matter-of-fact style unlike that of Abū al-Faẓl, showing that he borrowed the account or took over information supplied to him without adding his usual literary embellishments. The likely source – the experts assembled to effect the translation – are discussed in the following section.

After a number of awkward transitions introduced by phrases such as "it should not be hidden," "in short" and "after many happenings which this book undertakes to recount," the next notable suture is seen at Chapter 2, 33 (printed text). There the epic story is summarised and it is said that: "When thirty-six years passed . . . Yudhiṣṭhira, guided by divine grace, realised the faithlessness of this . . . world." On folio 26r (line 6), the British Library manuscript say thirty-six years, but the digit 7 is written above and the same written again in the margin. The printed text, meanwhile, gives thirty-two.[139] Whatever the number of years, Yudhiṣṭhira made preparations to leave his cares behind and journey to the next world. We are then told: "Along with his four brothers, he took the path of renunciation and journeyed to the Abode of Safety in the world of nonexistence – as will be described in this book." Some verses from Khāqānī and Kamāl al-Dīn Ismāʿīl follow by way of conclusion.

After this, the story is summarised all over again. The text once more says: "Yudhiṣṭhira ruled the earth for thirty-six years," but this time the years are part of a larger sum: the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas ruled together for seventy-six years, Duryodhana ruled for thirteen independently and, after the war, Yudhiṣṭhira for thirty-six. Then the text says: "the total years of the sovereignty of the two sides comes to one hundred twenty-five." This is adds up as follows: 76 + 13 + 36 = 125. The number thirty-six has not attracted annotation here, even though it appears just eight lines down on the same page (folio 26r, line 14, illustrated at the end of this volume). This shows a common pattern in manuscript practice when pas-

138 Chapter 2, 26 (printed text), as also the quotations from the *Preface* immediately below.

139 Chapter 2, 33 (printed text). We have not traced the source of this editorial decision because all the manuscripts available for the printed edition are not available to us and, as explained before, the printed text lacks explanatory apparatus.

sages repeat closely related content. Normally the first account attracts redaction or correction, while the second is passed over.[140] Apart from this, the repetition of the same information, with the years given in different ways in quick succession, shows that this section of the *Preface* is a compilation of passages assembled for the purpose with no time given to shape them into a unified account.

Toward the end of the *Preface*, Abū al-Faẓl turns to a curious etymological exploration of the name of the *Mahābhārata* and some observations about Vyāsa.[141] The second paragraph about Vyāsa contains the legendary account of how the work was reduced from an initial six million verses to its present size, and how blocks of the text were handed to the gods, ancestors, demi-gods and men during the process. This technical information, set out in the first book of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, could only have come from Abū al-Faẓl's unnamed informants. In the end, he takes issue with the verse count because it does not add up to the oft-repeated statement that the epic is 100,000 verses long: "Thus, it is better if the intelligent person does not trust such written accounts but rather follows his foresighted intellect on the paths of this life."[142] This device neatly sidesteps the problem of where we stand if we set aside written accounts. Abū al-Faẓl cannot resolve the numbering, so simply bats the problem away, but is happy to refer in the very next paragraph to "the 100,000 *śloka*s that are narrated in this book."[143] The statement becomes especially odd when were realise that the *Razmnāmah* is largely in prose. In the *Preface* itself, the only verses are those composed by Abū al-Faẓl or borrowed by him from the Persian literary greats of the past.[144]

These problems, and the different style of the Parvan summaries which also betray that they are borrowed, gives a sense of urgency to the compilation, as does the hurried and inferior literary style of some of the passages.[145] This may be due to the fact that Abū al-Faẓl was compelled to produce other work, notably the *ʿIyār-i Dānish*, completed at Akbar's order in July 1588.[146] Abū al-Faẓl himself

140 Seen not just in Persian manuscripts; for other examples, Willis and Gonkatsang, "An Archaeology of the *Dba' bzhed* Manuscript."

141 Chapter 2, 35–36 (printed text).

142 Chapter 2, 40 (printed text).

143 Chapter 2, 40 (printed text).

144 Many of the verses are identified by Hajnalka Kovacs in Chapter 2. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 118 notes their use as part of the process of embedding a new prose work in the Persian literary landscape.

145 Chapter 2, 31 (printed text) with comments by Hajnalka Kovacs.

146 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 220.

admitted – albeit using conventional expressions of self-abasement – that he lacked ability but would quickly finish the task:[147]

> In conformity with the sublime decree, I hurriedly penned a few sentences and made this summary about the origin of this book the frontispiece of the page of my entreaty, so that by specifying [the contents] from the beginning to the end, it somewhat quenches the thirst of those who are eager to find out about the contents of this book.

Abū al-Faẓl closes the *Preface* with a somewhat muddled comment on the Parvan summaries, saying he was "not content with the details and the summary that is in the original book," an abnegation that confirms he has borrowed these parts and had little time to digest them.[148] He then returns to some of his earlier themes and an apology for his shortcomings. The conflicted nature of this conclusion is analysed later in this volume.

1.5 Translation Team and its Documentation

Although Abū al-Faẓl enjoyed a reputation as a translator after his death, he did not actually know Sanskrit and he did not translate the *Mahābhārata*.[149] He admits this – more or less – in his introduction where he explains the how the translation team was formed.[150]

> Therefore the sublime decree went forth concerning the *Mahābhārata* . . . that the learned ones of both [Muslim and Hindu] factions and the experts of language in both groups, by way of friendship and agreement, should sit down in one place, and should translate it into a popular expression, under the scrutiny of expert judges and just inspectors.

Badāʾūnī also refers to the translation team. As detailed above, he reports how he became involved and mentions that Akbar "became much interested in the work, and having assembled the learned men of India, His Majesty directed that the book *Mahābhārata* should be translated."[151]

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147 Chapter 2, 20 (printed text).

148 Chapter 2, 41 (printed text).

149 In *AA* 2: 2 Abū al-Faẓl says that he was not familiar with Sanskrit and that "laborious work went into repeated translations." He cannot help adding that "by a turn of good fate and the strength of my own will, I obtained my goal," cited Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 151. His lack of Sanskrit is contrary to attributions in later MSS, taken up below.

150 Chapter 2, 18 (printed text).

151 See above, where we have given the full quotation.

Some members of the translation team have already been discussed. The names of the others involved are not given in the running text of the *Razmnāmah*, but the colophons in several manuscripts preserve their names. The information in British Library Add. 5642 (folio 481v) has been known for more than a century thanks to the catalogue entry published by Charles Rieu.[152] A number of authors have subsequently used this data, notably Truschke in *Culture of Encounters*.[153] For this study, we have taken the opportunity to revisit the reading and translation based on manuscripts not used by Rieu. The first is the *Razmnāmah* acquired by the British Library in the 1950s.[154] This has not drawn much attention, in part because the text is fragmentary and in part because the accompanying miniature paintings have proven an art historical distraction.[155] The manuscript, registered as BL Or. 12076, consists of the final portions of the text, including the colophon, folio 138v (Figure 7). On an earlier page, folio 136r, this text is dated AH 1007 like the other *Razmnāmah* in the British Library (Figure 8). The page has sustained damage but is written more clearly than BL Add. 5642 and the manuscript otherwise was illustrated with miniatures by artists who are known to have worked in the imperial atelier. The texts give the same account of the translation team and this allows us to conclude that both copies relied on the same exemplar, at least as far as the names of the translators are concerned. A third copy of the *Razmnāmah* with a well-preserved colophon is in the India Office collection. The manuscript is not dated but Ethé noted that the text agrees almost verbatim with a copy of 1737 (Figures 9, 10).[156] This colophon is the same as the sixteenth-century versions but

152 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57 and illustrated above in figures 04–05.

153 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 281, n. 27 and before that Truschke, "The Mughal Book of War," 507. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History,* 209–10 read the names without citing his manuscript source as: "Debi Misra, Satuwani, Madhusudhan Misra, Chaturbhuj Misra and Sahikh [sic] Bhawan." In Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 41, the transcription of the names is problematic, as noted by Das, *Razmnama*, 11, but Das does not advance the reading or identification of the individuals.

154 G. Meredith-Owens, *Handlist of Persian Manuscripts [Acquired by the British Museum] 1895–1966* (London: British Museum, 1968), 37 for a brief description. The complete manuscript is visible online at the British Library, retrieved December 2021.

155 Meredith-Owens and R. H. Pinder-Wilson, "A Persian Translation of the Mahābhārata, with a Note on the Miniatures," *BMQ* 20, no. 3 (1956): 62–65, illustrations in J. P. Losty and Malini Roy, *Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire: Manuscripts and Paintings in the British Library* (London: British Library, 2012), 55–56; Losty, *Art of the Book in India*, 124 where Losty suggests on the basis of the artists involved that the manuscript was commissioned by ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān (1556–1627) which, if true, coordinates the manuscript with Badāʾūnī's statement (given above) that nobles were ordered to have copies transcribed.

156 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1087, no. 1944 (IO Islamic 1702), folios 410v and 411r.

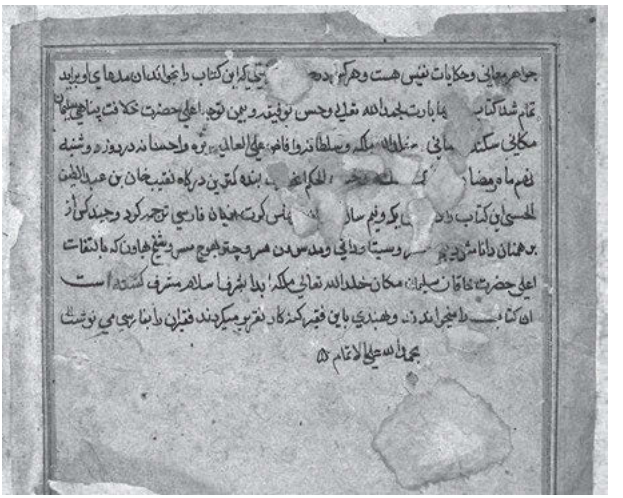

Figure 7: *Razmnāmah*. BL Or 12076, folio 138v, detail of the colophon mentioning Naqīb Khān, his collaborators in the translation and the date 9 Ramaḍān AH 992 in lines 3-4. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

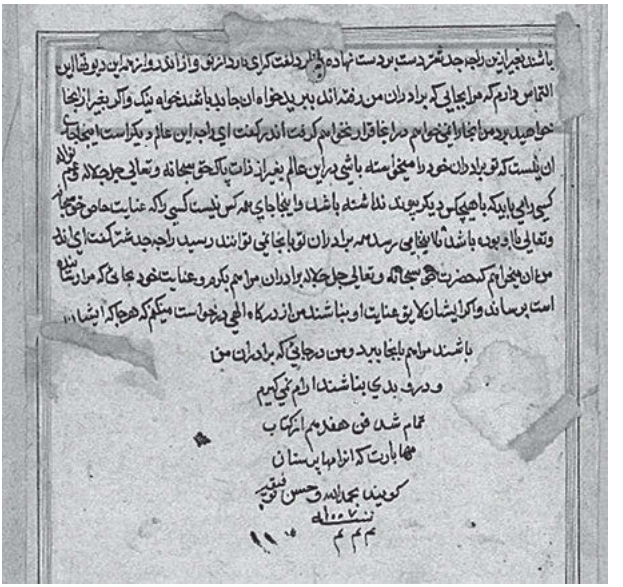

Figure 8: *Razmnāmah*. BL Or 12076, folio 136r, detail of the colophon showing Parvan ending and the date AH 1007. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

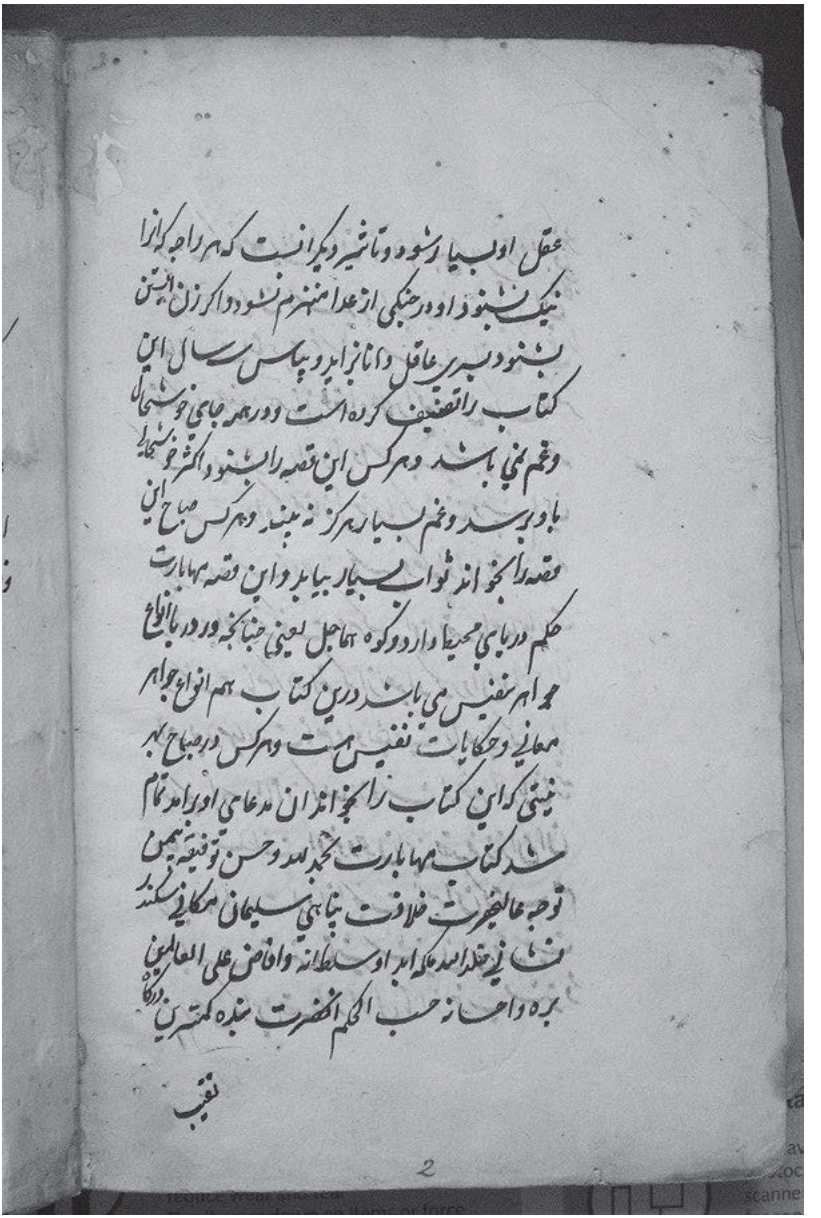

Figure 9: *Razmnāmah*. BL IO Islamic 1702, folio 410v, with the closing colophon mentioning Naqīb Khān and his collaborators in the translation, mid-eighteenth century. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

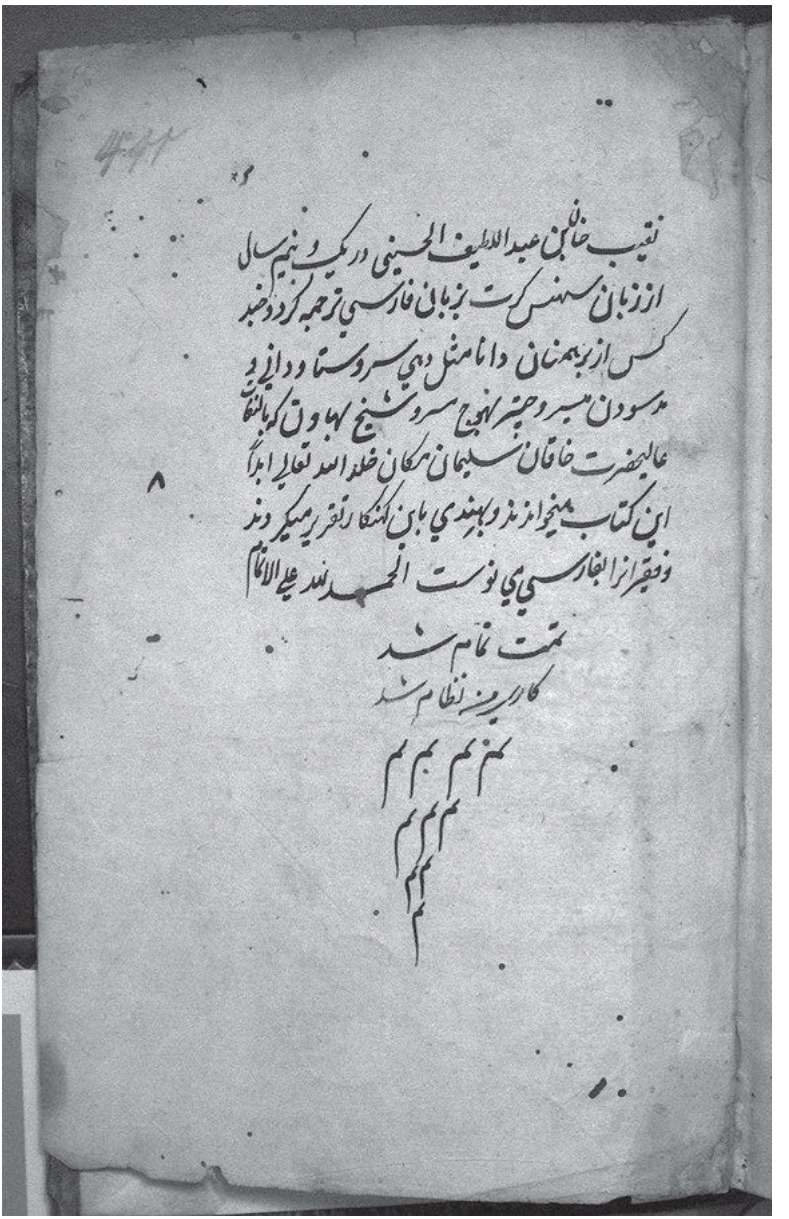

Figure 10: *Razmnāmah*. BL IO Islamic 1702, folio 411r, with the closing colophon mentioning Naqīb Khān and his collaborators in the translation, mid-eighteenth century. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

simplifies the text, dropping mention of the fact that Shaykh Bhāvan converted to Islam, as does a copy in the Royal Asiatic Society dated Rabīʿ I 1126/March 1714 CE in the reign of Farrukhsiyar.[157] Based on this evidence, we conclude that the basic historical data in the colophon was transmitted with some redaction into the eighteenth century. The text has not been published analytically and is thus given here. After stating the work was complete in AH 992, the relevant passage runs as follows (here with names highlighted):

> بیست و هفتم ماه شعبان المعظم سنه اثنی و تسعین و تسعمایه و حسب الحکم آنحضرت بنده کمترین درگاه **نقیب خان بن عبداللطیف الحسینی** این کتاب را در عرض یک و نیم سال از زبان سانس کرت بزبان فارسی ترجمه کرد و چند کس از برهمنان دانا مثل **دیبی مصر** و **ستاوداني** و **مدسودن مسر** و **چتربهوج مسر** و **شیخ بهاون** که به التفات اعلی حضرت خاقان سلیمان مکان خلد الله تعالی ملکه ابدا بشرف اسلام مشرف گشته است ان کتاب را می خوانند و بهندي باین فقیر گنه گار تقریر میکردند فقیر انرا بفارسی می نوشت بحمدلله علی الاتمام
>
> . . . Naqīb Khān, son of ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Ḥusaynī, translated [this work] from Sanskrit into Persian in one and a half years. Several of the learned Brahmins—such as Devī Miśra,[158] Śatāvadhānī,[159] Madhusūdhana Miśra, Caturbhuj,[160] Shaykh Bhāvan—who converted to Islam with the favour of His Most Exalted Majesty, the Khāqān whose station is equal to that of Sulaymān, may God Almighty make his reign eternal[161]—read this book and explained it in Hindī [to me,] a poor guilty man and this poor one would write it down in Persian. Praise God for its completion.[162]

The manuscripts just noted provide evidence for the involvement of Hindu scholars in the explication of the *Mahābhārata*, a conclusion confirmed in the text itself where the Indian interlocutors are referred to directly – and in some places where their phrases in old Hindi have actually entered the text – as noted by Truschke.[163] What this means is that the Sanskrit was explained by learned Brahmins

157 RAS Persian 14–15 Bequest of David Price (1762–1835).

158 BL Or. 12076 مسر* becomes دبي مسر in IO Islamic 1702; in RAS Persian 14–15 the name drops out and only سر is preserved.

159 BL Or 12076 سيتاوداني which becomes ستاو دانی in IO Islamic 1702, then اشتاودع نی in RAS Persian 14–15.

160 Both sixteenth-century MSS have مسر which we take to be a lapsus following the gloss in Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57.

161 The titles refer to Akbar.

162 The scribe Nāṣir al-Dīn Lahorī of BL Add. 5642 (for his name, see appendix 1) adds the completion of the copy (و بحسن الاختتام روز جمعه شهر ذی الحجه سنه الف و سبع مایه تم) giving 1700 (الف و سبع مایه) to which Halhed has added a notation "1700 Ind: Epoch vid [word unclear]" which we do not understand; the reading should be 1007 (الف وسبعة). This phrase is also missing from IO Islamic 702, showing it was not transmitted into the eighteenth century; the scribe of IO Islamic 702 has anyway added: تمت تمام شد and then كاري من نظام شد

163 Truschke, "The Mughal Book of War," 108; elaborated in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 101–41. The intersection of Hindi and Persian is explored in Shantanu Phukan, "'Through

in Hindi and that Naqīb Khān wrote down what he was told in Persian. The Philadelphia miniature shows this process in plain view: one member of the Hindu group is writing diligently on a scroll in Hindi.[164]

One feature of the colophon that has remained unnoticed is the abrupt change in voice. This calls for examination. At the start, we have a report in the third person stating that Naqīb Khān translated the work from Sanskrit. Then we have a quote in the first person, a direct statement from Naqīb Khān saying that the Sanskrit was explained to him in Hindi and based on that he wrote the story down in Persian. We interpret this change of voice – and the switch between Sanskrit and Hindi in the account – as an extrapolation introduced by the individual who composed the colophon exemplar. Although this exemplar must predate 1599 because it is documented by two manuscripts of that date, it shows that the author of the colophon was already removed from the translation activities that took place in the 1580s and that he was attempting to explain the source language. This becomes clear from Abū al-Faẓl's statement in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*. The *Mahābhārata*, he says, is "one of the ancient books of Hindustan," and "was translated from Hindi into Persian by Naqīb Khān, Mawlānā ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī and Shaykh Sulṭān Thānesarī. It comprises some one lakh couplets. His Majesty named this ancient epic the *Razmnāmah*."[165]

The author of the *Razmnāmah* colophons echoes this statement but he has changed Abū al-Faẓl's 'Hindi' into 'Sanskrit' because he knew that the original text was in Sanskrit and felt obliged to register this fact. That this was the train of redactional events is shown by a flyleaf note in the *Rāmāyaṇa* kept in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. This has been studied by John Seyller who translated the relevant part as follows: "Naqīb Khān of Qazvīn . . . translated [this work] into Persian from Sanskrit, in which language Indian literature was recorded at the time." As Seyller has shown, this comment was written after Akbar's death in 1605 and cannot be taken as a direct witness of the *Rāmāyaṇa* translation project.[166] The key point for the moment is the phrase ". . . from Sanskrit, in which language Indian literature was recorded at the time."[167] This

Throats Where Many Rivers Meet': The Ecology of Hindi in the World of Persian." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, no. 1 (2001): 33–58.

164 A sense of the use of Hindi – and thus what was happening in our context – is charted in an innovative manner in Busch, "Hidden in Plain View."

165 See *AA*, 1: 105, the passage noted above.

166 Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 73–74. Further discussion in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 211–14.

167 See discussion of Devī Miśra in the next section for a further examination of the passage in the Freer manuscript.

shows that the author knew about Sanskrit and that he, like the author of the *Razmnāmah* colophon, felt obliged to mention it. For Abū al-Faẓl, however, the position of Sanskrit was clear and he knew that the Persian had passed through the intermediary language of Hindi. What Abū al-Faẓl recorded in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* was his immediate knowledge of the translation activities and the fact that Hindi was used as the link. And indeed this is what we see in the second part of the *Razmnāmah* colophon.

What can we conclude from all this? It shows that while the *Razmnāmah* colophon is certainly a sixteenth-century account of what went on during the translation of the *Mahābhārata*, the first sentence is an interpolation inserted to explain and introduce the direct quote from Naqīb Khān. One indication of when this happened is given in the colophon of the royal copy of the *Razmnāmah* in Jaipur wherein there is no parallel passage and no mention of the translation team.[168] As noted earlier in this chapter, the Jaipur copy appears to have been finished in December 1586, with Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* added at the same time or shortly after in early in 1587. At some point after this, therefore, the colophon was composed and appended to the two manuscripts of 1599. The exemplar in which this colophon first appeared may be as early as the late 1580s, but it is more likely, in our view, that it was written in the 1590s.

Fayẓī

Naturally we should like to know the source and date for the account of the translation team. At least one precedent can be found in the work of Fayẓī. He was a prolific writer who excelled in poetry, elegant prose and philosophy, his poetic compositions earning him the title *Malik al-Shuʿarāʾ* ('king of poets').[169] As the translation team worked toward a finished *Razmnāmah*, Akbar called on Fayẓī to prepare a version. As Badāʾūnī reports, the king asked him "to write it in verse and prose, but he did not complete more than two chapters (*fan*)."[170] Badāʾūnī mentions this under his account of events in AH 990/1582 CE, the implication being that it was completed then. However, a manuscript in the India Office collection gives the date 1 Rabīʿ I AH 997/18 January 1589 CE for the completion of the

168 See appendix 2 in this volume for the text of the Jaipur colophon and its seals and notations.
169 See *AA* 3: 469; Munibur Rahman, "Fayżī, Abu'l-Fayż," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* IX, no. 5 (2012), s.v., retrieved March 2022.
170 See *MT* 2: 321; we have quoted the full passage just above.

first Parvan of Fayẓī 's version.[171] Rizvi has noted that it is difficult to determine the share of the contributors in the final *Razmnāmah* and that "on the whole, the work is not disjointed. It seems that Naqib Khan finally rewrote it to make it a unified whole."[172] Whether Fayẓī 's work was incorporated into the final product is difficult to say, but his rendering is preserved separately in a significant number of copies, one being British Library IO Islamic 761 which consists of the first two Parvans.[173] For our concern, the key point is that Fayẓī completed his treatment of the *Mahābhārata* in the 1580s. In the conclusion of the first Parvan, Fayẓī offers high praise to Akbar, crediting him with the vision for the Persian translation and, more importantly, mentioning that he depended on the "translation of learned Brahmins" for his version.[174] He was also aware of the political dimension of the work and reflected on his role in terms of Indian and Persian poetic styles.[175] With Fayẓī 's work finished between 1582 and 1589, we have, therefore, a high-status precedent that would have prompted people to collected available traditions about the translation of the *Mahābhārata* and add them to the manuscripts that were being prepared in the 1590s. This collection was both textual and visual, as we know from the painting of the *maktab khānah* in Philadelphia.

171 AH 990 fell entirely in a single western year, 1582, apart from the last 24 days. The manuscript is mentioned in Eduard Sachu and Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library: Part I: the Persian Manuscripts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 808, under catalogue no. 1306; for the catalogue entry for IO Islamic 3014, in which manuscript the date 997/1589 appears on folio 171r., see Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1088, no. 1946. The manuscript itself is dated 1730 CE.

172 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 210. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1588, no. 2923 (IO Islamic 3012) suggested that this particular manuscript represents the preliminary working version prepared by Naqīb Khān that was subsequently subsumed into the finished work.

173 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office,* 1: 1087–88, no. 1945 (IO Islamic 761); others include IO Islamic 3014, ibid., 1088, no. 1946 and IO Islamic 3107, ibid., 1587, no. 2922. The first Parvan, not quite complete in Oxford Walker 87, Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, 812, no. 1313; the "same flowery version of Faiḍî" as Ethé puts it, in Oxford Ouseley 391, 392, Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, 812, no. 1314. It is the fifth Parvan and dated 1632. C. H. Shaikh suggests that Fayẓī translated the entire text basing himself on a copy with all eighteen Parvans in the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, see Shaikh, "A Descriptive Handlist of the Arabic, Persian and Hindusthānī MSS belonging to the Satara-Historical Museum at present lodged at the Deccan College Research Institute, Poona," *BDCRI* 4, no. 3 (1943): 248. The attributions in later copies cannot be taken at face value and merit closer study; the Oxford and Bombay manuscripts at least show that Fayẓī 's style was perpetuated in the 1600s.

174 Noted in S. C. Husain "Translations of the Mahābhārata into Arabic and Persian," *BDCRI* 5 (1943–44): 274, جمٔ بر همنان كامل

175 This dimension explained in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 134–35.

We have, of course, no record of the motivation that informed the creation of that miniature, but there can be no doubt that discussions were had about how to represent the events that had taken place a dozen years before.

Naqīb Khān

Although our examination of the *Razmnāmah* colophons shows they are not the innocent factual documents they first appear to be, their collective testimony nonetheless indicates that Naqīb Khān was an important figure, leading the multi-lingual translation team assembled in response to Akbar's decree.[176] As an individual, Naqīb Khān is reasonably known. He was the grandson of the historian Mīr Yahya of Qazvīn and the son of Mīr ʿAbd al-Laṭīf.[177] The latter left Iran for the court of Humāyūn because he was persecuted as a Sunni, but arrived in AH 963 after Humāyūn's death in January 1556. He was well received by Akbar who made him his tutor. His son Mīr Ghiyās al-Dīn ʿAlī became one of Akbar's favourites and the king conferred the title of Naqīb Khān on him in AH 988/1580-81 CE. This was just before Akbar commissioned the translation of the *Mahābhārata*. Naqīb Khān lived a long life and died in AH 1023/1614 CE.

A portrait of Naqīb Khān, showing him in his later years, is included in an album in the Royal Collection (Figure 11).[178] This allows us to identify him in two other pictures. The most well-known is the one showing Jesuits visiting Akbar, preserved in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.[179] There Naqīb Khān is seated on a carpet, immediately below the emperor. An additional page with his portrait comes from the dispersed *Razmnāmah* of 1599, as noted before (Figure 1). Here Naqīb Khān is shown in direct conversation with Akbar in the centre of the picture. While the painting lacks the finish of the best imperial work, the other portraits of Naqīb Khān secure the sitter's identification. The person facing Akbar in the picture is not, anyway, Abū al-Faẓl. He is shown, as noted above, in a miniature in the *Akbarnāmah*: he had a heavy jowl and lacked Naqīb Khān's aquiline nose.

176 Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 40, gives Badāʾūnī 's account of further individuals involved and what they were able to achieve.

177 The information here is drawn from Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57.

178 Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 1005038, folio 38r. We are grateful to Emily Hannam for bringing this portrait to our attention.

179 Chester Beatty Library, MS 03.263, folio 263v, published in Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, 2 vols, 1: 152 and colour plate 41, also in Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jariwala, *The Indian Portrait, 1560–1860* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2010), 54 with further references.

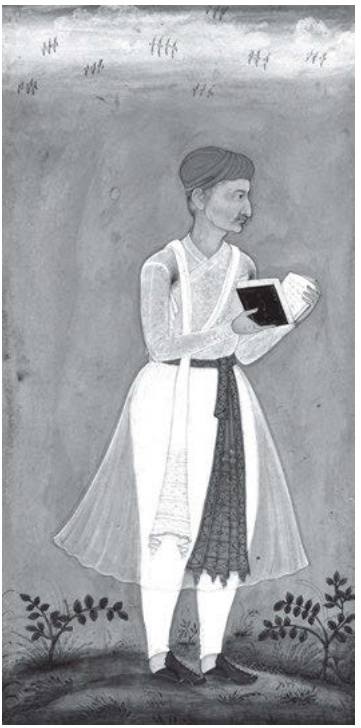

Figure 11: Naqīb Khān (d. 1614). RCIN 1005038, folio 38r, detail of Naqīb Khān in old age, from an album of calligraphy and Mughal portraits, seventeenth century with later additions. Courtesy of the Royal Collection Trust.

These identifications are important for textual and historical reasons because the Philadelphia page has text at the top pertaining to the scene. This is part of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*, as noted above in our discussion of the Translation Bureau. The marginal note at the bottom introduces Abū al-Faẓl and states: "The linguists of both groups, the Muslims and Hindus, wrote out the Mahābhārat together with Shaykh Abū al-Faẓl."[180] We know now, of course, that this statement is not correct and that it betrays a later understanding imposed – quite literally – on the picture. The date of the addition is difficult to determine, although the writing style suggests the eighteenth century. What the text demonstrates is the distance at which subsequent writers stood from the translation – even those with direct access to sixteenth-century manuscripts and the authority to intervene in them. We have noted this problem in the paragraphs just above: already in the late sixteenth-century copies of the *Razmnāmah*, the person who composed the

180 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 133, with transcription of the marginal note mentioning Abū al-Faẓl 289, n. 169. We read: زبان دانایان هر دو طایفه مسلمانان و هنود باتفاق شیخ ابوالفضل تصنیف مهابهارت می نمایند. Kramrisch, *Painted Delight*, 156; those who helped Kramrisch with the Persian (ibid., p. ix) have accepted the veracity of the note.

colophon attempted to explain his sources. Other manuscripts add to our understanding of the rising reputation of Abū al-Faẓl in later times. In a large copy of the *Razmnāmah* with miniature paintings dated between 1761 and 1763, Abū al-Faẓl actually displaces Naqīb Khān in the colophon: "Shaykh Abū al-Faẓl translated the *Mahābhārata* from Sanskrit into Persian in one and half years."[181] Other manuscripts give the translation of the *Gītā* to Abū al-Faẓl.[182] We will return to the *Gītā* below in our discussion of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, but before turning to him we need to review the other translators involved in the creation of the *Razmnāmah*.

Shaykh Bhāvan, Caturbhuj and Devī Miśra

Other than Naqīb Khān, the Indian scholars named in the British Library colophon have been noted on several occasions without, however, concerted efforts made to identify the individuals.[183] Shaykh Bhāvan is the least problematic and best known, having assisted Badāʾūnī in the attempt to translate the *Atharva Veda*.[184] He came from the Deccan, converted to Islām and appears in several Persianate histories of the period.[185]

Regarding Caturbhuj, we must first deal with the individual named Caturbhuja Miśra, the author of commentaries on the *Mahābhārata*, that on the Virāṭa Parvan titled *Vākyadīpikā*.[186] P. K. Gode tentatively assigned Caturbhuja Miśra to the period 1350–1550, so there is some chance that he could have been active in

181 British Library Add. 5640, fol 437v. Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 57–8, illustrated online at: Razmnāmah [BL Add. 5640] رزم نامه. ZENODO (2022), retrieved March 2022. We read: تمت تمام شد کتاب مهابهارت که شیخ ابوالفضل این مهابهارت را در یک و نیم سال از زبان سهنس کرت بزبان فارسی ترجمه کرده چند کس از برهمنان دانا و ساودهان مصر مدموهن و مصر چتربهوج خرد سخن کاتب مُحمدخان ولد شجاعت خان قوم افغان سردانی ساکن تهته بتاریخ بیست

182 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 59, Add. 7676. Abū al-Faẓl's knowledge of Sanskrit slips into some secondary literature from these traditions, for example A. K. Webb, *Deep Cosmopolis: Rethinking World Politics and Globalisation* (London: Routledge, 2015), 97.

183 For example in Najaf Haider, "Translating Texts and Straddling Worlds: Inter-cultural Communication in Mughal India," in *The Varied Facets of History: Essays in Honour of Aniruddha Ray*, ed. Ishrat Alam and Syed Ejaz Hussain (Delhi: Primus Books, 2011), 121–22. The subject is broached in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 151.

184 As mentioned above, this project was abandoned in 1583.

185 Truschke, "Naqīb Ḫan, Razm-nama," *Perso-Indica*, retrieved January 2022. Further biographical information about Shaykh Bhāvan is in Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 38–39.

186 Mentioned in Sukthankar, "Notes on Mahābhārata Commentators," 197; more detail in Sukthankar and P. K. Gode, *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata (V. S. Sukthankar Memorial Edition)* (Bombay: Karnatak Publishing House for the V. S. Sukthankar Memorial Edition Committee, Poona, 1944), 145.

the 1580s.[187] However, the *New Catalogus Catalogorum* states he belonged to *circa* 1412, so too early for our concerns, while Caturbhuja Upādhyāya Paṇḍita, who wrote on the *Ākhyātavāda* of Raghunātha Śiromaṇi belonged to the seventeenth century, so too late and, in any event, not an author in the genre of epic commentary.[188] The Caturbhuj mentioned in the *Razmnāmah* thus seems to be Caturbhuj Dās, the individual who made a separate translation of the *Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne* in addition to that prepared by Badāʾūnī.[189] This work is called *Shāhnāmah* in a manuscript kept in Oxford.[190] Further copies of Caturbhuj's translation are in the British Library. These give the title as *Singhāsan battīsī* and record, like the Oxford copy, that Caturbhuj Dās undertook the translation in the time of Akbar and that he was the son of Mihircand Kāyat of Sonpat.[191] Kayāt is an abbreviated form of Kāyastha, the caste of writers in north India, while Sonpat stands for Sonipat, the town on the Yamunā river immediately north of Delhi. The general background of Caturbhuj is thus reasonably known on this evidence. He was a follower of the Vaiṣṇava religion, as shown by his name: Caturbhuj means 'four-armed', a common epithet of Viṣṇu, while Dās, meaning a servant or slave, was and is a frequent addition to names. The colophons of the British Library manuscripts, one of which was in the collection of N. B. Halhed in the eighteenth century, further report that Caturbhuj's translation was revised in the time of

187 Sukthankar and Gode, *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata*, 167, n. 1.

188 V. K. Raghavan, K. Kunjunni Raja et al, *New Catalogus Catalogorum: An Alphabetical Register of Sanskrit and Allied Works and Authors*, 8 vols. (Madras: University of Madras, 1966–74), 6: 315, where it is also noted that he was surnamed Aupamanyava. For Caturbhuja Upādhyāya Paṇḍita, we consulted PANDiT, "Caturbhuja (Upādhyāya) Paṇḍita," retrieved March 2022.

189 Badāʾūnī 's translation of the text is reported in *MT* 2: 186, his title being a chronogram giving the date AH 989/1581 CE, see S. H. Hodivala in ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Mulūk Shāh Badāʾūnī, *Muntaḵẖabu-'t-tawārīḵẖ*, vol. 2, trans. W. H. Lowe, revised by B. P. Ambashthya with commentary of S. H. Hodivala and foreword to the second edition of 1924 by Johan van Manen (Patna: Academica Asiatica, [1973]), xxvii; also Anna Martin, "Ḫirad-afzā," *Perso-Indica*, retrieved January 2022. This text has not been traced so far and was reported as missing from the royal library at an early stage, see MT 2: 377. One can hardly resist thinking that Badāʾūnī himself was responsible for the copy's disappearance.

190 Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, 815, no. 1324 (Walker 118); Anna Martin, "Čaturbhūjdās bin Mihrčand, *Šāhnāma or Singhāsanbattīsī*," *Perso-Indica*, retrieved January 2022.

191 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 2: 763, Add. 6597; Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1106, no. 1988 (IO Islamic 1250), dated 1780 CE. There are seven other manuscripts of the *Singhāsan battīsī* in British collections (including one in Edinburgh dated 1776), but the texts do not agree and the relationship of the manuscripts awaits exploration. Among them may rest a copy of Badāʾūnī 's missing translation.

Jahāngīr, Shāh Jahān and ʿĀlamgīr.[192] Caturbhuj was thus an author of enduring importance in Mughal times, but his name has disappeared from the literary history of India.

Devī Miśra (Debi Misra) was an expert on the epics. From Badāʾūnī we have the following remarks about how he interacted with Akbar:[193]

> At other times, a Brahmin of the name of Debi was pulled up the wall of the fort, sitting on a *charpai*, till he arrived near a balcony where the emperor used to sleep. Whilst thus suspended, he instructed His Majesty in the secrets and legends of Hinduism, in the manner of worshipping idols, the fire, the sun and stars, and of revering the chief gods of these unbelievers, as Brahma, Mahadev, Bishn, Kishn, Ram, and Mahamai, who are supposed to have been men, but very likely never existed, though some, in their idle belief, look upon them as gods, and others as angels. His Majesty, on hearing further how much the people of the country prized their institutions, commenced to look upon them with affection.

Badāʾūnī's comment that Devī Miśra told the king about the "legends of Hinduism," confirms his expertise in epic literature and suggests he may be related to – perhaps a son or grandson of – Arjuna Miśra, the author of a commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, who flourished in Bengal in the second half of the fifteenth century.[194] Devī Miśra also appears from Badāʾūnī's testimony to have been an expert in forms of ritual worship but we have not traced texts on this subject that are attributable to him.

Devī Miśra also seems to have played an important part in the translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* – at least at first glance. His involvement is reported in the flyleaf note in the illustrated version of the text in the Freer Gallery.[195] As noted already, this records that "Naqīb Khān of Qazvīn . . . translated [this work] into Persian from the Sanskrit, in which language Indian literature was recorded at

192 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 2: 763, Add. 5652 is a re-translation by Kiśan Dās Bāsdev of Lahore in the time of Aurangzeb.

193 See *MT* 2: 257. Devī Miśra is also noted in Rizvi, "*Dimensions of Ṣulḥ*-i kul (Universal Peace) in Akbar's Reign and the Sufi Theory of Perfect Man," in *Akbar and His Age*, ed. Iqtidar Alam Khan (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999), 18 without, however, citing Badāʾūnī.

194 P. K. Gode, "Arjuna Miśra," *Indian Culture* 2, no. 1 (1935): 141–46. There is a link with Bengal among the prominent Hindu scholars at the Mughal court, see discussion of Madhusūdana below. Networks are introduced in Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, eds, *Religious Cultures of Early Modern India: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2012). The articles collected in this volume appeared in a special issue of *South Asian History and Culture* in 2011, each cited in the appropriate place in this book.

195 Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 73–74, cited and endorsed in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 281, n. 29. Seyller shows that the reference to Akbar using his posthumous title shows this flyleaf note was added after the king's death in 1605. We take this to show that Badā'ūnī's contribution to the translation was not known at that time, at least to the author of the flyleaf note.

the time." The document goes on to report that "There was a brahman by the name of Deva Miśra who would interpret the meaning of the verses and Naqīb Khān would translate [that] into Persian."[196] The note then says that the work was completed in AH 1007. While this seems to confirm Devī Miśra as a person who knew the epics, John Seyller has cast doubt on the testimony and pointed to a number of contradictions with regard to the note's statements and dates. We share his concerns and – going one step further – we observe that the flyleaf note appears to be a series of statements lifted from a variety of sources, one being, in fact, a *Razmnāmah* dated AH 1007 – perhaps even the British Library copies or their exemplar. The phrasing matches in places and is likewise contradictory, saying first that Naqīb Khān translated the text, but then immediately records that Devī Miśra explained the text to him and that Naqīb Khān wrote it down in Persian. We have already noted the same change of voice and pattern of information in the *Razmnāmah* colophon. That the information in the flyleaf note may draw on a *Razmnāmah* colophon helps explain why Badā'ūnī, and the key part he played in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* projects, is not mentioned. Thus, while Devī Miśra stands documented as an expert on the "legends of Hinduism" thanks to Badāʾūnī, the *Rāmāyaṇa* flyleaf note cannot be taken as supporting evidence for this.

Moving ahead in the list of individuals who helped in the translation according to the *Razmnāmah* colophon, we come to Śatāvadhānī. This is problematic, at least as a name. Sanskrit *śatāvadhāna* carries the dictionary meaning of "a man with such a good memory that he can attend to a hundred things at once." The epithet is often applied to Rāghavendra, the well-known seventeenth-century exponent of the dualist system of Indian philosophy. His life was celebrated in a poem by his nephew Nārāyaṇācārya entitled *Śrīrāghavendravijaya*.[197] However, Rāghavendra is several decades later than the time of *Razmnāmah* translation and has to be excluded. The usage, however, is indicative and shows that *śatāvadhānī* is being used in the list as an adjective – it is not actually a name. This explains why the Persian has retained the Sanskrit masculine singular possessive adjective ending ī. The word must apply, consequently, to Madhusūdana, the name immediately following.

196 Seyller, *Workshop and Patron*, 74 with slight changes.

197 D. R. Vasudeva Rau, ed., with translation and notes, *Mahākavi Nārāyanācārya's Śrī Rāghavendravijaya* (Visākhapatnam: Śrīmadānanda Tirtha Publications, 1982). For Rāghuvendra and the Dvaita school, B. N. K. Sharma, *A History of the Dvaita School of Vedānta and Its Literature*, 2 vols. (Bombay: Booksellers' Publ. Co, 1960–61), 2: 274–81.

Madhusūdana and the Roster of Scholars in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*

Madhusūdana, the well-known advocate of Advaita philosophy, is the most celebrated Sanskrit scholar in the *Razmnāmah* list. Further clues about him and his relationship to the Mughal court are found in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*. In the first volume, Abū al-Faẓl gives a long table of the learned people. Among the first class of holy men, who "understand the mysteries of both worlds," he includes a series of famous individuals. As might be expected, many are Muslim saints, but in the first class he includes the following Indians: "13. Madhu Sarsutī. 14. Madhusūdan. 15. Nārāin Asram. 16. Harijī Sūr. 17. Damūdar Bhat. 18. Rāmtīrth. 19. Nar Sing. 20. Parmindar. 21. Ādit."[198]

Before turning to Madhusūdana, we will attempt to identify the individuals mentioned in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* as a way of exploring the Indian scholarly currents at the Mughal court. Harijī Sūri, to begin, has been identified as Harivijaya (1526–95 CE), the Jain pontiff who came to the religious talks at Fatehpur Sikri in 1578.[199] We will return to the Jain presence at the Mughal court later in this book.

Damūdar Bhat can be identified as Dāmodara Bhaṭṭa, the author of a text called the *Kalpacintāmani*, otherwise known as the *Yantracintāmani*.[200] As the title indicates, the work deals with the use of diagrams (*yantra*) in the performance of magical rites (*abhicāra*). The applications include six rites, namely, appeasement (*śānti*), subjugation (*vaśīkaraṇa*) immobilisation (*stambhana*), enmity (*vidveṣana*), eradication (*uccāṭana*) and liquidation (*māraṇa*). Depending on their use, the relevant *yantra*s are named '*yantra*s for subjugation' (*vaśyakarayantra*), '*yantra*s for attraction (*ākarṣaṇayantra*) and so on. The significance of the *Yantracintāmani* can be judged from the fact that vernacular manuals on the subject are based on this text rather than any other. The work was first studied by Jean Marquès-Rivière and translated into French in 1939.[201] Gudrun Bühnemann briefly summarised the text and placed Dāmodara in the seventeenth century; a more

198 See *AA* 1: 538–547 (*Āʾīn* 30).

199 Stietencron, "Planned Syncretism," 185. See further Truschke, "Dangerous Debates: Jain Responses to Theological Challenges at the Mughal Court," *Modern Asian Studies* 49 (2015): 1311–44, as well as Pushpa Prasad, "Akbar and the Jains," in *Akbar and His India*, ed. Irfan Habib (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 97–108 and Shirin Mehta, "Akbar as Reflected in the Contemporary Jain Literature in Gujarat," *Social Scientist* 20, no. 232–33 (1992): 54–60.

200 Hans-Georg Türstig, *Yantracintāmaṇiḥ of Dāmodara* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1988) which supersedes (the now reprinted and unreliable) Narendra Nath Sharma, *Kalpacintāmaṇiḥ of Dāmodara Bhaṭṭa: an ancient treatise on Tantra, Yantra and Mantra; Sanskrit text in Devanāgarī and Roman scripts, English transl., Yantr. diagrams, introd. and index* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1979).

201 Jean Marquès-Rivière, *Rituel de magie tantrique hindoue : Yantra Chintâmani, le joyau des Yantras, traduit en français et précédé d'une "Etude sur le Tantrisme,"* (Paris : Librairie Véga, 1939).

detailed background has been provided by Hans-Georg Türstig.[202] The high status assigned to Dāmodara by Abū al-Faẓl – certainly out of step with modern rational taste – is due to Mughal interests in indigenous mathematics, astronomy, astrology and allied sciences of India, in which category were placed protective and magical rites that had the potential to protect both individuals and the state. The *Yantracintāmaṇi* is eulogised as the 'quintessence of the Atharvaveda,' which helps explain Mughal interest in the latter text.[203] In any event, Abū al-Faẓl's mention of Dāmodara places him in the sixteenth century.

Rāmtīrth or Rāmatīrtha, like Madhusūdhana with whom we started this section, was an adherent of Advaita Vedānta. Our account of the personalities in this school can be read with the tables provided by Christopher Minkowski in his study of early modern Advaita.[204] Rāmatīrtha – number 9 in Minkowski's table – was author of several works; a useful biography and an account of his writing, with a list of disciples, was prepared by P. V. Sivarama Dikshitar.[205] For present purposes, we note that Rāmatīrtha counted Jagannāthāśrama among his teachers and was responsible for the *Vidvanmanorañjinī*, a commentary on the *Vedāntasāra*. This is an important work that provided a summary of the doctrines of the Advaitavādins as set forth by Śaṅkara in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*. Now the same *Vedāntasāra* also drew the commentarial attention of Narasiṃha Sarasvatī.[206] This Narasiṃha, otherwise known as Nṛsiṃhāśrama and another pupil of Jagannāthāśrama, appears to be the Nar Sing who comes immediately after Rāmatīrtha in Abū al-Faẓl's listing.[207] While the identification is not absolutely certain, this Narasiṃha is probably not the Narasiṃha Miśra Vājapeyī who visited

202 Gudrun Bühnemann, *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 35; Hans-Georg Türstig, "The Indian Sorcery called Abhicāra," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 29 (1985): 69–117 which can be usefully read with the edition of the text of the *Yantracintāmaṇi* published by the same author.

203 Türstig, *Yantracintāmaṇi*, 11.

204 Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 207–09 (table 1).

205 P. V. Sivarama Dikshitar, "Rāmatītha," in *Preceptors of Advaita*, ed. T. M. P. Mahadevan, (Secunderabad: Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Sankara Mandir, 1968), 223.

206 G. A. Jacob, ed., with notes and indices, *The Vedāntasāra of Sadānanda, together with the Commentaries of Nṛsiṃhasarasvatī and Rāmatīrtha* (Bombay: Pāndurang Jāwajī, 1925); for the use of Sarasvatī as a title, see below. Regarding the MSS Jacobi says: no. 2833 IOL text only, well written but omits several passages in latter part; No. 2773 IOL, very accurate; No. 884 IOL, with N's commentary in which the whole text is incorporated, beautifully written and fairly correct. From these manuscripts, it appears that Nṛsiṃha's commentary enjoyed greater prominence.

207 N. Veezhinathan, "Nṛsiṃhāśama," in *Preceptors of Advaita*, 226–32. Dinesh Bhattacharyya, "Sanskrit Scholars of Akbar's Time," *IHQ* 13 (1937): 33 notes some further possibilities.

the Mughal court sometime in the 1560s and wrote some digests on ritual, the best known being the *Nityācārapradīpa*.[208]

According to Dikshitar's account of Rāmatīrtha, Puruṣottama Miśra was one of his disciples. This fact is worth mentioning because Badā'ūnī makes the following statement: "For some time His Majesty called on a Brahmin, whose name was Purukhotam, author of a commentary on the [*Saṃkṣepaśārīraka*?], whom he asked to invent particular Sanskrit names for all things in existence."[209] This Puruṣotttama, more generally known under the name Puruṣottama Sarasvatī, was the author of at least two known works: the *Subodhinī* on Sarvajñātman's *Saṃkṣepaśārīraka* – just mentioned – and a commentary on Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's *Siddhāntabindu*.[210] The connections given here show that Puruṣottama Sarasvatī was active in the last two decades of the sixteenth century.

The name Sarasvatī introduces a degree of confusion and calls for explanation because it was used by a number of the scholars known to the Mughal court. As noted by Phyllis Granoff – and earlier by P. C. Divānji – this is not a name as such but a title given to people who are especially learned.[211] Sarasvatī in this context refers to the Indian goddess of speech who is thought to bestow learning on pious people; her sweetness of speech is often compared to honey (*madhu*).[212]

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208 Narasiṃha Miśra Vājapeyī is discussed in Truschke, *Cosmopolitan Encounters: Sanskrit and Persian at the Mughal Court*, Thesis (Ph.D.)--Columbia University, 2012, 34. For the text: Narasiṃha Miśra Vājapeyi, *Nityācārapradīpaḥ*, 2 vols. ed. Sadāśiva Miśra (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1903–28); see further, Gudrun Bühnemann, *Pūjā: A Study in Smārta Ritual* (Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien, 1988), 14 and Kedarnath Mahapatra, "Some Forgotten Smṛti-Writers of Orissa: (2) Narasiṃha Vājapeyī," *Orissa Historical Research Journal* 2 (1953): 7 (cited by Truschke but not available for this book). As kindly pointed out to us by Truschke (personal communication, November, 2015), Vājapeyī was probably not in the court long enough to register in the Persian sources.

209 *MT* 2: 256. In the *MT* as published, the name of the text in the manuscript source is unclear but Puruṣottama is known for his commentary on Sarvajñātman's *Saṃkṣepaśārīraka* so we have inserted that. Puruṣottama names Rāmatīrtha as his teacher in a verse in his *Subodhinī*, see Dikshitar, "Rāmatītha," 223. Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānta," 214 (table 2, no. VII) shows the relationship.

210 P. C. Divānji, ed., translated with introduction and comparative notes, *Siddhāntabindu of Madhusūdana with the Commentary of Purushottama* (Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1933), all of sections V and VI of the introduction, dealing with the biography and date of Madhusūdana, are relevant but Puruṣottama is discussed only briefly (ibid., cxl). Another translation of this work is cited below. For the relationships, see Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānta," 207 (table 1, no. 6). Also, Karl H. Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies,* retrieved January 2022.

211 See Phyllis Granoff, "Sarasvatī's Sons: Biographies of Poets in Medieval India," *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 49 (1995): 351–76.

212 Further examples of Sarasvatī and Balasarasvatī in addition to those noted by Granoff are mentioned in Willis, "Dhār, Bhoja and Sarasvatī," 130.

How Indian scholars propitiated Sarasvatī to gain knowledge and eloquence is revealed in one of the later sections of Merutuṅga's *Prabandhacintāmaṇi*, a work completed in Gujarāt in the opening years of the fourteenth century. There we read of a fierce religious contest between the Buddhists and Jains, and how the Buddhists first gained the upper hand. An individual named Malla, born of the warrior caste, never forgot his enmity toward the Buddhists and vowed revenge. Studying a text with great zeal, Sarasvatī eventually appeared and granted him a boon. He asked for a logical treatise that would allow him to conquer the Buddhists. This was reported to king Śilāditya who then gave permission for a debate to go forward and "Malla, by the help of Sarasvatī, who descended into his throat, quickly reduced the Buddhist to silence."[213] In a lovely verse by Nārāyaṇācarya celebrating the achievements of his uncle Rāghvendra, Sarasvatī is invoked in a similar way.[214]

> May the goddess Sarasvatī –
> Who is the autumnal moonlight to the ocean of words and
> Who dances on the stage of the tongue of the eminent Śrī Rāghavendra –
> May she be my protector!

The importance of the goddess of speech, and her links to royal patronage and power, are usefully summed up in the following Sanskrit verse of the scholar Salakṣa who flourished, like Merutuṅga, in western India during the fourteenth century.[215]

> She adorns the entire world and
> Fervently runs toward the glorious king,
> Who is a portion of the divine here.
> May that radiant speech grant me happiness!

The title Sarasvatī brings us back to the start of the list in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* where we have Madhu Sarsutī as a name. As pointed out by Dinesh Bhattacharyya, the name published in the English publication is wrong and the reading is actually

213 Jina Vijaya Muni, ed., with Hindi translation and notes, *Prabandhacintāmaṇi of Merutuṅgācārya* (Śāntiniketan: Siṅghī Jaina Jñānapīṭha, 1933), translated as C. H. Tawney, *The Prabandhacintāmaṇi or Wishing-stone of Narratives* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1901), 171–72.

214 D. R. Vasudeva Rau, ed., *Mahākavi Nārāyanācārya's Śrī Rāghavendravijaya*, 1: *śrīrāghavendraratnānāṃ rasanāraṅganartakī | śabdāmbudhiśarajjyotsnnā śaraṇaṃ mam śāradā ||* 4

215 *Śabdavilāsa*, quoted in Truschke, "Defining the Other: An Intellectual History of Sanskrit Lexicons and Grammars of Persian," *JIP* 40 (2012): 638. The text was composed in 1365, thus subsequent to Merutuṅga.

Mādhava Sarasvatī.[216] This individual can be identified as the proponent of the Advaita system who lived in Varāṇāsi in the sixteenth century. His teacher was Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭa, a scholar whose biographical outline is known: he came from Paithan in the Deccan and, after periods of residence in Kohalpur, Vijayanagara and Dvāraka, settled in Varāṇāsī, probably in the second decade of the sixteenth century.[217] He attracted students there, among them our Mādhava Sarasvatī.[218] Six works of Mādhava are known with two available in modern editions: the *Mitabhāṣiṇī*, a commentary on the eleventh-century text *Saptapadārthī* of Śivāditya, and his *Sarvadarśanakaumudī*.[219]

As noted by Sanjukta Gupta in her monograph on the Advaita school of philosophy, Madhusūdana mentions Mādhava as his teacher in the *Advaitasiddhi*.[220] This dates both individuals to the middle part of the sixteenth century and, more importantly, brings us again to Madhusūdana. He is the only individual listed in both the *Razmnāmah* and *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*. The first gives "Madhusūdana Miśra," while the second gives "14. Madhusūdan." This is the person normally known in Sanskrit circles as Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. Abū al-Faẓl was familiar with the teachings of the Vedānta school of philosophy – the overarching system to which Madhusūdana's Advaita belonged – and he gives a summary of it in his 'Description of the Nine Schools' in the third volume of the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*.[221] Otherwise, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is recorded as the author of a substantial number of philosophical works, many of which have been edited and published. The *Siddhāntabindu*, for example, is a commentary on a work by Śaṅkara, the key

216 Dinesh Bhattacharyya, "Sanskrit Scholars," 31, cited and supported in Sanjukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism: The Philosophy of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī* (London: Routledge, 2006), 6. See Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānta," 214 (table 2, no. IV). Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, retrieved January, 2022.

217 Joya Chatterji and D. A. Washbrook, *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2013) and Rosalind O'Hanlon and D. A. Washbrook, *Religious Cultures in Early Modern India: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2012), 128–29, also Christopher Minkowski, "Learned Brahmins and the Mughal Court: the *Jyotiṣa*s," in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 107–09.

218 Dinesh Bhattacharyya, "Sanskrit Scholars," 32; Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta*, 6.

219 The six works are listed in Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*; the published items are: Rāmaśāstrī Tailaṅga, ed., *The Saptapadârthî of Śivâditya: together with its commentary, the Mitabhâshiṇî of Mâdhava Sarasvatî* (Benares: E. J. Lazarus & Co, 1893) and K. Sāmbaśiva Śāstrī, ed., *The Sarvadarśanakaumudī of Mādhavasarasvatī* (Trivandrum: Government Press, 1938) who notes (p. iii) that there is "no confirmatory evidence to determine the date of Śrīmādhavasarasvatī," but the problem is taken up in M. S. Bhat, "Date of Mādhava Sarasvatī," *JIH* 40 (1962): 217–22.

220 Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta*, 6.

221 See *AA* 3: 172–79.

figure in Vedānta who lived in the eighth century.[222] A philosophical counter to Madhusūdana came from Viśvanātha Nyāyasiddhānta Pañcānna who composed *Bhedasiddhi* as a refutation of monism and direct reply to Madhusūdana's *Advaitasiddhi*.[223]

Among his many works, Madhusūdana wrote a commentary on the *Gītā*.[224] As noted before, the *Gītā* is a key religious text that has attracted much scholarly attention through the centuries. It is notable that Abū al-Faẓl seems to have known the *Gītā* in so far as a translation of it is ascribed to his hand.[225] The source for this literary tradition seems to be the historical fact that Madhusūdana was in the Mughal court – as we know from the *Razmnāmah* colophon – and was likely known to Abū al-Faẓl.[226] The interest was certainly a one-way affair. As outlined in his valuable contribution to our understanding of Madhusūdana, Shankar Nair observes that the early modern Sanskrit intellectuals under Muslim rule were remarkably confident in the resources of their tradition and "its ability to consistently realise its own, most central truth-claims, hence utterly without need, desire, or even curiosity to venture anywhere else."[227] This 'Indo-centrism' was described in Halbfass, *India and Europe*, as Nair notes, but already in the late nineteenth

222 K. N. Subramanian, trans., *Siddhāntabindu: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's Commentary on Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's Daśaśloki* (Varanasi: Rishi Publications, 1989). Ali's comment that Śaṅkara was "not represented" at court is thus slightly overdrawn. See Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 44.

223 Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India, 1450–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 77.

224 Sisir Kumar Gupta, trans., *Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on the Bhagavad Gītā: being an English translation of his commentary, Gūḍhārtha dīpikā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977).

225 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 59. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1089, no. 1949 (IO Islamic 1358) mentions a note on folio 1r showing the translator was Dārā Shikūh, noted in Mujtabai, *Aspects of Hindu Muslim Cultural Relations*, 74. Further discussion of the *Gītā* translations in Y. D. Ahuja, "Some Aspects of the Persian Prose Translation of the *Gita* ascribed to Abu'l-Fazl," *Indo-Iranica* 13, no. 3 (1960): 20–27, and references in following note.

226 Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988), 33 notes that Abū al-Faẓl's account of the 18 *vidyā* systems in the *AA* seems to be based on the *Prasthānabheda* of Madhusūdana; Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 273 cites the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha* of Mādhava as an influence. As noted above, Madhusūdana had Mādhava as his teacher. The general run of these works – recalling that Abū al-Faẓl did not read Sanskrit – would have come to Abū al-Faẓl through Madhusūdana. Nair, *Translating Wisdom*, 61–62 gives a learned account of Madhusūdhana, but does not know the *Razmnāmah* colophon so finds no evidence to place him in the Mughal court.

227 Nair, *Translating Wisdom*, all of Chapter 2 is relevant; also Nair, "'Islam' in Sanskrit doxography: A Reconsideration via the Writings of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī," *JRAS* (2021): 1–26, retrieved January 2022.

century H. S. Jarrett observed that Abū al-Faẓl "found his Hindu informants, as he says, of a retrograde tendency, spinning like silk worms, a tissue round themselves, immeshed in their own opinions, conceding the attainment of truth to no other, while artfully insinuating their own views."[228]

The Persian *Gītā* translation – made in fact by Fayẓī and later Prince Dārā and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Chishtī – became a popular work, with some authors arguing that more people in later centuries read the text in Persian than in Sanskrit.[229] It remains to explain the name Misra or Miśra. This is a common surname among Brahmins in northern India and because Abū al-Faẓl reports that Madhusūdana was a Brahmin, we should not be surprised if he was a Miśra.

Valerie Stoker has given further information about Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. He was from Bengal but lived in the city of Vāraṇāsī, where he authored the *Advaitasiddhi* in *circa* 1585. This responded to a work from south India by an author named Vyāsatīrtha. As Stoker says: "That Vyāsatīrtha's criticisms of these rival Vedānta systems proved incisive is evident in the fact that for the duration of the sixteenth century, and even into the seventeenth, both direct and indirect responses to his works were being composed, not only in south India but as far north as Vāraṇāsī."[230] The philosophical content of the debates is less historically important for the present book than the fact that this example shows how the intelligentsia had networks covering wide geographical areas. An invaluable insight into the mechanics of these networks comes from a Sanskrit letter between two scholars from Bengal – one of *jyotiḥśāstra*, the other of *nyāyaśāstra* – that dates to around 1535 CE.[231]

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228 See *AA* 3: viii.

229 Cole, "Iranian Culture and South Asia," 22, citing Mujtabai, *Aspects of Hindu Muslim Cultural Relations*, 65. For readership of the *Gītā* see Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1089, no. 1950 (IO Islamic 614). The best work, so far unpublished as far as we are aware, is Roderic Vassie, *Persian Interpretations of the* Bhagavadgītā *in the Mughal period with special reference to the Sufi version of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Chishtī*, Thesis (Ph.D.) -- School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989.

230 Valerie Stoker, "Polemics and Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Vijayanagara: Vyāsatīrtha and the Dynamics of Hindu Sectarian Relations," *History of Religions* 51, no. 2 (2011): 131.

231 Samuel Wright, "Circulating Scholarship: A Note on a Sanskrit Letter from Bengal circa 1535 CE," *JRAS* 27, no. 1 (2017): 83–91. Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta*, 5 expresses surprise at the distance: "Vāraṇāsī, the accepted place of activity for Madhusūdana, is far removed from Vijay Nagar . . . it is plausible to think that the fame of these two great scholars [Mādhava and Sāyana] may have taken a long time to reach Vāraṇāsī." The letter of *circa* 1535 gives actual manuscript evidence of how materials moved to which we can add the career of Shaykh Bhāvan, who came from the Deccan to the Mughal court. For networks otherwise, O'Hanlon and Washbrook, eds, *Religious Cultures of Early Modern India*.

To complete this round up of the first grouping of scholars listed in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī,* we turn *to* Nārāin Asram, Parmindar and Ādit. The first, more correctly Nārāyaṇāśrama, appears to be a pupil of Nṛsiṃhāśrama, already mentioned above.[232] He was a contemporary of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and wrote a commentary on Nṛsiṃhāśrama's *Advaitadīpikā*.[233] The name Parmindar has been understood by Dinesh Bhattacharyya as Paramānanda.[234] He suggested that this is Paramānanda Bhaṭṭācārya, yet another Advaitin and disciple of Rāmatīrtha, who wrote a commentary on the Mokṣadharma section of the *Mahābhārata* titled *Mitabhāṣiṇī*.[235] Āditi, finally, presents difficulties. But as Bhattacharyya has noted, he should be a follower of Advaita given the preponderance of this school in the list.[236] He might therefore be Ādityapurin, the disciple of Haricaraṇapurī, and author of a text titled *Vedāntasaṃjñādīpikā*.[237]

There are no known portraits of the Hindu scholars listed in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī,* at least as far as art historians are presently aware. However, looking again at the *Razmnāmah* page in Philadelphia (Figure 1), we see a group of learned men at the bottom of the picture. All of these individuals have forehead marks, showing they are Hindus. One stands passively to the side, wearing white robes that suggest he is a mendicant. The remaining four, excluding the scribe, are shown speaking and gesticulating in an animated fashion. By coincidence or design, the colophons of the 1599 manuscripts name four scholars as assisting with the translation. Could we have here, therefore, portraits of Devī Miśra, Madhusūdhana Miśra, Caturbhuj Dās and Shaykh Bhāvan?

232 Dinesh Bhattacharyya, "Sanskrit Scholars," 32; further context in Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānata," 214. To judge from Minkowski's account Nṛsiṁhāśrama was the greater light; Abū al-Faẓl's inclusion of Nārāyaṇāśrama appears to be due to the fact he was a contemporary.

233 S. Subrahmanya Śāstrī, ed., *Advaitadīpikā of Nṛsiṁhāśrama: With the Commentary Advaitadīpikāvivaraṇaṃ by Nārāyṇaśrama* (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, 1982–87).

234 Dinesh Bhattacharyya, "Sanskrit Scholars," 33.

235 We have been unable to verify this information; Dinesh Bhattacharyya cites a manuscript of the text in Asiatic Society Calcutta. Minkowski, "Advaita Vedānata," 215 mentions one Paramānanda, follower of Nārāyaṇatīrtha, but this may be somebody else.

236 Dinesh Bhattacharyya, "Sanskrit Scholars," 33. Bhattacharyya continues with further individuals listed by Abū al-Faẓl, mostly followers of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. These individuals are outside the scope of the present study but see the useful discussion in Ganeri, *Lost Age of Reason*, 75–79 and Wright, "Circulating Scholarship: A Note on a Sanskrit Letter."

237 Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, retrieved January 2022.

1.6 State of the Art and Aims of the Present Work

The state of scholarship on Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* has two interlocking strands: that dealing with the *Preface* itself and that dealing more generally with the *Mahābhārata* and other translations. Here we focus on the first for the sake of precision. The *Preface* drew little attention from historians of Mughal history until it was given a scholarly debut in Rizvi's *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign*, a work already cited several times in this chapter.[238] In the context of the Translation Bureau, Rizvi devoted four pages to the text, giving a summary of its key points but necessarily simplifying Abū al-Faẓl's thinking and omitting much detail.[239] Rizvi also gave a translation of the passage dealing with the translation team; his source for the Persian was the *Razmnāmah* printed in Lucknow by Nawal Kishore Press.[240] Published in 1975, Rizvi's book has become a landmark study that has shaped much subsequent scholarship on the Translation Bureau and the *Razmnāmah*. Indeed, later writers have normally followed Rizvi's analysis due to his meticulous attention to the sources and his well-balanced treatment.

After Rizvi, the first scholar to return to Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* was Carl W. Ernst in a wide-ranging article called "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations of Indian Languages." In this piece, Ernst revisited the primary sources and for this used the Tehran edition of the *Razmnāmah* (published in 1979–81). Ernst offered translations of several passages from this edition, and deployed these to advance his reassessment of translation literature in the Indian milieu. The specific passages are noted in Chapter 2, and we will return to them again in Chapter 3.

Ernst's study, published in 2003, was more than a systematic re-examination of the *Razmnāmah* and related materials, however. He attempted to move beyond the terms of reference framed by Rizvi and specifically questioned the understanding of the translations as expressions of a 'liberal outlook' or exercises in 'religious tolerance'.[241] The idea that the translations were meant to build bridges between the Hindus and Muslims and to address Akbar's goal of reducing

238 We will not list earlier notices, for which see Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism," 174 and our bibliography.

239 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 207–10, presaged in Rizvi, "Abu'l Fazl's Preface to the Persian Translation of the Mahabharat," published in 1950.

240 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 208.

241 As in, for example, John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 36–40 and Rice, "A Persian Mahābhārata: The 1598–1599 Razmnama," 126.

religious factionalism are certainly true and they have enjoyed emphasis thanks to Rizvi and his contemporaries. But as Ernst has said:[242]

> Abu al-Fazl was interested in the philosophical and religious content of the epic, from the perspective of an enlightened intellectual whose cosmopolitan vision had moved him out of a strictly defined Islamic theological perspective. But I think it is fair to say that this intellectual project was thoroughly subordinated to the political aim of making Akbar's authority supreme over all possible rivals in India, including all religious authorities. The translation of the Sanskrit epics was not an academic enterprise comparable to the modern study of religion; it was instead part of an imperial effort to bring both Indic and Persianate culture into the service of Akbar.

The view that the translation project can be seen as an instrumentalist policy, and part of the imperial ambition of Akbar as an Indo-Persian king, is also seen in an article published by M. Athar Ali in 1992.[243] Ali buttressed his interpretation with a close examination of the Persian texts and new observations on the date of the translations and the contributions of those involved. The value of his essay is underlined by the fact that it was reprinted in *Akbar and His Age* in 1999.[244] The social context of the *Mahābhārata* translation was also taken up by Muzaffar Alam in his book *The Languages of Political Islam*. Given the magisterial scope of this work, it is not surprising that that the *Preface* receives brief treatment, with Abū al-Faẓl's passage explaining Akbar's motivation for commissioning the *Razmnāmah* introduced to illustrate Mughal concerns with morality and the king's interest in nurturing the conditions in which his subjects would appreciate each other's religious views.[245]

After a considerable hiatus, Audrey Truschke entered the field with a new study of the *Razmnāmah*.[246] Extending the work of Ernst, Truschke argued that the creators of the *Razmnāmah* approached the *Mahābhārata* as a mixture of imaginative history, political advice and a great story that served as a vehicle for imperial ideology while making the work resonate with the Indo-Persian literary traditions of the time. In particular, she devoted several pages to Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*, the first in-depth examination of the text since the time of Rizvi.[247] Truschke has also published articles on Sanskrit-Persian grammars, the Jain responses to the debates at Fatehpur Sikri and the accounts of Brahmins about

242 Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism," 182.

243 Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 38–45.

244 The paper is reprinted exactly, and under the same title, see *Akbar and His Age*, ed. Iqtidar Alam Khān (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1999), 171–80.

245 Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 64–5.

246 Truschke, "The Mughal Book of War," 506–20, published in 2011.

247 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 126–33.

their engagement with the Mughals. These articles are listed in our bibliography and cited in those places where the information is relevant to our discussion. More recently, Jonathan Peterson has examined how the sixteenth-century historian Muḥammad Qāsim Astarābādī engaged with the *Mahābhārata* through Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*.[248] Translating several key passages of Abū al-Faẓl afresh, Peterson explored Firishtah's vision of historical narration and his critique of Abū al-Faẓl's reading of the epic. This led Peterson to question the prevailing framework used to understand the cultural encounter between Persian and Sanskrit, an issue that will draw our attention later in this book.

While the publications outlined above shed valuable light on Akbar's Translation Bureau and the *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*, we are left asking how Abū al-Faẓl positioned himself in relation to the translation and how he approached his task as an author. How Abū al-Faẓl understood the people for whom the translation was intended, and how he viewed Akbar as his king and patron also merit scrutiny. These issues can only be answered by a close examination of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*. Accordingly, we have provided a complete translation of the *Preface* in Chapter 2, and a commentary and analysis of its themes in Chapter 3. For justification we only add a remark from Truschke: "Most Indo-Persian translations are severely understudied; many moulder away in manuscript libraries, unpublished and in want of sustained philological attention."[249] This observation – disheartening yet true – explains the scope and aims of the present work. The study of Abū al-Faẓl's script has barely begun – as the survey of the literature just given shows – and it has never been translated in full. This means that historians without Persian have resorted to English translations of the parts available, while even those with Persian have been deflected by Abū al-Faẓl's complex and difficult literary style.

By way of clarification and conclusion, we should note that our research questions do *not* embrace an exploration of the rich religious fabric of the Mughal empire or the general nature of translation activities in the Mughal world.[250] Even the context of the translation of Hindu works into Persian is something we sidestep for the most part given Truschke's overview in *Culture of Encounters*.[251] Our

248 Jonathan Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh: Rethinking Inter-Religious Encounter in the *Tārīkh-i Firishteh*," *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 1 (2018): 155–82.

249 Truschke, "Indo-Persian Translations: A Disruptive Past," *Seminar* 671 (July 2015).

250 For these themes see the essays in Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui, eds., *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*; Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter Through Translation Theory," *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (2001): 260–87 and Nair, *Translating Wisdom*.

251 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*; all chapter 3 on the *Mahābhārata* is relevant.

concern is simply with what Abū al-Faẓl is saying in his *Preface*. This approach means that we take Abū al-Faẓl's writing as an indication of what the royal circle thought about the *Razmnāmah*. As a prominent courtier under Akbar, and the king's chronicler and avid supporter, Abū al-Faẓl is an important source. He is not, of course, the only source. But in view of his close connection to Akbar and his knowledge of court activities, his account provides a point of departure for a host of contexts that can be left for other to explore in the future.

Hajnalka Kovacs

Chapter 2
The *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*

[page 1] [folio 15v][1]

> O You, for whom the eighteen thousand worlds are yearning intoxicated –
> Their heads questing on the path, their souls in the palm of their hands.
> So many writing tablets have been blackened and so many pens broken,
> Yet they come not even close to what You have designed.[2]

How would the speck of dust of contingency (*imkān*) – lost in the desert of bewilderment and straying – have the courage to speak of attaining the sun of Necessary Existence (*vujūb*)?[3] And to step from the abyss of ruin and the desert of aimless wandering to the height of witnessing (*shuhūd*) [Reality] and to the sky of uniting (*vuṣūl*) [with the sun]?[4] And how would he dare – thinking the earthenware of his own imagination and the adulterated goods of his knowledge, which are but lowly merchandise of the bazaar of contingency (*imkān*), to be exquisite treasures in the treasure-house of Necessary Existence (*vujūb*) and precious stones in the mines of Existence (*vujūd*) – to describe the exalted qualities of the sanctified essence of the Nurturer (may He be exalted)?

1 The aim here is to render Abū al-Faḍl's difficult prose as faithfully as possible and while the ornate features make for difficult reading, many are essential for understanding the text. As noted in Chapter 1, the page numbers in square brackets refer to the printed edition. Folio numbers are to the British Library manuscript illustrated at the end of this volume with the references to them inserted here by Vafa Movahedian.

2 The opening *rubāʿī* is translated also in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 208. For identifying the poems quoted we have utilised the online repository *Ganjoor* for Persian poetry (https://ganjoor.net). We have not been able to identify all poems; some, especially individual *rubāʿīs*, may be Abū al-Faḍl's own compositions. Poems by other poets as quoted by Abū al-Faḍl differ in some cases from the versions in published editions; in the present translation we have refrained from citing variants unless it is necessary to emend the printed text.

3 Abū al-Faḍl, who sets out to make the conventional opening by praising God – which he does by pointing to the inability of the contingent being to comprehend the Absolute – deploys binary opposites traditionally used in Persian poetry, such as the 'sun' (*āftāb*), 'speck of dust' (*ẕarrah*), to convey the fundamental ontological difference between 'contingent or possible existence' (*imkān*) and 'necessary or absolute existence' (*vujūb*), or human beings and God.

4 Abū al-Faḍl contrasts the position of the speck of dust with that of the sun, using the words *ḥaẓīẓ*, 'Nadir' and *awj*, 'Zenith', here translated as 'abyss' and 'height'.

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O You, on whose path the two worlds are just a speck of dust –
They are less than nothing in your court!
Our thinking has no way to your presence;
No one is aware of your mystery but You.
In our helplessness, it is better
That we acknowledge our own deficiency.
O You who have given us the substance of life,
At your door there is nothing we can pursue but service.[5]

However, since it is the custom of the dust-covered travellers on the highway of supplication to assume that the few matters that they have acquired – in accordance with their insight, knowledge, strength and capability, from the book of perfection and the [page 2] chapter of gnosis – are free of the contamination of deficiencies, and to present them in the royal pavilion of Oneness (*aḥadīyat*) and the chamber of Eternity (*ṣamadīyat*), naming them 'thankfulness' and 'praise of God' – necessarily I followed the customs and writings of this group and made my pen step on this path. That is, I opened the door of the book with the key of the tongue, which, along with the thirty-two teeth, is the opener of the treasure house of the heart. However, I was immediately drowned in the deluge of the sweat of embarrassment; no difference remained between me and flotsam on the sea. Therefore, I stopped trying the impossible and started spending my breath in silence.[6]

Neither the wise nor the simpleton is aware of Him:
The chameleon turned out to be as blind as the bat.[7]

Eternal praise be to God's elect, adorners of the herb-garden of morals and openers of the veils of the secrets of the souls and horizons,[8] who in this exalted court washed away the volumes of their erudition in the water of oblivion and

5 These verses are from the *maṣnavī Maṭlaʿ al-anvār* of Amīr Khusraw (1253–1325), different loci. Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī, *Khamsah-i Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī*, ed. Amīr Aḥmad Ashrafī (Tihrān: Shaqāyiq, 1983), 15–16.

6 Abū al-Faẓl, reflecting on himself and on his task, explains that he set out to follow the example of those writers who begin their writings by praising God and thanking him, only to realise that such words of praise would do no justice to God.

7 In Persian poetry, the 'chameleon' (*ḥirbā*) is sometimes contrasted with the 'bat' (*khaffāsh*), for it gazes into the sun for extended period whereas the bat hides from the sun.

8 The expression *asrār-i anfus va āfāq* ('secrets of the souls and horizons') is a reference to Qur'ān 41: 53: "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth . . ." (Arberry's translation).

surrendered themselves to the script of ignorance, and who turned over the pages of eloquence and spoke with the tongue of tonguelessness.[9]

> God's intoxicated servants who have spoken eloquently are drunk,
> Even without cup and flask, with a wine that does not knock them out.
> [folio 16r] Do not seek from them embellishment of knowledge and learning,
> For they have set their books on fire.

After disciplining my speech-transmitting tongue and restraining myself from expressing thankfulness, due to the justice (*inṣāf*) that I exercised, without letting that rascal imagination interfere, in the justice-court of rational thinking (*ʿaql*), and due to the laudable conduct toward myself in this respect, I – who have lost the thread of speech – was made the trustee of the keys of discourse.[10] I received permission from the audience-hall of the source of overflowing bounty (*mabdaʿ-i fayyāẓ*) to say a few words that would be appropriate to this subject. In the meantime, I was given leave to express a few fundamental concepts (*maʿānī-i nafs al-amrīyah*) that I had learned in the school of critical inquiry (*madrasah-i tahqīq*) and which had been imprisoned in the recesses of my mind. I conveyed my gratitude to the benefactor and made myself ready for this task.[11] Since I lacked the capital and the ability, I pledged my short-fingered hand and split-tongued pen to fulfill this lofty request and engaged in the elucidation of this noble objective.[12]

[page 3]

> O Lord, give me light from the lamp of gnosis!
> My heart is ruined – restore it with your love!
> If I seek closeness to you, it is outside of decorum –
> Since you have cast me far, look at me from far!

9 This passage refers to mystics who have realised that knowledge learned from books does not lead to God, and who have chosen silence over speaking about God.

10 What is translated here as passive is a plural third person active verb in the original ("they made me"), which, in the light of what follows, is used in deference to the emperor Akbar.

11 The word *munʿim* ('benefactor') could refer to God or the emperor; in this context the latter is more likely.

12 This sentence is a conventional expression of self-abasement by the author, reinforced by the images *dast-i kūtah-banān* (lit. 'short-fingered hand') and *khāmah-i shikāftah-zabān* (lit. 'split-tongued pen'). The word *kūtah* means 'short,' but in compounds it can denote weakness, lack of success, or the inability to reach, e.g. *dast-kūtāh* 'weak', 'unsuccessful,' *kūtah-dast* 'weak', 'short-handed', 'slow'. Although the reed pen's nib is 'split' (*shikāftah*) to hold ink, here the expression *shikāftah-zabān*, 'split-tongued' or 'cut-tongued' refers to inability to convey the meaning.

Let it not remain hidden[13] from the discerning who can penetrate the subtleties and from the enlightened whose breath is refreshing – who are aware of the subtleties of the minds and the souls and unveil hidden matters, intelligible or sensible – that in conformity with God's far-reaching wisdom, from the time the affairs of the living have been reported and information about the dead recorded, the eye of the rational soul has been blind and the eye of sight visionless. Men have been striving to ruin the meadows and fields of their spiritual dimensions, and made efforts which are not commendable – and yield no benefit – to cultivate the salt marshes of their physical beings.[14] If now and then innate felicity grabbed a troubled soul by the collar of existence and made him a seer of hidden secrets, expressing these secrets was equal to letting the head go down behind the veil of non-existence – whether due to the lack of aptitude, or due to the potency of this wine which is capable of knocking men out, or due to well-wishers from among his contemporaries.[15] For, good people of the time, due to their simple-mindedness or compassionate hearts, and hostile bad ones, due to their wicked souls and corrupt natures, out of calculation or by causing discord, made him travel the path leading to non-existence and take up residence in the realm of annihilation, the abode of oblivion. Exalted kings, who are pillars of the world, and the purpose behind their coming to existence is to regulate the outward affairs of common people, were usually not concerned with investigating the hidden recesses of the minds (*sarā'ir*) of the 'wearers of turbans'[16] in affairs like this. Therefore, if by chance such a matter reached their exalted ears, they necessarily counted it among the affairs pertaining to religion (*muʿāmalāt-i dīnī*). Entrusting it to the custodians of religion who are in control of the office of issuing legal decrees (*fatvá*) and are concerned with matters of Islamic jurisprudence (*faqāhat*) – who are the leaders of those who practice imitation (*arbāb-i taqlīd*), or rather, generals

13 The expression *pūshīdah namānad kih* ('let it not remain hidden that . . .' or 'may it not remain hidden that . . .'), just like *bi-dān kih* ('know that . . .' or 'let it be known that . . .'), is a common rhetorical device that signals transitions; here it marks the real beginning of the author's discourse after the conventional opening.

14 The sentence is built on the binary opposites *kharābī* and *maʿmūrī* ('ruin' and 'cultivation'), here used in connection with 'soul' and 'body'.

15 The imagery suggests that Abū al-Faẓl is referring to Sufis like al-Ḥallāj, executed in 922, allegedly for his saying *anā al-Ḥaqq* ("I am the truth"), a statement that can also be interpreted as "I am God." The passage contrasts the general situation of mankind with the few exceptional individuals who possess discernment and can see reality.

16 That is, the religious scholars.

of ignorance and foolishness – they protected themselves from the tongues of useless prattlers and the slanders of nonsense-speakers.[17]

But today, which is the time for the manifestation of the divine name 'the Hidden' (*al-Bāṭin*) and the coming in view of God's all-encompassing, overflowing mercy, [page 4] in conformity with divine inspiration and spiritual communication, the cream of human beings and the elect from among the righteous of the sons of Adam, the world of the soul and the soul of the world, that is, the Emperor of the Time – about whose bounty-filled person a little taste will be given by this loyal pen [folio 16v] – has been found to possess a truth-seeing eye and reality-choosing heart, aided by lofty understanding and knowledge-driven rational inquiry into the minutest details, and became the conveyor of bounty to both the elite and the common people.[18]

> Due to this exultation, the body of his throne rose above earth;
> Due to these good tidings, the top of his crown passed beyond the sky.[19]

It is not concealed from discerning, far-seeing eyes that whenever it [divine bounty][20] reaches a common subject of the king, it happens right when it is time for him to descend into the concealment of non-existence, otherwise this pleasing matter would turn out to be reversed and the one who is obeyed should become the one who obeys.[21]

On this joy-kindling day – which is the springtime of knowledge and insight, and the time for the renewal of the order of the created world – all should witness that the overflowing bounty from the Unseen world (*fuyūẓ-i ghaybīyah*) has

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17 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 127, has an abridged translation of this passage. Truschke interprets it as referring to a "specific dispute between Akbar and certain Muslim factions at court that the new *Razmnāma* will decisively resolve," whereas in our opinion it serves to highlight Akbar's uniqueness and greatness (described in detail in the following section) by contrasting his role and practice with that of the kings of the past.

18 This passage, which introduces Akbar as a king whose dominion encompasses both the physical and the spiritual realms (the latter signified by the divine name *al-Bāṭin*), is also rendered in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 128.

19 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Ẓahīr Fāryābī (d. 1201); Ạbū Al-Faẓl Ṭāhir Ibn Muḥammad Ẓahīr Fāryābī, *Dīvān-i Ẓahīr Fāryābī*, ed. Aḥmad Shīrāzī, 2nd ed., (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Furūghī, 1982), 141.

20 The BL manuscript has *īn fayẓ* ("this divine bounty") whereas the printed text only has *īn* ("this").

21 This sentence may be an interpolation by someone other than Abū al-Faẓl as it disrupts the logical flow of the description of Akbar as repository of divine grace. The point it aims to convey is that should the all-encompassing grace reach a common person in his life, it would put him on the top and would thus reverse the hierarchical order; therefore, it only reaches him at the time of death.

reached the mind – receptacle for the overflowing divine bounty (*khāṭir-i fayẓ-maẓāhir*) – and the soul – dwelling-place of reality (*bāṭin-i ḥaqīqat-mavāṭin*) – of the Emperor of the Time.[22] Now that the time has come for the inwardly-blind, covered-eyes members of mankind to increase in insight, and even for the dead-hearted ones of nature to receive life, in this wondrous state of affairs the meaning of kingship (*maʿnī-i salṭanat*) and the secret of the caliphate (*sirr-i khilāfat*) have received confirmation and verification. For, the emperor, for the sake of a felicitous outcome and sublime regulation of the important affairs of the physical realm, has dressed the physical form (*ṣūrat*) with the precious robe of honour of spiritual kingship (*salṭanat-i maʿnavī*), and made it adorn the royal throne and hoist the banner of the caliphate (*ẓill-i iláhī*).[23] By means of this this wondrous act of this chosen one of God, the headquarters of the absolute dominion of imitation (*bayt al-tasalluṭ-i taqlīd*), which throughout the passing of years and the turning of centuries stood on a firm foundation, was demolished and became the seat of the caliphate of critical inquiry (*dār al-khilāfah-i taḥqīq*).[24]

> In praise of the great king of kings, Abū al-Muẓaffar Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Akbar, the champion king – may God make his kingdom endure! [25]

Alláhu Akbar (God is Great)! The hand of astonishment has grabbed the collar of mind and keeps it hesitant to mention the well-known name[26] of this leader of the knowers of God, this exemplar of those whose foundation is laid on guidance. Even if the mind manages to bring itself, falling and rising, to the court of glorification, it may not procure a pass for the tongue of articulation for the attainment of good fortune. If it does give the tongue of eloquence permission to describe

22 As the wording of this passage indicates, Abū al-Faẓl invokes the philosophical doctrine of 'emanation' (*fayẓ*) but only with relation to Akbar who, in his view, is the perfect receptacle for the divine effusion or overflowing bounty (*fayẓ*). Compare p. 2 of the printed text where he calls Akbar 'the source of overflowing bounty' (*mabdaʿ-i fayyāẓ*). On the development of the doctrine of emanation in Islamic philosophy see Cristina D'Ancona, "Emanation," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet et at (2016), s.v., retrieved April 2022.

23 The passage quite explicitly posits Akbar as the king who unites in his person both temporal and spiritual rule (*salṭanat* and *khilāfat*, here *ẓill-i iláhī*, lit. 'Shadow of God').

24 Abū al-Faẓl's views about the relationship of human being and God, and the nature of kingship as expressed in this opening part of the preface, appear to be consistent with what he writes in more detail in his other works. See Hardy, "Abul Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah," 114–37.

25 This subtitle and the exclamation *Allāhu Akbar*, "God is great!" is missing from the BL manuscript; the place for is has been left empty.

26 That is, the name *Akbar* ('Greater' or 'Greatest' or 'the [truly] Great'), which happens to coincide with the adjective *Akbar* in the exclamation *Allāhu Akbar*, "God is great!" in the beginning of the paragraph.

the virtues and to recount the elevated stations of this absolute guide (*hādī ʿalá al-iṭlāq*), [page 5] this rightfully Guided One (*Mahdī bi-al-istiḥqāq*),[27] the reality and true state of affairs will make it ashamed, and it will shy away from engaging in such customary practice and habit. For, apart from the fact that whatever one says or writes will be in accordance with his own state and preparedness, and not in conformity with the sublime level of the glorified one [Akbar], how could his sublime traits and his glorious characteristics, which are known to the sanctified heavenly beings, be within the boundaries of the expression of the soiled inhabitants of the world of dust?

> I do not know how to praise him –
> Thinking of this, I despair of my life.[28]
> His body is like a large elephant, his soul is like Gabriel;
> His hand is like the rain cloud of Bahman, his heart is like the river Nile. [29]
> Just as the world is in need of rain,
> Knowledge is necessary for the soul.[30]

Would that those who possess Plato-like excellence or Aristotle-like traits pledged themselves to this important matter, so that, having comprehended the exalted nature of this saint-ruler, they would impress his perfect reality and godliness (*kamāl-i ḥaqīqat va ḥaqqānīyat*) on the minds of all mankind! Would that those who drink from the fountain of Junayd[31] and Shiblī[32] plunged into this stream, so

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27 Here Abū al-Faẓl has chosen vocabulary from the domain of religion – such as *sharḥ*, 'expounding', 'commentary,' *manqabat*, 'virtue,' i.e. praise poems about the Prophet's virtues, *ẕikr*, 'remembering' God by reciting the Divine names etc. – to indicate Akbar's greatness. The Mahdī ('the rightly guided one') features in both Sunni and Shiite thought as an eschatological figure, generally held to be a descendant of the Prophet, who would come before the end of the world to restore order. On the evolution of the concept of the Mahdī see W. Madelung, "al-Mahdī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved April 2022.

28 These verses are from the *Shāhnamah* of Firdawsī (ca. 940–1019); Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, ed. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 3:105.

29 Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 1: 17.

30 Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 1: 62.

31 Al-Junayd of Baghdad (d. 910) was an influential early Sufi, considered the greatest exponent of the 'sober' type of mysticism. See e.g. Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 2000), 52–56; A. J. Arberry, "al-Djunayd," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved April 2022.

32 Al-Shiblī (d. 945) was a disciple of al-Junayd, known for his eccentric behavior and ecstatic sayings. See F. Sobieroj, "al-Shiblī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved April 2022. Abū al-Faẓl's point is that only great philosophers and the likes of Sufi masters such as al-Junayd and al-Shiblī would be able to comprehend and speak about Akbar's true nature.

that their pen of expression could write a few words that would be suitable to be [folio 17r] recited in the royal court as praise!

> Even assuming that I am a pearl that the sagacity of Time produced,
> Where would the hands of my sagacity reach your perfection?[33]

At last, after a long conversation between me and my heart, an agreement was reached that I should write about this vicegerent of God (*khalīfat Allāh*) in accordance with what I have comprehended of his state during my felicitous employment in his service, and that I should restrict my intention[34] to embellishing my expression and to commenting upon my devotion to him.

> If anyone can be praised with glorification and encomiums,
> You are such a one that through your glorification encomium is praised.[35]

Therefore, I brought forth some incorporeal meanings that were capable of entering into the confinement of words and entrusted their completion to the sanctified understanding of that saintly one whose sight is far-reaching.[36]

> Who is he I speak of with veiled expression,
> Describing him with hundreds of carefully weighed subtle points?
> [page 6] He is the king, for whom I make my thought
> Emerge from my bosom again, to tell about him.

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33 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī (d. ca. 1189); Awḥad Al-Dīn Anvarī, *Dīvān-i Anvarī*, ed. Mudarris Raẓavī, 5th ed., (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī va Farhangī, 1997), 171. The 'pearl' (*gawhar*) is considered perfect because of its round shape and luminosity; the point the poet makes is that despite its perfection, the pearl falls short when compared to the perfection of the king. *Gawhar* at the same time also means 'intellect' and 'substance,' among others, and it is in this connection that the word 'sagacity' (*ẕakā*) is used. In the background of the couplet is the popular belief according to which pearls are born from raindrops only in a specific month (the month of Nīsān, corresponding to March-April). On this analogy, the poet argues that sagacious intellects come to existence only rarely, at specific times. Even then, they fall short of the sagacious intellect of the king (who for Abū al-Faẓl is Akbar).

34 The word *niyyat* ('intention') is not in the printed text but it is in the BL manuscript.

35 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī; Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 16, where the second hemistich has different wording: *tu ān kasī kih sutūdah bih tu-st madḥ o ṣanā* ("You are such a one that through you, glorification and encomium are praised"), instead of *tu ān kasī kih sutūdah bih madḥ-i tu-st ṣanā*.

36 The printed text has *daryāft-i taqaddus-shiʿārān-i bāligh-naẓar*, which would mean "the understanding of the saintly ones with far-reaching sight," whereas the BL manuscript has *daryāft-i taqaddus-shiʿār-i ān bāligh-naẓar*, "that saintly one whose sight is far-reaching." Since in our understanding the expression refers to Akbar, we have opted for the manuscript version.

He is the gem of the crown of kings, *qiblah*[37] of those who are aware of God, lamp for the night-chamber of the world, light for the descendants of Adam, the exalted one sitting on the throne. He is in auspicious conjunction with victory and conjoined with justice, the seal of the dominion of sovereignty and the lustre of the realm-conquering sword. He is frontispiece of [the book of] incomparability, royal signature on the mandate of the Majestic,[38] remover of the veil from secrets of the Unseen, revealer of the faces of the immaculate forms, intimate to the seclusion-chamber of witnessing [Reality], unique servant of the Worshipped One. He is discerner of the subtle matters of hair-splitting reasoning, owner of the touchstone for money-changing, fashioner of the marvels of imagination, opener of the ties of the veils of beauty, painter of the mirror-gallery of meanings, illuminator of the banquets of the world of fine criticism, compendium of the fashioners of understanding and the intellect, masterpiece of artisans from pre-eternity to post-eternity. He is the regulator of the royal etiquette, distributor of daily livelihood to servants of God, deputy of the court of the Lord, custodian of the trusts of hopes and aspirations, solver of the knotty problems of the treasures of the intellect, keeper of the key of the treasure-houses of God, giver of comfort to the expanse of earth and time, granter of order to the universe.

> With the hand of subjection, he places the lock of termination[39] on calamities,
> With the hand of justice, he chains the foot of oppression.[40]
> With the heat of his awe, he brings forth blood from the granite rock,
> With the hand of mercy, he milks the fierce lion.
> Destiny does not turn its reins from him, whether gently or roughly,
> Heaven does not keep anything concealed from him, whether little or much.

He possesses such capability that that he simultaneously accomplishes, without any doubt or mishap in thinking, several affairs and important matters, each of which would independently require extended time and the deliberation of a clerk. He gives all responsible officers of the imperial administration such categorical answers as if his complete attention had been paid to providing answers and his entire thinking had been devoted to regulating these matters.

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37 The *qiblah* indicates the direction of prayer.

38 The expression *manshūr-i ẕū al-Jalālī* ('mandate of the Majestic') includes a pun on Akbar's name, Jalāl al-Dīn; *Ẕū al-Jalāl va al-Ikrām* is one of the divine Names.

39 The following couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī, different loci. The printed text's *khashm* ('wrath') appears to be based on a scribal error for *khatm* ('seal, termination'); Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 254 has *khatm*.

40 Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 254 has *pā-yi fitnah* ('foot of sedition').

He is a king who is the guarantee for the order of his kingdom –
His thinking is above delusions and suppositions.
He speaks both the secrets of pre-eternity and the mystery of post-eternity,[41]
He is capable of both accelerating his tongue and expanding time.[42]

[page 7]
He is an inventor who, in ordering the affairs of his kingdom and in imprinting the stamps of the caliphate, invented so many laws and originated so many rules [folio 17v] that when knowledgeable experts inquire into them in accordance with the level of their understanding, they remain perplexed and astonished, thinking, "how did the emperors of the past manage to rule the world and govern their country without such regulations?"

He is sovereign who is the Refuge of the World. In regulating the world,
The tablet of his thought is the register of divine decree.
If his majesty[43] does not give leave to the pen of divine decree to move,
No letter will emerge from of it.

He is of such high capacity that despite having knowledgeable servants and able officials who are adorned with the manners of piety and self-restraint and with the qualities of suitability and intelligence, he approaches all important matters, with regard to both their totality and their details, with the attitude that he is in charge of and responsible for them. He knows with certainty[44] that the outcome of these matters is first and foremost for him personally, therefore it

41 *Azal* is 'eternity *a parte ante*', and *abad* is 'eternity *a parte post*'; *azal* may be translated as 'eternity without beginning' or 'pre-eternity' and *abad* as 'eternity without end' or 'post-eternity.' See S. van den Bergh, "Abad," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved April 2022. R. Arnaldez, "Ḳidam," ibidem, s.v.

42 The printed text has *ham ṭayy-i lisān dārad o ham basṭ-i zabān* ("he is capable of both folding the tongue and stretching it out"), whereas the BL manuscript has *zamān* for the last word. The latter appears to be correct, for both *ṭayy-i lisān* ('folding the tongue') *and basṭ-i zamān* ('expanding time') as technical terms refer to certain supernatural abilities that Sufis are believed to manifest. The former denotes the extension of the power of the tongue to recite *ẕikr* very fast, reaching several thousand counts per day, while the latter means the expansion of the moment to accommodate events that normally would take months or years.

43 Another pun on Akbar's *laqab*, Jalāl al-Dīn; *jalālat* is another form of *jalāl*, which forms part of the divine name Ẕū al-Jalāl va al-Ikrām.

44 The expression *ʿilm al-yaqīn* ('knowledge of certainty'), as a technical term in Sufism, refers to the lowest degree of certainty, that is, certainty as the result of knowledge. See Osman Yahya, "Theophanies and Lights in the Thought of Ibn 'Arabi," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 10 (1991): 35–44, retrieved April 2022.

would not do justice to open the gates of leisure for himself and to pass the tasks onto a few others.[45]

> The power of the two worlds is on his pillow,
> The treasure of both worlds is on his scale.
> As he seldom laid his head on the pillow of desire,
> He has placed the burden of both worlds on his head.
> Because of his gravity, the hearts of people are light,
> Because of his wakefulness, troublemakers are asleep.

He has such perfect control over himself that even in the midst of his multiple mundane occupations he does justice to what is required by the Oneness of God (*vaḥdat-i maʿnavī*). In all of his dealings he observes the presence of his breath (*ḥāẓir-i dam*) and is mindful of his footsteps (*vāqif-i qadam*),[46] seeking God's pleasure and being in constant awareness.

> Bravo, possessor of the royal throne
> On whom divine support is conferred![47]
> Which science is that he does not possess in his heart?
> Which good fortune is that he has not obtained?[48]

He is an efficient planner who, due to his excellent knowledge, is not in need of the counsel of ministers or opinion of advisors in regulating the affairs of the kingdom and treasury. The administrators of the time and [page 8] prudent instructors[49] obtain the codex of general and particular policies – which is the

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45 The printed text has *bar chand tāyī furū guẓāshtah āyad*, 'to pass them onto a few others', the wording of which seems too modern for Abū al-Faẓl's time. The BL manuscript has *ba-zabānī chand farā guẓāshtah āyad*, approx. 'to dismiss it with a few words', a reading which is not without its own problems.

46 With these terms Abū al-Faẓl is referring to Sufi practices, such as controlling the breath and focusing on one's footsteps to prevent losing awareness of God, called *hūsh dar dam* and *naẓar bar qadam* in Naqshbandi practice, for example; see Th. Zarcone, "Khwādjagān," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved April 2022; Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 27–28. On the links between the Mughals and the Naqshbandi order, see Alam, "The Mughals, the Sufi Shaikhs and the Formation of the Akbari Dispensation," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 135–74.

47 This couplet is from the *maṣnavī Khusraw va Shīrīn* of Niẓāmī (1141–1209); Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn-i Niẓāmī Ganjavī: matn-i ʿilmī va intiqādī*, ed. Barāt Zanjānī (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1998), 14.

48 This couplet is from Niẓāmī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, 13.

49 We have opted for the BL manuscript version, *mutadabbirān-i āmūzgār*, 'prudent instructors'; the printed text has *masnad-payrāyān-i āmūzgār* ('instructors who adorn his seat').

manual for chief administrators – from the marginal glosses[50] of his illuminated mind, which is the Preserved Tablet[51] for the secrets of the Unseen.

O you by whose existence the universe is honoured!
O you who are more than the creation but less than the Creator![52]
O you the time of whose reign is the daytime of Time!
O you whose shadow on the era is the grace of God![53]

He is so full of dignity[54] that even when he is in the state of complete lack of involvement,[55] the staff[56] of grandeur and dominion (*ʿaẓamat wa jabarūt*)[57] is visible on his felicitous forehead to such a degree that seeing it, the courage of the kings of the time and the tyrants of the world melt away and they become drowned in the sea of fear.

Eternal felicity is incorporated in his desire,
Adversities of fate are suppressed against him.
If he looks at the salt-marsh with the eyes of favour,[58]
And if he looks at the granite by way of chastisement,

50 *Ḥāshiyah*, 'margins' or 'marginal notes' is where in premodern Persian manuscripts commentaries or glosses are typically situated. Here Akbar's intellect is envisioned as a book, of which even the marginal notes or glosses are of utmost importance for the administrators of his empire.
51 In Islamic literature, the expression *lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ* ('the Preserved Tablet') refers to the tablet where the destiny of everything in existence is recorded; it may also denote the heavenly prototype of the Qur'ān. See A. J. Wensinck and C. E. Bosworth, "Lawḥ," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v. retrieved April 2022.
52 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī; Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 179.
53 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī; Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 160.
54 The printed text has *vāfī-hūshī*, 'full of awareness or intelligence'. We have opted for the BL manuscript's *vāfī-shawkatī*, 'full of dignity or majesty', which is more congruous with the wording and meaning of this passage.
55 The printed text has *bī-taʿalluqī*, 'lack of involvement', which appears to be better than the BL manuscript version *bī-taʿayyunī*, 'lack of determination', or 'the state without being determined'.
56 *Dūrbāsh* (lit. 'keep away!') is a kind of staff that used to be carried in front of kings when they were passing by, in order to keep the public out of his way.
57 In Islamic philosophy and Sufi thought, *ʿālam-i jabarūt* ('the World of Power' or 'the World of Divine Omnipotence') refers to a realm higher than the realm of humans but is below that of the Divinity; its exact relationship to other spheres of existence varies in the different systems of thought. See Tj. de Boer, and L. Gardet, "ʿĀlam," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved April 2022.
58 These couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī; Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 210 has *ba-vajh-i ʿināyat* ('with the face of favour', 'in the manner of favour', 'favourably') instead of *ba-chashm-i ʿināyat* ('with the eyes of favour'); because of its congruity with *ba-rū-yi* in the second hemistich, rhetorically *ba-vajh-i* is better.

> Through his favour the salt-marsh becomes a field of mandrake,[59]
> Through his awe-inspiring majesty the granite rock turns into ashes.

He is a chaste soul who, despite his youthful strength and having at his disposal the means of comfortable living and the gratification of his desires, strives continually and effectively to fight his base self (*mujāhadah-i nafs*) and to break in his body (*riyāẓat-i badan*), and makes ample effort to remove mundane-minded administrators and to appoint governors [folio 18r] with spiritual disposition.

> You could say, reason has nurtured his soul in its bosom
> And soul has nurtured his personality in its lap.[60]

He is the refuge of religion who, despite possessing personal perfections of holiness (*kamālāt-i qudsīyah-i ẓātīyah*) and God-given innate spiritual states (*ḥālāt-i fiṭrīya-i vahbīyah*) – which the clear-sighted inspectors of the gems of natural dispositions and the critics of the inner and outer characteristics of human nature do not find often – still seeks to perfect his person.[61]

> He was seeking from a stranger what he himself had.[62]

He is such a storehouse of knowledge that it can be said without any rhetorical exaggeration and the ornamentation of expression that despite not having undertaken preliminary studies or the acquisition of customary knowledge, whenever he turns his sublime attention [page 9] to an exceptionally subtle problem in the field of one of the sciences, such a high-level response emerges from his 'tongue that interprets the Unseen' (*zabān-i ghaybī-tarjumān*) that learned men of the time and solitary-minded cultivators of philosophical wisdom who have spent ages and burnt many candles in the deep reflection of critical inquiry, fail to comprehend – let alone to engage[63] in finding an answer that would please that noblest intellect!

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59 Mandrake or mandragora (*mihr giyāh*) is a plant that was believed to have medicinal properties and magical effects. It was known to induce passion as well as conception. See Howard R Turner, *Science in Medieval Islam: An Illustrated Introduction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 153.

60 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī; Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 162.

61 In other words, he strives to become a 'Perfect Man'. For Abū al-Faẓl's views on Akbar in relation to the Sufi doctrine of *insān-i kāmil*, see Hardy, "Abul Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah," 125–26.

62 This hemistich is from a *ghazal* of Hāfiẓ (ca. 1315–1390); Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Bahā' al-Dīn Khurramshāhī (Tihrān: Nīlūfar, 1994), 143.

63 The printed text has *mutaʿahhid* ('engaging in', 'attentive to'), whereas the BL manuscript has *mustaʿidd* ('ready', 'worthy of', or 'capable of [finding an answer]').

He is a king who received education from his teacher: the heart;
A king who has received instruction from his spiritual guide: the mind.
It is befitting that the truth-ascertainers who are aware of the secrets
Compile books of divine knowledge from his intellect.

He is so knowledgeable about unique matters that, despite his sublime nature, he descends from his elevated station for some time and offers each guild of artisans and artists – who have produced in their own respective crafts unique pieces and are renowned for their magic-like art – such delicate comments and fine points pertaining to their art that they get the impression that he [Akbar] has practiced this profession for his entire life and spent all his time in acquiring it.

He is a fine critic who is familiar with everything from pre-eternity to post-eternity;
Every inch of him is art and every word of him is wisdom.

He brings together[64] [in his person so many talents] that with the power of his innate genius he has produced all kinds of works and masterpieces that the unique masters of that particular art approve. In such a way he has given all arts their due – to the extent that even in crafts such as ironmongery and carpentry, which are far from the status of a king, he invented so many things that have become the source of astonishment for master craftsmen.

In front of him, the masters of all arts are, like the candle,
With the finger of astonishment in their mouth.[65]

He is a chosen one, from whose forehead the lights of rectitude and integrity shone, and from whose auspicious horoscope the signs of distinction and of being chosen were apparent right from the beginning of his infancy and the days of lactation – which is the frontispiece of the book of life and the time of the inception of the material intellect. Even before learning how to speak, marvelous words and signs would manifest from him – as narrated in detail by the midwives and chaste ladies who attended his holy cradle.

[page 10]

His being the Refuge of the World has been [ordained] since eternity –
May his sovereignty endure eternally!

64 The word *jāmiʿ* literally means 'unifier', 'assembler', 'the one who unites, brings together, comprises'.

65 *Angusht-i ḥayrat* refers to a gesture of expressing astonishment by placing the index finger on the lips. The candle-metaphor further reinforces that those who are in the state of astonishment are speechless, like the flame of the candle. The BL manuscript, however, has *tīsha* ('axe') instead of *shamʿ* ('candle').

He is of such a pure essence that in the embryonic stage when he was a unique gem in the mine of the womb, a life-refreshing Messiah in the cradle of concealment, radiant lights[66] shone from the clear forehead of Maryam Makānī (may God make the blessings of her chastity endure!),[67] to the extent that those who [folio 18v] were aware of the secret of this matter thought that a lamp had been placed in front of her face.

> He is both the one who provides light to the lamp of vision
> And the eye and the lamp of creation.

He is a knower of God who seeks God's pleasure in all affairs. In accordance with his far-sightedness and out of excessive desire, he inquires into the truth of young and old, poor and rich, base-born and noble, both in private and in public, and continually revolves around the hearts. Without regard for his grandeur and the dignity of his physical and spiritual rank, he seeks Reality (*ḥaqīqat*) in all atoms of creation.

> O king! May the foundation of your kingdom be solid!
> May your life endure, like the revolving of the sky!
> May all desires that emerge from the depth of your thinking
> Be in the embrace of your kingdom, like a bride.[68]

He is a champion who has subjected the Rustams of lust and anger – which break the ranks of fighters on the battlefields of the struggle [against the lower self] and overthrow men in the arena of righteousness and rectitude – to his command and made them slaves of his decree.[69]

> The world is subjected to his decree, with regard to both good and bad;
> Heaven follows his mandate, regarding both goodness and evil.
> Destiny has entrusted its own bridle[70] to his royal signet,
> Divine decree has given over the reins to his governance.

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66 The BL manuscript has *zāhirah*, 'shining radiant', whereas the printed text has *ẓāhir*, 'visible'.

67 The parallel between Jesus and Mary, and Akbar and his mother is deliberate, all the more since Ḥamīda Bānū Begam was given the title Maryam Makānī, meaning 'she who is equivalent in station to Mary,' to use Thackston's translation.

68 These couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Ẓahīr Fāryābī; Ẓahīr Fāryābī, *Dīvān*, 52.

69 About half of this sentence is supplied from the manuscript because it is missing from the printed text (the missing part between *maʿārik-i* and *farmān* is: . . . *jihād va mard-afganān-i maydān-i ṣalāḥ va sadād-and tābiʿ-i ḥukm va bandah-i* . . .).

70 These couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī, different loci. Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 196 has *zimām* ('reins', 'bridle') instead of *amān* ('trust', 'safety') of the printed text; *zimām* appears to be correct, given its congruity with *ʿinān* ('reins') in the second hemistich. There are other differences in wording but without significant difference in the meaning.

He is a generous person who has continually pours treasures of gifts into the lap of his era, not even leaving time for the needy to ask.

> Whenever the reality of rain is discussed,
> The possessors of imitational knowledge dismiss it summarily,[71] saying
> [page 11] That the cloud takes up water from the sea,
> Then scatters it in the world with the help of the wind.
> This is a mere tale, nothing more –
> For, [in truth] the oceans sweat, having been put to shame by your [generous] hands.[72]

He is comfort to the poor, who with his nurturing gaze has transmuted the dust and made those who sit in the dust on the threshold of hopelessness reach the sky of their desires.

> Dust turns into gold when you turn your face towards it,
> Poison turns into sugar when it recalls you.
> Lucky is the head on which you place your foot,
> Fortunate is the heart in which there is a place for you.

He is such a brave heart that with a few people he has marched against several armies, and with one movement has turned an entire world upside down.

> He is an entire world, hidden under a cloak;
> His illuminated heart is a world within the world.
> Alone he has broken the ranks of armies of many kings,
> Since he is both an emperor and a champion.

He possesses such understanding that he had to descend quite a bit from his most exalted level – a level that sublime intellects do not have access even to the

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71 These couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī; Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 180. We have opted for the reading *taqlīdiyān-i mukhtaṣar az rū-yi ikhtiṣār*, which is found both the BL manuscript and the edited *Dīvān*, as opposed to the printed text's *taqlīdiyān-i mukhtafī az rū-yi ikhtiyār*.

72 The BL manuscript and the edited *Dīvān* have *biḥār* ('oceans'), which is the correct reading, as opposed to the printed text's *bukhār* ('vapor'). The point that the poet makes is that the scientific explanation for the causes of rain is not adequate, for in fact the raindrops are drops of sweat, results of the oceans' feeling ashamed in front of the king's generosity. The image is particularly fitting since *baḥr*, singular for 'ocean', metaphorically also means a generous person.

peripheries[73] of it – so that the realities of the sciences and the minutest details of wisdom find capacity in the various layers of his comprehension.[74]

> The tongue of the pen falls short of praising the king –
> Alas, the fort is high and the ladder is short.
> The rope of the lasso of our knowledge falls short
> Of the parapet of his dignity and the arch of his grandeur.

He has such an appealing appearance[75] that in the brotherhood of affection and familiarity all possessors of physical and spiritual beauty are strongly bonded with him.[76] In traversing this path he has reached so far that on the royal highway of moral excellence (*makārim-i akhlāq*) all men with magnificent morals (*khuluq-i ʿaẓīm*)[77] should seek guidance from him.

73 Literally *ḥawāshī*, 'margins' or 'marginal notes.' As noted above, in premodern Persian manuscripts the margins are where commentaries or glosses are typically situated. Here Akbar's intellect is envisioned as a book, of which not only the main text but even the marginal commentary remains inaccessible to others.

74 The idea is that Akbar in his essence possesses such lofty understanding that any engagement with worldly sciences and wisdom (*ḥikmah* can also mean philosophy) is considered a 'descent' (*tanazzul*) from that level of knowledge. The word *tanazzul* clearly evokes the Quranic language, for it is a derivative from the verbal root NZL, which in the Qur'ān frequently refers to the sending down the Qur'ān as divine revelation (e.g. 2: 176, 17: 106). A derivative of this root is used in 97: 4 (*tanazzalu al-malā'ikatu wa-al-rūḥu fīhā bi-iḏni rabbihim min kulli amrin*, "In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, upon every command;" Arberry's translation) to express the descent of higher-level beings to lower levels.

75 Jahāngīr, Akbar's eldest son, described his father's appearance as "inclining to be tall; he was of the hue of wheat; his eyes and eyebrows were black, and his complexion rather dark than fair . . . , his august voice was very loud, and in speaking and explaining had a peculiar richness. In his actions and movements he was not like the people of the world, and the Glory of God manifested itself in him." Cited in John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 44–45.

76 Here Abū al-Faẓl is again using technical terms of Sufis, such as *silsilah*, 'lineage' or 'order', 'brotherhood'; *rābiṭah*, 'binding', or, as Fritz Meier translates it, "bonding the heart with the spiritual master." On the significance of *rābiṭah* in the Naqshbandi order see Jürgen Paul, *Doctrine and Organization: The Khwājagān/Naqshbandīya in the First Generation after Bahā'uddīn* (Berlin: Arabische Buch, 1998), 34–44; Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 29.

77 The Prophet Muḥammad is described Qur'ān 68: 4 as possessing magnificent morals (*wa-innaka la-ʿalá khuluqin ʿaẓīm*, "surely thou art upon a mighty morality;" Arberry's translation).

[folio 19r] It is befitting that the instructors of proper conduct[78]
Derive the guidebook of moral excellence from the periphery[79] of your assembly.

[page 12]
He possesses such marvelous chastity that he continually keeps his eye on the virgins of the bed-chamber of rational thinking, and has taken away the eye of lust from the manifestations of physical beauty. Again and again he lays a table full of bounty for those whose heart is hungry and sight is far-reaching by saying that, "if I had known in the past what I have come to know now, undoubtedly I would not have brought into the bonds of marriage the daughter of anyone from the guarded kingdom – for, my subjects are in the same position as my children."[80]

I would not call it chastity,[81] for, if I look with the eyes of my intellect,
It is a hundred ladder higher than the roof[82] of chastity.

He is the possessor of the touchstone (*ṣāḥib-ʿiyār*) who detects already at first glance whether the iron of the bad coin of the shopkeepers of the time has been covered over with gold and rectifies the matter. Through the grace of his sanctified attention many of those who are inwardly corrupt but outwardly cultivated have, on their own accord, taken off the dress of deception and dived into the ocean of gnosis.

Those who travel the path of blind imitation in the darkness of the night were perplexed –
Thank God, a guide has been found for this caravan!

He is an asylum of guidance, through the grace of whose blessings[83] so many of those who had been wandering on the path of deviation have taken the path of quest and found their true destination.

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78 On the concept of *adab* ('proper conduct' or 'moral refinement'), see Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Adab i. Adab in Iran," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* I, no. 4 (1983): 432–39, retrieved April 2022; on the political dimensions of ethics, see Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 26–80.

79 Literally *ḥāshiyah* ('margin'); see footnote 73 above.

80 Abū al-Faẓl reports in the *AA* that Akbar mentioned on numerous occasions that "had I formerly possessed the knowledge which I now have, I would never have chosen a wife for myself; for upon old women I look as mothers, on women of my age as sisters, and on girls as daughters." According to Abū al-Faẓl, "If any well-known courtier wanted to have a virgin they should first have his Majesty's permission," and if they failed to do so "they would be punished and censured." See *AA* 1: 192, 211.

81 In Islamic ethics, *ʿiffat* ('chastity' or 'temperance') is one of the four principal virtues; see footnote 96 below.

82 We have opted for the manuscript's *bām* ('roof') instead of the printed text's *nām* ('name').

83 The BL manuscript has 'through the grace of whose divine blessings' (*ba-mayāmin-i barakāt-i iláhiyah-i ū*).

He is the leader of the caravan of men with foresight,
He is the pupil of the eye of certainty.[84]
The chaste beings of the sanctuary of heaven
Are manifest to his eyes all the time.
Under the sky he is the Pole Star[85] of the time –
They say that there are two poles, but it is he alone.

He possesses such exalted power that so many of the wild animals sensed his might (*jabarūt*) and due to his transmuting gaze have eschewed ferociousness. Then what about men, who had lacked the capacity[86] but who, through the good fortune of being in his service, have climbed out of the mire of [base] human nature and the well of physicality?

He has such a laudable kindness that the kind of comfort that various groups of people, especially the youth, receive by beholding his world-adorning beauty, and the tranquility that ensues, is not attained by children even by seeing their fathers.

O life! Pass the time in happiness! For, his person
is grace and kindness embodied, head to foot.

[page 13]
He possesses such a high-level attention that by means of the spiritual connections that he has with the [divine] court – the asylum of all created beings – with half-focusing his attention he accomplishes matters of great importance and solves intricate problems.

84 In Sufi thought, *ʿayn al-yaqīn*, 'the eye of certainty' or 'certainty as a consequence of contemplation and vision', is a degree of certainty beyond the level of *ʿilm al-yaqīn*, 'the knowledge of certainty'; see Yahya, "Theophanies and Lights in the Thought of Ibn 'Arabi."

85 In Sufi thought, *quṭb* ('pole', 'Pole Star', 'axis') refers to the most perfect human being who heads the saintly hierarchy. On the concept of the *quṭb* see P. Kunitzsch and F. de Jong, "al-Ḳuṭb," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retrieved April 2022.

86 'Capacity' or 'preparedness' (*istiʿdād*) is an important concept in Ibn al-ʿArabī's system of metaphysics, referring to the pre-disposition of every being in accordance which it receives theophany; see E. Geoffroy, "Tadjallī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition (2012), s.v., retrieved April 2022. Although in this preface Abū al-Faẓl does not use the word in its technical sense, he appears to have chosen it to underscore the idea of Akbar's perfection and extraordinary spiritual eminence.

In the head of courage, you are the face;[87]
In the bosom of power, you are the heart.
In the rational soul of the kingdom, you are the intellectual judgment;
On top of the body of the state, you are the head.
The world is prosperous as long as you are the king of the world;
The country is at peace as long as you are the emperor of the country.

He has such an effective breath that through his special attention he brings swift healing and complete recovery to chronic illnesses on which skillful doctors have given up, thereby restoring to health the defective temperament.[88] I, lowliest of his faithful servants, have witnessed this on multiple occasions.

His clemency is an antidote to our sting,
A salve for the wound of our wounded heart.

[folio 19v] He is an able speaker who knows about the types of languages that the people of the world speak and enters into conversation with the different classes of people in their own particular manner. Being acquainted with the subtleties of various languages as they are (*kamā hiya*) – especially so many languages of India (*chandīn zabān-i Hindī*), which are far from the way of the people of Turkic descent – he invents wonderful meanings and unusual themes (*maʿānī-i badīʿah wa maẓāmīn-i gharībah*).[89]

Ask him about the secrets of the accounts of those who convey subtle points of wisdom!
For, apart from Solomon, he has been given [the knowledge of] the language of the birds.

He is such an asylum of sainthood that no matter how much he keeps himself under the wrap of concealment and the veils of hiddenness, a few of his completely devoted disciples, through the spiritual attention of this *qibla* and through their true devotion, became worthy of acquiring the capacity (*istiʿdād*) for discerning the perfection of this ruler-saint. It becomes apparent so many times that in the midst of worldly occupations, withdrawn into himself in con-

87 The BL manuscript has several scribal errors here, hence we rely on the printed text's version. The point being conveyed is that Akbar is the embodiment (referred to with body parts) of the abstract qualities or entities that are enumerated in the poem.
88 According to the system of Graeco-Arabic medicine illnesses are caused by unbalance in the equilibrium of four bodily humors that make up human disposition or temperament (*mizāj*).
89 Compare Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 129, where she takes *chandīn zabān-i Hindī* to be singular and to refer to Sanskrit.

templation (*murāqabah*) of God and witnessing of the infinite Beauty, he traverses the realm of Oneness.[90]

> We are the ones that love has nurtured –
> While being in the banquet, the taste of solitude has carried us off.
> We gaze at the face of meaning behind the veil of form –
> For us, the One is not veiled by multiplicity.

He is such a unique spiritual guide that the learners of letters in the school of meaning read from the tablet of his heaven-like mind – which is the best document for the four stages of sincerity (*marātib-i chahārgānah-i ikhlāṣ*).[91] Spiritual aspirants, in order to reach their goals, should come to the circle of instruction of that emperor-guide in the capital of form and meaning and enter the fold of the disciples of his way and the devotees of his court.

> O Lord! Grant me the special bounty of your glance!
> Grant me a place to dance in the sanctuary of love!
> Give me some goods from the crossroad-bazaar of spiritual excellence!
> Grant me a scent from the four gardens of sincerity!

[page 14]

He is such a righteous person that so many times when his devoted servants persistently asked his leave to destroy rebellious members of his administration and government who have failed to fulfill the obligations of complete obedience and submission, or who were, out of shortsightedness and the lack of consideration for the outcome (*kūtāh-bīnī va nā-ʿāqibat-andīshī*), speaking of opposing [Akbar], they did not receive permission from the sublime court. Instead, they received the declaration that it is not according to the customs of kingship to remove hidden opponents, and it is not according to the rules of chivalry to throw sincere servants of the threshold of loyalty into the traps of deceit.

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90 Being with God while being in the world is one of the important principles of the Naqshbandi order, where it is named *khalvat dar anjuman*, 'solitude in the crowd' or 'retreat within the society'; *khalvat* is also mentioned verbatim in the following *rubāʿī*. *Murāqabah*, 'contemplation' is a spiritual practice often connected with *rābiṭah* and *khalvat*. See Th. Zarcone, "Khwādjagān"; Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 25, 27–28; Paul, *Doctrine and Organization*, 30–44.

91 This paragraph, until the end of the *rubāʿī*, is not in the printed text; the translation is based on the BL MS folio 19v, which is not without problems. One of the many *kih* conjunctions is either redundant or misplaced, and the object of the verb *mī khwānand* may be missing as well. Therefore, we have chosen to omit the *kih* before *bihtarīn dastāvīzī-st*, reading the clause as *kih marātib-i chahārgānah-i ikhlāṣ rā bihtarīn dastāvīzī-st*. The expression *marātib-i chahārgānah-i ikhlāṣ* ('the four stages of sincerity') refers to the four verses of Surah Ikhlāṣ (Qur'ān 112).

O Lord, what courage is this that I should boast of his courage?

He is a possessor of such good fortune that the decrees [predestined] from pre-eternity (*taqdīrāt-i azalī*) are in conformity with his rational deliberations (*tadbīrāt-i ʿaqlī*). On the tablet of his will (*irādah*) no design is engraved other than what had been willed [from pre-eternity] (*murād*), and on the page of his hope nothing takes shape but the meaning that had been intended [from pre-eternity] (*maʿnī-i maqṣūd*).

Heaven does only what you say,
Fortune gives[92] only what you wish.
To [prove] the claim that no one is like you,
Your face gives evidence.

He has such an enlightened mind (*rawshan-ẓamīr*) that even while being completely occupied with worldly matters, his mind lays bare the recesses of the minds (*ẓamāyir*) of various groups of people and gains awareness of the secrets of their hearts (*sarāyir*) in the most complete manner. Regarding this, all accomplished men of high rank have stories to tell. Without any artificiality and ceremoniousness [I can say that], many volumes would not be enough to contain what this truthful disciple [folio 20r] and trustworthy loyal servant[93] has experienced in this respect.

Words about you cannot be contained in a story –
Language cannot be contained in the world of the heart.
Beauty that cannot be contained in what is beyond space
Has entered the veil of my eyes.[94]

He possesses such an intelligence that he has complete awareness [of everything], as it befits him, from the age of one year old to the present when his exalted age is in the middle of forty and fifty years – and God (glory to Him!) willing, once he fully enjoyed physical life for the sake of the order of the world, he will attain eternal life (*baqā-yi jāvīd*). Further, he keeps in his memory the particulars of everything that comes in or goes out, which so many chroniclers are unable to collect and record, to the extent that he even remembers the various names given to wild animals and birds, from the elephant to the sparrow, that have been

92 We have opted for the BL manuscript's *dihad* ('gives') instead of the printed text's *kunad* ('does').
93 Here Abū al-Faẓl is referring to himself in the third person.
94 *Pardah-i dīdah* or *pardah-i chashm* also means the 'eyelid'.

captured by the snare of his beneficence and enjoy daily sustenance at his table of favour.

[page 15]

Whatever is in these nine gardens, from the thorn to the rose,
His comprehension encompasses all.
Whatever is in this abode of snares, from the lion to the elephant,
All have his favour as their surety.

He has such a high repute that the fame of the generous acts of his beneficence and the noble deeds of his grace has drawn the inhabitants of East and West far from their homelands, and the witnessing of his praiseworthy manners and morals has caused the foreigners to forget their familiar habitations.[95]

If such is the movement of the pious ones toward him,
Then the two Pole Stars of the sky will also start going.
If such is the taste that the tongue experiences when describing him,
Then the leaves of the trees will also start speaking.

He has such refined moral character that, [I can say] without any ceremoniousness, [that] the fourfold principles of beautiful moral character[96] – which people with sublime nature and high aspiration could only reach through hundreds of thousands of trainings and struggles, and [in the end] out of thousand only one, and out of many only a few, acquired and got appointed as leaders of the world – are innate and natural (*jibillī va fiṭrī*) to this one who is favoured by God

95 Akbar attracted many people to his empire from Persia and Central Asia; Blochmann calculated that three-fourths of the poets and more than one-third of the doctors and musicians at Akbar's court were foreigners, see S. M. Edwardes and H. L. O. Garrett, *Mughal Rule in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 270. Akbar promoted social, cultural and intellectual contacts with Iran by identifying literati and persuading them to settle in India, see Alam, "The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 159. For a discussion of Iranian poets in the subcontinent, see Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

96 The 'fourfold principles of beautiful moral character' (here: *uṣūl-i chahārgānah-i akhlāq-i ḥasanah*) are, according to Islamic ethics, 'wisdom' (*ḥikmat*), 'courage' (*shajāʿat)*, 'temperance' (*ʿiffat*) and 'justice' (*ʿadl*); see e.g. Naṣīr al-dīn Ṭūsī, *The Nasirean Ethics*, tr. G. M. Wickens. (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1964), 79–81. On the development of the science of 'Islamic ethics' (*akhlāq*) see R. Walzer and H. A. R Gibb, "Akhlāḳ," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v., retreived April 2022.

(*īn manẓūr-i iláhī*). In truth, regarding the marvels of moral character, his perfection-filled person is a masterpiece of the Creator since pre-eternity.[97]

> It is appropriate that the scale on which his weight is weighed
> Should have the heaven as its tray and the earth as the weight.[98]

He is such a compassionate person that his perfect heart does not have any inclination to kill and eat animals. More than seven months pass that he does not consume meat; if his holy mind did not consider the difficulties of human beings, he would not eat it at all. In his sessions of guidance, he often says with his reality-translating tongue (*zabān-i ḥaqāyiq-tarjumān*) that what could better describe the injustice of man than the fact that despite having so many fine types of food he gives himself over to slaughter and butchery.[99]

> Even with hundred Qur'āns, no one reaches the conclusion that he does,
> Thanks to the intermingling of the four mothers and the seven fathers.[100]

He is endowed with such affection that by witnessing the results of his perfect affection,[101] sons [page 16] forget the kindness of their own fathers. Just as in matters of safety[102] they know him to be their emperor, the Refuge of the World, in matters of nurturing and affection they think of him as the father of fathers (*abū al-ābā*).

> May 'two worldful' of praise be from Mother Time to that son
> Whose kindness is like a father to an entire world.

Detachment is in his natural disposition to such a degree that, notwithstanding that the realms of so many great emperors are under his control and authority and that through the grace of God his imperial treasury is completely filled with all sorts of exquisite things and refined items – of which exalted emperors would wish to possess even the tenth of tenth – [folio 20v] he does not pay attention to, or have regard for, anything.

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97 The BL manuscript has *kārnāmah-i ṣāniʿ-i azalī-st*, which is better than the printed text's *kārnāmah-i azalī-st* ('a masterpiece since pre-eternity').

98 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī; Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 285.

99 Akbar's vegetarian practices are discussed here in Chapter 3.

100 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Anvarī; Anvarī, *Dīvān*, 16. The expression *chahār ummahāt va haft ābā* refers to the physical and spiritual qualities of which man is thought to be composed: the four elements and the seven (in some accounts nine) heavens.

101 We follow the BL manuscript in reading *ū* instead of *va* at the end of *bi-mushāhadah-i āṣār-i ʿuṭūfat-i kāmilah-i ū* ('by witnessing the results of his perfect affection').

102 The printed text has *ʿālam-i ʿāfiyat*, 'world of well-being' or 'matters of safety', whereas the BL manuscript has *ʿālam-i ʿaẓamat*, 'world of grandeur'.

O God! As long as the world has water and colour,
As long as heaven revolves and earth stays in its place,
Make the world the personal property of this 'Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction,'[103]
Make heaven the helper of this conqueror of the world.[104]

He is such a precious sapling of the clan of those endowed with a rational soul that the layers of physicality and corporeal attachments did not hinder his mental perceptions and spiritual advancement – rather, they have assisted and helped him in it. What objection could be made to this? Even though his holy physical frame did not receive command from the Holy Spirit [the archangel Gabriel],[105] without doubt it has reached the rank of the elevated souls of the perfect saints (*awliyā-yi kamāl*). From this one can estimate how bountiful the ocean-like heart and how wondrous the rational soul of this saint-ruler is.

May God be extolled for this pure gem,
In comparison with whose sanctity it is befitting to call the soul, body.
At the level where his detachment [from worldliness] is mentioned
It is befitting to call the gem of the soul, the dust of the body.[106]

He is favoured by fortune to such an extent that from the start of his kingship and accession to the throne of the caliphate – since which thirty-two solar years have elapsed – whoever from among the nobles, Sufis, and theologians, or other classes of people, out of inner blindness, challenged him, or thought of opposing him, [divine] will resulted in the immediate nullification [of their plotting] and their disgrace in front of the elite and the common folk. And what a disgrace! Subjected to all types of public punishment and modes of torture, they entered the path of perdition. For, God's far-reaching wisdom demands universal guidance, [page 17] and wants to impress the reality of this chosen servant of His on the minds of all individuals of mankind, so that they, in accordance with their

103 The title 'Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction' (*ṣāḥib-qirān*) refers to a ruler whose horoscope features the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn which was thought to usher in a time of world-conquest and justice. The late sixteenth century saw the occurrence of two momentous events: the Grand Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 1583 and the end of the first Islamic millennium in 1591. In the same year, Akbar ordered the compilation of a millennial history, the *Tārīkh-i Alfī*. See Stephen P. Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam: Calendar, Ceremony, and Chronology in the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Moin, *Millennial Sovereign,* 23–55 and 130–66.

104 These couplets are from Niẓāmī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, 12.

105 This is an allusion to the Prophet Muhammad receiving revelation through the archangel Gabriel.

106 The word *gawhar* means 'pearl', 'gem', 'jewel', but also 'essence', 'substance'. In the last line, the poet plays on the contrast between the luminosity and perfect shape of the pearl or gem and the darkness and dispersed state of the dust.

different capacities (*ba-mūjib-i tafāvut-i istiʿdād-i khvud*), comprehend the godliness (*ḥaqqānīyat*) of this ruler and do not depart from what he regards good (*maṣlaḥat*) – which by all means comprises of what pleases God (*marẕīyāt-i iláhī*) – and thereby become successful in obtaining gnosis.

> O king! When the time comes for revenge, the messenger of Death
> Delivers the edict of many deaths through your dagger.
> The kingly celestial sphere seeks a name from your countenance,[107]
> The auspicious influence of Jupiter takes a good omen from your character.

He is rich in such attributes that no matter how many pages and volumes the sharp intellects and brilliant minds – who are acquainted with the fine details of the page of heaven and can read what is written on the foreheads of men – [108] compose about his glorious characteristics, these would not amount even to a *maddah*-sign in the list of his perfections.

> O intellect! Less speeches about him, please!
> This is the place for proper etiquette – less showing off please!
> Do you know what kind of person he
> Who in rank is higher than a king and less than God, is?

He is the just emperor, the perfect authority, the decisive guide to knowing God, the clear proof of the universal mercy of the Merciful (*raḥmat-i raḥmānī*), the leader of caravans on the paths mundane and spiritual, Abū al-Fatḥ Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Akbar, the champion king[109] – may the shade of the parasol of his caliphate and the shadow of the banner of his justice and compassion be extended and expanded over the heads of those who stand firm-footed in the court of felicity and of those who travel fast on the royal highway of devotion!

> O God! As long as there is a pivot for the sky to turn around,
> Do not deprive the world of this king!

107 These couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Azraqī Haravī (11th century), different loci; Azraqī Haravī, *Dīvān-i Ḥakīm Azraqī Haravī*, ed. ʿAlī Abd Al-Rasūlī (Tihrān: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1957), 54–55. We follow the edited *Dīvān* in reading *ṭalʿat* ('countenance') instead of the printed text's *khidmat* ('service').

108 That is, their destiny.

109 The word *ghāzi* refers to those kings who exercise holy war on frontiers of *dār al-ḥarb*. The title was assumed by Bābur after his victories in India; see Ali Anooshahr, *The Ghazi Sultans and the Frontiers of Islam: A Comparative Study of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (London: Routledge, 2009), 11–13.

May the heaven, like his seal-ring, be under his seal![110]
May the key to the world be under his sleeve!

[folio 21r] Due to the benedictions of the guiding utterances of this king of the knowers of God and this sovereign of those who follow guidance, dawn has arrived after the dark night of blind imitation (*taqlīd*), and the light of the morning of discernment began to appear. [page 18] Ashamed, empty-handed shopkeepers hid their heads, like purses full of money, in the shirt-opening of remorse. Those, in whose disposition felicity was inherent, having woken up from the sleep of negligence, expressed their regret with their tongues, entered into the fold of the people of Truth (*arbāb-i ḥaqq*) and began to seek gnosis.

Since the benevolent mind [of the king], in accordance with his natural disposition, cares about improving the states of all classes of people, in his far-seeing eyes friend or enemy, relative or stranger, all appear equal.[111] Inasmuch as this is the excellent way of the physicians of the body in treating physical illnesses, the pleasing character of the physicians of the soul will be even more so. Then, why should this not be the noble nature of the chief healer of chronic illnesses of the soul [i.e., Akbar]?

Therefore, when with his perfect comprehension he found that the squabbling of sects of the Muslim community (*millat-i Muḥammadī*) and groups of the Hindus[112] increased, and their refutation of each other grew beyond bounds, his subtle mind resolved that the revered books of both groups should be translated

110 The second couplet is from the *maṣnavī Shīrīn va Khusraw* of Amīr Khusraw; Amīr Khusraw, *Khamsah*, 249, where the couplet reads *shukūhat rā falak zīr-i nigīn bād / kilīd-i ʿālam-at dar āstīn bād* ("May the heaven be under the seal of your grandeur / may the key to the world be under your sleeve"), as opposed to the printed text version, *falak chūn khātam-ash zīr-i nigīn bād / kilīd-i ʿālam-ash dar āstīn bād*. The expression *ba-zīr-i nigīn āwardan* (lit. 'to bring under one's seal') idiomatically means 'to bring under subjection'.

111 The translation of the following passages, from *chih har gāh ṭarīqah-i ʿanīqah-i aṭibbā-yi abdān* ("Inasmuch as this is the excellent way of the physicians of the body in treating physical illnesses") until *nuskhahā giriftah ba aṭrāf va aknāf-i ʿālam burdand* ("Different groups of people love to take copies to different corners of the world") is based on Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism," 180–182 with minor modifications. Also see Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 65–66; Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 126–33.

112 The printed text has *juhūd wa hunūd*, which may be interpreted in different ways. Truschke drops *juhūd* ('Jews'), as it may have been introduced simply to rhyme with *hunūd*, as also noted in Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 66. Ernst reads *juhūd-i hunūd* ('the quarreling of the Hindus', *juhūd* being the plural of *jahd*, 'effort', 'endeavor', 'pains', 'trouble'), which in this form would be a parallel to *nizāʿ-i millat-i Muḥammadī*, 'dispute among Muslims'). The BL manuscript, however, has *junūd* (plural of *jund*, 'army', 'troops,' 'kind', 'species'); *junūd-i hunūd* would mean 'groups of Hindus'. See also appendix 3 in this volume.

into the tongue of the other. Thus both factions, by the blessing of the holy words of His Excellence, the perfect one of the age [Akbar], holding back from excessive fault-finding and obstinacy, should become seekers of God. Having become aware of each other's virtues and vices, they should make laudable efforts to rectify their own states.

Likewise, in every group there are some who have come forward with the support of extremist, frivolous, and ignorant people. Considering themselves religious authorities, with falsifications and deceptions, they have impressed on the minds of common people preliminary matters that are far from the royal road of firm wisdom. These wretched deceivers, whether from ignorance or irreligiousness, in accordance with their selfish and lustful goals, conceal the books of the ancients, the advice of the pious ancestors, the sayings of the wise, and the weighty deeds of predecessors, and present them in a different manner. Inasmuch as the books of both factions are translated in a clear idiom, understandable to the masses yet pleasing to the elite, the simple-minded common folk will get to the truth of the matter and will be rescued from the meddling of the ignorant ones who pretend to be wise, thereby reaching the goal, Reality.

Therefore the sublime decree went forth concerning the *Mahābhārata*, a book written by skilled masters which contains most of the principles and applications of the beliefs of the Brahmins of India, than which there is no book more revered, greater, or more detailed[113] among this group: that the learned ones of both factions and the experts of language in both groups, by way of friendship and agreement, should sit down in one place, and should translate it into a popular expression, under the scrutiny of expert judges[114] and just inspectors.[115]

[page 19] Likewise, infidel zealots and leaders of the followers of blind imitation in India have a belief in their own religion that goes beyond all measure, and whether from lack of discernment or by way of injustice, they consider the false pretenses of their beliefs to be free from error, taking the path of blind imitation. Having impressed on the minds of simple-minded people a few preliminary matters, they prevent them from inquiring into the goals and make them firmly rooted in false beliefs. [folio 21v] They regard the adherents of the religion of Muḥammad (*dīn-i Aḥmadī*) as utterly foolish, and they refute this group ceaselessly, although they are unaware of its noble goals and refined sciences.

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113 The printed text has *mufaṣṣaltar* ('more detailed'), whereas the BL manuscript has *muṣaqqaltar* ('more polished').

114 The printed text has *munṣifān-i māhir* ('expert judges'), whereas the BL manuscript has *muṣannifān-i māhir* ('expert authors').

115 *Mushrifān-i ʿādil*; *mushrif* is an officer in the treasury who authenticates accounts and writings.

Therefore, the subtle intellect (of Akbar) desired that the book of the *Mahābhārata* – which contains both the valuable and the trifles of most of the goals of this group – should be translated with a clear expression, so that deniers should restrain their denial and refrain from intemperance, and so that the simple-minded believers, having become somewhat embarrassed by their beliefs, should become seekers of God.

Likewise, the common people among the Muslims, who have not studied adequately the pages of heavenly and religious books,[116] and who have not opened the admonition-seeing eye to the diverse histories of the age belonging to the Chinese, the Indians, etc., and who have not even read the words of the great ones of their own religion – such as Imām Jaʿfar Ṣādiq,[117] Ibn al-ʿArabī,[118] and others – believe that the beginning of humanity was some seven thousand years ago. They consider the scientific realities and intellectual subtleties that are well-known and talked about among the peoples of the world as the products of the thinking of the men of the past seven thousand years.

Therefore the bountiful mind [of Akbar] decided that this book, which contains the explanation of the antiquity of the universe and its beings, and is even totally occupied with the eternity of the world and its inhabitants, should be translated into a quickly understood language, so that this group favoured by divine mercy should become somewhat informed and retreat from this distasteful belief [in the recent creation of the world]. It will become clear that these subtle sciences and eminent understandings have no beginning, and these brilliant jewels of wisdom have no origin.[119]

Likewise, the minds of most people, especially the great kings, love to listen to histories, for the wisdom that is contained in the divine makes the science of history attractive to their hearts, for it supplies admonition for the wise. Taking counsel from the past and counting it as bounty for the present time, they may expend their precious hours in that which is pleasing to God. Therefore kings [page 20], more than the others, are in need of listening to the tales of their pre-

116 The printed text has *awrāq-i kutub-i āsmānī va dīnī (*'pages of heavenly and religious books'), whereas the BL manuscript has *awrāq-i āsmān va zamīn* ('pages of [the books] of heaven or earth'). Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," 163 also provides a translation of this paragraph.

117 Imām Jaʿfar Ṣādiq (d. 765) was transmitter of *hadith* and an important early Shi'ite imām; he was held in great respect by both Shi'ites and Sunnites. M. G. S. Hodgson, "Djaʿfar al-Ṣādiḳ," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, ed. P. Bearman et al (2012), s.v. retrieved April 2022.

118 Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240) was an Andalusian mystic whose system of metaphysics was highly influential on subsequent Sufi thought. For a short account of his life and thought, see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 163–68.

119 This passage also translated and discussed in Rizvi, "Abu'l Fazl's Preface to the Persian Translation," 200.

decessors.[120] Thus the wisdom-nourishing mind [of Akbar] had complete oversight on the translation of this book, which contains illustrious examples of this science. For this reason, a group was gathered together of learned men who know languages, are distinguished for their broad knowledge and numerous compilations,[121] are far from prejudice[122] and obstinacy and close to justice and equity, and they translated the aforementioned book with deliberation and penetration, with clear expressions and familiar terms. Different groups of people love to take copies to different corners of the world.

This one, the least of all sincere servants of the court, Abū al-Faẓl ibn Mubārak, who covers his head with the dust of the threshold of devotion, who has found the thread of discernment through the blessings of his continued employment at the Sublime Porte, and who, having become one of those who are thirsty for the fountain of Reality, entered the fold of the people of devotion [to Akbar], was appointed to write a preface (*khuṭbah*)[123] to this translation. In conformity with the sublime decree, I hurriedly penned a few sentences and made this summary about the origin of this book the frontispiece of the page of my entreaty, [folio 22r] so that by specifying [the contents] from the beginning to the end, it can somewhat quench the thirst of those who are eager to find out about the contents of this book.

Let it not be hidden from those informed about traditions and those who look into histories – who are critics of the [written] word and observers of the old and new – that in the land of India, different accounts have been transmitted about the creation of the world, whether by those in the tradition of philosophy (*ḥikmat*), practitioners of asceticism (*riyāẓat*), or experts of legal knowledge (*faqāhat*).[124] Out of these, thirteen will be mentioned in this wondrous book. In the eyes of justice, none of these is such that its process of reasoning (*istidlāl*) would make the verification-seeking mind believe it, or even keep it back to some degree from rejection and denial:

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120 This passage also translated and discussed in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 121.

121 The printed text has *kaṣrat-i tadvīn* ('numerous compilations'), whereas the BL manuscript has *kaṣrat-i tadayyun* ('much steadfastness in religion').

122 The printed text has *taʿaṣṣub* ('prejudice'), whereas the BL manuscript has *taʿassuf* ('inappropriate use of language', 'arbitrariness', 'deviation').

123 Although the most well-known meaning of *khuṭbah* is the Friday sermon, the word itself simply means 'address', and from here 'discourse', 'speech', 'oration', 'treatise', etc. (see trusted Arabic and Persian dictionaries, e.g. Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* and *Farhang-i Dihkhuda*). In the context of writing, it has been used extensively in the meaning 'preface', 'introduction'.

124 Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," 164 also provides a translation of this paragraph and the following verse.

The thread of the secret of creation
Is not such that it could be seen with the eye of sight.
Destiny did not spin this thread in such a way
That its beginning could be found.
To untie the knots of the thread of the divine omnipotence
Is not something that anyone could do.

Yet, concerning the currency of the abovementioned different paths, some of them are such that sharp minds do not hesitate[125] to take them to be false; half of them are of the kind that men of intelligence cross them out after careful consideration, dismissing them as unreliable. [page 21] Some of them such that the mind accustomed to careful consideration has no remedy but to stop there; and a few are of the nature that the sagacious intellect readily accepts them, or, following ample deliberation and close inspection, renders them acceptable.[126] Such an astonishing division is not specific to this matter but applies to all objectives of this book of wondrous content – except for what is reported from the sage Bhīṣma[127] containing advices and exhortations and the proper conduct (*ādāb*) of mundane and spiritual kingship, most of which is approved by the intelligent ones and liked by the wise. It is not clear whether this strange situation is due to the incomplete understanding of this person [Abū al-Faẓl], or is on account of the incompetence of the translators who could not penetrate the veils of the secrets of these themes (*maʿānī*) and just put down a few words based on analogy and incorrect conjecture, or is an outcome of the corrupted state (*nā-saragī*) of the original text and the darkness of the inner states of the members of this community. I wanted to devote a portion of my precious time to giving a brief account of this matter, but out of fear of being long-winded – which is a disgrace for the mind – I refrained from this intention. Therefore, I begin with a few matters that pertain to this book.[128]

In this ancient six-door abode, who has found more than a name?
Who has found the true nature of this movement of tranquility?
In this impregnable enchantment, thought misses the mark –
Who has seen the beginning of the world, and who has found the end?

125 The BL manuscript has *tavaqqufī* ('stopping', 'pausing', 'hesitation'), which appears more appropriate here than the printed text's *tavaqquʿī* ('relying', 'expectation').

126 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 130, reads the passage as offering three different approaches to creation stories, instead of the four given here.

127 In the Persian text, most of the Sanskrit names and terms are given according to the vernacular pronunciation. For the sake of clarity, in this translation we give the Sanskrit forms. For the advice of Bhīṣma, see the summary of the chapters of the *Mahābhārata* below.

128 The 'six-door abode' metaphorically refers to the world, the six doors signifying the six directions. Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," 164 also provides a translation of this verse.

The transmitters of sayings and the writers of the state of affairs declare that according to the belief of Indians, the cycle of the chameleon-like time is based on four periods (*dawr*). The beginning, the first period is 17 *lakh*s[129] and 28,000 common years [1,728,000 years]; in the Indian language[130] this period is called *Satya yuga*. In this period, the manners of every single individual of the world are based on righteousness and rectitude. Lowly and noble, rich and destitute, small and big – having made veracity and correctness as their mark in all their dealings – all conduct their lives in accordance with what pleases God. [page 22, folio 22v] The natural age of the people in this period is one *lakh* common years [100,000 years].

The second period, which is called *Treta yuga*, lasts for 12 *lakh*s and 96,000 common years [1,296,000 years]. In this time, three parts of the manners of people are in accordance with God's pleasure. The age of people is 10,000 common years.

The third period, which is known as *Dvāpara yuga*, extends to 8 *lakh*s and 64,000 regular years [864,000 years]. In this time, the two parts of the ways of the inhabitants of the world are based on truthful speaking and righteous character. The natural age is one thousand standard years.

The fourth period, which is known as *Kali yuga*, lasts for 4 *lakh*s and 32,000 ordinary years [432,000]. In this period three parts of the ways of the inhabitants of the world are based on dishonesty and falsehood. The natural age in this period is one hundred years.

The general rule regarding the length of each period is that the *Dvāpara yuga* is twice the length of the *Kali yuga*, the length of the *Treta yuga* is the length of the *Dvāpara yuga* plus the length of the *Kali yuga*, and the length of the *Satya yuga* equals the length of the *Treta yuga* plus the length of the *Kali yuga*.[131]

Now that it is the year 32 according to the divine calendar of Akbar's reign (*tārīkh-i iláhī-i Akbar-shāhī*), year 509 according to the Jalālī calendar,[132] year 956 according to the old Persian calendar,[133] year 1909 according to the Greek

129 One *lakh* equals one hundred thousand.

130 The 'Indian language' in this case most probably refers to Sanskrit, but the written form of the words reflects the vernacular form; therefore, we translated the phrase as it is and left it unspecified.

131 On the calculation of the length of the four *yuga*s, see Luis González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas: India's Great Epic Poem and the Hindu System of World Ages* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 6–7.

132 The Jalālī calendar is a solar calendar, adopted on 15 March 1079 by the Seljuk Sultan Jalāl al-Dīn Malikshāh.

133 The 'old Persian' calendar refers to the Yazdagirdi era, which began in 632 CE.

calendar,[134] year 1644 according to the Indian calendar,[135] and year 995 according to the Hijri calendar, according to the reckoning of the Indians 4680 years have passed since the beginning of the *Kali yuga*.[136] How ancient is the world, and how strange their inhabitants are!

> The beginning of the thread of the ancient world is not apparent;
> On this ancient page, no word is apparent.
> No matter how much I revolve around the sky,
> From this revolving circle, neither top nor bottom is apparent.

On the whole, it has been established, by mutual agreement between the authorities from among the Indians, that the world does not have a starting point and these periods have no beginning. They agree that, following the creation of the elements – which, according to them, are five: the four known ones and the fifth is *ākāśa* – . . .[137]

. . . regarding which, before I could have [page 23] exhaustive discussions with the wise men of India, what I had understood from the common people of India, was that it [*ākāśa*] refers to the sky. But after having had the opportunity to discuss the issue with the learned men of this group, it became clear that they do not assert the existence of the sky, and what they call *ākāśa* is the empty space, which they name air (*havā*). They say that what are known as the stars are the holy essences of pious ancestors who, through genuine ascetic practices and pure worship, have assumed luminous bodies and spiritual forms. Having become molded in the divine character traits (*takhalluq bi-akhlāq-i iláhī*) and having assimilated the essential qualities (*tashabbuh bi-awṣāf-i kamā hī*),[138] they

134 It is not clear to what the 'Greek' (Rūmī) calendar refers. The Seleucid, or Greek, era began in 312/11 BCE; the year 1909 given in the text, however, would yield 321 BCE as the beginning of the era.

135 The 'Indian' calendar refers to the Vikrama era, which began in 57/56 BCE. The date in the printed text (1640), however, is incorrect; the British Library manuscript has 1644, which appears to be the correct date.

136 This would put the beginning of the *Kali yuga* to 3092 BCE. It is not clear what system Abū al-Faẓl used for his calculation. There are differences in opinions regarding the beginning of the *Kali yuga*; the most popular calculation puts it to 3102 BCE.

137 Here Abū al-Faẓl enters a long digression on the nature of *ākāśa* and related issues; the sentence logically continues with "the Lord Creator of all creatures brought forth a person . . ." (see below). We have chosen to reproduce in translation Abū al-Faẓl's sentence structures as they are.

138 The phrase *takhalluq bi-akhlāq-i iláhī* is derived from the saying, often attributed to the Prophet, *takhallaqū bi-akhlāq Allāh* ("assume the character traits of God"). The second phrase, *tashabbuh bi-awṣāf-i kamā hiya* (the last word pronounced *hī* in order to rhyme with *iláhī*) is constructed parallel to this. We have interpreted *kamā hiya* ('as it is, as they are') as standing in this place for *māhiya* ('substance, essence, state of being').

are rejoicing in the stages of ascent, and are flying, through the will of their souls, in the world above.

> At each point of the nib of the pen there is a different word,
> But that precious pearl from a bottomless ocean is different.
> [folio 23r] That knot cannot be opened by a writer of words;
> The one who knows this deep secret is different.

. . . the Lord Creator of all creatures, according to different narrations, brought forth a person named Brahmā,[139] whose nature is detachment and origin is in knowledge, from the concealment of non-existence onto the place of manifestation of existence, and made him the means for creating the creation and the cause for bringing the world into existence – as it will be mentioned in this book in detail. In particular, Brahmā brought humans – again, with some differences in the narratives – from the hiding-place, his interior,[140] onto the podium of appearance, and made them into four groups: *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatrīya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*.[141]

He appointed the first group to the task of spiritual struggles and ascetic training, of protecting the rules and guarding the limits, and granted them leadership in these. He entrusted the second group with the task of temporal government and rulership, granted them authority over the mundane realm, and made them the means of the order of the inhabitants of the world. He appointed the third group to the tasks of farming, trading, and other professions, and the fourth group to various types of service.

In conformity with divine support and lordly inspirations, the aforementioned Brahmā manifested a book, [page 24] which consists of advices regarding this life and the hereafter (*maʿāsh wa maʿād*), and which is named *Veda*. To regulate the various species of creatures and various kinds of groups of the time, his detachment-inclined mind, through divine communication,[142] devised a law that brings multiplicity back to the seclusion-chamber of unity. He laid it down in the form of a number of rules and propositions, and made it known as the book of God, so that it, like a bridle in the nose, leads ordinary people forward

139 The sentence "following the creation of the elements – which according to them are five: the four known ones and the fifth is *ākāśa* –" continues here.

140 In the printed text, *makman-i buṭūn*, lit. 'the hiding-place of the interior' or 'the hiding-place which is his inside'. The BL manuscript has *makman-i mukavvan*, 'the hiding-place of the created world'.

141 For the four *varṇa*s, see Mikael Aktor, "Social Classes: Varna," in *Hindu Law: A New History of Dharmaśāstra*, ed. Patrick Olivelle and Donald R. Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 60–77.

142 In our translation we have omitted the *va* of the printed text between *bi-ilqā-yi iláhī* ('through divine communication') and *ʿaql-i tajarrud-shiʿār-i ū* ('his detachment-inclined mind').

and drives them from behind, not leaving them in the waterless desert[143] of negations and prohibitions (*lam o lā*) but making them travel the straight path (*ṭarīq-i mustaqīm*).

This book of divine origin [i.e. the *Mahābhārata*] is called *Veda* in the language of this group.[144] It consists of one hundred thousand *śloka*s; a *śloka* contains four feet (*caraṇa*), and one *caraṇa* cannot have less than one syllable (*akṣara*) and more than 26 syllables.[145] One *akṣara* consists of one letter[146] (*ḥarf*), or two letters, the second of which is not followed by a vowel (*sākin [ast]*).[147]

The wise men of India agree that the lifetime of this wonder of creation [Brahmā], who is the author of the aforementioned book,[148] is one hundred uncommon years, each of which contains 360 days. One such day consists of one thousand of the four aforementioned periods (*chahār dawr-i maẕkūr*), and each night, like a day, contains one thousand of the *caukarī*s [i.e. the four *yuga*s] delineated above.[149] Learned men and the Brahmins of the regions of India agree that until now, when this preface is being written, countless such Brahmās have come to the manifest world, and have gone back to the veil of concealment. According to what has reached us from trusted authorities concerning the life of Brahmās, the present Brahmā is the one thousand and first. His age is fifty years and half a day; he has just begun the [second] half of the first day of his fifty-first year. Glory to God, the exalted, the magnificent! What a workshop, and what managers of the workshop! Hearing these strange stories, I am transported into a state that cannot

143 The printed text has *maʿād* ('place of return', 'destination', also used in the sense of 'the Hereafter', which does not seem appropriate in this context. The BL manuscript has *maqāviz*, which is possibly a scribal error for *mafāviz* ('place of perdition', 'desert', 'a tract in which two watering places are so far apart that camels are kept from drinking two days, with a portion of the day preceding them and of the day following them'). We have opted for this reading.

144 At this point the description moves from the *Vedas* to the *Mahābhārata* (popularly also called *Veda*), as it is evident from the description of its prosody that follows.

145 The *śloka* consists of 16+16 syllables, or four *pāda*s, each *pāda* consisting of 8 syllables. The total comes to 32, not 26. The possible reading is taken up in Chapter 3.3.

146 That is, a consonant plus a vowel (CV).

147 That is, consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC).

148 We have followed the BL manuscript in interpreting this passage, as the printed text appears to be garbled. The manuscript reads (after the emendation of scribal errors): *ʿumr-i girāmī-i īn ʿajūbah-i khalāyiq kih mukhtariʿ-i īn kitāb-i maẕkūr ast ṣad sāl-i ghayr-i ʿurfī ast va har sāl mutaẓammin-i sīṣad va shaṣt rūz ast va har rūz mushtamil bar hazār chahār-dawr-i maẕkūr va har [shab bi-] dastūr-i rūz mutaẓammin-i hazār caukarī-i masṭūr.*

149 On the notion of cyclical time in Hinduism, see González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas*, 3–8. *Caukaḍī* or *caukaṛī* is a vernacular word for *mahāyuga*, the round of the four *yuga*s.

be described; listening to these wondrous tales, I experience a surge of feelings inside – how could I express it?

> I have a passionate heart, filled with all sorts of concerns;
> It can by no means find the way toward knowledge.[150]

Notwithstanding that I, a perplexed one in the school of understanding, [i.e. Abū al-Faẓl], collected in the valley in which I have spent an entire lifetime, as demanded by my knowledge-inclined nature and derivative intellect,[151] a few potsherds while seeking for genuine gems, when I contemplate on matters such as these strange propositions [folio 23v] and wondrous discourses and other things [page 25] that are found page after part, part after part, volume after volume in this wonder-filled book, my perplexity keeps increasing and I cannot lift my head from the enormous whirlwind of astonishment. If I commit the excess of relying on my deficient knowledge and, aided by a little knowledge, with philosophical arguments (*dalā'il-i ḥikmīyah*) – which the just intellect suspects of being compounded with ignorance – draw the line of rejection across the discourses that in the eye of discernment appear extremely far-fetched and strange, surely I lay my daring steps outside of the circle of justice and end up in a desert where one gets lost. For, whenever I – who in fact am somewhat distinguished with regard to discernment and comprehension – read the account of my past actions, I come to realise that in the prime of my youth, when after closing the pages of mere copying, I began to explore the art of discourse in the elementary school of intellect and to engage in combats on the battlefield of the learned ones, I impressed, with argumentation, many incorrect propositions on the minds of those who had been rejecting them, and accepted, through rational arguments, many false ideas from those who surpassed me. However, when, thanks to the fortunate days [in which I live], the light of guidance began to illuminate my interior, the works of the compilers (*kalām al-murattibīn*) clearly proved to be false, and I attained nothing but shame on account of my past, and a lack of trust in the present. Then how could I rely on acquired knowledge, and how could I consider my own knowledge?[152] If I lose sight of moderation and out of simple-mindedness trust

150 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Kamāl al-dīn Ismāʿīl (ca. 1172–1237); Kamāl al-Dīn Ismāʿīl Iṣfahānī, *Dīvān-i khallāq al-maʿānī Abū al-Faẓl Kamāl al-Dīn Ismaʿīl Iṣfahānī bih inẓimām-i Risālat al-qaws*, ed. Ḥusayn Baḥr al-ʿUlūmī (Tihrān: Intishārāt-i Sanā'ī, 2017), 12.

151 The printed text has *ʿaql-i mustaʿār* ('borrowed or derivative intellect'), followed by *bih vādi-ī* ('in the valley . . .'); the BL manuscript has *ʿaql-i mustafād-i yūnānī* ('an intellect that benefitted from the Greeks'); the interpretation of this passage is not without problems in either case.

152 We have followed the BL manuscript (*bar dānish-i khvud naẓarī andāzad*) as opposed to the printed text (*bar dānish-i khvud naẓarī nadārad*, 'not look at my own knowledge').

the reputation of our leaders and forerunners, accept their way and believe in that reality, then, like the heaven-born peacock, having brought my reason into the leash of those who imitate the ignorant ones, apart from becoming the laughing-stock of the sagacious critics, in my own defective eyes[153] too I fall into endless shame and humiliation – which is nothing but eternal torment.[154] It is then better that, in accepting or refuting such matters [that are in the *Mahābhārata*], I refer to the various ways competent people of various times understood them, and embark upon citing in this preface that which is necessary or laudable.

> Nothing familiar reaches us from the world of the Unseen;
> No call reaches us from the caravan of nonexistence.
> [page 26]
> The heaven is a caravan-bell, a sevenfold fervor arises from it –
> Despite all these seals, no sound reaches us.[155]

The narrators of this story and the transmitters of this tradition, who are the registrars (*qānūn-gū*) of events and the local chiefs (*chaudharī*) of occurrences, relate that in the second half of the *Dvāpara yuga*, in the town of Hastināpura[156] of India, there was a king named Bharata, who reigned over his people with justice. After him, his seven sons assumed kingship one after another, regulated the dispersed matters of this alluring, transitory abode, and then departed to the seclusion-chamber of non-existence. Then, an eighth son was born to him, who was named with the exalted name King Kuru – Kurukṣetra and Thāneśvar[157] are associated with his name – and his kingly descendants are called Kauravas. After six generations of his descendants who ruled the realm, a son was born, who too

153 The printed text has *dar naẓar-i aḥvāl-i nāqiṣ-i khvud* ('in the eyes of my/its own deficient state'), whereas the BL manuscript has *dar naẓar-i aḥval-i bī mā ḥaṣal-i khvud* ('in my/its own useless squinting eyes'). Both readings are not without problems.

154 This may be a reference to the story of the peacock in Islamicate lore, according to which the peacock was casted down to earth from Paradise because it helped the disguised Satan to enter and tempt Adam and Eve.

155 In this *rubā'ī*, the heaven is likened to a caravan-bell, the seven spheres or planets to its sound, and, according to their shape, to seals.

156 Hastināpura is identified as Hastinapur in Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh; A. Ghosh, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal), 2: 164–66.

157 Kurukṣetra, the 'field of Kuru' identified as immediately east of the town of Thanesar in Haryana district, north of Delhi. Thanesar is an important location, see R. C. Agrawala, "Early History and Archaeology in Kuruksetra and Ambala Division," in *Haryana Past and Present*, ed. S. K. Sharma, 2 vols. (Delhi: Mittal, 2005), 2: 41–82. In the Mughal period it was an active centre with the important tomb of Shaykh Chilli, deemed a protected monument of national importance under the administration of the Archaeological Survey of India.

became a great king; his blessed name was Vicitravīrya. As it will be described in this book with extraordinary details, two sons were born to him: Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu. Although Dhṛtarāṣṭra was the elder, because of his lack of [folio 24r] eyesight the kingship was conferred to the younger brother, Pāṇḍu – whose greatness later came to exceed all bound. Consequently, his sons were named after him Pāṇḍavas.

It should not remain hidden that Pāṇḍu had five sons: Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīmasena, and Arjuṇa were from his wife Kuntī, and Nakula and Sahadeva were from his wife Mādrī. In this text, by the 'Pāṇḍavas' these five brothers are meant. Dhṛtarāṣṭra had one hundred and one sons: one hundred from Gāndhārī, daughter of the king of Gandhāra,[158] the eldest of whom was named Duryodhana; the names of his sons will be mentioned in this book. The other son [of Dhṛtarāṣṭra] was Yuyutsu, was born to a grain-merchant woman.[159] In this book by the 'Kauravas' these one hundred and one sons are meant.

[page 27]
When by heavenly decree and divine ordainment Pāṇḍu passed onto the everlasting realm, the kingdom and sovereignty came to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's house. In accordance with the far-reaching wisdom [of God], although in name Dhṛtarāṣṭra was the king, in reality his sons were ruling – especially Duryodhana, his eldest son. Since practical wisdom requires the elimination of enemies to be an indispensable part of the rules of kingship, and the devastation of the house of those who are suspected of sedition and corruption to be a time-sensitive duty according to the laws of precaution, King Duryodhana always suspected the Pāṇḍavas, and spent his time thinking of their eradication. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra saw that the enmity between the two [families] were increasing, with this in mind that the matter should not reach a point where it could no longer be remedied, he ordered houses to be built in the city of Varṇavarta (*Barnāvah*)[160] for the Pāṇḍavas, so that due to the distance of their dwelling-places the mutual opposition and enmity may be alleviated. But since [human] planning cannot overcome [divine] destiny, this plan did not yield any benefit in any way. Duryodhana instructed the builders to construct a house in the quarters of the Pāṇḍavas, covered with lac and tar, so that even a small flame could cause the whole house to be set on fire

158 In the BL manuscript, *Qandahār* is given instead of *Gandhār*.
159 Yuyutsu was born to Gāndhārī's maidservant, who was from the Vaiśya *varṇa*; here she is referred to as *baqqāl zanī*, 'a trader woman'. According to Steingass, *baqqāl* in India was used in the meaning 'grain-merchant', 'corn-chandler'.
160 Varṇavarta is identified as the town of Barnawa in Uttar Pradesh. See Ghosh, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, 2: 55.

and, engulfing the settlement, the fire would consume its inhabitants. But what damage could the enmity and plotting of envious ones cause to someone over whom divine protection keeps watch?

In short, the Pāṇḍavas became informed of this plot and were prepared. There was a woman named Bhīlā, who, along with her five sons, came with the Pāṇḍavas, and settled in the abovementioned house of her own accord. The Pāṇḍavas set that house on fire and took to the desert with their mother; Duryodhana's plotters turned into ashes, together with that free woman and her sons. Duryodhana's spies, thinking the burning of that woman and her sons to be the burning of the fortune-favoured Pāṇḍavas, brought the news of their perishing to the exalted ears of the Kauravas, who rejoiced and were relieved. They did not know that those who are guarded by divine protection are not affected by the feeble intentions of the specks of dust of possible existence, [page 28] and that those whose leadership and sovereignty was granted in the pre-eternity of pre-eternities[161] by the overseers of destiny cannot be harmed by the deceptions of the mindless ones of the circle of contingency.

After many happenings – which this book undertakes to recount – the Pāṇḍavas came from the wilderness to a prosperous land, and honoured it by taking up residence in the city Kampilya.[162] [folio 24v] With the finest presents and choicest things they brought Draupadī, daughter of the king of Kampilya, into the precious bond of marriage with all five brothers; [the arrangement was that] each would have his turn with her for seventy-two days. Since in that time concord and unanimity was on the highest level, whatever one of the brothers or lovers wanted for himself, he wanted the same for the others as well. The abounding concord in the brothers demanded that even regarding wedlock they should observe the principle of unity – which is the condition of affection. In short, since, as a result of divine support, marks of rectitude and sovereignty were apparent on their fortune-favoured foreheads, and lights of divine guidance were manifest on their blessed faces,[163] the fame of their magnificent virtues[164] began to spread through the tongues of small and great, and the renown of their valour, generosity, and

161 The manuscript has *azal al-āzāl* ('pre-eternity of pre-eternities'), whereas the printed text has *azal al-azal* ('pre-eternity of pre-eternity').

162 Kampilya is identified as Kampil in Farrukhabad district, Uttar Pradesh. See Ghosh, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, 2: 198.

163 The printed text here is shorter and appears to be corrupted (*wa anvāʿ-i hidāyat-i īzadī az jamāl-i aḥvāl-i ānhā huvaydā*, "kinds of divine guidance were manifest from the beauty of their states"). The BL manuscript is not without problems either (*wa anvār-i imdādāt-i īzadī az vajnāt-i aḥvāl-i khujastah-āmāl-i īnhā huvaydā*, "lights of divine assistance were manifest from the faces of their states of blessed hopes").

164 The BL manuscript has *jalāyil-i manāqib*, whereas the printed text only *jalāyil*.

high aspirations[165] kept increasing day by day, until Duryodhana and his associates woke up from the sleep of negligence. They started telling each other, "the burning of the Pāṇḍavas was just a false rumour – these are certainly the Pāṇḍavas who have come forward with their names and outfits changed. It is better to investigate the matter. If that which we suspect is true, then, before they rise to prominence, we should lure them to our presence with arts of finesse. Disguising ourselves as friends, perhaps we can achieve peace of mind with regard to them."

After much discussion the Kauravas brought the Pāṇḍavas to Hastināpura, their capital, showering them with kindness and seeking to please their lost kin.[166] After performing their obligations as hosts, on account of the requirements of kinship and friendship they divided their territory into two brotherly parts. Laying down the trap of love, they gave Indraprastha – by which Delhi is meant – with half of their territory to the Pāṇḍavas, while keeping Hastināpura and the other half under their own control. Since rulership over the inhabited world was destined for the Pāṇḍavas, the signs of their fortune and the lights of their greatness increased day by day. Those in the school of wisdom who could read dominion over the world [page 29] on the page of the blessed outcome of the affairs of the Pāṇḍavas joined the ranks of the employees of their court, until the matter gradually reached a point where even the Kauravas became mere dependents and did not neglect to fulfill the conditions of obedience. At the same time, in their minds they kept scheming and plotting; without, however, turning these into action. They lived their lives showing conformity outwardly, while inwardly they opposed the Pāṇḍavas. This went on until it occurred to King Yudhiṣṭhira's bountiful mind that the *rājasūya* sacrifice[167] should be performed. It should not remain hidden that by *yajña* a specific form of worship is meant, in which the elders gather to perform specific acts of worship and turn to the divine court with special attention. They light a big fire and, having gathered different kinds of perfumes, fruits, grains, and other things from the nobles and others, throw them into the lit-up face of fire, mother of all elements. They give various alms and perform all sorts of good deeds, considering these the means of achieving close-

165 The printed text has *buland-naẓarīhā* ('high aspirations'), whereas the BL manuscript has *buland-fiṭrīhā* ('high-mindedness'). The two words can look very similar in handwriting.

166 The printed text has *taʿalluqāt* ('attachments', 'ties'), whereas the BL manuscript has *tafaqqudāt* ('seeking something lost', 'seeking something missed'; in Persian also 'seeking to gain the heart', 'kindness').

167 The *rājasūyayajña* or royal consecration is a sacrifice (*yajña*) performed by ancient kings in India who sought to transform themselves into powerful emperors, and is a key part of the first section of the *Mahābhārata*. A seminal study is J. C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration: The Rājasūya Described According to the Yajus Texts and Annotated* ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1957).

ness to God. These consist of many kinds, as it will be mentioned in this book. One of the conditions of the *rājasūya* sacrifice is that the kings of the seven climes (*haft iqlīm*) should come together and perform the services that are prerequisite for this great feast physically (*bah abdān-i khvud*).

In short, with divine assistance, Yudhiṣṭhira appointed his four brothers to subjugate [the rest of][168] [folio 25r] the seven climes of East, West, South, and North. Through the will of God, the Bestower of Bounties, this hope[169] was fulfilled in a short time. The brothers, expert commanders, guided by armies of divine assistance, traveled the world in a little time and brought the sultans of the time and the rulers of each region – Turkestan (Khatā), Western Asia (Rūm), the Arab lands (ʿArab), Persia (ʿAjam), Transoxiana and other inhabited lands of the world[170] – to the capital, along with lots of treasure, and set out to perform the necessary rites of the *rājasūya* sacrifice. Through the grace of God, Most Glorious, both the form and the meaning [of the sacrifice] were carried out the way their heart desired.

> If you seek your heart's satisfaction, submit to dissatisfaction,
> So that this very pain becomes a remedy for you.

When Duryodhana witnessed all this wealth and possession and magnificence and [page 30] sovereignty, since human nature is such, he could not control himself anymore – the fire of jealousy that had been hidden for years in the fireplace of his soul blazed up. With the help of plotters of the time and experts of machination he prepared a feast and invited the Pāṇḍavas. After performing the customary rites of hospitality, they started playing dice. Motivated by jealousy, they laid out the dice (*pānsah*)[171] incorrectly and employed all the stratagems that they wanted; through incorrect means[172] they took from the Pāṇḍavas their wealth and their kingdom. Since nothing was left, the Kauravas laid down the condition that "if you win, you can take back all that you have given to us, but if we win, you will have to leave the inhabited world and live in the wilderness with wild animals and birds in the guise of hermits. After the full period has elapsed, you can come back to the inhabited world, but you must live for a year in

168 The BL manuscript here has the additional word *baqiyyah*, 'remaining'.

169 The BL manuscript has *umnīyat* ('desire', 'wish') instead of *ummīd* ('hope').

170 This geography conforms to Abū al-Faẓl's understanding of the inhabited world, and shows how texts like the *Mahābhārata* were projected on the geographical horizon of the Mughal world.

171 The word *pānsah* is the transcription of the Hindi word *pāṃsā* (or *pāsā*) for dice.

172 The sentence starting with 'motivated by jealousy' up to 'through incorrect means' (*va az rāh-i ḥasad pānsah nārāst taʿbiyah kardah har naqshī kih mī khvāstand, mī āvardand va az ṭarīq-i nārāstī . . .*) is not in the BL manuscript.

a manner that no one can recognise who you are and where you are from. If this condition is not fulfilled, then you will have to live in the wilderness for another period of the same length." Since the nature of destiny is such that it often turns against the wishes of those in authority, the Pāṇḍavas subjected themselves to what they were compelled to do. To fulfill the condition, they set out on the road to the wilderness.

> Unexpected fortunes – but adversities are following.
> Heedless is the one who does not perceive this![173]
>
> Why do you wonder that in the garden of the world,
> The owl pursues the nightingale, and lamentation follows singing?

Since it is a characteristic of desire to couple with neglectfulness and arrogance, Duryodhana ruled with absolute authority, without taking others into consideration. Having opened the doors of neglectfulness on his time, he had no idea how his affairs would end. In short, the Pāṇḍavas, accompanied by divine favour, completed the stages and traversed the stations [of their exile], thereby fulfilling the condition. As they had promised, they lived in the city of Virāta[174] for an entire year behind the veil of concealment. No matter how many tricks were played on them, since they kept a strong guard, they were useless. No matter how many stratagems were devised to argue that they had failed to fulfill the conditions, since they did not let go of their sincerity, [page 31] these did not get anywhere.

After sending messengers, delivering messages, and extensive discussion, the Pāṇḍavas were ready to be content with five towns.[175] The Kauravas, however, being drunk with power and vainglory, did not accept this, therefore it was decided that the matter would be settled on the battlefield. After preparing for the battle and strategic planning, in accordance with the agreement the two armies met on the field of Kurukṣetra, near Thāneśvar. After arranging the armies and setting up the lines of the fighters of the two sides according to the rules established in the way (*maẕhab*) of contest and the creed (*millat*) of warfare, they began to fight. They performed such feats that in comparison with them, the story of Rustam and

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173 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Kamāl al-dīn Ismāʿīl. We follow the BL manuscript in reading *iqbālhā-yi nāgah o adbār dar qafā-st / bas ghāfil ast ān-kih tamāshā namī kunad*, which is the same in the edited *Dīvān*, whereas the printed text has *iqbālhā basā-st o adbār dar qafā-st / bas ʿāqil ast ān-kih tamāshā namī kunad*. See Kamāl al-Dīn Ismāʿīl Iṣfahānī, *Dīvān*, 342.

174 Virāṭa is identified as Bairat in Jaipur district, Rajasthan. Its early archaeology is noted in Raymond F. Allchin and George Erdosy, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 244–46.

175 The following summary of the events leading to the battle of Kurukṣetra is extremely hurried and stylistically of inferior quality; we made no attempt to improve it in the translation.

Isfandiyār[176] falls short of possessing the quality that would make it suitable to be invoked by way of comparison with the heroism and bravery of these proud [folio 25v] lion-defeater, mighty elephant-bodied warriors.[177]

Since the end of the actions of deceivers is misery, and the outcome of the work of falsifiers is disgrace, king[178] Duryodhana and his associates tasted the nectar of annihilation and hid their heads behind the curtain of nonexistence. Yudhiṣṭhira, after eighteen days of continuous fight, prevailed and became victorious. This event took place in the beginning of the *Kali yuga*.

> Death does not spare any man –
> The sultan of subduing does not show respect to anyone.
> The Lord of Death does not only issue his command to you and me –
> It reaches all inhabitants of the world.[179]

The transmitters of narratives narrate that in this magnificent battle, eleven *akṣauhiṇī* fought on the Kauravas' side, and seven *akṣauhiṇī* on the Pāṇḍavas' side – in the usage of the Indians, *akṣauhiṇī* means 21,870 elephant-riders, the same number of cart-riders, 60,310 horse-riders, and 109,350 foot-soldiers. In this wondrous fight and strange battle, which lasted for eighteen days, only eleven people survived on the two sides; the four who stayed alive in Duryodhana's army joined Yudhiṣṭhira's ranks. These are: Kṛpācārya brahmin, a man of both sword and pen, who was a teacher of both sides; Aśvatthāman, son of the wise Droṇācārya [Page 32], who was also teacher[180] of both sides; Kṛtavarmaṇ, one of the Yādavas and of the group of heroes;[181] and Sañjaya, who was the charioteer (*bahalbān*)[182] of Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

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176 Rustam and Isfandiyār are heroes of the Persian epic poem *Shāhnāmah*. Isfandiyār, against his own will but complying with the order of his father, King Gushtāsp, sets out to deliver the legendary champion Rustam to the court, chained. After a heroic combat, Rustam kills the invulnerable Isfandiyār with the help of the legendary bird Simurgh. See Dick Davis, *Epic and Sedition: The Case of Ferdowsi's Shāhnāmeh* (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press 1992), 128–66.

177 Both *taham-tan* ('powerful', 'mighty') and *fīl-tan* ('elephant-bodied') are attributes of Rustam in the *Shāhnāmah*.

178 The beginning of the sentence up to here is not in the BL manuscript.

179 These couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Kamāl al-dīn Ismāʿīl; Kamāl al-Dīn Ismāʿīl Iṣfahānī, *Dīvān*, 342.

180 We follow the BL manuscript in reading *ustād*, 'teacher', 'instructor' instead of the printed text's *ustād-zādah*, 'son of the teacher'.

181 We follow the wording of the BL manuscript in interpreting the phrase *va az gurūh-i abṭāl* as referring to Kṛtavarmaṇ.

182 The word *bahalbān* is apparently the Persianised form of the vernacular 'Hindi' *bail-vān*, 'bullock-cart driver'. In the BL manuscript, the clause describing Sañjaya is longer: *kih bā vujūd-i [jū] dānish bahalbān-i Dhṛtarāṣṭra-i maẓkūr ast* ("who, despite his knowledge, was charioteer

From the Pāṇḍavas eight people came out from the whirlpool of destruction to the shore of deliverance: the five brothers – Yudhiṣṭhira and the others –;[183] Satyaki, who was from the tribe of the Yādavas and was known for his prowess and learning; Yuyutsu, brother of Duryodhana, from a different mother; Kṛṣṇa, who is the chief of the great men of the world (*sarvar-i buzurgān-i ʿālam*) and head of the righteous of humankind (*sar-varaq-i nīkū-kārān-i afrād-i ādam*).[184]

A brief description of his [Kṛṣṇa's] auspicious life is this: he was the son of Vasudeva Yādava. His birthplace was Mathurā.[185] Out of fear of him, king Kaṃśa ordered him killed, for astrologers saw in his horoscope, and reported to the named king, that he would suffer death from the hand of the eighth son to be born in Vasudeva's house. Kaṃśa ordered Vasudeva and his wife, Devakī, to be brought to his mansion and to be kept behind eleven locked doors, and each son who was to be born to them, to be killed. This went on until the eighth time, when Kṛṣṇa was born. Through divine clemency, the eleven doors that had been locked with chains and iron locks, were open, and Kṛṣṇa was taken to be kept hidden in the house of Nanda, whose profession was to keep cows and sell milk. He was kept concealed there for eleven years. At last, with intrepidity and manliness he killed King Kaṃśa, and gave the kingship to Kaṃśa's father, Ugrasena, while he himself took upon himself the spiritual dimension of worldly governance (*ba-maʿnī-i ḥukūmat-i ṣūrī mī pardākht*). Since he found the natures of the men of that time to be empty of reason and to lack the capital of spiritual aspiration, he claimed, through the power of his innate nature, or rather, through mere discernment, to be the gist of the creation of the Creator. Because of his perfect nature and wisdom, many people believed him, set their hearts upon his actions, and became his followers. After leaving Nandagopāla's house, he spent

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of the mentioned Dhṛtarāṣṭra"). The word that looks like *jūdānish* appears to be a scribal error (containing a partial repetition of the last letters of the preceding word) for *dānish*.

183 The first part of the sentence up to here is not in the printed text.

184 The BL manuscript gives a different reading here: *sar-daftar-i muzavvirān-i ʿālam va sarvar-i muḥīlān-i afrād-i ādam*, "head of the cheats of the world and chief of the tricksters of humankind." The negative characterisation of Krishna continues in the manuscript even in the account of his life that follows (which is drawn from the *Harivaṃśa*), in stark contrast with the printed text. It is possible that the either the commissioner of the manuscript or the copyist was averse to Kṛṣṇa and his worship.

185 Mathurā, a city in Uttar Pradesh, has been a centre of Kṛṣṇa-worship. Its identification with Kṛṣṇa was known in the twelfth century, but more immediately from *māhātmya*-texts of the sixteenth century and Akbar's sanction of temple building there, see Heidi Pauwels, "A Tale of Two Temples: Mathurā's Keśavadeva and Orcchā's Caturbhujadeva," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 280–82.

thirty-two years in Mathurā in absolute authority. Strange things have been transmitted about him, and wondrous stories have been narrated.[186]

In the end King Jarāsandha came from Bihār and with a large army marched to Mathurā with the aim of destroying him. From the direction of West, King Kālayavana, a king of the *mlecchas* (*mlīchān*)[187] – [page 33] that is, a tribe that has no laws and no religion[188] – [folio 26r] too came with a big army against this great man.[189] Some are of the view that this king was the king of the Arab lands (*ʿArabistān*). The above-mentioned Kṛṣṇa did not have the strength to stand up against this massive[190] army and went to Dvāraka, which is on the shore of the ocean, hundred *kurūh*s[191] from Ahmadabad,[192] and garrisoned himself there. He stayed in that area for seventy-eight years, living in a strange palace. After reach-

186 The passage reads in the BL manuscript is as follows (some words are difficult to read or interpret, given the missing diacritical points and even letters due to the carelessness of the copyist): "A brief description of his unwholesome life is this: he was son of Vasudeva Yādava. His birthplace is Mathurā. Out of fear of king Kaṃśa, chief of the Yādavas, who had ordered him to be killed, for astrologers saw in his horoscope his infelicitous deeds and reported to the named king, he was kept hidden in the house of a man named Nanda, whose profession was to keep cows and sell milk [the text has *shutur*, 'camels', which is a typo for shīr, 'milk']. He was kept concealed in the house of the named person for eleven years. At last, with trickery and deceit and magical enchantments and jugglery he killed his own king, the above-mentioned Kaṃśa, and nominally gave the kingship to Kaṃśa's father, Ugrasena, while in reality he himself took upon himself worldly governance (*ba-maʿnī ḥukūmat-i ṣūrī mī pardākht*). Since he found the natures of the men of that time to be empty of spiritual aspiration, he claimed, through the power of necromancy, or rather, purely through falsification, divinity (*ulūhīyat*). Many people believed his false (*bāṭil*?) claim, and, whether due to mindlessness and bestial nature, or due to avarice and baseness, or because of the lack of innate capacity and spirit, were deceived by his tricks (*bāzīgarīhā*). Without consulting their own minds or paying attention to their intelligence (*ẕihānat*?), they became his followers. Having lost the way of both form and meaning, their lot is ruin in both religion and the world. After leaving Nandagopāla's house, he spent thirty-two years in Mathurā in debauchery. Strange things have been transmitted about him, and wondrous stories have been narrated."

187 *Mleccha* is a general term in classical India for non-Indic 'barbarians'. A foundational study is Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India: A Study in Attitudes toward Outsiders up to AD 600* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1991).

188 *Az ṭā'ifah-ī kih dīn va ā'īn nadāshtah bāshad;* the BL manuscript has *az ṭā'ifah kih nah bi-ā'īn va dīn-i hunūd bāshad* ('from a tribe that does not have the laws and religion of Hindus').

189 *Buzurg*; the BL manuscript has *bāzīgar* ('juggler', 'trickster').

190 *Girān* ('weighty', 'massive'); the BL manuscript has *fīrūz-aṣar* ('victorious').

191 One *kurūh* is about two miles.

192 Dvāraka is identified here as 'on the shore of the ocean.' Modern Dwarka is in Devbhoomi Dwarka district, Gujarat.

ing the age of one hundred and twenty-five years, he journeyed to the everlasting world[193] – as it will be narrated in this book in detail.

After Yudhiṣṭhira became victorious and Duryodhana was killed along with many people – as it has been mentioned briefly – Yudhiṣṭhira became the absolute sovereign and ruled the world. When thirty-six years[194] passed after this event, Yudhiṣṭhira, guided by divine grace, realised the faithlessness of this husband-killer world,[195] and before that his good fortune would undergo a reversal, he left worldly attachments (*taʿalluqāt-i dunyavī*) behind – which is the way those who are endowed with sublime nature and high spiritual aspiration. Along with his four brothers, he took the path of renunciation (*tajarrud*) and journeyed to the Abode of Safety in the world of nonexistence – as it will be described in this book.

> You asked: where did those crowned kings go?
> Lo! The womb of earth is eternally pregnant with them.[196]

> O heart! Since you are aware that annihilation comes in the footsteps of subsistence,
> For what do you have this far-fetched desire?
> It was you who have pledged yourself to time – time did not pledge itself to you!
> Then what is this outcry that the days are faithless?[197]

In short, the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas governed the country in harmony for seventy-six years, then, Duryodhana ruled with absolute authority for thirteen years. After the battle, Yudhiṣṭhira ruled on earth for thirty-six years; the total years of the sovereignty of the two sides comes to one hundred twenty-five. In the end, all passed away and left everything behind – whether it is the assembly of coquettish display or the tribunal of needlessness.

[page 34]

> O heart! Who has told you to settle in the world
> And draw this delicate soul into your embrace?

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193 *Musāfir-i ʿālam-i bāqī shud;* the BL manuscript has *musāfir-i rāh-i ʿadam shud* ('journeyed the path to nonexistence'). The clause is preceded by a few words (*yā panj ṭaraf*?) that are difficult to decipher and interpret.

194 The BL manuscript has 'thirty-six' (*sī o shish*) but the digit 7 is written above the word 'six' as well as on the margin; the printed text has 'thirty-two'.

195 In Arabic *dunyā* ('the lower world') is feminine, hence the metaphor 'husband-killer'. In the BL manuscript, this phrase is preceded by the adjective *bī-baqā* ('[that which is] without permanence').

196 This couplet is from a *qaṣīdah* of Khāqānī (1126–1198/99); Afẓal al-Dīn Khāqānī Shīrvānī, *Dīvān-i Khāqānī Shirvānī*, ed. Mīr Jalāl Al-Dīn Kazzāzī (Tihrān: Nashr-i Markaz, 1997), 468.

197 These couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Kamāl al-dīn Ismāʿīl, different loci; Kamāl al-Dīn Ismāʿīl Iṣfahānī, *Dīvān*, 15, 17.

> Look! By the time you arrived, so many had gone –
> At least, take a lesson from their passing.[198]

Praise to be God, Most High, Most Glorious! Such an extensive, wonderful, and rare narrative is not found in the various histories of the world, nor is such an eloquent work among the accounts (*ṭabaqāt*) of the world. If I say that this story is true in its entirety, I step out[199] of the circle of possibility, and if I relate it to the story of Ḥamzah,[200] how far I am from the truth! Although people of good taste do not hesitate to declare particulars of this story as false, but to be fair, if the quick and discerning mind, holding the reins of contemplation in its hands, places narratives like this in the realm of possibility, it will by all means be closer to fairness and caution.[201] And if a sagacious person looks with penetrating eyes at the wonders of the divine omnipotence and the marvels of infinite wisdom and thoroughly contemplates them, and, seeing with the eyes of insight the differences in the conducts and manners, aspirations and natural dispositions, of the people of one time, or even one clime, or even one city, or even one village, or even the differing states of one person through the stages of years, months, hours, stores in the treasure-house of his mind the accounts pertaining to different times of the past and different eras with all the detail – as much as he can – or summarily, inevitably [folio 26v] he will instantly consider hundreds of examples of such strange stories to be easily possible. He will not be surprised about their occurrence or regard them far-fetched. However, a wretched person who is captive of what he has been accustomed to in accordance with his nature falls short of serving the sovereign intellect. Because of being deprived of this felicity – which in turn is the cause of misfortune – he does not even recognise the majestic workings of divine omnipotence that are within the reach of his own understanding, and takes even the most ordinary things to be wonders of the created world. As for the wonders of the created world, because he looks at them repeatedly and

198 These couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Kamāl al-dīn Ismāʿīl, different loci; Kamāl al-Dīn Ismāʿīl Iṣfahānī, *Dīvān*, 23, 24.

199 The BL manuscript has 'I don't step out' (*qadam bīrūn na-nihādah bāsham*).

200 The romance of Ḥamzah (*Ḥamzah-nāmah* or *Dāstān-i Amīr Ḥamzah*) is a medieval romance in Persian, loosely connected with the figure of Ḥamzah, uncle of the prophet Muhammad. Though transmitted mainly orally, it was written down at a certain point and became especially popular in the Indian subcontinent; emperor Akbar reportedly enjoyed listening to it in the narration of his personal storyteller and commissioned the task of illustrating the narrative cycle. Subsequently it was translated into other languages as well. See William L. Hanaway Jr. and Frances W. Pritchett, "Ḥamza-nāma," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* XI, no. 6 (2003): 649, retrieved April 2022.

201 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 131, offers an abridged translation of the passage up to this point.

compelled by habit, he considers them ordinary matters, and does not learn any lesson from them.

> Traverse the inner world, using the intellect as your feet –
> There are so many treasures that you will find in this journey.
> [page 35] Although the words of the Real may be bitter to your taste,
> Swallow them, for you will get the taste of sugar from them.
> With the hand of proper conduct, keep the reins of your glance tight,
> For temptation in the heart arises from the coming and going of glances.[202]

The sellers of old merchandise in the bazaar of speech narrate that after the passing of many days and years, two generations after Arjuna a boy was born from among his descendants. When he sat on the throne of sovereignty,[203] he opened the gates of justice and compassion in his time and made past events to be a mirror for his future conduct.[204] He spent his life in pleasing God. One day, questions emerged in his discerning mind, such as: "What was the reason for the strife between my forefathers? How did the battle enfold between them? How did their feasts and wars happen, and the heart-ravishing discourses that are connected with these?" He disclosed these secret thoughts to a wise man named Vaiśampāyana, whose companionship he was honoured with, and requested him to tell about these events. Vaiśampāyana informed him that his master, Vyāsa, a learned and wise man, was among those who attend the splendid audiences at the court; he was the one to ask about this magnificent topic. For, apart from the fact that he [Vyāsa] had been present in those events and was aware of the minutest details of all that passed, he was thoroughly acquainted with the secrets of the themes of the Veda, in which events pertaining to different times are recorded in the way they happened. Upon the king's request, he would certainly relate or put to writing this story, as it should be. Therefore, the king requested Vyāsa to relate these matters, which serve as warning and yield practical wisdom.[205] The abovementioned 'refuge of wisdom' [i.e. Vyāsa], due to his physical weakness and

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202 These couplets are from a *qaṣīdah* of Kamāl al-dīn Ismāʿīl, different loci; Kamāl al-Dīn Ismāʿīl Iṣfahānī, *Dīvān*, 27.

203 As it will be clear from the summary of the Parvans of the *Mahābhārata* below (specifically the added part *Harivaṃśa*), the king referred to is Rāja Janamejaya.

204 The BL manuscript contains the additional word *awẓāʿ*, 'manners', 'actions' (*aḥvāl-i guẕashtah rā āyīna-i awẓāʿ-i āyandah-i khvud sākht*).

205 We have followed the BL manuscript's reading, *kih pīrāyah-i ʿibrat va sarmāyah-i khibrat tavānad būd* (lit. 'which may be an embellishment for warning and a capital for skill [arising from experience]'), which makes more sense, given that the king wishes to make 'past events to be a mirror for his future conduct'. The second phrase in the printed text reads as *sarmāyah-i ḥayrat ast* ('capital for astonishment'), which would be less appropriate in this context.

occupation with spiritual matters, declined to narrate this heart-ravishing story. Instead, expressing it in a nice idiom, he committed it, along with other corresponding and congruous matters, to writing, so that it could become a treasury of exhortations and a storehouse of advice, a key to the destination[206] which so many thirsty seekers of different times seek in the desert of quest. He named this collection *Mahābhārata*.

According to what I heard from people,[207] the reason for naming it this way was that *mahā* means 'great', and *bhārata* means 'war'; since the book contains the description of a great war, he gave this as the title.[208] But after I had the opportunity to consult experts, [page 36] it became clear that *bhārata* does not mean 'war'; on the contrary, since this book is comprised of the monumental affairs of the noble descendants of King Bharata, it was distinguished with the aforementioned name *Mahābhārata*. The letter *alif* ['ā'] in *bhārata* is the *alif* ['ā'] of relation (*nisbat*), which, [folio 27r] like the *yā-yi nisbat* ['ī'] [in Persian],[209] is common in the 'Indian' language [i.e. Sanskrit]. Since the greatest thing ascribed to the named king is the war delineated above, [in common usage][210] the word *bhārata* began to be applied in the secondary meaning of 'war'.

This Vyāsa is regarded as one of the holy souls. Some hold that in every era a person by this name comes into existence to rectify the affairs of the whole of mankind, whereas some believe that it is a single person (*shakhṣ*) who [repeatedly] appears dressed in various forms of manifestation (*maẓāhir*). This person is called Vyāsa for the reason that he arranged the intricacies of the Veda – which had been manifested by Brahma's reality-describing tongue – into four books: *Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Atharvaveda*; for, the literal meaning of the word *vyāsa* is 'detailer, analyzer'. And because he came into existence in between two

206 The wording of this part of the sentence appears to be garbled in the printed text; we have followed the BL manuscript's reading (*kih ganjīnah-i mavāʿiẓ va khazīnah-i naṣāyiḥ kih kilīd-i bayt al-maqṣūd-i chandīn mutaʿaṭṭishān-i bādiyah-i ṭalab-i rūzgārān shavad*) in constructing the sentence.

207 The printed text has *afrād* ('persons', 'individuals'), the BL manuscript has *afvāh* (lit. 'mouths', but in Persian it is used in the meaning 'rumour', 'hearsay').

208 Compare Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 218, where she discusses Firishta's borrowings from Abū al-Faẓl's preface.

209 In Persian, *yā-yi nisbat* (in most cases written with the letter 'y', and pronounced as 'ī') forms the relative adjective from nouns; e.g. *Hindī* ('Indian, belonging to India') from *Hind* ('India'), *Lāhorī* ('of Lahore') from *Lāhor* ('Lahore'). In Sanskrit, a secondary nominal derivative is formed by lengthening the first vowel of the noun (to the *vṛddhi* level), which in case of 'a' is 'ā' – written with an extra *alif* in the Perso-Arabic script.

210 The BL manuscript has the additional phrase *ʿurf-i ʿām* ('commonly known', 'common usage').

waters (*dū āb*), he is also called Dvaipāyana.[211] Regarding the creation of this person, a strange story, too far-fetched and unusual (*dūr az ḥiṣāb va muʿāmalah*), is given in this book.

Present-day transmitters of stories narrate that when Vyāsa completed this wondrous book [i.e. the *Mahābhārata*] in 6,000,000 *śloka*s on the bank of the river Sarasvatī, in the environs of Thāneśvar, he arranged a magnificent feast. Various groups of created beings presented themselves and benefitted from his beneficial assembly. The sage divided these 6,000,000 *śloka*s among creatures in the following way: he gave 3,000,000 *śloka*s to the group called *devatā*s, who inhabit the higher world, which is called *svargaloka* in the 'Indian' language; he sent 1,500,000 *śloka*s to the inhabitants of the *pitṛloka*, who also inhabit the higher world; he dedicated 1,400,000 *śloka*s to the *yakṣa*s, *rākṣasa*s, *gandharva*s, which are types of creatures [page 37] that are described with similar characteristics as the *jinn*s,[212] and left 100,000 *śloka*s for the benefit of human beings, which he arranged into eighteen Parvans – that is, eighteen chapters – and a concluding part called *Harivaṃśa*. In this way he transmitted [divine] grace to those who have capacity (*arbāb-i istiʿdād*).

The first Parvan is called Ādi Parvan; it has an account of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, a table of content of the book, and so on. It contains 8,884 *śloka*s.[213]

The second Parvan is called Sabhā Parvan; it describes King Yudhiṣṭhira sending his esteemed brothers to regions of the world with the purpose of subjugating them, the *rājasūya* sacrifice that follows, the Kauravas arranging for the dice game, and so on. It contains 2,511 *śloka*s.

The third Parvan is called Araṇya Parvan; it is also called Vana Parvan. It describes the Pāṇḍavas going to the wilderness and living there for twelve years, the events that took place during this period, and so on. It contains 11,664 *śloka*s.

The fourth Parvan is called Virāṭa Parvan; it describes the Pāṇḍavas going from the wilderness to the city of Virāṭa and concealing themselves there, and so on. It contains 2,050 *śloka*s.

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211 According to some accounts, Vyāsa was born on an island in the Yamunā river, this is why he is called *dvaipāyana* ('island-born'). See e.g. V. S. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *vyāsa*.

212 In Hindu mythology, y*akṣa*s (demi-gods), *rākṣasa*s (demons), *gandharva*s (celestial musicians) are various beings that inhabit the created universe. Bruce M. Sullivan has drawn our attention to the idea of the text being recited to gods, ancestors and demigods in *Mahābhārata* 1: 1: 61–65; for a translation see van Buitenen, *Mahābhārata*, 1: 22–23.

213 The numbering varies depending on the manuscript copy. Apart from the discrepancies, the numbers in BL manuscript are often ridden with scribal errors, therefore we have refrained from giving the variants.

The fifth Parvan is called Udyoga Parvan; it narrates the Pāṇḍavas coming out of hiding, sending Kṛṣṇa as an envoy, the Kauravas not accepting the peace, the Pāṇḍavas planning to go to war, the armies of the two sides presenting themselves on Kurukṣetra, and preparing the armies. It contains 6,698 *śloka*s.

The sixth Parvan is called Bhīṣma Parvan; it describes the combat of the fighters and [folio 27v] Bhīṣma Pitāmaha falling on the battlefield injured,[214] many sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra being killed, and the events of the ten-day fight. It contains 5,884 *śloka*s.[215]

The seventh Parvan is called Droṇa Parvan, describing Duryodhana's consultation with Karṇa, and Droṇācārya being appointed commander, and his being killed, and the events of the other five-day fight, [page 38] and Bhīṣma getting injured.[216] It contains 8,909 *śloka*s.

The eighth Parvan is called Karṇa Parvan; it narrates another two days[217] of the fight, and Duryodhana appointing Karṇa as commander, who was one of the great men of the time, possessing physical and spiritual perfection, and the description of his fight and Yudhiṣṭhira fleeing from him, and Karṇa being killed by Arjuna on the second day of his commandership. It contains 4,964 *śloka*s.

The ninth Parvan is called Śalya Parvan; it describes Śalya becoming the commander, his heroic deeds, his death, and Duryodhana's hiding himself in a pool and his being pulled out and being killed by Bhīma's mace, and the perishing of most heroes. This is the eighteenth day of the battle, when after much combat and fight the Pāṇḍavas prevail and come out victorious. It contains 4964 *śloka*s.

The tenth Parvan is called Sauptika Parvan; it gives an account of the conclusion of the war, the coming of Kṛtavarmaṇ, Aśvatthāman, and Kṛpācārya brahmin, who were men of sound judgment and men of sword, on the battlefield to Duryodhana, who still had the last sparks of life and consciousness in him, and their conspiring about a night attack, and following that, a night attack on, and slaughter of one *akṣauhiṇī* contingent of the Pāṇḍavas that has arrived home

214 The BL manuscript has *zakhm khwurdah uftādah* ('fallen', 'injured'), whereas the printed text only has *zakhm khwurdan* ('suffering an injury').

215 The sixth chapter also contains the *Bhagavadgītā*, a philosophical poem of religious significance to Hindus, to which no reference is made in the chapter summary. Even in the *Razmnāma* it is only accorded a few pages. For a discussion see Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 116 and Chapter 1 in this volume.

216 "With Karṇa" is missing from the BL manuscript, possibly by oversight; the second half of the sentence reads as "the aforementioned Droṇa being killed on the fifth day, and the events of the other five days of the story of Bhīṣma's being injured."

217 We have followed the BL manuscript, since the printed text's 'ten days' is clearly wrong and appears to be a typographical error or a reproduction in the printed text of a scribal error.

from the war safe and sound,[218] and the five sons of the Pāṇḍavas who were born from Draupadī being killed, and only eight persons remaining of the Pāṇḍavas. It contains 870 *śloka*s.

The eleventh Parvan is called Strī Parvan; it details the weeping of the women on both sides for their dead, and Gāndhārī, Duryodhana's mother, cursing Kṛṣṇa that after thirty-two years his whole tribe would perish in his presence in the worst circumstances, and after so many calamities he would be killed by the worst means, and so on. It contains 775 *śloka*s.

The twelfth Parvan is called Śānti Parvan. When after the victory Yudhiṣṭhira, having contemplated the nature of the faithless world, wished to renounce worldly possessions and to take the path of renunciation (*tajarrud*), Vyāsa and Kṛṣṇa gave consolatory speeches, urging him [to heed] the bountiful advice of Bhīṣma, who was still alive. [page 39] Yudhiṣṭhira, guided by good fortune, was honoured to be in his [Bhīṣma's] companionship and to listen to his heart-soothing speeches. In this Parvan these speeches are detailed and the proper conduct of the worldly and the spiritual kingship (*ādāb-i salṭanat-i ṣūrī va maʿnavī*) described. It contains 14,732 *śloka*s.[219]

The thirteenth Parvan is called Anuśāsana Parvan; it is also called Dharma Parvan. It is about Bhīṣma describing various alms and charities. It appears to me that the twelfth and thirteenth Parvans should have been made one Parvan, since both consist of Bhīṣma Pitāmaha's advice. The ninth Parvan, however, should have been made two Parvans: one of them Śalya Parvan, about Śalya's combat and death, and the other Duryodhana Parvan, about Duryodhana's affairs. In this regard, I have not heard any explanation from any Brahmin that would be of any use,[220] until I heard from some expert of this region that in some manuscripts of the

218 We have followed the BL manuscript in rendering the first part of this paragraph. The printed text reads: ". . . the coming of Kṛtavarmaṇ, Aśvatthāman, and Kṛpācārya brahmin, who were men of sound judgment and men of sword, Duryodhana's powerful fight – who still had the last sparks of life and consciousness in him – and the night attack on one *akṣauhiṇī* contingent of the Pāṇḍavas that has arrived home from the war safe and sound, their being killed, and the five sons of the Pāṇḍavas who were born from Draupadī being killed, only eight persons remaining of the Pāṇḍavas." The part "the five sons of the Pāṇḍavas who were born from Draupadī being killed" is missing from the BL manuscript.

219 For a discussion of the translators' refashioning this chapter, in particular Bhīṣma's advice, as 'a Mughal mirror for kings', and the significance of the *Mahābhārata* to Akbar's imperial ideology, see Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 121–25.

220 In rendering this paragraph, we have followed the BL manuscript, which in many loci gives better readings; in particular *ba-kār āmad* ('would be of use') as opposed to the printed text's *pasand āyad* ('I like'); *maharah* ('experts') as opposed to the printed text's *fahmīdah*

Mahābhārata [folio 28r] it is exactly the way as I have thought, except that instead of Duryodhana Parvan it is referred to as Gadā Parvan. It contains 8,000 *śloka*s.

The fourteenth Parvan is called Aśvamedhika Parvan, about the Aśvamedha [horse] sacrifice and its requisites.[221] The reason for including it is that after Bhīṣma delivered his advices in Yudhiṣṭhira's assembly, he bid farewell to this transient abode [passed away]. Yudhiṣṭhira's old wound of sorrow opened again, and he wanted to give up worldly attachments and to take the path of renunciation. To soothe his heart, Vyāsa gave him essential instruction in matters of kingship and governance and made him attentive to his duty. For the sake of removing the anxiety from Yudhiṣṭhira's bountiful mind, he ordered him to perform the Aśvamedha sacrifice, so that this specific worship could be expiation for his sins, real or imagined. It contains 3,320 *śloka*s.

The fifteenth Parvan is called Āśramavāsika Parvan; it describes the renunciation of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī – mother of Duryodhana – and Kuntī – mother of Yudhiṣṭhira – and their entering the forest that was dwelling-place of Vyāsa in the land of Kurukṣetra, their living their life in the dress of poverty, the Pāṇḍavas' visit to them, and so on. It contains 1,506 *śloka*s.

[page 40]

The sixteenth Parvan is called Mausala Parvan; it describes the anguish of the Yādavas and Kṛṣṇa, their deaths,[222] and other events. It contains 320 *śloka*s.

The seventeenth Parvan is Mahāprasthāna Parvan [or Mahāprasthānika Parvan], describing the renunciation of King Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers, their entrusting the kingdom to the people, and going to the snowy mountains [i.e. the Himalaya]. It contains 120 *śloka*s.

('understood'; it could be stretched to mean 'accomplished'). There are other minor differences in wording that do not have much bearing on the meaning.

221 As noted in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters* 109–10, chapter fourteen of the *Razmnāma* is not the translation of chapter fourteen of the *Mahābhārata*. Instead, it is based on the *Jaiminīyāśvamedha*, a different retelling of the Aśvamedha sacrifice.

222 As with the earlier negative characterisation of Kṛṣṇa in the BL manuscript, this sentence too is pejorative: *dar bayān-i bī-dawlatī va khurāfat va kharābī-i aḥvāl-i khusrān-ma'āl-i jādavān va Kishan va murdan-i ānhā ba-ḥāl-i bad* ("describing the bad luck and the nonsense story and the ruin of the affairs – the outcome of which is total loss – of the Yādavas and Kṛṣṇa, and their dying in bad condition").

The eighteenth Parvan is called Svargārohaṇa Parvan;[223] it narrates the souls of the Pāṇḍavas leaving their bodies in the abovementioned mountains, and Yudhiṣṭhira[224] going in body to the higher world, and so on. It contains 209 *śloka*s.

The conclusion of the book is named *Harivaṃśa*; it is an account of the Yādavas. When the aforementioned Rāja Janamejaya heard the detailed account of the affairs of his forefathers, he requested the account of the Yādavas to be appended to this story. Vyāsa, through his pure consciousness, perceived the reality of the affairs of the Yādavas and appended a description of it to this story. In the Ādi Parvan it is mentioned that the *Harivaṃśa* contains 12,000 *śloka*s; according to this, [the total of the *Mahābhārata*] would be 1,470 *śloka*s less than 100,000 *śloka*s. However, if we take a look at the existing manuscripts of the *Harivaṃśa*, they comprise 18,000 *śloka*s; according to this, [the total of the *Mahābhārata*] would come to 4530 more [than 100,000]. Thus, it is better if the intelligent person does not trust such written accounts but rather follows his foresighted intellect on the paths of this life and on those leading to the next, so that he attains felicity both in body and soul.[225]

> The intellect suffices as the Master of Masters on your path –
> Ask from it whatever you want – don't ask anyone.[226]

It should not be hidden that from the 100,000 *śloka*s that are narrated in this book, 24,000 describe the war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas – which for the people of knowledge is a handbook comprising lessons to heed and skills of warfare and fighting; the rest is advices, admonitions, stories, and descriptions of feasts and battles of the past.
[page 41]
Since after a summary a detailed account is more pleasing, I was not content with the details and the summary that is in the original book [folio 28v] but also specified in this preface the details and the summarised contents of the original

223 The title of the chapter is different in the BL manuscript; in the Arabo-Persian script the word looks like *jānaparvan* but it is not clear what the original Sanskrit would have been.
224 We have followed the BL manuscript in rendering this paragraph; the printed text does not contain the word Yudhiṣṭhira, which makes the sentence self-contradictory.
225 This appears to be sound advice, since the total number of the *śloka*s based on the numbers given in this chapter summary (which already differ in the printed text and the BL manuscript) does not conform to the totals indicated in the text itself.
226 This couplet is from Niẓāmī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, 257. The 'Master of Masters' is *shaykh al-shuyūkh* in the original.

book.[227] In this way, once the themes of this book have settled in the heart in the best manner, the mind of the seeker of truth can become more vigilant in distinguishing truth from falsehood, good coin from bad coin, and he will not set his heart upon words and stories, tale and narrative; rather, keeping the reins of his contemplative mind in his hands, he will be able to travel, if need arises, the paths of comprehension.[228] Further, if out of brotherly affection he can wake up his brothers who are imprisoned in the prison of imitation (*taqlīd*), and become a light for the eyes and a walking-cane for the spiritual aspiration of those who, gripped by inner blindness and lameness of spiritual aspiration, in their negligent sleep take themselves to be fast-running, far-sighted footmen of the plain of quest,[229] that will be an act of humanity and chivalry.

I ask forgiveness from God if I have meddled in the divine workshop! He satiates whom He wishes and keeps thirsty whom He wishes. If he seats someone on the cushion of critical enquiry (*taḥqīq*), it is mere good fortune, and if he drags someone on the leash of imitation (*taqlīd*), it is nothing but wisdom.[230] That one does not have opportunity to thank, and this one does not have permission to seek.

O meddling heart (*dil-i bū al-fuẓūl*)![231] When in front of the compassionate physician the tongue of the sick person remains dumb and does not ask "how" and "why," where would the speck of dust of contingency entrapped in human nature have the capacity to dispute [divine wisdom and decrees] in the court of the Necessary Existence of God?

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227 This sentence appears to contain unnecessary repetitions, added conjunctions, and other scribal errors, in both the printed text and the manuscript. The second half of the sentence in the BL manuscript reads as *tafṣīl va ijmālī kih bi-nisbat-i aṣl-i kitāb dar khuṭbah muqarrar sākht* ("in this preface I specified the details and the summarised content in relation to the original work") appears to be better than the printed text's *tafṣīl va ijmāl-i ṣabt-i aṣl-i kitāb* . . . (". . . the details and the summarised content recorded in the original work"). Whatever the correct wording may be, here Abū al-Faẓl attempts to justify why he gives a summary of contents in the preface of the *Razmnāmah*.

228 *Taʿaqqul*; the BL manuscript has a different word that looks like *naql* ('narration', 'narrative', 'story') but it may be a scribal error.

229 This is an allusion to the ever-popular fable of the Tortoise and the Hare.

230 We have followed the BL manuscript in reading *ḥikmat* ('wisdom'), as opposed to the printed text's *ḥukūmat* ('governance').

231 This address by the author to his heart contains a wordplay involving the name of the author, Abū al-Faẓl ('the father of bounty'). Both *faẓl* and *fuẓūl* come from the same root, but while *faẓl* means excess in the positive sense (as 'bounty', 'favour', 'grace'), *fuẓūl* means excess in the negative sense (such as 'interference', 'meddling'); *bū al-fuẓūl* accordingly means 'the father of meddling'.

O King of the World! Yours is lordship;
Yours is sovereignty from pre-eternity to post-eternity.
You are the opener of the eye of insight,
You are the writer who 'wrote' creation.
The intellect, with its reliance on knowledge, is unaware of you;
Conceptualisation has lost the way to you.
If you forgive all sinners,
Your lordship suffers no loss,
And if you cast all ascetics into hellfire,
It is not outside of your justice either.
[page 42] All your deeds are nothing but justice;
You cannot be suspected of injustice.

It is better that I cut my speech about the Creator short and expand it to praise the gist of the creation: the soul of the world and the king of the time, whose favourable attention has bestowed upon this dumb and lame one[232] a tongue to speak, and feet to walk, and made me a seeker of God's pleasure. However, when I looked with the eye of justice on the workshop of his greatness, I refrained from following up this thought; instead, I broke the tongue of the pen and the pen of the tongue.

May he be the king of the world until eternity!
May everything happen as he wishes!
May he enjoy life and youthfulness!
May he find felicity in success![233]
I have finished my discourse on 'felicity'
When I reached this point, I wrapped up the sheet.[234]

232 The BL manuscript has *hīch-madān* ('ignorant') added after *gung va lang* ('dumb and lame').
233 These couplets are from Niẓāmī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, 280. The third and the fourth hemistiches are reversed in the BL manuscript as well is in the edited volume of *Khusraw va Shīrīn*. In the edited volume the wording is different as well: *saʿādat yār-i ū dar kāmrānī / musāʿid bā saʿādat zindagānī* ("May felicity be his companion in success / May his life be aided with felicity").
234 The last couplet is not in the printed text but it is in the BL manuscript (*sukhan rā bar saʿādat khatm kardam / varaq k-īnjā rasāndam dar navardam*). In fact, this is the penultimate couplet in Niẓāmī's *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, followed by the last couplet which contains the poet's pen name.

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Chapter 3
Writing, Reading, Wondering

The *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah* provides a basis for a consideration of Abū al-Faẓl's ideas about the *Razmnāmah* and its purpose. His statements illuminate a host of issues and could prompt the exploration of many historical and literary topics. However, within the scope of the present book we will examine three themes that are of interest in relation to Abū al-Faẓl and the translation presented here in Chapter 2. These three themes follow the tripartite organisation of the *Preface* itself and are: 1) Writing for Akbar, the 'Emperor of the Age', 2) Reading the *Razmnāmah* and 3) Wondering about the *Mahābhārata*. In the first part of the *Preface* – after some preliminary remarks about writing – Abū al-Faẓl is concerned with the qualities of a great king and the personality of Akbar. Thus our first section: Writing for Akbar, the 'Emperor of the Age'. In our second section, Reading the *Razmnāmah*, we examine Abū al-Faẓl's consideration of the epic and his survey of those people who might benefit from reading the translation and the problems translators face with their source materials. Our third section, Wondering about the *Mahābhārata*, summarises Abū al-Faẓl's closing remarks about the origin of the *Mahābhārata*, the cosmological setting in which it is set and the wonderous tales it contains.

3.1 Writing for Akbar, the 'Emperor of the Age'

> *He is the world of the soul and the soul of the world, the 'Emperor of the Age' – about whose bounty-filled person a little taste will be given by this loyal pen.*
> Abū al-Faẓl, *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*.[1]

Abū al-Faẓl opens his *Preface* with a verse that highlights the supremacy of God and the difficulty – if not sheer impossibility – of doing justice to Him in writing. He then continues by contrasting darkness and light, depth and height, mundane existence and the eternity of God, indicating that he himself is but "a speck of dust . . . lost in the desert of bewilderment."[2] Notwithstanding this existential

1 Chapter 2, 4 (printed text), slightly adapted. The authors are grateful to Jonathan Peterson for his detailed comments on this chapter.

2 Chapter 2, 2 (printed text), as are further quotations from the *Preface* immediately below.

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problem, Abū al-Faẓl tells us that he followed the traditional path of his fellow "dust-covered travellers," and made an attempt to gain insight through the usual course of study. Like his colleagues, he wrote and spoke in the conventional manner, praising God and assuming that the "few matters" that he had come to know – in accord with prevailing insights, knowledge and capabilities – were "free of the contamination of deficiencies." Soon, however, he was drowned in the "deluge of the sweat of embarrassment," realising there was no difference between himself and "flotsam on the sea." As a result, he has decided to keep silent. He was not going to try and achieve the impossible with his pen.

Abū al-Faẓl is making a contrast with these statements, although he is far from explicit and draws a veil over his intentions with flowery language, poetry and technical terminology. Probing behind the flourishes and gestures of humility, it is clear that he is contrasting himself with those who have laboured diligently in the field of study and writing. Just about any scholar could fall in the frame of this criticism, but his primary swipe is against the *ʿulamāʾ* who based their authority on a command of scripture and jurisprudence. The verse Abū al-Faẓl gives to close this topic shows significant contempt: neither simpletons nor the wise are aware of God's majesty; both are blind in their own way. Unlike them, Abū al-Faẓl sees and admits the limitations. He resolves on silence as a result.

The matter of silence leads Abū al-Faẓl to those who speak "with the tongue of tonguelessness," – i.e. those who have decided to remain silent. These are religious mystics in the "herb-garden of morals," who open the "secrets of the soul" and who have "washed away the volumes of their erudition in the water of oblivion." They are "God's elect" who have "turned over the pages of eloquence" and now keep shtum.

The picture Abū al-Faẓl has created thus far puts him in a quandary. On one side is the fallibility of writing and speaking based on study, on the other is the commendable vow of silence taken by those with mystical insight. What Abū al-Faẓl needs now is some kind of rationale for continuing, otherwise he will have no viable framework in which to write his *Preface*. The first step is to dispatch the Sufis. He does this by appealling to the authority of Amīr Khusraw, quoting this verse: "Do not seek from them embellishment of knowledge and learning, for they have set their books on fire." This clears the ground for Abū al-Faẓl's methodology. He states this in a relatively simple manner: he has disciplined his tongue, restrained his indulgence in conventional usage and controlled his mystical imagination in the "court of rational thinking." This "laudable conduct," he claims, resulted in the king putting him in charge of the *Preface*. This being so, he is determined to get on with the task. Before he does, Abū al-Faẓl offers a few more observations on his approach. In the first place, he received permission from Akbar "to say a few words that would be appropriate to this subject,"

i.e. he has been given a free hand. Moreover, despite his earlier criticism of book learning, he was "given leave to express a few fundamental concepts that I had learned in the school of critical inquiry" that were "imprisoned in the recesses of my mind." On the face of it, this is a curious statement. We take it to mean that Akbar allowed him to call upon the education that he received from his father Shaykh Mubārak. The nature of this education, and the method of interpretation he would bring to bear as a result, has been described in our brief biography of Abū al-Faẓl in Chapter 1.

How these "fundamental concepts" played out in the *Preface* in practical terms can be seen in the many verses he inserted into the composition. Abū al-Faẓl uses these as devices to mark the steps in his presentation. Hajnalka Kovacs has traced most of the verses and noted the sources in Chapter 2. They include Amīr Khusraw, Fāryābī, Firdawsī, Anvarī, Niẓāmī, Azraqī and Haravī. More theoretically, Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* is built on the polarity between *taqlīd* (adherence to derived authority or imitation) and *taḥqīq* (critical inquiry or verification through analysis).[3] In Abū al-Faẓl's own words, the great change that has come about in his time thanks to Akbar is that "the absolute dominion of imitation (*bayt al-tasalluṭ-i taqlīd*) – which throughout the passing of years and the turning of centuries stood on a firm foundation – was demolished and became the seat of the caliphate of critical inquiry."[4] Abū al-Faẓl's experience of the *ʿulamāʾ* – who castigated his father as a heretic and who threatened his career until a senior noble came out in support – also accounts for Abū al-Faẓl's hostility toward the jurists and his reformist position with regard to *taqlīd*. Akbar too had little patience for the jurists and this helps explain the prominence and eloquence of the criticism at the opening of the *Preface*.[5] Abū al-Faẓl is of one mind with his patron.

3 The criticism of *taqlīd* among reformers has a substantial history and a corresponding historiography; one of several points of entry is Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, "Rethinking the *Taqlīd–Ijtihād* Dichotomy: A Conceptual-Historical Approach, *JAOS* 136, no. 2 (2016): 285–303 and Ibrahim, "Rethinking the *Taqlīd* Hegemony: An Institutional, *Longue-Durée* Approach," *JAOS* 136, no. 4 (2016): 801–16. The debate is still much alive: Rebecca Gould and Shamil Shikhaliev, "Beyond the Taqlīd/Ijtihād Dichotomy: Daghestani Legal Thought under Russian Rule," *Islamic Law & Society* 24, no. 1 (2017): 142–69; Muhammad al-Atawneh, "Wahhābī Legal Theory as Reflected in Modern Official Saudi Fatwās: Ijtihād, Taqlīd, Sources, and Methodology," *Islamic Law and Society* 18, no. 304 (2011): 327–55.

4 Chapter 2, 4 (printed text).

5 Akbar's attitude noted in Chapter 1.1.

The Fate of Seers as the Millennium Turns

After closing his preamble with a verse appealing for inspiration, Abū al-Faẓl turns to his next subject – marked by the expression "let it not be hidden." The theme is Akbar, but to begin he reflects on the current state of human affairs and the fate of seers in it. Even among the most perceptive people, Abū al-Faẓl states, "the eye of the soul has been blind and the eye of sight visionless,"[6] This is universal and applies to everyone – and has done since records began. This somewhat astonishing assertion is topped off with the observation that men have toiled in vain in the "meadows and fields of their spiritual dimensions." Their efforts have not been commendable and they have not obtained benefit. Despite this bleak situation, every now and then some "troubled soul" might happen to become a "seer of hidden secrets." Alas, this will be to no avail. Expressing these secrets will lead these seers to "non-existence" and "annihilation, the abode of oblivion," thanks to the indifferent, ineffective or malicious nature of most people. Moreover, if such matters come to the attention of kings, they consider it a religious concern and assign it to those in charge of legal decrees and jurisprudence, a necessary step to protect themselves from "the tongues of useless prattlers and the slanders of nonsense-speakers." For the *ʿulamāʾ* charged with attending to the problem, Abū al-Faẓl has a harsh rebuke: they are "leaders of those who practice imitation or, rather, are generals of ignorance and foolishness."[7]

It would be hard to imagine a sharper attack on the orthodox elite. Although Abū al-Faẓl seems alone here in his criticisms of the *ʿulamāʾ* – he certainly cites no other authorities – we know that the Mahdawī millenarian movement founded by Sayyid Muḥammad Jawnpūrī also had problems with the *ʿulamāʾ*.[8] They were, in the Mahdawī view, morally incompetent, corrupted by worldly influence and lacked a 'masculine' commitment to the truth. Akbar had similar views (as just

6 Chapter 2, 3 (printed text), and the same page for further quotations from the *Preface* in the present section.

7 This passage finds a parallel in the *AN* where the absence of a spirit of 'peace of all' is caused mainly by the preponderance of an attitude of imitation (*taqlīd*) and by the suppression of intellect and reason, see Iqtidar Alam Khan, "Akbar's Personality Traits and World Outlook – A Critical Reappraisal," in *Akbar and His India*, ed. Irfan Habib (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 88. Also see the incisive analysis in Hardy, "Abu'l-Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah," 122.

8 Derryl MacLean, "Real Men and False Men at the Court of Akbar: the *Majalis* of Shaykh Mustafa Gujarati," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 199–215. Given that Abū al-Faẓl's father was accused of following the Mahdawīs, as noted above in Chapter 1, Abū al-Faẓl would have been familiar with Mahdawī tenants. However, the Mahdawīs would have opposed the notion of Akbar as the spiritual pivot of the millennial age.

noted) and Badāʾūnī – himself an *ʿālim* – was critical of the *ʿulamāʾ* for working for the state and taking the opportunity to amass vast fortunes.[9] Although he does not name himself, we cannot help but think that Abū al-Faẓl has introduced this whole consideration because he sees himself as a seer who has suffered difficulties and struggled to gain preferment at court in the face of opposition from the orthodox establishment.

These concerns, substantial as they might be, are now swept aside by new developments. Without a break or introduction, Abū al-Faẓl gives the bold answer to the problems he has raised: "Today is the time for the manifestation of the divine name 'the Hidden' (*al-Bāṭin*) and the coming into view of God's all-encompassing, overflowing mercy." This takes the form of Akbar, "the Emperor of the Age," who is "the cream of human beings and the elect from among the righteous of the sons of Adam."[10] Because Akbar has a "lofty understanding and rational inquiry into the minutest details," bounty and good fortune will flow to the common people and the elite alike. Abū al-Faẓl then quotes Fāryābī to sum up the transformation:

> Due to this exultation, the body of his throne emerged on earth;
> Due to these good tidings, the top of his crown passed beyond the sky.

Here the word 'throne' has a double meaning, alluding to the throne of the king and the throne of God: with the sudden emergence of God's hidden name and the unfolding of God's grace in the world, the two are parallel, perhaps even conflated and present on earth.[11]

These statements and this point of view – extreme by contemporary standards – are put in context by the millennial preoccupations that prevailed as the year 1000 in the Islamic calendar approached. The start of year 1000 corresponded to October 1591, so the turn of the millennium was slated to arrive just five years after Abū al-Faẓl began writing his *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*.[12] It is worth pausing briefly to summarise the study of the millennial preoccupations in the late sixteenth century to better understand the context in which Abū al-Faẓl

9 For example, see *MT* 2: 311 where Badāʾūnī expresses shock and disapproval at the vast wealth of Makhdūm al-Mulk that was discovered on his death.

10 Chapter 2, 4 (printed text), and the same page for further quotations from the *Preface* immediately below. As noted in Chapter 2, this passage is addressed in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 128.

11 Fāryābī's reference to throne and crown finds a parallel in Humāyūn's earlier astrological staging of power, Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 124–25. The divine kingship implied provides a transition to the millenarian moment presided over by Akbar and the extended praise of Akbar in the next section.

12 Chapter 1.4. As noted there, Abū al-Faẓl gives the date AH 995 for the *Preface*.

was writing. The study of millenarianism was led by Derryl MacLean and Carl W. Ernst between 2000 and 2003.[13] This line of research led to A. Azfar Moin's *Millennial Sovereign*, published in 2012.[14] Moin's ground-breaking work, which drew critical attention from Richard Eaton, André Wink and Audrey Truschke, struck a chord on account of his comprehensive review of primary sources and his ambition to subvert the standard modes of scholarship on Safavid Iran and Mughal India.[15] The book also triggered a cross-cultural study of sacred kingship by Alan Strathern.[16] Moin's work should be read in tandem with Balabanlilar's *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire*, published concurrently in 2012.[17] Both interventions into the Persianate world attempted to break the regional approach that has divided the study of Iran and India. In different ways, both also attempt to show that new forms of royal power were articulated, developed and projected through courtly rituals, astrology, prognostication and mystical sainthood, subjects that tend to be marginalised in the histories of the Timurid, Safavid and Mughal dynasties. These developments have been carried further in a comparative study of time and time-keeping in the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires, published by Stephen P. Blake in 2013.[18] Taken together, the historiography as it has developed encourages us to read Abū al-Faẓl's extended praise of Akbar with interest and attention, and this is one reason why a full translation of Abū al-Faẓl's text is given here in Chapter 2.

Abū al-Faẓl's praise of Akbar is difficult for modern readers, made more so by the poetic selections he has inserted throughout. It would be a simple matter to dismiss this as a panegyric of little substance – as was once done with royal eulogies in Sanskrit – but given what has just been said, the text is important for the ways it shows how Abū al-Faẓl understood and articulated his vision of the

13 MacLean, "The Sociology of Political Engagement: The Mahdawiyah and the State," in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 150–68, first published in French in 2000; also from 2000, MacLean, "Real Men and False Men at the Court of Akbar." Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism?" published in 2003 and discussed in Chapter 1.

14 Moin, *Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam*.

15 Eaton in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 44 (2013): 289–91; Wink in *American Historical Review* 118 (2013): 1148–49; Truschke in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 809–11.

16 Alan Strathern, "Drawing the Veil of Sovereignty: Early Modern Islamic Empires and Understanding Sacred Kingship," *History and Theory* 53 (2014): 79–93.

17 Lisa Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in the Mughal Empire: Memory and Dynastic Politics in Early Modern South and Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

18 Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam*.

king.[19] How we should judge Abū al-Faẓl's writing has been a subject of discussion since the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* was first translated into English in the nineteenth century. In a landmark essay published in 1985, Peter Hardy provided an insightful analysis of Abū al-Faẓl's approach to the problems of writing about God and the king.[20] Hardy's essay has not enjoyed the currency it deserves due to the relative inaccessibility of the volume in which it was printed. For this reason, we take the opportunity to quote a key passage of his overview.[21]

> Abul Fazl's argument is as follows: conception (*andisha*), analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) and speech (*guft*) can only encompass created things, they cannot encompass God; man cannot praise with words what is beyond words; Abul Fazl's basic nature (*fitrat*) does not allow him to praise God like ignorant men who follow the authority of others (*taqlid*), that is by borrowed metaphor and hackneyed phrase. But Abul Fazl's perplexities were resolved by the realization (he describes it as the wisdom that is a light [*farugh*], from God's *hasti* [being or existence]) that what has been created by the Perfect Artificer is itself a praise of God. The drift of Abul Fazl's thought is that God has endowed him with a *fitrat*, inclining him to praise God: therefore God has made it possible for him to praise Him; the world of the possible is the world that can be conceived and experienced, hence God's praise is to be found in that world. In the world of the (four) elements, no greater sign or more honourable element or essence (*gauhar*) has been displayed to man than the precious existence of kings of exalted dignity. Kings complete the external organization of the dependent (i.e. contingent) world by means of their holy (*qudsi*) aspirations and their abstention from sin.
>
> Abul Fazl further alleges that to entrust the affairs of the world to such a person is also to place the world of inner significances and of esoteric meanings (*jahan-i ma'ni*) in his hands, indeed to make him the soul or spirit of the world of esoteric meanings (*jan-i jahani ma'ni*). Especially is this so where the ruler himself desires such esoteric knowledge and is fortunate in having a heart and mind nourished by a spring of hidden feeling and insight (*batin*). But above all is this so when 'the ruler rises above these levels (or grades, *maratib*) and through divine assistance (*ta'yid-i izadi*) himself becomes embellished and coloured by esoteric significance (*rang-amiz-i nigarin-khana-i ma'ni*).' A ruler of this highest degree shines forth 'at the banquet in the bed-chamber of the realities (*haqa'iq*),' has intimate access (*mahram*) to the inner chamber of God's witnessing unto Himself (*shuhud*), and is an intimate of the council-house of the divine unity (*anis-i safwat-saray-i wahdat*). To him is entrusted sway over (outward) form (*surat*) and (inner) meaning (*ma'ni*), the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*batin*).
>
> In order then to praise God, Abul Fazl necessarily has had recourse to describing and recording the deeds of a God-worshipping *padshah*, the *insan-i kamil* or Perfect Man. This figure is none other than Akbar. He is a *padshah* who, by reason of his success in seeking God, has

19 Schimmel et al, *Empire of the Great Mughals*, 33 gives a brief and somewhat dismissive assessment.

20 Hardy, "Abu'l-Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah," 114–37.

21 Ibid., 115–16, retaining his transliteration.

> removed the veil between the exoteric and the esoteric. He has, through love, joined in love those who withdraw from the world (*arbab-i tajarrud*) and those who remain in the world (*arbab-i ta'alluq*); through him the curtain concealing form and meaning has been raised. By reason of his existence in Abul Fazl's time, acceptance of authority (*taqlid*) has given way to inquiry (*tahqiq*) and men have returned to worship of God from a blind self-worship which had substituted worship of the creature for worship of the Creator.

Since Peter Hardy wrote these impressive lines, the tendency – led by Iqtidar Alam Khan and Carl Ernst – has been to extend the reading of Abū al-Faẓl as an author who interpreted Akbar's position as king in terms of the Neo-Platonist metaphysics of Ishrāqi illuminationism and the Sufi doctrine of the Perfect Man.[22] This metaphysical apparatus was invoked, Ernst has noted, not simply for philosophical consistency, but to undergird the political authority of Akbar in an eclectic fashion. These ideas were developed in Moin's *Millennial Sovereign* wherein he also discussed the illuminationist philosophy of Suhrawardī (d. 1191) in relation to the Mughals.[23] This was anticipated by Ernst in an article on Fayẓī and his illuminationist interpretation of the Vedānta school of Indian philosophy.[24] More recently, in the context of comparative literature, Rebecca Gould has argued that the panegyric needs to be taken seriously as a literary and political form.[25]

In Praise of Akbar

Having declared – as noted in the previous section – that the day has arrived for the revelation of God's name, Abū al-Faẓl elaborates his millennial vision. "This joy-kindling day," he says, "is the springtime of knowledge and insight."[26] The whole "order of the created world" will be renewed. Akbar, as the "Emperor of the Age" is the receptacle for "the overflowing bounty from the Unseen world." The moment has come for "the inwardly-blind members of mankind to increase

22 Ernst, "The Limits of Universalism in Islamic Thought: the Case of Indian Religions," in *Universality in Islamic Thought: Rationalism, Science and Religious Belief*, ed. Michael G. Morony (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 201; the same ideas earlier in Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism?", 179. Iqtidar Alam Khan, "Akbar's Personality Traits and World Outlook – A Critical Reappraisal," 89–90.

23 See, for example, Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 36, 209.

24 Ernst, "Fayzi's Illuminationist Interpretation of Vedānta: The *Shariq al-ma'rifa*," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30 (2010): 156–64. Vedānta was known to and discussed by Abū al-Faẓl in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī, see AA 3: 158*.

25 Rebecca Gould, "The Much-Maligned Panegyric: Toward a Political Poetics of Premodern Literary Form," *Comparative Literature Studies* 52 (2015): 254–88.

26 Chapter 2, 4 (printed text) as also the further quotes immediately below in this section.

in insight and for the dead-hearted to receive life." In our opinion, this clears the way for Abū al-Faẓl's writing of the *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*. All the difficulties connected with writing with which he opens – the impossibility of making a contribution, the slavish dependence on the written tradition, the inward-looking silence of those who resort to mysticism, the inevitable obstructions thrown down before men of insight – all are swept away in an instant by a new and powerful king and the dawning of the new millennium.

The new age is rich in promise. On the level of government, "the meaning of kingship and the secret of caliphate have received confirmation," and Akbar personally combines temporal and spiritual rule: "the sublime regulation of the important affairs of the physical realm" are dressed "with the precious robe of honour of spiritual kingship." The transformative nature of events is such that, thanks to Akbar, "the absolute dominion of imitation (*bayt al-tasalluṭ-i taqlīd*) – which throughout the passing of years and the turning of centuries stood on a firm foundation – was demolished and became the seat of the caliphate of critical inquiry." The importance of this statement in Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* has already drawn our attention. Adherence to derived authority or imitation (*taqlīd*) now gives way to critical inquiry or verification through analysis (*taḥqīq*).

This new situation provides a platform for Abū al-Faẓl to present his central statement about the king. That we are turning to the panegyric proper at this point in the text is signalled by the phrase *Allāhu ʾakbar* (God is Great)! Opening with a play on the word 'great' – the literal meaning of Akbar's name – Abū al-Faẓl describes Akbar as the "leader of the knowers of God" and an exemplary preceptor. Thereafter Abū al-Faẓl does not continue with his chosen theme, but once more hesitates, reverting to a version of the problems with which he opened the *Preface*. At this point he is concerned with his own diction and worries that it is not up to the task. It may prove impossible to "describe the virtues and to recount the elevated stations of this absolute guide." Akbar is the "rightfully Guided One," so he feels shamed by describing him according to "customary practice and habit."[27] Acknowledging that his own subjectivity might interfere (with a near modern sense of critical self-awareness), Abū al-Faẓl notes that "whatever one says or writes will be in accordance with his own state and preparedness."

After reflecting on the greatness of his subject and impossibility of doing it real justice through the lens of several verses from the *Shāhnāmah*, Abū al-Faẓl presents us with his working method: "After a long conversation between me and my heart, an agreement was reached that I should write about this deputy of God

27 Chapter 2, 5 (printed text) as also the further quotes immediately below in this section.

in accordance with what I have comprehended of his state during my felicitous employment in his service, and that I should limit my intention to embellishing my expression and to commenting upon my devotion to him." It is this unassuming method that will allow Abū al-Faẓl to overcome the limited capacities and subjectivism that might otherwise colour the final product. After expressing these concerns, Abū al-Faẓl then comes out with a frank observation in verse, one that signals he knows very well that his style is somewhat contrived.[28]

> Who is he I speak of with veiled expression,
> Describing him with hundreds of carefully weighed subtle points?
> He is the king, for whom I make my thought
> Emerge from my bosom again, to tell about him.

Abū al-Faẓl then starts on his long description of the king and his superlative qualities. While this covers a number of pages, the opening paragraphs are the most important for summing up his vision of Akbar as the 'Emperor of the Age.'[29]

> He is the gem of the crown of kings, *qiblah* of those who are aware of God, lamp for the night-chamber of the world, light for the descendants of Adam, exalted one sitting on the throne. He is in conjunction with victory and the companion of justice, the seal of the dominion of sovereignty and the lustre of the realm-conquering sword. He is like the frontispiece of [the book of] incomparability, royal signature on the mandate of the Majestic, remover of the veil from secrets of the Unseen, revealer of the faces of the immaculate forms, intimate to the seclusion-chamber of witnessing [Reality], unique servant of the Worshipped One. He is the discerner of the subtle matters of hair-splitting reasoning, owner of the touchstone of money-changing, painter of the marvels of imagination, opener of the ties of the veils of beauty, mixer of colors in the mirror-gallery of meanings, illuminator of the banquets of the world of fine criticism, compendium of the painters of the understanding and the intellect, masterpiece of the artisans of pre-eternity and post-eternity. He is the regulator of the royal etiquette, distributor of daily livelihood to servants of God, vicegerent of the court of the Lord, custodian of the trusts of hopes and deposits, solver of the knotty problems of the treasures of the intellect, keeper of the key of the treasure-houses of God, giver of comfort to the expanse of earth and time, granter of order to the universe.

This paragraph is key in that it maps the Abū al-Faẓl's foundational claims: the qualities of Akbar are the basis on which his power and authority rest. The question of good government is a central concern of Abū al-Faẓl. Taking the abstractions given in the paragraph just quoted, he turns to a number of particulars, beginning with the running of the state. Akbar is able, Abū al-Faẓl says, to work simultaneously on "several affairs and important matters," each of which "would

28 Chapter 2, 5–6 (printed text).
29 Chapter 2, 6 (printed text) as also the further quotes immediately below.

independently require extended time and full consideration."[30] No details escape him and he quickly gives officers "in the imperial administration such categorical answers as if his complete attention had been paid to providing answers and his entire thinking had been devoted to regulating these matters."

The king is also skilled, Abū al-Faẓl reports, at putting the affairs of state in order.[31] While this draws on a popular theme in the 'Mirror for Princes' literature that reaches back to classics like the *Siyāsatnāmah* and *Qābūsnāmah*, in the context of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* this appears to refer to the wide-ranging reforms that were instituted with regard to property and tax collection in Akbar's time.[32] The reforms and their benefits cause Abū al-Faẓl to reflect historically: "when knowledgeable experts inquire into them in accordance with the level of their understanding, they remain perplexed and astonished, thinking, 'how did the emperors of the past manage to rule the world and govern their country without such regulations?'"[33] This underplays the centralisation of power under Akbar and his emergence as an autocratic monarch. There was resistance to absolutism, as Abū al-Faẓl's wording actually hint and which Ali Anooshahr's reading of Badāʾūnī clearly shows.[34] For Abū al-Faẓl, however, centralised power is only a source of good:

30 Similar views are expressed by Abū al-Faẓl in opening of the *AA* 1: 11, under his discussion of the royal household.

31 Chapter 2, 7 (printed text) as also the further quotes below.

32 These are set out by Abū al-Faẓl in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, which maps the new monetary, organisational, and regional structure envisaged under Akbar. The 'Mirror for Princes' literature is extensive, see on the *Siyāsatnāmah,* for example, the translation of Hubert Darke, *The Book of Government* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), reprinted most recently in 2000, and Marta Simidchieva, "Kingship and Legitimacy in Nizam al-Mulk's Siyasat-nama," in *Writers and Rulers: Perspectives from Abbasid to Safavid Times*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Louise Marlow (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2004), 97–131. A more recent contribution of note in this subject is Neguin Yavari, *Advice for the Sultan: Prophetic Voices and Secular Politics in Medieval Islam* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014), reviewed Arthur Dudney, *JRAS* 25, no. 4 (2015): 724–26, and for the *Shāhnāmah*, Nasrin Askari, *The Medieval Reception of the Shāhnāma as a Mirror for Princes* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

33 Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, 208 understands this as Abū al-Faẓl saying "that it was only after they [the rules] were promulgated that the consciousness grew that kings were not well advised to rule without them."

34 Ali Anooshahr, "Mughal Historians and the Memory of the Islamic Conquest of India," *IESHR* 43 (2006): 274–300. Critical assessments of Akbar's misguided reforms appear fairly early in the historiography, for example, Badā'ūnī, ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Mulūk Shāh, *Muntakhabu-'t-tawārīkh*, vol. 2, trans. W. H. Lowe, revised by B. P. Ambashthya with commentary of S. H. Hodivala and forward to the second edition of 1924 by Johan van Manen (Patna: Academica Asiatica, [1973]), xvi.

> He is sovereign who is the Refuge of the World. In regulating the world,
> The tablet of his thought is the register of divine decree.
> If his majesty does not give leave to the pen of divine decree to move,
> No letter will emerge from of it.

Abū al-Faẓl hastens to add that Akbar has "perfect control over himself" so is not corrupted by power. He is committed and responsible and takes his duties seriously, ever mindful of God's pleasure. His knowledge is so excellent that he "is not in need of the counsel of ministers or opinion of advisors in regulating the affairs of the kingdom and treasury." He is, moreover, so full of dignity that "the courage of the kings of the time and the tyrants of the world melt away and they become drowned in the sea of fear." And despite his youth, his experience of pleasure and his many victories, Akbar is not a voluptuary: "He is a chaste soul who . . . strives continually and effectively to fight his base self."

Given these and other superlative characteristics, Abū al-Faẓl has to deal with the king's illiteracy, something that was probably judged a flaw at the time.[35] Admitting that Akbar was never schooled officially, Abū al-Faẓl nonetheless asserts that Akbar's insights are so sophisticated that when he makes pronouncements scholars "who have spent ages and burnt many candles in the deep reflection of critical inquiry, fail to comprehend – not to think of engaging in finding an answer that would please that noblest intellect!"[36]

Turning from matters of learning to the arts, Abū al-Faẓl says that when Akbar speaks to artists and craftsmen he offers such "delicate comments and fine points pertaining to their art that they get the impression that he has practiced this profession for his entire life and spent all his time in acquiring it." Due to his sensibility and "innate genius," the things to which he as turned his hand "have become the source of astonishment for master craftsmen." This seems to indicate that many of the innovative changes that we see in Mughal architecture – the city of Fatehpur Sikri being a prime example – were due to Akbar's intervention. Abū al-Faẓl's description of the king's artistic inclination is testified independently by the new style of court painting with artists, both Persian and Indian, contributing to a new syncretic style unique to the Mughals.[37]

Closing his coverage of the arts and crafts with a verse – a characteristic device as noted before – Abū al-Faẓl turns to the auspicious signs that marked his infancy, commenting that "the lights of rectitude and integrity" shone from

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35 Discussed at Chapter 1.2.

36 Chapter 2, 9 (printed text) as also the further quotes below.

37 The strands of influence are explored in Pramod Chandra, *Ṭūṭī-nāma of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, all of chapter 2 is relevant.

his forehead and that "even before learning to speak, marvelous words and signs would manifest from him – as narrated in detail by those who attended his holy cradle." In summary, "His being the Refuge of the World has been ordained since eternity – May his sovereignty endure eternally!"[38]

If this seems to verge on the divine, Abū al-Faẓl removes any doubt with a series of remarks that compare Akbar to Jesus. He was of "such a pure essence that in the embryonic stage, when he was a unique gem in . . . the womb, a life-refreshing Messiah in the inner cradle, radiant lights shone from the clear forehead of Mariam Makānī" – the Mary of both worlds.[39] The title Mariam Makānī refers to Akbar's mother, the title implying that she was akin to the Virgin. This is not as exceptional as it first seems. Jesus appears often in Persian poetry and mystical thought, as explored by Annemarie Schimmel.[40] For Abū al-Faẓl, Akbar shares the same grace as Jesus. This vision of the king helps account for the images of Akbar with a halo that appear in Mughal painting.[41] While the halo itself may have been inspired in part by European religious prints that came to the Mughal library and were copied there by local artists (as known from surviving examples), Abū al-Faẓl has his own explanation and elaborates this in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*.[42]

> Royalty is a light emanating from God, and a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the universe, the argument of the book of perfection, and the receptacle of all virtues. Modern language calls it *farr-i īzidī* (the divine light), and the tongue of antiquity called it *kiyān-i khwara* (the sublime halo). It is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of anyone, and men, in the presence of it, bend the forehead of praise toward the ground of submission.

38 Chapter 2, 10 (printed text) as also the further quotes immediately below.

39 For Akbar's mother, see Schimmel et al, *Empire of the Great Mughals*, 143–47.

40 Schimmel, *Jesus und Maria in der islamischen Mystik* (München: Kösel, 1996) and her "CHRISTIANITY vii. Christian Influences in Persian Poetry," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* V, no. 5 (1991): 542–44, retrieved March 2022.

41 Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, has explored the symbolism of the paintings, especially those of Jahāngīr and points out that the halo appears around ʿAli in painting from the fifteenth century (*Millennial Sovereign*, 80). Examples can be found even earlier in Mongol manuscripts: See Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History: The Illustrations of the Great Mongol Shāhnāma* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). The present book is not an art historical study and sidesteps the historiography of that discipline and the problems of influence. Useful studies are, nonetheless, Pedro de Moura Carvalho and W. M. Thackston, *Mir'āt al-quds, a life of Christ for Emperor Akbar: a commentary on Father Jerome Xavier's text and the miniatures of Cleveland Museum of Art, Acc. no. 2005.145* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Mika Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Abolala Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2003).

42 See *AA* 1: iii (i.e. volume 1 of H. Blochmann's version of the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* published in Calcutta, 1873).

Abū al-Faẓl then runs through Akbar's superlative attributes in a series of short paragraphs.[43] Each is attribute is marked from the next by a poetic quotation. Thus Akbar is exemplary in his search for God's pleasure in all affairs, in his struggle to control lust and and anger, in his generosity, in his concern for the poor, in his bravery, in his sublime understanding, in his fine appearance and spiritual beauty, in his concern about chastity, in his capacity to spot corruption and to offer guidance, in his ability to subdue ferocious animals and men by his "transmuting gaze," in his kindness, in his ability to accomplish many things due to his high spiritual connections, in his healing powers, in his facility with languages, especially those of India,[44] in his ability to be with God while being busy in the world, in his uniqueness as a spiritual guide, in his tolerance of opponents and repeated forgiveness of the rebellious,[45] in his good fortune in shaping rationally-informed decrees that conform to what has been intended from pre-eternity, in his perception of secrets deep in people's hearts, in his intelligence and phenomenal powers of memory, in his high repute and generosity that has attracted foreign talent to India,[46] and in his refined and innate moral character.

The king's kind-hearted nature extended even to a love of animals and his inclination to avoid eating meat. Abū al-Faẓl asserts that Akbar "does not have any inclination to kill and eat animals," and that more than "seven months pass that he does not consume meat."[47] In what seems to be a direct quote from Akbar, Abū al-Faẓl says that the king would often say that there was no better description of "the injustice of man than the fact that despite having so many fine types of food he gives himself over to slaughter and butchery." This is also found in *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* where Akbar is reported as saying: "If the scarf of social life were not on my shoulder, I would restrain myself from eating meat."[48] Akbar seems to have been encouraged in vegetarian practice by the religion of non-violence preached

43 Chapter 2, 10–15 (printed text).

44 Chapter 2, 13 (printed text) with notes.

45 Chapter 2, 14 (printed text) but nonetheless Akbar ordered Adham Khān to be thrown from the ramparts of Agra fort for murdering Muḥammad Atgah Khān, the episode illustrated in the 1590s in the *Akbarnāmah* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

46 Chapter 2, 15 (printed text) with notes. The drive to collect talent and create something new can be read as repeating the precedent set by Timur – Akbar's ancestor – in the building and decoration of Samarkand. The literature on Timurid patronage is well developed but other aspects are little known, such as the treatise on stringed musical instruments dedicated to Akbar and titled *Kashf al-Autār* by the central Asian scholar Qāsim b. Dūst ʿAlī al-Bukhāri, C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature* (Leiden: Royal Asiatic Society, 1977), 2: 415.

47 Chapter 2, 15 (printed text).

48 See *AA* 3: 332, discussed also in André Wink, *Akbar* (London: Oneworld, 2009), all of the section 'Hunting and government' in his Chapter 5 is relevant.

by the Jain monk Haravijaya who, as noted earlier, was at the Mughal court.[49] The degree to which the nobles practiced vegetarianism can only be a subject of speculation, but Akbar's actions drew the attention of Badāʾūnī who remarked that: "He prohibited the slaughter of cows, and the eating of their flesh, because the Hindus devoutly worship them."[50] The wording of Badāʾūnī suggests that Akbar had a conciliatory eye toward the vegetarianism of his subjects in addition to his own feelings in the matter, and even Abū al-Faẓl was obliged to qualify his statement by saying that Akbar took meat to maintain his strength and power.

Abū al-Faẓl completes his praise of Akbar by commenting on his learning, pure heart and the degree to which he is not tempted or swayed by material things. Those who have resisted him have failed, and those who try and show they are more knowledgeable have been proven wrong and have faced public humiliation. In conclusion, Abū al-Faẓl draws a firm line under the subject with a verse that returns in some ways to the inadequacy of words, if not their crassness:[51]

> O intellect! Less speeches about him, please!
> This is the place for proper etiquette – less showing off please!
> Do you know what kind of person is he,
> Who in rank is higher than a king and less than God?

Abū al-Faẓl signals the close of his praise of Akbar by mentioning the king's name (there are no sub-headings) and adding a poetic verse. This device – a sort of sub-colophon – reads as follows:[52]

> He is the just emperor, the perfect authority, the decisive guide to knowing God, the clear proof of the universal mercy of the Merciful (*raḥmat-i raḥmānī*), the leader of caravans on the paths mundane and spiritual, Abū al-Fatḥ Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Akbar Ghāzī – may the shade of the parasol of his caliphate and the shadow of the banner of his justice and compassion be extended and expanded over the heads of those who stand firm-footed in the court of felicity and of those who travel fast on the royal highway of devotion!
>
> O God! As long as there is a pivot for the sky to turn around,
> Do not deprive the world of this king!
> May the heaven, like his seal-ring, be under his seal!
> May the key to the world be under his sleeve!

49 See Chapter 1.5.

50 See *MT* 2: 261. He comes to the issue in several places, for example *MT* 2: 302.

51 Chapter 2, 17 (printed text).

52 Chapter 2, 17 (printed text), also see notes to the translation.

3.2 Reading the *Razmnāmah*

The learned, in friendship and agreement, should sit down together and translate the Mahābhārata *into a popular form.*
Abū al-Faẓl, *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*.[53]

After his extensive remarks on the great qualities of the king – and his rhetorical flourish in bringing that to a close – Abū al-Faẓl turns his attention to the *Razmnāmah* proper. This part of his *Preface* is important in showing how Abū al-Faẓl viewed the process of translation and his assessment of its likely readers.

To begin, Abū al-Faẓl compares the appearance of Akbar to the rising sun: "the light of the morning of discernment" has appeared after the dark night of blind imitation (*taqlīd*). New perspectives open up and people begin to reflect and seek knowledge.[54] The king, moreover, is concerned about "the state of all classes of people – in his far-seeing eyes, friend or enemy, relative or stranger, all appear equal."[55] In this he is akin to a physician, but in Akbar's case he is a "healer of chronic illnesses of the soul." Abū al-Faẓl echoes the medical metaphor in the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*.[56]

> He is continually attentive to the health of the body politic, and applies remedies to the several diseases thereof. And in the same manner that the equilibrium of the animal constitution depends upon an equal mixture of the elements, so also does the political constitution become well-tempered by a proper division of ranks; and by means of the warmth of the ray of unanimity and concord, a multitude of people become fused into one body.

The equilibrium of the body described here rested on the theory of the four bodily humours in Greco-Roman medicine, adopted also in *Āyurveda*, the Indian science of health.[57] The idea that the king is a physician, and thus responsible for balance in the body of society, was a frequent motif in Muslim political philosophy from at least the time of Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī (b. 1201 CE), but Abū al-Faẓl extends this to the translation of books so they become a medicine

53 Chapter 2, 19 (printed text), with slight adaptations.

54 Chapter 2, 17–18 (printed text). The use of solar symbolism to construct the figure of Akbar is put in wider context by Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 36, as well as being mentioned elsewhere in this volume.

55 See Chapter 2, 18 (printed text) as also the quotations from the *Preface* below. The passages analysed in this section also discussed in Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism?" 180–82.

56 See *AA* 1: iv. The elements mentioned again in *AA* 3: 158.

57 D. Wujastyk, *The Roots of Ayurveda: Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2003); for the Persian adaptations: Fabrizio Speziale, *Culture persane et médecine ayurvédique en Asie du Sud* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

dispensed thanks to royal patronage.[58] This medicine will allow "both groups" – by which Abū al-Faẓl means Muslims and Hindus – to address what ails them and "to rectify their own states." The whole passage is worth quoting in view of the fact that we have revised the reading based on the British Library manuscript.[59]

> Therefore, when with his perfect comprehension he found that the squabbling of sects of the Muslim community (*millat-i Muḥammadī*) and groups of the Hindus increased, and their refutation of each other grew beyond bounds, his subtle mind resolved that the revered books of both groups should be translated into the tongue of the other. Thus both factions, by the blessing of the holy words of His Excellence, the perfect one of the age [Akbar], holding back from excessive fault-finding and obstinacy, should become seekers of God. Having become aware of each other's virtues and vices, they should make laudable efforts to rectify their own states.

With this statement the translation of "the revered books of both groups" is named as the antidote for the poison of bigotry. By reading the sacred writings of opposing factions, individuals will hold back from "excessive fault-finding and obstinacy," become "aware of each other's virtues and vices" and strive for self-improvement.

Leaders of the Religious Establishment and the Common People

In the next paragraph, Abū al-Faẓl elaborates his diagnosis. This is marked off by the word "likewise," as are the following sections of Abū al-Faẓl's assessment.[60] He criticises individuals from all groups who put themselves forward as "religious authorities" and who have influenced the common people with "falsifications and deceptions."[61] They are "wretched deceivers" who, in "accord with their selfish and lustful goals, conceal the books of the ancients, the advice of the pious

58 The representation of Akbar as a physician is explored in Hardy, "Abu'l-Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah," 121. Ṭūsī's influence on the Mughals was direct, see Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, 46–80 and Losty, *Art of the Book*, 78 reporting an illustrated manuscript of the Akbar period.
59 Chapter 2, 18 (printed text), see notes for the reading *junūd* rather than *juhūd*, which changes the meaning and neatly resolves a long controversy. An early rendering of this passage, with the Persian, can be found in Husain, "Translations of the Mahābhārata into Arabic and Persian," 275–80.
60 Each part is signalled by the word ایضاً "likewise" in the manuscript, written in a different colour (folio 21r, 21v etc), see illustrations at the end of the volume.
61 Chapter 2, 18 (printed text) as also the quotes from the *Preface* below. The wording here perhaps echoes Mahdavi criticisms of religious experts and jurists, for which MacLean, "Real Men and False Men at the Court of Akbar."

ancestors, the sayings of the wise, and the weighty deeds of predecessors." To get away from their distortions, and to allow "simple-minded common folk" direct access to the sources, Akbar has ordered "the books of both factions be translated in a clear idiom, understandable to the masses yet pleasing to the elite."

That Abū al-Faẓl is referring to the problems being caused by the Muslim and Hindu religious establishment is evident. The concerted efforts made by Akbar to control that establishment has already drawn attention in this book.[62] The solution, as far as the *Preface* is concerned, is a translation of the *Mahābhārata*, ordered by "sublime decree." This text, Abū al-Faẓl says, was "written by skilled masters" and "contains most of the principles and applications of the beliefs of the Brahmins of India." There is no book that is "more revered, greater or more detailed." As a consequence, Akbar commanded that "the learned ones of both factions and the experts of language in both groups, by way of friendship and agreement, should sit down in one place, and should translate it into a popular expression."

The *Preface* being an introduction to the *Mahābhārata* in Persian, it does not describe other texts, but some indication of the transfer of ideas between "both groups" is provided by Maheśa Thākur's abridged translation of the *Akbarnāmah* into Sanskrit.[63] On the Persian side, the kind of re-writing that was called for – in "a clear idiom, understandable to the masses yet pleasing to the elite" – can be understood from the *ʿIyār-i Dānish*, a work completed by Abū al-Faẓl in AH 996/1588 CE at Akbar's behest because he so disliked the ornate style of the *Anvār-i Suhaylī*, a florid rendering by Kāshifī of the *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*.[64]

Devotional Movements and their Followers

Abū al-Faẓl has further targets he regards as problematic. He thus continues:[65]

> Likewise, infidel zealots and leaders of the followers of blind imitation in India have a belief in their own religion that goes beyond all measure, and whether from lack of discernment or by way of injustice, they consider the false pretences of their beliefs to be free from error, taking the path of blind imitation. Having impressed on the minds of simple-minded people

62 In addition what has been said above, see the summary in von Stietencron, "Planned Syncretism," 181–82.

63 Maheś Thākur, *Sarvadeśavṛttāntasaṅgraha athavā Akabaranāmaḥ*, ed. P. K. Miśra (Vārāṇasī: Akhila Bhāratīya Muslima-Saṃskṛta Saṃrakṣaṇa evaṃ Prācya Śodha saṃsthāna, 2012).

64 Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, 1: 75. In his preface to that work Abū al-Faẓl states it was complete in the equivalent of February, 1588.

65 See Chapter 2, 19 (printed text). Again, this section is signalled by the word اضیا "likewise," as noted above.

> a few preliminary matters, they prevent them from inquiring into the goals, and make them firmly rooted in false beliefs. They regard the adherents of the religion of Muḥammad (*dīn-i Aḥmadī*) as utterly foolish, and they refute this group ceaselessly, although they are unaware of its noble goals and refined sciences.
>
> Therefore, the subtle intellect (of Akbar) desired that the book of the *Mahābhārata* – which contains both the valuable and the trifles of most of the goals of this group – should be translated with a clear expression, so that deniers should restrain their denial and refrain from intemperance, and so that the simple-minded believers, having become somewhat embarrassed by their beliefs, should become seekers of God.

These paragraphs are important because they elaborate the context and Akbar's motivation for the *Mahābhārata* translation. At the start, Abū al-Faẓl is critical of a group that is spreading derivative teachings. Their beliefs, in which they hold great store, are based on false pretences. This is problematic because their perfunctory dismissal of the Muslim tradition contributes to social and religious friction. In the eyes of Akbar, a solution will come from a translation of the *Mahābhārata*. This will foster a moderate attitude and make "simple-minded believers" recognise that they have been duped and so become seekers of God.

The players mentioned here are one of the reasons the king had for ordering the translation. But who are these zealots? An important clue is the fact that they do not seem to be scholars: they have influenced the minds of their followers with "a few preliminary matters," and firmly rooted false beliefs in them. And the fact that they attract such vehemence in the *Preface* shows they were engaged in active proselytization. Moreover, the wording of this passage leaves no doubt that these people are not Muslims. For these reasons, we think the criticisms refer to the devotional movements that were emerging in Mughal lands and influencing some of Akbar's important subordinates. Abū al-Faẓl does not make the object of his concern clear, as is often the case, but we are able sketch the historical and religious possibilities based on external evidence.

One of the most likely groups was the *sampradāya* of Vallabhācāraya whose narratives were set around Agra in the second half of the sixteenth century.[66] As Shandip Saha's analysis of the Vallabha *vārtā* literature has shown, Muslims were viewed as foreigners of Paṭhān or Turkish blood who had occupied India and

66 Vasudha Dalmia, "Hagiography and the 'Other' in the Vallabha *Sampradaya*," in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 270–71. More recent overview of the wider history, Dalpat S. Rajpurohit, "*Bhakti* versus *rīti*? The Sants' perspective," *BSOAS* 84, no. 1 (2021): 95–113.

whose lifestyles were barbaric, uncouth and contrary to Vaiṣṇava attitudes.[67] The disdain for Muslims is evident from stories like that of Govindasvāmī, the poet and singer, who refused any contact with Tānsen, Akbar's celebrated musician, because he was a *mleccha* or barbarian. Only when Tānsen had renounced his *mleccha* identity and become a member of the Puṣṭi Mārga would Govindasvāmī accept him as his pupil.[68] Abū al-Faẓl's encounter with punctilious people of this ilk is revealed in the story of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Nabī as told by Badāʾūnī:[69]

> When the Emperor . . . halted at Fatḥepūr, judge ʿAbd al-Rahīm, the *qāẓī* of Mathurā, laid a complaint before the Shaykh, to the effect that a wealthy and stiff-necked Brahman of that place had carried off the materials which he, the *qāẓī*, had collected for the construction of a mosque, and had built of them an idol-temple, and that, when the *qāẓī* had attempted to prevent him, he had, in the presence of witnesses, opened his foul mouth to curse the prophet (on whom be peace), and had shown his contempt for Muslims in various other ways. When the Brahman was called upon to appear, he disobeyed the Shaykh's summons. The emperor sent Bīrbal and Shaykh Abū al-Faẓl to fetch him, and they brought him, and Shaykh Abū al-Faẓl represented to the Emperor what he had heard of the case from the people, and stated that it was certainly proved that he had uttered abuse of the prophet. Some of the *ʿulamāʾ* were of opinion that he should suffer death, while others were in favour of his being publicly paraded on the back of an ass and heavily fined.

Whether the Brahmin mentioned in this passage belonged to Vallabha tradition we shall never know, but this episode was probably one among many that prompted Abū al-Faẓl to comment on the religious acrimony of the day. The religious landscape was, of course, complex. Francesca Orsini has highlighted the telling case of the Mīr ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Bilgrāmī who wrote a mystical Persian text called *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* or 'The Truths of India' in 1566. This included a systematic treatment of the terms related to the story of Kṛṣṇa found in the devotional songs of his time.[70] There is, as far as we are aware, no direct evidence that Bilgrāmī's

67 Shandip Saha, "Muslims as Devotees and Outsiders: Attitudes Towards Muslims in the *Vārtā* Literature of the Vallabha Sampradāya," in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, 328–29. The attempt to distinguish ethnicity and religion in this and other works in the same volume is overdrawn. That there was ethnic and religious friction, and that ethnicity and religion were often conflated by many, can hardly be denied.

68 Ibid., 329. Note should be made of the little-referenced study: H. N. Dvivedi, *Tānsen, jīvanī, vyaktitva, tathā kṛtitva* (Gvāliyar: Vidyāmandir Prakāśan, 1986).

69 The episode is given under Shaykh ʿAbd al-Nabī in *MT* 3: 127–30. The event is discussed in Pauwels, "A Tale of Two Temples," 281.

70 Orsini, "Inflected *Katha*s: Sufis and Krishna Bhaktas in Awadh," in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 198–99.

work was known to Abū al-Faẓl and prompted a response from his side. More immediate – and politically pressing – was Madhukar Shāh of Orcchā (CE 1554–92). Abū al-Faẓl recounts punitive expeditions against him in 1572–73, 1577–78, 1588 and 1591. The details of these encounters have been studied by Heidi Pauwels.[71] As she notes, the relationship between Orcchā and the Mughals in the Persian sources can be usefully juxtaposed with the representation of Madhukar Shāh and his family by the writers at the Bundelā court. The most important was the devotional poet Keśavdās who composed the *Ratanbāvanī* in 1581–82.[72] This draws on Hindu mythology and includes references to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Bhagavad Gītā* to make its point. The hero is Ratan Singh, Madhukar's son, who falls in battle while fighting the inimical forces sent by the emperor in Delhi. As Pauwels has astutely observed, the *Ratanbhāvanī* makes a counterpoint to the battle of 1577–78 against Madhukar that is narrated in the *Akbarnāmah*.[73]

Beyond this intertextuality, the burgeoning devotional cult at Orcchā is shown by the celebrated image of Rām Candra that was brought from Ayodhyā by Rānī Gaṇes Kuṃvar, the wife of Madhukar Shāh. After seeing the image in a prophetic dream, she had it recovered from the Sarayu river and brought back to Orcchā.[74] An important religious actor in these events was Keśavdās who hailed from Orcchā itself.[75] While Abū al-Faẓl may not have known about the idol of Rām Candra specifically, he was certainly aware of Mathurā – just forty miles from the capital at Agra – and the spate of temple building and devotional activity that was taking place there.[76] But he would not have accepted the new devo-

71 Pauwels, "The Saint, the Warlord, and the Emperor: Discourses of Braj Bhakti and Bundelā Loyalty," *JESHO* 52 (2009): 192–96.

72 Pauwels, "The Saint, the Warlord, and the Emperor," 196–99 on which the comments here are based. The timing of *Razmnāmah* translation (1582–84) suggests it may have impacted Keśavdās.

73 Ibid., 197. This form of narrative was not, however, an innovation of Keśavdās as noted by Michael Boris Bednar, Conquest and Resistance in Context: A Historiographical Reading of Sanskrit and Persian Battle Narratives, Thesis (Ph.D.)--University of Texas at Austin, 2007; the material not otherwise published as far as we are aware.

74 The episode is discussed in a wider context in Willis, *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual*, 89.

75 Allison Busch, "Literary Responses to the Mughal Imperium: The Historical Poems of Keśavdās," *South Asian Research* 25 (2005): 31–54; also see Busch, "Hindi Literary Beginnings," in *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, ed. Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox and Lawrence J. McCrea (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2011), 203–25.

76 This is revealed in *AA* 3: 317–18 where Abū al-Faẓl says, in his description of the Kṛṣṇa incarnation, that the events took place at Mathurā, "near the metropolis of Agra." So he was aware of Mathurā and its connection with Kṛṣṇa – not that there can be much doubt about his knowledge given Akbar sanctioned the building of the Govind Dev temple and granted land to it, see Nalini Thakur, "The Building of *Govindadeva*," in *Govindadeva*: *A Dialogue in Stone*, ed. Margaret H. Case (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1996), 11–68.

tional writings – whether it be the *Mathurāmāhātmya* of Rūpa Gosvāmī or the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsi Dās – because they were not based on ancient textual sources and their proper study. This is revealed in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* where Abū al-Faẓl gives a long, interesting and well-known account of the 'Learning of the Hindus' and remarks that he, as "the writer of this work, has mixed with many of the leaders of thought and has made himself acquainted to some extent with the discussions of the different schools."[77] He further advises his readers that they "may carefully study them [i.e. the systems of the Hindus] and compare them with the principles of the Platonists, the Peripatetics, the Sufis and dogmatic theologians."[78] There follows a description of the 'nine schools.' This includes the classical schools of Indian philosophy as well as Buddhism and Jainism. After this he continues with an account of other areas of Indian learning (such as the sciences, rhetoric and music), the forms of worship in Hinduism, and the incarnations of Viṣṇu.

In all this there is no mention of the devotional ideas of Abū al-Faẓl's time, even in the description of the Rām and Kṛṣṇa incarnations. What he includes under this heading is drawn from classical myths, not the devotional hymns that were emerging in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For Abū al-Faẓl, then, the products of the *bhakti* movement in the modern vernaculars of north India were nothing but an invention, inspired by ecstatic faith, fervent religious love and – if these things were not suspicious enough – the manipulation of popular devotion in support of subversive political causes. Hindi literature thus found no place in Abū al-Faẓl wide survey, even though he made an effort, as he says, to mix with many people and acquaint himself with different schools. In this context, it is noteworthy that the translation project in Akbar's time did not include any works from the Braj dialect, such as the famous works of Tulsi Dās, because the Translation Bureau focused on 'classical' foundations. In this Abū al-Faẓl may have found common cause with the conservative Vedāntins and Mīmāṃsakas living in Benares.[79]

Our digression into the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* and Abū al-Faẓl's account of Hinduism helps show that the section of the *Preface* quoted above is referring to the devotional movement and the reinvention of the epic heroes and their stories in the sixteenth century. In fact, Abū al-Faẓl makes this perfectly clear with is remark that the *Mahābhārata* is to be translated in the best possible way because it con-

77 See *AA* 3: 141.

78 See *AA* 3: 141.

79 The issue is not explored but for a start see Anand Venkatkrishnan, "Ritual, Reflection, and Religion: the Devas of Banaras," *South Asian History and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2015): 147–71.

tains "both the valuable and the trifles of most of the goals of this group." Given the epic story and the *Harivaṃśa*, "this group" can only mean the Vaiṣṇavas of Akbar's time – as the summary of the *Razmnāmah* makes clear in its account of the Yadavas.[80] So for Abū al-Faẓl, popular trends were to be countered by a return to the sources. Just as the *ʿulamāʾ*, with whom Abū al-Faẓl started, were to be undermined by making texts available in a clear, pleasant and popular idiom, so too the advocates of the *bhakti* movement and those swayed by them were to be put right by translations from the Sanskrit, assuming, of course, that they would be reading Persian. Making the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* available would expose Persian readers to the 'real thing' and embarrass those who had been gullible enough to fall for the religious innovations. This would lead them to "become seekers after God."[81]

Muslims and Kings Trapped in Abrahamic Time

Having dealt with the learned establishment and the *bhakti* movement, Abū al-Faẓl turns to "common people among the Muslims" who have not adequately studied the pages of religious books, the varied histories of different countries or the recognised greats of the Islamic tradition.[82] These people, as a consequence, believe in Abrahamic time and hold to the view that humanity dates back only 7000 years. All progress and intellectual advancements have taken place in this timeframe. The *Mahābhārata*, Abū al-Faẓl asserts, is the remedy to this problem because it explains the "the antiquity of the universe and its beings." The translation of the epic will allow these common people to "become somewhat informed and retreat from this distasteful belief," i.e. the belief in the recent creation of the world.

Badāʾūnī, who knew Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* and was aware of its content, was not prepared to let this pass – at least within the confines of his private memoir. In his account of the *Mahābhārata* translation project, he noted that it is "the most famous of the Hindu books," and that it takes "the form of a history of the wars between the tribes of the Kurus and Pāṇḍus who were rulers in Hind, according to some more than 4,000 years ago and according to the common account more than 80,000. And clearly this makes it before the time of Adam: Peace be upon

80 Chapter 2, 40 (printed text).

81 Although we regard the main thrust Abū al-Faẓl's criticism to be Hindu followers of the devotional movement, it is possible that people like Mīr ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Bilgrāmī are also being referenced, for whom see references above.

82 Chapter 2, 19–20 (printed text) as also the quotes from the *Preface* immediately below.

him! And the Hindu unbelievers consider it a great religious merit to read and to copy it." But aside from these facts, Badāʾūnī had severe misgivings: "Most of the interpreters and translators are in hell along with the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, as for the remaining ones, may God save them, and mercifully destine them to repent."[83]

While Abū al-Faẓl was clearly directing his argument at conservatives like Badāʾūnī, he had other audiences in mind as well. This is shown by his reference to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the respected eighth-century scholar who is counted as the sixth Imām among the Shīʿah. The importance of this has been brought out by Jonathan Peterson who notes that followers of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq on the margins of Shīʿī belief adhered to the theory of multiple Adams, from seven (each of whose lineage spanned fifty thousand years) to four hundred (each with four hundred thousand year cycles).[84] While not mentioning these views – and certainly not endorsing them – Abū al-Faẓl is nonetheless using Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq to hint that even within the Islamic fold there were views that challenged the 'short chronology.' Given the common people have not even read Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, never mind the different histories of the world, what more could we expect of them?

But Abū al-Faẓl does not stop with this *ex cathedra* dismissal of the untutored. Having established to his satisfaction that deep historical time is proven by the *Mahābhārata* and that these "subtle sciences and eminent understandings have no beginning, and that these brilliant jewels of wisdom have no origin," he turns to the lessons of history in his next section, saying that great kings in other lands have much to learn: "the science of history," he pontificates, "supplies admonition for the wise."[85] This is hardly news and seems astonishingly banal given that history writing was a long-established genre in Persian.[86] We are obliged, as a result, to read this as a deliberately condescending remark directed at kings who need instruction in the basics. What Abū al-Faẓl is really saying is that a particular type of history merits attention – that found in the *Mahābhārata* as promulgated by Akbar – and particular kings need to pick it up. In his usual way, Abū al-Faẓl does not name those he has in mind, but his earlier references show that his script here was directed at the ʿĀdil Shāhīs in Bījāpūr who had established themselves as a Shīʿī dynasty in 1503. Founded long before Akbar was

83 See *MT* 2: 219–21, the full passage is given in Chapter 1.

84 Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," 166.

85 Chapter 2, 19–20 (printed text). This section again marked out with the word اضی.

86 Andrew C. S. Peacock, *Mediaeval Islamic historiography and political legitimacy: Balʿamī's* Tārīkhnāma (London: Routledge, 2007); Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," outlines the *tārīkh* genre for the present context.

born and over half a century before he came to the throne – as Abū al-Faẓl would have been painfully aware – the ʿĀdil Shāhīs had their own vision of the past.[87]

The ʿĀdil Shāhī view of history was articulated by Muḥammad Qāsim Astarābādī (penname Firishtah) in his *Tārīkh-i Firishtah*.[88] Composed under the auspices of Ibrāhīm ʿĀdil Shāh II (1580–1627) and presented at court in 1606, this work aimed to strengthen the dynasty's claim to power through a genealogy that originated with Adam and the Abrahamic prophets – a standard trope in the *tārīkh* genre.[89] Firishtah also engaged with the *Mahābhārata* translation and cites Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*. This degree of intertextuality allows us to understand both Abū al-Faẓl's statements and Firishtah's alternate reading of the *Razmnāmah*. To support the ʿĀdil Shāhī position, Firishtah has his own 'authoritative books' and cites a Shīʿī *ḥadith* from ʿAlī that endorses the concept of multiple Adams.[90] With the chronology thus extended, Firishtah reconciles Muslim and Indian histories by explaining that Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the other epic figures were not human but Jinn. This allows him to confirm the pre-Adamic time attested in the *Mahābhārata*, without undermining the tradition that God was responsible for the creation of mankind. The Qur'ān (15: 26–27) provided the necessary warrant: "Indeed, We created Man from sounding clay moulded from black mud. As for the Jinn, We created them earlier from smokeless fire."[91] Firishtah is thus able to take lessons from the *Mahābhārata*, but he does so on his own terms. We know nothing of Abū al-Faẓl's reactions to this – he had been assassinated in 1602 before the *Tārīkh-i Firishtah* officially appeared – and all he was able to do in the scope of the *Preface* was to bolster the authority of the *Razmnāmah* by saying that Akbar had "complete oversight on the translation," and that the learned men

87 The ʿĀdil Shāhīs were not exclusively Shīʿī because their commitment to that denomination vacillated. On this problem and its historiography, Keelan Overton, "Book Culture, Royal Libraries, and Persianate Painting in Bijapur, circa 1580–1630," *Muqarnas* 33 (2016): 91–154, more recently the papers in Overton, ed. *Iran and the Deccan Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation, 1400–1700*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

88 Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," on which the discussion here draws. An earlier discussion in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 217–21.

89 Firishtah produced a first draft of his text in 1606, with revisions to his death in 1623, Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 46, cited and endorsed in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 308, n. 57.

90 Quoted in Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," 165–66.

91 Cited in Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," 169, but here a different translation.

assembled to do the job where indeed illustrious scholars with broad knowledge and admirable qualities.[92]

Abū al-Faẓl closes this part of his discussion with the following sentence: "Different groups of people love to take copies to different corners of the world." On the face of it, this is an odd remark. If we accept that the translation was carried out between 1582 and 1584, and that the royal copy of the *Razmnāmah* with miniatures was finished in 1586 with Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* added at the end of the same year or early in 1587 (as explained in Chapter 1.4), then it would have been nearly impossible for copies to be taken "to different corners of the world" at the end of 1586 or the early part of 1587. This sentence can be explained, therefore, as an interpolation inserted into the 1599 and later copies of the *Preface*. The career of Abū al-Faẓl and his brother Fayẓī provide an explanation. Fayẓī had been sent on a mission to the Deccan between 1591 and 1593 and Abū al-Faẓl was deputised there in 1599 to settle some complex military and political matters.[93] With the *Preface* an active text in the author's lifetime, as shown by the use of parts of it in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, it appears that the *Preface* was subject to redaction in the 1590s.[94] Moreover, given Abū al-Faẓl's fine view of himself and his constant efforts at self-promotion, it would not be out of place to suggest that the "different groups of people" who "love to take copies to different corners of the world," are none other than Abū al-Faẓl, Fayẓī and members of their diplomatic entourage. This would help explain why Audrey Truschke thinks that Firishtah drew mainly on the *Preface* as his source rather than the translation proper.[95] This is actually proven by Firishtah's attribution of the translation to Abū al-Faẓl, not simply his free use of Abū al-Faẓl's text and poetic selections. In attributing the translation to Abū al-Faẓl, Firishtah is showing he did not have access to the *Razmnāmah* and its colophon which refers with perfect clarity to the translation team and the role of Naqīb Khān, as explained in Chapter 1. We have also seen in Chapter 1 (and we will see again just below) that Abū al-Faẓl had minimal knowledge of Sanskrit so he could hardly have translated anything.

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92 Chapter 2, page 20 (printed text). The alternate readings in the description of the team's qualities shows this part of the text was a bone of contention and subject to redaction, likely for reasons explained in the next paragraph.

93 See "Abu'l-Faẓl ʿAllāmī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v., retrieved March 2002; Alam and Subrahmanyam, "A Place in the Sun: Travels with Faiẓī in the Deccan," in *Les sources et le temps, Sources and Time: A Colloquium*, ed. François Grimal (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichery, École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2001), 272–75; Alam and Subrahmanyam, "The Deccan Frontier and Mughal Expansion, ca. 1600: Contemporary Perspectives," *JESHO* 47, no. 3 (2004): 357–89.

94 Abū al-Faẓl's use of materials from the *Preface* in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* is taken up in Chapter 4.2.

95 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 218, cited and endorsed in Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," 165.

Textual Problems Confronted

Having justified the translation of the *Mahābhārata* before its potential readers and critics, Abū al-Faẓl turns to some textual problems. First, he introduces himself by name – which he has not done before – and notes that Akbar assigned the *Preface* to him and that he was determined to work with alacrity.[96] Abū al-Faẓl then marks the opening of a new theme with the phrase "Let it not be hidden."[97] He begins by mentioning that there are different accounts about the creation of the world among philosophers, ascetics and legal experts in India. Thirteen such opinions will be mentioned "in this wondrous book." While not listing these thirteen positions, Abū al-Faẓl notes that they are bound to suffer varying degrees of "rejection and denial." Some people will reject them out of hand, some will "cross them out after careful consideration, dismissing them as unreliable."[98] Others will consider that no final conclusion can be drawn, while yet others, after "ample deliberation and close inspection," will accept them. This divided opinion applies to all parts of the *Mahābhārata* except "what is reported from the sage Bhīṣma," i.e. the Śānti Parvan. The Mughals regarded this as having royal relevance as a work of political guidance and they reworked it so that this portion constituted nearly a quarter of the *Razmnāmah*.[99]

Deeming the conflicting opinions about the *Mahābhārata* a "strange situation," Abū al-Faẓl posits a number of explanations. His own "incomplete understanding" might be part of the problem, or it might be due to the "incompetence of the translators" who could not understand the text and "just put down a few words based on analogy and incorrect conjecture." Another contributing factor could be the "corrupted state of the original text."[100] Finally, difficulties may arise from "the darkness of the inner states of the members of this community."[101] These observations are acute and would be valid in most modern analyses. Our own assessment of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* – to turn the spotlight on ourselves as the example – might involve our misunderstanding the *Preface* and forming opinions

96 Chapter 2, 20 (printed text), discussed further in Chapter 1.

97 Chapter 2, 20–21 (printed text) as also the quotes from the *Preface* immediately below. The use of the introductory device "Let it not be hidden" is noted and commented on above and in Chapter 2.

98 Similar levels of comparison and rejection or acceptance are found at Chapter 2, 34 (printed text).

99 As noted in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 122–23.

100 That Abū al-Faẓl knew about the manuscript culture of India is shown by his description of palm-leaf books in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, see *AA* 2: 61.

101 Note also the comments about the inward-looking nature of the Hindu tradition, noted in Chapter 1.

based on a flawed translation. Certainly, many passages of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* are so complex that it takes an experienced hand to make sense of them; even in English they are difficult reading. As for corruption, flaws in the source materials are evident enough even in the sixteenth-century copies of the *Preface*, as shown by the variants given in the notes in Chapter 2. Finally, for the "darkness of the inner states of the members of this community," we hardly need search for 'native informants' in a distant land when academic obfuscations and jealousies provide examples close to hand. Returning to historical concerns, one point is clear from Abū al-Faẓl's reference to "this community." This certainly refers to the community of Hindu scholars on which Abū al-Faẓl depended for information and who are, in whole or in part, depicted in the *Razmnāmah* page preserved in Philadelphia (Figure 1).

Having noted the range of difficulties, Abū al-Faẓl admits that he is unable to address them definitively. Although he wanted to devote time to the matter, he was wary of being long-winded, and resolved on "a few matters that pertain to this book." Abū al-Faẓl's words, slightly modernised, could find a place in the narrow focus of most research publications. His exit, however, is more graceful. He turns to a poem:[102]

> In this old, six-doored house (the world), who can discern anything except its name?
> Who can discern the essence of cosmic motion and stillness?
> It is futile to think on this unfathomable talisman;
> Who has seen the beginning of the world, and who has seen its end?

3.3 Wondering about the *Mahābhārata*

> *Hearing these strange stories, I am transported into a state that cannot be described.*
> Abū al-Faẓl, *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*.[103]

Having reflected on the methodological problems that confronted him, Abū al-Faẓl excuses himself from a full analysis of the *Mahābhārata* and turns to his summary. Given what has just gone before – in terms of Abū al-Faẓl's concerns about his sources and in terms also of the change in writing style – this part of the *Preface* appears to be material that Abū al-Faẓl has borrowed and adapted

102 Chapter 2, 21 (printed text), here, for comparative purposes, we give the translation in Peterson, "From Adam to ʿĀdil Shāh," 164.
103 Chapter 2, 24 (printed text).

from his informants. We have already noted in Chapter 1 that this is a turning point the organisation of the *Preface*. This appraisal is reinforced by Abū al-Faẓl's statement that "the transmitters of sayings and the writers of the state of affairs declare . . .," a clear an indication that he is reporting what he has heard.[104]

Abū al-Faẓl's first concern is the system of the four ages of Indian cosmology, a basic subject for every student of Indian history and religion.[105] This cosmological framework embraces all possible time, from the 'golden age' through two declining ages to the final 'dark age' of *Kali yuga*. Each age is shorter than the last and each is characterised by worsening conditions. Abū al-Faẓl attempts to set this Indian chronological system against the reign of Akbar, which he states is currently thirty-two years.[106] This agrees with his statements elsewhere in the *Preface* where he notes that: ". . . from the beginning of his reign, which is now thirty-two years."[107] This confirms the date of the *Preface* and, more importantly, confirms that this section of the text is integral and original to the sixteenth-century composition.[108]

Abū al-Faẓl then continues by mentioning equivalent years in other calendars: the Persian, Greek, Arab, Indian and *Kali yuga* (which he says is year 4680). These different reckonings position Akbar in the chronological systems of the world at the dawn of the new Islamic millennium. The point here is that the world is already ancient and in decline, that the time for renewal is coming, and that a new dispensation will emerge with Akbar as the universal monarch. While this millennial ardour soon dissipated in the early seventeenth century, the translation of the *Mahābhārata* opened a vision of time that continued to challenge the imagination of Muslim scholars and religious divines. In his *Mirʾāt al-Makhlūqāt*, the eminent mystic ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Chishtī (d. 1638 CE) drew on a variety of sources to construct an original argument about the beginning of the world and the complementarity of the Hindu *yuga* system, Puranic tradition and Islamic historical narratives.[109]

104 Chapter 2, 21 (printed text), as also the quotes from the *Preface* immediately below.

105 A convenient summary of the *yuga*-system is given in von Stietencron, *Hindu Myth, Hindu History*.

106 Chapter 2, 22 (printed text).

107 Chapter 2, 16 (printed text).

108 Also discussed above in Chapter 1.4.

109 Alam, "World Enough and Time: Religious Strategy and Historical Imagination in an Indian Sufi Tale," in *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*, ed. Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 108–09.

Cosmology and the Indian Social Order

After setting out the chronological framework, Abū al-Faẓl then turns to a summary of Indian cosmology. Once again, he refers to his sources saying: "it has been established, by mutual agreement between the authorities from among the Indians," and even more explicitly, "after having had the opportunity to discuss the issue with learned men."[110] The cosmology builds on the *yuga* framework with which he started, adding further dimensions to the *Mahābhārata* from the Indian perspective. Abū al-Faẓl first covers the five elements that make up the physical world: earth, air, water, fire and space. He then touches on the controversy in Indian thought about the nature of space (*ākāśa*). The nature of the controversy is less historically interesting than the fact that he remarks: ". . . before I could have exhaustive discussions with the wise men of India, what I had understood from the common people of India was that *ākāśa* refers to the sky." These two stages in Abū al-Faẓl's understanding – a gleaning from general conversation corrected later by experts – appears to reference the debates on religion and philosophy that took place at Fatehpur Sikri under Akbar's patronage, thus hinting at the content of some of the discussions.

From the question of elements – after describing the Indian idea that the stars seen in the sky are the essence of pious ancestors – Abū al-Faẓl turns to the creation of the social order by Brahmā, the Indian creator god. Acknowledging that there are different views on the matter (which he does not describe), Abū al-Faẓl notes that Brahmā created the four groups of Indian society: the priestly caste (*brāhmaṇa*), the warrior or ruling class (*kṣatriya*), the merchants and agrarian class (*vaiṣya*), and the servant or laboring class (*śūdra*). Abū al-Faẓl makes no critical comments on this system of social organisation, his description being neutral to such an extent that we would say he has glossed over the difficulties of caste and ignored the fact that the textual ideal seldom matched realties on the ground.[111] One can assume, however, that Abū al-Faẓl would not have had difficulties with caste hierarchies as such given his prescriptive review of class structure in the opening of the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* and the simple fact that he did not regard caste as applying to him or others in the Persianate realm.[112]

110 Chapter 2, 22–23 (printed text) as also the quotes from the *Preface* immediately below.

111 Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). All of Chapter 1, "Mass Conversion to Islam: Theories and Protagonists," is relevant.

112 See *AA* 1: iv-v.

Vision of Indian Scripture

After noting the role of each group in the social system, Abū al-Faẓl passes to Indian scripture. This is worth examination in view of Abū al-Faẓl's overarching concern with the authority of texts. He describes the Indian scriptures created by Brahmā as the 'Veda', a word that has a wide range of meaning in the South Asian context.[113] On one level, the Vedas are the texts from antiquity, generally regarded as the four Vedas and their early ancillaries, notably the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣads are called *Vedānta*, the 'end of the Veda'. Despite this terminology being widely known – and known to Abū al-Faẓl as well – the Veda is also said to be all the literature of Hinduism because the word Veda itself means 'knowledge'.[114] This means that any text containing some kind of knowledge might call itself a Veda as way of claiming validity. Accordingly, many later works and teachings declare themselves to be Veda in essence, if not in actual fact. For example, the *Naṭyaśāstra*, dated by most authorities to the fifth or sixth centuries CE, describes itself as a Veda even though it is a work on drama and the performance arts – concerns removed from the ritual and philosophical speculation of the earlier Vedic corpus.[115]

These details show that Abū al-Faẓl's idea of Veda fell in the broad definition, i.e. traditional Indic knowledge of all kinds, including the *Mahābhārata*. Brahmā manifested a book that "consists of advice regarding this life and the hereafter and which is named *Veda*."[116] This was devised as a law to regulate creatures and men, leading "ordinary people forward . . . not leaving them in the waterless desert of negations and prohibitions." All scripture is, in this view, Vedic because it is Vedic in its intention, i.e. making all people "travel the straight path." The wording reveals something of Abū al-Faẓl's Muslim perspective but, more importantly, highlights his concerns with social cohesion, an issue that appears recurrently in his writing.

From this general position, Abū al-Faẓl moves to the specifics of the *Mahābhārata*. This consists of 100,000 verses (*śloka*). The designation of the epic as a scripture of 100,000 verses – and a Veda – was and is ubiquitous, as noted

113 Pollock, "The Revelation of Tradition: *śruti*, *smṛti*, and the Sanskrit Discourse of Power," in *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia*, ed. Federico Squarcini (Firenze: Firenze University Press 2005), 41–61, also papers in Pollock, ed. *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

114 For Abū al-Faẓl on Vedānta, see *AA* 3: 158.

115 Paul Kuritz, *The Making of Theatre History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988), 68.

116 Chapter 2, 24 (printed text) as also the quotes from the *Preface* immediately below.

in Chapter 1. With the *Mahābhārata* containing 100,000 verses, Abū al-Faẓl is obliged to mention the verse form and its four metrical parts or 'feet' (*caraṇa*).[117]

Abū al-Faẓl's closing focus is the origin of the *Mahābhārata*. In charting this he does not cite Vyāsa as the author – the normal attribution – but rather says the author is Brahmā. This is not contrary to tradition in that Vyāsa is regarded as an incarnation of Brahmā.[118] This leads him to the issue of Brahmā's lifespan which, according to the accounts Abū al-Faẓl has heard, is one hundred divine years. Each day in a divine year is 1000 *yuga*s in length, as is each night.[119] The present Brahmā, "according to what has reached us from trusted authorities," is number 1001, and currently "he has just begun the second half of the first day of his fifty-first year."

This explanation given by Abū al-Faẓl represents a combination of ideas about the eternity of scripture and the position of scripture in the hundred-year cycles of Brahmā. The eternity of scripture, firstly, is characteristic of Vedic texts, described as *apauruṣeya*, i.e. not derived from a human source.[120] In essence, texts of this kind are impersonal, authorless and eternal. This understanding is important in Vedānta, a school of thought which, as noted just above, was known to Abū al-Faẓl. But the *Mahābhārata* is, of course, also known in time, so set by Abū al-Faẓl in the mythic cycles of time in Hinduism with Brahmā, incarnated as Vyāsa, as the author. Abū al-Faẓl does not describe the system in detail or enter into calculations about the huge numbers involved. He can only express wonder and say that the recurring "Brahmās have come to the manifest world, and have gone back to the veil of concealment." Consciously or not, this appears to conflate the Brahmās with the Abdāls, the hidden saints who are known only to God and who maintain the operation of the world and without whom it would collapse.

All these Brahmās and their years bring an infinite dimension of time into Abū al-Faẓl's discussion and lend great antiquity to the text. While this underscores the unfathomable 'pre-history' of the *Mahābhārata* – and forms a chronological contrast to the precise position of Akbar against the calendars in which

117 The form is explained in C. R. Lanman, *A Sanskrit Reader* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 300. Abū al-Faẓl adds that verses may have up to 26 syllables (چهار), see Chapter 2, 24 (printed text), the corresponding place in the manuscript is line 15 on folio 23r. Each quarter verse of the *śloka* has eight syllables, so the total should be 32 but the number as written in the manuscript is definitely not 32. One way to make sense of the manuscript might be to correct the reading to "more than twenty six" (زیاده از بیست و شش).

118 For Vyāsa, a key study is Bruce Sullivan, *Kṛṣṇa Ḍvaipayana Vyāsa and the Mahābhārata: A New Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

119 The *yuga* theory of time is explained in G. M. Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38 for a chart with the number of years for each age.

120 W. J. Johnson, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), s.v.

his years were calculated – Abū al-Faẓl does not attempt to mesh the Brahmā years with the Islamic calendar and his millenarian vision for the year 1000. This is because his purpose here is to say something about the origin of the text, and specifically to assert that the text is set in a vast system of time that is not only extremely ancient but, ultimately, beyond time altogether. At this point, he does not recount Vyāsa's role in the current iteration of the *Mahābhārata*. This appears later in the *Preface* where we are told that Vyāsa was a somewhat fallible participant in the events recounted in the epic and that he committed it to writing rather than narrating it in person.[121] This shows that Abū al-Faẓl wants to present the *Mahābhārata* as a timeless text, not one that was written by Vyāsa as a particular author at a particular moment. His aim is to raise the text's status, making it a subject worthy of attention – "a treasury of exhortations and a store-house of advice," that innumerable "thirsty seekers of different times seek in the desert of (their) quest."[122] On the matter of the deep mytho-poetic time in the Indian tradition, Abū al-Faẓl can only express his amazement: "Hearing these strange stories, I am transported into a state that cannot be described"[123]

Summary

A verse from the medieval poet Kamāl al-Dīn Ismāʿīl (d. 1237) indicates a change away from the consideration of cosmology, time and scripture to a summary of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole:[124]

> I have a melancholic heart, filled with all sorts of concerns;
> It can by no means find the way toward knowledge.

This verse sets the tone for a prelude that Abū al-Faẓl inserts before beginning the summary proper. In this prelude he offers an elaborate apology for what follows, excusing any mistakes by admitting he is quite perplexed by the text: "When I contemplate on matters such as these strange propositions and wondrous discourses and other things that are found page after page, part after part, volume after volume, in this wonder-filled book, my perplexity keeps increasing and I cannot lift my head from the enormous whirlwind of astonishment."[125] Given

121 Chapter 2, 35 (printed text).
122 Chapter 2, 35 (printed text).
123 Chapter 2, 24 (printed text).
124 Chapter 2, 24 (printed text).
125 Chapter 2, 25 (printed text) as also the quotes from the *Preface* immediately below.

these feelings, he questions his own knowledge and conclusions, his self-doubt and torment increased by memories of the blunders he has made in the past. He feels shame and does not trust his capacities. So he concludes: "Thus it is better that, in accepting or refuting such matters [that are in the *Mahābhārata*], I refer to the various ways competent people of various times understood them, and embark upon citing in this preface that which is necessary or laudable."

What lies behind this hyperbolic passage is the polarity between *taqlīd* and *taḥqīq* that is central to Abū al-Faẓl's thinking. Paradoxically, having subordinated adherence to derived authority (*taqlīd*) to critical inquiry (*taḥqīq*), he is forced to accept derived authority nonetheless because he does not have the time to interrogate the Sanskrit tradition, and this by his own admission.[126] He knows full well that he is dependant on what the Indian scholars have told him, so he is, in fact, following the 'path of imitation', the very thing he has criticised repeatedly. He gets out the problem through a combination of feigned humility, expressions of wonder and passing the buck.

That Abū al-Faẓl's humility is feigned is revealed by his unblushing remark that while he is ashamed of having imposed incorrect views on people in the past and also for having accepted views simply because they were ascendant, he is ". . . in fact, somewhat distinguished with regard to discernment and comprehension."

Abū al-Faẓl's expressions of wonder, secondly, seem to show him ever more baffled by the *Mahābhārata*: "Hearing these strange stories, I am transported into a state that cannot be described. Listening to these wondrous tales, I experience a surge of feelings inside – how could I express it?"[127] This sense of naïve awe is somewhat disarming, which is the intention. Abū al-Faẓl is using this as a device to excuse himself from being seen as credulous and, more critically, to avoid being allied to any particular assessments of the *Mahābhārata*. He knows full well – as we have noted above – that even if some of his readers accept the stories in the epic, others will reject them as palpably absurd, while others will dismiss them as unreliable, while yet others will consider that no final conclusion can be drawn.[128] Abū al-Faẓl's expressions of wonder allow him to sit on the fence and avoid being linked to any interpretative camp.

Finally, as for passing the buck, Abū al-Faẓl cites his informants, thus making them culpable for any failing. At the start he says: "The narrators of this story and the transmitters of this tradition . . . relate that that in the second half of the *Dvāpara yuga*, in the town of Hastināpura of India, there was a king

126 For example Chapter 2, 21 (printed text); other instances cited above.
127 Chapter 2, 24 (printed text).
128 Chapter 2, 20–21 (printed text).

named Bharata."[129] Similar turns of phrase occur later: "the transmitters of narratives narrate . . ."[130] or "present-day transmitters of stories narrate . . ."[131] Sometimes the tone is critical: "The sellers of old merchandise in the bazaar of speech narrate . . ."[132] Such devices are frequent in Persian literature – and used by Fayẓī to take a close example – but here they allow Abū al-Faẓl to negotiate the contradictions inherent in his intellectual project.[133] Examples of writers who find themselves conflicted by circumstance are not wanting, but an illustrative parallel comes from Horace Walpole who, in a letter to the Countess of Ossory in 1776 wrote: "Now to answer your question Madam. What am I doing? Strictly speaking, nothing: yet, according to the expressive old adage, I am busy as a hen and one chick."[134] On the face of it, this is simply a jaunty witticism. But what it reveals is the profound anxiety surrounding the social identity of a 'gentleman' who must be disinterested and should not be compelled to do anything – never mind work or publish. At the same time, however, a gentleman must not be idle, for the idle mind is the devil's playground. So necessarily Walpole must be doing nothing but must be busy at the same time. Abū al-Faẓl is caught similarly in a fraught contradiction, compelled to engage but compelled also to distance himself and be detached.

Abū al-Faẓl Retreats and Concludes

We come at last to Abū al-Faẓl's summary of the epic. This has two parts. The first is an outline of the narrative as a whole, interspersed with comments and verses.[135] The structure and specific contents of this section, where relevant to our analysis, have drawn attention elsewhere in the present volume. The second part of the summary is a brief account of each Parvan and the number of verses each contains. The *Harivaṃśa* is also noted.[136] As with the first part, relevant points are taken up elsewhere in this book in the appropriate place.

129 Chapter 2, 26 (printed text).
130 Chapter 2, 31 (printed text).
131 Chapter 2, 36 (printed text).
132 Chapter 2, 35 (printed text).
133 For Fayẓī's use, Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 134–35.
134 Peter Cunningham, ed., *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, 9 vols (Richard Bentley: London, 1857), 6: 355.
135 Chapter 2, 26–37 (printed text).
136 Chapter 2, 37–40 (printed text).

Having summarised the Parvans, Abū al-Faẓl turns to a few reflections by way of conclusion. The first, as noted in Chapter 1, is a somewhat muddled statement about the summaries and his discontent with them.[137] However unsatisfactory these may be, once the general substance of the text is fixed in the reader's mind, Abū al-Faẓl advises as follows: "As soon as the themes of this book have settled in the heart in the best manner, the mind of the seeker of truth can become more vigilant in distinguishing truth from falsehood . . . and he will not set his heart upon words and stories, tale and narrative; rather, keeping the reins of his contemplative mind in his hands, if need arises, he will be able to travel the paths of comprehension."

This is at once a challenge to Abū al-Faẓl's readers and a further defence of his position. He has reported what the Indian scholars have had to say, and offered a few comments along the way, but it is up to readers to make the final call; he is not ultimately responsible. He tops this off with one final attack on *taqlīd*, depicting it as a "prison" of "inner blindness and lameness of spiritual aspiration." Readers are urged, "out of brotherly affection" to release their brothers from this bond as an act of "humanity and chivalry." The reason for this is clear. Abū al-Faẓl is saying that readers should not default immediately to criticising him personally, but apply critical analysis to what they read and encourage others, who might be dismissive, to do the same.[138]

Abū al-Faẓl continues his retreat by asking the forgiveness of God if he has "meddled in the divine workshop," noting that it is God alone who sets people "on the cushion of critical enquiry (*taḥqīq*) or drags them along "on the leash of imitation (*taqlīd*)." Coming back to some of the ideas with which he opened the *Preface*, he refers to himself as mere "speck of dust" that is "entrapped in human nature." And as at the start, he feels it is prudent to cut short his "speech about the Creator." Turning from creator to creation, he refers to the king as "the soul of the world and the king of the time," but again restrains himself, breaking the "tongue of the pen and the pen of the tongue." Following a literary device used throughout, Abū al-Faẓl at last closes with verse, this time from Niẓāmī.

> May he be the king of the world until eternity!
> May everything happen as he wishes!
> May he enjoy life and youthfulness!
> May he find felicity in success!
> I have finished my discourse on 'felicity'
> When I reached this point, I wrapped up the sheet.

137 Chapter 2, 41–42 (printed text), as are the quotes from the *Preface* immediately below.
138 The same ideas also appear earlier in different words at Chapter 2, 34 (printed text), as noted before and taken up in Chapter 4.

Michael Willis

Chapter 4
Post-Script

Our aim in this book – as outlined in Chapter 1 – has been to translate and study the *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah* in order to understand Abū al-Faẓl's relationship to the *Mahābhārata*. Additionally, our aims have embraced allied problems, such as Abū al-Faẓl's relationship to Akbar as his king and patron, his view of his role as a writer and his understanding of the social groups for whom the translation of the *Mahābhārata* was intended. All these themes have been addressed throughout this book, but a few strands can be drawn together here by way of a post-script. This provides an opportunity to reflect on Abū al-Faẓl and the *Razmnāmah* without, however, wandering too far from our focus on the *Preface* as a primary source. Abū al-Faẓl was a learned writer and his work has the potential to trigger investigations into a host of associated contexts – as we have seen with the *Tārīkh-i Firishtah* in Chapter 3. These contexts reach across the cultural and literary landscape of India and beyond, creating an intricate web that covers much of the Islamic world. The temptation, as with many scholarly projects, is to pursue each and every link. One such temptation is offered by a little-known Ottoman copy of Abū al-Faẓl's *Correspondence* dated 1685 in the Mingana collection in Birmingham – a crucial manuscript for understanding Abū al-Faẓl's readership beyond India.[1] The present volume is not, however, a wide-ranging literary and social history, it is simply an exploration of a single source, the *Preface* to the *Razmnāmah*. The *Preface* is indeed modest compared to the *Akbarnāmah* or Abū al-Faẓl's *Correspondence*, but examining it closely provides material for future research into the many topics that Abū al-Faẓl's writing suggests.

4.1 Translation and the Author's Tasks

How Abū al-Faẓl approached the translation and his tasks as an author can be understood from the *Preface* in the form that it had in at the end of the sixteenth century and thus as the text stood in the author's lifetime. As noted earlier in this study,

1 *Correspondence of Abū al-Faẓl, partly composed in the name of Akbar*, compiled by ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn Afżal Muḥammad, Mingana 1153, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham. Dated 1 Shaʿbān 1096 (3 July 1685). For a copy from India, acquired by J. F. Hull and dated 1658, see Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts* 1: 396.

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much of the *Preface*, especially at the start, was composed by Abū al-Faẓl, but the structure and content of the later parts shows that elements of the work were drawn from outside sources and inserted. H. S. Jarrett, who made a comparison of Abū al-Faẓl and Bīrūnī concluded that unlike the latter's scrutiny of sources and original analysis, "Abū al-Faẓl on the contrary, transcribes either from existing works or from oral communication."[2] Even a cursory examination of the *Preface* fortifies this conclusion. Earlier in this book we noted the sutures in the composition and the changes in style that mark the Parvan summaries. Moreover, in several places Abū al-Faẓl openly states: "Present-day transmitters of stories narrate . . .," showing he was dependent on his informants for his knowledge of the contents of the *Mahābhārata*.[3] And indeed in one place the *Preface* was written with such haste that it is in an inferior literary style.[4] We have already posited in Chapter 1 that this was due to the fact that Abū al-Faẓl was pulled away to other duties and literary assignments.

The account that Abū al-Faẓl gives of Sanskrit prosody shows the distance he stood from the Sanskrit in the epic.[5] This is further evident in his account of the name of the *Mahābhārata*.[6]

> According to what I heard from people,[7] the reason for naming it this way was that *mahā* means 'great', and *bhārata* means 'war'; since the book contains the description of a great war, he gave this as the title.[8] But after I had the opportunity to consult experts, it became clear that *bhārata* does not mean 'war'; on the contrary, since this book is comprised of the monumental affairs of the noble descendants of King Bharata, he specified it with the aforementioned name *Mahābhārata*. The letter *alif* ['ā'] in *bhārata* is the *alif* ['ā'] of relation (*nisbah)*, which, like the *yā-yi nisbah* ['ī'] [in Persian],[9] is common in the 'Indian' language [i.e. Sanskrit]. Since the greatest thing ascribed to the named king is the war delineated above, [in common usage][10] the word *bhārata* began to be applied in the secondary meaning of 'war'.

2 See *AA* 3: viii.
3 Chapter 2, 36 (printed text), other examples cited in Chapter 3.3.
4 Chapter 2, 30 (printed text) and notes thereto.
5 Chapter 2, 24 (printed text) and comments thereon in Chapter 3.3; also Chapter 1.5.
6 Chapter 2, 25–36 (printed text) here retaining some of the notes by Hajnalka Kovacs.
7 The printed text has *afrād* ('persons', 'individuals'), the BL manuscript has *afvāh* (lit. 'mouths', but in Persian it is used in the meaning 'rumor', 'hearsay').
8 That is, Akbar gave it the title *Razmnāmah*.
9 In Persian, *yā-yi nisbah* (in most cases written with the letter "y", and pronounced as "ī") forms the relative adjective from nouns; e.g. *Hindī* ("Indian, belonging to India") from *Hind* ("India"), *Lāhawrī* ("of Lahore" or "from Lahore"). In Sanskrit, a secondary nominal derivative is formed by lengthening the first vowel of the noun (to the *vṛddhi* level), which in case of "a" is "ā" – written with an extra *alif* in the Perso-Arabic script.
10 The BL manuscript has the additional phrase *ʿurf-i ʿām* ("commonly known," "common usage") added in the running text. See folio 27r, line 2.

The report of a popular understanding that the word 'Bhārata' means 'war', additionally clarified by the copyist of the British Library manuscript saying this was a common usage, will draw our attention below. What is of immediate concern is the fact that the rudimentary matter of creating patronymic and matronymics by vowel lengthening was deemed worthy of note. This shows Abū al-Faẓl's remove from Sanskrit and coupled with his way of working otherwise, we are bound to ask if engaged with the Persian translation or simply depended on what he had heard from others. There are only two places in the *Preface* where he seems to quote directly, this coming from the summary where Duryodhana and his cohort prematurely celebrate the demise of the Pāṇḍavas.[11] Then, slightly later, the conditions of exile imposed on the Pāṇḍavas are given in quotation.[12] We have already noted that Abū al-Faẓl's dependence on his sources is most evident in the summaries, so we do not know if he read the *Razmnāmah* or simply inserted these passages because they had been brought to his attention. Abū al-Faẓl's engagement, or lack of it, is told in the miniature painting of the Translation Bureau (Figure 1) where he is not represented, even though the Persian text above the picture is part of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*. So what did he make of the *Razmnāmah*?

An answer is found in Abū al-Faẓl's remark that when Akbar assigned the *Preface* to him he felt unprepared and unequal to the task, from which we may assume Abū al-Faẓl had practically no independent knowledge of the *Mahābhārata* before the king deemed that it needed attention.[13] What he thought of the translation otherwise, and the important social and political reasons for doing it, are things that came directly from Akbar.[14] The translation, he reports, will help different religious groups abandon their enmity toward each other, encourage individuals to rectify their personal shortcomings and become seekers of God. Translations will also give ready access to "the advice of pious ancestors" and "the weighty deeds of predecessors."[15] Moreover, translation will acquaint the common people with the great antiquity of the universe and its inhabitants.

While enmity between religious groups was nothing new in India, the coming of the millennium seemed to provide an opportunity for change and improvement. Texts had a part to play in this and Abū al-Faẓl believed in the power of the text: as long as the translations were in an accessible idiom they would have a good effect. As he says: "the common folk will get to the truth of the matter and will be rescued from the meddling of the ignorant ones who pretend to be wise."

11 Chapter 2, 28 (printed text).
12 Chapter 2, 30 (printed text).
13 Chapter 2, 2 (printed text).
14 Chapter 2, 18 (printed text). The concerns there are echoed in *AA* 2: 1–2.
15 Chapter 2, 18 (printed text), as also the quotations from the *Preface* immediately below.

The idea that translations of the Sanskrit classics could be read in other ways does not seem to have crossed Abū al-Faẓl's mind, at least at this point. For him, any misunderstanding could be put down to flaws in the source materials or in the work and abilities of the translators.[16] Otherwise, the message would come through, clear and undistorted. To modern eyes, it seems naïve to assume that readers will understand what has been put before them and be so readily swayed. Indeed, in the *Preface* itself Abū al-Faẓl notes that readers will have varied 'takes' on the *Razmnāmah*, so he is contradicting himself, as we shall see in the next section.

4.2 Dissemination of the *Razmnāmah*

Abū al-Faẓl's understanding of the social groups for whom the translation was made, and the audience for his *Preface*, have been explored in Chapter 3. He does not have kind words for his readers and generally sees them as enthralled to tradition and received opinion. Kings in foreign lands are spared Abū al-Faẓl's immediate ire, but he leaves little doubt that they too stand to profit from the *Razmnāmah*.

Despite Abū al-Faẓl's stated faith in good translations – clearly the view of Akbar – he was aware that readers could not be controlled and that they might take away different things from the *Razmnāmah*. Accordingly, he urges his readers to study with diligence so their conclusions will be well informed. The contours of Abū al-Faẓl's thinking on this score have been examined in Chapter 3. His disquiet about reactions to the text were justified given the *Razmnāmah* was widely distributed.[17] How people responded is not a simple matter to trace, but one royal example is found in an exchange between Akbar and his son Murād. This is preserved in a copy of the *Akbarnāmah* kept in the British Library (Figures 12, 13).[18] Having been sent to govern Mālwa in 1591, Murād wrote to his father about his education, his concern being that he should not fall under the sway of traditionalism or *taqlīd*. The exchange runs as follows:

16 Chapter 3.2.

17 Evidence for this noted above in Chapter 1.4.

18 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 1: 247, *Akbarnāmah*, BL Add 27247, folio 403r-403v (last line of the recto and first lines of the verso). This copy of the *AN* noted in Iqtidar Alam Khan, "Akbar's Personality Traits and World Outlook – A Critical Reappraisal," in *Akbar and His India*, ed. Irfan Habib (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 89, n. 32, where he suggests that this copy represents Abū al-Faẓl's first draft of the text. Iqtidar Alam Khan's translation of the reference to the *Razmnāmah* in this manuscript of the *AN* appears in Shireen Moosvi, *Episodes in the Life of Akbar: Contemporary Records and Reminiscences* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 1994), 94. Cited Das, *Paintings of the Razmnama*, 11, n. 20 and again in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 101, n. 2 and 129.

> Q: (by Murād): If one or two volumes of books approved by the exalted mind [i.e. of Akbar] that might promote the intellect and discourage traditionalism (*taqlīd*) are given [to me] it would be a cause heightening of [my] education (*hidāyat*).
>
> A: (by Akbar): In the marshy land (*shūristān*) of tradition such a book is rarely to be found. But out of regard for him [Murād], the translation of the *Mahābhārata*, which is a strange tale just now available, has been sent.

Akbar's reply shows that he thought the 'strange tale' in the *Mahābhārata* would help Murād extricate himself from the marshy waste of bone-headed traditionalism. A key point that emerges from this evidence is that although the imperial copy of the translation was finished in 1586 – and the *Preface* written right on its tail – the *Razmnāmah* was not widely circulated, at least to the extent that a royal prince did not have a copy in 1591. This contradicts what Abū al-Faẓl says on the matter in his *Preface*: after mentioning how talented individuals had been assembled to translate the *Mahābhārata*, he goes on to say that: "Different groups of people love to take copies to different corners of the world."[19] Badāʾūnī clarifies to some degree by telling us that "His Majesty named the work *Razmnāmah*, and had it illustrated and transcribed in many copies, and the nobles too were ordered to have it transcribed by way of obtaining blessings."[20] Abū al-Faẓl's remark in the *Preface*, if taken at face value chronologically, suggests the distribution began in the late 1580s while the surviving manuscripts and the exchange between Murād and Akbar show it took place from the 1590s.[21] This confirms our earlier conclusion in Chapter 3.2 that Abū al-Faẓl's statement about copies being taken to "different corners of the world" was a later insertion into his script.

The nature of the historical record makes it difficult to know what readers outside the royal circle made of the *Razmnāmah* as copies came into their hands in last decade of the sixteenth century and beyond. One clue is found in the *Preface* itself in the statement that has drawn our attention immediately above. Abū al-Faẓl says that "According to what I heard from people . . . *mahā* means 'great' and *bhārata* means 'war'." Subsequently, 'experts' disabused him of this interpretation and he learnt that the title came from the name of king Bharata. This explanation shows an understanding that had emerged outside the court

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19 Chapter 2, 20 (printed text).

20 See *MT* 2: 319–21. Cited in Ali, "Translations of Sanskrit Works," 40, whose translation we follow. We have given the full passage from the *MT* above in Chapter 1.4.

21 Illustrated copies are explored in Seyller, "Model and Copy: The Illustration of Three "Razmnāma" Manuscripts," *Archives of Asian Art* 38 (1985): 37–66. If we follow Losty, *Art of the Book*, 124 then the illustrated *Razmnāmah* of 1599 in the BL was made for ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān (1556–1627 CE), the son of Bayrām Khān, for whom see Corinne Lefèvre, "ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Khān", *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE* (2009), s.v., edited by Kate Fleet et al, retrieved March 2022.

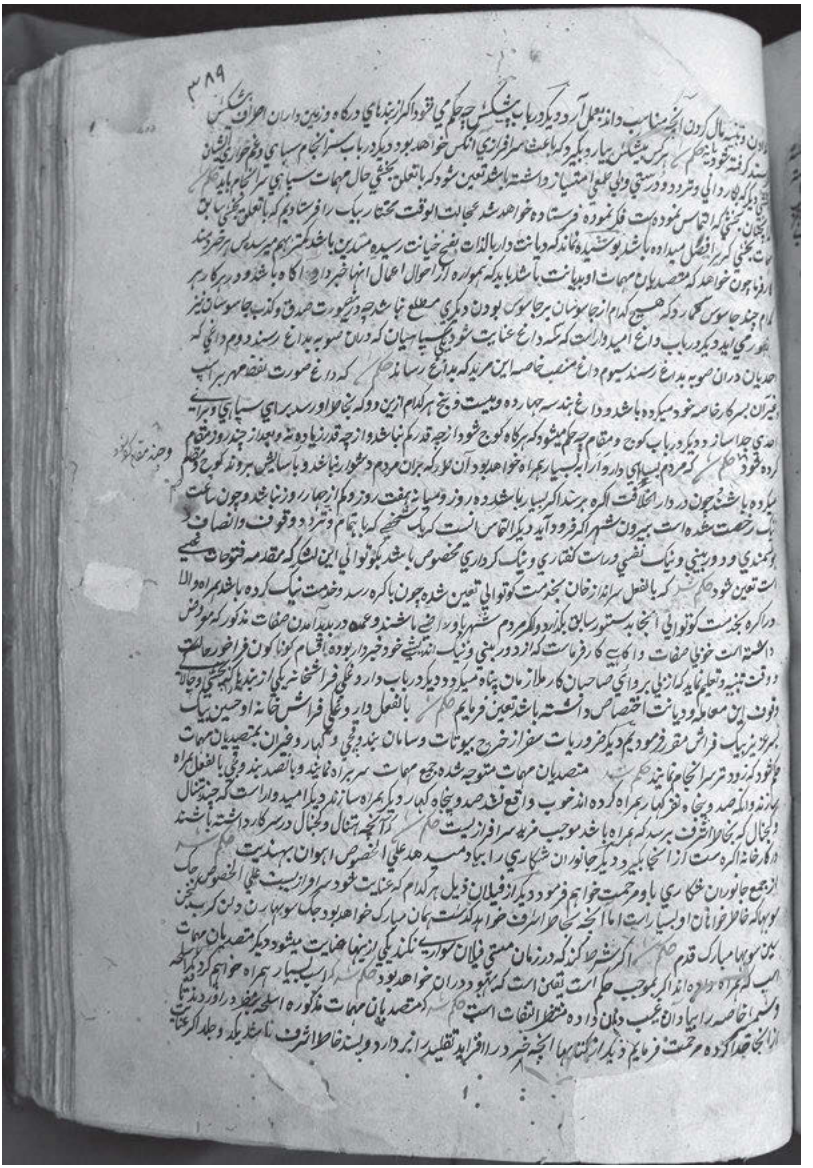

Figure 12: *Akbarnāmah*. BL Add. 27247, folio 403r, dated Dhū al-Qaʿdah AH 1080/March-April, 1670 CE, the last lines of this folio and the first of the following recording the exchange between Akbar and his son Murād about the *Razmnāmah*. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

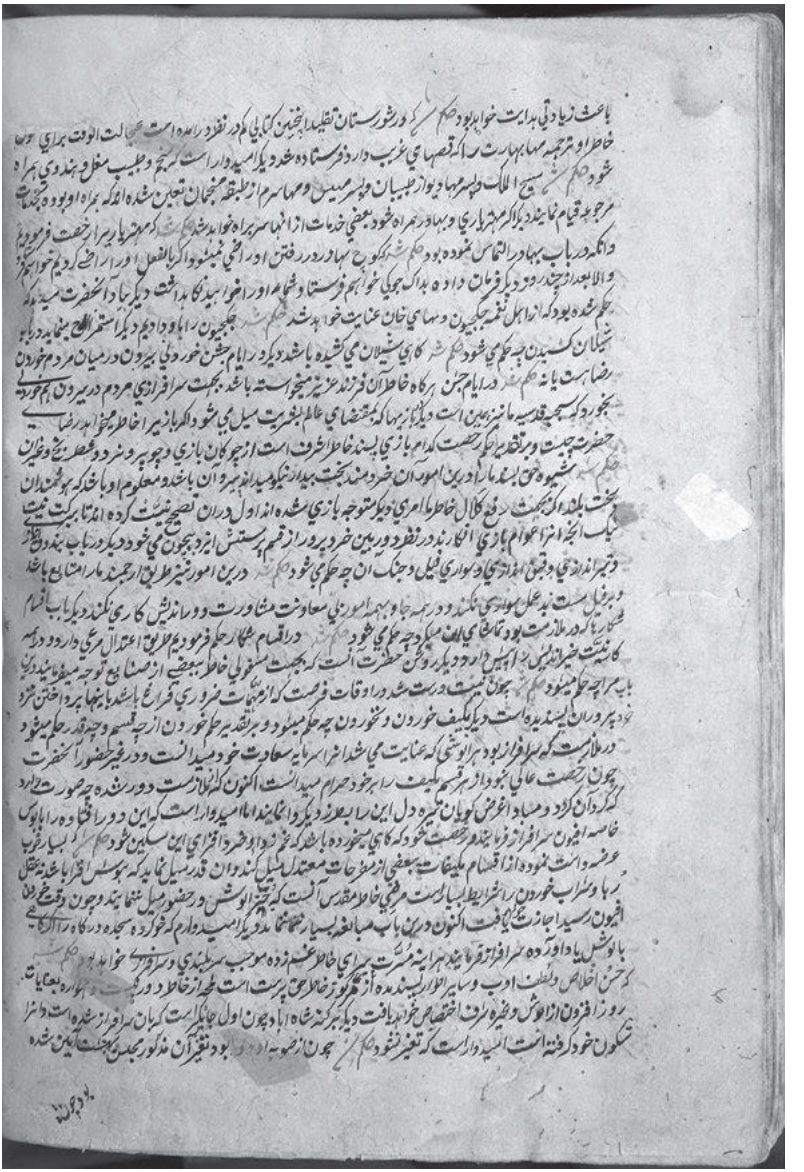

Figure 13: *Akbarnāmah*. BL Add. 27247, folio 403v, dated Dhū al-Qaʿdah AH 1080/March-April, 1670 CE. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

and the *maktab khānah*. The general notion that Abū al-Faẓl picked up from hearsay represents a popular idea that circulated as the text became known and, we may perhaps suppose, increasingly available. These people – Persian speakers and evidently important enough for Abū al-Faẓl to take notice of them – were attempting to harmonise the titles *Mahābhārata* and *Razmnāmah*. Their understanding was countered by 'experts', so in some sense Abū al-Faẓl is setting the record straight. That Akbar came up with the Persian title for the translation is testified independently by Badāʾūnī who says that "His Majesty named the work *Razmnāmah*."[22] Abū al-Faẓl says the same in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*.[23] Badāʾūnī's work was not, however, in open circulation in the sixteenth century and much of what he said only became known at a later date, for example, the role played by Mullā Shīrī in the translation.[24] The *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* suffered no such embargo. So the idea that Bhārata means 'war' was circulating in the sixteenth century among those who did not have access to the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*. In any event, thanks to Abū al-Faẓl's account of this particular issue, the explanation moved with manuscript copies of the *Preface* and we find it in the *Tārīkh-i Firishtah*, as noted in Chapter 3.

Further responses to the *Razmnāmah* could be mapped from the copies that were made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but such an exploration would take us beyond the stated aims of the present work.[25] Turning back to the *Preface* as it stands, we find a reaction to the Sanskrit text in the Parvan summaries. These are all simple summaries, except for the account of the Anuśāsana Parvan where we read as follows:[26]

> The thirteenth Parvan is called Anuśāsana Parvan; it is also called Dharma Parvan. It is about Bhīṣma describing various alms and charities. It appears to me that the twelfth and thirteenth Parvans should have been made one Parvan, since both consist of Bhīṣma Pitāmaha's advices. The ninth Parvan, however, should have been made two Parvans: one of them Śalya Parvan, about Śalya's combat and death, and the other Duryodhana Parvan, about Duryodhana's affairs. In this regard, I have not heard any explanation from any Brahmin that would be of any use, until I heard from some expert of this region that in some

22 The passage is given in full in Chapter 1.

23 See *AA* 1: 96–7 under *Āʾīn* 34, the passage given in full in Chapter 1.

24 Chapter 1.4. According to S. H. Hodivala in *Muntakhabu-'t-tawārīkh*, Badāʾūnī's text was not "made public until the accession of Jahāngīr," xvii. The first citations of Badāʾūnī after Akbar are reserved for a future study.

25 An entry into later readings of the *Razmnāmah* is found in Abhishek Kaicker, *The King and the People: Sovereignty and Popular Politics in Mughal Delhi* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020). We have hinted at future areas for research in the appendix by Muntazir Ali at the end of this volume.

26 Chapter 2, 39 (printed text).

> manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata*, it is exactly the way as I have thought, except that instead of Duryodhana Parvan it is referred to as Gadā Parvan. It contains 8,000 ślokas.

This statement presages the Indological controversy about the antiquity of the Anuśāsana Parvan inaugurated by E. Washburn Hopkins in 1903 and still active in the work of James L. Fitzgerald and other scholars.[27] The nature of the present debate is less critical than the historical fact that difficulties were noted in the sixteenth century among Sanskrit pundits and that these problems were sufficiently known to be mentioned in the Persian summary. The comment about Duryodhana Parvan and Gadā Parvan is also noteworthy. There is, of course, no Duryodhana Parvan in the *Mahābhārata*, perhaps surprising given he is a key enemy of the Paṇḍavas. Duryodhana's death is recounted in the ninth book, the Śalya Parvan.[28] He meets his end in combat with Bhīma who smashes his thighs with a club (*gadā*). What the Persian summary is saying is that the structure is not quite right. The twelfth and thirteenth Parvans should be combined, while the ninth Parvan – Śalya Parvan – should be divided. The Śalya Parvan has sub-sections, one of which is Gadāyuddha Parva – the Parvan of the Club Battle – and the Persian summary is suggesting that this should have been separated to make its own chapter.[29]

These observations surely register a discussion between members of the translation team and Naqīb Khān about the structure of the Parvans.[30] It would appear that Abū al-Faẓl was party to these conversations and imported this into the *Preface*. That it was Abū al-Faẓl that did this is shown by the way he recycled the analysis in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*. There, in the account of the province of Delhi, he gives a summary of the *Mahābhārata*. The source is revealed by Abū al-Faẓl's remark that: "In my judgment, the twelfth and thirteenth Parvans should be put together because they both contain the counsels of Bhīṣma, and the ninth divided into two, one dealing with the episodes of Śalya and the other with the death of Yudhiṣṭhira."[31] As will be apparent, this depends on the discussion of

27 E. Washburn Hopkins, "Epic Chronology," *JAOS* 24 (1903): 7–56; James L. Fitzgerald, "Negotiating the Shape of 'Scripture': New Perspectives on the Development and Growth of the Mahābhārata between the Empires," in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 259. The debates continue: Naama Shalom, *Re-Ending the Mahābhārata: The Rejection of Dharma in the Sanskrit Epic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017).

28 Chapter 2, 38 (printed text).

29 We do not think this refers to the Mausala Parvan (Mausla also means 'club'), for which Chapter 2, 40 (printed text).

30 Chapter 1.4 and 1.5.

31 See *AA* 2: 285.

the Anuśāsana Parvan in the *Preface*. It shows, quite importantly, that the text of the *Preface* as presently constituted was known and used by Abū al-Faẓl, even if he was not responsible directly for the assessment of the epic structure. An examination of commentaries on the *Mahābhārata* from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as that by Arjuna Miśra, may eventually locate a textual source for the discussions that are mentioned here.[32]

4.3 Patron and Power on the Plains of Hindustān

Our final question centres round Abū al-Faẓl's relationship to Akbar as his king and patron and what this meant in and for social and political power in northern India. Abū al-Faẓl's pen portrait of Akbar takes up much of the *Preface* and his celebration of him as an all-seeing monarch springs from his vision of kingship and his attempt to constitute that kingship. But as Peter Hardy has concluded, Abū al-Faẓl offered neither philosophy nor political philosophy for Mughal India. In Abū al-Faẓl's representation, Akbar was "no more than a focal point through which rays from the lamps of different traditions pass before dispersing, never to come together again."[33] Hardy sees Abū al-Faẓl as "an eclectic, but one who does not go beyond syncretism to synthesis. Therefore . . . the ideas that Abul Fazl gathers around the figure of Akbar are unlikely to compel intellectual assent from those well-educated in their own traditions." Those likely to be convinced were "those who wanted to be convinced and this from other than intellectual or religious motives."[34] In the final analysis, Hardy concludes:[35]

> The figure of Akbar as a ruler seems not to stand as the integration of an interlocked set of intellectual propositions, nor to stand as a rational conclusion reached by inference from data according to a set of axioms which do not change, or are not changed, in the course of the exercise. Akbar's ontological status as a receptacle of divine light, as a lord of the realms of outward form and inner meaning has not, in the manner that Abul Fazl characterizes it, any heuristic value. Whatever Akbar is, is for the best; whatever Akbar does is for the best; but the best is what, from moment to moment, Akbar is and does.

32 P. K. Gode, "Arjuna Miśra," *Indian Culture* 2, no. 1 (1935): 141–46.
33 Hardy, "Abu'l-Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah," 124.
34 Ibid., 124.
35 Ibid., 131.

The weakness of Abū al-Faẓl as a thinker had implications for his influence in his own time and after. As Hardy notes:[36]

> After Akbar's accession the chiefs and pillars of the sultanate took the oath of loyalty on their faith in God, having performed *bai'a*. It is unlikely then that Abul Fazl's style and vocabulary with all its Islamic resonances, deliberately produced, could do other than indicate to educated non-Muslim readers that though they might perhaps understand something of Abul Fazl's world, they could not make it wholly their own. A hope of participation in, rather than of identification with, that world, is likely to have been the most that Abul Fazl's prose could engender – even among those non-Muslims who could read it for themselves.

In the final analysis, Abū al-Faẓl's virtuoso performance could be carried off only by the performer for whom it was written – Akbar. No one, whether historian, writer on government or poet, seems to have claimed direct inspiration from Abū al-Faẓl's script, even though many manuscript copies of it were made through the eighteenth century.[37] An illustrative text in this context is the *Dabistān-i Madhāhib* which parallels the *Preface* in its account of the *yuga* system (Chapter 2, 24, printed text), notably where it says that current Brahmā is believed to be one in more than a thousand in a series. But the differences otherwise indicate that the *Dabistān* is drawing on different sources.[38] And although Akbar remained an important memory, he was not viewed with unalloyed admiration. Later portraits show the king old and frail, long past his prime (Figure 14). Such images are suffused with melancholy and were painted for those who mused on Akbar's time from the turbulent days of the eighteenth century.

From these larger questions about Abū al-Faẓl and political philosophy, I would like to turn to a few specific questions that the *Preface* prompts. Perhaps one of the most interesting for those studying Mughal translations is what we might call the proto-history of the text. To put the matter in the interrogative: "How did Akbar come to know the *Mahābhārata*?" For Abū al-Faẓl, the whole enterprise was clearly Akbar's idea: "Therefore the bountiful mind [of Akbar] decided that this book . . . should be translated into a quickly understood language."[39] Akbar's reason for wanting the translation were also given: "Therefore, when with his perfect comprehension he found that the squabbling of sects of the

36 Ibid., 130–31.

37 Ibid., 137. This is Hardy's view but perhaps it should be modified in light of the examples cited in Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*.

38 The *Dabistān*, outside the compass of the present study, is explored in Aditya Behl, "Pages from the Book of Religions: Encountering Difference in Mughal India," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern South Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800*, edited by Sheldon Pollock (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 210–29.

39 Chapter 2, 19 (printed text).

Figure 14: Akbar (d. 1605). BM 1974,0617,0.17.12, detail of the emperor in old age, from a Deccani album of miscellanea, eighteenth century. Transferred to the British Museum in 1974 from the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books, BL, originally Or. 2787. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Muslim community and groups of the Hindus increased, and their refutation of each other grew beyond bounds, his subtle mind resolved that the revered books of both groups should be translated into the tongue of the other."[40] That Akbar was the prime mover is corroborated by Badāʾūnī who reports as follows:[41]

> Now he ordered those Hindu books, which holy and sober sages had written, and were all clear and convincing proofs, and which were the very pivot on which all their religion, and faith and holiness turned, to be translated from the Indian into the Persian language, and thought to himself, "Why should I not have them done in my name? For they are by no means trite, but quite fresh, and they will produce all kinds of fruits of felicity both temporal and spiritual, and will be the cause of circumstance and pomp, and will ensure an abundance of children and wealth, as is written in the preface of these books." Accordingly, he became much interested in the work, and having assembled the learned men of India, His Majesty directed that the book *Mahābhārata* should be translated. For some nights His Majesty personally explained it to Naqīb Khān. On the third night His Majesty summoned me, and ordered me to translate it, in collaboration with Naqīb Khān.

40 Chapter 2, 18 (printed text).

41 The full text of this passage is given in Chapter 1.4.

This statement shows that Akbar already knew the *Mahābhārata*, and had fairly developed ideas about its worth. But how, in the first place, did he come to know the story? This is revealed in the *Preface* where it is mentioned in passing that: "The narrators of this story and the transmitters of this tradition, who are the registrars of events and the local chiefs of occurrences, relate that in the second half of the *Dvāpara yuga*, in the town of Hastināpura of India, there was a king named Bharata, who reigned over his people with justice."[42] We have already had occasion to quote this passage. In addition to what it has revealed already, this remark shows that there were professional bards who travelled the country reciting the *Mahābhārata*. A warrant for this comes from the *Caurāsīvaiṣṇavan kī vārtā*. In this work it is recounted how Padmanabh Dās, a Brahmin from Kannauj, had supported his family by discoursing on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, but after he heard a Vallabha preceptor explain that the text should not be used for one's income, he gave up the profession and turned instead to reciting the *Mahābhārata* for a local king.[43] That these professional reciters circulated in the Mughal court – and exposed the young Akbar to the text – can be inferred from Badāʾūnī's vitriolic remark about the king's vegetarian tendencies and his banning of the slaughter of animals on certain days: "The origins of this embargo was this: that from his tender years onwards the Emperor had been much in the company of rascally Hindus, and thence a reverence for the cow . . . became firmly fixed in his mind."[44] That 'company' extended to the conjugal: by all accounts Mariam al-Zamānī was the daughter of a Hindu ruler of Amber and, since the time of James Tod at least, has been known as Jodha Bai.[45] If indeed Akbar was married to this Hindu princess in 1562 CE, there can be little doubt that she would have encouraged him to take a more favourable view of India and the king's non-Muslim subjects.[46]

This court context, particularly the influences on Akbar at a formative stage, can be inferred from the manuscripts that belonged to noble women in the inner circle. We have not traced a copy of the *Razmnāmah* to women at

42 Chapter 2, 26 (printed text).

43 Orsini, "Inflected *Kathas*: Sufis and Krishna Bhaktas in Awadh," in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, 199

44 See *MT* 2: 302.

45 Satish Chandra, "Jodha Bai – Who Is She?" *Indian Historical Review* 35, no. 2 (July 2008): 237–39. Schimmel et al, *Empire of the Great Mughals*, 143 accepts the received opinion.

46 The role of women was mapped at an early stage in Rekha Misra, *Women in Mughal India, 1526–1748 A.D.* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967) and Schimmel et al, *Empire of the Great Mughals,* all of chapter 5*;* Balabanlilar, *Imperial Identity in Mughal Empire* gives attention to women in the royal lineage but the most helpful guide is Tahera Aftab, *Inscribing South Asian Muslim Women: An Annotated Bibliography & Research Guide* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

court, but we should not be surprised if such a manuscript was found given that Ḥamīda Bānū Begam – Akbar's mother and Humāyūn's Persian queen – owned a number of books, including a copy of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Figures 15, 16).[47] Held in high regard by Akbar and titled Mariam Makānī (as noted in Chapter 3), her views and tastes had a substantial impact. Whether these courtly women inclined Akbar to the epic stories we may never know, but certainly illustrated copies of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* were in the royal library and accessible to Akbar and his successor Jahāngīr, the latter commenting directly on the pages in his own hand.[48]

With the epic stories being told at court by bards, and manuscripts written, illustrated, known and read, we are left, finally, to consider how the Mughals thought about the epic and its 'strange tales' – as Akbar described the *Mahābhārata* to his son Murād. While the stories were certainly understood as a mix of ancient history and astonishing myth, they were known equally to recount events that occurred in northern India. This is shown in the summary given in the *Preface*.[49]

> After much discussion, the Kauravas brought the Pāṇḍavas to Hastināpura, their capital, showering them with kindness and seeking to please their lost kin. After performing their obligations as hosts, on account of the requirements of kinship and friendship they divided their territory into two brotherly parts. Laying down the trap of love, they gave Indraprastha, by which Delhi is meant, with half of their territory to the Pāṇḍavas, while keeping Hastināpura and the other half under their own control.

Indraprastha is generally said to be marked by the archaeological mound on which the Old Fort in Delhi was constructed in the sixteenth century. The mention of Delhi, no matter where Indraprastha may have really stood, shows that the epic was seen as set in the Mughal dominion and that the Mughal capital occupied the same place as the Pāṇḍava capital. Abū al-Faẓl elaborates this with perfect clarity in his account of the province of Delhi in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*.[50] Epic ground was, in essence, Mughal ground. What's more, the equations of place extended to equations of person: the *Razmnāmah* and *Vijayapraśastimahākāya* drew poetic parallels between Akbar and Karṇa, the hero in the *Mahābhārata* whose father is

47 For Ḥamīda Bānū Begam's books, including the *Rāmāyaṇa* dated 1594 CE, see Leach, *Paintings from India* (London: Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1998): 40–49; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," lists six books that belonged to her. Three pages from the dispersed *Rāmāyaṇa* are in the David Collection, Copenhagen; others are in the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha.

48 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library," 308, revisited in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 210.

49 Chapter 2, 28 (printed text).

50 See *AA* 2: 278–85, also noted in the section just above.

Sūrya, the god of the sun.[51] Badāʾūnī gives his own sceptical view of these literary equations and the motivations behind them.[52]

> Cheating, thieving Brahmins collected . . . one thousand and one names of "His Majesty the Sun," and told the emperor that he was an incarnation, like Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and other infidel kings who, though lords of the world, had assumed human shape in order to play with the people on earth. In order to flatter him, they also brought Sanskrit verses, said to have been taken from the sayings of ancient sages, in which it was predicted that a great conqueror would rise up in India, who would honour Brahmins and cows, and govern the earth with justice. They wrote such nonsense on old looking paper and showed it to the emperor, who believed every word of it.

Sanskrit works written under Akbar mirror these claims. The *Allopaniṣad*, written about 1580, is a short composition of ten verses in an archaic style that plays heavily on the word 'great' – the literal meaning of Akbar's name – and twice invokes the celebrated phrase *Alláhu Akbar* in a punning style.[53] Likewise, as noted in Chapter 3, Abū al-Faẓl opens his praise of Akbar in the *Razmnāmah* with a sentence that involves a play on the word on 'great' and describes Akbar as an absolute guide and rightly-guided Mahdī.[54] The *Preface* also gives hints that parallels were being drawn between Akbar and Kṛṣṇa. Abū al-Faẓl tells us that Akbar had been ruling for thirty-two years when he prepared his composition and this number appears again in the account of how Kṛṣṇa ruled for thirty-two years.[55] With vocabulary similar to that used to praise Akbar, he says that "because of his (i.e. Kṛṣṇa's) perfect nature and wisdom, many people believed him, set their hearts upon his actions and became his followers." The *Pārasīprakāśa*, a grammar written by Kṛṣṇadās, is more explicit. This praises Akbar as Viṣṇu embodied, an incarnation of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, whose name "is celebrated throughout the ocean of *śāstra*, *smṛti* and *itihāsa*."[56] A more precise connection with the epics – both deemed *itihāsa* in the Indic tradition – could not be expected. Like the British nobles of the eighteenth century who sought to give their lives a classical frame within the moral compass of the Christian faith, so too the early Mughals looked to the pagan past for inspiration and antique wisdom while remaining in the Muslim fold.

Let it not be hidden, however, that the response to these metaphors was mixed. Badāʾūnī's discomfiture has already drawn our attention repeatedly. Outside the

51 *Vijayapraśastimahākāya* 12: 142–45, cited in Truschke, "Dangerous Debates," 1326.
52 See *MT* 2: 326; Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 39.
53 Discussed in Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 40 with relevant references.
54 Chapter 2, 3–4 (printed text).
55 Chapter 2, 16 and 32 (printed text).
56 Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 39.

Figure 15: *Rāmāyaṇa.* David 016-1992, page from the illustrated copy owned by Ḥamīda Bānū Begam, Akbar's mother, now dispersed, end of the sixteenth century. Courtesy of the David Collection, Copenhagen.

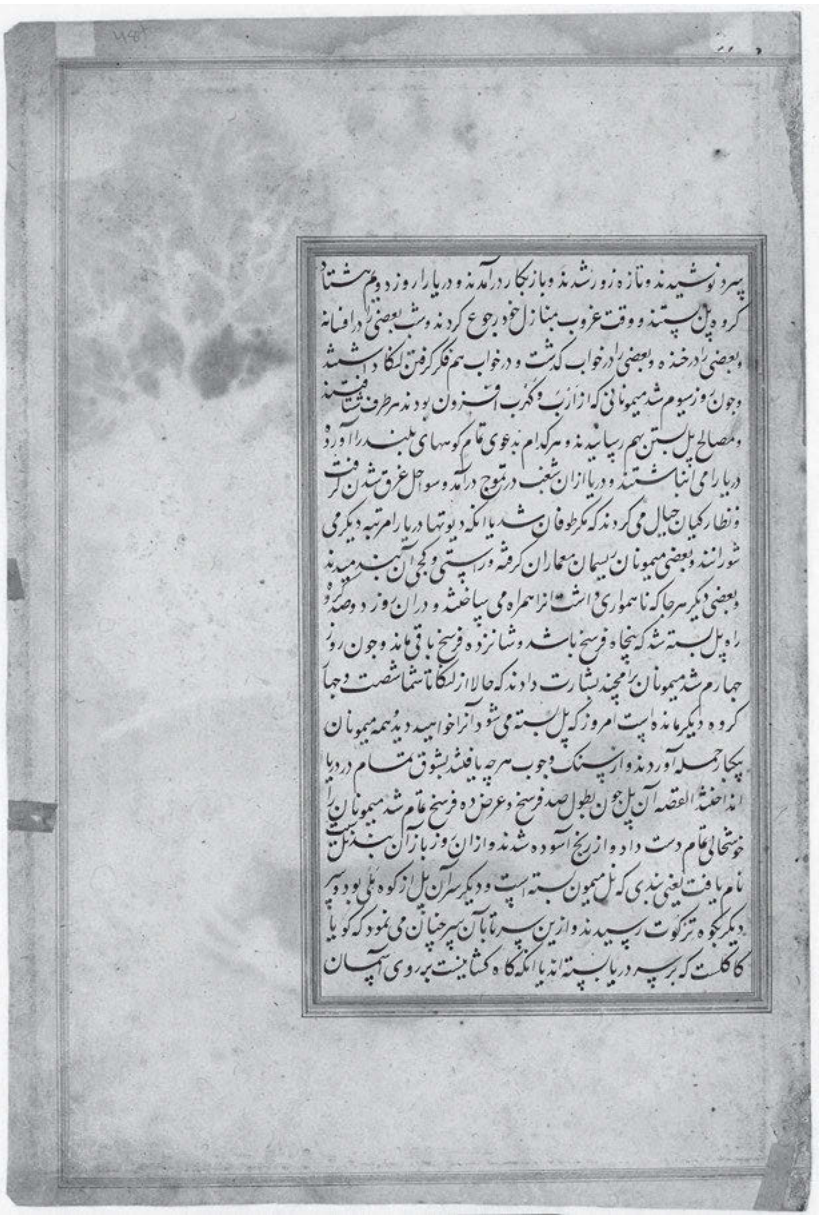

Figure 16: *Rāmāyaṇa*. David 016-1992, reverse showing text, end of the sixteenth century. Courtesy of the David Collection, Copenhagen.

scope of his *Muntakhab*, there were other opposing voices, found even the compass of the *Preface* in the British Library copy, a manuscript that was in the royal library as we have seen.[57] In the first place, and following the discussion just given, the account of Kṛṣṇa is openly hostile with his life not being called "auspicious," but rather "unwholesome."[58] And the brief summary of the *Harivaṃśa* does not end by saying that "he spent thirty-two years in Mathurā in absolute authority." Rather, "he spent thirty-two years in Mathurā in debauchery" – a fair enough description for those sceptical about Kṛṣṇalīlā and Kṛṣṇa's sexual antics. As for Kṛṣṇa himself, he was no "chief of the great men of the world and head of the righteous of humankind," but rather "the head of the cheats of the world and chief of the tricksters of humankind."

These readings in the *Preface* bring us to an important understanding of the British Library manuscript. There are a number of places where this copy distances itself from the equation of Akbar with God, such as the moment where Abū al-Faẓl launches into his praise of Akbar saying *Alláhu Akbar*. Here the scribe of the British Library copy has left a blank and not copied these words and also dropped the immediately preceding phrase: "In praise of the great king of kings, Abū al-Muẓaffar Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Akbar, the champion king – may God make his kingdom endure!"[59] All this was just too close for comfort. A few lines above this, a corrective sentence has also been inserted, as noted by Hajnalka Kovacs in Chapter 2.[60] This seeks to point out that should God's all-encompassing grace touch a common person in this life, it will do so only at the moment of death. This statement (something that "is not concealed from discerning, far seeing eyes") effectively cancels Abū al-Faẓl's preceding comments about what happens to some "troubled soul" who by happenstance becomes "a seer of hidden secrets." Although Abū al-Faẓl was using this to highlight his own position and to cast aspersions on the clerical elite, the inserted sentence dismisses the whole proposition. Finally, it appears that the month in the British Library manuscript has been changed. It is clearly written as Shaʿbān, but the other copy – with miniature paintings by artists known to have contributed to royal manuscripts – reads 9 Ramaḍān with equal clarity, a date that fell on Friday 14 September 1584 (Figure 7). It thus seems that in the mind of the person behind the British Library copy, the holy month could hardly be graced with such a questionable product, never mind a Friday.

This conflicted view is not surprising once the door of *taḥqīq* has been opened. If critical analysis is admitted, we are under no obligation to give credence to

57 Chapter 1.5 and appendix 1.
58 For the different reading here and immediately following, Chapter 2, 32, (printed text), notes.
59 Chapter 2, 4 (printed text).
60 Chapter 2, 3 (printed text).

the "strange propositions" we find in the *Mahābhārata* – as even Abū al-Faẓl is willing to describe them.[61] And Abū al-Faẓl knows full well that some readers will judge the philosophical propositions in the *Mahābhārata* to be manifestly false or, at the very least, unreliable. As he says, some "sharp minds do not hesitate to take them to be false; half of them (i.e. the propositions) are of the kind that men of intelligence cross them out after careful consideration, dismissing them as unreliable."[62] Such minds were active in Abū al-Faẓl's time, as their mention by him obviously shows. And what is especially remarkable is that these people were able to infiltrate their views into a copy of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* in the royal collection. We can draw, therefore, a faltering (and still uncharted line) from the British Library version of the *Preface* to works like 'Umar Miḥrābī's *Ḥujjat al-Hind*, the latter a sharp critique of the beliefs and rituals of the Hindus.[63] As noted by Annemarie Schimmel, Miḥrābī drew passages from the *Mirṣād al-'Ibāḍ* of 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (b. 1177), while other elements point anachronistically to the fourteenth century.[64] The oldest manuscripts belong to the seventeenth century – the likely date of the composition – and there are seven copies, so far unstudied, in the library collections in Britain. The frame story is a fable involving a prince who falls in love with a princess named Damyati, daughter of Nal Rāe, king of Naldrug, names that reference the story of Nala and Damayantī, translated most famously into Persian by Fayẓī in the sixteenth century.[65] Part of the *Mahābhārata*, the Nala story is traditionally set in Narwar (Nalapura) in central India and Miḥrābī, as part of his ambition to add authority to the text, represents it as a translation of a lost Sanskrit original.

For the Mughals, then, the relationship with ancient India remained problematic. The British elite in the eighteenth century may have taken delightful refuge in classical stories set in sun-drenched places far away, but for the Mughals, the

61 Chapter 2, 24 (printed text).

62 Chapter 2, 20 (printed text).

63 For which Peter Gaeffke in "How a Muslim looks at Hindu Bhakti," in *Devotional Literature in South Asia: Current Research, 1985–1988: Papers of the Fourth Conference on Devotional Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages, Held at Wolfson College, Cambridge, 1–4 September 1988*, ed. R. S. McGregor (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 80–87. The work finds mention in surveys, for example, Omar H. Ali, *Islam in the Indian Ocean World* (Boston: St. Martin's, 2016); Ernst, *Refractions of Islam in India: Situating Sufism and Yoga* (New Delhi: Sage, 2016), 256–57. A passage is translated, we presume by Peter Hardy, in William Theodore De Bary, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958): 401–02.

64 Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 253.

65 Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Love, passion and reason in Faizi's Nal-Daman," in *Love in South Asia: A Cultural History*, ed. Francesca Orsini (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 109–41.

epic past was rather more than a suite of literary conceits, never mind reflections on political power in distant lands. The *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* were about India itself and about great kingdoms that had been lost and regained there. The Pāṇḍavas won the war but the price was so terrible that the country was hardly worth inhabiting; the pomp of Rāja Rāma's return from exile was compromised by rumours about his wife's fidelity and his honour. This cut close to the quick. The Mughals knew well that they ruled a place where an epic bloodbath had taken place and they knew also that they been chased from their throne by a wily usurper. Returning from exile and wandering, would they – like their ancient forerunners – succumb to bickering, civil war and fratricide? Would they see their exalted womenfolk denigrated and themselves dying one by one in a tragic manner? Would their great king end his days grief-stricken, old and lonely? For the Mughals, therefore, the epics were not just vehicles for imperial ideology and rollicking good tales, they were terrible warnings of what might come and a dark reminder of the fraught nature of power on the plains of Hindustān.

John Seyller

Appendix 1
Notations in British Library *Razmnāmah* Add. 5642

The British Library copy of the *Razmnāmah* dated AH 1007 has three notations and seals at the foot of folio 481v that are hitherto unstudied and published here for the first time (Figure 17). The intent of the inscriptions is clear: to record a change in the librarian charged with custody of the book on a particular date and to assign a specific monetary valuation to the manuscript.[1] Apart from the fragmentary and illegible seals, the only ambiguity arises in the valuation in the lower right, where the mark after the word *nim* (half) should logically be *anna* (as in a valuation of 47 rupees and half an *anna*), though the orthography does not readily yield this exact reading.

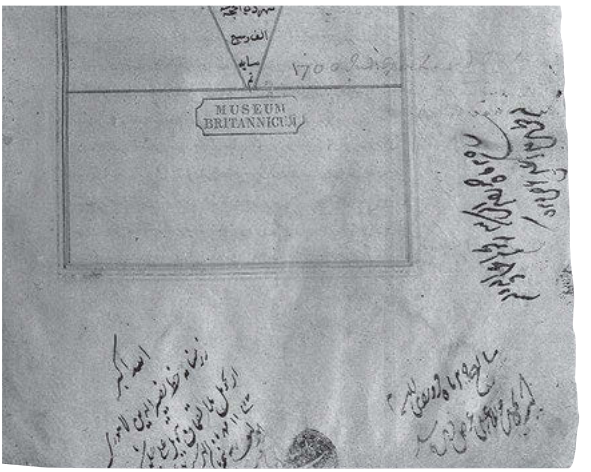

Figure 17: *Razmnāmah*. BL Add. 5641-5642, folio 481v, detail of figure 5 above, showing library notations and seals. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

The regnal years included in these notations can be placed to the reigns of Akbar or Jahāngīr because the names the three librarians mentioned on this folio – ʿAli Ḥakīm, Luqmān, and Iʿtimād al-Dawlāh – occur in other inspection notes from the last years of Akbar's reign (ʿAli in RY 49) and from the first five years of Jahāngīr's

1 See Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts."

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110501520-005

reign: Mullā ʿAli (RY 1, 2, 3, 4, 5); Luqmān (RY 40 and 47 of Akbar's reign, and RY 5 of Jahāngīr's reign); Iʿtimād al-Dawlāh (RY 3 and 5 of Jahāngīr's reign).[2] In one instance, Luqmān is described as librarian of the royal books (*khāṣṣa*).[3] The use of the Iranian Ilāhī calendar is characteristic of inspection notes written in the last third of Akbar's reign and the beginning of Jahāngīr's reign. The valuation of 47 rupees would be consistent with a third-class categorisation of the manuscript.[4] The notations show that this copy of the *Razmnāmah* was in the royal library until at least 1609; it seems likely that it passed to the family of Shā'istah Khān in the second half of the seventeenth century, under whose patronage the table of contents was added, as noted in Chapter 1.

The notations can be translated as follows:

(bottom, lower right)

On the date of the 29th of the month of Farwardīn Ilāhī year 2 (8 April 1607) it was inspected by Mullā ʿAli.

Seal (partial impression, undeciphered).

(upper right, written along the side of the folio)

Inspected (or transferred) on the date of the 25th of the month of Khurdād Ilāhī year 3 (31 May 1608) to the custody of Iʿtimād al-Dawlāh from the custody of Mullā ʿAli.

Seal (partial impression, illegible).

(bottom, lower left)

God is great. *Razmnāmah* in the writing of Nāṣir al-Dīn Lahorī, it was [transferred] from the custody of Mullā Luqmān to the custody of ʿAli Ḥakīm on the date of the 11th of the month of Mihr Ilāhī year 4 (3 October 1609). Value 47 rupees [and] half [an anna].

2 Ibid., 347.
3 Ibid., 248.
4 Ibid., 275.

Muntazir Ali

Appendix 2
Colophon of the Jaipur *Razmnāmah* and its Seals and notations

The royal copy of the *Razmnāmah*, finished in 1586 as noted in Chapter 1, has not been accessible to scholars for more than a century, however a photograph of the colophon is available and is published here in Figure 18. As can be seen this illustration, the page carries a number of seals and notations. These were first published in M. A. Chaghatai, "The Illustrated edition of the Razm nama (Persian version of the Mahābhārata) at Akbar's Court," *BDCRI* 5 (1943–44): 281–329. This was a landmark study, presaging by many decades the interest in manuscript ownership, readership and circulation. After a considerable hiatus, John Seyller continued the work in "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library," *Artibus Asiae* (1997) 57, nos. 3–4: 243–349. We have taken the opportunity of this publication to revisit the findings of both scholars, giving corrections and offering comments where appropriate. In addition, we give here a reading of the colophon text. The text proper, as can be seen in the illustration, covers most of the page, with the space for each line steadily reduced toward the end. The transcription given below follows this format for ease of reference.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110501520-006

Text

خواندن علم بجانب پاندو و بر آوردن کشن سفید مهره و جواهر و پسر استاد خود را از دریای عمان و محاصره کردن راجه
جراسنده و راجهای دیگر شهر متهره را در انتقام کنس و جنگ کشن با جراسنده آمدن اسلحه کشن با جراسنده
و رفتن کشن در دوارکا و ملاقات کردن کشن با پرسرام و رفتن کشن در کوه گومنت و محاصره کردن جراسنده
و راجها کشن را بالای کوه گومنت و کشته شدن راجه سکال بدست کشن و سلطنت دادن کشن برای پسر او
و باز آمدن کشن در شهر متهره و کشیدن بلبهدر دریای جمنه را بزور چوب قلبه و بر تخت نشاندن راجها کشن
در شهر کندن پور و مردن کال جمن از دیدن مچکند و بنای شهر دوارکا و دزدیدن کشن رُکمنی را و کشتن کشن
نُراکا سردیئت را آوردن شانزده هزار دختر که در بند او بود همه را در خانه خود نگاه داشتن
و عیش کردن کشن بآن شانزده هزار زن و خواستن کشن رُکمنی را و کشتن کشن رُکمی برادر رُکمنی
و آب بازی کردن کشن و بلبهدر با زنان خود در دریای عمان و دزدیدن کشن درخت پارجات را
از باغ اندر و بار دیگر آراستن شهر دوارکا و آمدن کشن دران شهر و مجلس آراستن و شنیدن حکایات
نارد و شرح اولاد قبیله جادونان و کشته شدن سنبردیئت بدست پَردمن و حکایت آفرین
نارد بر سنگ پشت و آفرین او بر دریای گنگ تا آخر و شرح بزرگی جگدیش
و جنگ بانا سردیئت و شرح احوال آینده که بیاس گفته است
و شرح احوال پُهکر برادر بهاو یعنی آفرینش برمها از
گل نیلوفر که از ناف جگدیش برآمده بود و باراه
برادر بهاو یعنی ظهور جگدیش بصورت خوک
و نرسنگ برادر بهاو یعنی ظهور جگدیش در قالب
آدمی و شیر ویاون برادر بهاو یعنی
ظهور جگدیش در صورت برهمن
کوتاه قد و سوختن مهادیو سه شهر
ترپر را تمام شد قصه هربنس
و هرکس خیراتی که در هربنس
گفته شد بدهد نواب
صد جگ اسمیده
بیابد این سخن را
بیاس گفته است
م

Synopsis

As can be seen from the text given above, the closing page of the Jaipur manuscript does not contain the colophon information about Naqīb Khān and the translation team found in the manuscripts of 1599 (described in Chapter 1). Rather, it ends with a condensed list of parts of the *Harivaṃśa*. Near the head of the list is Kṛṣṇa's recovery of his preceptor's son from the sea and Jarāsandha's attack on Mathurā. Further sections mentioned are the fight between Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsandha that emerged when the latter sought revenge for the killing of Kaṃsa, the visit of Kṛṣṇa to Dvāraka and the meeting with Paraśurāma, the retreat to the Gomanta hills and the capture of Jarāsandha, the assassination of king Sṛgala and the giving of the throne to his son, the return to Mathurā, the inhabitating of the city Dvāraka, the killing of the demon Naraka, the freeing 16000 women and

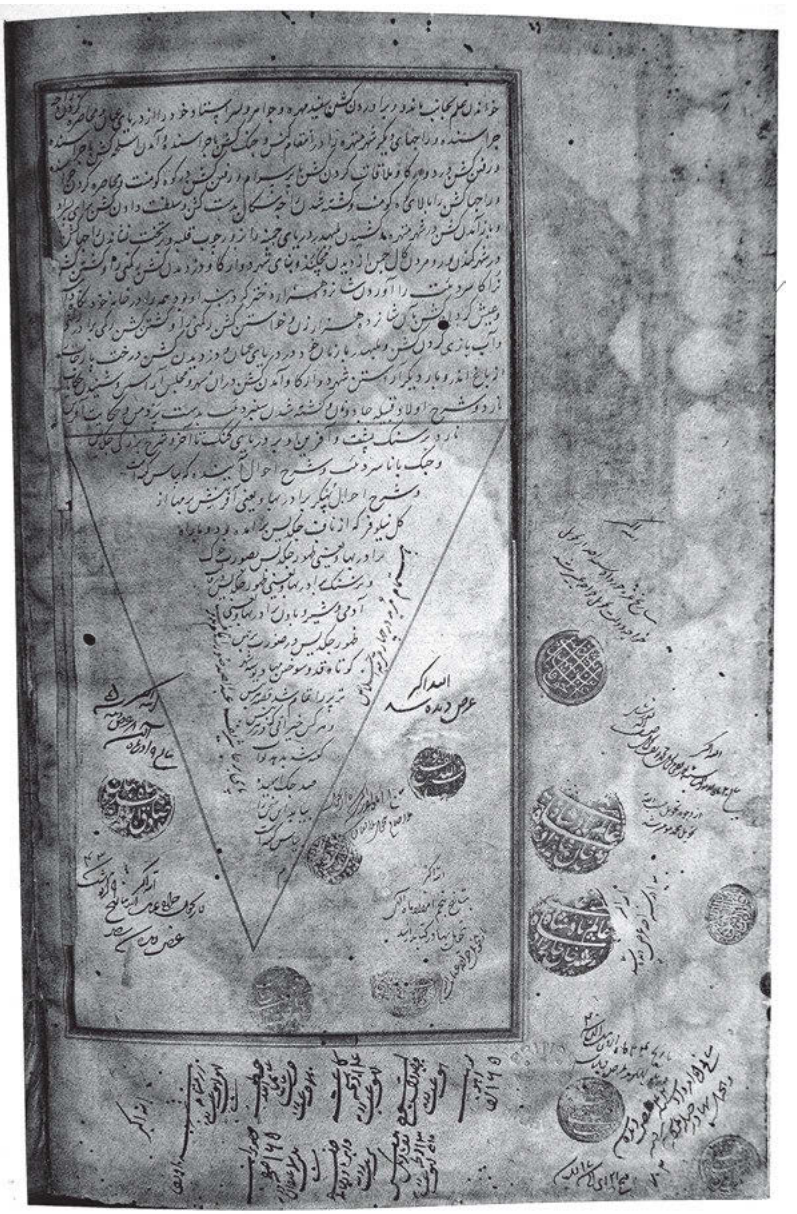

Figure 18: *Razmnāmah*. Jaipur AG 1683-AG1850, colophon of the *Razmnāmah* reported to be in the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur, completed in 1586.

the protection those women in Kṛṣṇa's home, the description of Rūkmiṇī and her brother Rukmi, the playing with the women in water, the Pārijāta tree, the re-decoration of Dvāraka, the listening to Narada concerning Dvāraka, the description of Viṣṇu, Brahmā's emergence from his navel and Viṣṇu's incarnations in the form of Varāha, Narasiṃha and Vāmana. The parts listed are truncated compared to what is available in the vulgate.[1] However important this is for the history of the *Harivaṃśa*, the present book not being a study of translation literature in Akbar's time, as noted elsewhere in this volume, the examination what forms of the text were available in the sixteenth century and what parts were selected for translation are reserved for a future time.

Seals and Notations

As noted by M. A. Chaghatai and John Seyller, the seals and notations on the colophon shed light on the procedures within the royal library, with endorsements and seals from the time of Akbar to Shāh ʿĀlam. In his account, Seyller lists the seals and notations in the earlier parts of the manuscript. However, the only illustration available to us being the colophon of one volume, our study focuses on that alone.[2]

On the lower part of the page are series of notations and seals, discussed below in approximate chronological order. Readers are referred to the accompanying key (Figure 19).

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Notation Text

On either side of the lower part of the text proper, the calligrapher has written lines that run at an angle down on each side. This text reads as follows:

1 The critical edition by P. L. Vaidya is shorter by two-thirds; for these problems see Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, all of chapter 6 is relevant.
2 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307.

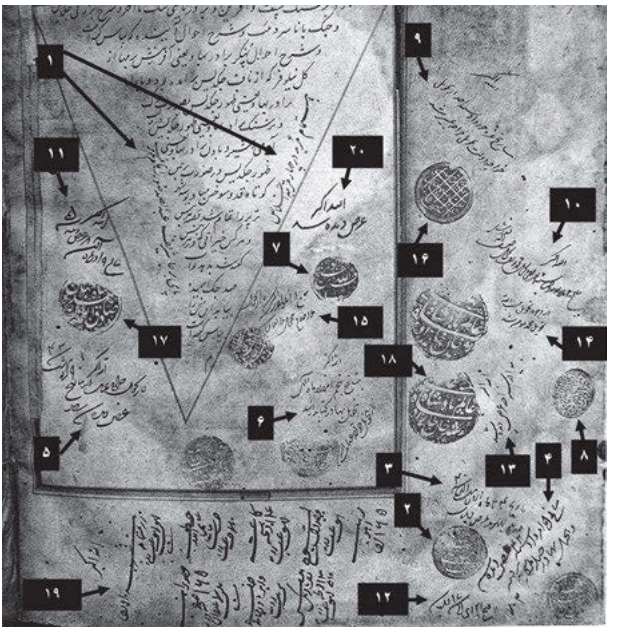

Figure 19: *Razmnāmah*. Colophon of the Jaipur *Razmnāmah* completed in 1586, key to the notations and seals.

Text

باهتمام مرید در چهار مرتبه اخلاص
پای برجا شریفِ عبدالصمد صورت اتمام پذیرفت

Translation

Completed under the management of Sharif (son of) ʿAbd al-Ṣamad, who being a disciple in the four stages of purity, is firm in the Dīn-i Ilāhī.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 287, but not coded in his plate 1. Muḥammad Sharif, who was in charge of the preparation of the manuscript, was the son of the well-known painter ʿAbd al-Ṣamad about whom much has

been written.[3] He was himself a painter in the *Razmnāmah* and subsequently enjoyed a high status under Jahāngīr. As noted by Chaghatai, Abū al-Faẓl has explained the four stages of purity as *Jān* (life), *Māl* (wealth), *Nāmus* (dignity) and *Dīn* (religion).[4] The Dīn-i Ilāhī is discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume.

٢

Seal Text

محب علي بندهٔ اكبر شاه

Translation

Muḥibb ʿAlī, servant of king Akbar

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 287, plate 1, no. 1; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. As Chaghatai observed, there are a number of people with this name in the time of Akbar, but the person indicated is ʿInāyat Allāh Muḥibb ʿAlī.[5] He was the author of a continuation of the *Akbarnāmah*, a copy of which is in the British Library. It forms the conclusion of the third volume of the *Akbarnāmah*, running from the beginning of the 47th year to the emperor's death.[6]

٣

Notation Text

بتاريخ ٢٤ ماه اردي بهشت الهي سنه ٤٠ در بلده لكهنو عرض ديد شد

3 Priscilla P. Soucek, "Persian artists in Mughal India," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 166–81; Barbara Brend, "Another Career for Mīrzā ʿAlī?" in *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East*, edited by Andrew J. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 213–35.

4 Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 287.

5 Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 287, n. 23.

6 Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, 3: 929, British Library manuscript Or. 1854.

Translation

Presented for perusal on the 24th of the month of Ārdibehsht, Ilāhī year 40 at the city of Lucknow.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 289, plate 1, no. I; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. This endorsement gives the oldest date in the colophon and corresponds to AH 1004/1595 CE. The Ilāhī era was introduced by the emperor Akbar in 992/1584. As M. Athar Ali has explained, "The first year of the Tāʾrīkh-i Ilāhī was the year of Akbar's accession, 963/1555–6, and it was a solar year beginning with Nawrūz (the day of vernal equinox, about 20 March). The names of the months were the same as those of the ancient Persian calendar. The number of days in a month varied from 29 to 32."[7] Ārdibehsht is the second month and spans western month May and June. The corresponding date is 3 May 1595.[8] The proximity of this notation to the seal of Muḥibb ʿAlī (no. ۲ above) suggests the seal is confirming this inspection and that Muḥibb ʿAlī was in charge of the manuscript at the time.

۴

Notation Text

بتاریخ ۱۵ امرداد سنه ٤٢ عرض دیده شد و بتحویل بهادر چیله نموده شد تصه

Translation

Presented for perusal on the 5th of Amordād, year 42 and entrusted to the charge of Bahādur Chela.

7 M. Athar Ali, "Ilāhī Era," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (2012), edited by P. Bearman et al, retrieved March 2022.

8 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 289, plate 1, no. II; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307; against Chaghatai 15th Seyller reads 5th with which we concur. This endorsement comes two years after inspection note ٣ and belongs to the fifth solar month, the corresponding date being July, 1597.[9] The notation reports that the manuscript was handed to a new custodian, Bahādur Chela. He was a librarian as shown in notation ٦.

٥

Notation Text

اللّٰه اكبر در تحويل خواجه عنايت اللّٰه بتاريخ ١٩ اردي بهشت سنه ٤٣ عرض ديده شد تص

Translation

God is Great. Entrusted to Khawājah ʿInāyat Allah. Presented for perusal on the 19th of Ārdibehsht, year 43.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 289, plate 1, no. III; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. This notation records that in the following year after notation ٤, the manuscript was in the custody of Khawājah ʿInāyat Allāh and presented for perusal. The corresponding date is April, 1598.[10] Given the identity given in seal ١, the individual named should be none other than Muḥibb ʿAlī.

9 Ibid., 307.
10 Ibid., 307.

۶

Notation Text

اللّٰه اکبر بتاریخ پنجم امرداد ماه الهي بتحویل بهادر کتابدار شد باز بتحویل خواجه عنایت اللّٰه شد

Translation

God is Great. On the 5th of the Ilāhī month Amordād, Khawājah ʿInāyat Allāh gave it to the charge of Bahādur the librarian and again handed back to Khawājah ʿInāyat Allāh.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 289, plate 1, no. IV; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. This notation records the handover of the manuscript to Bahādur in the Ilāhī month of Amordād which was given back to Khawājah ʿInāyat Allāh . This solar month coming after Ārdibehsht, year 43 can be presumed given the same individuals are involved. The librarian Bahādur in this note is probably the same person mentioned in notation ۴. The seal beside the notation probably authorises the transfer and may be the seal of Bahādur, but it is not legible. See related notation of ʿInāyat Allāh below.

۷

Seal Text

فتح اللّٰه ابو الفتح

Translation

Fatḥ Allāh Ābu al-Fatḥ

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 288, plate 1, no. 2; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. Chaghatai identifed Fatḥ Allāh Ābu al-Fatḥ as one of the individuals executed for conspiracy by Jahāngīr.[11] This was part of a rebellion led by Khusraw at the start of Jahāngīr's reign. The seal, if indeed of this individual, was thus added to the manuscript before 1605. The father, Ḥakim Abū al Faṭh, was an influential medic and courtier in the time of Akbar; a portrait of him survives in the Royal Collection (RCIN 1005038).

ٱ

Seal Text

آقا ملّا بديع الزّمان

Translation

Āghā Mulla Badīʿ al-Zamān

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 288, plate 1, no. 3. Chaghatai identified this seal as belonging to Āghā Mulla Badīʿ al-Zamān, mentioned in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*. [12] His father was Āghā Mulla Dawātdār and he was the father in turn of Mirzā Jaʿfar Beg.[13] Given the known dates of family members, this seal was probably added to the manuscript in the time of Akbar.

11 Beveridge, "Sultan Khusrau," *JRAS* (1907): 597–609; Alexander Rogers, trans., *The Tūzuk-i-Jahāngīrī, or, Memoirs of Jahāngīr*, edited by Henry Beveridge (London: Royal Asiatic Society,1909): 122–23.

12 Blochmann, *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, 1: 1873, 369; see also 398 in the revised 1927 edition.

13 Beale, *Oriental Biographical Dictionary*, 36, 80.

٩

Notation Text

اللّٰه اکبر بتاریخ غره خورداد سنه احد از تحویل خواجه دولت تحویل خواجه عبیر شد

Translation

God is Great. On the 1st of Khurdād year 1, Khawājah Dawlat gave it into the custody of Khawājah ʿAbir.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 290, plate 1, no. V; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. This is the first notation from the time of Jahāngīr, recording the transfer in his first regnal year (AH 1014) in the solar month of Khurdād, concurrent with the western months of May and June. Jahāngīr's first regnal year ran from October 1605 to March 1607, so the transfer took place in May 1606.[14]

١٠

Notation Text

اللّٰه اکبر بتاریخ ٢٠ ماه شهریور الهي سنه ٧ بنابر وجوه تحویل محمد یوسف تحویل حبیب اللّٰه نو ز شد

Translation

God is Great. On the 20th Shahrwar Ilāhī year 7 transferred from the custody of Muḥammad Yūsuf to that of Habīb Allāh.

14 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. For the regnal years, W. M. Thackston, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; Oxford University Press, 1999), 66.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 290, plate 1, no. VI; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. The year recorded in this notation corresponds to 11 September 1612.[15] Chaghatai identified Muḥammad Yūsuf from a reference in the *Bādshāhnāmah* of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Lāhawrī but did not give a complete reading.[16]

١١

Notation Text

بتاريخ ٩ آذر ماه الهي سنه ٨ عرض ديده شد. فقط

Translation

God is Great. On 9th Āzar year 8 presented for perusal.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 290, plate 1, no. VII; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. The date The date would have come in 1614.[17] This would have fallen in the 9th regnal year of Jahāngīr.[18]

١٢

Notation Text

بتاريخ ٢١ دي الهي سنه ١٧ ديده شد

15 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307.
16 Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 290, n. 32 citing *Bādshāhnāmah* 1, 543.
17 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307.
18 Thackston, *Jahangirnama*, 157.

Translation

On 21st Dai Ilāhī year 17, examined.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 290, plate 1, no. IX; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. The date corresponds to January 1623.[19] Beside the notation is the number 702 for which we have no exact explanation; it is perhaps an accession number of this book.

۱۳

Notation Text

اللّٰه اکبر ۳ آذر سنه احد عرض دیده شد

Translation

God is Great. On 3rd Āzar year 1 presented for perusal.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 290, plate 1, no. X; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. Chaghatai suggested this might fall in the reign of Shāh ʿĀlam; Seyller did not comment.

۱۴

Notation Text

از وجوه تحویل حبیب اللّٰه تحویل محمد مومن شد

19 Ibid., 307.

Translation

God is Great. Transferred from Habīb Allāh to Muḥammad Mū'min.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 290, plate 1, no. XI, labelled but not discussed. Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. This transfer is not dated but it shows the book passed from the hands of Habīb Allāh.

۱۵

Notation Text

بتاریخ ۱۱ ماه آذر الهي سنه ۱۵ از تحویل ملا صالح بتحویل ملا لقمان شد

Translation

On the 11th of the month of Āzar year 5 Mulla Ṣālih gave it into the custody of Mulla Luqmān.

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 290, plate 1, no. VIII; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. Chaghatai found mention of Mulla Ṣālih in the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī*, the memoirs of ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān (1556–1627).[20] The Luqmān mentioned here is the same person whose inspection notice appears in the British Library *Razmnāmah* of 1599 CE and other manuscripts up to year 5th

20 Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 290, n. 33 citing ʿAbd al-Bāqī Nahāvandī, *The Ma'āsir-i-Rahīmī*, 3 vols, ed. Hidayat Husain (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1930–31), 3: 1680.

of Jahāngīr's reign.[21] Against Chaghatai 15, Seyller read 5 with which we concur. The corresponding date is December 1615.[22]

۱۶

Seal Text

عبدالحق ابن قاسم شیرازی ۱۰۷۳

Translation

ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq son of Qāsim Shīrāzī 1037

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 288, plate 1, no. 4; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. This finely executed circular seal belongs to the well-known calligrapher ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Amānat Khān (978–1055/1570–1645).[23] He was responsible for the calligraphy on the Taj Mahal and other important buildings. Amānat Khān emigrated to India in about 1608 and was assigned calligraphic work on the tomb of Akbar at Sikandara. He worked at the royal library, as evidenced by the presence of his seals and inspection notices, and was assigned periodically to official functions. The date on the seal corresponds to 1627–28.

21 See Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," and appendix 1 in this volume.

22 Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307.

23 W. E. Begley, "Amānat Khan Šīrāzī," *Encyclopædia Iranica* I, no. 9 (1989): 923–24, retrieved March 2022; Mahbanoo Alizadeh (translated by Roxane Zand), "ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Amānat Khān," *Encyclopaedia Islamica* (2015), ed. Wilferd Madelung et al, retrieved March 2022.

١٧

Seal Text

بندهٔ شاهجهان صادق اللّٰه خان ٢٥

Translation

Ṣādiq Allāh Khān, servant of Shāh Jahān 25

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 288, plate 1, no. 5; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. The year 25 seems appear above the word اللّٰه. The corresponding date from coins is AH 1062/1651-52 CE.

١٨

Seal Text

ارشد خان خانه زاده شاه عالم پادشاه غازی سنه ۴

Translation

Arshad Khān, *khānazāda-yi* Shāh ʿĀlam Bādshāh Ghāzī

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 289, plate 1, no. 6; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. The seal, entered two times, probably belongs to year 4. Chaghatai found reference to Arshad Khān in the *Ma'athir al-'Umārā* (1: 290) and *Muntakhab al-lubāb* (2: 613).

١٩

Evaluation

اللّٰه اکبر
برآورد
زرمتامه ٠٢٤،٤ روپیه

(١) خط عنایت اللّٰه	تصویرات
٦٥--؟	١٦٥صفحه
٣٢٥روپیه	٣،٦٠٢روپیه
(٢) کاغذ	جلد و ابرة و دهالّي
١٤دستچه	٣٢روپیه
٢٤ روپیه	
(٣) لوح و جدول	سونش
٢٧ روپیه	نقرهٔ فرنگ
	١٣تولچه ١٥ماشه
	١٤ روپیه
(٤) پوست آهو	
١٦٥ فرد	

Translation

God is Great
Estimate
Total Cost Rupees 4,024

[1] Calligraphy by ʿInāyat Āllah
65—[?]

Rs. 325—
MO-II Bk Y 62-23a

[2] Paper:--
14 Quires/ gloves [?]
Rs. 24-

Miniature.
165 pages.

Rs. 3,602

Binding, marble, paper, etc.

Rs. 32-

[3] Opening panel and page-margins
Rs. 27-

Filings (Powder)
European Silver
13 tolchahs, 15 mashahs
Rs. 14-

[4] Deer Skin
165 pieces

Comment

Chaghatai, "Illustrated edition of the Razm nama," 291, plate 1, labelled "estimate" in English; Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 307. The evaluation is written vertically across the bottom of the folio.

٢٠

Notation

Text

اللّٰه اکبر عرض دید شد

Translation

God is Great. Examined.

Comment

Not previously read. The notation cannot be dated at this point.

Other Seals

The remaining three seals on the page, not numbered in our figure, were deemed illegible by Chaghati and we have not been able to make publishable progress despite a better photograph.

Vafa Movahedian

Appendix 3
The Philadelphia Fragment of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*

As explained in Chapter 1, Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* has been edited and printed based on a number of manuscripts, among them copies in the British Library. The oldest British Library manuscript, dated AH 1007, is illustrated at the end of this volume. Of the same date is the dispersed *Razmnāmah*, parts of which are in the British Library, the Free Library of Philadelphia and other collections. One page from the *Preface* in Philadelphia is illustrated at the beginning of this book as Figure 1, and its relevance to the history of the Translation Bureau taken up in Chapter 1. The folio gives only part of Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface*, but in view of the rarity of copies of this date, it is worth giving the text from this manuscript page.

Text (Recto)

The recto side of the folio is illustrated here in Figure 20. The corresponding place for the start of the Philadelphia text can be found in the translation, Chapter 2, page 16. In the British Library manuscript the start is found in folio 20r (line 4 from the bottom); see illustrations at the end of this volume. The reading presents a number of difficulties and in the text below we have added the words and corrections provided by the printed text and underlined them.

In this portion of the *Preface*, the name of Akbar is written in red; the corresponding place can be found in the translation in Chapter 2, page 17. In the British Library manuscript, the corresponding place is found in folio 20v (line four from the bottom), where Akbar's name is also written in red. Toward the end of the folio is the account of Akbar's decree regarding the translation of books, found in Chapter 2, page 18 and in the manuscript in folio 21r.

In the Philadelphia page, the king's name and titles spill over from the space allotted for them, showing the text was written in back, with gaps left. The scribe then returned to add the words in red, but the nib of the pen was a bit thicker, so he struggled to make the words fit. Another point of palaeography is that the word 'likewise' (ایضا) is not picked out in red, as was done consistently in the British Library manuscript (e.g. folio 21r). Moreover, the word is written differently (ایضه) in the Philadelphia page, in the second line from the bottom (the word underlined in our transcription).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110501520-007

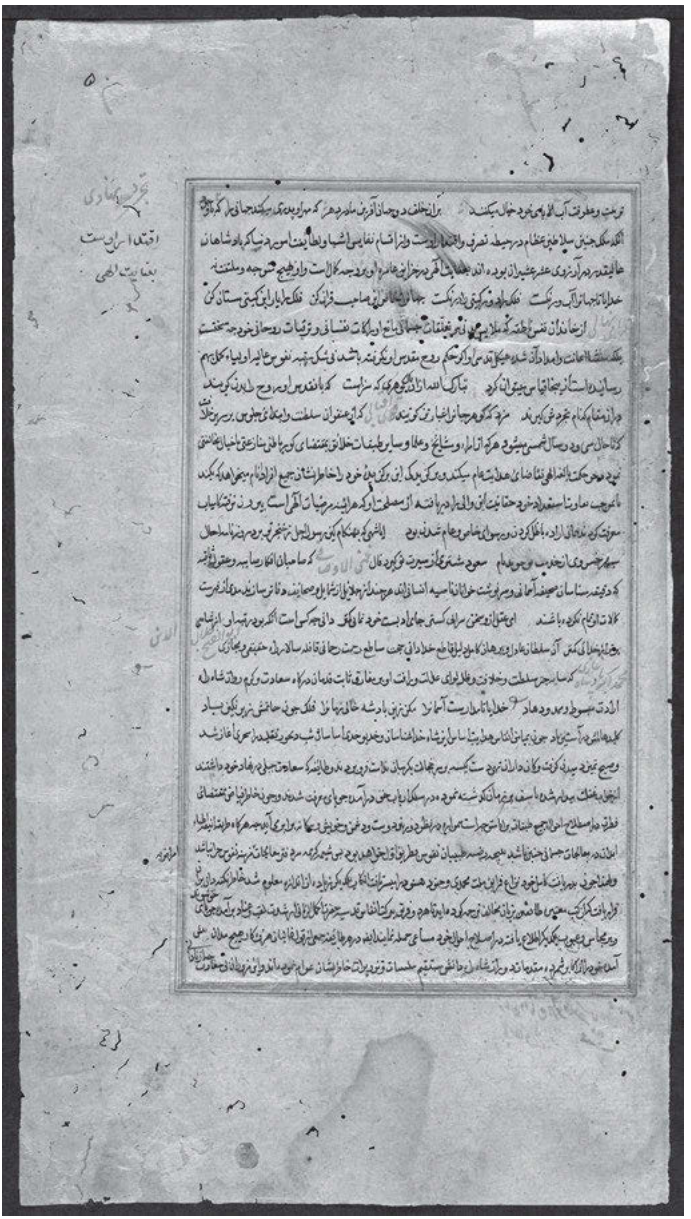

Figure 20: *Razmnāmah*. Free Library, Lewis M18, single folio from a dispersed copy prepared at the end of the sixteenth century, reverse of folio shown in figure 01 above. Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia.

In terms of the readings offered by the Philadelphia folio, it follows the British Library manuscript in giving "groups of Hindus" (جنود هنود). In the margin the writing in red is referencing the immediately adjacent text which is marked with the number 2, also in red.

تجرد ب نهادی
اقتدار اوست بعنایت الهی

تربت و عطوفت آب الابای خود خیال میکنند ✣ بران خلف دو جهان آفرین ما در دهر✣ که مهر او پدری میکند جهانی را که۲ باوجود انکه ملک چنین سلاطین عظام در حیطه تصرف و اقتدار اوست و از اقسام نفایس اشیا و لطایف امور دنیا که پادشاهان عالیقدر در آرزوی عشر عشیرآن بوده اند بعنایت الهی در خزاین عامره او بروجه کمال آنست و او هیچ متوجه و ملتفت نه. خدایا تا جهانرا آب ورنکست - فلک راد و رگیتی را درنکست- جهانرا خاص این صاحب قران کن -فلک را یار این گیتی ستان کن - گرامی نهالی از خاندان نفس ناطقه که ملابس بدنی و تعلّقات جسمانی مانع از برکات نفسانی و ترقیات روحانی خود چه سختست بلکه منشا اعانت و امداد آن شده هیکل قدسی او اگر حکم روح مقدس او نگرفته باشد بی شک مرتبه نفوس عالیه اولیاء تجمل بهم رسانیده است. ازینجا قیاس میتوان کرد - تبارک الله از ان ملک گوهری که سزاست - که به آن قدس او روح را بدن گویند- درآن مقام که نام تجردش گیرند - سزد که گوهر جانرا غبار تن گویند- قوی اقبالی که از عنفوان سلطنت و ابتدای جلوس بر سریر خلافت که تا حال سی و دو سال شمسی میشود هر که از امراء و مشایخ و علما و سایر طبقات خلائق بمقتضای کورباطنی منازعتی با خیال مخالفتی نموده چو حکمت بالغه الهی تقاضای هدایت عام میکند و برگزیدگی این برگزیدهٔ خود را خاطرنشان جمیع افراد انام میخواهد که بکند تا بموجب تفاوت استعداد خود حقانیت این والی را دریافته از مصلحت او که هر آئینه متضمن مرضیات الهی است، بیرون نرفته کامیاب معرفت گردند، همان اراده باطل کردن و رسوای خاص و عام شدن بود و چه رسوایی که بانواع نکال و اصناف عذاب گرفتار شده راه برار گرفتند.

ایاشهی که بهنگام کین رسول اجل
زخنجر تو برآورد نامهٔ آجال
سپهر خسروی از خدمت تو جوید نام
سعود مشتری از سیرت تو گیرد فال

غنی الاوصافی که صاحبان افکار صایبه و عقول ثاقبه که دقیقه شناسان صحیفهٔ آسمانی و سرنوشت خوانان ناصیهٔ انسانی اند، هر چند از جلائل از شمایل او صحایف و دفاتر سازند مدی از فهرست کمالات او تمام نکرده باشند

ای عقل ازو سخن سرایی کمتر
جای ادب است، خودنمایی کمتر
دانی چه کس است؟ آنکه بود رتبهٔ او
از شاهی برتر از خدائی کمتر

آن سلطان عادل و برهان کامل، دلیل قاطع خدادانی، حجت ساطع رحمت رحمانی، قافله سالار راه حقیقی و مجازی ابوالفتح جلال الدین محمد اکبر پادشاه غازی که سایهٔ چتر خلافت و ظل لوای عدالت و رأفت او بر مفارق ثابت قدمان درگاه سعادت و کرم روان شاه راه ارادت مبسوط و ممدود باد.

خدایا تا مدارست آسمانرا

مکن زین پادشه خالی جهان را
فلک چون خاتمش زیر نگین باد
کلید عالمش در آستین باد

جون بمیامن انفاس هدایت اساس این شاه خداشناسان و خدیو مهتدی اساسان شب دیجور تقلید را سحری آغاز شد و صبح تمیز دمیدن گرفت، دکان داران تهی دست چون کیسهٔ پر، سر خجالت بگریبان ندامت فروبردند. طایفه ای که سعادت جبلی در نهاد خود داشتند از خواب غفلت بیدار شده تأسف بر زمان گذشته نموده در سلک ارباب حق درآمده جویای معرفت شدند وچون خاطر فیاض بمقتضای فطرت در اصلاح احوال جمیع طبقات برایا متوجه است همواره در نظر دوربین، دوست و دشمن و خویش و بیگانه برابر میآید، چه هر گاه طریقهٔ انیقهٔ اطبای ابدان در معالجات جسمانی چنین باشد سجیهٔ مرضیهٔ طبیبان نفوس بطریق اوّلی خواهد بود. پس شیمهٔ کریمه سر دفتر معالجان امراض مزمنهٔ نفوس چرا نباشد و لهذا چون بدریافت کامل خود نزاع فرایق ملت محمدی وجهود وهنود را بیشتر یافت وانکار یکدیگر زیاده از اندازه معلوم شد، خاطر نکته دان برآن قرار یافت که کتب معتبرهٔ طائفتین به زبان مخالف ترجمه کرده آید تا هر دو فریق به برکت انفاس قدسیه حضرت اکمل الزمانی ازشدت تعنت و عناد برآمده جویای حق شوند و بر محاسن و عیوب یکدیگر اطلاع یافته در اصلاح احوال خود مساعی جمیله نمایند. ایضا از هر طایفه جمعی که از اقوال غالیان هرزه کار هیچ مدان در پیش آمده خود را از اکابر دین شمرده مقدمات دور از شاهراه دانش مستقیم به تلبیسات و تزویرات خاطرنشان عوام نموده اند و این مزوران بی سعادت چه از نادانی

Text (Verso, with Miniature Painting)

This side of the folio illustrates the Translation Bureau and in the text portion mentions the *Mahābhārata* (in the middle of line 3 in the painting, given in bold in the transcription below). The corresponding place in the translation is found in Chapter 2, page 18. The corresponding place in the British Library manuscript is folio 21r (line 8 from the bottom). The text in the Philadelphia folio ends with تی جمه نما یند, so the following passage headed with the word 'likewise' (ایضا), in the middle of folio 21r, is not available for verification. In terms of reading variants, the Philadelphia page has "expert judges" (منصفات ماهر) against the British Library manuscript's "expert authors," thus in accord with the printed text. Regarding the description of the *Mahābhārata*, the Philadelphia page gives "more authoritative/well-thought-of" (معتبر تر).

وچه از بی دیانتی بمقتضای اغراض هوی و هوس کتب اوایل و نصایح سلف و اقوال حکما و اعمال سنجیدهٔ گذشتگان را مخفی داشته بطور دیگر وا می نمایند. هرگاه کتب فریقین بعبارتی واضح عام فهم خاص پسند ترجمه یابد ساده لوحان عامه به حقیقت کار رسیده از فضولیات نادانان دانانما نجات یافته پی بمقصود حقیقت برند. بنابراین حکم عالی شد که **کتاب مهابهارت** که رقمزدهٔ ارباب مهارت است و براکثر اصول و فروع معتقدات براهمهٔ هند اشتمال دارد و معتبر تر و بزرگتر و مفصل تر از آن کتابی دراین طایفه نیست، دانایان هر دو فریق و زبان دانان هر دو طایفه از روی ائتلاف و اتفاق یکجا نشسته بمعرفت منصفان ماهر و مشرفان عادل بعبارت عامه باب ترجمه نمایند.

The Philadelphia page has 27 lines of text, and most of the British Library manuscript pages have the same number. This indicates that the size of the *Preface* in both copies was the same. The number 50, at the top left of the Philadelphia folio, thus presents problems. In the British Library copy, the *Preface* starts at folio 15v because the synopsis added in the seventeenth century has been added to the page count. In its original configuration, therefore, folio 15r marked the start of the sixteenth-century text. The Philadelphia text starts at the bottom of folio 20r, corresponding, more or less, to folio 10 or 11 in the original British Library manuscript, and thus in the Philadelphia *Razmnāmah* as well. This shows that the number 50 at the top of the page cannot be part of the *Razmnāmah* count, it is much too high a number. If we read the number as 5, it is too low.[1] Thus the number 50 probably represents a count that was taken after the manuscript was broken up and aggregated with other material. This possibility sheds some light on the notation on the miniature. As noted in Chapter 1, this says: "Shaykh Abū al-Faẓl translated the *Mahābhārata* from Sanskrit into Persian in one and half years."[2] The person who wrote this comment is giving a later understanding, as explained in Chapter 1, but he is also innocent of the colophon of the very same *Razmnāmah* in which Naqīb Khān and the translators are mentioned (Figure 7). While he may have simply missed the colophon, the number 50 suggests it was not available for consultation at the time the notation was written.

1 As noted in Chapter 1, the *Preface* was transmitted in an abbreviated form from at least the eighteenth century, so if we assume that the earlier part of the *Preface* was truncated by half in the Philadelphia version this might work, but it seems unlikely that a copy of 1599 would give a shortened *Preface* and it seems unlikely that the number is 5 rather than 50.

2 Chapter 1.5, under Naqīb Khān.

Muntazir Ali

Appendix 4
Colophon, Notations and Seal of the *Razmnāmah* in the India Office Collection (IO Islamic 762)

This manuscript was catalogued by Hermann Ethé and published in his *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts* in 1903.[1] It has not been examined otherwise as far as we are aware. Some notes on the text and illustrations are published here to give preliminary insight the ownership trail of the available copies and the nature of *Razmnāmah* readership after the sixteenth century.

The manuscript has Abū al-Faẓl's *Preface* from folio 1 recto in an incomplete or abridged form. The rest of the book has seven Parvans of the translation. The first six Parvans were copied in the sixteenth year of Muḥammad Shāh's reign (AH 1147/1734–35 CE), the first being dated the 19th Shawwāl, the second the 23rd of the same month, the third the 17th of Dhū al-Qaʿdah, the fifth the 15th of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, the sixth the 27th of the same month, the fourth being without a special date. The seventh Parva is written in another hand and is dated in the twenty-fourth year of Muḥammad Shāh (28 Rabīʿ al-ʾAwwal 1155=Saturday 22 May 1742 CE). As can be seen from the illustration (Figure 21), the writing is hurried and not entirely clear. The following transcription shows what we have been able to determine, the underlined words for the moment uncertain.

1 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1083 no. 1931 (IO Islamic 762). In addition to the illustrations here, further folios are available online.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110501520-008

Text

بهگدت و برهمن و عهد نمودن . . . .هات کشتن جید رتهه و در خواب دیدن ارض مهادیو
در گهات را و درآمدن ارض و سایک و ستم از لشکر کوروان و کشته شدن بهور سرو از جید رتهه
و کارزار نمودن بدست و سلاح گذاشتن درونه چارع و کشته شدن از دست دهرست . . . و در
ختم آمدن این سهاما و اندرجین از نراین استر و لباس مها دیو درین پرت مشتمل بر نه هزار
و نهصد و هشتاد و نه اشلوک است تمام شد پرت هفتم از کتاب
مها بهارتهه که آنرا درون پرت گویند واقعه بتاریخ بیست و هشتم
شهر ربیع الاول سنه ۲۴ محمد شاه بادشاه غاری بن محمد خجسته اختر
جهانشاه بن شاه عالم بهادره بن اورنگ زیب عالم گیر
بن شهاب الدین محمد ثانی صاحبقران شاهجهان بادشاه غازی
گیتی ستان بن نور الدین محمد جهانگیر بادشاه غازی
بن جلال الدین محمد اکبر بادشاه غازی
بن محمد همایون بادشاه بن بابر
بادشاه که از . . . .اند

Synopsis

The colophon closes by saying that this is the seventh book and alludes to the arrival of the Kaurava army and themes concerning Jayadratha and Śiva. The Parvan, said to contain nine thousand nine hundred and eighty-nine *śloka*s, was completed on the twenty eighth of Rabīʿ al-ʾAwwal during regnal year 24 of Muḥammad Shāh, as noted above.[2] Muhammad Shāh's royal line is then named: Jahān Shāh, Shāh ʿĀlam, Aurangzeb ʿĀlamgīr, Shāh Jahān, Jahāngīr, Akbar, Humāyūn and Bābur, each accorded titles. The need for a systematic comparison of colophons, to determine the stemma of the manuscript copies in later copies of the text, is highlighted by this example.

Notations

Right Bottom

بدستخط کمترین مخلوقات گهور سنگه بن هرسهای بن بهمل بن دهچند
بن سندر داس قوم پوری ساکن موضع گهرت عمله پرگنه گجرات که
سابق داخل پرگنه سیالکوت بود آنچه خواندن . . . ذولقار بهادر سنگه
و یادگاری خود دارالخلافه شاهجهان آباد بروز شنبه
در محله خرد سیف پوره کوچه پیپل بدریافت.

2 Compare with the *Preface*, where the number of verses is said to be 8909, see Chapter 2, page 37 (printed text). The uncertainty of the verse count was present even the sixteenth-century, as noted elsewhere in this volume.

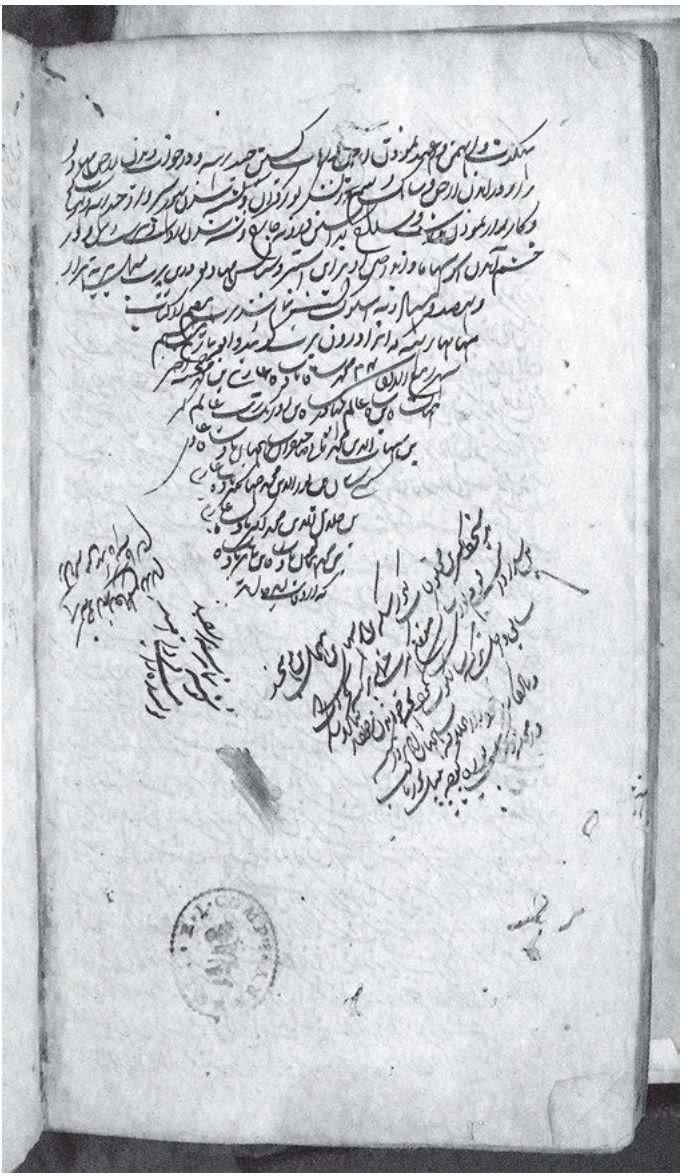

Figure 21: *Razmnāmah*. BL IO Islamic 762, folio 384v, colophon showing ownership notation and the seal of the East India Company, dated 1742. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

This notation presents a number of problems in terms of the names given and the purport, but it starts by saying this is the writing of the humble Ghor Singh, son of Harshāi, son of Bhimal, son of Dehchand, son of Sunder Dās Qum Puri. Qum Puri refers to a community prevalent in the Punjab. They were resident in a place called Gohārt and before that in Sialkot. Gujrat is mentioned as the location of Gohārt, most likely Gujrat, the town to the west of Sialkot. These individuals cannot be identified at this point but they were evidently owners of the manuscript, possibly in the eighteenth century. Further, the note states that one Bahādur Singh of Shāhjahānābād, in the neighbourhood of Khurd Saifpura (?) in Pīpal street, acquired or purchased this book on Saturday, but unfortunately no date is mentioned.

Left Bottom, Written Next to the Notation Above

نوشته بماند سینه بر سفید
نویسنده راست فردا امید

The author of this verse expresses hopes for the well-being of the text in future and that the paper will stay white and remain in the heart.

Left Bottom, Written Upside Down

هرکه خواند دعا طمع دارد
و گر نه من بنده گنه گارم.

Whoever recites the prayer is greedy, otherwise I am a slave to sin.

Generally speaking, authors and copyists often give prayers, blessings or curses to protect the book in question from damage or forgery. In the *Niʿmatnāmah* of the Sultan of Malwa, for example, the scribe invoked the 'king of cockroaches' in order to prevent the manuscript from being eaten by insects.[3] The use of certain terms in valuable books also allowed writers and owners to indicate their humility. The two couplets given above were used frequently by Persian authors.

3 Norah M. Titley, *The Niʿmatnāma Manuscript of the Sultans of Mandu: The Sultan's Book of Delights* (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), opening and closing folios.

Seal

On the page facing the colophon there is a small oval seal (Figure 22).[4] The proposed reading is as follows.

هو العزیز الرحیم ایّوبی
۱۷
۱۸۹

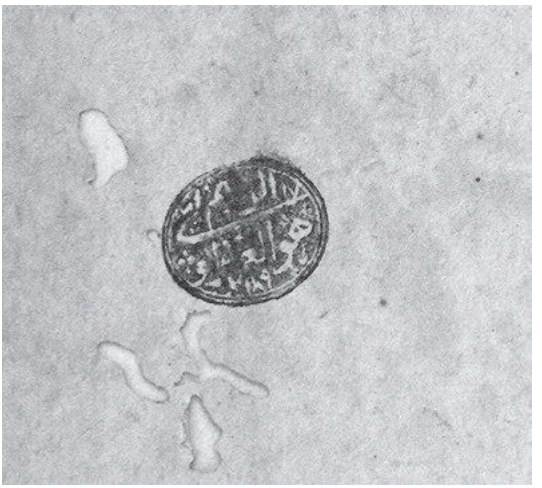

Figure 22: *Razmnāmah*. BL IO Islamic 762, folio 385r, detail of seal dated AH 1198/1775-76 CE. Courtesy of the British Library Board.

The seal can be translated as: "Ayyūbī, He (i.e. the Almighty) is the most merciful." In terms of the numbers on the seal, zero or one are often omitted in the date, a practice seen in the *Tafṣīl-i sikkah*, a treatise on the coinage of Hindu and Muslim rulers in India wherein the dates on Jahāngīr's coins are recorded as, for example, 114 instead of 1014, 118 instead of 1018, etc.[5] Some seals in the British Museum collection also betray this practice, thus 211 for 1211, 124 for 1124, 113 for 1113 and

4 Illustration published online: Muntazir Ali, folio 385r seal [IO Islamic 762] رزم نامه. ZENODO (2022), retrieved 2022.

5 Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 1: 1505, no. 2789, IO Islamic 1939; Ursula Sims-Williams, *Handlist of Islamic Manuscripts acquired by the India Office Library 1938–1985* (London, n.p., 1986), no. I.O. 4717A, a copy of IO Islamic 1939, while I.O. 4717B consists of fragments of a thematically related manuscript with information about coins issued by Haydar ʿAli and Ṭipu.

189 for 1189.[6] With these examples falling in the eighteenth century, and the aforementioned manuscript dated AH 1198/1783–84 CE, it is likely that 189 in the present seal means 1189. The corresponding date is 1775–76 CE. This falls in the reign of Shāh ʿĀlam II. The number 17 should be the regnal year, and given Shāh ʿĀlam II claimed the throne in 1759, this seems a plausible explanation.[7] On the basis of the seal, it seems that the manuscript came into the hands of Ayyūbī, or was put into his custody, at this date. This person has not been identified otherwise at this point but a systematic study of seals may reveal more about him.

6 Venetia Porter et al, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 2011, revised edition 2017), nos. 519–22.

7 S. S. Alvi, "ʿĀlam II, Shah," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I, no. 8 (1985): 791, retrieved April 2022.

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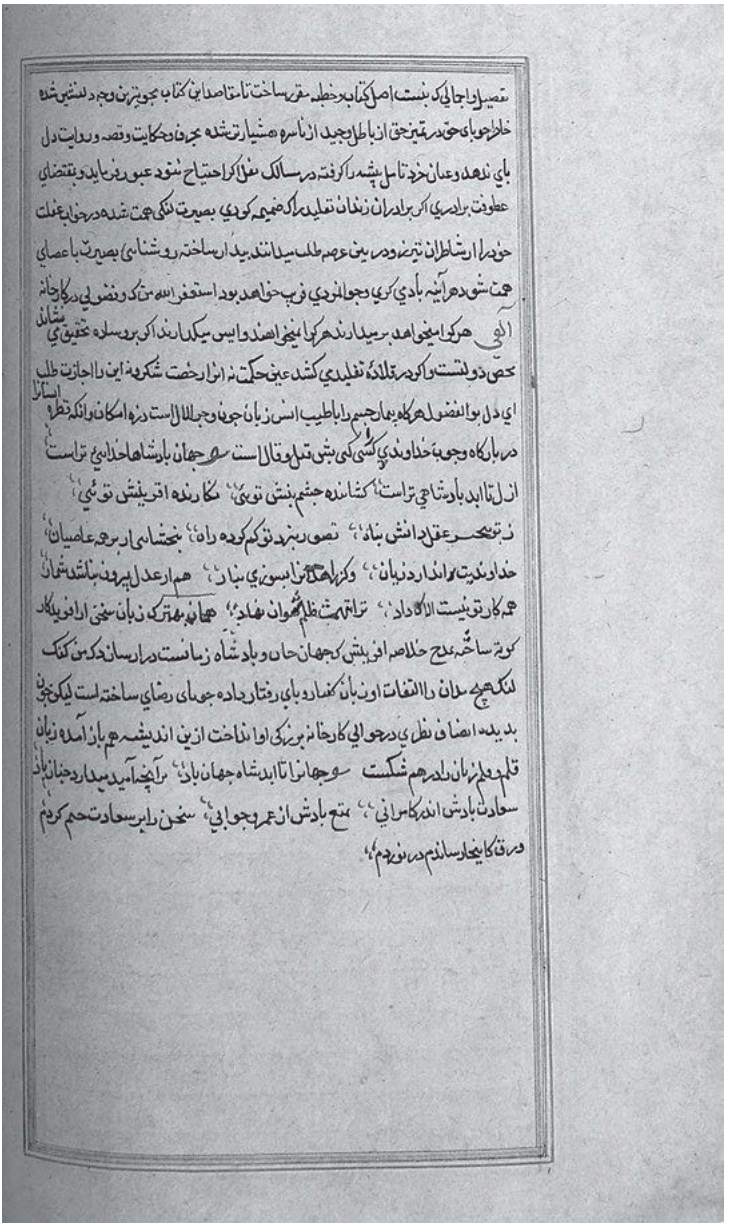

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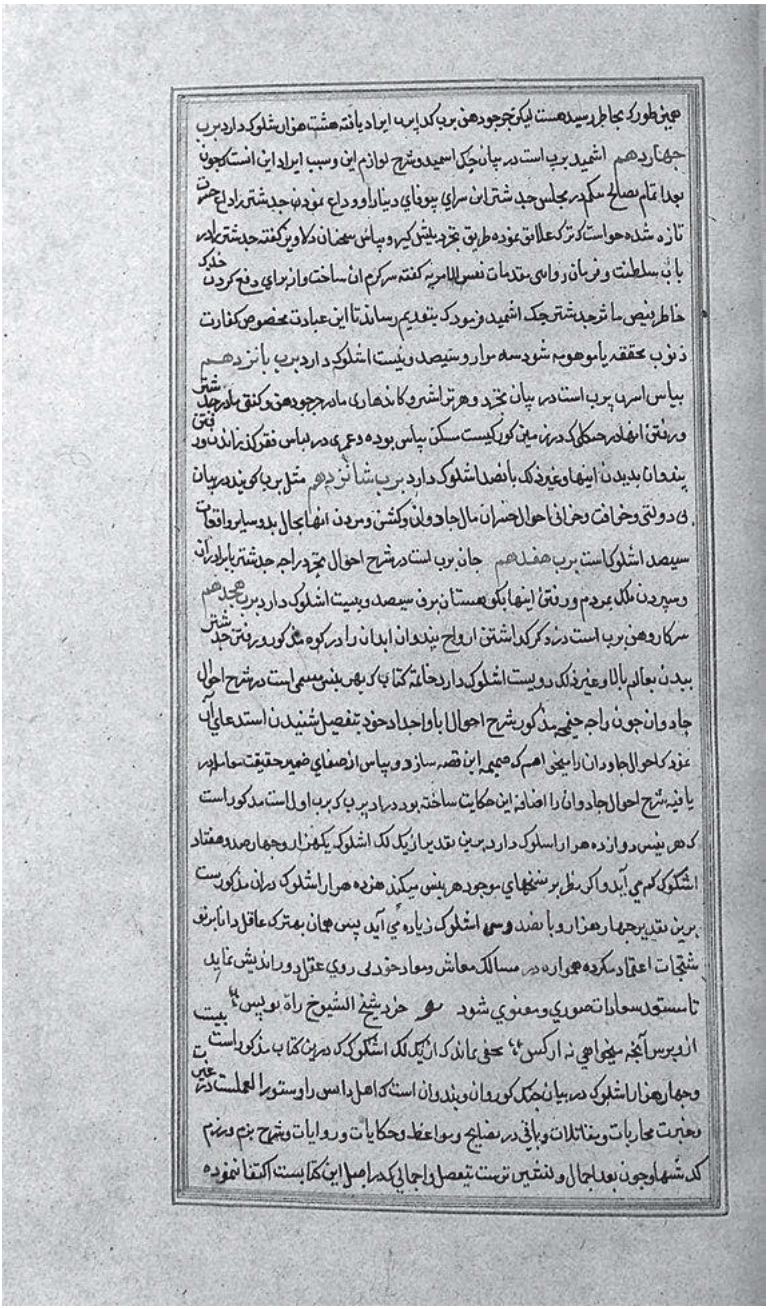

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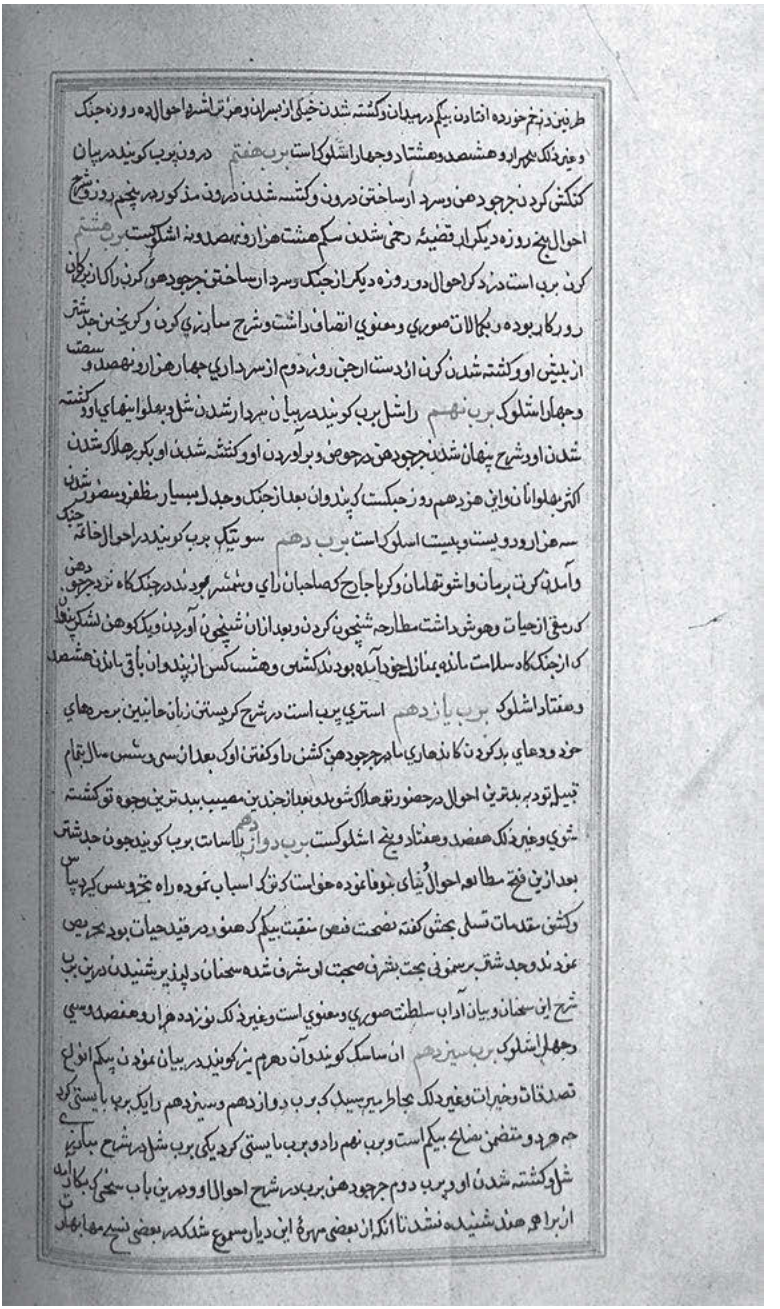

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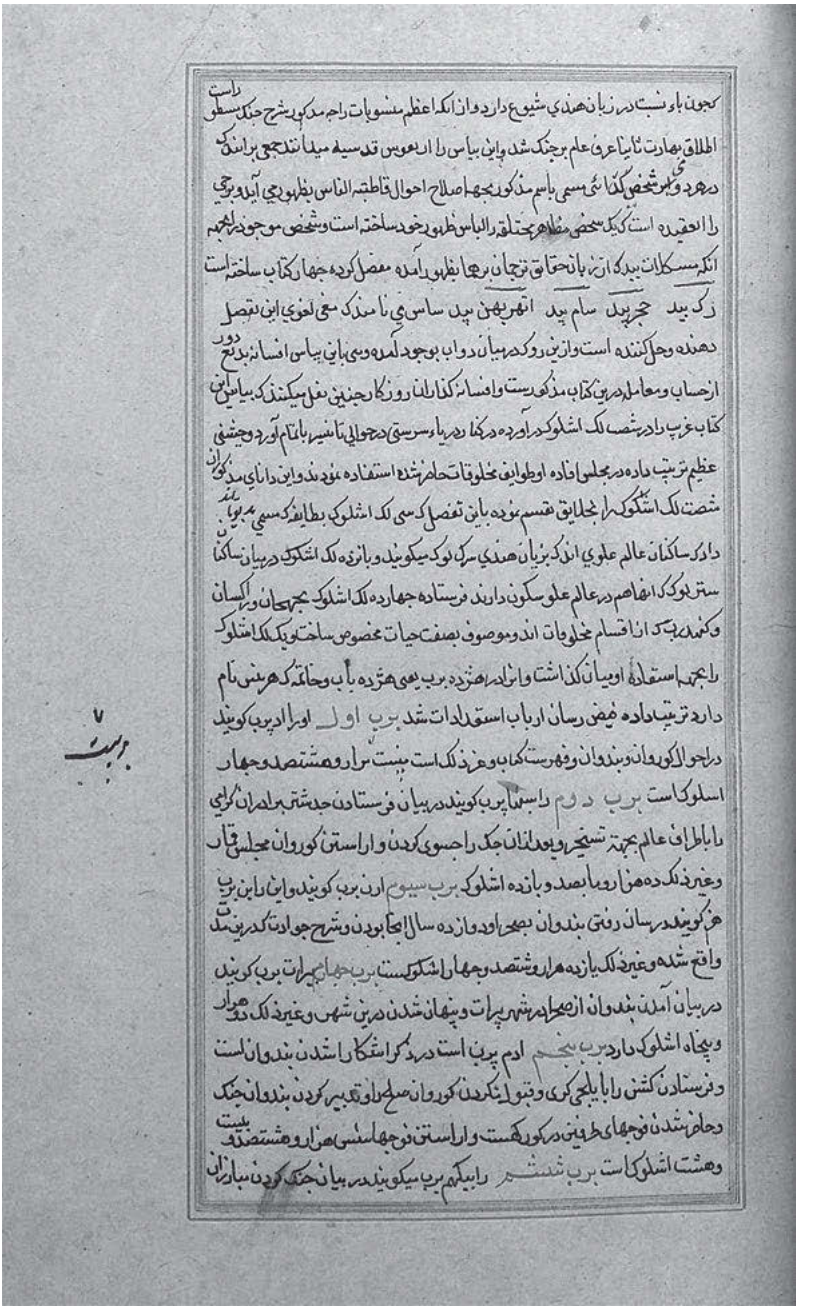

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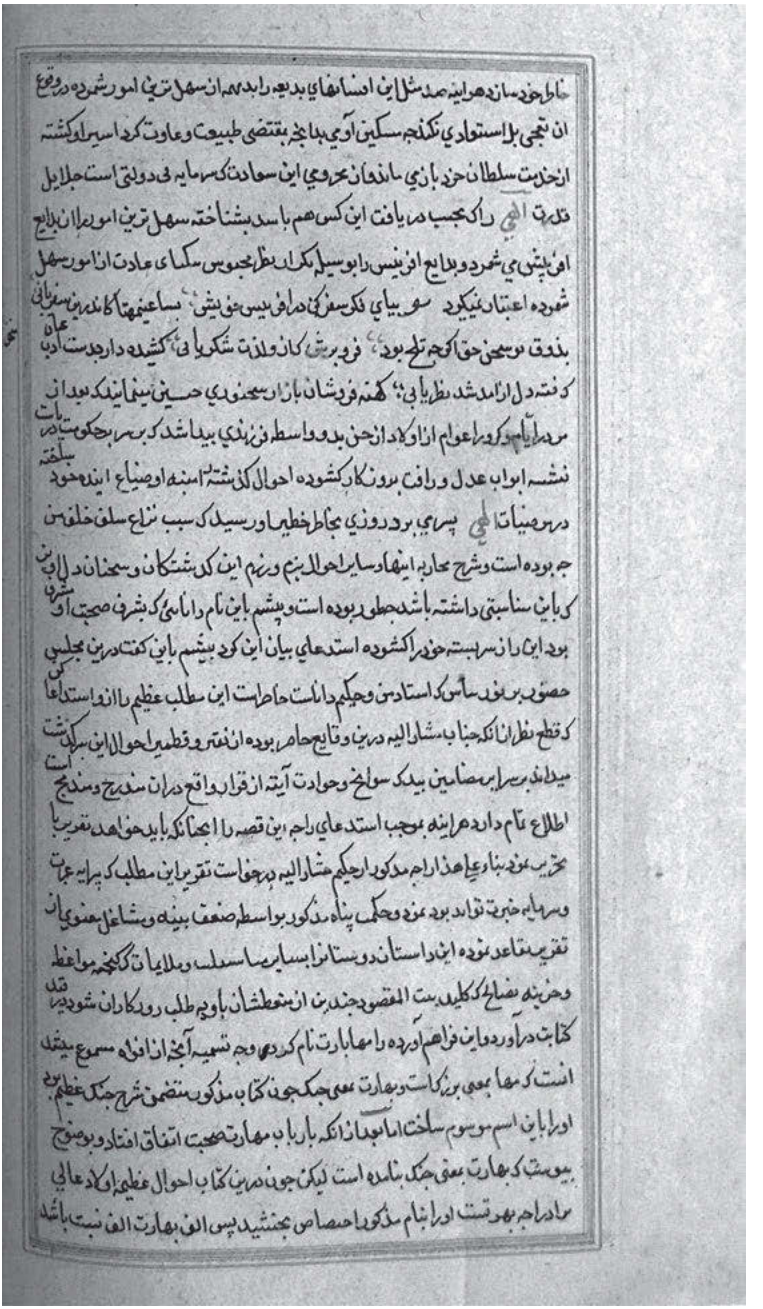

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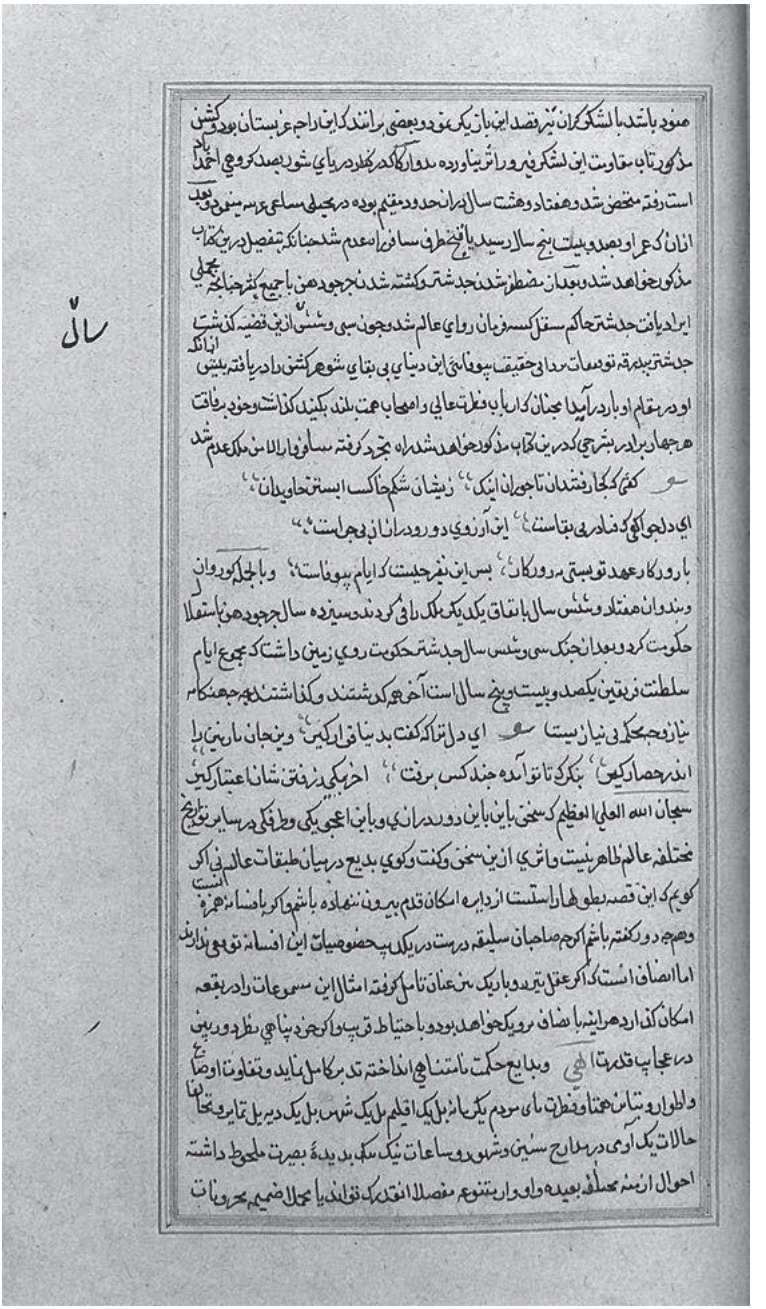

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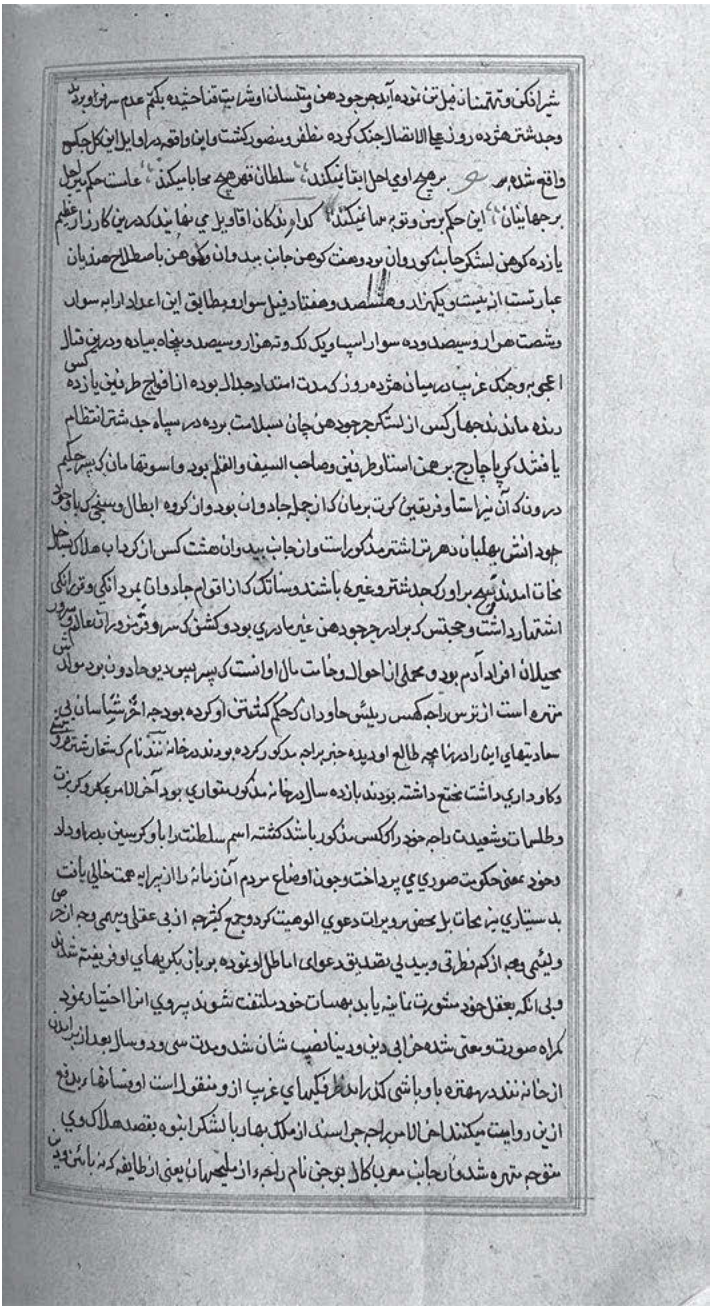

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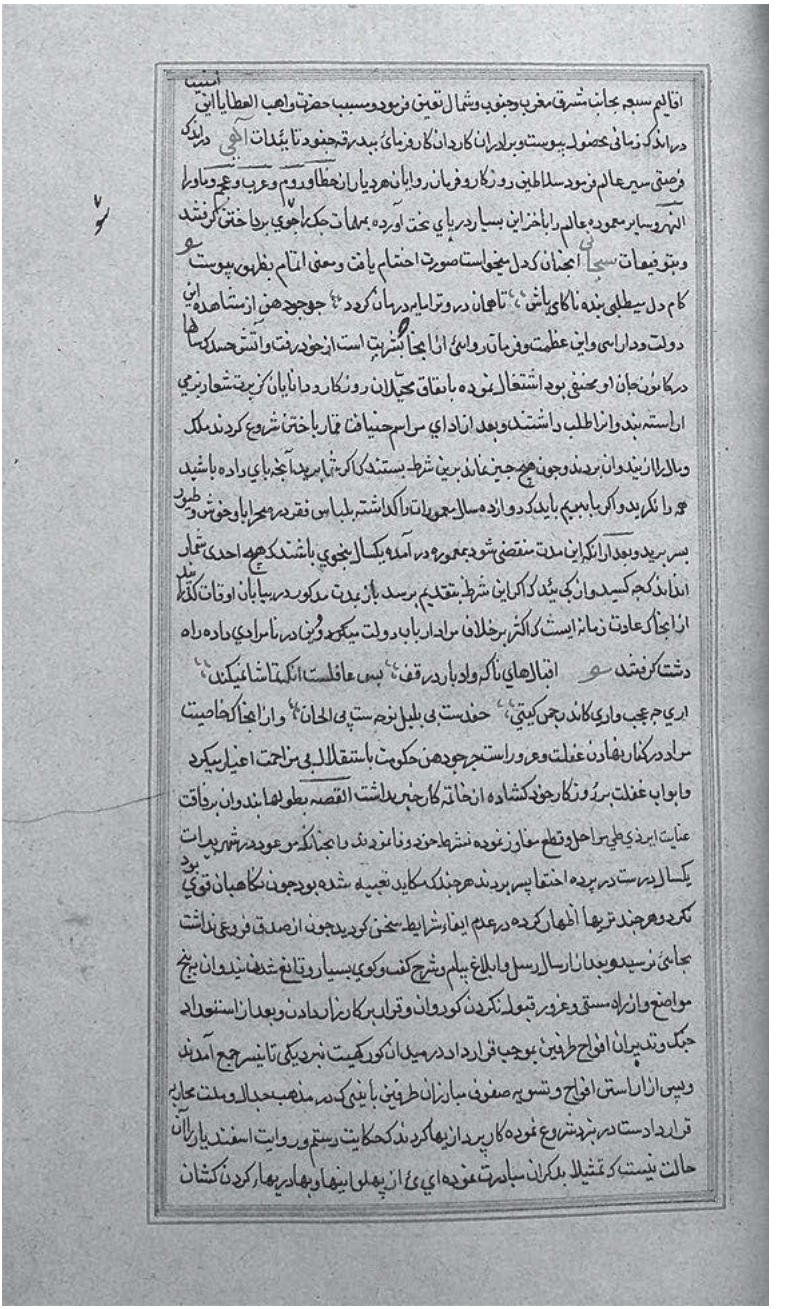

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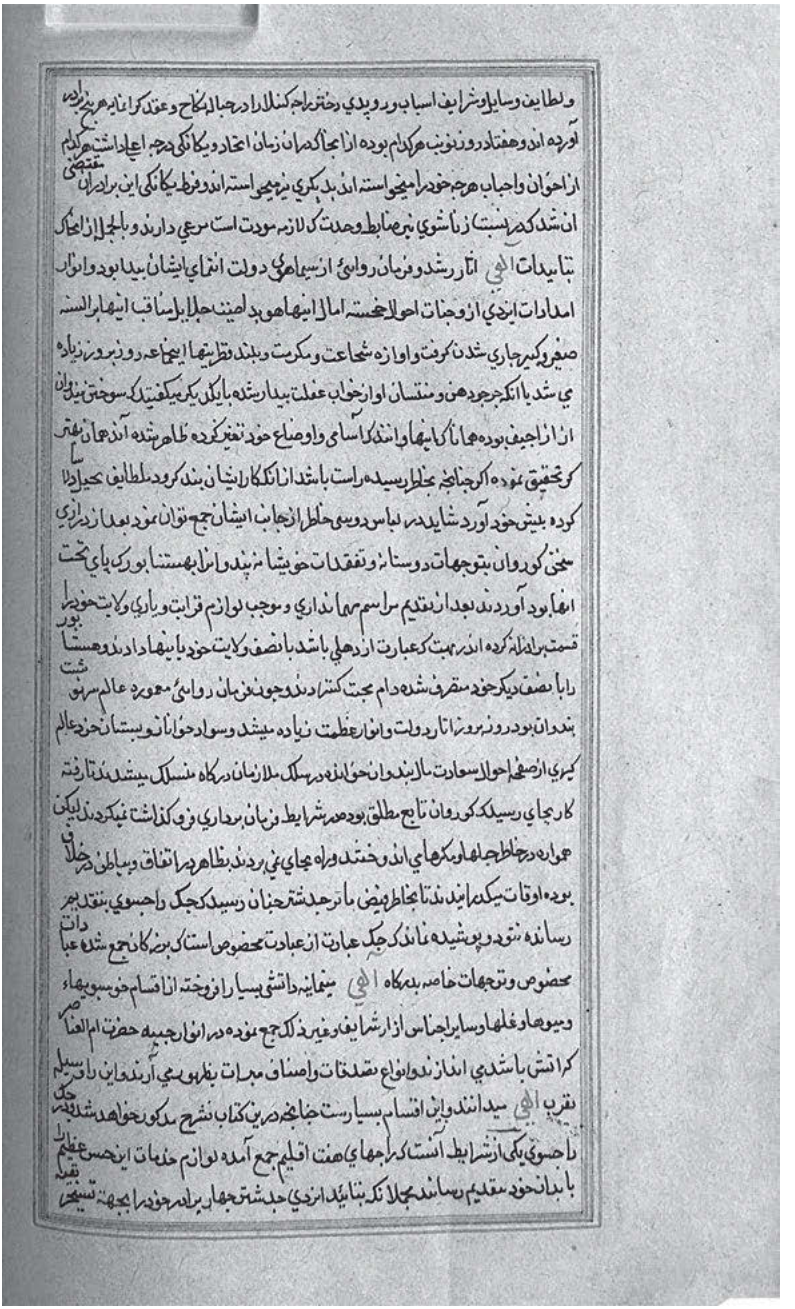

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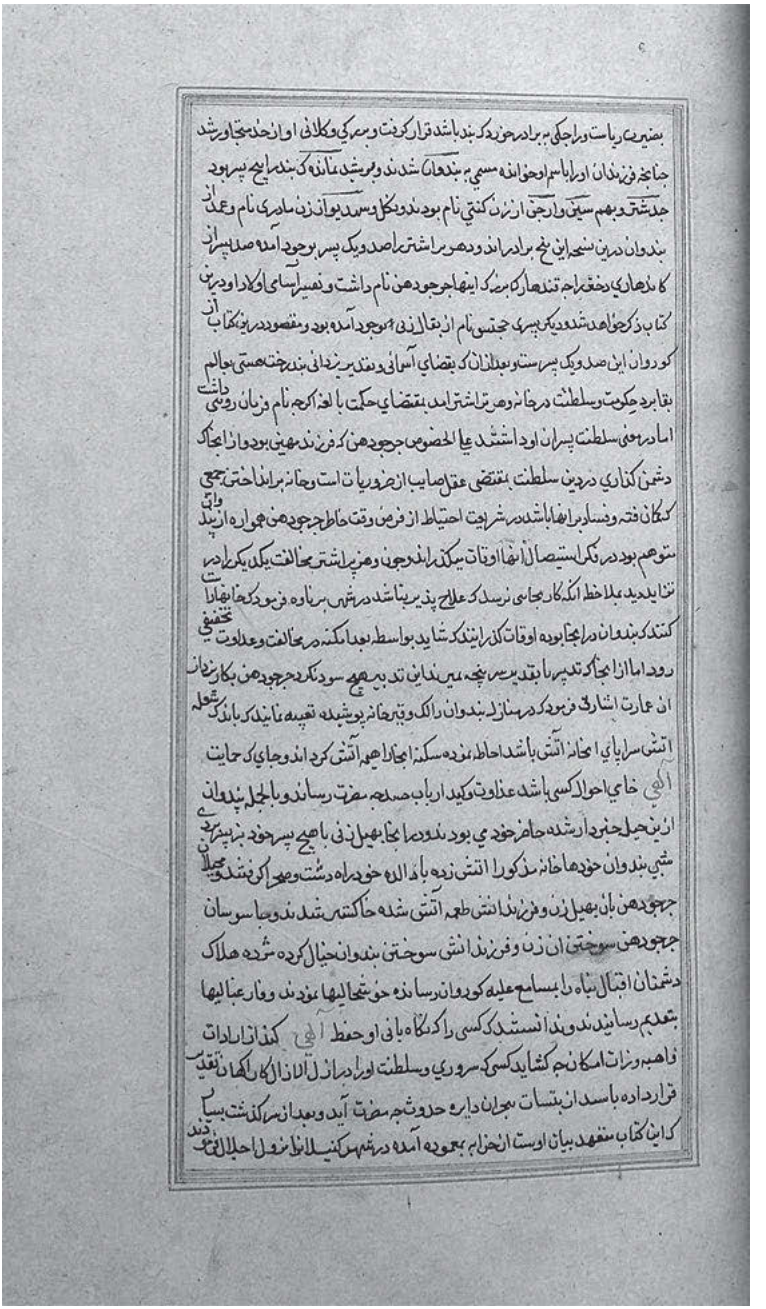

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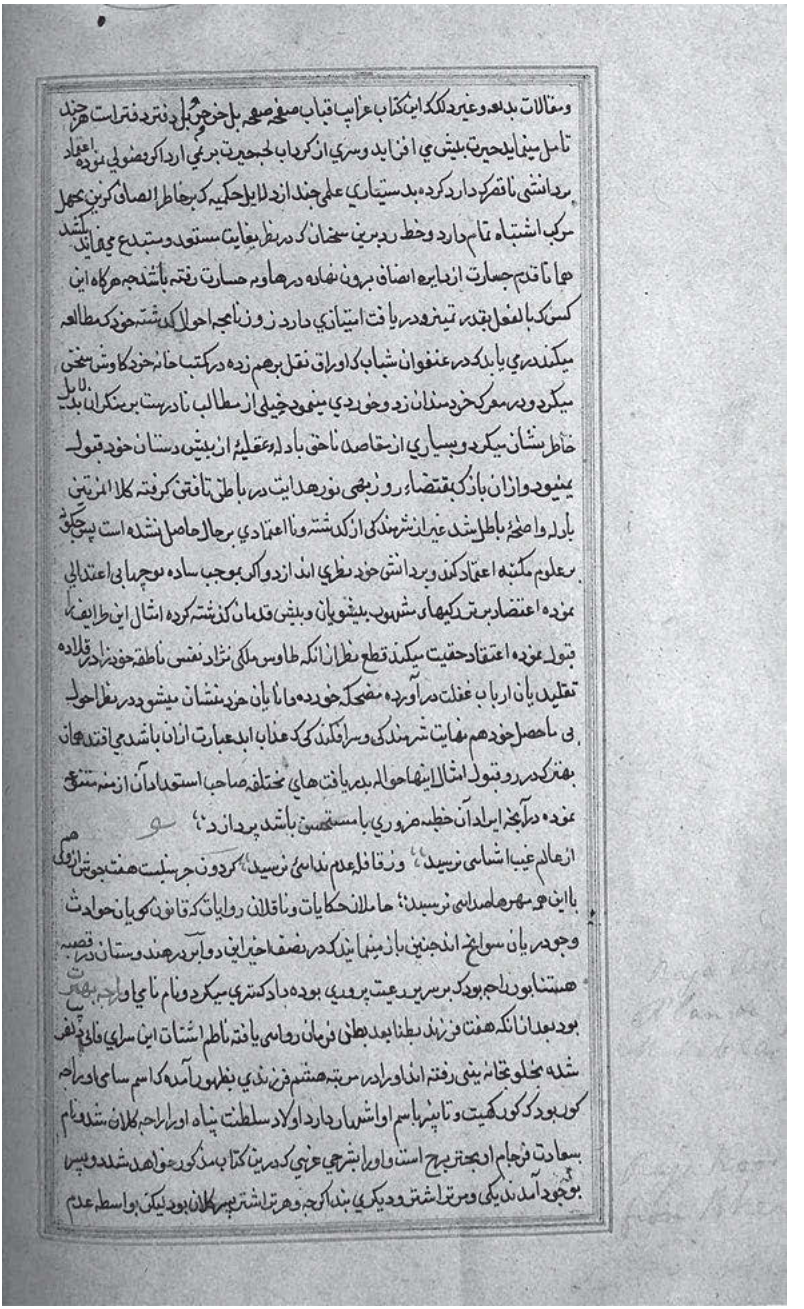

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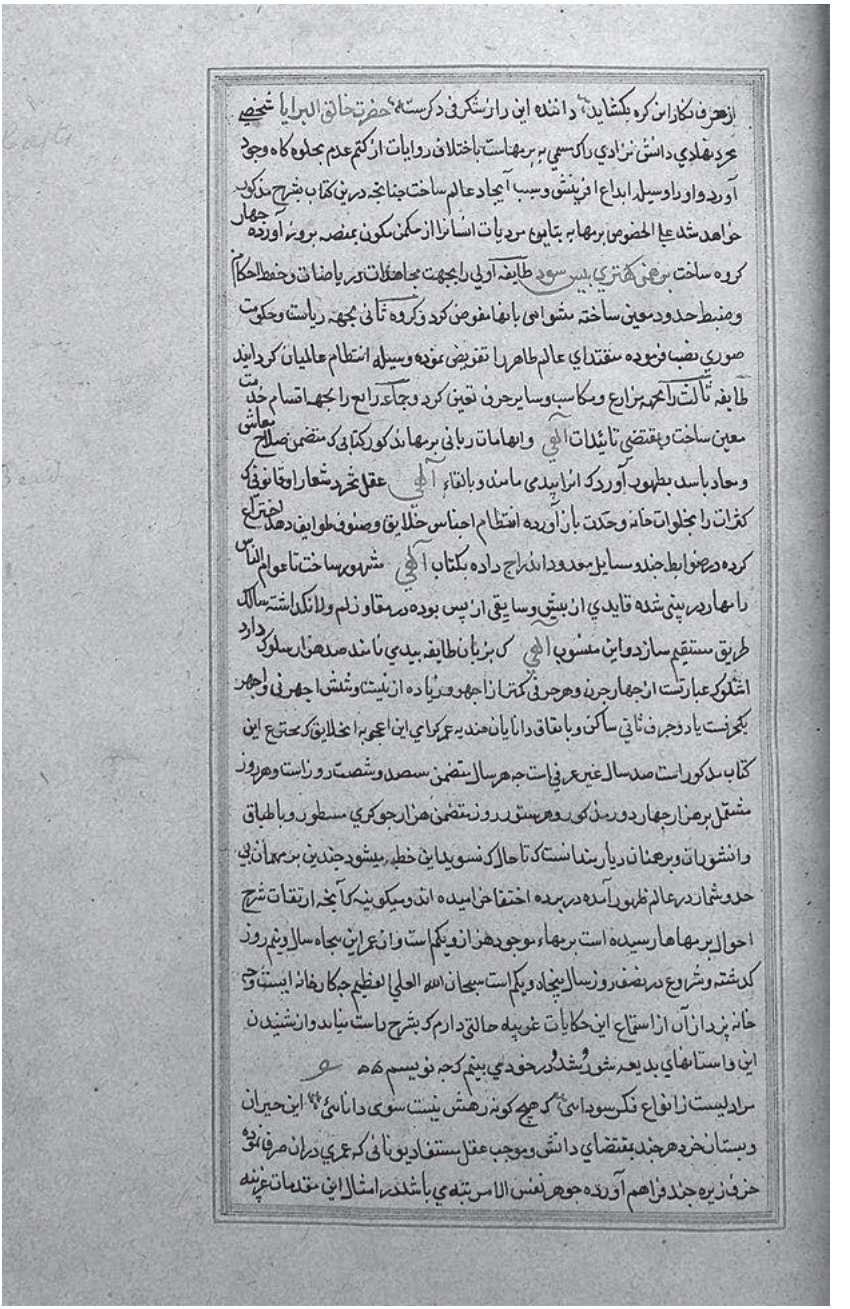

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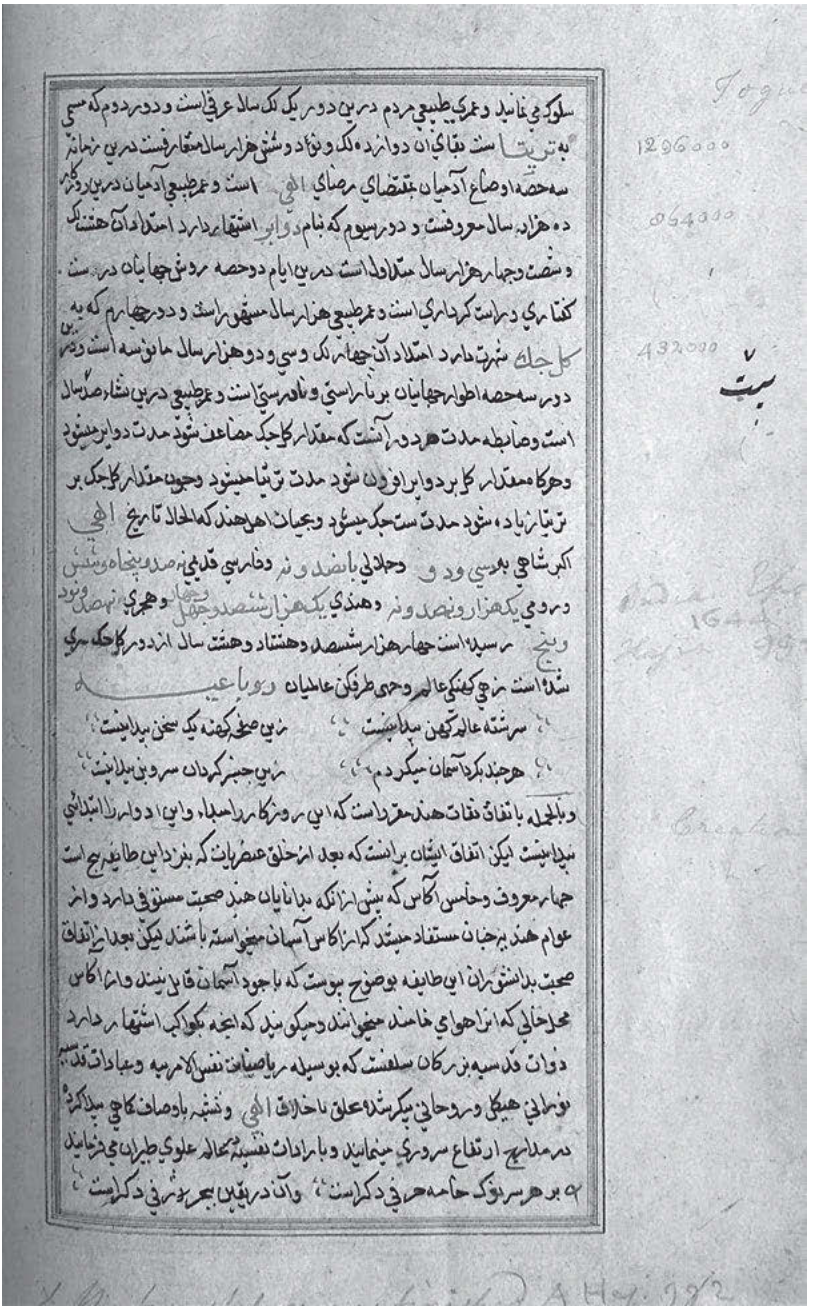

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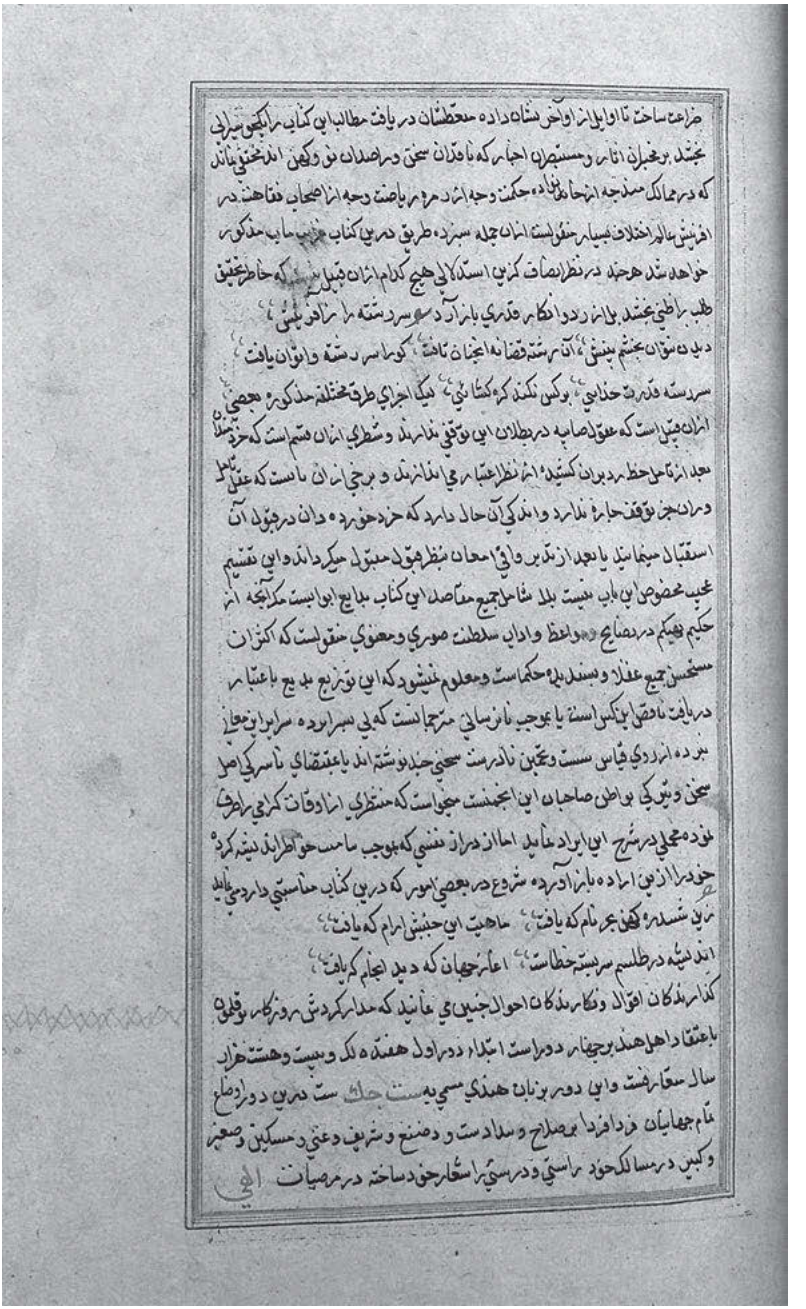

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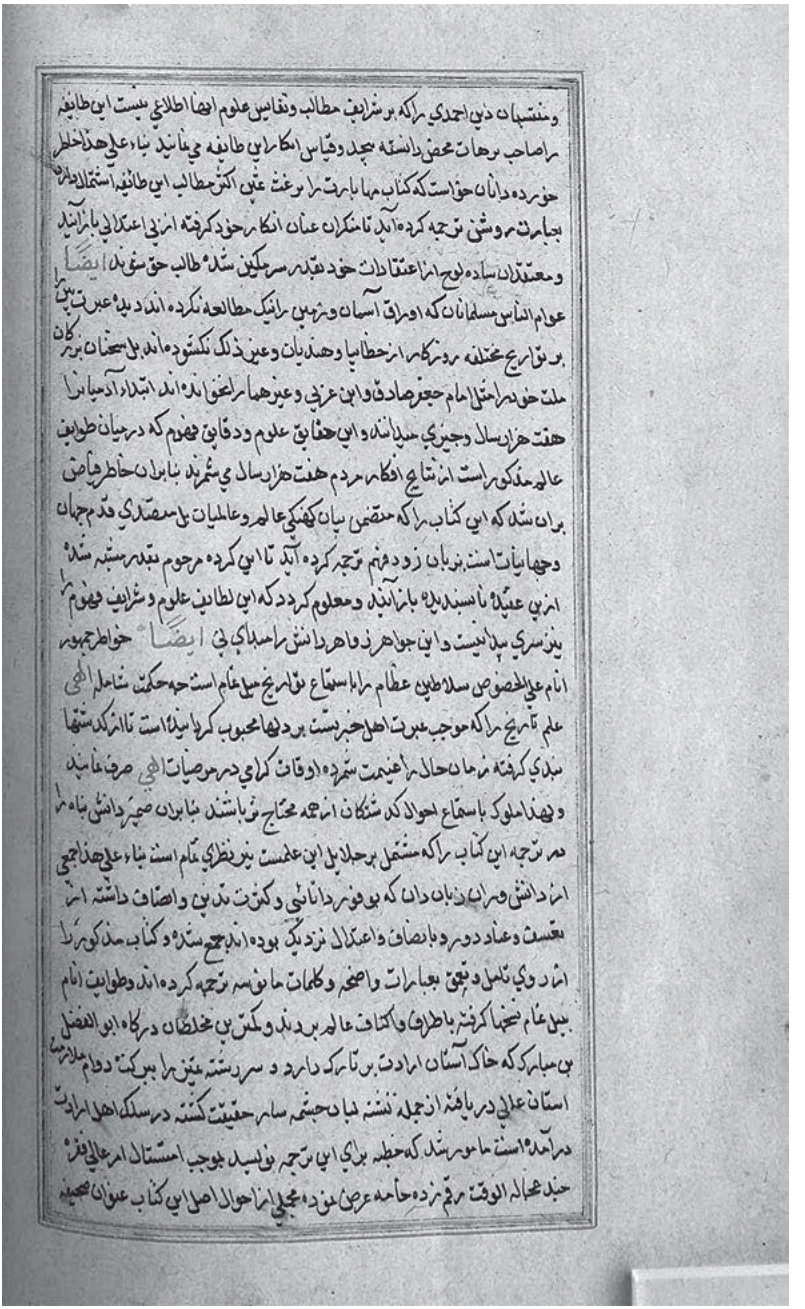

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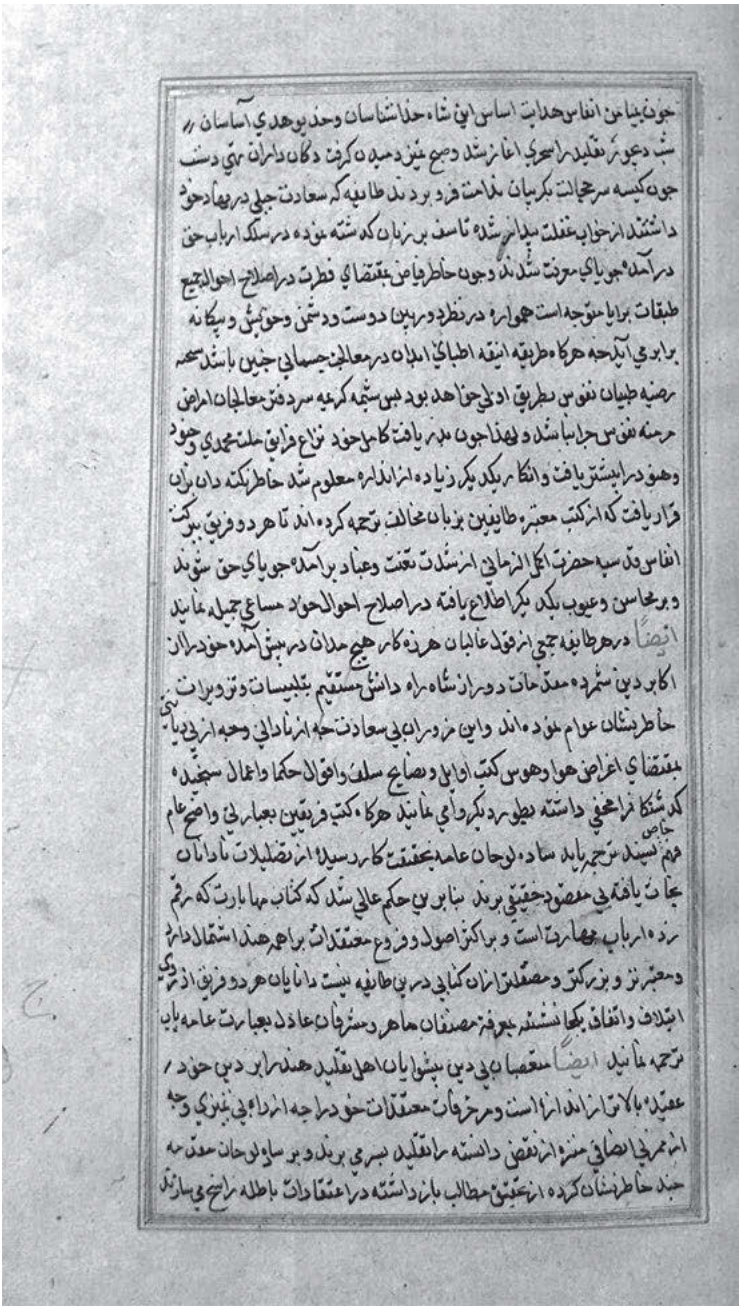

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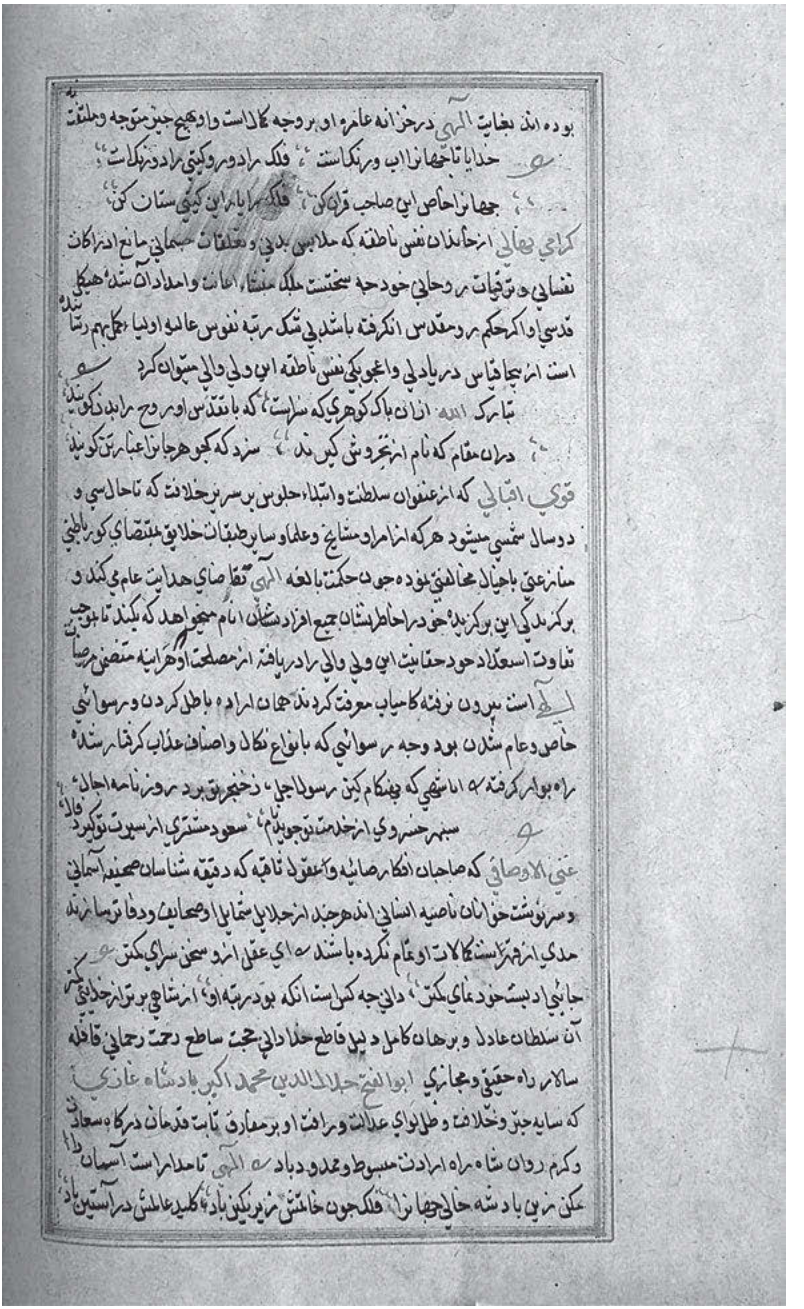

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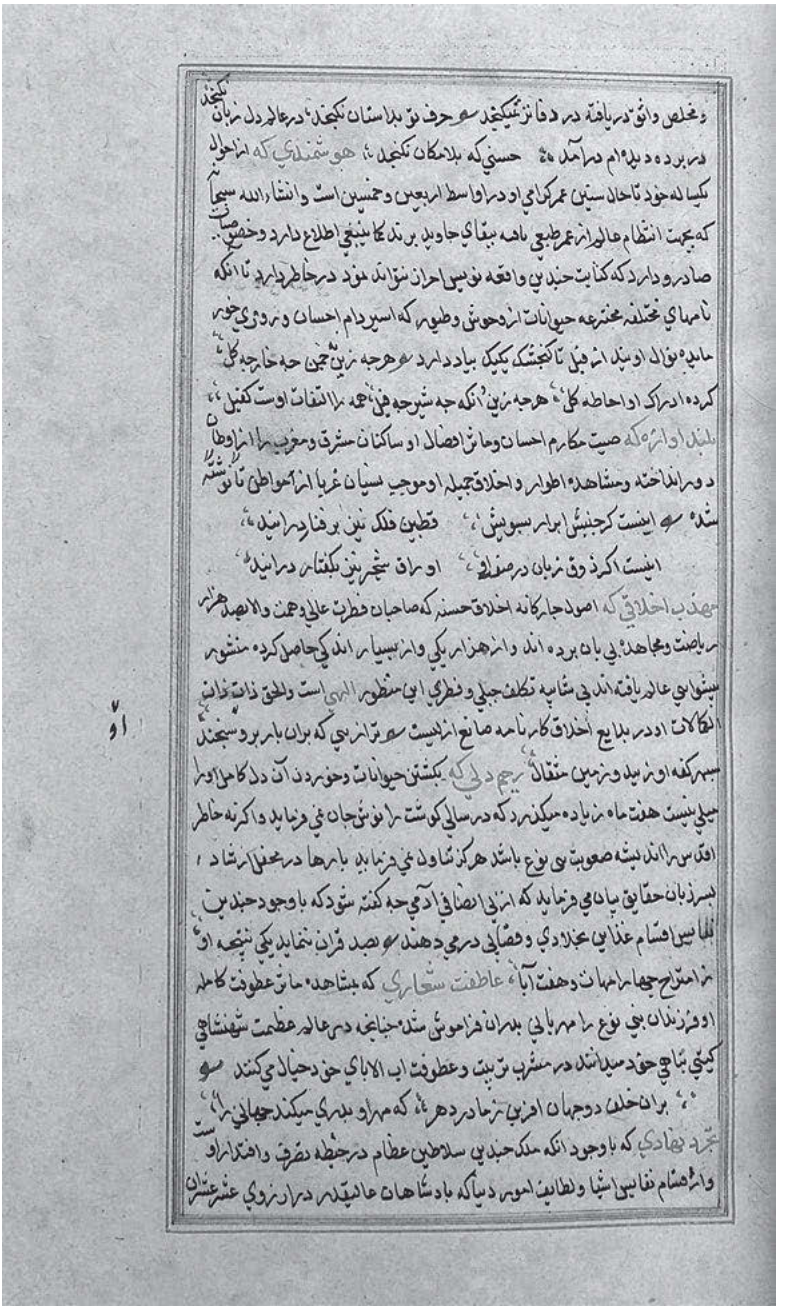

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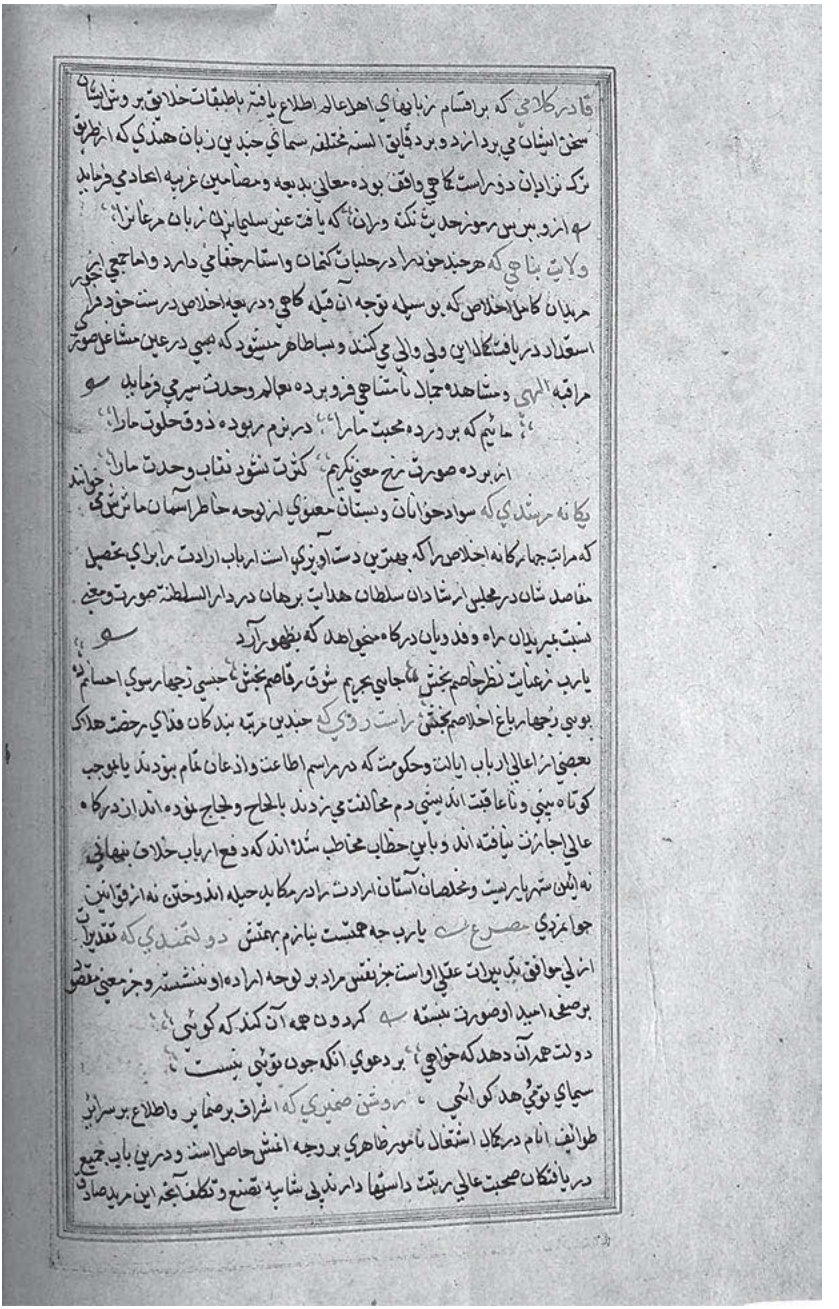

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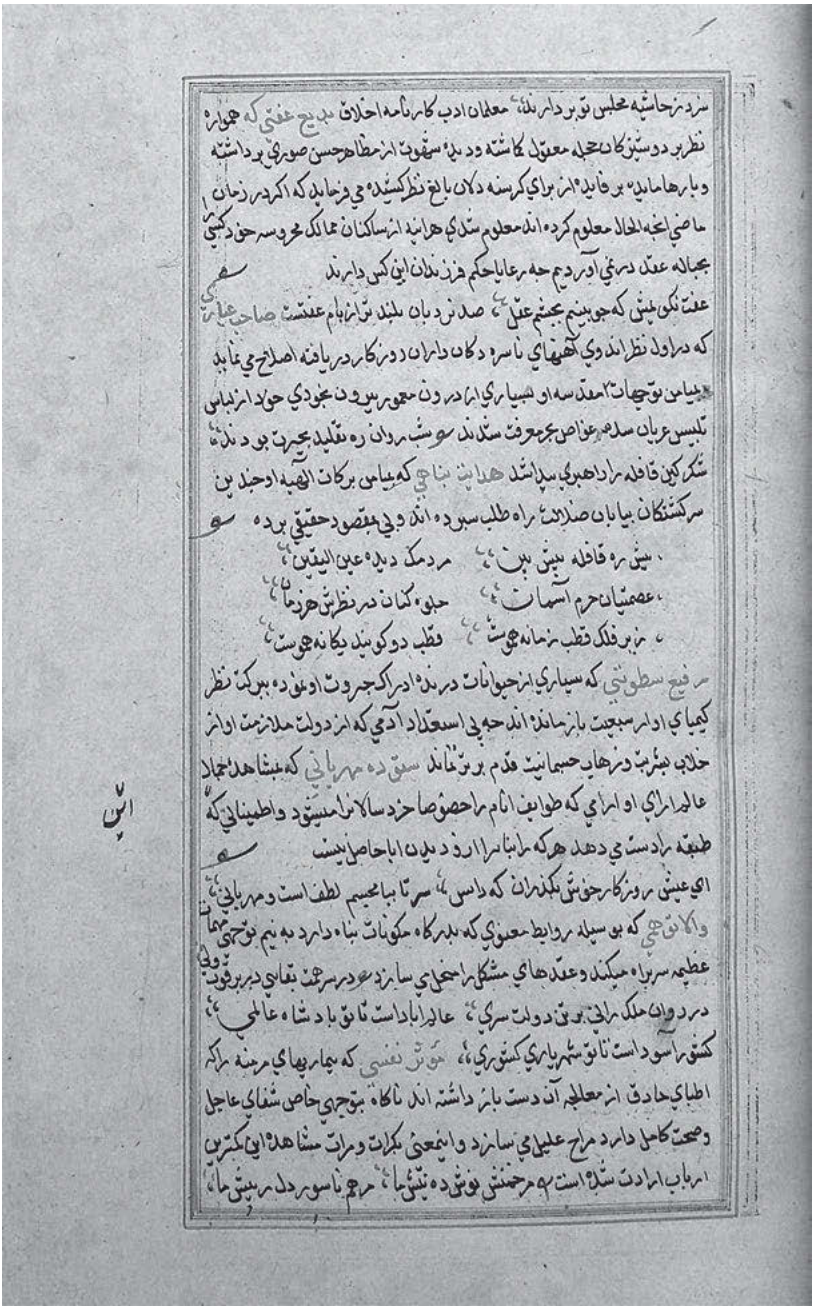

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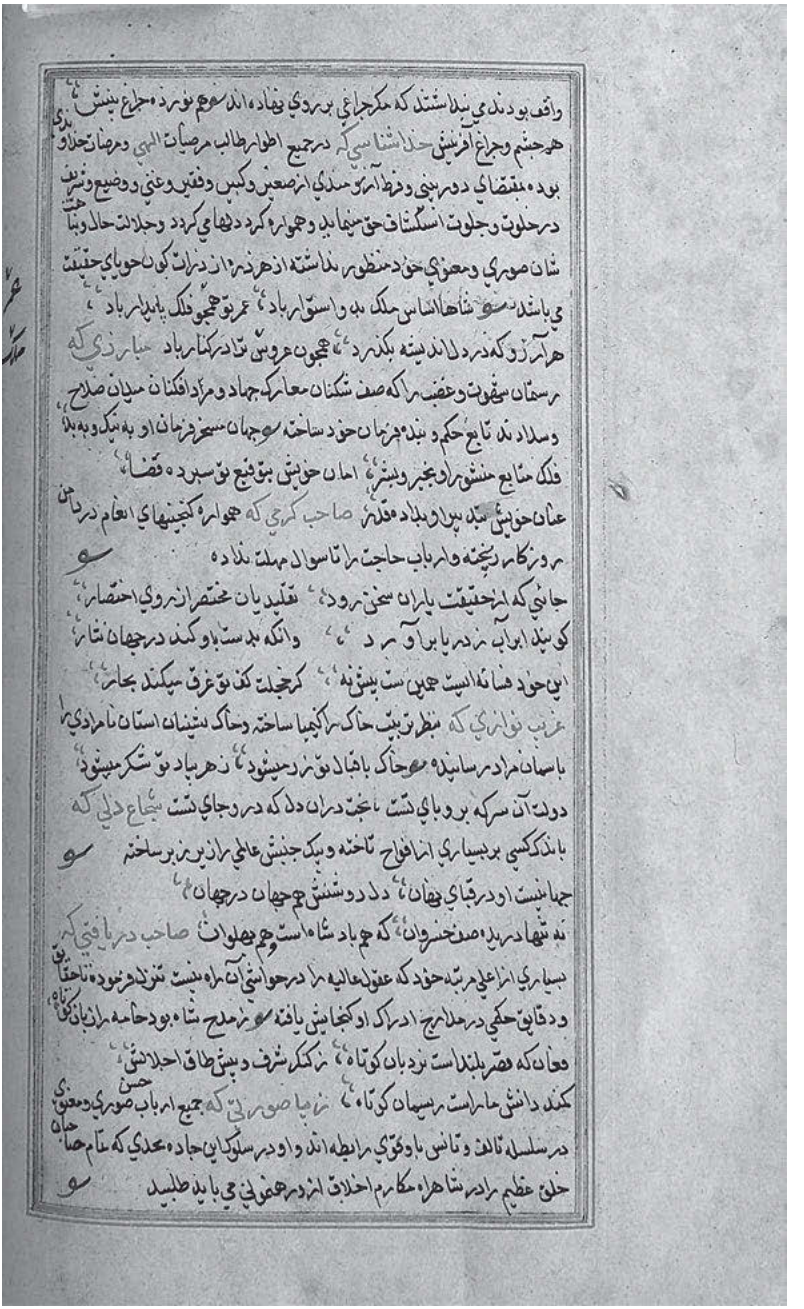

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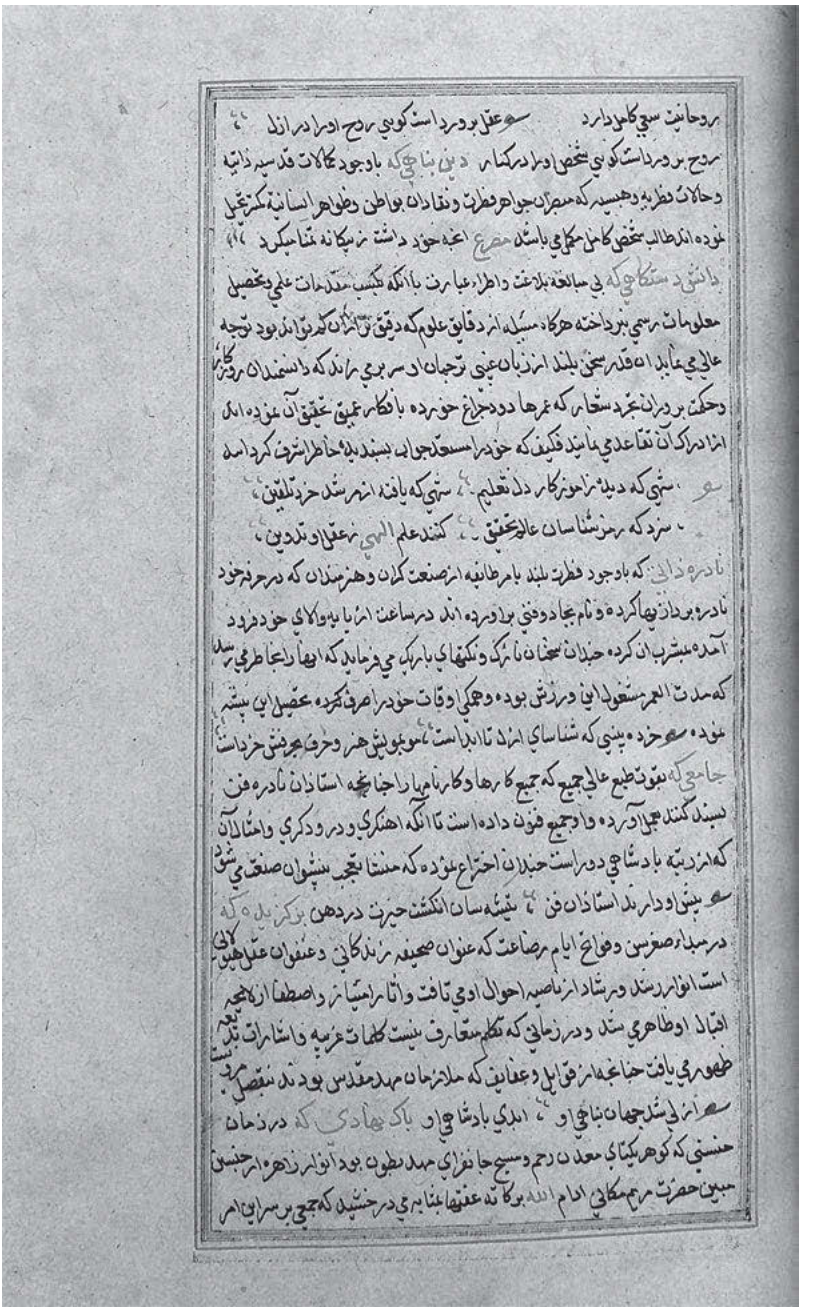

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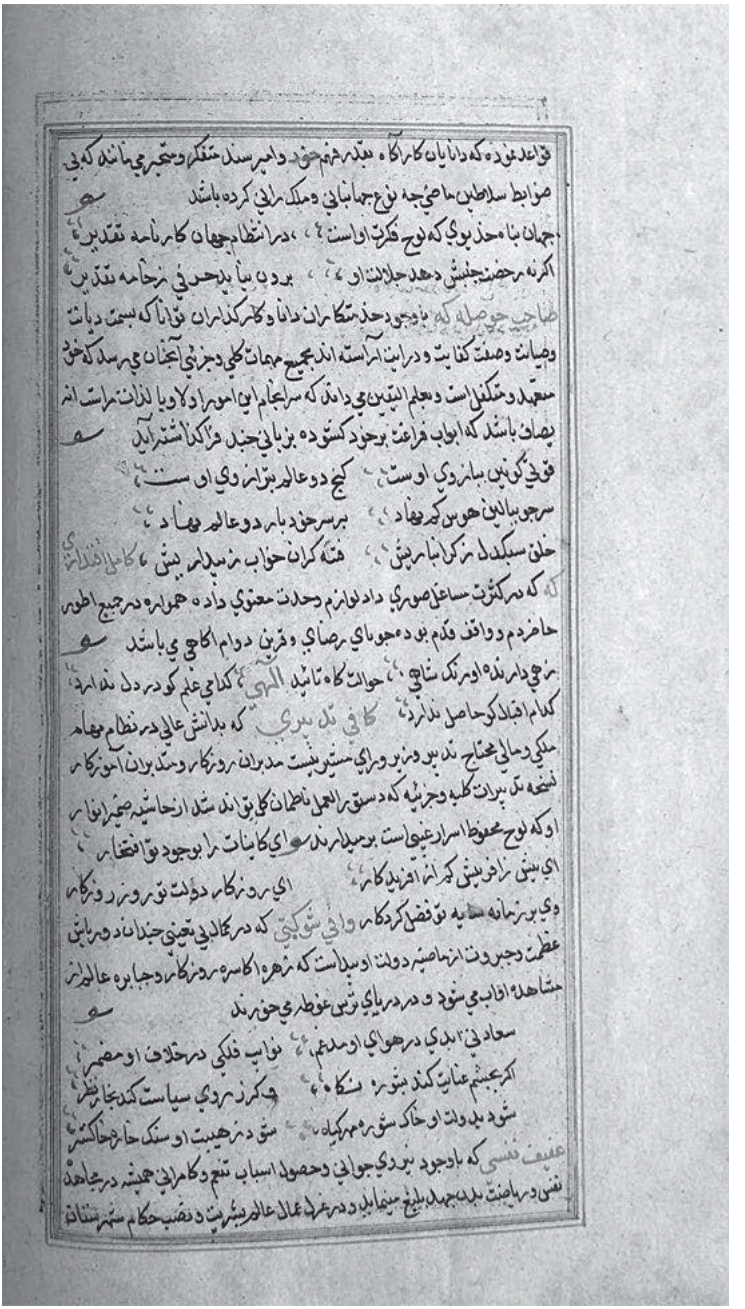

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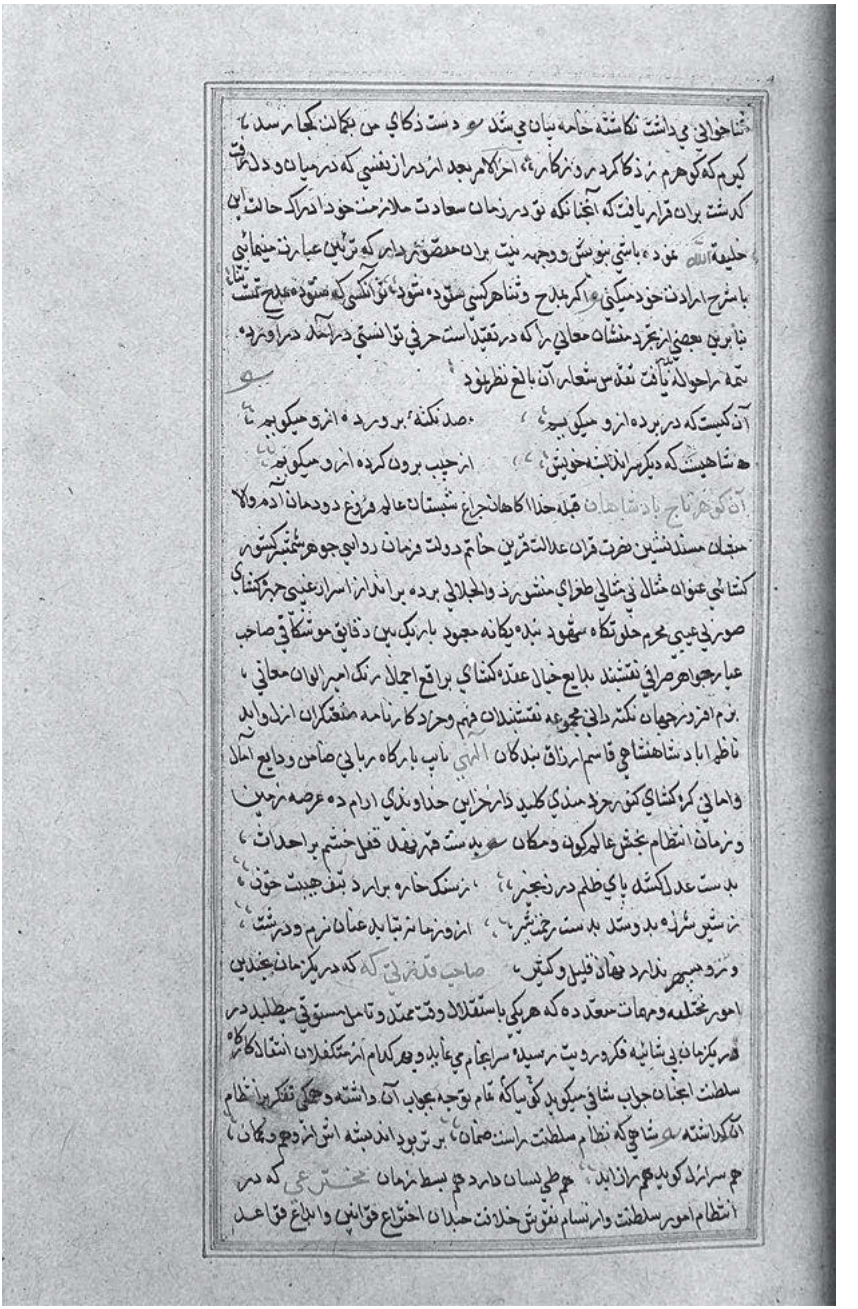

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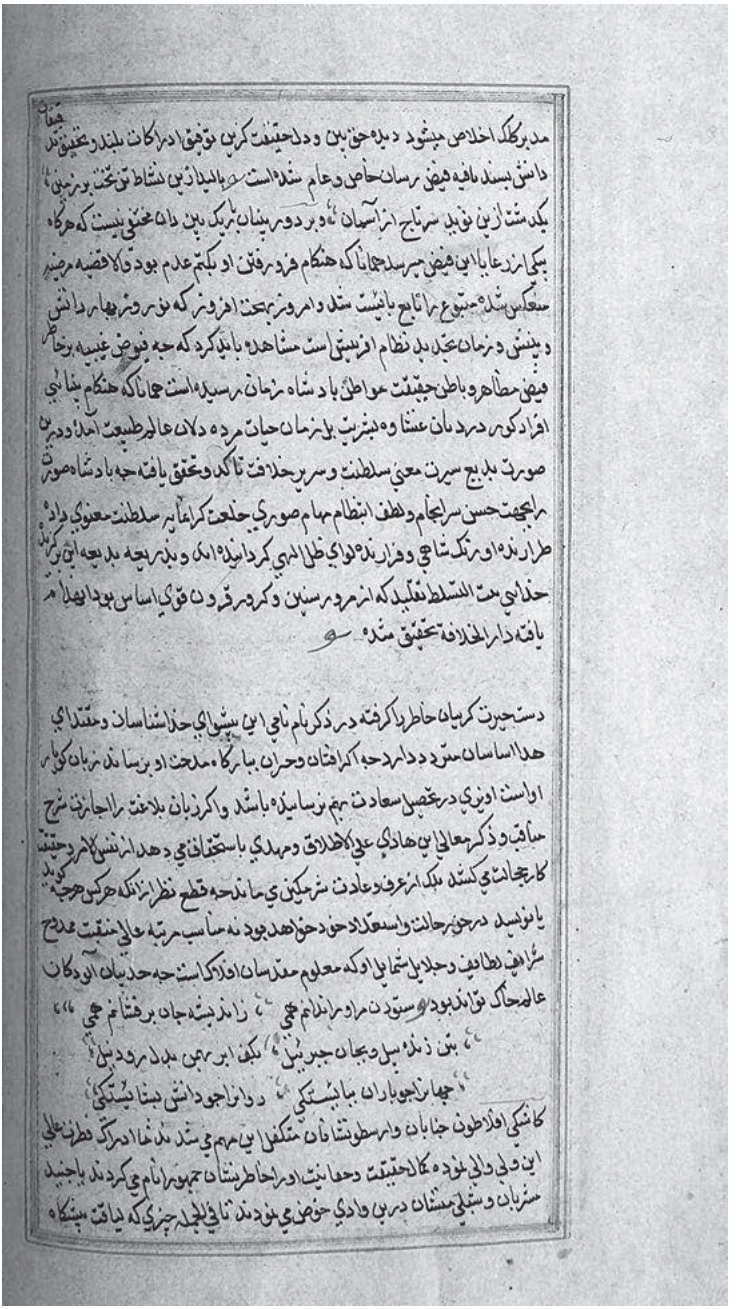

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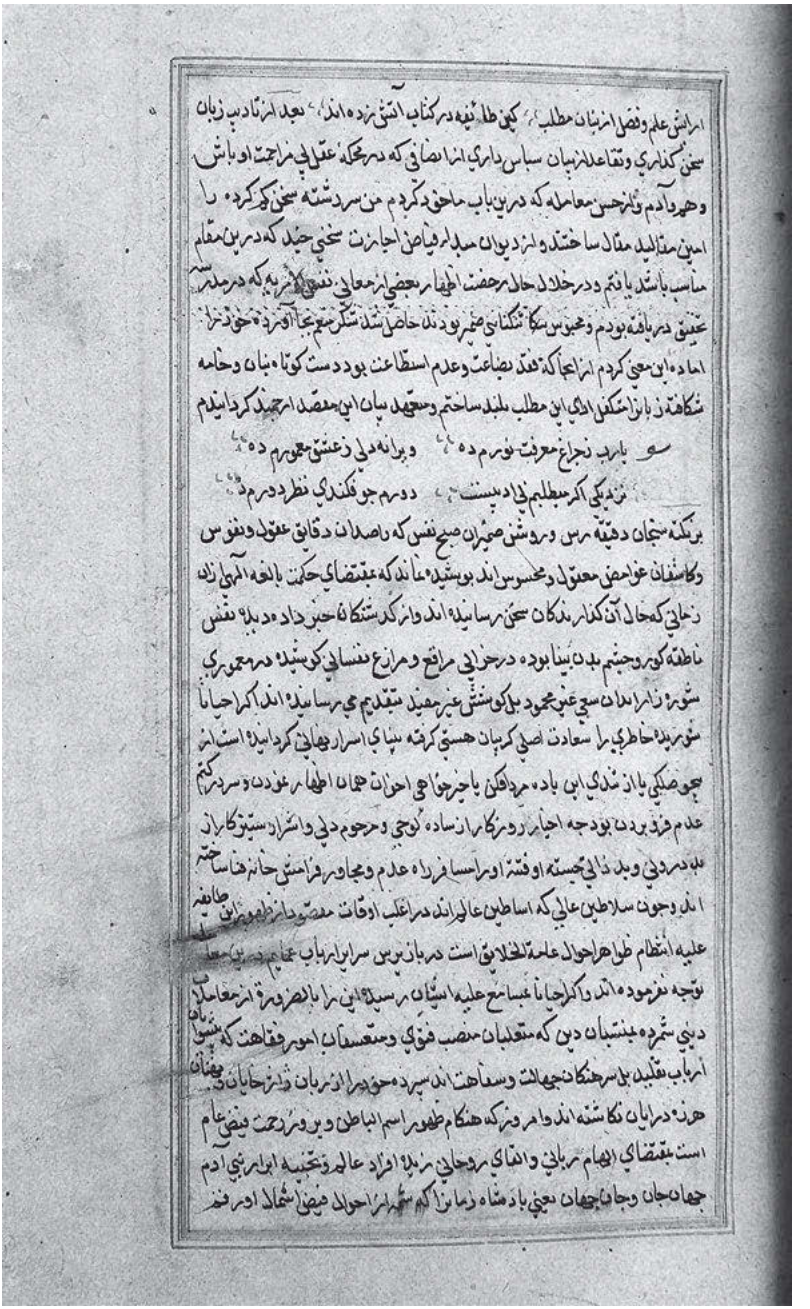

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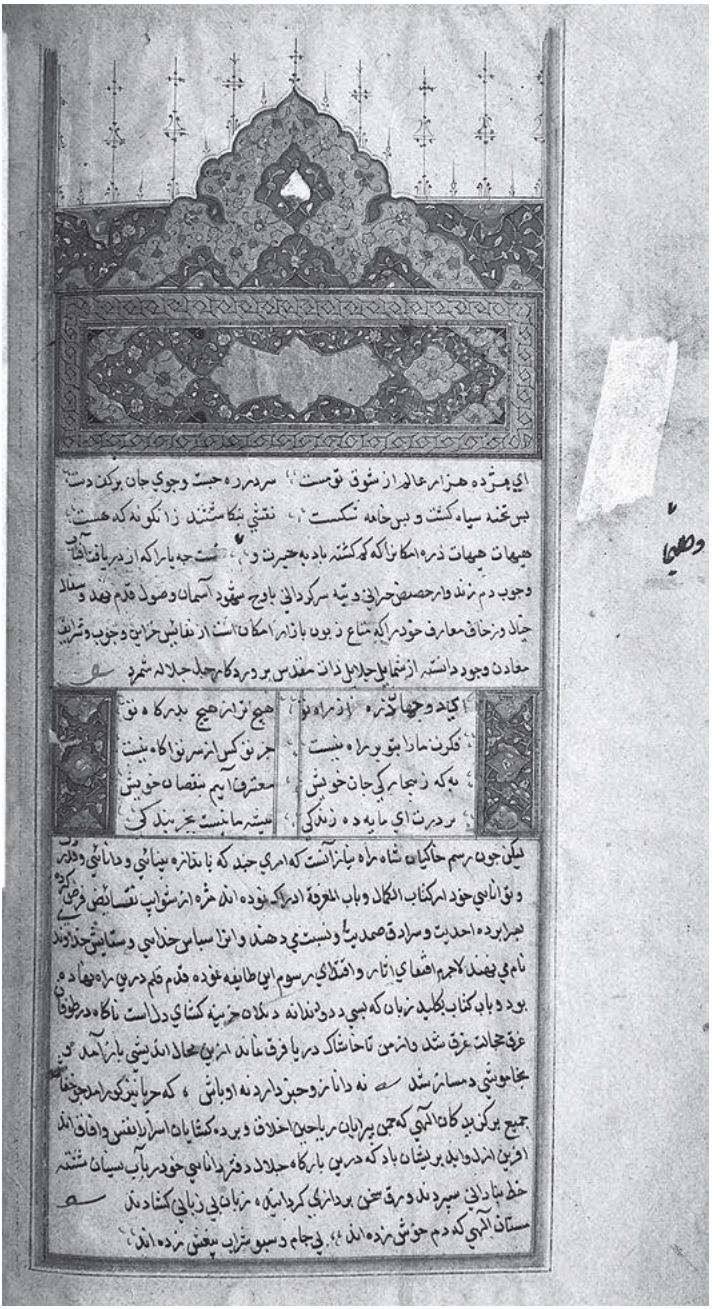

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