Messianism, rationalism and inter-Asian connections: The Majalis-i Jahangiri (1608–11) and the socio-intellectual history of the Mughal ‘ulama

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Relying on the Majalis-i Jahangiri (1608–11) by ʿAbd al-Sattar b. Qasim Lahauri, this essay explores some of the discussions the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–27) conducted with a wide range of scholars, from Brahmans and ʿulama to Jesuit padres and Jewish savants. By far the most numerous, the debates bearing on Islam and involving Muslim intellectuals are especially significant on several accounts. First, because they illuminate how, following in the steps of his father Akbar (r. 1556–605), Jahangir was able to conciliate his messianic claims with a strong engagement with reason and to turn this combination into a formidable instrument for confession and state building. These conversations also provide promising avenues to think afresh the socio-intellectual history of the Mughal ʿulama inasmuch as they capture the challenges and adjustments attendant on imperial patronage, depict the jockeying for influence and positions among intellectuals (particularly between Indo-Muslim and Iranian lettrés), and shed light on relatively little known figures or on unexplored facets of more prominent individuals. In addition, the specific role played by scholars hailing from Iran—and, to a lesser extent, from Central Asia—in the juridical-religious disputes of the Indian court shows how crucial inter-Asian connections and networks were in the fashioning of Mughal ideology but also the ways in which the ongoing flow of émigré ʿulama was disciplined before being incorporated into the empire.

Keywords: Mughal India, Safavid Iran, messianism, reason, intellectual history and networks

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to link together two movements whose importance in several regions of early modern Muslim Asia has been recently highlighted

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in a number of studies. On the one hand, the millenarian wave which, with the coming of the Islamic millennium in 1591–92, brushed the shores of the Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal empires. As shown by the works of Kathryn Babayan, Cornell Fleischer, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Azfar Moin, these three dynasties used the prevailing millenarian climate to bolster both their temporal and spiritual authority, and turned 'political messianism' into an instrument of inward cohesiveness and outward expansion.[1] On the other hand, the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries simultaneously witnessed a reinvigoration of what is generally referred to as the 'rational sciences' or *maʿqulat* in Islamic intellectual history: including logic, philosophy, mathematics and history, the *maʿqulat* played a key role in the process of administrative centralisation, especially in the Ottoman and Mughal empires where the patronage of a number of intellectual figures trained in this tradition led to the growing importance of rational sciences in the educational curricula and hence in the formation of bureaucrats. It comes out clearly from the research conducted by Muzaffar Alam and Ali Anooshahr on Mughal political culture, from Cornell Fleisher's and Kaya Şahin's analyses of two great Ottoman statesmen of the sixteenth century—Mustafa ʿAli (d. 1600) and Jelalzade Mustafa (d. 1567)—but also from the work of Khaled El-Rouayheb who, against received wisdom, has recently shown that rational sciences continued to flourish in Ottoman lands during the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries.[2]

Although the historiographies dealing with the millenarian and rationalist movements at work in the early modern Islamic world have so far largely ignored each other, several 'historical' elements indicate that these two processes were actually related through connections that deserve further investigation. The first element pertains to the collective identity of the actors who participated in these movements. Just as Iranian merchant-administrators have been shown by Sanjay Subrahmanyam to have played a substantial part in the diffusion of forms of state mercantilism throughout the Indian Ocean,[3] other categories of Iranians—especially Sufis and ʿulama, a term which is used here in its wider sense of scholars—contributed to the development of forms of messianism and rationalism in the Ottoman and Mughal empires. These Iranians were not, however, the only forces at play, and other factors also had a part in this process: for instance, one has to take into account the Habsburg cultivation of millenarianism in the Ottoman case and, where the Mughals are concerned, the direct exposure of emperors Babur (r. 1526–30) and Humayun

[1] Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs;* Fleischer, 'The Lawgiver as Messiah'; Subrahmanyam, 'Turning the Stones Over'; Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign.* For larger overviews of the many messianic movements at work in the Muslim world until today, see, for example, García-Arenal, *Mahdisme et millénarisme en islam* and Mir-Kasimov, *Unity in Diversity*.

[2] Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*; Anooshahr, 'Shirazi Scholars'; Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*; Şahin*, Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman*; El-Rouayheb, 'The Myth of "The Triumph of Fanaticism"'.

[3] Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians Abroad'.

(r. 1530–40; 1555–56) to Safavid messianic ideology, earlier North Indian Sufis' efforts at connecting Islamic and Hindu beliefs, as well as the 'new reason' (*navya nyaya*) promoted by contemporary Brahmanical intellectual circles.[4] Far more limited in scope at first sight, the second element—and the focus of the present article—is the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* or *Assemblies of Jahangir* by ʿAbd al-Sattar ibn Qasim Lahauri (d. after 1619), an Indo-Persian text which, since its discovery in Lahore in 2002, has been the object of quite a few publications.[5]

Building on the literary traditions of *munazara* (disputation) and *malfuzat* (teachings of a Sufi master), the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* are at once a record of the night sessions held at Emperor Jahangir's (r. 1605–27) court between 1608 and 1611 and a spiritual handbook for the newly enrolled disciples of the monarch. Contrary to the *Jahangir Nama* (*Book of Jahangir*)—Jahangir's autobiography-cum-official chronicle—where the king's spiritual pretensions are only alluded to, the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* may be read as a manifesto of the emperor's universal ambitions in what was commonly referred to as the 'invisible world' (*ʿalam-i maʿnawi*). The messianic pretensions of the monarch whom ʿAbd al-Sattar described as a 'manifestation of divine secrets' (*mahzar-i asrar-i ilahi*) unfold in the text through the narration of Jahangir's oneiric encounters with heavenly figures, the miracles he performed thanks to his capacities as a seer and, most importantly for the present purpose, the discussions he conducted with a wide range of scholars, from Brahmans and Muslim ʿulama to Jesuit padres and Jewish savants. These discussions are especially significant on several accounts. First, because they illuminate how, following the steps of his father Akbar (r. 1556–1605), Jahangir was able to conciliate his messianic claims with a strong engagement with reason and to turn this combination into a formidable instrument for confession and state building.[6] These conversations also provide a particularly vivid snapshot of intellectual life at the Mughal court and shed light on relatively little-known figures or on unexplored facets of more prominent individuals. Finally, the specific role played by scholars hailing from Iran—and, to a lesser extent, from Central Asia— in the juridical-religious disputes of the Indian court shows how crucial inter-Asian connections and networks were in the fashioning of Mughal ideology.[7]

[4] On *navya nyaya* in early modern India, see Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason*.

[5] Moosvi, 'The Conversations of Jahangir'; Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Disputations'; Lefèvre, 'The *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*', 'Le livre en acte à la cour moghole', 'Beyond Diversity' and '*Majalis-i Jahangiri*'; Khan, 'Jahangir on *Shias* and *Sunnis*', 'Jahangir and Muslim Theology' and 'Jahangir's Perceptions of Sufis'; Kollatz, 'The Creation of a Saint Emperor' and *Inspiration und Tradition*.

[6] For an account of Akbar's millenarianism, see the recent contribution by Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, ch. 5.

[7] For further insight into Mughal representations of Iran and Central Asia at work in the text, see Lefèvre, 'The *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*', pp. 263–75.

Oneiric Unveilings of Jahangir's Messianic Mission

In order to provide adequate background for the Jahangiri debates, it is only fit to start with the series of imperial dreams recorded in the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* where, as elsewhere in Islamic literature in general and in (Indo-)Persian royal chronicles in particular, such visions operated as a privileged medium for the revelation of higher truths.[8] The first and most powerful dream Jahangir narrated in the course of the night sessions he convened carried the monarch to the fort of Lahore, which had been turned into an 'arena of heaven and hell' (*maʿraka-i bihisht wa duzakh*) and where countless souls were being judged by the angel of death (*malak al-maut*): Only a minority of these 'celestial beings' (*asmaniyyan*) ended up on the 'bright and pure' (*raushan wa saf*) side of the river that ran below the fortress, whereas the majority was taken to the other bank, 'terrifying and dark' (*tarsananda wa tira*). When Jahangir recognised his father Akbar and his brothers among the crowd, he panicked and begged the master of ceremony to have mercy on his father and to take him in his stead. To no avail. His prayer was turned down on the grounds that his hour had not yet come. On hearing this, the emperor had a vision of a lightning-like flame (*atishi ba-san-i barq*) setting ablaze a great city situated on the dark side of the river which, as he was to learn later, was none other than Cairo (*shahr-i misr*).[9] Jahangir's second (and much less apocalyptic) dream brought him face to face with a man of greenish complexion (*mardi-yi sabzfam*), dressed in white and around whom a large crowd eager for advice had gathered. Animated by the same desire to benefit from the man's guidance, the monarch approached him respectfully but, in this case as well, his request was denied as he was told that:

> What is it that you do not possess and towards which I could guide you (*rah-bari kunam*)? God, may he be exalted, has given you everything. […] The heart of the poorest beggar is on a par with that of the greatest grandee of [this] world.

Despite his efforts, Jahangir failed to learn anything more from this mysterious figure, who ended up trying to comfort him with some wine—a soothing image with which the emperor woke up.[10] Finally, in the course of his third dream, the Mughal started a dialogue with an interlocutor whose identity was even vaguer, the monarch confessing that he could not remember whether he was speaking to himself or to another person standing in front of him. Either way, this figure revealed

[8] In the course of the 34th assembly, dream (*khwab*) is clearly stated as a channel to access the 'invisible world' (ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 84–85). For two recent collections dealing with the role of dreams in Islamic societies, see Marlow, *Dreaming Across Boundaries* and Felek and Knysh, *Dreams and Visions*; see also Quinn, *Historical Writing*, pp. 65–76, 133–36 for an in-depth analysis of oneiric narratives in Safavid historiography and a brief comparison with the Mughals.

[9] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 26–27.

[10] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 58.

to him that the Jains (*siura*[11]) and the damned (*duzakhiyan*) were one and the same and should therefore be punished (*muʿazzab*) similarly. By way of proof, he at once had half a dozen persons pass before Jahangir's eyes: They were completely naked, with a rhinoceros-like dark and rough skin clearly signalling their infernal nature.[12]

Taken together, these three oneiric episodes constitute the most blatant textual expression of Jahangir's sainthood to be found in his imperial discourse. Whether in the guise of ʿIzraʾil, the Islamic angel of death, of the figure of the second dream whose greenish complexion and function as an invisible spiritual guide strongly suggest an identification with Khizr,[13] or of the enigmatic character of the Jain vision, the main protagonists of Jahangir's oneiric experiences all convey to him a single message: He has been elevated by God to the highest level of mystical knowledge and chosen to act as an intermediary between the invisible and the visible worlds; he is, in other words, a saint (*wali*) of the highest rank. Equally (if not more) interesting than Jahangir's dreams are the commentaries they inspired to members of the audience, most of the glosses reported by ʿAbd al-Sattar emphasising the messianic nature of Jahangir's dispensation. 'The substance of this auspicious dream', Mirza ʿAziz Koka (d. 1624) thus exclaimed following the relation of the monarch's oneiric encounter with Khizr, 'is guidance towards justice' (*hidayat ba ʿadalat*), the amir thereby implicitly associating Jahangir with the figure of the Mahdi (or Messiah), literally 'the rightly guided one' who had been appointed by God to restore justice to mankind.[14] The connection is made even more explicit in ʿAbd al-Sattar's commentary on the first apocalyptic vision which was, according to him, a clear sign of the messianic mission the *padshah* was meant to accomplish during his reign: God had chosen to reveal such 'secrets' (*asrar*) to Jahangir because he wanted him to seat on the 'throne of guidance' (*masnad-i hidayat*) and to restore 'order' (*intizam*) to 'the spiritual and temporal worlds' (*ʿalam-i din u dunya*), that is to say to act as the 'Mahdi of the time' (*mahdi-yi waqt*).[15] ʿAbd al-Sattar's interpretation is all the more significant because it introduces the reader to what constituted, in Islamic millenarian movements, the very source of a just social order, that is to say the perceived ability of the Mahdi to renovate religious law or even to go beyond the normative framework of shariʿa to establish a new socio-religious system. As a matter of fact, it is that very task Jahangir is shown performing in his discussions with the scholars of the court.

[11] In Persian, *siura* refers to the Jain monks of the Shvetambara sect.

[12] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 110–11. For a perceptive and much needed reevaluation of Jain presence at the Mughal court, see Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*.

[13] On this aspect of Khizr, see Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice*, pp. 48–59. Kollatz, 'The Creation of a Saint Emperor', p. 247 suggests a similar identification.

[14] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 58.

[15] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 28.

Mughal Disputations between Spiritual Ecumenism and Hegemonism

By gathering in the hall of private audience (*diwan-i khass*) the representatives of the various religious communities (Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Jews) living in the empire and by seeing to the recording of his exchanges with them, Jahangir most probably sought to appear as a spiritual leader able to transcend the divisions that had so far plagued the 'world of religion' and, therefore, to give a new balance to the latter. Among the several episodes illustrating the monarch's universal claims in this domain, one is particularly instructive for the present argument because it brings to light the Central Asian and Iranian horizons against which these ambitions were formulated.[16] Situated in April 1611, the episode has to do with the Mughal's recommendations to Nur Qilich, an amir of Central Asian origin and Sunni persuasion, who had been chosen to lead a return embassy to the Safavid court of Shah ʿAbbas (r. 1587–629).[17] The monarch opened his admonition by asking, 'Do you consider the office of ambassador (*ilchi-gari*) to Iran with dread and terror (*haras wa tars*) or with extreme Sunni bigotry (*ghayat-i taʿassub-i sunni-gari*)?' Jahangir added that such bigotry would be most inappropriate to the subject of an emperor who, as a 'universal manifestation' (*mazhar-i kull*) and the 'lieutenant and shadow of God on earth' (*khalifa-i khuda wa saya-i u*), was meant to be the emperor of all people, without discrimination. And if Nur Qilich dreaded the fact that 'the shah and the whole population of this region were Shiʿis', how would his brother Shah ʿAbbas consider the subjects of the Mughal empire?[18] Such a display by Jahangir of the inclusive policy of the dynasty reveals the process of competition that had informed its elaboration as well as the hierarchical principles underlying its implementation: whereas the sacred essence of the Mughals had entitled them to dominion over all mankind, the Safavids' self-redefinition as mere Imami supporters and the Sunni sectarianism of the Uzbeks restricted their sovereignty to Shiʿi and Sunni adherents, respectively. Deriving from the dynasty's accession to sacred kingship in the late sixteenth century, *sulh-i kull* (universal conciliation) became at once a pillar of the superior status claimed by the Mughals and a criterion by which they evaluated alternative religious views. In the *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, such a drive to spiritual hegemony also surfaces in the taunts directed at the Safavids' old pretensions to sacred kingship[19] and, more generally, in the theological-juridical disputations recorded by ʿAbd al-Sattar—which it is now time to explore in more detail.

[16] See also ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 34, 71, 78.

[17] Jahangir later changed his mind and entrusted Khan ʿAlam with the charge of the embassy in 1613 (Jahangir, *Jahangir Nama*, p. 148).

[18] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 201.

[19] See, for example, ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 203 where Jahangir is shown mocking at the Safavid *taj* (crown) in general, which functioned as an emblem of affiliation to the dynasty-cum-Sufi order, and at the new model introduced by Shah ʿAbbas in particular.

Beyond the confessional diversity of their participants, these debates have in common a focus on the legal dimension of the religious traditions represented at court and they all bear the imprint, albeit to varying degrees, of the monarch's willingness to gain knowledge of the socio-religious norms that regulated the daily life of his subjects. Questions of jurisprudence largely dominated Jahangir's debates with Muslim ʿulama[20] as well as his fewer discussions with Hindu figures.[21] Likewise, the recent translation into Persian by one 'Yusuf the Jew' of the *Suhuf-i Ibrahim* (Scrolls or Book of Abraham) led to two successive discussions of Judaism's prescriptions for marital life.[22] Even though the debates with the Jesuits were primarily concerned with doctrinal and scriptural questions, they nonetheless contain an (admittedly faint) echo of the emperor's keen interest in religious norms when, during the very first *majlis*, the padres were ordered to clarify the provisions of canon law regarding remarriage.[23] Jahangir's interventions in all such discussions consistently illustrate his determination to act upon the famous *mahzar* of 1579 and to follow in the steps of his predecessor Akbar as supreme legal authority of the empire and of the various communities it included, be they Muslim or not.[24] By positioning himself along such lines, the monarch also meant to demonstrate his ability to bring renewal (*tajdid*) to the 'world of religion' through the exercise of his intellectual faculties (*ʿaql*), which he considered an independent source of knowledge.

Such a deconstructionist approach to law did not, however, equally impacts the various socio-religious norms at work in the empire. If the snapshots provided

[20] Jahangir's Muslim disputations primarily focused on the scriptural sources of the shariʿa (Quran and hadith) and on the latter's provisions on a wide variety of issues (diet, marriage and divorce, conquest, music and singing, funeral rites, henna dye). See Khan, 'Jahangir and Muslim Theology' and 'Jahangir on *Shias* and *Sunnis*', as well as Moosvi, 'The Conversations of Jahangir' for brief descriptions of some of these exchanges; Lefèvre, 'Beyond Diversity', Kollatz, *Inspiration und Tradition*, especially pp. 216–78 and the following pages of the present article for further insight.

[21] See Lefèvre, 'Beyond Diversity' and Kollatz, *Inspiration und Tradition*, pp. 126–30, 253–56 for analyses thereof. Except from a brief and derogatory mention (ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 72), it is worth stressing that Hindu religious traditions are not addressed in the text as a set of metaphysical beliefs.

[22] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 265–66, 268. Albeit mentioned in the Quran, the *Suhuf-i Ibrahim* are generally considered a lost body of scripture. One is therefore left to wonder what text was actually translated at the Mughal court, even though the nature of the subjects debated would point in the direction of the Torah (mentioned as such in the text p. 118 as *taurit*). For further details on the Jewish presence at the Mughal court, see Fischel, 'Jews and Judaism'.

[23] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 3–4. For a thorough analysis of the Muslim-Christian debates, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Disputations'.

[24] Signed by the principal ʿulama of the court, the *mahzar* stated the superior status of the Mughal ruler as *sultan-i ʿadil*: it acknowledged his ability to opine on religious questions (*musaʾil-i din*) on which *mujtahid*s (individuals qualified to exercise *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning in matters relating to the shariʿa) did not agree and also to issue new rulings (*hukm*), provided they did not contradict the Quran and were advantageous to mankind. For further details on the *mahzar*, see Buckler, 'A New Interpretation' and Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, ch. 5.

by the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* are any indication of a larger trend, it seems that, with regard to non-Muslim legal traditions at least, the emperor's arbitrations ultimately resulted in the legitimation of existing rules. An altogether different image emerges from the much more numerous jurisprudential debates pertaining to the shariʿa whose provisions the monarch considered either inadequate or contradictory, and whose authorised exegetes were therefore severely rebuked on a regular basis. Despite the universal idiom in which the emperor's spiritual ambitions were formulated and the presence, in the night sessions, of representatives of Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity, there is little doubt that Jahangir's religious-cum-legal reformism was primarily directed at Islam and the ʿulama. But who really were the Muslim intellectuals who populated the Mughal court in the opening years of the seventeenth century? Were they for the most part, as ʿAbd al-Sattar would have his readers to believe, scholars trapped in the formalism of the shariʿa and satisfied with legal conformism (*taqlid*), and therefore easy prey for the monarch's critical bent of mind?[25]

Debating with the Emperor of Reason: The Travails of (Iranian) ʿUlama

Delusive and provocative as it may sound, the latter question is meant to underline the relative sketchiness of existing scholarship dealing with the intellectual history of the Mughal empire. True, recent years have seen the publication of works of tremendous value shedding light on non-Muslim literati (whether writing in Sanskrit, in the vernaculars or in Persian) directly participating in court disputations and culture or thriving under the Mughal aegis from a greater distance.[26] However, this kind of 'new intellectual history' has so far had a limited impact,

[25] Whereas *taqlid* (lit. 'imitation', citation or following of a qualified jurist) has long been considered by historians of Islamic law a symbol of the supposed rigidification and stagnation of shariʿa following the so-called 'closing of the gate of *ijtihad*' in the tenth century, it has recently been the object of a thorough historiographical reevaluation emphasising continuity (rather than opposition) between the once-imagined binaries of *taqlid* and *ijtihad* (for further details, see, e.g., Ibrahim, 'Rethinking the *Taqlīd-Ijtihād* Dichotomy' and 'The Codification Episteme', especially pp. 163–69). Such a favourable evaluation of *taqlid* is, however, conspicuously missing from Akbari and Jahangiri imperial sources: In this body of texts, the term is used pejoratively to denote, beyond its technical juridical sense, the idea of blind imitation vis-à-vis any kind of transmitted knowledge (*naql*) and is therefore construed as an antithesis of the notion of intellect (*ʿaql*) which the Mughals meant to embody and to promote. The manipulation of the term *taqlid* in official histories is further illustrated by its range of use, chroniclers regularly employing it to discredit the ʿulama who had voiced scepticism about (if not outright opposition to) the juridical-religious claims of the *padshah*: compare for instance Abuʾl Fazl, *Akbar Nama*, 3, pp. 390–400 with Badaʾuni, *Muntakhab al-tawarikh* (ed.), 2, pp. 211–12, 272.

[26] On the first group, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'The Making of a Munshi', Busch, *Poetry of Kings*, especially ch. 3 and 4, Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, Pellò, *Ṭūṭiyān-i Hind*, Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, and Minkowski, 'Learned Brahmins'; on early modern Sanskrit scholars more generally, see, for example, Pollock, 'New intellectuals', O'Hanlon and Minkowski, 'What Makes People Who They Are?', O'Hanlon, 'Speaking from Siva's Temple', and Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason*.

as Ali Anooshahr also recently observed,[27] on the research conducted on Muslim Indo-Persian scholars active at the Mughal court, especially in comparison with available studies on the Safavid and Ottoman cases.[28]

As a matter of fact, the bulk of existing historiography on the topic still bears the imprint of Sayyid Athar Abbas Rizvi's seminal work first published in 1975—*Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign*—on at least two accounts.[29] On the one hand, most available studies continue to concentrate on the reign of Akbar and, more specifically, on the better-known intellectual figures of his time such as Abuʾl Fazl (d. 1602) and ʿAbd al-Qadir Badaʾuni (d. c. 1615),[30] with only a few historians venturing outside this well-chartered (if not always satisfactorily) territory.[31] On the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, the intellectual scene made up of Mughal ʿulama has remained disembodied to a large extent with greater emphasis being laid on their textual production (more often than not reduced to their magnum opus), the ideas expressed therein and their possible textual genealogy rather than on their individual intellectual trajectories and participation in contemporary scholarly networks. In particular—and with the notable exceptions of Muzaffar Alam's stress on the role played by Timurid Herat and the rival Mughal court of Kabul in the genesis of Akbari intellectuals, of Ali Anooshahr's analysis of Shirazi scholars' penetration in the Indian subcontinent, and of Azfar Moin's and Abbas Amanat's insistence on the influence of Iranian Nuqtawi Sufis on Akbar's millenarian claims[32]—relatively little effort has so far been made to connect the various intellectual developments taking shape in the Mughal empire with larger scale ideological movements operating simultaneously in other regions of Muslim Asia or to identify the possible agents of circulation and transmission (individuals and networks) of such movements.

Finally, it is worth stressing that, when summoned by historians, Mughal ʿulama still tend to be assessed for their upholding of (or divergence from) the so-called Sunni orthodoxy and their endorsement of (or disobedience to) state policies, but too rarely for their own sake, as intellectuals whose initial formation was possibly

[27] Anooshahr, 'Shirazi Scholars', pp. 332–33.

[28] See especially Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, ch. 5, Abisaab, *Converting Persia* and Pourjavady, *Philosophy* on the former; Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, Şahin*, Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman*, and El-Rouayheb, 'The Myth of "The Triumph of Fanaticism"' on the latter.

[29] Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*.

[30] Among the extensive literature on Abuʾl Fazl, see Richards, 'The Formulation of Imperial Authority' and Hardy, 'Abu'l Fazl's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah'; on ʿAbd al-Qadir Badaʾuni, see Abbas, *Abdul Qadir Badauni* for a conventional narrative and Anooshahr, 'Mughal Historians' and Moin, 'Messianism, Heresy and Historical Narrative' for two insightful reassessments. See also Grobbel, *Der Dichter Faiḍī* on Abuʾl Fazl's well-known brother Faizi (d. 1595).

[31] See, e.g., Dudney, 'A Desire for Meaning' on the renowned philologist Khan-i Arzu (d. 1756).

[32] Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, ch. 2; Anooshahr, 'Shirazi Scholars'; Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, pp. 164–66; Amanat, 'Persian Nuqṭawīs'.

later challenged by exposure to alternative scholarly or mystical trends and the need to earn one's living. Even though the politico-religious orientations of Mughal ʿulama constitute a crucial question, the emphasis placed on it has resulted in the relegation of (almost all) other aspects of their history but also in the absence of detailed prosopographical studies concerning this group. This has proved especially detrimental to our knowledge of the many little-known scholars who produced no major work or whose writings did not survive to this day, but who nonetheless contributed to the intellectual life and debates of the Mughal empire. It stands out particularly clearly from the materials contained in the *Majalis-i Jahangiri*. As a matter of fact, the text challenges some of the historiographical trends and methods delineated above in that many of the ʿulama participating in the disputations being rather obscure figures, their identity and ideological stance are not readily accessible via their literary production; rather, their intellectual orientation needs to be carefully reconstructed by mixing the information scattered in contemporary chronicles and biographical dictionaries (*tazkira*) produced in Mughal India or elsewhere with the content of their recorded interventions in the *Majalis-i Jahangiri*. In other words, the text-oriented approach favoured by Rizvi and others is here completely inoperative and needs to be replaced by a keen attention to the scholars' individual trajectories, social functions and insertion in wider intellectual circuits.

Interestingly, most of the ʿulama participating in Jahangir's table-talks are mentioned together in a collective entry of the *Zakhirat al-khawanin*, a mid-seventeenth-century Mughal *tazkira*: If all are said to be 'the mujtahids of the time and the wonders of the age', the information the author provides on each of them is unfortunately very scarce and even misleading at times (see below). [33] A closer analysis of the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* brings into view two subgroups behind this collective façade. The first cluster was made of representatives of institutional Islam who, as *mir ʿadl* (an official who assisted the emperor or governors in dispensing justice) or *qazi*s (judges), held positions in the judicial apparatus of the empire. From among the four individuals belonging to this first category, three are minor figures about whom very little information is available—Qazi ʿIsa,[34] Qazi Shukr[35] and the anonymous *qazi* of the army (*qazi-yi ʿaskar*),[36] whereas the fourth, a *shaikhzada* named Sayyid Ahmad Qadiri (d. 1629–30), is an interesting

[33] Bhakkari, *Zakhirat al-khawanin*, 2, pp. 373–74.

[34] A *shaikhzada* (Indian Muslim), Qazi ʿIsa was in charge of Agra. On his father Abu'l Fath Thanisari, see Badaʾuni, *Muntakhab al-tawarikh* (tr.), 3, pp. 187–88.

[35] Badaʾuni, *Muntakhab al-tawarikh*, 2, p. 191 mentions a Qazi Shukr in charge of Mathura in the time of Akbar. Pending further information and research, it is however impossible to establish whether Badaʾuni's and ʿAbd al-Sattar's Qazi Shukr were one and the same.

[36] Following Bhakkari, *Zakhirat al-khawanin*, 2, p. 373 who lists 'Qazi Nurallah [Shushtari] the qazi of the army' in his above-mentioned collective entry, one could be tempted to identify the latter with the *qazi* of the army referred to in the *Majalis-i Jahangiri*. However, this cannot possibly be the case since the well-known Shiite scholar (with Nurbakhshi leanings) had by that time been sentenced to jail by the emperor (as recorded by ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 78) before dying in 1610/11.

case in point for a number of reasons.[37] First because, besides his office of *mir ʿadl*, he was in charge of introducing the would-be disciples (*murid*) to Jahangir and was therefore a central figure of the imperial cult;[38] second, because he had initially been an adherent of Mir Sharif Amuli, a Nuqtawi Sufi who, following the millenarian orientation of this mystical order, had proclaimed himself *mujaddid* (renovator of Islam) before being forced to run away from Iran and to find refuge at the Mughal court under Akbar and then under Jahangir.[39] Interestingly, Ahmad Qadiri's conversations with the monarch indicate that the emperor was fully aware of his earlier affiliation against which he rigorously tested the amir's loyalty to his own person: In the course of the eighteenth session, the Shaikh was thus asked by the emperor if, after having shaved his beard in imitation of his companion (*musahib*) Sharif Amuli, he had also renounced wine (presumably for his sake) and would therefore refuse drinking a cup in the royal presence; needless to say, Ahmad Qadiri's answer amounted to a show of submission following which he was excused from drinking wine.[40] The cases of the Iranian *émigré* Sharif Amuli and of his Indian devotee Ahmad Qadiri are compelling examples because they highlight the continued presence and entrenchment of Nuqtawi adherents in the Mughal empire and court after Akbar's death. Despite their frequent lack of conventional education which contemporary Indo-Persian texts did not fail to mention,[41] the Nuqtawis and their messianic ideology obviously remained attractive enough in the eyes of the new *padshah* for them to achieve relatively high ranks and positions under his dispensation: In this respect, it is worth mentioning that Ahmad Qadiri was later promoted to the office of *sadr*, thereby becoming the head of the religious-judicial apparatus of the empire.[42]

The second category of ʿulama engaged in the Jahangiri debates was comprised of individuals who had no part in the legal system but were included in the disputations on account of their scholarship: they were Ruzbih Shirazi, Taqiyya Shushtari (d. 1616–17)[43] and Shukrallah Shirazi (d. 1639)—all of them of Iranian

[37] His name is also given as Shaikh Ahmad Lahauri or Sayyid Ahmad Qadiri Lahauri in other sources.

[38] Jahangir, *Jahangir Nama*, p. 53.

[39] See Badaʾuni, *Muntakhab al-tawarikh* (tr.), 2, pp. 252–55 and 295 for a contemporary account of Sharif Amuli's arrival at the Mughal court, and Jahangir, *Jahangir Nama*, pp. 46, 53, 63, 68 and 74 for the favours and high rank he still enjoyed in 1606–07. For an in-depth study of the Nuqtawi movement in Iran and the persecution its members suffered at the hands of the Safavid shahs, see Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs*, pp. 57–117; on the Nuqtawi presence at the Mughal court, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, pp. 164–66 and Amanat, 'Persian Nuqṭawīs' none of whom, however, mentions the role of Sayyid Ahmad Qadiri under Jahangir.

[40] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 46–47.

[41] See, for instance, Jahangir, *Jahangir Nama*, p. 46 on Sharif Amuli, and the entry on Ahmad Qadiri in the *Tabaqat-i Shah Jahani* (1638–39) as summarized in Akhtar, 'The Contemporaries', p. 183.

[42] Bhakkari, *Zakhirat al-khawanin*, 2, p. 373 and Shah Nawaz Khan, *Maʾasir al-umaraʾ*, 1, p. 624. Albeit his promotion is not explicitly recorded in Jahangir's memoirs, the charge of *sadr* is appended to his name from 1618 onwards (e.g., Jahangir, *Jahangir Nama*, pp. 251, 341).

[43] His name is also given as Taqi al-Din (Muhammad) Shushtari is other Mughal sources.

origin as indicated by their *laqab*. While Ruzbih Shirazi's career is very poorly documented,[44] we know that both Taqiyya Shushtari and Shukrallah Shirazi were trained in Iran by Muhammad Shah Taqi al-Din Nassaba Shirazi (d. 1610–11)—a man on whom little but valuable information is available. Most importantly for the present purpose, Nassaba was himself a disciple of Fathallah Shirazi (d. 1588–89), a very important figure in the transmission of the precepts of the Shirazi school of philosophy at the Mughal court.[45] As Ali Anooshahr has recently demonstrated through a detailed analysis of his career, Fathallah Shirazi's contribution to state and ideology building under Akbar was manifold and included a promotion of the rational sciences in the educational curriculum as well as a rationalisation of administrative practices (most notably revenue collection and time recording).[46] And yet, does the fact that Nassaba was Taqiyya Shushtari's and Shukrallah Shirazi's teacher necessarily imply that both of them eventually adhered to the precepts of the school of Shiraz?[47] It is of course very likely, especially when one takes into account other elements of the two men's biography such as Taqiyya Shushtari's Persian translation of advice literature and reputation for historical knowledge,[48] Shukrallah Shirazi's first education in calligraphy and account-keeping (*ʿilm-i siyaq*),[49] or the fact that both men had previously enjoyed the patronage of the liberal amir ʿAbd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan (d. 1627)—who had himself benefited from Fathallah Shirazi's teachings—before entering the imperial service of Akbar or Jahangir.[50] For the sake of argument, it is nonetheless worth mentioning that other students of Nassaba are known to have chosen a different path: It is for instance the case of Muhammad Amin Astarabadi (d. 1623–24/26–27) who (re)established

[44] Apart from his interventions recorded in the *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, he is known to have composed an astronomical work (*Kitab-i zij*) together with the better-known Mulla Muhammad of Thatta (Bhakkari, *Zakhirat al-khawanin*, 2, p. 373).

[45] Munshi, *Tarikh*, 1, p. 236. Thanks to Fathallah Shirazi, Nassaba's reputation also appears to have reached Mughal circles: according to Faizi, Nassaba even planned at some point to move to India but then abandoned the idea for lack of funding (Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'A Place in the Sun', pp. 293–94).

[46] Anooshahr, 'Shirazi Scholars', pp. 343–50. For a recent survey of Fathallah Shirazi's career in Iran and India, see also Blake, *Time in Early Modern Islam*, pp. 119–24.

[47] For further insight into the Shirazi school, see Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 193–207 and Pourjavady, *Philosophy*.

[48] Taqiyya Shushtari translated from Arabic into Persian the *Siraj al-muluk* by the Andalusian thinker al-Turtushi (d. 1126) and the *al-Hikmat al-Khalida* by the Iranian philosopher Ibn Miskawaih (d. 1030), two translations that were respectively dedicated to ʿAbd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan and Jahangir (Marshall, *Mughals in India*, n°1785 (ii), ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 127 and Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, p. 69). Besides, his expertise in history earned him the title of 'Muwarrikh Khan' (the lord chronicler) under Jahangir (Jahangir, *Jahangir Nama*, p. 95).

[49] Nahawandi, *Maʾasir-i Rahimi*, 3, p. 27.

[50] See Nahawandi, *Maʾasir-i Rahimi*, 2, p. 550 on ʿAbd al-Rahim and Fathallah Shirazi; 3, pp. 27–30 and 679–87 on Shukrallah Shirazi's and Taqiyya Shushtari's employment at the Khan-i Khanan's court. For further details on the amir's massive patronage of Iranian scholars, poets and artists, see Lefèvre, 'The Court of 'Abd-ur-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān' and Orthmann, *ʿAbd or-Rahim ḫan-e ḫanan*.

the *akhbari* or traditionist trend within Shiite jurisprudence.[51] Be it as it may, none of the Iranian ʿulama who participated in the disputations orchestrated by Jahangir are depicted by ʿAbd al-Sattar as proponents of Shirazi rationalism but rather as engaged in legal conformism. It comes out most clearly from the emperor's discussions with Shukrallah Shirazi which are all the more interesting because they took place shortly after the scholar's arrival at court from the Deccan—where, as mentioned above, he had spent a couple of years in the service of ʿAbd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan—and therefore capture the intellectual challenges that elites eager for Mughal patronage had to face in order to gain acceptance in the imperial order.

Shukrallah Shirazi's first recorded meeting with Jahangir in October 1610 went rather smoothly on the whole, even if signs of tension between the two men are already apparent in the proceedings of the session. As a matter of fact, it is certainly no coincidence that the monarch chose this occasion to expose to the Iranian scholar his own interpretation of the Imamite ban on eating fish without scales, the origins of which remained unexplained in Shiite books of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). In this instance, as in other debates concerning dietary rules prescribed by religious laws,[52] Jahangir resorted to a kind of 'zoologie raisonnée' mixed with hygienic thinking: Such a prohibition, he argued, originated in the very diet of fishes without scales which, because it included meat, made their consumption unlawful (*haram*). Predictably, the imperial interpretation met the enthusiastic approval of the audience, especially of the Shiite ʿulama present who exclaimed: 'There is nothing in our books [on this topic] but were [an explanation] written down, it would not differ [from the *padshah*'s interpretation].'[53] Although the monarch had purposely stressed his superior legal exegesis during this first encounter with the Iranian newcomer, the next two debates in which Shukrallah Shirazi took part in late 1610 to early 1611 show that the latter did not readily accept Jahangir's claims to supreme juridical authority.

The first discussion is especially significant because it indicates that Jahangir's ambitions in matters of religious law went far beyond the sphere of *fiqh* and touched upon its scriptural sources, first among them the Quranic revelation. Carried on during two sessions in early November 1610,[54] the dispute was triggered by the recitation of the Quranic verse 'To you your religion, and to us our religion'—a verse which made the monarch wonder why Islam otherwise prescribed the elimination of unbelievers (*kafiran*).[55] In response to Jahangir's interrogations, the *qazi* of the

[51] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, p. 32; Abisaab, 'Shiʿi Jurisprudence', p. 10. I thank Jan-Peter Hartung for having drawn my attention to this fact.

[52] See, for example, ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, 96–98 and Lefèvre, '*Majalis-i Jahangiri*' (translation) for Jahangir's discussion with a Brahman of the Hindu ban on eating beef.

[53] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 117–18 (citation p. 118).

[54] See ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 121–26, and Lefèvre, '*Majalis-i Jahangiri*', for a full English translation of the debate.

[55] Reference is here to the sixth verse of the sura 109 known as 'The Unbelievers' (*al-Kafirun*): dating from the first Meccan period, the sura 'is said to have been revealed in response to a proposal made by

army remarked that this verse had been in use (*maʿmul*) only until the time when the order to kill the unbelievers (*hukm ba qatl-i kuffar*) was revealed, following which it was abrogated (*mansukh gasht*). By indirectly acknowledging the existence of contradictions within the Quran, the *qazi* had inadvertently opened a breach into which the emperor eagerly stepped. As a matter of fact, the discussion thereafter revolved around the tricky question of the abrogation (*naskh*) of Quranic verses, Jahangir questioning the soundness of keeping within the scripture and of carrying on the recitation (*tilawa*) of those verses whose ruling (*hukm*) was no longer deemed binding for the *ʿumma* (community of believers). Even after he had been explained by Ruzbih Shirazi the three modes of abrogation that the ʿulama had established since the eighth century to deal with apparent inconsistencies within and between the Quran and the Sunna and, beyond, to stabilise Islamic law, the emperor stuck to his position.[56] In a bold move, he even suggested to expel from the Quran those verses whose ruling was no longer binding (*andakhtan-i an az quran*), thereby openly challenging the integrity of the sacred text. At this point, Shukrallah Shirazi stepped up in the discussion and sided with his colleague against the monarch, countering the latter's proposal with the theory of the inimitability (*iʿjaz*) of the Quran.[57] Jahangir, however, declared the argument invalid in the case of those verses whose very words (*lafz*) had been abrogated. Driven to the wall, the scholar had no choice but to invoke 'divine wisdom' (*hikmat-i ilahi*) in order to justify the keeping of those verses in the scripture. Resorting to devotion in the midst of a disputation with the Mughal was, however, a particularly clumsy move as Shukrallah was about to discover for himself. Addressing him, Jahangir ordered: 'Say: "I am unable to give a rational explanation and I stand guilty (*maʿqul nami-tawanam wa mulzam shudam*)."' Having recognised his weakness, the Maulana lowered his head in submission, and the session ended with Mirza ʿAziz Koka's intervention in favour of the ʿulama who were allowed more time to consult their books (*kitabha*). The discussion resumed the following night along very similar lines, the only new element introduced by the scholars being their equation of the recitation of the Quran with a meritorious act (*sawab*)—a line of reasoning that the monarch refuted by pointing out that, in this case, no verse should be abrogated as to recitation. Jahangir further supported his general argument by mentioning a verse whose recitation had, according to him, been abrogated. Ironically, it is

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the Meccan polytheists to simultaneously or alternatively worship Allah and the idols [my translation]' (Blachère, *Le Coran*, 2, p. 125). In this respect, sura 109 contrasts with later suras of the Medinan (post-Hegira) period, some of them advocating a more aggressive attitude vis-à-vis non-Muslims.

[56] The three modes of abrogation are the following: *naskh al-hukm duna l-tilawa* (abrogation of the ruling but not of the recitation); *naskh al-tilawa duna-l hukm* (abrogation of the recitation but not of the ruling); and *naskh al-hukm wa-l-tilawa* (abrogation of the ruling and of the recitation), this last category actually referring to missing verses in the written version of the Quran. On the theory of abrogation and its role in Muslim juristic theory and jurisprudence, see Rippin, 'Abrogation' for a useful introduction and Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law* for an in-depth analysis.

[57] For an introduction to the doctrine of inimitability, see von Grunebaum, 'Iʿd̲jāz'.

precisely the reference to this verse that brought to a close the lengthy debate on abrogation. Ruzbih Shirazi having remarked that the aforementioned verse was actually not part of the Quran, the focus of the discussion thereafter shifted on the difference between the Quran (the words of God transmitted to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel) and the holy (*qudsi*) hadith (the words of God directly transmitted to Muhammad)—a topic on which the emperor does not seem to have been willing or able to impose his views. The debate thus ended in a relatively pacified atmosphere starkly contrasting with the (contained) violence that had presided over most of the monarch's exchanges with the ʿulama, especially with Shukrallah Shirazi.

Taking place a few months later, the second discussion in which the Iranian scholar played a significant part exhibits a recurrent feature of the *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, that is to say the monarch's eagerness to know all the rules governing the Islamic diet (*zabita-i kulliya bara-yi anchi bayad khwurd*) and his badgering of the ʿulama on the lawfulness of all sorts of foods and drinks.[58] In this instance, he asked Shukrallah Shirazi whether eating the flesh of an animal killed with a musket (*bunduq*) while hunting was lawful (*halal*) or not. The Maulana exposed that the sharpness of the instrument of killing (*tizi-yi alat*) being a prerequisite (*shart*) in this matter and the bullet (*tir*) of the musket obviously lacking sharpness, its consumption was therefore illicit; besides, he added, the flesh of animals with canines or claws (*zi-nab wa zi-mikhlab*), namely of beasts and birds of prey, was more generally considered unlawful (*haram*). Both arguments, one should emphasise, were included in book 42 ('Of *zabah* or slaughtering of animals for food') of Burhan al-Din al-Marghinani (d. 1197)'s *Hidaya fi sharh al-bidaya*, a compendium of Hanafi jurisprudence that was composed in twelfth-century Central Asia and thereafter gained tremendous influence in the Sunni world, including in India.[59] Even though Shukrallah Shirazi's interpretation ran counter to the Mughal culture and practices of hunting, Jahangir simply commented on the unfairness and inner contradiction of such a ruling (why was it licit to kill animals that were not cruel, he asked, and illicit to get rid of the wild ones?), his attitude towards the Iranian scholar being overall far more lenient this time. This, however, was only the first part of a discussion which the monarch decided to resume a few days later in the presence of both the Maulana and ʿAbd al-Sattar, who was ordered to express his opinion on the point at issue. After having summarised the content of the preceding debate, the author of the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* started by narrating two anecdotes that were meant to show that the question was actually far more complex than Shukrallah Shirazi's presentation had suggested.

[58] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, pp. 143–44, 148–52. Just like the 'abrogation debate', the discussion spanned two night sessions in late January to early February 1611.

[59] Hamilton, *The Hedaya*, pp. 587–92. For an introduction to al-Marghinani and his influential work, see Heffening, 'al-Marghīnānī'.

Interestingly, both anecdotes were situated in neighbouring Balkh—a region which, like Central Asia more generally, enjoyed a high reputation in Islamic law and jurisprudence; both were also originally narrated to ʿAbd al-Sattar by ʿAbd al-Razzaq Birdi Uzbek (d. 1616), a fugitive from the Tuqay-Timurid khanate who had recently arrived at the Mughal court.[60] The first, and by far the most diverting, story staged a herdsman (*sahranishin*) who had come for advice to one Maulana Aka, the latter being apparently well known in the region for his knowledge, piety and rectitude (*danish, diyanat wa salah*). The herdsman started by narrating how the dog he used to watch his sheep had mated with one of them and thereby generated a rare breed, their offspring having the head of a sheep, and the body of a dog: was this creature *halal* or *haram*? By way of answer, the Mulla recommended a close observation of its behaviour: if it acted as a dog, it was unlawful to eat it, but it was lawful if it acted as a sheep. Upon this, the herdsman left but only to come back even more perplex a few days later, the observation having revealed that the offspring at times behaved like a sheep and at other times like a dog. The Maulana next advised him to kill it and to have its meat cooked in a cauldron: Meat going up to the surface would indicate lawfulness, whereas meat staying at the bottom would be a sign of unlawfulness. Once again, the herdsman acted upon the advice of the Mulla, but to no avail: When cooked in the cauldron, he recounted, the meat first came up to the surface before going back down to the bottom. On hearing this, Maulana Aka was very surprised and he concluded: 'I have told you what I knew. Now, if you want to eat *halal*, [take the meat that] has surfaced and, if you want to eat *haram*, [take the meat that has] remained at the bottom.' Far less amusing but more directly related to the ongoing debate between Jahangir and Shukrallah Shirazi, the other anecdote ʿAbd al-Sattar narrated dealt with the case of an onager killed by musket and whose meat had been considered lawful in Balkh.

Taking the discussion one step further, ʿAbd al-Sattar then proceeded to undermine Shukrallah Shirazi's arguments one by one through an alternative reading of the *Hidaya*.[61] According to his interpretation of the text which, in addition to book 42, was based upon the special regulations on hunting exposed in book 47,[62] the sharpness of the instrument of killing was a prerequisite only if the animal was slaughtered by choice (*ikhtiyari*); when the slaughtering (*zabh*) happened out of necessity (*zaruri*)—which was generally considered to be the case while hunting, a simple wound (*jirahat*) on any part of the animal's body was enough to guarantee the lawfulness of its consumption. Therefore, he emphasised, one had first to determine the exact conditions of the killing before being able to decide on

[60] On this figure and his role in the *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, see Lefèvre, 'The *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī*', pp. 274–75.

[61] He also explicitly mentions the *Sharh-i wiqaya* by ʿUbaidallah b. Maʿsud al-Mahbubi Sadr al-Shariʿa al-Sani (d. 1346–47), a later commentary on the *Hidaya* (ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 152).

[62] Hamilton, *The Hedaya*, pp. 623–29.

the lawfulness of the animal killed. On the second point—the illegality of eating beasts and birds of prey—ʿAbd al-Sattar proceeded similarly, picking up from the *Hidaya* examples of animals with canines or claws that were licit (the camel) and of animals without canines or claws that were illicit (all reptiles). After having listened to ʿAbd al-Sattar's arguments, Jahangir summoned the aforementioned ʿAbd al-Razzaq Birdi Uzbek and asked him to confirm the two anecdotes previously narrated. This, the Central Asian amir did readily, and the emperor then set out to stage a final duel between Shukrallah Shirazi and ʿAbd al-Sattar. Because the pattern of the concluding part of the discussion is very similar to what has been described above (with, on the one hand, ʿAbd al-Sattar displaying his superior jurisprudential knowledge and his ability to voice the opinion that was most likely to earn him the approval of his patron and, on the other hand, a Maulana portrayed as a lower ranking jurist incapable of legal reasoning and of adjusting his scholarship to the social practices of the Mughal elite), there is no need to go into its details.

Conclusion

What insights do the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* provide on the intellectual atmosphere and the ideological orientation prevailing at the Indian court less than a decade after Akbar's death? ʿAbd al-Sattar's table-talks first and foremost show how important the interactions between messianic and rationalist elements were in the formulation of the *padshah*'s authority. On the one hand, the text unmistakably indicates that, for Jahangir, 'presiding over the new post millennial order'[63] involved the implementation of Akbar's messianic programme through his own continued efforts to reform religious law and to go beyond existent normative frameworks—missions that were traditionally described as the hallmarks of the Mahdi: Under his dispensation, ʿAbd al-Sattar writes unequivocally, 'the ancient laws were destroyed and the foundations of justice renewed' (*zabitaha-yi kuhan-ra barham zada wa bina-yi ʿadalat jadid nihadand*).[64] On the other hand, the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* also made clear that the ruler's and, beyond, man's active intellect was thought of as the key instrument of renovation in the juridical-religious sphere (in much the same way as experimentation was used to test authoritative traditions concerning questions of natural philosophy). While Jahangir's authority was deeply rooted in a sacred and mystical idiom, he simultaneously set out to promote reason as a new universal law and his own person as its chief apostle, in keeping with the contemporary development of rational sciences and philosophy at work in both Muslim and Hindu intellectual circles. In this respect, it is significant that the monarch associated with at least one representative of the 'new reason' alluded to in the introduction: In his memoirs, the emperor reports a conversation he had with Rudra Bhattacharya, who

[63] I am here borrowing from Ali Anooshahr's apt phrase (Anooshahr, 'Review', p. 191).
[64] ʿAbd al-Sattar, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 247.

was one of the first Brahmins to teach *navya nyaya* in Banaras.[65] It is also worth emphasising here that Jahangir's stance differed to no small extent from the position of the Safavid shahs who, until the end of the first quarter of the seventeenth century, were satisfied with patronising the adherents of legal rationalism (*usulis*) at the expense of traditionists (*akhbaris*).[66] In addition to his unswerving support to the 'rationalist school' which was by then (as mentioned above) already well-established in the Mughal empire, the *padshah* not only did his utmost to be recognised as the leader of that intellectual movement but he also overstepped the limits that usually constrained Sunni ʿulama: In the hands of the emperor-cum-*mujaddid*, reason became an instrument for the renovation and standardisation of Islamic law as well as a means to rid the Quranic revelation of its contradictions. Needless to say, such reason-based criticism did not apply to the monarch's messianic claims.

Because of the importance given to legal questions in the *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, ʿAbd al-Sattar's work is also a remarkable text of transition between two periods of Mughal history generally associated with Akbar and his great-grandson Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), respectively: The first half of the seventeenth century was actually a time when, in Mughal India as elsewhere in the Muslim world, royal ideologies imbued with Sufism progressively gave way to more juristic approaches to power. There is, however, no denying that Jahangir's ambitions in the legal domain never translated into any concrete policy of reform. In point of fact, no text comparable to the *Fatawa-yi ʿAlamgiri* (1664–72)—a massive compendium of Hanafi jurisprudence commissioned by Aurangzeb to standardise Islamic law—is known for his reign. Nor, or so it seems, were Jahangir's religious-legal pretensions meant to circulate beyond court circles: His claims are nowhere mentioned in the works of contemporary ʿulama and Sufis. Such a silence is especially striking in the case of the Naqshbandi Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) who, like the monarch, considered himself to be the 'renovator of the second millennium' (*mujaddid-i alf-i sani*) and likewise ambitioned to reform the shariʿa: Unlike the emperor, however, he advocated a return to the Prophetic example and the exclusion of Hindus from public life.

Despite their limitations in terms of diffusion and impact, the *Majalis-i Jahangiri*—with their openness to Iran and Central Asia and the straightforward character of the imperial ambitions they record—finally provide a valuable insight on the circulation of ideas and intellectuals within the Eastern Islamic world in early modern times. Written at a moment when the Iranian inputs to Mughal sacred kingship and administrative organisation had largely been digested and appropriated by the Timurid dynasty, the *Majalis-i Jahangiri* nowhere acknowledge such contributions in any direct way. And yet Mughal indebtedness to Iranian intellectual

[65] Jahangir, *Jahangir Nama*, p. 362. On Rudra Bhattacharya, see Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason*, p. 52.

[66] For a useful introduction to the Akhbari-Usuli dispute and further references on the topic, see Gleave, 'Akhbāriyya and Uṣūliyya'.

and managerial tools pervades the text from beginning to end not only through the imperial ideology that informed it but also through Jahangir's (and ʿAbd al-Sattar's) relentless claims to superiority vis-à-vis the Safavid elites who continued to flock to the Indian court—an ongoing flow that was at once perceived as a source of pride and a resource that had to be disciplined before being incorporated into the empire. As shown by the monarch's harsh treatment of Shukrallah Shirazi, Jahangir made a point of having his messianic status recognised by outsiders, especially when they were Iranians. In this respect, the public humiliation the scholar suffered during the abrogation debate may be compared to a ritual of submission and appears in a way as an intellectual equivalent to the Safavid ceremony of the *chub-i tariq* (literally 'stick of the path', stick-beating) during which the shah brought the body of his disciples to obedience.[67] Once such rites of initiation were performed, the newcomer had to build on his own talents and networks to find his place in the Mughal sun: Shukrallah Shirazi seems to have been quite good at this, as he rose to become one of Shah Jahan's (r. 1628–58) most influential ministers (*diwan-i kull*) under the title of Afzal Khan and gained a reputation as a quintessential learned administrator.[68]

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[67] For further details on this ritual, see Morton, 'The *chūb-i ṭarīq*'.

[68] For an overview of his Mughal career, see Bhakkari, *Zakhirat al-khawanin*, 2, pp. 255–56 and Shah Nawaz Khan, *Maʾasir al-umaraʾ*, 1, pp. 149–53. For Afzal Khan as a model, see Kinra, 'The Learned Ideal of the Mughal *Wazīr*' and *Writing Self, Writing Empire*.

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