



BRILL



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SHAH ABU'L-MA'ALI, MIR SAYYID 'ALI, AND THE SAYYIDS OF TIRMIZ: THREE PORTRAITS CHALLENGE AKBARI HISTORIOGRAPHY

This essay is part of a wider research project on three portraits ascribable to a tightly-knit group of artists active in the 1560s–70s whose careers began in the Safavid court atelier and continued under the auspices of one or more Mughal patrons.¹ I focus here on the exquisite *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali* (fig. 1) in the collection of Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan; the other two works are the *Portrait of Mir Musavvir* in the Musée du Louvre in Paris, and an alleged *Self-Portrait of Mir Sayyid 'Ali* in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. These are the earliest specimens of portraiture in Mughal painting, and the artists who painted them or were portrayed in them—Dust Musavvir, Mir Musavvir, and Mir Sayyid 'Ali—were at the forefront of the introduction of portraiture into Safavid painting a few decades earlier (1530s–40s).² Accurate likenesses were occasionally included in Ilkhanid and Timurid paintings from the fourteenth century onwards, becoming more widespread during the fifteenth century;³ but paintings exclusively focused on one or two individuals like those found in the Bahram Mirza Album or the Tahmasp Album constituted a novel genre in the sixteenth century.⁴ Since the earliest known Mughal specimens postdate Safavid examples by a few decades and were produced by the same artists, the connection is quite straightforward. And yet no one would mistake a Mughal piece for a work from the Safavid atelier: even at such an early stage, there is something distinctive about the Mughal portraits, which makes them—to varying degrees—more lifelike and less idealized than their Safavid forerunners. Was this purely a matter of taste, or was the context of these paintings different? Did the three portraits originate in royal ateliers, as is commonly assumed? Were they conceived as a means to immortalize the individuals por-

trayed, or for some other purpose? In an attempt to address these questions and to establish a more precise date for the introduction of a novel genre that was to become one of the most distinctive Mughal art forms, we need to turn to historical sources and evaluate certain clues contained in the paintings themselves. The resulting scenario challenges current assumptions about Mughal portraiture, as well as some of the statements found in Mughal historical sources concerning the extent of Akbar's authority at the beginning of his reign and the role of Central Asian elites (more specifically, religious elites) in the early Mughal period.

Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali, who will be called simply Abu'l-Ma'ali in the remainder of this essay (Mughal sources alternate between the two names), is the subject of the first painting (fig. 1). He was a sayyid—that is, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad—and a high officer in the last few years of emperor Humayun's reign (r. 1530–56, with interruptions), who repeatedly fomented sedition during the first decade of Akbar's rule (r. 1556–1605). Despite the presence of an inscription, there is no scholarly consensus on the dating and *raison d'être* of the work. In order to establish a plausible context in which the portrait might have been produced, we should begin by examining several key episodes in Abu'l-Ma'ali's life. Most notable is his involvement in various rebellions chronicled by Akbar's court historian Abu'l-Fazl (d. 1602), who is our main source for the period. The rebellions instigated by Abu'l-Ma'ali and the extent of his connections to members of the Mughal elite are minimized by Abu'l-Fazl, in accordance with the court historian's efforts to retroject Akbar's charisma onto the years when the young Mughal ruler was still struggling to establish his authority. When re-examined in



Fig. 1. *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali*, signed by Master Dust the Painter (*'amal-i Ustād Dūst Musavvir*), Mughal, ca. 1564. Opaque watercolor on paper. Folio: ca. 38.4 × 25 cm. Image: ca. 14.3 × 17.4 cm. Collection of Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan.

conjunction with the painting, however, Abu'l-Ma'ali's biography becomes strikingly relevant. The *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali* is emblematic of the prominent role played by the old Central Asian elites in the early decades of Akbar's reign. More specifically, it illustrates the fate of the religious elites, whose power and involvement in politics had grown considerably in Central Asia (home to the Mughal dynasty) during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but were challenged when Akbar began to forge new alliances with local Indian elites.⁵

In the painting, Abu'l-Ma'ali is shown holding a scroll on which a short text is inscribed. The text on the scroll begins with *Allāhu Akbar* (God is Great), the standard formula that replaces the *basmala* in Akbari documents.⁶ The inscription then proceeds to identify the sitter as Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali *Kashgharī* (i.e., from Kashgar, in present-day Xinjiang), and describes him as a formerly devoted servant of Humayun (Akbar's father), who is referred to by his posthumous name, *Ḥaẓrat Jannat Āshiyānī* (He Who Dwells in Paradise), implying that Humayun was no longer alive when the portrait was

painted. Finally, the work is attributed to Master Dust the Painter (*Ustād Dūst Muṣavvir*). Assuming the portrait was executed during Abu'l-Ma'ali's lifetime, the information provided in the inscription allows us to restrict the date of the portrait between the years 1556 (death of Humayun) and 1564 (death of Abu'l-Ma'ali), i.e., during the reign of Akbar.

Such a dating, however, is not easy to reconcile with other circumstances and scholarly assumptions. The painting is usually thought to date from the reign of Humayun because Abu'l-Ma'ali is depicted in Humayuni rather than Akbari attire: note especially the distinctive headgear, known as the *Tāj-i 'izzat* (Crown of Honor), worn by Humayun's intimates.⁷ This is in contrast with posthumous depictions of Abu'l-Ma'ali (figs. 2, 3), where his clothes and headgear reflect the current fashion of the court in Akbar's time. Moreover, we know that Abu'l-Ma'ali fell into disgrace immediately after Akbar's accession and spent the remaining eight years of his life either in prison, on pilgrimage to Mecca, or fomenting sedition: therefore it is unlikely that Abu'l-Ma'ali would have been the subject of a painting commissioned by Akbar.

The only other known depictions of Abu'l-Ma'ali—a drawing in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (fig. 2), and a dispersed painting from a copy of the *Akbarnāma*, now in the Art Institute of Chicago (fig. 3)⁸—illustrate his arrest at Akbar's first public audience in 1556. They were painted years later, by artists who had in all likelihood never seen Abu'l-Ma'ali alive, or barely remembered him. Unsurprisingly, in these works Abu'l-Ma'ali is presented as a nondescript youth garbed in anachronistic Akbar-period clothing; in one of them (fig. 2), he sports a moustache that only came into fashion a few years after the incident. These two alleged "portraits" of Abu'l-Ma'ali differ from Dust's painting in both genre and purpose, since they illustrate an episode recounted in the official court chronicle, Abu'l-Fazl's *Akbarnāma*. In that chronicle, Abu'l-Ma'ali is presented as a quintessential rogue who dared challenge Akbar's authority and was crushed by the emperor's superior powers.⁹ By contrast, our *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali* (fig. 1) seems to extol his merits; furthermore, Abu'l-Ma'ali's colorful attire in this painting and the flower tucked into his *tāj* suggest a festive occasion, not a mere record of his likeness, and particularly, not one painted at the behest of his arch-enemy Akbar.¹⁰

The final problem with dating the *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali* is that the name of the painter, Dust Musavvir, does not appear in official Mughal sources from Akbar's reign. The last instance in which the artist's name occurs is in a list of dignitaries in Humayun's retinue as the ruler marched from Kabul to reconquer Hindustan in 1555.¹¹ Since Dust Musavvir is never mentioned afterwards, it is commonly assumed that he either died on the way to Hindustan, or retired before Akbar's accession. Dust was a pupil of the celebrated Timurid artist Bihzad, and had previously been active in the Safavid atelier under Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76). At some point, probably soon after Bihzad's demise (1535–36) and in response to Tahmasp's prohibition of alcohol,¹² Dust left the Safavid court and found employment with Mirza Kamran, Humayun's brother. Kamran initially held court in Lahore as a near-independent ruler; later, he held Kabul during Humayun's exile in Safavid territory (1543–45) (although at first he minted coins in his brother's name—a sign that he still acknowledged Humayun's authority).¹³ With Humayun's reinstatement in Kabul in 1545, Dust became a leading artist in the royal *kitābkhāna* (library-atelier), and possibly even served as its director.¹⁴ In Kabul, Dust produced some of the most inventive Mughal works of all time. Elsewhere I have argued that his impact on Safavid and Mughal painting was more profound than is commonly assumed. After two generations, some of his pupil's pupils—including Muhammadi and Farrukh Beg, both trained by Shaykh Muhammad, whom Dust had taught—still figured prominently among the leading artists recruited by Safavid, Mughal, and even Deccani patrons.¹⁵ Moreover, Muhammadi and Farrukh Beg were among the finest and most innovative portraitists of their time. It is therefore surprising that Dust's name is not included in the list of prominent artists in Akbar's atelier that Abu'l-Fazl provides in his *Ā'in-i Akbarī*.¹⁶

This omission and the Humayun-period clothes worn by Abu'l-Ma'ali in our portrait have led some scholars to doubt the authenticity of the inscription and to suggest that the *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali* may actually date from Humayun's reign.¹⁷ This was my initial working hypothesis as well; but after a careful examination of the inscription,¹⁸ I am confident that there is no reason to doubt its authenticity or to presume any later tampering. While the surface of the inscribed area does appear



Fig. 2. *The Arrest of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali*, ascribed to 'Abdussamad, Mughal, ca. 1556–60 or later. 13.2 × 11.4 cm. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ouseley Add. MS 172, fol. 17a.



Fig. 3. *The Young Emperor Akbar Arrests the Insolent Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali*. Page from a manuscript of the *Akbarnāma*. Designed by Basawan, painted by Shankar. India, Mughal period, ca. 1590/95. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Image: 32 × 19.3 cm (12 5/8 × 7 9/16 in.). Outermost border: 33 × 19.6 cm. Page: 34.4 × 20 cm. Lucy Maud Buckingham Collection, 1919.898. Chicago (IL), Art Institute of Chicago. (Photo: ©2018 The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY/ Scala, Firenze)

to be slightly different from the plain paper background, this is most likely the result of priming, a standard procedure before an inscription was penned. Nothing suggests later interventions. Even the fact that Humayun's posthumous title floats above the text is not a sign of a later adjustment, but rather—as Abolala Soudavar has shown in a similar instance—it indicates respect for the emperor, in accordance with Mughal chancery practice. A gap in the text signals the point where the name should be read.¹⁹

If we accept the inscription as genuine, we will have to look elsewhere for reasons to explain why a disgraced officer in open rebellion against the Mughal ruler (a situation that did not improve but in fact worsened over time, as detailed below) was portrayed during Akbar's reign, and moreover, by an artist who is commonly presumed to have already died by then. To resolve these apparent contradictions, we must consider the possible *raison d'être* of the *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali*. One clue from the painting itself seems to have escaped scholarly attention: the attitude of the sitter, who is portrayed with a bent back, pursed lips, and angled eyebrows, suggesting intense concentration. While scholars have noted Abu'l-Ma'ali's peculiar posture, to the best of my knowledge, it has always been explained as a mannerism on the part of Master Dust, whom scholars recognize as a painter with a caricatural vein. A distorted (and possibly alcohol-induced) view of life is indeed among the hallmarks of Dust's style,²⁰ but postures and details of clothing were hardly accidental in Mughal painting.²¹ Hence, we should consider that the deferential and slightly tense attitude depicted here may well be an integral, meaningful part of the portrait.

The similarity of the *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali* and another early Mughal portrait of the elderly artist Sayyid Muhammad, better known as Mir Musavvir (fig. 4), is especially striking. Mir Musavvir was the father of the painter and poet Mir Sayyid 'Ali, who succeeded Dust at the head of the Mughal imperial atelier. Both father and son had previously been active in the royal Safavid atelier alongside Dust, where all three painters contributed to major manuscript projects. Mir Sayyid 'Ali was then summoned to Kabul in approximately 1551, after Humayun was reinstated there. Based on the Safavid biographer Qazi Ahmad's witness and the absence of Mir Musavvir's name from earlier records, it would seem

that the elderly Mir rejoined his son in India somewhat later in life, probably in his retirement years.²²

In the *Portrait of Mir Musavvir* (fig. 4), the sitter's clothes are unquestionably Akbari. More specifically, the form of the turban—white and with thin folds producing an almost lacelike effect—suggests a dating within the first two decades of Akbar's reign, because of its close similarity to the turbans found in the illustrations of the *Hamzanāma* (ca. 1565–74).²³ Turbans in a variety of colors subsequently came into vogue, whose folds were not depicted prominently by contemporary artists. There is no visual clue as to the elderly sitter's sayyid status—unsurprisingly, perhaps, given Akbar's attempts to downplay sectarian differences, which culminated in his proclamation of *Ṣulḥ-i Kull* (Universal Peace) in 1582, and—more importantly in this connection—given his earlier efforts to undermine the authority of émigré Central Asian secular and religious elites in Hindustan. By contrast, in the *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali*, the unusual black color of the headgear suggests a parallel with the black turban worn by sayyids in Iran to this day (as further detailed below). But overall, the *Portrait of Mir Musavvir* is quite similar to the *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali*, in conception and (arguably) in purpose: both portraits, it is here proposed, convey polite requests from a subordinate to a superior, through a more or less explicit text and a body language that expresses submission and trepidation (compare the Mir's raised eyebrows with Abu'l-Ma'ali's facial expression). Although they are the earliest surviving specimens of their kind, it is possible that these “petitioners' portraits” were based on the conventions of an already established genre (perhaps developed at the Safavid court), earlier examples of which are either lost to us or remain unidentified. A few later examples testify that the genre extended beyond the artists' lifespan, at least in the Mughal milieu;²⁴ and further specimens of the genre may emerge in the future.²⁵

The inscription in the *Portrait of Mir Musavvir* can be roughly translated as follows:

*Allāhu Akbar! He!*²⁶ Petition: the old servant of long date, Mir Musavvir, brings to attention that for a long time the son of this servant has been in service. It is hoped that generosity will not be refused...the poor...very soon having accomplished his journey, will enter the circle in service. ... willing, the shadow of the sun will...²⁷



Fig. 4. *Portrait of the Aged Painter Mir Musavvir*, by Mir Sayyid 'Ali, ca. 1565–70. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Fonds Napoléon, 1893. OA3619ib. (Photo ©Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Raphaël Chipault)

The gaps occur at the end of the inscription, which is partially covered by the curl of the scroll, artfully depicted so as to conceal the section where Akbar's name or title, as well as God's name, were logically meant to appear; undoubtedly out of respect, their names were covered so they did not mingle with an "ordinary" text.

Both the inscription and the clothes worn by the Mir strongly suggest that the *Portrait of Mir Musavvir* was painted when he first arrived in Hindustan and petitioned to be admitted into Akbar's circle of servants, where his son was already well established. At variance with Melikian-Chirvani, I am inclined to attribute the work to Mir Sayyid 'Ali rather than to Mir Musavvir on the basis of style: although Sayyid 'Ali's work is imper-

fectly understood, he painted many seated figures with very similar folds concealing their feet, and his subjects typically display a stiffness similar to this rendering of the Mir.²⁸

Like the inscription in *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali*, the text in the *Portrait of Mir Musavvir* succinctly extols the merits of both father and son in terms of their long service (presumably to Tahmasp rather than Akbar in the case of Mir Musavvir); but it ends more explicitly with a request to join the royal entourage. Both Abu'l-Ma'ali and Mir Musavvir are depicted in a deferential stance, seated with a bent back, presumably before the recipient of the message written on the scroll. Petitions were customarily presented through an intermediary,

usually a high dignitary who agreed to support the petitioner's case. Accordingly, the function of the *Portrait of Mir Musavvir*—and, it is here proposed, of the *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali*—would be to accompany the petition, and to introduce the petitioner to his prospective patron. This is one of the most basic and ancient functions of portraiture. Whether in funerary sculpture, domestic shrines, or public spaces—from Roman equestrian statues of emperors to donor portraits in Indian temples—one of the fundamental aims of portraits was to perpetuate the presence of the individual portrayed. Petitioners' portraits function similarly in that they bring the pleader before their patrons' eyes even in their physical absence, as dictated by court etiquette.

Admittedly, the texts associated with the two portraits are somewhat different: the one held by Mir Musavvir is explicitly identified as a petition (*'arza dāsh*t) and contains a polite request, whereas the one in Abu'l-Ma'ali's hands merely identifies the sitter, extols his closeness to Humayun, and gives the name of the artist who painted the work. Additionally, Abu'l-Ma'ali is shown in the process of writing the inscription, rather than holding a scroll with a text already written out on it. But examples of petitioners' portraits are so scant that it is hard to draw conclusions about their typical features. The close timeframe in which the two portraits were presumably painted, along with the involvement of three artists who knew one another—Dust Musavvir, Mir Sayyid 'Ali, and Mir Musavvir—weighs in favor of the hypothesis that their formal similarities signal a common function.

Let us now turn to textual sources to investigate the circumstances that may have led Abu'l-Ma'ali to be portrayed as a hypothetical petitioner. Two main sources contain biographical information on Abu'l-Ma'ali: Bayazid Bayat's *Tārīkh-i Humāyūn va Akbar* and Abu'l-Fazl's *Akbarnāma*. According to the latter, Abu'l-Ma'ali was one "of the grand Sayyids of Tirmiz," whose family was related to the khans of Mughulistan and Kashgar.²⁹ In the sixteenth century, it was far from unusual for a Central Asian religious family to have intermarried repeatedly with the political elite, and a connection with the khans of Kashgar may explain why Abu'l-Ma'ali is dubbed *Kashgharī* in the inscription.³⁰ Alternatively, he may have simply hailed from there. Unfortunately, no written source to date has emerged with more specific

information on Abu'l-Ma'ali's family background,³¹ but some inferential evidence will be discussed below.

Abu'l-Ma'ali was introduced to Humayun's court in 1551–52 and soon rose to a prominent position in the army and administration.³² Things changed quickly, however, after Akbar's accession: as mentioned, Abu'l-Ma'ali was arrested during Akbar's first public audience, only three days after the new ruler's enthronement. In his *Akbarnāma*, Abu'l-Fazl seems to imply that Abu'l-Ma'ali was arrested due to his improper behavior at the audience, where he expressed dissatisfaction with his new, demoted position at court (the seating order at Mughal audiences being a reflection of one's rank³³). In his chronicle, Bayazid Bayat—who, unlike Abu'l-Fazl, was a contemporary witness—states more explicitly that Abu'l-Ma'ali was contemplating rebellion,³⁴ which is certainly true in retrospect, because he soon managed to escape from prison and proceeded to rally troops to confront Akbar. This is the first in a series of instances in which Abu'l-Ma'ali was imprisoned but managed to flee with the complicity of members of the old Timurid elite.

Abu'l-Fazl pictures Abu'l-Ma'ali as a capricious youth, whose ambitions verged on insanity; he presents the notoriously handsome sayyid as "intoxicated by the world and proud of his superficial good looks."³⁵ In the scheme of the *Akbarnāma*, which aims to demonstrate Akbar's divine right to rule, Abu'l-Ma'ali embodies the "King of Rogues" (*Shāh-i Lavandān*), as he allegedly became known at the time.³⁶ But it is easy to read between the lines of the *Akbarnāma* and see that some factions at court clearly supported Abu'l-Ma'ali's political ambitions, and even regarded him as a potential candidate to the throne—if not Akbar's own throne, then at least some other throne (that of Kashmir or Kabul). This surely constituted a threat to Akbar's rule, which at the time was far from established. Indeed, it is remarkable that Akbar never sentenced Abu'l-Ma'ali to more than prison or exile, even as he repeatedly crushed the sayyid's rebellions. One wonders whether Akbar's lenient attitude was due to Abu'l-Ma'ali's venerable sayyid status and the earlier service he had rendered to Humayun, or whether it was due to other details of his background and relation to the Mughal family that were deliberately obscured in official sources.

The first time Abu'l-Ma'ali was arrested, three days after Akbar's accession in 1556, he was imprisoned in Lahore; but the man in charge of his custody let him escape.³⁷ Shortly thereafter, supported by a substantial Nurbakhshi contingent, Abu'l-Ma'ali led an unsuccessful campaign to conquer Kashmir, then ruled by Ghazi Khan Chak.³⁸ In order to understand why the Nurbakhshi, a Kashmiri party, supported Abu'l-Ma'ali's claims to rule, we need to consider a few historical facts. When the Mughals, who had been defeated by the Afghan officer Sher Khan Sur (later Sher Shah) at the battle of Chausa in 1539, were forced to flee Hindustan, Humayun assembled his brothers and high officers in Lahore to consider various options. Among those present was a cousin of Humayun's late father Babur, Mirza Haydar Dughlat,³⁹ who suggested a plan for the conquest of Kashmir, where he had previously led military expeditions on behalf of the khan of Kashgar. While discussions were still ongoing, however, news came in that Sher Shah's army was approaching, and everyone started to flee in haste. So although Haydar's plan to conquer Kashmir was not implemented at that time, Haydar would later lead a successful expedition to Kashmir on his own, supported by his personal retinue. Eventually, Humayun sought asylum at the Safavid court, while Haydar successfully settled in Kashmir. At first Haydar installed a puppet ruler on the throne, but when Humayun regained hold of Kabul in 1545, Haydar renewed his loyalty to Humayun and began minting coins in the Mughal emperor's name. Subsequently, Haydar's religious zeal led him to persecute both Sufis and Shi'is; this made him unpopular and led to his death in 1551 in a desperate attempt to crush an insurrection.⁴⁰ Humayun, who had been the nominal ruler of Kashmir for a few years (since coins were minted in his name there), was about to mount an expedition to Kashmir in 1553 with strong support from Abu'l-Ma'ali, but other amirs eventually stopped him.⁴¹ Therefore, it is unsurprising to find the Nurbakhshi seeking the Mughal emperor's assistance against a rival Kashmiri political faction around 1555; apparently, only Humayun's premature death a few months later prevented an expedition from taking place.⁴² What is rather more surprising is that Abu'l-Ma'ali, and not Akbar, was then chosen by the same Kashmiri political faction as the next-best candidate shortly thereafter. Perhaps Akbar or his regent Bayram Khan declined to support the Nurbakhshi; or

perhaps Abu'l-Ma'ali (whom the Kashmiri refugees had met at Humayun's court in 1555)⁴³ was chosen because of his sayyid status: the Nurbakhshi were well-known for revering descendants of the Prophet. But other factors may have played a role as well: although nothing in the sources explicitly suggests a prior connection with Kashmir, Abu'l-Ma'ali may well have been familiar with the area. Perhaps it was not merely a coincidence that Abu'l-Ma'ali arrived at Humayun's court in Kabul shortly after Mirza Haydar's demise in Kashmir;⁴⁴ the timing suggests that the *Kashghari* officer may have been in the Mirza's retinue. Haydar had spent the greater part of his life in the service of the khans of Kashgar, and most of his liege men hailed from there. After the Mirza's death, officers from his retinue would have been forced to return to their homeland or seek employment elsewhere. This may account for the arrival of Abu'l-Ma'ali in Kabul at that time.

Whatever the exact circumstances, Abu'l-Ma'ali's expedition to Kashmir in 1556 was not successful, and he was forced to go into hiding, assisted once more by a Mughal officer, in whose house he secretly lived for some time.⁴⁵ Eventually, the sayyid was discovered and turned over to Akbar's regent Bayram Khan, a powerful commander-statesman born in the Badakhshan region of Central Asia and belonging to the Turkic Oguz clan, who at the time was still effectively in command of affairs at the Mughal court.⁴⁶ Abu'l-Ma'ali was dispatched to Gujarat with orders to prepare for a pilgrimage to Mecca, but again he managed to escape. Eventually the sayyid was caught and imprisoned in Bayana (Rajasthan), in whose dungeons he remained for a few years.⁴⁷ In the spring of 1560, when Akbar, supported by his loyal wet nurse Maham Änäkä (d. 1562) and her party, turned against the overbearing Bayram Khan and set up court in Delhi, one of Bayram Khan's first actions was to release Abu'l-Ma'ali from prison.⁴⁸ Intercepted by imperial troops, the "King of Rogues" was finally dispatched to Mecca. But three years later Abu'l-Ma'ali returned and, supported by contingents from Badakhshan and Transoxiana, successfully confronted Mughal imperial troops on several occasions before heading northward again, this time to Kabul.⁴⁹ At this point, Abu'l-Ma'ali's support appears to have stemmed directly from his family's Central Asian connections, since Badakhshan and Transoxiana were the strongholds of Tirmizi sayyids.

Meanwhile, in January 1564, an arrow was shot at Akbar from near Maham Ānākā's madrasa in Delhi, and wounded his shoulder. The archer was allegedly a slave of Akbar's brother-in-law, Sharafuddin Husayn, but Abu'l-Fazl mentions Abu'l-Ma'ali as one of those involved in orchestrating the attempted coup.⁵⁰ Sharafuddin and Abu'l-Ma'ali may have indeed known each other well, because the former had arrived at the Mughal court with an embassy sent by the khan of Kashgar shortly after Akbar's accession. In addition, Sharafuddin was a descendant of the Central Asian Naqshbandi Sufi shaykh Khwaja Ahrar on his father's side, and his mother was the daughter of a Tirmizi amir through a Timurid princess (a daughter of the Timurid ruler Abu Sa'id, the grandfather of Akbar's grandfather Babur).⁵¹ As a man descended from Akbar's ancestor Abu Sa'id, as well as from Abu Sa'id's spiritual mentor, Khwaja Ahrar,⁵² Sharafuddin certainly possessed the credentials to marry into the Mughal family. But it is his Tirmizi ancestors and Kashgari connections that are of greater interest here, because Sharafuddin and Abu'l-Ma'ali may have formed a bond either early on in Kashgar (supposing *Kashghari* means that Abu'l-Ma'ali hailed from there) or later, through their shared Kashgari and Tirmizi connections.

Akbar had not nearly recovered from the arrow wound when Abu'l-Ma'ali, undeterred by the aborted coup, busied himself in further pursuing his own agenda. On his way to Kabul he sent a letter to Mahchüchük, Humayun's widow and the mother of Akbar's half-brother Mirza Muhammad-Hakim. Mahchüchük was then acting as regent for her young son in Kabul. In the letter, Abu'l-Ma'ali proposed to marry the queen's daughter, Fakhrunnisa'.⁵³ It is at this point in the story, when Abu'l-Fazl introduces the literary motif of incompetent advisors who allegedly led the queen to make the wrong decision (i.e., to marry her daughter to the roguish suitor), that Abu'l-Ma'ali is described as being from "the grand sayyids of Tirmiz." Abu'l-Fazl additionally states that "the rulers of Moghulistan and the sultans of Kashgar are connected to that line," which seems to imply that Abu'l-Ma'ali himself was not directly descended from them.

Whatever the specific background of the ambitious sayyid—who was probably in his thirties at the time, although he is portrayed as a beardless youth, in the

manner of a Persianate "moon-faced beauty"—Mahchüchük eventually agreed to the proposal and permitted her daughter to marry him without Akbar's consent (although, presumably, the young ruler's endorsement was not necessary, since Mahchüchük was in some respects Akbar's senior).⁵⁴ Not long afterward, at the end of March 1564, Abu'l-Ma'ali turned against the queen and killed her; after which, we are told, he sat in Kabul's *dīvānkhāna* (council hall) with Prince Muhammad-Hakim seated next to him.⁵⁵ To the best of our knowledge, in Kabul the *dīvānkhāna* was actually a tent, of the trellis (*khargāh*) type.⁵⁶ There is scant information on Mughal audiences at this early stage, but it would seem that the amirs were summoned to council periodically, and not on a regular basis, as in subsequent times. In Kabul, there was no institution comparable to the public audience of Hindustan: public audiences were a Hindustani custom that the Mughals adopted after their conquest of that land; and apparently the custom remained confined to that region. Regardless of the specific details, Abu'l-Ma'ali's gesture in Kabul implies that he had usurped power and kept the child with him as a puppet figure.

This was a truly serious turn of events; but before Akbar even apprehended the situation, someone else intervened. Mirza Sulayman of Badakhshan, who was at the time a virtually independent ruler as well as the seniormost member of the Timurid family,⁵⁷ marched on Kabul with his troops, confronted Abu'l-Ma'ali, defeated him, gained hold of the city, and set up a proper trial in which the "King of Rogues" was convicted. Abu'l-Ma'ali was sentenced to death in Kabul and hanged, and Sulayman divided most of the province among his own followers and those of Muhammad-Hakim, marrying his daughter to the prince.⁵⁸

This would be a fitting conclusion to the story, with the culprit's body buried without much fanfare. Instead, Abu'l-Fazl notes that, after all that Abu'l-Ma'ali had done, including instigating an attempt on Akbar's life and murdering a queen, he was nonetheless buried in an honorable position, alongside the Mughal emperor Babur's sister and brother-in-law. Abu'l-Fazl writes that, "Through the mediation of some influential people his vile body was buried near the tomb of Khanzada Begim and Mahdi Khwaja,"⁵⁹ which is a tactful way of saying that he was buried close to Babur himself in the Mughal

family cemetery in Kabul, known today as the Bagh-i Babur. Since kinship ties were the rationale behind every burial at the site, even in the following century,⁶⁰ and since we know that Abu'l-Ma'ali had no Timurid blood, he must have been related either to Babur's brother-in-law, Mahdi Khwaja, or to Khanzada—that is, to Babur himself, since Khanzada was Babur's full sister. It may be no coincidence that Babur and Khanzada's mother, Qutlugh-Nigar Khanum, was a Mongol princess from Kashgar—a daughter of Yunus Khan,⁶¹ a descendant of Chingis Khan and at one time the khan of Mughulistan (Transoxiana) (r. 1462–87). Unfortunately, Mughal sources do not specify the details of Mahdi Khwaja's background beyond his sayyid status; since Abu'l-Ma'ali was buried close to him, he is usually thought to have been descended from the Tirmizi sayyids as well, but this is of little help for our purposes. Remarkably, however, when Babur was on his deathbed (in Agra, in 1530) there was an attempt to place Mahdi Khwaja on the throne.⁶² Again, we encounter a potential candidate to the throne, on whose background official Akbari sources are silent. One may well argue that Mahdi Khwaja's credentials included his marriage to a Timurid princess; but Abu'l-Ma'ali secured those same credentials, and the reason they both managed to do so was because they were deemed suitable matches for Babur's and Akbar's sisters, respectively. In the case of Sharafuddin, his credentials included the fact that he was a distant paternal cousin of Akbar's through their mutual descent from the former Timurid ruler Abu Sa'id (r. 1451–69). But did the two sayyids—Mahdi Khwaja and Abu'l-Ma'ali—boast a comparable degree of family kinship? According to the Timurid historian Khwandamir (d. 1534), Mahdi Khwaja's mother was a Chingissid princess, a descendant of Abu'l-Khayr Khan.⁶³ Both Sharafuddin and Mahdi Khwaja, in other words, had royal blood in their veins, besides their religious pedigree. Again, one is left to wonder whether Abu'l-Ma'ali might have had royal blood that made him eligible to marry a Mughal princess and to become a potential candidate to the throne. Unfortunately, no sources come to succor.

Whatever his exact lineage or relation to Mahdi Khwaja or Babur, we may infer something about Abu'l-Ma'ali's status from Akbar's lenient attitude upon the occasion of his repeated affronts, as well as from the care taken by Mirza Sulayman, who set up a formal trial for

Abu'l-Ma'ali, did not spill the Rogue's blood, and eventually had him buried in Kabul's royal family cemetery. The choice of burial, in particular, cannot be justified simply on the basis of Abu'l-Ma'ali's sayyid status. In fact, from all the evidence assembled, it would seem that Abu'l-Ma'ali was regarded as a family relation by the Mughals. He certainly stands out as a far more eminent figure in contemporary politics and diplomacy than is commonly assumed. Abu'l-Ma'ali is also a perfect specimen of a sixteenth-century sayyid with military training and political ambitions. Not all such sayyids coveted a throne: one of Abu'l-Ma'ali's brothers, Mir Sayyid Hashim, was a distinguished officer under both Humayun and Akbar, and one of the choice warriors employed by the Khankhanan Mun'im Khan on important campaigns in Bengal, Gujarat, and elsewhere.⁶⁴ Mir Sayyid Hashim was arrested (probably as a safety measure) when Abu'l-Ma'ali was first imprisoned, but he was soon released;⁶⁵ he always sided with his masters and never supported his brother's claims.

Returning now to our portrait and the context in which it might have been painted: when Abu'l-Ma'ali was first arrested, there would have been no need to remind Akbar of the sayyid's service to Humayun. Akbar and Abu'l-Ma'ali knew each other all too well at the time. Even subsequently, Akbar would seem an unlikely recipient, not to mention patron, of the *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali*. Abu'l-Ma'ali is not presented in the portrait as a destitute rogue seeking pardon for a grave offense; rather, he is depicted in brightly-colored clothes, and there is even a flower tucked into his *tāj*. As already noted above, the headgear he is wearing—a hat similar to ones worn by Kyrgyz pastorals today—was reserved for Humayun's intimates (*ichkiyān*). That simple hat form was the prerogative of Humayun's arms-bearers, who were typically youths from the families of his high officers. For higher-ranking officers, a scarf and an array of other accoutrements (such as plumes of various kinds, gold chains, and pins) were added to the basic form and, together with the color and fabric of the hat and scarf, conveyed information on the courtier's background, position at court, and proximity to Humayun.⁶⁶ We are only beginning to crack the code as to what each feature indicated, and no definitive conclusions can be made about the significance of the subject's headgear, except that the black color of Abu'l-Ma'ali's *tāj* is highly unusu-

al, and may possibly signal his sayyid status.⁶⁷ It is tempting to associate Abu'l-Ma'ali's rusty-brown scarf, depicted in a strikingly realistic manner evocative of the texture of pashmina, with Kashmir. The absence of ornaments such as ostrich feathers (typical of warriors) or black egret plumes (reserved for princes)—both of which have precise parallels not only in Humayuni paintings but also in early Safavid and even Timurid works—is in accordance with what we would expect of a religious figure.⁶⁸ The flower tucked into Abu'l-Ma'ali's *tāj* and the brightly colored (in all likelihood silken) yellow *qabā'*, are more elusive clues, but what they seem to suggest, for lack of better explanations, is a festive mood. It is premature to conjecture that they were also meant to evoke a groom's attire, for too little is known about such issues in the late Timurid and early Mughal period. Incidentally, the same flower is depicted in another work attributed to Dust Musavvir.⁶⁹

In light of the evidence assembled, by far the most plausible occasion for the painting would seem to be the proposal that Abu'l-Ma'ali sent to Mahchūchūk in 1564, asking for her daughter's hand in marriage. Alternatively—but somewhat less likely, especially given the sudden turn of events—the portrait may have been commissioned after the marriage in order to seek Akbar's blessing on the union. By then, eight years had passed since Humayun's death, and it would have been appropriate to remind the queen of Abu'l-Ma'ali's service to Humayun in connection with a marriage proposal. In this context, it also would have made sense for the artist to present the sitter in an attractive manner, as the sayyid and handsome man he notoriously was.

If we accept this hypothesis regarding the context of the painting, a few scholarly assumptions should be revised. The circumstances imply that the artist Dust Musavvir must have been alive nearly a decade after Bayazid Bayat's mention of his name in relation to the events of 1555.⁷⁰ Considering that Dust, who had been Bihzad's pupil, must have been in his seventies by then, it is not difficult to imagine him enjoying his retirement in Lahore, but willing to work on commission, especially for an old acquaintance. Alternatively, his age notwithstanding, Dust may have been employed by Mahchūchūk herself in Kabul: after all, his master Bihzad had been active well into his eighties. Perplexing though it may seem to postulate that an artist would

agree to assist Abu'l-Ma'ali in his scheme, Master Dust would have been a perfect candidate. Three decades earlier, he had chosen to leave his position in the royal Safavid atelier, allegedly so he could continue to drink wine. He then traveled to Hindustan, possibly in an attempt to find employment at Humayun's court, but ended up working instead for Humayun's rival half-brother, Prince Kamran—possibly because Humayun's situation had become precarious, or because Kamran made him an offer he could not refuse. When Kamran was ousted from Kabul, Dust accepted employment with Humayun, but some scholars have aptly observed that his caricatural twist on Humayun's portraits suggests he did not especially like his new patron.⁷¹ Thus we should not be too surprised to find the elderly artist supporting Abu'l-Ma'ali's plot, especially if he was handsomely rewarded. It is unlikely that the elderly painter felt any reverence for Akbar, who was only a boy when he rose to the throne, and still a youth in 1564.

This reconstruction of historical circumstances surrounding the *Portrait of Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali* contrasts with received wisdom on the relative importance of the founding figures of the royal Mughal atelier (*kitābkhāna*), as well as on the extent of the confrontation between Akbar and some of the old Central Asian elite during the first decades of his reign. Let us now return to the *Portrait of Mir Musavvir*. Both the Mir and his son Sayyid 'Ali, as mentioned, had worked alongside Dust in the Safavid atelier (the father being roughly from the same generation as Dust). In addition, if we may trust Qazi Ahmad, who associates the *nisba* "Badakhshani" with Mir Musavvir, the father and son were probably also Tirmizi sayyids like Abu'l-Ma'ali, the subject of the portrait painted by Dust. While nothing is known of Dust's own lineage, a tentative reconstruction proposed by Chahriar Adle suggests he was from a family of Khurasani artists specializing in the arts of the book.⁷² As for Mir Musavvir and his son Sayyid 'Ali, whether Tirmizi or not, sayyids they undoubtedly were (and very probably from the Timurid homeland). Moreover, just like Abu'l-Ma'ali—a capable military commander⁷³ and a man of royal ambitions—Mir Sayyid 'Ali and his father bear witness to the multiple roles played by religious elites in the sixteenth century: besides his activity as a painter, Sayyid 'Ali also wrote poetry under the mystically evocative name of Juda'i (a reference to separation from God).⁷⁴

Another prominent family of sayyids, associated with the shrine of 'Abdullah Ansari in Gazurgah on the outskirts of Herat, played an even more prominent role in the Mughal realm by introducing the Khurasani gardening tradition to Hindustan under Babur and Humayun; one of their kin even built the first great imperial Mughal mausoleum, Humayun's tomb.⁷⁵ It is a testament to the high esteem in which sayyids were held at Humayun's court that both Abu'l-Ma'ali and Mir Sayyid 'Ali entered the circle of Humayun's intimates soon after their arrival in Kabul.⁷⁶ Even the elderly historian Khwandamir, despite the prestige of his prior activity at the Timurid court as well as his service to Babur, had to struggle to attain the same honor.⁷⁷

A third and final early Mughal portrait (fig. 5) adds another dimension to the biography of this group of ex-Humayuni courtiers and servants. It is the most problematic of the three works examined here, since its sitter is not explicitly identified. The current scholarly opinion is that the painting is a self-portrait by the artist Mir Sayyid 'Ali.⁷⁸ Given the complexity of its composition and inscriptions, it deserves to be treated in a separate article. For our present purposes, however, I would like to point out a few facts related to the life and activities of Mir Sayyid 'Ali. The painting is usually believed to date to Humayun's reign based on the fact that the artist signs his name as *Nādir ul-Mulk Humāyūnshāhī* (Wonder of the Age, King Humayun's Servant). The clothes worn by the figure in the portrait, however, are inconsistent with a dating to Humayun's reign. In particular, the Deccani headgear of the subject closely resembles examples in Nizam Shahi paintings from the kingdom of Ahmadnagar.⁷⁹ Akbar eventually conquered Ahmadnagar in 1597, but confrontations and diplomatic exchanges had already occurred prior to this date. Conclusive evidence for dating the portrait in Akbar's reign comes from the flora, which could not be the work of the Mir alone, but rather points to a collaboration between Mir Sayyid 'Ali and one of the Indian artists he trained. The dark green ground and flowers appear to have been inspired by European landscape painting and herbals, respectively. They are unlike anything painted by the Mir, or for that matter by other Safavid-trained artists, but closely resemble the flora found in some folios of the *Hamzanāma* (ca. 1565–74). The closest parallels come from pages that have been attributed to

Basawan—a talented artist who would one day lead the Mughal *kitābkhāna*.⁸⁰

There is also evidence that the Mir continued to use the title *Nādir ul-Mulk Humāyūnshāhī* well into Akbar's reign: a seal impression in an early sixteenth-century copy of Jamal al-Din Husayni Shirazi's *Rawzat al-Aḥbāb* (Garden of Friends) preserved in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (fig. 6) bears both this title (fragmentarily preserved, but still discernible) and the clearly legible date 979 (1571–72), showing that Mir Sayyid 'Ali still referred to himself as “King Humayun's Servant” a full fifteen years after Akbar (r. 1556–1605) ascended to the throne. Mir Sayyid 'Ali is thought to have directed Humayun's atelier in Kabul and to have succeeded Dust in this capacity upon his arrival in Kabul ca. 1551. (Note, however, that the atelier in Kabul was probably a modest establishment, certainly much smaller than the Mughal atelier in Akbar's time.) After Humayun's demise, the Mir held that position, directing the first phase of the *Hamzanāma* until he somewhat abruptly undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca, as is testified by a contemporary witness writing around 1572–74.⁸¹ This account of events fully accords with the date of the seal impression, and it is possible that the Mir commissioned the seal for the purpose of stamping the books in his library before he entrusted them to someone as he set off on his pilgrimage.

Sources are silent about Sayyid 'Ali's motives for undertaking the hajj, which may have been personal or professional. In leaving his post as director of Akbar's *kitābkhāna*, Mir Sayyid 'Ali was replaced by 'Abdussamad, an Iranian émigré (possibly from Shiraz). Although 'Abdussamad was a less accomplished painter than the Mir, his greater administrative and organizational abilities are generally recognized; nonetheless, we cannot rule out more personal, or even diplomatic reasons for this sudden change in leadership. The same contemporary witness suggests that Akbar may have been dissatisfied with the way Sayyid 'Ali was running the *Hamzanāma* project; more specifically, the witness claims that once 'Abdussamad took over the project, he strove to bring the *Hamzanāma* to completion and reduce its expenditures.⁸² The Mir's father may have died in the meantime, thus freeing Sayyid 'Ali from family commitments that would have prevented him from undertaking the hajj previously. Interestingly, however,



Fig. 5. Alleged self-portrait of Mir Sayyid 'Ali, new dating proposed here: ca. 1564, opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper. Sheet: 31.59 × 20 cm. Image: 19.05 × 10.48 cm. Los Angeles (CA), Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), bequest of Edwin Binney, 3rd (M.90.141.1). (Photo: ©2018 Digital Image Museum Associates/LACMA/Art Resource NY/Scala, Firenze)



Fig. 6. Seal impression on an early sixteenth-century copy of Jamal al-Din Husayni Shirazi's *Rawzat al-Aḥbāb*. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, Per 201, fol. 1a. (Photo: ©The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin)

these were the very same years that Akbar delivered a final blow to the Central Asian elites at his court and took the reins of power firmly in his own hands. Anyone suspected of maintaining political connections with Akbar's few remaining Timurid siblings, who mounted a final revolt in 1572 and were defeated at the beginning of 1573,⁸³ would have been in an insecure position at this juncture. As a Central Asian (and quite possibly Tirmizi) sayyid, Mir Sayyid 'Ali would have been among those who were no longer welcome at court. This reconstruction of events, albeit partly tentative, opens up historical scenarios that might complement or challenge the official narrative provided by Abu'l-Fazl. Remarkably, works from Mir Sayyid 'Ali's Mughal period are extremely rare, suggesting they were not especially treasured after his departure, or even that the Mir himself destroyed or took back some of them.

From an art historian's point of view, the seal impression discussed above proves that the use of a title connecting the painter with Humayun does not necessarily imply that the third portrait considered here should be dated to Humayun's reign. Indeed, the sitter's clothes are so Indian-looking, and the flora so suggestive of Basawan's work, that a dating in Akbar's reign is almost obligatory. The subject of the painting and its possible intention deserve a separate inquiry and will not be dis-

cussed here. But it is worth noting that the evidence assembled above, including the likelihood that the so-called *Self-Portrait of Mir Sayyid 'Ali* was in fact a collaboration between the Mir and his pupil Basawan, restricts the potential dating of the work to a period of less than a decade, between 1564 and 1572. Considered alongside the biography and portrait of Abu'l-Ma'ali, Sayyid 'Ali's choice of title indicates that, even some fifteen years into Akbar's reign, connections with the late emperor Humayun were more important to the old elite than were associations with his son and successor.

Taken together, the evidence provided by the three earliest Mughal portraits and contemporary sources shows that the networks of Central Asian families extended deep into Hindustan. Of specific interest to the art historian is the fact that at least two of the three earliest surviving Mughal portraits, and possibly all three of them, do not seem to have been created for their own sake (i.e., for aesthetic pleasure, or to glorify their subjects), much less for posterity—as Western scholars sometimes seem to take for granted when it comes to portraiture—but rather to convey a message, or a petition. The alleged *Self-Portrait of Mir Sayyid 'Ali* also contains inscriptions: besides the historical inscription attributing the work to *Nādir ul-Mulk Humāyūnshāhī* (Wonder of the Age, Servant of Humayun), there are poetic couplets inscribed on the felt rug on which the subject is seated—a visual device previously employed by the Mir. These may well hold the key to the message of the painting, linking it to a specific episode or historical juncture, as further research may reveal.

As I hope to have shown in the above discussion, a wealth of information may be gleaned from a close study of these three early portraits. The intricate interplay between words and image conveys specific but not necessarily straightforward messages, as do many visual details that are not easily deciphered—or even noticed—by contemporary viewers. Not only do the three portraits bear witness to the complexity of court etiquette, they also provide a valuable complement to contemporary and later textual narratives. These are themes of potential relevance to the study of Mughal painting at large, and we are only just beginning to scratch the surface.

NOTES

1. A preliminary version of this paper was presented to an international conference organized by the British Institute of Persian Studies: "From Timur to Nadir Shah: Imperial Connections between India, Iran, and Central Asia" (Pembroke College, Cambridge, UK, December 15–17, 2014). It was further developed for the purposes of a guest lecture at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi in January 2017. My thanks go to all the colleagues, students, and reviewers who have helped to improve the text with their valuable comments; a full list would be too long to include here.
2. On the emergence of portraiture in Safavid and Mughal art, see Laura E. Parodi, "Tracing the Rise of Mughal Portraiture: The Kabul Corpus, c. 1545–55," in *Portraiture in South Asia since the Mughals: Art, Representation, and History*, ed. Crispin Branfoot (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 49–72; on portraiture in the Islamic world more generally, see Laura E. Parodi, "Portraits and Albums," *Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum: Arts of the Book and Calligraphy in the Islamic World*, ed. M. Graves and B. Junot (Geneva: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Istanbul: Sakıp Sabancı University and Museum, 2010): 308–15.
3. See discussion in Parodi, "Portraits and Albums," and "Tracing the Rise." A particularly pertinent Timurid-period example is discussed by Abolala Soudavar (with contributions from Milo Cleveland Beach), *Art of the Persian Courts: Selections from the Art and History Trust Collection* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), cat. no. 29.
4. On these two Safavid albums, see David J. Roxburgh, *The Persian Album 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Dust Musavvir is not regarded as a particularly capable portraitist; he is best known for his ability in creating intricate landscapes. Nevertheless, his depictions of Humayun and other contemporaries are the most individualized among the surviving work from the Kabul atelier, and earlier he had produced a famous *Prince and Courtier* (possibly Prince Bahram, Tahmasp's brother, with a favorite) and a less famous portrait of a princess with a suitor or attendant: Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, H. MS 2154, fols. 138b and 121b; illustrated in Roxburgh, *Persian Album*, fig. 133, and *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Düst-Moḥammad Mosawwer," by Chahryar Adle, pl. XVI. Adle interpreted the latter as a portrait of Shah Tahmasp and a maiden, but visual clues—including relative size, posture, and dress code—indicate that the woman is of a higher status than the man in this portrait. (Since her figure is more dominant, she must be a princess, and he cannot be a prince.) Other examples are the *Princely Lovers* attributed to Mirza 'Ali (ca. 1544) and the *Two Safavid Princes* attributed to Aqa Mirak (illustrated in Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts*, cat. nos. 65 and 69). A *Portrait of Murkhan Beg Sarfachi* ascribed to Mir Musavvir (ca. 1530), and a *Prince and Page* attributed to Mir Sayyid 'Ali (ca. 1535) are illustrated in Heather Elgood, "Who Painted Princes of the House of Timur?" in *Humayun's Garden Party: Princes of the House of Timur and Early Mughal Painting*, ed. Sheila Canby (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1994), 9–32, figs. 4, 7.
5. In the last decades of the sixteenth century, religious elites continued to be deeply involved in the politics of Central Asia: see Thomas Welsford, *Four Types of Loyalty in Early Modern Central Asia: The Tūqāy-Timūrid Takeover of Greater Mā Warā al-Nahr, 1598–1605* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). By contrast, about fifteen years into his reign, Akbar decided to turn to Indian elites for support, and strove to undermine the power of officers of Central Asian descent, most of whom were Turko-Mongol warriors or members of religious families, in an (ultimately successful) attempt to rid himself of potential contenders to the throne.
6. The use of *Allāhu Akbar* instead of the traditional Islamic *basmala* is not conclusive evidence of a dating in Akbar's reign, because the formula seems to have been in use under Humayun, judging from its appearance in an inscription in *Akbar Presenting a Painting to Humayun*, a painting securely dated to Humayun's reign. The inscription is illustrated in Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, *Le Chant du monde: L'Art de l'Iran safavide 1501–1736* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2007), cat. no. 174.
7. On which see Laura E. Parodi and Bruce Wannell, "The Earliest Datable Mughal Painting: An Allegory of the Celebrations for Akbar's Circumcision at the Sacred Spring of Khwaja Seh Yaran near Kabul (1546 AD) [Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Libr. Pict. A117, fol. 15A]," *Asianart.com*, November 2011 (<<http://www.asianart.com/articles/parodi/index.html>>), esp. paragraph "The Painting"; and Laura E. Parodi, "Humayun's Sojourn at the Safavid Court," *Proceedings of the 5th Conference of the Societas Iranologica Europaea, Held in Ravenna, 6–11 October 2003*, 2 vols., ed. Antonio Panaino and Riccardo Zipoli (Milano: Mimesis, 2006), 2:135–57.
8. In Andrew Topsfield, *Paintings from Mughal India* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2008), cat. no. 3, the entry states: "Ascribed to 'Abdussamad, c. 1556–60 or later." But the clothes worn by the figures are more compatible with a later date than with 1556–60.
9. Abu'l-Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 2:13–14.
10. The formal and stylistic aspects of the portrait are discussed in greater detail in Parodi, "Tracing the Rise."
11. Bayazid Bayat, *Tārīkh-i Humāyūn va Akbar*, in *Three Memoirs of Humāyūn*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, 2 vols. (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2009), 2:79 (English), 2:102 (Persian). Mir Sayyid 'Ali and Shah Abu'l-Ma'ali are included in the same list.
12. On which see Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 31–32.
13. The artist, whose full name was Dust-Muhammad, was known as Dust the Painter or *Dūst-i Dīvāna* (the Drunkard or the Eccentric), to prevent confusion with a namesake who was a prominent calligrapher in the royal Safavid *kitābkhāna*. Research on Dust the Painter was long hin-

- dered by Stuart Cary Welch's conflation of the two, but Chahryar Adle later clarified the issue. See Martin B. Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1:118; Chahryar Adle, "Les artistes nommés Dūst-Muḥammad au XVI^e siècle," *Studia Iranica* 22, no. 2 (1993): 219–96; *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. "Dūst-Moḥammad Mosawwer" and "Dūst-Moḥammad Heravī," by Chahryar Adle.
14. See my reconstruction of Dust's career in the introduction to Parodi and Wannell, "Earliest Datable Mughal Painting." At the time I also thought that Dust had either died or retired, a point I hereby propose to revise. See also Dickson and Welch, *Houghton Shahnameh*, 1:248 and n. 22 to chapter IV, for possible further evidence that Dust Musavvir was alive early in Akbar's reign.
 15. Parodi and Wannell, "Earliest Datable Mughal Painting," esp. conclusions; Dust-Muhammad's masterpiece is a large painting that was included in the *Gulshan Album* during the seventeenth century. See extensive discussion in the same essay.
 16. Abu'l-Fazl Allami, *The Ā'in-i Akbarī*, trans. H. Blochmann, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: [Royal] Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1927; repr. New Delhi, 1977), 1:114.
 17. See, for example, Sheila Canby, in *Chefs-d'œuvre islamiques de l'Aga Khan Museum*, ed. Sophie Makariou (Paris: Musée du Louvre Éditions, 2007), cat. no. 60.
 18. I had an opportunity to examine the painting before it was mounted for the 2007 exhibition *Chefs-d'œuvre islamiques de l'Aga Khan Museum* at the Louvre.
 19. Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts*, 120.
 20. See Abolala Soudavar, *Reassessing Safavid Art and History Thirty Five Years after Dickson & Welch 1981* (Houston: Soudavar, 2016), 10.
 21. As I hope to have shown in prior publications; see especially Parodi and Wannell, "Earliest Datable Mughal Painting."
 22. *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qādī Aḥmad, Son of Mīr-Munshī*, ed. and trans. V. Minorsky, *Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers* 3/2 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1959), 185. In the past, some scholars have questioned this source: see Massumeh Farhad and Marianna Shreve Simpson, "Sources for the Study of Safavid Painting and Patronage, or Méfiez-vous de Qazi Ahmad," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 286–91. And indeed, nothing supports Qazi Ahmad's claim that Humayun wanted to hire Mir Musavvir but settled for his son Sayyid 'Ali. According to the eyewitness Bayazid Bayat, Sayyid 'Ali and another master, 'Abdussamad, were summoned to court soon after Humayun securely reinstated himself in Kabul in 1551–52. Bayazid Bayat makes no mention of the older Mir, nor does the letter Humayun sent to the Khan of Kashgar that same year, in which the emperor discusses works by artists in his atelier, a copy of which Bayazid includes in his account. See *Three Memoirs*, 2:27–29 (English), 2:37–39 (Persian).
 23. See, e.g., John Seyller, *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), cat. nos. 32, 51.
 24. See Amina Okada, *Le Grand Moghol et ses peintres: Miniaturistes de l'Inde aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), fig. 99.
 25. A detailed study of inscriptions in Mughal painting may reveal unexpected scenarios and greatly advance our understanding of Mughal painting. Keelan Overton has provided an exemplary case with her study of Mughal-Adil Shahi correspondence through portraits and inscriptions: see Overton, "Vida de Jacques de Coutre: A Flemish Account of Bijapuri Visual Culture in the Shadow of Mughal Felicity," in *The Visual World of Muslim India: The Art, Culture, and Society of the Deccan in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Laura E. Parodi (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 233–64; and Keelan Overton, "Book Culture, Royal Libraries, and Persianate Painting in Bijapur, circa 1580–1630," *Muqarnas* 33 (2016): 91–154, esp. 125–27.
 26. These, as mentioned, were standard formulas replacing the *basmala* in Akbar's time. "He" is of course God Almighty.
 27. The inscription was previously published and translated by Melikian-Chirvani, *Chant du Monde*, 68 and cat. no. 172. Oddly enough, he transcribes one of the key words in the text as *pesar* (namely, "son"), but in the translation he gives it as *pīr* ("old man"). I agree with the latter reading for two reasons: first, because the letter *pe* was often written with a single dot, it is possible to read the three dots as *pī* (one dot for *pe* and the other two for *ye*); and second, because the word more logically refers to the petitioner than to his son.
 28. See, for example, two figures illustrated in Assadullah Sourén Melikian-Chirvani, "Mir Sayyed 'Ali: Painter of the Past and Pioneer of the Future," in *Mughal Masters: Further Studies*, ed. Asok Kumar Das (Mumbai: Marg Publications on behalf of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, 1998): 30–51, figs. 10, 11.
 29. Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 2:173. The Tirmizi sayyids are invariably called *sādāt-i buzurg*, or "great sayyids": not only by Mughal authors, but also by earlier historians such as Juwaini. See *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition (EI2)*, s.v. "Tirmidh," by W. Barthold.
 30. The "*Kashgharī*" *nisba* probably served to distinguish our man from other Abu'l-Ma'alis, not only those of his own lineage (of which there were a few), but also from contemporaries such as Abu'l-Ma'ali Topchi, also known as Rumi Khan, who was employed in the Mughal army and is also mentioned in the *Akbarnāma*. Based on Mirza Haydar's witness, it would seem that the name Abu'l-Ma'ali ran in the family of the Tirmizi sayyids: see *Mirza Haydar Dughlat's Tarikh-i Rashidi: A History of the Khans of Moghulistan*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1996), 21.
 31. Some of the marriage connections between the house of Tirmiz and the khans of Kashgar are listed by Wheeler Thackston in his edition of the *Akbarnāma*, but there is no information that is directly relevant to Abu'l-Ma'ali. One of Abu'l-Ma'ali's brothers was known as Khanzada Muham-

- mad, but the word *Khānzāda* does not refer to Chingizid descent; rather, the title, common among Tirmizi sayyids, represents a contracted form of *Khudāvandzāda*—where *Khudāvand*, “Lord,” is an honorary title for men of religion. Among others, Ibn Battuta and Sharafuddin Yazdi use *Khudāvandzāda*, but in later sources, including the *Bāburnāma*, the title appears as *Khānzāda*. See *EL2*, s.v. “Tirmidh,” by Barthold. Khanzada Muhammad, mentioned just once in the *Akbarnāma* (2:199), remains a mysterious figure: all we learn from the passage is that he was seized by the imperials as he tried to rejoin his brother in Narnaul, while the remarkable Abu’l-Ma’ali managed to leave the city before the arrival of the imperial troops.
32. See Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 1:280, 1:285–86.
 33. See Laura E. Parodi, “From *tooy* to *darbār*: Materials for a History of Mughal Audiences and Their Depictions,” in *Ratnamala (Garland of Gems): Indian Art between Mughal, Rajput, Europe, and Far East*, ed. Joachim K. Bautze and Rosamaria Cimino (Ravenna: Edizioni del Girasole, 2010), 51–76.
 34. Bayazid Bayat, *Three Memoirs*, 2:94 (English), 2:119 (Persian).
 35. Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 1:285, 1:288, 2:13.
 36. *Ibid.*, 2:168. The passage is ambiguous, and the translation even more so; but there is little doubt that the “King of Rogues” is [Shah] Abu’l-Ma’ali himself, both because of the pun on the “Shah” in his name, and because his brother never appears to have created trouble.
 37. Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 1:15.
 38. *Ibid.*, 2:86–87. The Nurbakhshi are an Islamic messianic group originating in fifteenth-century Iran from a branch of the Kubrawiyya Sufi order, with communities surviving to this day in Pakistan and India. In the early sixteenth century they challenged Safavid authority in Iran, and refused to intermarry with them in an attempt to maintain independence. See Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*. On their history more generally, see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nurbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003). Both Ghazi Khan and Abu’l-Ma’ali’s supporters were members of the Chak clan, according to Abu’l-Fazl. On the Nurbakhshi’s relationship to the Chak, see Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmīr under the Sultāns* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2005), 158–75; *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, 267. The date of Abu’l-Ma’ali’s Kashmir campaign is 1558. See Hasan, *Kashmīr under the Sultāns*, 173, n. 24.
 39. Author of the *Tārīkh-i Rashīdī*. Babur’s and Haydar’s mothers were sisters: see *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, 65.
 40. On Mirza Haydar’s rule and demise in Kashmir, see Hasan, *Kashmīr under the Sultāns*, 137–57.
 41. Bayazid Bayat, *Three Memoirs*, 1:159 (English), 1:194 (Persian).
 42. Hasan, *Kashmīr under the Sultāns*, 161–62.
 43. *Ibid.*
 44. Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 1:255.
 45. This was one of Bahadur Khan’s liege men, named Tūlāk, with whom Abu’l-Ma’ali was acquainted, according to Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 2:87.
 46. The Mughal court was initially based in Delhi; it was moved to Agra in October 1558, and back to Delhi in March 1560.
 47. Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 2:87.
 48. *Ibid.*, 2:85.
 49. *Ibid.*, 2:168–73.
 50. *Ibid.*, 2:170.
 51. *Ibid.*, 2:18–19.
 52. In 1451, Khwaja ‘Ubaydullah Ahrar had prophesied Abu Sa’id’s victory over another contender for the Timurid throne: see *The Letters of Khwāja ‘Ubayd Allāh Ahrār and His Associates*, ed. and trans. Asom Urumbayev and Jo-Ann Gross (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 13.
 53. Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 2:173.
 54. The exact relationship of the Kabul court to the Mughal throne between Babur’s death in 1530 and the death of Muhammad-Hakim in 1579 is far from clear. Although Muhammad-Hakim challenged Akbar’s authority only well into his mandate and never used the title Padshah, he—like his uncle Kamran before him—apparently enjoyed virtually full independence in practice. In between these periods was Mahchūchūk’s regency, on which we possess virtually no information.
 55. Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 2:174.
 56. See Bayazid Bayat, *Three Memoirs*, 2:23 (English), 2:31 (Persian). On the court tents of the Turko-Mongol tradition (*khargāh* and *bārgāh*) in pre-Mughal times, see Peter Alford Andrews, *Felt Tents and Pavilions: The Nomadic Tradition and Its Interaction with Princely Tentage*, 2 vols. (London: Melisende, 1999), 1:111, 1:548–57. The ceremonial use of the two tents at the Mughal court differed from previous periods; however, from a preliminary inquiry, which will require further substantiation, it would seem the *khargāh* (rather than the *bārgāh*) was the tent used for council and assemblies. If confirmed, this would be at variance with the Turko-Mongolian tradition (cf. Andrews, *Felt Tents*, 1:577).
 57. Sulayman had his own ambitions concerning Kabul. Bayazid Bayat writes that at the time of Humayun’s death, in 1556, “it occurred to him [Sulayman] that the coinage and *khutba* should be in his name in Kabul.” So at that time, Sulayman also mounted an attack on Kabul, but was repelled. See Bayazid Bayat, *Three Memoirs*, 2:95 (English), 2:119.
 58. Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 2:175–76.
 59. *Ibid.*, 2:176.
 60. See Salome Zajadacz-Hastenrath, “A Note on Babur’s Lost Funerary Enclosure at Kabul,” *Muqarnas* 14 (1997): 135–42.
 61. *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, 65.
 62. Abu’l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 1:117.
 63. According to the *Habību’s-siyār*, 4:402, Mahdi Khwaja “was a grandson on his father’s side of Murtaza Khwaja, and... was descended on his mother’s side from Abu’l-Khayr Khan.” I am indebted to Wheeler Thackston for this reference, and for sharing his thoughts on the background of

- Mahdi Khwaja. Research is still in progress on this subject. Abu'l-Khayr Khan (r. 1428–68) of the Shaybanid dynasty, named after Chingis Khan's grandson Shiban, first united the Özbek tribes of Central Asia. His grandson Shaybani Khan (r. 1500–1510) displaced the Timurids; in the process, he defeated Babur and demanded the hand of Khanzada. Khanzada had a child by Shaybani Khan, but rejoined Babur after Shaybani's death. Mahdi Khwaja was her second husband. For a discussion of the Abu'l Khayrid branch of the Shaybanid Khanate and their family tree, see Welsford, *Four Types of Loyalty*, 51–52 and fig. 6.
64. See Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 2:275, 3:325, 3:353.
 65. *Ibid.*, 2:15.
 66. A discussion of the forms and attributes that signalled an individual's status at Humayun's court may be found in Parodi and Wannell, "Earliest Datable Mughal Painting." I previously discussed the *Tāj-i 'Izzat* in relation to its Safavid counterpart and likely prototype, the Safavid *Tāj-i Ḥaydarī*, in "Humayun's Sojourn at the Safavid Court." Any such analysis is necessarily preliminary, as further details are likely to emerge from the study of individual paintings and comparisons with the far more extensive corpus of near-coeval Safavid paintings, in which various *Tāj-i Ḥaydarī* forms are depicted based on similar principles.
 67. I am indebted to Ünver Rüstem for prompting me to consider the issue of whether anything in Abu'l-Ma'ali's attire might refer specifically to his sayyid status. The color black (more specifically a black overcloak, or *burda*) is usually associated with the Prophet in Persian painting (for some Ilkhanid and Safavid examples, see Christiane Gruber, "Questioning the 'Classical' in Persian Paintings: Models and Problems of Definition," in *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 [2012]: 1–25). While the Prophet himself allegedly donned a black or a white turban, green was more typically associated with his descendants, at least in the Arab world. See Reinhardt P. Dozy, *Dictionnaire détaillé des noms des vêtements chez les Arabes* (Amsterdam, 1845), 10, 306, 308. However, sayyids wear black turbans in Iran today, and the color of their attire at the Mughal court in the sixteenth century (as well as Mughal color etiquette in general) remains to be investigated.
 68. For a comparison, see the likeness of Humayun's father-in-law, Mir Baba Dust (who came from a family of shaykhs), in Parodi and Wannell, "Earliest Datable Mughal Painting," esp. the section titled "Discussion."
 69. An identical flower (which has so far defied identification) is held out by one of Humayun's attendants in the *Allegory of Akbar's Circumcision at Khwaja Seh Yaran* (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Libr. Pict. A117, fol. 15a). Illustrated in Parodi and Wannell, "Earliest Datable Mughal Painting," fig. 4.
 70. In Bayazid Bayat, *Three Memoirs*, 2:79 (English), 2:102 (Persian).
 71. See the portraits of Humayun and his other brother, Hindal, illustrated in Parodi and Wannell, figs. 2, 5.
 72. Adle, "Düst-Moḥammad Mosawwer."
 73. See Jawhar Aftabachi, *Tadhkiratu'l Waqi'āt*, in Bayazid Bayat, *Three Memoirs*, 1:167 (English), 1:202 (Persian).
 74. Discussed in Melikian-Chirvani, "Mir Sayyed 'Ali," 32.
 75. On the Khurasani agricultural tradition and the role played by this family of sayyids, see Maria Eva Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), chapter 4. On the introduction of the Khurasani gardening tradition to Hindustan, see Laura E. Parodi, "The Taj Mahal and the Garden Tradition of the Mughals," in *Orientalia* 48, no. 3 (June 2017): 118–25; on Humayun's tomb, see Parodi, "The Posthumous Portrait of *Hadrat Jannat Āshiyāni*: Dynastic, Saintly, and Literary Imagery in the Tomb of Humayun," *Islamic Art* 6 (2009): 129–58.
 76. Bayazid Bayat, *Three Memoirs*, 2:28 (English), 2:37.
 77. See Khwāndamīr, *Qānūn-i Humāyūnī*, trans. Bains Prashad (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1940; repr. Delhi, 1996), 50, and discussion in Parodi, "Humayun's Sojourn," 144.
 78. Formerly known as *Portrait of a Young Scholar*. See Prata-paditya Pal, *Indian Painting: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection* (Los Angeles; The Museum, 1993), cat. no. 45; Melikian-Chirvani, "Mir Sayyed 'Ali," 34–39.
 79. See, for example, *A Portrait of Sultan Murtaza(?) Nizam Shah Enthroned*, illustrated in Mark Zebrowski, *Deccani Painting* (London: Sotheby Publications, 1983), pl. II.
 80. See especially Seyller, *Adventures of Hamza*, cat. nos. 76, 80, 81.
 81. Mention of Mir Sayyid 'Ali's pilgrimage is made in a marginal note found in an autograph copy of Mir 'Ala al-Dawla's *Nafā'is al-Ma'āsir*, datable to ca. 1572–74. Discussed in Seyller, *Adventures of Hamza*, 32–33.
 82. *Ibid.*
 83. An account of the campaign, including the capture of Shara-fuddin Mirza, Akbar's brother-in-law and Abu'l-Ma'ali's old ally, is found in Abu'l-Fazl, *History of Akbar*, 3:7–24.