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THE FORGOTTEN PRINCE: MIRZA HAKIM AND THE FORMATION OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE IN INDIA

BY

MUNIS D. FARUQUI*

Abstract

This paper examines the intense competition between Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605)—the effective founder of the Mughal Empire in India—and his Kabul-based half-brother, Mirza Hakim (d. 1585). A focus on this rivalry serves to highlight the critical but historically unacknowledged role played by Mirza Hakim in shaping the trajectory of Akbar’s reign and also that of the Mughal Empire in India. It is also intended to underline the continued significance of connective links between Central Asia and South Asia decades after the founding of the Mughal Empire in 1526.


Keywords: Mughal Empire, Akbar, Mirza Hakim, imperial state formation, early-modern

I

In August 1585, the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) received news of the death of Mirza Hakim, his half-brother and the independent ruler of Kabul. Even as Akbar feigned his mourning of Mirza Hakim (the same brother whose

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assassination he had contemplated ordering four years before), the emperor’s generals set in motion longstanding plans to mount a military campaign against Kabul. Their brief was a simple one: seize Kabul and gain physical control over the Mirza’s two pre-teen sons, Kaikobad and Afrasiyab. Akbar’s officers did not disappoint their master. By the end of 1585, Akbar’s army was safely garrisoned in Kabul and the Mirza’s sons were under house arrest at the Mughal court in Lahore.

The death of Mirza Hakim, the seizure of Kabul, and the capture of the Mirza’s sons mark a crucial milestone in Akbar’s reign. No longer would rival contenders within the Mughal family challenge Akbar’s legitimacy. No longer would opponents within the ranks of either the Mughal nobility or the ulama have an axis around which to focus their opposition to Akbar’s political and religious initiatives. Once rid of the menacing shadow cast by Mirza Hakim, Akbar no longer felt compelled to tailor his imperial initiatives to woo disparate political and religious constituencies. Indeed, the death of Mirza Hakim, I argue, is a hitherto overlooked element in the exploration of how and why Akbar conclusively moved from a pro-Islamic stance to the liberal and eclectic stance for which he is widely remembered.

This paper highlights the critical role that political and religious competition between Mirza Hakim and Akbar played in shaping the latter’s imperial vision. In so doing, it seeks to emphasize the general principle of sibling rivalry, and the specific case of rivalry between Mirza Hakim and Akbar, as key for understanding Mughal imperial succession. It also demonstrates the importance of moving beyond the field of South Asian history to focus on the connective links between South and Central Asia; we cannot fully understand the post-1550s trajectory of the Mughal Empire, or its particular diversion from Central Asia, without fully appreciating the vexed relationship between Akbar and Mirza Hakim. Finally, this paper contributes to recent discussions of Akbar that generally complicate the old view that his spectacular reign was simply a result of his genius.²

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2 See generally, Iqtidar Alam Khan, Gunpowder and Firearms: Warfare in Medieval India (Delhi, 2004); Jos Gommans, Mughal Warfare (London, 2002); Afzal Husain, The Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir (Delhi: 1999); Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., The Mughal State, 1526-1707 (Delhi, 1998); Irfan Habib, ed., Akbar and his India (Delhi, 1997); John F. Richards, The Mughal Empire (Cambridge, 1993); Dirk Kolff, Naukar, Raiput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850 (Cambridge, 1990); Douglas Streusand, The Formation of the Mughal Empire (Delhi, 1989); John F.
In order to understand Mirza Hakim’s significance in the formation of the Mughal Empire, however, we must begin by querying the longstanding historical neglect of the Mirza by generations of historians. Curiously, contemporary scholars share with their colonial and pre-colonial counterparts a failure to understand the central role played by competition between Akbar and his hitherto forgotten half-brother in shaping the policies of the greatest Mughal emperor.\(^3\) To what can the historiographical amnesia surrounding Mirza Hakim be attributed? The historical sources from the period provide a valuable starting point for answering this question.

II

Among the most important and commonly referenced chronicles for the period are Shaikh Abul Fazl Allami’s Akbarnama, Abdul Qadir Badaouni’s Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh, Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad’s Tabaqat-i Akbari, Muhammad Arif Qandahari’s Tarikh-i Akbari, and Bayazid Bayat’s Tazkira-i Humayun wa Akbar. All of these texts—barring Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh (a critical and secret account of Akbar’s reign)—are openly hostile towards Mirza Hakim. Interestingly, even in the case of the Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh, opposition towards Akbar’s policies does not translate into support for the political claims of the emperor’s Kabul-based half-brother. Nor does it result in a gentler representation of the Mirza. Rather, Badaouni’s attitude towards the Mirza can be best characterized as studied indifference; the author in fact is careful to avoid his customary commentary and limits himself instead to a bland recounting of the historical events involving the Mirza.\(^4\) The broad consensus among

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\(^3\) Among the only modern scholars who have paid any attention to Mirza Hakim are Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmaniyam. See The Mughal State, 1526-1707, 22-23. See also Sanjay Subrahmaniyam’s broad political narrative about Mirza Hakim’s rule in Kabul: “A Note on the Kabul Kingdom under Muhammad Mirza Hakim (1554-1585),” La Tramission du savoir dans le monde musulman peripherique, Lettre d’information 14 (1994): 89-101.

\(^4\) See Badaouni’s account of Mirza Hakim’s 1581 invasion of Hindustan: Abdul Qadir Richards, ed., The Imperial Monetary System of Mughal India (Delhi, 1987). These works cumulatively draw our attention to the complex sets of issues that enabled Akbar’s Mughal Empire. They varyingly highlight Akbar’s reliance on earlier Suri administrative reforms; they locate his Rajput policy in the advice and actions of both Humayun and Sher Shah Suri; they account for Mughal military strength in the diffusion of gunpowder technologies and the continued vibrancy of the “military labor” market in South Asia; they draw attention to the centuries-old processes of entrenching Indo-Persian political traditions to facilitate Mughal political legitimacy; and they underscore the importance of commercial developments—linked to the discovery of New World silver—in explaining Mughal wealth and power.
various Mughal chroniclers naturally begs the question as to why Mirza Hakim would receive such short shrift?

An important part of the explanation undoubtedly lies in the fact that all the above-mentioned chroniclers were resident at the Mughal court and, with the exception of Badaouni’s, working under Akbar’s direct patronage. Given Akbar’s own efforts to depict his sibling as a dim-witted, self-serving, and cowardly but obdurate political gadfly, it is no surprise that this portrait gets echoed in the representations of the Mirza. There are other explanations, however, that account for the partisanship of contemporary Mughal historians—including Badaouni.

Among them was the nagging sense that Mirza Hakim’s challenge to the Mughal enterprise in Hindustan mirrored the perfidious behavior of Humayun’s brothers—and especially Mirza Kamran (d. 1553)—through the late 1530s and early 1550s. The hostility of contemporary Mughal observers was also seemingly rooted in a widely held perception that the Kabul-based ruler was a “foreigner” and interloper in the affairs of Hindustan. Although rarely openly stated, this view must have drawn sustenance from the fact that Mirza Hakim neither lived in Hindustan nor feigned any interest in fostering his political appeal among Hindustanis.


7 See, for example, Shaikh Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, vol. 2, 327-328. For the definitive account of Humayun’s struggles with Mirza Kamran, see Iqtidar Alam Khan, *Mirza Kamran: A Biographical Study* (Bombay, 1964), 15-50.
8 This perception was reinforced by the fact that contemporary Mughal chroniclers,ographers and historians did not consider Kabul to be a part of Hindustan. See Bayazid Bayat, *Tazkira-i Humayun wa Akbar*, 255.
10 Although written just over a decade after Mirza Hakim’s death in 1585, the *Akbarnama* explicitly captures this sentiment when it reminds its audience that the Mirza’s abortive 1581
Coupled with doubts about the Mirza’s Hindustani-ness, however, were additional questions about Mirza Hakim’s ability to rule the sprawling and polyglot Mughal realm in north India. Indeed, contemporary Mughal historians even question the Mirza’s ability to manage the minor realm of Kabul. Although the Mughal chroniclers’ rendition of events is highly skewed, it became the basis for additional doubts about the Mirza’s ability to rule the far more complex and still insecure Mughal realm in Hindustan.

These unflattering representations, of course, could have been countered by the Mirza’s court in Kabul. Unfortunately, Mirza Hakim either did not consider it important to his self-image or simply lacked the financial resources to finance a slue of chroniclers to compete with Akbar’s Hindustan-based brigade. As a result, barring one document on religious ethics by Hasan Ali al-Munshi al-Khaqani, titled Akhlaq-i Hakimi, we know of no other books that were definitively produced under Mirza Hakim’s patronage. The Akhlaq-i Hakimi in fact makes little effort to bolster the Mirza’s self-image or enhance his claim to the Mughal throne. This work is a legalistic discussion divided into fourteen chapters each focusing on a particular abstract topic such as justice (adalat), patience (sabr), generosity (sakhwat), compassion (‘afv), bravery (shujaat), and consultation (mashwarat). Although the Mirza is praised at the beginning and conclusion of each chapter, the tenor of praise seems pro forma. It is also noteworthy that

invaded not only launched from Kabul but also encouraged by the “the foolish ones of Zabulistan” (harza dayaran-i Zabulistan) who had little sense of Hindustan’s complex political realities. Zabulistan refers to the region in and around Kabul. See Shaikh Abul Fazl, Akbarnama, vol. 3, 344. The “othering” of Mirza Hakim is even more pronounced in Amin Ahmad Razi’s Haft Iqlim (c. 1594), a three-volume topographical, historical and biographical encyclopedia. In it, Mirza Hakim is explicitly excised from a biographical listing of living and deceased Mughal princes who spent time in Hindustan. Unfortunately, if Razi intended to be consistent he should have also excluded an earlier ruler of Kabul—Mirza Kamran—who had only slightly greater experience of living in Hindustan than his nephew. Mirza Hakim’s exclusion speaks as much to Amin Ahmad Razi’s own perceptions of the Mirza’s “foreignness” as it does to those of his largely Hindustan-based audience. See Amin Ahmad Razi, Haft Iqlim, ed. E. Denison Ross and Maulvi Abdul Muqtadir, vol. 1, (Calcutta, 1918), 563-609.


12 Even this work was ultimately co-opted in the Hindustan-based Mughal literary corpus when al-Khaqani’s nephew, Nuruddin Muhammad al-Khaqani, wrote Akhlaq-i Jahangiri (1620) that drew heavily on the ideas developed by his uncle. See Sajida Alvi, Advice on the Art of Governance: An Indo-Islamic Mirror for Princes (Albany, 1988). A single copy of Akhlaq-i Hakimi is available in the British Library (IO Per. Ms. Etbe 2203).
stories or maxims about Mirza Hakim’s deeds do not find their way into the illustrative examples that mark the book’s didactic tone. Rather, the author relies upon other sources such as the Prophet Muhammad’s hadith or moments from both pre-Islamic and Islamic history to make his points. The narrow political range of Akhlaq-i Hakimi suggests that it was never intended to project Mirza Hakim’s political claims nor act as a propagandistic counterweight to Akbar’s own efforts to denigrate his younger half-brother. Mirza Hakim will instead rely, as I demonstrate later, on other sources by which to situate the terms of his challenge to Akbar.

With the field having been thus vacated by the Mirza and his followers, it is not surprising that later 17th—and 18th—century Persian chronicles, including Mutamid Khan’s Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri, Kamwar Khan’s Tazkirat-us-Salatin-i Chaghata, Sujan Rai Bhandari’s Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh, and Khafi Khan’s Muntakhab-ul-Lubub, largely reproduced (with occasional embellishments) their Hindustani predecessors’ less than flattering opinions of the Mirza.13

By the time we get to British colonial-era histories of India or Afghanistan—most of which draw exclusively on earlier Mughal source materials—Mirza Hakim is depicted in what have become familiar terms. Thus, if not actually ignored,14 he is quickly dismissed as weak-willed, impulsive and generally unfit to rule,15 “a cowardly and worthless debauchee,”16 or “a feeble, drunken creature.”17 These histories nevertheless engage a new element that is strikingly absent in the earlier Persian-language sources: the Mirza is increasingly depicted as a narrow-minded Muslim bigot and fanatic who “never ventured to question the truth of Islam.”18 In British hands, Mirza Hakim becomes a foil

13 Muntakhab-ul-Lubub (written in 1732) in fact is fairly typical in this regard. The Mirza is depicted at various moments as being easily misled, pliable, cowardly, impetuous, pompous and opportunistic. See Khafi Khan, Muntakhab-ul-Lubub, ed. Khairuddin Ahmad and Ghulam Ahmad, vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1860-1874), 168-169, 185.

14 See for example, Stanley Lane-Poole, Mediaeval India under Mohammedan Rule (London, 1903); and George MacMunn, Afghanistan: From Darius to Amanullah (London, 1929).


16 J. Allan et al., Cambridge Shorter History of India (Cambridge, 1934), 365.


against which to better appreciate Akbar’s tolerance and secularism. This, along with the other well-established representations of the Mirza, will wend their way into post-independence treatments of the period.

Scholarship since the late 1940s has largely failed to re-evaluate the figure of Mirza Hakim. In those Indian, Pakistani, European and American accounts where he does make an appearance, only Muzaffar Alam, Sanjay Subrahmanyan, and John F. Richards affirm, if only in passing, the Mirza’s role as a legitimate Mughal alternative to Akbar.19 Generally, however, he is either entirely ignored,20 or appears as a figure of considerable ridicule.21

Twentieth-century nationalist history writing projects in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the ex-Soviet Central Asian republics might have deployed their resources to revisit Mirza Hakim’s reputation and importance. Unfortunately, the Mirza’s multiple identities as a Kabul-based, orthodox-Muslim, Persian-speaking, ethnic-Turk, cause him to fall between the cracks of several nationalisms. The Mirza’s treatment in Dari and Pashtu language histories of Afghanistan are a case in point. Prior to 1977, the exigencies of state-sponsored Afghan (read: Pakhtun) nationalism—mediated by funding bodies such as the Anjoman-i Tarikh (Historical Society) and the Pashto Tolana (Pashto Academy)—worked to deny the identities and histories of non-Pakhtuns.22 Thus, although the Mirza ruled over Kabul for almost thirty years and was an active participant in the region’s politics, Afghan historians ignored him.23 His mixed heritage also meant that other groups within the Afghan polity—such as the Uzbeks, Tajiks, or Hazaras—had few reasons to resurrect his memory. The post-1977 collapse of Afghanistan and the destruction of the nation’s intellectual life continue to stymie attempts at re-evaluating Afghanistan’s history during the Mughal period, let alone during Mirza Hakim’s reign.24

19 John F. Richards, The Mughal Empire, 18, 19. See also footnote 3 above.
20 See generally, Iqtidar Alam Khan, ed., Akbar and His Age (Delhi, 1999); Irfan Habib, ed., Akbar and His India (Delhi, 1997); Neeru Misra, Succession and Imperial Leadership among the Mughals, 1526-1707 (Delhi, 1993); Douglas Streusand, The Formation of the Mughal Empire; Neeru Misra, Succession and Imperial Leadership among the Mughals, 1526-1707 (Delhi, 1993).
22 For an overview of the political nature of historical writing in 20th Century Afghanistan, see Sayed Askar Mousavi, The Hazaras of Afghanistan (London, 1997), 4-10.
23 An example is Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar, Afghanistan dar maasir-i tarikh (Kabul, 1968), 297-298.
24 See Mahmud Afshar Yazdi, Afghannama, (Tehran, 1980) and Abdul Hai Habibi, Tariikh-i Afghanistan (Tehran, 1984).
Although not as dramatic, a similarly daunting array of forces—including Indian nationalist and Hindu nationalist ambivalence towards Muslim historical figures and Pakistan’s decades-old attempts to position itself as a direct legatee of the South Asian versus Central Asian Mughals—ensures that nationalist projects elsewhere in the region will also overlook the historical importance of liminal figures like Mirza Hakim. At the end of the day, Mirza Hakim’s life and his impact on the formation of the Mughal Empire in South Asia is largely forgotten.

III

Mirza Hakim was born in April 1554 to Emperor Humayun and Mah Chuchak Begum—the youngest of his four wives. Akbar and Mirza Hakim were half-brothers and the only sons of Humayun to reach adulthood. When Humayun died following a fall down a flight of steps in January 1556—only months after having regained the throne he had lost in 1540—his thirteen-year old son Akbar was awarded the larger, richer and coveted imperial possessions in Hindustan. In contrast, the two-year old Mirza Hakim received the poorer, smaller and frontier territories of the Mughal Empire centered on Kabul and the Nilab basin. The only benefit that came with the Mirza’s possessions was the prestige that this had once been the home-territory of the Emperor Babur (d. 1530)—founder of the Mughal Empire and father of Humayun—and the springboard for the 1526 Mughal conquest of Hindustan.

Following the division of Humayun’s territorial possessions, the infant Mirza Hakim was placed under the guardianship of Munim Khan—an old servitor of Emperor Humayun. Sensing greater political opportunities in Hindustan, however, Munim Khan moved to Akbar’s court in 1560. In his place, Munim Khan appointed his son, Ghani Khan, to hold the political reins in Kabul. Ghani Khan’s ascent, however, did not go unchallenged. The most important figure to reject Ghani Khan’s authority over Kabul’s affairs was Mah Chuchak Begum, Humayun’s thirty-one year-old widow and the Mirza’s mother. Over the next few years, Mah Chuchak Begum emerged as the political force behind her minor son’s throne.

Mah Chuchak Begum’s ascent to power was slow and deliberate. After forging a successful alliance with Ghani Khan’s uncle, Fazail Beg, with the purpose

25 Unless otherwise indicated, this section is exclusively drawn from four sources: Akbarnama, Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, Tabaqat-i Akbari, and Tariikh-i Akbari.

26 For the definitive biography on Munim Khan, see Iqtidar Alam Khan’s The Political Biography of a Mughal Noble: Munim Khan Khan-i-Khanan, 1497-1575 (Delhi, 1973).
of removing Ghani Khan, Mah Chuchak Begum turned against Fazail Beg who was murdered. Mah Chuchak Begum’s efforts received crucial support from Shah Wali Atga—a nobleman who had also once served Humayun. Shah Wali Atga was now rewarded with the guardianship of Mirza Hakim.

Before long, however, the Atga’s political ambitions collided with Mah Chuchak Begum’s resolve to protect her son’s patrimony. Shah Wali Atga, it seems, was determined to capitalize on his Atga clan’s powerful position in the Ghazni region and his authority over Kabul to either carve out a separate fiefdom for himself or, failing that, leverage a high position for himself at Akbar’s court. When Mah Chuchak Begum learnt of Shah Wali Atga’s intentions, she forged a successful alliance with another nobleman, Haidar Qasim Kohbar, to remove the Atga.

Over the next few years, and until her assassination in 1564, Mah Chuchak Begum single-mindedly pursued two political goals. First, she sought to prevent Mirza Hakim from falling under the influence of officials appointed by or loyal to Akbar. To this end, she personally led troops into battle in 1563 against an invading force sent by Akbar and led by that old veteran of Kabul affairs, Munim Khan. Her victory near Jalalabad ensured that the Kingdom of Kabul would remain free of Akbar’s control as long as she was alive.

Second, Mah Chuchak Begum sought to preserve her son’s status as an imperial contender and heir to Humayun’s legacy. With this goal in mind, she provided safe-haven in Kabul to various opponents of Akbar’s rule in Hindustan. None was more formidable and treacherous than Shah Abul Maali. He was a former favorite of Emperor Humayun who fell out with Akbar shortly after his accession to the Mughal throne, launched an unsuccessful rebellion against the emperor, was captured and sent off into exile to Mecca, returned some years later, joined another rebellion against Akbar, and finally was forced to flee to Kabul in 1563-64. Sensing an opportunity to fashion a powerful anti-Akbar coalition, Mah Chuchak Begum married Mirza Hakim’s older sister (Fakhr-un-nisa) to Shah Abul Maali. Unfortunately, Shah Abul Maali was not looking to forge a partnership. In April 1564, he mounted a palace coup that led to the murder of Mah Chuchak Begum and a number of her closest associates. When news of the murders leaked out of Kabul, Mirza Sulaiman of Badakhshan seized the opportunity to invade Kabul. With the assistance of Mah Chuchak Begum’s loyalists, Mirza Sulaiman defeated and captured Shah Abul Maali. Shortly thereafter, and on the specific request of the ten-year old Mirza Hakim, Mirza Sulaiman had him strangled.27

27 Bayazid Bayat, Tazkira-i Humayun wa Akbar, 284.
Mirza Sulaiman’s control over Kabul proved short-lived. The resentment of Kabulis at the appointment of Badakhshanis to the most important political and fiscal positions, led to a rebellion that culminated in the expulsion of Mirza Sulaiman’s representatives. Mirza Hakim’s followers knew, however, that they could not defend the city against a fresh assault by Mirza Sulaiman. In desperation, they issued an invitation to Akbar to dispatch an army to protect the city and the person of his half-brother. Grateful for the chance to take charge of Kabul’s affairs, Akbar happily obliged. An army was sent across the Indus and Mirza Sulaiman’s invading force was confronted and defeated. Akbar now moved to install Mir Muhammad Khan Atga (the older brother of Shah Wali Atga) as Mirza Hakim’s guardian and the emperor’s representative in Kabul.

The new dispensation, however, also proved unstable. Besides having to confront the possibility that Mirza Sulaiman might reinvade Kabul, Mir Muhammad Khan Atga found his position gradually undermined by the emergence of a new political configuration centered on the person of the Mirza Hakim. Although the Mirza continued to exhibit “expressions of obedience” (izhar-i tab’yyat gunih mikard) towards Mir Muhammad Khan Atga, in reality he was planning to seize the reins of power for himself.28 Supporting him in this endeavor was a combination of familial loyalists, relatives, and foster-brothers. None was more important than Khwaja Hasan Naqshbandi—a descendant of Khwaja Ubaiddullah Ahrar (d. 1490), the greatest Naqshbandi saint of the fifteenth-century—who emerged as Mirza Hakim’s chief political advisor sometime in 1564. The next year, Mirza Hakim cemented the Khwaja’s authority by appointing him prime minister and marrying him to his sister, Fakhr-un-nisa, the widow of Shah Abul Maali. The marriage occurred without the prior approval of Mir Muhammad Khan Atga, Akbar’s representative in Kabul. Anticipating an attack on his person, Mir Muhammad Khan Atga fled back to Hindustan. Although Mirza Hakim likely rejoiced in the departure of the Mir, the removal of Akbar’s protection culminated in a fresh attempt by Mirza Sulaiman to capture Kabul.

Unable to resist the Badakhshani forces, Mirza Hakim was forced to choose between seeking the help of the Uzbekis based in Balkh or Akbar. Hesitantly—and over the objections of Khwaja Hasan Naqshbandi—the Mirza chose to undertake a journey to Akbar’s court to make a personal appeal for help. The year was 1566.

En-route to Hindustan, however, Mirza Hakim did the inexplicable: he abruptly changed his strategy. Instead of requesting Akbar’s assistance, Mirza

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Hakim decided to attack and annex the northwestern parts of Akbar’s empire—specifically the Punjab. The Mirza’s decision was prompted by Akbar’s heavy involvement in crushing a powerful Uzbek rebellion in Hindustan. Although Mughal historians portray the Mirza’s behavior as deceitful, the Mirza likely had little trouble justifying his actions. Besides the fact that the annexation of the Punjab to the Kingdom of Kabul would provide his own realm with badly needed strategic depth and an invaluable resource base, Punjab had been governed from Kabul during the first part of Emperor Humayun’s reign (1530-1540). Mirza Hakim probably saw control over the Punjab as his birthright; put differently, it was a part of his patrimony that had been stolen following the untimely death of Humayun and the unequal partition of the Mughal Empire by Akbar’s partisans. In seeking to seize the Punjab, Mirza Hakim signaled his intention to honor Mah Chuchak Begum’s vision that he be both acknowledged as a co-sharer in their father’s legacy and Akbar’s imperial equal.

Mirza Hakim managed to fight his way to Lahore but ultimately failed to storm the provincial capital. The refusal of the powerful Atgas—the clan of his former guardians, Shah Wali Atga and Mir Muhammad Khan Atga—to come over to his side played a significant role in his failure. Mirza Hakim finally acknowledged defeat when word reached him that Akbar was marshalling his own forces to commence a counter-attack. Rather than confront Akbar, the Mirza returned to Kabul in January 1567, having received news that his own capital had successfully withstood Mirza Sulaiman’s siege. As Mirza Hakim’s army marched out of the Punjab, it did so in good order. Over the next fifteen years, Mirza Hakim would pose an increasing political and military threat to Akbar.

The Mirza’s ability to challenge his half-brother between the late 1560s and early 1580s benefited from a number of factors. Among them was the Mirza’s decision to establish a clear political hierarchy within his own realm. After 1566, Mirza Hakim ensured that power flowed directly from his person to his closest advisor, Khwaja Hasan Naqshbandi. Challenges to the authority of either Mirza Hakim or Khwaja Hasan Naqshbandi would no longer be countenanced. The departure of men like Baba Qaqshal and Masum Khan Kabuli (a foster-brother of the Mirza) for Hindustan, following serious disagreements with Khwaja Hasan, suggests a new discipline over the previously fractious Kabul-based nobility.

The willingness of the powerful Naqshbandi tariqah to throw its full support behind one of its own—Khwaja Hasan Naqshbandi—further stabilized the Kingdom. For the first time since the Emperor Babur had positioned Kabul as the last redoubt of the Timurids, Kabul had a clear identity distinguishing itself from its more powerful neighbors; after the mid-1560s, the Kingdom of Kabul would be widely perceived as a bastion of Naqshbandi and orthodox-Sunni Islam.
The emergence of a relatively benign external political environment offered the Kingdom of Kabul a critical reprieve. Earlier threats posed by the Uzbeks, the Mirzas of Badakhshan, and Akbar had dissipated by the late-1560s. Mirza Hakim’s steady relations with the powerful Uzbek confederation—under the leadership of Abdullah Khan—were helped by their shared loyalty to the Naqshbandi tariqah. More crucially, however, both the Mirza and Abdullah Khan enjoyed a common enemy in Badakhshan. Although Mirza Hakim would have relished the opportunity to conquer Badakhshan for himself (it was, after all, part of Humayun’s appanage until Emperor Babur decided to grant it to Mirza Sulaiman in 1529), he was content to allow the Uzbeks to chip away at the defenses of Badakhshan. Besides distracting the Uzbeks from Kabul (which bordered on the southern Uzbek holdings in Balkh), such a policy also forestalled any further attacks by Badakhshan against Kabul. After 1567, Badakhshan was too preoccupied with warding off the Uzbeks to disturb Kabul’s peace again,29

Unsettled conditions in Hindustan similarly worked in Kabul’s favor. Akbar’s involvement in consolidating his own political and administrative authority in northern and central India seem to have curtailed the commitment of resources to crush the growing threat posed by Mirza Hakim through the 1570s.

Free from external threats, the Mirza moved to establish tighter control over the Pakhtun tribes residing on the eastern fringes of his kingdom. Most significantly, in 1570-71, the Mirza launched offensive operations against the Roshaniyya—a popular Islamic revivalist and millenarian movement that had a strong base of support among various Pakhtun tribes.30 Although the Mirza likely found Roshaniyya doctrines incompatible with his own understanding of Islam, his decision to ultimately confront them was prompted by continuing Roshaniyya attacks on trading caravans wending their way between Hindustan and Kabul. Fully cognizant that revenue from cross-border trade was crucial in maintaining his kingdom’s financial liquidity, Mirza Hakim determined to crush the Roshaniyya. After an unsuccessful attempt at conciliating Shaikh Bayazid (d. 1572)—the leader of the

29 It did not help that Badakhshan was also riven by a bitter intra-familial feud that pitted Mirza Sulaiman against his grandson, Mirza Shahrukh. In 1575, Mirza Sulaiman was forced to flee Badakhshan venturing first to Kabul and then Hindustan in search of military assistance to regain his lost throne.

Roshaniyya—during a series of meetings held in Kabul, the Mirza undertook scorched earth tactics against those Afghan tribes (like the Ghaurikhel and Tui) accused of Roshaniyya sympathies.\(^{31}\) Under intense pressure from the Mirza’s forces, the Roshaniyya and their Pakhtun allies were pushed out of the Kabul-Nilab region and into areas under Akbar’s ostensible control further to the east.

Having successfully contained the Roshaniyya threat, Mirza Hakim contemplated his next move. In 1577-78 the Mirza considered invading Hindustan but decided against it after Akbar responded by moving the imperial court and army to the Punjab. Two years later, however, Mirza Hakim participated in a short campaign against Badakhshan in support of his old archenemy, Mirza Sulaiman, who had been dethroned in 1575 by his own grandson, Mirza Shahrukh. With the tacit understanding of Abdullah Khan, Mirza Hakim imposed a political settlement on Badakhshan that divided the realm between the two warring Mirzas. The partition of Badakhshan conclusively weakened the kingdom; the Uzbeks would finally conquer it in 1584, driving both Mirza Sulaiman and Mirza Shahrukh to seek refuge at Akbar’s court in Hindustan.

1580 marked the high-water mark of Mirza Hakim’s power. In firm control of his own kingdom, the Mirza had succeeded in pacifying the Uzbeks, dividing the Badakhshani tribes, and thumbing his nose at Akbar. In 1581, however, Mirza Hakim overplayed his hand. He invaded Hindustan for the second time—this time in support of a coalition of rebels looking to resist Akbar’s attempts at centralizing and rationalizing power within the Mughal Empire. In a reprise of his 1566 invasion, Mirza Hakim’s forces were turned back outside Lahore. Unlike the previous occasion, however, an imperial army—under Akbar’s direct charge—followed in close pursuit. Following a short, but decisive, battle outside Kabul, Akbar entered the Mirza’s capital in the summer of 1582. At the time of his entry into Kabul, Akbar confidently expected the Mirza to beg for forgiveness. What happened next surprised even the seasoned and wily campaigner Akbar.

Instead of paying homage to his older brother, Mirza Hakim fled northwards, making for Uzbek territory across the Hindu Kush Mountains. In so doing, Mirza Hakim clearly signaled his intention to draw Abdullah Khan and the Uzbeks into his intra-familial struggle with Akbar. Rather than allow this to happen, Akbar was forced to quickly accept a bitter compromise. In return for

the promise that Mirza Hakim would eschew the Uzbek option and permanently banish Khwaja Hasan Naqshbandi, the Emperor agreed to withdraw his forces from Kabul and restore to the Mirza his old possessions. In effect, we might conclude, Mirza Hakim had outmaneuvered Akbar and snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.

The Mirza lived on for another three years. The final years of his life, however, were clouded by severe alcohol addiction. In the summer of 1585, at the age of thirty-one, Mirza Hakim finally succumbed to the ill effects of alcohol poisoning. Akbar had every reason to be relieved at the demise of his half-brother. He moved quickly to impose his direct control over Kabul and the Mirza’s sons before the Uzbeks had an opportunity to do so.32 Although Mirza Hakim never fulfilled his ambitions to dethrone Akbar or force a more equal division of the territories ruled by his father, he did successfully position himself as a competitor to his brother. In so doing, the Mirza influenced critical elements in the political and religious trajectory of the Mughal Empire. The next section precisely evaluates the nature of Mirza Hakim’s challenge.

IV

Akbar was barely thirteen years old when he ascended the Mughal throne in 1556. For the next five years, Akbar remained a figurehead emperor, dominated by various guardians, advisors and retainers. In 1561, however, Akbar signaled his determination to take direct charge of imperial affairs. Moving swiftly, Akbar confronted and tamed various powerful political coalitions resident at the imperial court. Next, he sought to impose his authority upon nominally loyal groups beyond the Mughal court: some were distantly related collateral lines (like the Timurid Mirzas), others were influential ethnic and clan-based formations (like the Uzbeks). The common thread tying these various groups to one another was their fevered opposition to Akbar’s efforts to depart from an older model of Timurid-Mughal authority that had allowed powerful individuals and clan-groupings considerable political latitude (often at the expense of central imperial power). They were also bitterly opposed to Akbar’s increasing desire to sideline the once-dominant Central Asians (who had comprised a majority of the nobility under both Emperors Babur and Humayun) in favor of more Hindustani Muslims and Rajputs within the Mughal nobility.33

32 Bayazid Bayat, Tazkira-i Humayun wa Akbar, 364-365.
33 The percentage of Turanis fell from 52.9% in 1555 (the last year of Humayun’s reign) to 38.06% in 1565-75 and 24.26% in 1580. Between 1555 and 1580, the position of Indian
Akbar’s reconsideration of his support for longstanding Turco-Mongol political traditions as well as Central Asian political interests would spark fierce resistance from formerly loyal servitors. Between 1564 and 1568, Akbar had to contend with a series of bloody revolts that rocked the foundation of the nascent Mughal Empire in South Asia. Akbar’s problems were compounded by Mirza Hakim’s attempts to position himself as the only authentic torchbearer of both Central Asian and Mughal familial traditions. How did Mirza Hakim go about these complicated tasks?

Although the Mirza’s abortive 1566 invasion of Hindustan—in support of the Uzbek rebellion—was the most immediate manifestation of his political ambitions, military failure did not foreclose Mirza Hakim’s attempts to make the same point in other ways as well. Between the 1560s and early 1580s, Mirza Hakim therefore self-consciously positioned the Kingdom of Kabul as a political counterpoint to the Mughal Empire in Hindustan. To this end, and like his mother (Mah Chuchak Begum), the Mirza gave sanctuary to a host of anti-Akbar rebels, including Hasan Khan, Faridun Beg Khan, and Sultan Ali Lashkar Khan, after they fled Akbar’s service. In the same vein, groups of rebellious Uzbeks and Mirzas were given refuge at Mirza Hakim’s court after Akbar crushed their rebellions in the mid-to-late 1560s. By offering the Kingdom of Kabul as a safe haven for Akbar’s enemies, Mirza Hakim determinedly signaled his political opposition to the new unfolding dispensation in Hindustan even as he highlighted his own allegiance to a Central Asian model of kingship in which the king ostensibly was a primus inter pares—or first among equals.

Mirza Hakim’s attempts to project himself as the only true guardian of Central Asian-Turani political ideals and interests took other guises as well. His kingdom thus adhered to a highly diluted version of the tura-i Chaghatai (customs of the Chaghatai), a Central Asian Turco-Mongol, tribal-nomadic code that laid down strict and fairly comprehensive rules of permissible behavior. Although its application under the Mirza never seems to have gone beyond punishing certain inhospitable hosts, poachers, adulterers, greedy merchants, and errant servants, it did not matter much given that the tura had been altogether discarded in Hindustan after Akbar ascended the Mughal throne in 1556. In his

Muslims and Rajputs improved dramatically rising from almost nothing to 16.17% and 15.83% respectively. Their gains were largely at the expense of the Turanis and, to a lesser extent, Persians. Iqtidar Alam Khan, “The Nobility under Akbar and the Development of his Religious Policy,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 1-2 (1968): 36.

34 Hasan Ali al-Munshi al-Khaqan, Akhlaq-i Hakimi, f. 34a-50a, 94b-99b.
willingness to apply even a few of the tura’s injunctions the Mirza made a powerful symbolic gesture. Besides the tura being the quintessential expression of a Central Asian political identity, it enabled Mirza Hakim to draw a link between himself and his Chengizid-Timurid and Mughal forebears. In so doing, Mirza Hakim successfully highlighted the fundamental differences between himself and his older half-brother. That Akbar was not unaware of the power of this statement is perhaps best suggested by his decision to briefly revive the tura-i Chaghatai in 1575. At the time, Akbar was seeking to impress his dethroned Timurid cousin, Mirza Sulaiman, who had just arrived from Kabul and was looking for imperial assistance to reclaim Badakhshan, his former kingdom.35

No gesture would prove too small for Mirza Hakim in his attempts to contrast his loyalty to Central Asian political traditions with Akbar’s neglect. An excellent example is Mirza Hakim’s decision to bar Akbar’s imperial coinage from circulating in the Kingdom of Kabul. This coinage was part of Akbar’s centralizing and standardizing administrative reforms in the early 1560s. By barring it, the Mirza signaled his rejection of Akbar’s reforms and his political authority (the coins were emblazoned with the emperor’s formal title). More significantly, the Mirza’s decision drew attention to his own fealty to earlier Timurid-Mughal monetary practices in the form of the continued circulation of the silver shahrukhi in Kabul. The shahrukhi was the preferred currency of previous generations of Mughals, including the Emperors Babur and Humayun. It did not matter that Mirza Hakim’s shahrukhis were not minted in Kabul but rather imported from Uzbek-controlled mints to the north in Balkh and Bukhara; nor that they occasionally received Akbar’s counter-stamp during times of greater imperial control over Kabul.36 At least they were not related to Akbar’s newly introduced and Hindustan-based currency of (gold) muhrs, (silver) rupees, and (copper) dams. At least their circulation highlighted the continued vibrancy of the Mirza’s own ties to Central Asia—the ancestral home of the Mughals. At least they reminded users of an earlier Mughal political dispensation—one to which Mirza Hakim considered himself the rightful heir.

Mirza Hakim’s attempts to forge a Central Asian political persona would even lead him to attempt to tap into broadly prevalent notions of Central Asian racial and political superiority.37 This was all part of a strategy aimed at gal-

36 John Deyell, “The Development of Akbar’s Currency System and Monetary Integration of the Conquered Kingdoms,” in The Imperial Monetary System of Mughal India, 40.
37 Shaikh Abul Fazl Allami obliquely dismisses the claims of Mirza Hakim to the Mughal throne by indicating that racial superiority alone cannot constitute a claim to royal power.
vanizing political support—within his own kingdom and also Hindustan—against the perceived bedrock of Akbar’s power, namely Hindustani Muslims and Rajputs. The Mirza’s appeals did not fall on deaf ears. Many among the old Central Asian elite believed that Akbar had abandoned his Central Asian roots by empowering these groups at their expense. Resentment eventually culminated in a largely Central Asian-led revolt across Hindustan and an attempt to overthrow Akbar in favor of Mirza Hakim in 1580-81. Former servitors of Mirza Hakim—including Masum Beg Kabuli and Roshan Beg Qaqshal, who had migrated to Hindustan and joined the imperial service in the 1570s—would play a pivotal role in fuelling Central Asian anger and angst. Even as late as 1581, Mirza Hakim seems to have held out the hope that he could unify all Central Asians against Akbar and his other subjects. This is attested by the Mirza’s last-ditch (and ultimately unsuccessful) appeal to Central Asian elements in Akbar’s army to not only help him avert the occupation of Kabul by imperial forces but also participate in the slaughter or imprisonment of “the natives of Hindustan” (Hindi nazhadan).

In as much as Mirza Hakim worked hard to project himself as the only authentic legatee of Central Asian political traditions and interests, he would simultaneously press his claims as the only true heir to Mughal familial traditions. He primarily did this by linking his person to the memory of his grand-father, Emperor Babur. This point merits discussion as it goes to the heart of the challenge posed by Mirza Hakim to Akbar.

Babur’s courage, tenacity and survival skills were widely admired by the Mughals. His entire life, or so it seemed, had been dedicated to overcoming overwhelming odds. Neither the loss of his own father at an early age, betrayal by close relatives, years as a rootless wanderer and adventurer, nor successive military confrontations against vastly superior forces of Afghans or Rajputs deflected him from ultimate success: the conquest of Hindustan. What clinched Babur’s popularity, however, was his reputation for compassion, simplicity, and his connection to his Central Asian steppe roots. Thus, even after having won an empire in Hindustan, Babur still longed for the fruits, gardens, and easy social


38 According to Iqtidar Alam Khan, 33 of the 54 nobles who participated in the 1581 revolt were Turani. See Khan, “The Nobility under Akbar and the Development of his Religious Policy,” 36.

relations of Ferghana (his birthplace) and Kabul (his home between 1504 and 1526). Indeed, he ultimately chose to be buried in Kabul, rather than Hindustan. From the 1560s onwards, Mirza Hakim assiduously cultivated his connections to Babur, forcing Akbar to seek familial legitimacy elsewhere.

Mirza Hakim sought to tie himself to Babur’s legacy in a number of ways. Among the most visible was his willingness to spend large sums of money maintaining Babur’s tomb, the garden surrounding it, and providing free food and alms to indigents on the occasion of Babur’s annual urs (death anniversary). Mirza Hakim also seems to have self-consciously modeled his public persona on that of his grandfather with the aim of projecting himself as a second Babur, or a true legatee of the conqueror of Hindustan. Like Babur, the Mirza therefore actively embraced a rough-and-ready Turkish-steppe identity by portraying himself as a ghazi (an Islamic warrior fighting religious infidelity), carousing with friends and companions in the hills above Kabul, and cultivating the image of a bold risk-taker (prominently witnessed in the decision to annex the Punjab in 1566 while his own capital was under siege by Badakhshan). Like Babur, the Mirza also enjoyed the ambience of Persian garden pavilions, and engaging in horticultural experiments—the most famous of which resulted in a hybrid apricot tree that, to quote Akbar’s son and successor Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), admiringly produced fruit “quite unlike the apricots of other trees.”

Most importantly, however, the Mirza emulated Babur in his patronage of the Naqshbandi sufi tariqah. Tracing their lineage back to the mystic and saint Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389), the Naqshbandis had emerged as the most powerful Central Asian tariqah by the mid-1400s. Their strength flowed from their ability to act as a


bridge between different segments within Central Asian society, including nomadic tribes, artisanal guilds, and peasant populations. Ultimately, however, Naqshbandi success relied on the tariqah’s willingness to lend its political and religious support to various Timurid rulers in return for political and economic patronage. The emergence of Khwaja Ubaidullah Ahrar (d. 1490) as both a dominant spiritual presence and also one of the largest landowners in Transoxiana speaks to the remarkable consolidation of Naqshbandi religious and secular authority by the late-1400s. The tariqah’s fortunes were barely impacted by the collapse of Timurid rule in Transoxiana in the first decade of the 1500s; the Naqshbandis merely re-allied themselves with the now dominant Uzbeks. In the few areas that remained free of Uzbek rule, however, local Naqshbandis continued to support Timurid-Mughal rule. Kabul under Babur’s control (after 1504) was one such place.

When Babur died in 1530, the Naqshbandis had hoped that the emperor’s eldest son and anointed successor, Humayun, would continue his father’s support. They were deeply disappointed when Humayun began to drift towards the Hindustan-based Shattari order instead. Luckily, Mirza Kamran, Babur’s second son and then ruler of Kabul emerged as a patron. The Naqshbandis

46 The simultaneous accrual of economic, political and religious resources by a Sufi tariqah is not entirely unusual. This is attested by the rise of the Safavids of Iran in the late 1400s. See Roger Savory, Iran under the Safavids (Cambridge, 1980), especially Chapters 1 and 2; and Monika Gronke, “Auf dem Weg der geistlichen zur weltlichen macht: Schlaglichter zur fruhen Safawyia,” Saeculum 42 (1991): 164-183.


48 One of the few constants through Babur’s tumultuous life was his deep devotion to the Naqshbandi tariqah. This can be partly explained by family custom dating back to his ancestor, the great conqueror Amir Timur (d. 1405). Babur’s loyalty, however, seems to have also been inspired by more personal connections. These included: Khwaja Ahrar choosing Babur’s name at his birth (1483); Babur’s claim that he won the decisive Battle of Panipat (1526) against the Afghans through the miraculous intervention of a Naqshbandi saint, Khwaja Ahmad Kasani; Babur attributing his recovery from a severe sickness to his attempt at versifying Risalah-i Walidiyya, a work by Khwaja Ahrar; Babur’s decision to marry one of his daughters to Nuruddin Muhammad Naqshbandi; and the presence of large numbers of Naqshbandi dignitaries at his Kabul-based court. Babur’s goodwill would enable the Naqshbandi tariqah to consolidate its economic, political and religious presence in Kabul.


50 Besides augmenting the Naqshbandis already considerable landholdings in and around Kabul, Mirza Kamran took the dramatic step of becoming a disciple of Khwaja Abdul Haq (a grandson of Khwaja Ahrar). Stephen F. Dale and Alam Paiyind, “The Ahrari Waqf in
repaid Mirza Kamran’s generosity and devotion by wholeheartedly supporting him in his bitter political struggle against Humayun through the early 1540s. The occupation of Kabul by Humayun in November 1545, however, led to a rapid turn-around. Fearing Humayun’s retribution and desperate to protect its properties and status in Kabul, the tariqah abandoned Mirza Kamran. Although various Naqshbandis would serve under Humayun until his death in 1556, the tariqah never fully mended its relations with the emperor. The accession of Akbar boded fresh opportunities for imperial patronage, particularly as Bairam Khan was appointed Akbar’s all-powerful guardian (ataliq) between 1556 and 1560. Bairam Khan considered himself a disciple of the Naqshbandi pir Maulana Kamangar. Unfortunately, during the early years of his reign, Akbar was not particularly interested in the Naqshbandis. Hope would come from a different direction in the figure of another Kabul-based Mughal prince: Mirza Hakim.

Under Mirza Hakim, the Naqshbandis achieved the pinnacle of their power in Kabul. The appointment of Khwaja Hasan Naqshbandi as Mirza Hakim’s prime minister in 1565 and his near-simultaneous marriage to Fakhr-un-nisa, Mirza Hakim’s sister, attests to this. Khwaja Hasan’s achievements, however, do not capture the full extent of the tariqah’s power and influence during Mirza Hakim’s reign. Besides controlling some of the best orchards, vineyards, and agricultural lands in and around Kabul, the tariqah exercised a powerful influence on Kabul’s commercial life through its control of water mills, shops, and public baths. By the early-1570s, Kabul had emerged as a center of Naqshbandi authority, scholarship and training, the home of such distinguished alims (religious authorities) as Maulana Sadiq Halwai, Khwaja Ubaidullah Kabuli, and Mir Shamsuddin Yahya Badakhshi. Over the course of the next decade a slue


52 Although Khwaja Abdul Haq never succeeded in rehabilitating himself, his brother and nephew—Khwaja Khwand Mahmud and Khwaja Muin—accompanied Humayun on an expedition against Badakhshan and nursed the ill emperor back to health in 1546. Shaikh Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, I, 253-254.


of rising stars in the Naqshbandi firmament, including men like Khwaja Khawand Mahmud and Baqi Billah, would also pass through Kabul.

Mirza Hakim’s cultivation of the Naqshbandis certainly enabled him to draw important parallels between himself and the Emperor Babur. Yet, in the context of his struggles with Akbar, the connection to the Naqshbandis afforded the Mirza two additional advantages. One, for all of Mirza Hakim’s attempts to project a Central Asian steppe identity for himself and his kingdom, he in fact needed settled and sedentary modes of governance to provide administrative and financial stability to his nascent kingdom. The Naqshbandi tariqah was singularly well-placed to help the Mirza due to its extensive tax-free land holdings (waqf). In Kabul, as well as other parts of the pre-modern Islamic world, these properties often served as substantial economic entities producing crops, facilitating trade through attached markets, affording spaces for the resolution of all manner of disputes, and providing training grounds for administrative personnel. It is probable that Khwaja Hasan Naqshbandi’s appointment as Mirza Hakim’s prime minister was partly influenced by his bureaucratic skills—skills that he would have almost certainly accrued managing some part of the massive Naqshbandi waqf in Kabul.

More importantly, however, Mirza Hakim’s alliance with the dour Naqshbandis helped him burnish his orthopractic, orthodox, and Sunni-Muslim religious credentials at a time when Akbar’s own faith in normative Islam was wavering. Broadly perceived to oppose most expressions of ecstasism in Islamic faith and practice, the Naqshbandis were especially well known for their forceful advocacy of sharia-inspired norms and bitter opposition to Shiism. The Mirza likely relished the opportunity to associate himself with these ideas. One

could even suggest that his political fortunes depended on this connection. For example, would Ismail II of Iran have approached the Mirza in 1576-77 for a political alliance if he had doubted the Mirza’s willingness to support him in his own attempts to convert Iran to Sunni Islam and away from Shiism? Would Akbar have felt obligated to continue highlighting his own qualities as a sharia-minded ruler if the Mirza’s ideological challenge not gathered strength through the 1570s? Would Akbar have moved to control the Mughal religious establishment by the late 1570s if he had not feared the possibility that it might throw its support behind his younger half-brother? Would Akbar have played to anti-Shiite prejudices through the 1560s and 1570s had the Mirza not posed some form of a threat? Would some of the highest-ranking elements within the Mughal religious establishment have supported the Mirza’s attempts to seize the imperial throne in 1580-81 if they had not believed Mirza Hakim’s claim to be a champion of Islam as seen in his patronage of the Naqshbandis? 

Between the 1560s and early 1580s Mirza Hakim posed a growing threat to Akbar’s rule. This is evidenced by such actions as invading Hindustan on two occasions; harboring political refugees from Hindustan; opposing many of Akbar’s political initiatives; highlighting Akbar’s distance from Babur’s legacy and his family’s Central Asian roots; and positioning himself as an orthodox-Sunni Muslim through his association with the Naqshbandi tariqah. Akbar’s attempts to out-maneuver Mirza Hakim’s challenge, I argue, fundamentally informed the characteristics of Akbar’s reign. The next section examines Akbar’s responses to the Mirza’s challenges, showing how crucial these responses were to the long-term development of the Mughal Empire in South Asia.

V

The first direct evidence that Akbar viewed Mirza Hakim as a threat comes from the early 1560s. In 1563 and again in 1564, Akbar launched military campaigns against Kabul. Despite official claims that he did so to ensure the Mirza’s safety, in fact the campaigns masked attempts to impose imperial con-

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61 The text of one of the letters sent by Shah Ismail II to Mirza Hakim is reproduced in Abdul Husain Nawai, Shah Tahmasp Safavi: Majmua-i asnad wa makatabat tarikhi hamra ba yaddashtha-i tafsili (Tehran, 1989), 503-505. For a summary of the text, see Riaz-ul-Islam, A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations, Volume I (Karachi, 1979), 100. On Ismail II’s religious policies, see Michel Mazzaoui, “The Religious Policy of Safavid Shah Ismail II,” in Intellectual Studies on Islam, eds. Michel Mazzaoui and Vera Moreen (Salt Lake City, 1991), 49-56.
control over the Mirza and Kabul. Where the first expedition ended in military defeat, the second had better luck. Ultimately, however, the occupation that it spawned also ended in failure. The emperor’s irritation at Mir Muhammad Khan Atga, his pro-consul in Kabul between 1564 and 1565, for failing to maintain imperial control is palpable even thirty years later when Shaikh Abul Fazl blames the Mir for allowing the Mirza’s affairs to reach the point of “sedition” (fasad) and then making matters worse by abandoning his post in the face of pressure from Mirza Hakim.62 The debacle of 1565, followed as it was by the Mirza’s invasion of the Punjab in 1566, might have persuaded Akbar to re-invade Kabul. Yet, the emperor chose not to. Why not? Was it because he was confronted by an Uzbek rebellion in Hindustan? Was it because he was marshalling his military resources for an assault against Rajasthan? Was it because Akbar felt that long-term control over Kabul was a losing proposition as long as Mirza Hakim was alive? Or, was it because the emperor no longer viewed the Mirza as a serious threat? All of the above may explain Akbar’s caution—except for the last! In fact, Akbar was anything but indifferent to the Mirza’s military and political threat.

In 1566, Akbar tackled Kabul by tightening imperial control over the adjoining region of the Punjab. He thus punished or co-opted those zamindars (local landholders) that had sided with the Mirza,63 and he undertook a qamargha hunt as a massive show of military force to intimidate future opponents.64 Around the same time, Akbar ordered his architects and engineers to begin strengthening the walls of the provincial capital, Lahore, and improving the roads and river crossings within the region. These infrastructural projects signaled a newly assertive imperial authority across the northwestern parts of the Mughal Empire.

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63 Ibid., vol. 2, 278.
64 Mughal hunting expeditions often served the same purpose as present-day live-fire military exercises. Besides forcing large-scale units of men to coordinate their actions, hunts were an occasion for individuals to sharpen and prove their military skills in conditions that roughly simulated combat. For excellent synopses, see M. Azhar Ansari, “The Hunt of the Great Mughals,” Islamic Culture 34 (1960): 242-253; and H. Hargreaves, “Mughal Hunting Parties,” in Punjab Revisited, ed. Ahmad Saleem (Lahore, 1996), 248-252. Akbar would engage in a similar qamargha hunt after pre-empting another planned invasion of the Punjab by Mirza Hakim in 1577-78. Shaikh Abul Fazl, Akbarnama, vol. 3, 241. According to the Tarikh-i Alfi, a reliable contemporary source, this particular hunt was one of the largest of Akbar’s reign engaging as it did the energies of tens of thousands of people. Cited in Shaikh Abul Fazl, Akbarnama, English trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 2 (reprint Delhi, 1998), footnote 2, 416.
Over the next couple of years other measures followed suit. In 1567, the imperial mint in Lahore began producing copper dams alongside silver rupees and gold muhrs.65 By thus honoring the city (Lahore being one of only four centers minting imperial coin), Akbar aimed to integrate it and the region into the larger Mughal economy. The calculation clearly was that the Punjab would be less likely to break away from imperial control if it benefited from and was invested in the prosperity of the empire.

Sealing imperial control over the Punjab in 1568, Akbar revoked an earlier 1560 edict awarding the region to the Atga clan. Although the Atgas had remained loyal during Mirza Hakim’s 1566 invasion, could the emperor always rely on their loyalty? Akbar clearly was not sure given their strong political and familial connections to the Kingdom of Kabul. The emperor would later view the transfer of the Atgas as an even greater achievement than the suppression of the revolts of the Uzbeks and Mirzas in the 1560s.66 Akbar had good reasons to feel proud; over the course his own reign the removal of the powerful Atga clan from the Punjab came to mark a conclusive break with Central Asian political traditions that had previously permitted familial, clan or tribal groupings considerable political latitude vis-à-vis the ruling monarch. Henceforth, or at least until the 1710s and the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, nobles would rarely challenge the authority of Mughal emperors.

Efforts aimed at deepening and extending imperial rule in the Punjab would continue through the 1570s and early 1580s. During these years, increased Mughal pressure was also asserted on contiguous areas such as northern Sind (beginning in 1567-68),67 Baluchistan, and Kashmir (through the 1570s). Moments of heightened tension with Mirza Hakim and the subsequent arrival of the imperial court in the Punjab invariably led to a ratcheting upwards of various political, military and economic initiatives designed to strengthen Mughal authority.68 Thus, we might say, the military threat posed by Mirza Hakim cat-

67 Sayyid Muhammad Masum Bhakkari, Tarikh-i Masumi, ed. U.M. Daudpota (Poona, 1938), 228-235.
68 The arrival of the imperial court in the Punjab in 1577-78 led to enquires into the administration of tax-free land grants (madad-i maash) to Islamic religious figures; attempts to subdue the rulers of Baluchistan and ruler of Kashmir; and uproot Afghan brigands. Likewise in 1581-82, the region would witness yet another qamargha hunt; the construction of a new imperial fortress at Attock on the northwestern border of the Mughal Empire with the Kingdom of Kabul; attempts to reorganize the administration; and continued bridge and road construction. See Shaikh Abul Fazl, Akbarnama, vol. 3, 233-249, 345-372.
alyzed Akbar’s assertion of power over the northwestern regions of the Indian sub-continent.

Mirza Hakim’s challenge would direct Akbar’s energies in other areas as well. Responding to the Mirza’s self-styling as Emperor Babur’s legatee, Akbar underscored his own relationship to the memory of their father, the Emperor Humayun. No gesture is more significant than the construction of a massive tomb complex for Humayun in Delhi between 1562 and 1571. Alongside performing his relationship with his father—first in competition with Mah Chuchak Begum and, after 1564, Mirza Hakim—the tomb symbolized Akbar’s new vision for Hindustan and for the Mughal Empire. Humayun’s mausoleum marked the new center of an imperial Mughal geography now in Hindustan and under Akbar’s control. Akbar reinforced this argument with highly publicized visits to the emperor’s tomb between the 1560s and early 1580s. Invariably, each of these visits—in 1566, 1577, 1578 and 1582—occurred against a backdrop of heightened tensions or actual strife with the Mirza.

The tomb’s innovative architecture also reflects an imperial vision increasingly accommodative of the Indian environment. Akbar, however, wished for its inclusive style to be a powerful statement of the deceased emperor’s desire to construct an empire based on both Central Asian and Indian foundations. Contemporaries likely did not view this as too far-fetched. After all, was it not Humayun who first acknowledged the need to accommodate Indian Rajputs among the predominantly Central Asian-born Mughal nobility? Was it not Humayun who first recognized that Mughal rule in Hindustan would be fragile as long as it adhered to a Central Asian model of shared authority and appanages? Was it not Humayun who first broke with family tradition by patronizing the Indian Shattari tariqah over the Central Asian Naqshbandis in order to strengthen his religious credentials in Hindustan itself? In the end, Akbar hoped to position himself less as an innovator and more as an implementer of Humayun’s imperial goals—the aim being to provide himself with crucial political legitimacy vis-à-vis a vociferous familial opponent like Mirza Hakim.


By deploying this self-conscious symbolism, Akbar rendered Mirza Hakim’s attacks on himself (for ostensibly deserting the Mughal’s Central Asian roots and attempting to indigenize the Mughal Empire) as attacks on the memory and vision of their common father. The Mirza’s recurrent acts of “filial disloyalty” would be used to justify attempts to deny him the Mughal throne. These efforts would be dramatically underscored in 1569 with Akbar’s decision to change the terms of imperial succession. In that year, after years of anxiously waiting for a male heir (the anxiety heightened by the fact of Mirza Hakim’s looming presence) Akbar’s wife, Maryam-uz-zamani, finally gave birth to a son, Salim. Akbar declared Salim his heir-apparent. This declaration marked a radical departure from previous Timurid-Mughal practice that had granted all members of the Mughal family an equal right to contest/share in their family’s patrimony. Naturally, Mirza Hakim did not accept Akbar’s rewriting of the rules of succession. Akbar, however, ultimately won the argument in 1582 when he gave his twelve-year old and second son, Murad, nominal command over the Mughal army invading Kabul. Mirza Hakim’s defeat at the Battle of Kabul-Khurd by his nephew’s forces signaled a conclusive end to the Mirza’s political ambitions at the hands of Akbar’s line. This marked a very significant reshuffling in Mughal familial hierarchies and authority and one that Akbar had hitherto been unable to fully impose on his extended family and their partisans. From the 1580s onwards, the right to compete for the Mughal throne would be the exclusive prerogative of the emperor’s sons. This radical narrowing of political competition within the Mughal royal family had dramatic long-term consequences for the development of the Mughal Empire as it sharply reduced a fissiparous tendency that had fractured earlier Mongol, Timurid and Mughal polities.

Between the 1560s and 1580s Akbar was never indifferent to Mirza Hakim’s attempts to position himself as the only candidate with the necessary Timurid and steppe credentials. This is witnessed by the fact that Humayun’s tomb is deliberately designed to echo many features from 15th-Century Timurid funerary architecture. Its walls also self-consciously depict astrological and mystical symbols pointing to Akbar’s connection to an originary divine light that had reached him—and him alone—through various Timurid and Mongol ancestors.

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73 Glen Lowry, “Humayun’s Tomb: Form, Function, and Meaning in Early Mughal
gestures would be complemented by others. Akbar designed an imperial seal that traced his lineage back eight generations to Amir Timur even as he avidly collected Timurid-era manuscripts (like the *Shahnama* of Muhammad Juki and the *Zafarnama* of Sharaf-ud-din Yazdi). He also commissioned a very expensive book project called *Tarikh-i Khandan-i Timuriyya* (or “History of the House of Timur”) on the cusp of Mirza Hakim’s invasion of 1581; ordered the translation of the Emperor Babur’s autobiography from Turkish into Persian (it was completed in 1589); and continued to engage in Mongol-style qamargha hunts throughout most of his reign. Besides affording Akbar a way of inoculating himself against the Mirza’s attacks, Akbar was likely aware of the fact that demonstrations of his Timurid heritage afforded him great prestige in a South Asian context where Afghans posed the primary political challenge through much of the sixteenth century. Also, after conclusively defeating Mirza Hakim and abandoning efforts to project himself as an orthodox Sunni-Muslim ruler in the early 1580s, Akbar would find ideological affirmation for himself and his dynasty by referencing his Central Asian roots.

Although any active engagement with Mongol and Timurid tradition may have tempted Akbar to woo the Naqshbandi tariqah, its deeply entrenched position in Kabul and its close association with Mirza Hakim in fact required a different set of choices. It is noteworthy, in the context of this article, to speculate on how Akbar’s decision to attach his political fortunes and those of his family to the Chishtis was informed by his struggle with Mirza Hakim through

Architecture,” 144. According to the terms of Akbar’s dynastic genealogy, a divine light had first penetrated the semi-mythical Mongol queen Alanquwa after which it passed through generations of her descendants down to Chengiz Khan, Amir Timur, Humayun and, finally, Akbar. According to Akbar and his dynastic ideologues no one else in the extended Mughal family—and especially Mirza Hakim—had been privy to this privilege. See Shaikh Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, vol. 1, 66. See also John F. Richards, “The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir,” in *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, ed. John F. Richards (Madison, 1983), 252-285.

74 For an excellent look at the political nature of translation projects and the collection of manuscripts, see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek thought, Arabic culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society* (New York, 1998). I would like to thank Matthew Gordon for drawing my attention to this book.

75 Even if the Naqshbandi tariqah as a whole was not Akbar’s favored order, individual Naqshbandis certainly did find honor and patronage at the Mughal court. Among others were: Khwaja Abdul Shahid who held a rich enough land grant to support 2000 mendicants; Sultan Khwaja Naqshbandi who led an imperial sponsored *hajj* expedition in 1577, was a high-ranking minister between 1582 and his death in 1584, and whose daughter married Akbar’s third son, Daniyal in 1588; and Muhammad Yahya Naqshbandi who led the hajj expedition of 1578.
the 1560s. First, the Chishtis were a quintessentially Indian Sufi order with few or no ties to either Afghanistan or Central Asia; hence, there was no question of split loyalties. Second, the Chishti network had a powerful presence across much of North India—but especially in the Punjab where Akbar needed all the support he could get to checkmate Mirza Hakim’s longstanding territorial claims. Third, in their eclectic and accommodating religious and spiritual practices, the Chishtis were the perfect bridge between the Indic and Islamic elements within Akbar’s realm. The last was an especially crucial point because an important source of Akbar’s political legitimacy—vis-à-vis the Mirza—was his willingness to embrace the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of his empire. In the end, the only question that remained was whom among the broad constellation of Chishti saints would Akbar fix upon? By the late-1560s the choice became clear: Shaikh Salim Chishti of Sikri, a Chishti pir and spiritual descendant of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (the thirteenth-century founder of the Chishti tariqah in India).

Shaikh Salim Chishti seems to have been chosen for a host of reasons. Thus, although the Shaikh correctly predicted the birth of a long-awaited heir (Salim) in 1569, Akbar also gravitated towards the Shaikh because he was an controversial figure whose home in Sikri was an approximate geographical center of North India. This dovetailed nicely with the fact that Akbar was seeking to emphasize a political vision that extended beyond the confines of North India and, more specifically, Delhi.76 Delhi, it seems, was tainted in Akbar’s eyes. Despite encompassing a number of politically important Chishti shrines (including those of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya and Nasiruddin Chiragh-i Dilli), each was variably associated with previous non-Mughal dynasties. More crucially, an assassination attempt in 1564 against Akbar’s life outside Shaikh Nizamuddin’s shrine (organized by Mirza Sharfuddin Hussain, a disgruntled Naqshbandi nobleman with indirect links to Mirza Hakim) likely convinced Akbar that Delhi would always be a contestable space as long as Mirza Hakim was alive. The fact that Sikri was unencumbered by any conflicting political associations—past or present—greatly recommended it to Akbar. In 1569, Akbar undertook the dramatic step of ordering the construction of a new imperial capital near the formerly sleepy village of Sikri. It was named “Fatehpur” (Abode of Victory).

76 Bruce Lawrence, “Veiled Opposition to Sufis in Muslim South Asia,” in Islamic Mysticism Contested, eds. Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden, 1999), 438. See also John F. Richards, “The Formulation of Imperial Authority Under Akbar and Jahangir,” 130-133.
Over the next fifteen years, Fatehpur would become synonymous with: Akbar’s power; the religious and political legitimacy of his three sons (they were all born in Sikri and under the auspices of Chishti holy men like Shaikh Salim or Shaikh Daniyal between 1569 and 1572); and Akbar’s vision of an imperial dynasty that is simultaneously Indic and Islamic, South Asia and Central Asian. Crucially, Fatehpur offered opponents like Mirza Hakim no stage upon which to project their political ambitions.

Attesting to Mirza Hakim’s crucial role in Akbar’s decision to affiliate with the Chishtis and his decision to construct Fatehpur is Akbar’s complete indifference towards the Chishti tariqah after 1582—the same year that the political threat posed by Mirza Hakim was permanently contained by the march on Kabul. Thus, after having undertaken almost annual pilgrimages to the great Chishti shrines in the Punjab, Ajmer or Delhi between the early 1560s and early 1580s, Akbar never undertook another pilgrimage between 1581 and his death twenty four years later in 1605. Similarly, Akbar’s interest in Fatehpur—in the words of Shaikh Abul Fazl, “that glorious coronet of God . . . the envy of its age” (keh befurugh daihim-i khuda . . . rushk afzai razgar)—abruptly ended following the news of Mirza Hakim’s death in 1585. Within a matter of days, Akbar ordered the imperial court’s departure for the Punjab. Having served its purpose, Fatehpur was abandoned. Akbar would never set eyes on the city again.

Scholars have sought all manner of explanations to explain Akbar’s varyingly contradictory and complicated relationship with Islam and its religious establishment prior to 1581. Some have argued that Akbar’s actions can be explained against the backdrop of a decades-long and sometimes inconsistent intellectual journey that culminated in the early 1580s with the rejection of Islamic norms and the articulation of a policy of sulh-i kul (peace to all). Others have sought to explain the emperor’s actions within the context of particular political exigencies—such as the need to recruit a diverse nobility while retaining the support of older loyalists or the need to expand the basis of the Mughal Empire

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77 Following Salim, Akbar fathered two more sons: Murad (b. 1570) and Daniyal (b. 1572).
while retaining the support of the Islamic religious establishment.\textsuperscript{81} A third group makes the argument that some of Akbar’s Islam-centric initiatives can be traced to an attempt to wrest religious authority away from the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{82} None, however, has placed Akbar’s actions against the backdrop of intense political competition with Mirza Hakim or the latter’s attempts to project himself as an Islamic alternative to his older brother. As long as Mirza Hakim posed a serious politico-religious threat, Akbar was seemingly forced—perhaps against his better judgment\textsuperscript{83}—to occasionally play the “Islamic card” even as he desperately searched for ways to assert his authority over the religious establishment.

Akbar is rightfully applauded for revoking the pilgrimage tax on Hindus and allowing non-Muslims to repair aging temples in 1562; abrogating the \textit{jizya} (poll-tax on non-Muslims) in 1564; offering \textit{madad-i maash} grants (tax-free land grants given to religiously learned or spiritually worthy individuals) to non-Muslims beginning in 1565; opening court-based religious discussions to non-Muslims in 1578; and wooing non-Muslim political elites into the ranks of the Mughal nobility through the 1560s and 1570s. Yet, it is easily overlooked that he rarely missed an opportunity to shore up his credentials as an orthodox-minded Sunni-Muslim ruler. Akbar’s policies in fact were carefully calibrated to counter the threat from Mirza Hakim as seen in the emperor’s attempts to forge the image of an arch-typical Sunni-Muslim monarch prior to the early 1580s.

Among the many examples are Akbar’s characterization of his late-1560s Rajastathan campaign as a \textit{jihad} and a war against “signs of infidelity;”\textsuperscript{84} permission to forcibly convert certain non-Muslims through the 1560s; acquiescence in the renaming of the Hindu holy city of Prayag as “Allahabad” in 1574; persecution of the messianic Mahdawi sect through the 1570s; extension of massive monies towards costly \textit{hajj} expeditions between 1577 and 1581; promises to Abdullah Khan Uzbek that he would rid India of the Portuguese in 1577; and shows of great regard for such Sunni clerics and bigots as Makhduuml-Mulk Abdullah Sultanpuri and Shaikh Abdun Nabi until 1579. Furthermore, Akbar occasionally—and especially during the first decades of his reign—

\textsuperscript{81} John F. Richards, \textit{The Mughal Empire}, 36.
\textsuperscript{82} K.A. Nizami, \textit{Akbar and Religion}, 175-176; John F. Richards, \textit{The Mughal Empire}, 40; and N.R. Farooqi, \textit{Mughal-Ottoman Relations: A Study of Political & Diplomatic Relations between Mughal India and the Ottoman Empire}, 1556-1748 (Delhi, 1989), 191-192.
\textsuperscript{83} Shaikh Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain-i Akbari}, vol. 3, 429.
\textsuperscript{84} Mir Abul Qasim Namakin, \textit{Munshaat wa Ruqaat-i Namakin}, Farsiya Collection No. 27, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, f. 29a.
accommodated anti-Shiite sentiments as seen in his 1567 command ordering the exhumation of the Shiite Murtaza Sharifi Shirazi’s remains from the enclosure surrounding the tomb of the noted Sunni poet Amir Khusrau. Sometime in 1572 Akbar also enjoined the muhtasib (religious censor) of Bilgram to eradicate “deviationism” (read: Shiism) in the area under his charge.85

Alongside placating Sunni-Muslim sentiment, Akbar also sought control over the Islamic religious establishment. These efforts were to increase after the mid-1570s—just when Mirza Hakim’s challenge was beginning to gather strength. Was Akbar afraid that the Mirza might be able to draw on broad support within the Islamic religious establishment unless it was brought under stronger imperial control? Perhaps. In any case, between 1574 and 1578, the emperor sought to impose his imprimatur over the administration of madad-i maash grants by weeding out fraudulent and less than qualified recipients. More significantly, individuals/families with suspect political loyalties lost their madad grants.86 Simultaneously, Akbar moved to concentrate widely scattered madad grants in select villages in each region and also areas that were under his firm control.87 Although these measures applied to the entire empire, their application was particularly draconian in the Punjab likely because Akbar feared an invasion by the Mirza.88

Over the next couple of years other assertions of imperial power over the Islamic religious establishment followed. In June 1579 (after having seen off a threatened invasion of Hindustan by Mirza Hakim), Akbar took the almost unprecedented step of addressing a gathered Friday congregation in Fatehpur with the express purpose of highlighting his religious erudition. This was followed in September of the same year by the issuance of a highly controversial Mazhar (the so-called Infallibility Decree). In it, the emperor, in his capacity as a sultan-i adil (just ruler), sultan-i islam (ruler of Islam), amir-ul-mominin (commander of the faithful), mujtahid (one capable of legal reasoning) and zil-ullah ala al-alamayn (shadow of God over the two worlds), assumed the right to not only mediate religious disputes between different Islamic religious

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86 John F. Richards, The Mughal Empire, 37.
87 Irfan Habib, The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556-1707 (Delhi, 1963), 346-347. See also Shireen Moosvi, The Economy of the Mughal Empire c. 1595 (Delhi, 1987), 153-173.
88 Khafi Khan, Muntakhab-ul-Lubub, vol. 1, 175.
authorities but also impose his judgment on them.\textsuperscript{89} Although Akbar was well aware of the deep resentment among Islamic religious elites towards this initiative, he nevertheless forged ahead with it. Again, the broader context of impending conflict against Mirza Hakim suggests a plausible reason for Akbar’s actions as well as his determination.

All of this would change, however, following the Mirza’s conclusive defeat by Akbar and the subsequent crushing of all dissent within the Muslim religious establishment by 1582.\textsuperscript{90} Hereafter Akbar threw all caution to the wind, abandoning even the slightest pretense of being an orthodox-minded Sunni-Muslim ruler or even someone who was mindful of Islamic religious opinion.\textsuperscript{91} Thus, starting in 1582, Akbar began initiating disciples into a religiously eclectic imperial cult—the silsilah-i muridan (circle of disciples), commonly referred to as the Din-i Ilahi (Divine Faith)—even as he stopped imperial sponsorship for hajj expeditions and annual subventions for the maintenance of the holy shrines in the Hijaz. In 1584, Akbar initiated the first steps to replace the Islamic hijri calendar with the ilahi calendar (according to which Year 1 began in 1556, the year of Akbar’s accession). In the same year, Akbar began placing the deliberately ambiguous Allah-o-Akbar (“God is Great” or “Akbar is God”) at the top of imperial documents and rescripts instead of the former Huw al-Ghani (“He is Rich”). Increasingly open irritation at Islamic ritual practice followed. Akbar would now also enjoin complete tolerance for Shiism and strict injunctions banning Sunni-Shiite polemics and incitements to strife.\textsuperscript{92} To conclude, Mirza Hakim’s defeat blessed the emperor with complete freedom of maneuver after 1582. This reality is best captured in the poet Sheri’s caustic couplet written in 1584:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{90} Mirza Hakim received broad support from the Islamic religious establishment for his attempt to dethrone Akbar in 1580-81. Thus, for example, Mulla Muhammad Yazdi (a Shiite and an Akbar appointee to the sadarat of Jaunpur) joined Mir Muiz-ul-Mulk (another Akbar appointee and the sadr of sarkar Bihar) and a large number of Sunni ulema to issue a fatwa (religious judgment) attacking Akbar for his irreligiosity and attempts to reform the administration of madad-i maash grants. S.A.A. Rizvi, A Socio-Intellectual History of Isna ‘Ashari Shiis in India, Volume I (Canberra, 1986), 215-219. Expressions of Muslim religious support for the Mirza were especially strong in the Punjab where notables in Sirhind openly welcomed the Mirza’s invading army. Khafi Khan, Muntakhab-ul-Lubub, vol. 1, 185.
\textsuperscript{91} M. Athar Ali, “Akbar and Islam (1581-1605),” in Islamic Society and Culture, eds. N. Wagle and M. Israel (Delhi, 1983), 124.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 129.
\end{quote}
The death of Mirza Hakim and the capture of his sons in 1585 removed any remaining threat to Akbar or his sons. The swift occupation of Kabul in 1585 also prevented the Uzbeks from extending their political challenge south of the Hindu Kush Mountains. Henceforth, Akbar was free to focus most of his political and military energies on pacification or expansionist projects within South Asia itself. He also enjoyed almost complete latitude in his attempts to articulate an imperial ideology that revolved exclusively around his person and that of his dynasty.

Even in death, however, Mirza Hakim’s legacy of opposition to Akbar lived on. It would do so in the person of his followers. Thus even as some of the Mirza’s soldiers refused to countenance living under Akbar’s authority after 1585 (preferring Abdullah Khan Uzbek’s service instead), others made their way to Hindustan. A few, like Shahbeg Khan Arghun, Qasim Khan Herati, Ahmad Beg Kabuli and Tash Beg Khan Mughal, drifted into the imperial service. A much larger number, however, would end up being actively recruited by Akbar’s son, Salim, to serve in his own nascent princely retinue. Salim would particularly value men like Lala Beg Kabuli, Khwaja Dost Muhammad, and Zamana Beg because they neither had ties to his father nor, as life-long opponents of Akbar, had any ambitions of joining the more prestigious imperial service. As Salim’s political ambitions increasingly collided with Akbar through the 1590s, many of Mirza’s Hakim’s old retainers would come to the fore within the prince’s service. They generally served with great distinction then as well as later when Salim went into rebellion against Akbar between 1599 and 1604. In many instances, they would help the prince articulate an oppositional identity vis-à-vis his revered father; their influence may in fact have been crucial in encouraging Salim to use Islam as a way of challenging Akbar’s religious reforms and undercutting his political legitimacy. Following Salim’s accession to the throne (in the wake of Akbar’s death in October 1605), a number of

Mirza Hakim’s erstwhile followers transitioned into the imperial service. None, however, rose higher than Zamana Beg Mahabat Khan who became one of the most powerful Mughal noblemen through Emperor Jahangir’s reign and even the first years of the reign of Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658)—Jahangir’s son and successor.

Surviving in broad outline for almost 150 years, Emperor Akbar’s (r. 1556-1605) imperial polity is rightfully accorded a central place in Mughal historiography. Between the 1560s and the 1580s, however, Akbar’s right to rule the North Indian-based Mughal Empire was bitterly contested by Mirza Hakim, who accused Akbar of abandoning the Mughal family’s Timurid heritage and previous receptivity to Central Asian models of statecraft. The Mirza would prove a formidable opponent. His presence in fact played a crucial role in framing and shaping many of the political and religious choices made by Akbar between the 1560s and 1580s. Likewise, his death freed Akbar to engage a vision of empire that no longer felt compelled to engage the legacy of his Mughal predecessors or even respond to political and ideological pressures emanating from Central Asia. We would do well to acknowledge Mirza Hakim’s critical role in shaping Akbar’s unfolding vision of imperium and also his impact on the future trajectory of the Mughal Empire itself.

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