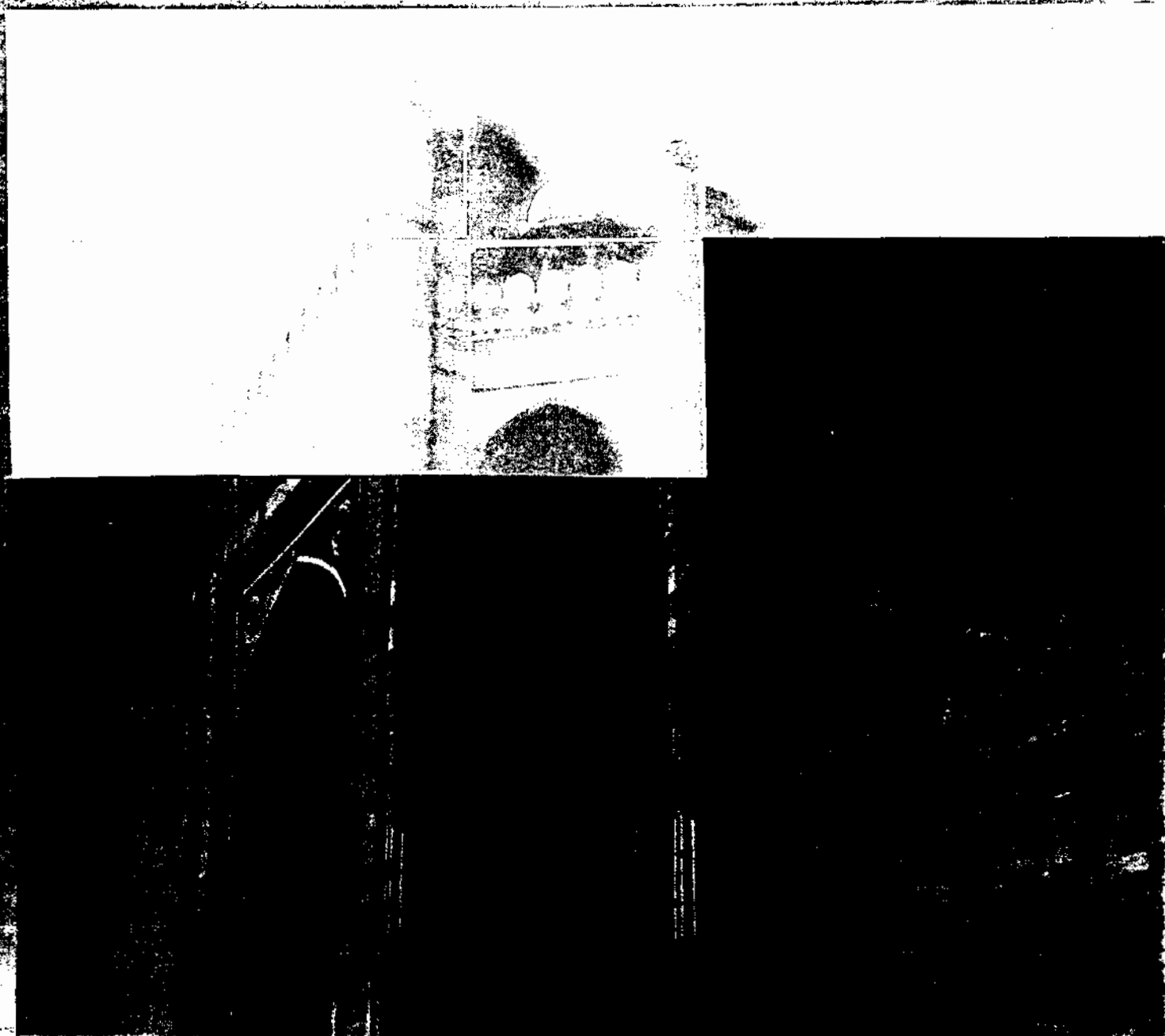


7

The City as an Artistic Center

Michael Brand



In talking about Fatehpur-Sikri as an artistic center, it is as important to look at the historical moment—the years between 1571 and 1585 when the city served as Akbar's capital—as it is to look at the actual artistic environment fostered by the juxtaposition of patron and artist in the new city. Fatehpur-Sikri was not necessarily the only imperial artistic center in Mughal India from 1571 to 1585, and much of our information on the arts during this period is specific neither to a particular site nor to a precise date. Studying Fatehpur-Sikri in parallel with a wider investigation of the theoretical basis of Akbar's aesthetic ambitions does, however, provide an opportunity to find a fuller explanation for what motivated Akbar as a patron and the means he used to imbue the arts in Mughal India with the mark of his own world view.

Virtually all studies of Mughal art, starting with the pioneering work of Laurence Binyon¹ and Percy Brown² in the 1920's, cover the entire dynasty or at least a significant part of it. Little has been published that falls between general surveys, on the one hand, and monographs or articles on a single manuscript or artist, on the other. Stuart Cary Welch's *The Art of Mughal India* (1963),³ the catalogue from the first American exhibition devoted to Mughal art, not only continued this trend but also set the tone for much of the work that has been done in this field over the past twenty years. Most studies of Mughal art have also emphasized painting—both individual works and manuscript illustrations. Robert Skelton's *The Indian Heritage* (1982),⁴ the catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum's contribution to the British Festival of India, surveyed the full range of arts at the Mughal court—aided at the exhibition by a brilliantly evocative layout—but could not attempt detailed conclusions.

Another characteristic of recent studies is the unswerving adherence they display toward the methodology of connoisseurship. That loyalty has, however, proved productive. For the study of Akbar's patronage, one only needs to look at a recent work such as Milo Cleveland Beach's *The Imperial Image*,⁵ especially its list of manuscripts noting which artists worked on them and in what capacity, to see what a wealth of either dated, signed, or attributed material now awaits the next round of study. With media other than painting, however, even the initial studies in connoisseurship have yet to be completed.

The rare studies that have attempted to interpret the iconography and ideology of Mughal visual expression have thus far concentrated on Akbar's successors, but they at least hint at the possible results of this line of research. For many years Richard Ettinghausen's "The Emperor's Choice"⁶ stood alone in this category, but more recently significant contributions have been added by Ebba Koch⁷ and Glenn D. Lowry.⁸ For Akbar's reign not much has been said beyond the obvious—that Akbar's personality was a key factor in the development of Mughal art. Binyon thought Akbar had a sensibility to natural beauty "in his blood"⁹ (an explanation that has achieved an almost universal currency), and even Emmy Wellesz's ambitiously titled book *Akbar's Religious Thought as Reflected in Mughal Painting* added little in the way of

concrete conclusions.¹⁰ Surprisingly, no critical analysis views on art expressed in the major primary source for Akbar's patronage, namely Abu'l Fazl's *A'in-i Akbari*, written late 1590's, has ever been made.¹¹ Many of these and issues related to the arts at Fatehpur-Sikri have been discussed in *Akbar's India: Art from the Mughal City of Victory*, by Glenn D. Lowry and I attempted to formulate a methodology for determining the effect of Akbar's patronage on both the arts of the book and the decorative arts.¹²

The administrative reforms Akbar made in 1583 years before he left Fatehpur-Sikri, gave his son, the thirteen-year-old Prince Murad, control over the management of the imperial household (*sar-anjam-i manzil*).¹³ Unfortunately, Abu'l Fazl gives no details of the responsibilities this entailed, nor do we know whether the organization was significantly different before these reforms. That the management of artistic production was included in this portfolio is suggested by the appointment of 'Abd as-Samad, one of the Safavid artists who had originally entered into the service of Akbar's father Humayun, as Murad's assistants along with Raisal Darbari, Karmullah, and Muhammad 'Ali Khazanchi. Abu'l Fazl's *A'in-i Akbari* includes the arts and architecture in the section on the imperial household, where "there are more than one hundred workshops (*karkhanas*) each resembling a city, or rather a little kingdom."¹⁴ Among the subjects he describes under the headings of the different *a'ins* are painting and calligraphy, building, the mint, royal seals, textiles, and clothing. The arrangement suggests that instead of distinguishing between the "decorative arts" and painting, it would be more accurate to regard them simply as the products of different workshops (*karkhanas*). A related question is how the library (*kitabkhana*) was viewed in comparison with the workshops, and whether or not it too was viewed as another *karkhana*.

In the *A'in-i Akbari*, Abu'l Fazl calls the department where Akbar's painters and calligraphers worked the "public bureau" (*tasvirkhana*),¹⁵ rather than the more common *kitabkhana*, a term that does not single out any one of the arts required for the production of a book (*kitab*). Although Abu'l Fazl maintained that calligraphy was more important than painting,¹⁶ the name *tasvirkhana* suggests that he thought differently. Abu'l Fazl occasionally also uses the common term, however, as in the following passage from the same *a'in* describing, in part, how the library was laid out:

His Majesty's library is divided into several parts: some of the books are kept within and some without the Harem. Each part of the library is subdivided, according to the value of the books and the estimation in which the sciences are held of which the books treat. The books, poetical works, Hindi, Persian, (Sanskrit), Kashmirian, Arabic, are all separately placed.¹⁷

Other important manuscripts were kept in the treasury (*khizana*) which might have functioned as a "rare-book room."¹⁸ Unfortunately, we do not yet know where the rest of the *Kitabkhana* was housed at Fatehpur. Father Monserrate, one of the Jesuit priests who arrived in the city in 1580, noted that when the mission was granted

quarters "built against the palace wall," he and his colleagues were at first greatly bothered by the noisy crowds that surrounded some "scribes" who worked close by,¹⁹ but it is not clear whether these scribes were in any way connected with the imperial Kitabkhana. It is likely that the library's many functions—including both the production and storage of manuscripts—were scattered among a number of buildings. Like many other institutions at Akbar's court, the library also traveled with the emperor on his campaigns, recalling the way Humayun had taken his library into battle stored in boxes strapped to the backs of camels. Badauni presented a book to Akbar in 1578-79, while the emperor was on his way back to Fatehpur-Sikri from Ajmer, and the passage in which he describes it clearly implies that the gift was placed in the library before the capital was reached.²⁰

Assuming that the ca. 1562-77 fourteen-volume illustrated edition of the *Hamzanama* (figs. 7.1-2) was the major project of its time, it is possible to suggest that the day-to-day running of the Kitabkhana was initially in the hands of the former Safavid artist Mir Sayyid 'Ali. According to Mir Ala ad-Dawla Qazvini's *Nafais al-Maathir*, he was in charge of the *Hamzanama* project for its first seven years, during which time only four volumes were completed. Then he received permission from Akbar to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and 'Abd as-Samad, another former Safavid artist in Akbar's service, took over the project.²¹ Pramod Chandra has concluded that 'Abd as-Samad was already at work on the project by 1572-74,²² allowing the suggestion that he was also in charge of the Kitabkhana at Fatehpur-Sikri from this date until he was appointed master of the mint there in 1577-78. The change in directors of the *Hamzanama* project and, presumably, of the Kitabkhana itself coincides almost exactly with Akbar's move to Fatehpur-Sikri; its construction had been ordered in about 1571, but it was probably not in full operation until at least 1573.

We do not know how, if at all, 'Abd as-Samad's later appointments, to the mint in 1577-78 and to assist Prince Murad in the administration of the household in 1583, affected his activities in the Kitabkhana. He certainly remained the leading figure in the arts at Fatehpur-Sikri, where he maintained a house worthy of entertaining state guests: in 1575-76 Akbar ordered the artist to provide accommodation there for a visiting shaikh.²³ Lacking any contemporary descriptions of the precise role of the director of Akbar's Kitabkhana, the best we can do is draw a parallel with Safavid practice in Iran. A decree issued in 1522 by Shah Ismail appointing Bihzad as director of his library makes it clear that not only did this master painter exercise control over the calligraphers and other artisans in the library, but that he also had administrative responsibilities.²⁴

Mir Sayyid 'Ali wrote poetry under the name "Judai" and 'Abd as-Samad's additional talents as a calligrapher earned him the epithet *shirin qalam* (sweet pen), but with this exception the painters and calligraphers in Akbar's library had little in common, and none of them ever practiced both skills. The painters were largely Indians with Hindu names; the calligraphers were all Muslim. Among the more than one

hundred other artists who worked for Akbar, the two singled out by Abu'l Fazl for particular attention were Daswar who studied under 'Abd as-Samad, but committed suicide in 1584, and Basawan, although it is said that no two could agree as to which was the superior artist.²⁵ Other artists mentioned by name in the same passage are Kesu Das (also known as Kesu the Elder), Lal, Mukund, Miskin, Farrukh Beg (who arrived in India in 1585), Madhu, Jagan, Mahesh, Khwaja Karan, Tara, Sanvalah, Haribans, and Ram.²⁶ At Fatehpur-Sikri, artists routinely worked in teams, presumably as a means of speeding up the production of illustrated manuscripts; the senior-most artist was generally responsible for design, an assistant for painting, and occasionally a third specialist added to the faces of important figures.

Akbar's favorite calligrapher was Muhammad Husayn al-Kashmiri, who received the epithet *zarin qalam* (golden pen) (fig. 7.3). Other calligraphers mentioned by Abu'l Fazl are Mawlana Baqir (the son of the famous Timurid calligrapher Mir 'Ali al-Husayni), Muhammad Amin al-Mashhadi, Husayn-i Kulanki, Mawlana 'Abd al-Hayy, Mawlana Daswar (also known as Sultan Bayazid and one of the scribes responsible for copying out Akbar's *Hamzanama*),²⁷ Mawlana 'Abd ar-Rahim (who entered Akbar's service well after 1575 and was later known as *anbarin qalam* (amber pen)), 'Abdullah, Nizami al-Qazvini, 'Ali Chaman al-Kashmiri, and Nurullah Arsalan.²⁸ Mir Masum Nami of Bhakkar, a poet, historian, and ambassador could be added to this list because he was responsible for composing and designing the inscription that was added to the right side of the great gateway of the Jami' Masjid [17] in Fatehpur-Sikri in 1601-2.

More than mere production centers for the decorative arts, the workshops at Fatehpur-Sikri manufactured a range of goods essential both for the functioning of the government and for the maintenance of Akbar's imperial style. In contemporary accounts of Akbar's historians, a variety of terms are applied to the workshops, with some described as "government" (*sarkar*) and others as "private" (*khass*). Some of the workshops served quite diverse functions, especially the storehouse (*farrashkhana*). This department not only stored Akbar's carpets and other furnishings, but was also responsible for manufacturing and setting up the great imperial tents (some of which allegedly took a thousand workmen a full week to erect). Along with the army, the workshops must have been a major source of employment at Fatehpur-Sikri.

The imperial workshops were administered as part of the emperor's household. Responsibility for their smooth operation fell on the *mir-saman* and the *nazir-i buyutat* who reported directly to the vizier (also known as the *divan*). Akbar's minister of finance. If the vizier was unable to deal with a problem he could refer it to the *vakil*, Akbar's chief minister.

Monstrous records having been seen near the palace at Fatehpur-Sikri "studios and work-rooms for finer and more reputable arts, such as painting, goldsmith-work, tapestry making, carpet-and curtain-making, and the manufacture



7.3

arms,"³⁰ but gives no details about their exact locations. Qandahari is no more precise: "On the sides and around that sublime building (*imarat*: i.e., Akbar's palace) they have constructed workshops (*karkhanah-yi sarkar*) especially for the royal household."³¹ Although we cannot yet identify specific workshops with any of the empty buildings at Fatehpur-Sikri, it is possible to surmise that they were an important part of the urban fabric around the imperial palace complex. There is no direct evidence to link any of these departments with the large structure with open courtyard [82] identified by E. W. Smith as the "mint"³² and by S. A. A. Rizvi and V. J. Flynn as the "imperial karkhanas."³³

If one thing characterizes Akbar's patronage, it is the need he felt to participate directly in the artistic process. One of the

sayings attributed to Akbar by Abu'l Fazl states his thus precisely: "Although knowledge in itself is regarded as the summit of perfection, yet unless displayed in action it is not the impress of worth; indeed, it may be considered worse than ignorance."³⁴ Monserrate mentions on a number of occasions how he had observed Akbar practicing the craft of various artisans of the workshops.³⁵

Another aspect of Akbar's character as a patron was his passion for collecting. He had inherited a number of excellent Timurid manuscripts, including the ca. 1440 *Juki Shahnameh* and the 1467-68 *Zafarnama* of Sultan Husayn Mirza with illustrations by Bihzad,³⁷ from his father and grandfather (fig. 7.4). Other Persian manuscripts that found their way to the court later had miniatures added by Mughal painters, such as in the case of the 1567-68 *Gulistan*³⁸ and the *Keir Kham* by Nizami from Yazd. Added to this were a number of European prints and the polyglot Bible brought to Fatehpur-Sikri by the Jesuit mission in 1580. Akbar's general inquisitiveness earlier led him to send an artistic mission to Goa under the direction of Haji Habibullah between 1575 and 1577. Borrowing from a wide variety of styles or traditions, the eclectic range of columns found in the second floor hall of the Panch Mahal might also be viewed as a "collection" of sorts (fig. 7.5).

Akbar was eminently qualified to work in the Kitabkhana; he had studied painting as a child under the guidance of Persian masters Mir Sayyid 'Ali and 'Abd as-Samad. Abu'l Fazl mentions two steps Akbar took to maintain his involvement. When an illustrated manuscript was being planned, it was Akbar who "indicated the scenes to be painted,"³⁹ and for the projects, Akbar would check the work done by each artist during the previous week and order increases in their monthly salary or other rewards if the quality of the painting warranted it. The paintings were shown to the emperor's clerks of the library, however, not by the artists themselves. The fact that Akbar was functionally illiterate required that his books be read out to him at set times of the day by storytellers, one of whom was the son of one of Shah Tahmasp's storytellers.⁴¹ This surprising side of Akbar's character might explain why calligraphy, the only branch of the arts in which no practical expertise was ever claimed by the emperor, changed the least (if at all) during his reign.

The large and varied output of Akbar's Kitabkhana can be best understood if it is first divided into some standard categories of book production. The stylistic evolution of the miniatures does not alone provide a complete picture of Akbar's patronage during the Fatehpur-Sikri years and tends to highlight only the innovative side of his taste. Furthermore, different kinds of manuscripts usually demanded different patterns, and qualities, of illustration. Three types of manuscripts were produced at the time of Fatehpur-Sikri. Unillustrated (though frequently sumptuously decorated) manuscripts included a Koran,⁴² the *Divan* of Hafiz copied by 'Abd as-Samad,⁴³ the *Gulistan* of Sadi copied in Fatehpur-Sikri by Muhammad Husayn Zarin Qalam with a painting added above the colophon by Manohar, the son of the great artist Basawa.

Illustrated manuscripts produced during this period included

the *Hamzanama* (The Tales of Amir Hamza)⁴⁵ (figs. 7.1-2), the *Anvar-i Suhayli* (The Lights of Canopus),⁴⁶ a second copy of the *Tutinama* (The Tales of a Parrot),⁴⁷ the *Darabnama* (The Tales of Darab),⁴⁸ the *Shahnama* (The Persian Book of Kings),⁴⁹ the *Razmnama* (a Persian translation of the *Mahabharata* intended to foster greater knowledge of the customs of Akbar's new Hindu allies among his Muslim courtiers)⁵⁰ (fig. 7.6), the *Ramayana*,⁵¹ the *Harivamsa* (originally an appendix of the *Mahabharata*)⁵² (fig. 7.7), the *Tarikh-i Alfi* (The History of One Thousand Years)⁵³ (fig. 7.8), and the *Tarikh-i Khandan-i Timuriyya* (The History of the House of Timur, i.e. the Mughal dynasty)⁵⁴ (fig. 7.9).

The third category of work produced is comprised of albums containing individual paintings and calligraphies, or a combination of both. In the *A'in-i Akbari*, Abu'l Fazl mentions that Akbar arranged "to have the likenesses taken of all the grandees of the realm," and adds that through the "immense album" thus formed, "those that have passed away have received a new life, and those who are still alive have immortality promised them."⁵⁵ Although Abu'l Fazl does not give a date for this decree, the style in which some of the surviving portraits are painted leaves no doubt that it was issued no later than the early 1570's, and perhaps even earlier (fig. 7.10). At the same time, Akbar's artists embarked on a series of animal and bird studies (many painted on cotton cloth) of an equally naturalistic and insightful character (fig. 7.11). Dispersed calligraphic folios (fig. 7.3) and copies of European prints might also have been intended for one or more of the imperial albums.

Of course, works produced during the 1560's, and even earlier, were still an important part of Akbar's collection at Fatehpur-Sikri, and some of the programs instigated there by Akbar, especially the production of historical manuscripts, were only brought to full fruition in the years after 1585. This attempt to define and illustrate Akbar's standing in both the Timurid dynasty and world history eventually led to illustrated versions of Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnama* in ca. 1590 and ca. 1604, Babur's memoirs (which had been translated from Turki into Persian as the *Baburnama* in the late 1580's) in ca. 1589 (fig. 7.12), ca. 1591, ca. 1593, and 1597-98, and the *Chingiznama* (The History of Chingiz Khan) which was completed in 1596 (fig. 7.13). In writing the *Akbarnama*, Abu'l Fazl had made considerable use of the new imperial Records Office that Akbar had set up at Fatehpur-Sikri in 1574-75 to keep track of all his activities and pronouncements. Though illustrated after Akbar had left Fatehpur-Sikri, both editions of the *Akbarnama* provide us with a number of views of the former capital painted by artists such as Kesu the Elder and Tulsi the Elder (fig. 7.14) who were evidently very familiar with its layout and topography. Some scenes in the second version, however, are clearly derived from miniatures in the earlier manuscript rather than from fresh observation (compare fig. 7.14 with fig. 1.3).

The manuscripts illustrated for Akbar during the Fatehpur-Sikri years can be further divided according to subject matter: some are literary texts, some are historical, and the rest are

based on new translations into Persian.⁵⁶ This strongly suggests that, for all his taste for innovation, Akbar still operated within a fairly traditional pattern of patronage. He may have been the first Muslim ruler to order an illustrated translation of the Hindu *Mahabharata*, for example, but commissioning translations had a long tradition in Islamic princely circles.

Compared to the Kitabkhana, any discussion of Akbar's *karkhanas* suffers from a lack of objects securely dated to his reign. Almost none of the objects attributed to the Fatehpur-Sikri years actually carry dates, and few coherent attempts have been made to locate and identify the undated objects from the first century of Mughal rule in India. Preliminary attributions have been very conservative, reflecting a general reluctance to assign objects to the sixteenth century. Studies of objects found in contemporary Akbari paintings, such as those undertaken by Som Prakash Verma,⁵⁷ document a range of possible forms and types, but at least some of them were presumably wholly restricted to the painters' decorative vocabulary.

Perhaps it is premature to talk about what was specifically produced in the Fatehpur-Sikri *karkhanas*, but a start can at least be made by briefly documenting the range of material that is attributable to Akbar's reign on stylistic grounds. If the amount that has survived is disappointingly small, the range of artistic conceptions and the different media through which it is expressed are truly impressive. In metalwork, there is the copper champlevé wine bowl with a problematic inscription claiming it was given to the shrine of Abu Abdullah al-Husayn in 1583-84, although it has recently been suggested that it must have been made after 1618-19;⁵⁸ a gem-encrusted golden spoon from around 1600;⁵⁹ a bronze rampant lion in a private collection;⁶⁰ and a pair of bronze lion heads that are as bold of form as they are intriguing of function (figs. 7.15-16).⁶¹ In *Akbar's India*, these latter two objects are given as examples of the ornaments for the prows of Akbar's boats that Abu'l Fazl described as having been intended to combine "terror with amusement."⁶²

Jade reached Akbar's court well before it was moved to Fatehpur-Sikri. Khwaja Mu'in, who had a monopoly on the supply of this stone from Kashgar, arrived in India in 1562-63.⁶³ However, only one object, a small fluted vessel from the Guennol Collection (fig. 7.17), has been found to match vessels depicted in contemporary miniatures.⁶⁴ Fragments of ceramics manufactured both locally and in Ming China have recently been excavated at Fatehpur-Sikri by the Archaeological Survey of India.⁶⁵

Wood was carved and also inlaid with mother-of-pearl. A small carved panel originally from a wooden throne shows a seated ruler, presumably an idealized representation of Akbar, surrounded by attendants watching two pairs of combatants.⁶⁶ The finest piece of inlay work is the canopy over the cenotaph of Shaikh Salim ad-Din Chishti (d. 1572) inside his white marble tomb [18] in the courtyard of the Jami' Masjid [17] at Fatehpur-Sikri, but the same technique was also used on smaller objects. Two such examples are a







box (figs. 7.18-19) and a chair that had found their way to Sweden by the end of the sixteenth century.⁶⁷

The workshops at Fatehpur-Sikri produced a great many textiles. Descriptions of how the palaces were decorated on feast days and how the roads leading into the city were beautified when important state guests arrived, the range of Akbar's wardrobe, not to mention the everyday requirements for tents, screens, awnings and the like, give an indication of just how important textiles were for the functioning of Akbar's court. A compound-weave silk hanging showing a courtier holding a winecup is a magnificent example of the type of textile that would have been used to decorate the palaces on such occasions; a painting of the same subject, attributed to the Safavid-trained Mughal artist Aqa Riza Jahangiri, also shows how stock motifs could be used in more than one medium (figs. 7.20-21).⁶⁸ A description of a disastrous fire that ravaged the *farrashkhana* in Fatehpur-Sikri in 1579 provides more direct evidence of the quality of textiles produced for (and acquired by) Akbar. Among the ten million textiles lost, according to the historian Qandahari, were gold cloth, European velvet, woolen cloth, Damask silk, satin and brocade, brocaded carpets, and embroideries.⁶⁹

Carpet manufacture was spread throughout the empire,

but according to Abu'l Fazl, Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri, and Lahore were the main centers of production.⁷⁰ A number of surviving carpets and carpet fragments can be attributed to Akbar's reign, although some of them have previously been assigned more conservatively to the seventeenth century.⁷¹ Some marked similarities with works in other media: it has been suggested, for example, that the painter Mir Sayyid might have had a hand in designing the early red ground carpet before he left India in 1572.⁷² The similarity in design between the Metropolitan Museum animal and tree carpet (17.190.858) and the relief-carved dado panels in the pavilion [57] by the Anup Talau tank [56] at Fatehpur-Sikri is an argument in favor of an earlier dating for this carpet which has previously been attributed to the early seventeenth century.

Great changes took place in Mughal art throughout Akbar's reign, but especially during the years his court was at Fatehpur-Sikri. Compare, for example, the ca. 1566 *Tutinama* (fig. 7.22), its disparate elements still in the process of merging into a distinctive new mode of pairing with the jewel-like miniatures of the 1588 *Divan* of Akbar (fig. 7.23), where Mughal painting appears as a fully realized idiom. An equally telling comparison can be drawn between Safavid paintings of single human figures (fig. 7.24)

Basawan's intensely psychological portrait of a scholar with his cat from ca. 1575-80 (fig. 7.25). While changes of a similar magnitude also took place in carpet weaving, and possibly in other media as well, contemporary textual sources put us on much firmer ground when we talk about this development with regard to painting.

All these extraordinary changes outpaced the steadily improving quality of raw materials available to Akbar's artists and included both the rejection of many features of the Timurid and Safavid modes of painting and a keen interest in European art. Why did they take place? First they represented a reaction against the past that followed the collapse of Timurid power. Babur and Humayun had both collected masterpieces of Persian illustrated manuscripts and had been particularly enamoured of Bihzad's work, and Humayun passed on his collection to Akbar, along with works of a number of Safavid artists. But Akbar decided to break new ground instead of rigidly following these old patterns of connoisseurship. The silence of contemporary sources tells us that Akbar was singularly unimpressed with whatever painting existed at the Islamic courts of India. European art, on the other hand, provided an element of the new and exotic that attracted him strongly. Akbar's personality was also a key factor, but we must still look for the source, or sources, for his motivation.

On the theoretical level, the most obvious starting point is Ibn al-Arabi's pantheistic theory of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being) which had permeated contemporary thinking in India and Iran. At Akbar's court, it was strongly supported by liberals such as Abu'l Fazl and his brother, the poet Fayzi, but bitterly opposed by other courtiers such as the more orthodox historian Badauni. Ibn al-Arabi's theory drew a distinction between inner meaning or esoteric content (*manavi* or *mana*) and outer form (*surat*): the former stands for God and the essence of all phenomena; the latter for the phenomenal world of appearances. The terminology of *wahdat al-wujud* was used in many different ways. In political metaphor, for example, Akbar was often described as "the shadow of God on earth," perhaps an indirect reference to Ibn al-Arabi's claim that "outer form" represents a mirror image or shadow of the more elusive "inner meaning."⁷³ Expressions like this can often be explained away as eulogistic literary *topoi*, but Abu'l Fazl makes the distinction very concrete in his discussion of painting and calligraphy in the *A'in-i Akbari*. In writing, he describes how "the written shape guides [the eye] to letter and word, and from there the content (*mana*) is found out."⁷⁴ A close reading of Abu'l Fazl's comments on painting suggests that what Akbar sought to create was a new pictorial language in which painted forms or signs would just as surely lead the viewer from "outer form" to a contemplation of "inner meaning." Abu'l Fazl claimed that Akbar, "from his earliest youth, has shown a great predilection for this art, and gives it every encouragement, as he looks upon it as means, both of study and amusement."⁷⁵

In *The Canons of Painting*, the contemporary Safavid painter Sadiqi Beg (1533-1610) asked the rhetorical question,



"when there has already been a Mani and a Bihzad, how else [except through the direct observation of Nature] could one break free of the crushing weight of past perfection?"⁷⁶ This seems to have mirrored Akbar's view, and probably also explains his great fascination with European art, which inspired Abu'l Fazl to make the following crucial observation: "Although in general a picture represents a material form . . . the painters of *firang* (Europe) quite often express, by using rare forms, our mental states and [thus] they lead the ones who consider only the outside of things to the place of inner meaning."⁷⁷ Although it has generally been thought that it was the "realism" of European artists that Akbar admired the most, it seems more likely that it was actually the level of "expression" allowed by their manner of painting that he sought to emulate.

If this was Akbar's conviction, then it is not at all surprising that he turned his back on the highly refined surface brilliance of the Timurid and Safavid modes of painting: they would have been seen as placing an undue emphasis on "outer form"



ویریکان نشان گشت تسخیر و طالع نوک کجایم و کجاست اقلع تو صد هزار جان خواهد بود و با و جلا آید و کجایم و دست اندر که در دست گشت
و نهایت و جهات و شوکت ایشان و نوک کجاست و کجاست شوهر بدست این طالع و کجاست و بنور شید و سحر و کجاست و با او را و کجاست







7.15

at the expense of "inner meaning." A verse by the great Timurid calligrapher Mir 'Ali al-Husayni exemplifies this old order:

O calligrapher! As long as thy pen continues to work
miracles,
It is fitting if Form proclaims superiority over
Meaning!⁷⁸

The new concerns Akbar instilled in the artists working in his Kitabkhana are best represented by the words of the otherwise unknown painter Amir Beg of Sawah who also wrote poetry at the Mughal court under the name Payravi ("the follower"). According to Badauni, a now lost poetic treatise written by this artist began as follows:

O Lord, I am unable to grasp hidden truth (*mana*)!
Forgive me, for I am too much a worshipper of the
outward form (*surat*)
Of thy grace, O most Pure God
Thou hast so fashioned the outward form of our
earthly tabernacles
That every [fair] form which I see
Points out to me the way to the hidden truths of
Thine Essence.⁷⁹

Might we then conclude that for Akbar, the observation of nature (whether it is reflected in the personality of a courtier

or a character in a poetic text, in a landscape setting or curious Indian animal) and the production of images led in hand to a fuller understanding of the world at large? Though not limited to a single fourteen-year period, concerns fit perfectly with the intellectual and political atmosphere of Fatehpur-Sikri at a time when Akbar was attempting to reconcile his Timurid ancestry with the political realities of India and looking for ways of extending his authority from the political arena to matters of a more religious nature.

This brings us back to the original question of why Fatehpur-Sikri functioned as an artistic center. There is no doubt that the city was a hungry and enthusiastic consumer of culture. If Fatehpur-Sikri was not the only site of important artistic production during the years from 1571 to 1585, it was at the very least a major center in the Mughal arts network. For if the Mughal political capital was determined more by the physical presence of the emperor than by the existence of a designated capital city, it stands to reason that Mughal art flourished where it had the greatest amount of Akbar's attention. This is what made the Fatehpur-Sikri years a unique period in the development of Mughal art. At his City of Victory, Akbar was able to structure the administration of the empire in such a way that artistic production could

17. Ibid., 109-10.
18. 'Abd al-Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab at-Tavarikh*, trans. G. S. A. Ranking, W. H. Lowe, and T. W. Haig (1898-99; rpt. Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1973), 2:328.
19. Father Monserrate, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S. J.*, trans. J. S. Hoyland and annotated by S. N. Banerjee (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), pp. 58 and 68.
20. MT, 2:262.
21. From Mir Ala ad-Dawla Qazvini, *Nafais al-Maathir*, as trans. by C. M. Naim in Chandra, *Tuti-Nama*, pp. 180-81.
22. Ibid., p. 67.
23. MT, 3:84-85.
24. As quoted in Sir Thomas W. Arnold, *Painting in Islam: A Study of the Place of Pictorial Art in Muslim Culture* (2d ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1965), p. 151.
25. A'in-i Akbari, 1:114.
26. A number of articles have been written about these artists, of which the most important are Beach, "The Mughal Painter Daswanthi," *Ars Orientalis* 13 (1982): 121-33; idem, "The Mughal Painter Kesu Das," *Archives of Asian Art* 30 (1976-77): 35-52; S. C. Welch, "The Paintings of Basawan," *Lalit Kala* 10 (1961): 7-17. For more information on Mir Sayyid 'Ali and 'Abd as-Samad, see Martin Dickson and S. C. Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1:178-91 and 192-200 respectively.
27. Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), p. 67.
28. A'in-i Akbari, 1:109.
29. Among the terms mentioned are *karkhana-i khass*, *karkhanah-yi sarkar*, and *umur-i shahanshahi*. For their descriptions, see Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry, *Fatehpur-Sikri: A Sourcebook* (henceforth *Sourcebook*) (Cambridge, Mass.: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1985), pp. 129-131 and 161.
30. Monserrate, *Commentary*, p. 201.
31. Muhammad Arif Qandahari, *Tarikh-i Akbari*, ed. Muin ud-Din Nadwi, Azhar Ali Dihlavi, and Imtiyaz Ali Arshi (Rampur: Raza Library, 1962), p. 151; *Sourcebook*, p. 36.
32. Edmund W. Smith, *The Moghul Architecture of Fatehpur-Sikri* (Allahabad: Archaeological Survey of India, 1894-97), 3: 55-56.
33. S. A. A. Rizvi and V. J. Flynn, *Fatehpur-Sikri* (Bombay: Taraporevala, 1975), pp. 19-20.
34. A'in-i Akbari, 3:430.
35. See, for example, Monserrate, *Commentary*, p. 201.
36. Royal Asiatic Society, London, ms. 239.
37. Evergreen Foundation, on loan to the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.
38. British Library, Or. 5302.
39. A'in-i Akbari, trans. Naim, in Chandra, *Tuti-Nama*, p. 184.
40. A'in-i Akbari, 1:113.
41. As a storyteller (*qissa-khwan*), Darbar Khan seems to have been particularly noted for his recitations of the *Hamzanama* (Akbarname, 2:343-44); and Shah Navaz Khan, *Maathir al-Umara*, trans. H. Beveridge (1941; rpt. Delhi: Janaki Prakashan, 1979), 1:453-55.
42. Dated 981 (1573-74), British Library, Add. 18497; Jeremiah P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: British Library, 1982), p. 85, and Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, p. 61, no. 21.
43. Dated 990 (1582-83), Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, ms. 15.
44. Dated 990 (1582-83), Royal Asiatic Society, London, ms. 258; Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, pp. 66 and 128, no. 25.
45. Ca. 1562-77: Heinrich Glück, *Die indischen Miniaturen des Hamza-Romanes im Österreichischen Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Wien und in anderen Sammlungen* (Leipzig: Amalteas-Verlag, 1925).
46. Dated 978 (1570), Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, ms. 10102; Losty, *Art of the Book in India*, p. 87.
47. Ca. 1580, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (ms. 21) and dispersed; Losty, *Art of the Book in India*, pp. 88-89.
48. Ca. 1580-85, British Library, Or. 4615; Losty, *Art of the Book in India*, p. 88.
49. Commissioned by Akbar in 1582, now almost entirely lost; a detached miniature in the Keir Collection might well be from this manuscript; see Robert Skelton, "Indian Painting of the Mughal Period," in *Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book*, ed. B. W. Robinson (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), pp. 237-38 and color plate 31.
50. Ca. 1582-86, Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur.
51. Ca. 1584-89, Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur.
52. Ca. 1585; Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, pp. 67-70, nos. 28-29.
53. The text was commissioned in 989 (1581-82) but the illustrative manuscript was not presented to Akbar until 1002 (1593-94).
54. Ca. 1584, Khudabakhsh Public Library, Patna, no. 107.
55. A'in-i Akbari, 1:115.
56. A fourth category of "theoretical" or philosophical works could be added here, although there are no surviving manuscripts of this kind dated to the Fatehpur-Sikri years. The ca. 1565-70 *Tilasm and Zohar* manuscript (Raza Library, Rampur, no. 1352), however, would presumably have been in the Kitabkhana there. That this type of work was popular at the time is also shown by the existence of a manuscript of the *Kutub Sa'at* illustrated for Mirza Aziz Koka, Akbar's foster-brother, in (1583) at Hajipur (private collection; Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, pp. 84-85, no. 56).
57. Som Prakash Verma, *Art and Material Culture in the Paintings of Akbar's Court* (Delhi: Vikas, 1978), and "Wine-pots of the Mughal Court in the Sixteenth Century," *Medieval India: A Miscellany* 3 (1975): 67-78.
58. Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, 56.51. For a discussion of its iconography, see S. C. Welch, *India: Art and Culture 1300-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 190-91.
59. Skelton, *The Indian Heritage*, p. 112 and pl. 12a.
60. Ibid., p. 153, and Welch, *India*, pp. 160-61.
61. Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Cologne, 42.5 a-b.
62. Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, pp. 114-15, no. 74.
63. *Akbarname*, 2:301-2: the development of Mughal jade carving is discussed in Skelton, "The Relations between the Chinese and Indian Carving Traditions," in *The Westward Influence of the Chinese Arts in the 14th to the 18th Century* (Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in China, no. 3) (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 1975), pp. 98-110.
64. On loan to the Brooklyn Museum, L79.19; Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, p. 116, no. 75.
65. Ibid., pp. 115-16, fig. 14.
66. Howard Hodgkin collection; Skelton, *Indian Heritage*, p. 161.
67. Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, pp. 117-18, no. 76.
68. The chair (University Museum, Uppsala) is illustrated in V. Slohni, "The Indian Period of European Furniture I," *Burlington Magazine* 1 (1934): 120.
69. Los Angeles County Museum of Art M73.5.702. This same figure of a courtier is also found in two roughly contemporary Mughal paintings. The first belongs to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva (B. W. Robin, "Catalogue de peintures et des calligraphies islamiques léguées par Pozzi au Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève," *Genève* 21 [1973]: no. 252).
70. *Sourcebook*, pp. 102-3.
71. A'in-i Akbari, 1:57.
72. Among the most important of these are the following: animal carpet fragments now in several collections in Europe and America; animal carpet fragment in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (INV 5212); animal tree carpet, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (17.190.8); landscape carpet, Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna (OR 292); "Widener carpet," National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (C. 328); "Ames" pictorial carpet, Boston Museum of Fine Arts (93.14); carpet with two fighting elephants: Textile Museum, Washington, D.C. (R. 63.00.13).
73. Dickson and Welch, *Houghton Shahnameh*, 1:109.
74. A. E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul Arabi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), p. 16.
75. A'in-i Akbari, 1:102 trans. in Koch, "Jahangir and the Angpuri," p. 193, n. 73.
76. A'in-i Akbari, 1:113.
77. Sadiqi Beg, *The Canons of Painting*, trans. in Dickson and Welch, *Houghton Shahnameh*, 1:264.
78. A'in-i Akbari, 1:102-3; trans. in Koch, "Jahangir and the Angpuri," p. 193, n. 73.
79. As quoted by W. E. Begley, *Monumental Islamic Calligraphy in India* (Villa Park, Ill.: Islamic Foundation, 1985), p. 12.
80. MT, 3:271; see also A'in-i Akbari, 1:670.