The Millennial Sovereign in the Early Modern World

HSTAFM 162
Class 8.1 (2/23/16)
The Death of Timur (1405)

Tomb of Tīmūr, Samarqand (Uzbekistan)
The Distribution of Sufi Orders, ca. 1400 CE
After the statement of supplication, it is reported that his holiness the great descendant of ‘Ali, Sayyid Muhammad Qannād (a confectioner by trade), is the guest of poor old me here. My request is that his children may live peaceably in the shadow of protection of your Majesty, and not be burdened because of the general tax. During the time of his Royal Majesty, the late lamented martyr Sultan Abu Saʿīd, they had obtained consideration in some way. I trust that now as well, his Royal Majesty will also distinguish them with his kindness. Peace!

—Khwāja ‘Ubaydullāh Ahrār
Khwāja Ahrār Khānqāh, Samarqand
Portico and Courtyard, Khwāja Ahrār Khānqāh
Tiled Arch Leading to Sanctuary
Exterior Portal with Tilework
Millennialist Movements

- Sarbadārīds: Fourteenth-century local dynasty of radical millenarians in the city of Sabzāvar, capitulated to Timur.

- Ḫurūfīs: Inaugurated by Fażlullāh Astarābādī (d. 1394); teaching based on a complex numerological interpretation of the letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet correlated with human form.
The letter ‘ayn forms our eye, lām our nose, yā the crook of our brow / You’d have to be blind not to see the name of ‘Alī in our face.

18th-century calligram, Princeton University Firestone Library, MS 102g, f. 8a
The Zodiac, from a manuscript belonging to Prince Iskandar Sulṭān (1384–1415)
Abū Ma‘shar’s
Conjunction Astronomy

Latin Translation of *On the Great Conjunctions*, pub. 1515
Trench in Ulugh Beg’s Observatory, Samarqand, Uzbekistan, 15th-century
14th-century astrolabe, Museum of the History of Science, Oxford
The seven planets and the twelve signs of the zodiac.
Probably painted in Iran, ca. 1580s
Fālnāma (“Book of Omens”),
Topkapı Palace Museum H.1703, f. 17b
I am ready to give my life, let me be a sacrifice to the Ka‘ba of union with ‘Alī.
I have become a pilgrim, I shed blood: where is the sacrificial altar?

*Dīvān-i Khaṭṭā’ī*, the poetry of Shāh Ismā‘īl I
Khānqāh of Shaykh Ṣafī, Ardabīl, Northwestern Iran
Center of Ṣafāvīya Sufī Order
The Battle of Chāldirān (1514)
Under Maratha influence, c. 1700

People in rebellion against the Empire, c. 1700

Maratha raids, 1664–1700

Maratha territory, c. 1700

Empire at the death of Shah Jahan (Aurangzeb), 1707

Mughal subah (province)

Empire at Akbar’s death, 1605

Mughal conquest by 1525

Mughal conquest by 1539

The Mughal Empire

1526 – 1707

Major European trading settlements, c. 1700

- French settlement
- Dutch settlement
- British settlement
- Danish settlement
- Portuguese settlement

In 1526–1707, Jahangir (Aurangzeb), 1707

Portuguese settlement

Danish settlement

British settlement

Dutch settlement

French settlement
Party held in pillared porch of Sultan Ibrahim Lodi, Bāburnāma
The king is the physician of the world. Just as there is no choice for the physician but to know about sickness, the causes of pain, and the methods of cure, likewise, it is necessary for the sultan to know the sickness of the kingdom and the means of its cure. Since the term “civilization” (tamaddun) is given to a general assembly of different peoples, then as long as every one of these peoples sticks to its own position and remains in the task assigned to it, and receives a befitting share of riches and honors, i.e., of station and property, then the temperament of the civilization is in a state of equilibrium (iʿtidāl) and its affairs are at the pinnacle of organization. [...] For it is established that the source of every state is the consensus of a population who in their cooperation resemble the organs of a single body. In this manner, it is as though they are a single person whose collective power is greater than that of the population.

(Akhlāq-i Jalālī, composed ca. 1500)
Shāh ʿAbbās, attributed to the Mughal artist Bishndās, ca. 1618
Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum 199.304
Portrait of Akbar as an Aged Man
Attributed to Govardhan, ca. 1640–50
Cleveland Museum of Art 1971.78
Today, when the land of Iran is quite depleted of sages who look to the future, it behooves the man who is the quintessence of his noble ancestors to strive greatly to manage the kingdom and to cure the affairs of all mankind […] In putting men to death and in destroying this divine structure, he must exercise complete caution […] The sections of humanity, which are the wonders of the deposits of the divine treasury, must be regarded with the eye of compassion, and you must strive to unite their hearts. Realizing that the all-encompassing divine mercy comprises all nations and sects, you must strive as completely as possible to bring yourself into the eternal spring garden of Universal Harmony.

(Akbar’s Letter to ‘Abbās, 1591)
Several inquiries were made regarding religion and sect with those of crooked conviction and turbid morality. Although gnosis and universal harmony have little compatibility with religion (mazhab), even still, as has been confirmed in heavenly scriptures and well-attested reports, every single one of the prophets and possessors of divine resolve have commanded in endless injunctions that one should wage war against the damned (ashqiyā). You, the good followers of the assembly of the lord of the nation will be happy and forgiven by men of reason. [Arabic:] Rulership and religion are twins. If it were not so, then the most beneficial security would not exist, no doubt about it. The conduct of the king is in strengthening the religion, as both the ancients and the moderns say.

(Shāh ‘Abbās’s Draft Response to Akbar, 1593)
Gushtāsp at prayer after slaying dragon, *Shāhnāma of 1605*, Berlin Staatsbibliothek MS. Or. fol. 4251, f. 460a