

Jahangir, Emperor of Hindustan, 1569-1627. *The Jahangirnama: memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*. Translated, edited, and annotated by Wheeler M. Thackston. Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. pp. 133-134; pp. 268; and pp. 279-281.

In 1605 Jahangir (“Seizer of the World”) succeeded his father Akbar to become the fourth ruler of the Mughal dynasty (1536-1857). Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) was not the active military man and political strategist that his father was. Instead, he preferred to spend his time more leisurely, partaking in the pleasures of courtly life. This inclination led the emperor to overindulge in wine and opium, but it also made him an important patron of the arts, as well as a consummate connoisseur and astute observer of the world and objects around him. Jahangir’s memoirs, referred to variously as the *Jahangirnama* and the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, capture these aspects of his reign and personality. In the journal, which operated as both a personal and public document covering the first nineteen years of his reign, Jahangir records a variety of events. He notes the promotions of courtiers, a multitude of gifts given and received, his own eating and drinking habits, as well as exotic and/or interesting objects and animals that he encountered.

Three excerpts from the journal are included here. The first describes a wondrous, strange animal—the North American turkey—given to the emperor by a courtier, the second is an oft-quoted passage in which the emperor comments on his discerning eye for painting, and the third records Jahangir’s shock at the physical state of a Mughal courtier, Inayat Khan, dying from alcohol and opium abuse.

Like the *Akbarnama*, the late sixteenth-century history composed for Jahangir’s father (featured in the previous reading), artists made images corresponding with the text. Unlike the *Akbarnama*, however, no intact illustrated manuscripts of the *Jahangirnama* survive. Single-page pictures, such as the painting and the preparatory sketch included here, do exist that relate to specific textual passages, but it is unclear whether they were intended for inclusion in a manuscript copy of the memoirs. Their non-narrative context suggests that they may have been intended for an album (*muraqqa*) compiling individual paintings and calligraphy specimen. That the images were produced at Jahangir’s request is certain, since he mentions the production of many of them in the journal.

By composing an autobiographical account of his reign, Jahangir was following the Mughal tradition of dynastic history writing, just as his father was when he commissioned the *Akbarnama*. Indeed, the two documents share many qualities. Both convey the power of the emperors, as well as the role of the arts in augmenting and communicating that power, both demonstrate the relationship between text and image in Mughal arts of the book, and finally, both provide crucial information for students of Mughal art. At the same time, the imperial accounts are distinct from one another. Their particularities stem from differences in authorship, the emperors’ personalities, the evolution of Mughal kingship, as well as developments within the early modern world of which the Mughal Empire was a part. Jahangir’s interest in close observation and his love of the “exotic,” particularly as manifest in material objects, speak to some of the cultural changes taking place in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.