

The Exile's Inheritance

Safavid Contact and the Conservatization of Same-Sex Regulation in Mughal India, 1526–1605

Ishaan Bajaj

ABSTRACT

Two Mughal texts, separated by under two hundred years, treat the same conduct in terms that barely acknowledge one another. In the *Baburnama*, the founder of the dynasty recounts his infatuation with a boy of the Andijan bazaar and the verses it drew out of him, writing for his own heirs and with no trace of juridical anxiety. In the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri*, commissioned by his descendant Aurangzeb and completed in the 1670s, *liwat* sits among the offences of a state-sponsored legal compendium and its punishment belongs to the courts. Neither text was aberrant in its own moment. The distance between them is the problem this paper sets out to solve.

Hanafi jurisprudence cannot account for it. The positions codified for Aurangzeb had been settled long before Babur was born, and the Mughal state held to them without deviation. What changed was the interest a Mughal emperor took in enforcing them. This paper traces that interest to Humayun's exile, and argues that Safavid influence on Mughal sexual culture was conservatizing.

Shah Tahmasp I, after a public act of repentance in the early 1530s, closed the taverns, gaming houses and brothels of his capitals and made the supervision of private conduct a claim to legitimate rule. Humayun reached that court in 1544 as a dispossessed refugee and left it a year later with an army and a working model of Muslim sovereignty. Akbar took up the model and discarded its theology. The office of *muhtasib* expanded, the prostitutes of Fatehpur Sikri were confined to a registered quarter, and the empire acquired machinery for the ordering of bodies that Babur's court had never possessed.

The argument is tested through a four-channel model of transmission. Influence between early modern courts travels by personnel, by legal doctrine, by the conventions of poetry and painting, and by administrative apparatus. Each is scored for volume, direction and persistence, and calibrated against four documented cases of Safavid-Mughal transfer (the painting atelier, the chancery, Shi'i religious politics, the regulation of wine) before application to same-sex conduct. The channels behave differently. Personnel and convention carry high volume with no normative content: the Irani share of the *mansabdari* climbs steeply after 1555, and the beardless beloved of Persian verse arrives in quantity while constraining nobody's behaviour. Doctrine carries nothing. Apparatus carries the whole of the change.

Transmission is measured through the composition of the nobility by decade, coded analysis of the Persian vocabulary of male desire across matched corpora from either side of 1555, and attestation counts in the biographical dictionaries of poets. Attribution rests on three controls: Shaybanid Bukhara, a Timurid successor outside the Safavid channel; Bijapur and Golconda, which had Safavid contact without an exiled emperor; and the Sur interregnum, governing the same territory across the same fifteen years.

Principal sources are the *Baburnama*, *Akbarnama*, *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, the Safavid chronicles of Rumlu and Iskandar Beg Munshi, and the Hanafi and Ja'fari literature on *liwat*.