

Instructive Memory: An Analysis of Auto/Biographical Writing in Early Mughal India

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Abstract

This article analyzes three early Mughal auto/biographical texts written at the order of Akbar as forms of instructive memory, and contextualizes these texts within an existing body of writings about *akhlāq* literature and literary genres. In doing so, this article discusses how auto/biographical narratives in Mughal India were both collected and collective, and how the didactic undercurrents of these texts relied upon individuated notions of character and kingship presented through the figure of Humayun. By reading lived experience across genres that often contained elements of one another, this article places interconnected Mughal lives as central to textual renderings of the past.

Keywords

Mughal India, Autobiography, Biography, Textuality, Historiography

A broad spectrum of texts in Mughal India include abbreviated and extended accounts of individual lives. I propose that auto/biographical writing, which threads through several genres, is central to the historiography of early Mughal India. This is because life accounts served as a form of instructive memory; lived experience, contained within the written word, formed a tangible and embodied link between the past and the present. Two qualifications are necessary here. First, genre is an inherently unstable term.¹ Historians who study Mughal India have classified texts produced

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¹) Genre instability and overlap has been addressed in literary studies. See Beebee (2004: 8-19), and Abbott (1988). See also Busch (2005), and Waldman (1980: 14-15). Anke von

by the Mughals into genres based upon commonalities in form and function. For instance, *akhlāq* literature is recognized as a genre of writing that contains philosophical discussions about justice and social organization, and is meant to instruct princes on norms of comportment.² *Inshā'* refers to collections of correspondences and letters that were often used to construct historical records.³ However, these two genres frequently display elements of one another; a treatise on ethics, or *akhlāq*, can include copies of correspondences, and correspondence manuals, or *inshā'*, can include advice that reads like an *akhlāq* text.⁴ Secondly, just as genres contained overlapping elements, the act of life writing could not be divided seamlessly into categories of "biography" and "autobiography." For instance, the founder of the Mughal Empire, Bābur (d. 1530) wrote what has often been referred to as an autobiography, namely a narrative of his life in the first person.⁵ However, within his account, Bābur included detailed biographies of the men and women who formed his circle of kin and compatriots.⁶

The names by which Bābur's account is known point to this; an early sixteenth-century translation of the text is titled the *Ṭabaqāt-i Bāburī*, an allusion to the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, a historical account of Muslim rule in North India and Bengal, written in 1260 by Abu 'Umar Minhāj al-Dīn Juzjānī, the justice of Delhi. Bābur was familiar with the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, and the text came to be influential in Mughal literary circles.⁷ The term *ṭabaqāt* itself refers to a compilation of biographies containing short accounts of the lives, works, kinship circles, and sayings of influential

Kügelgen has argued that the Euro-American divide between author, protagonist, and narrator as well as the divide between biography and autobiography does not exist in Mughal writings. See Von Kügelgen (2006). I am grateful to Ela Gezen for helping me translate this article.

² For a discussion of *akhlāq* literature in Mughal India, see Alvi (1989), Alam (2000), and Akhtar (1983).

³ For a discussion of Mughal historiographical categories, see Ali (1995).

⁴ For the autobiographical and *akhlāqī* components of Chandarbhan Brahman's writings, see Kinra (2010). See also Alam and Subrahmanyam (2004b). For elements of the autobiographical in Mughal texts, see Moin (2010: 274-75).

⁵ Roy Pascal has asserted that had the *Bāburnāma* been written in Europe, it would have occupied a significant place in the history of autobiography. See Pascal (1960: 22). See also Dale (1990).

⁶ For an analysis of Bābur's social circle, see Dale (2004: 142-148).

⁷ For Bābur's allusions to the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, see Anooshahr (2009: 21, 52-54). I am grateful to Ali for sharing with me his work on Bābur.

men, and many such biographical dictionaries were compiled across the Islamicate world. Since the character of the author and his familial and political ties were linked to the authenticity of written texts, this need to document lives was prevalent even in works we would now refer to as history, such as the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣiri* or works we would call autobiography, such as the *Bāburnāma*.⁸ My use of the term “auto/biography” points to the overlap between writing one’s life, composing a history of one’s times (which often included biographies of eminent men of letters) and locating one’s authorial self within social, political, familial, and literary circles.⁹ I do not then refer to autobiography or biography as a distinct genre; rather I speak of auto/biographical writing as a common thread that weaves together early Mughal historiography.

While Mughal texts written in the first-person have been translated and analyzed for the information they can provide about the past, they have not been examined as existing along a continuum in which many genres allowed for the writing of lives. Given that the term “autobiography” began to be used in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, and referred to the act of writing one’s own life, it would be semantically accurate to say that only Bābur and Jahāngīr wrote “autobiographies” and that other texts were merely autobiographical.¹⁰ The *Bāburnāma* is written in the first-person and chronologically arranged in a manner that mirrors the life of Bābur. The *Jahāngīrnāma*, written in the first-person by Bābur’s great-grandson Jahāngīr (d. 1627) follows the literary precedent set by Bābur.¹¹ However, if auto/biographical writing is understood as an act, rather than as a genre that is rarely found in the Islamicate world, then these two texts are simply

⁸ The original title for Bābur’s book was most likely *Vaqā’i* or “events.” Bābur’s descendants knew it as the *Vāqī’āt-i Bāburī*, and *vaqā’i* formed another genre of writing in Mughal India. See Dale (2004: 23 fn. 25). In Mughal historiography, the term *vaqā’i* is used to refer to a genre that consisted of reports of court proceedings; these were meant to provide historians with raw material. For a discussion of *vaqā’i* and *akhbār*, see Ali (1995: 366-367).

⁹ Michel Foucault (1977) points out that, in the premodern world, texts were inseparable from their authors, who were an index for the truthfulness of the text. On the inseparability of books and authors in Mughal India, see also Green (2010).

¹⁰ For some writings on Euro-American autobiography and approaches to this genre, see Anderson (2001). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001: 1-4) have pointed out that auto-biographical writing has been traditionally viewed in terms of eighteenth-century notions of self-consciousness as expressed within the psyche of the male enlightenment individual.

¹¹ For a discussion of the *Jahāngīrnāma*, including *akhlāq* influences on the text, see Lefèvre (2007). See also Balabanlilar (2009, 2007).

one manifestation of the writing of lives in Mughal India, and the space that Bābur and Jahāngīr's lives occupy is allowed to them by virtue of their prominence as kings.¹²

In the context of autobiographical writing in the Arab world, Dwight Reynolds (2001) has argued that auto/biographers were aware of the autobiographical act and that their texts were full of details specific to individual lives. Through a study of *akhbār* literature (oral biographies in the form of short narratives) and *ṭabaqāt*—both categories of writing found in Mughal India—Reynolds has shown that the recording of lives was common in the Arab world. Furthermore, the methods by which reports of the prophet were collected also called for accounts of the characters of those providing reports; thus, according to Reynolds, the raw material of Islamicate historical inquiry came from auto/biography.¹³ Autobiographical texts also appeared in clusters, where unstable times led to the need to record lives, or a close-knit circle of literati chose to pen their lives for one another (*tarjama* refers to biographical notices, and *tarjamat al-nafs* denoted a biographical notice about oneself).¹⁴ Biographical notices about prominent men, of course, commanded the most pages, and prominent men were more likely to write their own lives. In the context of Mughal India, the approach that autobiography is rare in the Islamicate world has been challenged by Stephen Dale along similar lines; Dale has pointed out that there were autobiographical precedents for the *Bāburnāma*.¹⁵

Beyond examining precedents for the *Bāburnāma*, it is important to examine instances of auto/biographical intertextuality. Lives were led, but also lived in texts. Literary space was layered, rather than differentiated into clearly defined genres.¹⁶ In Timurid Central Asia, for example, Ikhtiyār al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī, the chief qāḍī of Herat prepared a treatise on *akhlāq* (the *Dastūr-i Wizārat*) under Sultan Abu Sa'īd Mirza (1459-69), for the prince Ḥusayn Mirza. After Timurid power collapsed, the author came to

¹² The *Jahāngīrnāma* and the *Bāburnāma* are seen as the only two of their kind in Mughal India and the *Bāburnāma* seen as the superior text. See Elphinstone (1843: 117-119), Erskine (1854: 519-523), and Elliot and Dowson (1964: 282).

¹³ See Reynolds (2001: 3-5, 36-41). This point is supported by Steinfels (2004).

¹⁴ Reynolds (2001: 53-55).

¹⁵ Dale (2004: 28-66). For autobiography as a historical source within the Islamicate world see Fortna (2001), Kafadar (1989), Stewart (1989), Najmabadi (1990), Rooke (1997), and Arnold and Blackburn (2004). See also Alam and Subrahmanyam (2007).

¹⁶ For an analysis of layered literary space, see Kaviraj (2003). On the writing of history, Alam and Subrahmanyam have said that examining textures of history is an alternative to genre, form, and structure. See Rao, et al. (2001: 253-254).

Kabul, where he wrote of how he was impressed with Bābur's learned views on science and governance. The result, he writes, was a treatise titled the *Akhlāq-i Humāyūnī*, which represented Bābur's ethical ideals; he writes that he hoped Bābur would keep the text and pass it to his descendants.¹⁷ Bābur's appearance in the *Akhlāq-i Humāyūnī*, along with the author's evaluation of Bābur's character (in keeping with the use of historical persons by *akhlāq* texts to illustrate broader ethical principles), reveals the didactic functions of auto/biographical writing in the early years of Mughal ascendancy.

Bābur also makes several appearances in a contemporaneous text, the *Tarīkh-i Rashīdī*, a history of the Mughals of Central Asia composed by Bābur's first cousin Mirza Haydar for Sultan 'Abdul Rashīd Khān of Yarkand (r. 1533-1560). The text includes the author's own history, excerpts from existing histories, and biographical notes on the khans of Central Asia. Mirza Haydar writes that historians must note both the faults and virtues of men and believes this is necessary for the purpose of showing others how to live their lives.¹⁸ He states that he has composed his history from written accounts and oral tradition and carefully scrutinized these for discrepancies.¹⁹ One of the accounts Mirza Haydar had read was the *Bāburnāma*, and on occasion Mirza Haydar supplements Bābur's account of his life.²⁰ He also reports on Bābur's death and his text concludes with prayers for Humāyūn, who he hopes will, like his father, eventually triumph despite the many difficulties he faces at the present moment.²¹ Mirza Haydar establishes his authority by pointing out the meticulousness of his method, the interweaving of his life narrative with chronological accounts of the khans, and with events reported in the *Bāburnāma*. Texts such as the *Bāburnāma* continued to lead multiple lives under Bābur's grandson Akbar; the *Bāburnāma* was translated from Turki into Persian at his order, and the character of Bābur reproduced in other auto/biographical texts, including that of Bābur's daughter Gulbadan Begum, who recorded her father's death in her *Ahvāl-i Humāyūn Pādishāh*.²² In this sense, the

¹⁷ The text was a version of the *Dastūr-i Wizārat* and has been discussed by Alam (2004: 54-69).

¹⁸ Mirza Haydar (2004: 164-165). For a translation, see Elias and Ross (2008/1865: 129).

¹⁹ Mirza Haydar (2004: 177).

²⁰ Elias and Ross (2008: 73).

²¹ Elias and Ross (2008: 402, 484).

²² See Lal (2005: 57-58). *Ahvāl* did not exist as a genre, and Lal argues that Gulbadan may have chosen this term because she did not want to emulate existing genres. This may be the

story that Bābur began, ended within the pages of other narratives told in the first-person. This intertextuality, coupled with the fluid boundaries of genre and the interconnectedness of Mughal lives, points to the instrumentality of auto/biographical tellings to early Mughal historiography.

The Unlettered King²³

By writing an account of his life, Bābur chose to be his own historian. His son and heir Humāyūn (d. 1556) left behind no such autobiography. But Bābur's grandson Akbar, who consolidated Mughal rule in India, actively engaged in collecting auto/biographical accounts of Bābur and Humāyūn for the purpose of commissioning a history of his reign, the *Akbarnāma*. For this study of instructive memory, I will focus on a moment of collection and recollection in Akbar's India, and on the purposes that auto/biographical texts such as Gulbadan's *Ahvāl-i Humāyūn Pādishāh* served for Akbar's project. Akbar, who was unable to read or write, lived surrounded by books.²⁴ To what standards of accuracy were these accounts of lives subjected by the unlettered king, and how, and more importantly why, did Akbar initiate and shape the process of collection?²⁵

It was after thirty-one years of being king that Akbar, in 1587, issued an order stating that those who had known his father Humāyūn and his grandfather Bābur were to write down their remembrances for his historian Abu l-Fazl. While Akbar was unlettered, he valued the written word because it could contain within it the wisdom of the past. He believed too that his inability to read marked him with divinity, for the prophets were

case; it may also be that given the ease with which the titles of texts changed names, and genres embodied elements of one another, titles were simply incidental. The Persian text of the *Ahvāl-i Humāyūn Pādishāh*, along with an English translation by Annette Beveridge, can be found in Gulbadan Begum (1904). Lal supports Beveridge's speculation that Gulbadan may even have written the original in Turki. For the extant manuscript of the *Ahvāl-i Humāyūn Pādishāh* see Gulbadan Begum (n.d.).

²³ I use the term "unlettered" deliberately, in order to avoid the pejorative modernist connotations of the adjective "illiterate." While I am forced to use "illiterate" at times, I have consciously tried to minimize this.

²⁴ For his description of the imperial library see Abu l-Fazl 'Allāmī (1993: 111-118). See also Seyller (1997).

²⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis (1990: 22) writes of how we must imagine recordings and tellings to contextualize life accounts and I am influenced by her method.

unlettered.²⁶ Like his famed predecessor Timur, also unable to read and write, Akbar was fond of having books read to him, and was able to correct mistakes from memory.²⁷ Abu l-Fazl records that he spent much time questioning the king's servants and family members about their statements concerning the past. "In this project," writes Abu l-Fazl, "I spoke to old and young men of right character." Accounts written at Akbar's order were then recited in the king's presence. Abu l-Fazl praises Akbar's perfect memory in guiding him in correction, and says that it was through repeated interviews that he ascertained the truths that formed his history.²⁸ Akbar's close attention to the collection of memory and his correction of perceived flaws reveals how the unlettered king shaped the narratives that his historian transformed into a book. It also reveals that auto/biographical accounts were written by authors with the knowledge that they would be recited before the king.

Muzaffar Alam (2003) points out that under Akbar, Persian literary criticism flourished, as did the patronage of men of Persian letters. Political chronicles meant to praise their patrons would end with a biographical section on poets and scholars at the court, along with an assessment of their compositions, much in the manner that Bābur assessed the literary works of men of his time. Moreover, the books Akbar chose to have read to him most frequently were written in Persian (Alam 1998). Although Akbar's order does not explicitly state that memoirs were to be written in Persian, the emphasis placed on literary prowess in Persian caused some amount of anxiety to Jawhar Āftābchī. Jawhar's Persian was rustic, and he asked the litterateur Ilāhdād Fayzī Sirhindī to polish his account before presenting it to the king (Alam 2003: 160-61). Similarly, Bayazid Bayat writes that he spoke while performing his duties in the kitchen, and that his words were written down by Abu l-Fazl's scribe. He narrates that he could not read or write himself, and asks the reader to excuse failings in his memory since he is no longer young.²⁹ Bāyazīd concludes his narrative by mentioning that one copy of his book resides in Akbar's library, one copy

²⁶ According to a saying of Akbar's as written by Abu l-Fazl, the prophets were all illiterate and it was advisable for believers to retain one of their sons in such a condition. See Abu l-Fazl 'Allāmī (1978: 432).

²⁷ For an analysis of oral accounts read to and corrected by Timur, see Anooshahr (2009: 39-41). See also Woods (1987).

²⁸ Abu l-Fazl 'Allāmī (1979: 28-32).

²⁹ The Persian text is Bayazid Bayat (1941: 1-2). The text is also available in translation: Bayazid Bayat (1930: 71-148).

each was given to the three princes, two copies were given to Abu l-Fazl, and a copy given to Gulbadan Begum, Akbar's aunt. He hopes that more copies of his book will be made, for there is nothing in it of falsehood.³⁰

Like Bāyazīd's, Gulbadan Begum's text begins by saying that a royal order has been issued commanding those who knew anything of the events of Humāyūn and Bābur's lives to write their memories down. She adds that she was only eight years old at the time of Bābur's death and may not remember much, but will in deference to royal orders write down all that she has heard and remembers.³¹ Gulbadan Begum's world of the heard and the remembered includes stories she must have heard from her elders along with her own recollections of the past. In the *Ahvāl-i Humāyūn Pādishāh*, Gulbadan Begum's auto/biographical voice tells stories owned by many voices, and housed in many texts.³² Within the collectivity of shared remembrances, however, there was room for individual agency. Writers chose what they believed was valuable about events they had witnessed and heard, and accounts such as those of Gulbadan, Jawhar, and Bāyazīd were forms by which this privileging was communicated to Akbar.

It may well be that by having the *Bāburnāma* read to him in Persian, Akbar was able to claim his grandfather's memory in a manner distinctly his own. This is especially likely given that Akbar's physical ownership of the *Bāburnāma* and his ownership of other auto/biographical accounts of Bābur was an act through which Akbar emphasized his claims to Bābur's memory over those of others.³³ In the consolidation of his empire, Akbar actively marginalized the Central Asian elite that came to India with Bābur. In 1566, Uzbek nobles had revolted against Akbar by declaring his half-brother Mirza Muḥammad Ḥakīm in Kabul the legitimate Mughal ruler. Akbar had deposed Mirza Ḥakīm, captured and killed the Uzbek nobles who supported him, and begun to recruit Persian nobles and Indian Rajputs as a means of checking the power of Chagatai and Uzbek nobles within the imperial elite (Richards 1996: 17-19). Eventually, Akbar had given himself sweeping powers in matters of Islamic doctrine and taken harsh measures against the religious scholars who had backed Mirza Ḥakīm's claims to power (Richards 1996: 41).

³⁰ Bayazid Bayat (1941: 377). The accounts of Gulbadan, Bayazid, and Jawhar are available together in Persian and with English translations in Thackston (2009).

³¹ Gulbadan Begum (1904: 2).

³² For collectivity within South Asian auto/biographical narratives, see Steinfels (2004: 61).

³³ For Akbar's lavish illustrations of *Bāburnāma* manuscripts, see Smart (1986).

Mirza Ḥakīm's threat to Akbar lay in Mirza's portrayal of himself as the true guardian of Central Asian-Tūrānī political ideals; he had rejected Akbar's currency in favor of the silver *shābrukhī* preferred by Bābur and Humāyūn and extravagantly patronized Bābur's throne and the Naqshbandī sufi order favored by Bābur. Akbar had responded by commissioning several histories tracing his lineage back to Timūr, and a translation of Bābur's memoirs into Persian.³⁴ Akbar's edict that all those who remembered his father Humāyūn, and his grandfather Bābur, were to write down their remembrances was closely linked to such gestures. Meanwhile, the didactic undercurrents in these auto/biographies were well in keeping with a Persianate ethos in which offering advice to kings was part of courtly culture, and in which kings frequently read or listened to readings of *akhlāq* literature. In the case of those who witnessed Humāyūn's life, it was through the figure of Humāyūn that each writer was able to offer Akbar a vision of his father worth emulating. Each author's position in court, and proximity to Humāyūn, affected their telling of history.

Accounts of Humāyūn

I have chosen a comparative reading of the writings of Gulbadan Begum, Jawhar Āftābchī, and Bāyazīd Bayat for a number of reasons. While these texts are well in keeping with the auto/biographical practices that mark much of Mughal historiography, they do not fit into to any single particular genre. They are not official histories such as the *Akbarnāma*, which would come to set the tone for Mughal historiography, nor were they penned by kings such as Bābur and Jahāngīr, which means that they have been given considerably less attention than the *Bāburnāma* and the *Jahāngīrnāma*. They are also accounts of Humāyūn, who is a figure through whom Bābur and Akbar are linked, but who has been overshadowed by the literary and historical accomplishments of both. These three authors are therefore engaging in a difficult task, namely recounting the life of an unsuccessful king, but with the aim of proving his worth, retrospectively, to history. In all three cases, writers choose—in different ways—to emphasize their role in witnessing the sovereignty of Humāyūn, which was in question for most of his life. This role forms the autobiographical subtext of these three accounts; authors highlight what they have heard and/or

³⁴ I derive my analysis here from Faruqi (2005). See also Subrahmanyam (1994).

witnessed, and in some cases what only they could have witnessed of the king whose claims to kingship were dubious.

The role of these authors in affirming Humāyūn's kingship, both during his life and through the act of writing, becomes significant because of Humāyūn's inability to do so himself. Humāyūn's brothers Kāmṛān and 'Askarī wrested Punjab from him within a year of Bābur's death. By 1540, the Afghan nobleman Sher Shāh Sūr gained control of northern India, leaving Humāyūn to spend the next fifteen years in exile. In 1544, Humāyūn sought refuge with the Safavid King, Shāh Ṭahmasb, who provided Humāyūn with the forces he needed to occupy Qandahar and Kabul and to begin what would be an eight-year war with Kāmṛān for dominance in the region. It was after the death of Sher Shāh Sūr and the consequent devolution of his empire that Humāyūn was able to march from Kabul to Delhi, where he took the throne by 1555. Humāyūn's rule was to be short-lived; he died a year later, and the task of consolidating the empire was left to his young son Akbar, whose extraordinary military prowess, combined with his restructuring of the Mughal political elite, eventually established Timurid dominance in India (Richards 1996: 9-12).

The Uzbeks and Afghans who had rebelled against Akbar had done so because Akbar had broken with the tradition of Bābur and chosen to head his dynasty rather than represent it.³⁵ Through the figure of Humāyūn, Gulbadan evokes the very past with which Akbar has broken; Humāyūn is portrayed as acting according to the counsel of his Chagatai elders, and moments in which his claims to kingship are tenuous, especially during his stay in Iran, are downplayed by Gulbadan, who is invested in maintaining the prestige of the ruling house to which both she and Humāyūn belong. As a senior member of the dynastic ruling family, Gulbadan also uses her auto/biographical account to write herself into history; she places herself within the text as a figure through whom her interpretation of the legacy of Bābur and Humāyūn is conveyed to her nephew, and like Mirza Haydar, writes on the basis of both her own memory and oral accounts by others.³⁶

³⁵ For an analysis of the Turko-Mongol and Uzbek system of representative kingship, see Dickson (1958).

³⁶ For a placement of Gulbadan's text among contemporaneous sources, see Ruby Lal (2005: 52-58). For a discussion of Gulbadan's subject position in relation to Jawhar, see Zaman (2007).

While Gulbadan Begum was a child when Bābur died, she provides a vivid and dramatic account of the transfer of power through a tale that was likely to have become family lore.³⁷ Gulbadan writes that as Humāyūn lay ill, Bābur walked a circle around his bed and asked that his life be taken instead of Humāyūn's. Humāyūn was granted health, and three months later, Bābur's wish came to pass. As Bābur lay on his deathbed, he entrusted the care of his family to Humāyūn, invoking God's safekeeping for them all.³⁸ This story is not reported by Mirza Haydar; nor is it reported by Jawhar and Bāyazīd, both of whom focus more on Humāyūn's life. Just as Bābur wrote his life, his daughter writes his death; she also writes that while Bābur has recorded the events of his life himself, she has only recounted these events to secure his blessing on her work. This is why it is Bābur's death which is pivotal, because in her narration of the transfer of power from father to son through an act of human and divine will, Gulbadan places the elders of the household as witnesses to the transfer. The importance of family elders, of whom she is now one, is a leitmotif that marks her narrative.

The dramatic disappearance of Bābur from her text, and his replacement with the figure of Humāyūn gives Humāyūn legitimacy within her pages. It is the loyalties of family elders that Gulbadan shows as integral to affirming Humāyūn's kingship in the absence of actual claims to power. Gulbadan writes that when Humāyūn faced opposition from his brothers, it was the intervention of senior Chagatai women that assuaged the conflict.³⁹ In her account of the war between Humāyūn and his half-brother Kāmṛān for control of Kabul and Delhi, Gulbadan is quick to mention that her husband, Khizr Khawāja Khān heeded her advice to stand by Humāyūn despite Kāmṛān's urgings to Gulbadan that her husband join his forces instead.⁴⁰ When the brothers meet at Kishm, after Humāyūn's victory in 1555, Humāyūn says that he remembers how Gulbadan Begum used to say that it was her heart's desire to see her brothers together in one place. In her mention of this, Gulbadan places herself at the center of the

³⁷ For the Persian text see Gulbadan Begum (1904: 30-35), and for its translation, Gulbadan Begum (1904: 104-110). See also Dale (2004: 450-454).

³⁸ For the Persian text see Gulbadan Begum (1904: 31-34).

³⁹ For the Persian text see Gulbadan (1904: 44). For more on the role of women as mediators, see Lal (2005: 128-137).

⁴⁰ For the Persian text see Gulbadan (1904: 80).

ties of brotherhood that were meant, ideally, to sustain rather than challenge the legitimacy vested in Humāyūn by Bābur.⁴¹

In the year that followed, Kāmṛān once again gathered his troops and took Kabul from Humāyūn. Gulbadan Begum's brother Hindāl, now loyal to Humāyūn, was killed in an attack by Kāmṛān's Afghan forces, and Gulbadan Begum mourns this loss within her auto/biography. According to her, Hindāl martyred himself for the sake of his king and brother Humāyūn. "I don't know the name of the merciless man whose sword took the life of that innocent youth," she writes, adding that she would rather it were her life or her husband's or her son's that had been taken.⁴² In the last two pages of the incomplete manuscript of the *Ahvāl-i Humāyūn Pādishāh*, Gulbadan describes how Kāmṛān's luck failed him day by day, and how his affairs no longer prospered because he had been responsible for the death of his brother.⁴³ Finally, she writes that Kāmṛān was captured and brought to Humāyūn. In the manner of his father Bābur, Humāyūn assembled a council of khans, all of whom had suffered harm at the hands of Kāmṛān. Gulbadan writes that the khans were unanimous in saying that if Humāyūn wished to be a brother, he could not be king. Humāyūn responded that he saw their reason, but his heart was not reconciled to it. The khans were adamant, and Humāyūn gave the order that Kāmṛān was to be blinded in both eyes; this was carried out immediately.⁴⁴ The rest of Gulbadan's manuscript has been lost.

While both Bāyazīd and Jawhar report Humāyūn's many pardons of his brother and his distress as having to blind him, they do not display the king through the lens that Gulbadan does. Gulbadan uses Humāyūn's life to illustrate the struggle between the bonds of family and those of kingship, and emphasizes the need for a king to act in the best interests of his family elders even it means blinding his own brother. Humāyūn's struggle with the decision of the khans reveals his humanity, just as his honoring of their decision reveals his commitment to the higher standards of justice to which he is held by his elder kinsmen. Her anger at Kāmṛān, and her

⁴¹ For the Persian text see Gulbadan (1904: 84).

⁴² For the Persian text see Gulbadan (1904: 94).

⁴³ Like Gulbadan Begum, Bayazid Bayat (1941: 49) writes that Kamran's luck had failed him because of his betrayal of Humayun. I take this convergence to mean that the story of Kamran must have become part of Mughal lore, and that it was narrated through shared frameworks of causality and consequence.

⁴⁴ For the Persian text see Gulbadan Begum (1904: 95-96). See also Bayazid Bayat (1941: 155).

depiction of fate as failing him because of his transgressions against his king and brother contains a moral lesson, as does her depiction of the model of kingship embodied by Humāyūn, in which the locus of power rests upon the entire ruling dynastic house rather than upon the ruling individual.

Of Humāyūn's failures, most notably his exile to Iran, Gulbadan Begum says little. Her narrative of Humāyūn's exile emphasizes the kinship felt by Humāyūn and Shah Ṭahmasb towards one another. She mentions Bābur's alliance with Shah Ismail in securing Qandahar, and the warm welcome Humāyūn received in Iran from Shah Ṭahmasb.⁴⁵ She draws parallels between the women at Ṭahmasb's court and the women of Humāyūn's family, saying that Shahzada Sultanum, the Shah's sister would ride on horseback behind her brother, and that like the Shah towards Humāyūn, she showed much sisterly and motherly hospitality towards Humāyūn's wife Hamida-banu Begam.⁴⁶ While she does acknowledge that there was friction between Ṭahmasb and Humāyūn, she puts it down to the meddling of Rawshan *kuka*; a servant whom she says steals rubies from Humāyūn's purse, and "whispers to the Shah" about Humāyūn. Gulbadan diffuses the tension after the rubies are found and gifted to the Shah.⁴⁷

While Gulbadan paints Humāyūn's stay in Iran as a meeting between two equals—disrupted only by the meddling of servants—Jawhar Āftābchī shows the loyalties of servants to be integral to a king whose family members are capricious and given to disloyalty. Even though he criticizes Rawshan *kuka* for stealing from Humāyūn and conspiring with the Shah against Humāyūn, he does so by emphasizing his own worth and loyalty to the exiled king in comparison. Jawhar writes that he carries water for Humāyūn to drink and to perform ablutions, massages his body, and guards his possessions. He reports the king's praise when he finds the sack of jewels the king kept on his person, and suggests that had he not found the missing sack, Humāyūn would have been unable to gift gems to the Shah, thus incurring the temperamental monarch's disfavor.⁴⁸ The loyalties of servants to their king in exile, and Humāyūn's adherence to high moral standards at moments in which he is being tested by fate portray him as

⁴⁵ For the Persian text see Gulbadan Begum (1904: 9, 68). Bayazid Bayat's account of Humayun's welcome is integrated into Abu l-Fazl's *Akbarnāma*. See Bayazid Bayat (1941: 13-33), and Abu l-Fazl 'Allāmī (1979: 436-443).

⁴⁶ For the Persian text see Gulbadan Begum (1904: 69-70).

⁴⁷ For the Persian text see Gulbadan Begum (1904: 74).

⁴⁸ Jawhar Āftābchī (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 123-124).

exemplary. Jawhar writes that he attended to Humāyūn in all conditions and circumstances and that his narrative of events testifies to the grace and strength of character with which Humāyūn withstood hardship and regained his throne in Delhi.⁴⁹ In this, Jawhar writes Humāyūn's life the way Bābur wrote his, namely as a story of heroism in the face of impossible odds. Consequently, Jawhar's text paints a far more sinister picture of Humāyūn's exile in Iran than Gulbadan's.

According to Jawhar, Iran was hostile territory ruled by a Shī'ī king determined to convert Humāyūn, a test that Humāyūn withstood with forbearance and strength of character. Jawhar narrates that when Humāyūn sent his ambassador, Bayram Beg, to Shah Ṭahmasb, the latter asked him to cut off his hair and to wear a *tāj* (a Safavid cap). Bayram Beg (who was a Shī'ī himself) refused on the grounds that he was another king's servant, and Ṭahmasb responded by having some prisoners executed (on charges of being Sunnīs) in his presence in order to scare him. Bayram Beg then told Humāyūn that the Persian army was approaching and gave him a *tāj* that had been sent by Ṭahmasb for him to wear. Humāyūn refused to wear it, and did so only when asked by Ṭahmasb in person. Jawhar writes that Humāyūn's called the *tāj* a mark of honor, and let Shah Ṭahmasb place it on his head. In Jawhar's text, Humāyūn is in a position that is not much different from that of his servant; he too is being coerced into wearing the *tāj* by a more powerful king, and it is Humāyūn's skilful reply to Ṭahmasb that restores his dignity, especially in the eyes of his servants and witnesses.⁵⁰

In contrast to Gulbadan, who mentions Ṭahmasb's cordial visits to Humāyūn's quarters, Jawhar reports that it is Humāyūn who goes to greet Ṭahmasb, finds Ṭahmasb's response lacking in warmth, and then begins to regret his decision to seek protection with the Shah.⁵¹ Later, Shah Ṭahmasb sends firewood to the house of Humāyūn and says he will make a pyre for Humāyūn and his followers with that wood unless they convert. Humāyūn replies that he will not convert, that he and his followers are firm in their faith, and that life and death are in God's hands. At this point Qāḍī Jehān, who is a *wakīl* (representative) of Ṭahmasb, advises Humāyūn to obey the

⁴⁹ Jawhar Āftābchī (1610: fols. 2-3a). See also Jawhar Āftābchī (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 71-72). For Jawhar's account as revised by Ilāhdād Fayzī Sirhindī see Jawhar Āftābchī (n.d.).

⁵⁰ Jawhar Āftābchī (1610: fols. 69a-71a), and Jawhar Āftābchī (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 120-122).

⁵¹ Jawhar Āftābchī (1610: fol. 72b).

king, especially because if he does not, 700 people will be put to death on his account. Humāyūn then says that he wants in writing what Ṭahmasb wishes, and the Shah sends him three papers, of which Humāyūn reads two and puts them aside. Then Ṭahmasb enters and hands Humāyūn the third paper, which Humāyūn signs. Here too, Jawhar demonstrates Humāyūn's piety; Humāyūn signs the document to save the lives of other Sunnis facing persecution under a Shī'ī regime.⁵² This tale does not feature in the *Akbarnāma*; nor does Mughal indebtedness to Safavid Iran, something of which Ṭahmasb, Humāyūn, and for that matter, Akbar, must have been conscious.⁵³

According to Jawhar the *amīrs* under Humāyūn who had supported Mirza Kāmārān proposed that if Shah Ṭahmasb would imprison Humāyūn and give them an army, they would take Qandahar for the Safavids.⁵⁴ Jawhar also reports that when Ṭahmasb told Humāyūn his pride had led to his predicament, Humāyūn had conceded the point, but also said that the world was a divine workshop in which humans had no choice but to seek refuge with God. Jawhar writes that this calmed the Shah, and quotes from the Quran about the inability of men to understand how easily God could bring forth his purpose⁵⁵ Eventually, Humāyūn's (and in this case, Jawhar's) beliefs about God come to be echoed in the words of Shah Ṭahmasb's sister, who tells Ṭahmasb that she weeps and prays for him constantly; he has many enemies, and if he makes another enemy of Humāyūn, then Humāyūn's sons and brothers will one day seek revenge. She then tells her brother that he should let Humāyūn go. Ṭahmasb is moved by this, and says that while his men have been giving him unwise advice, what she suggests is sound.⁵⁶ He then orders that the men who have been conspiring against Humāyūn are to be imprisoned. Jawhar writes that Humāyūn chooses to ask Shah Ṭahmasb to pardon the conspirators, and impresses the Shah with this act of clemency and chivalry. The Shah then pardons the men.⁵⁷

Jawhar's rendition of the plea of the Shah's sister shows that Ṭahmasb is not invincible, and that one day he may be in the same position as

⁵² Jawhar *Āftābchī* (1610: fols. 72a-73b).

⁵³ The *Akbarnāma* makes no mention of the hostilities between Humayun and Shah Tahmasb. See Abu l-Fazl (1979, vol. I: 432-441).

⁵⁴ Jawhar *Āftābchī* (1610: fol. 75a).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, fols. 75a-76b, and Jawhar *Āftābchī* (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 125-126).

⁵⁶ Jawhar *Āftābchī* (1610: fol. 77a-b).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 79a-b.

Humāyūn and need him as an ally. This is mirrored in Jawhar's mentioning of Humāyūn's constant allusions to faith and the changes of fortune in his dealings with Ṭahmasb, in which Ṭahmasb is always at an advantage. Jawhar's citations from the Quran link together his interpretive framework; prior to Humāyūn's stay in Iran, Jawhar cites verses similar to those he has Humāyūn cite, which point to the inevitability of death, the protection granted to those whom God favors, and the helplessness of those whom God abandons.⁵⁸ At the end of his section on Humāyūn's exile in Iran, Jawhar writes that Ṭahmasb gives Humāyūn his troops, and asks Humāyūn to forgive him for anything in his bearing that Humāyūn may have found lacking.⁵⁹ In turn, Humāyūn gives him a ring that was his mother's, and tells the Shah to keep it in remembrance of him. Humāyūn then takes his leave of Ṭahmasb and Ṭahmasb wishes him success.⁶⁰ At this point, the two kings are portrayed finally as equals—they say the *fātiḥa* together—and there is a sense that it is largely because of Humāyūn's faith, grace, and chivalry that such equality has prevailed.

Bāyazīd's account of Humāyūn's stay in Iran is again different from Gulbadan Begum's rosy portrayal or Jawhar's grim one. He says nothing of the conduct of Rawshan *kuka*, or of the tension between the two kings on matters of faith. Instead, he begins his text by saying that Humāyūn's disloyal soldiers and his unkind brothers drove him to Iran, briefly summarizing Humāyūn's stay, and then moving on to Humāyūn's departure. How can we read Bāyazīd's summary treatment of the episode? One answer lies in the relative proximity of each man to the king; Bāyazīd mentions being part of a hunting party and an expedition to the shrine of Imam Raza in Mashad, but he does not seem to have waited on Humāyūn's person the way Jawhar had.⁶¹ This means that Bāyazīd was not party to Humāyūn's trepidations about being in Iran; nor was Iran unfamiliar territory to him, because he had spent his childhood in Tabriz.⁶² Bāyazīd's account is also not primarily about Humāyūn; Humāyūn figures in it, but Bāyazīd spends many pages discussing his service to Akbar under his patron Mun'im Khān, his attempts to leave government behind by going to Mecca on the pilgrimage indefinitely, and for a period, his vow to become a dervish

⁵⁸ See Jawhar Āftābchī (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 92-93), in which Jawhar describes Muhammad ibn al-Hanafīyya's, the son of Ali's, miraculous victory against Yazid.

⁵⁹ Jawhar Āftābchī (1610: fol. 80b).

⁶⁰ Ibid.: fol. 82b.

⁶¹ Bayazid Bayat (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 12).

⁶² Bayazid Bayat (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 116).

like his brother Mulla Saqqa.⁶³ Bāyazīd also creates Humāyūn in his own image: He reports the king's desire to leave the affairs of the world behind and become a dervish, and portrays his death as a merciful release from the world.⁶⁴

While Bāyazīd writes as someone who holds the record for veteran service to the empire, which includes service to both Humāyūn and Akbar, and a listing of the many posts conferred upon him by both kings, Jawhar's account focuses on his years with Humāyūn, and is meant to convey to Akbar that Humāyūn never compromised his self-respect.⁶⁵ This finds a parallel in Mirza Haydar's interpretation of Bābur's choice to take Samarkand in 1511 as an ally of Shah Ṭahmasb's messianic father, Shah Ismail. In a tale also left out of the *Bāburnāma* and the *Akbarnāma*, Mirza Haydar writes that Bābur's donning of the clothes of the Qizilbash, Shāh Ismā'īl's devotees, was a sign of unbelief (*kufī*), and eventually cost him the allegiances of the citizens of Samarkand, whom he refers to as *takht-i shari'a* (lit. 'under Islamic law'). However, Mirza Haydar makes excuses for his cousin by saying that he allied with Shāh Ismā'īl out of necessity, and could not have taken Samarkand otherwise.⁶⁶ Jawhar too explains away Humāyūn's conversion as inevitable, and uses the episode to point to Humāyūn's high moral standards. Conversion itself was not the heated matter it would be in a modern context; the signs of Mughal subservience to the Safavids, however, needed retrospective justification.⁶⁷

⁶³ For Bayazid's account of Mulla Saqqa, see Bayazid Bayat (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 112-116), for his pilgrimage account, see (trans.) Thackston (2009: 116-168), for his vow to become a dervish, see (trans.) Thackston (2009: 150), and for his lively account of his years with Mun'im Khān, see (trans.) Thackston (2009: 94-163).

⁶⁴ Bayazid Bayat (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 94).

⁶⁵ Jawhar Āftābchī (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 71-72). For a list of Bāyazīd's titles, see Bayazid Bayat (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 175-176).

⁶⁶ Mirza Haydar (2004: 377-378, 389-395). Mirza Haydar is criticized by Abu l-Fazl for his alliance with Mirza Kamran, and for weaknesses in the method by which he ruled Kashmir. For an analysis of Abu l-Fazl's treatment of Mirza Haydar, see Mansura Haidar (2002: 30-33).

⁶⁷ For a careful analysis of Persian and Mughal sources that address Humayun's stay in Iran, see Ray (1948). See especially the author's discussion of Humayun's conversion in light of Humayun's correspondences with Shah Tahmasb, and Humayun's professed loyalty to the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad. This discussion makes clear the political nature of such conversions, and the fluid lines between Sunnī and Shi'ī adherence in the premodern Islamic world. See Ray (1948: 35-38). See also Moin (2010: 192-195).

An anecdote of Humāyūn in Bāyazīd's brief account of his stay in Iran offers the intriguing possibility that Bāyazīd might have known, from hearsay, about Humāyūn's predicament. Unlike Gulbadan and Abu l-Fazl, who deliberately seem to avoid commenting on Humāyūn's conversion, and Jawhar, who comments on it vociferously, Bāyazīd might have seen the event as benign. As Humāyūn makes his way to Shah Ṭahmasb, Bāyazīd mentions Humāyūn's conversation with Husaynquli Mirza, the brother of Ahmad Sultan Shamlu, the Qizilbash governor of Sistan. Bāyazīd writes that the Mirza told Humāyūn about his study of Hanafī and Shī'ī jurisprudence in Mashad, and said that while Shī'īs believed that cursing the prophet's companions led to heavenly reward, Hanafīs believed the act of doing so made one an infidel. The Mirza's opinion, however, was that cursing the prophet's companions would not make someone an infidel, and Bāyazīd reports Humāyūn as having been pleased by this.⁶⁸

While Humāyūn disappears from Bāyazīd's text, and the incomplete manuscript of Gulbadan's ends abruptly with Kāmran's blinding, Jawhar Āftābchī's *Tadhkirat al-wāqī'āt* ends with the victory of Humāyūn in Hindustan, in which he is aided by Jawhar, who provides him with intelligence about the Afghans, and with Humāyūn's death, which is followed by Akbar's ascension to the throne. Jawhar writes that he dreams of Humāyūn, who tells him to make ready the court tent for the *pādishāh*. "But he always used to call him 'Mirza,'" thinks Jawhar to himself. As he leads the young king Akbar to the court tent, which sits atop a high mountain, its ropes extending to the sea, Jawhar realizes that Akbar is now king. Jawhar's metaphorical leading of Akbar to kingship completes his story.⁶⁹ If Gulbadan remembers Bābur's death and his transfer of power to Humāyūn through the recounting of it by her elders, Jawhar remembers Humāyūn's transfer of power to Akbar through his dream of the transfer, and communicates this, in writing to Akbar.

Can the Premodern Speak?

Genres cannot be done away with, and neither can categories. However, there is an epistemic violence inherent in the categorization of premodern texts according to *bounded* genres. For instance, studies of the *akhlāq* genre

⁶⁸ Bayazid Bayat (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 3).

⁶⁹ Jawhar Afatbchi (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 73-75).

run the risk of assuming that norms of conduct can be abstracted from individual lives. Conversely, demarcating the *Bāburnāma* and the *Jahāngīrnāma* as autobiographies runs the risk of assuming they represent the singular vision of their respective authors. Reading the *Akbarnāma* as a history of Akbar's reign also underplays Abu l-Fazl's auto/biographical voice. This study of three accounts of Humāyūn is situated, in textual space, between the *Bāburnāma* and the *Akbarnāma*. At the same time, it takes as precedent auto/biographical acts across genres. All three texts contain within them biographical information of the people with whom the authors came into contact. We learn of Gulbadan's life from Bāyazīd, for example; she set off for pilgrimage to Mecca in 1575, and Bāyazīd encountered her in Aden on her return voyage. With Gulbadan were several elder women whose biographies she includes, along with her father's, in her account. We also learn about how individual authors interpreted the value of their lives to history.

The field of Mughal historiography continued to be shaped by auto/biographical acts. A reading of the *Akbarnāma* in light of these auto/biographical accounts shows how the king's historian too engaged in strategic acts of omission and inclusion as he came to craft the voice that Akbar, unable to read and write himself, wished to project for history. The imposing presence of the *Akbarnāma*, modeled after Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī's history of Timūr, the *Zafarnāma* (completed in 1524-5), led Jahāngīr to write his account of his reign in the first-person. This allowed him to escape the shadow of his father and the textual shadow of Abu l-Fazl's magnum opus, and to emulate Bābur's narrative instead. Abu l-Fazl met his death within the pages of this very account; Jahāngīr had Abu l-Fazl murdered during his father's lifetime, justified the murder in the *Jahāngīrnāma*, downplayed Akbar's distress at the loss, and sent copies of the text to the kings of other empires as a manual for kingship.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ See Jahangir (1980: 15, 271-2). For a translation of the text, see Thackston (1999). For a discussion of later auto/biographical accounts, see Alam and Subrahmanyam (2004a). See also Bhimsen Saxena (1972) for an account of a life spent in imperial service under Aurangzeb. In the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-1658), who engaged in a campaign to conquer his ancestral lands in Central Asia, Abu Talib Husayni presented to Shah Jahan what he claimed was his Persian translation of the Turki *malfūzāt* (memoirs) and counsels (*tuzukāt*) of Timur. The original text, according to him, resided in the library of the governor of Yemen. Shah Jahan had the text brought into line with the *Zafarnāma*, but still allowed the original to survive. See Habib (1997).

Jahāngīr's account of the lives and deaths of Akbar and Abu l-Fazl, like the accounts of Humāyūn discussed in this article, is auto/biographical. Biographical narratives are filtered through the subjectivity of an author recounting his own life, and the author's account of his own life can only take place in reference to these other lives. Regardless of how many pages an author's life demands, the text cannot be separated from its author. This is why the standards by which Humāyūn is judged cannot be abstracted from the other lives through which his is narrated. Bāyazīd mentions Humāyūn's tears at the death of Hindāl, and his breaking into uncontrollable sobs at the sight of his blinded brother Kāmran.⁷¹ Bāyazīd's own frustration at political entanglements comes to be mirrored in his depiction of the king, whom he believes is too fine for this world, just as Jawhar's piety comes to be tied to his depiction of Humāyūn's, and Gulbadan Begum's loyalties to her dynastic house shape her portrayal of her brother as its rightful heir, regardless of whether or not he held actual power. Like living people advising a king, the memoirs written at the order of Akbar offer him conflicting images of his father Humāyūn, and conflicting advice.

The centrality of these tellings to early Mughal historiography and the inseparability of authors from their texts makes it all the more important to read across genres in order to reconstruct the lived perspectives that shaped tellings of the past and advice for the future. Reading auto/biographical acts in Mughal historiography reveals how authors relied on collective and individuated interpretive frameworks in their tellings of their lives and those of others. Despite the existence of shared social norms for kingly conduct, authors write Humāyūn's life in reference to their own lives and ideologies; Humāyūn can then be read as having failed as a king, or alternatively, as having succeeded as a man.⁷² Authors too, can be read as having successfully written themselves into historiography based on their value to kings, and on their lived and recollected custodianship of a shared past.

⁷¹ Bayazid Bayat (trans.) in Thackston (2009: 65, 70).

⁷² Anooshahr (2008) argues that Humayun falls short compared to Kamran by standards of manliness. However, I would argue that in the task of writing Humayun's life, authors can be read as admiring of aspects of his humanity.

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