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Neoplatonic Kingship in the Islamic World

Akbar's Millennial History

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Any king who learns wisdom and persists in his consecration of the Light of Lights, as we said before, will be given the Great Royal Light (kiyān kharra) and the luminous light (farra). Divine light will bestow upon him the robe of Royal Authority and of majesty. He will become the natural ruler of the world. He will receive aid from the lofty realm of heavens. Whatever he says will be heard in the Heavens. His dream and his personal inspirations will reach perfection.

—Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi¹

In AH 990/1582–1583 CE, just one year before the occurrence of the great Saturn-Jupiter conjunction (*qirān*), the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) commissioned a group of scholars to write a new history of the world. This *Tarikh-i Alfi*, or “History of the Millennium,” was to commemorate the first Islamic millennium that would soon come to a close.² Looking at the result, the reader is faced with a *mélange* of often well-known histories from a wide range of sources, which were not merely copied and pasted together but reorganized and reinterpreted to produce a new Mughalized metatext. Although this massive, three-part book of almost 6,000 (printed) pages is extremely revealing of Akbar’s effort to build a new universal empire, the work was soon overshadowed by the much more polished chronicle of Akbar’s reign, the *Akbar Nama*.³ In this chapter, we highlight this unique chronicle in the context of two wider developments, first and diachronically, the making of a Neoplatonic kingship

tradition in the aftermath of the Mongol conquests during the long thirteenth century; second and synchronically, the occurrence of a near global renaissance of Neoplatonic thought during the long sixteenth century.

The *Tarikh-i Alfi* was a truly remarkable intellectual project, a universal history written by an international team of some of the most avant-garde thinkers of their time. As its millennial title indicates, it was in fact a project of post-Islam. In a radical move, by declaring the end of the Islamic millennium, it skipped over the Prophet Muhammad to announce the coming of Akbar as saviour with a new covenant of universal peace (*ṣulḥ-i kull*). This Neoplatonist reconceptualization of Islamic history stressed the king's extraordinary new *ratio* and criticized the old Prophetic religion for introducing religious difference and violence—what Jan Assmann calls the “Mosaic Distinction.” Looking for a universal, more inclusive alternative, it replaced the Arab prophetic model with that of the Mongol royal model. For this reason, it redeployed traditional Neoplatonic elements of immanentist, divinized kingship based on the transmigration of the soul and the worship of the sun. To put it in terms of global history, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* turns Akbar into a Neoplatonic messianic philosopher-king. As such, Akbar follows in the footsteps of like-minded rulers such as the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate (r. 361–363), the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833), or the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror (r. 1444–1446; 1451–1481). But more directly relevant for the case of the Mughals was the example set by their Mongol ancestors and the way the Mughals achieved spiritual concord with their peers in Europe, such as Rudolph II of Habsburg (r. 1576–1612) and James I Stuart of England (r. 1603–1625).⁴

Interpreting this Akbar “the Apostate” as a Neoplatonic ruler, however, begs the question, what is actually meant by the term *Neoplatonism*? Hence, the first part of the chapter discusses three long-term interconnected Neoplatonic spheres of the *Tarikh-i Alfi* by zooming in from its global to its Islamic, to its specific Akbari context. The second half engages with three important Neoplatonic aspects of the chronicle itself.

1. NEOPLATONISM IN TIME AND SPACE

Neoplatonism remains a rather elusive label used in a myriad of different fields—primarily in philosophy, history, and art history—covering almost two millennia of global history. For the present purpose, when using the term Neoplatonism, we do *not* suggest a specific school of philosophical thinking that goes back to the

Hellenistic philosopher Plotinus (204–270 CE) and his followers, who thrived in particular in the eastern parts of the late Roman Empire. Instead, we take Neoplatonism more broadly as a metadiscourse that, as a result of its fluid, layered hierarchical structure, was able to absorb, appropriate, and harmonize creatively the various other philosophical and religious traditions that it encountered. Despite its breadth, this metadiscourse can be identified by four philosophical-cosmological features: idealism, monism, emanationism, and the human potential for divinization.⁵

First, Neoplatonists assume that mindful Consciousness (*nous*, Intellect) is, in an important sense, ontologically prior to the physical realm, which is itself taken as being the ultimate reality. Neoplatonists agree with Plato (against Aristotle) that the objects of mindful Consciousness (abstract concepts) are also ontologically prior. And so Neoplatonism inevitably turned out to be an idealist type of philosophy. Second, Neoplatonists assume that reality, in all its cognitive and physical manifestations, depended on a highest principle of conscience that is unitary and singular. Neoplatonic philosophy is a strict form of principle-monism, which strives to understand everything on the basis of a single cause that they consider divine and indiscriminately referred to as “the First,” “the One,” or “the Good.”

From this follows the third Neoplatonist assumption, emanationism: that the universe was created in a great Chain of Being, that reality emanates from the First in coherent stages so that one stage functions as the creative principle of the next, and that every activity in the world is in some sense double because it possesses both an inner and an outer aspect. Neoplatonists insist that there is nothing on the lower ontological levels within the chains of causality that is not somehow prefigured on the corresponding higher levels. In general, no property emerges unless it is already, in some way, preformed and preexistent in its cause. This thinking in terms of top-down emanation—often compared to light radiating out from the sun—creates various levels of being. Hence the derivative outer activity of the first principle, Consciousness (*nous*) becomes a second “hypostasis.” In turn, inner active life of Consciousness produces further outer effect, the Soul or *psyché*. In the same way—whether or not with the help of a Demiurge or divine craftsman—Soul facilitates the manifestation of form in matter. Further distinctions are drawn between the hypostases to articulate the transitions from one level of being to another. As a result, every aspect of the natural world, even the meanest piece of inorganic and apparently useless matter, has an eternal and divine moment. From this, it follows that human existence is a striking representation of the cosmos as a whole, a microcosm in which all levels of being (Unity, Consciousness, Soul, Nature, Matter) are combined into one organic individual.

This leads to the fourth, moral Neoplatonic assumption, which is targeted at individual deification through a sincere and arduous effort of the mind to return to the One and forever abrogate any concerns for the body.

In the sixteenth century, this extensively employed Neoplatonism, not as a specific philosophical school but as a well-established cosmological framework, facilitated the incorporation of various Sunni, Shia, Sufi, Millenarian, Hindu, and other philosophical and religious traditions that constituted Akbar's new imperial ideology. It is not so much the outcome but the process of assimilation itself that strikes us as thoroughly Neoplatonic and that reminds us so much of similar imperial projects, indeed going back to the late Roman emperor Julian. By using the term *Neoplatonic kingship*, we will be able to detect a type of kingship that has been forgotten today but in the premodern era is easily recognizable as a global spectacle that cuts across civilizational and religious boundaries. As such, we hope this will stimulate further comparative and connective research that engages with the political legacy of the Greek philosopher Plato, one in which the rightful monarch is the divinized philosopher-king who acts as the sole intermediary between the world of material existence and the world of higher (Platonic) Forms in different layers of being.

In the first systematic study of Neoplatonic political philosophy, Dominic O'Meara argues against the still conventional idea that Neoplatonism failed to find a valid relation between its metaphysical and its practical philosophy. For O'Meara, the first step on the king's path to divinization involves the cultivation of the political virtues described by Plato in his *Republic*: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. These political virtues, although not godlike, mirror the divine. All this is mediated by the enlightened philosopher-king whose soul has been emancipated from preoccupation with the body to bring him nearer to the perfection of divine life. In the words of the tenth-century Neoplatonist Al-Farabi, this divinized king "has reached a high degree of human happiness or felicity, a proximity to the life of the transcendent Agent Intellect which we can compare to the 'assimilation to the divine' sought by the Neoplatonic philosopher."⁶

In all its different avatars, Neoplatonic kingship is thoroughly monist and as such goes beyond any specific religious denomination and is, in fact, perfectly able to incorporate any of them.⁷ It is also thoroughly personal because it is only the king who, through divinization, becomes the *lex animata*, "the living law," thereby overruling the authority of a hierocracy consisting of prophets, jurists, theologians, and ritualists. More important than correctly adhering to any transcendent or scriptural law was devotion to the philosopher-king, who had revealed himself through both mysticism (Sufism) and occult sciences.

Such kings equipped themselves with ancient, universal wisdom of a *philosophia perennis* to counter the doctrinal criticism of jurists and keepers of sacred law derived from just one monotheist truth. In such situations, kings became indistinguishable from thaumaturges, saints, and messiahs—metapersons, to use the vocabulary of Marshall Sahlins. Their authority was not determined by truth or dogma but by divine grace, often demonstrated by heroic deeds, mostly on the battlefield. The all-encompassing, monist characteristic of Neoplatonism especially suited those miraculously victorious “world conquerors” who stood in need of a universal ideology for vast imperial realms with subject populations of immense religious diversity.

The Neoplatonic Moment

Neoplatonic authority has appealed to rulers at all times and in both the Western and the Eastern parts of the post-Hellenistic ecumene that shared this Platonic legacy; however, it became particularly fashionable during a global Renaissance that characterized at least the European and Islamic worlds from about 1450 to 1650. During this Renaissance, kings attempted to emancipate themselves from the clutches of the religious establishments, whether it was through the Reformation in Europe or through other forms of religious renewal in the Islamic world. In Europe, though, it seems that political Neoplatonism remained a sporadic and rather marginal phenomenon, more written and thought about than acted upon. At about 1200 CE, medieval Europe had already started to lose interest in Plato in favor of Aristotle. The European revival of Neoplatonism was primarily instigated from the outside following the arrival of Greek scholars in the wake of the Byzantine sage Georgios Gemistos Pletho (c. 1355–1454) whose Neoplatonism was shaped in his tripartite engagement with Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire, and Italy.⁸ From Quattrocento Italy a revived Neoplatonic-Hermetic worldview spread across the European courts but gradually succumbed under the unitary “inquisitorial chauvinism” of increasingly disenchanting and confessional states.⁹ A nonpolitical version of Neoplatonism was allowed to live on as esoteric knowledge and even flourish in the arts.¹⁰

In the Islamic world, this sixteenth-century Neoplatonic revival was nothing really new but actually another wave in a three-century-long dynamic that started with the pagan Mongols and their warband, which unleashed not only a new type of kingship but also a revolution in philosophical thought, with Neoplatonism providing the cosmological substratum. In fact, by embracing

Neoplatonism, the so successful meritocratic openness of the nomadic warband could actually be maintained under more settled conditions.¹¹ Hence, we would like to argue that Neoplatonism proved particularly attractive in postnomadic situations of transition, at the initial stage of state formation when a mobile warband had to be reorganized into a settled state, one that needed to incorporate the highly diverse elements of the conquered realm.

Notions of kingship in such situations of recent conquest tended to be extremely open and eclectic. Hence, these conquering kings began to stress the mystical and occult interpretation of their charisma. Instead of a chauvinistic scriptural-dogmatic dispensation, they tended to embrace various kinds of monist ideologies that enabled them to impose unity over the religious diversity of the peoples in their new territories. This situation is particularly relevant for areas where the so-called Arid Zone created sharp but porous *inner* frontiers between nomadic and settled societies from the Middle East to Central Asia. Under these conditions, postnomadic empires never became entirely settled, and kingship always remained in a state of transition.¹² Indeed, this particular frontier context of Asia's Arid Zone proved to be a much more fertile ground for an all-inclusive monist political theology encapsulated in Neoplatonism than Europe with its much more rooted, sedentary kingdoms. Since the beginning of the second millennium, Europe lacked postnomadic state formation as well as direct interaction with "pagan" religions such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Mongol shamanism. Thus far, it has not been recognized that postnomadism was a key factor in the long-term survival of immanentist sacred kingship, making Neoplatonism such a phenomenal success story in the Islamic world.

To translate this Neoplatonic moment into the wider scheme of things, as proposed by Alan Strathern and A. Azfar Moin, the nomadic conquests of Central Asian warbands during the long thirteenth century replaced the "transcendentalist righteous kingship" of the Islamic *ancien regimes* across Asia with the immanentist "heroic kingship" of the conquerors.¹³ After a conquest, however, with some routinization of power, the more active immanence of the first heroic conquerors gave way to a more static immanence of postnomadic rulers, who then fashioned themselves as cosmic kings. The political philosophy that suited this transition from heroic to cosmic kingship, at least in the Islamic world, was indeed the eclectic monism of a Neoplatonic brand. The repetitive nature of nomadic conquest continuously undermined a tendency from these more immanentist forms of kingship toward a more transcendentalist, righteous kind of kingship. Hence, in the frontier regions surrounding the Arid Zone, at least until the eighteenth century, there was never a fixed transcendent static order imposed by a scripture-based clergy that, in Strathern and Moin's words,

“could promote a codified form of ‘knowledge as indispensable ‘truth.’” In other words, although Neoplatonism created a bridge between “heroic” and “cosmic kingship,” it also prevented a permanent transition toward the “righteous” or “zealous kingship,” propagated and guarded by the jurists of Islam, the keepers of scriptural truth. Although Neoplatonism thus fundamentally operated as a profound means by which immanentism, especially divinized kingship, was validated, we should not forget that it also has a transcendentalist dimension. Plato himself is the closest the Greek world comes to transcendentalism in his depiction of an ethicized absolute higher reality and why the philosopher-king is not just superhumanly powerful in the form of a heroic king but is also a model of perfection in terms of virtue. It is exactly this dual nature of Neoplatonism that makes it so useful as a bridge for postnomadic regimes.

Neoplatonism in the East: From Mongols to Mughals

Although nomadic conquest remained a prominent phenomenon until the nineteenth century, the most critical phase of nomadic conquest and the establishment of postnomadic empires has been the long thirteenth century, when the Mongol conquest of western Asia destroyed the caliphal-sultanic jurisprudential model that had become standard in Islamic societies. Under the Caliphate, Plato’s philosophy—mostly in Aristotelian guise but in Neoplatonic interpretation—had persisted in fits and starts. Although Plato’s political legacy can be found in the universalizing policies of the Abbasids and the Fatimids, whether or not supported by the Neoplatonic ideas of primarily Isma‘ili philosophers, it was the Mongol invasions that really triggered a renewed interest in Neoplatonic political thought, first, via the Sufism of the Arab Andalusian scholar Ibn ‘Arabi (1165–1240) and, second, via the Illuminationism of the Persian polymath Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (1155–1191).

Although the relationship between the two is rather complex, the engagement of Sufism with Neoplatonism definitively generated major changes in the history of Islamic political thought. Like other mystically oriented authors of Al-Andalus, Ibn ‘Arabi was profoundly influenced by eastern Isma‘ili Neoplatonism through the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. At the same time, Ibn ‘Arabi tended to deintellectualize Neoplatonic notions. With many Sufi thinkers, he shared a somewhat condescending attitude toward the intellect (‘*aql*) as a means for obtaining truth.¹⁴ More important, however, is that both Sufism and Neoplatonism criticized the literal following of scripture (*taqlid*) and instead

supported a more direct experience (*kashf*) of inner, higher truth. Ibn ‘Arabi had promoted an alternative method of reading scripture (*taḥqīq*) in order to unveil various aspects of divinity immanent across all the levels of the cosmos. By this technique, one could even achieve the status of the *insān-i kāmīl*, “the perfect human being,” who uniquely mediates God’s creation and represents the entire universe as a human microcosm.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, Ibn ‘Arabi’s monist ideas had an immediate appeal to the Mongols. According to one of their fiercest critics, the fourteenth-century judge Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ‘Arabi served them well because the Mongols revered “many things such as idols, human beings, animals and stars.”¹⁶

More intellectualist Neoplatonic was Suhrawardi’s philosophy of Illumination, *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, literally “wisdom of the rising of the sun.” A highly complicated elaboration of the metaphor of light and vision as offered in Plato’s *Republic* V–VIII using logic, epistemology, and cosmology, Suhrawardi presented Illuminationism as the culmination of pre-Socratic wisdom, which originated in the Egyptian sage Hermes, “the father of wisdom” (*wālid al-ḥukamā’*), and over millennia absorbed the learned and divinely revealed accomplishments of philosophers, saints, prophets, and kings. In short, Illuminationism offered the most direct path to the attainment of enlightened wisdom. While it made divine inspiration accessible to everyone, it especially opened up a path for the divinization of kings, especially those marked by the radiating royal or divine light (*kharrā-yi kiyāni* or *farra-yi izadi*). Bestowed with such divine majesty, the king could achieve the sacred status of saints and prophets.¹⁷

Far more explicitly than Ibn ‘Arabi, Suhrawardi had incorporated pre-Islamic Iranian and Hellenistic aspects of cosmos worship into his philosophical system. For instance, according to Susan Maneck, although Ishraqi cosmology is based on emanations, Suhrawardi personalized those emanations by identifying them with Zoroastrian angels or deities. Besides this hierarchical order of angels, Suhrawardi held that there existed a nonhierarchical order corresponding to Platonic archetypes, to which Suhrawardi assigned the names of the Amshaspands—the Avestan archangels of the realm of light—which he associated with separate powers or attributes of God.¹⁸

As suggested already, Illuminationism became particularly popular in the thirteenth century, especially after the Mongol conquests ushered in a new political era. Ishraqi thinking was eagerly sought because of its potential use in formulating a sophisticated, all-embracing ideology of Mongol rule, lending it scientific and proven authority.¹⁹ Like Sufism, Suhrawardi’s Neoplatonic synthesis was all the more attractive because it kept the Islamic scriptural and legal establishment in the conquered regions at a distance. As in the case of their

Neoplatonic colleagues of the European Renaissance, the Muslim followers of Suhrawardi cultivated a reputation of unpredictable noncompliant recalcitrance, if not outright revolt, against the religious establishment. Although acknowledging the prophethood of Muhammad and the authority of the Qur'an, Ishraqis also promoted the authority of other, equally esteemed sages going back to Hermes, passing on the light along various branches to include ancient Persian sages, Old Testament figures, and even the Indian Brahmins. Suhrawardi's Illuminationism thus became the basis of a new mode of sacred Muslim kingship, catalyzed by the needs of neo-Muslim conquerors, especially the Mongols.²⁰

Both Sufism and Illuminationism became a political force in the wake of the Ilkhanid conquest of Iran. Exploiting the settled wealth of Iran from their capitals in the rich meadows of Azerbaijan, the Ilkhanids found themselves in gradual transition from a nomadic warband to a settled dynasty. As new postnomadic rulers, they required an inclusive political ideology that was to reach out to Islam but without becoming bound to the establishment of Islamic jurists. With this in mind, the Ilkhanids sponsored the construction of the impressive academic complexes of Maragha and Tabriz with massive research libraries stocked by the rich Caliphal and Isma'ili collections of Baghdad and Alamut. Under the direction of polymaths-cum-administrators like Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201–1274) and Rashid al-Din (1247–1318), there emerged a highly cosmopolitan scientific-philosophical spirit that stimulated the study of Islamic, Greek, Chinese, Indic, and pre-Islamic Persian thought, with a certain predilection for the most universal of disciplines like mathematics, astrology, and the occult sciences. These Mongol seats of learning generated an open intellectual milieu in which hybrid strands of thought, which had previously been suppressed as heretical and dangerous, could flourish.²¹

Due to his Isma'ili background, Tusi himself had a fairly relaxed relationship with the Sharia, which for him contained both exoteric and esoteric aspects.²² Among his very wide-ranging oeuvre, his work on political morals (*akhlāq*) has been most influential and enduring. *Akhlāq* offers a mixture of Greek, Persian, and Islamic political traditions that was to inspire so many forthcoming generations of postnomadic Turco-Mongolian rulers, including the Indian Mughals.²³ An even greater harmonizer was Rashid al-Din, who was deeply inspired by the Qur'anic verse 4:128 that stresses the importance of reconciliation (*wa-l-ṣulḥu khayrun*). Although Rashid al-Din is best known for his impressively inclusive world history—the *Jami' al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Histories), not surprisingly a major source for our own *Tarikh-i Alfi*—his assimilative mindset shows even more in his neglected theological work in which he aimed to create harmony (*muwāfaqah, ṣulḥ*) between the apparently contradictory

doctrines of ancient and modern, Islamic and non-Islamic scholars.²⁴ In this highly cosmopolitan context, in which scholars-*cum*-administrators were seeking ways to assimilate different worldviews, the works of Neoplatonic thinkers like Suhrawardi, Fakhr al-Din Razi, but also the work-in-progress of Tusi's star-pupil Qutb al-Din Shirazi, provided a perfect philosophical toolbox to overcome diversity and to fabricate an all-encompassing new ideology of cosmic rule in a world without end.

Very much claiming this Ilkhanid legacy, the fifteenth-century Timurids developed this new Neoplatonic dispensation into even more occult and performative forms with an increasing focus on saintly shrines. Even more so than under the Ilkhanids, sultans and Sufi saints competed fiercely with one another in laying claim to sacred power: sultans becoming saint-kings; Sufis becoming sultans. This Timurid version of "Millennial Sovereignty" was now indelibly stamped with the four signatures of Neoplatonism: idealism, monism, emanationism, and the tendency of the individual self toward divinization.²⁵ It attained hegemonic status throughout the postnomadic Persianate world, and most emphatically so along its Indian frontiers: the various sultanates of the Deccan and the Mughal Empire.

Although the Neoplatonic craze that filled the sixteenth-century Indo-Islamic courts was a result of the spread of monist ideals that had earlier taken post-Mongol Iran by storm, it became fueled by these courts' increasing interaction with Indic philosophy.²⁶ As in Europe, where translations of the Neoplatonic Hermetic texts had helped to engender a Neoplatonic renaissance if not *the* Renaissance, at these Indo-Islamic courts, the translations of Sanskrit works, especially from India's rich monist tradition, engendered another trend, one similar to the Renaissance, that, even more so than in Europe, strengthened the immanentist, cosmic characteristics of kingship.²⁷ Here we should not forget, of course, that Neoplatonism had, from its inception, always been orientalist *avant la lettre* and as such was possibly inspired by Indic monist thought.²⁸ As a consequence, by the early 1600s, we find a lengthy monist continuum, one that even crosses the Hindu-Muslim divide and connects the courts of Akbar (r. 1556–1605) in the north to that of Ibrahim Adil Shah II (r. 1580–1627) of Bijapur in the middle, down to Venkata II (r. 1585–1614) of Vijayanagara in the south of the subcontinent. It may perhaps be stretched even further, across the Bay of Bengal, to include the courts of Iskandar Muda (r. 1607–1636) in Aceh and Sultan Agung (r. 1613–1645) in Mataram (Java).²⁹ Perhaps the island of Buton, with its so-called *Martabat Tujuh* constitution, based on the seven grades of being, provides the most eastward, "Utopian" case of this Neoplatonic continuum.³⁰ Anyway, it seems that these courts developed an imperial ideology based

on various branches of Neoplatonic political thought. Safavid Iran was the least monist of them because Neoplatonism had to make compromises with doctrinal Shi'ism. In India, however, inspired by the Vedanta revival, Neoplatonism could continue its earlier millenarian, mystical spirit.

This was the backdrop to what is arguably the most successful example of Neoplatonic kingship in world history: Akbar's cosmic kingship. The *Tarikh-i Alfi* then is not just another chronicle but rather a millennial world history that culminates in the rise of the divinized Neoplatonic philosopher-king who, as Lord of the Age and Renewer of the Second Millennium (*mujaddid-i alf-i thānī*), directs the way to a new cosmic era.³¹

Neoplatonic Authorship

The *Tarikh-i Alfi* was commissioned after Akbar revealed himself as a millennial being, a saintly and messianic figure above the constraints of Islamic or any other revealed law. To compose a history of the thousand years that culminated in this miraculous unveiling of the cosmic king, the emperor assembled a team of international Neoplatonists. A central figure in the project was Abul Fazl, Akbar's chief adviser and hagiographer, a scion of a prominent family Indian Muslim scholars who openly promoted the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi and Suhrawardi. The original committee of authors comprised seven members. There were four scholars from Safavid Iran: Naqib Khan (d. after 1610), Shah Fath Allah Shirazi (d. 1587), Hakim Humam (d. 1595), and Hakim Ali Gilani (d. 1619). From Herat, there was Nizam al-Din Ahmad Haravi (d. 1594), whose family had been loyal supporters of the earlier Timurid rulers. The other two were Indian-born Muslims: Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni (d. 1615) and Haji Ibrahim Sarhindi (d. 1584). Apart from these seven, Abul Fazl was to coordinate the project, and he wrote the (now lost) introduction and epilogue to the book.

Although at first sight the background of the authors seems quite diverse, they were all polymaths who were knowledgeable in a wide array of fields, including theology, philosophy, mathematics, medicine, and metaphysics and the occult sciences. Most of them occupied practical administrative positions and participated in the religious discussions that were organized by the emperor. At least six of them—Naqib Khan, Bada'uni, Abul Fazl, Nizam al-Din, Mulla Ahmad, and Jafar Beg—were experienced historians, and the first was the grandson of the celebrated Safavid historian Mir Yahya (1481–1555) and the son of Akbar's tutor Mir Abd al-Latif Qazvini. He is described by Jerome Xavier, the Jesuit missionary

at Akbar's court, as one "whose office is to read histories."³² But Hakim Ali, for example, was not a historian and was primarily known as a medical scholar and an expert on Ibn Sina.³³ He was also Akbar's physician. At least four of them—Naqib Khan, Fath Allah, Bada'uni, and Sarhindi—had been involved in Akbar's Sanskrit translation project, which started as early as the mid-1570s and included an extensive collection of data that would also characterize the *Alfi* project.

If we look at the group as a whole, most of the authors seem one way or another to have been connected to the wider Neoplatonic philosophical tradition, including Ibn 'Arabi. At least three of them can be linked more specifically to the Ishraqi school through the important figure of Shaykh Mubarak Nagori (d. 1592), who was not only the father of Abul Fazl but also the venerated teacher of at least two other authors, Naqib Khan and Bada'uni.³⁴ However, the author with the most impressive Illuminationist credentials was Fath Allah Shirazi, who came from Iran via the Deccan to the Mughal court, where he was officially praised as "the Learned of the Age, the Plato of all times."³⁵ He had studied philosophy with the influential Mir Ghiyath al-Din Dashtaki, the chief religious functionary (*ṣadr*) of Safavid Iran who was dismissed because of his Neoplatonic disdain for Islamic law. What his teacher Dashtaki was unable to accomplish under the Safavids, however, Fath Allah managed to achieve under the Mughals. The Mughal poet laureate, Faizi, wrote thus of Akbar's sadness at the death of Fath Allah, his "Plato":

The world-emperor's eyes were full of tears at his death.
Alexander shed tears of grief when Plato left the world.³⁶

As a typical Ishraqi scholar, Fath Allah's training was not only in philosophy and theology but also involved much more practical disciplines, which—apart from astrology, mathematics, and the occult sciences—also included statecraft. When Fath Allah moved from the Deccan to the Mughal court, he helped rationalize imperial revenue collection, partly by confiscating the *waqf* properties of North Indian ulama. In line with these fiscal reforms, he also facilitated the collection of revenues by devising a new calendar that would replace the Islamic lunar one with a solar *ilāhī* (divine) calendar, which, in keeping with Illuminationist Neoplatonism, introduced old Persian months and festivals.³⁷

Looking beyond the immediate Ishraqi circle, at least one author of the *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Hakim Humam, was associated with the so-called Nuqtavis, another important Neoplatonic movement of post-Islam from Iran that had partial success in Safavid Iran but bloomed in Mughal India. The Nuqtavi were followers of Mahmud Pasikhani (d. 1427), who had taught that the universe

was created through emanations from a “point” (*nuqta*).³⁸ The Nuqtavis had strong millennial expectations. They predicted that the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter (*qirān*), which would happen in 990/1582–1583, would mark the end of the Arab era and the beginning of a Persian period and the coming of the Mahdi.³⁹ Although for the Nuqtavis the Mahdi was Pasikhani, through the transmigration of the soul, their millennial expectations could easily be transferred to someone else who was willing to embrace their ideas. Indeed, it was Akbar who invited various Iranian Nuqtavi refugees who were being persecuted by the Safavid emperor. One of these refugees was Sharif Amuli, who declared that Akbar had all qualities to be the Mahdi because his name in the Abjad numeral system was equivalent to 990. Indeed, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* confirms that it can only be Akbar who will be the Renewer of the Second Millennium (*mujaddid-i hazāra-yi duyum*) if only because the dots in Akbar’s name are equal to justice (*‘adl*) and the messiah (*mahdī*).⁴⁰

The millennial frenzy of the Nuqtavis linked well with the millennial expectations of the sons and disciples of Shaykh Mubarak, who was considered a Mahdavi, that is, a follower of Sayyid Muhammad of Jaunpur (d. 1505), who had declared himself to be the Mahdi. The Shaykh’s sons, Abul Fazl and Faizi were prominent Mahdavis but may also have corresponded with the neo-Zoroastrian Azar Kayvan (1533–1618), another Illuminationist author from Shiraz that had attempted to construct a millennial ideology of cosmic and solar kingship for the Safavids along Islamic-Zoroastrian and astrological lines.⁴¹ Overall, the amalgam of millennialist-Neoplatonist movements—Israqi, Nuqtavi, Azari, and Mahdavi—provided the main ingredients of Akbar’s imperial ideology as set out in the two major postmillennial chronicles of his reign, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* and the *Akbar Nama*. These works were produced in collaboration by a learned circle of cutting-edge Neoplatonic polymaths who combined knowledge of the religious and the secular, science, and philosophy, the theoretical and the practical, the seen and the unseen. Their main objective was to construct an imperial world history that would suit the one and only philosopher-king, Akbar, the Renewer of the Second Millennium.⁴²

2. A NEOPLATONIC PROJECT OF WORLD HISTORY

The *Tarikh-i Alfi* is a Neoplatonic Mughal world history designed to cover the events of the previous millennium. Unlike the majority of such Islamic histories, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* starts not from creation nor the prophet’s birth but, in a radical

fashion, from the latter's death (*raḥla*), which occurred ten years after his migration to Medina in 622 CE, the conventional start of the Islamic Era. The *Tarikh-i Alfi* was designed to be superior in scope and content to all other historical works that had been compiled previously and was to include the histories of all Muslim rulers along with an analysis of their rise and fall.⁴³ Organized in three parts, it emphasized the role of the Mongols in the history of Islam. The first part deals with events from the death of the prophet to Chinggis Khan, the second continues the chronological narrative to cover the Mongol conquest and its aftermath, and the third begins with the reign of the Ilkhanid ruler Ghazan Khan (r. 1295–1304) and ends with events related to the beginning of Akbar's rule and the consolidation of the Mughal Empire.⁴⁴

Overall, the book seems to be conceived as the first part of a wider Neoplatonic global history that rather heretically starts with the death of the prophet and with Akbar as its apotheosis. It reads like a Neoplatonic Old Testament, one that paves the way for the coming of the saviour who will be described in more detail in the Mughal New Testament, the *Akbar Nama*.⁴⁵ As ever, the latter states it loud and clear: "Be this ancient world new through him; may his star shed rays of light like the sun."⁴⁶ Indeed, the *Akbar Nama* was launched in the year AH 1000/1591–1592 CE, the start of the new millennium.⁴⁷

Universal Peace and the King's Ratio

If the previous millennial order had been for prophetic Islam, the new millennium was an era of universal peace (*ṣulḥ-i kull*). While Mughal universal peace is often thought of today as a South Asian version of the values of the Enlightenment—secularism, rationalism, and tolerance—it makes more sense to view it as a form of late Illuminationism in which scriptural-doctrinal prophethood was replaced by embodied-cosmic kingship. Far from offering a Weberian style disenchantment, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* actually uses an occult-Pythagorean version of Neoplatonism to prove Akbar's divinized status.⁴⁸

It begins with the observation that the number 12 should be used as a sacred number because the Islamic *shahada* has twelve letters, a calendar has twelve months, and a day has twelve hours. Referring to the foundational Timurid historian Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, it mentions that the ruler whose name has twelve letters will have an eternal rule. But because Akbar's name does not meet this condition, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* combines Akbar's name with that of Humayun and then removes the letters that recur to conveniently arrive at the number 12.

And see what happens as a sign from the unseen (*ghayb*): reversing them creates a new message that reads “his lordship is great” (*pirāya-yi buzurg-i u ‘azīm ast*).⁴⁹ Indeed, like the later *Akbar Nama*, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* can but confirm Akbar’s special talent for the occult sciences. As he combines material power (*padishāh-i šuvarī*) with spiritual authority (*salṭanat-i ma‘nawī*), he spends all his time thinking about the kingdom, engaging in meditation and strenuous types of praying (*riyādāt wa ‘ibadāt-i shāqqa*). One example of Akbar’s magical power is the *Tarikh*’s remarkable story about the war against the Afghans, when Akbar refused to kill the captured and injured leader Himu. Why kill him twice, the story goes, because Akbar had already killed him when he was a boy and had subsequently painted a figure with a dismantled body called Himu.⁵⁰

In the midst of such magical exercises, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* declares that Akbar was a man of reason (*‘aql*). Indeed, in the *Akbar Nama*, Abul Fazl highlights Akbar’s intellectual capacity by mentioning his “perfect reason” (*‘aql-i kāmīl*) and “sound intellect” (*‘aql-i salīm*).⁵¹ The *Tarikh-i Alfi* also stresses that Akbar’s aim was to produce a true narrative that is based on human capacity and not on legends. Abul Fazl also refers to miracles as fraudulent events that were meant to confuse and mislead ignorant people.⁵² As such, the authors were instructed that if they were not sure about a narrative or did not have access to accurate information, then that narrative or information should not be included.⁵³ But, despite all its sobriety, the book makes an exception for the position of the Mahdi, who possesses the science of divination (*‘ilm-i jafī*). By declaring Akbar to be the promised Mahdi, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* clearly implies that Akbar had access to these sciences, which means the Mughal emperor was not an ordinary person but a true philosopher-king who possessed both perfect logic as well as the perfect intellect to perceive the divine plan.⁵⁴ Thus, Akbar’s horoscope drawn by Fath Allah showed that happiness upon happiness would come from the unseen world (*‘ālam-i ghayb*) and that only Akbar’s brilliant mind would be able to fathom the depth of the unknown.⁵⁵ Whereas on the outside (*zāhir*) Akbar displayed the splendour (*farr*) of the mythical Iranian kings Jamshid and Faridun, his interior was bestowed with the wisdom of Socrates and the perspicacity of Plato. In other words, “his eye and heart were with the origin of emanation,” which, so close to the reference to Plato, reads like Abul Fazl’s description of the One.⁵⁶

But what about Akbar’s belief in Islam? Here, we have to rely on the secret chronicle of Bada’uni, who was a senior courtier of Akbar but had become extremely disgruntled, yet continued to work for the emperor.⁵⁷ Bada’uni records that, under the influence of Abul Fazl, Abul Fath Gilani, and the court jester Birbal, Akbar completely lost his belief in the Islamic revelation (*wahy*), the prophet’s ascension to heaven (*mi‘rāj*), the resurrection (*ma‘ād*), and other

miracles (*mu'jizāt*) because these contradicted plain reason.⁵⁸ He also mentions that Akbar even lost his belief in the prophet, his companions, and the Hadith because of his understanding of history.⁵⁹ This understanding was shaped by the Neoplatonist frame of the *Tarikh-i Alfi*.

The *Tarikh-i Alfi* makes a striking observation about prophets and kings. It notes that, although prophets are sent to distinguish between right (*ḥaq*) and false (*bātil*), their tendency is to divide people on the basis of the religion that they teach. It dismisses religious leaders who misuse religion to exploit the ignorance of the people and to create sectarian conflicts for their own benefits.⁶⁰ This argument, which comes close to Assmann's "Mosaic Distinction," is attributed to unnamed Sufis—most likely Nuqtavis—who believed that the last millennium had been the "Period of the Prophets" (*daur-i nabuwwat*), an era of disunity and disagreement. By contrast, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* presents Akbar as a unifier of the new millennium. The emperor not only accepted and respected the diversity of creatures (*tawḥid wa jam'*) but also the oneness of the creator. He believed that everyone has true faith, and each individual has his own way to understand the divine; as such, there is no reason to sow divisions between people because of their faith. The *Tarikh-i Alfi* then continues by stating that the Period of the Prophets had ended to make way for the Period of Unity, one in which all creeds and traditions would be united.⁶¹ Unlike the divisive approach of the prophets (*'ayn al-kithrat wa al-tafrāqa*), Akbar as king understands the world as it was created and sees all creatures through the divine eye (*naẓar-i ḥaq*). His approach is inclusive and accepts everything as it is (*maṣhrab-i wilāyat*). He believes that unity is in diversity (*'ayn al-wahdat wa al-jam'*), thus paving the way for Akbar's imperial ideology of universal peace.⁶²

The Mongol Legacy of Universal Peace

Although the *Tarikh-i Alfi* gives full credit to Akbar's new covenant of universal peace, it also makes the point that religious tolerance was part of the Mongol heritage going back to Chinggis Khan, who is staged as an alternative source of legitimacy to that of the prophet and scripture of Islam. Based on earlier Mongol chronicles such as Rashid al-Din's already mentioned *Jami' al-Tawarikh* and Juvayni's *Tarikh-i Jahangusha*, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* reiterates that Chinggis Khan did not discriminate against people because of their religion; instead, he was simply doing God's will by not being a follower (*muqallid, tābi'*) of any specific religion.⁶³ It mentions that almost all Mongol rulers believed in

the equality of religions and that they allowed the people to perform their religious rituals freely. Indeed, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* draws a parallel between Akbar and Chinggis Khan by referring to a discussion between Chinggis and qadi Ashraf of Bukhara. According to our *Tarikh*, the Mongol khan believed in one God and actually agreed that the Prophet Muhammad preached some good teachings. Then follows a revealing and significant episode in which Chinggis Khan compared himself with the prophet and said that he had also sent messengers (*ilchīyān*) to the people of all regions. Chinggis further disagreed with qadi Ashraf on the issue of the mandatory pilgrimage to Mecca by saying, “the whole world is the house of God and there are ways to God everywhere.”⁶⁴ As a result of this dialogue, qadi Ashraf declared Chinggis Khan to be a Muslim ruler, but some other mullahs denied it because Chinggis Khan disagreed about the hajj. The author of this part of the *Tarikh-i Alfi* may have been aware of the fact that Akbar—like most Muslim rulers of Iran, Central Asia, and India—had not gone on the hajj.

In highlighting the divinized roles of kings, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* gives much space to Mongol rulers in general. For example, in a short introduction to the reign of the Ilkhanid ruler Ghazan Khan (r. 1295–1304), the text discusses the traditional Persian-Islamic idea that God chooses a person and elevates him as king to perform His will. It is God who selects the one who has the right capacity, and his essence (*dhāt*) will be filled with honesty and absolute good. The message seems to be that God does not randomly select a king but only the most capable one—a rather elegant rationalization of the well-known Mongol meritocracy.⁶⁵ In providing a list of ideal rulers, as well as Ali, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* mentions Chinggis Khan, Ögedei, Möngke, Kaidu, Kubilai, and Timur because of their inclusive and tolerant policies. It reserves a special place, though, for Zayn al-Abidin, the cosmopolitan sultan of Kashmir (r. 1418–1470). He is presented as a lover of science, music, and nature, and as a polyglot who translated Indian books on astrology and medicine. He revived the Hindu rituals that were banned by his predecessor Sultan Sikandar (r. 1389–1413) and returned religious authority to the Brahmins. He also banned killing cows and hunting and allowed those Hindus who were forced to accept Islam to reconvert.⁶⁶ All these kings provided a model of royal tolerance that Akbar followed.

To further underscore the religious tolerance of the Mongols, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* gives the examples of Ögedei Khan and Möngke, son and grandson of Chinggis Khan, respectively. Of the latter, it is said that he kept scribes and secretaries from each group of people in his court. If the Khan needed to address these people, he would be able to address them in their own tongue.⁶⁷ The work also contrasts Mongol policy with that of the Persians and other rulers and advises all kings of

the world to follow this good tradition (*rasm-i pasandīda*).⁶⁸ Further elaborating on Möngke, the chronicle recounts how he ordered that his day of coronation should be commemorated as a special day. He ordered that no one should fight each other, animals should not be killed, plants and trees should not be cut down, and flowing water should not be polluted. People must prepare their food with meat they already had at home. Then, here, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* takes the opportunity to compare Akbar—now mentioned as a caliph—directly with Möngke by saying that the latter's order covered just one day, whereas Akbar managed to ban animal killing for several days of the year.⁶⁹ With examples like this, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* clearly suggests that Akbar's policy of universal peace had Mongol antecedents.

As far as the unity of the principle is concerned, the Mongols again provide the model. Chinggis Khan is cited saying that the state's stability is in the unity of the ruling class and their absolute obedience (*iṭā'at-i muṭlaq*).⁷⁰ The state cannot survive without laws (*yasāq*), discipline (*naẓm*), honesty (*pākī*), caution (*iḥtiyāṭ*), awareness (*ḥazm*), and skilled and knowledgeable people to run the administration.⁷¹ In a surprisingly analytical description that reminds one of Ibn Khaldun's famous circular theory of nomadic state formation, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* elaborates on the history of the Mongols before and after Chinggis Khan and relates how the Mongols' worldview, traditions, and lifestyle gradually changed after they settled in the cities of China and Iran, as the Mongol Ilkhans became Persianized and the Mongol Yuan becoming Sinified.⁷²

Perhaps it is precisely this context of early settlement after conquest that made rulers like Ghazan and Möngke such appealing models for Akbar, who experienced the same after the initial conquests of his father and grandfather. In any case, the chronicle shows how nomadic life in the deserts of Mongolia were the ideal stage for heroic achievements in ongoing wars, whereas the postnomadic life in the grand palaces of Iran and China limited the space for such activity. Instead, palace life led the Mongols in new directions: conversion, construction, learning about their subjects, hunting and playing, discussion with scholars, and becoming ideal rulers to their new subjects and changing their image from pagan-barbarian heroes to civilized rulers. Thus, these later generations led lives of great pleasure and, when pleasure prevails, forgot how their ancestors built the empire.⁷³ However, it was not only palace life that threatened to undermine the new state; the postnomadic Mongols were also facing Muslim and non-Muslim religious leaders who had their own understanding of kingship, one that was significantly different from that of the Mongols.⁷⁴

From the above, it is evident the *Tarikh-i Alfi* builds on the Mongol chronicles to offer an almost Ibn Khaldunian cycle of state formation, including the idea of

degeneration under more settled conditions after a conquest. We use the word *almost* because the *Tarikh-i Alfi* also finds the religious establishment to blame for this. In addition, it is not Ibn Khaldun's tribal cohesion or *'aṣabiyya*, but the law, as issued by the Great Khan, that realizes the strength of the nomads. By contrast, in an astonishingly perceptive historical analysis, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* states that the formation of the Mongol Empire was actually the result of a collaboration between *different* groups of people (*ba barakt-i ittihād wa dust-i bā yakdigar*) under one strong leadership (*yak kas*).⁷⁵ What really held them together were the commands (*yasāq*) and laws (*qawānīn*) that derived from the wisdom of Chinggis Khan. If not enforced, the empire would be lost (*padishāhi mutazalzil wa munqaṭi' gardad*).⁷⁶

Overall, we may conclude that the *Tarikh-i Alfi* constructs an Akbari universal peace that builds on the Mongol model. The ancient Persian kings; the Arab caliphs, including Ali; and even Akbar's direct Timurid ancestors play only a secondary role. Although the Mongols may have provided the model, the light that enlightens Akbar is the light of Illuminism: it is direct and the result of Akbar's personal intuition, something that does not require the interference of any historical precursor. The Chinggis legacy and this reverence for light converge in one of the illustrations of the *Chinggis Nama*, another chronicle commissioned by Akbar, where we see Chinggis Khan sitting on a hill praying to the source of all light: the sun, *not* as God but as His image.⁷⁷

The Sun and the Soul

To facilitate the building of a universal empire for a population that remained majority Hindu, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* provided Akbar with a comprehensive framework of inclusion. Here we would like to discuss two examples of the Indic religious experience that the *Tarikh-i Alfi* attempted to incorporate in its universal metanarrative: worship of the sun and transmigration of the soul. As has been demonstrated by Carl Ernst in what may be Faizi's work on Krishna and yoga, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* also interpreted these phenomena very much in terms of a generalized form of Illuminist philosophy. In so doing, it "naturalized and familiarized these 'Hindu' themes along lines familiar to Muslim intellectuals."⁷⁸ Of course, it is worth knowing that Akbar himself was both an avid sun worshipper and also believed in the return of the soul because both contributed to the legitimacy of his universal imperial ideology and, at the same time, helped to build a bridge with the Indic religious traditions in his empire.

The argument of the *Tarikh-i Alfi* in favor of sun worship starts by implicitly endorsing the pre-Islamic and Indic practice of sun worship. Even before the Islamic Era, the term that is used for the sun is *Great Luminous Being* (*nayyir-i a'zam*), which is the same as used later by the Mughals.⁷⁹ The main source on Indic sun worship is the twelfth-century Persian historian Muhammad al-Shahrastani's *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (The book of sects and creeds), which offers an extensive, nonpolemical overview of the world's religions.⁸⁰ In summarizing Shahrastani, the *Tarikh* writes that the Hindus stand before the sun, prostrate, and recite a prayer called "the secondary praising" (*tasbīḥ-i thanā'ī*), which is either directed toward the sun as the first light (*nūr-i awwal*) or, if there is a higher and brighter light than the sun, toward the creator of the sun. In both cases, the devotee comes closer to the light through purification of body and soul.⁸¹

Later in the story, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* adds another sun prayer, from the *Tashkir al-Kawakib* (The possession of stars), which is attributed to the famous ninth-century astrologer Abu Mashar al-Balkhi (d. 886). Abu Mashar himself was already deeply influenced by Indic notions of cyclical time and bequeathed the idea to both the Islamic and Christian worlds via the science of astrology. With a Persian translation of his Arabic prayer, the *Tarikh* gives a long description of the sun ritual, which should be performed during sunrise while the worshipper wears a royal dress that is gold in color. He should hold a golden firebox with particular material related to the sun. The materials should contain saffron and should be mixed with cow's milk. It cites a prayer that gives almost all specific epithets of God to the sun. In other words, it replaces God with the sun. At the end, it asks the sun for prosperity and completes the ritual with prostration to the sun.⁸²

Although the *Tarikh-i Alfi* reproduces Abu Mashar's passages on the veneration of the sun, the language that is used recalls the Illuminationist idea of light as the origin of creation. It calls the sun "the pure light" (*nūr-i khāliṣ*), "the perfect shining" (*daw'-i tamām*) and "the origin of all" (*aṣal-i hama*). The life of all stars and planets depends on the sun and light connects them to the sun. Suhrawardi himself had also composed prayers in Arabic addressed to the great Heavenly Sun, Hurakhsh, but also referred to again as *al-nayyir al-a'zam*, the sun being the heavenly counterpart of a king on earth. In the words of Hossein Ziai, just as Hurakhsh shines in the heavens, so does the light of kings (*kiyān kharra*) shine on earth. Both the sun and the king have manifest luminous qualities, which is why they are obeyed by their subjects.⁸³ All this neatly fits Akbar's own ideas about sun worship. Akbar followed Suhrawardi's idea that the sun was not God but just His image, His light. Hence the worship of the sun was actually the

worship of God's light. Abul Fazl's brother Faizi compared the sun to the Ka'ba and the Qibla. But to understand the sun, one should see it through the eyes of Akbar. Each of his eyes is an astrolabe; the sun itself is Akbar's educator; and, in turn, Akbar himself is the educator of the world.⁸⁴

Intersecting with the treatise on sun worship, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* also discusses the transmigration of the soul from pre-Islamic, Indic, and Muslim points of view. The *Tarikh-i Alfi* and Bada'uni's *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh* (The selection of histories) provide the two main sources for Akbar's understanding of *tanāsukh*—the Persian term for the transmigration of the soul, also called metempsychosis. According to Bada'uni, Akbar revealed to Azam Khan in 1582 that he was “absolutely convinced and satisfied on the issue of metempsychosis.”⁸⁵ This is the very same year that the *Alfi* project was launched, so we should not be surprised that *tanāsukh* attracts much attention within it. The *Tarikh-i Alfi*'s discussion on *tanāsukh* was the first major attempt to harmonize Indic and Islamic Neoplatonist ideals of reincarnation of the soul.⁸⁶ Following the Illuminationist philosopher Qutb al-Din Shirazi, it stressed that Hermes, Agathasimon, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato supported it, as did other philosophers of Greece, Iran, Babylon, and India; even Aristotle seems to have agreed with it.⁸⁷ Later, the Indian sages Buzasf (Buddha) and Barjamis (Burjumaniyun) are added to the list. In addition, an attempt is made to create a full Illuminationist consensus about the issue, bringing together the works of Qutb al-Din, Davani, and Dashtaki, which are then concluded by the great master himself, Suhrawardi. In short, as used in the *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Neoplatonism had again proven its mettle as an irresistible force of assimilation.

All this raises the important question, however: how did the sun and the soul contribute to the legitimacy of Akbar's universal rule? Our provisional answer to this question is provided by the work of Suhrawardi's contemporary and fellow Neoplatonist, Fakhr al-Din Razi. We have noticed him already as a major scholarly authority at the Ilkhanid academies. Like Suhrawardi, it seems that Razi's understudied occult work experienced something of a revival in Mughal India at the turn of the Islamic millennium.⁸⁸ Mughal interest in Razi was raised by the way he used the Hermetic tradition to link knowledge of the celestial realm—the sun, the planets, and the stars—to knowledge of God and the achievement of gnosis. To harmonize his court with the celestial sphere, Akbar's father, Humayun, had designed the so-called Carpet of Mirth on which “each group was ordered to sit in accordance with one of the seven planets,” Humayun himself sitting in the “golden sphere, similar to the sun in lustre, light and pureness.”⁸⁹ Far from being a Mughal invention, the complexity of this celestial carpet derived directly from Razi, who in his turn followed Hermetic ideas of heliocentrism.⁹⁰

Whatever the complexities of Neoplatonic astral thinking, to be in tune with the celestial sphere could occur only when the soul rose beyond the confines of the body. Hence, purification of the soul and separation of the body is one of the goals of astrological practice. In Hermetic terms, the ultimate goal of self-purification and the seeking of knowledge was the rebirth of the human soul not in the body but free from that corporeal prison in order to attain gnosis and ascent to the celestial realm. In the words of Nora Jacobsen Ben Hammed:

Razi views the celestial beings as mediators between human beings, whose souls are of the same genus as the angels, and God. God's light, perfection, and knowledge flow through these entities to the prophets and the rest of humanity. It is the greatest goal of the human being to perfect his or her soul and to join the lowest ranks of these celestial kin.⁹¹

For an "intellectual person" (*'āqil*), such an ascent to the celestial level—also called the universal intellect (*'aql-i kull*)—results in prophethood.⁹² In this way, ratio, sun, and soul become closely connected as the prime deliverers of the perfect prophet-cum-king. Hence, it seems that, through the Neoplatonic interpretation of both sun worship and metempsychosis, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* created an autonomous source of legitimation for its great intellectual patron's universal rule.⁹³



The general influence of Neoplatonism in the history of Western and Islamic philosophy is well known. What is much less acknowledged, however, is the way in which Neoplatonism, in all its various avatars, became one of the ideological mainstays of sacred kingship in the Islamic world after the Mongol conquests. Since the thirteenth century, the monist, hierarchically layered nature of Neoplatonist thought provided ambitious postnomadic kings with a powerful framework to accommodate a diversity of religious and philosophical traditions. The result was a remarkably successful Neoplatonic version of cosmic kingship that thrived in particular along the arid frontiers of the Islamic world ruled by Turco-Mongolian conquerors in need of a new, autonomous universal ideology to encompass their vast empires. During the long sixteenth century, driven by the intensified links between Iran, Central Asia, and India, there emerged a continuum of Islamic royal courts that immersed themselves in Neoplatonic thought. To its west, this continuum suddenly linked rather well

with the new Neoplatonic mood at the courts of Europe, generating an even more extensive, global Neoplatonic Renaissance. To its east, along its Indian frontiers, the cultural cauldron of the Mughal and Deccan courts amalgamated Indic monist traditions with a mixture of philosophical, mystical, and occult Islamic traditions, giving rise to new works of literature and imagination that sought religious inclusion on an ever more global scale. The *Tarikh-i Alfi* is a brilliant case in point.

NOTES

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1. Cited from *Partawnama* (“Epistle of Emanation”) in Hossein Ziai, “Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of Suhrawardi’s Illuminationist Political Doctrine,” in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Charles Butterworth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 329.
2. Qadi Ahmad Thattavi and Asaf Khan Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi: Tarikh-i Hazar Sala-yi Islam*, ed. Ghulam Reza Tabatabai Majd, 8 vols. (Tehran: Intisharat-i ‘Ilmi wa Farhangi, 1382/2002).
3. *Tarikh-i Alfi* was partially published for the first time by Sayed Ali Al-i Davoud, who considered only the last part of the book: Sayed Ali Al-i Davoud, *Tarikh-i Alfi: Tarikh-i Iran wa Kishvarha-yi Hamsaya dar Salha-yi AH 850–984 (Tarikh-i Alfi: History of Iran and the Neighbouring Countries from AH 850–984)* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Fikr-i Ruz, 1377/1999), based on three manuscripts preserved in Astan-i Quds Library in Mashhad and the library of Tehran University. Majd published the text in eight volumes without describing the manuscripts that he used or any kind of text criticism, introduction to the text, or reference to Al-i Davoud’s work.
4. The only other work that—albeit in passing—interprets Akbar as a Neoplatonic ruler is Ebba Koch, “The Intellectual and Artistic Climate of Akbar’s Court,” in *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India*, ed. John Seyller (Washington: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2002), 22. For a discussion of this Neoplatonic Renaissance in a global context, see Jos Gommans, “The Neoplatonic Renaissance from the Thames to the Ganges,” in *India after World History: Literature, Comparison, and Approaches to Globalization*, ed. Neilesh Bose (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2022).
5. Christian Wildberg, “Neoplatonism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2019 edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/neoplatonism>, accessed September 11, 2020.
6. Dominic J. O’Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

7. Perhaps a better term for monism would be henoism, that is, belief in a number of deities, but also in something greater than those deities, some greater cosmic order or consciousness. For us, both terms refer to a pluralistic theology wherein different deities are viewed to be of a unitary, equivalent divine essence.
8. Maria Mavroudi, "Pletho as Subversive and His Reception in the Islamic World," in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, ed. Dimeter Angelov and Michael Saxby (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 177–203. See also Alison Brown, "Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence and Its Contribution to Early Modern Political Thought," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): 383–413. It was Pletho in particular who reintroduced the Neoplatonic legacy to Italy and inspired the well-known translation movement under Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499). Hence, as usual in such earlier globalizing moments, Neoplatonism demonstrated its force to assimilate familiar strands of thought, in this case Hermetic and Kabbalah traditions to have a substantial, albeit short-term impact on European Renaissance courts, in particular under the Medici, the Habsburgs, and the early Stuarts. Since the seminal but also controversial work of Frances Yates, the European developments lack an overall historical survey, but see Vaughan Hart, *Art and Magic in the Court of the Stuarts* (London: Routledge, 1994), and more recently, Anthony F. D'Elia, *Pagan Virtue in a Christian World: Sigismondo Malatesta and the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
9. Matthew Melvin-Koushki contrasts this early modern Latin "inquisitorial chauvinism" with the Persianate "radical ecumenism" driven by "a brand of occult-scientific imperialism." See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "How to Rule the World: Occult-Scientific Manuals of the Early Modern Persian Cosmopolis," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 11 (2018): 140–54. See also Wouter J. Hanegraaf, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
10. For some surprising, artistic Neoplatonic commensurabilities, see Jos Gommans, *The Unseen World: The Netherlands and India from 1550* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum/Nijmegen: VanTilt, 2018). A thought-provoking Platonic reading of Islamic art is offered by Wendy M. K. Shaw, *What Is "Islamic" Art? Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
11. It is also in the specific context of the empire building and globalization in that century that we find the most ambitious attempts by rulers to epistemologically order their ever-expanding universe in universal histories and encyclopedias. As an example of the latter, Qazvini's *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat* (The Wonders of Creation) has a deeply Neoplatonic view on creation in which visible things also have invisible, Platonic forms and thus each wonder is a sign pointing to the oneness of its creator; see Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), and Stefano Carboni, *The Wonders of Creation and the Singularities of Painting* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).
12. Jos Gommans, *The Indian Frontier: Horse and Warband in the Making of Empires* (London: Routledge, 2018), 229–331.
13. See also Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Power: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).



14. Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-‘Arabi and the Ismā‘īlī Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Godefroid de Callatay, “Brethren of Purity,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet et al., http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/2048/10.1163/1573-3912_ci3_COM_25372, accessed March 12, 2021.
15. Ilker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Din ‘Alī Yazdī and the Islamic Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 99–103, 150, 258.
16. See A. Azfar Moin, “Millennial Sovereignty and the Mughal Dynasty,” in *Oxford Handbook of the Mughal World*, ed. Richard Eaton and Ramya Sreenivasan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
17. Although Ishraqī philosophy has been studied extensively by Henry Corbin and Hossein Nasr, this and the next section builds primarily on some of the more recent summaries provided by Ziai, “Source and Nature of Authority,” 304–344; John Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardī and Platonic Orientalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Roxanne Marcotte, “Suhrawardī,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2019 edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/suhrawardi>, accessed January 9, 2020; and Hossein Ziai, “Illuminationism,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. 3, Fasc. 6, 670–2, and Vol. XIII, Fasc. 1, 1–2, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kadimi-zoroastrian-sect>, accessed January 9, 2020. See also Ian Richard Netton, who sees Ishraqī as a mixture of Platonic, post-Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic ideas. In our view, it is this mixture itself that makes it Neoplatonic. Ian Richard Netton, “Suhrawardī’s Heir: The Ishrāqī Philosophy of Mīr Dāmād,” in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 3: *Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501–1750)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (Oxford: One World, 1999), 232.
18. Susan Stiles Maneck, *The Death of Ahriman: Culture, Identity and Theological Change among the Parsis of India* (Bombay: K. R. Bed Oriental Institute, 1997), 49–70.
19. Ziai, “Illuminationism,” 670–2. In a more elaborate discussion, Ziai also points out that some of Suhrawardī’s work had been commissioned by the Seljuk rulers Ala al-Din Kay-Qubad, Sulaiman Shah, and Malik Imad al-Din; see Ziai, “Source and Nature of Authority,” 322.
20. Jonathan Brack, “Theologies of Auspicious Kingship: The Islamization of Chinggisid Sacral Kingship in the Islamic World,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60 (2018): 1143–71.
21. Stefan Kamola, *Making Mongol History: Rashid al-Din and the Jami ‘ al-Tawarikh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 63–78, 92–115.
22. George E. Lane, “Tusi, Našir-al-Din,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/tusi-nasir-al-din-bio>, accessed April 19, 2018.
23. Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
24. Robert Wisnovsky, “On the Emergence of Maragha Avicennism,” *Oriens* 46 (2018): 270–1. For Rashid al-Din’s theological work, see also Dorothea Krawulsky, *The Mongol Ilkhāns and the Vizier Rashīd al-Dīn* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), and Josef van Ess, *Der Wesir und seine Gelehrten* (Wiesbaden: Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes XLV/4, 1981).

25. A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); A. Azfar Moin “The Politics of Saint Shrines in the Persianate Empires,” in *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 105–24. For the rise of the occult sciences, see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, in particular his “Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in High-Persianate Tradition,” *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 5 (2017): 127–99; Melvin-Koushki, “How to Rule the World,” 140–54, and Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Early Modern Islamic Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy” in *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam*, ed. Armando Salvatore and Roberto Tottoli (Chichester: Wiley, 2018), 353–75. It should be stressed that the adding of the label *Neoplatonism* to these developments is ours.
26. The history of how Illuminationism developed across Iran and Central Asia, spreading to South and North India is a complex one. Recent studies include Marco Di Branco, “The ‘Perfect King’ and his Philosophers: Politics, Religion and Graeco-Arabic Philosophy in Safavid Iran: The Case of the Utülügüyâ,” *Studia Graeco-Arabica* 4 (2014): 191–218; Ali Anooshahr, “Shirazi Scholars and the Political Culture of Sixteenth-Century Indo-Persian World,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 51, no. 3 (2014): 331–52; Carl W. Ernst, *Refractions of Islam in India: Situating Sufism and Yoga* (New Delhi: Sage, 2016), 406–407; Emma J. Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
27. Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). For the comparison with the European Renaissance, see also Ebba Koch, “Being like Jesus and Mary: The Influence of the Jesuit Missions on Symbolic Representations of the Mughal Emperors Revisited,” in *Transcultural Imaginations of the Sacred*, ed. Margit Kern and Klaus Krüger (Munich: Fink Verlag, 2018), 197–230.
28. Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East*, 13–17. Unfortunately, the search for such horizontal philosophical linkages is looked down upon in modern academia and has caused scholars to ignore the earliest Indian connections of Neoplatonism. See, however, some of the suggestive comparative work of Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), and the inspiring volume edited by Richard Seaford, *Universe and Inner Self in Early Indian and Early Greek Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). For a recent discussion of the Greco-Indian linkages, see Joachim Lacrosse, “Plotin, Porphyre et l’Inde: Un ré-examen,” *Le Philosophoire* 41 (2014): 87–104.
29. For a provisional discussion of the South Indian part of this continuum, see Jos Gommans, “Cosmopolitanism and Imagination in Nayaka South India: Decoding the Brooklyn *Kalamkari*,” *Archives of Asian Art* 70, no. 1 (2020): 1–21. In the Indonesia archipelago, Neoplatonic notions were primarily spread through a network of pantheist Shattari Sufis, which, via the work of Shams al-Din Sumatrani—the main religious figure under Iskandar Muda of Aceh (r. 1607–1636)—was connected to the Indian subcontinent, in particular to Muhammad ibn Fazl-Allah al-Burhanpuri. This Indonesian branch of Neoplatonism was at that time already criticized as being



- “Vedantic.” See Denys Lombard, *Le sultanat d’Atjéh au temps d’Iskandar Muda, 1607–1636* (Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1967), 163.
30. J. W. Schoorl, “Power, Ideology, and Change in the Early State of Buton,” in *State and Trade in the Indonesian Archipelago*, ed. G. J. Schutte (Leiden: KITLV, 1994), 17–57.
 31. During sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mughal rule, at least twelve other world histories were written. Most of these followed more or less the existing model that had started with Bal’ami (*Tarikhnama*) and Gardizi (*Zain al-Akhhbar*) and continued gradually to incorporate the eastern Islamic world after the Mongol invasions with the chronicles of Juzjani (*Tabaqat-i Nasiri*), Rashid al-Din (*Jami’ al-Tawarikh*), Mustaufi (*Tarikh-i Guzida*), and Mirkhwand (*Rauzat al-Safa*). Apart from the *Tarikh-i Alfi*, Akbar commissioned another world history, the *Rauzat al-Tahirin*, written by Tahir Muhammad Sabzavari (1602–1607). Like the *Tarikh-i Alfi*, all these chronicles were compilations that built on the most important earlier works available to the Mughal historians. For an excellent survey of these works, see Stephan Conermann, *Historiographie als Sinnstiftung: Indo-persische Geschichtsschreibung während der Mogulzeit (932–1118/1516–1707)* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2002), 364–82.
 32. Cited in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Frank Disputations: Catholics and Muslims at the Court of Jahangir (1608–11),” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46, no. 4 (2009): 482. Of Naqib Khan, it was said that his historical knowledge was unequaled and that he had learned the seven volumes of Mirkhwand’s world history *Rauzat al-Safa* by heart. See Shah Nawaz Khan, *Ma’athir al-Umara*, ed. Maulawi Abdur Rahim and Mirza Ashraf Ali, 3 vols. (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica 112, 1888–91), 3: 812–17.
 33. Antonio Monserrate, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J., on his Journey to the Court of Akbar*, trans. J. S. Hoyland, anno. S. N. Banerjee (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), 420; Nur al-Din Muhammad Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, ed. Muhammad Hashim (Tehran: Bunyadi-i Farhang-i Iran, 1980), 88.
 34. Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar’s Reign with Special Reference to Abu’l Fazl, 1556–1605* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975), 80; Azra Nizami, “Social-Religious Outlook of Abul Fazl,” *Medieval India, A Miscellany* 2 (London: Asia, 1972), 48.
 35. In Persian: ‘*allāmat al-zamāni aflātūn al-‘awāmi*. See Abul Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. M. Thackston, 6 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press—Murty Classical Library of India, 2017), 3: 30.
 36. In Persian: *Shahanshāh-i jahān rā dar waḡādash dida pur nam shud / Sikandar ashk-i ḡasrat rikht ki Aflātūn zi ‘ālam shud*. Cited in Shah Nawaz Khan, *Ma’athir al-Umara*, 1, 100–105.
 37. S. A. Husain, “Hakeem Ali Gilani: A Commentator of Canon of Avicenna,” *Bulletin of the Indian Institute for the History of Medicine* 27 (1997): 47. Amanat, “Persian Nuḡṭawīs and the Shaping of the Doctrine of “Universal Conciliation” (*ṣulḡ-i kull*) in Mughal India,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism and Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 371. Although not an Ishraqi himself, Mulla Ahmad had been at the Bijapur court with Fath Allah and they remained friends in Agra.

38. More broadly, this worldview was an extension of the Neopythagorean ideas of his teacher Fazl Allah Astarabadi (d. 1394), founder of the Hurufi (*lettrist*) movement. See Amanat, "Persian Nuqtawīs," 374; Shahbaz Bashir, "Between Mysticism and Messianism: The Life and Thought of Muhammad Nurbakhsh (d. 1464)," PhD diss. (Yale University, 1998), 54.
39. Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, ed. W. N. Lees and Munshi Ahmad Ali, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1865), 2: 312; Amanat, "Persian Nuqtawīs," 378–81.
40. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 241–3.
41. Daniel Sheffield, "The Language of Heaven in Safavid Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Azar Kayvān and His Followers," in *There's No Tapping Around Philology*, ed. Alireza Korangy and Daniel Sheffield (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag), 161–83.
42. Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamic Empire," 368. At least two authors, Bada'uni and Sarhindi, remained extremely critical of the whole project, but, as A. Azfar Moin has shown, even Bada'uni, who is generally viewed as a stern orthodox jurist, showed a great deal of interest in the occult sciences. See A. Azfar Moin, "Challenging the Mughal Emperor: The Islamic Millennium according to 'Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni," in *Islam in South Asia in Practice*, ed. Barbara Metcalf (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 375–90.
43. Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, 2, 318–19.
44. In Majd's printed edition, the first part is from pages 27 to 3526 and covers volumes 1–4/5. The second part is from pages 3526 to 4244 and covers volumes 4/5–7. The third part is from pages 4244 to 5929 and covers volumes 7–8. The beginning of the second part is marked by a short introduction by Mulla Ahmad regarding the title of the book and Akbar's order about the book. Similarly, the beginning of the third part is marked with an introduction written by Jafar Beg that mentions that Mulla Ahmad wrote two parts before his death and Akbar's order to him to complete the book. See Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 3527; 7, 4244.
45. This Christian comparison was originally suggested in the early twentieth century by F. W. Buckler, "Firdausi's Shāhnāma and the *Genealogia Regni Dei*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Suppl. 1 (1935): 1–21.
46. Abul-Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, 1, 27.
47. It is important to note that none of the surviving manuscripts of *Tarikh-i Alfi* we consulted include events later than 984/1576.
48. For a more secular, "modern" reading of the *Tarikh-i Alfi*, see Ali Anooshahr, "Dialogism and Territoriality in a Mughal History of the Islamic Millennium," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55 (2012): 220–54. For a more in-depth discussion on Neoplatonism in the making of *ṣulḥ-i kull*, see Jos Gommans and Said Reza Huseini, "Neoplatonism and the Pax Mongolica in the Making of *Ṣulḥ-i Kull*: A View from Akbar's Millennial History," *Modern Asian History* (forthcoming).
49. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 406–407; M. A. Alvi and A. Rahman, *Shah Fathullah Shirazi: A Sixteenth Century Indian Scientist* (New Delhi: National Institute of Sciences of India, 1968), 10–11.

50. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 8, 5738–9.
51. Abul-Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, 1, 22–23; 27; 1, 122–3.
52. Abul Fazl, *Ai'n-i Akbari*, ed. H. Blochmann, 3 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1872), 3: 182–8; Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, 2, 211; Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims*, 385.
53. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 8, 5375, 5617.
54. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 273.
55. Abul-Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, 1, 126–7.
56. In Persian *mabda'-i fayyād*. See Abul-Fazl, *The History of Akbar*, 1, 23–25.
57. In his alienation and rivalry from Abul Fazl, he wrote a scurrilous account that paints the emperor as an apostate and anti-Christ. Nevertheless, much of Bada'uni's criticisms can be corroborated by Jesuit reports as well as by statements in the imperial chronicles. See Moin, "Challenging the Mughal Emperor."
58. Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, 2, 211.
59. Bada'uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, 2, 211.
60. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 5, 3295, 3403–3508; Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 7, 4244.
61. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 242–3.
62. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 242.
63. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3744.
64. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3722. These words attributed to Chinggis Khan are not mentioned in any chronicles from the Mongol period.
65. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 7, 4261.
66. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 8, 5376–82.
67. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3914.
68. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3914.
69. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3902–3903.
70. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 5, 3649. Later, the *Tarikh-i Alfi* again stresses the extreme obeisance of the Mongols to their kings. See Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3891.
71. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 5, 3749. See also Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3748, which likewise stresses the meritocratic principles of Chinggisid rule.
72. *Tarikh-i Alfi* mentions that, in the middle of the month of Muharram, Ghazan Khan and his generals changed the old Chinggisid garment and wore the turban like the Muslims (*muntaṣaf-i Muḥarram, Ghāzān Khān libās-i ghadīm-i Changīz Khānī rā taghīr dāda ba tariq-i Musalmānān ba ittifaq-i jamī-i 'umarā dastār bast*); Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 7, 4290. It also gives detailed information on Kubilai's palaces and the Chinese traditions in them. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 4166–72.
73. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3751. The Persian text reads as follows: *ba 'd az mā urūq-i mā qabāba-yi zar dūkhṭa bipūshand wa ni 'mat hā-yi charb wa shīrīn bikhurand wa bar asbān-i nikū bar nīshinand wa khātūnān-i khūbruy dar bar kashand naqūyand ki inhā rā padarān wa aqāyān-i mā jam 'kardah-and wa ān ruz-i buzug ra farāmūsh kūnand*.
74. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 7, 4144–6. The example is Sultan Ahmad Teguder; his reign witnessed opposition from Mongols who saw the Muslim high officials as their rivals.

75. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3742, 3747.
76. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3748–9. Quite tellingly, on another occasion the *Tarikh* uses Juvayni but omits his comment on the similarity between the *yasāq* and Islamic law; see Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 6, 3742. This focus on the *Yasa* comes fairly close to the analysis of the contemporary Ottoman historian Mustafa Ali, except that the latter left at least some room for the revealed law of Islam. See Cornell Fleischer, “Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism and ‘Ibn Khaldunism’ in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18 (1983): 198–220.
77. Naindeep Chann, “In the Shadow of the Khan,” in *Empires and Diversity: On the Crossroads of Archaeology, Anthropology, and History*, ed. Gregory E. Areshian (Los Angeles: Cotzen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2013), 241. For this miniature, see <https://www.akg-images.com/archive/-2UMDHUR9T8Y7.html>.
78. Ernst, *Refractions of Islam in India*, 370–1.
79. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 253.
80. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 380–1.
81. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 253, 381.
82. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 381–2.
83. Ziai, “Source and Nature of Authority,” 320. See also Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 209.
84. For discussions, see Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 219–24, and Gerard Grobbel, *Der Dichter Faiḏi und die Religion Akbars* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2001), 51–67.
85. Bada’uni, *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh*, 2, 300.
86. It “contains some of the earliest and most detailed attempts by the Mughal court at harmonizing the Hindu notions of reincarnation with Islamic thought, particularly of the branch promoted at the Shiraz School through the commentaries of Suhrawardi.” See Ali Anooshahr, “Shirazi Scholars,” 347–9.
87. Thattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-i Alfi*, 1, 378–81; Qutb al-Din Shirazī, *Sharh-i Hikmat al-Ishraq*, ed. Mahdi Muhaqqiq and Abd Allah Nurani (Tehran: Anjuman-i Asar wa Mafakhir-i Farhangi, 1383/2004).
88. The Paris Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Rampur Raza Library have copies of late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century Persian translations of Razi’s *Al-Sirr al-Maktum* (The Hidden Secret), at least one of which was composed for Akbar: Živa Vesel, “The Persian Translation of Fakhr al-Din Rāzi’s al Sirr al Maktūm (‘The Occult Secret’) for Iltutmish,” in *Confluence of Cultures: French Contributions to Indo-Persian Studies*, ed. Françoise ‘Nalini’ Delvoe (Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 14–22.
89. Eva Orthmann, “Court Culture and Cosmology in the Mughal Empire: Humayūn and the Foundations of the Dīn-i Ilāhī,” in *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung (London: Routledge, 2011), 203–204. The citations about the Carpet of Mirth (*basāt-i nishāt*) come from the *Qanun-i Humayuni* written by Humayun’s contemporary Khwandamir.
90. Razi’s work that mentions exactly the same celestial sphere as the Carpet of Mirth is *Maṭālib al-‘āliya*. See Nora Jacobsen Ben Hammed, “Knowledge and Felicity of the Soul in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi,” PhD diss. (University of Chicago, 2018), 220.

91. Jacobsen Ben Hammed, "Knowledge and Felicity of the Soul," 242–3. This entire section on Razi is based on this work.
92. Here, we use the fairly conventional wording of Ibn Sina. See Jacobsen Ben Hammed, "Knowledge and Felicity of the Soul," 81. It indicates that much of the Neoplatonic hierarchy was already part of mainstream Islamic metaphysics, which was not the case for the role that the occult sciences could play in achieving gnosis. Although the latter became increasingly popular in post-Mongol courts, in theological and philosophical circles, it remained controversial.
93. Of course, this metaphysics of sun and light is not only Ishraqi but can also be associated with the Neoplatonization of the Light of Muhammad at a much earlier stage. See the recent survey of Khalil Andani, "Metaphysics of Muhammad: The Nur Muhammad from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d.148/765) to Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d.672/1274)," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 8 (2019): 99–175.