CHAPTER II

FATEHPUR-SIKRI: AKBAR’S CITY OF VICTORY

In an auspicious moment the unique pearl of the caliphate emerged from the shell of the womb, and arrived at the shore of existence in the city of Fatehpur.¹

On August 30, 1569 Akbar’s longest standing wish was fulfilled when Prince Muhammad Salim Mirza was born at the residence of an elderly Sufi mystic outside a little town named Sikri that nestled beneath a sandstone ridge not far from Agra. Several children, including twin sons, had previously been born to Akbar, but all had soon succumbed to illness and thus in 1569 Akbar still lacked a male heir to whom he could eventually pass on his ever expanding Indian kingdom. It was the arrival of Prince Salim that sparked in Akbar the desire “to give outward splendour to this spot which possessed spiritual grandeur,”² a desire that led to the transformation of the barren ridge above Sikri into a spectacular new city overlooking the cooling vista of what was then a broad and expansive lake.

As concern mounted over the sad fate of the emperor’s first children, a number of courtiers suggested that Akbar seek the blessings of Shaykh Salim ad-Din Chishti (1479-1572) in Sikri. Little persuasion was needed before Akbar set off to visit this Shaykh, who belonged to the esteemed Chishti order that had been established in India at the end of the twelfth century by Khwaja Muin ad-Din Chishti (d. 1236). In 1562, Akbar began a number of pilgrimages to the grave of Khwaja Muin ad-Din at Ajmer in Rajasthan (no. 13 and no. 32) and was thus well acquainted with the teachings of this relatively orthodox order that had originally shunned close ties with worldly rulers. Shaykh Salim, however, graciously received Akbar and, in addition, foretold that he would be blessed with three sons. Thus when Maryam az-Zamani became pregnant in 1569, she was conveyed to the Shaykh’s monastery³ in Sikri and it was there that she gave birth to Prince Salim, the future emperor Jahangir.

A miniature from the Victoria and Albert Museum Akhbarnama (no. 14) designed by Kesu the Elder and painted by Dharm Das vividly records this joyful event. Since the manuscript was illustrated around 1590, artistic liberties have been taken, and the scene has been transposed to the completed Fatehpur-Sikri, with Maryam az-Zamani reclining in an open pavilion high in the palace complex overlooking the lake. As the new-born prince is bathed by maidservants with water from a golden ewer, crowds gather outside the red sandstone walls of the palace awaiting the disbursement of alms that traditionally follows such an auspicious event. Here the motley crowd, which includes an ash-daubed Hindu ascetic, is rewarded with a shower of coins, as the vibrant sounds of horns and drums surge from an inner whitewashed courtyard.

Akbar was in Agra when the birth took place, but as soon as the good news reached him he ordered the preparation of celebrations lasting seven days. Alms were distributed to the public and many prisoners were also released as part of the general festivities. At any such celebration it was customary for the court poets to vie with one another in recording their praises, often in the form of a pithy Persian chronogram, where the date of the event would be given by the combined numeric value of the letters used to

The Gateway to the Jama Masjid (Plan: 27)
express the appropriate sentiment. On this occasion, Khwaja Husayn of Merv (a city in Central Asia between Herat and Bukhara) excelled himself, and presumably all his competitors, by composing an ode in which the first line of each couplet gave the date of Akbar's accession to the throne, and the second one the date of Prince Salim's birth. The Khwaja was rewarded with the staggering sum of 200,000 silver coins for his brilliantly devised ode, which began:

Praise to God for the pomp and grandeur of the Shah,  
A pearl of greatness to the shore of the sea of justice has come.  

Another, anonymous, chronogram was composed in the form of a bold restatement of the Prince's heritage:  
"The king of the House of Tirmidh"  
Salim's birth left Akbar in a newly optimistic, if not ecstatic, frame of mind. Following his great military and political successes of the 1560s, this joyous personal event instilled in Akbar a mood for action that revitalized the very basis of his aspirations in India. It is the dramatic events of this period that the daring originality of Akbar's personality left one of its most telling marks: the foundation of Fatehpur-Sikri, a new city that served as the Mughal capital until 1585.

According to one Akbari historian, Muhammad Arif Qandahari, the order to start work on the construction of Fatehpur-Sikri was not actually issued by Akbar until August-September, 1571, upon his return to Agra from a visit to Shaykh Salim that coincided with the second anniversary of Prince Salim's birth. While other writers imply a date closer to 1569, it is reasonable to assume that some delay was in order until everyone was sure that the young prince would survive. Trust in Shaykh Salim continued to rise in court circles when a second healthy prince, Murad, was born at his residence in Sikri on June 7, 1570 (fig. 3). The new city at Sikri was at first named Fathabad (City of Victory), but through popular usage it eventually became known as Fatehpur (with the same meaning) or Fatehpur Sikri, hence the modern form Fatehpur-Sikri.

The sandstone quarries at Fatehpur-Sikri were already busy sending out countless cardloads of red stone blocks for the work on the fort in Agra, so once the order for the construction of the new city was issued, progress must have been almost immediate. Residents of the Chisti quarter, at the far western end of the ridge, must have been rather alarmed by all the new activity. A miniature from the ca. 1590 Akbarnama designed by Tulai the Elder and painted by Bhuvani depicts the construction at Fatehpur-Sikri at a fairly advanced stage (fig. 15). A crowd of stone-masons and laborers is shown at work between the southern shore of the lake and the Elephant Gate. The arch of the gateway is still supported by a heavy wooden framework but the waterworks at the left are in full working order. The logistics of such an ambitious project might have seemed nightmarish but, according to Monserrate, Akbar had at least one practical means of coping with the situation: "In order to prevent himself being deafened by the noise of the tools with which stones are shaped and beams and other timber cut, he had everything cleverly fashioned elsewhere, in accordance with the exact plan of the building, and then brought to the spot, and there fitted and fastened together."

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Praise to God for the pomp and grandeur of the Shah, A pearl of greatness to the shore of the sea of justice has come.9

Another anonymous chronogram was composed in the form of a bold résumé of the Prince's heritage: "The king of the House of Timur."10

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Qandahari gives the most detailed description of the construction of Fatehpur-Sikri, as well as some insights into the actual design process. Presumably
through first hand observation, though perhaps embellished with a touch of flattery, he assigns Akbar a major role in the planning of his new City of Victory:

When the engineer of sound judgement [Akbar] drew the line of its foundation on the paper of fancy, he ordered it to have a circumference of approximately four to six miles on the face of the earth, and for houses to be built on the top of the hill and that they should lay out orchards and gardens at its periphery and center. 19

Qandahar then continues with a description of the radical transformation the work entailed for the environs of Shaykh Salim's monastery:

The lands which were desolate like the hearts of lovers and lifeless like the work of artisans attained freshness, purity, splendor and value like the cheeks of the beautiful and the tulip-faced ones. Trees were grown in the environs which had formerly been the habitat of rabbits and jackals, and mosques, bazaars, baths, caravanserais and other fine buildings were constructed in the city. 31

Rising above the caravanserais and the main gate near the banks of the lake, two distinct structures began to take shape. To the east was the main palace complex (p. 43), comprised of a series of stone pavilions, courtyards and gardens, while to the west, towards the old Chishti quarter, lay the massive Jami Masjid or congregational mosque (Plan: 17). Construction of the city was carried on from 1571 until at least 1576 but it is not known in what order this activity proceeded. There may be a good deal of truth in Monserrate’s remark that Akbar first “ordered a country-house—small but of royal magnificence—to be erected as swiftly as possible” and that “this was shortly afterwards enlarged into a palace.” 12

As late as 1576-77, Akbar ordered the construction of a long bazaar running down from the main palace complex on the top of the hill to the Agra Gate and a four-sided marketplace termed the Chahar Saq. Qandahar states that while he was writing his history, around the year 1580, only three of the four arched sandstone gateways leading into this Chahar Saq (Plan: 75, 77, 76) had been completed. 13 Unfortu-
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nately none of the sources mention the planners and architects who devised the city of Fatehpur-Sikri and its individual structures. The histories are equally unhelpful regarding the question of who administered the burgeoning city until Shāykh Ṣalīm and one of Akbar’s leading soldiers and courtiers, was appointed its governor in 1576. It is impossible to underestimate Akbar’s keen interest in architecture and his awareness of its recent history. In the space of roughly six years he ordered the construction of a pleasure palace at Naqarchin, the reconstruction of the fort at Agra and then the creation of a whole new city at Sikri, no doubt in full awareness of the popular sentiment that “the standard of measure of men is assessed by the worth of [their] building.” Throughout the 1560s he had also visited (and in most cases added to his dominion) some of the most impressive cities in India, such as the Muslim centers of Lahore, Ahmadabad, Mandu and Jaunpur, and the magnificent Rājpūr strongholds of Chittorgarh and Ranthambhor. Akbar’s childhood memories of Kabul, Qandahar, Ghazni, and Balkh, and Babur’s descriptions of the great Timūrid cities of Herat and Samarqand must have further whetted his appetite for construction.

The practical bent of the early Mughal emperors is just as clear as their love of building. It is amusing that in Babur’s description of the wonders of Samarqand one of the first things he did upon setting out for sightseeing was to have someone pace out the exact measurement of the city ramparts. In a similar vein, Monseratt, whose somewhat anecdotal account of his stay in Fatehpur-Sikri acts as a perfect complement to the more formal style of the Mughal historians, adds the curious insight that Akbar “is so devoted to building that he sometimes quarries stone himself, along with the other workmen.” Furthermore, there is the visual evidence of Akbar’s involvement in the building process afforded by another miniature in the Akbarnāma designed by Tūlīr the Elder, painted this time by Bandi with portraits added by Madhu the Younger (no. 16). Here Akbar stands at the site of construction, presumably in the area between the Jamī Masjid on the right and the main palace complex, and gestures to one of his stone-masons as the imperial entourage looks on. At the very least he wanted to live up to his symbolic epitaph as “the architect of the spiritual and material world,” both in real life, and, for posterity, in the painted version of the event. Most telling, however, is a walk through the interconnected courtyards of Akbar’s palace itself, where it is hard not to feel the vibrant presence of his will to create a perfect stage for the full range of his imperial activities.

The decision to build a new city at Sikri was neither pure whim nor the rash action of an ecstatic young father. Apart from being the home of Shāykh Salīm since the end of the fifteenth century, Sikri had a long connection with the Mughals themselves. In 1537, Babur won a crucial victory against Rana Sangram Singh of Chittorgarh (Mewar) at Khansar, just sixteen kilometers (ten miles) to the west of Sikri where he had set up camp for his army by the banks of the lake. Later that year he commissioned a “Garden of Victory” to be laid out there in addition to a number of other structures. One of these was an ogival platform built in the middle of the lake where, in his own words, “we went over by boat, had an awning set up on it and elected for majmūn [an opium confec-
tion].” For many years Sikri served as a pleasure retreat from Agra and, even in the unfortunate circumstances of 1540, Humayun halted there briefly in his father’s garden while fleeing from Agra towards temporary exile in Iran.

It was an enticing site physically as well as spiritually, with its lake providing the pleasant breezes that the palaces were designed to catch. Although it is a little hard to imagine today, with the lake now completely dried up, Fatehpur-Sikri was as much a wa-
terfront city as the other great Mughal centers of Delhi and Agra, which both lie on the banks of the River Jamna. More importantly, Fatehpur-Sikri was also part of a “royal corridor” stretching from Agra to Ajmer. It was along this route that Akbar used to make an annual pilgrimage on foot from Agra, still the great metropolitan center of the time as well as a bustling river port, to the tomb of Khwaja Muin ad-Din Chishti in Ajmer (nos. 13 and 32), from where the road continued on to Ahmadabad in Gujarat and the great seaports of Cambay and Surat. Fatehpur-Sikri can thus be seen as an almost perfect symbolic and formal point of connection between the older spiritual and political axes of Ajmer and Agra.

For Akbar, who once travelled from Fatehpur-Sikri to Gujarat in just nine marches, the thirty-eight kilometers (twenty-four miles) separating Agra from the new capital was a comfortable day’s journey. He could have made the trip in a matter of hours, if necessary, in spite of the frequently heavy traffic on
nately note of the sources mention the planners and architects who devised the city of Fatehpur-Sikri and its individual structures. The histories are equally unhelpful regarding the question of who administered the burgeoning city until Shaykh Ibrahim, a nephew of Shaykh Salim and one of Akbar's leading soldiers and courtiers, was appointed its governor in 1578. It is impossible to underestimate Akbar's keen interest in architecture and his awareness of its recent history. In the space of roughly six years he ordered the construction of a pleasure palace at Nagarchin, the reconstruction of the fort at Agra, and then the creation of a whole new city at Sikri, no doubt in full awareness of the popular sentiment that "the standard of measure of men is assessed by the worth of their building." Throughout the 1560s he had also visited (and in most cases added to his dominion) some of the most impressive cities in India, such as the Muslim centers of Lahore, Ahmadabad, Mandsaur and Jaunpur, and the magnificent Rajput strongholds of Chittorgarh and Ramthambhor. Akbar's childhood memories of Kabul, Qandahar, Ghazni, and Balkh, and Babur's descriptions of the great Timurid cities of Herat and Samarqand must have further whetted his appetite for construction.

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It was an enticing site physically as well as spiritually, with its lake providing the pleasant breezes that the palaces were designed to catch. Although it is a little hard to imagine today, with the lake now completely dried up, Fatehpur-Sikri was as much a waterfront city as the other great Mughal centers of Delhi and Agra, which both lie on the banks of the River Jumna. More importantly, Fatehpur-Sikri was also part of a "royal corridor" stretching from Agra to Ajmer. It was along this route that Akbar used to make an annual pilgrimage on foot from Agra, still the great metropolital center of the time as well as a bustling river port, to the tomb of Khwaja Main ad-Din Chishti in Ajmer (Nos. 13 and 32), from where the road continued on to Ahmadabad in Gujarat and the great seaports of Cambay and Surat. Fatehpur-Sikri can thus be seen as an almost perfect symbolic and formal point of connection between the older spiritual and political axes of Ajmer and Agra.

For Akbar, who once travelled from Fatehpur-Sikri to Gujarat in just nine marches, the thirty-eight kilometers (twenty-four miles) separating Agra from the new capital was a comfortable day's journey. He could have made the trip in a matter of hours, if necessary, in spite of the frequently heavy traffic on the road.

16. Akbar Inspecting the Construction of Fatehpur-Sikri
(Akbarnama, ca. 1590).
PLAN OF FATEHPUR-SIKRI

Many apocryphal names have been given to the buildings of Fatehpur-Sikri, causing much confusion. The plans reproduced here have the same numbering system that appears in our Fatehpur-Sikri: A Sourcebook, where only structures whose names are known from contemporary descriptions, or whose functions are easily identifiable, were included in the key. Here, however, we have added a number of buildings mentioned in our text that have yet to be conclusively identified. We have also substituted English translations for some Persian names.

Surveyed and drawn by Attilio Perrucci.

15 Mosque known as the Stonecutters' Mosque
17 Jamia Masjid
18 Tomb of Shah Jahan ad-Din Chishti
19 Tomb of Nawab Islam Khan
22 Elephant Gate with House of the Kettledrum
25 Unidentified gate
30 Mosque known as the Nagina Masjid
31 Unidentified gate
33 Unidentified gate
36 Unidentified pavilion ("Panch Mahal")
37 Unidentified gate
38 Unidentified pavilion ("Maryam's House")
40 Unidentified garden
45 Unidentified viaduct
46 Harem(?)
KEY TO PLANS

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40 Unidentified garden
43 Unidentified viaduct
46 Harem
47 Baths attached to No. 46 ("Jodh Bai's Palace")
50 Akbar's Private Palace ("Jodh Bai's Palace")
51 Baths attached to No. 10
56 Apar Talan tank
60 Chappar gate board
63 Unidentified pavilion ("Divan-i-Khas")
66 State Hall
67 Baths attached to No. 61
70 Unidentified baths
71 Unidentified tank
72 Unidentified step-well
74 Unidentified gate
75 Bazar
76 Chahar Soq marketplace
77 Bazar
84 Unidentified baths
85 Unidentified tank
88 Waterworks adjacent to Elephant Gate
89 Well attached to waterworks
92 Unidentified baths
94 Unidentified baths
98 Unidentified baths
100 Unidentified tower ("Hiran Minar")
103 Caravanserai
104 Unidentified garden
106 Maydan
107 Mosque known as Nawab Ibrahim's Mosque
108 Unidentified baths
this main trade route. According to the English merchant Ralph Fitch, who visited Fatehpur-Sikri in 1584, this road was virtually one long bazaar. The first thing to catch the attention of a Sikri-bound traveller would have been the strange mileposts along the side of the road; from each one of these, according to contemporary accounts, projected a profusion of deer antlers, allegedly all taken from animals hunted by Akbar himself. The few squat towers that still remain have been stripped of their decoration but originally they would have appeared as fine visual paws to the many literati who travelled this road to the emperor’s court, for their very description, “antler tower” (mil-i shakhl), is also a chronogram for the date of their construction in 1573-74 (A.H. 981).

Akbar ordered one of these towers to be built at intervals of one khana (approximately three kilometers or two miles) along the entire three-hundred-sixty-five-kilometer (two-hundred-twenty-eight-mile) distance from Agra to Ajmer. After every thirty-two kilometers (twenty miles) a resthouse was added, partly to lessen the need for Akbar to take along his full tent camp every time he made the pilgrimage to the tomb of Khwaja Moin ud-Din Chishti. The resthouses would have been equally appreciated by many other travellers, but the quirky spiked towers were apparently too much for some courtiers. True to form, the irascible Badami lamented, “Would that instead of these he had ordered gardens and caravanserais to be made!”

Also along the road from Agra was the garden built by Akbar’s mother Maryam Makani at Bustan-saray, near the modern town of Kirauli, about sixteen kilometers (ten miles) from Fatehpur-Sikri. In some respects Bustan-saray marked the true ceremonial boundary of Fatehpur-Sikri. It was here, for example, that Akbar came for New Year celebrations in 1584, and it was probably also one of the staging posts sixteen kilometers (ten miles) outside the city where Akbar officially welcomed important guests in true Timurid fashion. When Mirza Salayman, the elderly Timurid ruler of Badakshan, arrived in 1581 to seek aid from Akbar, the population of Fatehpur-Sikri witnessed one of the grandest displays of Mughal pomp and etiquette of Akbar’s entire reign.

On that day, as Akbar and his assembled nobles rode out the socially prescribed four or five kunal to meet the Mirza, according to Badashi, 5,000 elephants, some with housings of European velvet, and some with Turkish cloth of gold, and some with chains of gold and silver, and with black and white fringes hung on their heads and necks, were drawn up in a line on both sides of the road: also Arabian and Persian horses with golden saddles of like splendour. And between each pair of elephants they placed a car of cheetahs with golden collars, and coverings of velvet and fine linen, and an open-car with fillets of embroidered gold. And the whole face of the wilderness, in this manner, became like a vision of Spring, and the desert and hill-country like the reflection of a Nile bed.

Akbar then dismounted from his horse to embrace the Mirza, absolved him from performing the customary forms of salutation, and accorded him the added privilege of riding alongside him into the city proper, where another round of celebrations began. During the visit, Akbar tried to impress his honored guest by reviving an old Chaghatai custom and spreading the royal tables in one of the audience halls so that the high nobles and generals could eat together. “But,” Badami noted sarcastically, “when the Mirza departed, all these (revised customs) departed too.”

Upon reaching the outer walls of Fatehpur-Sikri (see plan, p. 42), which stretch for eleven kilometers (seven miles) around all sides of the city except the northwest, where the lakeshore once extended, a traveller was faced with a choice of massive red sandstone gateways. Continuing straight ahead, the road through the Agra Gate (now the main entrance for all motor traffic) leads up to the rear of the palace complex and the enclosed plain to the southeast of the ridge, but it appears that the main route originally branched off to the right shortly before the Agri Gate. This road, past a particularly impressive stretch of wall leading up to and over the eastern end of the ridge, heads towards two gates into the old town of Sikri: the Red Gate and the Delhi Gate farther on around the northeastern corner of the city wall.

Leaving Sikri, with its modest mosques and graves dating back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the traveller soon found himself proceeding towards the southwest, with the ridge on his left and the lake with Babur’s platform, which still existed up until at least the 1820s, on his right. It is along this route that the spectacular skyline of Fatehpur-Sikri first becomes apparent. It was surely this view, commencing with the darya (small cupolas raised on four columns), domes, and tiled roofs of the palace complex and concluding with the extraordinary silhouette of the great Jami Masjid, that inspired Qandahari to compare Fatehpur-Sikri with “Paradise on the brink of the precipice.”

Slightly more than four hundred and fifty-five meters (five hundred yards) from the village of Sikri stands a curious tower popularly known as the “Hiran Minar” (Deer Tower; Plan: 100). Over eighteen meters (sixty feet) high, its round body bristles with
this main trade route. According to the English mer-
dant Richard Fitch, who visited Fatehpur-Sikri in 1584, this road was virtually the only one in the area. The first thing to catch the attention of a Sirk-i-bound traveler would have been the strange mileposts along the side of the road; from each of one of these, according to contemporary accounts, projected a profusion of deer antlers, all neatly taken from animals hunted by Akbar himself. The few square towers that still remain have been stripped of their decoration but originally they would have appeared as fine visual points to the many travelers who traveled this road to the emperor’s court, for their very description, “antler tower” (tali-shakib), is also a chronogram for the date of their construction in 1573-74 (A.H. 981).

Akbar ordered one of these towers to be built at intervals of one kwareh (approximately three kilometers or two miles) along the entire three-hundred-sixty-five-kilometer (two-hundred-twenty-eight-mile) distance from Agra to Ajmer. After every thirty-two kilometers (twenty miles) a resthouse was added, partly to lessen the need for Akbar to take along his full tent camp every time he made the pilgrimage to the tomb of Khwaja Mian ad-Din Chishti.22 The rest-
houses would have been relatively crowded by many other travelers, but the quickly spiked towers were apparently too much for some courtiers. True to form, the irascible Badauni lamented, “Would that instead of these he had ordered gardens and caravanserais to be made.”23

Also along the route from Agra was the garden built by Akbar’s mother Maryam Makani at Bustan-saray, near the modern town of Kiraoli, about sixteen kilometers (ten miles) outside the city where Akbar officially welcomed important guests in true Timurid fashion. When Mirza Sulayman, the elderly Timurid ruler of Badakhshan, arrived in 1583 to seek aid from Akbar, the population of Fatehpur-Sikri wit-
nessed one of the most spectacular displays of Mughal pomp and etiquette of Akbar’s entire reign.

On that day, as Akbar and his assembled nobles rode out the socially prescribed four or five kwarehs to meet the Mirza, according to Badauni,

2,000 elephants, some with howitzers of European velvet, and some with Turkish death of gold, and some with chains of gold and silver, and with black and white fringes hung on their heads and necks, were drawn up in a line on both sides [of the road]: also Arabian and Venetian horses with golden saddles of like splendour. And between each pair of elephants they placed a car of cheetahs with golden cloaks and coverings of velvet and fine linen, and an oxen-car with fillets of embroidered gold. And the whole face of the wilderness, in this manner, became like a vision of Spring, and the desert and hill-country like the reflection of a mighty

bed.22

Akbar then disembarked from his horse to embrace the Mirza, absolved him from performing the customary forms of salutation, and accorded him the added privilege of riding alongside him to the city proper, where another reception was held. During the visit, Akbar tried to impress his honored guest by reviving an old Chaghatai custom and spreading the royal tables in one of the audience halls so that the high nobles and generals could eat together. “But,” Badauni noted sarcastically, “when the Mirza de-
parted, all these (revised customs) departed too.”23

Upon reaching the outer walls of Fatehpur-Sikri (see plan, p. 43), which stretch for eleven kilome-
ters (seven miles) around all sides of the city except the northwester, where the lakeshore once extended, a traveller was faced with a choice of massive red sandstone gateways. Continuing straight ahead, the road through the Agra Gate (now the main entrance for all motor traffic) leads to the palace complex and the enclosed plain to the southeast of the ridge, but it appears that the main route originally branched off to the right shortly before the Agra Gate. This road, past a particularly impressive stretch of wall leading up and over the eastern end of the ridge, heads towards two gates into the old town of Sikri: the Red Gate and the Delhi Gate farther on around the north-
corner of the city wall.

Leaving Sikri, with its modest mosques and graves dating back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the traveller soon found himself proceeding towards the southwest, with the ridge on his left and the lake with Babur’s platform, which still exists up until at least the 1860s, on his right. It is along this route that the spectacular skyline of Fatehpur-Sikri first becomes apparent. It was surely this view, commencing with the chatri (small cupola raised on four columns), domes, and tiled roofs of the palace complex and concluding with the extraordinary silhouette of the great Jama Masjid, that inspired Qandahari to com-
pare Fatehpur-Sikri with “Paradise on the brink of the precipice.”24

Slightly more than four hundred and fifty-five meters (five hundred yards) from the village of Sikri stands a curious tower popularly known as the “Hiran Minar” (Deer Tower; Plan: 100).25 Over eighteen meters (sixty feet) high, its round body bristles with stones that suggest elephant tusks but also bring to mind the mileposts along the road to Agra. From the sixteenth-century traveller proceeded to the adjacent caravanserai (Plan: 103) whose entrance faces across the main road towards the lake. Within this huge structure, whose open central courtyard is alm-

ighty three-meter (eighty-yards) square, was housed a wide variety of people and goods. The Jesuit

father among others, were lodged there upon their arrival at Fatehpur-Sikri, until they complained to Akbar about the excessive noise. Nearby the caravanserai was also the mausoleum (Plan: 106), a huge open space where Akbar engaged in a number of public, or semi-public, activities. On one such occasion events took a tragic turn when upwards of one hundred thousand poor and needy citizens gathered for a distribution of alms; in the ensuing crush eighty people were trampled to death.26 First and foremost among the uses of the mausoleum, however, was for the playing of polo, which Akbar had elevated in status beyond the mere pursuit of amusement. As Abdul Fadl noted, “men of more exalted views see in it a means of learning promptitude and decision. It tests the value of a man, and strengthens bonds of friend-
ship. Here is the very pride of this game.”27 Externally, the game adds to the splendour of the Court; but viewed from a higher point, it reveals concealed talents.”28 True to his character, Akbar was also partial to playing polo at night, an added pleasure made possible by an ingenious illuminated ball that had been devised in the mid-1650s.29

Apart from elephant fights and gladiatorial battles which continued, accompanied by the rhythm of four pairs of drums, until death befall one of the combat-
ants, the mausoleum was also used for displaying the brilliance, both in acrobatics and plumage, of the imperial pigeons. In this sport, where the birds turn somersaults together in the air and perform various ornithological tricks, Akbar prided himself on possessing trained pigeons that put to shame those of his great-grandfather Umar Shaktar Minza, who had died in an accident while tending to his birds.29 Recent survey has also revealed the possi-
ble existence of a chain of gardens in the area adjoining the southwestern wall of the caravanserai (Plan: 104, 105), and it may be that one of these is Babur’s original “Garden of Victory.”

Farther to the south of some of these gardens, the road continues on by the lake up to the Ajmer Gate from which, as the name implies, the road leads to Ajmer, the rest of Rajasthan, and eventually Gujarat. It was along this road that Akbar returned home after his conquest of Gujarat in 1573. A double-page miniature from the ca. 1920 Akhnatun depicting the emperor’s arrival in Fatehpur-Sikri also gives a remarkable bird’s eye view of this public area between the city and the lake (fig. 3). Designed by Kesu the Elder, with the right and left halved painted by Nar Singh and Jagjivan respectively, the scene is viewed from a location near the lakeshore. In the right half, Akbar, still on horse-
back, is welcomed by his three young sons (the third prince, Daniyal, had been born in 1573), who have approached him on foot. High above to the right a tower is a dome of the Tami Mausoleum while at the very left of the page can be seen the “Hiran Minar.” The left half of the composition offers a won-
derful vista of the Elephant Gate (Plan: 23) as seen from the vicinity of the tower. At the very right of the page a man disappears through the main entrance of the caravanserai, while merchants sell pan (betel leaves wrapped around condiments) by the side of the paved ramp that rises dramatically to the gateway along the northeastern wall of the caravanserai. On the left of this rampway, Kesu has shown the same waterworks that appeared in Tulsî the Elder’s design for the miniature illustrating the construction of Fatehpur-Sikri (no. 15).

The Elephant Gate is the first barrier between the great public space by the edge of the lake, and the zone of the city restricted to the royal family and the nobil-
ity. Its name is derived from the two huge, but now much damaged, figures of elephants that stand on either side of the outer face of the gate. The use of such figures outside the gate of a palace or fortress appears to be a genuinely Indian architectural device that Babur first noticed during his visit to Gwalior; it was first used by Akbar during repairs to the fort in Agra, where riders—said to represent Jaimal and Patta, the two Raiput heroes of the battle of Chittorgarh—were added on the elephant’s backs (see below, p. 19).

Located above the gate was the House of the Kettledrum,30 where a boisterous orchestra went through an elaborate multi-part performance at key times during the day and night. The sound of the band, which included about twenty pairs of kettledrums as well as a variety of horns and reed instru-
ments, ranged in mood from the frenetic to the soul-
ful, and provided an essential part of Fatehpur-Sikri’s atmosphere.

Behind the Elephant Gate two important paths converge in an open area with a number of pavilions (Plan: 26-29) that probably housed such administra-
tive departments as the Office of Administration, where city council meetings were monitored, and official documents affixed with the
imperial seal. These paths lead to elite ridge-top residential areas. The first one, where a number of houses and public baths still stand, is located in the triangle of land overlooking the caravanserai and bordered by the palace and the northern wall of the Jami Masjid. To reach the second area, which stretches along the northern end of the ridge almost up to the Agra Gate, one first has to pass through a high plastered archway (Plan: 25) directly behind the Elephant Gate and then underneath a viaduct that comes down from the main palace enclosure. Internal divisions must have been complex in these residential areas for there were at least three major Muslim factions at Akbar’s court as well as members of the newly allied Rajput-Hindu aristocracy. The main Muslim groups were the Tuiranis (Chaghatay Turkish speakers from Central Asia), the Iranis (Persian speakers from Iran and present-day western Afghanistan and eastern Iraq), and the Indian-born Muslims. The Tuiranis, who were in the ascendancy under Babur and Humayun, and the Indians were Sunni Muslims, but many of the Iranis were Shias, another possible source of tension.25

It was in a house in one of these areas that Prince Salim was married to the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das of Amber in 1586. On this occasion Akbar honored the Raja by visiting his mansion, scattering gold, pearls, and gems among the onlookers along the way from the imperial palace. In return, the Raja gave as his daughter’s dowry “several strings of horses, and a hundred elephants, and boys and girls of Abyssinia, India, and Circassia, and all sorts of golden vessels set with jewels, and jewels, and utensils of gold, and vessels of silver, and all sorts of stuff, the quantity of

![Image of a scene from Akbar’s court](image-url)


a) I.S. 2-1896 110/117 (left)
b) I.S. 2-1896 111/117 (right)
imperial seal. These paths lead to elite ridge-top residential areas. The first one, where a number of houses and public baths still stand, is located in the triangle of land overlooking the caravan area and bordered by the palace and the northern wall of the Jamé Masjid. To reach the second area, which stretches along the northern end of the ridge almost up to the Agra Gate, one first has to pass through a high plastered archway (Plan: 21) directly behind the Elephant Gate and then underneath a viaduct that comes down from the main palace enclosure. Internal divisions must have been complex in these residential areas for there were at least three major Muslim factions at Akbar's court as well as members of the newly allied Rajput Hindu aristocracy. The main Muslim groups were the Turanis (Chaghhatay Turkish speakers from Central Asia), the Iranis (Persian speakers from Iran and present-day western Afghanistan and eastern Iraq), and the Indian-born Muslims. The Turanis, who were in the ascendency under Babur and Humayun, and the Iranis were Sunni Muslims, but many of the Iranis were Shi'ah, another possible source of tension.  

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Between the above-mentioned archway and the viaduct is a small open junction. Moving on from here, and passing under the viaduct, one immediately encounters the main gateway of the palace (Plan: 21, now blocked up with modern masonry) that marks the barrier between the semi-public areas of Fatehpur-Sikri and the private zones of the imperial palace. From here Akbar's route into the palace proper took him up through a series of three more small gates to the very top of the ridge. Here the emperor would emerge at the northwest corner of the small courtyard containing the exquisitely proportioned stone pavilion popularly known as "Maryam's House" or the Sanurva Makian (Plan: 58). Standing before this compact building, which might be the "country-house" that Monserrate described as the first imperial structure built in Fatehpur-Sikri, Akbar would be in the true center of his palace complex.  

The abandoned structures, studded with the remains of gardens, that are described today as monuments of the "streetless ghost town" of Fatehpur-Sikri are actually only the remains of Akbar's central palace enclosure. Measuring approximately three hundred and forty meters (three hundred and seventy yards) across from east to west and two hundred and seventy-five meters (three hundred yards) from north to south, the complex spreads back across the full width of the ridge from the Elephant Gate. The buildings, exquisitely fashioned out of the rich, red Sikri sandstone, stand in almost pristine condition. Although they lack occupants, furnishings, and, more importantly, the sounds and smells of the 17th century, no other site in India evokes so vividly the architectural and social nuances of the Mughal court. Richly tailed tones of red dominate one's first impressions, uniting the diverse forms such as pillars, dome, pavilion, and verandah into a series of expansive courtyards. At this level the effect is extraordinarily bold, especially the skillfully massed red roofing, sharply silhouetted against the blue sky at the edge of the ridge. Upon closer inspection one is also dazzled by the brilliance of the surface treatment. Carved vegetal and geometric ornament excites the beholder with both its bold qualities of form and its razor-sharp technique. Inside, the faded remains of extremely fine wall paintings hint at an additional hidden brilliance.  

The many fanciful names that later became attached to the palace buildings of Fatehpur-Sikri, mostly during the first half of the nineteenth century, make the study and discussion of the imperial enclosure difficult. The exact name and function of a number of these buildings remain unknown. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the contemporary accounts of the city reveals a clear picture of the main divisions of function and access that were intended during the planning of Fatehpur-Sikri when Akbar "drew the line of its foundation on the paper of fancy." The same sources give an equally lively account of Akbar's court in action at Fatehpur-Sikri.  

Monserrate divides the complex into four major palaces. In his account—perhaps the best contemporary overview of the imperial enclosure—he writes that its wall "easily embraces four great royal dwellings, of which the King's own palace is the largest and the finest. The second palace belongs to the queens, and the third to the royal princes, whilst the fourth is used as a store house and museum. The main functional division, however, was between private and public areas; the delineation of boundaries that determined who was able to view Akbar, and who was able to interact with him. The court etiquette was extremely strict, and complex, in these matters, for, according to Monserrate, Akbar "always took the greatest pains to imitate, even in the minutest details, the traditional system of Timurid (Timur)."  

The emperor granted two audiences daily, one open to the general public and another closed to all but his leading nobles. The first took place as soon as Akbar had finished his morning devotions and fulfilled what Ablul Fazi considered to be a function crucial to the well-being of the state, "it is a pledge that the three branches of the government are properly looked after, and enables subjects personally to apply for redress of their grievances. Admiration to the ruler of the land is for the success of his government what irrigation is for a flower-bed; it is the field, on which the hopes of the nation ripen into fruit."  

This first occasion of the day was not, however, so much a meeting with the general public as an opportunity for Akbar to show himself, at a safe distance, to the general public standing outside the palace walls. The similarity of this practice to certain Hindu forms of worship was not lost on Ablul Fazi, who actually goes on to describe this performance by the Hindi word darshan, meaning the viewing or worship of a sacred image. Furthermore, Badami uses the Hindi word parvada to describe the window in which Akbar made these appearances. Fuyay's assertion to the effect that "see Akbar and you see God" takes on an added  

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significance when viewed against these ritualized performances. Badauni also implies that Akbar's devotions included a form of sun-worship, a ritual that Montesquieu describes as being performed in "a wooden building of ingenious workmanship" that had been added on the roof of his palace.44

The exact location of this _jharokha_ window has yet to be conclusively identified, but if we are correct in believing that the largest building in the compound, popularly known as "Jodh Bai's Palace" (Plan: 60), was Akbar's main private residence, then either of the two balcony windows on its southeast corner seems to be a logical choice, especially considering their proximity to the palace wall. If Akbar did indeed worship the sun, and one does need to keep in mind Badauni's personal vendetta against Akbar's alleged heterodoxy when reading such accusations, the window on the palace's eastern façade further suggests itself as a perfect place from which to view the rising sun.

The second, more exclusive, audience was generally held in the morning but according to circumstances it could be delayed until the evening or later in the night. The location of these meetings remains hard to identify, and they may in fact have occurred in a number of places depending upon who the participants were. In all probability, a good deal of this activity, along with other important large-scale events, was consigned to the State Hall (Plan: 62), a large open quadangle measuring approximately one hundred meters (one hundred and ten yards) long and fifty meters (fifty-five yards) wide at the eastern extremity of the palace. Abul Fazl described the courtyard, with its many bays and an elevated pavilion set into the corner of the western wall, as the _davatkhana_ (also translatable as the "Abode of Fortune"). It appears, however, that different terms employed by other Mughal historians, such as Badauni's _dumshkhan_, also refer to the same structure.42 Today one may also enter the State Hall through gates cut into its south and east walls at a later date but the original entrance leads into the very northwest corner of the quadangle.

The State Hall was the main theatre of public interaction within the palace, and as such witness to a wide range of events, not always entirely orthodox. Badauni, for example, mentions in passing that the Friday congregational prayers were frequently said there rather than in the mosque.43 This in itself is not surprising, for it is a conveniently located space large enough to hold a sizable assembly and, more importantly, is aligned facing west towards Mecca just like the mosque itself. However, when the State Hall is viewed as a surrogate mosque, some intriguing questions arise. Could it be a pure coincidence that directly in the middle of the western wall of the courtyard, towards which the assembly would pray, is the pavilion in which Akbar would have been seated? With his citizens prostrated towards him in prayer, Akbar must have revelled in the ironical pun of their repeated chant "Allahu akbar", meaning "God is great," but also construable as "Akbar is God!"

Another curious event in the State Hall is illustrated in the Akbarnama by a miniature designed by the great master Basawan and painted by Mansur (no. 17). In 1571 Ibrahim Husayn Mirza, a descendant of Timur who had settled in India, continued to instigate anti-government activities and was joined in rebellion by his younger brother Manas Husayn Mirza. Eventually the latter was captured in the Punjab and brought to Fatehpur-Sikri by Husayan Quli Khan, the governor of Lahore, shortly after the emperor arrived back from his conquest of Gujarat. The miniature shows Manas Husayn and a large group of co-conspirators, wrapped in animal skins by way of punishment and humiliation, being presented in the State Hall by Husayn Quli Khan. The passage in the Akbarnama illustrated here describes the prisoners as being wrapped in cowhides but Basawan apparently decided to draw instead from his own, fuller, memory of the event, which excited great amusement at court, and depicted the sad rebels in a far more splendid array of skins.44

The large courtyard behind and to the west of the State Hall is one of the most fascinating areas in Fatehpur-Sikri, although perhaps also the hardest to interpret. Presumably it was originally semi-private and pleasure-oriented in nature, but many of the internal barriers and connectors that might give further clues to its original use have since collapsed or been altered in subsequent repair work. Within this area one finds, among other structures, a unique single-pillared pavilion,45 the man-sized game board on which Akbar and his courtiers played the game of _chaupar_ (similar to pachisi), and the small pond or tank known as the Anup Talau, which Akbar had filled with gold, silver and copper coins during a fit of extravagance in 1579-80 (Plan: 63, 65, 66). Adjacent to the western wall of the courtyard stands the magnificent four-story structure topped by a domed _chahar_ now known as the "Panch Mahal" (The Palace of Five Levels; Plan: 46). As a group, the buildings in and around this courtyard form a passage of architecture unique in Islamic India, and display perfectly the ex-

significance when viewed against these ritualized performances. Badauni also implies that Akbar's devotions included a form of sun-worship, a ritual that Monserrat describes as being performed in "a wooden building of ingenious workmanship" that had been added on the roof of his palace. The exact location of this jharokha window has yet to be conclusively identified, but if we are correct in believing that the largest building in the compound, popularly known as "Jodhi Bai's Palace" (Plan: 50), was Akbar's main private residence, then either of the two balconied windows on its southeast corner seems to be a logical choice, especially considering their proximity to the palace wall. If Akbar did indeed worship the sun, and one does need to keep in mind Badauni's personal vendetta against Akbar's alleged heterodoxy when reading such accusations, the window on the palace's eastern facade further suggests itself as a perfect place from which to view the rising sun.

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perimentation and yearning for new forms that characterize Akbar's personality during the Fatehpur-Sikri years.

Impressive as these stone structures are, they do not give the complete picture of the palace as Akbar lived in it. Apart from their inner furnishings, virtually every building at Fatehpur-Sikri had some form of temporary exterior appendage such as an awning to provide shade from the sun, or a screen to give added privacy or help define the all-important zones of access. In the center of the large courtyards it is likely that whole tents and open pavilions were set up, something that must have been very comforting to the Mughal courtiers who still spent a large part of the year on the road in their magnificently organized tented camps.

Temporary decoration was particularly in evidence during the great festivals, the most extravagantly celebrated of which was the Persian New Year. For this festival, Nizam ad-Din Ahmad wrote:

The walls and pillars of the halls of the public and private palaces were distributed among the amirs, and being draped in rich fabrics, and painted curtains, were beautifully adorned; and were decorated in such a way that the spectators on seeing them were filled with wonder and admiration. The courtyards of the palaces were adorned with pavilions, and hangings of fabrics of gold embroidery and gold tussles; and a golden throne inlaid with emeralds and rubies was placed under them; and they became the object of envy of the higher paradise.

These beautiful mansions remained decorated for a period of eighteen days, and they were adorned during the nights by many coloured shades. His Majesty went there once or twice every day and night, and enjoyed social pleasure; and musicians of Persia and India were in attendance.

On the anniversary of Akbar's accession to power another grand feast was held and as part of the festivities a special bazaar selling goods from all over the known world was assembled, which the women of the harem were invited to attend first. According to Abul Fazl, Akbar also used such days "to select any articles he wishes to buy, or to fix the price of things and thus add to his knowledge. The secrets of the empire, the character of the people, the good and bad qualities of each office and workshop, will then appear." Afterwards, similar bazaars were opened for the male courtiers.

In his semi-public activities at court, Akbar was always surrounded by a large number of people. Twenty or so bodyguards were constantly in attendance, even though the emperor himself was well armed, and an equal number of courtiers would have been at his side. The prescribed court etiquette also called for the presence of entertainers such as wrestlers, musicians, jugglers and acrobats. All accounts agree that the court was constantly thronged with a vast crowd. Akbar, however, was always the focus of attention, whether seated cross-legged on his low rug-draped throne or promenading in a unique assortment of clothing that was often quite outranonish, and at least partially self-designed. Monserrate wrote that in contempt of earlier traditions Akbar, "wears garments of silk, beautifully embroidered in gold. His military cloak comes down only as far as the knee, according to the Christian fashion; and his boots cover his ankles completely. Moreover, he himself designed the fashion and shape of these boots. He wears gold ornaments, pearls and jewellery. Baqai adds that at Fatehpur-Sikri Akbar took to choosing the color of his clothes according to the symbolic color of the day's regent planet, the revival of a practice initiated by Humayun.

Little is known about Akbar's private life except that it was spent between a number of secluded apartments, not necessarily housed in the same building, and the harem, which can be identified with the long open structure adjoining Akbar's main palace at the southeast corner of the palace compound (Plan: 46). This building, with its numerous private cells and baths, was zealously guarded on the inside by eunuchs and on the outside by loyal Rajput soldiers and nobles such as Raisal Darbari (xso. 54). In general, Akbar spent the late evening hostting discussions and the early morning in private contemplation, after he had been awakened well before dawn by special musical performances. At which times he visited the harem is unclear, as is the location of his actual bedchamber. During the night Hindu and Muslim mystics were occasionally hoisted up to this room on a small cot (sharaf) in order to talk with Akbar while suspended outside his window. As was the tradition in other parts of the Muslim world, Akbar passed many relaxing hours in the baths behind his private residence and may also have joined his senior courtiers in the baths that adjoin the southwest corner of the State Hall (Plan: 31, 67). Akbar usually ate alone, his food having been sealed and secured against poison by the cook and then conveyed to his apartment by a chain of attendants. On certain days his diet was entirely vegetarian. His drinking water was always brought from the Ganges, the most sacred river of the Hindus.

Immediately to the west of the palace complex, on the highest part of the hill, is Akbar's enormous Jami Masjid (Plan: 17). Its monumental gateway, which
perimination and yearning for new forms that characterized Akbar's personality during the Fatehpur-Sikri years. Impressive as these stone structures are, they do not give the complete picture of the palace as Akbar lived in it. Apart from their inner furnishings, virtually every building in Fatehpur-Sikri had some form of temporary exterior appendage such as an awning to provide shade from the sun, or a screen to give added privacy or help define the all-important zones of access. 46 In the center of the large courtyards it is likely that whole tents and open pavilions were set up, something that must have been very comforting to the Mughal courtiers who still spent a large part of the year on the road in their magnificently organized tent camps.

Temporary decoration was particularly in evidence during the great festivals, the most extravagantly cele-
brated of which was the Persian New Year. For this festival, Nizam-ad-Din Ahmad wrote,

The walls and pillars of the halls of the public and private palaces were distributed among the artists, and being draped in rich fabrics, and painted curtains, were beautifully adorned; and were decorated in such a way that the spec-
tators seated on them were filled with wonder and admiration. The courtyards of the palaces were adorned with pavi-
ions, and awnings of fabrics of gold embroidery and gold tissue; and a golden throne with inlaid emeralds and rubies was placed under them; and they became the object of envy of the higher paradise.

These beautiful mansions remained decorated for a period of eighteen days; and they were adorned during the nights by many coloured shades. His Majesty went there once or twice every day and night, and enjoyed social plea-
sure; and musicians of Persia and India were in atten-
dance. 47

On the anniversary of Akbar's accession to power another grand feast was held and as part of the fest-
ivities a special bazaar selling goods from all over the known world was held, which the women of the harem were invited to attend first. According to Abu Fazl, Akbar also used such days "to select any articles he wishes to buy, or to fix the price of things and thus add to his knowledge. The secrets of the empire, the character of the people, the good and bad qualities of each office and workshop, will then appear." 48 After-
wards, similar bazaars were opened for the male courtiers.

In his semi-public activities at court, Akbar was always surrounded by a large number of people. Twenty or so bodyguards were constantly in attend-
dance, even though the emperor himself was well armed, and an equal number of courtiers would have

riser thirty-four meters (one hundred and fift-
teet) feet) above the level of the mosque, and forty-five meters (one hundred fifty feet) above the road below. Passing through this gateway popularly called the "Balrand Darwaza" (The Lofty Gateway), one enters a huge courtyard measuring approximately ninety-five meters (one hundred and five yards) by one hundred and eighteen meters (one hundred and thirty yards) and paved in the red sandstone from which the mosque is built. Nestled within this vast expanse of earthy red is the pearl-like white marble tomb of Shahjahan, who died in 1628 (Plan: 18). Even today traditional songs in praise of the Shahjahan are per-
formed by singers seated on the white marble apron that extends in front of the tomb with its single dome and exquisite lattice-work screens.

It was in the Jamn Masjid in 1579 that Akbar decided to read the Friday sermon (khutba) out of his desire to be seen to follow the example of Timur and other illustrious sultans. Badauni, who thoroughly disap-
proved of Akbar's affinity of such things notes that Akbar was barely able to stammer his way through three verses of a poem composed for the occasion by Fazi before he gave up, but this is not mentioned in other accounts of the event. All writers do, however, agree as to the content of those verses, which ended with the favorite court phrase:

Almighty God, that on me the kingship conferred, A mind of wisdom, and an arm of strength conferred, To justice and equity. He did me guide, Expelled all but justice from my thought. His attributes beyond all comprehension soar, Exalted is His Majesty, Alhul-Akbar (Almighty God). 52

Akbar's spiritual endeavors were not exclusively concerned with the "escapism". His drinking water was always brought from the Ganges, the most sacred river of the Hindus.

Immediately to the west of the palace complex, on the highest part of the hill, is Akbar's enormous Jama Masjid (Plan: 17). Its monumental gateway, which erosion of the status and power of orthodox Islam at the Maghul court in Fatehpur-Sikri and the compati-
tant strengthening of Akbar's position. The bound-
aries between politics and the "material world," on one hand and religion and the "spiritual world" on the other, gradually begin to blur.

The House of Worship was completed within a year. A general proclamation was then issued for "all orders and sects of mankind"—those who searched after spiritual and physical truth, and those of the common people who sought for an awakening, and the inquirers of every sect "to assemble there weekly on the designated "night of illumination." The various participants were divided and seated, according to their affiliations, on the four sides of the building. Akbar adjudicated the frequent disputes as he moved around from one group to another. For about the first three years the discussions, which generally lasted the whole of Friday night, appear to have been restricted to members of the Muslim community, including or-
thesis mulus, Sufi mystics, jurists, and philosophers. But later a number of non-Muslim theologians, in-
cluding Hindus, Jews, Christians, and Zoroas-
trians, joined them in the House of Worship.

The first construction of Akbar's greatness by Abu Fazl is illustrated in the Akbarnama of 1604 by the artist Nar Singh, who sets the scene in an open courtyard under a full moon (no. 18). The painting depicts the point in the narrative where Father Ac
avia, seated in the upper left corner with another member of the Jesuit mission, has just aroused a par-
ticularly hostile response from his Muslim opponents, who are shown seated around the lower edge of the carpet, during an argument over what constitutes the true word of God. Akbar presides from under a small canopy, looking out over a battlefield strewn with holy books. Eventually Father Acquaviva suggested that both the Gospels and the Koran be subjected to a test of the "escape the Ganges, Alhul-Akbar, nor were they restricted to the routine performance of the five required daily prayers. Upon his return to Fatehpur-Sikri in 1573 from his annual pilgrimage to Ajmer, Akbar ordered the construction of the House of Worship (exact loca-
tion unknown), and it is fair to say that intellectual life in the capital was never quite the same again. No other building or part of the court routine at Fatehpur-Sikri is discussed at such great length by Akbar historians. Together with the formulation of a new code of relig-
ious behavior known as the din-i sultan, often mis-
interpreted as an attempt to found a new religion, this move caused a great deal of concern and bitterness among the orthodox. In both cases one notices the
assured the Mughals for the first time free access to seaport facilities and thus a share of the lucrative Indian Ocean trade. This led to greater contact with Europeans, whom Akbar had met for the first time during his campaign in Gujarat the previous year. In a further attempt to increase state revenue, which was always a priority in view of Akbar’s massive spending on such costly projects as the construction of Fatehpur-Sikri and a general court taste for luxury, the cultivation of crops was rationalized in 1574-75 to encourage higher yields.

In 1576 Bengal was finally added to the Mughal dominions, but the years preceding this event were marked by indications that Akbar had yet to fully articulate the future direction of his newly stabilized empire. He appeared to vacillate between reform and tradition. On the one hand, land reform strengthened his position over jagirdars (holders of non-hereditary land grants) and the initiation of debates in the House of Worship in 1573 undermined the orthodox Turani establishment, whose political strength was clearly waning, along with their Chaghatai customs. However, Akbar re-imposed the jizya tax on non-Muslims in 1575 and the following year he briefly considered making the pilgrimage to Mecca, both moves that would have appealed to the more orthodox members of his court.

Towards the end of the 1570s, a more consistent policy emerged, the more radical and unorthodox approach having won the day. The new direction chosen by Akbar was not at all popular in many circles and it almost resulted in his being overthrown and replaced by a more conservative and pliable monarch. An event that appears to have played an important role in setting Akbar on this risky course of action is a mystical experience he had while hunting in the Punjab in 1578. Just as the hunt reached its climax, and the slaughter of the animals in the temporary corral was about to begin, a “sublime joy took possession of his bodily frame. The attraction (jannah) of cognition of God cast its ray.” Akbar ordered the animals set free and by all accounts he came out of his experience a changed man.

In June the following year, Akbar read the Friday sermon in the Jamai Masjied and just two months later the Decree of Infallibility was issued. This document granted Akbar the right to make binding decisions on religious matters should there be an irresistible difference of opinion among the members of the ulama. In September, Akbar made his final pilgrimage to Ajmer, although he had actually wanted to give up the practice that year and only changed his mind in order to assuage the growing public uncertainty and anxiety over his religious actions. During the course of the year, Akbar also re-imposed the jizya tax, the favorite political football of the day.

Feeling was already running too high, however, and open rebellion broke out in January, 1578 in the eastern provinces of Bihar and Bengal. Akbar’s predicament was made even more awkward when the religious judge of Jaunpur declared revolt against Akbar lawful, due to the alleged gravity of his unorthodox activities. The aim of the rebels was to replace Akbar with his half-brother Mirza Hakim Muhammad, who was then the governor of Kabul.

Consequently Akbar marched on Kabul with Prince Salim in February, 1581 and eventually achieved a decisive victory, but not before the vivid foundation of his rule in India had reached the point of crumbling. After visiting the tomb of Babur in Kabul, Akbar set off for Fatehpur-Sikri where he arrived to a spectacular series of welcoming ceremonies:

On this day of joy the great officers, the loyal servants, and others were drawn up in two sides of the way for a distance of four kos from the city. The mountain-like elephants stood there in their majesty... The noise of the drums and the melodies of the magician-like musicians gave forth news of joy. Crowds of men were gathered in astonishment on the roofs and at the doors. At the end of the day he sat in the lofty hall (daurathanaa) on the throne of sovereignty. He dispensed justice by rewarding the loyal and punishing the hostile.58

The point would not have been lost on Akbar that he had retained his throne only through the strong support of the Indian-born Muslims and his new Rajput allies, the Irani and Turani nobles having remained divided in loyalty during the course of the rebellion.59

After the suppression of this highly threatening rebellion, life at Fatehpur-Sikri returned to a more subdued pace and Akbar continued with the liberal policies of conciliation and consolidation that characterized the years he spent in his new capital. One such move was a thorough overhaul in 1585 of the administrative system so that, in the words of Abul Fazl, "in a short time the outer world attained an excellent management and the spiritual world a new development. . . The wicked descended into the hollow of ignominy, and the good were exalted.”60 The three princes and loyal courtiers, including Abu-i-Samad, were placed in key positions of power.

During the years in which Akbar resided at Fatehpur-Sikri the arts flourished consistently under his generous patronage. In music, Tansen (No. 55) co-

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During the years in which Akbar resided at Fatehpur-Sikri the arts flourished consistently under his generous patronage. In music, Tansen (no. 85) continued to reign supreme and worked in a manner that was to profoundly influence the subsequent development of Indian classical music. Similar developments were taking place in the field of dance, and a profusion of poets worked under Akbar’s patronage, although many of them had actually been inherited by Akbar from such previous patrons as his father Humayun, his uncle Hindal and even his former regent Bayram Khan. The Translation Bureau began the translation of many Indian texts into Persian for the first time and Akbar also started to take an interest in the writing of Moghul and world history. Artistic production at Fatehpur-Sikri was divided between the tarabkhana (library), the karkhana (workshops), the Mint, and even the Office of Administration, all of which were lavishly financed and lovingly supervised by Akbar.

Akbar’s great experiment at Fatehpur-Sikri came to an end in September, 1584, less than fifteen years after the city was founded. In response to the death of the troublesome Mirza Hakim Muhammad, and the series of vital political options and problems that this event opened up in the northwest, Akbar set off with his army for Lahore and almost never visited Fatehpur-Sikri again. No conscious decision to abandon Fatehpur-Sikri was ever made, and Akbar’s followers were genuinely surprised when he did not return there after the completion of his initial campaign in the Punjab.

After Akbar left Fatehpur-Sikri, military activity replaced social and administrative reform as his major concern. From 1586 onwards, operating from his new northern base in Lahore, Akbar once more harbored great ambitions for increasing his territory and replenishing his treasury, through renewed conquest. Although his success continued, his victories in Kashmir in the north (1586), Orissa in the east (1590), Sind, Makran and Baluchistan in the west (1592–94), and then the recapture of Qandahar (1595), were neither as decisive nor as strategically important as the ones he had gained earlier in his reign. After these successes he still dreamt of expanding the frontiers of his empire northwards into Central Asia and southwards beyond the Narmada River into the Deccan, or central plateau of peninsular India. His aims were kept in check, however, by fears of an Uzbek invasion from the north, by the growing Portuguese presence along the western coast of India, and by almost constant problems with his sons, who were all showing signs of various stages of alcoholism. Almost no progress was ever made towards recapturing the Central Asian homelands beyond Qandahar and therefore most later military activity was
directed toward the Deccan, a situation that prompted Akbar to move his capital back to Agra in 1598. Mughal forces had actually been deployed in the south under the command of Prince Murad since 1591 and Berar was captured in 1596. Murad's grasp of affairs was failing, however, and shortly before Abul Fazl arrived to take him back to Agra in 1599 he died of alcohol-induced delirium tremens near Daulatabad. Nevertheless, Abul Fazl managed to lead the imperial forces to victory in Ahmadnagar the following year and Akbar personally led the forces that succeeded in reducing Khondsheh in early 1601 after a taxing nine-month siege, thus creating the third new southern province.

Akbar spent most of the last five years of his life facing a revolt by his son Salim, who even set up his own court in Allahabad, where he felt secure and settled enough to establish a separate atelier of painters. In 1603, Akbar only just managed to dissuade him from continuing with a threatening march on Agra itself, but in the same year Salim did succeed in arranging the assassination of Abul Fazl on his way back from the Deccan, a move that caused Akbar untold grief. Although a brief rapprochement between father and son was arranged in 1603 by some of the leading women of the family, it was only after Prince Daniyal finally succumbed to alcohol in April, 1604, that Akbar was fully reconciled to Salim becoming his official heir. On October 31, 1605, Akbar passed away on his sixty-third solar birthday after a protracted bout of dysentery. Despite a brief challenge from proponents of his own son, Khurram, the Suki-born Prince Salim succeeded his father on the Mughal throne. With a reference to the Mughals' supposedly divine origin, he noted in one of the first decisions he made that, "inasmuch as the business of kings is the controlling of the world, I should give myself the name of Jahangir (World-seizer) and make my title of honour (insaaf) Nuru-d-din [Light of the Faith], inasmuch as my sitting on the throne coincided with rising of the great light."

Despite Akbar's absence during the last twenty years of his reign, Fatehpur-Sikri did not die and even during the reigns of Jahangir (1605-27) and Shah Jahan (1627-58) the city continued to be an important dynastic center. Akbar's mother, Maryam Makani, appears to have spent much of the remaining two and a half decades of her life there, and, in 1649, Jahangir spent a number of months there with Prince Khurram, the future Shah Jahan, who by all accounts had been Akbar's favorite grandson. During that stay Khurram's birthday was celebrated with the traditional weighing ceremonies in what was to become an annual event there. Throughout his reign Shah Jahan made many other visits to Fatehpur-Sikri both to hunt tigers in the surrounding forests and waterfowl on the lake, and to visit the tomb of Shaykh Salim. It was only during the reign of Aurangzeb (r. 1618-1707) that Fatehpur-Sikri lost its status as a living imperial center.
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View of the northwest corner of the Palace Complex