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0521615348 - Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World

Ruby Lal

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## CHAPTER 1

**Introduction**

This book seeks to construct a history of Mughal domestic life in the time of the first three Mughal kings of India, Babur (1487–1530), Humayun (1508–56), and Akbar (1556–1605). It is a study of the “domestic” as a discursive and performed site, which seeks to demonstrate the centrality of this space in the making of the Mughal imperium.

Mughal women and men were partners in the production not only of heirs but also of imperial genealogies and new royal rituals, in the establishment of new traditions, and even the practice of governance. Paradoxically, however, women are depicted as being so invested in the future of the empire – in the form of giving birth to illustrious progeny, and in the maintenance of “established” traditions – that their own present tends to be erased in the very performance of their royalty and womanhood. In a classic replica of patriarchal norms, women’s lives are not for living, but for creating other lives, for preserving and nurturing the future of the generations past, and the generations to come.

A history of Mughal domestic life has not so far been written, for reasons that I hope to clarify in the following pages. And yet ironically, while we have no sustained investigation of the details of domestic arrangements and familial affairs, we live with a widely accepted caricature of a mysterious and unchanging *haram*, which is supposed to represent the sum of Mughal private life from the beginning to the end of this remote yet magnificent imperial formation.<sup>1</sup>

Take this statement on the *haram*, as it appears in one of the few academic studies of the subject in English:

The term Mughal Harem conjures up a vision of a sequestered place ensconcing beautiful forms in mysterious magnificence . . . the young girls were not exposed to all the celebrations in the *Mahal* [palace] in which sex orgies dominated or the master bargained for beauty and love on occasions like Nauroz and Khushrooz . . . Naturally, every lady of consequence tried to win the master’s undivided love and openly

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. Nath, *Private Life of the Mughals 1526–1803 A.D.* (Jaipur, 1994), a study entirely devoted to the *haram*.

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 2 Domesticity and power in the early Mughal world

competed to gain ascendancy in the harem. Women's beauty gave them a power as undefined as unique. ... There were other tensions, though not so deep in effect. These may be classed under the generic term jealousy. ... But on this we need not dwell much for the harem was not meant for the old and ailing. It was meant to be a bright place, an abode of the young and beautiful, an harbour of pleasure and retreat for joy.<sup>2</sup>

Extracted from a book published at the end of the 1980s, the above account might be dismissed as the view of a somewhat traditional historian, were its assumptions not so widely and consistently shared.

There is one sentence on the *haram* in the volume on Mughal India, published in the New Cambridge History of India series in 1993: "Ideally, the harem provided a respite, a retreat for the nobleman and his closest male relatives – a retreat of grace, beauty, and order designed to refresh the males of the household."<sup>3</sup> Again, consider R. Nath's description of the *haram* in his *Private Life of the Mughals* (1994). Although Nath comments parenthetically that the "Mughal harem was a very delicate matter and a sweeping generalisation is hardly justified," his book delineates a *haram* that can only be described as fantasaical. "Though Akbar never indulged in excessive sex, he had a taste for young beautiful women whose company he liked. He had in his harem a large number of handsome concubines and slave-girls for his pleasure, besides more than a dozen legally married wives."<sup>4</sup> The emptying of all sense of social life and contradiction continues in his sketching of the "private life" of Jahangir, the fourth Mughal king. This emperor was "a sensuous person and he excessively indulged both in wine and women ..." writes Nath. "By a routine estimate, he had nearly 300 young and beautiful women attached to his bed, an incomprehensible figure in the modern age. This shows his over-indulgence in sex and his excessive engagement in the harem."<sup>5</sup>

A final example, from Ellison Banks Findly's remarks on the Mughal *haram* in her biography of Nur Jahan, Jahangir's wife, should suffice to demonstrate the pervasive hold of this caricatured representation. It is notable that this is one of the first studies that engages critically with Nur Jahan's life and her exercise of power. Nonetheless, Findly continues to work with a simple, stereotypical understanding of the *haram*. "Finding a productive and satisfying place in a society where pleasure (in all its forms) was the main competitive commodity was a substantial task," she writes. The presence of women improved the business: "this process was surely a more vibrant and honest affair given that it took place in the company of women."<sup>6</sup> But "pleasure (in all its forms)" remains the "main competitive commodity."

<sup>2</sup> K. S. Lal, *The Mughal Harem* (Delhi, 1988), pp. 19, 135, 139, 143, and 152.

<sup>3</sup> John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Nath, *Private Life*, p. 13. <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India* (New York, 1993), p. 89.

Cambridge University Press

0521615348 - Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World

Ruby Lal

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction 3

Further, “the enjoyment of palace life was enhanced . . . by the frequent use of drugs and alcohol. Intemperance was the Mughal family’s main affliction, and despite public abjurations and the clear ban on the use of liquor by Islam, it remained not only a private curse but a public habit.”<sup>7</sup> And finally this classic statement, worthy of the most Orientalist of colonial renderings (easily replicated in the case of other imperial *harams* the world over<sup>8</sup>): “Jahangir’s harem was, from all accounts, a rowdy and exuberant place to live and Nur Jahan’s fulsome charisma played out profitably against its many walls.”<sup>9</sup>

In these accounts, a “pleasure principle” constitutes the essence of the *haram*. There is little sense of history in the discussion of the domain of Mughal domestic relations, the establishment and institutionalization of the *haram*, its changing meanings, and contexts.<sup>10</sup> In fact, as the following chapters will show, the *haram* as well-structured physical quarters – and as distinct feminine space demarcated from more clearly marked male domains – came to be institutionalized only during Akbar’s reign. In the chronicles of his peripatetic predecessors, we find a wide range of other terms (including the *haram*) that are carefully deployed according to specific narrative contexts. These terms evoke a discriminating sense of near and distant relatives, generations of kinsfolk at work in imperial designs, their association and invocation of a spectacular genealogy, a sense of belongingness to a named bloodline, as well as of interaction and interdependence in noble communities. What is striking in the early chronicles is that there is no fixed realm such as the *haram*; it is under Akbar that the *haram* becomes a predominant symbol of the Mughal domestic world. Despite this history, the Mughal *haram* comes to be denoted in the unchanging form that Lal and others have handed down to us.

The received image of the Mughal *haram* is an apposite entry point for the present study. It leads me straightaway to the two broad propositions that run through this book. First, I am concerned to challenge some of the assumptions that have commonly been made about the existence of separate “public” and “private” domains in the Mughal world. As noted above, our understanding of the latter has been collapsed into the stereotypical image of something called the *haram*. I examine here the complex set of relations in which women of the nobility were involved in their everyday existence, the

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> The following two studies provide a good critique of the stereotypical rendering of the *haram*: Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York, 1993); Kathryn Babayan, “The ‘Aqa’id al-Nisa: A Glimpse at Safavid Women in Local Isfahani Culture,” in Gavin R.G. Hambly (ed.), *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (New York, 1998), Introduction.

<sup>9</sup> Findly, *Nur Jahan*, p. 126.

<sup>10</sup> Nath, *Private Life*, p. 11, makes the passing comment that the Mughal *haram* was “founded and developed, in the right sense of the term” under Akbar, but there is little detailing of this development, and as the above phrase shows, he works with a persisting sense of the essential *haram* already being given.

## 4 Domesticity and power in the early Mughal world

public-political affairs that were necessarily conducted in the “inner” quarters as well as in the (outer) courts, and through all this the very different meanings attaching to domestic life. I wish to point to the richness of many of these activities, and to their complex and contradictory character, thus showing that domestic life is not an endless journey between bedroom and kitchen, with the primary function of raising children and caring for husbands.

If domestic life is multifaceted and more contested than the flattened picture of the *haram* suggests, it is also not frozen in time. Domestic life, like political structures, is historically constituted through multifarious struggles and changes. My proposition is that the very coming into being of a more institutionalized and a regulated form of Mughal domestic world was a part of the making of a new Mughal monarchy. This book shows that there were different stages, as well as diverse and complicated procedures, that went into the making of this imperial polity. It was over time that the Mughals became the “Great Mughals” of popular text and memory. It may be noted, for example, that the *Akbarnama* was the first officially commissioned history of the Mughal era; and, again, it was only under Akbar that an elaborate network of statutes arose, regulating everything from the assignment of places to different nobles at the court to the branding of horses. Small indicators of the institutionalization of empire. Thus was the framework of a paramount, majestic polity established. The domestic world and its denizens were not likely to be exempt from this move towards regulation.

The changing political situation and power of a new dynastic regime is indexed in the domestic sphere in several ways: not only in the titles and honors bestowed upon women and other members of the household, but also in the ascription of roles and performance of activities and, indeed, in the living quarters assigned to them. When the term *haram* comes to be applied regularly to the women of the royal household (in Akbar’s time), it indicates a changed political and social situation. The term now also comes to describe the residential quarters of the women – a practice that was hardly possible in Babur’s peripatetic reign and still not noticeable in Humayun’s. It is in Akbar’s time that a clearly demarcated, “sacred incarcerated” sphere emerges as the space of the Mughal domestic – although, as already noted, this segregation is anachronistically assumed as the reigning characteristic of the Mughal domestic world for the entire tenure of Mughal rule.

In the following pages, I posit a domain of “domestic life” as a heuristic device. This domain may be thought of as a necessary reproductive, affective unit, dealing with familial relations, reproductive rights and duties, fostering and care, and suffused by a sense of a close intimate circle. This is a realm in which women have a much more obvious presence than in certain other Mughal activities, like military campaigns or the display of power and grandeur in the court. I have marked out this area of domestic life as separate, or separable, from other activities and forms of sociality that Mughal men and women were engaged in. I do this only to allow a long overdue investigation

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction 5

of the formation of subjects and subjectivities, and of the making of new imperial structures, institutions and practices, in an “invisible” space that has so far been treated as always already given.

The burden of my argument in this book, however, is that no such separate domain exists during the time of the early Mughals – at least not until the establishment of Akbar’s new imperial order. I have therefore also attempted throughout these pages to adopt a strategy of writing that displaces, or questions, the very notion of a separate domestic sphere, or of distinct public and private domains, even as I use terms like “domestic life,” or “familial affairs,” or “household matters,” to point to the reproductive and affective relationships and activities of the Mughal kings’ intimate circle.

It will be clear that terms such as “public–private,” “private life,” and so on, cannot be applied readily to the lives and experiences of the people under investigation. I have used the term “domestic” throughout these pages because we need a shorthand term in order to initiate a discussion, and because this term comes with less historiographical baggage than that associated with “public and private” or “private life.” It may thus allow us to think of a multifaceted and historically changing domain without very clearly marked boundaries. For the domestic life of the early Mughals is perhaps most usefully conceptualized as a realm in which an array of old and new traditions, intricate configurations of critical power structures, and striking convergences between the prescriptive and practice come together to play a central part in the making of Mughal subjects – men and women.

It is in this context that I raise the question of the meaning of public-private distinctions and how to engage effectively with these terms in a pre-modern context. I also ask what it meant to be a mother, a married woman, a wife, a queen, an elder (or a “junior”) in early Mughal India. My hypothesis is a simple one: that the meanings of motherhood, wifehood, love, marriage, filial relationships, and sexuality, are not given to us in some fixed, unchanging form. These meanings are historically and culturally constructed – in the light of different experiences, needs, and conditions.

The question of language is important for this exercise. I analyze an extensive Persian vocabulary in the course of building my argument. The changing terminology of the contemporary records projects the extent to which differences in the physical, political, and cultural circumstances of the early Mughals affected the making of domestic relationships. Varied contexts and diverse units of reference were invoked in thinking of kin and intimate relations during the period under study. It is through an appreciation of these that the domestic world itself may be conceptualized.

This book is addressed to three kinds of audience. To begin with, it should be of interest to scholars and students working on the history of Mughal India. At the same time, I hope it will speak to two other, more dispersed, groups of scholars and students, concerned, on the one hand, with the history and diversity of different Islamic societies and polities and, on the other, with

## 6 Domesticity and power in the early Mughal world

questions of gender relations, domestic arrangements, and the organization of “public” and “private” in the pre-modern world. The very diversity of these potential audiences poses something of a challenge, since they work with rather different theoretical lenses. Let me note something of the mode of debate among each of these intellectual groups, showing thereby the possibility of my own engagement and conversation with them.

### Towards a social history of the Mughals

Mainstream Mughal historiography continues to this day to be engaged in a fairly conservative manner with the political and economic bases of Mughal power. Issues of social and cultural history, not to mention questions of gender relations, have yet to find a significant place in this writing. In thinking of the reasons for the particular emphases that Mughal history writing has come to acquire, the problem of the inadequacy of source materials is often advanced as being central to the issue. “How will you write a history of the domestic life of the Mughals?” a leading historian of Mughal India asked me when I began this research. “There are no sources for it.” This book argues that, in spite of this historiographical ultimatum, a history of domestic life can be written – indeed must be written – for a better understanding of Mughal history as a whole. As I hope to show, the problem is not one regarding sources at all; it is about the politics of history writing. The archive exists for very different kinds of histories, as long as the relevant questions are asked.

Since the 1950s, historians of Mughal India have concentrated heavily on the political-administrative institutions of Mughal rule. Closely allied to these are studies focused on agrarian conditions, economic change, trade relations and the attendant class struggles. There has been considerable writing in the area of what might be called a socioeconomic history, both in the context of agrarian relations and in that of trade and trading networks.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Writings on the political-administrative institutions of the Mughals are extensive. Some of the important examples are: M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Bombay, 1966); Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court 1707–1740* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, New Delhi, 1972); I. H. Qureshi, *The Administration of the Mughul Empire* (Lohanipur, 1973); John F. Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda* (Oxford, 1975); and Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–48* (Delhi, 1986). For some useful recent bibliographies, see Richards, *Mughal Empire*; Hermann Kulke (ed.), *The State in India 1000–1700* (Delhi, 1997); Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State, 1526–1750* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Delhi, 2000).

Among a plethora of writings on economic and social history in the context of agrarian relations, some of the most notable works are: Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556–1707* (Bombay, 1963); Michael Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berkeley, 1976); Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat: c. 1700–1750* (Wiesbaden, 1979); for a general survey, see Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge History of India*, vol. 1: *c. 1200–c. 1750* (Cambridge, 1982).



Apart from the close and detailed investigation of politico-military, administrative, revenue and agrarian matters, the Mughal court has also been studied selectively as a site for factions and party politics. In most of the histories of the Mughal court and “political” institutions, two common features may be discerned. First, the premise for investigation is that these institutions are seats exclusively of high politics. Second, the histories show these institutional sites as fully developed from the moment of their birth, fixed, and uncomplicated in form. All one notices is a change of individuals, factions, and perhaps physical location. Many of these histories begin with Akbar, the third Mughal (whose imperium and power was truly impressive), and a time when the institutions of the grand Mughals were coming to be securely established.<sup>12</sup> Numerous books and articles have been written of the glory of the Mughal empire, presenting it as it appears in the hey-day of Akbar’s rule from Fatehpur-Sikri and Agra, with all its regal paraphernalia given from birth; and the picture is projected backwards to cover the time of his two predecessors.

This presentation of a splendid Mughal empire as an unchanging entity for all time hardly speaks to the making of institutions and their changing character. Adjacent to the above genre are other Mughal histories in which scholars have made an effort to study the evolution of political culture built around forms of ritual sovereignty, literary pursuits, art and architectural splendor. A certain attention to ceremonial as it related to the political, and accounts of marriage aimed primarily at political aggrandizement or consolidation, may be located in these writings.<sup>13</sup>

What happens to the history of Mughal social life? In the received literature, this history takes two main forms. The first is a statement that appears under the generic title “social conditions and life of the people” but amounts to no more than a journalistic listing of items of daily use, festivities, and pastimes. These are described in such general, commonsense terms that they give the reader a history that seems to be valid for all times. In compendiums such as the volume on the Mughal Empire, in the *Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan Series* on the life and culture of Indian people, chapters entitled

<sup>12</sup> Alam and Subrahmanyam note that the great bulk of writings in the Mughal state focus on two periods: the reign of Akbar (1556–1605), and that of his great-grandson Aurangzeb (1658–1707). The “pre-Akbar period,” the half-century after 1605, as well as the years after 1707, have been neglected in Mughal historiography. Alam and Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>13</sup> To take a couple of examples: John F. Richards, “The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir,” in John F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison, 1978); Norman P. Ziegler, “Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties During the Mughal Period,” in Richards (ed.), *Kingship and Authority*. In a similar way, discussions of religion are often centered on the development and place of religion in politics, and the various aspects of the religious policy of Mughal kings. Writings in this area are extensive as well. See, for example, S. R. Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn, New York, 1972); S. A. A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar’s Reign* (New Delhi, 1975).

## 8 Domesticity and power in the early Mughal world

“Social Condition” are usually the last ones.<sup>14</sup> The broad entries of the chapter “Social Condition” in this particular book are dress, toilets, diet, ornaments, kitchens and utensils, intoxicants, fairs and festivals, sports, games and pastimes, customs and ceremonies, social etiquette and manners, modes of traveling and conveyance, postal system, position of women, and education.<sup>15</sup> One cannot but be struck by the ahistoricity of a compilation of this kind.<sup>16</sup>

More directly relevant to the subject of the current investigation is a second strand in Mughal social history, which is best described as belonging to the genre of biographies of women worthies. Studies of this kind focus upon the visibility of imperial women and their power. An interesting feature of this writing is that it has come to be seen by male historians as sufficient to its subject (that is women), and there has been little attempt to rethink long-held assumptions about Mughal court and society. This reluctance to think about women’s histories as “history” is obviously not restricted to Mughal historiography alone.

Bonnie G. Smith’s point about the fate of early practitioners of gender history in the West – that “prestigious professional history based on deep reflection and weighty political topics was for men, while ‘amateurish’ women pursued a more ‘superficial’ kind of writing about the past”<sup>17</sup> – applies equally well to the way in which Mughal women’s biographical accounts have been received. The most useful of these, aimed at “bringing women to life,” were never thought of as serious mainstream histories, nor even as an important part of thinking “Mughal history.” In general, such biographies seem to exist in a separate sphere, all of its own. At best they are seen as (mild) “correctives”.<sup>18</sup> there were women too, of course – some of them quite talented!

There is greater irony here. While these studies of Mughal women opened up a neglected area of investigation, the women biographers themselves excluded the possibility of querying or even raising new questions about the

<sup>14</sup> R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *The Mughul Empire* (Bombay, 1974). <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. XXI.

<sup>16</sup> Within this genre of Mughal social histories, another remaindered category may be noted: “culture,” which refers to works of art, architecture and intellectual life. This area has become the domain of specialists, an exclusive preserve of technical “art” history, and its historians. Histories of Mughal art as well as that of architecture are represented as, in the main, the legitimizing indicator of the rule of an emperor and the glory of his rule – to be seen in wondrous art, and splendid buildings designed by his skilled craftsmen. Questioning parts of this legacy, in a recently edited anthology of essays on architectural history of India, Monica Juneja makes some important suggestions regarding the intellectual importance of architectural history for all historians; Monica Juneja (ed.), *Architecture in Medieval India* (Delhi, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), pp. 1, 6. For an extensive discussion of gender-based power struggles in (American) academic settings, see Joan Scott, “The Campaign Against Political Correctness: What’s Really at Stake,” *Radical History Review*, 54 (1992).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.



accepted boundaries of family and household, public and private spheres, gender relations and political power. In biographies of Mughal women, one finds little to suggest that royal women were a crucial component of the Mughal world – of imperial designs and the making of this monarchy – and therefore that an investigation of their lives and conditions is vital to any understanding of it.

Rekha Misra wrote an early book in this style of making women “visible,” with an appropriately indicative title, *Women in Mughal India* (1967).<sup>19</sup> It is a study of aristocratic Mughal women covering the reigns of the grand Mughals, which gives us details of their political activities, commercial engagements, education and artistic talents, construction and supervision of buildings, charities, and organization of marriages. Misra wrote about women mentioned in imperial records and in the narratives of the European travelers. The author presents her study in the form of biographical sketches of the royal women, unsurprisingly ending up replicating the sources.

Twenty-three years later this was still the dominant trend in writings on Mughal women. In 1990, Renuka Nath continued to write in the biographical mode for elite women, merely adding a few more characters to Misra’s list. The title of her book, *Notable Mughal and Hindu Women in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (1990) provides a good indication of its contents.<sup>20</sup> In 1993, the same year that Leslie Peirce’s extraordinary book on the Ottoman imperial *haram* came out (a book I take up for fuller discussion in the next section), Ellison Banks Findly produced another biography in the same mold as her biographer-predecessors. The subject here is Nur Jahan, the “Empress of Mughal India,” as Findly calls her.<sup>21</sup> The historian’s chronological summary of the high points of Nur Jahan’s life in the prologue to her book is instructive:

After four years of obscurity, the woman who came to be Nur Jahan met Jahangir at a palace bazaar in the spring of 1611 and the two were married a few months later. She was in her midthirties, had already had one child, and was to be Jahangir’s last and most influential wife. Almost at once, Nur Jahan and her cohorts took control of the government as Jahangir bowed to the effects of alcohol and opium. She minted coins, traded with foreign merchants, managed promotions and finances at the court, orchestrated new developments in art and religion, and laid out many of the Mughal gardens we now know. Her power over the emperor and in government affairs was almost complete, but came at the cost of internal tensions. Midway through the reign, her stepson Shah Jahan went into open rebellion and her ruling coalition fell apart as the couple increasingly spent their months in Kashmir. By the time Jahangir died in 1627, splintering of the familial center was so substantial that she had no real chance

<sup>19</sup> Rekha Misra, *Women in Mughal India 1526–1748 A.D.* (New Delhi, 1967).

<sup>20</sup> Renuka Nath, *Notable Mughal and Hindu Women in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries A.D.* (New Delhi, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> Findly, *Nur Jahan*.

Cambridge University Press

0521615348 - Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World

Ruby Lal

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 10 Domesticity and power in the early Mughal world

for power in the next reign. Nur Jahan was exiled to Lahore where she lived in seclusion with her daughter until her death in 1645.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of its brevity, this is a classic representation of Nur Jahan's life, one that may be found (with slight variations) in several other accounts.<sup>23</sup> All of these histories point to the central place that Nur Jahan came to acquire in the *haram* and court of Jahangir after her marriage. Her ascent to this position is portrayed as sudden, uncomplicated and yet almost miraculous – since it fits into no expected pattern. Even at the outset, one can discern Findly's unproblematic detailing of Nur Jahan's power, and ambition, as if all of these existed in a void (or at best, became possible due to her intimate relationship with Jahangir). Although the historian mentions the “many talented [Mughal] women,”<sup>24</sup> we are led to believe that Nur Jahan's power was a bolt from the blue, that there was no forerunner in this kind of practice of authority. Given the numerous examples of traditions of strong and influential royal women in Muslim societies contemporaneous with the Mughals, Findly's historical sketch of this unique empress is not very enlightening.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from the biographical histories of influential royal women, there have also been some studies of “private” life, and the *haram*. I cited extracts from a couple of these at the beginning of this chapter. Mughal private life and the *haram* appear here as nothing but a caricatured arena of fixed behavioral patterns, of unchanging and unmediated sexual and physical pleasure, a peculiarly static “feminine” domain of which a “history” is barely conceivable. The assumption behind these studies, clearly, is that activities and relationships here are fundamentally unchanging and that (almost before we start) we already know all there is to know about this domain. At the least, I hope, my book will dispel this notion by demonstrating that although there is a repetition in the activities and relationships of men and women (here as

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> See the following: Vincent A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India: From the Earliest Times to the End of 1911* (Oxford, 1920), pp. 376–377, 383, 385–386, and 394; Misra, *Women in Mughal India*, pp. 33–40; Chandra Pant, *Nur Jahan and Her Family* (Allahabad, 1978); Richards, *Mughal Empire*, pp. 102–103; Wiebke Walther, *Women in Islam* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 126–127.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>25</sup> As an aside, one might note that the tradition of powerful, visible women extends further back to the Mongol and Timurid periods. On Mongol women, see Morris Rossabi, “Kublai Khan and the Women in his Family,” in W. Bauer (ed.), *Studia Sino-Mongolica* (Wiesbaden, 1979); Mansura Haider, “The Mongol Traditions and Their Survival in Central Asia (XIV–XV Centuries),” *Central Asiatic Journal*, 28, 1–2 (1984); scholarly writings on Timurid women are extensive, see Priscilla P. Soucek, “Timurid Women: A Cultural Perspective,” in Hambly (ed.), *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*; Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles, 1989), especially pp. 74, 80, 84. On Turkish women in Central Asia from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries, see Isenbike Togan, “Turkic Dynasties: Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries,” *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Methodologies, Paradigms and Sources* (Leiden and Boston, 2003). See also the fantastic account of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo about his visit to the court of Timur, *Embassy to Tamerlane: 1403–1406*, trans. Guy Le Strange (London, 1928).