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AIPS Final Report

The generous support of the AIPS Junior Fellowship has helped me locate and examine artworks and manuscripts essential for my dissertation. My research focuses on iconic representations of Sufi saints in Indian miniature painting. These portraits have received relatively little scholarly attention, despite their proliferation from the 17th century onward. By surveying a wide selection of portraits of identifiable religious figures and connecting them to hagiographical literature my dissertation project attempts to reconstruct a more nuanced view of these iconic images and the milieu for which they were made.

My research also identifies a key historical moment in the evolution of this genre. The representation of Muslim saints took a decisive turn around 1640, under the patronage of the heir apparent to the Mughal throne, Dara Shikoh, and his elder sister, Jahanara Begum. Both art historical and textual evidence confirms that the imperial siblings were initiated into mysticism by Mullah Shah, a Sufi Shaykh whose influence aided in the development of this genre. Not only have I found and identified more than twenty paintings of Mullah Shah made by imperial Mughal artists, I have also discovered previously untranslated Persian manuscripts including two contemporary biographies of the saint and ten treatises written by the Mullah himself.

My original intention was to use the AIPS fellowship to survey artworks housed in collections throughout Europe. However, due to visa complications I was only able to travel to the UK and Ireland during the fellowship period. While initially frustrating, this limitation proved to be a blessing in disguise: rather than spreading myself thin doing a preliminary survey of European collections, I was able to examine paintings and key textual resources in depth. This was particularly useful when I began deciphering the original manuscripts of untranslated Persian texts by Mullah Shah, Jahanara and others. The main repositories that I visited included the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin; The Victoria & Albert Museum, London; The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; the British Museum, London; and the British Library, London.

Some of the literary resources that I examined include the biography of Mullah Shah written by his disciple Tawakkul Beg; a hagiographical account of the Chishti order of Sufism by Princess Jahanara; a manuscript containing ten treatises on Islamic metaphysics in *mathnawi* form by Mullah Shah, with his own signature and corrections; many paintings of Mullah Shah and other close members of his Sufi order made in both imperial Mughal ateliers as well as under regional patronage; and an album of 94 images of Sufi saints made for Tipu Sultan. During the fellowship period I also presented a paper introducing this genre of painting at the European Association of South Asian Archeology and Art (EASAA) conference in Wales, and received valuable feedback from scholars in the field.