

Evrengzib

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Dara Shukuh

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III. The Way of Tradition and the Path of Innovation

AURANGZEB AND DARAS HUKUH'S STRUGGLE FOR THE MUGHAL THRONE

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Every succession in the Mughal dynasty was a tensely anticipated event, a time of contestation and uncertainty that frequently erupted into violence and chaos.¹ As Timurids, the Mughals were inheritors of the difficulties attending the Central Asian tradition of collective sovereignty: in lieu of primogeniture (the automatic transfer of imperial power to the eldest son), the corporate dynastic structure and appanage practice (distribution of land and power among several members of the ruling family) central to the Timurid political system ensured that no succession had a predictable outcome. Princes plotted against each other, often long before the end of their father's reign, and each was supported by various factions and women in the royal family who, as you shall see, played a decisive if not always visible role.²

The war of succession between the four sons of Shahjahan (r. 1628–1658)—princes Dara Shukuh (d. 1659), Shah Shuja', Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), and Murad Bakhsh—was no different. When Shahjahan's health began to fail in 1658, all four sons began to maneuver against each other. After several battles, imprisonments, defections, pardons, hot pursuits, and continuously shifting alliances—all within the span of one year—Aurangzeb finally emerged as the uncontested victor in 1659 and had all rival claimants eliminated.³

Aurangzeb's long reign (lasting until his death in 1707) was defined by what some scholars have described as ineffective management of mounting pressures and crises—decentralization, rebellions, economic and financial problems, and a long, costly campaign in the Deccan. Others scholars have described his reign as marked by a broad policy of religious intolerance:⁴ Hindu temples were destroyed

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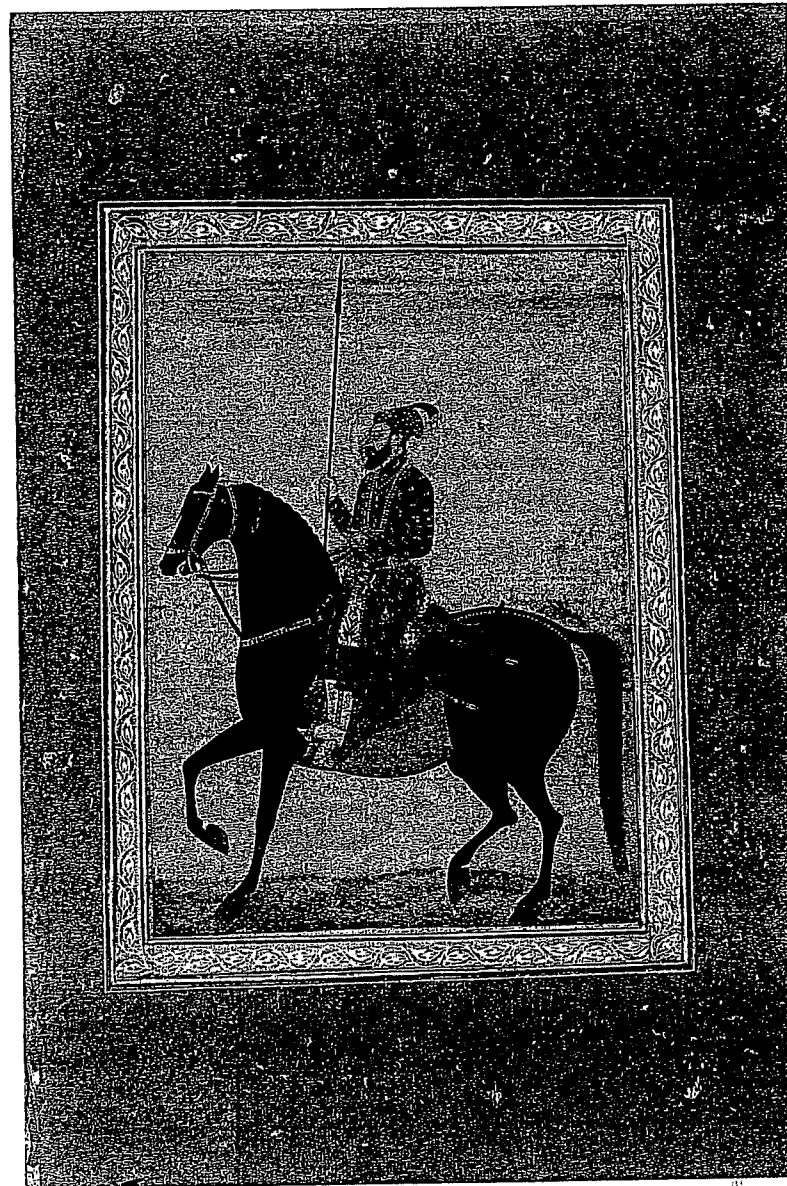


FIGURE 5.3 Equestrian portrait of Aurangzeb

Date: Seventeenth century

Place of origin: Attributed to India

Credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1925. 25.138.1

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