

Akbarnama

The ***Akbarnama*** which translates to *Book of Akbar*, is the official chronicle of the reign of Akbar, the third Mughal Emperor (r. 1556–1605), commissioned by Akbar himself by his court historian and biographer, Abul Fazl who was one of the *nine jewels in Akbar's court*. It was written in Persian, the literary language of the Mughals, and includes vivid and detailed descriptions of his life and times.^[1]

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History

The work was commissioned by Akbar, and written by Abul Fazl, one of the *Nine Jewels* (Hindi: Navaratnas) of Akbar's royal court. It is stated that the book took seven years to be completed. The original manuscripts contained many miniature paintings supporting the texts, thought to have been illustrated between c. 1592 and 1594 by at least forty-nine different artists from Akbar's studio,^[2] representing the best of the Mughal school of painting, and masters of the imperial workshop, including Basawan, whose use of portraiture in its illustrations was an innovation in Indian art.^[3]

After Akbar's death in 1605, the manuscript remained in the library of his son, Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) and later Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658). Today, the illustrated manuscript of *Akbarnma*, with 116 miniature paintings, is at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was bought by the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A) in 1896 from Mrs Frances Clarke, acquired by her husband upon his retirement from serving as Commissioner of Oudh (1858-1862). Soon after, the paintings and illuminated frontispiece were removed from the volume to be mounted and framed for display^[4]

Volumes I and II

The first volume of *Akbarnama* deals with the birth of Akbar, the history of Timur's family and the reigns of Babur and Humayun and the Suri sultans of Delhi. The second volume describes the detailed history of the reign of Akbar till 1602, and records the events during Akbar's reign. It also deals with that how Bairam Khan and Akbar won the battle of Panipat against Hemu an Indian warrior

Volume III: The *Ain-i-Akbari*

The third volume is named *Ā'in-i-Akbarī*, and details the administrative system of the Empire as well as containing the famous "Account of the Hindu Sciences". It also deals with Akbar's household, army, the revenues and the geography of the empire. It also produces rich details about the traditions and culture of the people living in India. It is famous for its rich statistical details about things as diverse as crop yields, prices, wages and revenues. Here Abu'l Fazl's ambition, in his own words, is: "It has long been the ambitious desire of my heart to pass in review to some extent, the general conditions of this vast country, and to record the opinions professed by the majority of the learned among the Hindus. I know not whether the love of my native land has been the attracting

influence or exactness of historical research and genuine truthfulness of narrative..." (*Āin-i-Akbarī*, translated by Heinrich Blochmann and Colonel Henry Sullivan Jarrett, Volume III, pp 7). In this section, he expounds the major beliefs of the six major Hindu philosophical schools of thought, and those of the Jains, Buddhists, and Nāstikas. He also gives several Indian accounts of geography, cosmography, and some tidbits on Indian aesthetic thought. Most of this information is derived from Sanskrit texts and knowledge systems. Abu'l Fazl admits that he did not know Sanskrit and it is thought that he accessed this information through intermediaries, likely Jains who were favoured at Akbar's court.

In his description of Hinduism, Abu'l Fazl tries to relate everything back to something that the Muslims could understand. Many of the orthodox Muslims thought that the Hindus were guilty of two of the greatest sins, polytheism and idolatry.^[5]

On the topic of idolatry Abu'l Fazl says that the symbols and images that the Hindus carry are not idols, but merely are there to keep their minds from wandering. He writes that only serving and worshipping God is required.^[6]

Abul Fazl also describes the Caste system to his readers. He writes the name, rank, and duties of each caste. He then goes on to describe the sixteen subclasses which come from intermarriage among the main four.^[7]

Abu'l Fazl next writes about Karma about which he writes, "This is a system of knowledge of an amazing and extraordinary character, in which the learned of Hindustan concur without dissenting opinion."^[7] He places the actions and what event they bring about in the next life into four different kinds. First, he writes many of the different ways in which a person from one class can be born into a different class in the next life and some of the ways in which a change in gender can be brought about. He classifies the second kind as the different diseases and sicknesses one suffers from. The third kind is actions which cause a woman to be barren, or the death of a child. And the fourth kind deals with money and generosity, or lack thereof.^[8]

The *Ain-i-Akbari* is currently housed in the Hazarduari Palace, in West Bengal.

The Akbarnama of Faizi Sirhindi

The *Akbarnama* of Shaikh Illahdad Faiz Sirhindi is another contemporary biography of the Mughal emperor Akbar. This work is mostly not original and basically a compilation from the *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* of Khwaja Nizam-ud-Din Ahmad and the more famous *Akbarnama* of Abu'l Fazl. The only original elements in this work are a few verses and some interesting stories. Very little is known about the writer of this *Akbarnama*. His father Mulla Ali Sher Sirhindi was a scholar and Khwaja Nizam-ud-Din Ahmad, the writer of the *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* was his student. He lived in Sirhind sarkar of Delhi Subah and held a *madad-i-ma'ash* (a land granted by the state for maintenance) village there. He accompanied his employer and patron Shaikh Farid Bokhari (who held the post of the *Bakhshi-ul-Mulk*) on his various services. His most important work is a dictionary, the *Madar-ul-Afazel*, completed in 1592. He started writing this *Akbarnama* at the age of 36 years. His work also ends in 1602 like the one of Abu'l Fazl. This work provides us some additional information regarding the services rendered by Shaikh Farid Bokhari. It also provides valuable information regarding the siege and capture of Asigarh.^[9]

Translations



Akbar on a hunt



Mughal Emperor Akbar crossing the river at night.

- Beveridge Henry. (tr.) (1902–39, Reprint 2010). *The Akbarnama of Abu-L-Fazl* in three volumes.
- *The History of Akbar, Volume 1* (the Akbarnama), edited and translated by Wheeler M. Thackston Murty Classical Library of India, Harvard University Press (January 2015), hardcover 656 pages, ISBN 9780674427754

References

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 2. "Akbar's mother travels by the boat to Agra" (<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9283/painting-akbars-mother-travels-by-boat/>). V & A Museum.
 3. Illustration from the Akbarnama: History of Akbar (http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_India/pages/India_12.shtml) Art Institute of Chicago
 4. "Conservation and Mounting of Leaves from the Akbarnama" (https://web.archive.org/web/20080324000916/http://www.vam.ac.uk/res_cons/conservation/journal/issue_24/akbarnama/index.html) *Conservation Journal* Victoria & Albert Museum, July 1997. Archived from the original (http://www.vam.ac.uk/res_cons/conservation/journal/issue_24/akbarnama/index.html) on 2008-03-24.
 5. Andrea; Overfield: "A Muslim's Description of Hindu Beliefs and Practices," "The Human Record," page 61.
 6. Fazl, A: "Akbarnama," Andrea; Overfield: "The Human Record," page 62.
 7. Fazl, A: "Akbarnama," Andrea; Overfield: "The Human Record," page 63.
 8. Fazl, A: "Akbarnama," Andrea; Overfield: "The Human Record," page 63-64.
 9. Majumdar, R.C. (ed.) (2007). *The Mughul Empire*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, ISBN 81-7276-407-1, p.7
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External links

- A resource site on *Akbarnama*, by Columbia University
- *Akabrnama* Online search through collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum
- Fazl, Abu'l (1877). *Akbarnamah (Persian)* Asiatic Society, Calcutta. Vol. 1, Vol. 2, Vol. I-III
- *Ain-e-Akbari*, English tr. by Colonel H. S. Jarrett The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta. 1948

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