

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Emperor Akbar's ecumenical approach to religion in general and his specific interest in Christianity were expressed in a number of ways during his long reign (1556–1605), the most important of which was perhaps his commission of the *Mir'āt al-quds* (Mirror of Holiness) from the Jesuit missionary Jerome Xavier. Such interest seems to have been unique, since no other Muslim ruler is known to have ordered the writing of a comparable text. Father Jerome's remarkable Persian Life of Christ is heavily indebted to the Gospels and reveals his close familiarity with the Vulgate Bible. Indeed, from a religious perspective, it might have been best to reproduce here the corresponding passages in the Douay-Rheims Bible, the standard translation of the Vulgate. However, the aim of the current study has been to translate and analyze Father Jerome's Life of Christ as a Persian text, not as a work of piety, and Father Jerome's relative unfamiliarity with Persian inevitably takes him some way from the original Latin. Our intention has been to present Father Jerome's Persian as accurately as possible, even if it does not always read smoothly. Moreover, many of his other sources were originally translated from Latin into Portuguese, and only then into Persian, which clearly allowed space for what some would classify as gaffes, or simply poor judgment. Religion is a personal matter and what may be accurate for one reader may be simply untruthful for another. When identifying his Biblical and other religious sources, a considerable space for interpretation has been allowed, but when Father Jerome's text varies greatly from the original, or its contents are somehow conflicting or less consistent with it, this has been noted. I hope that readers with stricter religious views will not find too much reason to object to Father Jerome's text or to my own work. It should also be born in mind that the Roman Catholic Father Jerome was a guest of one of the most powerful Muslim rulers of all time and that both men understood the need to compromise for the greater good.

This book would not have been possible without the vision of Gülru Necipoğlu, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture and Director of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture (AKPIA) at Harvard University. It was Gülru's idea to extend my initial fellowship at Harvard, giving me the opportunity to transform my shorter original project on the Cleveland manuscript into a deeper study of both the text and the miniatures. I am deeply grateful not only for her time, many suggestions, and enthusiastic support, but also for the funds provided by AKPIA to conduct research at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) in Rome, and for a trip to India and Lahore. In addition to offering valuable comments that were crucial to the improvement of the text, Gülru made another vital contribution to this project when she suggested the name of Wheeler M. Thackston as a possible translator of the *Mir'āt al-quds*. He graciously accepted the challenge without hesitation. In addition to the translation, I am grateful for his notes involving non-Western languages, the transcription, and the "Order of Folios" list (Appendix II). It was a privilege to work with Wheeler and his prompt assistance in the clarification of numerous religious, linguistic, social, and political issues during the eighteen months of my fellowship and the period that followed was simply invaluable.

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Pedro Moura Carvalho
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