With his publication on the Dome of the Rock nearly half a century ago in *Ars Orientalis*, Oleg Grabar established the centrality of inscriptions for the understanding of a building’s political, religious, and social significance. His affirmation of the importance of architectural epigraphs has been a constant throughout his career, brilliantly demonstrated in his study of the Alhambra, among other works. My efforts to understand the architecture of the Delhi Sultanate through its inscriptions owe much to his elegant and rigorous work. In its epigraphic analysis the examination of early Mughal architecture that I submit here in his honor is clearly informed by his methods. Additionally, as I developed this study of the youthful Akbar and the tensions among officials at his court in 1562, I recalled Oleg’s argument (stemming from the creation of the great Il-Khan *Shāhnāma* in the fourteenth century, which arose from power struggles at the royal court) that great art can arise in times of great tension as a compelling statement of ambition and authority. A patron’s aesthetic decisions are rarely frivolous: Akbar’s choice of materials and his conscious and pointed references to the past were as self-aware as those of ‘Abd al-Malik in the late seventh century.

Oleg’s work is also vital for its exploration of the meaning of holiness and the ways in which a piece of land and the buildings on it become sacred. In my study of Sultanate and early Mughal Delhi, a tomb situated in the fourteenth century dargah (shrine and Sufi center) of Nizamuddin Awliya in Delhi becomes a shrine to one of Akbar’s most loyal adherents, commemorating a defining event in Akbar’s kingship, one that marks a cultural shift and the formation of a new dynastic direction. Akbar symbolically appropriates the land—a key concept in Oleg’s work—transforming the site into a pilgrimage shrine.

I am pleased to submit this essay in honor and recognition of Oleg Grabar’s eightieth birthday. I owe more than I can say to him, his scholarship, his teaching, and the care he has shown for his students over the years.
riotous manner, attended by others more riotous than himself. The members of the assembly rose to do him honor, and the Ataga Khan rose half-up. Immediately upon entering, Adham Khan put his hand to his dagger and went towards the Ataga Khan. Then he angrily signed to his servant Khusham Uzbek and the other desperadoes who had come with their loins girt up for strife, saying: “Why do you stand still?” The wicked Khusham drew his dagger and inflicted a dangerous wound on the breast of that chief-sitter on the pillow of auspiciousness. The Ataga Khan was thoroughly amazed and ran towards the door of the hall. Immediately thereon, Khuda Bardi came and struck him twice with a sword. That great man was martyred in the courtyard of the hall of audience.

The horrendous story continues. Suddenly aware of the likely consequences of the impetuous act that he had been put up to, a panicked Adham Khan made a single-handed assault on the royal palace. It was Ramadan, and it must have been particularly demanding to keep the fast in the hottest time of the year: Akbar was resting in his second-story bedchamber when he was warned of the danger by a chamberlain, who brought him a sword. Adham Khan met Akbar on the veranda and dared to grab the emperor by the hands. With his fist, Akbar knocked Adham Khan senseless with a single blow to the head. He then ordered his servants to bind Adham Khan and throw him off the terrace. Surviving the first fall, the gravely injured Adham Khan was dragged up the stairs and again thrown down, head first, whereupon he died. This demonstration of imperial decisiveness and physical strength became one of the most celebrated events in Mughal hagiography and was a favorite subject in illustrated copies of the *Akbarnāma* (fig. 1). As the closing installment of a long-standing feud, Akbar’s action almost immediately took on the character of dynastic myth.

Several years older than Akbar, Adham Khan was a longtime Mughal retainer who held the high-ranking position of *panj-hazār*, or commander of five thousand troops. Abu’l-Fazl reports that Adham Khan’s father was a certain Shihab al-Din but also intimates that Adham Khan may have been one of Humayun’s progeny. He was the younger son of the noblewoman Maham Anaga, who had been responsible for supervising Akbar’s attendants when the emperor was a child, and who for several years thereafter remained a powerful figure at the court. In particular, Maham Anaga and her husband, Shihab al-Din Ahmad Khan, the governor of Delhi, had allied themselves with Mu’nim Khan to undermine the influence of Bayram Khan, the previous Khan Khanan, who had protected the young emperor and the Mughal Empire in the years immediately after the death of Akbar’s father, Humayun. Mu’nim Khan was appointed Khan Khanan after Bayram Khan was removed from that post in 1560. Maham Anaga apparently had easy access to the emperor, and her son was regarded as Akbar’s foster brother.