



Fayzullah, A blindfolded suitor is brought before a princess, 1755. Cleveland Museum of Art, Wikimedia CC CC0 1.0.

INTERNATIONAL ONLINE WORKSHOP

THE 17TH CENTURY IN INDIA: EVENTS, SOCIETY, THOUGHT, AND ART

The workshop “The 17th century in India: Events, Society, Thought and Art” is a sequel to the convention “The Mughal Empire under Shah Jahan” on 26 and 27 May 2014. It shall continue the success of that workshop, which brought together historians and art historians from the USA, Europe and India and led to the proceedings *The Mughal Empire from Jahangir to Shah Jahan* (ed. Ebba Koch und Ali Anooshahr, Bombay: Marg, 2019).

The central theme of the upcoming workshop will be the development of Indian society in the 17th century. We will turn our viewpoint away from the imperial palace to the discourses in society and their repercussion on politics. Such discourses are for example the ethos of the Mughal nobility, Norms of literature, self-awareness of religious charismatics and awareness of them by others, or the concept of art as depicted in literature.

Moreover, the workshop contains reappraisals of important events that result from a re-reading of the chronicles, and from studying new sources from the provinces and from Portuguese India. This shall accommodate the present research on the Mughal Empire and its southern neighbours, the Deccan sultanates. In the literature section, the workshop emphasizes the interdisciplinary exchange between experts on Indo-Persian literature and experts on the contemporaneous Hindi literature, which the Mughals supported likewise.

ABSTRACTS



Programme as seen from Paris, Göttingen, Naples, Vienna, and Kraków (from west to east)

	Wednesday 7 April	Thursday 8 April	Friday 9 April	Saturday 10 April
	Panel 1: Norms and representation	Panel 2: Literature, art, and their discourses	Panel 3: Sufism and society	Panel 4: New results of event history
15:45–16:00	Arrival and welcome	Arrival	Arrival	Arrival
16:00–16:15	Gulfishan Khan: <i>Emperor Shah Jahan's visits to Kabul: A connected narrative of the Imperial court</i>	Subah Dayal: <i>Invective against the Mughals: Poetry and Politics in the Early Modern Deccan</i>	Farhat Hasan: <i>Religious Pluralism and Social Conflicts in a 17th cent. Sufi Text</i>	Vikas Rathee: <i>The Portrayal of Shah Jahan in Some Seventeenth-century Narratives of the War of Succession.</i>
16:15–16:30	Nishat Manzar: <i>Prince Khurram "The Absolute King" – Extracts from the English East India Company Accounts</i>	Ebba Koch: <i>Jahangir's Elephants: Monumental Sculpture for a Mughal Padshah</i>	Meenakshi Khanna: <i>Religious authority of dreams: 'Abd al Haqq Muhaddith Dihlavi's Madarij al nabuwat</i>	Saqib Baburi: <i>The Bengal Perspective on the War of Succession</i>
16:30–16:45	Discussion	Discussion	Discussion	Discussion
16:45–17:00	Pause			
17:00–17:15	Roy Fischel: <i>Towards a new interpretation of the Sultanate of Bijapur</i>	Stefania Cavaliere: <i>Identity negotiation through literature: vernacular perspectives on the Mughal court</i>	Supriya Gandhi: <i>Discussions of caste in seventeenth-century Mughal texts</i>	Pratyay Nath: <i>Environment, Frontier, and Shah Jahan's Wars in Balkh and Qandahar</i>
17:15–17:30	Audrey Truschke: <i>Imagining Kashmir in the Mughal Empire and the Modi Sarkar</i>	Piotr Borek: <i>Early reception of a 17th-century Brajbhasha poem composed in the Deccan</i>	Rajeev Kinra: <i>Revisiting ... the Mughal Mystic Sarmad</i>	Harit Joshi: <i>Chronicle of an assassination in Mughal India</i>
17:30–17:45	Eva Orthmann / Corinna Forberg: <i>The Encounter of the Mughal and French Concept of the Sun King</i>	Stephan Popp: <i>Style development of literary inshā in Shah Jahan's reign</i>	Discussion	Ali Anooshahr: <i>Shah Jahan's Elephants</i>
17:45–18:00	Discussion	Discussion	Pause (optional)	Discussion
18:00–18:15	Pause (optional)	Pause (optional)		Farewell

Abstracts (in order of appearance)

Wednesday, 7 April 2021

Emperor Shah Jahan's visits to Kabul: A connected narrative of the Imperial court

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Emperor Shah Jahan visited Kabul for the first time after his accession to throne in 1639 and thereafter 1646, 1649 and 1652. All imperial visits along with the court and administrative staff which accompanied the royal entourages had been described by the principal authorities namely Abdul Hamid Lahauri, Muhammad Waris and Saleh Kanbuh in a detailed manner. Until recently these visits to Kabul via Lahore have been mostly viewed in connection with his aggressive policies towards Iran and Turan, at best safeguarding the two provinces of Kabul and Qandahar as well as reclaiming mulk-i-mauruthi, the ancestral dominions. However, some finer aspects of frequent journeys of a peripatetic court, such as landscaping the region, are still missing from the modern historical narrative. First, the well-organised imperial trips were a unique opportunity to make first-hand observations of what happened to be the strategically important regions of the empire. More significantly the manner in which the imperial narrative unfolds shows that it was also during these journeys that the emperor supervised the plans and execution of his imperial building projects and laying out of gardens en route to Kabul. The same gardens were also used as residences for the mobile court and its functionaries therefore it was during these trips that many buildings were ordered to be constructed such as that of a marble screen on the tomb of Ruqayya Sultan and a mosque in front of Babur's tomb at Kabul. Personal inspection and management of imperial projects of the new capital city Shahjahanabad, laying gardens at Sirhind, Ambala, Hasan Abdal now called Wah, Nimla, Lahore, Srinagar and Kabul were carried out during these trips. Rewards and promotions of nobles who were instrumental in materialisation of imperial agendas of conquests and construction such as Amirul Umara Ali Mardan Khan and Madarul Mahami Sadullah Khan was a regular feature during prolonged imperial journeys. Beautiful descriptions of flora and fauna of the region so traversed is yet another characteristic of these important imperial tours. Perhaps it was also a literary device to avoid any discussion of loss of lives and resources in the costly disastrous campaigns. However, despite all hazards, the long journeys involved the emperor and court remained well-informed of any event happening in the Darul Khilafat Akbarabad and Darus Saltanat Lahore. Even diplomatic embassies from Iran, Turan and Ottoman Porte were received during the imperial trips to Kabul. The paper would seek to present a connected imperial narrative based on the official historiography.

Prince Khurram: “The Absolute King” – Extracts from the English East India Company’s Accounts

NISHAT MANZAR, Dept. of History & Culture, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India

Sultan Khurram (1592), Shah Khurram (1616) and then Shahjahan (1617), was one of the most privileged princes of the seventeenth century. He received special favours from his father Emperor Jahangir not out of context, but by way of proving his worth in the art of diplomacy and first-hand experience in the battlefield. As a result, he received exclusive titles, usually not assigned to princes, and became a dominant figure in the imperial household and the court. He enjoyed immense privileges since the age of twenty-one (1613 onwards) and continued to do so till he rebelled against his father in 1622. Although it took him few years to get exonerated when he submitted (though not in person) to his father, somehow, on his (Jahangir’s) death in 1627 he was the sole ‘most eligible’ claimant to the throne of Hindustan.

Persian sources (specially compiled after his assuming the authority) extensively speak of the growing influence and innate virtues and potential of Prince Khurram. The extent of his authority is best recognised from the events vis-a-vis the influence of Nurjahan (and her so called ‘junta’) in the court politics, and Khurram / Shahjahan being a part of it. Somehow, these references are, to some extent, court centric. Europeans, especially the English East India Company servants add much more to what is contained in the Persian sources. They had the first-hand experience of the dealings with the Prince, especially after latter’s appointment as the *subahdar* of Gujarat- a province where not only the English but merchants of other nations were also striving to set up their trade. After the initial interventions of Muqarrab Khan and Asaf Khan, it was he who endorsed the decisions on the petitions submitted by the English. He also tried to establish the monopoly of the Mughals on (seaborne) trade in corals and trade with Mocha restricting English activities in the Red Sea. He also refused the English to purchase a piece of land for accommodation, not only in Surat but elsewhere too. They were to stay in rented accommodation only. On the other hand, Englishmen also strived to please the prince in some innovative ways, and one approach was to direct all the pearls and precious stones imported by them towards him and Jahangir to make a ‘first choice’, saying that ‘if they are pleased, the crie of a million of subjects would not be heard’. Although ambassadors like William Hawkins (1609-1611) and then Thomas Roe (1615-1618) were looking towards the Emperor for response in turn of their petitions and representations, authority of Khurram/Shahjahan always prevailed; so much so that Roe was forced to write- ‘Hee (Jahangir) is good to mee; his sonne (Shahjahan) lately better, who is absolute king’. (William Foster, *English Factories in India-1618-1621*, Oxford, 1906. Pp. 16-17.)

This paper proposes to underline the authority enjoyed by Khurram/Shahjahan in the matters of state with special reference to his dealings with the English in the early phase of their enterprise in Gujarat. A comparison with the Persian sources, like *Ahwāl-i Shāhzādi-i Shāhjahān Bādshāh*, *Shāhjahān Nāma*, *Bādshāh Nāma(s)*, *Amal-Sālih*, etc. will also be made to emphasize the importance of the information contained in the English/European accounts which is more detailed, minute, and distinct in nature.

Another kind of kingship? Towards a new interpretation of the Sultanate of Bijapur

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The historiography of early modern India focuses mainly on three political domains. Most attention gravitates towards the north, where the Mughals constructed their expansionist empire. A second field is the Vijayanagara Empire in south India and its successor Nayaka states. Third are the Europeans along India's littoral with their rich archives and appeal to Western audiences. Tucked in between, the Deccan Sultanates remained overshadowed, subject to relatively little scholarly attention that emphasised their final incorporation into Mughal domains. The historiography of the region, accordingly, lags behind, reflecting the persistence of old-fashioned intellectual frameworks; until recently, dynastic histories with a dash of Great Men approach have dominated the field. The direction of each state was perceived as emanating from the personal inclinations of sultans or their conniving advisors, creating an almost ahistorical flavour of political and social life in the Deccan. Above all stood towering figures, notably the poet-sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah of Golkonda, the queen-dowager and warrior Chand Bibi of Ahmadnagar, or the Ethiopian slave-commander Malik Ambar, around whom the history of the region has been often told.

Within this historiographical framework, the sultanate of Bijapur stands out. Unlike their neighbours in Ahmadnagar and Golkonda, the 'Adil Shahi sultans did not present a stable façade in terms of creed, as this has changed several times between Sunna and Shia. In the framework of the existing historiography of the region, such seemingly sharp changes, accentuated in early modern sources, were deemed representative of erratic breaks in all aspects of elite society. As a result, only few attempts have been made to understand longer-lasting elements of political thought or the principles that stood behind the formation of the state. This paper aims to offer preliminary insights into the political culture of Bijapur within a broader context. The paper focuses on the reign of Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II (r. 1580-1627), the longest-ruling and most iconic sultan of the dynasty. Remembered for the brilliant arts created in his court, his spectacular mausoleum, and his keen interest in music and his composition of poetry in Dakhani, the sultan was celebrated primarily for his idiosyncrasies. By this, his character became emblematic of the problems at the heart of Deccani historiography. Instead, this paper will aspire to introduce Ibrahim II and his court back into the particular historical environment within which they were located. Not a romantic and syncretic ruler, I argue that the direction the court took under his reign reflect a clear political ideology that has developed gradually, and which stands in distinction to that of the Mughal Empire. With that, I hope to make steps towards a new framework for the study of the early modern Deccan.

Imagining Kashmir in the Mughal Empire and the Modi Sarkar

AUDREY TRUSCHKE, Assistant Professor of South Asian History, Rutgers University, Newark NJ, USA

This paper considers Mughal imperial imaginations of and visits to the region of Kashmir during Shah Jahan's reign (r. 1628–58) against the backdrop of modern conflict in the region. Shah Jahan visited Kashmir several times, and the region proved a source of creativity to many in his court. To access Mughal vision of Kashmir during Shah Jahan's rule, I use sources in both Sanskrit and Persian. I especially draw upon Jagannatha's *Asaphavilasa* (Play of Asaf Khan, Sanskrit) and Chandar Bhan Brahman's description of Kashmir in his *Chahar Chaman* (Four Gardens, Persian). I read these texts for their insights about Mughal India and its relationship to a fairly unique part of its empire. Towards the end of the paper, I pivot to the present and reflect upon the experience of reading about an idealized Mughal Kashmir given twenty-first-century conflict in the region and its ongoing cost in terms of human lives and livelihoods.

The Travelling Sun: The Encounter of the Mughal and French Concept of the Sun King

CORINNA FORBERG, independent scholar

EVA ORTHMANN, chair, Seminary for Iranian Studies, University of Göttingen, Germany

Both the portrait of Shah Jahan with Nimbus in the *Jarokha-i-darshan* and of Louis XIV as Apollo with an aureole have one thing in common: they represent the absolute ruler as the Sun King. However, the representation of the Sun King does not limit itself to individual portraits, but encompasses painting, architecture, and ceremonial (as part of the performative arts) in its overall view. Representation is not a decorative element of imperial power, but a part of it. For the understanding of the sun cult in the age of absolutism, therefore, a detailed examination of the function and applied strategies of representation is of central importance, which, in addition to form, content and political-social aspects, considers the involved actors – patrons, addressees, mentors and recipients. Both pictorial and textual sources have to be taken into account.

The comparison of the two forms of representation deals, among other things, with the question whether the ideas of the Sun King realized in the same century are in any way linked or based on chance; or whether the sun cult is an inevitable effect of absolutism or, conversely, the image of the Sun King produces the idea of absolutism. In other words, does the image generate power or power the image? Where do both the concepts of the Sun King meet and where do they contradict each other?

Thursday, 8 April 2021

Invective against the Mughals: Poetry and Politics in the Early Modern Deccan

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What did the Mughals mean to those who lived at the empire's fringes? My presentation examines emotive responses to all things 'Mughal' from the perspective of seventeenth century Persianate literati in the Deccan (peninsular India), a neighboring region long contended over and occupied by the imperial army. From the common soldier to high-ranking nobles and imperial dynasts, the Mughals loomed large in the imagination of people, far removed from the capital city of Delhi, who had never set foot in the imperial center and yet felt the weight of its presence. At times, regional observers resentfully admired the empire's strength. On other occasions, they contemplated the possibility of the Great Mughals unraveling all together. Emotive responses to imperial rule encompassed envy, resentment, suspicion, scorn, and anger.

Setting aside the narrative certitudes of Persian chronicles, I follow ethical and moral critiques of the Mughal empire in a polyvocal, literary archive in Persian and Dakkani, the pan-regional idiom of southern India. I do so by comparing the poetic oeuvre of Hakim Atishi (d. ca. 1640s) and Nusrati (d. ca. 1670s), two Bijapuri poets who questioned the inevitability of Mughal power. By turning eulogy into invective in their martial compositions, both poets deployed affective vocabularies to make sense of the Mughals and weigh in on conflicts between regional political contenders. Words that make sense of empire were not selected with caution, but meant to hurt, reprove, and hold it to account. Narrative poems unveil the affective terrain upon which contested sovereignties unraveled in the seventeenth century in the shadow of imperial suzerainty. Those at the margins questioned the term 'Mughal' and its all-encompassing uses, often employing insults and humor in their writings to ridicule imperial occupation of distant lands. My comparison of these two works speaks to broader scholarly discussions that call for integrating the history of emotions into political and social history across the medieval and early modern world. I argue that we can broaden our definitions of emotions to not only include sentiments like anger and filial love, but also dedication to a regional household chief, anxieties about literary competition, feelings of betrayal, desire for fame or revenge, and above all, political apprehension about the uncertainties of kingly sovereignty in the seventeenth century.

Jahangir's Elephants: Monumental Landscape Art for a Mughal Padshah.

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In 1625, the Mughal emperor Jahangir (rul. 1605-1627) had two life-size statues of elephants carved out of the living rock on the road over the Pir Panjal pass into Kashmir. These monumental sculptures represent the most ostentatious expression of Jahangir's effort to leave his signature on nature and to 'tame' wilderness as his garden. The assimilation of the elephant as a royal sign has a longer history in the subcontinental political imagery and the Mughals certainly appropriated and developed it. But Jahangir's imagination that turned these boulders into an imperial record of power and majesty was unique and inspired the Iranian historian Jalal al-Din Tabataba'i to reconstruct the emperor's thinking process which led to these extraordinary creations.

Identity negotiation through literature: vernacular perspectives on the Mughal court

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My paper will analyse literary sources as witnesses of the historical reality they represent, parallel to official historiography. In the Indo-Persian milieu, along with the use of Persian as language of bureaucracy, we assist to a process of *cosmopolitanization* of the vernaculars through the system of circulation of poets, intellectuals, texts and ideas. This brought to the constitution of new systems of knowledge and structures of cultural power through the means of vernaculars such as Braj Bhāṣā.

My point is that assuming the perspective of Rājput courts represented in vernacular texts – and parallel to the official picture given in Persian records – we can detect some dynamics of power, on which the political and administrative system of the Mughal Empire was built. Royal panegyrics describing histories of the local courts in connection with the empire can be considered as enriched histories, transfiguring reality through poetry, or counter-histories to the official perspective of power represented for example in the Persian *Mau'izah* genre or the *Padshahnama*.

In particular, I will propose some parallel literary images of the emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan. For the first one, I will offer examples from the *Jahangīr Jas Candrikā* (1612) by Keśavdās of Orccha, who eulogises the emperor in the moment when his court entered the Mughal sphere of influence, after the controversial ascent to the throne of his patron Vīr Singh. While for Shah Jahan I will analyse the *Sundar Śṛṅgār* (1631) by Sundar Kavirāj and the *Kavīndra Kalpalatā* by Kavīndrācarya Sarasvatī, two texts that give hints on Mughal patronage of Braj Bhāṣā literature for a multilingual audience in the Mughal court. This paper will examine how literature and intellectual productions not only reflect historical dynamics but contribute to socio-cultural exchanges in a composite system of power.

Early reception of a 17th-century Brajbhasha poem composed in the Deccan

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In a region that had an already established rich tradition of history-writing in Marathi, Shivaji Bhosle commissioned a Brajbhasha poem of manifold political functions, a.o. of establishing a version of contemporary history. Before his royal consecration in 1674 he found it profitable to patronize works in Sanskrit and Marathi, and Brajbhasha as well. The range and historical importance of Bhushan's *Śivbhūṣaṇ* since the 19th century can be somehow evaluated basing on various printing enterprises and, to some extent, also on the location of the remaining manuscripts of a considerably late production. However, we deal with few material traces concerning the reception of this oeuvre at the time of its composition. On one hand, some literary historical evidence proves that the poem might have been sensed and understood in its original form also at Shivaji's court in Raigarh. On the other, and given various political functions of this text, its reception at home could not be the main reason for Shivaji to spend large sums on its composition. In view of little early metatextual references, when trying to reflect on the reception range of *Śivbhūṣaṇ* one may quite successfully focus on the internal evidence, or simply on what the text can tell us in this matter. In my presentation, I would like to bring us closer to the issue of how this text negotiates alliances within the geopolitical arena bound to the Mughal Imperium. What else, beyond such arguments like the language of this poem or the existence and purported sufficiency of local history in the form of *bhakhars*, makes us think that Bhushan's version of history served both local and transregional audience?

The development of the style of literary inshā in Shah Jahan's reign

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Inshā (literally, "composition") can be defined as non-narrative literary prose in Persian literature. Its most basic form are letters, but in the 17th century, its scope had widened to essayistic literature of many kinds: prefaces, epilogues, eulogies, descriptions of cities, gardens, buildings, royal elephants, and witty essays in a narrower sense, in short, all that is called belles-lettres in the narrower sense, but valued as genuine artistic literature. All of them have the *self-referentiality* of literature in common: the focus is not only on the object that the text describes, but also on the act of describing. 17th century literary inshā even features valuing description over topic, which is the characteristic that distinguishes it from non-fiction such as chronicles and scientific literature, even if these contained entertaining essayistic parts, too.

What readers of 17th century Indian literary inshā were expecting to read therefore was the writer's style, and the statements he could make using it: They knew what an elephant looked like, and often what the royal elephant described looked like, too, but they were

eager to read the new observations that the writer could convey to them, using his style. It was generally believed that artistic literature consisted of observations that only a skilled writer could conceptualize and communicate with his supreme command of language. These observations have been made for the poetry of Ṣā'ib and Ṭālib-i Āmulī by Mireille Schnyder in her book *Die Wunderfügnisse der Welt* ("World's Wondrous coincidences"), and they shall be applied on inshā here, and justly so because many poets were inshā authors too.

This lecture tries to analyse and compare the techniques that major 17th century inshā authors have used to express their "findings" on important phenomena of the world. Among those writers were Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Kāmbōh, Candar Bhān Barahman, Mullah Tuḡrā Mašhadī, Munīr Lahōrī, Amanullāh Ḥusainī Khānazād Khān "Mīrzā Amīnā", and Bēdil. Earlier authors like 'Urfī and 'Zuhūrī will be cited for comparison. In this way, the use of style and its development as a major conveyor of meaning shall be marked and explained.

Friday, 9 April 2021

Religious Pluralism and Social Conflicts in a Seventeenth Century Sufi Text: A Reading of Surat Singh's *Tazkira*

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In the mid-seventeenth century in Punjab, a 'Hindu' disciple (Surat Singh) of a 'Muslim' saint (Pir Hassu) compiled the conversations of his master (*pir*) and attempted to provide hagiographical details of his life in a work that he entitled, *Tazkira-i-Pir Hassu Teli*. The only extant copy of the text is available at the Center of Advanced Study at Aligarh and was noticed several decades ago by a well-known Mughal scholar, M. Athar Ali. The text is unusually interesting in so far as it allows us to understand better the composite constituency of sufis in Punjab, and the motives and purposes, and the *mentalities* and world views that drove the non-Muslim subjects to a Muslim saint. Reading the text, one realizes that the author crucially controlled the narrative and this enabled him to restructure the organizing principles and beliefs of the religious order. Interestingly, the text is not exclusively focused on the author's religious predilections, but Surat Singh takes care to provide a rich flavor of the religious diversity in Punjab, and there are in his work interesting details about several religions and sects that were active in Punjab during the 17th century. This includes a detailed discussion on Sikhism during its early formative period, as well.

Since the *pir* of the author came from a lower caste background, Surat Singh provides interesting details about the caste system, and the lower caste challenges to the system, as well. More importantly, since the primary constituency of the saint came from the socially inferior communities, the *tazkira*, as a record of his conversations, contains a rich

interchange of Persian with local lexicons. The text is potentially rich in its linguistic diversity and reveals the conversations between Persian and local dialects in the multi-lingual world of South Asia in the 17th century. The *tazkira*, therefore, serves to raise the question of the durability of linguistic boundaries, and highlights instead the porous nature of language make-up in 17th century India. Languages were porous and conversed with each other; Persian was no exception either!

The text is extremely rich in providing details about the socio-cultural life of the ordinary subjects in early modern South Asia. Many of the discussions of Pir Hassu were with ordinary people and centered on their anxieties and concerns. A critical engagement with the evidence on routine and everyday life could reveal fresh insights concerning social changes, identity conflicts and religious co-existence and conflicts during the 17th century. The text is a rich resource for historians interested in exploring the social history of the period.

Written in versified form, the *tazkira* should also be assessed for its literary and aesthetic effects. In combining ornate Persian with colloquial dialects and expressions, it can be suggested that the work introduces a departure from the traditions of literary aesthetics and introduces fresh norms and principles of aesthetics in the prevailing literary culture.

Revivifying religious authority of dreams: An exposition from ‘Abd al Haqq Muhaddith Dihlavi’s *Mudarij al nabuwat*

MEENAKSHI KHANNA, Department of History, Indraprastha College, Delhi University, India

Shaikh ‘Abd al Haqq Muhaddith Dihlavi has been the subject of scholarly discourse on Islamic history of the Indian subcontinent because he was a prominent scholar of Islam who pioneered the study of Prophet Muhammad’s traditions (*Ahadith*, sing. *Hadith*) during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. By teaching the Prophet’s traditions the Muhaddith furthered his agenda of reviving Islam and reforming Muslims who had strayed from the *shari‘a*. ‘Abd al Haqq is also remembered for his contribution as biographer of Sufi lives collected in the *Akhbar al akhyar*. As teacher of Islamic traditional science and practicing Sufi, ‘Abd al Haqq epitomizes the image of an ‘orthodox’ Muslim who strove for the cause of revivifying Islam.

This paper seeks to complicate ‘Abd al Haqq’s paradigmatic image by looking at his exposition of dreams in the *Mudarij al Nabuwat* (Biography of the Prophet Muhammad), which was compiled by him. The text offers a substantial discussion of dream traditions in the Islamic world. The Muhaddith discredits the position held by Mu‘tazilites and philosophers on dreams and upholds the position of the ‘Asharites and Sufis. In the process of this exposition, he brings forth the authoritative function of dreams in Muslim society. Further, ‘Abd al Haqq goes on to use his knowledge of dreams to verify visionary experience of other contemporary Sufis. He illustrates the complex ways in which religious authority was asserted and disseminated in the society.

Discussions of caste in seventeenth-century Mughal texts

SUPRIYA GANDHI, assistant professor, Department of Religious Studies, Yale University, USA

During the early modern period, caste and race were becoming categories of analysis in the writings of European visitors to India. This paper explores how authors of Persian texts in Mughal India wrote about caste. By caste, I mean both the varṇa system of social stratification described in Sanskrit texts, as well as the myriad caste groups operating in society. I survey here the treatment of caste in a selection of doxographies, chronicles and works of belles-lettres from the seventeenth century. I argue that while these Mughal writings show an awareness of caste, they do not present a reified notion of a caste system as such. They also do not create a firm boundary between the idea of a caste group and that of a community bound by religious doctrine and practice. However, these works do construct representations of particular caste groups as possessing certain essentialized traits.

Rebel Without a Cause? Revisiting the Life, Career, and Execution of the Mughal Mystic Muhammad Sa'id "Hakim" Sarmad (d. 1661)

RAJEEV KINRA, Associate Professor, Department of History, Northwestern University
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This paper will try to situate the career of the eccentric wayfarer Muhammad Sa'id "Hakim" Sarmad (d. ca. 1661) at the nexus of two conceptual axes: first, within the larger context of mobility in the Indian Ocean commercial world; and second, as a case study for the culture and politics of pluralism in early modern South Asia. Sources tell us that Sarmad was a Jew from an Armenian merchant family who went to Iran early in life, where he received a classical Persian education, and at some point also converted to Islam. In the early 1630s, still a merchant, he arrived in India via Thatta, Sindh, where he reportedly fell madly in love with a Hindu youth named Abhay Chand, abandoned all social decorum, and spent roughly the next 30 years wandering the subcontinent as a naked yogi with Abhay Chand in tow. Defying easy categorization within a conventional binary of "Hindu-Muslim" relations in India, Sarmad's career presents an excellent opportunity to reconsider some of the conventional wisdom about the politics of difference in seventeenth-century India. In this regard we must also revisit the politics of Sarmad's spectacular execution, an event that has often been viewed simply as a reassertion of "Muslim orthodoxy" under the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707), but which, upon closer examination, does not appear nearly so straightforward.

Saturday, 10 April

A War of Succession for the Mughal throne (1658) as Described in Muhammad Saleh Kamboh's *Shah Jahan Nama*

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A War of Succession (1658) amongst the sons of Shah Jahan preceded the accession of Aurangzeb to Mughal *padshahī* in 1658-9. The broad strokes, sequence and chronology of this War were described in multiple Persian historical works written during the seventeenth century. Arguably, the narrative of the War in these works was fairly standardised not only in terms of the sequence of events but also in the manner in which personnel were characterised. However, within the constraints of this standardisation of narrative, some texts managed to take off on tangents in particular directions. This paper looks at the *Shah Jahan Nama* (c.1670) of Muhammad Saleh Kamboh (died c.1670) and compares it with some other Persian texts written during the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) to find points of commonality and difference in the narrative of the War. The texts to be contrasted include the *Waqiat-i Alamgiri* (1660s) of Aqil Khan Razi, *Mirat-ul Alam* (1680s) of Bakhtawar Khan, and the *Khulasat-ut-tawarikh* (c.1700) of Sujan Rai.

Documenting Crisis: The Bengal Perspective on the War of Succession, 1657-8

SAQIB BABURI, British Library, London, United Kingdom

Later Timurid (Mughal) history records several episodes when society erupted in great military conflagrations sparked by succession crises. One such episode is the crisis that grew from the week-long illness of Emperor Shāhjahān I, in September 1657, disrupting communications between the imperial centre and provinces, as well as relations between their nominal rulers, Princes Dārāshukūh, Shāhshujā', Awrangzīb, and Murādbakhsh. This eventually led to Shāhjahān's overthrow by Awrangzīb, and the execution or exile of the other princes.

Studies based largely on historical accounts, letters, and a few paintings have mapped the significant arc of events. The problem lies in their ex post facto bias, given their selective creation after the conflict. Therefore, original accounts and documents created as events developed have much to contribute. Offering a rare perspective from Bengal, this paper studies a previously unknown and unique document issued in the name of Prince Shāhshujā', throwing light on the depth of the crisis in Bengal and the veracity of later accounts.

Imperial Embarrassments: Environment, Frontier, and Shah Jahan's Wars in Balkh and Qandahar

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During the reign of Shah Jahan, Mughal armies fought two major wars on the north-western frontier of the empire – in Balkh (1646-47) and in Qandahar (1648-1653). The expedition to Balkh was an attempt at projecting imperial power beyond South Asia. It was conceptualised as the first step towards Shah Jahan's potential reconquest of the erstwhile Timurid lands of Transoxiana. The Qandahar campaigns, on the other hand, were a bid to retake the strategically important fort that lay between the empires of the Mughals and the Safavids. The expeditions were triggered when the Safavid emperor Shah Abbas II seized the fort in 1648. Both these wars ended with major defeats for the Mughal forces.

In both these theatres of war, campaigning armies faced strong adversaries. However, more than the military difficulties, Shah Jahan's armies found it particularly challenging to negotiate the natural environment of these regions. They were both very arid. This prevented Mughal armies from living off the land for extended periods. This became a major problem since the itinerant grain-merchants of South Asia – who would usually supply campaigning Mughal armies – did not operate in these parts. Additionally, these regions experience very harsh winters that bring low temperatures and ample snowfall. This made the winter months – from October to March – completely inhospitable and quite impossible to campaign there. Both Balkh and Qandahar were also located far away from the imperial centres of North India. Because of this, troops and weaponry could be shipped to these parts only by very long overland routes. In turn, this increased the cost of campaigns and reduced the temporal window for executing the campaigns. Finally, the distance factor also resulted in Mughal troops not being able to deploy enough artillery – especially in Qandahar, given the difficulties of overland transport.

The present paper shows that while the Mughals struggled against the military techniques of their adversaries, they did also manage to overcome them from time to time. The failures of the campaigns actually emanated less from purely military reasons and more from their inability to negotiate the difficulties posed by the aridity, distance, and climate. In turn, this also shaped the way the frontier evolved in these north-western limits of the Mughal Empire under Shah Jahan. The failure to conquer Balkh meant that Kabul remained the outermost major Mughal city on the route to Turan. At the other end, the loss of Qandahar implied that Mughal control over the route to Iran became quite precarious. Thereafter Quetta near the Bolan Pass effectively became the principal frontier outpost on the west. Through a close engagement with contemporary Mughal texts, the present paper will show how these two wars illustrate the impact of the physical geography and the natural environment of South Asia on the processes of war-making and frontier-building under Shah Jahan.

Chronicle of an Assassination in Mughal India: Narrative Variants or Tendentious Interpretations?

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I shall, in my talk, conduct a historiographical study of an incident that occurred in the 17th year of Shah Jahan's reign (August 1644), namely the assassination of a Mughal noble, Salabat Khan, the *mir bakshi*, by Amar Singh Rathor, a member of the ruling Rajput clan of Marwar, in the emperor's presence. Although the exact motives behind the act remain uncertain, I will evoke the manner in which it has been portrayed in different sources over the years. Whereas the officially sponsored contemporary literature describes it as an isolated deed of a deranged opium addict, later renderings (including foreign travellers' accounts, 18th century narratives, vernacular ballads and cinema) provide a strikingly different perspective, each of them motivated by its own specific agenda.

Shah Jahan's Elephants

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Beginning in the seventeenth century, with the widespread incorporation of gunpowder weapons in the Mughal army, the strategic use of the elephant began to fade. However, it must be said that the animal continued to be of material significance in areas where the use of the artillery was hampered by geographical and climate factors. A good example of this was the eastern frontiers of the Mughal Empire, Bengal and Assam, where rainfall, thick forests, and large rivers rendered the use and transportation of gunpowder weapons quite difficult. Simultaneously, the elephant continued to play an important symbolic role for the sovereign, as the imperial mount, as the paramount object of gift exchange between the sovereign and subordinate lords, and as the emperor's entertainment since Elephant fights were performed continuously at the palace.