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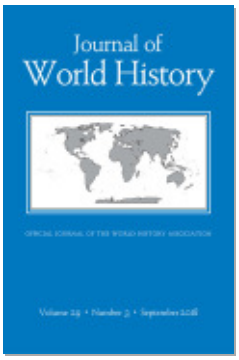

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Beyond 'Tribal Breakout': Afghans in the History of Empire, ca. 1747–1818

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In the desiccated and mountainous borderlands between Iran and India, the uprising of the Hotaki (Ghilzai) tribes against Safavid rule in Qandahar in 1717 set in motion a chain reaction that had profound consequences for life across western, south, and even east Asia. Having toppled and terminated *de facto* Safavid rule in 1722, Hotaki rule at the centre itself collapsed in 1729.[1] Nadir Shah of the Afshar tribe—which was formerly incorporated within the Safavid political coalition—then seized the reigns of the state, subduing the last vestiges of Hotaki power at the frontier in 1738, playing the latter off against their major regional opponents, the Abdali tribes. From Kandahar, Nadir Shah and his new allies marched into Mughal India, ransacking its cities and their coffers in 1739, carrying treasure—including the peacock throne and the Koh-i-Noor diamond—worth tens of millions of rupees, and claiming *de jure* sovereignty over the swathe of territory from Iran to the Mughal domains.

Following the execution of Nadir Shah in 1747, his former cavalry commander, Ahmad Shah Abdali, rapidly established his independent political authority.[2] Adopting the sobriquet *Durr-i-Durran* (Pearl of

[1] Rudi Matthee, *Persia in Crisis. Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), especially 197–241.

[2] In this essay, Afghanistan refers roughly to the territory coterminous with the present-day state. 'Afghan', however, is used very loosely and it is certainly not the intention to conflate Afghan, Pathan (or Pattan), and Pashtun. On the problems of such slippages: Nichols, "Afghan Historiography: Classic Study, Conventional Narrative, National Polemic," *History Compass* 3, no. 1 (2005): 2–4. Afghan and Pattan/Pathan are the terms appearing in the eighteenth-century sources consulted in this essay, reflecting contemporary usage in north India rather than autochthonous descriptions. On colonial officials' interest in this lexicon from circa 1780 and the processes resulting in the conflation of these identities over the nineteenth century: Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, "Quandaries of the Afghan Nation," in *Under the Drones*, ed. Shahzad Bashir and Robert D. Crews (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), especially 86, 89–93, 100.

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Pearls), Ahmad Shah first united the Abdalis into the Durrani tribal confederation, and then launched a series of campaigns into the Mughal Empire. Although the first campaign of 1747–1748 was relatively (but not absolutely) unrewarding, Ahmad Shah returned successfully six times until his death in 1772, each time transferring Indian treasure and territory from his domains to build the Durrani Empire.[3] Ahmad Shah exercised effective control over Afghanistan with the Mughal emperor ceding the provinces (*subas*) of Lahore and Multan to the Afghans in 1752—the subsequent campaigns serving to assert Durrani authority and extract tribute or tax revenues—such that the Afghans' gains came at the expense of the power of the Mughal centre and its allies. Outside the Durrani territories, the destabilisation of Mughal authority permitted a new assertiveness on the part of other Afghan or Indian tribal or peasant groups to challenge imperial power and establish or enlarge states of their own.

Collectively termed 'tribal breakout', these phenomena are considered historically significant insofar as they accelerated what C. A. Bayly sensitively described as the 'hollowing out' or weakening of the old Asian empires, especially Mughal India, permitting the expansion of European power in their wake, not least by the English East India Company.[4] In this respect, tribal breakout represents a boon for world and global historians, for this 'exogenous shock' allowed scholars such as Bayly to explain both the transition to colonialism in south Asia and the subsequent rise of British hegemony across the globe without recourse to ideas of Asian 'decline' or European 'superiority'. Bayly, for example, had carefully studied the vibrancy of commercial and political life in eighteenth century India to make a canonical contribution to a growing body of scholarship challenging long-standing notions of decline and chaos as characteristic of the

[3] These seven campaigns do not include two smaller excursions, including that made by Ahmad Shah into Punjab in 1769, or those of smaller or local campaigns made by his successors, such as the 1781 campaign into Sindh. For a comprehensively-researched (if rather hagiographic) biography of Ahmad Shah, with details from contemporary sources of each campaign that has not been bettered in the half-century since its initial publication: Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani. Father of Modern Afghanistan* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1959). His successors also campaigned – mostly in Punjab, mostly unsuccessfully – the details of which can be found in Fayz Muhammad Katib Hazarah, *The History of Afghanistan. Fayz Muhammad Katib Hazarah's Siraj al-tawarikh. Volume 1. The Saduzai Era 1747–1843*, trans. R. D. McChesney and M. M. Khorrami (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[4] C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian. The British Empire and the World 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989), especially 16–61.

period that followed the Mughal centre's loss of political hegemony after the long-seventeenth-century 'golden age'.[5]

In his synthesis, Bayly connected the history of the Safavid dynasty to the histories of its Mughal and Ottoman counterparts, and of their agrarian empires to the ascendance of British imperial power in Asia.[6] In this way, Bayly—more than the scholars to whom he owed a debt—brought tribesmen into the larger frames of world and imperial history, his work still read and cited widely.[7] The aim of this essay is not to dismantle Bayly's contribution, which would be impossible in an essay of this scope and undesirable in light of the value of the larger thesis, nor is it focused on revisiting the history of the later Safavids. Rudi Matthee has recently interrogated the influence accorded to 'foreigners' in Safavid history to argue that the relatively small and poorly-armed band of Afghans only succeeded in toppling the dynasty because of the weakness of the political center, thereby subduing the significance of the sudden unbridling of frontier tribesmen.[8] Rather, this essay examines the period and the processes following what Bayly termed the 'second breakout' of Ahmad Shah, whose defeat of the Mughals at Panipat in 1761 'was a critical precondition for the growing influence of the English East India Company in the subcontinent'.[9] The Durrani campaigns are cast as exogenous and only their destructive dimensions feature in Bayly's analysis, so that the Afghans' role is at once integral to and yet outside or on the margins of the narrative arc of world history. Is this an accurate reflection, this essay asks, of Afghans' role or is it necessary to think beyond tribal breakout to retrieve the constructive agency of Afghans in south Asian, imperial, and world history?

A 'national hero' or 'founding father' of the modern state of Afghanistan, where he continues to be celebrated as such today, Ahmad Shah has also appealed more recently to historians intent on

[5] C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars. North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770–1870* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). For a review of the historiographical debates and shifts: Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1–32.

[6] For the genealogy and development of these ideas from A.K.S. Lambton's work in Iranian studies to Bayly's in world history, see: Jos J. L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710–1780* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2018), 3 and nn. 4–5.

[7] For example, most recently, and rather telling of the traction gained by Bayly's working of the thesis: Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, xxxiv; Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean. The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 212.

[8] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*.

[9] Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 40.

highlighting the world-historical significance of Afghanistan and its inhabitants.[10] In contrast, his successors continue to receive rather short shrift, seen as presiding over the territorial retreat of the empire, which is taken, in turn, as a sign of the onset of wider decline. With the historiography thus skewed towards personalities and politics, and towards the early over the later period of Durrani rule, a number of issues remain.[11] Ahmad Shah extracted a considerable quantity of liquid wealth from north India, but what became of this liquidity, what sort of political economy was exercised under the rule of Ahmad Shah and his successors, and with what larger significance for the economy of south and central Asia? This essay aims to engage the concern with political economy and capitalism that animated Bayly's thesis of tribal breakout yet to move beyond the constraints of that particular narrative.

The first section of this essay evicts the notion of a sudden and chaotic breakout of tribals, emphasising instead the agency and skill of Ahmad Shah and the Durranis in what ought to be conceived as a political process. The so-called 'second tribal breakout' was endogenous in two respects. In the first place, Afghans were always part of the political and commercial life of the Indian subcontinent through their seasonal participation in Indian military markets and/or long-distance trade, while the Abdali elite had a strong connection and foothold in Punjab through the settlement of their kinsmen and relationships with magnates involved in caravan trade. Second, the opportunity and incentive to launch campaigns into north India after 1747 was itself connected to the fragmentation of Mughal authority and the conflict of competing interests amongst political actors and magnates, resulting in the Afghans' cultivation of collaborative alliances.

The most unusual aspect of the Durrani campaigns has attracted the least attention; namely, the enormous expropriation and transfer of wealth from the Mughal heartland to the expanding Afghan polity. The second section thus turns to the issue of 'plunder'. Whatever the lament felt by the Mughal elites at the 'loot' carried away by the Afghans, conquest booty had earlier been critical to Mughal imperial expansion as also to the rulers of the Ottoman and Qing empires. What is emphasised in the tribal breakout narrative, therefore, is the

[10] Robert Crews, *Afghan Modern. The History of a Global Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015). For critical engagement with the 'national hero' narrative: Amin Tarzi, "*Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi*. The First History of 'Afghanistan'," in *Afghan History Through Afghan Eyes*, ed. Nile Green (London: Hurst, 2015).

[11] Nichols, "Historiography."

destructive dimension of Ahmad Shah's campaigns. What this analysis shows, however, is how the wealth sequestered by the Afghans was disbursed and circulated through the Durrani territories. At the micro- or local level, the effect was the revivification of the local economy of Punjab and the lubrication of long-distance trade.

As Punjabi magnates and Pashtun traders resumed, or even intensified, their long-distance operations, so the macro-level effects of this transfer of liquidity started to take shape. Zooming into the Multan province, which remained under Durrani authority until it was lost to the Sikhs in 1818, it is argued that its Afghan rulers were typical of eighteenth-century elites elsewhere in south and central Asia in incentivising productive activities, especially the expansion of cultivation and the intensification of commercialisation, supported through the development of productive infrastructure such as canals, as revealed through an examination of the indigo economy. To conclude, this essay examines alternative formulations of the emergence and transformation of the Durrani state and the fruitfulness in world and imperial history of thinking beyond the narrative of tribal breakout.

Much of the analysis in this essay is rooted in Multan and its environs in western Punjab, the first half focussing particularly on the period preceding and during Ahmad Shah's reign, the second ranging more widely to developments under his successors through to circa 1818. In this way, this essay also improves our understanding of eighteenth-century Punjab, which has been neglected in the revisionism initiated in the late 1970s and 1980s of the so-called 'decline' phase in the Asian empires. Mughal and Ottoman historians displaced the notion of an eighteenth-century 'dark age' by emphasising the reconstruction of regionally-based political order and economic prosperity by newly-empowered or newly-emerged local elites.[12] This paradigm shift resulted from a shift of vantage points from the decaying Mughal or Ottoman centre to the archives of the provinces and new regional kingdoms. In contrast, the dearth of rich records from Punjab continues to give credence to the view that

[12] Dina Rizk Khoury, "The Ottoman Centre versus Provincial Power-Holders: An Analysis of the Historiography," in *Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Mughal historians have recently started to emphasise the long-term drift in Indian political economy over several centuries to the colonial conquest: Sumit Guha, "Rethinking the Economy of Mughal India: Lateral Perspectives," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58, no. 4 (2015): 532–575; Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

disorder and hardship—rather than stability and prosperity—prevailed in what became the agriculturally-productive and revenue-yielding core of the Durranis' north Indian domains.[13] Yet, two pockets of relatively under-exploited information permit a fuller exploration of economic themes, and are utilised in this essay.

The first are sources surviving from the East India Company's short-lived trading post or factory in the province of Sindh (at Thatta, on the Indus Delta), established in the effort to secure a saltpetre monopoly and open trade relations in Sindh in 1758, and terminated when the English monopoly was cannibalised by the Dutch in 1777–1778. These records consist of the factory diary for 1762–1764 and letters from the factors to the command centre of the Company's operations in the western Indian Ocean at Bombay for 1757–1775. They have been largely overlooked because of scholarly disinterest in this rather marginal and unsuccessful area of commercial and political activity. They provide rich insight into the passing of the Durrani forces during the Indian campaigns, however, and contain much valuable information into trade and finance.[14] The second set of sources are rather different, forming not a discrete body of documents produced by a single authority, but a range of materials on a single commodity, most of which relate to the period of Durrani rule. Indigo was one of the most important items in long-distance trade between northwest India and central Asia in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and was typical of the sorts of cash crops whose cultivation was encouraged by regional rulers for trade and the revenues deriving therefrom. Indigo thus serves as a prism through which to refract various aspects of Durrani political economy, including those related to production, trade, and taxation, and to link it to developments elsewhere in south and central Asia during the colonial transition.

I.

Over the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, the combination of agrarian expansion and trade prompted the commercialization and

[13] On the limited information on trade to be found in local Persian and Punjabi-language sources, at least those that are catalogued or otherwise accessible to scholars, see: Veena Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of the Punjab during the Late Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993), 130; Shireen Moosvi, *The Economy of the Mughal Empire, c. 1595. A Statistical Study* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 376.

[14] Similarly, for the value of European sources to studying trade and the economy of the eighteenth-century Ottoman centre: Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Brill: Leiden, 1999).

marketization of agricultural production and of land (or, more precisely, in the rights to land revenue) across the Middle East and south Asia. The influx of bullion, especially from the New World, lubricated this transformation. These economic developments, however, were uneven, favoring areas of plenty over those whose ecology naturally produced deficit, both between but also within empires such as those established by the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals. The side-effect was the deepening of subinfeudation in the fertile heartlands and their seaboards that served as vents-for-surplus, and the sharpening of social difference between the prospering and the relatively poorer parts of the empire, between center, locality, and periphery. These rifts initiated the hollowing out of the Asian empires, while the feeling of relative impoverishment and the alienation of tribesmen along the frontiers triggered the breakouts that accelerated this process, according to Bayly's thesis.[15]

In fact, the second tribal breakout was more of a 'breaking-in', not so much an exogenous shock precipitated by outsiders from the imperial periphery, as a process resulting from the accumulation of human and material resources through a long-standing and deeply-embedded relationship to the imperial heartland. Of relevance here are Jos Gommans' (now collected) writings on the Arid Zone.[16] 'From the twelfth century onward', Gommans argues, 'state formation more and more revolved around the frontier between the Arid Zone and the agrarian cores of the [Indian] subcontinent'. In the latter, were the rich revenue-producing areas of settlement and cultivation, such as Punjab, Hindustan, and the Gangetic valley. In contrast, the arid regions were better-suited to the breeding of animals (bullocks, camels, horses) required as part of the productive and war apparatus of sedentary states, an advantage which empowered those semi-nomadic but highly-mobile pastoralists, mercenaries, and military entrepreneurs.[17]

Because of their seasonal transhumance from the central Asian and Afghan dry zone into the Indian wet zone, Pashtun tribesmen were rooted within the dynamics of campaigning and conquest on the Indian subcontinent, both through their provision of animal power (as pastoralists) and their participation in the military labour market (as

[15] Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 17–44.

[16] Jos Gommans, *The Indian Frontier. Horse and Warband in the Making of Empires* (Delhi: Manohar, 2018), especially 51–77. For an evaluative review, including discussion of the issues of power and violence that are implicit or backgrounded in Gommans' work: Jagjeet Lally, "Introduction to the Third Edition. Afghans and their History between South Asia and the World" in Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*.

[17] Gommans, *Indian Frontier*, 69.

mercenaries, or *naukar*s). In this respect, their recruitment by the Durranis was unusual only in diverting their services away from the armies of Indian rulers. But these circulatory patterns were also complemented with the settlement of some Afghans in parts of Iran and the Indian subcontinent. In the case of the Abdalis, this settlement around southern Afghanistan was partly the product of service and strategic linkages with the Mughals and Safavids in the contest for the control of Kandahar; thus, Christine Noelle-Karimi has highlighted that the Abdali elite were neither 'merely a local phenomenon', nor did '[t]heir rise in power [. . .] develop from a political void', for they had 'positioned themselves within a network extending from Multan in the east to Herat in the west well before the time of Nadir Shah'.[18] In part, this was also the result of the involvement of Pashtun tribes in long-distance trade and the markets for military labour and materiel.

Of immediate significance to the rise of the Durrani polity in the mid-eighteenth century was the prior settlement of Abdali tribesmen near Multan, in western Punjab, where they traded in camels, presumably as nodes in a larger network reaching further into north India and Afghanistan. This Indo-Afghan diaspora proved instrumental in the successful contest with their Ghilzai opponents in Herat in 1717, prior to the Nadirid and Durrani campaigns, and it was within the community of Multani Abdalis that Ahmad Shah had either been born or else spent his early life.[19] Within this context, the recruitment of Ahmad Shah and the Abdalis by Nadir Shah is unsurprising, explicable not merely as playing-off the Abdalis against their Ghilzai rivals, but also as a way of tapping the networks and resources possessed by the former. In turn, service to Nadir Shah was to bring greater rewards and resources to the Abdali tribes in the form of grants of prebends (*tiyul*, akin to the Mughal *jagir*) over more than half of the cultivated land in Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.[20] This is indicative, moreover, of the Afghans' participation in those same practices that were hollowing out the heartlands of the Asian empires in Bayly's analysis. As for Ahmad Shah, the future leader of the

[18] Christine Noelle-Karimi, "The Abdali Afghans between Multan, Qandahar and Herat in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Beyond Swat. History, Society and Economy along the Afghanistan-Pakistan Frontier*, ed. Benjamin D. Hopkins and Magnus Marsden (London: Hurst, 2013), 32. On 'tribe' as remoulded by imperial power, rather than immutable: Crews, *Afghan*, 39–40. And, on their refashioning and repositioning from 'within': Nile Green, "Tribe, Diaspora, and Sainthood in Afghan History," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 1 (2008): 171–211.

[19] Noelle-Karimi, "Abdali Afghans."

[20] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, 35.

Abdalis, service with Nadir Shah was a vital stepping-stone towards his subsequent and autonomous political career.[21]

In these respects, the notion of a sudden tribal breakout in the mid-century belies the longer-term accumulation of power and resources, strategic alliances and specialist knowledge upon which Durrani expansion was predicated. The process of Durrani state making was not propelled by this tailwind alone, however. The expansion of Ahmad Shah's ambitions following Nadir Shah's death and the first independent campaign of 1747 necessitated the courting of regional power holders and the forging of further alliances, both military and civilian. Of course, collaboration has been a central theme of imperial history since the 1970s, especially in studies of the transition to colonialism in south Asia, even if its role in the process of Durrani political expansion has been relatively neglected.[22] In fact, the comparison of the Durrani with the Ottoman and Qing experiences of empire-building is remarkable. Impressed by their martial prowess and early expansion on the imperial periphery and beyond, but seen as unsophisticated and disinterested in the sedentary life associated with the exercise of imperial power, competitors vying for control in these crumbling empires saw Eurasian frontier tribes as a military resource exploitable to their own ends.[23] In each case, the old imperial elites often failed to recognise the fluidity and malleability of identities in the frontier, the adroitness with which charismatic leaders could cultivate new allegiances, and the extent of supposedly 'tribal' or nomadic rulers' vastly-expanded ambitions beyond the collection of booty.[24]

The Mughal elites in the localities and provinces had earlier acquired rights over revenue and land through loyal service, but began to enlarge their political authority and act with increasing autonomy from the emperor's command in the eighteenth century. In turn, these new power holders often relied upon carefully calculated but unstable

[21] Singh, *Ahmad Shah*, 18.

[22] This scholarship is now too extensive to relate here. For a summary of work relating to the themes of this essay, see: Kumkum Chatterjee, "Collaboration and Conflict: Bankers and Early Colonial Rule in India: 1757–1813," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 30, no. 3 (1993): 283–310.

[23] Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chapter. 2; Frederick Wakeman Jr., *The Great Enterprise. The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), vol. i, 301–302.

[24] For a comparison of the Ottoman and Qing enterprises: Peter Perdue, "Empire and Nation in Comparative Perspective: Frontier Administration in Eighteenth-Century China," in *Shared Histories of Modernity. China, India and the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Huri Islamoglu and Peter Perdue (London: Routledge, 2009).

coalitions with opponents—or even the Mughal centre—to defeat more immediate rivals. Nowhere was this 'crisis of empire' more apparent in the mid-eighteenth century than in Punjab.[25] The nominally-Mughal governorship of Punjab was riven by familial feud at the death of Zakariya Khan in 1745, his sons—Yahiya Khan and Shah Nawaz Khan—vying for political control. Advised by his military officer (*faujdar*), Adina Beg Khan, Shah Nawaz Khan called on Ahmad Shah to take control of the province in return for a position as the Afghans' prime minister (*vizier*). Upon hearing from Delhi, however, Shah Nawaz Khan abruptly turned his back on the Durranis, instead reaffirming his loyalties and military allegiance to the Mughal centre while Ahmad Shah's forces were beginning their march towards Punjab.[26] The result was the first, and only moderately successful campaign of 1747, the Afghans succeeding in entering Lahore to receive a ransom of 3 million rupees, while also seizing resources from the city's noble houses, including a treasure trove of arms and rockets, and sufficient horses and camels to transform 5000–6000 footmen into cavalrymen.[27]

With this alliance proving flimsy, the Durranis sought to establish more durable relations with other sorts of power holders. Multan became the bridgehead of Afghan expansion further into north India, for it was also an important commercial centre and gateway from central Asia to north India. Aside from Ahmad Shah's Abdali kinsmen, other Pashtun trading tribes had also established roots in the countryside surrounding the city. The Mian Khels and Musa Khels of the Lohani Pawinda tribes, for example, had become powerful local landlords (*zamindars*) in the area around Dera Ismail Khan on the left bank of the Indus, although even the most prominent would '[n]ow and then [. . .] take an excursion to Kabul or Bokhara [sic]', indicative of the maintenance of their longer-term commercial interests.[28] With such close connections to trade, these tribes were likely to support a charismatic Afghan leader, such as Ahmad Shah, through whose intervention some degree of regional economic stability could be achieved in support of their interests.

[25] Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India. Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–1748* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[26] *C.f.* Hazarah, *Siraj*, 12.
[27] Singh, *Ahmad Shah*, 43–53.
[28] H. A. Rose, ed., *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province. Vol. III. L.-Z* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1914), 101; Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, 109.

The Afghans' collaborators also included non-Pashtuns. Bankers and merchants were deeply implicated in eighteenth-century state building across the Indian subcontinent and the Ottoman world, frequently exploiting the fracturing of the political landscape by financing or else encouraging competition between political opponents where they thought the outcome would support their long-term interests. The collusion of Indian bankers—the so-called 'portfolio capitalists'—with the East India Company in 1757 is perhaps the most infamous example of this process.[29] With their financial and scribal skills, and extensive networks of credit and information, merchants—mostly of Hindu and Jain *khatri* castes, but also including Sikhs and Muslims—were certainly closely connected to power holders in northwest India. In their negotiations with the *amir* of Sindh to secure access to saltpetre and enlarge their goods trade, for example, the Company traders' first points of contact were 'Gulabroy', the *diwan* (treasury officer), and 'Preetumdass Roopchund', the state-appointed saltpetre contractor, a function indicative of the overlapping of trade with finance and private enterprise with political office.[30] In fact, these trader-cum-financier networks were entrenched in the revenue machinery of the state at all levels throughout Sindh and Punjab, down to the *amil* (revenue collector) in the countryside.[31] Most of these networks were headquartered in Multan, but the rise of Durrani authority also empowered merchants from Shikarpur, or else caused bankers and traders to resettle in that city.[32] By providing cash advances to the peasantry or to artisans, and buying-up products at below-market prices for sale in proximate or more distant markets, Punjabi magnates were crucial to the further commercialisation of the economy and, in turn, the flow of cash into the Durrani treasury.[33] An early nineteenth-century European account notes that the Shikarpuri bankers had financed all of Ahmad Shah's campaigns. This was highly

[29] Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C. A. Bayly, "Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 25, no. 4 (1998): 401–424. See, also: Ali Yaycioglu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 80–84, 95–97.

[30] Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai (henceforth: MSA), 'Scindy Diary. Commencing 1st of August 1762 & ending 31st of July 1763', entries for 25.11.1762 and 31.5.1763.

[31] Hughes, *Gazetteer*, 86–89, including a brief description of the small minority of Sikh traders.

[32] Scott Levi, "Multanis and Shikarpuris," in *Global Indian Diasporas. Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory*, ed. Gijsbert Oonk (IIAS/Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

[33] Scott Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade, 1550–1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 211–220.

likely, the remembrance of which by Shikarpuri merchants several decades later revealing the degree of interdependence between the Durrani imperium and the fortunes of Indian banking houses.[34]

The third campaign of 1751–1752 resulted in the ceding of control over Lahore and Multan to the Durranis. To consolidate his connection with Multan, Ahmad Shah installed his closest kinsmen—especially Abdalis of Saddozai families—in positions of power in Multan, granting them land and offices.[35] Alliances were also sought further afield, in the heart of Hindustan. A direct consequence of the growth of Durrani power was the tarnishing of Mughal prestige, swinging the balance from continued loyalty to the imperial centre towards fealty or service to the Durranis in the calculations of those petty rulers who were trying to carve political niches for themselves in north India. Amongst these were Afghans who had amassed grants of various sorts of prebends (*zamindari*, *jagir*, *ijara*, and *inam*) through loyal imperial service that constituted the basis of a new sub-imperial polity in the Gangetic valley: Rohilkhand. Only when the Durrani imperium seemed to eclipse the rewards and security available from Mughal service did the rulers of Rohilkhand offer their manpower and horsepower and join the service of Ahmad Shah, thereafter fashioning a distinctly 'Afghan' identity for themselves. In return, these Indo-Afghan rulers gained Durrani support in the conflicts with the Maratha polity—which was then expanding from western India and making incursions into (nominally) Mughal domains—as well as the re-affirmation of their existing offices.[36]

Having forged such political relations, further campaigns or expeditions were sometimes necessary as a means of extracting the revenue arrears to the Afghan treasury from tributary states, at once also reaffirming Durrani sovereignty. The campaign of 1748 resulted in the transference from the Mughals to the Durranis of the four districts (*chahar mahal*) of Sialkot, Aurangabad, Gujrat, and Pasrur to the west of the Indus. The Mughals had assessed the revenue (*jama*) of these districts at 1,400,000 rupees—a healthy regular revenue stream albeit a fraction of the treasure seized from Delhi following the campaign of 1757. The rebellion of the administrator of the *chahar mahal*, and his failure to remit the annual revenues, thus precipitated the campaign of 1751–1752, resulting in a settlement of 3,000,000 rupees.[37] Ruled by

[34] Charles, Masson, *Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan and the Panjab* (London: Richard Bentley, 1842), vol. i, 353–355.
[35] Singh, *Ahmad Shah*, 120–121, 126.
[36] Lally, "Afghans," xxxiii–xxxiv.
[37] Singh, *Ahmad Shah*, 72, 102.

the Kalhora dynasty as a sub-imperial polity of the Mughal Empire, Sindh was incorporated into Nadir's imperial claims in 1739 as a tributary province paying 2,000,000 rupees annually, the local ruler (*amir*) recognising Ahmad Shah as his new overlord in 1748 through the submission of tribute to Kandahar.

But payment fell short in 1754, the full amount only exacted following the advance of the Afghan forces, resulting in the flight of the *amir* to Jaisalmer, and negotiation between his son (and successor) and Ahmad Shah.[38] The difficulty perhaps arose from the fact that the mid-century was a time of famine and scarcity in the province, circumstances noted by the Company's factors.[39] Ultimately, tributary relations continued, the *amir*'s agent recurrently requesting '3 Gold repeating Watches for the Pattan king' from the factors to form part of the tribute of 1764, for example. In the context of Afghan victory over the Marathas in 1761, and the resulting eviction of the Maratha threat from Sindhi territory, however, the Sindhi *amir*'s request for such unusual gifts perhaps reflected his desire to impress Ahmad Shah and cement closer relations with the Durranis. The Company not being forthcoming in supplying the gold watches, the tribute was eventually submitted with a ritual gifts of turbans, shawls, and a sword embellished with rubies and emeralds.[40] Tributary relations remained in place through to 1805–1806, at least, when the Durrani forces were sent to extract revenues from the Talpurs, who had replaced the Kalhoras as rulers of Sindh.[41]

II.

By the fourth Indian campaign, launched in 1756, Ahmad Shah's forces were regarded as a significant threat to the continuation of material life on the subcontinent—to production and taxation, trade and consumption, and, thus, to the exercise of sovereignty and state power. Whereas the preceding campaigns had resulted in the secession of Mughal territories in the northwest—at the increasingly turbulent edge of the imperial polity—Ahmad Shah directed the 1756–1757

[38] A. W. Hughes, *Gazetteer of the Province of Sindh* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874), 32–33.

[39] MSA, Secretariat Inward Letter-Book (henceforth: MSA-SILB), 1760, no. 14, letter no. 204.

[40] MSA, 'Scindy Diary. Commencing 1st of August 1763 & ending 31st of July 1764', entries for 12.3.1764 and 28.3.1764.

[41] Hazarah, *Siraj*, 113–116.

campaign at the imperial centre, seizing Delhi, sacking its treasuries, and crowning himself as the overlord of the Mughal emperor, Alamgir II. Having gained the loyalty of the Afghan rulers of Rohilkhand, fears spread that Ahmad Shah would continue his campaign by marching eastward from Delhi to the nominally-Mughal and revenue-rich province of Bengal. In turn, this prompted the Bengal ruler, Siraj-ad-Daula, into swift negotiations with the East India Company—who had reconquered their settlement at Calcutta from his army—in the hope that favourable treaty terms might persuade the Company to form a defensive alliance against the Afghans.[42] In this weakening of the Mughal heartland and the rippling of panic through Indian courts can be found the world-historical significance of the Durrani campaigns in the tribal breakout narrative, paving the way to the formation of new political and commercial alliances between Indian courts and European powers, thus allowing the Company's military-fiscal machine to conquer its way to territorial sovereignty on the subcontinent and, in turn, in Asia.[43]

Viewed from the perspective of an established political authority such as the Mughal court and elite in Delhi or Siraj-ud-Daula in Bengal, it is obvious why the activities of aspirational state builders would appear as little more than 'marauding' and 'plundering', antithetical to the maintenance of the *existing* order, and emanating from the tribal frontier, outside the urban centres of Mughal civility.[44] What such attitudes betray is not so much hypocrisy as amnesia: the seizure of treasure from rivals during military campaigns remained an important source of revenue even in the Mughal polity as it approached maturity in the seventeenth century.[45] When forced to dig up the treasure buried beneath their *haveli*s (mansions)—often the accumulations of several generations—the Mughal nobility despaired the enormity of their dispossession to the Afghans. Voicing despair, however, was rather disingenuous and ought to be read critically in contemporary Mughal sources: relinquishing past wealth was part of the ritualised bargaining necessary to ensure re-investiture of political offices and, thus, the potential for future accumulation.[46] This process

[42] Jon Wilson, *India Conquered. Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 96.

[43] Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, here 41–42.

[44] On the development of a new Afghan identity to counter this long-standing portrayal of the Pashtuns in Mughal sources, see: Green, "Tribe."

[45] John Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 58, 185.

[46] *C.f.* Yaycioglu, *Partners*, especially 114–115.

reveals as much about the open-ended and negotiated nature of early-modern power as it does about the economy and trade, which must have remained buoyant enough to suggest such calculations might be profitable.

What is revealed in sources penned both by certain Afghan and Mughal writers, furthermore, is the distinction between the legitimate extraction of booty sanctioned by Ahmad Shah, on the one hand, from illegitimate plundering undertaken by soldiers in an arbitrary and sometimes violent manner during the Indian campaigns, on the other.[47] The former not only provided payment for troops; the distribution of treasure by the leader of the campaign also served to cement relations of authority.[48] Nor did plunder consist of cash and treasure alone: the seizure of beasts of burden and animals of war—including mules and bullocks, camels, elephants, and horses—at once weakened enemy forces and enhanced the fighting power of the Durrani military.[49] If there were norms guiding what (and how) resources could justifiably be seized following a successful campaign, Ahmad Shah's recurrent campaigning within the recently-conquered domains was also justifiable amongst those who came to view the Durrani polity as a legitimate entity. As Stephen Blake and others have shown, early-modern kings were peripatetic, royal power predicated on patrimonial bonds that were reaffirmed through face-to-face ritual exchanges and side-by-side campaigning, both necessitating the frequent movement of the court.[50]

Plunder therefore encapsulated motive and means, resource and symbolic capital, and was possessed with a crucial agency of its own in the emergence and consolidation of a new and normatively legitimate order. Only in their audaciousness and scale can the Durrani campaigns be distinguished from the activities of other contemporary political aspirants, such as the Marathas or Sikhs, for they were neither unusual in nature nor unprecedented. Of the 1739 campaign by Nadir Shah, Jadunath Sarkar estimated the value of the assets seized at 150 million rupees in cash and a further 500 million rupees in the form of jewellery, clothing, and objects.[51] This influx supported long-distance, large-scale exchange rather than local transactions, Iran's economy still ailing

[47] See, for example: Singh, *Ahmad Shah*, 184.

[48] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, 122–125.

[49] For details of the Durrani seizures of resources following the 1747 and 1757 campaigns: Singh, *Ahmad Shah*, 43–53, 186–187.

[50] Stephen Blake, "The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 1 (1979): 77–94; Gommans, *Frontier*, chapter 4.

[51] Gommans, *Frontier*, 167–168. *Cf*. Matthee *et al*, *Monetary History* 158.

after 1739 because of the continued shortage of copper coin—not part of the booty from India—necessary for everyday exchange.[52] Indeed, Nadir Shahi rupees—coins reminted from the booty in Nadir's name—remained in circulation within the circuits of caravan trade for some time after Nadir's assassination in 1747, not least in northwest India and Afghanistan, because the Abdali tribes were rewarded with booty for their military service in these campaigns, and because these tribes were active in commerce.[53]

Of the 1757 campaign by Ahmad Shah, Ganda Singh's estimate of the cash seized ranges from 120 to 300 million rupees, and as much treasure as could be loaded onto 28,000 elephants, camels, mules, bullocks, and carts, noting, however, that some of this treasure was appropriated by the Sikhs when they attacked the passing train en route to Kandahar.[54] Gommans estimates—based upon evaluations of the total assessed revenue (*jama*) of the territories under Durrani authority of 20–30 million rupees per annum, 1750–1770—that the value of plunder seized or tribute and revenue exacted during Ahmad Shah's routine campaigns into north India could approach this figure.[55] In other words, the Durrani polity was enriched by both the sequestration and transfer of a vast amount of wealth from the Mughal heartland and the receipt of revenues from the territories formerly remitting monies to the Mughal centre.[56] What, then, were the consequences of this vast sequestration and transfer of wealth from the perspective of Durrani-ruled northwest India and Afghanistan?

Recently, scholars have drawn to attention the cultural dimensions of the early Durrani polity, emphasising the conscious crafting of an imperial ideology and a centralised revenue-bureaucratic state. Gommans noted a number of actions, from the striking of coins and the reading of the *qutbah* (Friday sermon) in Ahmad Shah's name, to the ritual gift exchange of *khilat* (robes of honour) and the commissioning of dynastic history that highlight how Durrani kingship was imbricated within, and articulated with reference to, the wider

[52] Rudi Matthee, Willem Floor, and Patrick Clawson, *The Monetary History of Iran. From the Safavids to the Qajars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 160.

[53] Ibid., 172, n. 112.

[54] Singh, *Ahmad Shah*, 186–187. The Sikhs had also pillaged the Afghan caravans passing through Punjab with the plunder of the 1747 campaign: ibid., 70.

[55] Gommans, *Frontier*, 167–168. *C.f.* William Irvine, "Ahmad Shah, Abdali, and the Indian Wazir, 'Imad-ul-Mulk (1756–7)," *The Indian Antiquary, A Journal of Oriental Research* xxxvi (1907): 14.

[56] In fact, the Punjab governors' recalcitrance in remitting revenues to the center had undermined Mughal operations on the frontier earlier in the century, paving the way for the growth of Afghan power: Alam, *Crisis*, 292–296.

cultural framework of early-modern Eurasian or Indo-Persian universal sovereignty.[57] Christine Noelle-Karimi has studied more closely this commissioning of Nadir Shah's former biographer to pen the *Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi* ('The History of Ahmad Shah').[58] Waleed Ziad has examined the patronage of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Sufi order. From the Durrani perspective, such patronage brought from north India some of the most important and expert practitioners of Sharia, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and Sufism into the life of the Afghan polity, where they could build the spirito-political authority of the dynasty through the spiritual, judicial, and bureaucratic apparatus that accompanied the foundation of their orders in local soil.[59] If the instability in north India encouraged this migration into the Afghan domains, the instability in post-Safavid Iran likewise encouraged emigration of men of the sword (*ahl-i saif*) and masters of the pen (*arbab-i qalam*) towards opportunities in the Durrani polity, as Sajjad Nejatie has highlighted.[60]

These were impressive projects and important developments but their cost is unlikely to have drained the imperial coffers. A far more important—if mundane—outflow of wealth from the imperial centre resulted from the support of commerce and the material lives of subjects. A range of religious-cum-ethical treatises on good kingship and the proper exercise of aristocratic power—those that articulated the norms of kingship within which Ahmad Shah sought to embed his authority—made a clear connection of royal power to the lives of traders, artisans, and peasants, particularly through the proper use of taxation and the disbursement of revenue hoards.[61] In general, aristocratic or royal support for the commercial classes, the safeguarding of commercial ventures and routes, and the development of infrastructure was all viewed as inherently virtuous, since courtly patronage contributed to a sort of trickle-down effect from town to country, from traders and artisans to peasants. Urban centres were major recipients of royal patronage through rulers' institution of charitable endowments that supported commerce and trade

[57] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, chapter 2.

[58] Christine Noelle-Karimi, "Afghan Polities and the Indo-Persian Literary Realm. The Durrani Rulers and their Portrayal in Eighteenth-Century Historiography," in *Afghan History Through Afghan Eyes*, ed. Nile Green (London: Hurst, 2015).

[59] Waleed Ziad, 'Transporting Knowledge in the Durrani Empire. Two Manuals of Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Sufi Practice' in *Afghan History Through Afghan Eyes*, ed. Nile Green (London: Hurst, 2015).

[60] Sajjad Nejatie, "Iranian Migrations in the Durrani Empire," *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 3 (2017): 494–504.

[61] Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam. India 1200–1800* (London: Hurst, 2004).

(*waqf*, *madad-i ma'ash*, *inam*).[62] Such connections became closer still by the eighteenth century, for the fracturing of Mughal authority and the rise of new or bolder political actors in the localities led to the farming out of the perquisites of royal power, namely, rights over revenue from the land.[63] The importance of careful economic management was not lost on the Marathas, for example, even though Mughal and early Company histories have painted them as ruffians and upstarts set on obliterating the Mughal order. Rather, they took pains to adapt the mechanisms of revenue extraction established by the Mughals and promote long-distance trade while also engaging in plunder campaigns into rivals' territories.[64]

Nowhere, perhaps, was the importance of patronage of production and long-distance trade greater than in the Durrani polity, for it was located squarely within the Arid Zone, in contrast to earlier Indo-Afghan states that had either straddled or were located on the frontier of the dry and wet zones. Trade was of importance not only to the state but also those magnate and pastoral groups who collaborated with the Durrani regime and its campaigns in north India. Aside from their role in supplying their military labour and livestock to buyers outside the Arid Zone, the Afghan nomads' pack animals and carts also doubled as the caravan trains connecting north India with central Asia, through the Khyber, Bolan, Sanghar, or Gomal passes, and via Afghan cities including Kabul and Kandahar.[65] From the commercial centres of Punjab—not least Multan and Shikarpur—merchants travelled east towards Delhi and Bengal, or south towards Rajasthan and the Red Sea ports, some journeying as far as the Deccan plateau. From the marts of the khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Khokand, goods and people circulated through networks reaching into China, Russia, and Iran.[66] Wealth transferred from north India thus represented an enormous injection of liquidity into the Durrani economy, supporting the economic activity in northwest India and Afghanistan that sustained the activities of pastoralists and magnates, peasants and artisans.

[62] Stephen Dale, "Empires and Emporia: Palace, Mosque, Market, and Tomb in Istanbul, Isfahan, Agra, and Delhi," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1/2 (2010): 212–229.

[63] Bayly, *Rulers*, especially chapter 1.

[64] Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[65] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, 21, 24, 80–81.

[66] Stephen Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 53; Erika Monahan, *The Merchants of Siberia. Trade in Early Modern Eurasia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), especially 100–101, 271–272, and passim.

Quickly, this bullion coursed through trade networks into central Eurasia, lubricating exchange at the Russian garrison-cum-trading post at Orenburg, for instance.[67]

In fact, looting and legitimate exchange (trade) were two sides of the same coin, the latter following fast on the heels of the former. Following the Afghan victory against the Marathas at the Battle of Panipat in 1761, for example, the Company's factors observed that Ahmad Shah dispatched his personal agents across north India to make purchases en route back to Kandahar.[68] Ahmad Shah returned to north India until his death in 1772, each time with his agents sent to make purchases with the wealth formerly or freshly plundered from north Indian towns, or the tribute and revenue extracted from proxy rulers.[69] One such agent was 'Hussein Caun [Khan]', whom the Company's employees encountered in connection with the purchase of woollens, 'the Pattan King having sent a Commission' for the purchase of textiles in Sindh.[70] Because these exchanges were predicated upon the transfer of wealth from north India, the Company's servants regularly received payment in a mixture of *sicca* (the standard rupee in circulation across north India, outside Company territories) and Nadir Shahi rupees.[71] Occasionally, the factors received payment in other sorts of treasure, taking a deposit on the sale of woollens to the value of Rs. 20,000 in the form of a diamond and string of pearls from a trader named Mirza Mendi in 1771–1772, for example.[72]

Of course, these exchanges are not representative of trade as a whole, either in terms of the types of products or the traders involved. Of broader significance is the Durrani regime's extension of its support to those private traders who were so integral to the cash-revenue nexus of the state. After the campaign of 1762, Ahmad Shah and his vizier issued the 'Pattan' merchants with 'perwunnahs' or warrants granting

[67] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, 28–29.

[68] MSA-SILB, 1761, No. 15, Letter no. 139. Note: The Company factors simply use the designation 'chuppar'. Irvine defines 'chapars' as Ahmad Shah's 'Quick-riding horsemen' in the context of the transmission of edicts to Rohilkhand and Farrukhabad following Ahmad Shah's arrival in Shahjahanabad; Irvine, 'Ahmad Shah's', 13. But these horsemen were treated 'with all due ceremony' suggesting that, therefore, they were more than mere messengers and were, in fact, the personal agents of Ahmad Shah.

[69] MSA-SILB, 1763, No. 17, Letter no. 201; MSA-SILB, 1765, No. 19, Letter no. 175; MSA-SILB, 1766, No. 20, Letter no. 2; MSA-SILB, 1767, No. 21, Letter Nos. 108, 148; MSA-SILB, 1768, No. 22, Letter no. 25; MSA-SILB, 1769, No. 23, Letter no. 92; MSA-SILB, 1770, No. 24, Letter no. 179; MSA-SILB, 1771, No. 25, Letter no. 35.

[70] MSA, 'Scindy Diary. [. . .] 1764', entries for 10.12.1763, 15.12.1763, and 11.3.1764.

[71] MSA, 'Scindy Diary. [. . .] 1763', entries for 31.8.1762.

[72] MSA-SILB, 1771, No. 25, Letter no. 35, p. 68; MSA-SILB, 1772, No. 26, Letter no. 254, p. 355.

them freedom from tolls and duties when passing through what was now Durrani territory beyond the Hindu Kush mountains in northwest India in an attempt to support and enlarge long-distance trade.[73] Published in 1994, Stephen Dale's seminal monograph on India's trade with central Eurasia offered a sketch of the actors and exchanges that contributed to the vibrancy of overland trade in the period before the Durrani raids.[74] Scott Levi extended this analysis into the early twentieth century, but said little of the state of trade in the period from circa 1750 to circa 1830, the survival of caravan trade from the Mughal era to the period of colonial rule taken implicitly as evidence of continuities in the structure and nature of the economic relations underlying long-distance exchange.[75] Claude Markovits, too, studied the Punjabi and Sindhi traders involved in caravan trade, but located an important moment of transformation around the mid-nineteenth century when the integration of this region into the British Empire opened new opportunities for merchants in markets outside Afghanistan and central Asia.[76] By zooming-into the local context of Multan during the reigns of Ahmad Shah and his successors, therefore, the next section shows how the establishment of Durrani authority, the injection of cash, and the interventions supportive of trade led to a longer-term transformation and upswing in the economy of western Punjab.

III.

In the wake of the Afghan campaigns, Indian rulers felt emboldened to enlarge their political authority or more openly flaunt their independence from the Mughal centre. Yet, sustaining this power necessitated the tightening control over land, revenue, and trade, or what Bayly termed 'Asian "mercantilism"'.[77] The establishment of monopolies, the extension of cultivation, and the farming of revenue rights were instrumental to the accumulation of wealth with which to pay mercenaries—both of local and of outside origin, Asian but also European—at once also empowering entrepreneurs and magnate

[73] MSA, 'Scindy Diary. [. . .] 1763', entry for 31.4.1763.
[74] Dale, *Merchants*.
[75] Levi, *Diaspora*.
[76] Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947. Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[77] Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 52–54.

groups who became ever more deeply involved in politics. The result was a fragile prosperity where surplus production and trade were possible, and hardship or insecurity in others; a deepening, in other words, of the uneven economic development that had triggered this very process.

Intersected by the arterial Grand Trunk Road connecting Kabul, Lahore, and Delhi, Punjab is thought to have borne the brunt of the tangled trio of phenomenon that rocked eighteenth-century India: the growth of local opposition to Mughal rule, the fragmentation of central authority, and the repeated campaigns of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah. Major political and commercial cities such as Jalandhar and Lahore were ruined as they bore the brunt of conflict between the Mughals, Afghans, and Sikhs.[78] Most scholarship thus depicts Punjab as one of the regions experiencing chaos, disorder, and decline through the eighteenth century even as the scholarly consensus has shifted in the past forty years or so, with historians of other parts of the subcontinent emphasising the experience of periodic or sustained economic growth and political stability.[79]

Yet, it was in the heartlands of Sikh authority—in eastern Punjab, especially around the Lahore *suba* and towards Delhi—that the effects of political confrontation and economic dislocation or disruption were most pronounced. In contrast, in western Punjab—and the Multan *suba* in particular—the economic picture was somewhat different. Multan's economy certainly suffered in consequence of the ineffectiveness and corruption of certain governors appointed by the Durrani rulers, the disruption brought by almost a decade of sieges by the Sikhs, and the exactions associated with the Sikh interregnum (1772–1780).[80] Accounts of turbulence ought to be balanced, however, with the signs of recovery evident in both the city and the province of Multan.[81]

The Company's factors, for example, observed traders of diverse origins criss-crossing northwest India, connecting it to distant markets, indicative of some degree of health in the Indian domains of the

[78] Anon, "Tour to Lahore," in *The Asiatic Annual Register, [. . .] Vol. XI For the Year 1809*, ed. E. Samuel (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1811), 429, 433, 438–439; William Francklin, ed., *Military Memoirs of Mr. George Thomas* (London: John Stockdale, 1805), 343.

[79] P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 13–19; Guha, "Lateral Perspectives," 542–543.

[80] National Archives of India, New Delhi, Foreign Department Proceedings (henceforth: NAI-F), Political, 5.9.1836, Nos. 9–21, 84, 94–96; Ashiq Durrani, *History of Multan* (Lahore: Vanguard Book, 1991), chapter 6.

[81] See, for evidence of recovery: Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy*, 144.

Durrani Empire. Aside from Afghans, there were Persians, one of whom provided details of Russian trade to Bukhara and the Durrani territories, and numerous Multanis, such as 'Nersildass', through whose extensive trade network Himalayan *putchuck* (a root used as incense) was procured, transported across Punjab and Sindh, and shipped via Bombay to China.[82] In fact, the Multanis were more closely knitting—or else simply complementing—their north-south overland trade with maritime trade in the eastern and western Indian Ocean segments, producing a dense network not dissimilar from the Armenian merchant diaspora.[83]

Multan was home to the headquarters of many of these trader-financiers, having emerged as a major commercial centre because of its proximity to the various passes through the Hindu Kush mountains connecting north India with central Asia, and its role, in turn, as a major mint-town and administrative centre. Multan's revenues were respectable for a relatively arid and sparsely populated region, especially compared to eastern Punjab, its treasury balance a sizeable 438,089 rupees compared to 576,599 in the much larger and more densely populated *suba* Lahore three years after its reconquest by the Sikhs from the Afghans in 1818.[84] Before Lahore recovered from its secular decline over the long eighteenth century, a variety of evidence thus suggests that the locus of economic vibrancy shifted westward, to Multan.[85] In this, however, the establishment of Durrani authority played a part. Much as Multan was the bridgehead of Durrani campaigns and imperial enlargement, so, too, did it become the locale of economic expansion.

In the mobile world of the Arid Zone, sedentarization was seldom a permanent transition. Rather, tribes across Eurasia shifted between settlement and cultivation of the land, on the one hand, and livestock-breeding and nomadism, on the other. Using their share of wealth and the receipt of *tiyul* in southern Kandahar from Nadir Shah, some of the Abdalis had sedentarized and expanded the cultivated area, for instance.[86] Other Afghans had moved into the wet zone. Whether motivated more by the need to improve the fiscal health of the state or

[82] MSA-SILB, 1762, No. 16, letter 109; MSA, 'Scindy Diary. [. . .] 1763', entries for 5.10.1762 and 3.2.1763.

[83] S. M. Edwardes, *A Monograph on the Silk Fabrics of the Bombay Presidency* (Bombay: 1900), 4. On the Armenian network in maritime south Asia: Aslanian, *Armenian Merchants*, 44–52, 202–214, and the conclusion, which compares the Multani and Julfan Armenian networks.

[84] L. Sita Ram Kohli, "Land Revenue Administration under Maharajah Ranjit Singh," *Journal of the Panjab Historical Society* 7, no. 1 (1918): 90.

[85] For a comparison of Multan and Lahore in 1794: Singh, *European Accounts*, 90, 93.

[86] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, 35.

to secure the loyalty of various corporate groups, a number of former Afghan mercenaries and servicemen formed thriving new states in the wake of Mughal decline—such as Rohilkhand, Farrukhabad, and Tonk—based on overseeing investment and expansion of the economy, as well as the patronage of religious and cultural institutions, as Iqbal Ghani Khan has argued. In other words, neither merely a fleeting and predatory presence nor inept in the art of government and political economy, Afghans in fact experimented with new technologies much like other nascent Indian rulers, their activities including 'agricultural incentive mongering, irrigation control, and craft production'.[87]

Similar efforts are evident in Multan under Durrani rule. Multan was not the larger sort of Durrani administrative unit (*vilayat*), such as Kabul, but a *hakumat-i ala*, the centre appointing a governor who was given relative autonomy, receiving the centre's share of revenue in turn.[88] Yet, it is evident that these administrators made investments in productive infrastructure, such as Ali Muhammad Khan (of the Pashtun Khugiani tribe, appointed 1752) or Muhammad Muzaffar Khan (of the Sadozai tribe, appointed 1780), many of the Sikh-era transformations simply extending earlier initiatives and continuing the improvements made in the period of Afghan rule.[89] An inquiry into the state of the canals in Multan's indigo tracts compiled shortly after the British conquest of Punjab notes the Sikhs were able to realise five times more revenue around the River Sutlej than the Durrani authorities had collected a few decades earlier, and without considerably changing the rate of revenue assessment.[90] This resulted, in part, from the extension or elaboration of earlier Afghan initiatives. But it was also because each authority focussed their efforts in different areas—the Afghans focussing on canal cleaning or construction around the Chenab, the Sikhs around the Sutlej—as each nevertheless realised the revenue potential of producing larger surpluses for export.[91]

More remarkable, however, was the connection of these initiatives to the production and trade of indigo dye. In the seventeenth century,

[87] Iqbal Ghani Khan, "Technology and the Question of Elite Intervention in Eighteenth-Century North India," in *Rethinking Early Modern India*, ed. Richard B. Barnett (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 280.

[88] Singh, *Ahmad Shah*, 353–356.

[89] Durrani, *Multan*, 96, 116.

[90] Morris, "Appendix A. Memo. on the Cultivation and Manufacture of Indigo in the Mooltan District," in *Gazetteer of the Mooltan District: 1883–4* (Lahore: Arya Press, 1884), 165.

[91] Ibid., 165; T. Morris, "Appendix B. The Inundation Canals of the Mooltan District (by Mr. Morris, A.D. 1860)," in *Gazetteer of the Mooltan District: 1883–4* (Lahore: Arya Press, 1884), 167.

Lahori, Kabuli, and western Asian traders competed with others buyers for the best indigo in the tracts near Agra, east of Delhi, well beyond Punjab.[92] In contrast, Punjabi indigo receives no mention in Indian and European sources that speak of the best sources of indigo supply, and early eighteenth-century Punjabi sources are similarly silent on indigo.[93] Gradually, however, Punjab indigo emerged as an article distinct from the indigo of other regions of India.[94] From the mid-eighteenth century, Afghan and, later, Sikh rulers encouraged indigo planting and processing in the Multan *suba* through taxation and irrigation policies, and exports to overland markets assumed an unprecedented importance.[95] By the late eighteenth century, therefore, indigo was well-established as a cash crop in the canal-irrigated tracts in the region straddling the Indus and Chenab rivers and along the arterial trade routes between Afghanistan and Hindustan, with production concentrated in villages around Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, and Bahawalpur, which was preponderant and preferred to other sorts in markets such as Kabul, Kandahar, and Bukhara.[96]

This process, far from unusual, was a reflection of the innovativeness of eighteenth-century Indian rulers in striving to improve the reliability of their revenue streams, and their desire for collection in coin, rather than kind. By incentivising the production of cash crops for sale in proximate or more distant markets, commercialisation—and, thus, the cash-revenue nexus—could be deepened. Thus, as old supply sources were declining, and as the extent of inter-regional transport and trade was curtailed by rising security costs on the roads, indigo and other dyestuffs came to be cultivated in areas with no prior cultivation history or expertise, such as Jaipur or Kota, as well as Company-ruled Bengal and Bihar.[97] But in Afghan-governed western Punjab, the

[92] W. H. Moreland, and P. Geyl (trans.), *Jahangir's India, the Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1925), 15.

[93] Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556–1707* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 47.

[94] Charles Lockyer, *An Account of the Trade in India* (London: Samuel Crouch, 1711), vol. i, 354, vol. ii, 20–23.

[95] Ganda Singh, ed., *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs* (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1962), 93; Morris, 'Appendix A', 165.

[96] Peter Simon Pallas, *Travels through the Southern Provinces of the Russian Empire, in the Years 1793 and 1794* (London: A. Strahan, 1802), vol. ii, 228; Masson, *Narrative*, vol. i, 390; NAI-F, Political, 14.12.1835, Nos. 64–65, 8.

[97] Bayly, *Rulers*, 88; Madhu Sethia, *Rajput Polity. Warriors, Peasants and Merchants* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2003), 237–238; Dilbagh Singh, *The State, Landlords and Peasants. Rajasthan in the 18th Century* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), 65.

significance of this transformation lay in its connection to the revivification of long-distance commercial circuits.[98]

Just as Bengal indigo was oriented towards markets across the Atlantic and Indian oceans (frequently described as 'global markets'), Punjab indigo serviced a separate set of terrestrial markets in the Eurasian interior.[99] Just as the expansion of Company power was pulling large parts of the Indian economy more deeply into new patterns of trans-oceanic trade, connections constituting what Bayly termed 'modern' or 'proto-globalisation', the Durrani imperium integrated western Punjab more deeply into the economy of Afghanistan and central Eurasia, that is, into the networks of 'archaic globalisation'.[100] This was part of a larger economic efflorescence in the continental interior that positively distinguishes the Durrani polity from other Indian successor states. Qing expansion toward central Asia after circa 1750 led to a bullion influx into Xinjiang and the Fergana valley in exchange for livestock, military supplies, and other goods or services, resulting in the expansion of commerce and the formation of new polities, as Kwangmin Kim and Scott C. Levi have recently brought to attention in brilliant detail.[101] The rulers of Xinjiang and Khokand, as well as Bukhara, re-invested this wealth into irrigation infrastructure and support for commerce.[102] The parallel with the Durrani polity is striking, as is the comparable pattern of change over time. These states were only obliquely connected to the new global economy increasingly dominated by Britain, receiving revenue through commercial interchange with India and China rather than direct trade with the European powers. The economic efflorescence and political stability experienced in these states received a jolt around the second quarter of the nineteenth century, therefore, when the British tightened their grip over their new domains in Asia while the global

[98] Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan. Market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 53.

[99] Prakash Kumar, *Indigo Plantations and Science in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ghulam A. Nadri, *The Political Economy of Indigo in India, 1580–1930* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

[100] C. A. Bayly, "'Archaic' and 'Modern' Globalisation in the Eurasian and African Arena, c. 1750–1850," in *Globalisation in World History*, ed. A. G. Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002).

[101] Kwangmin Kim, *Borderland Capitalism. Turkestan Produce, Qing Silver, and the Birth of an Eastern Market* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Scott C. Levi, *The Rise and Fall of Khoqand, 1709–1806. Central Asia in the Global Age* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017).

[102] On such developments in Bukhara, see: A. S. Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand 1868–1910. A Comparison with British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially 12–13, 92–93, 201–203.

economy went into depression, constricting the flow of silver into India and China and further into the continental interior therefrom. Those Punjabi portfolio capitalists who earlier supported the Durranis extended loans to the Company during its (disastrous) invasion of Afghanistan in 1839, the loans of such extent they almost bankrupted the British Indian government.[103] The commercial arena, as Shah Mahmoud Hanifi has shown so lucidly, thus became a site through which 'Afghanistan'—as a discrete entity—was constructed, constrained, and subordinated by British colonialism in south Asia.[104]

IV. Conclusions

B.D. Hopkins has conceptualised the evolution of the Durrani polity as a shift from a 'plunder polity' to a 'transit economy'.[105] The reliance on north Indian plunder to sustain the state came to an end as the Mughal domains were sucked dry and as other power holders—most notably the East India Company—took control of taxation and revenue-extraction mechanisms, transforming the relationship of sovereign power or princely duty to the populace.[106] Other scholars have also identified a marked shift in the character of the Durrani polity after the death of Ahmad Shah. Often, this is explained as a sort of enfeeblement, Ahmad Shah's successors unable to sustain the campaigning and reproduction of 'hard power' necessary to retain territorial integrity, the Durrani polity thus retreating to the confines of what was to become the nation-state of Afghanistan.[107] Yet, the plunder polity model is itself too simplistic, overlooking the intricate relationship of the emergence of Afghan power to the trajectory of the Mughal Empire. The Mughal Empire was destabilised from within, but this was not imperial decay resulting from Oriental decadence, as scholars argued before revisionist narratives gained currency.[108] Rather, the mid-century campaigns by Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah were rooted in the

[103] William Dalrymple, *Return of a King. Shah Shuja and the First Battle for Afghanistan, 1839–42* (London: Bloomsbury 2012), 469.

[104] Hanifi, *Connecting Histories*.

[105] B. D. Hopkins, *The Making of Modern Afghanistan* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 91–98, chapters 5–6.

[106] Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade. The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

[107] Hopkins, too, touches on such arguments in connecting the increased reliance on transit trade to 'the breakdown of unified political order' – Hopkins, *Making*, 113. See, also: Lally, "Afghans," especially xl–xli.

[108] See, above, n. 5.

exchanges born of ecological interdependencies in the *longue durée*, as well as frontier politics and the build-up of material resources therefrom in the medium term. More immediately, the impact was to accelerate or embolden regional power holders in the enlargement of their autonomy and assumption of those powers and perquisites formerly monopolised—if only symbolically—by the Mughal emperors.

The outcome was the formation of a patrimonial-bureaucratic state typical of those found throughout the eighteenth-century (former) Mughal and Ottomans worlds.[109] These states had emerged from the crisis of empire, caused by the drift into obsolescence of the old imperial system centred on the assignment of prebends to the imperial elite for the support of cavalry forces. The response was a shift towards tax farming, more intensive commercialisation and expansion of agriculture, and the extension of trade. The result, however, was the empowerment of those 'intermediate entities' (landlords, scribes, bankers, merchants, military entrepreneurs) upon whose services local or provincial power rested, often with the effect of enlarging their ability to act autonomously from the imperial centre. The Durrani Empire not only emerged from this context; it also nurtured the development of a similar type of economy and set of political-economic relations, as refracted into view through the prism of indigo production and trade, for example.

The 'mature' Durrani polity did not enter a period of decline following the death of Ahmad Shah, nor were his successors, the administrators they appointed, and their collaborators as passive or ineffectual as historians have suggested (if only by implication), therefore. Insofar as the Durrani state's reliance rested more heavily on transit duties over time, this partly reflected the culmination of processes that commenced with the prior transfer of wealth from north India; the 'plunder polity' and 'transit economy' were not so much separate phases in the transformation of Afghan political economy as interconnected. Furthermore, the Durrani state shared much in common with the Mughal and Ottoman empires, especially apparent now that historians have reconceived what were seen as highly centralised and hegemonic entities until the onset of 'decline'. Such conceptualisations of power as now viewed as fictive, ignoring how power was contested and constantly negotiated not only between centre and 'periphery', top and bottom, but between actors at all levels of the state and across regions.[110] These empires did not suddenly enter

[109] On the replication of the Ottoman household 'model': Khoury, "Historiography."
[110] Yaycioglu, *Partners*; Hasan, *State and Locality*.

a phase of decline so much as a long drift into decentralisation almost coterminous with the history of each empire itself. In this light, the Durrani polity's relative decentralisation—as well as the maintenance of tributary provinces (Sindh) and clientage or vassalage (Rohilkhand, the Mughal centre for a time)—was not reflective of failure as much as a lumpier topography of power than hitherto associated with empire. This complexity of forms of political relations reflected the differing balance of costs over benefits of incorporating frontiers or peripheries into the somewhat more bureaucratically-centralised but compact core of the state—a calculus common across most imperial polities.

What this essay has also shown, however, is that long-distance trade and financial networks were far more durable than the overarching political authorities within their ambit: magnates took pains to command and control flows of information about commerce and politics to determine where the (re)direction of their services would support their continued accumulation of resources. This was as true of actors in networks linking south and central Asia as those stretching across the Sahara, in fact.[111] Imperial power not only depended upon collaboration in phases of expansion, but also rested upon the continued participation of various sorts of intermediaries, seldom directly penetrating particularly deeply to fundamentally transform or dismantle economic or religious networks, more often supporting their continuation and transformation according to their own dynamics.[112] Such ideas remain controversial in the colonial context, especially in the extreme formulation of empire as epiphenomena, which can easily be conceived as a sleight of hand aimed at offloading the responsibility for the violence of colonialism onto indigenous societies.[113]

Outside colonial studies, especially in the study of early modern empires, the allure of the loci or 'container' of political power—(rival) states, (rival) empires—remains. But a shift is discernible, in Gagan Sood's rich study of eighteenth-century webs of exchange across 'Islamicate Eurasia', recovered and remapped from actors' perspectives, or Rosalind O'Hanlon's tracing of Brahmin scribal networks cross-

[111] Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails. Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[112] D. A. Washbrook, "Progress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History c. 1720–1860," *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 57–96; Anand A. Yang, *The Limited Raj. Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793–1920* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[113] For this critique, see: Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind. Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), coda.

cutting and interlacing Mughal and Maratha authority, which reconstituted or reconfigured in response to political change when necessary, for instance.[114] In both cases, commercial or religious groups were entangled within a changing canvas of political authorities, as often the lower reaches of the state hierarchy as representatives closer to the centre, where the 'network's' interests were exhorted from the bottom upwards in constantly renegotiated bargains. Similarly, those magnates who proved critical to the Durrani campaigns survived the straitened circumstances of the mid-nineteenth century to harness new opportunities following European penetration deeper into the interior of south and central Asia.[115] Ultimately, beyond the 'tribal breakout' narrative lies a world—within which Afghans were enmeshed as clients and patrons, consumers and producers—with much to offer world and imperial history.

[114] Gagan D. S. Sood, *India and the Islamic Heartlands. An Eighteenth-Century World of Circulation and Exchange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Performance in a World of Paper: Puranic Histories and Social communication in Early Modern India," *Past and Present* 219, no. 1 (2013): 87–126, among much of her recent work on these themes.

[115] Hanifi, *Connecting Histories*; Levi, *Indian Diaspora*.