

A Mulk of One's Own: Languages of Sovereignty, Statehood, and Dominion in the Eighteenth-Century “Empire of Hindustan”

NICHOLAS J. ABBOTT*

Email: nabbott@odu.edu

Over the course of the eighteenth century, India's Mughal empire (1526–1858) fragmented into a number of regional polities that were, in turn, gradually subsumed under the paramount authority of the British East India Company. This essay describes concomitant developments in the empire's Persianate political language, particularly with regard to ideas of sovereignty, statehood, and dominion. It argues that by the mid-eighteenth century, the Mughal “empire of Hindustan” was increasingly framed as a territorialised governing institution comprising emerging provincial sovereignties rooted in local ruling households. This conceptual dispensation, however, remained ill-defined until the 1760s, when a treaty regime dominated by the Company built upon this language to concretise the empire as a confederacy of independent, sub-imperial states. The essay contends that in the short term, this redefinition bolstered the authority of incipient dynasties in provinces like Awadh, but in the longer term generated conflicts that abetted the expansion of colonial rule and laid conceptual foundations for British paramouncy in India.

Keywords: sovereignty, statehood, Mughal empire, Awadh, British East India Company, paramouncy

In early November 1827, Nasir-ud-din Haidar (r. 1827–37), the young ruler of the North Indian kingdom of Awadh, wrote to the British East India Company's governor-general William Amherst on the occasion of his accession. In his Persian-language letter, the king solicited the governor-general's goodwill by reminding him of the decades-long alliance between his kingdom and the Company and the constant support his forbearers had received from Amherst and his predecessors. “For generations,” he wrote, “the stability of this family's sovereign authority (*istiqrār-i riyāsat-i in dūd mān*)” had depended on the assistance of the Company. At the same time, he also pointed to the peculiar nature of the

Anglo-Awadh relationship. On the one hand, he noted, “the two states” (*har dū sarkār*) were “like one” (*ba-manzila-yi sarkār-i wāhid*) and “integral parts” (*juz'-i lā yunfakk*) of one another. On the other hand, the king was compelled to admit his own dominions were, “in truth, a drop in the global British empire (*dar haqīqat qatrī-yi mamlakat-i gardūn bastat-i anglīshīya*).”¹

Rather succinctly, then, Nasir-ud-din Haidar not only summarised his kingdom's particular relationship with the Company but also the contradictory nature of statehood and sovereignty in the early nineteenth century for “native princes” in an emerging British India. Theoretically sovereign within recognised territorial boundaries, the so-called native or princely states constituted, in the minds of many British officials and metropolitan thinkers, part of an empire of notionally independent states bound together through formal treaties and mutual diplomatic recognition. At the same time, however, such princely regimes were subject to the mediating authority of a paramount British government, which increasingly reserved for itself the right to pare away facets of “divisible” local sovereignty from Indian princes.²

The construction and elaboration of this contradictory, unequal legal-political architecture has received increasing attention in recent years as scholars have probed intersections between imperialism and the formation of international law.³ Yet in drawing primarily upon the archives of European imperial governments and Euro-American political theory, this literature has often overlooked the original diplomatic languages and conceptual frameworks through which British paramountcy and imperial “state systems” were fashioned. Indeed, Nasir-ud-din Haidar's ability to describe his kingdom's ambivalent status in Indo-Persian terms reflected more than a grappling with the nineteenth-century consolidation of British power in India. Rather, as this essay contends, it also illustrated the ways in which British paramountcy—and its conceptual building blocks of autonomous statehood and divisible local sovereignties—was built upon, and negotiated through, an Indo-Persian political language that had first emerged by the mid-eighteenth century with the fragmentation of the Mughal empire and was crystallised further after 1765 with the instantiation of a new treaty regime dominated by the British East India Company.

The development of this new conceptual vocabulary, and its linkages to the subsequent formation of British India and the princely states, has, however, also been overlooked in studies of South Asia's eighteenth-century transition, a literature that has otherwise emphasised significant continuities between late-Mughal and early British imperial rule.⁴ A now-substantial body of work has illustrated how the Mughal imperial regime was pulled apart in the eighteenth century by the tectonic forces of economic growth and political competition, as provincial governors and other imperial officials allied with empowered commercial groups and rural gentries to establish *de facto* autonomous regional polities—a process that also created critical interstices for the establishment and expansion of Company power in India.⁵ Yet the ways in which these processes reconfigured the shared vocabularies of pan-Indian political languages like Persian, or contemporary concepts of statehood and sovereignty, have received rather little attention. Pathbreaking studies of regional state formation in Awadh, for example,

have detailed how Nasir-ud-din Haidar's ancestors negotiated relationships with the imperial court, rival regional powers, and local social groups to forge an effectively independent provincial regime by the mid-eighteenth century.⁶ But in depicting a complex political landscape characterised by a durable, transcendent Mughal sovereignty, tacit acknowledgement of provincial polities, and conflict between imperial and regional "states," this work has assumed multiple and shifting categories of sovereignty and statehood but left their precise articulation in contemporary political discourse largely unexamined. More recently, Robert Travers has illustrated how Company officials in the last quarter of the eighteenth century drew on notions of an "ancient Mughal constitution" to legitimate their administration in Bengal.⁷ Nevertheless, how British engagement with shared Mughal conceptual categories may have reshaped the meaning of sovereignty and statehood for contemporary Indian regimes outside Bengal, or laid the groundwork for a new imperial constitution, has remained obscure.

Taking this scholarship as a point of departure, this essay highlights dimensions of a mid-eighteenth-century conceptual terrain that emerged with the splintering of the Mughal empire and the formation of provincial polities; crystallised through the formation of a treaty-based imperial order after 1765; and furnished an Indo-Persian scaffolding for the subsequent construction of British paramountcy over the princely states. Focusing on North India—and more particularly the Awadh regime under Nasir-ud-din Haidar's great grandfather Shuja'-ud-daula (r. 1754–75)—the essay considers this terrain in two parts. The first part considers the shifting "textures" of the late-Mughal empire's polyvalent Indo-Persian political vocabulary in the mid-eighteenth century, particularly with regard to ideas of statehood and sovereignty. It argues that while the meanings of certain key terms remained multiple and contested, usage at mid-century suggested a growing sense of the Mughal "empire of Hindustan" (*saltanat, mamlakat-i hindūstān*) as a territorially defined institutional space, bound by a malleable "constitution" of norms and regulations and an increasingly notional Timurid suzerainty. At the same time, within this imperial frame, incipient provincial dynasties like that of Awadh exerted effective provincial sovereignty (*riyāsāt*) over quasi-autonomous territorial dominions (*ta'alluqas, mulks*) through independent governing establishments (*sarkārs*) that also functioned as metonyms for their emerging regimes.

This dispensation, however, remained fragile, contested, and ultimately ill-defined until 1765, when, as the essay's second part shows, the Company's defeat of Shuja'-ud-daula facilitated the construction of a new treaty regime for the empire of Hindustan. Formally recognising their independent authority within their respective territories, the 1765 treaties effectively redefined the empire for Shuja'-ud-daula and Company officials as a confederacy of independent "states" and its "constitution" as an expanding body of written treaties and compacts overlaying earlier imperial norms. Yet despite apparently establishing a framework for relations between autonomous "states," the new treaty-based imperial constitution contained its own set of tensions and incommensurabilities, negotiations of which, as the essay concludes, would soon facilitate the establishment of British paramountcy and the submergence of the empire of Hindustan and Indian princely sovereigns within a global British empire of states.

Textures of Statehood and Sovereignty in the Late-Mughal Empire of Hindustan

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Mughal empire's Persianate political vocabulary contained a rich array of terms to describe both an identifiable, autonomous institution of governance ("the state") and supreme political authority (sovereignty). This vocabulary was largely derived from a well-established Perso-Arabic political lexicon in use throughout much of the Islamic world. Yet as Muzaffar Alam observes, these terms not only possessed intrinsically multiple and shifting meanings but often came to be characterised by unique usages in the context of early modern South Asia.⁸ Such particularity and polyvalence in the Mughal political vocabulary was, at times, reflected in contemporary works of lexicography and, as this essay suggests, amplified by eighteenth-century forces of imperial disintegration.⁹ Taking a fuller account of some of these late-Mughal conceptual shifts and delineating a broader "texture" of eighteenth-century sovereignty and statehood, however, also requires reading across multiple, sometimes overlapping genres of political discourse and synthesising disparate moments and patterns of usage.¹⁰ Using examples drawn from eighteenth-century administrative manuals (*dastūr-ul-ʿamal*), news reports (*akhbārāt*), histories (*tārīkh*), biographical dictionaries (*tazkira*), and lexicons (*lughāt*), the following section surveys several key terms in the late-Mughal political vocabulary to illustrate an emerging, albeit contested and ill-defined, vision of the empire and incipient provincial regimes in the mid-eighteenth century.

Perhaps no term more clearly exemplifies the Mughal political vocabulary's polyvalence and the shifting terrains of eighteenth-century sovereignty and statehood than the term "*saltanat*," which, depending on context, could denote royal power or sovereign authority ("kingship"); institutions and individuals through which that power was projected; and the territory over which a king or emperor ruled (his "kingdom" or "empire"). Derived from the Arabic word "*sultān*" (power), *saltanat* had, from the ninth century, described the temporal authority wielded by local Muslim rulers vis-à-vis the increasingly notional supremacy of the Abbasid caliphs and was eventually glossed as a synonym for pre-Islamic Persianate conceptions of kingship ("*pādshāhī*").¹¹ The relationship between *saltanat* and caliphate (*khilāfat*), or succession to the political authority of the Prophet, had, however, already begun to blur by the time of the Mongols' destruction of the Abbasid dynasty in the mid-thirteenth century.¹² Afterwards, notions of *khilāfat* were further subsumed within early modern reformulations of sultanic kingship that drew from idioms of Sufi preceptorship, Perso-Islamic royal justice, and the Turko-Mongol sovereign as dynastic law-giver to shape multiple enunciations of *saltanat* and imperial authority in later Turkic Muslim dynasties, including that of the Timurid Mughals.¹³

The use of "*saltanat*" to describe Mughal kingship and the exercise of Timurid authority persisted into the nineteenth century, even by those who were most dedicated to turning that kingship into a titular suzerainty.¹⁴ By the mid-eighteenth century, however, other valences had begun to predominate as *saltanat* also came to represent more an institutional collectivity and a territorial space. Where, for example, *saltanat* was often

construed at the height of Mughal power in the seventeenth century with Timurid dynastic appellations (e.g., *tīmūrīya*, *gūrgānī*), it became by the mid-eighteenth century nearly universal to describe it in territorial terms as “the *saltanat* of Hindustan” (*saltanat-i hindūstān*).¹⁵ In one sense, this usage conveyed simply kingship and sovereign authority over Hindustan, or North India. In another, however, it also suggested an equivalence between that authority and the territorial “kingdom” or “empire” (*mamlakat*) it commanded. In two separate places in his *tazkira* the *Khizāna-yi ‘āmira* (c. 1762), for example, noted eighteenth-century poet and scholar Ghulam ‘Ali ‘Azad’ Bilgrami eulogises the nearly simultaneous deaths in 1748 of the emperor Muhammad Shah (r. 1719–48), *wazīr* Qamar-ud-din Khan, and governor of the Deccan Asaf Jah. In nearly identical terms, using first the word “*mamlakat*” and later the word “*saltanat*,” he notes in verse and prose that within a year “three pillars” (*sih rukn*) of the “empire” had passed away.¹⁶

Describing Muhammad Shah as one of its pillars of the empire, Bilgrami’s rhetorically radical yet matter-of-fact subordination of the emperor Muhammad Shah to the “empire of Hindustan” not only pointed to a territorialised understanding of the *saltanat* but also highlighted the term’s more abstract, institutional valences as well. Seventeenth-century advice manuals composed for the Mughal emperors—which drew on well-established traditions of political ethics (*akhlāq*) and “mirrors for princes”—often described the *saltanat* through structural metaphors as a “house” (*khāna*) or “fortress” (*qasr*) supported by particular foundations.¹⁷ For some, like *hadīth* scholar Shaikh ‘Abd-ul-haqq Dihlawi (d. 1642), these metaphors provided opportunities to recapitulate earlier theories of the circle of justice that linked virtuous kingship to its social and material foundations. Others, however, like former provincial governor Muhammad Baqir Najm-i Sani (d. 1637), used them to present the *saltanat* as a collective institution of governance, its various “foundations” (*qā’ima*) constituted by different groups of officials and imperial servants.¹⁸

This image of the *saltanat* as a corporate body and institutional structure was further enriched through the ongoing development of an imperial “constitution” of edicts, norms, precedents, and traditions, referred to most often with the Perso-Arabic terms *zābta* (pl. *zawābit*), *qānūn* (pl. *qawānīn*), and *ā’in*. As Guy Burak has recently argued, post-Mongol imperial dynasties like the Ottomans and the Mughals drew on Turko-Mongol conceptions of the sovereign as law-giver to construct new bodies of “dynastic law” that augmented (and sometimes contradicted) the juristic law of the *sharī’a* and created a kind of parallel constitutional framework for the empires.¹⁹ The extent to which these dynastic laws and imperial constitutions were formalised differed considerably, and the Mughals did not appear to codify their regulations to the same degree as their Ottoman contemporaries. As the polymathic scribe and lexicographer Anand Ram ‘Mukhlis’ (d. 1750) observed, “The regulations and rules of the empire of Hindustan are many (*zawābit wa qawānīn-i saltanat-i hindūstān bisiyār ast*) [but] if they were [ever] written out in full (*mabsūt nawishta shawad*), they would demand an entire office.”²⁰ Yet as Mukhlis also makes apparent, the idea of an established corpus of regulations and traditions clearly informed Mughal officials’ perception of what the

saltanat was and, as Kumkum Chatterjee observed, generated among them a sense of institutional order and an analogue to what Cornell Fleischer has described in the Ottoman context as “*kanun* consciousness.”²¹

For Mughal officials, this emerging consciousness—as well as the empire’s relative lack of formal codification—shaped not only their understanding of the “*saltanat* of Hindustan” as a territorial space and a governing collectivity of established institutional norms, but also how that institution had apparently transformed in the eighteenth century. For contemporary critics like the anonymous author of the mid-century history the *Tārīkh-i ahmad shāhī*, this was an era in which the *saltanat*’s “traditions, institutes, and regulations” (*ā’in wa qawā’id wa qawānīn*), established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by “the great emperors” (*bādshāhān-i ’umda*), had now “gone to ruin” (*barham khwurda*).²² Others, however, also saw, in the wake of growing competition among the imperial elite and the expanding power of provincial interests, more sinister attempts to transform the imperial constitution into something else entirely. In an evocative passage in his memoir the *Bayān-i wāqī’* (1779), for example, former imperial official and resident of Delhi Khwaja ‘Abd-ul-karim described how, during the reign of Muhammad Shah, manipulation of imperial regulations fuelled rivalries among the great officials (*umrā*) and disorder through the empire of Hindustan. Whenever one of the officers issued an order “on the basis of sound regulations (*bar tabq-i qānūn-i salāh wa suwāb*),” he recalled, another would undermine his efforts out of spite and a desire for profit.²³ Moreover, these plans, particularly for high-ranking officials like Muhammad Shah’s paymaster (*mīr bakhshī*) Samsam-ud-daula, often involved allying with “rebellious” provincial groups and promoting their interests at court. For ‘Abd-ul-karim, this behaviour did more than disgrace both the *saltanat* and the officials who comprised it. It also presented a more existential threat, establishing through new precedents a kind of counter-constitution that he condemned in the language of Islamic jurisprudence as “black traditions” (*sunnat-i siyah*) and a “disgusting [new] school of legal opinion” (*mazhab-i zishtī*).²⁴

As ‘Abd-ul-karim’s lamentations demonstrate, territorialised and “constitutional” visions of the *saltanat* of Hindustan provided a means for critiquing both the state of the imperial institution and the behaviour of prominent officials, particularly those with provincial connections who were seen to be amassing “private” resources at the empire’s expense. Hence, in the eyes of their contemporary critics, provincially aligned officials like Samsam-ud-daula or governor of Awadh and sometime *wazīr* Safdar Jang (r. 1739–54), were concerned solely with “enriching [their] own households (*ābād namūdan-i khāna-yi khwud*)” while “despoiling the [rest of the] empire (*kharāb kardan-i mamlakat*).”²⁵

In order, however, to parse this complex conceptual relationship between elite households, emerging provincial regimes, and the *saltanat* of Hindustan as an imperial “state,” it will be useful to consider briefly another key term for understanding statehood and sovereignty in mid-eighteenth-century Mughal India, “*sarkār*.” Unlike the widely used Arabic loan word “*saltanat*,” the Persian “*sarkār*” was one of the few political terms particularly associated with early modern India.²⁶ Meaning literally an “overseer” or

“superintendent,” *sarkār* in Indo-Persian political discourse was used as an honorific for a high-ranking individual and, more frequently, the household establishment he (or she) commanded.²⁷ Such establishments could range from the relatively humble households of low-ranking officials to the massive complexes maintained by the Mughal emperors, their politically viable sons, and their most influential female relatives.²⁸ Crucially, in terms of their organisation and composition, the difference between the *sarkārs* of petty officials and the behemoths of the imperial family was largely one of degree rather than kind. Each was constituted by a secluded core (*haram*), accessible only to women, preadolescent male children, *mahram* male kin, and eunuchs; offices, workshops, stables, and storehouses (collectively referred to as *kārkhānas*) staffed by artisans, scribes, and a panoply of servants and specialists; and beyond them, a body of other hired soldiers, servants, slaves, and assorted service providers who linked the *sarkār* to the wider world.²⁹

As such, each *sarkār* was effectively its own self-contained, scalable monad of governance. In this regard, it is unsurprising that the career trajectories of Mughal officials were described not as steady ascents through clearly demarcated bureaucratic departments but as frequent hops to positions of greater responsibility in larger, more prestigious *sarkārs*, or that *dastūr-ul-‘amals* and administrative advice literature recommended staffing one’s *sarkār* with someone “who had already been a servant in the *sarkār* of a reputable official.”³⁰ Furthermore, high-ranking officials serving imperial and princely establishments typically maintained their own *sarkārs* nested within those of their masters. As suggested by the work of Stephen Blake and more recently Munis Faruqi, the Mughal “state”—seen through the lens of the *sarkār*—appears less a single rigid bureaucratic structure than a dense network of interlocking and perpetually reconstituting households that overlaid a loose hierarchy of offices and graded numeric ranks.³¹

Yet this granular view of the Mughal regime does not typify how the term *sarkār* was most frequently deployed, particularly in the context of dynastic narrative. By the late seventeenth century, imperial histories limited it almost exclusively to establishments of the emperor, Mughal princes, and high-ranking women of the dynasty. Even within this more confined usage, at the apex of the imperial hierarchy the emperor’s *sarkār* was, like the *saltanat*, discursively depersonalised and set apart as “the imperial *sarkār*” (*sarkār-i bādshāhī*) “the sublime *sarkār*” (*sarkār-i wālā*), or simply “[the] *sarkār*.”³² Such depersonalisation of the emperor’s household in high-imperial discourse allowed “the *sarkār*” to act as a synonym for the *saltanat* as imperial institution and as a metonym for the regime as a whole, particularly as relations between the Mughal emperors, their servants, and their subjects came to be construed in terms of the *sarkār*. Hence, by the mid-seventeenth century, the Mughals’ dynastic law and “constitutional” norms and protocols were referred in administrative discourse alternately as *zābta-yi sarkār* or *zābta-yi saltanat*; its officials (even petty accountants and headmen in distant villages) as “the *sarkār*’s servants” (*mulāzimān-i sarkār*); its tax demands as “the *sarkār*’s revenues” (*māl, zar-i sarkār*); its confiscations of deceased and disgraced officials and family members’ property as “the *sarkār*’s seizures” (*zabt-i sarkār*); and its many subjects as “the *sarkār*’s taxpayers” (*mālguzārān-i sarkār*).³³ As illustrated by Munis Faruqi, the politics of imperial succession remained into the eighteenth century one of often bloody

competition between multiple princely households and skillful consolidation of the victor's princely establishment with that of his predecessor.³⁴ At the very same time, however, depersonalised depictions of “the *sarkār*”—and its perpetual demands for loyalty, obedience, and taxes—increasingly framed the imperial establishment, like the *saltanat* of Hindustan, as a single, autonomous institution with its own artificial life—in a word, the “state.”

Yet as martial and fiscal power shifted decisively away from the establishments of the Timurid dynasty to those of its influential provincial governors, *wazīrs*, and other powerful courtiers in the eighteenth century, it became difficult to sustain discursively the image of a single, universal household as an all-encompassing metonym for the empire. Accordingly, historians and memoirists broadened their use of the term in this period to narrate competition between the great households of competing officials, though some deferential news-writers and sympathetic chroniclers continued to differentiate between the *sarkārs* of the emperors and the mere “households” (*khānas*) of their nominal subordinates.³⁵ More provocatively, some governors began to be addressed—and, in some cases, even to refer to themselves—as “the *sarkār*” within their particular provinces, thus seemingly appropriating the same image of a single expansive governing establishment for their own emerging regional regimes.³⁶

What precisely this meant, however, was not always clear. Depending on the context, such usage could suggest that “the *sarkār*” in the province was either an autonomous institution of its own or, as East India Company officials initially understood the term, a local manifestation of the imperial government.³⁷ Moreover, this ambiguity was compounded by the fact that, despite wresting practical provincial authority away from the imperial court by the 1740s, the governors of the Deccan, Awadh, and Bengal had hardly renounced Timurid suzerainty or the empire of Hindustan as a whole. Indeed, even with their often tumultuous relationships with the Mughal emperors and the imperial court, men like Awadh's Safdar Jang or the Deccan's Asaf Jah continued to be lionised as “pillars of the empire” (*rukni saltanat*).³⁸

Yet by the early 1760s, some observers (particularly those closely associated with provincial courts) began to describe and distinguish the authority wielded by the governors and their *sarkārs* in ways that reflected their growing autonomy within the imperial framework. In particular, they began to employ another well-established Arabic loan word, “*riyāsat*.”³⁹ Derived from the word “*ra'īs*” (chief, headman), the term was defined in Arabic-Persian lexicons of the period literally as a synonym for “*sardārī*” (leadership) or “*mihdarī*” (lordship, chieftaincy).⁴⁰ In practice, however, like the term “*saltanat*,” the word possessed a number of valences and potential connotations in Mughal imperial discourse. The elaboration of these valences paralleled those of “*saltanat*,” and the word would similarly come to encompass the personal exercise of authority, the institutions and individuals through which that authority was exerted, and the territorial space over which it was projected. Indeed, at its most abstract, “*riyāsat*” and “*saltanat*” could be used almost interchangeably. In an advice manual composed for Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–27), for example, Shaikh 'Abd-ul-haqq Dihlawi advised the emperor to keep his mind sharp, for “kingship (*saltanat*), leadership (*riyāsat*), sovereignty

(*farmān-dihī*), and command (*hukm-ravā'ī*)” depend on wisdom and vigilance—an admonition the emperor Aurangzeb would repeat to his son Prince Muhammad A'zam in similar terms decades later.⁴¹

Attributions of *riyāsāt* to the provincial governors, however, did not signal formal independence or a renunciation of Mughal suzerainty. As Deccan *sūbadār* Asaf Jah allegedly testified to his son on his deathbed in 1748, not only was his “*riyāsāt* of the Deccan” (*riyāsāt-i dakkān*) derived from his imperial service (*naukarī*), but he had in fact refused a gift of local *saltanat* when it was offered by the Iranian warlord Nadir Shah during the latter's occupation of Delhi in 1739.⁴² Rather, in the specific context of mid-eighteenth-century regional regimes, the term functioned more often as a synonym for other words like “*hukūmat*,” “*nizāmat*,” and “*ayālat*” that had long been associated with assumption of provincial governorships.⁴³

Nevertheless, there was *something* new and distinct about the *riyāsāt* wielded by Asaf Jah and his contemporaries. While not a direct discursive challenge to the notional supremacy of the emperors, *riyāsāt* and its synonyms, at least in the formulations of some mid-century observers, seemed to convey not just gubernatorial authority but, like the idea of “the *sarkār*” in the province, effective sovereignty within established local boundaries (*sarhadd*, *hudūd*). In a suggestive passage in his *Khizāna-yi 'āmira*, Ghulam 'Ali Bilgrami narrates an incident in 1757 when the powerful *wazīr* Imad-ul-mulk secured imperial patents (*sanads*) from the emperor 'Alamgir II (r. 1754–9) and attempted to oust, in favour of a Timurid prince, Awadh's current governor Shuja'-ud-daula (r. 1754–75), whose family had held the position uninterrupted for more than three decades and who had recently “adorned the provincial throne.” Despite ostensibly effecting the will of the Mughal sovereign, Bilgrami nevertheless describes the *wazīr* as seeking to “interfere (*mudākhillat numāyad*) in the Awadh *sūba*.” Apprised of Imad-ul-mulk's intentions, Shuja'-ud-daula then brought his army up to Sandi, the “frontier of the Awadh *sūba*,” where in the end the *wazīr* was compelled to accept the governor's “reappointment” in exchange for a sizeable cash payment.⁴⁴

If, however, as in Bilgrami's telling, *riyāsāt* entailed a kind of vague sovereignty within the recognised bounds of a given *sūba* and immunity from outside “interference” (even that of the imperial court), the encounter between Imad-ul-mulk and Shuja'-ud-daula also illustrates that its legitimacy was frequently tested and its perpetuation demanded continual negotiation with regional rivals. Moreover, the precise nature of rights and privilege associated with *riyāsāt* remained ill-defined, particularly with regard to territorial possession and hereditary succession.

Such vagaries are most apparent in the terminology applied to territories under the *riyāsāt* of incipient gubernatorial dynasties like that of Awadh and the Deccan. Most frequently, these areas were—especially by those critical of the provincial governors—construed elliptically as “*ta'alluqas*” (attachments), or as being “attached” (*muta'alliqa*), to particular governors and their *sarkārs*.⁴⁵ In Mughal administrative discourse, the term “*ta'alluqa*” typically connoted an official's particular jurisdiction, his *ta'alluqa-yi khidmat*, or the area to which the office was attached.⁴⁶ It could, however, also refer generally to the “estates” of *zamīndārs*, who held both proprietary rights to their lands and its

produce, or to tenures in which large *zamīndārs* (sometimes known as *ta'alluqādārs*) farmed revenues owed by their smaller neighbours and occasionally expropriated their lands.⁴⁷ Conflating imperial service, tax farming, and landed proprietorship, the term *ta'alluqa* thus conveniently denied that the provincial governors were anything more than imperial office holders, while also suggesting, as Muzaffar Alam has argued, that they had become in effect principal farmers of provincial revenues—and perhaps holders of more proprietary rights to their lands, as well.⁴⁸

A few observers, however, went still further by hinting that territories under their control were the governors' "dominions" (*mulk*, *mamlakat*; pl. *mamālik*). Derived from the Arabic root "m-l-k" (to possess), these terms denoted both the exercise of royal authority and territories possessed by a sovereign.⁴⁹ As such, they could signal dominion and *de facto* local sovereignty, and occasional references in mid-century narratives gesture towards an understanding of these areas as, in Muzaffar Alam's construction, the governors' "home provinces."⁵⁰ Describing a Maratha invasion of territories in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab held by the Rohilla Afghans, for example, Ghulam 'Ali Bilgrami reported that the Afghan chieftains wrote to Shuja'ud-daula, governor of neighbouring Awadh, to explain the necessity of their allying against Marathas: "[The Marathas] are seizing our dominions (*mulk-i mā*). . . . Once they take this area (*nāhīya*) they will then sink their greedy teeth (*dandān-i tama'*) into your dominions (*ba-mulk-i shumā*) as well."⁵¹ Elsewhere, Yusuf 'Ali Khan, the author of a contemporary history of the province of Bengal, recorded that following the death of governor Alivardi Khan (r. 1740–56), his grandson Siraj-ud-daula (r. 1756–7) imagined himself "heir to [Alivardi Khan's] dominions and wealth (*wāris-i mulk wa māl*)."⁵²

Yet here, too, contemporary usage muddied even these suggestive enunciations. Since at least the mid-seventeenth century, "*mulk*" and "*mamlakat*" had also been used as synonyms for the *sūbas* or administrative provinces that collectively comprised the empire of Hindustan's "well-protected dominions" (*mamālik-i mahrūsa*).⁵³ Apart from employing the terms "*mulk*" or "*mamlakat*," observers like Bilgrami and Yusuf 'Ali Khan also portrayed territories under the control of the governors as their "own provinces" (*sūba-yi khwud*, *khwīsh*)—a formulation that clearly suggested a form of possession but that left its precise nature vague and gave cover to imputations of effectively sovereign dominion elsewhere.⁵⁴ Indeed, by the 1750s, the blurriness between "*mulk*" and "*sūba*" was such that even scions of the Timurid dynasty could use the terms interchangeably in correspondence with East India Company officials, a fact which may in turn explain the Company's own variable deployment of the English words "country," "territory," "province," and "dominion" to describe areas under gubernatorial control.⁵⁵

If, as the above examples suggest, *riyāsat* conferred at best suggestions of provincial sovereignty and ill-defined forms of territorial dominion, so too did it remain nebulous as a hereditary right. As studies of regional state formation have illustrated, by the mid-1740s, not only had regional governors wrested away imperial prerogatives to appoint provincial officers and assign local revenues, but the *sūbas* of the Deccan, Awadh-Allahabad, and Bengal-Bihar-Orissa had all come under the control of *de facto* hereditary dynasties—a fact not lost on the imperial court. As the emperor 'Alamgir II

(r. 1754–9) allegedly observed during *wazīr* Imad-ul-mulk's failed attempt to remove Shuja'-ud-daula from Awadh in 1757:

It is clear that [reasserting imperial] control over these dominions (*'amal-i mamālik*) will be impossible without force; how [can you expect someone] who has run a province (*sūba guzrānīda*) for three generations (*sih pusht*)—a period of thirty-five years—to simply leave his home (*makān-i khwud*) and go?⁵⁶

Acknowledging the reality of multigenerational administration and overtly recognizing hereditary, dynastic rights were, however, two very different things. With the notable exception of Yusuf 'Ali Khan's *Tārīkh-i bangāla-yi mahābat jangī*—which explicitly narrated succession to the Bengal governorship in terms of hereditary right (*irs*, *wirāsat*) and was designed to defend the authority of the Bengal governors against recent encroachments by the East India Company—few (if any) Indo-Persian histories composed prior to 1765 and the establishment of a new imperial treaty regime made such assertions on behalf of the effectively autonomous governors.⁵⁷ Some observers like Ghulam 'Ali Bilgrami, an ardent supporter of the Deccan's emerging Asaf Jahi dynasty, narrated gubernatorial transfers of power as an analogue to imperial successions. Describing the sons of deceased governors being seated on “the provincial throne” (*masnad-i riyāsāt*), he again gestured towards *riyāsāt* as a form of sub-imperial sovereignty while still preserving *saltanat* as an ultimate (if increasingly notional) Timurid suzerainty over, and a symbol of, the empire of Hindustan.⁵⁸ Most often, however, accounts of provincial succession before 1765 described the new governor simply functioning as his predecessor's “deputy” (*qā'im maqām*) or receiving imperial patents to act “in the manner of his father” (*ba-dastūr-i pidar*).⁵⁹

In contrast, in the decades following 1765, as local claims were concretised by the new imperial treaty regime, later narratives of the provincial dynasties would not hesitate to explain events earlier in the century in terms of dominion or hereditary right.⁶⁰ Yet before turning in the subsequent section to how the 1765 treaties of Allahabad refashioned provincial rights within the empire of Hindustan, it will be useful to summarise the discussion thus far. Attending to a collective texture of statehood and sovereignty in mid-eighteenth-century Indo-Persian discourse, an emerging new vision of the Mughal empire can be discerned. Although the polyvalent term “*saltanat*” still encompassed an idea of individual sovereign kingship, more often it was deployed to describe a territorial “empire of Hindustan” and its collective institutions of governance, including an established, though malleable and contested, “constitution” of norms, precedents, and protocols. At the same time, as provincial governors gained increasing local autonomy, they and their incipient regimes began to be marked in new ways within the imperial framework. Appropriating the idea of a single, expansive imperial household (*sarkār*) as a metonym for the empire, the governors were frequently designated as “the *sarkār*” within their provinces. Moreover, contemporary observers marked their local authority as—and found a provincial analogue to imperial *saltanat* in—“*riyāsāt*,” a term which increasingly suggested effective sovereignty within established provincial boundaries. Nevertheless, despite imputations that it was a hereditary right or conferred

possession or proprietorship over a territorial dominion (*mulk*), *riyāsat*—and the governors' status as “the *sarkār*” in the province—remained, as of yet, ill-defined and subject to challenge and contestation.

The Treaties of Allahabad and the Remaking of the Empire of Hindustan

At this point, it might well be asked why the governors' claims to *de facto* sovereign authority and hereditary provincial dominion—tacitly acknowledged and discursively gestured towards in numerous ways—remain otherwise so ill-defined? Why did the governors who held practical provincial power not define and assert their authority more directly against that of the Timurid emperors? In explaining this phenomenon, some—following the insights of F. W. Buckler and Bernard Cohn—have seen the emperors as enduring symbols of a larger sacred order that even the most powerful officials were reluctant to reject.⁶¹ Others, however, have seen more quotidian factors at play. For more distant provinces like those of the Deccan, Munis Faruqi contends that governors there had little to lose from continuing a notional submission to the emperors that demanded next to nothing from them and, in turn, allowed them to remain part of the more prestigious cultural milieu of Hindustan.⁶² For Hindustani provinces like Awadh that lay closer to the court in Delhi, Muzaffar Alam has maintained that the imperial framework continued to provide tangible benefits in the form of legitimation and opportunities for alliance-making.⁶³ To this it might be added that the idea of an empire of Hindustan defined by an imperial “constitution” of norms, regulations, and precedents also furnished a means for collectively structuring and managing competition between emerging provincial potentates. In particular, by adhering to norms that even functionally hereditary officials receive and renew in the emperor's name formal patents of investiture (*sanads*) for offices or territorial grants, the imperial elite preserved the court as a space for negotiating regional rivalries. Safeguarding one's holdings from competitors, or expanding at their expense, thus required both maintaining ample material resources and continued influence at court, demands which in turn incentivised the development of local bases of power and calculated alliances rather than all-out conflict among evenly matched rivals.

At this stage, then, venturing beyond vague discursive gestures and formally asserting provincial powers and privileges in the form of hereditary or proprietary rights threatened to undermine the organising, “constitutional” principles of mid-century imperial politics. But as this present section illustrates, the sudden expansion of the British East India Company's involvement in imperial politics in the 1750s and 1760s began to generate a new framework for negotiating and defining rights, one that could concretise hitherto ill-defined claims to provincial authority and dominion while still maintaining an overarching structure for intra-imperial relations. Drawing upon and further defining the empire's emerging language of provincial statehood and sovereignty, the treaty regime inaugurated in Allahabad in 1765 began a process of transforming the *saltanat* of Hindustan into an empire of independent “states” and—at least for signatories like governor of Awadh Shuja'-ud-daula—creating a source of “imperial” legitimation increasingly decoupled from the emperors themselves.

This transformative treaty regime was brought about by a rapidly escalating conflict between the British East India Company and Shuja'-ud-daula, one that capped nearly two decades of political tumult as Mughal imperial politics intersected with globalised European conflict.⁶⁴ In 1757, in the midst of the Seven Years' War, the Company and its Indian allies' overthrew Siraj-ud-daula, governor of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, and installed a candidate of their choosing in his place.⁶⁵ The following year, Mughal prince 'Ali Gauhar escaped the grasp of *wazīr* Imad-ul-mulk and fled from Delhi to Awadh.⁶⁶ Hoping to restore Timurid authority from a new provincial base, 'Ali Gauhar made two attempts to conquer Bihar and Bengal in 1759 and 1760 but was thwarted by the Company's military effectiveness and Shuja'-ud-daula's tepid support.⁶⁷ In 1761, in an effort to gain recognition for its newly installed governor Mir Qasim (r. 1760–3), Company officials acknowledged 'Ali Gauhar (who had announced his accession in late 1759) as the emperor Shah 'Alam.⁶⁸ Shah 'Alam issued a *sanad* for Mir Qasim but eventually returned to Awadh to press Shuja'-ud-daula, whom he had appointed as his *wazīr*, to march with him back to Delhi. For his part, Shuja'-ud-daula was more interested in asserting his territorialised *riyāsat* throughout his current provincial holdings and resisted the emperor's demands.⁶⁹ In 1763, however, after violence broke out between Company officials and Mir Qasim, the latter fled to Awadh and eventually persuaded Shuja'-ud-daula, who hoped to lay claim to Bihar, to unite against the Company.⁷⁰ In spring 1764, Shuja'-ud-daula then crossed into Bihar with Mir Qasim, the emperor, and a sizeable army. Despite his numerical superiority and some early successes, however, he was beaten decisively by British forces at the Battle of Buxar in October 1764 and, by spring of the following year, he had not only been driven from Bihar but also ousted from Awadh and Allahabad altogether by the Company's advancing army.⁷¹

Now in possession of the emperor—who had abandoned Shuja'-ud-daula after the latter's initial defeat to take refuge with British forces—and provincial territories they had regularly referred to as Shuja'-ud-daula's "dominions," Company officials found themselves confronted with new opportunities and dilemmas.⁷² As Philip Stern has illustrated, from the seventeenth century, Company administrators had sought to ground their own claims to territorial sovereignty in India through receipt of an all-encompassing edict or "phirmaund" (*farmān*) from the Timurid emperor, a project that was never fully realised.⁷³ By the mid-eighteenth century, however, some—informed by their own observations and the evolving Persianate diplomatic discourse in which they too were enmeshed—had also come to see local sovereignty effectively residing with provincial governors like Shuja'-ud-daula and Alivardi Khan in Bengal, who had begun to grant European traders new rights and privileges.⁷⁴ Following the 1757 "revolution" in Bengal and growing contestation with other European powers, the Company found itself increasingly divided about whether to safeguard its claims by bolstering gubernatorial sovereignty in the provinces or continuing to pursue an imperial *farmān* and perhaps even a restoration of Timurid authority by force.⁷⁵ At the time of the Battle of Buxar, supporters of an imperial restoration happened to be temporarily ascendant in the Calcutta council and in the field, and in the heady moments after their initial victories, some even contemplated a march

on Delhi that would remove local usurpers like Shuja 'ud-daula and remake the Mughal monarchy in the capital.⁷⁶ Ultimately, greater caution prevailed and the council determined to turn the conquered provinces over to the emperor before contemplating subsequent campaigns.

Yet no sooner had military commanders in the field begin to establish a new administration in the emperor's name than Company policy completely reversed in summer 1765. Following his arrival in India, newly reappointed Governor Robert Clive—an ardent proponent of pursuing Company interests through provincial sovereigns—worked quickly to undermine the restoration project.⁷⁷ Arguing that the young emperor had no real provincial connections and would invite disorder on the Bihar and Bengal frontier, Clive elected to restore Shuja 'ud-daula as governor of Awadh and Allahabad and to cultivate him as a grateful ally and friendly buffer from Maratha and Afghan threats to the west.⁷⁸ Given the ease with which British forces had ousted him and installed new administrators in his place, it seems clear that Shuja 'ud-daula was not universally recognised as “the hereditary embodiment of regional political authority.”⁷⁹ But, in their determination to relocate sovereignty to the provinces and to protect their holdings in Bihar and Bengal, Clive and his supporters in the Court of Directors saw Shuja 'ud-daula as far more useful than the emperor or his partisans and subsequently justified their decision to reinstate by him claiming he was the “natural prince” of the provinces.⁸⁰

By mid-summer, with Shuja 'ud-daula resuming control of Awadh and Allahabad, Clive devised a settlement that—over the repeated protests of Shah 'Alam—would be formalised through two treaties signed in Allahabad in August 1765.⁸¹ The first part of the settlement concerned the emperor and the Company. Although Clive was committed to entrenching provincial authority, he also sought to use the emperor to immunise the Company's rights from subsequent contestation by European or Indian powers. To that end, he demanded the emperor issue a *farmān* for the Bengal *dīwānī* (i.e., provincial accountancy) that, in the minds of British officials, would confer upon the Company effective sovereignty over the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. In exchange, Shah 'Alam would receive districts in the Allahabad provinces formerly held by Shuja 'ud-daula for the expenses of the imperial household (*sarkār-i wālā*); a sizeable annual tribute from the revenues of Bengal; and a vague promise that British forces would install him in Delhi at a later date. The second portion of the agreement restored Shuja 'ud-daula's control over Awadh and Allahabad (in exchange for a hefty indemnity) and allied him to the Company and current governor of Bengal Najm-ud-daula in a perpetual pact of mutual defence.⁸²

Furnishing as it did long-sought imperial recognition for the Company, the first of the Allahabad treaty agreements was, unsurprisingly, considered momentous at the time and has been seen as a pivotal moment in the history of the British empire in India ever since.⁸³ The second component of the agreement, however, has received far less scrutiny but was no less important.⁸⁴ Indeed, in concretising the emerging yet ill-defined claims of provincial sovereignty and statehood in mid-century imperial discourse, the second of the Allahabad treaties and its subsequent enforcement did arguably more than the grant of the *dīwānī* to shift the locus of sovereign authority in India away from the Timurid

emperors and to lay groundwork for British paramountcy by recasting Hindustan as an empire of independent “states.”

In the first instance, the language of the treaty construed Awadh and the remainder of Allahabad as the territorial dominions of Shuja‘-ud-daula, which he now appeared to enjoy by a hereditary right independent of the emperor. Given the great importance placed on the *farmān* by Company officials, Clive had insisted that the *dīwānī* be granted as what he understood to be the Mughal empire’s most permanent form, the *āltamghā*, or a hereditary grant typically awarded by the Mughal emperors to the families of deceased officials.⁸⁵ The treaty with Shuja‘-ud-daula, however, made no such reference to a grant of that kind, or even to the emperor at all beyond noting that he had reviewed and sealed the agreement.⁸⁶ Instead, the agreement between Shuja‘-ud-daula, the Company, and Najm-ud-daula referred to their respective territories as their “own dominions” (*mulk-i khwud*).⁸⁷ Coupled with the perpetual nature of agreement—signed, on one side, by the Company and Najm-ud-daula and, on the other, Shuja‘-ud-daula and “his heirs” (*āl-i aulād-i ūshān*)—the use of the term “*mulk*” thus endorsed the territories not simply as imperial provinces held on a contingent basis but as Shuja‘-ud-daula’s own “hereditary dominions” (*mulk, mamālik-i maurūsī*), terms by which they would henceforth be referred to in Anglo-Awadh discourse and dynastic histories.⁸⁸

In assuming hereditary succession by Shuja‘-ud-daula’s heirs in perpetuity, the treaty also implicitly decoupled imperial authority from territorial *riyāsat*—which would be further formalised as provincial sovereignty through subsequent enforcement of the Allahabad treaties—and construed it instead as emanating from pre-existing rights and the magnanimity of Clive and his successors. Such a view proved an enduring facet of Anglo-Awadh political discourse in the decades to come. Echoing, for example, Shuja‘-ud-daula’s deathbed letter to the Company, in which he claimed British officials had been his authority’s sole source of stability (*qiyām-i riyāsat*), his grandson Ghazi-ud-din Haidar reminded the Company’s governor-general of the dual sources of his authority upon his own accession in 1814.⁸⁹ Although, he maintained, his grandfather had held the provinces by virtue of proprietary and hereditary right (*milkiyat, wirāsat*), had the Company not restored him to his “hereditary dominions (*mulk-i maurūsī*) . . . this dynasty’s sovereign authority (*riyāsat-i īn khāndān*) would not have endured.”⁹⁰

As significantly, the treaty marked perhaps the first time in its diplomatic engagements that the Company referred to itself as a *sarkār*, a term that was subsequently translated as “government” or “state” in the Company’s internal deliberations and in publications aimed at the British public.⁹¹ The act of translation not only established a sense of diplomatic parity between the Company and Shuja‘-ud-daula,⁹² it also created a sense of apparent commensurability between European conceptions of statehood and late-Mughal notions of a metonymic *sarkār* establishment that, in turn, provided a requisite sense of institutional continuity for treaty relations and sovereign debt obligations. In coming decades, dissonances between British notions of an autonomous, “public” government and the *sarkār* as patrimonial household-cum-governing establishment would spur the expansion of Company power over regimes like that of Awadh.⁹³ But, in the nearer term, the conflation of *sarkār* and state helped to translate and ensconce the

“Company’s government” (what was increasingly referred to in Indo-Persian discourse as the *sarkār-i kampanī angrēz*) within the conceptual framework of the late-Mughal empire of Hindustan.

Rendering the Company as fellow provincial *sarkār* alongside Shuja‘-ud-daula also pointed to the ways British officials had come to understand the empire and how they would interpret and enforce the treaties of Allahabad. In particular, following the formal absorption of the Company’s provincial *sarkār* into the empire of Hindustan—and the construction of what amounted to *de jure* provincial sovereignty for it and Shuja‘-ud-daula via the treaties of Allahabad—British officials began to frame the empire in their Persian correspondence as a confederacy of distinct provincial governments and independent territorial dominions that were linked by formal treaties and unified by a common (if purely nominal) allegiance to the Timurid dynasty. Moreover, jettisoning former plans to restore the authority of the emperor, Clive’s successors made it clear that Shah ‘Alam’s exiled *sarkār* and its attached “demesne” (*khālisa*) in Allahabad were to be but a single component of a larger imperial whole. Writing to the emperor’s deputy in 1767, for example, Governor Harry Verelst observed that, compared to its previously “distracted and confused state . . . the royal demesne . . . the territories of Shuja‘-ud-daula, [and] the *subas* of Bengal, Behar and the Carnatic all form part of the Empire now.”⁹⁴ Elsewhere, he and his successor John Cartier emphasised the Company’s readiness to defend from “foreign” Deccani Maratha and Afghan invasions the collective “empire” of Hindustan (variably rendered as *saltanat*, *mamlakat*, or *mamālik*), as well as the constituent dominions (*mulk*) of Shuja‘-ud-daula, the emperor, and the Company.⁹⁵

Furthermore, concretising earlier constructions of provincial *riyāsat*, Clive and his successors also made clear through their interpretation of the treaties that within this confederated empire, Shuja‘-ud-daula, the Company, and their respective *sarkārs* were to be sovereign inside boundaries of their dominions and immune from outside “interference.” For Clive, such immunity particularly applied to the emperor, who, unsurprisingly, was thoroughly dissatisfied with the Allahabad settlement and keen to test its limits. Only months after the treaties were signed, for example, Shah ‘Alam conferred upon the Afghan chief Ahmad Khan Bangash of neighbouring Farrukhabad, one of Shuja‘-ud-daula’s regional rivals, an *āltamghā* for districts within the Awadh dominions, and demanded Clive press Shuja‘-ud-daula to honour the grant.⁹⁶ Clive, however, refused to do so, arguing that Shuja‘-ud-daula was “entirely independent” of the Company’s authority.⁹⁷ Although neither directly refuted Shah ‘Alam’s theoretical suzerainty, Shuja‘-ud-daula and the Company thus established through the treaty a mutual nullification of the emperor’s commands within their respective dominions, a freedom that in turn allowed both to lay more aggressive claim to their respective provincial assets.⁹⁸

In this regard, Shuja‘-ud-daula also clearly benefitted from the Company’s formalisation and enforcement of the empire of Hindustan as a confederated empire of independent dominions. But, embracing his more well-defined authority within his territories, he also found opportunities of his own for further asserting his effective autonomy from the emperor. In 1769, for example, following repeated demands from Shah ‘Alam that he and the Company honour their promises to escort him to Delhi, Shuja‘-ud-daula agreed

to do so—but only on the condition that the emperor sign a separate treaty with him to clarify the terms of the expedition. Referring to himself as a loyal slave (*banda*, *ghulām*, *khānāzād*) of the court, Shujaʿ-ud-daula maintained a rhetorical deference to the emperor, but the form of the agreement—a mutual compact (*qaulnāma*) like the one he had signed in Allahabad in 1765, rather than a unilateral imperial *farmān*—underscored their ultimate diplomatic parity.⁹⁹ Moreover, the treaty apparently extracted Shah ʿAlam’s begrudging recognition of a confederated empire of proprietary dominions. While Shujaʿ-ud-daula winkingly framed his *mulk* as deriving from both “divine bounty” (*fazl-i haqq*) and “imperial favor” (*ināyat-i huzūr*), Shah ʿAlam was compelled to promise that he would not only give to Shujaʿ-ud-daula half of any territory conquered during the expedition to Delhi, but that he would always safeguard and respect his “property and dominions” (*māl wa mulk*), both “old and new” (*qadīm wa jadīd*).¹⁰⁰

Ultimately, despite the emperor’s concessions, Shujaʿ-ud-daula had no real intention of going to Delhi, and the proposed expedition, like British prior assurances, similarly came to nothing.¹⁰¹ This most recent broken promise, however, proved too much for Shah ʿAlam and prompted the emperor to abandon the imperial confederacy and mount a final challenge to the new treaty dispensation. In 1771, the emperor concluded a pact with resurgent Maratha chieftains, who agreed to escort him to Delhi in exchange for a sizeable cash payment.¹⁰² Unsurprisingly, Company officials, who had had repeatedly portrayed the Deccani Marathas as “foreign” enemies of the Timurid dynasty and the empire of Hindustan, stridently protested the emperor’s decision.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, despite their mutual commitment to subordinating imperial authority to the treaty order, neither they nor Shujaʿ-ud-daula felt empowered to forcibly impede the emperor. Instead, they reluctantly agreed to escort him to Awadh’s western frontier—what Company officials considered the territorial limits of their obligations to the emperor—in exchange for which Shah ʿAlam proposed to transfer his erstwhile holdings in Allahabad back to Shujaʿ-ud-daula.¹⁰⁴ Following his arrival in Delhi in 1772, however, under pressure from the Marathas, the emperor now awarded *sanads* for the same areas to them, compelling Shujaʿ-ud-daula and the Company either to contest the emperor’s authority to dispose of his own “royal demesne” as he wished or to open their frontier to the Maratha threat.¹⁰⁵

The allies’ subsequent response not only demonstrated how thoroughly earlier insinuations of hereditary, provincial dominion had been concretised by the Allahabad treaties, but also how they had come to rely on the new treaty regime as an inviolable source of legitimation and a constitutional framework for negotiation all its own. Writing to Shah ʿAlam in January of 1773, after chiding the emperor for his decision to return to Delhi, Shujaʿ-ud-daula abandoned any pretence that he enjoyed his territories (including the contested areas in Allahabad) by virtue of an imperial “gift.”¹⁰⁶ Gesturing towards the sixth clause of the 1765 treaty, in which he and the Company had jointly confirmed the present emperor’s possession of Allahabad, Shujaʿ-ud-daula instead implied the area was, in fact, his to give in the first place, arguing he had done so previously as a “tribute” (*nazr*) to the imperial *sarkār* and had never contemplated it would be transferred to the Marathas. Reprising earlier constructions of *riyāsat* as bounded, provincial sovereignties

immune to outside meddling, he then warned the emperor that neither he nor the Company would ever permit Maratha “interference” (*dakhl*) in the districts and vowed to take back his “own lands” (*jā-hā-yi khwud*) if the Marathas tried to occupy them.¹⁰⁷

British officials concurred that the emperor had no right to cede Allahabad to the Marathas but they also maintained that, owing to their initial conquest of Awadh and Allahabad in 1764–5, original proprietorship of the territories had reverted not to Shuja‘-ud-daula but to the Company.¹⁰⁸ After some negotiation, in which Shuja‘-ud-daula continued to insist the territories belonged to him by right of inheritance, the Company’s view prevailed and Governor Warren Hastings (1772–85) compelled him to purchase his rights to the territories from the Company for five million rupees.¹⁰⁹ Ratifying the purchase, the subsequent treaty of Benares signed between Hastings and Shuja‘-ud-daula in September 1773 underscored the Company’s original rights to Allahabad, which in turn permitted it to transfer the territories to whomsoever it chose. More radically, however, the treaty also made it plain that, within the confederated empire of Hindustan, mutual interests and treaty obligations between independent local sovereigns trumped the authority of their titular suzerain, particularly when he had allied himself with those “hostile to [his] former allies and friends.”¹¹⁰ Thus, since the emperor had acted “contrary to the meaning of the said Treaty [of Allahabad of 1765]” and “to the great prejudice” of Shuja‘-ud-daula and the Company, he had “thereby forfeited his right [to Allahabad].” As a result, the territories reverted to “the Company from whom he received them,” which subsequently allowed British officials to put them “into the possession of [Shuja‘-ud-daula] . . . in the same manner the Province of [Awadh] and the other dominions are possessed by [him] . . . for ever.”¹¹¹

Ultimately, for Hastings, Shah ‘Alam’s departure to Delhi, his alleged violation of the 1765 treaties, and his alliance with enemies of the empire of Hindustan did more than permit the Company to resume and transfer Allahabad. It also opened the door for the governor to repudiate payment of annual tribute from Bengal—the Company’s last remaining treaty obligation to the emperor—an act by which he effectively renounced Mughal sovereignty over the Company.¹¹² As the governor put it at the time, “his desertion of us and union with our enemies leaves us without a pretence to throw away more of the Company’s property” on an emperor who he elsewhere derided as a “mock king and an idol of our own creation.”¹¹³

Thus, far from undermining the new political order, the emperor’s rejection of the imperial confederacy only served to illustrate how—at least in the minds of Company officials and their principal Indian allies—the empire of Hindustan had transformed into a political community of discrete, sovereign, proprietary dominions, one that was to be bound together less by a titular Mughal suzerainty and more by a new constitution of inter-“state” treaties and precedents. In less than a decade after the signing of the treaties of Allahabad, then, the emerging yet ill-defined and contested order of the mid-eighteenth century had solidified into a treaty-based imperial framework that transcended the authority of the sovereign who imbued it with its initial legitimacy, thereby creating vital political and conceptual foundations for the subsequent construction of British paramountcy over an empire of Indian states.

Conclusion

By the mid-eighteenth century, the disintegration of the Mughal empire and the formation of new regional polities under *de facto* hereditary provincial governors had generated an emerging, if ill-defined, conceptual order and new textures of sovereignty and statehood in contemporary Indo-Persian political discourse. Emphasising particular dimensions of a polyvalent political language, such discourse in aggregate represented the empire (*saltanat*, *mamlakat*) less in terms of personalised imperial kingship and more as a particular territorial space and political institution defined by an established though flexible “constitution” of regulations, norms, and precedents and bound by an increasingly notional Timurid suzerainty. Within this empire of Hindustan, governors like those of Awadh were portrayed with growing frequency as exercising a form of near-sovereign authority (*riyāsat*) within their respective provinces, through household-cum-governing establishments (*sarkārs*) that in turn served as metonyms for their respective regimes. The need to preserve the imperial court as a forum for negotiation, however, left provincial governors reluctant to fully assert their claims and, as a result, the extent of their rights and the status of territories under their control remained vague and highly contested.

The 1765 treaties of Allahabad and their subsequent interpretation and enforcement crystallised the late-Mughal imperial order by recasting the territories of the signatories as hereditary, proprietary dominions (*mulk*) overseen by autonomous *sarkārs*, and the empire of Hindustan as a unified community of independent provincial sovereignties (*riyāsat*). Deriving their initial legitimacy from the imprimatur of Shah ‘Alam, the Allahabad agreements quickly came to have an authority all their own, one that transcended that of the emperor or his ability to challenge them. In this regard, the treaties were in a sense the culmination of both an idea of a unifying imperial constitution and a collective desire to preserve a forum for intra-imperial arbitration. Once Shah ‘Alam inaugurated an alternative framework by assenting to the Allahabad agreements, he rendered himself effectively irrelevant—at least to those encompassed by the treaty architecture of the imperial confederacy.¹¹⁴

Yet, as Hastings’s imperious and self-serving interpretation of the Allahabad treaties made readily apparent, the crystallisation of the late-Mughal order and the conceptual construction of a collective empire of locally sovereign dominions was not to be a permanent dispensation but rather a point of departure for the establishment of British paramountcy over India’s princely states. In short order, Hastings and his successors—citing Mughal precedents and more recent treaty obligations to protect their allies from internal disorder—would demand regular treaty renegotiations with allies like the rulers of Awadh upon their accessions and, in turn, force them to use their concretised sovereignty and territorial proprietorship to cede portions of their dominions and authority to the Company.¹¹⁵ At the same time, fundamental incommensurabilities between European notions of statehood and the *sarkār* as a household-cum-governing establishment would abet prolonged disputes between Company officials and members of local dynasties over the boundaries of “public” and “private” and shares of dynastic property and authority. Assuming an exclusive right to arbitrate these disputes, Company officials

formulated additional agreements and precedents that, coupled with an expanding body of treaties, generated a new imperial constitution for Britain's empire as it subordinated, by negotiation, annexation, and conquest, most of the subcontinent by the mid-nineteenth century. As Shuja'-ud-daula's great-grandson Nasir-ud-din Haidar had keenly observed, the alliance and corresponding treaty framework that had formalised his ancestors' sovereign authority within a community of independent dominions had, in a matter of decades, subjected them—and the rest of the erstwhile empire of Hindustan—to British paramountcy within a global empire of states.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Paolo Sartori and James Pickett for organising the Beyond the Islamicate Chancery conference in Vienna, as well as my fellow participants for their generative comments and questions. I would also like to thank *Itinerario's* two anonymous reviewers for their clarifying comments and productive suggestions for improvement. Research for this article was funded in part by a Summer Research Grant from the ODU Research Foundation.

Bibliography

Unpublished Primary Sources

National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (NLW)

–John Carnac Papers

–Robert Clive Papers, Original Correspondence (CR)

Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai (MSA)

–Parasnis Daftar

National Archives of India, New Delhi (NAI)

–Foreign Department, Secret Proceedings (FDSP)

–Foreign Department, Persian Branch (FDPr)

–Foreign Department, Political Consultations (FDPC)

National Library of India, Calcutta (NLI)

–Sarkar Collection (SC)

Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library, London (OIOC)

–Oriental Mss., Or. and I.O. Islamic

–Richard Johnson Papers

–Warren Hastings Papers

Published Primary Sources

'Abd-ul-karim. *Bayān-i wāqī'*. Ed. K. B. Nasim. Lahore: University of Panjab, 1970.

Abu'l Fath. *A Medieval Arabic-Persian Dictionary: al-Mulakhkhas fī al-Lughāt*. Ed. G. Dadkhah and A. Goodarznia. Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda, 2014.

- Aitchison, C. U., ed. *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads, Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*. 13 vols. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1909.
- Arzu, Siraj-ud-din Khan. *Chirāgh-i hidāyat*. In Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammad Rampuri. *Ghiyās-ul-lughāt ma'a chirāgh-i hidāyat*. Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1890.
- Aurangzeb, 'Alamgir. *Ruqqa'āt-i 'ālamgīrī*. Kanpur: Matbi-i Nizami, 1876.
- Bahar, Lala Tekchand. *Bahār-i 'ajam: farhang-i lughāt tarkībāt, kināyat wa amsāl -i fārsī*. 3 vols. Ed. K. Dizfuliyān. Tehran: Talayah, 2001–2/1380.
- Bilgrami, Ghulam 'Ali 'Azad. *Khizāna-yi 'āmira*. Kanpur: Nawal Kishore, 1871.
- Brahman, Chandar Bhan. *Chahār chaman-i brahman*. Ed. M. Y. Jafāri. New Delhi: Markaz-i Tahqiqat-i Farsi, 2007.
- Clive, R. *A Letter to the Proprietors of East India Company Stock*. London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1764.
- Daghestani, 'Ali Quli Khan. *Riyāz-ush-shu'arā*. Ed. S. H. Qasmi. Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, 2001.
- Dihlawi, 'Abd-ul-haqq. *Risāla-yi nūrīya-yi sultānīya*. Ed. M. S. Akhtar. Islamabad: Markaz-i Tahqiqat-i Farsi-i Iran wa Pakistan, 1985.
- Forrest, G., ed. *Selections from the Letters, Despatches, and Other State Papers Preserved in the Foreign Department of the Government of India, 1772–1785*. 3 vols. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1890.
- Ghulam 'Ali Khan. *Imād-us-sa'adat*. Kanpur: Nawal Kishore, 1897.
- Imperial Record Department. *Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Being Letters, Referring Mainly to Affairs in Bengal, Which Passed between Some of the Company's Servants and Indian Rulers and Notables*. 7 vols. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1911–40 (CPC).
- Khafī Khan. *Muntakhab-ul-lubāb*. 2 vols. Ed. K. Ahmad. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1869–74.
- Long, J. *Selections from the Unpublished Records of Government for the Years 1747 to 1768 Inclusive*, vol. 1. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1869.
- Mansaram, Lala. *Mā'asir-i nizāmī*. Ed. Z. Parvin. Delhi: Kitab Ghar, 2015.
- Mukhlis, Anand Ram. *Mir'āt-ul-istilāh*. 2 vols. Ed. C. Shekhar et al. Delhi: Kitab Ghar, 2013.
- . *Safarnāma-yi mukhlis*. Ed. and Urdu trans. S. A. Azhar. Rampur: Hindustan Press, 1946.
- Najm-i Sani, Muhammad Baqir. *Advice on the Art of Governance: An Indo-Islamic Mirror for Princes: Mau'izah-i Jahāngīrī of Muhammad Bāqir Najm-i Sānī*. Ed. and trans. S. S. Alvi. Albany: SUNY Press, 1989.
- Polier, A. *Shah Alam II and His Court, a Narrative of the Transactions at the Court of Delhy from the Year 1771 to the Present Time*. Ed. P. C. Gupta. Calcutta: S. C. Sarkar and Sons, 1947.
- Tattavi, 'Abd-ur-rashid. *Muntakhab-ul-lughāt*. Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1877.
- Yusuf 'Ali Khan. *Tārīkh-i bangāla-yi mahābat jangī*. Ed. A. Subhan. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1969.

Secondary Sources

- Abbott, Nicholas J. "Bringing the *Sarkār* Back In: Translating Governmentality and the State in Early Modern and Early Colonial India." In *State Formations: Global Histories and Cultures of Statehood*, ed. John Brooke, Julia Strauss, and Greg Adams, 124–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Alam, M. *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–48*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Alam, M. *The Languages of Political Islam in India: 1200–1800*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.
- , and S. Subrahmanyam. "Introduction." In *The Mughal State, 1526–1750*, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 1–71. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

- Alavi, S. "Introduction." In *The Eighteenth Century in India*, ed. Seema Alavi, 1–56. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Al-Azmeh, A. *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 1997.
- Anghie, A. *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Athar Ali, M. *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*. Rev. ed. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001 (1966).
- Barnett, R. B. *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720–1801*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Bayly, C. A. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Benton, L. *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Benton, L., and L. Ford. *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800–1850*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Blake, S. P. "The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 39:1 (1979): 77–94.
- Burak, G. "The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Post-Mongol Context of the Ottoman Adoption of a School of Law." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55:3 (2013): 579–602.
- Chatterjee, K. "History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Late Eighteenth-Century Eastern India." *Modern Asian Studies* 32:4 (1998): 913–48.
- Crone, P. *God's Rule: Government and Islam*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Datta, K. K. *Shah Alam II and the East India Company*. Calcutta: The World Press, 1965.
- Faruqi, M. D. "At Empire's End: Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India." *Modern Asian Studies* 43:1 (2009): 5–43.
- . *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Fisher, M. H. *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British, and the Mughals*. Riverdale, Md.: The Riverdale Company, 1987.
- Fleischer, C. H. *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa 'Ali (1541–1600)*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Habib, I. *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556–1707*. Rev. ed. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999 (1963).
- Kinra, R. *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.
- Leonard, S. P. "A Fit of Absence of Mind? Illiberal Imperialism and the Founding of the British Empire, 1757–76." PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2010.
- Marshall, P. J. "Introduction." In *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?*, ed. P. J. Marshall, 1–52. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Marshall, P. J. *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, c. 1750–1783*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Moin, A. A. *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.
- Narayana Rao, V., D. Shulman, and S. Subrahmanyam. *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600–1800*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006.
- Nayeem, M. A. *Mughal Administration of Deccan under Nizamul Mulk Asaf Jah (1720–48 AD)*. Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1985.
- Ramusack, B. N. *The Indian Princes and Their States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

- Siddiqi, N. A. *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals, 1700–1750*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1970.
- Spear, P. *Twilight of the Mughuls: Studies in Late Mughul Delhi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.
- Srivastava, A. L. *Shuja-ud-Daulah*. 2 vols. Calcutta: S. N. Sarkar, 1939–45.
- Stern, P. J. *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Subrahmanyam, S. “The Mughal State—Structure or Process? Reflections on Recent Western Historiography.” *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 29:3 (1992): 291–321.
- Travers, R. “A British Empire by Treaty in Eighteenth-Century India.” In *Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600–1900*, ed. Salia Belmessous, 132–60. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- . *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Yilmaz, H. *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Notes

- * Nicholas J. Abbott is Assistant Professor of History, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.
- 1 NAI, Letter, Nasir-ud-din Haidar to Lord Amherst, 6 Nov. 1827: FDP, Original Received (OR) 393. For consistency and clarity, I have modified the Company’s original translation (NAI, FDP, 16 Nov. 1827, no. 23). Cited in Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, 164.
- 2 For the construction of an idea of “divisible” sovereignty in colonial India, see Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, 236–50. For the British empire as an empire of states, see Benton and Ford, *Rage for Order*. For a useful overview of the construction of British paramountcy, see Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*, 65–87 and 92–8.
- 3 Notable works include Anghie, *Imperialism*; Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*; and Benton and Ford, *Rage for Order*.
- 4 For useful overviews of this literature, see the introductions to Marshall, *The Eighteenth Century*; and Alavi, *The Eighteenth Century*.
- 5 This argument is made most explicitly in C. A. Bayly’s classic synthetic study, *Indian Society*.
- 6 See, for example, Barnett, *North India between Empires*; Alam, *The Crisis of Empire*; and Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*.
- 7 Travers, *Ideology and Empire*.
- 8 Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 2–3.
- 9 Eighteenth-century Indo-Persian dictionaries like the *Bahār-i ‘ajam* of Tekchand ‘Bahar’ or the *Chirāgh-i hidāyat* of Siraj-ud-din Khan ‘Arzu’ often allude to particular usage in the imperial offices (*dafātar*) of Hindustan. See, for example, *Bahār-i ‘ajam*, vol. 2, 1281 and 1362; and *Chirāgh-i hidāyat*, 63.
- 10 Here, I borrow a notion of “texture” as developed by Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam in *Textures of Time*, esp. 253–4.
- 11 See, for example, the late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century Arabic-Persian lexicon by Abu’l Fath, *A Medieval Arabic-Persian Dictionary*, 123. For medieval juristic discussions of the relationship between sultans and caliphs, see Crone, *God’s Rule*, 146 and 243–9; and Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 163–88.
- 12 Crone, *God’s Rule*, 252–4.
- 13 For recent studies of the refashioning of kingship in the Ottoman and Mughal empires, see Yilmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*; and Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*.
- 14 E.g., Imperial Record Department, *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*

- (CPC), vol. 2, nos. 326 and 1366; NAI, Letter, Verelst to Shah Abdali, 17 Apr. 1767: FDP, Copies Issued (CI) 1766–7, no. 127–8; and NAI, Preliminary articles from Shuja'ud-daula to Shah 'Alam, 11 May 1769: FDP, Copies Received, 1769, no. 18.
- 15 Compare, for example, references to the *saltanat-i gūrgānī* in seventeenth-century correspondence with the Safavids of Iran (e.g., NLI, SC Ms. 164, *Ruqqa'āt-i shāh 'abbās-i sānī*, fol. 31r) with the ubiquitous references to the *saltanat-i hindūstān* in disparate eighteenth-century *tazkiras* and *tārīkhs* like the anonymous *Tārīkh-i ahmad shāhī*, OIOC, Ms. Or. 2004, fols. 3r, 45v; 'Abd-ul-karim's *Bayān-i wāqī'*, 215, 218, 270; and 'Azad' Bilgrami's *Khizāna-yi 'āmira*, 44, 90.
- 16 Bilgrami, *Khizāna-yi 'āmira: sih rukn-i mamlakat-i hind az jahān raftand/ fata'-o-haif sih darīgāna az kaff-i dahr* (38), *in sih rukn-i saltanat dar yak sāl ba-ittifāq kūs-i rihlat az 'ālam zadand* (79).
- 17 E.g., Dihlawi, *Risāla-yi nūrīya*, 30, 35; Najm-i Sani, *Advice on the Art of Governance*, 17, 63, 168. For discussions of *akhlāq* and mirrors for princes literatures in South Asia, see Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 26–80.
- 18 Compare Dihlawi, *Risāla-yi nūrīya*, 30, in which the “foundation of the imperial house” (*banā-yi khāna-yi saltanat*) has four pillars (*arkān, sutūn*)—to wit, treasure (*khizāna*), army (*lashkar*), unity within the army (*ittifāq miyān-i lashkar*), and justice (*'adl*)—with Najm-i Sani, *Advice on the Art of Governance*, 168–9, in which the four foundations of the *saltanat* are commanders (*umrā'*), ministers (*wuzrā'*), magistrates (*hākīm*), and informants (*sāhib-i khabrān*). On the circle of justice, see Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 129.
- 19 Burak, “The Second Formation.”
- 20 Mukhlis, *Mir'āt-ul-istilāh* vol. 1, 62. Emphasis mine.
- 21 Chatterjee, “History as Self-Representation,” esp. 928–9. For Ottoman *kanun* consciousness, see Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*.
- 22 *Tārīkh-i ahmad shāhī*, OIOC, Ms. Or. 2004, fol. 21v.
- 23 'Abd-ul-karim, *Bayān-i wāqī'*, 235.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 236.
- 25 *Tārīkh-i ahmad shāhī*, OIOC, Ms. Or. 2004, fol. 44r.
- 26 The following draws on Abbott, “Bringing the *Sarkār* Back In.”
- 27 See, for examples of definitions from eighteenth-century lexicons, the entries for “*sarkār*” in Mukhlis, *Mir'āt-ul-istilāh*, vol. 2, 443; Arzu, *Chirāgh-i hidāyat*, 63; and Bahar, *Bahār-i 'ajam*, vol. 2, 1281.
- 28 See, for a detailed discussion of princely *sarkārs* in imperial politics, Faruqui, *Princes of the Mughal Empire*.
- 29 Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility*, 261–5; Faruqui, *Princes of the Mughal Empire*, 66–133.
- 30 NLI, SC Ms. 94, *Hidāyat-ul-qawā'id*, 27. For the life and intellectual milieu of one such *sarkār*-hopping scribe, see Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*.
- 31 Blake, “Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire.” Blake's model of the Mughal state—which centred around the household of the emperor—has, however, been critiqued for being historically static and over-emphasising the reign of Akbar (1556–1605), most trenchantly in Subrahmanyam, “The Mughal State—Structure or Process?” Nevertheless, Blake's fundamental insight regarding households as central institutions of Mughal governance has been elaborated in recent, more nuanced work, notably Faruqui's *Princes of the Mughal Empire*. For wider debates about the Mughal state, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State*, 1–71.
- 32 Persian does not have a direct article and thus “*sarkār*” on its own would be translated into English with an implied “the.”
- 33 E.g., NLI, SC Ms. 94, *Hidāyat-ul-qawā'id*, 18, 74–5, 130; Brahman,

- Chahār chaman*, 93; NLI, SC Ms. 14, *Akhbārāt*, fol. 135v; and Khafi Khan, *Muntakhab-ul-lubāb*, vol. 2, 333.
- 34 Faruqi, *Princes of the Mughal Empire*.
- 35 See, for an example of the former, Mukhlis, *Safarnāma-yi mukhlis*, 68. See, for examples of the latter, NLI, SC Ms. 37, *Akhbārāt*, 74; and *Tārīkh-i ahmad shāhī*, OIOC, Ms. Or. 2004, fol. 44r.
- 36 According to revenue records from Hyderabad, for example, officials of the Deccan *sūbadār* Nizam-ul-mulk Asaf Jah (r. 1724–48) formally differentiated between the “sublime” imperial *sarkār* and his own “exalted” *sarkār* (*sarkār-i ‘ālī*). Nayeem, *Mughal Administration*, 22.
- 37 In a Company glossary of terms used in *sanads* issued by newly installed governor Mir Jafar in 1757, “*sircar*” is defined as “any office under the government.” Long, *Selections*, 178. Intriguingly, translations of those documents (p. 175) indicate a distinction between “the *sarkār*” [of the governor of Bengal] and “the imperial *sarkār*” [of the emperor].
- 38 E.g., Yusuf ‘Ali Khan, *Tārīkh-i bangāla*, 49; and Bilgrami, *Khizāna-yi ‘āmira*, 79.
- 39 E.g., Yusuf ‘Ali Khan, *Tārīkh-i bangāla*, 20, 157, 169; and Bilgrami, *Khizāna-yi ‘āmira*, 50, 54, 55.
- 40 Bahar, *Bahār-i ‘ajam*, vol. 2, 1133.
- 41 Dihlawi, *Risāla-yi nūrīya*, 42; Aurangzeb, *Ruqqa‘āt-i ‘alamgīrī*, 8, no. 17: “Negligence and carelessness are contrary to the path of leadership (*riyāsāt*) and kingship (*jahānbānī*).”
- 42 Mansaram, *Mā‘asir-i nizāmī*, 83.
- 43 E.g., Bilgrami, *Khizāna-yi ‘āmira*, 50. See, for earlier descriptions of governorships as “*hukūmat*,” etc., Brahman, *Chahār chaman*, 130–44.
- 44 Bilgrami, *Khizāna-yi ‘āmira*, 86–7.
- 45 E.g., *Tārīkh-i ahmad shāhī*, OIOC, Ms. Or. 2004, fols. 21r and 30v.
- 46 E.g., NLI, SC Ms. 36 *Akhbārāt*, 122.
- 47 Habib, *The Agrarian System*, 172–4, 211–2; Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration*, 25–8.
- 48 Alam, *The Crisis of Empire*, 218. The nature of *zamīndārī* rights—and of proprietary rights to land more generally—under the Mughals was, however, a vexatious question for British colonial officials and has remained a point of historiographic contention. Nevertheless, when pressed, eighteenth-century Indian officials typically held that *zamīndārs* possessed at least some form of hereditary, proprietary land rights beyond simply shares of revenue. Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, 126–32.
- 49 E.g., Tattavi, *Muntakhab-ul-lughāt*, 434, 456.
- 50 Alam, *The Crisis of Empire*, 16, 243. Alam, however, relies on sources written after 1765, which, as this essay contends, reflect the further concretisation of provincial dominion in the wake of the treaties of Allahabad.
- 51 Bilgrami, *Khizāna-yi ‘āmira*, 88.
- 52 Yusuf ‘Ali Khan, *Tārīkh-i bangāla*, 153.
- 53 E.g., Brahman, *Chahār chaman*, 106, 123–44.
- 54 Bilgrami, *Khizāna-yi ‘āmira*, 76, 89; Yusuf ‘Ali Khan, *Tārīkh-i bangāla*, 50.
- 55 Writing to Governor Robert Clive during his first attempt to retake Bihar in April 1759, Prince ‘Ali Gauhar (later, Shah ‘Alam) described how Muhammad Quli Khan, Shuja‘-ud-daula’s deputy governor in Allahabad, had accompanied him across the Karamnasa river, “frontier of the Bihar province” (*sarhadd-i sūba*)—what Clive understood as “the boundary of Shujah Doulat’s dominions” (Datta, *Shah Alam II*, 7)—only to have Muhammad Quli Khan later abandon him to return to his “own country (*mulk-i khwud*)” in Allahabad. NLW, Letter, ‘Ali Gauhar to Clive, 29 Apr. 1759: Clive Papers, CR 9/17/35(ii).
- 56 NLI, SC Ms. 178, *Tārīkh-i ‘alamgīr sānī*, 233.

- 57 Yusuf 'Ali Khan, *Tārīkh-i bangāla*, 4, 8, 153.
- 58 Bilgrami, *Khizāna-yi 'āmira*, 54, 56, 71.
- 59 E.g., in the case of Awadh, Daghestani, *Riyāz-ush-shu'arā*, 704; NLI, SC Ms. 37, *Akhbārāt*, 115.
- 60 For example, Ghulam 'Ali Khan's *Imād-us-sa'adat* (1808), one of the most important histories for the Awadh dynasty, narrates succession deliberations following the death of governor Sa'adat Khan in 1739 in terms of degrees of hereditary right (*wirāsat*), 30–1, and argues that the emperor Muhammad Shah had recognised Safdar Jang as “master of [the Awadh] dominion” (*mālik al-mulk*), 36.
- 61 E.g., Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, 5–16.
- 62 Faruqui, “At Empire’s End,” 33–7.
- 63 Alam, *The Crisis of Empire*, 16.
- 64 Marshall, *Making and Unmaking*, esp. 119–57.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 149–50.
- 66 Datta, *Shah Alam II*, 1–2.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 2–12.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 17–21.
- 69 Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-Daulah*, vol. 1, 113–41.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 153–6, 158–61.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 167–72, 204–17, 245–9.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 220–8. For examples of Awadh as Shuja'ud-daula's “dominions” in Company correspondence, see NAI, Letter, Munro to Board: FDSP, Vol. 2A (24 Jul. to Dec. 1764), 642–3; and NLW, Letters, Board to Carnac, 21 Mar. 1765 and 1 Apr. 1765: Carnac Papers, 6/8/24 and 6/6/5A.
- 73 Stern, *The Company-State*, 13, 185–206.
- 74 E.g., Clive, *A Letter*, 3.
- 75 Leonard, “A Fit of Absence of Mind?,” chap. 1.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 95–101.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 20–1, 109–13.
- 78 Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-Daulah*, vol. 2, 20.
- 79 Cf. Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 72.
- 80 Long, *Selections*, 468.
- 81 Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-Daulah*, vol. 2, 11–22.
- 82 For the details of the agreements, see *ibid.*; and Datta, *Shah Alam II*, 38–40.
- 83 In the oft-quoted words of Edmund Burke, the emperor's grant of the *dīwānī* furnished the Company “a fixed constitutional form, with a legal title, acknowledged and recognised now for the first time from the charter of the undoubted sovereign” and represented “the great act of the constitutional entrance of the Company into the body politic of India.” Cited in, among others, Datta, *Shah Alam II*, 42.
- 84 For useful discussions of the significance of the agreement as a whole, see Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-Daulah*, vol. 2, 18–22; and Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 72–5.
- 85 Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-daula*, vol. 2, 12; Habib, *The Agrarian System*, 302, 358–9. For European understandings of the *āltamghā* as a “permanent fief,” see Polier, *Shah Alam II*, 41.
- 86 According to the Swiss adventurer Antoine Polier, who served at the courts of both Shuja'ud-daula and Shah 'Alam, the emperor had, in fact, granted Awadh and Allahabad as an *āltamghā* as part of the restoration. *Shah Alam II*, 34. This assertion, however, is not confirmed by any other contemporary account.
- 87 For a copy of the original Persian-language treaty, see OIOC, Johnson Papers, Ms. I.O. Isl. 4375/B, fols. 19v–21v. For the English translation, see Aitchison, *A Collection*, vol. 2, 67–9.
- 88 E.g., *Aitchison*, vol. 2, 98; OIOC, Ms. Or. 1732, Harcharan Das, *Chahār gulzār-i shujā'ī*, fols. 223v, 231r.
- 89 NAI, Letter, Shuja'ud-daula to Hastings, 5 Feb. 1775: FDP, CR 3, no. 26.
- 90 NAI, Letter, Ghazi-ud-din Haidar to Lord Moira, 13 Oct. 1814: FDP, OR 16.
- 91 The term is used in the sixth article of the treaty to refer to Shuja'ud-daula's indemnity payments to the Company; see Aitchison, *A Collection*, vol. 2, 68; and OIOC, Johnson Papers, Ms. I.O. Isl. 4375/B, fol. 20v. Petitioners had addressed Clive and the Company as

- sarkār-i kampanī* prior to the 1765 treaty (e.g., NLW, Letter, Najaf Khan to Carnac, 23 Apr. 1765: Carnac Papers, 6/8/9) and *sanads* from the governor of Bengal refer to records being kept in the Company's *sarkār* (Long, *Selections*, 175), but I have not seen examples of Company officials describing their establishment as such to a diplomat equal prior to this treaty. See, for further discussion, Abbott, "Bringing the *Sarkār* Back In."
- 92 Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 75.
- 93 Abbott, "Bringing the *Sarkār* Back In."
- 94 Imperial Record Department, *CPC*, vol. 2, no. 660.
- 95 E.g., Imperial Record Department, *CPC*, vol. 2, no. 207, and vol. 3, no. 190; NAI, Letters, Verelst to Raghunath Rao, Rohilla *sardārs*, 25 Mar. 1767, and Cartier to Shah 'Alam, 28 Apr. 1770: FDP, CI 1766–67, no. 95–96, and CI 1770, no. 20.
- 96 Imperial Record Department, *CPC*, vol. 2, no. 2743.
- 97 *Ibid.*, no. 2750.
- 98 For the Company, this meant resuming all *jāgīrs* and *āltamghās* for which no pre-1765 *sanads* could be produced and reconfirming those that could be verified under its own seal. Imperial Record Department, *CPC*, vol. 2, nos. 2697 and 2700. For Shuja'-ud-daula, it meant resuming *āltamghās* (like those held by the family of the nawab of Arcot) and other long-standing grants that even his predecessors, who had taken control of provincial *jāgīr* assignments in the 1740s, had been reluctant to claim. See, for example, *CPC*, vol. 2, nos. 607 and 861; vol. 3, no. 968; and vol. 4, nos. 1748 and 1773–4.
- 99 Imperial Record Department, *CPC*, vol. 2, nos. 1366–9; NAI, Shah 'Alam and Shuja'-ud-daula's compacts, 11 May 1769: FDP, CR 1769, no. 18.
- 100 *Ibid.*
- 101 Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-Daulah*, vol. 2, 128–30.
- 102 Datta, *Shah Alam II*, 54–7.
- 103 *Ibid.*, 56. For examples of the Marathas as a "foreign" threat to the empire of Hindustan, see Imperial Record Department, *CPC*, vol. 3, nos. 94, 190, 195, 314, 319, 367, etc.
- 104 Datta, *Shah Alam II*, 56–8.
- 105 Srivastava, *Shuja-ud-Daulah*, vol. 2, 204–6.
- 106 OIOC, Letter, Shuja'-ud-daula to Shah 'Alam, 22 Jan. 1773: Hastings Papers, Add. 29195, fol. 65r. The abstract translation in Imperial Record Department, *CPC*, vol. 4, no. 1281, appears incorrectly dated.
- 107 *Ibid.*
- 108 Conveniently, however, Company officials ignored or concealed that royal jurists had determined territories conquered by the Company to be property of the British crown. Travers, "A British Empire by Treaty," 144.
- 109 Forrest, *Selections*, vol. 1, 49.
- 110 *Ibid.*, 58: Hastings to Shah 'Alam, 13 Sep. 1773.
- 111 Aitchison, *A Collection*, vol. 2, 73.
- 112 Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls*, 44–5; Datta, *Shah Alam II*, 68–70.
- 113 Cited in Datta, *Shah Alam II*, 62 and 68. As A. L. Srivastava points out, however, Hastings never explicitly informed Shah 'Alam of the tribute's permanent stoppage, citing internal conditions in Bengal as an excuse for perpetual delay. *Shuja-ud-Daulah*, vol. 2, 226–7. Nevertheless, letters from Shuja'-ud-daula made clear that the loss of Allahabad and the cessation of the Bengal tribute were direct consequences of the emperor's departure for Delhi. See n106 above.
- 114 Of course, an idea of Timurid imperium did not disappear entirely. The Company remained reluctant to formally disavow the dynasty (preferring rulers like those of Awadh to do it for them), and Indian princes continued to write to the emperors on the occasion of the accessions. Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls*, 44–5. These, however,

were less obligatory applications for recognition than customary courtesies notifying the emperors that rights of hereditary succession had been enforced. See, for example, NAI, Letter, Sa'adat 'Ali Khan to Shah 'Alam, 9 Feb. 1798: FDPC, 1 May 1798, no. 36. Cf. Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, 9–14. Significantly, too, the Allahabad agreements' vision of empire as a unified community of local sovereignties and autonomous dominions would also spread beyond the Company and its immediate allies and provide a useful conceptual tool even for those, like the Marathas,

who sought to use the emperor to oppose British power. As a Maratha *wakīl* put it to Shuja'-ud-daula's successor in 1776, he should ally by treaty (*qarār*) with the Marathas against the "power hungry and faithless English," since their "interference in the imperial court (*pīshgāh-yi huzūr*) and in every (*tamāmī*) [other] *riyāsat*" posed a common threat to the *mulks* of Hindustan and the Deccan alike. MSA, Draft Letter (*masauda-yi khatt*), Peshwa to Asaf-ud-daula and Sa'adat 'Ali Khan, 1 Safar 1190 AH (22 Mar. 1776), Parasnis Daftar, Rumal 16.

115 Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures*, 70, 163.