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The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719

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SUMMARY

The Mughal Prince explores how a Muslim, ethnically Turkish, and Persian-speaking dynasty came to establish itself in the Indian subcontinent, becoming over time one of the largest and most dynamic empires in history. Rather than linking Mughal success to the empire's powerful and imaginative administrative institutions however, it uncovers and details the pivotal role of the Mughal prince in imperial state formation, theorizing thus the 'princely institution'.

THE
PRINCES
OF THE
MUGHAL
EMPIRE,
1504–1719



MUNIS D. FARUQUI

CAMBRIDGE

Mughal princes are most often depicted as engaging in pointless court intrigues and debilitating political backbiting that resulted in bloody rebellions and wars of succession. This book offers a fresh interpretation of such familial and political wrangling. It argues that rather than weakening the empire, competition among Mughal princes – and the related construction of independent households, forging of empire-wide networks of friends and allies, defiance of the emperor and the imperial court, and wars of succession – served to spread, deepen, and mobilize Mughal power. Since the Mughals never instituted ordered rules of dynastic succession – an inadvertent strength and not in fact a failing – intense political competition propelled princes to guard their long-term political interests by any means necessary.

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Birth of Prince Salim (V&A Museum)

After the 1580s in particular, and Emperor Akbar's decision to discontinue granting royal heirs semi-independent territories (also known as appanages), princes scrambled to establish loyal followings, accrue wealth and influence, and build their political power and military strength across an expanding imperial terrain. The stakes were high; all knew that only one prince could ascend the throne and that the rest would die. Crucially, in the course of fortifying their own power in anticipation of a succession struggle, Mughal princes helped imprint and extend dynastic authority. *The Mughal Prince* explores these processes, bringing to Mughal historiography new ways of understanding Mughal imperial success and fresh insights regarding an institution, the princely institution, hitherto unnamed and undescribed.

While the main focus of *The Mughal Prince* is on the central role of the princely institution in Mughal state formation, the book also demonstrates how the gradual sclerosis of that institution, starting in the late-seventeenth century, had a devastating impact on the dynasty. Once princes and their households along with their capacity to build

alliances were compromised – due to a growing financial crisis, deliberate efforts by Emperor Aurangzeb to undermine his heirs' ability to challenge his authority, and rising intergenerational strife – the robustness and reach of the empire also went into terminal decline.

This book combines a longitudinal with a chronological organization. With the former, it identifies key themes in the story of the princely institution – the princely household; a prince's friends and allies across the empire; his disobedience and rebellion; and finally his bid for the imperial throne. With the latter, this book identifies three main periods in the history of the princely institution: the early period (1504-1556), the high period (1556-1680s), and the late period (1680s-1707). Following the introduction, the first chapter traces the shifts in Mughal succession practices in each of these periods. While two of the remaining six book chapters focus on the early and late periods respectively, between them are four chapters that examine princely households, alliance building,



Circumcision of Akbar (British Library)

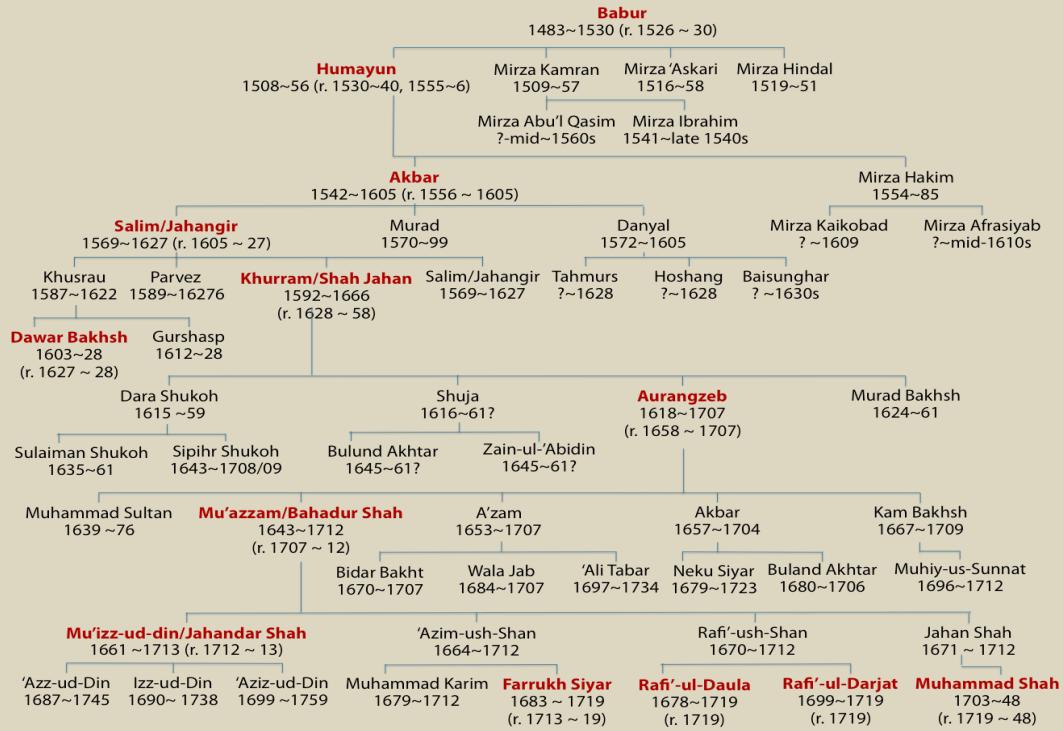
rebellion and succession, as these worked during the high period of Mughal rule. The book thus demonstrates that, in the thriving middle years of the empire, the princely institution too was at its zenith.

The Mughal Prince draws on a vast archive. This includes European traveler accounts as well as the records of the English East India Company. However, the book is primarily based on Persian sources from the Mughal period, both published and archival, including: officially sanctioned court chronicles; privately written historical accounts; imperial memoirs; administrative documents; biographical dictionaries written by imperial noblemen and religious scholars; collections of imperial and noble correspondence; Sufi hagiographies; and local and regional histories. By far the most valuable archival resource is a thus far little utilized collection called the *Akhbarat-i Darbar-i Mualla* (News Bulletins of the Exalted Court) in the National Library of India (Calcutta).. This consists of thousands of daily reports of the Mughal court and offers invaluable insights into the difficulties that buffeted the princely institution in the last decades of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's reign (r. 1658-1707).



The Mughal Family Tree

Mughal Emperors & select Princes



Munis Faruqui (Ph.D. Duke University) is a historian and Associate Professor in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies. He focuses on the Muslim experience in South Asia, especially during the Mughal period.

Professor Faruqui's books include *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (2012) and two forthcoming edited volumes: *Religious Interactions in Mughal India* (co-edited with Vasudha Dalmia) and *Expanding Frontiers in South Asian and World History* (co-edited with Richard Eaton, David Gilmartin and Sunil Kumar). His various journal articles have interrogated the creation of the Mughal Empire under Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605), the founding decades (c. 1720-40) of the princely state of Hyderabad, and the relationship between religion and politics in the life and work of the Mughal prince, Dara Shukoh (1615-59). He is currently working on a book reevaluating the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707).



Young Prince (Smithsonian Institution)

Book Excerpt

(p. 81-82)

The Importance of a Prince's Education

There probably is no better indication of the importance the Mughals attached to their princes' education than the anger expressed toward bored or truant princes. Thus, after learning that his son Kam Bakhsh had been skipping his tutorials, Aurangzeb furiously reprimanded him: "A person without knowledge (*bi-ilm*) is a beast (*haiwan*). A prince, in particular, should have a refined mind." After reproaching Kam Bakhsh, Aurangzeb ordered him confined to his personal quarters for a month and a half. A prince whose education was considered lacking was likewise stigmatized and shunned. Aurangzeb's grandson Buland Akhtar, for example, spent much of his youth in the care of rebellious Rajputs after being abandoned by his father Prince Akbar following the latter's failed rebellion in 1681. Upon his reunion with Aurangzeb and the Mughal court in the late 1690s, Buland Akhtar was deemed uneducated and uncivilized; one contemporary described him as possessing no restraint of speech or habit. It was a reputation that he was never able to shake.

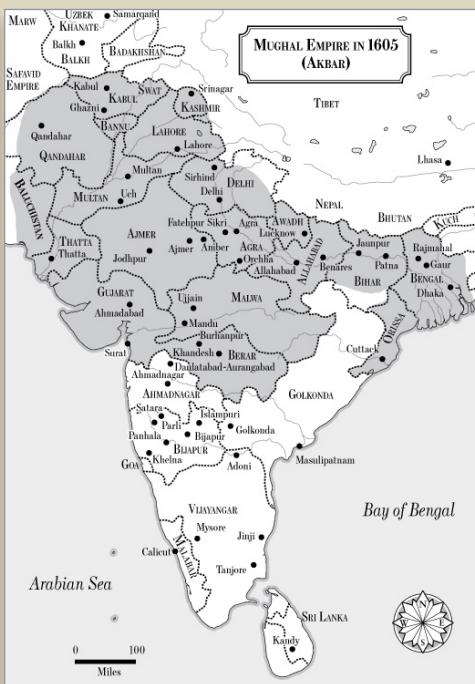
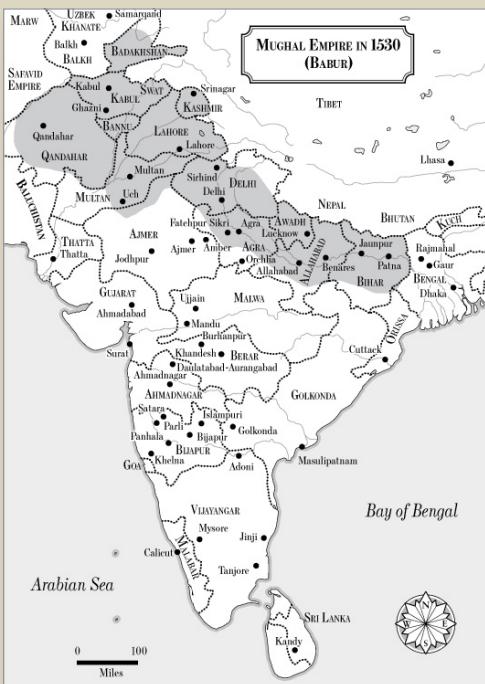


(1530)

The Spread of the Mughal Empire

(1605)

(1707)



Book Excerpt (p. 54-55)

The Emperor and the Errant Prince: Babur's relationship with Humayun

Babur and Humayun may have enjoyed a warm and loving relationship while the latter was still a child. But any affection evaporated in the years following Humayun's dispatch to Badakhshan (1519). Their drifting apart is apparent from the unusual silences in otherwise loquacious Mughal accounts. It is also attested to by Humayun's decision to temporarily ignore his father's summons to Kabul to participate in the long-planned invasion of India in 1525–6. Babur's anger is clearly registered in his memoir, the *Baburnama*. The emperor noted that he sent his son "harshly worded letters." When Humayun finally did arrive, his father gave him an earful: "I rebuked him quite a lot for being so late." This was not the end of Humayun's misbehavior, however. Although the historical sources are careful to not offer us any examples of Humayun's troublemaking over the next few years, we know that Babur had grown tired enough of his son's errant behavior to transfer him and his contingents out of India and back to Badakhshan in 1527. Although Babur explained his action by claiming that the Badakhshans were exhausted from constant fighting, that Kabul was undermanned, and that he had made a prior promise to release the Badakhshans once northern India was successfully conquered, these seem to be nothing more than excuses. For instance, the suggestion that Babur was concerned about Kabul's vulnerability is suspect given that he was sending letters "in all directions" at that time pleading for additional troops to come to India. There clearly was little warmth left between father and son. Indeed, the *Baburnama* records the emperor's greater interest in exploring the hot springs of Ferozpur than in bidding farewell to Humayun on the eve of his removal from India.



Timeline of Key Events in Mughal History

1483	Birth of Babur in Ferghana (contemporary Uzbekistan)
1493	Babur becomes ruler of Ferghana upon death of his father
1501	Uzbeks defeat Babur; he is forced to vacate Samarkand
1504	Babur captures Kabul
1508	Babur assumes the title of <i>padshah</i> ; birth of oldest son Humayun
1519	Badakhshan given to Humayun as his princely appanage
1526	Babur invades India; the Lodis defeated; the Mughal Empire established
1527	Babur defeats Rajput coalition under Rana Sangha at Khanua; Humayun sent back to Badakhshan, sacks Delhi treasury on way out
1530	Death of Babur; Humayun ascends throne
1540	Humayun defeated by Sher Khan Suri, flees India; Mughal rule collapses
1540 –52	Humayun and Mirza Kamran battle for supremacy
1542	Birth of Akbar
1555	Humayun invades India, reestablishes the Mughal Empire
1556	Death of Humayun; Akbar ascends the throne
1570s	Akbar introduces the <i>mansabdari</i> and <i>jagirdari</i> systems
1583	Akbar offers his sons first experience of running the Mughal Empire
1599 –1604	Salim's rebellion
1605	Death of Akbar; Salim/Jahangir ascends the throne
1606	Khusrau's rebellion; imprisoned following capture
1607	Khusrau blinded; Khurram/Shah Jahan accorded adult status
1611	Jahangir marries Mehr-un-Nisa/Nur Jahan
1612	Khurram marries Arjomand Banu Begum (later Mumtaz Mahal)
1614	Khurram defeats Rajput kingdom of Mewar
1616 –17	Khurram enjoys military success in the Deccan
1621 –22	Khurram undertakes second successful campaign in the Deccan

Contd. overleaf

Book Excerpt (p. 168-169)

Life Away from the Imperial Court

Life away from the imperial court was not easy for princes, especially in their early years. Jahangir's son Prince Parvez asked to return to court shortly after his first major appointment as commander of the Mughal forces against Mewar in 1606. The rigors of the campaign as well as the presence of a host of domineering Mughal nobles came as a shock to the young prince. Less than forty years later (in 1644), Aurangzeb simply abandoned his governorship of the Deccan and returned to court without permission. It seems he was exhausted and longed to be back in the imperial court. In 1646, Aurangzeb's brother Murad also deserted his command in Balkh on the northwestern frontier.



Battle of Samugarh (Harvard Art Museums)

But despite the drawbacks of being and feeling out of touch with events at court, princes sometimes learned that in the bitter competition for the throne, certain advantages accrued to having relative independence. Thus, for a time, Akbar's son Murad evaded his father's efforts to bring him back to court from his command in the Deccan. As tensions with his father and stepmother, Emperor Jahangir and Nur Jahan, increased in the early 1620s, Prince Khurram in fact requested assignment to the Deccan. In 1645, after realizing how unwelcome he was at the imperial court, Aurangzeb begged his father's chief minister Sa'dullah Khan to assign him anywhere so long as it was far removed from the court.



Book Excerpt (p. 103)

The Prince and His Household

Every adult Mughal prince – barring the disgraced or imprisoned – possessed his own household. These varied in size from a few individuals for princes of collateral imperial lines to the mega-households of the direct heirs of an emperor. Such grand princely households could encompass thousands of individuals. After the 1580s, exercising their tentacle presence across the entire empire, these households exerted enormous political influence. Their strength, size, and combined capabilities helped determine the



Shah Shuja' (Smithsonian Institution)

political fortunes of the small group of princes jockeying to be the next emperor. On the basis of his household wealth and the effectiveness of his retainers, a prince might establish his reputation as a general, project his power in times of peace and war, accomplish delicate political missions, build ties to powerful individuals or groups, and broadly make the case for his suitability to be the next emperor to imperial subjects of every status.



Book Excerpt

(p. 240)

Fratricide: The Case of Salim & Danyal

Although no historical account directly implicates Salim in the death of Danyal in March 1605 – a mere seven months before Akbar's own demise in October 1605 – circumstantial evidence suggests otherwise. Danyal was a long-standing alcoholic, and by late 1604 his alcoholism had gotten so bad that he was constantly ill and weak. In a desperate attempt to control his son's habit, Akbar had ordered Danyal to be placed under house arrest in the Deccan. Somehow, rust and lead-laden (in effect poisoned) alcohol was smuggled into the prince's quarters by a group of "wicked persons" who, according to the *Akbarnama*, "seeing their own good in his harm . . . conspired to kill" the prince. Among those involved in the plot were a nephew of Khwaja Fathullah and a brother of Zamana Beg (later Mahabat Khan), both diehard supporters of Prince Salim. Three days after Danyal's death and following a public trial, ten men were publicly beaten and stoned to death by Danyal's aggrieved supporters. This brutal form of capital punishment was most likely employed because of the conviction that the men had acted on Salim's orders. With Danyal's death, Salim became Akbar's sole surviving son and de facto heir to the throne.



1622 –27	Khurram's rebellion
1626	Rebellion of Mahabat Khan
1627	Death of Jahangir; war of succession follows
1628	Khurram/Shah Jahan ascends the throne
1636 –44	Aurangzeb serves as governor of the Deccan
1644	Aurangzeb returns to imperial court without permission, stripped of rank
1646 –47	Failed Mughal campaign against Balkh and Badakhshan
1649 –53	Failed Mughal campaigns against Qandahar
1652 –57	Aurangzeb serves as governor of the Deccan
1656 –57	Aurangzeb wages war against kingdoms of Bijapur and Golkonda
1657 –59	War of succession involving Shah Jahan's four adult sons
1658	Shah Jahan forced to abdicate, imprisoned in Agra; Aurangzeb ascends the throne
1659	Muhammad Sultan's rebellion, imprisoned until death in 1676
1681	Akbar rebels
1685 –87	Mughal campaigns against Bijapur and Golkonda
1687 –95	Mu'azzam imprisoned by Aurangzeb
1690s	Emergence of Ghazi-ud-Din Khan, Chin Qilich Khan, and Zulfiqar Khan as key imperial generals
1693	Kam Bakhsh placed under house arrest for a brief time
1700 –02	All major princes removed from command positions in the Deccan
1701 –15	A'zam serves as governor of Gujarat
1707	Death of Aurangzeb; war of succession follows; Mu'azzam/Bahadur Shah I ascends the throne
1712	Death of Bahadur Shah; war of succession ensues; Mu'izz-ud-Din/Jahandar Shah ascends the throne with the help of Zulfiqar Khan
1713	Jahandar Shah overthrown; Farrukh Siyar ascends the throne; Sayyid brothers emerge as most powerful nobles in the empire
1719	Farrukh Siyar overthrown; Sayyid brothers successively appoint Rafi'-ul-Darjat and Rafi'-ul-Daula as emperors; end of the open-ended system of succession

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Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719

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