The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion

A Soldier’s Diary of the 1689 Siege of Bombay with Related Documents

Edited with an Introduction by

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it. We have generally regularized and modernized the spelling of proper
and place names as well as administrative and legal terms, both English
and South Asian, usually rendering them with the most common name
in use today (if known), though in several cases, we have left the spell-
ing or expression where we felt it captured something of the spirit or
meaning of the original (well-known Anglicized South Asian terms are
sometimes retained for example, usually with the original Persian or
other word glossed in a footnote). On the whole, we have not italicized
non-English words in the original documents; however, where the origi-
nal source used italics for emphasis, we have often retained these. In
cases where it is unclear if two sources were talking about the same per-
son, we left the original spelling in place. Some of the translations have
been modernized and infelicities of expression quietly altered. Dates are
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Contents

Foreword iii
Preface iv
LIST OF MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS x

PART ONE
Introduction: The 1689 Siege of Bombay in
Global Historical Perspective 1

The New Global History 4
Mughal Expansion and the English Acquisition of Bombay 5
The First Anglo-Mughal War in Regional and Global Context 9
The Siege of Bombay 13
Making Peace and the Emperor’s Farman 16
The Outcry in England and the Campaign to Abolish the
East India Company 19
James Hilton and His Diary 21
Conclusion 22

PART TWO
The Siege of Bombay: A Soldier’s Diary 26

James Hilton, Diary of the Siege of Bombay, February 15, 1689,
to June 22, 1690 27
PART THREE
Related Documents 106

1. The East India Company on the West Coast of India 107
   1. John Ovington, The Great Rival to Bombay: The Port of Surat and Indian Ocean Trade, 1689 107
   2. Charter Granted by Charles II to the East India Company, Confirming and Extending Their Former Charters, April 3, 1661 111
   3. Letters Patent from Charles II for the Port and Island of Bombay, March 27, 1669 114
   4. Letters Patent from James II Extending Jurisdiction of Prize Courts in the East Indies, April 12, 1686 116

2. Mughal Expansion under the Emperor Aurangzeb 119
   5. Ishwar das Nagar, Modes of Siege Warfare—and Restoring Order Afterward, 1688 119
   6. Capture of Orchha, 1635 123
   7. The Emperor Aurangzeb at a Chishti Shrine, 1670s 125

3. Sidi Yakut Khan and Rising Tension in Bombay 126
   8. Khafi Khan, On Sidi Yakut, 1670s–1680s 125
   9. Murder in the Bazaar: Clashes between Englishmen and the Sidi's Soldiers, 1683 130

4. Company Plans for War 132
   10. East India Company, A Fleet of Warlike Ships: Secret Instructions for War, March and April 1686 132
   11. Bartholomew Harris and Samuel Annesley, Diplomatic Overtures between Surat and the Company, 1687 136
   12. East India Company, Letter to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, 1688 139

5. Other Experiences of the Siege 142
   14. The Governor and Council of Bombay, Letter to London about the Siege, 1689 147
   15. John Stevens, alias Abd al-Allah, Conversion to Islam while at the Sidi's Camp, 1689 149

6. The Quest for Peace 154
   17. Peace Negotiations between the Company and the Mughals, July 1689 to February 1690 156
   18. The Emperor Aurangzeb, Declaring a Peace? The Imperial Parman, 1690 162
   19. John Vauxe, An East India Company Hostage Reflects Back upon the Siege, 1691 164

7. The Company's War: Defenders, Critics, Petitioners 166
   21. The Great Oppressions and Injuries Which the Managers of the East India Company Have Acted on the Lives, Liberties, and Estates of Their Fellow Subjects and Injustice Done to the Natives in Sundry Parts of India, 1691 168
   22. Edith Holloway and Others, A Petition to the House of Commons by Widows of East India Company Sailors, 1693 171
   23. Sheikh Mahmud Hosson, Mulla Abdul Ghafur, and Others, Surat Merchants, Clerics, and Port Officials Petition against the East India Company, 1700 173
8. The Legacy and Memory of the Siege of Bombay 175
   24. Khafi Khan, *English Pirate Attacks and Continuing Tensions between Bombay and the Mughal Empire, 1694* 175
   25. John Burnell, *Bombay Twenty Years after the Siege, 1710* 180

APPENDIXES
   A Chronology of the Siege of Bombay (1600–1709) 184
   Questions for Consideration 186
   Selected Bibliography 187

Index 189

Maps and Illustrations

MAPS
1. *The Mughal Empire, c. 1689*  6
2. *Bombay, 1680s*  28

ILLUSTRATIONS
1. *English Fort of Bombay, 1672*  2
2. James Hilton, *Count of Dead and Wounded from the Diary, 1690*  104
*Capture of Orchha, 1635 (Document 6)*  124
*The Emperor Aurangzeb at a Chishti Shrine, 1670s (Document 7)*  125

In the early hours of the morning of February 15, 1689, Sidi Yakut Khan, a coastal military commander with strong ties to the Mughal Empire, invaded Bombay, off the west coast of what is now India, and laid siege to the English East India Company's fort and settlement there (see Figure 1). The siege lasted almost a year and a half and led directly or indirectly to the death of much of the Company garrison and an untold number of townspeople, both European and South Asian. The conflict also left the town in ruins. As the English ran low on gunpowder, food, and money to pay the troops, a number of their soldiers deserted, and many ended up fighting for Sidi Yakut Khan against their former comrades.

The peace, when it came, was widely represented as humiliating to the Company and, by extension, a blow to English national honor. It became fodder for critics in England, who used it to argue that the Company was corrupt, greedy, violent, and poorly managed. This criticism in turn fueled nearly successful efforts to have the Company dissolved. Mughal officials, especially those in the nearby port town of Surat, also capitalized on the moment, using it to make demands on the Company for years to come. However, Company leaders saw or claimed to see the conflict as part of a larger strategy to assert themselves against both Asian and European rivals; to them, the so-called "War with the Great
the modern world city we now know as Mumbai. The Siege of Bombay was, in short, a regional conflict with global ramifications. It also tells us a great deal about the nature of the encounter between European and Asian empires in the early modern period.

Until fairly recently, the 1689 Siege of Bombay has gotten little attention from historians. One obvious reason is that the siege coincided with one of the most famous events in the history of the British Isles, the Revolution of 1688–89 (also known as the “Glorious Revolution”), which removed from power the Catholic king James II (Stuart) and replaced him with the Dutch Protestant William of Orange (crowned William III) and his wife Mary (crowned Mary II), who was also the daughter of James II. As a consequence, when British historians and English-language schoolbooks talk about 1689, they tend to focus on events in Europe and England, especially in London, as opposed to events happening half a world away. Nor is there much mention of the siege in the major Mughal memoirs and other sources that have been the foundation for much work on the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb. A second, more practical reason for passing over the Siege of Bombay is that it was so disruptive of the East India Company’s governance in its Asian factories and settlements that the usual flow of letters and reports to Company directors in London largely dried up. James Hilton’s daily account of the siege is the only detailed source we have for this event, and it is being published here for the first time.

But the most important reason the Siege of Bombay has been neglected is that it does not fit well with the stories traditionally told about the English East India Company, British imperialism, and the nature of early modern Asian states and empires. The siege, which resulted from a much larger and more aggressive policy the Company had adopted across the Indian Ocean, challenges a long-standing vision of the seventeenth-century East India Company as a mere trader, which fell into its political ambitions almost inadvertently as a result of territorial expansion in the middle of the eighteenth century. Conversely, the conflict tests the assumption that the Mughal Empire and its greatest contemporary rivals, most notably the Marathas, were primarily territorial powers, with little interest in either sea power or commercial wealth. At the same time, the fact that the First Anglo-Mughal War was such a disaster for the English from almost its first day belies the triumphalist assumption that English imperial expansion—and, indeed, European expansion more generally—swept over the globe with the force of destiny.
THE NEW GLOBAL HISTORY

Today scholars are in the middle of a major reassessment of the way they think and write about global history, and this reassessment has been especially pronounced in relation to European encounters in Asia. There is a new emphasis on the contingent and unpredictable nature of European expansion and the many setbacks Europeans encountered. Historians no longer study only imperial “successes” but instead see imperial expansion, in the words of Alison Games, as a “complex process, one riddled with trial and error, success and failure, triumph and despair.” Increasingly, historians also reject teleological assumptions about the motives and aims of people in the past. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a century or more after the events described in this book, the English East India Company conquered almost all of South Asia and came to dominate the Indian Ocean. But it would be wrong to assume that eighteenth-century Englishmen—or the eighteenth-century East India Company—aimed to do either of these things. This is not to say that the Company did not have political ambitions. However, owing to various factors—not least of which was the overwhelming reach and military power of the Mughal Empire—these took a much different form than they would one hundred years later.

Finally, historians today are more skeptical of the power of national or regional solidarities than they used to be. While an earlier generation of historians claimed to see both Europeans and Asians as unified constituencies, inevitably locked in combat (this notion is sometimes expressed in the contested phrase “clash of empires”), today scholars are more likely to point out the tensions and disunities within these groupings, not least among traders and settlers from Europe, as well as shifting relationships, alliances, and interactions that undermined the coherence of categories such as “European,” “Asian,” or even “English.” This is often coupled with a stress on what historian Sanjay Subrahmanyan has called the “connected histories” of Eurasia, meaning a kind of history that focuses not on incommensurability or inevitable differences but on the complex and shifting links, affinities, similarities, and conflicts among peoples, cultures, economies, and politics in early modern world history.

The Siege of Bombay lends itself well to all of these approaches. From the English perspective, it was a conflict ridden with despair and defeat. It also revealed a shocking degree of disunity among the European settlers, who in some cases were deeply hostile to the Company.

Even more disturbing, the Company found itself unable to rely on its own soldiers, many of whom fled to the enemy. At the same time, the fort was only able to hold out because of an alliance of convenience between the East India Company and the Maratha Empire, a growing power vying with the Mughals and others for regional dominance. The story of the siege thus puts center stage a dizzyingly entangled cast of characters—not just English, Mughal, and Maratha but also Portuguese, Dutch, Gujarati, Rajput, Abyssinian, Persian, and many others. This was global “connected history” of the most complex kind.

MUGHAL EXPANSION AND THE ENGLISH ACQUISITION OF BOMBAY

The defining political event of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century South Asia was the rise and expansion of the Mughal Empire. The Mughals traced their origins from Central Asian, Turkic, and Mongol lineages of Timur (i.e., Tamerlane) on the one side and Chinggis Khan on the other. Emerging in the region around Kabul, the Mughals began their expansion into what is now northern India under Emperor Babur (1483-1530). By the time of the Siege of Bombay, under Emperor Aurangzeb, or Alamgir (“world-seizer”) (r. 1658-1707), Mughal power had dramatically expanded, reaching almost to the southern tip of the South Asian subcontinent (see Map 1). Militarily this expansion relied on a combination of heavy—sometimes unworkably heavy—artillery and the mobilization of large armies supported by a nimble military labor market. Mughal power was also facilitated by a sophisticated and layered approach to governance that balanced the central authority of the emperor with a good deal of scope for local initiative. This was accompanied by a relative openness to ethnic and religious diversity. So, for example, while the Mughals themselves were Muslims and favored Islam, even under the self-consciously devout Aurangzeb the empire was adept at incorporating, co-opting, or ignoring both people and polities of various religious persuasions, including various forms of Hinduism. It was also multiethnic, welcoming courtiers, tributaries, and fighters of diverse origins and from many regions (Document 7).

It was this already remarkably cosmopolitan place into which Europeans sought to insert themselves in the early modern period. Of course, Europe had had commercial and military contact with Asia for centuries, from the campaigns of Alexander the Great to the travels of Marco Polo. The attempt to reach Asia by a maritime route was the holy grail
of fifteenth-century exploration; it was the original goal of Christopher Columbus in 1492 as well as many subsequent expeditions futilely seeking both a “northwest” passage (via what is now Canada) and a “northwest” passage (via what is now Russia) to the “East Indies.” The arrival in India of the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama’s fleet in 1498 and the subsequent founding of Goa on the southwestern coast of the Indian subcontinent, however, marked a significant change. Initially concerned less with the subcontinent than with the “Spice Islands” of what is now Indonesia, the Catholic Portuguese were, by the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries, challenged by other European competitors. Both Portugal and Spain had claimed a rather illusory dominion in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans based on a series of papal bulls (edicts) as well as the Luso-Spanish Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), which ran a line of demarcation near the Azores in the Atlantic, delegating responsibility for the western portions to Spain and the eastern portions to Portugal. Protestants, such as those from England, the Netherlands, and Denmark, as well as some Catholics (particularly from France) rejected this logic and began to undertake their own concerted efforts at maritime Eurasian trade by the beginning of the seventeenth century—fueled as well, perhaps ironically, by the massive influx of silver flowing to European markets from mines in Spanish colonial America and redirected into the trade to Asia.

Among these upstarts was the English East India Company, chartered in 1600 by Queen Elizabeth with the exclusive right among English subjects to trade with all of the lands and seas between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan. Its ships were heavily armed, though the main concern was not Asian politics but the Company’s European rivals, especially the Portuguese Estado da India and the Dutch United East India Company (VOC), itself created in 1602. The seventeenth century was marked by various and shifting alliances and conflicts among and between both European and Asian powers. From 1612 to 1615, the English East India Company, allied with Mughal forces, faced off against the Portuguese fleet at Suwall (known at the time to the English as Swally Hole or Swally Marine), which served as a deepwater anchorage for nearby Surat, the largest port and trading city in western India. Similarly, in 1622, the Company and the Persian (Safavid) Empire combined to force the Portuguese from the Persian Gulf port of Hormuz. In 1623, Dutch officials executed a number of English and Chinese merchants on the Indonesian island of Ambon, in what came to be known as the Amboyna Massacre, though not long after, an Anglo-Dutch alliance would seek to attack Portuguese interests in western India, including at Bombay.
Meanwhile, the English East India Company was attempting to create for itself more permanent settlements and a more secure trade in the area. In the 1610s, the Company and the English king James I even sent an ambassador, Sir Thomas Roe, to the court of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb; the Company's victories over the Portuguese fleet at Suva led Roe secure an imperial farman (imperial command or order) to establish its first factory (i.e., trading establishment) at Mughal-controlled Surat in 1616. Other factories soon followed throughout India. By the early 1640s, the Company had also obtained its own independent, fortified city of Madras (also known as Fort St. George) in the eastern India, similar in ambition to what the Portuguese had at Goa and the Dutch at Batavia (modern-day Jakarta in Indonesia). The Company had long desired something similar on the west coast of India, but, unlike at Surat, it could be independent of Mughal authority. An opportunity arose in 1661. In that year, England and Portugal cut an alliance, sealed by the marriage of the English king Charles II and the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza. That treaty included the rights to two Portuguese settlements: the North African city of Tangier and the "Port and Island" of Bombay.

In fact, Bombay was not simply a port and an island but an archipelago of islands, marshes, rivers, straits, and passages, which had mainly been under Portuguese jurisdiction and control since the early sixteenth century. Bombay itself was largely the private estate of a handful of Portuguese landowners. As a result, what precisely was meant to be transferred in the treaty would be a matter of conflict and controversy between the English and the Portuguese for decades to come. Nonetheless, in 1668, the English government granted Bombay to the East India Company as a sort of colonial proprietorship, with full rights to make laws, punish offenses, govern its people, and organize military defense. Other prerogatives of sovereignty soon followed, such as the right to mint coin. The Company quickly set up a governmental infrastructure, especially during the tenure of Gerald Aungier, the island's third English governor (r. 1672–1675), creating, among other things, a system of courts and a series of fortifications around the archipelago. In 1687, it declared Bombay to be the center of its trading and military operations in western India, instead of Mughal-controlled Surat. Despite these efforts, Bombay itself grew slowly, its development impeded by environmental challenges; shortages of resources; high mortality rates; tensions with neighbors; and the need to build a civil society from a multitude of religions, ethnicities, legal systems, and commercial ties and interests. In the late 1680s, on the eve of Sidi Yakut Khan's invasion, the Company's colony (as they called it) at Bombay was still very much an ambitious work in progress.

THE FIRST ANGLO-MUGHAL WAR IN REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT

While part of the history of European expansion, the Siege of Bombay was in many ways also an extension of a much larger conflict raging over control and jurisdiction in western and southern India. During the latter part of the seventeenth century, Emperor Aurangzeb built upon the conquests of his Mughal predecessors by pushing decisively into western and southern India. In the process, imperial armies ran up against a number of other powerful sovereign polities, including Golconda, Bijapur, the remnants of the Vijayanagar Empire, and, most famously, the Marathas. Maratha power had consolidated under Emperor Shivaji Bhonsle (r. 1674–1680) in the 1660s and 1670s and quickly became a major threat to Mughal expansion. The result was a significant ramping up of conflict. Mughal expansion into Bijapur in the early 1680s, an area recently claimed by the Marathas, launched almost three decades of armed conflict—the so-called Deccan Wars (1680–1707)—that engulfed large parts of southern and western South Asia.

Often represented as contests over territory, the Deccan Wars also had a significant maritime dimension that is frequently overlooked. Both Marathas and Mughals extended their power to the sea, or at least to the littoral regions along the western Indian coast, which included the area around Bombay. However, this force was not represented by a navy as we might understand it today. Rather, it was constituted similarly to the way military service was on land; that is, through various forms of tributary, itinerant, and somewhat decentralized power. Mughal might along the Gujarati coast was primarily embodied in the Sidi, people of East African ancestry who had established themselves in South Asia over the course of the previous millennium. Initially coming to southern Asia as traders, laborers, and slaves, over the centuries Sids had gained an enviable reputation as warriors and seafarers, and some had become quite prominent officials in princely households. By the mid-seventeenth century, perhaps earlier, a group of Sids had established themselves as a semi-autonomous power on the coast, based in the coastal fortified enclave of Danda-Rajpuri and the adjoining island fortress of Janjira.

In 1689, this principality was under the coleadership of Sidi Yakut Khan and another Sidi who may have been a relative. Sidi Yakut had
urned the esteem of the Mughals through a series of notable victories against the Marathas. As a result, he was given a mansab by Aurangzeb at some point, also acquired the honorifics Yakut and Khan. Khai Khan’s account (Document 8) suggests that Sidi Yakut was charismatic, strongly resourceful, and not a man to be trifled with.

As his jostling with Maratha power at sea became more heated, Sidi Akut grew ambitious for control of the region. During the 1670s and 1680s, both Sidi and Maratha forces had attempted to take up positions near small islands at the far reaches of the Bombay archipelago, lesser out concern for the fledgling English settlement on a neighboring island than as strategic advantages against one another, as well as the nearby Portuguese. However, tensions with the English soon began to emerge as Sidi Yakut insisted on harboring his fleet at Bombay during the monsoon season. It was a request Company officials could not refuse, even though when the Sidi’s men came ashore there were often altercations between them and the English soldiers and settlers. Some of these encounters ended in fatalities and political crises (Document 9).

The tensions got much worse after a change of policy within the English East India Company. By the early 1680s, the Company was facing a number of challenges, including growing threats from the Dutch and Portuguese, as well as what it perceived as increasing infringements on its rights from Mughal and other South Asian officials. The company was also alarmed by a related problem—a dramatic rise in interloping, that is, English subjects trading with or traveling to the East Indies without Company license or permission. This in turn was related to a growing political opposition to the Company at home, fueled both by a split in Company leadership and by the success of its opponents in linking it with the increasingly unpopular regimes of the late Stuart kings, Charles II and James II, and their Tory supporters. Among the most controversial of these supporters was the London merchant and economic writer Josiah Child (1631–1699). During the 1680s, Child became the largest stockholder in the English East India Company. Because the amount of stock a person owned determined how many votes he could command, Child served at various points as the Company’s governor, deputy governor, or just an extremely influential member of the Company’s court of committees (board of directors). He and a small group of other men from the top echelon of Company stockholders also used their positions to great financial and political advantage, owning shares in ships leased to the Company, arranging low-cost sales of East India goods to themselves and their friends, and commanding outsized influence at court and with the Treasury and Royal Navy.

By the early 1680s, Child and his allies had become convinced that aggressive policies were needed to defend the Company’s monopoly on trade in the East Indies. This meant engaging in a forward policy of lobbying at home, including instituting an annual “gift” to the monarch of more than £10,000. Yet Company leadership also saw this problem as partially rooted in politics in Asia. Interlopers could not succeed, they argued, without support from merchants and politics in India, particularly the Mughal Empire. Making matters worse, the Company faced growing challenges from its European rivals, particularly the Dutch who in 1682 had successfully supported a coup that resulted in the expulsion of the English factory from the Javanease port of Banten. There were also problems in the settlements themselves. In 1683, a garrison mutiny led by Captain Richard Keigwin lost the Company control of Bombay for upward of a year.

Child and others became convinced that only a show of force would arrest what they saw as the downward spiral of the Company. Beginning in the early 1680s, he and his circle encouraged a major program of shipbuilding in England aimed at developing a fleet of unusually large, heavily armed warships that could be used to police the interlopers, to overawe the Mughals, and to give the Dutch and Portuguese pause. The fleet would then also be available for other policing projects in and around the Indian Ocean. The Company also announced in 1687 that it was shifting its western Indian “Presidency” from Surat to Bombay, partly in order to gain more autonomy from the Mughals. Thus, its larger goal was not territorial expansion or empire in the modern sense but rather a defense of what it saw as its natural and negotiated rights in Asia: exclusive English trade and jurisdiction over all English subjects, especially favorable trading privileges; concessions on customs and other duties demanded by the Mughals; and the ability to defend itself against aggressors, especially other Europeans. It meant to send a signal to politics in Asia that the Company was to be taken seriously as both a political and a commercial power. There was also a more immediate objective. Company officials had come to believe that the rights and privileges they sought could not be secured permanently without a new, comprehensive farman from Emperor Aurangzeb, and they persuaded themselves that if this farman could not be obtained by diplomacy it would have to be won by war.

The prime agent of this policy in Asia was John Child (a close ally of but no relation to Josiah), the governor of Bombay and newly appointed general over all the Company’s forces in Asia. From at least 1686 on, he was supported by that large fleet of English ships, all of them secretly
authorized to seize not just the ships of English interlopers but also those of Mughal subjects (Document 10). The Company's war strategy was broad and involved four theaters of conflict: the Persian Gulf, to recover payments the English felt they were owed based on the agreement reached after the expulsion of the Portuguese in Hormuz in the 1620s; Siam, which had become a haven for English interlopers as well as a growing French ally; Bengal, where the Company also wanted expanded trading privileges as well as an independent settlement to fend off Mughal, Dutch, and Portuguese rivals alike; and, of course, western India, where the English felt military conflict would allow them to extract concessions from both the Mughals and the Portuguese.

As governor and general, John Child embraced the newly belligerent policy with enthusiasm mixed with some personal animosity, especially against the chief Mughal official in Surat, Muktihar Khan. As Child wrote in a letter back to London, "The Moors grow mighty insolent and it's high time they were taken down." East India Company ships attempted to blockade Surat and began seizing ships up and down the coast—a policy many observers, both Mughal and European, saw as indistinguishable from piracy. At least twenty-one ships owned by Mughal subjects were captured and held, along with their goods. In some cases, the cargoes were judged as lawful "prize" (seizures) by Company Admiralty Courts (Document 4) and were either sold in India or sent back to England. The Company also took the opportunity to confiscate the ships and cargo of English interlopers. As a result of the Company's actions, trade in the region came almost to a standstill.

Under great pressure from influential merchants at Surat who owned most of the captured ships, Mughal officials reacted swiftly, confiscating East India Company goods and monies, imprisoning their factors and other employees, and demanding not only that the Company return the seized goods but also that it return its trading headquarters to Surat.

The Portuguese and others made several attempts to broker a peace, but all of the attempts were resisted or bungled by one side or the other. John Child in particular apparently believed, like his mentors in London, that if he caused enough pain the Mughals would simply give in and grant the Company more favorable terms of trade. As a result, he gained a reputation with the Mughals and the Surat merchant elite for incivility, insolence, and irrational stubbornness. By the end of 1688, matters were at an impasse. Then Child made the fatal mistake, supposedly against the advice of more prudent subordinates, of seizing the provisioning fleet that was carrying grain to Sidi Yakut's army at Danda-Rajpuri. According to one source, Sidi Yakut asked several times for his ships to be returned and was rudely rebuffed (Document 13). It is possible that Sidi Yakut would never have been drawn into what amounted to a mercantile quarrel between Surat and Bombay had it not been for this incident. Or it may be that the Company's growing independence and assertiveness would have prompted action from the Mughals one way or the other. Either way, confrontation now became inevitable.

THE SIEGE OF BOMBAY

Sidi Yakut's forces disembarked at Sewri, a creek a few miles north of the main town of Bombay at about 2:00 a.m. on February 15, 1689. There is some disagreement about how many soldiers were involved, but 14,000 seems the most plausible number. During the first few days after the invasion, the vastly outnumbered Company troops—approximately 300 European and Indo-Portuguese soldiers—were repeatedly forced back. The Sewri Fort was abandoned almost immediately, and outlying Company forts or fortlets, at Mahim, Mazagaon, and presumably Sion and Worli, were soon also evacuated. By February 17, the Sidi's forces were seen in the town itself "burning all before them," and within a few more days they had taken control of all the former territory of the Company except for Bombay Castle itself (usually referred to in James Hilton's diary as "the Fort"), a section of the town close to the fort, and a small area of perhaps no more than a square mile between the fort and the southern tip of Bombay Island (Mendham's Point). Sidi Yakut promptly set up his field headquarters at the Company's fort on Mazagao Hill about two miles north of Bombay Castle.

During the next few days, the English hurriedly and belatedly prepared for a siege, slaughtering livestock, imposing rationing, and quartering the troops on Bombay Castle's various bastions. Governor Child also put in place the first of various defensive measures in case of a direct attack on the fort. For their part, the Sidi's forces established outposts and gun batteries in larger buildings in the town, notably the governor's own mansion, the East India House, and the "Portuguese" (Catholic) Church, three of the more imposing structures in Bombay. The Sidis also set up a battery on Dongri Hill, above and within easy shooting range of the fort.

Within weeks of the invasion, the governor and council had contracted with Sidi Yakut's great regional rivals, the Marathas, to supply reinforcements. The reinforcements began arriving on March 19, eventually comprising 2,000 men. Considerably smaller numbers of troops
This would prove to be a long process. In the meantime, the fighting continued, more Maratha troops arrived, and the Sidis inched ever closer to the fort. Governor Child, who had instigated the conflict, now faded from the scene. Hilton mentions Child's being ill at the end of August 1689, with Child's last reported order coming on November 29, after which it appears that the fort was governed by Deputy Governor John Vaux and the council, which was itself being decimated by disease. Child died on February 4, 1690.

From November 1689 through March 1690, both sides focused on artillery exchanges, often at night. It is tempting to think that the relative decline in direct engagements reflected the impact of epidemic disease on both Sidi Yakut's and the Company's troop strength. In the meantime, Bombay had sent an embassy to negotiate terms, first with representatives from Surat at Portuguese Damão and then at the Mughal Court on campaign in the Deccan. (See Document 17.) On March 3, 1690, news finally reached Bombay that a definitive peace had been achieved, though it took more than a month longer to end the fighting—indeed, in the interim, the fighting grew more intense. Finally, on April 10, a messenger arrived from Surat to request that Sidi Yakut lift the siege.

During the next month and a half, James Hilton was involved in ferrying the peace articles back and forth between the fort and the Sidi camp; the peace documents presumably focused on logistical arrangements for getting Sidi Yakut's troops off the island. There was a prisoner exchange, and Hilton went with a free pardon to the Sidi camp for any Europeans who wanted to come back into the East India Company's employ. In the middle of all this, on May 28, came confirmation that William and Mary had been proclaimed king and queen back in England. Sidi Yakut began pulling out his troops on May 24, and the last of the troops left on June 22, blowing up Mazagaon Fort as a parting insult.

Sidi Yakut's forces never made a frontal attack on the fort, though there were many rumors that they would. Perhaps they were deterred by the determined defense, by the arrival of Maratha forces, or by the English artillery arrayed both on the fortress bastions and on the ships. It is also possible that the Sidi never intended to make a direct assault but instead sought to capitalize on the desertions, shortages of ordnance or food, and dwindling morale to force a surrender (Documents 14 and 15). Finally, the whole exercise may have had the aim of forcing the English to come to the bargaining table with the Surat merchants, which in the end was exactly what happened.

When the Sidi's forces finally departed, the infrastructure of Bombay lay in ruins. Larger buildings had been turned into gun batteries or
reduced to rubble. Warehouses had been looted. Smaller houses had been pulled down or burned by one side or the other. More than one hundred people died directly as a result of fighting or bombardment, and many others likely died from their wounds. Well over a hundred more men deserted the garrison. Even more destructive of human life was epidemic disease, especially the plague, which almost certainly killed more people than the Sidi’s army had. As Deputy Governor Vaux Les would later write: “If this be the fruits of war, let them that love it have their bellies full; for I have had fate bad enough in it” (Document 19).

MAKING PEACE AND THE EMPEROR’S FARMAN
The concessions the Company had to make to get the siege lifted and receive its long-awaited farman proved extremely embarrassing. Despite a long list of demands of its own, the Company ultimately had to admit fault, compensate Surat merchants whose ships and goods it had seized, and make a large indemnity payment to the Mughal emperor, along with smaller payments to various officials. When the farman the Company had sought for so long finally arrived at Surat, it proved a major disappointment (Document 18). Its tone was offensive to Company officials’ sensibilities, it offered no special privileges, and it demanded the banishment of John Child from India. This last condition, an overt challenge to Company sovereignty, was rendered moot by the fact that Child had already died. Nonetheless, it was a bitter blow, one that did not go unnoticed by the Company’s critics and enemies.

What did the Mughals gain from this victory? The fact that there is little discussion of the English East India Company or of the siege in the official sources suggests that, while it loomed large for the English, it was not an issue of great moment to the Mughals. It seems probable that, from the Mughal point of view, the siege was a successful effort to knock an insufficiently deferential power down to size or it might simply have been seen as one incident among many in the Mughal-Maratha conflict, which consistently drew into its gravitational pull a range of local and regional powers. One must also remember that it was not the Mughal state itself but, as was typical, its tributary, Sidi Yakut Khan, who undertook the Bombay invasion. While the Mughals and the Sidis were closely allied, their aims with respect to the siege may not have been identical. Still, it would be a mistake to imagine that the English did not matter to the Mughals. Obviously, the Company’s blockade and seizures of Mughal shipping out of Surat was seen as hostile—indeed a form of piracy—and it threatened the city’s livelihood. Furthermore, some sources (see, for example, Document 24) suggest that Bombay’s increasing attempts to assert its autonomy, even going so far as to coin its own money, were regarded by Mughal officials and perhaps even Aurangzeb himself as a challenge to their sovereign rights. One can almost see the invasion as the ultimate consequence of the Company’s decision to move its trading headquarters from Surat to Bombay, a move that was extremely unpopular, not only because it seemed to be a hostile claim to power by the Company, but also because it represented a potentially significant loss of income for the political and merchant elite at Surat. This interpretation makes sense of one of the more puzzling features of the period after the siege—the fact that the Company was fairly quickly rehabilitated and ultimately received some trading concessions. And in fact the outcome might not have seemed so odd from the Mughal perspective. Once a rebellious noble was prepared to submit, he and his dependents were often reabsorbed into the Mughal governmental and military structure and sometimes even rewarded (Document 5). It was also clear that the world of trade in western India—and the revenues and customs it brought to places like Surat—had come to be fully integrated with the intra-Asian and Eurasian markets serviced by the European companies, and that Mughal officials, at least on the local level, did not treat that lightly.

It is also significant, though only clear in hindsight, that the period of the siege marked the high point of Mughal territorial expansion. Emperor Aurangzeb died at the age of eighty-eight in 1707, having spent close to three decades waging war in the Deccan and elsewhere at enormous cost in men and money. Overextended, and witnessing a rapid changeover of imperial leadership (there were six emperors in the dozen years after Aurangzeb’s death), the empire began a rapid decentralization. Regional states within the empire, such as Bengal, now became essentially independent powers. While the empire lasted for another 150 years, it was soon reduced to a mainly titular power and, by the nineteenth century, to a largely symbolic entity under British domination. Meanwhile, the Marathas, who had been at one of their low points during the Siege of Bombay, recovered momentum in the eighteenth century and made major incursions into the former Mughal Empire. They would later be the premier power with which the East India Company had to contend, on land and at sea.

While the First Anglo-Mughal War and the siege in particular could hardly be said to have had a direct effect on the waning of Mughal power in the eighteenth century, it is well worth reflecting on its unforeseen
long-term effects for English power in the region. Certainly, the Ben-
aal phase of the war—which was always central to the Company’s
lans—had world-historical consequences. Though also apparently
ility defeat that resulted at first in the retreat of Company forces, by
le 1690s the East India Company had acquired grants from both
rangzeb and the nawab (provincial governor) of Bengal to build the
own and fortification that became Calcutta, ultimately the capital of
ely British India. Meanwhile, the Siam and Persian Gulf conflicts
buted to the growing militarization of the Company’s maritime fleet.

The Siege of Bombay had a somewhat different set of consequences.
ations both with Sidi Yakut and with the Mughals remained very
se for the rest of Aurangzeb’s reign, and the Company was for some
e deep fear of another invasion. Over the next several decades,
f was rebuilt and strengthened with some sense of urgency, and
ers were built or refurbished across the archipelago. This was
panied by a renewal of the Company’s long-standing attempts to
and local jurisdiction at the expense of the Portuguese (especially
 Portugese Jesuits), bolstered now by the excuse that some Portu-
ese residents had either abandoned the Company in its hour of need
— it was alleged— offered material support to Sidi Yakut. At a lon-
er remove, the impulse to greater command and control of both the
nd and the surrounding waterways led to the drainage of the tile-
er causeways of the Bombay archipelago and their amalgamation
what became Greater Bombay. Ultimately this policy, coupled with
etermined maritime policing, undermined the power of all of the other
peting coastal powers, including that of the Sidis, though it was not
ll the late eighteenth century that the latter were reduced to mili-
 insignificance. Through the first half of the eighteenth century, the
omby council instituted policies designed to attract more settlers,
 both population and infrastructure, and engage in shipbuilding
 other efforts that would ultimately lead to the creation of the Bom-
 Marine, a crucial aspect of eighteenth-century British domination
 the Indian Ocean.

Indeed, naval power became, if anything, even more critical in the
term of the siege. The conflict had revolved around the seizure
 ships and had blurred the lines for many between the East India
 and pirates. English critics jumped at the opportunity to dele-
ize the Company’s behavior; and some South Asian rivals used
 moment to press the Company on its own promises to be oppo-
g, rather than increasing, the “piratical threat” (Documents 23 and

24). In fact, the western Indian Ocean was becoming a more violent
place. Piracy was a flexible and politicized category, and the decades
between about 1690 and 1730 witnessed a dramatic rise in European
maritime predation in the Indian Ocean, particularly from pirates
ning from England and the Americas. At the same time, new maritime
powers arose in the western Indian Ocean, such as the Qawasim from
the northern coast of modern-day Oman (the so-called Muscat pirates)
and revived Maratha power centers, particularly those associated with
Kanhoji Angre (1669–1729), variously described as a “pirate” by the
British and a “naval admiral” by the Marathas. The defeat of Kanho-
ji’s successors helped by the 1750s to establish East India Company
supremacy in the western Indian Ocean and ultimately even at Surat—
at the same time that, after the Battle of Plassey of 1757, it began to
quire territorial power in Bengal to the east. Control of both land and
sea were crucial to the subsequent expansion of the British Empire in

THE OUTCRY IN ENGLAND AND THE CAMPAIGN TO
ABOLISH THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

If the consequences in Asia of the First Anglo-Mughal War, and
especially the Siege of Bombay, are open to interpretation, there is little
doubt that, from the Company’s point of view, it had an outsized effect
back in England. The East India Company had been a source of great
controversy in English politics well before the war even began. Almost
since its inception, the Company had been at the center of a debate over
the best way to regulate trade and overseas expansion. Its leadership
aggressively defended the Company’s monopoly as the only effective
way to manage not only trade but also diplomacy and war in so distant,
alien, and “heathen” a place as Asia (Documents 4 and 20). Its rivals, by
contrast, insisted that monopoly stifled commerce, artificially inflated
consumer prices, and infringed on natural rights of trade and travel. The
Company’s policy of having the ships and goods of interlopers con-
fiscated, in both Europe and Asia, and of prosecuting its enemies in court,
created even more resentment and gave rise to a well-funded opposition
that sought to have the Company either reformed under new leadership
or abolished altogether (Document 21).

The coincidental timing of the First Anglo-Mughal War with the Rev-
olution of 1688–89 only fueled these fires. The removal of James II as
king in England and Scotland and the accession of William and Mary as joint rulers saw a revival of the political fortunes of the Whigs and the House of Commons. This posed major political and ideological problems for the Company, which had come to be associated with Toryism and royal absolutism. Enemies of the Company seized upon the war to argue that the Company had taken on the prerogatives of sovereignty—the power to wage war being one—that rightfully belonged to the monarch and that it was doing so illegitimately and incompetently, diminishing the reputation of England across the globe. Critics of the Company often set their sights on the person of Sir Josiah Child, who a decade earlier had helped to force a number of mostly Whig men of influence out of the Company. More unexpected constituencies also emerged, such as a group of East India Company sailors’ wives and widows who petitioned the English Parliament in 1693 for redress against the Company (Document 22).

The widespread hostility toward the Company in the 1690s, coupled with the change of regime, gave rise to a sustained and highly organized effort to dissolve the Company and to establish a new one in its stead. It also gave rise to a notorious scandal, in which the Company was accused of paying large bribes to members of Parliament, including the speaker of the House of Commons, and to royal courtiers in order to hold on to its exclusive monopoly and quash efforts to create a new company. The Company’s last-ditch efforts were to no avail, however. In 1698, William III and Parliament authorized the establishment of a rival company (known colloquially as the new East India Company), and for a time the two companies did political and financial battle both in Asia and in England. But this conflict would prove surprisingly short-lived: Both stockholders and politicians (often one and the same) quickly realized its futility and decided to merge the two companies into one. The United East India Company came into being in 1708, just two years after the union of England and Scotland created the modern state of Great Britain. Thus in the short term, the First Anglo-Mughal War helped fuel a near-mortal challenge to the East India Company. In the longer term, however, the crisis set the stage for a reinvigorated Company that was able to consolidate political and financial power in Britain as well as commercial and military power at sea and on land in Asia. Indeed, one could argue these early failures produced some of the preconditions—though hardly ones that contemporaries could have understood or anticipated—for the Company’s ultimate military and administrative conquest of most of the South Asian subcontinent a century and some later.

JAMES HILTON AND HIS DIARY

Almost everything that is known about the day-to-day events of the siege comes from the diary of James Hilton (page 27), adjutant to Governor John Child, yet we know little about the man himself. He was sent from England in 1686 to serve as an ensign and, for some extra pay, adjutant (senior staff assistant in charge of organization and administration) in the Bombay garrison. He arrived in February 1687. At some point, he married the widow of another Company employee and they had a daughter named Mary. By the end of the invasion, two years after he came to Bombay, he had been made captain, both of the militia and of the island’s grenadier guard, by Governor John Child. Unlike his patron, Hilton survived the siege, though only barely. In 1691, he seems to have been recommended by the Bombay Council to head the first garrison company, and he was at that point the longest-serving officer in the garrison. It is not clear whether he took up the post, but if he did, he did not occupy it for very long. He died sometime in late December 1691 or early January 1692.

The diary itself is unsigned, but among other clues to its provenance is a letter accompanying the copy of the diary sent from Bombay to London after the end of the siege, which credits Hilton with its authorship. Still, it is evident from the text itself that Hilton was a soldier not a scholar. His spelling is erratic and phonetic (it has been regularized in this transcription), and the diary in the original uses almost no punctuation and tends to pile clause upon clause without clear beginnings or endings. In the seventeenth century, these were a common feature of texts penned by self-taught or lightly educated people; such people tended to write in the way they spoke.

Yet, if Hilton was not an accomplished prose writer, he was a seasoned raconteur. He is rather good at capturing the immediacy of armed conflict: its unpredictability, the inevitable problems of communication and supply, and the small acts of courage and teamwork (or their lack) that can spell victory or defeat. Good examples of this are the entries for February 15, 1689 (the day the Sidi’s forces invaded), for March 10, 1690 (a bloody nighttime attack on one of the batteries), and for April 5, 1690 (an effort to undermine and blow up a second battery). And there are many others. Hilton also supplies valuable information about Mughal siege and battle tactics, particularly those of Sidi Yakut, whose presence looms large in the diary.

Still, the diary is hardly a disinterested account. This was not a “diary” in the sense we might imagine today: that is, a private journal.
Hilton was in a sense recording an official history of the siege, which both he and Governor John Child knew would be read with a critical eye by their superiors in London. So there is almost nothing in the diary that could be construed as critical either of the East India Company or of John Child, and a good deal that, in retrospect, was probably whitewashing. In fact, the diary almost always puts the most positive possible gloss on the actions of the defenders. A striking example of this is the account of the rout of Lieutenant Paul Paine’s forces at the beginning of the diary, during which Ensign Alexander Monroe and more than a dozen others were killed. It is instructive to compare Hilton’s description of these events, and many others, with the highly critical account of the same episode that appears in Alexander Hamilton’s discussion of the conduct of the war (Document 13). At the same time, while Hilton does not or cannot express his views explicitly (and, in fact, we have little way of knowing what he really thought), his is a vivid record, perhaps inadvertent, of the challenges facing the fort during the siege, especially among the soldiers, whose low morale, desertsions, and mutinies are leitmotifs of Hilton’s account.

As is true of many accounts from the field, Hilton’s statistical reportage should be viewed with some skepticism. He almost certainly overestimates the size of the Sidi’s forces, and he is also quite optimistic—at times fanciful—about the amount of damage inflicted on the enemy by the English and their allies. There are also problems with the casualty figures for his own side, made worse by the persistent ethnic chauvinism that pervades the account. Despite this, Hilton’s diary is rich with detail on the daily lives of these soldiers and sailors attempting to withstand the stress, food shortages, sickness, and claustrophobia of a sixteen-month siege. Moreover, though civilians are clearly not among Hilton’s main concerns, we get a sense of their conditions during the siege, not only in the grim reports of deaths but also in the numerous glimpses of the lives of townspeople, including women, children, laborers, servants, and others we might think of as “non-combatants.”

CONCLUSION

The English at Bombay were venturing rather late into a world of great complexity. There was an abundance of powerful and already established political and politico-commercial polities on the Indian subcontinent: the dwindling yet still intimidating coastal empire of the Portuguese Estado da Índia; the seemingly ever-rising power of the Dutch East India Company; the centuries-old and still expanding Mughal Empire; the relatively new but increasingly formidable Maratha Empire; and many others. Though deeply connected in many ways to the world of Atlantic colonization—from the silver that fueled commercial expansion to the many Euro-American pirates who helped destablize the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Indian Ocean—this was also a very different environment from the Americas. While Europeans could leverage their power at sea to dominate over scattered littoral regions and some smaller coastal polities, even the Dutch and the Portuguese—let alone the English, French, and Danes—could hardly pretend to have martial, commercial, or political superiority in Asia, especially with respect to large and well-established territorial empires. Moreover, Asian populations did not suffer catastrophic death from the encounter with foreign microbes in the way that the indigenous peoples of the New World did; indeed, to the contrary, European mortality from disease was one of the greatest challenges to settlement and colonization efforts in Asia—as Bombay demonstrated. Although it can be plausibly argued that European trade and colonization created an “Atlantic world,” this was certainly not the case in the Indian Ocean, which was being crisscrossed by people, ships, and merchandise for millennia before any European hoisted his sail there.

In the seventeenth century, the English East India Company sought to set itself up as both a commercial and a sovereign power, but its position was extremely ambiguous and tenuous. Its legitimacy as a trading monopoly, as well as its right to deploy force, derived from the English king, but its continued presence on the South Asian subcontinent—as the Siege of Bombay clearly showed—depended on the sufferance of the Mughal emperor. The Company needed both English charters and Mughal farman to support its ambitions. However, the Company was also willfully independent, establishing armed and fortified settlements, law courts, and diplomatic regimes that, while small in size and confined to the coasts, nevertheless sought to operate autonomously. The Company thus represented the complexity and pluralism of sovereignty so evident across early modern Eurasia. Meanwhile, Bombay itself was a sort of microcosm of an imperial crossroads. Nominally under English sovereignty, the lines between the English crown and Company remained blurred, while a host of powers—Portuguese, Mughal, Maratha, Sidi, and Dutch, as well as different coalitions of settlers on the islands—contended for position and jurisdiction at various points around and within the archipelago.

Thus, though the Siege of Bombay and the First Anglo-Mughal War were in some sense passing moments in the greater history of the Indian Ocean, they tell us a great deal about the early modern Eurasian
world and the prehistory of modern European empire in Asia. The
English did not arrive dominant over a subservient indigenous popu-
lation, nor were the seventeenth-century Europeans in Asia under the
thump of local powers. Rather, both coexisted and overlapped in a com-
plex of negotiated relationships that involved ever-shifting regimes of
both alliance and violence. Greatly complicating this picture was the
intricate racial, ethnic, and religious makeup of South Asia, which, in
itself, played a major role in creating the contingent world in which
both Asians and Europeans sought to operate. Mughal Surat depended
heavily on trade and navigation, not only of merchants from the wider
Asian world but also of Europeans, and Surat's leaders clearly fought
quite hard to retain these people under their authority at the same time
that they deeply distrusted them. Conversely, who would have pre-
dicted that the English East India Company, a number of whose direc-
tors, including Josiah Child, were also deeply involved in the expanding
Atlantic slave trade, would find its flagship settlement brought to its
knees by a military commander who was ethnically African and, accord-
ing to some sources, a former slave? While a single incident in a much
larger story, the Siege of Bombay focuses our minds on just how little
people know of their own future and, conversely, how careful students
of history need to be about projecting the assumptions of their contem-
porary world into the past. It also shows that even in the seventeenth
century, local events had global reverberations and vice versa. Indeed,
the accelerated cultural and geographical convergences across the early
modern world led to new and unpredictable encounters, unusual institu-
tional arrangements, and personal and collective challenges whose char-
acter we in the twenty-first century are still trying to understand.

NOTES

1 Sidi Yakut Khan's given name was Sidi Qasim; the English in this period often referred
to him simply as "the Sidi" (often spelled "Siddy"). In this collection, he is referred to as Sidi
Yakut, Sidi Yakut Khan, or the Sidi.

2 The distinction between the two is important and often misunderstood. A "factory"
was a trading outpost, located within a port or trading town under another jurisdiction,
which usually consisted of a residence for the Company's "factors" (i.e., trade representa-
tives), warehouses, and other buildings necessary for trade. A "settlement" was a place
the English East India Company actually governed, such as Madras (or Fort St. George,
known today as Chennai) on the east coast of India and Bombay (known today as Mumb-
ai) just off the west coast.

3 Two influential discussions of the problem of contingency are Kenneth Pomeranz,
The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy
Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2002).
Related Documents

1
The East India Company on the West Coast of India

JOHN OVINGTON

The Great Rival to Bombay: The Port of Surat and Indian Ocean Trade 1689

John Ovington, who served as a chaplain in the East India Company, visited Surat in 1689 and later published his impressions of the city, which is less than 200 miles to the north of Bombay. Surat was the principal Mughal seaport in western India, home to some of the empire's greatest merchants and the main embarkation point for Indian Muslims undertaking the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Since 1616, the East India Company had maintained a "factory" (that is, a residence and trading house) in Surat, from which it directed all of its operations in western India, Persia, and Arabia. By the 1680s, Company leaders began to try to turn their colony of Bombay into a rival to Surat, though at this point the island was still quite small and in many respects still very dependent on and connected to the Surat trade. Ovington's account pays a good deal of attention to the mechanics of trade, but it is also full of detail about social and cultural practices, especially among the Europeans resident in the city.

Surat is reckoned the most famed emporium of the Indian Empire, where all commodities are vendible, though they never were there seen before. The very curiosity of them will engage the expectation of the purchaser to sell them again with some advantage, and will be apt to invite some other by their novelty, as they did him, to venture upon them. And the river is very commodious for the importation of foreign goods, which are brought up to the city in boats by both small and large shipping, and the great convenience and expedition. And not only from Europe, but from China, Persia, Arabia, and other remote parts of India, ships unload abundance of all kinds of goods, for the ornament of the city, as well as [the] enriching of the port. It is renowned for traffic through all Asia, both for rich silks, such as satins, cuttanes, sooses, galars, allajars, velvets, taffeties, and satins; and for zarbatss, from Persia; and the abundance of pearls that are brought hither from the Persian Gulf; but likewise for diamonds, rubies, sapphires, topazes, and other stones of splendor and esteem, which are vendible here in great quantities; and for agates, cornelian, nigranees, desks, scutorees [i.e., portable writing desks] and boxes neatly polished and embellished, which may be purchased here at very reasonable rates.

The Indians are in many things of matchless ingenuity in their several employments and admirable imitators of whatever they affect to copy after. The Banian, by the strength of his brain only, will sum up his accounts with equal exactness, and quicker dispatch, than the readiest arithmetician can with his pen. The weavers of silk will exactly imitate the nicest and most beautiful patterns that are brought from Europe. And the very ship-carpenters at Surat will take the model of any English vessel, in all the curiosity [i.e., complexity] of its building, and the most artificial [i.e., inventive] instances of workmanship about it, whether they are proper for the convenience of burthen or of quick sailing, as exactly as if they had been the first contrivers [i.e., inventors]. The wood with which they build their ships would be very proper for our men of war [ships] in Europe for it has this excellence that it never splinters by the force of a bullet, nor is injured by those violent impressions beyond the just bore of the shot. The tailors here fashion the clothes for the Europeans, either men or women, according to every mode that prevails; and fit up the commodoes and towering head-dresses for the women, with as much skill, as if they had been an Indian fashion, or themselves had been apprentices at the Royal Exchange.

In some things the artists of India outdo all the ingenuity of Europe, viz. in the painting of chintzes or calicoes, which in Europe cannot be paralleled, either in the brightness and life of the colors, or in their continuance upon the cloth. The gold stripes likewise in their sooses, and the gold flowers in their atlases are imitated with us [i.e., by us], but not to perfection.

The English East India Company... are at the annual expense of one hundred thousand pounds. For they esteem it necessary, as well for the honor of the English nation, as facilitating of their traffic, to maintain their principal servants in India, not only in decency, but splendor, as is visible to any that has travelled either to Surat, or the Fort of St. George, to Gombroon in Persia, or Bengal. These are the chief places of note and trade, where their presidents and agents reside, for the support of whom, with their writers and factors, large privileges and salaries are allowed.

Each day there is prepared a public table for the use of the President and the rest of the factory, who sit all down in a public place according to their seniority in the Company's service. The table is spread with the choicest meat Surat affords, or the country thereabouts; and equally plenty of generous Shiraz wine, and arrack punch, is served round the table. Several hundreds a year are expended upon their daily provisions which are sumptuous enough for the entertainment of any person of eminence in the kingdom; and which require two or three cooks, and as many butchers to dress and prepare them. But Europe wines and English beer, because of their former acquaintance with our palates, are most coveted and most desirable liquors, and though sold at high rates, are yet purchased and drunk with pleasure.

Both before and after meals, a pew appointed for that purpose attends with a large silver ewer and basin, for those that sit down to wash their hands; which at both times is a decency in all places, but here necessary, because of the heat and dust which are so very troublesome.

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3 A commodoe was a tall headdress fashionable with elite European women in the last third of the seventeenth century.
4 The Royal Exchange was a London commercial and merchant center famous for millinery and, apparently, hairdressers.
5 Owington is referring here to the permanence of the dye.
6 In short, imitation runs in both directions.
7 This refers to food in general, not just to "meat" in the sense that we think of it.
All the dishes and plates brought to the table are of pure silver, massy and substantial; and such are also the toasses or cups out of which we drink. And that nothing may be wanting to please the curiosity of every palate at the times of eating, an English, Portuguese, and an Indian cook are all entertained to dress the meat in different ways for the gratification of every stomach. . . .

Upon Sundays and public days, the entertainments keep up a face of more solemnity, and are made more large and splendid, deer and antelopes, peacocks, hares, partridges, and all kind of Persian fruits, pista-chios, plums, apricots, cherries, &c are all provided upon high festivals; and European as well as Persian wines are drunk with temperance and alacrity . . .

The President upon solemn days generally invites the whole factory abroad to some pleasant garden adjacent to the city, where they may sit shaded from the beams of the sun, and refreshed by the neighborhood [i.e., proximity] of tanks and water-works. The President and his lady are brought hither in palanquins [i.e., litters or sedan chairs], supported each of them by six peons, which carry them by four at once on their shoulders. Before him at a little distance, are carried two large flags, or English ensigns, with curious Persian or Arabian horses of state, which are of great value, rich in their trappings, and gallantly equipped that are led before him . . .

The evenings and the mornings being allayed with moderate breezes, and cool and temperate in respect of the heat when the sun is at the height, invite the factors daily almost to the groves or gardens near the water side, there to spend an hour or two with a bottle of wine, and cold collation which they carry with them. And neither the chaplain nor any of the Council stir without the walls of the city without the attendance of four or five peons upon the coach. This creates a respect from the natives as they pass along, strikes them with a regard to the English wherever they meet them, [and] makes them value our friendship, and place an honor in our intimacy and acquaintance . . .

The factors when they eat at home, do it after the English manner, but abroad they imitate the customs of the East in lying round the banquet upon the Persian carpets which are spread upon the ground, twenty or thirty foot in length . . .

And that both the Company and their servants may be constantly blessed with the favors of heaven upon them in their respective stations, therefore they have ordered a form of prayer to be used daily in their factories, for the obtaining a common blessing upon them all; which is as follows:

Oh Almighty and most merciful God, who art the sovereign protector of all that trust in thee, and the author of all spiritual and temporal blessings, we thy unworthy creatures do most humbly implore thy goodness for a plentiful effusion of thy Grace upon our employers, thy servants, the Right Honorable East India Company of England. Prosper them in all their public undertakings, and make them famous and successful in all their governments, colonies, and commerce both by sea and land; so that they may prove a public blessing by the increase of honor, wealth and power to our native country as well as to themselves. Continue their favors towards us, and inspire their generals, presidents, agents and councils in these remote parts of the world, and all others that are entrusted with any authority under them, with pietie towards thee our God, and with wisdom, fidelity, and circumspection in their several stations; that we may all discharge our effective duties faithfully, and live virtuously, in due obedience to our superiors, and in love, peace and charity one towards another; that these Indian nations among whom we dwell, seeing our sober and righteous conversation, may be induced to have a just esteem for our most holy profession of the gospel of our lord and savior Jesus Christ, to whom be honor, praise and glory, now and forever. Amen.

2

Charter Granted by Charles II to the East India Company, Confirming and Extending Their Former Charters
April 3, 1661

Though originally given by Elizabeth I in 1600, the East India Company’s charter underwent several revisions and amendments under subsequent regimes. The primary purpose of such a charter of incorporation was to confirm the East India Company as a legal entity and (in parts not reproduced here) to detail its governance procedures. But the letters patent (state documents issued by the monarch) also provide for particular constitutional rights and immunities similar to those offered both to other

overseas traders and to charters for plantations and colonies, including
the right to export large amounts of specie, seize English subjects infringing
on the monopoly, establish fortifications, set up courts, and exact
reprisals on non-Christians.

Know ye, therefore, that We taking the Premises in Our Royal Consider-
ation, and well weighing how highly it imports the Honor and Welfare
of this Our Realm, and of Our good Subjects thereof, . . . have of Our
especial Grace, certain Knowledge and mere Motion, and at the humble
Petition of the said Governor and Company, given, granted, ratified and
confirmed . . . unto Our said Trusty and well-beloved Subjects, the
Governor and Company of Merchants of London, Trading into the East-
Indies, that they from henceforth for ever be and shall be One Body Corporate
and Politick, in Deed and in Name . . . And by the same name . . . capable
in Law . . .

And further We do, by these Presents, for Us, Our Heirs and Suc-
cessors, will and grant unto the said Governor and Company of
Merchants of London, Trading into the East-Indies, and their Successors, that
they . . . shall and may, from henceforth for ever . . . freely traffic, and
use the Trade of Merchandize by Seas, in and by such Ways and Pas-
sages, already found out and discovered, or which hereafter shall be
found out and discovered, as they shall esteem and take to be fittest,
into and from the said East-Indies, in the Countries and Parts of Asia
and Africa, and into and from the Islands, Ports, Havens, Cities, Creeks, Towsns
and Places of Asia, Africa, and America, or any of them, beyond the Cape
of Bona Esperanza, to the Straits of Magellan, where any Trade
or Traffick of Merchandize may be used or had . . .

And further . . . that they and their Successors, and their Factors,
Servants and Assigns, in the Trade of Merchandize . . . shall for ever
hereafter have, use, and enjoy, the whole entire and only Trade and
Traffick, and the whole entire and only Liberty, Use and Privilege of
trading and trafficking, and using the Seat and Trade of Merchandize,
to and from the said East-Indies, and to and from all the Islands, Ports,
Havens, Cities, Towsns and Places aforesaid, in such Manner and Form
as is above-mentioned . . .

And further of Our especial Grace, certain Knowledge and mere
Motion, We do, for Us, Our Heirs and Successors, grant to and with the
said Governor and Company of Merchants of London, Trading into the
East-Indies, and their Successors, that all Plantations, Forts, Fortifica-
tions, Factories or Colonies, where the said Company's Factories and
Trade are or shall be in the said East-Indies, shall be immediately and
from henceforth under the Power and Command of the said Governor
and Company, their Successors and Assigns; and that the said Governor
and Company of Merchants of London, Trading into the East-Indies, shall
have Liberty, full Power and Authority to appoint and establish Gover-
nors, and all other Officers to govern them: And that the Governor and
his Council, of the several and respective Places where the said Com-
pany have, or shall have any Factories or Places of Trade, within the
said East-Indies, may have Power to judge all Persons, belonging to the
said Governor and Company, or that shall live under them, in all Causes,
whether civil or criminal, according to the Laws of this Kingdom, and to
execute Judgment accordingly . . .

And moreover . . . We do give and grant unto the said Governor
and Company of Merchants of London, Trading into the East-Indies, and
their Successors, free Liberty and License for the said Governor and
Company, in case they conceive it necessary to send either Ships of
War, Men or Ammunition, into any of their Factories or other Places
of their Trade, in the said East-Indies, for the Security and Defense of
the same: And to choose Commanders and Officers over them, and to
give them Power and Authority, by Commissions under their Common
Seal or otherwise, to continue or make Peace or War with any Prince
or People, that are not Christians, in any Places of their Trade, as shall be
most for the Advantage and Benefit of the said Governor and Company,
and of their Trade: And also to right and recompense themselves, upon
the Goods, Estate or People of those Parts, by whom the said Governor
and Company shall sustain any Injury, Loss or Damage, or upon any
other People whatsoever, that shall any ways interrupt, wrong or injure
them, in their said Trade, within the said Places, Territories and Limits,
granted unto the said Governor and Company, or their Successors, by
this Charter: And that it shall and may be lawful, to and for the said
Governor and Company, and their Successors, from Time to Time, and
at all Times from henceforth, to erect and build such Castles, Fortifica-
tions, Forts, Garrisons, Colonies or Plantations, at St. Helena, as also
elsewhere, within the Limits and Bounds of Trade, granted unto the
said Governor and Company, as aforesaid, as they in their Discretions
shall think fit and requisite . . .

And further Our Will and Pleasure is, and by these Presents, for Us,
Our Heirs and Successors, We do grant unto the said Governor and

1The South Atlantic island of St. Helena was first granted to the East India Company
in 1658 by Richard Cromwell.
Company of Merchants of London, Trading into the East-Indies, and to their Successors, full Power and Lawful Authority, to seize upon the Persons of all such English, or any other Our Subjects, in the said East-Indies, which shall sail in any Indian or English Vessel, or inhabit in those Parts, without the Leave and License of The said Governor and Company, in that Behalf first had and obtained, or that shall commit or disobey their Orders, and send them to England; and that all and every Person or Persons, being Our Subjects, any ways employed by The said Governor and Company, in the said East-Indies, or any other Place, within the Parts, Places and Limits, before by these Presents granted unto The said Governor and Company, shall be liable unto and suffer such Punishment, for any Offences, by them committed in the said East-Indies, and Parts before granted as the President and Council for The said Governor and Company there shall think fit, and the Merit of the Offence shall require.

3

Letters Patent from Charles II for the Port and Island of Bombay
March 27, 1669

In 1661, upon the marriage of the English king Charles II to the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza, and as part of a larger peace treaty and alliance against the Dutch, Portugal granted to the English monarch "direct, full and absolute dominion and sovereignty" over both the North African port of Tangier and the western Indian "island" of Bombay. While it tried, with disastrous results, to rule at Tangier, the English government very quickly transferred Bombay to the East India Company. These patents are similar in form to many documents issued for colonies in the Americas, as well as to those issued by Charles II in 1674 for the Company's proprietorship over the South Atlantic island of

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Charters Granted to the East-India Company, from 1601; Also the Treaties and Grants, Made with, or Obtained from, the Princes and Powers in India, from the Year 1706 to 1772 (London, 1773), 80–85, 87–89, 91.
exercise all such Powers and Authorities, in cases of Rebellion, Mutiny or Sedition, of refusing to serve in Wars, flying to the Enemy, forsaking Colors or Ensigns, or other Offences, against Law, Custom and Discipline Military, in as large and ample Manner, to all Intent and Purposes whatsoever, as any Captain General of Our Army, by Virtue of his Office have used and accustomed, and may or might lawfully do.

4

Letters Patent from James II Extending Jurisdiction of Prize Courts in the East Indies

April 12, 1686

One of the biggest challenges facing the East India Company in the late seventeenth century was the threat from interlopers—English subjects living and trading in Asia without the Company's permission and often hostile to its purposes. Though the Company's charters had always given it the authority to establish laws and judicature courts, it had lobbied for some time to have authority from the king to prosecute interlopers in India and to seize and condemn booty from their ships, rather than having to wait to do so in Europe. In 1668, the Company received such a license from Charles II, in the form of letters patent authorizing the East India Company to establish its own law courts in South Asia. In 1686, James II, who succeeded Charles II in 1685, confirmed and expanded the power of those courts, which came to deal not only with interloper and piracy "prizes" but also with confiscations made within the context of war.

And further We do, for Us, Our Heirs and Successors, by these Presents, erect and establish a Court of Judicature, to be held at such Place or Places, Fort or Forts, Plantations or Factoryes, upon the Coasts before recited, within the Limits of any of the before recited Charters, as the said Company shall, from Time to Time, direct and appoint; which

Court...shall have Commission and Power to hear and determine all Causes of Forfeitures and Seizures of any Ship or Ships, Goods and Merchandize, trading and coming upon any the said Coasts or Limits, contrary to the Intent of these Presents, or of the First recited Letters Patents: and also all Causes, mercantile or maritime, Bargains, buyings, sellings, bartering of Wares whatsoever, and all Policies and Acts of Assurance; all Bonds, Bills, and Promises for Payment of Money, or mercantile or trading Contracts, all Charter-Parties, or trading Contracts for affreighting of Vessels, and Wages of Mariners, and all other mercantile or maritime Cases, or Cases of Repraisals of Ships or Goods, for any Hurt or Damage done to the said Company, by any Person or Persons whatsoever, and all other maritime Cases whatsoever, concerning any Person or Persons residing, coming or being in the Places aforesaid, and all Cases of Trespasses, Injuries and Wrongs, done or committed upon the High Sea, or in any of the Regions, Territories or Places aforesaid, within the Limits of the First recited Letters Patents of the said late King Charles the Second, concerning any Person or Persons residing, being or coming in the Parts of Asia, or Africa, within the Bounds and Limits aforesaid.

And further, whereas We are also given to understand, that many of the native Princes and Governors of India, and other Nations, taking Opportunity from the Divisions, Distractions or Rebellions, amongst the English, occasioned by the late licentious trading of Interlopers, have of late violated many of the Company's Privileges, surprised their Servants, Ships and Goods, besieged their Factories, invaded their Liberties, and in many other Ways, without just Cause, greatly endangered and abused their Chiefs and Factors, to the Dishonor of the English Nation in those Parts of the World; for which Injuries and Damages, the said Company intend[s] to demand and procure Satisfaction in a peaceable Way, if in that Manner it be attainable; and if not, then the said Company intend[s] to endeavor the Recovery of their Loss and Damages, and to procure their Satisfaction, by Force of Arms, wherein they will have Occasion to use their Ships in a Warlike Manner; and have thereupon humbly besought Us, that in Time of War, or actual Hostility, with any Nation in the East-Indies, they may use and exercise the Law, commonly called the Law Martial, as well in their Ships as in any of their Plantations, Forts and Places, within the Limits of their respective Charters aforesaid, for Defense of their said Ships, against any foreign Enemy or domestic Insurrection, Rebellion or Disorder. We do therefore, for Us, Our Heirs and Successors, further give and grant full Power, License and Authority, to the said Governor, Deputy, and Court...
of the said Company, for the Time being, or the major Part of them, duly assembled, to name and appoint Admirals, Vice-Admirals, Rear-Admirals, Captains and other Sea Officers, from Time to Time, in all or any Ship or Ships serving the said Company, in the said East-Indies, within the Limits of any of the above recited Charters. . . . [And] We do, for Us, Our Heirs and Successors, give them hereby full Power, License, Commission and Authority, to raise, arm, train and muster such Number of Seamen, or other Military Soldiers, as to them shall seem necessary, on board their respective Ships, or as they shall be ordered and directed by The said Governor and Company, or their Successors, or the Captain General of the English, in India, appointed or to be appointed by The said Governor and Company, and to exercise and use, within their Ships on the other Side of the Cape of Good Hope, in the Time of open Hostility with some other Nation, the Law, called the Law Martial, for Defense of their Ships, against the Enemy.

2

Mughal Expansion under the Emperor Aurangzeb

5

ISHWAR DAS NAGAR

Modes of Siege Warfare—and Restoring Order Afterward

1688

This excerpt describes an attack by the Mughals on an especially strong fort, Fort Adoni, located about two hundred miles east of Goa on the border between the modern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The story displays some striking parallels with Sidi Yakut’s Siege of Bombay. One spark (or pretext) for war, as in the case of Bombay, was the fort’s governor having stopped grain shipments meant for the imperial army. The author of this account, Ishwar das Nagar, was a Brahmin from Gujarat who worked in various capacities for the Mughal legal and courtly bureaucracy and who was ultimately given a mansab by Aurangzeb. Sidi Masud Khan, the defeated noble, was, like Sidi Yakut, of African descent. He had been wazir (chief minister) in the Bijapur Sultanate, a Muslim regime that fell to Aurangzeb’s forces in the 1680s. Sidi Masud Khan had apparently sought to establish himself independently at Fort Adoni, but he was thwarted by Aurangzeb.