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**THE DIPLOMATIC REPERTOIRES OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANIES IN
MUGHAL SOUTH ASIA, 1608-1717***

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ABSTRACT. This article presents the first survey of the full range of diplomatic interactions between the Mughal Empire and the English and Dutch East India Companies (EIC and VOC) in the period 1608-1717. It proposes a typology of the six different modes of diplomacy practiced by the EIC and VOC as a means to better understand the distinct nature of corporate diplomacy. Moving its focus beyond exceptional embassies, this article demonstrates that by far the most common forms of Company diplomatic activity consisted of low-profile petitioning at the imperial centre and ongoing political interactions with provincial and local power-holders. It draws on circa fifty distinct episodes to chart how Dutch and English diplomatic repertoires in South Asia took shape in response to local demands and conventions. Both Companies petitioned Mughal emperors in much the same way as Indian subjects did, and both relied on Mughal patrons to do so. Cast in the role of supplicants seeking imperial favour and protection, Company-envoys presented themselves as obliging participants in the ceremonial performance of an asymmetrical relationship. By tying commercial privileges to expectations of submission and service, the imperial government proceeded to incorporate these foreign actors into a domestic political framework.

In the literature on early modern global interactions, few episodes have received more sustained attention than the diplomatic encounter between Nur-ud-Din Muhammad Jahangir

(1569-1627), fourth emperor of the Mughal dynasty in India (r. 1605-27), and the Jacobean courtier and royal ambassador, Sir Thomas Roe (c. 1581-1644).¹ Over time, this first English embassy to India has come to signify many different things to many different readers – its meanings hotly contested, yet its centrality to early modern Asian-European contacts virtually unquestioned.² Whilst providing fertile ground for key debates in global history, the enduring scholarly fascination with Roe's reception at Jahangir's court has served to privilege this unique encounter over many other, less well-known but far more representative, encounters. As such, the focus on Roe's embassy has severely limited our understanding of European diplomacy in Mughal South Asia as a whole.³ This article seeks to redress the historiographical imbalance by providing the first survey of the full range of diplomatic relations between the Mughal state and the two leading European commercial enterprises in seventeenth-century Asia, the English and Dutch East India Companies (EIC and VOC). It studies these organisations in conjunction to bring out correspondences between English and Dutch diplomatic activities in Mughal domains, and by doing so traces the outlines of a distinct type of East India Company diplomacy.

As a royal mission aimed at brokering 'Articles of treaty on equall tearmes' between the English and Mughal sovereigns, Roe's embassy (1615-19) was far from successful.⁴ However, as a seminal text from the opening phase of Anglo-Indian encounters, the journal Roe kept during his stay at Jahangir's court has turned into a classic reference point for historians and literary critics interested in early modern global connections, cross-cultural communication, and early Orientalism. As manifestations of England's first ambitious foray into India, Roe's mission and writings have been seen to exemplify early English imperial desire as well as England's marginal place in seventeenth-century Asia.⁵ It has also inspired arguments about the presumed incommensurability of European and Indian court cultures, as well as about the relative success of cross-cultural understanding and cultural translation.⁶

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These are foundational debates which have expanded the critical vocabulary of diplomatic history in general.⁷ Even so, as a testing ground for the meta-narratives that have been constructed partly on its basis, Roe's mission is both limited in scope and problematic in nature. When set against the entire range of East India Company diplomacy, it becomes apparent that not just the ambassador's unyielding engagement with the Mughal diplomatic world, but the very form of his embassy was atypical. Cut down to size, Roe's mission stands out mainly for highlighting the differences between royal diplomacy on the one hand, and the Companies' customary modes of political representation on the other.

An important reason for the disproportionate weight given to Roe's mission is the paucity of available research on the forms of low-profile diplomacy practiced by English and Dutch representatives at the various levels of the Mughal imperial administration.⁸ Save for Richmond Barbour's article on English emissaries preceding Roe at Jahangir's court, Miles Ogborn's chapter on James I's royal letters, and discussions of Sir William Norris's embassy (1699-1702) by Harihar Das and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, the treatment of English diplomatic activity in South Asia prior to the mid-eighteenth century has been limited to brief comments in standard works.⁹ Indicative is that a recent overview of 'Diplomacy in India, 1526-1858' is almost exclusively concerned with the 1750s onwards, leaving readers interested in EIC diplomacy in the long century following Roe's embassy chiefly dependent on archival publications by William Foster and others.¹⁰ Research on VOC diplomacy has been more abundant, particularly in recent years.¹¹ Nevertheless, with the exception of two essays on Joannes Bacherus and scattered remarks concerning Dutch representatives at the court of Shah Jahan (r. 1628-57), analyses of Dutch diplomatic activity in the Mughal Empire have only focused on the two best-known instances: the splendid embassies of Dirck van Adrichem (1662) and Joan Josua Ketelaar (1711-13).¹² Above all, very few attempts have

been made to situate these exceptional moments within the longer history of political interactions between the Companies and the Mughal government.¹³

By doing just that, this article hopes to demonstrate that it was not the sporadic dispatch of stately missions, but periodic low-profile representations at the imperial centre combined with continuous political exchanges and negotiations with local and regional power-holders, that constituted the norm in early modern Mughal-European diplomacy. Based on circa fifty distinct diplomatic events – comprising all known Dutch and English representations at the imperial court from 1608 to 1717, plus a representative sample from the much larger set of negotiations at sub-imperial levels – this article charts how Dutch and English Company agents, Mughal noblemen, Indian brokers, and other intermediaries used a diverse range of formal and informal approaches to insert the newcomers into the Mughal political landscape. The combined evidence from dozens of diplomatic episodes – many of which have not been studied before – conclusively dispels the notion that Mughal-European exchanges were hampered by the so-called “incommensurability” of diplomatic cultures.¹⁴ It shows that the Companies’ diplomatic activities effectively took shape in Asia in response to local conditions, conflicts, and conventions. And it decisively shifts the perspective towards Mughal agency and the successful efforts by the imperial administration to incorporate the Europeans into existing power structures. As such, the present analysis of VOC and EIC diplomacy in Agra, Delhi, Surat, and Dhaka helps to bring into view a much clearer image of the Companies’ position *vis-à-vis* the Mughal state.

When reviewing Anglo-Mughal and Mughal-Dutch diplomatic interactions from the first exchanges in the 1600s down to the last large European embassies to the imperial court during the 1710s, what stands out is their degree of variety. To be sure, between the magnificent deputations to imperial capitals involving hundreds of attendants, and the plain petitioning of a single Company agent at a provincial court, several key features were shared,

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most evidently their soliciting the imperial government for commercial privileges, legal protection, and extra-territorial rights. This shared focus on negotiating the legal status and trading rights of foreign communities within the Mughal imperial framework enables us to think of this divergent range of practices as representing different modes of a single diplomatic repertoire. That said, in order to better appreciate the subtly different emphases of these various styles of operating, this article proposes a typology of six modes of diplomacy as practiced by the EIC and VOC in Mughal South Asia: 1) the sending of royal ambassadors; 2) the dispatch of high-profile embassies headed by Company officials; 3) small-scale petitioning at the central court; 4) the commissioning of Indian brokers; 5) provincial diplomacy; and 6) local diplomacy. Each mode will be discussed below with reference to several representative examples, prefaced by a brief outline of the general features of East India Company diplomacy.

I

Chartered trading companies played a fundamental role in early modern diplomatic exchanges, most evidently in relations between Europeans and non-Europeans.¹⁵ Whilst their importance is increasingly noted as a result of the growing interest in the participation of ‘non-state’ and ‘sub-state’ actors in inter-polity relations, the specific nature of corporate diplomacy has so far remained underexplored.¹⁶ Recent scholarship has recognized that modern definitions of diplomacy as the conduct of relations between territorially-bounded sovereign states are unsuited to understanding the pluriform landscape of early modern political entities engaged in cross-border exchanges.¹⁷ A period in which the rules and boundaries of diplomacy were far from stable or universally agreed, the early modern world was also characterized by imperial formations within which ‘the line between internal supplication and foreign relations is difficult, if [not] impossible to draw.’¹⁸ Indeed, as is

best-documented in the Ottoman context, rights of political representation on behalf of external powers (that is, diplomatic duties) were frequently invested in officials (consuls, *bailos*, or directors of trading factories) who doubled as heads of small ethnic communities of resident foreign merchants seen by their host states as ‘one of myriad communities...living within the polity’.¹⁹ Hence, just as scholars regard English and Dutch diplomacy in Istanbul in terms of lobbying the Ottoman authorities for commercial freedoms and legal protection, this article refers to EIC and VOC diplomacy in Mughal India as those political interactions aimed at setting the parameters for, and resolving friction arising from, the Companies’ commercial presence in Mughal domains.²⁰

Perhaps the single most defining feature of the diplomatic approaches of the VOC and EIC was their adaptability to diverse foreign environments, itself a product of their hybrid character as commercial body politics.²¹ In regions where indigenous authority was comparatively weak, such as island Southeast Asia, the VOC’s promises of military assistance in exchange for monopoly trading rights formed the pretext for growing territorial claims.²² By the mid-seventeenth century, the Dutch ‘empire by treaty’ also extended to parts of South Asia, particularly the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and the Malabar Coast (Kerala) in southern India. A century later, reflecting the EIC’s military ascendancy after the battle of Plassey (1757), unequal treaties with local rulers likewise underpinned British imperial expansion on the Indian Subcontinent.²³ However, throughout the early modern period and in most parts of Asia, the situation was very different. From Safavid Iran to Qing China and Tokugawa Japan, powerful Asian states consistently forced the European newcomers into subordinate positions.²⁴

This, too, was facilitated by the hybrid nature of the trading company. ‘Unlike a monarchical state’, Philip Stern has pointed out, corporations ‘could modulate between positions of deference and defiance’.²⁵ Indeed, in the words of William Pettigrew, ‘a

corporation was in a position to submit itself to a foreign state', and 'could offer obeisance' or 'fealty' to such states as a precondition for receiving much-coveted commercial privileges.²⁶ The most manifest case was arguably that of Japan, where the Dutch 'deliberately positioned themselves as loyal subordinates intent on taking up their place alongside the shogun's domestic vassals'.²⁷ Such unequal relationships were both expressed by and constituted through diplomatic practice. As Rudi Matthee has noted in relation to Persia, Company representatives at Asian courts were routinely compelled to partake in highly asymmetric rituals that were 'structured in visions of royal sovereignty, patronage, and benevolence mirrored in obligations of deference, subordination and tribute'.²⁸ This description applies to Mughal India in equal measure. It was only in the later eighteenth century that a 'Mughal-centred' system of diplomatic relationships, ceremonies, and hierarchies gave way to 'Company-centred diplomacy', and even then not without a degree of 'mimicking Indo-Persianate diplomacy and culture'.²⁹ Until then, European parties seeking advantageous trade had little choice but to acknowledge the emperor's supreme authority and accept being incorporated into the existing configuration of power.

What enabled the East India Companies to do so on their own accord was the fact that they enjoyed the right to wage war, conclude alliances, or otherwise establish political relationships with rulers within their designated area of operations, as set down in successive charters granted by their home authorities.³⁰ Hence, with the notable exception of Roe and Norris, each of the men who during this period conducted EIC or VOC diplomacy in Mughal India was commissioned solely by the Company they served, not the English Crown or the Dutch States-General.³¹ This crucial circumstance allowed these merchant-envoys substantial leeway to adjust to the norms and practices of Mughal diplomacy, which practically all of them did to a remarkable degree. As foreign merchant communities, the Dutch and English derived the right to trade and reside in Mughal domains from a variety of written orders

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(*farmans*, *nishans*, and *parwanas*) issued by successive Mughal governments. This arrangement was framed within a vision of imperial sovereignty, as is evident from the wording of decrees. The Dutch traders, a *farman* by Shah Jahan tells us in the VOC's contemporary translation, 'enter under my shadow and protection' and were expected to strive 'obediently and willingly' towards the well-being of the empire.³² Similar rhetoric is found in a number of *farmans* which Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) issued to the English. 'Doe the King acceptable service and expect a reward', one of them urged, while a later one stated that the EIC had 'made a most Humble Submissive Petition', and 'Sent their Vakkeels [agents] to the Heavenly Palace the most illustrious in the world, to get the Royall Favour'.³³ Far from mutually-binding treaties, such documents were unilateral directives from emperors to their subordinates, expressing a vertical relationship of protection and vassalage.³⁴

The main reason that the Mughal administration was quick to extend its favour was that foreign trade generated substantial tax income and a welcome supply of precious metals. In addition, the relationships they struck up with the various groups of Europeans enabled them to keep a check on the potentially disruptive impact of these armed traders, while seeking to benefit from their access to foreign luxury goods and military potential.³⁵ As for the Companies, their objectives were to enjoy free access to cotton, silk, indigo, and other commodities; obtain exemption from or reductions in customs duties and road tolls; and retain the right to try their own people and freely practice their religion.³⁶ The various modes of diplomacy they practiced were uniformly geared towards the extension or renewal of such privileges, the confirmation of extraterritorial rights, and obtaining redress against high-handed treatment by Mughal administrators or the non-observance of previous decrees. Cast in the role of humble supplicants seeking favourable commands by the courts that received them, English and Dutch representatives petitioned Mughal emperors and their viceroys in much the same way as the empire's Indian subjects did. Just how much these conclusions

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modify received wisdom based on the paradigmatic example of Roe's embassy becomes clear when placing this exceptional mission in context.

II

Organized by the East India Company and accredited by King James I, England's first formal diplomatic engagement with South Asia was aimed at securing a firm foundation for English trade in the Mughal Empire through mutually-binding agreements.³⁷ The unfeasible nature of this objective became apparent soon after Roe landed in Surat, and before long his letters home featured bitter complaints laying bare the mismatch between English means and expectations and the demands and conventions of Mughal imperial culture.³⁸ Instructed to uphold James's honour, Roe's comportment in India was informed by contemporary European diplomatic theory, above all the notion that ambassadors represented their sovereign in person.³⁹ This guiding principle underpinned Roe's persistent protests against what he regarded as 'affronts and slavish Customes', most famously the symbolic acts of submission to imperial authority expected of those attending the Mughal court, manifested in ritual prostrations and the donning of honorific robes (*khil'at*).⁴⁰ Although he quickly became aware that different diplomatic conventions prevailed in the Indo-Persian world, the ambassador felt duty-bound to those concepts he shared with his royal master, repeatedly insisting on their universality as part of the 'law of Nations' when interacting with Mughal officials.⁴¹ Caught between the conflicting needs of representing his king and furthering the interest of a fledgling corporation, Roe was ill-equipped to deal with a ruler who signed unilateral commands instead of bilateral treaties; a diplomatic tradition that did not acknowledge European standards as universally applicable; and a court whose standards of royal largesse made his modest gifts look painfully scant.⁴²

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Several of these issues also dogged the only other royal ambassador sent from England to the Mughal court, Sir William Norris (c. 1657-1702). Tasked with soliciting fresh *farmans* confirming the right of English subjects to trade and reside in Mughal domains under favourable conditions, Norris arrived in India in September 1699 to act on behalf of the so-called “New” East India Company, founded the previous year to replace the existing or “Old” Company although eventually merging with the former in 1708.⁴³ Commissioned by William III and carrying the king’s letter to the aged emperor Aurangzeb, Norris acted as a conduit for the establishment of ‘Perpetuall Friendship’ and ‘mutuall love’ between two monarchs from different ends of Eurasia; a move which paralleled James I’s efforts to fashion a discourse of mutuality in his epistolary exchange with Jahangir.⁴⁴ Further parallels existed in the way both Roe and Norris appealed to universal notions. Gesturing towards the Ottoman court to support his claim, Roe had sought to convince his Mughal interlocutors that ‘the honor and qualety of an ambassador is not ruled by the customes of England, but the consent of all the world’.⁴⁵ Over eighty years later, Norris likewise invoked the global applicability of the *ius gentium* to protest against what he regarded as a violation of diplomatic immunity, insisting that the detainment of one of his servants by the *kotwal* (chief of police) of Masulipatnam constituted ‘a break of ye Law of Nations & ye Infringement of ye privileiges & Imunitys of Ambassadors wch was secured all ye world over’.⁴⁶

Even if these particular arguments carried little weight in the Mughal context, it is evident that the imperial administration recognized European monarchs as valid diplomatic partners and sought to accommodate the differences between their respective diplomatic cultures to some degree. Thus, both Jahangir and Aurangzeb authored replies to the royal letters received from England, and both reportedly allowed the English ambassadors to do reverence after their ‘owne Custome’.⁴⁷ Most importantly, Aurangzeb’s reception of Norris in April 1701 was preceded by detailed negotiations about points of diplomatic ceremony

carried out between the ambassador and two of the highest Mughal dignitaries, Asad Khan and Ruhullah Khan, the imperial *wazir* (chief minister) and *khan-i-saman* (head of the imperial household), respectively.⁴⁸ Insisting on points of European diplomatic protocol, and commenting that the Mughals were ‘strangers to all Customes of yt nature in Europe, havinge had none of my character here these 100 yeares’, it is clear that both Norris and his interlocutors viewed his embassy as qualitatively different from the ongoing political interactions between the Mughal state and the EIC’s representatives in India.⁴⁹ Norris cited the precedent of Roe’s reception, and demanded that his rank be acknowledged through the highest possible diplomatic honours.⁵⁰ Conversely, Mughal officials showed interest in European politics and courtly customs, quizzing Norris about a range of issues relevant to his audience, including whether ambassadors in Europe were allowed to sit in a monarch’s presence and keep their hats on.⁵¹

Whilst the status and formality attached to the office of ambassador limited royal envoys in making concessions – as the rigidity regarding protocol displayed by both Roe and Norris reveals – the greater prestige connected with royal embassies also induced the Mughals to allow greater degrees of reciprocity.⁵² It are these two aspects that most clearly set royal embassies apart from other forms of East India Company diplomacy – not the size of embassy trains, the value of diplomatic gifts, or their commercial and political aims. Both responses followed from a shared sense that these embassies existed within a global sphere of inter-dynastic exchange.⁵³ Yet royal missions were the eye-catching exceptions to the norm. As becomes clear when broadening the scope of research, the vast bulk of what constituted East India Company diplomacy in Mughal India was concerned not so much with representing far-flung sovereigns, but with cultivating relationships of political patronage in what was essentially a domestic, South Asian setting.

III

On the face of it, there is very little that unites the diplomatic missions of Marcus Oldenburgh (1633) and Joan Josua Ketelaar (1711-13). The first Dutch deputation to the Mughal court about which we are reasonably well-informed, Oldenburgh's dispatch to Agra is a typical example of the low-key, small-scale petitioning at the imperial centre routinely practiced by the VOC.⁵⁴ Accompanied by just one colleague, Oldenburgh was explicitly instructed not to use the high-sounding title of 'ambassador', but instead to introduce himself as a commissioned agent (*expresse gecommitteerde*). He was also strictly ordered not to exceed his tight budget, whether by extending his retinue, disbursing gifts to courtiers, or by seeking to appear in a stately fashion before the emperor.⁵⁵ How different was the situation when Ketelaar made his appearance in Lahore some eight decades later: Ketelaar's embassy to the courts of first Bahadur Shah (r. 1707-12) and then Jahandar Shah (r. 1712-13) was both the last and the most splendid of Dutch missions to the central Mughal court. Spanning exactly two years, it involved an entourage consisting of forty European staff with their Indian servants, and a military escort of well over 200 Indian soldiers.⁵⁶ The quintessential example of high-profile diplomacy carried out under Company auspices, Ketelaar's embassy carried a price tag of 1,201,495 guilders, half of which was spent on gifts. This was the most expensive diplomatic mission the VOC ever sent to any Asian ruler.⁵⁷ Yet these two delegations at opposite ends of the spectrum – and the many diplomatic assignments located on the continuum between them – had three crucial facets in common. Their common objective was to petition the emperor for favourable decrees; they relied on Mughal patronage to do so; and they performed symbolic submission to imperial authority in order to achieve their aims.

Both Companies opted to fit out long and costly stately missions only when exceptional circumstances required the renewal of privileges, and when alternative approaches were deemed insufficient. The VOC sent grand *hofreizen* (court journeys) on three occasions: in

1662, when Dirq van Adrichem was sent to congratulate Aurangzeb upon his succession to the throne; in 1689, when Joannes Bacherus sought confirmation of Dutch privileges in the Deccan upon the Mughal conquest of Bijapur and Golkonda; and in 1711-13, when Ketelaar solicited fresh *farmans* in the wake of Aurangzeb's death.⁵⁸ The only similar English undertaking was the mission of John Surman (1715-17), sent from Patna to the court of Farrukhsiyar (r. 1713-19) in Delhi to secure a *farman* freeing the EIC from paying customs in lieu of a fixed annual sum.⁵⁹ While Ketelaar's embassy train had been vast, Surman managed to outdo him. Carried in silver palanquins, the ambassador and his second-in-command, the Armenian merchant Khwaja Sarhad, were accompanied by 1200 Indian porters and over 500 Indian footmen. 160 bullock-carts were needed to transport gifts and other goods, and twenty-two oxen to tow their guns.⁶⁰ Together with royal embassies, high-profile Company missions provide us with the most detailed available record of English and Dutch diplomacy in the Mughal Empire. Yet for all their intrinsic interest, these conspicuous encounters represent only the uppermost layer of the wide scope of diplomatic activity which both Companies engaged in.

Far more common than stately embassies were small-scale representations at the imperial court undertaken by one or two Company agent(s) bearing modest gifts. The first Company representative acting as merchant-envoy was William Hawkins, who arrived in Agra in April 1609 and remained at Jahangir's court until November 1611.⁶¹ Later commissions were usually much briefer. Between 1613 and 1615, Paul Canning, Thomas Kerridge, and William Edwards successively acted for short stints as royal letter-bearers, while Roe left William Biddulph as English procurator (1618-20) in his place, who was in turn succeeded 'in the courts agentshipp' by Robert Hughes (1621).⁶² In the years following, Robert Young and John Willoughby procured Jahangir's *farman* in Lahore (1624), while John Bangham acted as the English solicitor at court in the closing years (1625-7) of

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Jahangir's reign.⁶³ For later reigns, some details are known regarding Thomas Kerridge's visit to the newly-proclaimed emperor Shah Jahan in December 1627; the dispatch of the petitioners John Drake (1636), Henry Bornford (1637), John Turner (1644), and Richard Davidge (1650-1) to Shah Jahan's court in Delhi; Thomas Andrews' (unauthorized) dealings at Aurangzeb's court (1660); and the low-profile mission of George Weldon and the Jewish interpreter Abraham Navarro to Aurangzeb's Deccan camp in 1689-90.⁶⁴ In soliciting new privileges or lobbying for the redress of perceived wrongs, these Company representatives made use of similar channels and procedures as Mughal subjects.⁶⁵ They implored the emperor to discipline his officials, entreated him to grant securities 'for our free and peaceable living and that wee may not bee injured in our persons or estates', or sought to be pardoned for offences committed against his subjects.⁶⁶ As time progressed, petitions also increasingly featured "domestic" political requests such as 'that his Majesty will be graciously pleased as a Mark of his Royall favour to bestow' revenue collection rights over Indian villages.⁶⁷ Performing a role mirroring that of Indian *vakils* (agents, attorneys), the Companies' merchant-envoys hence emerge less as actors in foreign relations than as spokesmen of interest groups operating within the Mughal imperial system.⁶⁸

Like the EIC, the VOC also regularly made use of small-scale petitioning at the central court. The little-known activities of Wouter Heuten (1621), Hendrick Arentsz. Vapour (1625), Marcus Oldenburgh (1633), François Timmers (1635), Cornelis Weylandt (1642), Nicolaes Verburgh (1646), Wollebrant Geleynssen de Jongh (1637-40), Johan (or Jan) Tack (1648, 1650, 1656, and 1660), Joan Berckhout and Tack (1653), and Joannes Bacherus (1677), all fit this model.⁶⁹ These were mostly ad-hoc deputations, organized largely by the VOC's director in Surat with limited involvement of the Governor-General in Batavia. In terms of their duration, the amount of gifts they carried, the pomp surrounding them, and the total number of people involved, they came nowhere near the impressive dimensions of the

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stately embassies on which most research has focused. The status of the person in charge also tended to be more modest, as both Companies relied chiefly on their agents in Agra for political representation at court. Besides time- and cost-efficiency, the employment of agents stationed close to the central seat of power carried a further benefit. As exemplified by Tack, who spent twenty-seven years in Agra and became fluent in Hindustani (Hindi/Urdu), their proximity to the court enabled Company representatives to become closely acquainted with the language, culture, and key figures of Mughal political society.⁷⁰

This process of rapprochement worked both ways. Company envoys required the backing of influential Mughal courtiers to obtain audiences with the emperor and ensure that their petitions were dealt with. Through personal visits, gift-giving, and polite correspondence, they actively cultivated relations with their benefactors at court. From the perspective of individual Mughal dignitaries, patronage of European traders could serve to advance their commercial interests and guarantee a supply of exclusive luxury items for personal use or to offer to their superiors, thus helping them raise their profile at court.⁷¹ The imperial administration also took an official interest in cross-cultural advocacy arrangements. Although marked by recurrent tension, these arrangements provided a functional institutional provision for dealing with foreign petitioners and tended to be remarkably long-standing. In 1616, Roe remarked that Asaf Khan, elder brother to Queen Nur Jahan and father of Shah Jahan's wife Mumtaz Mahal, was 'appoynted sollicitor for our Nation, soe that I can doe nothing without him'.⁷² Twenty years later, Drake's (unsuccessful) lobby still relied chiefly on the intercession of Asaf Khan, whom, notwithstanding several acrimonious disputes, was also by the Dutch described as 'a friend and great advocate (*voorstander*) of our nation'.⁷³

In other cases, patronage was transmitted along family or factional lines. From the 1630s through to the 1660s, prominent contacts of the VOC included Asalat Khan, his younger brother, Khalillullah Khan, and the former's sons, Iftikhar Khan and Multafat Khan.⁷⁴

The Company also received ample assistance from Haqiqat Khan, the *diwan* (fiscal officer) of the emperor's eldest daughter, Jahanara Begum.⁷⁵ Jahanara's concern with the Dutch stemmed from the fact that, in the mid-seventeenth century, she controlled the revenues of the port of Surat, and hence took a direct interest in maritime trade. Besides Haqiqat Khan and the princess herself, Jahanara's former wet nurse, Huri Khanam, also took an active role in communications with VOC representatives.⁷⁶ These examples throw additional light on the involvement in Mughal-European diplomacy of women from the imperial harem, best-known through the exceptional figure of Juliana Dias da Costa, an influential Portuguese woman at the court of Bahadur Shah who acted as the VOC's patroness during Ketelaar's mission.⁷⁷ These cases also indicate that, even if misgivings about perceived Mughal pride and greed remained commonplace, the Companies' mutually-beneficial contacts with courtly patrons helped sustain the larger political relationship despite everyday friction and episodic conflict.

As conscious acts of political self-representation by burgeoning Company-states, sumptuous embassies by the likes of Ketelaar and Surman reflected a preoccupation with status that was subdued during small-scale missions such as those of Drake or Oldenburgh. This difference was appreciated by Mughal emperors, for whom the reception of splendid foreign deputations added an extra dimension to the courtly spectacle through which they expressed their power. Imperial cavalymen were provided to escort Ketelaar and Surman to court, while Van Adrichem was entertained by noblemen along the way and taken to view temples, tombs, and pleasure gardens. Most clearly, Jahandar Shah demanded the presence of Ketelaar's European soldiers during his ceremonial entry into Delhi, seeking to add a further touch of grandeur to the pageantry staged to inaugurate his short-lived rule.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, unlike the two royal diplomats, Company envoys leading stately missions never sought to challenge the central narrative of ceremonial submission to imperial authority. All merchant-envoys participated in the forms of ritual obeisance (*taslim* and *kurnish*) expected at Mughal

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courtly audiences. They incorporated Persianate forms of honorific address ('Lord of beneficence and Liberalitie', 'Potentate of ye World [and] Center of Security', 'Emperour of ye Earth and of ye Age', 'The Divine Shadow of ye holy Prophet Mahomet') and self-deprecation ('ye least of your servants', 'like a graine of sand', 'kissing ye Floor...w[i]th lipps of Respect and obsequiousness') in their written appeals (*arzdasht*), and adopted Mughal forms of ceremonial offerings of gold and silver coins (*nazr*).⁷⁹ Many also expressed their appreciation at the signs of distinction received from the emperor and his leading nobles, taking pride in receiving ceremonial gifts such as diamond-studded daggers and robes of honour.⁸⁰ In sum, while certainly regarding their compliance as compulsory, the agents who represented the EIC or VOC at the Mughal court presented themselves as obliging participants in the ceremonial performance of the hierarchical relationship expressed in imperial decrees.

IV

Following Aurangzeb's departure from Delhi in 1679, the imperial court spent nearly thirty years on the move during the emperor's interminable Deccan campaigns. Aurangzeb's reign, especially its later decades, coincided with a marked drop in diplomatic representations at the central court by both Companies, whom now increasingly came to engage in provincial diplomacy instead. Yet the declining presence of Dutch and particularly English agents near the imperial abode was also partly offset by a growing reliance on the services of commissioned brokers. Indian brokers contributed to all forms of Company diplomacy, acting as interpreters, scribes, messengers, and assistants in negotiations. Their participation was indispensable on account of their superior knowledge of local customs, often extensive networks of contacts, and linguistic abilities. However, the VOC and EIC also employed Hindu, Muslim, and Armenian *vakils* as diplomatic agents in their own right, above all at the

courts of the Hindu and Muslim rulers in southern India but also regularly at the Mughal court. The use of Brahmin mediators in South Indian diplomacy was a means of accommodating cultural difference, as they enjoyed freer access to local Hindu elites than was allowed to European outsiders.⁸¹ While the Companies' use of Indian diplomatic agents in Mughal domains was less extensive, in 1669 the English factors in Surat did argue that to prevent extortions from Mughal officials 'noe way was deemed more suteable and effectuall' than to keep a Hindu *vakil* 'constantly at court'.⁸²

Such brokers were seen as ideally-suited for handling matters discreetly and in a cost-effective manner. In 1660, while the Surat factors were mulling over the choice of 'a judicious person to goe up to court to congratulate the new King', they decided in the meantime to dispatch 'a Bannian, to acquaint King Orange Zeeb with our aggreivances' against the Mughal viceroy of Bengal.⁸³ Seven years later, an Indian agent dispatched to Delhi to petition the imperial *wazir* succeeded in obtaining a *farman* confirming the reduction of customs duties payable by the EIC in Surat.⁸⁴ And in 1687, the English entrusted the weighty business of procuring a *farman* to their Armenian *vakil*, Khwaja Abnus, after the previous efforts of 'Mahomed Hurriff the Bengall Vakeil att the Mogulls Camp' had proved ineffective.⁸⁵ Financial reasons motivated the Madras Council to refrain from sending two of their own number to Aurangzeb's court, just as considerations of costs had prompted the Company to decide against sending an English envoy to Delhi in the 1660s.⁸⁶ Even so, the local EIC officials also agreed that Abnus was the right man for the job because he had been recommended by the Mughal governor of Golkonda, Mahabat Khan. Acquiring the backing of imperial officials was paramount, as the Dutch director and Council in Surat likewise concluded in 1700 when desperately seeking to annul the agreement (*muchalka*) they had been forced to sign which held them liable to compensate Indian merchants for losses due to

piracy. Citing their brokers' extensive contacts at court, Hendrick Zwaardecroon and his colleagues authorized the brothers Bhagwandas and Raksikadas to conduct the negotiations.⁸⁷

The importance of agents possessing local knowledge when conducting diplomacy in a foreign environment was undisputed, yet the question to what extent one should entrust this delicate business to outsiders remained a matter of debate. Answers varied according to the circumstances of each case, yet always involved considerations of costs, reputation, and trust. The latter was connected to the issue of perceived loyalty, which itself was clad in cultural assumptions. Although Zwaardecroon chose to rely on Bhagwandas and Raksikadas, he noted that there was room to question their professed allegiance 'when one considers their greedy nature, with which all natives, whether provided with money or not, are ordinarily impregnated'.⁸⁸ A Company envoy who expressed a clear-cut preference for employing European rather than Indian representatives was Ketelaar. In 1713 he informed the VOC's Governor-General that several Mughal noblemen had recommended him to maintain an agent at the imperial court, yet that to appoint a 'native' (*inlander*) he deemed inadvisable: 'such a man at all times would pursue his own advantage more than his masters' interest, whereas of a European Company servant, bound by oath to the Company, one can at all times expect more and sincerer services'.⁸⁹

V

The final two modes of diplomacy practiced by the VOC and EIC in Mughal South Asia – provincial and local diplomacy – are both the most common and the least studied varieties. Political contacts between Company representatives and Mughal officials at the provincial and local levels of the imperial administration spanned the range from formal audiences at provincial seats of power, to attendance at the courts (*darbars*) of local officials, and informal meetings involving a wide array of Asian and European intermediaries. Extensive diplomatic activity in port towns such as Surat or provincial capitals such as Dhaka normally preceded,

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proceeded in parallel with, or continued beyond, Dutch and English representations at the central court. What is more, official and unofficial commercial arrangements frequently relied solely on decrees issued at the provincial level, particularly in Bengal where *subahdars* (provincial governors) enjoyed considerable autonomy.⁹⁰ Diplomatic interactions between lower-tier Mughal power-holders and Company agents operating at the district-level hence both complemented and reduced the need for central diplomacy. It is by following the channels of communication through which agents of both Companies applied themselves to their contacts in the imperial administration that the full scope of trans-imperial patronage becomes visible.⁹¹ Besides offering greater insight in everyday practices of cross-cultural diplomacy, a focus on local forms of conflict resolution and political brokerage also elucidates how the larger Mughal-European relationship took shape through inter-personal interactions in different parts of the empire and in response to conditions on the ground.⁹²

There are countless examples that show how deeply central diplomacy was embedded in a web of local and provincial relationships. In a typical passage, the English merchants in Surat in 1663 noted that a cost-effective alternative to Van Adrichem's recently-completed embassy had been identified: 'The President made knowne to his Councell that an opportunity now presented, by an acquaintance of his in towne who had a brother up at court in great credit and respected there by most of the nobles, through whose means there was hopes of obtaining the like priviledges that the Dutch had lately graunted them after so vast an expence'.⁹³ The scenario was strikingly familiar. In 1677, when commissioning Bacherus to proceed to Delhi, the director of Dutch trade in Surat procured a letter of recommendation from the local Mughal governor (*mutasaddi*), Ghiyasuddin Khan, addressed to the latter's brother who was in charge of handling petitions at Aurangzeb's court. Bacherus also paid a visit to the *subahdar* of Gujarat, Muhammad Amin Khan, to solicit letters of support addressed to the imperial *wazir* and other noblemen.⁹⁴ Naturally, assistance of this kind had

its price, as the Companies' requests for exemption from customs duties, road tolls, and other charges competed with the interests of local merchants and tax collectors. When Zwaardecroon was preparing his petition to the imperial court, in June 1700, he spent several weeks negotiating with Surat's *mutasaddi*, Diyanat Khan, again in order to procure a cover letter to an influential brother at court, this time to Arshad Khan who worked as the *wazir*'s deputy. Both parties eventually agreed that the governor would write the letter in return for a gift of 1,000 *mohurs* (gold coins) to himself, 3,000 rupees to his son, and smaller sums to several of his staff. Local diplomatic events such as these are particularly revealing of the central significance of seemingly minor actors in shaping the course of Mughal-European relations. From the dense chain of mediation that shaped the latter case, it was the eunuch of Diyanat Khan, a man called Mia Ambar, who emerged as the key mover. Consequently, it was Mia Ambar at whom Dutch efforts to obtain political favour were principally directed.⁹⁵

In yet other cases, settlements reached between the Companies and local officials were arguably more decisive than their formal authorisation by the central government. When Tack's mission to Shah Jahan's court in 1648 had not brought the result the VOC desired, the Company decided to arrest Mughal shipping in an attempt to obtain redress for a number of grievances. This version of gunboat diplomacy proved fruitful, and in September 1649 a list of proposed articles was approved by Surat's *mutasaddi*, Mir Musa, who wrote to the emperor recommending their endorsement.⁹⁶ A similar deal was brokered at the conclusion of the so-called Anglo-Mughal War of 1686-90, when the EIC agents in western India and the Mughal governor of Surat agreed that both parties would restore or pay compensation for any assets that had been seized. The arrangement had been reached following extensive meetings in the summer of 1689 between George Weldon and Abraham Navarro on the English side, and Qazi Ibrahim and Mir Nizam on that of Surat.⁹⁷ Weldon and Navarro's embassy to

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Aurangzeb's court subsequently brought the conflict to a formal close, yet the most crucial steps had already been taken through successful local diplomacy.

Finally, perhaps the greatest part of provincial diplomacy was geared towards localized arrangements and relationships. In the eastern provinces of Orissa and Bengal, early English and Dutch diplomatic efforts were aimed at securing trading rights within these respective districts, as was the case with Ralph Cartwright's mission to the provincial court in Cuttack in 1633, and Jacob Mahuysen's audience with *subahdar* Islam Khan in Dhaka in 1636.⁹⁸ In later years, Company representatives most commonly travelled to provincial capitals to complain about local officials' non-compliance with existing privileges and to request fresh decrees, as Louis Junius and James Bridgman did when attending Prince Shah Shuja's court in Rajmahal, in 1650 and 1651 respectively.⁹⁹ Other instances of provincial diplomacy focused on welcoming the incoming governor (as with William Blake's visit to Shaista Khan in 1664); settling local disputes (the reason for Pieter Hofmeister's mission to Dhaka in 1672); or maintaining relations through the periodic presentation of gifts (which provincial officials in Dhaka, Kasimbazar, Patna and elsewhere expected from the VOC at least once every two years).¹⁰⁰ Vice versa, Mughal governors summoned Company agents to their presence or dispatched messages to them when they sought material or military support. The best-known instance is Shaista Khan's military campaign against Arakan of 1665, for which the viceroy demanded men and ships from the Dutch and English. In an unprecedented move, the Mughal *subahdar* even sent two envoys to Batavia to acquire the desired assistance, a unique occurrence in a diplomatic relationship characterized by the lack of reciprocal exchange.¹⁰¹

Besides differences of scale and degrees of formality, in their ceremonial form diplomatic encounters at regional seats of power were analogous to those at the central court. Mughal imperial symbols and languages of political authority were used throughout the empire, and Mughal princes and high noblemen modelled their personal courts on that of the

emperor.¹⁰² Consequently, courtly audiences in Bengal and other provincial sites bore the usual marks of Mughal sovereignty, including the presentation of *nazr* and the donning of *khil'at*. That said, the smaller scale at which these interactions played out allowed for greater proximity between hosts and visitors. For instance, during his attendance at Shaista Khan's court in Dhaka in 1682, the English agent William Hedges had multiple opportunities to directly converse with the *subahdar* and the provincial *diwan*.¹⁰³ Such direct, personal contacts between Mughal officials and Company representatives were most common at the port town level, where political and social interactions took place on an everyday basis. Local diplomacy hence also had a communal side to it, for instance in the form of the banquet hosted by the *mutasaddi* of Surat for 'all the eminent men in Towne', at which the Dutch and English merchants publicly reconciled their differences with the Mughal harbour-master.¹⁰⁴ From the perspective of the EIC and VOC, to prevent disputes from happening at the local level was preferable over the cure of soliciting the emperor.¹⁰⁵ The latter option was deemed exceedingly costly, but more importantly still, the implementation of imperial decrees depended strongly on the cooperation of administrators on the ground. The gradual turn-away of both Companies from central diplomacy toward a focus on maintaining functional relations with provincial and local power-holders thus also serves as a reminder of the agency and autonomy of the latter, who strategically employed their positions of influence to benefit from the European presence.

VI

The study of cross-cultural diplomacy has become one of the most vibrant sub-fields of early modern global history. Combining the macro-perspective of inter-polity relations with the micro-lens of interpersonal interactions, it has the potential to revise Eurocentric accounts of imperial expansion, economic integration, and cultural exchange by foregrounding the

contributions of a multiplicity of actors from different parts of the world. This article has aimed to deepen our understanding of early modern diplomacy by providing the first survey of the various forms of diplomatic activity that structured commercial and political relations between the Mughal Empire and the two largest East India Companies. By proposing a typology of six different modes of diplomacy as practiced by the VOC and EIC, it has sought to provide a fuller and more textured account of the distinct nature of Company diplomacy.

Unlike what previous studies have suggested on the basis of exceptional cases, Mughal-European diplomacy was not primarily based on rare but costly embassies, nor was it irredeemably hampered by incompatibility between South Asian and European norms and practices. From everyday lobbying with port town officials to high-profile missions to the central court, the diplomatic activities of English and Dutch merchant-envoys were highly responsive to their host environment, as both Companies made use of the forms and channels of political petitioning current within Mughal imperial culture. These interactions relied on the knowledge, networks, and support of local intermediaries, as well as on the backing of high-placed members of the Mughal administration. The site-specific modes of Company diplomacy that emerged are thus best seen as forms of political representation operating within the constitutional framework of Mughal India. By forcing the European arrivals into the role of supplicants dependent on imperial favour and protection, the Mughal government was able to exert a degree of control over these disruptive outside elements. Ironically, it was its formal incorporation as a Mughal landholder that eventually provided the EIC a much-needed source of legitimacy for its growing claims to territorial possessions, yet such aggressive European expansionism was only possible after the decline of Mughal central power had produced a fundamental shift in the balance of power on the Subcontinent.¹⁰⁶

Although they were the most powerful, the Mughals were certainly not the Companies' only diplomatic partners in early modern South Asia. During the period covered by this

article, the EIC and VOC conducted regular diplomatic interactions with a wide range of South Asian polities, including the Sultanates of Golkonda and Bijapur, the Marathas, the Hindu principalities of Madurai, Thanjavur, and Ramnad, and the Buddhist kingdom of Kandy.¹⁰⁷ In those cases, too, power differentials affected the nature and shape of diplomatic relations, with the Companies least likely to appear accommodative when the power balance tipped in their favour. Research on EIC diplomacy outside India is as yet too scarce to allow for broader comparisons, yet studies on VOC diplomacy confirm that a tendency to adjust to local contexts defined the Dutch approach to diplomacy in Asia more widely. Reflecting on VOC embassies to China and Japan, Leonard Blussé has observed that ‘the Dutch had no qualms about subjecting themselves to Asian court ritual’, while Carl Fredrik Feddersen’s recent study of Dutch relations with Makassar argued that the VOC’s diplomacy was characterized by ‘principled pragmatism’.¹⁰⁸ It is hoped that this article will contribute to comparative analysis of the forms and effects of cross-cultural diplomacy within a global framework. Now that it is increasingly becoming apparent just how common it was for European actors to adopt local practices when negotiating in a variety of African and Asian contexts, future research will need to explore to what extent such practices were carried over from one diplomatic context to the next, and how such transfers served to shape the global history of diplomacy.

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¹ The principal source for all scholarship on Roe are the ambassador’s detailed journals, whose ready availability in print was instrumental in achieving their canonical status: William Foster, ed., *The embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the court of the Great Mogul, 1615-1619* (2 vols. London, 1899; 2nd edn London, 1926).

Citations are from the two-volume 1899 edition, with the exception of material which only appears in the one-volume 1926 edition.

² For the embassy's fullest treatment: Colin Paul Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal empire* (Karachi, 2000). As is often the case for Mughal-European diplomacy, there are no Mughal sources that recount Roe's embassy.

³ We lack a comparative synthesis of this important topic. Standard works on diplomatic history pay little attention to Euro-Indian relations before the mid-eighteenth century. For instance: Jeremy Black, *A history of diplomacy* (London, 2010). The main exception is: C.H. Alexandrowicz, *An introduction to the history of the law of nations in the East Indies (16th, 17th and 18th centuries)* (Oxford, 1967).

⁴ Foster 1899, *Embassy* II, p. 346.

⁵ See: Kate Teltscher, *India inscribed: European and British writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi, 1995); Jyotsna G. Singh, *Colonial narratives/cultural dialogues: "discoveries" of India in the language of colonialism* (London and New York, NY, 1996). Compare: Richmond Barbour, *Before Orientalism: London's theatre of the East, 1576-1626* (Cambridge, 2003); Mehreen M. Chida-Razvi, 'The perception of reception: the importance of Sir Thomas Roe at the Mughal court of Jahangir', *Journal of World History*, 25 (2014), pp. 263-84.

⁶ The idea that Roe radically misread Mughal political culture was first formulated by Bernard Cohn in 1985. See: Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: the British in India* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), pp. 16-56; Teltscher, *India inscribed*; Singh, *Colonial narratives/cultural dialogues*. Critiques include: William R. Pinch, 'Same difference in India and Europe', *History and Theory*, 38 (1999), pp. 389-407; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Frank submissions: the Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris', in H.V. Bowen, Margarete Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby, eds., *The worlds of the East India Company* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 69-96; Nandini Das, "'Apes of imitation": imitation and identity in Sir Thomas Roe's embassy to India', in Jyotsna G. Singh, ed., *A companion to the global Renaissance: English literature and culture in the era of expansion* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 114-28; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly encounters: translating courtliness and violence in early modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Kim Siebenhüner, 'Approaching diplomatic and courtly gift-giving in Europe and Mughal India: shared practices and cultural diversity', *The Medieval History Journal*, 16 (2013), pp. 525-46. For a partial return to the position of mistranslation: Audrey Truschke, 'Deceptive familiarity: European perceptions of access at the Mughal court', in Dries Raeymaekers and Sebastiaan Derks, eds., *The key to power? The culture of access in princely courts, 1400-1750* (Leiden, 2016), pp. 65-99.

⁷ See Maartje van Gelder and Tijana Krstić, 'Introduction: cross-confessional diplomacy and diplomatic intermediaries in the early modern Mediterranean', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 19 (2015), pp. 93-105; Toby Osborne and Joan-Pau Rubiés, 'Introduction: diplomacy and cultural translation in the early modern world', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 20 (2016), pp. 313-30; Tracey A. Sowerby, 'Early modern diplomatic history', *History Compass*, 14 (2016), pp. 441-56.

⁸ Another reason is the relative neglect of Portuguese diplomacy in Mughal India, which falls outside the scope of this article. A recent exception is: Jorge Flores, *Unwanted neighbours: the Mughals, the Portuguese, and their frontier zones* (New Delhi, 2018).

⁹ Richmond Barbour, 'Power and distant display: early English "ambassadors" in Moghul India', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 61 (1998), pp. 343-68; Miles Ogborn, *Indian ink: script in the making of the English East India Company* (Chicago, IL, 2007), ch. 2; Harihar Das and S. C. Sarkar, eds., *The Norris embassy to Aurangzib (1699-1702)* (Calcutta, 1959); Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Submissions'. For brief but valuable discussions of the missions led by George Weldon (1689) and John Surman (1715-17), see: Philip J. Stern, *The company-state: corporate sovereignty and the early modern foundations of the British empire in India* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 123-4, 199-203.

¹⁰ Michael H. Fisher, 'Diplomacy in India, 1526-1858', in H.V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid, eds., *Britain's oceanic empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, c. 1550-1850* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 249-81; William Foster and Charles Fawcett, eds., *The English factories in India 1618-1621 [to] 1670-1684: a calendar of documents in the India Office, British Museum and Public Record Office* (17 vols. Oxford, 1906-1954) [Henceforth: *EFI*]; C.R. Wilson, ed., *The early annals of the English in Bengal, being the Bengal public consultations for the first half of the eighteenth century* (3 vols. Calcutta, 1895-1917).

¹¹ Recent works with a South Asian focus include: Lodewijk Wagenaar, "'Met eer en respect": diplomatieke contacten tussen de VOC-gouverneur in Colombo en het hof van het koninkrijk Kandy, 1703-1707', in Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Peter Rietbergen, eds., *Hof en handel: Aziatische vorsten en de VOC 1620-1720* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 227-50; Markus Vink, *Mission to Madurai: Dutch embassies to the Nayaka court of Madurai in the seventeenth century* (New Delhi, 2012); Lennart Bes, 'Sultan among Dutchmen: royal dress at court audiences in South India, as portrayed in local works of art and Dutch embassy reports, seventeenth-eighteenth centuries', *Modern Asian Studies*, 50 (2016), pp. 1792-1845.

¹² On Bacherus: Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer and Gijs Kruijtzter, 'Camping with the Mughal emperor: a Golkonda artist portrays a Dutch ambassador in 1689', *Arts of Asia*, 35 (2005), pp. 48-60; Guido van

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¹³ However, see: Van Santen, *Op bezoek*, pp. 39-51.

¹⁴ The debate around the presumed incommensurability of Mughal and European diplomatic cultures goes back to Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*. For the principal counter-case, see: Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*.

¹⁵ This is true for the Atlantic as much as for Asia. See: Mark Meuwese, *Brothers in arms, partners in trade: Dutch-indigenous alliances in the Atlantic world, 1595-1674* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2012); Christina Brauner, 'Connecting things: trading companies and diplomatic gift-giving on the Gold and Slave Coasts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 20 (2016), pp. 408-28.

¹⁶ For 'non-state' and 'sub-state' actors: Osborne and Rubiés, 'Introduction', pp. 318, 320. For 'interpolity': Lauren Benton and Adam Clulow, 'Legal encounters and the origins of global law', in Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry E. Wieser-Hanks, eds., *The Cambridge world history, volume 6: the construction of a global world, 1400-1800 CE, part 2* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 80-100.

¹⁷ Early exponents of the "New Diplomatic History" are Daniela Frigo, ed., Adrian Belton, trans., *Politics and diplomacy in early modern Italy: the structure of diplomatic practice, 1450-1800* (Cambridge, 2000); Christian Windler, *Diplomatie comme experience de l'autre: consuls français au Maghreb (1700-1840)* (Geneva, 2002).

¹⁸ Jan Hennings and Tracey A. Sowerby, 'Introduction: practices of diplomacy', in: Sowerby and Hennings, eds., *Practices of Diplomacy*, pp. 1-21, at p. 5.

¹⁹ Daniel Goffman, 'Negotiating with the Renaissance state: the Ottoman empire and the new diplomacy', in Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman, eds., *The early modern Ottomans: remapping the empire* (Cambridge,

2007), pp. 61-74, at p. 66; Michael Talbot, *British-Ottoman relations, 1661-1807: commerce and diplomatic practice in eighteenth-century Istanbul* (Woodbridge, 2017).

²⁰ This understanding accords with Michael Fisher's definition of diplomacy as 'efforts at negotiating sustained political relations among polities', but places greater emphasis on seeing the Companies as political entities operating within as much as outside the Mughal imperial framework. Fisher, 'Diplomacy in India', p. 250.

²¹ Jurrien van Goor, *Prelude to colonialism: the Dutch in Asia* (Hilversum, 2004), pp. 7-25; Stern, *The company-state*.

²² Arthur Weststeijn, "'Love alone is not enough": treaties in seventeenth-century Dutch colonial expansion', in Saliha Belmessous, ed., *Empire by treaty: negotiating European expansion, 1600-1900* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 19-44.

²³ Robert Travers, 'A British empire by treaty in eighteenth-century India', in Belmessous, *Empire by Treaty*, pp. 132-60.

²⁴ This process is best-documented for the VOC, whose diplomatic presence outside the Indian Subcontinent was most extensive: Rudi Matthee, 'Negotiating across cultures: the Dutch Van Leene mission to the Iranian court of Šāh Sulaymān, 1689-1692', *Eurasian Studies*, 3 (2004), pp. 35-63; John E. Wills Jr., ed., *China and maritime Europe, 1500-1800: trade, settlement, diplomacy, and missions* (Cambridge, 2011); Adam Clulow, *The company and the shogun: the Dutch encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York, NY, 2014).

²⁵ Stern, *The company-state*, 13.

²⁶ William A. Pettigrew, 'Corporate constitutionalism and the dialogue between the global and the local in seventeenth-century English history', *Itinerario*, 39 (2015), pp. 487-501, at p. 490.

²⁷ Adam Clulow, 'Gifts for the shogun: the Dutch East India Company, global networks and Tokugawa Japan', in Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen, and Giorgio Riello, eds., *Global Gifts: the material culture of diplomacy in early modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 198-216, at p. 205.

²⁸ Matthee, 'Negotiating across cultures', p. 37.

²⁹ Fisher, 'Diplomacy in India', p. 254; Tanja Bühler, 'Cooperation and cultural adaptation: British diplomats at the court of the nizām of Hyderabad, c. 1779-1815', in: Tanja Bühler, Flavio Eichmann, Stig Förster, and Benedikt Stuchtey, eds., *Cooperation and empire: local realities and global processes* (New York, NY, and Oxford, 2017), pp. 90-114, at p. 106.

³⁰ On 'corporate sovereignty': Stern, *The company-state*. On the legal foundations of VOC diplomacy: J.A. Somers, *De VOC als volkenrechtelijke actor* (Deventer, 2001); Martine Julia van Ittersum, *Profit and principle:*

Hugo Grotius, natural rights theories and the rise of Dutch power in the East Indies, 1595-1615 (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2006).

³¹ Nor did VOC representatives in the Mughal Empire carry letters from the Prince of Orange, unlike in other parts of Asia. See: Somers, *De VOC*, p. 53.

³² J.E. Heeres and F.W. Stapel, eds., *Corpus diplomaticum neerlandico-indicum: verzameling van politieke contracten en verdere verdragen door de Nederlanders in het Oosten gesloten, van privilegiebrieven, aan hen verleend, enz.* (6 vols. The Hague, 1907-1955), I, p. 281.

³³ Foster, *EFI 1661-1664*, p. 315; Translated *farman* by Aurangzeb, 23 Jumada al-Awwal in 31st year of reign [5 Mar. 1690], London, British Library (BL), IOR/E/3/48, fo. 156.

³⁴ Regarding the Mughals, it has been argued that '[t]he entire notion of a treaty itself was foreign to them': M. Athar Ali, *Mughal India, studies in polity, ideas, society, and culture* (Oxford, 2006), p. 313.

³⁵ Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the economy of Bengal 1630-1720* (Princeton, NJ, 1985), pp. 43-52.

³⁶ For Mughal edicts in contemporary Dutch translation: Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, passim. For translated *farmans* granted to the EIC: Foster, *EFI 1655-1660*, pp. 411-16.

³⁷ For Roe's instructions: Foster 1899, *Embassy II*, pp. 547-53. While the moral and legal status of treaties with non-Christians remained contested in seventeenth-century Europe, the VOC and EIC rejected such objections: Richard Tuck, 'Alliances with infidels in the European imperial expansion', in: Sankar Muthu, ed., *Empire and modern political thought* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 61-83.

³⁸ Roe first voiced these concerns within weeks of arriving at Jahangir's court: Foster 1899, *Embassy I*, pp. 119-20.

³⁹ The classic statement is: Abraham de Wicquefort, *l'Ambassadeur et ses fonctions* (Cologne, 1690), pp. 3-5. Compare: Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance diplomacy* (Boston, 1955).

⁴⁰ Foster 1899, *Embassy I*, p. 358; Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes of honour: khil'at in pre-colonial and colonial India* (New Delhi, 2003).

⁴¹ Foster 1899, *Embassy I*, p. 73; II, p. 508; Foster 1926, *Embassy*, pp. 139-40.

⁴² On the tensions inherent in Roe's dual charge: Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe*, pp. 147-8; Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, pp. 155-6; Rupali Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the edge: split interests in the Roe embassy to the Mughal court', *Journal of British Studies*, 53 (2014), pp. 5-28.

⁴³ Das, *The Norris embassy*, pp. 24-28, 40-52; Stern, *The company-state*, pp. 156-68.

⁴⁴ William III to Aurangzeb, Kensington, 1 Jan. 1698/9, BL, Add. MS 31302, fos. 3r-v. Compare: Foster 1899, *Embassy II*, pp. 553-4, 557-60. Rather than seeking to conclude mutual articles, William III requested Aurangzeb to grant English merchants ‘yo.r Favour & Protection’.

⁴⁵ Foster 1926, *Embassy*, pp. 139-40.

⁴⁶ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS. Rawl. C. 912, fo. 33.

⁴⁷ Foster 1899, *Embassy I*, p. 244; Das, *The Norris embassy*, p. 313.

⁴⁸ Das, *The Norris embassy*, pp. 266-74, 307-8.

⁴⁹ Bodleian Library, MSS. Rawl. C. 913, fo. 97.

⁵⁰ Das, *The Norris embassy*, pp. 271-4.

⁵¹ ‘The answer of the King of England the wearer of Hats, concerning what was demanded of the Ambassador by His Exalted Highness the Paymaster General of the Empire Rūhūllah Khan’, BL, MSS Eur. D. 1075.

⁵² Their ideological claims to universal rule notwithstanding, Mughal emperors acknowledged foreign sovereigns and engaged in diplomatic exchange particularly with the Safavids, Uzbeks, and Ottomans: Riazul Islam, *Indo-Persian relations: a study of the political and diplomatic relations between the Mughul empire and Iran* (Tehran, 1970); N.R. Farooqi, ‘Diplomacy and diplomatic procedure under the Mughals’, *Medieval History Journal*, 7 (2004), pp. 59-86; Athar Ali, *Mughal India*, pp. 311-12.

⁵³ An earlier expression is Akbar’s reference to a universal ‘family...of princes’ in his 1582 letter to Philip II: Ebba Koch, ‘How the Mughal pādshāhs referenced Iran in their visual construction of universal rule’, in Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, eds., *Universal empire: a comparative approach to imperial culture and representation in Eurasian history* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 194-209, at 196.

⁵⁴ Prior to Oldenburgh’s commission, the VOC relied for political representation at Jahangir’s court on its agents in Agra, first Wouter Heuten and later Hendrick Arentsz Vapoer. The audiences of Pieter Gillis van Ravesteyn (1618) and Pieter van den Broecke (1627) at the court of Prince Khurram (the later emperor Shah Jahan), in Ahmadabad and outside Surat respectively, are more accurately seen as examples of provincial diplomacy. See: H. Terpstra, *De opkomst der Westerkwartieren van de Oost-Indische Compagnie (Suratte, Arabië, Perzië)* (The Hague, 1918), pp. 68-9; W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Pieter van den Broecke in Azië* (2 vols. The Hague, 1962-1963), II, pp. 336-7.

⁵⁵ Instruction to Marcus Oldenburgh by Philip Lucasz, Swally, 30 Apr. 1633, The Hague, Nationaal Archief (hereafter: NL-HaNA), 1.11.01.01 (Aanwinsten), inv. no. 119, fos. 415-21.

⁵⁶ Vogel, *Journal*, pp. 41, 72, 79.

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- ⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 102, 348, 400.
- ⁵⁸ For Bacherus, see: NL-HaNA, 1.04.02 (VOC), inv. nos. 1475 and 1510.
- ⁵⁹ Wilson, ed., *Early annals*, II.2: 'the Surman embassy'.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. xx-iv.
- ⁶¹ William Foster, ed., *Early travels in India, 1583-1619* (Oxford, 1921), pp. 60-121.
- ⁶² Barbour, 'Power and distant display'; Foster, *EFI 1618-1621*, pp. xv-ix, xxxiii, 251.
- ⁶³ Foster, *EFI 1624-1629*, pp. viii, xvii; Foster, *EFI 1624-1629*, p. 32; Foster, *EFI 1624-1629*, pp. 171-4.
- ⁶⁴ Foster, *EFI 1624-1629*, pp. 204-6; Foster, *EFI 1634-1636*, p. xxvi and *passim*; Foster, *EFI 1637-1641*, p. xx; Foster, *EFI 1642-1645*, p. x; Foster, *EFI 1646-1650*, pp. xxii-iii; Foster, *EFI 1655-1660*, pp. 317-18. For Weldon and Navarro, see: BL, Western Manuscripts, Sloane Mss 1910, fos. 45-58.
- ⁶⁵ Athar Ali, *Mughal India*, 308-9; Farhat Hasan, *State and locality in Mughal India: power relations in western India, c. 1572-1730* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 42.
- ⁶⁶ Foster, *EFI 1646-1650*, p. 303; Translated *farman* by Aurangzeb, 23 Jumada al-Awwal in 31st year of reign [5 Mar. 1690], BL, IOR/E/47, fo. 156.
- ⁶⁷ 'A List of the Priviledges and Immunitys desired for the Factorys belonging to the New English Society and Company Trading to the East Indies att Metchlapatam and other places its dependences', n.d. [1701], BL, IOR/E/61, no. 7552.
- ⁶⁸ Consequently, some Company agents looked towards tributary *rajās*' dealings with the Mughal court for guidance: Edward Littleton et al. to William Norris, Hugli, 22 Apr. 1701, BL, IOR/E/61, no. 7549; Wilson, *Early Annals II*, p. 251.
- ⁶⁹ Manuscript journals are available for the 1648, 1653, 1656, and 1677 missions: NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. nos. 1168, 1201, 1210, and 1323. See also: Hans Walther van Santen, *VOC-dienaar in India: Geleynssen de Jongh in het land van de Groot-Mogol* (Franeker, 2001); Bernet Kempers, *Journaal*, pp. 1-11; Van Santen, *Op Bezoek*, pp. 39-51; W. Ph. Coolhaas et al., eds., *Generale missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (13 vols. The Hague, 1960-2007), I, pp. 236, 381, 724; II, pp. 144, 341, 415, 547-8.
- ⁷⁰ Van Santen, *Op bezoek*, pp. 49-51.
- ⁷¹ Van Santen, *VOC-dienaar*, pp. 164-8; Van Santen, *Op bezoek*, pp. 41-5.
- ⁷² Roe called the arrangement an 'inconvenience' born of 'necessitie': Foster 1899, *Embassy I*, p. 181.
- ⁷³ Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven II*, pp. 43-5.

⁷⁴ About these noblemen: Nawwāb Samsām-Ud-Daula Shāh Nawāz Khān and ‘Abdull Hayy, H. Beveridge, trans., *The maāthir-ul-umarā: neing biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu officers of the Timurid sovereigns of India from 1500 to about 1780 A.D.*, ed. Bains Prashad (2 vols. Calcutta, 1911-52), I, pp. 295-9, 662-3, 767-70; II, pp. 281-2.

⁷⁵ Shāh Nawāz Khān, *Maāthir-ul-Umarā* I, pp. 614-5.

⁷⁶ Translated letter from Huri Khanam to Gerardo Pelgrom, received in Surat on 17 Oct. 1652, NL-HaNA, VOC 1201, fo. 771r; Diary Joan Berckhout and Joan Tack, Agra and Delhi, 26 Dec. 1652 to 30 Mar. 1653, NL-HaNA, VOC 1201, fos. 759-70.

⁷⁷ Vogel, *Journaal*, pp. 65, 136-8; Taymiya R. Zaman, ‘Visions of Juliana: a Portuguese woman at the court of the Mughals’, *Journal of World History*, 23 (2012), pp. 761-91.

⁷⁸ Vogel, *Journaal*, pp. 133-5, 197-8; Wilson, *Early Annals* II.2, pp. xx-iv; Bernet-Kempers, *Journaal*, pp. 91, 117-18, 122, 158, 176.

⁷⁹ Petition John Child to Aurangzeb, Bombay, n.d. [Feb. 1689], BL, IOR E/3/47, fo. 224.

⁸⁰ Foster, *Early Travels*, p. 80; Foster, *EFI 1651-1654*, pp. 49-50; Extract from the diary of Johannes Bacherus at the Mughal court in Delhi, 11 Sept. 1677, NL-HaNA, VOC 1323, fo. 630v.

⁸¹ Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, pp. 49-50.

⁸² Foster, *EFI 1668-1669*, p. 181.

⁸³ Foster, *EFI 1655-1660*, p. 303. The caste label *bania* refers to members of Indian mercantile professions.

⁸⁴ Foster, *EFI 1665-1667*, pp. 273-4.

⁸⁵ Consultation Fort St. George, 27 Feb. 1687: *Records of Fort St. George: Diary and Consultation Book of 1687* (Madras, 1916), p. 38.

⁸⁶ Consultation Fort St. George, 5 Dec. 1687: *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁸⁷ Copy secret resolutions regarding negotiations with the Mughal court, Surat, 3 June 1700, NL-HaNA, VOC 11316.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Vogel, *Journaal*, p. 343.

⁹⁰ Farhat Hasan, ‘Conflict and cooperation in Anglo-Mughal trade relations during the reign of Aurangzeb’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 34 (1991), pp. 351-360; Guido van Meersbergen, ‘Diplomacy in a provincial setting: the East India Companies in seventeenth-century Bengal and Orissa’, in

Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert, eds., *The Dutch and English East India Companies: diplomacy, trade and violence in early modern Asia* (Amsterdam, 2018), pp. 55-78.

⁹¹ My use of the notion ‘trans-imperial’ draws on E. Nathalie Rothman, *Brokering empire: trans-imperial subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2012).

⁹² An interesting parallel is found in the context of Spanish expansion in North Africa: José Miguel Escribano Paez, ‘Negotiating with the “infidel”’: imperial expansion and cross-confessional diplomacy in the early modern Maghreb (1492-1516)’, *Itinerario*, 40 (2016), pp. 189-214.

⁹³ Foster, *EFI 1661-1664*, p. 186.

⁹⁴ Van Meersbergen, ‘Kijken en bekeken worden’, p. 205.

⁹⁵ Copy secret resolutions, Surat, 3 June 1700, NL-HaNA, VOC 11316.

⁹⁶ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum I*, pp. 521-8.

⁹⁷ ‘A Diary of all occurrences of our Expedition to Daman in order to the making a peace between the English Nation and the Mogull’, 29 May-23 Sept. 1689, BL, Sloane MSS 1910, fos. 47r-57v.

⁹⁸ William Bruton, *Newes from the East-Indies: or, a voyage to Bengalla, one of the greatest kingdomes under the high and mighty prince pedesha Shasalleem, usually called the Great Mogull* (London, 1638); J.A. van der Chijs et al., eds., *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlands-India* (31 vols. The Hague and Batavia, 1887-1931), 1637, p. 99.

⁹⁹ Coolhaas, *Generale missiven II*, pp. 411-12; Foster, *EFI 1651-1654*, pp. xxvi-vii.

¹⁰⁰ Foster, *EFI 1661-1664*, pp. 394-5; NL-HaNA, VOC 1288, fos. 74-79; Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven III*, p. 944.

¹⁰¹ Van der Chijs, *Dagh-register Batavia 1665*, pp. 42-5.

¹⁰² Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: the sovereign city in Mughal India, 1639-1739* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 96-7.

¹⁰³ Henry Yule and R. Barlow, eds., *The diary of William Hedges, esq. (afterwards Sir William Hedges), during his agency in Bengal; as well as on his voyage out and return overland (1681-1687)* (3 vols. London, 1887-9), I, pp. 42-58.

¹⁰⁴ Foster, *EFI 1661-1664*, p. 205.

¹⁰⁵ Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven II*, p. 799. Compare: Consultation Fort St. George, 24 Oct. 1674: *Records of Fort St. George: Diary and Consultation Book 1672-1678* (Madras, 1910), p. 33.

¹⁰⁶ Travers, ‘A British empire by treaty’.

¹⁰⁷ See for a detailed treatment: Markus Vink, *Encounters on the opposite coast: The Dutch East India Company and the Nayaka state of Madurai in the seventeenth century* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2016).

¹⁰⁸ Leonard Blussé, 'Peeking into the empires: Dutch embassies to the courts of China and Japan', *Itinerario*, 37 (2013), pp. 13-29, at p. 18; Carl Fredrik Feddersen, *Principled pragmatism: VOC interaction with Makassar 1637-68, and the nature of company diplomacy* (Agder, 2017).