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Response Paper 2

Sir Thomas Roe was an English traveller who documented his voyages to the Indian subcontinent in the early seventeenth century. In a letter he wrote back to England regarding his trip to Mughal ruler Jahangir's headquarters, the true facts about the court are clouded by Roe's ulterior motive for visiting the court.

Roe's primary motive for visiting Jahangir's court was to document unfavorable conditions in the Mughal empire so that he could be sent back to England. This is made evident as early as the first paragraph, where Roe wrote:

I had need to write an Apologie for it, there being nothing of worth, nothing memorable, and yet not my fault; but I had rather trust your Noblenesse, then trouble you with excuses; and so descend to a more vniuersall description of the state and customes of the Land. (Roe, 110)

Furthermore, in the third-last paragraph, he wrote:

I shall be glad to doe your Lordship seruice in England; for this is the dullest, basest place that euer I saw, and maketh me weary of speaking of it. Therefore if you be also weary of reading, I am glad...

I hope to returne to doe you better seruices. In the meane time to liue a miserable life, though with abundance and state enough; yet I want the conuersation and presence of those friends I loue and honour. (Roe, 113-114)

Roe writes that he hopes Lord Carew feels sympathy for him after sending him to the subcontinent, calling it the "dullest" place that he has ever been to and saying that it has nothing noteworthy or significant. He also claims that he will live a miserable life until he has the comfort of having his family and friends by his side (which of course is only possible in England), and instead of making excuses, he wrote about what he saw so that the King can assess the situation and make a decision for himself.

The content in the rest of his letter to Lord Carew supports this argument. Roe chose to emphasize the behaviors of Jahangir, making him out to be ruthless, painting the picture that it was unfortunate for anyone that had to live under Mughal rule. For one, Roe emphasized that Jahangir was a tyrant, who did whatever he wanted and took ownership of his citizen's property when they died. In the second and third paragraphs, he wrote:

They haue no written Law. The King by his owne word ruleth, and his Gouvernours of Prouinces by that authoritie.

He is euery mans heire when he dyeth, which maketh him rich, and the Countrey so euill builded. (Roe, 110)

Additionally, on the penultimate page of the letter, Roe further emphasized this idea when he described what Jahangir did to the inhabitants of surrounding regions:

The King hath taken away water and reliefe from Ormus, and banished the Portugals his Territories. He hath lately ouer-runne the poore Georgians with fire and sword... He lately strucke off his sonnes head with his owne hand. (Roe, 113)

In all fairness, however, Roe did write about some positive experiences with Jahangir. He recounted the first day he arrived at the court, where he appeared to be slightly sick; the King brought him doctors to treat him. Additionally, he said that he was quite humble and had no trouble with making public appearances (Roe, 112).

In the end, it is important that we read Roe's correspondence and journal entries carefully when trying to use them as primary sources, as we know that his writings may have been influenced by the actions he was trying to accomplish back when they were written.