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The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals

STEPHEN P. BLAKE

A number of nonspecialists have used the Mughal Empire as an example of various models of state organization,¹ but no authority on Muslim India has yet attempted to place the Mughal state in a larger context, as part of a more generalized type of political organization. Depending on which aspect of the state was examined (economic, administrative, social, religious, or military), the Empire was characterized as oriental, despotic, Persian, Indian, Turkish, Mongol, or some combination of these. In no instance were the implications of these terms fully spelled out, and no complete model of this traditional state was presented.² The lack of a blueprint did not mean, however, that scholars wrote about the Mughal Empire in a vacuum, without presuppositions; on the contrary, a set of unexamined assumptions which established the categories of analysis and limited the varieties of evidence lay beneath most explications of the Mughal state. The following reinterpretation is based on the belief that these assumptions were nonindigenous and anachronistic, were not supported by the Persian sources, and were the cause of widespread misunderstanding.

The source of these assumptions was the notion that the Mughal Empire was ancestor to the British Raj—and, to be sure, there were a number of ways in which the British system followed Mughal practice. For example, like the Mughals, the British divided governmental authority into two main branches, military and revenue; they kept the basic Mughal administrative subdivisions and centralized civil power at each level in the hands of one person; and they adopted, especially after the Mutiny of 1857, the Mughal position that the state's role should be limited to collecting taxes and maintaining law and order. As a result, most specialists on the

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¹ Compare the treatment of the Mughal Empire in the following: S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (New York: The Free Press, 1969); Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 12 vols. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935–64), 7, pt. 4; Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 3; Edward L. Farmer et al., *A Comparative History of Civilizations in Asia*, 2 vols. (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1977),

1; and Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 3 vols. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 3.

² M. Athar Ali exhibits the clearest perception of this failure in his presidential address to the 1972 meeting of the Indian History Congress, *Proceedings of the 33rd Session of the Indian History Congress* (Muzaffarpur: Indian History Congress, 1972), pp. 175–88. In the last chapter of his recent work, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1976), Michael Pearson offers a model of the political system in Gujarat. This model certainly has implications for the organization of the empire at large, but Pearson does not spell them out in any detail. He restricts his analysis for the most part to western India and Gujarat.

Mughal period (particularly those writing in the early part of the century) looked to the highly structured military, judicial, and administrative systems of late Imperial India (c. 1875–1914) for clues to the organization of the Mughal state. Thus, scholars described *mansabdārs*, the officers of the Mughal army, as members of a finely graded, hierarchical system of rank and responsibility similar to that of the British army, with detailed salary schedules, promotions, demotions, bestowal of honors, regulations regarding horses and equipment, and a great gap between officers and soldiers. *Mansabdārs* filled almost all of the posts in what was portrayed as an elaborately bureaucratic administrative system. The Empire was divided and subdivided, according to this view, into provinces, districts, and subdistricts for ease of administration. At each level, military, fiscal, and judicial officials operated within definite jurisdictional limits. Carefully drawn lines of authority, it was argued, linked ministers of central departments in the capital to junior officials in small towns, with each official answering to his immediate superior. These scholars seem to have understood Mughal government as a kind of undeveloped forerunner of the rational, highly systematized military, administrative, and legal framework of British Imperial India.³

The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire

Before moving to an analysis of Mughal government, I would like to discuss briefly a model of the premodern state called the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire. As an ideal type, this model does not reflect the working of any actual state, but presents a catalogue of elements drawn from existing situations and ordered into a functioning but theoretical system. Just as an economy can be judged “free market” without displaying all the elements of Adam Smith’s model, for example, so an

³ Examples of this approach occur most frequently in the work of an earlier generation of scholars whose writings were responsible for the standard introductions to the Mughal state. See, for example, William Irvine, *The Army of the Indian Moghuls: Its Organization and Administration* (1903; rpt. New Delhi: Eurasian Publishing House Private Ltd., 1962); Ibn Hasan, *The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire* (1936; rpt. Karachi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967); Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *The Administration of the Mughal Empire* (Karachi: Univ. of Karachi, 1966); A. L. Srivastava, *Akbar the Great*, 2 vols. (Agra, U.P.: Shiva Lal Agarwala and Company, 1962–67), 2; P. Saran, *The Provincial Government of the Moghals* (Allahabad, U.P.: Kitabistan, 1941).

The younger historians, on the other hand, having narrowed their interests and limited their topics, have not yet begun to re-examine the larger question. While none of what I stress here is unknown to them, these scholars have not, because of their more circumscribed purview, reflected on the implications of these aspects of Mughal government for the established interpretation. They have not seen the contradiction between the patrimonial aspects of the Mughal state and the conventional description of it in the standard works. See M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb*

(Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1968; paperback ed., 1970); and Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court*, 2d. ed. (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1972). Both authors have put together detailed studies that break important new ground, but neither has looked into the impact of his work on the conventional model of the Mughal state.

Two careful, imaginative Western historians of Mughal India, John F. Richards and Michael N. Pearson, are pertinent also. Pearson’s closely argued study focuses almost exclusively on western India. Richards’s painstaking examination of Mughal administration in the South Indian state of Golconda, a revealing look at an often-ignored area, discusses both the patrimonial and bureaucratic aspects of the Mughal state without touching the larger issue. See *Mughal Administration in Golconda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 75–78. Finally, a look at the new historical atlas of South Asia reveals that the older view is far from dead. The table portraying the administrative organization of the Mughal Empire is a perfect rendering of the standard interpretation. See Joseph Schwartzberg, ed., *A Historical Atlas of South Asia* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), plate VI.A.2, p. 45.

empire can be termed "patrimonial-bureaucratic" without demonstrating all of the particulars of the type. Understood in this way, the model is more a suggestion, an outline, a guide, or point of departure than it is a final explanation of a particular historical circumstance.

In discussing the political framework of this type I draw heavily on Max Weber's work on the patrimonial state. The ruler of such a state governs on the basis of a personal, traditional authority whose model is the patriarchal family. Patrimonial domination originates in the patriarch's authority over his household; it entails obedience to a person, not an office; it depends on the reciprocal loyalty between subject and master; and it is limited only by the ruler's discretion. Patrimonial states arise, according to Weber, when lords and princes extend their sway over extrahousehold subjects (patrimonial masters themselves) in areas beyond the patriarchal domain. This extension involves a change of authority: from the patrimonial, which is domestic and personal, to the purely political, which is military and judicial and which must be administered by extrahousehold officials. Expansion does not limit the ruler's ambition, however. Within the larger realm, conceived as a huge household, the ruler/master tries to exercise military and judicial power in the same absolute and unrestrained way. In the description which follows I distinguish two variants within the patrimonial type of political organization. The first, the patrimonial kingdom, is the smaller of the two, and is closer in organization and government to the ideal represented by the patriarchal family. The second, the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire, is larger and more diffuse. Rulers of such empires developed a collection of strategies and techniques that allowed personal, household-dominated rule of an attenuated sort within realms of considerable area, population, and complexity.

To govern successfully, a patrimonial ruler must have at his disposal a body of loyal, disciplined soldiers. Patrimonial armies were made up of troops whose primary allegiance was to an individual rather than to a dynasty or an office. In patrimonial kingdoms the military forces consisted, for the most part, of the household troops of the ruler. In patrimonial-bureaucratic empires, on the other hand, armies grew large and complex. The armies required to pacify and maintain order in states of such size were too large for the imperial household to manage and support. As a result, the armies of patrimonial-bureaucratic emperors split into two groups: the private household troops of the emperor, and the soldiers of major subordinates, who made up the bulk of the army—men who were bound more to their commanders than to the emperor.

Patrimonial administration followed a similar pattern. In the limited compass of the patrimonial kingdom the private domain of the ruler was virtually coterminous with the realm itself, and there was little or no difference between state and household officials. In patrimonial-bureaucratic empires, however, these groups were not the same. The extension of control beyond the household domain called forth extrapatrimonial officials who administered, for the most part, the collection of taxes and the settlement of a limited number of disputes. Such officials, neither dependents nor bureaucrats, worked in an organization intermediate between the household apparatus of the patrimonial kingdom and the highly bureaucratized system of the modern state. For example, patrimonial-bureaucratic officials filled positions that were loosely defined and imperfectly ordered—a situation very different from the articulated hierarchy of precisely circumscribed offices in a modern bureaucracy. Candidates for posts in patrimonial-bureaucratic administrations had

to demonstrate personal qualifications—loyalty, family, and position—in addition to technical qualifications such as reading and writing. Whereas modern bureaucrats are given fixed salaries in money, members of these administrations were often assigned prebends or benefices, such as rights to certain of the fees, taxes, or goods due the state. In a modern bureaucracy a job is a career, and is the primary occupation of the jobholder; in patrimonial-bureaucratic administrations, on the other hand, officeholders served at the pleasure of the ruler and often performed tasks unrelated to their appointments. Finally, while modern bureaucrats are subject to an official, impersonal authority, patrimonial-bureaucratic emperors demanded personal loyalty and allegiance of their officials. Such rulers ignored the modern distinction between private and official, or personal and professional, and tried to make household dependents of their subordinates.

In the smallest and most intimate patrimonial kingdoms, officials received compensation for their services directly from the ruler's household—they ate at his table, clothed themselves from his wardrobe, and rode horses from his stables. Beyond that, however, they had no claim on the resources of the realm. In the larger, more complex situation of the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire, on the other hand, rulers found it impossible to maintain personally all members of their expanded administrations; thus they began more and more to give officials benefices or prebends. In time this led to a situation in which the greater portion of state revenues was assigned to soldiers and officials. Since these revenues bypassed the ruler entirely, and since the assigned lands were often at considerable distances from the capital, this arrangement meant a loosening of the emperor's control over his officials. Under such conditions the strength of personal, patrimonial authority began to wane, and officials began to appropriate prebends and declare their independence.

As a result, patrimonial-bureaucratic emperors began to devise strategies that would replace, to some extent at least, the traditional sources of control. In order to maintain their hold and prevent appropriation, emperors traveled widely and frequently, renewing in countless face-to-face meetings the personal bond between master and subject on which the state was founded; they demanded of all soldiers and officials regular attendance at court and, on their departure, often required that a son or relative be left behind as hostage; they periodically rotated officials from post to post, allowing no one to keep his job for more than a few years running; they maintained a network of newswriters or intelligence gatherers outside the regular administrative structure who reported directly to them; and, finally, in an effort to check the power of subordinates, rulers of patrimonial-bureaucratic empires created provincial and district offices with overlapping responsibilities.⁴

As I turn now to an analysis of the Mughal state, it is important to remember that I have just described the political structure of an ideal type. Although one

⁴ The most complete discussion of the patrimonial state and its variants is Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1: 229–57, 263–64; 3: 966–72, 1006–69, 1086–92. Weber's remarks on the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire are scattered and fragmentary, and so not easy to integrate and interpret. His style is to construct pure types—the patrimonial state and the modern bureaucratic state—and contrast

them. No historical state, as Weber himself points out, exactly matches either type. All present and past state systems are combinations of elements from several types; the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire is a mixture of the modern bureaucratic and patrimonial states. Actual historical examples of the model differ as they approach closer to one or the other pure type.

cannot expect to find a perfect patrimonial-bureaucratic image in the governmental organization of any historical state, a number of states should approximate the model more or less closely. The Mughal Empire belongs to that number,⁵ as do several other roughly contemporaneous Asian states—the Ottoman Empire in Turkey, the Safavid Empire in Iran, the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan, and the Ming Empire in China.⁶

The *Ā'in-i Akbari* (Regulations of Akbar) of Abu al-Fazl is the major text on Mughal government; it is the manual that expounds Akbar's conception of the state and his plans for ordering and administering it. The structure developed by Akbar and described in the *Ā'in* by Abu al-Fazl endured: succeeding emperors left it pretty much alone, and it survived in its basic form down to the early eighteenth century. Most misinterpretations of the Mughal Empire stem from a misreading of the *Ā'in*. It is not that scholars relied on inaccurate translations—most of them, in fact, knew Persian, and read the texts in the original. The misreading arose instead from the preconceptions they brought to their work. To examine the *Ā'in* de novo, in Persian, and, as far as possible, without presuppositions, is the only way to uncover the indigenous categories of state organization.

The bulk of this essay concentrates on the details of reinterpretation. While I do not mean to imply that the Mughal state was unique, I also do not want to begin a search for origins. Such a search is often elusive and unproductive, especially when it is intended as an explanation. However, I do want to include a few lines on the Asian states that seem to have influenced, to some degree at least, the organization of the Mughal Empire.

The Mughal Emperors were Turks. Babar, the founder of the dynasty, spoke Chaghatai Turkish and descended from Timur, the great Central Asian ruler (r. 1370–1405). “Timurid” is probably a more accurate name for the dynasty than “Mughal” (from Mongol). As Turks, the Mughal Emperors—like the Timurid rulers before them—were influenced by both the Mongols and Persians. The Mongol state of Chinghiz Khan (r. 1206–27), much closer than the Mughal Empire to the pure patrimonial type, contributed a strong patrimonial strain. The Mongols, for example, gave Imperial officers household titles: the man in charge of one of Chinghiz's armies had the title “cook,” and some of the highest officials were given the title “fifth-son”—Chinghiz had four natural sons and, at one time, three fifth-sons. Furthermore, a decree issued by Hulegu (son of the Grand Khan Mongke) in the mid-1250s divided government into the same three categories—household, army, and empire—as did the *Ā'in*.⁷

The Persians contributed a strong bureaucratic strain not only to the Mughals, but also to the other Turkish and Mongol states in West and Central Asia. From the time of the Sasanid Empire (c. A.D. 224–651), the Persians had a routinized system of tax collection, a well-developed, bureaucratic administrative system, and a tra-

⁵ This is, as far as I know, the first serious attempt to analyze the Mughal empire in terms of the patrimonial-bureaucratic model. Both Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers*, p. 62, and Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 12–14 mention Weber's work. Neither, however, writes at any length on the application of the model to Mughal India.

⁶ I do not have the space here to present the

evidence. The details of the argument are worked out in a manuscript I am preparing on the history of Shahjahanabad, the capital of the Mughal Empire from 1648–1858.

⁷ Rashid al-Din, *Jami al-Tavariikh*, ed. B. Karimi, 2 vols. (Tehran: n.p., 1959), 2: 688. I am indebted to Thomas Allsen for the reference and the information about the Mongols.

dition of strong centralized rule under an absolute, semidivine emperor. Akbar's contribution to the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire in India was to develop, refine, and systematize the elements of state organization he had inherited from India and West and Central Asia. Both the Muslim dynasties which preceded the Mughals (collectively called the Delhi Sultanate, c. 1206–1526) and the earlier Hindu states such as the Mauryan Empire (c. 322–185 B.C.) exhibited aspects of patrimonial-bureaucratic organization. Akbar synthesized these elements into the coherent, rational system of government that we see described in the *Ā'in-i Akbari*, and gave the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire in India its most systematic, fully developed, and clearly articulated form.

The Structure of the Mughal Empire

In his preface to the *Ā'in-i Akbari*, Abu al-Fazl states that the art of governing comprises three topics: "I shall explain the regulations [*ā'in*] of the household [*manzil*], the army [*sipāh*], and the empire [*mulk*] since these three constitute the work of a ruler."⁸ The divisions of the text reflect this view of state organization: Book One discusses the Imperial household, Book Two the army, Book Three the empire at large, Book Four Hindu religious, social, and intellectual activity, and Book Five the sayings of Akbar.

Household

The dominating presence in Book One and, indeed, in the text as a whole (two of the five books center on him) is Akbar, the emperor. A major theme in the first book, one that is treated from a variety of perspectives, is the relationship between the emperor and his subjects. Abu al-Fazl defines a ruler as a man touched by God, a person ennobled by divine inspiration: "Royalty [*pādshāhī*] is a light from God. . . . Without a mediator it appears as a holy form to the holders of power and at the sight of it everyone bends the forehead of praise to the ground of submission."⁹ On receipt of this illumination a ruler acquires the qualities and virtues needed to govern successfully. These include trust in God, prayer and devotion, a large heart, and, first and most important, a paternal love for the people—the ideal ruler governs as a father.¹⁰ Such a ruler—and Abu al-Fazl uses Akbar as the exemplar—is presented as an *insān-i kāmīl* (perfect man), a Sufi phrase which describes a person who enjoys a special and intimate relationship with God.¹¹ In his massive biography of Akbar, *The Akbar Namah*, Abu al-Fazl includes a number of miraculous stories intended to

⁸ Abu al-Fazl, *The A'in-i Akbari*, ed. H. Blochmann, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1872–77), 1: 7; Abu al-Fazl, *The A'in-i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann and H. S. Jarrett, corrected and annotated by Jadunath Sarkar, 2d ed., 3 vols. (1927–1949; rpt. New Delhi: New Imperial Book Depot, 1965), 1: 9. I follow the system of transliteration in F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*. In all footnotes to the *Ā'in*, I include references to both the Persian and English editions of the text, so that interested readers may discover Blochmann's errors by comparing his translation with the original work. All translations in this paper are, of course, my own.

⁹ *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 2; *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 3. For a similar statement see *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 158 and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 172.

¹⁰ *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 2; *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 3.

¹¹ For a discussion of the term see *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d. ed., s.v. "al-insan al-kamil." Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 3: 75–80; and Srivastava, *Akbar*, 2: 309 both argue that Abu al-Fazl presented Akbar in such a light throughout his writings. *A'in* 77 provides perhaps the best example of Abu al-Fazl's approach. See *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 158–60; and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 170–76.

illustrate the emperor's close relationship with God, and to buttress the claim that Akbar was a perfect man.

This view of Akbar as a divinely inspired patriarch, an extremely wise, just, competent, and creative father of his people, is one supported by the most controversial *ā'in* in Book One, A'in 77. "The Regulation on Guidance" (*ā'in-i rāh-namūnī*), mistranslated "His Majesty as the Spiritual Guide of the People,"¹² has been interpreted by the translator Heinrich Blochmann and others as Akbar's attempt to start a new religion called the *din-i ilāhī*, or divine faith. As several scholars have pointed out, however, this interpretation is surely false. What Akbar almost certainly intended, as befits a perfect man, was to start a small Sufi sect with himself as *pīr*, or leader.¹³ A crucial phrase in A'in 77, "regulations for the disciples" (*ā'in-i irādat guzīnān*), was misrendered "Ordinances of the Divine Faith" by Blochmann and was, without justification, set off from the body of the text.¹⁴ Neither the regulations nor the ceremony of initiation described in A'in 77 would seem unusual to any member of a Sufi order.

The elaborate rules governing admission to court and establishing behavior before the throne (A'ins 73–75) also support this reading of the relationship between emperor and subject. Extreme deference is the only attitude possible in the presence of an emperor who is also a perfect man. That rulers are touched by God, singled out, and called to the throne is a major theme in Abu al-Fazl's discussion of the Imperial household. Once in power a ruler is inspired by God to govern his state with the same strength, wisdom, and compassion that a father employs in looking after his household.

A second theme—the mixing of household and state—surfaces in Abu al-Fazl's discussion of this first branch of government. In the Imperial household, departments dealing with purely domestic matters coexist side-by-side with departments of wider reach and greater significance. In Book One there are regulations for the harim, the wardrobe, the kitchen, and the perfumery; there are also directives on the care and keeping of the emperor's elephants, horses, cows, camels, and mules. Several *ā'in* touch on matters of construction—on styles, materials, and workmen. In addition to departments of a mostly personal and familial kind, there are departments whose responsibility extends beyond the care and comfort of the emperor's immediate family. Thus Book One contains regulations on the Imperial mint, the state arsenal, the department of the treasury, the use of royal seals, the symbolic prerogatives of royalty, and the organization of the Imperial camp.

A look at the finances of the Imperial household indicates something of the scale of this branch of government. In 1594 the income of Akbar's household (i.e., the monies from the emperor's private lands) was about 25 percent of total state revenues, and salaries for clerks, servants, and laborers—by no means the entire dependent population of the household—amounted to nearly 9 percent of Imperial

¹² A'in, ed. Blochmann, I: 158; A'in, trans. Blochmann, I: 170.

¹³ This issue has generated a good deal of controversy. For the arguments in favor of a new religion, see A'in, trans. Blochmann, I: 176–223. For the opposing and, it seems to me, more plausible view, see Srivastava, *Akbar*, I: 303–13, 2: 311–16; and S. M. Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India*, ed.

Ainslie T. Embree (New York and London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 156–65. For a comprehensive and reliable discussion of the entire issue, see S. A. A. Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975), pp. 374–417.

¹⁴ A'in, ed. Blochmann, I: 160; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, I: 175.

revenues.¹⁵ All of this suggests close similarities between the Mughal and patrimonial-bureaucratic empires. The centrality and importance of the Imperial household in the organization of Akbar's empire parallels the position of the ruler's establishment in the ideal type. Abu al-Fazl's portrayal of Akbar as a divinely aided father to his people recalls the traditional, family rooted authority of the patrimonial-bureaucratic emperor. And, finally, the inclusion of state offices and officials in the Imperial household, the combination there of personal and official, brings to mind the thwarted ambition of patrimonial-bureaucratic emperors to absorb state into household and to rule the realm as one great extended family.

Army

In Book Two of the *Ā'in-i Akbari* Abu al-Fazl discusses the army, and divides this second branch of Mughal government into four classes: *mansabdārs* and their men, *aḥadis* (from *aḥad*, "one"), other soldiers, and infantry. Although *mansabdārs* are clearly preferred, and although scholars have written a good deal about them, it is well to remember that this group did not make up the whole of the Mughal army. Men with mounted followers became *mansabdārs* only after an interview with Akbar. In the meeting between emperor and applicant, Akbar had an opportunity to size up the candidate and to inquire into his background and experience. With his divinely aided insight and judgment, Akbar was, according to Abu al-Fazl, consistently able to choose superior men: "According to his knowledge of the temper of the times . . . he evaluated many [candidates] immediately and gave them high rank at once."¹⁶ Akbar established sixty-six ranks, corresponding to the value of the letters in the word Allah. It is clear, however, that this division of the interval between ten and ten thousand, the high and low ranks, was mostly theoretical. Blochmann found, for example, that only thirty-three of the sixty-six possible ranks were ever actually filled during Akbar's reign.¹⁷

Aḥadis, the second class of the Mughal army, were single men who had no mounted military following, and so could not be given *mansabdāri* rank. Since they were often men of talent and birth, however, and skilled in fighting and administration, the emperor decided it was better to keep them nearby as a body of personal servants than to assign them to *mansabdāri* contingents. *Aḥadis*, like *mansabdārs*, had to maintain a certain number of horses in proper condition.¹⁸

The third class of the Mughal army included all those horsemen who were neither *aḥadis* nor members of a *mansabdāri* contingent. Since these men were usually too poor to own horses, the Mughals gave them lands or cash to buy mounts and to support themselves. In return, these cavalrymen served as extra troops for *mansabdārs* on campaign and as auxiliaries for provincial authorities.¹⁹

¹⁵ In *The Agrarian System of Mughal India: 1556–1739* (Bombay, India: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p. 272, Irfan Habib estimates Akbar's private lands to have yielded about 25 percent of total land revenues. For the salaries of servants and others, see *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 9; and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 12. The figure for total state revenues can be found in *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 386; and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 2: 129.

¹⁶ *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 179; and *A'in*,

trans. Blochmann, 1: 248. For another example of Akbar's penchant for making quick decisions on *mansabdāri* candidates see *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 191; and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 265.

¹⁷ *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 248–50.

¹⁸ *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 187; and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 259–60.

¹⁹ *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 175, 187–88; and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 241, 260–61.

The dominance of the cavalry in Mughal military thought and organization is reflected in the rag-tag character of the fourth class of the Mughal army, the footsoldiers. Of the nine groups listed under A'in 6, only one, matchlock bearers, participated in actual combat. Porters, runners, guards, gladiators, wrestlers, slaves, bearers, and laborers worked as miscellaneous support personnel.²⁰

The remainder of Book Two deals with other aspects of army organization: A'ins 7 and 8 establish procedures for the branding of horses, while A'in 9 outlines the regulations for mounting guard. For purposes of protecting the person and household of the ruler, the four divisions of the army were required to perform three kinds of guard duty. To staff the most visible and demanding shift, that which performed court duties and stood daily before the emperor, the army was divided into seven parts, one for each day of the week. For the two longer shifts, the Mughal military forces were broken down into two separate and distinct divisions of twelve parts each. One shift, one-twelfth of the army, headquartered in the Imperial establishment for an entire month and the other shift, a different one-twelfth, lived with the emperor for a full year.²¹

Another group of regulations appears at first glance to have little in common with the subject matter of Book Two: A'ins 16–19 treat Akbar's charitable contributions; A'in 22 discusses feasts; A'in 23, fancy bazars; A'in 24, marriage; and A'in 25, education. If these regulations are read carefully and in context, however, a common theme links them all: namely, the emperor's efforts to influence, order, and shape the lives of his subordinates. Thus, the *ā'ins* on Akbar's gifts to the needy and deserving seem intended to give *mansabdārs* examples of meritorious activity.²² The regulations on feasts and fancy bazars are also exemplary, since feasts provide opportunities to dispense charity, and bazars are occasions for hearing the grievances of local shopkeepers and inspecting the productions of household workshops.²³ Akbar's intention to regulate the private lives of his nobles is even more evident in the *ā'ins* covering marriage and education. In A'in 24 Akbar established rules for the size of dowries, the age of consent, and the permitted degrees of consanguinity; he also appointed two officials to see that the rules were followed. Finally, in A'in 25 Akbar suggested reforms in the traditional system of education: he wanted the method of instruction simplified and its pace increased, and urged that the curriculum be expanded to include subjects of practical interest, like arithmetic, arithmetical notation, agriculture, household management, rules of government, and physiognomy, in addition to the traditional religious topics.²⁴

A'ins 27 and 28 cover hunting, and A'in 29, games. According to Abu al-Fazl, Akbar's motive in pursuing these activities was not primarily relaxation or diversion: hunting expeditions gave the emperor a chance to examine the condition of the people and the army, and games like chess and field hockey sharpened the reflexes, judgment, and concentration of the participants.²⁵

It is time now to summarize Abu al-Fazl's discussion of the Mughal army.

²⁰ A'in, ed. Blochmann, I: 188–90; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, I: 261–64.

²¹ A'in, ed. Blochmann, I: 192; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, I: 267–68.

²² A'in, ed. Blochmann, I: 197–99; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, I: 276–80.

²³ A'in, ed. Blochmann, I: 200–201; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, I: 286–87.

²⁴ A'in, ed. Blochmann, I: 201–2; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, I: 287–89.

²⁵ A'in, ed. Blochmann, I: 204–22; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, I: 292–320.

Mansabdārs, the most important of the four military divisions, received ranks and assignments only after an interview with the emperor. Acceptance into the army required no special qualifications and did not depend on heredity. Although Abu al-Fazl's table of sixty-six ranks suggests a carefully worked out system of organization, the fact that only thirty-three of these were ever used agrees with the individual and ad hoc character of other military arrangements—recruitment, promotion, and assignment, for example. All *mansabdārs* reported directly to the ruler and not to other men of greater rank; no chain of command separated emperor and officer. *Mansabdārs* had to spend a good deal of time in the presence of the emperor. They were called to court on change of assignment and for promotion, and they had to stand three separate guard duties in the Imperial household. The emperor apparently took advantage of these periods of proximity to meddle in their private lives: he regulated their marriages, prescribed the education of their sons, and organized the activities of their leisure. The personnel of the Mughal army, like soldiers in patrimonial-bureaucratic empires, could not be contained within the Imperial household. As a result, the Mughal army functioned in two parts. One part was headquartered in the Imperial household. It included the *ahadis*, Imperial foot-soldiers, and *mansabdārs* who had been assigned duty at court and their contingents. The other part, on campaign or stationed in posts around the realm, comprised the *mansabdārs* outside court, their cavalry, and the extra horsemen and infantry assigned them.

All of this suggests an empire much closer to the patrimonial-bureaucratic than to the British Indian. It is inappropriate, it seems to me, to characterize Abu al-Fazl's discussion of *mansabdārs* in Book Two as the delineation of a highly bureaucratic administrative system. To describe it this way, as many scholars have done,²⁶ is to employ categories anachronistic and foreign to the Mughal experience. And, as I have tried to show in the discussion above, Book Two of the *Ā'in-i Akbari* cannot bear the burden of such an interpretation. Book Two *does* seem to support the interpretation of the Mughal state as a patrimonial-bureaucratic empire. In Abu al-Fazl's discussion, the Mughal army is the adjunct of a household-dominated patrimonial-bureaucratic empire rather than the fighting arm of a highly structured, bureaucratically administered state.

Empire

The designation of the empire as the third aspect of governance indicates a progressive widening in the range of the ruler's responsibility. A'in 1 of Book Three lays out the duties of the *sipāh sālār* (army commander), the man in general charge of provincial affairs. Known later as the *nā'im* or *ṣūbahdār*, this *mansabdār* controlled the largest body of troops in the area, and was primarily responsible for keeping the peace.²⁷ A'in 2 discusses the major military subordinate of the *sipāh sālār*, the *faujdār*. This officer commanded a large body of cavalry, and was supposed to maintain order in several subdivisions (*parganahs*) of the province. He was charged not only with subduing recalcitrant cultivators, but also with checking the ambitions of local revenue-collectors and *jāgīrdārs* (*mansabdārs* who had been assigned lands in lieu of cash salaries).²⁸ A'in 3 outlines the duties of the Imperial sub-

²⁶ See, for example, Srivastava, *Akbar*, 2: 218; trans. Blochmann, 2: 37–41. and Qureshi, *Mughal Administration*, p. 102.

²⁷ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 280–83; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 2: 41–42.

ordinates (*qāzī* and *mīr 'adl*) responsible for the administration of justice in the provinces. The regulation does not assign these men specific posts, and they may well have had permanent positions only in large towns and cities, spending the rest of their time riding circuit and dispensing periodic justice.²⁹ A'in 4 takes up the duties of the *kotwāl*, the chief urban official in Mughal India, who was charged with patrolling the streets and maintaining order, collecting information on towns-people, regulating artisans and merchants, seeing that markets ran properly, and collecting taxes.³⁰

A'ins 5, 6, and 7 describe the responsibilities of revenue collectors. The *'amal-guzār* (collector) was the chief fiscal officer at the subprovincial level, who, with the help of his assistants, oversaw all aspects of revenue administration in the village. He dealt directly with village officials, and mediated between them and provincial and Imperial officers. He also sent to court information on prices, local assignees, artisans, cultivators, and the poor.³¹ A'in 6 sets out the duties of the accountant (*bitikchī*), writer, and assistant to the *'amal-guzār*. He gathered data on land tenures, sales, leases, yields, prices, and taxes and made it available to the collector. In the survey of village lands, and during the assessment and collection of taxes, the *bitikchī* prepared a meticulous record of all holdings, assessments, payments, and disbursements. After being checked by the collector, this record was sent directly to the Imperial court.³² The second assistant of the collector, the *khizānadār* (treasurer), is considered in A'in 7; this official deposited government revenues in a secure place in or near the collector's residence. All monies received were entered in an account book, and no disbursements were made without written order of the provincial or Imperial *dīwān* (finance officer).³³

The rest of Book Three deals with matters of land revenue. A'ins 8 through 13 consider the classification and measurement of agricultural lands. To fully understand A'ins 14 (The Nineteen Years' Rate) and 15 (The Ten Years' Settlement) it is necessary to see them in the context of Akbar's attempts to determine a fair and accurate tax on agricultural produce. Before 1579 the tax demanded of an individual cultivator was based on estimates of the size of his land, the yield on his crop, and its price in the market. In 1560, in an attempt to reduce the inaccuracy and unreliability of this method, Akbar's men began collecting data on the market prices and revenue rates of various crops in the provinces of Agra, Allahabad, Oudh, Delhi, Lahore, Multan, and Malwa. These figures, collected for the years through 1579, are displayed in the tables of A'in 14.³⁴ In 1575, still dissatisfied with the revenue system, Akbar ordered that all lands in the central Indo-Gangetic provinces revert to the *khālīṣa*, the Imperial domain. This meant that *mansabdārs* who had been assigned the state's share of the tax on a group of lands (the lands were called a *jāgīr* and the person so compensated a *jāgīrdār*) were henceforward to be paid in cash from the Imperial treasury. During the following five years the lands in the newly expanded Imperial domain were carefully measured, crop prices meticulously noted, and the tax rates accurately determined. In 1579 a new assessment was prepared: the

²⁹ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 283; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 2: 42–43.

³⁰ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 284–85; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 2: 43–45.

³¹ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 285–88; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 2: 46–50.

³² A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 288; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 2: 50–52.

³³ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 289; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 2: 52–53.

³⁴ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 303–47; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 2: 75–93.

revenue rates for the five years prior to 1575 were added to the figures collected from 1575 to 1579, and the total divided by ten. The new assessment, the average of the rates for each crop over a ten year period, is shown for the eight provinces of the central Empire in A'in 15.³⁵ After these figures were established, Akbar removed a large part of the rich lands of the central provinces from the Imperial domain and reassigned it to *mansabdārs*, but retained for his own household lands yielding some 25 percent of total revenues. The remainder of A'in 15 is given over to a general account of the fifteen provinces of the empire. Included in these descriptions are revenue figures for each revenue subdivision of each district of each province.

The seven officials who made up the administrative structure described in Book Three are not presented as links in administrative chains joining individual villages—by way of subdistrict, district, and provincial offices—to central departments in the capital. Rather, as we have seen, an official's responsibility often cut across several of these essentially fiscal divisions; individual men were not posted at each separate level. In such an arrangement Mughal officials, unlike modern bureaucrats, were expected to deal not only with those nearest them in the organization—immediate superiors and subordinates—but with others as well. In fact, the expectation seems to have been that most officials would report directly to the emperor. A passage in A'in 7 suggests the Mughal view: "All of the work, from that of the *sipāh sālār* to that of this person [*khizānadār*], is primarily in the charge of the emperor. And since the strength of one person is not sufficient, he appointed a deputy for each task and gave the necessary threads [of government] extra strength."³⁶ A look at what modern scholars call the central level of administration lends support to the idea that the emperor took direct and personal responsibility for all facets of governance. Book Three, as we have seen, discusses only the seven officials named above; it contains nothing whatsoever on the superiors of the army-commander, collector, or judge stationed at court.

It is necessary to return to the preface to find mention of these officials. There Abu al-Fazl divides the men who assist the ruler, the men of the state, into four groups. The first group, nobles of the state (*nūyīnān-i daulat*), included all high-ranking *mansabdārs*. As head of this group, the *vākīl* (prime minister) was the "... emperor's deputy in all things concerning the empire (*mulūk*) and the household (*manzil*)."³⁷ Accordingly, he was the one person in the Imperial entourage most concerned with the problems of the army-commander and his subordinates in the districts. Group two, friends of victory (*auliyā-i nuṣrat*), included all those who dealt with the collection and disbursement of state funds. The *dīwān* commanded these men, and was the person in the capital most interested in the reports of the *'amal-guzār* and his assistants. Group three, companions of the emperor (*aṣḥāb-i ṣubḥat*), included men of religion and learning. Here we find the *sadr*, to whom the provincial officials responsible for law and justice reported. Group four, servants (*arbāb-i khidmat*), included those who worked for and waited upon the emperor and his family in the Imperial household.³⁸

Book Three, like Books One and Two, describes an empire much closer to the patrimonial-bureaucratic than to the British Indian model. Although the Mughal

³⁵ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 347–86; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 2: 94–122.

³⁶ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 289; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 2: 53.

³⁷ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 4; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 1: 4–5.

³⁸ A'in, ed. Blochmann, 1: 4–5; and A'in, trans. Blochmann, 1: 6–7.

state was too large to be absorbed into the household and administered as the emperor's private domain, the Mughal policy of dividing the realm for purposes of land revenue administration into two types—household lands and assignable lands—enabled the Mughal ruler to control a large part of state revenues personally, as did the patrimonial-bureaucratic emperor. In the area of the Imperial domain, supplementary officers from the Imperial establishment were assigned to district and subdistrict levels to help the regular officials with the actual collection of taxes. Officials at court, whose responsibilities covered both household and empire, directed the activities of all administrative personnel in the lands of the Imperial domain.

The second area comprised the lands assigned *mansabdārs*, and ranged from a minimum of 75 percent of the empire during the reign of Akbar to a maximum of 95 percent during the reign of his son Jahangir. Although the extrahousehold officials of Book Three remained in the assigned lands to oversee the activities of the *mansabdārs*' agents, it is clear that this part of the empire could not be controlled as closely as the household lands of the emperor. Akbar's brief resumption of assigned lands—surely in part an attempt to extend the range of authority of the Imperial establishment—illustrates an important truth about patrimonial-bureaucratic empires: the impossibility of achieving in premodern times a degree of control over the empire at large comparable to that exercised in the household.

The organization of officials also followed a patrimonial-bureaucratic pattern. In Mughal India men of the state were not, for the most part, allowed to specialize in either the civil or military branches of government; all officials came from one class, the *mansabdāri*, and all were deemed capable of handling both kinds of responsibility. For the Mughals, there was no clear relationship between *mansabdāri* rank and position in government; high-ranking officials sometimes held provincial or subprovincial posts, and middling ranks often filled central level offices in the household. For Mughal officials, promotion depended as much on being present at court for birthday, New Year's, and 'Īd (Islamic holiday) celebrations and on the quality of gifts given the emperor, as it did on performance in office. Finally, as we saw above, Mughal officials usually reported directly to officers in the Imperial household rather than to officials of lesser responsibility outside the capital. All of this, it seems to me, argues against the prevailing interpretation of Mughal administration.

That interpretation supposes a complex system of offices arranged in a hierarchy stretching from villages to central departments, offices manned by graded and ranked officials with specific duties and responsibilities. Blochmann's decision to entitle Book Three of his translation of the *Ā'in* "Imperial Administration" encapsulates this entire misconceived attempt to explain the Mughal state on the model of the British Indian Empire. There is, in fact, no justification for such a heading: the Persian edition of the text uses the word *mulk* (empire),³⁹ and Book Three itself deals with the state at large—everything of interest outside the household and the army. It covers much more than "Administration." In the Mughal method of government there were no clear-cut lines of authority, no separate departments at successive levels of administration, and no tables of organization. To the contrary, what one

³⁹ *Ā'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 265; and *Ā'in*, trans. Blochmann, 2: 1.

finds are groups of men in the Imperial household who oversaw, on behalf of the emperor, provincial and subprovincial officials, who in turn exercised military, financial, or legal power within jurisdictions of varying scope.

Control of Officials

Within the smaller compass of the patrimonial kingdom, the ruler retained control by dint of personal force. Where area and scale were restricted, and where the fiction of state as household approached reality, a ruler was better able to renew the ties of loyalty and devotion in the day-to-day job of governing. The great size of patrimonial-bureaucratic empires, however, denied emperors the advantages of such workaday intimacy. In order to prevent the appropriation of prebends or benefices, and to reinvigorate the relationship on which the empire was founded, patrimonial-bureaucratic emperors had to employ extraordinary measures: requiring attendance at court, establishing overlapping spheres of authority, transferring officials frequently, using intelligence gatherers, and traveling regularly.⁴⁰ That the Mughals used all of these strategies again suggests the similarities between the patrimonial-bureaucratic model and the Mughal empire.

As we have seen, the Mughal Emperor required regular attendance at court of all his officers. In addition to the intricate schedule of weekly, monthly, and yearly visits set out in A'in 9 of Book Two, *mansabdārs* were expected to present themselves before the emperor on a number of other occasions: after a change in assignment, after a change in *jāgīr* posting, on the occasion of promotion, and, if at all possible, on days of special celebration. A second technique of patrimonial-bureaucratic control used by the Mughals was the appointment of officials with competing, cross-cutting areas of responsibility. In the provinces, the authority of the provincial governor was undercut by two other officials, the finance office and the *bakhshī* (military official). The finance officer was responsible for collecting and disbursing monies at both the provincial and subprovincial levels. No sum of consequence could be withdrawn from the provincial treasuries without his signature. In matters concerning the army, the military official encroached on the provincial governor's territory. He inspected the contingents of provincial *mansabdārs*, including those of the provincial governor and the finance officer, to see that horses and riders met rank requirements. At the subprovincial level a similar system of checks and balances prevailed: the army captain worked to protect villagers against unjust demands by the collector and local assignees, and the treasurer would not make payments without authorization of the finance officer.

The Mughal emperors relied on frequent transfers to curb the independence of far-flung subordinates; no man was allowed to keep his piece of land or stay at his post for more than three or four consecutive years. This strategy was designed to prevent distant *mansabdārs* from making alliances with local elements and building independent bases of power. Although shifts of such frequency introduced a great deal of waste and uncertainty into Mughal government, Akbar and his successors thought the gain in control worth the loss in efficiency. A'in 10 of Book Two discusses the duties of the newswriter (*wāqī'-nawīs*). Although Abu al-Fazl concentrates on the duties of those men assigned to court, it is clear that newswriters

⁴⁰ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 3: 1042–44.

Table 1.
Years Away From the Capital: 1556–1739*

	Akbar	Jahangir	Shahjahan	Aurangzeb	Bahadur Shah	Farrukh- siyar	Muhammad Shah
Regnal Years	1556–1605	1605–1627	1627–1658	1658–1707	1707–1712	1712–1719	1719–1739
	49 years	22 years	31 years	49 years	5 years	7 years	20 years
5	1556–60		1630–32	1662–64	1707–12		
10	1565–67	1613–19	1635–37				
15			1638–43	1669–71			
20	1577–78		1645–48	1674–76			
25			1651–53	1679–1707			
30	1585–86						
35							
40							
45	1599–1601						
50							
Percentage of Reign Absent	10/49 20%	6/22 27%	14/31 45%	34/49 69%	5/5 100%	0/7 0%	0/20 0%
							Total 69/183 38%

*The sources for this table are the chronicles of each emperor's reign. The capital city of the empire shifted several times during the period. From 1564–71 it was in Agra, from 1571–85 in Fatehpur Sikri, from 1585–98 in Lahore, from 1598–1648 in Agra, and from 1648–1858 in Shahjahanabad. Only the first twenty years of Muhammad Shah's reign, up to the sack of Delhi in 1739, are included. Muhammad Shah died in 1748.

were stationed in cities and towns throughout the realm, and were responsible for acquainting the emperor with the doings of the *mansabdārs* and local assignees in their areas.⁴¹

Of the strategies used by patrimonial-bureaucratic emperors to control their officials, travel was the one most heavily relied upon by Mughal rulers. Moving regularly across the countryside to renew the personal tie between leader and distant subordinate was an important activity in the reigns of most emperors. Table 1 illustrates the pervasiveness of this tactic during the reigns of the seven emperors between 1556 and 1739. Even when trips of one year or less are excluded, rulers of the Mughal state spent nearly 40 percent of their time during this approximately two hundred-year period on tour. An administrative manual written in the early eighteenth century and devoted to the reigns of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb corroborates this finding. The manual divides the reign of each emperor into two parts: settled (*istiḳāmat*) and peripatetic (*safar*). Under "settled" the manual lists the periods during which each emperor resided in the major cities of the realm; under "peripatetic" the manual gives the itineraries of the longer journeys of each ruler.⁴² A final piece of information, perhaps apocryphal, underscores the central role of travel in the life of the Imperial household. In a letter said to have been written to the emperor Muhammad Shah in the early eighteenth century, Nizam al-Mulk, the ruler of Haidarabad, referred to a curious practice among the women of the Imperial harim: the wives of the Mughal emperor, he wrote, gave birth lying on a saddle cloth.⁴³

During the period 1556–1739, an emperor would leave the capital and begin a tour for one or more of the following reasons: to hunt, to put down a rebellion, to check the administration of a province, to conquer new areas, to reconquer old ones, to visit a shrine, to attend a festival, or to escape the midsummer heat of northern India. Amidst all this change and variety, however, the place and function of the emperor remained constant. No matter where he might be, city or camp, the Mughal emperor held court and conducted state business. The organization and activity of the Imperial camp illustrate the exercise of sovereignty on tour. Virtually the entire Imperial household—men, women, animals, supplies, and equipment—traveled with the emperor. In addition to officers, soldiers, clerks, artists, musicians, craftsmen, and merchants of the palace, the records of the Imperial record office, the money and jewels of the Imperial treasuries, and the men and equipment of the mint could all be found at the Imperial camp.⁴⁴ Those princes and great nobles assigned to court accompanied the emperor, of course, along with the personnel and supplies of their establishments.

A look at the arrangement and function of tents within the enclosure of the Imperial household confirms that the Mughal emperor continued to rule on tour.

⁴¹ See *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 192–93; and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 268–69 about news-writers at court. *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 5, and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 7 discuss the need for spies. For such people in the provinces, see Noman Ahmad Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals: 1700–50* (Bombay: Aligarh Muslim University, 1970), p. 113.

⁴² "Dastur al-'Amal," Persian Manuscript Collection, Oriental 1690, British Museum, folios

98a–99b, 145a–49b.

⁴³ *Asiatick Miscellany* (Calcutta: n.p., 1785), 1: 491.

⁴⁴ For the *daftar*, see *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: xxi, plate iv; for the treasuries, see Nizam al-Din Ahmad Harawi, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, ed. B. De and Muhammad Hidayat Husain, 3 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1913–40), 2: 284; and for the mint, see *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 27; and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 16–18.

The map of the Imperial establishment in the *Ā'in-i Akbari* shows a two-storied structure with a window or balcony near the harim.⁴⁵ From this balcony in camp, as from the balcony of audience in the palace, the emperor gave audience, listening to complaints, receiving petitions, and dispensing justice to anyone who chose to come. In Akbar's reign the hall of ordinary audience of the camp stood just inside the gate to the Imperial enclosure.⁴⁶ The emperor conducted the routine business of state in the hall of ordinary audience in both camp and city; that is, he received reports and petitions, examined financial accounts, granted promotions, decided on assignments, interviewed *mansabdāri* candidates, and inspected the products of various Imperial workshops. During the reign of Akbar the hall of special audience was set back within the Imperial enclosure; this secluded location indicated the importance and secrecy of the matters to be transacted there.⁴⁷

It is clear from this discussion that the Imperial camp was a place of significance for the state at large. The emperors' frequent and extended travels and their activities on tour have led several scholars to conclude that the Imperial camp functioned as the administrative center of the realm during much of the Mughal period.⁴⁸ Although it is difficult to point to a great deal of indigenous, contemporary evidence on this point, a look at the inscriptions on some of the coins from Akbar's reign suggests that the Mughals held this view. Coins issued for only one or two years from small towns or villages, the work of the camp mint, carried the epithet *dār al-khilāfat* (seat of sovereignty).⁴⁹ Since this same phrase was used to describe capital cities throughout the period 1556–1739,⁵⁰ it appears that the Mughals considered the Imperial camp—the temporary settlement of the emperor, princes, great nobles, and their households—the seat of sovereignty of the state and the capital of the empire.

Aurangzeb, the most peripatetic of the seven emperors, stressed the importance of frequent movement. He wrote that “. . . the ruler of a kingdom should not spare himself from moving about.”⁵¹ Elsewhere, he justified the overthrow of his father Shahjahan: “If Shahjahan had not chosen to stay in *dār al-khilāfat* [Shahjahanabad] and *mustaqqar al-khilāfat* [Agra], but had been constantly traveling [*safar*], he would not have ended up as he did. . . .”⁵² The Mughal emperor kept the personal, quasi-familial ties of the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire fresh and vital by moving

⁴⁵ *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: xxii, plates iv, xi.

⁴⁶ *A'in*, ed. Blochmann, 1: 42; and *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: 48–49.

⁴⁷ *A'in*, trans. Blochmann, 1: xxii, plate iv, p. 48.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Parmeshwari Gupta, “A Study of the Mint Towns of Akbar,” in *Essays Presented to Sir Jadunath Sarkar*, ed. Hari Ram Gupta, 2 vols. (Hoshiapur, India: Punjab University, 1958), 2: 147; Upendra Thakur, *Mints and Minting in India* (Varanasi, U.P.: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1972), pp. 140–41; and Irvine, *Army of the Indian Mughals*, p. 190.

⁴⁹ Gupta, “A Study of the Mint Towns of Akbar,” 2: 157; Stanley Lane Poole, *The Coins of the Mughal Emperors in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1892), pp. 24, 51; and V. P. Rode, *Catalogue of the Coins in the Central Museum Nagpur: Coins of the Mughal Emperors* (Bom-

bay: Government of Maharashtra, 1969), pp. 23, 38, 39, 42.

⁵⁰ The epithets for Akbar's capitals illustrate the point. For Agra, see Harawi, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, 1: 331; 2: 145, 168, 202, 227, 249, 284, 298; and Abu al-Fazl, *Akbar Namah*, ed. Agha Ahmad Ali and Maulavi Abd al Rahim, 3 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873–86), 2: 14, 45, 60, 76, 78; 3: 4, 9, 19, 21, 23, 29; for Fathpur Sikri, see Harawi, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, 2: 253, 256, 284, 324, 331, 362; and Abu al-Fazl, *Akbar Namah*, 2: 344, 364, 370; 3: 52, 66, 74; and for Lahore, see Harawi, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, 2: 402, 424, 646.

⁵¹ Hamid al-Din Khan, *Ahkam-i 'Alamgiri*, Persian text with an English translation by Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar and Sons, 1912), p. 14.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 49.

rapidly and frequently from distant subordinate to distant subordinate, renewing in the face-to-face contact of the court ceremonial the household bonds of loyalty, respect, and devotion.

Summary and Implications

The prevailing view of the Mughal Empire has been based on the mistaken assumption that this state was a kind of unfinished, unfocused prototype of the British Indian Empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This assumption has caused most writers to misunderstand and misinterpret the nature and organization of the Mughal state. A more fruitful approach, one closer to indigenous ideas and more consonant with the work of other scholars on premodern states, is to treat the Mughal Empire as one example of the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire. A close and careful reading of the major document on Mughal government, the *Ā'in-i Akbari* of Abu al-Fazl, not only reveals the weakness of the established interpretation, but shows as well the remarkable congruence between the state Akbar organized and the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire analyzed by Weber. In its depiction of the emperor as a divinely-aided patriarch, the household as the central element in government, members of the army as dependent on the emperor, the administration as a loosely structured group of men controlled by the Imperial household, and travel as a significant part of the emperor's activities, the *Ā'in-i Akbari* supports the suggestion that Akbar's state was a patrimonial-bureaucratic empire.

This view of the state has a number of implications for our understanding of Mughal India. First and most important, it alters our conception of Mughal political organization. This is obviously the basic argument of my essay; I have tried to show the new light this reinterpretation sheds on such aspects of the political system as transfer of officials, administrative structure, and the *mansabdāri* system. Other issues in Mughal politics—the rebellion of princes and the causes of decline, for example—I have not touched upon at all. Nevertheless, it seems clear that to accept this interpretation of the empire is to accept the necessity of re-examining the entire structure of Mughal political activity.

Our understanding of other facets of Mughal culture and civilization is also affected. Urban organization is one example. From this new perspective, life in the administrative centers of patrimonial-bureaucratic empires—capital cities, provincial headquarters, and the like—is seen to revolve around the resources and requirements of imperial and noble households. Thus, in Shahjahanabad (capital of the Mughal Empire from 1648 to 1858) the palace-fortress of Shahjahan and the mansions of princes and nobles dominated social, economic, and political activity.⁵³

Finally, taking this view of the state highlights a hitherto neglected aspect of the Mughal economy, and enables us to see the households of emperors and great nobles as important elements in the economic organization of the empire. In administrative centers in particular, the households of great men emerge as the central productive institutions in the urban economy and as major forces in the patterns of production, exchange, and consumption.

⁵³ My manuscript on Shahjahanabad discusses these points and those in the following paragraph in considerable detail.