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DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

BARATI ANDRÁS

Royal decrees of the Nādirids, Durrānīs and Zands
from the Āstān-i Quds-i Rażawī of Mashhad

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INTRODUCTION

The history of Iran in the eighteenth century, by reason of its relative dynastic discontinuity and interim disposition, does not appear to be in the centre of academic research, especially in comparison with the Safavid or Qajar eras. The sporadic investigation on this period is attested by the rather brief list of secondary literature. For this situation, first and foremost, the lack of narrative sources is accountable, which was due to the periodic upheavals and unrests and the relatively small output by eighteenth-century contemporary authors. Moreover, the unintended repercussions of earlier scholarship which described this period as “horrible to read about, horrible to disentangle, horrible to have tried to live in”\(^1\) and concluded that “insecurity became the order of the day [...] political decay was accompanied by economic decay”,\(^2\) should also be taken into account, which resulted in the neglect of this field, even if this century was truly perfused with wars, hardships, disorders, and famines. With the advent of 2000s, the literature covering this time period has started to expand with the publication of several excellent studies and received further boost through the efforts of the late Michael Axworthy,\(^3\) which may be considered as a milestone in the direction of the reassessment and reappraisal of this era and to the enticement of scholarly attention towards eighteenth-century Persia.

One of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles that lie ahead of this area of study is that the available written source material at our disposal clearly revolves around the three great rulers of the century, Nādir Shāh (1736–1747), Karīm Khān Zand (1751–1779) and Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī (1747–1772), and their entourage. Therefore, it creates an impediment to the breaking out of the confines of the dynastic approach and stands to reason why this century was examined mostly as an account of great men. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the disruption of the political frames is at variance with the economic, religious, and social developments in this era, for the most part, these issues are still analysed from this perspective.

The research is further hindered by the dearth of the source material, which is significantly less than in previous or subsequent times. Naturally, this reality makes the use of archival documents even more relevant. This realisation led to the subject of this dissertation, the study and examination of twenty-three royal decrees from the period between the fall of the Safavids and

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the rise of the Qajars, preserved in the libraries of the Āstān-i Quds-i Rażawī (Sāzmān-i kitābkhānahā, mūzahā wa markaz-i asnād-i āstān-i quds-i rażawī) in the city of Mashhad.

Regardless of the respective age or century, the difficulties of research in the administrative history of Iran are several, ranging from the complexity of defining terminology, the obscure use of terms by the contemporary authors, and the general lack of adequate information concerning the organisation of the state apparatus. In this regard, the turbulent decades of eighteenth-century Iran are a particularly demanding period to study. Additionally, in contrast with the Safavid or Qajar periods of Iranian history, the number of royal documents from the eighteenth century is also rather scarce. The recurring destruction of entire records in the course of our period was the result of the relatively frequent political uproars and mayhem. Still, relying to a greater extent on the exploration of surviving royal decrees may result in the benefit of better understanding regarding the political, administrative and economic situation in the post-Safavid era.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The present work consists of two parts. The first part establishes a framework of diplomatics and provides an overview of the attributes of eighteenth-century royal decrees. In the fundamental works of Heribert Busse and Jahāngīr Qā’im-Maqāmī considering Persian diplomatics, no more than a few short observations can be found with respect to the age of the Nādirids, the Durrānīs and the Zands. Therefore, to this date, a comprehensive study on the subject of post-Safavid diplomatics has not been written. At the heart of this section are the systematic description of the external characteristics, the formulary and the designation of the deeds. In this theoretical background, it is also shown how the decrees of the royals differ from one another, what influences the earlier Safavid system had on the eighteenth-century practice, and what changes have been made to certain elements and aspects of the documents in the course of the respective period.

The second part of the dissertation probes into the royal decrees of the Nādirids, Durrānīs and Zands from the Āstān-i Quds-i Rażawī. The analysis rests on the following documents:

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The documents under consideration cover the period between 1733 (Document I) and 1787 (Document XXIII), and the affairs they contain are not limited exclusively to the region of Mashhad. In spite of the fact that these documents are preserved in the Central Library of the Āstān-i Quds-i Rażawī, only nine of them are concerned with matters related to the pious endowment (Documents IV, VII, VIII, XIII, XIV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XXII), issued by Shāh Rukh, Nādir Mīrzā and Aḥmad Shāh. The majority of documents are highly diverse in type and content, from appointment letters to tax affairs. It is noteworthy to remark that seven documents contain the petition that preceded the royal order.

Beside diplomatics, the real value in the publication of these documents for most scholars is their content. Accordingly, the texts and their translations are followed by commentaries. In these sections a wide variety of issues are touched upon, ranging from the formal requirements of penning a petition, different aspects of the seals and endorsements of the Chancellery (dār al-inshā’) and the Finance Chamber (daftarkhāna), untangling the events of particular years with gaps of information, to the elaboration of fiscal terms and offices within the state and the waqf administration.

In the conclusion, I attempt to summarise the results of the examination of these twenty-three documents diplomatics- and content-wise. The section that follows covers briefly, in the form of a glossary, the bureaucratic terminology utilised in the documents. At the very end of the dissertation, the images of the royal decrees are appended.

RESULTS

1. The most significant result of the present dissertation is the publishing and translation of the twenty-three royal decrees of the Āstān-i Quds-i Rażawī of Mashhad issued by the Nādirid, Durrānī and Zand rulers. Undoubtedly, with this work, the study of these
documents became attainable for those scholars of the history of early modern Iran, who have no access to these Persian sources.

2. The dissertation offers several findings with respect to the political history of eighteenth-century Iran. Concerning the extent of Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī’s rule over western Khurāsān, four of his decrees (Documents V–VIII) presented in this study can provide some clarity on the matter. According to most chronicles, Aḥmad Shāh’s sway over western Khurāsān was short-lived and merely coincided with his physical presence there in 1754–1755. The Tārīkh-i Aḥmadshāhī and the decrees presented here indicate that the Durrānī presence had a more sustained effect on the administrative structure. In light of the respective decrees, it can be stated that the representative of the Afghan ruler, Nūr Muḥammad Khān, was not set aside or recalled in 1755. The documents corroborate the fact that Aḥmad Shāh still had the authority to appoint, dismiss and reaffirm middle- and higher-ranking officials in the organization of the Āstān-i Quds-i Rażawī in 1757, in order to place the foundation under his direct supervision. Consequently, Mashhad must have been under his rule as well. Moreover, the royal decrees clearly substantiate that western Khurāsān was a Durrānī province at the time. The governor of Farāh is designated as the “ṣāhib-i ikhtiyār of the dominions situated in Khurāsān”, which shows that the provincial centre was not Mashhad, nor Herat, but the peripheral city of Farāh. As Noelle-Karimi points out, the districts of Bākharz, Khwāf, Turbat-i Ḥaydarīya, Turbat-i Jām and Turshīz were placed under the jurisdiction of Herat in 1755. In view of the decree, Farāh apparently became the administrative centre of entire western Khurāsān, and the mentioned districts were most likely incorporated later into the province of Herat (at the latest during the reign of Tīmūr Shāh). The jurisdictional scope of Mashhad and Farāh and their comparative administrative level are not clearly delineated or defined. The text of Document VII plainly indicates that Nūr Muḥammad Khān had higher authority in relation to the governor of Farāh, which may indicate that either Mashhad and its immediate surroundings were considered as a separate administrative unit or Nūr Muḥammad Khān was in charge of the region. Be that as it may, without further sources and documents the administrative situation of the region within the Durrānī empire cannot be uncovered. Still, even before the military campaigns of Aḥmad Shāh, the suzerainty of Shāh Rukh over western Khurāsān was nominal; in reality, it extended only to the gates of Mashhad, which then further deteriorated when Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī turned his attention to the Nādirid successor state. Based on the abovementioned

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5 Noelle-Karimi 2014: 117.
observation, it can be safely established that the extent of Aḥmad Shāh’s rule over the region lasted at least until the beginning of the 1760s.

3. Documents XIII, XIV and XXIII highlight the events that transpired in western Khurāsān during the 1770s and 1780s. Based on these decrees, it can be argued that the son of Shāh Rukh, Nādir Mīrzā, had the upper hand in the region between the years of 1773 and 1778, with his father’s blessings. Nādir Mīrzā was ousted from the city of Mashhad by Mīr Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Mardān Khān Zangūʿī, and the governorship of Mamīsh Khān Zaʿfarī lasted three or five years. Naṣrullāh Mīrzā, Shāh Rukh’s eldest son, successfully secured his position and power in Mashhad in the first half of 1780s. Nādir Mīrzā took refuge in the Durrānī kingdom most likely in the late 1770s, and by the military support of Timūr Shāh Durrānī, he managed to wrestle control of the city from his brother for a short period of time around 1787.

4. A further example of complementing current knowledge on the chronology of the turbulent second half of the eighteenth century is Document XV. The decree sheds light on the fact that ʿAlī Murād Khān Zand considered himself as ruler as early as October 1779 (instead of 1780 or 1781), seven months after the death of Karīm Khān. At the time, the region comprising Tihrān, Qum, Iṣfahān, Hamadān and probably parts of Kurdistān were under his control.

5. The present analysis of a series of eighteenth-century documents thus gives new insights into the history of events from a local and regional perspective. More importantly, it enhances our understanding of the administrative history as evidenced by diplomatics. A case in point is the taxonomy of Persian royal decrees in this period. It can be safely established based on the available documents that the issuing of decrees was reduced to a single type, to the raqam (in the case of Karīm Khān Zand it is termed as farmān). Under post-Safavid monarchs, however, no distinction was made between the different documents in terms of administrative rules and regulations.

6. The new type of raqam underwent significant formal changes. First of all, every kind of ornamentation and decoration disappeared, along with such permanent components of the Safavid decrees, such as the insertio, the corroboratio and the apprecatio. Furthermore, the arenga, which was a constant segment in the Safavid documents of nishān and parwāncha-yi sharaf-i nafāzī, was adopted by the raqam. To this fusion of former document types, an additional element was the devotio in the form of al-mulk lillāh, which in the

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6 NOELLE-KARIMI 2014: 127.
Safavid period was drawn with gold ink on the *parwāncha* type of decrees. Although it faded away from the documents in the post-Safavid period, it continued to adorn Aḥmad Shāh’s decrees. The introductory formula constituted the most visible difference in this new type of *raqam*. On every single document of Nādir Shāh and Aḥmad Shāh, and some of the decrees of Shāh Rukh, the introductory formula consisted of the *farmān-i humāyūn shud* phrase. However, the formula of the *raqam* in the seventeenth century was the *ḥukm-i jahānmuṭā’ shud*, and this *farmān-i humāyūn shud* was the introductory formula of the *parwāncha* of the Safavid period. Interestingly, the post-Safavid introductory formula was complemented by a hitherto unknown religious motto, which was drawn in a highly ornate technique. Without doubt, this motto served to strengthen the impression of the rulers’ divine legitimization. The increasing use of religious formulas in the seals and parts of the corpus is a matching phenomenon. It should be noted that Shāh Rukh is the only ruler of eighteenth-century post-Safavid Iran, who utilizes more than one type of introductory formula during his rule. The original introductory formula of the *raqam* was employed only by Shāh Rukh and ʽĀdil Shāh. The Zands did not avail themselves of regal introductory formulas, in keeping with their practice of sealing. Karīm Khān Zand apparently utilized the pre-coronation formula of Nādir Shāh (*farmān-i ʽālī shud*) in order to demonstrate his subordinate position vis-à-vis Ismā’īl III. The attitude of ʽAlī Murād Khān was even more submissive since he employed the formula of the provincial governors in the Safavid period (*ḥukm-i ʽālī/wālā shud*) although there was no reigning Safavid ruler at the time. All things considered, the blending of the different types of seventeenth-century royal decrees resulted in a single type of document, the *raqam*, employed by every post-Safavid dynasty in eighteenth-century Iran.

7. As the most important authentication tools, the royal seals of this era maintain their position at the top of the documents. Originally, by the innovation of Ismā’īl I the royal seal was relocated from the bottom of the paper (the traditional position of the royal seal up until that time) to the top. The rationale behind this action was the fact that the names of the Twelve Imams were included in the new royal seal(s), therefore, it was imperative to reposition the seal. In spite of the fact that the names of the Imams were missing from the seals of the Nādirids and Zands (or were partially present containing the names of ʽAlī or Riżā, or referring to them), the position of the royal seal was not adjusted accordingly and remained on the top of the document. The study of Nādir Shāh’s and Shāh Rukh’s seals indicates that no identifiable system may be discerned in the application of the different
royal seals. It can be observed that contrary to ʽĀdil Shāh, Nādir Mīrzā, Aḥmad Shāh and the Zands, the only rulers who employed more than one seal during their reigns are Nādir Shāh and Shāh Rukh (Karīm Khān Zand merely changed the shape of his seal between December 1763 and October 1765).

8. In the Safavid era, two kinds of administrative remarks can be distinguished on the back of the decree in terms of content: paraph and registration. The former consists of no more than a religious motto, the latter comprises the respective acts of registration. In the era under study the paraphs seem to fall out of use completely.

9. The dissertation supports the theory that in the post-Safavid period the distinction made between the khāṣṣa and mamālik administration dissipates. The decrees presented in this study show that the remarks of both state and crown administrations are present and used interchangeably and simultaneously (such as ba qalam āmad and qalamī shud). Furthermore, it is clear that the provincial governors collected the taxes and sent them to the ruler after deducting the amount of their expenses. The governors were required to present detailed accounts of tax revenue and expenditure regularly.

10. Following the fall of Iṣfahān, a simplified form of Safavid chancellery practice was devised, which then was more or less preserved throughout our respective period. On the whole, the administration of Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī inherited and closely followed the modus operandi of the bureaucracy of Nādir Shāh. Aḥmad Shāh and his chancellery followed Nādir Shāh in their phraseology and even went beyond the precedent set by him in the total avoidance of siyāq. While Nādir Shāh had merely prohibited the use of siyāq in the registers, the available evidence indicates that the Durrānī ruler even refrained from using it in his decrees. By contrast, the application of seals was regulated to a greater extent in the Durrānī court, and the utilization of previously neglected Safavid procedures, such as the royal mandate and the devotio were revived and applied again. The administration of Karīm Khān Zand was, for the most part, very similar to Nādir Shāh’s: the systematic assessment of all landed property, or tax census, commissioned by Nādir Shāh was fully implemented by Karīm Khān, and the continuous efforts to abolish or reduce the size, power and influence of the bureaucrats and elevate his family members to positions of power were just a few of the similarities. However, in the decrees of his, and also of Shāh Rukh, a return to Safavid practice can be observed in terms of structure and diplomatics. It may be attributable to the deep-rooted collective nostalgic feeling for the Safavid period, which overshadowed the second half of the eighteen century. Even though the Safavids were utterly powerless, they still remained the source of legitimacy. In the case of Shāh
Rukh, the admiration of the Safavids is ever-present in several decrees and in one of his seals as well. The prominence and authority of Shâh Rukh, albeit limited, originated from his Safavid roots and not from his Nâdirid lineage. However, his situation was even more intricate, considering that major political forces started to take shape in western Khurâsân shortly after the assassination of Nâdir Shâh, and the real powerbrokers turned out to be the three factions of the Arabs, Turks and Kurds. The incessant conflicts between the chieftains of these confederacies profoundly marked the long reign of Shâh Rukh, who was not able to maintain an equilibrium among them. Despite his – and Sulaymân II’s – Safavid descent, on which their legitimacy rested, he was compelled to manoeuvre between the competing tribal interests and to adapt to the shifting dominance of factions. The Durrânîs, however, did not rely on the legitimizing force of the Safavids (or the Mughals for the matter), when they created their new empire. Nevertheless, considering that the number of similarities between the royal decrees of Nâdir Shâh and any of his successors is the highest in the case of Aḥmad Shâh, it seems that from a strictly diplomatic and administrative point of view, Aḥmad Shâh was the true heir of Nâdir Shâh’s empire.