

Proposal: Seeing like a Princely State

American Institute of Pakistan Studies Summer Research Grant

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Princeton University (PhD defense: May 2015)

Summary: I propose to conduct preliminary research for my second book project in Lahore, Pakistan from July through early August. I will work in the Sindh Archives and the Punjab University Library.

Research Statement: This summer I will begin data collection for “Seeing Like a Princely State: Eurasian Protectorates Between Persianate Court and the Modern State.” During the colonial period a curious form of quasi-autonomous polity emerged known as the protectorate in the Central Asian context and the princely state in the South Asian one. What were the new coercive mechanisms through which the state expanded the scope of resources extracted from the periphery? And why did protectorates emerging directly from pre-colonial princely courts expand their ambitions to include seemingly “modern” concerns such as the provision of welfare, control over popular aspirations, and economic development? This study examines the opportunities and limitations inherent in protectorate status, as well as the impact of expanded state resources on non-state religious elite.

Program of Study: I am seeking three main genres of historical sources in Lahore: (1) Low print-run Urdu language secondary works dealing with the princely state of Hyderabad, which will constitute one of my main case studies; (2) Persian manuscripts (primarily from the Punjab University Library collection) dealing with transregional cadres of Islamic scholars that traversed between Central and South Asia; and (3) Colonial-era documents from the Sindh Archives dealing with the Sikh Empire during its later years, which may also serve as a semi-colonial comparison case. Having conducted research extensively in India and Central Asia, but not Pakistan, this is first and foremost an exploratory expedition with the potential to significantly shape the direction of my second book project. A colleague from Lahore has already initiated the various processes for obtaining permissions and affiliations with local research institutions.

Note on Affiliation: Per the attached CV, during the period of this grant I will have already received my PhD from Princeton and will be affiliated with that university, but the research I carry out will be for my subsequent postings at Yale University (InterAsia Postdoctoral Fellow) and the University of Pittsburgh (Assistant Professor).