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# Dean Mahomet: Advocate of Classical Empire

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Dean Mahomet: Advocate of Classical Empire

By

Colleen C. Fitzgerald

A Thesis

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Dean Mahomet: Advocate of Classical Empire

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## ABSTRACT

This essay looks at Dean Mahomet through his autobiographical text, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet: An Eighteenth-Century Journey through India*, a portrait of an elite Indian male at the beginning of the British conquest of India from within the British military. I analyze the political and economic history of India, discuss Muslim Indian travel literature, and Mahomet's use of the epistolary travel novel. I show how the text presents the virtues of an empire ruled by an absolute sovereign, and Dean Mahomet as an advocate of empire. *Travels* is a significant document on the people, politics and economics of India and Britain in the eighteenth-century.

“Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through. Analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined...or taken over.”

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (207).

“The interdependence of human existence at the present time, the unity of human culture, which is becoming more of a fact every day in spite of the political and other differences that divide us, require mutual study.”

Bernard Lewis, *Islam and The West* (128-9).

In this essay I look at Dean Mahomet through his autobiographical text, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet: An Eighteenth-Century Journey through India*. He paints a portrait of a cosmopolitan figure, knowledgeable with a refined aesthetic sense, imbued with morality, educated in a classical manner and above all disciplined. What we also see is a portrait of a young man with a mythologized paternal lineage who traced his roots along the centuries with the great Mughal Empire, star-struck by authoritarianism, military men in uniform, and a life of ritual and spectacle. He also dissolves the boundaries between cultures by focusing on commonalities between culture and history.

*Travels* offers a view of an elite Indian male at the beginning of British conquest of India from within the British military. His autobiographical travelogue is critical yet understanding of the English and Muslim Indian cultures in power. I analyze the political and economic history of India, not just of Dean Mahomet's time, but of the Mughal Empire. It has bearing on his acceptance of the British rule. I look at him as a military man, first and foremost, who developed within the specific culture of his family. I also

discuss his use of the epistolary travel novel, how it was the most versatile form available to him, allowing him to contribute to the public record and public discourse on India.

*The Travels of Dean Mahomet: An Eighteenth-Century Journey Through India* is a collection of experiences, events and reflections from his time with the Bengal Army in northern India, between 1769 and 1784. The journey begins with his introduction of himself as an eleven-year old boy and his family following the death of his father. Mahomet ends his journey passing Governor Hastings Lady and the remains of the great Irish Lieutenant-General Eyre Coote en route to the docks at Dartmouth. Along the way the expanse of his perspective increases with his exposure to the land and the people. He begins as a child knowing only his family, but a family that traces paternal lineage through military service to the Mughal Empire and within the Bengal army. Shortly after the death of his father, young Dean, star-struck by the dress and manners he observed in members of the British military stationed near his home, acquaints himself with a young officer and is adopted into the disciplined environment of the military.

As a travel novel, his writing is intended to contribute to the information about India. He provides descriptions of the land, noting strategic points such as wells, forts and the layout of urban centers. He provides information on economic practices and details of markets. He comments on the goods available in various regions. He catalogs flora and fauna. He provides information on the people, discussing cultural practices of the Hindu and Muslim elite societies he has had contact with and exposure to portraying them as moral (Mahomet 49) and virtuous (Mahomet 52), as well as treacherous (Mahomet 86-7) and decadent (Mahomet 88-90). His descriptions of the non-elite society, however, merely classifies them into “merciless savages,” (Mahomet 47)

“licentious barbarians” (Mahomet 48) or “humane people” (Mahomet 114-5) directed by an “all ruling Providence” (Mahomet 114-5).

Mahomet also provides opinion on the interrelationship of governance and commerce, and the effects on the land and people. He highlights areas of overlap between the Anglo and Islamic-Indic cultures and similarities in form of state and religion such as the absolute sovereign and monotheism. The text develops a public position strongly supporting absolute sovereign rule as the only form of government that can ensure security and prosperity to a land and its people. Mahomet perceives the overwhelming strength of the British to be indicative of the sovereignty able to once again unify India. At the time of his books publication the sensational impeachment trial of General Warren Hastings was taking place in Britain. His opinions add to the public discourse about whether or not the British sovereign should assume absolute rule over the colonies.

## I. Orientations

In this section I discuss two contemporary perspectives on narratives from colonized zones. *Orientalism*, first released by Edward Said in 1978, though highly controversial, has had a lingering influence on the study of literature from eastern countries. His sequel, *Culture and Imperialism*, further develops these themes and looks into the notions of empire building through institutions. I focus on Mary Louise Pratt’s terms “contact zones” and “transculturation” from her book on South America, *Imperial Eyes*. From these two influential theorists I look into how texts define culture, the idea of

institutionalized “contact zones” and how these ideas help to understand an advocate of empire. From there I contextualize the form of the epistolary travel novel.

The expansion of British influence in the eighteenth-century on the Indian subcontinent resulted in unprecedented access to eastern materials. The seventeenth-century saw an explosion in data acquisition by the British, French, Germans, and Swedes as they expanded their experience of the world around them. This information included experiential knowledge of the lands, the people, and their cultures and societies. The acquisition, storage and dissemination of this information by exploration resulted in an “orientalist” perspective on lands to the east of Europe. Said develops a theory of how the British, French and Americans limited discourse on eastern societies. Said uses the term to mean both a perspective and a classification. It is a term from the West for the West. It was not meant for non-European use. There are three interdependent designations for the term “orientalism.” The first, academic: “Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient...either in its specific or its general aspects.” The second “is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’” The third “something more historically and materially defined than either of the other two,” it is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, *Orientalism* 3). Bernard Lewis responds to the breadth of the term in chapter six of his book *Islam and the West*, returning to the origin of the word. It had originally been used for two different groups. One reference was to artists who depicted what they saw, or even just imagined, of North Africa and the Middle East. The second returns the word to the Renaissance in Western Europe and the scholars of Greek, Latin and Hebrew (Lewis

101). It is the locus of text within the formation of a body of knowledge and in the creation of imagery that I will use within this essay.

*Orientalism* had a great impact on academic studies, generating no small amount of conversations on the topic of epistemology, highlighting the importance of discipline in scholarship. As a term, orientalism is dependent upon its opposite, the occidental, a binary relationship positing the East against the West. It demarcates people and societies, systematically classifying and categorizing one against the other. From this point of view the observer makes meaning and creates images from a position of power. Said's term relates to the members of the culture of power. Text is a primary vehicle for the dissemination of the meaning and imagery developed by the power of culture. Mahomet challenges his audience to see his representations within *Travels*.

While *Orientalism* deals with image making, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) looks into how representation, in the form of narrative, creates and maintains the power Empire requires to sustain itself. Of particular interest while looking into Mahomet is the way Said describes resistance as an "alternative way of conceiving human history" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 216). This process involves replacing the narrative from the European perspective with the local "to mix with it and transform it" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 216). This process can be illustrated with the section from *Travels* where Mahomet describes the practice of chewing betel. Michael Fisher demonstrates the way in which Mahomet takes words directly from John Henry Grouse's *Voyage to the East Indies* (1766) and changes the narrative from one describing "'vicious' habits indulged in by natives" (Mahomet 139) into a practice in which everyone from all cultures engage in and which "no one attempts to address his superior, unless his mouth is perfumed with it,

and to neglect this ceremony even with an equal, would be deemed an unpardonable rudeness” (Mahomet 104). Said describes this creative reapplication of terms the “voyage in” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 216).

Said claims that, “One of the first tasks of the culture of resistance was to reclaim, rename, and reinhabit the land” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 226). Through *Travels* Mahomet provides a glossary of terms and includes visual images as well as using terms from the Hindu and Muslim cultures of India. Said presents a binary relation and describes it as creating control through knowledge. Mahomet’s text works within this structure, but with a twist. His direct experiential knowledge of both cultures affords him a greater degree of authority than the other English travel writers. When Mahomet lifts information from other English travel novels he recontextualizes it, placing it within a perspective from home. This begs the larger epistemological questions of how we know and what constitutes knowledge. The intention and process of defining an entire half of the world as “less-than” or in strictly negative terms doesn’t constitute knowledge. It is a means of social persuasion based in fear.

In the theory developed by Mary Louise Pratt an individual can creative, manipulate and adapt the use of cultural forms. As with Said’s studies, Pratt’s explication on travel writing in *Imperial Eyes* looks at how European writers have written back to their European audiences. While Said focused on the East, Pratt focused on the South. There are three terms in the discussion of perspective on other cultures and societies within the process of colonization from Pratt’s writing for consideration. The first is the term, “contact zone.” Pratt defines a “contact zone” as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of

domination and subordination” (Pratt 7). She uses this term to refer to “the space of imperial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt 8). This term is literally what it means a zone of contact, but it is perhaps not bound to the process of colonization. These spaces are found in centers of trade and in the military. By Pratt’s definition the military is an institutionalized “contact zone.” One quote of Pratt’s I think insightful at this point is, “It is surely not coincidence that the emissaries of the modern state most often position themselves as an invisible and passive eye looking out over a space, a conduit for information rather than a mediating agent. The reader is by their side, looking with them and not at them. These are not the subjects who act in the name of the state—the state will act through them” (Phelan, Rabinowitz 208). Throughout the *Travels*, Mahomet shifts between these positions. He is a conduit for information, but the information is intended to dissolve perceived boundaries between cultures. Mahomet does have the reader by his side, but he also moves into view within the text, becoming a subject. As a member of the military who does indeed see active duty, he is that vehicle through which the state enforces control.

Pratt states the terms “autoethnography” or “autoethnographic expression” of “transculturation” to reference “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s terms.” They are “texts the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” (Pratt 9). The process of colonization brings culture and modes of communication into contact with one another. The colonizer’s cultural forms are only those they can be

engaged in, and it is through the use of them locals make themselves seen and heard. Until it is translated for them the colonizing society cannot recognize the indigenous. If locals can figure out a way to communicate to colonizers they might be able to teach their identities as a community and as a culture, to make themselves visible, and to be heard, to remove the colonizer's veil of prejudice. There is also a problem of recognition within the colonizing culture, which was first addressed in Said's term "voyage in." The text creates knowledge, and its information is believed if the writer can be seen as an authority.

If writers are judged on whether or not they are writing "authentically" their content becomes suspect. Pratt suggests, "When 'autoethnographic' texts are read simply as 'authentic' self-expression or 'inauthentic' assimilation, their transcultural character is obliterated and their dialogic engagement with western modes of representation lost" (Pratt 100). From within the space of autoethnography that assumes interaction between disparate cultures, Pratt describes a creative process of transculturation, explaining it as "a phenomenon of the contact zone." She describes it as a term used by ethnographers "to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture...(and) determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, how they use it, and what they make it mean" (Pratt 7). Autoethnography is the form available to carry descriptions of the phenomena of transculturation. What emerges is the colonizing culture unable to even see the culture it is moving over, yet the unrecognized culture is adaptable enough to recognize the forms and then manipulate them to gain entry into the public discussions of the colonizer. This creative reapplication of terms was also described as the 'voyage in.'

The observation point for the perspective that holds these terms within it comes out of an epistemological development which Pratt describes as, “Europe’s ‘planetary consciousness’...marked by an orientation toward interior exploration and the construction of global-scale meaning through the descriptive apparatuses of natural history” (Pratt 15) attributing this new consciousness to two events in 1735: the publication of Carl Linnaeus’ *Systema Naturae*, and a scientific expedition between Britain and France, led by the French, to determine if the earth was a sphere (Cartesian supposition) or a spheroid flat at the poles (Newton, English supposition) (Pratt 15-16). As in the discussion of Said, the expansion of contact between cultures that had been previously separated creates spaces for interaction, which challenge concepts of epistemology and ontology. Pratt keeps her theory confined within the parameters of colonization, but the terms and processes she describes are equally applicable to the effects of commercial expansion.

The epistolary form was a standard for travel novels in Britain by the eighteenth-century. There are several advantages for the writer in using the letter format in a travelogue. The author partakes in a tradition that can be found living in texts from ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. It allows the use of a familiar voice and creates an intimate space for author and reader to engage. It allows the author to move between private and public boundaries. Two fascinating questions arise when looking into the epistolary travel novel found within Amy Elizabeth Smith’s “Travel Narratives and the Familiar Letter Form” (1998). The first is for the writer, and it is “a question of private versus public audience” (Smith 90). Do you have something about *your* journey *worth relating* to the public? What is remarkable about the experience and the narrative beyond

a drawing room setting? The second is for the reader, “the larger question of what *role* a reader is *willing to adopt* in relation to the writer and the work” (Smith 90-1, emphasis mine). This distinction between private and public asks how far the writer and the reader are willing to enter into either realm. There were different categories for published collections of letters, and different expectations from audience and critics in Britain. Collections such as *Letters Concerning Clay Roads* (1755), *Roman History in a Series of Letters* (1774) and *Letters on the Force of the Imagination in Pregnant Women* (1765) reported scientific or philosophical findings, part of a tradition from the Royal Society. This style can be contrasted with “familiar letters,” written more as an authentic letter that one would compose to a friend, such as *The Ingenious and Diverting Letters of the Lady\_\_\_\_\_ Travels into Spain* by the modest Catherine D’Aulony (Smith 80).

Epistolary travel novels were expected to meet the same standards audience and reviewers had for collections of authentic familiar letters. Commentary in reviews from the British journals *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review* addressed “four basic areas: style, the writer, the authenticity of the letters, and the value of the content” (Smith 81). Familiar letters were expected to present a portrait of the author and establish personal character through anecdotes and articulated opinions, which could reveal traits such as virtue, fortitude, good sense and sympathy as well as intelligence and taste (Smith 84).

Letter writing was considered an art, not merely a mode of basic communication, and it is a common conceit that “Art rendered reality as one wished it to be” (Smith 92). Travelogues were more likely to be reviewed positively if written in epistolary form and if they read as familiar letters. It was style that was most frequently addressed, “‘Ease,’ ‘simplicity,’ ‘naturalness’ and ‘elegance’ were recurring compliments assigned to a good

epistolary travel writer's style" (Smith 82). It was not considered necessary that epistolary travel novels be comprised of authentic familiar letters, just that they read as such. Travel writing and familiar letters met in style, but a distinction was made for content.

Mahomet intended *Travels* to shape the public perception of India and opinion on sovereign rule. It is interesting, at this point, to think of the idea of art rendering reality in conjunction with the creative reapplication of terms. Mahomet can be seen as trying to alter reality through control of the narrative, and viewed as a figure, described by Said, producing, "interventions of non-European artists and scholars," which are "not only an integral part of a political movement, but in many ways the movement's *successfully* guiding imagination, intellectual and figurative energy reseeing and rethinking the terrain common to whites and non-whites" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 212). He provides a more intimate perspective on the land, people, and customs from sheer proximity, and his journey reflects on his direct experience within the contact zone. His journey records the dissolution of one empire and the rise of another from the point of view of an individual with an intimate knowledge of the strength of the previous and an understanding of the reasons for its demise. Said claims "such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition" (Said, *Orientalism* 94). The text is a work of art, a creation of the creative process participating in the development of a planetary consciousness. It is important to recognize and acknowledge the possibility that colonizing and colonized cultures may have literary traditions in common, as well as cultural traditions.

## II. Context

Looking at travel literature from both Britain and Muslim India links travel and the expansion of knowledge. Noting the development of modern man in the literature of the Mughal Empire breaks the notion out of the domain of western tradition and roots it within the economic development of a society, further supporting recognition of commonalities of culture. This is important to consider when looking into a figure who sees an intimate relation between the individual and prosperity, and the state and security, which results from strong centralized rule.

India's familiarity with dynasty and empire began long before the British formally engaged with India through the English East India Company. Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries the territories of northern India were unified under a series of Muslim dynasties, commonly referred to as the Delhi Sultanate. These rulers enjoyed varying degrees of success maintaining leadership, but it was the splintering of centralized control that provided the opportunity for aggressive neighbors to end dominion. Mahomet mentions this in Letter XXII in his discussion of Delhi as "the frequent wars that desolated a great part of the country" (Mahomet 91), and "the history of revolutions...fraught with so much friction, that it would be impossible to reconcile it to reason or reflection" (Mahomet 92), and in how "the royal tenure of the throne, is grown so insecure, that the Mogul has been, of late years, deposed at pleasure, to make way for such of his servants as could gain over the people, that great engine of power! to their cause" (Mahomet 92). These describe a place of plenty whose poor leadership created loss, which he recognized from history. The Mughal invasion by Babur at the First Battle

of Panipat in 1526 brought an end to the three hundred year rule of a fractured Muslim dynasty, and marshaled in the next.

The Delhi Sultanate established a system of administration based on land-revenue and land-revenue assessment (Ali 39), but it would be the rulers of the Mughal Empire who would refine that into a highly systematized and centralized administration the likes of which had never been seen on the subcontinent. Of significance in the development of an enduring Mughal polity was the work of Akbar (1556-1650) in the form of clearly defined classification in three important areas: officers of the military, land-revenue assignment and division of his empire (Ali 40). There were a few conceptual components institutionalized in addition to the structural components of administration to help secure longevity of rule. Of note is Akbar's promotion of the concept of an absolute sovereign whose authority was derived directly from God. This was coupled with a renewed emphasis on a theory of a secularized social contract from earlier political theorist of the Muslim world. Akbar redefined the parameters of nobility for inclusion of different races and religions (Ali 42). In a country with a history of religious and national plurality, as was India's in the sixteenth-century, a ruler who wished to retain control of a vast area would find it necessary to adopt principles not just of tolerance, but equity. One of the most remarkable shifts that occurred under Akbar was the moderate approach to discipline of individuals within the nobility, while his contemporaries employed execution, confiscation of property and humiliation of family (Ali 43). These foundational alterations of governance cultivated a strong and enduring loyalty in the subjects of the Mughal Empire, and it is in these developments that a notion of 'just rule' can be seen. Mahomet contemporizes this idea in Letter XXXIII as he records Raja

Cheyt-sing's manifesto, "expressive of the most lively sensibility for the fate of a country" (Mahomet 120). The Raja's defense is "in vindication of his government" after the surrender of his territory to the British. He requests leniency because of the superior state of his lands and people, which are the direct result of the security he had provided over the territory during his rule (Mahomet 120-1).

By the 1570's Akbar began an aggressive expansion from the Indian plains out to the coast of the Indian Ocean. This was a major political move for control of the maritime trade routes and strategic ports and engaged the Mughals with the Deccan Sultanates of the south, the Portuguese *Estado da India* (who arrived in 1497) at Goa and the Safavids of Iran whose history in the area went back to 1500 (Alam, Subrahmanyam 360). The Mughals were after control of Gujarat, Bengal, Goa, Surat and the Deccan. Ambassadors were dispatched to the various territories and reported back, detailing court activities and describing the environment, commodities and manufacturing capacity of each state. If the sovereigns of the areas of Mughal interest were willing to declare allegiance as well as a financial tribute, war could be avoided but expansion could not be stopped (Alam, Subrahmanyam 370).

In an ever-expanding territory, which encompasses a more diversified landscape and citizenry, it is not just relations with nobility that affect the rule of an empire, but also the role and influence of merchants to balance and control within it. Trade figures heavily in the success of any civilization or empire, and it is paramount in global relations. Mahomet provides an example of this in Letter XXV, "as an instance of the wealth and consequence that aggrandize any situation, where trade is introduced" (Mahomet 99), continuing on to describe the influential port of Surat. A little more than a hundred years

before the publication of *Travels* the town had been a small exchange market where the people, “by extending their commerce, invited numbers to settle among them; and thus, by the introduction of arts, population, and industry, Surat became in a few years, one of the most considerable towns in the world” (Mahomet 99), ruled by a Governor before whose administration “all actions criminal and civil are brought” (Mahomet 99). The portrait suggests that strong central power, security of property, and the practice of trade can flourish in contemporary society as it had in the past. There has always been, and there always will be, a tension between the interests of commerce and governance. Balance between these two forces that the challenge of any great ruler. Both require currency, both desire currency, but only one, by definition is a polity.

The port of Gujarat, and the Gujarati traders, played a significant role in western Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade. In Goa, Calicut, and Melaka there existed influential Hindu-Jain merchant communities referred to as *baniyas*. Mahomet refers to the Banyans in his discussion of Surat, “while the Mogul government was in vigor” (Mahomet 99) as “the fairest dealers in the world, and remarkable for plain integrity, and an admirable control of temper” (Mahomet 99). The name appears in records of the Dutch and English as late as the eighteenth-century, and as early as a 1518 report by the Cairo-based Jewish merchant Francisco de Albuquerque who had served the Portuguese for years in the Indian Ocean. These traders created networks and worked out agreements with one another as well as local government officials. Instability and lack of security is evidenced in records from the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries, noting ports along the west coast of India where military actions, which the Portuguese termed “piracy” (Subrahmanyam, “Of Imarat and Tijarat” 769), were frequently taking place. A

letter from Francisco Brito Chanoca in 1546 requests that business in Dahbol be wrapped up quickly, fearing for his safety (Subrahmanyam, “A Note On The Rise of Surat” 27).

The systematization of both polity and commerce introduced at the start of the sixteenth-century with the Mughal Empire stabilized relations between traders, while simultaneously allocating an enormous amount of productive land to the control of a relatively small number of elites. This elite class controlled the commodities produced, which were then traded through the merchant class (Subrahmanyam, “Hearing Voices,” 76). These patterns of production and trade generated a lot of revenue, keeping both classes content, tending toward decadence, and requiring a strong independent government to regulate relations of commerce and to minimize aggressive tactics employed to gain power.

In looking back at some of the literature in the history of India, we find several elements considered as developments of modernity, such as the distinction between public and private and the rise of the self-made man in society. Mahomet writes about a variety of the customs of these different areas of his society. Letters XII (Mahomet 62-5) and XIII (Mahomet 65-8) discuss circumcision and marriage, respectfully, and as a military man writing of his journey across north India, many letters write of the bravery of the British military and provide descriptions of battles and spoils of war. His descriptions of landscapes provide examples of great bounty in well-governed areas, which can be contrasted with occurrences of poverty and hunger from poor agriculture years. He points out that the failure of the people to thrive is the result of poor governance. An example of this is found in Letter III where he describes the dearth of 1769 and at seeing people fall down dead in the streets, how “a small portion of rice,

timely administered to their wants, would have been of more real importance than their mines of gold and diamonds” (Mahomet 41). From the consideration of commerce as a prime mover, trade routes and sites of production, and the increase in consumption of luxury goods, I move to cultural effects of expansion, ”to delink the notion of modernity from a particular European trajectory,” and acknowledge how, “it represents a more or less global shift, with many different sources and roots” (Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories,” 737). It is within this discussion that we again see an intimate connection in the growth of individual, commerce and strong centralized government.

Even before the Mughal reign, oral and literary traditions existed defining roles and ideals for men and women, as well as myths and legends of romance, courage, virtue, and benevolent rulers. Islamic society also utilized normative constructs, such as “*adab*, at once moral training, and cultivation of manner, bodily discipline and spiritual refinement, that represented an ideal for every cultured Muslim of west Asia, and that extended to women as well as men” (O’Hanlon 51). These infused practical activities with spiritual meanings, provided ideals of behavior for members of civilized and cultured society, and they connected mind and body through instruction of physical discipline, and analysis and interpretation of the effects of food, scents, and balances of the elements of the physical environment on temperament. The Delhi Sultanate expanded on these *adab*, with spectacle “in the rituals of display, consumption and gifting” (O’Hanlon 54). These rituals required the exchange of items from distant areas, conferring high value on the gifted items. This ritualized exchange expanded trade across the realm, bringing people from distant areas into contact, strengthening the ties of the realm.

Travel between India and England dates back to 1600 when the English joined the

trade markets. However, for fear of pollutants, by the sixteenth century the Brahmanic Hindu groups largely confined travel to pilgrimages within India (Fisher 157). With the Mughal invasion beginning in 1562, cultural ties were stretched between the Muslim elite of north India and “the more prestigious Islamic lands of Central and West Asia” (Fisher 157). These ties between India and Asia were strengthened through intermarriage, with people defining themselves as descendants of immigrants, and through the commission and dissemination of travel texts from Asia. Again we see the important role of text described by Said and Pratt. Additionally, many elite Muslim men and women from North India took part in pilgrimages to Islamic holy sites (Fisher 157-8). Travel literature was an established form in Mughal India by the time the English began voyage around the Cape of Good Hope. While travel literature was popular in eighteenth-century England, we see a long tradition of the form in Muslim Indian society.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his article “Connected Histories: Notes Toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” suggests markers for modernity are created out of two seemingly conflicting occurrences that are intimately linked to the expansion of commercial interests (736-8). Three markers of modernity are the distinction between public and private, increased importance of the individual with the ability to form identity, and the move from rural to urban. In the expansion of commerce a decline in mobility shifts people from largely nomadic societies to more stationary agricultural ones, and then to urban societies. The second occurrence in the expansion of commerce is the travel along global trade routes. So as mobility declines travel expands. In the expansion of contact between cultures, knowledge grows about places, peoples and the components of lands previously unexplored. The methodic and systematic notation, in the

form of text and maps, replicated and disseminated among various people creates what Pratt refers to as the development of a planetary consciousness. From the idea of cultures engaged in dialogue and cultural exchange, I move to the possible implications of that contained within the man of Dean Mahomet. His *Travels* actively participates in the formation of knowledge about India while offering opinions, through examples, of just rulers, and prosperity as a direct result of the security of private property and person through strong central rule.

### III. Dean Mahomet

“If one studies only what the Europeans saw and said, one reproduces the monopoly on knowledge and interpretation that the imperial enterprise sought.”

Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*. (7)

Through the course of his narrative Mahomet provides examples of classical education, evidenced in his use of Latin and references to writers such as Seneca, Milton, and Cervantes. He provides moral judgments and an understanding of politics and economics. In presenting himself as an authority he intends his opinions on politics, culture, people, and geography to influence the public narrative. He positions his narrative between the Anglo and Islamic-Indic. The book itself is an authoritative document recording the cultural commonalities of colonizer and colonized and entered as public record upon publication. The end result is the articulation of the virtues of an empire ruled by a strong sovereign.

Mahomet brings different cultures into contact within himself, and through *Travels* provides an example of what Said describes as “*liberation*, and not nationalist independence... a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness”(Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 230). Dean Mahomet never once articulates support for independence from Britain, seeing a form of empire in the British government and recognizing the strength that used to exist in the Mughal Empire. Indeed, Mahomet’s support of British expansion is rooted in his perception of India as chaotic and unstable, and his belief in unification through a powerful authoritarian government. *Travels* is necessarily personal, enhanced further by presentation in the epistolary form. The mythology of his lineage as protector and his view of the role of the military within empire precedes the personal narrative style. His use of personal possessive adjectives defines his identification with the military, which is indicative of an underlying political philosophy, which I found exceptionally reminiscent of Hobbes’ theory in *Leviathan*.

Hobbes’ rationale for the necessity of an authoritarian sovereign rests on his idea of man in a state of nature, devoid of law and justice because the terms have no meaning in that state. This state of nature is described as “the war of all against all,” similar to the Darwinian idea of “survival of the fittest.” If man wishes to leave this state of nature and develop a ‘civilized’ society there must be a consensus to adhere to a ‘covenant,’ or contract. However, Hobbes states, “covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure man at all” (Hobbes 93). The military is the sword the sovereign wields. Mahomet provides descriptions of India in Hobbes’ state of nature, when the bands of marauders attack the army, in the ability of many foreign nations to come into

India and fight amongst themselves, and in the fact that the Rajas fight against each other. The country is disjointed, unstable and it's rulers ineffective.

Mahomet's identification with the military includes identification with Hobbes' sword controlled by an authoritarian sovereign power with effective rule through liberal application of the sword, or as Hobbes writes, "that by terror thereof, he is enabled to form the wills of them all, to peace at home, and mutual aid against their enemies abroad" (Hobbes 96). This is a sentiment that Mahomet seems to approve of, as found in Letter IX in the description of the punishment of rebels, those "licentious savages...giving way to our superior courage and discipline"(55), and in Letter XXXIV when "the country became quiet, and no future disturbances were heard of...the refractory were awed into submission by the terror of our arms" (123).

Through the military Mahomet places his identity directly within the elite of his ancient culture and the classical British. Looking at his use of personal pronouns and adjectives offers evidence of the process of an individual's identification with a group. In Letter I (Mahomet 34-6) Mahomet uses possessive personal adjectives in the first paragraph: "my countrymen," "our ancestors," "our women." The first person plural pronoun "we" is found in the fourth paragraph, and in the seventh paragraph "my country," all of which reference inclusion in India. In the second paragraph of Letter I, "our doors" is in reference to Ireland. In the first paragraph of Letter III (Mahomet 39-41) he joins the military and from then on his use of "our" is in reference to the military: "our army," "our camp," "our hotteewallies."

Mahomet identified paternal lineage through service to sovereignty and the Mughal Empire. He recognized classic ideas of virtue and control from just rule in an absolute

sovereignty, and sees this expansion of commercial influence as responsible for the instability of society. The interest of commerce is to make as much money as possible as quickly as possible, but the interest of just sovereignty is the common good of the people. This is seen in the admonishment of the Grand Mogul of Delhi within the last paragraph of Letter XXII (Mahomet 92) where he articulates the authority of the sovereigns usurped by their own depravity. Mahomet presents himself as an instantiation of the new conception of individual in modernity, whose development is intimately linked to commercial interests and expansion of empire. He is a plurality, influenced by multiple societies in time and space, who finds commonalities between elite societies in classic roots: Seneca, sovereignty, Milton, moderation, benevolence, and warrior. Through his use of the epistolary travel novel he participates in traditions of both cultures. He contributes directly to the formation of a body of knowledge about India, presenting himself as a member of an elite class recognized in both cultures. His experiential knowledge provides him with the right to claim authority of his opinions, especially his returning emphasis on the well-being and prosperity of a society and its culture directly linked to the security provided by an absolute sovereign.

*The Travels of Dean Mahomet: An Eighteenth-Century Journey Through India* provides contributions to the public record: academic (flora and fauna); commercial (manufacturing and trading centers); imperial/military (topography, wells); cartographic (latitude and longitude); and even information pertinent to the Hastings Trial. *Travels* was published in the midst of a trial “considered one of the key political trials in the history of the British Empire” (Mukherjee 589). The trial was significant in part because of the very nature of impeachment, it being not just about an individual and specific

crimes but the principals and maxims that legitimize the colonial state (Mukherjee 609). Mahomet perceives the British sovereignty as able to restore India to the grandeur of its antiquity, but only if it is able to avoid the increasing political influence from the mercantile sector of its society.

Nations and the individuals within the nations have intricate and rich histories, ideologies and mythologies, which are claimed and rendered contemporary through the creative process. Mahomet portrays India as a country with a magnificent past and moral people, and the land as Eden able to give biblical bounty to those who warrant it and who know where to get it. His observations on the elite ruling class praise those whose territories are secure and able to prosper, and is highly critical of territories in a state of chaos where rulers are engaged in the indulgence of passions instead of effective rule. Mahomet lived within the commonalities of Indian and British cultures: literacy, arts, sovereignty, and military might. He presents Britain and India as culturally compatible, using himself as proof. He was a company man who believed in the right rule of a strong centralized sovereign and took pride in membership in a disciplined military engaged in just battle. The sword the sovereign wielded in defense of his people secured the common good. Even with his regard for the British military, Mahomet never diminishes the greatness of India, the country or its history even as he dissolves cultural boundaries between the countries. The articulation of equality between elite classes of different cultures can be followed through his use of personal possessive pronouns with the British and Irish, and in references to the ancient Greeks, as found in Letters XVII (Mahomet 79-81), XVIII (Mahomet 81-4) and XIX (Mahomet 84-6). The idea of shared histories is particularly vivid when he writes of “our mamma Eve” (Mahomet 108) in Letter XXVIII.

Far from inhabiting a position of the marginalized or subjugated, Dean Mahomet provides reminders of the superiority of the Muslim Indian culture, such as in Letter XVIII, “Even before the age of Pythagoras, the Greeks traveled to India for Instruction” (Mahomet 83). There are also numerous instances of exceptional abilities exhibited in descriptions of the products of industry such as fine cloth, embroidery, gardens and architecture.

So what is to be learned from this unique narrative? That empire and imperial conquest know no nationality. That there are physical and ideological contact zones in which we all contribute and steal, in unequal measure, and those zones know no nationality. This is all located within or without power, an elusive conquest. Just as we occupy a single human hair’s width in world time, so do names in power’s lineage. Mahomet’s perspective is from the stage of Empire, “from one of the apartments of the Imperial palace, built by Akbar...I looked down, and beheld, as it were from the clouds, the town, four hundred feet below me” (Mahomet 113). Who wouldn’t want to occupy a position of victor atop a cliff in the clouds? It is the position of gods and kings. It is the position that provides a view of the suffering that can be alleviated with the distribution of bounty. *Travels* is a significant document providing witness and testimony on India, its people and culture, and on the politics and economics of India and Britain at the beginning of the British conquest of India. The British needed to see India as he saw it for a successful transition of empire. *Travels* was intended to participate in discussions on art, philosophy, history, cartography and politics, and was intended to be seen doing so.

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## *Biography*

As an undergraduate working towards a BA in Philosophy at Kutztown University, Colleen Fitzgerald focused on the role of the individual within various social constructs, such as religion and government. Her senior thesis, “Personal Identity as Artefact,” was produced under the advisement of Dr. John Lizza. Her studies for completion of an MA in English Literature at Lehigh University focused on the concept of individual agency through such authors as Spaulding Grey, Mary Shelley, Langston Hughes and Dean Mahomet. Her Master’s thesis, “Dean Mahomet: Advocate of Classical Empire,” was produced under the advisement of Dr. Elizabeth Fifer.

Upon graduation, Colleen looks toward gaining teaching experience in higher education while she considers possibilities for further education. She sincerely thanks her friends and family, most especially her sons Angus and Donovan, for their indulgence of her proclivity for bird hunting in Theaetetus’ aviary.