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INVADER ENTHRONED

*The Indian Portraits of Nadir Shah
and Their Local and British Collectors*

ABSTRACT

The conquest of Delhi in 1739 shook India and stunned the world. Despite the horror of his invasion, Nadir Shah (r. 1736–47) was commemorated in dozens of portraits from across the subcontinent. Contemporary depictions of the Iranian conqueror align with his imperial rhetoric and the new aesthetic of his Indo-Persian realm, but the vast majority were created posthumously between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. More curious is the fact that many of them are inserted into dynastic portrait series of Mughal emperors even though Nadir Shah did not stay to rule. Why did local painters continue to glorify a foreign invader and plunderer for another century after his death? The motivations are further complicated by two very different groups of patrons and collectors—local and British elites in India. Nadir Shah's defeat of Delhi empowered regional rulers and emboldened British imperialist ambitions. Their divergent perspectives and the roles they played in the viral circulation of Nadir Shah's image across India form the core of this investigation.

"The Persians laid violent hands on everything and everybody. . . . For a long time, streets remained strewn with corpses, as the walks of a garden with dead leaves and flowers."¹ This was the mental picture of the Delhi massacre of 1739, as recalled by Anand Ram Mukhlis, a senior official at the Mughal court.

In India, Nadir Shah (r. 1736–47), founder of the Afsharid dynasty (1736–96), is remembered as the invader from Iran who devastated the capital city, plundered its treasures, and slaughtered twenty thousand of its inhabitants. The phrase *nādir-shāhī* entered the local parlance to refer to a massacre, and it carries the meaning of tyrannical rule and terror to this day.² Yet, this brutal conqueror was commemorated in dozens of portraits from across the subcontinent.³ This article begins with the few but fascinating contemporary representations and considers them in light of the rhetoric and aesthetic of his empire-building project. The majority, however, were produced posthumously from the early prototypes, and many were added to genealogical series of Mughal emperors, including painting albums and medallion portrait sets. Some were made for local collectors, while many others were produced for the new British elite. Their demand for Nadir Shah's image, which lasted until at least the mid-nineteenth century, is the prime focus of this investigation.⁴

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Nadir Shah elected not to stay to rule India. He reinstated Muhammad Shah (r. 1717–48) on the throne under his suzerainty and left Delhi after two months, carrying off its treasures back to Iran.⁵ But in painting, he was thrust into the Mughal dynastic lineage. This study explores the divergent motivations behind the often pondered but never explained transformation of Nadir Shah from a foreign aggressor to a haloed emperor of India. It asks how, and why, regional and colonial collectors constructed their own versions of the legend of the Iranian conqueror. What also emerges from this inquiry is a novel consideration of Nadir Shah's Indian portraits as a measure of the British agenda. By tracing the popularization of his image—in portraits, engravings, and biographies—to the rise of British power in India, this study presents a new art historical perspective on the formative period of colonial rule under the East India Company.⁶ As a final thought, the article takes a brief look at the transmission and mutation of Nadir Shah's image in India through the concept of virality and considers how it was shaped and spread by multiple carriers and variants.

The broader aim of this study is to contribute to the scholarship on royal portraiture in India,⁷ not just by attending to a hitherto unexplored body of work, but by offering fresh considerations of patrons and collectors as agents of circulation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and by posing new questions about the varied political functions of portraiture.

From Shah to *Shāhanshāh*

Son of a herdsman of the Afshar tribe in Khurasan on the northeastern frontier of Iran, Nadir Shah's meteoric ascent is the stuff of legend. He emerged as a gifted warrior following the collapse of the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722). His subsequent successes in regaining Iran from the Afghans in 1729 and the Caucasus from the Russians and Ottomans in 1735 caught the world's attention. It was, however, his invasion of Delhi and sack of the wealthiest Islamic empire in 1739 that propelled him into global infamy. This was swiftly followed by the conquests of Central Asia, Dagestan, and the Persian Gulf. The Ottomans were his next target. Europe and China, too, were rumored to be in his sight.⁸

As an outsider with neither dynastic nor religious legitimacy, Nadir Shah cast himself as the successor of Timur (r. 1370–1405) and Genghis Khan (r. 1206–27) and aspired to replicate their territorial reach.⁹ Both the Mongols and Timur sacked Delhi (in 1303 and 1398, respectively). Nadir Shah, too, needed India to prove his world-conquering claim, as well as its vast riches to fund future campaigns.

The Delhi conquest was the highpoint of Nadir Shah's legend, and his known paintings, from Iran and India, were all created after this climactic moment.¹⁰ A life-size oil portrait, ca. 1740s, at the V&A is perhaps the most pronounced pictorial representation of his Indian victory (fig. 1).¹¹ Dressed in a Persian robe and his signature four-pointed red hat, the Iranian ruler is adorned with the Mughal emperor's jewels, seated on a Mughal carpet in a Mughal tent. Bearing the fruits of his conquest, his body functions as a resplendent monument to his biggest military feat.

This bodily transformation began before he even reached Delhi. A report that Nadir Shah was dressed as a Mughal emperor caused alarm at the Mughal court when he was still five hundred miles away: "News was brought that Nadir Shah had put on the Indian dress, and sat on the throne in the manner of Indian emperors. . . . On this news the Emperor was quite confounded."¹²

The translation of Nadir Shah's body into the Indian realm is fully realized in several contemporary portraits by Indian artists. Among the earliest are three identical compositions by Muhammad Panah, all dated to the early 1740s, one at the V&A, another at the Bodleian



FIGURE 1. *Nadir Shah*, attributable to Muhammad Riza Hindi, ca. 1740s, Iran, Isfahan. Oil on canvas, H x W: 179 x 116.5 cm. V&A, London, IM.20-1919

Library, and the third formerly in the F. R. Martin Collection (figs. 2a–c). Seated against a gold brocade bolster,¹⁵ Nadir Shah is dressed entirely in red, a color designed to induce awe and fear in his opponents.¹⁴ His attire and adornment are similar to those in his Iranian portraits (fig. 1), but the painting style is distinctly Indian, most noticeably in the facial rendering.

Besides their identical composition,¹⁵ all three paintings bear an inscription that reads “image of the king of kings (*shāhanshāh*), possessor of Jamshid’s majesty (*jam-jāh*), Nadir Shah.”¹⁶ The Iranian ruler claimed universal sovereignty as the *shāhanshāh*, a title that originated in ancient Iran.¹⁷ He issued an order that he should be addressed as *shāhanshāh* of the



FIGURES 2a–c. *Nadir Shah*, signed Muhammad Panah, India. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper. (a, top left) ca. 1740s, India. H x W: 26.5 x 15.5 cm. V&A, London, IM.237-1921. Photo by author. (b, top right) From the “House of Timur” album compiled ca. 1800 by Gore Ouseley, dated AH 1155/1742–43, India. H x W (image): 20.2 x 11.2 cm. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS. Ouseley Add. 173, fol. 29v. (c, bottom) Regnal year 24/1741–42, India, from F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1912), vol. 2, pl. 168. Dims. unknown. Former F. R. Martin Collection, present location unknown

world and throne giver of India.¹⁸ The title is inscribed on many objects to commemorate his victory, including a coin that reads, “Over the sultans of the world is the sultan, *shāh-i shāhān*, Nadir, lord of the conjunction.”¹⁹ The term *jam-jāh*, another of his honorifics, refers to a king whose dignity or majesty is like Jamshid,²⁰ the mythical king of Iran. In the treaty of cession, Muhammad Shah addresses Nadir Shah as “*Jamshid-jāh*” as well as *shāhanshāh*.²¹

The Bodleian and F. R. Martin paintings are signed “the work of the well-wisher Muhammad Panah,”²² indicating they were a gesture to honor Nadir Shah. Little is known about the artist, except that two of his works, both portraits, are included in an album assembled ca. 1740 for Muhammad Shah.²³ His court patronage, the panegyric inscription, the exquisite skills, and



FIGURE 3. *Muhammad Shah and Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, ca. 1730–40, India. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, H x W: 21.5 x 31.5 cm. Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris, MA 3544. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

the intricate decorative details all point to a royal provenance, even though there is nothing to confirm that the works were directly ordered by Nadir Shah.

Another Indian representation likely painted during or soon after his time in Delhi is a double portrait with Muhammad Shah on a white marble terrace, now at the Musée Guimet (fig. 3). Both its stylistic vocabulary and large horizontal format are closely associated with the court paintings of Muhammad Shah.²⁴ Terrace scenes were well established in the Mughal tradition, as were double portraits that typically show a ruler with his successor or subordinate. Representations of two rival rulers are rare; the most well-known precedents are *Jahangir Entertains Shah ‘Abbas* and *Jahangir Embraces Shah ‘Abbas*, both dated ca. 1620 and in the Freer Gallery of Art Collection at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Asian Art in Washington, DC (fig. 4 and F1945.9a).

Despite what appears to be a conventional terrace scene, the intrigue of this double portrait lies in its visually subtle yet politically charged details. Jointly enthroned on the same carpet, the rivals face each other in a mirror-image composition with identical gestures and props, but the appearance of equilibrium is a mere façade. Nadir Shah’s eyes are set slightly above Muhammad Shah’s, casting his gaze downward on the subjugated emperor. The black-feather *jiqqa*—a symbol of sovereignty—has been transferred to the victor. The two nimbus may appear to be the same size, but the inner disc of Nadir Shah’s is significantly larger, signaling his augmented *farr* (divine glory) gained from his victory over Muhammad Shah.²⁵ The hierarchical size of the nimbus is a frequent device in Mughal royal portraiture. In *Jahangir Entertains Shah ‘Abbas* by Bishandas (fig. 4), a submissive ‘Abbas, with a subtly smaller nimbus, much fainter *jiqqa*, and averted gaze, sits next to a larger, more assured Jahangir. This painting



FIGURE 4. *Jahangir Entertains Shah 'Abbas*, from the St. Petersburg Album, attributed to Bishandas, ca. 1620, India. Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper, H x W: 25 x 18.3 cm. National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Freer Collection, Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1942.16a

was in a Mughal album that Nadir Shah looted from Delhi, and it is tempting to think of the Guimet painting as a retort to the slight to Iran in Bishandas's representation.

The veneer of equal standing afforded to Muhammad Shah might have been a face-saving gesture, even if only artificial. The absence of the *jiqqa* from his turban indicates that this is a representation of his first meeting with his vanquisher three days after the defeat. According to Nadir Shah's official account, the Mughal emperor removed his own crown and went to the Iranian camp. Nadir Shah took Muhammad Shah's hand "out of kindness" and seated the Mughal emperor by his side, but "in truth, the full reins of control over the kingdom of India were taken by Nadir."²⁶ In a letter to Riza-Quli, his eldest son, Nadir Shah wrote, "It is our royal intention, from the consideration of the high birth of Muhammed Shah, of his descent from the house of Gaurgani [Timur], and of his affinity to us a Turkoman, to fix him on the throne of empire, and to place the crown of royalty upon his head."²⁷ His feigned respect for Muhammad Shah was thus an act to construct a link to the Mughals, and ultimately, to Timur.

Besides the thinly veiled domination, what is remarkable about this double portrait is the migration of Nadir Shah's body from the pictorial land of Iran to that of India. The circular nimbus, strict profile, terrace setting, and double-portrait composition are all quintessential Mughal elements, but the transformation goes beyond a stylistic makeover. Research on his Persian portraits demonstrates a fundamental shift from the Safavids in terms of how kingship is represented.²⁸ By contrast, the goal here was not to break with tradition but to conform to it. By immersing Nadir Shah's body in the conventions of Mughal royal portraiture while retaining his Persian dress, the painter has created an unambiguous and instantly recognizable image of an Iranian conqueror of India. He is no longer just the shah of Iran but "the *shāhanshāh* of the era, crown giver of the king of India," as his chronicler, Mirza Mahdi Khan Astarabadi, enunciates in the opening of his official history, the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī* (History of Nadir).²⁹ By glorifying the invader, the Indian painters played a role in presenting Nadir Shah as the deserving victor who rescued India. This savior identity is declared in the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*: "the world-illuminating sun conquered the darkness of India, and the abode of the caliphate of the world was enlightened by the light of his existence."³⁰

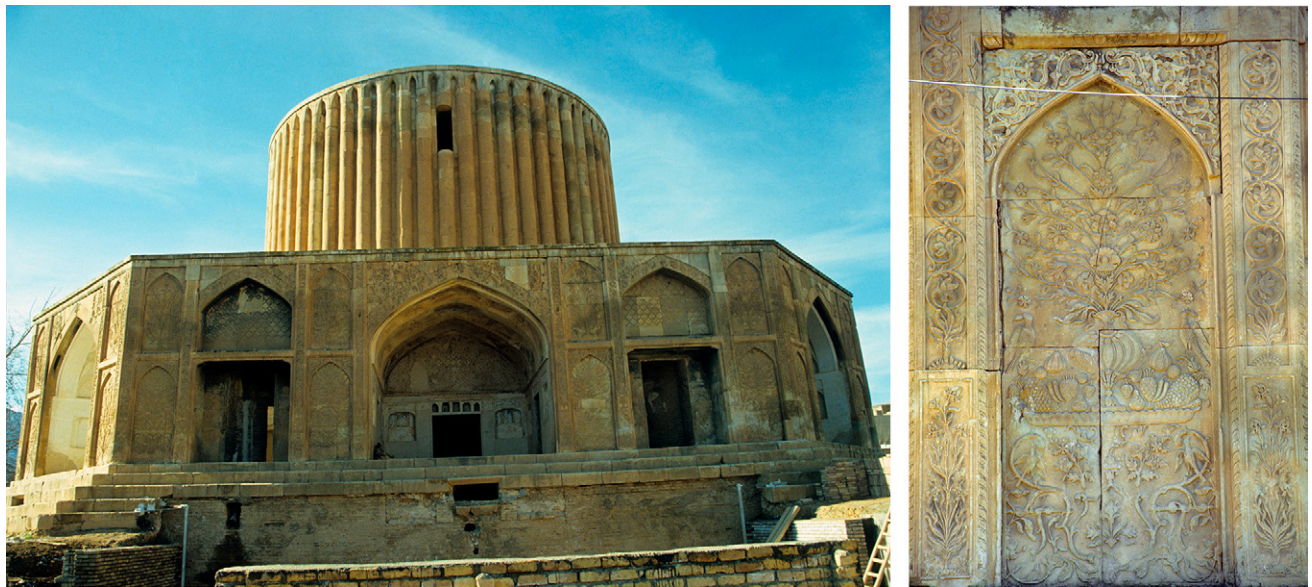
In India, unlike Iran, single portraiture had been a primary mode of representing kingship for over a century, and the four paintings discussed above were created at a time when the production of royal portraits was reinvigorated under the patronage of Muhammad Shah.³¹ These artists were now at Nadir Shah's disposal, and he was in a position to take advantage of a thriving, readymade local practice—with its established makers and audience—by taking over as the royal subject. Whether the present works were created by the Mughal painters at Nadir Shah's command or of their own accord to win favor with the new overlord, it is clear the artists made a conscious decision to present the conqueror in the local visual language.

While their target audience is unknown, the fact that these portraits are replicated in later versions implies a sufficient level of exposure. Some of these prototypes were made in multiples, such as the composition by Muhammad Panah, thus further indicating that they were intended for dissemination. Such intention becomes more compelling when viewed in light of Nadir Shah's instruction to distribute the victory dispatch: "Make copies of this our royal mandate and disperse them over our empire, that the well-wishers of our throne may be happy and rejoice, and our secret enemies be dejected and confounded."³²

Whether it was putting on Indian dress and jewels or having Indian-style portraits painted by Muhammad Shah's artists, the "Indianization" of Nadir Shah's body was not an isolated

attempt. As the next paragraph will show, it is consistent with the broader evidence of his appropriating, if not acculturating to, the visual traditions of the conquered land to create a new aesthetic of empire. This simultaneous “taking and making” of art as an instrument of empire building fits into the innovative concept of “grafting” conceived by Holly Shaffer. In her book, *Grafted Arts*, she uses the idea to illustrate “the violent and creative processes of suturing arts” during the British campaigns to establish control over western India in the late eighteenth century, an example being a Maratha painting layered over an English print of a British soldier, now galloping through an Indian landscape.³³ This “grafting” of a foreign body onto the host in what Shaffer terms the “mercenary method of artistry” has an earlier example, it would seem, in the artistic mode associated with Nadir Shah.

When the Iranian conqueror left Delhi, he took with him a great number of artists, though it is not known who they were or if painters were among them. He also brought back hundreds of scribes, masons, builders, smiths, carpenters, and stone carvers.³⁴ According to Jonas Hanway’s contemporary account, Nadir Shah recruited these Indian craftsmen with the intention “to build a city after the model of Dehlie. . . . This new city was proposed to be called Nadirabad; which . . . might remain a monument of his conquest in India.”³⁵ Of the many buildings reportedly erected by Nadir Shah in Iran,³⁶ few have survived. Qasr-i Khurshid (Sun Palace) in Kalat, just seventy-five miles from his birthplace of Dargaz, was constructed by Indian builders to house his loot from Delhi.³⁷ The pavilion is, in the words of Sussan Babaie, “a concoction of the most incomprehensible features of Iranian architecture, some of which . . . are hybridized and adopted as exotic elements from an Indian context” (fig. 5).³⁸ The Indian stone carvers decorated the exterior walls with panels of floral sprays, tropical fruits, and parrots typical of Delhi’s architectural ornamentation. This Indianizing tendency was not confined to art, adornment, and architecture. Nadir Shah was said to have adopted Indian customs by celebrating Nauruz “after the manner of the Emperors of Hindustan” and distributing Indian gold coins (*muhurs*) among his army.³⁹



FIGURES 5a,b. Qasr-i Khurshid (Sun Palace), Kalat, and one of the Mughal-style carved stone panels on exterior. Photo © Sussan Babaie

Attempts at acculturating to the ways of the conquered peoples were not new. Beginning with Ghazan Khan (r. 1295–1304), the later rulers of the Ilkhanate converted to Islam and patronized the first illustrated manuscripts of the Iranian national epic, the *Shāhnāma*. The Timurids (1370–1507) transitioned from their nomadic Turkic tribal system to a sedentary Perso-Islamic polity.⁴⁰ Unlike the Ilkhanids and the Timurids, however, Nadir Shah did not stay to rule the conquered land. His stylistic appropriation focused on his external appearance.⁴¹ By cloaking his physical body, painted body, and palatial body in the aura of the Mughal dynasty, the conqueror assumed the outward identity of the subjugated to create a new vision of himself as the *shāhanshāh* of an Indo-Persian empire.

The Afterlives of Nadir Shah: Patronage and Perspectives

The contemporary paintings of Nadir Shah represent his imperial rhetoric, but the vast majority of his Indian portraits are later reproductions. Forty of them were located in this study, though there must be many more. When viewed together, it becomes manifest that they are derived from a small handful of prototypes. While a complete survey is beyond the scope of this article, a brief introduction and some broad observations will be helpful before delving into specific examples.

Based on stylistic, iconographic, and compositional traits, the posthumous portraits may be categorized into five types. The first shares a close affinity with the depiction of Nadir Shah in the Guimet painting (figs. 6a–d, A5–A19).⁴² The second comprises iterations of the composition by Muhammad Panah (figs. 2a–c), showing a red-clad Nadir Shah in three-quarters view, plus works that were loosely based on the same model (figs. 7a–c, A20–A24). The next group shows a very different-looking Nadir Shah, donning an elongated version of his hat (figs. 8a–d, A25–A31). This is followed by an assortment of bust and half-length representations set in a feigned or physical oval frame borrowed from the European portrait tradition (figs. 9–11, A32–A42). Some form part of a portrait miniature set, in ivory or on paper, while others were printed in European texts. The final group shows Nadir Shah with a square face and a thick scarf tied at the front of his hat (figs. 12–14, A40–A44).

Notwithstanding adherence to their corresponding precedents, some variations are observed across the different groups. Nadir Shah is depicted with a disc or ring halo in most of them, though not all. He is seated either on a carpet, a platform- or chair-throne, and occasionally accompanied by attendants. Unlike the early models, Nadir Shah is depicted with a sword in most of these instances. Some paintings are nearly identical and have the same frame, thus suggesting an open market for readymade portraits. Quality varies; some could be copies of copies, while others, such as the portrait at the NMAA (fig. 6a), show impressive delicacy in their rendering. Pounced lines are visible in some cases, demonstrating that they were transferred from a prototype (figs. 6a,b).

Nadir Shah's Indian portraits also reveal the remarkable geographic and temporal extent that his image had traversed—from Delhi to the Punjab Hills in the north, Murshidabad in the east, Hyderabad in the south, and Jaipur in the west, from the mid-eighteenth century following his death to the British period in the nineteenth century. But why did local painters continue to make these exalted images of a foreign invader and plunderer? And who gave agency and impetus to the dissemination? Virtually none of the painters are named. Their provenance and other particulars as well as the prevailing political environment, however, guide us in two directions—local and colonial collectors.



FIGURES 6a–d. *Nadir Shah*. Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper. (a, top left) Artist unknown, mid-18th century, India. H x W: 19.9 x 10.5 cm. National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Freer Collection, Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1907.256. (b, top right) Signed Ram Sipar Musavvir, ca. 1800, India. H x W: 12.5 x 8.8 cm. British Museum, London, 1936,0111,0.4. Photo by author. (c, bottom left) ca. 1900, India. H x W (folio): 30.6 x 22.9 cm. National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Arthur M. Sackler Collection, Purchase — Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.439. (d, bottom right) Artist unknown, from an album of portraits of Mughal rulers and courtiers, 18th century, India. H x W (folio): 40.7 x 29.6 cm. British Museum, London, 1920,0917,0.144. Photo by author



FIGURES 7a–c. *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown. Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper. (left to right) (a) 19th century, India, Himachal Pradesh. H x W: 34.8 x 25 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, MA, 1919.133. (b) From an album interspersed with portraits of Mughal rulers, 18th century, India. H x W (folio): 44 x 32 cm. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS. Ouseley Add. 166, fol. 44r. (c) From an unbound series of portraits of Mughal and regional rulers in India, 19th century, India. H x W (image): 43 x 29 cm. Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Bournemouth, BORG M 00620

Becoming *Pādshāh* of India

Information on the portraits' Indian patronage is scarce, but at least three local collectors, albeit subsequent owners rather than original patrons, are identified. The V&A portrait by Muhammad Panah (fig. 2a) came into the possession of a Delhi judge named Maulvi Muhammad Husayn before 1904. A Murshidabad portrait (A19) was owned by Nawab Sayyid Muhammad Bahadur (1867–1919), a politician from Calcutta and a descendant of Tipu Sultan of Mysore (r. 1782–99). An album of Hyderabad rulers featuring Nadir Shah (Fig. 8a) belonged to Mir Usman 'Ali Khan, nizam of Hyderabad (r. 1911–48). Other portraits, by virtue of their present locations, such as the Dogra Art Museum in Jammu (A6) and Delhi Museum (A30), have likely had Indian owners too.

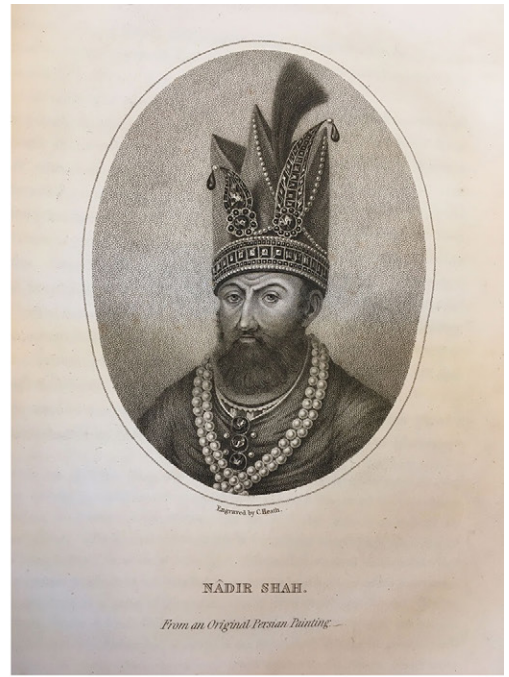
The arrangement within an album also offers tantalizing clues and reveals Iranian leanings among some of the collectors. In an album at the British Museum, Nadir Shah is placed not in a chronological sequence but between two Mughal courtiers with Iranian connections (fig. 6d). The first is Shuja' al-Daula (r. 1754–75), the third nawab of Awadh, which was established in 1722 by Sa'adat Khan, a Nishapur native who became a governor under Muhammad Shah, and Persian heritage remained strong under Shuja'.⁴³ The other figure is Miyan 'Abd al-Hadi, later known as Asalat Khan, who was brought from Iran to India with the return of the embassy of Khan 'Alam in 1618 and rose to the rank of paymaster general (*mīr bakhshī*) in 1644.⁴⁴ It raises the question whether the patron might have been of Iranian heritage, perhaps with an admiration for fellow countrymen who had risen to power in India. This would explain the reverence paid to the Iranian ruler in the Persian inscription: "Sultan of the sultans of the world, *shāhshāhān*, Nadir Shah, *pādshāh*, lord of the conjunction," which was taken almost verbatim from the coin issued after the Delhi conquest.⁴⁵ In a Deccani portrait album



FIGURES 8a–d. *Nadir Shah*, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. (a, top left) From an album of portraits of Hyderabad rulers and courtiers, to which portraits of Timur, Nadir Shah, and others were added, artist unknown, ca. 1800–25, India, Hyderabad. H x W (image): 20 x 10.5 cm. British Library, London, Add. Or. 4415, fol. 20. Photo by author. (b, top right) Artist unknown, second half of the 18th century, India, Deccan. H x W (folio): 29.2 x 20 cm. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 2013.19.52. (c and d, bottom left and right) Artist unknown, ca. 1890, India, Jaipur. H x W: approx. 8 x 6 cm. V&A, London, IS.39-1990 and IS.40-1990

(A30), Nadir Shah fits chronologically between Muhammad Shah and 'Ahmad Shah Durrani (r. 1747–72).⁴⁶ What is unusual, however, is that the series begins with Iraj, the favorite son of the *Shāhnāma* warrior-king Faridun, who inherited Iran and India. He was followed by Alexander, Genghis Khan, and Timur, who all invaded Iran and India and were celebrated in both cultures. This tracing back to Iraj and other hero-conquerors of the two empires points to an owner who was favorably disposed toward Iran, and Nadir Shah was likely viewed as an heir to that warrior lineage.

The inscriptions in Persian, the language of literature and high culture of Mughal India, and in Indic scripts provide another possible indication of local patronage. While the Indic scripts tend to identify him simply as Nadir Shah (figs. 2a, 8c,d, A28, A30), the Persian inscriptions are more elaborate in some instances. The portrait at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the NMAA has two inscriptions (fig. 6c): “The blessed likeness of His Majesty Nadir Shah, the emperor-warrior (*pādshāh-ghāzī*) / Drawn at the time of his honorable visit to Shahjahanabad [Delhi].”⁴⁷ This painting is attributed to the nineteenth century, and the text might have been transferred from an eighteenth-century original, thus providing further corroborative evidence that



FIGURES 9a-d. *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown. (a, top left) From an unbound portrait series of mostly Mughal and Sikh rulers, ca. 1840, India, Punjab Plain (Sikh with Guler influence). Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, H x W (image): 15.2 x 11.7 cm. V&A, London, IS. 136-1953. (b, top right) Engraving, from John Malcolm, *The History of Persia* (London: John Murray, 1815), vol. 2, p. 44, Charles Heath (printmaker), 1815. Photo by author. (c, bottom left) From a set of miniatures depicting Timur to 'Alamgir II, ca. 1805-10, India, Delhi. Opaque watercolor on ivory, H x W: 8.9 x 7 cm. British Library, London, Add. Or. 3113. Photo by author. (d, bottom right) Miniature set depicting Babur to Aurangzib with Nadir Shah at the center, ca. 1830, India, Delhi. Opaque watercolor on ivory, miniature: H. 8 cm. Bonhams, London, October 25, 2007, lot 418, present location unknown

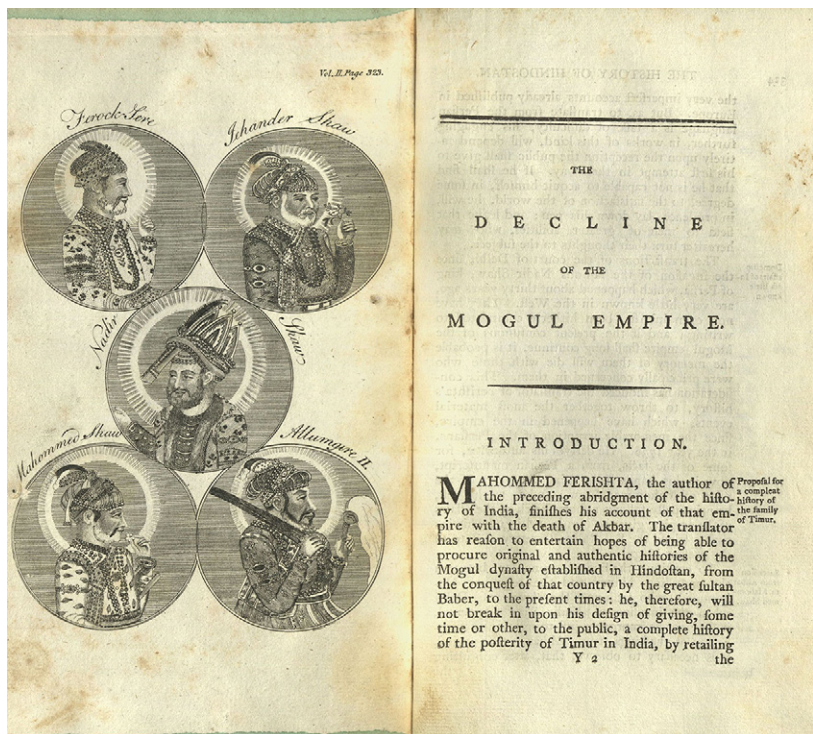


FIGURES 10a,b. (left to right) (a) *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from a portrait series of Mughal rulers bracketed by Timur and Nadir Shah, ca. 1740s, India, Delhi or Deccan. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, H x W: 8.4 x 7.2 cm to 14 x 11 cm (Nadir Shah). Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 2012.25.10. (b) Framed display (only thirteen of the eighteen portraits are displayed) showing a considerably larger Nadir Shah (bottom). Courtesy of Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia



FIGURES 11a,b. A set of miniatures of rulers depicting Timur to Shah 'Alam II, followed by Asaf al-Daula of Awadh and Tipu Sultan of Mysore, artist unknown, ca. 1790, India, Murshidabad. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, H x W (frame): 80 x 72 cm. Bonhams, London, April 8, 2014, lot 296, present location unknown. (left to right) (a) *Nadir Shah* (detail). (b) Nadir Shah in top row, second from the right after Timur and replacing the Mughal founder, Babur

FIGURE 12. Nadir Shah (center) surrounded by four 18th-century Mughal rulers, artist unknown, engraving, from Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan* (London: John Murray, 1792), vol. 2, p. 322, ca. 1779



Nadir Shah had commissioned portraits in the Indian manner during his stay in Delhi. More pertinent to the present discussion is that he is not represented as a ruler of Iran, but rather as a *pādshāh-ghāzī*, a title assumed by the Mughal founder, Babur (r. 1526–30), and his successors.⁴⁸ Nadir Shah himself adopted the title on some of his Indian coins: “The blessed coin of *pādshāh-ghāzī* Nadir Shah.”⁴⁹ *Pādshāh* by itself was a general title for Mughal emperors.⁵⁰ In the inscription on the painting in the British Museum album (fig. 6d), the word *pādshāh* has been added to an otherwise verbatim quote from the coin commemorating his Delhi victory.⁵¹ Where a title is included, virtually all the Persian inscriptions on these reproductions refer to Nadir Shah as *pādshāh* or *pādshāh-ghāzī* (figs. 6a, 6d, 7b, 9a, 13, A28, A34), thus hailing him as the new emperor of India.⁵² This status was confirmed in a contemporary French account from Delhi: “All the proclamations in the city are made in his name as the King of India”; he was recognized as “King of India” as far as Murshidabad on the western edge of India even though he had not penetrated there, and coins were struck in his name and prayers were offered to him.⁵³

Historical circumstances concerning the commissioning and collecting of royal portraits in India may also help further our understanding of the milieu for the local transmission of Nadir Shah’s image. The genre in Mughal India began with Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and flourished under Jahangir (r. 1605–27) and Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58).⁵⁴ It went into decline when Aurangzib (r. 1658–1707) shunned figurative painting in his later years but was revived by Muhammad Shah as mentioned earlier. Mughal emperors utilized portraiture to, among other functions, assert their ancestral lineage to Timur—the source of their legitimacy—and genealogical portraits became a primary mode of visualizing their dynastic rhetoric.⁵⁵ The practice of collecting royal portraits and organizing them into series spread beyond the Mughal court and became part of the pursuit of the local cultured class and regional rulers. They acquired single



FIGURE 13. Nadir Shah (right) and Akbar (left), artist unknown, ca. 1900 (?), India. Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper, H x W (folio): 9 x 8 cm. Wellcome Library, London, 582691i. Photo by author

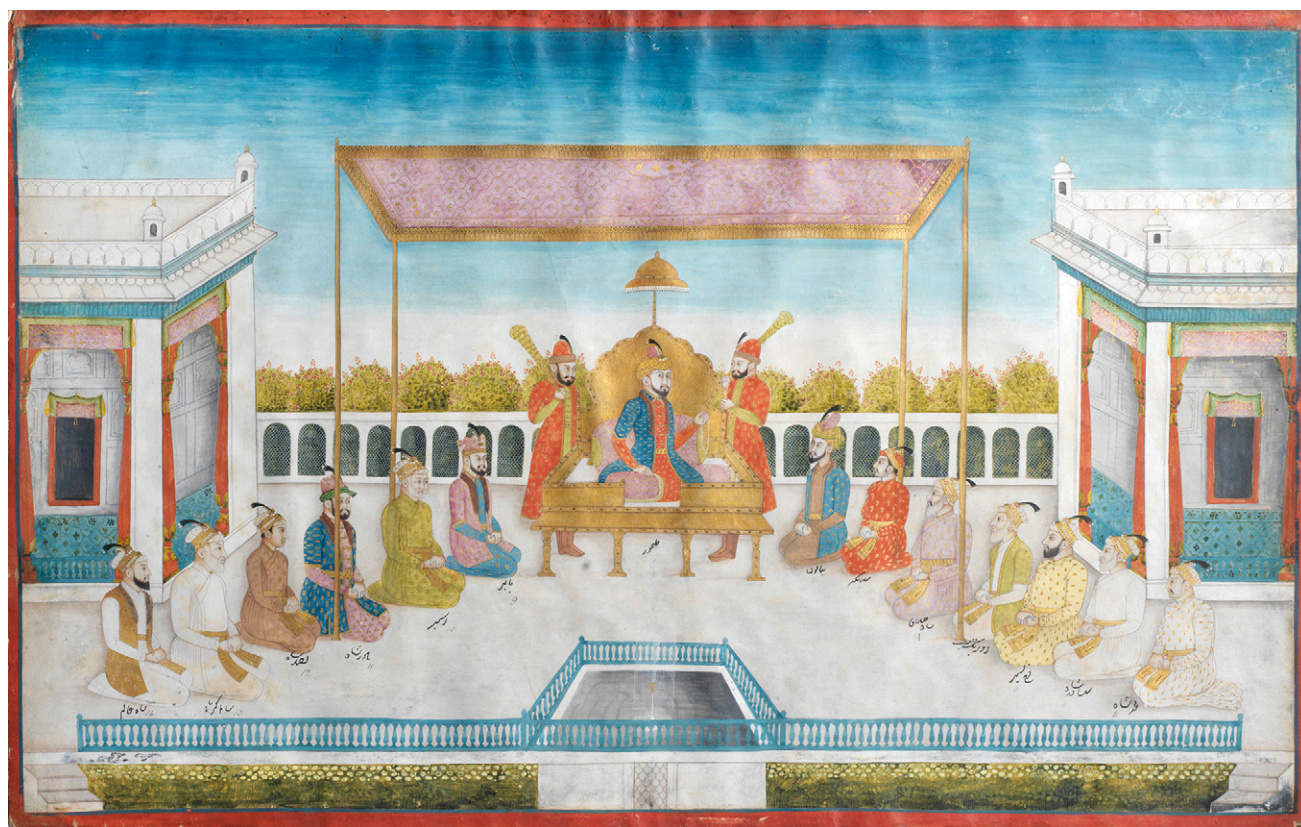


FIGURE 14. Mughal Rulers, the House of Timur (Nadir Shah is fourth from the left), artist unknown, 1772, India, Murshidabad. Opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper, H x W (mount): 35 x 54 cm. Bonhams, London, April 21, 2015, lot 181, present location unknown

folios and albums sold by or taken from the Mughal royal library as well as commissioning them from local or Delhi émigré painters, either for their own collections or as gifts (*nazr*) to forge bonds of affiliation between Delhi and the provinces, or between provinces.⁵⁶

In the aftermath of Nadir Shah's invasion, painters fled the capital city to seek work in the regions: the Punjab Hills, Rajasthan, Awadh, Bihar, Bengal, and the Deccan.⁵⁷ Among their new patrons were local nawabs, who had for some time been plotting to destabilize Muhammad Shah's authority.⁵⁸ The dystopian state of affairs is captured in a contemporary Punjabi ballad, with "falsehood, deceit and stratagem" prevailing, "thieves" holding court, and "all nobles and chiefs . . . waiting for [Nadir] day and night" with "treasuries in their hands."⁵⁹ They saw Nadir Shah as someone who could free them from Delhi, while calculating that he would not stay in India. It was widely claimed that Nizam al-Mulk of Hyderabad (r. 1724–48), who had incited the Marathas to invade the Mughal capital in 1737, encouraged the Iranian to deal the final blow, and Sa'adat Khan of Awadh was also implicated.⁶⁰ According to one account, Nadir Shah was alerted by Sa'adat Khan, a fellow Khurasani, to the immensity of the Mughal treasure.⁶¹ Other regional rulers submitted to Nadir Shah's authority in return for titles and military assistance to challenge Mughal rule.⁶² Some areas, such as Jammu and Kangra, gained in prosperity from the diversion of the trade route through the Hill states after the Delhi invasion.⁶³ With Muhammad Shah's authority in shreds and Nadir Shah back in Iran, regional leaders took advantage of the political vacuum to form independent kingdoms, including the Marathas and Rajputs in the north, Sikhs in Punjab in the northwest, nawabs of Awadh in Lucknow and Faizabad in the northeast, nizams of Hyderabad in the central region, and Tipu Sultan of Mysore in the south.⁶⁴ Their gamble that Nadir Shah would release them from Delhi had paid off. Considering the circumstances, it is not difficult to see why collectors in those quarters might be desirous of a portrait of this famed conqueror, their "liberator," whom they would honor as a *pādshāh-ghāzī* in the lineage of Timur. The influx of painters from Delhi, who were skilled in royal portraiture, would surely have been eager to oblige.

Back in Delhi, sympathy for Muhammad Shah was in short supply too. As Muzaffar Alam has observed, the Mughal court was already at a state of near collapse before Nadir Shah's invasion, and there was little loyalty among the self-interested, factious members of the ruling class.⁶⁵ Two contemporary writers pinned the blame squarely on their own ruler. Anand Ram Mukhlis (1739), the personal representative (*vakīl*) of Muhammad Shah's grand vizier, concludes in his *Tazkira* (Memoir) that the weakness of the Mughal emperor was "the true cause" of the defeat; by contrast, he praises Nadir Shah as "a leader of unshakeable resolution" "whose sword, like the orb of light, had flashed over the world from east to west."⁶⁶ In the *Tārīkh-i Hindī* (History of India) (1741–42), Rustam 'Ali expresses grave misgivings about Muhammad Shah, saying he was "negligent of political duties, and . . . careless regarding his subjects."⁶⁷ Poets, too, added their censure. A contemporary Punjabi ballad laments, "our king has worn the cloak of foolishness"; it even justifies the attack by claiming that the Iranian ruler was avenging the siege and massacre of Isfahan by Timur in 1387.⁶⁸ A Hindi poem by Tiluk Das dated ca. 1747–60 recognizes Nadir Shah as "a great lord . . . a hero, famous."⁶⁹ After the sack of Delhi, Mughal officials either fled or capitulated; in the words of Rustam 'Ali, "all these ungrateful persons, through their ambition, had adhered much to the interests of Nadir Shah."⁷⁰

One should not forget the longstanding tradition of migration between Iran and India, and the large number of Iranian émigrés and their descendants in India. Many held powerful positions in Delhi and the regional courts, most prominently the nawabs of Awadh (1722–1858) and nizams of Hyderabad (1724–1948), which stood as centers of Persianate culture in India.⁷¹

Some even interacted with or assisted Nadir Shah,⁷² including Sa'adat Khan, as mentioned earlier. Their strong ties to Iran, through descent, language, customs, code of conduct (*adab*), and the Shi'i faith, might have contributed to a more approving view of this famed conqueror from their homeland. Besides, many of them had fled to India during the final days of the Safavid dynasty or to escape the Afghan invasion of Iran in 1722.⁷³ In their eyes, Nadir Shah, who drove out the Afghans in 1729, was a deliverer rather than a destroyer. The Parsi community, too, would have taken pride in the rise of a new Iranian empire. They formed a wealthy and powerful merchant class in British-controlled Bombay in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷⁴ Despite having settled in India for over a millennium, they still clung "to the idea of being true, yet displaced, Persians," according to Talinn Grigor.⁷⁵

There is scant documentation to connect the visualization of Nadir Shah as the new *pādshāh* to any specific group or faction. Nonetheless, the fractured political landscape and shifting alliances in India complicate perspectives on his invasion and give cause to challenge the single, undifferentiated impression of Nadir Shah as the "scourge of Hindostan."⁷⁶ His many surviving representations as a haloed emperor of India provide compelling evidence of alternative viewpoints generated by a complex set of motivations and allegiances.

The surprisingly favorable treatment of the invader is also noted in contemporary writing. In his study of several accounts of the Delhi conquest, including Mukhlis's *Tazkira* and the Punjabi and Hindi poems cited above, Ernest Tucker finds it startling that contemporary writers in India were willing to idealize the Iranian invader in order to censure the weakness of their own ruler and the disloyalty of his officials.⁷⁷ Tucker puts it down to "a growing self-critical awareness" in eighteenth-century historiography.⁷⁸ But that same narrative continued into the British Raj period (1858–1947). In *Nadir Shah in India* (1925), Jadunath Sarkar, a leading writer from Bengal who was knighted Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire but later criticized for his British leanings, blames the feeble character and "imbecility" of the Mughal emperor whom he reviles as "a gorgeously dressed corpse," while praising the Iranian ruler as "a master of diplomacy and statecraft as well as of the sword."⁷⁹ Syad Muhammad Latif, author of *History of the Panjāb* (1891), for which he was honored with the imperial title *Shams al-'Ulama'* (Sun of the Scholars),⁸⁰ lauds Nadir Shah as a "great Asiatic conqueror" possessing "a dignity which few monarchs have attained by birth."⁸¹ Such adulation for a conqueror can be put in context when it is read in light of the sixteen-page preface in which he lavishes gratitude on behalf of the people of India to Britain for protecting the weak.⁸²

As will be argued below, the narrative of a neglectful and ineffectual ruler suited British imperialist plans and provided convenient justification for an outsider to step in to "rescue" the people of India, and local scholars might have chosen to align their views with those of their masters. As part of the colonial project, British administrators employed a large number of "native" writers in the post of *munshī* (scholar-administrator) to draft official documents, to guide them in local etiquette (*adab*) and politics, and to create Enlightenment associations with their rule.⁸³ Crucially, they helped reshape the history writing of India.⁸⁴ According to Blain Auer, the creation of this new class of *munshīs* "gave birth to the British colonial historiographical tradition of India . . . first in translation, and later through 'original' English language histories."⁸⁵ When one considers the sustained efforts of the British to construct and control the historiographical narrative in India, the glorification of a foreign conqueror by local writers becomes easier to comprehend. This idealized representation of Nadir Shah is by no means limited to writers. As the discussion above has sought to demonstrate, local painters transformed him into an illuminated and illustrious *pādshāh-ghāzī* of India.

The Foreign Savior: An Opening Act for the British Conquest?

While some of the Indian portraits of Nadir Shah were acquired by local owners, it seems a very substantial, if not greater, portion were collected by the British.⁸⁶ The East India Company (EIC) had been present in India since shortly before 1615 when James I sent the first embassy, led by Thomas Roe, to the court of Jahangir to negotiate a trading agreement. Its expansion, however, was a long gestation. It was only after witnessing how Nadir Shah was able to capture Delhi with such ease that the British switched from a mercantile enterprise to an outright military and territorial power,⁸⁷ culminating in Robert Clive's Battle of Plassey in 1757, which led to the beginning of Company rule. The question posed here is whether the British saw an opportunity in leveraging Nadir Shah's image in their own conquest of India.

The British patrons and collectors belonged to a homogenous class of colonial administrators, military officers, and merchants. Many of them were Oriental scholars connected by a deep interest in both India and Iran. Their investment in matters of the history, literature, and language of the two lands was motivated not only by administrative needs, at a time when British policies for the two were tied,⁸⁸ but also by broader goals to control the historiography of the region and to create an Enlightenment image of the EIC, as will be discussed below. This extended to their study of Persian, the official language of Company rule in India until the 1830s, as well as the language of Iran. The Indo-Persian world they inhabited, linguistically, culturally, and politically, may be gleaned from a brief look at their backgrounds. Gore Ouseley (1770–1844), owner of the two Bodleian albums (figs. 2b, 7b, 17) and a key figure in this study, was the aide-de-camp to the nawab of Awadh in Lucknow, an appointment made by the British governor-general around the time the albums were assembled.⁸⁹ A scholar in Persian studies, Ouseley was friends with the renowned Orientalist William Jones (1746–1794), who translated the official biography of Nadir Shah, *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, into French and English.⁹⁰ In recognition of his contribution to the advancement of British interests, Ouseley was appointed ambassador to the Qajar court in 1810–14.⁹¹ Another important personage, James Fraser (1713–54), who commissioned the portrait miniature series at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (fig. 10), was employed by the EIC as a writer in Surat in 1730–40 and 1743–49.⁹² He published the first English biography on Nadir Shah in 1742, just three years after the Delhi conquest.⁹³ Both Fraser and Ouseley were well-known collectors and amassed vast collections of Persian and Indian manuscripts and paintings.⁹⁴

Besides these two prominent figures in the British Indo-Persian network in the eighteenth century, later collectors continued to show an interest in Nadir Shah. Henry Bathurst Hanna (1839–1914), former owner of the Freer drawing (fig. 6a), was a colonel in the Bengal Staff Corps, commanding in Delhi. As a military strategist, he studied Nadir Shah's campaigns.⁹⁵ A keen art collector, too, his holdings of nearly one hundred and fifty paintings were acquired by Charles Lang Freer in 1907 and formed the nucleus of the Mughal art collection of the Freer Gallery of Art, now part of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, when it opened in 1923. The Deccani portrait at the John Rylands Library (A29) is part of the *Bibliotheca Lindesiana* of Alexander Lindsay, twenty-fifth earl of Crawford (1812–1880), which includes a comprehensive collection of texts on the history of India, several copies of the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, and albums of Mughal royal portraits. Other collectors include George Hewett, commander-in-chief in India (1807–11) (fig. 7c); George Eden, governor-general of India (1836–42) (fig. 9a), and James Thomson Gibson-Craig (1799–1886), a Scottish bibliophile (fig. 6b). The paintings with name labels or annotations in English (figs. 6b, 8a,c, 9c,d, 10, 14), and those in UK collections were likely purchased by expatriates and travelers in Delhi and British administration centers such as Bengal.

The British expansion brought its representatives into close contact with regional powers in India. Colonial officials grew fond of collecting Mughal paintings,⁹⁶ and portrait albums were gifted by local leaders to the British at different levels in the new political order, from EIC employees to governors-general and British monarchs. The Surat governor Tīgh-Beg Khan regifted an album to James Fraser in the 1730s.⁹⁷ The nawab of Awadh sent the famous *Pādshāhnāma* and other portrait albums to George III's governor-general from 1797 to 1810, and another album to George IV in 1828.⁹⁸ The British Library album (fig. 8a) was presented in 1915 by Mir Usman 'Ali Khan, nizam of Hyderabad, to Charles Hardinge, viceroy of India. Other exchanges include the V&A portrait by Muhammad Panah (fig. 2a) purchased by Robert Nathan, private secretary to the viceroy in 1904–5, from Maulvi Muhammad Husayn, a Delhi judge; and another V&A painting (A19) acquired in the 1930s by J. C. French in the Bengal Indian Civil Service from Nawab Sayyid Muhammad Bahadur, a Calcutta politician. It was this continuous network of British collectors that helped sustain the demand for Nadir Shah's portraits. Learned in the intertwined languages, histories, and politics of India and Iran, these men moved in the same Indo-Persian circles, and in that world, the Iranian conqueror remained a key historical figure long after his demise.

The fame of Nadir Shah had reached the West even before his audacious invasion of India. Written accounts appeared in Europe as early as 1731, hailing him as the savior who rescued Iran from the Afghan occupation.⁹⁹ The British press followed his rapid rise from the early days as Tahmasb Quli Khan in the service of Tahmasb II to his seizing of the throne in 1736. His sack of Delhi in 1739 generated a frenzy of reports from Surat, Isfahan, St. Petersburg, Istanbul, Venice, Rome, Madrid, and Paris that were published in the London newspapers.¹⁰⁰ Nadir Shah also began to appear in European engravings. A large German print dated 1736, the year of his coronation, represents the Iranian conqueror as a fully armored and mounted warrior (fig. 15). It has more in common with images of a victorious European monarch, such



FIGURE 15. *Tahmas Kuli Chan* (Nadir Shah), Christopherus Volf, 1736, Germany. Etching and engraving, H x W: 79 x 61.2 cm. British Museum, London, 1917,1208.2295. Photo by author



FIGURE 16. Pointing at Nadir Shah (bottom right corner), the Ottoman sultan Mahmud I cries, “Temeswar Bannat— But see the Devil comes.” *The C[a]rd[i]n[a]ls Master-Piece, or Europe in a Flurry* (detail), artist unknown, 1741, London. Etching and engraving, H x W: 31 x 31.5 cm. British Museum, London, 1868,0808.3670. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

as Peter the Great, than the perennial stereotype of a turbaned “Oriental” king.¹⁰¹ Iranian rulers are rarely depicted in European armor; to my knowledge, the only other figures so depicted are Timur and Cyrus.¹⁰² This transformation of Nadir Shah into a European knight speaks to a recognition of his military prowess and chivalric qualities as perceived in the West, as the Latin text in the cartouche informs the viewer that this is an image “of the greatest in peace, of the wonder in war, of the highest Hercules, of the most serene and invincible prince and lord . . . true hero of the time . . . the greatest triumphantor.”¹⁰³ Just months after his conquest of India in 1739, satirical prints of the War of Austrian Succession (1740–48) printed in London added Nadir Shah as a threat to the Ottoman empire and the European imperialist contest (fig. 16).

Writers, too, immediately set to work after the fall of Delhi. *Histoire de Thamas Kouli Kan, Sophi de Perse* by an anonymous French writer was published in 1740, and was translated into English, Italian, and Spanish soon after.¹⁰⁴ In the same year, Joseph Louis de Voulton published an account in Portuguese; and an English translation, thought to be by Samuel Johnson, of a French text was published in London.¹⁰⁵ The first biography written in English was *The History of Nadir Shah* published in 1742 by James Fraser. Commenting on Nadir Shah’s fame, Fraser wrote of “the famous conqueror, who of late has made so much noise in the world,” and he called his subject “a great hero . . . that few ages have produced his equal.”¹⁰⁶ The structure of his book offers a hint at how Nadir Shah was placed in history by Fraser and his compatriots. It opens with a short chronicle of “the Hindostan emperors of the Moghol race beginning with Temur,” and it ends with Muhammad Shah. This is followed by the “History of Nadir Shah,” which doubles the length of the Mughal history. Both the sequence and the emphasis on Nadir Shah are replicated in a set of eighteen portrait miniatures Fraser commissioned several

years later, which runs from Timur to Muhammad Shah and ends with a considerably larger Nadir Shah (fig. 10). The latter is almost certainly a copy of the oil portrait at the V&A (fig. 1), bearing close resemblance in his clothing and jewels down to his right index finger resting on his belt. The ashen face, however, might suggest that the painted portrait was made soon after Nadir Shah's assassination in 1747; the date in the inscription "W. Chinnery scrip 1750" seems to support this.¹⁰⁷

To Fraser, Nadir Shah was not a *pādshāh* of India, as he is identified in the Persian inscriptions discussed above with regard to Indian patronage. Rather, he was the "Emperor of Persia" and the "Famous Conqueror" who ended the Mughal empire.¹⁰⁸ This British "label" for Nadir Shah is inscribed in English on several portraits acquired by other British collectors.¹⁰⁹ Fraser's narrative was followed by that of Alexander Dow, an EIC army officer and author, in *The History of Hindostan* published in 1772. Dow's chapter "The Decline of the Mogul Empire"—a collapse that he characterized as being precipitated by "the invasion of the famous Nadir Shaw"—opens with a full-page illustration that features the Iranian conqueror at the center of a quatrefoil formed by the medallion portraits of Muhammad Shah and three other emperors from that phase of "decline" in the eighteenth century (fig. 12).¹¹⁰ Nadir Shah's role in hastening the demise of the Mughal empire is emphasized not only by his central position and much bigger halo but also by his facing the Mughals in the opposing direction.

Nadir Shah is similarly prioritized in miniature series. These were commercially produced for British residents and tourists in Delhi and major cities of the Presidencies.¹¹¹ In an ivory portrait set from Delhi, ca. 1830, bearing English name plates (fig. 9d), the Iranian ruler is placed at the center surrounded by six Mughal emperors from Babur to Aurangzib, who ruled during a period that was historically dubbed the "golden era" of the Mughal empire.¹¹² Two near-identical sets of portrait miniatures produced in Murshidabad, ca. 1790, are painted on paper and arranged in a four-by-four grid (fig. 11). Nadir Shah appears next to Timur as a substitute for the Mughal founder, Babur, and is followed by the second and third Mughal emperors, Humayun and Akbar. In a genealogical painting dated 1772, also from Murshidabad (fig. 14), Nadir Shah (fourth from the left, between Akbar and 'Ahmad Shah [r. 1748–54]) stands out among other pastel-clad emperors as the only figure with a lapis-and-gold coat that matches Timur's. The visual prominence given to Nadir Shah in the above examples mirrors the emphasis in British biographical accounts, such as Fraser's and Dow's, on Nadir Shah's outsize role in the history of India and in bringing forth the demise of the Mughal empire. Furthermore, it was commensurate with his celebrity as a conqueror, who in British eyes was equaled only by the famous Timur.

Timur's genealogical series also come in album form. One of the two Ouseley albums at the Bodleian Library, assembled around 1800, bears the English title "House of Timur" (fig. 17). It comprises thirty-four portraits and court scenes on facing folios, alternating with pairs of calligraphic specimens. The paintings are arranged more or less chronologically from Timur—on which Ouseley wrote, "conquered Hindustan A.D.1397"—to Muhammad Shah, followed by two portraits of Nadir Shah, thus bookending the Mughal line by the two conquerors of India.¹¹³ The assemblage is prefixed by a biographical introduction written by Ouseley, beginning with "the famous Conqueror, Timur," and ending with Muhammad Shah. Each biography corresponds to a portrait identified by the same number. There is no separate text for Nadir Shah; he is described in the biography of Muhammad Shah. Unlike Fraser's heroic characterization of Nadir Shah, Ouseley, like Dow,¹¹⁴ casts him as a tyrant. He blames Muhammad Shah for pursuing "a life of luxury and sensuality" and accuses "traitorous nobles" such as Nizam

N^o. 1. Timur.

The first of this collection of portraits is a real Indian drawing of the famous conqueror Timur, the founder of the Mogul Empire in India.

According to the Persian Historian, Niebuhr, the name of Timur was originally in the Turkish or Tartar language Timur, pronounced Timur, the 13th Turk, and long time, perhaps some of his arms, making their names long, soon became corrupted into Tamerlane.

Timur was descended from the same ancestor as the great conqueror Gengis Khan, and was born on the 25th of the month Rabi-ul-Khair in the year of the Hijri 736 AD 1335, in the neighbourhood of Kesh, a town in the north-west. At the age of three years he showed an extraordinary degree of bravery and courage, and at seven and a half years of age he defeated the Prince Arghun. When he reached his 25th year he expelled the Mongols of India, and later, but his brother Sultan Bulghak having afterwards quarrelled with him, it was the consequence, by which Timur was expelled, but he liberty and his dominions and ultimately his life.

The year 1371 AD may be considered as the commencement of Timur's Indian Empire, as he immediately overtook the throne of the King of India, and of Ceylon in Hindustan, and shortly after became master of Afghanistan. From this time, the whole of his 36 years' reign was a succession of victories over the Indian world.

In 1398 he undertook the conquest of Hindustan, defeated Sultan Mahmud and his army of 100,000 men, the capital of the empire, but after a short sojourn gave away his empire and government to his children and retired to Kesh and returned to Hindustan.

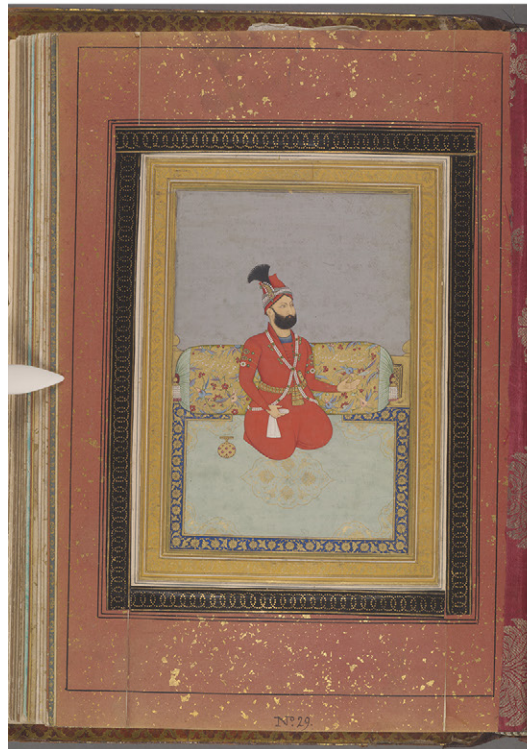
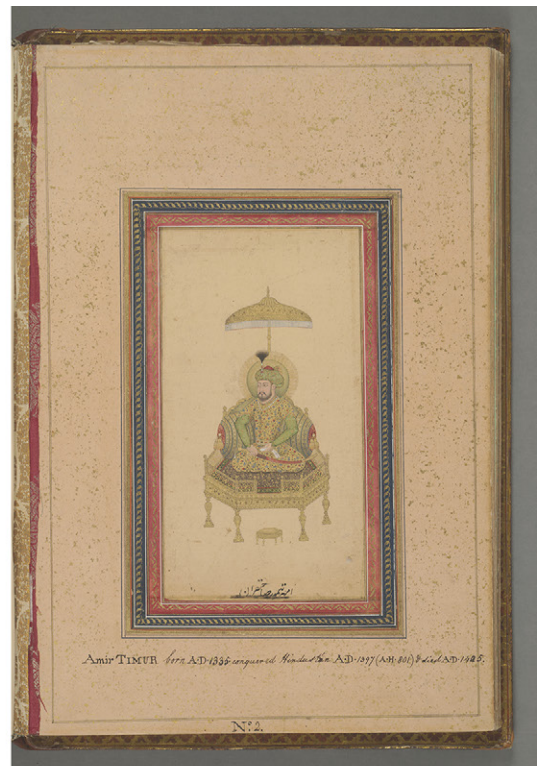
In 1400 Timur completed the conquest of India, defeated Bajajid (commonly known as Bajajid) Emperor of the Turks, and took him prisoner.

Having added to his empire all the Kingdoms South and West of Hindustan, crossed or attacking the empire of Malabar or China, but being set out in the middle of the country of the sea he proceeded his progress and obliged him to call at Oree until a change of wind might enable him to return his march. But fate had ordered that it was to be a longer one than a journey to China, for on Wednesday the 10th of Shaaban 807 AD 1404 he departed from a world, a large portion of which had submitted to his conquering sword. His body was transported from Oree to Samarkand, where it was interred with great pomp.

This Portrait N^o. 1, appears to be an original drawing of the King, and the undergarment of white or support for his arm, formed the robe, shows the form of his banner, and the absence of numerous ornaments and conveniences in the barbarous art pieces in which he chiefly resided.

N^o. 2. Timur

This is also a portrait of the conqueror, but probably reflected in his real features by the imitation of an Indian artist.



FIGURES 17a–d. Gore Ouseley's "House of Timur" album, compiled ca. 1800, India. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, H x W (image): approx. H x W: 22 x 12 cm. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS. Ouseley Add. 173. (a and b, top left and right) First page of biographical introduction and corresponding portrait of Timur, artist unknown, 18th century (fol. 2r). (c, bottom left) *Nadir Shah*, signed Muhammad Panah, dated AH 1155/1742–43 (29v). (d, bottom right) *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, 18th century (30r)

al-Mulk and Sa'adat Khan for conspiring "against their King and Country by calling in the Great Tyrant of Persia, Nádír Sháh, whom they treacherously assisted in his invasion of Hindustan."¹¹⁵

Ouseley's approach to this album is a blending of two traditions: Mughal royal portrait *muraqqa'*s (albums), popular since the reign of Akbar,¹¹⁶ and European engraved portrait books of illustrious kings and famous men,¹¹⁷ specifically books of English kings such as Renold Elstrack's *Baziliologia* of 1618.¹¹⁸ The two cultures shared a preoccupation with royal portraiture and genealogy, as well as a history of collecting royal portraits for display and documentation. The practices of subject identification and dynastic serialization were common to both traditions, but Ouseley's customized juxtaposition of portraits and biographies might also have sprung from a popular hobby among contemporary British bibliophiles. Extra-illustration, or Grangerization as it was later called, became "a craze" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹¹⁹ It was fashionable as a gentleman's pursuit to collect engravings of royal and historical personages and affix them to supplemental pages inserted into a printed text such as James Granger's *A Biographical History of England* (1769), thus creating their own "bespoke" versions of history.¹²⁰ Responding to a historical consciousness and a fixation with order and hierarchy among his contemporaries, Granger introduced an innovative taxonomy whose aim was "reducing our biography to system" and ranking the subjects in their "proper place" based on status, achievement, and fame.¹²¹ He organized the biographies of monarchs and other social classes between the reign of Egbert, the first king (r. 802–39), and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Granger's systemization established "an epistemological framework within which English history could be ordered" and is recognized as being "important to England's national self-definition."¹²² Ouseley's sequencing of emperors, which originates with Tímur, "the founder of the Moghul Empire," and terminates with the invasion of Nadir Shah aided by internal rebels,¹²³ has echoes of Granger's approach of mediating biographical history through portraiture. Another album in the Ouseley collection, without biographies this time, contains portraits from Shah Jahan to 'Ahmad Shah Bahadur (r. 1748–54) interspersed among court scenes, and it, too, ends with Nadir Shah (fig. 7b).¹²⁴

Ouseley was the British-appointed aide-de-camp to the nawab of Awadh in Lucknow. As a British colonizer, his ordering, or reordering, of India's past was more potent than that of a hobbyist organizing the history or defining the identity of his own nation. His albums, and other portrait series collected by his compatriots, were more than private scrapbooks and souvenirs for a gentleman's library; they give us a window into the British perception of the history of their colony and their desire to reorganize its historiography. In her book *The Origins of Modern Historiography in India*, Rama Mantena charts the "profound shifts" in the practice of Indian history and history writing under British rule. She writes, "British interest in the status of history and of historiographical narrative in India was very much at the heart of the formation and consolidation of the colonial state in India."¹²⁵ Their need to reshape the history of India led to the production of historiography by Indian *munshís* as well as English writers, a point raised above, and the making of colonial archives.¹²⁶ The act of collecting, compiling, organizing, and reorganizing portraits of Mughal rulers by the British colonial class may be understood as another manifestation of their tendency to intervene in the narrative of India, which resulted in their own "editions" of the history of India expressed in visual form.¹²⁷

As demonstrated earlier, these serialized royal portraits of the Mughal empire are either bracketed between the two foreign invaders, Timur and Nadir Shah (figs. 10, 17), or they prioritize Nadir Shah as the central or terminal figure (figs. 9d, 10–12, A39) or through other visual means (figs. 13, 14). This narrative headlined by famous conquerors was already in

circulation in the written history by British authors who portray Nadir Shah as the most powerful monarch of the East and an unequalled hero,¹²⁸ though also a bloodthirsty despot and an odious tyrant.¹²⁹ In their visual equivalent, his role as the “terminator” of Mughal authority is commemorated, even though Mughal rule did not officially end with his conquest and Muhammad Shah was reinstated. Why might this elevated image of the Iranian conqueror be useful to British rule? And why were so many versions of it made?

Nadir Shah fascinated Europeans and became a famous personality of his time, as stated above. The London press called him “the Terror of the East, the Wonder of Europe.”¹³⁰ At a time of rapid colonial expansion, his military genius and daring feats were admired by army officers who counted among the collectors of his portraits; even the Duke of Wellington took a translated copy of the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī* with him to India in 1796.¹³¹ Engravings of Nadir Shah were printed in London and Paris, including illustrations in a growing number of English publications (figs. 9b, 12). His first English biography, published by James Fraser in 1742, was followed by many others, including the works of Jonas Hanway (1753), W. H. Dilworth (1758), Alexander Dow (1772), and John Malcolm (1815); William Jones’s French and English editions of the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī* (1770 and 1773), and two further translations into Georgian and German; Francis Gladwin’s translation of *Bayān-i Vāqī’*, a memoir written by ‘Abd al-Karim Kashmiri ‘Abd, who accompanied Nadir Shah on his return from India to Iran (1768); and travelogues by James Spilman (1742) and John Cook (1770).¹³² His story was even versified by Joseph Wise, fictionalized by Henry Mortimer Durand, and staged in theaters across Europe, including Britain, the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Italy.¹³³ The celebrity factor and heroism alone would have spurred the demand for his portraits among the British.¹³⁴

But Nadir Shah was not just a household name. His invasion in 1739 left the door wide open for the British. As Rudi Matthee sums it up, the Iranians “acted as Trojan horse.”¹³⁵ His conquest exposed the vulnerability of the Mughal authority and the political chasm between Delhi and the provinces. Sanjay Subrahmanyam has put forward a counterfactual history: had Nadir Shah stayed to rule India, a longer-lasting Indo-Persian empire would have emerged under him and it would have been far more resistant to British imperialist ambitions.¹³⁶ But he left Delhi after just two months, and Britain was poised to succeed him as the heir to the Indo-Persian realm, rising to become the next conqueror of India and a dominant foreign power in Iran.¹³⁷

The plethora of English publications is almost unified in promoting “the famous conqueror” for defeating the “indolent” and “imbecilic” Muhammad Shah, aided by rebel governors who conspired with Nadir Shah to end the chronic misgovernment.¹³⁸ It suited the British to paint a picture of a weak emperor abdicating his duties to his people, who then had to invite foreign forces to save them from their own master.¹³⁹ Nadir Shah fashioned himself as the liberator of India. In the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, he is compared to the arrival of Nauruz, like spring after a winter of discontent, like light after darkness.¹⁴⁰ The British, too, would cast themselves as the savior and enlightener of India, as will be discussed further below. Such heroizing of an invader needs not be a conscious, coordinated effort, but its repetition in the textual representation of Nadir Shah does speak to a certain attitude that might have evolved with the expansion of colonial control in India, and it might have gone hand in hand with the replication of his visual representation.

For the British in India, even if they were not actively promoting an idealized image of the invader, it was perhaps gratifying to see Nadir Shah being portrayed in the local manner as an enthroned and haloed figure, and to picture themselves in a similar fashion. That vision was

actualized in various Indian portraits of British officers, such as those in the *Dīvān of Mir Qamar al-Din Minnat*, an illustrated manuscript of poems commissioned by Richard Johnson and produced in Lucknow, ca. 1782, now in the British Library. In this manuscript, paintings of the ruler and ministers of Awadh, which had by then become a de facto British protectorate, are followed by those of the new governing elite—Warren Hastings, the first governor-general and an early architect of British India (1772–85) and Richard Johnson, assistant to the resident-general in Lucknow—as well as William Jones, the leading Orientalist and translator of the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*.¹⁴¹ Each illustration is accompanied by an ode (*qaṣīda*) in praise of the subject. Depicting Hastings seated on a white marble terrace and waited on by an Indian attendant (fig. 18), this composition, like Nadir Shah’s portraits, adheres to the formula for local royal imagery. But here the sword is replaced by a book,¹⁴² presumably alluding to Hastings’s reputation as a patron of knowledge and the Enlightenment vision of the British empire,¹⁴³ rather than the brutality of military advancement. In the verse below his painting, Hastings



FIGURE 18. Warren Hastings, artist unknown, from a *Divan* of Mir Qamar al-Din Minnat, ca. 1782, India, Lucknow. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, dims. unknown. British Library, London, Or.6633, fol. 67r

is hailed as having been “born of the First Intellect” (*bimavālid zi ‘aql-i avval*),¹⁴⁴ a reference to al-Farabi’s philosophy on the supreme ruler who serves as the link to the Divine. Central to the political thought of the renowned tenth-century Islamic philosopher is the non-hereditary virtuous regime led by the ruler-philosopher, the source of all power and knowledge, and it is through him that the ruled attain knowledge and happiness.¹⁴⁵ The poet Minnat enthuses about Hastings’s virtuous rule, saying that sedition (*fitna*) will be extirpated.¹⁴⁶ He goes further by extolling the British for liberating India from Mughal oppression: “Our torment is by reason of the adornment of the heavens. . . . We will grab onto the coattails of the noble lord for protection.”¹⁴⁷ This constructed narrative of the “destined” suffering of the people of India and their pleading for rescue by an outsider had already been written into India’s history by British authors, and I would argue that they had positioned Nadir Shah’s conquest as a prologue to British colonization.

We can think of portrait series such as the illustrated *Dīvān* commissioned by Johnson, the two albums compiled by Ouseley, and the miniature set commissioned by Fraser as a visual system through which these British patrons, who were also colonial administrators and officials, were able to reorient the history of and hegemony over India. By doing so, they constructed a pictorial lineage marked by illustrious foreign conquerors—from Timur to Nadir Shah, and finally to themselves.¹⁴⁸ A remark in *Indian Problems* (1895) by Colonel Henry Bathurst Hanna (former owner of the NMAA drawing in fig. 6a) captures Britain’s sense of superiority over the earlier conquerors and its self-image as a benevolent master: “the difference is enormous between the India of the days of Alexander the Great, or of Timor the Tartar, or of Baber, or of Nadir Shah, divided, . . . and Great Britain’s Indian Empire, no longer weak by internal divisions, but strong in the unity of its government.”¹⁴⁹ One wonders if the intimation in the English texts of Nadir Shah saving India from itself,¹⁵⁰ as well as the dissemination of his biographies and images, were a buildup by the British to help justify their own conquest, like an opening act for the main event. It is a conjectural question, but one that rings in my mind.

That question finds further resonance when one considers that after the British colonial project had reached full crescendo, the image of Nadir Shah began to fade among the British audience as his portraits and publications dwindled from the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁵¹ At the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, the Kuh-i Nur diamond, which had been surrendered by the Sikh founder Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore and presented to Queen Victoria the previous year, became the centerpiece at the Crystal Palace. The exhibition guide informed visitors that Nadir Shah was “the Persian adventurer” who plundered the fabled diamond from the Mughals;¹⁵² he was no longer the “King of Persia,” and certainly not “Conqueror of India.” He and other earlier possessors of the diamond were all denounced as usurpers, robbers, and murderers; “Rogues all!,” the author roars, but fear not, the Kuh-i Nur “is at length in honest hands.”¹⁵³ Nadir Shah might have handed India to Britain, but to the British, he was a warm-up act that must not be allowed to steal the show of the glorious empire.

A Final Thought: Viral Replication and Variants

This article begins with several portraits of Nadir Shah that were painted soon after his Delhi conquest. They present the Iranian conqueror as the *shāhanshāh*, in the new aesthetic of his Indo-Persian empire. Nadir Shah might have sought an Indian makeover to announce his victory, but it was the local and British collectors who sustained the demand for his Indian portraits through the century after his death. Yet, these visually similar forms attracted conceptually

divergent interpretations. To the local patrons and collectors, who were empowered by Nadir Shah's defeat of Delhi or otherwise held him in admiration, Nadir Shah was the new *pādshāh* of India. On the other hand, the British, whose imperial ambitions were emboldened by his conquest, seemed more invested in adding luster to the image of a foreign conqueror. The popularizing of Nadir Shah's representation—in portraits, engravings, and biographies—might have stemmed from that colonial mentality.

Notwithstanding the different meanings and motives attached to these reproductions, their unusually large number out of a handful of prototypes as well as their vast geographic and temporal dispersal have prompted the question of whether they could be considered a “viral” phenomenon, a point offered as a final morsel for thought. It is true that portraiture was an increasingly prominent means to convey power as regional kingdoms emerged from the shadow of Delhi in the mid-eighteenth century and continued into the British period.¹⁵⁴ But the sheer quantity of Nadir Shah's portraits in circulation in India far surpasses representations of other rulers of Iran, except Timur.¹⁵⁵ In addition to the roughly forty works identified (see Appendix), many more are probably still hidden in albums, uncatalogued or assumed to depict one of the Mughal emperors, or in lesser-known collections such as the one at the Russell-Cotes in Bournemouth (fig. 7c).

The unprecedented reach of Nadir Shah's image attests to its viral effect beyond the binary of original and copy. To borrow epidemiological terminology (of which we have grown all too familiar in recent years), we can think of his first portraits by Mughal court painters as the viral source, including the Guimet painting (fig. 3), those by Muhammad Panah (fig. 2), and other now-lost precedents. As they multiplied, the original strain mutated to form regional variants, enabling Nadir Shah's image to circulate through the subcontinent. To engage a little more deeply with the notion of virality beyond appropriating Covid vocabulary, we may consider a study by Stephanie Porras in which she tests the Internet concept as a theoretical model for the spread of an engraving printed in Antwerp in 1584 to an oil painting of ca. 1630 in Lima.¹⁵⁶ Allowing for technological limitations, Porras defines a viral image in the seventeenth century as one that was copied on a large scale by different groups within a period “between a human generation and a lifetime, or approximately 50 years . . . potentially extending much longer.”¹⁵⁷ Nadir Shah's portraits were replicated manually rather than mechanically, but the long transmission period adopted for early modern printmaking could reasonably be applied in this instance.

The image of Nadir Shah was spread by everyone involved in its chain of circulation—not just painters, patrons, and collectors, but also engravers, book printers, writers, sellers, and so on. As previously indicated, portraits were purchased or taken from the Mughal royal library; they were gifted and regifted among officials in Delhi, the regions, and representatives of the new British governing class;¹⁵⁸ and they were traded among collectors. Together, these carriers transmitted the image of Nadir Shah across space and time, in an infectious environment created by his fame as a historical personality and by the collectability of royal portraits more generally. The uniformity of the reproductions points to the need for speedy multiplication, and it also warrants recognizability. The ease of movement across different media—album paintings, miniatures on ivory and paper, medallion portraits in manuscripts and printed texts—further supports the viral phenomenon.¹⁵⁹

Porras also likens inscriptions on a replicated image to Internet memes that allow an image to be “re-scripted or re-performed in various iterations.”¹⁶⁰ The inscriptions in her study are

limited to the printmakers' names and dates, but her analogy perhaps finds a more satisfactory application in Nadir Shah's portraits. While the same compositions are repeated, the inscriptions alter their interpretation and enable mutation into variants of what the Iranian ruler represents—from his self-image as the *shāhanshāh* to the new *pādshāh* to Indian viewers, and a victorious conqueror to the British audience.

Moreover, Nadir Shah's image takes on new relational meaning and hierarchical emphasis depending on the contents and sequence of the series to which it is added. It was not uncommon for albums to be reassembled, which would give rise to further reinterpretation. The process of serialization displaces the portrait from its original context—the historical circumstances, intentions of the painter and patron, and target audience. The portrait now shares a new, communal space with others and interacts with them in new ways that are determined by those responsible for the compilation and recompilation. Old meanings are destabilized and new meanings are formed.

The shifting identity and interpretation of a viral image is remarked by Porras: "each social network traversed by the image may have its own aims in forwarding, copying and sharing that image. When an image truly goes viral, it can take on additional valences or directions—losing and/or transforming its originary or secondary context—as it is forwarded and redeployed anew."¹⁶¹ While her analysis focuses on the forward trajectory, the viral process does more than reformulate the image for future transmission. It reactivates the existing image of Nadir Shah from the past, which encompasses not only the visual template but the broader corpus of his painted and engraved portraits, the mental picture, the written accounts, and the word-of-mouth legend. Every new adaptation reframes the idea of Nadir Shah and his place in the history of India from the viewpoint of the painter, the patron, or the collector who assembled the portrait series. Their individual cultural background, political allegiance, and social position determined the significance attached to Nadir Shah's image. Borrowing Walter Benjamin's oft-quoted words, "in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced," or as Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser more succinctly put it, reproduction "at once takes from and gives back to its model."¹⁶² Through this process of reactivation and reinterpretation, the image of Nadir Shah is extended anew, carrying forward the visual legacy of his Indian conquest.

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Appendix: Indian Portraits of Nadir Shah Included in This Study

- A1 (Fig. 2a).** *Nadir Shah*, signed Muhammad Panah, ca. 1740s, India. V&A, London, IM.237-1921
- A2 (Figs. 2b and 17c).** *Nadir Shah*, from the “House of Timur” album, compiled ca. 1800 by Gore Ouseley, signed Muhammad Panah, dated AH 1155/1742–43, India. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS. Ouseley Add. 173, fol. 29v
- A3 (Fig. 2c).** *Nadir Shah*, signed Muhammad Panah, regnal year 24/1741–42, India, from F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey, from the 8th to the 18th Century* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1912), vol. 2, pl. 168. Former F. R. Martin Collection, present location unknown
- A4 (Fig. 3).** *Muhammad Shah and Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, ca. 1730–40, India. Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris, MA 3544
- A5 (Fig. 6a).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, mid-18th century, India. National Museum of Asian Art, Freer Collection, Washington, DC, F1907.256
- A6.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, 18th century, India. Dogra Art Museum, Jammu. <https://twitter.com/CMASonya/status/1018550553998217216>
- A7.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, mid-18th century, India. Artifacts Collections of New York
- A8 (Fig. 6c).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, ca. 1900, India. National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, DC, Arthur M. Sackler Collection, S1986.439
- A9 (Fig. 17d).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from the “House of Timur” album compiled by Gore Ouseley, 18th century, India. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS. Ouseley Add. 173, fol. 30r (facing A2). <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/640d7ea3-ed45-44b0-b388-677799018839/surfaces/2214798a-b5d2-4809-813e-d6597931c58b/>
- A10.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, third quarter of the 18th century, India. Location unknown. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/indian-school-mughal-18/portrait-de-nadir-shah-8Qd4qaNNn8gwUzWD6lKpGA2>
- A11.** *Thamas Kouli Kan King of Persia*, artist unknown, from an unbound series of portraits of Mughal rulers and regional rulers, ca. 1747–85, India. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Réserve OD-45(A), fol. 1. Gift of Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil in 1785. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55003372n/f1.item>
- A12.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, 18th century, north India. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 15.101. www.mfa.org/collections/object/portrait-of-nadir-shah-148715
- A13 (Fig. 6b).** *Nadir Shah*, Ram Sipar Musavvir, ca. 1800, India. British Museum, London, 1936,0111,0.4
- A14.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, ca. 1740–50, India. David Collection, Copenhagen, 74/2007. <https://www.davidmus.dk/art-from-the-islamic-world/miniature-paintings/item/1021>
- A15.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, 18th century, India. Location unknown. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:نادر_شاه.jpg
- A16 (Fig. 6d).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from an album of portraits of Mughal rulers and courtiers, 18th century, India. British Museum, London, 1920,0917,0.144
- A17.** *Nadir Shah with Attendants*, artist unknown, early 19th century, India, Jaipur (?). British Museum, London, 1880.2380. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1880-2380

- A18.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, ca. 1760, India, Jaipur. Denver Art Museum, 1968.9. <https://www.denverartmuseum.org/es/node/8171>
- A19.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, ca. 1770–80, India, Murshidabad. V&A, London, IS.237-1955. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O433916/nadir-shah-painting-unknown/>
- A20 (Fig. 7a).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, 19th century, India, Himachal Pradesh. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, MA, 1919.133
- A21 (Fig. 7b).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from an album interspersed with portraits of Mughal rulers, 18th century, India. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS. Ouseley Add. 166, fol. 44r
- A22 (Fig. 7c).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from an unbound series of portraits of Mughal and regional rulers in India, 19th century, India. Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Bournemouth, BORG M 00620
- A23.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, 18th century, India. Skinner Auctioneers, Boston, October 12, 2013, lot 17, present location unknown. <https://www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2678B/lots/17>
- A24.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, mid-18th century, north India. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 15.94. <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/148708>
- A25 (Fig. 8a).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from an album of portraits of Hyderabad rulers and courtiers, to which portraits of Timur, Nadir Shah, and others were added, ca. 1800–25, India, Hyderabad. British Library, London, Add. Or. 4415, fol. 20
- A26.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, mid-18th century, India. Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 83.961
- A27 (Fig. 8b), A28.** *Two Portraits of Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, second half of the 18th century, India, Deccan. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 2013.19.52, 2013.19.53
- A29.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from an album including Mughal royal portraits (not in sequence), 18th century, India. Crawford Collection, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, “Persian Drawings 1”
- A30.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from a portrait series starting with Iraj from the *Shāhnāma* and including Alexander, Genghis Khan, and Timur, but mostly Mughal emperors. Photograph dated 1911–12 of the Darbar Loan Exhibition in the Delhi Museum, early 19th century (?), India. British Library, London, Photo 1010/10(176), C. 54
- A31 (Figs. 8c,d).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, ca. 1890, India, Jaipur. V&A, London, IS.39-1990 and IS.40-1990
- A32 (Fig. 9a).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from an unbound portrait series of mostly Mughal and Sikh rulers, ca. 1840, India, Punjab Plain (Sikh with Guler influence). V&A, London, IS.136-1953
- A33 (Fig. 9b).** *Nadir Shah: From an Original Persian Painting*, engraving, from John Malcolm, *The History of Persia* (London: John Murray, 1815), vol. 2, p. 44, Charles Heath (printmaker), 1815. British Museum, London, 1873,0712.621
- A34.** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, 19th century, India. British Museum, London, 1920,0917,0.226. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1920-0917-0-226
- A35 (Fig. 10a).** *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from a portrait series of Mughal rulers bracketed by Timur and Nadir Shah, ca. 1740s, India, Delhi or Deccan (Nadir Shah’s portrait is the largest). Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 2012.25.10

A36 (Fig. 9c). *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from a set of ivory miniatures depicting rulers from Timur to ‘Alamgir II, ca. 1805–10, India, Delhi. British Library, London, Add. Or. 3113

A37 (Fig. 9d). *Nadir Shah* (center), artist unknown, from a set of ivory miniatures depicting rulers from Babur to Aurangzib, ca. 1830, India, Delhi. Bonhams, London, October 25, 2007, lot 418, present location unknown

A38 (Fig. 11a), A39. *Nadir Shah* (top row, second from the right after Timur and replacing the Mughal founder, Babur), artist unknown, from two near-identical sets of miniatures on paper depicting rulers from Timur to Shah ‘Alam II, followed by Asaf al-Daula of Awadh and Tipu Sultan of Mysore, ca. 1790, India, Murshidabad. Bonhams, London, April 8, 2014, lot 296, present location unknown. <https://www.bonhams.com/auction/21720/lot/296/two-groups-of-sixteen-portraits-of-mughal-emperors-and-other-muslim-rulers-murshidabad-circa-17902/>

A40. *Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, from Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil, *Abrégé historique des souverains de l’Indoustan ou Empire Mogol* (1772), p. 381, India, probably Faizabad. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Français 24219. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9063609p/f307.item.zoom>

A41 (Fig. 12). *Nadir Shah* (center) surrounded by four 18th-century Mughal rulers, artist unknown, ca. 1779, engraving from Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan* (London: John Murray, 1792), vol. 2, p. 322, ca. 1779

A42 (Fig. 13). *Nadir Shah* (right) and *Akbar* (left), artist unknown, ca. 1900 (?), India. Wellcome Library, London, 582691i

A43 (Fig. 14). *Mughal Rulers, the House of Timur* (*Nadir Shah* is fourth from the left), artist unknown, ca. 1772, India, Murshidabad. Bonhams, London, April 21, 2015, lot 181, present location unknown

A44. *Equestrian Portrait of Nadir Shah*, artist unknown, 18th century, India. British Museum, London, 1920,0917,0.200.

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Notes

- 1 Ānand Rām Mukhliṣ, “Tazkira,” in *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians*, ed. Henry M. Elliot and John Dowson (London: Trübner, 1877), 8:88–89.
- 2 Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2004), 2:262; R. S. McGregor, *The Oxford*

Hindi-English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 552; Bashir Ahmad Qureshi, *Kitabistan’s 20th Century Standard Dictionary: Urdu into English* (Lahore: Kitabistan, 1971), 632. For a recent analysis of the uprising of the Delhi populace and the subsequent massacre, see Abhishek Kaicker, *The*

- King and the People: Sovereignty and Popular Politics in Mughal Delhi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–17, 18–53.
- 3 For his Indian group and manuscript paintings, see Janet O'Brien, "Nādir Shāh: The Emergence of Royal Portraiture and a New Body Politic in Eighteenth-Century Iran" (PhD diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, 2022), 161–84.
 - 4 Dozens of paintings were studied as part of this research. This article, however, is not about the analysis of individual portraits. Rather, they are examined collectively in order to extract patterns concerning patronage, motivation, and so on. Their diversity and divergence warrant a broader approach, one that identifies the myriad threads and distills the overarching narratives.
 - 5 All the lands west of the Indus were ceded to Nadir Shah; Mīrzā Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, *Tārīkh-i Jahān-gushā-yi Nādirī* (History of the world-conquering Nadir), ed. 'Abd Allāh Anwār (Tehran: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, SH 1390/2011–12 CE), 334. Originally named the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī* (History of Nadir), this biographical history was completed in the 1750s, a few years after the death of Nadir Shah in 1747. Astarabadi was hired by Nadir Shah to chronicle his reign from the outset, and the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī* was compiled based on official documents written by Astarabadi contemporaneously and presumably with Nadir Shah's approval.
 - 6 In this essay, "colonial" and "colonial period" refer to Company rule up to 1858 rather than direct Crown rule, the British Raj, that followed.
 - 7 The scholarship on Indian portraits is too extensive to cite here. The main texts consulted in this study include Crispin Branfoot, ed., *Portraiture in South Asia since the Mughals: Art, Representation and History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Marta Becherini, "Effigies in Transit: Deccan Portraits in Europe at the Turn of the 18th Century," *Journal* 18 6 (2018), <http://www.journal18.org/2979>; Mika Natif, "Concepts of Portraiture under Akbar and Jahangir," in *Mughal Occidentalism: Artistic Encounters between Europe and Asia at the Courts of India, 1580–1630* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 205–60; Yuthika Sharma, "Art in Between Empires: Visual Culture and Artistic Knowledge in Late Mughal Delhi, 1748–1857" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013); William Dalrymple and Yuthika Sharma, *Princes and Painters in Mughal Delhi, 1707–1857* (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2012); Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jariwala, eds., *The Indian Portrait, 1560–1860* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2010); Elaine Wright, *Muraqqa': Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2008); Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, ed., *Portraits in Princely India, 1700–1947* (Mumbai: Marg, 2008); Barbara Schmitz, ed., *After the Great Mughals: Painting in Delhi and the Regional Courts in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Mumbai: Marg, 2002).
 - 8 Aniruddha Ray, "Invasion of Nadir Shah and the Origins of French Imperialist Thought, as Exemplified by Dupleix: A Contemporary Document," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 33 (1971): 371.
 - 9 Astarābādī, *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, 26.
 - 10 I argue elsewhere that his single portraits represent the emergence of royal portraiture in Iran. Janet O'Brien, "Dismembering the Corporate: The Single Portraits of Nader Shah and the Changing Body Politic in Post-Safavid Iran," in *The Contest for Rule in Eighteenth-Century Iran*, Idea of Iran 11, ed. Charles Melville (London: I. B. Tauris, 2022), 27–56; O'Brien, "Nādir Shāh."
 - 11 Layla S. Diba attributed this portrait to ca. 1740s, and not ca. 1780–1800 as recently argued by Marcus Fraser. Diba and Maryam Ekhtiar, *Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch, 1785–1925* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1998), 138; Marcus Fraser, "Muhammad Riza-i Hindi: An Important Indo-Persian Artist of the Mid-Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the David Collection* 5 (2021): 203–4. While this is not the place to go into the details, based on the body types, styles, and palettes of royal representations in the Afsharid period and the periods immediately before (late Safavid) and after (Zand), observed in my own research as well as that of Diba, who is the authority on royal paintings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I agree with her attribution to ca. 1740s and not the early Qajar period as suggested by Fraser. Furthermore, an oil portrait of Nadir Shah dated 1815–16 has a very different body type. Layla S. Diba and 'Alī-Rizā 'Atīgahchī, *Naqqāshī-hā-yi Zand va Qājār az Majmū'a-hā-yi Khuṣūṣī: 9 Khurdād–29 Khurdād* (Zand and Qajar paintings from private collections: May 30–June 19, 1974) (Tehran: Anjuman-i Īrān va Īmrīkā Kānūn-i Farhangī, 1974), fig. 19. See another piece of compelling evidence in n. 107 below.
 - 12 James Fraser, *The History of Nadir Shah, Formerly Called Thamas Kuli Khan, the Present Emperor of Persia* (London: A. Millar, 1742), 146.
 - 13 An enigmatic detail is the *wāqwāq*-tree pattern on the bolster in all three paintings. The *wāqwāq* tree is a fabled tree that bears fruit in the form of human and animal heads. It is said to be grown in India or the land of *wāqwāq*. It is also used as a visual motif for the talking tree Iskandar (Alexander) encoun-

- tered at the ends of the earth in the *Shāhnāma*; see the object entry for Folio from a *Shāhnāma* (Book of kings) by Firdawsi, National Museum of Asian Art, F1935.23, https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/edanmdm:fsg_F1935.23/. The tree cautions Iskandar not to fall prey to greed, which would lead one to “wander the wide world, harass mankind, and kill kings,” and more ominously, it foretells his imminent death in a foreign land. It is not known if the painter was alluding to the fate of Iskandar, and the *wāqwāq*-tree pattern could simply be the bolster’s fabric design without any intended allegorical meaning, but the *wāqwāq*-tree story does foreshadow the downfall of Nadir Shah, whose tyranny would lead to his assassination by his own men in just a few years.
- 14 Red was traditionally worn by Safavid rulers when handing down capital punishment. Michael Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 251. His enemies in India were said to be “terrified at the sight of the Persians, who were all clad in red.” Laurence Lockhart, *Nadir Shah: A Critical Study Based Mainly Upon Contemporary Sources* (London: Luzac, 1938), 159.
 - 15 There are slight variations in the hand gestures, but all are fairly common in royal representations. Nadir Shah’s right hand is closed in figs. 2a and c, though it is not known if the painter had originally intended to place anything in the clutched hand, such as a kerchief, a string of prayer beads, or a sword.
 - 16 تصویر شاهنشاه جمجاه نادر شاه
 - 17 For a discussion of the ancient origins of the title, including its brief adoption by the Buyids (934–1062) and Shah Isma‘il (r. 1501–24), see O’Brien, “Nādir Shāh,” 31–32. The title is also used in the *Akbarnāma* to refer to the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Abū al-Faẓl Allāmī, *The Akbarnāmah*, ed. Maulavī ‘Abd al-Raḥīm (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1877), 1:7.
 - 18 Axworthy, *Sword of Persia*, 227.
 - 19 هست سلطان بر سلاطین جهان، شاه شاهان نادر صاحبقران. Hyacinth Louis Rabino di Borgomale, *Coins, Medals, and Seals of the Shāhs of Irān, 1500–1941* (Hertford, Hertfordshire: S. Austin and Sons, 1945), 51.
 - 20 Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/steingass_query.py?qs=جمجاه&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact
 - 21 Astarābādī, *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, 334, 810–11.
 - 22 بعمل خیر خواه محمد پناه. The phrase “well-wisher” (*khayr-khvāh*) does not appear in the V&A version.
 - 23 Royal Trust Collection, RCIN 1005068.u and RCIN 1005068.n.
 - 24 Malini Roy, “The Revival of the Mughal Painting Tradition during the Reign of Muhammad Shah,” in Dalrymple and Sharma, *Princes and Painters*, 17–23; Terence McInerney, “Mughal Painting during the Reign of Muhammad Shah,” in Schmitz, *After the Great Mughals*, 12–33; Chanchal Dadlani and Yuthika Sharma, “Beyond the Taj Mahal,” in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 1064–68. For a summary of the scholarship on eighteenth-century Mughal painting, also see Chanchal Dadlani, *From Stone to Paper: Architecture as History in the Late Mughal Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 6–7.
 - 25 Originating in ancient Iran, *farr* was a central tenet of Persian kingship and invoked by rulers in both Islamic Iran and Mughal India as their legitimizing attribute. Abolala Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003).
 - 26 در حقیقت زمام اختیار کل ممالک هندوستان بدست تصرف دولت نادریه درآمد. Astarābādī, *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, 327.
 - 27 John Malcolm, “Translations of Two Letters of Nadir Shah,” in *Asiatic Researches*, 10 vols. (London: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1811), 10:545.
 - 28 O’Brien, “Dismembering the Corporate”; O’Brien, “Nādir Shāh.”
 - 29 شهنشاه دوران، تاج بخش ملوک ممالک هند. Astarābādī, *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, 2.
 - 30 چون خسرو گیتیستان آفتاب جهانتاب هند ظلمت را مسخر و دار الخلافه جهان را بنور وجود خود منور ساخت. Astarābādī, 299–300. Some local rulers in India also saw Nadir Shah as someone who liberated them from the control of the Mughal court in Delhi; see my discussion below under the heading “Becoming *Pādshāh* of India.”
 - 31 Roy, “Revival of the Mughal Painting Tradition”; McInerney, “Mughal Painting”; Dadlani and Sharma, “Beyond the Taj Mahal.”
 - 32 Malcolm, “Translations of Two Letters,” 10:546.
 - 33 Holly Shaffer, *Grafted Arts: Art Making and Taking in the Struggle for Western India, 1760–1910* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 1–17.
 - 34 Astarābādī, *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, 335; Fraser, *History of Nadir Shah*, 220–21.
 - 35 Jonas Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (London: Dodsley et al., 1753), 4:197. The intended site was near Hamadan in northwestern Iran. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 154n2.
 - 36 For details, see O’Brien, “Dismembering the Corporate,” 30; O’Brien, “Nādir Shāh,” 55.

- 37 Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 254; ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Kashmīrī, *The Memoirs of Khojeh Abdurkureem*, trans. Francis Gladwin (Calcutta: Mackay, 1768), 71.
- 38 Sussan Babaie, “Nader Shah, the Delhi Loot, and the 18th-Century Exotics of Empire,” in *Crisis, Collapse, Militarism and Civil War: The History and Historiography of 18th Century Iran*, ed. Michael Axworthy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 221.
- 39 Al-Kashmīrī, *Memoirs*, 19. The Mughal *muhur* became the principal gold coin in Iran after the Delhi conquest. Stephen Album, Michael L. Bates, and Willem Floor, “Coins and Coinage,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* VI/1, 14–41, December 15, 1992, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/coins-and-coinage>.
- 40 Maria Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
- 41 Nadir Shah’s currency interventions do point to a deeper attempt at reform but that is a matter of monetary policy rather than acculturation. See Album, Bates, and Floor, “Coins and Coinage.”
- 42 All of Nadir Shah’s Indian portraits in this study are listed in the Appendix. Those that are not illustrated are referred to by their number in the Appendix. For an expanded analysis, see O’Brien, “Nādir Shāh,” 209–15.
- 43 R. B. Barnett, “Avadh,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, August 17, 2011, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/avadh>
- 44 Nawwāb ṣamṣāmuddaula Shāh Nawāz Khān, *The Maathir-ul-Umara: Being Biographies of the Muḥammadan and Hindu Officers of the Timurid Sovereigns of India from 1500 to about 1780 A.D.*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 2003), 1:295–99.
- 45 سلطان السلاطين جهان شاه شاهان نادر شاه پادشاه صاحبقران. See n. 19 for the coin inscription.
- 46 For ‘Ahmad Shah Durrani, see nn. 124 and 155.
- 47 شبیه مبارک حضرت نادر شاه پادشاه غازی بوقت تشریف فرمایی بشاهجان آباد کشیده شد
- 48 Annabel Teh Gallop, “The Genealogical Seal of the Mughal Emperors of India,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 9.1(1999): 80, 98, 102; Ali Anooshahr, “How Babur Became a Ghazi,” in *The Ghazi Sultans and the Frontiers of Islam: A Comparative Study of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (London: Routledge, 2008), 15–37. *Ghāzī* is an Arabic word that refers to an Islamic warrior who leads a military expedition against infidels.
- 49 سکه مبارک پادشاه غازی نادر شاه. Rabino di Borgomale, *Coins, Medals, and Seals*, 51–52.
- 50 *Pādshāh* means guardian king or emperor in Persian. Shah Isma‘il was described as the “*pādshāh* of the inhabited quarter of the globe.” Sussan Babaie, “Persia: The Safavids, 1501–1722,” in *The Great Empires of Asia*, ed. Jim Masselos (Oakland: University of California Press, 2010), 139. But, as a title, it is generally associated with Mughal emperors.
- 51 See n. 45.
- 52 With the exception of two portraits that describe Nadir Shah as “*pādshāh-i Īrān*” (A28, A34), there are no references to Iran among the Persian inscriptions.
- 53 Ray, “Invasion of Nadir Shah,” 365–69.
- 54 Natif, “Concepts of Portraiture”; Wright, *Muraqqa’*, 165–77; Susan Stronge, “Portraiture at the Mughal Court,” in Crill and Jariwala, *Indian Portrait*, 23–31.
- 55 Corinne Lefèvre, “In the Name of the Fathers: Mughal Genealogical Strategies from Bābur to Shāh Jahān,” *Religions of South Asia* 5.1–2 (2011): 409–42; Lisa Golombek and Ebba Koch, “The Mughals, Uzbeks, and the Timurid Legacy,” in Flood and Necipoğlu, *Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, 2:811–12. For a summary of the different types of genealogical portraits, see O’Brien, “Nādir Shāh,” 176–77.
- 56 Some regional capitals, such as Golconda, already had a vibrant production of royal portraits since the seventeenth century. Becherini, “Effigies in Transit.” For a case study of the practice of *nazr* between the Awadh court and other regional elites, see Natalia Di Pietrantonio, “Circuits of Exchange: Albums and the Art Market in 18th-Century Avadh,” *Journal 18*, October 2018, <http://www.journal18.org/2846>. For the circulation of images across India, see Natasha Eaton, *Mimesis across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India, 1765–1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
- 57 George D. Bearce, “Intellectual and Cultural Characteristics of India in a Changing Era, 1740–1800,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 25.1 (1965): 8; Roy, “Revival of the Mughal Painting Tradition,” 22–23.
- 58 Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and Punjab, 1707–48* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 59 R. B. Pandit Hari Kishan Kaul, trans., “Ballad on Nadir Shah’s Invasion of India,” *Journal of the Panjab Historical Society* 4.1 (1917): 17, 26.
- 60 Rustam ‘Alī, “Tārikh-i Hindi,” in Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 8:60–63, 2:327–33; Syad Muhammad Latif, *History of the Panjāb* (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press, 1891), 199; Fraser, *History of Nadir Shah*, 60–70, 129–33; W. H. Dilworth, *The History of the Life and Surprising Transactions of Thamas Kouli Khan, Late Sophi of Persia* (London: G. Wright, 1758), v. Also see Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 123–24. One writer has argued that the allegation of treason was spread by writers hired by Khan Dauran,

- head of the Mughal army. Zahir Uddin Malik, *The Reign of Muhammad Shah, 1719-1748* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1977), 183.
- 61 Jadunath Sarkar, *Nadir Shah in India* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1973), 59-60, 62.
- 62 <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/india-vii-relations-the-afsharid-and-zand-periods; al-Kashmīrī, Memoirs, 22; Fraser, History of Nadir Shah, 144-48>.
- 63 J. Hutchison and J. Ph Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States* (New Delhi: Asian Education Services, 1994), 542-43; J. C. Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 411.
- 64 Al-Kashmīrī, *Memoirs*, 146; Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan* (London: John Murray, 1792), 2:353-59; Sarkar, *Nadir Shah in India*, 85-87.
- 65 Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, 51-52; also see Malik, *Reign of Muhammad Shah*, vii-viii, 1-2, 12-13, 157-60, 182-89. Abhishek Kaicker (*King and the People*, 1-53) argues that while members of the Mughal elite were keen to cooperate with the invading power, the common people of Delhi were the ones who rose to protect their king.
- 66 Mukhlis, "Tazkira," 8:77-78, 97. For the background of Mukhlis's account, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Discovering the Familiar: Notes on the Travel-Account of Anand Ram Mukhlis, 1745," *South Asia Research* 16.2 (1996): 131-54.
- 67 'Alī, "Tārikh-i Hindi," 42-43.
- 68 Kaul, "Ballad," 27, 37.
- 69 William Irvine, "Nādir Shāh and Muḥammad Shāh, a Hindī Poem by Tilōk Dās," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* 66.1 (1897): 51.
- 70 'Alī, "Tārikh-i Hindi," 63-64.
- 71 Masashi Haneda, "Emigration of Iranian Elites to India during the 16-18th Centuries," *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 3/4 (1997): 129-43; Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), xvii-xix, xxi, 1-27; Sajjad Nejatie, "Iranian Migrations in the Durrani Empire, 1747-93," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37.3 (2017): 497-98; Malik, *Reign of Muhammad Shah*, 23-24.
- 72 Nejatie, "Iranian Migrations," 497.
- 73 Rudi Matthee, "Europe, Persian Image of," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, January 20, 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/europe-persian-image-of>
- 74 John Russell Hinnells and Alan Williams, introduction to *Parsis in India and the Diaspora*, ed. Hinnells and Williams (London: Routledge, 2012), 1-2.
- 75 Talinn Grigor, "Parsi Patronage of the *Urheimat*," *Getty Research Journal*, no. 2 (2010): 61.
- 76 Dow, *History of Hindostan*, 2:351.
- 77 Ernest Tucker, "1739: History, Self, and Other in Afsharid Iran and Mughal India," *Iranian Studies* 31.2 (1998): 207-17.
- 78 Tucker, 217.
- 79 Sarkar, *Nadir Shah in India*, 1-7, 16, 34. For a critique of Sarkar's view on Muhammad Shah, see Kaicker, *King and the People*, 18-19.
- 80 Muhammad Shafique, "Syed Muhammad Latif: A Pioneer Man of Regional Historiography of Punjab," *Journal of Indian Studies* 4.1 (2018): 9-10.
- 81 Latif, *History of the Panjāb*, 194, 210. Subsequent scholarship has challenged this narrative of a weak *Rangīlā* (lit. "colorful"), a merrymaking emperor who was unfit to rule; instead, they believe the waning of Delhi's authority was a result of Muhammad Shah's failure to curb the rise of regional polities and to resolve the power struggle between "the old guard and the aspiring indigenous nobility" within his own court. Malik, *Reign of Muhammad Shah*, vii-viii, 1-2, 12-13; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Un Grand Dérangement: Dreaming an Indo-Persian Empire in South Asia, 1740-1800," *Journal of Early Modern History* 4.3/4 (2000): 349-54; Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, xxxi-xxxii, xvii-lxi.
- 82 Latif, *History of the Panjāb*, i-xvi.
- 83 Warren Hastings, the first governor-general, argued that patronizing scholarship of both British and Indian *munshīs* would help "conciliate" opinion in Britain and India and create positive associations with the East India Company; Joshua Ehrlich, "The East India Company and the Politics of Knowledge" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2018), 22-25. For Hastings's Enlightenment projects, see Ehrlich, "East India Company," 22-116, as well as my discussion below under the heading "The Foreign Savior: An Opening Act for the British Conquest?" and n. 143. Also see Joshua Ehrlich, *The East India Company and the Politics of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 21-61. For the role of the *munshī*, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Witnesses and Agents of Empire: Eighteenth-Century Historiography and the World of the Mughal *Munshī*," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53 (2010): 393-423.
- 84 Rama Sundari Mantena, *The Origins of Modern Historiography in India: Antiquarianism and Philology, 1780-1880* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3; Blain Auer, "Early Modern Persian, Urdu, and English Historiography and the Imagination of Islamic India under British Rule," *Études de lettres* 2-3 (2014): 199-225.

- 85 Auer, "Early Modern Persian, Urdu, and English Historiography," 201, 219.
- 86 Two portraits commissioned by Gentil were also found (A11, A40). The French contended with the British for domination of India, and biographies and engravings of Nadir Shah were published in Paris as well as London, as will be discussed below. Far fewer portraits are traceable to French ownership; the two owned by Gentil and the Guimet painting are the only ones located thus far.
- 87 Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2, 67; Subrahmanyam, "Un Grand Dérangement," 343, 365.
- 88 Britain's primary goal was to safeguard India from Russian expansion, and Iran became a buffer state in the Anglo-Russian imperial contest. Bonakdarian, "India vii. Relations."
- 89 Peter Avery, "Ouseley, Gore," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, July 20, 2004, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/ouseley-sir-gore>; Gore Ouseley, *Biographical Notices of Persian Poets . . . to Which Is Prefixed a Memoir of the Late Sir Gore Ouseley* (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1846), v–ccxxvi.
- 90 Avery, "Ouseley, Gore"; Ouseley, *Biographical Notices*, v–ccxxvi; Mīrzā Mahdī Khān Astarābādī, *Histoire de Nader Chah*, trans. William Jones (London: Elmsly, 1770); Astarābādī, *The History of the Life of Nader Shah, King of Persia*, trans. William Jones (London: T. Cadell, 1773). The Ouseley collection of Persian manuscripts at the Bodleian Library includes two *Tārīkh-i Nādirī* manuscripts (MS. Ouseley 228 and 322).
- 91 Avery, "Ouseley, Gore"; Ouseley, *Biographical Notices*, v–ccxxvi.
- 92 William Irvine, "Note on James Fraser, Author of the 'History of Nadir Shah' (1742)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 31.1 (1899): 214–20.
- 93 Fraser, *History of Nadir Shah*. Fraser was in India during Nadir Shah's invasion of Delhi but he did not come into contact with the conqueror. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 304–5. For a list of Fraser's sources of contemporary accounts and correspondence, see Fraser, *History of Nadir Shah*, iii–v.
- 94 The manuscript collections of both men are kept in the Bodleian Library.
- 95 Henry Bathurst Hanna, *Can Russia Invade India?*, Indian Problems 1 (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1895), 37.
- 96 Natasha Eaton, "The Art of Colonial Despotism: Portraits, Politics, and Empire in South India, 1750–1795," *Cultural Critique* 70 (2008): 68–69.
- 97 William Dunn Macray, *Annals of the Bodleian Library: With a Notice of the Earlier Library of the University* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1890), 215–18.
- 98 Royal Trust Collection, RCIN 1005025, 1005068, 1005069, RCIN 1005038.
- 99 Rudi Matthee, "Nader Shah in Iranian Historiography: Warlord or National Hero?," Institute for Advanced Study, 2018, <https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2018/matthee-nader-shah>
- 100 They are too numerous to list here; see O'Brien, "Nādir Shāh," 298.
- 101 *Equestrian Portrait of Peter I*, Aleksey Zubov and Pieter Picart, ca. 1707–21, State Hermitage Museum, Russia, ЭРГ-8027, <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/04.+engraving/1516054>. For an example of the common depiction of an "Oriental" king, see Abbas, *King of Persia*, from Thomas Herbert, *Some Years of Travels into Diverse Parts of Asia and Afrique* (London: Richard Bishop, 1638), 207. That said, Nadir Shah was not immune to the Oriental stereotype. See Hanway, *Historical Accounts*, 4: frontispiece.
- 102 They appear in a plate from Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great* (1592; Menston, Yorkshire: Scholar Press Facsimile, 1973), <https://archive.org/details/marlowetamburlaine/page/n83/mode/1up>; and as *Cyrus Maior*, from *Four Illustrious Rulers of Antiquity*, Adriaen Collaert after Maarten de Vos, ca. 1575–1618, Antwerp, British Museum, 1948,0410.4.58, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1948-0410-4-58
- 103 I am grateful to Scott Wakeham for deciphering this knotty Latin inscription.
- 104 Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 315n1. Also see four books that have been wrongly attributed to Jean-Antoine du Cerceau: *Histoire de Thamas Kouli-Kan, Sophi de Perse*, ed. Tadeusz Jan Krusiński (Amsterdam: Chez Arkstee & Merkus, 1740); *The History of Thamas Kouli Kan, Sophi of Persia* (London: Brindley, 1740); *Istoria di Thamas-Kouli-Kan, Sofi di Persia* (Venice: Giovanni Battista Pasquali, 1740–41); *Historia de Thamas Kouli-Kan, Sophi de Persia* (Madrid: En la oficina de los herederos de Juan de Ariztia, 1740–41).
- 105 Joseph Louis de Voulton, *Verdadeira, e exacta noticia dos progressos de Thamas Kouli Khan Schach da Persia no Imperio do Gram Mogôr* (Lisbon: Lisboa Occidental, 1740); Frederick V. Bernard, "The History of Nadir Shah: A New Attribution to Johnson," *British Museum Quarterly* 34.3/4 (1970): 92–104.
- 106 Fraser, *History of Nadir Shah*, 70, 234.
- 107 William Chinnery, a published typographer, wrote the name labels in 1750 after the portrait series

- was brought back to England. The date also supports Layla Diba's attribution of the V&A oil portrait to ca. 1740s, and not ca. 1780–1800 as suggested by Marcus Fraser; see n. 11.
- 108 Fraser, *History of Nadir Shah*, 70, and as indicated by the book's full title, which identifies him as "formerly called Thamas Kuli Khan, the present emperor of Persia."
- 109 "King of Persia and a conqueror" (fig. 6b); "Persian conqueror of India 1739" (fig. 8c); "Nadir Shah of Persia, conqueror of India" (on a numbered list that accompanies fig. 14).
- 110 Dow, *History of Hindostan*, 2:322–24.
- 111 Yuthika Sharma, "Mughal Delhi on My Lapel: The Charmed Life of the Painted Ivory Miniature in Delhi, 1827–1880," in *Commodities and Culture in the Colonial World*, ed. Supriya Chaudhuri, Josephine McDonagh, Brian H. Murray, and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (London: Routledge, 2018), 15–31; Stephen Vernoit, "Royal Patronage of the Arts in India," in *Occidentalism: Islamic Art in the 19th Century* (London: Nour Foundation, 1997), 126–28. The miniature sets were made for both personal and commercial consumption, but the examples featuring Nadir Shah in this study appear to have been for the open market.
- 112 The colonial narrative of decline since Aurangzib has been reconsidered in recent scholarship. Alam, *Crisis of Empire*, xvii–lxi.
- 113 The predecessors of Muhammad Shah from the early eighteenth century appear at the end of the album and are probably misplaced.
- 114 Dow, *History of Hindostan*, 2:351–52.
- 115 Pp. 9–10 of the album (MS. Ouseley Add. 173).
- 116 Wright, *Muraqqa'*. Also see above for a summary of the rise of Mughal royal portraiture.
- 117 Marcia R. Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 62.
- 118 British Museum, L,77.1–L,77.21.
- 119 Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 53–78; Gabrielle Dean, "'Every Man His Own Publisher': Extra-Illustration and the Dream of the Universal Library," *Textual Cultures* 8.1 (2013): 57–71; Lucy Peltz, *Facing the Text: Extra-Illustration, Print Culture, and Society in Britain, 1769–1840* (San Marino CA: Huntington Library, 2017).
- 120 James Granger, *A Biographical History of England* (London: T. Davies, 1775); Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 70–72.
- 121 Peltz, *Facing the Text*, 57–58, 71; Granger, *Biographical History*, 1:vii. The phrase "reducing our biography to system" appears in the long title of Granger's text.
- 122 Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 60; Dean, "'Every Man His Own Publisher,'" 57.
- 123 Pp. 1, 9–10 of the album (MS. Ouseley Add. 173).
- 124 On the facing folio is a portrait of 'Ahmad Shah Durrani, Nadir Shah's Afghan commander who founded a new dynasty after the death of his former master; he, too, invaded India. He is depicted in a gold hat with a dome-shaped crown and four black-feather *jiqqas* but is often mistaken for Nadir Shah. For another portrait of the Afghan ruler (inscribed "Hamed Shah Duranny"), see British Library, Add. Or.2685.
- 125 Mantena, *Origins of Modern Historiography in India*, 9.
- 126 Mantena, 1–14; Auer, "Early Modern Persian, Urdu, and English Historiography," 199–225.
- 127 Nadir Shah's portraits are also found in British-owned albums whose mix of figures and court scenes do not follow any discernible sequence, such as the Crawford album in A29. These may be viewed as a display of the collector's aesthetic taste in Indian painting rather than a visual study of India's history.
- 128 Hanway, *Historical Account*, 4:227; Fraser, *History of Nadir Shah*, 234.
- 129 Dow, *History of Hindostan*, 2:351–52; Hanway, *Historical Account*, 4:269–71; Jones, preface to Astar-ābādī, *History of the Life of Nader Shah*, a2.
- 130 Untitled obituary of Nadir Shah, *London Evening Post*, no. 3107, October 1–3, 1747.
- 131 Matthee, "Nader Shah"; Axworthy, *Sword of Persia*, 212.
- 132 For references to the texts of Hanway, Dilworth, Dow, Jones, and Gladwin, see nn. 35, 60, 64, 90, and 37; John Malcolm, *The History of Persia* (London: John Murray, 1815); James Spilman, *A Journey Through Russia into Persia* (London: R. Dorsley, 1742); John Cook, *Voyages and Travels through the Russian Empire, Tartary, and Part of the Kingdom of Persia* (Edinburgh: printed for the author, 1770). For the Georgian and German translations of the *Tārīkh-i Nādirī*, see Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 296.
- 133 Joseph Wise, *Nadir: A Dramatic Poem* (London: J. Brown, 1779); Henry Mortimer Durand, *Nadir Shah* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908). Earlier fictionalized versions appeared in 1754 and 1758; Matthee, "Nader Shah" (see this source also for theatrical plays).
- 134 Romita Ray writes about the importance of Robert Clive's constructing a heroic image in India for a British audience that prized heroism and other military virtues in an age of empire. Ray, "Baron of Bengal: Robert Clive and the Birth of an Imperial Image," in *Transculturation in British Art, 1770–1930*, ed. Julie F. Codell (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 25.

- 135 Matthee, "Nader Shah."
- 136 Subrahmanyam, "Un Grand Dérangement," 337–78.
- 137 India formally came under direct rule in 1858 when the British Crown took over from the EIC.
- 138 Fraser, *History of Nadir Shah*, 69–70, 129–33, 216, 234; Dow, *History of Hindostan*, 2:322–32; Hanway, *Historical Account*, 4:138–42, 158.
- 139 The French, who were competing with the British for control in India, favored a similar narrative. Ray, "Invasion of Nadir Shah," 381.
- 140 See n. 30. This invader-turned-hero narrative had precedents in Iran, the most notable example being Alexander, who was revered as the ultimate defender despite his sacking and razing of Persepolis in 330 BCE. The Ilkhanids, too, legitimized their rule of Iran as foreign conquerors by celebrating Alexander in the illustrations of the Great Mongol *Shāhnāma*. Robert Hillenbrand, "The Iskandar Cycle in the Great Mongol *Shāhnāma*," in *The Problematics of Power: Eastern and Western Representations of Alexander the Great*, ed. Margaret Bridges and Johann Christoph Bürgel (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), 203–30.
- 141 Ursula Sims-Williams, "'White Mughal' Richard Johnson and Mir Qamar al-Din Minnat," *British Library Asian and African Studies Blog*, May 1, 2014, <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2014/04/white-mughal-richard-johnson-and-mir-qamar-al-din-minnat.html>
- 142 The sword is either absent or tucked away in the Iranian and Indian portraits made during Nadir Shah's lifetime but is ubiquitous in the reproduced paintings. This might suggest an attempt by later painters to draw attention to his martial image.
- 143 Enlightenment political thought underpinned British colonial policies in India. See Siraj Dean Ahmed, *The Stillbirth of Capital: Enlightenment Writing and Colonial India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Asma Sharif Ahmad, "The British Enlightenment and Ideas of Empire in India, 1756–73" (PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 2005). For Hastings's patronage of literature, learning, and art and the role of the Orientalists led by Jones, see n. 83 above.
- 144 انقدر فرق ز قدر تو بود تا بعقول، که بود تا بموالید ز عقل اول
- 145 Muhsin Mahdi, "Fārābī vi. Political Philosophy," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, January 1, 2000, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/farabi-vi>
- 146 نسبت فتنه بکس غیر غرق نیست صحیح، آنچه حادثه در عهد تو شد
مستأصل (verse above Hastings' portrait).
- 147 آزار ماست باعث آرایش سپهر . . . در دامن حمایت صاحب ز نیم
چنگ (two lines above Johnson's portrait).
- 148 To put it another way, using Shaffer's idea of grafting, these foreign conquerors are sutured onto the local lineage of rulers; see my earlier discussion on the concept of grafting. See n. 33.
- 149 Hanna, *Can Russia Invade India?*, 5.
- 150 A similar narrative was already propagated in relation to Timur, who was a much-lauded figure in the British writing of Indian history in the eighteenth century. His conquests were justified "by the manners of the age and country in which he lived, and by the treachery of kings." Beatrice Teissier, "Texts from the Persian in Late Eighteenth-Century India and Britain: Culture or Construct?," *Iran* 47 (2009): 139–40; Joseph White, preface to Timur, *Institutes Political and Military*, trans. White (Oxford: Clarendon-Press, 1783), vii.
- 151 Michael Axworthy, too, observes that Nadir Shah faded from Western historiography and became "little more than an anomaly in the history of India." His military successes "did not fit" in the Victorian Orientalist view of a weak and backward Iran, and worse, they threatened the British "myth of Empire." Axworthy, "The Awkwardness of Nader Shah: History, Military History, and Eighteenth-Century Iran," in *Crisis, Collapse, Militarism and Civil War: The History and Historiography of 18th Century Iran*, ed. Axworthy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 55.
- It is also interesting to see that the front cover of *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford University Press, 2005), features the portrait of Warren Hastings in fig. 18. Visually, it asserts British authority over the whole of the eighteenth century in India and effaces Nadir Shah's pivotal place from this period of Indian history.
- Natasha Eaton has observed a decline in the demand for Mughal paintings among the London elite from 1785, based on a study of Christie's auction catalogues. Eaton, "Nostalgia for the Exotic: Creating an Imperial Art in London, 1750–1793," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39.2 (2006): 245. Her study, however, is not concerned with the demand among the British in India. The production of Nadir Shah's portraits continued well into the nineteenth century, and their eventual disappearance cannot be explained by a fall in Mughal painting sales in London.
- 152 Great Exhibition, *The Illustrated Exhibitor: A Tribute to the World's Industrial Jubilee* (London: John Cassell, 1851), 94.
- 153 Great Exhibition, *Illustrated Exhibitor*, 94.
- 154 Llewellyn-Jones, *Portraits in Princely India*; Schmitz, *After the Great Mughals*; Molly Emma Aitken, "Colonial-Period Court Painting and the Case of Bikaner," *Archives of Asian Art* 67.1 (2017): 25–59; Becherini, "Effigies in Transit." For practices of

- reproducing album paintings in India, see Yael Rice, "Painters, Albums, and Pandits: Agents of Image Reproduction in Early Modern South Asia," *Ars Orientalis* 51 (2021): 27–64.
- 155 While Safavid shahs are occasionally found in Indian albums, two features distinguish them from Nadir Shah's portraits. First, they follow the Safavid pictorial mode rather than the conventions for depicting rulers in India. Second, they are placed in a separate section for neighboring rulers and not inserted into the Mughal genealogy. Becherini, "Effigies in Transit." As mentioned in n. 124 above, 'Ahmad Shah Durrani, Nadir Shah's Afghan commander who founded his own dynasty and followed in the latter's footsteps to invade Delhi, appears alongside his former master in some albums but there are far fewer of his portraits.
- 156 Stephanie Porras, "Going Viral? Maerten de Vos's *St. Michael the Archangel*," in *Netherlandish Art in Its Global Context*, ed. Thijs Weststeijn, Eric Jorink, and Frits Scholten (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 54–79; also see her recently published book *The First Viral Images: Maerten de Vos, Antwerp Print, and the Early Modern Globe* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2023). For sociological studies of virality, see Karine Nahon and Jeff Hemsley, *Going Viral* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014); and Tony D. Sampson, *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
- 157 Porras, "Going Viral?," 59. Also see Porras, *First Viral Images*, 8.
- 158 Di Pietrantonio, "Circuits of Exchange"; Becherini, "Effigies in Transit."
- 159 The ability to move between media is considered a crucial component of virality. Porras, "Going Viral?," 62; Porras, *First Viral Images*, 86. An example of this cross-media transmission is the V&A portrait, ca. 1840 (fig. 9a). It was modeled on an illustration in *The History of Persia* by John Malcolm published in 1815 (fig. 9b), which in turn was copied from an oil painting dated 1775–76, now at the Sa'adabad Museum in Tehran. This relay from an oil canvas in Tehran to a print in London and finally a watercolor in the Punjab Hills demonstrates the contagiousness of Nadir Shah's image.
- 160 Porras, "Going Viral?," 65.
- 161 Porras, 71; also see Porras, *First Viral Images*, 7, 14. Though not framed as a viral study, Holly Shaffer's examination of the transmission of form and its changeable meaning shares a similar line of thinking and provides further support for some of the points raised here. Shaffer, "Portraits and Types: Reinscribing Forms in Nineteenth-Century India and Europe" and "Introduction: The Graphic Arts: Replication and the Force of Forms," *Ars Orientalis* 51 (2021): 249–85, 1–26.
- 162 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 22; Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, "The Power of the Infinite Copy," in *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy, from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Reaktion, 2013), 195. Also see Yuthika Sharma's discussion of the replication of ivory miniatures in Delhi and her reference to Benjamin. Sharma, "Mughal Delhi," 27.