

**The Colonial Entombment of the Mughal Habitus: Delhi in
the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine changes in the way in which the city of Delhi was perceived by its residents and visitors over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the eighteenth century, the built environment of Delhi was interpreted by residents and visitors via a distinctively Mughal habitus of urbanity that ultimately depended on a matrix of Mughal technologies and institutions, and particularly the management of water resources in the urban environment. After the British assumed control of the city in 1803, residents' perceptions of Delhi began to change in response to the manner in which colonial authorities envisioned the city and changed the way in which water was used and distributed through the city. The desire of colonial authority to remake the city in its own image in order to secure hegemony is evident in its ways of gathering and processing knowledge of the city. By scrutinizing the city through a *mausoleal modality*, the British administration began to identify Delhi as a 'dead' city that needed to be ordered, classified, interpreted, and ultimately placed within the confines of History. In doing so, the British regime made previous modes of seeing and inhabiting the city irrelevant and introduced a colonial habitus of urbanity that privileged their own rule. This process reached its logical culmination in the destruction of the city during the war of 1857 and the creation of yet another city of 'New Delhi' as a reflection of imperial grandeur.

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The Colonial Entombment of the Mughal Habitus: Delhi in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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...Then Mirza Fakhru addressed the gathering: "Sirs, by some strange coincidence this gathering of poets (*mushaira*) started with the *Fatiha Khair* and now it has come to end on the very same *Fatiha Khair*." Saying this, he snuffed out both candles (*shama*) which had circled around [the gathering] and returned to him. Just as the candles extinguished, the heralds called out: "Gentlemen, Delhi's last Mushaira ends!"¹

With these words, the author Farhatullah Beg (1883-1948) ended his epic *A Memorable Poetic Gathering of Delhi in 1845 (Dehli Ka Ek Yadgar Mushaira, ca. 1935)*, an elegy to the culture of Mughal Delhi that had vanished by the twentieth century. The image draws its poignancy from the final act of the extinguishing of candles: circulated around the poetic assembly (*mushaira*), these candles ritually permitted each poet in turn to recite his compositions before an audience of patrons, peers, and competitors. In Beg's vision, the *mushaira* represented the primary site of literary creativity in a city long-renowned for its elegance and sophistication. In this context, the candles were an apt symbol of Delhi's culture: they signified not only its beauty and vitality but also its evanescence in the age of British colonial rule. The final snuffing out these candles – and the reading of the invocation in the first chapter of the Quran (*Fatiha Khair*) – both pointed to the irrevocable demise of that culture.

Looking back from the early twentieth century, Beg imagined that the last light of Delhi's autonomous culture had been extinguished in 1845, and the residents of the city

¹ Farhatullah Beg, *Dehli Ki Akhri Shama* (Delhi: Urdu Academy 2003) p. 138-39. Translation mine.

were left helpless in the darkness of colonial rule. C M Naim has shown that the sense of the past generated by this conflation of the poetic assembly's 'candle' with the notion of 'Mughal culture' was fundamentally ahistorical.² According to Naim, the beginning of British rule over Delhi in 1803 created a stable environment which led to the 'Delhi Renaissance' – a burst of intellectual creativity facilitated by intercultural contact between British and Indians and the diffusion of western knowledge through newly-established educational institutions and newspapers.³ For Naim, the 'candle' of Delhi's culture was not the flickering remnant of a supposedly pure Mughal tradition: rather, it was the "product of Indo-British collaboration."⁴ If this is indeed the case, then what explains the pervasive sense of loss and nostalgia with which Muslim intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century imagined Delhi before the devastating war of 1857? Why did the conception of Delhi as a 'ruined' city with a 'dead' culture gain such resonance amongst the Muslim elite of the city in the colonial period?

The problem of cultural change and continuity in the city has generally been examined as a part of the broader social, political and intellectual history of the city.⁵

² C. M. Naim "Ghalib's Delhi: A Shamelessly Revisionist Look at Two Popular Metaphors" *Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 18 2003

³ On intellectual activity fostered by colonial institutions, see Gail Minault, "Master Ramchandra of Delhi College: Teacher, Journalist, and Cultural Intermediary" *Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 18 2003; Gail Minault, "Delhi College and Urdu" *Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 14 1999; Gail Minault, "Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavi and the 'Delhi Renaissance'" in Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Delhi Through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture, and Society* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 524, Margrit Pernau, "Preparing a Meeting-Ground: C.F. Andrews, St. Stephen's and the Delhi College" in C. F. Andrews, *Zaka Ullah of Delhi* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); on emerging print culture in Delhi, see Margrit Pernau, "The *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* Between Persian Akhbarat and English Newspapers" *Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 18 2003

⁴ Naim, 23

⁵ For the history of Delhi and its society under colonial rule, see Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires, 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981) Delhi as the center of a 'patrimonial-bureaucratic empire' has been discussed in Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639-1739* (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) . For the intellectual culture of 19th-C. Delhi see Mushirul Hasan, *A Moral Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

This study, however, focuses on city and culture in *mentalités* of its residents. I argue that the change in the perception of the city and its culture from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century was caused by the colonial desire to replace the accepted forms and customs of Mughal rule with their own. The visions and actions of colonial administrators ultimately destroyed the pre-colonial imagination of Delhi, and reshaped the ways in which people related to the built environment of the city.

The city of Delhi itself is particularly worthy of study. With a population of at least four hundred thousand in 1739, the city represented a pinnacle of pre-colonial urbanism in the subcontinent.⁶ Delhi was a political-administrative capital of immense strategic importance because it lay between the North Indian Gangetic Plains and the paths to West and Central Asia.⁷ As a center of elite consumption, Delhi encouraged the economic development of a large hinterland, and encouraged overland trade with across south and west Asia. Most importantly, Delhi was the capital of the realm and the symbolic heart of civilization and culture in Hindustan. The city's aura and prestige far outlasted its political and economic importance. As both mutinying soldiers and British officers understood well enough during the war of 1857, the fate of Delhi represented the fate of Hindustan.

In this paper I use on the writings of Pierre Bourdieu to theorize change in perceptions of the city.⁸ In particular, I employ Bourdieu's notion of the habitus in conceptualizing the perceptual world of historical subjects and its relationship to the built environment of the city. While Bourdieu's idea of the habitus has been criticized for

⁶ Blake, 67

⁷ Frykenberg, xxiv-xxv

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu and John B. Thompson, Language and Symbolic Power (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991) 302, Pierre Bourdieu, Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998)

lapsing into the very objectivism it seeks to transcend, it nevertheless remains useful in relating the multiplicities of social practice that are bounded by the *commonly assumed* parameters of objective reality.⁹ The habitus, when embodied in historical actors, reflects the connections between the putatively instinctive knowledge of societal codes to the realities of urban existence. While it thus preserves the possibilities of historical agents to employ a variety of strategies for advancing through the social field, the habitus also points to the indisputable relations of power that constitute social reality and privilege certain historical actors over others. The embodied habitus thus ties the perceptions of individuals to their society as a whole, and to the large number of technologies and institutions that engender the society and the habitus in the first place. In this paper, the embodied habitus refers to the perceptions and practices by which individuals relate to the city and make it 'inhabitable.'

I focus particularly on the place of water in the city and in the imaginations of city-dwellers.¹⁰ The presence of water throughout the city shaped the urban experience and the economy of the region in the Mughal era: the water which streamed through the main streets of Delhi contributed to the city's distinctive urbanity and reflected Mughal ideas of civilized space. But under colonialism, water assumed a wholly different identity derived from the emerging discourses of capitalist progress and sanitation. This change in the conception of water reconstituted the city in terms of colonial authority. An examination of this change reveals the delicate relationships between the subjective perception of the city and the structures of authority. It also demonstrates how the urban

⁹ For an excellent summation of the criticisms leveled against the habitus, see Anthony King, "Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus," *Sociological Theory* 18:3 November 2000

¹⁰ Ivan Illich, *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1985) 92

experience was directly affected by the ideology and practices of the colonial administration.

The first part of this paper analyzes the writings of eighteenth-century visitors to Delhi in order to create a sense of the Mughal habitus of urbanity. Here, I show how the habitus privileged the Mughal emperor and associated his person with the city of Shahjahanabad and the realm of Hindustan. I then examine the perceptions of early British visitors to the city and contest the widespread notion that Delhi had been reduced to a ruined and irrelevant city by the eve of colonial rule. While the Mughal Empire had ceased to exist by the end of the 19th century, the Mughal emperor remained of paramount symbolic significance in North India. This, I argue, was due to the fact that the Mughals retained their symbolic capital even after they had lost all access to its economic forms. British perceptions of the city as 'declined' and 'destroyed' were charged with a rhetorical force that attempted to reject this symbolic capital and to legitimize the expansion of their own rule.

Having examined the habitus of urbanity of the *ancien régime*, I then turn to the emergence of a colonial habitus of urbanity that was shaped by British views and desires. This presence of this habitus is evident in the physical transformations of the city under British rule, and the manner in which British administrators saw the city and the King's place within it. This colonial habitus was produced by a mausoleal modality of investigation, which saw the city as a series of monuments that needed to be identified, classified, and fixed in History. This modality made the lives and practices of the inhabitants of the city irrelevant and prepared it for reform. In turn, it shaped how native elites such as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan came to view the city.

While some native elites vociferously championed the new vision of the city, the Mughal habitus of urbanity remained dominant. In the aftermath of the war of 1857, however, the British fundamentally reconstituted the city and attempted to impose their own perceptions of urban practice on the residents of Delhi. I discuss the reaction of two native intellectuals to this process. While Ghalib noted the reconfiguration of the city with despair and predicted the doom of the 'old culture,' later reformers such as Nazir Ahmad sought to find a 'third way' that acknowledged the past was dead but nevertheless resisted British ways of thinking about the city. Thus, by the beginning of the 20th century, the Mughal habitus of urbanity had been completely destroyed. In conclusion, I assess the impact of this destruction on the lives of Delhi's inhabitants.



On July 10, 1737, the sixty-six year old Mughal nobleman Chin Qulich Khan and his entourage were warmly welcomed at the gates of Shahjahanabad. For his many services to the empire, he had been given control of the six provinces (*subah*-s) of the Deccan and a title by which he was most commonly known: Nizam-ul Mulk (Administrator of the Realm). Thirteen years before, Nizam-ul Mulk had left Shahjahanabad to establish an autonomous fiefdom in the Deccan that was only nominally under the authority of the Mughal court. His move signaled the weakness of the imperial court, and other noblemen in the empire were quick to take note of the fact. Between 1724 and 1730, the administrators (*subahdar*-s) of the richest provinces in the empire established themselves as the *de facto* rulers of their domains. While they stopped remitting revenue to the increasingly hapless Mughal emperor in Delhi, they continued to represent themselves as his faithful servants.

Nizam-ul mulk returned to the imperial capital in 1737 because he sensed a profound shift in the politics of Hindustan. The imperial court was no longer capable of defending its territories and seemed to be in imminent danger of a humiliating defeat at the hands of its old enemies, the Marathas. Just four months before Nizam-ul mulk's arrival, the city and its emperor lay at the mercy of a contingent of Maratha cavalry for three days whilst Mughal armies stumbled cluelessly farther afield. Perhaps out of lingering respect for Delhi's imperial aura, Baji Rao, the Maratha commander, did not despoil the city. Writing later wrote to his brother, he claimed that he "did not want to drive our friends to an extremity by committing sacrilege on the capital."¹¹ It was the knowledge that the Mughals could not rest their security on the reverence of their enemies that presumably galvanized Nizam-ul mulk into action and brought him yet again to the service of the emperor Muhammad Shah.

Some Mughal chroniclers in Delhi had long felt the sense of crisis that doubtless spurred Nizam-ul mulk into action in the twilight of his life. Jahandar Shah, (r. 1712-13) for instance, is said to have sold the treasures and furnishings of the palace and spent "the last of the reserves accumulated since the time of Babar."¹² Fiscal calamities were associated in the minds of the chroniclers with moral decline; there are many descriptions of Jahandar Shah taking a common singing-girl (*mughinah*) by the name of Lal Kunwar to be his queen and permitting her to use the regalia commonly associated with the person of the emperor himself: she was allowed to display the imperial standard, march with beating drums, and possess a personal guard of five hundred mounted

¹¹ Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court 1707-1740*, 4th ed. (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 267, ft. 51

¹² Chandra, 123

gentlemen-troopers (*ahadi-s*).¹³ The chronicler Hadi Kamwar Khan was infuriated by the fact that “the fiddlers and drummers who were the brothers and relations of Lal Kunwar, swaggered through the streets of Delhi, committing every sort of outrage.” Similarly, Khafi Khan sarcastically remarked that “it was a fine time for minstrels and singers, and all the fine tribe of dancers and actors.”¹⁴ Writing in 1718-19, Nur-ud Din Faruqi complained,

Everybody high and low immersed themselves in a life of ease and pleasure... There was no one to pay heed those oppressed by the *kalawants* [performers] and [those] whose life and property was in danger. All things forbidden by the *sharia* [Islamic law] were completely forgotten by the Shah and the soldiers alike, and from *faqir* [dervish] to *wazir* [minister] everyone became immersed in things forbidden, and became heedless of everything except pleasure. Little by little, the prestige and dignity of the sovereign was forgotten by high and low alike, and the king appeared to be a king in the game of chess, moved hither and thither...¹⁵

Here, then, is almost a classical portrayal of decadence: in contrast to Aurangzeb, who had banned the performance of music as un-Islamic, the musicians of Shahjahanabad were running amok only five years after his death. Not only did they purvey a life of “ease and pleasure,” but they threatened private property, emasculated the soldiery and incapacitated authority. While the unfortunate Jahandar Shah’s reign lasted barely a year, some thought that his reign signaled a time of decadence and unmitigated imperial decline. Much of the criticism in this vein was directed against the emperor Muhammad Shah. Reigning from 1719 to 1748, Muhammad Shah came to be known as “The Colorful” because of his fondness for entertainment, and for his lassitude in the conduct of the affairs of state. The contemporary observer Rustam ‘Ali Shahabadi may have

¹³ Chandra, 110-11

¹⁴ Chandra, 112, ft. 41

¹⁵ *Jahandar-Nama*, quoted in Satish Chandra in Frykenberg, 211-212

reflected the disgust of a section of the nobility when he described the emperor to be a veritable “asylum of negligence.”¹⁶ Following the accounts of these chroniclers, historical work since has tended to reproduce the chroniclers’ emphasis on the rapid moral decay of the imperial court after the death of the emperor Aurangzeb in 1707.¹⁷

There was little doubt that the Shahjahanabad in which Nizam-ul mulk’s procession arrived that sweltering day in July had lost some of its sheen. The emperor in 1737 could not control large swathes of his empire in the fashion that his ancestors had. While the emperors Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb had maintained a gruelling schedule of movement from city to city within the empire, Muhammad Shah remained sequestered in the *Lal Qila* (Red Fort) and left only to visit nearby parks and a fair at Garhmukteswar, a hundred miles east of Delhi.¹⁸ The ability of the imperial court to control Delhi itself had also become compromised: the privy-counsellor (*wazir*) Qamar-ud Din Khan and his soldiers had considerable difficulty in quelling the so-called Shoe-sellers riot of 1729 which was severe enough to prevent the Friday prayers from taking place at the central mosque (*Jama Masjid*).¹⁹

The apocalyptic visions of elite Mughal political commentators reflected their own preoccupations in a time wherein dominant authority was being eroded and other centers of power and authority had begun to develop.²⁰ The fact that some elite Mughal writers were appalled by the dissolution of social norms and the rise of ‘vulgar’ people did not mean that the Mughal world was falling apart. In fact, an excellent description of

¹⁶ Chandra, 207, ft. 9

¹⁷ See esp. Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire* (Calcutta, India: M.C. Sarkar, 1932), Chandra, 354, , Thomas George Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls: Studies in late Mughul Delhi* (Cambridge Eng.: University Press, 1951) 269

¹⁸ Sarkar, 4

¹⁹ Chandra, 282-83

²⁰ Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-48* (Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 365

the city and its variegated charms was produced by Dargah Quli Khan, a seventeen year-old nobleman who accompanied Nizam-ul Mulk's procession to Shahjahanabad. Dargah Quli Khan was Nizam-ul Mulk's protégé: the young man had been groomed for governance since his childhood by the elder statesman. Before leaving for the North, he had also been appointed the Superintendent of Newsrunners (*Daroga-e Harkara*).²¹ As the central node in a large and sophisticated intelligence network, Dargah Quli Khan's tasks would have been to collate information for his master from a constant stream of data provided by a network of settled newswriters (*akhbar navis*) and peripatetic undercover agents (*khufia navis*).²² But the young Dargah Quli Khan was not overburdened overmuch by his official duties, for he found time to record the many attractions of the city in a manuscript entitled *Salar Jang's Essay* (*Risalah-e Salar Jang*) which now forms one of the best extant records of eighteenth-century Delhi.²³ First published in Persian in 1926 under the title of *The Delhi Folio* (*Muraqqa-e Dehli*), the text was subsequently translated into Urdu (1981) and English (1989).²⁴

The *Muraqqa* does not fit contemporary notions of a travelogue. Instead of presenting a linear, chronological narrative from the perspective of a self-conscious author, it consists of a series of descriptions of people and places. It does not describe the manners and customs of the common people of Delhi, and it contains none of the physiocratic accounts of environmental and economic characteristics that were the

²¹ Shama Mitra Chenoy, "Introduction" in Dargah Quli Khan, (ed. Chandar Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy) *Muraqqa-e-Delhi: the Mughal Capital in Muhammad Shah's Time* (Delhi: Deputy Publication, 1989) xxxv

²² On intelligence networks in pre-colonial India, see C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

²³ "*Risalah-e Salar Jang*," Persian Manuscript Collection, Add. 26,237, British Museum

²⁴ In this paper I rely on the translation of Dargah Quli Khan's *Muraqqa-e Dehli* in Shekhar and Chenoy, 1989

hallmark of the later writings of visiting East India Company officials. Though written after the supposedly devastating invasion of Nadir Shah (1739), the text has only a peripheral mention of the event. Indifferent to matters beyond the purview of leisurely consumption and religion, the *Muraqqa* is clearly a text written for the sophisticates who had the luxury to spend their days in the enjoyment of life. From a reading of this text, then, there emerges the figure of Delhi in the *mentalité* of the Mughal elite. More particularly, the text represents an elite conception of the cityscape of the imperial capital, and sheds light on the city's habitus of urbanity in its embodied forms.

The cityscape of Shahjahanabad, for Dargah Quli Khan, was an uneven agglomeration of places that were related in a network of elite social practice situated in urban space. Since he measured distances from the fort, it appears that he considered it to be the central feature of the cityscape. Some distances, however, are given from the 'old' fort or city, indicating the presence of pre-Shahjahanabad settlements that continued to exist in the architectural remnants of other urban spaces. For the author, the space of the city was composed of sites that had religious, commercial, and erotic significance.

The shrines of the Holy Footprint (*Qadam Sharif*), Qutb Sahib, Chiragh Dehli, Baqi Billah, and of Nizam-ud Din Aulia, are accorded considerable space and respect in the text. As sites of great religious importance, all attracted large crowds of pious devotees, not only from neighbouring regions but from other parts of the Mughal realm (*Hindustan*).²⁵ Both nobles and commonfolk jostled for space in the crowds that inevitably assembled on certain days of the week or at times of the year. Popular religiosity blended easily with commerce in such spaces: artisans displayed their wares, minstrels, ventriloquists and dancers performed before the crowds, and traders set up

²⁵ Dargah Quli Khan, 6

shops on the roads leading to the shrine. Dargah Quli Khan stated that the caretakers of the mausoleum of Nizam-ud Din had set up their residences nearby, and that the locality had consequently become "populous;" indeed, he noted that, "Their [the caretakers'] livelihood depends on the offerings sent through representatives of devotees."²⁶ There was even a market for grave-sites: the wealthy purchased plots near the dargah (presumably from the caretakers) while the "innumerable" graves of the poor surrounded the complex.²⁷

Within the habitus of Mughal urbanity, places gained religious significance because of the presence of shrines and mausolea. These sites, in turn, accrued the cultural capital of holiness from the number of graves of mystics and miraculous saints near or around them. Thus, the shrine of Qutb Sahib enjoyed a plenitude of "the graves of saints in the surroundings of the *masjid* [mosque]" that would "cause envy for even the *Rauza-e-Rizwan* [garden of Paradise]." For Dargah Quli Khan, mystical significance pervaded these shrines and graves in a most literal sense. In an age before the onset of mechanical reproduction, the very physicality of such structures was imbued with a potent aura. Therefore, "an extraneous illumination can be perceived at dawn" enveloping the shrine of Khwaja Qutb-ud Din Bakhtiyar Kaki in his shrine (Dargah Qutb Sahib); the "walls and gates" of the mausoleum of Nizam-ud Din were similarly illuminated.²⁸ The aura of these sites was literally overpowering, for it could affect the bodies of those within its range: the "threshold" of the shrine of Nizam-ud Din, thought the author, "strikes horror amongst the proud and compels the rebellious to prostrate before it."²⁹ Both Hindus and

²⁶ Dargah Quli Khan, 10

²⁷ Dargah Quli Khan, 3

²⁸ Dargah Quli Khan, 6, 9

²⁹ Dargah Quli Khan, 9

Muslims flocked to bathe in the reservoir (*hauz*) of the shrine of Chiragh Dehli to receive “perfect cures” for chronic corporeal afflictions.³⁰

Water was often perceived to be the agent of divine healing and it played a seminal role in Islamic conceptions of sanctity. It was an integral feature of the morphology of religious sites: both secular and religious activity accreted around the bodies of water that had been excavated as complements to shrines and mausolea. A reservoir was sacred because it not only nourished the populace, but also indicated that God cared for his people and provided for them.³¹ The idea of water (*ab*) lay at the etymological root of the concepts of cultivation, (*abadani*) urban settlement, population and prosperity (*abad, abadi*).³² Such reservoirs often had mythological origins: in elite hagiography, they could be the sites of the conflict between Muslims and Hindus – sites that were consecrated by the martyrdom (*shahadat*) of Islamic warriors.³³ But in the realm of popular religion, reservoirs acquired sanctity because of their association with *Sufi* saints, who offered prayers or performed miracles in the vicinity of such water-bodies.³⁴ The healing waters of such reservoirs were highly prized: that from the Shrine of the Holy Footprint was distributed in distant regions by returning pilgrims. Very much like the sacred waters of the well of Zamzam in the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, the “sweet water of the spring” near the Shrine of *Hazrat Ali* was said to fulfill “the desires of the needy.”³⁵ Water-bodies such as the Illuminated Reservoir (*Hauz-e Shamsi*) near the Shrine of Qutb Sahib were thus integral parts of religious complexes.

³⁰ Dargah Quli Khan, 11

³¹ Sunil Kumar, *The Present in Delhi's Pasts*, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Three Essays Press, 2002) 69

³² Kumar, 69

³³ See Shahid Amin, “Un Saint Guerrier sur la Conquête de l'inde du Nord par les Turcs au XIe siècle,” *Annales* 60. 2.(2005): 265-292

³⁴ Kumar, 71

³⁵ Dargah Quli Khan, 3, 4

Such reservoirs were prominent in the cityscape not only because of their religious significance, but also because they were the locus of considerable secular activity. In the vicinity of the complex that included the Shrine of Qutb Sahib, the grave of emperor Bahadur Shah (*Khuld Manzil*) and the *Hauz-e Shamsi*, Dargah Quli Khan noted that the “debauched and drunken revel[ed] in all kinds of perversities” and lovers wandered about “hand in hand.”³⁶ The imperial censor (*muhtasib*), tasked with protecting public morality, was helpless as “whores and lads entice[d] more and more people to this atmosphere of lasciviousness;” both high and low “quench[ed] the thirst of their lust” in the vicinity of the reservoir.³⁷ Similarly, a *hauz* near the shrine of Hazrat Nizam-ud Din became a gathering spot for the nobility of the day. This reservoir, along with a canal and garden, was part of the funerary complex that housed the grave of the important Mughal nobleman Mir Musharraf. His son Mir Kallu commemorated the anniversary of the father’s death as the ritual wedding of the departed soul to the almighty (*urs*) in the tree-lined gardens near the reservoir. According to Dargah Quli Khan, these commemorations had assumed the character of lavish parties: noblemen and their retinues of entertainers and lovers all pitched their tents near the banks of the canal and enjoyed the candle-lit gardens and fragrant flowers. At night, they amused themselves with alcohol, fine food and entertainment into the wee hours of the morning.³⁸ In this environment, declared the author, “all hesitations are overcome and the people indulge in their desires and enjoy themselves.”³⁹

³⁶ Dargah Quli Khan, 17

³⁷ Dargah Quli Khan, 17-18

³⁸ Dargah Quli Khan, 19-20

³⁹ Dargah Quli Khan, 20

This environment of elite consumption was enabled by a complex hydraulic system which also served the agrarian hinterlands of the city. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, pre-Shahjahanabad settlements in the region had been supplied by tanks, which received rain-water through run-off channels. In times of general stability, the tanks were replenished and permitted the growth of population in the region. But whenever local order began to crumble, the supply of water failed and urban settlements came under threat. Thus, the Hauz-e Shamsi dried up sometime in the 1260s because the channels feeding it were closed off by "dishonest men;" Firoz Shah Tughlaq destroyed these dams and revitalized the tank.⁴⁰ Shifting away from the rocky site of Tughlaqabad, Firoz Shah founded the new city of Firozabad near the banks of the Yamuna; he is also credited with the excavation of the canal that Ali Mardan Khan re-opened at Shah Jahan's behest.⁴¹ The Mughal system of canals fed the city and watered the inexhaustible topes of the poets' beloved rose-garden; but it also undergirded the agrarian economy of the Delhi region. The canal permitted the development of orchards and farms which produced fruit and grain for consumption in the city. By permitting farmers to purchase cuttings, the Mughal state earned considerable revenue from the canal system; it could assign sections of the canal to individuals, who presumably were responsible for its maintenance. A bureaucratic staff surveilled the canal system and ensured that no illegal cuttings were made.⁴² The network of canals and reservoirs that found frequent incidental mention in Dargah Quli Khan's account thus played a crucial role in sustaining Mughal urbanism. Not only did this hydraulic system enable an elite cultural milieu and attendant patterns

⁴⁰ Athar Ali, in Frykenberg, 39

⁴¹ Gupta, in Frykenberg, 253

⁴² Bayly, 17

of consumption, but it also augmented the water supply for the monsoon-dependent agricultural economy.

There was, of course, much more to the city than the shrines, gardens, and reservoirs that Dargah Quli Khan praised. But neither the architecture of the walled city nor the features of public life within it were of particular interest to the young visitor. Only two central public spaces, Sa'adullah Khan Square (*Chowk Sa'adullah Khan*) and the Moonlight Avenue (*Chandni Chowk*) merited any attention from the author. Sa'adullah Khan Square is presented as a slightly deceptive and risky environment. Besides "beautiful lads dancing at intervals," there were fortune-tellers seated on wooden chairs in a manner reminiscent of *Maulvis* on their pulpits.⁴³ Unlike the benign scholars of Islam, these men glibly discoursed on exoteric religious matters – for instance, the benefits of fasting in certain months – and relieved the gullible of their money. Similarly, astrologers and geomancers pleased their clientele by assuring them of good fortune; and doctors (*hakim-s*) sold "multicoloured pouches which are supposedly a variety of medicines but are in fact just muck."⁴⁴ The doctor, "by sheer force of his words" could induce people to purchase potions to increase virility; having "pawned everything they owned" these "cuckolds leave for their houses in a state of euphoria."⁴⁵ Dargah Quli Khan may have held these men in contempt because they were unaffiliated with the established Sufi shrines and because they catered to the needs of the non-elite population of the city. But he was nevertheless fascinated by the weapons, the clothes, and especially the market for wild birds and beasts. Sa'adullah Khan square merited attention for a nobleman because it was a quintessentially urban environment: because of its

⁴³ Dargah Quli Khan, 21

⁴⁴ Dargah Quli Khan, 22

⁴⁵ Dargah Quli Khan, 22

concentrated possibilities of pleasure and demotic, threatening character, it marked the embodied habitus of the urbanite in a way that differentiated him sharply from rustics and visitors from other cultures.

If Sa'adullah Khan Square may have been slightly unsavory to the tastes of a nobleman, the Moonlight Avenue was nonpareil in the luxuries that it proffered to the discerning visitor. Running 1,389 meters west from the Lahori Gate of the Exalted Fort (*Qila-e Mu'alla*) to the Fatehpuri Mosque, the avenue came to be known by the name of the octagonal square (with sides of roughly 90 meters) that lay at its center.⁴⁶ The Canal of Plenty (*Nahr-e Faiz*) ran through the middle of the street and made water an integral of the cityscape. This canal was a branch of the Paradise Canal (*Nahr-e Bahisht*) that according to the late 17th-century chronicler Sujana Rai Bhandari, "confers freshness on the gardens in the suburbs of the capital, lends happiness to its streets and bazaars, and enhances the splendour of the imperial palaces."⁴⁷ Dargah Quli Khan found the Canal of Plenty "full of good and clean water."⁴⁸ The silvery reflection of these waters on moonlit nights gave the avenue its name. Shopkeepers on this street were prosperous enough to hire assistants to conduct everyday transactions in jewelry, cloth, perfume, Chinese porcelain and fine glassware. The street also had a number of coffee-houses (*Qahwa Khana-s*) where poets recited their verses before an audience in which the nobility were to be found.⁴⁹ The coffee served here was presumably more palatable than that served at

⁴⁶ Blake, 55-56

⁴⁷ Blake, 65

⁴⁸ Dargah Quli Khan, 24

⁴⁹ Dargah Quli Khan, 24

by residents of the Arab Lodge (*Arab Serai*), which was laced with sugar and nauseated visiting guests.⁵⁰

While the Arab Lodge was at some distance from the city's walls, a variety of urban institutions were clustered around Shahjahanabad's main thoroughfare. Many lodges were created in the vicinity of mosques in order to house pilgrims who visited them from distant regions. Jahanara Begum, daughter of Shah Jahan, built a luxurious lodge for the use of merchants, along with a garden and water-courses immediately to the north of Moonlight Avenue; a map from the mid-nineteenth century records the presence of more humble lodges such as Mahal Serai, Khwaja Serai and Serai Bangash near the main thoroughfare, and also lodges for Hindu pilgrims (*dharmsala*).⁵¹ Important visiting noblemen, of course, rented mansions or were allotted them, so we find no mention of residence in a lodge in Dargah Quli Khan's account. The map indicates not only temporary residences, but also the presence of compounds (*katra*) that seem, by their names, to have housed groups of people from regions outside the city. A Little Kashmiri Compound (*Chota Kashmiri Katra*) and a Marwari Compound (*Katra Marwari*) may have housed semi-permanent or permanent communities of traders or officials who were drawn to the center of the realm. Besides lodges, a courtesans' quarter (*Tawaif Kucha*), and a school (*Madrassah*), the magistrate's headquarters (*Chabutra Kotwali*) were also situated on the street. The multitude of urban practices engendered by that the avenue's residences, lodges, shops, cafes, places of worship, imperial institutions – and the silvery, flowing water – all served to place it at the center of Delhi's cityscape for visitors and residents alike.

⁵⁰ Dargah Quli Khan, 48

⁵¹ An excellent reproduction of this map is presented in Eckart Ehlers and Thomas Krafft, *Shāhjahānābād/Old Delhi: Tradition and Colonial Change* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1993)

Amongst the imperial institutions of the city, the Magistracy was one of the most important. The magistrate (*Kotwal*) was responsible for maintaining law and order in the city; his headquarters is depicted as being a fair-sized building with a number of cells, perhaps used for the incarceration of criminals. The system of surveillance and punishment worked vigorously to maintain order amongst the lower orders. The magistrate's headquarters was a classically urban public space where inchoate anti-imperial resentment found expression. For instance, during the last years of Aurangzeb's reign someone affixed a flag to the railing of the magistrate's headquarters in the dead of night; the flag read, "When the King comes out of the fort, let him beware!" The magistrate sent the flag to the Emperor, and upon the issuance of a proclamation, an ascetic of a militant Sikh order was apprehended and flogged to death.⁵² Again, in 1721, a flag bearing the phrase "Let the Emperor beware and quit the palace," was found tied to the railing of the headquarters; after the announcement of an imperial proclamation throughout the city accompanied by the beating of drum, a Muslim mendicant of the Azad sect – who went by the Hindu name Naranjan – was caught and brought before the emperor. He was turned over to the Vazir, who had him severely flogged.⁵³ Public executions, though infrequent, also took place at the open platform of the headquarters, thus exposing the workings of imperial power on the bodies of its objects to the view of the assembled masses of the city. The magistrate's headquarters, situated so prominently on the Chowk, thus marked the ubiquitous presence of imperial authority amongst the lives of the people. In doing so, it staked a claim to legitimacy within Shahjahanabad's built environment.

⁵² Bayly, 20

⁵³ William Irvine and Jadunath Sarkar, *Later Mughals* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp.; exclusively distributed by Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1971)

Many other urban institutions staked this claim within the city: of these, the central Mosque of Congregation was the most obviously significant. Situated on an elevated area in the city, the mosque was a central place where people gathered in prayer or spent time in quiet contemplation away from the bustle of the city. The architectural style of the Mosque was identical with that of the Red Fort, and the emperor's name was invoked during prayers every day. On significant days, the emperor himself prayed at the mosque. Markets and eateries were to be found in the surrounding open spaces. The architectural unity of mosque and fort, the public rest-houses and gardens near Moonlight Avenue, and the canals which flowed out of the ever-visible Red Fort, were all acts of royal munificence which made imperial presence ubiquitous and associated it inseparably from the urban character of the city.

Urban institutions such as the magistracy, the lodges, and the gardens were all crucial to the conception of the city, but do not find mention in Dargah Quli Khan's text. In the nobleman's sense of the cityscape, many arenas of plebian intercourse were relegated to the periphery; as a member of the elite, Dargah Quli Khan was (nominally) a servant of the emperor, and his relationship with that figure was not mediated through impersonal institutions such as the magistracy. Within his sense of the cityscape, therefore, lay elite contexts of recreation and consumption: shrines, markets, and gardens. These were populated by individuals who satisfied desires, whether sacred or carnal. While prominent saints are reverently described in the text, a large part of the *Muraqqa* is devoted to descriptions in praise of dancers and singers, courtesans and catamites. The highest mark of approbation for a performer was to entertain the emperor (the supreme arbiter of elegance). Dargah Quli Khan cultivated his own sense of connoisseurship and

critically evaluated the particular abilities of individuals. Some, like the older courtesans Asa Pura and Chamani, were desirable for their “intoxicating voices.”⁵⁴ Others, like Panna Bai, were prized for their subtlety and wit.⁵⁵ These entertainers were generally encountered in the context of elite assemblages (*mahfil*). Removed from the demotic entertainments of streets and shrines, such gatherings were private and restricted to the city’s elites. But they did not represent a formal and static school of manners, for their fashions were constantly shaped by interaction with non-elite entrants into the world of ‘high’ culture. Low-class performers sometimes popularized their own idiom amongst elite gatherings, and the poets such as Mir Taqi Mir employed the ordinary language ‘spoken on the steps of the Jama Masjid’ in poetry presented before exalted audiences.⁵⁶ Rather than a rigidly hierarchical world of semi-autonomous patrimonial fiefdoms, Delhi in Dargah Quli Khan’s account appears to have been a relatively freely-circulating urban society in which high and low were often in proximity.

Writing of sexually available young men and women, Dargah Quli Khan describes the gatherings of Azam Khan to be “occasions where the beauty and attributes of these people are judged, and [they] are not considered worthy unless they pass the test here. This molten gold or silver has to go through the furnace of his [Azam Khan’s] assemblies before they become standardized.”⁵⁷ This metaphor of the imperial mint points to the fact that the bodies of lowly entertainers circulated in two economies: these people could provide their services in a highly competitive urban market in which the

⁵⁴ Dargah Quli Khan, 104, 108

⁵⁵ Dargah Quli Khan, 125

⁵⁶ For performers see Dargah Quli Khan, 100, Dargah Quli Khan, 100; on Mir, see Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Three Mughal Poets: Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 265

⁵⁷ Dargah Quli Khan, 39

consumption of leisure provided Mughal elites a means to dispense revenues back into the economy. In this sense, the constant stream of molten silver shaped the cityscape much as silvery waters of the urban canals did. But having been stamped with the seal of elite approval, the bodies of singers and dancers themselves became a form of currency within the symbolic economy of the city. By the possession and transaction of this currency, members of the Mughal elite established and affirmed their place in the urban habitus. Through their patronage of entertainers and their appreciation of music, poetry and dance, the Mughal elite came to dominate the point of intersection between the symbolic and real economies of Hindustan.

The substance of both symbolic and real economies, as we have seen, was produced in an urban space that was undergirded by a matrix of technologies (such as those of hydraulic management) and institutions (markets and *mahfil*-s). The importance of water in both cannot be understated. The flow of water helped create the farms which provided the revenue that was then spent in the city on the creation of cultural capital. This capital defined both elite and non-elite lifestyles; in creating gardens and beautifying streets, the management of water was a necessary precondition of the particular habitus of the city. If technologies such as water-management enabled this habitus, institutions shaped and regulated it. The markets, shrines, and coffee-houses, as well as marks of imperial authority in the form of public architecture all shaped the particular and contingent terms on which cultural capital was generated in the city. Such influence shaped the embodied habitus of elite noblemen who perceived, appreciated and enjoyed the practices and structures which led to the production of cultural capital. Indeed, this cultural capital may be more properly considered *symbolic* capital, because the relations

of its production signified the hegemonic dominance of the Mughal *imperium*. In 1740, a scion of an old Mughal service family from Hyderabad could easily navigate the urban field of Shahjahanabad and feel at home within it.



The repeated sacking of the city in the later half of the eighteenth century damaged, if not destroyed, the matrix of technologies and institutions that supported Delhi's urbanism. The extent of the damage is open to question. For the poet Mir Taqi 'Mir,' the most noteworthy sacking of the city took place in 1760, at the hand of the Rohillas (Afghans who had long lived in India):

The armies of the Rohilla poured in and set about looting and killing. They knocked down doors of the houses and tied up the owners, and some they burned while others they beheaded... Roofs were dug up; walls were pulled down. Breasts were torn open; hearts were charred... The wealthy were turned into beggars. Those who once set the style in clothes now went naked; and those who owned property were now homeless... The soldiers slashed and wounded, and abused and cursed... It was a reign of tyrants. They stole and plundered, and obscenely enriched themselves. They laid hands upon women. They waved their swords and snatched away wealth... on every doorstep stood a blackguard; in every lane was a reign of terror. And every marketplace was a field of combat. Bloodshed went on everywhere. People were strung up everywhere... The grounds of the old city, which used to be called a world of its own, appeared like the rubble of some wall that had been painted with figures, for wherever one looked one saw heads and limbs and torsos of those who had been slaughtered.⁵⁸

This account, like that of the poet Sauda, has often been taken the paradigmatic account of the destruction of Delhi.⁵⁹ Taken literally, it would reflect a destruction of Delhi so thorough that the events of 1857 would appear mild by comparison. But in translating

⁵⁸ 'Mir', Mir Muhammad Taqi, (ed. C. M. Naim) *Zikr-i Mir: the Autobiography of the Eighteenth Century Mughal Poet: Mir Muhammad Taqi 'Mir', (1723-1810)* (Delhi: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 84-85

⁵⁹ See (Russell and Islam, 35), and more recently, (Blake, 166-8)

this section, C.M. Naim observes that it “was composed by Mir with much passion – and also with other concerns, which are evident from his skillful rhyming prose and the use of any number of unusual idioms...”⁶⁰ Furthermore, Mir had on other occasions referred to Delhi as a ‘house of enchantments,’ wherein existed ‘luxury,’ ‘sensuous delights,’ ‘intoxicants,’ and ‘women,’ in sufficient quantity to ruin a young man who gave himself up to hedonistic pursuits.⁶¹ This Delhi, with its unlimited ability to sustain elite lifestyles of dissipation, seems closer in spirit to Dargah Quli Khan’s vision of the city; here Mir was referring to the years between 1779 and 1782 – only two decades after the seemingly apocalyptic destruction of the city! Such inconsistencies suggest that poetic accounts of Delhi’s decline over the second half of the eighteenth century must be treated primarily as poetry designed to excite pathos, and not as reportage.⁶² Especially in Mir’s case, it is clear that the ruined city provided an excellent topos in verses such as:

The city of my heart – alas! – was once a wondrous sight.
Her going razed it to the ground; none will live there again. (I.27.18)⁶³

And,

Why do you mock at me and ask yourselves
Where in the world I come from, easterners?
There was a city, famed throughout the world,
Where dwelt the chosen spirits of the age:
Delhi its name, fairest among the fair.
Fate looted it and laid it desolate,
And to that ravaged city I belong.⁶⁴

Here, Mir (addressing a *mahfil* in Lucknow) neatly invokes the symbolic capital of ‘Delhi:’ not only does he establish the cultural supremacy of the city (thus denigrating his

⁶⁰ ‘Mir’, Mir Muhammad Taqi, 85, ft. 194

⁶¹ ‘Mir’, Mir Muhammad Taqi, 118

⁶² See Sunil Sharma, “The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 24:2 (2004), esp. p.80

⁶³ Russell and Khurshidul Islam, 222

⁶⁴ Russell and Khurshidul Islam, 260

audience), he also posits himself as one of the last representatives of that shattered tradition. The topos of a desolate Delhi, and Mir's glorification of the language 'spoken on the steps of the Jama Masjid' (itself a charged signifier of Mughal *imperium*) all serve to buttress his own position as the pre-eminent poet in North India during his time on the basis of the symbolic capital produced within the confines of Shahjahanabad's walls.

Although it is difficult to gauge the extent of the city's decline through the verses of its poets, it is nevertheless clear that Delhi's economic position declined substantially in the latter half of the eighteenth century, especially after 1761. Perhaps the most important cause of this decline lay in the destruction of the Canal system around Delhi in that year. As the canals ceased to function, the irrigation systems that enabled the imperial territory of Delhi failed. This territory, which had yielded 3,075,314 rupees according to the A'in-e Akbari, fell out of irrigated cultivation.⁶⁵ Land which had produced up to three harvests a year now produced one, if at all. The king had granted land in this region to local chiefs in return for military service, but such obligations were broken. The King in Delhi thus lost his last possible source of revenue, and with it, all hopes of future autonomy. As the canals dried up, the ecology of the region changed; the water table fell rapidly, causing a drop in the height of the river. Because fresh water ceased to enter the city, the sanitation system (which had depended on flushing the city waste through underground conduits) failed, and the gardens of the city suffered.⁶⁶ Many of the residents of the city had received income from agricultural production in the hinterland, but settled cultivators were being rapidly displaced by nomadic and pastoral Gujjar and Batti tribesmen; the old nobility of the city was unable to assert its rights to

⁶⁵ C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770-1870*, 1st ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) 87; *Ain*, Vol. 2, Sec. 189

⁶⁶ Vijay Prashad, "The Technology of Sanitation in Colonial Delhi," *Modern Asian Studies* 35.1 2001, 120

hinterland properties until the onset of the Raj.⁶⁷ But the picture was not one of unmitigated decline. While poets like Mir and Sauda emigrated from the city to emerging cultural centres such as Lucknow, Jain commercial folk and Panjabi Khattris continued to migrate to it in later half of the eighteenth century.⁶⁸



During the last decade of the eighteenth century, several British travelers had the opportunity to visit the city. Their descriptions of the city, Bayly suggests, cannot be accepted at face value because they were prone to romanticising the past and marveling at the decay of great empires.⁶⁹ While British gentlemen of the era were indeed trained to appreciate antiquity through a classicist aesthetic, such elegiac lauding of the past was not just the idle fancy of highly-educated men; rather, much writing on Delhi was infused with a rhetoric of decline that had a pointed purpose in the present. British perceptions of the cityscape, like those of the Mughals who had preceded them, were not ideologically neutral, as the following comparison between two British descriptions of the cityscape will demonstrate.

In 1793, a British lieutenant by the name of William Franklin had occasion to visit Delhi while ‘surveying’ the Doab region between the Ganga and Jamuna rivers on behalf of the Presidency of Bombay. His article on the city, published in Sir William Jones’ *Asiatick Researches*, was one of the first European accounts of the city in more than a century. Franklin had much to say about the city, but all his comments indicated that he was visiting the ruins of a once-glorious but now sorrily debased imperial centre. Examining the houses of the elite, Franklin wrote, “Within the city of new Delhi [i.e

⁶⁷ Bayly, in Frykenberg, 230

⁶⁸ Bayly, in Frykenberg, 235

⁶⁹ Bayly, in Frykenberg, 224,

Shahjahanabad as opposed to older settlements in the region] are the remains of many splendid palaces, belonging to the great Omrahs of the empire. All of these palaces are surrounded with high walls, and take up a considerable space of ground... Each palace has a Mahal, or seraglio, adjoining; All of them had gardens with capacious stone reservoirs and fountains in the center... Each palace was likewise provided with a handsome set of baths, and a Teh Khana [Basement] underground.”⁷⁰ The uneasy shift from past tense to present is indicative of Franklin’s own ambivalence about what he saw: if there were only ‘remains’ of ‘splendid palaces,’ why did they continue to have gardens, baths, and underground chambers? Was Franklin wandering the desolate ruins of abandoned palaces, or being shown the accommodations of (nameless) hosts? Shahjahanabad, Franklin thought, had been rebuilt and now contained many good houses. The streets, however, were narrow: there were once two “very noble” streets that had now fallen into disrepair. “Shah Jahan,” declared Franklin, “caused an aqueduct to be made of red stone, which conveyed the water along the whole length of the street... some remains of the aqueduct are still to be seen, but it is choked up in the most part with rubbish.”⁷¹ Similarly, the markets of the city were “miserably reduced:” even the Chandni Chowk market had only “very trifling” commerce.⁷²

In Franklin’s eyes, the Red Fort was also in pitiable condition. The rooms around courtyard of the Divan-e am, Franklin imagined, “in the times of the splendour of empire, were adorned with a profusion of the richest tapestry, velvets and silks... these

⁷⁰ William Franklin, “An Account of the Present State of Delhi” Asiatic Researches, or, Transactions of the Society, Instituted in Bengal, for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature, of Asia ... (London: Printed for J. Sewell, 1799) 421-22

⁷¹ Franklin, 425-26

⁷² Franklin, 426

decorations have been long since laid aside, and nothing but the bare walls remained.”⁷³ No persons, save one, are mentioned or described in this account of the city, so a modern reader might be pardoned for thinking that Shahjahanabad, like Persepolis, offered only mute testimony to former dominion. The only figure to appear in this account was the emperor Shah Alam II. Franklin imagined he “could observe in his [Shah Alam’s] aspect a thoughtfulness, as if sufficiently well acquainted with his present degraded situation, and the recollection of his former state.”⁷⁴ Franklin ended his article by describing the view towards Delhi from the Shalimar Gardens to the north:

The prospect to the southward of Shalimar towards Delhi, as far as the eye can reach, is covered with the remains of extensive gardens, pavilions, mosques, and burying-places, all desolate and in ruins. The environs of this once magnificent and celebrated city now appear nothing more than a shapeless heap of ruins, and the country around it is equally forlorn.⁷⁵

Franklin’s sense of the cityscape is striking: Delhi, for him, was no more than a heap of rubble, atop which rested a throne for the blind and helpless descendant of Timur. Almost all traces of the past had disappeared from this palimpsest, and it was ready to bear the inscription of a new elite, one that could bring peace and order. By rejecting the city’s claim to vitality and cultural importance, Franklin refused to ascribe value to its symbolic currency. His view of the cityscape, with its focus on the ruins and curiosities of a decidedly dead empire, reflected the incipient habitus of an encroaching colonial urbanity.

While Franklin saw a Delhi that had been completely destroyed, another British visitor to the city saw it in quite a different light only one year later, in 1794. Like Franklin, Thomas Twining found the suburbs of the city in ruins. Behind the city’s walls,

⁷³ Franklin, 429

⁷⁴ Franklin, 428

⁷⁵ Franklin, 432

however, life seemed to proceed apace. Twining found the streets “well-peopled, though not crowded,” with “perfectly well behaved and civil” people; these men had a “lofty military air,” and many of them bore swords and shields – a testament, perhaps, to the unsettled times.⁷⁶ Twining noticed new construction in the city, much of which consisted of “small houses of mean appearance” and obscured the previous layout of the city streets. But the residences of elites were still in good repair. The Maratha governor of the city lived in a large mansion with a flower-filled garden that contained an open pavilion (barah-dari) and a pond.⁷⁷ Of his hospitality, Twining wrote,

The servants of the palace, in consequence of orders they had received, now brought me, on large waiters of silver, the Paandan, Utrdan, and Golabdan, and chougurrahs, or trays, of Colfy. Being a lover of fruit, this part of the ceremony was by no means displeasing to me. I tasted such of the productions of the Shah’s garden as I had not seen before, or not seen in such excellence. Utr of roses and other perfumes were now poured on the palms of my hands, which I rubbed together, and wiped upon my dress and handkerchief. Rose water was next sprinkled upon me from an elegant silver vessel having a long neck, perforated with holes at the end. The officer charged with this part of the honours stood at a little distance, and seemed not inattentive to the grace of his action, as he flourished the vessel about, and showered its fragrant stream on me.⁷⁸

Twining’s description reveals that the Maratha governor of the city, though a ‘non-Hindustani,’ nevertheless embodied the habitus of Shahjahanabad. In his practice of courtesy and amenability, as in his use and display of cultural capital, the Maratha was indistinguishable (except for his regional accent) from others within Delhi’s cultural milieu. Even after six decades of endemic warfare, the Mughal court retained its

⁷⁶ Thomas Twining, *Travels in India a Hundred Years Ago, With a Visit to the United States* (London: J.R. Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1893) 224, 242

⁷⁷ Twining, 225-26

⁷⁸ Twining, 227

symbolic importance by continuing to define the social norms of cultivated behavior and politeness (*adab*).

In his memoirs, Twining devotes considerable space and attention on his visit to the emperor at the Red Fort. Although he noticed that some parts of the fort were in disrepair, Twining was nevertheless awed by the palace and especially by the Hall of Special Audience (*Divan-e Khas*):

This splendid room was composed entirely of white marble, as is the adjoining terrace and its two pavilions... The highly-sculptured roof, which rested lightly on these elegant columns, was also of white marble, embossed with gulcurrys of the same exquisite workmanship, intermixed with decorations in gold. A velvet cushion was on the chabooturah, and under a handsome canopy, supported by massive pillars of silver, was the throne of the Padshah, covered with crimson velvet.⁷⁹

Franklin, who had also visited the emperor, does not appear to have noticed these marks of Mughal finery. His sense of the cityscape was too ideologically charged to permit him to notice that the Mughal world, though impoverished in terms of economic capital, still was the guardian of an immense reserve of symbolic capital. Thus, the very site in which this capital was produced became 'ruined' and in need of 'restoration.' Twining, however, did not think of the pomp and ceremony of the court to be the effeminate indulgences of a helpless and indolent emperor. In spite of his expectations, he found "nothing repulsive" in the visage of the blinded emperor, who addressed him with proper regal dignity. The young British visitor humbly accepted a gorgeous set of ceremonial robes (*khillat*.) Then, at the emperor's behest, Twining was led around the palace. At night, twenty men (each

⁷⁹ Twining, 233

carrying two dishes on a bamboo pole) brought him dinner, along with “a numerous set of handsome and richly dressed nautch girls” and a “respectable” set of musicians.⁸⁰

Having enjoyed the king’s hospitality, Twining began the return to Calcutta. Before his departure, he made several purchases in the markets of Shahjahanabad. His chief acquisition was an enormous Kabuli sheep, and the hookah-bottoms for which the city was renowned. But he also bought:

[A]n axe with a gun in the iron-handle and a large two-edged dagger with a Hindoo figure upon it... To these objects I added a handsome coat of mail... an accurate map of Dehli, neatly delineated with red and black lines on a fine paper of yellow hue... some bows of buffalo horn, some quivers and arrows, (the latter tastefully ornamented with gilt) and an entire copy of the Koran, neatly written, in miniature, upon a long roll of fine paper about three inches in width.⁸¹

This is a revealing list, because it sheds some light on the sorts of things one could purchase in the city of Delhi during one of its supposedly darkest periods. The market for high-quality arms that Dargah Quli Khan had admired seems to have been maintained: except for the dagger and the coat of mail, all the other items were the ornamental luxury goods, perfect bric-a-brac for the well-to-do early modern tourist. The ‘accurate map’ and the handwritten miniature Koran are tantalizing pointers to the literary aspects of urban culture which have not yet been fully reconstructed. But it is clear that even in the last decade of the eighteenth century, Delhi’s markets were capable of exchanging cultural capital for its economic equivalents.

What explains the considerable difference in Franklin’s and Twining’s perceptions of the city? Franklin, it appears, did not sense the cityscape at all: his account is bereft of the descriptions of the character of the city’s inhabitants and their practices.

⁸⁰ Twining, 239-40

⁸¹ Twining, 256

For Franklin, as we have noted, the city was an urban space that had declined and ceased to retain the characteristics that might once have made it worthy of comparison with other cities in other places. The merciless impulse to catalogue ruin after ruin, without the attendant impulse to note the presence of living societies within those ruins, may stem from Franklin's self-conception as a surveyor: a person exercising the governmental impulses of a British regime that was already looking towards North India with interest. But this was not the only or indeed the 'natural' way in which servants of the East India Company might view the city of Delhi. Twining, too, commented from time to time on the extraordinary ruination of certain parts of the city – most notably the suburban districts. But within the walls of the city, he found much to appreciate amongst the obvious decay of some aspects of urban order. For Franklin, the only individual worth nothing in the city was the emperor, and he cut quite a pathetic figure. Twining, on the other hand, reports conversation with a variety of personages (both high and low) in the city, whom he appears to have found courteous and civil. By appreciating the practices of hospitality and condescension that he encountered, Twining accepted the symbolic economy of the city that Franklin had refused to acknowledge. The dissonance between these two visitors' perceptions of the city appears to foreshadow the fierce debate between the Orientalists and the Anglicists over the forms of colonial authority best suited for India. The discourse underlying Franklin's writings was certainly shared by those who felt that the time was ripe to establish actively interventionist British rule over North India under the guise of 'reform' and 'rejuvenation.'

The Mughal *ancien régime* thus appears to have maintained some, not inconsiderable, level of cultural vitality even up to the eve of the British takeover, and it

certainly maintained symbolic authority amongst the rulers of successor states. Muzaffar Alam has explained this by arguing that when local rulers “sought institutional validation of their spoils, they needed a centre to legitimize their acquisitions.”⁸² Through the figure of the emperor who provided this validation, the regime dominated the apparatus of symbolic legitimation. This was a fact of which both Europeans and North Indians were keenly aware. Writing in 1779 of the previous Mughal emperors’ punitive powers, Col. Antoine Louis Henry Polier noted:

Tho: from the debility and want of power of the Court of Delhy, such reversions do not take place now a days, nevertheless, while the name of King is preserved in the illustrious family of Timur, the different princes of India will always be proud to acknowledge his right, by applying to him, and by requesting the patterns of investiture for their different territories, and also for having particular honours conferred on themselves, none being hereditary in India.⁸³

By his monopoly over the distribution of the “patterns of investiture” the Mughal emperor continued to be the dominant symbolic authority in North India even though his military authority had waned. As the first part of this section has shown, the continued production of symbolic capital depended on the previous application of economic capital on a large scale to the task of creating a technological and institutional framework that ordered the urban landscape. This matrix of technologies and institutions, in turn, produced the powerful symbolic currency which bore the name of the so-called descendants of Timur and continued in circulation long after the demise of Mughal authority.



⁸² Alam, 17

⁸³ Polier in Pratul Chandra Gupta, Shah Alam II and his Court, a Narrative of the Transactions at the Court of Delhy from the Year 1771 to the Present Time (Calcutta: S.C. Sarkar and sons, 1947) 41

The British assumed formal control of Delhi in 1803, and immediately began to modify the built environment of the city. They built a series of highly defensible settlements on the ridge that ran to the north and the east of the walled city, and amongst the overgrown suburban gardens of the erstwhile Mughal elite. Within the city, the British strategically appropriated choice land to the north and the south of the fort. In the north, British residences clustered around the Kashmiri Gate, whilst in the south they were established near the Delhi Gate of the city. Some buildings, such as the residency, were built in the Palladian style that was popular in Europe and America in the later half of the eighteenth century. The new construction entailed the destruction of the sprawling mansions that had previously belonged to members of the royal family. For instance, Prince Dara Shikoh (1615-59) had established a palatial mansion in this region when the city of Shahjahanabad was established: because of its gigantic scale, the complex had all the functional features of a neighbourhood, including barracks for soldiers and stables.⁸⁴ The British administration carved up this complex into a set of residences and created a magazine, quarters for engineers or carpenters, a court, a hospital, a Christian graveyard, a post-office, a treasury, stables, barracks for soldiers and the city guard, and perhaps a printing press (Chappa Khana). In doing so, the British altered the cityscape in a manner that was new to the city. For one, the residences of the new elite were built in a distinctly European style, with completely new internal arrangements: The only concession that the resident Charles Metcalfe made to the architecture of the East was in continuing to use the basements which were presumably excavated by Dara Shikoh: in other respects, his house was very different from those of the natives of the city, eschewing as it did the use of an internal courtyard. While some of the Mughal gardens (*bagh*) appear to have been

⁸⁴ Hosagrahar, 29

maintained, others were landscaped in a formal European style. The impact of these structures on the inhabitants of the city would have been curtailed by their remoteness from city life and their inaccessibility to the city's elites and the gardeners, stable-hands, servants or laborers who worked in the British zones.

Before the War of 1857, the most graphic changes in the terrain took place around the city. The new British administration realized that Delhi had formerly lain in a 'Sea of Plenty' that was the result of Mughal hydraulic engineering. Under the direction of Lord Hastings, the Delhi branches of the old Mughal canals were opened, so that on May 30 1820, water ran through the Paradise Canal into Delhi after eighty years. The social memory of water flowing through the city appears to have survived the tumults of the previous century, for the people of Delhi held a "general festival" and welcomed the water with garlands of flowers.⁸⁵ A British officer noted that the "canal has arrived, and the people [are] delighted. The town is wonderfully improved, and the people look happy, clean and contented. New houses are building on every spot."⁸⁶ Other accounts confirm that the water revitalized intramural wells in the city and vastly improved the quality of life of residents within the city.⁸⁷ Sonipat, some 50 kilometers north of the city, had become a "perfect garden" because of the renewal of irrigation.⁸⁸

It was not an interest in the urban environment but an explicitly economic and utilitarian logic that drove these hydraulic projects. Contemporary British observers such as Henry Spry were more interested in the fact that the supply of water to the city

⁸⁵ Spear, 105

⁸⁶ William Dalrymple, "The British in Delhi," Draft Manuscript, Forthcoming, 16

⁸⁷ Henry H. Spry, Modern India (London: Whittaker, 1837) 280

⁸⁸ Spear, 105

permitted the operation of flour-mills which yielded as much as 3,000 pounds annually.⁸⁹

Overjoyed at the profitability of these canals, Lord Hastings further ordered the development of more watercourses in the Doab, which were opened in 1830. The desire for profit was couched, as ever, in the rhetoric of utility and responsibility: Writing in 1837, Spry approvingly cited the announcement “to the people” that:

[T]he object of government in obtaining a rent through the canals was not so much to form a productive source of revenue from the actual price paid for the water, as to give them an efficient control over its expenditure, by making it of value sufficient to prevent its being wasted wantonly, and that they looked alone to the general improvement of the country as the source from which they should derive the return adequate to the outlay.⁹⁰

The new canals led to the “inactive pastoral people” – the criminalized Gujjars, for instance – being led to “useful and profitable employment:” in turn, the inexorable revenue machine worked ever more efficiently: the rents of canal villages were raised, while “others that were reckoned highly assessed have been enabled to pay their revenue.”⁹¹ Once revenue was being extracted at the highest possible level, it became possible to fantasize about extensive sugarcane, tobacco and cotton plantations in the regions surrounding Delhi. Doubtless with the inevitable onward march of reason in mind, Spry confidently predicted a day would soon come when “scientific agriculturalists and others shall have put us in possession of their hygrometrical observations” and it would be known before a crop was planted “whether it will be successful or not, and with safety transport into regions far apart the productions of different countries.”⁹² As “the art of agriculture in India is still its infancy,” better varieties of crops and more efficient mills

⁸⁹ Spry, 281

⁹⁰ Spry, 285-6

⁹¹ Spry, 286

⁹² Spry, 292

“than the miserable pestle and mortar thing now in use” would ensure that the “benefits would soon be fully apparent, and the time and expense repaid by an abundant return.”⁹³ In this optimistic scenario, the flows of British capital and Jamuna water would intermingle and increase each other. With careful monitoring and rational planning, the increase of this factor of production would forever change the ‘primitive’ relations of production in the countryside, and bind the old Mughal heartland with the imperial economy.

The residents of Delhi could hardly have known that the logic and vision which brought the water back to Delhi lay at the cusp of modernity. They would also have been unable to predict the environmental disasters that would soon befall the Delhi district because of the poor alignment of the canals, and the subsequent immiseration of rural areas around the city. For them, the moment must have appeared pregnant with possibilities: the clear liquid which returned to Delhi was still the ‘Water of Life’ (*ab-e hayat*) and not H₂O, the sanitary product required to make the city clean or the factor of production that would create an industrious and settled yeomanry. It is hardly surprising, then, that the opening of the canal coincided with the dawn of the ‘Delhi Renaissance.’ Water had made the city come to life again, and its management represented an administration that in 1820 had not wholly donned the garbs of modern rationality and pragmatism. The institutions which came to define the city in this period reflected, at least initially, the weak ideological basis of the British administration.

The uncertainties of British rule were reflected in the thorny question of how the powers of the British resident were to be reconciled with the nominal sovereignty of the Mughal emperor, who was now described as the king of Delhi. The Company gained

⁹³ Spry, 292-4

rights to revenue from the so-called assigned territories outside the city, from which it would provide the royal treasury with at least eleven and a half lakh rupees a year. The king was to maintain all authority within the Exalted Fort, but the British resident in Delhi ran the show in the city outside.⁹⁴ The sum was designed to ensure that the Mughal emperor and his many dependents could live with dignity. But the Mughals, Percival Spear notes, “never ceased to dip the hand of hope into the treasury of demand.”⁹⁵ Even so, the initial policy was generally conciliatory. In 1811, Court of Directors of the East India Company decided:

The course which appears to us the most proper to be pursued, and which has in fact been hitherto pursued with respect to his Majesty the King of Delhi, is to leave his authority in the state in which we found it, and to afford the Royal Family the means of subsistence, not merely in a state of comfort, but of decent splendour not unsuitable to the descendants of a fallen but illustrious House, to whose power we have in a great measure succeeded.⁹⁶

Indeed, the first British residents remained suitably considerate of the king's perquisites. But by the 1830s the institutions of the East India Company in North India had begun to harden. As their institutions of rule became more secure, the British found themselves in an increasingly contradictory position vis-à-vis the King of Delhi. On the one hand, the company exacted revenues, maintained law and order, and freely governed the city of Delhi. On the other hand, the King of Delhi remained the sole symbolic authority in the city: his establishment alone legitimized and validated symbolic capital. The King resided in, and was metonymically intertwined with, the city: by the nineteenth century, this

⁹⁴ Quoted in Spear, 38

⁹⁵ Spear, 39

⁹⁶ Spear, 44

symbolic complex of 'King' and 'City' produced hegemony without dominance.⁹⁷ The city and its built environment were richly symbolic of an authority that was not wholly subordinate to those who regarded themselves the real masters of the land. It is therefore significant that the site of the sharpest conflicts between the British administration and the inhabitants of the fort were over the symbols of obedience and subservience.

In this context, Spear has demonstrated how matters of court etiquette and ritual came to cause tremendous friction between the Resident and the King. While early British visitors such as Thomas Twining reverently performed the requisite obeisances, in the colonial era British administrators refused to perform the symbolic acts of supplication required of all visitors to the Red Fort. Lord Hastings could not meet the king in Delhi as he traveled to command the Gurkha War (1814-15) because he refused to present the offerings (*nazr*) by which social hierarchy was re-affirmed in the Mughal world. It was not that the practice of presenting *nazrs* was in itself offensive: Rather, Hastings could not countenance any acknowledgement of the King as his superior. By 1826, the Mughals and the British had learned to make some concessions: the superior rank of the king was acknowledged over visiting British Governors-General without, however, any reciprocal acceptance of British obligation. Lord Amherst visited the King but sat in his presence while all others stood. This was ameliorated to some extent by the fact that he sat at *right angles* so as not to indicate a direct challenge to the King; on the other hand, the King had to pay a reciprocal visit to Amherst at the Residency, which must have been yet another galling breach of etiquette for a nominal sovereign not yet

⁹⁷ Cf. Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) 245 which explicates Guha's notion that 'feudal' and colonial states in India were dominant through coercion and persuasion but were never hegemonic because of their inability to gain the full consent of the ruled.

completely inured to mistreatment.⁹⁸ Despite these humiliations, the King's *mythos* appeared to be ineradicable: even as late as 1830, the Nizam of Hyderabad – whose ancestor had founded a 'successor state' in the Deccan more than a century ago – sent the customary *nazrs* to the King via his resident, and asked to be granted the title of Nizam held by his late father. The British recognized this for what it was: a deeply symbolic assertion of customary loyalties that rejected the absolute superiority of the Company. The residents involved were admonished by the administration in Calcutta for their oversight in permitting such proto-rebellious behavior.⁹⁹ By 1856, the administration had convinced itself that a titular king in Delhi was "anomalous" and that "there is every appearance that the presence of the Royal House in Delhi has become a matter of indifference, even to the Mahomedans."¹⁰⁰ That this was not the case at all was demonstrated conclusively within months of this pronouncement, when large sections of the Company's army revolted and hastened to Delhi, where they declared their allegiance to the emperor Bahadur Shah.

As the British attempted to redefine the King of Delhi, the British administration also generated a new cityscape for Delhi. In the initial stages of their rule, the British attempted to conform to the cultural practices of the city. The first resident was Defender of the Realm (*Nasir-ud Daulah*) Sir David Ochterlony, who came from a loyalist highlander family that immigrated to Canada in 1777. By the time he became the Resident of Delhi, Ochterlony had adopted Mughal fashions so utterly so as to be barely distinguishable from the noblemen of the city. A famous portrait (Figure 1) is testament to Ochterlony's status as a 'cultural insider.' While the European paintings and windows

⁹⁸ Spear, 46

⁹⁹ Spear, 49

¹⁰⁰ Spear, 59

depicted in the image seem slightly out of place, Ochterlony exemplifies the embodiment of the Mughal habitus of urbanity. He is shown completely at ease wearing Mughal dress, smoking a hookah, seated in Indian style on pillows, and enjoying dance and music. Surrounded by the accoutrements of luxury and a train of respectful courtiers who wield subcontinental symbols of authority (a fly-whisk and a mace), Ochterlony clearly had no qualms in freely participating in the Mughal symbolic economy and no desire to overthrow it.



Figure 1: David Ochterlony (1820) BL: Add.Or.2, 2

British residents in the early part of the century brought their own ways of seeing the city, but these tended to change after some time in Delhi. Ochterlony's bookish assistant William Fraser arrived from the recently-established Fort William College having won a gold medal in Persian. When he first arrived in the city, he was prone to the

sort of rhapsodizing – in classical vein – that was also the case with William Franklin.

Writing of the region to his father, he described what he saw:

The immense extent of ruins which appear all around offer a melancholy picture of the former opulence and population of the city... Archways, porticoes and gateways are all reduced to heap of desolation... I wish to ascertain historically the account of every remarkable place or monument of antiquity, or building erected in commemoration of singular acts of whatever nature. The traditional accounts I receive from natives are generally absurd or contradictory. I must first know how they obtained credence, and then search for the origins of the story.¹⁰¹

But in a few years, Fraser had become assimilated in elite Delhi society: consorting with scholars of Persian and Urdu, collecting manuscripts, attending *mushairas*, and fathering children from six or seven wives appear to have been his main forms of recreation. By 1821, Fraser had drifted far beyond the pale and come to be regarded as a “*sakt banchod*” (tough sister-fucker) and a generally “obstinate fellow.”¹⁰² In 1829, Victor Jacquemont found him to be a “misanthrope” with a “monomania for fighting;” but he noted also that Fraser was fluent in Hindustani and Persian and that he had a “real and profound understanding” of the “inner life” of the people he governed.¹⁰³ Moody, wild, and increasingly depressive, Fraser had come to fear leaving India by the end of his life: he was utterly immersed in the habitus of the late Mughal setting and was keenly aware that he could never learn the codes of the world to which he would have to return.

These early instances of cultural adaptability rapidly became eclipsed as the East India Company grew in strength. As Britain gained economic and military strength, the disorganized rapacity of the Nabobs such as Clive was replaced by the mechanistic

¹⁰¹ Fraser Papers, Vol 33, Alec Fraser to his mother, p279 Delhi 3rd August 1811 in William Dalrymple, Forthcoming

¹⁰² Gardner Papers, National Army Museum, 6305-56, Letter 90 Babel. 16th August 1821 in Dalrymple, Forthcoming

¹⁰³ Jacquemont, *Letters From India* (1829-32), p. 354 in Dalrymple, Forthcoming

ruthlessness of a bureaucracy that lured the best and the brightest of Britain with promises of imperial glory and tidy fortunes still to be made. With no thought of India as anything but a temporary posting, the new breed of administrators, such as Thomas Metcalfe and Francis Hawkins, could not imagine investing their personal capital in a culture they would inevitably leave. It was not only the rise of utilitarianism and racial contempt that made these men come into conflict with the society they ruled: at the heart of the matter lay the evolving conception of the proper forms that colonial power should take. In this light, the Orientalist ideas of governing India through the integuments of customary authority were replaced – at least until the war of 1857 – by Anglicist notions of the complete superiority of English culture, and the need to apply it directly to Indian contexts. These notions were apparent in the Residents' style of governance and their conceptions of the city.

The administration of the city and surrounding territories began to take firm shape under the first residency (1811-19) of the 'Administrator of the State' (Muntazim-ud Daulah) Sir Charles Metcalfe. Metcalfe's 'Delhi System,' began the break with the 'orientalized' administrative and cultural practices of earlier British rulers. Indeed, the Delhi System marks the emergence of classical modern governmentality in the city. According to Metcalfe, the city was primarily troubled by youthful gangs of pickpockets. An integral part of the ever-deceptive environment of public spaces, these young miscreants were subject to the natural justice of the city: as relatively unimportant offenders, they were usually soundly flogged if apprehended. Metcalfe, however, established a "Home of Industry" where these children were incarcerated and taught to produce blankets and carpets. There was, of course, some recidivism; but many were

‘reformed’ and were released.¹⁰⁴ Capital and corporal punishment, slavery and *sati* were all abolished: there were to be no spectacles of the sovereign’s authority in the Magistrate’s Office as before.¹⁰⁵ Retribution became more ‘humane’ and more discreet: the harshest sentence for a crime was ‘solitary close confinement in chains for life’ – a punishment so terrifying that it led prisoners to petition to be hanged instead.¹⁰⁶

Constant surveillance was of primary importance in the new governmental regime, and its micropower began to penetrate every lane and alley of Delhi. The city police built a network of informants among the sweepers who removed the nightsoil from every house in the city. Every morning, male and female cohorts of sweepers assembled at the police station (the old Mughal Magistrate’s Office) to report on the goings-on in the houses they serviced.¹⁰⁷ Through the collection of statistics, the colonial regime generated a sense of control and order over the unfamiliar environment of the Mughal city: thus, by 1844, the Governor-General’s agent to the Imperial court Thomas Metcalfe (younger brother to Charles Metcalfe) knew that there were 52 Police Officers, 148 Foot Soldiers, 230 Guards, 400 nightwatchmen, who kept order on 377 streets (of which 11 were ‘of good width’); the people who lived in 23,462 houses (of which 17,564 were ‘substantial’) made purchases in 7,662 shops, prayed in 246 mosques or 147 temples, drank water from 667 wells (but only 52 had ‘good water’), strolled in ten gardens and upon death were buried or cremated in 31 burial grounds.¹⁰⁸ In Metcalfe’s cityscape, the colonial city was reconfigured to become an urban space inhabited by a population. The

¹⁰⁴ Edward John Thompson, *The Life of Charles, Lord Metcalfe* (London: Faber and Faber limited, 1937) 122

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, 127

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, 125

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, 123

¹⁰⁸ *Reminiscences of Imperial Delhie*, in Emily Bayley, Mary Margaret Kaye, and Thomas Metcalfe, *The Golden Calm: an English Lady's Life in Moghul Delhi* (Exeter, Eng.: Webb & Bower, 1980) 34

acquisition of governmental knowledge about the city was therefore necessitated by the imperative to tend to the population. But the exercise of new forms of power in the absence of the consent of the ruled made the city more unruly during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹

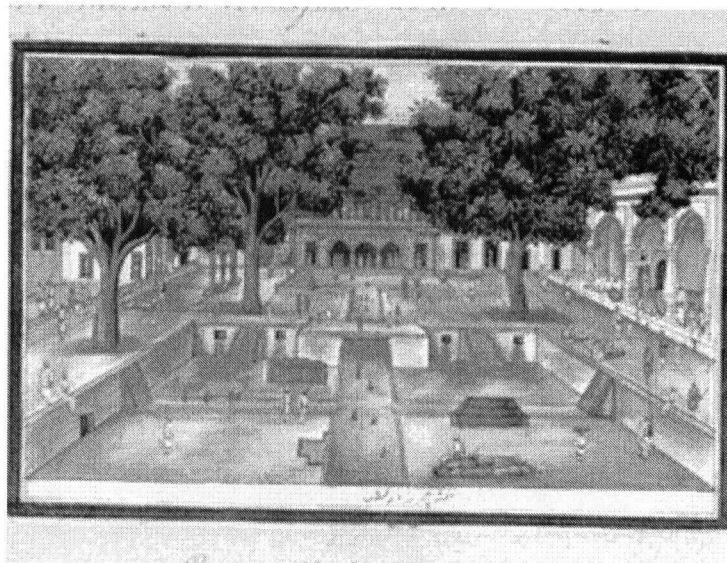
While the British administrators of Delhi made strenuous attempts to 'know' the urban environment, they had no desire to learn about its internal structure and order, and no interest in the forms of urbanity that had characterized it. The advent of British rule in Delhi was marked by the operation of a mausoleal modality, which may be considered a sub-variant of the museological modality of colonial knowledge.¹¹⁰ The workings of this modality are well-illustrated in Thomas Metcalfe's album entitled 'Reminiscences of Imperial Dehlie (1844):' the name betrays the prejudices of the author. Once a great imperial city, Delhi now had become a static, lifeless collection of ruins to be classified, categorized and historicized. And indeed, the album is filled with portraits of the city, along with long historical descriptions. Most of these images seem to organize themselves into two categories: they either depict physical structures or represent people marked by their profession. What is noteworthy that the two categories do not intersect. The images of structures, such as the Golden and Pearl mosques are drawn with an attention to detail, but are almost inevitably depicted as empty. Since the studio of Mazhar 'Ali Khan (to whom these images are credited) could easily draw detailed studies of humans within their environment, the lifelessness of these images is the function of

¹⁰⁹ Michael Mann, "Turbulent Delhi: Religious Strife, Social Tension and Political Conflicts, 1803–1857," *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 28 No. 1, April, 2005

¹¹⁰ Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: the British in India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996) pp. 5-8

colonialism's mausoleal modality and not the technical capabilities of the 'Company school.'¹¹¹

When humans are shown in these images, they have been added as an afterthought: in most images, vague and formless human figures have been drawn wholly out of proportion, perhaps by someone other than the artist. Invariably, these human figures stand frozen aimlessly in the midst of empty spaces designed for far larger populations. If, however, humans are depicted in detail, they are presented without context. Their identities are defined not by their activities in the urban environment, but by their professions: so mimics and dancing girls appear to perform for invisible audiences and litter-bearers carry palanquins across a blank cityscape. Only in two images are people shown in some sort of social context: one is a lavish and detailed portrayal of an imperial procession, and demonstrates the extent to which the pomp and splendour of the King was still intact. The other is a drawing of the waterfall complex near the Illuminated Reservoir (*Hauz-e Shamsi*). (Figure 2)



¹¹¹ For instance, see "The shrine of Shah Sharaf Bu 'Ali Qalandari at Panipat" attrib. Mazhar Ali Khan, British Library Add.Or.4669, 4669

Figure 2: *Hauz-e Shamsi* in *Reminiscences of Imperial Delhie* BL: Add.Or.5475, ff. 77v-78

This picture of the Illuminated Reservoir complex in the 1840s would have been recognizable to Dargah Quli Khan, who had described it a century before. Delhi-wallahs still thronged to enjoy the environs of the tank, which provided a more interactive experience than the glistening waters of the formal European-style parks of Delhi that were designed to be admired from afar. The inhabitants of the city waded in the cool water of the channels and relaxed under the shade of the trees; they conversed in the pavilions and purchased fruit from vendors. The sociality of the scene was still defined by the norms of Mughal urbanity. It was also a scene in which no British people were to be found. The attention to the interaction of people and their environment makes this image an exception within Metcalfe's album. Even so, the picture fit Metcalfe's book only as indicating a feature of the physical domain that lay under the Government's authority.

The mausoleal modality therefore generated particular forms of knowledge which identified the urban forms as dead and of only 'historic' interest. This informed the colonial vision of a cityscape in which the city itself was exogenous to the life of people. The modernity of the colonial administration is apparent in this attempt to convert the *bios politikos* of urban inhabitants to a depoliticized *zoē* fit for the care of the state.¹¹² The product of the reshaping of the categories of 'City' and the 'People' generated a new system of the performance and appreciation of urban practice: in effect, a new habitus. Of course, this emerging habitus privileged the British and their practices. The development of this sense of the city – and the place of the colonizers within it – accelerated in the

¹¹² This theoretical point has been made by Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998)

period after the war of 1857, and culminated in the effort to create yet another new Imperial Delhi.

British perceptions of the cityscape had also changed how the residents of the city perceived their own surroundings. This change in perceptions of the city is embodied in the figure of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898). Sir Sayyid was born in an elite Delhi family that had been connected with the royal court since the reign of Shah Jahan: as a child, he was trained in the noble pastime of archery and visited the Red Fort regularly.¹¹³ As a hereditary servant of the Mughal family, Sir Sayyid attended imperial investiture ceremonies and waited on the emperor; he also visited the elite gatherings of noblemen in his childhood and participated in the festivals of the city.¹¹⁴ The perspectives of this world inform Sir Sayyid's *Traces of the Notables (Asar-us Sanadid)*, the first edition of which was published in 1846. Recent scholarship has identified the origins of this history in Mirza Sangin Beg's *An Excursion through the Dwellings (Sair-ul Manazil, 1827)*.¹¹⁵ In turn, Mirza Sangin Beg had been asked to write the text by Sir Charles Metcalfe, and his influence is plainly visible within it.¹¹⁶

The first edition of *Traces of the Notables* described the built environment of the fort, the city, and its suburbs, and each entry was accompanied by sketches. These illustrations were in the Company style and predictably excluded all human figures in their pursuit of the picturesque. Each region was described in one chapter. Besides the physical environment, the work also described the climate and the language of the city, as

¹¹³ Altaf Hussain Hali, *Hayat-i-Javed: A Biographical Account of Sir Sayyid* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1979) 21-22

¹¹⁴ Altaf Hussain Hali, 22-25

¹¹⁵ Nazir Ahmad, "Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's Work on Archaeology Entitled *Athar-us-Sanadid: A Study*" in Asloob Ahmad Ansari, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: a Centenary Tribute*, 1st ed. (Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2001) 128

¹¹⁶ I am grateful to Dr. John Roosa for pointing this out to me.

well as 129 resident religious figures and pious mendicants, readers and memorizers of the Quran, poets, calligraphers, and musicians.¹¹⁷ The second edition of this work that followed in 1854 was markedly different from the first: we might say that it had been suitably modernized. The impetus for a second edition, according to Sir Sayyid, came from a Mr. Roberts and a Colonel Saxon. This version described more structures in greater detail. However, the fourth chapter was completely deleted, and all illustrations were removed. Whereas the first edition had described structures based on their location, the second organized them on the basis of chronology. Furthermore, Sir Sayyid attached great importance to a final novelty in the second edition: it presented every inscription on the buildings of the city “in their very original form.”¹¹⁸ Instead of a living entity, the city became a text to be logically deciphered, rationalized, codified, and fixed in place. Once the city had been reduced to ‘historic’ interest, it would become irrelevant to the present and the future. The mechanical workings of the mausoleal modality thus destroyed the aura of the very structures that Dargah Quli Khan had praised a century before Sir Sayyid. By means of this quintessentially modern vision of the city, Sir Sayyid had come to reproduce the foundations of a new cityscape in the second edition of his *Traces of the Notables*.

This new cityscape generated a radically different embodied habitus of urbanity. For one, residents of the city had to learn to think of the city as fundamentally dead and reject the urban practices and symbolic capital associated with the old. As residents of a dead city, city-dwellers had to look *outside* the ‘old’ city and imitate the urban styles of their new masters, who would then gain the right to legitimate their own cultural capital.

¹¹⁷ N. Ahmad in Ansari, 130

¹¹⁸ Introduction pg. xvii, second edition reproduced in Sayyid Ahmad Khan, (ed. R. Nath), Monuments of Delhi: A Historical Study (New Delhi: Ambika, 1979) 107

It was only when the metonymies which tied the Mughals to the city of Delhi were completely unraveled that the British could overcome the fundamental contradictions of their situation in North India. But it comes as no surprise that this new sense of the city, so enthusiastically purveyed by Sir Sayyid, failed to take hold in the minds of the residents of Delhi.

The aftermath of the war of 1857 presented the British with the opportunity to realize the ideological vision of the city as a vast mausoleum. The recapture of the city was marked by vicious hand-to-hand fighting and no quarter was spared. Harriet Tytler, who entered the city soon after its capture, noted her reactions:

The first thing which struck me so forcibly on entering the great city of Delhi, only a few months before so crowded, was it was now a city of the dead. The death-like silence of Delhi was appalling. All you could see was empty houses where the household hearths had ceased to burn, and not a living creature, except now and then a starved-looking cat, would show itself...¹¹⁹

Having reconquered the city from its defenders, the British made it unrecognizable. The first targets of the soldier's wrath were the Mughal emperor and his lineal descendants, the bodies of whom lay at the heart of the *ancien régime* and which had again become metonymic with the city of Delhi and with Hindustan. Writing to a friend, a British officer described his encounter with Bahadur Shah Zafar:

I saw the King of Delhi, and abused him like a pick-pocket, and treated him anything but as the great Mogul. I saw his three sons after they were killed, lying at the Kotwali, where the Europeans were treating their remains with every indignity.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Harriet Tytler (ed. Anthony Sattin), An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler, 1828-1858 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 165

¹²⁰ W. S. Graham, Delhi to Daniel Cullimore. Graham Mutiny Papers D.812/14/152 p.82

After a short trial, the King was ignominiously packed off to exile in Burma via bullock-cart. Most of the structures within the fort were destroyed, leaving only a few pavilions and the halls of Public and Private Audience marooned amidst a newly-created plain. The fort was turned over to the army, which then garrisoned it until 1947. Emily Bayley, the daughter of Sir Thomas Metcalfe, found this entirely appropriate:

Up to the time of the Mutiny, the King had entire control of the palace; and any criminal or ruffian could secure an asylum there and could never be found if wanted. Hence it was really a den of thieves and murderers and criminals of all classes, a source of never-ending difficulty and annoyance to the British government, and arrangements had been made to completely alter this state of things at the death of the King of Delhi. But the Mutiny did this for us, in that it cleared out this den of iniquity, as everyone fled from the Palace when our soldiers entered it, and thousands were killed.¹²¹

In this account, the fort is presented as a 'den of iniquity,' the continued existence of which stood in the way of good government and order. As the body of the king and his sons was treated, so indeed was the city for which he stood. As the symbolic core of the city and the physical manifestation of the generations of Mughal *imperium*, the fort was literally hollowed out and replaced with the signifiers of aggressive British authority. At a stroke this annulled the possibilities of ever thinking of Delhi in terms of the *ancien régime*. The British also destroyed every building within 400 yards of the fort, and also all structures immediately to the north and the south of the fort within the city. This brought about the destruction of a large mosque, several notable mansions, and many important markets. The effects on the city are evident in this photograph taken in 1860. (Figure 3)

¹²¹ Bayley in Metcalfe, 208



Figure 3: Delhi ca. 1860; view towards the red fort. BL: Photo 394/(41), 39441

A third of the city to the North was similarly razed and a gigantic railway station was created within the city-walls. Perhaps most importantly, the British filled in the canals that ran through the main streets of the city and cut down the trees which lined them. In doing so, they changed the urban experience of the city's streets forever. This signaled the transition to a regime in which financial conservatism dictated that water could only be used 'rationally' for the sanitation of European suburban enclaves. Nothing if not methodical, the British also evacuated the entire city to the countryside and allowed first Hindus and then Muslims to return. Much of the property in the city was redistributed, so that old neighbourhoods and associations vanished without a trace.

The reconstitution of Delhi ensured that the foundations on which the urbanity of the old city had depended were completely razed. The habitus which defined the lives of the residents of the city was anchored in a built environment, which in turn had been

generated by Mughal urban institutions and technologies of environmental management. The latter had been eroding under British assault for half-a-century before the mutiny: the former were destroyed in the few years after. The destruction of the Mughal habitus made those who were privileged within it strangers in their own world. This fact found frequent mention in the writings of the old cultural elite, such as the great poet Mirza Asadullah Ghalib. Responding to a verse written by his close friend Mir Mahdi Majruh that boasted of the purity of Delhi's courtly speech, ("My friend, this is the language of Dihli"), Ghalib wrote, "Listen, my friend. Nowadays, the people of Dihli are either Hindus or common workers of men in Khakhi [soldiers] or Panjabis or Goras [Whites]. Which of these do you intend as the speakers of praiseworthy language?"¹²² He then described listed the neighbourhoods of which "there was no trace left" and complained about the dearth of fresh and cool water ever since the wells were choked. Ghalib concluded:

In short, the city has already become a wilderness. Now if all of the wells are destroyed or fouled and a drop of potable water becomes as rare as the rarest of pearls, this place will turn into the desert of Karbala. Allah! Allah! The Dihli-born lovers of Dihli continue to praise the language spoken here! What wild and invincible faith! Listen, strange creature of God: the Urdu Bazar is no more. So how can Urdu survive? I swear to god, Dihli is a town no more. You might call it a military encampment, but the fort and the city are no more. The bazar and the lovely canal are no more.¹²³

In Ghalib's mind, water, the city, the old regime, and Delhi's culture were all linked. Water made civilization, and without water the city became a 'wilderness' akin to the sandy wastelands of Iraq. The sonorous speech and the refined manners (of which the court was the ultimate arbiter) could not survive the razing of the city's built environment and the destruction of the fort. In this context, Ghalib's identification of speech is

¹²² Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (ed. Daud Rahbar), Urdu letters of Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1987) 132–33

¹²³ Ghalib in Rahbar, 134

particularly significant, and not only because he was a poet: the command of language, with its possibilities of both ludic entertainment and the endless generation of subtlety and meaning, was the ultimate marker of urbanity. The command of speech, then as now, lay at the core of the urban strategy and was the most powerful strategy for advance within the social field. When Ghalib mourned the loss of cultured speech, he mourned the destruction of the habitus of urbanity – the social field in which he had thrived. This habitus had privileged him, but could not be reproduced in the foreign bodies of the now-dominant trader-caste Hindus, Panjabis, and Goras. From his endless recounting of the neighbourhoods that have ceased to exist, it becomes apparent that Ghalib's sense of the cityscape was shattered forever.

While those of Ghalib's era were never able to come to terms with the destruction of Delhi, the younger generations of the city's residents had little choice. In the writings of Nazir Ahmad (1830-1812), the city of Delhi was frequently a site where the traumas of the destruction of Delhi had to be resolved. In dealing with the British after the war of 1857, Sir Sayyid had stressed complete consonance with 'his master's voice.' Nazir Ahmad, however, advocated distance and aloofness. Like the other Muslim intellectuals of his generation, Nazir Ahmad recognized that the old city and its ways were gone forever. But to play the game within the field of the city on British terms was also a losing proposition. This idea was forcefully established in Ahmad's famous novel entitled *The Son of the Moment* (Ibn-ul Waqt, 1888). The story begins with a loyalist premise: the scion of an ancient and reputable family ("Ibn-ul Waqt") saves the life of a British officer ("Noble Sahib") during the war and the two establish a fast friendship. After the

reconquest of Delhi, Noble Sahib persuaded Ibn-ul Waqt to become a 'reformer' by adopting British ways. How was this to be achieved? Noble Sahib suggests,

Well, at least [get] a house in English taste. You know that we like to live in spacious houses outside the city and our lifestyle is also different. My friends wish to see you and they ask me if they may. Many a time I thought I would bring them to meet you but then I thought that I would unnecessarily put myself to shame since you were not in a position to meet them. Firstly, your house is situated in the streets where one can't take one's carriage. Then the streets are so narrow, winding, and unclean that no Englishman would like to go to such a filthy place. Your house is not so bad but there is no chair or table to make an Englishman feel comfortable.¹²⁴

Here, Nazir Ahmad recognizes the British critique of an Indian city-life that is dominated by unsanitary living conditions in disorganized and crowded neighbourhoods. Ibn-ul Waqt apparently did not realize that much of the filth and pestilence of the old city was a direct result of the British overuse of sanitary resources.¹²⁵ To be modern and progressive, Ibn-ul Waqt had to live in a suburban British bungalow and to become British in every respect. Having moved to a suburban bungalow in a British residential neighbourhood, Ibn-ul Waqt set about deracinating himself with exemplary zealously. Within the space of a month, Ibn-ul Waqt changed to the extent that a stranger visiting his residence would be unable to judge "whether it was the house of an Englishman or of a simple Indian whose anglomania had led him to leave his family and people and live in seclusion in a jungle away from his native city."¹²⁶ Nevertheless, Ibn-ul Waqt's efforts came to naught: he lost his religion, and was shunned by both Indians and British. Through this antibildungsroman, Nazir Ahmad warned that it was impossible to truly enter the British

¹²⁴ Nazir Ahmad, *The Son of the Moment* (New Delhi India [Great Britain]:, 2002) 53

¹²⁵ Prashad, 155

¹²⁶ Nazir Ahmad, 114

habitus of urbanity that had emerged in the suburban districts and cantonments of India. The native city, despite its marked inferiority, remained the only place for Indians.

The extension of the new habitus of urbanity to the population of Delhi thus faced resistance even after the cultural milieu of the *ancien régime* had been destroyed completely. Lived experience and everyday practice continued to tenaciously hold the imaginations of the inhabitants of the city. After having gained full control of the city, the British regime freely manipulated the symbols of erstwhile empire for its own purposes. Thus, by 1886, the British administration had decided that “all political interests [had] died out” with regard to the Jama Masjid; but even as they declared that the structure did not represent Mughal authority, the British banned Hindus from entering it.¹²⁷ In doing so, they transformed a symbol of the Mughal *imperium* into a marker of distinctive Muslim identity. But other symbols were appropriated wholesale, for the British government could not resist the lure of using the red fort in order to cement its own rule.¹²⁸ The most grandiose instances of this tendency were the Delhi Durbars of 1903 and 1911: in the latter, the King-Emperor George V and the Queen of India entered the Red Fort and presented themselves to the public from the very spot, and in the very manner, of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan even as they announced the construction of the new Imperial Capital of Delhi.



This paper has shown how the forcible imposition of a colonial habitus of urbanity came to displace the ways in which people perceived the city. By the beginning

¹²⁷ Gupta, 127

¹²⁸ The British use of native forms of authority in order to indicate the permanence of their rule has been described in Francis G. Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967)

of the twentieth century, only traces of the past ways of seeing the city survived in the memory of its elderly inhabitants. While the British regime increasingly emulated Mughal practices in order to create an illusion of continued imperial authority in a time of increasing nationalist resistance, some of those who remembered the old world mourned its loss. Charles Freer Andrews recalled an outburst of emotion in an old friend who had just visited a British Durbar held by the Governor General of Punjab in the red fort's Hall of Public Audience:

Suddenly there came upon him while he spoke with me the vision of days that were no more, and the memory of that Hall of Audience in the Moghul times. In the anguish of his soul he said to me openly: 'Oh to think how I have degraded myself in that royal hall today by stooping to the stranger!' His head sank down to his breast and he lost altogether the sense of my presence while the tears poured down from his eyes. He did not seek to hide from me the anguish of humiliation he had been through; and I could feel it in his presence as a very terrible thing.¹²⁹

While the adoption of the forms of Mughal rule did not establish firm British hegemony, the reconfiguration of the city and the creation of British New Delhi nevertheless ensured that the way in which people related to urban space would be irrevocably changed. In this sense, the victory of the colonial habitus of urbanity is etched in every stone of the imposing buildings that lie at the heart of New Delhi and are now central to any conception of the city as a whole. A small archipelago of other urban forms survives within the ceaselessly-churning ocean of New Delhi. But the Mughal habitus of urbanity has been so thoroughly destroyed that the significance of the remnants has become confused and unclear. While Old Delhi is often referred to as the 'Walled City,' few traces of the city-walls remain. Bereft of trees, water, open space and shade, Chandni

¹²⁹ C. F. Andrews, (eds. Mushirul Hasan and Margrit Pernau), *Zaka Ullah of Delhi* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 39-40

Chowk no longer occupies a central place within the cityscape. The Red Fort has been appropriated as a symbol of the Indian nation, and preserved as a monument. It is now a place to visit and photograph, but its significance cannot be fathomed because it has no relation to the city or its inhabitants. The experience of the Mughal city had depended on the skillful and artistic use of water to create and enliven urban space; but the regimented water-courses and the rigid, shooting fountains of New Delhi's government district point to a formal and depersonalized conception of the city as a site for the exhibition of the grandeur of the British empire and the Indian nation that succeeded it. Years of haphazard regional planning, driven in part by the instrumental logic of development, have ensured that water has become a scarce resource for the private enjoyment of the modern elite in secluded swimming-pools and gardens. The desolate and empty lakes of most public parks, littered with plastic refuse and bereft of life, are indicative of an urban reality defined by thwarted ambitions of modernizing city-planners. The destruction of the old habitus has clearly caused a profound epistemic break with the past. This disjuncture has denied the inhabitants of the city any way of comprehending and inhabiting the pasts of their urban landscape. This is the logical outcome of the mausoleal modality: securely encased the shroud of monumental History, the 'ruins' of the 'Old City' have been muted forever. No longer can they be reached by memory, lived experience or comprehension.

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