

Written nearly five hundred years ago, Babur's description of Kabul and its dependencies is peppered with references to heavy wine-drinking bouts set in lush and bountiful venues. The grapes used to make wine receive a good deal of attention in the Kabul section of Babur's memoirs. About Laghman, an important region to the east and north of Kabul, readers are told: **4**

It also has grapes and the vines all grow over trees. (Here) Dara-i-Nur wine is famous. There are two sorts, *arratashi* and *sawhantashi*. The *arratashi* is yellowish, while the *sawhantashi* is a beautiful bright red color. The *arratashi* is more enjoyable, although neither is equal to its reputation.⁵

In addition to grapes, Babur mentions an array of fruits grown around Kabul. Among these are pomegranates, apricots, apples, quinces, pears, peaches, plums, and jujube.⁶ For example, while referring to the dependencies of Kabul, Babur states: **5**

Most of these villages are located on the slopes of the mountain. There are many grapes in the orchards. There is also an abundance of all sorts of fruit. Among these villages there are none like Istalif and Istarghij.⁷

In his *Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, Irfan Habib (1986) confirms Babur's portrait of Kabul as a fruit-filled region. Habib plots the production sites of apples, apricots, citron, grapes, melons, oranges, and pomegranates in his mapping of the natural resources of the Kabul *suba* or provincial administrative division during the Mughal period.⁸ In addition to those fruits, Habib mentions the local production of other commodities including barley, iron, lapis lazuli, madder, rice, salt, silver, sugarcane, and wheat.⁹ However, fruit was clearly the most abundant category of agricultural produce in and around Kabul, and Babur definitely carried his taste for it to North India. **6**

The Mughal nobility descended from Babur (ruled c. 1526–30) inherited his love for Central Asian fruit. India was accustomed to receiving dried fruits and nuts from Kabul and Central Asia. Muzaffar Alam argues that Mughal rulers after Babur exhibited a heightened concern for the security of interregional traders and the routes they plied through Kabul and Qandahar.¹⁰ Alam contends this was especially so in the seventeenth century when Mughal state policy of securing a steady trade with their Central Asian homeland resulted in an expanded presence in India of fresh fruits imported from Kabul, Balkh, Samarqand, and beyond. Jahangir (ruled 1605–26) is said to have enjoyed imported fresh apples, grapes, and melons, and boasted that his father Akbar (ruled 1556–1605) also loved such fruit.¹¹ **7**

It is important to appreciate that dried and fresh fruits imported from Kabul and greater Central Asia were broadly consumed in Delhi and greater South Asia during the Mughal period. Certain fresh fruits may have been generally restricted to the elites and nobles, but **8**

other fresh and most dried fruits and nuts appear as both appealing and accessible to the popular classes of Indian consumers. Bernier, who wrote about his travels in Hindustan during the mid-seventeenth century, supports the claim of widespread consumption of Central Asian fruit in India. He describes the popularity and abundance of imported dried and fresh fruits in Hindustan generally and Delhi specifically. Regarding the former, he indicates:

Hindustan consumes an immense quantity of fresh fruit from Samarkand, Balc, Bocara, and Persia; such as melons, apples, pears and grapes, eaten at Delhi and purchased at very high price nearly the whole winter; and likewise dried fruit such as almonds, pistachio and various other small nuts, plums, apricots, and raisins, which may be procured the whole year round.¹²

And concerning the presence and visibility of Central Asian fruits in Delhi, Bernier wrote:

9

. . . a fruit market (in Delhi) makes some show. It contains many shops which are well supplied with dry fruit from Persia, Balk, Bokara, and Samarkande; such as almonds, pistachios, and walnuts, raisins, prunes, and apricots; and in winter with excellent fresh grapes, black and white, brought from the same countries, wrapped in cotton; pears and apples of three or four sorts, and those admirable melons which last the whole winter. These (fresh) fruits are however very dear . . . (b)ut nothing is considered so great a treat.¹³

It is also important to consider the local consumption of fruit grown in Kabul and greater Central Asia. Early colonial sources provide abundant information in this regard. The first substantive published account of economic and social life in and around Kabul comes from the British mission of 1808 to the Durrani monarch Shuja. This diplomatic and research collective was led by Mountstuart Elphinstone. James Strachey served in the important post of Secretary for this Anglo-Indian delegation, and he was responsible for relating information about the prices of commodities to Elphinstone.¹⁴ The published text resulting from the Elphinstone-Strachey labor consortium indicates a profuse supply of fruit for local residents. Therein we find the following quote that comes from a discussion of the foods of the "common people" in Kabul:

10

Provisions are cheap and people derive a great luxury from the prodigious abundance of fruit. At Caubul grapes are dear when they sell for more than a farthing a pound; pomegranates are little more than a halfpenny a pound; apples sell at two hundred pounds for a rupee (two shillings and four pence); two sorts of apricots are equally cheap; and the dearer sorts are less than a halfpenny a pound; peaches are dearer but quinces and plums are as cheap; and melons are cheaper; grapes often bear scarce at any price, and the coarse sort, which is exported with so much care to India, is sometimes given to cattle. Nuts of all kinds are very cheap; and walnuts, with which the hills north of Caubul are

covered, sell at two thousand for a rupee. The price of vegetables is also extremely low . . . ¹⁵

According to this first British account, the prices of fruit and nuts harvested locally appear quite accessible for everyday consumers in precolonial Kabul. Next in the line of colonial officers deputed to Kabul was Alexander Burnes. Whereas Elphinstone's extensive delegation did not proceed beyond Peshawar, and it is unclear precisely how that mission collected and recorded information, Burnes passed through and stayed in Kabul a number of times, with much smaller entourages, and his published accounts reflect his own rendition of firsthand experience. Burnes describes public culture and social life as centered in fruit tree-laden gardens in and around Kabul. Images of flowers, birds, and poetry characterize his accounting of Kabul's garden culture.¹⁶ In marked contrast, Burnes's description of grapes is less lofty, more mundane, and results in the impression of widespread local use, perhaps even dependence, on this single fruit group. **11**

Cabool is particularly celebrated for its fruit, which is exported in great abundance to India. Its vines are so plentiful, that the grapes are given, for three months of the year, to cattle. There are ten different kinds of these: the best grow on frame-works; for those which are allowed to creep on the ground are inferior. They are pruned in the beginning of May. The wine of Cabool has a flavour not unlike Madeira; and it cannot be doubted, that a very superior description might be produced in this country with a little care. The people of Cabool convert grape into more uses than in most other countries. They use its juice in roasting meat; and, during meals, have grape powder as a pickle. This is procured by pounding the grapes before they get ripe, after drying them. It looks like Cayenne pepper, and has a pleasant acid taste. They also dry many of them as raisins, and use much grape syrup. A pound of grapes sells for half a penny.¹⁷

Burnes's appreciation for the role of grapes in the local diet of Kabul arose from his contacts with and experiences among ordinary Afghans. But Burnes also had a number of important interactions with elites generally and the Durrani ruler in Kabul, Dost Muhammad (ruled 1826–38 and 1842–63) specifically, before the first British occupation of the city. In the following passage, Burnes provides a window into the personal political histories and communal social life surrounding the production and consumption wine in Kabul: **12**

The present chief of Cabool, with the best intentions, has put finishing blow to the Armenian colony, by a strict prohibition of wine and spirits. . . . After a life by no means temperate, this chief has renounced wine, and, under the severest penalties, commands that his subjects should be equally abstemious. The Armenians and Jews of Cabool have, therefore, fled to other lands, as they had no means of support but in distilling spirits and wine. There are but three Jewish families left in Cabool, the wreck of a hundred which it could last year boast. If Dost Mohammad Khan can succeed in suppressing drunkenness by the sacrifice

of a few foreign inhabitants, he is not to be blamed; since forty bottles of wine or ten of brandy might be purchased from them for a single rupee . . . we shall not criticize his motive, nor comment with severity on the inconsistency of a reformed drunkard. Cabool seems to have been always famed for its revels.¹⁸

Writing about his journey through eastern Afghanistan in 1836, G. T. Vigne also comments on the plentiful supply of grapes in the region. Vigne's narrative addresses the intricate preparation and packaging of certain grapes for export to India, and implicitly advocates their further distribution to Europe: 13

I have no where seen such an abundance of fruit. Of grapes there are four or five different kinds; but I think that the *husseini*, a long grape which is sent to India in cotton, in flat, circular boxes is the only one that will bear competition with those of the south of Europe.¹⁹

The colonial imagination conceived the export of Afghan fruit to be a profitable enterprise, and such a commercial conception of the area involved much more than a single type of grape grown in Kabul. For example, Henry Bellew outlined a wide array of fruits harvested in Qandahar. Bellew noted at least four types of apples, ten types of apricots, two types of figs, ten types of muskmelon, eight types of mulberries, two types of peaches, three types of plums, six types of pomegranates, three types of quinces, six types of watermelons, in addition to nineteen types of grapes produced in that locality alone.²⁰ 14

As colonial knowledge about Kabul developed the British began to recognize the large amount of capital linked to fruit production in addition to the service of that commodity group as a medium of exchange in its own right. Compared to Burnes, Charles Masson had a greater amount of firsthand interaction with people in and around Kabul. Masson commented on the revenue generated by fruit trees in the royal gardens and other orchards that, either through outright confiscation or a form of sale, became a given ruler's personal and therefore the Durrani state's property.²¹ He also described an incident at Honai, on the road linking Bamian and Kabul, where armed men demanded a monetary duty that was ultimately satisfied by a payment in grapes.²² In his published account, Masson equates the fruit market of Kabul with the Shikarpuri quarter and claims that brokers controlled all commercial traffic passing through the city.²³ 15

Durrani State Mints and Hindki Money Handlers

Fernand Braudel invokes a useful turn of phrase to convey the disorientation experienced by a local French community when first exposed to the growing global forces of money and credit during the medieval period. In typically erudite fashion he says: 16

This uneasiness was the beginning of the awareness of a new language. For money is a language . . . it calls for and makes possible dialogues and conversations; it exists as a function of these conversations.²⁴

If money is a language, there have been many tongues spoken in Kabul, Qandahar, and communities between the two cities, arguably throughout recorded history. More intriguing than the historical depth of money use in the region now known as eastern Afghanistan is the multiplicity of currencies circulating in the area at any one time. Most significant for our purposes is Braudel's attention to three different "dialects of money." These are metallic money or what we have termed state currency, paper bank notes including bills of exchange that Braudel argues to be the most important of all instruments of credit, and scriptural money that was strictly a textual or book money used for account-keeping purposes.²⁵ The thrust of this chapter deals with the interaction between metallic state currencies and a derivative fiscal instrument, namely credit, which is a paper product, during Anglo-Durrani state formation.²⁶ **17**

State coinage, or metallic money, precedes paper credit in conceptual terms, so it will be considered first. The Mughal period is a reasonable point of departure in this regard. Irfan Habib locates two silver rupee mints in both Kabul and Multan, one in each city built in 1595 by Akbar (ruled 1556–1605), and another set dating to the reign of Aurangzeb/Alamgir (ruled 1658–1707).²⁷ During the Mughal period, Kabul served as a frontier provincial capital inside the Hindu Kush range. It was an important supply center and staging area for Mughal forays to the north. Multan's location just east of the Indus River, between the Punjab in the north and Sind to the south, gave the city a distinct commercial appeal and vibrancy. For example, Multan was a primary if not the principle wholesale market for horses imported into India through Kabul and Qandahar.²⁸ Merchants from Multan were active in Iran, Central Asia, and Russia between 1600 and 1900.²⁹ **18**

Control over Multan's marketing and minting functions were important variables in the rapid expansion and contraction of the early Durrani empire.³⁰ Ahmad Shah (ruled 1747–72), the ephemeral empire's founder, was born in Multan in 1722. The breadth of his suzerainty accounts for the large number of mints which at one time or another operated under Ahmad Shah's controlling authority, and this helps explain the wide variety of coins struck in his name. During Ahmad Shah's reign, copper, gold, and silver coins were issued from a number of cities, including Qandahar, Kabul, Peshawar, Attock, Dera Ghazi Khan, the Derajat (Dera Ismail Khan and Dera Fateh Khan), Multan, Bhakkar, Thatta, Sind, Kashmir, Lahore, Aonla (Anwala), Bareli, Farrukhabad, Muradabad, and Najibabad.³¹ When the British first reconnoitered Multan between 1835 and 1837, the town was estimated to have eighty **19**

thousand residents, making it the third largest city in Sikh territory behind Lahore and Amritsar.³² At that time, the farm of Multan's mint sold for *Nanak Shah* or Sikh Rupees 22,563.³³

In addition to the mint, the early British commercial surveillance reports make it clear that Multan's credit and money exchange markets were also very active in the period leading up to the first Anglo-Afghan war. Colonial authorities registered local rates on bills of exchange, or *hundi chalan*, in the city through a listing of transaction amounts in eight currencies at many different time intervals for bills circulating between Multan and five other cities.³⁴ In the early colonial documents about Multan there is a good deal attention devoted to the transit taxes paid by camel and pony commercial caravans moving from Bukhara to Multan.³⁵ Multan was further characterized as an important site of production in its own right. In Multan, imported Central Asian silk was refined into clothing for the Amritsar market, and indigo was harvested and packaged for export to Central Asia. The only form of local commercial insurance covered the silk, in finished piece good form, moving from Multan to Amritsar.³⁶ These sources indicate that trade between Bukhara and Multan was routed through Kabul and dominated by Shikarpuri Hindus and Lohani Afghans. **20**

For the Mughals and early Durranis Multan was important as a mint city, as a hub of the interregional trade networks linking Central and South Asia, and as a production center in its own right. Dale (1994) has proffered a good deal of evidence about Multanis in Central Asia, Iran, and Russia during roughly the same period. But during the nineteenth century, there is little indication of a Multani presence in eastern Afghanistan. There is, however, a wide and relatively thick array of information about Shikarpuris in Kabul, Qandahar, and territories between those points during the 1800s. The early British commercial intelligence about Shikarpur indicated that the city held about thirty thousand people, was only recently founded, and did not seem to have an active state mint.³⁷ Shikarpur was not noted for any significant local production or marketing of local or imported commodities. The city was known almost strictly as a money market and banking center, and its reputation was garnered by those claiming or being ascribed the Shikarpuri identity who resided far from the city itself.³⁸ Individuals identified as Shikarpuris were found in approximately forty major markets between Astrakhan and Calcutta.³⁹ Lal hints at that fact by noting Khattri Hindus from Shikarpur were spread out all over Central Asia and that in the city itself: **21**

. . . you will see all the shop keepers writing hoondees, or bills of exchange, which you can take in the name of agents at Bombay, Sindh, the Punjab, Khorasan, Afghanistan, part of Persia and Russia.⁴⁰

Burnes is more explicit in his caricature of a widely dispersed but well integrated Shikarpuri commercial network by noting that while in Kabul he: **22**

. . . made the acquaintance of many of the Hindoo or Shikarporee merchants. The whole trade of Central Asia is in the hands of these people, who have houses of agency from Astracan to Meshid to Calcutta. They are a plodding race, who take no share in any other matters than their own, and secure protection the Government by lending it money. They never bring their families from their country, which is Upper Sinde, and are constantly passing to and from it; which keeps up a national spirit among them. In Cabool, there are eight great houses of agency belonging to these people, who are quite separate from the other Hindoo inhabitants. Of them there are about 300 hundred families. I met one of these Shikarporee merchants on the island of Kisham in the Gulf of Persia. With such an extensive agency distributed in the parts of Asia which we were now about to traverse, it was not, as may be supposed, a very difficult task to adjust our money matters, and arrange for receiving a supply of that necessary article, even at the distance we should shortly find ourselves from India. . . . I had a letter of credit in my possession for the sum of five thousand rupees, payable from the public treasuries of Lodiana or Delhi; and the Cabool merchants did not hesitate to accept it.⁴¹

Here, Burnes contradicts himself by first equating the Hindus in Kabul with Shikarpuris then claiming the Shikarpuris were a separate community from the other Hindus in the city. Elsewhere, Burnes notes the residents of Shikarpur city itself to be about 50 percent Baba Nanak Sikhs and 10 percent Muslim, most of the latter group being identified as Afghans who received land grants from the early Durrani.⁴² This leaves a Hindu resident population of approximately 40 percent, but their importance was proportionately much greater because members of this community comprised most of the Shikarpuris found so widely outside the city. Among these Shikarpuri Hindu businessmen spread throughout Asia Burnes noted three different "tribes," the "Bunya, Lohana, and Bhattea."⁴³ **23**

Khattris are conspicuously absent from Burnes's list of Hindu communities in Shikarpur. Burnes would therefore not count Khattris among the numbers of commercially active Shikarpuris residing outside the city. But Burnes's elision in this regard is destabilized by a number of other sources. Nearly contemporaneous with Burnes's account of Shikarpur, Lal indicated that Hindu Khattris from Shikarpur were highly visible if not dominant in Multan's trade with Bukhara. Alam notes an "extraordinary strong Khatri participation" in the trade between Central and South Asia during the Mughal period, and Dale counts Khattri Hindus among the three main groups of diaspora Multanis in Iran, Turan, and Russia during the same period.⁴⁴ A Khattri Hindu from Shikarpur, Lala Jeth Mall, served as Shuja's finance minister in 1832 during the former sovereign's failed attempt to reclaim his throne.⁴⁵ **24**

It is important to emphasize the variety of groups subsumed within the Shikarpuri or Multani label. Shikarpur and Multan and arguably all markets contain representatives of communities carrying multiple layers of identity, some of which overlap with those of other local groups **25**

and as a result serve integrating purposes, and others of which serve to differentiate the many social sectors calling the same location home. For representatives of those communities residing or traveling outside of the home locality, any particular aspect of their identity package could become the distinguishing feature for that person or group, and furthermore different people from within the host setting could refer to the same "guests" in different ways based on those features. Thus an Indian, who might be a Khattri Hindu from Shikarpur or Multan, could be reasonably identified in historical sources in Central Asia by any one of five valid designations. It is also important to note that significant pieces of these identity puzzles are missing. This results from so little being known about how people labeled Multanis, Lohanis, or Shikarpuris identified themselves differently in different contexts, as all people do, and what social and economic calculations laid behind the invocation of any one of many possible, and all equally valid on some level, self-referents. The fluidity and simultaneity of social categories, the interactive and relational nature of social action, and the situational ways identities are constructed and practiced are necessary considerations when trying to historically unpack the identity layers of a diaspora group.⁴⁶

This is especially true for the Lohanis, who are regularly and all-too-unproblematically conflated with Afghans, Pashtuns, and Pawindahs.⁴⁷ Over time, through space, across cultures, and in texts heterogeneity and movement stand out as defining features of the Lohanis. To accept that social and historical diversity and fluidity for the Lohanis sensitizes one to the same basic but unspoken variety subsumed in each of the three other terms. Treating the four labels as static surrogates for one another compounds the original obfuscation and avoidance of the assorted and imprecise nature of each category. Anthropologists have shown that for nomadic, pastoral, and tribal societies economic adaptation and cultural accommodation explain the fundamental diversity and resilience of these populations. For example, there has been a healthy discussion of the wealthier and poorer segments of pastoral communities, the multiple possibilities for those at each pole of the economic spectrum inside and outside the original group, and the role of commercialization and access to markets in creating and responding to those disparities.⁴⁸ The Lohanis were known for long-distance commercial migrations, so any sedentarization among these nomadic trader-carriers implies significant social change and economic disparities that are generally downplayed in diaspora studies of this fundamentally heterogeneous group.

Recognizing but undervaluing preexisting social diversity and ongoing social change are features of studies of diaspora merchant communities.⁴⁹ The trade diaspora approach tends to emphasize the cultural homogeneity of both guest and host communities. One response to the trade diaspora paradigm has been to focus analytical attention on the circulation of resources through merchant networks connecting the dispersed communities and the home setting or network center of the group. Claude Markovits is the proponent of this "merchant

26

27

network with a center" alternative to the trade diaspora analytical scheme. In this model, circulation of resources to and from the center and through the network is primary. In his words:

. . . a network generally consists of a centre, a locality or a cluster of localities where capital is raised and where capitalists have their main place of residence, and of dispersed colonies of merchants and commercial employees which keep close links with the network centre. Between the network centre, on the one hand, and the dispersed colonies on the other hand, goods, but also men (and sometimes women), credit and information circulate. While goods may circulate widely outside the network (otherwise there would not be any exchange), men, credit, and information circulate almost exclusively within it. Most crucial is probably the circulation of information.⁵⁰

In this view, circulation of resources, movement of people, and economic adaptation are key, whereas proponents of trade diasporas tend to focus on long-term stability, cultural unity, and generally do not problematize social reproduction of the communities. In Afghanistan during the nineteenth century, the experience of Indian bankers, including the Shikarpuris, was quite varied. During the early part of the century, they were favored by the state, while later in the century representatives of the Shikarpuri banking community in Kabul, Qandahar, and eastern Afghanistan were relocating and reallocating their resources as a result of unfavorable state policies and practices. In a dramatic change of circumstances, the Shikarpuris were largely dispersed from the Durrani polity Markovits credits with ushering their commercial network to interregional prominence in the first instance.⁵¹ **28**

The sheer range of Shikarpuri and other Indian bankers' experiences in nineteenth-century Afghanistan attenuates the applicability of the static trade diaspora framework to this context. But unfortunately the kind of data Markovits musters in support of the merchant network with a center model is not available for the Afghan context. For example, there is little precise data about the circulation of resources between Shikarpur and localities in Afghanistan during the nineteenth century. More important, Markovits refers to *panchayats* as the institutional loci for communication within each Shikarpuri community located away from the center, between those dispersed communities, and between each of those communities of Shikarpuris and the their network center in Shikarpur.⁵² The information about panchayats in Afghanistan does not conform to, and in substantive ways contradicts, this model. A panchayat institution first appears in Kabul during Abd al-Rahman's reign. However, this was not an exclusively Shikarpuri or even Indian institution. The Durrani panchayat was an instrument of state control over merchant communities, and as such served a very different purpose than suggested by Markovits.⁵³ **29**

