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Introduction to the Mughal Empire

Ruling a vast and diverse territory like the Indian subcontinent during the Middle Ages was a challenging task. The Mughal Empire, unlike its predecessors, established a long-lasting empire from the latter half of the sixteenth century, expanding from Agra and Delhi to control nearly the entire subcontinent by the seventeenth century. The Mughals introduced administrative structures and governance ideas that influenced subsequent rulers. The Red Fort in Delhi, built by the Mughals, remains a symbol of their political legacy and is the site from which the Prime Minister of India addresses the nation on Independence Day.

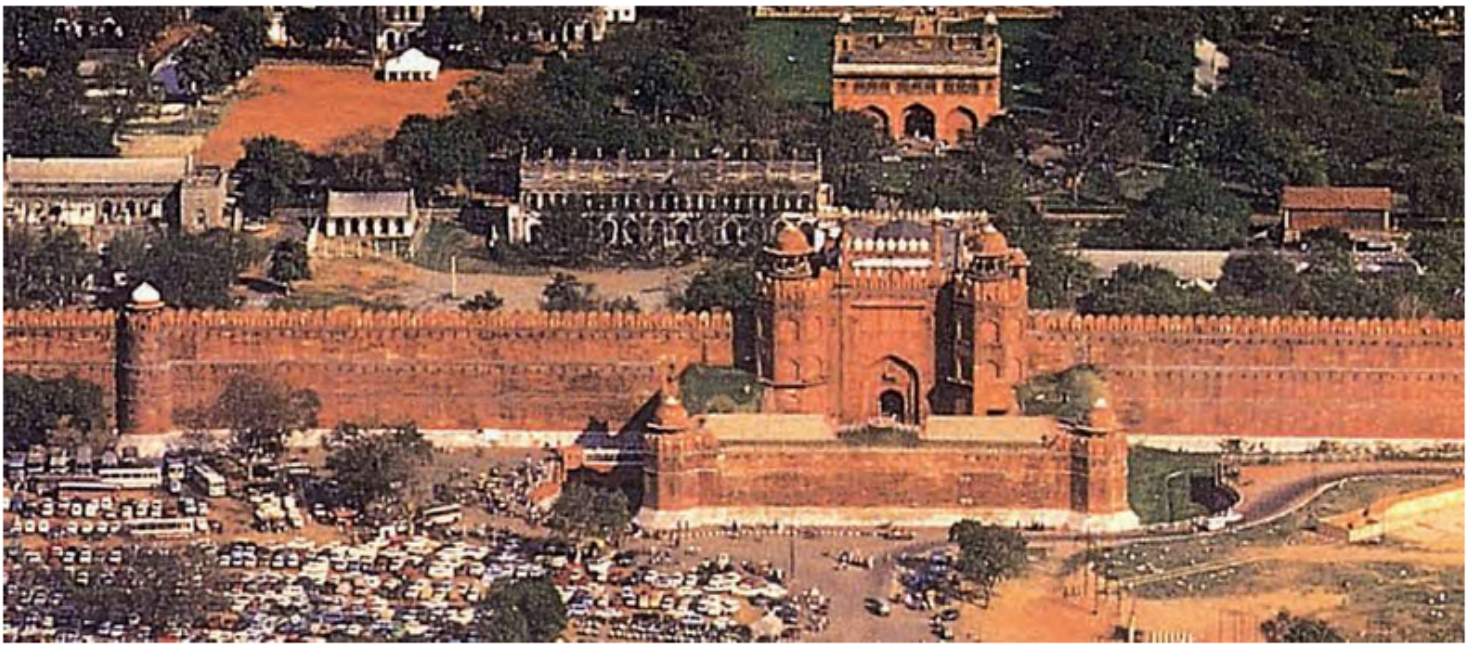


Fig. 1
The Red Fort.

Exam Questions

Q1: Why was the Mughal Empire considered significant in the history of the Indian subcontinent?

Answer: Because it established a large and long-lasting empire that controlled most of the subcontinent and introduced administrative and governance systems that influenced later rulers.

Q2: What is the historical importance of the Red Fort?

Answer: It was the main residence of the Mughal emperors, a symbol of their power and architectural brilliance, and today it is the site of India's Independence Day celebrations.

Origin and Genealogy of the Mughals

The Mughals descended from two great lineages: from their mother's side, they were descendants of Genghis Khan, the Mongol ruler; from their father's side, they were successors of Timur, the ruler of Iran, Iraq, and parts of Turkey. The Mughals preferred to emphasize their Timurid ancestry rather than their Mongol roots due to the negative associations with Genghis Khan. They celebrated their genealogy through pictorial representations linking themselves to Timur.



Fig. 2
Mughal army on campaign.

Exam Questions

Q1: From which two great rulers did the Mughals claim descent?

Answer: Genghis Khan from their mother's side and Timur from their father's side.

Q2: Why did the Mughals prefer to highlight their Timurid ancestry?

Answer: Because Genghis Khan was associated with massacres and their Mongol competitors, so they preferred the more prestigious Timurid lineage.

Mughal Military Campaigns

Babur, the first Mughal emperor, ascended the throne of Ferghana at age 12 but was forced to leave due to Uzbek invasions. He seized Kabul in 1504 and defeated Ibrahim Lodi at the First Battle of Panipat in 1526, capturing Delhi and Agra. Babur's use of cannons was innovative and decisive in establishing Mughal power.

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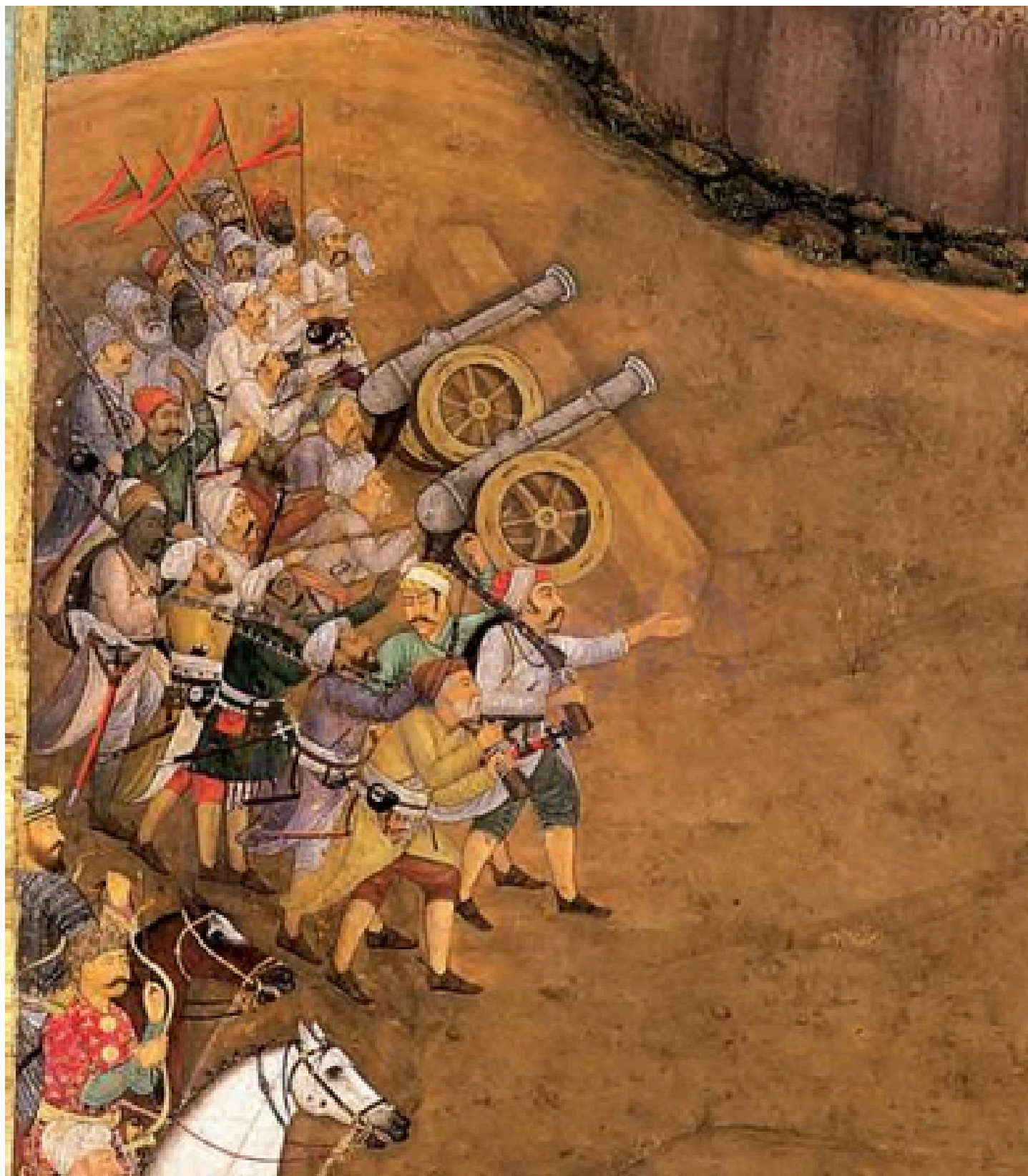


Fig. 3

Cannons were an important addition in sixteenth-century warfare. Babur used them effectively in the first battle of Panipat.

The Mughal army included elephants with canopies, infantry soldiers, and cavalry units, organized in strategic formations to maximize strength and protection during campaigns.



Map 1

Military campaigns under Akbar and Aurangzeb.

Exam Questions

Q1: What was the significance of the First Battle of Panipat?

Answer: It marked the beginning of the Mughal Empire in India, with Babur's victory over Ibrahim Lodi.

Q2: How did Babur's use of cannons influence the battle?

Answer: Cannons allowed Babur to break enemy fortifications and gain a decisive advantage

through long-range firepower.

Mughal Traditions of Succession

The Mughals did not follow primogeniture (eldest son inherits everything) but practiced coparcenary inheritance, dividing the estate among all sons. This often led to conflicts over succession.

Exam Questions

Q1: What type of inheritance system did the Mughals follow?

Answer: Coparcenary inheritance, where the estate was divided among all sons.

Q2: What is one possible consequence of this system?

Answer: It could lead to disputes and conflicts among brothers over the division of power and property.

Mughal Relations with Other Rulers

The Mughals campaigned against rulers who resisted their authority but also formed alliances, especially with Rajputs through marriage. For example, Jahangir's mother was a Rajput princess from Amber, and Shah Jahan's mother was a Rajput princess from Marwar. The Sisodiya Rajputs of Mewar resisted Mughal rule for a long time but were treated honorably after defeat.

Exam Questions

Q1: How did the Mughals maintain relations with Rajput rulers?

Answer: Through marriage alliances and by honoring defeated Rajputs with land and positions.

Q2: Why was balancing defeat and honor important for the Mughals?

Answer: It helped extend their influence without provoking constant rebellion.

Mansabdars and Jagirdars

The Mughal administration included mansabdars, officials who held ranks (mansabs) determining their salary, rank, and military responsibilities. The rank was measured by a number called zat. Mansabdars maintained cavalrymen called sawars and received revenue assignments called jagirs as salary. Jagirs were revenue rights, not land ownership, and were often managed by servants while mansabdars served elsewhere.



Fig. 4
A mansabdar on march with his sawars.

Exam Questions

Q1: What was the role of a mansabdar?

Answer: A mansabdar was a military and administrative officer responsible for maintaining a specified number of cavalrymen and holding a rank that determined salary and status.

Q2: What were jagirs?

Answer: Jagirs were revenue assignments given to mansabdars as payment, representing rights to collect revenue from certain lands.

Zabt and Zamindars

The main source of Mughal income was tax on agricultural produce, collected through intermediaries called zamindars, who could be local headmen or powerful chieftains. Akbar's revenue minister, Todar Mal, introduced the zabt system, fixing cash taxes based on crop yields and prices. This system was effective where land surveys were possible but not in all provinces. Zamindars sometimes abused their power, leading to peasant revolts that challenged Mughal stability.

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Fig. 5
*Details from a miniature from
Shah Jahan's reign depicting*

*corruption in his father's administration:
(1) a corrupt officer receiving a bribe and
receiving a bribe and
(2) a tax-collector punishing poor*

Exam Questions

Q1: What was the zabt system?

Answer: A revenue system where taxes were fixed in cash based on crop yields and prices after careful land surveys.

Q2: How did zamindars affect peasants?

Answer: Some zamindars exploited peasants, leading to hardship and sometimes rebellion.

Akbar Nama and Ain-i Akbari

Akbar commissioned his courtier Abul Fazl to write a detailed history of his reign called the Akbar Nama. It consists of three volumes: the first on Akbar's ancestors, the second on events during his reign, and the third, Ain-i Akbari, on administration, army, revenues, geography, and culture. The Ain-i Akbari is notable for its rich statistical data on crops, prices, wages, and revenues.

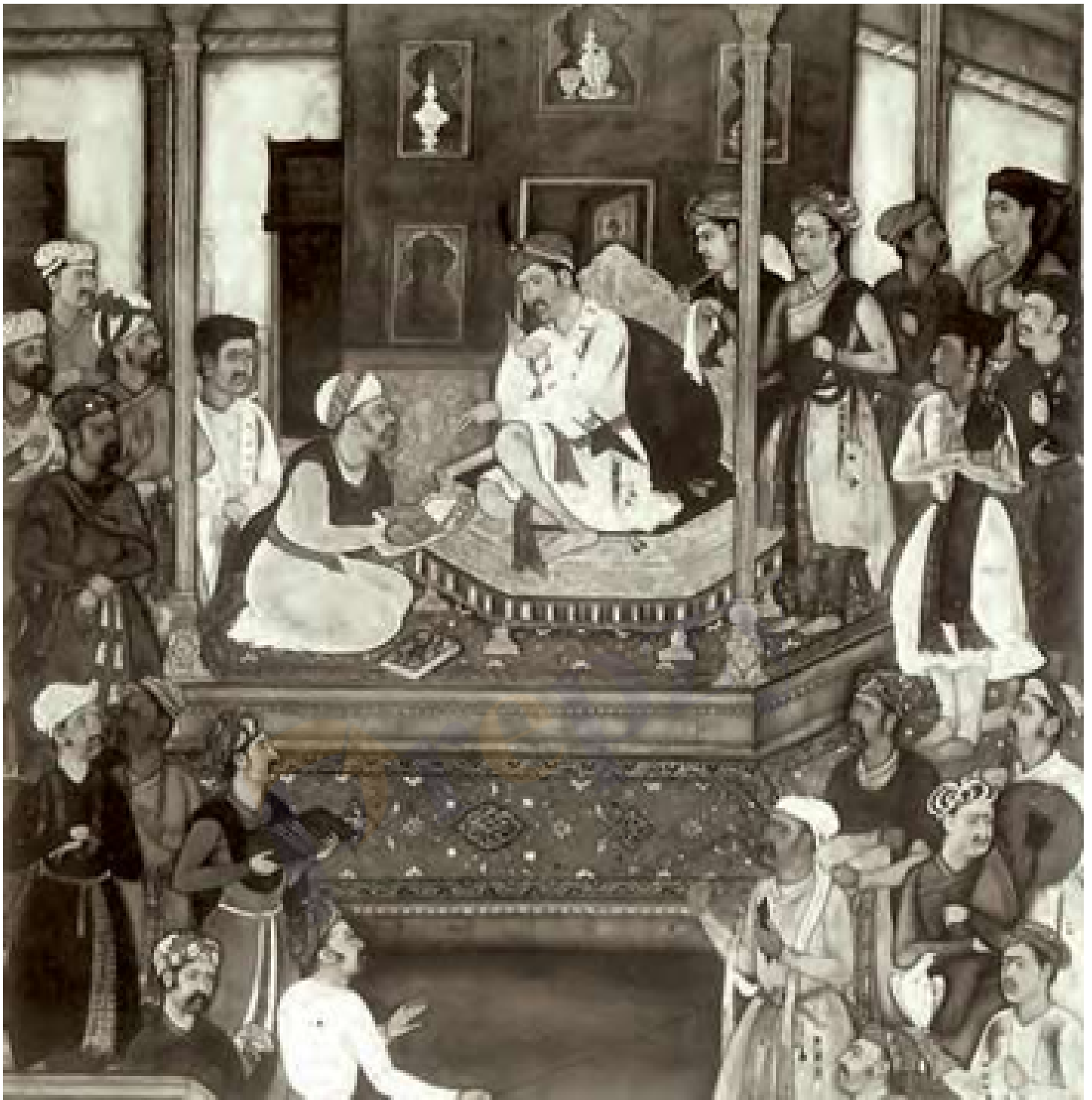


Fig. 6
Akbar receiving the Akbar Nama
from Abul Fazl.

Exam Questions

Q1: What is the Akbar Nama?

Answer: A three-volume history of Akbar's reign written by Abul Fazl.

Q2: What topics does the Ain-i Akbari cover?

Answer: Administration, army, revenues, geography, and culture of Akbar's empire.

Nur Jahan's Influence in Jahangir's Court

Mehrunnisa, known as Nur Jahan after marrying Emperor Jahangir in 1611, was a powerful and loyal queen. Jahangir honored her by issuing silver coins bearing her name and issuing royal decrees (farmans) under her authority. Her farmans were official orders sealed with stamps and often included numerological charts symbolizing power and harmony.

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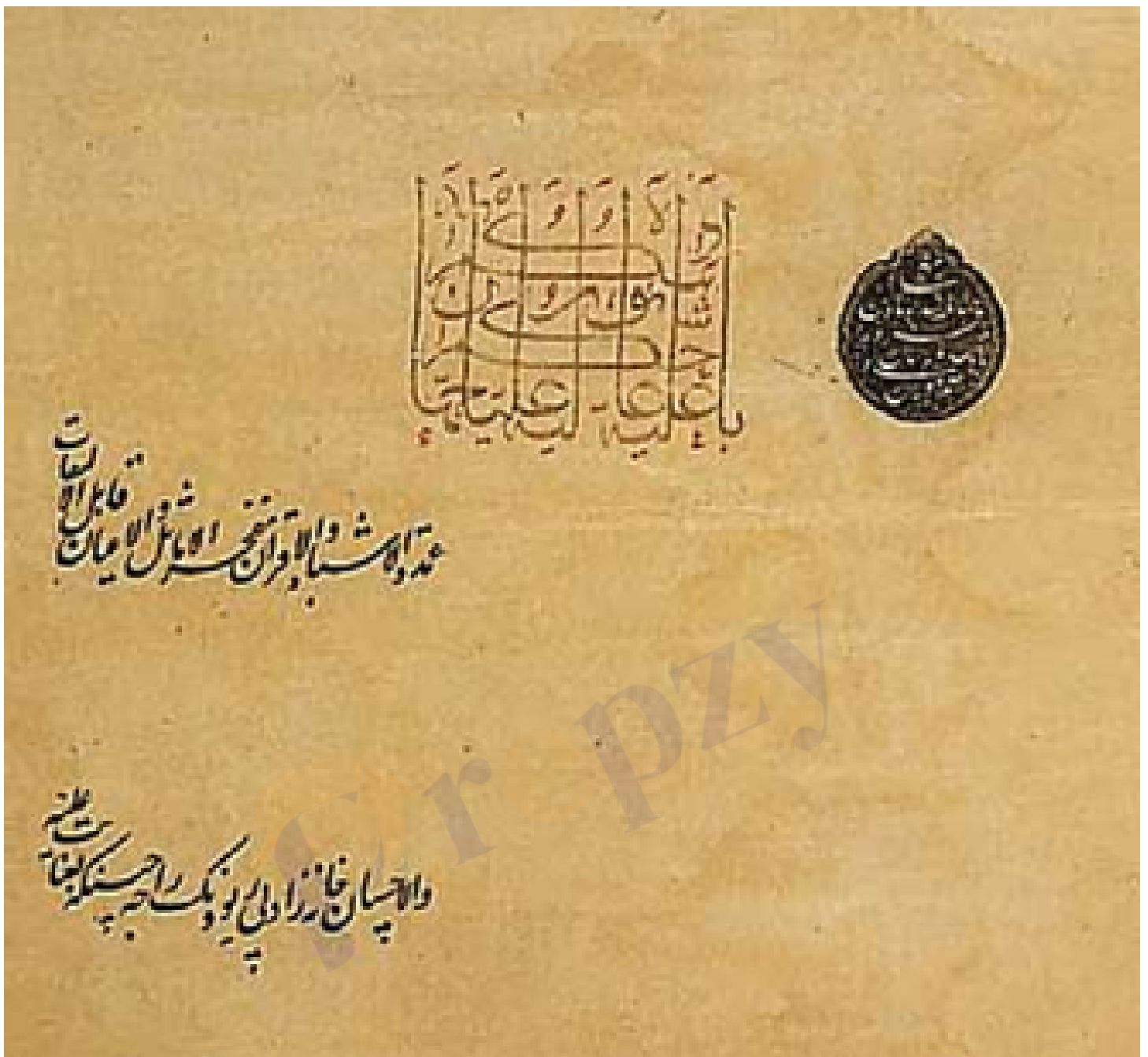


Fig. 7
Nur Jahan's farman.

Exam Questions

Q1: Who was Nur Jahan?

Answer: The influential wife of Emperor Jahangir who played a significant role in governance.

Q2: What is a farman?

Answer: A royal decree or official order issued by the emperor or empress.

Sulh-i Kul Policy

Jahangir described his father Akbar's policy of sulh-i kul, meaning "universal peace," which promoted tolerance and acceptance of all religions and beliefs within the empire. This policy allowed Sunnis, Shias, Christians, and Jews to worship freely and discouraged intolerance.

Exam Questions

Q1: What does sulh-i kul mean?

Answer: Universal peace and tolerance towards all religions and beliefs.

Q2: How was sulh-i kul reflected in Akbar's empire?

Answer: Different religious communities worshipped together peacefully, and intolerance was discouraged.

The Mughal Empire in the Seventeenth Century and After

The Mughal Empire's administrative and military efficiency led to economic prosperity, but wealth was unevenly distributed. A small elite of high-ranking mansabdars received a large share of revenue, while peasants and artisans lived in poverty. Over time, regional governors gained power and established independent identities, even while recognizing the Mughal emperor nominally. This marked the beginning of the empire's decline.

Exam Questions

Q1: What was the economic condition of peasants under the Mughals?

Answer: Many peasants lived in poverty with little surplus to invest, while the elite controlled most wealth.

Q2: How did the power of regional governors affect the Mughal Empire?

Answer: They became powerful centers of authority, leading to the empire's fragmentation.

Solved Examples

Example 1: Explain the significance of the First Battle of Panipat.

Solution: The First Battle of Panipat in 1526 was significant because Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi, marking the beginning of the Mughal Empire in India. Babur's use of cannons gave him a technological advantage that helped secure victory.

Example 2: Describe the mansabdari system.

Solution: The mansabdari system was a ranking system used by the Mughals to organize their nobility and military. Mansabdars held ranks called zat, which determined their salary and the number of cavalymen (sawars) they had to maintain. They were paid through jagirs, revenue assignments from the empire.

Practice Set

Easy

- Who was the first Mughal emperor?
- What is the Red Fort?
- Define zamindar.

Moderate

- Explain the policy of sulh-i kul.
- What was the role of Abul Fazl in Akbar's court?
- Describe the mansabdari system and its importance.

Challenging

- Discuss the economic inequalities during the Mughal Empire and their consequences.
- Analyze the impact of Mughal-Rajput relations on the stability of the empire.
- Explain the significance of the Ain-i Akbari in understanding Mughal administration.

Answer Key

- **First Mughal emperor:** Babur
- **Red Fort:** A historic fort in Delhi, residence of Mughal emperors, and site of Independence Day celebrations.
- **Zamindar:** An intermediary who collected taxes from peasants.
- **Sulh-i kul:** Policy of universal peace and religious tolerance.
- **Abul Fazl:** Court historian and author of the Akbar Nama.
- **Mansabdari system:** A ranking and administrative system organizing nobles and military officers.
- **Economic inequalities:** Wealth concentrated among elites, peasants impoverished, leading to social tensions.
- **Mughal-Rajput relations:** Alliances through marriage and diplomacy helped maintain stability.
- **Ain-i Akbari:** Detailed record of administration, economy, and culture under Akbar.

Quick Reference

- **Babur:** Founder of the Mughal Empire, victorious at Panipat (1526).
- **Akbar:** Mughal emperor known for administrative reforms and sulh-i kul policy.
- **Mansabdari system:** Mughal ranking system for nobles and military officers.
- **Zabt system:** Revenue system based on crop surveys and fixed cash taxes.
- **Nur Jahan:** Influential Mughal empress and political figure.
- **Akbar Nama:** Historical record of Akbar's reign by Abul Fazl.
- **Red Fort:** Mughal fort in Delhi, symbol of imperial power.

Glossary

- **Coparcenary inheritance:** Division of inheritance among all sons.
- **Farman:** Royal decree or order.
- **Jagir:** Revenue assignment given to mansabdars as salary.
- **Mansabdar:** Mughal official holding a rank and military responsibility.
- **Sawar:** Cavalry soldier maintained by a mansabdar.
- **Sulh-i kul:** Policy of universal peace and religious tolerance.
- **Zamindar:** Tax collector or local chieftain.
- **Zabt:** Revenue system based on land surveys and fixed cash taxes.

| Year | Event | Significance |
|------|-------------------------|---|
| 1526 | First Battle of Panipat | Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi, establishing Mughal rule in India. |

| | | |
|-----------|----------------------------|---|
| 1556-1605 | Akbar's reign | Expansion of empire, administrative reforms, and sulh-i kul policy. |
| 1611 | Nur Jahan married Jahangir | Nur Jahan gained political influence in the Mughal court. |
| 1638 | Construction of Red Fort | Symbol of Mughal imperial power and architectural achievement. |
| 1658-1707 | Aurangzeb's reign | Further expansion and eventual decline of Mughal authority. |

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