



# MONASH University

**“For Nation, King, and Company”: William Norris, two English East  
India companies, and a forgotten embassy to Mughal India,  
1699–1702**

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## Abstract

In 1699, English ambassador William Norris was dispatched by King William III and a new East India Company on an embassy to Mughal India. Equipped with two sets of instructions – one from the Company, the other from the Crown – Norris set out to renegotiate the terms of England's lucrative trade with India and to repair relations between the English and the Mughal state, which had been damaged by recent episodes of maritime violence on the Indian Ocean.

The ambassador achieved neither objective and managed to spend £80,000 of company funds – an enormous sum for the period. Through a close examination of the unpublished and largely neglected diaries of William Norris, which I have transcribed in full, my thesis aims to produce a comprehensive analysis of the embassy and to understand the different pressures that doomed it. I argue that, while Norris encountered many of the problems common to European embassies in early modern Asia, three extraordinary and interconnected challenges combined to defeat his mission.

The first was the 'Old-New Company conflict' – a fierce battle among the English that stemmed from a major upheaval to England's East India trade at the end of the seventeenth century. In 1698, by an Act of Parliament approved by William III, a new joint-stock company was formed that was designed to completely replace the existing East India Company, which had been operating in India for almost a century. This decision forced Norris to represent the New Company while facing off against the Old Company, which, for its part, fought ruthlessly to tear down the embassy.

The second major factor behind Norris's downfall stemmed from the unique structure of the embassy itself, and is what I have labelled the 'hybrid-embassy problem'. As an ambassador appointed by the king but funded by the New Company, Norris was handed two different sets of objectives: one from the state, which covered issues of royal diplomacy, and the other from the New Company, which concerned matters of trade. Balancing the Company's mercantile interests with the statelier objectives of the Crown became highly problematic.

The third obstacle, the 'maritime violence scandal', involved European attacks on Indian shipping and the Mughal government's attempts to safeguard against it. The scandal, concerning the English, the Mughal government, and some wealthy Gujarati merchants, came to the fore at the very moment Norris approached the Mughal court. This crisis, in turn, caused Mughal officials to make demands of Norris that he refused to fulfill, convinced that to do so would be in direct violation of his duty to the king.

In recent years, scholars have acknowledged that the road from the East India Company's early trade in South Asia to the British Raj was a bumpy one, that the Company was less unified than previously thought, and that Britain's empire was never, as traditional historians saw it, predetermined. Few, however, have focused their attention on the brief phase at the turn of the seventeenth century when the Company – which would soon go on to establish control over large swathes of the Indian subcontinent – very nearly collapsed, and when the English appeared on the brink of expulsion from India. By examining the Norris embassy and the reasons behind its failure, my thesis not only sheds light on a largely neglected episode in the history of the English in India, but also builds on recent scholarship that understands the road to the British Empire as haphazard, chaotic, and littered with failures and surprises.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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## CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	5
List of illustrations and maps.....	7
Introduction.....	8
1 Thomas Roe and the First English Embassy to Mughal India.....	45
2 A Company in Crisis.....	66
3 The New East India Company.....	88
4 ‘Punctilios and points of honour’: Burning bridges in Masulipatnam.....	109
5 ‘All manner of villanys’: English companies at war in Surat.....	144
6 ‘Securing the seas’: Failure and fear at the Mughal court.....	171
7 ‘No better than a prisoner’: Embassy detained at Brahmapuri.....	214
8 ‘Unheard of insolent behaviour’: A chilly reception at Surat.....	242
Conclusion.....	260
Bibliography.....	273

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1	Map showing the route of the Norris embassy to the Mughal court September 1699–April 1701..... <b>43</b>
Figure 2	Map showing the major trading ports around the Indian Ocean c. 1700..... <b>44</b>
Figure 3	View of the Harbour of Sūrāt (Gujarāt)..... <b>143</b>
Figure 4	Portrait of Aurangzeb commissioned by William Norris..... <b>170</b>

## Introduction

On his return journey from the Mughal emperor's court in November 1701, English ambassador William Norris was confronted with an alarming sight. Blocking his path forward just a mile north of Brahmapuri, were thousands of armed Mughal soldiers, many of them on horseback, and the lead officers astride towering elephants. To add to this dramatic display of military muscle, 24 cannons were planted across the road, aimed directly at the approaching embassy and its tiny retinue of 70 soldiers. As the English edged tentatively towards the blockade, the Indian force, with its weapons drawn, closed in, and swiftly surrounded them. 'Out of reach of our guns', the ambassador dismounted his horse and, with the rest of the English, 'drew up in a square body on foot', watching aghast as several Mughal officers advanced towards them.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking through the ambassador's interpreter, Rustamji, the lead officer of the army announced that he had received orders from the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, to prevent Norris from departing India. Hopelessly outnumbered, the ambassador 'thought it most advisable to make a virtue out of necessity' and allowed his embassy to be escorted to Brahmapuri, where he set up camp under the army's watchful guard.<sup>2</sup> So began Norris's two-month-long detainment at the hands of Mughal officials. The ambassador and his retinue were held prisoner by the *nawab* (ruler of the province in which Brahmapuri was located), Firuz Jang, until Aurangzeb finally authorised their release. Infuriated by his detention, Norris described his captors as 'the vilest, basest wretches in the whole creation', and prayed that he would escape 'away from this detested place', home to his beloved England.<sup>3</sup> The ambassador's capture and subsequent imprisonment at Brahmapuri was a final humiliation for the Norris embassy, which had begun more than two years earlier.

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<sup>1</sup> William Norris. *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume III: September 1701–March 1702. Unpublished. National Archives, Kew, CO 77/50, fol. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 199.



While the Norris embassy to Mughal India ended in failure, it started out with grand expectations. Norris's delegation was large, well-funded, and it travelled with a royal authority. As such, it stands alongside far more famous embassies such as Thomas Roe's delegation to Mughal India in 1615, or George Macartney's mission to Qing China in 1793.<sup>4</sup> Norris sailed from London in April 1699, bound for the port city of Masulipatnam on India's Coromandel Coast. Equipped with two sets of instructions – one from a newly-established East India Company, the other from the Crown – Norris set out to obtain a *farman* (a written decree granted by the Mughal emperor) that would provide favourable trading conditions for the company, and to repair relations between the English and the Mughal state, which had been badly damaged by recent acts of European violence on the Indian Ocean. Flanked by four of the king's warships and carrying expensive gifts for the Mughal emperor and other officials at court, Norris seemed well prepared to complete his mission.

There were reasons for this initial confidence. Not only was the embassy well-armed and generously financed, but the English had more than 100 years of trading experience in South Asia by the time Norris arrived there. At the turn of the seventeenth century, the East India Company's trading factories and settlements dotted the South Asian coastline, where the English not only carried out their business, but coined money, built fortifications and settlements, and established their own laws and courts.<sup>5</sup> The English also had direct experience with royal embassies: Thomas Roe's delegation to the court of Jahangir (1615–1619) was judged a success by his contemporaries because it gained provisional trading rights that allowed the East India Company to set up important footholds in India.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The embassies of Roe and Macartney have generated numerous studies in recent years. Another example of an early modern European embassy to Asia that is comparable to Norris's in scale is Dutch ambassador Joan Josua Ketelaar's embassy to Mughal India in 1711.

<sup>5</sup> Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> While Roe's embassy was considered a moderate success at the time, it has been judged differently even in recent literature, from an outright failure (Sanjay Subrahmanyam) to a resounding success (J.C. Sharman and Andrew Phillips). See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris', in *The Worlds of the East India Company*, eds. Bowen, H.V., Lincoln,

Unlike Roe, however, Norris achieved none of his objectives and managed to spend £80,000 of Company funds – an enormous sum for the period. He left India with tensions between the English and the Mughal government at an all-time high, and met an untimely death, from dysentery, on his voyage home to England. Norris's failed mission to Aurangzeb, which stretched out across three years from 1699 to 1702, was one of only two royal English embassies ever dispatched to Mughal India. While the first embassy, led by Roe, has been well documented, Norris and his mission to the Mughal court have been almost entirely neglected in historical scholarship. It is not difficult to understand why. Whereas excerpts of Roe's account of his mission to Jahangir – a set of diaries and written correspondence – were first transcribed in 1625, and the source published in its entirety in 1899, Norris's account has remained scattered and largely unknown.<sup>7</sup> This dramatically different treatment has much to do with the perceived outcomes of each embassy. On its return to England in 1619, Roe and his embassy were celebrated by the Company, and the tale of his mission to the Mughal court spread widely.<sup>8</sup> After the full version of Roe's account was published at the turn of the nineteenth century, moreover, the inaugural English ambassador's embassy was hailed as a key first step on the road to the British empire.

In Norris's case, in contrast, the Company opted to put the expensive debacle of the embassy behind it. It seemed easiest for everyone simply to forget it. The Norris embassy was, in addition, overshadowed by the Company's dramatic advancements in India during the eighteenth century, where the organisation grew from participating as a minor player in the

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Margarette, and Rigby, Nigel (Leicester: The Boydell Press, 2002); J.C. Sharman and Andrew Phillips, *Outsourcing Empire: How Company-States Made the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Excerpts of Roe's diary were first published in Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimes, Contayning a History of the World, in Sea Voyages, & Lande Travels, by Englishmen and others* (London, 1625); Roe's diary was transcribed and published in its entirety for the first time in 1899, in William Foster, ed., *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul 1615–1619: As Narrated in his Journal and Correspondence* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1899).

<sup>8</sup> The Company released excerpts of Roe's diary to Samuel Purchas for his popular compendium of travel narratives, *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, on the condition that only excerpts that painted the English in a positive light were included in the work. See JP. Helfers, 'The Explorer or the Pilgrim? Modern Critical Opinion and the Editorial Methods of Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas', *Studies in Philology* 94, no. 2 (1997): 168.

Mughal empire to acting as a regional powerbroker. As a result, Norris's diaries have remained collecting dust in their archives for the better part of four centuries. Aside from one posthumously published book by Indian scholar Harihar Das, written in 1930s and 40s England, there have been no sustained studies of the English mission that make use of Norris's diaries.<sup>9</sup>

My thesis seeks to provide the first comprehensive analysis of Norris's failed embassy to Mughal India since Das's book written almost a century ago. For an embassy seemingly so well-equipped, its dramatic failure is striking. My research, therefore, seeks to answer a basic but vital question: 'Why did the Norris embassy fail'? It does so through a close examination of the ambassador's handwritten account of his journey – a set of four diaries that has never been published but which I have transcribed in full. This unwieldy, approximately 250,000-word, four-volume, handwritten document is divided over two separate archives in the United Kingdom – two volumes in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and the other two in the National Archives in Kew.<sup>10</sup> An additional two volumes of the diary have not survived.<sup>11</sup> Better than any other source, the Norris diaries illuminate this forgotten historical episode and reveal that three extraordinary and interconnected factors, above all others, doomed the ambassador. My thesis aims to disentangle these factors and work through their devastating impact on Norris's mission. Only once we do this, I argue, can we properly understand this key moment of encounter between Europe and Asia. At the same time, interpreting why the Norris embassy

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<sup>9</sup> Harihar Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699–1702)*, ed. S.C. Sarkar (Calcutta: Mukhopadhyay, 1959); Other works have discussed the embassy, but it is not their primary focus. For recent examples, see Guido Van Meersbergen, "'Intirely the Kings Vassalls': East India Company Gifting Practices and Anglo-Mughal Political Exchange (c. 1670–1720)", *Diplomatica* 2, no. 2 (2020); Guido van Meersbergen, 'The Diplomatic Repertoires of the East India Companies in Mughal South Asia, 1608–1717', *The Historical Journal* 62, no. 4 (2019); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris', eds. H.V. Bowen, Margaret Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby, *The Worlds of the East India Company* (Leicester: The Boydell Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volumes 1–2, unpublished, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson Collection, C.912 and C.913; William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volumes 3–4, unpublished, National Archives, Kew, CO 77/50 and CO 77/51.

<sup>11</sup> Das noted that the missing volumes were received by the Colonial Records Office in 1876. They have not been cited since then. Harihar Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699–1702)*. Original manuscript, 14 May 1945, typescript, Rawlinson Collection, Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, pp. 7–8.

failed gives us unique insights into the history of early modern diplomacy, the East India Company, and the trajectory of the British Empire.

So, what went wrong? This thesis argues that, while part of the answer lies in the standard obstacles faced by most European embassies sent to early modern Asia, such as language barriers, disease, and shortages of funds, it was three exceptional and interconnected problems that were ultimately responsible for the Norris embassy's downfall. I refer to these three problems as the 'Old-New Company conflict', the 'hybrid embassy problem', and the 'maritime violence scandal'. The first problem – the Old-New Company conflict – stemmed from a major transformation in England's East India trade, which forced Norris to represent the members of two competing English East India Companies in Mughal India, while one of those companies waged a coordinated and protracted war against him. In 1698 in London, by an Act of Parliament approved by William III, a new joint-stock company was formed that was designed to completely replace the existing East India Company, which had been operating in India for almost a century. The 'New Company', as it was commonly referred to, received a royal charter from the king which allowed it to exercise the same monopoly on English trade in Asia as, and in place of, its predecessor. The existing, or 'Old Company', the parliamentary act stipulated, would be phased out over the following three years.

The overhaul came in response to a push by members of the English government and the wider public to end the Company's trade monopoly in Asia. Systemic private trade and other abuses of power carried out by the Old Company agents in India were commonly cited by critics as reasons for the company to be shut down. William III, on the other hand, saw the dispute as an opportunity to bolster the Crown's coffers, which had been depleted by the Nine Years' War with France, and so forced the Old and New Companies to compete for the charter. The New Company won out with an unbeatable offer to the king of £2 million. Part

of Norris's role as ambassador in India was to inform the Mughal authorities of the change and to lend credibility to the New Company in the face of its more influential forerunner.

The Old-New Company conflict turned what would have been, for any ambassador, a daunting task into an almost impossible mission. The key source of tension was that the Old Company merchants were still conducting their business in India. From the outset, they viewed Norris as a threat to their very livelihoods, and so set out to sabotage the embassy. With a century of experience behind the Old Company, its merchants used their wealth, knowledge, and networks in an elaborate and systematic scheme, involving bribes, violence and other underhand tactics, to bring down Norris and the New Company. While Norris managed to ward off some of their attacks, the Old Company inflicted significant damage to both Norris's and the New Company's reputations in India. To complicate matters further, throughout the embassy, debate raged in London over whether the Old Company should continue as a corporation and merge with the New Company or, as the 1698 Parliamentary Act stated, face termination in September 1701. In the two and a half years Norris spent in India, he received a stream of conflicting reports about the fate of the two companies. Because this ongoing debate remained unresolved until well after the embassy had ended, the purpose of the ambassador's mission and who or what he represented in India became irreversibly muddled – and not just to Norris and rest of the English. The Mughal government and other local authorities frequently demanded clarification on the issue and exploited the divisions between the companies for their own advantage and profit. My thesis unpacks the Old-New Company conflict and shows how it helped to bring down the Norris embassy.

The second major problem experienced by the Norris embassy stemmed from the unique structure of the embassy itself. I have called this the 'hybrid-embassy problem', utilising a framework that builds off the pioneering work done by Rupali Mishra on Roe and

the first English embassy to Mughal India.<sup>12</sup> Unlike most royal embassies in the early modern period, in which ambassadors followed orders given directly to them from their head of state, Norris was expected to represent the interests of both the Crown and the New Company. In this type of embassy, carried out in India on just one other occasion by Roe on his assignment to Jahangir, the trading company nominated the ambassador and funded the entire affair.<sup>13</sup> The Crown, for its part, invested the ambassador with its royal authority, and instructed him to forge diplomatic ties with the Mughal emperor and build up England's prestige. Norris was, therefore, given two different sets of objectives: one from the state, which covered issues of royal diplomacy, and the other from the New Company, which concerned matters of trade. Balancing the Company's mercantile interests with the more diplomatic objectives of the Crown proved enormously complex.

The fundamental tension underlying the hybrid embassy has been recognised by numerous scholars in relation to Roe and the first English embassy to Mughal India.<sup>14</sup> In an innovative study, however, Mishra pushes the idea further, arguing that much of Roe's behaviour on his embassy to Jahangir can be explained by his 'split interests' – his concern about balancing his own interests with those of the Company and the Crown, which 'manifested as a constant anxiety about securing and demonstrating his status and authority'.<sup>15</sup> This anxiety, Mishra has it, led to Roe's belligerent style of diplomacy that, in turn, resulted in difficulty in his exchanges at the Mughal court and with the Company's servants in India. My thesis takes Mishra's argument concerning Roe and applies it to Norris. I show that much of Norris's behaviour in Mughal India can be explained by the anxiety he

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<sup>12</sup> See Rupali Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the Edge: Split Interests in the Roe Embassy to the Mughal Court', *The Journal of British studies* 53, no. 1 (2014), pp. 5-28, and; Rupali Mishra, *A Business of State: Commerce, Politics, and the Birth of the East India Company* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> The East India Company and the Crown also sent a handful of 'hybrid embassies' to the Ottoman Empire and North Africa. Philip Stern has noted that Norris was even 'specifically instructed to model his efforts on agreements between England and the Ottoman empire. He even carried with him copies of those treaties as models'. Stern, *The Company-State*, 165.

<sup>14</sup> An in-depth discussion of the hybrid embassy problem as it related to Roe is included in Chapter One.

<sup>15</sup> Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the Edge', 9.

felt over his role, which developed into an obsession with demonstrating and upholding his royal status. I argue, however, that Norris's loyalties were rather less 'split' than Roe's – while the inaugural ambassador appeared genuinely invested in the success of the East India trade, Norris was often dismissive of the New Company's concerns over their business and uncompromising in his devotion to the Crown. The second ambassador, as a result, consistently prioritised what he saw as the Crown's interests over those of the New Company, often to the detriment of the company. Norris's fixation with demonstrating his royal status, in turn, prompted missed opportunities and burned bridges with Mughal authorities, including the emperor Aurangzeb, as well as causing serious tensions between Norris and the New Company merchants.<sup>16</sup>

The third major problem faced by Norris's embassy – what I refer to as the 'maritime violence scandal' – centred on European violence on the Indian Ocean and the Mughal government's attempts to curtail it. Norris's embassy happened within the context of an unprecedented spike in European attacks on Indian shipping, which resulted from a volatile combination of piracy, privateering, and an ill-conceived war carried out by the Old Company that aimed to force the Mughal government to grant more favourable trading terms to the English.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, part of the reason Norris was sent to India in the first place was to repair England's relationship with the Mughal government, which had been damaged by this violence. During the period of Norris's embassy, the maritime violence scandal became a major source of concern for the Mughal government – not only was it being pressured by the empire's most prominent merchants to take action against Europeans to stop the violence, which was damaging Indian trade, but Aurangzeb had also recently lost some of his own

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<sup>16</sup> The Norris Diaries contain almost daily references to the ambassador's fixation with maintaining and demonstrating his royal authority. See, for example, w fol. 7.

<sup>17</sup> For an excellent analysis of the Old Company's war against the Mughal government and its dramatic consequences, see Margaret R. Hunt and Philip J. Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion: A Soldier's Diary of the 1689 Siege of Bombay, with Related Documents* (St Martin's: Bedford, 2015).

ships to such attacks – some of which were carried out by notorious English pirates like Henry Every and William Kidd.<sup>18</sup>

When Norris came along, therefore, the Mughal government sought to use the English embassy to its advantage. Aurangzeb promised Norris that he would grant the desired trading rights to the New Company if the ambassador would just perform one task – sign a *muchalka* (a written obligation or bond) guaranteeing protection for Mughal shipping against future acts of European piracy. Protection would come in the form of ship convoys to safely guard Mughal ships along the Indian Ocean’s busy trading routes, as well as compensation for losses incurred at the hands of European pirates. Norris, however, refused Aurangzeb’s request. Put simply, this was a demand with which the ambassador felt he could not comply. Convinced that entering into such an agreement ‘would forever enslave the English to this unsufferable [Mughal] government’ and would therefore be in direct violation of his duty to the king and the English nation, Norris rejected the Mughal government’s repeated demands to sign the *muchalka*.<sup>19</sup> The ambassador also believed he would be seized and held to account for English maritime attacks that occurred while he resided at the Mughal court, and so he and his retinue fled the court in November 1701, bringing an abrupt end to his negotiations.

As this thesis will show, Norris experienced many other difficulties in addition to these three major challenges to his embassy – monsoonal weather, illness, and administrative delays, to name a few. But from a close analysis of Norris’s diaries – by far the most detailed and comprehensive account of the embassy that exists – this thesis demonstrates that the volatile combination of the Old-New Company conflict, the hybrid-embassy problem, and the maritime violence scandal, ultimately brought the embassy undone.

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<sup>18</sup> Every’s capture of Aurangzeb’s vessel, the *Ganj-i-Sawai* was one of the most lucrative attacks on Mughal shipping ever recorded. For a recent overview of the episode, see Srinivas Reddy, ‘Disrupting Mughal Imperialism: Piracy and Plunder on the Indian Ocean’, *The Asian Review of World Histories* 8, no. 1 (2020): 135–136; On Kidd, see, for example, John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 188–190.

<sup>19</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 62.



Why is it useful to dissect the embassy in this manner, to reveal the extent of the English failure and the reasons behind it? I argue that the abject failure of the Norris embassy calls into question older narratives about the inexorable rise of the British empire, and speaks to current debates over the trajectory of the East India Company in early modern India. Recent scholarship has acknowledged that the road from the East India Company's early trade in South Asia to the British Raj was a bumpy one, that the Company was less unified than previously thought, and that Britain's empire was never, as traditional historians once saw it, predetermined. Few, however, have focused their attention on the brief phase at the turn of the seventeenth century when the Company – which would soon go on to establish control over large swathes of the Indian subcontinent – very nearly collapsed, and when the English appeared on the brink of expulsion from India. By examining the Norris embassy and the reasons behind its failure, my thesis not only sheds light on a rare and largely forgotten episode in the history of the English in India, but also builds on recent scholarship that shows the road to the British Empire as haphazard, chaotic, and littered with failures and surprises. I maintain, furthermore, that the Norris embassy represents a zenith of chaos and failure for the English in Mughal India, something that has previously been overlooked.

A new study of the Norris embassy also helps us to better understand the nature of early modern diplomacy, and the ways in which Europeans understood and portrayed their encounters with Asia. Scholars have applied a range of frameworks to understand early English ambassadors to Asia. Some argue that these actors floundered in Asian environments because of an unbridgeable gap between their own cultures and those of their Asian counterparts.<sup>20</sup> Others argue that royal embassies tended not to work because of their rigid structure, and that trade delegations were a much more effective method of diplomacy in the

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<sup>20</sup> For the originator of this line of argument, see Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

long term because they were more adaptable to Asian settings.<sup>21</sup> Still others maintain that we should view such early ambassadors through the lens of Edward Said's classic work, *Orientalism* – that is, understanding their depictions of Asia as the origin of later European violence and control.<sup>22</sup>

Norris's diaries – a rich, highly detailed, and, until now, largely untapped resource – give a rare insight into the mindset and perspectives of an early modern royal ambassador encountering South Asia for the first time, and reveal a worldview heavily influenced by preconceived notions of identity and culture, as well as personal desires and ambitions. At the same time, the diaries highlight a measure of connection and understanding between the English and the Mughals at the diplomatic level.<sup>23</sup> The picture I show, overall, is a mixed one. Norris was not a bumbling ambassador unable to make sense of the world around him. Rather, he confronted structural issues fundamental to the hybrid embassy. At the same time, he was far from objective in his portrayal of Mughal society. Instead, in moments of crisis or defeat, he consistently lapsed into descriptive language that can most accurately be labelled as 'proto-orientalist'. Following on from recent literature on Roe, I argue that Norris's use of Orientalist tropes was closely tied to his diplomatic failures and his desire to justify them to his English audience.<sup>24</sup> In these ways, my thesis contributes to the ongoing scholarly debates over cultural commensurability, Orientalism, and the nature of early modern diplomacy in Asia.

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, David Veevers and William Pettigrew, 'Trading Companies and Business Diplomacy in the Early Modern World', *Diplomatica* 2, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>22</sup> For example, see Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600–1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> This line of argument builds mainly on Guido van Meersbergen's recent work. Guido van Meersbergen "'Intirely the Kings Vassalls": East India Company Gifting Practices and Anglo-Mughal Political Exchange (c. 1670–1720)', *Diplomatica* 2, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>24</sup> This argument builds on scholarship on Roe by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Rupali Mishra, and Colin Mitchell, but carries it forward to a new embassy. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris', in *The Worlds of the East India Company*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (Leicester: The Boydell Press, 2002); Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the Edge'; Colin Paul Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Such a complex and dynamic source as the Norris diaries requires careful navigation, and it is my intention in this thesis to tell a history of the embassy that reflects on the nature of its main source, and the complexities inherent in it. What follows is a study that attempts to document the Norris embassy and uncover why it failed, and in so doing, to tell us something more about the history of the East India Company and early modern diplomacy.

### The Norris embassy in scholarly context

In the last decade, a series of innovative studies have transformed how we think about the early East India Company. Scholarship on the trading organisation, however, has a much longer history. The journey began in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when scholars depicted the Company's initial activity in India as the starting point on a linear pathway to the British Empire. This wave of scholarship was sympathetic to Britain's imperial ambitions and tended to vastly overestimate the authority of the Company in India during the seventeenth century. Writing at the height of Britain's imperial expansion, William Foster, for example, viewed the Company's activities at the beginning of the seventeenth century as 'the first step in a march of conquest'.<sup>25</sup> James Talboys Wheeler similarly described a clear trajectory from the Company's early trade to the British Raj. In his words, 'a single association of British traders established factories which grew into fortresses, and governed native towns which became the capitals of a British empire'.<sup>26</sup> This 'march of events', Wheeler proudly declared, 'is without a parallel in the annals of the world'.<sup>27</sup> This preliminary body of literature on the Company also aimed to further the colonial project in India by making a historical claim to the subcontinent.<sup>28</sup> For these historians, two centuries of

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<sup>25</sup> William Foster, ed., *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul 1615–1619: As Narrated in his Journal and Correspondence* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1899): 7.

<sup>26</sup> James Talboys Wheeler, *India Under British Rule from the Foundation of The East India Company* (London: Macmillan and Co: 1886): x.

<sup>27</sup> Wheeler, *India Under British Rule*.

<sup>28</sup> Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 207–208.

the Company's involvement in India seemed to provide all the justification necessary for Britain's subsequent rule over it.

After decolonisation, historians moved away from such celebratory interpretations of the rise of the British Empire. They began to understand the history of the East India Company in India as divided by the Battle of Plassey (1757) into two distinct eras - the trading era and the imperial era.<sup>29</sup> In these accounts, the early Company was seen as a benign organisation with no ambitions to rule India, interested solely in advancing its trade. It was only in the second era, after it had been somewhat unwillingly dragged into a position of authority, that the Company began to set its sights on government.<sup>30</sup> Historians within this school also emphasised that the seventeenth century was characterised by cooperation and interdependence between the Company merchants and Indians.<sup>31</sup> This 'Age of Partnership', as some understood it, saw the English working within the pre-existing social, economic, and political confines of the Mughal state, and in collaboration with Indians, rather than in the coloniser-colonised-style relationship imagined by historians in the first wave of literature on the Company.<sup>32</sup>

The direction of East India Company scholarship shifted course once again with the publication of Philip Stern's, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India*, in 2011.<sup>33</sup> In this hugely influential study, Stern argues that the Company was far from a group of benevolent traders. In his view, the

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<sup>29</sup> For a recent explanation of why the scholarship is divided by this battle and the problems associated with this, see David Veevers, "'The Company as Their Lords and the Deputy as a Great Rajah': Imperial Expansion and the English East India Company on the West Coast of Sumatra, 1685–1730", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no.5 (2013): 706.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, C. A. Bayly, *Indian society and the making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); P. J. Marshall, *Trade and Conquest: Studies on the Rise of British Dominance in India* (London: Variorum, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> David Veevers, 'The Contested State: Political Authority and the Decentred Foundations of the Early Modern Colonial State in Asia', in *The East India Company, 1600–1857: Essays on Anglo-Indian connection*, ed. William A Pettigrew and Mahesh Gopalan (London: Routledge, 2017): p. 175.

<sup>32</sup> Blair B Kling and M. N Pearson, *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia Before Dominion* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979).

<sup>33</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*.

Company had ambitions to exercise sovereignty in Asia from the outset. From the mid-seventeenth century, Stern claims, the Company thought and acted like a political entity separate to the Crown, a unified ‘body politic’ overseen by the Company’s Court of Committees in London that coined money, built institutions, raised taxes, waged war, and conducted diplomacy.<sup>34</sup> ‘Though theoretically dependent on the Crown’, Stern argues further, the Company in practice ‘exercised a great deal of autonomy’, gaining its authority from a mixture of Asian and English grants at the state and local levels, and ‘its own deliberate and aggressive political behaviour’ in Asian spaces.<sup>35</sup> My analysis of the Norris embassy adopts Stern’s understanding of the Old Company as an aggressive political body acting largely independently of the state. Indeed, I argue that the case of the Norris embassy demonstrates that the Old Company was not only acting independently of the Crown, but in open defiance of it, making for an exceptional situation in the history of the English in India. These attempts to sabotage the Norris embassy at every turn show that the Old Company leaders and servants were willing to do anything to protect the political sovereignty they had built for themselves in India over the previous century, even if it meant acting against their own king.

Following Stern’s work, East India Company scholars shifted their focus to the political character of the Company in the seventeenth century, showing how, during this period, a complex and dynamic foundation was established on which the Company would eventually build its empire.<sup>36</sup> One notable example of this recent literature that is also highly relevant to my study of the Norris embassy comes from Rupali Mishra. Like Stern, Mishra recognises the essentially political nature of the early East India Company and presents it as a ‘centralized’ operation ‘based in London and rooted in that time and place’.<sup>37</sup> Where Mishra diverges from Stern, however, is in her understanding of the state’s relationship with the

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<sup>34</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 4–6.

<sup>35</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 6, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Veevers, ‘The Contested State’, 176.

<sup>37</sup> Mishra, *A Business of State*, 4.

Company and its direct involvement in the East India trade. In contrast to Stern, who argues that the Company thought of itself as a political entity largely separate from the state, Mishra maintains that, from the very beginning, the Company was rooted in and inseparable from the state because of the various charters granted to it by the Crown to carry out its trade in Asia.

Mishra takes this argument further, emphasising the ‘extensive involvement that the state—be it king, Privy Council, or occasionally Parliament—had in the life and functioning of the Company’ in the first half of the seventeenth century, showing how the Crown was directly concerned in the daily operations of the Company, despite them being carried out on the other side of the world.<sup>38</sup> This relationship between the Crown and the Company, Mishra maintains further, was often messy, contradictory and in other ways problematic, but it remained central to the Company’s operations throughout its history. Indeed, the overall trajectory of the Company’s development in India, Mishra concludes, ‘was the product of the unique relationship between the Crown and the Company’.<sup>39</sup> Building on the foundations laid by Mishra, my study of the Norris embassy highlights the complicated relationship between the East India Company and the Crown, and the importance of events in England to the path of English expansion in South Asia. Specifically, I demonstrate how the Crown’s direct interjection into the East India trade by sending the Norris embassy to the Mughal court (whether William III cared much about the embassy’s outcome or not) only added to the overall difficulties the English found themselves with in India, and that the issues associated with Norris simultaneously representing the New Company and the Crown were behind the failure of the embassy overall.

While embracing Stern’s overall view of the political nature of the East India Company in the seventeenth century, some scholars have questioned visions of the early Company in Asia as a coherent body with a set of policies directed from London. They argue

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<sup>38</sup> Mishra, *A Business of State*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Mishra, *A Business of State*, 302.

that the seventeenth-century experience of the Company was far messier, more fragile, partial, and contested than such narratives suggest. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, for example, suggests that we should understand the early Company in South Asia as ‘a loose-knit set of networks and interests, overlapping with those of other Europeans and sometimes even other Asian actors’.<sup>40</sup> Miles Ogborn similarly portrays the Company’s position in India during the early modern period as tenuous, its expansion haphazard and predicated on pragmatic alliances and negotiations with local actors.<sup>41</sup> While David Veevers supports the move away from the benevolent traders ‘myth’, he explicitly warns against the recent trend in East India Company scholarship which views the organisation in its early years as a ‘monolithic institution in which social relationships and political authority in Asia could be sufficiently regulated’.<sup>42</sup> Such narratives, Veevers cautions, are ‘in danger of papering over the cracks, fissures and the generally eclectic nature of early modern colonial state formation’.<sup>43</sup>

Carrying this argument further, Veevers claims that ‘a process of decentralisation’ occurred within the Company in Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, driven by private interests and family networks.<sup>44</sup> This process allowed Company agents to exercise a high degree of political autonomy in Asia, away from the Company directors in London. Company servants living in Asia established and maintained familial, business, and political relationships with Asian actors that aided English expansion over time. In this way, Veevers strongly argues against seeing English expansion in Asia as driven from the metropole and responding to an overall plan. Conversely, he sees the process of English expansion as something that occurred alongside, or in collaboration with Asian states rather than against

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<sup>40</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Hybrid affairs: Cultural histories of the East India companies’, *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 55, no. 3 (2018): 431.

<sup>41</sup> Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Veevers, ‘The Contested State’, 176.

<sup>43</sup> Veevers, ‘The Contested State’, 176.

<sup>44</sup> David Veevers, ‘The Early Modern Colonial State in Asia: Private Agency and Family Networks in the English East India Company’ (PhD thesis, University of Kent at Canterbury, 2015), ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

them through aggression and force.<sup>45</sup> My analysis of the Norris embassy extends this vision of the English as a disunified and often dysfunctional body, whose experience in India, even at the very end of the seventeenth century, was chaotic and ad hoc, characterised by setbacks and major interruptions. Far from a cohesive body directed from the metropole, I demonstrate that the English were not only clinging on to their place in India, but they were fighting each other, and the future of the East India trade was in utter turmoil. If Subrahmanyam understands the early Company as ‘loose-knit’, my thesis presents a picture of a messy entanglement.

Norris arrived in India in the wake of unprecedented episodes of maritime violence. A recent flurry of work on European trading companies in the early modern period explores maritime space, violence and protection in relation to the rise of empires. Traditional narratives on this subject have presented Europeans as wielding total control over the oceans from as early as the sixteenth century due to technological advancements in their shipping. It was this technological superiority on the seas, the old story goes, that enabled the rise of Europe and the subsequent spread of European empires well into the twentieth century.<sup>46</sup> Historians in this traditional school, in addition, tend to view Asian rulers as inherently land-focused and uninterested in extending their influence on the waters surrounding their dominions.<sup>47</sup> Writing in 1988, one scholar emphasised the ‘impotence of the Moguls in the

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<sup>45</sup> David Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 5; For a similar view, see Ghulam Nadri, ‘The English and Dutch East India Companies and Indian merchants in Surat in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Interdependence, competition, and contestation, in *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, eds. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mossert (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Carlo Cipolla, *Guns, Sails, & Empires: Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion, 1400–1700* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965).

<sup>47</sup> For recent overviews of this traditional view, see Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014): 135–140; Sebastian R. Prange and Robert J. Antony, ‘Piracy in Asian Waters Part 2: Piracy, Sovereignty, and the Early Modern Asian State—An Introduction’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 17, no. 1 (2013): 1–7.



face of European naval superiority’ under Aurangzeb’s reign.<sup>48</sup> ‘Handicapped by the lack of a fleet to police the Indian seas’, they argued, Aurangzeb was forced to ‘acquiesce to European brigandage’.<sup>49</sup> It was this very disinterest in the sea, they argue further, that led to the downfall of the Mughal Empire and facilitated the rise of the British.

Historians have since challenged these ideas, however, instead showing how, even though Asian states may not have been able to match European maritime technology with their own naval fleets, they exercised substantial influence over the seas – and Europeans on the seas – in other ways. In an important study, Adam Clulow demonstrates how the Tokugawa Bakufu, ‘a state with very limited maritime resources’, was able to render the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the world’s strongest maritime force, essentially powerless in the seas around Japan.<sup>50</sup> It was able to do so, he argues, not by combatting the Dutch with a navy, for Tokugawa Japan had ‘no force worthy of such a name’, but by constraining them through a range of laws and ‘legal markers’, such as the system of maritime passes known as *shuinjo*.<sup>51</sup> Others have noted the ways in which Asian governments forced Europeans to cooperate on the sea by threatening to hinder their trading activities on land.<sup>52</sup> Ashin Das Gupta has called this the ‘balance of blackmail’, demonstrating how the Mughal government threatened the trade of the English and Dutch East India Companies if they attacked Indian shipping.<sup>53</sup> Nazer Aziz Anjum has likewise argued that the Mughal

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<sup>48</sup> Naim Farooqui, ‘Moguls, Ottomans, and Pilgrims: Protecting the Routes to Mecca in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, *The International History Review* 10, no. 2 (1988): 211.

<sup>49</sup> Farooqui, ‘Moguls, Ottomans, and Pilgrims’, 211.

<sup>50</sup> Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*, 139.

<sup>51</sup> Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*, 139; Lauren Benton has also undertaken pioneering research in this area, focusing on maritime law, territory and sovereignty in the Atlantic Ocean. See Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> For a slightly different argument, Tonio Andrade maintains that Asian powers successfully adopted and adapted European maritime technology in this period to ‘beat Europeans at their own game’. Tonio Andrade, ‘Beyond Guns, Germs, and Steel: European Expansion and Maritime Asia, 1400–1750’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 14 (2010): 165.

<sup>53</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, ‘The Maritime Merchant and Indian History’, reprinted in Ashin Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500–1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 30; For a similar argument, to Das Gupta’s, see Farat Hasan, ‘Conflict and Cooperation in Anglo-

administration, even though it lacked a naval force, was ‘in a position to counter the strength of the European companies on the ocean by threat of seizure of their men and merchandise on the land’, and did so ‘fairly effectively’ throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>54</sup>

My thesis lends further support to the argument that Asian governments, even at the turn of the seventeenth century, were able to curtail European maritime power, despite their own weakness on the sea. The ambassador’s written account shows that the English at this time, despite their maritime prowess, were frequently at the mercy of the Mughal government’s imperial edicts around shipping and trade on the Indian Ocean, and that the Old Company was even forced, despite much protest, to provide fleets to safely convoy Mughal shipping across the seas. The failure of Norris’s embassy, I argue further, was in part a result of Aurangzeb’s decision to further clamp down on European maritime violence, which involved the ruler refusing to grant trading rights to the New Company unless Norris agreed to sign a *muchalka*. On the other hand, however, the embassy demonstrates the complexities involved in maintaining the ‘balance of blackmail’, and reveals that it was increasingly difficult for Aurangzeb to keep the Europeans in check on the Indian Ocean. While Norris’s embassy was defeated, Aurangzeb also failed to achieve what he wanted out of his negotiations with the ambassador, despite the government chasing down and imprisoning Norris in an attempt to pressure the ambassador into signing the agreement. This was not, therefore, an open-and-shut case of Mughal strength and English weakness (or vice versa) but rather an episode that illustrates the complexities, contradictions, and confusion involved in early modern European encounters with Asia.

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Mughal Trade Relations during the Reign of Aurangzeb’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 34, no. 4 (1991).

<sup>54</sup> Anjum, Nazer Aziz. ‘Indian Shipping and Security on the Seas in the Days of the Mughal Empire’. *Studies in People’s History* 2, no. 2 (2015): 167; See also, See also, Farat Hasan, ‘The Mughal Fiscal System in Surat and the English East India Company’, *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 4 (1993); Adam Clulow, European Maritime Violence and Territorial States in Early Modern Asia, 1600–1650’, *Itinerario* 33, no. 3 (2009): 80; Anjana Singh, ‘Indian ports and European powers’. In *The Sea in History - The Early Modern World*, ed. Christian Buchet and Gérard Le Bouëdec, (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, Boydell Press, 2017).

My study of the Norris embassy also fits within a wider reassessment of early modern diplomacy. The school of ‘New Diplomatic History’, which has undergone a veritable boom in the last two decades, has moved away from the narrative of high politics and the supremacy of the European diplomatic system.<sup>55</sup> Instead, scholars have begun to integrate the history of diplomacy with wider historical themes and questions around culture, politics, trade and institutions. They are also increasingly looking to European embassies sent to Asia in the early modern period to understand broader histories of European expansion, colonisation, and globalisation. Some recent work on Thomas Roe and the first English embassy to Mughal India constitutes part of this move, which has also seen historians examine other European embassies to the Mughal court, as well as to places like Tokugawa Japan, Qing China, and Indonesia.<sup>56</sup> My thesis contributes to this wider framework of New Diplomatic History by using the Norris embassy – and the untapped resource of the ambassador’s diaries – to explore broader historical themes.

At the centre of recent scholarship on European diplomacy to early modern Asia are questions around cultural commensurability and ‘Orientalism’. Post-colonial interpretations of early modern diplomacy tended to view European and Asian cultures as divided by an unbridgeable gulf, actors from either side of the divide incapable of understanding those from the other through their own ‘system of meanings’.<sup>57</sup> These narratives also tended to portray

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<sup>55</sup> Tony Osborne & Joan-Pau Rubiés, Introduction: Diplomacy and Cultural Translation in the Early Modern World, *Journal of early modern history* 20 (2016): 318.

<sup>56</sup> Some examples are Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*; Adam Clulow, ‘A Fake Embassy, the Lord of Taiwan and Tokugawa Japan’, *Japanese Studies* 30, no. 1 (2010); Tonio Andrade, *The Last Embassy: The Dutch Mission of 1795 and the Forgotten History of Western Encounters with China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); Tonio Andrade, ‘An Accidental Embassy: How Two Minor Dutch Administrators Inaugurated an Alliance with the Qing Dynasty of China, 1661–1662’, *Itinerario* 35, no. 1 (2011); Guido van Meersbergen, ‘The Diplomatic Repertoires of the East India Companies in Mughal South Asia, 1608-1717’, *The Historical Journal* 62, vol. 4 (2019); Birgit Tremml-Werner, ‘Friend or Foe? Intercultural Diplomacy between Momoyama Japan and the Spanish Philippines in the 1590s’, in *Sea Rovers, Silver, and Samurai: Maritime East Asia in Global History, 1550-1700*, eds. Tonio Andrade and Xing Hang (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016); Joan-Pau Rubiés, ‘Political Rationality and Cultural Distance in the European Embassies to Shah Abbas’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 4 (2016).

<sup>57</sup> Bernard Cohn led the body of work emphasising cultural incommensurability between European and Asian societies. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*.

Europeans in early modern diplomatic exchanges as having a heightened sense of superiority over their Asian counterparts, and as unwilling to adapt to and work within the cultural and political systems of Asian states. When it comes to the English in India, much of this scholarship has focused on Thomas Roe and his embassy to Jahangir at the beginning of the seventeenth century. For Jyosnta Singh for example, Roe was a haughty and culturally incompetent figure who constantly misread Mughal symbolism and customs, and sought to push his English style of diplomacy on to the Mughal court.<sup>58</sup> ‘Equipped with the wrong cultural script’, Kate Teltscher, in a similar vein, insists, Roe regularly ‘turns a compliment into an insult’.<sup>59</sup> As a result of his inability to ‘read’ Mughal culture, these scholars tell us, Roe’s embassy turns into an embarrassing string of failures and miscommunications.

Recently, however, historians have challenged this narrative of cultural incommensurability in diplomatic exchanges between Asian and European actors during the early modern period. Instead, they have begun to show how diplomacy acted as a form of cultural translation, that shared understandings and practices developed out of regular diplomatic interactions at the state and local levels, and that the idea of an unbridgeable gap between European and Asian cultures in the early modern period is no longer tenable.<sup>60</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam has led the way for this newer understanding of early modern diplomacy, dismissing outright the idea of ‘largely impermeable cultural zones, perfectly coherent in and of themselves but largely inaccessible to those who look in from the outside’.<sup>61</sup> Through his study of various Eurasian diplomatic encounters in the early modern period, he shows, on the contrary, that there was a high level of cross-over between cultures.

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<sup>58</sup> Jyosnta Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>59</sup> Teltscher, *India Inscribed*, 55.

<sup>60</sup> Osborne, ‘Introduction’, 321; Guido van Meersbergen, “Intirely the Kings Vassalls”; Birget Tremml-Werner, Lisa Hellman & Guido van Meersbergen, ‘Introduction: Gift and Tribute in Early Modern Diplomacy: Afro-Eurasian Perspectives’, *Diplomatica* 12, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>61</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 5.

One space in which this cross-over could be clearly identified, Subrahmanyam demonstrates, was the early modern court, where ‘most things passed easily precisely because of an implicit theory of broad congruence once inside this sphere’.<sup>62</sup> In Subrahmanyam’s view, cross-cultural encounters between European and Asian actors were characterised by ‘approximation, improvisation, and eventually a shift in the relative positions of all concerned’.<sup>63</sup>

Scholars following on from Subrahmanyam have widely accepted this view of a common ground in diplomacy between actors from different cultures. Adam Clulow and Lauren Benton, for example, have presented a picture of early modern cross-cultural relations in which ‘political communities shared some basic characteristics that allowed legal actors to rely on analogies, rather than elusive cross-cultural understandings, as they engaged with other peoples and polities’.<sup>64</sup> Birgit Tremml-Werner, Lisa Hellman and Guido van Meersbergen have likewise found that ‘the interaction between plural traditions created common diplomatic repertoires as the outcome of multidirectional processes of adaptation and accommodation’.<sup>65</sup> In a new study that looks specifically at the English and Dutch East India companies in seventeenth-century Mughal India, Van Meersbergen argues that there developed, at the very least, a basic understanding between the English and the Mughal government that the Company was expected to gratify the Mughal authorities with gifts and money in return for the trading concessions and protections it received.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 214.

<sup>63</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> Lauren Benton and Adam Clulow, ‘Empires and Protection: Making Interpolity Law in the Early Modern World’, *Journal of Global History* 12, no. 1 (2017): 91–92.

<sup>65</sup> Tremml-Werner et. al., ‘Introduction’, 192.

<sup>66</sup> Van Meersbergen, “Intirely the Kings Vassalls”, 289; The area of diplomacy and gift giving in Asia has grown dramatically in recent years. See, for example, Ania Loomba, ‘Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-Cats: Diplomacy, exchange, and difference in early modern India’, *Emissaries in Early Modern Literature and Culture: Mediation, Transmission, Traffic, 1550-1700*, (2016): 41–75; Kim Siebenhuner, ‘Approaching Diplomatic and Courtly Gift-Giving in Europe and Mughal India: Shared Practiced and Cultural Diversity’, *The Medieval History Journal* 16, no. 2 (2013).

In line with this recent scholarship, my thesis argues that we cannot simply point to cultural incommensurability to explain why the Norris embassy failed. It would be easy to put Norris's failures down to his inability to understand Mughal customs and diplomatic practices – to paint him, like some have painted Roe, as a bumbling fool whose false sense of cultural superiority over his Indian counterparts prevented him from effective negotiating. Indeed, there were many, sometimes laughable, miscommunications between the ambassador and Mughal authorities during the embassy, as well as countless instances in which the ambassador railed against Mughal society and custom, while placing English culture up on a pedestal. I argue, however – and building particularly on Van Meersbergen's recent work on Mughal India – that, throughout his embassy, Norris displayed enough of a grasp of the Mughal diplomatic system to allow him to communicate effectively with the various state and regional authorities he dealt with.<sup>67</sup> While the royal ambassador was by no means as experienced in Mughal culture as the English merchants in India, his basic comprehension of diplomatic practices, such as gift-giving and courtly ceremony, was evident in his writings. What caused his negotiations to fail was not an inability to read Mughal culture, but that fatal combination of the three major obstacles I have outlined in this introduction: the hybrid embassy problem, the Old-New Company conflict, and the maritime violence scandal. The overall picture my thesis presents, then, is of an ambassador not necessarily diplomatically or culturally inept (although he sometimes could be), but tightly constrained by a unique set of circumstances.

And yet the fact remains that Norris so often portrayed the Mughals in a negative light in his diaries, presenting them as despotic, effeminate, hedonistic infidels. This issue speaks to the ongoing debate over Orientalism, and whether 'proto-orientalist' views characterised early modern European accounts of Asia. This debate has so far focused on Roe, with

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<sup>67</sup> Van Meersbergen, "Intirely the Kings Vassalls", 289.

historians on one side presenting the ambassador as a proto-orientalist; his negative views on Indian society and heightened sense of English superiority evident in his diaries are seen as the germ of later British violence and control over the Indian subcontinent.<sup>68</sup> Scholars on the other side of the debate, however, argue that Roe's interpretation of Mughal India was far more nuanced than their opponents suggest, with some intimating that the ambassador found much to admire about India and its people.<sup>69</sup> Any contempt for the Mughals expressed in Roe's diary, still other scholars argue, is better explained by the ambassador's bitterness derived from his diplomatic failures at the Mughal court, as well as his need to win over his audience, King James I, by showing his loyalty to England.<sup>70</sup> My thesis shows that, to an even larger extent than Roe, Norris's use of orientalist tropes was tied to his diplomatic failures and his desire to justify them to his English audience. In other words, the more Norris failed, the more he presented Mughal culture in a negative light, drawing on well-worn orientalist tropes to do so.

In addition to emphasising mutual understanding in Eurasian diplomatic exchanges during the early modern period, and in line with the move away from Saadian readings of early modern accounts of Asia, recent scholars have highlighted that Europeans willingly played subservient roles within Asian political systems in order to expand, or even simply to retain, their positions in those locations. In his study of the Dutch encounter with Tokugawa Japan, Clulow demonstrates that VOC agents fashioned themselves into 'loyal vassals' of the Japanese state, playing a similar role to the state's *daimyo* – feudal lords who, in return for their allegiance to the Shogun, received land, status and other privileges.<sup>71</sup> In doing so, the VOC managed to hold on to a place in Japan (albeit within a diminished physical space – the

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<sup>68</sup> For proponents of this side of the debate, see, for example, Teltscher, *India Inscribed*; Singh, *Colonial narratives/cultural dialogues*.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Rahul Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism: Seventeenth-Century Representations of India* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Barbour, *Before Orientalism*; Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the Edge'; Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*; Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Submissions'.

<sup>71</sup> Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*.

Dutch were confined by the Tokugawa regime to the tiny island of Dejima) while all other Europeans were expelled from the empire in 1639.

Guido van Meersbergen has made a similar finding in relation to the English in seventeenth century India. As mentioned above, Van Meersbergen presents a picture of English-Mughal relations in which diplomatic negotiations were characterised by a significant level of cross-cultural understanding. This mutual understanding between the Mughals and the English, furthermore, he argues, ‘reflected the principles of Mughal political culture, with gifts functioning as the material expression of notions of submission, loyalty, and service, as well as patronage, honor, and reward’.<sup>72</sup> Similarly to the Dutch in Japan, then, the English acted as ‘loyal vassals’ of the Mughal state. These views are clearly at odds with earlier understandings of early modern Eurasian diplomatic encounters, which portray a yawning divide between European and Asian cultures.

Such findings on the commonly submissive and adaptable nature of European diplomacy in early modern Asia also speak to current conversations about the usefulness of corporate diplomacy compared to traditional state diplomacy in these settings.<sup>73</sup> Recent work in this area has shown that negotiations carried out at the local and state level by merchants acting for European trading corporations were more common and, over the long term, more effective than traditional embassies undertaken by state actors. This was precisely because company agents, exempt from the restraints placed on them by state heads, could be more malleable in Asian diplomatic environments. As David Veevers and William Pettigrew put it, ‘trading companies were to an extent freed from the need to directly represent their domicile nation states overseas, and were therefore able to engage in more flexible and adaptive diplomatic pursuits that crown representatives would have been’.<sup>74</sup> To illustrate this point,

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<sup>72</sup> Van Meersbergen, “Intirely the Kings Vassalls”, 289.

<sup>73</sup> Veevers and Pettigrew, ‘Trading Companies and Business Diplomacy in the Early Modern World’, 39–47.

<sup>74</sup> Veevers and Pettigrew, ‘Trading Companies’, 44.



they compare direct negotiations between the East India Company ‘governor’ of Madras and the *Nizam* of Hyderabad in 1743, in which the Company was able to obtain a significantly expanded trading charter, with what they see as Thomas Roe’s lack of success in his formal embassy to the Jahangir’s court.<sup>75</sup>

Van Meersbergen has similarly shown that, for the English and the Dutch in India, royal embassies such as those led by Roe and Norris were by far the exception to the rule, and that the most common form of diplomacy carried out by the English and the Dutch was ‘low-profile petitioning at the imperial centre and ongoing political interactions with provincial and local power-holders’.<sup>76</sup> This more localised form of diplomacy was, moreover, Van Meersbergen argues, much more successful in facilitating English expansion in India than state-led embassies were during this period. Not only was it more economical and time-efficient, but the long-term proximity of the merchant diplomats involved to state and regional authorities meant they were much better versed in Mughal politics and culture than royal ambassadors, who spent relatively short periods in these locations.<sup>77</sup>

Norris, neither decentralised nor disconnected from the Crown, faced a more complex task than those confronted by merchant diplomats. My thesis shows that Norris’s embassy failed in part because the ambassador, confined by his role as the Crown’s representative, was unable to mould himself into a ‘loyal vassal’ of the Mughal State and submit to foreign authority in the same way that merchant diplomats did. This point falls into my broader argument about the hybrid-embassy problem, and how the unique and rigid structure of this type of embassy prevented Norris, even more so than Roe before him, from succeeding at the Mughal court. In this way, too, my analysis of the Norris embassy supports

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<sup>75</sup> Veevers and Pettigrew, ‘Trading Companies’, 43–44.

<sup>76</sup> Van Meersbergen, ‘The Diplomatic Repertoires of the East India Companies in Mughal South Asia’, 875.

<sup>77</sup> Van Meersbergen, ‘The Diplomatic Repertoires of the East India Companies in Mughal South Asia’, 889.

recent scholarship that suggests that royal embassies were far from the best way of doing diplomacy in early modern Asia.

The Norris embassy, then, offers an important new window through which to view the history of the East India Company and early modern diplomacy. My thesis not only builds on recent scholarship in these areas but carries that scholarship forward to an embassy that has been largely neglected in historical research. At the centre of my study are Norris's voluminous diaries.

### The Norris Diaries

Like Roe before him, Norris was given instructions to keep a detailed record of his experiences in India, to be handed over to the New Company and the Crown on his return to England. The account was to include details on all his encounters with Mughal authorities, Indian society and customs, the trading market, and any other matters the ambassador deemed relevant. As William III's instructions to the ambassador stated, 'at your return you shall present to Us [...] a Perticular Relation of the Customes manners and policies of the Court of the greate Mogul [...] and of what you can propose to Us for the Interest and Advantage of Trade'.<sup>78</sup> Norris's diaries easily match Roe's in terms of their vivid detail on Indian society, government and culture, as well as the circumstances of the Old Company and New Company factors trading in Masulipatnam, Surat and other areas of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>79</sup>

The reason almost no scholarly analysis on Norris exists is that, unlike Roe's, Norris's embassy diaries were never published. Demand for travel literature in England was at its

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<sup>78</sup> William III, Instructions for our Trusty and well beloved Sr William Norris Bart: whom wee have appointed R. ambassador to the great Mogull & other Princes in India. Given at our Court at Kensington the 31st day of December 1698, in the tenth year of our Raigne', 31 December 1698, MS 31302, British Library, London.

<sup>79</sup> William Norris. The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702, volumes 1–2, unpublished, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson Collection, C.912 and C.913; William Norris, The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702, volumes 3–4, unpublished, National Archives, Kew, CO 77/50 and CO 77/51.

pinnacle in the seventeenth century. Excerpts of real-life accounts such as Roe's were widely published alongside their fictional counterparts, and were all avidly consumed by a public captivated by tales of the 'exotic East'.<sup>80</sup> On Roe's return to England as the first official ambassador to India, the East India Company saw an opportunity to boost investment by releasing excerpts of the ambassador's diaries to Samuel Purchas for his hugely popular, four volume work on English travel accounts, *Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625).<sup>81</sup> Publishing an account of Norris's embassy at the end of that century, on the other hand, would have been counterintuitive for the New Company – it clearly preferred to keep evidence of its expensive failure away from the public eye. The window of opportunity for the ambassador's diaries to be published among his contemporaries was missed, and, as a result, the handwritten volumes remain in two separate locations in the United Kingdom, and just a single book has been dedicated entirely to the ambassador and his journey to the Mughal court.<sup>82</sup>

The sole book focused exclusively on the embassy is Harihar Das's, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*.<sup>83</sup> Written in 1930s and 40s England, the original manuscript was later edited by SC Sarkar and published posthumously in 1959.<sup>84</sup> The work represents years of scholarly toil; Das combed through not only Norris's diaries, but other documents relating to the ambassador in the East India Company records, including letters he wrote to the New Company's board of directors in London, as well as other letters, factory records, and court minutes pertaining to the New Company and the Old Company. In addition, Das translated a number of Persian and Arabic documents relating to the embassy into English, including

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<sup>80</sup> Richmond, *Before Orientalism*, 158.

<sup>81</sup> Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimes, Contayning a History of the World, in Sea Voyages, & Lande Travels, by Englishmen and others* (London, 1625).

<sup>82</sup> Other works have discussed the embassy, but it is not their primary focus. For recent examples, see Van Meersbergen, "Intirely the Kings Vassalls"; Van Meersbergen, 'The Diplomatic Repertoires of the East India Companies in Mughal South Asia'; Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Submissions'.

<sup>83</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, ed. S.C. Sarkar, 18.

<sup>84</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, Original manuscript.

Aurangzeb's letter to William III and Norris's petitions to the court (which were originally translated from English by a scribe and presented to the court in Persian).<sup>85</sup> These latter documents are included with Das's original manuscript and are particularly interesting because they shed some light on how the Mughal government received or understood Norris and his embassy, whereas the Mughal records scarcely reference the English mission.<sup>86</sup> The end product of Das's painstaking research is a largely descriptive account of the embassy, which utilises the diaries for the first time. In this way, the book represents a crucial contribution to our understanding of Norris and his embassy to India. Indeed, in my own research for this thesis, Das's original manuscript has been an invaluable resource in terms of fact-checking and identifying key figures, dates and place names, particularly in the Mughal context.

Das's work is important but also limited. First, it is representative of the period in which it was written. The utter failure of Norris's mission is not presented by Das as such. Instead, he portrays the ambassador as a well-intentioned and patriotic courtier who maintains the dignity of his monarch and nation even if he did not obtain trading privileges for the English or establish a positive relationship with Aurangzeb. In this way, for Das, the embassy was at least a partial success. In his words, Norris 'manfully upheld the dignity of his sovereign and the reputation of his country. He had not secured the much desired *farmans* from Aurangzeb, but [...] he had made some impression on that potentate'.<sup>87</sup> As a member of the Indian colonial elite, Das also adhered to British colonial visions of Indian culture and social structure. Much like scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth century did with Roe's diary, Das takes Norris's negative ideas about Indian religion and the caste system and presents them as evidence to support Britain's early-twentieth-century imperial beliefs. In his

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<sup>85</sup> Aurangzeb, *Aurangzeb's letter to King William III, February 1702*, translated by David Samuel Margoliouth, quoted in Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzeb*, Original manuscript, p. 731.

<sup>86</sup> European embassies to the Mughal court are seldom referenced in the Mughal records. See Van Meersbergen, 'The Diplomatic Repertoires of the East India Companies in Mughal South Asia', 876.

<sup>87</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzeb*, 332.

chapter dedicated to 'Aspects of Mughal Administration: Religion and Society', for example, Das asserts that 'Norris's shrewd observations on the conduct and attitude of the Brahmans bring us face to face with some of the acute problems of our own time', a reference to derogatory early twentieth-century British views of Brahmins in India.<sup>88</sup> My thesis turns Das's narrative on its head, first, by taking the failure of the Norris embassy as its starting point, and second, by reading against the grain when it comes to Norris's account of Indian society.

Another drawback of Das's work is that his analysis is at times contradictory. For example, on the whole, Das heaps praise on Norris for his diplomatic skills and ability to uphold the honour of the British Crown. In his conclusion, however, the author labels Norris as 'undiplomatic', as well as 'self-important and pompous', and appears to lay the blame for Norris's failed negotiations at the Mughal court squarely at the feet of the ambassador himself.<sup>89</sup> The overall impression of Das's book, then, is of an unfinished work. This, in reality, is exactly what it was - as the book's editor, Sarkar put it, 'death intervened before the author could give it a finishing touch'.<sup>90</sup> The book was also heavily edited by Sarkar, who himself admitted that 'in very many places... the text had to be rearranged into new paragraphs to break the monotony of long passages'.<sup>91</sup> Large sections of Das's original manuscript were omitted from the book, most notably a chapter that covered Norris's experiences at the Mughal court and his audiences with Aurangzeb. All of this means that, while Das provided a pioneering study, he left much work to be done. Clearly, there is room in the field for a fresh, comprehensive, analytical, and focused study of the Norris embassy, which makes full use of the diaries.

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<sup>88</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, 162.

<sup>89</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, 329.

<sup>90</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, ix.

<sup>91</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, ix.

My transcriptions of Norris's four extant diaries will provide the foundation for my work. In addition to the diaries, I have consulted an abundance of letters and other documents pertaining to the embassy, most of which are located in the East India Company archives at the British Library. Dozens of letters written by the New Company and Old Company merchants in India, the directors of the companies in London, and Norris himself have been examined, as have the court minutes relating to the embassy, and a number of official applications made by Norris to Aurangzeb during his time at the Mughal court.<sup>92</sup> These additional documents become particularly important when examining the periods of the embassy for which Norris's diary entries have been lost. The two lost diaries cover a seven-month period (May to December 1700), when Norris was at Masulipatnam on the east coast of India and at sea on his journey from Masulipatnam to Surat, and a six-month period (April to September 1701), when the ambassador was at the Mughal court in Panhala. The latter, disappointingly, would have covered the ambassador's record of his meetings with Aurangzeb. These additional sources are also important because they allow us to piece together a more comprehensive account of the embassy that incorporates different perspectives, albeit mostly English ones.

This leads me to some final points on the nature of the primary sources used in my thesis. A critic might point out that one cannot hope to achieve a sound analysis of a cross-cultural historical exchange that relies so heavily on one source (the Norris diaries), or that relies almost entirely on sources from one side of the cultural divide (the English). Just as with any historical source, there is no doubt that using Norris's diaries to seek some indisputable 'truth' about this historical encounter would be problematic. While the diaries undoubtedly serve the purpose of providing structure for the account of what happened in the

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<sup>92</sup> The British Library also houses a bound collection of copies of letters and other documents pertaining to the Norris embassy compiled in 1881, which I have utilised in this thesis. Register of papers and correspondence relating to the embassy of Sir William Norris, Bart., to the Great Mogul, 1698–1702, compiled 1881, MS 31302, British Library, London.

Norris embassy and why it happened the way it did, as this thesis shows, the ambassador's depictions of Mughal India are influenced by a range of factors that make establishing any hard and fast notion of truth through them, challenging. For this very reason, I have chosen to focus a large part of my analysis on Norris's perceptions of India, how they compared to Roe's before him, what motivated him to portray Mughal India as he did, and whether his depictions of South Asia can be understood within the framework of Said's Orientalism.

I have, in addition, concentrated my examination of the Norris embassy on the circumstances surrounding the two English East India Companies rather than attempt to write a history of Mughal South Asia. It is also true that the Mughal documents from this period scarcely reference Norris's embassy, and so even if my work did include an examination of Mughal sources, it would only get us so far. The scarcity of Mughal sources on the Norris embassy, in addition, only supports the argument running through my thesis that the English, even at this late stage, occupied a peripheral position in India and the seas surrounding it during this period. On a more practical level, cross-examining further English and South Asian sources would inevitably extend the scope of this thesis and take away focus from Norris's diaries. While no primary source is so rich that it does not benefit from cross-examination, the primary aim of my study is to utilise this untapped source to the fullest extent, and I have limited analysis of other sources for this purpose.

By viewing the embassy through the eyes of the ambassador who led it, while, at the same time, grounding the Norris's depictions in what we now understand about the East India Company and diplomacy in early modern Asia, I aim to provide valuable new insights into a little-understood historical encounter. This, in sum, is a thesis about Norris, the English, and the East India Companies. It is a thesis that uses the Norris diaries to try and understand the embassy, not from the outside, but from the inside. A detailed analysis of the Norris embassy has not been undertaken since Das's attempt almost a century ago. It is therefore my intention to provide one that is focused and grounded in the latest historiography.

My thesis will be divided into chronologically and geographically ordered chapters, beginning with three ‘background’ chapters. Chapter One reviews Thomas Roe’s mission to Jahangir’s court (1615–1619) – the first and only other royal English embassy ever sent to Mughal India. It examines the recent scholarship that has come out of Roe’s embassy in an attempt to locate the Norris embassy within its broader context of diplomacy between England and Mughal India, as well as to highlight the major themes in the Roe scholarship that are crucial to understanding the Norris embassy. Chapter Two skips forward 70 years, to the decade and a half before the Norris embassy. It seeks to show how a unique and volatile set of circumstances in India and England during the final 15 years of the seventeenth century triggered a full-scale crisis for the East India Company, resulting in the Crown’s decision to terminate the organisation and replace it with a new one. In India, these crisis-inducing conditions included an unsuccessful war launched by the Company against the Mughal regime, as well as a broader problem of European violence on the Indian Ocean. In England, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, public backlash against the Company’s violent actions in Asia, and growing efforts by various actors to gain entry to the East India trade, combined with events in India to create a perfect storm of problems threatening to bring down the Company. Chapter Three follows immediately from the previous chapter, demonstrating how efforts by a group of England’s most influential figures to access the East India trade led to the creation of the ‘New Company’ and the decision to shut down the ‘Old Company’. It then examines the establishment of the New Company and the decision to send the Norris embassy to Aurangzeb’s court.

The subsequent five ‘embassy chapters’ will each cover a phase of Norris’s mission to the Mughal court, from the ambassador’s arrival in India to his departure and subsequent death three years later. These chapters document the embassy in close detail, showing how stage by stage, the embassy unravelled as it confronted the three interconnected problems outlined in this introduction. The main purpose of these chapters is to provide a detailed,



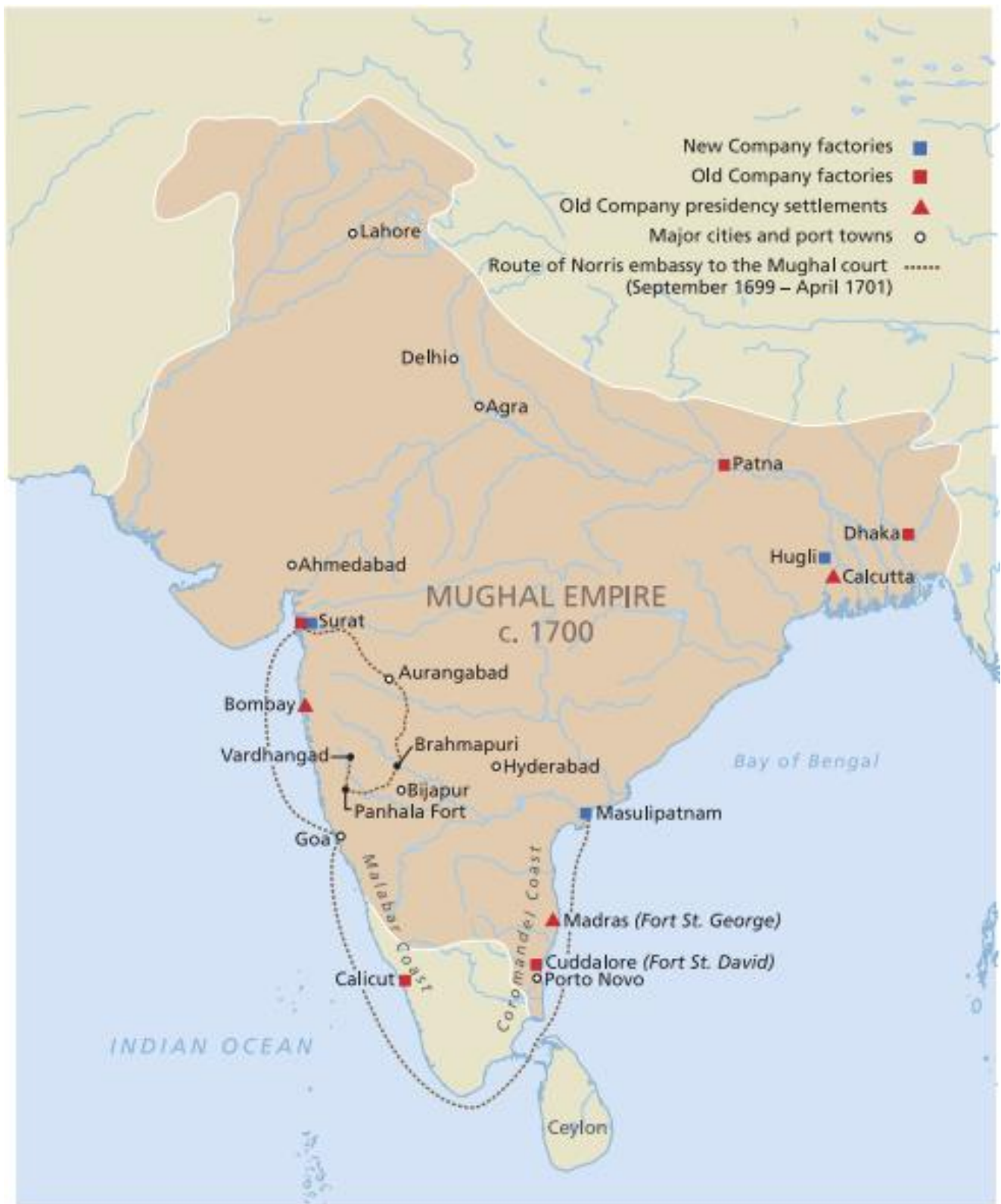
narrative driven account of the embassy and how it failed – offering a view into the internal workings of the embassy from the angle of the ambassador himself. The diaries provide an extraordinary level of detail from which to reconstruct the forgotten embassy. At the same time, the embassy chapters reflect on the nature of the diaries, as well as how Norris's encounter with Asia speaks to the themes in recent scholarship discussed in this introduction.

Accordingly, Chapter Four examines the eight-month period that Norris and his embassy spent in Masulipatnam on India's Coromandel Coast, where he landed after a nine-month journey from London in September 1699. It aims to show that, during this time, the hybrid embassy problem and the Old-New Company conflict worked to impair the embassy and set it on a course to failure. Chapter Five illuminates the short but eventful six-week period Norris and his entourage spent in Surat, after he and the embassy sailed there from Masulipatnam, and before their march to the Mughal court. A flashpoint in the wider progress of the embassy, this phase was defined by the intensification of conflict between the Old Company and the New Company, which further damaged the reputation and financial muscle of the already struggling embassy. It also brought to light the problems around the maritime violence scandal, and how this would impact the embassy moving forward. Chapter Six examines the ambassador's journey to, and time spent at, the Mughal court in Panhala. During this eight-month period, Norris faced a series of disasters that worked to unravel the embassy. It was a lethal combination of the hybrid-embassy problem and the maritime violence scandal, however, that would prove the biggest test in this phase of the embassy, and led to the ambassador fleeing the court in disgrace.

It seemed at this point – to Norris at least – as if the embassy was over. There was more drama to come, however, before the ambassador could finally depart India. Chapter Seven covers the tense three-month period in which Norris and his retinue, on their return journey from the Mughal court to Surat (from where Norris hoped to set sail home to England), were captured by Mughal authorities and forced into further negotiations over the

commitment of the English to provide protection against piracy to Mughal shipping. It reveals just how pivotal the issue of maritime violence was to the regime, and how Norris's persistent concern over representing what he viewed as the interests of the Crown, first and foremost, meant that striking an agreement between the parties on this issue became impossible. Chapter Eight examines the final phase of Norris's embassy to Mughal India – from the frosty reception he received by the New Company factors at Surat, to his death at sea, seven months later, as the ambassador made the journey home to England. This phase once again highlights the problematic nature of the hybrid embassy and, particularly, the conflict caused by the competing commercial interests of the company, on the one hand, and the diplomatic interests of the Crown, on the other.

The picture that emerges in this thesis is one of the English in Mughal India in a state of disorder and disgrace, not only fighting to cling on to their place in India, but warring among themselves. As such, my study contributes to the recent body of scholarship that presents the early East India Company as disunified and often dysfunctional, its rise to empire characterised by failures and mistakes, peaks and troughs. The Norris embassy, indeed, reveals just how deep those troughs could reach.



**Figure 1** Route of the Norris embassy to the Mughal court, September 1699–April 1701



**Figure 2** Major trading ports around the Indian Ocean c. 1700

## Chapter One

### Thomas Roe and the First English Embassy to Mughal India

Settling into his new living quarters in Masulipatnam, India, after his official landing in 1699, Norris reflected that ‘it was a little remarkable that I should land the same day of the month on the coast of India as [...] Roe did, who was the only ambassador ever sent from England to these parts before’.<sup>1</sup> Norris was referring to Sir Thomas Roe, the first and only other royal English ambassador ever to be sent to Mughal India. Dispatched on behalf of the East India Company and the Crown, Roe arrived in India in 1615, launching a three-and-a-half-year embassy tasked with signing a treaty with the Mughal emperor, Jahangir, designed to establish favourable trading conditions for the English in India. The embassy was judged a moderate success by the Crown and the Company.<sup>2</sup> Though he failed to obtain the desired treaty from the emperor, Roe gained some limited trading concessions that allowed the Company to set up important footholds in India. The ambassador also received an official letter from Jahangir to King James I, establishing diplomatic contact between the two states for the first time.

Norris pictured himself in relation to Roe. On its return to England in 1619, Roe’s embassy was celebrated by the Company and the wider public – the ambassador lauded as ‘a very worthie gentleman that hath husbanded things exceedingly well’.<sup>3</sup> Excerpts of Roe’s account of the embassy – a set of diaries and written correspondence – were published in

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<sup>1</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume I: September 1699–April 1700, unpublished, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson Collection, C.912, fol.16.

<sup>2</sup> While Roe’s embassy was considered a moderate success at the time, it has been judged differently even in recent literature, from an outright failure (Sanjay Subrahmanyam) to a resounding success (J.C. Sharman and Andrew Phillips). See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris’, in *The Worlds of the East India Company*, eds. Bowen, H.V., Lincoln, Margarette, and Rigby, Nigel (Leicester: The Boydell Press, 2002); J.C. Sharman and Andrew Phillips, *Outsourcing Empire: How Company-States Made the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Court minutes of the East India Company for 6 October 1619, quoted in William Foster, ed., *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul 1615-1619: As Narrated in his Journal and Correspondence*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1899), 528.

1625 and widely circulated.<sup>4</sup> At the end of that century, the New Company looked back on Roe's embassy as a significant accomplishment, and this sense underpinned the dispatch of a second royal embassy to Mughal India. There is little doubt that, in preparation for his own mission to the Mughal court, Norris studied his predecessor's account of the embassy to Jahangir.<sup>5</sup> In Norris's eyes, Roe was his successful forerunner, whose diplomatic style he sought to emulate at the court of Aurangzeb. The handful of scholars who have looked at Norris's embassy also see Roe and Norris as a pair, 'symmetrically located' in important ways.<sup>6</sup> Roe and his diaries cast a long shadow, and came to significantly influence Norris's interactions with Mughal authorities, as well as his depictions of South Asia. It was not an influence that was beneficial to Norris's embassy, however. I argue that the memory of Roe's embassy became yet another obstacle for Norris to overcome; the latter ambassador became caged in by the embassy template set by Roe, and blindly followed in what he saw as the successful footsteps of his predecessor.

But to consider the relationship between Roe and Norris, we need, first, to understand Roe's embassy. This chapter reviews Roe's mission to Jahangir's court with a view to placing the Norris embassy within its broader context of diplomacy between the English and Mughal India, and to highlighting major themes in the Roe scholarship that are crucial to understanding the Norris embassy. Ever since their publication, Roe's diaries have been regarded by scholars as the most detailed early English account of Mughal India. As such, they have been subjected to a steady stream of scholarly analysis and debate. In recent years, two questions have come to dominate the scholarship on Roe: First, how did the dual nature of Roe's role – that is, the requirement to represent both the Company and the Crown – affect

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<sup>4</sup> *Purchas his Pilgrimes, Contayning a History of the World, in Sea Voyages, & Lande Travels, by Englishmen and others* (London, 1625).

<sup>5</sup> There are explicit references to Roe in Norris's diaries, and it was standard diplomatic practice to study one's predecessor's account of their embassy.

<sup>6</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris', in *The Worlds of the East India Company*, edited by H.V. Bowen, H.V., Margarete Lincoln, and Rigby, Nigel (Leicester: The Boydell Press, 2002), 84.

his embassy to Jahangir? Second, should Roe be viewed through the lens of Said's Orientalism? This chapter will explore these questions in detail, which will, in turn, feed into my analysis of Norris. As the subsequent chapters of this thesis will show, Norris's experience of his dual role, or as I refer to it, 'the hybrid-embassy problem', mirrored Roe's to a remarkable extent. Moreover, what some call 'proto-orientalist' tropes were utilised by Norris in a strikingly similar way to Roe.

#### Roe's embassy: a summary

Although the embassy lasted several years, the basic facts regarding Roe's mission can be quickly summarised. In 1600, after years of lobbying from various London merchant groups, Queen Elizabeth granted a royal charter to the East India Company, establishing it as a corporation and allowing it to exercise a monopoly on English trade in Asia. A haphazard string of Company ships was subsequently dispatched from London to conduct commerce in Southeast Asia and India, many of the vessels returning with cargoes of textiles and spices more valuable than any imports the small English nation had ever seen. After a decade of trading on the subcontinent, however, the Company merchants in India resolved that, in order to make permanent inroads into the Indian trading network, a royal English ambassador should be sent to the Mughal court. In their minds, sending a figure with such high prestige to represent them at the court would improve the reputation of the English among the Mughals, which would translate into favourable trading conditions for the Company in India.

Esteem for the English among the Mughals was certainly in short supply during the lead up to Roe's embassy. As Richmond Barbour has shown, in the decade or so before Roe landed in India, no less than six English merchants had tried their hand at obtaining trading concessions at the Mughal court, some of them masquerading as official ambassadors sent

from the English monarch.<sup>7</sup> When their deceptions were exposed, some were expelled from the court in disgrace, causing serious damage to the Company's reputation. Roe himself later worried that he would not be taken seriously in India, because 'at this name of an ambassador, [the Mughals] laughd one upon another; it being become ridiculous, so many hauing assumed that title, and not performed the office'.<sup>8</sup> The only way to rectify this, the Company agents in India argued, was to send a genuine, royal ambassador to the Mughal court to act on their behalf. As one agent put it, the Company would benefit significantly if 'a sufficient man be sent in your first shippes that may bee Resident in Agra withe the Kinge, and sutch a one whose person may breade regarde, for they here looke mutch after greate men'.<sup>9</sup> The Mughal emperor, the Company merchants hoped, would consequently award permanent trading privileges to the English, allowing them to entrench themselves into the Indian market while giving them an edge over their Portuguese and Dutch rivals.

In 1614, at the Company's request, King James I agreed to appoint an ambassador of the Company's choosing to be sent to the Mughal court on behalf of the Company and the Crown. The Company, for its part, agreed to fund the embassy, including purchasing gifts for the ambassador to hand out to the Mughal emperor and other authorities, a substantial wage and the upkeep of the ambassador and his retinue. As will be discussed in more detail below, this agreement between James and the Company created a new type of embassy for the English in India – the template of which would be followed, largely unmodified, by the Norris embassy more than eighty years later.

Roe certainly seemed to fit the Company's bill of a person who 'may breade regarde' at the Mughal court. As a personal attendant to the queen from a young age, Roe was a

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<sup>7</sup> Richmond Barbour, 'Power and Distant Display: Early English "Ambassadors" in Moghul India', *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 61, no. 3/4 (2000): 343.

<sup>8</sup> Foster, *Embassy*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Foster, *Embassy*, iii.



familiar fixture of the Elizabethan court.<sup>10</sup> He also had extensive education and training in the Arts, including philosophy, history and biblical studies, which, as Colin Mitchell points out, ‘distinguished him from his East India Company colleagues’.<sup>11</sup> When James I came to the throne in 1603, Roe was immediately knighted by the new king, and he subsequently formed close friendships with the monarch’s children, ensuring his continued high status in England’s courtly circles. In addition to prestige and status, Roe had experience in overseas voyages. In 1610, at 29, he led an expedition to Guiana in the Americas at the behest of James’s son, with the goal of finding gold and a location for an English settlement near Peru. The expedition was unsuccessful, but this had little impact on Roe’s career trajectory. In 1614, he entered politics, becoming a member of Parliament for Tamworth. The Company viewed the MP and courtier as ‘a gentleman of pregnant understanding, well spoken, learned, industrious, [and] of a comely personage’, nominating him for the position of royal ambassador to the Mughal court on 7 October 1614.<sup>12</sup>

Equipped with instructions from the Crown and the East India Company, an assortment of gifts, and an official letter from the king to the Mughal emperor, Roe arrived in India in September 1615. He remained on the subcontinent for three and a half years, more than two of which were spent residing with his retinue at Jahangir’s court in Ajmer. Here, Roe made several formal visits to the Mughal emperor, petitioning him to sign a treaty that would grant permanent trading rights to the English, including no customs charges and the ability of the Company to set up factories anywhere in the Mughal’s dominions. The treaty was never granted. Put plainly, the Mughal government, at the height of its wealth and power, had no reason to enter into a binding agreement with a small and insignificant European nation, especially one whose representative arrived at the court with gifts that Jahangir

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<sup>10</sup> Michael J. Brown, *Itinerant Ambassador: The Life of Sir Thomas Roe* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xvii.

<sup>12</sup> Foster, *Embassy*, xviii.

considered to be of ‘small valewe’.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, ‘treaty-making’ as Europeans understood it was simply not part of Mughal diplomacy.<sup>14</sup> Roe did, however, make enough of an impression on the court to obtain a grant from the Mughal’s son and *subhadar* of Gujurat, Prince Khurram, in August 1618, that formalised the right to trade in Surat, where the Company had settled a factory some years earlier. Jahangir also presented Roe with a reply to James’s letter promising the English free trade and safety in India, and allowing the English to set up factories in his dominions. ‘All the merchants of the English nation’, Jahangir stated in the letter, may live in ‘what place soeuer they choose to liue’ and that ‘what goods soeuer they desire to sell or buy, they may have free libertie without restraynt’, and that ‘neyther Portuguall nor any other shall dare to molest their quiett’.<sup>15</sup>

Roe left India in February 1619. On his return to England, he presented the Mughal emperor’s letter to the king, and a detailed written account of his embassy to the Company’s board of directors. The ambassador was met with praise. While Roe was unable to obtain the desired treaty, he had managed to secure agreements which allowed the Company to set up factories in Surat and conduct their trade in India without obstruction. The Company directors surmised that Roe, ‘by his modestie, honestie and integritie hath giuen good satisfaction’.<sup>16</sup> That the Company and the Crown deemed Roe’s embassy as at least partially successful was also evident from the path his career took after his return to England. The ambassador went on to act as a paid consultant on foreign trade to the Company until he reached old age, and led further embassies to the Ottoman Empire, Sweden, Germany and Italy.

Much of what we know of Roe’s embassy to Mughal India comes from the ambassador’s own account of the mission. Just as Norris was instructed to do more than 80

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<sup>13</sup> Foster, *Embassy*, 284.

<sup>14</sup> M. Athar Ali, *Mughal India, Studies in Polity, Ideas, Society, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), 313.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Letter from the Great Mogul to King James’, quoted in Foster, *Embassy*, 505.

<sup>16</sup> Court Minutes of the East India Company for 12 November 1619, quoted in Foster, *Embassy*, 528.

years later, Roe was obliged by the Company's directors to write a detailed account of his experience at the Mughal court, to be handed over on his return to England in the hope that the intelligence provided would assist the Company in its future trading endeavours. During the embassy, Roe wrote more than 500 pages of detailed descriptions of Mughal society, culture, and politics, in addition to dozens of letters to various recipients, including the Company directors in London, his friends at the English court, and his family. In 1625, excerpts of his account were published by Samuel Purchas in his four-volume work, *A History of the World in Sea Voyages and Land Travells*, which showcased several stories of English overseas expeditions.<sup>17</sup> In 1899, more than two centuries later and at the height of British expansion, the full version of Roe's account was published by the Hakluyt Society, edited by William Foster.<sup>18</sup> The latter edition has become the standard text used by scholars ever since.

Roe's embassy was a middling success but generated an influential paper trail. Below, I delve further into the recent scholarship on Roe, looking specifically at two themes that have come to dominate it, and that are also highly relevant to the Norris embassy.

#### Roe and the hybrid-embassy problem

In recent years, scholars have come to articulate a basic paradox missed in earlier hagiographies of Roe: It is unclear who or what the ambassador represented in India, and that the confusion surrounding the dual nature of his role – that is, having to represent the Crown and the Company – came to dramatically influence his actions at the Mughal court and hinder his embassy overall. Richmond Barbour, for example, draws attention to the 'tensions between the commercial and the royal functions of the office' (of ambassador) in Roe's embassy to Jahangir.<sup>19</sup> He argues that such tensions mainly developed out of the

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<sup>17</sup> Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgimes*.

<sup>18</sup> Foster, *Embassy*.

<sup>19</sup> Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 151.

incompatibility between the Crown's expectation that Roe present England to the Mughal court as a worthy counterpart, and the request of the Company (only beginning to establish itself in India) that the ambassador exercise frugality in his dealings with the court. This clash between the mandates of the Company and the Crown was embarrassingly highlighted for Roe when, at the Mughal court, Jahanghir deemed the gifts he had brought, which had been paid for by the Company, of 'small valewe' and unfitting for a royal ambassador sent from a great king.<sup>20</sup> This was just one of the 'confusing implications', Barbour argues, that came from 'grafting royal prestige onto commercial endeavour'.<sup>21</sup>

Alison Games also acknowledges that the 'awkward position' of having to represent the Crown and the Company in India 'impeded his [Roe's] progress', and that no one was more conscious of the problem than the ambassador himself.<sup>22</sup> To illustrate Roe's awareness of the issue, Games points to a letter the ambassador wrote while he was at the Mughal court in 1616, in which he complains about the dual nature of his role and argues that a representative without the responsibility of upholding the dignity and prestige of the Crown would be in a much better position to obtain trading privileges for the Company. In the letter, Roe lamented that:

it is not fitt to keepe an Ambassador in this Court. I have shuffled better out and escaped and avoyded affronts and slavish Customes clearer then ever any did...But his Majestie commanded mee to do nothing unwoorthy [of] the Honour of a Christian King, and noe reward can humble mee to any baseness...I know one that might creepe and sue would effect more busines then I.<sup>23</sup>

Games also acknowledges the financial pressure that this type of embassy placed on the Company, and the tensions that this caused between the Company and the Crown. Of course, all embassies to the Mughal court were expensive, but the fact that the Company had to

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<sup>20</sup> Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 153.

<sup>21</sup> Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 153.

<sup>22</sup> Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 158.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Roe, quoted in Games, *The Web of Empire*, 158.

support Roe without any financial help from the king, Games argues, ‘heightened tension with the crown’.<sup>24</sup>

Another confusing implication of the hybrid embassy was that it was not immediately clear as to who or what Roe represented when he arrived in India. What was clear to the English, however, was that diplomatic engagement with lowly merchants was held in contempt by the Mughal authorities, which made it crucial for Roe to establish himself as a royal figure. From the outset of his embassy, therefore, Roe acted to distance himself from his affiliation with the Company in the eyes of the Mughal authorities, and to establish credibility in India as a royal ambassador sent from a mighty king. Given that the English had a reputation in India for sending merchants disguised as official ambassadors to the Mughal court, this was a particularly difficult task.<sup>25</sup> In the end, Roe did succeed in establishing himself as the true representative of the English King. What this highlighted, once again, however, was the problematic nature of the hybrid embassy; in order to succeed at the Mughal court, Roe was forced to cover up his affiliation with the East India Company.

Historians have also noted the tensions that arose between the ambassador and the Company as a result of the embassy’s hybrid structure. As Rupali Mishra has shown, from the very outset, the Company directors expressed major concerns about how much authority an ambassador would have in their trading affairs once on the ground.<sup>26</sup> As a result, they inserted a clause into Roe’s official commission that instructed the ambassador to follow Company directives in all matters relating to trade. As Mishra puts it, however, this was ‘a direction that Roe found difficult to follow’.<sup>27</sup> Despite the Company’s instructions, the ambassador felt compelled to exercise his ultimate authority as the king’s representative over the Company factors residing in India. This caused resentment from the Company merchants

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<sup>24</sup> Games, *Web of Empire*, 159.

<sup>25</sup> On England’s history of sending ‘fake ambassadors’ to the Mughal Court, see Barbour, ‘Power and Distant Display’.

<sup>26</sup> Mishra, *A Business of State*, 154–155.

<sup>27</sup> Mishra, *A Business of State*, 155.

in India on numerous occasions. Chief factor at Surat, John Kerridge, for instance, threatened to quit his role after the ambassador announced that he must consult him on all matters and obey his orders.<sup>28</sup> While Roe was accepted and acknowledged as their king's representative, the Company agents on the ground in India clearly found it unpalatable, not to mention confusing, to follow orders from the very individual whom they had employed to obtain trading privileges for them at the Mughal court.

Mishra has also examined the 'split interests' of Roe on his embassy to Jahangir. Her work recognises the problematic nature of the ambassador's dual mandate, arguing that 'many of the challenges facing Roe in India developed out of his difficulties in squaring what he saw as mercantile interests with what he understood as the courtly and state demands of his embassy'.<sup>29</sup> Mishra takes the argument further, however, by demonstrating how much of Roe's behaviour in India can be explained by the bind in which the ambassador felt the dual mandate put him. For Roe, she argues, the tension between the Crown's interests and those of the Company 'manifested as a constant anxiety about securing and demonstrating his status and authority'.<sup>30</sup> He became desperate to affirm his royal identity and separate himself from the Company in the eyes of the other English in India, as well as the Mughal authorities. He did this by seeking to distinguish himself and his household from the Company agents, for example, by wearing traditional English dress while the others had adopted the local attire. Mishra emphasises that the anxiety experienced by Roe over having to balance multiple interests was the root cause of much of Roe's 'pugnacious behaviour' in India.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly to Mishra, Collin Mitchell has argued that Roe's anxiety over his dual role resulted in his 'unyielding approach to diplomacy'.<sup>32</sup> He shows how, on several occasions during his embassy, Roe refused to take part in Mughal customs at the court that he believed

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<sup>28</sup> Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the Edge', 25.

<sup>29</sup> Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the Edge', 9.

<sup>30</sup> Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the Edge', 9.

<sup>31</sup> Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the Edge', 38.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 152.

would debase his royal stature, even when he knew that doing so would help him achieve the objectives given to him by the Company. For example, the ambassador refused to bow to the Mughal emperor the expected number of times because ‘Roe would never allow himself to do anything “unwoorthy [to] the honovr of a Christian king”’.<sup>33</sup> This, Mitchell states, ‘would prove one of his largest obstacles’.<sup>34</sup> Again, Roe himself appeared well-aware of the hybrid-embassy problem, writing a rather apologetic letter to the king, promising that ‘I haue sought to meyntayne vpright your Majesties greatnes and dignitie, and withall to effect the ends of the Merchant; but these two sometymes cross one another’.<sup>35</sup>

The hybrid nature of Roe’s embassy, then, caused a number of difficulties for the ambassador in India, which have been widely acknowledged in recent scholarship. Almost a century later, Norris would experience some of the very same problems associated with the hybrid embassy on his mission to Aurangzeb’s court. In particular, and building mainly from the platform of Mishra’s work on Roe, I show how Norris developed deep anxieties over demonstrating and upholding his royal status. He attempted to separate himself from the New Company and what he viewed as their inferior trading matters, focusing foremost on the stately aspects of his mission. Time and time again, this mind-frame led to an inflexible approach to diplomacy – Norris, just like Roe, refused to do anything that might tarnish his royal image or go against what he saw as his duty to the king. This reliably led to Norris prioritising what he perceived as the Crown’s interests over those of the New Company – something the New Company merchants found difficult to swallow considering they were funding the entire mission to the Mughal court. In addition to causing tension with the New Company, Norris’s uncompromising diplomatic style also saw him destroy relationships with Mughal authorities that were crucial to the embassy’s success.

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<sup>33</sup> Roe, quoted in Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 152.

<sup>34</sup> Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 152.

<sup>35</sup> Roe, quoted in Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 152.

### Roe and the proto-orientalism debate

Thomas Roe and his embassy to Mughal India have also been at the forefront of the debates around 'proto-orientalism', which are based around Edward Said's ground-breaking work, *Orientalism*.<sup>36</sup> Said's work barely needs an introduction, so deeply has it impacted on the academic field since its publication in 1978. To briefly summarise, however, Said argues that the 'West' dominated and controlled the 'East' through a way of thinking he calls 'Orientalism'. He claims that Orientalism is a 'style of thought', or 'mode of discourse' through which Europeans viewed and represented people in those parts of the world they designated as 'the Orient', a vast area encompassing what we now understand as Asia and the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> This style of thought, which was posited and continually reinforced through the burgeoning number of European texts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was, Said argues, invented and used not so much to understand the 'Orient' and its peoples (though that is what it claimed to do), as it was as a way for Europeans to identify and define themselves.

In this effort to define themselves, Europeans presented the Orient as the 'Other', or the contrasting image of Europe (the 'Occident'). Where Europe was presented as strong, masculine and reasoned, the Orient was depicted as weak, effeminate, and irrational. Where Europe was civilised, liberal and moral, the Orient was barbaric, tyrannical and depraved. Crucially, in all aspects the Orient was seen by Orientalists as inferior to Europe. Said insists, however, that while it was a method of thinking about the Other invented by Europeans, Orientalism also had very practical implications that made this discourse much more than a mere figment of the European imagination. From the nineteenth century, Orientalism was used as a method for Europeans to dominate over the Orient. It became a system of knowledge that was deeply embedded into the institutions, doctrines, and vocabulary of

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<sup>36</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>37</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 2.



colonial rule. To the Orientalists, the people of the Orient were backward and inferior, incapable of governing themselves and in need of Europeans to modernise and civilise them.<sup>38</sup> The rational way for dealing with the Orient, then, was for the Orientalists to rule directly over it. Orientalism for Europeans therefore became a way not only of thinking about the Orient, but managing it in a material sense. In Said's words, 'Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient'.<sup>39</sup>

Applied across a broad spectrum of scholarship, Said's *Orientalism* quickly became known as the foundational text for post-colonial theory.<sup>40</sup> Scholars aimed to move away from the Orientalist discourse of the past by focusing on and giving a voice to the colonised and other minorities or marginalised peoples in history. In doing so, they showed an implicit acceptance of Said's thesis. Writing in 1986, Ronald Inden, for example, aimed to show how 'Europeans have constructed...varied images' of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>41</sup> 'They have not only used media such as the literary text and the painted canvas to fashion their constructs', he said.<sup>42</sup> 'They have, by their gaining of control of knowledge of the East, also used the very people and institutions of Asia itself to remake the civilizations of that continent'.<sup>43</sup> A decade later, in a study that showed how Britain's colonisation of India was as much due to its ability to harness knowledge of India as it was to military strength, Bernard Cohn argued that the production of European texts about India (such as dictionaries and teaching aides) 'began the establishment of discursive formation, defined an epistemological space, created a discourse (Orientalism) and had the effect of converting Indian forms of knowledge into European

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<sup>38</sup> D.A. Washbrook 'Orientals and Occidents: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography*, ed. Robin R. Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 597–598.

<sup>39</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Washbrook 'Orientals and Occidents', 596–597.

<sup>41</sup> Ronald Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India', *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (1986): 406.

<sup>42</sup> Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India', 406.

<sup>43</sup> Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India', 406.

objects'.<sup>44</sup> While these works focused on India during and after the period of British colonial rule – and, indeed, Said himself presents Orientalism as a product of the European Enlightenment, its starting point therefore in the eighteenth century – other scholars have applied Said's thesis to an expansive range of historical contexts, including early modern Asia.

As a key text illuminating the nature of the encounter between Europe and Asia, Roe's diary has been injected into the debate over Orientalism. This debate focuses on whether Europeans who wrote about Asia in the early modern period exhibited what some have called 'proto-orientalism' – early attempts to 'other' Asian societies and cultures and a sense of cultural and moral superiority over Asian peoples. On one side of this debate are scholars who view Roe as a proto-orientalist. Through an exploration of the ambassador's diary and written correspondence, as well as other seventeenth century 'travel narratives' of the English in India, Jyotsna Singh, for example, argues that the European idea of the Orient as the weak and inferior 'Other' was very much present in this early period. Singh depicts Roe as an entitled official who viewed India as barbaric and inferior, and makes the case that his attitude is typical of the English toward India at this time. She points to the ambassador's descriptions of the Mughal Court, maintaining that they present 'a series of *spectacles* that both exoticize and demonize the natives', and in doing so, Roe 'defines his own culture as the norm and in opposition to "uncivilized" practices'.<sup>45</sup> Singh suggests, further, that Roe's orientalist narrative and others like them can be seen as the initial steps on the road to imperial domination, the 'beginnings of the British colonization of India'.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 21; Miles Ogborn makes a similar argument about the 'history of knowledge making', demonstrating that forms of writing around the English East India Company shaped the encounter between Europe and Asia, as well as the power dynamics in that exchange. Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the East India Company* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), xxii.

<sup>45</sup> Jyotsna Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 26.

<sup>46</sup> Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues*, 21.

Like Singh, Kate Teltscher presents Roe as a proto-orientalist and maintains that his views were characteristic of Europeans writing about India between 1600 and 1800. 'For the most part', she argues, Roe's representations of India in his diary and other correspondence written during his embassy to Jahangir 'follow Said's model of binary opposition: India is presented negatively, as the inverse of England'.<sup>47</sup> Roe is presented in Teltscher's work as a figure, at once pompous and insecure, and filled with a sense of national pride and Christian zeal, who constantly vilifies the Mughal court in order to emphasise and define the virtues of his own culture.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, and extending Cohn's claim that Roe read India through 'his own system of meanings', Teltscher argues that Roe saw India through the 'conventions of English theatrical representation' – the Mughal court, to Roe, was a theatre, the Mughals, actors in a play.<sup>49</sup> Teltscher gives the example of Jahangir's birthday ceremony, where the Mughal emperor is weighed against bags filled with several commodities, which were then passed on to his subjects. She shows how Roe questions the legitimacy of the ceremony, suggesting the bags that were supposed to be filled with gold, silver and jewels could, in fact, have been filled with pebbles. In Roe's eyes, Teltscher argues, the bags were mere 'stage props'.<sup>50</sup> As a result of perceiving India through his own conventions, Teltscher suggests, the ambassador constantly misreads Mughal customs and ceremonies. 'Equipped with the wrong cultural script', she insists, Roe regularly 'turns a compliment into an insult'.<sup>51</sup>

Other scholars have warned against applying Said's theory, which refers to the age of high imperialism, to precolonial historical episodes such as Roe's embassy to Mughal India. Barbour, for instance, argues that 'to project [Said's] findings backwards, to read precolonial ethnography as if its rhetoric bespoke European dominance of the world, or its defensive

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<sup>47</sup> Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) 26.

<sup>48</sup> Teltscher, *India Inscribed*, 7, 110.

<sup>49</sup> Teltscher, *India Inscribed*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Teltscher, *India Inscribed*, 20–21.

<sup>51</sup> Teltscher, *India Inscribed*, 21.

tropes necessarily foretold aggressive expansion, is anachronistic'.<sup>52</sup> He shows, instead, how Roe's use of 'oriental tropes', far from demonstrating any sense of European superiority or aggression, actually revealed his deep insecurity and defensiveness over his, and England's, insignificant position in the Mughal sphere. Barbour points to Roe's frequent depictions of the Mughals as effeminate, suggesting that 'these constructions of unmanliness and effeminacy mediate profound anxieties about India's compelling appeal and manifest power'.<sup>53</sup> He also highlights the ambassador's ridiculing of the Persian ambassador who visited Jahangir while Roe resided at the Mughal court. The negative language Roe uses, Barbour insists, was a direct consequence of Roe feeling upstaged by the Persian ambassador, who brought far superior gifts to Jahangir than Roe did, and was afforded much better treatment at the Mughal court.<sup>54</sup> The anxiety and defensiveness displayed by Roe, moreover, Barbour argues, were common to Europeans in Asia during the early modern period – such early cross-cultural engagements actually 'undid Eurocentric confidence', rather than reinforced it.<sup>55</sup>

Still others hold that Europeans in the early modern period often respected, admired and even envied the societies they encountered in Asia, and that there was much more cultural exchange and understanding between Europeans and people from India than Said's model of binary opposition – of Orient versus Occident – allows for. Rahul Sapra, for example, has pointed to seventeenth century English travel narratives, including Roe's account of his embassy to India, in which writers often depict the Mughals as highly civilised and cultured. As he puts it, 'the overall picture of the Mughal empire that emerges from the seventeenth century travel narratives is one of a highly evolved civilisation with a high level of religious tolerance' – a far cry from the negative Western image of the Orient that Saidian

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<sup>52</sup> Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 180.

<sup>54</sup> Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 180–181.

<sup>55</sup> Barbour, *Before Orientalism*, 3.

scholars present.<sup>56</sup> Alison Games, in a similar vein, presents Roe and other early modern European travellers as cosmopolitan and adaptable, able to insert themselves into vastly different cultures from their own with relative ease.<sup>57</sup> Nandini Das also urges against ‘reading such encounters [as Roe’s with the Mughal court] in terms of difference and misunderstanding’, arguing that, despite obvious disparities between the Mughals and the English in terms of their ‘systems of meaning’, there were also important convergences.<sup>58</sup> William Pinch, in addition, claims that Roe and Jahangir reached a ‘mutual understanding’ that was achieved through ‘basic human curiosity’ and ‘cultural convergences’.<sup>59</sup> These interpretations of Roe’s encounter with Mughal India are at odds with Said’s thesis that Europeans viewed themselves as superior and diametrically opposed to people from Asia and the Middle East.

More recently, some scholars have attempted to move away from these, at times, overly rosy pictures of early modern cross-cultural relations. Instead, they aim to show how particular contexts and individual motives are more helpful in understanding Roe’s portrayals of the Mughal court during his embassy to Jahangir than through the framework of Orientalism. Colin Mitchell, for example, demonstrates how the context of early seventeenth century England, and particularly Roe’s training in Jacobean diplomacy, heavily influenced the ambassador’s approach to his embassy in India.<sup>60</sup> Mitchell argues that, while Roe’s writings ‘undoubtedly borrow from a corpus of medieval Oriental imagery that depicted the East as a land of despotism and riches’, this does not mean that the ambassador was motivated by a desire to emphasise the strengths and superiority of his own culture by

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<sup>56</sup> Sapra, *The Limits of Orientalism: Seventeenth-Century Representations of India* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 60.

<sup>57</sup> Games, *Web of Empire*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Nandini Das, ‘“Apes of Imitation”: Imitation and Identity in Sir Thomas Roe’s Embassy to India’, in *A Companion to the Global Renaissance English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion*, ed. Jyotsna Singh (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Pub., 2009), 126.

<sup>59</sup> William R. Pinch, ‘Same Difference in India and Europe’, *History and Theory* 38, no. 3 (1999): 407.

<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 152.

demeaning the Mughal court.<sup>61</sup> His characterisations of the court ‘parallel many Jacobean literary devices and mechanisms of expression’, and, in this way, Roe’s writings are more a representation of seventeenth-century England than they are of Mughal India.<sup>62</sup>

In opposition to those such as Sapra, Games, and Pinch, Sanjay Subrahmanyam argues that there should be no skirting around the derogatory language used by Roe to describe the Mughal court. ‘It is difficult to read in [Roe’s] view of the Mughal court a positive appreciation by an open-minded visiting dignitary, as some scholars have wished to have us believe’, he says.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, to do so, Subrahmanyam argues, would be to ‘deliberately shut our eyes’ to many passages in the ambassador’s diaries.<sup>64</sup> But rather than attribute Roe’s descriptions to a Saidian sense of European superiority or attempts to ‘other’, Subrahmanyam puts them down to the ambassador’s desire to justify his own failings at the Mughal court to his audience back home in England. ‘The account of Thomas Roe’ Subrahmanyam insists, ‘cannot present the embassy itself as a failure’.<sup>65</sup> As a result, Roe attributes any shortcomings that occurred during his embassy to the Mughals, utilising well-worn European tropes of the Mughal government as despotic, corrupt, barbaric, and hedonistic, in the process.

Taking a similar approach to Subrahmanyam, Mishra shows that on Roe’s embassy to Jahangir, the ambassador was far more driven by his own career ambitions and desire for status upon his return to England than any real concern for the future of the English in India.<sup>66</sup> She cautions against seeking a ‘deeper truth about the nature of the later British Empire’ through Roe’s writings, as many scholars have done, arguing that the ambassador

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<sup>61</sup> Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 153.

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 233.

<sup>63</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘Frank Submissions’, 75.

<sup>64</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘Frank Submissions’, 75.

<sup>65</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘Frank Submissions’, 78; For a fuller discussion of the term ‘cosmopolitan’ and how it relate to South Asian history, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘The Hidden Face of Surat: Reflections on a Cosmopolitan Indian Ocean Centre, 1540-1750’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61 (2018).

<sup>66</sup> Mishra, ‘Diplomacy at the Edge’, 5–28.

‘longed for domestic office’ after his embassy to Jahangir and that his forays into overseas diplomacy were simply means to an end – that end being a traditional and financially rewarding career in London. As shown earlier in this chapter, Mishra demonstrates how Roe developed anxiety around having to balance his own career ambitions with the interests of the Crown and the Company, and that this manifested in a constant anxiety to demonstrate his authority and status in India. This anxiety, in turn, Mishra explains, best explains Roe’s characterisations of the Mughal court.

Norris employed strikingly similar language to describe India and his experiences at the Mughal court to that used by Roe eighty years earlier. The latter ambassador frequently painted the Mughals as despotic, weak, money-grabbing infidels, and portrayed the English as the contrasting image – morally upright, militarily strong, and courageous. In line with the likes of Subrahmanyam, Barbour, Mishra, and Mitchell, I argue that Norris’s depictions of India should be understood primarily in terms of the ambassador’s diplomatic failures and his desire to justify them to his English audience. His use of oriental tropes can also be seen as a defence mechanism, and an expression of his anxiety about a power relationship over which he had very little control.

At the same time, we might reflect on how Roe’s depictions of India, as part of the large body of seventeenth-century European literature on Asia, informed Norris and his writings. As Colin Mitchell argues, in the early seventeenth century, Roe’s account of Mughal India borrowed from a ‘corpus of medieval Oriental imagery that depicted the East as a land of despotism and riches’.<sup>67</sup> Nearly eight decades later, when Norris was dispatched to India, this corpus had grown dramatically, and was influenced by Roe himself. Guido Van Meerbergen has similarly written about the vast body of writing on Asia generated by the

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<sup>67</sup> Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 153; See also, James D. Tracy, ‘Asian Despotism? Mughal Government as Seen from the Dutch East India Company Factory in Surat’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 13, no. 3 (1999): 256–280.

Dutch and English East India Companies in the seventeenth century, arguing that, even in this earlier phase of European expansion, ‘Company agents’ understandings of and attitudes towards Asian peoples and societies informed institutional approaches to trade, diplomacy, and colonial governance’.<sup>68</sup> Norris’s stereotyping of Mughal actors, and his negative portrayals of Indian society more broadly, clearly drew on this burgeoning body of European writings about Asia.

Roe’s embassy and the scholarly questions that have arisen in response to his writings about Mughal India have critically informed my understanding of the Norris embassy. The dual nature of Roe’s role as ambassador, and whether he should be understood within the framework of Orientalism, in particular, form focal points of my analysis. Norris would face the very same difficulties associated with the hybrid embassy as Roe did. For Norris, however, the hybrid-embassy problem was magnified and exacerbated by new problems unique to the latter embassy, making it almost impossible for Norris to succeed where Roe was able to reach moderate achievements, at least in the eyes of his contemporaries. On Norris and the Orientalism question, my argument aligns most closely with recent scholars on Roe who maintain that certain contexts and individual motives best explain Roe’s portrayals of Mughal India, and that we should resist projecting imperialist notions of the ‘Other’ backwards onto the pre-modern period. Specifically, my thesis will demonstrate that Norris’s representations of Mughal society are closely connected to his diplomatic failures and his desire to justify them to his English audience. At the same time, I show that Norris’s writings were also influenced by those of his predecessor. Roe’s diaries and the ghost of the first English embassy to Mughal India affected Norris’s actions at Aurangzeb’s court, as well as his depictions of South Asia. Skipping forward nearly seven decades, the next chapter

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<sup>68</sup> Guido Van Meersbergen, *Ethnography and Encounter: The Dutch and English in Seventeenth-Century South Asia*, (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2022).



examines the lead up to the Norris embassy in India and England, and how the fateful decision was made to send a second royal embassy to the Mughal court.

## Chapter Two

### A Company in Crisis

In the weeks before Norris departed London to undertake his embassy to the Mughal Court, King William III issued an official set of instructions to his ambassador. The document contained several core directives, the first of which was to facilitate the establishment of a new, royally chartered company in India, which would take over the role of the existing East India Company in England's trade with the region. This task involved formally announcing the change to the Mughal government, as well as obtaining the trading rights necessary for the New Company's future success. In the king's words,

When you are admitted to make your application to the Mogull or his ministers [...] you shall acquaint them with the Establishment of the Generall Society and English Company trading to the East Indies in pursuance of the late Act of Parliament [...] and you shall particularly endeavour to obtain such [...] Privileges for our Subjects of the said Generall society and Company as may be necessary for their security and protection in the carrying on and management of their Trade and Commerce'.<sup>1</sup>

This command seemingly spelled the end of the East India Company, England's most profitable organisation that had traded with India for almost a century. The Company had, during that time, brought in a steady stream of revenue to the Crown and fundamentally reshaped the social, economic, and political fabric of English society. Exactly how, then, did circumstances reach a point where the Company was destined for dissolution? And why did this change necessitate sending a royal embassy to Mughal India, the likes of which had not been undertaken since Thomas Roe's embassy more than eight decades earlier, and which was never again attempted in the history of the Company?

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<sup>1</sup> William III, 'Instructions for our Trusty and well beloved S<sup>r</sup> William Norris Bar<sup>t</sup>: whom wee have appointed R. ambassador to the great Mogull & other Princes in India. Given at our Court at Kensington the 31<sup>st</sup> day of December 1698, in the tenth year of our Raigne', 31 December 1698, MS 31302, British Library, London.

This chapter provides background to the Norris embassy in the decade and a half preceding it (1686–1699). It seeks to demonstrate how a unique and volatile set of circumstances in India and England during the final fifteen years of the seventeenth century triggered a crisis for the East India Company, resulting in the English government's decision to terminate the organisation and replace it with a new one. In India, these crisis-inducing conditions included an unsuccessful war launched by the Company against the Mughal regime, as well as a broader problem of European violence on the Indian Ocean. Back in England, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the rise of Parliament, and broad public backlash against the Company, combined with events in India to create a perfect storm of problems that threatened to bring down the trading organisation.

By shedding light on these significant events in India and England during the final decade and a half of the seventeenth century, this chapter reveals how conditions were created for a group of England's most prominent figures to call for the abolition of the Company, and the creation of a new one – a push that eventually led to the formation of a new East India Company and the decision to send the Norris embassy to the Mughal court.<sup>2</sup> These conditions provided the impetus for Norris's embassy; they also hampered it from the beginning. With so many factors complicating Norris's mission before he even left England, it becomes easy to see how the ambassador became so tightly constrained at the Mughal court, his embassy doomed to failure. As this chapter will show, all these problems stemmed from an East India Company crisis, the beginnings of which can be traced to 1686, when the Company launched a war against the Mughals on the Indian Ocean.

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<sup>2</sup> The establishment of the new East India Company and the decision to send the Norris embassy is examined in Chapter Three.

### The crisis begins: Child's War against the Mughals

In April 1686, the infamously bullish director of the East India Company and its largest stockholder, Josiah Child, sent the following secret orders from the Company's London headquarters to the captain of a fleet of heavily armed ships headed for India.

'[...] you are thereby ordered and empowered to make war upon the Mughal or Great King of Indostan, and his subjects, as you shall be directed by the East India Company and their chief officers in India [...] We] do hereby require you, that in case you meet with any of the Great Mughal's or his subjects' ships in the sea in your passage to Bombay, that in such case you do require and compel them by force of arms or otherwise to go along with you to Bombay, to the intent that [...] those Moors' ships may be detained, condemned and confiscated to the Company's use'.<sup>3</sup>

These orders marked the launch of a two-year period in which the Company's agents seized over twenty vessels along the busy trading route between Surat and the city of Mocha in Yemen, and took them as prizes to their settlement in Bombay.<sup>4</sup> The Company had spent years building a fleet of large warships in England designed to overwhelm smaller trading vessels, partly for the purpose of these attacks.<sup>5</sup> Some of the vessels captured were the Mughal's very own ships, while others belonged to Indian and other non-European traders, including shipping magnate Abdul Ghafur, the wealthiest merchant in the Mughal empire.<sup>6</sup> Ferrying cargoes of precious jewels, cloth and other highly valuable commodities, the ships

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<sup>3</sup> Josiah Child, 'East India Company Secret Committee Instructions to Captain Jonathan Andrews, Commander of the Charles II', April 24 1686, quoted in Margaret R. Hunt and Philip J. Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion: A Soldier's Diary of the 1689 Siege of Bombay, with Related Documents* (St Martin's: Bedford, 2015), 135.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Hunt and Philip Stern provide an excellent analysis of Child's War and the Bombay siege. See Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*. For an overview of commercial relations between India and the Ottoman Empire (and later, Yemen), see for example, Gilles Veinstein, 'Commercial relations between India and the Ottoman Empire (late fifteenth to late eighteenth centuries): a few notes and hypothesis', in *Merchants, Companies and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era*, eds. Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> For an alternative argument, Andrew Ruoss has recently claimed that Child directed the building of this fleet in order to maintain competition with the VOC, and that Child's war against the Mughals was therefore 'linked to an established pattern of competitive emulation of VOC practices'. Andrew Ruoss, 'VOC Competitive Collaboration: The Dutch and English East India Companies & The Forging of Global Corporate Political Economy (1650-1700)' (PhD thesis, Van Horn Duke University, 2017), ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 340-344.

<sup>6</sup> Abdul Ghafur/Guffur was head of one of the great merchant families of Surat in the seventeenth century and dominated the Surat trade from the 1680s. He is well-known to scholars of the early East India Company. See, for example, Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and Decline of Surat: 1700-1750* (Delhi: South Asia Books, 1979); Ghulam Nadri, 'The Maritime Merchants of Surat: A Long-term Perspective', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2-3 (2007).

carried a combined worth of tens of millions of rupees, or hundreds of thousands of pounds. A decade later, Ghafur would personally inform Norris that the ships belonging to him alone held freight worth over 16 million rupees.<sup>7</sup>

For most of the seventeenth century, the Company in India had operated relatively peacefully and within the political, legal, and economic confines of the Mughal state. That is not to say that the Company did not foster political ambitions in India. As Stern has convincingly argued, from the seventeenth century, the Company thought and acted like a political entity, coining money, building institutions, and conducting diplomacy.<sup>8</sup> There had, however, been few overt acts of aggression toward Mughal authorities exhibited by the Company in the lead up to this period. So, why would the Company now suddenly launch a coordinated and violent attack on the very government upon whose endorsement it relied for its trade's success?

Recent scholarship has revealed that the motive behind the Company's actions, commonly referred to as 'Child's War' or the 'First Anglo-Mughal War', was the attainment of a comprehensive *farman* from Aurangzeb that would give the Company greater control over its settlements and English subjects living and trading in India, as well as more favourable trading concessions and the ability to defend itself with forts and standing armies.<sup>9</sup> As Hunt and Stern have argued, the Company's attacks on Mughal vessels 'meant to send a signal to polities in Asia that the Company was to be taken seriously as both a political and commercial power [...They believed that] if this *farman* could not be obtained by diplomacy it would have to be won by war'.<sup>10</sup> Veevers also describes the Company's attacks against

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<sup>7</sup> Norris's interaction with Ghafur is discussed in more detail Chapter Five. William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702, volume II: December 1700–April 1701*, unpublished, Rawlinson Collection, C.913, Bodleian Library, Oxford, fol. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 11; John Keay, *The Honourable Company* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 144.

<sup>10</sup> Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 11.

Mughal shipping as an attempt to bargain for a better position within India, though he plays down the notion that the organisation intended to wage an actual war.<sup>11</sup> James Vaughn takes a stronger stance, concluding that, in waging a war against the Mughals, the Company ‘sought to centralise and militarise the English presence in Asia in order...to maintain its control of England's trade to the East’.<sup>12</sup> As part of his broader argument that the Company’s actions should be viewed in light of political circumstances in England rather than South Asia, Vaughn maintains, further, that Child’s actions should be seen as a show of support for the Crown and Stuart absolutism (the Company’s links to the Stuart monarchy are discussed in more detail later in this chapter).

Waging a war on the sea was also a convenient way for the Company to manage the growing problem of ‘interloping’, the practice of English merchants trading in Asia without authority from the Company. Interloping had always posed a challenge to the Company, which had fought ruthlessly since its inception to keep its trade monopoly in Asia. In the last two decades of the seventeenth century, however, incidences of the illegal practice increased, and there developed a widely held belief within the Company that it was damaging the trade.<sup>13</sup> There was, indeed, no bigger opponent of interloping than Child himself. Even before he served as Director of the Company, Child wrote several influential papers advocating for the Company’s right to a monopoly in Asia, and was instrumental in several of the legal cases brought against interlopers in the 1670s and 80s, including the famous Sandy’s case of 1684 in which the Company won the right to retain its monopoly and to punish interlopers on the

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<sup>11</sup> David Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 135–138.

<sup>12</sup> James M. Vaughn, ‘John Company Armed: The English East India Company, the Anglo-Mughal War and Absolutist Imperialism, c. 1675–1690’, *Britain and the World* 11, no. 1 (2018): 101; James Vaughn, *The Politics of Empire at the Accession of George III: The East India Company and the Crisis and Transformation of Britain's Imperial State*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam argues that ‘the nuisance value of the “interlopers” was probably greater than their real economic clout’, in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Frank Submissions: The Company and the Mughals between Sir Thomas Roe and Sir William Norris\*’, in *The worlds of the East India Company*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Margarete Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (New York: Boydell Press, 2002) 85; also see, Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 172.

seas.<sup>14</sup> From 1683, the director launched a crusade against interlopers, sending fleet after fleet of Company ships to the Indian Ocean to stifle them.<sup>15</sup> The war against the Mughals provided another way for Child and the Company to rid the seas of the interloper threat.

This dramatic change in the Company's tactics in dealing with the Mughal government seems to have been driven by a combination of factors. They were Child's forceful style of leadership, the Company's commercial success in the previous quarter of a century (which had emboldened its directors to seek further privileges in Asia and control over the trade) and the recent renewal of the Company charter. In 1686, James II issued a new charter that gave the Company the same powers as the one granted by Charles II before he died two years earlier, including the monopoly on English trade to Asia and the ability to use English ships and soldiers against Asian rulers.<sup>16</sup> The Company had spent huge sums of money and many years lobbying for the charter. Its issue was confirmation of the monarchy's continued support, and a big win against its critics in England. Whatever was behind it, however, the Company's violent new strategy elicited a dramatic reaction from the Mughal government, which would set off a chain of events that would bring the Company in India to its knees.

### Mughal retaliation

In India, the response from the Mughal government to the Company's attacks was swift and far reaching. Aurangzeb ordered an embargo to be placed on the Company's trade within his dominions, confiscated its merchandise and funds, and imprisoned its agents residing near the empire's main trading port at Surat.<sup>17</sup> This was a strategy the Mughal government had

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London: Routledge, 1993) 60.

<sup>15</sup> Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 176.

<sup>16</sup> Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 178.

<sup>17</sup> In reality, this was not a blanket punishment affecting all Company agents in India, but rather one that was limited to certain places and times, and that depended much on local authorities to implement the imperial orders. Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 12; Om Prakash, *European commercial enterprise in pre-colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 144–145.

employed on various occasions throughout the seventeenth century in response to European violence on the seas, and was one side of what Ashin Das Gupta calls the ‘balance of blackmail’, a situation where the Mughal government curtailed European maritime aggression by hindering their activities on land.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the Company’s ‘war’ was viewed by the Mughal administration and the broader community in India as no different to blatant piracy, and considered as part of a broader piracy problem in Asian waters, for which the English and other Europeans were blamed. The Company’s attacks did not stop, however, and in 1688 it captured an imperial vessel delivering provisions to the army of one of the Mughal emperor’s tributaries, Sidi Yakut, which was in the midst of a battle against the government’s enemy, the Marathas. The ship was taken into the Company’s port in Bombay, and the provisions offloaded into its warehouse. This particular attack elicited a dramatic response from the Mughals for which the Company was woefully unprepared.

After the Company leaders in Bombay refused to return the confiscated ship and its cargo, Sidi Yakut’s army struck, beginning a sequence of events that led to the year-long siege of the Company’s Bombay fort. While very few recent studies of this siege have been undertaken, in part due to the fact that the Company tried to keep the entire event a secret, Hunt and Stern’s recent research into the episode estimates that 14,000 of Sidi Yakut’s troops descended on the Bombay settlement, burning down everything in their path.<sup>19</sup> They also show that the Company’s army of just 300 soldiers was quickly overwhelmed, and many died, deserted the settlement or defected to the Mughal army. In just a few days, Sidi Yakut took control of Bombay, all except for the Company’s main fort, which remained under siege

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<sup>18</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, ‘The Maritime Merchant and Indian History’, reprinted in Ashin Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500–1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 30. For other occasions where the Mughal government inflicted this punishment on Europeans, see Naim Farooqui, ‘Moguls, Ottomans, and Pilgrims: Protecting the Routes to Mecca in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, *The International History Review* 10, no. 2 (1988); Anjum, Nazer Aziz. ‘Indian Shipping and Security on the Seas in the Days of the Mughal Empire’. *Studies in People's History* 2, no. 2 (2015): 167.

<sup>19</sup> Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 13; See, also, Margaret Hunt and Philip J. Stern, ‘Bombay: The Genealogy of a Global Imperial City’, *Urban History* 48, no. 3 (2021).



for more than a year, until April 1690, when the siege was lifted after the Company's Bombay agents brokered a peace deal with the Mughal government.

The peace deal, confirmed in a *farman* issued by Aurangzeb, was humiliating for the Company. Opening with the line, 'All the English having made a most humble submissive petition that the ill crimes they have done may be pardoned', the *farman* went on to lay blame for the battle at Bombay and the ensuing siege entirely with the Company agents.<sup>20</sup> It ordered them to pay a fine to the government of 150,000 rupees, as well as to return all the apprehended goods lying in the Bombay factory that had avoided incineration by Sidi Yakut's army. In addition, the Company was required to pay compensation to the merchant owners of the other ships that had been seized in the Company's war, and the Company's president at Bombay, John Child (no relation to Josiah) was to be banished from India.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, the *farman* gave none of the special privileges to the Company which it had sought when it launched the war against the Mughals in the first place.

The Company's Bombay settlement was left devastated by the siege and would take many years to recover. Child's attempt to force the Mughal government to grant the Company extra jurisdiction and trading concessions by waging a war on the Indian Ocean had backfired spectacularly. Unfortunately for the English, however, there would be further and far-reaching consequences of the Company's ill-conceived attacks, some of which Norris would be forced to suffer on his embassy years later.

### The piracy problem

At the same time as the Company was seizing vessels as part of its officially sanctioned war against the Mughals, other kinds of maritime violence were being committed against Mughal

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<sup>20</sup> Aurangzeb's imperial *farman*, 1690, quoted in Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 203.

<sup>21</sup> John Child was never banished because he died in India shortly after the *farman* was issued. Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 16.

subjects on the Indian Ocean. These additional attacks fell under the categories of piracy and privateering, the former carried out primarily by European and Anglo-American buccaneers, some of them ex-Company agents gone rogue; the latter, by crews of privately owned vessels who were hired by European governments, usually during wartime, to carry out attacks on enemy targets.<sup>22</sup> Piracy and privateering were common features of seventeenth-century maritime Asia. The last decade and a half of the seventeenth century, however, saw a sharp increase in both. This was fuelled, in part, by wars in Europe. For example, during the Nine Years War between England and France (1689-97), the recently ousted English king, James II, commissioned French warships to attack English ships in the deep sea from his position of exile in France.<sup>23</sup> The Company's stock price plummeted in the 1690s due in part to the French seizing five of the Company's richly laden ships on their return to England from Asia.<sup>24</sup> The new English king, William III, likewise funded a number of privateering missions to seek out French ships over the first decade of his reign. As Sebastian Prange and Robert Antony have demonstrated, 'piracy and privateering tended to flourish in the contested spaces between the sovereignties of competing empires'.<sup>25</sup>

The proceeds of such privateering ventures were split between the owners of the vessels that made the enemy captures, and the government that authorised them. While the target of these missions was always officially 'enemy' ships, often the quests would result in the plunder of any vessels with valuable cargo, including those belonging to Asian subjects.

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<sup>22</sup> As part of the broader historical trend which seeks to place the maritime world at the centre of early modern global history, new research has been undertaken on the fundamental role piracy played in European-Asian encounters and empire building. See, for example, Sebastian R. Prange and Robert J. Antony, 'Piracy in Asian Waters Part 2: Piracy, Sovereignty, and the Early Modern Asian State—An Introduction', *Journal of early modern history* 17, no. 1 (2013); Simon Layton, 'Discourses of Piracy in an Age of Revolutions', *Itinerario* 35, no. 2 (2011); Srinivas Reddy, 'Disrupting Mughal Imperialism: Piracy and Plunder on the Indian Ocean', *The Asian Review of World Histories* 8, no.1 (2020).

<sup>23</sup> John Appleby, 'Pirates, Privateers and Buccaneers: The Changing Face of English Piracy from the 1650s to the 1720s', in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1650-1815*, ed. Cheryl A. Fury (Martlesham: Boydell Press, 2017) 213-217.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Horwitz, 'The East India Trade, The Politicians, and the Constitution: 1689-1702', *The Journal of British studies* 17, no. 2 (1978): 8.

<sup>25</sup> Prange and Antony, 'Piracy in Asian Waters Part 2', 3.

In addition, even if European nations were officially at peace, this did not always translate to harmony between old rivals on the ocean. For example, the French and English East India companies occasionally seized each other's vessels on the Indian Ocean during their nations' brief interwar periods in the latter half of the seventeenth century.<sup>26</sup> In short, the line between piracy and privateering remained blurred right up until the early nineteenth century, when the practice of privateering was largely abandoned.<sup>27</sup>

The surge in piracy in the late seventeenth century was also driven by the recent establishment of new pirate bases in southern Africa and Madagascar, which made travel to the seas around South Asia more feasible. By the early 1690s, a large pirate community had been established in Madagascar, which flourished until the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Robert Antony estimates that, during this period, as many as 70,000 pirates were located along the 'great pirate belt' which extended from the Caribbean to the South China Sea.<sup>29</sup> Some scholars, in addition, have directly linked the increase in piracy in the Indian Ocean during the late 1680s and 90s to Child's war against the Mughals. As John Keay puts it, piratical 'raids on the Indian shipping between Gujurat and the Red Sea began in earnest only after Josiah Child set the example'.<sup>30</sup> The combination of these factors – European wars and competition, easier access to the Indian Ocean, and Child's War – was potent, causing what many at the time viewed as an infestation of pirates on the seas.

Some of the richest seizures ever recorded were carried out by Europeans against the ships of Mughal officials and subjects during the 1690s. The route from Surat, through the

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<sup>26</sup> Bryan Mabee, 'Pirates, privateers and the political economy of private violence', *Global Change, Peace & Security* 21, no.2 (2009): 142.

<sup>27</sup> Mabee, 'Pirates, privateers and the political economy of private violence', 142; For an explanation of why privateering was eventually abandoned, see Henning Hillmann, & Christina Gathmann, 'Overseas Trade and the Decline of Privateering', *The Journal of Economic History* 71, no. 3 (2011): 730–734.

<sup>28</sup> Appleby, 'Pirates, Privateers and Buccaneers', 22; Jane Hooper, 'Pirates and Kings: Power on the Shores of Early Modern Madagascar and the Indian Ocean', *Journal of World History* 22, no. 2 (2011): 216.

<sup>29</sup> Robert J. Antony, *Pirates in the Age of Sail* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2007), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 185; See also, Mark G. Hana, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570–1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Arabian and Red Seas to the city of Mocha in Yemen, provided Gujarati merchants with their principal market, with around 20 heavily laden ships making the annual trip, usually one or two of which belonged to members of the Mughal government.<sup>31</sup> In 1695, for example, English pirate Henry Every violently took possession of the *Ganj-i-sawai*, a ship owned by Aurangzeb himself, laden with gold, silver and jewels estimated to total between £200,000 and £600,000, and carrying passengers, including noble women, for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>32</sup> This capture was rumoured to have been particularly violent, with its passengers tortured and abused by the English pirates.<sup>33</sup> That year, Every also captured a ship belonging to none other than Abdul Ghafur (India's wealthiest merchant mentioned earlier), the *Fath Mahmamadi*, which carried a cargo valued at £60,000.<sup>34</sup> Such attacks on Indian trading vessels, combined with those carried out by the Company as part of its 'war' against the Mughals, led to outcry in the merchant community in India, and particularly in its main trading centre, the port city of Surat.

For the owners of the vessels taken in Mughal waters, it was difficult to determine which attacks on the seas were carried out 'officially' by the Company as part of its war, against the Mughal government, and which by rogue European or Anglo-American pirates, not least because the latter often flew European company or state flags on their vessels in order to facilitate their assaults. The distinction between Company-sanctioned and pirate-led seizures, however, would have mattered little to the victims. In fact, it was in the interests of the local ship owners involved not to differentiate between the attacks and, instead, lay blame

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<sup>31</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant 1500–1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 125.

<sup>32</sup> Joel Baer, *Pirates of the British Isles* (Tempus Publishing Limited, Stroud, 2005), 104; Srinivas Reddy, 'Disrupting Mughal Imperialism: Piracy and Plunder on the Indian Ocean' *The Asian Review of World Histories* 8, no. 1 (2020): 136.

<sup>33</sup> James H. Thomas, 'Merchants and Maritime Marauders: The East India Company and the Problem of Piracy in the Eighteenth Century', *The Great Circle* 36, no. 1 (2014): 88; See also, Tyler Joseph Kynn, 'Pirates and Pilgrims: The Plunder of the Ganj-i Sawai, the Hajj, and a Mughal Captain's Perspective', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 64, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>34</sup> Baer, *Pirates of the British Isles*, 101, 125; Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant*, 112.

for all of them on the English and other European companies trading in India – compensation for their losses was much more likely to come from a corporation whose agents were well-established on the subcontinent than from a bunch of roving pirates.

And lay blame on the Company they did. In 1695, directly following the Every piracies, a group of local merchants, led by Abdul Ghafur, mobbed the Company's factory at Surat, demanding recompense.<sup>35</sup> Partly in order to keep them safe from the angry throng, and partly as punishment for the piracies, the Governor of Surat ordered that the English factors there be clapped in irons by the city's *mutasaddi* (the port town governor), and prevented from any communication outside the factory. The merchants, getting no further satisfaction from the governor, then took the case directly to the Mughal Court, demanding justice against the English Company for all the assaults that had occurred on their shipping over the preceding decade.<sup>36</sup>

The Company had until that point managed to avoid paying out compensation to the merchants for their losses at sea during Child's War, despite Aurangzeb ordering them to do so as part of the peace agreement made after the Bombay siege five years earlier. This evasion appears to have been made possible by a string of gratuities paid to the Mughal court by the Company agents in India, as well as to the powerful governor of Surat.<sup>37</sup> As Farat Hasan has also conjectured, 'perhaps (the Company's) recall and restoration had less to do with the humble phrasing of their supplication, as with the fact that their trade settlements...were the only checks in Aurangzeb's hands against their high-handedness on the high seas'.<sup>38</sup> But this latest bout of piracy committed by Every, which had involved one of

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<sup>35</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 135; Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant*, 11–12.

<sup>36</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 135; Syed Hasan Askari, 'Mughal Naval Weakness and Aurangzeb's Attitude Towards the Traders and Pirates on the Western Coast', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 24, no. 1 (1961): 169.

<sup>37</sup> There are many references in Norris's diaries to the gratuities that the Old Company made to the Mughal court and the governor of Surat. See, for example, Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Farat Hasan, 'Conflict and Cooperation in Anglo-Mughal Trade Relations during the Reign of Aurangzeb', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 34, no. 4 (1991): 360.

Aurangzeb's own ships carrying pilgrims to Mecca and other precious cargo, combined with the repeated petitions against the Company by Ghafur and other Surat merchants, convinced the Mughal emperor that further action against the European companies trading in his dominions was required. Once again, he ordered the Company's factories, along with those of the Dutch and French in Surat, to be shut down. Trade in the city came to a standstill. The head English factors were placed under house arrest and other Europeans in Surat were given a strict curfew, prohibited from carrying arms or from travelling in palanquins, and were likewise banned from playing musical instruments or flying flags.<sup>39</sup> Again, the Company was ordered to compensate the merchants for their losses. This time however, Aurangzeb made an additional demand, one that would have significant repercussions for the Company and its place in India, as well as for the Norris embassy.

### The *muchalka*

In 1696, Aurangzeb ordered that the English, Dutch and French companies trading in India sign an agreement called a *muchalka* (a written obligation or bond), to provide ongoing security against piracy in Mughal waters in the form of armed ship convoys.<sup>40</sup> These convoys would accompany large trading vessels on their journeys around the coast of India and to other Asian destinations, and particularly Aurangzeb's imperial vessels making the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, in order to protect them from maritime attacks. The European companies were also required to actively seek out, pursue and destroy pirates that were at risk of attacking Mughal shipping, and to pay compensation to Indian ship owners for losses sustained at the hands of European ships.<sup>41</sup> As Norris discovered when he arrived at the Mughal court five years later, Aurangzeb had designated different zones to the three

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<sup>39</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 134; Thomas, 'Merchants and Maritime Marauders', 92.

<sup>40</sup> For an overview of this *muchalka* and its results, see Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and Decline of Surat: 1700–1750* (Delhi: South Asia Books, 1979) 97.

<sup>41</sup> Naim Farooqui, 'Moguls, Ottomans, and Pilgrims: Protecting the Routes to Mecca in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *The International History Review* 10, no. 2 (1988): 210.

companies to police – the VOC was mainly responsible for monitoring the trading route between Surat and Mocha, and guarding the entrance to the Red Sea, while the French were forced to police the Persian Gulf.<sup>42</sup> The Old Company was responsible for protecting the southern Indian seas from the Coromandel Coast and Bengal to Java and Sumatra.<sup>43</sup> There was, however, sometimes overlap – the Dutch and English were at one point ordered to undertake a joint convoy, which stalled a number of times because the two sides couldn't agree on which of their national flags to fly during the mission.<sup>44</sup> The European companies all fiercely opposed the *muchalka*, arguing that undertaking the convoys would quickly bankrupt them. The French even proclaimed they would go to war with the Mughal government rather than provide it with convoys.<sup>45</sup> All three companies eventually signed on the dotted line, however, realising they had little choice but to follow Aurangzeb's orders if they wanted to continue trading in India.<sup>46</sup> The Dutch even managed to make a virtue out of necessity, turning some of the voyages into trading ventures.<sup>47</sup>

At this juncture, the Company agents in India were painfully aware of the impact the piracy problem was having on their position in the region, and so endeavoured to make a dramatic show of their anti-piracy stance for the Mughal government and its subjects. As Stern has pointed out, for the first time since Thomas Roe was sent as ambassador to Jahangir, the Company even enlisted the help of the Crown for the cause.<sup>48</sup> In the 1690s, just a few years before the Norris embassy, the Company directors sent a request to William III to provide a fleet of imperial ships to assist them in convoying Mughal vessels.<sup>49</sup> They also set up a committee in India to investigate piracies and provide evidence and information back to

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<sup>42</sup> Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant*: 123; Laiq Ahmad, *The prime ministers of Aurangzeb* (Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1976) 137; Farooqui, 'Moguls, Ottomans, and Pilgrims', 210.

<sup>43</sup> Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant*, 123; Ahmad, *The prime ministers of Aurangzeb*, 137.

<sup>44</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 138.

<sup>45</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 136;

<sup>46</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 136.

<sup>47</sup> Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant*, 123.

<sup>48</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 141.

<sup>49</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 142.

the government in England on the whereabouts of individual felons.<sup>50</sup> The Company's leadership in India, in addition, called loudly for the public executions of captured pirates and for the ban on any pardoned pirates from entering Asia, and went to great lengths to advertise incidences in which it had assisted in bringing pirates to justice.<sup>51</sup> After persistent lobbying in England, the British Parliament even granted the Company the right to try and execute pirates anywhere in Asia.<sup>52</sup> In these ways, it worked closely with the Crown, in the most visible way possible, to exhibit an anti-piracy attitude in India.

None of these efforts mattered, however, for in a highly unfortunate turn of events for the Company, the cash-poor and preoccupied King William III, fighting a war against the French in Europe, declined to supply his own royal ships for the convoys, and instead contracted the job out to none other than William Kidd. Kidd was a Scottish privateer who had previously been employed by the Company and who, on his government-funded mission to suppress piracy in the Indian Ocean, turned to piracy himself. In 1697, he captured several vessels in the Arabian Sea, one of which belonged to Abdul Ghafur, and in 1698 he seized another of Aurangzeb's imperial ships, the *Quedah Merchant*, carrying a cargo worth £30,000, and killing many on board.<sup>53</sup> In the same year, two notorious pirates based in Madagascar, one English, the other Dutch, violently apprehended yet another of the emperor's ships carrying pilgrims to Mecca.<sup>54</sup> It was a public-relations nightmare for the Company trading in India, and, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, one that would be of crucial consequence to the Norris Embassy. As for Kidd, after the Company launched a global manhunt, the pirate was captured in New York and extradited to London, where he was tried and executed.<sup>55</sup> As will be explained in the following chapter, William III

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<sup>50</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 139.

<sup>51</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 139; Prange & Antony, 'Piracy in Asian Waters Part 2', 3.

<sup>52</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 140.

<sup>53</sup> Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 189.

<sup>54</sup> Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 189; Baer, *Pirates of the British Isles*, 101, 125.

<sup>55</sup> Reddy, 'Disrupting Mughal Imperialism: Piracy and Plunder on the Indian Ocean', 137–138.



specifically instructed Norris to emphasise to Aurangzeb the lengths the Crown had gone to in order to bring Kidd to justice.

Aurangzeb's response to the latest bout of piracy, which came just months before Norris's arrival in India, was to shut down the Company's trade once again and imprison its agents at Surat. But the now incensed Mughal emperor also offered an ultimatum to the English, Dutch and French companies trading in his dominions. The European companies were forced to choose between permanent expulsion from India, or signing an amended *muchalka*, which would not only mean providing convoys for Mughal shipping indefinitely but would also make them liable for all future acts of piracy against Mughal shipping, and therefore obliged to pay compensation for all losses incurred at the hands of pirates.<sup>56</sup> Backed into a corner, Samuel Annesley, head factor for the Company at Surat, signed the document. The Dutch and French followed suit, though it was a decision all three companies would come to bitterly regret. The Dutch later claimed they signed the agreement under duress, only when their agent was physically forced to do so.<sup>57</sup> The English also argued that they had been threatened with execution or expulsion if they refused to sign the document.<sup>58</sup> Soon after the Company's board of directors in London learned of the most recent *muchalka*, Annesley was dismissed from office and replaced by Stephen Colt, who would soon lead the fierce resistance to the Norris embassy in Surat.<sup>59</sup> The burned Annesley, for his part, would act as an important source of information for Norris when the ambassador arrived in the port city in December 1700.

At the close of the seventeenth century, then, the Company's position in India had by all appearances become desperate. Its presidency settlement at Bombay had been left

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<sup>56</sup> Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 188.

<sup>57</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, 'Gujarati merchants and the Red Sea trade, 1700–1725', in *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia Before Domination*, eds. Blair B. Kling and M. N. Pearson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979): 125.

<sup>58</sup> Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 189.

<sup>59</sup> Arnold Wright, *Annesley of Surat and his times, the true story of the mythical Wesley fortune* (London: A. Melrose, 1918), 226.

devastated after the siege, and due partly to the multiple trade embargos and imprisonments ordered by the emperor after Child's war and subsequent acts of piracy, the value of the Company's imports from the subcontinent had been slashed to a mere fraction of what they had been in the early 1680s. By 1695, the value of the Company's imports from India had plummeted from £800,000 in the 1680s to just £30,000.<sup>60</sup> The Company's share price was reduced to £37, a third of what it had been less than a decade earlier.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, the Company's agents in India owed huge sums to local financial brokers, but they had yet to pay a single rupee to the Surat merchants in compensation for their losses on the Indian Ocean, despite these merchants' persistent lobbying.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the Company had, under the threat of expulsion from India, been forced by the Mughal government to sign an agreement that virtually guaranteed more financial hardship. All this however, was only half the story. In England, the Company was fighting yet another battle, one that would throw its very existence into doubt.

### Crisis in England

At the same time as the Company was waging a war against the Mughals on the Indian Ocean, England was experiencing dramatic political, social and economic change, which spelled further trouble for the Company. In 1688, the Dutch Stadholder (military leader of the Dutch Republic) William Prince of Orange invaded England and, with widespread support from various sectors of English society, overthrew the deeply unpopular Catholic king, James II, in what became known as the Glorious Revolution. As James II fled to France, where he would live in exile for the rest of his life, a new Parliament made up of English noblemen, and broadly championed by the public, declared William the king of England. William's wife

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<sup>60</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660–1760* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 116–117.

<sup>61</sup> Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia*, 434.

<sup>62</sup> In his diaries, Norris frequently refers to the large sums the Old Company owed to their brokers. See, for example, William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume I: September 1699–April 1700, unpublished. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson Collection, C.912, fol. 72.

Mary, who was also James II's eldest daughter and was therefore deemed to have a hereditary right to the throne, was named Queen. This event was in many senses the first modern revolution – one of several which would transform the early modern world.<sup>63</sup> It led to a new regime in which the Crown was held more accountable to the Parliament, and the Parliament to the English public. In Steve Pincus's words, 'England had new rulers who, it appeared, were placed on the throne by the will of the English people. The power of that throne, Parliament implied in its Declaration of Rights, was limited by the rights of English subjects'.<sup>64</sup> Robert Tombs has likewise asserted that the Glorious Revolution 'almost without bloodshed in England,...ended monarchical absolutism [and] established the primacy of Parliament'.<sup>65</sup>

But why did this regime change mean more bad news for the East India Company? First, the Company was closely tied to the ousted King James II, his predecessor and brother Charles II, and their Tory supporters.<sup>66</sup> As mentioned above, the Company had enjoyed a strong alliance with these monarchs, who granted it expansive trading privileges that had licensed its shareholders to amass unprecedented profits over the previous quarter of a century. As recently as 1686, the Company was granted a new charter from James II which once again confirmed and expanded these rights. It had not received these privileges for nothing, however. To the contrary, the Company had spent colossal amounts of time and money in maintaining favourable relationships with these kings in order to keep its trade monopoly in Asia. In addition, head of the Company Josiah Child (the same director who led the war against the Mughals) was an outspoken Tory who had written prolifically about the

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<sup>63</sup> Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p.vii.; Other recent examples on how the Glorious Revolution transformed English society include: Gary Cox, 'Was the Glorious Revolution a Constitutional Watershed?', *The Journal of Economic History* 72, no. 3 (2012): 567–600; John Beckett, 'The Glorious Revolution, Parliament, and the Making of the First Industrial Nation', *Parliamentary History* 33, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>64</sup> Steve Pincus, *1688*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Tombs, *The English and their History* (London: Penguin Press, 2015), 260.

<sup>66</sup> Generally speaking, in the 1680s the Tory political faction supported James II for the position of king, whereas the Whigs supported finding an alternative monarch, and would go on to support William III.

strengths of absolute monarchy.<sup>67</sup> Now William, the arch enemy of James II who naturally favoured the Whig political faction of the Parliament, was England's new leader. In the new regime, therefore, the Company suddenly found itself out of favour with both the Crown and the Parliament.

The 'primacy of Parliament' that the Glorious Revolution had established also signified danger for the Company. Until 1688, the Company's relationship with the English government had involved a two-party dynamic in which the monarch issued royal grants to the Company in return for a steady stream of taxes reaped from its overseas trade. In this dynamic, the Company answered to the Crown alone, and not to Parliament. Post-revolution, however, the new eminence that Parliament enjoyed in the English government meant that a third party was introduced into the equation. This was problematic for the Company because that third party (the Parliament) was ideologically opposed to the Company's monopoly on trade in Asia, and suspicious of its close ties to the disposed monarch. As Stern explains, 'Parliament had long figured as an outlet for dissent against monopolies and, now especially, against the monarchical power that theoretically constituted them'.<sup>68</sup> It did not help the Company, in addition, that the new Parliament contained a number of prominent Whigs that it had dismissed in its attempt to win over the previous monarchs who favoured the Tories.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, as will be shown below, these parliamentarians would be strong allies to the Company's opponents who sought to have the organisation shut down.

Parliament now demanded to have a say in the Company's affairs and made strong advances towards the claim that it, rather than the Crown, should oversee the East India trade.<sup>70</sup> In 1689 a parliamentary committee was set up to enquire into the Company's affairs. The committee recommended that a new company be established; one that would receive its

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<sup>67</sup> Lawson, *The East India Company*, 60

<sup>68</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 143.

<sup>69</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 143.

<sup>70</sup> Lawson, *The East India Company*, 53.

authority from an Act of Parliament, not the Crown.<sup>71</sup> As will be shown in the following chapter, over the course of the next decade, the Parliament continued to muscle its way into the East India trade by making a number of similar moves, which all flew in the face of the trading monopoly the Company had enjoyed almost uninterrupted since its inception almost 90 years earlier. This early resolution made by the Parliament, indeed, foreshadowed the ultimate decision to shut the Company down and instate a new one. In this way, the Parliament, in addition to the new king, acted as a powerful hurdle to the Company and the continuation of its trading rights in Asia. Indeed, the Glorious Revolution, in Stern's words, 'did fundamentally transform the East India Company's position within British politics'.<sup>72</sup>

The English political establishment, however, was not the only place where the Company faced opposition in the last fifteen years of the seventeenth century. At the same time as it was forced to deal with a new regime unsympathetic to its ambitions, the Company experienced a broader public backlash in England. This was in no small part due to the war against the Mughal government carried out in the late 1680s. When news reached England in 1689 of the Company's violent and unprovoked attacks on Mughal shipping and the humiliating peace deal signed by its agents in Bombay, it did so in the midst of a nation-wide printing boom. This boom contributed to a spike in public awareness of and interest in the activities of the East India Company – and much of the press was negative.<sup>73</sup> In the widely-circulated pamphlets, scholarly papers and broadsides of the day, critics slammed the Company for unlawfully acting as a sovereign, for carrying out a war without the authority of the Monarch, and for damaging the nation's reputation in Asia.<sup>74</sup> One such article argued that:

The Unaccountable War made with the Mogul, was undertaken for the private base Ends and Purposes, giving out, That the Company should be enrich'd by taking many

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<sup>71</sup> Subrahmanyam, 'Frank Submissions', 85; Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 181; Lawson, *The East India Company*, 53.

<sup>72</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 143.

<sup>73</sup> Lawson, *The East India Company*, 57–58.

<sup>74</sup> Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 20.

Millions from the Mogul and his subjects... Thus has the English Nation been made to stink in the Nostrils of that People; when before, from the time that we first set foot on that Golden Shoar, we were the most beloved and esteemed of all Europeans... But as things now stand, 'tis not to be hop'd we shall ever regain our lost Credit in India; nor have we reason to beleive that the Mogul and his People who have been so unjustly spoil'd, will ever be heartily reconcil'd to the present Company, and those Persons that have actually committed such violences upon them'.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, the Company's war against the Mughals would become a centrepiece in the concerted effort to oust the organisation from its place in India. But it was not only the literate echelons of the English public that harboured resentment towards the Company during this period. There was also growing opposition towards the organisation from various other sectors of society, including England's manufacturers and producers. As Philip Lawson has shown, the massive spike in the Company's imports from 1660 had left the English market saturated with products, particularly spices and textiles, from India and other parts of Asia.<sup>76</sup> While this may have been positive for some (even the poorest families in England could afford to season their food with pepper by the 1680s, for example), many trying to make a living in this marketplace struggled to compete with the corporate giant.<sup>77</sup> By the late 1680s, protests from those belonging to the domestic textile and various other industries had become commonplace.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, calls against the large amounts of bullion the Company exported to Asia became louder, an issue that, as Michael Wagner states, had affected the company for 'its entire life'.<sup>79</sup> Still others petitioned Parliament against the Company, such as the wives of deceased East India Company employees, who argued the Company owed them their late husbands' estates.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Sir Humphrey Edwin, 'An Account of the East India Companies War with the Great Mogul'. Pamphlet, n.d., CO (Colonial Office) 77, National Archives, Kew.

<sup>76</sup> Lawson, *The East India Company*, 60.

<sup>77</sup> Lawson, *The East India Company*, 60.

<sup>78</sup> Horwitz, 'The East India Trade, The Politicians, and the Constitution', 9; Michel Morineau, 'The Indian Challenge: seventeenth to eighteenth centuries', in *Merchants, Companies and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 243.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Wagner, 'The East India Company and the shift in Anglo-Indian commercial relations in the 1680s', in *The East India Company, 1600--1857: Essays on Anglo-Indian connection, 2017 – 2017*, eds. William A. Pettigrew and Mahesh Goplan (London: Routledge, 2017), 61.

<sup>80</sup> Keay, *The Honourable Company*, 181.

At the end of the seventeenth century, the East India Company was facing opposition and hostility from multiple directions. In England, furthermore, Parliament had become a place for people from all sections of society to air their grievances against the Company.<sup>81</sup> As the next chapter will reveal, these volatile circumstances created the perfect conditions for a group of the nation's most prominent and wealthy figures to push for the abolition of the Company and offer themselves as an alternative through which to conduct England's East India trade. The push led to the abolition of the Company by an Act of Parliament approved by the king, and the establishment of a new East India Company that was designed to completely replace the old one. This, in turn, prompted the decision by the New Company to send a royal ambassador to the Mughal court, a feat that had not been undertaken since Roe's embassy more than eight decades earlier.

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<sup>81</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 144.

## Chapter Three

### The New East India Company

On 6 January 1699, just days before he set sail for India, Norris was handed a long list of instructions from the directors of the New Company for his mission to the Mughal court. Enclosed was a warning to the freshly appointed ambassador that the agents of the Old Company, who continued to conduct their business in India, were not to be trusted, and that he would be wise, therefore, to avoid offering any consular assistance to them. In the directors' words,

Wee further caution you of being forward in considering of any that are in the Old Companies interest or service, it being our own opinion that they will stick at nothing that may lessen you, and defeate the designs of this Embassy.<sup>1</sup>

It was an ominous indication of two enormous hurdles Norris would soon face in India. The Old-New Company conflict and the Old Company's attempts to sabotage the embassy was a significant issue. So too were the complications involved with having to represent the New Company, on the one hand, and the Crown – and, therefore, all the Crown's subjects in India, including those working for the Old Company – on the other. The previous chapter explained how a unique and volatile set of circumstances in India and England during the final decade and a half of the seventeenth century triggered a major crisis for the East India Company. This chapter reveals how that crisis led to the creation of a new East India Company and the decision to send a royal embassy, headed by William Norris, to the Mughal court. It also examines the dual nature of Norris's mandate, and how, similarly to the case of Roe, structural problems were built into the Norris embassy before the ambassador had even left England – problems that would eventually bring the embassy undone.

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<sup>1</sup> The New Company, 'Directions & Instructions given by the English Company Trading to the East Indies', 3 January 1699, MS 31302, British Library, London.



### Print wars

England's change in regime brought about by the Glorious Revolution, combined with the broader public backlash against the Company in the 1690s, provided a ready environment for a group of the country's most prominent and wealthy figures to push for the abolition of the Company and offer themselves as an alternative through which to conduct the nation's trade with Asia. The 'New Society', as the group was called, was made up of wealthy traders, noblemen, ex-Company servants, bankers, and parliamentarians, who were also collectively referred to as the 'Interlopers' or the 'Dowgate Adventurers' (the 'Interlopers', because several of its members had undertaken illegal trading operations to India and other parts of Asia in the preceding years, and 'Dowgate Adventurers', because the group's headquarters was established at Skinner's Hall in Dowgate, London).<sup>2</sup>

The group was led by Sir Thomas Papillon, a Whig parliamentarian (he was MP for Dover until 1695 and purported to be worth £200,000) and ex-Company director who, due largely to his belief in opening the trade to a wider public, left the Company in 1681 and had since fought vigorously for an end to its monopoly in Asia.<sup>3</sup> Many of the New Society's other members had likewise been engaged in the various efforts to gain entrance into the East India trade that took place during the 1670s and 80s, all of which were ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>4</sup> They protested against the Company's exclusivity and advocated for broader membership in, and access to, the East India trade. By the early 1690s, the New Society presented a powerful and united front against the Company and launched a coordinated and well-funded attack to shut down the corporation and replace it with a new one.

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<sup>2</sup> John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 181.

<sup>3</sup> Harihar Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699–1702)*, ed. S.C. Sarkar (Calcutta: Mukhopadhyay, 1959), 175.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Wagner, 'The East India Company and the shift in Anglo-Indian commercial relations in the 1680s', in *The East India Company, 1600–1857: Essays on Anglo-Indian connection, 2017–2017*, eds. William A. Pettigrew and Mahesh Goplan (London: Routledge, 2017), 61.

The New Society's attack against the Company was two-pronged. First, the group funded the publication of a stream of pamphlets critiquing the Company and calling for its abolition. These publications seized on recent events like the Company's war against the Mughals discussed in Chapter Two, citing them as evidence that the organisation should be shut down. One such article argued that the Company's:

late dealings with the natives in India have [...] been unjust and scandalous, they having about six years past commenced an unjustifiable war with the Great Mughal, and under that pretense, committed many great depredations on the subjects of that prince, which has rendered the English in all parts of India odious and contemptible, and made them to be esteemed rather pirates than merchants.<sup>5</sup>

The New Society's pamphlets, in addition, commonly played up the Company's ties to the unpopular exiled king, James II, and argued that support for the Company meant support for monarchical-absolutism and the limitation of the English people's natural rights.<sup>6</sup> As Stern has shown, Company director Josiah Child 'was likened to every villain imaginable' during this period, including Oliver Cromwell and Satan.<sup>7</sup> Such arguments struck a chord with the English public, which, after the Glorious Revolution, was questioning the very notions of sovereignty, monarchy and natural liberty. Indeed, the New Society's pamphlets were widely circulated in England and further incensed a society that was already hostile towards the Company.

Evidently threatened by the New Society's printed assaults, the Company fought back by publishing and distributing its own pamphlets, beginning a print war that would last the greater part of a decade. The Company's pamphlets repeated the same arguments the organisation had always employed against its enemies, for example, that a monopoly was the only effective way to conduct trade and diplomacy in the 'heathen' lands of Asia, where

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<sup>5</sup> 'The Great Oppressions and Injuries Which the Managers of the East India Company Have Acted on the Lives, Liberties, and Estates of Their Fellow Subjects and Injustice Done to the Natives in Sundry Parts of India', London, 1691, quoted in Margaret Hunt and Philip Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion: A Soldier's Diary of the 1689 Siege of Bombay, with Related Documents* (St Martin's: Bedford, 2015), 170.

<sup>6</sup> Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 10, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 144.

despotic kings ruled.<sup>8</sup> In 1689, Josiah Child even republished his written defence of the Company and its monopoly first written in 1681, in which he argued that the ‘East India Trade is the most national of all trades’, and therefore should be kept in the safe hands of the Company rather than opened up to all.<sup>9</sup> These pamphlets also claimed that if the Company was abolished and a new one established in its place, the new company would only end up facing the same challenges as its predecessor, and so the whole idea was not only economically unsound but simply nonsensical. One pamphleteer’s novel way of phrasing this was that:

The pulling down this Company to set up a New one may prove as unsuccessful as it would be to grub up a flourishing well grown orchard, in the strength and prime time of its bearing Fruit, to Plant a New Orchard in the same place, in hopes to have more and better cyder: whereas a New Plantation yields little fruit and the worst cyder.<sup>10</sup>

This print-war between the Company and the New Society persisted relentlessly through the 1690s, and was fought alongside another battle of print, which involved written petitions to Parliament.

Indeed, the second prong in the New Society’s attack against the Company was their persistent lobbying of Parliament. During the late 1680s and 90s, the group made several petitions to the House of Commons that called for an end to the Company and the establishment of a new organisation to conduct England’s trade with Asia. Though all debated heatedly, the petitions were ultimately met with considerable support for the New Society. In response to one submitted in 1689, for example, the House of Commons recommended that a new Company should be established by an Act of Parliament.<sup>11</sup> As a

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<sup>8</sup> Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 19; Harihar Das, ‘The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699–1702)’. Original manuscript, 14 May 1945, typescript, Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, 145–148.

<sup>9</sup> Josiah Child, *A discourse concerning trade, and that in particular of the East-Indies, wherein several weighty propositions are fully discussed, and the state of the East-India Company is faithfully stated*, 1689, London: Andrew Sowle, Wing/D1590, Proquest.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Some Considerations offered touching the East-India Affairs’. Pamphlet, quoted in Harihar Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699–1702)*. Original manuscript, 14 May 1945, typescript, Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, 148.

<sup>11</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, ed. S.C.Sarkar, 25.

result of another petition presented in 1691, the House sent a written request to the king, asking him to dissolve the Company in favour of a new one.<sup>12</sup> In 1693, after the Company had lobbied Parliament once again, the House of Commons passed a vote in favour of the termination of the Company.<sup>13</sup> Every time, however, the New Society's attacks were met with fierce resistance from those fighting the Company's corner. In response to their opponents' persistent lobbying, the Company's Court of Directors made several of its own submissions to Parliament, defending its actions against the Mughals on the Indian Ocean as necessary for the continued success of the English nation overseas, and arguing that the Parliament's interventions in the Company's affairs directly violated its constitutional arrangement with the Crown that had been established more than 90 years previously.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to its official appeals to Parliament, the Company employed underhand tactics to defeat the New Society and keep its trading monopoly. In the early 1690s, Josiah Child and his successor Thomas Cook paid bribes totalling over £200,000 to a number of prominent government figures in England, including members of the Privy Council and the speaker of the House of Commons.<sup>15</sup> These bribes helped to secure another charter from the Crown in 1693, which further guaranteed the Company's trading monopoly in Asia.<sup>16</sup> The 1693 charter was granted after Child, in a clever manoeuvre, purposefully forfeited the Company's old charter granted by James II, and applied for a new one directly from the Crown (or more specifically, the bribed members of the Privy Council) while Parliament was not sitting.<sup>17</sup> Its obtainment represented a huge win for the Company in the face of its rivals. When the Company's actions were exposed, however, further public scandal ensued. Its

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<sup>12</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, ed. S.C.Sarkar, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, 27–28.

<sup>15</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660–1760* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 434; Wagner, 'The East India Company and the shift in Anglo-Indian commercial relations in the 1680s', 62.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Horwitz, 'The East India Trade, The Politicians, and the Constitution: 1689–1702', *The Journal of British studies* 17, no. 2 (1978): 5–6.

<sup>17</sup> Wagner, 'The East India Company and the shift in Anglo-Indian commercial relations in the 1680s', 62.

opponents cried that such bribery further exposed the Company as a corrupt and despotic organisation unworthy of carrying on the nation's trade. Parliament subsequently ordered an investigation into the Company's actions, revealing the great extent of the bribery, and in 1694, resolved that 'all the subjects of England have equal right to trade to the East Indies, unless prohibited by an Act of Parliament'.<sup>18</sup> In doing so, Parliament rejected out of hand the Company's long-held monopoly and effectively opened the East India trade to all English subjects.<sup>19</sup>

At this point, the war between the Company and the New Society appeared to have reached deadlock. Despite years of fierce battles in England through print and through Parliament, the rivals were now in the unprecedented and utterly confusing position where, on the one hand, the Company was in possession of a recently renewed royal charter which further guaranteed its monopoly on trade in Asia, while on the other, the New Society, and all other English traders for that matter, had been given the green light to trade in Asia by the Parliament.<sup>20</sup> Further confusion was added when, in 1696, the Parliament refused to sanction the Company's existing royal charter.<sup>21</sup> As many on both sides of the dispute argued at the time, something clearly had to give in order to prevent England's trade with Asia from descending further into chaos.

### A £2 million Act

The breakthrough came in 1698, when the English government, financially drained from its Nine-Years' War with France, publicly announced its need for a loan. The Company had always understood that its privileges for conducting the East India trade were predicated on the financial loans, taxes and other gratuities it paid to the Crown. By this time, too, it had

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<sup>18</sup> House of Commons, quoted in, Horwitz, 'The East India Trade, The Politicians, and the Constitution', 7–8.

<sup>19</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699-1702)*, ed. S.C.Sarkar 26.

<sup>20</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699-1702)*, ed. S.C.Sarkar 26.

<sup>21</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699-1702)*, ed. S.C.Sarkar 38.

come to realise that the Parliament's seal of approval was equally vital to its continuation as an organisation. As a result, on 4 May, the Company offered the state a loan of £400,000 at four percent interest to secure its charter.<sup>22</sup> The New Society, which had just weeks earlier submitted yet another petition to Parliament requesting the establishment of a new company, retaliated immediately with a £2 million loan at eight percent interest on the condition that it receive exclusive rights to the East India trade.<sup>23</sup>

The New Society's offer was unbeatable.<sup>24</sup> In just two months, an Act was passed by both Houses of Parliament which created a new 'General Society' to trade with the East. This body's original membership was based on the 1442 subscribers who had contributed the funds for the £2 million loan to the state. Every subscriber was entitled to trade with India, and, while most of those subscribers, unsurprisingly, belonged to the New Society, there was one unexpected contributor – Josiah Child. On behalf of the Company, he pledged £315,000 – the largest individual amount put forward for the loan – in an attempt to hedge his bets and ensure a stake in whichever company succeeded in running the East India trade.<sup>25</sup> On 5 July, the king gave his royal assent to the Act and served official notice to the 'Old Company' – as it came to be colloquially known – of its termination in three years' time, on 29 September 1701. The Act also established Parliament's new powers to supervise the East India Trade – from this moment forward, no changes could be made to the trade without the approval of Parliament.

In addition to the Act, on 5 September of the same year, William III granted a royal charter to the General Society, which styled itself as 'The English Company Trading to the East Indies' and was commonly referred to as the 'New Company'.<sup>26</sup> For the most part, this

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<sup>22</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 156.

<sup>23</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699-1702)*, ed. S.C.Sarkar 39.

<sup>24</sup> Stern shows that the Company proposed to make another counteroffer, but this was refused by the Parliament. Stern, *The Company-State*, 156.

<sup>25</sup> Lawson, *The East India Company*, 55.

<sup>26</sup> The English Company Trading to the East Indies is referred to in this thesis as the 'New Company'. For details on the New Company's charter, see 'Letters Patent of William III granting the incorporation of the

charter granted the same privileges to the New Company as the Old Company had enjoyed previously, including the coveted monopoly on England's trade with Asia, with the concession that the Old Company could continue trading for three more years, after which it would be terminated.<sup>27</sup> The New Company was to be presided over by a Court of 24 directors from the Company's headquarters in London, and its agents in Asia empowered to set up factories, possess land and build institutions, such as forts, schools and courts.<sup>28</sup> The charter also empowered the New Company to conduct diplomacy in Asia on behalf of the English state. In addition to the privileges formerly enjoyed by the Old Company, however, the New Company gained the extra power of 'consular status'. The chiefs of the New Company factories in India were all to be given the title of 'consul', indicating their appointment by the state and close connection to the Crown. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, these consular powers caused multiple problems, not least because the chief factors of the New Company interpreted their consular status to mean that they acted for, and held authority over, all the English residing in India, including those belonging to the Old Company.

To all appearances, then, by 1698 the future direction of the East India trade was sealed. The New Company, with its sweeping new powers granted by the Parliament and approved by the Crown, would take over the trade, while the Old Company would be shut down completely in three years' time. While it was one thing to announce these changes in England, however, it was another matter entirely to implement them in India. Just how, for example, would the New Company convince the Mughal government and the trading community in India that it, and not the Old Company, was now the legitimate English trading authority? In what way would the New Company agents go about obtaining trading rights from the Mughal authorities that would allow them to establish their organisation in India?

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General Society entitled to the Advantages given by an Act of Parliament for advancing a Sum, not exceeding Two Millions, for the Service of the Crown of England', 1698, BL\_IOR\_A\_1\_55, British Library, London.

<sup>27</sup> 'Letters Patent of William III'.

<sup>28</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699-1702)*, ed. S.C.Sarkar, 42.

How, also, could the New Company merchants repair English-Indian relations, which had been so badly damaged by the actions of the Old Company and rogue English pirates, in order for its trade to succeed? For the New Company, all these problems pointed to a single solution: a royal embassy.

### Why an embassy, and why Norris?

In September 1698, the New Company's Court of Directors sent an official request to William III, asking that he dispatch a royal embassy to India on their behalf, which the New Company, for its part, would fund. It was the first time such an undertaking had been formally proposed since Roe's embassy more than 80 years earlier, and those belonging to the New Company had considered the idea for some time. Many agreed it was the best answer to repairing English-Mughal relations after the injury caused by Child's War and other recent acts of piracy against Mughal shipping. As New Company advocate put it,

tis absolutely necessary that some well qualifi'd Person be sent to the Great Mogul, under the Character of His Majesties Ambassador, to accommodate the present Differences, and to vindicate the Honor of the Nation, by disowning the late unjust Proceedings.<sup>29</sup>

Repairing these relations, it was held, was key to the future success of the East India trade, and therefore crucial to the New Company.

It was also believed that a royal embassy would lend legitimacy to the New Company on the ground in India in the face of its Old Company rivals, and would expedite the process of obtaining the necessary trading rights for the New Company's establishment on the subcontinent. The Court of Directors was well aware that the Old Company merchants in India planned to resist the roll-out of the New Company across Mughal India (more on which will be discussed below), and would therefore 'stick at nothing that may [...] defeate the

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<sup>29</sup> Sir Humphrey Edwin, 'An Account of the East India Companies War with the Great Mogul'. Pamphlet, n.d., CO (Colonial Office) 77, National Archives, Kew.



designs of this Embassy'.<sup>30</sup> Sending a representative with royal authority to the Mughal Court was something the Old Company could not legally undertake, as it had lost its royal charter. Doing so, therefore, would give the New Company a clear edge over its adversary. At the same time, having a representative of a crowned head speak for them at the Mughal Court would, the New Company directors believed, help them obtain more advantageous trading rights than they would have otherwise gained. An embassy, in sum, would help the New Company to establish itself in India as the only legitimate English trading authority in India.

The purpose of the embassy was, therefore, two-fold: it would repair relations between the English and the Mughal government and merchant community in India, while at the same time facilitating the New Company's takeover and the Old Company's dissolution. But who would lead such a daunting mission? The man chosen by the New Company was William Norris. Born into a noble family and educated at the University of Cambridge, since 1695 Norris had occupied a seat in the House of Commons as the member for Liverpool, a position that he took over from his older brother. Norris had been a vocal supporter of William and Mary's takeover in the Glorious Revolution and had since advocated persistently for the Whig cause, including in a case of high treason against a James II loyalist who had attempted to assassinate the new king.<sup>31</sup> But while his sympathies clearly lay with the Whigs, Norris appears not to have been personally engaged in the fierce conflict surrounding the East India trade during the 1690s, beyond being present in the many parliamentary debates surrounding it. Indeed, the soon-to-be ambassador owned no shares in the New Company, nor did he have any prior experience in overseas commerce, having never stepped foot outside Europe.

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<sup>30</sup> The New Company, 'Directions & Instructions given by the English Company Trading to the East Indies, To Sr W<sup>m</sup> Norris Bar<sup>t</sup>. his Ma<sup>ties</sup> ambassadorto the great mogul', 3 January 1698, British Library, London, MS 31302.

<sup>31</sup> Das, 'The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib'. Original Manuscript, pp. 48–51.

While he may not appear the obvious choice, the reasoning behind Norris's selection for the role of ambassador made sense to his contemporaries. As discussed in Chapter One, the idea behind the first royal English embassy to Mughal India was to send a figure to the court who would exude maximum prestige and majesty, thereby countering suspicions around the authenticity of English 'ambassadors', and catering to the Mughals' preference for royal figures over merchant envoys. Roe's high social standing as one of Queen Elizabeth's royal courtiers was therefore behind his appointment as ambassador to Jahangir's court. Norris similarly enjoyed noble status as a parliamentarian with a long history of royal connections. Indeed, his family's presence in the English court dated back to Henry VIII.<sup>32</sup> Just for good measure, however, immediately before Norris left for India, King William knighted the ambassador and gave him the further title of Baronet, leaving the incumbent with the prestigious designation of 'His Excellency Sir William Norris Baronet Ambassador Extraordinary from the King of England Scotland France & Ireland'.<sup>33</sup>

The decision to send a royal embassy to the Mughal court was momentous. Such an embassy had not been carried out in more than eight decades, and much was riding on its success. The Old Company directors in London resisted the announcement of the Norris embassy from the outset, and even made a short-lived attempt to send their own delegation to the Mughal Court in retaliation. Charles Davenant, a parliamentarian, economist, and Old Company advocate, was selected to lead the rival embassy on an annual salary of £1,000.<sup>34</sup> The plan fell through, however, when Davenant withdrew from the position in May 1700, not long before he was due to set sail for India, and eight months after Norris arrived on the subcontinent.<sup>35</sup> While the reasoning behind Davenant's withdrawn is unclear, it is likely he,

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<sup>32</sup> Das, 'The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib'. Original Manuscript, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume I: September 1699–April 1700, unpublished, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson Collection, C.912, fol. 48.

<sup>34</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 158; Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699-1702)*, ed. S.C.Sarkar, 18–19.

<sup>35</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 158; Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699-1702)*, ed. S.C.Sarkar, 18–19.

and the Old Company, realised that without any royal authority, he had little hope of succeeding in India against an ambassador appointed by the Crown. That the Old Company never selected another candidate for the role supports this hypothesis. It is also possible that the Old Company decided a large embassy to match Norris's was not worth the cost and effort, when their agents residing in India negotiated effectively with Mughal authorities most of the time. Abandoning the idea of its own embassy entirely, the Old Company clearly decided it would have to find other ways to bring down the Norris embassy.

### The dual mandate

Before his departure from London in January 1699, Norris was handed two sets of instructions – one from King William, the other from the New Company – alongside a letter from the English monarch to Aurangzeb. The documents formed a kind of 'dual mandate' that, as this thesis will reveal, would have unintended and unwelcome implications for the embassy. The king's instructions and letter focused on two major themes. The first was repairing relations with the Mughal government after the recent violence against Mughal shipping on the Indian Ocean, an effort which included sending a royal fleet of four warships along with the ambassador to combat piracy on the Indian Ocean. As the instructions stated, the ambassador should

acquaint the Mogul and his Ministers with the great care Wee have taken to suppress the Pyrates in the East Indies having to this End sent a Squadron of our Shippes on purpose to those parts, and that such of the Pirates as have been taken within our Dominions have been brought to justice.<sup>36</sup>

The king's instructions even specifically commanded Norris to explain the recent crimes of William Kidd to the Mughal Court. Kidd been commissioned by the Crown two years earlier to capture pirates in the Indian Ocean, but had instead turned to piracy himself, seizing one of

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<sup>36</sup> William III, Instructions for our Trusty and well beloved Sr William Norris Bart: whom wee have appointed R. ambassador to the great Mogull & other Princes in India. Given at our Court at Kensington the 31st day of December 1698, in the tenth year of our Raigne, 31 December 1698, MS 31302, British Library, London, fols. 3–4.

Aurangzeb's own royal vessels. Norris was commanded to assure the Indian ruler that the English fleet would 'Seise and Secure him [Kidd] and the rest of the pyrates [...] soe such Robbers and Comon Enemys of all Nations may be punished with the utmost Severity'.<sup>37</sup> The Crown's attempt to make amends for the recent violence against Mughal shipping was once again underscored in the king's letter to Aurangzeb, which stressed that

nothing may be wanting on our part to protect and Secure Your People and Merchants [...] in their Navigation against those Pirates and Comon Enemys of all Nations, who wee hear have of late done much mischeife in the Seas of India, Wee have sent a Squadron of our Shippes of Warr on purpose to pursue and destroy them.<sup>38</sup>

This expensive promise to protect Indian trade against future piracy was, of course, offered in the hope that it would lead to tangible benefits for England's trade with India, and more specifically, for the New Company.

The second major theme of the King's letter and instructions was the establishment of the New Company in India and, with it, a relationship of 'mutual advantage' between the English and Mughal domains.<sup>39</sup> In the instructions, William ordered Norris to 'acquaint them [Aurangzeb and his ministers] with the Establishment of the generall Society and English Company [the New Company] trading to the East Indies in pursuance of the late Act of Parliament', and to do all he could to obtain the 'Priviledges Imunities or Advantages' necessary for the New Company's success in India. By the same token, William's letter to Aurangzeb informed the Mughal leader that 'We have thought fit with the advice of our Nobles and great Men in Parliament assembled to establish a new Society and Company of our subjects to Trade to your Dominions', which, he claimed, would be 'to the mutuall benefit and Wellfare of our Kingdoms and People'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> William III, Instructions for our Trusty and well beloved S<sup>r</sup> William Norris Bar<sup>t</sup>, fol. 3.

<sup>38</sup> William III, Instructions, fol. 3.

<sup>39</sup> William III, Instructions, fol. 3.

<sup>40</sup> William III, His Majesties lett<sup>r</sup> to the Great Mogull by his Ambassad<sup>r</sup> S<sup>r</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Norris, 31 December 1698, MS 31302, British Library, London, fol. 3.

Of course, establishing the New Company in India as the legitimate English trading authority meant shutting down the Old Company, which had been trading on the subcontinent for almost a century. To that effect, the king's instructions ordered that Norris inform the Mughal Court of the Old Company's termination in three years time, on 29 September 1701. But they also went further, emphasising that the ambassador should draw a clear line between the companies and insist that the New Company was not responsible for any of the actions and debts of its predecessor. In the king's words, once arrived in India, Norris was 'on all proper occasions to make it known that as the new Company have no interest or concern in the Estate or Affairs of the old Company soe they are not lyable to answer for any of their Debts'.<sup>41</sup> This was, of course, a neat attempt to absolve the Crown of any responsibility for the Old Company's past actions against the Mughal government and Indian merchants. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, this was much easier said than done, and Norris's efforts during his embassy to absolve the New Company from all responsibility for the Old Company's misconduct were tested at every turn.

In several ways, the New Company's commission to the ambassador reflected the king's instructions. The Company's Court of Directors ordered Norris to advise Aurangzeb of the English nation's determined efforts to suppress European piracy in Mughal waters by dispatching an imperial fleet of warships to the Indian Ocean, and promise they would take 'all necessary care for the further security of the merchants trading in those seas'.<sup>42</sup> The leaders also instructed the ambassador to formally announce the establishment of the New Company and the termination of the Old Company in 1701, and to 'Informe all the Governments he [Norris] goes thro' That this Company is distinct from and not lyable to the debts or misdemeanours of the Old Company'.<sup>43</sup> Similarly to the king's instructions, also, the

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<sup>41</sup> New Company, 'Directions & Instructions given by the English Company Trading to the East Indies', 3 January 1699, MS 31302, British Library, London.

<sup>42</sup> New Company, 'Directions', fol. 12.

<sup>43</sup> New Company, 'Directions', fol.10.

New Company's commission asked that Norris obtain trading rights and privileges from the Mughal government that would allow their establishment in India as the only legitimate English trading authority in the region.

On the final point of obtaining trading rights, however, the New Company's commission was more detailed than the king's instructions. Norris was specifically required to obtain a *farman* from the emperor that would entitle the New Company to 'all the Privledges and freedom from custome and duties which the English Nation have at any time heretofore enjoyed', as well as any other rights possessed by the other European trading companies in India. He was, furthermore, to seek freedom from all customs charges across Aurangzeb's domains, but especially in Bengal, 'which is become of greatest consequence to England', and, if that failed, to accept no more than a two percent duty on all imports and exports.<sup>44</sup> Mints for the New Company's settlements at Hugli and Masulipatnam, it was advised, should also be procured, and the requirement to pass all English imports through the customs house in Surat, waved.<sup>45</sup>

But while the embassy instructions from the Crown and the New Company aligned in some ways, they also diverged in others, which, just as they had for Roe more than eighty years earlier, caused difficulties for Norris on the ground in India. One major difference between the king's instructions and the New Company's instructions centred around the embassy's expenses – a tension that caused problems for Norris that were strikingly similar to those experienced by Roe during the first mission to the Mughal court. The New Company's instructions stressed that Norris should be prudent in his spending during his time in India and pay close attention to the embassy's accounts. In the Court of Directors' words, the ambassador must display 'as much good husbandry and thriftiness as may consist with this

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<sup>44</sup> New Company, 'Directions & Instructions given by the English Company Trading to the East Indies', fol. 11.

<sup>45</sup> New Company, 'Directions', fol. 11.

affair', and 'avoyd all extravagant charges'.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, however, the king's instructions urged Norris to radiate the grandeur of the English Crown on the Mughal stage, to take 'care on all occasions to preserve the honor and dignity of your character' as the official representative of the 'the most Invincible and most mighty Defender of the Christian Faith'.<sup>47</sup> Preserving the honor and dignity of the king, however, was an expensive exercise, one which the New Company was often at pains to limit.

The extent of Norris's authority in relation to the New Company's business also became a point of contention, just as it had in the case of Roe. While the king encouraged Norris to defer to the New Company's counsel in matters relating to the trade, his instructions fully empowered the ambassador to make sweeping decisions on issues of state. The king granted Norris

full power and authority to confer negotiate and treat in our name with the said Mogul and other princes...and to agree and conclude with them all such matters and things as shall be necessary and convenient [...] for procuring for our subjects such capitulations, privileges & immunities [...] as may conduce to their [...] advantageous carrying on of their trade and comerce in those parts.<sup>48</sup>

The problem here was that it was not always clear which issues came under the category of 'state' and which under 'trade'. As a result, on more than one occasion Norris was accused by the New Company factors in India of acting beyond his remit.

The New Company, conversely, sought to place strict limits on Norris's powers when it came to their trade. The commission demanded that Norris 'in all matters relating to Trade and the affairs of the said Company [was] to observe the orders of the said Court of Directors of the said Company'.<sup>49</sup> The New Company also insisted that Norris keep up regular correspondence with the chief factors of the various New Company settlements 'in order to your receiving such Information and advice from them as may be for our service'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> New Company, 'Directions', fol. 13.

<sup>47</sup> William III, Instructions for our Trusty and well beloved S<sup>r</sup> William Norris Bar<sup>t</sup>., fol. 4.

<sup>48</sup> William III, Instructions, fol. 4.

<sup>49</sup> New Company, 'Directions & Instructions given by the English Company Trading to the East Indies', fol. 5.

<sup>50</sup> New Company, 'Directions', fol. 13.

Evidently, the New Company directors understood Norris to be working for them. His royal status, in their eyes, was a conduit to gaining the desired trading rights in India for their organisation, rather than something to which they should show particular deference. The new 'consular status' that the Act of Parliament had awarded to the New Company chief factors further complicated the matter. Did Norris and the New Company consuls both represent the Crown? If so, who outranked whom? While it may seem obvious to us that Norris, as the king's official ambassador, was the supreme English authority in India, the New Company consuls residing in India appeared less convinced, leading to serious clashes with the ambassador that helped to erode the embassy's progress.

The biggest problem with Norris's dual-mandate, however, centred on the question of who the ambassador was expected to represent on his embassy to Mughal India. As a royal ambassador to the Crown, Norris was appointed spokesman over all Englishmen in India in the light of the termination of the Old Company. For the duration of the embassy, the Old Company merchants trading in India were prohibited from negotiating with Mughal authorities independently of Norris. This power granted to Norris, in theory, would shore up the ambassador's position as the head of the English, and allow him to facilitate the transition of the East India trade into the New Company's hands. All English trading interests, it was thought, would therefore come under a single body (the New Company), and all trading privileges granted by the Mughal administration would be restricted to the New Company.

It was hoped that Norris, acting as a just advocate for all English subjects with legitimate grievances, would help to bring all the English in India – Old Company merchants, New Company merchants and any private traders – into the fold of a single body with Crown authority. To this effect, the king's instructions declared that Norris must 'do all you can to protect all our subjects and to procure them Redress in their Just Complaints and



Grievances'.<sup>51</sup> In another section of the same document, the king directed Norris to 'Insist that his Majesties Subjects may be allowed the same' trading privileges as 'any other European Nations, which are not enjoyed by the English', again indicating that Norris must represent all those belonging to the English nation, regardless of the company they worked for. By the same token, all Englishmen were expected to submit to royal authority as embodied in the ambassador.

But the fierce and ongoing war between the New Company and the Old Company meant that, for Norris, representing all the English in India was much easier said than done. For one, given that the New Company provided the financial backing to the embassy, and considering the protracted conflict it had fought against the Old Company over the previous decade, its directors unsurprisingly expected Norris to act solely in the interests of those English belonging to their company, to the exclusion of those in the Old Company's service. Their commission to Norris, again, plainly warned the ambassador against assisting Old Company merchants once he arrived in India, stating

Wee further caution you of being forward in considering on any that are in the old Companies Interest or service, It being our own opinion that they will stick at nothing that may lessen you, and defeate the designs of this Embassy.<sup>52</sup>

This warning was as far as the New Company directors could venture without overstepping the limits of their authority— the ambassador was, after all, a royal representative who answered directly to the king and not to them. The warning does, however, reveal the difficult position Norris was placed in from the very beginning – one that would hinder his efforts from the moment he stepped foot on the Indian subcontinent.

The plan for Norris to act as the head of the English in India was also problematic in that it relied on the Old Company merchants falling into line behind the ambassador. The Old Company servants in India, however, had no intention of submitting to Norris's authority, nor

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<sup>51</sup> William III, Instructions for our Trusty and well beloved S<sup>r</sup> William Norris Bar<sup>t</sup>., fol. 4.

<sup>52</sup> New Company, 'Directions & Instructions given by the English Company Trading to the East Indies', fol. 12.

even recognising him as the official representative of the English nation. In fact, and just as the New Company directors had warned in their instructions to Norris, the Old Company would do everything within its power to ruin the embassy. Nevertheless, the English pushed forward with the plan to send the Norris embassy, perhaps in the hope that, once Norris was on the ground in India, the Old Company merchants would see the error of their ways and submit to their ambassador's leadership. It would not take long, however, before everyone realised such a thought was pure fancy.

Equipped with his instructions, a fleet of warships for combatting piracy on the Indian Ocean, and a myriad of expensive gifts to win over the Mughals, Norris left London in January 1699, bound for Mughal India. The ambassador was accompanied by a retinue of around 30 Englishmen, making his embassy one of the larger European missions to Asia undertaken in the early modern period.<sup>53</sup> His entourage included a core group of five chief assistants, among them Norris's younger brother, Edward Norris. Edward would act as the ambassador's chief secretary, adviser, and closest confidant for the duration of the English mission to India, and was paid a salary of £200 by the New Company. He would also play a key role in the embassy's negotiations with Mughal authorities, and was appointed to act on the ambassador's behalf in the event of his death. Thomas Harlowin and Thomas Thurgood were also appointed assistants; the former was to act as the embassy treasurer, the latter was hired for his knowledge of Portuguese and tasked with looking after the gifts for the Mughal emperor.<sup>54</sup> Adiel Mills was given the position of the embassy's accountant and second secretary, and Edward Paget was appointed as the embassy's chaplain. Norris, in addition, personally selected a team of 22 English servants for the embassy.<sup>55</sup> They included a steward

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<sup>53</sup> Roe's embassy, for example, was less than half the size of Norris's. Michael J. Brown, *Itinerant Ambassador: The Life of Sir Thomas Roe* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 33–34.

<sup>54</sup> Harihar Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699–1702)*. Original manuscript, 14 May 1945, typescript, Rawlinson Collection, Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, fol. 221.

<sup>55</sup> 'A List of the Names and Salaries of the Persons to Attend the Ambassador & Hired by Himselfe', in *Register of papers and correspondence relating to the embassy of Sir William Norris, Bart., to the Great Mogul, 1698–1702*, compiled 1881, MS 31302, British Library, London., fol. 13.

and ‘master of the horse’, two valets, two pages, two cooks, two butlers, four footmen, seven trumpeters, a bagpiper and a kettle drummer.<sup>56</sup> The embassy would be further bolstered once in India with more than 100 additional English and Indian servants.

Norris’s relatively smooth voyage to India was a poor signal of the challenges to come once he arrived in India. From London, the embassy fleet sailed to Portsmouth, and from Portsmouth, to the Portuguese island of Madeira, where the ambassador and his retinue made a formal visit to the island’s governor on 17 February, all ‘richly clad’ in an ‘appearance’ that the ambassador surmised ‘the Portuguese never saw the like before’.<sup>57</sup> After being ‘very nobly entertained’ on the island, the embassy departed on 20 February.<sup>58</sup> The next stop was Praia in the Cape Verde Islands, off the west coast of Africa, where the fleet arrived on 10 March to restock provisions, staying for a few days during which Norris was entertained by the Portuguese governor, who, according to the ambassador, secretly pleaded with Norris to take him to India.<sup>59</sup> From there, the fleet travelled south, stopping near the Dutch settlement at Table Bay before rounding the Cape of Good Hope in late June. While stationed here, Norris received a report that the infamous pirate, William Kidd, had recently been spotted in the nearby Comoros Islands, and immediately ordered his squadron to seek the pirate out. When the fleet arrived there on 1 August, however, Kidd was nowhere to be found.<sup>60</sup> From the Comoros Islands, the Norris embassy sailed directly for India, and would arrive there six weeks later.

Though it was not yet obvious to the ambassador or the rest of the English, the dual nature of Norris’s mandate – having to represent the New Company, on the one hand, and the Crown on the other- would leave the ambassador hamstrung in India, even more so than his

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<sup>56</sup> ‘A List of the Names and Salaries of the Persons to Attend the Ambassador & Hired by Himselfe, MS 31302’; Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, original manuscript, fol. 220.

<sup>57</sup> William Norris quoted in Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, original manuscript, fol. 236.

<sup>58</sup> William Norris quoted in Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, original manuscript, fol. 236.

<sup>59</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, original manuscript, fol. 242.

<sup>60</sup> Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, original manuscript, fols. 245–246.

predecessor Roe. At the same time, Norris would face fierce resistance from the Old Company, which refused to go down without a fight, and would do everything in its power to destroy the embassy. Indeed, this was only the beginning of the conflict between the two English East India companies. In addition, the relationship between the English and the Mughal government was in tatters due to the former's violence on the Indian ocean, and Norris himself would soon face pressure from the Mughal government to help solve the problem. Before he had even stepped foot in India, then, Norris faced multiple hurdles. These problems, furthermore, were more than a decade and a half in the making, and were so deeply entrenched by the time of Norris's departure from London that it is difficult to see how the ambassador could ever have succeeded on his embassy to the Mughal court.

## Chapter Four

### ‘Punctilios and points of honour’: Burning bridges in Masulipatnam

On 25 September 1699, after months at sea, Norris made his grand debut into India. Landing at the port city of Masulipatnam on the Coromandel Coast, where the New Company had recently set up a small factory, the ambassador followed ashore a large procession of soldiers, sailors, musicians and servants. As they waved the flags of William III and the New Company, and marched to the vibrant sounds of trumpets and a kettle drum, Norris and his retinue were met with fanfare. The ambassador boasted in his description of the landing that, gathered at the shore to greet him, were ‘all the English of both Old and New Company, all the Dutch, the Governour of the place and vast crowds of people not only of the town but of the country from some miles around’.<sup>61</sup> They were, he explained ‘gott together in such numbers, the like not been seen’.<sup>62</sup> The town governor welcomed Norris with a hearty embrace and promises of his loyal service, which, the ambassador happily noted, was ‘a salutation denotinge the greatest kindnesse and respect’.<sup>63</sup>

Carried on a palanquin past the crowds and through the town’s winding streets, Norris finally arrived at his lodgings – an imposing palace owned by the region’s *nawab* (regional governor), Faqir Ullah Khan, that had been rented out for the ambassador and his entourage at great expense by the New Company. Here, the ambassador was, once again, warmly received. This time, the welcome included a stately salute by a group of English mariners and music played by a horde of locals in the street, who, as Norris saw it, ‘express[ed] great joy at my arrivall’.<sup>64</sup> Celebrations over the embassy’s landing continued well into the night, and

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<sup>61</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume I: September 1699–April 1700, unpublished. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson Collection, C.912, fol.14.

<sup>62</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 14.

<sup>63</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 15.

<sup>64</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 15.

included a feast in the palace ‘for all the English gentlemen’, festive music played by the ambassador’s personal orchestra, and a dramatic fireworks display that lasted several hours.<sup>65</sup>

To all appearances, then, Norris’s entrance into India was a resounding success. Things were not as they seemed, however. Behind the exuberant scenes of the official landing, the ambassador’s plans were already beginning to unravel, and his sojourn in Masulipatnam would prove damaging to the embassy in several ways. This chapter examines the eight-month period that Norris and his embassy spent in Masulipatnam (September 1699–August 1700). It aims to show that, during this time, Norris experienced a myriad of problems that hindered his embassy. Some of these were standard issues experienced by many early modern ambassadors. One was delays in correspondence. Landing on the east coast of India meant that Norris faced difficulties in communicating via letter with officials at the Mughal court, which was then camped on the other side of the subcontinent. Monsoonal weather and difficulties in purchasing the necessities for the ambassador’s march to court were also behind the embassy’s extended stay in Masulipatnam.

In addition to these issues that were commonly faced, there were two core problems that caused the Norris embassy to unravel from the start. First was the fierce conflict with the Old Company. As shown in the previous chapter, the heated battle between the Old Company and the New Company was far from resolved when Norris left for India, and the Old Company viewed the ambassador as a major threat. From the moment Norris arrived in Masulipatnam, the Old Company merchants residing there fiercely resisted the embassy and sought to undermine Norris’s efforts at every turn. The ferocity of the conflict among the English was shocking – while the New Company had anticipated resistance from the Old Company agents in India, nothing could have prepared Norris for their open and sometimes even violent opposition to the embassy. This conflict caused significant damage to the

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<sup>65</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 15.

embassy in Masulipatnam, from which it would never truly recover. The second issue was the problematic structure of the hybrid embassy and the complications that arose from it.

Representing both the Crown and the New Company presented a significant challenge for Norris, who, like Roe before him, developed deep anxieties over the nature of his role. These anxieties manifested in frequent and sometimes desperate attempts to assert and display his royal authority, which, in turn, led to the ambassador destroying relationships with key allies, both Indian and English, which weakened the embassy irreparably.

### Prestige and resistance

As the previous chapters have shown, the Old Company leadership in London had, from the very outset, viewed Norris and his embassy as an existential threat. It is unsurprising, then, that conflict between Norris and the Old Company merchants in India began before the ambassador had even stepped foot on Indian soil. In the two weeks leading up to the official landing in Masulipatnam, the ship carrying Norris and his retinue stopped for refreshments near Fort St George, one of the Old Company's principal fortifications in India and a thriving commercial hub 500 kilometres south of Masulipatnam on the Coromandel Coast. Here, and for the first time, Norris experienced open hostility from the Old Company merchants, and began to learn of their plans to resist the embassy.

By the time the fleet carrying Norris and his retinue reached the Coromandel Coast on the eastern side of the Indian subcontinent, the Old Company factors residing there had received notice of the recent Act of parliament establishing the New Company and foreclosing the Old Company in three years' time. The advice they had received on this issue from their directors in London was clear. When it came to the trade, the factors should treat the New Company as competition, and should carry on their business in a manner that was

‘faithfull and Zealous [...] against all our opposers’.<sup>66</sup> The directors stressed to their employees that they, being ‘a little better stocked with experience’ in the East India Trade than the New Company merchants, had a clear upper hand in this contest.<sup>67</sup> It was hoped, furthermore, that before the Old Company’s three years were up, the New Company would grow ‘weary of fighting and giving the world occasion to laugh at our [the English nation’s] folly’, and would agree to a merger with the Old Company.<sup>68</sup>

The Old Company factors in India had also heard rumours of the New Company’s plan to send a royal embassy, and that an ambassador named William Norris had been selected for the task. The directors warned their factors abroad that the purpose of such an embassy would be to ‘distinguish betwixt the Old and New Companys’ at the Mughal Court, to the New Company’s obvious favour, and that Norris’s mission would therefore be ‘very injurious’ to the Old Company’s East India trade.<sup>69</sup> The advice the factors had received by the time Norris arrived in India, contained in letters sent from London in December 1698, was that the embassy was unlikely ever to eventuate, but that, if it did, the factors should fight tooth and nail to defeat it. In the words of the directors, the plan to send the embassy ‘tis thought by many not to be in earnest, yet the Company will prepare themselves against the worst [...] Tis not doubted but with your [...] assistance we will overthrow the Designs of our enemys’.<sup>70</sup> Further instruction for the Old Company factors in India on how to act against the embassy would not arrive in India until mid-1700. It was somewhat of an unwelcome surprise (though not entirely unexpected) for the Fort St George merchants, then, when Norris sailed into the local harbour in September 1699.

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<sup>66</sup> Letter from Old Company directors in London to their agents at Fort St. George, London, 26 August 1698, IOR/E/3/93, British Library, London, fols. 99–100.

<sup>67</sup> Old Company directors, 26 August 1698, fols. 99–100.

<sup>68</sup> Old Company directors, 26 August 1698, fols. 99–100.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Old Company directors in London to their agents at Fort St. George, London, 30 December 1698, IOR/E/3/93, fols. 154–155.

<sup>70</sup> Old Company directors, 30 December 1698, fol. 155.



Upon anchoring near the fort, Norris sent his chief secretary and younger brother Edward Norris ashore to alert the Old Company merchants residing there to the embassy's arrival. The visit was also to act as a formal notification of the establishment of the New Company and the closure of the Old Company in three years' time, a message that Norris expected would be disseminated to 'all the Governments and [Old Company] factorys' in India.<sup>71</sup> However, while Edward and his entourage were given an outward show of respect by the Old Company agents, with 'Guns firing att their landing and going off, the soldiers all drawn up and officers saluting with their pikes', they quickly learned the real extent of their welcome. As Edward relayed to Norris later that night aboard the *Sommers*, after the formal pleasantries took place at the fort, Old Company chief factor, Thomas Pitt, pulled Edward aside to inform him that the Old Company viewed the ambassador as the enemy, and stood prepared to fight against the embassy.<sup>72</sup> As Norris recorded it, Pitt spoke

as if I came to destroy them, [that] he was commander of the Fort and must defend themselves as well as they could, and that he was informed I was come preposed against the Old Company to ruin them all.<sup>73</sup>

The Old Company's fighting stance against the embassy was reconfirmed when, two days later, Norris and his retinue left Fort St George for Masulipatnam. As the embassy sailed out of the port, an Old Company ship refused to salute them or lower its state flag in a signal of deference to the ambassador, an act he considered 'in derogation to the flag and a slight to me'.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately for the ambassador, however, this act of opposition was a sign of bigger things to come.

It made for an extraordinary situation: the representatives of one English company effectively declaring war against the king's envoy. With the Old Company agents' hostile actions fresh in his mind, when Norris arrived in Masulipatnam he sought immediately to

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<sup>71</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 6.

<sup>72</sup> On Thomas Pitt, see Cornelius Neale Dalton, *The Life of Thomas Pitt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915).

<sup>73</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 8.

assert his authority as head of all English merchants in India, regardless of the company they worked for. He did this, first, by assuring the Old Company merchants that his role as the king's ambassador was to protect and assist them. His first chance to do so came three days after the official landing, when Thomas Lovell, an Old Company factor residing in Masulipatnam, came to stake out the embassy. When Lovell voiced similar concerns to those of the Old Company factors at Fort St George, Norris assured him that, 'As I bore the publick character of the King's Embassadour I would equally protect all Englishmen'.<sup>75</sup> The ambassador echoed this sentiment repeatedly throughout his stay in Masulipatnam, promising that those employed by the Old Company should not 'suffer in the least [...] for that I was always [...] ready to do the same good offices of kindness for them as any others'.<sup>76</sup> So adamant was Norris to enforce the idea that he represented all the English in India, and not just those belonging to the New Company, that he pledged to 'take care to represent [to the Mughal] what was fit to be represented by any of the King of England's subjects and get freedom of trade for them all'.<sup>77</sup>

But pulling the Old Company merchants into line would take more than promises of consular support. Understanding this, Norris acted further to establish his supremacy as head of the English by stamping down on what he saw as illegitimate activities of the Old Company in Masulipatnam and preventing them from negotiating directly with Indian authorities. Just days after the landing, Norris issued a stern warning to Lovell and the other Old Company factors at Masulipatnam to cease conducting their own private trading deals (rather than official Old Company business) in the city's port, as such actions were contrary to a recent parliamentary Act, which forbade non-licensed company ships from conducting private trade. 'According to the letter of the Act [of Parliament]' he advised Lovell,

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<sup>75</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. 1, fol. 90.

<sup>77</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol.82.

all persons trading Coast ways in India not actually in the New or Old Company [...] were lyable to forfeiture upon a seizure, which would comprehend all the factors of the Old Company they havinge no authority to license anyone to trade by the Act.<sup>78</sup>

Norris continued, stressing that he ‘could have seized one of their factors’ ships belonging to Masulipatnam, but chose not to as a gesture of good will to the Old Company factors. In addition to the warning about the Old Company merchants’ private trade, the ambassador sent out an official notice to all the Old Company factories in India, cautioning its agents against making any deals with local authorities without his prior approval, declaring ‘I would not suffer any application to be made to the Mogull or his ministers by any English men but through my hands’.<sup>79</sup> To Norris, establishing his authority as head of the English and bringing the Old Company merchants into line was crucial to the success of the embassy.

Unfortunately for him, however, the Old Company merchants were unwilling to comply with his demands.

In defiance of Norris’s orders, the Old Company agents in Masulipatnam and other factories along the Coromandel Coast continued to conduct their official, and unofficial, business as usual with the local authorities. Six weeks into Norris’s stay in Masulipatnam, for example, a ship carrying the spoils of an Old Company agent’s private trade stopped in the port on route to Madras. After placing a brief embargo on the vessel, Norris once again refrained from seizing its cargo, explaining that he had come ‘on this embassy with full intention to doe all the good I could to the English in generall’, and so was ‘averse to [act] against all those factours and agents for the Old Company’.<sup>80</sup> The ambassador viewed the Old Company agent’s actions, however, as a deliberate attempt to undermine the embassy, ‘a snare to embarrass our affaires’.<sup>81</sup> When the ambassador soon after uncovered information

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<sup>78</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 20.

<sup>79</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 75.

<sup>81</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 75.

relating to a private deal conducted between the Old Company agents at Fort St George and the nawab of Masulipatnam, therefore, he decided to take stronger action.

On 25 December, chief New Company Consul at Masulipatnam, John Pitt, informed Norris of a private deal contracted between the Old Company merchants and the region's *nawab*, Faqir Ullah Khan.<sup>82</sup> According to Pitt, after overindulging on celebratory Christmas wine, a drunken Lovell had 'let some words slip', revealing that the nawab had recently granted the Old Company merchants a permit that allowed them to vet English ships trading in the city's port. As Pitt explained further, the permit stipulated that

no English ships could be permitted to trade upon the coast but such as were allowed by [the Old Company merchants at Masulipatnam], and withall an order to hinder any that should come to Trade and a power for the Hovaldar [a halvadar was a local governor] to raise 500 men to scour the place att his will and pleasure.<sup>83</sup>

Though Lovell tried to reassure Norris that the transaction was made simply in an attempt by the Old Company to prevent interlopers, the ambassador viewed it as a direct attack on the New Company merchants in Masulipatnam and a threat to the embassy's success.<sup>84</sup> Believing the Old Company planned to 'have seized of the [New Company] Consull and factory and all their effects', and worrying about 'how ridiculous the whole nation would appear' if the Old Company continued to negotiate with Mughal authorities with such flagrant disregard for the embassy, Norris consequently issued a formal notification to the Old Company. The written order, issued to Lovell on 26 December, read

This is to Require and command you not to presume to make any addresse or application either in your own person or by any other, directly or indirectly to any publick minister or officer of the Greate Mogull without my knowledge and permission as you will answer the contrary att your perill.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> John Pitt was also the estranged cousin of chief Old Company factor at Fort St George, Thomas Pitt.

<sup>83</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 79.

<sup>84</sup> It is likely that Lovell was telling the truth about the agreement with the *nawab*. Negotiations with local authorities over trade were commonplace for the Old Company merchants living in India. In addition, and as shown in Chapter Two, interloping had always been fiercely opposed by the Old Company. It is likely that the deal referenced here was initially made to prevent interloping, rather than to damage the embassy, especially as it seems to have been made prior to the embassy's arrival in India.

<sup>85</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 90.

At the same time as he handed over this instruction, the ambassador reiterated to Lovell his willingness to help the Old Company factors in India, if only they would consult him about any concerns they had, and that any ‘Immunitys or priveileiges I sollicitted for should be for the English Nation in General in which I beleive they would thinke themselves comprimized’.<sup>86</sup> Despite promises to the contrary, however, Lovell and the other Old Company merchants in India continued to defy the ambassador’s orders forbidding them to deal directly with local Indian authorities.

But the ambassador’s conflict with the Old Company only intensified. In January 1700, three months into Norris’s stay in Masulipatnam, Lovell nervously presented a letter addressed to Norris from the chief Old Company factor and council (made up of the principal company agents at a factory) at Fort St George. Lovell had been hiding the letter from Norris for days out of fear the ambassador would hinder his trading operations once he gained knowledge of its contents, but finally decided to hand it over. Norris ordered Lovell to read the letter aloud in front of him and the entire New Company council in the gallery of the ambassador’s residence. While it is unclear what the exact contents of the letter were, the document was evidently intended as a snub to the ambassador. It came unsealed and addressed to ‘his Excellency Sir Wm Norris Baronet Embassadour to the Great Mogull att Metchlapatam’, leaving out any reference to his position as royal ambassador to the King of England.<sup>87</sup> As Norris put it, the letter’s

chief intent and aime as far as I could judge was to lett me know they did not looke upon me as the Kings Embassadour Terminge me in plain words the Companys Embassadour with severall such like unmannerly expressions which I beleive they were Instigated to by advices from their masters in London.<sup>88</sup>

Infuriated, Norris instructed Lovell to ask the Fort St George merchants why ‘they should leave out the most material part of my character that I was Embassador from the King of

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<sup>86</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 90.

<sup>87</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 127.

<sup>88</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 128.

England', an act which he regarded 'as an affront'.<sup>89</sup> Norris proceeded to show the letter 'the greatest slight to it I could', by ordering his footman to 'take the paper from [Lovell's] hands and cast it amongst my waste papers'.<sup>90</sup> The incident clearly distressed the ambassador, who later lamented that the Old Company factors at Fort St George 'did not look upon me as the King's Ambassador terming me in plain words the Company's Ambassador'.<sup>91</sup> The letter was an open display of the Old Company's opposition towards the embassy and outright refusal to recognise Norris as their superior. Unfortunately for Norris and the New Company, refusing to recognise Norris as their leader and carrying out negotiations with Mughal authorities despite him were not the only strategies the Old Company merchants would employ in their attempts to bring down the embassy.

#### Whistle-blower Woolston

As part of a coordinated and sustained effort led by the Old Company directors in London, the Old Company merchants in Masulipatnam moved to convince the Mughal authorities in India that Norris was a fake ambassador, employed by a company of violent and piratical merchants with no money and no real link to the English king. Such a strategy was not unheard of among European trading groups in seventeenth-century India. The Portuguese, for example, had tried to convince the Mughal emperor, Jahangir, that Thomas Roe was not the royal ambassador he claimed to be, but a mere merchant.<sup>92</sup> The aim of this strategy, in Roe's time, was to prevent the ambassador from receiving an audience at the Mughal court by playing into the Mughals' well-known disdain for diplomatic exchange with lowly merchants, and their suspicions around the English, who, as has been shown in previous chapters, had developed a reputation for sending merchants disguised as royal ambassadors to

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<sup>89</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 128.

<sup>90</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fols. 126–127.

<sup>91</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 127.

<sup>92</sup> See Richmond Barbour, 'Power and Distant Display: Early English "Ambassadors" in Moghul India', *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 61, no. 3/4 (2000).

the Mughal court.<sup>93</sup> This time, the Old Company clearly sought to seize on the Mughal government's concerns over piracy in Asian waters.

It was one thing, however, for members of one European trading group to adopt this strategy in order to compete with another. For the English to use this strategy against their own countrymen was something entirely new. This was a dramatic attempt to undermine the English embassy from within. Norris and the New Company merchants in Masulipatnam had suspected the Old Company's plot, but lacked concrete evidence of it until early February 1700, when Old Company agent Woolston arrived in Masulipatnam to take over the post of Lovell, who had left the city for Madras. On the evening of 2 February, as Norris prepared for lunch at the embassy palace, Woolston paid the ambassador a secret visit. The Old Company agent anxiously presented Norris with a stack of letters, which, he told the ambassador, 'he thought not safe for him either to keepe or dispose of'.<sup>94</sup> According to Woolston, the letters had been written and sent between his predecessor, Lovell, the Old Company factors at Fort St George, and the *nawab* of the region. The contents of the letters Woolston deemed so explosive, that he 'thought it most advisable [...] for his security' to hand them over to the ambassador. The documents were certainly revealing. They, first, confirmed that Lovell and the Old Company factors at Fort St George had continued to negotiate trading deals with the *nawab*, long after Norris had expressly forbidden such actions. More serious than their blatant disregard of Norris's orders however, was new evidence revealing the Old Company's plan to ruin the New Company and sabotage the embassy.

A letter addressed to the *nawab*, signed by the chief Old Company factor at Fort St George, Thomas Pitt, and accompanied by a Persian translation, was so damning that Norris

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<sup>93</sup> Barbour, 'Power and Distant Display'.

<sup>94</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 131.

recorded an excerpt of it in his diary, ‘least either [copy] should be lost’.<sup>95</sup> In this excerpt, Pitt apologised to the nawab for not paying him a formal visit recently, claiming his

‘factours would have waited on him [...] but were hindred by the New English that lately arrived who threatened violence to their persons should they attempt it, whereas [...] they have nothinge to doe with our Trade nor have they any right to our Privileges And are only sent into These parts by a Company of Merchants to procure Both wee have always had the protection and great encouragement from your predecessours and hope that Honour will continue the same unto us with free enjoyment of our privileges and not permitt any persons whatsoever to offer violence to the persons of our factours.’<sup>96</sup>

In this short passage, then, Thomas Pitt accuses Norris and the New Company of violent threats and pleads the nawab for protection against them, requesting that the New Company be denied any rights to the trading privileges previously obtained by the Old Company in the region, and denies the New Company any connection to the king of England by labelling them a ‘Company of Merchants’. This narrative was perpetuated in several Old Company documents uncovered later. Just a few days after Woolston’s first visit to Norris, for example, the whistle-blower produced the Old Company’s Masulipatnam letter book, in which Lovell had informed the nawab and other Mughal authorities that the New Company were ‘Rouges and pyrates’ with the intent, as Norris put it, ‘not only to hinder the New Company from Tradinge att all here but to drive them out of Towne’.<sup>97</sup> To the ambassador’s horror, moreover, he and the New Company factors at Masulipatnam would discover that this was not limited to the Old Company merchants at Fort St George and Masulipatnam, but part of a wider attack spearheaded by the Old Company directors in London.

In March, Norris received correspondence from the New Company Council at Surat, on the other side of the Indian subcontinent, in which the ambassador was informed that the Old Company’s board of directors in London was currently coordinating an India-wide effort to ruin the New Company and sabotage the embassy, with the narrative of Norris as a ‘fake

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<sup>95</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 132.

<sup>96</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 132.

<sup>97</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 140.



ambassador' at the centre of the plot. According to John Lucas, second in command at the New Company's Surat factory, 'such [was] the nature of their Revenge', that the Old Company agents at Surat would 'spare no cost or paines' in fighting the establishment of the New Company in India, and had threatened the New Company agents in the city that 'their stock shall not be worth a Rupee in 2 yeares'.<sup>98</sup> Lucas continued on, notifying Norris that the Old Company had agents stationed at the Mughal court who were propagating the rumour that Norris was 'not the King's Embassadour but employed only by the Company, thinkinge by that either to Retard or stop [Norris's] access to the Mogull'.<sup>99</sup> After reading the letters, Norris lamented that 'there is nothinge they [the Old Company agents] will now leave unattempted' and that their actions 'may be of fatall consequence [...] to my negotiation [and to the] Trade in generall for ever after'.<sup>100</sup>

Such acts of corporate sabotage undercut the ambassador's authority and were damaging to the embassy's progress in several tangible ways. First, they caused confusion and mistrust towards Norris and the New Company among the local authorities and trading community in Masulipatnam, and diminished Norris's reputation as a royal ambassador. One incident in January 1700 demonstrates this neatly. The episode began soon after Norris had issued his formal notification to the Old Company merchants that forbade them from negotiating directly with Indian authorities. Lovell, the drunken Old Company factor at Masulipatnam whose allegiance wavered between his superiors at Fort St George and the ambassador, asked Norris if he could apply to the city's *nawab* for a permit to move a ship laden with Old Company goods from the Masulipatnam port. Norris prohibited Lovell from applying to the *nawab* himself, but instead ordered the New Company consul to request the permit on Lovell's behalf.

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<sup>98</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 138.

<sup>99</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 138.

<sup>100</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 138.

The *nawab*'s response to the request was to ask 'why did wee trouble ourselves for the other Company which was another interest?'. If the Old Company merchants wanted a trading permit from him, the *nawab* asserted curtly, 'he would talk with them distinctly'.<sup>101</sup> This response was telling. It showed that, more than three months into his stay in Masulipatnam, Norris had been unable to establish himself as head of the English in the eyes of the local authorities, but was rather looked upon as the representative of the New Company only. It was exactly the impression Norris had tried so hard to avoid giving, and indicated that the Old Company had been successful in convincing the local government that the ambassador was no representative of theirs. This, in turn, diminished Norris's standing with the *nawab*, who clearly felt the need to remind Norris that he, and not the ambassador, oversaw who received trading privileges in Masulipatnam.

Second, Norris and the New Company's battle with the Old Company allowed local players in Masulipatnam to take advantage of the embassy for their own, usually financial, ends. Local authorities demanding gifts and gratuities from Europeans in return for political rights and favours was standard practice in seventeenth-century India, and, as Van Meersbergen has shown, was part of the broader Mughal political culture in which gratuities and gifts functioned 'as the material expression of notions of submission, loyalty, and service, as well as patronage, honor, and reward'.<sup>102</sup> But the conflict between the English companies in Masulipatnam also enabled the *nawab* to play the warring English parties off against each other, demanding large gratuities from both in return for political favours. As an irritated Norris put it, it 'was a piece of policy of the Nabob to have the squeezeing of both [companies]'.<sup>103</sup> This was costly for Norris and the New Company, who had to fork out large

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<sup>101</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 124.

<sup>102</sup> Guido Van Meersbergen, "'Intirely the Kings Vassalls": East India Company Gifting Practices and Anglo-Mughal Political Exchange (c. 1670–1720)', *Diplomatica* 2, no. 2 (2020): 289.

<sup>103</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 124; That Mughal authorities pitted European companies against each other (e.g. The English against the Dutch) has been recognised by Murari Khumar Jha. Murari Khumar Jha, 'The Mughals, Merchants and the European Companies in the 17th century Surat', *Asia Europe Journal* 3, no. 2 (2005): 281–282.

sums for trading grants and favours the Old Company had already obtained from the nawab, on top of a constant stream of lavish gifts. The New Company council at Masulipatnam expressed their frustration at this situation in a letter to their directors in London, which stated that ‘we have met with a great deal of difficulty with the Government of the place, who are poor, proud, and insolent, greedily catching at all opportunity to feather themselves’, all the while, the council believed, ‘the Old Company agents have not bin wanting underhand to back them [the Masulipatnam authorities] in it.’<sup>104</sup>

Third, and on a more basic level, conflict with the Old Company was detrimental to the embassy’s progress in Masulipatnam for the simple reason that Norris and his retinue did not receive the benefits of a century’s worth of English experience in India. Being ‘a little better stocked with experience’ than the New Company, as the Old Company directors themselves put it, was an enormous advantage on the battlefield.<sup>105</sup> While some of the New Company factors at Masulipatnam had previously worked for the Old Company in India, and so had some understanding of its trading networks and government structures, this could not make up for being part of what was, by the end of the seventeenth century, an established organisation that had entrenched itself into the political and economic landscape of the Mughal Empire. Indeed, if Norris had been equipped with the knowledge and expertise of the Old Company, he may easily have avoided making many of the mistakes he made during his sojourn in Masulipatnam.

Finally, and similarly on a fundamental level, the time and money that Norris and the New Company devoted to fending off the Old Company’s attacks during his stay in Masulipatnam set the embassy back considerably. The conflict was a major distraction to the task at hand, with most pages of Norris’s journal during this period referring to the Old

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<sup>104</sup> Masulipatnam factory records, New Company, 23 October 1699, IOR/26/13, British Library, London, fol. 45.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Old Company directors in London to their agents in Fort St. George, 26 August 1698, IOR/E/3/93, fols. 99-100.

Company's plot to sabotage his mission. Norris's efforts to prevent the Old Company from making private deals with Mughal authorities in Masulipatnam, as discussed above, were particularly consuming for the ambassador. Unfortunately for Norris and his retinue, however, conflict with the Old Company was not the only, nor even the greatest, barrier to progress during this initial stage of the embassy.

### The hybrid embassy hitch

Much like his predecessor Roe, Norris was sent to India with two sets of objectives: one from William III, and the other from the New Company's board of directors in London. As outlined in Chapter Three, the king's instructions to the ambassador centred around repairing relations with the Mughal government after the recent violence against Mughal shipping on the Indian Ocean and establishing the New Company in India in the place of the Old Company. The New Company's set of instructions to Norris, in contrast, centred around securing trading licenses and other privileges for the Company and its factors residing in India. Managing the dual mandate, while simultaneously trying to carve out a clear identity for himself and his role in India, was a constant challenge for Norris during his stay in Masulipatnam. Just as Mishra has demonstrated in the case of Roe, Norris quickly developed anxieties over the situation, which manifested in constant and sometimes desperate attempts to assert and display his royal prestige and authority. Carrying out the king's wishes and acting in such a way that would reflect honour and reverence on the English monarch became an obsession for the ambassador. Most pages of volume one of his diary, which pertain to the period he spent in Masulipatnam, refer to the importance, as he saw it, of this task. In the ambassador's own words, King William 'had honoured and intrusted me soe farr to invest me with His character and authority', and, consequently, he would 'take care to exert it in all just, proper and lawfull occasions'.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 128.

Upholding the character of the king in India for Norris, and just as it had for Roe, involved strictly observing certain behaviours, rules and ceremonies that he understood to be befitting of a royal ambassador, and displaying a regal presence in India that would command respect among the Mughals. Norris's official landing at Masulipatnam, outlined at the beginning of the chapter, provides an early example of his rigorous adherence to ambassadorial procedure and ceremonial display, which he would carry through to the very end of the embassy. Another colourful example of Norris's pomp and pageantry was the ambassador's reception of Medhi Khan, the new *nawab* of the Deccan, or Hyderabad, where Masulipatnam was located. In January 1700, Mehdi Khan, who appeared 'very grave and becominge with a longe gray beard and rich turbant and cloathes', strode into the city atop an elaborately adorned elephant and surrounded by hundreds of his retinue on horse and foot.<sup>107</sup> Not to be outdone, Norris saw this as an opportunity to exhibit his own royal status to the Mughal official and others in the city. As the new *nawab*'s parade passed by the embassy palace, Norris ordered his soldiers to be drawn up, and his musicians to assemble at one end of the balcony facing the street to play music.<sup>108</sup> Norris positioned himself at the other end of the balcony, 'on a couch with a large carpett spreade before me with my hatt on', while his entire retinue and the New Company factors stood surrounding him. The ambassador, in addition, ordered 21 guns to be fired as the exact moment the *nawab* passed by the palace, and was delighted when the *nawab* 'turned his head twice or thrice back on me and seemed well pleased (as he had reason) with the respect that was shewn him'.<sup>109</sup>

But, for Norris, establishing a royal presence in Masulipatnam involved more than lavish displays, or cultural and military prowess. The ambassador paid particular attention to symbolic detail, always insisting, for example, that the wax seal on any correspondence

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<sup>107</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol I., fol. 96; The new *nawab* was formally the *kotwal* of Delhi and had risen to the position of *nawab*. Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, original manuscript. p. 289.

<sup>108</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol I., fol. 96.

<sup>109</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 96.

contained his full title, ‘His Excellency Sir William Norris Baronett Ambassadour Extraordinary from the King of England Scotland France and Ireland’.<sup>110</sup> The ambassador responded angrily when his servant presented him with a sample seal in the Persian translation, on which his title had been shortened to ‘Ambassador to the King of England’, and politely suggested that the title Norris had requested was too long. After curtly informing his servant that ‘I would not admitt of [the seal] by any meanes, it beinge a diminishing of my master’s just Titles’, the ambassador immediately ordered another sample to be made, ‘and all my master’s titles incerted in words at length and not in figures’.<sup>111</sup> Norris’s gifts to various local authorities included coins engraved with the king’s head, and silk banners with the king’s arms and the union jack flag were permanently draped across the front of the embassy’s palace. The ambassador also only ventured into public spaces on a handful of occasions, and sometimes in disguise, due to his firm belief that an ambassador should not be seen as a fellow member of the public, but as a raised, symbolic figure, always in stately garb, in order to create an aura of mystery and grandeur. This practice had comical consequences in Masulipatnam. Remaining largely out of sight of the broader public led to a rumour spreading around the town that Norris was in fact the late Abul Hasan Qutb Shah, Sultan of Golkonda (who had been defeated by the Mughal Army in 1687) ‘in Disguise of European Habit’, who had returned to take back the region from the Mughal government.<sup>112</sup>

To Norris, upholding his status as a royal ambassador in Masulipatnam meant always prioritising his duty to the Crown. While the ambassador frequently tried to fulfill his obligations to the New Company, when he felt that a choice must be made between maintaining his ‘character’ as royal ambassador and helping the New Company with matters

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<sup>110</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 48.

<sup>111</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 48.

<sup>112</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 73.

of trade, Norris would reliably choose the former. As the ambassador himself succinctly phrased it,

I was to have particulare regard in the first place to the Kings honour on the account of the character I bore and then [to] the Companys interest, soe resolved to use my utmost indeavour to reconcile the one with the other, [but] to doe nothinge derogatory to my character.<sup>113</sup>

In Norris's mind, then, his duty was first and foremost to the Crown, with the Company's interests of secondary importance. Behaving in such a way, Norris firmly believed, was vital to the success of the embassy.

In some ways, Norris's uncompromising stance over who and what he represented on his mission to India was beneficial to the embassy during his stay in Masulipatnam. His expensive, grand gestures such as the landing celebrations, lavish gifts presented to key officials in the city, and public displays of his retinue's weaponry helped to create an initial aura of prestige and mystique around the embassy among the local community, and assisted him in making some useful contacts with Mughal authorities. After the landing, for example, the governor of the city assured Norris that his presence in India 'would be most acceptable to the Mogull and that as soone as ever he should be acquainted with my arrivall he would send strict and immediate orders for my reception', after which he proceeded to assist the ambassador in notifying Aurangzeb of his arrival.<sup>114</sup> The New Company merchants likewise stressed that the ambassador's grand entrance into Masulipatnam on imperial ships had 'done us a mighty kindness in giving encouragement and life to these merchants'.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, it was in response to the grand landing that Norris received an official acknowledgement of his arrival in India from the Mughal government, along with passes for his safe passage to the

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<sup>113</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 84.

<sup>114</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 17.

<sup>115</sup> New Company merchants in Masulipatnam to their directors in London, 23 October 1699, IOR/G/13, Masulipatam: Proceedings of the New Company's representatives at Masulipatam (1699-1700), British Library, London, fols. 45-46.

court overland and an offer of an official escort to take him there (the Mughal escort is discussed later in this chapter).

Often, however, Norris' insistence on enforcing European ambassadorial standards and practices in India and upholding the 'king's character' was more detrimental to the embassy than it was advantageous. The anxiety Norris developed as a result of the confusing nature of the hybrid embassy made the ambassador acutely sensitive to any kind of opposition or insult, which frequently led to him damaging relationships with important figures. Soon after he arrived in India, for example, the *faujdar* (military commander who also undertook judicial and land revenue roles), *kotwal* (chief law-enforcement officer) and *halvadar* (town governor) of the neighbouring town of Petipoli visited Masulipatnam. Before paying a formal visit to Norris, they called on the chief of the Dutch East India Company's factory in Masulipatnam. Norris viewed their act of visiting a merchant chief ahead of himself, the royal representative to the king of England, as 'such a slight and affront to the greate character I bore', that when the trio attempted to visit him at his palace the following day, the ambassador refused them entry.<sup>116</sup> The Mughal officers were stunned by Norris's response. Appearing 'much abashed', the two looked at one another without speaking for a 'considerable time', after which they left, resolving that the ambassador's behaviour could only be explained by his being considerably 'indisposed'.<sup>117</sup> Norris, however, sent a messenger chasing after them, to insist that he was not unwell, but that 'the only reason I would not see [them] was because the first visitt was not made to me'.<sup>118</sup>

While Norris later noted that the officers remained 'disgusted for some time' over his decision to turn them away, the full extent of the offence caused was not realised until some months later, when Lovell, the Old Company factor introduced earlier in the chapter, visited

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<sup>116</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 26.

<sup>117</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 26.

<sup>118</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 27.



the ambassador. During this visit, Lovell confessed to Norris that, after the ambassador had snubbed the Mughal officers, the pair had offered Lovell and the other Old Company merchants assistance in throwing Norris and the New Company out of Masulipatnam with military force. As Norris recounted it, one of the Mughal officers promised Lovell that ‘if he would give him the word he would bringe 500 horse and 1000 foot immediately and seize or turn us all out’.<sup>119</sup> While Lovell declined the offer, the episode clearly demonstrates that Norris, in his attempts to uphold his ‘character’ as a royal ambassador, damaged key relationships with key figures on his embassy.

Another similar incident arose when Norris sent John Pitt, the chief New Company factor at Masulipatnam, accompanied by three Englishmen from Norris’s entourage, to greet the new *nawab* of the Deccan, Mehdi Khan, who had been selected by the Mughal emperor to replace Faqir Ullah Khan. It was an important moment for Norris and the New Company, who were keen to impress the replacement ruler of the region. Norris had recently heard that the Dutch in Masulipatnam were prohibited from playing drums on their approach to see the new *nawab*, due to the practice being a ‘particular mark of honour’ reserved only for those of the highest rank in the Mughal government.<sup>120</sup> Norris, therefore, ‘was resolved to have them [drums]’ on the English visit, and demanded that they be played despite any protests to the contrary.

As the English approached the new *nawab*’s camp in palanquins, the governor of Masulipatnam galloped towards them on horseback, demanding that the instruments be stopped at once. When Pitt refused, as per Norris’s order, the governor ‘seemed very uneasy, swearing by the blood of his son if he had known what would have happened he would have gone out of the Town to have avoided being concerned in the matter’.<sup>121</sup> In the end, Pitt and

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<sup>119</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 80.

<sup>120</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 96.

<sup>121</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 93.

his entourage pushed past the governor, demanding the drums ‘as a right, not favour’, and marched forward to the *nawab*’s residence.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps bemused by the incident, the Medhi Khan allowed the English to enter his abode. This highly disrespectful entrance, however, undoubtedly made for a negative first impression of Norris and the New Company, and it is perhaps unsurprising that their relationship with the regional ruler soured from this moment. Enemies were not only made on the Indian side, however. As revealed below, the dual nature of Norris’s role also led to deteriorated relations between the ambassador and the very people he was paid to represent.

### New Company conflict

The hybrid nature of Norris’s embassy, and the ambassador’s uncompromising stance on representing the Crown over the New Company also created serious tensions between him and the New Company agents in Masulipatnam. For the New Company merchants at the Masulipatnam factory, establishing their trade in India and building positive relationships with the regional authorities and merchants was paramount. This, of course, was why the New Company had commissioned Norris’s embassy in the first place, and the Masulipatnam factors fully anticipated Norris would act solely in their interests. So, when Norris finally arrived in Masulipatnam and made it clear that his priority was the Crown, and not the New Company, conflict began to arise.

Much of the conflict between Norris and the New Company agents at Masulipatnam centred around the ambassador prioritising the Crown over the New Company’s trade. When, for example, Norris instructed his interpreter to inform a visitor from the Mughal Court that his formal title was the ‘Ambassadour Extraordinary from the most potent warlicke and victorious Kinge William the 3d, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland’, Chief factor Pitt urged the ambassador to leave out ‘France’, as he believed this would cause

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<sup>122</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 94.

confusion and distrust among the locals, who had come to an understanding of France as an entirely separate entity to England.<sup>123</sup> Norris responded curtly, telling Pitt that ‘failing in soe materiall [a] circumstance as [...] not asserting my Master’s Titles, I ought to loose my heade when I came home’.<sup>124</sup> In another incident, Pitt asked Norris for the New Company’s four large looking glasses, which were in the ambassador’s possession, to present to the new *nawab* as a gift. Norris, however, refused the request, telling the chief factor that ‘they were the most valuable presents I had and was loath to part with them to be bestowed here’ in Masulipatnam, but that he would rather offer them as gifts to superior members of the Mughal government when he finally managed to reach Aurangzeb’s court.<sup>125</sup> In yet another episode, Pitt pleaded with Norris to request a trading permit from one of the Mughal’s top ministers with whom the ambassador had been in correspondence, arguing that it would be very beneficial to the New Company’s trade. The ambassador refused the request, however, asserting that it was in ‘no ways adviseable to make mention of any such thinge first for feare it should be denyd’.<sup>126</sup> If such a request were denied by a Mughal minister, Norris continued, ‘it would lessen my character’ and therefore ruin the embassy’s chances at the Mughal court.<sup>127</sup>

Another point of contention between Norris and the New Company factors at Masulipatnam was the ambassador’s promise to assist the Old Company. As previously discussed, Norris had claimed from the outset that, as the king’s royal representative, it was his duty to act on the behalf of all English merchants in India, not just those belonging to the New Company, and vowed to help the Old Company agents at Masulipatnam and Fort St George in all their ‘just complaints and grievances’.<sup>128</sup> As part of these efforts, Norris at

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<sup>123</sup> The French by this stage had several factories around India, including one at Masulipatnam.

<sup>124</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 19.

<sup>125</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 130.

<sup>126</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 109.

<sup>127</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fols. 108–109.

<sup>128</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 20.

times put the New Company's trade at risk and even prioritised the Old Company over their competitors. One early example of this was when Norris prohibited Pitt, the New Company chief at Masulipatnam, from visiting the new *nawab* to introduce the embassy, lest 'it might have given [him] umbrage to beleive that I was sollicitinge only for the New Company', and decided to send his Indian interpreter, Venkatadri, instead.<sup>129</sup> On another occasion, Norris ordered Pitt to ask the *nawab* to prioritise granting a short-term trading permit to the Old Company over a longer-term grant for the New Company. For the New Company agents, Norris's actions were difficult to swallow. The New Company had provided all the funding for the Norris embassy, and so many of its factors expected the ambassador to act in their interests. In their eyes, Norris preferred to act in the interests of their competitors and arch enemies.

Still another sticking point between Norris and the New Company factors was money. In order to maintain his character as the king's ambassador in Masulipatnam, Norris insisted that the embassy be fitted out accordingly. This involved a constant stream of funds from the New Company factors at Masulipatnam, who were forced to take out substantial loans from local brokers in order to cover the ambassador's expenses. The strain this put on the New Company factors was palpable. In June 1700, the New Company agents at Masulipatnam recorded in their factory records that Norris has asked them for yet another bill. In response to Norris's request, the chief New Company factor

informed his excellency that upon the account of the great charges he had already been at for the embassy, the utmost he could strain to supply was the summe of thirty four thousand Rupees which was by computation thought sufficient, but for fear of any accident it was thought [...] his excellency should also be supplyd with a bill of credit to be made use of in case of utmost necessity.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 86.

<sup>130</sup> John Pitt, New Company at Masulipatnam to their directors in London, 23 October 1699, IOR/G/26/13, British Library, London, fol. 45.

Funds were evidently stretched at the New Company factory due to Norris's spending, which the factors viewed as excessive. Such quarrels between Norris and the New Company agents, however, turned into deeper divisions when Norris began to destroy more relationships with local authorities who were crucial to the success of their trade.

### Lascars revolt

There was one event that, perhaps better than any other during his time at Masulipatnam, highlighted the problems with representing both the Crown and the New Company, and how that problem damaged the embassy. Indeed, Norris himself believed this event 'might have put a stop to all our affaires and perhaps had proved fatal to the transaction I came about'.<sup>131</sup> The episode began in late December 1699, when a group of twelve *lascars* (Indian seamen) appeared on Norris's doorstep, claiming noisily that the ambassador owed them a large sum of money, and demanding immediate payment. As Norris relayed, the lascars had previously worked for the Old Company aboard the ship, *Scarborough*, and had travelled all the way to England in that pursuit. According to the ambassador, once arrived in London, the lascars had no way of returning home, and so the New Company directors offered them free passage to India aboard a ship belonging to the very same fleet Norris travelled in, believing that 'whatever kindness was shewn by them to these poore people would be well looked on in India and soe prove an advantage' to their trade.<sup>132</sup> Contrary to Norris and the New Company agents' expectations, however, the lascars, instead, demanded 23 shillings for work carried out by them for the New Company over several months. Though Norris turned the group away, they returned the following day, and the day after that, until the irritated ambassador had the group's ringleader 'seized and soundly bastinaded and told the next time he came in such a manner he should be worse used'.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 113.

<sup>132</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 113.

<sup>133</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 114.

This act of violence quickly produced consequences. Afterwards, the lascars went directly to the *nawab* of the region to complain of their mistreatment at the hands of the ambassador and the New Company and insisted that the debts owed to them be paid at once. The *nawab* then redirected the dissenting crew to the city's *qazi* (chief justice) whose role it was to resolve such matters. At the same time, the *nawab* asked Norris to send a representative to the *qazi* to explain his side of the story and that, once the ambassador had done so, that would be the 'end of the businessse'.<sup>134</sup> Norris however, took extreme offence to this direction from *nawab*, viewing it as debasing to his royal character as the king's ambassador, and refused to comply with the instruction. As the ambassador explained, it 'was below me to submitt to any such thinge', and so he 'should never doe a thinge like it'.<sup>135</sup> Norris sent a message to this effect to the *nawab*, through his interpreter, Venkatadri. The *nawab*, however, once again insisted that the ambassador send someone, 'any person whatsoever, either moorman or Gentoo', to the *qazi* to represent his case.<sup>136</sup> Furious that he was being forced to engage in what he saw as a matter entirely beneath him and therefore damaging to the embassy, Norris again sent his Venkatadri to inform the *nawab* that he would not send any representative to the *qazi*, and that he 'expected to heare no farther of it'.<sup>137</sup>

Norris did hear further of it, however. Later that night, he received a message from Venkatadri informing the ambassador that he had been imprisoned by the *nawab*, who threatened to keep the interpreter detained until Norris sent a representative to appear before the *qazi*. Norris viewed this development as 'the greatest rudenesse could be committed', and 'was resolv'd, the consequence what it will, to resent the affront and have satisfaction for it'.<sup>138</sup> He subsequently sent a threatening message to the *nawab*, demanding Venkatadri's

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<sup>134</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 115.

<sup>135</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 115.

<sup>136</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 116.

<sup>137</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 116.

<sup>138</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol 116.

immediate release, or the nawab ‘would answer the contrary att his peril’.<sup>139</sup> The *nawab*, however, stood firm, explaining to Norris that he could not release the interpreter until he had sent someone to the *qazi* to explain his side of the case against the lascars, as to do otherwise would be against the ‘Law of Aurangzebe’.<sup>140</sup> This prompted a dramatic response from the ambassador, which would have long term repercussions for the embassy.

In an extraordinary act of military aggression, Norris called his retinue to arms, ordering all the English soldiers to stand to attention and weapons, including muskets, blunderbusses and canons, to be pulled out of their chests, loaded and put out for public display. Norris’s Indian servants were ‘frightened out of their witts’ by these actions, many of them sending their wives and children out of town, convinced that Norris’s plan was to seize the *nawab* or set the town on fire.<sup>141</sup> Word of the ambassador’s actions quickly spread across the town to the *nawab*’s residence, at which point the local ruler sent a lookout to observe Norris’s residence for himself. According to Norris, the lookout reported back that the ‘English men were all in armes’, and assured the *nawab* that Norris’s plan ‘was nothinge lesse then to seize him and his sons upon account of his deteining his servant’.<sup>142</sup> These actions had the desired effect – the next morning Venkatadri returned to the ambassador’s residence, declaring that the *nawab*, upon hearing of the English arming themselves, had released the interpreter and ‘even pushed him away with his own hands biddinge him to make all imaginable hast to me, that I might see he was at liberty’.<sup>143</sup> There was no further mention from the *nawab* of sending a representative to the *qazi* over the lascars’ case.

Determined to impress his royal status upon the *nawab* once and for all, Norris then sent an additional message to the local ruler, demanding a formal apology for Venkatadri’s imprisonment. The message, delivered by Venkatadri himself, asserted that Norris

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<sup>139</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 116.

<sup>140</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 117.

<sup>141</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 117.

<sup>142</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 118.

<sup>143</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 118.

was sent from the King of England to enable a lastinge peace and freindship betwixt the two nations; That I had and would contribute all in me [...] towards it; that [I] could not expect to have mett with such an affront in return as that of deteininge my interpreter; That as an Ambassadour from soe greate a prince I could not suffer soe great an indignity to be sent on my character; That the affront now offered was contrary to the Law of Nations and that I sent him now to demand satisfaction for it that I would admit of no other satisfaction unlesse he begged pardon and was sorry for doinge it.<sup>144</sup>

The *nawab* returned an apology that day, along with assurances of his continued friendship and service. Later reflecting on the incident, Norris justified his actions against the *nawab* by surmising that his character as a royal ambassador ‘must insist on [...] punctilios and points of Honour [...] and not suffer such indignitys’.<sup>145</sup> He was, moreover, convinced that the embassy would have suffered had he not taken any action, and that the ‘best way to deale with these people [the local Mughal authorities] is to make them feare you, for though they will doe much for gifts [...] Threateninge seemes to prevaile farther with them’.<sup>146</sup> But while the ambassador may have won this battle, he would not win the war.

Later the same day, after hearing what had occurred between Norris and the *nawab*, the New Company chief factor visited Norris to ask his permission to request a permit from the *nawab* for the New Company’s trade in Masulipatnam, and that to delay the request any further would ‘obsruct the businesse’.<sup>147</sup> Norris advised Pitt that he thought it inappropriate to ask the *nawab* for anything, considering what had just occurred, but that since he ‘did not hold it honourable [...] to have any farther Treatment with him [the *nawab*]’ himself, that Pitt and the New company council could now interact with the *nawab* as they saw fit. Norris, therefore, completely washed his hands of any further negotiations with the *nawab*, and refused to communicate with the local ruler for the rest of his stay in Masulipatnam.

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<sup>144</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 119.

<sup>145</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 123.

<sup>146</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 117.

<sup>147</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 120.



In one fell swoop, then, Norris destroyed his relationship with the *nawab* and further damaged his relationship with the New Company factors at the Masulipatnam factory. In his attempts to put the Crown first and maintain his royal character, Norris had lost his main link to the Mughal emperor. The *nawab* also appeared to make things difficult for the New Company factors after this incident, asking for larger gratuities and purposefully delaying the granting of trading licenses. As Norris put it, when the New Company subsequently applied to the ruler for anything, they were ‘put off from time to time, ordered to attend this time and that, but nothing done, only now the Nabob [requested larger bribes]’.<sup>148</sup> This incident increased simmering tensions between Norris and the New Company agents. When the episode described below occurred, therefore, it was enough to tip the New Company merchants over the edge.

#### Masulipatnam to Surat

By July 1700, Norris and his embassy had spent nine months in Masulipatnam. The main reason for the ambassador’s extended stay in the town was that he was forced to wait for authorities at the Mughal court to send an official escort to conduct him to the court overland – a standard practice for foreign embassies in India – along with an imperial *dastak* (permit) issued by Aurangzeb for his safe travel. Communication between Norris and authorities at the court to arrange the embassy’s escort began soon after Norris’s landing. Mediated by the empire’s *waqianavis* (the imperial news writer) and *pattamars* (letter carriers), Norris exchanged several letters and gifts with Asad Khan, Grand Wazir of the Mughal empire (Aurangzeb’s main minister) his son, army general Zulfiqar Khan, and some other key members of the court.

In terms of political clout in Mughal India, the Grand Wazir came second only to the emperor himself. At 80 years old, Asad Khan had held the post of Grand Wazir for a quarter

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<sup>148</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 121.

of a century, a role which saw him act as the emperor's main adviser, and take responsibility for the government's revenue and finance and the execution of imperial commands throughout the empire. Zulfiqar Khan, Asad Khan's eldest son, was General of the Mughal Army in the Deccan and had led the recent siege of Jinji Fort in 1698, earning him favour with Aurangzeb.<sup>149</sup> The direct exchange between Norris and Aurangzeb's top ministers was a promising sign for the embassy – such figures would be crucial in negotiations for the New Company's *farman* and therefore for the success of the embassy. Encouraged by the connections Norris had made already, Consul Pitt even asked the ambassador if he would request a *parwana* (temporary permit) from Asad Khan for the New Company's trade as a temporary measure before acquiring the *farman*. Norris predictably refused the request, however, arguing it was 'no ways adviseable to make mention of any such thinge' to Asad Khan, because it would 'lessen my character' if the request were denied before he had even reached the court.<sup>150</sup>

The exchange between Norris and ministers at the court, however, was severely hampered by the physical distance between Masulipatnam and the emperor's court, which was then stationed on the other side of the Indian subcontinent. Aurangzeb led a roaming court, which travelled across the empire, much of the time following Mughal battles against the Marathas.<sup>151</sup> When the decision to send the Norris embassy was made, it was anticipated that the Mughal court would be residing in Bijapur when the ambassador arrived in India, which was within a comfortable travelling distance overland from the New Company's factory in Masulipatnam. By the time Norris landed in Masulipatnam, however, the court had moved away. The problem of sheer distance was exacerbated by ongoing warfare in the Deccan between the Mughals and the Marathas, which resulted in further delays in

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<sup>149</sup> Laiq Ahmad, *The Prime Ministers of Aurangzeb* (Chugh Publications: Allahbad, 1976), 100.

<sup>150</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 108.

<sup>151</sup> For a good overview of Aurangzeb's roaming court and his long war against the Marathas in the Deccan, see John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 225–252.

correspondence due to the frequent halting and raiding of *pattamars*.<sup>152</sup> It was only in January 1700, more than three months after Norris's landing, that the ambassador received confirmation that the Mughal court had been notified of his arrival in India, and that Asad Khan had arranged an escort for Norris, encompassing 50 camels and led by a Medi Quli Beg (a young and minor player at the court), to be sent to Masulipatnam.<sup>153</sup> It was not until May that year, furthermore, that Medi Quli Beg actually arrived in Masulipatnam with the official documents for Norris's safe passage to the court.<sup>154</sup>

At the same time, the New Company agents at Masulipatnam were experiencing major difficulties in preparing the embassy for its long march to the court. Necessities for the embassy, such as tents, carts, and oxen, were not in ready supply in Masulipatnam, and had to be purchased and sent there from distant locations. As Norris put it, 'great difficultys' were had in preparing for the march, 'which perhaps in part were not to be avoided in this place consideringe everythinge wee have sent for 300 miles one way or another'.<sup>155</sup> Added to this was some monsoonal weather in June, which, as Norris was informed by the New Company merchants, would further 'obstruct our Travellinge'.<sup>156</sup> Heat likewise posed a problem for moving across South Asia, especially if the embassy could not find access to water. The New Company, in addition, were forced to rely on a dissident *faujdar* (military commander who also undertook judicial and land revenue roles) for some of the embassy's transport needs. It was the *faujdar*'s responsibility to provide transport to foreign embassies within their jurisdiction, but the officer repeatedly refused to assist, citing the exorbitant costs involved.<sup>157</sup> Norris again and again hounded the New Company merchants to end these 'great delays' and allow him to set out for the Mughal court immediately and 'with all expedition', taking

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<sup>152</sup> Das, 'The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib'. Original Manuscript, p. 331.

<sup>153</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 167.

<sup>154</sup> Das, 'The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib'. Original Manuscript, p. 334.

<sup>155</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 143.

<sup>156</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 154.

<sup>157</sup> Das, 'The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib'. Original Manuscript, p. 334–5.

particular aim at consul Pitt, whom the ambassador suspected of exacerbating the problems.<sup>158</sup>

In July 1700, frustrated after spending nine months in Masulipatnam and despairing that he was no closer to meeting Aurangzeb at the Mughal Court than he had been when he left England, Norris called a meeting with the New Company council at their local factory. Here, the ambassador demanded that the council immediately prepare a ship to take him and his retinue to Surat, a commercial hub on the other side of the subcontinent where the New Company's head factory was located, and a place from which the ambassador believed he could access the Mughal court more readily. In a thinly veiled threat, Norris informed the council that

if he was not furnisht with a shipp to goe immediately to Surat, the embassy will then be at an end, and [he would] take the oportunity of going in the first shipp to England, which, how much it will redound to the Kings and nations Honour [...] he] gives them to judge, & the President and councill to act as they see good [...] and recommends to them to be speedy in their resolutions, that [he] may give notice of it to England.<sup>159</sup>

Norris's grand plan to relocate the embassy to Surat by ship exacerbated tensions between him and the New Company factors in Masulipatnam even further, not least because they were expected, once again, to foot the bill for the move. The ambassador had also recently presented the New Company factors with an official document, which not only asked them to prepare a ship, but requested that they account for the lengthy delays in preparing the embassy for the overland trek to the Mughal Court. This was the last straw for the New Company merchants, who had for some time now protested that had done everything they could to advance the embassy, that

wee deserve thanks for our diligence rather than a [...] a Reprimand, which wee really my Lord value not [...] Wee have discharged our duty to the King our obligation to the Honourable Court of Directors and have been slaves to the embassy, and for all our actions shall justify them to the world.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. I, fol. 154.

<sup>159</sup> Proceedings of the New Company's representatives at Masulipatam, 9 July 1700, IOR/G/26/13, fols. 34–35.

<sup>160</sup> Proceedings of the New Company's representatives at Masulipatam, 25 April 1700, IOR/G/26/13, fol. 17.

Despite their objections, the Masulipatnam New Company agents prepared a ship for their ambassador, which was set to depart in August.

More importantly, however, Norris's decision to move to Surat went against the express wishes of the Mughal government, which had arranged an official convoy to escort the ambassador to the court overland. When Asad Khan learnt of the plan, he immediately wrote to the ambassador, imploring him not to sail to Surat, but to make use of the escort he had organised especially. Concerned about the emperor's reaction to Norris's rejection of his imperial escort, Asad Khan pleaded with Norris to 'give ear to me and come by land that my word to the king [Aurangzeb] may not prove a lye'.<sup>161</sup> Asad Khan and the other top ministers at the Mughal court were not the only ones to take offense to Norris's actions. Indeed, after learning of Norris's intentions, Masulipatnam's *waqianavis* warned the ambassador that the Mughal emperor himself would disapprove if Norris chose to forgo the convoy, and that the New Company's trade would suffer as a result. The town governor of Masulipatnam likewise warned Norris not to depart Masulipatnam by sea, and even threatened to 'carry Gunns out to [...] oppose it'.<sup>162</sup> Believing the embassy and his reputation was at stake, however, Norris once again 'resolved to maintain his Character' as a royal ambassador by defying the advice of the Mughal court and the New Company, and pushing forward with the plan, departing Masulipatnam port by ship on 23 August 1700.

Once again then, Norris's choice to put the Crown before the good of the New Company's trade produced unfortunate consequences for the embassy, not only deepening divisions with the New Company, but by putting important people, including the Grand Wazir Asad Khan and other top ministers at the court, offside. When the New Company directors in London heard about the ambassador's decision to move the embassy, they also disapproved, questioning why Norris had put the company to such great expense. By the end

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<sup>161</sup> Asad Khan, quoted in Das, 'The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib'. Original Manuscript, p. 339.

<sup>162</sup> New Company agents at Masulipatnam to their directors in London, 9 July 1700, IOR/G/26/13, fol. 35.

of the embassy's sojourn in Masulipatnam, then, Norris's relations with various parties had deteriorated significantly, setting the embassy off to a rocky start.

This chapter has shown that two key issues – conflict with the Old Company and the hybrid embassy problem – set Norris on course to eventual failure in the very first stage of the embassy. There were, of course, other factors that created barriers to the ambassador's progress in Masulipatnam. Monsoonal weather, for example, prevented Norris and his retinue from travelling to the Mughal court. Long delays caused by local manufacturers and merchants in equipping the embassy with necessities for the long trek to court, such as tents, palanquins, carts, and oxen, also prolonged Norris' sojourn in Masulipatnam. The fact that the ambassador and his retinue went first to Masulipatnam, and not Surat, which was closer to the Mughal Camp, in addition, delayed the embassy significantly. These, however, were all issues that may have been overcome had it not been for the Old Company's attacks on the embassy, as well as Norris's deep anxieties over representing both the Crown and the New Company, which saw him destroy relationships with the very people he needed on side in order to advance his mission. This profound disunity among the English and the problems associated with Norris's dual mandate would only intensify in the next stage of the embassy, as will be shown in the following chapter.

Incredibly, there was another problem brewing in the background during Norris's time in Masulipatnam, which would come into full view when the ambassador reached Surat. This was the issue around European maritime violence against Mughal shipping on the Indian Ocean. From the beginning of his stay in Masulipatnam, Norris had received reports about the developing piracy situation from the New Company factors at Surat. The Old Company merchants there were in trouble - along with the French and the Dutch they had been placed under house arrest on multiple occasions on the Mughal's orders and ordered to provide compensation for losses incurred by piracy. It was a tough situation for the ambassador to walk into. But how exactly would it affect the broader course of the embassy?



**Figure 6** View of the Harbour of Sūrāt (Gujarāt), anonymous, c. 1670, courtesy of Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden.

## Chapter Five

### ‘All manner of villanys’: English companies at war in Surat

In December 1700, after a four-month journey on board the *Sommers* from Masulipatnam, the Norris embassy finally arrived in the port of Surat. In the days leading up to his official landing, Norris and the New Company factors made an unusual move to visibly distance the ambassador from his affiliation with the company. In a top-secret effort carried out aboard the ship, the embassy was stripped of the New Company’s insignia. Flags and banners bearing the New Company’s coat of arms were destroyed, the crest erased from palanquins, trumpet banners, roundels and cannons, and even picked off the uniforms of Norris’s servants. As the ambassador recorded it in his diary, ‘wee have been put to greate trouble in makinge alterations in the liverys and banners and colours by pulling of the [New] Company’s arms wherever they were affixed’.<sup>1</sup> Only royal emblems, the crests of King William III and Norris himself, were to be displayed by the embassy.

It was a striking and seemingly counterintuitive move. Why remove any reference to the very organisation that was paying Norris to represent it at the Mughal court? As it turned out, the manoeuvre was a response to an aggressive attempt to sabotage the embassy made by agents of the Old Company. Just as they did in Masulipatnam, the Old Company agents in Surat had informed the city’s authorities that Norris was a fake ambassador, sent, not by a crowned head, but by a company of lowly merchants. This was not the first time an English ambassador had been forced to prove their royal connections in Mughal India. As shown in Chapter One, Roe battled to assert himself as the king’s official representative after a string of English merchants falsely claimed the title at Jahangir’s court. But for Norris to have to prove himself in the face of accusations made by his own countrymen – countrymen whose

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<sup>1</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume II: December 1700–April 1701, unpublished, Rawlinson Collection, C.913, Bodleian Library, Oxford, fol. 14.



interests he had been sent to India to represent - was something entirely new. On the night before the landing, Norris worried that if he or his retinue demonstrated any links to the New Company, 'it would have been such a confirmation to them [the Surat authorities] that I was not sent by the Kinge, but the [New] Company, that it would att once have put an end to my reception and embassy'.<sup>2</sup> The ambassador had yet to disembark at Surat and, already, the entire embassy was at stake.

The clash between Norris and the Old Company merchants at Surat seriously threatened the ambassador's landing and the embassy as a whole. This chapter illuminates the short but action-packed six-week period that Norris and his entourage spent in Surat before their march to the Mughal court (10 December 1700–27 January 1701). As the above episode indicates, this key phase in the wider progress of the embassy was defined by the intensification of conflict between the Old Company and the New Company, which further damaged the reputation and financial muscle of the already struggling embassy, and saw relations among the English deteriorate even further. This chapter details how the conflict between the English companies unfolded in Surat and the sticky web of problems this caused for Norris. At the same time, during his short stay in Surat, Norris became ensnared in the English maritime scandal – a problem he had largely avoided in Masulipatnam. As demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three, a string of violent attacks on Indian shipping in the previous decade had seen the Mughal government crackdown on the European companies trading in India, forcing them to sign an agreement to safely convoy imperial ships on the Indian Ocean. The Indian merchants caught up in these attacks continued to fight for compensation for their losses, however, and, as will be seen, dragged Norris into the controversy. This scandal would plague Norris all the way to the Mughal court, and was one of three main problems that eventually brought the embassy undone.

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<sup>2</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 14.

This chapter, on the one hand, shows an embassy being destroyed from within. The image presented here is of the English in a state of internal conflict and confusion, in which the very purpose and authority of the embassy were thrown into doubt, and tensions, simmering since Norris landed in Masulipatnam, reached boiling point, resulting in an all-out war between the Old Company and New Company English, and causing irreversible damage to the embassy. On the other hand, this chapter reveals the Norris embassy becoming further and further entangled in the broader issue of European maritime violence on the Indian Ocean and the Mughal government, and Indian merchants', attempts to put a stop to it.

### Proving royal ties

By 1700, the densely populated city of Surat on the west coast of India had functioned as the main trading port of the Mughal empire for more than a century, and was home to a myriad of Asian, European and other mercantile groups, including the English.<sup>3</sup> Having traded there for a century, the Old Company boasted a well-established factory and settlement in Surat, which was overseen by two key figures: Stephen Colt, president of the factory, and his superior John Gayer, the Governor of Bombay who also acted as the Old Company's chief agent in western India.<sup>4</sup> A newcomer to South Asia, the New Company was far less established in Surat, having only acquired a factory there less than a year before Norris's arrival. This factory was headed by Nicholas Waite, a recent arrival to India, who landed in Surat just a few months before Norris. Waite, who enjoyed the title of 'His Majesty's Consul and Minister', had previously served the Old Company as chief factor at Bantam in Java.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a recent analysis of Surat that emphasises the city's sustained importance as a trading centre from the sixteenth 'well into the nineteenth century', see Martha Chaiklin, 'Surat and Bombay: Ivory networks in western India', in *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, eds. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mosstert, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); See also, Radhika Seshan, 'Intersections: Peoples, ports and trade in seventeenth-century Surat and Madras', *The International Journal of Maritime History* 29, no. 1 (2017); Ruby Maloni, *Surat, Port of the Mughal Empire* (Mumbai: Himilaya Publishing House, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Wright, *Annesley of Surat and His Times: The true story of the mythical Wesley fortune* (London: A. Melrose, 1918), 157.

<sup>5</sup> Wright, *Annesley of Surat and His Times*, 257.

The Consul's previous employment with the New Company's greatest rival was nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, many of the New Company factors, especially those in leadership positions, had previously worked for the Old Company – a situation that made the conflict between the two English companies more personal and, therefore, more heated.

The year prior to the embassy's landing in Surat had been difficult for Norris. As revealed in the previous chapter, the ambassador had spent the best part of it languishing on the other side of the subcontinent in Masulipatnam, trying desperately to progress his embassy to the Mughal court, but to no avail. The New Company factors at Surat had, for months, urged Norris to leave Masulipatnam for Surat, where they believed the ambassador would have better luck in advancing the embassy. As previously discussed, there was even speculation among them that the Old Company was behind the decision to direct Norris to Masulipatnam rather than Surat in the first place, part of a plan designed to physically isolate the ambassador in order to impede his negotiations with the Mughals. Unfortunately for Norris, however, the move to Surat would bring with it more problems and, in particular, more Old Company attempts to ruin the embassy.

Hostility towards Norris's presence in Surat was openly expressed by the Old Company merchants trading there from the outset. As the ambassador sailed into the city's harbour on the *Sommers*, those on board a passing Old Company ship, the *Tavistock*, refused to salute him with gunfire or lower the Union flag from the main mast as a basic mark of respect to their king's representative. This act of defiance elicited a curt written order from Norris to

strike the Union flagg now flyinge on board you and imediately to repaire on board the ship *Sommers* your self to give me an account by what authority you have worn the same and how you dare to presume to doe it in sight of his majesty's flagg: As you will answer the contrary att your perill.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 2.

The Old Company merchants begrudgingly lowered the flag and let off a round of canon fire, but ignored Norris's direct summons. The ambassador later learnt that Gayer, president of the Old Company, had made violent threats about 'what they would do if a messenger from me should have come on board them as the *Tavistock* commanding to lower the Union flag'.<sup>7</sup> This maritime tussle between Norris and the Old Company merchants set the stage for the larger conflict to come in Surat, a conflict that would damage the embassy irreparably.

Before he had even disembarked at Surat, Norris learnt of a fresh attempt by the Old Company to put a stop to his embassy. In the ambassador's private cabin aboard the *Sommers*, head New Company factor at Surat, Nicholas Waite, informed Norris that the Old Company agents had convinced the city's governor, Dianat Khan, with a hefty gratuity, that Norris was a fake ambassador. As shown in the previous chapter, the image of Norris as a merchant representative sent, not by the King of England, but a poor, inexperienced, and even piratical, company of merchants, was perpetuated by the Old Company as part of a sustained and coordinated attack on the embassy that began before the ambassador's landing in Masulipatnam over a year earlier. The attack was apparently intended to play into the Mughal government's concerns over European piracy in Asian waters, as well as their indifference towards engaging in diplomatic exchange with lowly merchants compared to figures with royal status.<sup>8</sup> As demonstrated in Chapter One, Norris's predecessor, Roe, had battled against the Portuguese to prove his relationship to the Crown at the court of Jahangir. Norris would now, more than eight decades later, have to do the same, against his fellow English.

The Old Company's move achieved the desired effect of casting doubt over Norris's royal identity in the Surat community. On 15 December, the governor of the city, Dianat Khan, sent to demand that Norris prove himself as the King of England's true representative, asserting, as Norris put it, that 'if I came from merchants he durst not receive me as from a

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<sup>7</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Colin Paul Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 153.

Kinge without losse of his heade'.<sup>9</sup> The governor claimed that he had received advice about Norris's allegedly merchant origins directly from the Old Company, who 'had wrote him in Persian that I was the New Company's Ambassador'.<sup>10</sup> According to the governor, the Old Company agents had also claimed that they had their own ambassador making the journey to India, and that he would be arriving at Surat at any moment.<sup>11</sup> With the entire mission at stake before he had even landed, then, Norris and the New Company merchants moved to destroy all visible signs of the ambassador's connection to the New Company and create an authentically royal aura around the embassy.

The success or failure of the embassy hinged on Norris's ability to prove his connection to the Crown beyond doubt – and in the face of accusations thrown, not by external actors, but by his own countrymen. As seen in the opening story to this chapter, this extraordinary effort to prove his identity included stripping the embassy of the New Company's coat of arms and other insignia. It also involved a gratuity of 43,000 rupees paid by the New Company to the Surat governor and his son, Mir Al-Naki. As Waite relayed to Norris, the governor demanded a large sum of money to give the ambassador a favourable reception upon his landing, at which he would be given the opportunity to prove himself as the English king's official representative by presenting the formal letter written by William III to Aurangzeb. Waite assured the ambassador that the payment handed over to the ruler was necessary to counter the Old Company's earlier gratuity. Giving so large a sum to the governor was not something that Norris endorsed, believing such an underhand exchange to be beneath him as a royal dignitary. Understanding, however, that 'had I not been recvd here suitable to my character it would have confirmd everybody in the belief of what the old

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<sup>9</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 11.

<sup>11</sup> This was a reference to David Davenant, who, as explained in Chapter Three, was selected by the Old Company to carry out an embassy to Mughal India. This plan, however, was aborted and Davenant never left England; Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 11.

factory had been labouringe and bribinge to persuade them', he turned a blind eye to the exchange, and prepared for his landing and reception.<sup>12</sup>

On 26 December Norris and his retinue made their official landing in Surat, and were welcomed to the city in a stately ceremony. Escorted to the shore by a fleet of yachts, Norris was then transported up a bank in a palanquin to a large tent, where he was embraced by the governor and his son. With 'great state and grandeur', the ambassador presented the letter from William III to Aurangzeb in an open box, made with the 'richest brocade brought out of England, on the top of the box the Kings Armes richly embroyderd'.<sup>13</sup> The governor appeared satisfied with the display, pointing out the king's seal on the letter and recommending that the ambassador proceed to the Mughal court with all haste.<sup>14</sup> After the ceremony, Norris and the governor, accompanied by their entourages, marched four miles into the city centre, Norris proudly 'takinge the right hand of the Governor all the way wee marcht'.<sup>15</sup> A lavish reception ensued at the governor's house, where, much to his satisfaction, Norris was informed that Aurangzeb himself had recently sent to Surat to request that he proceed quickly to the court.<sup>16</sup>

Determined to prove himself not only to the authorities but to the wider Surat community, Norris ordered a public reading of his commission from William III, summoning all the English in Surat, including those belonging to the Old Company, to attend so 'they might be fully apprized of the powers and authority I was invested with'.<sup>17</sup> Endeavouring to invoke his full royal power, the ambassador set up a grand room especially for the occasion, which was 'spreade over with rich carpets', the walls 'hunge with fine scarlett cloth'.<sup>18</sup> On 28 December, the commission was read out by Edward Norris, the ambassador's brother and chief secretary, as Norris watched over the standing audience, seated on a stately chair

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<sup>12</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 24.

surrounded by velvet cushions. Among those attending the reading were the New Company council, some Mughal officers, and a number of wealthy Indian and Turkish merchants. Just one Old Company agent was present, the rest openly defying the ambassador's direct summons. The lone agent was Samuel Annesley, who had recently been replaced by Stephen Colt as head of the Old Company factory in Surat. After the reading, and in full sight of the ambassador, a group of merchants questioned Annesley over whether the seal on the king's commission was authentic. Surrounded by New Company merchants and Norris himself, Annesley realised he could not do otherwise but to acknowledge that the commission was, indeed, genuine.

After the governor's favourable reception and the reading of the King's commission, it seemed, for a moment, as if the embassy had made headway. Demonstrating his royal authority to the Surat community was certainly a victory for Norris, who was evidently elated that the local authorities and merchants had 'understood I was sent Ambassador from the King of England'.<sup>19</sup> Notably, this episode was marked by a distinct absence of the kinds of orientalist tropes Norris tended to adopt in his diaries when things went wrong. We also see high level of cultural commensurability, with Norris communicating effectively with the various Indian figures involved. However, this effort to verify the ambassador's identity had come at a huge financial cost to the New Company, which was already struggling to fund the embassy. Since his arrival in Masulipatnam over a year earlier, the New Company had poured money and resources into the embassy, much of it to directly fend off the Old Company's sabotage attempts. The 43,000-rupee gratuity to the governor of Surat to receive Norris favourably was another heavy blow, as were the other costs involved in upholding the royal aura of the embassy, such as fitting out the room for the reading of the king's commission. As will be discussed later in this chapter, these large costs involved in defending

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<sup>19</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 24.

the embassy from the Old Company's onslaught created serious tensions between Norris and the New Company agents in Surat.

The full cost of the Old Company's sabotage in Surat, moreover, extended far beyond this initial outlay. This became clear as Norris's new interpreter and broker, Rustamji, over the following weeks, sought to borrow money from Surat's local *shroffs* (bankers or moneychangers), to aide the embassy's journey to the Mughal court. According to the broker, none of the city's creditors would agree to loan bills to the embassy because they had been led to believe that Norris and the New Company merchants were poor. While the rumour, as shown above, had elements of truth, Rustamji further asserted that it was the Old Company's own brokers who had purposefully spread this information among the shroffs of the city in order 'to put a stop to all remittances and loans' to the embassy.<sup>20</sup> The problem was such that, days before Norris left Surat, Waite was forced to give personal security for a loan of 40,000 rupees to the embassy for the purpose of hiring carts, tents and other essential items for the march. As will be illustrated in the following chapters, this problem did not go away when Norris left Surat, but followed the ambassador all the way to the Mughal court. A month later in Brahrampuri, for example, Rustamji confessed to Norris the 'naked truth that no money was to be procurd here from the shrofts', and that the 'reason of our not beinge able to procure money for Bills was that the shrofts of Suratt had wrote to their correspondents that the New Company were poore'.<sup>21</sup> By damaging its reputation and inflicting a large financial burden on it, then, the Old Company was at least partially successful in hindering the embassy.

While the Old Company certainly did some damage, Gayer and his council in Surat were hardly the resounding victors in this battle either. Their attempts to sabotage the embassy had cost them considerably, with the large sum they paid to the governor not to

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<sup>20</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 63.

<sup>21</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 105.



receive Norris rendered useless by the New Company's counteroffer. The Surat authorities and broader community's acceptance of Norris as a royal ambassador also came as an undeniable setback for the Old Company. For reasons that will be explored later in this chapter, the Old Company at this time were already held in low esteem by the Surat community, and having their sabotage attempts exposed so publicly further damaged their reputation. Though the Old Company agents managed to inflict serious financial and reputational damage on the embassy, as shown above, they also failed in their higher goal of putting a stop to the embassy.

To add insult to the Old Company's injuries, just days before Norris's departure from Surat to the Mughal court, Gayer's own personal secretary, John Lane, along with four guards, abandoned the Old Company and approached Norris for employment 'on account of his little salary under Sr John Gayer'.<sup>22</sup> In an episode which bore a striking resemblance to the incident in Masulipatnam outlined in the previous chapter, Lane brought with him a pile of letters written by Gayer and the other Old Company factors at Surat, which confirmed the Old Company's plans to ruin the embassy. Upon discovery of Lane's desertion, Gayer wrote to Waite, asking him to return his secretary immediately. Norris, however, 'did not thinke it proper to send him back to be sacrificed', and so took the man temporarily into his service.<sup>23</sup> In response to Gayer's letter, Waite sent a letter to the Old Company factory claiming 'he knew nothinge of those mentiond to have left [their] service', so could not fulfil Gayer's request.<sup>24</sup> It was an embarrassing affair for the Old Company merchants, and one that further highlighted the messy nature of the English conflict.

The only real winners to come out of the Old Company's acts of sabotage in Surat were, of course, the local authorities. Happily collecting a stream of gratuities and gifts from

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<sup>22</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol.57.

<sup>23</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 58.

<sup>24</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 58.

both companies, it was clear even to the ambassador that individuals such as the governor and his son were using the conflict between the companies to their own advantage and profit. As Norris lamented, the Surat authorities' 'whole business is to gett as much money as can be squeezd from both Companys by pretending to be a great friend and confidant of both and betrayinge both'.<sup>25</sup> As seen in the preceding chapter, this was not the first time local authorities in India had exploited the divisions between the two companies, pitting them against each other for their own personal gain. It would also not be the last.

There is a distinct picture that emerges from this examination of the Old Company's sabotage in Surat. It is one in which each side of the conflict throws all its efforts into attacking or defending itself from the other, neither gaining much ground, each struggling to keep afloat while those around them exploit the divisions, making significant gains. Even though Norris managed to prove himself as a royal representative, it was at a huge and ongoing financial cost to the New Company. The embassy, furthermore, never fully bounced back from being painted as destitute, as exemplified by the continued refusal of local creditors to issue loans to the embassy. The Old Company merchants in Surat also lost face and money in the battle, and failed in their overall aim to stop the embassy in its tracks. This internal English conflict, however, would also cause trouble for the embassy in other, unexpected, ways.

#### Old Company sedition and New Company tensions

The Old Company merchants had failed in their attempt to botch Norris's landing in Surat – the ambassador proved his direct connection to the Crown and, after the landing, preparations continued for his march from Surat to the Mughal court. Unfortunately for Norris and the New Company, however, the Old Company's effort to bring down the embassy did not end there. But what would be the Old Company's next move, now that Norris had proven his

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<sup>25</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 47.

royal identity to the Mughal authorities? As will be demonstrated below, in an extraordinary act of defiance against the British Crown, the Old Company agents moved to dispute the authority of William III himself, in the hopes, thereby, of painting Norris as an irrelevant figure unworthy of the emperor's attention. This act, which was carried out by the president of the Old Company factory at Surat, Stephen Colt, caused further divisions between the ambassador and the Old Company merchants and cast more uncertainty over the embassy in the eyes of the local community. But the incident also led to the deterioration of relations between the ambassador and the New Company merchants in the Surat factory - a relationship that was crucial to the success of the embassy.

Norris first learned of Colt's subversive efforts as he settled into his accommodation at Surat - a grand tent set up in the New Company's garden. The source was the governor of Surat's political adviser and eldest son, Ali Naki. In a secret meeting, Ali Naki advised that Colt had informed the governor that the current King of England was unfit to rule, that he would be imminently dethroned and executed, and replaced by the rightful king, who was currently living in exile in France. As Norris recorded it, Colt claimed that the

present Kinge of England was a madman and a foole and that there was another Kinge of England who had been deposd and was fled to France who would in a short time be restord to the Crowne and the present Kinge would be killd.<sup>26</sup>

This was a sensational accusation, made the more so because it gave credence to popular allegations in England of the Old Company's links to deposed king, James II and the Catholic Church. As discussed in Chapter Two, in 1688, Willem Hendrik, a Protestant Dutch prince, invaded England and took over the throne from the deeply unpopular Catholic king, James II, in what became known as the Glorious Revolution. Willem, who became King William III, had subsequently defended the Crown from several attempts made by Catholic rebel groups to restore James II, who lived in exile in France. All such attempts were ultimately

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<sup>26</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 54.

unsuccessful, though they posed a threat to the monarchy and elicited a ruthless crackdown on Catholicism in England. As previously demonstrated, the revolution destabilised the East India Company in England, leading to its complete restructure and the formation of the New Company. During its overhaul in the 1690s, the Company's critics frequently pointed to its close relationship with both James II and his predecessor, Charles, as a reason why it should be shut down and replaced. For Norris, Colt's actions would undoubtedly have confirmed the widely-held suspicions about the Old Company and its allegiances.

On receipt of this information, Norris acted decisively. Without consulting Waite or any of the New Company factors, he sent a threatening notice to the governor of Surat, demanding Colt's immediate arrest. On 14 January 1701, the message was delivered aloud in English and Persian to the governor and a panel of Mughal officials at the public *darbar* (local courthouse) by Norris's secretaries. It asserted that the:

words and actions of Mr Colt are Treason against the Kinge of England (The greatest crime any subject can be guilty of) for wch the Law of England inflicts the punishment of death. That his Excellency beinge in the Mogull's Dominions has sent to the Governr publickly in the Durbar to demand in the name of the Kinge of England that he immediately seize and arrest the person of Mr Colt & keepe him in Irons till his Excellency has acquainted the Mogull therewith... And if he (the Governr) refuse to doe it then his Excellency is duty bound to... informe the Mogull of the whole matter and to demand of him satisfaction for his officers not doinge me justice on this occasion.<sup>27</sup>

After the reading, the governor and the rest of the panel appeared to briefly discuss the matter among themselves and then abruptly broke up the *darbar* without responding to the message. This reaction was hardly encouraging, and likely indicated the Mughal panel's disapproval of the ambassador's demand. This was, at the very least, how the New Company factors viewed it when they learned of the ambassador's actions.

Believing it might jeopardise their trade in Surat, the New Company factors responded angrily to Norris's threat against Dianat Khan. President Waite sent a curt letter to

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<sup>27</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 54.

the ambassador expressing his concern that it ‘might sett the Governr against us and be prejudiciall to the factory’.<sup>28</sup> The next day, Wait and the rest of the New Company’s Surat council handed Norris a three-page paper outlining their opposition to his action ‘in obtruse and darke termes’, and warned him not to take the matter further.<sup>29</sup> Viewing the factors’ response as completely out of line, Norris berated Waite, asserting that ‘neither he or they [the council] had anythinge to doe to concern themselves about it’.<sup>30</sup> He insisted, further, that matters relating to the king’s honour ‘I was the sole judge of..[and] nothinge should hinder me’ from taking the incident further.<sup>31</sup> It was a fiery exchange that exacerbated tensions between the ambassador and the New Company agents that had been building since his arrival in Surat.

Tensions between Norris and the New Company factors in Surat first surfaced over what the factors saw as Norris’s liberal expenditure of Company funds. In a meeting with the New Company council soon after he arrived in the city, Norris requested that the Surat factory, as the New Company’s largest branch in India, reimburse the smaller factory at Masulipatnam for the expenses he incurred during his year-long stay there. The factors, who had already footed the bill for the ambassador’s expensive move from Masulipatnam to Surat, protested, arguing that they ‘were not in a capacity to disburse such a sum’.<sup>32</sup> They flatly ‘refusd to draw bills for the money’, instead sending an account of Norris’s request to the New Company’s board of directors in London.<sup>33</sup> As discussed above, defending the embassy from the Old Company’s interference was another costly exercise for the New Company factors at Surat, which only fostered their growing hostility toward the ambassador.

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<sup>28</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 55.

<sup>29</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 56.

<sup>30</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 56.

<sup>31</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 56.

<sup>32</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 38.

<sup>33</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 38.

The New Company factors urged Norris to tighten his belt and find ways to cut costs. Waite went so far as to personally warn the ambassador to ‘be easy in this affaire [of spending money]’, as he had ‘pawnd his estate’ to raise finances for the embassy.<sup>34</sup> Predictably, however, Norris was reluctant to do anything that might reduce the grandeur of his embassy. As a token gesture in response to the factors’ concerns, he dismissed 50 of his Indian servants ‘in order to lessen and lighten the charge as much as may be, beinge sensible it will be heavy’.<sup>35</sup> Norris continued, however, to spend the New Company’s money in a way that he believed would uphold the dignity and honour of the king of England, viewing this as key to the success of the embassy overall. As will be shown in the following chapters, this issue became a sticking point, with Waite continuing to urge Norris to exercise restraint in his spending.

After the demand Norris made on the Surat governor to arrest Colt, tensions between the ambassador and the New Company agents reached a peak. As the factors saw it, not only was the ambassador costing them financially, but he also risked damaging relations with the very people they relied upon for the New Company’s future prosperity in Surat. Norris, on the other hand, believed the factors had acted out of line, labelling their three-page paper opposing his actions ‘such a hotchpotch and miscellany of bombast stuff’ that he ‘would not trouble myselfe with talking [...] any more about it’.<sup>36</sup> Fortunately for the New Company factors – though embarrassingly for Norris – the incident appears to have had less of an impact than initially feared; Dianat Khan simply ignored the ambassador’s demand to arrest Colt, and the Old Company president was left unreprimated for his offence against the English king. As will be examined below, the governor’s disinterest in arresting an English trader for treason against a foreign monarch was most likely due to him having bigger fish to

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<sup>34</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 43.

<sup>35</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 59.

<sup>36</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 56.

fry when it came to the Old Company merchants in Surat. By the time Norris left Surat for the Mughal court, however, his relationship with the New Company merchants was severely damaged, and the wounds would only continue to deepen as the embassy progressed.

This episode once again shows that it was the local authorities who both had the upper hand in their relationship with the English, and benefitted most from the conflict between the companies. One of the key rights of foreign merchant communities was internal autonomy, including the right to try cases internally. It was a clear sign of the lack of Norris's own power that he did not dare make the arrest himself. Dianat Khan's disinterested response to Norris's demand to arrest Colt was also indicative of the ambassador's overall importance in the eyes of the Mughal authorities – that is, he did not appear significant at all. In regard to local authorities benefiting from the Old-New Company conflict, many of the details about Colt's treacherous behaviour came from the private secretary to Ali-Naki (Dianat Khan's son), to whom Waite made regular payments in return for inside information about the Old Company merchants in Surat. As Norris put it, the 'meer's secretary [is] with great secrecy kept in continuall pay by the Consull', the secretary having exclusive access to the Surat governor's interactions with not only the Old Company factors, but with other Mughal officials and principle merchants.<sup>37</sup>

The Colt episode also drives home the idea that the Old Company merchants in India were acting in complete defiance of the Crown, committing seditious acts with impunity. As Norris himself lamented, in England, such a crime would 'inflict the punishment of death', but in Surat, not even the English king's official ambassador could bring the Old Company merchants into line.<sup>38</sup> It is, indeed, hard to imagine that such a scene as the English in Surat at this time could become even more chaotic. Unfortunately for Norris, however, the Old

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<sup>37</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 34.

<sup>38</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 54.

Company's sabotage attempts and his deteriorating relations with the New Company factors were not the only, nor the biggest problems he would face in this port city.

### Maritime scandal ensnares the embassy

Norris's efforts to prove his royal authority and distance himself from his commercial ties in the eyes of the Surat community backfired spectacularly, dragging him into a piracy scandal involving the Old Company, the Mughal government, and India's most prominent merchants. As will be revealed in the following chapters, this scandal would eventually help to bring an end to the embassy. Below, I unpack the scandal and show how, instead of smoothing the path to success for his embassy, proving himself as the English King's official representative made him responsible for a whole new set of problems.

No sooner had Norris proven his royal authority to the governor in Surat than a group of local merchants began to petition him about a major dispute they had with the Old Company. Led by the fabulously rich Abdul Ghafur, who Norris described as the 'most considerable merchant in Surat and perhaps in the world', the merchants accused the Old Company of piracy.<sup>39</sup> It was claimed that, over the previous decade, the Old Company hijacked eleven vessels along the Indian coast, which belonged to Ghafur and a number of other major traders and, combined, carried a cargo worth a staggering 46 million rupees.<sup>40</sup> The Old Company's attacks, they alleged, were violent; there were 'a greate many men killed' aboard the captured vessels, and some of the ships were taken to the Old Company's settlement at Bombay and destroyed there.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fols.31–32. Abdul Ghafur/Guffur was head of one of the great merchant families of Surat in the seventeenth century and dominated the Surat trade from the 1680s. He is well-known to scholars of the early East India Company. See, for example, Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and Decline of Surat: 1700–1750* (Delhi: South Asia Books, 1979); Ghulam Nadri, 'The Maritime Merchants of Surat: A Long-term Perspective', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 50, no. 2–3 (2007).

<sup>40</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fols. 30–31.

<sup>41</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 30.



The merchants had repeatedly sought redress for the crimes by appealing to the Surat governor and other authorities. They had even had their case heard by the emperor, twice, who had each time, and as shown in Chapter Two, imprisoned the English merchants, placed temporary embargoes on the Old Company's trade and ordered it to compensate the merchants for their losses. The Old Company avoided handing over the massive payout, however, by repeatedly paying off the Surat governor. As one Turkish merchant, Hussein Hammadan angrily asserted, 'Dinant Chawn [Dianat Khan] the present Governor of Surat was a great Rouge', and had cheated them of justice time and again.<sup>42</sup> The group of merchants now entreated Norris to represent their story at the Mughal court and seek justice against the Old Company on their behalf. As they framed it, the king of England's true representative would condemn the crimes committed by the king's own subjects in India, and, as a result, would pursue punishment for those English who had 'prostituted their own King and Country'.<sup>43</sup> Flattering the ambassador by stating that he 'had never seen or heard of any person of the like quality', Ghafur cleverly pinned Norris as their saviour, asserting that 'now that [Norris had] arrived nobody doubted that they should have justice done them'.<sup>44</sup>

The merchants' claims certainly stacked up. As shown in Chapter Two, during the late 1680s and '90s, many Indian vessels were hijacked by European ships on the Indian Ocean, particularly on the trade route from Surat to Mocha. Some of this maritime violence was part of Old Company director Josiah Child's war against the Mughals – which, as previously discussed, comprised aggressive maritime attacks on Mughal shipping in the Indian ocean aimed to pressure Aurangzeb to grant the Company better terms of trade. Ex-Old Company president, Samuel Annesley, certainly couched the Old Company's attacks on

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<sup>42</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 29.

<sup>44</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 29.

the Indian Ocean in terms of a just war against the Mughals. In a private consultation in Norris's accommodation on 21 December, Annesley first admitted that

it was true 4 ships of his [Ghafur's] were taken brought to Bombay the goods taken out put in a warehouse there, which when the Mughal heard word, on the Island the warehouse was burnt by one of the Mogulls officers and all the goods consumed.<sup>45</sup>

Norris recorded that Annesley then attempted to defend the Old Company's attacks as a war against the Mughal Empire. In the ambassador's words, 'As to the Company's takinge severall moores vessells with their own passes on board them for security he [Annesley] did not deny, but saide it was in the war, which he acknowledged to be begun without proclamation or due notice'.<sup>46</sup>

As shown in Chapter Two, increased piracy and privateering in the Indian Ocean were also behind the rising number of Indian vessels being attacked on the Indian Ocean during this period. Naturally, however, the owners of these merchant ships viewed the seizures, whether they were part of Child's War or not, as illegal attacks and consequently sought justice against the Old Company. They demanded full compensation for their losses, and complained that the Old Company had bribed their way out of paying any recompense so far. As Ghafur privately explained to Norris, the Old Company had, in addition, entered 'into an obligation to defend the Mogulls subjects from pyrates', which had also helped them to avoid paying compensation to the merchants.<sup>47</sup> This was a reference to the *muchalka* signed by the Old Company and the French and Dutch East India Companies, discussed in Chapter Two. Norris was openly swayed by Ghafur's plight, describing the trader as 'a subtle crafty fellow', who, 'though neare 80 yeares of age knew to introduce his story and tell it to all the advantage imaginable'.<sup>48</sup> Wanting to appear the arbiter of justice and fighter of pirates, the ambassador predictably took the step of promising to help him.

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<sup>45</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 58.

<sup>46</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 58.

<sup>47</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 31.

Norris assured the merchants that he would represent their case against the Old Company to Aurangzeb.<sup>49</sup> He asked them to put their claims in writing and translate the document into English and Persian with all their signatures before he left Surat, so that he could take it with him to the Mughal court.<sup>50</sup> The ambassador went further, assuring them that he had been sent to India by William III to solve the piracy issue more broadly. ‘The King of England, havinge been informd of severall pyracys committed and injustices done by some of his subjects in these parts’, the ambassador told the merchants, had sent him to India with a convoy of ships to ‘looke for and destroy all pyrates’, and had already executed several of the offenders in England.<sup>51</sup> This information was, to an extent, true. As discussed in Chapter Three, Norris had been sent with four warships to combat piracy in Mughal waters, and William Kidd and a number of other pirates had recently been tried and hanged in London. The ambassador, however, soon changed his tune when he realised that promising the merchants justice would risk the success of his embassy.

Just days after Norris had promised the merchants redress, the ambassador received reports about a ‘curfew’ placed on the Old Company merchants by Dianat Khan. The information, once again, came from Annesley, who told the ambassador that ‘neither he who was lately president of the old factory nor any of them are permitted to goe out of the gates without either leave or a guard’.<sup>52</sup> It was the first concrete indication Norris received of the Old Company merchants in Surat being, once again, placed under house arrest on direct orders from Aurangzeb. The orders came in response to the acts of European piracy committed on the Indian Ocean, and as mentioned above, Ghafur’s repeated attempts to claw back the money he had lost over the preceding decade at the hands of the English. While

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<sup>49</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 30.

<sup>50</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 30.

<sup>51</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 48.

Norris had not grasped the full extent of the problem yet, he rightly took the reinstated curfew as an ominous sign for his embassy.

The ambassador was forced to think quickly. It was his duty as a royal ambassador to represent all English subjects in India and he had, as has been shown, gone to great efforts to convince the local community that this was so. But if he was now held responsible for the Old Company's crimes, would it ruin any chance of the embassy succeeding at the Mughal court? Realising that involving himself in this piracy scandal could not possibly mean good news for the embassy, Norris backflipped, reneging on his promise to help the merchants at the Mughal court and seeking to distance himself from the issue. The ambassador ordered a notification to be drawn up 'in Persian and English' which was to be displayed in the *darbar* 'so that not only the Mogull's officers then present but all the merchants might be apprized fully and clearly of the contents'.<sup>53</sup> The contents, which were read out by his secretaries, Edward Norris and Mills, to the *darbar* panel and a large crowd of townspeople, acknowledged the merchants' complaints against the English, but stated that, as per the King's instructions, the New Company would not be held accountable for any of the debts owed or crimes committed by the agents of the Old Company.<sup>54</sup>

The ambassador's notification also stated that he was 'commanded by his Majesty to give notice to the Mogull and all his officers', that the Old Company would terminate on 1 September 1701, and that anyone with claims against or debts owed to them by the Old Company should 'take proper measures' to settle directly with the Old Company agents before that date.<sup>55</sup> Clearly mistaking the ambassador's intent, after the notification was read, the same merchant who had earlier appealed to the ambassador, Hussein Hammadani, rose to his feet and shouted at the *darbar* panel that the Dianat Khan was 'corrupted' and that Norris

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<sup>53</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 32.

<sup>54</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fols. 32–33, 36.

<sup>55</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 25.

was there to ‘have justice done them’.<sup>56</sup> Norris, however, remained purposefully noncommittal towards the merchants over the question of whether he would alert the emperor to the case for the rest of his time in Surat, and refused to sign a petition against the Old Company presented to him by Ghafur, assuring him instead ‘that my word was sacred, that he might and should depend on it’.<sup>57</sup>

In submitting this notification, Norris was attempting to wash his hands of responsibility for the Old Company merchants in India. He afterwards admitted this resolution to his trusted confidant Pedro Pereira (an independent diamond trader originally from the Netherlands who had lived in India for almost 30 years), who questioned why it was that Norris had, at this point, chosen to renounce his obligation to represent the Old Company merchants.<sup>58</sup> Norris informed Pereira that

had the old Company known their own interest, acknowledged me the King’s Embassadour, and made their case known to me, it might have been possible to have done them some signall service which nobody could have done them but myself, but by their unaccountable slight they have sent on my character and their ill behaviour before and since my arrivall att Suratt they had now sent it out of my power to doe them any good.<sup>59</sup>

It was, of course, true that the Old Company had made it nearly impossible for the ambassador to act as their representative. Up until this point, however, Norris had repeatedly claimed that, as the king’s official representative, it was his duty to defend and protect all Englishmen, regardless of the company they belonged to. As he had stated in Masulipatnam, ‘All the King’s subjects should be equally under my care and protection’, and those employed by the Old Company should not ‘suffer in the least [...] for that I was always [...]

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<sup>56</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 33.

<sup>57</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 32.

<sup>58</sup> In addition to diamond trading, Pedro Pereira spent years petitioning for a Jewish settlement in India, which was established in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Walter J. Fischel, ‘Pedro Pereira Jewish Merchant in Surat (India) 1686-1721’, *Sefunot: Studies and Sources on the History of the Jewish Communities in the East*, 1964, Vol. 5, p. 78-83; Ishrat Alam, ‘Jewish Merchants in the Mughal Empire’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 65, (2004).

<sup>59</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 37.

ready to do the same good offices of kindness for them as any others'.<sup>60</sup> Even at the reading of the king's commission, it was clear that Norris held out hope of representing all the English, including the Old Company merchants. The ambassador's thinking on the matter had clearly shifted.

That Norris intended to evade accountability for the Old Company merchants in Surat to avoid being dragged into the Old Company piracy case and save his embassy is further supported by the fact that the ambassador was purposefully misleading in his notification to the *darbar*. At the time he delivered his public message about the Old Company's upcoming termination to the Surat community, Norris was aware that that the Old Company would not be terminated at all. On 11 December on board the *Sommers*, head New Company factor, Nicholas Waite, informed Norris that 'he had somethinge to Impart of wch he Requestd nobody might be present but me and himselfe and to passe my word of Honour what was saide on such occasion to be kept secret'.<sup>61</sup> This highly sensitive piece of information was that a bill had been passed in the British parliament to continue the Old Company as a corporation. Instead of replacing the Old Company with the New Company, as had been decided by the parliament in 1698, the two companies would now have to exist side by side in India indefinitely. Fully aware of the damaging effects this intelligence could have on the embassy, Waite and Norris agreed that Norris should pretend 'not to be possessd of it'.<sup>62</sup> By falsely claiming in the notice to the *darbar* that the Old Company was to terminate in 1701 and that all disputes with the Old Company merchants should be settled directly with them, Norris was clearly trying to shirk responsibility for the Old Company in order to save his embassy.

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<sup>60</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume I: September 1699–April 1700, unpublished, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson Collection, C.912, fol. 90.

<sup>61</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 5.

<sup>62</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 7.

The steps Norris took to distance himself and the embassy from the Old Company's debts and piracies came too late, however. The wheels had already been set in motion, and the ambassador would continue to be dragged further and further into this piracy scandal that would prove one of three ultimate reasons for the embassy's downfall. It could not have been otherwise – as soon as Norris proved himself as the English King's official representative, it became inevitable that he would be held to account for the crimes of the English in India – regardless of the company the English perpetrators worked for.

Just days before Norris and his retinue left Surat for the Mughal court, another confrontation occurred between the ambassador and some Old Company agents. On 22 January, three Old Company employees, Bernard Wiche, Newark Garnett, and Samuel Richardson, approached the New Company garden with a letter to Norris from John Gayer and the general council. On Norris's orders, the men were stopped at the gate, and tersely informed that the ambassador would not receive any message from them until all the Old Company merchants in Surat had 'acknowledgd their fault and made their submission to me' as their king's ambassador.<sup>63</sup> The Old Company agents responded violently, forcing open the gate and throwing the letter on the ground before departing the garden. Outraged, Norris ordered the men to be chased, seized and bound. A guard was set to watch over them overnight while Norris sent a message to Dianat Khan demanding that the three 'criminalls', along with Gayer and the rest of the council, be imprisoned at Surat until he had informed the emperor of their villainy.<sup>64</sup>

The Old Company's Surat council fired back, the next day submitting its own complaint to the *darbar*, accusing Norris of committing 'an act of hostility' by illegally detaining their employees, and demanding their release.<sup>65</sup> Evidently fearful of the potential

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<sup>63</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 60.

<sup>64</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 61.

<sup>65</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 61.

consequences this could have for his embassy, the ambassador not only released the prisoners, but ordered Harlowin (one of Norris's main entourage) to take them to his tent and 'entertain them with all civility and respect'.<sup>66</sup> The three Old Company factors enjoyed a feast with the New Company gentlemen, and thanked them for their 'kind usage' in a letter the following day.<sup>67</sup>

Bringing the merchants from the warring companies together for a 'friendly' dinner in the New Company's garden after the Old Company merchants had been bound and detained there overnight appears nothing short of ridiculous. The display was perfectly illustrative, however, of the state of internal chaos the English in India were in. This chapter has analysed how this English war played out in Surat, and its impact on the embassy. In doing so, it has revealed several key points. First, it has shown that the Old Company's sabotage attempts in this port city inflicted serious financial and reputational damage on the embassy. Second, it has demonstrated that the conflict led to a permanent weakening of the relationship between Norris and the New Company merchants in Surat, a relationship that was vital to the success of the embassy. Third, this chapter has revealed how Norris, despite his best efforts to distance himself from it, was dragged into the piracy scandal and painted as responsible for the Old Company's crimes, further ruining the embassy's chances of success. Overall, the chapter shows the English in India, at the turn of the seventeenth century, in a state of disorder and disgrace, and of the deeply dysfunctional natures of the two English East India Companies at this time.

On 27 January 1701, finally 'in readiness', Norris and his retinue marched out of Surat 'after the same manner as my entry', in a long and exuberant procession of soldiers, servants, musicians, and his close entourage of English 'gentlemen', including his brother, Edward Norris, assistants Mills and Harlowin, chaplain Paget, and new assistant Josiah Hale

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<sup>66</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 62.

<sup>67</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 62.



(Hale replaced Thurgood, who did not make it past Masulipatnam. Thurgood attempted suicide in a large water tank after becoming, as Norris put it, ‘disformed in his brain’ and was sent home to England on the New Company ship, the *De Grave* as a result).<sup>68</sup> Their destination was the Mughal court near Panhala Fort, around 600km south of Surat, where Norris hoped to finally meet Aurangzeb and obtain the *farman* for the New Company.

After the commotion involved in obtaining the Mughal escort and *dastak* for Norris’s safe travel from Masulipatnam to the court, discussed in the previous chapter, Grand Wazir Asad Khan had arranged new documents to be issued for the embassy to travel from Surat to Panhala Fort.<sup>69</sup> In a letter to the ambassador, the Wazir wished him a speedy journey and ‘was very complementary’.<sup>70</sup> Norris suspected, however, that Asad Khan was ‘no great friend of ours’.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps this comment was as close as Norris would come to an acknowledgement of his own diplomatic gaffe in refusing the Mughal escort Asad Khan had originally arranged in favour of sailing for Surat. Or perhaps the ambassador was not so self-aware as to realise those actions would undoubtedly have offended Aurangzeb’s top minister. Regardless, Norris would soon come almost face to face with Asad Khan on his journey to the Mughal court. The next chapter examines the embassy’s march south, through the heartland of the subcontinent, as well as Norris’s long residency at the Mughal court. It was a pivotal phase of the Norris embassy – a crescendo at which the ambassador’s dreams of stately recognition and the New Company’s hopes for a *farman* would be quashed.

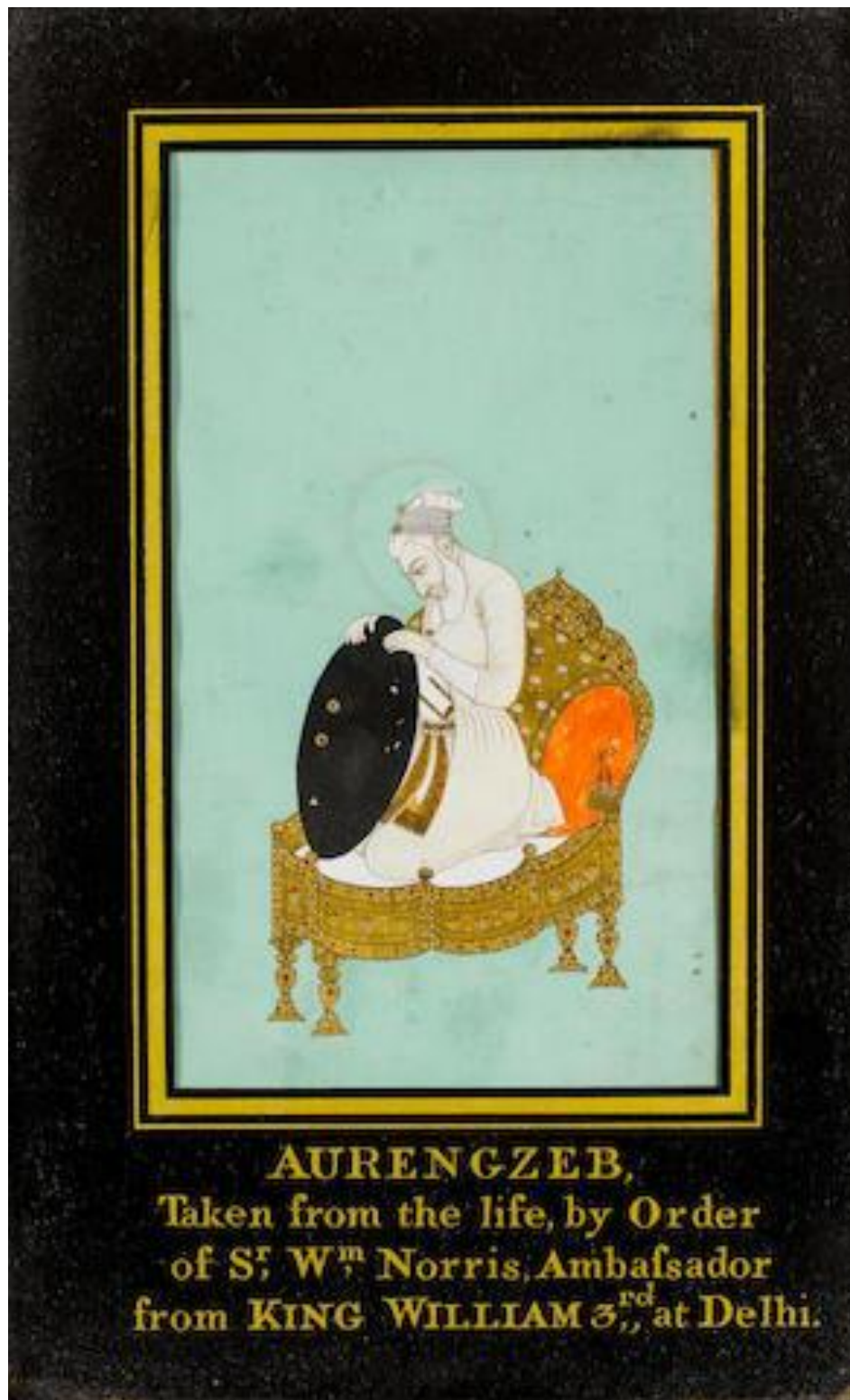
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<sup>68</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 63; On Thurgood, see Norris, Diaries, vol. I, fol. 147.

<sup>69</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 22.

<sup>71</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 22.



**Figure 4** This portrait of Aurangzeb was commissioned by William Norris when the ambassador was at the Mughal court in 1701. The title underneath the image must have been added later, as it incorrectly references Delhi as the location of the court (the court was actually near Panhala Fort). It is the only image from the embassy that survives, and was sold at auction to a private collector in 2009. Courtesy of Bonhams, London. <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/16776/lot/134/>

## Chapter Six

### ‘Securing the seas’: Failure and fear at the Mughal court

On 4 November 1701, Norris and his retinue departed the Mughal *lashkar*, Aurangzeb’s travelling camp that followed the Mughal Army across the Deccan as it warred against its enemy, the Marathas, and from which the emperor conducted his court. Seven months had passed since he had first arrived at the camp, and Norris had yet to achieve the primary goal of his embassy – to secure a *farman* for the New Company’s trade. Humiliated by what he viewed as ‘the greate charge and dishonour’ inflicted on him by Aurangzeb and his chief ministers, and convinced that he would be seized and kept hostage by the Mughal government for the Old Company’s crimes if he continued to remain at the court any longer, the ambassador’s exit was intended to display his indignation, as well as his military muscle.<sup>1</sup>

As the embassy marched out of the *lashkar*, Norris’s soldiers were armed to the hilt, each carrying a ‘pair of pistolls’ with ‘20 rounds ready to discharge’, while the ambassador and his gentlemen equipped themselves with the more-threatening blunderbusses.<sup>2</sup> In defiance of the emperor, who banned the beating of drums without his express permission, Norris paraded out of the camp with trumpets blaring and ‘beate the drum in the fface of the whole leschar [lashkar]’.<sup>3</sup> Before leaving, the ambassador refused even to wait for a *dastak* (a permit) to be issued by the court for his safe passage back to Surat, where he hoped to depart home to England, despite stern warnings that setting off without the permit would offend Aurangzeb. Departing in this bold manner, the ambassador asserted, would ‘show [the emperor and his ministers that] I was not afraide of them’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume III: September 1701–March 1702, unpublished, National Archives, Kew, CO 77/50, fol. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol III, fol. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol III, fol. 78.

<sup>4</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 78.

Norris's defiant exit from the Mughal court brought the embassy to an abrupt end. But what prompted this hostile act? Furthermore, why did the ambassador believe there was no choice but to leave the court without the *farman*, thereby giving up on his mission once and for all? This chapter examines the ambassador's journey to, and time spent at the Mughal *lashkar* (27 January – 4 November 1701). During this eight-month period, Norris faced a series of disasters that worked to unravel the embassy and led to the ambassador departing the court in disgrace. Some of these fell into the category of 'common problems' that most European ambassadors experienced in early modern Asia. While residing at the court, for example, the embassy encountered a severe funds shortage, leaving Norris powerless to negotiate with Aurangzeb's top ministers, who expected large gratuities in return for their services. This shortfall coincided with a gruelling two-and-a-half-month trip through rough terrain and monsoonal weather from Panhala Fort to Vardhangad, after Aurangzeb ordered the relocation of the *lashkar*. Norris and his retinue also experienced various illnesses, which rendered them out of action at pivotal moments, including the ambassador's formal entrance to the Mughal court.

Added to these common problems, however, were the three extraordinary challenges that had plagued Norris from the beginning of his embassy. First, there was conflict with the Old Company. The Old Company merchants continued to undermine the embassy at every opportunity, proceeding so far as to order a violent ambush on the ambassador and his retinue as they made their way to the Mughal court. This first problem was further compounded when Norris later received shocking news from London that the New Company and the Old Company had recently agreed to merge, throwing the entire purpose of the embassy into doubt. Second, there was the hybrid embassy problem. As shown in previous chapters, Norris's anxiety over the dual nature of his role led to him damaging relationships with key political figures. During this stage of the embassy, the same anxiety led to the ambassador bungling crucial engagements with Mughal authorities, including an official meeting with

one of the most important political players in the Mughal empire – the Grand Wazir, Asad Khan. Finally, the ongoing piracy scandal that had consumed Norris at Surat erupted once again at the court, after more of Aurangzeb’s ships were captured off the Malabar Coast. The emperor and his ministers consequently refused to issue the *farman* to the ambassador unless he agreed to provide ongoing security in the form of ship convoys to protect the Mughals against future acts of piracy – an agreement into which Norris simply refused to enter. Over and above the usual “common problems”, a combination (and coalescence) of these three extraordinary problems together undercut the embassy and removed any possibility of success.

This stage of the embassy marked a new nadir for Norris, and it showed in his representations of the Mughal court. The ambassador frequently embraced what have been termed ‘proto-orientalist’ framings to explain and justify his failures to himself and to his audience in England. During this stage of the embassy, however, as his embassy reached a point of no return, Norris’s writings became saturated with negative portrayals of the Mughals as despotic, barbarous, weak and effeminate. This contrasted starkly to his presentation of the English, and his retinue in particular, as strong, principled, civilised, and masculine. The ambassador, indeed, framed his eventual exit from the court without the *farman* as an ‘honourable’ departure, one that would save the English nation from ‘the chains [and] slavery’ of the Mughals, ‘the most cowardly, base, despicable government in the world’.<sup>5</sup> This chapter shows, then, that, like Roe before him, the ways in which Norris utilised proto-orientalist tropes was bound tightly to his own diplomatic failures.

#### ‘Very pleasant country’: The journey south

While this phase of the embassy ended in disaster, it did not start out that way. For the most part, Norris and his retinue’s two-month-long journey from Surat to the Mughal camp at

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<sup>5</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fols. 72, 43.

Panhala proceeded smoothly. The peacefulness of the period was, moreover, reflected in Norris's positive depictions of his surroundings, with the upbeat ambassador finding much to admire about India and its people. As the convoy departed the bustling port city and travelled south through the heartland of India, stopping to camp near various towns and villages along the way, the ambassador marvelled at the richness and natural beauty of this 'very pleasant country'.<sup>6</sup> Passing thick forests and raging waterfalls, rivers of 'very sweet water', thriving mango groves and wheat plantations, mountains and wide, open plains of 'rich and fertill' soil, Norris mused that the people on these lands 'may live very pleasantly and contented and I believe in as sweet aire and pleasant clymate [as...] the world affords'.<sup>7</sup> Convinced that India was a land of unlimited potential (and as he devoured some particularly delicious grapes), the ambassador asserted that 'there is nothinge of grain, fruit, flowers or anythinge belonginge either to a field or garden but what may be produced here in plenty and perfection'.<sup>8</sup> The ambassador was equally impressed by large textile cities such as Aurangabad and Shahgadh, describing the latter as 'a place of the greatest manufacture of all sorts of fine cloathes', and admiring that this town sold its prized silks to prominent merchant Abdul Gharfur, who 'sent [them] for merchandize all over this part of the world'.<sup>9</sup> The trip, on the whole, was a welcome reprieve from the chaos of Surat, and the frustration and inertia of Masulipatnam.

It was not without hiccups, however. Norris's journey to the Mughal court, after all, coincided with the Mughal war against the Marathas, a warrior force whose tactics involved burning down villages, and ambushing roaming convoys in the contested territory of the Deccan.<sup>10</sup> Norris and his entourage were, as a result, exposed to some violent scenes as they

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<sup>6</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume II: December 1700–April 1701, unpublished, Rawlinson Collection, C.913, Bodleian Library, Oxford, fol. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fols. 69, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 81.

<sup>9</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 87.

<sup>10</sup> For a short overview of Aurangzeb's war against the Marathas, see Eric Osborne, 'The Ulcer of the Mughal Empire: Mughals and Marathas, 1680-1707', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 31, no. 5 (2020).

made their way south. On 20 February, the embassy passed through a small village that had been burnt to the ground by an army of Marathas that very morning, the flames and smoke rising from huts still visible. Seven murdered men lay strewn across a road, ‘all stript of their faces on the ground, their heades wounded in severall places and stabbed with a lance on their backs and sides’.<sup>11</sup> A *dastak* lay torn up beside the bodies, a clear statement that Mughal documents held no authority in the eyes of the Marathas.

Such displays of violence – visible signs of external threats to the embassy – prompted a response from Norris that was clearly intended to impress his English audience. Reaching into his arsenal of orientalist tropes, Norris claimed to be unperturbed by such outside threats, portraying the Maratha warriors, with their swords, bows and arrows, as no match for his highly regimented army and their superior European weapons. Shortly after resuming their march following an overnight stay in the small village of Kelda, for example, the embassy was approached by a large militia of ‘sevajis’ on horseback who, according to Norris, ‘looked as if they designed to attacke us’.<sup>12</sup> Jumping out of his palanquin, the ambassador called his retinue to arms and confronted the army, marching towards them ‘drawn up in rank and file’ with blunderbusses and pistols at the ready. As the ambassador observed it, ‘the enemy perceiving our discipline and readynesse to receive marcht away in hast’.<sup>13</sup> Just days later, Norris recorded that a different party of Maratha warriors, equipped with ‘stringe in their bosom of twisted silke and cotton on purpose to strangle those they caught’, and poised to attack a town, fled when they observed Norris’s approaching embassy.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Norris’s portrait of the Marathas (and Indians more generally) as a cowardly and rudimentary people, as opposed to the English as a disciplined and advanced one, was a common thread in the ambassador’s diaries when he felt under attack, the

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<sup>11</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 87.

<sup>12</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol II, fol. 84; The term ‘sevajis’ referred to Marathas. Chhatrapati Shivaji was the famous leader of the Marathas until his death in 1680.

<sup>13</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 84.

<sup>14</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 87.

ambassador frequently bragging that ‘severall times great bodys of the Mogulls enemy were in sight of us but never durst attack us’.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most significant obstacles Norris faced on his journey to the court was an ill-organised attempt by the Old Company to physically halt the embassy. Although he had travelled some distance, the ambassador had not managed to put the Old-New Company conflict behind him. On 8 February, two weeks into the journey, Norris’s guards came running to the ambassador, claiming they had thwarted an attempt by the Old Company factors at Surat to physically stop the embassy from reaching the Mughal court. According to the guards, two unknown men had suspiciously hovered around the embassy camp for two consecutive days. When confronted, the men confessed that they had been contracted by the Old Company as ‘spys’ and were paid to convince Norris’s own Indian servants to ‘blow up my ammunition if they had the oportunity or doe what mischeife they could’.<sup>16</sup> Subsequent intelligence received by Norris seemed to confirm the Old Company’s drastic plan. Just a few days later, Norris’s interpreter Rustamji informed Norris that he had received a report from one of the Old Company’s Indian brokers that 40,000 rupees had been offered to 40 local men ‘who to earn it were to make me away att any rate’.<sup>17</sup> The same evening, one of Norris’s Indian servants lunged at the ambassador with a sword in an apparent attempt to kill him, before Norris’s chaplain, Paget, put a stop to the commotion. As Norris described it, the man

made his way thro all the peons and with his sword employed for execution made his way directly to me and was come very neare before I in the least discerned him but hearinge an outcry and seeinge all my English servants runninge up to me armed I snatched a pistoll out of one of their hands and the first thinge I discerned was this fellow very neare me stopt in his career by Mr Pagett my chaplain.<sup>18</sup>

The would-be assassin managed to escape in the commotion before Norris could discover what ‘tempted the fellow to this villany’, but it appears likely the murder attempt was

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<sup>15</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 95.

<sup>16</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 73.

<sup>17</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 76.

<sup>18</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fols. 76–77.



connected to the Old Company's bribe. Norris consequently replaced a group of servants he suspected was linked to the plan and kept an extra guard for the remainder of the journey to court.

The travelling embassy also received worrying reports on events surrounding the European maritime violence scandal at Surat. On 9 February, New Company president Nicholas Waite wrote to Norris, informing him that, since the ambassador's departure from the city, circumstances surrounding the Old Company merchants there had grown even more volatile. Old Company leaders John Gayer and Stephen Colt had been locked up with their wives and families by the city's governor Dianat Khan in an apparent attempt to protect the Englishmen from a raging mob intent on seeking justice for English crimes in Asian waters. Waite urged the ambassador to be cautious on his journey to the court, explaining that 'great crowds' of local merchants had subsequently gathered around the governor's house 'crying justice against them [the English]'.<sup>19</sup> Soon after, a letter from Hakim Salah, the New Company's local representative at the Mughal court, notified the ambassador that Aurangzeb was so incensed by the latest bout of European piracy that he ordered 'that [the Old Company] should all be clapt up in prison and made to pay all their debt'.<sup>20</sup> A week later, the emperor's order had clearly been followed. Another letter from Waite reached Norris, confirming that Gayer had been seized and imprisoned 'by express order from the Mogull', who had also ordered the Old Company to pay '111 lack of Rupees' to the government, otherwise they were to be 'expelled [from] India'.<sup>21</sup> This situation did not bode well for the English embassy. Just how it would affect Norris's progress, however, was yet to be seen.

While the Norris embassy managed to avoid any debilitating obstacles on its journey to the Mughal court, a storm over the embassy was brewing. Events took another turn for the

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<sup>19</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 76.

<sup>20</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 81.

<sup>21</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 82; One 'lakh' is equivalent to 100,000.

worse when, on 6 March, one month after they had left Surat, Norris and his retinue arrived at Brahmapuri, a riverside town 60km north-east of the emperor's camp at Panhala Fort.

#### A diplomatic stand-off

Brahmapuri housed the temporary camp of Asad Khan, Grand Wazir, or chief minister to the emperor, who had stopped there on route to Aurangzeb's camp at Panhala Fort. Asad Khan's camp had been proposed as the location of a formal diplomatic engagement between the Grand Wazir and Norris, arranged through the New Company's local representative at the Mughal court. As has been shown in previous chapters, the relationship between Norris and Asad Khan was less than amicable. The pair had been in intermittent contact since Norris's landing in Masulipatnam 18 months earlier, after the Grand Wazir arranged for an imperial convoy to escort the ambassador from Masulipatnam to the Mughal court overland. When Norris announced that he would sail from Masulipatnam to Surat instead of waiting any longer for the convoy, Asad Khan wrote to the ambassador, warning him against disobeying the imperial order. As seen in Chapter Four, Norris failed to heed this warning, and so Asad Khan arranged for travel permits to be sent to the ambassador for his safe passage from Surat to the Mughal court instead. Having received advice in Surat that, as a matter of ceremonial protocol, he must pay a formal visit to Asad Khan before meeting the emperor, Norris reluctantly agreed to meet with the Grand Wazir at Brahmapuri. The ambassador was convinced that Asad Khan was 'no great friend of ours', but instead favoured the Old Company.<sup>22</sup> Norris did recognise, however, that Asad Khan's political reach and networks meant that he was an important person to have onside, lamenting that even the 'Mogull [does] not thinke it a fitt act of policy to displace him [Asad Khan] because his sons and creatures

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<sup>22</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 22.

have the cheife command of the severall armys and that it would be difficult and breed ill blood amongst his other cheife ministers'.<sup>23</sup>

The ambassador was right to acknowledge Asad Khan's importance. As discussed in Chapter Four, the Grand Wazir held enormous political clout in India, having held the post of Aurangzeb's main minister for more than 25 years. Asad Khan had, moreover, played a central role in the decision-making around the European maritime violence scandal, and had issued the most recent decrees that shut down the Old Company's trade in Surat and ordered compensation to be paid for the crimes. In addition, Asad Khan held the role of formally introducing foreign envoys to the emperor, the most recent of whom was the Persian ambassador in 1693. As one early scholar put it, 'without his [Asad Khan's] acquiescence, no final decision could be made on any matter [and] no order could be issued'.<sup>24</sup> It is in some ways surprising, then, that Norris's approach to the Grand Wazir and their meeting was so confrontational.

In other ways, however, Norris's hostile approach to the Grand Wazir was predictable. As we have seen in previous chapters, while Norris wrote about India as he saw it, he was also writing self-consciously for his superiors, endeavouring to show them that he was carrying out his role in India successfully. When things did not go his way, he tended to justify and explain his situation by using standard orientalist language – by depicting the Mughals as barbaric, corrupt, and effeminate, and in contrast portraying himself and his retinue as civilised, moral and strong. Norris had long perceived Asad Khan as the enemy and an impediment to his embassy. So, just as he had with other important political figures who had thrown obstacles in his way, Norris pigeonholed the Wazir into the stereotype of a drunk, effeminate man driven by money and lust. Sighting Asad Khan's camp at the bottom of a steep hill as the embassy rode into the Brahampuri, the ambassador was scathing in his

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<sup>23</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol II, fol. 101.

<sup>24</sup> Laiq Ahmad, *The prime ministers of Aurangzeb* (Allahabad : Chugh Publications, 1976), 143.

assessment of the Grand Wazir and his entourage, painting them as a fragmented, disorderly mob led by men driven only by their fleshly desires. In Norris's words,

There was nothinge but confusion in their enchampment, no order or regularity but everybody raisinge a little mud hutt as he thought convinient for himselfe and his family, and what they call a camp of 100 000 may perhaps contain 10 000 of what they call fightinge men, the rest made up of women, children, shrofts, Banians, Tradesmen that follow the camp and seeme to me to be a very easy prey to any that would attack them, all in confusion and buryd in Lust and Luxury and Idlenesse. They have neither Courage nor know anythinge of the art of war.<sup>25</sup>

Again, in Norris's mind, this stood in stark contrast to the discipline, orderliness and strength of his own English retinue. The ambassador's scornful evaluation did not end there, however.

As Norris and his retinue set up their own camp just outside the town, Asad Khan's chief eunuch visited to welcome the ambassador and provide some advice on his upcoming meeting with the Wazir. Speaking privately with Norris's interpreter, the eunuch advised that the ambassador should present Asad Khan with the most valuable gift he had in his possession, and that, in addition, the Wazir's chief secretary would be 'very well pleased [...] if he had 2 cases of spiritts'.<sup>26</sup> This incensed the ambassador, who thought it incredulous that the eunuch should 'come and beg for somethinge to be given to the Greatest and Richest man in the Empire'.<sup>27</sup> It was this kind of avaricious behaviour, Norris asserted, that made the Grand Wazir 'generally hated'.<sup>28</sup> Continuing on this scornful thread, Norris complained that 'it is impossible to believe how dissolute and luxurious the lives of these great men are', that the Grand Wazir, despite his old age, whiled away his days with his many wives and that he and his fellow Mughal officers were 'fond of nothinge more then Hott spiritts with which they make themselves drunke every day'.<sup>29</sup>

On 10 March, Norris proceeded to send a list of terms and conditions to Asad Khan, which the ambassador insisted the Grand Wazir would have to fulfil for the meeting to take

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<sup>25</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 100.

<sup>28</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 100.

<sup>29</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 101.

place. The list of demands, written in Persian and in English, included, first and foremost, that the ambassador be permitted to attend the Wazir in all his state, with drummers and trumpeters playing their instruments on the approach to the meeting place, ‘according to the Custome of his own Country’.<sup>30</sup> Norris also requested that both he and the Wazir enter the meeting place at the same time through different entrances, and that they embrace, standing, before sitting beside each other ‘in equal state’.<sup>31</sup> At the conclusion of the meeting, Norris insisted, the two dignitaries should rise and exit the meeting place simultaneously to show their equal status, and that ‘if att any time any greater Honour & Respect has been paide to the Ambassador of any Kinge whatsoever more than is above expressed, His Excellency insists on the same’.<sup>32</sup> Unless these demands were met and the ambassador was assured he would ‘be received with all the distinguishinge marks of Honor and Respect due to his quality’, Norris insisted he could not go through with the meeting.<sup>33</sup>

Norris’s demands, however, were swiftly rejected. The Wazir’s chief secretary responded to the ambassador by penning a list of his master’s own terms for the meeting. In this document, written in Persian and translated into English by the ambassador’s scribe, the Wazir prohibited any beating of the instruments, advising that such action during formal diplomatic engagements was expressly banned by the emperor. The ambassador was also notified that, rather than the two dignitaries entering the meeting place simultaneously, the Wazir would receive Norris in his tent and that, at the close of the meeting, the ambassador would be required to exit the tent first. Most importantly, however, the document flatly denied Norris’s request to be treated as a dignitary of equal standing to the Wazir, rather stating that the ambassador was ‘a servant of the Nabob [Asad Khan]’ who desired to ‘be received accordinge to his quality’.<sup>34</sup> The Wazir’s response riled the ambassador, who

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<sup>30</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 102.

<sup>31</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol.103.

<sup>32</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 103.

<sup>33</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol.102.

<sup>34</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 103.

returned the document with a curt message that he, as a royal representative, was ‘neither servant or subject to any man living but to the King of England my Lord and master’, and that he could not compromise on any of his terms ‘without derogation to my Honour and lesseninge my character’.<sup>35</sup>

There ensued an extraordinary battle between Norris and Asad Khan over the terms of the meeting, which lasted almost three weeks. The main point of contention between the dignitaries was Norris’s request to play drums on the embassy’s approach to the Wazir. In a series of memoranda delivered to the Wazir’s secretary by Norris’s interpreter, the ambassador repeatedly insisted that he be permitted to beat the drums upon entrance to the meeting with the Wazir, as the instruments were ‘brought from England as an ensign of honour due to me which [I] cannot recede from’.<sup>36</sup> Norris argued that Roe, the first English ambassador, had been permitted to beat drums at the court of Jahanghir, and he should therefore be afforded the same privilege. In response, the Wazir’s secretary again and again denied the ambassador’s requests, arguing that a Dutch ambassador who had recently visited him was refused the right to beat drums, and that Norris should expect the same treatment. Norris retorted that the Dutch example should set no precedent for him, because, unlike the Dutch commissary who was sent from the governor of Batavia, he came ‘from a Crowned Heade’ and so must insist on ‘a reception more honourable and distinguishinge than he’.<sup>37</sup> The Wazir, however, doubled down, maintaining that not even Aurangzeb’s own sons could beat drums without the emperor’s permission, and so it was incomprehensible that a foreign dignitary such as Norris should receive such an honour.

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<sup>35</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 104.

<sup>36</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 104

<sup>37</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 109.

On 18 March, after yet another rebuff by Norris, the Wazir's secretary issued a stern and final warning to the ambassador to back down over his terms for the meeting or move on, out of Brahmapuri. In the ambassador's words, the secretary cautioned that

Whoever advised me to insist on these termes was not my freind, that if I should goe away without seeinge the wazir the Mogull would take it ill: That the wazir was a very mild, curteous man [... But] that as to the Drum – [he] could not on any termes admitt the beatinge of it and that if I was resolved to goe without seeinge of him there would goe a convoy in 4 or 5 days [headed for the Mughal court] which I might take the oportunity of.<sup>38</sup>

Understanding that this was make or break for his meeting with Asad Khan, Norris finally backed down over the issue of the drums and sent a list of the presents he intended for the Wazir, which were 'of greater value than offered to any but the Emperor himselfe', as a show of good faith.<sup>39</sup> It appears, however, that the damage to his relationship with Asad Khan was already done. After delivering the list of presents, Norris's interpreter returned, relaying that those at the Wazir's camp had scoffed at the ambassador's list, questioning 'why must the Nabob show [Norris] soe much Honour for soe small a present'.<sup>40</sup> The following day, Asad Khan sent Norris a revised list of terms for the meeting, in which he instructed that, when Norris arrived at his camp, the ambassador should wait for him in a common reception area and that the Wazir would be free to leave the venue if and when he pleased.<sup>41</sup>

This added condition acted as the final straw for Norris, who lamented that 'nothinge could be devised more slighinge and lesseninge my character than this, which if I had admitted I had deservedly been despised'.<sup>42</sup> The ambassador consequently returned a message to Asad Khan announcing his immediate departure from Brahmapuri, informing the Wazir that he was

sorry I must leave this place without payinge a visitt to Him but that my character as the King of Englands Ambassador will not permitt me to waite a moment for any

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<sup>38</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fols.113–114.

<sup>39</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 116.

<sup>40</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fols. 115–116.

<sup>41</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 116.

<sup>42</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 117.

subject whatsoever that therefore I sent to acquaint Him I shall make all possible dispatch to the Mogulls court.<sup>43</sup>

As Norris and his retinue prepared for their exit from the town, packing their carts and procuring supplies for the final leg of the journey to the Mughal court, the ambassador received another letter from Asad Khan's camp. This time, the message came from the Wazir's son, and head of the Mughal Army, Zulfiqar Khan, who had stopped by Brahampuri on his way to assist Aurangzeb in seizing Panhala Fort from the Marathas. Zulfiqar Khan questioned why Norris refused to visit his father, and asked to know 'which way either his father or he had disoblged me'.<sup>44</sup> He reminded Norris that he and Asad Khan had been instrumental in securing *dastaks* for the ambassador's safe passage to court, first, from Masulipatnam, and then from Surat, clearly inferring that Norris's actions had caused considerable offence. Norris replied, assigning responsibility for the entire affair to the Wazir's secretary. The 'reason I had not seen his father', the ambassador explained to Zulfiqar Khan, 'was because I never could have any assurance from his secretary that I should be received suitable to my character'.<sup>45</sup>

The next day, Norris and his entourage departed Brahampuri. The ambassador planned to leave the town via the edge of Asad Khan's camp, marching 'in the greatest order imaginable' in a last-ditch effort to assert his power in front of the Wazir. In a comical blunder, however, the embassy made a wrong turn, missing Asad Khan's camp entirely and ending up stuck before a deep section of river. This, Norris lamented, 'caused all the disorder imaginable'.<sup>46</sup> The ambassador's servants spent hours hauling the carts over the river 'in a very confused manner' before the embassy could finally exit the area once and for all. It was a far cry from the clean and striking departure Norris had envisaged, and the ambassador felt

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<sup>43</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 117.

<sup>44</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 132.

<sup>45</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 130.

<sup>46</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 133.



‘ashamed and concerned att the ill management’ of his retinue, blaming the incident on his interpreter, Rustamji, who led the navigation. What the ambassador did not consider, however, was that this was likely Rustamji’s deliberate attempt to avoid causing any further offense to the Wazir by marching indignantly past his camp, and doubtless, in the end, paid Norris a considerable favour.

Norris’s refusal to meet with the Grand Wazir is a prime example of how the hybrid-embassy problem continued to damage the embassy. Norris believed that, as a royal ambassador, his primary duty was to uphold the dignity and status of the Crown. He could not, therefore, agree to terms which would in any way undermine his royal status or, as he often put it, ‘lessen my character’. If Norris had been a regular trade envoy there is little doubt but that he would have agreed to Asad Khan’s terms. Indeed, it is unlikely a trade delegate would have attempted to set any terms for such a meeting in the first place, but would have jumped at the opportunity to be introduced to the empire’s second most powerful figure. The New Company’s interests in this case, however, were once again put on the backburner.

### Insider intelligence

After another eight days of marching, which Norris described as ‘tedious’ and over a ‘desolate and seemingly barren’ landscape, the ambassador and his retinue set up camp three kilometres from the entrance to Aurangzeb’s lashkar near Panhala Fort. The emperor had recently established his roaming court here while his army attempted to seize the fort from the Marathas. The strategic and symbolic importance to Aurangzeb of this capture could not be underestimated; the site had acted as one of the Marathas’ main strongholds from 1673 until 1689, when the Mughal Army captured it for a brief period before the Marathas took it over again in 1692.<sup>47</sup> The fort had also housed the famous Maratha leader, Shivaji. As

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<sup>47</sup> John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 222–224.

Norris's crew pitched their tents and drew up their weaponry so that they 'might be seen and account carryd of them [to the lashkar] beforehand and everybody admire them that see them', the ambassador overheard intense gunfire coming from the fort. Toasting to the 'Mogulls health' and settling in for the night, Norris made the entirely unsubstantiated claim that his arrival near the lashkar was the reason for the celebratory gunfire.<sup>48</sup>

For a week, Norris remained at his camp outside the lashkar making final preparations for his formal entrance. Here, he gleaned valuable insights into the Mughal government, some of which came from an unexpected source. On 5 April, an English soldier who had lived in India for 32 years and was then employed in the Mughal Army turned up, unannounced, at the ambassador's camp. Seeming 'very free and open', he gave his fellow countrymen their first inside glimpse into the state of the Mughal Army and its war against the Marathas.<sup>49</sup> The 'whole army', according to the soldier, was 'vastly in arreare', as emperor was 'very poore' and could not afford to pay their wages.<sup>50</sup> As a result, the army 'grumbles and begins to be mutinous', speaking openly against Aurangzeb and his government.<sup>51</sup> Though 'very indifferent and not able to performe any greate service' the army continued its battle against the Marathas at Panhala Fort.<sup>52</sup> The recapture of the fort, according the soldier, was Aurangzeb's top priority, the emperor having seized it from the enemy a decade ago, 'but no sooner had mended the breachers, refortifyd it and sent in good stor of provisions and ammunition, but the Rajahs [Marathas] sealed the walls and tooke it in one night and kept it ever scince'.<sup>53</sup>

The soldier offered further comment on the emperor and the state of the government more broadly. Aurangzeb's sons, he told the English, made continuous attempts to usurp their

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<sup>48</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 141.

<sup>49</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 145.

<sup>50</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 145.

<sup>51</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 145.

<sup>52</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 145.

<sup>53</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 146.

father's leadership, which made the emperor 'very cunninge' and place 'spys upon everybody'.<sup>54</sup> Aurangzeb's secret intelligence was so good, the soldier insisted, that 'nobody can move a step or speake a worde but he knows it'.<sup>55</sup> Though pretending to be a just and pious leader in public, the soldier continued, Aurangzeb was ruthless behind the scenes, murdering anyone who he believed threatened his leadership by presenting them with honorary robes secretly laced with poison.<sup>56</sup> Aurangzeb and his sons, moreover, were not the only conniving and callous figures in the Mughal government, according to the soldier. In fact, he asserted, 'from the top to the bottom there is nothinge but cheatinge, treachery and basenesse in the highest degree'.<sup>57</sup> This scathing assessment of the Mughal government from the clearly disgruntled Mughal soldier played into Norris's own view, or, more specifically, the view he portrayed in his diaries, of the Mughal government as despotic, corrupt, cash-hungry and morally bankrupt.

During the week Norris and his retinue spent camped near the Mughal lashkar, the ambassador also met with Hakim Salah, the New Company's *wakil* (mediator or spokesman) at the Mughal court. Hakim Salah had been in regular correspondence with Norris since the embassy's arrival in Masulipatnam more than eighteen months earlier. He was a vital source of intelligence for the ambassador, keeping him informed about the actions of the Old Company at the Mughal court, the various political interests of Aurangzeb's chief ministers, and the political and cultural practices involved in court engagements. While the ambassador was in Brahmपुरi, for example, Hakim Salah sent Norris a lengthy document with the equally drawn-out title, 'An account of the quality charge, power, interests and inclinations of

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<sup>54</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 146.

<sup>55</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 146.

<sup>56</sup> Legends about poisoned robes were rife in the seventeenth century and, interestingly, came to be adopted into the later colonial mentality which saw Mughals as despotic Orientals. For more on the legends of poisoned robes see Michelle Maskiell and Adrienne Mayor, 'Killer Khilats, Part 2: Imperial Collecting of Poison Dress Legends in India', *Folklore* 112, no. 2 (2001); Stewart Goron (ed), *Robes of Honour: Khil'at in Pre-colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 146.

the Omratis and greate men neare the Kinge, and the manner of proceedinge att Court'.<sup>58</sup> The document outlined the roles of Aurangzeb's chief ministers and their relationships with the emperor, and suggested which of them it would be in the embassy's best interests for Norris to form allegiances with, and who to be wary of.<sup>59</sup>

On 5 April, Hakim Salah and Norris met in person for the first time, conversing at length, as Norris put it, 'about the posture of our affaires'. Hakim Salah also conveyed some vital information involving the Surat governor, Dianat Khan.<sup>60</sup> As shown in Chapter Five, the Old Company had paid the Surat governor a large gratuity to continue trading freely in the city (after Aurangzeb had ordered an embargo on their trade) and to induce the governor to speak out against the Norris embassy at court. According to Hakim Salah, Dianat Khan had upheld his end of the bargain, informing the emperor in a letter of the 'greate power, riches [and] trade of the Old Company' and that the 'New Company were poore, had little trade and could not be depended on or beleivd'.<sup>61</sup> More importantly, however, Hakim Salah's intelligence revealed that Dianat Khan had recently written to the court requesting that the emperor not grant Norris any *farman* for the New Company's Surat factory before he had the chance to advise the emperor, and then only if Norris provided 'security for all the Mogulls subjects ships from piracy'.<sup>62</sup> The court was to take the governor's advice seriously – according to Hakim Salah, Mughal protocol stipulated that Dianat Khan should advise the Mughal court on any *farman* relating to Surat. In these ways, Hakim Salah asserted, Dianat Khan was 'an Enemy to His Excellencys Negotiation, and the New Company, and will embroyle affaires as much as possible'.<sup>63</sup> While Norris did not know it yet, the issue of

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<sup>58</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fols. 124–126.

<sup>59</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fols. 124–126.

<sup>60</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 144.

<sup>61</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 83.

<sup>62</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 72.

<sup>63</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 122.

providing security against European piracy in Mughal waters would indeed become the largest roadblock to the embassy's success.

By this point, things were beginning to crumble around the ambassador. It is no surprise then, that he latched on to the only piece of good news that Hakim Salah delivered. The *wakil* informed Norris that Yar Ali Beg – who he referred to as a *dārogha* at the court (indicating he played law enforcement or supervising role rather than a noble) – had been appointed by Aurangzeb to assist in handling Norris's affairs at the court. Hakim assured Norris that Yar Ali was 'a man of greate piety and vertue', who 'never takes money or presents' and would be ready to assist the ambassador with 'anythinge he askes'.<sup>64</sup> The *wakil*'s advice shortly appeared to have been made good – the same day, Norris received a letter from Yar Ali Beg, informing the ambassador that he had arranged for a *dastak* to be issued by the Mughal court that allowed for the ambassador to enter and reside inside the *lashkar*.<sup>65</sup> On Hakim Salah's advice, Norris sent his brother and a few other 'well attended' English to visit Yar Ali Beg to thank the minister for securing the *dastak* and to extend the ambassador's friendship. The English returned to Norris with a glowing review of Yar Ali Beg, emphasising that he had received them 'with greate civility and respect' and promises of his service at the court.<sup>66</sup> Bolstered by the prospect of events finally turning a corner for the embassy, Norris recorded a gushing statement about the *dārogha*, which entirely overemphasised the minister's importance at the Mughal court. 'I esteeme it very fortunate', the ambassador stressed,

to be recommended to this greate and virtuous minister Yarelebegue who deservedly is great favourite of the Emperour and may be a pattern to all ministers of state in all Kingdoms havinge none like him in this part of the world and not many in any part of it: In the midst of the most base visious and corrupt court in the universe this minister alone is virtuous.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 125.

<sup>65</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 125.

<sup>66</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 148.

<sup>67</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 149.

This once again showed how Norris's depictions of Mughal figures could be closely tied to his own successes and failures. Norris perceived Yar Ali Beg as someone who would help him negotiate the Mughal court, when everyone else, so far, had let him down. Yar Ali Beg also apparently made a habit of not accepting large gratuities for his services, something that would have come as a great relief to Norris, who, as we have seen, had been forced to hand over large sums of money time and again in order to make any kind of progress. The ambassador's enthusiasm, however, was short-lived.

### Clamour at the court

On 10 April 1701, more than eighteen months after he first arrived in India, and equipped with the dastak facilitated by Yar Ali Beg, Norris and his entourage finally made their entrance into the emperor's lashkar. Despite suffering a violent illness complete with 'vomitinge and purginge', the ambassador was carried through the camp aboard a palanquin in a stately parade.<sup>68</sup> 'Crowds of quizing people' watched on as the embassy snaked through the bustling lanes of the camp, Norris's servants waving the royal flags, his soldiers riding on horseback, twelve brass cannons proudly exhibited on carts, and 100 peons marching, two by two.<sup>69</sup> Though Norris was too ill to even peer out of his palanquin, his brother Edward noted his own distaste at the smells, sights and sounds of the camp, 'nothinge to be seen but confusion and disorder in their enchampment and the nastinesse and stench of the place very offensive'.<sup>70</sup> Upon reaching his quarters inside the lashkar, Norris was once again disappointed that none of Aurangzeb's chief ministers sent to compliment him on his arrival, save for Yar Ali Beg, who sent him some fruits and sweetmeats as a welcome. It was not the enthusiastic reception the ambassador had envisaged, and circumstances were very soon to grow even more unsatisfactory for him.

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<sup>68</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fols. 151–152.

<sup>69</sup> Edward Norris to the New Company's Surat Factory, 'Honourable Gentlemen, From His Excellencys Quarters in the Emperors Laskar near Pamella', 11 April 1700, in Add MS 31302, British Library, London.

<sup>70</sup> Edward Norris, 11 April 1700.

The following day, Norris received a parcel of documents, the contents of which would throw the entire purpose of the embassy into doubt. The package, which had travelled from the Court of Directors in London ‘by way of Aleppo over land’, contained a copy of an Act of parliament that continued the Old Company as a corporation.<sup>71</sup> The ambassador had previously heard rumours about the Act – while in Surat, Nicholas Waite had privately informed him that the freshly arrived New Company ship, the *Tavistock*, brought news that a bill to extend the Old Company’s trading charter was then before the parliament.<sup>72</sup> Under no illusions as to how this could affect the embassy – the main purpose of which was to shut down the Old Company and replace it with the New Company – Waite and Norris then agreed that the ambassador should deny any knowledge of this information. Instead, the ambassador was to proceed with the embassy as originally instructed by the king and the New Company, which included informing the Mughal court that the Old Company would be discontinued that year, and the New Company would be established in its place.<sup>73</sup> With the printed copy of the Act now physically laid before him, however, there could be no further denial. Norris would have to change tactics – just what he would inform the court when he eventually secured an audience with the emperor, however, was yet to be decided.

Norris’s hopes of making a positive first impression at the emperor’s *lashkar* were dashed further just days after his arrival there, when the ambassador’s English guards shot and killed several Indian men. On the morning of 19 April, as Norris prepared for the Easter Sunday service inside his tent, he and his brother were startled by the sound of musket fire and shouts of ‘stop him, shoot him’.<sup>74</sup> Running, unarmed, out of his tent, Norris witnessed a ‘strong, lusty moore man with his sword drawn and his sheild on his arm, runinge a muck as

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<sup>71</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 152. This Act Norris referred to was passed in April 1700. It stated that the Old Company could continue to trade alongside the New Company indefinitely.

<sup>72</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 161.

they call it, hackinge and hewinge all that came neare him'.<sup>75</sup> The guards shot the assailant in the leg and dragged him into one of the embassy's tents, where he later died. As the ambassador discovered, the actions of the attacker were part of a wider mutiny attempted by a group of peons working for the embassy, who were disgruntled after a disagreement over their earnings. The guards explained to Norris that, during the commotion, one of them had three fingers sliced off as he wrestled a sword from a peon's grasp, and that several other peons were killed by musket fire as they charged, swords at the ready, towards the ambassador's tent. It was only after they killed the ringleader of the mutiny, the guards attested further, that the rest of the peons fled the camp, putting an end to the insurgency. Taking full advantage of the situation, the Old Company's *wakil* at the Mughal court (according to Hakim Salah) assisted the surviving peons in reporting the incident to the Mughal government. The image of Norris and his retinue portrayed to the *lashkar's kotwal* (chief law-enforcement officer) was, unsurprisingly, highly unflattering. As Norris explained, the peons

all went open mouthed to the cutwall (where the procurator for the old company was ready to put into their mouths what to say to aggravate and add as well) and told him the English had killed 8 true beleivers and not contented with that, dragged them into a Tent, beate the Drum and dranke wine in a Triumph over them, shaved off one side of their Beards and pissed in their mouths.<sup>76</sup>

After hearing this shocking report, the *kotwal* immediately imprisoned Norris's interpreter as a surety, and ordered a full inquiry. The ambassador, more concerned by this turn of affairs 'than any thinge that has happened yett', reported his side of the story to Yar Ali Beg, pleading with the minister to convey it to the emperor.<sup>77</sup> Yar Ali obliged the ambassador, and Aurangzeb, in turn, referred the incident to the *qazi*, the chief judicial authority at the Mughal court.<sup>78</sup> The peons' case was eventually dismissed by the *qazi* and Rustumji released, but

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<sup>75</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 161.

<sup>76</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 165.

<sup>77</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. II, fol. 165..

<sup>78</sup> The *qazi* was a 'judge charged with upholding the holy law of Islam and carrying out numerous civil functions'. See John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 301.



only after the ambassador gifted the *qazi* with ‘a horse he was very fond of’ together with ‘embroiderd accoutrements’.<sup>79</sup> It was certainly a testing start to the ambassador’s time at the Mughal court.

The challenges faced by Norris during the beginning of his time at the lashkar were further exacerbated by deteriorating relations with one Mughal noble, Ruhullah Khan. Before Norris arrived at the lashkar, Aurangzeb assigned Ruhullah Khan, one of his chief nobles, to handle the ambassador’s affairs at the court. This was standard Mughal protocol – as *Bakshshi-ul Mulk*, Ruhullah Khan’s role included mediation between various dignitaries and the Mughal emperor.<sup>80</sup> Relations between Ruhullah Khan and Norris, however, broke down almost immediately. Days before he entered the lashkar, Norris sent his treasurer, Adiel Mills, to negotiate with Ruhullah Khan about the terms of the ambassador’s entrance, and particularly, to request that Norris’s retinue be permitted to sound trumpets and beat drums. Unsurprisingly given the ambassador’s recent encounter with the Grand Wazir, Ruhullah Khan flatly refused the request, curtly responding that ‘should [Norris] sound or beate without order it would give great offence’.<sup>81</sup> Relations continued on this downhill spiral once Norris entered the lashkar, when Ruhullah Khan invited Norris to pay him a personal visit before the ambassador’s first audience with the emperor. Believing it inappropriate to visit Ruhullah Khan before the emperor, and receiving advice from Yar Ali that such a visit ‘alone would be sufficient highly to disgust him [Aurangzeb]’, Norris rejected the invitation.<sup>82</sup> To make matters worse for relations between the pair, Norris’s treasurer bungled a second visit to Ruhullah Khan when he neglected to present the noble with the expected gift of gold mohurs.

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<sup>79</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 165.

<sup>80</sup> Arshia Shafqat, ‘Public Face of the Mughal Empire: The Proceedings of Diwan-I Khas O Aam’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 73 (2012): 246.

<sup>81</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 151.

<sup>82</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 155.

Norris was convinced that Ruhullah Khan was out to get him – that he was working for the Old Company and therefore purposefully delaying his meeting with the emperor. The ambassador, ‘findinge nothinge but delays and Tricks from Ruilo Chawn’, consequently went over Ruhullah Khan’s head to Yar Ali Beg, asking him to request an audience for Norris on the ambassador’s behalf.<sup>83</sup> While this appeared to be effective in the short term – Norris was granted a viewing with the emperor on 28 April – the move was detrimental to relations between Norris and Ruhullah Khan, which would only further deteriorate over Norris’s time at the lashkar.

### Negotiations begin

On 28 April, Norris attended his first audience with Aurangzeb. While the volume of the ambassador’s diary pertaining to the visit, as well as the next five months of his stay at the emperor’s lashkar, is non-extant, other records document the event and enable us to fill in the gap. The visit was an entirely ceremonial one – the ambassador was previously instructed that making any formal requests for a *farman* at the initial meeting with Aurangzeb would violate court etiquette. Having made a timely recovery from his illness, Norris entered the meeting in full state. The ambassador, carried in ‘a rich palanquin with Indian embroidered furniture’, followed behind his retinue in an eye-catching parade, including ‘musicians in rich liveries on horseback’, ‘four English soldiers [...] guarding the presents’ intended for Aurangzeb, and the ‘King’s and the Ambassador’s Arms richly gilt and very large; the former being borne by sixteen men’.<sup>84</sup> As one admiring bystander, the Italian Niccolao Manucci, observed it, ‘never had an ambassador from Europe appeared with such pomp and magnificence’.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 171.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Order of the procession at Sir William Norris’ audience of the Mogul’, quoted in John Bruce, *Annals of the Honorable East-India Company: From Their Establishment by the Charter of Queen Elizabeth, 1600, to the Union of the London and English East-India Companies, 1707–8*, Volume 3 (London: Black, Parry, and Kingsbury, 1810), 462–464.

<sup>85</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Di Mogor (1653–1708)*, volume III, translated with introduction and notes by William Irvine (London: 1907), 299.

Norris's first viewing with Aurangzeb followed standard Mughal protocol. The ambassador, accompanied by Edward Norris, Harlowin, Mills and Rustumji, was ushered into the diwan-i-khas, a private hall where the emperor received guests of state, by *dārogha* Yar Ali Beg. Here, the emperor sat on his throne, surrounded by his chief ministers and son, Prince Kam Baksh. Yar Ali formally introduced the ambassador to Aurangzeb, as the ambassador and his gentlemen made four deep bows to the emperor. Norris then presented King William III's letter to Aurangzeb, along with a list of gifts intended for the emperor, and a 'hand present' of a finely decorated box filled with 201 gold mohurs. In response, the emperor bestowed a *sarapa*, or honorary robe, on the ambassador, which he put on in a private chamber. Once dressed in the robe, Norris saluted Aurangzeb and marched back to his quarters in the lashkar, thrilled that he had been received by the emperor with 'all imaginable markes of honour and respect'.<sup>86</sup> Later that night, the gifts on the list presented at the diwan-i-khas were delivered to the emperor for inspection. Edward Norris was confident that the gifts would be well received, asserting they 'will be far better esteemed than was imagined' and that 'never was such a collection of Europe rarities ever before presented to the emperour of India'.<sup>87</sup>

But while Norris's first viewing with Aurangzeb went smoothly, it also contributed to the next major obstacle Norris and his embassy faced at the Mughal Court – a severe shortage of funds. The ambassador had long understood that little could be achieved at the Mughal court without large sums of money. 'Nothinge was to be done with these people [Mughal authorities]', he repeatedly asserted, 'without money', and that 'from the highest to the lowest all were mercenary'.<sup>88</sup> The emperor, according to Norris, was the worst of them all, valuing

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<sup>86</sup> Edward Norris, 'To the Honourable John Pitt Esq His Majestys Consull Generall and President & Councill at Metchlapatam From His Excellencys Quarters in the Mogulls Laskarr near Parnella', 30 April 1701, in Add MS 31302, British Library, London, fol. 67.

<sup>87</sup> Edward Norris, 'To the Honourable John Pitt', fol. 67.

<sup>88</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume III: September 1701–March 1702, unpublished, National Archives, Kew, CO 77/50, fol. 5.

‘nothinge soe much as a good sum of money paid into his treasury’.<sup>89</sup> On several occasions during his journey to the lashkar, therefore, Norris had written to the New Company council at Surat to request bills of credit for the embassy’s use at the lashkar. By the time he had his first viewing with Aurangzeb, however, the New Company had yet to send the bills, leaving the embassy high and dry, or as Norris put it, ‘drein[ed] of all our cash that wee shall have hardly subsistence for a weeke’.<sup>90</sup>

In these dire straits, Norris pushed on as best he could, attempting on multiple occasions to engage Ruhullah Khan in negotiations over the *farman*, whose role, in turn, was to review and present the ambassador’s application to Aurangzeb for approval. But it appeared Ruhullah Khan was unwilling to exert himself for the English ambassador without the expected gratuities, and perhaps also as a consequence of Norris’s earlier diplomatic gaffes. By mid-May, little progress had been made, with Ruhullah Khan repeatedly brushing off Norris’s requests to submit his application to Aurangzeb. Norris was deeply troubled by the situation, frequently writing to the New Company councils at Surat and Masulipatnam that ‘I very much fear the nations honour as well as the Companys interest will suffer for want of [money], perhaps beyond redress’.<sup>91</sup> The ambassador’s brother Edward agreed, insisting in a letter to the Surat council that the embassy could not make headway at the court without more money, and that ‘the interest of the Company will greatly suffer’ if the New Company did not send bills for the embassy’s use immediately.<sup>92</sup>

Bills of credit finally came through from the New Company in late May, providing a lifeline to the embassy in the nick of time. On 25 May, the Mughal Army won its battle at Panhala Fort, seizing back the castle from the Marathas’ grip. Norris was obliged to pay a

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<sup>89</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 6.

<sup>90</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 175.

<sup>91</sup> William Norris, ‘Honorable Gentlemen, From my Quarters in the Emperors Laskar at Parnella’, May 26 1701, Add MS 31302, British Library, London, fol. 69.

<sup>92</sup> Edward Norris, ‘To the Honourable John Pitt His Majestys Publick Minister Consull Gentlemen President and Councill at Metchlapatam’, Add MS 31302, British Library, London, fol. 71.

second visit to Aurangzeb to congratulate the emperor on his victory, placing another heavy financial strain on the embassy. On 29 May, 'in the same state as to his first audience', the ambassador and his retinue re-entered the diwan-i-khas, presenting the emperor with another set of expensive gifts, including 300 gold mohurs.<sup>93</sup> Like the first, this meeting with Aurangzeb was entirely ceremonial, and the ambassador made no mention of the desired *farman* for the New Company. Aurangzeb presented Norris with a horse and another *sarapa* and ordered the ambassador to fire his cannon in a salute to his victory. Clearly in a celebratory mood, the emperor even granted Norris permission to 'beat drum at his pleasure', an action Norris and his retinue happily received as 'a punctillio of honour'.<sup>94</sup> But while this seemed good for relations between the ambassador and the emperor, it placed a heavy strain on the embassy's purse strings. The financial situation, however, was about to become a whole lot worse.

### Moving camp

Just days after the Mughal Army's victory at Panhala Fort, Aurangzeb ordered his lashkar to be packed up and moved north, towards another Mughal-Maratha battle near Vardhangad. Without having obtained the *farman* for the New Company, Norris and his retinue had no choice but to follow the travelling court. On 2 June, Aurangzeb departed the camp, passing Norris's quarters on his way out. 'Mounted on horseback', the ambassador rode towards the emperor to 'wish him a good journey'.<sup>95</sup> Upon perceiving Norris's approach, Aurangzeb stopped his carriage and accepted a gift from the ambassador of a gold medal and two pistols, afterwards putting 'his hand to his head' in thanks.<sup>96</sup> It was an encouraging sign that relations

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<sup>93</sup> Edward Norris, 'To the Honourable John Pitt Esquire His Majestys Consull Generall to President & Councill for the English Company trading to the East Indies at methlapatam From his Excellencys Quarters in the Emperors Laskarr on the banks of the River Kisnah', 9 June 1701, Add MS 31302, British Library, London, fol. 70.

<sup>94</sup> Edward Norris, 9 June 1701.

<sup>95</sup> William Norris, 'From my Quarters in the Emperors Laskar on the banks of the River Kisnah ten corse above Merch', 9 June 1701, Add MS 31302, British Library, London, fol 72.

<sup>96</sup> William Norris, 9 June 1701.

between the emperor and the English ambassador were friendly, and Norris remained optimistic that his 'business would go on successfully, the Emperour being highly pleased and satisfied' with him after his second audience.<sup>97</sup> Before he could pursue any further negotiations with the emperor, however, Norris and his the embassy had to survive the relocation to Vardhangad.

Immediately after Aurangzeb departed Panhala, Norris ordered the embassy's carts to be loaded for the move, and any unnecessary items immediately sold or discarded. Costs for transporting the goods to Vardhangad were so high that the ambassador and his retinue could 'take with them nothing but what was absolutely necessary'.<sup>98</sup> Cash-strapped once again after the enormous expense of his second viewing at the court, Norris complained that the 'manner of carriage is here very extravagantly dear and scarce be got with very great difficulty'.<sup>99</sup> As a result, he was forced to borrow '10,000 rupees at a high interest to be repaid in two months time' in order to pay for the move.<sup>100</sup> On 4 June, Norris and his retinue left the camp, following Aurangzeb to Vardhangad. From the banks of the Kisnah river, the ambassador sent another urgent reminder to the New Company at Surat to send a bill for 40,000 rupees at their earliest convenience. Otherwise, the ambassador urged 'I shall have neither money to go on with my business nor subsist', warning them 'you very well know nothing of that nature can be done without money, especially at the court'.<sup>101</sup>

There followed a gruelling two-and-a-half-month-long march to Vardhangad through rough terrain and monsoonal weather. Negotiations over the *farman* for the New Company were put on hold entirely during this period, as Norris and his entourage battled to keep up with Aurangzeb's mobile camp while simultaneously fighting the elements. 'Great part of our

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<sup>97</sup> William Norris, 9 June 1701.

<sup>98</sup> William Norris, 9 June 1701.

<sup>99</sup> William Norris, 9 June 1701.

<sup>100</sup> William Norris, 9 June 1701.

<sup>101</sup> William Norris, 'From my Quarters in the Emperors Laskar on the banks of the River Kisnah ten corses above Merch', 9 June 1701, fol. 72.

time' Norris lamented in a letter sent to the Surat factory in mid-July, had 'been taken in travelling and keeping company with the laskarr, all of us being put to the utmost difficulty and extremity'.<sup>102</sup> On several occasions, heavy rain forced them to halt their march and take cover, and many of the embassy's camels and oxen died along the way, while others were stolen by roaming bands of thieves.<sup>103</sup> Still no funds from the New Company had reached the travelling embassy, despite Norris's repeated requests for them. As a result, and in a further humiliating blow to the ambassador who prided himself on the strength and prestige of his retinue, the embassy was twice forced to take shelter under Aurangzeb's camp and accept the emperor's assistance in escorting them north. By the time they arrived at Vardhangad in early August, the embassy was drained not only of finances, but of morale.

For the adversities faced over the past few months and his inability to obtain the *farman* at the court, Norris blamed the New Company council at Surat and, especially, President Nicholas Waite. 'It is too long to particularize', the ambassador bemoaned when they finally reached Vardhangad, 'the difficultys I have undergone and the hardships the embassy has been put to for want of timely and sufficient supplys from Surat'.<sup>104</sup> In a series of letters, Norris launched a scathing attack on the New Company, asserting that, had the Surat council sent the bills of credit to him as promised, the *farman* would already have been procured, and 'with less charge and difficulty then can be now'.<sup>105</sup> Instead, without any money 'to push my business on and gratifie those that expected it', Ruhullah Khan and the other ministers of the court simply refused to do business with Norris, and his application for the *farman* submitted on 29 May lay collecting dust.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, Norris asserted, the New Company's neglect had left the embassy open to the Old Company's attacks and lent

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<sup>102</sup> William Norris, 'From my quarters on the Emperors Laskarr near Murdaqgurr', 11 July 1701, Add MS 31302, British Library, London, fol. 73.

<sup>103</sup> William Norris, 11 July 1701.

<sup>104</sup> William Norris, 'To the President and Councill In Bengall From My Quarters in the Emperours Laskarr', 14 August 1701, Add MS 31302, British Library, London, fol. 79.

<sup>105</sup> William Norris, 'To the President and Councill In Bengall', 14 August 1701.

<sup>106</sup> William Norris, 'To the President and Councill In Bengall', 14 August 1701.

credence to their claim that Norris and the New Company were poor and insignificant.<sup>107</sup>

According to the ambassador, their enemies at the court continued to undercut the embassy at every opportunity and, without money, there was very little Norris could do about it.

A sudden, yet fleeting, change in direction from this downwards trajectory took place in early August. New bills of credit finally came through from the New Company councils at Masulipatnam and Surat, giving Norris fresh hope of bringing the embassy 'to a quick and happy conclusion'.<sup>108</sup> The funds certainly got things moving. Upon receiving a large gratuity from the ambassador, Ruhullah Khan immediately submitted the ambassador's application for *farman* to the emperor, and on 5 August, Norris received news that Aurangzeb had granted the *farman* and ordered it to be drawn up as Norris had requested.<sup>109</sup> Two days later, with his 'usual solemnity and cavalcade', Norris visited Aurangzeb for a third time to thank the emperor 'for his great grace and favour' in granting the *farman*.<sup>110</sup> Thrilled by this turn of events, the ambassador boasted that, should the *farman* be written out 'in every particular as I requested', then he would be so bold as 'to say it will be the most honourable, sure and beneficial settlement that ever was obtained yet by Europeans'.<sup>111</sup> The news, however, quickly proved too good to be true.

#### 'Obligation for securing the seas'

No sooner had Norris completed his third visit to Aurangzeb than a 'mighty complaint' was lodged at the court, sparking a chain of events that quickly reversed any gains made by the ambassador. The complaint was made against the Old Company on behalf of a group of merchants from Surat, led by Abdul Gharfur and Hamadan Hussein – the same merchants Norris had spoken to personally in Surat. The merchants claimed that the Old Company owed

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<sup>107</sup> William Norris, 'To the President and Council In Bengall', 14 August 1701.

<sup>108</sup> William Norris, 'To the President and Council In Bengall', 14 August 1701.

<sup>109</sup> William Norris, 'To the President and Council In Bengall', 14 August 1701; See also, Edward Norris, 'To the honourable John Pitt', fol. 70.

<sup>110</sup> William Norris, 'To the President and Council In Bengall', 14 August 1701, fol. 79.

<sup>111</sup> William Norris, 'To the President and Council In Bengall', 14 August 1701, fol. 79.



them ‘vast debts’ that had accrued from the company’s illegal capture of the merchants’ commercial shipping in Mughal waters and that, despite the emperor’s repeated orders to pay the merchants compensation, the Old Company had so far refused to hand over a single rupee. The complaint caused a commotion at the court. ‘The clamour at this juncture’ Norris worried ‘seemed to be carryd higher than ever’ and led to Aurangzeb taking stronger and more decisive action against the Old Company than at any previous time. As Norris was informed by Ruhullah Khan’s head secretary, on 12 August, Aurangzeb

expressd his utmost displeasure [at the Old Company’s actions] and signified it in a severe manner, comanding imediate orders to be issued out not only to Surat, Bengall and Metchlapatam but all India over to have the Old Companys persons and effects seized and not be permitted farther trade in his dominions.<sup>112</sup>

If the Old Company merchants continued to refuse to pay back their debts, the secretary warned, they would be expelled from India once and for all.

Norris knew this commotion meant bad news for the embassy. In a letter to the New Company at Surat, he warned that it ‘may give some turne to our affaires’ and even put ‘a present stop to them’.<sup>113</sup> The ambassador was concerned that the Mughal government would now not only refuse to grant the *farman* to him as requested, but would also force Norris, as the official English ambassador, to shoulder responsibility for the Old Company’s debts, and place further pressure on him to provide security against future acts of piracy in Mughal waters in the form of ongoing ship convoys to escort the merchants’ ships. ‘I have bin jealous’, Norris fretted, that ‘there is a formed design to make the Old Companys debts a nationall concerne, notwithstanding I have so often urged and repeated to the contrary from my first audience’.<sup>114</sup> He ordered the New Company to issue an official warning to all their ship masters against interfering with Mughal vessels at this time, as ‘it canot be construed otherwise then direct piracy if they should offer to seize any ships belonging to the subjects

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<sup>112</sup> William Norris, ‘To the President and Councill In Bengall’, 14 August 1701, fol. 79.

<sup>113</sup> William Norris, ‘To the President and Councill In Bengall’, 14 August 1701, fol. 79.

<sup>114</sup> William Norris, ‘To the President and Councill In Bengall’, 14 August 1701, fol. 79.

of the Mogull who is a friend and ally to the King of England'.<sup>115</sup> The ambassador's fears were justified. More than two weeks after Aurangzeb's imperial order was issued against the Old Company, nothing more had come of the emperor's promise to provide the *farman*, and Ruhullah Khan repeatedly brushed off Norris's requests to have it drawn up immediately.

On 25 August, the Grand Wazir, Asad Khan, arrived at the court from Brahmapuri, a development Norris viewed as an opportunity to reboot the ruptured negotiations over the *farman*. Asad Khan, of course, was the minister Norris had refused to visit in Brahampuri back in March due to their disagreement over the terms of their meeting. Realising that the wazir could hold the key to putting his embassy back on track (and perhaps comprehending his grave error in snubbing the most important minister in the empire), however, Norris changed his tune towards the wazir entirely, asserting that he would show him 'all imaginable respect' and that 'nothing shall be wanting on my side to engage his friendship'.<sup>116</sup> In a bold move immediately after Asad Khan's arrival at the court, Norris sent his secretary, along with a 'a fine purse of gold containing 101 gold mohurs', to formally request that the wazir step in to take over Ruhallah Khan's role in representing the embassy to the court, complaining that Ruhallah Khan had 'misrepresented' him to Aurangzeb all along and had caused a 'four month delay' to his business.<sup>117</sup> Asad Khan agreed to take on Norris's case, and communicated that he would 'procure a speedy and honourable dispatch' for the ambassador.<sup>118</sup> Over the following month, Norris showered Asad Khan and his officers with complements and gifts in a last-ditch effort to obtain the *farman*.

On 25 September, six months after Norris stormed out of Brahampuri in disgust at the Grand Wazir, the ambassador finally paid a personal visit to Asad Khan at the Mughal

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<sup>115</sup> William Norris, 'From My Quarters in the Emperors laskerr near Murdawgurr 20 September 1701, Add MS 31302, British Library, London, fol. 83.

<sup>116</sup> William Norris, 'From My Quarters in the Emperors laskerr near Murdawgurr', 20 September 1701, fol. 84.

<sup>117</sup> William Norris, 'From My Quarters in the Emperors Laskar near Murdawgurr', 24 October 1701, Add MS 31302, British Library, London, fol. 86.

<sup>118</sup> William Norris, 'From My Quarters in the Emperors Laskar near Murdawgurr', 24 October 1701, fol. 86.

lashkar. It was a regal affair. The ambassador entered Asad Khan's quarters 'attended in the same manner as when I had audience of the Emperour', carried on a palanquin in a stately parade of musicians, soldiers and servants, the king's arms displayed prominently.<sup>119</sup> Drums, however, were absent from the meeting, and Norris declined to mention how he sat in relation to Asad Khan, perhaps indicating that he submitted to the wazir's authority. After presenting Asad Khan with another set of expensive gifts, including English telescopes, furniture, and horses, Norris and the wazir began negotiations over the *farman*. In return for his assistance in obtaining the documents from the emperor, Norris agreed to pay Asad Khan a lakh of rupees, and a further 57,500 rupees to the wazir's chief eunuch and secretaries, and other officers involved in drawing up the documents.<sup>120</sup> Most importantly, however, Norris also agreed to offer the emperor an additional lakh of rupees in lieu of the New Company providing ongoing insurance against piracy in Mughal waters.<sup>121</sup> These enormous sums revealed Norris's desperation – the ambassador was well aware this would be his final chance to obtain the *farman*. Apparently pleased with the transaction, Asad Khan promised to take Norris's offer to the emperor the following day.

But the timing of Asad Khan's visit to the Mughal court to present Norris's final bid for the *farman* on 2 October could not have been worse for the embassy. The day before Asad Khan's audience at the *darbar*, where the wazir was to put forward Norris's offer, Aurangzeb was notified of a further development in the ongoing piracy scandal at Surat. The information came, once again, from the Surat governor, Dianat Khan. According to the governor, two of the emperor's imperial ships loaded with highly valuable cargo had recently been seized 'in sight of Surat by a pyrate carrying English colours'.<sup>122</sup> To make matters worse, the remaining ships in the same imperial fleet had later been captured at Mocha by local authorities there in

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<sup>119</sup> William Norris, 'To the President and Councill In Bengall', 14 August 1701, fol. 79.

<sup>120</sup> William Norris, 'From My Quarters in the Emperors laskerr near Murdawgurr', 20 September 1701, fol. 84.

<sup>121</sup> William Norris, 'From My Quarters in the Emperors laskerr near Murdawgurr', 20 September 1701, fol. 84.

<sup>122</sup> William Norris, 'From My Quarters in the Emperors laskerr near Murdawgurr', 20 September 1701, fol. 84.

reprisal for the losses sustained by Turkish merchant Hossein Hammadan.<sup>123</sup> As shown in the previous chapter, Hammadan was one of Surat's wealthiest and most well-connected merchants, who had sought compensation for English piracies for years and even attempted to engage Norris in his plight. Having given up on receiving justice through the Mughal government, Hammadan had evidently reached out for support across the Indian Ocean. This report so incensed the emperor that he immediately ordered his annual tribute of a lakh of rupees to Mocha to be withdrawn.<sup>124</sup> When Asad Khan presented Norris's requests for *farman* the next day, therefore, Aurangzeb 'threw downe the paper' that the ambassador's requests were written on, and refused to 'read a word of it nor hear [out] the Vizier'.<sup>125</sup> As Asad Khan's secretary later relayed this episode to Norris, the ambassador lamented that 'it is very unfortunate to our affaires that these thinges should hapen att this criticall juncture'.<sup>126</sup>

Asad Khan made a second attempt at submitting Norris's request for the *farman* on 6 October, the outcome of which was only marginally better than the first. According to the wazir, after reading Norris's application at the durbar, the emperor asked Asad Khan 'for what reason he should grant [Norris and the New Company] more privilegeiges then other Europeans enjoyed' in his dominions?'.<sup>127</sup> Asad Khan replied that Norris was sent 'from a greate king' to ask for the *farman*, which was 'a greate honour', and that if the emperor would not grant the documents then the ambassador would 'imediately take [his] leave and be gone'.<sup>128</sup> After some consideration, Aurangzeb demanded that a summary of the current trading rights and freedoms enjoyed by the English and Dutch throughout the Mughal empire be brought to him. After he was acquainted with this information, the emperor declared, he would make his final decision on the *farman*.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> William Norris, 'From My Quarters in the Emperors laskerr near Murdawgurr, 20 September 1701, fol. 84.

<sup>124</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 11.

<sup>125</sup> William Norris, 'From My Quarters in the Emperors laskerr near Murdawgurr, 20 September 1701, fol. 84.

<sup>126</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, f. 10.

<sup>127</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 17.

<sup>128</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 17.

<sup>129</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fols. 17–18.

As Norris and his retinue waited for the report on European privileges to be written and presented to the emperor, the problem with the Old Company reared its head again. This time, Ruhullah Khan made an application to Aurangzeb on behalf of the Old Company. According to Asad Khan, who was present at the *darbar* when the application was submitted, the Old Company agents in India gave a formal apology to Aurangzeb for their past crimes committed against Mughal shipping and offered four lakhs of rupees to the emperor. In return for this sum, the Old Company agents requested that they be cleared of all their debts and wrongdoings and that a new *farman* be issued to reconfirm the privileges they currently enjoyed in India.<sup>130</sup> But after the most recent developments in the piracy scandal at Surat, Aurangzeb was in no obliging mood towards the English. The emperor ‘took the [application] in his hands and tore it’, admonishing Ruhullah Khan by asking whether he would ‘have me doe soe dishounourable a thinge and soe much injustice to many other people for 4 Leck of Rupees’?<sup>131</sup> Unsurprisingly, Ruhullah Khan did not pursue the matter further. Norris worried, however, that if the Old Company continued down this avenue to clear their debts successfully in the future, it would ‘put a stop and determination’ to the New Company’s trade in India.

Meanwhile, and as Norris had feared, pressure mounted for the ambassador to provide open-ended support in the form of ship convoys to protect Aurangzeb’s shipping against piracy. Before he presented Norris’s application to the emperor for the final time, the Grand Wazir directed Norris to liaise with Inayat Khan, a noble at the office where *farman* and other imperial documents were drawn up, to go over the finer details of the ambassador’s bid. After carefully reading over every article in the application, however, Inayat Khan made it very clear that the New Company would not be granted the *farman* without giving some sort of insurance against piracy. ‘It would be unreasonable’, Inayat informed Norris through the

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<sup>130</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 20.

<sup>131</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 20.

ambassador's interpreter, 'for the New Company to expect the same and greater privileges as the other established companies and to be exempted from giving any security'.<sup>132</sup> With that in mind, the minister asked, 'what obligation for securing the seas would he [Norris] give'?<sup>133</sup> The exasperated ambassador refused to back down on the matter, however, countering with the same arguments he had given against providing security against piracy time and time again. They were, first, that the other European companies had already signed a *muchalka* promising to protect Mughal shipping against piracy, so there was no need for the New Company to provide additional support. Second, that he promised to provide the emperor with an additional lakh of rupees in lieu of signing such an agreement and, third, that it would be improper for him as the official representative of the English nation to agree to a policy that might see the English committing 'acts of hostility' against Mughal subjects on the seas (this last line of argument made little sense, and was more an indication of the ambassador's desperation to get out of signing a *muchalka*).<sup>134</sup> Unluckily for Norris, however, another event occurred that would only force Inayat Khan to double down on his efforts to extract an obligation from the ambassador.

As Norris's fight with Inayat wore on, another bombshell hit the court, resulting in more angst for the ambassador. On 22 October, Norris received a packet of letters from the New Company council at Surat, the contents of which had been 'broke open' by Maratha rebels and the patamars who delivered it detained for two days.<sup>135</sup> According to the council, on 25 September a French ship had docked in the port of Surat. The captain of the ship brought the shocking news that a merger between the two warring English companies had been agreed upon by the English Parliament, and immediately informed the Surat governor.<sup>136</sup> Viewing this development as an opportunity, Dianat Khan wrote to the Mughal

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<sup>132</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 44.

<sup>133</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 44.

<sup>134</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 58.

<sup>135</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 54.

<sup>136</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 54.

court immediately, recommending that, since the two companies were joining, Aurangzeb should force the New Company to shoulder some of the responsibility for the Old Company's debts if the Old Company was not in a position to repay them, and that the New Company, and Norris as their representative, should 'all be seized and detained till full satisfaction' for the Old Company debts was made.<sup>137</sup> The Surat council warned Norris to take 'timely caution', believing that, as a result of this report, the ambassador could be captured by Mughal forces at the lashkar at any moment.

It appeared, then, that the three main challenges of the Old-New Company conflict, the hybrid embassy problem, and the maritime violence scandal were now coming together to create a perfect storm that would destroy the embassy. The news of the two English companies merging certainly appears to have resulted in more pressure on Norris to agree to be bound by an obligation to protect Mughal shipping against piracy. Two days after Norris received the letters from the New Company, Inayat Khan sent for the ambassador's interpreter to visit him 'in all haste'.<sup>138</sup> When Rustamji arrived at the minister's quarters, Inayat Khan instructed the interpreter to deliver Norris the following ultimatum; if Norris promised to provide security for Mughal shipping against future acts of piracy in Mughal waters, Inayat Khan asserted, he 'would undertake my busnesse [and the *farman*] should be dispatched immediately'.<sup>139</sup> If the ambassador refused to give such insurance, however, the *farman* would not be issued and he could expect to wait at the court indefinitely. In Inayat Khan's words, Norris 'had been here 7 monthes already, soe [he] might stay 7 monthes longer'.<sup>140</sup> Norris once again refused to give any security against piracy, and urged the Grand Wazir to take his application to the emperor again as soon as possible, regardless of Inayat Khan's reservations.

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<sup>137</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 54.

<sup>138</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 55.

<sup>139</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 55.

<sup>140</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 56.

On 25 October at the *darbar*, Asad Khan presented Norris's application for *farman* to Aurangzeb for the final time. According to the Grand Wazir, who reported the event to Norris, after reading over the ambassador's requests, Aurangzeb asked a single question: Would Norris and the New Company provide security against piracy for his imperial shipping? Responding as the ambassador had instructed him, Asad Khan informed Aurangzeb that Norris would not agree to provide such insurance because the other European companies had already agreed to protect his shipping. Aurangzeb, however, was unconvinced, citing information from the Surat governor that the Malabar Coast remained unprotected.<sup>141</sup> When Asad Khan relayed this information to Norris later that day, Norris asked the Wazir to deliver a further message to the emperor, that the coasts of India 'were the Emperors own' and that his subjects 'might be punishd by himselfe and their pyracys prevented by his government'.<sup>142</sup> The King of England and the Mughal emperor, the ambassador continued, 'were in amity', and as such, 'it would not be proper for the English to use any force or comitt acts of hostility upon the Mogulls subjects'.<sup>143</sup>

These excuses, however, were simply how Norris cloaked his refusal to submit to the foreign authority of the Mughal government, to turn the English into 'loyal vassals' of the Mughal state. To Norris, providing ongoing protection against piracy to the Mughal government would be a direct violation of his duty to the Crown. As the ambassador later put it, signing a *muchalka* 'would forever enslave the English to this insufferable government', and that by refusing to sign, he had, in fact, 'performed my Duty to the Kinge my master'.<sup>144</sup> Once again, then, Norris placed the Crown's interests before those of the New Company, which made the attainment of the *farman* impossible. Had Norris seen himself as a trade ambassador, as acting first and foremost for the New Company, it is highly likely he would

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<sup>141</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 58.

<sup>142</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 59.

<sup>143</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 59.

<sup>144</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fols 62, 120.



have been willing to accept an obligation to protect Mughal ships in return for a *farman*.

Because he also believed he owed a duty to the king, however, he saw himself as unable to offer what was required in order to secure the *farman*.

It is likely that Aurangzeb never heard Norris's creative new excuses for refusing to sign a *muchalka*. Two days later, the ambassador received information from Ruhullah Khan that the emperor had given his final answer to Norris's application for *farman* in writing, and it was more bad news for the embassy. According to Ruhullah Khan, Aurangzeb declared that, if Norris would not agree to be bound by an obligation to help with the piracy problem in India, then he should go back to England. As Norris recorded it, the emperor wrote down that 'as to tradinge in his dominions, the New English knew best what to doe [...] and if I refused to give security for the seas I might return to England by the same way I came'.<sup>145</sup> It was a devastating blow to the ambassador, who immediately sent a resigned reply to Asad Khan to pass on to the emperor, expressing 'that I was very sorry I could not answer the Emperor's expectation' in providing security against piracy, but that 'I would not give any security at all'.<sup>146</sup> He continued, imparting that

if his majesty was pleased to grant the phirmaunds as desired without any obligation I was ready to order the Leck of Rupees as offered: If it was not his majestys pleasure to grant the phirmaunds without such security I desired dustwicks to return to Suratt from thence to embarke for England to give the King my master an account of the Emperor's pleasure and that the Emperor would be pleased to apoint a day for me to come and take my leave of him.<sup>147</sup>

But Asad Khan did not return to the emperor on Norris's account again, and even the ambassador understood that, after Aurangzeb's angry outburst against him, he would 'find it very difficult ever to persuaide the vizir to speake any more to the Emperor in relation to my

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<sup>145</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 59.

<sup>146</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fols. 59–60.

<sup>147</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 60

affaires'.<sup>148</sup> The following day, Norris gave public notice at the lashkar that he would leave the camp in five days' time.

Norris's realisation that his embassy was now at an end brought about the longest and most scathing attack on the Mughals he had written yet, a tirade that was dripping in derogatory, proto-orientalist language. The Mughal government, the ambassador attested in his diary, was

the most cowardly, base, despicable government in the world, indeed not fitt to be called a government havinge neither Laws, morality, Honesty or Religion nor any method of doinge anythinge but cheatinge those they can and squeezinge all in their power and att that they are very dextrous and are not in the least ashamed of the most palpable cheate or basest action imaginable if found out in it.<sup>149</sup>

The ambassador continued painting the Mughals as morally bankrupt, lawless infidels, claiming that he had heard many stories of 'the Emperor having severall times layn with his own daughter', and jesting that if he 'had brought a handsome youth [from England] for the Emperors use it might have done us well'.<sup>150</sup> The ambassador went even further, claiming he knew of 'no notion they have amongst them of committinge a sin or beleivinge themselves accountable wither here or hereafter'.<sup>151</sup> It appeared the ambassador had had enough of India.

Though Norris had resigned to leave without the *farman*, the emperor's ministers had not yet finished trying to wrest an agreement from Norris on providing ship convoys to protect Mughal shipping against future piracy. On 27 October, Inayat Khan sent for Norris's interpreter to pay him a visit. When Rustamji arrived at the minister's quarters, the minister once again asked, 'with a threateninge, menacinge countenance and voice', whether Norris intended to offer protection against piracy for Aurangzeb's shipping, and demanded that Rustamji sign a paper stating the ambassador's answer.<sup>152</sup> When Rustamji replied that Norris

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<sup>148</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 60.

<sup>149</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 42.

<sup>150</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 43.

<sup>151</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 43.

<sup>152</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 61.

had already answered this question, Inayet Khan became enraged, shouting at the interpreter that

The Emperor had referred my givinge an obligation wholly to him and that he must have my answer in writinge forthwith, and that if I did not agree to what the Emperor demanded, orders would be imediatley given out to turn the New Company out of his dominions.<sup>153</sup>

Rustamji returned to Norris escorted by four of Inayet Khan's heavily armed guards

'frightend out of his witts'.<sup>154</sup> This blatant attempt to intimidate the ambassador backfired, however. Norris immediately returned a written answer chopped with his seal to Inayet Khan that formally refused to provide the desired protection, so that the Mughal minister 'might be authentically certifyd of my intention and resolution [...] not to give any obligation att all, nor to be frightned into it by their blusteringe and threateninge'.<sup>155</sup>

On 4 November, Norris and his retinue marched out of the emperor's lashkar, trumpets blaring and drums beating. Convinced that there was 'a design to seize and secure me' over the ongoing piracy scandal, the ambassador and his retinue exited as quickly as they could. Norris clearly took some satisfaction from the style of his exit – in his eyes, allowing the English to march out in front of their noses showed the Mughals' 'greate cowardice', and the strength, bravery and honour of the English retinue, in contrast.

This chapter has shown that a perfect storm of problems unfolded during Norris's journey to, and time spent residing at, the Mughal court, bringing about the embassy's demise. Some of the issues the ambassador faced in this phase belong to the common set of problems experienced by European ambassadors in early modern Asia. The most damaging of these was a lack of funds. The New Company's failure to provide Norris with bills of credit for significant stretches of his time at the court rendered the ambassador powerless to negotiate with Mughal ministers, particularly Ruhullah Khan, who refused to assist Norris

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<sup>153</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 62.

<sup>154</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 62.

<sup>155</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 62.

without large gratuities. This problem was compounded by the relocation of the emperor's lashkar from Panhala Fort to Vardhangad, which further drained the embassy of finances and morale. This chapter has shown, however, that, while common problems such as these undoubtedly contributed to the failure of the embassy, they were not ultimately responsible for Norris leaving the court without the *farman*, and with tensions between the English and the Mughal government at an all-time high.

What ultimately brought the embassy undone were the three recurring obstacles Norris faced throughout his assignment in India – conflict with the Old Company, the hybrid embassy problem, and the piracy scandal. During this phase, the Old Company continued to undermine Norris at every opportunity, including by bribing the Surat governor Dianat Khan to inform the court that Norris was not a royal ambassador, which the governor did, writing numerous letters to the court asking that Norris and the New Company be held accountable for. The Old Company merchants also continued to conduct their business with the court as usual and despite Norris's repeated orders not to communicate with Indian authorities without his permission. They even submitted a formal offer to the emperor of four lakh of rupees to make up for the crimes committed against Aurangzeb's shipping. To make matters worse for Norris, at the very moment the embassy arrived at the lashkar, he received the shocking news that the Old Company was to continue as a corporation indefinitely. Months later, the ambassador learned that the two English companies were set to merge. This shifted the goal posts for Norris's assignment again and again, and threw more confusion over the mission, weakening the embassy even further.

The hybrid embassy problem also hobbled the embassy during this phase. Norris's obsession with maintaining his royal character above all else meant the ambassador missed important opportunities to form positive relationships with key political figures. His decision to pass up the meeting with the Grand Wazir in Brahmपुरi because the wazir would not allow him the points of ceremony he believed were due to him as a royal ambassador was

undoubtedly detrimental. Later realising his mistake, the ambassador was forced to heap cash and lavish gifts on the wazir in order to persuade him to speak to Aurangzeb on his behalf, which came at a huge cost to the already cash-strapped embassy. The hybrid embassy problem also contributed to the ambassador's decision to leave the court without the *farman*. While the ambassador gave various reasons for refusing to offer support to Aurangzeb in the form of ongoing ship convoys to combat piracy, it eventually becomes clear from his diaries that the reason for his resistance was to uphold the dignity of his monarch and the English nation. Norris believed that signing such an agreement would be akin to forever 'enslaving' the English to a tyrannical government and would therefore be against the interests of William III. The New Company's interests, on the other hand, appeared to bear little weight in the ambassador's decision-making. It is not difficult to imagine that a regular trade delegate sent by the New Company to the Mughal court, rather than a royal ambassador, would have agreed to provide security against piracy if asked to do so by the emperor. The French, Dutch and Old English companies, as shown in the previous chapter, had already done just that. Indeed, it was the piracy scandal that put the final nail in the coffin for the Norris embassy. The commotion that the latest seizing of Aurangzeb's ships caused at the court made it impossible for Norris to obtain the *farman* for the New Company without agreeing to secure the seas against future acts of piracy. This was, as shown above, something Norris was simply unwilling to give.

In addition to showing what problems caused the downfall of the Norris embassy, this chapter has demonstrated how Norris's proto-orientalist depictions of Indian and the Mughal government were inextricably bound to his successes and failures. As Norris's embassy went into a steep decline during this phase, so too did the ambassador plumb new depths in his negative portrayals of India and the Mughals. Like Roe before him, the more things went wrong for Norris, the more scathing he was in his depictions of India – depictions that, in turn, drew on well-worn orientalist representations and language.

## Chapter Seven

### ‘No better than a prisoner’: Embassy detained at Brahmapuri

Early in the morning, just two days after Norris abruptly exited the emperor’s *lashkar*, and as his retinue packed up their tents to continue their march back to Surat, a Mughal officer and ten guards on horseback approached the ambassador’s camp. The officer was Mahabat Khan, *subadar* of the Deccan, who explained that he had been sent by Aurangzeb to deliver Norris an important message.<sup>1</sup> Eager to ‘shew all imaginable respect to a person of his rank and quality [...] sent to me by the Emperor’, yet noticing that all his belongings had already been loaded on to carts for the daily march, Norris ordered an impromptu reception area of a carpet and two chairs to be set up in the open air, and offered his visitor a warm embrace.<sup>2</sup> Once the two dignitaries were seated, the officer informed Norris that Aurangzeb wished the ambassador to return to the *lashkar* immediately, and that whatever information the emperor’s ministers had previously given Norris about the *farman* being rejected was false, and provided ‘without the Emperors knowledge’.<sup>3</sup> If Norris returned to the camp, Mahabat Khan promised, the *farman* for the New Company would be granted within a month.

Though impressed that Aurangzeb had sent an officer of such high rank to pursue him, Norris refused to go back. ‘I was sent Embassador from the Kinge of England, the greatest Kinge in Europe’, Norris explained to the *subadar*, ‘to aske a favour of the Emperor in relation to the settlement of the New Company in his dominions’.<sup>4</sup> But from the moment he arrived at the *lashkar*, Norris continued, it had been ‘my misfortune to be all alonge

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<sup>1</sup> Mahabat Khan held the title of *subadar* of the south, the head of provincial administration under the Mughals. See Farzana Ashfaque, ‘“Subedars” of Kashmir under Shahjahan’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 72 (2011: 308; MD. Shakil Akhtar, ‘Composition and Role of the Nobility (1739-1761)’, (PhD thesis, Aligarh Muslim University, 2008), 26.

<sup>2</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume III: September 1701–March 1702, unpublished, National Archives, Kew, CO 77/50, fol. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 81.

misrepresented to his majesty' by the emperor's own ministers.<sup>5</sup> These ministers, Norris asserted, had done him many disservices, and finally led him to believe that Aurangzeb had ordered his embassy to leave India. Having departed the *lashkar* in such circumstances, Norris argued, 'it would be highly dishonourable for me to return again' and that the King of England, 'to whom alone I was accountable', would disapprove of such action.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Norris feared that the emperor's secret plan was to seize the embassy and hold him accountable for the Old Company's maritime offenses, as well as to force him to sign an agreement locking the English into providing ongoing convoys for Mughal shipping. Desperate to return home to England on the earliest available ship to depart from Surat, the ambassador ignored Mahabat Khan's request and resumed his march, praying this would be the end of the matter.

It was not the end of the matter, however. In fact, Norris's exchange with Mahabat Khan marked the beginning of an extraordinary three-month period in which Norris and his retinue were captured by Mughal authorities and forced into further negotiations over English commitments to provide protection against piracy to Mughal shipping. This chapter examines this period in detail, showing how the ambassador and his retinue were seized, on the emperor's orders, by the Mughal army and forced to camp under guard near the town. The capture was carried out on the pretence that Aurangzeb intended to stop Norris in order to give him a proper dismissal from his court (because the ambassador had left without one) and to present the ambassador with gifts and a letter to the king of England. As they languished at the camp, the maritime violence scandal that had plagued Norris from the beginning of his embassy erupted once more in Surat after the emperor sent fresh orders for the English and Dutch to pay compensation to local merchants whose ships had been recently attacked by European pirates on the trading route to Mocha. The Old Company and the Dutch prepared to

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<sup>5</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 82.

fiercely resist the orders. They argues that paying compensation for piracies they had not committed, in addition to providing ship convoys to the government, had led to a situation so onerous that they their business was almost destroyed.

It became clear that Aurangzeb and his ministers were intent on making Norris and the New Company contribute to keeping Mughal shipping safe. They did this by continuing to promise the *farman* for the New Company if Norris agreed to sign an agreement guaranteeing protection for Mughal shipping. Norris, however, would not give in. Despite mounting pressure, both from the Mughal government and from the New Company merchants, who both argued that he was acting against the instructions issued to him, the ambassador simply refused to sign a *muchalka*. This chapter shows how, eventually, the Mughal emperor sent gifts and a letter meant for the king of England to Brahmapuri, but with no *farman* for the New Company. Such action from Aurangzeb highlights the importance of the maritime violence scandal to the Mughal government, and the increasing difficulty around maintaining the ‘balance of blackmail’ with the English. At the same time, it once again reveals the problems inherent in the hybrid embassy. After steadfastly refusing to sign a *muchalka* because he believed doing so would breach his duty to the Crown, and reluctantly attending a formal dismissal from the *nawab*, Norris left Brahmapuri on 6 March 1702. Though he escaped with his freedom, the ambassador had little else to show for his lengthy embassy. Drained of every last penny and without the *farman*, Norris would return to the New Company factory at Surat in disgrace.

#### Escape from the Mughal court

Rumours that Aurangzeb intended to force Norris to return to the lashkar, ‘by faire or fowle meanes’ mounted as Norris continued his march to Surat, and appeared confirmed when, on 12 November, the ambassador received a letter from Firuz Jang, *nawab* of the *subah* (province) which incorporated the nearby town of Brahmapuri. In the letter, Firuz Jang



informed Norris that the emperor had ordered him ‘either to persuade [Norris] back to the Leschar’, or if the ambassador refused to return, to convince him to make a stopover at Brahmapuri. If Norris chose the latter option, Firuz Jang alleged, Aurangzeb had ordered gifts of an elephant, a horse, and a *sarapa* (honourary robe) to be presented to Norris on the emperor’s behalf. It was expected, Firuz Jang added, that the ambassador would pay a formal visit to his residence at Brahmapuri to receive the emperor’s presents. Norris had no choice but to accept the *nawab*’s request to stay in the area. As he put it, ‘the Nabob has at least 100,000 [military] men’ and so he was ‘resolved to comply.’<sup>7</sup> Norris answered the letter, agreeing to halt his march for no more than seven days, but refusing to visit the *nawab* at his residence. Convinced that the Mughal government’s hidden agenda was to arrest him and hold him hostage for the Old Company’s actions, Norris believed such a visit would provide the perfect opportunity for his capture. Just to be safe, the ambassador and his retinue crossed over the large River Birma to set up camp. This, Norris reasoned, would place a safety barrier ‘betwixt me and the Nabob in case any onsett or surprize’.<sup>8</sup>

As they camped riverside, the embassy received more unsettling news concerning the piracy scandal at Surat. According to letters sent to Norris’s interpreter from his family living in the port city, yet another ship belonging to prominent merchant Abdul Ghafur had recently been captured by European pirates on the trading route to Mocha. This had caused such a furore among Surat’s merchant community against the Old Company and the Dutch that the governor of Surat had promised to pay for the damage himself if the merchants agreed to ‘be quiett’ while he wrote once more to the Mughal court to seek instructions on the matter.<sup>9</sup> In another letter from Captain Simmonds, the captain of the royal fleet Norris sailed in to India, Norris learnt that the Old Company and the Dutch, for their part, were ‘preparing for

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<sup>7</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 89.

<sup>8</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 87.

<sup>9</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 83.

resistance' if the Mughal government continued to force them to take responsibility for such captures.<sup>10</sup> The situation at Surat clearly did not bode well for Norris, and the ambassador vented his frustration at the New Company council in Surat for neglecting to inform him of these 'material circumstances' through their own letters, 'as they ought' to have done.<sup>11</sup>

The ambassador was infuriated by the New Company merchants' failure to report developments at Surat – but he likely understood why they had acted this way. Since Norris had publicised his decision to leave the emperor's *lashkar* without the *farman*, the New Company factors had made known their dissatisfaction with his decision, terming it a 'decedinge from my instructions and what may prove an utter ruin to the New Company'.<sup>12</sup> They were also horrified by the 'immense charge' involved in Norris's negotiations at the court, and pleaded with the ambassador to shrink his expenditures.<sup>13</sup> Norris had dismissed their concerns out of hand, accusing them of 'never consideringe how farr the Kings Honour was concerned in my departure after the Emperor had shewd me the way out'.<sup>14</sup> Tensions between the ambassador and the New Company merchants, then, were at an all-time high, which perhaps explains the reluctance of Waite and the New Company council to keep Norris informed on developments in Surat - as far as they were concerned, the embassy was over, and nothing Norris could do would help the New Company now.

The seven days Norris had promised to stay near Brahmapuri elapsed without the ambassador receiving any further information from the Mughal court, but it became clear that the *nawab* was doing everything he could to persuade the ambassador from moving on. After providing servants to assist Norris 'in settinge up my tents and clearing and watering the ground', Firuz Jang proceeded to send daily compliments and gifts to the ambassador and his

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<sup>10</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 83.

<sup>12</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 135.

<sup>13</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 136.

<sup>14</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 135.

entourage, including fruits, meats and ‘curious pastes’.<sup>15</sup> Though Norris refused to visit the *nawab* himself, the ambassador’s English entourage were entertained at his residence on multiple occasions, each time ‘introduced into the Nabobs presence’, where they were ‘very kindly received and admitted to sitt down’.<sup>16</sup> The *nawab* even offered two of his boats to Norris with which to ‘take my pleasure on the river’ during his stay.<sup>17</sup> Norris refused to step aboard the vessels, however, believing the offer was part of a ploy by the *nawab* to entrap him. Thinking on his feet, the ambassador excused himself on this occasion by notifying the *nawab* that he had recently ‘caught [a] cold [...] soe yett durst not venter upon the water for feare of increasinge of it’.<sup>18</sup>

The *nawab* also made repeated requests for Norris to pay him a formal visit to accept the emperor’s *farman* and gifts when they finally reached Brahmapuri. When Norris rejected these requests, the *nawab* doubled down, insisting that it was in Norris’s own interests to visit him to accept the presents, as it would placate the emperor who was upset that the ambassador had departed the court without his permission. In Norris’s words, the *nawab* argued that if Norris paid him a visit,

it would be construed as my takinge leave of the Emperor who knew nothinge of my leavinge the Leschar occasioned by his ministers misrepresentation of me and my affaires and that if I did not comply with this request the Emperor would believe I parted in disgust which would be a greate uneasynesse and dissatisfaction to the Emperor.<sup>19</sup>

True to form, however, Norris refused to budge, firm in his belief that this was all a ruse devised to take him prisoner. The Mughal government’s ‘designes’, the ambassador asserted, were ‘too plaine and open and their baseness and vilany too well known to eschape discovery’.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 96.

<sup>16</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 94.

<sup>17</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 94

<sup>18</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 96.

<sup>19</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 103.

<sup>20</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 103.

The ambassador replied to the *nawab*'s repeated invitations with the same argument each time – that to visit the *nawab* after he had left the Mughal court in such undesirable circumstances would be to act in defiance of his king's instructions and against European diplomatic etiquette. As the ambassador put it,

I had been obliged to come from the Leschar without takinge leave of the Emperor [...] which not havinge done I could upon no account whatsoever pay a visitt to any subject of the Emperors the same beinge contrary to the custome and usage of all European ambassadors and instructions given them by the severall kings their masters from which they could in no ways deviate.<sup>21</sup>

Instead of giving in to the *nawab*'s requests for a formal visit, the ambassador made Firuz Jang a hefty offer of one lakh of rupees (the same amount paid to the Grand Wazir at the Mughal court) if he arranged for the emperor's *farman* for the New Company to be 'procured [...] in every particular as I had requested without any obligation for securinge the seas' and sent directly to the New Company factory in Surat within 40 days.<sup>22</sup>

Frustrated and threatened, Norris predictably descended into the use of what we now describe as proto-orientalist language. The Mughal authorities were again depicted as cowardly and shameless, willing to use trickery but not to battle superior English soldiers. 'Their greate and unwanted civilitys, their condercentions and stooping in such humble and suplicant manner as they doe', asserted the ambassador, 'att once bespeakes their baseness and their cowardize'.<sup>23</sup> He continued on this tirade, arguing that 'there is nothinge their pride would not crouch and bend to gett me into their power by any artifice and craft and yet dare not (as I both believe and hope) attempt it by open fforce'.<sup>24</sup> Taking a direct swipe at Firuz Jang, Norris scoffed that he, the 'greatest generall the mogull has with above 100000 men in his camp has paide the most submissive deference to my character I could expect or desire'.<sup>25</sup> There was one upside to all this in Norris's mind – that the Mughal government's actions

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<sup>21</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 102.

<sup>22</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 98.

<sup>23</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 101.

<sup>24</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 101.

<sup>25</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 102.

would reflect well on the English. As the ambassador put it, all their ‘crouching’ was to the ‘greate honour of the Kinge my master, and the reputation of the English nation’, and that ‘the complements and respects paid me will be open and publick to all the world’.<sup>26</sup>

As the days continued to tick by without any further updates from the *nawab*, Norris received a letter from Hakim Salah, the New Company’s *wakil* (spokesman or mediator) residing at Aurangzeb’s camp. It seemed to give further credence to Norris’s theory that Aurangzeb intended to force him into signing an agreement committing the New Company to providing the Mughal government with protection against future acts of piracy on the Indian Ocean. In the letter, Hakim Salah explained that, the day after Norris left the *lashkar*, he was imprisoned by the *kotwal*, the chief law enforcement officer at the court, and interrogated over why Norris had ‘gone away without the Emperors leave or knowledge’.<sup>27</sup> The procurator had since received information that the emperor had sent out an imperial order to the Mughal nobility in the area to halt the embassy’s march. The letter also mentioned that, on the very same day Hakim Salah was interrogated, Aurangzeb sent fresh orders to the English and Dutch in Surat to ‘make payment’ for the recent attacks against Mughal shipping by European pirates.<sup>28</sup> In Norris’s mind, this information proved that the Mughal government’s ‘cheife aime is to seize me alive in order to force me for compliance in what they have soe often demanded of givinge an obligation for securinge the seas and beinge answerable for all the Old Companys debts’.<sup>29</sup> If he refused to acquiesce, the ambassador claimed dramatically, the government’s ‘aime [was] to kill me’.<sup>30</sup>

Resolved ‘not to be taken alive’, Norris decided to make a run for it. On 22 November, the ambassador and his retinue dismantled their tents and loaded them on to carts once more, and began their march away from Brahmapuri. As they exited the town, one of

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<sup>26</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 101.

<sup>27</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 101.

<sup>28</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 102.

<sup>29</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 106.

<sup>30</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 106.

Norris's Indian servants, whom the ambassador had sent as a spy into the *nawab*'s camp the previous night, came to deliver Norris some crucial intelligence. According to the servant, Firuz Jang had learnt of Norris's decision to leave and had hatched a plan to stop him by force. The strategy, the spy insisted, was for the *nawab*'s guards to seize one of the embassy's carts as they made their way out of the town, which, Firuz Jang hoped, would provoke Norris into firing his guns at the guards. Once Norris had made the first move, the guards could then justifiably use force to capture the ambassador and bring him back to Brahmapuri.<sup>31</sup> Though alarmed by this update, the ambassador and his entourage proceeded with caution, 'marching rank and file', all 'well armed' and on high alert.<sup>32</sup>

### The capture

Moments after Norris received this inside intelligence, the carts carrying the embassy's food and drink were seized by the *nawab*'s guards. This action so terrified Norris's Indian servants that they 'one and all relinquished their carts and refused to drive one step farther', despite Norris offering them two months' wages in advance if they agreed to carry on.<sup>33</sup> As the embassy stood still, arguing over the next course of action, Norris observed a large body of armed Mughal soldiers on horseback and elephants, a force estimated in the tens of thousands, moving towards them 'in a hostile manner'.<sup>34</sup> As the army drew closer, the ambassador also noticed 24 cannons being planted across the road forward, aimed directly at the embassy and its tiny retinue of 70 soldiers. The English moved cautiously towards the blockade, which prompted the local army, with its weapons drawn, to close in and quickly surround them. Cut off by the army from the embassy's larger weapons, Norris alighted his

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<sup>31</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 115.

<sup>32</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 116.

<sup>33</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 116.

<sup>34</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 116.

palanquin and stood with the rest of the English, watching in panic as several Mughal officers on elephants advanced toward them.

Rustamji translated for the English as the lead officer of the local army announced that he had been sent from Firuz Jang, who had received direct orders from Aurangzeb to prevent Norris from leaving the town. The officer, who was also Firuz Jang's brother, promised Norris that he and his army meant no harm, but that he had come to peacefully escort the embassy back to Brahmapuri, where, if the ambassador would only wait a few more days until the *nawab* received further instructions from the emperor, he would be free to go. The officer also advised Norris that the embassy's tents and other provisions had been collected and returned to Brahmapuri, where their camp had been set up for the ambassador's convenience. As a gesture of good will, the officer even offered Norris his elephant on which to ride back to the town. Hopelessly outnumbered, Norris 'thought it most advisable to make a virtue out of necessity' and allowed his embassy to be escorted back towards Brahmapuri. The ambassador refused the officer's offer of the elephant ride, however, guessing that his real 'intentions [were] to have inveigled me and carryd me off' on the animal to his imprisonment.<sup>35</sup>

When the embassy returned to Brahmapuri, however, they found that their camp had been moved to the other side of the river, much closer to the *nawab*'s own residence. At this time, a message from Firuz Jang was delivered to the ambassador, informing him that his servants had 'pitched [Norris's camp] upon a more convenient place for me, and much pleasanter', with a house for the ambassador surrounded by 'pleasant gardens' and water tanks for his retinue.<sup>36</sup> This news was enough to send Norris into a spin. The ambassador saw the new set-up as 'intended more for a prison' and, still surrounded by the *nawab*'s army, once more ordered his men to arms and 'drew up in a body' in order to show their 'resolution

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<sup>35</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 118.

<sup>36</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 119.

not to go to that place but insist to stay where we were' before.<sup>37</sup> At the sight of Norris and his retinue's loaded guns, thousands of local onlookers who had gathered to view the spectacle scattered, and word of the ambassador's protest was sent to the *nawab*. Firuz Jang consequently relented, ordering his servants to re-establish Norris's camp wherever Norris directed, and assured the ambassador that he only set up the embassy's camp at the other location as it was 'more pleasant and convenient'.<sup>38</sup> As the rattled members of the embassy that evening sat in their tents under the watchful eye of the *nawab*'s guards and surrounded by 20 cannons, Firuz Jang sent another message, suggesting that, now Norris 'was returned, he hoped he should have the honour of a visit' from the ambassador.<sup>39</sup> Tired, distressed and defeated, Norris replied that he would answer the *nawab*'s request at another time. 'Without mincing the matter', the ambassador lamented in his diary later that night, 'I looked upon myself no better than a prisoner'.<sup>40</sup>

The next day, after much deliberation with his English entourage and yet another request from the *nawab* for a formal visit, Norris ordered his treasurer, Adiel Mills to personally deliver a letter to Firuz Jang, closed with the ambassador's official seal. The letter read:

To the Nabob Gazde Chawn:

I was sent Ambassador from the King of England to the Emperor of Indostan to confirm the ancient League of Amity and friendship betwixt both Kingdoms, where I expected to be received suitable to my character and quality according to the Laws of God and all Nations. I perceive it is the Emperors pleasure I should be a prisoner. I desire to know for what reason that I may acquaint the King of England.<sup>41</sup>

Mills took the letter to the *nawab*'s residence, where Firuz Jang's brother (the same army general who had led the blockade against the embassy the previous day), read it aloud to the

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<sup>37</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 119.

<sup>38</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 119.

<sup>39</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 120.

<sup>40</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 121.

<sup>41</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 122.



*nawab*. Firuz Jang retorted that Norris ‘was no prisoner or anything like it’, and that the armed soldiers surrounding the ambassador’s camp were simply to ‘keepe pilferinge rouges off’.<sup>42</sup> Mills did not back down, however, arguing that the embassy’s current situation could not be construed as anything other than detention. ‘If [Norris] was not a prisoner’, Mills asked the *nawab*, ‘how came [he] to be stopt? How came [his] baggage to be rifled, [his] Indian servants bound [and] detained [...] and [he] attempted by an army of 50,000 men’?<sup>43</sup> The *nawab* then relented somewhat. Though still insisting Norris was no prisoner, he admitted to Mills what the ambassador had long suspected – that Aurangzeb had given him direct orders to persuade Norris to stay in Brahmapuri, but that if the ambassador could not be persuaded ‘by entreaty’, then he was to be kept there by force.<sup>44</sup> Firuz Jang then promised Mills that in two or three days, Norris would be dismissed from Brahmapuri ‘with honour’ and that the emperor’s *farman* would be sent to Surat after him.<sup>45</sup>

The message appeared to be, then, that Aurangzeb, upset by Norris’s abrupt departure from his court and furious at his own ministers for their role in convincing the ambassador that the emperor wanted him banished from the lashkar, wanted to make amends by presenting the ambassador with gifts, a letter to William III and the desired *farman* for the New Company before he left home for England. Norris was convinced, however, that the real reason behind his capture was that the Mughal government intended to force him into signing an agreement committing the New Company to providing ongoing protection to Mughal shipping in the form of ship convoys, and hold him responsible for the Old Company’s crimes and debts. Over the next few weeks, the ambassador would receive conflicting reports over the matter. Some seemed to support Norris’s theory. On 24 November, for example, Mills visited the *nawab*’s brother, Hamid Khan, who was put in charge of Norris’s affairs

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<sup>42</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 124.

<sup>43</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 124.

<sup>44</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 124.

<sup>45</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 124.

until Firuz Jang returned from a four-day hunting trip. During the visit, Hamid Khan became very inquisitive about the piracy scandal developing in Surat and the ‘nature of the obligation for securing the seas’ that Norris had been pressured into giving by Aurangzeb’s ministers, asking why the ambassador had not agreed to sign the obligation when he was at the lashkar.<sup>46</sup>

The meeting with Hamed was closely followed by Norris receiving more correspondence from Hakim Sala, the New Company’s procurator at the Mughal court. The letter notified the ambassador that, though Aurangzeb was ‘very much [Norris’s] friend’ and wished to end the embassy on happy terms by granting the *farman*, Hakim Sala firmly believed that the documents ‘would never be granted’ without the ambassador’s commitment to protect Mughal shipping against future piracy.<sup>47</sup> This was the case now more than ever, Hakim Sala insisted, because Aurangzeb’s ministers had recently notified the ruler that, despite the Old Company, the French and the Dutch previously agreeing to provide convoys for Mughal shipping, they were all now attempting to renege on the deal, leaving the emperor’s ships open to further acts of piracy.

A similar report from yet another source reached Norris a few days later, after the ambassador’s interpreter, Rustamji, discussed the question of the *farman* with Brahmapuri’s *qazi*. The *qazi* told Rustamji that he had recently spoken to his counterpart at the Mughal court, who informed him that Aurangzeb had ordered a Persian translation of William III’s letter and, after reading it, concluded that Norris ‘had not done what the King of England wrote in relation to securing the seas from pyrates’.<sup>48</sup> The king’s letter, as illustrated in Chapter Three, had indeed promised the emperor a fleet of royal ships to help stamp out piracy on the Indian ocean. As we know, however, Norris believed that this one-off offer of a

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<sup>46</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 125.

<sup>47</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 129.

<sup>48</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 137.

royal fleet was very different to an open-ended agreement to protect the emperor's ships against piracy and provide compensation for the losses incurred at the hands of European pirates. Aurangzeb apparently did not discern a difference. Instead, he insisted that if Norris continued to refuse assistance, then the New Company must sign a document promising that they would 'give an obligation for securing the seas tho' [the ambassador] would not'.<sup>49</sup>

The most alarming report for Norris reached the ambassador's camp via letter on 23 November. The letter was sent by Captain Simmonds, who notified Norris that an English man residing at the emperor's *lashkar* had recently informed him of rumours relating to the ambassador and his retinue that were currently rife at the court. 'It has been soe reported in this Bazar' the expatriate had told Simmonds, that Aurangzeb wished the embassy to be stopped and 'sent to Kilnah', where the emperor and his court were currently residing. This further convinced the ambassador that he was being kept at Brahmapuri while the Mughal authorities waited for the right 'oportunity of gettinge me in their hands by some meanes or other in order to send me a prisoner to the Mogull'.<sup>50</sup> The increasingly paranoid ambassador prayed that instructions from the Court of Directors in London would soon reach him on 'what methods will be most proper to pursue to extricate our selves out of these difficult circumstances'.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, Norris received intelligence that indicated that Aurangzeb wanted to restore diplomatic relations with the English and fully intended to grant Norris the desired *farman* if he would sign the *muchalka*. On 2 December, two of Firuz Jang's scribes visited Norris, carrying letters supposedly written by people in the *nawab*'s networks at the Mughal court. The letters, which were written in Persian, were interpreted to Rustamji, who rendered

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<sup>49</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 142.

<sup>50</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 172.

<sup>51</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 172.

them into Portuguese to Mills, who in turn conveyed them to Norris in English. The purport of the letters, as Norris understood it, was that

the Emperor had granted every article of the [*farman*] as I requested, delivered them to phazall chawn [Faizal Khan] to be made out, ordered phazall chawn to write a letter to the King of England to acquaint him that he had granted all I had requested and ordered likewise a [...] Hunjar [Khanjar] for the King of England to be taken out and sent to me. That the letter and presents were to be dispatcht forthwith and the phirmaunds to be sent after me to suratt.<sup>52</sup>

Two days after Norris viewed these letters, Firuz Jang sent a message to Norris directly, congratulating the ambassador on the *farman* being granted by the emperor, and informing him that the document, along with Aurangzeb's presents and letter to the king, were now on their way to Brahmapuri. In addition to this, Norris received reports from a young eunuch and a female jeweller who had access to the *nawab*'s wives, both of whom confirmed that the *gurbardar*, a mace-bearer, charged with carrying orders, was now on his way down to Brahmapuri with the presents and letter for the king of England.<sup>53</sup> As the conflicting reports over the *farman* and the emperor's gifts piled up, however, Norris grew increasingly frustrated. 'We have had very different reports about the phirmaunds as well as the presents for the King of England', the ambassador complained, none of which he could 'give any greate creditt to'.<sup>54</sup>

Powerless to discover the truth of the matter and prohibited from leaving his camp, the ambassador responded by upping his offer to the *nawab* to 120,000 rupees if the *farman* was granted without any agreement to secure Aurangzeb's shipping, and was delivered to Surat in 40 days. Firuz Jang requested that the ambassador sign a contract confirming the offer, which was written out by the *nawab*'s two scribes. When the scribes delivered the contract to Norris for review, however, the ambassador discovered that 'the most materiall

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<sup>52</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 141.

<sup>53</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 168; Definition for *gurbardar* in Guido Van Meersbergen, "'Intirely the Kings Vassalls": East India Company Gifting Practices and Anglo-Mughal Political Exchange (c. 1670–1720)', *Diplomatica* 2, no. 2 (2020): 287.

<sup>54</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fols. 172, 179.

part of the obligation [was] left out'.<sup>55</sup> That is, the contract included no mention of Norris's demand that, in order for the *nawab* to receive his payment, the *farman* should be delivered without any obligation for the English to provide security to Mughal shipping against piracy. This, Norris asserted, was 'most certainly wilfully omitted' by the *nawab* in an attempt to trick him into handing over the money, regardless of whether the *farman* turned up without strings attached. Norris rejected the contract and requested another draft to be written immediately. Several drafts were subsequently drawn up, and on each occasion they omitted any mention of ship convoys, further indicating to Norris that the emperor would not send the *farman* without the ambassador's commitment to help combat piracy – and that the *nawab* and his scribes were well aware of it.

#### Tensions rise in Surat

Meanwhile, the clash over European maritime violence in Surat was worsening. As Norris continued his detainment in Brahmapuri, word reached him from various sources that the port city was in a state of chaos due to the latest capture of Abdul Ghafur's ships on the Indian Ocean. Aurangzeb had sent repeated orders for the assets of the Old Company and the Dutch, 'wherever found', to be seized and paid to Ghafur and other Surat merchants as compensation for their losses.<sup>56</sup> According to one report received by Norris on 5 January, 4.5 lakh of rupees worth of spices was confiscated from the Dutch warehouse alone and paid directly to Ghafur.<sup>57</sup> Aurangzeb also ordered the Old Company factors to be placed under house arrest until an arbitrator had been sent down from the court to Surat to resolve the matter once and for all. Trade in the port city had come to a complete halt, and the Old Company factors languished in their prison while Mughal guards surrounded it, preventing 'the carrying in

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<sup>55</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 154.

<sup>56</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 145.

<sup>57</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 186.

[of] either provision or water'.<sup>58</sup> It was also reported that Dianat Khan, the governor of Surat, was hanging on to his position by a thread, so angry was the emperor over the governor's handling of the matter.

The Old Company and the Dutch, for their parts, put up a fight against Aurangzeb's orders. They argued that the agreement they had previously signed to pay compensation for losses sustained by the government and major merchants in India was crippling their trade and called for their release from the contract. The Dutch even had eight ships recently sail into the Surat port that, to Norris, 'looked as if they designed force'.<sup>59</sup> The situation in Surat was so dire that Norris's interpreter Rustamji arranged for his family to be sent out of the town to their safety, as 'nobody belonging to Europeans nor any of the Europeans themselves caring to stir abroad in the towne'.<sup>60</sup> On receiving this intelligence, Norris felt vindicated for his decision not to sign an agreement committing the New Company to protecting Mughal shipping against piracy. However, he sent several letters to the New Company factors in Surat, urging them to protect themselves and their merchandise, 'for that I suspected there were orders [...] to seize both'.<sup>61</sup>

None of these reports on the grave circumstances at Surat, however, had come from the New Company factors residing there. This fact astounded Norris, who wrote that 'these matters [were] very material to be known' and yet 'the President and Council are silent in [them]', instead wasting their 'time and paper in frivolous matters'.<sup>62</sup> The 'frivolous matters' Norris was perhaps referring to were the New Company's continued criticisms of the decisions the ambassador had made during his embassy, particularly his decision to leave the

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<sup>58</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 167.

<sup>59</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 162.

<sup>60</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 163.

<sup>61</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 163.

<sup>62</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 167.

court without the *farman*. As Norris would discover when he eventually returned to Surat, the New Company merchants saw Norris's actions as unforgivable.

### Aurangzeb's parting gifts

On 3 January, two months after Norris first arrived there, the ambassador received intelligence that the *gurzbardar* had arrived at Brahmapuri, bringing with him Aurangzeb's letter to the king of England. According to the ambassador's interpreter, Firuz Jang received the letter and gifts from the *gurzbardar* in a formal ceremony inside 'a tent [the *nawab*] had ordered to be pitcht on purpose'.<sup>63</sup> As was customary, upon delivery, Firuz Jang made four salaams and placed the letter to his forehead. He then dressed in a *sarapa* sent to him by the emperor, and exited the tent, returning home in his palanquin, his drummers playing all the way. Rustamji told Norris that it had taken the *gurzbardar* 16 days to reach Brahmapuri, as the convoy the officer had come under was raided by Marathas on route. Luckily for Norris, the letter had survived the raid, but several men and elephants were killed during the commotion. Other details of Aurangzeb's letter also trickled through to the ambassador. According to one of the *nawab*'s servants, who came to visit Norris at his camp, the document had a gold background with green lettering, at the top of which was some religious text, which, in Norris's understanding, amounted to 'a sort of a blessinge', and was 'soe sacred [that] any Gentoo [Hindu] that reades [it] is forced to turn moore'.<sup>64</sup> Norris proudly stated that the blessing was intended as a 'high complement from the Emperor to the Kinge of England', and began to look forward, with raised hopes, to receiving it.<sup>65</sup>

But along with the small piece of good news for Norris came more difficulties. The *farman* that Firuz Jang had promised would be delivered alongside the letter and gifts from Aurangzeb had failed to materialise. According to Rustamji's networks at the court, this was

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<sup>63</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 184.

<sup>64</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 190.

<sup>65</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 190.

because the emperor had, in the end, denied the *farman* as a result of Norris's continued refusals to help protect his shipping against piracy, and due to the fact that he was still 'very angry with the Old [Company] English' for their crimes against Mughal shipping and the vast debts they owed to Surat's merchants as a consequence.<sup>66</sup> This news was corroborated by another letter from Hakim Salah, who informed the ambassador that, while Aurangzeb was willing to grant the *farman* for the New Company, he simply would not do it without Norris's commitment to 'securing the seas'.<sup>67</sup>

The *nawab*, unsurprisingly, refuted these claims. With Norris's offer of 120,000 rupees for delivery of the *farman* on the line, Firuz Jang tried to reassure the ambassador that the *farman* had in fact been granted and would be sent to Surat imminently. 'The letters and presents and phirmaunds [have] all [been] sent but haven't arrived yet', the *nawab* promised.<sup>68</sup> As soon as they turned up, the *nawab* assured Norris, the ambassador 'should be dismissed immediately'.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps, at this point, understanding that the *farman* might never show up as promised, but still intent on receiving the additional sum from Norris, the *nawab* took this occasion to remind the ambassador of his great friendship, and even claimed to have saved the ambassador's life. As Norris recorded it, Firuz Jang professed to be

very much my freind, and had done all that lay in his power, and that the Mogull was soe incensd att my leavunge the Leschar, and my designd departure from hence that he once thought not to have spared my life; but by meanes of his writinge, the Emperor was pacifyd.<sup>70</sup>

The ambassador was unconvinced, however, looking upon the *nawab*'s claims as 'as a continued amuzement', and yet another attempt to 'squeeze' as much money from him as possible.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 190.

<sup>67</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 191.

<sup>68</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 191.

<sup>69</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 191.

<sup>70</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 195.

<sup>71</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 195.



Certain his embassy was now at an end, Norris wished desperately to return to England, and requested to be released by the *nawab* immediately. In a formal letter delivered by Mills, Norris thanked the Firuz Jang for his service, but noted his great concern that, since he had stayed in Brahmapuri for more than two months, the *nawab* ‘must be sensible that the season of the yeare was soe farr spent that I could not without greate difficulty gaine my passage to England this monsoon’.<sup>72</sup> As ‘an Ambassador from the Kinge of England pursuant to the custome and Laws of all Nations’, Norris requested that the documents for his safe travel to Surat be drawn up right away.<sup>73</sup> The *nawab*, however, was reluctant to let the ambassador go. He replied to Norris’s letter ‘very coldly’, informing him that the *farman* would arrive at Brahmapuri in a few days and that he simply could not leave without a proper dismissal taking place, in which Norris must pay a formal visit to him. Just to make sure Norris did not attempt to make another escape, over the next few evenings, the *nawab* ordered all his weapons to be put on display in sight of the ambassador’s camp.

The *nawab*’s latest refusal to release him was enough to tip Norris over the edge, and the two dignitaries proceeded to lock horns. In another angry outburst against the Mughal authorities and India in general, Norris complained that ‘as matters stood at present I was in no liklyhood of gettinge away from this detested place, and [the] company of the vilest basest wretches in the whole creation’.<sup>74</sup> Portraying the *nawab* as selfish and greedy, Norris argued that Firuz Jang’s refusal to let him return to Surat was solely because the *nawab* ‘had not made his marketts with me or others as he expected or intended, soe that I was to be kept untill his insatiable avarice was satsydy one way or another’.<sup>75</sup> After more deliberation with his English entourage, the ambassador responded to the *nawab* the best way he knew how – by offering him and his staff yet more money for his release from Brahmapuri. The

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<sup>72</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 199.

<sup>73</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 199.

<sup>74</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 199.

<sup>75</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 199.

ambassador once again refused Firuz Jang's request to visit him and receive a formal dismissal but promised the payment for the *nawab*'s assistance in releasing him would be 'punctuall'.<sup>76</sup> Firuz Jang, in turn, denied Norris again, asking the ambassador 'did [he] not know what trouble he had been att' to help him over the past two months, and if he did understand the *nawab*'s great efforts, why 'would [the ambassador] not come to see him?'.<sup>77</sup>

One month after Aurangzeb's letter arrived at Brahmapuri, and still at an impasse with the *nawab*, Norris finally gave in. On 2 February, after a late night of 'serious consideration' about the 'most proper method to take in this greate exigency of our affaires', Norris and his entourage resolved that the only way out was for the ambassador to pay a formal visit to the *nawab* to receive the emperor's letter and gifts and a proper dismissal. As the ambassador put it, it was 'impracticable to force our way 400 miles thro' a country where everybody was our enemy' and so making a break for it was simply not a viable option.<sup>78</sup> Still fearful that the Mughal authorities would use his visit to Firuz Jang as an opportunity to seize him and send him to the emperor's lashkar, Norris prepared to sacrifice himself for his retinue by entering the *nawab*'s residence unarmed and attended by just three of his English entourage. The ambassador's brother Edward Norris and the rest of the English retinue were ordered to stay behind 'to take care of everythinge' if the *nawab* 'should be soe base and perfidiously treacherous, to seize and detein me'.<sup>79</sup> It was a momentous decision, one that had taken many weeks to make and in which Norris (as he saw it) was forced to compromise his position and submit to the authority of the *nawab*.

Firuz Jang, however, took Norris's change of mind as an opportunity to demand that Norris increase his present to be given during the visit from 2,000 gold mohurs to 6,000, and also asked Norris how much he would be willing to pay to receive Aurangzeb's presents

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<sup>76</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 205.

<sup>77</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 208.

<sup>78</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 218.

<sup>79</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 219.

intended for the ambassador and the king of England. Norris, in disbelief that the Mughal officer could ask for more still when he had compromised so much, consequently unleashed, retorting that he would not ‘give him a gold mohur more then I promised him’.<sup>80</sup> As for the emperor’s gifts intended for him and the king of England, the ambassador snapped

that I did not come hither to purchase a present either from the Emperor or him for the Kinge my master. If the Emperor was pleased to send him a present I should take it as an honour and respect shewd him [...] but would not buy the favour.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps realising the ambassador had finally reached his limit, the *nawab* agreed to keep the deal as it was and arranged for the ambassador’s dismissal to be held at the *darbar* the following day.

‘Never soe honourable a dismission given’

On 4 February 1702, Norris paid a formal visit to Firuz Jang to accept Aurangzeb’s letter and gifts to William III. Resolved to proceed without his full entourage ‘in case I should be seized’ by the *nawab*’s guards during the visit, the ambassador left his camp at 9am attended by just three of his English entourage, two pages, four footmen, two trumpeters and two unarmed guards on horseback.<sup>82</sup> The tiny English party was escorted by two of Firuz Jang’s senior staff to a ‘very handsome tent’, where the emperor’s letter to William III was placed, covered by an ornate cloth, on a richly embroidered chair. Lying next to the letter was a jewel-encrusted *khanjar* (dagger) enclosed in a finely decorated box, clinched at the top with Ruhallah Khan’s seal – a present from Aurangzeb to the king of England. When the cloth covering Aurangzeb’s letter was pulled away, Norris made four deep bows and walked closer to the chair, where the *gurbardar*, as was customary, placed the letter upon Norris’s hat (the hat was held, hovering, over Norris’s head by the *nawab*’s servant for the remainder of the

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<sup>80</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 221.

<sup>81</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 221.

<sup>82</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 225. Hale, Harlowin, and Mills were the three English chosen to accompany Norris.

ceremony).<sup>83</sup> The *gurzbardar* then presented the *khanjar* to Norris, who, to end the ceremony, bowed four more times and passed the gift to his page to carry.

It is unclear whether Norris ever read an English translation of Aurangzeb's letter, as no reference to its contents is made in the ambassador's diaries. More than three hundred years later, Harihar Das, author of *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib*, had the document translated from Arabic into English by David Samuel Margoliouth, a British priest and scholar who translated a range of texts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and included it as an appendix in his original manuscript.<sup>84</sup> As previously indicated to Norris by the *nawab*'s servant weeks earlier, the first part of the long awaited letter to William III comprised of a lengthy religious prelude, a standard feature of Aurangzeb's diplomatic correspondence, which was written in the long-established insha tradition.<sup>85</sup> With phrases such as 'Mohamed is the Apostle of God, and those that are with him are vehement against the Unbelievers' and 'whosoever seeks any other religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him, and he in the last world shall be one of the losers', Aurangzeb also emphasised his devotion to the Islamic faith.<sup>86</sup> The emperor also took the opportunity in the letter to inform the king that, at the time of Norris's visit to the Mughal court, his government was in the throws of a war against the 'unbelievers', and that God was helping him to 'suppress the rebellious pagans and their tribes, to destroy what they build, and to undo what they suppose themselves to be doing well'.<sup>87</sup> Aurangzeb even made note that Norris had reached his

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<sup>83</sup> The custom was to place the letter on the recipient's head (or for the recipient to place the letter on their own forehead). The fact that Norris wore a hat made the ceremony slightly unconventional.

<sup>84</sup> Aurangzeb, 'Letter to King William III', 1702, translated by David Samuel Margoliouth, quoted in Harihar Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699–1702)*. Original manuscript, 14 May 1945, typescript, Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, pp. 731–736.

<sup>85</sup> Aurangzeb, 'Letter to King William III'; Little has been written (in English) on the insha tradition in Mughal India. See, for example, Adrian Gully, 'Epistles for Grammarians: Illustrations from the insha' Literature', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 2 (1996): 147–166.

<sup>86</sup> Aurangzeb, 'Letter to King William III'.

<sup>87</sup> Aurangzeb, 'Letter to King William III'.

lashkar at Panhala Fort when he was ‘on active service, securing the ridges of the hills and the hollows of the valleys against those who disbelieve’.<sup>88</sup>

In the few sentences of the letter devoted specifically to Norris, Aurangzeb informed the king that the Mughal administration had ‘showed to him [Norris] the respect due to a guest and envoy, and gave him the welcome of a kindly host’.<sup>89</sup> Aurangzeb ended with the advice that ‘we accepted his [the ambassador’s] request with favour and gave him permission to return [to England]’.<sup>90</sup> No mention was made, however, of the increasingly dire circumstances surrounding episodes of European maritime violence against Mughal shipping or the emperor’s attempts to safeguard against it by forcing Norris to sign a *muchalka*. Indeed, without the *farman*, and presently detained by force by the Mughals at Brahmapuri, Norris would have disputed Aurangzeb’s assertions wholeheartedly. For now, however, and unaware of Aurangzeb’s claims to his king, the ambassador was preoccupied with his imminent visit to the *nawab*.

After receiving Aurangzeb’s letter and present to William III, Norris was conducted into the entrance hall of the *nawab*’s *diwan-i-am* (hall of public audience) – a ‘very pretty apartment’, painted white and with a large fountain and a metre-wide canal running through the middle of the room. Here, the ambassador met the *nawab*’s brother, Hamid Khan. The pair exchanged gifts and compliments as they each sat on a chair set up on opposite sides of the canal. Hamid Khan afterwards announced that the *nawab* was ready to receive Norris and dismissed the ambassador with betel. Norris was subsequently led to a gateway that opened into the *diwani-khan*, a much larger, open building where hundreds of people had gathered to view the rare spectacle of a foreign ambassador’s visit. Norris was chaperoned through the ‘vast crowds’ by the *nawab*’s guards on ‘richly adorned’ elephants and horses.<sup>91</sup> As he

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<sup>88</sup> Aurangzeb, ‘Letter to King William III’.

<sup>89</sup> Aurangzeb, ‘Letter to King William III’.

<sup>90</sup> Aurangzeb, ‘Letter to King William III’.

<sup>91</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 226.

approached the *nawab*, raised on an sumptuously decorated throne at the end of the building, Norris noticed a large area below him crowded with armed guards, who the ambassador supposed were ‘brought on purpose to shew me [the *nawab*’s] strength and what forces he had ready’.<sup>92</sup> The ambassador could not help but make the snide comment that ‘a more confused mob cannot be conceived than they were, no rank or order’.<sup>93</sup>

Norris was formally introduced into the *nawab*’s presence, at which the ambassador ‘bowed to the Nabob after my fashion and he salaamed to me after his’.<sup>94</sup> The pair were seated three metres apart in what Norris proudly described ‘an equall line’, with ‘nobody sittinge equall but myselfe’.<sup>95</sup> Twelve soldiers with swords in velvet covers flanked the *nawab*, another attempt by Firuz Jang, Norris interpreted contemptuously, at ‘shewing all his greatnesse’.<sup>96</sup> After sitting down, with Harlowin, Mills and Hale seated beside the Norris, the *nawab* welcomed the ambassador and professed he was ‘was very glad of the oportunity of givinge me an honourable dismission as the Emperor had directed and he doubted not but [that it] would be to my entire satisfaction’.<sup>97</sup> He went on to inform the ambassador that, as for the long-promised *farman* from the emperor, it had not yet reached Brahampuri, despite his ‘utmost endeavours to procure [it] for the [New] Company’.<sup>98</sup> He promised, however, that it would be delivered to Surat as agreed ‘in a little time’.<sup>99</sup> Though entirely sceptical of Firuz Jang’s promises, Norris returned the *nawab*’s praise, thanking him for all his assistance and declaring that, such was the *nawab*’s favour with Aurangzeb that ‘either [the *farman*] would be procured by him or could be by nobody else, and [that he] should be very glad to receive them from him’.<sup>100</sup> Norris ended the discussion with a diplomatic embellishment, informing

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<sup>92</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 227.

<sup>93</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 227.

<sup>94</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 227.

<sup>95</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 227.

<sup>96</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 227.

<sup>97</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 227.

<sup>98</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 228.

<sup>99</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 228.

<sup>100</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 228.

the *nawab* that ‘nothings since I came to India was greater satisfaction than this oportunity of seeinge him’.<sup>101</sup>

After this ceremonial exchange, Firuz Jang directed some entertainment to begin. Ordering all his elephants, ‘very large indeed and fine, all clad in fine attlasses and greate plates of silver att their heade and tayle’, into a single line, each elephant then walked past Norris and raised its trunk as a ‘salaam’, afterwards ‘bend[ing] their feet to pay their complements’ to the ambassador.<sup>102</sup> Firuz Jang looked on proudly at the display, asking Norris if ‘ever wee saw any elephants in England’, to which Norris politely replied that he had only ever seen the kind brought from Africa.<sup>103</sup> Norris then briefly withdrew into a small tent to change into the *sarapa* (honourary robe) sent down for the occasion from the Mughal court, placing the turban over his head and shawl over his shoulders. When he returned to his seat, the ambassador was presented with his very own elephant from the emperor. The animal was led to Norris on a silver hook handed to the ambassador over his shoulder. As previously instructed by the *nawab*’s servants, Norris then offered the *nawab* just one gold mohur in return for the gifts. This last pleasantry deeply annoyed Norris, who complained that Firuz Jang’s ‘takinge one gold mohur only in publick, of which he will take care the Emperor shall be advised of’, was a farce in light of ‘all the rest he has squeezed out of us in private’.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, the two dignitaries parted on cordial terms, and the small English party at last exited the *diwani-khan* with the letter and *khanjar* from the emperor in Norris’s palanquin, and the union flag flying high over his brand new elephant.

Norris’s fears that he would be captured and returned to the Mughal court to face responsibility for the Old Company’s crimes, then, had come to nothing, and the relief the ambassador and his retinue felt on the ambassador’s return to his camp was palpable. The

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<sup>101</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 228.

<sup>102</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 228.

<sup>103</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 228.

<sup>104</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 229.

English celebrated all afternoon and into the evening, with drinking, guns firing, trumpets blaring and drums beating. The ambassador even allowed his guards to play their own music in their tents ‘to give all outward appearance of satisfaction’.<sup>105</sup> Refusing to acknowledge that the *farman* from the emperor had failed to materialise, and in a clear attempt to convey at least some achievement to his English audience, Norris made the entirely unsubstantiated claim that ‘there was never soe honourable a dismissal given in publick to any person whatsoever before in the Emperor’s dominions, which is a Nationall Respect’.<sup>106</sup> That evening, the *nawab* sent over his own gifts intended for the king of England, including three turbans, three vests and three sashes, asking Norris to deliver them ‘with his respects’.<sup>107</sup> Though Norris graciously accepted them lest he should give ‘umbrage or disgust to the man with whom I had att last entrusted the procurement of the phirmaunds’, the ambassador judged the gifts ‘very poore mean and ordinary’ and pledged ‘never [to] trouble the Kinge with them’.<sup>108</sup>

On 9 February, almost three months since he first arrived in the town, Norris finally departed Brahmapuri. Their release, however, did not pass without one last attempt by the *nawab* to extract all he could from the English. As Norris and his embassy began their march to Surat, a messenger sent from Firuz Jang requested that Norris hand over the stately embroidered English saddle from the ambassador’s very own horse.

Resting on a Sunday after a few days’ march from Brahmapuri, Norris took the opportunity to write some letters to England. ‘In the fatigue and affliction I was under’ from the events at Brahmapuri, however, the ambassador ‘could not thinke if [he was] writinge either to the secretary of state or [the New Company’s] Court of Directours’.<sup>109</sup> It was an off-

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<sup>105</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 230.

<sup>106</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 228.

<sup>107</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 235.

<sup>108</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 235.

<sup>109</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. III, fol. 236.



the-cuff remark that was neatly emblematic of the hybrid embassy problem and the confusion – sometimes even in the ambassador's own mind – of who he represented on his embassy to Mughal India. This chapter has shown the English ambassador suffering a further humiliation at the hands of the Mughals – a two-month long detainment over which he simply had no control, and in which he was finally forced to submit to the *nawab*'s demands in order to escape the town. To add insult to injury, the New Company factors – so infuriated by Norris's decision to leave the court without the *farman* – had left the ambassador hanging out to dry, barely responding to his repeated pleas for help. The next chapter reveals the depths of the New Company's resentment towards the ambassador over the failed embassy. At the same time, this chapter has shown just how important the issue of maritime violence was to the Mughal government – Aurangzeb's order to halt the embassy in order to push Norris into signing a *muchalka* was striking, and the ambassador's continued refusal to do so meant that the *farman* was out of the question. Such failures led Norris deeper into harsh criticism designed to justify his failures to his audience in England.

## Chapter Eight

### ‘Unheard of insolent behaviour’: A chilly reception at Surat

Finally free from *nawab* Firuz Jang’s grip, as the embassy marched towards Surat, Norris turned his attention to the New Company factors and his final departure from India.

Incredulous that President Nicholas Waite and the Surat council neglected to assist him through the embassy’s ordeal in Brahmapuri, and furious that they had ignored most of his letters since he left the Mughal court several months previously, Norris sent them a curt message demanding to know why they had shown ‘no regard in answering’ his correspondence.<sup>1</sup> In the same breath, the ambassador notified the factors of his impending return to Surat and ordered them to place ‘everythinge in readynesse for [the embassy’s] speedy embarkinge’ from the port city, home to England.<sup>2</sup> As the previous chapter has illustrated, the New Company factors at Surat had made clear their dissatisfaction with Norris’s actions at the Mughal court, terming his decision to leave the *lashkar* without the *farman* a ‘deciding from [his] instructions’.<sup>3</sup> Though aware of their frustrations, Norris seriously underestimated the extent of the New Company factors’ hostility towards him and the financial burden his failed embassy had placed on the company – problems that would place the ambassador’s return to England in jeopardy.

This chapter examines the final phase of Norris’s embassy to Mughal India – from the frosty reception he received from the New Company factors at Surat, to his death at sea, seven months later, as the ambassador made the journey home to England. This phase once again highlights the problematic nature of the hybrid embassy and, in particular, the conflict caused by the competing commercial interests of the company, on the one hand, and the

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<sup>1</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume III: September 1701–March 1702, unpublished, National Archives, Kew, CO 77/50, fol. 244.

<sup>2</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 239.

<sup>3</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 135.

diplomatic interests of the Crown, on the other. During this period, tensions between Norris and the New Company factors reached crisis point. As shown in the previous chapter, Waite and rest of the Surat council vigorously opposed Norris's actions at the Mughal court, especially his decision to leave the *lashkar* without the *farman*. As a result, the factors sought to punish Norris by publicly snubbing the embassy on its return to Surat and otherwise humiliating the ambassador. At the same time, this phase made the inherent disadvantages of the financial structure of this type of embassy abundantly clear. Drained by the embassy almost to the point of bankruptcy, the New Company simply could not afford to fulfil Norris's repeated demands for a furnished ship to return the embassy to England, and the issue was solved only when the ambassador promised to accept personal liability for the cost of the trip. Finally, the President of the New Company's personal reasons for preventing Norris from returning to England also played a role in the ambassador's delayed exit from India. As Norris discovered, Waite sought to prevent Norris's return to England for fear of the ambassador exposing his bigamous relationship to the authorities. Together, these issues put the safe return of the embassy at serious risk, and once again reveal the intrinsic dilemmas of the hybrid embassy.

### The cold shoulder

As the travelling embassy closed in on Surat, tensions between the ambassador and the New Company bubbled to the surface. On 7 March, Norris received a visit from a group of New Company factors who had travelled a short distance to welcome the embassy back to Surat. President of the New Company, Nicholas Waite, however, was not among them. According to the group, Waite sent his apologies to the ambassador, lending the excuse that he could not attend the greeting because he had been banned by the Surat governor from carrying drums or flags outside the factory and believed it inappropriate to appear before the ambassador without them. Norris was thoroughly unconvinced, viewing Waite's absence as an insult. He

dismissed the excuse immediately, instructing the group to inform Waite that he ‘should be glad to see him as soon as it stood with his convenience to come’.<sup>4</sup> In the meantime, Norris informed the New Company factors, he would prepare for this formal re-entrance to Surat in just a few days time and that he expected everything to be organised for his immediate departure from there, home to England.

But Waite and the New Company council at Surat refused to make Norris’s dispatch to London so easy. That evening, one of the New Company factors, John Lock, stayed behind at Norris’s camp to deliver the ambassador some sensitive information. Lock, whose loyalty would, over the following weeks, waver between the New Company president and the ambassador, informed Norris that the ‘matter of a ship for [the embassy] to embark on would perhaps be opposed by the President’ and his followers, who insisted that all ships belonging to the New Company should be utilised solely for trading voyages – not to return the failed embassy to London at yet more expense to the company.<sup>5</sup> According to Lock, Waite had, in addition, ordered his council to ignore Norris on his return to Surat. As Norris put it, ‘now I was come away [from the Mughal court] and the embassy was ceased [... Waite had ordered] that nobody ought to take notice of me’.<sup>6</sup> That same evening, the ambassador received a report from one of his entourage, Whitaker, that the new lodgings the president had arranged for the embassy upon its return to Surat was little more than a small patch of dirt – a ‘little spott of plowed ground without any shade or trees and not able to containe halfe of us’.<sup>7</sup> According to Whitaker, Waite maintained that there was nothing else available in Surat for the ambassador and his retinue – a claim dispelled when Whitaker immediately afterwards arranged the hire of a large and pleasant garden nearby. It appeared that Waite and

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<sup>4</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 250.

<sup>5</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 251.

<sup>6</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 251.

<sup>7</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 253.

the New Company council were intent on punishing Norris for his actions at the Mughal court and his failure to obtain the *farman*.

Norris was enraged by the New Company factors' behaviour, which he blamed primarily on the President. 'It would be difficult to relate and more hard to beleive of severall base actions and villanous proceedings of the Consull [Waite] in relation to me', the ambassador recorded.<sup>8</sup> As he understood it, Waite was doing everything in his power, 'contrivinge all methods that villany can invent', in order to prevent the embassy from returning home.<sup>9</sup> The rest of the council, in the ambassador's view, was 'led by the nose' by Waite and was forever 'subserviant to his humour and tooles', leaving Norris with no one in the New Company to turn to.<sup>10</sup> As for the area in Surat that Waite had arranged for the embassy's lodgings, Norris was convinced that the president had purposefully hired it in order to humiliate him, and considered Waite's claims to the contrary as 'false and base as all else he had saide or done'.<sup>11</sup> Overall, such actions by Waite and the New Company council at Surat, the ambassador believed, would bring 'shame and dishonour' to the king and the English nation.

But what was the reasoning behind the New Company's hostile behaviour? In Norris's mind, it had less to do with the outcome of the embassy than it did with a personal scandal. A few weeks earlier, Norris had heard a piece of salacious gossip about Waite from Richard Pereira, a confidant of Norris who had lived in Surat for thirty years and was also familiar with the New Company factors. According to Pereira, Waite had recently married a young English girl in Surat. The problem was that Waite was already married to a woman back in England. To make matters more complicated, the girl was the niece of Waite's living wife. Norris gleaned from this that the sole reason the New Company president was refusing

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<sup>8</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 251.

<sup>9</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 251.

<sup>10</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume IV: March–September 1702, unpublished, National Archives, Kew, CO 77/50, fol. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 253.

to provide a ship for his journey home to England was fear of Norris exposing him for his bigamous relationship. The ‘Consull being sensible I knew soe much of him’, Norris mused, was terrified that Norris would turn him in to the authorities in England, which ‘would undoubtedly cause him [Waite] to [be] dismissed of his office if nothings more’.<sup>12</sup> Waite, as Norris saw it, was therefore ‘resolved to stick att nothings to stop my passage thither, and [...] now acted both like a desperate and mad man’ by preventing Norris from leaving India.<sup>13</sup> As will be shown below, there was some truth in Norris’s theory. By attributing the factors’ actions to Waite’s private life, however, Norris avoided taking any personal responsibility for Waite and the New Company’s anger towards him over the failure of the embassy.

The spat deepened. On 12 March, the embassy finally made it back to Surat, entering the city in a stately and uniform parade of soldiers, horses, musicians and servants, marching, as Norris proudly noted, ‘in very regular order’ and ‘everybody appearing hansomly’.<sup>14</sup> Even the elephant that Aurangzeb had given to the ambassador marched in the parade, the Union flag flying high above it.<sup>15</sup> No English factors, however, save for Lock and two others from the New Company who rode out to meet the ambassador in a private coach, were there to witness the spectacle. In a highly public snub, Waite and the rest of the New Company council neglected to come out of the factory to formally greet the embassy. Norris was shocked, later writing of the incident that ‘I was extremly concerned to see the honour of the nation soe traduced by the[se] villanous practises’.<sup>16</sup> Though he had long come to expect such behaviour from those factors belonging to the Old Company, Norris lamented that he had never anticipated ‘such a slight and indignity’ would be showed to him by the New Company

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<sup>12</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 254.

<sup>13</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 254.

<sup>14</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 253.

<sup>15</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 253.

<sup>16</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 254.

factors.<sup>17</sup> ‘It was high time for me to depart this place’, Norris reflected bitterly, ‘scince att my first arrivall I had that disrespect shewd to my character by the gentlemen of the Old Company which was now almost in the same manner repeated by the gentlemen of the New Company’.<sup>18</sup> Not about to let them get away with such treacherous actions, however, Norris sent the New Company factors an official written summons, ordering that they attend him at 9am the following morning at his new quarters in Surat.

There ensued a battle between Norris and the New Company factors at Surat. The following day, Norris received a letter signed by Waite and the entire Surat council, once again revealing their festering resentment towards the ambassador. The letter demanded to know the reason behind Norris’s summons, and to have it delivered to them in writing. In disbelief at their actions, Norris sent a stinging rebuke in the form of a second summons, which threatened severe punishment should they continue their disobedience. The document reminded them

that I was instructed by the Court of Directours to advise and consult with their president and councill wherever I had oportunity and that it was the most proper method [... and] what I supposed they were instructed to doe as well as I: And besides as ambassador from the Kinge of England I required their imediate attendance in the Garden [...] They would answer that ill consequence that might attend their refusall.<sup>19</sup>

The ambassador, in addition, demanded to know why his repeated requests for a ship to return him to England had been ignored. Waite and the council, in response, doubled down, arguing they would not visit the ambassador nor answer any of his messages unless they were put in writing.

Two more rejected summons later and desperate to leave India before a change in season made it impossible to set sail, Norris finally changed tack, promising the New

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<sup>17</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 254.

<sup>18</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. III, fol. 254.

<sup>19</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume IV: March–September 1702, unpublished, National Archives, Kew, CO 77/51, fol. 1.

Company factors a friendly reception if they agreed to visit him and inviting them to dinner. ‘Notwithstandinge their behaviour to me deserved to be highly resented’, Norris told Lock, who passed the message to the council, ‘the president and councill should be kindly received’ and that ‘I should be glad to see them att dinner tomorrow’.<sup>20</sup> Behind the scenes, however, the ambassador sought to obtain proof of Waite’s unlawful marriage to use as leverage should the president and the New Company factors continue to disobey him. Norris called in the New company’s chaplain, who had officiated the marriage between Waite and his niece, to ‘signify [...] under his hand’ what had happened so that ‘it might be known [...] if ever it came to be enquired into’.<sup>21</sup> The chaplain submitted to the ambassador’s request, drawing up a ‘testification with his own hand’, which was witnessed by two of Norris’s entourage.<sup>22</sup> The following morning, Paget, the embassy chaplain, delivered Norris and his retinue a sermon on ‘the greate virtue of patience’, which, the ambassador pointedly remarked, ‘was a seasonable subject’.<sup>23</sup>

While Norris’s dinner invitation was, on this occasion, ignored by the New Company factors, the ambassador at least received a reply to his request for a ship to take him home to England. It was not the answer he sought, however. In a letter signed by Waite and a few other members of the council, Norris was informed that the New Company had ‘no authority that will justify dispatchinge an empty ship for Europe’, and so could not procure one simply for the purpose of taking Norris home.<sup>24</sup> Waite told Norris that he hoped, by the following October or November, two New Company ships would be sufficiently stocked with goods to warrant a return trip to England, and that the ambassador could travel on these vessels if he

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<sup>20</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 5; For a recent article on the role of English East India Company chaplains in enforcing moral and religious codes of conduct for the Company’s servants around the world, see Haig Z. Smith, ‘Risky Business’ The Seventeenth-Century English Company Chaplain and Policing Interaction and Knowledge Exchange’, *Journal of Church and State* 60, no. 2 (2018):

<sup>22</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 8.



pleased. Norris immediately retaliated, again demanding a ship as his right as an ambassador, and pointedly reminding the president of what an ‘unnecessary expence it would be to the Company should I be kept here till November next’.<sup>25</sup>

A few days later, Norris received another letter – this time signed by the entire council – which informed him that the Company simply could not afford to send the embassy home. ‘They seem to expresse themselves plainly in one point’, Norris conceded after reading the message, which was that they could not procure a ship because it would cost 100,000 rupees and they could not ‘gett the money’.<sup>26</sup> The New Company’s dire financial straits were thereafter confirmed to Norris by several other sources, who agreed that ‘the creditt of the ffactory is now and has been for some time soe low’ that the New Company factors ‘have lately been reduced to that necessity that they wanted both money and credit for breade and meate’.<sup>27</sup> Apparently not considering the role the embassy had played in draining the New Company’s finances, Norris blamed the situation entirely on Waite’s mismanagement. The ambassador went even further, claiming that Waite was responsible for the failure of the embassy because of his poor supervision of the company’s books. That ‘the factorys greate want both of money and creditt [is] soe publickly known and talked of both in Suratt and the Emperors Leschar, has all alonge been a greate damp and prejudice to our affaires’, the ambassador complained.<sup>28</sup> Now understanding that any effort to force the New Company to pay for a ship was futile, the ambassador once again changed tack.

Resolved to do whatever lay in his power ‘to gett away from this detested place’, Norris once again invited the New Company council to dinner, promising them a friendly reception.<sup>29</sup> This time – perhaps realising the ambassador did not seek to punish them, but simply wished to go home – the factors, including Waite, all attended. After entertaining

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<sup>25</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 12.

them ‘with all freindship and ffredome to shew them I could lay by my resentments’, Norris assured them that, if they could procure a ship to take him home, either he or the king’s treasury would cover all costs involved, so as not to place any further burden on the company. The ambassador even put his promise in writing, handing them a signed document stating, ‘in the Kings name’, that the king’s

treasury should make good all damages [to the] Company for their orderinge a ship for my immediate embarkinge and likewise (to leave them without excuse) made all my own estate reall and personall lyable to beare them and the Company harmlesse on the like account.<sup>30</sup>

Norris then threatened the council that, if they continued to refuse him a ship, he would have no trouble making their actions known back in England, and the ‘world would have too just reason to thinke they designed I should be sacrificed here’.<sup>31</sup>

On 20 March, the following day, the New Company council formally agreed to Norris’s offer, and proposed two ships, the *Scipio* and the *Rebow*, to be fitted out immediately for the ambassador and his retinue. Norris’s joy over their decision was quickly tempered, however, when, over the next few weeks, Waite raised concerns over the two ships selected, inventing several reasons why they would not be suitable for the ambassador’s journey home. Convinced that Waite’s actions were simply a ploy ‘in order to stop my going for England’ because the president was ‘guilty of soe many ill actions that he did not care I should goe home to make them known’, Norris sent a veiled warning to Waite that it would not be good for him if people back in England discovered his bigamous relationship, and it would therefore be in Waite’s interests to help Norris return home.<sup>32</sup> This seemingly frightened Waite into action – the president visited the ambassador’s quarters that evening, and in a private consolation, asked whether Norris ‘design’d to prosecute him for his

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<sup>30</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 38.

marriage with his neice during his former wifes life'.<sup>33</sup> Somewhat disingenuously considering the signed testament the ambassador had sought from the chaplain just days earlier, Norris promised the distressed president 'that I never said or intended any such thing, and moreover would not be hir'd to do it; that whoever told him soe did it out of a malicious intent to create or forment a misunderstanding betwixt us'.<sup>34</sup>

Remarkably, Waite responded to Norris's assurances by making a full confession to the ambassador over his unlawful marriage. As Norris recounted it, the president

of his own accord sollemnly avow'd that he beleiv'd his wife to be dead when he marryed: that he was wholly ignorant of his crime in marrynig his wifes neice and sollemnly protested and vow'd he never had any carnall knowledge of her soe the marriage never consumated.<sup>35</sup>

Thrown by the unexpected confession, Norris took pity on Waite and offered the president some advice. In order to avoid 'censure and scandall', the ambassador told Waite, the girl should be sent far away, preferably to the New Company's settlement in Hugli, where the ambassador apparently intended a life of solitude for her. Norris insisted that under no circumstances was she to cohabit with Waite or any other man thereafter. The girl, Norris insisted, 'by no means could enter into a second marriage', as this would be considered as 'adultery'.<sup>36</sup> According to Norris's account, Waite took his advice 'in good part', and promised to send the girl away in the next few days.

After promising to foot the bill for his journey home, and reassuring Waite that his bigamous relationship would be kept secret, tensions between the ambassador and the New Company factors eased considerably. Just days after the private discussion between the ambassador and the president, Waite announced that the ships being prepared to take Norris and his retinue home to England were ready to set sail, and Norris proclaimed that he would

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<sup>33</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 40.

<sup>34</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 40.

<sup>35</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 41.

<sup>36</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 41.

depart India with his retinue on 25 April. Over the remainder of Norris's time in India, the factors dined with the ambassador and his entourage on several occasions, the president even presenting Norris with 'a fine chest of China and Japan ware' as a gift.<sup>37</sup> In the ambassador's final days on the subcontinent, Waite, in addition, backtracked on his insistence that Norris should have signed the *muchalka* to protect Mughal shipping against piracy in order to obtain the *farman* for the New Company, claiming that, even if 'the Court of Directors should have commanded him to have given it [the obligation] yett he would not have done it'.<sup>38</sup> Norris was highly sceptical of this last point, however, noting that if anyone should analyse the president's written correspondence with the ambassador over the duration of his embassy, 'it will be found he [Waite] had another opinion', and that the president had all along placed pressure on Norris to sign the agreement.<sup>39</sup>

Norris felt further vindicated over his decision not to sign a *muchalka* at the Mughal court when, on 17 April, he received an English translation of the Dutch agreement signed on 26 October 1700. Despite spending the duration of his embassy being repeatedly assured by Waite and other New Company factors that signing a *muchalka* would simply mean that the New Company would have to convoy some of Aurangzeb's ships to protect them against piracy on the Indian Ocean, and would not mean that they had to bear financial liability for any losses at the hands of European pirates, Norris believed the translated document proved otherwise. 'Nothing can be more plainly and fully exprest', the ambassador stated smugly upon reading the document, 'than that they [the Dutch] oblige themselves and successors to make good any piracy [that] shall befall on the merchants ships by Hattmen'.<sup>40</sup> This confirmed to the ambassador that he had made the right decision not to enter the English into

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<sup>37</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 29.

<sup>40</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 37.

any such agreement, but to leave India without having obtained a *farman* for the New Company.

As for the *farman* the *nawab* of Brahmapuri had promised Norris would be sent after him to Surat – it never arrived. In Norris's last days in the port city, rumours swirled about the documents. New Company factor Bonnell, for example, told the ambassador that he had been 'privately inform'd' that the *farman* had been drawn up at the Mughal court and that the New Company's procurator there, Hakim Sala, 'would hasten down [to Surat] with them with all speed'.<sup>41</sup> Norris remained sceptical, however, commenting that 'all this I take to be amusement', and instead focusing his attention on his impending exit from the Mughal's dominions.<sup>42</sup> The night before his appointed departure date, Norris 'order'd all my retinue to inspect their armes and have them in readyness to give out powder and ball publicly', so that, if necessary, the ambassador and his retinue could 'force our way' out of India.<sup>43</sup>

### Final departure

But there was no need for the public displays of military might. Unlike most events during his ill-fated embassy, Norris's final departure from India ran smoothly. Early in the morning of 25 April, the Surat governor sent word that the embassy was free to leave the Mughal's dominions, after which the city's customs officials visited the docks to perform a final inspection of the Scipio's cargo. Delighted by the 'extraordinary respect and good manners' displayed by the officials, who scanned over the freight but resisted opening any trunks, the ambassador was convinced that instructions had been sent directly from the Mughal emperor to give the ambassador a 'respectfull' send-off.<sup>44</sup> At 9am, Waite and the rest of the Surat council visited Norris in his garden to formally farewell the embassy. Here, the ambassador

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<sup>41</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 34.

<sup>42</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 35.

<sup>43</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 53.

<sup>44</sup> Norris, Diaries, vol. IV, fol. 46.

handed over the embassy's financial accounts, including a report 'of all moneys issued for the use of the embassy', as well as a list of presents distributed to various Mughal authorities during his mission.<sup>45</sup> 'Being desirous to part [...] with all publick appearance and demonstrations of friendship' towards the New Company, 'as was absolutely requisite for the nation's honour', Norris then presented Waite and the council with the elephant and horse given to him by the Mughal, as well as the embassy's tents and furnishings.<sup>46</sup> In a final act intended to display unity with the New Company, Norris awarded each of the council members a *sarapa* and a horse, and, after they followed him down to the water's edge at the Surat port, warmly embraced them all 'in the sight of multitudes of spectators'.<sup>47</sup> At 12 noon, Norris boarded the yacht that transported him out to the *Scipio*, the Union flag hoisted on the main mast and guns firing in a final salute.

It was a slow and tedious start to the journey home, however, the weather unfavourable to sailing. The yacht ran aground twice as it drifted down the Surat canal, and four days passed before the vessel reached the *Scipio* and Norris and his luggage were transferred to the bigger ship. From there, it took twelve days for the *Scipio* just to reach Bombay, one of the Old Company's main outposts where the ship's crew could replenish their food and water supplies. Though it would have come as no surprise to him, the ambassador was nevertheless disappointed by the Old Company factors' refusal to acknowledge his presence there. 'Tho I carry'd the Union flag on the main topmast head, which was signification enough who I was', the ambassador complained, the Old Company merchants 'neither saluted us when we came to anchor nor did the Deputy Governor or any of the Councill take the least notice [...] of my being on board'.<sup>48</sup> It appeared, then, that old

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<sup>45</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 46.

<sup>46</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 47.

<sup>47</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 48.

<sup>48</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 52.

habits died hard, with news of the Old and New companies' union not enough to change the minds of the Old Company merchants towards the embassy.

As the *Scipio* lay at anchor at Bombay, and a small number of livestock were brought aboard from the island, Norris was informed that there were 'little or no provisions or refreshments to be had' in Bombay, the 'island [being] in a very poor and disconsolate condition'.<sup>49</sup> The ambassador was told, further, that only 130 Old Company English remained in Bombay, after a plague had decimated the island's population. As shown in Chapter Two, Bombay – once a thriving hub of English trade in India – had indeed been devastated. The main cause of the company's downgraded status on the island, however, was not so much a plague as it was the effects of the year-long siege of the island by the Mughal government in retaliation for Josiah Child's ill-planned war against the Mughals. Perhaps ironically, the ambassador made no connection between the siege – part of the reason he came to India in the first place – and the depleted state of the island, which he believed would be 'able to contain and provide for a great number of men' if it were simply 'well cultivated and look'd after', and cleared of the 'aire poyson'd by the stinking ffish'.<sup>50</sup> On 17 May, the winds finally picked up, and the *Scipio* 'gott a pretty good offing' on route to its next destination – Mauritius – narrowly evading the onset of the Indian monsoon.

Six weeks of stormy seas later, the *Scipio* arrived at Mauritius. During this leg of the journey, Norris's secretary and translator, Adiel Mills – who accompanied Norris all the way through his embassy and had become the ambassador's close friend – died. His funeral was held aboard the *Scipio* and his body 'committed to the deep'.<sup>51</sup> Norris was deeply moved by Mills's death, which he put down to 'the great quantity of mangoes Mr Mills ate at Bombay [that] still continued within him and never work'd themselves off'.<sup>52</sup> The loss was apparently

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<sup>49</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 53.

<sup>50</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fols. 53–54.

<sup>51</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 56.

<sup>52</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 56.

a stark reminder of Norris's own mortality, as his prayers 'to God to protect us with his good providence, and send in a prosperous voyage and safe arrivall in our country in his good appointed time', grew more frequent thereafter.<sup>53</sup> Norris was elated, therefore, to lay anchor at Mauritius on 10 July, and to hear that his brother, who had been travelling on a separate ship, the *China Merchant*, had arrived there eight days earlier. Edward came to visit the ambassador aboard the *Scipio* that evening, where the pair celebrated their reunion over dinner in the ambassador's cabin.

Over the next two months, Norris and his retinue remained at Mauritius, disembarking the *Scipio* on several occasions to explore the island. Walking for hours through picturesque rainforest, fishing in 'several little riverletts of very good ffish water running down the hills', devouring island produce, such as 'excellent good beef, ffatt venison' and 'a pineapple I think as good as ever I ate', Norris was as cheerful as he had been for perhaps the entire duration of his embassy.<sup>54</sup> The ambassador was also given a 'sincere and hearty welcome' to the island by Captain Raines, head of the *Martha* (one of the ships belonging to Norris's fleet from Surat) and an English expatriate who had established a plantation on Mauritius.<sup>55</sup> After several meals with Raines aboard the *Scipio*, the captain invited Norris to his plantation, which included a Cajun-style house surrounded by orange and lemon trees and where, the ambassador remarked, he was 'very handsomely and kindly entertained'.<sup>56</sup> Having been 'ill for some time', Raines's opportunity to host the English ambassador was his last – the captain succumbed to his ailments just a few weeks later. Norris noted that Raines had, in his will, requested his heart be preserved and given to a Sir Harry Johnson back in England. Without openly speculating on the nature of the relationship between the captain and

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<sup>53</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 51.

<sup>54</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fols. 61,70.

<sup>55</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 66.

<sup>56</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 66.



Johnson, Norris remarked curiously that ‘I hear he [Raines] had left good part of his estate being worth as reported 30,000 pounds sterling’ to the same man.<sup>57</sup>

As the crew prepared the *Scipio* at Mauritius to sail the next leg of the journey to St Helena, Norris faced other glaring reminders of life’s impermanence and the doomed nature of his mission to India. On 17 July, Norris came across a ‘handsome tomb’ belonging to George Weldon, an Old Company merchant who had died on the island on his return to England. Weldon, as Norris reported it, had appeared before the Mughal about a decade ago with ‘a rope about his neck’ to beg forgiveness for the Old Company’s attacks on Aurangzeb’s shipping undertaken as part of Josiah Child’s ill-conceived war against the Mughals.<sup>58</sup> Shortly afterwards, the ambassador was informed of a recent event in which a ship of drunk Dutch pirates showed up at Mauritius with the spoils of an attack on one of Aurangzeb’s ships making its way to Mecca (see Appendix B). The pirates reportedly had ‘a very great treasure on board the ship’ including ‘18000 [pounds...], great quantitys of dollars, [and] barrs of gold and silver’.<sup>59</sup> The pirates even wore ‘gold bracelettts upon their armes and leggs taken from women on board the mocha ships’.<sup>60</sup> While the pirates caused havoc on Mauritius, triggering some of its inhabitants to take ‘refuge in the woods’, their arrival was a boon for the island’s economy. As Norris put it, ‘for all their pretentions, I understand the pirates left a great deal of money behind them upon the island, paying extravagant rates for all things they bought’.<sup>61</sup>

The pirate tale was followed by foreboding news from Europe of an imminent war between England and France, as well as fresh reports of a union between the Old and New companies. In late July, a Dutch ship arrived at Mauritius from the Cape of Good Hope, the passengers of which informed Norris and his retinue that James II, ousted by William III in

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<sup>57</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 76.

<sup>58</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 61.

<sup>59</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 62.

<sup>60</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 62.

<sup>61</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 65.

the Glorious Revolution more than a decade earlier (see Chapter Three), had died, prompting the French monarch to announce James's son (also named James) as the new Catholic king of England. The announcement was seen by the anti-Catholic English as an aggressive and hostile act, 'complemented or order'd by no body but the Pope', and prompted the English ambassador residing in France to leave his post in opposition.<sup>62</sup> As Norris understood from this report, the general feeling in Europe was that, 'tho warr was not actually broke out when their latest advices came away', it was 'generally expected every moment'.<sup>63</sup> The Dutch crew also informed the English that 'the two East India Companys in England were at last joyn'd, tho with much difficulty'.<sup>64</sup> The ambassador did not care to elaborate in his diary on this latter piece of news, which, in the eyes of many at home in England, and perhaps even to the ambassador himself, rendered his embassy to India largely futile.

Perhaps it was a combination of the deaths of several people around him, the stories of piracy and war, and the impending journey home that motivated Norris to renew his will. On 22 July, the ambassador 'revok'd and cancell'd all former wills and made a new one', assigning most of his estate to his wife in England and his 'dear brother Edward', the latter of whom had walked every step of the way with the ambassador on his journey to the Mughal court.<sup>65</sup> In August, the ambassador made copies of the embassy's accounts and gave them to his brother to hand over to the Court of Directors if his ship failed to make it back to London. Then, finally, on 7 September, the *Scipio* - in a fleet of four other ships - set sail for St Helena, 'whither', Norris wrote, 'I pray God to bring us in safety'.<sup>66</sup>

But Norris never made it to St Helena or home to his beloved England. The last entry in the ambassador's diary was written on 14 September on board the *Scipio*, after which he became gravely ill. On 10 October, after weeks of fighting his infection, Norris finally

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<sup>62</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 63.

<sup>63</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 63.

<sup>64</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 64.

<sup>65</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 63.

<sup>66</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. IV, fol. 74.

succumbed to it. His body was laid to rest at sea the next day, somewhere between Mauritius and the Cape of Good Hope, where the fleet stopped for supplies.<sup>67</sup> It was an unceremonious ending for an ambassador so fixated on ceremony, with not even the funeral service recorded on board.

Norris's death on his journey home to England was a fitting end to a disastrous embassy, one that had failed to achieve any of its objectives and had left the New Company in an untenable financial position. This chapter has explored the final phase of Norris's mission to India, arguing that it once again revealed the problematic nature of the hybrid embassy. In particular, it has shown how competing commercial and diplomatic interests led to fierce tensions between Norris and the New Company factors at Surat, resulting in a hostile reception for Norris that put his final exit from India at risk. This chapter has also illustrated how the structure of this type of embassy meant that Norris's final departure was contingent on the whim of the president of the New Company, Nicholas Waite, who had his own, very personal reasons for preventing the ambassador from returning home.

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<sup>67</sup> Harihar Das, 'The Norris Embassy to Aurangzib, (1699–1702)'. Original manuscript, 14 May 1945, typescript, Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, p.702.

## Conclusion

On his march from Surat to the Mughal court in February 1701, travelling through a green and mountainous region in the heartland of India, Norris encountered a live chameleon. The ambassador, whose only previous knowledge of chameleons came from ‘libraries and cutts in bookes of travells’, was captivated by the creature.<sup>1</sup> He ordered it to be captured and kept it for days in order to fully observe its behaviours. The ambassador marvelled at the various features of the animal, its eyes ‘that looked like little diamonds sett after the Indian fashion’, its tongue as ‘quick as an arrow’, and feet ‘in the nature of lobsters claws’, on which it walked ‘with as greate circumspection as a rose dancer’.<sup>2</sup> But the thing that ‘raised my admiration in this creature’ the most, Norris wrote, was its ability to change colours, blending into its surroundings – no matter how complex – in just a moment.<sup>3</sup> ‘What ever you put it upon white red or blue’, he remarked, the chameleon ‘sympathised with the colour he was upon’.<sup>4</sup> Picking it up and placing it on a Persian rug, the ambassador was astonished when the lizard ‘in a trice appeared in the severall colours as were in the carpett’.<sup>5</sup>

If Norris had been able to adapt to his political surroundings in Mughal India in the same way as the chameleon to the Persian carpet, perhaps the story of the embassy would have ended differently. The point, however, is that he could not. This thesis has demonstrated that, just like Roe before him, Norris was so tightly constrained by the rigid structure of the hybrid embassy – so anxious to maintain his royal character above all else – that any form of flexibility in his diplomatic interactions proved extremely challenging. Building on Rupali Mishra’s work on Roe, I have shown that, for Norris, the hybrid embassy problem manifested in a constant anxiety to demonstrate and display his royal status and authority, and led to the

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<sup>1</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume II: December 1700–April 1701, unpublished. Rawlinson Collection, C.913, Bodleian Library, Oxford, fol. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fols. 72, 73 and 78.

<sup>3</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 71.

<sup>4</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 71.

<sup>5</sup> Norris, *Diaries*, vol. II, fol. 72.

ambassador consistently prioritising what he saw as the Crown's interests over those of the New Company.<sup>6</sup> More clearly than any other source, the Norris diaries reveal the ambassador's deep insecurities over his position, with almost daily references to his concerns over fulfilling his duty to the king, first and foremost, and to upholding his royal character as the Crown's official representative. For Norris, the New Company's interests were always of secondary importance, despite the upstart organisation's funding of the entire mission to the Mughal court.

Norris's uncompromising approach to diplomacy, in turn, led to the deterioration of his relationships with Mughal authorities that were key to the embassy's progress and success. The ambassador's decision, in Masulipatnam, to cut off all contact with the region's *nawab* after his interpreter was imprisoned, an action he believed that, 'as an Ambassadour from soe greate a prince', he simply 'could not suffer soe great an indignity to be sent on my character', offers one example of an important connection destroyed because of the ambassador's anxieties over his royal status.<sup>7</sup> His determination to sail from Masulipatnam to Surat despite the express advice of top officials at the Mughal court, provides another. His choice to reject a meeting with the Grand Wazir, Asad Khan, on his journey to the Mughal court in Panhala after the two dignitaries could not agree to the terms of their engagement, provides yet another example. But the ambassador's refusal, at Aurangzeb's court, to sign an agreement committing the English to providing future protection to Mughal shipping against piracy on the Indian Ocean best illustrates the fundamental problem inherent in the hybrid embassy. As this thesis has shown, Norris viewed the signing of such an agreement as a

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<sup>6</sup> Rupali Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the Edge: Split Interests in the Roe Embassy to the Mughal Court', *The Journal of British studies* 53, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>7</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume I: September 1699–April 1700, unpublished, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawlinson Collection, C.912, fol. 119.

direct breach of his duty to the king and the English nation, and, in the ambassador's words, a decision that 'would forever enslave the English to this unsufferable [Mughal] government'.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time as destroying relationships with Mughal authorities, Norris's obsessive focus on upholding his royal status led to deep divisions between the ambassador and the New Company merchants in India. As we have seen, much of this tension derived from the ambassador's liberal spending of the New Company's money in an attempt to convey his royal status in India – sums his sponsor could ill afford. The New Company merchants in both Masulipatnam and Surat pleaded with Norris to rein in his spending and were dismayed by the costs of the embassy. New Company president Nicholas Waite's leveraging of his own estate to obtain bills of credit for the embassy from the local shroffs provides just example of this financial tension. Waite's reluctance to furnish Norris with a ship to carry the embassy home to England also demonstrates this financial tension. The ambassador, for his part, often reacted to the New Company's pleas to limit costs with hostility, claiming the king's honour was at stake in the matter.

Animosity between the parties also grew from Norris prioritising what he saw as the Crown's interests over those of the New Company. The New Company council in Masulipatnam reacted with a combination of bitterness and genuine surprise when Norris insisted that, as the king's ambassador, he must help all English in India, including their arch enemies – the Old Company. In the end, New Company president Nicholas Waite and the Surat council openly displayed their anger toward the ambassador after he fled the Mughal court without the *farman*, leaving Norris and his retinue to fend for themselves when they were captured by Mughal authorities in Brahmapuri, and further snubbing the ambassador when he finally returned to Surat. In these ways, the hybrid embassy problem consistently

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<sup>8</sup> William Norris, *The Norris Diaries, 1699–1702*, volume III: September 1701–March 1702, unpublished, National Archives, Kew, CO 77/50, fol. 62.

hindered the progress of the Norris embassy, and was one of three main reasons for the embassy's overall failure.

My analysis of Norris and his mission to Aurangzeb's court has demonstrated that the hybrid embassy was prone to failure, and that failure informed the negative views of Mughal India that each ambassador exhibited in their writings. I have shown that Norris experienced many of the same problems Roe did almost a century earlier, and responded to them in remarkably similar ways to his predecessor. In particular, the dual nature of the hybrid embassy produced an anxiety in both ambassadors to exert and display their royal authority, which led to their unyielding approaches to diplomacy that damaged key relationships on the English and Indian sides. This indicates that the ambassadors' failings should not be put down to shortcomings in their personalities, lack of skill, or their inability to 'read' Mughal culture, but rather, should be understood as symptomatic of the unique and rigid structure of the English embassies to the Mughal court.

In addition, both ambassadors justified their failures in India to their English audiences by drawing on a shared language surrounding the Mughal government and Asian societies. The more each ambassador failed, the more they portrayed the Mughal government using well-worn European characterisations of the Mughal government as, for example, 'despotic', 'barbaric', and 'effeminate', to do so. Of course, this arsenal of orientalist tropes, derived from a growing body of early modern European literature on Asia, was bigger and better-defined by the time Norris arrived in India, eight decades after Roe, and this is reflected in the latter ambassador's writings. Importantly, too, as the first and only other English ambassador to Mughal India, this thesis has shown that Roe himself directly informed Norris's view of India.

By demonstrating that Norris's embassy contained a fatal design flaw before it even left England, my research also supports Guido Van Meersbergen's recent findings about European diplomacy in early modern Asia, which suggest that diplomatic negotiations at the

central and local levels carried out by European company representatives in Asia were far more effective and economical in the long term than state-led or royal embassies.<sup>9</sup> The Norris embassy cost an enormous £80,000, and, as we have seen, all but bankrupted the New Company. For all the effort and cost involved in the embassy, moreover, the New Company had little to show for it in the end – the ambassador left Aurangzeb’s court in disgrace and without the coveted *farman* granting trading rights for the New Company. The fact that the English never again sent a royal embassy to Mughal India further supports the idea that the hybrid embassy model was fundamentally flawed and simply not worth the trouble. In a similar vein, my analysis of the Norris embassy echoes some of the work of Adam Clulow, who showed how the Dutch East India Company was able to secure its place in Japan by positioning its merchants as ‘loyal vassals’ of the Tokugawa Shogun.<sup>10</sup> As a royal ambassador who believed his duty was first and foremost to the king of England, and who felt unable to do anything that might contradict his role or lessen his royal authority, Norris proved incapable of moulding himself into a ‘loyal vassal’ of the Mughal state in the same way that company representatives could (and did in India, as van Meersbergen has shown). This problem was clearly highlighted by Norris’s decision not to sign the *muchalka*, as merchant representatives for the other European trading companies in India previously had, including the Old Company.

While both Roe and Norris grappled with the hybrid embassy problem on their missions to Mughal India, Norris was forced to contend with two additional and unprecedented challenges, which made the failure of his embassy more indisputable and complete than Roe’s. I have argued that the Old-New Company conflict made an already complicated mission almost impossible for Norris. From informing Mughal authorities in

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<sup>9</sup> Guido Van Meersbergen, “Intirely the Kings Vassalls”: East India Company Gifting Practices and Anglo-Mughal Political Exchange (c. 1670–1720), *Diplomatica* 2, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>10</sup> Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).



Masulipatnam that Norris was a fake ambassador sent by a band of pirates, to Surat president Stephen Colt paying off the city's governor to refuse a meeting with the English ambassador, to attempting to physically halt the embassy by detonating its ammunition on the embassy's journey to the Mughal court, the Old Company stopped at nothing to prevent Norris's progress. While, in the end, the Old Company's scheming failed to prevent Norris from gaining an audience with Aurangzeb, the damage the conflict inflicted on the embassy, and to the English more broadly, was heavy. Financially, the New Company spent huge sums of money trying to ward off the Old Company's attacks on Norris, including, for example, the 40,000-rupee payment given to the Surat governor in order to counter the Old Company's initial offer. The Old Company also lost money and face, particularly when the ambassador publicly presented the king's letter to the governor of Surat in front of a throng of merchants already angry with the Old Company over their maritime attacks on Indian shipping.

As this thesis has shown, what made this Old-New Company conflict even more complicated was that Norris and the New Company received conflicting reports from England over the future of the English East India trade and the fate of the two competing companies, which threw the entire purpose of the embassy into doubt. In Surat, Norris received information that a new parliamentary Act had approved the continuation of the Old Company indefinitely (as opposed to the 1698 Act that stated the Old Company would become defunct in 1701). Less than two months later, and at the very moment Norris arrived at Aurangzeb's court, the ambassador received yet another report that the two English companies were set to merge. Considering that the main purpose of the embassy was to facilitate the establishment of the New Company in the place of the Old Company, such reports caused utter confusion for Norris, who chose to deal with the situation by pressing on with the embassy and attempting to obtain a *farman* for the New Company as if nothing had changed.

The Old-New Company conflict examined in this thesis, perhaps more than anything, highlights the disunified, chaotic and fragile position of the English in India at the turn of the seventeenth century. Two English companies battling it out on a Mughal stage, with the Old Company agents doing their utmost to tear down an embassy appointed by their own king, made for an unprecedented, striking, and patently absurd spectacle. The picture painted in this thesis pulls a further brick away from older edifices around the inexorable rise of the East India Company and the British empire in India. It also calls into question more recent understandings of the Company as a coherent, unified, and monolithic organisation directed from the metropole. Instead, I have argued that the English in India during the period of Norris's embassy were dysfunctional and deeply divided, not only fighting to maintain their place in India, but warring against each other.

The Old Company agents in India, moreover, acted in complete defiance of their head of state by attempting to sabotage the embassy, underlining a significant disconnection in the Old Company's century-old relationship with the Crown. Nowhere was this better highlighted than when Norris discovered that Old Company president Stephen Colt had informed the governor of Surat that Norris had been sent from an imposter king, and that the Old Company would send out a real ambassador as soon as the rightful king of England was returned. My thesis, then, contributes to recent scholarship that understands the East India Company's rise to empire as complicated and uneven, or as Alison Games eloquently puts it, a 'complex process, one riddled with trial and error, success and failure, triumph and despair'.<sup>11</sup> The Norris embassy was, indeed, a moment of extreme error, failure and despair for the English in India. It has also shed light on a largely neglected episode of failure in the East India Company's expansion in India – one that nearly brought about the end of the Company and its trade in India.

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<sup>11</sup> Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14.

Finally, I have argued that the English maritime violence scandal joined the hybrid embassy problem and the Old-New Company conflict as one of the three major reasons for the Norris embassy's downfall. While piracy and other forms of maritime violence on the Indian Ocean were nothing new, the last fifteen years of the seventeenth century saw a dramatic surge in such attacks. As we have seen, some of the largest seizures ever recorded happened in the lead up to and during the Norris embassy, and in combination with Old Company director Josiah Child's ill-fated war against the Mughals on the Indian Ocean. Throughout Norris's embassy, the issue of maritime violence was at the forefront of English-Mughal relations. The Old Company merchants, particularly in Surat, had been punished on multiple occasions for such violence, and, along with the Dutch and French companies, had recently signed a *muchalka* agreeing to provide convoys for Mughal shipping and to pay compensation to the government for any losses incurred at the hands of European pirates.

When Norris arrived in Surat, the Old Company's maritime crimes were again highlighted to the ambassador by two prominent merchants, Abdul Ghafur and Hossein Hamadan, who pleaded with Norris to seek justice for the crimes of the Old Company on their behalf at the Mughal court. While it seems Norris never raised the plight of the Surat merchants with Aurangzeb himself, the Mughal government was clearly preoccupied with the issue when Norris arrived at the court in Panhala, even more so when another of Gharfur's ships was attacked by pirates while Norris resided at the court. Aurangzeb insisted that Norris also sign a *muchalka* committing the English to providing protection against piracy to Indian shipping. Indeed, I have shown that it was this issue that became the sticking point in negotiations between the emperor and Norris, and it is conceivable that, had Norris agreed to sign the *muchalka*, the desired *farman* may have been granted. Maritime violence on the Indian Ocean was such an important issue to Aurangzeb at this time that he ordered Norris to be detained in Brahmapuri after the ambassador fled the court, and pushed him further to sign the *muchalka*.

My analysis of the maritime violence issue and the crucial role it played in the Norris embassy also contributes toward the overall picture presented in this thesis of the English in a position of disunity, weakness and chaos. Despite English maritime superiority relative to the Mughals, the future of the English trade in India hinged on imperial edicts issued by Aurangzeb. In order to continue their trade on the subcontinent, the English from the Old Company, along with other Europeans trading on the subcontinent, were forced to sign the *muchalka* guaranteeing safety for Mughal shipping along the main trading routes on the Indian Ocean, and, in this way, to act as ‘loyal vassals’ of the Mughal state for the foreseeable future. English attempts at combatting the growing problem of piracy in this region in other ways, such as the fleet of warships with Norris’s embassy to seek out pirates, and the other sporadic attempts the English made to show their anti piracy stance to the Mughals, simply were not enough in this case.

This picture challenges traditional narratives on this period that, on the one hand, depict the English as an all-powerful force on the seas, able to manipulate Asian rulers using their technological advantages, and on the other, the Mughal government as both powerless against English maritime force and uninterested in exerting any authority over the ocean. At the same time, the image highlights the increasing difficulty for the Mughal government in striking the ‘balance of blackmail’ with the English.<sup>12</sup> After all, Aurangzeb also failed to obtain what he wanted out of his negotiations with the ambassador, with Norris departing India after refusing to signing an agreement to protect the emperor’s shipping from the increasing threat of maritime violence. The fact the all three European companies managed to wriggle out of the *muchalka* less than two years after Norris left India further indicates the Mughal government’s increasing struggle to control Europeans on the seas.

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<sup>12</sup> Ashin Das Gupta, ‘The Maritime Merchant and Indian History’, reprinted in Ashin Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500–1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 30.

The immediate reaction to the failure of the Norris embassy in England seems to have been to sweep the embarrassing fiasco under the carpet. The New Company's Court of Directors had expressed frustrations at Norris's actions in India on several occasions over the duration of the embassy. They were particularly displeased by what they saw as the ambassador's excessive expenditures, eventually ordering the ambassador 'to desist from any further extraordinary charge but what was necessary to bring him home and that he should retire home with all convenient speed'.<sup>13</sup> After the embassy ended, it was clear that the directors intended to put the event behind them once and for all. In a letter to Nicholas Waite and their other agents in Surat, the directors advised that they would not 'enter into a particular examination of the ambassador's management of the affair committed to him [...] seeing what is past can't be altered or recalled'.<sup>14</sup> Sending a sum of more than £5000 to the Surat factory as partial payment for the debts incurred by the ambassador, the New Company directors also lamented the expense of the embassy and even claimed they 'shall be glad if the Phirmaunds agreed for by the ambassador and promised to be sent are not come; seeing so great a sum was to be paid for them'.<sup>15</sup> In their effort to forget about the embassy entirely, it appears the New Company directors also avoided presenting Norris's account of his embassy to the English court. Conveniently for them, by the time the deceased ambassador's diaries arrived back in London, William III – the master whom Norris had shown unwavering devotion towards, and for whose eyes the diaries had been originally intended – was dead, and a new monarch, Queen Anne, reigned over the English nation.

In 1709, seven years after the Norris embassy ended in failure, the two warring English East India companies officially merged to form the United Company of Merchants of

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from New Company Court of Directors to their agents at Surat, London, 21 May 1702, IOR/E/3/94, fol. 404.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from New Company Court of Directors to their agents at Surat, London, 11 June 1703, IOR/E/3/94, fol. 459.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from New Company Court of Directors to their agents at Surat, London, 11 June 1703, IOR/E/3/94, fol. 459.

England Trading to the East Indies. Discussions over a union between the directors of the Old Company and the New Company in London had begun as early as 1698, before Norris had even departed London for India, and in 1700, William III offered to arbitrate a treaty between them.<sup>16</sup> In 1702, the same year as Norris left India and died at sea, the Old Company agreed to give up its charter, which allowed for the creation of the joint company – a three-party deal between the Old Company, the New Company, and Queen Anne.<sup>17</sup> As I have argued, this ever changing situation in London made for an utterly confusing mission for Norris, and contributed to the failure of the embassy overall. Indeed, it might well be argued that the subsequent union between the companies rendered the Norris embassy not only a costly failure, but – considering the main purpose of the embassy was to facilitate the establishment of the New Company and replace the Old Company – a waste of time and resources.

Perhaps Norris's efforts were not all in vain, however. It is entirely conceivable that the abject failure of the embassy, the humiliation and absurdity of the conflict between the ambassador, the New Company, and the Old Company, and the outrageous cost of the entire exercise, helped to convince the English that a union between the companies was essential to the future of the East India trade. There were, unsurprisingly, some early difficulties with the merging of the organisations. Philip Stern has illustrated that the implementation of the union in India was complicated given the heated rivalry between the agents of each company on the ground. For example, at one point, the United Company was jointly presided over by none other than arch nemeses John Gayer (previously president of the Old Company) and Nicholas Waite (previously consul of the New Company in Surat).<sup>18</sup> However, it was this union, certainly, that helped to consolidate the Company's presence in India and spur on its development, particularly in its three presidencies in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.

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<sup>16</sup> Philip Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 162.

<sup>17</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 162.

<sup>18</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 166.

The four decades succeeding the union saw dramatic advancements in the Company's expansion within the Mughal Empire, both in terms of financial growth, and political and military power. After a huge dip in the Company's fortunes in the late seventeenth century, caused in part by the Old Company's war against the Mughals and the ensuing East India Company crisis, the union of the English companies led to a long stretch of unprecedented dividends for shareholders, unparalleled expansion of the Company's settlements, especially in the city of Calcutta, growing political sovereignty and further development of militias, forts and military garrisons.<sup>19</sup> As Philip Lawson has put it, during this period, 'growth, development and consolidation became the watchwords of the eastern enterprise'.<sup>20</sup> Stern has also recently commented on the subject, arguing the early eighteenth-century was a period of 'renewed British fiscal and political power, following a significant period of catastrophe and breakdown; of the expansion of British power, conditioned by political crisis and political change in both Europe and Asia'.<sup>21</sup>

Viewed from this perspective, the Norris embassy could be seen as a contributing factor in the change in direction of the Company in the fifty years following the embassy. Hunt and Stern have pointed out that Child's War against the Mughals and the resultant East India Company crisis 'set the stage for a reinvigorated Company that was able to consolidate political and financial power in Britain as well as commercial and military power at sea and on land in Asia'.<sup>22</sup> They push further, arguing that such 'early failures produced some of the preconditions...for the Company's ultimate military and administrative conquest of most of the South Asian subcontinent a century and some later'.<sup>23</sup> Could the failure of the Norris embassy have had a similar 'reinvigorating' effect on the Company, giving the organisation a

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<sup>19</sup> Stern, *The Company-State*, 176.

<sup>20</sup> Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London: Routledge, 1993), 64.

<sup>21</sup> Philip J. Stern, 'Early Eighteenth-Century British India: Antimeridian or Antemeridiem?', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 21, no. 2 (2020): unpaginated.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret R. Hunt and Philip J. Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion: A Soldier's Diary of the 1689 Siege of Bombay, with Related Documents* (St Martin's: Bedford, 2015), 46–47.

<sup>23</sup> Hunt and Stern, *The English East India Company at the Height of Mughal Expansion*, 46–47.

renewed energy, harmony and purpose? The disastrous outcome of Norris's mission undoubtedly proved to all the English involved that infighting was severely damaging to the East India trade, and seems to have produced a resolve among them never to travel down the same path. A further discussion lies beyond the scope of this thesis, but examining early failures such as Child's War and the Norris embassy, and how they affected the United Company's subsequent decision making and governance, may well prove fruitful fodder for future research and scholarly debate over the Company and the trajectory of the British empire.

The Norris embassy and the ambassador's diaries most obviously lend themselves to research on the early East India Company and the British empire, and this thesis has attempted to contribute to scholarship in this field, as well as to the area of early modern diplomacy. But a source as rich, detailed, and untapped as the Norris diaries should certainly not be confined to those disciplines – as vast, dynamic, and in-vogue as they may be. For scholars of Mughal India, for example, the Norris diaries offer fresh insights into the workings of the Mughal government under Aurangzeb, the Mughal wars against the Marathas and the emperor's expansion into the Deccan, as well as early English perceptions of Mughal culture, politics, class, and religion. Those interested in global, trade, or maritime history would likewise find much to pique their interest in the source, including many hundreds of references to piracy, Indian Ocean trading routes, and cross-cultural mediation and exchange. Scholars studying the history of religion, disease and medicine, gender, music, travel literature, culture – the list goes on – would all likewise gain much from further analysis of Norris's account of his embassy to Aurangzeb. As this thesis has shown, the diaries of Norris's predecessor Thomas Roe have garnered enormous and sustained attention from scholars since their publication at the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps it is finally time for Norris to share some of the limelight.



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