Power, Presents, and Persuasion: Early English Diplomacy with Mughal India

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It was the first of September in 1617 in the Mughal Empire. The Mughal Empire, consisting roughly of modern day India, Bengal, Pakistan, and much of Afghanistan, was ruled by the Mughal Dynasty, a powerful Muslim dynasty that ruled India for centuries. The first of September in 1617 was the celebration of the birthday of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Sir Thomas Roe, English Ambassador to the Mughal Court at the time, was in attendance. He entered a beautiful garden filled with flowers and trees with a pond in the center, a part of the palace where the ceremony was being held. All around the garden were beams, scales, and massive chains of gold, as well as countless rubies, turquoise, and other valuable stones. Into this scene entered Jahangir, covered from head to toe in diamonds, rubies, pearls, and other precious things. Sir Thomas Roe could only stand and marvel.  

After entering, Jahangir climbed onto one side of a giant set of scales. This was the ceremonial “weighing” of the Emperor. It occurred on every birthday and displayed the wealth of the Mughal Empire. On the other side of the scales various bags were heaped. First gold and jewels, then cloth of gold and silks, then spices, and so on in that fashion, until the bags had been changed a total of six times. As Jahangir, with garments, weighed roughly 250 lbs., the amount of wealth weighed at this time was immense. In fact, the amount of wealth displayed was so immense that even Roe doubted what he saw, and wondered if all the containers of the wares were truly filled with those items only and not augmented with rocks.  

This story serves to illustrate the complexity early European ambassadors faced in Asia. Like the Chinese Empire at the time, Mughal India saw itself as the supreme power in the world. And as this story revealed only a glimmer of the wealth and power at the command of the Mughal Emperor, it is not hard to see why. Furthermore, the Mughals did not take to the seas, and knew little, if anything, about peoples not in their realm or along their borders. Marguerite Eyer Wilbur, in The East India Company and the British Empire in the Far

2 Ibid., 412.
East, notes that to Jahangir “India…was the entire universe.” 3 Everything outside of it was inferior, and as such owed deference and submission to the Mughal Empire. The Empire was vast, the Court’s coffers filled with riches, and the army was massive. The English, the later colonial masters of what at this time was the Mughal Empire, would not even attempt to use outright force against the Mughal Dynasty until the end of the 17th Century, and would not succeed in doing so until the mid-18th Century. So how were early European ambassadors supposed to engage in diplomacy and advance the interests of their respective nations with an Empire that not only saw itself as the center of the world, but had never even heard of Europe, oceans away?

While the Portuguese were the first European power to establish itself at the Mughal Court, it was not long before they were challenged by the English. From the early 1600s on, England expanded its presence and influence in the Mughal Empire, quickly overshadowing its European rivals. Based on this success, this paper will examine the early English Ambassadors to the Mughal Court to see how the English were able to get concessions from an Empire that considered all others insignificant. This in turn will shed light on the early interactions between Europeans and the great Asian empires, as well as their views of and reactions to one another.

While this is not necessarily a new question, scholars have failed to balance the various strategies taken by the English at the Mughal Court, opting instead to promote one strategy over the others. Further, scholars have focused too much on the opinions given by ambassadors in the heat of the moment rather than on the wider context of the entirety of each embassy and its successes and failures. In fact, while one strategy, ironically the one least emphasized in scholarship on the topic, was the most critical in prevailing at the Mughal Court, it was a balance of the various strategies (three in total) that was necessary to establish the English presence. This can be seen by examining the various early English embassies to the Mughal Court holistically, especially that of the most successful English ambassador of the time, Sir Thomas Roe.

As noted above, there are three main strategies used by early English ambassadors to the Mughal Court: maritime power, bribes/presents, and diplomatic theatrics. The first of these strategies is argued most strongly by I. Bruce Watson in a number of articles. Watson subscribes to the idea, originally put forward by K.N. Chaudhuri, that force was a key factor in European-Asian

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trade. He further proposes that it was the key factor used by early English ambassadors in diplomacy with Mughal India based on naval victories over the Portuguese near India as well as statements made by Roe himself regarding the effects of sea power. Adam Clulow also argues for this strategy and uses similar evidence. Nevertheless, both Watson and Clulow fail to see that naval power and naval victories only affected Mughal India on the provincial level at best and had no bearing on the Emperor, the only one with whom diplomacy really mattered. In fact, despite the demonstrations of naval power over the Portuguese, by the time Roe was at the Mughal Court, the English were, far from being granted trade, under threat of expulsion.

Bribes are a bit trickier in terms of diplomacy. As Ian Woodfield points out, “The giving of gifts or ‘bribes’ in return for official favours was an immutable fact...[in the] East,” and the importance of gifts or bribes in early diplomacy with Mughal India has been assumed by many authors, though it has been explicitly argued by few. Ambassadors realized that Jahangir had a love of presents (the English seemed to be fixated on this point), but when looking at the embassies holistically, the nature of gifts in diplomatic exchanges between the English and the Mughal Court is not as clear cut as it seems. While all embassies saw presents as significant, when looking at the successes of the various English embassies comparatively it seems that presents actually had little to do with concluding successful negotiations.

The last main strategy is diplomatic theatrics. This strategy is often ignored, though it is implicit in most admirers/biographers of Sir Thomas Roe and argued explicitly by Richmond Barbour. Barbour claims that maritime

5 Ibid., 74-75, 76.
power was useless to impress the Court, which resided far from the coast.\(^{11}\) Further, Barbour notes the English obsession with giving gifts at court, but argues that gifts to such powerful and wealthy leaders in Asia amounted to little.\(^{12}\) Instead, Barbour criticizes the first few ambassadors to the Mughal Court and contrasts them with Roe, who was the only ambassador with “noble demeanor.”\(^{13}\)

The Mughal Dynasty in India, with which the ambassadors dealt, was founded in the year 1526 A.D., after Babur, the founder of the dynasty, conquered Delhi.\(^{14}\) The Empire was then expanded and firmly “consummated” by his descendent Akbar, the father of Jahangir.\(^{15}\) Jahangir, though not favored by his father, was the only son of Akbar to survive. He faced a rebellion by one of his own sons shortly after ascending, though this was put down without too much difficulty.\(^{16}\) Jahangir launched other military campaigns in his career, though these were most often led by his sons rather than by himself personally. It is difficult to ascertain Jahangir’s true nature, however, especially in regards to diplomacy. At times he clearly showed signs of greed and pomp, epitomized in the “weighing” of the Emperor ceremony described above,\(^{17}\) while at others times he seemed indifferent to these things but enlightened about true honor and dignity, such as when he contrasts Roe with previous ambassadors and pledges to greatly honor Roe for his upstanding character.\(^{18}\) Nevertheless, it was with Jahangir that the early English ambassadors had to learn to deal with if they wanted to achieve their aims.

While the Mughal Court frequently sent and received embassies, it had no specified officers, let alone whole departments (diwan), to deal with foreign affairs.\(^{19}\) Jahangir did appoint an officer in 1616 to deal with “external affairs,” but this officer made no real decisions, all power in regards to diplomacy still being held by Jahangir himself. This frequently caused problems, as Jahangir,

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12 Ibid., 362.
13 Ibid., 361.
17 Roe, *The Embassy*, 411-413.
18 Ibid., 390.
like other Mughal Emperors, would often make calls on whims and had no qualms sacrificing state interests for his own personal reasons.\textsuperscript{20} Further, diplomacy was made difficult for Europeans by the fact that they were unknown at the Mughal Court. The primary diplomacy carried out by the Mughal Court was with the Ottoman Turks, the Persians, and the Uzbeks, all neighboring or near neighboring states. Each of these states was militarily powerful, and the Mughal Empire often fought wars and/or sought alliances with these nations. As the Uzbeks were seen more as nomadic barbarians, only the Persians and Turks were seen by the Mughals as being close to the level of the great Mughal Empire.\textsuperscript{21} Those seeking to gain anything close to equal status with Mughals had their jobs cut out for them.

Into this world stepped the English. English merchants had begun to conduct trade with the near east under the auspices of the Crown as early as 1505.\textsuperscript{22} The English were lured to the idea of trade with India by the capture of Portuguese Carracks in the late 16\textsuperscript{th} Century, one by Sir Francis Drake and another by Sir John Burroughs. The English found the Carracks filled with riches such as spices, silks, pearls, gold, porcelain, and more. Around the same time the Levant Company, a merchant outfit that traded with the Ottoman Empire, had made a side expedition to India, which set alight the imagination of English merchants.\textsuperscript{23}

All of this coincided with changes in England. London’s population broke the one-hundred thousand mark, and the middle and upper classes were on the rise and becoming more distinct. As England increased in wealth, its taste for luxury goods also rose. Perhaps more important than these facts, however, was the English defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 which gave the English a sense of pride and power upon the seas. An empowerment on the seas combined with the growing desire for riches and luxury to create an increased desire to expand trade.\textsuperscript{24} This desire for riches and luxury became more than just that as England began to fear the power other European nations were gaining through trade. For example, when the Portuguese and Dutch decided to dramatically increase the price of pepper, as the two nations had a monopoly on

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 72-74.
\textsuperscript{22} Wilbur, \textit{The East India Company}, 5.
\textsuperscript{24} Wilbur, \textit{The East India Company}, 9-11.
the spice, England realized how vulnerable their markets were and would continue to be if they did not branch out in global trade themselves.25

Sir Stephan Soane, a London merchant, used these arguments in 1599 to rally other merchants to help him lay the groundwork for the English East India Company.26 The East India Company was based largely off of the Levant Company, and many of its investors had been part of the Levant Company as well. In September of 1600 Queen Elizabeth granted a charter to establish a joint-stock company with a monopoly on Asian trade, which became known as the East India Company.27

The Company financed voyages to India to buy and sell goods and return to England. The voyages were extremely profitable, steadily increasing interest in trade with India. As the voyages became regular, men were left in India by one fleet to buy and sell and collect commodities and other trade goods in preparation for the next fleet. These men were called “factors” or “agents,” and the places where they lived and stored goods were called “factories.” Along with cutting down the time fleets needed to stay at ports, this system also allowed the English to buy goods at cheaper prices, as agents would be there year round, avoiding the inevitable spike in prices when the ships came into port.28 However, in order to carry out this trade, permission from the Indian government was required. Precarious local agreements were reached, but these were subject to constant change and thus caused great difficulty for the merchants of the East India Company. It was in light of this that the East India Company, with various amounts of endorsement from the English Crown, began to send ambassadors to the Mughal Court in hopes of gaining a more permanent trade agreement.

The first English embassy to be sent to the Mughal Court actually predated the establishment of the East India Company, though it was sent at the behest of the boards of the Levant Company and the Muscovite Company and carried letters from Queen Elizabeth to the Emperors of India and China (though no one from the embassy wound up even trying to go to China). The embassy consisted of two merchants, John Eldred Leeds and John Newberry, as well as a man named Ralph Fitch, of whom little is known before this embassy.

25 Ibid., 13-16.
26 Ibid., 18-19.
28 Brown, Itinerant, 28.
Ralph Fitch was the only man to return from this overland trip, and was the first man to provide a useful account of India and its possibilities to the merchants in London.  

The embassy departed London on 12 February 1583 on the ship Tyger to Tripoli, from where they proceeded by land to Agra, the capital of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (the first two embassies, Fitch and Mildenhall, met with Akbar; subsequent embassies met with Jahangir). They arrived in India on the fifth of November, though they wandered the Empire for some time before arriving at the Mughal Court. At this time the Court itself was at Fatehpur Sikri, located about 23 miles from Agra. Based on the account of Ralph Fitch, Akbar’s court seemed to take up both cities. He notes that each city was “much greater then London and very populous,” and describes the distance between the towns as a large market, “as though a man were still in a towne.” The group stayed there until 28 September 1585, after which Newberry returned overland to the Ottoman Empire, Leeds stayed in service to the Mughal, and Fitch continued exploring India and its surrounding territories. Fitch eventually returned to London on 29 April 1591.

It is uncertain if Fitch and his companions actually met with Akbar. They arrived just before Akbar left his capital on a military expedition against the Uzbeks, so it is possible. Because Fitch was able to describe Akbar’s appearance and Leeds was taken into Akbar’s service, some speculate that the embassy must have met with Akbar. Fitch, in his account, does not say explicitly, nor do any surviving letters from any members of the embassy. Regardless, this embassy did not achieve any agreements with Akbar and seems to have been more for exploring possibilities than for explicitly seeking trade rights. Still, his account views India and its trade prospects favorably, and it greatly influenced the merchants to establish the East India Company.

The next embassy, and the only one known to definitely have conversed with Akbar, was that of John Mildenhall. Now, Mildenhall was not a true ambassador. He had no ties to either Queen Elizabeth or to the East India

30 Ibid., 26; Wilbur, The East India Company, 7.
32 Ibid., 18.
33 Ibid., 12-18.
34 Prasad, Early English, 32.
36 Ibid., 52.
Company, and seems to have decided to travel to India on a whim. Sir William Foster, editor of various travel accounts and early authority on early relations with Mughal India, suggests that Mildenhall, who had heard of the establishment of the East India Company while in Constantinople, decided to go to India and try to establish relations and gain trade rights in the hopes of trading them for compensation from the East India Company. Some believe he may have visited India twice, the first time officially designated by Queen Elizabeth, but evidence for the first journey is scarce and inconsistent with his later activities, putting its existence in question. Ram Chandra Prasad, like many other commentators, is highly critical of Mildenhall. Mildenhall was already on a trade mission when he decided to go to India. Upon making this decision, Mildenhall ran off with the goods from the trade mission, possibly poisoned two or three other Englishmen, and, rather than being a stern Protestant, changed his allegiance to Catholicism when it became convenient. In Prasad’s words, Mildenhall “was not an estimable character.”

Mildenhall arrived in India in 1603, immediately stating his business. He was taken quickly to Agra, where after just a short time he gained an audience with Akbar. From the start he sought to ingratiate himself with Akbar, noting how Akbar was renowned even “into the furthermost parts of the westerne ocean” for his greatness and kindness to Christians. Mildenhall presented great gifts to Akbar, such as twenty-nine excellent horses, jewels, and jewelry, at his own expense, though part or all of this expense may have come from the trade goods he commandeered from his trade mission.

Nevertheless Mildenhall encountered trouble when the Portuguese Jesuits at the Court began to berate him severely to the Emperor. Because of this he spent six months learning Persian, known to Akbar, so that he could defend himself without relying on suspect translators. He successfully defended himself, mainly by discrediting the Jesuits, and claims to have gained concessions from both Akbar and his son, the future Emperor Jahangir. It is worth nothing that Jahangir sided with Mildenhall in his accusations against the Jesuits. Mildenhall also promised a future ambassador to be sent from England to the Court.

37 Early Travels, 48.
38 Prasad, Early English, 71-72.
39 Ibid., 70-71.
40 Early Travels, 54-55.
41 Ibid., 58-59.
Mildenhall is important to the discussion about strategies for a few key reasons. First of all, Mildenhall gave Akbar splendid gifts and, when arguing against the Jesuits, claimed, and Jahangir supported, that the Jesuits had given no gifts or profit of any kind to the Court the whole eleven or twelve years they had resided there.\textsuperscript{42} Also, Mildenhall seems to have been liked by Akbar and his court. They treated Hawkins, the next ambassador, royally because of Mildenhall’s promise of a future ambassador. However, if he was granted trade rights the English never heard about it. Further, based on the trouble Hawkins and Roe would have in obtaining concessions from Jahangir, if Mildenhall did receive concessions they were either only local or not taken seriously, the Court perhaps believing the English and Portuguese to both be negligible. At any rate, it played out that the East India Company decided they needed to send an official ambassador, and on 24 August 1608 William Hawkins arrived in India.\textsuperscript{43}

Hawkins had been to both the West Indies and the Ottoman Empire and knew Turkish, and was probably a merchant. It is likely for his fluency in Turkish for which he was chosen from among other merchants to be the ambassador, as Jahangir and many others at the Court spoke Turkish as well.\textsuperscript{44} Upon his arrival he visited the governor of Surat, the main port of call for the English in their early dealings with India, who treated him well. He also dealt with plots against him and his mission by the Portuguese,\textsuperscript{45} who perhaps remembered Mildenhall’s defeat of their intrigue at the Mughal Court. Hawkins arrived safely at Agra and the Mughal Court on 16 April 1609.\textsuperscript{46}

Mukarrab Khan, a powerful official in the Empire, put himself against Hawkins, siding with the Portuguese who had provided him with so many novel things with which he impressed the Emperor.\textsuperscript{47} Hawkins believed that Mukarrab Khan was working with the Portuguese in the various attempts on his life, and many of his goods reserved for Jahangir were seized by Mukarrab Khan.\textsuperscript{48} This caused Hawkins to, embarrassingly, present a meager gift of cloth to Jahangir when he finally met him. Despite this, Jahangir treated him royally, likely thinking him the ambassador promised by Mildenhall as mentioned earlier, and, speaking with him in Turkish, promised to remedy all with Mukarrab Khan.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 63; \textit{Beyond the Three Seas: Travellers’ Tales of Mughal India}, ed. Michael H. Fisher (India: Random House India, 2007), 59.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Early Travels}, 71-8.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Beyond the Three Seas}, 62.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Early Travels}, 63.
\textsuperscript{48} Prasad, \textit{Early English}, 94.
Jahangir took a great liking to Hawkins, constantly asking him to stay at the Court indefinitely. In fact, Jahangir even provided Hawkins with an Armenian-Christian wife and seemed to raise him above Mukarrab Khan.

Hawkins’s success, however, did not last. Mukarrab Khan gained favor once again and, with the Portuguese, sought to deride the English at Court. Hawkins managed to convince Jahangir otherwise, but he could not withstand it for long. While Jahangir kept honoring him, many of Jahangir’s promises inevitably fell through. Eventually Hawkins demanded to be given his due demands or leave to depart, and he was told to go, receiving no concessions or response to his letter from King James. One Mughal official said that the Mughal did not write to “pettie prince[s] or governour[s],” to which Hawkins claimed that the Mughal knew the King of England was mighty. Thus Hawkins departed the Mughal Court and India without achieving his aims. He died on the return voyage, just a few days before reaching England.

In his despair, Hawkins accused Jahangir of “esteeming a few toyes… more than his honour.” Contrary to this statement, however, Hawkins had received great honors even though he often had no gifts to give. Hawkins blamed much of his failure on the machinations of the Portuguese, who had influence with the powerful Mukarrab Khan. It is instances such as this that have led many scholars to believe that maritime power was a necessity in early diplomacy, as the only threat the Portuguese could make against the Mughal Empire was to burn their shipping and kill their pilgrims heading to Mecca. However, as noted above, Mukarrab Khan took sides with the Portuguese because they supplied him with novelties for the Emperor, and Foster argues that part of his opposition to the English was his fear of the English disrupting the system of privileges-for-rarities he had set up with the Portuguese. The naval power of the Portuguese may have been part of this as well, but there is no explicit evidence for it. But perhaps the real reason for Hawkins’s failure was his character. Foster called him “arrogant and tactless,” and even Sir Thomas Roe,

49 Early Travels, 64-65.
50 Ibid., 67-68.
51 Ibid., 69-72.
52 Ibid., 75.
53 Ibid., 71.
54 Prasad, Early English, 102.
55 Ibid., 103.
56 Early Travels, 63-64.
the later English ambassador to the Mughal Court, called Hawkins “a vayne fool.”\textsuperscript{57}

There were three more ambassadors after Hawkins and before Roe, but they are hardly worth mentioning. The three, Canning, Kerridge, and Edwards, had unoriginal gifts (with the exception of Canning’s cornet and its player, which caught Jahangir’s fancy) and made so many mistakes in presentation that the Jesuits easily discredited them. For example, Canning admitted that most of the gifts were from the East India Company and not the English Crown, discrediting the name of King James at the Mughal Court. Kerridge, for his part, acted slavishly at the Mughal Court, making England appear no different from other submissive states. Edwards, lastly, was an illegitimate ambassador like Mildenhall, who acted similar to Canning and Kerridge combined. He was so bad, in fact, that he was “forced back to England for defrauding the company.”\textsuperscript{58} All three were short embassies and Nicholas Withington, a member of the East India Company in India, noted their inadequacy, singling out Edwards, with whom he was directly acquainted. Withington hoped that Roe, whom he knew to be the next ambassador, would “by his worthye carriage… redeeme the great dishonour” caused by these previous embassies.\textsuperscript{59}

So what can be gleamed from these embassies in regards to how diplomacy was conducted by early English ambassadors to the Mughal Court? Ralph Fitch proves of little use in this regard, but that is understandable based on the nature of his embassy, which was purely exploratory. The last three, also, provide little insight. Mildenhall and Hawkins, however, provide excellent sources for examination, as they at least made headway at the Mughal Court, even if they failed to achieve their prime objectives.

In regards to the theory of maritime power, their embassies seem to prove that this played a part, to an extent. When Mildenhall was at the Court, he had to take great pains to battle the Jesuit influence. More significantly, according to Hawkins, the Portuguese were able to bring Mukarrab Khan to make bold attempts to get rid of the English. Mukarrab Khan, besides his personal arrangements with the Portuguese, was in charge of coastal provinces, and likely knew something of the power of the Portuguese at sea, even if he might not have taken it into serious consideration. Still, the Mughal Emperors, and especially Jahangir, did not understand the importance of the sea and the

\textsuperscript{57} Both quoted in Prasad, \textit{Early English}, 105.

\textsuperscript{58} Barbour, “Power and Distant Display,” 357-360.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Early Travels}, 231.
sea trade, and “were largely indifferent to what happened on the high seas,” including naval warfare. Thus, based on these two embassies, maritime power seems to be an avenue the English could explore to curb Portuguese influence, but little more.

In terms of gifts, the ambassadors’ words and deeds seem to contradict one another. Mildenhall gave grand gifts, which may have helped, or even been a primary factor, in his rapidly gaining the favor of Akbar; it is hard to make a conclusive judgment based on the surviving records. Hawkins believed gifts to be key to diplomacy, saying that “no man that cometh to make a petition… cometh optie-handed.” However, as noted above, when Hawkins was given great honor he hardly had any gifts to give. He started giving more worthy gifts around the time he began to fall out of favor with Jahangir. Admittedly, the two may be unrelated. Hawkins may have only received initial honor due to Mildenhall’s promise before him, in which gifts may have been a significant part, and his giving of worthy gifts later most likely has no relation to his losing favor with Jahangir.

In terms of diplomatic theatrics, the ambassadors faced a formidable task. Abraham Early, in his book The Mughal World: India’s Tainted Paradise, notes that in early Mughal India Europeans were appreciated only for their professional skills, but were otherwise seen as barbarous and treated as curiosities. Barbour says that the “severe protocols of Asiatic courts intimidated Englishmen,” which is not surprising, considering the size, power, and wealth of these courts which had never heard of Europe until the Portuguese, and even after only had an extremely limited understanding of it. Barbour claims that Mildenhall, by giving such deference to Akbar and downplaying the importance of his own nation in his initial meetings with the Mughal, as well as his numerous other attempts to flatter Akbar, resulted in making England look “irrelevant.” As noted above, Roe was extremely critical of Hawkins, and with some justification. Hawkins immersed himself in the Mughal Court and culture, even to the point of taking a wife provided by the Mughal. As Barbour argues, “Hawkins was forgetting his origins.” Of course,

60 Prasad, Early English, 141.
61 Mughal world, 296-7
62 Beyond the Three Seas, 70.
64 Barbour, “Power and Distant Display,” 349.
65 Ibid., 353.
66 Ibid., 356.
as also noted above, Hawkins successors were no better, prompting Withington’s hope that Roe would show what a true Englishman was like. By these critiques it is easy to draw the conclusion that the behavior of Mildenhall and Hawkins and the Mughal Court worked to the detriment of the English. However, without a comparison case this is mere speculation. Luckily, Sir Thomas Roe, the next ambassador, fills this role perfectly.

Sir Henry Middleton and Thomas Best, two naval commanders, had achieved local agreements with Surat. Middleton had been denied an agreement in 1611 and in retaliation attacked Surat traders in the Red Sea. Best, in turn, was awarded a local agreement when he defeated a Portuguese fleet in 1612, off the coast of Surat and in full view of the coastal authorities.67 Also as a result of Best’s victory, an impressed Mughal Court declared that a new English ambassador would be welcome at the Court. This was good news for the East India Company, which had been having difficulties. Factories and their agents in India were not cooperating, were conducting illegal trade, and were generally behaving in a way the board of the East India Company saw as unacceptable. Sir Thomas Smythe, then governor of the East India Company, saw this as an opportunity to straighten out the operations in India as well as form a lasting, favorable relationship with the Mughal Court.68

This time, however, the Company wanted to send “‘an ambassador of extraordinary countenance and respect.’”69 Sir Thomas Roe had disputed with the Dutch in Latin America and had even sat in the “Addled Parliament.”70 He was seen as a man who “combined the qualities of the great explorer with the urbanity of the courtier,”71 and when it came to understanding British foreign affairs and commerce “‘he probably had no living equal.’”72 And so on 2

68 Brown, Itinerant, 29-30.
69 Quoted in Brown, Itinerant, 31.
70 The “Addled Parliament” was the second Parliament under King James I. It was rumored that many members were in league with the King to possibly rid England of the Parliament altogether. It wound up lasting a mere two months before it was dissolved, passing no legislation. Roger Lockyer, “‘Addled Parliament.’” The Oxford Companion to British History, ed. John Cannon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Emory University. 17 November 2011 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t110.e22>
71 Prasad, Early English, 136.
72 Quoted in Ibid., 136.
February 1615 Roe set off for India and arrived off the coast of Surat in September.\textsuperscript{73}

Upon his arrival, the people of Surat laughed at him, because “so many hauing assumed that title [Ambassador], and not performed the offices.”\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, right from the start Roe encountered issues with the local government. Upon his landing, Roe was informed that he, his attendants, and their belongings were to be searched. Roe was furious. He went on a tirade, saying that as an ambassador from a free and powerful nation he was “not to be subject to Common and barbarous vsage,” and would not “subject…[himself] to so much slauery.”\textsuperscript{75} A compromise was reached, in where only a few would be nominally but not actually searched, with the a few not being searched at all, and the belongings would be taken account of after they had been delivered to a private residence. However, when the time came, the officials insisted on a search, threatening the use of force. Roe rode up to the men, laid his hand on his sword, and demanded they cease. When they tried to defend their actions, Roe would not listen, but took some pistols in his hands, saying that “those were my Frendes, and in them I would trust.”\textsuperscript{76} Then, when the governor gave him further trouble by arguing about the protocol for relations, the governor mentioned how previous ambassadors had submitted to the search and sought out the governor to form a good relationship. In response, Roe said that the Mughal Empire “neuer did receiue any [ambassador] at this Port, nor euer from a Christian King.”\textsuperscript{77} In other words, Roe denied the legitimacy of all the former embassies sent to the Mughal Court. From the beginning, Roe made it clear that he was not like the previous “ambassadors.”

When Roe departed for the Court he came across the entourage of Prince Parwiz. When he was admitted to see the Prince he again asserted himself, demanding the same treatment that was given to ambassadors from Persia or the Ottoman Empire, which he was granted. He attained local trade rights from the Prince,\textsuperscript{78} but as the Prince soon fell out of favor with his father, these became essentially useless.

\textsuperscript{73} Strachan, Sir Thomas Roe, 59, 73; Brown, Itinerant, 35, 38.
\textsuperscript{74} Roe, The Embassy, 45.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 48-50.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 91-93.
Finally, on 10 January 1616, Roe, who had made it to the Court, was admitted to see the Mughal Emperor, Jahangir. The meeting went rather well. Roe was allowed to pay respects using his own customs and he gave gifts. The gifts, however, are hardly mentioned, other than the fact that they “were well receiued.” Jahangir seemed much more interested in Roe’s health, as Roe had been ill, and even offered his own physicians to Roe. After the evening concluded, Roe stated that he was shown “more fauor and outward grace…then euer was showed to any Ambassador, eyther to the Turke of Persian, or other whatsoeuer.”

As mentioned before, upon Roe’s arrival the English were under the threat of expulsion. Roe met with Prince Khurram, the later Emperor Shah Jahan, who claimed that the governor had done this on his own volition and promised to rectify the situation. The result was the sacking of the governor of Surat. During his meeting Roe had given the Prince a present from himself, claiming it was not good enough to be from his King. Interestingly, in a meeting two days later with a Mughal official, Roe commented in regards to gift giving that it was “the Custome that when any body hath business to giue somewhat.” In another instance with the Prince, Roe says he gave him “a few toyes after the Custome.” This can be interpreted in two ways: one is that bribes were necessary to conduct business and the other is that it was a formality and a nice gesture but nothing more than that.

There were two major incidents during Roe’s embassy involving presents. The first happened in early 1617, when a batch of new gifts and other supplies was being sent to Roe. The shipment was intercepted and sent to Jahangir, who had looked through everything and taken it all for himself. Roe was outraged. When confronted, Jahangir tried to assuage Roe, pledging to make restitution for that which had not been meant for him and offering to loan some items to Roe should he need them; Jahangir was adamant, however, on keeping them. He also said that Roe “at all times…should be welcome emptie handed, for that was not my [Roe’s] fault, and I [Roe] should receiue right from him.”

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79 Ibid., 106-109.
80 Ibid., 114-115; Brown, Itinerant., 43-44.
82 Ibid., 136.
83 Ibid., 382-391.
The second incident occurred in January of 1618. Another shipment of presents had been intercepted, this time by Prince Khurram, who had put seals on the gifts and said that they should not be opened until he allowed. After twenty days of waiting, however, Roe had decided to open them anyway. He had obtained consent from Asaph Khan, a powerful official and relative by marriage to Jahangir, though Asaph Khan denied it when brought before Jahangir. Jahangir was angry with Roe, but Roe stood his case, arguing that they were his gifts to give and, besides, he did not know the customs of the seals. In the end the Prince forgave Roe, the presents were viewed, and again some of Roe’s things were taken that were not meant to be presents, though again he was paid for this seizure.  

Despite all these and many more interesting events at Court, after about three years at the Court Roe had managed only to get some local and specific agreements, but had failed to obtain any sort of empire-wide, lasting agreement. He had been in negotiations with both Asaph Khan and Prince Khurram about the agreements, but they could never seem to agree on the details, especially regarding the nature of the English-Portuguese relationship. In despair, Roe made one last attempt, planning to leave the Court regardless. In August of 1618 Roe submitted a final proposal to resolve the issues. After one final exchange and some compromises, with Prince Khurram finally either giving in to or meeting Roe halfway on points he had hitherto objected to, the agreement was made. It gave the English rights to trade throughout the Empire, solidified what the English could and could not do in the Empire, and gave the English some ability to counter the Portuguese if they were threatened. Thus Roe obtained what none of the other previous ambassadors had been able to before.

So how does the embassy of Sir Thomas Roe sit with the three strategies for gaining concessions from the Mughal Court? In regards to maritime power, it seems to relate to the experience of the former ambassadors. At first the talks to reach an agreement are held up in large part because of issues over the English-Portuguese relationship. However, after both Best’s and later Downtown’s victories over the Portuguese, the grip of the Portuguese on the Mughal Court seems to have waned. Jahangir even mentions Downtown’s defeat of the Portuguese in 1614 in his memoirs, the only mention of Europeans in the whole text. Clulow, writing about maritime force in Asia during this time period, notes how Roe mentioned the necessity of force in

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84 Ibid., 456-458.
85 Ibid., 507-514.
negotiations with the Mughals.\textsuperscript{87} However, he makes these comments at the end of his embassy, after he has been exasperated in his dealings. Also, in other instances, he explicitly is against war with, or even building forts in, India.\textsuperscript{88} So in the end it seems that maritime force was best used to weaken the Portuguese, and perhaps to gain local concessions (as Best was able to get a local agreement after his victory over the Portuguese), and was of little use in dealing with the Mughal Court directly.

In regards to presents or bribes, the conclusion is mixed. Roe, by his own account, seemed to have understood the role of presents, even if he does not make it entirely clear to the readers of his journal what that role is. It has been shown by scholars, such as Barbour, Woodfield, and Loomba, that the Mughal Court cared more about the novelty of the English presents than about their actual worth, which may show why the Court could not contain themselves when Roe’s new shipments came. Still, Jahangir claimed to grow tired of English presents at times,\textsuperscript{89} and seems to have had a fickle attitude, as in other instances he was unable to contain himself at the thought of new presents. However, at still other times he seemed to treat gifts with little or no regard.

In terms of diplomatic theatrics, Roe certainly set himself apart from his predecessors. Roe’s story at the Mughal Court is a constant struggle to stand up for himself and his country, demanding the treatment of a true ambassador of one of the world’s greatest powers. And in this Roe was successful. Jahangir bestowed greater honors on Roe, such as making him a royal disciple of his, that were bestowed on none before him.\textsuperscript{90} Jahangir himself asked Roe why petty merchants had been sent before with five times as many gifts which were all more novel, and Roe, so gentlemanly and of great character, was sent by the English with so little.\textsuperscript{91} And despite being so honored, Roe acted as the professional he was. Where others such as Meldenhall and Hawkins had emulated Mughal ways and ingratiated themselves to the Emperor, Roe had kept English ways and English dignity, letting nothing demean him or his nation.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{87} Chulow, “European Maritime,” 75.
\textsuperscript{89} Roe, \textit{The Embassy}, 203.
\textsuperscript{90} Barbour, “Power and Distant Display,” 361.
\textsuperscript{91} Roe, \textit{The Embassy}, 390.
\textsuperscript{92} Strachan, \textit{Sir Thomas Roe}, 87.
Now that all the early English embassies have been laid out as well as their implications regarding the three strategies, what is the final conclusion? It seems that maritime force and gifts were indeed an important aspect of early diplomacy with the Mughal Court, but diplomatic theatrics was the clincher. Maritime force was useful in gaining the respect of coastal governors as well as relegating other European competitors, particularly the Portuguese, at Court. This latter point was more important, as the Portuguese had been a thorn in the side of the English, capitalizing on every mistake made by an ambassador to degrade the English. This may have played a part in the Mughals granting some leeway for the English to take action against the Portuguese should a conflict between the two break out, a major point of contention in discussions between Roe and the Court. However, the fact that Best’s and Downtown’s victories happened six and four years, respectively, before an agreement was reached shows that they were likely not as significant in obtaining this concession as the proponents of maritime force believe. Further, that Roe seems to have had less issues with the Portuguese at Court is due more to Roe’s ability to handle himself at Court compared to previous ambassadors than any threat of force. Gifts, again, are a bit tricky. The main problem seems to have been the fickleness of Jahangir. At times he seemed like a greedy child, only interested in new presents. At other times, however, Jahangir brushed presents aside and weighed a supplicant or an issue on its merits. Also, the fact that ambassadors before Roe had given grand and novel presents yet obtained nothing while Roe gave less as well as less interesting gifts but eventually walked away with an agreement with the future Emperor and endorsed by the current Emperor shows that gifts were not as important as most scholars have either argued or simply assumed. And while Mildenhall, Hawkins, and Roe all garnered favor with the Mughal Emperor (Akbar for Mildenhall, Jahangir for Hawkins and Roe) initially, Roe was the only one who was able to sustain it, and based on the above analysis it can only be for the same reason that Roe succeeded in obtaining an agreement where the others failed. In the end it was diplomatic theatrics, the personality, bearing, and persistence of the ambassador, that made a real impression at the Mughal Court. It was the qualities for which Roe had been chosen as ambassador that allowed him to prevail at the Mughal Court and succeeded where his predecessors had failed.

While Roe was successful, however, he was not successful in the way that the East India Company would have liked him to be. This was not the fault of Roe, however, but rather of the fundamental differences in the way diplomacy was looked at by the English and the Mughal Court. The goal of a treaty, which the English sought, was impossible to obtain from the start. The
Mughals did not sign treaties, and no real agreement was lasting that did not have to do with war. Instead, the Mughal Emperors and Princes gave firmans. Firmans were royal favors and as such were neither binding nor lasting. Firmans could be changed on a whim, causing problems when the Emperor was very fickle, as Jahangir was. Also, as the firman was a royal favor from one Emperor or Prince, if that Emperor or Prince died or the Prince fell from favor, the firman’s authority became mute. So while Roe obtained the best that could be obtained at the time, the English, in the long run, would not be satisfied with these temporary and nonbinding firmans. And future Englishmen dealing with the Mughal Court would not be as patient and dignified as Roe was.

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