



Panel's title: *Warfare and Empire-Building in Early Modern Asia, 1500-1800*

Coordinators: Peter Lorge (Assistant Professor of History and Asian Studies, Vanderbilt University) and Pratyay Nath (Assistant Professor of History, Ashoka University)

Language: English

Topic: History

Panel presentation:

The early modern world was marked by spectacular imperial enterprises. At least six big empires – those of the Ming, Manchus, Mughals, Safavids, Ottomans, and Muscovites – dominated vast swathes of the Asiatic landmass. Several smaller states, including those of Arakan, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam as well as those of the Uzbeks and the Marathas – held sway over other parts. As empires rose, they scrambled for more and more power and territory. Alongside aggressive diplomacy, this inevitably led to frequent and violent wars. Empires busied themselves in increasing their army sizes; in developing, acquiring, and adopting new military technologies; in maintaining elaborate logistical infrastructure to support military campaigns; in gathering funds to sponsor their military endeavours; and in deploying sophisticated and multi-layered propaganda to legitimise their wars.

Taking the entire continent of Asia as its unit of analysis, the present panel looks at this complex history of war-making and empire-building over the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. It brings together five historians working on five different regions – Southeast Asia, China, Iran, South Asia, and West Asia. The papers look at diverse facets of these historical processes, including the relationship between state-formation and military organisation; the evolution of gunpowder technology vis-à-vis the imperatives of imperial finance; the interaction between military strategy and geopolitics; the influence of environment on the conduct of warfare; and the role of fortress warfare in the making of imperial frontiers. By assembling historians with diverse linguistic and methodological expertise from four different countries and three different continents, this panel holds out the promise of breaking new ground in macroscopic and comparative analyses of military and imperial processes. We hope to gather all the essays together afterwards and publish them in the form of an edited volume.

Key words: warfare; empire; guns; technology; environment; state; siege; finance; frontier

Participants:

- 1) **Name: Michael W Charney (Professor of Asian and Military History, SOAS, University of London)**

Communication's title: Firearms, Cavalry, and Ships: Military Ascendancy and the Internal Re-Organisation of Imperial Administration in Pre-Colonial Mainland Southeast Asia

Language: English

Presentation: It was not until the expansion of new empires on the borderlands of regional empires and the challenge and availability of new military innovations and technologies that the development of a permanent financial, armaments, and military organizational reworking of indigenous states, the true gunpowder empires, of Southeast Asia became a necessity. This reorganization, which reached its nadir ironically just as European states felled them in the nineteenth century, took on unique dimensions due to the particular nuances of patrimonial



kingdoms in the region. The struggle between kings and ministers that followed to ensure that Burma, Siam, and Vietnam did not succumb to European rule was often destabilizing and provoked a range of seemingly unrelated changes to the cultural and religious takes of the court, but in fact represented a turnover of elites from central nobility to military families connected with the emergence of a new military and military-related fiscal bureaucracy. This paper will look mainly at Burma and Siam with some discussion of Vietnam comparing this phase of empire-building and its relationship to military developments with the earlier sixteenth-seventeenth century phase, to identify how “empire” manifested itself differently in Southeast Asia in two different military and geopolitical contexts.

Key words: empire; southeast Asia; warfare; Burma; Siam; Vietnam; military; geopolitics

2) **Name: Kahraman Şakul (Assistant Professor of History, Istanbul Şehir University)**

Communication's title: Ottoman Siege Warfare on the Eve of the Siege of Vienna (1683)

Language: English

Presentation: This presentation focuses how war shaped the formation of imperial frontiers during the resumption of Ottoman territorial expansion through siege warfare in the ‘Second Golden Age’ under three grand viziers from the Köprülü family who held the office uninterrupted from 1661-1683. The Ottomans renewed territorial expansion in an attempt to control the Ottoman northern arc of stretching from Slovakia across the Pontic Steppe as far as the lower Volga. While the conquests of Uyvar (1663), Crete (1667-69), Kamianets-Podilsky (1672) and of Chyhyryn (Çehrin) (1677-78) served this policy, it was doomed to failure after the unsuccessful siege of Vienna (1683). Although the early modern Ottomans may not have had a “Grand Strategy”, this northern policy served as one for the Köprülüs who were represented in Ottoman literary production as the champions of Islam.

It is also important to see how the unfolding geopolitical, cultural, and military processes shaped Ottoman attitudes to new military technologies. Rather than a diffusionist model in which military innovations spread in waves from the first-tier innovators in Western Europe, the Ottoman Empire should be considered as a regional power, and compared with its immediate rivals in the theatres where they confronted one another.

Key words: Ottoman; siege; frontier; warfare; region

3) **Name: Rudolph P Mathee (John and Dorothy Munroe Distinguished Professor of History, University of Delaware, Newark)**

Communication's title: The Role of the Military in the Creation and Maintenance of the Safavid Empire

Language: English

Presentation: The Safavids were an anomaly in the history of Iran during the second millennium C.E. in that they came to power with the assistance of tribal, nomadic forces but were non-tribal themselves. My presentation considers the non-martial origins of the Safavids alongside environmental factors to argue that their army was limited in its capacities, good at guerilla warfare marked by mobility and speed, but ill equipped for sustained control. Nomadic warfare was often more about finding suitable grazing grounds and plunder than about the long-time occupation of urban centers. Especially destructive was their scorched-earth policy, which was routinely applied by the Safavid as a form of “asymmetric” warfare against the numerically and logistically superior Ottomans. Campaigns moreover were conducted following the rhythm of the seasons, allowing not enough time to reach deep into Ottoman territory other than Iraq and to go much beyond



Qandahar in the east. These circumstances explain why it was generally the Ottomans who launched hostilities and why the Safavids were happy to conclude a lasting peace with their archenemies in 1638.

Key words: Safavid; Iran; military empire; environment; warfare

4) Name: Peter Lorge (Assistant Professor of History and Asian Studies, Vanderbilt University)

Communication's title: Money, War and Guns in China

Language: English

Presentation: There are two ways to mobilize the weapons and men necessary to create and maintain empires. Governments must either requisition men and materials or they must raise the money to pay for them. These requirements lay astride the pre-modern/modern divide in state formation, at least from the European perspective. Economic historians have traced a progression in the West from “domain,” to “tax,” to “fiscal” states that coincided with the introduction of firearms, monetization of the economy, government bureaucracy, and the modern nation state itself. War and state finances developed in interconnected ways to create modern Europe. The trajectory of financial and military developments was not unidirectional in China.

Guns and modern warfare developed during the Song dynasty, declined in use during the Mongol Yuan and early Ming dynasties, and returned to prominence in the mid Ming dynasty with the return to tax state practices. The coincidence of tax state conditions and the extensive use of guns in China explains the history of gun development and use in China. The paper argues that the tax state is a precondition for the uptake and widespread use of guns in war rather than a result of the introduction of that technology.

Keywords: Manchu; China; mobilization; warfare; guns; finance; taxation

5) Name(s): Pratyay Nath (Assistant Professor of History, Ashoka University)

Communication's title: War, Environment, and Mughal Empire-Building in Early Modern North India

Language: English

Presentation: The imperial and military experience of the Mughals in early modern South Asia was decisively shaped by their engagement with the natural environment. The vast expanse of the South Asian landmass presented the Mughals – originally a Central Eurasian Turkic people most proficient in mounted warfare – with enormously diverse environmental conditions in terms of terrain, ecology, and climate. Mughal armies also encountered numerous rivers that had to be bridged, forests that required to be cut down, and roads that needed to be built for military operations to take place. This environmental diversity bred great heterogeneity in Mughal military tactics, strategy, deployment patterns, campaigning seasons, and use of technology over both space and time. Wherever imperial armies campaigned, their techniques of war had to be constantly adjusted to local environmental conditions. The extent of success in such adaptations shaped the course of military operations and the dynamics of imperial expansion. It also moulded the process of the conversion of initial conquest to lasting control. The present paper argues that studying this unceasing engagement of the Mughals with the natural environment is crucial for understanding the dynamics of war-making and empire-building in early modern South Asia.

Keywords: Mughal; South Asia; warfare; environment; logistics