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## **Early modern caravan networks in Afghanistan: a view from above**

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### **INTRODUCTION: EARLY MODERN CARAVAN ROUTES AND CONFLICT**

#### **ARCHAEOLOGY**

This chapter takes advantage of the opportunity opened by new remotely-sensed data on early modern (15th-18th **century** AD) caravan routes in the Republic of Afghanistan to review the nature and significance of caravan routes to early modern economies. This region and period are critical to a broader historical understanding of both aspects of interaction and trade in the early modern period, as well as **of** the consolidation of economic and political structures considered modern: state infrastructures, global trade companies, bulk commerce, and world-scale markets. Further, this relatively brief **examination discussion** re-inserts the territories of modern Afghanistan into the discussion of the early modern world. For half a century, ongoing conflict has prevented the country-scale archaeological investigation of Afghanistan. As a result, despite the routes of travel through Afghanistan being known from historical accounts, systematic assessments of early modern trade infrastructure tend to trail off at the modern border (e.g. Kleiss 2001: 89). More critically, the importance of caravan route infrastructure for defining the material conditions of travel through this frontier region has been discounted in historical analysis (**see Franklin and Boak 2019**).

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As we will explore, the caravanserai network in Afghanistan demonstrates the infrastructural role of caravan routes in tying together the frontiers of early modern empires. In particular, the caravanserais of Afghanistan demonstrate a ‘meeting on the edge’ by institutions of political economy developed within both the Safavid Persian empire (1501-1722) and the Mughal empire (1520s-1757).

Our discussion is informed by data generated during management and preservation research undertaken in the context of ‘conflict archaeology,’ or the use of academic research and recording techniques to track and mitigate threats to archaeological heritage during periods of war. Conflict archaeology often involves a research paradox: the same conflict which limits on the ground investigations also, through the generation of cartography and remote surveillance by occupying forces (in this case the United States as well as prior actors like the Soviet Union and British Empire), enables regional-scale examinations of landscapes at the countrywide scale (Boak 2019). In addition to historical maps, we draw on the descriptions of travelers, from merchants and mercantile agents to the agents of the British Afghan Boundary Commission, who described both sites and routes in the course of their explorations (e.g. Kinneir 1813; Adamec 1980). In our broader discussion of the Afghan and early modern routes we are reliant on data sources which are each in their own way ‘remote:’ satellite and aerial imagery on the one hand, and the accounts of early modern and modern travelers on the other. Combined, they contribute to a brief introduction to the politics, mechanics and cultures of caravans in early modern Central Asia.

## **Geographic introduction to Afghanistan**

This chapter focuses on early modern trade routes through the territory of the modern Republic of Afghanistan. Our data was generated as part of the Afghan Heritage Mapping Partnership (AHMP) at the University of Chicago Oriental Institute, a remote-sensing project focused on compiling site data across Afghanistan for the purposes of monitoring and management. The AHMP is a collaboration between the Oriental Institute and various institutions in Afghanistan including the Afghan Institute of Archaeology and Kabul Polytechnic University. The project is centered on the digitization of archaeological sites and landscapes through techniques of remote survey developed specifically for Afghanistan (Thomas and Kidd 2017). Our methodologies and data sets developed with a dual purpose, both to systematically record sites and also to construct tools for targeted research into Afghanistan's rich archaeological past (Franklin and Hammer 2018). The past half century of ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan has had a deleterious effect on archaeological research, both through the acute destruction of sites, monuments and museum collections as well as by drawing an arbitrary barrier to research across Central Asian landscapes which were contiguous in the past.

The core of Afghanistan is mountains: the jagged Hindu Kush form a highland center to the country and run northeast to meet the western Himalayas. These mountains divide Afghanistan into regions, each of which has through history been connected by river valleys, desert roads, or mountain passes to neighboring areas. This has led to a multipolarity in the geopolitical and cultural history of the region, as well as in a long record of mobility along the routes through Afghanistan's mountains and deserts. While some of these routes are topographic constants (such as the Khyber Pass, for example), the directionality of trade through Afghanistan has shifted through history according to changing geopolitics.

Afghanistan has been noted as a crossroads since at least the Hellenistic period, when the Greco Bactrian kingdom was centered in the oases to the north (Baumer 2012: 285-292). In this period Afghanistan was a crossroads of steppe, Iranian, south Asian and Greek material cultures and artistic tastes, as evidenced in hybrid objects like those from the grave assemblage at Tillya Tepe (Sarianidi 1980: 131), or the sculptural repertoires at Hadda in Nangarhar province. Likewise, the city of Farah, located on the eastern edge of the Iranian plateau, had been an entrepot since the time of Alexander (Ferrier 1857: 392). Art historical study of the medieval period has ably demonstrated the play of cultural influences between Islamic cities and the Hindu subcontinent, mediated by polities of what is now southern and central Afghanistan (Flood 2009). In the 11th through 15th centuries, nomadic invasions reconfigured the cultural world of Central Asia, and trade shifted around Ghurid, Mongol and Timurid cities including Herat, Kandahar, Balkh, and Kabul (Thomas 2018). The earliest remaining travel infrastructure in Afghanistan dates from this period (Pugachenkova 1970: 45-49). The development of caravan routes and route infrastructure to support late medieval trade presaged the use of these same travel landscapes for large-scale caravan commerce in subsequent centuries.

## **EARLY MODERN CENTRAL ASIA: THE SAFAVID AND MUGHAL EMPIRES**

The early modern period (16th-18th centuries) in Central Asia was shaped by the expansion of Muslim empires, which influenced urban and regional life across the continent in terms of political and social institutions, traditions of power, and material and visual aesthetics. Hodgson famously categorized the Mughal Empire of India and Pakistan, the Safavid Persian Empire, and the Ottoman Turkish Empire as “gunpowder” empires (Hodgson 1974: 16), essentially attributing what he saw as a 16th century florescence of new forms of social life and

state power to the technical reorganization of military hierarchies. Subsequent scholars have pointed out that this term overstates the similarity between these polities as historical and social phenomena (Streusand 2010: 3). Beyond the synchronicity of the Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman empires within the ‘gunpowder era’ (a term which itself implies a transformative effect on global social orders which is debatably merited by a single technology), these polities also shared Turkic-Mongol traditions of governance, ideas of rulership, and grammars of spatial and aesthetic order. Among the shared social institutions of early modern Central Asia is a commitment at the aristocratic, royal, or state level to institutions of hospitality; this institution overlapped in the early modern period with a state commitment to the fostering of trade. We will focus for the remainder of this chapter on Safavid and Mughal examples (being most pertinent to Afghanistan), but the expansion of all three of the early modern Islamic empires involved the construction of hospitable institutions for travelers and infrastructure for traders and their goods: hospices, hostels, and caravan inns, known most commonly as *(k)hans* (Ottoman Turkish, “inn”), *caravanserais* (Persian, “caravan hall”), or as *sarays* (Hindi “inn,” Urdu “hall or palace”) in the Mughal context. Caravanserais, as we shall explore, are both one of the most prominent physical monuments to the early modern Islamic empires, as well as symbolic of the more complex and spatio-temporally entangled institutions of hospitality, sovereignty and political economy which united Central Asia as a social ecumene for multiple centuries of the medieval and early modern periods.

### **Architecture of early modern caravanserais in Central Asia**

The caravanserai has a long institutional tradition in Eurasia, building from multiple intersecting traditions of infrastructure and hospitality, including the Greek *pandocheion* (guest

house) and royal roads networks built by the Achaemenids (Constable 2003). The canonical form of the Central Asian caravanserai, with a monumental entrance leading to a broad courtyard lined with rooms, was developed under the Karakhanid khaganates in the 10th-11th centuries; at the same time, the caravanserai as an institution of hospitality was cemented within narratives of Islamic politics (Hillenbrand 1994: 331-376; Franklin 2014 a and b). The 12th-13th centuries saw an explosion of caravan networks from the Mediterranean coast under the Mamluks, to Seljuk Anatolia, across the Caucasus and through the Mongol khanates, as major geopolitical changes united people from northwestern Europe to China in common cultures, from cuisine to religion (Cytryn-Silverman 2010, Tavernari 2017). These connections and routes would shift and expand still further in the early modern period, with the development of maritime trading companies and the consolidation of the 'gunpowder empires.' Siroux described the Safavid practice of modifying earlier Seljuk and Mongol caravanserais elsewhere in the empire (Siroux 1974: 351). The corpus of caravanserais built under the Safavids has been painstakingly collated by Wolfram Kleiss (2001 1996 etc etc); his series of volumes categorize these structures as variations around a standard model. Built from stone or (more frequently in Central Asia) from mudbrick, the Safavid caravanserai was square with a central courtyard, with *iwan* entrances and internal rooms arranged to strict axial symmetry. Some caravanserais feature corner towers or bastions. Mughal sarays were built to very similar specifications; monumental stone or brick gates opened into a central courtyard, leading to a series of chambers for the storage of goods and the accommodation of human travellers and their animals (Campbell 2011). In both empires, caravanserais on major routes were equipped with stately chambers over the main gate, where traveling kings or nobles would stay. These buildings would also frequently feature inscriptions

indicating to whose glory the enjoyment of the facilities ought to be attributed, whether a king or a local administrator.

### Trade patronage of the Safavid and Mughal empires

The place of trans-continental caravan trade within the political economy of the Safavid and Mughal empires is an ongoing subject of active research and debate. While the contributions of these empires to global economy in the early modern period is unquestionable, the relationships between trade policy and political philosophy, or between tactics of revenue collection and traditions of hospitality, are not always clear. Rudi Matthee (1999: 3) argued that a large cohort of western economic historians have treated Safavid Iran “as a giant clearing house through which a considerable volume of trade passed on its way to somewhere else-- following the seventeenth century French cleric du Mans, who compared Iran to a caravanserai with one gate open to Turkey and another to India.” Beyond encapsulating the perception of Safavid Iran as a passive “transit” economy, this conceptualization also echoes rhetorics of the state that were native to early modern Islamic empires, though with different connotations. An inscription of Shah Abbas I (r. 1588-1629) at the Kashan caravanserai begins, “The world is a caravanserai and we are the caravan” (translated from Chardin 1811, 3:3). Rather than a metaphor for political economy, this inscription (drawing on longer traditions of political thought and writing in Central Asia) frames the caravanserai in cosmological terms, as a microcosm ruled over by the benevolent will of the Shah. A broader epigraphic tradition linking the construction of caravanserais “as wide as the heavens” to the will and memory of a royal or princely patron is found in the Mughal empire as well, tying that empire to hospitable politics across Eurasia (Campbell 2011: 65; Cunningham 1882: 64; Franklin 2014a). Even as the early modern period



saw the appearance of ‘modern’ innovations in trade, the practices of caravan travel through which trade was realized in Eurasia were literally contained within political cosmologies with longer traditions, mediated through built spaces like caravanserais.

### **The Silk Road during the early modern period**

The focus of most history of early modern trade in Central Asia has been on the commodities traded; these objects and substances are admittedly critical to understanding the geographies of taste and desire that were constituted through the long-distance movement of people and animals in this period. Caravans carried a combination of goods, both things that we would now consider ‘bulk goods’ as well as exotic ‘luxuries.’ Durable goods like ceramic dishes, tiles and furnishings were carried from workshops in eastern Iran across the empire; porcelain and celadons were imported from Ming China. ‘Exotic’ substances included forest products from the subcontinent: pepper, mace, cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon (Floor 1989). In the early 16th century the bulk of sugar still came from India-- at this point it was still nearly as costly in Europe as other south Asian spices. Camphor, indigo, cardamom, chinaroot, lac, and benzoin were imported from various South Asian countries, while coffee was brought from Moḳā in Yemen and sandalwood, sappanwood, and agalloch (agilawood) carried from northern Thailand (Ferrier 1986: 448). Meanwhile, horses were transported by caravans from northwestern Afghanistan. And of course, caravans carried textiles. Indian textiles were in demand both in Europe and as goods for trading with South East Asia, where they were highly sought after (Sen 1962). Silk produced in the northern regions of Persia was transported both internally to be woven as well as shipped in its raw form by the bale from ports like Bandar Abbas, which the Safavid Persians and British mercantile companies controlled after seizing it from the Portuguese in 1622 (Mathee 1999).

## Life on a caravan: evidence from traveler's accounts

Scholars of travel in early modern Central Asia have a valuable resource in the accounts left by travelers in the 17th and 18th centuries. The nature of these historical sources of course requires a caveat: as pointed out by Mathee, the bulk of our descriptions of the Safavid empire come from aristocratic, European travelers (Mathee 2012b). They stood out from the general population of caravaners, both in their ability to afford comforts and in their origin, as is evidenced by their frequent use of disguise (beards, caftans, and in at least one early 20th century case, facepaint) in order to blend in (Byron 1994: 278). Notwithstanding the need to consider their situated perspectives, these travelers provide amazing descriptions of caravans and caravan life.

The 17th century French merchant and traveller Jean Baptiste Tavernier (who traveled to Isfahan and then to India in the 1630s) wrote:

“The caravans are as it were great convoys, which consist of a good number of merchants, that meet at certain times and places, to put themselves into a condition to defend themselves from thieves, that are very rife in troops in several desert places upon the road. These merchants choose among themselves a caravan-bashi, who orders them how they shall march, assigns the places of lodging at night, and who with the chief of the caravan, is a kind of judge of the differences that fall out by the way” (Tavernier 1678: 45).

He continues:

“The camels that go into Persia through the northern provinces of Turkey travel like Horses in a cart, by seven and seven; they are tied together by a cord about the bigness of a man's little finger, and a fathom long; fastened to the packsaddle of the camel that goes before, and to the head harness of the camel that follows ....The last time I went from Smyrna the Caravan consisted of six hundred Camels, and almost the same number of Horse. Sometimes their number is greater, so that the Camels going but by one and one after another, a Caravan seems to be an Army; and whether it be in travelling or lodging, they take up a world of Ground.” (Tavernier 1678:46).

Tavernier notes that caravans were made up of both camels and horses, which traveled at different speeds. Jean Chardin, who traveled through Persia in the 1670's, noted that guards-- called rahdar-- were appointed by the state to watch the road and accompany caravans (Chardin VI: 124). Furthermore, Shah Abbas I continued policies employed by the Ilkhanid Mongols and others, requiring local governors be held accountable for the safety of travelers through their territories (Emerson and Floor 1987: 318).

Caravans this large required monumental housing. While caravans could camp, they would frequently seek the shelter-- as well as food, fodder, supplies and companionship-- provided at a caravanserai, sometimes camping outside if necessary. An excellent description of the strategy of traveling between caravanserais is provided by the French traveler J.P. Ferrier, who journeyed through Persia, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1820s. Though Ferrier's account is somewhat later than our primary period of interest, it provides useful details on how caravaners negotiated the challenging landscapes in this region, as well as on the makeup of merchant caravans:

“Once in motion the caravan breaks into small parties of ten or twelve persons; that of the djilo dar is at the head of the column, and there in front of all, he puts his best beast to set an example to the rest by her steady and sustained pace. This mule is always gaily caparisoned the harness covered with embroidery and other varieties of decoration in addition to the bells which give notice of the approach of the caravan. After these detachments comes the merchandize, also carried by mules, and those travellers who have only half, nay, sometimes only a third of an ass, for there is often a triple partnership, ride and tie -- the foot passengers bring up the rear. All halts and hours of march are determined by the djilo dar. If there is no caravanserai he selects the camping ground and the goods are ranged under his orders in a circle or a square round which the travellers sleep; the space within is reserved for the horses and mules which are tethered to a long pole. The djilo dar is, as he well need be, an active fellow for he has sometimes to look after five or six hundred mules their burdens and their drivers who are ten thousand times more troublesome than their beasts. When the halt is made he announces the hour of departure for that day or the next morning he also regulates the pace or stops the caravan by various cries which are passed from mouth to mouth along the road” (48).

Travelers, beasts and goods would frequently be locked into the caravanserai for the night, and unlocked at sunrise the next morning. Ferrier observed that in his period of travel the royal caravan inns-- *caravanserai shāh*-- were free to enter, while private caravanserais were entered “for a trifling sum” (Ferrier 1857: 8). Of course, caravanserais by the later early modern period were frequently used by foreign trade agents as well; Floor (1999) compiled a series of firsthand accounts by VOC agents of the Isfahan- Bandar Abbas road and its stopping places. The caravanserais along this route were noteworthy in that they were “often palatial in design and size, covered in glazed tiles and artwork as well as adorned with gardens and trees, waterworks and other amenities” (1999: 67). Travelers through Mahyar in 1691 remarked on the size and accommodation of the under-construction caravanserai there, fitted with tiled verandahs and cisterns, as well as shops. However, the duration of even a well-appointed caravanserai could be brief. Mudbrick requires constant upkeep, and they were subject to the fickleness of geopolitics. As is typical of weary travelers, Europeans on the Bandar Abbas road complained of the dilapidation and dirtiness of some stopping places due to the negligence of local administrators. This speaks to the relative rapidity with which caravanserais would be erected, as well as to the dependency of caravan routes (especially in frontier and desert areas) on frequently renewed investment. As we shall now explore, these aspects of route maintenance inform our analysis of the material evidence for caravan infrastructure in Afghanistan as a key (though neglected) part of the early modern caravan routes.

Safavid and Mughal power in Afghanistan: a networked frontier

Situated as a shifting frontier zone between the Safavid Persian and the Mughal empires, Afghanistan's archaeological landscapes testify to the strategies of monumental infrastructure developed under these polities. Kandahar and Kabul were both conquered by the Mughal emperor Babur in the early 16th century, displacing the remnants of Timurid and Arghun dynasties which had ruled those cities. At that time both Kandahar and Kabul, along with Herat, were entrepôts on the India-Khorasan trade route (Matthee and Mashita 2012). From essentially the 1520s onwards, Kandahar would be an apple of discord between the Mughal and Safavid empires, both of which sought to control its nodal position between mountain passes and desert routes. This long-running rivalry over the Kandahar route was immortalized in the illuminations of the *Padshahnamah*, which show the 1631 siege of Kandahar by the Mughal Nasiri Khan (Beach and Koch 1997: 54-5). Caravanserais became a central aspect of monumental architecture in this period, epitomized by the Khan-e Babur in Kabul, built as one component within an expansive architectural repertoire. Yet, the routes and caravanserais of Afghanistan fade from view in historical analyses except for the Kandahar route, which was traveled by traders en route between the Safavid capital (or Bandar Abbas) and the cities of the Indian subcontinent (e.g. Matthee 2012b; Steensgaard 1999). This effective erasure is contradicted by our remotely-sensed data, which suggest a key role played by caravanserais in mediating the spaces of power across the plural and shifting frontiers of Afghanistan in the early modern period.

## **THE VIEW FROM ABOVE: DISCOVERY OF EARLY MODERN CARAVANSERAIS IN AFGHANISTAN USING REMOTE IMAGERY**

Through the fragmentary spatial pattern of the small set of caravanserais recorded in the 1982 Ball and Gardin gazetteer and chance observations of additional caravanserais made in the course of digitizing the gazetteer, it became apparent that the scattered stations across Afghanistan were part of a much larger, standardized network that connected the cities of Iran with Central Asia and Mughal India. Using satellite imagery, historical maps and route modeling, we reconstructed Safavid-era (early-mid 17th century) travel networks. Seventeenth century maps and traveler's accounts, along with the locations of known caravanserais, were used to inform a linear GIS model that created targeted survey points every 20km at predicted station distances. This spacing was based upon the observed distance between known caravanserais and accounts of daily distances covered by camel caravans. Along the targeted survey areas, differentially dated satellite imagery was examined, including the ESRI basemap and high resolution Buckeye aerial imagery, Corona spy satellite imagery from the 1960s, and the 1:50,000 scale series of Soviet survey maps, produced between 1983 and 1987. The standardized nature of the early modern caravanserai routes through Afghanistan made this method of targeted survey extremely effective, and we were able to locate 149 caravanserais, 81 of which share the standardized plan and orientation initially observed and associated with the early modern routes (Franklin and Boak 2019: 45-46).

## Results

The caravanserais we located make up a dataset that operates on multiple scales - from individual building to route to network of routes. The 149 structures include 81 Safavid caravanserais, as well as heterogeneous structures identifiable as caravanserais based on their attributes: they are monumental structures with cellular rooms arranged around a central court,

and one or two gated entrances. This latter set -set of 81- contains structures from various periods, for instance, the Timurid-period Khush Rabat, north of Herat; non-standardized buildings dating to the Safavid period, such as Islam Q'ala; damaged or ambiguous structures requiring further research or on-the-ground verification; and contemporary structures which may have been built on the ruined foundations of standardized Safavid caravanserai, and which follow their plan and orientation. However, the set of 81 standardized caravanserai - sharing similar layouts, dimensions, and orientations - form the core of our argument. These caravanserais are consistently square, with corners marked by rounded towers. The exterior walls are plain on three sides, with a single monumental chambered iwan entrance, which most frequently faces east. The caravanserai wraps around a spacious court, with a dividing wall running perpendicular to the iwan entrance. In the interior of the court, the majority (78%) have a small internal building divided by arches into nine domed chambers. The courtyard is accessible on all sides through arched doorways that lead into a double arcade running the length of three sides. Forming individual spaces for travelers, the arcades were divided into a series of bays by low arches. We informally designated these standardized caravanserais the "E type," for the abstracted layout of gate, court, and dividing wall bears resemblance to the capital letter (Franklin and Boak 2019: 46). Following standardized dimensions as well as layout, the E-Type caravanserais cluster unimodally around 100 meters square (measured from the central points of the towers); 17th century accounts of comparable Mughal caravanserais report that these large spaces could accommodate up to 1000 people with their goods and animals.

These data represent a material investment in travel through the Safavid-Mughal frontier that goes beyond the Kandahar-Farah-Isfahan route discussed in accounts of overland trade. Our data represent routes that connected the major Afghan cities, and the standardization of building

form and stage length implies a degree of centralized planning. Our data allowed us to reconstruct significant sections of caravanserai routes between Herat and Merv, Herat-Farah, Farah-Kandahar, Kandahar-Kabul, Kabul-Balkh, and Herat-Kabul (Franklin and Boak 2019: Fig. 5). Below, we discuss the culture surrounding caravan travel, informed by early modern travelers along these routes.

### **Sociality of travel on caravans through Persia and Afghanistan**

The archaeological record makes up only part of the history of caravan travel and trade through Afghanistan. Travel accounts through Afghanistan in the Safavid period, written over several centuries for a variety of purposes, provide us necessary access to observations of the culture of travel, albeit through the nearly singular lens of aristocratic European men involved in the projects of merchant companies and state governments. It is critical to note that in our ability to imagine the culture surrounding caravan travel, we are subject to the idiosyncrasies of observation, memory, and, in particular, style, for it is historiographical fact that the dozens of journals, loose notes, and papers brought back by travelers (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: li) were edited down and re-written to “fit them for public perusal” (li). Nonetheless, the data contained in these sources demonstrate the sociality formed around the caravanserai network.

The caravanserai system represented an investment in hospitality, convenience, and care for travelers. John Fryer, traveling through Persia in 1672-1681, noted the furnishing of caravanserais with cheese, fruit, and bread for travelers, and barley for the animals (Fryer 2010: 26), while Chardin extolled how little needed to be carried due to the provisions conveniently provided (Chardin II: 143). The layout of caravanserais simultaneously fostered hierarchical and communal social organization. The large courtyards represented an undifferentiated space where



“he that comes first, is first served” and “none give way to another” among the “multitude of all sorts” traveling (Fryer 2010: 27). However, should a noble or foreign ambassador arrive, he would be proffered room, and there were separate apartments for “persons of the best quality to keep together” (Tavernier 1678: 45). Distinct roles in the caravanserai, within traveling caravans, and along routes created a system of protection from thieves. The “gelabdar” protected and kept animals in line (Fryer 2010:28), while the “rahdar” (a Mughal term) were guards posted along roads and in caravanserais (Chardin VI: 124).

More than just spaces of hospitality and protection, however, the caravanserais were critical to the early modern political economy, as spaces where travelers encountered governmentality, and which mediated difference across borders. Travelers note that the caravanserai at the place now called Kishkinakhud, in Kandahar, Afghanistan, was “the last outpost of the grand Mogul” (Manrique 2010: 266), or “a small castle in which the Mogul has a garrison, being the utmost boundary of his dominions westwards” (Steel and Crowther, cited in Kerr 1813: 213). Travelers experienced changes in control and the frontier nature of the land that now makes up modern Afghanistan through the changing tolls and taxes, varying from ½ to 2 abacees (charged per camel) along the Safavid/Mughal frontier (Steel and Crowther, cited in Kerr 1813:152). As travelers moved west, leaving Mughal control, they came upon the caravanserai at “Greece” or modern Gereshk, the “first belonging to the king of Persia” (Steel & Crowther, cited in Kerr 1813: 153), and farther west, reached the town of Farah, where in order to continue into Persia, they would wait for seven to ten days while the “king’s treasurer [saw] all their packs weighed,” in order to estimate the duties owed (Steel & Crowther, cited in Kerr 1813: 155).

The experience of waiting was part of the culture of travel across the Safavid and Mughal empires; when a caravan reached its terminus, there was a period of waiting, filled with trade and gathering of new supplies in the town, before a new caravan was formed for the next leg of the journey, and caravans were timed with the seasons so as to safely travel through mountain passes (Goës, cited in Yule 1916). The caravanserai networks were infrastructural in that they enabled the transport of people and goods, but also because they constituted an organizational structure that situated travelers in relation to states. Further, the caravanserais created an infrastructure for information exchange. Of the caravanserais of Persia, Chardin notes that each caravanserai is specially designated for caravans from a certain country or the merchants of certain goods, and thus forms a space where one can seek news as well as particular goods. (Chardin II: 147, 394).

More than just a system of overland trade, the caravanserai networks through Persia and Afghanistan constituted a society of the road and an early modern form of globality. The infrastructural networks of the caravanserai systems represent a conscious investment in the creation of a culture of caravan travel, wherein travellers were protected from the dangers of the road, provided with hospitality, given a space to exchange goods and ideas. We glimpse this society of the road through early modern accounts of travel through Afghanistan in the Safavid period, which constitute the framework and primary evidence for historical knowledge of the period.

## **DISCUSSION**

Early modern travelers agree in their descriptions of the importance of caravan trade to politics in the ‘gunpowder empires.’ Both Tavernier and Chardin relate tales of Shah Abbas I and his focus on the care and accommodation of both trade and travelers (Tavernier 1678: 202,

Chardin 1811 Vol. 7: 324-325). But the construction of “bridges, pavements and caravanserais on the highways, for the convenience of passers” was also noted as a practice of lesser nobility and more widespread charity in this period (Chardin 1811 Vol. VII: 296). Indeed, comparanda from the Mughal empire suggest that the construction of route infrastructure and the provision of hospitality to travelers was not merely a tactic of Safavid economy but a unifying aspect of Central Asian Islamic cultures. We might speculate that if this analysis were expanded further to include Ottoman caravan routes, it might be possible to further re-categorize the Central Asian Islamic empires and their expansions on the basis of hospitality as much as of gunpowder. In the case of Afghanistan specifically, our data on early modern caravanserai networks corroborates the historical position, showing as well that political economy resided in physical, often quotidian infrastructures as well as in regal performance. Lastly, the commonality of architecture and institutions along the fraught Mughal-Safavid frontier demonstrates the potential of cultures of mobility and trade to cut across violent military and political antagonisms.

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## FIGURES

1. A map of the research area (the territory of modern Afghanistan is highlighted) showing the reconstructed routes of several early modern travelers, and sites mentioned in the chapter.



2. Map of the territories of modern Iran and Afghanistan by Robert de Vaugondy, 1753, showing routes and cities
3. A map showing the network of early modern caravanserais recorded by the authors
4. A series of examples of the early modern caravanserais recovered by the project, with an inset map showing their locations
5. Historical illustration of the Safavid caravanserai at Mahyar by E. Flandin, 1840.