

The Charisma of Colonial Rule

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On the eve of partition, the Khan of Kalat, the ruler of a frontier princely state, met with Viceroy Mountbatten. Though the new government of Pakistan would soon takeover administration of relations with Kalat and the rest of Baluchistan, the Khan was anxious to ensure that Pakistan's representative to the area would remain a British man. While a Pakistani center was acceptable, a Pakistani representative of the center was not, because "all Baluchis loved and trusted the British in a way they had never trusted anybody else." The demand is a curious one, especially considering the much-vaunted process of modernization, rationalization, and bureaucratization of government by the colonial state. If the British had been ruling India through a faceless and impersonalized bureaucracy, then why were the Baluch insistent on a British administrator? This contradiction indicates that personalized forms of power were an important part of colonial government in India.

In my dissertation, I intend to show that the British developed new personalized forms of power in the late nineteenth century at the same time as they were also expanding their bureaucracy. This form of rule was pioneered by Sir Robert Sandeman, who responded to the challenge of governing Baluch tribes on India's northwestern frontier. These tribes had thwarted the earlier strategy of control through a British-backed prince. In the 1870s, Sandeman inserted himself directly into tribal governance and negotiated a personalized form of power, which emphasized the character and charisma of the administrator.

A form of power that has been associated with pre-colonial states and is supposed to have been displaced by the British was in fact essential to colonial rule. Because of Sandeman's success, this form of rule became ascendant in the Indian Political Services. His biography was one of the four texts IPS officers were examined on. These officers in turn applied this form of power to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas on India's frontier and also to Middle Eastern and African colonies. My research will focus on investigating the development, nature, and influence of this form of government. I am also interested in exploring the postcolonial state's abortive attempts to modify this form of government in Baluchistan.

On my trip to Pakistan in September and October 2013, I intend to visit the Commissioner of Quetta Division Archive and the Home Secretariat Archives in Quetta, the Sindh Archives in Karachi, and the Punjab Archives in Lahore. The archives in Sindh and Punjab also contain colonial documents pertaining to the administration of Baluchistan because these provinces were intimately involved in its administration in the nineteenth century. In fact, Sandeman started his career as the district official of Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, where one of his responsibilities was to manage the Marri and Bugti tribes across the border in Baluchistan. This trip to the archives in Pakistan will allow me to ascertain the range of materials available for my research. It will also be instrumental in shaping my ideas as I apply for dissertation research fellowship towards the end of the year.