Introduction

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This special issue of the *JRAS*, guest-edited by Heidi Pauwels University of Washington and Anne Murphy University of British Columbia, brings together an extremely interesting set of articles that collectively explore vernacular perspectives on the emperor Aurangzeb/Alamgir drawn from outside the Persianate heartland of Mughal India. Its beginnings lay in an innovative interdisciplinary panel at the 2014 European Conference on South Asian Studies (ECSAS) held in Zurich in July 2014, which was organised by Heidi and Monika Boehm-Tettelbach (Horstmann). Drawing on vernacular literature, as opposed to more mainstream Persian sources, their authors seek, in various ways, to complicate past and present-day assumptions about the nature of Aurangzeb's rule, how he interacted with his subjects, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and how his subjects in turn viewed him. Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707 as Alamgir) continues to divide opinion sharply, as reactions to Audrey Truschke's 2017 study *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford University Press) have recently underlined. Aurangzeb remains a firm fixture in South Asia's twenty-first century 'culture wars'. By drawing on less-commonly referenced vernacular sources, and hence offering access to less state-centric views of Aurangzeb, this special issue makes a welcome — and very opportune — case for more rounded and nuanced understandings of the emperor and the India in which he lived.

Back at the turn of the twentieth century Indian Civil Service judge Henry Beveridge — husband of Annette Beveridge who famously translated both the autobiographical *Babur-nama* (1912-21) and Gulbaden Begum's memoirs of her brother's life *Humayun-nama* (1902) and himself translator of *The Akbarnama of Abu-L-Fazl* (1902-39) and *The Tūzuk-i-Jahangīrī Or Memoirs Of Jahāngīr* (1909–1914) — published a very short piece in the *JRAS* entitled 'Aurangzeb's Revenues'.[1] A second equally brief (6 page) article with Aurangzeb in the title — 'A New (?) Contemporary History of Aurangzeb's Reign' by Ram Sharma — appeared three decades later in 1936.[2] While Aurangzeb has since then appeared fleetingly on the pages of the Journal, these have remained the only two contributions dedicated to him or

[1](Apr., 1906), pp. 349-353.
[2]No. 2 (Apr., 1936), pp. 279-283.

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his time as emperor until this special issue in 2018. This unfortunate deficiency is now, at least in part, redressed!

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