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INDIA
AT THE DEATH OF AKBAR



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INDIA
AT THE DEATH OF AKBAH
AN ECONOMIC STUDY

BY

W. H. MORELAND
C.S.I., C.I.E.

LATE OF THE INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE

AUTHOR OF

"THE AGRICULTURE OF THE UNITED PROVINCES,"

"THE REVENUE ADMINISTRATION OF THE UNITED PROVINCES,"

AND "AN INTRODUCTION TO ECONOMICS FOR INDIAN STUDENTS"

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PREFACE

THE aim of this book is to present a sketch of the economic life of India at the opening of the seventeenth century, that is to say, at the period immediately antecedent to the first appearance of those new forces which were destined to exercise an increasing and eventually predominant influence on the development of the country. If it be permissible to assign a precise date to what is essentially a gradual transition, we may say that the medieval history of India ended, and the modern history began, in the year 1608, when the English ship *Hector* reached Surat. Starting from this date, it is possible to trace the economic story of the next three centuries, first in the narratives of travellers and the early Letter-Books of the East India Company, and then in the more copious official records and publications of later times, so that a well-defined period for study is within the reach of our schools and universities, provided that a suitable beginning can be made. This book attempts to supply such a beginning, by furnishing an account of the economic position at the close of Akbar's reign; there is, I fear, little prospect that adequate materials for a similar study of earlier periods will ever become available, but our knowledge of the closing years of the sixteenth century appears to be sufficient to justify the attempt which I have made.

Whether the attempt is successful is a question for the reader. The materials which I have used seem to me to provide the basis for a coherent and consistent account of the main currents of the economic life of India, but I cannot claim that the account now offered is definitive. It is a sketch

rather than a finished picture ; there is room for more intensive study of some of the authorities, and there is a reasonable prospect of the discovery of additional facts among sources to which I have not at present access, such as the records of the Portuguese administration and of the Jesuit missionaries, or the vernacular literature of the East and South and West. The period thus offers opportunities for further research, much of it of a kind well suited to the schools of economics now growing up in the Indian Universities, and while there are obvious arguments for deferring publication until the sources have been more fully explored, it seems to me that the balance of advantage lies in offering the sketch for use until the schools have got to work ; it will serve at the least as a frame-work on which additional results can be arranged, and as an index to the topics on which further information is required.

A few words are necessary regarding the point of view. I have tried to write from the standpoint of readers who have a general knowledge of recent conditions in India, and to state the past in terms of the more familiar present, or, to speak more precisely, in terms of the years between 1910 and 1914, before the occurrence of the sudden economic disturbances resulting from the war. Comparisons are, however, difficult to draw when the earlier period is described in superlatives ; the wonderful capacities of India could not fail to stir the imagination of visitors from the West, and the exuberant language of the sixteenth century may give a very misleading impression if the adjectives are taken at their modern value. The only possible corrective is to fix the attention on quantities, and I have attempted throughout to arrive at numerical estimates, actual or relative as the available data permit, of the various factors which composed the stream of economic life. The dangers attendant on this form of political arithmetic can best be realised by those who have practised it, and I am not so sanguine as to hope that I have escaped them all ; the justification for offering such estimates is that they may assist the reader to see the past more nearly in its true perspective, and while

they may be at variance with the facts, they will usually indicate the order of magnitude of the quantities under consideration, and will at any rate direct attention to an aspect of the subject which is almost wholly neglected by popular writers on the period. I ask only that these estimates should be regarded as first approximations, and that readers to whom they may appear to be improbable should test them in the light of the original authorities.

It would be unfair, however, not to add a word of warning for the benefit of any one who may accept this invitation. One of the difficulties surrounding this period is the diversity of language employed by the authorities. I have worked on them in English, French, Latin, Persian and Portuguese, and I have found that translations (where they exist) must be used with caution; they may be sufficiently accurate for all ordinary purposes, and yet miss the technical sense of words in which economists are specially concerned, while even standard dictionaries may fail to indicate the precise shade of meaning intended by a writer of the sixteenth century. It is advisable, therefore, to go to the original text wherever possible, and if I have myself failed to do this in the case of the Italian, Spanish and Russian travellers, I can offer only the plea that I am ignorant of those languages. What I have said regarding translations applies particularly to the English versions of the *Ain-i Akbari*, in which the technical force of many expressions is lost, and I fear that some knowledge of Persian must be regarded, for the present at least, as indispensable for the detailed study of this particular period.

The subject which I have treated is extensive, and has involved a certain amount of exploration in unfamiliar by-paths of literature and science. I have received cordial assistance from almost every one to whom I have applied, and I take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to the friends and the strangers on whose resources I have drawn,—to Mrs. C. M. Knowles of the London School of Economics, Sir David Prain and Dr. Stapf of Kew, Dr. Barnett of the British Museum, Mr. P. S. Allen of Merton College, Oxford, Mr. R. W. Dana, the Secretary of the Institution of Naval

Architects, Mr. J. H. Dickenson of Manchester, and Mr. F. Lauder, the Honorary Secretary of the India Section of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce; also to the following past and present members of my old Service (which, by the way, is sometimes said to have lost its interest in study and research),—Sir George Grierson, Sir Edward Maclagan, Mr. Vincent Smith, Mr. R. Sewell, Mr. M. Longworth Dames, Mr. R. Burn, Mr. A. C. Chatterjee, and Mr. A. Yusuf Ali. I have also to thank Mr. D. T. Chadwick, the Indian Trade Commissioner, for his readiness to place his knowledge at my disposal; and finally I have to acknowledge the unvarying kindness of Mr. W. Foster of the India Office.

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APPENDIX A

THE CROPS GROWN IN INDIA IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

1. THE crops specified in the revenue statistics of the *Ain* may be arranged in modern classification as follows :

CEREALS. Wheat. Barley. Rice.

Summer-rice is entered distinct from the two grades (*not* varieties) enumerated among the autumn crops.

MILLETS. Jowar. Bajra. Chena. Sawan. Kodon. Kakun. Mandwa. Kudiri or Kuri. Barti.

Bajra is entered as lahdara, a name now almost obsolete. Kakun is shown as Kal or Gal, with Kangni as synonym. Kudiri (or kuri) and Barti are both described as resembling sawan, and probably denote the lowest-grade millets such as kutki or mijhri ; it is possible that one of these inferior crops may have gone out of cultivation, but the descriptions given are not sufficiently detailed to make this certain.

PULSES. Gram. Lentils (masur). Peas. Mung. Urd. Moth. Lubiya. Kulthi. Arhar.

Two varieties of gram were assessed under the names nakhud-i Kabuli and nakhud-i Hindi.

Kisāri is not shown in the tables of rates, but in the description of Bihar (for which no rates are given) it is mentioned as eaten by the poor, but unwholesome.

OIL-SEEDS. Til. Linseed. Rape. Toria. Safflower.

SUGAR-CANE. Two grades are distinguished, common and thick (paunda).

FIBRES. Cotton. Hemp.

DYES. Indigo. Al.

DRUGS, ETC. Poppy. Betel.

MISCELLANEOUS. Various minor crops are specified, including vegetables, spices or relishes, water-nuts (singhara), melons (both Persian and Indian), and a long series of gourds and pumpkins.

2. Outside the provinces where the regulation-system of assessment was in force, the only indications I have noticed of additional crops in the Mógul Empire are (1) the statement referred to in the text that a kind of sackcloth was made in Bengal, which I take to indicate that jute was grown; and (2) the cultivation of tobacco in Gujarat, where it had just been acclimatised.

3. As regards Southern India, the following crops are mentioned by Paes, Nuniz, Garcia da Orta, or other sixteenth-century writers.

FOOD GRAINS. Rice. Wheat. Jowar. Ragi (mandwa). Millets in general.

Jowar appears as *milho zaburro*, the meaning of which is discussed in the next appendix. Barley is mentioned in one translation, but I doubt whether this is accurate.

PULSES. Gram. Mung. Horse-gram. Various pulses (unspecified).

OTHER CROPS. Sugar-cane. Cotton. Indigo. Til. Linseed. Pepper. Coconut. Ginger. Turmeric. Betel. Cardamom. Areca. Various vegetables (unspecified).

APPENDIX B

“ INDIAN CORN ” IN VIJAYANAGAR

Two passages in Mr. Sewell's *A Forgotten Empire* (pp. 237, 333) suggest that Indian Corn, or Maize (*Zea Mays*), was one of the commonest grains in Vijayanagar in the first half of the sixteenth century. This suggestion is rendered highly improbable by facts known to botanical students, which indicate that maize first reached India through Portuguese agency (vide *de Candolle*, under *Maize*), since in that case it could scarcely have become a staple crop on the upland within a very few years of the Portuguese settlement at Goa; the expression translated “ Indian Corn ” is *Milho Zaburro* (literally, zaburro-millet), and while this rendering is justified by all the Anglo-Portuguese dictionaries within my reach, further investigation shows that it is not applicable to our period, when the expression meant not maize but the great millet Sorghum, known in India as jowār. A few details of this investigation will be useful to students as indicating the kind of precautions necessary in handling the evidence of sixteenth-century writers.

The word *zaburro* occurs in the works of various Portuguese writers on botany, while the allied form *ceburro* is used in Spanish. Regarding the meaning of these expressions, Dr. Stapf of Kew writes that “ all the botanical authorities whom I have been able to consult, from Grisley, 1661, to Coutinho, 1913, connect Zaburro with Sorghum,” while Sir David Prain, to whose kindness I am indebted for this information, has also given me a reference to Dodoens' *Frumentorum . . . Historia*, on p. 71 of which it is stated, under the heading *Sorghum*, that the Portuguese call it zaburro-millet (“ *Lusitanis milium saburrū appellatur* ”). The date of this book is 1566, while the narratives translated by Mr. Sewell date from 1525 to 1535, so that we are justified in concluding that, whatever the modern signification may be, *Milho Zaburro* meant jowār, and not maize, at the time they were compiled.

Before this information reached me, I had tried to ascertain

the meaning by tracing the derivation of the word *zaburro* (which is not explained in any of the modern dictionaries), but had failed to find any probable or even plausible origin in any of the Latin languages or in those of Northern Africa, the sources from which millets might be expected to have reached the Iberian peninsula, while the first records of the discovery of maize in America showed that the word could not have come from there. When these inquiries had yielded no result, Mr. R. Burn, C.S.I., suggested to me that the word might be of Indian origin and represent a corruption of *jowār*, and this appears to be the truth. The Portuguese had no letter with the sound of the Indian *j*, and they represented this sound by *z*; they had no *w*, and used either *b* or *v* in its place, while they commonly added an *o* in borrowing a substantive; examples of these changes can be easily found in *Hobson-Jobson* (e.g. *Zedoaria* from *Jadwar*, *Baçaim* from *Wasai*, *Mungo* from *Mung*), and it is clear that *jowār* might easily become *zubāro*, or with a natural change of stress, *zubarro*. At this point the suggestion was referred to Sir George Grierson, who wrote that metathesis of the *u* and the *a* need cause no difficulty, and that the word *zaburro* might be treated as most probably a corruption of *jowār*.

We thus reach the conclusions that *zaburro* certainly meant *jowār* in the sixteenth century, and that it is most probably the same word, transformed in the mouths of the Portuguese. Why it should now be given the sense of maize is a different question. If, as the dictionaries say, maize has assumed a Portuguese name belonging to a millet, the assumption can be paralleled in various other languages: in English, maize is commonly called corn ("Indian Corn"); in French, it is wheat ("blé de Turquie"); in South Africa, it is "mealies," that is *milje*, or millet; and in Oudh, it is "great *jowār*." It is, however, more probable that the Anglo-Portuguese lexicographers have been misled regarding the word, which is described correctly as a variety of Indian millet in Figueiredo's dictionary published in 1913, but at this point the interest of the topic becomes purely philological.

APPENDIX C

THE SEAPORTS OF BENGAL

WHEN Portuguese writers of the sixteenth century speak of a voyage to Bengal they usually refer either to the Great (*grande*), or to the Little (*pequeno*), *Porto*. These names were adopted by writers of other nations (e.g. *porto piqueno* in *Purchas*, II. x. 1736), and the missionaries latinised them as *Portus Magnus* and *Portus Parvus* (e.g. *Hay*, 728 ff.). The word *porto* in these names seem to have been usually taken as the equivalent of the English "port," and hence modern writers have looked for only two important seaports in sixteenth-century Bengal; when this view is taken, the literature of the period leads at once to the identification of Hooghly (or Satgaon, which was close to it) as the "Small Port," and of Chittagong as the "Great Port," as is done by the authors of *Hobson-Jobson*. I believe this view to be mistaken. It seems to me that the word *porto*, in the mouths of seafaring Portuguese at this period, referred primarily to a gap in the coast-line, and not, as landsmen are apt to assume, a town on the sea-shore; in other words, *porto* might signify a gulf or estuary, which might contain several seaports. Modern Portuguese dictionaries recognise this meaning of the word, but their authority is not of great importance in a matter of the kind; my view that it is the primary meaning is based mainly on the language of Father F. Fernandus, a Jesuit missionary who was sent to Bengal in 1598 to attempt the reformation of the Portuguese settlements. His letter describing his journey is printed in *Hay*, 727 ff.

Fernandus embarked at Cochin for the *portus parvus* (*sic enim vocant*); the words in parenthesis indicate that he was giving the current name (*Porto pequeno*) of his destination. After describing various anxieties on the sea voyage, he speaks of a greater danger within the *portus*, when the ship ran aground; they succeeded, however, in getting off the shoal, and then after sailing for eight days, still in the *portus*, reached the Portuguese

"station"¹ of Hooghly. It is clear, therefore, that Fernandus meant by *portus* the river, and not the town, of Hooghly, and I think it is equally clear that he must have taken his nomenclature from ordinary Portuguese, whether sailors on the ship or the men among whom he worked on land; he cannot have invented these names, and there is no reason to suppose that he did not follow the ordinary usage. Thus *Porto pequeno* does not necessarily signify any single town, but may denote the river Hooghly, on which Calcutta now stands.

After some months' stay, Fernandus went on to the *Portus magnus*; this was not a sea voyage, because he mentions the danger from tigers on the way, and doubtless his boat travelled by some of the inland waterways. He first reached Sripur, which he describes as a "station" belonging to the *Portus magnus*, and he dated his letter from this place, but he added a postscript to announce his arrival at Chittagong, also a "station" in the *Portus magnus*. Thus Fernandus certainly did not mean only Chittagong when he wrote *portus magnus*; the expression covered both Chittagong and Sripur. The situation of Chittagong is well known; that of Sripur is fixed by Fitch's description of his visit to Sonargaon,² the eastern capital of Bengal (*Purchas*, II. x. 1737). Sripur was on the "river of Ganges" and was six leagues from Sonargaon; it was a sea-going port, for Fitch sailed thence on a small ship for Pegu. Thus in the language used by Fernandus the *Porto grande* extended at any rate from the Karnaphuli river to the immediate neighbourhood of Dacca, and since he was probably using terms in their current meaning, we are not bound to limit the expression to any single port. The use of the expression becomes clear if we look at a map of the Bay of Bengal, and remember that the Portuguese came to Bengal by sea. On the left they would have the estuary of the Hooghly (*Porto pequeno*): on the right lay that of the Meghna stretching from the Backergunje district to Chittagong, and the whole of this constitutes the *Porto grande*. It may well have included numerous other ports in the landsman's sense of the word, but in any case it included both Chittagong and Sripur. We are not therefore bound to say that Bengal had only two seaports; it had, and has, two estuaries, with room for an indefinite number of seaports within them, and at the end of the sixteenth century there were

¹ The Latin word is *statio*. Is this the ancestor of the Anglo-Indian "station," a term of which the origin is not traced in *Hobson-Jobson*?

² Fitch writes phonetically: Sonargaon appears in his narrative as Sinnergan, and Sripur as Serrepore, but I think there can be no doubt as to the identification. Fernandus writes the latter name as Syripur.

at least three of sufficient importance to be noticed by our authorities, Hooghly on the river of the same name, Sripur some distance up the Meghna, and Chittagong.

This primary use of the word *Porto* was not, however, universal at our period; Fitch, for instance, definitely identifies the town of Satgaon with *Porto Pequeno* (*Purchas*, II. x. 1736), and some other writers can be read in the same way. The change in meaning may, I think, be attributed to the fact that the Portuguese did not to any great extent trade directly with Sripur; their communications were with either Hooghly or Chittagong, that is, with only one "station" in each *porto*, and in these circumstances the transfer of the name from the *porto* to the "station" might easily take place, just as "the Mersey" has become almost a synonym for Liverpool. The passages cited from Fernandus show, however, that up to the end of the sixteenth century the derivative meaning had not been universally adopted, and justify the view that *porto* may be read as estuary in any case where this interpretation is consistent with the context.

The question will naturally be asked which of these seaports represents the "city of Bengala" described by Barbosa at the beginning of the century. My own opinion is that Barbosa was referring to Sonargaon with its adjacent port, but the question is too intricate to be discussed here, and readers may wisely suspend judgment until the completion of Mr. Longworth Dames' translation of Barbosa.

APPENDIX D

THE SHIPPING TON

THE origin of the shipping ton is the tun of wine. In European ports the practice grew up of describing a ship's capacity for cargo in terms of the number of tuns of wine which could be carried. A tun of wine consisted of two butts, and was equivalent to 40·3 cubic feet; adding the size of the casks, and the loss of space due to their irregular shape, the space occupied by a tun comes to about 60 cubic feet.¹ Originally the number of tuns was not reached by any process of measurement: the capacity of a ship which had carried wine would be known by experience, and practical men would acquire sufficient knowledge to judge the capacity of other ships by their appearance and build. It is such estimates as these that are available in regard to the period we are considering: they are all given in round numbers, and obviously are not intended to be accurate to a tun; on the average, they are probably fairly close to the truth, though there are doubtless errors in particular observations.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century the number of tuns for particular ships became an important question in England, because it determined the amount of the subsidy paid for ship-building, and estimates such as had hitherto sufficed became subject to bias; a system of measurement was therefore worked out to supersede such estimates. At the first attempt the number of tuns which could be carried in a particular ship was determined by experiment; the length, breadth, and depth of the ship were then measured, and the volume in cubic feet calculated; the rest was a sum in simple proportion. It was found that each actual tun required about 97 cubic feet of volume measured on

¹ *Oppenheim* gives 60 cubic feet: *Holmes* says that the tun is 42 cubic feet *plus* at least one-third of 42; this gives 56 cubic feet as the minimum. I take 60 as a convenient round number with a possible error small in comparison with the other factors to be considered.

the lines adopted, and this relation was made the basis of a general rule; find the volume of a ship by a particular set of measurements and divide by 97.

The effect of this rule was to alter the definition, but not at first the size, of the tun. The unit was still the space required by a tun of wine, and this space was found to be 97 cubic feet *measured in a particular way*. This system has survived up to the present day, but both the method of measurement and the divisor adopted have been varied from time to time. A "registered ton" is now defined as 100 cubic feet of space measured according to the precise specifications made under the Merchant Shipping Acts; it is a conventional unit, which has lost its original relation to the tun of wine, and its present relation could be determined with precision only by filling a series of modern cargo boats with tuns, a measure which nobody is likely to undertake. For our purposes, the important point is that the changes in the method of measurement have been in the direction of a closer approximation to the actual cargo space. The original method of measuring the length, breadth, and depth of the ship as a whole could give the actual cargo space only if the ship was rectangular and there were no internal structures below the top-most deck; the fact that 97 cubic feet (measured in this way) were required to accommodate 60 cubic feet (actual) shows that the cargo space was greatly overstated. This overstatement has now disappeared, because each deck is measured separately, and allowance is made for the curve of the sides; hence substantially less than 100 cubic feet (a measured ton) would now be required to accommodate a tun of wine, and in fact the volume of ordinary goods carried in recently-built vessels is, generally speaking, in excess of the volume given by the measurement. It follows that we shall not understate the cargo-capacity of Indian ships of the sixteenth century if we say that a tun of wine would require from $\frac{4}{10}$ to $\frac{6}{10}$ of a modern registered ton, instead of requiring a whole measured ton as was the case when measurement was first introduced. At this rate 1000 tuns of wine would require from 400 to 600 modern tons of shipping; and we should reduce the "tunnage" calculated for Indian trade in the sixteenth century by from $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ in order to compare it with the returns of shipping published at the present day. In the text I have arrived at 60,000 tuns as the probable maximum volume of Indian commerce: this would require from 24,000 to 36,000 tons present measurement, and since this figure has to be compared with about $6\frac{1}{4}$ million tons (the volume of Indian trade before the War), it really matters very little which fraction we take.

A word must be added regarding the modern distinction between gross and net tons. The shipping statistics which have just been quoted are given in *net* registered tons, but landsmen's ideas of ships are usually based on *gross* tons,¹ and the difference between the two is important. The gross tonnage of a ship includes space occupied by machinery, etc., and not available for cargo; the net tonnage excludes the space so occupied. The relation between gross and net tonnage varies greatly among different classes of ships, but for modern cargo boats we shall not be very far from the truth in taking the net tonnage as on the average 60 per cent of the gross. If, then, we conclude that the Indian sea-borne commerce at the end of the sixteenth century could be carried in from 24,000 to 36,000 tons *net*, we may say that it would require from 40,000 to 60,000 tons *gross*, or at most one modern cargo-boat of moderate size sailing in each month of the year.

¹ Gross tons are given in the ordinary shipping advertisements, which are probably the most important sources of the landsman's rather vague ideas on the subject.

APPENDIX E

LIST OF AUTHORITIES

THIS list is arranged in the alphabetical order of the abbreviations or 'key-words' which have been used in the notes and references to the text.

- ABDUR RAZAK.** See under Major.
- AIN.** The *Āin-i Akbari*. By Abul-Fazl-i 'Allāmi. Persian text, edited by H. Blochmann. Printed for the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
Translation by Blochmann and Jarrett. Printed for the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- AKBAR-NAMA.** The *Akbar-nāma*. By Abul-Fazl-i 'Allāmi. Persian text issued by the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
Translation by H. Beveridge. Issued by the same Society, but not yet complete.
- BABUR.** The *Memoirs of Bābur*, a new translation of the *Bābur-nāma*, incorporating Leyden and Erskine's of 1826 A.D. By Annette S. Beveridge. London. Luzac & Co.
- BADAONI.** *Muntakhab-ut-Tawārīkh*. By al-Badaoni. Translation issued by the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- BARBOSA.** *Livro de Duarte Barbosa*. Issued by the Lisbon Royal Academy of Sciences, as vol. ii. No. VII. of *Colleção de Notícias para a Historia e Geographia das Nações Ultramarinas*.
The translation issued for the Hakluyt Society in 1865 is now being superseded, and the first volume of the new rendering by Mr. Longworth Dames has been issued for 1918. Had this rendering been complete, I should have given references to it, but as only one volume is available, I have quoted the original text.
- BERNIER.** *Travels in the Mogul Empire, 1656-68*. Revised edition by A. Constable. London, 1891.
- CLIFFORD.** *Further India*. By H. Clifford. London, 1904.

CONTI. See under Major.

COUTO. See under Decadas.

CUNNINGHAM. Growth of English Industry and Commerce. 3rd edition, 1903.

DANVERS. The Portuguese in India. By F. C. Danvers. London, 1894.

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The references given are to this translation. I have used the French edition of 1833.

DE LAET. De Imperio Magni Mogolis. By J. de Laet. Leyden, 1631.

DELLA VALLE. Travels in India. Hakluyt Society, 1892.

DODOENS. Frumentorum . . . Leguminum . . . Historia. By R. Dodonaeus. Antwerp, 1566.

DU JARRIC. Thesaurus Rerum Indicarum. By P. du Jarric. Cologne, 1615-16. (I have not had access to the original French edition.)

ELLIOT—HISTORY. The History of India as told by its own Historians. Edited from the posthumous papers of Sir H. M. Elliot. By J. Dowson. London, 1867-77.

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ENGLISH FACTORIES. The English Factories in India. By W. Foster. Oxford.

EPSTEIN. Early History of the Levant Company. By M. Epstein. London, 1908.

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