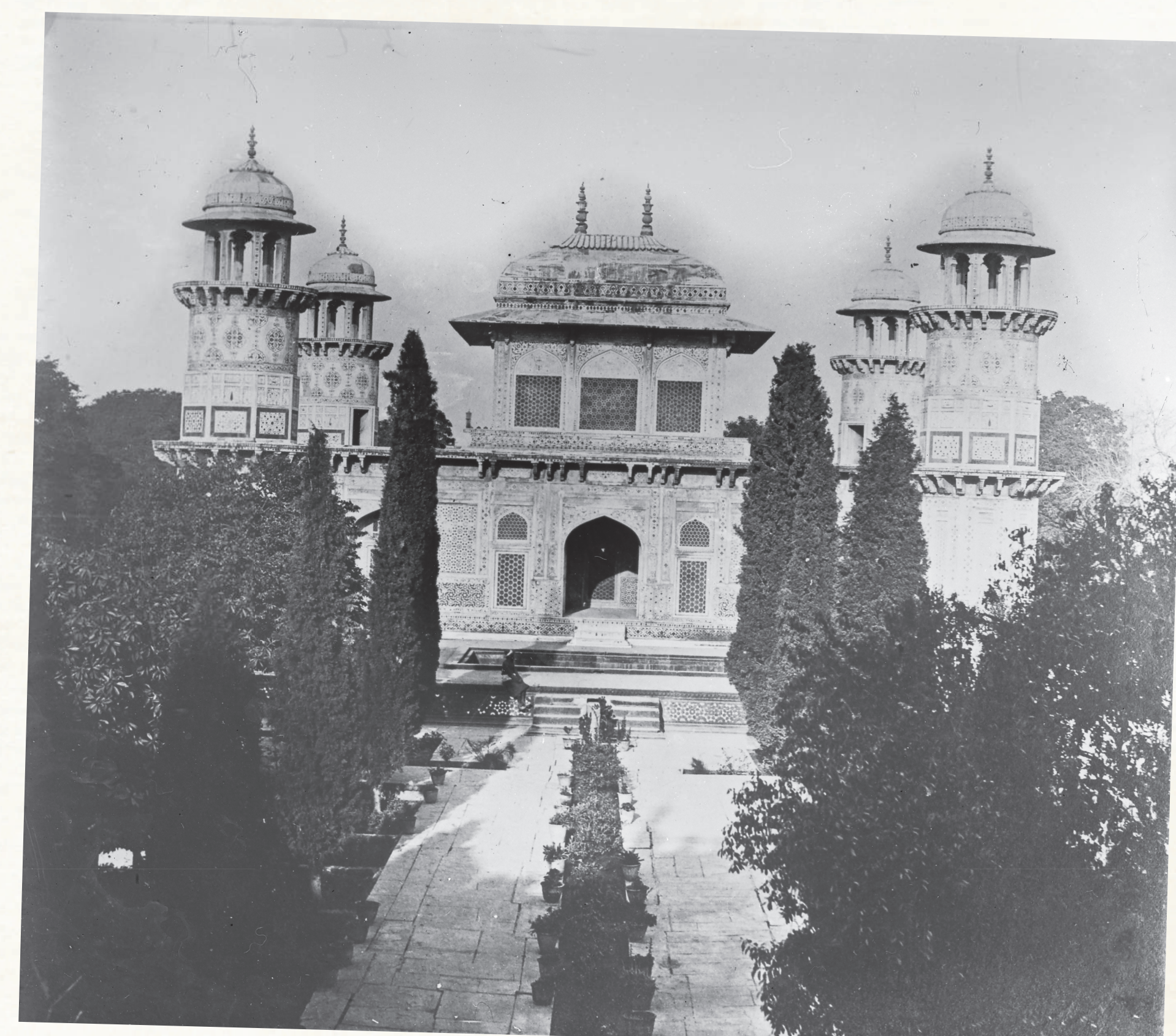


The Mughal Empire



Threads of Empire

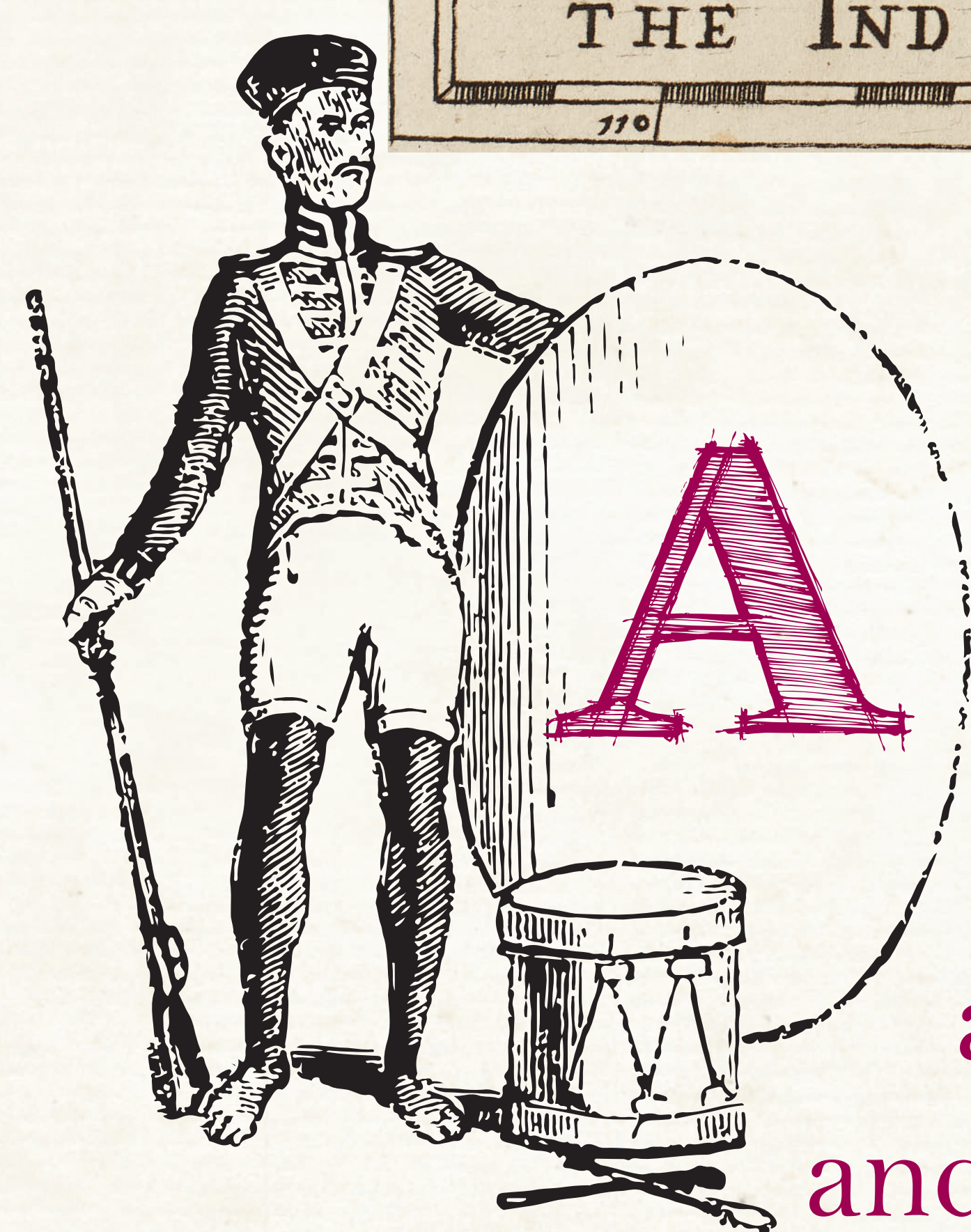
Rule and resistance in colonial India



The tomb of Itmad-Ud-Daulah near Agra (Uttar Pradesh), in about 1870. It was built for Mirza Ghiyas Beg (d1622), a high-ranking official whose position allowed his children to become wives, mothers, and generals of the Mughal emperors. Papers of Henry Swinnerton MS 148/12/49.

Map of the Mughal Empire from Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's *Collections of Travels through Turkey [sic] into Persia, and the East-Indies*, 1684. Wollaton Library Collection WLC P/37.

Sikh soldier, from children's book *India: pictorial, descriptive and historical* (1854), by Miss Julia Corner. Briggs Collection LT310.G/C6.



At the turn of the 18th century, the Mughal Empire stretched across the entire Indian subcontinent, a landmass of over 4.5m sq km. The Mughal court, based in Delhi, was renowned for its sophisticated administrative system, its patronage of the arts and its immense wealth.

Since 1526, the Mughals had extended their power through military conquest and a complex system of alliances with local nobles. These nobles gave their allegiance to the emperor in exchange for the right to tax the land.

Yet Mughal power declined rapidly in the 18th century. Economic and political crisis undermined successive Mughal emperors' claims to loyalty. Higher taxation led to peasant revolts. Throughout the century, the highly centralised bureaucratic system that had characterised the Mughal Empire fragmented.

The decline of Mughal rule took various forms. In Eastern India, regional powers in

Bengal, Hyderabad and Awadh established states that were autonomous from the Mughals in all but name. In the North, the Afghans, Sikhs, and Jats formed separate, warring kingdoms.

For over a century, the Deccan plateau in Central India was the site of almost-constant warfare as Maratha factions fought the Mughals, and each other, for wealth and resources.

Increasingly overstretched, the great Mughal Empire of the 17th century was, by the 1780s, an empire in name alone.

