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THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY
OF INDIA

Bengal: The British Bridgehead

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THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF INDIA

General editor GORDON JOHNSON

Director, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of
Cambridge, and Fellow of Selwyn College

Associate editors C. A. BAYLY

Smuts Reader in Commonwealth Studies, University of
Cambridge, and Fellow of St Catharine's College

and JOHN F. RICHARDS

Professor of History, Duke University

Although the original *Cambridge History of India*, published between 1922 and 1937, did much to formulate a chronology for Indian history and describe the administrative structures of government in India, it has inevitably been overtaken by the mass of new research published over the last fifty years.

Designed to take full account of recent scholarship and changing conceptions of South Asia's historical development, *The New Cambridge History of India* will be published as a series of short, self-contained volumes, each dealing with a separate theme and written by a single person. Within an overall four-part structure, thirty complementary volumes in uniform format will be published during the next five years. As before, each will conclude with a substantial bibliographical essay designed to lead non-specialists further into the literature.

The four parts planned are as follows:

- I The Mughals and their Contemporaries.
- II Indian States and the Transition to Colonialism.
- III The Indian Empire and the Beginnings of Modern Society.
- IV The Evolution of Contemporary South Asia.

A list of individual titles in preparation will be found at the end of the volume.

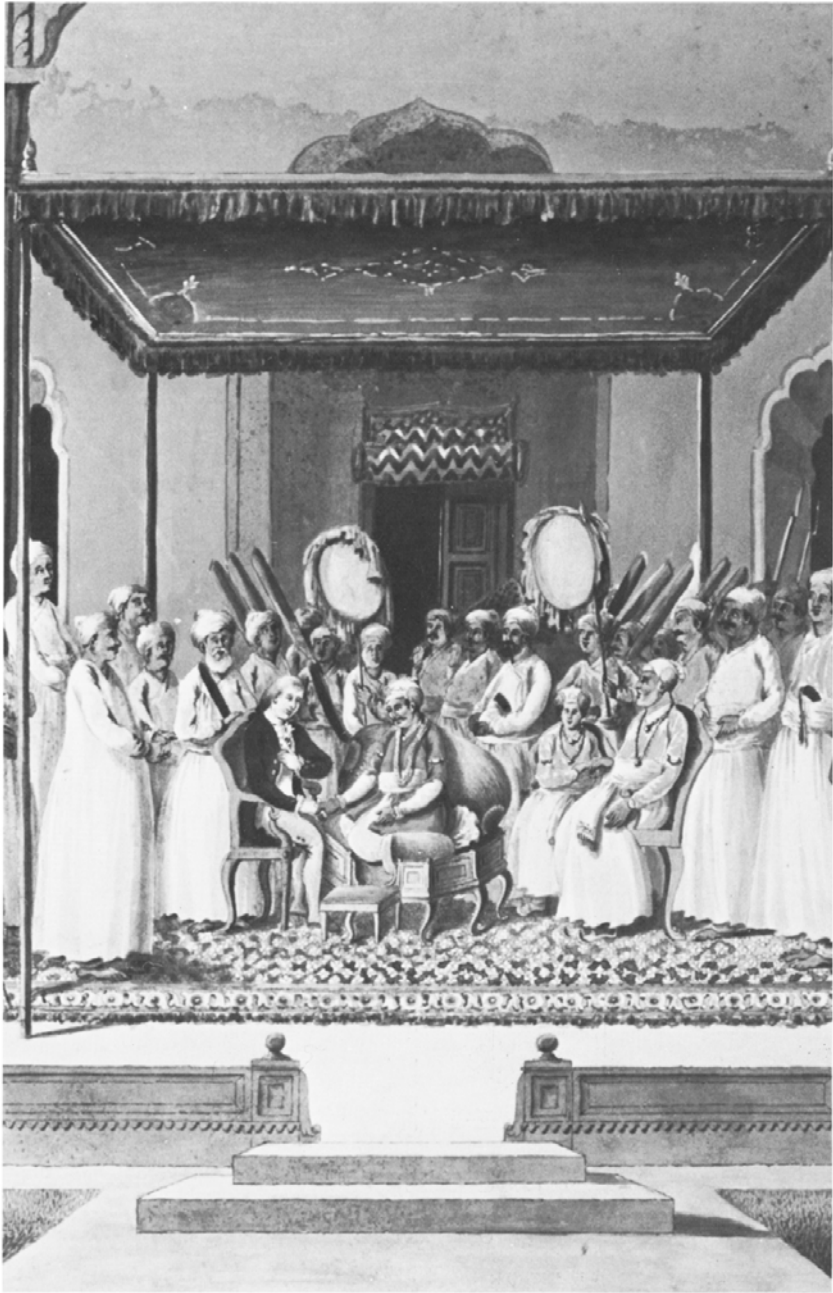
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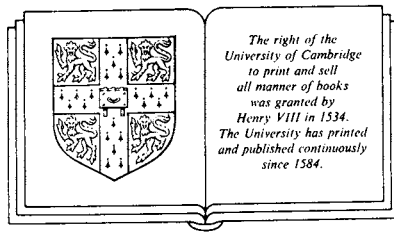
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II · 2

Bengal: The British Bridgehead
Eastern India 1740-1828

P. J. MARSHALL

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Cambridge University Press

0521253306 - Bengal: The British Bridgehead Eastern India 1740-1828

P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>General editor's preface</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Maps</i>	xii–xv
1 The setting for empire	1
2 Late Mughal Bengal	48
3 The crisis of empire, 1740–65	70
4 The new regime	93
5 A new society?	137
6 Conclusion	180
<i>Bibliographical essay</i>	183
<i>Index</i>	189

Cambridge University Press

0521253306 - Bengal: The British Bridgehead Eastern India 1740-1828

P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The New Cambridge History of India covers the period from the beginning of the sixteenth century. In some respects it marks a radical change in the style of Cambridge Histories, but in others the editors feel that they are working firmly within an established academic tradition.

During the summer of 1896, F.W. Maitland and Lord Acton between them evolved the idea for a comprehensive modern history. By the end of the year the Syndics of the University Press had committed themselves to the *Cambridge Modern History*, and Lord Acton had been put in charge of it. It was hoped that publication would begin in 1899 and be completed by 1904, but the first volume in fact came out in 1902 and the last in 1910, with additional volumes of tables and maps in 1911 and 1912.

The *History* was a great success, and it was followed by a whole series of distinctive Cambridge Histories covering English Literature, the Ancient World, India, British Foreign Policy, Economic History, Medieval History, the British Empire, Africa, China and Latin America; and even now other new series are being prepared. Indeed, the various Histories have given the Press notable strength in the publication of general reference books in the arts and social sciences.

What has made the Cambridge Histories so distinctive is that they have never been simply dictionaries or encyclopedias. The Histories have, in H.A.L. Fisher's words, always been 'written by an army of specialists concentrating the latest results of special study'. Yet as Acton agreed with the Syndics in 1896, they have not been mere compilations of existing material but original works. Undoubtedly many of the Histories are uneven in quality, some have become out of date very rapidly, but their virtue has been that they have consistently done more than simply record an existing state of knowledge: they have tended to focus interest on research and they have provided a massive stimulus to further work. This has made their publication doubly worthwhile and has distinguished them intellectually from other sorts

Cambridge University Press

0521253306 - Bengal: The British Bridgehead Eastern India 1740-1828

P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

of reference book. The Editors of the *New Cambridge History of India* have acknowledged this in their work.

The original *Cambridge History of India* was published between 1922 and 1937. It was planned in six volumes, but of these, Volume 2 dealing with the period between the first century A.D. and the Muslim invasion of India never appeared. Some of the material is still of value, but in many respects it is now out of date. The last fifty years have seen a great deal of new research on India, and a striking feature of recent work has been to cast doubt on the validity of the quite arbitrary chronological and categorical way in which Indian history has been conventionally divided.

The Editors decided that it would not be academically desirable to prepare a new *History of India* using the traditional format. The selective nature of research on Indian history over the past half-century would doom such a project from the start and the whole of Indian history could not be covered in an even or comprehensive manner. They concluded that the best scheme would be to have a History divided into four overlapping chronological volumes, each containing about eight short books on individual themes or subjects. Although in extent the work will therefore be equivalent to a dozen massive tomes of the traditional sort, in form the *New Cambridge History of India* will appear as a shelf full of separate but complementary parts. Accordingly, the main divisions are between I *The Mughals and their Contemporaries*, II *Indian States and the Transition to Colonialism*, III *The Indian Empire and the Beginnings of Modern Society*, and IV *The Evolution of Contemporary South Asia*.

Just as the books within these volumes are complementary so too do they intersect with each other, both thematically and chronologically. As the books appear they are intended to give a view of the subject as it now stands and to act as a stimulus to further research. We do not expect the *New Cambridge History of India* to be the last word on the subject but an essential voice in the continuing discourse about it.

Cambridge University Press

0521253306 - Bengal: The British Bridgehead Eastern India 1740-1828

P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

British territorial empire in South Asia began in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the area chosen for this volume of the *New Cambridge History of India*. Over much of the area the British were in control by 1765, but to show something of the circumstances in which they gained power and of the inheritance which so powerfully shaped the early years of their rule, it seemed appropriate to include the reign of the last effective ruler of eastern India under the aegis of the Mughal empire. The starting point for this book is therefore 1740. The choice of 1828 as a closing date is a more or less arbitrary one. By the 1820s the new regime was firmly established in eastern India (except in the newly conquered Assam, which is excluded from this volume) and many of its enduring characteristics were becoming apparent. Certain developments towards the end of the decade – the founding of the Brahma Samaj, the arrival of Lord William Bentinck, the failure of the great Agency Houses – do, however, suggest that within an established framework British–Indian relations were entering a new phase. For some of these developments, 1828 has some significance for marking off the old from the new.

Entrusting this volume to a British historian with serious deficiencies in his knowledge of the sub-continent inevitably means that its emphasis will be on the new colonial regime. I am, however, very conscious of the immense debt which I owe to the vigorous tradition of historical scholarship which flourishes in eastern India, especially in a now-divided Bengal. This has enabled me to mask some of my shortcomings by presenting the findings of others to those who have had neither the time nor the opportunity to seek them for themselves.

Other debts are more immediate. Dr Gordon Johnson and Dr C. A. Bayly have been indulgent and trusting editors. Dr Bayly's suggestions have been especially helpful. My colleague at King's College, London, Dr Friedhelm Hardy, has patiently answered questions. The British Academy gave me a grant to go to West Bengal and to

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0521253306 - Bengal: The British Bridgehead Eastern India 1740-1828

P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

Bangladesh in 1982. I received much help on that trip from friends in the universities of Dhaka and Calcutta.

The Frontispiece to the book is a gouache by an Indian artist, presumed to be after an original painted 1785–8 by George Farington. The central figures are the Resident, Sir John D'Oyly, and the Nawab, Mubarak-ud-Daula. For permission to reproduce it, I am grateful to the India Office Library and Records, and the British Library Board.

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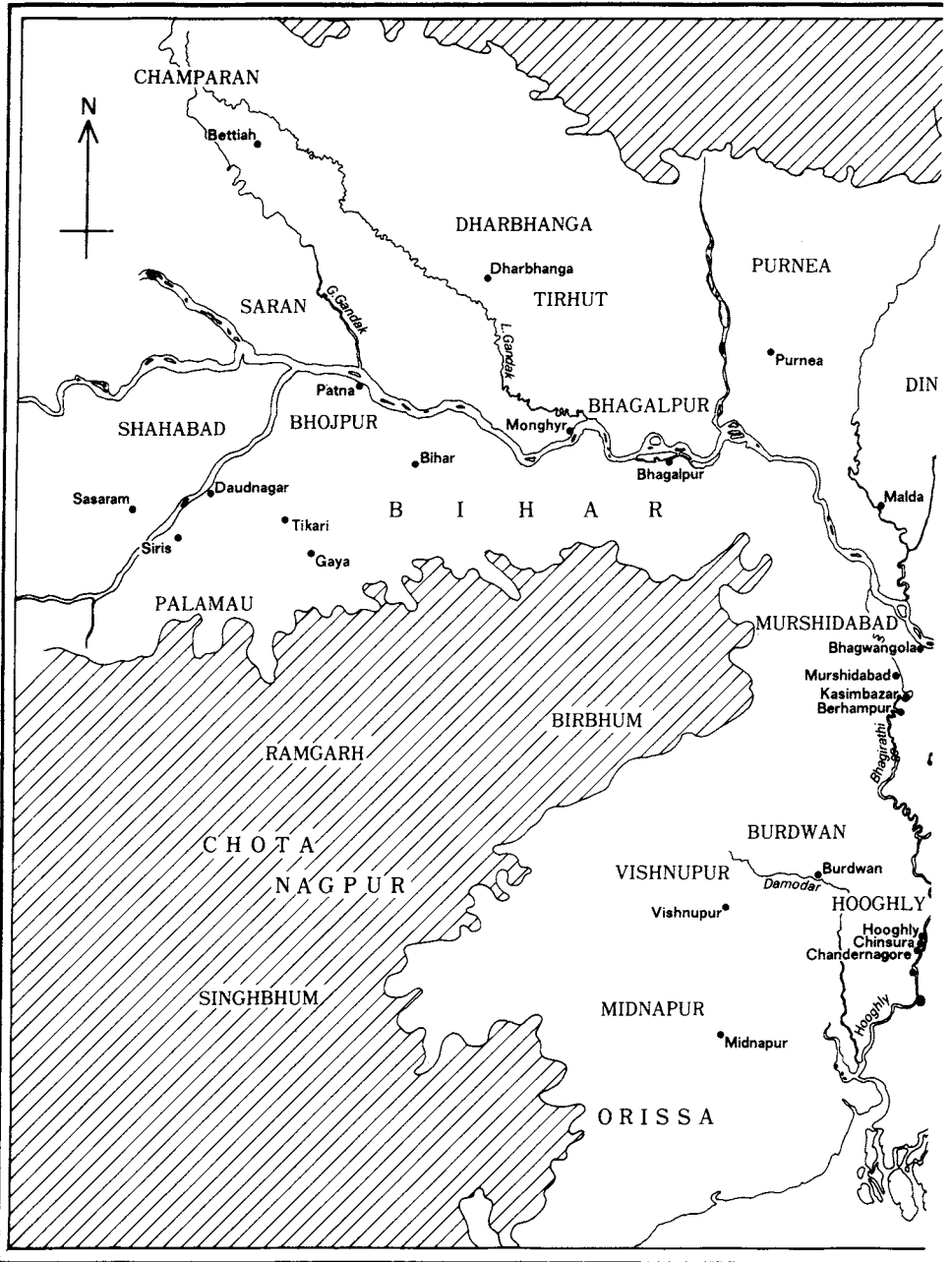
NOTE

Generally accepted modern spellings of place names are used throughout, except in quotations.

Abbreviations used:

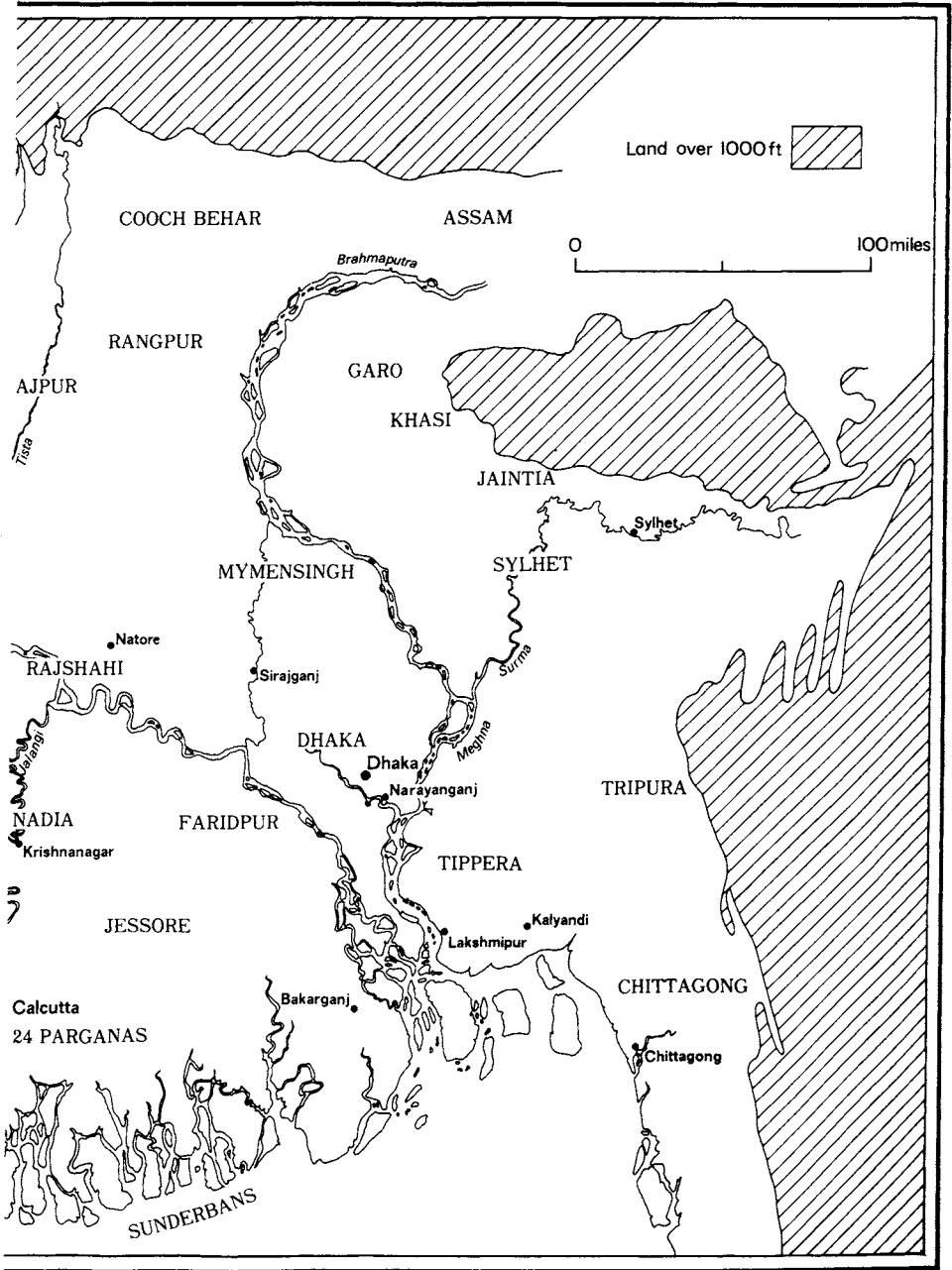
Add. MS	Additional Manuscript, British Library, London
IOL	India Office Library (British Library), London
IOR	India Office Records (British Library), London
PP	<i>Parliamentary Papers</i> (House of Commons), London

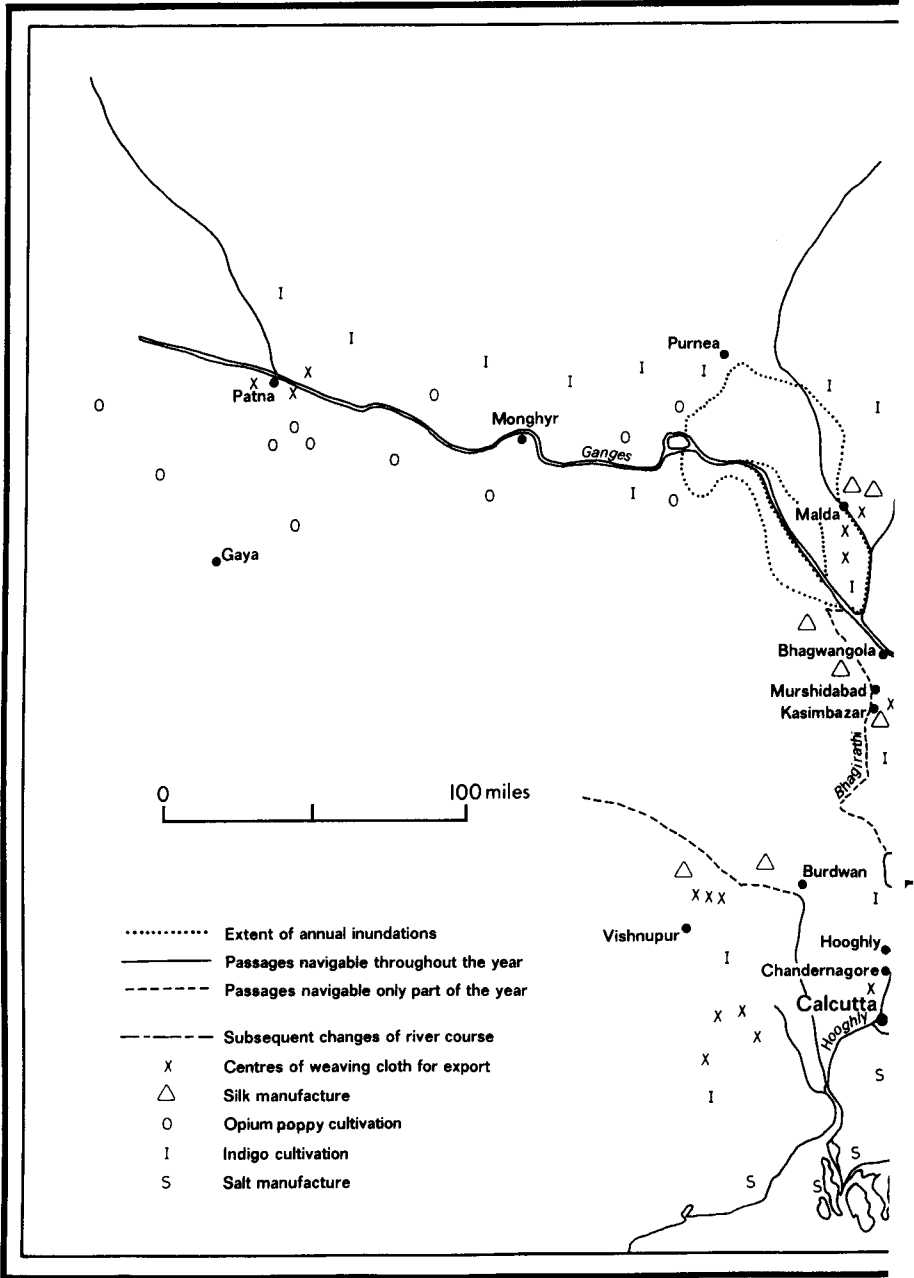
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Map 1 Eastern India, 1740-1828: places mentioned in the text

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)





Map 2 Eastern India, 1740-1828: economic

