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# Mughal Empire and the administration's farman

Shirali Samimi[1], Mohammad Bashir Elham[1], and Najibullah Akbari[2]

Email : a.alisamimi.s7@gmail.com*
[1] Department of History, Bamyan University, Afghanistan
[2] Department of Computer Education, Bamyan University, Afghanistan

## ABSTRACT

Royal decrees, or farmans, connected Mughal imperial authority with the administrative work required to record decisions, establish entitlements, and authorize transactions. This article examines how the Ain-i-Akbari describes the preparation and authentication of farmans under Akbar and what these procedures reveal about administrative responsibility. The study uses a descriptive-analytical historical approach based on published sources, with particular attention to the first volume of H. Blochmann's 1873 English translation. The analysis considers the work of recorders, the preparation of memoranda and certificates, the registration of financial transactions, and the placement of official seals. The findings identify differentiated documentary routes for appointments, revenue assignments, payments, and orders involving urgency or confidentiality. They show that royal authorization operated alongside the specialized responsibilities of clerks, accountants, and senior officials. Signatures, registers, and seals linked a command to its administrative processing. The discussion distinguishes these prescribed arrangements from evidence of implementation in particular localities. Farmans are interpreted as administrative instruments whose wording, authentication, and documentary context need to be examined together when assessing Mughal governance.

**Keywords:**
farman;
Mughal administration;
Akbar;
record keeping;
seals

## INTRODUCTION

Royal authority in the Mughal Empire depended partly on the preparation, circulation, and preservation of written orders. A farman communicated a ruler's decision, but its administrative significance also depended on the procedures through which that decision became a recognized document. Appointments, revenue assignments, stipends, and other transactions required identifiable records. The relationship between the emperor's command and the work of clerks and officials is therefore central to understanding how Mughal government represented and organized its authority. Roshangar et al. (2024) place administrative organization and revenue management among the principal features of Mughal governance.

The term farman belongs to a wider Persianate documentary vocabulary. It commonly denotes a sovereign or governmental decree, whereas sanad has a broader documentary meaning. The terminology of particular document types varied across dynasties and administrative settings. Fragner (1999) distinguishes the study of these documents, known as diplomatics, from a simple reading of their verbal content. Their physical arrangement, authentication, and administrative functions also require examination. This distinction helps explain why an imperial order should be studied as a document produced through institutional practices, rather than only as a statement of royal intention.

Akbar's reign provides a useful focus because the Ain-i-Akbari offers detailed descriptions of court administration. Its account includes recorders, financial documentation, categories of orders, and the placement of official seals. In the English translation prepared by H. Blochmann, the relevant regulations appear in the first volume, including Book 1's description of royal seals and Book 2's provisions concerning recorders and sanads. These sections identify documentary practices that can be examined directly without assuming that every part of the empire operated in exactly the same way (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, pp. 52, 258–264).

Historical interpretation nevertheless requires attention to the character of the evidence. The Ain-i-Akbari presents the court's account of its own regulations and administrative ideals. A prescription about how a document should be processed is evidence of a prescribed procedure; it does not establish that every transaction followed that procedure. Blake (1979) similarly argues that Mughal institutions should be understood within their historical setting. His interpretation of the empire as patrimonial-bureaucratic challenges readings that take the later British-Indian administration as the model for Mughal government.

Previous discussions of Mughal administration have also emphasized the importance of Abu-l-Fazl's historical writing. Forogh and Samimi (2021) examine his association with Akbar and his contribution to accounts of imperial governance. The present article concentrates more closely on the documentary stages connecting commands, memoranda, certificates, registers, and authenticated orders. This focus brings the administrative process into view while retaining the distinction between a court text and evidence of implementation in individual localities.

The article asks two questions: How does the Ain-i-Akbari describe the preparation and authentication of farmans under Akbar? What do these documentary procedures reveal about the relationship between imperial authority, administrative responsibility, and record keeping? The analysis addresses these questions through a descriptive examination of published sources. It considers the work of recorders, the transformation of reports into documentary instruments, differences between types of orders, and the functions of seals. The discussion then assesses what these descriptions can establish about governance and where their explanatory limits lie.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive-analytical historical approach based on published documentary and scholarly sources. Its principal historical text is the first volume of Abu-l-Fazl's Ain-i-Akbari in Blochmann's English translation published in 1873. The examination centers on the regulation of royal seals in Book 1 and the regulations concerning recorders, sanads, seal placement, and farman-i-bayazi in Book 2. These passages provide the basis for the description of documentary procedures. The study concerns the published account of those procedures and does not present newly discovered archival documents.

The supporting literature serves specific purposes. Blake's (1979) article provides an interpretation of Mughal institutional organization. Forogh and Samimi (2021) and Roshangar et al. (2024) supply contextual discussions of historical writing and administration. Fragner's (1999) account clarifies the documentary meaning of farman, while Desai's (1998) discussion of inscriptions supplies a comparison with another form of historical record. The evidence is organized by documentary function instead of treating all sources as interchangeable descriptions of a single administrative system.

The analysis proceeds through three tasks. First, the relevant regulations are read to identify the actors, documents, and transactions described. Second, their relationships are compared: who records a decision, who checks it, what document replaces or summarizes an earlier record, and which officials authenticate the resulting instrument. Third, the procedures are interpreted in relation to the distribution of responsibility within the court. Distinct document names are retained where they identify different stages or

functions. English spellings are simplified consistently without implying that transliteration variants represent different institutions.

The study distinguishes descriptions in the historical text from interpretations developed from those descriptions. Prescriptions concerning signatures and seals are reported as prescribed arrangements, not as measurements of administrative efficiency or proof of uniform enforcement. References to the translated source use its publication year and, where relevant, its printed page numbers or numbered regulations. No claim is made to have compared the translation against a Persian manuscript. This scope permits a focused examination of documentary practice while keeping the conclusions within the evidence actually considered.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

#### *Recording commands and administrative events*

The documentary sequence begins with recording. In the regulation concerning the waqia-nawis, Abu-l-Fazl describes fourteen clerks, with two performing daily duty in rotation. Additional personnel could substitute when a regular clerk was occupied. The recorders' responsibilities covered the emperor's orders and activities as well as reports from the heads of departments. The text therefore connects record keeping to the movement of information between the ruler and his officers, rather than presenting it as an activity limited to producing a final decree (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, p. 258).

The range of matters recorded is extensive. It includes appointments, military contingents, salaries, revenue assignments, rent-free grants, changes in taxation, contracts, sales, and transfers of money. Court attendance, the arrival of reports, and the issuing of orders also appear within the recorders' remit. These subjects show that the same documentary environment brought together personnel, finance, and the activities of the imperial household. The account does not support a sharp separation between the ruler's personal court and every function that would now be categorized as public administration (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ain 10).

The prescribed sequence also includes review. A corrected diary was submitted to the emperor for approval. The clerk then copied a report, signed it, and supplied it to the person requiring documentary confirmation. Further signatures were required from the

parwanchi, the mir-arz, and the official who had presented the matter. At this stage, the document was termed a yaddasht, or memorandum. The memorandum was consequently more than an informal recollection: it was a written record whose standing depended on a sequence of recognized endorsements (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ain 10).

Copyists then prepared an abridgment of the completed memorandum. This abridgment was signed and sealed by designated officers and became a taliqa. The historical account thus distinguishes an initial record, an approved memorandum, and a subsequent documentary summary. These are connected stages, but their names and functions are not identical. The distinction matters because an account that labels every paper a farman would conceal the intermediate work through which an imperial decision was converted into an instrument usable by other officers (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, pp. 258–259).

***Registers and the distribution of responsibility***

The next regulation concerns sanads and explains the importance of written statements for transactions and payment. The sanad supplies documentary authority for a claim and provides a basis on which a treasurer can discharge responsibility. The daftar is the register into which such instruments are entered. The text places the written instrument and the register in a relationship of mutual administrative use: a transaction generates a document, while registration allows its terms to be retained within a continuing record (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, p. 259).

The division of the daftar into three parts is especially important. One part concerns state revenue and other income; another records household expenditure and the accounts of cashkeepers; and a third concerns military pay. These are divisions of the accounting record described in the regulation. They should not be confused with a complete enumeration of all departments in the empire. The distinction prevents an apparent contradiction between the number of account divisions and the number of officers or offices mentioned elsewhere in the administrative description (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ain 11).

The same regulation indicates that authentication was differentiated. Some sanads required the imperial seal alone. Others first received the signatures and seals of ministers before being submitted to the emperor. A further group was authenticated by senior court

officers. This variation means that imperial authority did not require the emperor to perform the same documentary act in every case. The level and route of approval depended on the type of instrument and the transaction for which it was prepared (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ain 11).

The procedures also identify distinct responsibilities within a shared process. The diwan handles financial records and scrutiny; the bakhshis participate in military and salary-related matters; accountants preserve and enter relevant details; and other senior officers add authorization where prescribed. The khan-saman appears in the processing of particular payments, while the sadr participates in the certification of grants associated with the diwan-i-saadat. These roles emerge from the documentary sequence itself. The text supports an account of connected responsibilities more securely than a simplified assertion that every document passed through an identical set of four departments (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, pp. 260–263).

***Farman-i-sabti and the processing of grants***

Abu-l-Fazl groups farman-i-sabti instruments under three broad purposes. The first concerns appointments, including ranks and major offices. The second includes certain assignments of jagirs and responsibility for newly conquered territory. The third concerns sayurghal grants, subsistence allowances, and grants for beneficent purposes. These categories connect the decree to the organization of officeholding, territorial and financial arrangements, and the allocation of support. Their significance lies in the kinds of administrative claims that the instrument was intended to establish (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, p. 260).

A grant connected with military service required additional processing. The account describes inspection by the bakhshis and the preparation of descriptive rolls where the recipient was required to present horses for muster. After the relevant examination, the bakhshi issued a signed and sealed document specifying the monthly salary. This document, called a sarkhat, was entered into the appropriate registers. The prescribed connection between muster, pay, and documentation shows that the farman formed part of a larger system of personnel and financial records (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ain 11).

The diwan then retained the salary document, calculated the annual and monthly amounts, and reported to the emperor. If a jagir was ordered, a further certificate and

draft were prepared. The draft received inspection and the marks or seals of relevant officers before the grant was completed. The sequence links the ruler's decision with the calculation and recording of an entitlement. An imperial order did not remove the need to establish what was payable and how the grant related to the existing accounts (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, pp. 260–262).

The military accountant entered the details of the earlier certificate on the farman and authenticated it. Further inspection and sealing followed through the mustaufi, nazir, bakhshis, diwan, and other prescribed officers. The resulting instrument therefore carried traces of several stages of scrutiny. This should be read as the route specified for the transaction described, rather than as a rule that can automatically be extended to every order issued throughout the Mughal period (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ain 11).

***Cash payments and related instruments***

Where the order specified payment in cash, the text describes a comparable documentary process and identifies the instrument as a barat. A statement of accounts accompanied the transaction. Payments concerning imperial workshops and the wages or allowances of their workers also involved barats. The account therefore distinguishes related documentary forms according to their financial function. A farman, a certificate of salary, an accounting entry, and a payment instrument belonged to an interconnected process, but each provided a different kind of administrative information (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, pp. 261–262).

For workshop and stable expenditure, accountants prepared periodic statements covering provisions and salaries. The relevant financial officers inspected the statements, authorized payment, and recorded the transaction. An estimate accompanied the instrument so that the payment could be checked against its supporting calculation. Details concerning the manner of payment were also recorded. Such provisions reveal the practical importance of documentary attachments: an order established authority, while its accompanying accounts clarified the amount, purpose, and terms of the expenditure (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ain 11).

The regulation also discusses parwanchas and identifies transactions that did not require the emperor's personal signature. The examples include certain salary and allowance documents as well as several types of receipts and accounting statements. This

is evidence of prescribed delegation within the documentary system. It qualifies any account that makes the emperor's handwritten intervention a universal requirement for a valid administrative transaction. The relevant question is which authorization a particular document required, rather than whether every instrument repeated the same royal signature procedure (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, pp. 262–263).

### *Royal seals and official endorsements*

Book 1 describes the manufacture and use of different royal seals. Maulana Maqsud is associated with a seal bearing Akbar's name and the names of his ancestors up to Timur. Another seal carried the emperor's name in nastaliq. The regulation also identifies a seal for judicial transactions and distinguishes uses of the smaller round seal and the larger genealogical seal. These details show that the seal was not a single, unchanging device used indiscriminately for every purpose (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, p. 52).

Book 2 turns from the design of royal seals to the arrangement of endorsements on completed instruments. Documents were folded from the bottom, and particular officers had designated positions for their seals on successive folds. The wakil, accountants, sadr, khan-saman, diwan, bakhshi, and other officers appear in this arrangement. Some seals extended across a fold. The text specifies the relative placement of these marks, making the physical organization of the paper part of the prescribed authentication process (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, p. 263).

The emperor's seal had a position above the tughra lines at the top of the farman. This arrangement distinguished the imperial mark from the departmental endorsements placed elsewhere on the instrument. The document thus combined signs of sovereignty with evidence of administrative handling. Reading only the main command would miss this relationship between the authority expressed at the head of the decree and the responsibilities recorded through the positions of seals and signatures (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ain 12).

### *Farman-i-bayazi and the protection of contents*

The regulation of farman-i-bayazi concerns matters that required prompt action or restricted disclosure. In the account, this form received the imperial seal and was closed so that its contents could not be seen. Its edges were brought together, secured with a

paper fastening, and sealed. The document could then be transmitted in a protective covering. These provisions associate the category with urgency, confidentiality, and the protection of the written command, rather than simply defining it through the absence of an ordinary administrative register entry (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, p. 264).

The account also describes the formal reception of such an order by its recipient. Acts of deference accompanied the arrival of the document, and the messenger could receive a reward. Administrative communication therefore included the handling and reception of the authenticated paper. The prescribed ritual made the document a visible representation of the ruler, while the fastening protected its contents during transmission. The same regulation connects comparable precautions for report bags with the prevention of alteration (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ain 13).

This difference between the ordinary procedures described for registered instruments and the arrangements for bayazi orders is analytically important. The documentary system allowed different balances between scrutiny by multiple officers and direct imperial authorization. The regulations do not present all written commands as interchangeable. Their classification responds to different administrative requirements, including the need to record continuing financial obligations and the need to communicate a restricted instruction without delay (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, pp. 259–264).

## Discussion

### *Imperial command and administrative mediation*

The findings indicate that the expression of royal authority and the work of administrative officers were connected. An order could originate with the emperor, but its conversion into a claim, grant, or payment required a documentary sequence. Memoranda and certificates preserved decisions in forms that officers could inspect and use. Registers connected a transaction with continuing accounts, and the relevant signatures and seals identified responsibility for different parts of the process. This interpretation follows the relationship between the stages described in the regulations (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ains 10–12).

The significance of that sequence is not that it demonstrates an impersonal modern bureaucracy. Blake's (1979) patrimonial-bureaucratic interpretation is useful precisely because it considers formal administrative organization alongside the ruler-centered

character of Mughal power. The present analysis identifies a similar combination at the level of documents: imperial approval and representation coexist with specialized work by recorders, accountants, and senior officers. The procedures give institutional form to authority without removing the emperor from its foundation.

The intermediate documents also matter for interpreting continuity. A memorandum preserved an approved report; an abridged certificate made its contents available for further processing; a salary instrument established a specified financial entitlement; and a register retained relevant details. Each stage reduced dependence on a single oral instruction or a single person's recollection. This is an interpretation of the functions attributed to the instruments in the text. It does not establish the frequency with which records were lost, disputed, bypassed, or incorrectly entered (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ains 10–11).

***Documentary form and evidentiary value***

The arrangement of seals supports an interpretation of documentary form as part of administrative meaning. An endorsement identified more than the presence of a decorative mark. Its prescribed position associated an officer with a particular stage of processing. At the same time, the distinction between several royal seals shows that authentication depended on the document's function. The evidence therefore supports reading the material form and the written command together, while avoiding the assumption that a single visual feature proves the full history of a surviving instrument (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, pp. 52, 263).

Fragner (1999) places Mughal farmans within a broader history of Persianate documentary traditions while distinguishing their particular graphic conventions. His discussion also cautions that documentary arrangements were not identical across chanceries. This provides a basis for comparison, but formal resemblance alone cannot demonstrate an identical administrative procedure or a specific diplomatic agreement between two states. The present analysis accordingly concerns the functions supported by the cited regulations, rather than deriving political relationships from visual similarity alone.

Inscriptions offer a complementary evidentiary form. Desai (1998) describes records concerning buildings, public works, endowments, administrative orders, and

taxation. He also documents variation in the use of Arabic and Persian across regions and periods. These materials can add local or material context to the study of government, but their functions differ from those of a court regulation. An inscription recording an order is evidence of a particular recorded act; it does not necessarily preserve the entire administrative sequence through which the order was prepared.

Desai (1998) also identifies variation in inscriptional dating, including Hijri dates, chronograms, and the Ilahi era in some Mughal records. Such information is relevant when comparing documents, but dates require interpretation within the system actually used. A general statement about an imperial calendar cannot substitute for reading a specific date and its context. The comparison reinforces the importance of identifying the kind of source, its chronology, and its function before using it to establish a broader administrative pattern.

### *Historical scope and interpretation*

The Ain-i-Akbari is particularly valuable here because it describes relationships between documentary stages in considerable detail. Nevertheless, its account is produced within the courtly world that it describes. The statements concerning honest officials, accurate accounts, and the prevention of wrongdoing articulate administrative expectations. A historical reading must preserve the difference between those expectations and independent evidence of their fulfillment. The presence of a rule against alteration or delay establishes that the text addresses these concerns; it does not show that the concerns disappeared (Abu-l-Fazl, 1873, Book 2, Ains 10–13).

The contextual literature gives the documentary account a wider setting without replacing it. Forogh and Samimi (2021) connect Abu-l-Fazl's writing with the representation of Akbar's rule, while Roshangar et al. (2024) discuss administration and revenue policies across Mughal reigns. The present findings concern a narrower body of evidence: the regulations examined in Blochmann's first translated volume. Broader claims about every Mughal ruler, province, or religious community would require additional sources directed to those places and periods.

The analysis therefore supports conclusions about prescribed documentary organization more securely than claims about empire-wide outcomes. The sources do not provide a basis here for measuring the speed of issuing decrees, the percentage of orders

implemented, or the degree of peace achieved through farmans. Their contribution is to clarify how written commands were connected to recorded decisions, financial claims, official responsibility, and forms of authentication. This distinction keeps documentary evidence central without allowing the existence of a detailed regulation to stand as proof of universal administrative success.

## CONCLUSION

The Ain-i-Akbari describes farmans within an administrative process that connected the emperor's commands with the work of recorders, accountants, and senior officials. Reports became approved memoranda and abridged certificates; financial and personnel matters generated further instruments; and registration preserved details needed for subsequent transactions. Different documents required different combinations of signatures, seals, and imperial approval. The treatment of farman-i-bayazi further shows that urgency and confidentiality could shape the form and handling of a royal order. These findings establish the importance of documentary mediation in the court's account of governance.

The main implication is that a farman should be interpreted through its administrative function and authentication as well as its wording. The historical text supplies evidence of prescribed procedures, while inscriptions and other records can provide different kinds of contextual evidence. The present analysis is limited to published sources and is strongest for the regulations examined under Akbar. It does not demonstrate uniform implementation throughout the Mughal Empire. Further study of dated original instruments, their endorsements, and their provenance would allow the prescribed procedures to be compared more closely with documented transactions in particular settings.

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