

9 IO 4439

- A A firmān dated 27 Shawwāl 1203 (21 July 1789) issued by Shāh 'Ālam II.
- B At this auspicious time the Emperor has conferred the title of Bilqīs'z-zamān¹⁸ upon Sophia Elizabeth Plowden¹⁹ who is especially gifted with devotion and rare fidelity. Thus she is distinguished among grantees. The princes, viziers, nobles and governors (hukkām) should therefore regard her as distinguished by imperial favour.²⁰
- C This firmān has no enclosures or endorsements.
- D i At the top of the firmān there is a small tughrā in place of bismi'llāh, made out of a religious phrase.
ii There is a tughrā of the name of Shāh 'Ālam.
iii A round seal engraved during the first RY 1173 (1759) of Shāh 'Ālam II, has been affixed on the right of the tughrā. The phrase hūwa'l-ghālib²¹ is engraved in the crest of the seal. The seal contains the full name of Shāh 'Ālam II in the centre and his genealogy up to Amīr Timūr around it.

18 'The Bilqīs of her age'. Bilqīs is the traditional Arabian name of the Queen of Sheba or Saba (Steingass).

19 Sophia Elizabeth, daughter of George Augustus Prosser, was the wife of Richard Chicheley Plowden.

The Chicheley Plowdens served in India from 1773 when Henry Chicheley Plowden was appointed to the Bengal Infantry. Richard Chicheley Plowden was born in 1743. He entered the army in 1763 in the 70th Foot and became Captain in 1777 when he left the service. In the same year he married Sophia Elizabeth, a noted beauty. In 1777, when Edward Wheler, his brother-in-law, was appointed Governor General of India in succession to Warren Hastings, Richard and Sophia accompanied him to Calcutta. His early career in India is a bit obscure but in 1784 he became a member of the Committee of Accounts at Calcutta and held this appointment till his departure from India in 1790.

In 1788 Richard went to Lucknow with Sophia. The object of the visit was principally to recover the price of his house which he had sold to the Nuwāb of Audh who was notorious for coveting and acquiring every sort of building. During their visit to Lucknow Sophia was promised the title of Begum. On 26 July 1788 she wrote in her diary:

"Heard from Major Palmer that he had got my title from the King, the patent making out."

Richard and Sophia formed many friendships at Lucknow with persons who are historically famous in India. They returned to England in 1790 and took up residence in No. 8 Devonshire Place, where they cultivated the society of French Royalist émigrées.

Richard Plowden died in 1830 and Sophia Elizabeth on 21 December 1834 (Plowden pp. 35, 151-173; for her picture see Archer pp. 411, 412).

20 For a full translation of the firmān see Plowden pp. 174-5.

21 Means 'He (God) is victorious'.

- E i Size: 69.5 x 114 cm. mounted on a printed cloth of 93 x 194 cm. The cloth is an example of one of the varieties of 18th-century Indian textiles.
- ii Script: ta'liq.
- iii Illuminated. Each line has been enclosed in a golden, orange and green border. The border around the seal and tughra is a work of art. A beautiful umbrella (chatr) has been printed above the seal. The firmān is held between wooden rods (now replaced by new ones). The roll is kept in a wooden cylinder lacquered green with orange bands.
- iv Very good state of preservation.

10 IO 4440

- A A firmān dated 25 Zū'l-qa'da 1205 (26 July 1791 issued by Shāh 'Alam II.
- B At this auspicious time the Emperor has kindly conferred the title of Sāhib Begam on his most devoted and deserving servant, Faiḡu'n-Nisā Begam.²² Thus she has been distinguished among grandees. The princes, nobles, governors (hukkām) and all those attached to the imperial court should therefore regard her as distinguished by imperial favour.
- C This firmān has no enclosures or endorsements.
- D i The tughrās and the imperial seals are the same as on document no. 9 (IO 4439).
- ii Seal of IOL dated 15 November 1934, with the no. 4440.
- E i Size: 71 x 116 cm. mounted on printed cloth of 93 x 194 cm. The cloth is an example of one variety of 18th-century Indian textile.
- ii Script: ta'liq.
- iii The decoration is similar to that of IO 4439. See no. 9, section E iii.
- iv Very good state of preservation.

²² Faiḡu'n-Nisā Begam or Bibī Faiḡ Bakhsh (d. 1828) was the wife of General William Palmer (1740-1816) father of William Palmer of William Palmer and Company Hyderabad (IOR: R/1667/34; Archer pp. 142, 146, and for her picture pp. 280, 286; Yazdani p. 42).