

**The Market of Fact and Fantasy:
Brokering Afghanistan in Late Imperial Britain
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The search for reliable intelligence on Afghanistan posed a longstanding dilemma for the British Empire, which between 1839 and 1919 fought three wars based on rumours of Russian influence in Kabul. Over time, this predicament produced a semi-formal system of 'native informants,' more often Indian than Afghan, to supply intelligence from the other side of the North-West Frontier. Given the high stakes of the cost of war, information not only became monetized; it also became a manipulable social resource. Against this background, the present paper traces the career of one such informant as he navigated the diversifying markets, both private and public, opened in Britain in the wake of the Third-Anglo Afghan War. Amid the expanding mediascape of late empire, the paper shows how the role of secret informant morphed into that of public spokesman, rendering authenticity an increasingly important measure of authority.