Shortly after 1500, three major regional powers—the Mughals, Safavids, and Uzbeks—seized control of the territories that today make up Afghanistan. Until around 1730, the Mughal and Safavid empires and the Uzbek khanate of Bukhara controlled and competed for eastern, western, and northern Afghanistan, respectively. Although the capitals of these states lay outside Afghanistan, the cities of Herat, Kabul, Qandahar, and Mazar-i Sharif became important provincial outposts for the different religious groups that were patronized by these states. Twelver Shi’ism thus flourished in Herat, whereas Naqshbandi Sufism was introduced to Kabul. Meanwhile, the presence of the purported shrine of the Prophet’s son-in-law ‘Ali saw Mazar-i Sharif (Holy Pilgrimage Place) increase its fame a pilgrim center. Hundreds of smaller shrines developed around the graves of the holy all across Afghanistan, sometimes under the patronage of imperial elites. In the early eighteenth century, the rapid collapse and contraction of the Safavid and Mughal empires saw the rise of the Hotaki and Durrani rulers. These first Pashtun dynasties tried to embellish Qandahar into an imperial capital of their own, building royal and religious monuments that included a domed reliquary for the Prophet Muhammad’s cloak. Close connections nonetheless remained with established religious centers in surrounding states, and regional networks saw Sufis and ‘ulama from Afghanistan circulate between Delhi, Bukhara, Mashhad, and beyond. Hostels were established for Afghan pilgrims and Sufis as far away as Istanbul, Jerusalem, and Mecca. In terms of access to religious learning, a few works were written in spoken vernaculars such as Pashto and Uzbek. However, the main languages of learning remained Arabic and Persian. Though few people were literate, and no books were printed in Afghanistan before the 1870s, these languages of learning connected Afghans with their coreligionists far and wide.