INDO-PERSIAN TRAVELS IN THE AGE OF DISCOVERIES, 1400–1800

This is a path-breaking work based on detailed and sensitive readings of travel-accounts in Persian, dealing with India, Iran and Central Asia between about 1400 and 1800. It is the first comprehensive treatment of this neglected genre of literature (*safar nāma*) that links the Mughals, Safavids and Central Asia in a crucial period of transformation and cultural contact. The authors' close readings of these travel-accounts help us enter the mental and moral worlds of the Muslim and non-Muslim literati who produced these valuable narratives. These accounts are presented in a comparative framework, which sets them side by side with other Asian accounts, as well as early modern European travel-narratives, and opens up a rich and unsuspected vista of cultural and material history. This book can be read for a better understanding of the nature of early modern encounters, but also for the sheer pleasure of entering a new world.

MUZAFFAR ALAM is Professor in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago. His previous publications include *A European experience of the Mughal Orient*, with S. Alavi (2001).

SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM is Professor and Doshi Chair of Indian History at the University of California, Los Angeles. His previous publications include *The career and legend of Vasco da Gama* (1997).

INDO-PERSIAN TRAVELS IN THE AGE OF DISCOVERIES, 1400–1800

MUZAFFAR ALAM and SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521780414

First published 2007

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-521-78041-4 hardback

For John F. Richards

Contents

Illustrations

Maps

Preface

This book has been very long in the making, so long that at times we despaired of ever completing it. Its origins date back largely to a set of leisurely and pleasurable conversations between the authors in Dakshinapuram, on the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, in the early 1990s. We had met first in 1985 in Yogyakarta, and then renewed our acquaintance in Delhi in early 1989. Many cups of *chāi* and *vāi* were drunk in those days, as we became not merely collaborators but close friends. While discussing the possibilities of ploughing new furrows in the field of Mughal studies, the question of the Persian language travel-account came up. We embarked on our study of them soon after, partly encouraged by our friend (the late) Denys Lombard, who solicited a text from us that eventually appeared in a collection on Asian travel-accounts edited by his wife Claudine Salmon (entitled *Récits de voyage des Asiatiques*). Our initial interests were in travellers from Central Asia and Iran who came to India, and it was hence for obvious reasons that we began with an analysis of the text of Mahmud Wali Balkhi, that had been edited by Riazul Islam. However, we soon began to cast our net wider. After having read through the text of Mutribi Samarqandi, we turned our attention to writings having to do with "internal" travels in South Asia, such as those of Anand Ram "Mukhlis" and Abu'l Faiz "Faizi". However, a discussion of these latter accounts could not eventually be included in this book, and will appear in a companion volume concerned with travels within Mughal India.

The corpus continued to grow with the passage of years, and our joint work proceeded in fits and starts, mostly in Delhi, but also in other places such as Leiden, Paris and eventually Chicago, Oxford and Los Angeles. Several distractions came our way, in the form of individual as well as collective projects, that unfortunately took precedence over this one. Our own travels too became an obstacle to this book on travels. Others who were working at the same time on similar materials, notably Simon Digby, continued to publish their own essays drawing upon similar texts to ours. In at least one instance, that of Mutribi, a translation and commentary in English appeared, by Richard C. Foltz. We, for

our part, continued to publish isolated essays, but hesitated to turn the whole into a monograph until we were encouraged to do so by the enthusiasm shown by a number of seminar audiences, both in India and elsewhere, to whom these materials were presented. The renewed interest shown in the European travel-account of the early modern period seemed to us to justify a whole book, rather than a set of scattered essays, on the world of the Indo-Persian travel text. Cambridge University Press accepted this project with alacrity, and has since shown much patience with us.

Many colleagues and friends have shown us great kindness along the way. Papers drawing on these materials have been presented in Bamberg, Cambridge, Chicago, Heidelberg, London, Los Angeles, New Delhi, Oxford, and many other places, whether in conferences or as lecture presentations. Amongst our friends and colleagues, Simon Digby, Suraiya Faroqhi, Bert Fragner, Robert McChesney and Christine Noelle-Karimi shared with us some of their extensive knowledge of these materials. Juan Cole was particularly helpful in regard to contacts between Iran and Mughal India, a subject that has long interested him. Kathryn Babayan pointed us in the direction of valuable texts and editions, time and again; to her, we are particularly grateful. Michael Fisher shared some of his thoughts as the project was nearing a close. Our colleagues in Ottoman studies, Cornell Fleischer and Cemal Kafadar, were of the greatest help in thinking through the conceptual difficulties posed by these texts. The late Jean Aubin and Denys Lombard were present to aid us in early stages of this project, and we fondly remember their help and advice. Jos Gommans and Dirk Kolff were helpful in arranging a stay for us in Leiden.

Regarding libraries and archives, some merit special mention. The National Museum in New Delhi – and in particular Dr Naseem Akhtar – generously allowed us to dip into its vast collections for purposes of illustrating this text. The staff of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the British Library, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute in Hyderabad, the Regenstein Library in Chicago, and other institutions were always of great help.

The generosity, humour and hospitality of Rizwana Khatun also made this book possible, since she has indulged our lengthy conversations on this and other subjects from the days in Dakshinapuram onwards. Innumerable others have heard one section of this book or another, and we can hardly begin to list the audiences and individuals who have helped us clarify a point or seek out an additional reference. Still, we must thank a loyal set of audiences in the Oriental Institute in Oxford, who sat through an extensive set of lectures on this subject in 2004; and amongst the best of listeners there, we thank John D. Gurney above all, but also Imre Bangha and Fariba Adelkhah. Caroline Ford gave generous

advice and forceful encouragement as the project drew to a close, and more or less obliged us to clear our desks.

This is a book about travel-narratives, and it is also a book that carries an engagement with narrative production within it. Our declared intention from the outset was not to take apart our narratives into bite-sized chunks and rearrange them thematically or otherwise, in keeping with our own idiosyncratic tastes. Rather, we wished to follow our travellers and listen to them, and also take the manner in which they organised their materials seriously. Where we have taken obvious liberties is in terms of choosing which accounts to classify and analyse with others, that is to say in how we have gone about the division of chapters. Yet here too, we hope that our choices will not appear entirely devoid of reason or plausibility.

The book consists of eight slightly unequal chapters. After a survey of some other neighbouring travel literatures, from Beijing to the Bosphorus, we plunge in the first chapter directly into an unusual seventeenth-century account in verse of a female pilgrim to the *ḥajj*. Having given the reader a foretaste of things to come, Chapter 2 then looks to a few accounts from the fifteenth century, notably those of 'Abdur Razzaq Samarqandi, and the Russian traveller Afanasii Nikitin. These set the stage, as it were, for the core of the book which is concerned with the India of the Mughals and its external relations.

The three chapters that follow explore different aspects of the view of India as seen by visitors from Central Asia, the Ottoman domains and Iran. One of these looks to "courtly encounters", in the form of the sixteenth-century account of the Ottoman admiral Seydi 'Ali Re'is, comparing it to the texts of Mutribi Samarqandi from the 1620s, and the Iranian embassy to Thailand in the late seventeenth century. The next chapter focuses in large measure on the combination of travels and wonders, with a central emphasis on the voyage from the late 1620s of Mahmud Wali Balkhi. Chapter 5 then considers a series of disgruntled travellers, who made their way from Safavid Iran to Mughal India, and found that what they encountered was not to their taste. These travellers, for whom travel itself was a form of hell, thus represent one end of a spectrum, as opposed to others who are seemingly all-too-happy to encounter and absorb the "wonders" they see en route. Chapter 6 then reverses this view to a large extent by examining the account of a traveller from Mughal India, Khwaja 'Abdul Karim Shahristani, who found his way westwards, to Iran, the Hijaz and the Ottoman empire. Chapter 7 continues the westward exploration by looking at travellers from India to the Ottoman empire, and comparing their vision with those of the travellers examined earlier whose itineraries took them in the opposite direction. Finally, the concluding chapter seeks to return to a comparative perspective, by considering the difference between the body of texts surveyed and

analysed in this work, and the far more common, as well as far more celebrated, European travel-accounts of the early modern period.

Writing this book has been an unusual exercise, not least of all because it has proceeded in fits and starts over so many years. We should not leave the reader with the impression that this has been a joyless task, or one in which we have not taken pleasure. Indeed, we hope that some of our own enjoyment in reading these texts comes through these pages, and that we have not produced a text that serves – as the sour Swiss writer Béat Louis de Muralt put it in the eighteenth century – only to persuade our readers not to travel.

Chicago and Los Angeles

A note on transliteration

The Persian and Indian terms not in common use in the English language have been italicised, and their plurals have been indicated usually by adding the letter *s*. However, we have chosen not to add diacritical marks in the text for proper nouns, such as the names of persons and places. We have, however, used the spiritus asper (ʿ) and spiritus lentis (ʾ) for the '*ain* and *hamza* respectively. In order to transliterate words and phrases in Persian, we have used a modified version of the system in F. Steingass's *Comprehensive Persian–English dictionary*, while avoiding the excessive use of apostrophes. We have therefore preferred to diverge from his usage with regard to combined words, as can be seen in forms such as "Niẓām-ud-Dīn" rather than "Niẓāmu'd-Dīn", or "Quṭb-ul-Mulk" in place of "Quṭbu'l-Mulk". In regard to Turkish, we have followed standard modern conventions in that language. In regard to Chinese, we have normally followed the Pinyin system of transliteration.

A note on calendars

Since many of the texts that are discussed use the lunar Hijri calendar, we have tried, to the extent possible, to give both the original dates and the equivalents in terms of the Common Era (CE). In the interests of clarity, it may be pointed out that the following broad equivalents apply: 800 H. is 1397–8 CE; 900 H. is 1494–5 CE ; 1000 H. is 1591–2 CE; 1100 H. is 1688–9 CE; 1200 H. is 1785–6 CE. Further, the succession of months is as follows.

1. Muharram
2. Safar
3. Rabi‘ I
4. Rabi‘ II
5. Jumada I
6. Jumada II
7. Rajab
8. Sha‘ban
9. Ramazan
10. Shawwal
11. Zi-Qa‘da
12. Zi-Hijja

"Kh." stands for "Khurshidi", and "Sh." for "Shamsi" (calendars used in Iran).