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 (sañar 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).
For John F. Richards
## Contents

*List of illustrations*  page viii  
*List of maps*  x  
*Preface*  xi  
*A note on transliteration*  xv  
*A note on calendars*  xvi  
1 Introduction: the travel-account from Beijing to the Bosphorus  1  
2 From Timur to the Bahmanis: fifteenth-century views  45  
3 Courtly encounters  93  
4 An ocean of wonders  130  
5 When Hell is other people  175  
6 A western mirror  243  
7 The long road to Rum  296  
8 On early modern travel  332  

*Bibliography*  364  
*Index*  384
Illustrations

1 Babur crossing the Son river, Bābur Nāma, Persian text, late sixteenth century, National Museum, New Delhi, No. 50.336. page 22
2 Representation of the Ka’aba in Mecca with details of the holy sites surrounding it, Rauzā-i Khair ul-Bashar, National Museum, New Delhi, No. 55.56/1. 39
3 Map (ṣūrat) of the country (dayār) of Sind and parts of Hind from Ibn Khurdadbih, Šuwar al-aqālīm wa masālik-i mamālik, ms copied in 831 H. (1427–8), National Museum, New Delhi, No. 56.96/4. 56
4 Scene from the Ā‘īna-yi Sikandari, Khamsa of Amir Khusrau of Delhi, ms copied on 18 Zi-Hijja 901 H (28 August 1496), National Museum, New Delhi, No. 52.81. 63
5 Single caparisoned elephant, Fil-nāma, National Museum, New Delhi, No. 78218. 77
6 Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, M. 525, fos. 83v–84, Livro de Lisuarte de Abreu, combat between Portuguese and Ottoman fleets. Caption reads: “This was the first encounter that Dom Fernando had with the galleys at Cape Mocadam in the year 1555”. 98
7 Darab in a boat on a Greek island, encounters Mehrasp, a Parsi adventurer, Dārab-nāma, National Museum, New Delhi, No. L53.2/9. 110
8 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M. 75.4.28 Emperor Jahangir triumphing over Poverty, c. 1622, attributed to Abu’l Hasan. 124
9 Death of a rich and greedy merchant, who had wanted to enslave Tamrusia, widowed queen of Amman, Dārab-nāma, National Museum, New Delhi, No. L53.2/9. 141
10 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M. 78.9.14, portrait of Mirza Rustam Safavi, c. 1640, attributed to Hashim. 206
11 Scene with monstrous creatures, ‘Ajā‘īb al-Makhlūqāt, National Museum, New Delhi, No. 57.26/2. 213
12 Map (ṣūrat) of ‘Iraq-i ‘Arab, from Ibn Khurdadbih Šuwar al-aqālīm wa masālik-i mamālik, National Museum, New Delhi, No. 56.96/4. 218
**List of illustrations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Title page of the abridged English translation of the <em>Bayān-i Wāqi'</em> (1788).</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The bazaar of Mina in Mecca, showing the three noted sites from where the haţis throw stones at Satan, <em>Futuh al-haramain</em> by Jami, National Museum, New Delhi, No. 61.89.</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M. 83.105.2, portrait of Ibrahim ‘Adil Shah II, c. 1675.</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Portrait of Tavernier in “Oriental costume”, engraving by Johann Hainzelmann, Paris (1679), based on a portrait by Largillière.</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maps

1 Nikitin’s travels to India. page 84
2 Seydi ‘Ali Re’is’s itinerary. 102
3 Major trade routes in Mughal India. 203
4 Map of Nadir Shah’s campaigns. 257
5 The route of the envoys to Istanbul. 320
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 cha and vai 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 Farooqi, 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 \textit{h\text{"a}jj}. 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 on 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 (‘) and spiritus lentic (’’) for the ‘\( \text{‘} \text{ain} \) and \( \text{‘} \text{hamza} \) 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 “\( \text{‘} \text{Niz\={a}m}\text{-ud-D\={i}n} \)” rather than “\( \text{‘} \text{Niz\={a}mu’d-D\={i}n} \)” or “\( \text{‘} \text{Qut\={b}-ul-Mulk} \)” in place of “\( \text{‘} \text{Qut\={b}u’l-Mulk} \)”. 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’dā
12. Zi-Hijjā

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