1 | *Introduction*

In 933/1527, after an eventful career as a diplomat, historian, adminis-
trator, and writer under multiple rulers – a career that included com-
posing a variety of texts for multiple patrons – Ghiyas al-Din
Khvandamir (ca. 880–942/ca. 1475–1535/1536) left Herat, a town
which had recently come under Safavid control, and made his way to
Qandahar and Mughal territory. There, he authored his final compos-
ition: a short historical treatise for the Mughal emperor Humayun
(r. 937–963/1530–1556). Khvandamir's career represents movement
in a number of ways. In addition to his physical journey from
Khurasan to India, he moved effortlessly, it seems, from genre to genre
in his writing, and from patron to patron, some of whom were dis-
tantly related to each other and others who ruled over rival empires.
Khvandamir was not unique in terms of his movements. The early
modern Persianate world was one connected by a common Persian
language and a body of texts familiar to an elite that existed across
empires. However, while we know what, where, and when
Khvandamir wrote, we have only started to understand how and why.

This book is a study of Persian historiography during the period of
the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires. Beginning in approxi-
mately 1500, three empires formed in Southwest Asia, South Asia,
and North Africa out of the political fragmentation that followed the
dissolution of the Timurid Empire. The Ottomans, Safavids, and
Mughals became three of the most powerful empires of the seventeenth
century. After their establishment, a series of dynastic kings built
elaborate capital cities or expanded already established ones; sur-
rounded themselves with a dizzying array of artists, architects, and
intellectuals; developed bureaucracies that allowed their empires to
continue expanding without losing administrative control over their
provinces; and formed disciplined and effective armies. They engaged
in diplomacy, ruled over multiethnic and multireligious communities,
and created conditions through which new literary, artistic,

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philosophical, and social movements could thrive. At the same time, rulers of these empires also engaged in warfare, massacre, religious persecution, and the forced resettlement of peoples.

The Ottomans managed to accomplish what no Islamic dynasty or ruler had previously been able to do: capture Constantinople and transform it into Istanbul, which became the imperial seat of the Ottoman sultanate. From there, they launched a series of successful military campaigns that brought them into direct contact with the peoples of Europe and Iran. Eventually bringing Arabia and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina under their control, they came to see themselves as the champions and guardians of Sunni Islam while sharing an eastern border with their rival Shi'i Safavid neighbors.

The Safavids, whose origins trace back to a Sufi dynasty in the northern Iranian city of Ardabil, eventually ruled from Isfahan, a purpose-built capital city that they filled with mosques, bazaars, bathhouses, and more. Having established Twelver/Imami Shi'ism as the official state religion, they proceeded to "convert" Iran, bringing together religious scholars and clerics and establishing religious institutions to help them carry out this project. Like the Ottomans, they engaged in international trade and international diplomacy. Under the Safavids, a philosophical school flourished and so too, eventually, new styles of art and poetry.

At nearly the same time that the Safavid state was founded, the Mughal dynasty established itself in India, and as Muslims, ruled over a Hindu majority population. A series of Mughal emperors situated Agra and then Delhi as their capitals where they used their tremendous wealth to build edifices such as the Taj Mahal. In addition, they attracted large numbers of poets, artists, and other intellectuals to their territory with the promise of financial reward and patronage. The Mughals engaged in unique religious experiments designed to reconcile the different religious communities over which they ruled. They eventually managed, through their effective army, to extend their rule over the entire Indian subcontinent.

Each of these empires cultivated their own unique identities, as rulers tried to ensure the strength of their political borders and boundaries. They squashed rebellions and attempts at defection, waged military and propaganda wars against each other, and competed with each other in terms of their kingship and their legitimacy. However, this was also a period of great movement, exchange, and synthesis. People

traveled from one empire to another, living under different dynasties, and as people moved, so too did their religious beliefs, artistic styles, languages, poetry, and practices of historical writing, which in turn interacted with local traditions.

Historical Writing in Persian

Given the magnitude of these empires, it should come as no surprise that their kings made certain that historians would record their accomplishments. The period thus witnessed a significant output of historical writing of many kinds, much of it in the same Persian language, although some of the earliest Ottoman chronicles and most of the later ones were written in Ottoman Turkish.[1] During the Middle Periods of Islamicate history, "new Persian" had spread across the eastern portion of the Islamic heartlands and become the vehicle through which social norms of refined etiquette (*adab*) were communicated. By the early modern period, secretaries (*munshī*s), poets, courtiers, and other writers adhered to models that became familiar to a literate class who composed their own texts in light of these models.[2] Mughal emperors, starting with Humayun, actively encouraged scholars in Iran to go to India, and Persian became the language associated with Mughal kingship and administration.[3]

This study focuses on histories written in Persian because this "lingua franca" served not only as the language of administration and culture across the empires but also the primary language of historical writing for nearly the entirety of the Safavid and Mughal periods and for the earliest phase of Ottoman rule. Persian histories were also composed under the Shaybani Uzbeks in Central Asia and for various

[1] For more background on early Ottoman historiography, see Halil Inalcik, "The Rise of Ottoman Historiography," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt, 152–167 (London: Oxford University Press, 1986). Turkish also played an important role in Central Asia and the Mughal Empire during this time.

[2] Brian Spooner and William L. Hanoway, "Introduction: Persian As *Koine*: Written Persian in World-Historical Perspective," in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, ed. Brian Spooner and William L. Hanoway, 1–69 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[3] Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," *Modern Asian Studies* 32 (1998): 317–349. See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Iranians Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 51 (1992): 340–363.

other local rulers and patrons in the region. Since Persian histories form such an essential source of information for this period, scholars often make extensive use of this material, especially for the Safavid and Mughal dynasties.[4] Knowing more about these indispensable texts, including the methods of their composition and how they relate to each other across political boundaries, remains a matter of paramount importance as we use them to understand the past.

The following chapters demonstrate that Persian historiography during this era was part of an extensive universe of literary-historical writing that drew on earlier established models and historiographical traditions, most immediately Timurid. As heirs to the Timurid historiographical legacy, historians of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals modified and further developed these traditions across all three empires. Furthermore, they also read and sometimes cited each other's works, thereby connecting their histories not only to the earlier tradition but also to each other's compositions. Some, like Khvandamir, even physically moved from one empire to another, writing under different and rival dynasties and patrons at various points in time. For these reasons, in studying Persian historical writing, it is important to look beyond the confines of political boundaries and instead focus on the Persianate world.

Connected Histories and the Persianate World

The present volume complements research undertaken in the last few decades on connected histories and notions of the "Persianate world." Such scholarship has suggested that the study of historiographical traditions should not be straightjacketed into the confines of modern nation-states or even the early modern dynastic empires where they were written.[5] Instead, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam has noted, histories, while diverse in terms of genre and other elements, were part of a connected world in which their influence was felt across great

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[4] Due to the survival of the extensive Ottoman archives, it has been possible to write a social and economic history of the Ottoman Empire in ways that have not been as possible for the Safavids or the Mughals. See Douglas E. Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011), 6–10.

[5] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 759.

distances.[6] Subrahmanyam further outlines a circulation of legendary
material, such as those associated with Alexander the Great, and ideas
and concepts, such as the notion of the appearance of a *mujaddid*, or
"renewer," who according to Islamic tradition (*ḥadīth*) would appear
at the beginning of each century to renew the faith.[7] The chronicles
under examination, as will be demonstrated, were used and traveled
across empires, as Persian was the primary language of transmission in
the early modern era. They thus form part of the circuit or circulation
of historiographical traditions. The primary purpose here is to demon-
strate in a detailed manner what happened to such texts as they
circulated. How exactly were they utilized and rewritten by later
generations of chroniclers writing across empires? This is where taking
a comparative approach becomes useful. In order to understand the
relationship between the chronicles and what happened as they moved
from, say, Safavid Iran to the Ottoman Empire or to the Mughal
Empire, it is necessary to compare them to each other, not only to
establish their dependency, but also to understand the transformations
that they underwent. Such an approach does not "compartmentalize"
the chronicles but rather allows us to understand them in a more
nuanced manner.

In addition to being "connected histories" in ways that subsequent
chapters will demonstrate, the chronicles were produced in the
"Persianate" world, a notion that, like connected histories, has also
received considerable recent scholarly attention. While the renowned
University of Chicago historian Marshall G. S. Hodgson was respon-
sible for coining the term "Persianate," a sibling term to his rather more

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[6] For example, the late Timurid world history, Mirkhvand's *Rawzat al-safa*, while
an extremely important text for the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals alike, was
mentioned in a Portuguese world history completed in 1530. See Sanjay
Subrahmanyam, "Intertwined Histories: *Crónica* and *Tārīkh* in the Sixteenth-
Century Indian Ocean World," *History and Theory, Theme Issue* 49 (2010):
135, 140.

[7] For the Alexander legends, see Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories," 757. For
more on the notion of the *mujaddid* in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal chronicles,
see Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The
Historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,
1986), 281 (Ottomans); Sholeh A. Quinn, *Historical Writing during the Reign of
Shah ʿAbbas: Ideology, Imitation and Legitimacy in Safavid Chronicles* (Salt
Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), 81–83, 86 (Safavids); A. Azfar Moin,
The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam (New York:
Columbia University Press, 2012), 9, 134, 171, 198–204, 209 (Mughals).

popular "Islamicate," this concept has been more recently revisited in an attempt to define it more consciously and explore its implications.[8] These studies suggest that looking beyond and decentering Iran would be useful in helping us to understand the nature of the Persianate world and culture.[9] This study contributes to such scholarship by examining Persian chronicles that were written beyond the borders of the Safavid Empire, across territory spanning from Western Anatolia to the Indian subcontinent, including Iran and Central Asia. Such an approach is particularly effective when applied to the early modern period, as this was a time when each of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal zones "earned a discrete personality of its own," as Persianate culture interacted with Ottoman Turkish in the west and with Hindu and Sanskrit cultures in India.[10] As these empires became "epicenters for a transregional Persianate experience,"[11] the question remains as to how historical writing fits into this paradigm. Do chronicles written across the early modern empires possess something unique that distinguishes them by the dynasty under which they were written, or can we discern more homogenizing characteristics? How does historiography change over time?

The Historiographical Context

The best way to address the questions that theoretical discussions on connected histories and notions of the Persianate world raise is by closely reading and analyzing the chronicles themselves. While

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[8] An unexhaustive list of such works include the following: *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, ed. Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); *Medieval Central Asia and the Persianate World: Iranian Tradition and Islamic Civilisation*, ed. A. C. S. Peacock and D. G. Tor (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Richard M. Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age 1000–1765* (London: Allen Lane, 2019). In explaining the importance of the period from 111 to 1274, Marshall G. S. Hodgson notes the significance of the Persian language, distinguishing "cultural traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration" as "Persianate." See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2: 293–294.

[9] See Peacock and Tor, *Medieval Central Asia and the Persianate World*, xix–xxi; Green, *The Persianate World*, xiv–xv.

[10] Abbas Amanat, "Remembering the Persianate," in *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, 28–29.

[11] Amanat, "Remembering the Persianate," 51.

historical chronicles form a body of what we might consider "trad-itional sources," they certainly should not be dismissed for that reason but rather examined in a sophisticated manner.[12] Throughout this work, I draw attention to the importance of placing these histories not only in historical but also in historiographical contexts. It is the latter of these contexts, the historiographical, that still has not received enough scholarly attention, which is emphasized in this study. Its importance lies in the fact that so many early modern writers employed a method of imitative writing in which they drew heavily on an earlier work or works, modifying the earlier model texts in significant ways. Without identifying these models, it is likely that scholars will read a particular history without realizing whose words they are actually reading. Imitative writing is one of the most important features of Persian historiography when chroniclers narrate their past. In other words, when historians could find earlier texts that covered a particu-lar past period and place, they usually used one or more such sources as the basis upon which they wrote their own accounts. Taking that earlier text, they would modify it by rewriting it in different ways, such as adding new language, changing the wording, removing certain passages, or reproducing the earlier text verbatim. If enough chronic-lers chose to carry forward the same portions or sections of an earlier narrative, those sections became conventional elements.

In my earlier study, *Historical Writing during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas: Ideology, Imitation and Legitimacy in Safavid Chronicles*, I analyzed this process in Safavid chronicle prefaces and accounts of the early Safavid Sufi order, pointing to the highly conventional elem-ents in the prefaces and noting how certain stories originating in the fourteenth-century hagiography of Shaykh Safi al-Din (650–735/ 1252–1334), founder of the Safaviyyah Sufi order, were reproduced and then significantly rewritten in order to make Shaykh Safi and his followers appear as practicing Twelver Shi'i Muslims. Chroniclers from the period of Shah Isma'il (r. 907–930/1501–1524) later engaged in this rewriting process. When comparing the passages in these vari-ous chronicles, it became very clear that the historians chose particular texts as models that they imitated. In some cases, by skillfully adding a

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[12] Peacock and Tor, "Preface," xxi. See also Assef Ashraf, "Introduction: Pathways to the Persianate," in *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, 10.

single word or a short phrase, they completely changed the meaning of
the earlier narrative. In other instances, they added significant pas-
sages, thereby making their political agendas very clear.[13] Through
this creative process of interacting with an earlier text, the chronicler
maintained an active engagement and dialog with the past. It is essen-
tial to keep this process in mind and read a historical work compara-
tively alongside its model. Failing to do so may be likened to listening
to half of a conversation with the resulting dialog incomplete and
difficult to understand.

The phenomenon of imitation has been studied not only in relation
to historiography but also to Persian poetry. Paul Losensky analyzed
Safavid–Mughal poetry in light of various forms of imitation in which
a poet pays tribute to earlier poems through, for example, reproducing
the same meter or rhyme. The practice was popular with Safavid–
Mughal poets such as Baba Fighani.[14] In the case of both poetry and
history, the practice that earlier modern writers engaged in cannot be
labeled plagiarism, because to do so ignores the creative and innovative
elements inherent in the process of composing a poem or writing and
rewriting the past.

The State of the Field

Despite the tremendous historiographical output spanning three
empires and the significance that body of writing has for our under-
standing of early modern history, little research across empires has
taken place thus far. This is not surprising for the study of Persian
historiography within each of these three dynasties has only recently
reached a point where such work can proceed. Nevertheless, a number
of books have been recently published that provide the necessary
background for the kind of "across empires" approach used in this
study. In 2012, a volume entitled *Persian Historiography*, edited by
Charles Melville as part of Ehsan Yarshater's *History of Persian
Literature* series, brought together numerous essays on Persian histori-
ography from its origins to the Pahlavi period.[15] The chapters in this

[13] Quinn, *Historical Writing*, 63–91.
[14] Paul E. Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the
Safavid-Mughal Ghazal* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1998), 12, 15,
100–114.
[15] *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

volume provide general overviews of the main sources and main fea-
tures of historical writing for each time period/dynasty. *Persian
Historiography* includes separate chapters on Ottoman, Safavid, and
Mughal historiographies. These essays build on several monographs
and articles that had been recently published, such as Julie Meisami's
Persian Historiography, Ernest Tucker's *Nadir Shah's Quest for
Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*, numerous articles published by
Charles Melville on Mongol and Timurid historiographies, and
Historical Writing during the Reign of Shah 'Abbas.[16]

Since the publication of *Persian Historiography*, and in one instance
before, several monographs have been published that emphasize pri-
marily dynastic and occasionally interdynastic history, making heavy
use of historical narratives.[17] Tilmann Trausch's study on Safavid
historiography, *Formen höfischer Historiographie im 16.
Jahrhundert*, focuses on the rise of Safavid historiography.[18] Kaya
Şahin's *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the
Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World*, a study that brings a much-needed
focus on narrative sources for the reign of the Ottoman sultan
Süleyman, emphasizes histories written in Ottoman Turkish rather
than Persian texts.[19] Ali Anooshahr's *The Ghazi Sultans and the
Frontiers of Islam: A Comparative Study of the Late Medieval and
Early Modern Periods* examines three key historical figures: Mahmud
of Ghazna (r. 388–421/998–1030), the Mughal founder Babur
(r. 932–937/1526–1530), and the Ottoman sultan Murad II

16 Julie Scott Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century*
    (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); Ernest Tucker, *Nadir Shah's
    Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (Gainsville: University Press of
    Florida, 2006); Quinn, *Historical Writing*, and numerous articles published by
    Charles Melville on Mongol and Timurid historiographies, several of which are
    listed in the Bibliography.
17 Space does not allow for a comprehensive list of recent scholarship in Arabic
    historiography, which has made tremendous progress in recent years. See, for
    example, Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands:
    A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh
    University Press, 2012). See also Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic
    Historiography: Authors As Actors* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
18 Tilmann Trausch, *Formen höfischer Historiographie im 16. Jahrhundert:
    Geschichtsschreibung unter den frühen Safaviden: 1501–1578* (Wien: Verlag der
    Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW), 2015).
19 Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the
    Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University
    Press, 2013).

(r. 824–848/1421–1444; 850–855/1446–1451).[20] The book makes use of a wide range of narrative sources from multiple dynasties. For the Mughals, A. Azfar Moin's *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* similarly makes use of historical narratives, looking particularly at what they have to say about Mughal kingship.[21] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam's *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* contains many chapters that deal with Mughal historiography.[22] Audrey Truschke's *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* examines Persian texts, paying particular attention to understanding the impact of Sanskrit on texts written under the Mughals.[23] Finally, Ali Anooshahr's *Turkestan and the Rise of Eurasian Empires* examines the broad historiographical traditions surrounding the origin narratives of the Ottomans, Safavids, Uzbeks, Mongols, and Mughals.[24]

In addition to this body of scholarship, several recently published books focus on the historiography of the early and middle periods of Islamicate history, providing further context and background for later developments. These include Sarah Bowen Savant's *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion*, which examines Persian historiography immediately following the early Islamic conquests; Blain H. Auer's *Symbols of Authority in Medieval Islam: History, Religion, and Muslim Legitimacy in the Delhi Sultanate*, which analyzes Persian sources written under the Delhi sultanate; and Mimi Hanoaka's *Authority and Identity in Medieval Islamic History*, which focuses on local Persian chronicles.[25]

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[20] Ali Anooshahr, *The Ghazi Sultans and the Frontiers of Islam: A Comparative Study of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

[21] Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*.

[22] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[23] Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

[24] Ali Anooshahr, *Turkestan and the Rise of Eurasian Empires: A Study of Politics and Invented Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[25] Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Blain H. Auer, *Symbols of Authority in Medieval Islam: History, Religion and Muslim Legitimacy in the Delhi Sultanate* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); Mimi Hanoaka, *Authority and Identity in Medieval Islamic Historiography: Persian Histories from the Peripheries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).