"The Necessary Ornaments of Place":
Similarity and Alterity in the Persianate Imaginary

Mana Kia

Columbia University

mk3586@columbia.edu

This article analyzes representations of place in seventeenth-century texts to consider how early modern Persians made sense of the world. The Persian formulation of alterity stands in contrast to Edward Said's formulation about Orientalism, by which Europe makes itself into the West. In early modern Persianate Asia, common representations of place appear in geographical and travel writing. These shared features, which I call ornaments, adorned both places that shared a learned Persian language, Muslim rule, and those beyond, in other parts of Asia and Africa. The presence or absence of these ornaments made the world intelligible for early modern Persians, creating categories of similarity and alterity that were partial, diffuse, and aporetic, defying the self-other distinctions of Orientalism. This form of knowledge about the self and the world then generated the possibility for encounters different from both modern colonial power and the nation-state.

"Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?" (Said 1978, 45)

"...the benefits (*favāʾid*) of travel are many—pleasant <u>diversion</u> for the mind (*nuzhat-i khātir*), acquisition of profit [alternate: attraction of sights (*jazb-i nāzir*)], seeing <u>wonders</u> (*ʿajāʾib*), hearing <u>strange things</u> (*gharāʾib*), observing different cities/countries (*buldān*) [alternate: seeing wonderful and strange things, <u>hearing</u> and <u>observing</u> cities/countries], <u>attaining proximity</u> to new intimates (*khullān*), <u>acquiring</u> position and prestige (*jāh va adab*), [as well as] increase in wealth and <u>gains</u>, <u>knowledge</u> of friends (*maʿrifat-i yārān*), and <u>experience</u> of the world/times (*ruzgārān*), just as wayfarers on the path have said:

equinoxonline

As long as you are pledged to shop and home/ Never will you become a [sea-
soned] man (ādamī), O green one (khām)
Go into the world and look around/ Before the day [comes] when you leave the
world." (Saʿdī Shirāzī 2008, 89)[1]

I juxtapose Said's question with a quote from the most widely read book of
pre-twentieth-century Persian education, Saʿdī's *Gulistān.* Together they
urge us to consider whether the representation of difference is always
radical, generating the same kind of authority over others.[2] Saʿdī's char-
acter articulates the benefits of travel, among which are seeing the won-
drous and the strange, taking in the sights and sounds of new cities and
their provinces, closeness (*mujāvirat*) with new intimates (*khullān*, pl. of
khalīl), as well as gaining wealth, high status, knowledge, and experience
of the world. Persians across West, Central, and South Asia read and rumi-
nated over this story, which was foundational to the basic education that
defined them. Because of this shared Persianate culture, this text and its
stories circulated, embedded among people, goods, and ideas in a dense
network across Iran and India in the early modern period.[3]

   Travel and circulation are central to cosmopolitanism, a concept with a
European genealogy. I argue, however, that transregional Persianate cir-
culation and the cultural hermeneutics of which it was a part cannot be
called cosmopolitan, much less Iranian. If we accept, without assuming a
Euro-centric concept, that cosmopolitanism's conceptual home is Europe,
then why is Persianate practice or sensibility that may share only *some* fea-
tures of the European concept also cosmopolitanism (Pagden 2000, 3–4)?[4]

---

1. I have used Thackston's English translations of this text, modified in consultation
    with the original Persian. In an early eighteenth-century north Indian manuscript
    of the *Gulistān*, this section is marked with the marginal annotation, "uses/gains
    (*manāfiʿ*)." Houghton MS Persian 62, 84b–85a (underlined in original). The alternative
    phrases show us the variations of manuscript culture glossed over by print editions.

2. This question is partly provoked by a contradiction in Said's elaboration of Orien-
    talism as both part of a specifically European production of "the West" and also a
    universal structural reaction of "human societies" with "advanced cultures" when
    dealing with "others" (Said 1978, 204). For a piquant insight into this contradiction,
    see Anidjar (2009).

3. This circulation was part of larger Indian Ocean flows. The literature on early mod-
    ern transregional circulation between Persianate domains is large, particularly in
    economic history. See, for instance, Aslanian (2011) and Sood (2016). Cultural and
    social history is far smaller (Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007; Anooshahr 2014; Moin
    2012; Kia 2013). Corrine Lefèvre (2012, 263–269) notes that Iran loomed exceptionally
    large in the seventeenth-century Mughal imperial imagination and worldview.

4. Later Pagden (2000, 12–16) identifies a world order based on commerce between

Can we generalize cosmopolitanism as "historically significant ways in the past of being translocal, of participating—and knowing one was participating—in cultural and political networks that transcended the immediate community" (Pollock 2006, 10)?[5] What justifies our linkage of these historical practices with cosmopolitanism? Furthermore, if, as Anthony Pagden (2000, 5–6) tells us, cosmopolitanism as an idea has a particular genealogy rooted in a conception of justice and manner of living within a single political order, a single legal system, is a "non-European expression of cosmopolitanism, that is not the outcome of engagement with the European idea even possible?"[6] Extending the concept of cosmopolitanism to historical practices and sensibilities rooted in their own genealogies propagates European universalism's project of writing itself large as transhistorical humanity, self-defined according to others' lack. And inherent to cosmopolitanism is a particular idea of absolute categorical difference.[7] If we are to understand how and why European cosmopolitanism was encountered, translated, and adapted in the modern period, we must understand the earlier Persianate notions with which they resonated (Pollock 2006, 10).

I therefore address Iran as part of a larger Persianate cultural domain that encompassed multiple empires and polities from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries. "After the fall of the Mongol and Timurid empires, Islamic lands from Anatolia to the Indian subcontinent, were ruled by one of four dynasties, all sharing some sort of Turko-Mongol descent and a similar cultural legacy, yet espousing a variety of political ideologies to legitimize their rule" (Quinn 2003, 19). Studies have begun to assert distinctions about these various articulations of political authority, but such an inquiry must be grounded in knowledge of what was shared (Kinra

---

states, with nations as the presumed, already constituted community. I also repeat the language of this special issue's call for papers, where the editors outline the problem of "always tracing cosmopolitanism back to Europe, where it is conceptually at home" and the ensuing "dilemma intrinsic to theorization of non-European cosmopolitanisms."

5. Pollock's (2006, 11–12) justification for using "Sanskrit cosmopolis"—"besides being hybrid and ahistorical, it is actually uncosmopolitan in the cultural specificity of the form of citizenship in implicit in it: membership in the polis"—is the lack of an emic term. I propose that we honor this lack in Persian and see what its "repertoires of practices" (11) were outside a single organizing term that "never objectified, let alone enforced, its universalism" (12).

6. Quote from a call for papers for this issue on Iranian Cosmopolitanism.

7. Crucial to Kant's idea of cosmopolitanism was an idea of culture as the end of nature, defined according to a uniquely European culture (Pagden 2000, 18–19).

2015; Faruqui 2012; Babayan 2003; Mitchell 2009). A significant challenge to the notion of cosmopolitanism is that in the Persianate different political orders, with their own legal systems, coexisted, acknowledged, and competed with one another using the same universal notions of justice, morality, and idealized order. These were articulated and embedded in the aesthetics and ethics of proper form, or *adab*, of the Persian textual tradition.

  This article explores the shared gradient of similarity and alterity by which Persians viewed each other and their surrounding lands by considering two texts, with different circulations, composed 100 years apart at separate imperial courts, for divergent purposes. Yet despite such differences, these texts articulate and evoke strikingly similar forms of representation. Comparing them gives us a glimpse of the shared means by which Persians understood other Persianate places and people, made them intelligible and even familiar, and elucidates how this familiarity could extend beyond Persianate societies or Muslim rule. Accompanying and enabling this aporetic distinction was an epistemology of certainty that accommodated different truths, allowing partial acceptance of the strange and unfamiliar.[8]

  By contrast, Edward Said famously argued that Europe's self-definition was predicated on a particularly sharp distinction between itself as "the West" and its quintessential other, the Orient.[9] Over the last two decades, scholars have debated whether to consider premodern Iranian attitudes toward India Orientalism and nineteenth-century Persian representations of Europe Occidentalism.[10] But, returning to our epigraphs, is the attitude Saʿdī describes toward the places where one may travel, see the

---

8. I use Jacques Derrida's (1993, 20) formulation of *aporia* as a distinction that has "no limit. There is not yet or there is no longer a border to cross, no opposition between two sides: the limit is too porous, permeable and indeterminate."

9. Central to Orientalism is how "academic as well as literary Orientalism" developed as fields of knowledge, giving rise to "an explicitly colonial-minded imperialism" that in turn further spurred development of these scholarly and popular modes of knowledge (Said 1978, 18). All of these forms constitute "European *material* civilization and culture" through representations of the Orient, "one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1–2). The labor of these representations is to produce the "radical difference" Said argues is integral to the West's own self-production (45).

10. For instance, Cole (1996). Alam and Subrahmanyam (2007) adopt Cole's characterization. For a counter, see Kia (2013, 48–49). For the Occidentalism argument, see Tavakoli-Targhi (2007). For elaboration of the implausibility of such applications, see Dabashi (2007, 272–273, n14).

strange and wondrous, and possibly gain new intimates the same domination through delineation of radical difference that Said describes?[11] Orientalism, too, depended on intimacy and domestication, but as an assertion of self in the face of an already "threatening Otherness" (Said 1978, 21).

More importantly, Orientalism's "literary or imaginative" form points to "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction" (Said 1978, 2–3). Its method of representing difference, the polarized distinction by which the West defined itself, did not always depend on "actual" conquest but did create "a kind of intellectual *authority* over the Orient within Western culture."[12] This authority

> is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, and reproduces. (Said 1978, 19–20)[13]

Thus, representational authority, together with the polarized delineation of difference, carried the potential for domination actualized at the moment of imperial reach (and part of the impetus for it).

Was there another way to know the world outside one's ambit, another way to recognize and represent difference? Could alterity be different, relationally, without being threatening? Persianate universalism is not Iranian cosmopolitanism, and not only because its tradition lived beyond the lands of Iran or its people. The gradient between the Persianate world

---

11. Scholarship has challenged the historical validity of Orientalism for pre-modern periods (Sapra 2011)*.* It is nevertheless indisputable that influential seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European thinkers defined themselves through contrast with others, regardless of distinctions between those others. This is true from John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, to Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Law*, to Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. Montesquieu's elaborations of despotism (1989, 28–30, 59–62), explicitly cites travel and historical writings on Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals, as well as various peoples in Louisiana and Southeast Asia. It didn't really matter who they were. The point was that they were not us (or we should not be them).

12. Said (1978, 19) uses the word "actual" to distinguish German Orientalism, which he claims was "exclusively a scholarly" interest, though it nevertheless participated in creating and asserting intellectual authority over the Orient.

13. Said (1978, 19–20) studies authority through examining strategic location and strategic formation. Strategy is the way authors dealt with the problems of "how to get hold of it [the Orient], how to approach it, how not to be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope, its awful dimensions," through "the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf."

and beyond offered an epistemology that allowed for difference and contained hierarchy, but its knowledge generated an authority of intimacy without threat or will to dominate, even in moments of imperial assertion. Unlike Orientalism, Persians constituted themselves according to ethical and aesthetic ideals projected outward, heuristically, to understand new peoples, practices, and places. Though unevenly successful and subject to politics, representations of lands, peoples, and practices display significant continuities across the Persian-speaking world, about its own domains, the (non-Persian-speaking) Muslim-ruled world, and places neither Persianate nor Muslim-ruled.

Articulated according to what I call the necessary ornaments of place, features like built environment (monuments and gardens), lineages of origin, rulers, names, governance practices, social structure, and recognizable virtues like learning and friendship made places intelligible. However different, these features established varying degrees of intimacy according to Persianate ideals across Persianate and Muslim-ruled locales. Together with the millennial imperial ethos of the early modern Islamic world, particularly strong in the Persian-speaking east, the iterative authority of this mode of knowing eluded certainty, and thus categorical difference (in contrast to Orientalism's iterative certainty).[14] This was a world not of equality but of possible equivalences. Empires expanded, incorporating people and their knowledge into the Persianate (Berlekamp 2015; Truschke 2016). There was hierarchy, but certainty, which belonged to God alone, could be claimed only in degrees. This apparatus of knowing contained superiority, but for Persians, humankind could not claim the radical differences of positivist certitude with any hope of retaining moral authority.

Mimi Hanaoka (2016) demonstrates how, from the tenth through the fourteenth centuries, new Muslim communities in Persianate lands of Iran and Tūrān (Central Asia) wrote themselves into Islamic histories dominated by Egyptian, Syrian, and Arabian places, persons, and lineages. By the early modern period, the integration of Iran and Tūrān as Muslim heartlands, especially in relation to its farther Persianate domains, was well accomplished. The Persianate world's geography was narratively invested with the storied figures of the near and far past, as narrated in the universal histories of the Timurid period. These narratives linked a
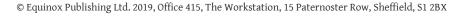
---

14. For the millennial nature of these empires see Moin (2012). For the intellectual scaffolding of the power they wielded, see Melvin-Koushki (2016, 2017) and Binbaş (2016, 165–286).

reconciled pre-Islamic Persian and Qurʾanic history as an antecedent to an Islamic history geared towards Persianate lands after the fall of the Abbasids. The late Timurid Mīr Khwānd's (d. 1498) *Rawzat al-safā* and his grandson Khwāndamīr's (d. 1534) *Habīb al-siyar* focused their post-Caliphate narratives on Mongol and then Turco-Mongol fortunes of the two ʿIrāqs (ʿarab and ʿajam), Khurāsān and Tūrān/Māvarā al-Nahr (roughly Mesopotamia, the Iranian Plateau and Afghanistan, and Central Asia). [15] These were some of the most widely circulated works of the early modern period, ubiquitously read and cited in other texts.[16] Indeed, they were part of the prism by which a whole host of other texts—travel, autobiographical, geographical, historical, and commemorative—made sense of their subjects. So what happened when Persians—persons with the same basic education extending well past Iran to West, Central, and South Asian lands—encountered and wrote about places beyond this geocultural grid? Here we will look at two texts that have little to do with one another—one a geographical text written at the Mughal court at the end of the 16th century and widely read across the Persianate world and the other a travel account written for a narrow Safavid court audience a century later—but nevertheless evince identical features, to establish the shared nature of these ornaments and the notion of difference that they indicate.

I have purposefully written "encountered and wrote," instead of traveled and narrated to distinguish between the experience of travel, the act of writing, and the encounter with a place. Beyond physical presence, people experienced places through narrative, whether by translating physical travel into language or encountering someone else's account.[17]

---

15. On this geocultural significance at the start of the eighteenth century, by which point Hindūstān, as north India, had been written into some historical accounts of the Persian-speaking world produced in Iran, see Kia (2014; forthcoming, ch 2).

16. For more on the shorter of these works, *Habīb al-siyar*, and its narrative and conceptual components, see Bashir (2014, 531–535; 2015). On *Rawzat al-safā* and its importance, see Kia (2014), Tavakoli-Targhi (2001), Quinn (2003, 21–22), and Alam and Subrahmanyam (2007, 216).

17. Antrim (2012, 33) similarly puts the textual representation of cities alongside built cities as a cultural labor through which "early Muslims expressed their values and aspirations. Like the cities themselves, works in the discourse of place devoted in whole or large part to representing urban areas acquired critical mass slowly and from multiple directions." By the early modern period, these textual representations in the Islamic east were mostly written in Persian, though they still "incorporated scriptural, legendary and literary materials from both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods...in an increasingly familiar, if flexible, set of forms that reimagined earlier forms and communicated messages to a broad audience."

Translating experiences into language and then into composition is culturally specific labor (Ricoeur 1990). Though narrative is never entirely absent from first-hand experience, *most* Persians encountered places textually (rather than physically) through these culturally specific translations.

Geography and its (generic) particulars

Premodern conceptions of places were hardly as they are now. Places could be made to be close, though not in modern geographical terms. "Objective" proximity of places was unnecessary for imagining their relation as familiar and contiguous.[18] Sacred sites could be replicated and brought near in different ways. In the early nineteenth century, Ahmad Bihbahānī could describe Hyderabad's Shia graveyard as connected to the Iraqi shrine cities through the sprinkling of dirt from its famous graveyard (*Dāyirah-yi Mīr*) in Karbala (Bihbahānī 1993, 237). Alternately, the clime system yoked lands under a different rubric of geographic coherence. And the literary imagination disseminated images of place throughout the Persianate, through wondrous stories and outstanding ornaments (or their lack) that could bestow a sense of proximity or distance.

Before the nineteenth-century discourse of civilization, places were often defined in two ways. One drew on notions of *madaniyat* or *tamaddun*, which meant something akin to socio-political order and proper urbane conduct. This often included descriptions of rulers and/or learned men and idealized relations between them. The other drew on the status of a built environment (*maʿmūr*) or its built-ness (*ʿimārat*), including gardens.[19] These two features animated one another. Urbane conduct was most conspicuous in men of learning, who were seen as possessors of ethical and aesthetic substance and form. Their presence could imbue a place with moral stature due to the association between learning and virtue. The perceived connection between such men and wider social harmony was

---

18. I have not called this "xenology" of a "Mughal worldview" because it presumes a clear sense of where the "foreign" begins (Lefèvre 2012, 257). The native/foreign binary needs justification at the very least and must be complicated to be historical meaningful. Also, as I show, this view exceeded the Mughal domains of Hindustan.
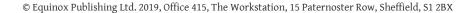
19. For a discussion of Persianate ornaments of place and their role in inducting places into Persianate space, see Kia (forthcoming, ch 3). For a similar discussion in the context of early Islamic Arabic sources, see Antrim (2012), particularly chapters 3 and 4. Antrim (34) notes that "authors employed a set of textual strategies to make plots of land recognizable as cities and distinguish them from homes and regions," including "naming and locating the city, assembling a foundation or conquest narrative, and describing its built environment."

prevalent in texts of ethical instruction. Learned men animated the built environment, itself an indicator of order and just rule.

Ideally, a properly Persianate place would have all these crucial ornaments. But outside lands marked by narratives of Persianate history, or even Muslim rule, such features as rulers, evidence of knowledge, and built environment could make places legible and familiar to Persianate audiences. In contrast, their absence meant alterity, the strange and unfamiliar. To render visible these ornaments of place, or make sense of their lack, I trace the cultural labor of such representations in Persianate encounters from the late sixteenth through the seventeenth centuries, the height of early modern Persianate empires. First, to elaborate the meaning of encounters outside Persianate space, I look at a literary map of the world, beyond the bounds of Persian-speaking Muslim dominion. Then I compare these narrative encounters to a text that has been read as a travelogue of "actual" encounter with Thailand. Through shared modes of narrative representation, both encounters are part of the early modern Persianate experience of place. They provide a way to inquire into the potentials and limits of early modern Persian universalism and its representational possibilities for recognition, connection, affinity, or their lack.

Many of the best-known texts that map places and communities were written in Mughal India by migrants from Safavid domains, circulated back to its cities, and read and cited in texts produced in Iran for centuries after.[20] They evince a technique whereby the generic was used to render places familiar. One such text, written in the late sixteenth century, is Amīn ibn Ahmad Rāzī's (d. 1619) *Haft iqlīm* [*The Seven Climes*] (1002 AH/1593–1594 AD). This was a widely cited and transregionally circulated work that scholars more often read for its biographical entries than its narrative mapping of the world.[21] One reason is its purported lack of accu-

---

20. In addition to the (Tehran) *Majlis* library's numerous copies of Amīn Rāzī's *Haft iqlīm* this text is frequently mentioned in subsequent *tazkira*s produced in Iran throughout the eighteenth century, such as Āzar Baygdilī's *Ātashkada* written in Qum and Shāhnavāz Khān's *Maʾāsir al-umarā*, written in Awrangabad (see list of sources in Awrangābādī 1979, 1: 3).

21. For information on manuscripts, see Tāhirī (1999, *davāzdah-chahārdah*). Tāhirī (1999) uses three manuscripts from Iranian libraries (two in Tehran and one in Mashhad), originally copied in India in the seventeenth century. Manuscripts that contain only the geographical accounts attest that these portions were at least as important to eighteenth-century readers (see Hakīm Mahārat Khān's *Bahjat al-ʿālam*, I.O. Islamic 2409, fol. 2b–104b). Rāzī wrote this text separately though contemporaneously with the texts created at Akbar's court for the Islamic millennium, in 1593–1594 AD. For

rate descriptions of specific places. But it is precisely the way in which specific locations represented as readily intelligible—for example, the generic descriptions of paradise—could be imagined locally, here with us, as much as elsewhere. Through these universally recognizable ornaments, generic features of place brought such descriptions to any number of other localities. This ambiguity between the specific and the generic allowed places that shared the universal features of Persianate cities (with certain features emphasized in reference to a locality) to be inducted into Persianate geocultural space.

Haft iqlīm maps Persian poetry and prose onto the world, but poetry is not found in all the places of this world. Nor are poets its only subjects. The text is divided into the seven climes, listing major places, according to its men of learning—scholars, mystics, poets, nobles and kings—although some geographical descriptions are devoid of biographies. Amīn Rāzī narratively maps the known world, sometimes through descriptions of wonders that make a place strange, sometimes through men of learning that make a place familiar, and sometimes by creating familiarity through the strangeness of such wonders.

In the *Haft iqlīm*, the place of Ahmadnagar and the Deccan more generally takes shape as a site of forts and gardens, both characterized by their towering fastness. Amīn Rāzī tells us that the Deccan is a place where "all needs can be easily met from within its domain (*mamlakat*)," and that "its air opens the bud of the heart's hope." The verse that follows specifically notes the paradisiacal garden-esque nature of its water and air (meaning landscape and climate), before moving on to its hundreds (360, to be precise) of impenetrable sky-scraping forts (Rāzī 1999, 1: 50). This vision of firm and deft construction described in wondrous terms also characterizes descriptions of Ahmadnagar itself, though in the context of topoi specific to the city.

He begins, "Of all the cities of the Deccan, it is exceptional on account of [its] water and air and the particularities of its hills and plains. On the outskirts of the city there are several continuously flowing subterranean canals (*qanāt*), which have not been produced in India until now. One among the gardens within those pleasing (*dil-nishīn*) borders is the garden of Farah Bakhsh, which is incomparable." The Farah Bakhsh garden is iconically mentioned in tandem with Ahmadnagar in the decades that follow. Rāzī further gives it meaning by making it analogous to the

more on Amīn Rāzī and his text, see Memon (1989); Tāhirī (1999, dah-davāzdah); and Losensky (forthcoming).

Garden of Iram, the legendary earthly garden as beautiful as the heavenly one, because of its pond, within which a wondrous structure defying engineering knowledge is erected. "In grace and light [it is] heaven, in elegance and beauty [it is] Iram/ In grandeur and power [it is] the heavens, in length and breadth [it is] the earth."[22] Immediately following this verse is a description of an impenetrable fort on one side of the city, which "kings have given up all hope of taking... and the hand of calamity has fallen short of its skirt" (Rāzī 1999, 1: 68). For a Persianate audience, this repeated attention to the strength, dimensions, and skill of the built environment signified a settled and prosperous kingdom under idealized rule. Indeed, Amīn Rāzī (1999, 1: 69) repeatedly uses the word *ma'mūr* (built),[23] paired with *ābādān* (as cultivated or habitable), to describe places in the Deccan (such as Telengāna, 1: 69–72), evoking grandeur or eminence of rulers through detailed descriptions of buildings and gardens, their open-air counterparts.[24]

Through their similarly represented characteristics, places could become coterminous. Poetic verses were highly mobile representations of place. Images of Kashmir (like in the *sāqīnāma* of Fānī Kashmīrī, d. 1081/1670–1671), were often anthologized, memorized, and excerpted, circulating far and wide beyond *dīvān*s or *tazkira*s (Gulchīn Ma'ānī, 1980).[25] Homologies could then be made with other places, as in the case of Kashmir, with Mazandaran or Badakhshan.[26] Places where Persian poets originated or lived could be represented in these familiar terms, since eloquent men of learning were among the most necessary ornaments. Images of home circulating in poetry and other genres could convey familiarity to readers, in contrast with representations of less familiar regions, such as the Rūs (Russia) of *Haft iqlīm's* sixth clime, which describe practices as outlandish (Rāzī 1999, 3: 1663–1665).[27] These texts, mediating the encounters

---

22. *Ba-lutf va nūr bihisht va ba-husn va zīb iram/ ba-farr va qadr sipihr va ba-tūl va 'arz zamīn*

23. This term was commonly used to indicate a well-cultivated Persianate place. See, for instance, Kia (2014, 98).

24. For another example in the context of travel writing, see Kia (2013, 56–61).

25. There is an extensive entry on him in Arzu (2004–2006, 1273–1279). Nasrabadi (1999, 690) has a short entry on him but a far more extensive entry on his famous student, Ghani Kashmiri, who also wrote about Kashmir (287–289).

26. For a discussion of homologies made through circulation of generic images between Mazandaran and Kashmir, see Kia (forthcoming, ch. 3).

27. Some of the material in this section seems to be lifted from Ibn Fadlan's tenth-century travelogue, though it is not cited and could well have been transmitted to Amīn

of Persians who did not travel, could be extended to places not under Persianate, or even Muslim rule.

Beyond the grid

Narrative techniques connecting non-contiguous places challenge the application of modern categories for understanding historical imaginings of place. *Haft iqlīm* mapped the world according to a system that linked regions within the Mughal kingdom with Safavid domains and beyond, in the central (and most desirable) climes. But what happened in the outlying climes, which were also outside the Persianate? Unlike latitudes, climes were arcs, drawn across the known earth, moving south to north.[28] Scholars of the early Islamic period distinguished the "circular" *kishvar* system from the "latitudinal" clime system, but by the early modern period, at least in Persianate geographical imaginings, these concepts had bled together. Indeed, Amīn Rāzī refers to them as *vilāyat*s, a term that could mean region, province, or district, but essentially meant a cohesive land. For example, the first clime includes Yemen, East Africa (*bilād al-Zanj*), Sudan (*Nūba*), Sri Lanka (*Sarāndīb*), and China (*Chīn*). It is the outermost layer of lands around the Indian Ocean.

  Within this first clime, places are heterogeneous, marked by differences as well as characteristics of affinity. Amīn Rāzī explains that "the common inhabitants (*ʿāmma-yi ahl*) of this clime are black-colored (*asvad*)" and that the section will begin with Yemen, "where the candle of those for whom it was a homeland (*mutavattinān*) is illuminated by the light of Islam and faith (*īmān*)" (Rāzī 1999, 1: 7). Yemen, although a place where the light of Islam shines, has few biographical entries on great men adorning its cities, most of whom are God's friends from early Islamic times, none of whom wrote in Persian (Rāzī 1999, 1: 19–24).[29] The region itself is introduced by a long historical narrative, its inhabitants' lineage dating from Sām ibn Nūh (Noah)'s branch of humanity, with its kings, a crucial ornament, descended from the Prophet Hūd (Qahtān ibn Hūd) (Rāzī 1999, 1: 7). The first name in this kingly lineage is Yaʿrab ibn Qahtān, who "is the first person to converse in the Arabic tongue (*lughat*)" (Rāzī 1999, 1: 8). Yemen is further represented through the humoral understanding of several

---

Rāzī through an intermediate translation, since he does cite other texts by name.

28. For more, see especially the diagrams in Memon (1989). http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/haft-kesvar (accessed January 25, 2015).

29. A number of these mostly short entries cite Shaykh ʿAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-Uns*, a Timurid text commemorating the intimates of God.
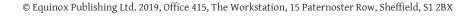
equinoxonline

porous factors, which give meaning to this land: the character of the ruler, the nature of his sovereignty, and the manners of the inhabitants. Kingly lineage is the progenitor not just of language but also of people, since "the Arabs of Yemen have all appeared from the lineage (*nasl*) of Qahtān." (Rāzī 1999, 1:8). Such delineations of origin locate Yemen outside the Persianate but still identify a Muslim place.

Ornaments could also make non-Muslim places contiguous with Muslim lands. Rāzī describes today's Sri Lanka (*Sarāndīb*) as an island in the Indian Ocean (*Bahr-i Hind*) that has "several mines of gold, silver, rubies and diamonds." Sarāndīb's most noteworthy feature, however, is the large footprint of Adam alighting to earth from heaven atop of one of its mountains. This is a place of magical properties, such as constant light and nightly showers to wash the footprint (Rāzī 1960, 1: 30). The last detail explicitly cites *ʿajāʾib* (wonders) literature, invoked in a way that associates Sarāndīb with the ambit of Islam:

> The author of the book, *ʿAjāʾib al-buldān* has claimed that in the vicinity of Sarāndīb there is a tree from which a leaf falls every dawn. On one side there are the words "There is no God but God and Muhammad is God's Messenger" and on the other side is painted a verse from the Qurʾan. The king of that land (*malik-i ān mulk*) has preserved them [the leaves] and [they have enabled] recovery from all troubles and calamities (*har dardī va ʿillatī sihhat yāband*). (Rāzī 1960, 1: 30)

Not only are the (otherwise unbelieving) inhabitants of Sarāndīb distinguished by a wondrous occurrence linking them to Islam, but they also have a king who recognizes the talismanic power of the blessed words of God.

Wonders of creation as a mode of narration have a long history across the Muslim world. Persis Berlekamp (2011, 4–5, 25–27) notes a shift in the emphasis in wonders literature after the Mongol conquest of Baghdad. Thirteenth-century manuscripts representing the cosmological order of the universe through natural wonders gave way (along with a shift in language to Persian translations and texts) to representations of wonders emphasizing human works. These included monuments, as well as the variety of peoples and their social configurations. Human agency in the cosmographic order took center stage, blending this genre with geography. By the early modern period, these stories imbued other texts, such as *tazkira*s (like *Haft iqlīm)* and travel texts (like *Safīna-yi Sulaymānī*). Engendered by incorporation of the eastern Islamic world into a Mongol imperium linked to non-Muslim domains, the wonders of creation became a lens through which to marvel at the world and a means by which to

understand encounters with the unfamiliar.[30] Zakariyya ibn Muhammad Qazvīnī, author of the most influential medieval wonders text, defined wonder as a state "of bewilderment a person feels because of his inability to understand the cause of a thing."[31] Though these things "are beyond familiar experience and, he admits, include things whose truth the reader might doubt," nevertheless, "nothing is beyond God's power" (Berlekamp 2011, 23). The seemingly fantastical was also a way to encounter the incomprehensibly real, or the confusingly different. The real may have been hard to believe, but its un-verifiability preserved the line between human agency and divine creation.[32] Not all natural wonders, however, granted the same intimacy. Articulated alongside the presence, perversion, or absence of man-made ornaments, some places became unfamiliarly strange and explicitly inferior.

Amīn Rāzī describes Zanj (1999, 1: 24–25), broadly understood as eastern Africa, as a spacious *vilāyat* that borders "the great cities of Yemen" to the north, the Sudan to the east, and Ethiopia (*Habasha*) to the west. But this proximity to Yemen means little. Rāzī goes on to note an outstanding characteristic of the Zanjīs, as attested in the verse of Shaykh Abū Saʿīd Abū ʾl-Khayr: "the people of that province (*diyār*) are never sad (*ghamgīn*)."[33] The cause for their joy (according to the wise ones—*hukamā*) is "the prominence of the star Canopus, which rises every night over [where] that group [lives]" (Rāzī 1999, 1:25). This propensity for joy is a state written into the structure of the universe. It is destiny linked to place, not the skin color that Zanjīs share with others in the first clime. In the absence of *buzurgān,* or great men, the description features their Qurʾanic collective descent from "Zanj son of Kūsh ibn Kanʿān ibn Hisām" (Rāzī 1999 1: 25).

---

30. The resulting infusion of knowledge about the world and the later centrality of Islamicized Turco-Mongol norms consolidated under the Timurids are reflected in Persianate universal histories. For the effect of Mongol invasions, see Berlekamp (2011, 10–14).

31. Zakariyya ibn Muhammad al-Qazvīnī, *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt va gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt*, translated and cited in Berlekamp (2011, 23).

32. "For one can *testify* only to the unbelievable. To what can, at any rate, only be believed; to what appeals only to belief and hence to the given word, since it lies beyond the limits of proof, indication, certified acknowledgement, and knowledge" (Derrida 1998, 20).

33. The verse reads, "Whose heart is without sadness, [let me know] so that I may grab them in my hands/ the hearts of the Zanjīs are without sadness, maddened and drunk (*bī gham dil-i kīst tā bidān mālam dast/bī gham dil-i Zangīʾān shūrīda va mast*)" (Rāzī 1999, 25). The text alternates between Zanj and Zang, a common interchange of letters.

The Zanjī's other prominent characteristic is their propensity to eat human flesh, according to Amīn Rāzī, who narrates that "every time they are victorious over their enemies they eat their flesh and, similarly, if they experience hardship from their king, they kill and eat him (*har gāh bar dushman-i khvud zafar yāband gūshtash rā ba-khvurand va hamchinīn agar az pādshāh khvud ba-ranjand u rā ba-kushand va ba-khvurand*) (Rāzī 1999 1: 25). To a late sixteenth-century Persianate audience, for whom the king was a conduit of divine authority (as the shadow of God in the absence of prophets) maintaining stability and harmony among social groups, killing and eating one's king was a truly horrifying practice.[34] Lack of men of learning, a proper socio-political order, or an impressively built environment expressed lack of virtue or just rule. Unsurprisingly, we are also told that "even though there is a great deal of gold in that province they make their decorative ornaments from iron and say that whoever has iron cannot be touched by Satan and will grow increasingly brave" (Rāzī 1999 1: 25). Even wondrous features associated the land not with correct precepts of Islam but with what was rendered as ridiculous superstitious behavior. Thus, in *Haft Iqlīm*, the heavens create people whose actions, in spite of their joy, preclude virtuous and learned behavior, as well as consistent kingship.

Association with Islam need not ornament place. Amīn Rāzī describes Chīn's idolatry but then discusses its well-known excellence in painting, a reference to the Alexander legends articulated in Nizāmī's *Iskandarnāma,* where Alexander debates and competes with renowned Chinese painters. Next is mention of the false prophet Mani, who managed to seduce even the Chinese with his beautiful pictures (Rāzī 1960 1: 28–29). While Chīn is not under Muslim rule, nor does it possess any great men of (Persianate) learning, Amīn Rāzī makes it familiar through reference to tales of storied figures from the Persianate past. They have a king, as well as political practices such as royal audiences open once a year to both high and low. To be sure, these are strange ceremonies involving axes and wood, but they nevertheless are recognizable as kingship practices. These are wonders of human effort, not nature. For instance, "It is known that in that region they have built a chariot (*gardūn*) from wood that, without movement of the mover, moved as much as they wanted, and without any discernable signal would stop again according to when its masters (*ustādān*) wanted." Other details note that their king is from the Mongol people (*qawm*) and that "a great river passes through their capital city."

---

34. The sacred authority of early modern kings, as for friends of God, derived from *vilāyat* (Moin 2012; and Melvin-Koushki 2016).

Next, Amīn Rāzī discusses their trade goods, such as the famed Chinese ceramics, the creation of which he details:

> Its substance is a stone (*sang)*, which is brought down from the mountains of that domain (*mamlakat)*. It is ground up and then thrown in a pool until it congeals (*bar ham zanad*) until, however much is heavy and sedimented will come to rest on the bottom of the pool. Having become pure it then congeals in another pool and similarly this process is repeated several times until whatever is the most pure is brought before the king for him to possess. The [porcelain] vessels for the emperor and the capital are derived from it and the remainder is distributed to the rest of the people. (Rāzī 1960 1: 29)

Chinese porcelain was a well-known luxury good, represented as specific to that land and created through expertise, whose fruits circulate first to the king and then to the people, according to a recognizable social order.

Descriptions of China use wonders, amazing stories, and information about places that read to us like facts. But, these modes of knowing the world are distinct from the positivistic claims of Orientalism. This Persianate view of the world pulls from a previous textual tradition (such as the second volume of the late Ilkhanid *Jāmiʿ al-tavārīkh* about the Yuan dynasty), whose authority derives partly from iteration, repetition, and its own widespread textual travel. Its iterative authority accommodates the accounts of a geographical text such as the thirteenth-century Hamdullāh Mustawfī's *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, with its wondrous, legendary, and historical stories.[35] For Persians, all these tales are testaments that require selective representation and homage because, in their own ways, they are all part of the truth, which in the end, only God knows.

It is these truths, the wondrous and the once true, that a way of knowing like Orientalism rejects. Its truth lies in an empiricism that claims ultimate, God-like authority yet derives its power from a made-made tradition of certainty that obscures its own particularity. In contrast, Persianate ornaments of place unite truths and make them beautiful and appreciated (sometimes also fearsome and horrific), and only part of the Truth that we must strive (but cannot hope completely) to see. Only in God's Truth is unity, where image, understanding, and experience coalesce.

The *Haft iqlīm* distinguished Muslim-ruled places from those specifically Persianate by the presence (or absence) of Persian poets. But these

---

35. As Derrida (1998, 20–21) says, "It is as if the order of attestation itself testifies to the miraculous, to the unbelievable believable: to what must be believed all the same, whether believable or not. Such is the truth to which I am appealing... Even in false testimony, this truth presupposes veracity—and not the reverse."

places were nonetheless linked through the ubiquity of the friends of God, another kind of "great man (*buzurg*)" (as predominated in Yemen), who was the living embodiment of virtue.[36] The second clime contains places such as the Hijaz, Bengal, the Deccan, and *ʿIrāq-i ʿarab*. The third clime is marked by Iranian regions, such as Fars and Kirman, alongside cities such as Farah and Ghazni in today's Afghanistan; Lahore, Panipat, Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow in the subcontinent; and, Damascus and Aleppo in *Shām*. Predominantly Arabic-speaking lands have fairly elaborate historical descriptions, selectively drawn from geographical and wonders literature, but their sections contain the fewest biographies of the third clime, mostly of God's friends, or no individuals at all.[37] With their own significant histories, these places are linked to the Persianate through their learned individuals, God's friends. The Persianate is distinct, though not separate from the Islamic. But language did matter: regions marked by men of Persianate learning and its storied past are at the center of the text and its map of the world, connected in other ways to sacred sites of Islam at its peripheries.

Amīn Rāzī, a product of interregional Persian mobility, was descended from prominent Shah Tahmasp-era Safavid officials, with family ties to the Timurid court of Hindustan (he was the first cousin of Nūr Jahān's father). Outside of his migration from Rayy to north India, he encountered the rest of the world through his patron's library in Ajmer, which he drew on to write the *Haft iqlīm*. Indeed, the location and particular composition of this library makes it an Indo-Persian text, and attributing its features to any purported proto-nationalist affiliation is difficult. Accordingly, it was read and cited throughout Persian-speaking domains. Its trans-political ubiquity gave it an authority that does not map onto a single empire, or the kind of knowing linked to a will to dominate, either at its time of writing as a Mughal text or in the subsequent centuries of its broader circulation. Furthermore, it exhibited features similar to texts authored for (and limited to) the Safavid court, in which some places were adorned with the necessary ornaments that made them either legibly familiar or strange to varying degrees.

---

36. See Hanaoka on living virtues (2016). Since by the early modern period, the authority of God's friends was also drawn from the same source (*walāya)* that legitimized kingly rule, both granting the power of sovereignty, their presence changed the nature of a place and could bring it into Islam's ambit. See note 34.

37. For instance, see in descriptions of the notable men of Syria and then Damascus, where Rāzī (1999, 1: 485–490) references ʿAttār's *Tazkirat al ʿAwlīyā* and Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-Uns* as biographical sources.

The place of narrative encounters and first-person travel accounts

Ornaments of place are also the representational imagery of first-hand travel narratives. A late seventeenth-century account of Thailand written by a Persian from Safavid Iran, illuminates the close coincidence of textual encounters and narrated experiences. Here, travel experience is narrated through the same representational practices as the textual encounters that made a place legibly similar or strange to early modern Persians. In both types of texts, aesthetic forms, such as the proximate or distancing qualities of ʿajāʾib, become the lens through which place is narrated and, perhaps because experience consists of narration to oneself, also experienced. After all, textualization is also mediated re-narration of experience, but to become legible as experience, narration to oneself had to happen first.

Safīna-yi Sulaymānī opens with an account of the failed Safavid diplomatic mission to Thailand. The Thai court is held responsible for the mission's failure in a way that illustrates Persianate ideas of rulership, collective character of inhabitants, and the land itself, demonstrating that what we now understand as objective geography is partly a matter of politics. It begins with the mission's framing. Just as the *hamd* (opening praises often situating the cosmological orientation of the text and the author and patron within it) describes God as the God of all men, "who can [harmoniously] regulate the world and the state (*hāl*) of the sons of Adam" (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 2), so is the Prophet the bearer of a universal message.[38] The next object of praise is the king, in this case the Safavid Shah Sulaymān, who in the vein of the shadow of God on earth, is the universal king. He is thus "the standard for kingly conduct (*nāzim-i ādāb-i shahanshāhī),* because "he is the distributor of God's bounties," a conduit between God and humanity and God's representative (*nāʾib*) to other kings (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 4). The Safavid Shah's duties in the world inform the mission's imperative. Diplomacy is discussed in the language of friendship, giving a moral cast to the act of connecting with non-Muslim kings and travel to their domains (Muhammad Rabiʿ 1999, 4–8).[39] Thus while the Thai are ultimately found wanting, travel and engagement with the place are prerogatives of universal kingship.

---

38. For the *hamd* praising God, Muhammad, and ʿAlī, see Muhammad Rabīʿ (1999, 1–4). For the English translation of this text, see Muhammad Rabīʿ (1972).

39. Such a formulation challenges studies on Mughal universal kingship, which claim that the Safavids turned away from this model in the early seventeenth century to embrace a narrow sovereignty defined by and concerned only with a sectarian focus on Imāmī Shiʾism (Lefèvre 2012; Moin 2012; Kinra 2015).

Most discussions of Muhammad Rabīʿ's *Safīna-yi Sulaymānī* highlight its belittling of Thai customs, people, and officials (Marcinowski 2002; Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007, 159–171). But this text seeks to make the disastrous diplomatic mission to the Thai court accountable to the Safavid court, and someone or something had to take the blame. Apart from accounts of the people, their practices, the court, and its governance—narrated as responsible for the failure of the mission—other parts of the text evince a different picture.

As Alam and Subrahmanyam (2007) have noticed, land itself is described in glowing, generically paradisiacal terms.[40] Indeed, after a comparatively brief account of the mission, largely concerned with showing how the embassy and the royal document (with Shah Sulaymān's seal) were treated (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 51–53), most of the text is a geographical, social, and historical account of Thailand, including extensive discussion of the sea and islands between it and Iran, as well as the wonders encountered en route and at the destination.[41] The rather long account of the islands includes Ceylon, the Andamans, Aceh (the northern tip of Sumatra), the Philippines (as Manila), and Japan.[42] That these sections draw heavily on previous geographical descriptions and wonders literature, and are written according to their models should alert us to the indispensability of the textual tradition to authorizing the travel account, narrating the experiential, and framing subsequent encounters of place (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 159–197).[43] Is this a text of experience? Like other texts, it is constituted by politics, justifying the encounter between representatives of the Safavid throne and an unfamiliar place. The description it produced is thus a textual encounter with Thailand, a place situated in a larger world, rather than just the subjective experience of the author or embassy.

This encounter demonstrates the limits of Persianate inclusion. Like Amīn Rāzī's depiction of Zanj, the space is made legible, but with limited, lackluster ornaments of place. Inclusion is uneasy and partial. Thailand has a king, whose practices, such as advisers, are comprehensible to the

---

40. For example, see Muhammad Rabīʿ (1999, 43). Alam and Subrahmanyam (2007, 171) briefly note that "once the people are removed from the picture, Nature does please Muhammad Rabīʿ."

41. This takes up most of the fourth section of Muhammad Rabīʿ (1999, 157–237).

42. Muhammad Rabīʿ calls the island, *saylān* (Ceylon) and the mountain where Adam alighted to earth, sarāndīb (1999, 166–169).

43. Muhammad Rabīʿ cites *Rawzat al-safā* and *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt* in his account of Japan. (1999, 189–190).

author, though one adviser is a woefully incompetent Irānī and the other a dastardly European. The king has a strict routine, but things are done incorrectly.[44]

This representation of Thailand does not produce a hard line of difference, yielding chaos and incomprehensibility. Names of the land and the inhabitants' lineage are two sections where Muhammad Rabīʿ attempts to narrate according to universal Persian notions. Drawing on famous geographical accounts, such as *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, he states the various reasons that the region is known as Machīn, a place geographically understood to be near China, and Khitā, and which is extremely large, built, and flourishing (*buzurg, maʿmūr, ābādān*). He adds his own thoughts, that the real reason for this association of Thailand with Māchīn is that "travelers from Iran" have deduced this linkage because Shahr-i Nāv is on the way to Chīn. Muhammad Rabīʿ describes the origin of the name Shahr-i Nāv but also notes that the residents themselves call it Ayutthia, while the Europeans call it Siam. Muhammad Rabīʿ acknowledges that the city may in fact be in the land of Māchīn, though "in the end only God knows" (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 83–85). Here the written tradition and assertion of others links Thailand to the built and prosperous (and thus civilized) land that Māchīn is known to be, yet this linkage is ultimately uncertain. However much Muhammad Rabīʿ wishes to discredit the connection, he cannot cast it aside, as the truth of received tradition cannot be discounted by a single man's authority. Such a connection is in stark contrast to the denigration he heaps on Siam's people, rulers, and practices. With the king's religion in question, however, the abject position of the people, comprehensible only to be debased, could change, especially if the Thai king took the Safavid king's hand of friendship.

This uncertain and uneasy incorporation of Thailand into Persianate modes of knowing is further reflected in Muhammad Rabīʿ's attempts to reconcile local knowledge with universal Persian genealogical knowledge of origins:

> The people of Iran and Europe call the residents of Shahr-i Nāv, Sīʿām. They [the Thai] know themselves as descended from the line of Tāʿī, whom they count as one of their *jinnī*s [a kind of demonic spirit]. They relate many varnished and tall tales about their lineage that do not seem to come together to make any sense. Although they do not connect themselves with Adam's line, in submission to
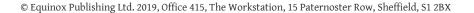
---

44. For instance, he does not overindulge in sleep, an admirable quality, but "the time [of his repose] excludes the best [times] (*dar ʿayn-i mahrūmī-yi fayz*), [it is] from near dawn until two hours after sunrise" (Muḥammad Rabīʿ 1999, 136).

divine fate the people of Iran who are in Siam think that it is possible that their lost lineage could be from Sān ibn Yāfath (Japheth) ibn Nūh... because those people (*jamāʿat*) are very weak in the speaking of their language, and let fall their words without pronouncing or distinguishing most of the letters from one another. Nūn and Mīm are pronounced alike [so that] this is Sān that has come to be pronounced Sīʾām. Another theory (*zaʿm*) held by chroniclers [is] that Sīʾāmack ibn Kīʾāmars had children and that the Sīʾām lineage is connected to Sīʾāmack. Over the course of time [and poor pronunciation] (*bā-kisrat-i istiʿmāl*) it [the lineage] became Sīʾām (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 85–86).

Again Muhammad Rabīʿ concludes that only God knows the truth. He attempts to discard the demonic origins professed by the Thai and reconcile them with a universal cosmography of the origins of the world and humanity. He notes that the Thai do not count themselves "connected to Adam's line (*khwud ba-ādamīyat qāʾil nīstand*)," which is tantamount to disconnection from the monotheistic conception of humanity as a family. Nevertheless, Muhammad Rabīʿ tries his best to explain how they nevertheless *are* part of this family. Drawing on authorities such as learned chroniclers and locally resident Persians from Iran, he can at least cast doubt on Thai claims that undermine the universality of his Persianate understanding of Muslim history. He is only partially successful, since in a world full of God's wonders, humans can never obtain absolute certainty. Perhaps the outstanding feature of such narrations is the inescapable encounter with the local, more easily burnished out of representations of place for which Muhammad Rabīʿ was a source. Instead, through the lens of the wonders of creation, humans can marvel but not master.

Persian speakers exist in Thailand; some even hold positions of rank throughout the kingdom. But their presence is only enough to spread some knowledge of proper interior furnishings, like rugs and cushions, and culinary comforts from home, like oils and seasonings. The text's overwhelming pronouncement is on the formless and senseless practices of the Thai and their king (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 109–128). These practices are not always directly linked to a lack of Islam or recognizable monotheism. For instance, even as he decries their marriage practices, such as a lack of marriage contracts, and more generally, a sense of "what is sanctioned and what is forbidden (*halāl va harām*)" he compares them not to Muslims, but to Hindus, who "will not consider marriage to a girl until she is at least seven generations distant [in relation] (*haft pusht bīgāna*)." The Thai, by contrast, marry their closest relatives, such as daughters, milk-siblings, or their children (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 126–127).

Such practices constitute legible alterity, not chaotic nonsensicality. Though the Thai have a means of carrying out ordinances (*ihkām*) in the context of law courts, "the end of investigations and prosecutions, which seems as if it references the term of humanity (*mānand-i itlāq-i lafz-i insān*), is a meaningless term with that group" (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 118). In spite of the declaration of Thai legal practices as sub-human, what follows is in fact a description of resolving legal complaints involving petitions, plaintiffs, defendants, an official adjudicating body, recorded testimony, careful scrutiny, and deliberation. But because "amongst these people (*tāʾifa*) it is extremely shameful for a person to lose a legal dispute," if the two parties are powerful the dispute devolves without resolution, with either side dragging it out to keep from losing face. As a result, "the two sides are never willing have their documented cases weighed so that their claims may be compared and the truth become clear from lies" (Muhammad Rabīʿ 1999, 118–120, quote from 119). This is a description of alterity that marks difference, inferiority and antithetical outcomes, not the lack of a recognizable system.

****

The necessary ornaments of place are part of Persianate modes of inclusion applied beyond the familiar geocultural grid. Inclusion had little to do with proximity in a modern geographic sense and more to do with familiar features that offered recognition, legibility, and affinity. The beyond thus represents not radical alterity but variable gradation of unfamiliarity. Places could remain partially connected to a central Persianate world, through wondrous features associated with Islam or through the urbanity of a built environment that bestowed a place with system, order, and some modicum of good rulership, however strange and different. But without these ornaments, places were legible only as unfamiliar alterity. Understanding this beyond in their own terms, Persians allowed the strange to have varying degrees of familiarity. A hermeneutics of legibility was shared across texts, even when the specifics of that legibility may differ. Or, as Alam and Subrahmanyam have noted, there was a common way of "defining the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar" (Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007, 159). These shared techniques of representing place provided a Persianate readership with a map of the world, whether wondrous or strange, impressive or disappointing. Here, difference by itself was not threatening.

equinoxonline

Between the negational self-representation that Said describes and the pleasures of the wondrous and new, where one might gain knowledge, experience, and stature, there was the early modern potentials for encountering place in Persian. This culture is usually identified as Islamicate, especially when speaking of wonders. As we have seen, however, that is only part of the story. Other narrative resources draw on Persianate notions of kingship and urbanity. These ornaments of place situate themselves as universal features of civilization, which reach their perfection in Perso-Islamicate settings. Though variable, ornaments could also appear beyond Persianate or Muslim rule, situating Persians in proximity to lands partially representing ideals by which they measured themselves. Ultimately, the question to ask with respect to Islam as culture is whether language (as articulated form in a textual tradition) makes a difference. And, if we are dealing with a different epistemology of categorization, is difference a matter of sharp distinction, of one or the other?
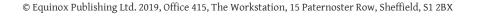
Acknowledgements

References

Alam, Muzaffar, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. 2007. *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Anidjar, Gil. September 2009. "Symmetrism." In *Middle East Institute Viewpoints* (Orientalism's Wake: The Ongoing Politics of a Polemic) 12: 4–6.

Anooshahr, Ali. 2014. "Shirazi scholars and the Political Culture of the Sixteenth Century Indo-Persian World." *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 55(3): 331–352. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464614536015

Antrim, Zayde. 2012. *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199913879.001.0001

equinoxonline

Ārzū, Sirāj al-dīn ʿAlī Khān. 2004–2006. *Tazkira-yi majmaʿ al-nafāʾis.* Edited by Zib al-Nissāʾ ʿAlī Khān, Mihr Nūr Muhammad Khān, and Muhammad Sarfarāz Zafar. 3 vols. Islamabad: Markaz-i Tahqīqāt-i Fārsī-i Iran va Pakistan.

Aslanian, Sebouh David. 2011. *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Awrangābādī, Shāhnavāz Khān. 1888–1892. *Maʾāsir al-ʾumarā.* Edited by Mawlavī ʿAbd al-Rahīm. 3 vols. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal.

———. 1979. *The Maasiru-l-Umarā, being biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu officers of the Timurid sovereigns of India from 1500 to about 1780 A.D.* Translated by Henry Beveridge. Edited by Baini Prashad. 2nd edition. 2 vols in 3. Patna: Janaki Prakashan.

Babayan, Kathryn. 2003. *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiah: Cultural Landscape of Early Modern Iran.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bashir, Shahzad. 2014. "On Islamic Time: Rethinking Chronology in the Historiography of Muslim Societies," *History and Theory* 53(4): 519–544. https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10729

———. 2015. "A Perso-Islamic Universal Chronicle in its Historical Context: Ghiyas al-Din Khwandamir's *Habib al-siyar.*" In *Historiography and Religion*, edited by Jörg Rüpke, Susanne Rau and Bernd-Christian Otto, 207–223. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Berlekamp, Persis. 2011. *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

———. 2015. "Administering Art, History, and Science in the Mongol Empire." In *Pearls on a String: Artists, Patrons, and Poets at the Great Islamic Courts*, edited by Amy S. Landau, 66–68. Baltimore, MD: The Walters Art Museum.

Bihbahānī, Āqā Ahmad ibn Muhammad ʿAlī. 1993 [1372 AH]. *Mirʾāt al-ahvāl-i jahān numā.* Edited by ʿAlī Davvānī. Tehran: Markaz-i Farhangī-yi Qibla.

Binbaş, İlker Evrim. 2016. *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107286368

Chittick, William C. 2013. *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Cole, Juan R. I. 1996. "Mirror of the World: Iranian 'Orientalism' and Early 19th-Century India." *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 8(8): 41–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/10669929608720081

Dabashi, Hamid. 2007. *Iran: A People Interrupted.* New York: New Press.
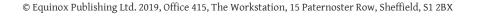
equinoxonline

Derrida, Jacques. 1993. *Aporias: Dying--Awaiting (One Another at) the "Limits of Truth" (Mourir--s'attendre aux "limites de la vérité")*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

———. 1998. *The Monolingualism of the Other: The Prosthesis of Origin*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Faruqui, Munis D. 2012. *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gulchīn Maʿānī, Ahmad. 1980 [1359 AH]. *Tazkira-yi paymāna*. Mashhad: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Mashhad.

Hanaoka, Mimi. 2016. *Authority and Identity in Medieval Islamic Historiography: Persian Histories from the Peripheries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316411506

Khan, Hakīm Mahārat. *Bahjat al- ʿālam*. I.O. Islamic 2409, British Library. compiled by in 1130/1718, copied in 1211/1797.

Kia, Mana. 2013. "Limning the Land: Social Encounters and Historical Meaning in Early 19th-century Travelogues between Iran and India." In *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing*, edited by Roberta Micallef and Sunil Sharma, 44–67. Boston, MA: Ilex, Distributed by Harvard University Press.

———. 2014. "Imagining Iran before Nationalism: Geocultural Meanings of Land in Azar's *Ātashkadah*." In *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, edited by Kamran Aghaie and Afshin Marashi, 89–112. Austin: University of Texas Press.

———. Forthcoming. *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Kinra, Rajeev. 2015. *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary*. Berkeley: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.3

Lefèvre, Corrine. 2012. "The *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* (1608–1611): Dialogue and Asiatic Otherness at the Mughal Court." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55: 263–269. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685209-12341236

Losensky, Paul E. Forthcoming. "Biographical Writing: *Tadhkere* and *Manâqeb*." In *A History of Persian Literature, volume 5: Persian Prose,* edited by Bo Utas. New York: I. B. Tauris.

Marcinkowski, M. Ismail. 2002. "The Iranian-Siamese Connection: An Iranian Community in the Thai Kingdom of Ayutthaya." *Iranian Studies* 35(1/3): 23–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/00210860208702010

Melvin-Koushki, Matthew. 2016. "Astrology, Lettrism, Geomancy: The Occult-Scientific Methods of Post-Mongol Islamicate Imperialism." *The Medieval History Journal* 19(1): 142–150. https://doi.org/10.1177/0971945815626316

———. 2018. "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy." in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Islam and Islamic Civilization,* edited by Armando Salvatore, Roberto Tottoli, and Babak Rahimi, 353–375. Malden, MA: Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118527719.ch17

Memon, M. U. 1989. "Amin Ahmad Razi," *Encyclopedia Iranica.* I/9: 939. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/razi-amin-ahmad (accessed online January 25, 2015).

Mitchell, Colin Paul. 2009. *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran: Power, Religion and Rhetoric.* London: I.B. Tauris.

Moin, A. Azfar. 2012. *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam.* New York: Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/moin16036

Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat 1989. *The Spirit of the Laws*, translated and edited by Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller and Harold Samuel Stone. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nasrābādī, Muhammad Tāhir.1999. *Tazkira-yi Nasrābādī*, edited by Ahmad Mudaqqiq Yazdī. Yazd: Dānishgāh-i Yazd.

Pagden, Anthony. 2000. "Stoicism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Legacy of European Imperialism." *Constellations* 7(1): 3–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00167

Pollock, Sheldon. 2006. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Quinn, Sholeh A. 2003. "The Timurid Historiographical Legacy: A Comparative Study of Persianate Historical Writing." In *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period,* edited by Andrew J. Newman, 19–32. Leiden: Brill.

Muhammad Rabiʿ ibn Muhammad Ibrāhīm. 1999 [1378 AH]. *Safīna-yi Sulaymānī: Safarnāma-yi safīr-i Irān ba Sīʾām.* Edited by ʿAbbās Fārūqī. 2nd edition. Tehran: Muʾassasa-yi Intishārāt va chāp-i Dānishgāh-i. Tehran: Pāʾīz

———. 1972. *The Ship of Sulaimān.* Translated by John O'Kane. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rāzī, Amīn ibn Ahmad. 1999 [1378 AH]. *Tazkira-yi haft iqlīm.* Edited by Muhammad Rizā Tāhirī. 3 volumes. Tehran: Surūsh.

———. 1960. *Haft iqlīm*, edited by Javād Fāzil. 3 volumes. Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-i ʿAlī Akbar ʿIlmī va Kitābfurūshī-i Adabīya.

Ricoeur, Paul, 1990. *Time and Narrative.* Vol. 1, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism* New York: Vintage.

Saʿdī Shirazi, Shaykh Mushrifuddin. 2008. *The Gulistan, Rose Garden of Saʿdi: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary*, translated by Wheeler M. Thackston. Bethesda, MA: Ibex.

———. *Gulistān.* MS Persian 62. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Sapra, Rahul. 2011. *The Limits of Orientalism: Seventeenth-Century Representations of India.* Newark: University of Delaware Press.

Sood, Gagan D. S. 2016. *India and the Islamic Heartlands: An Eighteenth-Century World of Circulation and Exchange.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316393581

Steingass, Francis Joseph. 1892. *A Comprehensive Persian-English dictionary, including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature.* London: Routledge & K. Paul.

Tāhirī, Muhammad Rizā. 1999 [1378 AH]. Preface to *Tazkira-yi haft iqlīm*, by Amin ibn Ahmad Razi, edited by Muhammad Rizā Tāhirī. 3 volumes. Tehran: Surūsh.

Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohamad. 2001. *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography.* New York: Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403918413

Truschke, Audrey. 2016. *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court.* New York: Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/trus17362