

Introduction:

The Indo-Persianate World

Firoozeh Papan-Matin

This special section on the cultural heritage of the Indo-Persianate world addresses topics on language, literature, mysticism, religion, and ritual, and offers an occasion to revisit the long relationship among the kindred people who lived in greater Iran and the Indian subcontinent. The magnificent quality of this heritage has led to centuries of scholarly research urged by interest and fascination. This practice goes back to the time of the renowned scholar of the Ghaznavid court, Abu Rayhan Muhammad al-Biruni (d. AD 1048), whose encyclopedic travelogue on India, *Tarikh al-Hind*, is to this day an unparalleled reference. The works that appear in this special section are instances of scholarly wayfaring motivated by a familiar appreciation of this heritage.

The first article, by Kazim Abdullaev, evaluates traces of an important communal experience of the people who lived in greater Iran and northern India. Abdullaev considers new archaeological evidence found at locations in western Asia and reconstructs the ritualistic use of the haoma plant and its consumption in combination with other herbs as a narcotic. Abdullaev offers new insight on the religious and ritualistic convictions of the nomadic tribes who partook of haoma to access altered states of consciousness. Those who became inebriated by drinking the divine potion were trying to enter into the subtle realms of an independently existent reality. Abdullaev's findings provide context for some of the references that appear in the Vedas and the Avesta. His discussion sets the tenor for the remaining articles, which in unique ways investigate expressions of transcendence and its treatment among the Indo-Iranian people.

In the next article Firoozeh Papan-Matin evaluates the contributions of the important Iranian mystic 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani (AD 1096/98–1131) and his reception by later mystics and scholars of Islamic mysticism. 'Ayn al-Qudat had a profound influence on the early Chishti leaders of India, who studied his writings more attentively than anyone else's in the Muslim world, including Iran. Papan-Matin has discussed the reason for this attention elsewhere, and here she considers the possibility of contact between 'Ayn al-Qudat and a founder of the Chishti order, Sheikh Qutb al-Din Mawdud (d. AD 1133), an observation she bases on marginal manuscript evidence. Papan-Matin further argues that the work of 'Ayn al-Qudat, an early author of mystical prose in Persian, was a source to which the Chishti authors aspired in composing their own Persian treatises. Her article calls attention to the dynamic history of the relationship between Iran and India long before Persian became the court language of the Mogul Empire.

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The article by Carl W. Ernst highlights the zenith of this history under Akbar's rule (r. AD 1556–1605). Ernst considers this subject through the work of Fayzi (AD 1547–95), best known as the author of the *Shariq al-ma'rifa*, an analytical text in Persian on Indian philosophy. Fayzi was an important scholar and literary figure who produced works and translations in Persian, which responded to the global cultural sensibilities of the empire. In the *Shariq al-ma'rifa*, he provides an analytical study of the philosophical traditions of India with reference to the Islamic and also the Neoplatonic (Illuminationist) categories of signification. In conclusion, Fayzi's analysis gives prominence to Islamic thought.

Scott Kugle brings the discussion closer to our time in his analysis of the poetry of Mah Laqa Bai (AD 1768–1824), an influential female courtesan of the Deccan. She was a close affiliate of the court of the second Nizam and an advocate of poetry and the arts at a time when Deccani was making its transition into the highly Persianized Urdu. Although a significant figure, Mah Laqa has not received sufficient scholarly attention. Her life story and her literary contributions provide greater insight on gender relations and linguistic transformations in southern India. In this engaging discussion Kugle analyzes the quality of Mah Laqa's devotion to the first Shi'i imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. He invokes different aspects of her life and vocation—courtesan, singer, dancer, philanthropist, and, similar to the Nizam, devotee of 'Ali—in defining her self-conception as a woman.

An apt departure from Kugle's article is the collection's final essay, by Karen G. Ruffle, on the reception of Fatimah al-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet and the wife of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, among the Shi'is of the Deccan. Ruffle argues that in this culture Fatimah al-Zahra is allotted a most exalted position alongside the Prophet. She is endowed with intercessory powers to intervene on behalf of the Prophet's followers on the Day of Judgment. In fact, Fatimah al-Zahra is considered the embodiment of grace whose emanations are the genesis of prophecy and the imamate.

These articles, except for the contribution by Kugle, were presented at the “Medieval Islamic Mysticism and History in Indo-Persian Cultures”

symposium held in January 2008 at the University of Washington in Seattle. The symposium's other participants, through their input and discussions and the arguments they offered in their own presentations, contributed to the current result of our research. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the contributing authors and to all the participants at the symposium. I especially thank Elahe Omidyar Mir-Djalali, the president and chief executive officer of Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute, whose generous support made it possible to organize this scholarly event. S