

International Symposium Islamicate Historiography of India

6 December 2019, Université de Lausanne, 3028 Anthropole
convened by the Section de langues et civilisations de l'Asie du Sud

Program

9.30-10.00 : Café and Welcome

10.00-11.15 : Session 1, Chair : Anna Kollatz

Stephan Conermann (Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn), **Pre-modern Historiography - Some General Remarks**

Blain Auer (Université de Lausanne), **The Rhetoric and Historiography of Battle: The Victory Tale (*fathnāma*) in Islamicate India**

11.15-11.45 : Break

11.45-13.00 : Session 2, Chair : Roy S. Fischel

Florian Saalfeld (Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn), **The Dynamics of Critique in *Ẓiyā' al-Dīn Baranī's Tārīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī*: How to Counsel a Sultan and Keep a Clear Conscience While Doing It**

Tilmann Trausch (Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn), **The Sultan's Life as a Tragedy: Staging Mu'izz al-Dīn Kayqubād in *Ẓiyā' al-Dīn Baranī's Tārīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī***

13.00-14.30 : Lunch

14.30 -16.30 : Session 3, Chair : Blain Auer

Roy S. Fischel (SOAS University of London), **The *ta'ziya* of Saraswati's Sunni Son: Persian Historiography and Religious Politics in the Deccan Sultanates**

Jyoti Balachandran (Penn State), **Counterpoint: Reassessing Ulughkhānī's Arabic history of Gujarat**

Anna Kollatz (Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn), **People, Spaces, Emotions: India through the Eyes of a Manumitted Slave**

19.30 : Dinner

The Rhetoric and Historiography of Battle: The Victory Tale (*fathnāma*) in Islamicate India

Blain Auer, Université de Lausanne

The *fathnāma* or “victory tale” was an official report and glorifying eulogy composed to celebrate the conquests of sultans. It was prepared by court officials holding high office and disseminated publicly within the kingdom. It served the purpose to inform the ruler’s subjects of his military triumphs and was a propaganda tool wielded by the intelligentsia and by rulers. These public proclamations confirmed the sultan’s power and skill as a military strategist. The *fathnāma* is a valuable source for our knowledge of the history of battles and the instruments of court culture. However, they have largely been neglected and remain little studied. This paper describes the use, composition and public nature of the *fathnāma* and will demonstrate how the “victory tale” influenced the development of Islamicate history writing in India.

Counterpoint: Reassessing Ulughkhānī’s Arabic history of Gujarat

Jyoti Balachandran, Penn State

Despite his familiarity with the well-established Indo-Persian history writing traditions, ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Makkī al-Āṣafī al-Ulughkhānī ‘Ḥājjī al-Dabīr’ (b. 1540) chose to write his history of the Gujarat Sultanate and of other Indo-Muslim polities in Arabic. Ulughkhānī consulted several Persian chronicles produced in Delhi and Ahmedabad and registered his disagreement with earlier and contemporary historians, including Sikandar Manjhū whose *Mir’āt-i Sikandarī* (composed c. 1611) serves as the standard history of the Gujarat Sultanate for modern historians. Despite its “exceptionalism”, Ulughkhānī’s Arabic history of Gujarat has largely been seen as a corroborative text to Persian *tawārīkh*. This paper re-evaluates the importance of the Arabic history of Gujarat by situating the text and its author in the social, political and intellectual context of the sixteenth-century western Indian ocean. Ulughkhānī was as much a part of the elite scholarly community in the Hejaz as he was of the political and social community in Gujarat. He was as familiar with the rich Arabic historiographical traditions that existed in places like Yemen, the Hijaz, and Damascus as he was with the Persian histories produced in Ahmedabad, the Deccan and Delhi. Ulughkhānī’s Arabic history reflects the author’s expansive social and intellectual horizons and offers considerable nuance to the widely evident historical reality that a variety of commercial, pilgrimage, diplomatic and scholarly networks thrived between Gujarat and the Red Sea and Persian Gulf regions.

Pre-modern Historiography - Some General Remarks

Stephan Conermann, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

A work of history, like any other composition (written or oral) is, first and foremost, a construct of language. The events recorded, the actors in those events, the circumstances and locations in which the events took place, and the cultural, societal, or political or religious details which surrounded them, are filtered not only through the writer's sensibility, bias, or agenda, but, most importantly, through the medium of language. Thus historical works are not merely records of the past, but literary texts that may be approached through literary analysis. The historian's implicit contract with his audience is that he is providing a true record of events. Writers of history routinely stress their truthfulness, their use of reliable sources, their rejection of unreliable, unverifiable, or fantastic material. But despite these avowals of truthfulness, history was not, either for those who wrote it or for their audience, a mere record of facts, but was an act of interpretation. For facts were bearers of meaning (and most particularly of moral meaning); and history was, in the main, conceived of as exemplary. Its intent, in large part, was ethical, and its means rhetorical. Even if a text wants to be true and correct, it cannot escape its immanent subjectivity so that it will be able to look at the object treated by it in a neutral way. The subjectivity that resonates in all statements denotes the fact that a text is the product of an individual reorganizing his material into a story.

The *ta'ziya* of Saraswati's Sunni Son: Persian Historiography and Religious Politics in the Deccan Sultanates

Roy S. Fischel, SOAS University of London

Persian historiography produced in the Deccan Sultanates presents particular challenges to the modern historian. Operating within the cosmopolitan Persianate framework, history writing in the region linked local dynasties to broader discourses of the Muslim East. This association, however, has its limitations. In contrast to the Mughal Empire, where various members of elite society took part in Persian writing, in the Deccan this activity remained the domain of itinerant Iranian intellectuals. Consequently, Deccani historiography retained inherent biases, which reflect views that developed elsewhere; these views were later carried into modern writings. This paper aims to examine some of these biases and their role in the interpretation of Deccani history. Focusing on questions of inter-religious hostilities (Sunnis/Shiites, Muslims/Hindus), I argue that early modern as well as contemporary historiography of the Deccan assumed stark divisions between groups. This approach reflects views imported from West and Central Asia, while disregarding the unique circumstances that developed in the region. I therefore suggest a more nuanced approach to the sources. Not abandoning the centrality of Persian historiography, this approach asks to accommodate

the often overlooked idiosyncrasies of elite society and political culture in the Deccan Sultanates.

People, Spaces, Emotions: India through the Eyes of a Manumitted Slave

Anna Kollatz, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

The *Ṭahmāsnāma* is a regional history of the Punjab from about 1740–1780, written by a contemporary author. In addition to rich historical information, which mainly focuses on political and military conflicts in the context of the beginning decay of the Mughal Empire, it also includes a biography of the narrator, who experienced various forms of strong asymmetrical dependencies during the period he addresses. Kidnapped as a child by Nādir Shāh's troops in his Turkish hometown and trained by Central Asian masters, he was offered as a gift to the Mughal governor of the Punjab, whom he served as a *ghulam*. Forced mobility and the experience of social dependency characterize his narrative, alongside Tahmas' admiration for his new homeland, the Punjab, and his struggle for social advancement. Since no information about Tahmās Khān has come to us outside his own writings, it seems all the more important to examine the context of his work in terms of both its historical background and concerning its generic entanglements. In this talk, I will follow Ṭahmās Khān's ego-narrative on the process of his integration into the setting he was forcefully put into. This includes not only his description of the places he lives in or travels through, but first and foremost their narrative connection and interaction with people the author encounters there.

The Dynamics of Critique in Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī's *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī*: How to Counsel a Sultan and Keep a Clear Conscience While Doing It

Florian Saalfeld, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

When dealing with the Delhi Sultanate, one cannot miss Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī's *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī*. Being one of the most important historiographical texts covering the period from 1266–1355 CE, all modern historical research on that period had to be premised on it. Even though the majority of previous research on Baranī's text has been guided almost exclusively by an interest in historical knowledge, only little could be found out recently due to the lack of sources. With some notable exceptions, researchers often ignored aspects of literary studies that could contribute to or revive the debate focusing on it.

Therefore, this paper puts a literary approach to the test and shows that this approach can help us to better understand the text itself and its context. Using the toolkit offered by modern narratology and evaluating narrative strategies applied by Baranī, the paper focuses on scenes of counsel that are woven into the whole text systematically. It shows how Baranī

reshaped historical events in order to serve a cause that was deeply entangled to his personal situation. However, to which extent do literary reworking and construction of events effect the text's historicity – and therefore our research on it?

The Sultan's Life as a Tragedy: Staging Mu'izz al-Dīn Kayqubād in Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī's *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī*

Tilmann Trausch, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

With respect to works of Persianate historical writing, scholarly debates usually center on their contents, the narrative strategies applied, and authorial intentions. The other side of the process of understanding and sense making, however, the reception of these contents and narrative strategies, is usually not discussed in any larger scope. Were such texts intended to be read, to be read out loud (and, thus, to be heard by others), or maybe even to be watched? In general, so it seems, the implicit assumption prevails of one recipient reading the text that lays before him to himself – like a modern researcher does. However, the actual kind of reception is crucial for those politico-normative texts, both for their authors and their audiences, in order to work properly and to make an actual impact. In this respect, arguably, it makes a difference if history is written down in order to be read in private or to serve as a stage play.

This talk is about Ziyā' al-Dīn Baranī's depiction of Mu'izz al-Dīn Kayqubād, sultan in Delhi from 1287 to 1290. This passage of the *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī* strongly indicates that in Persianate northern India, history was not just intended to be read in private. Quite the contrary, it fulfils many prerequisites of a stage play: the personalization of the story goes way beyond the degree typical for works of Persianate historical writing; the figures' actions are solely motivated by their emotions; and the plot is not overly complex, but easy to follow, comprehensible, and to a large extent predictable, even if one does not have a copy of the text at hand and the time to look up details. If we look at this passage of the *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz-Shāhī* with respect to how Baranī modelled its plot in four acts, we see a tragedy, with its protagonist being doomed to fail right from the outset; and tragedies are written for the stage, not the study.