

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Band: 74 (2020)
Heft: 1

Artikel: Finding the local in islamicate history writing in India (1200-1400 CE)
Autor: Auer, Blain
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-905704>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 14.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Blain Auer*

Finding the Local in Islamicate History Writing in India (1200–1400 CE)

<https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2019-0059>

Abstract: This paper discusses the idea of the “local” as it applies to Persian history writing across the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and produced in South Asia. Geographers ordered land and space with the concepts of climes (s. *iqīm*) and regions (*kishvar*) which reflected different peoples and climates. Historians more generally related geography to power, and kingdoms (s. *mamlakat*) served as the primary geographical framework. How did imperial ideologies formulated in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Islamic courts define India through geographical and historical concepts? Does the idea of the “local” exist as a conceptual idea in history writing? This paper is concerned to understand how historical knowledge was used in this political context to define the localities and regions of India in relation to Delhi and other Islamic courts of India.

Keywords: local history, Persian history writing, thirteenth–fourteenth century India, regional history, conceptual history, India

Introduction

In what is considered one of the earliest local histories written in Persian, Ibn Funduq (ca. 490–565/1097–1169) authored *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*, a paeon to the region of Bayhaq, located in the Khurasan province to the west of Nishapur.¹ He was not the first author to dedicate a history to a place. He provides a list of the cities and regions that had been the subject of historians before him: Merv, Herat, Bukhara, Samarkand, Khwarazim, Balkh, Nishapur, and Khurasan.² From that time a number of histories were produced in Iran that scholars have treated as “local histories.” Yet, histories which bore the names of cities and regions do not appear until a much later date in the Persian speaking world of South Asia.

¹ On Ibn Funduq and his history see Pourshariati 2000 and Bosworth 2010.

² Ibn Funduq n.d.: 21.

***Corresponding author: Blain Auer**, Section de langues et civilisations slaves et de l’Asie du Sud, Université de Lausanne, Quartier UNIL-Chamberonne Bâtiment Anthropole, Lausanne 1015, Switzerland. E-mail: blain.auer@unil.ch
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8476-7959>

One of the earliest is *Tārīkh-i Sind* by Mīr Muḥammad Maʿsum (d. 1019/1610) who served the Mughal emperor Akbar.³ According to different dates, Ḥaydar Malik wrote *Tārīkh-i Kashmīr* in 1027/1617 or 1030/1621. He carried out various duties in Kashmir, first under Yūsuf Shāh Chāk (d. 1000/1592), the last ruler in the short-lived Chāk dynasty, and then under Jahāngīr.⁴ What constitutes local history in these works has not been subject to research. Their appearance in the early seventeenth century and composed by Mughal officials appointed to those regions cannot be detailed in this study. However, the historical gap between the early tradition of local histories in Persian and historiography of the Mughal period raises a curious question. Why do we not possess such works dedicated to a city like Delhi, or one of the various regions of India in the medieval period?

The challenge of local history as a style of Islamicate historiography

The dominant mode of historiography of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was dynastic and universal in nature, which provides part of the answer to this question. In those genres of history writing geography is relegated to power, and kingdoms, not regions or cities, were the focus of the historian's attention. In particular, universal histories present a meta-narrative in which Islam is the organizing force of time and events, in which everything is introduced as a logical chronology from the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, even from time eternal. This properly reflected the imperial ideologies of the Delhi sultans. Their historians were concerned to tie the exploits and conquests of their leaders into the meta-narrative of Sunni Islam. Although the general features of these histories are well understood, many unexplored questions remain relating to how historians defined the regions and cities of India through geographical and historical concepts. Does the idea of the "local" exist in Persian historiography of India? To answer this question I will show how styles of local history writing in South Asia of this period can be studied in a limited sense. This can be explored through two cases where local history writing was used in the Indian context: *Nuh Sipihr* of Amīr Khusraw (651–725/1253–1325) and *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī* of Ḍiyāʾ Baranī (c. 684–758/1285–1357). What constitutes the "local" in

³ Maʿsum 1938.

⁴ Sufi 1948: vol. 1, 257–259; Ethé 1903: 202–203; Chādūrah 1991.

Islamicate historiography is a question that has occupied a special niche in studies of history writing of the Middle East and Iran, but not as yet of India.⁵

As there is no term in Arabic and Persian for “local history” scholars must engage in a certain level of translation that is not necessary when discussing *tārīkh*. Local history is an appellation applied to a variety of Islamicate historiographical orientations, rather than a distinct genre, and scholars have questioned the suitability of the term. For instance, Stephen Humphries has argued that “local history is not a genre but a focus of concern.”⁶ *Tārīkh*, the term generally and accurately translated as history, is an umbrella classification for historiography. In addition, there are subgenres of history writing such as *ṭabaqāt*, *sīra*, *manāqib*. Inevitably, our understanding of local history is somewhat strained when we try to squeeze medieval genres of history into a modern concept of historiography.⁷

Despite the challenge of terminology, there is no doubt that Muslim historians of the past were concerned with the histories of cities and regions. Mimi Hanaoka has noted that what binds heterogeneous genres of history writing into a typology of local history is the manner historians on the one hand “insert their regions into paradigmatic events in Islamic history and the perceived Arab heartlands of Iraq, Syria, and Arabia. On the other hand, these texts also ground their narratives in highly local contexts that celebrate and articulate the uniquely local dimensions of their cities and regions.”⁸

Early Islamicate historiography of a local nature displays two particular characteristics that we must take notice of before considering the cases from India. Ibn Funduq and *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq* provide us with some clues as to how histories were organized in a fashion that might be called local history. He praised this region by demonstrating its links to the companions of the Prophet who resided there, thus connecting the region to the early religious history of the Muslim community. He discusses a variety of subjects including the history of the Islamic conquest of the region, some of its pre-Islamic history, the weather, different diseases and pestilence endemic in the area, its geography and topography. A significant portion of the text is a biographical dictionary of the ulema and poets of Bayhaq, noble families and ruling dynasties. Although in Arabic, a similar feature is characteristic of ‘Alī Ibn ‘Asākir (499–571 / 1105–1176) and *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq* which is a masterpiece in the genre of

⁵ See the analysis in Melville 2000.

⁶ See S. Humphries, *EI2*, “Ta’rīkh. II. History Writing.”

⁷ This is equally problematic when local history is applied to medieval European historiography. See Hudson 2012.

⁸ Hanaoka 2016: 18.

biographical dictionaries. The title of his work ostensibly indicates it is a history of the city of Damascus. In reality, Ibn ‘Asākir was focused on al-Shām, what is referred to as “Greater Syria.” His work is in large part the study of hadith and hadith transmitters that played a role in “Syria’s importance in the expansion of Islam.”⁹

A second characteristic of early Islamicate local histories is their appearance in the context of autonomous city-states. Stephen Humphries has noted that this type of history emerged “particularly in cities and regions with a strong tradition of political autonomy, places that the big empires found it difficult to digest.”¹⁰ More recently, Jürgen Paul has argued that power of a local character was prevalent in an *amīr-a’yān* system of urban nobles that became “the rule in much of Iran, meaning from the Seljuq conquest of around 431/1040 to the Mongol one of around 616–7/1220.”¹¹ This period coincides with the early Persian historiographical tradition. Franz Rosenthal statement that listing histories according to location “was hardly done by anyone prior to the later-half of the sixth/twelfth century,” should be revised.¹² In the same note he gives two eleventh-century valuable sources in Ibn Ḥazm (384–456/994–1064) and al-Bayhaqī (385–470/995–1077). As we have already seen Ibn Funduq also provided such a list.

Given the parameters of local history writing, with its attachment to early Islamic origins and the context of patronage in semi-autonomous city-states, it should come as no surprise that we lack a similar historiographical tradition in India of the medieval period. Certainly, the establishment of Islamic empire in India was posterior to the early development of “local” history in Arabic and Persian. In the late-twelfth century, under Mu‘izz al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Sām (r. 569–602/1173–1206), Ghurid rulers laid the foundations for the emergence of an imperial polity in northern India that we know as the Delhi Sultanate. Those rulers and the sultans of Delhi had no grand claims to links with early Islamic history, though in a certain fashion they tried to establish those connections. Delhi was the capital in an imperial formation, not an autonomous city-state. Thus, no historian wrote a *Tārīkh-i Dihlī*. Even though local histories are lacking in the Delhi courts, the typology of the local may fruitfully be employed in a limited sense to the analysis of Persian history writing in South Asia of this period. There are two histories in particular where historians employed styles of local history writing that have not been subject to study: Amīr Khusraw’s *Nuh*

⁹ Antrim 2006: 13.

¹⁰ Humphreys 1991: 132.

¹¹ Paul 2018: 314.

¹² Rosenthal 1968: 457n1.

Sipihr and Žiyā' Barani's *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī*. Before detailing these two unique cases it will be necessary to discuss how the category of the local can be used in profitable ways to investigate how regions, localities and geographies of South Asia appear in history writing of this period.

Hindustan as empire: The imperial ideal and the local

Much of the Persian histories that we have of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries produced in India fall into a single distinct category. They are in various fashions different modes of the *tārīkh al-mulūk* or the “history of kings.” Most were written in prose, though some are found in poetry, and are frequently referred to as dynastic history. The clearest case is that of Minhāj-i Sirāj Jūzjānī (b. 589/1193 died after 658/1260) and his *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī* or *Nasirean Genealogies*. The title of *ṭabaqāt* chosen by Jūzjānī reveals the manner he envisioned history, as a genealogy of rulers, both prophetic and royal, traceable from the origins of humankind down to Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh (r. 644–664/1246–1266), for whom the work was ultimately dedicated. Jūzjānī's structure of history was universal in the sense that he treated the genealogy of humankind from the origins of Adam and the pre-Islamic Persian kings down to his own period. Genealogies of this sort were an essential element of historical thinking and it was a form of historiography that also inspired Fakhr-i Mudabbir (c. 552–626/1157–1236) to write *Shajara-yi ansāb* or *Tree of Genealogies*.¹³

A distinguishing feature of the universal and imperial historical vision is the absorption of the local. In the medieval period, the imperial ideal was embodied in the concept of the sultanate. The sultan, a title that came into prominence in Ghaznavid, Būyid and Seljuq contexts, is not the ruler of a city, the frontiers of the sultanate are not limited by geographical features and ethnic identities. The sultanate is a kingdom and sultans often had imperial aspirations. Quṭb al-Dīn Aybeg (d. 607/1210) did not take the title of sultan, even after his assumed power following the death of his Ghurid master Mu'izz al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Sām. However, once Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish (r. 607–633/1210–1236) was established in his capital of Delhi he employed the title of sultan and secured the investiture of the Abbasid caliph, fulfilling his duty in the Sunni international political order.

¹³ For a study of Fakhr-i Mudabbir's genealogical trees see Binbaş 2011: 470–482.

Sultanates in India do embrace a geographical orientation, but one in the abstract. Their borders extend beyond rivers and mountains and are only constrained by the real political, economic and military influence of the ruler. This can be seen in the twentieth chapter of *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī* where Jūzjānī details the Mu‘izzī sultans of India or al-Hind. He tells us that his history treats the reigns of the sultans who sat on the “throne of the sultanate” (*bi takht-i salṭanat*) in the “kingdoms of India” (*mamālik-i hindūstān*).¹⁴ The use of the term *mamālik* for the “kingdoms” of “Hindustan” is quite interesting. That Hindustan was thought of as comprised of kingdoms, or perhaps more accurately translated as “possessions,” is indicative of the imperial framework girding Jūzjānī’s historical vision. *Mamālik* and *mamlakat* (s.), a word of Arabic origin with its verbal root *ma-la-ka* meaning to possess, shows how geographical knowledge was framed in terms of property and ownership. Therefore, when Jūzjānī describes the conquests of Quṭb al-Dīn Aybeg, who subdued Meerut and Delhi, he mentions the battles with Jayacandra (r. c. 1170–1194 CE), the Rai of Benares, and Bhima II (r. c. 1178–1240 CE), the Chalukya ruler of Anhilwara in Gujarat. He briefly mentions the victories of Malik ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī who conquered the regions of Bihar and Nabadwip (*bilād-i Bihār wa Nūdīah*), the Sena capital of Bengal.¹⁵ Geography in this type of history views regions as the arena of conquests, a battle for kingdoms and possessions. This is equally on display in Jūzjānī’s opening section on the first sultan of Delhi Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish where he lists his military victories.¹⁶

In the uncertain period following Quṭb al-Dīn Aybeg’s untimely death in 607/1210, Jūzjānī describes the kingdom of Hindustan as being parceled out into four divisions (*qism*).¹⁷ These territories were divided between the top military commanders in the realm. The kingdom of Sind (*mamlakat-i Sind*) was ruled by Nāṣir al-Dīn Qubācha (d. 625/1228). Sind in this period indicated the southern Indus river region, including western Punjab which extended from Multan to Uch. Further south was Sindustan or Siwistan (modern Sehvan, and the general region of Sind defined by the Sindi people). This extended all the way down to the Indus delta port of Daybul. The kingdom of Delhi in northern India, or Hind, was ruled by Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish. To the east was the kingdom of Lakhnawti in Bengal which was ruled by the Khaljī sultans. In Punjab, the kingdom of Lahore was contested and for a time fell under the governance of Tāj al-Dīn Yildiz.

¹⁴ Jūzjānī 1342sh: vol. 1, 415. He also refers to *bilād-i hindustān* vol. 1, 417.

¹⁵ Jūzjānī 1342sh: vol. 1, 417.

¹⁶ Jūzjānī 1342sh: vol. 1, 452.

¹⁷ Jūzjānī 1342sh: vol. 1, 418.

The conceptualization of India in history writing differs from the geographical knowledge of India first produced in Arabic and Persian in the tenth century, long before the Ghurid conquests. A representative work of this type is the anonymous work *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam* or *The Frontiers of the World*, a unique and early Persian geographical treatise (c. 372/982–83). The author gives detailed knowledge of topographical features of the cities of Hindustan and Sind, as well as information of the flora and fauna and commercial produce of these two regions.¹⁸ Al-Bīrūnī’s (362–c.440/973–c.1048) definition of al-Hind is the land “limited in the south by the above-mentioned Indian Ocean, and on all three other sides by the lofty mountains [Himalayas].”¹⁹ He situated the middle of this land in Kannauj, capital of the Gurjara-Pratihāra dynasty. This relates to the geographical sense of “center” in political terms as, according to al-Bīrūnī, it was the seat of the greatest of the Indian kings. Al-Bīrūnī drew his knowledge of India, in part, from Sanskrit geographical knowledge since he refers to the kingdom of Kannauj as being found in Madhyadesh, which means “the middle country.”²⁰ The western regions of al-Hind are Sind which he sees as beginning in the far west in the region of Nimruz, the south-western corner of Afghanistan. The route to al-Hind from the Ghaznavid territories begins in Kabul to the north.

Political philosophy, historiography and the local

Behind the dynastic concept of history is a political philosophy that underpinned imperial ideologies and geographical knowledge. This can be understood through a discussion of the idea of *jahāndārī* that Ṣiyā’ Baranī placed at the fore of his concept of kingship. This he established in his famous work of political advice the *Fatāwā-yi jahāndārī* or *Edicts of World Rule*. *Jahāndārī*, which literally means “world-holding or world-possessing,” reflects a similar vision of *mamlakat* or kingdom. As has already been mentioned *mamlakat* indicates the “possession” and “ownership” of territory. Baranī’s concept of *jahāndārī* is concerned with an imperial and political vision of geography, one not limited to regions and lands. Baranī summarized the nexus of territory and kingdom saying, “You should know that kingship (*bādshāhī*) means the possession which an individual holds over a territory (*diyārī va iqlīmī*) by conquest. This is regardless whether he is entitled to it (*mustaḥaqq*) by right or whether he

¹⁸ Anon. 1970: 86–92, 122–123.

¹⁹ al-Bīrūnī 1888: vol. 1, 198.

²⁰ 1888: vol. 1, 198.

obtained it by usurpation (*mutaghalib*) and without any right. It is because he is in possession of the territory that they call him king.”²¹ These comments should be understood in light of Baranī’s thoughts on the legitimacy of the ruler according to the Sunni concept of imperial rule and the relations between sultans and the caliph, between usurper and ruler. Baranī argued, like other thinkers on the topic, that any ruler who claimed control over a kingdom without the caliphal investiture is to be considered a usurper, such a ruler is *de facto* sultan.²² In any case, Baranī’s thoughts on kingdoms and territorial possession illustrate the political vision behind the histories of kings and dynasties.

Another passage taken from Baranī’s history can help demonstrate the role of imperial ideologies in the discussion of cities and regions. It is a passage that treats Ghiyāth al-Dīn Balaban’s conquest of the kingdom of Lakhnawti in Bengal around the year 680/1281. Baranī records a meeting between the Sultan and his son Maḥmūd, also known as Bughrā Khān. Ghiyāth al-Dīn Balaban wished to share his advice concerning governance with his son, as he intended to confer upon him the possession of that kingdom. He spoke about the punishment awaiting the rebels of Hind, Sind, Malwa, Gujarat, Lakhnawti and Sonargaon who oppose the ruler of Delhi.²³ Here the geography of India is divided into territories and kingdoms subject to conquest and rule. Baranī does not describe the regions themselves or the peoples who live in them, only the sultans who pass through them.

The political geography of India in an imperial model grew over time with the expanse and extent of the control exerted by the sultans of Delhi over the course of the fourteenth century. In the anonymous treatise *Sīrat-i Firūz Shāhī* composed in 772/1370 in the middle of the tenure of Firūz Shāh (r. 752–90/1351–1388), the longest reigning sultan of Delhi, the author discusses the momentous first occasion in 764/1363 when Firūz Shāh received the caliphal investiture from a delegation sent from Cairo by the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 763–79/1362–77). He describes the geographical expanse of Firūz Shah’s empire over the “kingdom of the regions of India” (*mamlakat-i aqālīm-i Hind*). His realm was said to include the islands of Sri Lanka and Java, the coastal lands of Ma’bar and Kollam, Baknur in Karnataka²⁴, Bengal in the east, Gujarat, Delhi and Sind in the west, the Himalayan regions of Himachal Pradesh, the Afghan frontiers and

²¹ Baranī 1972: 292 (tr. 96).

²² Baranī 1862: 491.

²³ 1972: 93 (tr. 56).

²⁴ Also known to medieval Arab geographers as Fāknūr. See Nainar 1942: 33–34.

Zabulistan, Kashmir, all the way to the borders of Turkistan and Transoxiana.²⁵ Certainly, Firūz Shāh's power never extended concretely to all of these territories, but in theory this India, in all of its expanse, was conferred upon him by the Caliph.

Amīr Khusraw, Żiyā' Baranī and styles of local history

With this background in how imperial ideologies shaped history writing it is now possible to consider the exceptional cases where local history may be employed to describe histories in medieval India. The first observable case is *Nuh sipihr* or *The Nine Spheres* of Amīr Khusraw. Amīr Khusraw was first and foremost a poet, but he was also a historian and he applied his considerable literary talents to the treatment of historical events of the sultans he served. This can be observed, for example, in his historical *maṣnavīs* *Tughluqnāma* and *Miftāḥ al-futūḥ*. *Nuh sipihr* is the fourth of his historical *maṣnavīs*.²⁶ It was written in 718/1318 during the reign of Quṭb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh (r. 716–20/1316–20), and is dedicated to certain major events in his rule. The “nine spheres” refers to the medieval belief that the universe was divided into nine celestial spheres and is the metaphor employed by Amīr Khusraw to structure his literary work. Unfortunately, we lack in-depth studies of *Nuh sipihr*.²⁷ It has never been approached from the perspective of local history, although there are stylistic and content reasons to regard it from this particular angle.

Overall, the poem is difficult to categorize in terms of genre. It is arranged according to an astronomical conception of the universe as being comprised of nine spheres. Planetary science was highly developed in Islamic contexts and Muslim astronomers drew inspiration from the study of Ptolemy planetary system. In this geocentric vision of the universe, the nine spheres in descending order are heaven, the fixed stars (*ṣavābit*), Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon. Amīr Khusraw added the additional innovative poetic twist of using a different meter for each sphere. He took the spherical concept of the heavens to create his own celestial geography of rule and astronomy. Each sphere treats a different topic. The first two spheres are dynastic history in

²⁵ Anon.1999: 275–276.

²⁶ On Amīr Khusraw's historical writings in verse see Sharma 2002: 112–118.

²⁷ For a summary of the *Nuh sipihr* see Mirza 1975, 181–189 and Khusraw 1949: xxvii–xxxv.

nature as Amīr Khusraw dedicated these to Quṭb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh's ascension in 716/1316 and his early military campaigns.

In the third sphere Amīr Khusraw changes the subject entirely and it is here one can observe the poet employing a style of writing that shares the characteristics of local history writing. Amīr Khusraw dedicates the third sphere to India which corresponds to the planet Saturn (*zuḥal*), the most exalted and furthest celestial orb from the earth in premodern astronomy. India is Amīr Khusraw's country (*kishvar-i Hind*) and he dedicates his poetic skills to its praise and acclamation.²⁸ In this section of the *Nuh sipihr* we have a description of the people who inhabit the land of India, we learn about their knowledge systems and science, and the landscape is brought to life with vivid descriptions of its flora and fauna. He lists two reasons for his praise of India. First, principally because it is his country, his land of birth. It is the expression of the natural pride of the native-born's affection for his own soil. Second, Amīr Khusraw notes that it is also the country of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' (ca. 640 or 41–725/1243 or 44–1325), his mentor and shaykh. Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā' was one of the most prominent religious figures of Delhi in his lifetime. He begins his description of India by locating it in a rivalry with other lands. He writes,

Rum, Khurasan and Khotan mock and taunt,
that this land [India] is not worthy of description.
But as I know of the magic of this land of mine,
It is my intention to give form in the mind to its existence.
If God blesses me with the strength to give it substance,
My pen will build the foundation of this land in describing it.
I will not lower Saturn from its height down to this land on earth,
As I make its heaven it will be eternal.²⁹

Khusraw's use of terminology is interesting in that the language fits more the conceptual outlook of local history. The organizing vision for his description of India is that it is a "paradise on earth."³⁰ Amīr Khusraw situates India within the sacred geography of Islam and the prophets by referring to the legends of Adam's first days on earth which were said, according to many traditions, to have been spent in India. God gave India to Adam as a kind of soft landing following his expulsion from Paradise. Then he goes on to describe India as the land of the peacock or the "bird of paradise." He speaks in praise of its climate, its pleasant breezes, beautiful flowers and fragrance, thus describing its land with its animals and nature. It is not like Khurasan where "the body is colder

²⁸ 1949: 151 (tr. 35).

²⁹ Khusraw 1949: 148 (tr. 26).

³⁰ Khusraw 1949: 151 (tr. 35).

than ice.” Khurasan fairs poorly in Khusraw’s rendition because of its excessively cold weather and short growing season with flowers that lack fragrance. He laces his arguments with quotations from the Prophet Muḥammad further sacralizing the sacred geography of India. To the accusation that India is too hot he makes allusion to a saying of the Prophet who expressed the opposite sentiment.³¹ In his history, al-Ṭabarī reports the following hadith, “The land with the sweetest smell on earth is the land of India. When Adam was cast down there, some of the smell of Paradise clung to India’s trees.”³² He finds the abundance of indigenous fruits which are not found elsewhere remarkable, such as the mango, banana and sugarcane as well as the spices of cardamom, camphor and cloves. He saves special mention for betel leaf.

Amīr Khusraw’s treatment of Indian learning

Amīr Khusraw says that learning achieved great heights in India. He has much praise for the wisdom of Brahmins who he singles out for their accomplishments in logic (*manṭiq*), astronomy and astrology (*tanjīm*), and theology (*kalām*).³³ He says that all the natural and mathematical sciences come from India. He gives a lengthy description of the religious beliefs of Hindus. He praises Indians for their skill in learning multiple languages.³⁴ He admires the number of different spoken languages present in India, especially Sanskrit.³⁵ Of the great works of literature that India has given to the world Amīr Khusraw mentions the *Pañcatantra* which had been translated into Persian, Turkish, Arabic and Dari.³⁶ He mentions chess as an excellent game of Indian origin and he praises Indian music.

He has a lengthy description of the birds and animals of India. The parrot, myna, skylark, peacock, and woodpecker. He adds remarks on the intelligence of the parrot and myna birds and the skill of their trainers to teach them all sorts of tricks. He also discusses the skills with which Indian sages interpret the

³¹ Khusraw 1949: 158 (tr. 48).

³² al-Ṭabarī 1989: vol. 1, 291. What Rosenthal has translated as “smell” is *rīḥ* in the Arabic, also meaning breeze. Here the sense of the hadith can be interpreted that Adam brought the pleasant breeze of paradise with him to India upon his descent. The pleasant breeze and scent of paradise is attested in other hadith.

³³ Khusraw 1949: 162 (tr. 54).

³⁴ Khusraw 1949: 166 (tr. 57).

³⁵ Khusraw 1949: 179–180 (tr. 75).

³⁶ Khusraw 1949: 169 (tr. 59).

sounds and movements of jackals and deer. He describes the intelligence of the monkey and strength of the elephant. He records certain magical practices of Indians who he claims could revive the dead.³⁷ He devotes attention to the breathing practices of yogis which can prolong life. He describes the practice of *satī* or widow immolation. Although he notes that it is an un-Islamic practice, he nevertheless believes it is one that can be admired. Finally, he describes India as a land of poets.

In the above description found in *Nuh Sipihr* we see many of the characteristics of what is referred to as local history, elements similar to those found in early Persian historiography such as the *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*. He praises India by demonstrating its links to the early religious history of the Muslim community through the story of Adam's descent to earth. Akin to paradise, India compares favorably to other regions such as Khurasan and connects it to a sacred history linked to the very origins of Islam. He discusses a variety of subjects including the history of the Islamic conquest of the region under Quṭb al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh, some of its pre-Islamic history, the weather, its geography and topography. Local history is manifest in Amīr Khusraw's desire to write a paean to India through a description of its unique flora and fauna. We learn about the particularities of India with its unique birds such as the peacock and its delicious mangoes and bananas. Amīr Khusraw highlights the diversity and richness of Indian languages. India is distinguished by its rich tradition of learning in various fields of knowledge. Like earlier local histories which took the form of biographical dictionaries describing the intellectual achievements of the ulema of Balkh or Damascus, Amīr Khusraw focuses on the accomplishments of Brahmins in learning and their contributions to mathematics, philosophy and astronomy. These details illustrate the manner Amīr Khusraw drew upon styles of local history writing and applied them to the region of India, adding his own literary innovations in the process.

Žiyā' Baranī, local history writing and biographical dictionaries

There is a second case where we can see the influence of styles of local history writing on other forms of historiography, particularly those marked by the characteristics of biographical dictionaries. This is evident in *Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī* of Žiyā' Baranī. Completed in 738/1357, this is, by and large, a classical

³⁷ Khusraw 1949: 191–192 (tr. 97–98).

example of a dynastic history. Baranī organized his history according the reigns of the Ghiyāthid, Khaljī and the Tughluq sultans and was inspired to write history in the lineage of Jūzjānī. Therefore, his history is primarily an account of the conquests and achievements of the sultans ruling in each of these three dynasties. However, there is one section of the history where the author delves into a style of local history writing, and this has not been studied. Baranī provides particular insights into the Muslim scholars who enriched the cultural life of Delhi during the reign of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh (r. 695–715/1296–1316). Baranī detours from his dynastic schema and provides us with the most detailed account of the intellectual figures of the Delhi Sultanate to be written of the period. He notes that it was during the reign of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh that Delhi “became the envy for Baghdad, the source of jealousy for Cairo, equal to Constantinople and comparable to Jerusalem.”³⁸ The first group Baranī discusses in this small-scale biographical dictionary is the Sufī shaykhs of the kingdom, for which he singles out three notable figures: Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ of Delhi, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn (c. 667–737/1268–1330) of Pākpattan and Rukn-i ‘Ālam (d. 735/1335) of Multan. It is because Baranī’s respect for the piety of these shaykhs that we learn details about the religious life of Sufi communities in and around the capital. Baranī provides information on the initiation of individuals who took oaths (*bay‘a*) from Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ and who received the Sufi cloak (*khirqā*) as a symbol of their initiation. He also provides details on the various types of supererogatory prayers that were performed as part of the religious practices established by Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’.³⁹ Because of the great popularity of Sufism during this period we learn of the lively book market that flourished due to the sale of the classics of Sufi literature which he lists: *Qut al-qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* of al-Ghazālī (450–505/1058–1111), *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif* of Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (539–632/1145–1234), *Kashf al-maḥjūb* of ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān Hujvīrī (d. between 465/1073 and 469/1077), *Sharḥ-i ta‘arruf* of Ismā‘īl Mustamlī Bukhārī (d. 434/1042–3), *al-Risāla* of al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1073), *Mirṣād al-‘Ibād* of Najm al-Dīn Dāya Rāzī (573–654/1177–1256), *Maktūbāt* of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī (490–525/1097–1131), *Lawā’ih wa Lawāmi’* of Qāḍī Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāgawrī (d. 641/1244) and *Favā’id al-fu’ād* of Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī (655–737/1275–1336).⁴⁰ We also learn details about the festivals organized around the death anniversaries (*‘urs*) of shaykhs and the *samā’* rituals that were performed.

³⁸ Baranī 1862: 341 (tr. 209).

³⁹ Baranī 1862: 344–345 (tr. 211–212).

⁴⁰ Baranī 1862: 346 (tr. 212–223).

The second group discussed by Baranī are the sayyids or the descendants of the Prophet who lived in Delhi during the reign of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh. Baranī praises the sayyids noting that the “world stands on their existence.”⁴¹ Baranī lists seven families and groups of sayyids according to their residence, some of whom he had met during his lifetime. He also mentions female sayyids who belonged to the family of Kaithal, a city to the north-west of Delhi and the burial place of Rāziyya (r. 634–8/1236–40). Baranī notes that his own father was the son of a daughter of Jalāl al-Dīn, a sayyid of Kaithal. He refers to his paternal grandmother as a *sayyida* “in possession of marvels (*kashf va karāmat*) and many virtuous women witnessed her marvels.”⁴² Some sayyids were known by the region from which they migrated before they settled in India, as was the case of the sayyids of Gardez, a city in Afghanistan south of Kabul. The following chart helps illustrate the genealogies of sayyid families established in the Delhi Sultanate.

Chart of Sayyid families in the Delhi sultanate of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh

Sayyids of Badaun

A‘az al-Dīn (grandfather)

Quṭb al-Dīn (father)

Tāj al-Dīn (son)

Rukn al-Dīn (nephew of Tāj al-Dīn and Qāzī of Kara)

Sayyids of Kaithal

Mughīth al-Dīn and Mujīb al-Dīn (brothers)

Jalāl al-Dīn

Sayyids of Nauhatta

Sayyids of Gardez

Sayyid Chajjū

Sayyid Ajlī

⁴¹ Baranī 1862: 348 (tr. 214).

⁴² Baranī 1862: 348 (tr. 214).

Sayyids of Jajner

Malik Mu‘īn al-Dīn

Malik Tāj al-Dīn Ja‘far

Malik Jalāl al-Dīn

Malik Jamāl al-Dīn

Sayyid ‘Alī Badwalī

Sayyids of Qubāi

Sayyids of Bayāna

Baranī dedicates the next section to those individuals who held high judicial positions. Of the ulema of Delhi he says they rivaled in knowledge those of “Bukhara, Samarqand, Baghdad, Cairo, Khwarazm, Damascus, Tabriz, Isfahan, Ray, Rūm and the rest of the inhabited world. In every branch of learning such as transmitted sciences (*manqūlāt*), rational sciences (*ma‘qūlāt*), exegesis of the Qur’an (*tafsīr*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl-i fiqh*), principles of religion (*uṣūl-i dīn*), grammar (*nahv*), lexicography, knowledge of figures of speech, theology (*kalām*) and logic (*manṭiq*).⁴³ He mentions three specialists in the recitation of the Qur’an: Jalāl al-Dīn Shāṭibī, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muqri’, Khvāja Zakī. Baranī provides us details of the preachers of Delhi. He particularly highlights Żiyā’ al-Dīn Sunnāmī as an eminent exegete and jurist who attracted thousands of people who came to hear his sermons, but who due to his jealousy of Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ lost his fame.⁴⁴ One particularly eloquent preacher in Delhi, Karīm al-Dīn, had a particular skill to extemporaneously compose poetry and recite it during his sermons.

Another category of Delhi’s public figures are the *nudamā’* or the court companions of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn. This is particularly significant group for Baranī as he had served in this role for Muḥammad b. Tughluq for a period of seventeen years. In his description of Tāj al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, who served as *amīr-i dād* of the army and was a *nadīm* to ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh, he writes, “He was without a peer in the entire city as regards the various branches of learning, personal grace, knowledge of the annals of sultans and shaykhs were concerned.”⁴⁵ We learn that some of the companions to ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh were employed as reciters of books (*kitāb-khvān*) due to their eloquence.

⁴³ Baranī 1862: 352–353 (tr. 217).

⁴⁴ Baranī 1862: 356 (tr. 219).

⁴⁵ Baranī 1862: 358 (tr. 220).

Another major category of intellectuals and courtiers discussed by Baranī are the poets of Delhi that lived during the reign of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn. It was indeed a time of great achievements in poetry not solely because Amīr Khusraw’s complete oeuvre has a place in the classics of Persian literature. Baranī had intimate knowledge of this as he considered Amīr Khusraw a friend of many years and wrote, “Amīr Khusraw who was the king of all the earlier and later poets and had no rival in inventing subtleties of meaning, authoring a very large number of books and unveiling delicacies of hidden meanings.”⁴⁶ Similarly, Baranī speaks of his friend and contemporary Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī (655–737/1275–1336) who excelled in the art of the ghazal due to which he became known as the “Sa’dī of India.”⁴⁷

Baranī mentions two historians that were active during the time of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn for whose works are now lost. First, was Amīr Aṣṣalān Kulāhī who was said to have a remarkable capacity to recall events from history by memory. He also taught history as a discipline (*‘ilm-i tārikh*). The second historian mentioned is Kabīr al-Dīn, who was the son of Tāj al-Dīn ‘Irāqī mentioned earlier. He was particularly skilled in composing *fathnāma* or “victory letters” that were prepared upon the completion of a successful military campaign. *Fathnāma* were a means for the sultan to celebrate his achievements and spread his renown to the members of his court and to the subjects of his realm. Therefore, this public form of history was an valuable tool for the propaganda of the king. Although it is lost, Baranī tells us that Kabīr al-Dīn recorded a history ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh which was presented to the Sultan.

Baranī provides commentary on the physicians who served in the court during the reign of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn. Chief of these was Badr al-Dīn Dimashqī who was particularly astute at diagnosing various illnesses and diseases. He taught medicine within the city and had a deep knowledge of Ibn Sīnā’s medical treatise *Qānūn fī al-ṭibb* (*Canon of Medicine*) and the later Persian recension *Qānūnchah*. In addition to the Muslim physicians mentioned by Baranī he also mentions other non-Muslim physicians that were celebrated in the city.

Baranī remarks that astrology was extremely popular during this period and that from kings down through the court hierarchy all dignitaries would consult an astrologer before fixing the date to accomplish major life ceremonies such as marriage and circumcision. Because of their popularity astrologers became quite wealthy through the sale of their almanacs and horoscopes to princes, courtiers and women of the Sultan’s harem. Some groups of astrologers became extremely rich from the gifts and wealth they received from the Sultan and the members of

⁴⁶ Baranī 1862: 359 (tr. 221).

⁴⁷ Baranī 1862: 360 (tr. 222).

his harem.⁴⁸ We learn that certain affiliated professions of geomancy and alchemy were practiced, but frowned upon by ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, and that individuals practicing these arts, if caught, were punished.

In a concluding passage, Baranī mentions the Qur’an reciters that were celebrated in the city. The two families that achieved recognition were Mawlānā Mas‘ūd Muqri’ and his sons and the sons of Mawlānā Laṭīf. He finishes this section mentioning the accomplished ghazal singers of the court. He writes “the voices of Maḥmūd b. Sikka, ‘Īsū Nishyān, Muḥammad Muqri’ and Īsā Khudādī resembled the psalteries of the people of King David.”⁴⁹ Baranī summarizes his excursus into the great cultural figures of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s court saying “The city of Delhi could not remember such skilled artisans and master professionals in any other age.”⁵⁰ With these details Baranī provides us a rich portrait of the cultural and intellectual life of the court in Delhi.

Conclusion

What I have tried to do in this paper is to show how a conception of the local can be applied to history writing of the Delhi Sultanate. We have seen that in terms of region and place historians saw India in terms of kingdoms, a vision that was closely tied to the imperial ideologies of the Delhi rulers. History of a dynastic nature was primarily concerned with the stories of conquest of the sultans who ruled over India. However, at least two works of Persian historiography applied styles of local history writing to describe India. Amīr Khusraw focused on the superior qualities of Hindustan. He sacralized his native land connecting its history to the life of the prophet Adam. He praised the excellence and beauty of its flora and fauna and lauded the skills of Indians in a variety of fields of knowledge. All of this fits closely the model of local history as it was developed in the early Persian tradition. Similarly, Żiyā’ Baranī employed a style of local history writing, the biographical dictionary, to write of the intellectuals and nobles that enriched the cultural life of Delhi during the reign of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh. I have presented these limited, but revealing cases, for local history writing produced in the courts of Delhi in the hope to stimulate investigations on the topic for future research. New studies in this perspective will uncover unexplored dimensions of the Persian historiographical tradition of India.

⁴⁸ Baranī 1862: 364 (tr. 224).

⁴⁹ Baranī 1862: 364–365 (tr. 225).

⁵⁰ Baranī 1862: 365 (tr. 225).

Bibliography

- al-Bīrūnī (1888): *Alberuni's India*. tr. Edward Sachau. Vol. 2. London: Trübner & Co.
- al-Naysābūrī, al-Ḥākīm (2014): *Mustadrak 'alā Al-ṣaḥīḥayn* Vol. 9. Beirut: Dār al-Ta'ṣīl.
- al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr 1989: *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'riḫ Al-rusul Wa'l-mulūk)*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Anonymous (1970): "Ḥudūd Al-'ālam 'The Regions of the World'". Translated by Vladimir Minorsky. London: Oxford University Press.
- Anonymous (1999): *Sīrat-i Fīrūzshāhī: Nuskah-i Khudā Bakhsh*. Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library. 1999.
- Antrim, Zayde (2006): "Ibn 'asakir's Representations of Syria and Damascus in the Introduction to the *Ta'riḫ Madīnat Dimashq*". *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38. 1. 109–129.
- Baranī, Ṣiyā' (1862): *Tārīḫ-i Fīrūz Shāhī*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society.
- Baranī, Ṣiyā' 1961: *The Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate (Including a Translation of Ziauddin Barani's Fatawa-i Jahandari, Circa, 1358-9 A.D.)*. Translated by Afsar Umar Salim Khan. Allahabad: Kitāb Mahal.
- Baranī, Ṣiyā' (1972): *Fatāwā-yi Jahāndārī*. Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan. 1972.
- Baranī, Ṣiyā' (2015): *Tārīḫ-i Fīrūz Shāhī*. Translated by Ishtiyāq Ahmad Zilli. Delhi: Primus Books.
- Binbaş, İlker Evrim (2011): "Structure and Function of the Genealogical Tree in Islamic Historiography (1200-1500)". In: *Horizons of the World: Festschrift for Isenbike Togan*. Edited by İlker Evrim Binbaş, Nurten Kiliç-Schubel. Istanbul: Ithaki, 465–544.
- Bosworth, Clifford Edward (2010): "Historical Information from Ibn Funduq's *Tarikh-i Bayhaq* (563/1167-68)". *Iran* 48. 81–106.
- Bulliet, Richard (1972): *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Chādūrah, Ḥaydar Malik (1991): *History of Kashmir*. Translated by Razia Bano. Delhi: Bhavna Prakashan.
- Ethé, Hermann (1903): *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the India Office Library*. London: India Office Library & Records: Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
- Hafsi, Ibrahim (1976): Recherches Sur Le Genre « *Ṭabaqāt* » Dans La Littérature Arabe: I. *Arabica* 23. 3. 227–265.
- Hanaoka, Mimi (2016): *Authority and Identity in Medieval Islamic Historiography: Persian Histories from the Peripheries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hudson, John (2012): "Local Histories". In: *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: 400–1400*. Edited by Sarah Foot, Chase Robinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 457–475.
- Humphreys, R. Stephen (1991): *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ibn Funduq, 'Alī ibn Zayd al-Bayhaqī (n.d.): *Tārīḫ-i Bayhaq*. Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-i Furūghī.
- Jūzjānī, Minhāj-i Sirāj ((1342sh)): *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*. Kabul: Anjuman-i Tārīḫ-i Afghānistān.
- Khusraw, Amīr (1949): *The Nuh Sipīhr of Amir Khusrau*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Khusraw, Amīr 1981: *India as Seen by Amir Khusrau in 1318 A.D.* Translated by R. Nath. Jaipur: Historical Research Documentation Programme.
- Ma'sūm, Muḥammad (1938): *Tārīḫ-i Sind*. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

- Melville, Charles (2000): "Persian Local Histories: Views from the Wings". *Iranian Studies* 33. 1–2. 7–14.
- Mirza, Mohammad Wahid (1975): *The Life and Works of Amir Khusrau*. Lahore: National Book Foundation of Pakistan.
- Nainar, S. Muhammad Husayn (1942): *Arab Geographers' Knowledge of Southern India*. Madras: University of Madras.
- Paul, Jürgen (2018): "Balkh, from the Seljuqs to the Mongol Invasion". *Eurasian Studies* 16. 1–2. 313–351.
- Pourshariati, Parvaneh (2000): "Local Historiography in Early Medieval Iran and the *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*". *Iranian Studies* 33. 1–2. 133–164.
- Rosenthal, Franz (1968): *A History of Muslim Historiography*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Sharma, Sunil (2002): "Amir Khusraw and the Genre of Historical Narratives in Verse". *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 22. 1–2. 112–118.
- Sufi, G. M. D. (1948): *Kashmīr: Being a History of Kashmīr*. Lahore: University of Punjab.

