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## Counterpoint: Reassessing Ulughkhānī's Arabic history of Gujarat

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**Abstract:** Despite his familiarity with the well established Indo-Persian history-writing traditions, ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad al-Makkī al-Āṣafī al-Ulughkhānī ‘Ḥājī 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, including Sikandar Manjhū’s *Mir’āt-i Sikandarī* (composed c. 1611) that has served as the standard history of the Gujarat Sultanate for modern historians. Despite its ‘exceptionalism’, Ulughkhānī’s early seventeenth-century *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ bi Muẓaffar wa ālihi* has largely been seen as a corroborative text to Persian *tawārīkh*. This article re-evaluates the importance of Ulughkhānī’s 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. Specifically, it demonstrates how the several historical digressions in the text are not dispensable aberrations to his narrative but integral to Ulughkhānī’s expansive social horizons at the time of robust commercial, pilgrimage, diplomatic and scholarly connections between Gujarat and the Red Sea regions.

**Keywords:** Ulughkhānī, Ḥājī al-Dabīr, *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ*, Arabic history of Gujarat, sixteenth-century Indian Ocean

The historiography on medieval and early modern South Asia has consistently drawn upon Persian, Sanskrit, and a diverse group of vernacular languages to produce a wide range of social, political and literary histories. Indeed, our understanding of the nature and use of Persian itself has expanded significantly in the context of recent scholarly engagements with Persian’s interactions with other spoken and literary languages.<sup>1</sup> Historical texts produced in the Arabic language in

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<sup>1</sup> As the recent edited volume by Nile Green demonstrates, Persian’s written and spoken interactions with other languages were not limited to the Indian subcontinent but included the vast and varied geographies of a ‘Persianate Eurasia’. Green 2019. For a preliminary foray into the role of Persian in the Indian subcontinent as an “intermediary language for the pedagogical and doctrinal diffusion of Islamic knowledge systems available in Arabic,” see Kanalu 2019.

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South Asia, however, have been relatively slow in entering mainstream historiography, in part because Arabic was largely employed (as a quick scan of archival collections would confirm) to write exegeses on the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*, commentaries on earlier works pertaining to Islamic belief and orthopraxis and works on grammar and law. A recent survey of Arabic usage in the Indian subcontinent compared to Persian textual production demonstrates that historically a significantly large percentage of all Arabic compositions were religious in nature.<sup>2</sup> The production of much of this textual corpus aligns with the general understanding that as the premier language of Islam, Arabic was the choice medium for composing certain kinds of texts, texts that, at least on the surface level, are not conducive to recovering the social, cultural and political histories of South Asia by modern scholars.

At the same time, however, the growing interest in the circulatory rhythms of the Indian Ocean world has brought to centerstage the importance of Arabic religious, literary and legal texts in reconstructing a wide range of social, intellectual and cultural connections. The scholarly conception of what Ronit Ricci called an “Arabic cosmopolis” has enabled us to perceive the role of the Arabic language and literary texts in connecting the geographically distant coastal lands from the Arabian Peninsula to peninsular India and Southeast Asia.<sup>3</sup> By tracing the production and circulation of Arabic literary and legal texts as well as commentaries on Prophetic traditions over this maritime space, scholars have been able to retrieve transregional diasporas, the spread of specific schools of legal thought and practice, and intellectual histories of *ḥadīth* transmission.<sup>4</sup> The systematic study of extant Arabic manuscripts produced and copied in the Indian subcontinent – the Egyptian grammarian Muḥammad al-Damāmīnī's (d. 1424) works, for instance – has similarly begun to reclaim the importance of an expanding Arabic cultural sphere in the early modern period while adding new insights into South Asia's growing connections in the western Indian Ocean world.<sup>5</sup> In fact, a fuller investigation of Arabic manuscript circulation through paratextual elements and scribal notations (often in Persian) seems to indicate that by the seventeenth century, “Arabic has to be considered as a significant learned

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<sup>2</sup> Qutbuddin 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Ricci describes Arabic cosmopolis as “a trans-local Islamic sphere in which language and literature played major roles”. Ricci 2010: 3. Also see Ricci 2011.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Ho 2006, Kooriathodi 2016 and Blecher 2018. See also the discussion on an anonymous thirteenth-century Arabic text that narrativized the expansion of Islam on the Malabar coast in Kugle/Margariti 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Bahl 2018. Also see Bahl 2020.

tradition of the multilingual landscape of South Asia and one that was enduringly shaped by exchanges with the wider Western Indian Ocean world.”<sup>6</sup>

It is within the context of a steadily growing scholarly interest in the largely underutilized Arabic textual production in South Asia that I re-evaluate an early seventeenth-century historical text titled *Ẓafar al-wālih bi Muẓaffar wa ālihi*, popularly known as “The Arabic history of Gujarat”. Written by ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad Ḥājī al-Dabīr Ulughkhānī (b. 1540), *Ẓafar al-wālih bi Muẓaffar wa ālihi*, or ‘The excellent victories of Muẓaffar and his descendants’, has been known to scholars since the early decades of the twentieth century when E. Denison Ross, upon a chance discovery of the sole manuscript copy housed in the Library of Calcutta, spent three decades editing it. As the title of Ulughkhānī's text itself suggests, here we actually have a narrative text in Arabic that was not concerned with matters of religion, law or grammar but with a subject that was the concern of many Indo-Persian histories of the time: recounting the achievements of Sultans, in this case, Muẓaffar Shāh (r. 1407–11), the founder of the Gujarat Sultanate in the early fifteenth century, and his successors.

By the time Ulughkhānī composed his text, a rich regional Persian historiographical tradition had flourished in Gujarat for almost two centuries. Much like north India, Bengal and the Deccan, the composition of Persian histories in Gujarat chronicled the reigns and victories of regional Sultans as they expanded their military and administrative reach over the course of the 15th and 16th centuries. While many scholars have noted the unfortunate loss of several of these Persian histories written in Gujarat, references to and excerpts from them in later texts written during the period of Mughal control over Gujarat (late sixteenth-seventeenth centuries) point to a robust production of *tawārīkh* (state histories) under the Gujarat Sultans. Many of these histories followed the dynastic and sultan-centric *tawārīkh* tradition established during the Delhi Sultanate while others followed in the footsteps of the early Delhi Sultanate historian Juzjānī by writing universal histories.<sup>7</sup> The development of a regional Persian historiographical tradition even included a versified history of the reign of Sultan Aḥmad Shāh (r. 1411–1442) composed by one Hulwī Shirāzī. It is thus not surprising that writing at the time of Mughal administration in Gujarat, Ḥājī al-Dabīr Ulughkhānī's Arabic history relied on the corpus of earlier (as well as contemporary) Persian *tawārīkh* composed in Gujarat. More significantly,

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<sup>6</sup> Bahl 2018: 244.

<sup>7</sup> There are two chronicles composed in the late-fifteenth century that have come down to us: Ṭūnī 1985 and Nimdihī c. 1490. For a recent survey of imperial and regional historiographical traditions in the Indian sub-continent including Gujarat, see Auer 2018.



Ulughkhānī consulted many of the same histories that his contemporary Sikandar Manjhū consulted for his well-known Persian history, the *Mir'āt-i Sikandari*. And while the *Mir'āt* has continued to be the principal historical text on the Gujarat Sultanate for modern scholars (unlike Ulughkhānī's chronicle there are several manuscripts of the *Mir'āt* in libraries across the world), Ulughkhānī's Arabic history has often served as a supplemental or corroborative text to Manjhū's *Mir'āt*.

Hence, despite the 'exceptionalism' of Ulughkhānī's text – for the author wrote a *tārīkh* in Arabic not Persian – it has for the most part remained an understudied text. Looking at the merit of *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ* solely as a history of *Gujarat* has further limited the much broader horizons of Ulughkhānī's political and social world that extended from the Red Sea region to western India and the Deccan. Indeed, as we shall see below, to Ross' mind, any discussion tangential to the recounting of the reigns of the Gujarat Sultans was an undesirable digression in Ulughkhānī's text, detrimental to the narrative structure of his Arabic history. In some ways, such limited perspectives on *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ* have been indirectly challenged by the fairly consistent use that modern historians have recently made of Ulughkhānī's observations on the shifting political alignments in the sixteenth-century Indian Ocean. Recent works concerned with understanding the nature of increased Portuguese and Ottoman presence in the Indian Ocean in this period have frequently consulted Ulughkhānī's *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ* and valued Ulughkhānī's eye-witness accounts.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, scholars have found Ulughkhānī's text extremely useful in reconstructing the close patronage relationships that several Ḥabashī (Abyssinian) slave military commanders developed with Ḥaḍramī sayyids in Gujarat, owing in part to the crisscrossing and overlapping commercial and scholarly networks of the western Indian Ocean.<sup>9</sup>

In this article I argue that a reassessment of Ulughkhānī's chronicle must situate the text and its author in the social, political and intellectual context of the sixteenth-century western Indian ocean world. 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 Egypt, Yemen and the Hejaz as he was with the Persian histories produced in Ahmedabad, the Deccan and Delhi. A fuller consideration of Ulughkhānī's social and intellectual context allows us

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<sup>8</sup> Casale 2010, Petrovich 2012, Alam/Subrahmanyam 2012, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Ho 2006.

to bring nuance to the widely evident historical reality that a variety of commercial, pilgrimage and scholarly networks thrived between Gujarat and the Red Sea and Persian Gulf regions. If studied in the context of the Indo-Persian histories produced in the subcontinent since the thirteenth century, Ulughkhānī's work might seem peripheral. But if placed within the transoceanic connections, his text emerges as a major interlocutor for the intensified relations in the 15th and 16th centuries between the Indian subcontinent on the one hand and the Red Sea region, the Hejaz and southern Arabian Peninsula on the other.

In order to resituate Ulughkhānī and his chronicle more broadly, I focus on the so-called digressions that Ross identified in his Introduction to the edited text. Several of these digressions concerned personalities and events that were geographically removed from (though I would argue still connected to) Gujarat. At the first instance, they might appear to the reader frustrating interruptions in the otherwise neat chronological recounting of the reigns of the Gujarat Sultans. Or they might seem to be another example of Ulughkhānī's sometimes confused narrative and convoluted language. But a reassessment of Ulughkhānī and his chronicle in the context of interconnected maritime and transregional connections offers a very different perspective on Ulughkhānī's narrative choices, making the digressions pertinent and natural to the author's overall organization of his material. Furthermore, it is in his digressions that Ulughkhānī sometimes gives us a glimpse of how he perceived himself as a historian and what value he saw in composing his chronicle. Even in what appears to have been a rough draft, Ulughkhānī acknowledged when he included a discussion that might seem tangential to the reader or made the effort to explain the reasons for why he chose to recount a set of events that might seem, in the first place, unrelated to the main topic of concern. A closer look at these digressions hence offers us an opportunity to not only situate Ulughkhānī and his chronicle more broadly but also begin to outline the author's views on the very enterprise of history-writing itself.

## 1 Situating Ulughkhānī between Gujarat and Hejaz

‘Abdullāh Muḥammad al-Nahrawālī al-Makkī al-Āṣafī al-Ulughkhānī, also known as “Ḥājī al-Dabīr”, was born in Mecca in 1540. While a lot of information on Ulughkhānī's life and career is scattered throughout his chronicle, he noted many

details of his personal and familial history in the later sections of his text.<sup>10</sup> One of Ulughkhānī's ancestors had migrated to Multan and Sind from Iran sometime in the early thirteenth century in the context of Mongol incursions.<sup>11</sup> Over a century later, Ulughkhānī's family moved once again, this time to Nahrwala-Patan (corruption of Anhilwada-Patan) in northern Gujarat as Timur's army sacked Delhi causing much devastation to northern and northwestern India in the late fourteenth century. It is clear from the family's *nisba* al-Nahrawālī that over generations Ulughkhānī's family developed close ties with Patan, a center of local power in north Gujarat and an important hub of Islamic knowledge production and dissemination since the late thirteenth century. With the establishment of the Gujarat Sultanate in the fifteenth century, however, the capital city of Ahmedabad rose as a more prominent urban center in Gujarat attracting scholars of various intellectual and spiritual persuasions. Like many others, Ulughkhānī's learned family members, including his father Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar who was born in Nahrwala-Patan in the early sixteenth century, came to Ahmedabad to serve the Gujarat Sultans in various capacities as *mudarris* (teacher), *muftī* (jurist) and *qazī* (judge).<sup>12</sup> Ulughkhānī's father's position in the Gujarat Sultanate was further consolidated when Āṣaf Khān, his long-time friend and a newly appointed *wazīr* (chief minister) to Sultan Bahādur Shāh (r. 1526–37) selected Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar as his *wakīl* (deputy). As Sultan Bahādur Shāh faced increased political pressure on land from the Mughal ruler Humāyūn (d. 1556) as well as from the Portuguese at sea, Āṣaf Khān, accompanied by Ulughkhānī's father Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar, led a diplomatic mission to Mecca to transfer the sultan's family and treasures and seek Ottoman help against the Portuguese. And while Āṣaf Khān returned to Gujarat in 1548 to aid the new Gujarat Sultan Maḥmūd III (r. 1537–53) in his attempts to control the worsening political turmoil, Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar stayed back in Mecca longer. Our author Ulughkhānī who had been born in Mecca in 1540 continued to receive his early education there under his father and other Meccan scholars for several more years.

It appears that Ulughkhānī first came to Gujarat with his father in 1555, two years after both Āṣaf Khān and the Gujarat Sultan had been assassinated. Over the next decades, he served a variety of prominent nobles and slave administrators in

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<sup>10</sup> These details came right towards the end of the first of the two sections of his chronicle. Ulughkhānī 1921: II/619–635. Denison Ross's compilation of Ulughkhānī's biographical details and introduction to the contents and style of his chronicle continue to be a standard introduction for modern scholars. See Ulughkhānī 1910: I/v–x, Ulughkhānī 1921: II/v–xxxiv, Ulughkhānī 1928: III/vii–xix.

<sup>11</sup> Ulughkhānī 1921: II/620.

<sup>12</sup> Ulughkhānī's father's full name was Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar al-Naharwālī b. Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. Ishāq b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Qāsim.

different capacities.<sup>13</sup> His first appointment was in 1558 as a scribe to an Abyssinian general in Gujarat, Muḥammad Ulughkhān after whom Ḥājī al-Dabīr called himself “Ulughkhānī” and in whose service he remained until 1576 – the same year as the birth of Ulughkhānī's son Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad.<sup>14</sup> Apart from offering his secretarial skills, he also proved his value on the battlefield several times, including in the Battle of Baroda in 1559 that earned him a gift of two villages.<sup>15</sup> Like many former administrators of the Gujarat Sultanate, Ulughkhānī's employer entered into the service of the Mughal Emperor Akbar in 1571, following which Ulughkhānī's father was appointed to administer the religious endowment (*waqf*) dedicated to Mecca and Medina. Ulughkhānī himself was entrusted with the responsibility of carrying the endowment to the Hejaz and distributing it there among the poor in 1572. While Ulughkhānī's position was not renewed after his father's death in 1575, he found employment with another important Gujarat noble Sayf al-Mulūk from 1576 to 1595. Ulughkhānī's last employment that we have information on was with a leading noble of Khandesh, Fūlād Khān (d.1014/1605). Ross conjectured that Ulughkhānī might have gone back to Mecca after Fūlād Khān's death and written his text from there.<sup>16</sup>

The main outlines of Ulughkhānī's life clearly situate him and his family in the active scholarly and pilgrimage networks that connected Gujarat to the Hejaz. The famous Egyptian polymath al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497), for instance, included biographical accounts of scholars from different regions of the Indian subcontinent in his compendium *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi'*. As Christopher Bahl has shown, the inclusion of geographical agnomens like al-Aḥmadābādī, al-Pattanī, that were more specific than al-Hindī in al-Sakhāwī's text reflected not only an increased traffic between the Indian subcontinent and the Hejaz from the late medieval period but also a more sophisticated understanding of the diverse political milieu from which a greater number of scholars came to the Hejaz.<sup>17</sup> These networks between the Hejaz and Gujarat were particularly vibrant during the time of the Gujarat Sultans who welcomed several religious scholars from the Red Sea region to their court and administration in Ahmedabad. Indeed, Ulughkhānī himself provided biographical details on several of them as they arrived in Ahmedabad and received patronage from various Gujarat Sultans.<sup>18</sup> The Sultans, like their contemporaries in Bengal and the Deccan, were also actively invested in knowledge production and learning

<sup>13</sup> Ulughkhānī 1921: II/ 630–635.

<sup>14</sup> Ulughkhānī's son died the following year. He also noted the death of his sister Fāṭima (born in Mecca in 1538–39) in 1568 and that of his mother in 1596. Ulughkhānī 1921: II/620.

<sup>15</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/455.

<sup>16</sup> Ulughkhānī 1921: II/x.

<sup>17</sup> Bahl 2017.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Ulughkhānī 1910: I/117–119.

in Mecca.<sup>19</sup> As early as the early fifteenth century, Sultan Aḥmad Shāh (r. 1410–42) had established a madrasa in Mecca and later sultans continued the tradition of providing money and other resources for the successful employment of Muslim scholars in their sponsored institution of higher learning.<sup>20</sup> Growing up in Mecca in the 1540s, Ulughkhānī witnessed the charity of the Gujarat Sultan Muḥaffar Shāh II (r. 1511–1526) that included the building of an inn (*ribāṭ*) with a madrasa, fixing of religious endowment for teachers, students, and servants as well as distribution of money among the people of Mecca.<sup>21</sup> Ulughkhānī had personally seen the copies of the Qurʾān “inscribed in *thuluth* letters with gold water” that the sultan had sent to Mecca and appointed a Ḥanafī imam to recite from them.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Ulughkhānī noted in detail Sultan Maḥmūd Shāh III’s (r. 1537–54) charitable acts that he had personally witnessed as a young boy in Mecca including the assignment of the revenue of a village near Khambayat (Cambay) for Mecca and Medina, construction of an inn, a fountain, a religious school and a road to Jiddah among other building projects.<sup>23</sup> One should add here that such investment on part of the Gujarat Sultans was also noted by scholars writing in Mecca – Jārullāh (d. 1547), a member of the elite Ibn Fahd family in Mecca, for instance, noted the financial resources that the Gujarat Sultans regularly sent to Mecca and Medina in his chronicle *Nayl al-munā*.<sup>24</sup> He also provided a detailed account on Āṣaf Khān who, accompanied by Ulughkhānī’s father among others, had spent about a decade in Mecca and associated closely with the political and scholarly community in the Hejaz.<sup>25</sup> It is further significant that Muḥyi al-Dīn Lārī’s (d. 1526–27) *Futūḥ al-Ḥaramayn*, a text on Mecca and Medina and the Hajj pilgrimage that was copied widely in Istanbul and the wider Indian Ocean world, was dedicated to the Gujarat Sultan Muḥaffar Shāh II (1511–25).<sup>26</sup> Jārullāh ibn Fahd himself intended to send a *hadīth* compilation to Muḥaffar Shāh II whom he called “the Great Sultan and Noble *khāqān*”.<sup>27</sup> The presence of the Gujarat Sultans in Mecca through their representatives and financial investment was palpable enough for the Ottoman

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19 For a descriptive study of endowments for madrasas in Mecca by various rulers and other elites in the medieval period, see Mortel 1997.

20 The Kanba’iyah madrasa would later get demolished in 1567 to accommodate the bigger Ottoman madrasa endowed by the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman (r. 1520–66). Blackburn 2005: XII.

21 Ulughkhānī 1910: I/131.

22 Ulughkhānī 1910: I/132.

23 Ulughkhānī 1910: I/313–14.

24 Alam/Subrahmanyam 2017: 288–289.

25 Alam/Subrahmayam 2017: 296–313.

26 For a useful discussion on the significance of such a dedication in the context of Ottoman attempts to claim sovereignty over Mecca and Medina, see Burak 2017.

27 Alam/Subrahmanyam 2017: 289; Burak 2017: 308.



Sultans to deploy a variety of means to surpass the goodwill that the Gujarat Sultans had generated in the Holy City.<sup>28</sup> Ulughkhānī hence grew up in Mecca at a time when the connections between Gujarat and the Hejaz had been particularly strong and dynamic. His personal life and secretarial career unfolded in the context of frequent diplomatic and scholarly engagements that had brought Gujarat closer to the Hejaz in the sixteenth century.

As Engseng Ho wrote in the context of Ulughkhānī's notes on the close relations between the Ḥabashī slave commanders and Ḥaḍramī sayyids in Gujarat, "the traffic between Mecca and Gujarat constituted his social world and is reflected in his book."<sup>29</sup> Ulughkhānī's own employment with Ḥabashī generals in Gujarat and the Deccan clearly also led to his interest in and extensive use of *Futūḥ al-Ḥabsha* (also known as *Tuḥfat al-Zamān* and, in English, as 'Conquest of Abyssinia') by 'Arab Faqīh, a Yemeni scholar in Ethiopia who chronicled the campaigns of Imām Aḥmad (1529–1543) of Adal Sultanate against the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, writing his *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ* not long after the composition of 'Arab Faqīh's mid sixteenth-century chronicle, Ulughkhānī's text has preserved the earliest known mention of *Futūḥ al-Ḥabsha*.<sup>31</sup> Ulughkhānī's access to this text further reinforces the author's expansive social and scholarly horizons beyond Gujarat. In fact, Ulughkhānī's active connections across the western Indian Ocean are apparent in many places throughout his chronicle. He was familiar with prominent debates taking place among the Hejazi scholars, including the use of coffee and intoxicants, as well as the circulation of significant material culture like books, horses and swords that connected Gujarat to the Arabian Peninsula. Ulughkhānī often cited the works of earlier generations of Hejazi scholars but he also had access to texts whose authors were Ulughkhānī's contemporaries or near contemporaries in Mecca and Yemen. One such significant text composed in Mecca that Ulughkhānī reproduced in his own text with a running commentary was *Riyāḥ al-Riḥwān* by the famous *ḥadīth* scholar and Shāfi'ī jurist Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1566–67) in praise of the Gujarat *wazīr* Āṣaf Khān.<sup>32</sup> One can multiply these kinds of examples to show Ulughkhānī's ongoing connection with the Red Sea and Persian Gulf regions even as he moved in the service of one military commander to another in Gujarat and the Deccan upon his arrival in India in the 1550s. Indeed, it was likely in part due to his Hejazi connections that Ulughkhānī (and his father)

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<sup>28</sup> Burak 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Ho 2007: 353.

<sup>30</sup> Ulughkhānī's extracts from this text can be found in Ulughkhānī 1921: II/584–598.

<sup>31</sup> Chekroun 2012: 305–307.

<sup>32</sup> al-Haytamī was also known to scholarly circles in South Asia, East Africa and Southeast Asia through the dissemination of his legal text *Tuḥfat al-Muḥtāj*. See Kooria/ Ravensbergen 2018.



was appointed to administer the *waqf* related to Mecca upon the Mughal conquest of Gujarat in the late sixteenth century.

Once we place Ulughkhānī within the larger social and scholarly networks of the sixteenth-century Indian Ocean world, how does that enable us to reassess the nature of his chronicle? To answer this question, the following section takes a closer look at Ulughkhānī's tangential historical discussions as he recounted the reigns of the Gujarat Sultans in his annalistic *Ẓafar al-wālih*.

## 2 A matter of perspective? Contextualizing Ulughkhānī's aberrations and digressions

Ulughkhānī's annalistic text is composed in two parts or *daftars*: the first *daftar* deals with the reigns of the Gujarat Sultans from the early fifteenth century to 1572–3 when Gujarat came under the rule of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (d.1605). The second *daftar* recounts the history of other Muslim rulers in the Indian sub-continent up till the accession of Akbar. Since the introductory folios of the chronicle are missing, it is not clear if Ulughkhānī meant to dedicate this work to anyone like the special memoir *Fawātiḥ al-Iqbāl wa Fawā'id al-Intiqāl* that he mentioned having dedicated to his employer Muḥammad Ulugh Khān.<sup>33</sup> But Ulughkhānī's *Ẓafar al-wālih* was far from a finished product; the work that has come down to us seems to have been a draft that the author was still working on around 1611 (he quotes from Sikandar Manjhū's *Mir'āt-i Sikandarī* composed around 1611) even though the last date mentioned in the text is 1605. There is indication in one place in *Ẓafar al-wālih* that Ulughkhānī intended to continue the narrative of an earlier Persian history of Gujarat titled *Tārīkh-i Bahādur Shāhī* by Ḥusām Khān Gujarātī upon which he had relied extensively for his own chronicle.<sup>34</sup> From Ulughkhānī's text it appears that Ḥusām Khān's *tārīkh*, which is no longer extant, had ended in 1532–33 with the siege of Chittor by the Gujarat Sultan Bahādur Shāh (r. 1526–1537). Much of the continuity that Ulughkhānī provided in his own chronicle then concerned events that were contemporaneous to him. Ulughkhānī was a keen observer of his own times and significant parts of the book, particularly dealing with the last decades of the Gujarat sultanate to the

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<sup>33</sup> The extant manuscript is also incomplete in certain places, most prominently, the sections on the first two sultans of Gujarat are missing. Ulughkhānī 1910: I/vi. For two references to Ulughkhānī's other text see Ulughkhānī 1910: I/206 and Ulughkhānī 1921: II/632.

<sup>34</sup> Ulughkhānī 1921: II/227.

conquest of Gujarat by the Mughal Emperor Akbar, are a first-hand record of what Ulughkhānī saw and experienced.<sup>35</sup> His employment with Ḥabashī (Abyssinian) military commanders gave him intimate access to the intense political rivalries among the sultanate power holders in Gujarat that ultimately paved the way for Akbar's conquest. In addition to recounting the fierce political maneuverings of the military elites in Gujarat in the sixteenth century, Ulughkhānī also included several biographical details on prominent scholars and poets from different parts of the larger Islamic world throughout his chronicle. As Ross noted a century ago, the text is "much more than a mere Chronicle of the Kings of Gujarat, and that a large portion of this volume is devoted to digressions, historical, biographical and bibliographical, which carry the reader back to the early history of Islam on the one hand, and forward to the beginning of the 17th century on the other."<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, the historical development of both Persian and Arabic *tawārīkh* shows that the authors of these texts often went beyond the mere factual recounting of events and military campaigns to include anecdotal recollections, autobiographical reflections, and poetic and other literary embellishments. These narrative strategies were integral to the oeuvre of chroniclers and historians. They offered what Hirschler calls in the context of medieval Arabic historiography, "the room for manoeuvre"<sup>37</sup> – the agency to authors, embedded in different social and intellectual contexts but often relying on similar textual basis, to impart varying meaning and value to historical personalities and events. While there are many places throughout Ulughkhānī's chronicle where he added historical and anecdotal information to his primary recounting of events in the reigns of the Gujarat Sultans, I focus here on what Ross identified as the six "principal" digressions in the first daftar of *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ*. Ross called them digressions not so much because they added value to Ulughkhānī's larger text but because they interrupted the narrative organization and flow of the text concerned primarily with the discussion of the reigns of various Gujarat Sultans.<sup>38</sup> These digressions are as follows:

1. On certain local dynasties in Arabia, including quotations from the *Daw'u u-l-Lami'* of as-Sakhawī.
2. On the history of the town of Zabīd.
3. On the history of Jaunpore [sic].

<sup>35</sup> For a few examples where Ulughkhānī mentioned that he witnessed firsthand an event or was in the company of someone who had firsthand knowledge, see Ulughkhānī 1910: I/75, 98, 176.

<sup>36</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/ix.

<sup>37</sup> Hirschler 2006: 1.

<sup>38</sup> Ross noted a few digressions in the second daftar of Ulughkhānī's work which was for the most part an abridged compilation of several histories especially those written during the Delhi Sultanate. Ulughkhānī 1928: III/ ix–x.

4. On the Conquest of the Deccan by the arms of Islam, bringing the history down to A.D. 1605.
5. On the Sultans of Mandu.
6. On the life of the famous vezir ‘Abd-il-‘Aziz Asaf Khan, including the reproduction *in extenso*, (with a running commentary by our author) of a hitherto unknown work by Ibn Hajar al-Haythmi, called *Riyad-ur-Ridwan*.<sup>39</sup>

It is important to note here that Ulughkhānī himself was very aware of the fact that digressing from the main topic in hand could lead to potential criticisms from readers as they may not fully appreciate the value of those digressions. Such awareness led Ulughkhānī to explain the reasons and benefits of certain tangential historical discussions. As I revisit these digressions, I will demonstrate that firstly, the digressions were actually not irrelevant to the principal topic of discussion and even illumined, by historical comparison and contrast, what Ulughkhānī wanted to convey to his readers. To view them as digressions or aberrations is to separate the historian from his ideas on what constituted history and what important lessons a study of the past was meant to teach to the readers. The fact that he at times foreshadowed his upcoming digression also points to the fact that such digressions were not added on a whim but were carefully thought to be a part of the history that Ulughkhānī was writing. Secondly, separating these digressions from Ulughkhānī’s larger project undermine the expansive social and intellectual networks of which Ulughkhānī and his chronicle were a product. Given Ulughkhānī’s personal experience with Mecca (where he grew up and later travelled to) as well as the Deccan (where he served), it is not surprising that examples from the history of the Arabian Peninsula and the Deccan formed a large part of these digressions in his recounting of the reigns of the Gujarat Sultans in the first daftar. But they also located Gujarat in a particular geography – connected overland to Multan and Sind in the north to Khandesh and Deccan in the south, and oriented towards the circulatory rhythms that connected the realm of the Gujarat Sultans to the Red Sea area.

The first digression that Ross identified as Ulughkhānī’s discussion on local dynasties in Arabia is actually an account of the Mamlūk military admiral Amīr Ḥusayn al-Kurdī’s brutal campaigns in Aden and Zabid and the defeat of the Ṭāhirid dynasty in Yemen.<sup>40</sup> The context for such a discussion is provided by Ulughkhānī’s recounting of the events of the Gujarat Sultan Maḥmūd Begarha’s reign (r. 1458–1511) in 1507 when the Mamlūk admiral Amīr Ḥusayn al-Kurdī arrived in Gujarat to join in the efforts to oust the Portuguese from the western

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<sup>39</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/ix–x.

<sup>40</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: 38–50.

Indian Ocean. Here, Ulughkhānī narrated the help Sultan Maḥmūd Begarha and his slave military commander (and governor of Diu) Malik Ayāz received from Amīr Ḥusayn al-Kurdī in repelling the Portuguese at the Battle of Chaul in 1507. Ulughkhānī noted that Amīr Ḥusayn, whom the Egyptian Mamlūk Sultan Qanṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–1517) had sent to dispel the Portuguese from as far as Hormuz, was later received by Sultan Maḥmūd and offered the governorship of Mahim but Amīr Ḥusayn al-Kurdī proposed to come back once he had completed the task he had originally set out for.<sup>41</sup> Modern historians have reconstructed in detail the history of these events by using Ulughkhānī and other contemporary authors.<sup>42</sup> For our purposes here it is relevant to note that it is after narrating Sultan Maḥmūd Begarha's meeting with Amīr Ḥusayn al-Kurdī that Ulughkhānī paused his annalistic account of Sultan Maḥmūd Begarha's reign. He instead followed Amīr Ḥusayn's return to Cairo and subsequent military adventures in Yemen in 1515 (while in charge of a bigger fleet to reengage with the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean which never happened) leading up to the bombardment of Aden and the defeat of the Ṭāhirids in 1516–17.<sup>43</sup> Prior to narrating these events in great detail, Ulughkhānī noted that he wanted to show to his readers that the Ottoman naval commander Amīr Salmān (Selmān Re'īs) had been with the Mamlūk admiral Amīr Ḥusayn al-Kurdī in Yemen at the time.<sup>44</sup>

This tangential historical account ends with a short biography of the defeated Ṭāhirid ruler Malik al-Ẓāfir 'Āmir II (r. 1489–1517) and a note on the life and works of Ibn al-Dayba' (1461–1537), the prominent historian of Yemen on whose authority Ulughkhānī based his account. For the biography of al-Dayba', Ulughkhānī in turn relied on one of the senior contemporaries of the Yemeni author, the Egyptian polymath al-Sakhāwī (1427–1497). In his biographical compendium *al-Ḍaw al-Lāmi'*, al-Sakhāwī had detailed the life and education of al-Dayba' and also copied some of his verses (including the one in which al-Dayba' conveyed his wish to become an *imām* of the *ḥadīth*, which he would narrate at the feet of al-Sakhāwī).<sup>45</sup> Ulughkhānī further supplemented this biographical account by citing the Meccan historian, Jārullāh ibn Fahd (d. 1547).

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<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Ulughkhānī did not mention that Amīr Ḥusayn al-Kurdī's departure from Gujarat was likely prompted by his defeat at the hands of the Portuguese viceroy Almeida with whom Malik Ayāz, afraid of al-Kurdī's reputation for ruthlessness, secretly allied. See Casale 2010: 27; Alam/Subrahmanyam 2012: 42.

<sup>42</sup> For a recent overview and discussion of these events see Alam/Subrahmanyam 2012. Also, Casale 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Casale 2010: 27.

<sup>44</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/38. On the Ṭāhirids and Ibn al-Dayba', see Smith 1984.

<sup>45</sup> "*la'li an akūn bihi imāman; a'rawihu 'ala qadam al-Sakhāwī*". Ulughkhānī 1910: I/50. This and other of Ibn al-Dayba's verses can be found in al-Sakhāwī 1966: 105.

Ulughkhānī was aware that he had taken a detour in the narration of his history of the Gujarat Sultans and he acknowledged it as much. Thus he noted “I know that this tangential narration became long” (*a‘lamu an hadhihi al-tarjamat al-mu‘tarḍat wa an ṭālat*).<sup>46</sup> However, before resuming the events of Maḥmūd Begarha’s reign in 1508, Ulughkhānī made clear the reason for detailing the history of Yemen that, Ulughkhānī reminded the reader, had come under the influence of the Ottoman Turks after their conquest of Mamlūk Egypt in 1517. According to Ulughkhānī, the fall of the Ṭāhirid dynasty and the Ottoman dominance over Yemen, were events full of significant warnings. Not least of all because they were illustrative of capricious men who, through their ill advice and personal benefit, could bring rulers down. Such fall was the fate, Ulughkhānī noted, of the Ṭāhirid ruler Ṣāfir ‘Āmir when, Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mawza‘ī “laid the basis of enmity in the hearts of the present and the absent”.<sup>47</sup> In his preceding account on the fall of the Ṭāhirid dynasty, Ulughkhānī had mentioned (or rather copied Ibn al-Dayba‘) how Sharaf al-Dīn, the *mustawfī* (director of finances) of Zabid had been the main cause of the defeat of the Ṭāhirid dynasty by breeding ill-will and animosity among the elites and the general people.<sup>48</sup> Hence, as Ulughkhānī put it, the long tangential discussion on Yemen was not “outside of history” – *lam takhal min mūzū‘ al-tārīkh* – [that Ulughkhānī was writing]; it was a reminder that the wise should learn lessons from their kings.<sup>49</sup> Writing at the time when the Mughals had put an end to the authority of the Gujarat Sultans in part due to the internecine conflict between Gujarat’s political elites and the betrayal of many that Ulughkhānī himself was an eye-witness to, the story of the fall of the Ṭāhirid dynasty was a historical comparison that perhaps also resonated with Ulughkhānī on a personal level.

Some of the other digressions similarly provide insights into how he intervened as a historian to better communicate past events to his readers. In part due to his intimate knowledge with multiple geographies and access to both Persian and Arabic textual production, Ulughkhānī often provided background information and comparisons on rulers, kingdoms and places to his readers with which they could better comprehend his recounting of events in Gujarat and elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent. Two such digressions concerned the history of the town of Zabid in Yemen on the one hand and that of Jaunpur in northeastern India on the other (nos. 2 and 3 in Ross’ list respectively).<sup>50</sup> Ulughkhānī included the account on the rulers of Zabid after he finished chronicling the reign of Sultan Maḥmūd

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<sup>46</sup> Ulughkhani 1910: I/50.

<sup>47</sup> Lokhandwala 1970: I/46; Ulughkhānī 1910: I/ 50.

<sup>48</sup> Lokhandwala 1970: I/40. Ulughkhānī 1910: I/43.

<sup>49</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/ 50.

<sup>50</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/88–97 and I/134–137 respectively.



Begarha and right before he commenced his account of the following sultan, Muẓaffar Shāh II (1511–1525). The fact that Ulughkhānī had planned ahead to include the account on Zabīd – that it was not an unintended or unrelated digression – is clear from the manner he signaled it in the context of a chain of narrations starting with Sultan Maḥmūd Begarha's subordination of the Fārūqī rulers of Asir and Burhanpur in the Khandesh region, and followed by a recounting of the history of the Sultanate of Khandesh and its relations with other neighboring Deccani sultanates. While narrating the events in the Khandesh ruler 'Ādil Khān III's (r. 1509–1520) reign, Ulughkhānī compared the assassination of the noble Shahriyār (Ḥusām al-Dīn, brother of Khandesh noble Yār 'Alī Mughalī) by 'Ādil Khān III who suspected him of a plot against him, to what had transpired in the life of Amīr Jayyāsh (d. 1104), the ruler of Zabīd in the Tihama region of Yemen. But instead of elaborating it further for his readers Ulughkhānī continued with the reign of 'Ādil Khān III with the promise that he would return to the life of the Amīr and his descendants and several anecdotes related to them after finishing the present discussion (*sayatīka bayānhi ba'ad istīfa' hadhihi al-tarjama*) with the hope that considering them would provide comfort from the troubles of this world (*fatammalahu 'asāka tajidahu maslatan 'an al-duniyā*).<sup>51</sup> Hence, at the completion of his discussion on the history of Asir and Burhanpur and the end of Maḥmūd Begarha's reign, Ulughkhānī added his “promised account” from “the beneficial history” (*al-akhbār al-mufīd*) on the “descendants of Najāḥ, Jayyāsh, and Ibn-i Ziyād and the city of Zabīd”.<sup>52</sup> The beneficial history is most likely a reference to *Kitāb al-mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, more popularly known as *Tārīkh al-Yaman*, the earliest history of Yemen written by 'Umāra al-Hakamī al-Yamanī (d. 1174) and later copied by several scholars including the Yemeni historian Ibn al-Dayba' in his history of Zabīd titled *Bughyat al-Mustafīd fī tārikh madīnat Zabīd*.<sup>53</sup>

It is worth noting here that in Ulughkhānī's mind, the inclusion of the history of Asir and Burhanpur itself was a digression, and a fairly long one (although Ross did not identify it as one of his six principal digressions). It is likely that he followed his main source, Ḥusām Khān Gujarātī's, *Tārīkh-i Bahādur Shāhī*, closely for he relied on this text for the narration of the history of Asir and Burhanpur. At the same time, however, Ulughkhānī was aware of potential criticisms with regard to interrupting the organization of his chronicle, that he should have first continued

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<sup>51</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/58.

<sup>52</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/89. Ibn-i Ziyād was the ruler of the Ziyādid dynasty that ruled from 819–1018; Najāḥ (r. 1050–1060) and Jayyāsh (r. 1089–1104) are references to the Abyssinian slave rulers of the succeeding Najāḥid dynasty in Zabīd that ended in 1158. See Strothmann/Smith 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Smoor 2012. According to Timothy Power, *Kitāb al-mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd* was a reference to the work of Amīr Jayyāsh that al-Hakamī cited in his history of Yemen. Power 2012: 260, fn72.



his narrative on the reign of Sultan Maḥmūd until the sultan's death.<sup>54</sup> Consistent with his other digressions, Ulughkhānī took the time to explain to his readers why he chose to narrate the history of the Fārūqī dynasty of Khandesh. Given the geographical proximity to Gujarat and existence of the matrimonial relations between the families of the sultans of Gujarat and Khandesh, the history of these two sultanates was often intertwined. In Ulughkhānī's assessment, it was hence important to consider in detail the events that shaped the Sultanate of Khandesh and the role of the Gujarat Sultans in it until the Mughal Emperor conquered Khandesh in the early seventeenth century, not long after their conquest of Gujarat itself. In the end, Ulughkhānī hoped that "the critics will look at it with indulgence on their part; it is obvious that an author becomes a target of criticism (*man ṣannaḥa faqad istuhadaḥa*)."<sup>55</sup> Such authorial reflection on digressions highlight the seriousness with which Ulughkhānī viewed his role as a historian and structured his chronicle with a great degree of thoughtfulness.

Ulughkhānī's relatively brief narration of the history of Jaunpur – the third principal digression identified by Ross – occurred towards the end of the short reign of the Gujarat Sultan Sikandar Shāh b. Muḥaffar Shāh II (r. 1526) and connected to the beginning of the reign of Sultan Bahādur Shāh (1526–1537).<sup>56</sup> Relying once again on Ḥusām Khān Gujarātī's Persian chronicle *Tārīkh-i Bahādur Shāhī*, Ulughkhānī listed the reigns of the various sultans who ruled Jaunpur from the late fourteenth century, their relationship with the Lodi Sultans of north India and their increased military entanglements with the Mughals in the sixteenth century. This brief digression in Ulughkhānī's chronicle was prompted by the fact that Bahādur Shāh, the future Sultan of Gujarat, had been invited to assume the reins of the Jaunpur sultanate by the courtly elite in Jaunpur who resisted the Lodi Sultan Ibrahīm Shāh's (r. 1517–26) control over them. Bahādur Shāh, who had been moving across north India at the time, had earned much admiration for his valiant fight in support of the Lodi Sultan Ibrahīm Shāh in Panipat against the Mughal ruler Bābur (r. 1526–30).<sup>57</sup> Upon his arrival in Jaunpur, he received the invitation to accede to the throne, but with this offer also came the news of his father Muḥaffar Shāh II's death. Aware of the political turmoil in Gujarat in light of his father's

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<sup>54</sup> Ulughkhānī 1919: I/51.

<sup>55</sup> Lokhandwala 1910: 47; Ulughkhānī 1910: I/51. Here Ulughkhānī was drawing upon a popular aphorism attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 756), famous for translating Persian works into Arabic. Roughly translated, the aphorism expressed how an author becomes a target; if he is good, he receives love and sympathy and if he offends, people bring him down. Thanks to Soha Aboelsoud for pointing this out to me.

<sup>56</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/134–137.

<sup>57</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/128–129.

death, Bahādur Shāh preferred to assert his sovereignty as the new Sultan of Gujarat in 1526.

We can hence clearly see that it was not unreasonable for Ulughkhānī to debrief his readers on the history of Jaunpur to provide a more nuanced account of the circumstances in which Sultan Bahādur Shāh began his reign. In a similar vein, Ulughkhānī also provided a very short history of the rulers of Sind and Multan following the history of Jaunpur.<sup>58</sup> The Jām rulers of Sind maintained matrimonial relations with the family of the Gujarat Sultans – including Bahādur Shāh who married the daughter of Jām Firūz – and sought the military help of Sultan Bahādur Shāh upon Mughal incursions into the region in the early sixteenth century.<sup>59</sup> These then were not digressions unrelated to the events in the Gujarat Sultanate; in fact, they highlighted the complex web of relationships Gujarat Sultans had with neighboring and more distant political principalities. Having established this larger transregional political context as it related to the Gujarat Sultanate, and particularly to the transition to the new Sultan, Ulughkhānī returned to chronicle the events in the reign of Sultan Bahādur Shāh in full detail.

Ulughkhānī's two other digressions (nos. 4 and 5 in Ross' list) on the history of the Deccan and Mandu respectively occurred during his discussion of the reign of Sultan Bahādur Shāh.<sup>60</sup> Here Ulughkhānī relied on several Persian histories including Ẹiā' al-Dīn Baranī's *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, Ārām Kahsmīrī's *Tūḥfat al-Sādāt*, Ḥusām Khān Gujarātī's *Tārīkh-i Bahādur Shāhī* and Sikandar Manjhū's *Mir'āt-i Sikandarī*. The accounts on the Deccan and Mandu belong to the same cluster of digressions where the author provided the reader the larger context and background as they related to specific events in the Gujarat Sultanate. Thus, for instance, the most prominent theater of Sultan Bahādur Shāh's political activities in his early reign was in the Deccan. Soon after his accession to the throne, he moved into the Deccan to help the sultans of Berar and Khandesh against the military aggression of the Nizām Shāhī ruler of Ahmednagar. Once again relying heavily on Ḥusām Khān *Tārīkh-i Bahādur Shāhī*, Ulughkhānī narrated the multiple expeditions Bahādur Shāh took into the Deccan until 1529 when the Nizām Shāhī ruler agreed to accept the suzerainty of the Gujarat Sultan and ceased to be a threat to the neighboring sultanates. It was at this point that Ulughkhānī launched into his digression on the history of the conquest of the Deccan by the Delhi Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī in the fourteenth century. He brought the discussion down to Mughal interventions into the region up to 1605. A larger discussion of the history

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<sup>58</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/137–138. Note that Ross did not count the history of Sind and Multan as one of his six principal digressions.

<sup>59</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/138.

<sup>60</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/154–192 and 196–208 respectively.

of the Deccan was thus an important tool with which the readers could evaluate the nature of Sultan Bahādur Shāh's involvement in the region and compare his successes to those who preceded and followed him. Sultan Bahādur Shāh's engagements in the Deccan were thus an occasion to look back (and forward) to similar interventions into the region by other Muslim rulers beginning with 'Alā' al-Dīn Khalajī. Since in his larger text, especially the sections on the history of other Muslim polities in the Indian subcontinent in the second daftar, Ulughkhānī often brought his chronicle down to 1605 (the end of Akbar's reign), it is not surprising that he discussed Deccan's history until that time also. It is further significant that given Gujarat Sultans' entanglements in the Deccan, Ulughkhānī included the history of this region – unlike the history of the Bengal Sultanate – in the first daftar and not the second. We should also remember that Ulughkhānī himself had spent a number of years in the Deccan, serving Fūlād Khān, and he was thus an eyewitness to the changing politics of the region. In that sense, his inclusion of the region's history was not that different from his discussions on the developments in the Red Sea region. These were the geographies Ulughkhānī was most familiar with and confident to narrate. Ulughkhānī's following digression into the history of Mandu, the capital of the Malwa Sultanate, similarly came right after the events that led to the victory of Sultan Bahādur Shāh over Maḥmūd Khalajī II (r. 1511–31), the ruler of Malwa.<sup>61</sup> Much like the account on Khandesh, the Deccan and Jaunpur, Malwa's political history was important to lay the larger historical context with which the readers could situate Bahādur Shāh's interventions into the region. Most importantly, the author's liberties with the chronological organization of the reigns of the Gujarat Sultans serve as a reminder that Ulughkhānī's digressions were not ramblings unrelated to the history of Gujarat. They were triggered by certain events in the specific reigns of the Gujarat Sultans, usually wars and conflicts with neighboring polities and threats along its maritime borders. In fact, the digressions are an indication of the more deliberate organization of the chronicle by Ulughkhānī than has generally been acknowledged.

The last of Ulughkhānī's digressions identified by Ross in the first daftar concerns a biography of the *wazīr* (chief minister) of the Gujarat Sultanate Āṣaf Khān who served Sultan Bahādur Shāh and his successor Sultan Maḥmūd Shāh III (r. 1537–53). This account thus came at the end of the narration of the reigns of both these sultans for Āṣaf Khān played a central role in sultanate politics and eventually lost his life, along with Sultan Maḥmūd Shāh III, to internecine fighting.<sup>62</sup> But Āṣaf Khān was unlike other courtly elites that Ulughkhānī had known or served. He was personally known to Ulughkhānī as one of his father's closest

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<sup>61</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/196.

<sup>62</sup> Ulughkhānī 1910: I/333–390.

friends in Gujarat. When Āṣaf Khān was given the responsibility of transferring Sultan Bahādur Shāh's harem and treasure to Mecca in 1535, Āṣaf Khān appointed Ulughkhānī's father as his deputy. And as we noted in the previous section, it was around this time that Ulughkhānī was born in Mecca and grew in the company of his father, Āṣaf Khān, and other Meccan elites. Āṣaf Khān, very much like Ulughkhānī and his father, navigated the political and social worlds across the western Indian Ocean with considerable ease. Before Sultan Maḥmūd Shāh III asked him to return to Gujarat in 1548, Āṣaf Khān had gained much reputation for his piety, knowledge and generosity in Mecca. Indeed, one of the prominent Meccan scholars and theologians who personally interacted with Āṣaf Khān, Ibn al-Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1567), dedicated one of his Arabic works, *Riyāz al-Riẓwān*, to Āṣaf Khān.<sup>63</sup> It was this text that included several biographical details on Āṣaf Khān and an elegy to him as well as al-Haytamī's personal interaction with Āṣaf Khān, that became the basis of Ulughkhānī's long digression where he not only copied al-Haytamī's text but also provided his own running commentary.<sup>64</sup> Like other instances of digression, Ulughkhānī returned to his narrative on the Gujarat Sultans after the section on Āṣaf Khān and chronicled the reigns of the last of the sultans Aḥmad Shāh III (r. 1554–1561) and Muẓaffar Shāh III (r. 1561–1573).

A closer look at what Ross identified as the six principal digressions in the first daftar of Ulughkhānī's chronicle and how they fit into the larger structure of *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ* reveal several aspects of Ulughkhānī's role as a historian. While the extant manuscript is far from a finished product and gives us little sense for the author's motivations for writing a work of history, a closer engagement with the digressions offers important insights into Ulughkhānī as a chronicler of past and contemporary moments. As noted above, it is in these digressions that Ulughkhānī meditated over the usefulness of the history he was writing and why it was necessary to include digressions in his otherwise annalistic recounting of the reigns of the Gujarat Sultans. Indeed, read along with the main text, the digressions make clear that as a historian, Ulughkhānī, even in his rough draft, had reasonable ideas on what tangential historical discussions he wanted to include and when. As we already saw above, he often foreshadowed those digressions in his account of the specific reigns of the Gujarat Sultans. And more often than not, Ulughkhānī's digressions were triggered by developments in the Gujarat Sultanate, and they contextualized those developments within a larger geographical and political

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<sup>63</sup> As we noted before, the Meccan historian Jārullāh similarly included a long account of Āṣaf Khān's presence in Mecca and praised his good qualities in *Nayl al-munā*. See Alam/Subrahmayam 2017: 296–313.

<sup>64</sup> Ulughkhānī referred to Haytamī's text again later in his chronicle where he provided his own biographical details and recounted Āṣaf Khān's time spent in Mecca. See Ulughkhānī 1921: II/ 628.

terrain. In addition, Ulughkhānī was not simply satisfied with copying his narrations verbatim from earlier histories; the digressions often became the means to interpret the events for his readers through comparison with former and other contemporary historical developments. As Ulughkhānī noted several times in his text, he had been a witness to many significant political events in the sixteenth century. In fact, his familial and personal history was closely entwined with the history of the successes and failures of the Gujarat Sultans. As a historian of and commentator on his times who survived past the demise of the Gujarat Sultanate, Ulughkhānī's digressions (as also other parts of his chronicle), were occasions to reflect upon how certain events had turned out and judge the role of various individuals decades after the Gujarat Sultanate had ceased to exist. If we were to separate Ulughkhānī's digressions from his chronicle deeming them irrelevant and dispensable, we would be foregoing a valuable resource to better understand the author and the nature of his oeuvre.

The nature of Ulughkhānī's digressions as discussed here also raises the question of Ulughkhānī's audience. Who were the readers that he had in mind when he wrote his Arabic history of Gujarat? The question is incredibly hard to answer satisfactorily. Given that the text exists in only one manuscript, we have little sense for how widely it was read and copied. Nonetheless, Ross had suggested that it is quite possible that Ulughkhānī spent his last years in Mecca and wrote his chronicle there. If Ulughkhānī wrote in Mecca, and being well-versed as he was with the Arabic language and Arabic historiographical traditions (he admitted in his chronicle that he learnt Persian much later upon his arrival in Gujarat),<sup>65</sup> it would not only explain his use of Arabic, but also point to his potential intended audience in the Hejaz (as we know, the Persian *tawārīkh* traditions were far more dominant in the Indian subcontinent). And one can perhaps take it a step further and conjecture that the text eventually landed in India through someone who had travelled to the Hejaz and brought Ulughkhānī's chronicle back. At the same time, however, the ease with which Ulughkhānī could narrate the history of Zabid and of Jaunpur, of Ottomans in the Indian Ocean and of Sind and Deccan, not only point to Ulughkhānī's own embeddedness in a transregional context but perhaps also to an audience that was similarly meant to be transregional as well. Depending upon where the chronicle was read – and irrespective of whether Ulughkhānī wrote in Mecca, Ahmedabad or someplace in the Deccan – the readers had opportunities to learn about histories and geographies that they might not have been as intimately familiar with as Ulughkhānī was. If Ulughkhānī meant to educate those in the Hejaz and the Hadramawt in the history of Gujarat and of the Indian subcontinent more generally, he clearly also felt the need to

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<sup>65</sup> Ulughkhānī 1921: II/634.



illustrate to his learned audience across the western Indian Ocean the significance of events, prominent individuals and narratives that had shaped the histories of the Red Sea region.

### 3 Conclusion

In his overview of the production of Arabic literature in the Indian subcontinent from ancient times to 1857, M.G. Zubaid Ahmad organized the Arabic texts under 11 headings including Qur'ānic literature, jurisprudence, sufism, mathematics and medicine, and poetry. In his arrangement of works that constituted "History, Biography and Travel", there were only four texts that, according to Zubaid Ahmad, constituted works of "pure history": Zayn al-Dīn al-Ma'barī's *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn*, Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Nahrawālī's two texts, *Al-I'lām bi A'lām Bayt Allāh wa al-Ḥarām* and *Al-Barq al-Yamanī fi al-Faṭḥ al-'Uthmānī*, and lastly, Ḥājji al-Dabīr Ulughkhānī's *Ẓafar al-wālih bi Muẓaffar wa ālihi*. Ahmad also added a "Work of chronology": *Al-Nūr al-Sāfir fi qarn al-'āshir*, a biographical compendium by 'Abd al-Qādir al-'Aydarūs produced in Ahmedabad.<sup>66</sup> Working within the nation-state framework popular at the time, Zubaid Ahmad had counted the works the theologian and teacher al-Nahrawālī (d. 1582), who had left Gujarat to settle in Mecca, among the contribution of 'Indo-Pakistan' to the Arabic literature by arguing that "it is within the scope of the present thesis to include the works of those scholars of Indian blood also who were born and flourished outside India".<sup>67</sup> In any case, compared to the Indo-Persian historiography, the Arabic historiographical tradition in the Indian subcontinent could nicely be summed up in a few pages.

What was not very apparent in Ahmad's categorization is the fact that all of these four authors were sixteenth-century contemporaries even as they were located on the Malabar coast in south-western India, Mecca and Gujarat. And even as they wrote very distinctive histories in Arabic, they all engaged, one way or another, with what they witnessed to be the changing political alignments in the western Indian Ocean world as the Ottomans and the Portuguese grew increasingly invested in controlling access to trade and movement. Beyond their shared milieu and historical concerns, there is also good reason to believe that Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrawālī and Ulughkhānī's family knew each other: as we noted above, Ulughkhānī's father had accompanied his friend and *wazīr* Āṣaf Khān to Mecca in the hopes of safeguarding Sultan Bahādur Shāh's harem and treasures. When Āṣaf Khān organized a diplomatic mission from Mecca to Istanbul to seek help from the

<sup>66</sup> Ahmad 1968: 168–194.

<sup>67</sup> Ahmad 1968: 172.



Ottomans against the Portuguese in 1536, al-Nahrawālī had been a part of that mission.<sup>68</sup> We also know that it was al-Nahrawālī's father who had performed the burial rituals for one of Āṣaf Khān's companions, Shams Khān, who died on his way back to India.<sup>69</sup> As we connect all these men with each other and many others – for instance, al-Nahrawālī was also good friends with Ibn al-Ḥajar Haytamī who dedicated a text to Āṣaf Khān that Ulughkhānī reproduced in his chronicle – we get a new set of inter-connected empirical details. And as we reconstruct personal and scholarly connections among individuals, we are able to recover their shared social and intellectual milieu more fully. Such specific inter-connections then become the foundation with which we can further develop and refine our conceptual understandings of mobility, transmission of Arabic texts, and other cultural practices related to the dissemination of the Arabic language and literature in South Asia.

Recently, Sanjay Subrahmanyam has made a compelling case for seriously considering the prolific Arabic intellectual output of Muslim scholars residing in Mecca to reconstruct the history of 'global' intellectual networks in the early modern period. As he noted in the context of intellectuals like al-Nahrawālī (d. 1582) and his older contemporary Jārullāh ibn Fahd (d. 1547), these men "should rightly be thought to belong in an account of early-modern global intellectual history for at least two reasons: because of their extensive networks and connections, and because they were certainly aware of (and wrote about) a world that stretched from the Mediterranean to South East Asia."<sup>70</sup> As the above discussion has demonstrated, Ulughkhānī's social and scholarly networks were similarly broader than Gujarat, and significantly shaped his account of the historical narrative he chose to write. Indeed, Subrahmanyam rightly cautions that the Meccan historians and intellectuals need to further be placed into conversation with other scholars of Arabic literary and historical works in places like Egypt and Syria as well as Gujarat.<sup>71</sup> The placement of Ulughkhānī's chronicle in its social and intellectual context also brings attention to the development of Arabic historical writing in places that often appear to be peripheral to the 'core' sites of Arabic historical and literary production.

In the context of the pre-dominant Indo-Persian historical writing, Ulughkhānī's text further allows us to tease out the relationship between Ulughkhānī's

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<sup>68</sup> al-Nahrawālī made at least two references to his participation in the 1536 mission in the record of his second journey from Mecca to Istanbul in 1556 (on a different diplomatic mission on behalf of the Mecca Sharifs). See Blackburn 2005: 219, 222.

<sup>69</sup> See Alam/Subrahmanyam 2017: 313.

<sup>70</sup> Subrahmanyam 2017: 40.

<sup>71</sup> Subrahmanyam 2017: 40.

Persian “sources” and the rendition of his own history in Arabic. It is significant to note that Ulughkhānī chose the genre of *tārīkh* over *tarājim* (also, *tazkira*) or biographical compendium to record the past. Biographical dictionaries had been a fairly popular form of history writing on both sides of the western Indian Ocean world. It was a form that Ulughkhānī was clearly familiar with (as his citations to the biographical compendia of Ibn Khallikān [d. 1282] and al-Sakhāwī [d. 1497] would indicate). Ulughkhānī's Ḥaḍramī contemporary in Ahmedabad al-'Aydārūs had similarly drawn upon this genre to record important personalities and events of the sixteenth century in his text *Al-Nūr al-Sāfir*. Ulughkhānī's decision to write a *tārīkh* perhaps reflects, albeit indirectly, on Ulughkhānī's self-representation as a historian who saw more in common with the conventional court-chroniclers. What framed his understanding and interpretation of the past, like the many Indo-Persian authors he had relied upon, were the successes and failures of individual rulers and their dynasties. While a detailed narratological study of Ulughkhānī's chronicle is beyond the scope of this article, a comparative micro-study of *Ẓafar al-wāliḥ* with the Persian *Mir'āt-i Sikandarī* by his contemporary Sikandar Manjhū who drew upon many of the same texts, can offer important insights into Ulughkhānī's unique engagement with the past. A recognition of the importance of Ulughkhānī's text beyond empirical corroboration to the *Mir'āt* and a recontextualization of Ulughkhānī's social and intellectual networks are important steps towards such a comparison.

The question of historical digressions that I have discussed in this article serves as one point of entry into re-evaluating Ulughkhānī's chronicle and its historical milieu. Without a fuller consideration of the author's expansive intellectual and social horizons, the so-called digressions in his Arabic history of Gujarat may seem unnecessary tangential discussions that interrupt the flow of his narrative. However, once we foreground Ulughkhānī's expansive networks, the same digressions illuminate what history writing looked from the vantage point of a scholar who spent the foundational years of his life in the Hejaz, navigated the scene of political opportunities and patronage in the Indian subcontinent with relative ease, and most importantly, stood in the crisscrossing scholarly and pilgrimage networks that had historically brought Gujarat closer to the Arabian Peninsula, but more so in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In many ways, Ulughkhānī writing his history in Arabic in the late sixteenth century was not an aberration for that time period, but an important contribution to the consolidation of Arabic historiographical tradition and literary networks in the Indian Ocean world.

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