Transoceanic Arabic Historiography –
Sharing the past of the 16th-century Western Indian Ocean

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Abstract

The early modern Western Indian Ocean constituted a dynamic space of human interaction. While scholarship has mostly concentrated on trade and commerce, recent studies have shifted the focus to social and cultural mobilities. This article argues for the emergence of a transoceanic Arabic historiography during the sixteenth century that reflected on the cultural integration of regions from Egypt, the Hijaz and Yemen in the Red Sea region, to Gujarat, the Deccan and Malabar in the subcontinent. Historians from the Persian cosmopolis further north observed a strong cultural connection between Arabophone communities of the Western Indian Ocean region. Manuscript collections in India show that Arabic historical texts from the Red Sea region had a readership in the subcontinent. Most importantly, mobile scholars began to compose Arabic histories while receiving patronage at the Western Indian courts. Scholarly mobilities fostered cultural exchanges, which increasingly built on a shared history, written, read and circulated in Arabic during the sixteenth century.

Keywords: Arabic mobilities, Persianate Cosmopolis, History writing, Manuscripts, Transoceanic

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Introduction

Oceans divide continents but they also connect their shores. Over the early modern period, maritime trade increasingly integrated the regions of the Western Indian Ocean. Spices were traded from Malabar in South India to Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula with the eventual terminus in Cairo further west.[1] Trade went hand in hand with political ambitions and fostered aspirations to transoceanic empire building and maritime exploration across a sea of exchanges that were otherwise determined by the monsoon.[2] Slaves from East Africa were shipped across the Ocean to serve in the armies of the subcontinent.[3] Pilgrims from around the Indian Ocean basin and beyond congregated in the Hijaz for the annual *ḥajj*.[4] Studies of the early modern Western Indian Ocean region have highlighted these multi-layered configurations of networks, connections and exchanges that spanned its waters.[5] They render the story of the Western Indian Ocean prone to partial analysis since its sheer scope defies an all-encompassing narrative. Instead of a *histoire totale*, a recently formulated 'new thalassology' has identified 'the spread of ideas and practices' as one among many promising future pathways of research.[6] In a similar vein, Sujit Sivasundaram emphasised that knowledge formation and cultural exchange have important transoceanic trajectories, which need to be integrated into the study of the Indian Ocean history.[7]

Maritime connections gave rise to cosmopolitan forms of writing history. This article argues that the sixteenth century saw the emergence of a new kind of transoceanic Arabic historiography. Highly mobile scholars used Arabic to write historical texts in the subcontinent. Their biographical works and chronicles borrowed from both the model of collective biographies, prevalent across the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea region, and forms of Persian history writing in the subcontinent and beyond. These historians held affiliations with courts in Gujarat

[1] Sebastian Prange, 'Measuring by the bushel, Reweighing the Indian Ocean Pepper Trade', *Historical Research,* 84, 224, 2011, pp. 212-235.
[2] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians Abroad. Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation', *Journal of Asian Studies, 51/2,* 1992, pp. 340-363. Giancarlo Casale, *The* Ottoman *Age of Exploration.* Oxford: OUP, 2010, pp. 4-8, 23-26. Sebastian Prange, *Monsoon Islam. Trade and Faith on the Medieval Malabar Coast,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
[3] Richard Eaton, 'Malik Ambar (1548–1626), The Rise and Fall of Military Slavery', in Meena Bhargava, ed., *Reader on History of India, 1550-1750*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010, pp. 121-47.
[4] Suraiya Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and sultans, The Hajj under the Ottomans, 1517-1683,* London and New York: Tauris, 1994. Michael Pearson, *Pilgrimage to Mecca, The Indian experience, 1500 – 1800,* Princeton: Wiener, 1996.
[5] Prange, *Monsoon Islam.* Markus Vink, 'Indian Ocean Studies and the 'new thalassology'', *Journal of Global History,* 2, 2007, pp. 41-62.
[6] Vink, 'Indian Ocean Studies and the 'new thalassology', p. 61.
[7] Sujit Sivasundaram, 'The Indian Ocean', in David Armitage, Alison Bashford, Sujit Sivasundaram, eds., *Oceanic Histories,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 31-61.

and the Deccan. However, they used Arabic to reflect on the history of events and communities within the Western Indian Ocean region and thereby integrated the history of this region into a transoceanic Arabic historiography.

Recently, Engseng Ho provided a crucial starting point for the emergence of a sixteenth-century transoceanic historiography in Arabic. According to him, an 'Islamic ecumene' emerged during the fifteenth-century reconfiguration of the Indian Ocean.[8] Commercial activities intensified and merchants started to realign trading networks along a circuit that centred on the Hijaz and Yemen in the west and Gujarat, the Konkan and Malabar coasts in the east. The rise of the Muzaffarid sultanate in Gujarat and the Bahmanī sultanate in the Deccan reinforced a transoceanic pull on mobile communities, who spotted professional opportunities through courtly patronage. Central to his work are the *sayyids* from the Hadramawt in Yemen, in particular the al-ʿAydarūs kinship group, who transformed their sacred lineage that went back to the Prophet Muḥammad into social capital, which served them as crucial currency among the subcontinent's elites. Ho's notion of 'local cosmopolitanisms' captures their ability to become rooted in different places while at the same time forging transient networks that allowed them to remain mobile. Members of the al-ʿAydarūs kinship group served as advisers, scholars and administrative personnel at royal courts and among learned communities.

From their individual life-trajectories these sayyids composed Arabic texts, 'travelling texts', which mirrored all the things that mattered for such highly exclusive, mobile communities: the tool of genealogy, which accommodated new family ties, courtly patronage in faraway places and learned affiliations through scholarly circles.[9] Ho offered a seminal analysis of one of the Arabic 'travelling texts', the *Nūr al-sāfir ʿan akhbār al-qarn al-ʿāshir* ('The travelling light regarding the stories of the tenth century [sixteenth century AD]'). ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydarūs penned it in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, in the early seventeenth century. In it, he combined the events and the people of the sixteenth century that he deemed worthy of remembrance. His centenary framework of selection had prominent precedents. He had learned this tradition of history writing from the scholarly communities of Syria, Egypt, Iraq and the Hijaz. They had employed this model to record, remember and respect members of a transregional learned community. Their authors

[8] Here and in the following see Engseng Ho, *The graves of Tarim. Genealogy and mobility across the Indian Ocean,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 99-105.
[9] Here and in the following Ibid., pp. 116-125.

established their own criteria of selection and thus the biographical dictionaries that emerged from such a practice are also highly personal stories reflecting their world views.[10] Al-ʿAydarūs' intellectual genealogy can be traced back to two famous historians of the Red Sea region. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī and his student Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī wrote similar biographical works about the eighth/fourteenth and the ninth/fifteenth centuries, respectively, while living in Egypt, Syria and the Hijaz. Thus, Ho's observed 'shift in East-West trade routes, from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea, [which] brought Hadramawt and Aden into greater contact with Egypt, the Hejaz, and India',[11] was paralleled by a spread in ideas and cultural practices in Arabic history writing from the Red Sea region to Gujarat.

The story from the perspective of the al-ʿAydarūs family and their texts is, however, only one partial way to tell it. There is a broader context of these transoceanic learned exchanges. The proliferation of Arabic historical writing followed the earlier spread of learned figures and the creation of scholarly networks. Movements between the subcontinent and the Red Sea region had gained pace during the fifteenth century. A growing community of Indians travelled to the Hijaz to study with prominent teachers, to receive teaching certificates and to copy books.[12] At the same time, more and more learned figures ventured the other way as well. Lavish courtly patronage at a growing number of courts offered them high rewards.[13] Several scholars chose al-Hind to pursue an academic career, to compose books and to teach. For example, the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad al-Damāmīnī (d. 828/1424) made his way from Egypt, via the Hijaz to Yemen and then further on to al-Hind in the fifteenth century.[14] He received patronage from several sultans in Gujarat and the Deccan. Moving from court to court he composed three commentaries on Arabic grammars initially written in the Red Sea region and Western Asia. Scholarly exchanges continued during the sixteenth century, as is evident from a work written by the Meccan historian Jārullāh b. Fahd.

[10] Konrad Hirschler, 'Studying Mamluk Historiography. From Source-Criticism to the Cultural Turn.' Stephan Conermann (ed.). *Ubi sumus? quo vademus? Mamluk studies, state of the art,* 2013, pp. 159-186.
[11] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, p. 99.
[12] Christopher Bahl, 'Reading *tarājim* with Bourdieu. Prosopographical traces of historical change in the South Asian migration to the late medieval Hijaz,' *Der Islam. Journal of the History and Culture of the Middle East*, 94/1, 2017, pp. 234-275.
[13] Christopher Bahl, 'Histories of Circulation. Sharing Arabic Manuscripts across the Western Indian Ocean, 1400-1700', PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2018, pp. 46-53.
[14] Ibid., pp. 76-153.

It reports the comings and goings of courtly embassies, precious cargo and 'savant-migrants' between the Hijaz and Gujarat.[15]

Sixteenth-century Arabic history writing across the Western Indian Ocean has to be studied within a broader geographical and empirical context. In the following, I will discuss the emergence of a transoceanic Arabic historiography from three perspectives. Firstly, I will zoom out and explore the traces of this transoceanic Arabic historiography as seen from the Persianate world, a transregional sphere of cultural influence that stretched from Anatolia via Iran, Central and South Asia to Southeast Asia. Specific to the current purpose, I will focus on the *Haft iqlīm* ('The seven climes'), a sixteenth century-Persian work by Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī, a scholar from Safavid Iran.[16] From his vantage point in the 'Persian Cosmopolis',[17] a transoceanic entanglement based on Arabic exchanges was observable. At the same time, this text can also serve as a starting point to discuss important entanglements between Arabic and the Persian circulations, the flows between them and the limits of exchange. Transoceanic Arabic history writing emerged next to a diverse Persian historiography that had taken shape over the medieval period and provided the form and means in history writing at Muslim courts.[18] Persian universal chronicles and histories played a central role from the Mughal North, across the Deccan and further south to the principalities of South India.[19] The elite groups at courts in the subcontinent and the wider Persianate world constituted the main audiences of these works.[20]

Secondly, a transoceanic Arabic historiography did not emerge out of thin air. Contemporary manuscript collections in India hold a diverse corpus of Arabic historical texts from the early modern and modern periods. Significantly, almost all the manuscripts that are held in the most prominent collections in Rampur (Uttar Pradesh), Patna (Bihar), Kolkata (West Bengal) and

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[15] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'A View from Mecca: Notes on Gujarat, the Red Sea, and the Ottomans, 1517-39/923-946 H', *Modern Asian Studies*, 51, 2 2017, pp. 268-352; pp. 286-290.

[16] Ahmed Razi, *Tazkere-ye Haft Eqlim (Chronicles of the Seven Climes). 3 Vols.* S. Taheri (Hazrat) (ed.). Tehran: Soroush Press, 1999.

[17] Derived from Pollock's and Ricci's work, which will be discussed below, the term 'Persian Cosmopolis' has proliferated in South Asian scholarship more recently. See for example Richard Eaton, 'The Persian Cosmopolis (900-1900) and the Sanskrit Cosmopolis (400-1400)', in: Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf (eds.), *The Persianate World, Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, Leiden: Brill 2018, pp. 63-83.

[18] Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India, Studies in Indo-Muslim Historical Writing*, London: Luzac, 1960.

[19] Stephan Conermann, *Historiographie Als Sinnstiftung, Indo-persische Geschichtsschreibung während der Mogulzeit (932-1118/1516-1707)*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002. David Shulman, Vēlcēru Nārāyaṇarāvu, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time, Writing History in South India, 1600-1800*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

[20] Roy Fischel, 'Origin Narratives, Legitimacy, and the Practice of Cosmopolitan Language in the Early Modern Deccan, India', *Purushartha, 33*, 2015, pp. 71-95.

Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh/Telangana) – to be discussed below – are concerned with the history of the Red Sea region, especially Egypt, the Hijaz and Yemen. Ownership statements, reading notes and other traces of perusal and transmission demonstrate the wide circulation of these Arabic historical manuscripts among readers in South Asia. With these manuscripts, it becomes possible to look at the transoceanic cultural references from the reception side of historical texts, and thus the aspect of *reading* in a transoceanic Arabic historiography.

Thirdly, during the sixteenth century, the relative diffusion of Arabic scholarly traditions and literacy provided a conducive environment for the writing of Arabic historical texts. Other historical texts survive, some of them previously studied for their own merit and others essentially untouched. I argue that the Arabic historical texts from the sixteenth-century subcontinent have to be read together to consider their accumulative significance: a deeper historical consciousness and reflection about the transoceanic connections that linked communities from both sides of the sea. While mobile historians certainly had an eye on the South Asian audience they significantly aimed at a broader transoceanic narrative and readership. Arabic historical texts from Gujarat to the Deccan and Malabar are of importance because they transcend courtly and regional contexts to engage with the pasts of transoceanic communities. I will offer a reading of the transoceanic cultural references of the texts – both in terms of their story of composition, and the contents – which reflect on the historical connections of South Asia with the Red Sea region. Thus, with this set of texts, the focus will be on the *writing* of Arabic historical texts and their proliferation among communities of Western India during the sixteenth century. They are Ḥājjī al-Dabīr al-Ulughkhānī's, *Ẓafar al-wālih bi-Muẓaffar wa ālihi* ('The victory of the fervent concerning Muẓaffar and his family') and ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydarūs' *al-Nūr al-sāfir ʿan akhbār al-qarn al-ʿāshir* ('The unveiled light concerning the news about the tenth century') for Gujarat, Ibn Shadqam al-Madanī's *Zahr al-riyāḍ wa-zulal al-ḥiyāḍ* ('The flower of the garden and the pure water of the cisterns') for the Deccan and Zayn al-Dīn al-Malībārī's *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn fī baʿd aḥwāl al-burtukāliyyīn* ('The gem of the proponents of Jihād concerning some of the news about the Portuguese') for Malabar.[21]

[21] Al-Malībārī, MS IO Islamic 2807e, British Library, London. Ibn Shadqam al-Madanī, 3 vols, Vol I: Ms 269, National Library, Kolkata. Vol II: Ms 4428, Rampur Raza Library, Rampur, Vol III: Ms Delhi Arabic 1329, British Library, London; Ulughkhānī 1910, 1921, 1928; ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Shaykh al-ʿAydarūs, *Al-Nūr al-Sāfir ʿan akhbār al-qarn al-ʿāshir,* Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2001.

Compared to a substantial corpus of Persian chronicles, prosopographies and hagiographical works, the transoceanic Arabic history corpus seems rather small. Yet, small does not mean insignificant. Taken together the texts of this Arabic corpus reflect on particular confluences in the sixteenth-century Western Indian Ocean. This article begins the task of exploring and delineating them.

Excavating an Arabic transoceanic connection – Rāzī's 'Seven Climes'

In the late sixteenth century, historians in the Persian cosmopolis of Iran and Northern India were aware of the Arabic maritime network that spanned the Red Sea region and Western India.[22] Scholars who inhabited the Persianate worlds imagined these cultural links in the context of geographical descriptions in narrative texts. In 1594, Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī, a scholar from Safavid Iran, finished the composition *Haft iqlīm* ('The seven climes') after a final editing period of six years.[23] In this Persian composition he combined topographical, biographical and historical aspects of the world known to him.[24] He divided this world up into seven geographical zones or climes (*aqālīm*, sg. *iqlīm*).[25] The first clime included Yemen, Nubia and China. The second reached from Mecca to Hormuz, and via Gujarat to the Deccan. The third extended from Iran and Iraq to Northern India. The fourth focused on Iran and present-day Afghanistan. The fifth consisted of broader Transoxiana. The sixth stretched across Turkestan and the Russian steppes to Anatolia and the seventh listed the Slavs and ended with the mythical figures Gog and Magog.

Such a sevenfold conceptual geography had its predecessor in earlier periods. Medieval Arab geographers developed different but often very persistent notions, which structured their worlds.[26] In the Abbasid period, for example, geographers and littérateurs made sense of increasing interactions with ethnicities and cultures from East to West and North to South, they

[22] For a recent summary on this maritime network Jos Gommans, 'Continuity and Change in the Indian Ocean Basin' in Jeremy Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, eds., *The Cambridge World History. Vol. 6. The Construction of a Global World, 1400-1800 CE, Part 1: Foundations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 182-209.
[23] Evgenli Berthels, 'Rāzī', *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition.* Brill Online. Consulted online on 28 May 2018 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6269, 2018.
[24] Razi, *Tazkere-ye Haft Eqlim*. I thank Francesca Orsini for providing me with an unpublished paper on '"Significant geographies", In lieu of "world" literature', presented in Paris on 5th February, 2016, and for making me aware of this geographical treatise, which she mentioned in her elaboration of conceptual and imaginative geographies.
[25] For the following summary see Berthels, 'Rāzī'.
[26] Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The myth of continents: A critique of metageography.* Berkeley, CA: London: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 46-47.

would establish links between a climate zone and its inhabitants, and thereby also provide justifications for the enslavement of certain ethnic groups and the cultural dominance of others.[27] According to medieval ethnographic works it was the climate zone that determined the cultural characteristics of peoples living in it and consequently structured the populated parts of the world in a hierarchical manner.[28] Geographers not only described the world in ways comprehensible to their audiences. They also provided a culturally commensurable version of it by reflecting on what they knew about it.

Naturally, this was also the case with Rāzī's work; however, his mental map differed remarkably in comparison with previous geographical divisions of the world. His underlying conceptions cut across several seemingly naturally perceived areas, at least in comparison to geographical treatises from the medieval period.[29] Regions such as Iran and al-Hind were broken up to create new cultural zones that made more sense to him.[30] Each of his climes contained a succession of entries on the cities, regions and personalities which made up the social fabric of that geographical zone. The fourth zone traditionally represented the central of the seven climes,[31] usually the place of origin of the person who had penned the treatise and therefore the most elevated and prestigious of the seven zones.[32] As in earlier treatises, the location of the fourth zone, its climate and its significance as the earliest habitation of mankind distinguished this area from the other climes.[33] Temperament, nature, knowledge and virtue rendered its inhabitants superior to their neighbours. At the same time, this clime seemed to describe a central part of the early modern Persianate world, which Rāzī and his family of literary fame inhabited.[34] Judging from the enumeration of regions and cities, the fourth clime consisted of the core cultural centres in Persian history such as Khurasan and Tabriz and as well as places which became prominent due to their famous learned men, such as Astarabad and Gilan. By grouping certain places and their people

[27] Susanne Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation: arabische Schriftsteller Abū ʿUṯmān al-Ǧāḥiẓ (gest. 868) über die Afrikaner, Perser und Araber in der islamischen Gesellschaft*, Freiburg: Schwarz, 1979. Andre Miquel 'Iḳlīm', *EI2*, Consulted online on 18 May 2017. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3519.
[28] Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, New York, 1990.
[29] Miquel, 'Iḳlīm'.
[30] Razi, *Tazkere-ye Haft Eqlim*, vol. I, pp. 29, 83-515 and 29-82.
[31] Miquel 'Iḳlīm'.
[32] Razi, *Tazkere-ye Haft Eqlim*, vol. II, pp. 518-1441.
[33] Razi, *Tazkere-ye Haft Eqlim*, vol. II, p. 517.
[34] Berthels, 'Rāzī'. Razi, *Tazkere-ye Haft Eqlim*, vol. II, pp. 518-1441.

within one clime, Rāzī ordered the world in terms commensurable to him. Each zone represented an internal cultural affinity as its raison d'être.

Rāzī's second clime imagined an Arabic connection between the Red Sea region and Western India as a discernible cultural zone. This clime consisted of the Hijaz with Mecca and Medina on the Arabian Peninsula and the port city of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.[35] It then moved across the *baḥr al-hind* (Indian Ocean) to link these places with the historic region of the Deccan, subdivided further into Ahmadnagar, Dawlatabad, Telangana and adding Ahmadabad and Surat in Gujarat.[36] In the introduction to this section, Rāzī provided the defining outer limits of this space:[37] it stretched from China, across India, and Iran into Africa. It was made up of 88 cities, most of them located in the Arab lands. Due to the religious importance of Mecca, the seat of the Hijaz (*çūn kursī-yi Ḥijāz Makka ast*), this city provided the starting point in the Western part and connected ultimately with the towns, forts and people of the Deccan plateau. Therefore, I suggest a reading of his compilation of these places and people in the second geographical zone as an expression of underlying close cultural and social ties. While the reason for this geographical arrangement is not elaborated further, this second clime can still be treated as an analogous case to his own fourth zone, albeit on a lower rank in his hierarchical conception.

Rāzī's observation makes it possible to excavate and set into context an Arabic transoceanic connection. This maritime Arabic connection at times rivalled, complemented or simply paralleled the Persian cosmopolis.[38] Persian was a crucial transregional idiom of prestige during the early modern period.[39] The spread of Persian described different 'significant geographies' and underpinned forms of cultural conduct from Southeast Asia to the Persian Gulf.[40] Connections and exchanges between the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal worlds were maintained

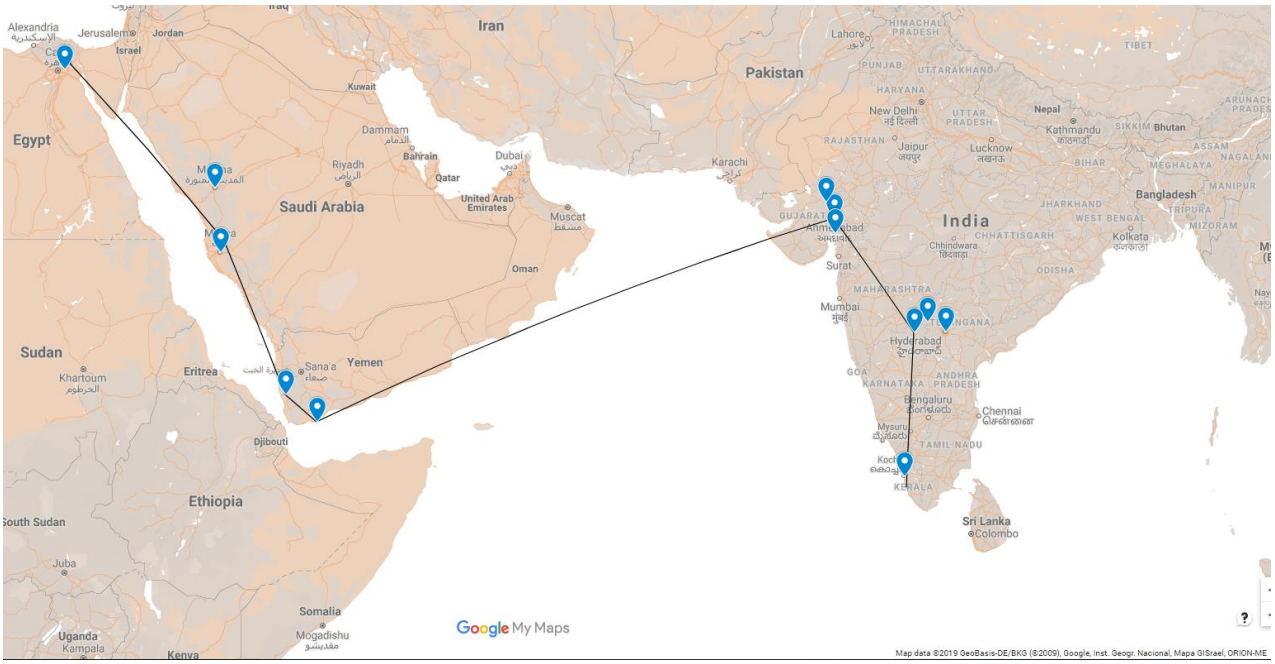
[35] Razi, *Tazkere-ye Haft Eqlim,* vol. I, pp. 29-82.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., vol. I, p. 29.
[38] Gommans, 'Continuity and Change in the Indian Ocean Basin'.
[39] The field of early modern Persianate studies is vast. See for example Muzaffar Alam, *The languages of political Islam, India, 1200-1800,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Nile Green, *Making Space, Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters. Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia,* Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2012.
[40] See Orsini, '"Significant geographies"'. For a recent assessment of studies on the Persianate world see Mana Kia and Afshin Marashi, 'Introduction: After the Persianate', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 36, 3, 2016, pp. 379-383.

largely through Persian.[41] For example, Muzaffar Alam's examination of Persian *akhlāq* texts on ethics and statecraft in the subcontinent shows the complex and long-lasting spread of political and cultural norms from the Persian Gulf region to Central Asia and Northern India.[42] Persian became the political language at Muslim courts throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Work on intra-Asian elite migration has demonstrated how Iranian groups combined the skills of trade and state-building to move between Iran and several courts in the Deccan during the seventeenth century.[43] Most significantly, Persian was quasi omnipresent when it came to history writing, at least in 'Islamicate'[44] contexts of this period. Courtly elites sponsored Persian transregional history writing from Iran to Central Asia, North India, to the Deccan and South India.[45] Rāzī was culturally rooted in this Persian cosmopolis and probably visited India, where his cousin served in different posts under the Mughal emperor Akbar and his successor Jahangir.[46] Rāzī worked in a social environment that was characterised by professional mobility. He provided a commentary to such geographical proximities and notions as mobile social groups experienced them during the sixteenth century. Thus, his delineation of the second clime makes sense as an imagined Arabic connection between the Red Sea region and Western India, grounded in a reflection of prevailing social mobilities and cultural exchanges across the Western Indian Ocean.

Rāzī's second clime or Western Indian Ocean connection also paralleled an *Arabic cosmopolis* of literary networks further south, which likewise stretched across core regions of the Indian Ocean world during the early modern period.[47] Ronit Ricci studied the transmission of *The Book of One Thousand Questions* – essentially a conversion story structured in a list of questions the Prophet Muhammad was asked by a Jewish leader – from Arabia, via South India to Southeast

[41] Ali Anooshahr, 'Shirazi Scholars and the Political Culture of Sixteenth-Century Indo-Persian World', *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 51, 3, 2014, pp. 331-352; Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*. Francis Robinson, 'Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems', *Journal of Islamic Studies 8/2*, 1997, pp. 151-184.
[42] For this and the following Alam, *The Languages of political Islam*.
[43] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians Abroad. Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation', *Journal of Asian Studies, 51/2,* 1992, pp. 340-363.
[44] The term 'Islamicate' was originally coined by Marshall Hodgson and principally denotes a 'culture centred on a lettered tradition (...) shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims', which distinguishes it from 'Islamic' as pertaining to the sphere of religious belief. Thus, the term emphasises the cultural elements of the Islamic traditions. Marshall Hodgson, *The venture of Islam. Vol. 1. The Classical Age of Islam.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974: 56-60.
[45] This is implicit in the argument in Stephen Dale, *The Muslim empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals,* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
[46] Berthels, Rāzī.
[47] For this and the following Ronit Ricci, *Islam translated, Literature, conversion, and the Arabic cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Asia. She analysed the transregional dissemination of this Arabic text through processes of 'translation' and 'conversion' with 'tellings' produced in Tamil, Malay and Javanese. Thereby, she built on Sheldon Pollock's concept of the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis', who initially used this term to interrogate the dominant transregional discourse in Sanskrit that shaped political and cultural formations in South Asia during the first millenium.[48] Ricci employs the overarching notion of an *Arabic cosmopolis* to trace the emergence of a shared canon of texts along literary networks. This Arabic cosmopolis was 'defined by language, literature, and religion', and thereby represented a 'translocal Islamic sphere' that ultimately encompassed communities from the Arabian Peninsula, across South India and into mainland and maritime Southeast Asia.[49]



Map data: Google, My Maps

Map – Arabic cultural connection across the early modern Western Indian Ocean – from Egypt to the Hijaz, Yemen and to Gujarat, the Deccan and Malabar across the sea.

The presented variety of *cosmopoli* raises the issue of the relative use of Arabic and Persian across the Indian Ocean world and beyond more generally. Different strands of scholarship offered different answers to this. Marshall Hodgson posited Arabic and Persian as two increasingly marked

[48] Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men, Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India.* Berkeley [et al.]: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 12-19.
[49] Ricci, *Islam translated*, p. 4.

'geographical zones' from the thirteenth century onwards, roughly congruent with the Arab Middle East and North Africa on the one hand, as well as Anatolia across Iran, Central Asia and South and Southeast Asia on the other.[50] Especially Shahab Ahmed's magisterial *tour de force* through the 'Balkans-to-Bengal complex', which was dominated by a widely circulated 'Persian canon of literature' and thus constituted 'a common paradigm of Islamic life and thought',[51] sparks the question of where Arabic fits into the Indian Ocean world, what cultural role it played and for whom. Previously, it was often assumed that the uses of Arabic in South Asia were restricted to religious rituals and that it merely served as a tool for the purpose of studying Islam.[52] This was reinforced by juxtaposing Arabic's religious significance with the secular and cultural importance of Persian. Going beyond this dichotomy, Ricci's cosmopolis included vernacularized languages which became Arabicised over time.[53] This also implied that Arabic was more prevalent across regions from East Africa, to South India and into Southeast Asia.[54] Michael Pearson considered Arabic as a crucial lingua franca of communication in maritime contexts from the Swahili coast, to South India and into Southeast Asia.[55] He also pointed out that in the fourteenth century, the famous traveller Ibn Battuta recognised the prevalence of different Arabic idioms across these oceanic worlds, next to the practice of a higher Arabic idiom by some social groups. For the region of Malabar, Sebastian Prange provided a detailed and vivid picture of Arabic contacts with the Red Sea region, which built on the *longue durée* of trade, political patronage and religious networks.[56] Then again Persian served as an important language of exchange across the Bay of Bengal and became vernacularized across different languages.[57] At the same time, Gagan Sood has shown how vernacularized forms of Persian provided the medium for epistolary communication between eighteenth-century South Asia and the Persian Gulf region.[58]

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[50] Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*, p. 293.
[51] Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 32, 38 and 53.
[52] Tahera Qutbuddin, 'Arabic in India. A Survey and Classification of Its Uses, Compared with Persian'. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127/3, 2007, pp. 315-338.
[53] Ricci, *Islam translated*.
[54] Gommans, 'Continuity and Change'.
[55] For this and the following Michael Pearson, 'Communication in the early modern Indian Ocean world,' *Transforming Cultures*, 4/2, 2009, pp. 23-27. http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/TfC
[56] Prange, *Monsoon Islam*.
[57] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History, From the Tagus to the Ganges*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 76-79.
[58] Gagan Sood, *India and the Islamic heartlands: An eighteenth-century world of circulation and exchange.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

As will be shown below, Arabic historical writing emerged where Arabic scholarship had made a substantial landfall. By the fifteenth century, Arabic scholarship began to play an integral part in Islamicate court cultures and their learned communities in Gujarat, the Deccan and Malabar, although the extent of this part has not been researched sufficiently yet.[59] What comes up repeatedly, however, is that when it comes to Islamicate scholarship, Arabic and Persian often went hand in hand. Prominent sources, such as the sixteenth-century historian Firishta of the Deccan, referred to the establishment of *madāris* (sg. *madrasa*), 'institutions of higher learning', across the medieval Deccan to promote both Persian and Arabic for the teaching of a diverse set of Islamicate subjects.[60] Recent scholarship by Samira Sheikh named various Arabic scholars who contributed to the flourishing learned culture at the court of the Gujarati sultans, whose chronicles were written almost without exception in Persian.[61] As the recent meticulous research by Jyoti Gulati Balachandran has shown, learned groups beyond the courts in fifteenth-century Gujarat employed both Arabic and Persian in their textual traditions.[62] These were essentially community building exercises intended to anchor growing Muslim communities in a spiritual geography, erudite Islamicate tradition and sacred geography. Similarly, in China, Islamicate scholarship both in Arabic and in Persian provided the foundation for the elaboration of a Chinese Islamic canon – *Han Kitab* – among scholarly networks of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries.[63]

This previous scholarship also implied that questions of sacredness, cultural heritage, language policies and personal inclinations played an important role in the preference and use of Arabic and Persian. What this article explores is how such preferences changed as cultures changed over time. The subsequent study of the transoceanic reading and writing of Arabic historical texts builds on this diverse scholarship to emphasise historical contingencies over normative preconceptions. Tracing practices and texts in their changing contexts can paint an intricate picture of when and how the uses of Arabic became amplified, the connections people could forge through it and the meaning-making processes that it could thereby shape.

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[59] For a recent study of Arabic influences in Malabar in the context of Islamic law see Mahmood Kooriadathodi, 'Cosmopolis of law: Islamic legal ideas and texts across the Indian Ocean and Eastern Mediterranean Worlds', PhD thesis, Institute for History, Humanities, Leiden, 2016.
[60] N. Ansari, 'Bahmanid Dynasty', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1988, Vol. III, Fasc. 5, pp. 494-499.
[61] Samira Sheikh, *Forging a Region. Sultans, Traders, and Pilgrims in Gujarat, 1200-1500*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 205-206.
[62] Jyoti Balachandran, 'Texts, Tombs and Memory: The Migration, Settlement and Formation of a Learned Muslim Community in Fifteenth-Century Gujarat', PhD thesis, Los Angeles: ProQuest, 2012.
[63] Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad, A Cultural History of Muslims in late Imperial China*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Reading Arabic histories in early modern South Asia

The exploration of a transoceanic Arabic historiography can start with those who read historical texts in the early modern period. The reception side as well offers a more complex picture of the cultural importance of Arabic across the Ocean. One way to approach reading habits of Arabophone audiences is to study which Arabic historical texts circulated in South Asia during this period. Scholarship on European book cultures provides meticulous studies on the history of reading, and how specific individuals perused their books.[64] Manuscript versions of Arabic historical texts can be approached in a similar vein. To begin with, it is necessary to survey Arabic manuscript collections in the subcontinent. To my knowledge, the corpus of Arabic historical texts in manuscript collections in Hyderabad, Kolkata, Patna and Rampur has not been studied yet. Manuscript notes, such as statements of scribes, most importantly the colophon at the end of a work stating its completion, reading notes and ownership marks are an invaluable record to assess the nuts-and-bolts of reading tastes and practices.[65] However, in the cases of Arabic histories this record is more often fragmentary than not. Ultimately, manuscript notes can only indicate a general interest of South Asian communities in Arabic histories and tehreby serve as a starting point to explore individual cases of reception through reading notes and references.

Ibn Khallikān's biographical dictionary *Wafayāt al-aʿyān* dominates the collections of Arabic historical works across India. Several manuscripts of his text survive in libraries in Hyderabad, Patna and Rampur.[66] Since the evolution of the collections in all three cities are complex and as yet almost unstudied, an essential aspect of the manuscripts' circulation histories is missing. Therefore, it is difficult to pin down where, how and among whom these manuscripts circulated after they had been copied. What the actual manuscript versions show, though, is that scribes continuously copied and recopied Ibn Khallikan's famous biographical compendium over the early modern period. Copyists produced both Rampur versions during the sixteenth century.[67]

[64] Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, '"Studied for Action": How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy', *Past and Present*, 129/1, 1990, pp. 30-78.
[65] Andreas Goerke and Konrad Hirschler, 'Introduction. Manuscript notes as documentary sources', in Andreas Goerke and Konrad Hirschler, eds., *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*, Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag (Beiruter Texte und Studien, Bd. 129), 2011, pp. 9-20.
[66] See for example MS Taʾrīkh 994, APOML, Hyderabad; MS Arabic 650, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public library, Patna. Khuda Bakhsh Catalogue; and two copies from Rampur MS 4424-4425 and MS 4426-4427, Rampur Raza Library, Rampur. See also the respective catalogue entries.
[67] Rampur MS 4424-4425 and MS 4426-4427, Rampur Raza Library, Rampur.

Another version survives in the Khuda Bakhsh in Patna, which bears the seal of the Mughal Emperor Shāh Jahān.[68]

The South Asian circulation of Ibn Khallikan's biographical work is correlated with the usage of this text as a model for Arabic history writing in South Asia. As will be discussed in the following section in more detail, Ibn Khallikan appears in different ways in the sixteenth-century transoceanic histories from Gujarat and the Deccan. In Ḥājjī al-Dabīr's text, Ibn Khallikān shows up in a historical digression, as a famous biographer from the Red Sea region. Ibn Shadqam partly continued and partly reworked Ibn Khallikān's biographical work. He exhibited how influential Ibn Khallikan's conception of writing a collective biography was until the sixteenth century. I suggest that Ibn Khallikan's centrality in the transoceanic history writing projects of the sixteenth century reflects on his work's status as crucial historical reading material.

Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-aʿyān* functioned as a 'prior text' for the pursuit of Arabic history writing.[69] Ricci employed this concept and phenomenon in her analysis of translation practices across Southeast Asia.[70] This phenomenon describes the process by which 'familiar stories and characters [are used] to introduce new ideas and narratives'.[71] In other words, prior texts become manifest in the textual relationships between an earlier 'text' and its reworking in a different socio-cultural environment. Thereby, they help to establish localised histories for groups, which are simultaneously shared by translocal communities.[72] It was because Ibn Khallikān's presentation of a favourable Muslim community made for good reading across communities of the Western Indian Ocean that it was conducive to transoceanic history writing exercises.

Other Arabic historical texts rose to fame across the subcontinent as well and taken together they read like a historical library of the Red Sea region. Most of them are concerned with the regions of the Red Sea, from Egypt, to the Hijaz and Yemen.[73] Compared to other genres, not many manuscripts survive from this period. Those that survive are almost all copies from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. For example, the history of Egypt was disseminated through the work *al-Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara fī taʾrīkh al-miṣr wa-l-qāhira* ('The excellence in lectures

[68] MS Arabic 650, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public library, Patna, fol. 270v. See Khuda Bakhsh Catalogue.
[69] Andreas Becker, *Beyond Translation, Essays toward a Modern Philology*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.
[70] Ronit Ricci, 'Islamic Literary Networks in South and Southeast Asia', *Journal of Islamic Studies,* 21, 1, 2010, pp. 1-28, and *Islam Translated*.
[71] Ricci, *Islam Translated*, pp. 246-247.
[72] Ibid., pp. 248-249.
[73] This is based on an examination of libraries in Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Patna and Rampur.

regarding the history of Egypt and Cairo').[74] The famous fifteenth-century historian Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī compiled this text mainly based on biographies of people that he considered important to the history of Egypt. At the same time, transoceanic Arabic histories also reached a readership in the subcontinent. The previously mentioned fifteenth-century biographical dictionary by al-Sakhāwī, the *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, survives in manuscript versions as well as in abridgments and summaries in collections from Gujarat to Patna.[75] The sixteenth-century transoceanic history by al-ʿAydarūs, *al-Nūr al-sāfir,* was copied across the early modern subcontinent.[76]

To dig deeper, a case study from the Khuda Bakhsh Library in Patna can exemplify the extent to which South Asian readers engaged with Arabic histories of the Red Sea region. The text is one of the famous fifteenth-century histories of Medina entitled *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā* by ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Samhūdī (d. 911/1506) and consists of an abridgement of his larger work on Medina.[77] The version at hand preserves al-Samhūdī's statement of completion at the end of the text, the initial compositional colophon. The scribe added a Persian completion note below stating that he copied this text in the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat in 1015/1606.[78] More importantly, the same scribe (according to a similar hand) seems to have perused this Arabic manuscript thoroughly and added an abundance of informed comments and extracts from other works in the margins. Firstly, there are several correction notes and lexicographical annotations, which demonstrate traces of the reader's philological encounter with the text.[79] Secondly, the reader placed *qif*-notes (the imperative of *waqafa*, meaning 'stop' and addressed to the person reading the text) in the margins of the manuscript folia. They function as highlighters of sections labelling them for future reference. In particular, his *qif*-notes mark references to the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and further historical information on this highly venerated place.[80] Thirdly, the reader was interested in other religious aspects of Medina as a holy Islamic city as well. For

[74] MS 4395, MS 4396 and MS 4397, Rampur Raza Library, Rampur and MS Arabic 1071, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna. See Khuda Bakhsh Catalogue.
[75] ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ḥalabī, *al-Qabas al-Ḥāwī li-ghurarī ḍawʾ al-Sakhāwī,* MS Arabic 657 and 658, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna. See Khuda Bakhsh Catalogue; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, MS 700, Pīr Muḥammad Shāh Dargāh Library, Ahmedabad; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Miṣrī, *al-Nūr al-sāṭiʿ min al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, MS 4431, Rampur Raza Library.
[76] For example, MS Arabic 659, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna.
[77] MS Arabic 1091, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna. For al-Samhūdī Harry Munt, 'Mamluk Historiography Outside of Egypt and Syria: ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Samhūdī and his Histories of Medina', *Der Islam,* 92, 2, 2015, pp. 413–441.
[78] MS Arabic 1091, Khuda Bakhsh Library, Patna, fol. 435v.
[79] Ibid., fol. 10-13.
[80] Ibid., fol. 139re, 212v and 260v.

example, he marked a section with a *qif*-note, which dealt with the superior quality of performing the fast (*ṣiyām*) in Medina.[81] These examples of reading notes probably only represent a partial and incomplete record of the reader's engagement with the text, and more specifically one that was intended to help with future inquiries into the history of Medina. Nonetheless, this case study gives a sense of the profound interest that a reader had in the Islamic past and religious significance of the Hijaz. It thereby stands as an example of how deeply Arabic history writing concerned with the Red Sea region percolated across learned communities of Gujarat.

Arabic history writing in sixteenth-century South Asia

Mobile communities and literary networks have become crucial for studying social and cultural dynamics of transoceanic entanglements. What is more, the people involved left behind several Arabic historical texts, which reflect on their place in the Western Indian Ocean region. Their texts help us understand how they perceived their transoceanic world, its past and its people. In the following, I will study the emergence of a transoceanic Arabic historiography as a corpus of texts and a scholarly practice. I argue that the sixteenth century witnessed a form of Arabic history writing that linked people, places and practices of the Red Sea region and Western India. The sixteenth-century Western Indian Ocean connections created a social and cultural constellation in which Arabic as a scholarly idiom of Islamicate prestige became conducive to the pursuit of history writing among mobile groups. They traversed an Arabic cosmopolitan world reaching from Egypt in the Red Sea region via the Hijaz and Yemen, to Gujarat, the Deccan and Malabar across the sea. In their historical texts they reflected on the shared past of this transoceanic space, its communities and cultural traditions.

Gujarat

In sixteenth-century Gujarat, Ḥājjī al-Dabīr Muḥammad al-Nahrwālī al-Makkī al-Āṣafī Ulūghkhānī's (b. 1540) *Ẓafar al-wālih bi-Muẓaffar wa ālihi* ('The victory of the fervent concerning Muẓaffar and his family') offers a crucial case of Arabic history writing.[82] Yet, there are several problems with this text to begin with. So far, only one manuscript of this text has been

[81] Ibid., fol. 24v.
[82] For this and the following see ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar Ulughkhānī, *An Arabic history of Gujarat: Zafar ul-wálih bi Muzaffar wa álih / edited from the unique and autograph copy in the Library of the Calcutta Madrasah by E. Denison Ross*, London: J. Murray, 1910, vol. I, pp. v-ix.

located, in the Calcutta Madrasa, and this version, incomplete at the beginning and the end, serves as the commonly used edition. Since an introduction and other details about the work's history of composition are missing, not much is known about how the author presented his relationship with his text. Also, the date of composition is not clear, but conjecture puts it in the early seventeenth century.[83] Based on the condition in which the manuscript was found, scholarship has speculated that it remained a draft throughout the author's life and did not circulate widely.[84]

Ḥājjī al-Dabīr's biography linked his personal fortunes and background closely to the Hijaz. He was of Meccan origin and his father was responsible for the religious endowments (*awqāf*, sg. *waqf*) of the sultan of Gujarat in Mecca.[85] Ḥājjī al-Dabīr returned to Cambay in 1554, where he belonged to the scribal service elites in the sultanate of Gujarat and worked for different nobles.[86] After the Mughal conquest of Gujarat in 1572/73 his father was tasked with the responsibility of administering the Mughal's religious endowments in Mecca and Medina. Ḥājjī al-Dabīr accompanied him to deliver the necessary funds. After his father's death he moved on to serve a different courtier in Khandesh, a region of the northern Deccan.

Thus, Ḥājjī al-Dabīr was well established in Arabic elite networks in Gujarat and across the Sea. Apart from his Hijazī background he seemed to have retained strong personal ties with Mecca while living in Ahmedabad. In Gujarat, he belonged to the service elites of the sultanate. However, his family looked back on a long scholarly tradition. They could boast of scholarly successes in Patan, where they had held offices as muftis, judges and teachers in the past.[87] Patan, also *al-Nahrwāla* in the Arabic and Persian sources, hence the element al-Nahrwālī in his name, was a scholarly centre in Gujarat famous for the proliferation of learned figures. For example, the sixteenth-century historian, traveller and Meccan ambassador to the Ottoman court Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrwālī hailed from an important service family in Patan and wrote both historical accounts of the Ottoman Yemen and Mecca in the Hijaz.[88] Similar to Ḥājjī al-Dabīr, Quṭb al-Dīn also had a

[83] Ibid. vol. I, p. viii, and vol. II, pp. ix-x.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, p. 105.
[86] For this and the following Peter Jackson, 'Ḥāǧǧī al-Dabīr', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Consulted online on 05 October 2017 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8583.. See also Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, 122.
[87] Ulughkhānī, *An Arabic History of Gujarat*, vol. II, pp. xx-xxiv.
[88] Richard Blackburn, 'Introduction', Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Nahrwālī, *Journey to the Sublime Porte: The Arabic memoir of a Sharifian agent's diplomatic mission to the Ottoman Imperial Court in the era of Suleyman the Magnificent; the relevant text from Quṭb al-Dīn al-Nahrawālī's al-Fawāʾid al-sanīyah fī al-riḥlah al-Madanīyah wa al-Rūmīyah.* Beirut and Würzburg: Orient-Institut, Ergon Verlag, 2005, pp. xi-xiv.

strong relationship with the Hijaz, where he refined his education in Islamicate subjects during his extensive stays.

It is Ḥājjī al-Dabīr's transregional connection that helps to explain why he chose Arabic to write his history. As pointed out before, in the South Asian context a Persian historiography flourished at the courts in Gujarat, the Mughal worlds and the Deccan. Arabic represented a medium through which he could relate to other audiences. His historical text mixes political chronologies, biographical entries of famous personages and personal information.[89] It is split into two sections. The first section entails the history of the sultans of Gujarat in the form of a succession of sultans interspersed with further biographical entries and other digressions. The second section contains the succession of the north Indian Muslim dynasties, ending with the Mughals. Here the similarities with frameworks of universal histories in the Indo-Persian historiography are striking. These histories generally accounted for the proliferation of Muslim dynasties from Muhammad to the authors' own times.[90] Although it is impossible to provide an exhaustive analysis here, the Indo-Persian historiographical tradition seemed to have served Ḥājjī al-Dabīr as a blueprint for his own history.

Historical digressions, which pervade the larger narrative mélange of dynastic succession and biographies of his text, link his story back to the Red Sea. His historical radius extended beyond South Asia. For example, he integrated sections about the history of the town Zabīd in Yemen, which by the fifteenth century was a crucial transit point for scholars moving between the Hijaz and the subcontinent.[91] In the same vein, he included a biographical entry on the famous thirteenth-century biographer and historian from Egypt and Syria, Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282).[92] Ḥājjī al-Dabīr gave a short summary of his professional life and enumerated his scholarly skills, especially his qualities as a historian, which are manifest in his work *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa- anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān* ('The deceased of the nobles and news about the sons of time').[93] In this biographical compilation Ibn Khallikān brought together famous figures from across the Islamicate world to expound their qualities, deeds and virtues.[94] Ḥajjī al-Dabīr dwells on the importance of

[89] For this and the following Ulughkhānī, *An Arabic History of Gujarat*, vol. I, pp. viii-ix.
[90] Conermann, *Historiographie*.
[91] Ulughkhānī, *An Arabic History of Gujarat*, vol. I, pp. 88-97.
[92] J. Fück, 'Ibn Khallikān', *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, consulted online on 05 October 2017. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3248.
[93] Ulughkhānī, *An Arabic History of Gujarat*, vol. I, p. 184.
[94] Fück, 'Ibn Khallikān'.

this text when he states that a Persian translation of the work was produced, and offered to the sultan of Gujarat as a gift.[95] In sum, Ḥajjī al-Dabīr's audience is presented with hand-picked information about the history of the Red Sea region. Those elements are simultaneously highly relevant to the history of communities in his own social environment in Gujarat.

Another text underscores the profound transoceanic historical entanglements of the sixteenth century. The Arabic biographical work *al-Nūr al-sāfir ʿan akhbār al-qarn al-ʿāshir* ('The unveiled light concerning the events of the tenth century') provides another case for the spread of Arabic history writing from the Red Sea to Gujarat in this period.[96] ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydarūs al-Ḥusaynī al-Ḥaḍramī al-Yamanī al-Hindī wrote the work while resident in Ahmedabad in Gujarat during the early seventeenth century. Al-ʿAydarūs was a member of the al-ʿAydarūs kinship group, born in Ahmedabad in Gujarat in 978/1570, where he grew up to serve as a courtier and thus offered his scholarly skills to the regional sultanate. He died in the same city in 1038/1628 after a full life of scholarship. The several *nisbas* ('affiliations') of his name point to the transregional dimension of his family lineage. It showcases how he negotiated the transoceanic dispersal of the al-ʿAydarūs family and his own past as part of his persona. The Ḥaḍramī origin of the family in Yemen coexisted with his current place of personal attachment in al-Hind.

Ho's observations, which merge into a success-story of ḥaḍramī scholarship,[97] can serve as a starting point to probe the wider historiographical significance of the work for the emergence of a transoceanic Arabic historiography. He pointed out how this work 'chronicled' communities, events, scholarly genealogies and the expansion of Islamicate learning, and thereby created a transregional Islamicate space that encompassed the Indian Ocean from the Red Sea to Southeast Asia.[98] Still, Ho concentrated on the particular significance of the work to the family project of the Ḥaḍramī Sayyids. Building on this, I want to elaborate on significant themes of al-ʿAydarūs' biographical work. Al-ʿAydarūs incorporated into his work several clues about the more widespread rise of Arabic learned pursuits. Therefore, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydarūs' biographical work has to be seen in the wider context of Arabic history writing across sixteenth-century Western

[95] Ulughkhānī, *An Arabic History of Gujarat,* vol. I, p. 32.
[96] For this and the following Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, pp. 118-124; Oscar Löfgren, 'al-ʿAydarūs', *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* Brill Online. Latest Retrieval: 08/12/2013. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/aydarus-SIM_0899?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=Aydarus. Al-ʿAydarūs, *Al-Nūr al-Sāfir*.
[97] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, pp. 122-124.
[98] Ibid., pp. 118-124.

India. At the same time, his work was embedded in a complex socio-cultural environment conducive to the composition of Arabic historical texts in seventeenth-century Gujarat. The fact that the work appeared in Gujarat signifies transoceanic connections that go beyond the family network of the al-ʿAydarūs. A larger transoceanic scholarly world spread out across the Ocean and combined with a local community receptive towards Arabic scholarship.

Al-ʿAydarūs' work has a strong intertextual relationship with al-Sakhāwī's collective biography *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*. As Ho already pointed out, he used the same centennial framework for his work and he furthermore stated in the foreword that his work contained 'the great events and wonders of the tenth century hijrī' (roughly the sixteenth century) together with the obituaries of its 'great men' (kings, scholars, judges, men of letters and the righteous),[99] 'be they Egyptian or Syrian, Hijāzī or Yamanī, Rūmī or Indian, mashriqī or maghribī'.[100] Thus, his idea of the Islamicate world, mapped out in the introduction, echoed al-Sakhāwī's. It shaped their biographical works accordingly. Whereas al-Sakhāwī had gained scholarly prestige in the Hijaz, al-ʿAydarūs experienced the increasing transregional movements of various social groups in Gujarat. Al-ʿAydarūs structured the whole work as a chronicle. While al-Sakhāwī compiled an enormous list of biographical entries, al-ʿAyadrūs arranged events and biographies according to the sequence of years from 901-1000 hijrī. [101] Similar to al-Sakhāwī, al-ʿAydarūs' historiographical treatise praised the pursuit of intellectual endeavours in the rhetoric of the prosopographical.[102] These prosopographical elements, i.e. biographical entries, need to be studied further to explore the ways in which al-ʿAydarūs placed learned pursuits of individuals at the centre of a transoceanic cultural connection.

A deeper scholarly and cultural relationship between Gujarat and the Hijaz is also clear from the wider choice of biographical entries in the *Nūr al-sāfir*. This goes beyond the aforementioned intellectual link that al-ʿAydarūs established with al-Sakhāwī, his former teacher.[103] During the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries the importance of the Hijaz rested not only in the *ḥaramān* (reference to the two holy places Mecca and Medina). The Hijaz was very much a scholarly centre as well.[104] Al-ʿAydarūs offered biographies of personages who travelled from

[99] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, pp. 118-119.
[100] Al-ʿAydarūs, *Al-Nūr al-Sāfir,* p. 17.
[101] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, pp. 118-120.
[102] Ibid., p. 120.
[103] Ibid., p. 123.
[104] This point was summarized in Bahl, 'Reading *tarājim* with Bourdieu'.

Gujarat to the Hijaz. Here, the emphasis rests on the transformation of their educational trajectory that takes place while residing in the Hijaz. For example, the main entry for the year 955/1548 is the return to Gujurat of al-Khān al-Aʿẓam Aṣafkhān al-Kujarati [al-Gujaratī], a vizier of the sultan of Gujarat (*manṣab al-wizāra*).[105] He returned from his sojourn in Mecca, where he had been sent by the Gujarati rulers. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam recently studied a historical text by Jārullāh b. Fahd from sixteenth-century Mecca, which devotes many references to Aṣafkhān as the head of the Gujaratī embassy in Mecca, his efforts in creating an amicable relationship with the rulers of Mecca and his extensive patronage activities among the learned communities.[106] Al-ʿAydarūs, however, puts greater emphasis on Aṣafkhān's own learned pursuits.[107] Early on he became well-versed in several fields of knowledge. Even more crucial were his scholarly transactions and the social networks he forged as part of his administrative post in the Hijaz. In Mecca, he was an important beneficiary for the resident scholars. The students flocked to him, and through his charitable activities in the field of knowledge (*ʿilm*) they excelled in their studies. Aṣafkhān personified the importance of the Hijaz as a magnet for scholars and in Gujarat al-ʿAydarūs seemed to have been so well placed in the flow of transoceanic information that he could observe this *en détail*.

Al-ʿAydarūs was himself an itinerant scholar, who travelled widely to study and collect books. His own entry in the book puts him on the map as a central learned figure.[108] It showcases his educational upbringing, compositional activities and the links he forged with other scholars of repute. In Gujarat he shared the mobile transregional world of scholars, Sufis and sultans who came to him for advice, blessings and learning. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydarūs was also an important Sufi Shaykh (mystical and spiritual tradition in Islam) and eligible to bestow the *khirqa* (lit. 'garment') of affiliation on new disciples of his Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*).[109] Learned men from across the Western Indian Ocean approached him in scholarly and spiritual matters. The names of the listed affiliates sketch the transregional contours of the Western Indian Ocean. They represent the various regions from al-ʿAllāma al-Shahīr Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Sinbāṭī al-Makkī al-Miṣrī in Egypt, to al-Sayyid al-Jalīl […] al-Shāmī al-Makkī in Mecca, to al-Shaykh al-Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAllāma […]

[105] For this and the following al-ʿAydarūs, *Al-Nūr al-Sāfir*, pp. 325-330.
[106] Alam/Subrahmanyam, 'A View from Mecca', pp. 297-303.
[107] For this and the following al-ʿAydarūs, *Al-Nūr al-Sāfir, pp.* 325-330.
[108] Ibid., pp. 447-453.
[109] Ibid., p. 447.

al-Ḥaḍramī in Yemen, to al-Shaykh al-Kabīr al-ʿAllāma al-Shahīr Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan […] al-Kawkinī al-Hindī in the South Asian subcontinent. Here again, names are important for the places and connections they signify in the grand scheme of things. The people behind the names make up the social fabric of a historically and culturally linked Western Indian Ocean connection.

The Deccan

In the sixteenth-century Deccan, sultans offered courtly patronage to mobile scholars for their transoceanic Arabic history projects. Ibn Shadqam al-Madanī's biographical work *Zahr al-riyāḍ wa-zulal al-ḥiyāḍ* ('The flower of the garden and the pure water of the cisterns') presents one such effort with regard to the court of Ahmadnagar, one of the five Deccani courts which succeeded the Bahmanīs over the course of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.[110] His peregrinations bear witness to the persistent connections between the Hijaz and the Deccan as well as the high mobility of elite groups in this period.[111]

The biographer and historian Sayyid Abū l-Makārim al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Shadqam al-Madanī (d. 999) was born in Medina in 1535 and died in the Deccan in 1590.[112] Following in the footsteps of his father he became *naqīb al-ashrāf* (chief of the *ashrāf*, i.e. a line of descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad) and a *mutawallī* ('custodian') of the prophet's grave.[113] Contemporary sources agree that Ibn Shadqam left Medina because he did not succeed in his post. He travelled widely to visit the shrines of the Shi'i Imams at Najaf, Kerbala and Mashhad and made contact with the Safavid court in Iran and the Niẓāmshāhī court in the Deccan. While affiliated to the court of the Niẓāmshāhī dynasty in Ahmadnagar, he composed the work *Zahr al-riyāḍ wa-zulal al-ḥiyāḍ*. After his death his body was brought to the cemetery of Medina *al-Baqiʿ*, where he was buried.[114] Scholarship on him and his work is limited to general references by Werner Ende and Zubaid

[110] This work has not been edited yet. I collected one set of surviving manuscripts in 3 volumes from libraries in Kolkata, Rampur and London; see respectively, Ibn Shadqam, *Zahr al-riyāḍ*, Ms 269, National Library, Kolkata, Ibid, *Zahr al-riyāḍ*, Ms 4428, Rampur Raza Library, Rampur and Ms Delhi Arabic 1329, British Library, London. For the Deccani Sultanates see Richard Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300-1761, Eight Indian Lives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, chapter 5. For a rather dated account of the Sultanate of Ahmadnagar see Radhey Shyam, *The Kingdom of Ahmadnagar*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966.
[111] Roy Fischel, 'Society, Space and the State in the Deccan Sultanates, 1565-1636', PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2012.
[112] al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Amīn, *ʿAyān al-shīʿa*, 4th edition, Beirut, 1986ff, vol. V, pp. 175-179.
[113] Werner Ende, 'The Nakhawila, a Shiite Community in Medina', *Die Welt des Islams*, 37, 3, 1997, pp. 263-348, p. 271.
[114] al-Amīn, *ʿAyān al-shīʿa,* vol. 5, pp. 175-179.

Ahmad.[115] Jacqueline Sublet and Muriel Rouabah placed his biographical work in a larger group of texts whose authors used the previously mentioned prominent biographical dictionary by Ibn Khallikan when composing recensions and continuations for their own period.[116]

Ibn Shadqam's biographical work again demonstrates a deep historical connection with the Red Sea region. According to the introduction to the *Zahr al-riyāḍ*, he composed this work during the years 1580-1584 while he was affiliated to the court of Murtadā Niẓāmshāh.[117] Furthermore, he recounts his reading (*muṭāla'a*) of Ibn Khallikān's prosopography as a meaningful impetus to writing his own work.[118] He thereby places himself in an intellectual relationship with Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-a'yān*. Yet, there is also a close textual link. Many personages who feature in Ibn Shadqam's prosopographical account are derived from Ibn Khallikān's biographical community.[119] Transregionally famous and notorious figures appear, such as Jingīz Khān, as well as Saljuq kings, 'Abbāsid viziers, poets and scholars from East to West.[120] Sultan Amīr Timur Tamerlane turns up as well due to the political repercussions he caused across West and South Asia. His entry is followed by biographical entries of his successors enshrined in a Timurid genealogy that ends in Humayun, son of Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire.[121] And Deccani rulers are mentioned as well.[122] Ibn Shadqam continues his predecessor's idea of bringing together these figures of great importance in an imagined transregional Muslim community.

Ibn Shadqam's transoceanic Arabic history project has to be seen in the context of a Persianate cosmopolitan world that the Deccan shared in the sixteenth century. Roy Fischel recently elaborated on the Persian history writing activities at the early modern Deccani courts.[123] The writers of major Persian chronicles, such as Firishta, Shirazi and Tabataba'i wrote their histories in the Deccan from the 1590s to the 1620s. They belonged to the faction of the 'Foreigners' (*gharībān*) at these courts, mainly sailing from Iran, and building on Persian as a cosmopolitan

[115] Ende, 'The Nakhawila' and Zubaid Ahmad, *The Contribution of Indo-Pakistan to Arabic Literature. From Ancient Times to 1857*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968, pp. 184-185.
[116] Jacqueline Sublet et Muriel Rouabah, 'Une famille de textes autour d'Ibn Ḫallikān entre VIIe/XIIIe et XIe/XVIIe siècle, Documents historiques et biographiques arabes conserves à l'IRHT', *Bulletin d'études orientales*, Tome LVIII, 2009, pp. 69-86.
[117] Ibn Shadqam, Ms 269, National Library, Kolkata, fol. 7v, and National Library, Būhār II, Kolkata.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] See the fihrist at the beginning of MS 269, Kolkata.
[121] Ibid., fol. 96re and the following folios.
[122] Ibid., fol. 71v.
[123] For this and the following Fischel, 'Origin Narratives', pp. 71-73.

language and simultaneously an established cultural idiom that was supposed to guide personal 'comportment' and the arts of 'statecraft'.[124] Factional rivalries often occurred between these Persianate Foreigners and the groups of the Deccanis, the majority of which were locally rooted Muslims, who communicated in the Dakhnī language.[125] While these Foreigners were crucial to the state-building exercises of the Deccani courts, they always had one foot out the door.[126] These scholarly and administrative elites kept close ties to their homelands. However, while affiliated at different times to the courts of Ahmadnagar and its neighbouring sultanate Bijapur, these historians provided crucial 'origin narratives' for the local dynasties. They used common tropes and moulded familiar stories to make 'improbable narratives' sound reliable.[127] They provided the Deccani courts with a diverse corpus of Persian history writing as well as a Persian past and genealogy that linked the Deccani dynasties with famous dynastic lineages from Western Asia. Thus, they integrated the Deccan into a sixteenth-century cosmopolitan world of Persian mobilities.

Ibn Shadqam's case is similar in a way. His activities map an Arabic cosmopolitanism that coexisted side by side with the Persianate sphere. He shared a wider Arabic transregional idiom with the mobile elites of the Western Indian Ocean region. While he moved between the interconnected worlds from the Red Sea region to al-Hind, Iran and back again, Arabic opened doors at the Deccani court of Ahmadnagar. He was able to translate his scholarly skills into successful courtly patronage. He brought with him a text and model of Arabic history writing from the Red Sea region that he reshaped socially and culturally. To a local and translocal audience he could present a transoceanic social history that linked the Red Sea region, Iran and the Deccan in a cultural space in which Arabic functioned as a transregional idiom side by side with Persian.

Malabar

Moving further to the South Indian region of Malabar, the work *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn fī baʿd aḥwāl al-burtukāliyyīn* ('The gem of the proponents of Jihād concerning some of the conditions of the Portuguese') is important in the sixteenth century.[128] Zayn al-Dīn al-Maʿbarī al-Malībārī, on whom

[124] Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan,* p. 76. See Fischel, 'Society, Space and the State', 180 Fn4 for the preference of the term 'Foreigner' rather than 'Westerner' as translated by Eaton.
[125] Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan,* pp. 67-70, 76. Fischel, 'Society, Space and the State', p. 7. Gijs Kruitzer, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India,* Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009, pp. 74ff.
[126] Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians Abroad' and Fischel 'Society, Space and the State'.
[127] Fischel, 'Origin Narratives'.
[128] al-Malībārī MS IO Islamic 2807e, London. Ibid. 1833.

biographical information is scarce, composed it during the second half of the sixteenth century.[129] It consists of four sections: the first is a compilation of prophetic traditions with stipulations about *jihād*, the second an account of the spread of Islam in Malabar, and the third concerns the customs of the non-Muslim inhabitants of Malabar. These three parts function as an introduction to the fourth part: the 'account of the proceedings of the Portuguese' from the time of their arrival in 1498 to 1579.[130] Scholarship over the last decades has repeatedly made use of this narrative source to study the military conflict of Malabarī polities with the Portuguese during the sixteenth century, the competition over the Indian Ocean spice trade, as well as forms of conversion and the spread of Islam across South India.[131] Most recently, Prange edited an English translation of a text from South India which bears a strong textual relationship with al-Malībārī's narrative.[132] It indicates a wide transcultural circulation of his text in South India. But while Malabar was closely linked with the wider Red Sea region through trade and scholarly networks, it is nonetheless difficult to locate al-Malībārī within these activities.[133]

Instead, I suggest that his choice of language can be explained based on the historical significances of Arabic within his wider socio-cultural setting. For the recompilation of prophetic traditions on *jihād* in the first part of the introduction Arabic seemed to be the natural choice predetermined by the genre of *ḥadīth*. His choice to compose the historical sections in Arabic was then probably a logical continuation. The use of Arabic for the composition of his historical work reflects on the close relationship Malabar already had and continued to have with regions and societies across the Sea to Yemen and the Hijaz in one direction and to Southeast Asia in the other direction.[134] Malabar was an important contributor to the Indian Ocean spice trade, a crucial

[129] For this and the following see Ibid., 1833: vii-xvi.
[130] Ibid. MS IO Islamic 2807e, London, fol. 113v
[131] See respectively, Stephen Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Māppilas of Malabar 1498-1922*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1980. Sebastian Prange, 'A Trade of No Dishonor: Piracy, Commerce, and Community in the Western Indian Ocean, Twelfth to Sixteenth Century', *The American Historical Review*, 116, 5, 2011, pp. 1269-1293. Engseng Ho, 'Custom and Conversion in Malabar: Zayn al-Dīn al-Malibari's Gift of the Mujahidin: Some Accounts of the Portuguese' in Barbara Metcalf, *Islam in South Asia in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 403-408.
[132] Sebastian Prange, 'The Pagan King replies: An Indian Perspective on the Portuguese Arrival in India', *Itinerario*, 41, 1, 2017, pp. 151-173.
[133] The introduction to a new edition of the work sadly does not back up claims of Zayn al-Dīn's transregional exploits and contacts across the Red Sea region. See Muhammad Husayn Nainar, *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin. A historical epic of the sixteenth century,* translated from Arabic with annotations byMuhammad Husayn Nainar, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006, pp. xix-xxi.
[134] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*.

crossing point for travellers and traders coming from West or East and therefore central to the networks of the wider Indian Ocean.[135]

The political history of the early modern Indian Ocean provides a necessary context to explain the emergence of this historical text.[136] The Portuguese had entered the Indian Ocean as competitors in the lucrative trade in spices from Malabar to Egypt. However, their combined military and commercial ventures were complemented by Ottoman expansionism into the Indian Ocean. Giancarlo Casale recently argued that Portuguese and Ottoman 'discoveries' of the Indian Ocean both built on similar interests in access to the spice trade.[137] This was accompanied by the expression of similar notions of Universal Empire.[138] The Ottoman conquest of Egypt and the Hijaz was therefore part of a larger strategy to take control of these commercial activities and formulate claims of a global caliphate, just as the maritime blockade of Mecca's seaport Jidda in 1517 was a move by the Portuguese intended to encroach on these economic activities.[139] This military conflict had already involved the Mamlūk Empire, forged short-term alliances between the Ottoman successors and the Sultanate of Gujarat and even reverberated as far as the neighbouring realms of Bijapur.[140] The sultans of the Ottoman Empire, Gujarat, Bijapur and the Portuguese forces, as well as a host of local power holders in the Hijaz and Malabar, became entangled in a political power struggle over commercial prospects of the Indian Ocean trade.[141]

In the context of these emerging political fault lines al-Malībārī's narrative made use of Arabic to reflect on the politics of Malabar's past and present. Al-Malībārī stated his political purpose in writing this work in the introduction.[142] He aimed to unite a hitherto allegedly inactive group of Muslim states from around the Western Indian Ocean to defeat the Portuguese invaders of Malabar. The choice of Arabic made sense in the complex political setting of the sixteenth-century Western Indian Ocean. Al-Malībārī's case shows that by the sixteenth century Arabic history writing formed part of a transoceanic dissemination that permeated deeply into the courtly societies in South Asia. His choice of language was particularly important in terms of the audience

[135] Prange, 'Measuring by the bushel' and Ho, *The Graves of Tarim,* pp. 101-103.
[136] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim,* pp. 100-103.
[137] For this and the following Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration,* and especially pp. 4-8, 23-26.
[138] See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in connected history. Mughals and Franks,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.
[139] See also Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'A View from Mecca', pp. 290-296.
[140] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim,* p. 101.
[141] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration,* and Ho, *The Graves of Tarim,* p. 101.
[142] al-Malībārī, MS IO Islamic 2807e, London.

he envisioned. The book had a specific addressee. He dedicated the oeuvre to ʿAlī ʿĀdil Shāh I. (r. 965/1535-987/1558) of Bijapur,[143] one of the Deccan sultanates. He cited the sultan's excellent track record as a just and legitimate Muslim ruler, together with his military zeal, in a panegyrical fashion, thus making a case for an armed resistance against the Portuguese.[144] More specifically, the stated purpose, introduction and structure of al-Malībārī's work show that the objective of dedicating this work was political communication with a Muslim court and not just the addition of an Arabic book to the royal library.[145] Within this process, Arabic represented not only the preferred medium of telling, but also an accepted language for reading a historical narrative about the region of Malabar.

Conclusion

The sixteenth-century Western Indian Ocean witnessed a confluence of factors that allowed a transoceanic Arabic historiography to emerge beyond its waters. The proliferation of Arabic history writing was traceable from Gujarat, to the Deccan and to Malabar. Mobile and transregionally connected scholars used Arabic to reflect on the pasts of regions and communities East and West. These transoceanic historians thrived on mobility, learned pursuits and shared networks from the Red Sea region, to Iran, Gujarat and the Deccan. Their narratives built on scholarly authorities and their texts from across the Red Sea region. Yet, their works did not emerge out of nowhere. Surviving Arabic historical manuscripts and their notes indicate a readership with a diverse interest in the history of Egypt, the Hijaz, but also the wider Western Indian Ocean region as a whole. Arabophone communities of the Western Indian Ocean shared their connected pasts through writing and reading. By the late sixteenth century, a mobile scholar from the Persian cosmopolis observed this transoceanic space as a distinct cultural zone and as a transoceanic Arabic connection that linked the Red Sea with the subcontinent.

The study of writing and reading practices in this transoceanic context can offer an empirically grounded trajectory to explore forms of transregional cultural integration. Within the field of global historical scholarship, the dimension and degree of 'global integration' is a recurring

[143] Deborah Hutton, ''Ādil Shāhīs', *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. Consulted online on 24 May 2018. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23656, 2018.
[144] al-Malībārī MS IO Islamic 2807e: fol. 112v-113v.
[145] Ibid.

topic.[146] It often involves the question of when is a historical phenomenon truly global? The Western Indian Ocean did not witness a 'systemic integration on a global scale'.[147] At the same time, the story of 'global integration' is not a one-way street. Scholarship over the last decades has drawn a complex picture of ups and downs, phases of acceleration and of slowdown as well as a multitude of connections and interdependencies. Since it is not the geographical extent of a historical process that determines its 'globality' the level and intensity of transregional integration has to be examined based on other parameters. Writing, reading and sharing the history of communities and their practices across regions can inform inquiries into the cultural integration of human spaces along connections and mobilities.

Delineating changing transregional constellations based on social and cultural connections in the study of a transoceanic Arabic historiography can inform and elaborate on recent approaches to global history. Sanjay Subrahmanyam developed the concept of *Connected Histories* as a global framework for historical inquiry.[148] By tracing change in symbolic and ideological constructs in the context of South Asia and the subcontinent's wider links with the regions of Early Modern Eurasia, he provides a heuristic for the investigation of interrelated social and cultural processes across time and space. Most importantly, it is the emphasis on individuals and communities in the way they transcend and encompass a variety of regionally fixed histories which offers an angle to explore the historically contingent connections. Flows of ideas and cultural constructs can be related in their global spread to regional adaptation and reformulation. This can be brought into a fecund dialogue with Arif Dirlik's call 'to confront the contingencies and ground-level processes of human activity with the structures that are at once the product and the conditions of that activity'.[149] The transoceanic Arabic historiography offers a manuscript- and text-based angle to study such forms of cultural dialogue as a 'process' and a 'performance'.[150] The people involved traversed the Western Indian Ocean and thereby imagined, wrote and read about its shared history in Arabic. They created their cultural space, a 'significant geography',[151] by writing and reading

[146] Sebastian Conrad, *What is global history?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
[147] Ibid., 9.
[148] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 31/3, 1997, pp. 735-762, 736-745.
[149] Arif Dirlik, 'Performing the World: Reality and Representation in the Making of World Histor(ies)', *Journal of World History*, 16/4, 2005, pp. 391-410, 396.
[150] These terms are emphasised by Ibid.
[151] Orsini, '"Significant geographies"'.

Arabic histories in it. These cultural practices offer a conceptual pathway to 'spatialize the past',[152] and thus acknowledge change over time in this cultural formation itself. The practice of transoceanic Arabic history writing further stresses historical contingency and change over time in the globalising early modern Indian Ocean worlds.

The early modern world was very much a multi-centric one. Instead of seeing the Arabic and the Persian cosmopoli as exclusive spheres of influence, this research has also emphasised that Arabic and Persian circulations were enmeshed with each other and constituted often complementary cultural flows in these transoceanic connections. Each language offered a range of opportunities for mobile scholars within and across the respective cosmopoli. Still, the study of Arabic historical texts through manuscript versions provides a bottom-up approach to complicate the broad-brush effects of seeing the Indian Ocean worlds though the eyes of such cosmopolitan cultural formations. As an intellectual practice it represents one form of a transregional cultural integration within the Indian Ocean world.

Thus, for the early modern period it is necessary to ask wider questions about the social and cultural interactions of Arabophone communities on both sides of the Ocean. Further research in South Asian archives and manuscript collections, which offer a range of early modern Arabic (and Persian) texts that were shared with communities in Anatolia, Egypt, the Hijaz, Yemen and Iran, is necessary to study these entanglements from the view-point of other textual traditions, networks and practices and determine moments of cultural interaction and confluence, but also shifts and suspension of these connections.

[152] Arif Dirlik, 'Performing the World', p. 392.