

# Limning the Land:

## Social Encounters and Historical Meaning in Early Nineteenth-Century Travelogues between Iran and India'

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THIS ARTICLE CONSIDERS THE IMPORTANCE of place of origin in two Persian travelogues that span a critical historical moment, the first three decades of the nineteenth century. At this time, the Persianate world was fractured and shrinking. British presence in the South Asian subcontinent was becoming unmistakably dominant, and, though newly unified under the new Qajar state, Iran was embroiled in wars that would bring British and Russian imperial pressures to impinge on its sovereignty. Scholars have shown this period as a critical moment when indigenous discourses began to shift. In Bengal, elites began to adopt the terms of colonial discourse.<sup>2</sup> The most studied example is Raja Rammohan Roy, who first worked for the British as a classically trained Persian *monshī* before making a name for himself as a social reformer. Lata Mani has shown how as the discursive terrain of his exhortations changed, so too did the languages he chose to write in – abandoning Persian first for Bengali, and then also English.<sup>3</sup> These changes in elite discourse in the subcontinent took place as a split in literary aesthetics was being formalized between Irani and Hindustani Persian from the early nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In Iran, a new awareness of European scrutiny and Orientalist evaluations of society and culture began to

1. This title is a nod to Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet's work on the role of new notions of geography in the conceptualization of land in modern nationalist imaginings of Iran (Kashani-Sabet 1999, 47-74). However, Kashani-Sabet's focus is exclusively on Iran's interaction with Europe, whereas this article is the beginning of attempts to think about how modern ways of seeing, thinking and being may have entered Iran by way of its interaction with South Asia.

2. For instance see Mani 1998, 42-82. This process is less well understood in Iranian studies, though Afsaneh Najmabadi postulates that mid-nineteenth century shifts in notions of gender and sexuality toward heteronormativity that underwrote Iranian modernity were the result of a European gaze (Najmabadi 2005, 4-5).

3. For more celebratory accounts of Roy than Mani's, see Robertson 1995; and Zastoupil 2010.

4. For more on the disputes that caused the stylistic split, see Faruqi 1998, esp. 17-21; Alam 2003, 177-86; and Smith 2009.



Caravanserai on the road from Isfahan to Shiraz (litho), Flandin, Eugene (1809-76). (Courtesy Bibliothèque des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, France / Archives Charmet / The Bridgeman Art Library.)

pervade Irani Persian encounters with Europe.<sup>5</sup> How do these changes make themselves felt in encounters between Iran and India? This paper argues that differences between two early nineteenth-century travelogues reflect historical changes, but that older Persianate ideas about the spiritual and moral meanings of geography and culture are more significantly constitutive of the texts.

Āqā Aḥmad Behbahānī (1777–1819), a *mujtahed* (jurisconsult) from a long line of prominent religious scholars, was the author of the first travel narrative. Born in Iran, he journeyed to Iraq in 1797 for study and pilgrimage, and then widely within Iran. From 1805 to 1810 he traveled throughout India. After unsuccessful attempts to gain long-term patronage in Hyderabad, Lucknow and Murshidabad, Behbahānī obtained the position of Friday prayer leader at the Shi‘i congregational mosque in British-ruled Patna.<sup>6</sup>

5. Tavakoli-Targhi 2001, 35–53 and 54–76. Also see Najmabadi 2005, 4–5.

6. This patronage was extended by the elites of Patna, though after his falling out with the ruling nobles and clerics of Lucknow, he secured British protection in the form of guards, exemptions from customs and taxes, and letters of safe passage. For more on Behbahānī and his text, see Cole 1988, 141–2; Cole 1996; and Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007, 240–2.

*Merāt al-aḥvāl-e jahān-nomā* was written at the end of his stay in Patna, just before he returned to Iran. Behbahānī encountered India at a time when Mughal power had devolved on to regional centers and the British were among a number of powerful players on this field. Though the text reflects rising British power, Mughal rule and its regional successors still served as worthy exemplars for Qajar rule.

Twenty years later, ‘Alī Mīrzā “Maftūn,” a minor poet from Delhi resident in Patna (‘Azīmābād), traveled through Iran in 1826–27.<sup>7</sup> In November 1825 Maftūn left for the Hijaz via Calcutta and the Indian Ocean. After performing hajj, he traveled from Jeddah to various ports on the Arab side of the Persian Gulf and then on to Iran, arriving in the port of Bushehr in November 1826. Due to the unsafe roads between Bushehr and Baghdad, he decided to forgo pilgrimage to the Iraqi shrine cities in favor of pilgrimage to the tomb of the eighth Shi‘i Imam in Mashhad, where he returned to India via Transoxiana. His long journey to Mashhad was punctuated by stops in Shiraz, Esfahan and Tehran, as well as smaller towns. Maftūn completed his text soon after he returned to Patna from his travels, but given the level of detail and information about each stage of the journey (*manzel*), he must have taken notes during the trip itself. Maftūn encountered Iran during the reign of Fath‘Alī Shāh (r. 1797–1834), the second Qajar monarch, just as British power was eclipsing Muslim rule in the subcontinent and Persian was soon to be abolished as the language of power in their domains. Maftūn’s text does not seem to have left Patna or even to have been copied beyond the original manuscript, while Behbahānī’s text circulated widely in both Iran and India.<sup>8</sup>

Both travelers were Persian-speaking Shi‘a Muslims whose travel was inflected with religious concerns, bringing place of origin into relief as their primary parochial difference. In this context, I examine their representations of encounters with new places and people in their respective texts, and the ways in which expression of strangeness and familiarity of geographical and social contexts were mutually constitutive. Behbahānī narrates places largely according to social encounters, as well as local practices. While physical details of place are important, it is the ethical comportment and moral

7. Maftūn, meaning one who loses all in the throes of love, was his *takhallos* (poetic pen name). There is no known birth or death date for him.

8. Since my analysis looks at how each author expressed himself according to ways each assumed would be intelligible to his audience, differences in the reception and impact of the texts are less important, especially since the lack of circulation of Maftūn’s text is likely to be due to the decline of Persian and his more modest social influence. The only known manuscript is HL 272 and HL 273 in the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library in Patna, India. The published version that I cite below begins on folio 32b of HL 273.

stature of its inhabitants that gives meaning to place. In Maftūn's text, place itself is central, with moral meaning narrated according to the history that inheres in geography and its physical structures. Social encounters and practices usually function as further embellishments of the meaning of place. Such an analysis allows for an appreciation of how a shared culture of Persianate learning could allow two individuals from different places of origin to experience new places and people as familiar to some degree, though the limits of this familiarity are telling of the local inflections of a shared culture.

## Directions of Travel and Structures of Meaning

Place of origin, direction of travel and reasons for writing influence the structure of meaning within these texts. For both writers, the larger tradition within which they wrote framed Hindustan as a land of worldly wealth and Iran as part of the Islamic heartlands, though these characteristics could be given different meanings within larger textual narratives. Movements from South Asia toward the Middle East were usually written as pilgrimage to sacralized heartlands, via Iran, dotted with the scenes of pre-Islamic and Islamic Qur'anic figures, as well as the well-known saints of the far past. The Iraqi shrine cities were adjacent to Iran, and were primary centers of Shi'i devotion and education. Iran and Turan (Transoxiana) had accrued further meaning as the originary landscape of Persian history and culture, defined through epic literature, universal histories, and commemorative texts that limned the land with famous rulers, invaders, heroes, poets and heretics.<sup>9</sup> Movements from Iran to the subcontinent were usually written as journeys away from this heartland, of which most migrants and travelers from Iran saw themselves a part (the shrine cities of Iraq and Khurasan being as important for Shi'a Muslims as the Hijaz). Travel there was seen, even under voluntary circumstances, as to a place less spiritually pure (with a largely non-Muslim population) and in possession of more worldly wealth, an ethically ambivalent trait under the best of circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Travel from Iran to India by various groups of people, from elite courtiers to merchants, soldiers and craftsmen, is well-documented, and quite frequent in the centuries

9. This Persianate history is often discussed in the context of studies of Iranian modernity and nationalism, though such works usually refer to it as quasi or entirely mythical. See Tavakoli-Targhi 2001, Marashi 2008, Kashani-Sabet 1999. A closer look at eighteenth-century Irani and Hindustani Persian texts demonstrates that these ideas circulated widely and provided paradigmatic signification for historical events and geographical locations. See Kia, forthcoming.

10. For further discussion, see Sharma 2003; Dale 2003; and Kia 2011, Ch. 1.

leading up to the early nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Less known is movement in the opposite direction. In both cases such flows of people were facilitated by the fact that Persian was the language of power and education in India. At the height of the Mughal Empire, seven times more Persian-speakers lived in India than in Iran.<sup>12</sup> Though Persian would be abolished as the language of government in the 1830s, and eventually replaced by Urdu as the language of education in the nineteenth century, in its early decades, travel between Iran and India was still facilitated by the predominance of Persian in literature, administration and elite culture.

In the scholarly literature on travelers from Iran to India, the dominant argument is that the encounter with India was “Orientalism.” Juan Cole has outlined this point most explicitly through a specific analysis of Behbahānī’s text and extrapolates that it “exhibits a sentiment of cultural and civilizational superiority which pervades eighteenth and nineteenth century [Iranian] Persian writing about India.”<sup>13</sup> In the first place, sentiments of superiority are not the same as Edward Said’s definition of the term Orientalism, since by Cole’s own admission “this sort of writing lacked the power nexus of imperialism,” and as importantly, it also lacked the institutionalization of such knowledge into disciplines.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, such sentiments need to be read within context, and against other features of the text that contradict and disrupt such assertions. For example, Cole notes that “inferences by intertextual frames required the audience to have read other Persian works about India, including romances, chronicles and travel accounts.”<sup>15</sup> But how can this be understood as a systematic body of knowledge that created a sense of radical difference, since a number of the texts upon which Behbahānī draws are in fact Hindustani Persian; for example, he uses Amīr Khosrow Dehlavī’s poetry to extrapolate on the adornments of the four-wheeled chariots used by rulers and nobles in India, and cites extended passages from the *Jahāngīrnāma* to explain the Mughal governing system.<sup>16</sup> Behbahānī’s harshest censure is for those whom he perceives to

11. Dadvar 1999; Green 2004; Green 2011, ch. 4 (118–54); Khan 1978; Richard 2000; Subrahmanyam 1988; Subrahmanyam 1996; and Tavakoli 2011.

12. Cole 2002, 16–17.

13. Cole 1996, 42. Alam and Subrahmanyam adopt Cole’s characterization (2007, 242).

14. Cole 1996, 41. Also see Hamid Dabashi’s critique of this use of the term (2007, 272–3 n14).

15. Cole 1996, 43.

16. For Behbahānī’s use of Amīr Khosrow, see 1993, 183 and 184–5. For his use of the *Jahāngīrnāma*, see 1993, 187–90 and 191–8. He also mentions other famous texts, such as Gholām Hosayn Khān Ṭabāṭābā’ī’s history, *Seyar al-mota’akharīn* (186). For his mention of Shaykh Bahā al-Dīn ‘Āmeli’s travel narrative on India, see 1993, 202. For a somewhat problematic and incomplete translation, see Behbahānī 1996.

violate the norms of ethical comportment, or, for Shi'a who violate what counts as orthodox Shi'ism in his estimation. The governing principle of this text is therefore not an assumed "Iranianness" that lends Behbahānī a protonationalist interpretive framework of cultural difference. It is rather an older Persianate ideal of ethics, one that he shares with his Hindustani Persian subjects and interlocutors.<sup>17</sup>

## The Primacy of Social Encounters in Behbahānī's *Merāt al-aḥvāl-e jahān-nomā*

In his encounters with India, new places are both strange and familiar, but place itself is not the ground upon which such understandings are narrated. Far more central to his representations of difference or familiarity are social encounters, narrated through an ethics of sociability. It is not that Behbahānī does not understand differences between places. For example, he describes his birth "in the town of Kermanshah ... from within the borders of Iran (*az ḥodūd-e Iran*)."<sup>18</sup> Yet, while he demonstrates a sense of a geopolitical place called Iran, rather than encountering "Iranians" in India, Behbahānī meets "Qizilbash": persons whom he identifies with place-name monikers that signal their own or their immediate forefathers' origin or arrival from provinces or cities ruled by the Safavid shahs of Iran.<sup>19</sup> The term Qizilbash (red-capped) evokes the Turkomen tribes that brought the Safavid rulers of Iran to power. But in post-Safavid times, in India, it distinguished Persian-speaking Shi'a from former Safavid Iranian domains from other Persian-speaking Muslims. There were non-Qizilbash Shi'a, and non-Muslims, such as Parsis, whom Behbahānī identified as originating from the land of Iran in the distant past. Behbahānī describes Parsis as migrants from Iran who are "all fair-skinned and beautiful" because they have not intermarried with "outsiders" (*biḡāna*), and who "are extremely familiar (*ma'lūf*) with the Qizilbash" in Bombay.<sup>20</sup> Ostensibly pure descendants of the land of Iran, Behbahānī and the Qizilbash seem to understand a degree of consanguinity with these Parsis despite their religious difference. This similarity is not just through genealogical overlaps, but realized through social interaction.

Behbahānī's inclusion of substantial biographical information about the

17. Though I disagree with its main argument, Cole's 1996 article is still a useful source of information about the text. For further discussion of this text, see Kia 2011.

18. Behbahānī 1993, 140. This and all following quotes are my own translations from this published Persian edition.

19. For instance, he refers to "Alī Bayg Khān Kermānī," who "was the head of the Qizilbash community," Behbahānī 1993, 231.

20. Behbahānī 1993, 227.



life and work of his famous forbears as a prelude to his own narrative is indicative of the formative role of social encounters within his text. Indeed, the text is titled *Merāt al-aḥvāl-e jahān-nomā* (The World-Revealing Mirror of Events), which could indicate an autobiographical journey of a life, rather than just a geographically defined travel narrative. The centrality of autobiography in the text is heralded by the long section at the beginning of the text through which he introduces himself through biographical, scholarly, and familial accounts of his biological and intellectual ancestors.<sup>21</sup> His life is produced from its location within a particular social fabric. This foregrounding of himself in the text may have served to act as introduction to a potential patron, the Qajar prince, Mohammad 'Alī Mīrzā Dawlatshāh (1789–1821), to whom the text is dedicated.<sup>22</sup> Features of the narrative, such as the ways in which he recommends emulation of certain Mughal state institutions, including the system of marking time and the postal system, address directly the imagined concerns of this prince.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the decided inferiority of Shi'i power in Murshidabad and Awadh reflected well on the new Qajar monarchy as the protector of the faith, particularly in the midst of the first Perso-Russian war. But these sorts of discussions on different practices and polities are presented in the context of knowledge derived from travel, part of the larger body of Behbahānī's learning by which he defines himself. Thus, his narrative is best understood as the autobiographical telling of his journey through life, which encompasses his geographical journeys and is encompassed by his social affiliations.

Behbahānī's notion of friendship, based on shared notions of culturally specific ethical behaviors, expressed a basis for affiliation outside of consanguineous or legal bonds. This is not to say that differences did not matter; instead they held varying degrees of significance. Friends and enemies, kind and repugnant, make frequent appearances in Behbahānī's narrative, but these figures are not constructed along neat lines of religion, social location or place of origin. Behbahānī deems people virtuous and thus socially desirable according to their virtuous comportment. Traitorous Iranians were

21. Volume One focuses on Mollā Mohammad Taqī Majlesī, Behbahānī's ancestor, removed by five generations. From there he moves to Majlesī's son and then to his son-in-law, from whom Behbahānī is directly descended, concluding with accounts of his grandfather and father, Vahīd and Mohammad 'Alī Behbahānī. The accounts revolve around a list of their major works, accomplishments, and chain of familial links, including teachers, in-laws and children (Behbahānī 1993, 68–138).

22. Behbahānī 1993, 66; for more on this oldest son of Fatḥ 'Alī Shāh Qajar, see Amanat 1994.

23. For Behbahānī's description of time-keeping, see Behbahānī 1993, 206–7; for his description of the postal system see 1993, 208–9.

cursed, and conscientious Hindus lauded.<sup>24</sup> Being Muslim was not enough to be cast in a good light. For a man whose biological and intellectual forefathers were responsible for the dominance of the Usuli method of jurisprudence in Shi'ism, practices and beliefs that fell outside a specific idea of "proper Islam" were ridiculed and derided. But in personal relations, adherence to religious injunctions was not enough, because recognized modes of ethical comportment were also a basis of virtue. Thus, while a man might have good connections, high social standing, and a proper religious reputation, lack of hospitality or humility trumped these positive characteristics.<sup>25</sup>

On the way to India, Behbahani narrates two encounters, one with the antithesis of a desirable friend, and another with a wayward student. After receiving permission to issue legal rulings (*ejāza*) from the famed Sayyed 'Alī Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Mohammad Hosayn Shahrestānī in the Iraqi shrine cities, Behbahānī sets out for Qom.<sup>26</sup> There he teaches junior scholars, studies with senior scholars and collects another *ejāza*. Behbahānī then makes a similar pilgrimage to Mashhad, after which he journeys to Bandar Abbas to sail for India. His pupil, Mollā Esmā'īl, is with him on all these journeys. At Bandar Abbas he meets Sayyed Rezā Sindhī, "who previously had come to Najaf and with exquisite trickery persuaded me to make a trip to India." Sindhī is "inherently wicked" and "accursed" because "he avoids neither fornication, anal intercourse, nor any other of the religiously prohibited behaviors." Behbahānī laments being stuck with the man, especially when Sindhī publicly (and dishonestly) claims to be Behbahānī's patron. The only way to preserve his honor (*hefz-e āberū-ye khod*), he explains, is to bite his tongue and pay his own way. Preserving his honor entailed maintaining the fiction that all was as it seemed.<sup>27</sup> It is no coincidence that Behbahānī mentions religiously prohibited anal intercourse and fornication in the same breath as the unethical behaviors of dishonesty and stinginess.

To add insult to injury, Mollā Esmā'īl, whose expenses Behbahānī had been bearing in full, "was separated from me by the temptation of that ac-

24. Behbahānī curses the Qizilbash who betrayed (*namak be-ḥarāmī kardā*) his master, Tipu Sultan, to the Nizam of Hyderabad's army, although that army was led by Mīr 'Ālam, whose father was a migrant from Iran and a sayyed (234–5). On his first attempt to travel from Patna to Benares, Behbahānī was robbed. The first person to come to see him after his party limped back to Patna was his student, a Hindu Monshī Rāmchand, whom he praises for his solicitude in the wake of this misfortune (Behbahānī 1993, 282).

25. Behbahānī uses the example of the Navvab of Lucknow, Sa'ādat 'Alī Khān, a devout Shi'a who refused to accept state revenue from religiously prohibited activities such as alcohol consumption and prostitution, but whose character was marred by stinginess (*emsāk*), Behbahānī 1993, 219.

26. Behbahānī 1993, 163.

27. Behbahānī 1993, 174–5.



cursed [Sindhī].” Although they had houses next to one another, “for the duration of two months he [Mollā Esmā‘īl] did not greet me (*be-man salām namikard*).”<sup>28</sup> Upon arriving in Muscat, Behbahānī found another patron and eventually “the accursed Sayyed” departed for Sindh. Mollā Esmā‘īl, “remorseful of his deeds, expressed his apology and demonstrated his repentance.” Behbahānī accepted his apology and allowed him back as a student.<sup>29</sup> That Behbahānī forgave Mollā Esmā‘īl, after his rude behavior and unsavory activities with Sindhī, indicates that perhaps at this early stage in his career Behbahānī needed students in order to secure his status as a religious scholar and teacher. More than anything, though, Behbahānī’s forgiveness narrates his own magnanimity.

In a narrative that presents himself and his friend as virtuous individuals, Behbahānī relates the ethical conduct that took place within a desirable friendship in Hyderabad. He describes a welcoming committee meeting him, headed by ‘Alī Bayg Khān Kermānī, the head of the Qizilbash community, about three kilometers from the city. The day after he entered the city, his second day in Hyderabad, he was called on by a group of city notables, including Mīr ‘Abd al-Latīf Shūshtarī. Shūshtarī also returned the following day with an apology on behalf of his paternal cousin, Mīr ‘Abd al-Qāsem Khān (titled Mīr ‘Ālam), who had sent the welcoming committee but was himself unable to pay Behbahānī a visit due to the advanced state of his leprosy.<sup>30</sup> Noting his visitors’ illustrious ancestry, Behbahānī elaborates on their correspondingly noble (ethical) acts of hospitality by describing his visit to Mīr ‘Ālam’s house in minute detail. Upon arriving at his house, Behbahānī was greeted and escorted inside by another of Mīr ‘Ālam’s cousins and then met in the middle of the courtyard by Mīr ‘Ālam and a host of notables: “When I reached the edge of the carpet, two people holding Mīr ‘Ālam by the underarms brought him to greet [me].” In spite of the severity of Mīr ‘Ālam’s disease, which had ravaged his face and body, and the general injunction to flee lepers, Behbahānī tells us that he and Mīr ‘Ālam sat next to one another and were freely affectionate (*dast va baghal shodīm*).<sup>31</sup> Recounting the honors that Mīr ‘Ālam bestowed on him indicated to the reader that Behbahānī was a high-status person of noble lineage and ethical comportment, further demonstrated by his disregard of Mīr ‘Ālam’s leprosy.

While Mīr ‘Ālam became his patron, through whom Behbahānī se-

28. Behbahānī 1993, 175.

29. Behbahānī 1993, 176.

30. Behbahānī 1993, 231. Mīr ‘Ālam and Shūshtarī hailed from an illustrious lineage of learned scholars, including their great-grandfather, Sayyed Ne‘matollāh Jazā‘erī, a famous late Safavid *mollā*. For more on this family, see Momen 1985, 118; and Cole 1988, 22.

31. Behbahānī 1993, 231–2.

cured funds to repair and build fortifications around the Iraqi shrine cities, Shūshtarī is narrated as his closest friend in Hyderabad. Having told us of their close and constant friendship, he describes Shūshtarī as “extremely well spoken and well mannered (*nīkū aṭvār*), generous, humble, and his was the soul of gentility (*mabādī-ye ādāb*).” To demonstrate these characteristics, he remarks that “there was never an occasion at his house or at my house but that he sat opposite me on the *masnad* [raised platform], even though all the officials and notables viewed him with such honor and respect... he had not lost his humility (*kūchak-deli va forū-tanī*).”<sup>32</sup> Inviting a guest to sit next to, rather than facing a host of high-status birth and high rank could signify the host’s acknowledgement of a similar status, as well as the humble display of honor bestowed upon a guest through intimacy.

At one point Behbahānī fell sick, and Shūshtarī visited him and received Behbahānī’s request that, should he die, Shūshtarī accompany his corpse to the graveyard on foot. But Behbahānī recovered, and it was Shūshtarī who fell ill and died. Behbahānī faithfully attended to his friend’s affairs and “in spite of the fact that people flee from the dead and if anyone attends to them [the dead] even a little bit he is considered a corpse-washer (*mordashū’ī*), I closed his eyes and mouth myself and carried his corpse outside of the house.”<sup>33</sup> As they set off for the graveyard, Behbahānī, at the insistence of the attending notables and officials, was about to accompany the bier in a carriage because of pains in his legs that had rendered him virtually unable to walk: “Just when I was about to climb [in the carriage], the request I had made of him [Shūshtarī] that he should accompany my corpse on foot, came to my mind. I took heed of this warning (*‘ebrat*) and I accompanied [the bier] on foot.” To drive the point home, Behbahānī reports that “for as long as I was in that city, on Friday nights I would visit his grave and read the prayer for [the forgiveness of] the dead (*fātiḥa*).” Behbahānī remained a loyal friend even beyond death through the fulfillment of this ritual, in spite of the fact that this put him in an awkward position vis-à-vis Shūshtarī’s adversaries.<sup>34</sup> By depicting the ethical comportment of friendship, embodied in the exchange of physical acts, Behbahānī narrates Shūshtarī as kindred. It is through the forms of these relationships that exchanges of status and patronage are made. In the act of sitting next to him, two powerful citizens of the city embrace the young religious scholar of renowned family who traveled through elite circles in Iran. Behbahānī’s description of the honor

32. Behbahānī 1993, 236–7.

33. Behbahānī 1993, 238.

34. Behbahānī 1993, 238. For more on Shūshtarī’s family and involvement in Hyderabad politics, see Dalrymple 2002, 129–39.

and intimacy they show him repays this kindness in the public space of his text. It buttresses his own status, depicts Hyderabad as a place, and animates the journey of Behbahānī's life.

### The Primacy of Place in Maftūn's *Zubdat al-akhbār fi sawānih al-afsār*

Just as Iranians came to India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to perfect their poetry, so, in the early nineteenth century, Maftūn represented his travels through Iran as a way to perfect his spiritual state. Never far from spiritual integrity was Persianate cultural perfection, and Maftūn's narration of his trip through Iran alternates between veneration of the tombs of *emāmzādas* (children of the twelve Shi'i Imams) and Persian poets, effusive praise of men of religion and men of letters. It is through these affiliations with the Shi'i and the Persianate that Maftūn's place of origin is framed as a locality, and Iran as an unfamiliar, rather than foreign, place. As the nineteenth century waned, Maftūn's way of affiliating with Iran became increasingly unintelligible, since first languages vested in territorial origins came to dominate the terms of identity. The prestige of Persian was vested in land and Persianate culture could then only be understood as foreign to India.

After the Napoleonic wars, Russia emerged as Britain's main imperial rival in Central Asia. Qajar Iran was caught in the middle of this Great Game. By the early nineteenth century, the former Safavid Empire had been reunited under the rule of Qajar kings, though Iran was engaged with Russia in two wars (1804–13 and 1826–28) over the last of these erstwhile domains in the Caucasus. The result was the loss of not just Georgian and Armenian Christian subjects, and Sunni subjects in Dāghestān, but also, with the loss of half of Azarbaijan, of Shi'a subjects to Russian rule.<sup>35</sup> In India, the Mughal monarchs in Delhi were virtually British prisoners and their political legitimacy was slowly being demoted. The once powerful regional kingdoms of Awadh and Hyderabad, heirs to the Mughal imperial system, were increasingly unable to resist the pressures of British power. The legitimacy of Mughal sovereignty was still acknowledged by Indian princes, who continued to read the *khoṭba* (Friday prayer), strike coins and sign decrees in the Mughal emperor's name, as his vassals. The British government had also observed Mughal ritual forms.<sup>36</sup> But this changed in the 1820s as the British

35. For an account of these wars and their context, see Algar 1969, 45–102; and Kashani-Sabet 1999, 19–23.

36. Burke and Quraishi 1995, 25–29.

government began addressing Akbar Shāh (r. 1806–37) as they addressed the sovereigns of West Asia, as peers rather than overlords.<sup>37</sup> The British, then, were dismantling the formal edifices of Mughal power when Maftūn visited Iran.

As Shi'a, both Maftūn and Behbahānī related to Iran as a part of the Persianate world that concentrated a Shi'i ruler, religious community and centers of learning. Both Maftūn and Behbahānī describe Fath 'Alī Shāh as *pādeshāh-e Islam* (the King of [Shi'i] Islam), invoking a responsibility to protect Muslim subjects, especially from non-Muslim rule. In the geopolitical context of the third decade of the nineteenth century, Maftūn's travel text exhibits some differences from its eighteenth-century predecessors. Whereas previous travelers to Iran and the Ottoman domains from Hindustan could proudly boast of the accomplishments of the Muslim Mughal monarchs in turning Hindustan into a paradisiacal land prospering due to just (Islamic) government and able administration, Maftūn is strangely silent.<sup>38</sup> His effusive praise of past and present Shi'i rulers of Iran and their accomplishments (as seen in cities and across the land) needs to be read in the context of this silence about home. Like Behbahānī, Maftūn's praise is articulated according to an ethics of proper comportment based on religious norms, but not reducible to them. He notes that Karīm Khān (r. 1750–79) was known as *Vakīl* (Regent or protector) because "he sincerely believed that he was not worthy of taking the throne... Inspired by great belief in the Lord of the Age (the Hidden Imam) he considered himself a Regent among the deputies of that choicest part of God's mercy (the Hidden Imam) entrusted with the custody and guardianship of the Shi'a populace and their vassals (*mavālī*)," and the inscriptions of the gold and silver coins of his reign bear witness to his fidelity to that promise (*bar ṣadāqat-e īn qawl shāhed ast*).<sup>39</sup> Such a narration highlights the fulfillment of the promises of Shi'i rule, unencumbered by British dominion.

In the section on Tehran, where Maftūn outlines the ongoing events of the second Perso-Russian war, he reports that Sayyed Mohammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the foremost *mojtahed* of the Iraqi shrine cities, based on reports of Muslim persecution under the Russians, forced Fath 'Alī Shāh to declare war in 1826. Maftūn refers to the Russians as "uncouth godless ones (*bī*

37. Burke and Quraishi 1995, 52–3.

38. See for instance, Kashmīrī 1970, 215–7. 'Abd al-Karīm Kashmīrī's *Bayān-e Vāqe'* has a similar itinerary to Maftūn's. Kashmīrī traveled from Delhi with Nadir Shah Afshar's army in 1739 to Iran, and then to visit the Iraqi shrine cities on his way to the Hijaz to perform hajj. He returned to Hindustan via a ship to Bengal in 1742. See further Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007, 247–90; and Kia 2009.

39. Maftūn 2003, 9.

*dīnān-e bad-ā'in*),” linking a lack of proper comportment with a lack of proper belief.<sup>40</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī issued a fatwa tarring as an unbeliever (*kāfer*) anyone who failed to do their utmost to struggle against the Russian dominion over the Shi'a subjects of former Iranian domains. Maftūn approvingly describes Ṭabāṭabā'ī's concern and initially gentle attempts to convince the Shah, finally going so far as to travel from Karbala to Tehran to rally support.<sup>41</sup> For Maftūn, the clergy is rightfully protecting the people and forcing the Shah to do the same. This concept of the proper relationship between ulema and ruler, and their creation of an ethical/religious realm for the protection of the people is not inherent to Iran or India, but the ability to realize this ideal relationship is specific to Iran in Maftūn's time.

For Maftūn, the new land he encounters is laden with spiritual and cultural significance, focused around figures and places Hindustani Persians would know from various literary and commemorative texts. It is the physical presence of spiritual and cultural markers through which he narrates Iran. It is not that cities in Hindustan do not have illustrious founders, or are not dotted with the tombs of saints, but they are not integral to pre-Islamic Persian or Qur'anic history, or part of the early history of Islamic heartlands. The city of Shiraz boasted the tombs of the poets Hāfez and Sa'dī, both of which Maftūn visited and described at length.<sup>42</sup> Shiraz was also home to the shrine of Shāh Cherāgh, and other prominent *emānzādas*, whom Maftūn calls *ma'šūmzāda*, or born of purity.<sup>43</sup> This difference in the valence of geography, however, is not the radical alterity that modern notions of native versus foreign evoke.

Shared understandings of geographical valence are the product of a literary culture that contained the tools through which the unfamiliar could be rendered familiar. Maftūn has a sense of India and Iran as distinct but similar places, like the broad road out of Būshehr that resembles, for him, the roads in India.<sup>44</sup> When extolling the natural beauty of Shiraz and its environs, he comments that “its green plains and verdant city are the cause of shame and the hyacinth and narcissus filled hills are the envy (*rashk*) of the agreeable hills of Kashmir.”<sup>45</sup> Nothing in Maftūn's biography, little known as it is, indicates that he traveled to Kashmir. There is no reason to assume

40. Maftūn 2003, 117.

41. Maftūn 2003, 117–8. For Maftūn's full description of the wars and these politics, see 2003, 117–28. For an analysis of the declaration of this war as jihad, see Masroori 2004, 263–74.

42. For his visit to Hāfez and then Sa'dī's graves, see Maftūn 2003, 25–30.

43. For instance, Maftūn 2003, 24 and 26.

44. Maftūn 2003, 3.

45. Maftūn 2003, 8–9.

his readers would have done so either. It is more likely that he was familiar with the common literary image of Kashmir as a paradisiacal land, passed down in Hindustani Persian texts, which would have been familiar to his readers as well.<sup>46</sup> By connecting the beauty of a place in Iran with a place in the subcontinent, Iran is reinforced as unfamiliar, but not radically different and thus foreign. But rather than link the beauty of the two places equitably, Maftūn places the beauty of the Shirazi countryside above that of Kashmir, causing it to be a source of envy.

Though political fragmentation, colonial encroachment and a decided Iranianization of the Persian language had occurred in both India and Iran, a Hindustani Persian could still narrate the history of places according to a dual Islamic and pre-Islamic Persian narrative.<sup>47</sup> This dual parallel narrative permeated Irani and Hindustani Persian culture up through the early nineteenth century, as seen in various kinds of texts, from formal historical chronicles, *tazkeras* (commemorative compendiums) or travel narratives like Maftūn's.<sup>48</sup> Maftūn's text is laden with historical context, both the immediate political context of current rulers and ongoing events (like the Perso-Russian war), as well as the near and far past of places. The far past was the history of a place of which no physical marks remained, rather knowledge of this history saturated Persianate literary and visual culture in the form of universal and dynastic histories, literary epics and symbolic representations in miniature painting. Julie Meisami notes that "[t]he role of history in linking present rulers with past ones (whether with those of ancient Iran or early Islamic times) and thereby legitimizing the transfer of power to the current incumbents is clearly crucial" and had been since the early eastern Islamicate regimes embraced Persian as one way to cultivate autonomous authority from the Caliphate.<sup>49</sup>

Maftūn begins his description of Esfahan with a genealogy of its builders,

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46. This view is propagated in Mughal texts, and shared by Iranian Persian texts as well. See Kia, forthcoming; and Kashmīrī 1970. Kashmir became the summer residence of Mughal emperors.

47. The narrative of pre-Islamic Persian kings is a prose re-inscription of the epic poem the *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings). This format of reconciled, parallel Biblio-Qur'anic and pre-Islamic Persian history followed by the birth of the Prophet and the start of the era of Islam in the universal history *Rawzat al-safā* became the template for Mughal and Safavid-period universal histories throughout the early modern period, however differently their post-Timurid accounts might be focused. See Tavakoli-Targhi 2001, 93 and 85; Quinn 2000, 127–36; and Meisami 1993.

48. For an example of this type of mapping of history on to geography in a *tazkera*, see Āzar Begdelī's *Ātashkada*, written in the 1770s in Qum. Also see Kashmīrī's *Bayān* and 'Abdul Latīf Shūshtārī's *Tohfāt al-'Ālam*, among many others.

49. Meisami 1993, 250.

locating the city not just as the best city of Iran, and by extension the world, but also as the oldest. He notes that “the flourishing of the city was built by the heirs of Tahmūrath Pīshdādī and Jamshīd and Eskandar and Kayqobād, who was the first Keyāni ruler.”<sup>50</sup> This Persianate history also visually limns the physical structures of the cities. In Shiraz, Maftūn provides a detailed description of the governor’s palace.<sup>51</sup> He notes that the walls are painted with images of the feats of “lion-hunting heroes and well-known champions (*tahamtanān*), including Rostam, Zāl, Gīv, Gūdarz, Farāmarz, Pashūtan, Bahman, Rohām, Borzū’ī, Sohrāb, and Esfandeyār.”<sup>52</sup> The mention of such names is not accompanied by any explanation, suggesting that Maftūn could assume his audience’s familiarity with such information. Islamic and pre-Islamic Persian historical narratives run in parallel harmony in most universal histories so that the latter does not conflict with the former. Together they could be evoked to link a new land with familiar meanings slower to change than the meaning of the near past.

Another historically specific aspect of Maftūn’s text is the new form of representation that structures Maftūn’s text. The minutiae of the state of the roads, every caravanserai and its nearby villages, as well as information about the quality of available water, and kinds of food stuffs in village market places, indicate that at least one possible use for the text was as a practical manual for future pilgrims and travelers. These descriptions also demonstrate that Maftūn’s celebration of Iran is not uniform, that he found some places less than spectacular. An instance is Maftūn’s description of Mehyār, the final halting place before Esfahan:

With two hours remaining of the night we set out and arrived at the next halting place near to perishing (*qarīb-e zavāl*). Its main road is level and at the middle of the way is a flowing stream, around which there is a run-down village (*qarīa-ye kharābī*) in which agriculture takes place. There are also several gardens visible. There is a caravanserai fine and firmly built, solid and spacious in the fashion of Shāh ‘Abbās’s structures, where reservoir water, bread and accompanying victuals (*qāteq*) can be obtained. The headman (*kadkhodā*) is Hajji ‘Alī Akbar. Its [the village’s] income is 3000 tomans a year. At this time, revenue collection is [in the hands of] Amīr Qāsem Khān and copper coin is the collected currency. The office higher [than that of Amīr Qāsem Khān] belongs to the prince of Esfahan. This halting place is five farsakhs [from the previous one].<sup>53</sup>

50. Maftūn 2003, 55. For more on these figures, see Ferdowsi 2007.

51. For the full description, see Maftūn 2003, 11–4.

52. Maftūn 2003, 13–4; for more on these figures, see Ferdowsi 2007.

53. Maftūn 2003, 54.



The descriptions of cities provide another conundrum, one not so easily chalked up to practical information for the future pilgrim. Various structures within cities, usually those that classically define Islamic cities – palace, bath, bazaar, mosque and garden – are described in such a way that very nearly create a photographic image of these structures through written description. Certain structures even warrant pages of versified praise, such as the mosque and bathhouse built in Shiraz by Karīm Khān Zand.<sup>54</sup> In addition to structures common to every Muslim urban center, Maftūn describes those that define Iran within the Persianate world—providing painstaking details of the design and inscriptions of *emāmzādas*, tombs of poets and structures built by political figures.<sup>55</sup> He carefully identifies the builder of each, the builder’s history, the building’s location, its appearance and its features. Previous travel texts, like Behbahānī’s, certainly mention and describe important or impressive buildings within cities, but not in such realistic, comprehensive and minute detail down to the type of stone, its color and inscriptions. In fact, Maftūn maps every major city that he travels through from end to end, beginning with each gate, its major thoroughfares, the sectors of the cities, pinpointing the structures he describes in three-dimensional detail on to the map. For instance, after pages of both prose and poetic description of Karīm Khān’s mosque and baths, Maftūn notes that “to the east of the mosque is the market square (*chār sū*) of the Vakīl, which without exaggeration has no equal in all the provinces of the seven climes. Length-wise it is approximately just over 1500 paces, and the same in width. In the center is a perfectly laid out, well-cut octagonal fountain (*ḥawẓ*). In all four directions are substantial (*matīn*) shops, possessing high, full ceilings, singular in height and width, and each property is in such an appointed condition which is not to be found elsewhere.” He then goes on to detail which areas of the market square contain which wares, all described in detail.<sup>56</sup> The cities are presented as sites of political power, cultural prestige and religious devotion. These descriptions go on for over twenty pages in Shiraz, Esfahan, Tehran and Mashhad. This limning of the landscape, mapped with such detail, materially recreates Iran, in all its spiritual and cultural glory, as well as providing practical information for the would-be traveler.

Perhaps a reason for this unprecedented virtual tour lies in an earlier shift in representational forms of painting in late eighteenth-century India, where the artistic focus shifted to the architectural monuments of urban

54. Maftūn 2003, 9; for descriptions of Shiraz, see 2003, 11–32; for poetry in honor of the mosque 2003, 15; and in honor of the bathhouse 2003, 16–8.

55. For the shrine of a son of the fourth Imam, see Maftūn 2003, 24.

56. Maftūn 2003, 18.

spaces. Architecture always had a presence in Mughal painting, but mostly as backdrop to provide context of place. Thus buildings were drawn with specifically identifiable features, but these were vaguely articulated due to the largely stylized forms of depiction. Previous travel texts also described cities and their major structures, but these descriptions were not realistic; rather they provided several specificities, couched in vague, stylized terms used for any number of other structures. Beginning in the eighteenth century, architecture in Mughal manuscript traditions would emerge as a central subject of representation in subsequent artistic traditions, in contrast to the earlier prevalence of portraiture and studies of flora and fauna. These textual and pictorial representations of architecture, in more technical and clearly articulated detail, lent character to a place and posed architecture as a more integral sign of the achievements of rulers.<sup>57</sup> This connection is echoed in Maftūn's description of the history of cities in terms of its architecture that was always linked to a patron/ruler. Just as Maftūn connects Karīm Khān to the structures of Shiraz, he limns Esfahan with structures built by the Safavid Shahs, Tehran as built by Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh and Mashhad as built by centuries of rulers, particularly Nāder Shāh and Shāhrokh Shāh Afshār. These linkages between architectural structures mapped on to urban space and political order serve as a vehicle through which Maftūn narrates the political and cultural impact of history.

Social encounters play a smaller role in the text, buttressing the effect of geographical descriptions. In Tehran, Maftūn and his companions receive visits and invitations from other Hindustani Persian Shi'a migrants. One of these is Sayyed Akbar 'Alī Fayzābādī, a prominent physician "who has been in this land (*deyār*) for eighteen years and has chosen to settle down and establish a family (*ta'hel*). He can enter into the society of many great and leading nobles of the city without ceremony and they accord him great honor and respect (*'ezzat va eqtedār*)."<sup>58</sup> Representations of Hindustani Shi'a in Iran, described as commanding respect and receiving great honor from prominent local nobles and officials, serve to make Iran more familiar.

Encounters with religious scholars buttress Maftūn's spiritual limning of the land. For example, Maftūn and his eminent Hindustani travel companions arrive in Tehran with letters for local personages, such as the Friday prayer leader of Tehran, Sayyed Mohammad Mahdī. On the first day Maftūn arrived in Tehran he was invited to call upon the Sayyed. He describes him with such honorifics as the "cream (*zobdat*) of the ulema" and effusively lauds his praiseworthy qualities and morals/manners (*awṣāf-e ḥamīda* and

57. Dadlani 2010, 186–9.

58. Maftūn 2003, 108.

*akhlaq-e pasandīda*). He also notes that the Sayyed is descended from the son-in-law of Mollā Mohammad Bāqer Majlesī, the famed late Safavid Shakyh al-Islam of Esfahan. This information draws a parallel that would be obvious to a Shi'i audience, exalting clerical lineage in a reflection of the nobility of prophetic lineage. After the Sayyed had received and read the letters, he welcomed the travelers. Maftūn comments that, "as much as this noble group (*tā'efa-ye sharīfa*) has customs (*rasm*), more than [even] those rituals and polite manners (*akhlāq*) came into practice."<sup>59</sup> For Maftūn, the pinnacle of the Persianate is also the pinnacle of Shi'ism. Throughout his text, those devoted to and correct in religion are also the most noble and virtuous in terms of the ethics of sociability. The idea of Iranian kingship as a Shi'i monarchy, as protector of the faithful and the domains of the faithful, was the idiom through which the land of Iran came to be venerated.<sup>60</sup> We can see this veneration of Iran as a sacred site in Maftūn's extensive descriptions of Iranian cities. In a poem extolling and elaborating on the mosque that Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh had built in the bazaar neighborhood of Tehran, Maftūn calls it the second Ka'ba (*bovad īn masjid-e Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh ka'ba-ye dovvom*).<sup>61</sup>

As a final note, it is important to note that Iran was not automatically a site of pilgrimage for Maftūn. His original intention, like many of his predecessors, was to visit the shrine cities of Iraq. Only when that way was closed to him did he journey toward Mashhad and thus visit the poetic centers of Esfahan, Shiraz and the capital city of Tehran. Other Persian travelers from the subcontinent had been perfectly content to bypass Iran on their return to India, such as Abū Ṭāleb Esfahānī, who visited Kazamayn, Samara, Najaf and Karbala on his return from Europe to India in 1804.<sup>62</sup> In fact, the Hindustani Persians that Maftūn finds living in Tehran are all described as having taken up residence there on their way to or just after pilgrimage to the Iraqi shrine cities, rather than as having intentionally traveled to Iran to settle. Still, once there, Iran was limned according to well-known religious, poetic and Persianate historical personages and events, according it a kind of spiritual and cultural veneration on the part of a Shi'i Hindustani Persian living under British rule. Over the course of the next decades, room for this veneration would shrink and shift as first colonial and then anti-colonial nationalist narratives vested geographical entities with discrete cultures embodied in exclusive native language(s), until Persian became as foreign to

59. Maftūn 2003, 108.

60. See Babayan 2002.

61. Maftūn 2003, 113.

62. Abū Ṭāleb 2004, 400–35. For the early nineteenth-century English translation of this travelogue, see Abū Ṭāleb 2009.

India as the Indian was in Iran.

## Encountering Difference

In spite of the ways both Maftūn and Behbahānī render the new as familiar and comprehensible, they also encountered people, places and practices that were alien and incomprehensible to them. Unfamiliar practices were interpreted according to proximity or distance from Muslim lands, or the efficacy of Muslim rule in creating an ideal virtuous society. Behbahānī identifies local customs mostly as deviations from the true faith that stem from adoption of Hindu practices. He notes difference primarily with Hindustani Shi‘a, and it is for them that he reserves harsh censure. For instance, Behbahānī describes the local practice of marriage rituals as undermining the gender relations upon which proper social order rests:

[In this country,] they [Muslims] give a marriage portion (*mahr*) [to a wife] beyond their means: a man who does not possess the capacity to pay even a thousand rupees commits to forty or fifty thousand, up to even twenty or thirty lac rupees. It is for this reason that women in this country rule (*mosallaṭ*) over their husbands, except for a few, who because of their endowed goodness (*khūbī-ye dhāt*) are submissive and strive to please their husbands.<sup>63</sup>

Women rule rather than men, a calamity for the social order produced by erroneous practices. Behbahānī comments that most of these customs, along with many others, are of Hindu origin and were introduced into Muslim practice under the Mughal emperor Akbar. But this disapproval is due to the perception that this intermingling with Hindu practice had in some cases led to the abrogation of Muslim law, such as the supposed abandonment of circumcision among imperial princes.<sup>64</sup> Such disapproval was not uniform toward any local practice. As noted above, Behbahānī admired certain institutions, including the postal system. He also lauded certain social practices, such as adoption and fosterage, and himself adopted a son, for whom he professed “love as for a true son.” Rendering it proper to Islam, he notes that it was a custom prevalent in the Hijaz, though unknown in Iran.<sup>65</sup> Thus in some ways Hindustan was superior to Iran in the practice of Islam.

Similarly, Maftūn stopped in Kazarūn and had to camp outside the city because of the violent rivalry between the Ne‘matīs and Haydarīs, factional affiliations territorially rooted in the various neighborhoods of the city:

63. Behbahānī 1993, 212.

64. Behbahānī 1993, 214.

65. He cites the introduction of Zayd ibn Ḥārīsa, Behbahānī 1993, 222–3.

“There are groups called Ne‘matīs and Haydarīs who fight and kill each other. The reason for their generations-long quarrel since olden times has been for the purpose of the perfection of their own sect. The astounding thing is that they are together united in the Twelver Shi‘i sect.” But the reason for this conflict is not a result of the corrupting influence of another faith. Maftūn states that “No other reason for the origin of this war and strife comes to mind, except the deceit of the accursed Devil (*Eblīs*). And no threat or contrivance of any governor or leader has profited the situation at all. Taking heed of this bad activity (*bad-‘amali*), I made camp a little outside the town in the warehouse (*barband*) of Hajji Husayn, which was an enclosure without a ceiling.”<sup>66</sup> Since this rivalry was territorially rooted, his residence in any part of the city would have automatically affiliated him with one of the two rival factions. He thus avoids error and involvement in an erroneous practice by staying outside the city proper, in rather uncomfortable circumstances. In Iran, error was caused by the Devil and not by idolaters, as it was in India for Behbahānī. Yet Maftūn’s tone of condemnation is somewhat more muted, likely because he is not a *mojtahed*, but also because such error is caused by the exceptional work of the devil, rather than the sustained interaction with a faith perceived as idolatrous.

Although Persianate culture was something in which people both in Iran and India participated, *‘ajam* meant more than a Persian-speaker. Muzaffar Alam calls *‘ajam* “the non-Arab world of eastern Islam.” The high culture dominant in both Mughal and Safavid realms in the early modern period, based on a shared education and literary aesthetics, developed through “a dialogue between the Persian language and the Indian cultural ethos...a result of constant interaction between the literary matrices of India, on the one hand and of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia on the other.”<sup>67</sup> This interaction was also of a social nature, as migration, even in the less frequent and less documented travel from east to west, resulted in an embodied social aspect of this shared cultural ethos. Maftūn, for example, describes being entertained by the various Hindustani Shi‘a of Tehran:

Janāb Mīr Mughal Sāheb, who is of the Sayyeds from within the borders (*khetta-ye*) of Kashmir is unrivaled in his praiseworthy qualities (*awṣāf-e ḥamīda*) and had residence (*qeyām*) in Lucknow. Having arrived in Iran five or six years ago, he undertook noble pilgrimage to the holy cities of Iraq, and chose to settle down here [Tehran] ... he offered us hospitality in the Persian style (*ḏeyāfat-e ‘ajamāna*).<sup>68</sup>

66. Maftūn 2003, 6. For more on these factions, see Perry 2003.

67. Alam 2004, 121.

68. Maftūn 2003, 109.

The idea of ‘*ajam*’ appears as a distinctive style, something Maftūn attributes to the form of Kashmīrī’s hospitality, while another of his hosts, Janāb Chaudhuri, is described differently as “taking the greatest pains” (*be-kamāl-i takallof*).<sup>69</sup> Maftūn recognizes ‘*ajamāna*’ as a particular manner and custom of hospitality, something that Hindustanis can and do practice, making them Persian in Iran.

For Behbahānī, the presence of ethical social behavior and resulting community harmony could change the nature of place itself. He notes, “unlike the residents of the island of Bombay, where everyone is a blood-thirsty enemy (*doshman-e khūnkhvār*) and seeks to ruin each other’s business,” all of the Qizilbash in Masulipatnam “appeared in unanimity (*mottafeq*) with each other.” Because of the “beauty of the unity and morality (*hosn-e ettefāq va akhlāq*) [of the inhabitants of Masulipatnam] that port has come to resemble (*nemūna-ye*) Iran.”<sup>70</sup> Social interaction here has a direct impact on perceptions of place, transforming the proximity and thus identity of place itself. Such observations are hardly the polarized radical difference of place that defines Said’s notion of Orientalism.

Like many learned Persians, Behbahānī’s mobility was a constant feature of his existence, even before he set out for India. Behbahānī’s text presents his early travels in Iran and Iraq as a search for knowledge. When he arrives in the subcontinent this purpose becomes inverted, as he seeks to impart religious knowledge as a way to gain patronage. In contrast, Maftūn traveled westwards to improve his spiritual state through pilgrimage, a form of gaining knowledge. As a Persian poet, his travels through Iranian literary centers provided a means of cultural self-perfection through the acquisition of another kind of knowledge. These differences were bound up in the shared understanding of the meaning of different lands where West and South Asia had contrasting relationships to sacred space and cultural knowledge. However, access to knowledge and the sacred could be acquired through travel and study. As a text of travel and specifically of pilgrimage, the rhetorical labor of Maftūn’s narrative can be read as a forum where he displays his religious and poetic knowledge, for his audience at home, confirmed through the cultural and spiritual luminaries of the Hijaz and Iran. Traveling out of their respective domains, yet still within the Persianate world, albeit somewhat fractured by the early nineteenth century, Behbahānī and Maftūn reveal place of origin as a category of difference still tied to pre-colonial meanings where difference was not absolute, and could contain certain similarities forged according to a shared understanding of

69. Maftūn 2003, 109; the phrase also means offering many dishes.

70. Behbahānī 1993, 252–3.

virtue and ethical comportment.

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