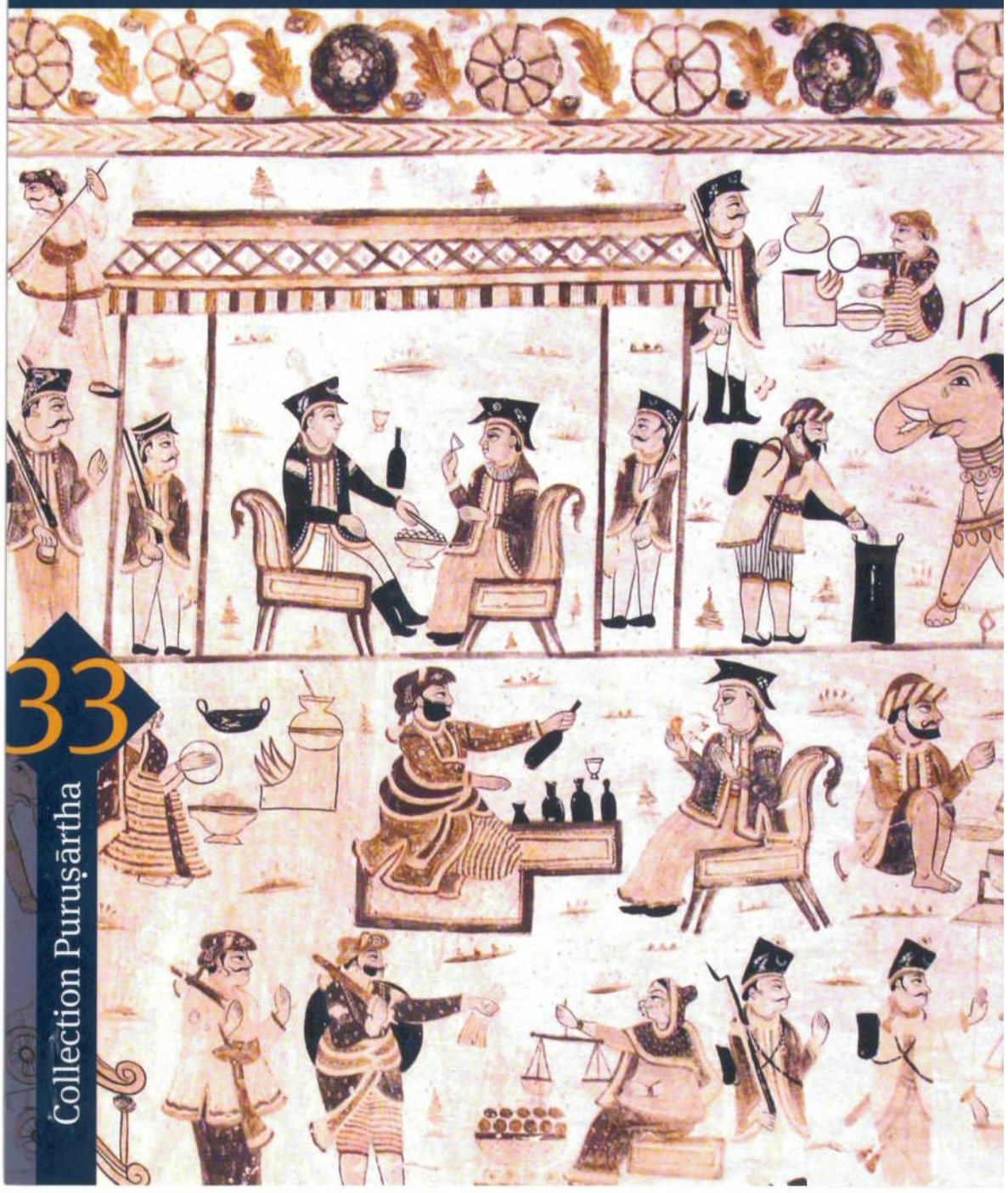
Cosmopolitismes en Asie du Sud

Sources, itinéraires, langues (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle)



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Collection Puruṣārtha

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Origin Narratives, Legitimacy, and the Practice of Cosmopolitan Language in the Early Modern Deccan

To a sixteenth century elite reader in Iṣfahān, Herāt, or Bukhārā, court chronicles from India would sound quite familiar. Notwithstanding the unique political, social, and geographical circumstances in the subcontinent, premodern India was part of a Perso-Islamic world. As such, many elite groups in India were operating within a Persian-speaking environment that stretched from the subcontinent to Iran, Central Asia, and even Anatolia. These elites, therefore, shared basic cultural characteristics with their peers elsewhere in the Persianate world: political philosophy, literary imagery, ways of expression, and historical memory (Alam 2004). In this sense, the political language of the Muslim East was operating within a Persian cosmopolis, to use Sheldon Pollock's term.[1]

At the same time, the large diversity in populations, beliefs, and societies led to the creation of varied political structures within this wide space. Accordingly, the mutually intelligible political idiom was employed in different manners to correspond with the diverse circumstances. Stephen Dale (2010) marked such variations on a theme when comparing the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals. Further variations are only expected to be found in smaller, non-imperial polities, which emerged in the peripheries simultaneously with the aforementioned empires. Their weaker position and ongoing struggles notwithstanding, these polities shared elements of their political language with their wider surroundings, thus acting, at least in part, within the Persian cosmopolis.[2]

Such non-imperial polities were the Deccan Sultanates, a collective term referring to the successors of the Bahmanī Sultanate in the Deccan Plateau of peninsular India; this terms covers the sultanates of Aḥmadnagar, Bījāpūr, Golkonda, and the short-lived Berār and Bīdar. The sultanates varied from one another in historical memory, territorial identity, and linguistic affiliation.

Yet they shared basic sociopolitical characteristics. In all sultanates, the majority of the population, including a significant part of the elites, were non-Muslims, who were politically and culturally identified with their vernacular of Marathi (in Aḥmadnagar and Bījāpūr), Kannada (in Bījāpūr), or Telugu (in Golkonda). Local Muslim society too was not homogeneous, with several identifiable groups. One included the Deccanis *(dakniyān or dakkhaniyān),* or local Muslims, who were the descendants of local converts to Islam, manumitted slaves from neighbouring countries (e.g. Vijayanagara), and Muslim migrants from North India. A second group comprised of Abyssinian or Ethiopian military slaves *(ḥabshiyān or ḥabashiyān),* who are mentioned in the sources as a distinct group, but onlyas slaves, whose connections with their home countries were severed, usually identified with their new home and tended to cooperate with the Deccanis.[3]

The last political group, on which I focus in this article, includes Muslims who immigrated into the Deccan. They hailed from different places in Iran; the chronicles identify them by their town or province of origin, or by their lineage, if bearing any socio-religious significance. However, as a group, especially in relation to the Deccanis, they appear under the self-styled title of Foreigners *(gharībān).* In a sense, they can be seen as a local manifestation of the wider movement of Iranians around the early modern Indian Ocean in search for both commercial opportunities and employment, positioning themselves at the heart of the political system of various states in South and Southeast Asia (Subrahmanyam 1992; 1995; 2005: 45–79). The Foreigners were not always welcomed by the local population: they presented political and economic challenges, and furthermore, they preferred continuous mobility and identification with their transregional networks to creating long-lasting local affiliations. This choice stood in contrast to the developing regional identities among local Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The growing rift between Foreigners and locals was, in part, responsible for the collapse of the Bahmanī Sultanate in the late fifteenth century, to be later inherited by the Deccan Sultanates, where it occasionally came to the surface both in Bījāpūr and in Aḥmadnagar (Eaton 2005: 67–70; Fischel 2012: 179–226; Kruijtzer 2009: 74–103 ; Sherwani 1985: 131–34, 151–73, 239–43; Shyam 1966: 202–8).

Elite society of the Deccan Sultanates, then, remained highly diverse. This is not unique to that part of the early modern world: elite society of the neighbouring Mughal Empire was similarly divided, if not even more so (Richards 1993; Gommans 2002: 67–97). However, due to their different social and political structures, the Mughal Empire and the Deccan Sultanates managed this diversity differently. This is well reflected in linguistic policies. In the Mughal Empire from the time of Akbar (1556–1605), Persian was chosen and promoted as the state language. As such, all elements of society—regardless

of origin or creed—were invited to take part in working and creating in this language. Whereas vernaculars such as Brajbhāṣa did enjoy some patronage, they remained marginal (Alam 1998; Busch 2010; Kinra 2010). In comparison, in the Deccan Sultanates, a multilingual system emerged. Vernaculars such as Marathi in Bījāpūr and Telugu in Golkonda were incorporated into the administrative system in addition to Persian (Eaton 2014; Fischel 2012: 126–30). Dakhni, the language of the Deccani element of elite society, was promoted too, with sultans such as Muḥammad Qulī Quṭb Shāh of Golkonda (1580–1611) and Ibrāhīm ʿĀdil Shāh II of Bījāpūr (1580–1626) writing in this language (Sherwani & Joshi 1973: ii, 21–30). Considering the highly politicized position of language and the divided structure of society, Persian, the cosmopolitan language in which the sultans communicated with the wider world both technically and symbolically, was identified with the Foreigners.

This essay examines the ways in which elements from the Persian cosmopolitan idiom were integrated into the political language of the Deccan Sultanates. At the heart of this article are origin narratives of two dynasties, the ʿĀdil Shāhīs of Bījāpūr (1480s–1686) and the Niẓām Shāhīs of Aḥmadnagar (c. 1490–1636). Those narratives were composed in Persian by three of the most prominent historians who worked in the sultanates, Muḥammad Qāsim Firishta, Rafīʿ al-Dīn Shīrāzī, and Sayyid ʿAlī Ṭabāṭabāʾī. All three were Iran-born intellectual who migrated to India, and were identified as Foreigners, thus embodying the link between state mechanism in the Deccan and the Persian cosmopolis. They have produced their histories over a limited period, between the 1590s and the 1620s, during what is considered as the heyday of the sultanates. With additional examples from the contemporary Quṭb Shāhī sultanate of Golkonda, I suggest that the origin narratives were operating within the Persian political idiom. At the same time, the common stories and images were manipulated according to the needs of the ruling dynasties. In this way, the sultans aspired to establish their legitimacy according to the acceptable language of the early modern Muslim East, both in order to gain support from their own elites in a turbulent environment, especially the ever transient Foreigners, and to secure their place among the more powerful empires, in particular against the ever-approaching Mughals.

Two Improbable Narratives from Bījāpūr

In the early seventeenth century, when the Sultanate of Bījāpūr was at the height of its glory under Ibrāhīm ʿĀdil Shāh II, two famed chroniclers set to write histories of the Deccan. As residents of Bījāpūr, the main focus of both histories was the ʿĀdil Shāhī dynasty, with each narrative giving an

important place to the life story of its founder, Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān (d. 1510).[4] Their proximity notwithstanding, the two narratives differ from one another quite significantly.

The first narrative was written by Muḥammad Qāsim Hindū Shāh Astarābādī, better known as Firishta (d. 1623), probably the most famous—maybe almost canonised—chronicler who worked in the Deccan Sultanates. Firishta was born in Iran on an unknown date, probably in the 1550s or 1560s. He was brought to Aḥmadnagar as a boy or young man, where he entered the service of Murtaḍa Niẓām Shāh I (1565–88). He left Aḥmadnagar in 1589, along with other Iranians who suffered from another wave of anti-Foreigner hostility, and joined the service of the ʿĀdil Shāhīs of Bījāpūr (Sherwani 1974: 683–84; Hardy 1965). His career puts him safely within the milieu of the Foreigners.

According to Firishta, Abū al-Muẓaffar Yūsuf was the son of the Ottoman Sultan Murād II (1421–51). When the sultan died, his eldest son Muḥammad II (1451–81) ascended the Ottoman throne uncontested. Nevertheless, his nobles encouraged him to kill his younger brother Yūsuf to prevent any problems in the future. This brutal action was explained by telling a story from the early days of Murād II, when a man appeared in the realm, claiming to be Muṣṭafa, son of Bāyezīd I (1389–1402). The false Muṣṭafa carried many nobles after him and presented a serious challenge to Murād's rule. Following the advice of his nobles, Muḥammad II sent them to the harem to seize Yūsuf, execute him, and display his body to the public to avoid any false Yūsufs appearing later. When the nobles arrived at the harem, Yūsuf's mother asked for a delay until morning to bid farewell to her son. At night, she summoned the merchant Khwāja ʿImād al-Dīn Maḥmūd, a Georgian and a resident of Sāva, Iran, who by then had established commercial links with the harem. The mother asked him to bring all slave boys at his disposal. She acquired from him a Circassian boy who resembled Yūsuf, and asked Khwāja ʿImād al-Dīn to smuggle her son to safety in return for generous compensation. In the morning, the nobles returned. Yūsuf's mother bribed one of them to execute the slave boy as if he were Yūsuf and bury him without displaying his body, thus buying Yūsuf precious time.

ʿImād al-Dīn Maḥmūd and Yūsuf embarked on their journey out of Ottoman territories, joining a caravan going to Baghdād. The merchant took a vow that if they arrived at the border of Iran, he would send money to the tomb of Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn, the founder of the Safavid order, in Ardabīl. Thus, from the border, ʿImād al-Dīn hastened to Ardabīl, where he fulfilled his vow and even enrolled Yūsuf among the disciples *(murīd)* in Ṣafī al-Dīn's shrine. From Ardabīl, they continued to ʿImād al-Dīn's hometown of Sāva, where Prince Yūsuf, whose identity was kept secret, was treated as a family member.

Fulfilling his familial responsibilities, ʿImād al-Dīn also sent him to gain formal education along with his own children. At that point, Yūsuf's mother sent a messenger to enquire about the well-being of her son, and when she was assured of his good condition, she sent precious gifts as promised to Khwāja ʿImād al-Dīn. The merchant had already left for India for trade, so with this gift, his family discovered Yūsuf's true identity. Soon thereafter, the Aqquyunlu governor of Sāva too became aware of the issue. He tried to blackmail Yūsuf, who chose to leave the city.

Yūsuf first travelled to Qom, where "he decided that so long as the governor of Sāva is not dismissed, he would not return to his home country *(vaṭan-i maʾlūf)*" (Firishta 1864: ii, 2). From Qom he continued to Kāshān, Iṣfahān and eventually arrived in Shīrāz. When the oppressive governor of Sāva was finally dismissed, Yūsuf intended to return to the town. But then, "our prophet Khiḍr ʿAlī" appeared in his dream, and said:

> By divine order, sip from the goblet of severing all connections to your home and of leaving your friends and loved ones, and endure the labour of a promising journey. Do not consider turning away from your intention [to go to] India because of your fluctuating fortunes. The reins of self-control, [given by] divine guidance [to be used] against [the seductiveness] of the Zulaykhās of this world,[5] will be firmly in your grasp; the prosperity of religion and state will be attached to your fortunes. Embark on a ship and travel away on board without doubting this bright zenith of prosperity [to come] from the gracious [divine] power. Drive away [your] fears from the desert of hesitation and discord, [just like] Joseph (Yūsuf) turned his eyes away from Canaan and his brothers and erased the picture of [his] home country from the board of [his] memory (Firishta 1864: ii, 3).

In 1459-60, Yūsuf travelled from Hormuz, and after a troubled journey, arrived in Muṣṭafa-ābād Dabhol. The good fortune, which Firishta attributes again to Khiḍr, helped Yūsuf once more. In Dabhol, Yūsuf met Khwāja ʿImād al-Dīn Maḥmūd Gurjistānī (lit. "the Georgian"), possibly the very same merchant who had smuggled him out of the Ottoman Empire and happened to be in the harbour for business. Based on Yūsuf's good manners and beauty, Khwāja ʿImād al-Dīn Maḥmūd enrolled him as a military slave and took him to Bīdar. As Khwāja ʿImād al-Dīn Maḥmūd had friendly relations with the celebrated Maḥmūd Gāwān (d. 1481), head of Bahmanī administration, the merchant told him about Yūsuf's musical and military training to the royal family. Eventually, the sultan bought Yūsuf, who was then given his first role within the Bahmanī state system. (Firishta 1864: ii, 3–4)

Firishta's narrative raises some curious issues. Yūsuf, founder of the dynasty, is claimed to have been an Ottoman prince, brother of the celebrated Muḥammad II, conqueror of Constantinople. Using elements that appear

repeatedly in Ottoman history—most notably fratricide—Firishta places him in a familiar historical context and gives a sound explanation for his departure. Yūsuf's journey takes him to some of the most important towns of Iran, both culturally and politically (Ardabīl, Qom, Kāshān, Iṣfahān, Shīrāz, and Hormuz), from whence he sailed to Dabhol in India. This itinerary links Yūsuf's story to a real geography and to known trading and migration routes; Maḥmūd Gāwān himself took a similar path not much earlier (Eaton 2005: 60–61). This sense of reality attached to the story continues when Firishta describes Yūsuf's arrival to Bīdar and access to Bahmanī service by means of military slavery, a central institution in the Deccan;[6] what guaranteed Yūsuf's success were his talent, training, and looks. Finally, an important element in Firishta's narrative is the dream, which convinced Yūsuf to leave for India. In the dream, no other than "our prophet Khiḍr ʿAlī"[7] appears, adding to the sense of divine intervention. The prophecy, in addition to justifying his future leadership, establishes the basis for a panegyric to Yūsuf as a contemporary version of his namesake, the biblical Joseph, who likewise had to leave his homeland but enjoyed a brilliant career in a new country. Lastly, Firishta also places Yūsuf in the ideological circles of the Safavid world, as a disciple in Ṣafī al-Dīn's shrine (we will return to this point later).

Firishta's version of the beginning of the ʿĀdil Shāhī dynasty was not the only one. Let us look at the story as told by his contemporary Rafīʿ al-Dīn Shīrāzī (c.1540–after 1635). Even more than Firishta, Shīrāzī epitomises the cosmopolitan and transient networks of Iranians in the Deccan. He was born in Iran into a family whose members were involved in both administrative roles and commercial endeavours. He arrived in the Deccan with his father on a commercial enterprise, but later was admitted to the service of ʿAlī ʿĀdil Shāh I of Bījāpūr (1558–79), where he served as a registrar in the royal treasury in the early 1580s. Shīrāzī's introduction to the court was most likely facilitated by his uncle, Afḍal Khān, who was an influential nobleman in Bījāpūr at that time. While Rafīʿ al-Dīn Shīrāzī and Afḍal Khān achieved considerable success in India, other members of the family remained in Iran, where at least two of Shīrāzī's uncles served as revenue collectors in the Safavid province of Fārs, whereas others, including Shīrāzī's father and yet another uncle, were trading between Iran and India (Shīrāzī 126–28, 161–63; Sherwani 1974: 684–85).

According to Shīrāzī's narrative, the beginning of the story takes the reader back to the victory of Ḥasan Beg (Uzun Ḥasan), leader of the White Sheep Confederation (Aqquyunlu), over Jahān Shāh, leader of the Black Sheep Confederation (Qaraquyunlu), in 1467. Following this victory, Ḥasan Beg conquered "Ādharbāyjān, Khorāsān, the two ʿIrāqs (lower Mesopotamia and western Iran), Fārs, and Kermān" (Shīrāzī 26) and then appointed his

people to govern this vast territory. Among them was his nephew Aḥmad Beg, whom he sent to govern Sāva Province. Aḥmad Beg ruled the territory firmly but justly, in Shīrāzī's account. He married a girl from a local noble family, who gave birth to two sons. After Aḥmad Beg's death, his son Maḥmūd succeeded him as governor, and for twenty years he too ruled the province justly, following in his father's footsteps. However, after the death of Ḥasan Beg, leader of the clan, the confederation faced wars of succession between Ḥasan's two sons Sulṭān Khalīl and Yaʿqūb, which turned into a general upheaval. Maḥmūd Beg was killed, and his children and grandchildren were scattered in all directions.

Yūsuf, who was Maḥmūd's eldest son, fled to Iṣfahān, but as he still felt threatened, he continued to Shīrāz, where he stayed for five years and received his education. However, because he lost all his property in the feuds, "the desire of [moving to] Hindūstān appeared in his mind," and he continued southwards:

> When Yūsuf Beg (Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān) arrived in Lār,[8] being lonely, distressed, and desperate, he stayed for a few days in the mosque of the righteous man of the time (*ṣādiq al-waqt*, probably Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shiite *imām*). One night, an old man (*pīr*, possibly a Sufi saint) appeared in his dream, put a piece of warm bread in his hand, and said: "You should go to the Deccan, because your bread is being baked there." When he woke up from his dream, he became happy and cheerful. Following the divine message, he travelled to the Harbour of Jarūn (Hormuz) (Shīrāzī 28).

When he arrived in Hormuz, he did not know anyone. At that time, the trader Khwāja Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn Semnānī was in the city to procure horses as well as Turkish and Ethiopian slaves for the Bahmanī Sultan. His people noticed Yūsuf, a handsome and strong lad who looked like a Turk. When Khwāja Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn heard about him, he admitted him to the ship's crew.

Yūsuf was assigned to the ship's kitchen, but he was not pleased and instead returned to Lār, where once again the old man appeared in his dream and said: "I had sent you to the Deccan. Why are you impatient? Return to the same place, where your lamp will be lit" (Shīrāzī 28). Understanding that destiny would eventually bring him to the Deccan, he returned to his kitchen work. In the meantime, he worked on improving his military skills and organised a training club, where he successfully instructed about fifty men in wrestling. The text does not provide us with details about the journey to the Bahmanī capital of Bīdar, but it is possible that the training section took place at this stage of Yūsuf's life.

Finally, Yūsuf's opportunity to shine had come. Shīrāzī continues that a famous wrestling champion from Delhi was touring the country. He defeated all competition, and enjoyed titles and favours. He eventually arrived in Bīdar

where, every Friday, magicians and entertainers gathered and demonstrated their skills to the court. One Friday, the sultan invited the champion, who defeated all local competitors. His success made him disturbingly arrogant, which worried the sultan. Yūsuf suggested to the sultan that he would fight the arrogant champion, saying "if I throw [him on the ground], the troubles on the king's mind will be lifted, and I will also be released from my misfortunes" (Shīrāzī 30). The sultan agreed, and the battle was arranged. After long maneuvering, Yūsuf defeated the champion. The sultan was delighted, and the favours he bestowed on the victorious marked his access to the highest levels of state service:

> The sultan bestowed on him horses, fortresses, and one thousand coins. The nobles followed suit and gave him horses, expensive clothes and fabric, gold coins, and weapons. In the very same royal council, matters of military and administrative positions were discussed and ordered according to the king's will [...]. As royal favour was directed towards him, [Yūsuf] received the position of city magistrate (probably of Bīdar) and the commandership over the city forces *(kotwālī bā imārat)* (Shīrāzī 32).

The general framework of Shīrāzī's narrative is similar to that provided by Firishta. In both cases, Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān was born into a royal family, Ottomans or Aqquyunlu. According to both narratives, the personal story began with a political crisis that shook the realm, either actual (i.e., the twilight of Aqquyunlu rule), or theoretical (i.e., the desire to prevent future turmoil based on past experience). The political crisis led to a personal crisis for Yūsuf, during which he had to flee his place of residence to save his life, losing everything he had. Having left the comfort of the family, in both stories Yūsuf received fine education in Iran. An important element that appears in accounts is the prophecy that came in his dream, according to which he would have a great future as a sovereign in India. Yūsuf then arrived in India, where a merchant introduced him to the Bahmanī court through the military system. Upon proving his talent, character, and training, Yūsuf advanced from his humble beginning to fulfil the prophecy. Taken together, there are a few assumptions we can make about the origin of Yūsuf: he was probably from around Sāva and arrived in the Bahmanī court for employment as a military man; he rose to prominence from within the system (and not due to his potential noble birth), like many other Iranians before him in the fifteenth century and after (Eaton 2005: 59–77; Subrahmanyam 1992: 340–63).

However, within this similar framework, the two narratives significantly diverge from one another in details: the itinerary Yūsuf took; the man who appeared in his dream; the kind of training he enjoyed (Shīrāzī stresses martial elements, whereas Firishta implies more traditional Iranian elite intellectual training); the identity of the merchant who brought Yūsuf to

Bīdar; and the exact path that took him to the court. Though the two narratives diverge in these respects, these elements are quite marginal to the story. More central, however, is the irreconcilable contradiction regarding Yūsuf's origin. Whereas Firishta argues that the ʿĀdil Shāhī dynasty of Bījāpūr was of Ottoman origin, Shīrāzī suggests that Yūsuf was actually of the ruling family of the Aqquyunlu clan, being the great-grandson of Uzun Ḥasan's sister. Accordingly, Firishta portrays the only Aqquyunlu noble in his narrative—the oppressive governor of Sāva—in a negative light, while Shīrāzī emphasises the good qualities of Yūsuf's father and grandfather as governors of Sāva on behalf of the Aqquyunlu. Regardless of these differences, both narratives locate Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān within the Persianate world. The association with this cosmopolitan world was stressed on two levels: historically (or allegedly so), linking Yūsuf to the intellectual and commercial circulation between India and the lands to its northwest, and symbolically, as possessing the qualities of a sovereign (we will return to this point later).

Not only do the narratives contradict one another, but also internal problems raise questions about the reliability of both. Firishta's storyline is based on the idea that the Ottoman sultan Muḥammad II had a younger brother named Yūsuf; however, no Ottoman source corroborates this story (Sherwani and Joshi 1973: i, 291). Shīrāzī's narrative seems, on the face of it, more likely. But a careful examination of the details reveals serious chronological problems. Shīrāzī's opening point was the battle in which Uzun Ḥasan Aqquyunlu defeated Jahān Shāh Qaraquyunlu. This battle is dated to 1467, but "the two ʿIrāqs, Fārs, and Kermān," including Sāva, were conquered only in 1469 (Woods 1976: 109–14). Then, according to Shīrāzī, Uzun Ḥasan appointed his nephew, Aḥmad, as governor of Sāva. Aḥmad's son and successor, Maḥmūd, was born only after his marriage into a noble family from Sāva. Maḥmūd is said to have ruled for twenty years; this would put us at the earliest in the 1490s, if not well into the sixteenth century, as a probable date for Maḥmūd's death. However, Shīrāzī references his death with the struggle of Uzun Ḥasan's sons, Sulṭān Khalīl and Yaʿqūb, right after his death in 1478 (Woods 1976: 139–40); the order and duration of events, therefore, do not match the narrative. Furthermore, even if we take 1478 as the opening point, Shīrāzī tells us that Yūsuf, who was Maḥmūd's son, spent five years in Shīrāz before beginning his journey to India. Adding several years in Bahmanī service before Yūsuf could have become a provincial governor, as suggested by the story, we once again find ourselves in the 1490s. Yet other sources as well as the details of Yūsuf's career put him in this high position before the death of Maḥmūd Gāwān in 1481. Therefore, Yūsuf must have arrived in India in the 1470s or earlier, i.e., even before the death of Uzun Ḥasan Aqquyunlu. It is therefore clear that like Firishta's chronicle, the basic element in Shīrāzī's narrative is not probable.

Curiously, the Portuguese chronicler Dom Fernando de Castro, a contemporary of Firishta and Shīrāzī, reports that "according to the general opinion of those who helped the *Sabaio* (i.e., Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān Sāvaʾī) acquire his fortune," Yūsuf was a servant of a merchant from Sāva, who sent him on a commercial mission to India. Yūsuf later decided to stay there and settle in the capital (i.e. Bīdar) (Subrahmanyam 2011: 35). This story resembles the general framework of Yūsuf's life as it appears in the two chronicles from Bījāpūr. However, as the chronicler was not working in the court and was not obliged to serve the ʿĀdil Shāhī cause, his narrative follows the public knowledge regarding the history of the dynasty. By that, de Castro's version helps us to understand the kernel of the story without the rather dubious elements which Firishta and Shīrāzī attached to it in order to project a certain image for their patron's dynasty.

Making the Stories Reliable

Notwithstanding the improbability of Firishta and Shīrāzī's additions to the story of Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān, it is clear that the two chroniclers strove to anchor their versions within real geographical and historical context. As mentioned before, the road that Yūsuf took reflects a common historical route. Furthermore, the chroniclers provided sources for their stories to add to their credibility. Firishta mentions that "this [story] is what Mīrzā Muḥammad Sāvī (i.e. Sāvaʾī) passed over from his father, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Maḥmūd, the vizier of Yūsuf ʿĀdil Shāh" (Firishta 1864: ii, 4). This reference provides two links between Firishta and the origins of the story. First, the main source of the story, the vizier of Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān, sounds reliable both due to his position and because he was probably close to Yūsuf, as attested by his high position. Second, as the name of the vizier's son indicates, the family arrived from Sāva, a focal point in Yūsuf's itinerary, therefore the vizier and his son were presumably knowledgeable about this matter.

Shīrāzī provides a more elaborate description of the source of his narrative and the way in which he obtained it. He says:

> The author, Rafīʿ al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. Nūr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, in the year 968 (1560-61 CE) arrived in Sāghar, a famous town in the Deccan, to buy goods. One *farsakh* [about six kilometres] from Sāghar, there is a town called Gogī, where the tombs of Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān and his children are located.[9] There is also a large soup kitchen for whose provision nearly ten villages were assigned. About one hundred guardians reside there [...]. There is one person among them, a guardian named Shams al-Dīn Ḥayḍarī, who was more than ninety years old. He has seen many places and times, and at the end of his life, he resided in that

> garden, and joined the guardians [...]. He was for most part at the service of the superintendent of that soup kitchen, a learned man, a sayyid, and a Sufi, with whom we (i.e. Shīrāzī) were friendly. Nearby there was a wide space, [where the superintendent] enjoyed the good fortune of his company. As Shams al-Dīn travelled much and saw and heard many events, he used to tell his own or other people's past occurrences. (Shīrāzī 26)

The old guardian himself adds another layer of credibility, stressing his position in the story by opening with the words "I was in Diyarbakir during the reign of Ḥasan Beg Aqquyunlu," *(ibid.)* thus indicating that he was almost an eye witness.

The effort to create this sense of reliability to the narrative was not limited only to the way in which these stories were framed. The content of the story is grounded in actual geographical and historical contexts that would sound familiar to contemporary ears. We can demonstrate this by looking again at Firishta's Ottoman episode. As stressed above, Ottoman sources do not corroborate the story. However, very similar events did happen. Thus, we can find a prince named Yūsuf, son of Sultan Bāyezīd I, who escaped to Byzantine Constantinople to seek shelter from his brothers' struggle for domination (Finkel 2005: 29–30). Considering the circulation of texts and of people between the Ottomans, Iran, and India, and keeping in mind that the historians were born in Iran and still had connections there, it is not unlikely that this story was familiar beyond the Ottoman realm, even if as a remote rumour. Even more precise is the story brought by Firishta to justify the planned killing of Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān: the claim of an unknown man that he was Muṣṭafa, son of Bāyezīd I, who had been imprisoned by Amīr Tīmūr (Tamerlane) in 1402 along with Bāyezīd I (Firishta 1864: ii, 2). Muṣṭafa the False, as he came to be known in Ottoman sources, swept the western territories of the Empire, but by 1420 he was defeated and found refuge in Constantinople, just like his alleged brother Yūsuf (Shaw 1976: 43).

The story of an impostor coming back from the dead resonates not only with past Ottoman experiences, but was a rather commonplace issue in the early modern world. Stories involving the Mughals, the Safavids, and the Portuguese were known throughout South Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Flores & Subrahmanyam 2004). In Golkonda too, quite a similar affair had occurred around 1600, shortly before Firishta complete his work. The story goes as follows: Shāh Ṣāḥib was the son of Sultan Ibrāhīm Quṭb Shāh of Golkonda (1550–80). He married into the family of a *pīr-zāda* (descendant of a Sufi *pīr* who carried the leadership of the Sufi line) called Khalīlullāh, a resident of Bīdar. Shāh Ṣāḥib died around 1580, soon after his marriage. About twenty years later, a person claiming to be Shāh Ṣāḥib appeared in Bīdar. The sultan of Golkonda at the time, Muḥammad Qulī

Quṭb Shāh, son of Ibrāhīm and brother of the late Shāh Ṣāḥib, enquired of the people who were present at the washing and shrouding of Shāh Ṣāḥib's body. Based on their testimony, the sultan concluded that this person was an impostor, and asked Malik Barīd, ruler of Bīdar, to capture him. However, the *pīr-zādas* rescued the false Shāh Ṣāḥib by smuggling him out of the city. The false Shāh Ṣāḥib arrived in Vijayanagara, where he raised an army and incited powerful commanders in Golkonda to join him against Muḥammad Qulī. The rebellion was eventually quelled by the royal army of Golkonda, and not without significant effort (*Tarīkh-i Sulṭān Muḥammad Quṭb Shāh:* 522–26). As the Deccan Sultanates were tightly connected to one another and the story itself was more than an internal affair in Golkonda, and extended to Bīdar and Vijayanagara, it is most likely that it was known in Bījāpūr in the 1610s. That being the case, even if the rumours of Muṣṭafa the False had not reached the Deccan, the story itself was still operating within the familiar moulds of early modern Deccani historiography.

This careful attempt to make the stories sound reliable, by justifying their sources and by using familiar tropes and partial stories from elsewhere, meant that the chroniclers were limited in how far they could stretch the truth. To demonstrate this point, let us now turn to another origin story. This story discusses the beginning of the Niẓām Shāhī dynasty of Aḥmadnagar, the northern neighbour of Bījāpūr, as told by the Sayyid ʿAlī Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1595-6 or after) who, similarly to the previous chroniclers, was also a Foreigner. Ṭabāṭabāʾī was born in Semnān in Iran, from whence he moved to ʿIrāq where he resided for a while until migrating to India. He entered the service of Murtaḍa Niẓām Shāh I (1565–88) in 1580 and continued to serve the sultans of Aḥmadnagar. His history, *Burhān al-Maʾāthir* enjoyed the patronage of Burhān Niẓām Shāh II (1591–95) (Sherwani and Joshi 1973: i, 107; Verma 1974: 274).

According to Ṭabāṭabāʾī, sometime in the mid-fifteenth century, Bahmanī commanders conducted raids into "the lands of the idol-worshipers" for purposes of tribute and plunder, where they captured "a beautiful girl [who was] from the daughters of the kings of that realm" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1936: 168). When the commanders saw that she was worthy of a king they sent her with the rest of the tribute to the court. Her beauty and virtue attracted the sultan Muḥammad Bahmanī, and she became his favourite of all women in his household. The girl gave birth to a prince, whom Muḥammad Bahmanī named Sulṭān Aḥmad.

> Thereafter, the sultan ordered the astrologers to thoroughly inquire into the horoscope of that newborn and to draw and announce the fortunes of the prince [...] Based on the auspicious alignment from which fortune and felicity rise and on the map of the astronomical positions at the time of his birth, the astrologers proved beyond doubt that he would reach the highest degrees:

> "it is manifest in the alignment of the seven stars //that the key of the world will be given to him." However, it would be for the best of the kingdom and its people if he were kept as far away as possible from the capital city (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1936: 170).

Therefore, the sultan sent the prince with his mother to his noble Malik Nāʾib in Maharashtra, where the noble took care of Aḥmad's education, while the sultan kept observing and supervising. After the death of Muḥammad Bahmanī, his son Maḥmūd ascended the throne. Soon thereafter, a war broke between Maḥmūd and his Hindu neighbours, in which the Bahmanī army was defeated and women of his harem were captured by the enemy. Aḥmad came to the rescue, defeated the enemy and sent the women back to Maḥmūd. Aḥmad's success concerned some nobles, who remembered the astrological prediction regarding the future sovereignty of the prince. Thereafter, the relationship of the sultan and Aḥmad steadily deteriorated until the independence of the latter (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1936: 170–73).

Similarly to the case of Bījāpūr, here too the narrative is not uncontested. Firishta, who worked in Aḥmadnagar before moving to Bījāpūr in 1589 (Sherwani and Joshi 1973: ii, 578), reports that Aḥmad was actually the son of Malik Nāʾib, not of Muḥammad Bahmanī. However, Firishta tried to elevate Malik Nāʾib's image by saying that he was a Brahmin of Vijayanagara, born as Tīmā Bhat, son of Bhario; the mentioning of a lineage may imply a noble birth. Tīmā Bhat was imprisoned by Bahmanī forces, received the name Malik Ḥasan (he was bestowed the title Malik Nāʾib later), was enrolled as a military slave, and due to his educated background, was sent to receive further education in Persian (Firishta 1864: ii, 93). Ṭabāṭabāʾī himself acknowledges the idea that Aḥmad Niẓām al-Mulk was the son of Malik Nāʾib. At the beginning of the narratives, he mentions that:

> Although those who portray the image of the king are in much discord regarding the circumstances of his birth, and [even though] the author of this compilation [Ṭabāṭabāʾī] saw in the royal Niẓām Shāhī library a letter written by Burhān Niẓām Shāh I (1510–53), under the title of Shaykh Burhān al-Dīn b. Malik Aḥmad Niẓām al-Mulk b. Malik Nāʾib, in some [other] books that discuss the sultans of the kingdoms of the Deccan that reached the attention of the author, and this story[appears in stories] he heard from news tellers (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1936: 168).

Similarly to the case of Bījāpūr, the narratives above provide rather sketchy details regarding the origins of the Niẓām Shāhī dynasty. Some of the basic elements are commonly used in both sultanates: a respectable genealogy that cannot be proven—Ottoman, Aqquyunlu, Bahmanī, or the kings of Vijayanagara; intensive education and training, turning the protagonist into a person fit to establish a dynasty based on his talents, not his

inheritance; and advance within state service to the highest of ranks. The narratives from Aḥmadnagar, however, take this storyline to a different place: instead of the non-Indian connections that both Firishta and Shīrāzī created for the rulers of Bījāpūr, the narratives of Aḥmadnagar stress their local, inner-Deccani origins. This is clear in the narrative promoted by Ṭabāṭabā'ī, that links the Niẓām Shāhī dynasty not only to their Muslim Bahmanī predecessors, but through Aḥmad's mother also to the kings of "the lands of the idol-worshipers," most likely a reference to Vijayanagara (clearly stated by Firishta). For more down-to-earth purposes and in order to appeal to local actors, a Marathi-oriented element is further developed in the narrative by mentioning that Aḥmad began to rise after arriving in Maharashtra, where Malik Nā'ib was based and which is a territory that became strongly associated with the Niẓām Shāhī dynasty.[10]

The difference in the origins attributed to the two dynasties seems to reflect the question of reliability once again. The stress on the foreign origins for the ʿĀdil Shāhīs and the local origin of the Niẓām Shāhīs, also owe a lot to the internal structure of elite society and its perception. As stressed above, elite society was associated with networks of identities: Muslims and non-Muslims, Foreign and local. With strict notions of identity and society in mind, the chroniclers were limited to the actual origin of the founders of the dynasties. The basic narrative of Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān's arrival through the military system from Iran, and Aḥmad Niẓām al-Mulk being the son of the Deccani Malik Nā'ib were known; no narrative could go beyond these details, or step around the social reality of the Foreigner-Deccani divide.

What the chroniclers could do was to work within these strict lines to add details and thus turn the stories to the best option possible. Returning to the narrative of Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the choice of Vijayanagara in the Maharashtrian context of Aḥmadnagar is, admittedly, somewhat odd. From Shivājī's time, "Maratha historical memory was largely impervious to the appeal of Vijayanagara as a repository of ancestral glory" (Guha 2009: 274). The choice Ṭabāṭabā'ī made might suggest that in the imagination of Marathi speakers, the memory of Vijayanagara was still alive eight decades before Shivājī's coronation (1674–80). More likely, however, is that considering the undebatable kernel of the story, which firmly identified the Niẓām Shāhīs as Deccanis, association with more appealing origin that would place the dynasty in the Persianate cosmopolis was simply not possible. The best option open to Ṭabāṭabā'ī was to link his patrons with greatest local dynasties: the Bahmanī and Vijayanagara.

Deccani Narratives and the Surrounding World

The need for reliability in the story—or at least the pretence thereof—is understandable when we consider the role that these narratives filled. All narratives discussed here were found in court-related chronicles. More than simply telling a historical tale, they were part of the process of creating legitimacy for the rulers and expressing their legitimacy to rule in a manner that would be convincing for the people and accepted by external forces. The means to do so was by rooting the narratives in both the reality and the political language of the time. In early modern India, this language was Persian, by then established as the main language of political expression and diplomatics throughout the subcontinent. The use of Persian was not limited to the linguistic sense, but included everything that the language was carrying with it: a wider world of images and literature as well as political thought (Alam 2004: 115–51). This process was not limited to dynasties who arrived from elsewhere in the Persianate world like the Mughals, but was prevalent also at the courts of non-Muslim rulers (Wagoner 1996).

We can demonstrate this point by looking at the elements in the stories that might seem irrational to the modern-day reader. Both chroniclers from Bījāpūr elaborate on a dream, in which a holy person—ʿAlī/Khiḍr in Firishta's story, a Sufi *pīr,* possibly Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, in Shīrāzī's narrative—delivers a prophecy, according to which Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān would become a sovereign in India. The use of prophetic dreams as an expression of legitimacy was a common practice for centuries. Roy Mottahedeh argues that dreams in which a promise of sovereignty is made were a common theme in Near Eastern literature. Using the case of the ninth century Ṭāhirids, he suggests that such dreams should be understood as an expression of "a compact of sovereignty" between God and the ruler. This is based on the common belief that attributed prophetic power, in politics and other fields, to dreams (Mottahedeh 2001: 69–71). This tradition continued to later periods. The Ottomans extensively used a specific dream narrative that promised the sovereignty to ʿUthmān, founder of the dynasty, and to his house; the same dream is mentioned in all narratives discussing early Ottoman history (Kafadar 1995: 132–33).

In the following centuries, magic, astrology, dreams, prophecy, and millennialism became an increasingly important theme in Persianate cosmology. Dreams and astrology were also an integral part of the political language of the Timurids, and later in their South Asian scions, the Mughal Empire, as well as in Safavid Iran (Moin 2012; Binbaş 2013). A. Azfar Moin suggests that in the early sixteenth century, dreaming was a common social practice that operated within the cultural logic of the time. He elaborates: "dreams implied a prophetic connection with the invisible world and were considered a highly

regarded source of truth" (Moin 2012: 73). Dreams continued to play an important role in formulating Mughal legitimacy, as expressed by the painting of the dreams of Emperor Jahāngīr (1605-27) (Moin 2012: 204–6). Hence, the origin narratives from both sultanates seem to have operated within this very same political idiom that was shared with polities beyond the immediate environment of the Deccan, to include the wider Persian cosmopolitan world of the Muslim East.

The need for legitimacy was naturally aimed inwardly, to make sure that the local elites remain loyal to the dynasties. This is true in particular for the Foreigners, who were most closely related to the Persianate world and whose presence was desired for the good functioning of the state as well as their pivotal role in commerce, as suggested above. Moreover, as part of transient networks, the Foreigners were more likely than others to leave for the service of another ruler, therefore the sultans had to find a way to convince them to stay.

At the same time, the stories also seem to aim, at least in part, towards Deccanis and non-Muslim elites: best reflected in the link Ṭabāṭabāʾī made between the Niẓām Shāhīs and both the Bahmanīs and, by implication, the kings of Vijayanagara. Furthermore, as the boundaries between the polities and the groups operating at the time were not hermetically sealed—after all, people moved between courts, and even if occasionally hostile to one another, they still shared the very same space. Consequently, the political idiom used in the courts of South India included both Persianate and local elements (Eaton and Wagoner 2014; Wagoner 1996).

The shared political idiom enabled the sultans of the Deccan to deliver their message not only internally, but over a large territory. Quite curious is the link made with the external world. Most sources of the Deccan Sultanates stress some Shiite connections. The Shiite link is expressed sometimes directly, for example when in the 1630s, ʿAbdullāh Quṭb Shāh of Golkonda (1626–72) publicly attributed his success in "spreading the customs of the sect of Murtaḍa (ʿAlī, i.e. Shiism)" in the Deccan to the "sacred spirits of the twelve imāms" (Shīrāzī 1961: 128–29). It could also appear indirectly, for example in the Iran-centric narrative of Rafīʿ al-Dīn Shīrāzī, and the implied role of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in the story. This connection could be related to the Shiite creed some attribute to the sultans. Richard M. Eaton (1978) suggests that in Bījāpūr, dominance of Foreigners in the court brought to affiliation with Shiism, whereas dominance of Deccanis resulted in expressed Sunni affiliation. More generally, the Shiite affiliation of the courts of Aḥmadnagar, Golkonda, and for times also of Bījāpūr, is accepted without much debate (Cole 1988: 22–24; Daftary 2007: 453–54; Sherwani 1974).

The cultural meaning of Shiite affiliation in the Deccani context goes beyond the scope of this article. At any rate, Firishta's narrative suggests

a somewhat down-to-earth motive behind this Shiite link. Firishta's story not only focuses on religion, but also points to the direct connection with the Safavids. This special connection is expressed directly in describing the visit of Khwāja ʿImād al-Dīn Maḥmūd and of the very young Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān in the Ardabīl tomb of Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn (1252–1334), founder of the Safavid Sufi order and father-figure to the sixteenth century-dynasty, which was followed by the enrollment of Yūsuf as a Safavid disciple in that shrine. Association with Ṣafī al-Dīn's tomb has long been used as a marker of connections with the Safavids; Safavid sources aspired to create a link between Tīmūr and the Safavid order to boost their own legitimacy by mentioning Tīmūr's visit to Ardabīl, a visit that is otherwise not mentioned in Timurid sources (Quinn 2000: 86–89). Even though the stories work in opposite directions—a dynasty using Safavid legitimacy or the Safavids trying to attach themselves to an external source of legitimacy—the holiness associated with the shrine in Ardabīl plays a similar role in each. The Safavid link is possibly further expressed by the negative view of the Aqquyunlu as expressed by Firishta, as the two sides struggled for the control over Iran, ending when the Safavids annihilated the Aqquyunlu state in the first decade of the sixteenth century (Woods 1976: 173–78). Yūsuf's detailed itinerary in Iran, and in particular his visit to the Shiite centre in Qom, also support the Shiite-Safavid line.

At the same time, the pro-Safavid agenda presented by Firishta seems to be at odds with the early sections of this narrative, linking Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān to the Ottomans, considering the century-long hostility between the Ottomans and the Safavids and the constant struggle between the two dynasties, including series of wars, in 1578–90 and again in the early seventeenth century (Finkel 2005: 170–71, 187–88), only a few years prior to the completion of Firishta's history. To that we should add the contradiction between the contemporaries Firishta and Shīrāzī, reflecting very different sympathies from one another. The contradictions within Firishta's narrative and between Firishta and Shīrāzī only stress the tentativeness of their additions beyond the kernel of the story, and shed light on the attempts made by both authors to legitimise their patrons. Furthermore, the contradictions also attest to the lack of imperial, top-down mechanism of creating consistent legitimacy as could be found in the more secure empires of the time.

This tension concerning the origins of Bījāpūr—Ottoman or Aqquyunlu, accompanied by association with the Safavids, the enemy of them both—as well as the identity of the ancestral character of the sultanate of Aḥmadnagar should not come as a surprise. We have seen that these narratives tend to be inconsistent and contain internal contradictions. However, they maintain some kind of logic by using familiar language and stories to justify themselves.

These seeming attempts to create links in several directions may be a reflection of the moment of anxiety in which the narratives were created.

Already in the Mughal emperor Akbar's twenty-eighth regnal year (1583-4), his historian Abū al-Faḍl (d. 1602) states that "[Akbar] would proceed to the Deccan, and take possession of that country which was longing for a just ruler" (Abū al-Faḍl 1973: iii, 616–17). This was followed by an abortive attack on Aḥmadnagar in 1585 (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1936: 537–51), and a later long siege that ended in the conquest of Aḥmadnagar-city in 1600 (Shyam 1966: 217–32). Even though the Niẓām Shāhī survived under Malik Ambar (d. 1626), the involvement of the Mughals in the region continued, in what Richard Eaton has termed an obsession (Eaton 2005: 121; Alam & Subrahmanyam, 2004). The clear Mughal designs kept the levels of anxiety high in the rest of the Deccan. For example, officials in Hyderabad, then capital of the sultanate of Golkonda, complained that "many Mughal and Foreign *(mardum-i mughūl wa gharīb)* riffraff have gathered in the capital at the same time as the Mughal army intended to conquer the Deccan," demanding direct action against them (*Tarīkh-i Sulṭān Muḥammad Quṭb Shāh:* 574).

Considering this anxiety, the sultans of the Deccan tried to recruit any possible assistance they could get. They usually cooperated with one another against the Mughals, but this was not always enough.[11] A more ambitious attempt was to receive external assistance against the Mughals. The immediate candidates for support were the Safavids.[12] This potential alliance was usually expressed in terms of the Safavid *khuṭba* and abortive attempts to create marriage connections. For example, according to Firishta, the Safavid Shāh ʿAbbās I (1588–1629) proposed to marry "one of his sons" to Ḥayāt Bakhshī Begam, daughter of Muḥammad Qulī Quṭb Shāh (1580–1611) (Sherwani 1974: 290–291). The idea of alliances with the Safavids, for which Firishta has built his narrative, had only limited impact on the political or cultural affairs of the sultanates. We should keep in mind that sultans such as Muḥammad Qulī Quṭb Shāh or Firishta's patron Ibrāhīm ʿĀdil Shāh II championed pro-Dakhni and Hindu-friendly policies. Moreover, Ibrāhīm II's reign, considered as a time of Deccani-Sunni supremacy in the court, is remembered as a period of Muslim-Hindu syncretism (Eaton 1978: 89–105; Sherwani 1974: 387–88, 432–33; Verma 1974: 51–54).

The problematic circumstances of the Deccan Sultanates in the early seventeenth century might be, at least in part, accountable for this frantic search for legitimacy and historical connections wherever they could be found. Firishta's narrative is not only aimed at internally justifying the rule of the ʿĀdil Shāhī dynasty, but also aspires to create a basis for more material cooperation against the Mughals with whomever would be willing to assist (the Safavids or even the more remote Ottomans) or, more likely, to use the

threat of such cooperation as a whip against the Mughals. The narratives of Shīrāzī and Ṭabāṭabā'ī focus more on the internal aspect: lacking an affiliation with any living dynasty, the two authors seem to maximise the known stories by adding royal content, aiming at their own Persian elites, Foreigners and possibly also Deccanis.

Unfortunately for the sultans of the Deccan, their plan did not work: the Mughals were not impressed by threats of that kind, the Safavids preferred their own interests of prolonged peace with the Mughals, and it is doubtful whether the Ottomans were ever part of the story. The Foreign elites of the Deccan too continued with their own business, constantly favouring cooperation with the Mughals over war (Kruijtzer 2009: 74–103). Eventually, the Deccan Sultanates found their end at the hands of the Mughals one by one.

Conclusion: The Non-Imperial State and the Cosmopolitan Language of Sovereignty

The narratives presented by Firishta, Shīrāzī, and Ṭabāṭabā'ī were composed in royal courts. They should therefore be understood as part of a royal endeavour to construct ruling legitimacy. Whereas the use of official histories was a common practice in the Muslim East, the character of the Deccani narratives differs significantly from those of other dynasties of the time. Typically, the origins of a ruling family, or at least the official claims thereof, is unified throughout the historiography of the dynasty, even if modified according to its changing needs and circumstances. Thus, Mughal Emperors used their Timurid ancestry in their construction of legitimacy; Safavid historiography always went back to Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn of Ardabīl; all Ottoman accounts stressed the role of ʿUthmān and retold the same dream that promised him sovereignty in a manner that reflects not only the origins, but also the changing nature and ideology of the empire (Moin 2012; Lefèvre 2011; Quinn 2000: 63–91; Kafadar 1995: 132–33).

In contrast, the narratives from the Deccan present a surprising plurality. We can maybe understand the contradictions in the narratives from Aḥmadnagar if we consider the place of composition: Ṭabāṭabā'ī was in Aḥmadnagar, whereas Firishta was at the time in Bījāpūr, thus we can assume that the former wrote the official version of the court whereas the latter, writing on Aḥmadnagar while enjoying the patronage of Bījāpūr, was not obliged to do so. But we do not have such an easy solution to the opposite stands taken by Firishta and Shīrāzī regarding Bījāpūr, as they worked at the same time and under the same sultan, Ibrāhīm ʿĀdil Shāh II. The plurality of narratives does not allow us, or the seventeenth century reader for that

matter, to mark a fixed, accurate ancestry, the way we can in the Mughal or Safavid cases.

This unique characteristic notwithstanding, the narratives of the Deccan have much in common with the wider cultural framework within which they were operating. Elements such as profound education and qualities of the founding figure, natural leadership, noble genealogy, and the founder's ability to excel over others can be found widely. "Strange sciences" too—dreams, prophecies, astrology, and the like—were in use as part of the legitimacy process, similarly to other regions of the Persianate world. In this sense, the narratives of the Deccan are quite standard in their components, and reflect clear association with the wider Persian cosmopolis. At the same time, they are unusual in their composition. These narratives were acting by realigning existing elements within the Persian cosmopolitan environment in order to explain their special position in a common language. The narratives they created, therefore, were based not on the accuracy of the stories, within reasonable limits, but on the use of widely circulated tropes, familiar to all. This idea is surprisingly well expressed by the German novelist Erich Kästner, who in the introduction to his 1935 novel *Pünktchen und Anton* says that "it does not matter whether a story has actually happened. The main thing is that the story is true. True is a story that could have happened exactly the way it was told."

Writing histories within the Persianatecosmopolitan world was part of the political idiom of the time, and served the effort of legitimacy building. The Deccan sultanates, even more than other contemporary polities, had a desperate need to gain such legitimacy due to their fragile position as weak, marginal entities. Their use of the political idiom should be understood, then, as reflecting both their affiliation with this Persian cosmopolis and the limitation thereof. Within their realms, all sultanates had to secure the support of various elements of elite society. In particular, it was crucial to attract the flaky Foreigners, who at a time of distress might leave. This group embodied belonging to the cosmopolitan world in their actions as well as in their linguistic and cultural affiliation.[13] In parallel, the use of the same cosmopolitan language could appeal to other elements in elite society, Deccanis and vernacular elites, but only marginally. To attract these groups, additional measures were required; these measures were not necessarily using the cosmopolitan idiom but rather more localised ones. A hint for that can be seen in the clear Maharashtrian and Vijayanagara context of the Niẓām Shāhī dynasty as presented by both Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Firishta.

Furthermore, the Deccan Sultanates had to create legitimacy for external use. The sultanates operated as minor actors within an international system; they were small fish in a big imperial pond. The kind of legitimacy they

presented reflects their acknowledgement of their inferior position. Their sovereignty was not self-contained and well-defined in the fashion that the Mughal, Safavid, or Ottoman Empires claimed; considering the social and political circumstances in the Deccan as well as their modest pasts, the sultans could not claim an imperial status of the kind that we find among the aforementioned empires (Richards 1997; Dale 2010).

Accordingly, the sultans of the Deccan did not always claim completely independent status, but rather tried to tie themselves to an external source of legitimacy: other dynasties, usually the Safavids (directly or by playing on their Shiite sentiments), but also the Ottomans in Firishta's narrative. Creating this association, the sultans tried to either create a threatening image or to gain actual political support against the real enemy: the Mughals, already on their march into the Deccan. Origin narratives seem to have operated as part of the mechanism of securing moderate claims for sovereignty as non-imperial states—and to gain support for such claims—in a dangerous imperial world. The way to do so was by using the very same political language shared by all actors, imperial and non-imperial alike: that of the Persian cosmopolitan.*

Notes

* The author wishes to thank Carl Ernst, Ben Fortna, and Elizabeth Lhost for their great help with this paper.

1. POLLOCK's (2006) discussion on cosmopolitanism and vernaculars is beyond the scope of this paper. It will suffice here to emphasise his notion of the Sanskrit cosmopolis as a wider region in which the language and its associated cultural and literary world served as the main, or even the only legitimate vehicle for political exchange over a large territory, superior to all vernaculars; this is similar in some respects to the role Arabic filled in the Indian Ocean (RICCI 2011) and Persian in the Muslim East.

2. For a discussion on early modern empires and the non-imperial nature of the Deccan Sultanates, see FISCHEL 2012: 240–67.

3. For general histories of the Deccan Sultanates, their specific circumstances, and the rather unusual character of their elite society, see EATON 2005; FISCHEL 2012; SHERWANI 1974; SHERWANI & JOSHI 1973; SHYAM 1966; VERMA 1974.

4. The rulers of the Deccan Sultanates did not usually claim sovereignty, expressed by adding the word *shāh* (king) to their title, until the death of the last Bahmanī sultan, Kalīmullāh, in 1538. Therefore, they will be referred to using the title in which they were known during their lifetime: ʿĀdil Khān (in Bījāpūr) and Niẓām al-Mulk (in Aḥmadnagar), even if the sources quoted use the full sovereign titles of ʿĀdil Shāh and Niẓām Shāh, respectively, as accepted at the time of their composition.

5. Zulaykhā is the name given in Persian literary tradition to Potiphar's wife, who

tried to seduce Joseph due to his beauty. Introducing Zulaykhā, who was widely used in Persian literature along with Yūsuf, exemplifies the links between this narrative and the Persian literary world, but also creates another layer of comparison between Yūsuf ʿĀdil Khān and the biblical Joseph (see BIZUIJN & FLEMMING 2002).

6. For a discussion of military slavery in India, see CHATTERJEE & EATON 2006.

7. Al-Khiḍr or Al-Khaḍir is a miraculous figure that appears in various legends (*Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. "al-Khaḍir (Al-Khiḍr)"); his association with ʿAlī seems rather unusual.

8. Lār is a town in Fārs, located on one of the roads from Shīrāz to the Persian Gulf, served as a station on the caravan route CALMARD 1986.

9. Considering the location of Gogī, the name Sāghar refers to Sagar, some 100km east of Bījāpūr in northern Karnataka (MICHELL & ZEBROWSKI 1999: 88), not to be confused with the larger Sagar in southwestern Karnataka.

10. Malik Nāʾib had a military land grant *(jāgīr)* in Bīr (Beed), central Maharashtra, extended significantly in the early 1480s towards Daulatābād and Junnār. This region became the core of the sultanate of Aḥmad Niẓām al-Mulk founded, with the new capital city of Aḥmadnagar, constructed in 1494 (SHYAM 1966: 26–39).

11. For example, both Bījāpūr and Golkonda sent forces to assist Aḥmadnagar against the Mughal siege (ṬABĀṬABĀʾĪ 1936: 609–14; SHYAM 1966: 220–22). However, their success was temporary, as the Mughals eventually conquered the city.

12. A letter from Ibrāhīm ʿĀdil Shāh II (1580–1627) to the Safavid Shāh ʿAbbās I, probably from 1612-13, reveals such designation: Ibrāhīm II offers a military alliance and urges ʿAbbās I to attack the Mughals from Qandahār in Afghanistan while the Mughals are involved in the Deccan (ISLAM 1982: ii, 131–35). For more details on the relationship between Bījāpūr and the Safavids, see AHMAD 1969a and 1969b; NAYEEM 1974.

13. Such was the case of Aḥmadnagar: Ṭabāṭabāʾī, who wrote in the 1590s, was the last Persian chronicler who worked in the sultanate. I have not found further evidence for Foreigners in post-1600 Aḥmadnagar: until the fall of the sultanate in 1636, the main elite groups were Deccanis, Ethiopian military slaves, and Marathas (EATON 2005: 115–24).

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Abstract

This article discusses the ways in which the sultanates of Aḥmadnagar and Bījāpūr in the Deccan Plateau of peninsular India employed the Persian cosmopolitan language and the associated political idiom to construct the legitimacy for their ruling dynasties. Focusing on origin narratives from around the turn of the seventeenth century, I demonstrate that these narratives contain counterfactual elements and even contradict one another. At the same time, they consisted of stories and tropes that were familiar to the contemporary reader, and adhered to the social and political realities of the time. This enabled the chroniclers to create some degree of reliability, which was important not for the telling of a historically accurate account as much as for the acceptability of the narratives as foundations of legitimacy. This legitimacy was required to secure the support of the elites within the sultanates and to gain assistance from external powers, most notably the Safavids of Iran, support that was necessary considering the weak position of the Deccan Sultanates from within *vis-à-vis* the Mughal Empire.

Résumé

Récits d'origine, légitimité et pratique d'une langue cosmopolite dans le Deccan de la première modernité

Cet article explore comment les sultanats d'Aḥmadnagar et de Bījāpūr établis sur le plateau du Deccan de l'Inde péninsulaire ont utilisé la langue cosmopolite persane et l'idiome politique qui lui est associé pour construire la légitimité de leurs dynasties. Me centrant sur des récits d'origine datant du tournant du XVII[e] siècle, je montre que ces récits contiennent des éléments contrefactuels et vont jusqu'à se contredire les uns les autres. Ils incluent parallèlement des histoires et des tropes qui étaient familiers au lecteur contemporain, et se conforment aux réalités sociales et politiques contemporaines. Ces caractéristiques ont permis aux chroniqueurs de créer un certain degré de fiabilité, qui importait moins pour un compte rendu historiquement exact des récits que pour leur acceptabilité en tant que sources de légitimité. Cette légitimité était nécessaire pour garantir le soutien des élites dans les sultanats et pour obtenir l'aide de puissances extérieures, notamment les Safavides d'Iran – un soutien indispensable compte tenu de la position de faiblesse intérieure des sultanats du Deccan vis-à-vis de l'empire moghol.

Cosmopolitismes en Asie du Sud

Sources, itinéraires, langues (XVI^{e}-XVIII^{e} siècle)

Le cosmopolitisme est-il un enfant de la modernité occidentale ou peut-on le trouver en d'autres temps et d'autres lieux ? Cet ouvrage entend apporter une réponse à cette question aujourd'hui vivement débattue en retraçant ses contours en tant que pratique et *Weltanschauung* dans une région du monde – l'Asie du Sud – pôle majeur de l'espace de circulation de l'Asie musulmane et nœud des flux humains, matériels et immatériels reliant l'Occident à l'Orient au cours des XVI^{e}-XVIII^{e} siècles.

Terre d'accueil pour de nombreuses élites en quête de patronage, port d'ancrage pour d'autres ou encore simple étape au sein de parcours trans-océaniques guidés par l'appétit de richesses ou de savoirs, l'Asie du Sud de la première modernité est un terreau particulièrement fertile pour la construction d'identités et de visions cosmopolites, tant au niveau individuel qu'à celui de la *polis*.

Aussi hétérogène comme idée que comme *habitus*, le cosmopolitisme est abordé ici sous un angle résolument pluriel favorisant la multiplication des approches (acteurs, langues, lieux, activités à « vocation » cosmopolite) et le croisement de ses différentes manifestations – moghole, marathe, européennes, etc. – afin d'en faire mieux ressortir les constantes, variantes, limites et interactions.

Dans cette optique, les études réunies au fil de ce numéro illustrent bel et bien ce que le « citoyen du monde » des Lumières doit aux « Indes orientales ».

Corinne LEFÈVRE, Ines G. ŽUPANOV & Jorge FLORES

éditions EHESS

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