Book Review

The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca. **Edited by Nile Green (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), xvi + 340 pp. ISBN 978-0-520-30092-7. Price: $34.95 (paper).**

The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere. **Edited by Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf. Iran Studies 18 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 256 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-38728-7. Price: $126 (cloth).**

Sunil Sharma
Boston University

(sharma@bu.edu)

The term "Persianate" is widely used by scholars in various disciplines at present. Of course, it has been around for several decades, but although it has been used to serve different purposes by scholars depending on their disciplines or regional specialties, there have been frequent attempts to return to Marshall Hodgson's original definition to justify or challenge its use. Not surprisingly, the term's usage is largely confined to academic writing and it has not caught on in the larger world, unlike other area studies designations such as Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian. In literary and art-historical scholarship, Persianate is often conflated with Persian, suggesting the aspiration for a more transnational and cosmopolitan civilizational reach. But Persian (like Iranian) denotes a national designation as well as a language, and hence there is some slippage in the use of these terms. Literary scholars and art and architecture historians have long grappled with these questions and faced the dilemma of choosing between Persian, Persianate, Indo-Persian, and Islamicate in the case of South Asia. Naturally, people, texts, and cultural practices can be discussed under multiple categories, and often there are no precise distinctions between them. Are some Persian texts Persianate, while others are not? Are the instances in which the medieval Persian poet Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī's poetry was commented on by an Ottoman Turkish scholar or translated into a vernacular language of the Deccan in the sixteenth century manifestations of Persianate culture? Or is it perhaps more accurate to state that they occurred in a Persianate world? The transregional extent of Persian in different premodern vernacular contexts justifies the use of the term in the original Hodg-

sonian sense, but outside of literary and artistic discourses, style and genre are not the defining criteria for what is Persianate. In recent times, historians have taken up the challenge to further articulate and even broaden the conceptual parameters of the Persianate. This effort has resulted in two edited volumes, issuing from conferences held a few years ago, with the same title, albeit different subtitles: *The Persianate World*. There is obviously some overlap in the introductory historical surveys of the spread of Persian beyond Iran in the two books, but there is also some degree of conversation between the essays of a few scholars, including two of the three editors, whose work appears in both books.

Green states early in his introduction that the collection of essays in the volume he edited is "an exercise in world history, [whose] aim is to decouple the study of Persian from both explicit and implicit methodological nationalisms" (p. 2). Building largely on post-Hodgsonian scholarship on the multiple dimensions of the Persianate by Bert Fragner,[1] Brian Spooner, and William Hanaway[2] and the seminal essays of Saïd Amir Arjomand,[3] all of which explored the role of Persian as a spoken or written contact language entrenched in the activities of specific social groups, Green proposes a new and more precise term for the premodern Persianate world: "Persographia," as distinct from the "Persophonie" or Persophonia, a term introduced by Fragner. This term has a parallel in the field of East Asian studies, where the designation "Sinographic sphere" has found consensus among current scholars and provides a better approach, historically and intellectually, than the area studies model.[4] Placing the emphasis on "scribal practices and manuscript-based exchanges" that spread through courtly and Sufi networks, which were distinct from those connected to the spread of Islam, rather than merely on the movement of Persian-speaking communities outside the Iranian plateau, the concept of a Persographic sphere is highly appealing in many ways. It is even applicable to cultural areas with languages not written in the Perso-Arabic script, such as Armenian, Georgian, and Bengali, to name a few, where literary genres and poetic images were nevertheless derived from Persian. According to Green, it is not sufficient to delineate a broad Perso-Islamic "cultural axis" to map the geographic region of the Persianate; instead, more precise locations that served as sites for the circulation of texts and people must be identified. The attempt to shift the focus of the study of the Persianate from disciplines that privilege aesthetics to a world-historical inquiry nevertheless calls

1. Bert Fragner, *Die "Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999).

2. William Hanaway, *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2012).

3. Saïd Amir Arjomand, "Defining Persianate Studies," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1 (2008): 1–4; idem, "Evolution of the Persianate Polity and Its Transmission to India," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 2 (2009): 115–136.

4. Wiebke Denecke and Nam Nguyen, "Shared Literary Heritage in the East Asian Sinographic Sphere," *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature*, ed. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-Yee Lee, and Xiaofei Tian, 551–567 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

for a survey of the origins and spread of the New Persian language as a lingua franca in the *longue durée* in order to identify the "breaking points and fault lines" in this global phenomenon. Persian as a lingua franca and Persianate practices flourished in multilingual societies, at times in tandem with other vernacular languages, but eventually lost out to them as this world shrank. Even as printing technology allowed more communities to have access to texts from a shared literary heritage, it also helped the cause of the languages that were in competition with Persian and were linked to nascent nationalist movements. As a result, the map of the Persianate world, especially the locations of Persographic hubs and centers, underwent a dramatic and permanent change.

The twelve essays in Green's volume were carefully curated to highlight the fullest geographic spread of the Persian world from China in the east to Britain in the west. There is a chronological division, with three parts of four essays each by scholars who are specialists in a particular area of the Persianate world. The overall narrative charts the rise and apex of Persianate cultural achievement in the medieval and early modern periods, including the incorporation of many non-Persophone communities into the fold, leading to the so-called breaking point. Part I, "Pan-Eurasian Expansions, ca. 1400–1600," is on the earliest period, covering the history of Persian learning in the early Ottoman empire and the careers of some Ottoman Persianists (Murat Umut Inan); the spread of Persian in rural Bengal and the formation of a Bengali Muslim identity (Thibaut d'Hubert); translation between Persian and Chinese at the Ming court (Graeme Ford); and the history of the use of Persian vis-à-vis Turkic in the Volga-Ural region in Inner Asia (Devin DeWeese). Part II, under the rubric "The Constraints of Cosmopolitanism, ca. 1600–1800," includes essays on the importance of personal and provincial networks in the production of Mughal Persian texts (Purnima Dhavan); the fate of Persian in Qing China, especially its Sufi communities (David Brophy); multilingual Persianate communities in Imperial Russia (Alfrid Bustanov); and the new use of Persian through a study of talismanic scrolls in Xinjiang, Eastern Turkistan (Alexandre Papas). Part III, with the heading "New Empires, New Nations, ca. 1800–1920," has essays on hybrid identities as exemplified in the life and career of the white Mughal D. O. Dyce Sombre (Michael Fisher); on the de-Persification translation program at the court of the Khanate of Khiva (Marc Toutant); on colonial Daghestan as seen through the lives of migrants such as ʿAbd al-Rahim Talibuf (Rebecca Ruth Gould); and on the poet Adīb Peshāwarī (d. 1930), another migrant, this time one who had left British India to settle in Iran (Abbas Amanat). The book concludes with a short excursus, in the form of an epilogue titled "The Persianate Millennium" by Brian Spooner, that provides a brief history of the Persian language. The topic of multilingualism in Persianate societies is one of the overarching themes in these essays, attesting to the development of Persian in interaction with other literary cultures in various societies through a range of textual practices. Together, the essays provide different pieces of the history of Persian learning at the court, chancery, school, and shrine, enmeshed in webs of power and politics over a millennium. There could have been

more dialogue among the essays in this volume, including direct cross-references, but that is a difficult task and Green ties them together in the introduction. The essays open up exciting prospects for more comparative work, especially with respect to the degree of Persianization and competition with vernacular cultures in different corners of the Persianate world at the local or transregional levels.

The underlying questions in the volume edited by Amanat and Ashraf, as articulated in the introduction by Ashraf and the first essay by Amanat ("Remembering the Persianate"), are whether the "category of Iran" can effectively be marginalized in Persianate studies, and how Iranian studies—the concern is mainly with the discipline of history—can avoid the pitfalls of "parochialism and essentialism" (p. 13). The process of retrieving the cultural high points of a unified cultural sphere demonstrates that the Persianate model is central to the academic study of the Middle East, in particular Iran. Stressing the existence of a vast sociocultural sphere connected by Persophonie (*fārsī-zabān*), a harmonious "comfort zone," the editors emphasize the viability of Persianate studies as an academic field whose purview extends beyond language and literature. It was the shared experience of Persianate forms of governance, learning, and pleasure in the courts of premodern transregional empires that allowed the sustenance of this ecumene. The expansion from a Persian to a Persianate sphere is mapped through the mobility of medieval literary figures such as Nāṣir Khusraw, Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī, and others who upheld the cause of Persian in areas beyond the Iranian heartland. Rooted in ideals of kingship and statecraft in the pre-Islamic past, the cultural achievements of Iran in poetry and music—described in a celebratory vein—along with the mobility of Sufis, trade networks, and material culture blossomed in a Muslim context, overlapping to some extent with the use of Arabic. Literary genres and texts played a central role in the flowering of the Persianate, attesting to the Persographic feature of the cultural expansion. In contrast to Green's book, in which particular geographic spots in the history of the Persianate world are scrutinized as sites for the limits of Persian, here it is the waning and demise of the robust Persianate cultural sphere, with its shared legacy that failed to "survive the trauma of encounters with modernity" (p. 40), that signals the swan song of the vast cultural ecumene.

The eight essays in the volume edited by Amanat and Ashraf explore a range of topics. After Amanat's historical survey, which is really a second introduction to the volume, Richard Eaton's essay offers a comparative discussion of the Persian and Sanskrit cosmopolises, the latter related to the pioneering work of Sheldon Pollock. The implicit suggestion that the Persian cosmopolis is perhaps a more useful term for the same geographic and cultural sphere as that denoted by the Persianate world is supported by a preference for it in some current scholarship. Eaton points out the pitfalls of confusing the application of two Hodgsonian terms, Islamicate and Persianate, in the case of premodern South Asia, especially the Deccan. The essay by A. Azfar Moin on the politics of saint shrines in the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires is also comparative in nature. A study of the Bengali version of the *Sayf al-mulūk* romance by Ālāol

(fl. 1651–71) in Arakan by Thibaut d'Hubert is the sole piece on a literary text. The other four essays are studies on the rise of Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Sufi networks (Waleed Ziad); multilingualism in the context of the Enikolopian family in the Caucasus (Hirotake Maeda); inclusion and exclusion of the Baluch people in the Persianate world (Joanna de Groot); and the twilight of Persian in India through a close analysis of an Indo-Persian travel account to Britain by Mīr Lāʾiq ʿAlī from the late nineteenth century (Nile Green). Only de Groot's essay includes a further elucidation of the conceptual value of the term "Persianate world," suggesting that "explorations of its fluidity, complexity, and heterogeneity will give it more force and impact as an analytical tool" (p. 197). Altogether the essays attempt to provide case studies representing the four Persianate modalities identified in the first essay: governance and statecraft; a shared literary heritage; Sufi networks; and commonalities in material cultures.

These two books with their wide array of scholarly output will certainly remain landmark volumes marking the maturation of Persianate studies as an interdisciplinary field of historical inquiry. The introductions are valuable in themselves, especially for pedagogical purposes. As with most edited volumes, the individual essays will mostly be consulted by those with a specialized interest in a particular region or linguistic tradition. In the end, it is not possible to marginalize Iran, or for that matter India, because of the astounding levels of Persographic textual and artistic production in those areas as compared to frontier areas. At the same time, the books afford the opportunity to take stock of the state of the field, and it may be time to stop redefining the term at every instance, or to stop avoiding its existence altogether, as the case may be. Going beyond offering sweeping surveys of Perso-Islamic political and Persian literary histories or collating a set of case studies in an edited volume, more nuanced and comparative studies of how the term can be effectively integrated into various methodological approaches that do rely heavily on texts—such as the self and body, sexuality and gender, history of emotions and sports, food, and travel studies—will further establish the conceptual uses of the term. The various roles played by women in Persianate societies, whether as poets or patrons, a point brought up by Green in his introduction, should also be given more attention. Mana Kia's recent book, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford University Press, 2020), offers a compelling and attractive model to understand what Persianate signified at an individual level in the broader context of the interconnected histories of Iran and India. This is currently a thriving area of study despite the disparate understandings of the term in different disciplines, but as Green argues in his introduction, the Persianate will always be a "contingent" and "contested" category and has the scope to be redefined in multiple ways in future scholarship.