



The topography of travel in early modern Persianate landscapes

Citation

Babayan, Kathryn. 2012. The topography of travel in early modern Persianate landscapes. Harvard Library Bulletin 23 (1-2): 25-34.

Link

<https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37363346>

Terms of use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material (LAA), as set forth at

<https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFIOWI2M2EwYTg>

Accessibility

<https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#)

The Topography of Travel in Early Modern Persianate Landscapes

Kathryn Babayan

ONE OF THE MOST DISTINCT OUTCOMES OF TRAVEL WITHIN THE EARLY modern Persianate world is an expression of the “self” through writing (*safarnamah*).¹ The travel narratives depict diverse experiences and discrete ways in which travelers “map” their selves out through familiar and foreign lands. The variety of subjective voices and of modes of witnessing and recording travel defy any neat categorization in terms of genre, form, or content. Many journeyers, however, transmit their encounters through the ubiquitous and shared mystical vocabulary of spiritual journeys (*safar*) that connect individual states (*ahval*) with en route experiences of holy, human, material, arboreal, and vegetal topographies. I would like to highlight here the relationship between “self and geography” as one fascinating feature of early modern Persianate travel literature.

Whether diplomats, pilgrims, or fortune seekers, travelers communicate their ambivalence; aware of the dangers, they vacillate at first, but are tempted by the thrills and riches promised on the journey. The risky conditions of voyages require divine consultation and protection, communicated through signs (*ayat*) from the Qur’an, or dreams that capture the anxious individual desire to establish the outcome of travel. Never far from the mind of the author/audience is the realization that destiny determines every traveler’s fate, and hesitation is a necessary stage before a male or female traveler can embark on an adventurous journey toward discovery, fortune, calamity, or, perhaps, death.

1 Historians use the term “early modern” to mark a discrete temporal space that preceded the great transmutations accompanying the technicalistic age of modern globalism. The early modern period corresponds roughly to the span of the Safavi Empire (1501–1722). I have chosen to use the Persianized form of “Safavi” rather than the more commonly used westernized version, “Safavid.” On the autobiographical qualities of travelogues see Cemal Kafadar, “Self and Others: Diary Of a Dervish In Seventeenth-Century Istanbul and First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature,” *Studia Islamica*, 69 (1989): 121–150; Gottfried Hagen, “Some Considerations on the Study of Ottoman Geographical Writings,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 18 (2000): 183–193; and more recently Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

What can we make of the mystical language deployed by travelers to explore dimensions of “self” and belonging, as they journey far from their families, friends, and hometowns? It is through mystic tropes of hesitation, fear, separation, and longing that the “self” is represented in both foreign and familiar landscapes. Epistemologies to which mysticism is central shape the travelers’ experiences and the production of their narratives. Furthermore, common circuits of travel westward to the Ottoman dominions and eastward to India, Central Asia, and even China suggest a cultural horizon common to Safavi subjects, and a map of travel and movement in which family, community, and empire intersect. How does the use of mystical vocabulary determine these Safavi travelers’ experiences, nostalgia for the homeland of Iran, and discovery of new spaces and places? Why does the mystical rhetoric of “fear and longing” distinguish their travel writing?

To learn more about the significance of travel during the Safavi period, let us turn to the popular polymath and preacher, Va‘iz-i Kashifi (d. 1504), who is writing in Timurid Herat at the turn of the sixteenth century.² In his didactic manual on chivalry Kashifi relates the multi-dimensional significance of travel (Kashifi, 241–245). He sees travel as a constituent to the characters of members of the crafts and mystical brotherhoods. Craftsmen are obliged to travel on pilgrimages to the tombs of prophets, saints, and the imams. Pilgrimages entailed exercising the spirit (*riyazat al-nafs*), seeking the teachings of spiritual elders, and tending to mendicants on the path of God. According to Kashifi travel is also beneficial to one’s bodily health, for physical exercise improves one’s humors and temperament. Pilgrimage is not only a pious act but a disciplinary one that curtails laziness and boredom. The psychological benefits of travel are numerous: it dissipates the pain of fear (*vahm*) and anguish (*malalat*) from the unknown. And of course travel involves the novice’s learning (*tahsil-i ‘ulum*) about the various customs and practices of the different people he encounters along the journey. In the course of travel, the disciple is able to observe for himself the natural and animal wonders of creation to which he has been already introduced through stories such as those recounted by Muhammad Qazvini (d. 1283) in his famous *‘Aja‘ib al-Makhluqat*. Kashifi insists that eyewitness accounts are far superior to worded or bookish ones. Awareness of one’s self in relation to other selves and ensuing comparisons between selves, customs, and landscapes have produced the testimonies elemental to the early modern travelogues. Separation from the familiar is a necessary stage if individual consciousness and growth are to be achieved. True, longing for friends (*yanan*), brothers (*baradaran*), and relatives (*khwishan*) cause distress, but it also encourages deeper appreciation of one’s “community” of friends, brothers, and relatives. Kashifi’s identified didactic features map out the experiences that characterize Safavi travelogues;

2 Husayn Va‘iz-i Kashifi, *Futuvvatnamah-yi Sultani*, ed. Muhammad Ja‘far Mahjub (Tehran: Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1971).

they capture for us something new and unprecedented at a historical moment in the experience of travel writing: the distinct “early modern” eyewitness encounters with people, events, and spaces that evoke a “realistic” style and ethnographic perspective in the structure of *safarnamahs*.

A WIDOW FROM ISFAHAN

To exemplify this new mode of self-discovery, I would like to discuss a seventeenth-century Safavi pilgrimage narrative written by an unnamed Isfahani widow³ in the poetic form of a *masnavi* (rhymed couplets for didactic, romantic, and Sufi expressions).⁴ Born into a privileged literary family (Urdubadi) of penmen, the narrative’s author is a rare feminine voice within a masculine domain of representation and travel. The widow’s account of the Hajj demonstrates her familiarity with the different modes of representing the pilgrimage’s sacred geography and, in recounting her personal circumstances, illustrates vividly the common themes of lamentation, absence, separation, and longing for the beloved.⁵ Hoping to diminish the void created by her husband’s death, the widow sets off from Isfahan, the capital of the Safavi Empire, on a pilgrimage to holy Mecca. She begins her narrative with the reasons for her Hajj: “Since the wiles of fortune [*charkh-i hilah pardaz*] left my heart burning with sorrow due to the absence [*firaq*] of my intimate companion [*yar*] . . . I vowed to circumambulate the holy Ka’ba” (*Safarnamah-yi Manzum-i Hajj*, 23–24). Enduring melancholy, sleepless nights, and tormented days, she tells readers, “I saw no solution [*charah*] other than travel [*siyahat*].” Her fear, much like that of Sufi devotees upon the path toward the unknown, must be conquered, and, embarking upon her journey, the brave widow—using the language of chivalry—“tied her belt and wore her armband.” In her words, a prospective reader can interpret determination and resolve in her outlook about her future trip: “I washed my heart from the fear of danger. I wrote the divination of my trip as auspicious.”

A persistent, song-like call draws her in the direction of Mecca, and the excitement propels her onward along the arduous terrain between Isfahan, the northern part of

3 *Safarnamah-yi Manzum-i Hajj*, ed. Rasul Jafarian (Qumm: Mash’ar, 1995). The author is the widow of Mirza Khalil, the *raqamnivis* of the *divan* who penned royal decrees for the last Safavi ruler, Shah Sultan Husayn (1694–1722).

4 The Isfahani widow’s *masnavi* is inspired by Nizami (d. 1205 or 1209), whom she quotes.

5 Pilgrimage narratives, like the twelfth-century poet Khaqani’s *Tuhfat al-‘Iraqayn*, draw on the genre of complaint literature (*shakwiyat*), wherein the state of anguish and sorrow sets the narrative tone. See A.L.F.A. Beelaert’s study of Khaqani’s *Tuhfat al-‘Iraqayn*, *A Cure for Grieving* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000). The Isfahani widow was also probably aware of Muhyi Lari’s (d. 1526) *Futuh al-Haramayn*, a similar mystical rendering of pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

the Caucasus, through the regions of Anatolia and Syria, and finally southward into Arabia. Although strenuous, the journey through Iranian territory is reassuring and in some ways familiar, for both relatives and strangers hospitably greet and receive her when she enters her father's hometown of Qazvin and her birthplace, Urdubad, near the Aras River. The environment turns hostile and ominous, however, when she reaches the northwestern frontiers of the Safavi world: Nakhjavan, Qarabagh, and Erevan, called the land of Armenia (*sarzamin-i armanistan*). She falls sick, the water tastes like blood, and, worse, she learns that the area is teeming with bandits and robbers. In her fear and loneliness she prays and pleads with God to give her health and protection so that she may fulfill her vow. "I am a stranger [*gharib*] and have no friends or relatives [*bikas*]. I have abandoned my home and possessions [*khan u man*]" (46). Her prayers answered, she makes it to Karamanlar safely; yet a cry of anguish rises from her breast: "Woe! Here the land of 'Ajam [*vilayat-i 'Ajam*] ends! No longer are people under the authority [*farman*] of the shahinshah (Safavi monarch)." Crossing into territory not known or governed by the shah, "in our own abode we are fierce lions, now we are debased and despised by the Rumis [*bi shahr-i khud shir-i jiyanim kunun khwar u zalil-i rumiyanim*]." This new abjectness and fear of humiliation, bodily harm, and harassment at the hands of wanton foreign rulers or their officials injure the personal and imperial honor of 'Ajamis entering Rumi territory. Religious difference also forces her and other 'Ajamis into watchful silence: "[Our] tongues were restrained from uttering the name of 'Ali [*zabanha bastah shud as nam-i haydar*]. From fear of the Rumis we became like mice [*za bim-i rumiyan chun mush gashtand*]. Like the morning candle they ['Ajamis] were extinguished" (47).

On the road to Syria the first in a series of Rumi attacks happens, and, though the Safavi pilgrims had known to expect this and prepared themselves, the bandits still carry off a fifth of the goods; the foreign travelers lose ninety tomans of *baj* and *kharaj* (taxes) in another attack. Fondly referred to by the widow-traveler as "our" "brave" 'Ajam Aqasi, the Safavi chief of the Hajj speaks sternly with the Rumi highwaymen who by force seek to extract the pilgrims' taxes, but the discussion turns sour and the "ignoble" ones (*nakisan*) draw their swords and rifles. Like *pahlivans*, the widow proudly recalls, the young gallant 'Ajami pilgrims fought, but it was a fierce fight and some lost their lives. Clearly the violent event scarred the widow; she warns future 'Ajami pilgrims from following their ill-fated, treacherous route and suggests going through Mosul, where the roads are better patrolled and populated by more peaceful folk.

The caravan manages to arrive in Aleppo safely, however. The city's old urban layout of shops, bazaar, and *maydan* (central plaza), and the "maternal-like" kindness of its denizens evoke in her a homesickness for Isfahan. Although Qazvin holds for her fond memories of her father and grandfather, and Urdubad of her birthplace and childhood (*Urdubadam*), the city Isfahan is her real home, her *vatan*, where her children

(*farzandan*) and relatives (*khwishan*) reside and await her. Exposure to Aleppans' native warmth, admiration of the urban architecture and quarters, and tasting the delicious and famous local figs and watermelons all trigger a visceral longing for hearth and home.

As the 'Ajami pilgrim caravan travels through the land toward the city of Damascus, the widow can vividly see upon a bloodied spear the head of the martyred Imam Husayn. She curses the Al-i Sufyan, the branch of the Umayyad family descendent from Abu Sufyan b. Harb, whose son Mu'awiyya usurped 'Ali's caliphate and whose grandson Yazid was responsible for the massacre of Imam Husayn at Karbala. Oral and literary accounts of the internecine dispute over the Islamic caliphate and the authority to govern the Muslim community have informed her Shi'i subjecthood, religious orientation, and beliefs. As they pass through the city gates into Damascus, her day turns "black." But not for long: the Isfahani widow discriminately reserves her acrimony for the Al-i Sufyan (the Umayyads), and Sham's (Syria's) paradisiacal fresh and sweet streams and fruits, such as pears and grapes, positively seduce her (61–62).

The combination of Muslim, Shi'i, and Safavi subjects enables her to appreciate the Ottoman family as protectorate of Mecca and Medina and of pious pilgrims like her. Her cultural sensitivity is manifest in the respect toward the Ottoman Amir al-Hajj, the Ottoman official charged with protecting and guiding the Hajj caravans. With some veneration she describes this pasha of the Al-i 'Uthman as a learned man, a shah even, seated on the throne of Solomon (61–62).

The sacred and spiritual spaces of the Hajj flood the Isfahani widow's heart and senses; upon espying the holy city of Medina, during tomb visits, and the circumambulation of the Ka'ba, she is gripped by a deep peace and rapture. At Medina the Muslim pilgrims are powerfully bound together: "We were all running, not with our feet, but with our heads." The heart and bosom of Medina are engraved with the seal of the Prophet; here, she cries, is the king of this world and the other (*din u dunya*) (70).

The widow observes Shi'i rites in paying homage at the tombs of the Four Imams—Hasan, Zayn al-'Abidin, Muhammad Baqir, and Ja'far al-Sadiq—holy men and the treasuries of God's secrets who were wronged by foul play and poisonous plots. She feels overwhelmed by gratitude for Imam Ja'far, the propagator of religion (*din*) and law (*mazhab*). "When I realised that it is thanks to him that this sect flourished [*ravnaq*], I became faint." She continues, reproaching the Safavi shah:

Oh Wind, blow in the direction of Isfahan and notify the Sultan of Iran. Tell him: Oh Just Shah, where are you? Why have you neglected this House of Paradise? Come and see how the Prophet's children all dwell in one place. Their tombs are of wood and their carpets are reed mats. Oh Slave of the Family of Haydar, send for these four lords appropriate carpets, gold chandeliers, and

pomegranates stuffed with jewels, so as to spite those opponents [*an raqiban*], and turn [the tombs] into eternal ornaments. (72)

The Isfahani widow's travelogue is to some extent a portrayal of a historic and certain female subjectivity, constituted through relations with kith and kin and through religious and emotional ties and associations to the material land as well as the abstract concept of "Iran." How she experienced and responded to the places, people, emotions, and trials on her momentous journey was influenced to some important extent by how she had already experienced and inhabited her world before she ever set out, of course. (Re)affirmation of membership in various group identities depends on the sacred, religio-social, gendered, and sexual spaces along the pilgrimage journey. The multiple subject positions her person occupies are at neither extreme of the binaries of Sunni and Shi'i, 'Ajami and Rumi, local and imperial, elite and popular, private and public. The widow's narrative informs us of culture and environment that permitted her person considerable freedom and allowance, despite a putatively rigidly gendered and sectarian differentiation associated with the early modern Safavi imperial structure and logic. Hers is a subjectivity larger than the sum of its parts.

A BUREAUCRAT FROM YAZD

Mirza Muhammad Mufid Bafiqi Yazdi well exemplifies the contemporaneous masculine sphere of travel.⁶ A Safavi courtier employed in the financial administration (*mustavfi*) of Yazd, Mirza Muhammad Mufid decides in 1670–1671 to leave Safavi Iran and seek his fortune in India. The reasons to depart Yazd and set out differ in obvious and important ways from the Isfahani pilgrim's, but the two travelogues share a number of narrative devices, including the use of mystical tropes to inscribe and represent selfhood. Like the Isfahani widow, Mirza Muhammad Mufid has been suffering from melancholy; he grieves the premature death of his young son and feels dissatisfied with his employment. Friends attempt to dissuade him from the "folly" of departure and travel, advising that nothing in this world exceeds friendship in value and that separation from loved ones would no doubt be unbearable hell. Mufid, however, is lured by the promise of riches and prospects in Mughal India. He hopes to share the destiny of many talented Safavi compatriots who, preceding him to India, found fortune and fame as painters, poets, and historians at the courts of rich Mughal patrons. Perhaps to convince himself, his friends, as well as a possible audience,⁷ Mufid lists the beneficial and advantageous

6 Mirza Muhammad Mufid Mustavfi Bafiqi, *Jami'-yi Mufidi*, ed. Iraj Afshar, 3 vols. (Tehran: Asatir, 1960–1963); Mirza Muhammad Mufid Mustavfi Bafiqi, *Risalah-yi Muhammad Mufid*, Oxford University, Bodleian Library, Ousley 90.

7 This possible audience would include future travelers to India: poets, bureaucrats, and merchants.

effects on one's character when taking a journey. "Travel," he declares, "is the patron of man, the court in which status is gained" (Mufid Mustavfi Bafiqi, 3:766). Torn between friendly advice and material desire, Mufid has a dream in which an illuminated Sufi⁸ appears holding a book. The dream decides the course of action, casting divine blessing and protection. In it the Sufi inquires about Mufid's keen desire for travel to India, reads his fortune (*istikhara*) from the book, and finally announces that Mufid should indeed pursue India for he shall there acquire an abundant share of its wealth (3:766).

The trip to India, however, does not deliver the material success Mufid had dreamt of, and readers—both then and now—may wisely surmise that the Sufi's *istikhara* had more likely meant the spiritual gains the journey would bestow upon Mufid. What he could not have known when he set his sights on glorious India was that the golden age of Mughal patronage was already on the decline (Alam and Subrahmanyam, 179). Writing in his travelogue in Multan (in 1679), he reproaches his greed: "Life has no other purpose than communion with friends." He remembers friends' advice and longs for his homeland (*vatan*) (3:212).

The contemporaneous Safavi travelers share an urban aesthetic sensibility as well. He misses his home city Yazd, its natural and urban scapes: the congregational mosque and its curative powers, the canals, gardens, and the central plaza (*maydan*) identical in splendor to the Naqsh-i Jahan in Isfahan. Home, as it was for the Isfahani widow, consisted of the familiar and known, both in human relations and in physical, natural topography. For pilgrims and fortune seekers, women and men, who have gone beyond the "known" realm into the disorienting and unsettling world, personal and cultural memories are evoked and cherished (for absence makes the heart grow fonder); in fact they serve to ground and orient the travelers to their faraway and out-of-reach "homes."

Despite the important similarities of the two narratives, attention must be given to several other features that distinguish Mufid's travel experience from the Isfahani widow's. In the final part of his travel account Mufid includes a chapter on India's marvels (*ʿajaʿib u-gharaʿib*) (3:212). In the late seventeenth century, India was very much in the Iranian travelers' eyes and minds a wildly and excitingly bizarre and wondrous land. The placement of this chapter at the end of his narrative strongly suggests a new emphasis on and valorization of personal experience and eyewitnessing, which, I argue, is one of several features which begin to define travel writing in the early modern Persianate world. Moreover, by that time the routes to India were well-traveled and -known, so that even the "strange" and "unfamiliar" were expected, ready, and waiting for the travelers' "discovery." India no longer was a land of pure imagination. And it could not disappoint: Mufid's travelogue confirms the strange and marvelous that one finds in India—bodily hirsute women and giant-like men—whereas the Isfahani

8 A Sufi who appears with a bright light around him, signifying holiness.

widow's travelogue expected and conveyed from the Mecca-and-Medina destination the deeply spiritual sense of belonging and unity among all Muslim pilgrims.⁹ Another common convention peculiar to the travel narratives is the trope of "dark" and "crafty" India. As already mentioned, Mufid's expectations of fortune and fame from his "India experience" were dashed, and his bitterness prevented reconsideration of the damning view of the sinister subcontinent.

A POET FROM HERAT

On the other hand, the Safavi poet 'Abdullah Thani Bihishti-yi Haravi (b. 1597–1598) provides a very different experience of India in his travel account.¹⁰ A successful poet in Herat, he joins on a whim a caravan of Mughal ambassadors traveling to Kashmir, and is immediately employed, serving Prince Murad Bakhsh for twenty years. He writes his *Nur al-Mashriqayn* in verse.¹¹ Conventionally he makes note of India's "blackness" and prefers the mannerisms of Persians (Iraqis), but for him too India is a land of wonders (*hindast vilayat-i 'aja'ib, mamlu za 'aja'ib u ghara'ib*) (Bihishti-yi Haravi, 225). Bihishti-yi Haravi projects personal values and cultural and aesthetic sensibilities onto the Indian landscapes and topography, finding them pleasurable. Though insect-infested, India is remarkably vast and populated, he writes; it is gold-rich like Egypt and soil-fertile like Syria (Sham) (258). He meets descendants of the Prophet (*sayyids*) like himself, and revered holy men like Sufi mystics and masters (*shaykhs*). Cities' architecture and revenue systems remind him of Herat's and those of other Iranian urban centers. He praises the beauty of the men and women whom he encounters in his travels, particularly charmed by male youths. The Indians' physique, humor, and artistic talents also impress him (260).

Bihishti-yi Haravi's appreciation of land and people does not preclude cultural chauvinism; among the diverse population which includes Turks and Central Asians

9 Pilgrimage to Shi'i shrines in Iraq, such as Najaf and Karbala, are similarly described by Shi'i religious scholars from the Safavi period who visit colleagues and relatives resident in the holy spaces.

10 'Abdullah Thani Bihishti-yi Haravi, *Nur al-Mashriqayn*, ed. Najib Mayil Haravi (Mashhad: Astan-i Quds-i Rizavi, Bunyad-i Pizhuhishha-yi Islami, 1998). Bihishti's narrative is modeled after Khaqani's *Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn*.

11 'Abdullah Thani Bihishti-yi Haravi's versified narrative begins with similar tropes of insecurity; here, it is the political unrest pervading the Safavi realms during Shah 'Abbas's efforts to centralize his dominion. Bihishti's self-writing is consciously autobiographical; the account (*sharh-i ahval-i khud*), he states, is the writing of his state or circumstances from childhood to adulthood. We read about his premature birth and difficult childhood plagued by a disease that left him both mute and paralyzed. Miraculously, he is cured at a Sufi shrine, relearning to talk and walk and progressing to master the religious and literary sciences that make him a famous poet.

(*Turk u Turan*), the Persian grandees at the court of the Chagatai (Mughal) kings receive exceptional praise. Thanks to the Mughal kings who have discriminatingly and rightly patronized the appropriate functionaries, India has been transformed from hell into heaven (*khuld-i piray*), Bihishti-yi Haravi writes (238).

CONCLUSION

In my conclusion I would like to sketch the Persianate worldview central to the political, religious, and economic life of the early modern imperial courts. On the map of this worldview Central Asia and China are the frontier's easternmost points. Sayyid 'Ali Akbar Khata'i writes his Persian-language *Khata'i-namah* in 1520 about his travels to China.¹² The homeland of Sayyid 'Ali Akbar is not clearly known, but he traveled from China to Central Asia and the northern Iranian territory, where Shah Isma'il and the Qizilbash, whom he loathingly calls infidels and savage cannibals, ruled ('Ali Akbar Khata'i, 167). Written in Sufi-inflected language in Istanbul, where Sayyid 'Ali Akbar enjoyed the patronage of Sultan Selim (r. 1512–1521) and upon his death, that of his son, Sultan Suleiman (r. 1521–1566), the account of his travels through China, Machin, Khata'i, and Khutan is offered to Sultan Suleiman. The preface describes it as a precious "gift" that reveals the strange popular customs and rituals of the Islamic world's eastern frontiers (27).

His travelogue, he clearly believes, holds great value and significance. Its preface includes *hikayat*, a versified story, about a polished cup (*jam*), presented to the Persian king Jam, through which all the secrets of the world (*giti numa*) became transparent. Courtiers at Jam's court disagree about the cup's significance: the philosopher says it was a cup filled with water, the astrologer calls it an astrolabe, another courtier decides it is the magic mirror through which universal secrets are to be revealed. At this point the story's narrator interjects to give the true meaning of the cup: the knowing soul (*nafs-i dana*), which, upon completion (*kamil*), embodies universal truth. Sayyid 'Ali Akbar's parable strongly instructs Sultan Suleiman to submit to a spiritual master—i.e., himself—for the first stage of the path to universal discovery begins with the self. Only then will Sultan Suleiman be able to access both worlds (material and spiritual). "Knowledge is your path," advises Sayyid 'Ali Akbar. "Once you learn effectively [*nik dani*], you will become like Alexander" and attain both the material and spiritual worlds (28).

Sayyid 'Ali Akbar's use of the mystical language of self-discovery is readily clear. Symbolized as the cup of Jam, the material and spiritual knowledge he personally gains about the self and selfhood as a result of journeying and traveling is gifted to Sultan

12 Sayyid 'Ali Akbar Khata'i, *Khata'i-namah*, ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnad-i Farhangi-yi Asiya, 1993).

Suleiman in the form of a travelogue. The notion of the travelogue as a precious gift suggests the desirable effect of reading practices as guidance for self-discovery, and, in Sultan Suleiman's case, for universal rule. Sayyid 'Ali Akbar's ethnographic account contains valuable information about China's culture of diplomacy, including rituals of gift exchange, banquets, and festivals that would surely benefit future diplomatic missions to China. More importantly, however, the account is a valuable resource to Suleiman, who was interested in establishing a millenarian kingdom and incorporating China's imperial practices, since its emperors had successfully established amongst the populace reputations for just rule. The account then, posits Sayyid 'Ali Akbar, is no less than a contribution to the important genealogical tradition of tactical knowledge compiled by the Chingizid world-conquerors, such as Ulugh Beg, who sent his ambassador Mavlana 'Ali Qushchi to China. He commanded him: "Whatever you see and learn, record, for China is the land of the wondrous [*'ajā'ib*]." Perhaps Sayyid 'Ali Akbar is following Prophet Muhammad's dictum "In order to obtain knowledge, travel all the way to China," for the travelogue adds to this record for governance fascinating details about the legal system, prisons, brothels, and temples under the Chinese administration. Like Alexander the Great, Sultan Suleiman harbored millenarian aspirations to conquer the world and establish justice on earth, and so Sayyid 'Ali Akbar intended to offer his wisdom and knowledge of travel through his own travels. Sayyid 'Ali competed for Sultan's Suleiman's patronage with astrologers, philosophers, and geomancers at this apocalyptic juncture in time, although he did not obtain it in the end. Sayyid 'Ali Akbar shrewdly marketed his "travel guide" as a manual for self-awareness and world-conquest.

Persianate travelogues from the early modern era emerge as a site for the expression of the individual personal self. Even as they still rely on the mystical epistemology of the era, these first-person eyewitness experience narratives, such as the examples I have discussed here, reflect a newly emergent "map" of comprehending the world and one's self in this process. In this burgeoning new knowledge, individual Persianate subjects and selves are shaped and renegotiated around the discursive categories of sameness and difference evoked during these travelers' journeys into their wide world.

Contributors

KATHRYN BABAYAN is Professor in the Departments of Near Eastern Studies and History, University of Michigan, and the author of *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (2003), which earned her honorable mention for the Saidi-Sirjani Book Award in 2004. Babayan has also co-authored *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavi Iran*, with Sussan Babaie, Ina Baghdiantz-McCabe, and Massumeh Farhad (2004), and co-edited with Afsaneh Najmabadi *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire* (2008). She is currently working on a monograph that explores the history of friendship and epistolarity in early-modern Iran.

ELIO BRANCAFORTE is Associate Professor in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, Tulane University (New Orleans). He has worked on the travel accounts of Adam Olearius, Engelbert Kaempfer, and most recently on “The Encounter between Pietro Della Valle and García de Silva y Figueroa at the Safavid Court of Shah Abbas I,” in *Estudos sobre Don García de Silva y Figueroa e os «Comentarios» da embaixada à Pérsia (1614–1624)* (2011). Presently he is working on a book that examines the representation of Safavid Iran in six European travel accounts.

SONJA BRENTJES is Researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, Germany. Recent publications include *Travellers from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, 16th–17th centuries: Seeking, Transforming, Discarding Knowledge* (2010) and, as co-author with Robert G. Morrison, “Sciences in Islamic Societies,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, Volume 4 (2010). Her current research concerns a text on balances by the twelfth-century scholar ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Khazini.

RUDI MATTHEE is John and Dorothy Munroe Professor of History at the University of Delaware. His latest book is *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (2012). He is currently working on Iranian perceptions of the outside world since 1500 as well as on the role the Safavids played in East-West diplomacy.