

KEELAN OVERTON (ed.):

Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation, 1400–1700.

468 pp. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020. \$36. ISBN 978 0 25304891 2.

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Over the past decade, a renewed interest in the Deccan and its engagement with Iran has resulted in several conferences, exhibitions, and monographs. *Iran and the Deccan*, edited by Keelan Overton, is a welcome addition to this scholarship as it focuses on the circulation of people and ideas in this particular ambit. An earlier generation of scholars such as M.A. Nayeem had written about the connections between the Deccan and Persianate lands, but the focus was usually based on diplomatic, epistolary, and literary sources, often silent on the networks that could be recovered by understanding the movement of material culture. With the rise of Indian Ocean studies and notions of connected histories prolifically promoted by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, the Iran–Deccan axis was argued as a single ecumene, and a range of investigations on several avenues began in earnest. Not narrowly limited to art and architecture, but inclusive of folk traditions, manuscript ateliers, and cultural practices, among others, a range of studies on the Deccan reinforced its position in the Persianate world of the Indian Ocean. Several writings on the late medieval and early modern period acknowledge the deep connections between Iran and the Deccan, such as the essays in Laura Parodi (ed.), *The Visual World of Muslim India: The Art, Culture and Society of the Deccan in the Early Modern Era* (London, 2014). However, there is no book with the singular objective of investigating the depth of this relationship between the years 1400 to 1700, using a variety of interdisciplinary methods. It is in this scholarly context that *Iran and the Deccan* claims to be “the first interdisciplinary exploration of [the] vibrant centuries of human migration and cultural exchange between Iran and the Deccan” (p. 4).

Fourteen essays, all dealing with different sources and primary data, are woven into a single narrative of cultural mobility between Iran and the Deccan. The volume is organized thematically, as explained in the introduction (pp. 3–76), with the following sections: i. Iranian elites and their trails; ii. Bidar in the international Timurid; iii. Religious codices and Shii sectarianism; iv. Album culture, calligraphy, and diplomacy; and v. Dakhni literature and history. Essays are grouped under these loose themes, but this scheme is not represented in the Table of Contents, where it would have been better understood. The editor has otherwise done a fantastic job of bringing together such diverse material and unifying it under a single rubric.

The book opens with an introductory chapter by the editor, aptly named “Iranian mobilities and Persian interventions in the Deccan” in which the rationale and the structure of the publication is explained. The appendix is a biographical directory of Iranian elites in the Deccan from 1400 to 1700. The next three essays are on the theme of the easy migration and networks of Iranians as elites in the Deccan, authored by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam, Wheeler Thackston, and Roy Fischel respectively. It is possible to see through these essays, as Fischel remarks, that the presence of Iranian elites “contributed both to the making and unmaking of state in the Deccan” (p. 140). Using calligraphy (Peyvand Firouzeh) and the transmission of architecture (Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair) as the lens of investigation, the next two chapters help understand the art of the pen and of architecture in the Deccan, as part of much larger networks of learning and

craft. The next four chapters, authored by Maryam Habibi, Jake Benson, Rachel Parikh, and Keelan Overton and Kristine Rose-Beers, respectively, all deal with manuscripts and documents that demonstrate the large republic of letters in the Persianate world. The next couple of chapters, written by Jake Benson and Hamidreza Ghalichkhani respectively, focus on a manuscript album and a scribe, and thus use the arts of the book and the pen in dealing with the theme of the book. The final two chapters discuss the role of language and the reception of Persian literature in the Deccan. Written by Sunil Sharma and Subah Dayal respectively, they also discuss an overarching theme: the intersection of a larger Persianate culture with that of the Deccan.

The editor acknowledges that the book is neither “arbitrary nor comprehensive”, citing the various academic circumstances and constraints in the years that culminated in this book (p. 45), and therefore the absence of scholars and aspects of Deccan culture is not a surprise. Such a disclaimer also explains the absence of any material from one of the three major post-Bahmani dynasties, the Nizam Shahs, which is regretted as a “conspicuous gap” (note 124, p. 68). The essays in the volume examine various Persianate cultural elements (including people) that arrived in the Deccan, often by volition and occasionally by accident. The push and pull factors that made such movement possible, such as persecution in Iran or patronage in the Deccan respectively, are elucidated in detail (pp. 6–7). Commendably, the publication aspires to the essays in this volume being “a mix of synthetic analysis and meticulous excavation of a single source” in the form of an individual, a text, a building, or a codex (p. 12). Thus, conceptually, each research essay has been crafted with a unique object as the locus, with various levels of fidelity to this idea. Using primary sources as diverse as an inscription in Mahan (Iran), a manuscript in Scotland, and a building in Bidar, the different essays illustrate the movement of people, ideas, and materials. The essays are of a high calibre, with original research, using hitherto undiscovered or unused sources. The good scholarship and high production values of this handsome book make it an invaluable resource for any scholar of the Deccan. The high-quality images of rarely seen cultural material are a delight, and this lavish publication is highly recommended.

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NAMAN AHUJA:

Art and Archaeology of Ancient India: Earliest Times to the Sixth Century.

360 pp. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2018. £40. ISBN 978 19 1080717 0.
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Art and Archaeology of Ancient India is an engagingly written catalogue of the Indian collections of the Ashmolean museum, beautifully illustrated with ample photographs that bring the collections to life. Comprehensive, other than its omission of the museum’s Gandharan material which is treated in a separate work, the catalogue is structured broadly according to geographic region with historical overview and proto-historic chapters followed by those on northwest, north and central India and eastern India and the Deccan, and finished with a Miscellanea section that includes items of