

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Mana Kia. *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020. 371 pp. ISBN: 9781503611955. DOI: 10.22679/avs.2021.6.2.007

*Persianate Selves* highlights the contextual nature of a set of commemorative texts (*tazkeiras*, travelogues, etc.) from the 17<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century to answer the following question: What did possessing the Persian language and its *adab* mean before modern nationalism? The work is divided into two parts. The first one explores terms related to homeland and surveys how storied Persianate figures and narratives could render unknown places intelligible. The second part of the book delves into questions related to the multiplicity of personal lineages and challenges mutually exclusive categorizations.

The work seeks to clear the hermeneutical ground from anachronistic, singular, and seemingly objective presumptions about homeland, origin, and social collectives, which obscure our understanding of the more expansive pre-nationalist modes of belonging. Therefore, *Persianate Selves* works with context-driven terms such as Turan and Hindustan. It also prefers ‘Indian Timurid’ over ‘Mughal,’ which in Persianate languages functioned as a marker of prestigious origin rather than that of nationality or loyalty (pp. 155-162).

The central concept of the book is *adab*, which refers to the “proper forms of aesthetic style, and ethical conduct” disseminated by basic education (p. 9). It was a common cultural ground for articulating tastes and distastes, which rendered specificities and distinctions communicable. Despite its usefulness as a heuristic device, its definition remains somewhat vague in the book. Commemorative texts served as circulating, textualized sites of remembering and connected past and contemporary artistic, intellectual, occupational, and religious groups. These texts also mediated a publicly constructed representation of the imagined self. According to Jacques Derrida, the autobiographical self requires identification. This idea, combined with Kia’s view that *adab* functioned as the mode by which Persians could identify, is crucial (p. 174). This argument reveals some of the theoretical underpinnings of the book. Firstly, it draws from Derrida whose notions of *aporia* and selfhood form the backbone of the work. Secondly, it embraces the concept of Persianate coined by Marshal Hodgson, which originally referred to the multilingual cultural orientation of 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century Khurasan and Central Asia inspired by Persian models. Thirdly, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* also looms large in Mana Kia’s treatment of trans-regional, polyglot

imagined communities, and allows the author to align nationalism “with the large cultural systems that preceded it” (p. 196).

Chapter 1 examines how dual pre-Islamic and Persianate Islamic narratives, including the various redactions of the *Shāhnāma* and its trans-regionally recognizable figures, places, and stories, could render certain regions more familiar or distinct to their Persianate audiences. The chapter also illustrates that terms such as *mamlakat* may simultaneously refer to smaller domains (e.g. Georgia) and kingdoms (e.g. *mamlakat-i Īrān*). The latter in 18<sup>th</sup>-century texts denoted the territory of Safavid Iran instead of a fixed, ahistorical land (p. 43). The comparison of the memories of Ḥazīn (d. 1766) and Kashmīrī (d. 1784) in Chapter 2 illuminates how these figures remembered the fall of the Safavids in 1722 and the appearance of Nādir Shāh (r. 1736-47). Indian Timurids relied on Safavid help and friendship, yet, according to Ḥazīn’s narrative, they failed to return these gestures, and their immoral behavior spoiled the land of South Asia. While the other author, Kashmīrī, acknowledges the Safavids’ help, he creates a narrative that enables him to portray Indian Timurids and Safavids as equal parties. Ḥazīn and Kashmīrī arrived at diverging conclusions, however, both works were nested in a shared cultural idiom, which enabled them to articulate their disagreements without creating a cultural dichotomy. Chapter 3 documents how urbanity and built environment represented just rulership. Rāzī’s (d. 1619) description of the gardens and forts of the Deccan in his *Haft Iqlīm* (Seven Climes) emphasized the prosperity of the justly ruled region. It drew attention to the friendship of the Khurasani born Zuhūrī (d. 1619) and his Deccani companion, which created a trans-regionally understandable framework for accommodating specificities. It also ascribed geo-cultural significance to new Persianate places.

Chapter 4 examines how learned genealogical chains, lineages of service, and occupations complicated the identification of the protagonists of the book. In a particularly illuminating subchapter, Kia discusses how Āzar, in his *Ātishkada*, aspired to associate poets with Persianate places to justify his aesthetic proclivities for the communities of ‘*Irāq-i ‘ajam*. Entries dedicated to women are found at the end of *Ātishkada* and, unlike elsewhere, their geographical origins are disregarded. Instead, they are treated separately from male authors. Kia convincingly argues that manhood (*mardānagi*) symbolized moral ideals in the *Ātishkada*, whereas femininity was associated with the lack thereof. Women’s placement at the end of the work symbolized a gendered moral hierarchy (p. 119). Chapter 5 argues that thanks to their knowledge of *adab*, recent converts to Islam, females, and Turks could also become members of the Persianate. It demonstrates how porous and historically contextual the names of social collectives, such as Shāmlū and Qizilbāsh, were. The following chapter elaborates how affiliations were accrued and fixed in naming practices. Meanwhile, it compares the elastic usage of the term ‘Mughal’ with the mutually exclusive and apparently objective categories of modern nation-states. The final chapter turns to *tazkiras*, describing crumbling political power to encapsulate the ways in which these works created imagined, multi-generational socio-intellectual collectives, and allowed their authors to construct and display their autobiographical selves.

In comparison with other recent publications, such as *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* edited by Nile Green (2019) and Richard Eaton’s *India in the Persianate*

*Age 1000-1765* (2019), *Persianate Selves* is chronologically more focused. Its terminology offers an alternative discourse about Persian as a cosmopolitan language. The main text is followed by a rich endnote section. Footnotes could clarify certain points and ameliorate the understanding of the multilayered arguments of the book. The system of transliteration contains a few redundancies in words such as *tizkirih* and *silsilib* (p. 109), instead of *tazkira* and *silsila*, and does not mark long vowels (e.g. “Bidil” on page 182 instead of “Bedil”). However, *Persianate Selves* makes significant interdisciplinary connections and will surely animate discussions while opening new theoretical avenues.

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Koulouri, Anastasia and Nikolai Mouraviev, eds. *Kazakhstan's Developmental Journey: Entrenched Paradigms, Achievements, and the Challenge of Global Competitiveness*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. 271 pp. ISBN: 9789811569012. DOI: 10.22679/avs.2021.6.2.008

At the present moment, Kazakhstan has entered a new stage of its evolutionary development, associated with the beginning of political and economic modernization under the new leadership of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The voluntary resignation of the first President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, from the political Olympus, has attracted increased attention from scholars to an objective study of the political heritage of the ‘Father of the Nation’ or ‘Elbasy.’

The present collection consists of an introduction and three parts, devoted to the analysis of some of the most key issues on the agenda of the Government of Kazakhstan over the past 30 years, including energy (Chapter 2), agriculture (Chapter 3), education (Chapter 4), public administration (Chapter 5), management of water resources (Chapter 7), and monotowns (Chapter 8). Many of these issues are capturing increased attention from the civic groups of Kazakhstan, which in recent years have expressed their opinions more and more openly.

This collection is very extensive in its content and covers almost all key policy documents and milestones of the modern model of Kazakhstani development or ‘Kazakhstan’s Way.’ Indeed, the book scrutinizes the primary goals of Nazarbayev’s following strategies ‘Kazakhstan-2030,’ ‘Kazakhstan-2050,’ the ‘Nurly Zhol’ economic program, and the five institutional reforms, as well as their impact on the above-mentioned areas.

It is noteworthy that most of the chapters were written by young researchers from Kazakhstan, who contributed to the significant enrichment of the book with meaningful empirical data and expert assessments of modern political and socio-economic trends in Kazakhstan. This approach continues the efforts of the Asian Development Bank Institute,