

Book Review

Naz, Humera. *Sindh Under the Mughals: Origin and Development of Historiography (1591–1737 CE)*. 254pp. Oxford University Press 2023.

Dr Shayan Rajani¹

¹ Department of History, Michigan State University

E-mail: srajani@msu.edu

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Sindh Under the Mughals is a comprehensive survey of Persian-language historical sources written in Sindh, or, in some cases, by people from Sindh, during the Mughal period. The book considers three genres of writing: political literature or chronicles; biographical dictionaries, including *tadhkira* and *malfuz* literature; and epistolography or *insha*. An achievement of considerable erudition, *Sindh Under the Mughals* joins a long and esteemed tradition of philology in Sindh, and in Pakistan more broadly. The author, Humera Naz, brings together several generations of historical, editorial, and philological works by scholars working in Sindhi, Urdu, Persian, and English, and introduces it to an English-speaking scholarly audience.

The book is organised into five chapters, in addition to an introduction and conclusion. Chapters 2 to 5 offer detailed accounts of historical texts written in Sindh immediately before and during the Mughal period. Chapter 2 introduces Persian and Arabic prose texts from sixteenth-century Sindh that predate Mughal rule. These include a history of the ruling Arghun and Tarkhan houses, titled *Nusrat Nama-i-Tarkhan*; a biography of the Sufi saint Shah Murad Shirazi, titled *Tadhkirat al-Murad*; and biographical dictionaries of male and female Persian poets, titled *Tadhkira Rawzat al-Salatin* and *Jawahir al-Aja'ib*, respectively. Chapter 3 introduces six historical works written in Sindh during Mughal rule: *Tarikh-i-Masumi*, *Beglar Nama*, *Tarikh-i-Tahiri*, *Mazhar-i-Shahjahani*, *Tarkhan Nama*, and *Intikhab-i-Muntakhib al-Tawarikh*. Chapter 4 presents three biographical dictionaries produced during this period, including *Hadiqat al-Awliya-i-Sindh*, *Tadhkira Mashayikh-i-Sewistan*, and *Dhakhirat al-Khawanin*. Chapter 5 details three collections of letters by men associated with Sindh including *Munshat-i-Namakin*, *Aadab-i-Alamgiri*, and *Raq'a'im-i-Kara'im*.

The book offers a rich vein of information and useful scholarly assessments for these texts. Each entry introduces the author, and gives the time and place, and cause and context for the writing of the text. Moreover, it offers a detailed description of the work, including its structure and content, its style and sources. The entries assess the value of each text as a historical source and its merit as a work of history. Finally, they review extant manuscripts and survey edited and printed volumes and critical scholarly work about the texts. With a few exceptions, most of the texts described have already been edited, printed, translated, and commented upon in Persian, Sindhi, Urdu, or in a few instances in English. The author bases her accounts on these earlier works and does not, in most cases, examine the manuscripts themselves. The value of this work lies in bringing all these various texts together into one volume and making them accessible in English. Naz also offers keen and interesting observations about these texts, which will be of interest to historians of Sindh and the Mughal world.

This survey of historical writing in Mughal Sindh is framed by an account of history-writing as a world-historical phenomenon. This teleological and universalist account prefers schematisation over historicisation, and relies on many old assumptions about history, historiography, and India, which have largely been set aside in recent times. In this book, history is presented simultaneously as “a universal human need” manifest in Ancient Greece, Rome, and China, but also as a practice that has somehow missed India.[1] Naz writes, “History is a weak spot in Indian literature, in fact, it is practically non-existent.”[2] Indo-Muslim historiography is joined to Islamic historiography more broadly and described together as the second phase of historiography after Ancient Greece and Rome. Naz favours Indo-Muslim historiography for

its commitment to chronology, but frowns on its belief in divine intercession over mechanistic causation; overuse of praise; and its emphasis on history as literature rather than science.[3] It is only under British colonialism, Naz writes, that “history transformed into a full-fledged field of knowledge and a discipline of the arts and became a part of the syllabi in schools and colleges.”[4]

While this universalist account of history recedes into the background in the substantive chapters of the book, its positivist commitments continue to guide it. Each text under analysis is adjudged for accuracy, the use of firsthand accounts, and objectivity, and evaluated for its contribution to reconstructing Sindh’s history. Thus, for example, the *Beglar Nama* is found wanting because it does not give any information on the origins of the Beglars and their migration to Sindh, and for factual errors with regards to the names of kings, places, and dates. However, it is praised for its account of the battle between Jani Beg Tarkhan and Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, which is not described elsewhere.[5] These are undoubtedly useful notes for scholars thinking to pick up these texts, but they do little to explain or contextualise the decisions of the author within the historical situation of Mughal Sindh.

Naz’s work exchanges a contextual and historically grounded account of the origin and development of historiography in Mughal Sindh for a normative assessment of this historical production. As a result, the fascinating question about the reasons for the outpouring of historical texts during this period is answered only in a cursory manner. Mughal peace, prosperity, and patronage are credited in passing, but without a concerted effort to marshal evidence from the diverse sources under scrutiny.[6] Moreover, the different genres of history, biographical dictionary, and epistolography are situated in each chapter within a broader history of those respective genres and their significant texts, but without exploring the social, political, literary, and aesthetic connections between these genres within Sindh. Such an investigation might well have pointed to the distinctive aspects of Persian prose and historical writing in Sindh, and explained the significance of using Sindh as a spatial unit of analysis in the study of early modern historical writing.

Sindh and the Mughals will be an indispensable work for scholars and students seeking to understand historical sources produced in Sindh during this period. The book should encourage scholars to incorporate materials from Sindh into broader studies of the Mughal world. Thus far, *Dhakhirat al-Khawanin*, *Tarikh-i-Masumi* and *Mazhar-i-Shahjahani* are well-known among Mughal historians. This was the result of the efforts of earlier scholars who edited and translated those texts into English, and published studies of them, also in English. Naz’s work points up the many possibilities for political, social, and cultural histories using the other, lesser-known sources, too.

This book may also inspire new histories of Sindh under the Mughals. There is a great paucity of scholarly monographs on this period. We have so far relied on S.P. Chabliani’s *Economic Conditions in Sind* (1951) and Muhammad Saleem Akhtar’s book, also titled *Sindh Under the Mughals* (1990), but which is largely an English-language translation of the *Mazhar-i Shahjahani* with only the introduction offering an account of Mughal Sindh. The state of affairs with regards to scholarship on Mughal Sindh does show signs of changing. However, more work is certainly required. Naz’s book is an excellent invitation for such future scholarship.

Note: This article follows the transliteration choices of the book under review.

Endnotes:

- 1 Naz, *Sindh Under the Mughals*, 4.
- 2 Naz, *Sindh Under the Mughals*, 5.
- 3 Naz, *Sindh Under the Mughals*, 28–30.
- 4 Naz, *Sindh Under the Mughals*, 193.
- 5 Naz, *Sindh Under the Mughals*, 99.
- 6 Naz, *Sindh Under the Mughals*, 193.