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## From the Editor: Defining Persianate Studies

The launching of a journal to define the new interdisciplinary field of Persianate studies is surely a timely event. As the first decade of the new millennium of the Common Era draws to a close, it is evident that we live in a global age requiring reorganization of research and learning in the human sciences. The inadequacy of the nineteenth-century division of these sciences into History, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology and Political Science, lodged in separate university departments, is made evident by the generally acknowledged fact that the most original research at the frontiers of knowledge is interdisciplinary. The conservative hostility of the entrenched university departments to interdisciplinary research and their contempt for area studies, already undermined epistemologically by the demise of scientism, are increasingly irrelevant in the face of the global integration of cultures and civilizations. No such rear guard action can breathe new life into the false claims of the old social sciences to universalism or mask their serious knowledge deficit with respect to the non-Western world.

Globalization forces us to take the dynamics of major world civilizations seriously, and thus invites a new interdisciplinary approach to civilizational analysis based on the study of history, culture and literature. The *Journal of Persianate Studies* is the new organ of the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies (ASPS), which was founded in 1996 to promote the study of the Persianate world—the civilization encompassing an area ranging from Iran to the Caucasus, India and Central Asia, where Persian and related languages have historically been dominant. Like its predecessor, *Studies on Persianate Societies*, it publishes the results of research on the Persianate world in the social sciences and humanities. In the effort to set the rough parameters of such research, Persianate studies are best viewed in the context of interdisciplinary area studies.

In Europe, Oriental studies developed in fairly close connection with British, French, Dutch and belatedly Russian and German imperial ventures, but the idea of area studies emerged in the United States in anticipation of post-World War II reconstruction. Area studies were conceived as the wedding of the social sciences and the study of non-Western civilizations. As early as 1943, the concentration on regions in area studies was seen by the Social Science

Research Council (SSRC) as a catalyst to the weakening of the rigid departmental separation of the disciplines, as well as a means to cleansing social theory of its Western provincialism. The SSRC accordingly set up a Near and Middle East Committee in 1951 with the aim of unifying the study of Islamic civilization and the social sciences. In practice, however, things worked the other way around for two reasons. First, area specialists were greatly outnumbered by social scientists without any area interests who used primarily American data and socio-cultural patterns to arrive at universal generalizations. Secondly, the Cold War began soon after the launching of area and development studies and imposed an extra-epistemic, political frame on the whole project. There is also an institutional reason for the failure to fulfill the promise of Middle East area studies as formulated in the 1940s, which may be even more important than the political ones: the mutual isolation of social sciences, and Oriental languages and cultures and religious studies. Consequently, the promise of the original idea of area studies remains entirely unfulfilled.

Nevertheless, one important positive outcome of the SSRC-sponsored area studies project was the foundation of the Middle East Studies Association of North America in 1966 and the launching of its organ, the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* in 1970. In the four decades since, the major advancement of our knowledge of this region has been truly impressive. The Persianate civilizational area, however, includes India and therefore its study cuts across the arbitrary division that has developed institutionally between Middle Eastern and South Asian area studies. The Persianate world also includes Central Asia, the study of which was orphaned until the demise of the Soviet Union, and has more recently been relegated to a number of separate learned societies.

The Persian language survived the Arab conquest of Iran as a vernacular for some two centuries, after which it developed into a major literary language, spreading from Iran and Central Asia into the Indian subcontinent in the south-east, and the Caucasus and Anatolia in the west. Persian became the *lingua franca* of several kingdoms and empires in the eastern Muslim lands and thus formed the nucleus of a vast civilizational area which we call the Persianate world. As far as I know, the term Persianate was coined by Marshall Hodgson in *The Venture of Islam* (1974) to describe a major component of the Islamic civilization. Persian, according to him, “was to form the chief model for the rise of still other languages to the literary level. Gradually, a third ‘classical’ tongue emerged, Turkish, whose literature was based on the Persian tradition . . . Most of the more local languages of high culture that later emerged among Muslims likewise depended upon Persian [Urdu would be a prime example] . . . We may call these traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration, ‘Persianate’ by extension.” (2, p. 293)

The unity of the Persianate world was undermined with the rise of Western imperialism in the nineteenth century, and shattered by the creation of nation-states in the twentieth. Under the impact of British imperialism, Persian literacy gradually became a nostalgic veneer in India. Although Persian remained a living language in Central Asia under Russian and Soviet imperialism, it was increasingly cut off from the Iranian nation-state, the core Persianate society in the twentieth century.

We now have a second chance, we believe, to meet the missed challenge of making the world intelligible through area studies by riding on the crest of a different current trend—namely, globalization. Techno-scientific globalization, as well as the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the opening of Afghanistan, and visible cracks in the edifice of state-formation and its exclusionary, nationalistic political culture, all open new possibilities for symbiosis within the Persianate world and thus for the development of Persianate studies. It is into this newly opened cultural space that the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies has inserted itself; and it is this cultural space that is the field of interdisciplinary Persianate studies our *Journal* intends to cover.

The launching of the *Journal of Persianate Studies* does not occur in a vacuum, but builds on other current efforts aimed at developing Persianate studies. There are strong signs that the challenge of developing Persianate studies is being met in different quarters and a major intellectual force can be created by linking them. The monumental *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, edited by Ehsan Yarshater since 1985, has reached its 14th massive volume, offering an immensely rich resource to students of Persianate studies. Other efforts include the Armenian initiative, *Iran and the Caucasus*, which has completed the first decade of its publication under the energetic editorship of Garnik Asatrian, and Indian initiatives such as the publication of *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature* by Nabi Hadi (1995) and *The Growth of Civilizations in India and Iran* by the Aligarh Historians' Society (Irfan Habib, ed., 2002). In North America, *Iranian Studies* had a special issue (36.2[2003]) on Indo-Persian studies, and a named chair of Iranian History of the Persianate World has recently been created at the University of California, Irvine. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* and the Centre for the Comparative Study of Muslim Societies and Cultures at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver (which has administered the Mirhadi Endowment in Iranian and Persianate Studies since 2001) have also sought to overcome the Middle East-South Asian divide by adapting a Persianate focus. Last but not least, there have been the three ASPSPS biennial conventions in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (2002), Yerevan, Armenia (2004) and Tblisi, Georgia (2007), and three volumes of our annual *Studies on Persianate Societies* (2003-2005), published with the support of the Soudavar Memorial Foundation.

Below the institutional level but even more indicative of the future trend, there has been an explosion of interest in Persianate studies, especially in comparative studies of cultural formations (Turkish and Persian, Sanskrit and Persian, Caucasian and Persian) and of the modern empires (Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal) among graduate students in the United States. The steady increase in ASPS student membership and participation gives the impression of a similar trend in Europe and Japan.

The subject matter of the human sciences is not ethically neutral, nor is it morally indifferent. As Max Weber explained with regard to what he called 'value-analysis,' these sciences can help with the development of our ultimate values through clarification of their implications and consequences. In line with the objective of ASPS to enhance public culture and mutual understanding within the Persianate world by disseminating the results of its members' scholarly efforts, the *Journal of Persianate Studies* publishes articles on linguistic, social, cultural and historical aspects of the growth of Persianate culture and civilization. Knowledge flows from pre-existing facts but is also constructed and thus helps shape the present reality. Knowledge of the Persianate world can therefore mitigate the leveling effects of globalization as well as counteract the distortions of the area's common historical memory and civilizational continuity by the divisive forces of modern nationalism and imperialism.

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