

ROUNDTABLE

Introduction: Arabic as a South Asian Language

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In recent decades, the ascent of the “Persianate world” paradigm has prompted a major revival in the study of Persian sources in and on South Asia, while at the same time building on Marshall Hodgson’s capacious original conception of the Persianate as being more than Persian *per se* by including “more local languages of high culture that ... depended upon Persian wholly or in part for their prime literary inspiration.”¹ While this has been an extraordinarily productive cycle of scholarship, it has also coincided and perhaps contributed to the longstanding occlusion of South Asia’s Arabic tradition. A single bibliographical citation may serve to illustrate the stark contrast to the Persianate publishing boom: the last English-language book-length survey of “the contribution of India to Arabic” was completed as long ago as 1929.²

Yet in the near century since then, Arabic has not disappeared from what in 1947 became India and Pakistan (and, after 1971, Bangladesh).³ For in the postcolonial period, the presence of Arabic has expanded and its roles diversified through a blend of Islamizing Pakistani educational policies, Indian labor migration to the Gulf, and Arabic’s continued use as a common language by Muslim religious students and scholars across the Middle East and South Asia. This has produced a steady stream of publications in both Arabic and Indian regional languages, such as Urdu, exploring different regional or genre-based dimensions of South Asia’s Arabic heritage.⁴

¹ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2: 293. Amid the vast secondary literature in Hodgson’s wake, see the appraisal and survey volumes by: Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, eds., *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Bert G. Fragner, *Die “Persophonie”: Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999); Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019); and Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway, eds., *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2012).

² M. G. Zubaid-Ahmad, *Contribution of India to Arabic Literature* (PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 1929), subsequently published as M.G. Zubaid Ahmad (with a foreword by H.A.R. Gibb), *The Contribution of India to Arabic Literature: From Ancient Times to the Indian Mutiny of 1857* (Jullundur, India: Maktaba-i-Din-o-Danish, 1946; reprinted in Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968) and translated into Arabic by ‘Abd al-Maqṣud Muhammad Shalqami as *al-Adab al-‘Arabiyya fi Shihb al-Qarra al-Hindiyya* (Cairo: Nahdat Misr, 1995). Note also the Indian sections in Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, Supplement II (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1938), 309–12, 598–628, 849–64.

³ Although the trajectories of Arabic-learning in other regions often considered as part of “South Asia”—particularly Afghanistan and Sri Lanka—lie beyond the scope of this roundtable, they are similarly ripe for exploration.

⁴ See for example Kavish Badri and Faiḍanullah Faruqi, *Qadim Tamil Naddu main ‘Arabi-o-Farsi Adabiyat ki Char Sau Salah Tarikh* (New Delhi: Qaumi Kaunsil Bara’e Furugh-i Urdu Zaban, 2004); Jamal al-Din Faruqi, ‘Abd al-Rahman Muhammad and ‘Abd al-Rahman Hasan, *A‘lam al-Mu‘allifin bi-l-‘Arabiyya fi-l-Bilad al-Hindiyya* (Dubai: Markaz Jum‘a al-Majid li-l-Thaqafa wa-l-Turath, 2013); Abu Sada Isalahi, *‘Arabi Zaban-o-Adab main Ruhaylkhand ka Hissah* (Rampur, India: Rampur Raza La’ibreri, 2004); Zubair Shams Tabriz Khan, *‘Arabi Adab main Hindustan ka Hissa ‘Ahd-i Saltanat-i Dihli main, 1206 ta 1526* (Lucknow: Nizami Press, 1989); Shabbir Ahmad Qadirabadi, *‘Arabi*

Happily, a new generation of scholars based in Europe and North America is also now studying various aspects of the troika of Arabic in India; Arabic and India; and India in Arabic. Drawing attention to these junior researchers—and to the work of the small number of more senior scholars who have paved the way—this introductory essay makes the historical and historiographical case for the importance of Arabic as an Indian language.

Along with the case-study essays that follow, this roundtable as a whole both builds on and challenges the ascent of “Indo-Persian” and “Persianate world” studies over the past two decades by showing how attention to Persian has helped conceal what ultimately proves to be the more enduring history of South Asian engagement with Arabic.⁵ The collective goal of the contributors is not to prematurely foreclose horizons or ascertain conclusions, but rather to open a range of research possibilities for future scholars. To better enable this goal, the following pages pose a series of basic questions to lay out the many research avenues that remain open alongside pointing to studies that already exist for particular topics. Intended to map the temporal, spatial, social, and operational aspects of Arabic-use, the broad questions posed here address the when, where, who, and how of over a millennium of Arabic-use in South Asia.

When: Temporal Aspects of South Asian Arabic

In his magisterial history of Arabic literature, Carl Brockelmann issued what might appear to be a warning shot for future investigators of South Asian Arabic:

From the very beginning, Islamic culture in India was entirely under Persian influence... Even though individual travelling scholars such as Ibn Battuta and al-Firuzabadi were received with honour at the courts of Muslim India... their influence did not extend far enough to give Arabic literature any real significance compared to Persian. Similarly, relations between the Muslim theologians of India and the cultural centres of South Arabia and Mecca have left almost no evidence. Thus, the contributions of Indian Muslims to Arabic literature remained very limited.⁶

If this seems a disheartening appraisal of prospects for a nascent research field, then it will come as a relief to realize that Brockelmann was writing here about the period before around 1500—which brings us briskly to a primary point about the temporal aspects of South Asian Arabic: far from being an expression of the earliest periods of Indo-Islamic history, the production of Arabic texts in India and broader engagement there with both written and spoken Arabic increased over time as a result of closer interaction with the Ottoman Hijaz, British Egypt, and then the postcolonial Gulf states in turn.⁷

Zaban-o-Adab 'Ahd-i Moghuliyya main (Lucknow: Taqsimkar Danish Mahall, 1982); Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Rahman Rabi', *Adab al-Mahjar al-Sharqi* (Giza: Jami'at al-Qahira, 1999); and Muhi al-Din Qadiri Zur, *Dastan-i Adab-i Haydarabad: Ya'ni Hydarabad ke Tin Sau Sala Urdu Farsi-o-'Arabi Adab-o-Sha'iri ka Ja'iza* (Hyderabad, India: Idara-yi Adabiyat-i Urdu, 1951). Comparable works likely also exist in Bengali, Malayalam, and other regional languages. Note also the important South Asian Anglophone regional surveys of Muhammad Yusuf Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic, 1710-1960* (Madras: Hafiza House, 1974) and Baqirali Muhammadali Tirmizi, *Rise and Development of Arabic Language and Literature in Gujarat* (Ahmedabad, India: Hazrat Pir Mohammad Shah Library and Research Centre, 2011).

⁵ On these questions, see also the valuable survey article by Tahera Qutbuddin, “Arabic in India: A Survey and Classification of its Uses, Compared with Persian,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127, no. 3 (2007): 315–38. The many relevant South Asian manuscript catalogues are conveniently cited together in Omar Khalidi, “A Guide to Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu Manuscript Libraries in India,” *MELA Notes* 75–76 (2002): 1–59.

⁶ Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur* (1949), vol. 2, 284–85, with Joep Lameer's translation quoted from Brockelmann in *English: The History of the Arabic Written Tradition Online*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2542-8098_breo_COM_231060 (accessed 9 August 2022).

⁷ However, on the earliest periods of contact, which modern South Asian Muslim scholars have emphasized, see Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi, *'Arab-o-Hind ke Ta'lluqat* (Allahabad, India: Hindustani Ekadimi, 1930) and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, “Early Arab Contact with South Asia,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 52–69.

Far from following a simplistic diminishing trajectory of cosmopolitan Arabic to (more or less) cosmopolitan Persian to regional vernaculars to national languages and postcolonial global English, the chronology of Arabic-use across South Asia has pursued a series of more complex and fluctuating trajectories shaped in turn by the spatial and social variables of “where” and “who” discussed below. There is undoubtedly the risk here of confusing the disappearance of early texts through the attrition of time with the greater survival rate of more recent (especially printed rather than manuscript) works. But the broader picture beginning to appear in recent studies is one of early modern Arabic-based networks expanding across the Indian Ocean then being followed by a further expansion of Arabic-learning in colonial India (prompted in part by easier access). This may suggest a broad pattern of increasing South Asian engagement with Arabic over time that accelerated with the contraction of Persian studies from the mid-nineteenth century. Thereafter, building on the reputations of earlier Indian scholars in the Hijaz, from the early twentieth century there emerged a wider diaspora of South Asian authors and teachers in Arabic based in colonial Egypt, as well as in what was by the 1920s Saudi-ruled Arabia. A case in point is the post-Persianate revival of Arabic as a language of South Asian history-writing in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, examined by Mohsin Ali in his essay for this roundtable. This culminated in the Arabic histories written by the North Indian Sayyid Abu’l-Hasan ‘Ali Nadwi (1913–99), who frequently lectured in Mecca and published books in Damascus.⁸

These closer connections emerged in colonial India after the founding of new institutions of Arabic studies, particularly Lucknow’s Nadwat al-‘Ulama’ seminary in 1898, which sought to modernize the teaching of Arabic in line with pedagogical trends in Cairo and the late Ottoman Levant.⁹ Such ties of steam and print similarly saw Chinese Muslim reformists establish Beijing’s Arabizing Chengda Shifan Xuexiao (Chengda Normal School) and other new schools, whose graduates travelled in turn to Lucknow and Cairo.¹⁰ Even the predominantly Urdu-medium Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh engaged with Egypt’s Islamic modernists, also partly through the promotion of Arabic as a Muslim *lingua franca* by the European orientalist and British officials who helped shape the college’s curriculum.¹¹ This transregional linguistic geography not only saw Rashid Rida’s stridently religious journal *al-Manar* (The Lighthouse) find South Asian readers, but also lent an Indian dimension to the Nahda movement, whose epistles of print ecumenism similarly reached India’s steam ports and rail-connected libraries inland at a pace that far outstripped medieval and early modern ties.¹² Meanwhile, in developments discussed in Sohaib Baig’s contribution to this roundtable, India’s own booming print emporia not only saw commercial printers (including the great Hindu entrepreneur Naval Kishore) issue Arabic books for both the domestic and overseas markets, but also saw the establishment of state-patronized Arabic presses such as Hyderabad’s Da’irat al-Ma’arif al-‘Uthmaniyya. So much for South Asia’s contribution to the production of Arabic books.

⁸ Mohsin Ali, “Modern Islamic Historiography: A Global Perspective from South Asia” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2022).

⁹ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Arabic, the Arab Middle East, and the Definition of Muslim Identity in Twentieth Century India,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8, no. 1 (1998): 59–81.

¹⁰ Mao Yufeng, “Muslim Educational Reform in 20th-Century China: The Case of the Chengda Teachers Academy,” *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 33 (2011): 143–70. For various outcomes of these new Beijing-Lucknow-Cairo connections, see Nile Green, *How Asia Found Herself: A Story of Intercultural Understanding* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), ch. 5 and 6.

¹¹ Roy Bar Sadeh, “Islamic Modernism between Colonialism and Orientalism: *Al-Manar*’s Intellectual Circles and Aligarh’s Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, 1898–1914,” in *The Muslim Reception of European Orientalism: Reversing the Gaze*, eds. Susannah Heschel and Amr Ryad (London: Routledge, 2018), 103–28.

¹² On *al-Manar* in South Asia, see *ibid.* and Leor Halevi, *Modern Things on Trial: Islam’s Global and Material Reformation in the Age of Rida, 1865–1935* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019). On South Asia’s links to the Nahda, Roy Bar Sadeh, “Islamic Modernists between South Asia, the Middle East, and the World, 1856–1947” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2022), ch. 6.

However, these modern publishing developments also reshaped the reception of medieval texts. This suggests that attention to authorial textual production should be set beside the more dynamic processes of reception and tradition as *traditio* (being “handed down”), as Arabic works from beyond South Asia were imported, copied or printed, and studied there over the centuries—and in turn became the focus of commentarial production, whether in Arabic or regional languages.¹³ With the passing of time, the dynamic nature of tradition meant a single imported text could become the focus of an expanding sequence of commentaries and meta-commentaries, suggesting that the relationship between text and time—that is, the “when” of any single work—could be an expansive and progressively voluminous one. While this process has scarcely been examined for Arabic texts in South Asia, one important recent study traces the many commentaries on the seventeenth-century advanced logic textbook *Sullam al-'Ulum* (Ladder of the Sciences), which were written almost entirely in Arabic (with Persian limited to anonymous interlinear notations) until first quarter of the twentieth century, when Urdu commentaries also began to be published.¹⁴

Yet the ascent of Urdu as a language of learned prose by no means meant the eclipse of Arabic. For as Mohsin Ali's essay in this roundtable shows, as the twentieth century progressed Arabic only gained in importance as a language of history-writing by ‘ulamā’ who had previously spurned *tārīkh* (history) as lying outside of the religious sciences. Moreover, building on the reputations of earlier Indian scholars in the Hijaz, by the mid-twentieth century there emerged a new diaspora of South Asian Arabic-medium authors and teachers based in what was by then Saudi Arabia, not least those associated with the Mecca-based Muslim World League and the Islamic University of Medina, which became major promoters of Arabic studies across South Asia.¹⁵

Where: Spatial Aspects of South Asian Arabic

Like the question of “when,” the issue of “where” for Arabic in South Asia is far from self-explanatory. Even as innocuous and inclusive a label as “South Asian Arabic” begs basic questions concerning the spatial configurations of Arabic-use across the diverse geography of the South Asian subcontinent. The first seeds of Arabic were carried to the region along at least two different routes—overland and oversea—then sown in furrows leading from the imperial dominions of the ‘Abbasids then Ghaznavids into Sindh and Punjab, and from the maritime emporia of Arabian merchants into the hinterlands of coastal Gujarat and Malabar. Simple as this is to surmise, this early period remains the most problematic and debated, not least due to the paucity of surviving sources from South Asia itself (such as the Persian rendition of the purportedly Arabic original of the history of the Arab conquests in Sindh, known as the *Chachnama*).¹⁶ From the thirteenth century, another sketch map

¹³ Asad Q. Ahmed, “Post-Classical Philosophical Commentaries/Glosses: Innovation in the Margins,” *Oriens* 41 (2013): 317–48; Christopher Bahl, “Histories of Circulation: Sharing Arabic Manuscripts across the Western Indian Ocean, 1400–1700” (PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 2018); Christopher Bahl, “Arabic Philology at the Seventeenth-Century Mughal Court: Sa’d Allāh Khān’s and Shāh Jahān’s Enactments of the *Sharḥ al-Radi*,” *Philological Encounters* 5, no. 2 (2020): 190–222; Simon Leese, “Longing for Salmá and Hind: (Re)producing Arabic Literature in 18th and 19th-Century North India” (PhD diss., SOAS University of London, 2019); Claudia Preckel, “Screening Şiddiq Ḥasan Khān’s Library: The Use of Ḥanbalī Literature in 19th-Century Bhopal,” in *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, eds. Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 162–219; and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Commentaries, Print and Patronage: ‘Ḥadīth’ and the Madrasas in Modern South Asia,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62, no. 1 (1999): 60–81.

¹⁴ Asad Q. Ahmed, *Palimpsests of Themselves: Logic and Commentary in Postclassical Muslim South Asia* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022).

¹⁵ Michael Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith: Migration, Education, and the Wahhabi Mission* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

¹⁶ Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); and Andre Wink, Review of *Ibid.* in *H-Asia: H-Net Reviews* (May 2017): <http://www.h-net.org/>

points to the ascendance and dissemination of Persian after the founding of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206, followed by the Tughluq sultans' conquests to the east and south. This prompted Richard Eaton to delineate a Perso-Islamic "cultural axis" linking the cities of Khurasan and Central Asia to their urban Persianate counterparts between Delhi, Bengal, and the Deccan.¹⁷ But since Arabic remained ever-present (if not omnipresent) across this "Persianate" space—whether in the closed confines of madrasas, the mumbling of private prayers, or the public splendor of epigraphy—there remains the question of how we should configure the geography of Arabic in relation to this Persianate axis.¹⁸ The easiest way to reinstate Arabic in this Persianate space would be to think of it terms of a Perso-Arabic geography, but this is surely to dodge rather than detect what were perhaps distinct locales, routes, and institutions of Arabic-learning. The most obvious example is the western littoral of India, from Gujarat through the Konkan to Malabar, which has generated a number of studies in recent years.¹⁹ The oceanic character of this coastal region suggests the terrestrial notion of an axis is less suitable than a maritime plexus that required regular movement between the Middle East and South Asia to remain alive.²⁰ This is particularly true when we factor in the Hijaz and Hadramawt as sites of learned interaction with a range of spaces across South Asia, both coastal and interior.²¹ These factors suggest that language-use

[reviews/showrev.php?id=47738](https://www.cambridge.org/core/reviews/showrev.php?id=47738). On 'Abbasid Sindh more broadly, see Derryl N. Maclean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sind* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

¹⁷ Richard M. Eaton, *Islamic History as Global History* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 1990).

¹⁸ On sultanate epigraphy, see Johanna Blayac, "Sovereign Epigraphy in Location: Politics, Devotion and Legitimation around the Qutb Minār, Delhi," in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Cemil Schick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 217–29; and Anthony Welch, Hussein Keshani, and Alexandra Bain, "Epigraphs, Scripture, and Architecture in the Early Delhi Sultanate," *Muqarnas* 19 (2002): 12–43. Also M.S. Khan, "An Undiscovered Arabic Source of the History of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq," *Islamic Culture* 53 (1979): 187–205.

¹⁹ Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A View from Mecca: Notes on Gujarat, the Red Sea, and the Ottomans, 1517–39/923–946 H," *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2017): 268–318; P.K. Yasser Arafth, "Malabar Ulema in the Shafiite Cosmopolis: Fitna, Piety and Resistance in the Age of Fasad," *Medieval History Journal* 21, no. 1 (2018): 25–68; Christopher D. Bahl, "Transoceanic Arabic Historiography: Sharing the Past of the Sixteenth-Century Western Indian Ocean," *Journal of Global History* 15, no. 2 (2020): 203–23; Jyoti Gulati Balachandran, "Counterpoint: Reassessing Ulughkhānī's Arabic History of Gujarat," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 74, no. 1 (2020): 137–61; Michael Cooperson (trans.), "The Autobiography of al-'Aydārūs," <https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docid=ft2c6004x0&chunk.id=d0e7324&toc.depth=1&toc.id=d0e7324&brand=ucpress>; and Scott Kugle and Roxani Eleni Margariti, "Narrating Community: The *Qīṣṣat Shakarwatī Farmād* and Accounts of Origin in Kerala and around the Indian Ocean," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 60, no. 4 (2017): 337–80.

²⁰ Nile Green, "Re-Thinking the 'Middle East' After the Oceanic Turn," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 3 (2014): 556–64; Nile Green, "The View from the Edge: The Indian Ocean's Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 3 (2016): 746–49.

²¹ Sohaib Baig, "Indian Hanafis in an Ocean of Hadith: Islamic Legal Authority between South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula, 16th–20th Centuries" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2020); Christopher Bahl, "Creating a Cultural Repertoire Based on Texts: Arabic Manuscripts and the Historical Practices of a Sufi in 17th Century Bijapur," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 9, no. 2–3 (2018): 132–53; Guy Burak, "Between Istanbul and Gujarat: Descriptions of Mecca in the Sixteenth-century Indian Ocean," *Muqarnas Online* 34, no. 1 (2017): 287–320; Jyoti Gulati Balachandran, *Narrative Pasts: The Making of a Muslim Community in Gujarat, c. 1400–1650* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020); Engsang Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Scott A. Kugle, *Hajj to the Heart: Sufi Journeys across the Indian Ocean* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Erik Ohlander, "Mecca Real and Imagined: Texts, Transregional Networks and the Curious Case of Baha' al-Din Zakariyya of Multan," in *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800*, eds. John Curry and Erik Ohlander (London: Routledge, 2011); Stefan Reichmuth, *The World of Murtada al-Zabidi: (1732–91): Life, Networks and Writings* (Cambridge, UK: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2009); and John Voll, "Muḥammad Ḥayyā al-Sindī and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth-Century Madina," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38, no. 1 (1975): 32–39.

creates its own geographies, a translocal sphere of the kind Ronit Ricci dubbed an “Arabic cosmopolis.”²²

Yet Arabia could also play the role of geographical intermediary, as when the Arabic works of the Moroccan sufi Ahmad Zarruq (d.1493) were studied there by the Gujarati ‘Ali Muttaqi (d.1568), who in turn transmitted them to his Indian homeland. Or, on a larger scale, with the transmission from Egypt to Gujarat, via Yemen, of the imamate and teachings of Fatimid Isma‘ilism to foster the Bohra community of Gujarat, who thereafter revived their linguistic and geographical links to the spaces of their collective past.²³ From the mid-nineteenth century, Bombay and its Arabian outpost of Aden became major sites of Arabic-based interactions, written and spoken, between Arab and Indian Muslims (including many of the latter who considered themselves ancestrally Arab).²⁴ Looking beyond Arabia, though, we know far too little about the wider engagements of either South Asian Muslims or their Arabic writings in other Arabic-using regions of Asia and Africa.²⁵

Such attempts to map the networked geography of Arabic on the larger scale should not mislead us to picturing the language as solely an urban, even less a solely littoral, phenomenon.²⁶ Here, institutional geography may be the most useful scale, potentially helping us to chart the spread of Arabic-use through mosques, *maktabs*, madrasas, and *khanqaqs* located not only in cities, but also in small *qaṣba* and harbor towns.²⁷ Indistinct as he is in the scholarship, the figure of the small town qadi—resorted to for the resolution of quotidian disputes—is perhaps the most elusive evidencer of the penetration of Arabic across South Asia. Less elusive—but still the focus of remarkably little scholarship—is the Arabic corpus

²² Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

²³ Olly Akkerman, *A Neo-Fatimid Treasury of Books: Arabic Manuscripts among the Alawi Bohras of South Asia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022) and Scott A. Kugle, “Usuli Sufis: Ahmad Zarruq and his South Asian Disciples,” in *La Voie soufie des Shadhilis*, ed. Eric Geoffroy (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2005).

²⁴ Scott S. Reese, *Imperial Muslims: Islam, Community and Authority in the Imperial Indian Ocean, 1839–1937* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017) and John M. Willis, “Making Yemen Indian: Rewriting the Boundaries of Imperial Arabia,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 1 (2009): 23–38. On South Asian identifications with “Arabness,” see Thomas J. Barfield, *The Central Asian Arabs of Afghanistan: Pastoral Nomadism in Transition* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981) and Julien Levesque and Laurence Gautier, eds., *Historicizing Sayyid-ness: Social Status and Muslim Identity in South Asia*, special issue of *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30, no. 3 (2020).

²⁵ For notable exceptions, particularly with regard to manuscript circulation, see Éloïse Brac de la Perrière, “Du Caire à Mandu: transmission et circulation des modèles dans l’Inde des sultanats,” *Cahiers de Studia Iranica* 40 (2009): 333–58; Amélie Chekroun, “Manuscrits, éditions et traductions du Futūḥ Al-Ḥabaṣa: état des lieux,” *Annales Islamologiques*, 46 (2012): 293–322; Sana Mirza, “The Visual Resonances of a Harari Qur’ān: An 18th Century Ethiopian Manuscript and its Indian Ocean Connections,” *Afriques* 8 (2017): 1–29; Stefan Reichmuth, “Murtadā al-Zabīdī (1732–91) and the Africans: Islamic Discourse and Scholarly Networks in the Late Eighteenth Century,” in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott S. Reese (Leiden: Brill, 2004); and Tim Stanley, “A Qur’an Once in Zanzibar: Connections between India, Arabia, and the Swahili Coast,” in *The Decorated Word: Qur’ans of the 17th to 19th Centuries*, eds. Manijeh Bayani, Tim Stanley and Anna Contadini (London: Nour Foundation, 1999), 26–31. With regard to Indian Muslim financial and legal entanglements across a far wider ocean region, see Michael O’Sullivan, *No Birds of Passage: A History of Gujarati Muslim Business Communities, 1800–1975* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

²⁶ Cf. Thibaut d’Hubert, “Persian at the Court or in the Village? The Elusive Presence of Persian in Bengal,” in Green, *Persianate World*, 93–112.

²⁷ For South Asia, the largest survey of this kind is the long-awaited first volume of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies’ Atlas Project, under contract to Oxford University Press as *The Historical Atlas of the Islamic World*. The main studies of individual madrasas from the precolonial era are art historical: Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, “From Iran to the Deccan: Architectural Transmission and the Madrasa of Mahmud Gavan at Bidar,” in *Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation, 1400–1700*, ed. Keelan Overton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), 175–202; Subhash Parihar, “A Little-Known Mughal College in India: The Madrasa of Shaykh Chillie [sic] at Thanesar,” *Muqarnas* 9 (1992): 175–85; and Anthony Welch, “A Medieval Center of Learning in India: The Hauz Khas Madrasa in Delhi,” *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 165–190. However, for a notable regional picture of teaching and writing in Arabic in small town colonial-era madrasas, see Mohammad Raisur Rahman, *Locale, Everyday Islam, and Modernity: Qasbah Towns and Muslim Life in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

of technical *ṭaṣawwuf* and *falsafa* which was read in at least some *khanqaḥs* and madrasas across the subcontinent.²⁸ But which institutions and how they related we hardly know, further limiting our sense of the where of Arabic in South Asia.

Together with the obvious fact that at an oral, memorized, and embodied level, Arabic is present wherever Muslims pray, the literate qadi, the aspiring talib, and the unlettered worshipper take us from the “where” to the “who” of Arabic in South Asia—including the question of the relationship of Arabic to the region’s larger non-Muslim populations.

Who: Social Aspects of South Asian Arabic

Despite their plain significance for the history of South Asian Muslims, ‘ulama’ remain a remarkably neglected focus of inquiry, particularly in comparison to the extensive secondary literature on their counterparts in the Middle East.²⁹ Building on the extensive scholarship on the history of sufis in South Asia, a similar corpus of hagiographies and biographical dictionaries could be used to produce social histories of ‘ulama’, whether for particular institutions or regions (reflecting the organizational structure of many primary sources), or for particular polities or periods.³⁰ This neglect is even more the case with regard to the social history of ‘ulama’; that is, their relations with their varied clients, whether rulers or ruled, and how this in turn shaped the interplay between Arabic texts, their specialist interpreters, and their larger human environments.³¹ Indeed, the question of the social penetration of shari‘a—whether state-promulgated ‘ulama’ rulings or more local legal decisions—has only recently begun to be systematically investigated in line with the recent growth of applied legal history via studies of not only of jurisprudential treatises but also of qadis and their rulings in particular times and places.³²

This is not only a question that relates to the history of Muslims: the legal status of non-Muslims (*dhimma*) under Muslim rule was a major concern of at least some Mughal

²⁸ Bahl, “Creating a Cultural Repertoire”; William C. Chittick, “Notes on Ibn ‘Arabi’s Influence in the Indian Sub-Continent,” *Muslim World* 82, no. 3–4 (1992): 218–41; and Kugle, “Usuli Sufis.”

²⁹ The majority of studies focus on the modern period: Jamal Malik, “Ulama Institutions in Contemporary South Asia,” *Muslim World* 87, no. 3–4 (1997): 199–220; M.M.M. Mahroof, “The ‘Ulamā’ in Sri Lanka, 1800–1990: Form and Function,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (1995): 25–50; Muḥammad Miyan, *Tarikh ‘Ulama’-i Hind ka ek Bab: Az 1857 ta 1974* (New Delhi: al-Jami‘atah Buk Dipo, 1974); Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *Ulama in Politics: A Study Relating to the Political Activities of the Ulema in the South-Asian Subcontinent from 1556 to 1947* (Karachi: Maaref, 1972); and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). On the early modern period, however, see Sajida Sultana Alvi, “Qadi Thana’ Allah Panipati, An Eighteenth-century Indian Sufi-‘Alim: A Study of His Writings in Their Sociopolitical Context,” in idem, *Perspectives on Mughal India: Rulers, Historians, ‘Ulamā’ and Sufis* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Arthur F. Buehler, “Shari‘at and ‘Ulamā’ in Aḥmad Sirhindī’s ‘Collected Letters,’” *Die Welt Des Islams* 43, no. 3 (2003): 309–20; and Jamal Malik, *Islamische Gelehrtenkultur in Nordindien: Entwicklungsgeschichte und Tendenzen am Beispiel von Lucknow* (Leiden: Brill, 1997). For scholarship on Islamic law *per se*, see M. Reza Pirbhai, “A Historiography of Islamic Law in the Mughal Empire,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Law*, eds. Anver M. Emon and Rumea Ahmed (Online edition, Oxford Academic, 2015): <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199679010.001.0001>.

³⁰ For example, Stefan Reichmuth, “Murtadā Az-Zabīdī (d. 1791) in Biographical and Autobiographical Accounts: Glimpses of Islamic Scholarship in the 18th Century,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 39, no. 1 (1999): 64–102.

³¹ Cf. the historical anthropology of legal application in Yemen in Brinkley Messick, *Shari‘a Scripts: A Historical Anthropology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

³² On applied law in the postcolonial and colonial era respectively, see Lucy Carroll, “*Talaq-i-Tafwid* and Stipulations in a Muslim Marriage Contract: Important Means of Protecting the Position of the South Asian Muslim Wife,” *Modern Asian Studies* 16, no. 2 (1982): 277–309; Lucy Carroll, “Definition and Interpretation of Muslim Law in South Asia: The Case of Gifts to Minors,” *Islamic Law and Society* 1, no. 1 (1994): 83–115; and Elizabeth Lhost, “Writing Law at the Edge of Empire: Evidence from the Qazis of Bharuch (1799–1864),” *Itinerario* 42, no. 2 (2018): 256–78. Cf. the studies of earlier periods in the pioneering volume of Muhammad Khalid Masud, Rudolph Peters, and David S. Powers, eds. *Dispensing Justice in Islam: Qadis and their Judgements* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

imperial jurists.³³ Moreover, as recent studies have shown, shari'a-based commercial contracts were used by a variety of Hindu and Muslim merchants around the Indian Ocean, while also finding their way—through adaptation or equivalence—into contracts drawn up in South Asian vernacular languages used by non-Muslim traders.³⁴ Nor was the 'ālim (pl. 'ulama') the only knowledge-worker to deploy his mastery of Arabic texts for such broad clientele. Another possible example is the *ḥakīm*, or the expert in *Yunānī ṭibb* (Greco-Arabic medicine), particularly prior to what seems to have been the increasing communalization of traditional medicine in the late colonial era—an era that saw the Hindu medical public urged to use Ayurveda specialists at the same time that *Yunānī ṭibb* began to spread for the first time among Muslims in colonial Sri Lanka.³⁵

Hindus' employment of Muslim legal or medical specialists in turn begs the question of whether different Hindu groups learned Arabic for themselves. Since thousands of members of the *kayasth* scribal caste were employed by Muslim-ruled polities—whether the Mughal Empire or the many smaller successor states that survived until 1947—some degree of facility with Arabic, not only Persian, would presumably have been an additional professional asset. There is some evidence that *kayasths* occasionally studied Arabic in addition to Persian, not least as a corollary of having studied alongside Muslims in madrasas.³⁶ But despite the growing literature on Persian-using *kayasths*, their relationship with Arabic is yet to be addressed in any detail.

Such common and cooperative use of Arabic should be set alongside its role in inter-religious boundary-maintenance and even polemic.³⁷ While, for understandable political reasons, such topics have received far less scholarly attention than the “composite culture” of Hindu-Muslim cosmopolitanism (particularly via Persian), critical evaluations and the delineation of difference were a part of the Arabic (and Persian, and for that matter Sanskrit and Hindi) textual landscape of South Asia, raising questions about both the impact of such texts on actual social relations and their relationship with their better-known cosmopolitan counterparts.³⁸ Yet Hindus were by no means the only, or even the prime, focus of such works. An initial survey of surviving manuscripts suggests that far more inter-Muslim sectarian

³³ Satish Chandra, “Jizya and the State in India during the Seventeenth Century” and Alan M. Guenther, “Hanafi *Fiqh* in Mughal India: The *Fatawa-'Alamgiri*,” in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mouez Khalfoui, “Together but Separate: How Muslim Scholars Conceived of Religious Plurality in South Asia in the Seventeenth Century,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74, no. 1 (2011): 87–96; and Corinne Lefèvre, “Beyond Diversity: Mughal Legal Ideology and Politics,” in *Law Addressing Diversity: Premodern Europe and India in Comparison (13th–18th Centuries)*, eds. Gijs Kruijtzter and Thomas Ertl (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 116–41.

³⁴ Fahad Ahmad Bishara, *A Sea of Debt: Law and Economic Life in the Western Indian Ocean, 1780–1950* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Fahad Bishara and Hollian Wint, “Into the Bazaar: Indian Ocean Vernaculars in the Age of Global Capitalism,” *Journal of Global History* 16, no. 1 (2021): 44–64; and Thomas F. McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018).

³⁵ Guy Attewell, *Refiguring Unani Tibb: Plural Healing in Late Colonial India* (Hyderabad, India: Orient Longman, 2007). Thanks to Torsten Tschacher for the point about Sri Lanka.

³⁶ Muhammad Umar, *Islam in Northern India During the Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1993), 381–82.

³⁷ Muhammad Khalid Masud, “Cosmopolitanism and Authenticity: The Doctrine of *Tashabbuh bi'l-Kuffar* ('Imitating the Infidel') in Modern South Asian Fatwas,” in *Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts: Perspectives from the Past*, eds. Derryl N. MacLean and Sikeena Karmali Ahmed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 156–75. Almost the only Arabic-based scholarship here for the premodern period relates to Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1624) and debates around his influence on Mughal policy. See for example, Aziz Ahmad, “Religious and political ideas of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 36 (1961): 259–70 and Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971), ch. 8. On earlier Arabic heresiographical accounts, see Yohanan Friedman, “Medieval Muslim Views of Indian Religions,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95, no. 2 (1975): 214–21.

³⁸ Carl W. Ernst, “Indian Lovers in Arabic and Persian Guise: Āzād Bilgrāmī's Depiction of *Nāyikas*,” *Journal of Hindu Studies* 6, no. 1 (2013): 37–51. Also, Shawkat Toorawa, “Azad Bilgrami,” in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1350–1850*, eds. Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 91–97.

polemics were written than anti-Hindu ones, while the onset of Christian missionary critiques of Islam in the early nineteenth century generated a responding series of Muslim (as well as Hindu, and in Sri Lanka, Buddhist) critiques of Christianity.³⁹ Arabic played an important part here too, whether through critical or defensive quotations from the Qur'an and hadith or as a learned medium for detailed refutations of Christian doctrine that, in the case of Jawad ibn Sabat's 1814 *Barahin as-Sabatiyya* (Proofs of Sabat) and Rahmatullah Kairanawi's 1867 *Izhar al-Haqq* (Clarification of Truth), were also diligent studies of the scripture and theology of a different religion.⁴⁰ Still, it is worth pointing out again that inter-Muslim polemics appear to have been the more prolific genre, albeit one that has garnered similarly little attention, including in terms of impact on social relations.⁴¹ Nor should we be tempted into facile contrasts between an inclusive, pluralizing Persian literary corpus and an exclusive, scripturalist Arabic counterpoint. For in the 1920s, Arabic translations of Gandhi, Tagore, and various Sanskrit classics offered a new outlet for positive inter-religious engagements between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and Hindus and Muslims in India.⁴²

Yet it would be counterproductive and counterfactual to deny the close relationship between Arabic learning and the deeper engagement with Islamic tradition. As Tahera Qutbuddin has calculated, around eighty-five percent of the South Asian Arabic books listed by Brockelmann relate to Qur'an and hadith studies, jurisprudence, sufism, theology, and hagiography, with only around fifteen percent on "secular" subjects, such as philology, philosophy, *belles-lettres*, and medicine (though Zubaid Ahmad lists 360 Indian-authored Arabic "religious" works and 217 in "secular" fields).⁴³ However, as our sketch of the social dimensions of Arabic in South Asia already suggests, these bald statistics should not prevent us from recognizing the many purposes of the language beyond formal religious studies. And, beyond the limited social sphere of authors, motivations for learning Arabic have also encompassed symbolic capital, employment prospects, and paid services, whether for the state-sponsored mufti, the community Qur'an-reciter, the prospective bride, the talisman-maker, or the migrant worker.

In addressing the "who" of Arabic in South Asia, there also of course remains the crucial question of gender. This applies to most if not all of the issues touched on in the previous paragraphs, whether through the impact of legal rulings on women (including non-Muslim wives) or direct female engagements with the Arabic textual tradition. In contexts of multilingualism and widespread non-literacy, "direct" female engagement must necessarily be conceived in several ways, ranging from the oral memorization of Qur'an sections and often-lengthy *du'ā'* prayers to the copying of Arabic talismans (usually known in South Asia by the Arabic term *ta'widh*) and the formal study of Arabic texts.⁴⁴ However, while there is now

³⁹ My thanks to Hinesh Shah for sharing with me his initial findings on surviving Arabic polemics in Indian manuscript collections.

⁴⁰ Nile Green, "Jawād (Sometime Nathaniel) Sābāt b. Ibr. Sābāt al-Ḥasanī and the Text *al-Barāhīn as-Sābāṭiyya*," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, 1500-1900*, ed. John Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 489–94 and Christine Schirrmacher, *Mit den Waffen des Gegners: Christlich-muslimische Kontroversen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1992). On the counter-intuitive notion of such polemics as a form of cross-cultural learning, see Green, *How Asia Found Herself*, ch.1 and 2.

⁴¹ Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land: Shi'ism between Pakistan and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), ch. 2; Usha Sanyal, "Are Wahhabis Kafirs? Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi and his Sword of the Haramayn," in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas*, eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 204–13; and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Islam in Pakistan: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), chs. 5 to 7.

⁴² Roy Bar Sadeh, "Debating Gandhi in *al-Manar* during the 1920s and 1930s," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 38, no. 3 (2018): 491–507; Esmat Elhalaby, "Empire and Arab Indology," *Modern Intellectual History* (2021): 1–25; and Green, *How Asia Found Herself*, ch. 2.

⁴³ Qutbuddin, "Arabic in India," 329.

⁴⁴ For ethnographic accounts of the latter two activities, see Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 64–105; and Mareike

extensive historical literature on female Muslim education and literary production in South Asia, the focus has been overwhelmingly on English, Urdu and to a lesser extent Persian, providing few comparable counterparts to the women hadith scholars known from scholarship on the Middle East.⁴⁵

In such ways, the social penetration of Arabic cut not only across space, but also across gender and religious boundaries, albeit in ways we are yet to understand. Even as manuscript catalogues demonstrate that the majority of (surviving) Arabic texts in South Asia focused on Muslim religious topics, attention to the social life of Arabic suggests that the language served as a medium of engagement—both collaborative and conflictual—with various non-Muslim groups, whether Hindu scribes, merchants, and medical patients; British Orientalists, administrators, or missionaries; or Arab Christians and fellow Muslims overseas.

How: Operational Aspects of South Asian Arabic

Turning from questions of “who” to issues of “how” Arabic was used in South Asia, the sheer range of media used for the language open a vista of research possibilities. These multiple media comprised not only paper documents, both handwritten and printed, but also coinage, epigraphy, and both communicative and ritual speech. For whether through its lexical incorporation into local languages, its use as a liturgical language, or its use as a spoken language of labor for the many thousands of émigré workers in the Gulf states, Arabic also retains an important place in the oral sphere of South Asian Muslim life.⁴⁶ Behind each of these cases lies the question of how Arabic was learned, not only in terms of the institutional “where” of madrasa and chancery, but also in terms of the pedagogic “how” of teaching techniques and textbooks.⁴⁷ While this is generally invisible for the medieval centuries, the survival of teaching manuals of later periods offers potential for addressing this topic, as researchers already have with regard to the learning of Persian in South Asia.⁴⁸ Yet elementary rubrics and grammars formed only one part of a wider spectrum of lexicographical works that also included Mughal-era commentaries on more complex works of Arabic grammar, such as the eponymous *Sharh al-Radi* (Radi’s Commentary) of Radi al-Din al-Astarabadi (d. 1287 or 89).⁴⁹ Such was the continued confidence of nineteenth-century South Asian scholars that, in the case of Nawab Muhammad Siddiq Khan of Bhopal and his *al-Bulgha fi Usul al-Lughah* (A Sufficiency in the Roots of Philology, published in Istanbul), their output included

Winkelmann, “‘Inside and Outside’ in a Girls’ Madrasa in New Delhi,” in *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages*, eds. Farish A. Noor, Yoginder Sikand, and Martin van Bruinessen (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 105–22.

⁴⁵ Gail Minault, “*Begamati Zuban: Women’s Language and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Delhi*,” *India International Centre Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1984): 155–70; Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women’s Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); compare Asma Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴⁶ Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, “Muslim Entrepreneurs in Public Life between India and the Gulf: Making Good and Doing Good,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009): 202–21; and Tahera Qutbuddin, “Karbala Mourning among the Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī-Shī’a of India: Doctrinal and Performative Aspects of Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn’s Arabic Lament, ‘O King of Martyrs’ (Yā Sayyida l-Shuhadā’i),” *Shii Studies Review* 5 (2021): 3–46. Compare Mirjam Lücking, *Indonesians and their Arab World: Guided Mobility among Labor Migrants and Mecca Pilgrims* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

⁴⁷ Focusing mainly on the colonial and postcolonial periods, see Tariq Rahman, “The Teaching of Arabic to the Muslims of South Asia,” *Islamic Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 399–443; and on the late Mughal period, see Umar, *Islam in Northern India*, ch. 4.

⁴⁸ Walter Hakala, “On Equal Terms: The Equivocal Origins of an Early Mughal Indo-Persian Vocabulary,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25, no. 2 (2015): 209–27; Simon Mills, “Learning Arabic in the Overseas Factories: The Case of the English,” in *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Jan Loop, Alastair Hamilton, and Charles Burnett (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 272–93.

⁴⁹ Bahl, “Arabic Philology.”

engagements with major works of Arabic linguistics by the likes of Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505).⁵⁰

Even so, South Asia remained a region where written Arabic could be read by very few—a fact that stands in striking contrast to the existence of so many monumental inscriptions in the region. For many regions of the subcontinent, Arabic inscriptions constitute the earliest surviving Islamic texts.⁵¹ Often (though by no means always) Qur’anic inscriptions, such as “public texts” raise important questions of verbal communication versus symbolic affirmation; and of how inscriptions affect and effect the meaning of buildings and the ceremonies that take place in them.⁵² Other Arabic public texts were found on coins, which, unlike static buildings, circulated far and wide. Such coin inscriptions are not solely sources on the Muslim past, but can also be used to understand processes of interaction—whether accommodation or transformation—with non-Muslim milieux.⁵³ A vivid example is the large-scale issuing of Arabic-script coinage by the Kashmir Smast Hindu cave temple complex during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁵⁴ The potential insights to be drawn from such early yet enduring stone and metal texts shows their significance far beyond the recondite realms of epigraphic and numismatic studies.

Returning to paper, the realm of documentation—whether *ijāzāt*, *shajārāt*, *waqf*, or other legal and official documents—remains woefully under-explored in South Asia, not least with regard to how such documents were used as paper instruments with effects on the surrounding world.⁵⁵ Partly this may be due to the absence of any surviving Mughal equivalent to the Ottoman imperial archive.⁵⁶ But there remain many other repositories of Arabic

⁵⁰ Nawwab Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Khan, *al-Bulgha fi Usul al-Lugha* (Constantinople [Istanbul]: Matba’at al-Jawa’ib, 1296/1878); on which, see John A. Haywood, “An Indian Contribution to the Study of Arabic Lexicography: The ‘Bulgha’ of Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Kḥān Bahādur (1832–1890),” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3–4 (1956): 165–80. More broadly, see Rahmatullah (*sic*), “Contribution of Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan to Qur’anic and Hadith Studies” (PhD diss., Aligarh Muslim University, 2015).

⁵¹ Finbarr Barry Flood, “Islamic Identities and Islamic Art: Inscribing the Qur’an in Twelfth-Century Afghanistan,” *Studies in the History of Art* 74 (2009): 90–117; M. A. Ghafur, “Fourteen Kufic Inscriptions of Banbhore,” *Pakistan Archaeology* 3 (1966): 65–90; M.A. Ghafur, “Two Lost Inscriptions Relating to the Arab Conquest of Kabul and the North West Region of West Pakistan,” *Ancient Pakistan* 2 (1966): 4–12; Shabbir Hussain, “Qur’anic Texts on Gravestones at Makli,” *Islamic Studies* 32, no. 1 (1993): 77–91; A. N. Khan, *Al-Mansurah: A Forgotten Arab Metropolis in Pakistan* (Karachi: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, 1990); Muhammad Nazir Khan, “A Ghaznavid Historical Inscription from Uḍḡrām, Swāt,” *East and West* 35, no. 1–3 (1985): 153–66; and Anthony Welch, “Qur’an and Tomb: The Religious Epigraphs of Two Early Sultanate Tombs in Delhi,” in *Indian Epigraphy: Its Bearing on the History of Art*, eds. Frederick M. Asher and G.S. Gai (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 257–67.

⁵² Irene A. Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Richard Ettinghausen, “Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation”, in *Near Eastern Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honour of George C. Miles*, ed. D.K. Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), 297–317; and Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), ch. 2.

⁵³ Finbarr Barry Flood, “Conflict and Cosmopolitanism in ‘Arab’ Sind,” in *A Companion to Asian Art and Architecture*, eds. Rebecca M. Brown and Deborah S. Hutton (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 365–97. With regard to paleography, note also the development of two distinctive early “Indo-Arabic” calligraphic styles: Éloïse Brac de la Perrière, “Bihârî et naskhî-dîwânî: remarques sur deux calligraphies de l’Inde des sultanats,” *Studia Islamica* 96 (2003): 81–105. On the later reappearance of the Bihari style in Ethiopia, likely through direct contact with India, see Mirza, “Visual Resonances.”

⁵⁴ Waleed Ziad, “‘Islamic Coins’ from a Hindu Temple: Reconsidering Ghaznavid Interactions with Hindu Sacred Sites through New Numismatic Evidence from Gandhara,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59, no. 4 (2016): 618–59 and idem, *In the Treasure Room of the Sakra King: Votive Coinage from Gandharan Shrines* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 2021), ch. 4.

⁵⁵ Stefan Reichmuth, “The Quest for Sufi Transmissions as Links to the Prophet: Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791) and his Encyclopedic Collection of Sufi *Salāsīl*,” in *Performing Religion: Actors, Contexts, and Texts*, ed. Ines Weinrich (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2016), 75–99.

⁵⁶ For an astute summary of and intervention in the debate on the existence or absence of Islamic medieval archives, see Francisco Apellániz, “Producing, Handling and Archiving Evidence in Mediterranean Societies,” in idem, *Breaching the Bronze Wall* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 38–142.

documentation, particularly private religious institutions. There are also innumerable modern examples of what is perhaps the most ubiquitous form of paper instrument in South Asia—the written talisman—which raise questions of where, when, and whom Arabic serves as a *lingua magica* rather than a *lingua franca*.⁵⁷

There also of course remain hundreds of formal Arabic texts authored in South Asia, along with many more imported, copied, and commented on there. New approaches to intellectual and literary history are examining the intertwined writing and reading practices that characterized this “culture of colophons” in which Arabic manuscript texts were circulated, copied, and commented on, whether between South Asia and Arabia or between distinct but as-yet poorly described centers of Arabic learning in South Asia itself.⁵⁸ Nor did these manuscript methods of reading and writing disappear with the rise of print, which (as it had earlier in Europe) coexisted and mingled with manuscript production well into the twentieth century, albeit in ways not yet understood.

Recent years have seen the history of the printed book emerge as a lively field in Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies. But the history of Arabic printing in South Asia—happily the focus of Sohaib Baig’s contribution to this roundtable—has somehow fallen between the linguistic cracks of Area Studies.⁵⁹ This is doubly unfortunate, not only because the history of Middle Eastern and South Asian printing is deeply intertwined, but also because the earlier expansion of South Asian vis-à-vis Middle Eastern printing—in both technical and commercial terms—produced such a startling range of Arabic books.⁶⁰ Perhaps none is more surprising than the first ever Arabic printed edition of the *Arabian Nights*, issued in Calcutta between 1814 and 1818, which not only predates the first Middle Eastern imprint—the larger Bulaq edition of 1835—but also precedes the founding of Egypt’s pioneering Bulaq Press itself. The traffic in printed texts was by no means one way, however. For just as Middle Eastern Arabic texts were printed in Calcutta, Bombay, Lucknow and Hyderabad, South Asian Arabic “classics” such as al-‘Utbi’s history of the early Ghaznavid sultanate were printed in Cairo (albeit, in al-‘Utbi’s case, combined with an Ottoman Syrian commentary that belied the Orientalist concern with purified critical editions disconnected from commentarial traditions).⁶¹ In contrast to recent studies of the circulation and reception of manuscripts, the question of how such South Asian Arabic printed works interacted with what has been conceived as the “Arabic cosmopolis” of the Indian Ocean remains unanswered.⁶²

Imported European (then American) technologies not only impacted the circulation of written Arabic texts. They also transformed how oral texts were communicated through

⁵⁷ Flueckiger, *In Amma’s Healing Room*. Compare Alexandre Papas, “Lingua Franca or Lingua Magica? Talismanic Scrolls from Eastern Turkistan,” in Green, *Persianate World*, 207–22.

⁵⁸ Ahmed, *Palimpsests of Themselves*; Akkerman, *Neo-Fatimid Treasury of Books*; Christopher D. Bahl, “A Prosopography in Circulation: Advertising Scribal Travails in Arabic Manuscripts Across Early Modern South Asia,” in *Scribal Practice and Global Cultures of Colophons, 1400–1700*, eds. Stefan Hanß and Christopher D. Bahl (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 37–61; Baig, “Indian Hanafis”; Leese, “Longing for Salma”; Claudia Preckel, “Islamische Bildungsnetzwerke und Gelehrtenkultur im Indien des 19. Jahrhunderts: Muhammad Siddiq Hasan Hān (st. 1890) und die Entstehung der Ahl-e hadīth-Bewegung in Bhopal” (PhD diss., Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2005); Reichmuth, *World of Murtada al-Zabidi*; and SherAli Tareen, “South Asian Qur’an Commentaries and Translations: A Preliminary Intellectual History,” *ReOrient* 5, no. 2 (2020): 233–56.

⁵⁹ See, however, Sohaib Baig, “Printing a Transregional Tariqa: Haji Imdadullah (d.1889) and Sufi Contestations from Thana Bhawan to Istanbul,” *International Journal of Islam in Asia* (forthcoming); Roy Bar Sadeh, “Printing Islamic Modernism: Arabic Texts for Arab and South Asian Muslims in the Early Twentieth Century,” *International Journal of Islam in Asia* (forthcoming); and Brannon D. Ingram, “The Portable Madrasa: Print, Publics, and the Authority of the Deobandi ‘Ulama,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 4 (2014): 845–71.

⁶⁰ Nile Green, “Journeyman, Middlemen: Travel, Transculture, and Technology in the Origins of Muslim Printing,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 2 (2009): 203–24.

⁶¹ Ahmad ibn ‘Ali Manini and Abu al-Nasr Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbar ‘Utbi, *Hadha Sharh al-Yamini al-Musamma bi-l-Fath al-Wahbi ‘ala Tarikh Abi Nasr al-‘Utbi* (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Wahbiyya, 1286/1869).

⁶² For an important exception, see Bar Sadeh, “Islamic Modernists.”

the rise of song recordings. As with printing a century earlier, the swifter development of gramophone technology in India in the early twentieth century enabled Bombay and its satellite port of Aden to become important sites for the recording and distribution of Arabic songs (particularly from the Gulf).⁶³ This paved the way for the more recent relationship between Bollywood and Arabic, which ranges from the opening of studios in Dubai specializing in subtitling and dubbing to the collaborative co-productions of Arabic versions of Bollywood songs, as discussed in Ada Petiwala's contribution to this roundtable.

A more formal mode of engagement with overseas Arabic-users was the written letter. Although the occasional rare surviving letter helps illuminate Mamluk-era engagements with Indian trading ports, this was by no means solely a medieval and early modern phenomenon.⁶⁴ For the expansion of the British imperial postal system, in which Aden was positioned as the key communicational waystation between Calcutta and London, meant that the geography of Indo-Arab interaction was built into the epistolary infrastructure of empire. As a colonial postmaster's manual testifies, this resulted in the mailing from India of Arabic letters written in a range of calligraphic styles favored by the different regions and communities of the subcontinent.⁶⁵ Arabic also functioned in different periods as a formal diplomatic language, to the extent that at least some of the secretaries recently framed as primarily Persian specialists were similarly trained in Arabic letter-writing.⁶⁶

Nor was such Arabic-based diplomacy solely an epistolary phenomenon. The second half of the twentieth century saw the founding of Arabic journals in both India and Pakistan as tools of state cultural diplomacy by government departments such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (Majlis al-Hind li-l-Rawabit al-Thaqafiyya).⁶⁷ By the 1980s, non-state actors (albeit sometimes with state funding) dispatched Arabic journals and translations in the opposite direction when the anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan and its support bases in Pakistan prompted the rapid proliferation of jihadist journals and other genres, such as hagiographical martyrologies.⁶⁸ Also gaining traction by the 1980s was a more constructive mode of Islamist politics: the Arabic and Urdu discourse of "Islamic finance" emerging from a century-long re-conception of Islamic commercial law in the light of modern Western

⁶³ Gabriel Lavin, "Music in Colonial Aden: Globalization, Cultural Politics, and the Record Industry in an Indian Ocean Port City, c. 1937–1960," *British-Yemeni Society Journal* 29 (2021): 12–20.

⁶⁴ Francisco Javier Apellániz Ruiz de Galaretta, *News on the Bulaq: A Mamluk-Venetian Memorandum on Asian Trade, AD 1503*, EUI HEC, 2016/01: <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/38764>. On Judeo-Arabic merchant communications from the Cairo Geniza, see Shelomo Dov Goitein and Mordechai Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). On the Geniza Arabic materials more broadly, see Colin F. Baker and Meira Polliack, eds., *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections: Arabic Old Series* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Avihai Shvitiel and Friedrich Niessen, eds., *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Anne Regourd, "Arabic Documents from the Cairo Geniza in the David Kaufmann Collection in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 3, no. 1 (2012): 1–19.

⁶⁵ C. W. Hutchinson, *Specimens of Various Vernacular Characters Passing through the Post Office in India* (Calcutta: Surveyor-General's Office, 1877), with samples of the distinct Arabic calligraphic styles used by educated north Indians, Sindhis, Bombay-based Bohras, Mappilas from Malabar, and Tamils provided as plates 1 to 5.

⁶⁶ Apellániz, "Producing, Handling," 53–54, 58–59 and Meia Walravens, "Arabic as a Language of the South Asian Chancery: Bahmani Communications to the Mamluk Sultanate," *Arabica* 67, no. 4 (2020): 409–35.

⁶⁷ Mohammad Ayub, "Arabic Journalism in India: Its History, Current Status and Role in National Integration and Indo-Arab Relations," in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Islamic Civilisation in South Asia*, ed. Halit Eren (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 2013), 147–57.

⁶⁸ Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, "Do Excellent Surgeons Make Miserable Exegetes? Negotiating the Sunni Tradition in the *ghihādī* Camps," *Die Welt des Islams* 53, no. 2 (2013): 192–237; Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, "Glossy Global Leadership: Unpacking the Multilingual Religious Thought of the Afghan Jihad," in *Afghanistan's Islam: From Conversion to the Taliban*, ed. Nile Green (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 189–206 and 299–307; and Darryl Li, "Taking the Place of Martyrs: Afghans and Arabs Under the Banner of Islam," *Arab Studies Journal* 20, no. 1 (2012): 12–39.

economics, which found institutional outlets between the Gulf states, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.⁶⁹

These issues of interaction in turn lead us to ask how Arabic related to other languages in South Asia. One mode was via the translation of specific texts, of which the Qur'an has been by far the most closely investigated.⁷⁰ But other modes of translation remain to be explored, not least the translation of Arabic works into Persian (medical works are a case in point), which would help us better understand how the relationship between these two languages evolved across time, space, and subject matter. Building on SherAli Tareen's point that translation from Arabic into Indian vernacular languages formed a "powerful medium of hermeneutical populism," there is also the question of how translations into Urdu helped such Arabic "classics" as the *Muqadimma* of Ibn Khaldun and the *Rihla* of Ibn Battuta to be re-discovered (or, perhaps, plainly discovered in South Asia for the first time) as a result of complex engagements with Orientalism.⁷¹ But more modern works also found their way into Indian languages. By the 1900s, Urdu renditions of Arabic novels were proving popular, particularly the historical fiction of Jurji Zaydan (1861–1914), which together with translations of Sir Walter Scott may have shaped the development of the Urdu historical novel over the following decades.

Compared with rich recent scholarship on translations from Sanskrit to Persian, far less attention has been paid lately to the translation of Sanskrit works into Arabic, which began at a distance in 'Abbasid Baghdad and then proceeded within the space of al-Hind through the peregrinations and collaborations of al-Biruni (d. ca. 1048).⁷² Far from ceasing after this early phase of "first contact," such translations continued into later centuries. As in the earlier 'Abbasid and Ghaznavid cases, there seem to have been specific topics of interest, not least of which was the distinctly Indian science of Yoga.⁷³ By the twentieth century, a wider selection of Sanskrit works would find their way into Arabic, albeit through textual

⁶⁹ Michael O'Sullivan, "Before 'Islamic Finance': The Political and Religious Economies of Indian Muslim Capital from the Balkans to Burma, 1850–1950" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2019); and Michael O'Sullivan, "Interest, Usury, and the Transition from 'Muslim' Banks to 'Islamic' Banks," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 2 (2020): 261–87.

⁷⁰ Mehr Afshan Farooqi, "Changing Literary Patterns in Eighteenth Century North India: Quranic Translations and the Development of Urdu Prose," in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, ed. Francesca Orsini (Hyderabad, India: Orient Blackswan, 2010), 222–48; Marc Gaborieau, "Traductions, impressions et usages du Coran dans le sous-continent indien (1786–1975)," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* (2001): 97–111; and Simon Leese, "Arabic Utterances in a Multilingual World: Shāh Walī-Allāh and Qur'anic Translatability in North India," *Translation Studies* 14, no. 2 (2021): 242–61. On non-Quranic translations from Arabic into Persian, see Ernst, "Indian Lovers."

⁷¹ Tareen, "South Asian Qur'an Commentaries," 233. For the Urdu translations, see 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima-i Tarikh Ibn Khaldun ka Urdu Tarjuma*, trans. Muhammad Insha'allah (Lahore: Matba'-i Hamidiyya, 1904) and Ibn Battuta, *'Aja'ib al-Asfar: Shaykh Ibn Battuta ka Safarnama*, trans. Khan Sahib Mawlwi Muhammad Husayn (Ferozpur, India: Rafa-i 'Am Lahawr, 1898). On the impact of such Orientalist engagements on the re-discovery and making of Arab "classics," see Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); and Robert Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 162–203. It is also worth noting that the field-defining 1929 University of London dissertation of Zubaid Ahmad cited above was advised by Sir Thomas Arnold (1864–1930), who, during his previous Indian career at Government College, Lahore, then Aligarh, had taught Sulayman Nadwi and Muhammad Iqbal, and worked together with Shibli Nu'mani.

⁷² Mario Kozah, *The Birth of Indology as an Islamic Science: Al-Birūnī's Treatise on Yoga Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). On al-Biruni's *Kitab Batanjali*, see Hellmut Ritter, "Al-Birūnī's Übersetzung des *Yoga-sūtra* des Patañjali," *Oriens* 9 (1956): 165–200; and Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī, *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*, ed. & trans. Mario Kozah (New York: New York University Press, 2020). On the Sanskrit sources used for 'Abbasid period Arabic medical, mathematical, and astrological works respectively, see Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 9 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1967–84), vol. 3, 187–202; vol. 5, 191–202; and vol. 7, 89–97.

⁷³ On early modern translations, see Carl W. Ernst, "The Islamization of Yoga in the *Amrtakunda* Translations," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13, no. 2 (2003): 199–226; Carl W. Ernst, "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Persian and Arabic Translations from Sanskrit," *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 2 (2003): 173–95; and Carl W. Ernst, "Fragmentary Versions of the Apocryphal 'Hymn of the Pearl' in Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Urdu," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 32 (2006): 144–88.

transfers by then intertwined with Orientalist editions (including via bridging translations into English and French).⁷⁴ Yet there were also cases of direct translation from Indian languages into Arabic, including the detailed Arabic study of Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) written by the long-term Indian resident of Cairo, Muhammad Hasan Aʿzami, in the 1950s, as well as the many essays in broader Indo-Arab cultural translation written by Muhi al-Din al-Alwaʿi, who worked as editor of the *Ṣawt al-Hind* (Voice of India) journal published from 1967 by the Indian embassy in Cairo.⁷⁵ A more complex case is seen in the Arabic translations of Rumi’s Persian poetry in the 1960s (reprinted in Cairo as recently as 2021) in the fourth volume of the biographical *Rijal al-Fikr wa-l-Daʿwa fi al-Islam* (Thinkers and Preachers in Islam) by the aforementioned prominent north Indian scholar, Abu Hasan ʿAli Nadwi.⁷⁶

Asking how Arabic related to South Asian languages also points to another mode of interaction: the more subtle and slower processes of linguistic change that shaped new written languages in the region. The role of Persian is far better studied (or perhaps at times assumed) in generating “Persianate” *qua* Persianized languages and literatures in South Asia. But, returning to the issue of the “where” of Arabic in South Asia and how this geography overlapped with or diverged from that of Persian, it is worth asking whether the Arabi-Malayalam and Arabu-Tamil literatures of the Malabar and Coromandel coasts can correspondingly be considered as “Arabicate.”⁷⁷ The similar case of *Lisan al-Daʿwa*—the Arabized form of Gujarati used by the Bohra Ismaʿilis—is examined in Michael O’Sullivan’s contribution to this roundtable.

Case Studies in Lieu of Conclusions

Paving the way for the case study essays that follow, this survey has pointed to the varied chronological, spatial, and social configurations of Arabic in South Asia, along with the operational dimensions of different media and translation practices that have shaped the region’s varied engagements with the language. The aim here has been to take stock of a field that has never yielded its full potential, not least by falling through the linguistic fissures of Area Studies. Yet as many of the preceding footnote citations suggest, recent years have seen renewed attention to the use of Arabic as a language within South Asia (“Arabic in India”); the shared use of Arabic between South Asia, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean more broadly (“Arabic and India”); and the tertiary topic of representations of South Asia in Arabic texts (“India in Arabic”). At once building on and challenging the ascent of “Persianate” studies over the past few decades, such studies point us to the older—and ultimately more enduring—history of South Asia’s relationship with Arabic.

While the previous pages have drawn this scholarship together both to sketch broad parameters and pose problems for a maturing field, the question of an overarching label has been deliberately sidestepped. This leaves aside whether, *pace* existing models of “Indo-Persian” and the “Persianate world,” it is fruitful to think in terms of “Indo-Arabic” and a larger “Arabicate world” that incorporates but is not restricted to South Asia. But given the multilingual settings in which South Asian Arabic necessarily participates, it would clearly be counterproductive to study Arabic in isolation from either Persian or the

⁷⁴ Elhalaby, “Empire and Arab Indology” and Green, *How Asia Found Herself*.

⁷⁵ Muhi al-Din al-Alwaʿi, “Tatawurat al-ʿAlaqa al-Thaqafiyya al-ʿArabiyya-al-Hindiyya,” *al-Risala* 1083 (15 October 1964): 15–17, 20; translated by Simon Leese (with parallel Arabic text): <http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk/the-development-of-arab-indian-cultural-relations/>; and Muḥammad Ḥasan Aʿzami, *Falsafat Iqbal wa-l-Thaqafa al-Islamiyya fi-l-Hind wa-Bakistan* (Cairo: Dar Ihyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1369/1950). Note that al-Alwaʿi was also published in English as Mohiaddin Alwaye.

⁷⁶ Ali, “Modern Islamic Historiography,” 391–93.

⁷⁷ P.K. Yasser Arafath, “Polyglossic Malabar: Arabi-Malayalam and the Muhiyuddinmala in the Age of Transition (1600s–1750s),” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30, no. 3 (2020): 517–39; M. M. M. Mahroof, “Arabic-Tamil in South India and Sri Lanka: Language as Mimicry,” *Islamic Studies* 32, no. 2 (1993): 169–89; and Torsten Tschacher, “From Script to Language: The Three Identities of ‘Arabic-Tamil,’” *South Asian History and Culture* 9, no. 1 (2018): 16–37.

various regional languages. And so, in methodological terms, we must try whenever possible to position Arabic in relation to these other languages, thereby building on Marshall Hodgson's original definition of the "Persianate" as being more than solely Persian—regardless of whether we then come to speak of a corresponding "Arabicate world" that, via Arabic-influenced literatures such as the African 'Ajami languages, Arabu-Tamil, and Jawi Malay, reaches from sub-Saharan Africa through South Asia to Southeast Asia.

For now, though, the more pressing need is for further studies of Arabic texts and documents from and on South Asia. This brings us finally to the seven case-study essays that make up the main substance of this roundtable. As part of the new generation of scholars alluded to above, their authors are all early career scholars whose research addresses different aspects of the triangle of Arabic in India, Arabic and India, and India in Arabic. The chronological focus of their essays extends from the early modern to the colonial and contemporary eras, taking in a geography that reaches from Gujarat, Bengal, and Bollywood to Egypt, the Hijaz, and Dubai. Ranging in genre from historiography, biography, and theology to legal texts, polemics, and songs, the sources under scrutiny vary similarly in their media from manuscripts to printed books to trans-imperial journals and film. Finally, given the importance of reckoning with South Asian multilingualism, several essays examine the interplay of Arabic with Gujarati, Urdu, and Hindi. For if there is or was an "Arabicate world," then it is in such linguistic fusions and collusions that we will begin to recover its history.

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