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Audrey Truschke. *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. 384 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-17362-9.

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If a Kayastha or a Khatri in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century were to have reached for a copy of the *Ramayana*, or the *Bhagavad Gita*, chances are that they would have had a Persian translation in hand. From the sixteenth century onward, the Mughal Empire fostered the growth of Persian in India, which certain Hindu communities came to use as a primary literary language. Frequently, the Mughal court also hosted several Brahmin and Jain intellectuals and sponsored the translation of Indic texts into Persian. These policies and practices had the unintended outcome of mediating Indic knowledge for a range of Persian readers, including many Hindus, until Persian in the subcontinent gradually faded and language became more firmly associated with religious identity.

The linguistic and religious paradigms of the Mughal past have not only been poorly appreciated, they have often been put to the service of various contesting visions of the nation-state and modern religious identity. However, this enormously productive interaction between Indic and Persian knowledge traditions is gradually becoming a dynamic arena of scholarly inquiry. The ground has been laid by the growing efforts to write histories of early modernity with a South Asia focus, as well as the increased scholarly attention that the intellectual history of the period has been garnering. It is thus an opportune moment for a project such as Audrey Truschke's *Culture of Encounters*.

Truschke argues that engaging with Sanskrit literary cultures formed a crucial dimension of the Mughal state, whether through the sponsoring or translating of Sanskrit texts, or engagements with Sanskrit intellectuals. *Culture of Encounters* marshals an impressive range of Sanskrit and Persian texts produced in or around the Mughal court. Although the book's main focus is the latter half of the sixteenth century during Akbar's rule, it also treats the first half of the seventeenth century.

Culture of Encounters aims to avoid the problem of anachronistically applying modern categories to the early modern context, by framing its inquiry in terms of language, rather than, say, religious traditions. However, Sanskrit itself was not always an operative term at the Mughal court. As Truschke points out, Mughal cultural productions often refer to their source texts as "Hindi" or "Hindavi" works, rather than Sanskrit. Yet, Truschke's use of Sanskrit itself as a category of inquiry enables her to skillfully weave together discussions of a range of texts as well as figures, for instance, both Jains and Brahmans.

The book seeks to make an argument about power as well as an argument about language and literary cultures. The Mughals did not engage in cross-cultural activities in order to legitimize their rule to their non-Muslim subjects, it asserts. Instead, these projects served as a means to invite others, in this case mainly certain Jains and Brahmins, "to participate in the imperial project" (p. 3). Truschke does, however, admit one formulation of political legitimation, following Rodney Barker: "the self-legitimation of rulers, the need to provide oneself with a distinctive political identity" (p. 2). It is this kind of political self-fashioning, the book suggests, that best characterizes the workings of power in the Mughal imperium. This, Truschke distinguishes from the quest for an external source of legitimation.

The first chapter diachronically maps the associa-

tion of Brahmin and Jain intellectuals with the Mughal court. Here an instructive three-part timeline is provided, which details Sanskrit engagements with the court, including a range of works composed or translated. Chapter 2 discusses Sanskrit texts specifically produced for members of the imperial court. It includes a table listing seven Sanskrit praise poems for Mughal emperors, and other nobles. Such works include the *Akbarasāhiśṛṅgāradarpaṇa*, composed by the Jain Padmasundara in 1569, which is a work on *rasa* (aesthetic) theory that also includes an encomium to Akbar. It incorporates both Islamicate vocabulary as well as Sanskrit terms to describe Akbar, implicitly likening him to the deity Siva. The author raises questions about the reception of such texts: How much Sanskrit did the Mughals understand? While Akbar and Jahangir sponsored bilingual grammars and other Persian-learning aids, they were aimed at the Sanskrit milieu. How then were these panegyrics meant to be heard and appreciated? While there are no easy answers to these questions, Truschke suggests that there is scope for imagining performative contexts in which the meanings of these texts were orally conveyed.

Chapter 3 analyzes the *Razmnama*, a translation of the *Mahabharata* made for Akbar, as well as its more immediate afterlives, which include the poet Fayzi's rendition of its first two books in mixed verse and prose, as well as Tahir Muhammad Sabzavari's abridgment, incorporated in his world history. Truschke reads the *Razmnama* as a source of political thought as well as readerly pleasure. Here, the Persianate idea of history as advice to rulers dovetails with the idea of the *Mahabharata* as *itihasa*. The chapter shows how *Mahabharata*'s twelfth book, the *Santi Parva*, appears to have especially captured the attention of its translators, as it is replete with quotations of Persian poetry inserted within the text.

The fourth chapter looks closely at the *Ain-i Akbari*, Abu'l Fazl's detailed compendium of knowledge about India, which treats the land's geography, peoples, and religious creeds among other topics. Truschke observes that Abul Fazl's project retained several Indic terms and concepts, lending his work a particular texture that sometimes even rendered it hard to understand. The *Ain-i Akbari* aims consciously to access Indic knowledge in a more direct and updated manner, Truschke notes, than previous Persian writings about India. According to her, Abul Fazl, "sought to revolutionize the Indo-Persian tradition by placing cross-cultural projects and a consistent return to Sanskrit texts and ideas at its very core" (p. 161). This chapter eschews reading the *Ain-i akbari* as a project of epistemological domination and control: "Akbar's court aggressively tried to move Sanskrit knowledge from the realm of the foreign into that of the familiar, but teasing out their specific ambitions requires a more nuanced formulation than the language of domination" (p.164).

Chapter 5 examines the Sanskrit response to the Mughal imperium, through works not directly sponsored by the court. It draws, among other writings, on a valuable corpus of six Jain texts on lives of Tapa and Kharatara Gaccha leaders who frequented the Mughal court. While Mughal Persian texts displayed an anxiety about how to treat Indic polytheism, some of these works grapple with the problem of reconciling Jain atheism with Islamic theism. There are also instances where such texts are ultimately concerned with reinforcing the authority of the Jain leaders. Truschke notes the relative silence of Sanskrit texts produced by Brahmans regarding the Mughal Empire. This chapter also surveys some of the exceptions to this silence, such as the *Sarvadeśavṛttāntasaṅgraha*, a Sanskrit translation of the *Akbarnama*, as well as a festschrift to commemorate Kavindracarya Sarasvati, a pandit who frequented Shah Jahan's court.

The sixth and final chapter discusses Mughal Persianate responses to the court's engagement with Sanskrit. Its scope includes several *Ramayana* Persian translations. Though the imperial translation of the *Ramayana* produced for Akbar is still extant, the manuscript is unfortunately unavailable to scholars. Truschke therefore turns her attention to other *Ramayana* renditions. These include *Ramayana*s produced for figures close to the emperor like the nobleman Abd al-Rahim Khan-i Khanan, and Akbar's mother, Hamida Banu. The chapter also discusses Persian *Ramayana*s that were linked to the court but not directly sponsored by it. It also examines works of historical genealogy such as the *Rajavali* attributed to Banvalidas "Vali." All these examples serve to demonstrate the enduring legacy of the Mughal courtly project of translation. These initial translations for Akbar formed a repository of Indo-Persian literature that later writers drew upon.

Culture of Encounters is a pioneering book. In the past, other works have dealt with the Mughal patronage of Sanskrit intellectuals. Jatindra Bimal Chaudhuri's *Muslim Patronage to Sanskritic Learning* (1942) is a notable example. Several articles, both old and recent, provide overviews or lists of Persian translations of Indic texts. This is the first, however, to provide such a wide-ranging and comprehensive look at these rich materials.

Truschke excels at presenting complex phenomena in a subtle and thorough manner. A clear line of argumentation binds the book's variegated tapestry together. The prose, moreover, is readable and elegant.

It is a mark of a good book, though, that it raises questions and problems for further discussion. In this context, I would like to bring up two issues. The first concerns Truschke's theorization of power, and the linked question of the relationship between politics and aesthetics. The notion of power in this book is developed in opposition to the theory of legitimation mentioned above. One wonders why *Culture of Encounters* focuses on this particular conception of political legitimation as an object of critique. It is not always clear that the book is taking aim at the arguments of any specific scholar or group of scholars who advocate this view. Indeed, because of the paucity of modern scholarship on Mughal cultural history, broadly conceived, it is hard to make the case that legitimacy theory is an established or especially prevalent approach in current academic conversations on the subject.

Truschke is certainly right that there are more sophisticated ways of conceiving the relationship between knowledge and power than solely resorting to theories of legitimation, a problematic that has been taken up by, among others, Sheldon Pollock. However, regardless of what is meant by legitimation in the practice of statecraft, it is still useful to ask if and how the exigencies of governance and political relations informed the Mughal patronage of Sanskrit learning and intellectuals. For instance, I have learned through my own research that the most prolific period of the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh's engagement with Indic religious thought occurred at a time when he was actively seeking the support of Rajput nobility. This is certainly not to advocate, of course, a crude linkage of these cultural activities at the Mughal court with the appeasement of influential Hindus—exactly the kind of argument that Truschke preemptively critiques. But political self-fashioning is an ongoing and relational process that is not independent of the broader context of the era in question.

My second point turns to the matter of translation. *Culture of Encounters* is not a book about translation per se, though it sensitively details the salient characteristics of the many translations it examines. However, its case studies provoke a number of further questions regarding the notion of translation itself, both as a practice and as a way of conceiving cultural and religious exchanges. For instance: How did the Mughal translation project relate to other instances of courtly translations taking place in the subcontinent or even in neighboring Iran? Can we argue that translation was a crucial feature of early modernity in South Asia? How might we compare early modern sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ideas of translation with later ones on the eve of colonialism and during colonial rule? There is much scope for other, specific studies of courtly or sub-imperial translation activities in early modern South Asia, such as in the Sikh, Rajput, and Bengali contexts.

Today only faint traces remain of the Mughal engagement with Indic knowledge traditions. Barring Mughal emperors, most of the texts and figures discussed in *Culture of Encounters* are virtually unknown in South Asia. If they do occasionally feature in public discourse, it is often through the efforts of well-meaning proponents of Indian secularism, who invoke them as symbols of a past age of religious harmony. *Culture of Encounters* is an important step towards an enriched understanding of these entanglements in terms of their own historical particularities.

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