
UNIT 13 MUHAMMAD QASIM FIRISHTA*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 History Writing in India at Around 1600
- 13.3 The Historian and His Patron: Firishta and Ibrahim Adil Shah II
- 13.4 *The History of Firishta*
 - 13.4.1 Concept of History
 - 13.4.2 Time and Chronology
 - 13.4.3 Sources
- 13.5 The European Perception of Firishta's Chronicle
- 13.6 Summary
- 13.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 13.8 Suggested Readings
- 13.9 Instructional Video Recommendations

13.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- know trends of history writing around 1600,
- understand Firishta's background and the cultural heritage he carried with him,
- grasp the impact of Firishta's cultural heritage on his writings,
- understand Firishta's concept of history,
- interpret Firishta's concept of time,
- analyse Alexander Dow's interpretation of Firishta's works, and
- examine the European perceptions of Firishta's writings.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Firishta's *Gulshan-i Ibrahimi* or *Tarikh-i Firishta* (*The History of Firishta*) is a Persian chronicle of Muslim rule in India written in the Deccani sultanate of Bijapur in the early years of the 17th century. Based on established patterns of historiography of the time, it gives a traditional narrative of events and dynasties from the times of the Ghaznavid ruler Mahmud in the early 11th century until the time of Firishta's patron, the Sultan of Bijapur Ibrahim Adil Shah II. Since it was not written under the then dominant Mughal dynasty in northern India, it never achieved the fame that, for example, Abu l-Fazl Allami's (d. 1602) historiographical works *Akbarnama* and *Ain-i Akbari* have to this day. This is surprising insofar as the *Tarikh-i Firishta* became a kind of model chronicle for Persian historiography on the Indian subcontinent after its completion, to which the enormous number of surviving manuscripts in the collections in India and Europe testifies, as do the many abbreviations and derivations of the work and its reception in Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Sindhi, Bengali, and Marathi histories. As the final chapter of this Unit will show, *The History of Firishta*, in the form of its English translations provided by Alexander

Dow in 1768 and 1772 and John Briggs in 1829, became a seminal text for the perception of India by Enlightenment philosophers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and therefore also affected early colonial images of India.

13.2 HISTORY WRITING IN INDIA AT AROUND 1600

Firishta's *History*, written around 1600, is part of a long tradition of world and dynastic historiography in Persian that emerged in the Muslim political units on the Indian subcontinent right after the first conquests. This tradition begins with the works of historians of the Ghaznavid period such as Abu l-Fazl Bayhaqi (d. 1077), whose *Tarikh-i Bayhaqi*, now only partially preserved, chronicles the early conquests of Sultan Mahmud. In addition, it includes chronicles written during the time of the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th and 14th centuries, such as Minhaj al-Din al-Juzjani's (d. after 1266) *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* and Banakati's (d. 1330) *Tarikh-i Banakati* as well as the famous histories written under the Mughal emperors from the end of the 16th century onwards. During Firishta's time, there were several Muslim political entities in India under whose rule histories were written. By far the most important was the Mughal Empire with its capitals of Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Delhi, and Lahore in the north of the subcontinent, which became a vibrant centre of learning and the arts under Humayun's son Akbar (r. 1556-1605). Apart from various sultanates such as those in Gujarat and Bengal, it was the Deccan plateau, i.e. the western side of the subcontinent, where a series of interlocking and overlapping dominions became centres of Indo-Muslim culture. These included the cities and forts of the Nizam Shahis at Ahmadnagar (1496-1636), the Qutb Shahis at Golconda and Hyderabad (1496-1687), the Barid Shahis at Gulbarga and Bidar (1487-1619), and the Adil Shahis at Bijapur (1490-1686), which emerged in the late fifteenth century and lasted until the Mughal conquest at the end of the seventeenth century. It was for the latter that Firishta wrote his chronicle.

13.3 THE HISTORIAN AND HIS PATRON: FIRISHTA AND IBRAHIM ADIL SHAH II

Firishta, whose real name was Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Astarabadi, belonged to a Shia Muslim family originating from Iran and was born some time before the year 1572. During his lifetime, he served the rulers of the two Deccan sultanates of Ahmadnagar and Bijapur. This was mainly due to his family background, which entailed a close connection to the court of Ahmadnagar, for his father Ghulam Ali was the royal tutor of the heir to the throne of Ahmadnagar, prince Miran Husayn Nizam Shah. Firishta therefore entered the service of Murtaza Nizam Shah (r. 1565-1588), the ruler of Ahmadnagar, at a young age and became an officer in the royal guard. During the events that unfolded in the wake of his patron's assassination, he left Ahmadnagar for Bijapur at the end of 1589 and entered the service of the Bijapuri Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II (r. 1580-1627) the following year. In the same year (1590) Firishta again became involved in the conflict between the two sultanates and narrowly escaped death. Later, still in the service of Ibrahim Adil Shah II, he acted as a diplomat and accompanied his overlord's daughter on the journey to her future husband, the Mughal prince Daniyal, son of the Mughal emperor Akbar. The year of Firishta's death is unknown and commonly given as after 1623-1624. He is known as the author of two works: a work on medicine

titled *Dastur al-Atibba* (or *Ikhtiyarat-i Qasimi*) and a history book called *Gulshan-i Ibrahimi* (*The Garden of Ibrahim*), which became famous as *Tarikh-i Firishta* (*The History of Firishta*). Of the latter, he is known to have produced at least two versions: the first dates from 1606-1607 and the second, for which he chose the title *Tarikh-i Nawrasnama* (*The Book of the Newest Flavour*), from 1609-1610.

To this day, Firishta's patron Ibrahim Adil Shah II, whose dynasty of the Adil Shahis ruled Bijapur from 1490 to 1686, is famous for promoting the arts in the Deccan sultanate of Bijapur. He ascended the throne at the age of nine and ruled the sultanate for almost half a century. During this period, he gained fame as the author of the *Kitab-i Nawras*, a book of songs in the Dakhni language. In addition to Firishta, Ibrahim Adil Shah II also promoted the Persian poets Nur al-Din Muhammad Zuhuri Turshizi (d. 1616) and his father-in-law Malik Qummi (d. 1616, poet laureate of the Adil Shahi court), who together wrote the panegyric collections *Gulzar-i Ibrahim* and *Khvan-i Khalil*. Especially Zuhuri's poetic works *Si Nasr* and *Mina Bazar*, as well as Malik Qummi's *masnavi Manba al-Awhar*, modelled on the famous *Makhzan al-Asrar* by the Persian poet Nizami's (d. 1209), show the high cultural taste at the court of Bijapur at this time.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) What was Firishta's cultural heritage?

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- 2) What were the political ties between Firishta and the Adil Shahi court?

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13.4 THE HISTORY OF FIRISHTA

Firishta's chronicle narrates the history of Muslim India from the time of the Ghaznavid dynasty in the early 11th century until his time, i.e. the first years of the 17th century. The work is divided into an introduction (*muqaddima*), twelve parts (*maqala*), and a concluding chapter (*khatima*). Only in the *muqaddima* does Firishta include non-Muslims as a distinct group in the structure of his work, while the twelve *maqalas* deal exclusively with Muslim dynasties in India. The first *maqala* depicts the history of the Ghaznavids in Lahore, while the second *maqala* covers the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal emperors Babur, Humayun, and Akbar. The third *maqala* continues with the Deccan sultanates of the Bahmanis, Adil Shahis, Nizam Shahis, Qutb Shahis, Imad Shahis and Barid Shahis, to each of which Firishta devotes a subchapter (*rawza*). The following eight *maqalas* depict the history of regional dynasties across the subcontinent, i.e. in Gujarat (*maqala* 4), Malva (5), Burhanpur (6), Bengal and Jaunpur (7), Sind, Thatta, and Multan (8 and 9), Kashmir (10), and Malabar (11). Here Firishta ends the dynastic account of Indian history and adds a whole chapter on holy (Muslim) men in India (12). The book ends with the final chapter (*khatima*) *An Account of Conditions of the*

Heaven-Representing Hindustan, in which Firishta concludes with a description of the diversity and extent of India and a list of Hindu rulers (*rajas*).

As far as the overall structure of Firishta's *History* is concerned, it is interesting to note that the scope of the book is not very different from that of his contemporary Nizam al-Din Ahmad's (d. 1594) *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, which is divided into an introduction (*muqaddima*), nine parts (here: *tabaqa*), and a concluding part (*khatima*). Thematically, the *Tabaqat-i Akbari* also gives an overview of Muslim history in India, beginning with the Ghaznavids in the first *tabaqa* and ending with the local dynasty of Multan (*tabaqa* 9). The (incomplete) *khatima*, as in Firishta's chronicle, is a topographical description of India. Considering that Nizam al-Din Ahmad wrote his historiographical work for the Mughal emperor Akbar, after whom the chronicle is named, it becomes clear that the two histories followed patterns of historiography already established in the Islamic kingdoms of India around 1600.

13.4.1 Concept of History

In Firishta's *History*, the author focusses heavily on court history in his account of the Muslim history of India. For Firishta, as for almost all other historians of the pre-modern period (in Europe and the Islamic world), the deeds of great men, i.e. kings, princes, and nobles, were at the centre of history. One explanation for this is the fact that historiographical works were usually written for a ruler or members of the court, e.g. waziers or princes. For the readership of chronicles, therefore, people from the lower, i.e. non-aristocratic classes such as scholars, craftsmen, and peasants simply did not count, as their deeds were not considered important enough. They were therefore not worth remembering and recording. A second reason for the clearly royal focus is that Persian chronicles had primarily a didactic and exemplary function and were written both to educate and entertain members of the court to learn from the past. When Firishta's work deals with episodes from Muslim dynasties in India of the past, it has these characteristics and is aimed at its contemporary audience, as the following story shows. The episode is about the Bahmani Sultan Firuz Shah (r. 1397-1422) and his regular gathering (*majlis*) at court. According to Firishta, this place of exchange between the Sultan and his nobles had become an open space for informal conversation:

[The courtiers] might come in or go out whenever they wanted; and in the assembly each person might call for whatever he chose to eat or drink, and the servants of the court would make it appear, and they might speak about anything, with just two exceptions: and one of those about which no word should be spoken was worldly matters, which should be brought up at the time of the court assembly; and the other thing which should not be spoken, was slander and evil words against each other. One day, Mulla Ishaq Sirhindi, who was a learned and cheerful man, observed to the sultan, that 'obliging the courtiers to speak to him without etiquette was not appropriate for the temperament of sultans; and the story of Mahmud b. Sabuktigin and Abu Raihan [al-Biruni], his astrologer, corroborates my assertion.' [...] Sultan Firuz Shah smiled and observed that 'Such deeds could only come from emperors who did not possess knowledge or wisdom: may God forbid that such characteristics be implanted in my disposition.' And the intelligent men who are familiar with the service of princes, and are accustomed to crowned assemblies, know that although it was claimed that Sultan Firuz Shah would be weakened by such characteristics, he actually excelled famous kings in his disposition.

Firishta, *Tarikh-i Ibrahimi*, vol. 2, pp. 323-324; translation by Flatt. *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates*, pp. 40-41

Firishta uses the episode of the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud and his astrologer Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 1050), handed down by Mulla Ishaq Sirhindi, to derive rules for what exemplary behaviour between rulers and their courtiers can generally look like. The punchline of the story is al-Biruni's 'indecent' behaviour towards the sultan, to whom he candidly informs that according to his astrological calculations, the sultan's planned actions were deliberately misleading. As this is totally unacceptable to the sultan, who is apparently used to flattery and praise instead of criticism, he has the astrologer imprisoned and justifies his decision as follows: 'This man may be versed in the speculative sciences, but the perfect sage should also understand dispositions: emperors for example, are like children, and so one must speak appropriately to their character.' At this point, it becomes clear that the story about Sultan Mahmud and al-Biruni, and the one about the open atmosphere in Sultan Firuz's court serve a higher purpose. In contrast to the Ghaznavid example of an irascible ruler who is not accustomed to the slightest criticism, the Bahmani Sultan represents the wise and responsible king who is more interested in truth rather than in sugarcoating.

In transmitting the anecdote, the historian Firishta intends to instruct both the ruler and his courtiers at the court of Ibrahim Adil Shah II about the accepted norms of courtly behaviour: rulers should be fair in their dealings with their dignitaries, and courtiers should hold back on criticism if their Sultan is not as fair as Shah Firuz in the episode. To clarify the moral wordplay of the story, historians often enriched their accounts with Persian poetry, direct speech, and contemporary aphorisms. As the episode shows, in history books such as Firishta's *History*, messages about right behaviour were usually presented as stories about righteous rulers (or men in general) on the one hand, and wicked and unrighteous kings on the other. In the *History*, Firishta does not simply repeat what his sources say, but compiles information about events and rulers according to his own narrative, mixing it with non-Indian epic works such as Firdawsi's *Shahnama* written in Iran around the year 1000, and the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) In what ways does Firishta's *Tarikh* quite similar to Nizamuddin Ahmad's *Tabaqat*?
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- 2) What is Firishta's concept of history?
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- 3) What were the accepted norms of courtly behaviour in Firishta's view?
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13.4.2 Time and Chronology

Firishta's chronicle not only covers the history of the Islamic dynasties in India, but has a much broader temporal scope that also touches on the pre-Islamic period. Right at the beginning of his work, in the *muqaddima*, whose full name is *Introduction on the Beliefs of the People of Hind and the Accounts of the Appearance of Islam in their Land*, he turns to the pre-Islamic Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*, probably written between the third century BCE and the third century CE, which had been translated from Sanskrit into Persian only a few years earlier by a group of translators commissioned by Akbar in 1582. The translation project was undertaken by a number of scholars of Persian and Sanskrit. The Persian rendering of the *Mahabharata* was given the title *Razmnama* by Akbar, to which his confidant Abu l-Fazl Allami wrote the preface. Besides the prose translation, there was also a partial translation in verse by Abu l-Fayz Fayzi' (d. 1595). Fayzi was the elder brother of Abu l-Fazl Allami, who worked as royal tutor to the emperor's sons Salim (later emperor Jahangir), Murad, and Daniyal, and later became famous as Akbar's poet laureate. These and other translation projects testify to the Mughal court's interest in pre-Muslim Indian history, through which works written in Sanskrit became available to a wider Muslim audience. As Firishta himself attests, he gained access to the Persian translation of the *Mahabharata* made at Akbar's court, which he places at the beginning of his account of India and thus uses as a historical source. Since it provides a deeper understanding of Firishta's conception of time and the chronological frame of his *History*, the information it contains is of interest and will be quoted here, at least in part. No English translation of this part has yet appeared, as the most comprehensive translation of the work by John Briggs, first published in 1829, omits the *muqaddima* and begins with the first *maqala*. Firishta continues as follows:

The *Mahabharata*, which comprises more than 100,000 verses, has been translated from the original Sanskrit into Persian by Sheikh Abul-Fazl¹ son of Sheikh Mubarak, on the orders of Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar Padishah. The writer of these lines has used it as a model. [...] May it not remain hidden [...] that the sages (of India) differ with regard to (the idea of) the creation of the world. In the *Mahabharata* alone, 13 versions are mentioned, none of which, however, seems sufficiently satisfactory to be preferred over the others. [...] The Hindus divide time into four world times: Satyayuga, Tretayuga, Dvaparayuga and finally Kaliyuga. They maintain that these four world times succeed each other uninterruptedly until the end of time. The present is the Kaliyuga, and when this ends, the Satyayuga will begin again. They therefore conceive of the world as eternal in principle, without beginning and without end, although some sages claim that this world will have an end and a day of judgement will come. [...]

The Satyayuga, in which decency and truth prevailed and people lived for 100,000 years [...] is said to have lasted 1,728,000 years. The Tretayuga, in which three-fourths of the creatures obeyed the word of God and the life of a human being lasted 100,000 years, covered a period of 1,296,000 years. [...] The Dvaparayuga, in which humanity had become evil and an individual lived only 1,000 years, lasted 864,000 years. The Kaliyuga has now existed for 432,000 years. Humans have become godless during this time. Only a quarter still follow the laws of God, and a person's life has been limited to 100 years. [...] According to the Hindu calendar, 4684 years of the Kaliyuga have passed in the present year, i.e. in the year 1015 of the Hijra (1606-07).

Firishta. *Tarikh-i Ibrahimi*, vol. 1, pp. 11-13; German translation by Conermann. *Historiographie als Sinnstiftung*, pp. 243-244.

¹ Firishta wrongly attributes the translation of the *Mahabharata* to Abul Fazl. Abul Fazl only wrote the 'Preface' of the Persian translation of the *Mahabharata*.

The inclusion of the pre-Islamic *Mahabharata* shows that, contrary to the normative historical thinking found in many Persian chronicles, e.g. in Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni's (d. c. 1615) *Muntakhab-ut Tawarikh* which was written in the late 16th century and thus only a few years before Firishta's chronicle, emphasising common patterns in chronicles such as religious war (*jihad*) was not envisaged by the author of the *History*. As the insertion of the four distinct ages of Satyayuga, Tretayuga, Dvaparayuga, and Kaliyuga in the *Mahabharata* reveals, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Indian subcontinent were often very different in reality from any theoretical approach that would strictly separate the two groups. Instead, as seen in Firishta's work, pre-Islamic history, or rather historical narrations, found its way into Indo-Persian chronicles as part of a distant past that had preceded the early Muslim rulers of the Ghaznavid dynasty at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. In fact, Muslim authors of historiographical narratives sometimes even admired Hindu, i.e. non-Islamic, scholarship, as Amir Khusrau (d. 1325) shows in his work *Nuh Sipih*. It is therefore important to note that Firishta in the *muqaddima* prefers to portray local Hindu ideas of the world and its cycles, rather than beginning his chronicle with the traditional Islamic belief in the creation of the world by God, which follows later.

In any case, immediately after the Hindu belief in the division of time into four world times, Firishta conveys the Biblical-Quranic world narrative, in which he manages to establish direct links between Islamic salvation history and India when he discusses the offspring of Noah's son Ham, who founded all the cities after their own names. Ham's son Hind produced four sons who founded Purab, Bang (Bengal), Dakan (Deccan), and Nahrwal; Dakan had the sons Marhat, Kanhar, and Tilang; Nahrwal had the sons Bahraich, Kunbaj, and Malraj; Hind's brother Sindh had the sons Thatta and Multan, and so on. Of interest to us are Dakan's three sons Marhat, Kanhar, and Tilang, who divided the Deccan among themselves and stand for the Marathi, Kannada and Telugu-speaking lands respectively: in the words of the historian, 'today, these three [geographical and linguistic] groups are found in the Deccan.' According to Firishta, it is thus the genealogical allegory that helps us understand the Deccan as a divided entity not only geographically and politically, but also linguistically and culturally. Yet Firishta neither proposes concrete links between linguistic regions nor provides a general and coherent conception of the Deccan. Instead, he provides a novel (legendary) account of the foundation of cities such as his new homeland of Bijapur in the Deccan, weaving together stories from the *Mahabharata*, Firdawsi's Persian epic *Shahnama*, and the *Quran*. He then continues with *maqala* 1 on the history of Muslim rule beginning with Mahmud of Ghazna in the early 11th century.

13.4.3 Sources

Firishta's use of sources to construct his work is in keeping with traditional patterns of Islamic historiography on the one hand, and based on individual choices as well as personal circumstances on the other. As he explains in the *muqaddima* of the *History*, he had been interested in history since his youth and intended to write a work on the Muslim conquest of India and the holy men present in the region. According to his own words, he could not fulfil this desire and start writing such a book when he was in Ahmadnagar, where he could not find the sources required for this project. The situation changed after he moved to Bijapur in 1589, when his new patron Ibrahim Adil Shah II, himself an avid reader of history books, urged Firishta not to abandon his project. In Bijapur, the budding historian was

given access to books from various regions and was able to study everything in detail, but to no avail: even the aforementioned *Tabaqat-i Akbari* by Nizam al-Din Ahmad did not contain the information he had hoped for, but rather many errors. This, Firishta reports at the very beginning of his work, was the occasion to begin a work of his own, of which he completed the first version in 1606-1607 and the second in 1609-10, dedicating it to his patron Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II. This historical process is also reflected in Firishta's approach to writing history: first, he collects earlier works of history in order to have access to events before his own time. Secondly, he reproduces the 'correct' turn of events that he himself witnessed, and thirdly, he integrates statements by others about events that he did not personally experience.

Since his work is a history of India going back to the Ghaznavid dynasty in the early 11th century, it is clear that the *History* is merely a compilation of earlier history books. To support his authority as a historian, Firishta lists the names of 35 historiographical works in the introduction and cites another twenty throughout the book. Among the names of history books are works from the period of the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th and 14th centuries, such as *Taj al-Maasir* of Nishaburi (written in 1217), Minhaj al-Din al-Juzjani's world history *Tabaqat-i Nasiri* (penned around 1259-1260), or Banakati's *Tarikh-i Banakati*, written around 1317-1318. Other texts are general histories produced outside India, such as Mirkhvand's *Rawzat al-safa*, written in Timurid Herat in the late 15th century, and Khvandamir's *Habib al-siyar*, written in the 1520s. Firishta also lists several local and regional stories from Gujarat, Sindh or Bengal. It is clear from the above works that Firishta, in writing the history of the Islamic dynasties in India, relied on texts belonging to a particular group of known works and did not consider texts written in languages other than Persian. As for the *Mahabharata* quoted above, he refers to the translation into Persian and not to the Sanskrit text or a vernacular version of the epic. His approach of basing his narrative on chronicles of earlier times obviously has implications for the structure and content of the *History*, which in any case remains a traditional dynastic history written in Persian, the predominant literary language for history writing of the time.

Check Your Progress-3

1) What is Firishta's concept of time?

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2) What approach does Firishta take in writing history and selecting sources?

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13.5 THE EUROPEAN PERCEPTION OF FIRISHTA'S CHRONICLE

In addition to analysing the text of the *History* itself, it is worth looking at the reception of the work, as it became one of the most important texts on India to be

read among scholarly circles concerned with the philosophy of history in Europe for several decades. This dates back to the first translation of the work into English by an officer of the Bengal Infantry of the British East India Company, Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Dow (1735-1779), *The History of Hindostan; from the Earliest Account of Time, to the Death of Akbar; translated from the Persian of Mahumud Casim Ferishta of Delhi: Together with a Dissertation Concerning the Religion and Philosophy of the Brahmin with an Appendix Containing the History of the Mogul Empire, from Its Decline in the Reign of Mahumud Shaw, to the Present Times*. This first comprehensive history of (Muslim) India was published in two volumes in 1768 and included a partial translation of Firishta's work as well as Dow's own account of Hindu customs. Its dedicatory lines to King George III can be seen in the light of an early colonial worldview:

Sir, the History of India is laid, with great humility, at the foot of the throne. As no inconsiderable part of Hindustan, is now in a manner comprehended within the circle of the British empire, there is a propriety in addressing the history of that country to the Sovereign. In the history of Hindustan, now offered to your Majesty, the people of Great-Britain may see a striking contrast to their own condition; and, whilst they feel for human nature suffering under despotism, exult at the same time, in that happy liberty which they enjoy under the government of a Prince who delights in augmenting the security and felicity of his subjects.

The passage makes it clear that Dow sees the need to understand the political history of India in the light of the early conquests by the British East India Company in the 1750s and 1760s. It thus can be said that he understands his book as part of knowledge formation in the new colony, which he presents as the rightful successor to the Muslim, i.e. Mughal, political entity. In contrast to Firishta, who sees Islamic rule in India as something natural and just, Dow argues vehemently in his book against Islamic rule in the Indian subcontinent, which he sees as something alien to the non-Muslim native population, and accuses Firishta of not knowing Sanskrit (and therefore not having a deeper knowledge). With reference to the passage from the *Mahabharata* quoted above, which is to be understood as a sign of the intellectual effort to include non-Muslim Indian traditions, Dow even manages to criticise both Muslims and Hindus alike when he states:

The prejudices of the Mahommedans against the followers of the Brahmin religion seldom permits them to speak with common candour of the Hindoos. It swayed very much with Ferishta when he affirmed, that there is no history among the Hindoos of better authority than the Mahabarit [*Mahabharata*]. That work is a poem and not a history.

The notion of India as a land where no history writing existed until the first Muslim conquests, and of Muslims as fanatics who destroyed temples and spread despotism, persisted in the decades after Dow and shaped the image of India and its people in the discourse of philosophy of history in England, France, and Germany. Dow's reading of Firishta's *History* and his understanding of India influenced works such as Edward Gibbon's (1737-1794) sixth volume of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published in 1776), Voltaire's (1694-1778) later revisions of his seminal *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (*An Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirits of Nations*, first published in 1756 and revised in 1769, 1775, and 1778), and Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbuergerlicher Absicht* (*Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*) of 1784. Dow's negative perception of both Hindus and Muslims culminates in the words of the German Enlightenment philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) who concluded that the people of Hindustan would have persisted in their 'ignorant bliss'

with ‘barbarous customary practices’ such as ‘*sati*’ if not for the intervention of ‘warlike Mongols’ and the ‘covetous adventurers of Europe’. The statements of some of the main protagonists of the Enlightenment show that the perception of history can sometimes differ greatly from what the author of a historical work – here Firishta in his *History* – had in mind when writing his work.

Check Your Progress-4

1) Mention Alexander Dow’s perception of Firishta’s work.

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2) How were Firishta’s writings perceived in Europe?

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13.6 SUMMARY

At first glance, Firishta’s *History* is one of many Persian works on the history of Muslim rule in India that can be placed within a centuries-long tradition of historiography on the Indian subcontinent. As mentioned above, it is shaped by the intellectual horizon of its author, who integrated parts of non-Muslim, i.e. Hindu, traditions into his work when treating the four different ages of Satyayuga, Tretayuga, Dvaparayuga, and Kaliyuga, which occur in the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*. At the same time, Firishta draws on the traditional Islamic narrative of Noah and his descendants to give India a place in the Biblical-Quranic narrative of the creation of the world and its peoples. With respect to other aspects of the work, it can be said that Firishta’s *History* follows the usual patterns of Islamic historiography in terms of depicting the righteous ruler and legitimate kingship, for which he cites examples from the past to illustrate to his readership at the court of Ibrahim Adil Shah II in Bijapur what is and is not to be understood as proper courtly conduct. It is not surprising that the sultanate of Bijapur is dealt with at length in *maqala* 3 of the work, for historiography has always been more concerned with the legitimacy of power than with the mere reproduction of facts. As has been shown, this is true even in the decades and centuries following the completion of the *History* in the Enlightenment and early colonial periods. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Firishta’s work achieved great significance as one of the earliest comprehensive histories of India translated into English, paving the way for a broader treatment of the history of the Indian subcontinent in the writings of English, French, and German intellectuals and shaping their perceptions of Hindus and Muslims in world history.

13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Section 13.3
- 2) See Section 13.3

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Section 13.4
- 2) See Sub-section 13.4.1
- 3) See Sub-section 13.4.1

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) See Sub-section 13.4.2
- 2) See Sub-section 13.4.3

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) See Section 13.5
- 2) See Section 13.5

13.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Fischel, Roy S., (2020) *Local States in an Imperial World: Identity, Society and Politics in the Early Modern Deccan* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

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Hardy, Peter S., (1960) 'Firishta', In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, vol. II, pp. 921-923.

Sherwani, Haroon Khan and Joshi, Purshottam M., (1974) *History of Medieval Deccan (1295–1724)*, 2 vols. (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Govt. Text-book Press).

13.9 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Firishta's Tarikh and its Renditions

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbYeupM_ao