



‘ĀDELŠĀHĪS

‘ĀDELŠĀHĪS, a dynasty of Indo-Muslim kings who governed the city-state of Bijapur from 895/1490 to 1097/1686. The city and its surrounding territories became an important province when, in the 8th/14th century, Muslim settlers in the Deccan declared their independence from the Delhi sultanate and founded the Bahmanī kingdom (see [Bahmanids](#)). In the late 9th/15th century, however, the Bahmanī kingdom underwent rapid decline, and each of its five major provinces became, in turn, an independent sultanate. The first was Bijapur, whose governor Yūsof ‘Ādel Khan had the *koṭba* read in his own name in 895/1490. The dynasty descended from Yūsof thus styled itself the ‘Ādelšāhīs and ruled the kingdom of Bijapur until the armies of Awrangzēb annexed it to the Mughal empire in 1097/1686. The sequence of ‘Ādelšāhī monarchs is as follows:

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| Yūsof ‘Ādel Khan | 895-916/1490-1510 |
| Esmā‘īl b. Yūsof | 916-41/1510-34 |
| Mallū b. Esmā‘īl | 941/1534-35 |
| Ebrāhīm I b. Esmā‘īl | 941-65/1535-58 |
| ‘Alī I b. Ebrāhīm I | 965-88/1558-80 |
| Ebrāhīm II b. Ṭahmāsp b. Ebrāhīm I | 988-1037/1580-1627 |
| Moḥammad b. Ebrāhīm II | 1037-67/1627-56 |
| ‘Alī II b. Moḥammad | 1067-83/1656-72 |
| Sekandar b. ‘Alī II | 1083-97/1672-86 |

Most Persian histories of the dynasty attribute a royal lineage to Yūsof ‘Ādel



Khan, linking him with the Ottoman dynasty as a son of Morād II. An Iranian merchant, according to this tradition, spirited the infant Yūsuf out of Turkey to Sāva, so that the child could escape death on the succession of his elder brother, Moḥammad II. Yet the non-Bijapuri sources fail to support this tradition, and epigraphic evidence suggests that Sāva was Yūsuf’s ancestral home, not merely his place of upbringing. In any event, it is clear that Yūsuf migrated from Iran to India around 865/1460 and rapidly rose in the service of the Bahmanīs. After declaring his independence at Bijapur, however, Yūsuf was immediately beset with problems of consolidation, and he had to spend the remainder of his reign either securing the loyalty of Hindu chieftains within his domains or resisting the external challenges to his authority. He was challenged, not only by the other Deccani sultanates (especially Ahmadnagar and Golconda), but also by the powerful Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar to the south as well as by the newly arrived Portuguese power on the western coast.

Yūsuf’s most significant achievement, apart from securing and maintaining the independence of Bijapur, was his declaration of Shi‘ism as the official creed of the ‘Ādelšāhīs. For some time after achieving independence, Yūsuf had apparently desired to make his personal sectarian preference the official denomination, but his advisors cautioned him against this course of action. When, however, in 908/1503 news arrived that Shah Esmā‘il Ṣafawī had just declared Shi‘ism the official creed of Iran, Yūsuf was emboldened to follow suit, making the ‘Ādelšāhī dynasty the first Shi‘ite state in Indian history.

Only with the greatest difficulty did Yūsuf’s immediate successors hold on to the kingdom carved out by the founder. They had to struggle against Ahmadnagar over the strategic fort of Sholapur to the north, with Vijayanagar over the fertile Raichur plain to the south, and with the Portuguese over the Konkan coastal ports. But in ‘Alī I, the fifth ‘Ādelšāhī monarch, the kingdom found its greatest soldier, its most skillful diplomat and its most impressive builder. Having personally visited the raja of Vijayanagar, ‘Alī I secured the Hindu empire’s support in his campaign to seize Sholapur from the kingdom of Ahmadnagar. After this successful feat, ‘Alī I forged an alliance with the other principal Muslim sultanates against Vijayanagar, resulting in the destruction of the Hindu empire in 972/1565. Having nearly doubled the area of his kingdom by these conquests, ‘Alī I turned his attention to establishing a rational civil bureaucracy, building an enlarged and reliable standing army, and endowing the capital city with the walls, mosques, and palaces that



eventually made Bijapur one of the leading Muslim cities of India.

What 'Alī I was as a soldier and builder, his successor, Ebrāhīm II, proved to be as a patron of the arts—the apogee of the 'Ādelšāhī dynasty. Himself an artist, musician, and poet, Ebrāhīm II made an effort to attract artists and literati not only from north India and Iran but also from south India. Thousands of Hindu artists, musicians, dancers, weavers, and masons formerly dependent on the overthrown Vijayanagar court benefited from the 'Ādelšāhī king's patronage. His wide esthetic tastes were paralleled by a markedly liberal cultural and political outlook. Ebrāhīm II supported Hindu temples, permitted Christian missions to operate within his borders, dismissed Shi'ite-Sunnite differences among his nobles, and showed special reverence for Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of learning and music. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Ebrāhīm II's reign witnessed a remarkable cultural evolution, vividly reflected in the blending of Persian and indigenous styles in the art, architecture, and literature of Bijapur.

The éclat of 'Alī and Ebrāhīm II could not be sustained, however. Their successors were plagued by ever worsening political problems. One was the mounting intervention of the Mughal empire in Deccani affairs. A treaty with the Mughals signed in 1045/1636 had guaranteed the northern border of Bijapur, and by virtue of this treaty Moḥammad 'Ādelšāh had been free to expand his kingdom southward almost to the bottom of the peninsula. But twenty years later, revived expansionist sentiment in the Mughal government resulted in increasing encroachments on Bijapur's territory and sovereignty. A second problem was the rise of Maratha chieftains under Šivājī Bhonsle in the northwestern sector of the kingdom. This development placed a severe strain on the loyalty of the kingdom's Marathi-speaking population, who inhabited fully half of Bijapur's total area and dominated the revenue administration. Finally, in the 1080s/1670s there developed severe factionalism between Afghans and Abyssinians within the Muslim nobility. When the dynasty could no longer present a united front against either the Mughals or the Marathas, its fate was sealed, and in 1097/1686 it became a Mughal province.

Throughout the two centuries of 'Ādelšāhī rule, Bijapur had close diplomatic, social, commercial and cultural contact with Iran. The relationship between the 'Ādelšāhīs and Šafawīs was as extensive as it was distinctive, and is worthy of detailed examination.

The diplomatic exchanges were motivated by two dominant considerations.



The first, more characteristic in the 10th/16th century, was the ‘Ādelšāhī desire to express ideological solidarity with Shi‘ite Iran. The second, more characteristic in the 11th/17th century when Mughal pressures began to be felt, was the dynasty’s attempt to forge alliances with the most formidable international rival of the Mughals, namely, the Şafawīs. The first consideration, voiced in Yūsuf ‘Ādel Khan’s establishment of Shi‘ism as the state religion, implied that Iran was Bijapur’s link to the Islamic world. Indeed, the historian Ferešta wrote that the youthful Yūsuf, before leaving Iran to go to India, had been taken to Ardabīl and enrolled as a disciple of the Şafawī *ṭarīqa*. Even if this tradition is apocryphal, it shows the desire of official historians to discover ideological roots in the Şafawī house. Yūsuf had proudly dispatched Sayyed Aḥmad Heravī to the Şafawī court bearing not only gifts and declarations of attachment but also news that Bijapur, too, had become a Shi‘ite state. And when in 925/1519 Shah Esmā‘īl Şafawī deputed his own ambassador, Ebrāhīm Beg Torkmān, to the court of Esmā‘īl ‘Ādelšāh, the latter greeted the ambassador twelve miles outside of Bijapur. On learning that he had been described as an independent sovereign by the Iranian monarch, he was so elated that he gave orders to his officers to wear twelve-pointed *qezel-bāš* caps. He also regularly included the name of his Şafawī contemporary in the Friday *koṭba*. Sultan ‘Alī I, probably the most strident of Bijapur’s kings in his Shi‘ite partisanship, dispatched several embassies to Iran and once reminded Shah Ṭahmāsp that his name was, indeed, mentioned in Bijapur’s Friday *koṭba*.

This diplomatic contact seems to have been intended more to identify Iran as Bijapur’s link with Dār-al-Eslām than to secure tangible benefits. But with the accession of Emperor Jahāngīr in 1014/1606, Mughal pressure became increasingly felt in the court of Ebrāhīm II, with the result that Bijapur’s diplomacy with Iran became more pragmatic. Thus in 1018/1609-10 Ebrāhīm II sent the famous calligrapher Mīr Ḳalīlallāh to the court of Shah ‘Abbās, bearing a letter of complaint against Mughal pressures and suggesting that Shah ‘Abbās “should unhesitatingly come forward to help us in this vital matter.” The letter even recommended that an Iranian attack on Qandahār, then held by the Mughals, could be coordinated with a simultaneous attack from the south by the Deccan sultanates. Though Shah ‘Abbās sent no army to Qandahār at this time, he did write Jahāngīr recommending leniency toward the Deccan states. This advice did not seem to have influenced Mughal policies in the Deccan, and Jahāngīr’s successors viewed any diplomatic contact between Iran and the Deccan states as an infringement on their natural



sphere of influence.

Social contact between Iran and Bijapur was pervasive and constant. Like the Bahmanī dynasty that preceded it, the ‘Ādelšāhīs were essentially a conquest dynasty, i.e., a foreign group that by force of arms had taken over the reins of an already organized state.

Without founding radically new administrative institutions, such dynasties merely skimmed the surplus revenue off the top of a pre-existing structure, leaving intact the indigenous local government and revenue system. It was only in the ruling nobility that the ‘Ādelšāhīs required replenishment with fresh immigrants. Unlike the Mughal empire, whose sources for such replenishment lay in nearby Afghanistan and Central Asia, Bijapur sought new recruits from overseas immigrants, whether Abyssinians, Arabs, or Iranians. The last were preferred. They were the most accessible because of the relatively easy route through the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, but more importantly the ‘Ādelšāhīs saw Iran as their own historical and ideological homeland. Thus the dynasty’s entire history is replete with Iranian generals, ministers, diplomats, governors, and cavalymen enjoying royal patronage. Some of the more prominent include Asad Khan Lārī in Esmā‘il’s reign, Moṣṭafā Khan Ardestānī, Mortazā Khan Enjū and Abū Torāb Širāzī in ‘Alī I’s reign, and Afzal Khan Širāzī and Šāhnavāz Khan in Ebrāhīm II’s reign. But an adverse result of this constant immigration from Iran was the creation in Bijapur of two hostile classes within the ruling nobility. One class consisted of fresh immigrants, usually Iranian and Shi‘ite, at once proud of Persian culture and disdainful of Indian culture. The other class, called Deccanis, consisted of the descendants of Turkish, Abyssinian or Arab immigrants. Most often they were Sunnite and native-born Indians, preferring to speak indigenous languages, especially their own dialect of proto-Urdu known as Dakhnī. This class cleavage led on occasion to serious struggles within the nobility, sometimes manifested in disputes over whether the *koṭba* should be read in the Sunnite or Shi‘ite fashion, and it remained a major cause of the dynasty’s internal weakness.

Bijapur’s commercial contact with Iran was almost entirely maritime. At the outset of the kingdom’s history, when it was consolidating its hold over the western coasts, the Portuguese arrived with superior naval power and, having seized the important port of Goa in 916/1510, forced Bijapur to use ports such as Dabhol farther to the north. But with the decline of Portuguese maritime supremacy in the late 10th/16th century, Bijapur’s overseas trade recovered. In



the following century it was carried on mainly by the English and trafficked through the ports of Dabhol, Benguria, and Rajapur. Horses, the mainstay of the Iranian nobility and the Bijapur cavalry, were the major item imported from Iran, followed by precious stones, dried fruits, spices such as saffron, and pearls from the famous fisheries of Bahrain. Of the kingdom’s exports to Iran, cotton goods such as calicoes and muslins were doubtless the most important, followed by rice, pepper, sugar, cardamom, and coconuts.

The most significant form of contact between the ‘Ādelšāhīs and Şafawīs was cultural, though it was overwhelmingly uni-directional, from Iran to Bijapur. In the 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries a great many literati and artists migrated from Iran to Bijapur, mainly because patronage of art and letters was more generous in Indo-Muslim courts than in the Şafawī court. Of the many Iranian poets who adorned Bijapur at that time, the most conspicuous include Nūr-al-dīn Moḥammad, Żohūrī Korāsānī (d. 1025/1616), author of the lyrical *Sāqī-nāma*, Mawlānā Malek Qomī (fl. 1010/1600), Moḥammad Hāšem Sanjar (d.1021/1612), Bāqer Kāšānī (d. 1034/1624-25), Āqā Moḥammad Nāmī Tabrīzī (fl. 1020s/1610s), Mīrzā Moḥammad Moqīm Astarābādī (fl. 1060s/1650s) and Ḥakīm Ātašī (fl. 1040s/1630s), author of the versified *‘Ādel-nāma*. Several outstanding historians wrote under the patronage of Bijapur. One of them, Rafī‘-al-dīn Ebrāhīm Šīrāzī (fl. 1020/1611), came to India from Shiraz as a merchant, rose in Bijapur’s central secretariat during ‘Alī I’s reign and, in Ebrāhīm II’s reign, wrote the authoritative but still unpublished *Tadkerat al-molūk*. Another historian, Hāšem Beg Fozūnī Astarābādī (fl. 1054/1644), sailed to Bijapur when he was unable to return to Iran after performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. Subsequently, during the reign of Moḥammad ‘Ādelšāh, he wrote *Fotūḥāt-e ‘Ādelšāhī*. But without doubt the most renowned historian of Bijapur was Moḥammad Qāsem Ferešta (d. ca. 1033/1623), the celebrated author of *Golšan-e Ebrāhīmī*, commonly known as *Tārīk-eFerešta*. Born in Iran (probably Astarābād) around 978/1570, Ferešta reached the court of Bijapur in 998/1589. The supreme benefactor of artists, Ebrāhīm II, asked him to write a comprehensive history of India modeled on Mīrkvānd’s *Rawzat al-şafā*, with particular emphasis on the Deccan sultanates. Based on many sources no longer extant and written in a free, straightforward style, Ferešta’s history remains an indispensable source not only for the history of Bijapur but for the history of medieval India generally.

From Ebrāhīm II’s reign the court also began patronizing literature written in Dakhnī, the dialect of indigenous Deccan Muslims. This patronage formed part



of a much larger cultural trend which by the 11th/17th century had begun to move away from the undiluted Persian cultural model in search of ways of blending that model with local Indian styles. There is little doubt that Ebrāhīm II, whose imperfect command of spoken Persian was noted with surprise by a Mughal ambassador, set the tone for this movement. Thus, about the time that Deccanis began achieving political dominance over the Iranian elite, Dakhnī literature became patronized on a par with or even above Persian. Indigenous poets, such as ‘Abdol (d. 1012/1603), Ḥasan Šawqī (d. ca. 1050/1640), Mīrān Mīān Hāšemī (d. ca. 1109/1697), and especially Mollā Moḥammad Noṣratī (d. 1085/1674), attained special prominence. Sultan Ebrāhīm II himself composed a major Dakhnī work on Indian musicology entitled *Nawras-nāma*. Yet the Persian language and its literary tradition continued to pervade even Bijapur’s later culture. For one thing, the style used in Dakhnī literature, e.g., the *maṭnavī* or *ḡazal* in poetry, the *taḍkera* or *tārīk* in prose, adhered closely to Persian norms. More than that, through centuries of contact the Persian language had even altered the indigenous languages of the common folk; fully one-third of modern as well as medieval Marathī vocabulary is derived from Persian.

Finally, the most vivid legacy of Iran’s cultural impact on Bijapur is in the realm of visual arts. Again, the 10th/16th century saw the importation of Persian art and architecture in its purest form, whereas the 11th/17th century saw a greater mingling with Indian styles. In calligraphy, a supremely visual art in the Persian tradition, none surpassed Shah Ḳalīlallāh (fl. 1020s/1610s), who reputedly had given lessons even to Shah ‘Abbās before leaving his native Khorasan for Bijapur. The kingdom’s most famous artist was Farroḳ Ḥosayn, brilliant painter identified by Robert Skelton as Farroḳ Beg, who, born and educated in Shiraz, worked in the atelier of Ebrāhīm Mīrzā in Mašhad, then in Akbar’s court at Agra, and finally in Ebrāhīm II’s court at Bijapur. By the time of Farroḳ’s arrival, however, Bijapur’s distinctive style—use of rich colors such as olive-brown, mauve, and, in particular, gold, with subjects often set off against scenes of dense vegetation—had already taken shape, influenced mainly by the influx of Hindu artists, who had gravitated north after the destruction of Vijayanagar. Similarly, Bijapur’s 10th/16th century architecture adhered somewhat more closely to Persian styles, especially in the vast porticos (*ayvān*) of its palaces (e.g., Gagan Maḥall) or the vaulted ceilings and intersecting arches of its mosques (e.g., the Jāme’ Mašjed). But in the 11th/17th century, especially in secular architecture, the purely Iranian spirit merged with Hindu conceptions and usages, e.g., the fine carving of stone to resemble



wooden lattice-work, or the use of Hindu vegetative motifs, such as lotus blossoms and bulbs, in domes and spires. This composite Persian-Deccani style is nowhere more aptly illustrated than in Ebrāhīm II’s own magnificent mausoleum, the Ebrāhīm Rawza, or in the palace of a nobleman, the lovely Mehtar Maḥall.

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