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The confluence of two oceans: Hindustani music in the British Library Persian collections

Of all the collections we have consulted for the European Research Council project “Musical Transitions to European Colonialism in the Eastern Indian Ocean”, the British Library possesses by far the richest set of materials on Indian music and dance yet found. Many of the most important are in the Persian collections. They stretch from the earliest known Persian treatise on Hindustani music, the *Ghunyat al-Munya*, written c.1375 in Gujarat, to the last: Wajid ‘Ali Shah’s *Şaut al-Mubārak* of 1853. One can traverse the full gamut from the sublime – a beautifully calligraphed copy of the *Thousand dhrupads of Nayak Bakhshu* (1637-46) for the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, to the vaguely ridiculous – Safdar ‘Ali Khan’s mildly pornographic *Rāgsandhav* (1812). Amongst multiple copies of the canonical Mughal treatise the *Tohfāt al-Hind* (c.1675) lies Sir William Jones’ copy absolutely covered in his annotations; and elsewhere, the emperor Shah ‘Alam II’s *sanad* bestowing a Mughal title on the amateur song collector Sophia Elizabeth Plowden. And then there are the Library’s inestimable visual treasures: a portrait of the last hereditary musician to the Mughal emperors, Miyan Himmat Khan (1825); and of course hundreds of *rāgamālā* paintings, of which the Bijapuri set in the *Javāhir al-Mūsīqāt-i Muḥammadī* (c.1570/c.1630) is possibly the Library’s oldest. My aim in this paper is quite simple: to draw some of the more interesting and beautiful of these unparalleled musical treasures to your attention.