



AFŻAL AL-TAWĀRIK

AFŻAL AL-TAWĀRIK, title of a chronicle of the Safavid dynasty, composed by Fażli b. Zayn-al-‘Ābedin b. K̄vāja Ruḥ-Allāh K̄uzāni Eşfahāni (Storey, I, pp. 308-9, 1278; Storey-Bregel, II, pp. 869-70). The author was from a distinguished family with a long record of service in the Safavid bureaucracy, starting with the celebrated *wakil*, Yār Aḥmad K̄uzāni Najm-e Tāni (Aubin, pp. 10-13; Haneda, esp. pp. 83-85). Fażli entered government employment as an accountant around 1608 at the age of sixteen, and was vizier to the governor of his native Georgia in the period 1616-25. It was during this time that he started work on the *Afżal al-tawāriḳ*, presenting a first draft in Shah ‘Abbās’s camp near Ganja in the winter of 1616-17. The chronicle was planned in three volumes, each of which has survived, though it seems that the work was never completed to the author’s satisfaction. Fażli was still revising the text in 1639 in India, having left Persia after the death of Shah ‘Abbās. Partly because of its unfinished state, and no doubt also as a result of his migration to India, his history remained unknown and has had no influence on later Safavid historiography. Each volume presently exists in a single manuscript, none of which has been published. All three originated in India, where another manuscript is reported in Fayżābād, still unstudied (*al-Ḍari‘a* II, p. 259, apud Monzawi, *Nosḳahā* VI, pp. 4220-21).

The first volume (276 folios) is part of the Edmund Pote collection, divided between Eton College and King’s College, Cambridge (Margoliouth, pp. 4, 22, under the heading *Tāriḳ-e ‘ālamāra*); this is now in the Cambridge University Library (Eton-Pote ms. 172). It was purchased in India by Antoine-Louis-Henri



Polier (1741-95), many of whose acquisitions are now in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (Colas and Richard). The volume covers the rise of the Safavids down to the end of the reign of Shah Esmā'il I (r. 907-30/1501-24). It has been ungenerously assessed by G. M. Meredith-Owens, who nevertheless gives a useful résumé of its contents and the author's sources. As demonstrated by A. H. Morton, the first volume of the *Afżal al-tawārik* contains important information on the early years of Shah Esmā'il, and it will certainly repay closer study for the whole period. The copy is undated.

The second volume (276 folios) is in the British Library, ms. Or. 4678 (Rieu, *Persian Manuscripts, Supplement*, pp. 37-38, no. 56). This is only the first part (*daftar*) of the volume, devoted to the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb (931-84/1524-76); the second part, which has not yet been recovered, was to chronicle the reigns of Esmā'il II (r. 984-85/1576-78) and Moḥammad Ḳodābanda (r. 985-95/1578-87). An earlier planned *daftar*, on the childhood of Ṭahmāsb, seems not to have been undertaken. The manuscript is apparently the author's autographed copy, completed in his rather distinctive hand on 24 Ša'bān 1049/20 December 1639, perhaps in Golconda, Deccan (fol. 274r). It was purchased in Tehran by Sidney Churchill, but nothing is known of its transfer from India to Persia. The volume puts a heavy emphasis on the spiritual authority of Ṭahmāsb. On the basis of case studies of three separate episodes, Simin Abrahams (p. 110) concludes that the author had a tendency to "suppress inconvenient truths and gloss over fractures in the reign of Shah Tahmasp." She sees the work as an attempt by Fażli to rewrite the history of Ṭahmāsb's reign in accordance with the perceptions of his own time, creating a myth of the ruler to bolster the legitimacy of a flagging regime.

The third volume (579 folios) is in Christ's College, Cambridge, ms. Dd.5.6, where it was originally catalogued as the *Tārik-e 'ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi* of Eskandar Beg Monši (Browne, pp. 139, 313; Melville, 1998). The manuscript was purchased in India by Jean-Baptiste Gentil (1726-99), and brought to France by Chevalier de Caunon, governor of Chandernagor. It was offered for sale in Paris in 1789 after his death, and again in London in 1793 (*Notice de manuscrits persans*, p. 3; *A Catalogue of the Curious ... Library of Books*, p. 42), whereafter it finally entered Christ's College in 1861 (Melville, 2003, esp. pp. 64-65). As anticipated, this volume contains the history of Shah 'Abbās I (r. 995-1038/1587-1629) from his accession down to his death in 1629. The copy is defective at the beginning (missing text being replaced on the first folio by the opening of Eskandar Beg Monši's chronicle); it was completed on 17 Rabi' I,

1045/31 August 1635 (*sic*; fol. 566r), that is, four years before the copy of the second volume. The discovery of this previously missing volume confirms and extends the biographical information already known about the author and his family, who remained prominent in Safavid service. It also offers considerably more detailed accounts of Shah ‘Abbās’s campaigns in the Caucasus and Georgian affairs (cf. Maeda, 2003), an area well known to the author, and supplies a great wealth of information about appointments and promotions in the Safavid central and provincial administration that is not found elsewhere. In addition, Fażli Beg always has some new material, or a different view to offer, on the events of the reign and the role of the shah, not always eulogistic. It is a contemporary source of the first importance, which will undoubtedly permit, in time, a reevaluation and better knowledge of the pivotal reign of Shah ‘Abbās I (Melville, 2003).

General characteristics. The *Afżal al-tawāriķ* is in annalistic format, arranged by regnal year and the Turkish animal calendar (year commencing in Spring), for which Fażli inaccurately implies a one-to-one correspondence between the solar animal year and the lunar *hejri* year. In the first two volumes, in practice, he probably follows the *hejri* annals of Ḥasan Beg Rumlu, which he cites as a source; in the third volume his chronological structure is the same as Eskandar Beg’s. The use of precise dates throughout the chronicle is, however, rather sparse. One feature of his composition is that all three volumes begin with a very detailed index (*fehrest*) of the events covered in each year, to assist the reader to go straight to what he is looking for (for a tr. of the *fehrest* of the 2nd vol., see Abrahams, pp. 125-39). The rubrics in the text are also quite detailed; in the third volume, he follows Eskandar Beg’s general outline rather closely, though the contents of his narrative differ. The second and third volumes conclude with a prosopographical section, the former (fols. 274v-275v) listing Ṭahmāsb’s children and grandchildren and various officials, the latter (fols. 566v-579r) giving inventories of scholars, poets, and the civilian and military establishments at court and in the provinces.

Fażli includes many official documents throughout the work, though these are often paraphrases of the *farmāns* (see [FARMĀN](#)) rather than the original text (see Abrahams, pp. 40-42, for a list of the documents in the 2nd vol., the first of which is the appointment of the poet-laureate, Mirzā Qāsem Gonābādi, author of verse chronicles for Shah Esmā‘il and Shah Ṭahmāsb, see *ibid.*, pp. 50-68). Among those in the third volume is the *farmān* for establishing Shah ‘Abbās’s silk monopoly in 1619 (fol. 409v-410r; Melville, 1998, p. 264).



The text of the *Afẓal al-tawārik*, as it has come down to us, is a patchwork of versions clearly produced over a long period. The opening passages in each manuscript are distinct from the rest in terms of calligraphy and paper, and even the first volume, which seems the most “finished” of the three, is a composite text with many changes of hand. Both the second and third volumes contain numerous marginalia, the third volume particularly in the first part (to ca. 1616), many of which are in Fażli’s characteristic hand. He was evidently revising this copy after its completion in 1635, and recopying volume two four years later. There remains much to learn both about and from this largely unused source.

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