



'AJĀ'EB AL-MAQDŪR

'AJĀ'EB AL-MAQDŪR FĪ NAWA'EB TĪMŪR ("The wondrous turns of fate in the vicissitudes of Tīmūr"), a history of the life and conquests of Tīmūr (736-807/1336-1405), including a survey of developments after his death, written in ornate Arabic rhyming prose (*sajʿ*) by Aḥmad b. 'Arabšāh Demašqī (791-854/1389-1450). Ebn 'Arabšāh was deported to Samarkand when Tīmūr captured Damascus in 803/1400-01; studying under the great scholars of Central Asia, he learned Persian, Turkish, and Mongolian. Subsequently he was a private secretary and tutor at the court of Moḥammad I b. Bāyazīd in Adrianople. In 825/1422 he returned to Damascus, and in 840/1436 he settled in Cairo, where he remained until his death. The *'Ajā'eb* was completed on 17 Moḥarram 839/12 July 1435. After a brief preface the work explains the significance of Tīmūr's name and then traces his life and career step by step. The rulers whose kingdoms Tīmūr annexed are discussed in detail and their territories described. The plundering, devastation, and ferocious cruelty which Tīmūr unleashed wherever he met with any resistance are scrupulously depicted. The exiling to Samarkand of the skilled craftsmen, scholars, artists, and so on, whom he encountered on his campaigns is also described.

Tīmūr, born in 736/1336 at Kaš in Transoxania, began by leading local raiding parties but eventually made himself lord of Balk and Samarkand (*'Ajā'eb*, Cairo, 1285/1868, p. 14). After consolidating his power in Transoxania and waging campaigns against K̄vārazm, he invaded Khorasan in 782/1380-81 and proceeded to subjugate the various local dynasties of Iran. In 789/1387 Tīmūr exacted revenge for the rebellion of the city of Isfahan by slaughtering 70,000



of its inhabitants (pp. 35-38). Campaigns in Armenia, Georgia, Anatolia, and southern Russia followed. The ruler of the Dašt-e Qepčāq, Toqtāmīš, was overthrown and his land laid waste (p. 61). Tīmūr marched into India and captured Delhi (pp. 72-73). Then he plundered Damascus and ravaged Syria; the chapter on the capture of Aleppo and the discussion between Tīmūr and the lawyers about legal matters Ebn ‘Arabšāh based on the chronicle of Ebn Šeḥna (pp. 94-99). At the battle of Angora in 805/1402 Tīmūr inflicted a shattering defeat on the Ottomans (pp. 134-36). In 807/1405 he died at Otrār on his way to China (pp. 171-76). The work continues with a description of the internal political situation after Tīmūr’s death and the rapidly ensuing conflicts and struggle for power among his successors (pp. 176-216). In the next chapters (pp. 216-44), Ebn ‘Arabšāh examines Tīmūr’s character, abilities, and conduct towards friend and foe, and offers a relatively objective assessment. Finally he gives a valuable account of the intellectual world of Samarkand with a list of famous scholars, lawyers, shaikhs, interpreters of the Qur’ān, doctors, and artists whom he had seen or of whom he had heard. This section deserves thorough investigation and analysis, as do the references to the composition of Tīmūr’s forces.

The *‘Ajā’eb* has a bitter tone, conveying Ebn ‘Arabšāh’s hatred of Tīmūr, and is marked by spiteful descriptions and crude attacks and insults. Hence the official Persian historians (Šaraf al-dīn Yazdī, Neẓām-al-dīn Šāmī) tend to be more truthful, accurate, and comprehensive in chronicling Tīmūr’s campaigns. But Ebn ‘Arabšāh’s emotional judgments, arising from his personal involvement, probably provide a truer expression of the actual spirit of the age. He was, moreover, a keen observer, and his evaluation of Tīmūr’s abilities and personal qualities is helpful to the historian. He also provides many useful details; an example is his account (pp. 107-13) of the conversation between Tīmūr and the historian Ebn Kaldūn (732-808/1322-1406). The encounter is not recorded by any of Tīmūr’s Persian biographers, and the authenticity of the report was called into question as early as the 17th century when the Turkish historian Ḥājjī Kalīfa (1017-67/1619-57) gave an account of the interview which contradicted Ebn ‘Arabšāh in almost every respect (*Kašf al-ẓonūn* [Leipzig] II, no. 2085, p. 101). B. d’Herbelot made matters worse by adding to Ḥājjī Kalīfa’s account statements of his own, equally fictitious (*Bibliothèque Orientale*, Paris, 1697, II, p. 418). The doubt voiced about Ebn ‘Arabšāh’s trustworthiness were not dispelled until the discovery of the autograph of Ebn Kaldūn’s autobiography (*al-Ta’rīf*, Cairo, 1951), in which the audience with Tīmūr is recalled and Ebn ‘Arabšāh’s report confirmed.



From the early 17th century onwards, as numerous versions, editions and translations testify, Ebn 'Arabšāh's book repeatedly attracted attention and interest in the Ottoman empire and Western Europe. Thanks to early renderings into European languages (e.g., French by P. Vattier in 1658, Latin by S. H. Manager in 1767-72), the work played a decisive role in molding the image of Tīmūr that prevailed in the West.

Mortažā Naẓmīzāda Baġdādī translated the book into Turkish in 1110/1698 under the title *TārīkTīmūrlenk* (see *Kašf al-ẓonūn* [Leipzig] IV, p. 190; VI, p. 544). In 1142/1729-30 it was printed in Constantinople as one of the first books to be produced in the Ottoman empire (F. Babinger, *Stambuler Buchwesen im 18. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig, 1919, p. 14; Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches* VII, p. 583). Since the style of this translation was so abstruse, a clearer rendering was commissioned and was printed in Constantinople in 1277/1860 under the title *Tārīk-eTīmūr-e Gūrkan*. This version is not reliable, however, for sections were omitted and the work as a whole abbreviated.

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