



'ĀLAMĀRĀ-YE 'ABBĀSĪ

'ĀLAMĀRĀ-YE 'ABBĀSĪ, a Safavid chronicle written by Eskandar Beg Monšī (b. ca. 968/1560, d. ca. 1042/1632). The work, which is of great length (1,116 pages in the two-volume, closely printed edition published in Tehran, 1334-35 Š./1955-56), comprises a *moqaddama* on the origins of the Safavid house and the reigns of Shahs Esmā'īl I, Ṭahmāsp I, Esmā'īl II, and Moḥammad Ḳodābanda, and a detailed history of the reign of Shah 'Abbās I. The bulk of the work (*ṣaḥīfas* I and II; alternately called *ṣaḥīfa* I and *ṣaḥīfa* II, *maqṣad* i) was completed in 1025/1616. The remainder (called *ṣaḥīfa* III or *ṣaḥīfa* II, *maqṣad* ii) was completed in 1038/1629, the year of Shah 'Abbās's death. The chronicle known as the *Ḍayl-e tāriḳ-e 'ālamārā-ye 'Abbāsī*, which is a history of the reign of Shah Ṣafī, is largely by another hand, although Eskandar Beg may be the author of its first four years (see Storey, I/1, pp. 312-14, and V. Minorsky's observations in *BSOAS* 10, 1940-42, pp. 540-41). The Tehran printed edition is based on the Tehran lithographed edition of 1314/1896-97; it reproduces the latter's innumerable textual errors and with one exception makes no attempt to fill its many lacunae; the exception, *maqālas* 2-12 on the character and habits of Shah 'Abbās, is filled from two mss. in the Maḵles Library (pp. 1099-116 of the printed text). Nearly all extant manuscripts of the 'Ālamārā-ye 'Abbāsī are defective, and most omit the eulogy to Abū Ṭāleb Mīrzā, the vizier of Shah 'Abbās I and subsequently of Shah Ṣafī.

The 'Ālamārā-ye 'Abbāsī is without question the greatest work of Safavid historiography and one of the greatest Persian historiographical works of any age. J. R. Walsh ("The Historiography of Ottoman-Safavid Relations in the 16th



and 17th Centuries,” *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. B. Lewis and P. M. Holt, London, 1962, p. 200, n. 8) goes even further; after noting how it totally dominates historiography for two centuries, he calls it one of the greatest of all Islamic historical works, “perfect within the limitations of its traditions.” A. K. S. Lambton (“Persian Biographical Literature,” *ibid.*, pp. 147-48) has called attention to the great value of the biographical material in the ‘Ālamārā; not restricted to the ‘*olamā*’ and ‘*odabā*’ (as is the case with the few chronicles of the period which contain obituary notices), it includes short biographies of amirs, viziers, finance officials, accountants, secretaries, etc.—in other words, of the men who were actually responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the Safavid administrative machine. A careful study of this biographical material can tell us much about the way in which the administration functioned.

One of the outstanding virtues of the ‘Ālamārā is its orderly arrangement and clarity of outline. Despite its length, not once does the author lose sight of its shape and proportion and, if he digresses from the main theme, he returns unerringly to the point where he left off. This makes E. G. Browne’s condemnation of the “dull and arduous” nature of the ‘Ālamārā and similar chronicles, with their “absence of any breadth of view or clearness of outline” (*Lit. Hist. Persia* IV, p. 107), all the more extraordinary. In choosing the ‘Ālamārā as typifying this genre of Safavid historiography, he could not have been wider of the mark. The “overwhelming mass of trivial details” that he found so repugnant is not only enormously important in itself, but brings to life the bare bones of historical fact and enables the historian of today to gain insights into the “inwardness” of the history of the period. The ‘Ālamārā contains passages of the finest dramatic narrative, and the text is enlivened by the author’s humorous and ironical comments on human foibles. His career in the Safavid royal secretariat enabled him to be an eyewitness of many of the events he describes, and this imparts freshness and verisimilitude to his narrative. Where he has not been an actual eyewitness, he assures us that he has done his best to obtain his information from the most reliable sources available. The style of the ‘Ālamārā, though ornate, is not so to the point where floridity obscures the meaning; indeed, apart from passages like the conventional invocations to spring which occur at the beginning of the account of each year’s events, the style is in general straightforward.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also Storey, I/1, pp. 309-13, for details of the extant mss.

The text has been translated into English by R. M. Savory under the title *The History of Shah 'Abbas The Great*, 2 vols., Persian Heritage Series 28, Boulder, 1978-79.