



'ĀLAMĀRĀ-YE ŠĀH ESMĀ'ĪL

'ĀLAMĀRĀ-YE ŠĀH ESMĀ'ĪL, an anonymous narrative of the life of Shah Esmā'īl (r. 907-30/1501-24), the founder of the Safavid dynasty in Iran. The work, also published under the title *'Ālamārā-ye Šafawī*, takes the form of an historical romance; compiled late in the 11th/17th century (the text contains the date 1086/1675-76), it is related to a group of biographies of Shah Esmā'īl (e.g. those listed in Storey-Bregel, nos. 709-12, 721; Storey, nos. 375-77) and is rooted in a popular, probably oral, tradition of historical narrative. The work deals with Esmā'īl's antecedents (pp. 1-41 of the Montazer-e Šāheb edition) and his life and exploits (pp. 41-626). Progressing more or less chronologically, it opens with a brief account of the first "historical" figure in Esmā'īl's lineage, Fīrūzšāh (or Sultan Fīrūzšāh), six generations before Shaikh Šafī-al-dīn (d. 735/1335), and concludes with Esmā'īl's death in 930/1524 (although the work itself gives no date). Based on certain well-known events and personages, the work carries the narrative forward with such devices as monologue and dialogue (to emphasize the resolute and agile mind of the shah) and reminiscences of earlier historical personages (to draw parallels with circumstances in which Esmā'īl is involved).

As an historical record, the *'Ālamārā-ye Šāh Esmā'īl* must be treated with great caution. Chronology, for example, is of little importance to the work's structure. Writing more than a half century after Eskandar Beg's *'Ālamārā-ye 'Abbāsī* and Jalāl-al-dīn Moḥammad Yazdī's *Tārīk-e 'Abbāsī*, both of which are annals, the author/compiler of the *'Ālamārā-ye Šāh Esmā'īl* produced a book that describes the mythic, legendary, and ideological qualities of the Safavid



exemplar rather than an objective sequence of actual events. But as a reflection of 11th/17th century political, historical, and religious ideology, the *‘Ālamāra* is of considerable interest; contained within its numerous anecdotes and vignettes of Shah Esmā‘īl and his age are important clues to popular religious and political lore as well as to the significance of Esmā‘īl as an ideological archetype. One example will suffice here: the account of the birth of Ṭahmāsp, Shah Esmā‘īl’s successor and like him a figure of near legendary importance for 11th/17th century thinkers. Three sources more nearly contemporary with Ṭahmāsp’s birth—the *Ḥabīb al-sīar* completed in 930/1524, the so-called Ross Anonymous (B.M., Or. 3248) written towards the middle of the 10th/16th century, and the *Aḥsan al-tāwārīk* completed in 985/1577—describe the event briefly in a relatively straightforward manner, providing date and place of birth and appropriate verses. But the *‘Ālamārā-ye Šāh Esmā‘īl* devotes fourteen melodramatic pages to it; the queen comes to term on a stormy night while separated from the shah, she seeks refuge at a village near Isfahan, the Sunni *raʿīs* of the village works skullduggery, and the Shiʿite *raʿīs* makes his home available to the queen while his wife delivers the prince. Into this the author weaves a parallel story involving the harem of the Jalayirid, Ḥasan Bozorg (d. 757/1356), and its relations with the same village. The account also relates a dream of Shah Esmā‘īl in which ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb instructs him to name his son Ṭahmāsp, and it tells how a certain Naṣīr-e Ṭūsī cast the infant’s horoscope, predicting his accession and foretelling twenty-five years of war with the Ottomans (Rūm) followed by thirty years of peace. The narrative appears indebted throughout to popular oral tradition, a conclusion supported by the absence of comparable material on Ṭahmāsp’s birth in other accounts of Esmā‘īl’s reign (e.g., the 10/16th century sources mentioned above and such 11th/17th century works as *‘Ālamārā-ye ‘Abbāsī* and *Rawzat al-Šafawīya*) and the variants in the different manuscripts of the text. For example, in the Montazer-e Šāḥeb edition (pp. 82-96) the story of Ṭahmāsp’s birth appears immediately before the final struggle with the Āq Qoyunlū leader, Sultan Morād b. Ya‘qūb, while in the Šokrī edition (pp. 164-71) a considerably shortened version with a different narrative sequence and many differences of detail appears well after this struggle.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Variant versions of the same work, both of these represent an 11th/17th century corrupt and popularized rendition of the by now legendary aspects of Shah Esmā‘īl’s life, adapted, in large part, from the *Ḥabīb al-sīar* and B.M. Or. 3248 corpus. This writer’s comparison of the more or less identical material found in the much earlier Or. 3248 (ff. 1b-25b and the first 25-30 pp. of the published editions) has shown that whole phrases and sentences are dropped, names are distorted or confused, the narrative sequence is disordered, and different versions of the same stories are offered; in short, both published versions of the work derive in part from Or. 3248, which has been drastically corrupted in transmission. For a discussion of the authorship and antecedents of Or. 3248, see H. Rieu’s letter to E. G. Browne in E. G. Browne, *A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library*, Cambridge, 1896, p. 148.

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