



ASTARĀBĀDĪ, MAHDĪ KHAN

ASTARĀBĀDĪ, MĪRZĀ (MOḤAMMAD) MAHDĪ KHAN B. MOḤAMMAD-NAŠĪR, court secretary and historiographer to Nāder Shah Afšār (r. 1148-60/1736-47).

Despite his position as an eminent public figure and scholar during the reign of Nāder Shah, little is known for certain of the life of Mīrzā Mahdī, not even the dates of his birth and death. The pen-name *Kawkab* or *Kawkabī*, by which he is sometimes called, is also in dispute (Šahīdī, p. *md*). The son of one Moḥammad Našīr, he presumably trained as a civil servant under the late Safavids; though it is not recorded if and when he left his native Astarābād for the capital of Isfahan. If we are to believe documents reproduced in his *Monša'āt* (see *Anwār*, pp. *seh*, *panj*; Šahīdī, p. *mj*), he was appointed in his youth to a sinecure in the royal household at Isfahan, and wrote a formal congratulation to Nāder on his capture of the capital in 1142/1729. He served Nāder for the next seventeen years, until the end of his reign (1160/1747), first as head of the secretariat (*monšī-al-mamālek*) until Nāder's coronation at Moḡān in 1148/1736, then as his official biographer and historiographer (*wāqe'a-nevīs*). During this time he was responsible for composing victory dispatches (*fath-nāma*), preambles to treaties, and other state documents. He was present at the private meeting of Nāder Shah with the Mughal emperor Moḥammad Shah, during which the latter presented him with a diamond of unequalled beauty and luster. The diamond was later taken from him by Nāder Shah (Sir Harford Jones Bridges, *The Dynasty of the Kajars*, rep. New York, 1973, p. clxxxix).

Early in 1160/1747 he was sent, together with Moṣṭafā Khan Biḡdelī Šāmlū, as



ambassador to the Ottoman court, in order to ratify the peace treaty concluded in the previous year. They had only reached Baghdad when news arrived of Nāder's death. The embassy was discontinued, but nothing is known of Mīrzā Mahdī's subsequent career. He may have gone on pilgrimage to Mecca before returning, either to Mašhad, to Māzandarān, or to Tabrīz (see Anwār, p. *haft*; Šahīdī, pp. *lṭ*, *mw*). Evidently he retired from public life to complete the historical and philological works he had been compiling during his service with Nāder. He died some time between 1172/1759 and 1182/1768 (see Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, p. 294 n. 1).

His three main works are his histories of Nāder; the ornate *Dorra-ye nādera* and the more prosaic *Jahāngošāy-e nāderī*; and *Sanglāk*, a Persian guide to the Turkish (i.e. Čaġatāy) language. There is also the *Mabāni 'l-loġa*, a Turkish grammar which is properly a part of his *Sanglāk*, and the *Monša'āt-e Mahdī*, a miscellany of his chancellery compositions. His *Dorra-ye nādera* was written in the abstruse and florid style popularized by the Il-khanid historian Waṣṣāf, replete with rhymed prose and Arabic quotations. The *Jahāngošāy*, though simpler in style, is somewhat distorted by an expedient eulogy and whitewashing of his patron. Nevertheless, the latter work was widely admired and imitated by younger historians such as Mīrzā Šādeq Nāmī (*Tārīk-egṭīgošā*). It was translated (not quite accurately) into French by Sir William Jones (*Histoire de Nader Shah, traduite du Persan par ordre de sa Majesté le Roi de Dennemark*, London, 1770); this translation was itself later translated into German and Georgian.

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See also L. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, London, 1968, pp. 292-96.

Search terms:

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