



BĀMDĀD, MAHDĪ

BĀMDĀD, MAHDĪ (d. 1352 Š./1973), the son of Rafī' Ḳorāsānī (titled Rafī'-al-Mamālek). Bāmdād made a career in the civil service and was one of the assistants to the prime minister in the cabinet of Ḥakīm-al-Molk from Ābān to Bahman, 1324 Š./October, 1945-February, 1946, but is best known as the author of *Šarḥ-e ḥāl-e rejāl-e Īrān dar qorūn-e 12 wa 13 wa 14 hejrī* (Biographies of [notable] personages of Iran in the 12th, 13th, and 14th/18th, 19th, and 20th centuries), Tehran, 6 vols., 1347-51 Š./1968-72 (see below). His only other published work is the *Ātār-e tāriḳī-e Kalāt o Saraḳs* (Historical monuments of Kalāt and Saraḳs), a lecture delivered on 2 Ābān 1333 Š./24 October 1954 to the [Anjoman-e Ātār-e Mellī-e Īrān](#) and published that year by the society (publication no. 30) in Tehran and again in 1344 Š./1965. In the introduction to that work, Bāmdād explains that in 1332 Š./1953, he spent several months traveling in eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan for the purpose of observing communities in those areas and comparing toponyms that appear in classical geographies and the *Šāh-nāma* with their modern forms. During his travels in the north of Khorasan, he examined the archeological remains of Kalāt and Saraḳs and made notes on them. According to the introduction to his *Rejāl*, Bāmdād also wrote *Ḳāṭerāt-e man* (My memoirs), *Čehel sāl kārmand e dawlat* (Forty years as a civil servant), and *Sīāḥat-e 23 mamlakat yā safar-nāma-ye Orūpā wa Efrīqā* (Travels to twenty-three countries or a travelogue of Europe and Africa), but these works were never published.

Bāmdād's *Rejāl*, originally planned to cover ten volumes, was published with



many illustrations during the years 1347-51 Š./1968-72 in Tehran, volumes five and six being independent supplements to the previous four. The work is based on a variety of sources; however, not all sources available to him were exhausted nor was the information found in the ones he did consult critically examined. Among the principal sources for many of the biographies of the statesmen, politicians, litterateurs, and cultural and religious figures found in the work are Ma'sūm-'Alīšāh's *Ṭarāyeq al-ḥaqāyeq*, Ḥasan Fasā'ī's *Fārs-nāma-ye nāṣerī*, Modarres's *Rayḥānat al-adab*, E'temād al-Salṭana's *Rūz-nāma-ye kāṭerāt* (his main source of information) and *al-Ma'āter wa'l-āṭār*, Sepehr's *Nāseḵ al-tawārīḵ*, *Nāma-ye dānešvarān*, Mo'allem Ḥabībābādī's *Makārem al-āṭār*, and the newspapers *Šaraf* and *Šarāfat*. He also used works by European authors, particularly E. G. Browne, G. N. Curzon, and Count de Gobineau.

Though Bāmdād's work is the most complete biographical survey of the last two and a half centuries currently available, nevertheless it suffers from serious omissions, both as regards certain periods and certain social groups. The *Rejāl* does not include figures from the Nāder Shah and Zand periods and relatively few from the Qajar period outside of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's reign. The chief reason for these omissions is that Bāmdād's principal source, the *Rūz-nāma-yekāṭerāt*, is the diary of Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan E'temād-al-Salṭana, the director of government publications under Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah, which covers only the years 1292-1313/1875-96. The contents of *Rejāl* have to some extent been skewed by its author's exaggerated reliance on the *Rūz-nāma*: he sometimes treats figures outside of the realms of government, letters, and learning as well as tangential issues merely because they are mentioned in the diary for one reason or another (e.g., Esmā'īl Khan Jalāyer [VI, p. 41], Moḥammad-Taqī [VI, p. 21], Akbar Mīrzā [VI, p. 44], 'Alī-Akbar Šowharī [V, p. 159], and Moḥammadqolī Khan [V, p. 257]), while the biography of an important figure like Moḥammad Moṣaddeq is missing. Social groups, such as women, scholars, poets, and mystics of the period apparently held little interest for Bāmdād. His work is devoted to men (*rejāl*), and such important women as Qorrat-al-'Ayn (I, p. 204), Faḵr-al-Dawla (III, p. 199), and Amīna Aqdas (III, p. 317) are only marginally mentioned, while many others, such as [Parvīn E'tešāmī](#) and Qamr-al-Molūk Wazīrī, were completely ignored. Among male authors and poets the biography of Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan Ṭabīb is treated in one page (VI, p. 8), without mentioning his works, and in the biography of Mīrzā Moḥammad-'Alī Naqīb-al-Mamālek there is no reference to his *Amīr Arslān Rūmī* (q.v.), the most widely read Persian story of the last part of the Qajar period. Most men of learning are not mentioned at all, only a few



receive brief notices, e.g., Forṣat Šīrāzī, Moḥammad Qazvīnī, ‘Abbās Eqbāl Āštīānī (whose works Bāmdād made liberal use of without quoting his source, cf. Eqbāl’s biography of Yaḥyā Khan Mošīr-al-Dawla in *Yādgār* 1/3 with *Rejāl* IV, p. 441), and Moḥammad Mo‘īn (III, p. 237, IV, pp. 15, 203, V, p. 131). Bāmdād demonstrates that he had no ear or liking for poetry (VI, p. 12) by quoting fourteen lines of insipid poetry by Moḥammad-Nabī Khan (V, pp. 271-72) and six pages of the poetry of Ḥājj Sayyed Naṣr-Allāh Taḡawī (III, p. 118), while not a single line from the poetry of the poet laureate Maḥmūd Khan is quoted in his biography (V, p. 282).

Though Bāmdād’s professed aim was to “present figures in a realistic manner” (I, p. 1) his work is far from being objective and to the point. He frequently criticizes the political figures he writes about but his criticism is rarely concerned with their roles in society, most often it is directed at their moral acts and intentions and their private lives (e.g., their addiction to opium, drink, or gambling). He strongly disliked demagogues and “religious charlatans” and opposed the clerical class and reciters of passions (*rawza-kvān*; V, p. 297, VI, pp. 18, 20). His lack of complete objectivity is also seen in such generalizations as “since he was a poet and a man of this country, he used everything” (V, p. 141) or “all in all, Īraj Mīrzā’s character was like that of the rest of the poets of his era” (I, p. 175), and occasionally falls prey to emotionalism, e.g., on the *ṣandūq-e ‘adālat* (II, p. 440), and in the biography of Mīrzā Āqā Khan Nūrī (IV, pp. 370f.), where (pp. 371-72) he quotes two pages on cholera from the travelogue of Count de Gobineau. Occasionally his criticism seems to have been partially prompted by personal vendettas, as in the case of Badī‘-al-Zamān Forūzānfar (V, p. 37) and ‘Alī-Akbar Bāṣer-al-Salṭana (V, p. 161).

Bāmdād saw the hand of non-Iranians (especially the Russians and the British) behind events in Iran. He states that most of the prime ministers and viziers of the Qajar and Constitutional periods came to power with the help of foreign embassies (IV, p. 368), that all of Iran’s leaders were cut from the same cloth (V, p. 128), that one could not find a court physician who was not in league with or the agent of foreigners (III, p. 278), that the factions and religions found in Iran were all created by outsiders (III, p. 18) and, finally, that the bombardment of the Majles in 1326/1908 by Moḥammad-‘Alī Shah was only a facade (III, p. 6) and that after his fall a governing body was formed by “those invisible hands” (*az mā behtarān*) for Iranians (VI, p. 293).

A major shortcoming of *Rejāl* is its lack of proportion in the length of the biographies. Four pages are devoted to the life of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah’s illiterate



saddle master (III, p. 415) and even more to that of a fugitive thief (III, p. 163), while such significant figures in the political and the cultural history of Iran as *Ākūnd Mollā Moḥammad-Kāẓem Qorāsānī* (I, p. 4), Sayyed Kāẓem Raštī (III, p. 137), and Sayyed Moḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī (III, p. 279), were treated in less than a page or even just a few lines. Bāmdād's exaggerated reliance on E'temād-al-Salṭana's *Rūz-nāma-ye kāṭerāt* caused him to include in the *Rejāl* many details of little or no significance or relevance that E'temād-al-Salṭana had jotted down as personal notes about courtiers and his acquaintances, thus sometimes resulting in lengthy, tedious, and even incoherent articles (e.g., III, pp. 20ff., IV, pp. 246ff.).

Negligence in giving the date of birth and often even the date of death of his contemporaries (e.g., Moḥammad-'Alī Khan Dargāhī [II, p. 242], Naẓar-'Alī Khan Lor [VI, p. 283], 'Alī-Akbar Dāvar [II, p. 427], and 'Alī Sohaylī [II, p. 380]) and lack of or incomplete references to his sources, whether quoted or not (e.g., V, p. 244), somewhat detract from the usefulness of the work; moreover occasional misinformation and errors (e.g., See baḳtīārī, 'alīqolī khan sardār as'ad) requires it to be used with great caution. Numerous technical shortcomings bespeak a rushed publication that left no time for the author to reread and edit his work, e.g., repetition of biographies in III, p. 125 and V, p. 178, and in IV, p. 15 and VI, p. 282; flawed sentences, e.g., I, p. 3; ambiguous wording (e.g., in V, p. 178, it is unclear whether Mīrzā Qāsem Khan was the minister of construction or his father Mīrzā Ḥasan Khan or Mīrzā Asad-Allāh Khan; see also I, p. 3), and lapses in the recording of dates (e.g., "altogether 'Abd-al-Bahā's travels were from Ramaẓān, 1327 [. . .] to Moḥarram, 1332 [. . .] two years, three months, and some odd days" (II, pp. 202)).

The biographies are listed by first names, e.g., the biography of Mīrzā Āqā Khan Nūrī appears under Naṣr-Allāh. The indexes at the end of each volume are unfortunately incomplete.

Despite these numerous shortcomings, Bāmdād's work is important as a pioneering effort for compiling a national biography of Iran and especially for the photographs that it contains (esp. vols. V and VI).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

For a critical review of the *Rejāl* see Ḥ. Maḥbūbī Ardakānī, *Rāh-nāma-ye ketāb* 12/7-8, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 538-43; 13/10-12, 1349 Š./1971. pp. 771-78.

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