



BĀYSONĠOR, ĠĪĀṬ-AL-DĪN

BĀYSONĠOR, ĠĪĀṬ-AL-DĪN B. ŠĀHROḶ B. TĪMŪR (799-837/1397-1433), also called Sultan Bāysonġor Bahādor Khan, Timurid prince who played an important role as a statesman and a patron of art and architecture and was himself a first-class calligrapher. His title (*laqab*) is sometimes given as Mo'ezz-al-Dīn (Nezām-al-Dīn Šāmī, ed. Tauer, 1956, p. 134; Zaryāb, p. 79). Instead of Bāysonġor or Bāysonqor, other vocalizations such as Baysunqar (Barthold, p. 58) are possible but improbable (Doerfer, pp. 272-77), all the more so in view of the unambiguous Greek spelling Soggoúr (Moravcsik, pp. 283f.). He was born on 21 Du'l-ḥejja 799/16 September 1397 (Faṣīḥ, p. 118) at Herat and died at the age of thirty-seven lunar years on 7 Jomādā 1837/20 December 1433 in the Bāġ-e Safīd palace near Herat (*Ḥabīb al-sīar* [Tehran] III, p. 623; *Bābornāma*, tr. Bacqué-Grammont, 1985; Togan, in *ĪA* II, p. 430, with correction of the date; other dates given in some sources are less probable). His mother was Gowharšād Begom, the most important and distinguished of ŠāhroḶ's wives (Nezām-al-Dīn Šāmī, loc. cit.).

Bāysonġor was an outstanding representative of Islamic culture of the Turco-Iranian type, whose distinctiveness and worth have only in recent decades received adequate appreciation in modern scholarship. Nöldeke (p. 205), who knew the facts of Bāysonġor's career, was uncertain about his role in the cultural life of his time. In both contemporary and modern historical works, Bāysonġor is overshadowed by his elder brother Oloġ Beg (796-853/1393-1449). The historian Ja'farī praised him only as a courageous and generous prince (Zaryāb, p. 79). In fact Bāysonġor was an abler statesman than Oloġ Beg, and



his cultural achievements, though in different fields, by no means fell short of the latter's. In the opinion of Browne (*Lit. Hist. Persia* III, p. 385), Bāysonġor was "perhaps the most talented" of Šāhroġ's sons. The reasons why he was so long underrated are obvious enough. He never held a post so high as Oloġ Beg's viceroyalty at Samarqand, but served instead as his father's right-hand man at Herat. Second, no modern scholar has made a special study of his achievements, whereas Oloġ Beg's astronomical tables and observatory at Samarqand had been known to European scientists from Newton in the 17th century onward and his career had been the subject of a detailed monograph by Barthold (Eng. tr., 1955). Juster appreciation of Bāysonġor's significance has been made possible by the progress of art historiography in very recent years. In an important article (*ĪA* II, pp. 428-30) Togan has drawn attention to the neglect of Bāysonġor and helped arouse interest in him, particularly among art historians.

Bāysonġor played a big part in the administration of the Timurid empire. He was still a child when Tīmūr died in 807/1405. He was appointed governor-general (*wālī*) of Ṭūs, Nišāpūr, and Astarābād when he was seventeen years old, and according to Faṣīḥ (p. 175) *amīr-e dīvān* in 819/1416-17. This probably meant head of the high council of state (*dīvān-e 'ālī-e amīrī*), i.e., Šāhroġ's supreme council in Herat (Togan, in *ĪA* I, p. 351; cf. Roemer, 1952, pp. 85, 169, 171, 182). Faṣīḥ mentions several persons who were appointed to this council and some, including himself, who were punished with dismissal from it, and his statements indicate that Bāysonġor was not just a member but the chairman (Faṣīḥ, pp. 170, 196, 198, 207). For a time in and after 824/1421 Bāysonġor was apparently *wālī* of Tabrīz, but he later returned to his previous post. Insofar as the duties of governorship allowed, he preferred not to reside at the provincial headquarters but to stay at Herat with his father, who entrusted him with major responsibilities, including the regency, as early as 817/1414 when Šāhroġ was absent from the capital. Though not formally designated as successor to the throne, he appeared to be the *de facto* crown prince (Togan, in *ĪA* II, p. 429). Only occasionally did he go away on visits to estates in eastern Iran which had been granted to him in fief (*soyūrgāl*), mainly, it seems, in spring for hunting in the Mašhad-Ṭūs district (Faṣīḥ, 1980, pp. 192, 194, 195, 197, 199); but some of these trips may have been tours of inspection undertaken at his father's command, as was the case when he was ordered by a decree dated 15 Šafar 835/23 October 1431 to accompany the amir 'Alā'-al-Dīn 'Alīka Kūkaltāš to a winter camp at Astarābād (*ibid.*, p. 206).



Bāysonḡor fought in campaigns against the most dangerous enemies of the Timurids. He accompanied Šāhroḡ's expeditions against the Turkmen in the northwest in 824/1421 and 832/1429 and against Borāq the Uzbek in the northeast in 830/1427 after the latter had inflicted a defeat on Oloḡ Beg. As soon as Borāq was repulsed, Bāysonḡor returned to Herat, apparently because Oloḡ Beg, who had grounds for fearing displacement by Bāysonḡor, asked his father to send him home.

There must be some truth in the statements that the main reason why Bāysonḡor always went back to Herat was his devotion to his father and mother; but a further reason was probably the city's cultural life, which had indeed been largely created by his parents. Nowhere else could he so well pursue his manifold artistic and intellectual interests. One of these was poetry. Although he is reported to have said that a prince should not personally compose poetry (Faṣīḡ, p. 209), some occasional verses of his are quoted by Dawlatšāh (ed. Browne, pp. 350-51; Togan, in *IA* II, p. 429). He had an excellent knowledge of both Persian and Arabic as well as his Eastern Turkish mother tongue. He corresponded with his brothers Oloḡ Beg at Samarḡand and Ebrāhīm at Shiraz about the Persian poetic art and expressed preference for the works of Amīr Ḳosrow Dehlavī over those of Neẓāmī Ganjavī, which Oloḡ Beg liked best.

The fondness of the Timurids for splendid architecture and fine art can be explained by two considerations: first, the then prevalent tendency of rulers to enhance their prestige by making their courts centers of culture and, second, the legacy of Tīmūr, who had deported architects, artists, craftsmen, scholars, and poets from conquered cities to Central Asia and set them to work in that region, mainly at his capital Samarḡand. He had done so to glorify himself rather than from any personal esthetic inclination. Some of his descendants may have had the same motive (Aubin). At Herat in Šāhroḡ's reign, however, this was not the case. Bāysonḡor must have had a real talent for visual art and music, if not for poetry. He put his abilities to use, notably in the field of calligraphy, as can be seen in a surviving example of his work. He not only patronized eminent exponents of this art, but was himself a master of six different styles of graceful handwriting (Stchoukine, p. 15). The calligraphic decoration of the splendid mosque which his mother Gowharšād caused to be built at Mašhad was drawn by Bāysonḡor with his own hand before being traced on the tiles; his work can still be seen in the strips of glazed tiles on the south *ayvān* bearing white *tolot* script on pale and dark blue backgrounds



with interspersed Kufic passages (Togan, loc. cit.), though some are replacements ordered by Shah ‘Abbās II after the earthquake of 1084/1673. Togan also mentions single tiles with *reqā’* inscriptions which, at the time when he saw them, were in private possession in Turkistan. Uncertainty surrounds the opinion (expressed by A. Alparslan in *EI*², “Khatt, ii”) that the famous Bāysonġor Qur’ān, of which some folios survive, is the work of the prince himself, as its completion date is 837/1433, which was the year of his death.

Baysongor’s contribution to the rise of Herat as a cultural center in the Timurid empire was recognized as long ago as 1912 by F. R. Martin (quoted in Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* III, pp. 395f.), who noted that this prince was not only a great bibliophile but also the sponsor of works of art in a specifically Herati style and of such high quality that few if any of the contemporary princes in Europe could vie with him as a Maecenas. Since Šāhroġ, the reigning monarch, undoubtedly also contributed to the rise of the Herati school, the importance of Bāysonġor’s role is difficult to appraise. Kühnel (in *Survey of Persian Art*, 2nd ed., pp. 1849-53) and Ettinghausen (ibid., pp. 1959-68) acknowledge but do not adequately explain his part, while other scholars such as Stchoukine (pp. 15f.) and above all Gray (1979, passim, and 1986, pp. 843-76) do him full justice.

Another art with which Bāysonġor concerned himself was poetry. He continued the tradition of court poetry, which at that time was no longer limited to panegyric but could also appeal to wider circles. Being an admirer of Amīr Ḳosrow Dehlavī, Bāysonġor not surprisingly planned to collect all his works, but according to Dawlatšāh (ed. Browne, p. 20), these ran to almost half a million verses, and Bāysonġor, after collecting 120,000 with no end in sight, saw that the project was impracticable and gave it up. The predilection for Amīr Ḳosrow shows that Bāysonġor, despite his high intellectual stature, was a child of his time, as it was then that the trend to artificial and unrealistic floridity, adumbrated a century earlier by Amīr Ḳosrow (d. 725/1325), began to become conventional under the name Indian style (*sabk-e hendī*, q.v.). This trend is seen as degenerate by many modern scholars (e.g., Rypka, *Hist. Iran. Lit.*, p. 261; Šafā, p. 914; in a broader context, Yarshater, 1955).

Bāysonġor’s taste, however, extended to the *Šāh-nāma*, and he caused a new recension of Ferdowsī’s work to be made (see bāysonġorj sāh-nāma). Although the preface was usually said to be from Bāysonġor’s own pen, Moḡammad Qazvīnī (apud Rypka, p. 159 n. 77) has shown that this attribution is



unsupported by any evidence and probably incorrect.

Bāysonğor was also a patron of Persian historiography. Although none of the historians who wrote under Tīmūr and the Timurids had the high stature of Rašīd-al-Dīn Fażl-Allāh and Jovaynī in the Mongol period, some have left works of substance. Foremost among them is Ḥāfez-e Abrū (d. 833/1430), whom Bāysonğor did much to encourage. Probably at Šāhroḡ's suggestion, Ḥāfez-e Abrū composed the fourth part or his *Majma' al-tawāriḡ* in the form of a separate book and on its completion in 830/1426-27 dedicated it to Bāysonğor under the title *Zobdat al-tawāriḡ-e bāysonğorī* (Storey-Bregel, p. 346; Ettinghausen, 1955). The book is in two parts, the first a transcript of Neẓām-al-Dīn Šāmī's history of Tīmūr's career, *Zafar-nāma*, the second Ḥāfez-e Abrū's history of Šāhroḡ's reign up to the date of the work's completion.

Book illustration was intimately bound up with manuscript production. Herat became the center of calligraphic art after Bāysonğor's return from a campaign against the Turkmen in 823/1420 bringing with him from Tabrīz the leading master of the *nasta'liq* style, Mawlānā Ja'far Tabrīzī, later also called Ja'far Bāysonğorī, and other experts (Stchoukine, p. 9). Nevertheless, miniature painting continued for some time to be centered at Shiraz, under the patronage of Bāysonğor's brother Ebrāhīm, and then briefly at Isfahan. Eventually, however, Šāhroḡ's success in gathering power into his own hands at Herat and his and Bāysonğor's concern for the arts drew so many artists from all parts of Iran to Herat that other formerly important art centers began to lose prestige and sank to a provincial level, though they still occasionally produced high-class work. The Herati school which thus arose under Šāhroḡ and Bāysonğor functioned as a sort of academy, with a staff of about forty artists and scholars. Here was evolved a new style of book illustration and indeed of book craft as a whole, including calligraphy, illumination, and binding. Although traces of other styles reflecting the provincial origins of the artists are sometimes perceptible, the Herati style has a distinct character of its own. One of its features is the presence of Far Eastern elements, probably introduced as a result of the exchange of embassies with China. Herati artists are known to have been attached to diplomatic missions to and from Peking; one of them, Ġīāṭ-al-Dīn Naqqāš, was picked by Bāysonğor and afterward wrote an account of the journey which is incorporated in Ḥāfez-e Abrū's history (Maitra; Dunlop, pp. 15-19).

The Herati, sometimes called Bāysonğorī, style can be reckoned to have come into existence not later than 828/1425. Among the artists whose names are



known were Mawlānā Jaʿfar Tabrīzī, K̄vāja ʿAlī, Qewām-al-Dīn, Amīr K̄alīl, and Sayyed Aḥmad Tabrīzī. Of the masterpieces only a random selection can be mentioned here. The earliest clearly identifiable items are an illuminated two-volume manuscript of Saʿdī's *Golestān* done by the master Jaʿfar in 830/1426-27 and an anthology done by Moḥammad b. Ḥosām known as Šams-al-Dīn Solṭānī in the same year. Dated the following year is a manuscript of K̄vājū Kermānī's *Homāy o Homāyūn* by the same Solṭānī. A new version of *Kalīla wa Demna* copied by Moḥammad b. Ḥosām and the famous *Šāh-nāma* copied by Jaʿfar Bāysonḡorī are from 833/1429-30. The *Golestān* manuscript, now in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, is one of the greatest masterpieces in the whole range of Persian miniature art.

Gray (1986, pp. 854ff.), in his study of the characteristics of the Herati style, attaches particular importance to the interplay between the portrayed persons evoked by their expressive gestures; this liveliness, he notes, is in marked contrast to the stiffness of the figures in Jalayerid miniatures. The scenes also acquire more depth through the placing of the horizon nearer to the upper edge of the border. Turquoise shades of blue and green are the dominant colors.

Bāysonḡor should not be regarded as the sole sponsor of the Herati school, as Šāhroḡ did much to promote its rise. In Gray's opinion Bāysonḡor was more interested in the production and illustration of historical books than purely poetical manuscripts. In any case he must have exerted a strong and lasting influence, as the Herati school continued to flourish after his death until Šāhroḡ passed away in 850/1447.

Bāysonḡor's early death was due to his dissolute life-style and in particular the excessive consumption of alcohol. His last resting place is in an enclosed graveyard belonging to the *madrassa* which Gowharšād built at Herat. Although the *madrassa* was demolished in 1885, remains of the tombs could still be seen in the 20th century (Togan, in *ĪA* V/1, pp. 11, and no. 13 on plan facing p. 433). It is not known whether the graveyard has suffered further harm with the lapse of time or from the fighting in the early 1980s, which is said to have severely damaged the old quarter of Herat.

While Bāysonḡor's importance in the history of art is no longer open to question, his services to Persian literature await adequate study and



assessment—compare the few remarks in Rypka (pp. 157-58, 281)—despite the work by Dawlatšāh (writing in 892/1487) and E. G. Browne (writing in 1920). He was certainly an important, and perhaps the most important, representative of the Turco-Persian cultural synthesis in central and western Asia in the Timurid period.

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