



EŞFAHĀNI, MOĤAMMAD MA'ŞUM

EŞFAHĀNI, MOĤAMMAD MA'ŞUM (عشفاهانی، محمد ماسوم) b. K̄'āja 'Ali-Šāh (b. ca. 1597, *Isfahan*; d. ca. 1647, *Ganja*), *Safavid* bureaucrat and historian, whose history entitled the *Ḳolāṣat al-siar* chronicles the reign of Shah Ṣafi (r. 1038-52/1629-42).

Life. The exact dates of Moḥammad Ma'şum's birth and death are unknown, but there is evidence to suggest that he was born in the closing years of the 1590s. At about the age of 30, he joined the Safavid court bureaucracy. Prior to this, he had worked as an apprentice scribe with his father, K̄'āja 'Ali-Šāh, also known as K̄'ājagi, himself a bureaucrat in service of the Safavid court in Isfahan (Eşfahāni, p. 311). In 1026/1617, Shah 'Abbās made Moḥammad Ma'şum inspector of the royal camel stable (*şāḥeb-jam'-e šotor-kān*; *eşrāf-e šotorkān*) in Isfahan, a post he held up until Shah 'Abbās' death (Eşfahāni, p. 312; Romaskevich, p. 12). Under the later Safavids, the bureaucratic staff at the royal camel stable were among the shah's personal retainers (*moqarrab al-ḥazra*) and had direct access to him on a daily basis (Mirzā Rafi'ā, fols. 50b-51a, tr., pp. 67-68; Naşiri, p. 70). Moḥammad Ma'şum states that, on several occasions, he had been commissioned directly by Shah 'Abbās to compose poetry (Eşfahāni, p. 312).

Moḥammad Ma'şum came from a family of landed and bureaucratic notables based in Isfahan. They were descendants and relatives of Šāh Ḥosayn Eşfahāni



(d. 929/1523), who worked for nine years as grand vizier under Shah Esmā'il I (Naşrābādi, p. 108). During the reign of Shah 'Abbās, the elder brother of MoĤammad Ma'şum, called Mirzā 'Abd-Allāh, held the posts of vizier of Gaskar (present-day Şawma'a-sarā) in Gilān-e Biapiş between 1020-30/1611-21, tax inspector of Astarābād in 1031/1622, and vizier of Lāhijān during 1033-38/1624-29 (Kuzāni Eşfahāni, pp. 25, 597, 599, 790, 802, 824, 839, 891; Naşrābādi, p. 108). MoĤammad Ma'şum claims that he had managed to land a job in the court bureaucracy thanks to his own talents and not as a result of intervention of his influential family members and relatives in Isfahan. This might be true, but it is known that, in 1031 and 1036/1621-22 and 1626-27, another relative of his called Mirzā Vali Beg Eşfahāni worked as registrar (*taĥwildār*) of the royal camel stable, which can be taken to imply that the influence that MoĤammad Ma'şum's close relatives wielded at the Safavid court had a bearing on the steadiness of his bureaucratic career under Shah 'Abbās (Kuzāni Eşfahāni, pp. 820, 952).

Two years after Shah Şafi's ascent to the throne, MoĤammad Ma'şum was removed from his post as inspector of the royal camel stable. Shah Şafi spent the first two years of his reign in Qazvin, compelling all court retainers, including MoĤammad Ma'şum, to take up residence in Qazvin unaccompanied by their families. After two years of unemployment, MoĤammad Ma'şum was appointed in 1040/1631 as vizier of Qarābāġ, where he worked as scribe/fiscal supervisor at the court of the Safavid governor of Ganja, Mortazā-qoli Khan Ziādli Qājār (Eşfahāni, pp. 312-15). MoĤammad Ma'şum died in Ganja during the early years of the reign of Shah 'Abbās II (1052-77/1642-66; Naşrābādi, p. 109; Romaskevich, p. 12).

From a young age MoĤammad Ma'şum was an avid reader of major chronicles and narrative sources in Persian and Arabic. He tells us that, prior to his employment at the Safavid court, he had studied the works of such prominent historians as Ṭabari, Abu'l-Faraj 'Abd-al-Raĥmān b. 'Ali, also known as Ebn al-Jawzi, 'Aṭā Malek Jovayni, Waşşāf Şirāzi, Şaraf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, Mirķ'ānd, K'āndamir, and Aĥmad Tatawi (Eşfahāni, p. 224). Elsewhere, he mentions Eskandar Beg Monşi Torkamān's *Tāriķ-e 'ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi* and Abu'l-Fazl 'Allāmi's *Akbar-nāma (Ā'in-e akbari)* as two sources of inspiration, after which he tried to model his work (Eşfahāni, p. 29). MoĤammad Ma'şum's easy access to the Safavid court during the early years of the reign of Shah Şafi, on the one hand, and his participation in military campaigns in western and northwestern Iran in 1043/1633, 1045/1635, and 1048/1639, on the other,



helped him base the narrative spine of his chronicle on personal observations (Eşfahāni, pp. 28, 169, 208, 223, 228). He admits that, after his transfer to Ganja in 1045/1635, he lost the privilege of living among the shah's retainers at the Safavid court in Isfahan, a setback that forced him to finish his chronicle sooner than he had originally planned (Eşfahāni, p. 315). During his years at the Safavid court, Moḥammad Ma'şum was allowed to use a number of the volumes kept in the royal library (*każāna-ye 'āmera*) for the purpose of his chronicle (Eşfahāni, pp. 286-87).

Work. Moḥammad Ma'şum's chronicle, the *Ḳolāşat al-siar*, had long been assumed to be a sequel (*zayl*) of the *Tāriḳ-e 'ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi*. In 1852, Boris A. Dorn described it as being penned by Eskandar Beg Monşi Torkmān and dedicated to Mortazā-qoli Khan Ziādlu Qājār "under whose patronage Eskandar Monşi composed this work" (Dorn, p. 291). W. H. Morley too claimed that Eskandar Beg had authored the *Ḳolāşat al-siar* as a "continuation" of his chronicle of the reign of Shah 'Abbās (Morley, p. 134). Similarly, a manuscript of Moḥammad Ma'şum's chronicle in Leiden University library is catalogued as "a continuation of the *'Ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi* composed by Iskandar Monschi" (De Goeje et al., V, p. 230). It was Joseph Aumer who first noticed that the *Ḳolāşat al-siar* is in fact an independent account of the reign of Shah Şafi from the pen of Moḥammad Ma'şum Eşfahāni (Aumer, pp. 80-81). Less than two decades later, Franz Teufel also concluded that the *Ḳolāşat al-siar* has nothing to do with Eskandar Beg's history of the reign of Shah 'Abbās (Teufel, p. 92). In 1939, based on the autobiographical section of the *Ḳolāşat al-siar*, Alexander A. Romaskevich came to the conclusion that it is in fact an independent account of the reign of Shah Şafi by Moḥammad Ma'şum Eşfahāni (Romaskevich, pp. 11-13; Minorsky, p. 540; Bregel and Storey, II, p. 886). In addition to the manuscripts of the *Ḳolāşat al-siar* in Munich and St. Petersburg, two late 17th-century manuscripts are preserved in the Malek Library in Tehran and the *Āstān-e Qods-e Rażawi* Library in Mashhad (Darāyati, IV, p. 955; Eşfahāni, Ger. tr., pp. xxxvii-xxxix).

The *Ḳolāşat al-siar* can be considered as the official history of the reign of Shah Şafi. Moḥammad Ma'şum states (p. 319) that he had been commissioned by Shah Şafi to compose his history. It was in the winter of 1048/1639 in the midst of military campaign against the Ottomans in Kurdistan and Armenia that some of his friends and colleagues at the Safavid court told Shah Şafi about Moḥammad Ma'şum's decision to write a history in the name of the Safavid monarch (Eşfahāni, pp. 28, 200-3). Moḥammad Ma'şum had been



allowed to borrow books from the royal library for the purpose of preparing an early draft of his universal history that covered the history of the universe from its creation up until the advent of Tamerlane (Eşfahāni, p. 327). Shortly thereafter, Shah Şafi read this first part of the chronicle and ordered him to focus his narrative solely on his own reign and to refrain from the misplaced floridity of prose style. According to MoĤammad Ma'şum, the Safavid monarch recommended that he quit plagiarizing (*taşnif*) the works of other historians for the purpose of writing a universal history, emphasizing the importance of originality in authorship (*ta'lif*). It was based on Shah Şafi's recommendations that MoĤammad Ma'şum decided to prioritize the third chapter (*maqşad-e sevvom*) of his chronicle, which deals with the reign of Shah Şafi (Eşfahāni, pp. 28, 327). There are scattered references in the *Ķolāşat al-siar* to a second chapter (*maqşad-e dovvom*), suggesting that MoĤammad Ma'şum had originally planned to cover the history of the reign of Shah 'Abbās in the final draft of his chronicle (Eşfahāni, pp. 30, 33). In 1052/1642, he finished his account of the first ten years of the reign of Shah Şafi. Shortly after Shah 'Abbās II's ascent to the throne, MoĤammad Ma'şum kept working on his chronicle and extended the temporal scope of his narrative to include the remaining three years of the reign of Shah Şafi (Eşfahāni, p. 327). He then dedicated the final version of his chronicle to Mortazā-qoli Khan Ziādlu Qājār.

In the *Ķolāşat al-siar*, MoĤammad Ma'şum follows an annalistic line of historiographical representation. However, in the uncritically edited version of the chronicle published in Tehran in 1989, the events given under each year extend into the next year, making it almost impossible for the reader to determine the exact dates of the developments that shaped the reign of Shah Şafi. Interestingly, when discussing the merits and shortcomings of Eskandar Beg's chronicle, MoĤammad Ma'şum criticizes him for embedding his narrative in an annalistic framework (Eşfahāni, p. 29). Chronological lapses are few and far between in MoĤammad Ma'şum's account of the opening years of the reign of Shah Şafi, wherein he chronicles the bloody purges at the court as well as the way in which the Safavid regime's hold on provincial administration began to unravel immediately after Shah 'Abbās' death. Given MoĤammad Ma'şum's presence at the Safavid court in Qazvin during 1038-41/1629-32, his account of the execution and blinding of a number of high-ranking bureaucrats and military chiefs as well as more than fifteen Safavid princes and princesses together with their parents, in 1041/1631-32, is chronologically more precise than the coverage of the same events in the histories of Eskandar Beg, MoĤammad-Yusef Vāleh Qazvini, and MoĤammad-



Taĥer Vaĥid Eşfahāni (Eskandar Beg, pp. 86, 97-101, 141; Vāleh Qazvini, pp. 64, 104-09, 115-16; Vaĥid Qazvini, pp. 222, 239-41, 246-47, 248, 250, 260-61).

Border clashes with the Uzbeks in Khorasan during the early years of Shah Şafi's reign have received the lion's share of attention in Moĥammad Ma'şum's narrative. *Sub anno* 1038/1629, he chronicles the outbreak of wars with the Uzbeks and the Khanate of Urganj, which resulted in the fall of [Abivard](#) and [Nesā](#), two major fortress towns in northern Khorasan, to the hands of the Uzbeks. Uzbek raids against the rural and nomadic settlements to the north of [Herat](#) in the autumn of 1629 are also chronicled (Eşfahāni, pp. 48, 57-60, 61-63).

When dealing with Shah Şafi's military campaigns against the Ottomans in the provinces of Arabian Iraq, Kurdistan, and [Yerevan](#) (also [Çokur-e sa'd](#)), Moĥammad Ma'şum pays special attention to Shah Şafi's alliance with the Ardalān ruler of Şahrazur, Aĥmad Khan. Despite fierce opposition on the part of his pro-Ottoman relatives in Kurdistan, Aĥmad Khan Ardalān decided to assist the Safavids in their fight against the Ottomans and, as it appears from Moĥammad Ma'şum's chronicle, his troops mounted several successful raids against the Ottoman garrison in Mosul (Eşfahāni, pp. 70-71, 74, 75, 97). Yet, shortly after the Battle of Marivān, which was fought in Ramazān-Şawwāl 1039/April-June 1630 between Shah Şafi and the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623-40) and ended with the defeat of the Safavids, Aĥmad Khan Ardalān's brother, Ma'mun Khan, was arrested and imprisoned in the Eştakr Castle in Fars on account of his alleged pro-Ottoman leanings (Eşfahāni, p. 97). In Moĥarram 1046/June 1636, Shah Şafi removed Aĥmad Khan from his post as hereditary governor of Şahrazur and made another Ardalān military chief called Solaymān Khan governor of the same city (Eşfahāni, p. 235).

Apart from his own observations, in some cases Moĥammad Ma'şum relies on the testimonies of his contemporaries. For example, when dealing with the life and times of [Darviş Rezā Afşār](#), an alleged claimant to [Mahdship](#) in Qazvin, who was arrested and executed in Zu'l-ĥejja 1040/July 1631, Moĥammad Ma'şum confirms his use of eyewitness accounts and details supplied by several sources, including the famous vizier of Māzandarān, Sāru Taqi Eşfahāni, who at one point was a devotee of Darviş Rezā (Eşfahāni, pp. 117-21). There are also references in the *Ķolāşat al-siar* to the news of the outbreak of flood, plague, and earthquake in Tabriz, Qazvin, Soltāniya, [Ķalkāl](#), [Gilan](#), Isfahan, [Karbala](#), and [Baghdad](#) in Şawwāl 1043/April 1634, the summer of 1044/1634, Zu'l-qa'da 1045/May-June 1636, Moĥarram 1046/June-July 1636,



Zu'l-qa'da 1046/April-May 1637, and Zu'l-qa'da 1050/February 1641 (Eşfahāni, pp. 184, 195, 233, 234-35, 247, 286). MoĤammad Ma'şum's chronicle sheds light on the formative years of the question of **Kandahar** under Shah Şafi. According to MoĤammad Ma'şum, in Ramazān 1047/January-February 1638, the Safavid governor of Kandahar, 'Ali-Mardān Khan, joined forces with the Mughals and within a few months managed to bring the province out of the effective control of the Safavids (Eşfahāni, pp. 251, 254-55). In Rajab 1051/October-November 1641, MoĤammad-Ma'şum points out, the Safavid military chiefs in Isfahan and Khorasan mobilized their troops for a military campaign against 'Ali Mardān Khan and his Mughal allies, but it came to naught (Eşfahāni, p. 293).

MoĤammad Ma'şum's chronicle closes with a history of the Ziādli (also Ziādoġli) clan of the Qajars from the time of their emigration from eastern Anatolia to Qarabagh in the latter part of the 15th century up until the reign of Shah 'Abbās (Eşfahāni, 317-25). In 1978, Gerhard Rettelbach published a German translation of the *Ķolāşat al-siar* in Munich.

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