



FALSAFĪ, NAṢR-ALLĀH II. ZENDAGĀNĪ-E ŠĀH 'ABBĀS-E AWWAL.

ii. ZENDĀGĀNĪ-E ŠĀH 'ABBĀS-E AWWAL

Naṣr-Allāh Falsafī's magnum opus, the *Zendagānī-e Šāh 'Abbās-e Awwal*, is a study of the reign of Shah 'Abbās the Great in five volumes, totalling 2102 pages with 158 illustrations of Safavid, Ottoman, Mughal, and Indian rulers; Shah 'Abbās' generals; and certain historical buildings (2nd ed., Tehran, 1332-45 Š./1953-66). The book, compiled on sound historiographical principles and utilizing the earliest Persian and European sources, is, to this day, one of the most important studies of the Safavid monarch's life and time.

Falsafī explained his goal and methods in the preface to the first volume of his work. His aim was to investigate the life of Shah 'Abbās in all its aspects—his psychological, physical, moral, and behavioral characteristics as well as the political, military, and social events of the period; the shah's foreign and domestic policies; his treatment of native subjects and foreigners; and assessments of the shah from many perspectives. Falsafī also sought to make a comprehensive survey of all available source material and culled material from contemporary Persian writings, accounts by foreign visitors and travelers, exchanges of correspondence between kings, and reports from ambassadors to their governments. All in all, he utilized some 251 Persian



and Turkish sources and 133 sources in European languages. Finally, Falsafī employed his considerable literary talent in organizing this material and writing about it in a fluent, simple, and attractive prose style.

Volume I covered two main topics: (1) the historical background and description of major events from the founding of the Safavid dynasty by Shah Esmā‘il I in 907/1501 through the troubled reign of ‘Abbās’s father, Shah Moḥammad Ḳodā-banda (985-996/1577-1587) and (2) the formative years of ‘Abbās’s life, from his birth to his coronation, during which the prince witnessed the revolt of the Qezelbāš, the murder of his brother Ḥamza Mīrzā and of his mother Mahd[-e] ‘Olyā, and the occupation of northwest districts of Persia by the Ottomans and of the eastern parts by the Uzbeks, prior to his ascension to the throne at the age of eighteen in 996/1588. The second and third volumes were devoted to the subject of Shah ‘Abbās’s personality. They delineated the monarch’s physical and moral characteristics, his education, his passion for the acquisition of art and science, his interest in astrology and the casting of horoscopes, his taste in entertainment (fondness for women and wine and dislike of narcotics and tobacco), and his interaction with people. They also dealt with his interest in religion, his treatment of the *‘olamā* and non-Muslims, his domestic policy, his administration of justice, and his collection of revenue from his assets and industrial factories. The remaining volumes, IV and V, described the court of Shah ‘Abbās, the reception of ambassadors and treatment of foreigners, and the nature of foreign relations with the Ottoman Empire, India, the Uzbeks, Portugal, Spain, Russia, Britain, Holland, Germany, and Tuscany.

In Falsafī’s interpretation, Shah ‘Abbās was an enigmatic man with many contradictory traits. He was a sagacious, intelligent, brave king and a statesman; at the same time he was a ruthless despot suspicious of everyone around him. He was both merciful and merciless, generous and stingy, grateful and ungrateful, tyrannical and benevolent (I, p. *yh*).

Falsafī’s work is not without its flaws. Although he asserts, for example, that there is no statement of fact in the book without at least one supporting historical source (II, p. 316), in many cases the cited reference is simply “in most books of history,” “in some histories,” “in Ottoman histories,” or “a writer”; in some cases the source quoted lacks a page number or a statement made without mentioning any source at all, thereby subjecting the diligent researcher who wishes to follow up on such statements to uncertainty and difficulty. On the whole, however, the book is a mine of useful information



and constitutes a major landmark in the realm of Safavid historiography.