



HISTORIOGRAPHY VI. SAFAVID PERIOD

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Safavid historiography, although developing unique features of its own, had its origins in the eastern Timurid tradition that was centered in Herat (Aubin, p. 248). Many, if not most, Safavid historians praised earlier Timurid histories as works worthy of emulation. For example, Ebrā-him Amini, author of *Foṭuḥāt-e šāhi*, the earliest Safavid history (comp. 1531), mentions Šaraf-al-Din 'Ali Yazdi's *Ẓafar-nāma* (comp. 831/1427-28) in his preface, as does Eskandar Beg Torkamān, author of the *Ālamārā-ye 'ab-bāsi* (q.v.). Other Safavid writers use Timurid histories as models, both in terms of content and structure. A secondary influence on Safavid historians is the western Turkman historiographical tradition. Safavid writers narrated earlier events in western Persia, based on sources such as Abu Bakr Ṭehrāni's *Ketāb-e Diārbakriya* and Fażl-Allāh Kōnġi Eşfahāni's *Ālamārā-ye amini* on the history of the Āq Qoyunlu (Woods, p. 223). In this way, the two historiographical strands of the Timurids in the east and the Turkmans in the west came together in the hands of Safavid historians. Despite these antecedents, as the dynasty solidified its rule, Safavid historiography developed its own distinctive features.

In 1519-20, Šadr-al-Din Ebrāhim Amini started writing the first history after



the establishment of the Safavid state. His book, *Fotuḥāt-e šāhi*, is a general history with sections on the Imams, the Safavid Sufi order, and the career of Shah Esmā'il I (q.v.). Amini, who lived in Herat, first served as *ṣadr* under the Timurids Sultan Ḥosayn Bayqarā and Moẓaffar Ḥosayn Mirz'ā. Subsequent to a period of imprisonment following the Uzbek takeover of Khorasan, Amini met Shah Esmā'il, who commissioned the *Fotuḥāt-e šāhi*. Although a detailed study of this text and its sources has not yet been undertaken, Amini appears to have relied on the hagiographical *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā* (comp. 1334) by Ebn Bazzāz (q.v.) for his section on the Safavid shaikhs.

At approximately the same time that Amini was writing his chronicle, his colleague Ġiāṭ-al-Din K̲vāndamir composed the *Ḥabib al-siar*, which he completed a few months after the death of Shah Esmā'il in 1524. The book is dedicated to Karim-al-Din K̲vāja Ḥabib-Allāh Sāvaji, whom Shah Esmā'il had appointed vizier of Herat after capturing the city from the Uzbeks. K̲vāndamir was the maternal grandson of Mirk̲vānd (1433-98), the celebrated late Timurid historian who enjoyed the patronage of the Timurid vizier, 'Ali-Šir Navā'i. K̲vāndamir modeled his *Ḥabib al-siar* largely on his grandfather's *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, the last volume of which he himself had written, thereby historiographically bridging the Timurid and Safavid dynasties. For his section on the Safavids, K̲vānd-amir, like Amini, relied mostly on the *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā*. Together, Amini and K̲vāndamir form the first generation of Safavid historians.

It was not until after Shah Esmā'il's death, however, that Safavid historiography truly began to flourish. No fewer than six major histories, including Qāẓi Aḥmad Ġaffāri's *Nosaḳ-e jahānārā* (972/1564-5) and 'Abdi Beg Shirāzi's (1525-80) *Takmelat al-akbār* (comp. 1570) were composed during the combined reigns of Ṭahmāsb (1524-76) and Esmā'il II (1576-77). This second generation of historians continued to develop the historiographical patterns and styles which were established by Amini and K̲vāndamir and which later came to characterize Safavid historiography. Among this group was Amir Maḥmud, son of K̲vāndamir, who considered his work, completed in 1550, a continuation (*ḍayl*) of his father's *Ḥabib al-siar*. At the end of Esmā'il II's reign, in 1577, a Qezelbāš *qorči*, Ḥasan Beg Rumlu (b. 938/1531-32), completed his *Aḥsan al-tawāriḳ* (qq.v.), an important 12-volume history, of which only two volumes have survived, which became a source that later Safavid historians often cite. With the exception of Amir Maḥmud, who wrote in Herat, all of the second-generation Safavid historians composed their works in the capital city



of Qazvin. Shah Ṭahmāsb himself wrote his memoirs in about 1561-62; unlike his Mughal counterparts, he was the only Safavid monarch to do so.

Esmā'il II's successor, Moḥammad Ḳodā-banda (r. 1578-87), does not seem to have officially commissioned any historical works, so the historians of Shah 'Abbās (r. 1588-1629) started writing following a ten-year historiographical lapse. This point was noted by Qāzi Aḥmad Qomi (b. 1546) who, lacking a patron, took it upon himself to write the *Ḳolāṣatal-tawāriḳ* (comp. 1591), one of the first works produced during 'Abbās's reign. When 'Abbās I took over the Safavid throne, he faced a chaotic and unstable situation, where his greatest challenge was recovering his own empire from the various Qezelbāš factions that had enjoyed increasing power during the preceding decade. As he gradually consolidated his rule, historical writing diversified further. Towards the end of Shah 'Abbās's life, Qāzi Aḥmad's student, Eskandar Beg Torkamān (1560-1632), completed one of the best known works of the Safavid era, the *'Ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi* (comp. 1629). Both the *Ḳolāṣat al-tawāriḳ* and the *'Ālamārā* contain many elements that had by then become standard in Safavid chronicles, including the Safavid genealogy, tracing the dynasty back to Imam Musā al-Kāẓem (745-99), the seventh Imam of the Twelver Shi'ites, and accounts of the dynasties origins as a Sufi order in Ardabil. At the same time, poets such as Qadri wrote the versified works *Jang-nāma-ye Kešm* and the *Jarun-nāma* about the expulsion of the Portuguese from Qešm and Hormoz islands (Storey, I, p. 309; Šafā, *Adabiyāt* V, pp. 579-81); and historians composed narratives devoted to individual battles, such as Siāqi Neẓām's (1551-1602) *Fotuḥāt-e homāyun*, which is devoted to the 1598 campaign of Shah 'Abbās in Khorasan. Finally, Jalāl al-Din Monajjem Yazdi, the first Safavid court astrologer to write a history, completed his *Tāriḳ-e 'abbāsi* in about 1611.

Safavid historiography continued to develop after Shah 'Abbās. The impact of *'Ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi* cannot be overemphasized here, for many later historians such as Waliqoli Šāmlu, author of *Qeṣaṣ al-ḳāqāni*, used this work as a model. Under Shah Šafi, Eskandar Beg himself started a continuation (*ḍayl*) of his *'Ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi*, which was finished by another author, while Mirzā Beg Jonābadi's *Rawẓat al-Šafawiya* continued the older and ornate style of the early Herat histories. At the same time, other chroniclers chose simpler writing styles. Moḥammad-Ma'sum b. Ḳvājagi Ešfahāni, for instance, appears to have deliberately rejected Eskandar Beg's mode of writing, as he mentions in the preface to his *Ḳolāṣāt al-siar* (comp. 1642; Moḥammad-Ma'sum, p. 29). Jalāl al-Din Monajjem Yazdi's son, Mollā Kamāl, continued in his father's



historiographical footsteps and wrote his *Zobdat al-tawāriḳ* in 1652 (Monzawī, *Nosk̄ahā* VI, p. 4173).

Following the comparatively sparse historical output during the time of ‘Abbās II (r. 1642-66)—during which time, nevertheless, Moḥammad-Ṭāher Waḥid Qazvini composed his florid *‘Abbās-nāma*—Safavid historiography particularly flourished under the rule of Shah Solaymān (r. 1666-94). Interestingly, none of these works narrates the reign of Solaymān himself. A brief sampling of historical works reflects the diversity of this era: the anonymous *Šāhanšāh-nāma*, a *maṭnawī* about Safavid history (Monzawī, *Nosk̄ahā*, VI, p. 4341); three “historical romances,” narrating in partly fictionalized form the heroic exploits of Shah Esmā‘il; Shaikh Ḥosayn Pirzāda Zāhedī’s *Selselat al-nasab*, a detailed genealogical work devoted to the early Safavid Sufi order (Monzawī, *Nosk̄ahā*, VI, p. 4328); and Waliqoli Šāmlu’s *Qeṣaṣ al-kāqāni*, an ornate history similar to the *‘Ālamārā-ye ‘ab-bāsi*. During the reign of Sultan Ḥosayn (r. 1694-1722), however, historical writing again decreased in volume. Among the histories written at that time were Moḥammad-Ebrāhim b. Zayn-al-‘Ābedin Naṣiri’s *Dastur-e Šahriā-rān*, Mir Moḥammad-Sa‘id Moširi Bardasiri’s *Taḍkera-ye Šafawiya-ye Kermān*, and Ḥosayn b. Mortazā Ḥosayn Estrābādī’s *Tāriḳ-e solṭāni* (1115/1703-04).

Throughout the Safavid period, historians used a number of different organizational frameworks in their narratives. Generally the formats of these works were either annalistic, thematic, or a combination of the two. Often, chroniclers narrated the reign of earlier Safavid kings according to theme, and then commenced with the annalistic divisions for the contemporary period. The chroniclers employed a number of dating systems to mark time. For instance, they used *hejri* years, regnal years (*sāl-e jolus* or *sāl-e salṭanat*), and Turkish animal years, and in a few cases tried to combine these, with less than perfect results (McChesney, 1980). Often, historians further broke down events by theme within the annalistic format (e.g., Qāzi Aḥmad Qomi, Eskandar Beg).

Most of the histories written during the reigns of Es-mā‘il I and Ṭahmāsb I were general histories. They include K̄vāndamir’s *Ḥabib al-siar*, Yaḥyā Qazvini’s (1481-1555) *Lobb al-tawāriḳ* (comp. 1542), and Qāzi Aḥmad Ġaffārī’s *Nosaḳ-e jahānārā* (comp. 1564). The initially large number of general histories probably reflects the fact that, in its earliest stages, the dynasty had not yet been in power for long; it was thus easier for chroniclers to append a section on Safavid history to the end of a general history, and at the same time politically legitimize the Safavids as the latest in a succession of dynasties to



rule Persia.

By the time of Shah ‘Abbās, however, most Safavid historians were writing dynastic histories, either in the form of partial dynastic histories, such as Maḥmud b. Hedāyat-Allāh Afušta’i’s (b. 938/1531-2) *Noqāwat al-āṭār* (comp. 1598), covering the period of the end of Tahmāsb’s reign to ‘Abbās I, or full-fledged dynastic histories, such as Eskandar Beg’s *‘Ālamārā-ye ‘abbāsi* and Faḏli Eṣfāhāni’s *Afzal al-tawāriḳ* (comp. 1639; Melville, forthcoming). This is not a clearly defined rule, however. During the later Safavid period, a number of general histories were written, including Qāzi Aḥmad’s *Ḳolāṣat al-tawāriḳ*. The unknown author of another work also entitled *Ḳolāṣat al-tawāriḳ* flourished during Shah ‘Abbās II’s reign and modeled his universal history on Yaḥyā Qazvini’s *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, which dates to the time of Shah Ṭahmāsb (Dehqān, p. *dāl*).

Safavid historians largely utilized a technique of imitative writing when narrating the past. This practice consists of choosing an earlier text as a model, which the historian would “update,” making changes to reflect the stylistic, political, and legitimizing trends of his own time. The fact that the Safavids used this methodology allows us to trace relationships between various histories and discover which sources Safavid historians favored the most. When reading texts in light of their models, it becomes immediately apparent that the most popular tradition was late Timurid and Herat-based, as most chroniclers used Miḳvānd’s *Rawzat al-ṣafā* and Ḳvāndamir’s *Ḥabib al-siar*. For example, several chroniclers writing during the reign of ‘Abbās I and later used these works as models for their prefaces, thereby perpetuating conventional elements in these early histories.

Aside from those histories imitating the early Herat narratives, other types of historical writing also enjoyed popularity in the Safavid period. For example, the reign of Shah Solaymān (1666-94) witnessed the composition of a number of histories focusing on the reigns of Shah Esmā‘il I and Shah Ṭahmāsb I. Relatively little is known about these narratives or the reasons they were written, but scholars have suggested that they seem to point to an “alternative” tradition of Safavid history, one that perhaps was intended for audiences of palace *ḡolāms* (Morton, 1990, p. 202). Nearly all anonymous, these histories are rich in dialogue and short on embellished phrases, although they draw on earlier texts, in particular Ḥasan Beg Rumlu’s *Aḥsan al-tawāriḳ*. The authors of these works rewrote the early Safavid past in order to cast certain individuals in a heroic light (Morton, 1990, pp. 203-4; Rota, pp. 166-67; Quinn, 1999).



Although written down in the late Safavid period, it has been suggested that the origins of this type of history go back as early as the reign of Shah ‘Abbās (Rota; Morton, 1996; Melville, forthcoming).

Although Safavid historians continued many practices of Timurid historiography, they also expressed new concerns in their works. The most important of these was the establishment of Twelver Shi‘ism as the new state religion by Shah Esmā‘il in Tabriz in 1501. This radical change in Persia’s state orientation reflects itself in historical writing. For instance, Safavid prefaces routinely contain praise of the twelve Imams, following the opening tribute to God and the Prophet Moḥammad. Various Safavid monarchs are referred to by phrases such as *kalb-e āstān-e ‘Ali* (dog of the threshold of ‘Ali), as seen in Yazdi’s *Tāriḳ-e ‘abbāsi*. Also, nearly every Safavid history contains a genealogy tracing the Safavid family back to Imam Musā al-Kāẓem, the seventh Imam of the Twelver Shi‘ites. The most significant new structural elements in Safavid histories is a biography section. Drawing, perhaps, on the example of Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi’s *Tāriḳ-e gozida*, Kṡvāndamir was the first Safavid historian to fuse biography type material with the historical chronicle at the end of each section of his *Ḥabib al-siar*; and later Safavid historians, such as Ḥasan Beg Rumlu, Qāẓi Aḥmad Qomi, and Eskandar Beg continued the tradition (Beveridge and De Bruijn). Consequently, in addition to chronological narrative, many Safavid histories contain sections providing biographical information about significant military leaders, bureaucrats, artists, clerics, scholars, and other important high-ranking individuals.

Safavid historians seldom elaborated on their philosophical views of history or stated their purpose in writing, although they occasionally included such information in their prefaces, particularly if they were following Timurid models. It nevertheless is possible to obtain some sense of authors’ historical consciousness from the chronicles themselves. The king remains the point of focus in Safavid narratives, and the historians placed him at the core of all discussions. They were most keen to record all of his actions, including his military campaigns, his domestic policies, his treatment of adversaries, and his charitable activities. In various ways, Safavid historians promoted the king’s legitimate right to rule; and, as notions of legitimacy shifted and evolved over the generations of the Safavid dynasty, they rewrote earlier Safavid history in order to reflect those changes. In the case of the anonymous histories, one of the reasons for composing them was to entertain. A. H. Morton has suggested that such texts might have been written for the sake of being read aloud in



public. He cites the account of Michele Membre, an Italian traveler who visited Persia at the time of Shah Ṭahmāsb and described how individuals stood in the squares of Tabriz, reading about the battles of Shah Esmā'il (Morton, 1996, pp. 44-45).

Individuals from diverse backgrounds such as government officials, secretaries, astrologers, religious figures, and *ḡolāms* engaged in historical writing. Some writers, such as K̲vāndamir, were also poets and were attached to a particular literary court or circle. For instance, in addition to his *Ḥabib al-siar*, K̲vāndamir wrote a number of poetic works, which he lists in the preface to his history. Although best known as “men of the sword,” Qezelbāš officers and individuals of Turkic background also participated in historical writing. The best known was Ḥa-san Beg Rumlu, a *qorči* in the service of Shah Ṭahmāsb, who, in addition to his military responsibilities, completed his *Aḥsan al-tawāriḡ* during the reign of Esmā'il II (1576-77). After the original Qezelbāš tribes lost their power and were replaced by new *ḡolām* forces, some of the *ḡolāms* became involved in historical writing. The best-known example from this group is Bižan the “Qeṣṣa-ye Ṣa-fawikvān” (reciter of the Safavid story) and author of the *Tāriḡ-e Rostam K̲ān* and the *Tāriḡ-e jahāngošā'i-e k̲āqān* (Morton, 1990). However, throughout the Safavid period, administrators, bureaucrats, and court officials such as secretaries and astrologers form the largest category of historians. Individuals such as Fażli Eṣfahāni were able to write histories based both on court records and eyewitness accounts (Melville, forthcoming). Often, several generations of administrators or members of a single family would engage in historical writing. For example, three generations of astrologers/astronomers (*monajjem*) wrote historical works (Mossadegh). Jalāl al-Din Monajjem Yazdi, author of the *Tāriḡ-e 'abbāsi*, started the family tradition. As the official astrologer of Shah 'Abbās, Jalāl-al-Din constantly accompanied the king and could observe his actions, which he most likely recorded in order to make his astrological predictions. He uses technical language in his history, indicating that he was most probably involved in the production of royal court missives and documents, and incorporated such material into his narrative. His son and grandson also wrote historical works mostly hagiographical in nature, thus indicating a connection between astrologers and historical writing in the Safavid era.

Historical works were produced throughout the Safavid period, with the exception of Moḥammad K̲odā-banda's reign. The chroniclers of Shah 'Abbās, however, did cover the events of this earlier period in their narratives. As far



as regional coverage is concerned, official court chroniclers had more of an interest in events associated with the king and what took place at the capital. Although the tradition of regional or local historical writing was somewhat reduced in the Safavid period, it did continue to some extent, particularly in places which already had long established traditions of local historiography. For instance, Šams-al-Din ‘Ali Lāhiji composed the earliest regional history in 1516. His *Tāriḳ-e k̄āni* is a history of Gilān from 1475 until 1514, before the region was conquered by the Safavids. A little over 100 years later, Gilān again became the focus of a local history, the *Tāriḳ-e Gilān* of ‘Abd-al-Fattāḥ Fumani. Others regions to receive specific attention include Yazd, about which Moḥammad Mofid Yazdi wrote his *Jāme‘-e mofidi* (comp. 1679), and Kerman, where Moḥammad b. Ebrāhim wrote his *Tāriḳ-e Saljuqiān-e Kermān*. Moḥammad Mirak b. Mas‘ud Ḥosayni wrote his *Riāz al-ferdows* (comp. 1671) about Fārs; and Shah Ḥosayn b. Malek Ġiāt-al-Din Maḥ-mud’s *Ehyā’ al-moluk* (comp. 1619) focuses on events in Sistān.

Much research still needs to be done on many aspects of Safavid historiography. None of the major Safavid historians have been the subject of full-length biographical studies. Comparative research, placing Safavid Persian writing in the context of contemporary Mughal, Uzbek, and Ottoman traditions of historical writing, has barely started. Finally, and most importantly, a number of major Safavid texts are at various incomplete stages of edition and publication.

Unedited histories include, but are not limited to: *Fotuḥāt-e šāhi* and *Afzal al-tawāriḳ*; published histories that need critical editions include: *Tāriḳ-e ‘ālamārā-ye ‘abbāsi*, *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, and *Tāriḳ-e ‘abbāsi*; histories that need complete critical editions include: *Takmelat al-aḳbār*, *Zobdat al-tawāriḳ*, and *Tāriḳ-e solṭāni*; edited histories, still in dissertation form, that need to be published include *Fotuḥāt-e homāyun* and *Tāriḳ-e Rostam K̄ān*.

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