



ḤOSAYN BĀYQARĀ

ḤOSAYN BĀYQARĀ, the common designation for Sultan Abu'l-Ġāzi Ḥosayn Mirzā b. Maṣṣūr b. Bāyqarā, the last Timurid ruler of major importance in Khorasan (r. 873-75/1469-70 and 875-911/1470-1506). Through his father he was a great-grandson of Timur's second son, 'Omar-Šayk, and through his mother, Fīruza Begom (a daughter of Timur's third son, Mirānšāh), a great-grandson of Timur himself; born in Herat in Moḥarram 842/May-June 1438, he died, of a respiratory attack, in the village of Bābā Elāhi near Herat on 10 Du'l-ḥejja 911/4 May 1506. He was successful as a politician, recognized as a poet, and renowned as a benefactor and patron of learning in his kingdom.

Although original documents are very rare, nevertheless later copies of royal decrees and other government documents are preserved in the epistolographic literature available (Roemer, 1952; Navā'i, p. 1341; Herrmann, 1968). As they are not limited to records of tax privileges and diplomas for court officials, but also include examples of diplomatic correspondence with various princes in Central Asia and the Near East, they elucidate significantly the scope of activity in the Timurid chancery, thus supplementing the sultan's own written works (see below) as primary sources of information. Other contemporary texts of special importance include the memoirs of *Zahir-al-Din Bābor* (888-937/1483-1530) and the *Ḥabīb al-siar* by K̄vāndamir (ca. 880-941/1475-1535), as well as the later *Tāriḳ-e rašidi* by Mirzā Moḥammad Ḥaydar Doḡlāt (q.v.; 905-58/1499-1551), the *Toḥfa-ye Sāmi* by the Safavid prince Sām Mirzā (923-81/1517-77), written in 958/1551, and the *Golestān-e honar* by Qāzi Aḥmad Qomi (953-1015/1546-1606 or later). The classic secondary source



for information about the life of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā is the study by V. V. Bartol'd (1928).

Career as warrior and ruler. In his youth a restless and fearless nature combined with an unbridled desire for conquest are said to have led Ḥosayn Bāyqarā into a series of military adventures, first in the entourage of Abu'l-Qāsem Bābor (q.v.; 825-61/1422-57), a grandson of Šāhroḡ (807-50/1405-47). Later he distinguished himself as the leader of a band of mercenary soldiers; and in about 864/1460 he launched a campaign on his own behalf, advancing from Ḳvārazm to Khorasan and on to Gorgān, which he took from the powerful Āq Qoyunlu governor, Ḥosayn Beg Sa'dli. He then submitted to the authority of the Timurid Abu Sa'id (863-78/1459-69), who had been dominant in Khorasan since 862/1458 from his capital in Herat. Nevertheless, soon afterwards he began to encroach on the sovereign rights of the latter by occupying Māzandarān and, in Ḍu'l-qa'da 865/September 1461, by even laying siege to Herat; he appears, however, to have retreated without achieving a victory. Three years later he again undertook a raid on Khorasan from Ḳvārazm. In these skirmishes with Abu Sa'id he enjoyed the support of the Uzbek khan of Ḳvārazm, Abu'l-Ḳayr (832-73/1429-68).

In the race for power in Khorasan that followed the capture and execution of Abu Sa'id by the Āq Qoyunlu in Azarbaijan on 4 Ša'bān 873/17 February 1469, Ḥosayn Bāyqarā was not actually the first to arrive in Herat; in fact the city must have been surrendered to him by Sultan Maḥmud, a younger son of the former ruler, who had reached the capital with the remainder of the defeated army shortly before Ḥosayn. Once in possession, Ḥosayn then claimed the throne on 10 Ramaẓān 873/24 March 1469. Sultan Aḥmad Mirzā, Abu Sa'id's eldest son, upon hearing the report of his father's death, set off from Samarqand with a powerful army; but when he met his brother, Sultan Maḥmud, en route and learned of the fait accompli in Herat, he retreated. Nevertheless, Ḥo-sayn's control was still not firmly established; for the victorious Āq Qoyunlu ruler Uzun Ḥasan (857-82/1453-78), in his desire to extend his power over all of Persia, had entrusted the conquest of Khorasan to the Turkman prince Yādgār-Moḥammad (b. ca. 857/1453), who briefly seized control of Herat. Only after Sultan Ḥosayn finally defeated Yādgār-Moḥammad and had him executed in the summer of 875/1470 could he feel secure on his throne, which he continued to occupy for a further thirty-six years.

Nevertheless, the fact that he later conducted campaigns against Sultan Maḥmud, who had established himself in Ḥeṣār, shows that Sultan Ḥosayn



must still have thought it necessary to be on his guard. He also had cause for concern, especially as he grew older, about repeated rebellions by his sons, such as the uprising of Ebrāhim-e Ḥosayn in 895/1490 and the revolt by [Badi‘-al-Zamān](#) in 905/1499, the purpose of which was to further the interests of his own son Moḥammad-Mo‘men. None of these events appears to have threatened Sultan Ḥo-sayn’s position seriously, although in the latter instance Herat actually came under siege.

Despite the opportunities that presented themselves, Sultan Ḥosayn apparently abandoned the idea of expanding his territory; in fact, he went out of his way to avoid conflict, even when action on his part would have seemed necessary or reasonable. For example, he did not attempt to take advantage of declining Turkman power after Uzun Ḥasan’s death in 882/1478, nor did he make determined efforts to counter ever-increasing pressure from the Uzbeks, or to oppose the victorious campaigns of the Safavid ruler Shah Esmā‘il I (907-30/1501-24). Just before his death, when it was too late, he finally started a campaign against the Uzbek prince Moḥammad Šaybāni Khan (905-16/1500-10). In 913/1507, however, the latter succeeded in taking Herat from Sultan Ḥosayn’s two sons, Badi ‘-al-Zamān and Moḥammad-Ḥosayn, who had agreed to a joint succession after their father’s death.

Personality and interests. However much Ḥosayn Bāy-qarā’s attention during his long reign may have been taken up with military campaigns, especially to quell internal disorders, and however little he may have done to consolidate Timurid power for the long term, it is now recognized that his positive achievements far exceeded the mere “introduction of culturally productive activity” (Brandenburg, p. 25) and earned him a unique place among the outstanding intellectual figures of the Timurid period. Clues to his personality can be found in his own works, written under the pseudonym Ḥosayni, such as his collection of poems (*divān*) in Chaghatay Turkish (see [CHAGHATAY LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE](#)), which was dedicated to Mir ‘Ali-Šir Navā’i; the Safavid shah, Solṭan-Ḥosayn I (1105-35/1694-1722), considered it worthy of a translation into Persian (Gandjei, in *EI2* III, p. 603), though modern critics consider it of little value. The work *Majāles al-‘oššāq* (Conferences of the lovers), which has been ascribed to Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā, is less impressive still. In any case, judging from the poems it contains, it appears to be the work of Kamāl-al-Din Gā-zorgāhi instead (Bābor, ed. Bacqué-Grammont and Hasan, p. 169). Nevertheless, it is possible that the sultan approved of the claim that he had written it himself or even sought to claim the credit for it, for toward



the middle of the 16th century Sām Mirzā mentioned Sultan Ḥosayn's authorship of the work as a generally accepted fact (p. 11).

Judged by the works named so far, Sultan Ḥosayn could not personally have achieved much literary stature, and his poems reveal all too little about his thought and personality. On the other hand, they can be compared with an epistle written by him in the Chaghatay language sometime between 891/1486 and 897/1492 (Gandjei, 1953); it is a sort of autobiography cast in the form of a mirror for princes and must be accepted as the personal achievement of the author. At the beginning the sultan lays claim to a noble ancestry (stretching back not merely seven but seventy generations!) in the style of Timur and other Timurids. This work reveals that Sultan Ḥosayn respected and supported the Sufis, especially those belonging to the Naqšbandiya order; the ideas current among them were in accordance with Timurid religious policy, and Timur's personal sympathies with this group were also well known. Another important feature is the sultan's expressed concern for the upkeep of religious and philanthropic establishments, as well as his extraordinary generosity to poets, painters, and apprentices in the various creative arts and crafts. The memoir thus represents a complete picture of the ideal of feudal Islamic kingship in the late Middle Ages.

In spite of the fact that, when he wrote this work, Sultan Ḥosayn could draw on two decades of rule to discuss his actual experiences, concerns, and aspirations, not everything in it should be taken as the literal truth. This includes the suggestions that he was advised by both Jāmi and 'Ali-Šir Navā'i to take an anti-Shi'ite stance. This would seem to be contradicted by Ḥosayn's generosity to the Shi'ite Qāsem Fayzbaḡš b. Nurbaḡš, as well as his contributions towards the construction and maintenance of the shrine over the putative grave of 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb in Mazār-e Šarif, the only building outside Herat and its environs to which the prince devoted his personal attention. At any rate, throughout his lifetime Ḥosayn never rejected the Sunna, and there can be no doubt that he held the *šari'a* in reverence. In the first six or seven years of his reign he fulfilled the religious prescriptions, certainly to the satisfaction of the overseer of markets and morals (*moḥtaseb*), who was all-powerful in Herat. Of course, he personally observed neither the requirements for prayer and fasting nor the ban on alcohol; it is mentioned only that he never drank wine before midday.

Ḥosayn Bāyqarā showed little concern for administrative reforms. Very soon after his accession there were already complaints about the injustice, hostility



and corruption of the royal financial agents, just as there had been prior to it under the Karts. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that he made effective use of the revenues collected in this manner.

Patronage of literature and the arts. Ḥosayn Bāyqarā's role as a patron, particularly of poets, is widely recognized; literary culture flourished in Herat during his long reign. Foremost among the literati of this period were two major figures who enjoyed close personal relations with their ruler, namely 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmi (817-98 /1414-92) and Mir 'Ali-Šir Navā'i (844-906/1441-1501), the former generally recognized as the last great classicist of Persian literature and the latter widely acclaimed as the father of Chaghatay literature. The appearance of literature in this Turkic language has been taken as indicative of the contemporary intellectual milieu in Herat, which was a product of the cultural symbiosis of Persian and Turkic-speaking peoples. Although Persian was undoubtedly predominant, Turkic still managed to develop an independent identity; an example from the pen of Mir 'Ali-Šir is *Mohākamat al-loğatayn*, or "Arbitration between the two languages" (1841; ed. R. Devereux, 1966), the bulk of which is devoted not to Persian but to Turkic. It contains not only moralizing sayings but also an appendix in which Mir 'Ali-Šir introduces Persian motifs and themes into Turkic literature (Barthold, 1962, pp. 288 ff.). This tour de force by a spokesman for the monarch must have had a particularly powerful impact, in view of the fact that the Turk author, Mir Ali-Šir, was not only an authority on Persian poetry but even wrote Persian verse himself (under the pen name Fāni). The close relations that Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā maintained with his friend and adviser, not to mention his own education and literary interests, attest to the cultural osmosis between Turks and Persians; this reached its peak during Ḥosayn's reign, due to the ruler's patronage of and participation in the literary culture of both languages (see the testimony of Zahir-al-Din Bābor concerning this point in Bābor, ed. J.-L. Bacqué-Gramont and M. Hasan, p. 161).

As demonstrated by the bio-bibliographical data on more than twenty known poets from the reign of Ḥosayn Bāyqarā (Subtelny, 1979), Persian remained the predominant language not only of poetry but of literature in general, including historiography. There was a kind of academy at the Herat court under the direction of Mir Ali-Šir, to which poets who passed a rigorous set of criteria were admitted. The project of compiling an edition of Ḥāfez, which was initiated by Ḥosayn Bāyqarā, would probably have been entrusted to this circle of poets (Roemer, 1952).



A personal interest in the arts was not the only motivation for patronage. Another major impetus, as has recently been pointed out by Maria Subtelny (1979, pp. 149-52), was the acquisition of cultural prestige, which was perceived as a necessary correlative to political power. In fact, although belles lettres was the highest representation of such cultural prestige, other creative arts were also important, above all those connected with the production of books, i.e., calligraphy, bookbinding, and especially illumination. In Herat, where these art forms had already gained a reputation for excellence, they advanced to unprecedented heights under Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā. For instance, Amir Ruḥ-Allāh, known as Mirak Naqqāš, the prince's librarian, can be given credit for being the first to recognize the extraordinary talents of the master painter and illustrator, [Behzād](#), and for training him. When Behzād entered Sultan Ḥosayn's service shortly before 883/1488, he found such celebrated intellectuals as Jāmi, Navā'i, and K̄vāndamir already at the court (Gandjei, 1967, p. 365).

Architecture was among the foremost areas of cultural life in which Ḥosayn Bāyqarā took a personal interest. Bernard O'Kane has justly referred to an "explosion of architecture" under his rule (O'Kane, 1987, p. 81). Sixty-three out of 140 Timurid buildings that are mentioned in the sources but have not been preserved, including new constructions, renovations, or expansions, are dated to his reign (Golombek and Wilber, I, pp. 445-52), while 38 out of 257 surviving buildings or building complexes in Khurasan alone are from his reign (O'Kane, 1987, pp. 379-82 nos. 70-107). Though only seven of them are attributable to his personal initiative (Golombek and Wilber, I, nos. 71B, 77, 96, 98, 104, 105, 123), many others were sponsored by members of his family or officials of his military and civil administrations. The first of his personal projects began as early as 873/1469 with the construction of his palace installation in Bāḡ-e Jahān-ārā. The other buildings erected during his reign were mostly religious: mosques, madrasas (religious schools; see [EDUCATION iv.](#)), *kāneqāhs* (Sufi convents), and *ziā-ratgāhs* (mausoleums of holy men). Apart from Mazār-e Šarif, Sultan Ḥosayn's personal contribution to the architectural monuments of his age was limited to Herat and its environs. The architects and engineers working for Sultan Ḥosayn and his contemporaries (such as Mir 'Ali-Šir Navā'i, who played a much greater role in this regard than the Sultan himself), shaped significantly the evolution of the Timurid architectural style. It is characterized by soaring domes and vaults, vast interior spaces, the lavish use of tile decoration and distinctive color compositions, all of which represent the continuation of traditions that had been evolving on Persian soil for many



centuries.

Although Ḥosayn Bāyqarā died in the village of Bābā Elāhi, his body was taken to Herat for burial in the madrasa that he himself had erected in 897/1492-93. Neither Badi‘-al-Zamān, his nominal successor, nor his favorite son, Moẓaffar, was able to salvage Ḥrosayn’s legacy, even with the assistance of Ẓahir-al-Din Bābor. In 913/1507, the Uzbek Moḥammad Šaybāni Khan took control of Herat, thus bringing to an end the rule of the Timurids in the Near East. Twenty-five years later the renowned historian from Herat, Zayn-al-Din Maḥmud Wāṣefi, wrote that Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā was “brighter than the sun and clearer than the daylight,” and that there had been no ruler since the time of the Prophet who surpassed him in knowledge, understanding, and cultivation (Barthold, 1938, p. 88).

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