



KĀDEM-E BESTĀMI

KĀDEM-E BESTĀMI, Moḥammad Ṭāher b. Ḥasan, local historian, calligrapher, and poet of the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I (Kādem-e Bestāmi’s exact dates are not known). His short history, entitled *Fotuḥāt-e Feriduniya*, describes the wars of Feridun Khan Čarkas (d. 1620-21), the eunuch Governor-General (*amir-al-omarā*) of the province of *Astarābād* (known also in Safavid administrative terminology as *Dār-al-marz*) in northeastern Iran, with the Turkmen nomads of the northern fringes of the province.

Little is known about Bestāmi’s life. As suggested by the toponym, we can perhaps assume that he was born in the district of Bestām itself, which was administratively part of the Astarābād province throughout the Safavid era (*pace* Floor in Naširi, p. 166). The unique autograph manuscript of *Fotuḥāt* is written in a fine *nasta’liq* (Dānešpažuh, XI, p. 2297; Ṭehrāni, XVI, p. 118), a testimony to Bestāmi’s calligraphic talents. It is possible that Kādem may have been related to Šams-al-Din Moḥammad Bestāmi, a relatively unknown calligrapher at the royal library of Shah ‘Abbās I (Ešfahāni, pp. 131, 254). As with many other Safavid historians, Bestāmi was also a gifted poet: more than 340 lines of his own poetry appear in different parts of his narrative. His sobriquet Kādem (“Deacon”) can provide us with another clue about his career. Before attending the local court of Feridun Khan in November 1613, Bestāmi lived in Mashad, where he describes himself “circumambulating the tomb of Imam ‘Ali b. Musā al-Rezā” (Bestāmi, p. 21). It is feasible therefore that, while he was residing there, he was a *kādem* serving the flourishing administration of Imam Rezā’s shrine (see *āstān-e qods-e rażawi*) under Shah



‘Abbās I and, given his position, he was known as Kādem.

Bestāmi’s history, written in 1613, consists of a preface (*dibāča*), the introduction, 20 chapters (*fath*s), and an epilogue. Its contents are organized topically, with the single exception of the opening chapter, which bears November-December 1606 as its date. Elsewhere, the chronological sequence of events is totally subordinated. The introduction deals briefly with Feridun Khan’s early life. He was of Circassian origin (see [Čarkas ii](#)) and was kidnapped at an early age by the “thieves of the Āstān” (Bestāmi, p. 25). After more than seven years in captivity, Feridun was finally bought as a *gōlām* (see [Barda and bardadāri iv](#)) by merchants acting for the Safavid royal court, who, as Bestāmi’s narrative suggests, were systematically engaged in the slave trade in Central Asian marketplaces (Bestāmi, pp. 25-28). Afterwards, having been elevated to the rank of *giyem qurčisi/qurči-e zereh* (the keeper of the shah’s armor), Feridun became a member of the shah’s expanding retinue of *gōlāmān-e kāšša-ye šarifa*. Late in October 1605, during a period of intense Safavid military operations in Azarbaijan against the Ottomans, when a Kurdish prisoner from the Mokri tribe tried to murder Shah ‘Abbās I at the royal camp, it was Feridun Khan who managed to save the shah’s life (the date is given by Monajjem-e Yazdi, p. 294; Bestāmi, p. 30, does not mention the exact date of the incident). In response to this act of bravery, in November 1606 (but December 1605 according to Monajjem-e Yazdi, p. 300) Shah ‘Abbās appointed Feridun as governor of the province of Astarābād. During the Safavid period the province covered the administration of a vast stretch of Persia, enclosing most of today’s provinces of Golestān, Semnān, and northern Khorasan

As governor, Feridun Khan’s main brief was to protect his province from the Göklān, Yamut, and Dodorġa Turkmen nomads of Khwarazm, as well as from the indigenous Turkmens of Astarābād, such as the Sālur, the Oġlu, the Qušči, and the Dövaji, who were bent on extending their territory and carrying out routine raids, to the detriment of the rural and urban communities in the hinterlands of Safavid Persia. The remaining chapters of Bestāmi’s history are devoted to the clashes between the province’s Safavid troops, led by Feridun Khan, and Turkmen nomadic warriors. Almost exclusively, Bestāmi focuses his narrative on the military accomplishments of Feridun Khan, with recurrent references to Turkmen captives and severed heads as trophies from Feridun Khan’s military campaigns (Bestāmi, pp. 68, 73, 83, 90, 96, 109, 116, 131, 134, and 143; Monajjem-e Yazdi, p. 426).



Apart from his own eyewitness observations, Beṣṭāmi drew on the details of military operations given to him by Feridun Khan and the military elite of the province, including Qāsem Beg Laškarnevis, who was later sent by Shah ‘Abbās as the holder of the honorary post of the Sepahsālār of Mazandarān to the Ottoman court and the Qoṭb Šāhi sultanate of Deccan (Eskandar Beg, II, pp. 931, 933, and 951). Parallel to the central role of the eunuch Feridun Khan in Beṣṭāmi’s narrative, three non-Qezelbāš chiefs of the region are also applauded by him for their distinguished service to the Safavid crown: Tavakkol Khan Ġarāyli from the district of Ġarāyli (present-day Bojnurd), and Šafar Khan and Oğurlu Šoltān Čaġani, both from the region of Darun (present-day Qučān and the district of Abivard). Beṣṭāmi is fulsome in his praise of the military achievements of his master, Feridun Khan, and the local, mainly non-Qezelbāš, including *inter alia* the Jalāyer tribal chiefs who helped in subjugating the Turkmen invaders, placing them well above past victories achieved by Tamerlane and all the kings of Iran (Beṣṭāmi, pp. 78, 109). This exaggeratedly sensational and heroic evaluation accords well with the concerns of Iranian urban and landed notables in northeastern provinces of Safavid territory, who had suffered grievously from the constant raids of the Turkmen plunderers. Furthermore, in stark contrast to his contemporary, Monajjem-e Yazdi, who emphasizes the active role played by Shah ‘Abbās I in Feridun Khan’s dealings with the Turkmen nomadic chiefs (Monajjem-e Yazdi, pp. 300, 333), Beṣṭāmi is reticent on any part that the Shah may have played in the internal affairs of the province of Astarābād. From yet another point, Beṣṭāmi’s work can be seen as one of the first literary expressions heralding the final elimination of the Qezelbāš from the Safavid structure of political power in the concluding decade of Shah Abbās I’s reign.

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