



ḲEṬĀY-NĀMA

ḲEṬĀY-NĀMA “Book on China,” written by Seyyed ‘Alī Akbar Ḳeṭā’ī in Istanbul. According to the colophon, the book was finished on the last day or in the last days of Rabī’ I 922/3 May 1516 (Ḳeṭā’ī, 1993, p. 174), but in the preface a panegyric on Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520-66) can be found (*ibid.*, p. 27). However, this may be a later addition in the different manuscripts, which do not comprise an autograph (Kahle, 1933, p. 94). The work and the author’s name are also read with an “a” (*Ḳaṭāy-nāma* and Ḳaṭā’ī), but as the name for (North) China is usually pronounced Ḳeṭāy in Persian (Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, Paris, 1959, I, p. 220), the book which is written in this language is here transliterated with an “e.”

Apart from the information given in his work, nothing is known of the author, and the book itself does not contain any biographical details about him. He calls himself several times *qalandar* (dervish), but this might be more to stress his humbleness than to show an affiliation to any dervish order. Though the name ‘Alī Akbar may indicate a Shi‘ite affiliation, he praises all four caliphs in his preface (Ḳeṭā’ī, 1993, p. 26), which, however, may also indicate the renouncement of his former faith in a time shortly after the battle of *Cālderān* against the Shi‘ite Safavids. Furthermore, he possibly tries to reinforce his position in the Ottoman capital by referring to ‘Alī Qūšjī, the famous astronomer, who, as ‘Alī Akbar maintains, was ordered by Oloḡ Beg to go to China and write down a travelogue (Ḳeṭā’ī, 1993, p. 28). ‘Alī Akbar’s familiarity with Transoxanian conditions may also be a clue to his origin, perhaps Bukhara (Mazahéri, p. 85). The Chinese scholar Lin Yih-Min, who



translated the *Keṭāy-nāma* into modern Turkish and annotated it, insists that his author never saw China (Lin, 1967, pp. 1-22; idem, 1983, p. 59), whereas Paul Kahle, another scholar familiar with the subject, affirms that ‘Alī Akbar did visit the major places which he describes, as he mentions himself in several places in his book (Kahle, 1933, pp. 96-97).

The *Keṭāy-nāma* has twenty or twenty-one chapters according to the counting of the different manuscripts. Their titles are (Keṭā’ī, 1993, pp. 33-38, abbreviated here or slightly changed): roads to China, different religions, cities and castles, armies, magazines, the imperial throne, the imperial jail, celebrations, entertainments, brothels and prostitutes, wonderful arts and strange cures, legislation, schools, persons from the west, Qalmāqs, agriculture, personal observations, gold, silver, and money, obedience to the law, and, finally, Chinese temples. However, the content of each chapter does not always correspond with its title. For example, not much is written on the Qalmāqs in chapter 16 with that title (*ibid.*, pp. 147-49), but in chapter 4 on the armies, there is a lengthy and fairly exact description of the war between the Ming dynasty and the Oirats (Qalmāqs), the capture of the emperor, and the ensuing enthronement of the new emperor (*ibid.*, pp. 67-72). To give some more examples of the content: ‘Alī Akbar outlines imperial worship, the postal system and domestic communications, the imperial palace and the related administration, imprisonment and prisons, foreign envoys and merchants, social customs and culture, and also introduces porcelain, produced in Jiangxi 江西 province (*ibid.*, pp. 43-7, 53-59, 77-110, 143-44, 160-63; Kahle, 1933, pp. 102-7). Many poems of different authors are disseminated in the text.

Five Persian manuscripts are extant, three of which are found in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul: (1) Reisülküttap 609 (Aşir Ef. 249, 127 fol.), (2) Reisülküttap 609 m. (Aşir Ef. 609 m., 110 fol.), (3) Reisülküttap 610 (Aşir Ef. 610, 129 fol.). The first of these manuscripts was printed as a facsimile in 1994 (‘Alī Akbar Keṭā’ī, *The Book on China*). (4) Leiden University Library (Or. 854, 94 fol., from the Legatum Warnerianum). (5) Cairo, Dār al-kotob 17 (Ṭal‘at Persia collections). The original Persian text was translated into Ottoman Turkish during the reign of Murād III (1574-95), probably in 1582 (title: *Qānūn-nāma-ye Ğīn va Kaṭāy*; for a facsimile see Keṭā’ī, 1993, pp. 195-266).

Charles Schefer started a translation into French, but published only three chapters. Paul Kahle and Muhammad Hamidullah produced a draft translation into English which was never published. Kahle tried to persuade the Chinese scholar Zhang Xinglang 張星烺 to collaborate on a joint annotated

edition of the book, and both exchanged many cordial letters from 1934 onwards, but the endeavor never came to fruition because of the Japanese invasion of China and World War II. However, the son of Zhang Xinglang, Zhang Zhishan 張至善, started a search for the draft translation in 1982, found it, and translated it into Chinese with the help of Chinese Iranists, and the book was published in 1988. Lin Yih-min had already published his annotated translation into modern Turkish in 1967, and Aly Mazahéri translated the *Keṭāy-nāma* into French (1983). The authoritative critical edition, based on the Cairene manuscript (collated with mss. 2 and 3) was produced by Irāj Afšār (1978, 2nd ed. 1993).

The basis of the first researches on the *Keṭāy-nāma* was not the Persian, but the Ottoman Turkish, version, which was also included in some Ottoman geographies and became the basis of Ottoman knowledge on China (Hagen, 2003, pp. 95-97). Matthaeus Norberg was the first who made use of the Ottoman Turkish version in his work *De regno Chataja* in 1818; H. L. Fleischer and J. Zenker continued these first appraisals with more thorough researches in 1851 and 1861. Schefer was the first who studied the Persian original.

The immediate impact of the *Keṭāy-nāma* is difficult to estimate, but astonishingly the Ottoman empire, transcribed as Lumi 魯迷 (Rūm), figured rather prominently in Chinese sources after a first embassy arrived in Beijing in 1524; others followed until 1618 (Kauz, pp. 264, 266-67). The year 1524, only a few years after the work was finished, could indicate a direct influence on Ottoman diplomacy and commerce toward Central Asia and China by ‘Alī Akbar and his book.

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