



ḲORŠĀH B. QOBĀD ḤOSEYNI, NEZĀM-AL-DIN

ḲORŠĀH B. QOBĀD ḤOSEYNI, NEZĀM-AL-DIN (d. 25 D̄o'l-Qa'da 972/4 July 1565), a [Hyderabad](#)-based diplomat and historian of Iranian descent best known for his composition of a universal chronicle in Persian in the name of the Qoṭbšāhi ruler, Ebrāhim (r. 1550-80).

LIFE

Little is known about Ḳoršāh's life and career. Contemporary epistolary evidence¹ Ṭabāṭabā'i Ḥasani, I, p. 290 suggests that he was related (*aqvām*) to the prominent [Ismā'ili](#) scholar, poet, and bureaucrat Šāh Ṭāher b. Raẓi-al-din Ḳāndi Ḥoseyni (d. 1546), which can be taken to imply that like Šāh Ṭāher Ḳoršāh too had an Ismā'ili descent. Reading between the lines, one can also assume that Ḳoršāh's family was from Ḳānd (also Ḳvānd, Ḳond), a rural district located midway between Qazvin and Solṭāniyeh, from whence the propaganda network of the Moḥammad-šāhi branch of the Ismā'ili *da'wa* in Iran was led (Astarābādi, fol. 39b; [ISMA'ILISM](#), iii. [ISMA'ILI HISTORY](#)). A number of the Ismā'ili Seyyed notables of Ḳānd are reported to have set up home in Solṭāniyeh in the latter part of the 15th century.² Ḳoršāh, 2000, pp. 262-63. Perhaps Ḳoršāh and his immediate predecessors spent part of their lives in Solṭāniyeh during the early part of the 16th century.

Under the first Safavid monarch [Esmā'il I](#) (r. 1501-24), Šāh Ṭāher attended the Safavid court for a while, but anti-Ismā'ili intrigues on the part of his enemies



from among the Shiite clerics brought about his disgrace, forcing him to quit his job and move to [Kashan](#). Early in Jomāda I 926/May 1520, Šāh Ṭāher fled along with his close relatives—presumably including either Ḳoršāh himself or his parents—from Kashan to the port city of Jerun (present-day [Bandar ‘Abbās](#)). According to an autobiographical note (Šāh Ṭāher, fol. 68b; cf. Ṭabāṭabā’i Ḥasani, I, p. 254), shortly after arriving in Jerun, Šāh Ṭāher and his kinsmen were sailed to Goa, from whence they first made their way to [Bijāpur](#) and then to [Ahmadnagar](#), where Šāh Ṭāher managed to settle into a prestigious bureaucratic career line at the court of Borhān Neẓāmšāh (r. 1509-52).³ Astarābādi, fols. 39a-39b; Badā’oni, p. 130; Šuštari, II, pp. 234-40; Šafavi, p. 29; Nahāvandi, II, pp. 413-14; Šafā, V/2, pp. 662-70; Golč’in Ma’āni, I, pp. 791-802; Ahmad, p. 79; Sherwani, p. 421; Kazimi, p. 42; Shyam, pp. 63-66 and 80-83; Calmard, pp. 363-64.

It was no doubt Šāh Ṭāher’s political clout at the Neẓāmšāhi court that helped Ḳoršāh build a successful bureaucratic career for himself in Ahmadnagar. Early in 1545, Borhān Neẓāmšāh appointed Ḳoršāh as his envoy (*ilči*) to Safavid Iran. Šāh Ṭāher masterminded this diplomatic overture, which took place in response to a letter from [Ṭahmāsp I](#) dated Moḥarram 949/April-May 1542, in which Šāh Ṭāher had been invited to either make an official visit to Iran or send one of his sons to the Safavid court. Šāh Ṭāher accordingly arranged for his underage son Ḥeydar to travel to Iran (Ṭabāṭabā’i Ḥasani, I, pp. 287-88). Ḳoršāh led this diplomatic mission, which was accredited to the Safavid court near the city of Rey in Rajab 952/September-October 1545. At that time, Ṭahmāsp I was busy with making preparations to stage a punitive campaign against Āqā Moḥammad Ruzafzun, the “unruly” governor of Māzandarān in Sāri (Ḳoršāh, 2000, p. 153; Novidi Širāzi, pp. 94-95). Ḳoršāh’s residence in Safavid Iran lasted for some twenty months (Rajab 952/September-October 1545 to Rabi’ I 954/May 1547), of which he spent eighteen months as a companion of the shah at the Safavid court (Ḳoršāh, 2000, p. 154).

After short stops in Rey, Savādkuh, and Solṭāniyeh, from March to December 1546 Ḳoršāh accompanied Ṭahmāsp I first in Qazvin and then on his way to Armenia and Georgia on the occasion of military campaigns against the rebellious Safavid prince [Alqāš Mirzā](#) and local rulers of Kakheti and Kartli in Georgia (Rumlu, pp. 407-408; Ḳuzāni Ešfahāni, fols. 129b-30b, 132a-33a; Posch, pp. 46-49; [GEORGIA, ii. HISTORY OF IRANIAN-GEORGIAN RELATIONS](#)). In his narrative, Ḳoršāh makes references to his short stays in Ujān (present-day



Bostānābād), a famous summer campsite on the foot of the mount Sahand, as well as in *Naḵjavān*, Čokur-e Sa‘d (Yerevan), and Georgia (Qoršāh, 2000, pp. 156-58). Qoršāh’s residence at the Safavid court, to say nothing of his family background, helped him get a first-hand knowledge of the realities of political life in Iran. During his time in Safavid Iran he made friends with local bureaucrats and powerbrokers in Māzandarān and *Gilān* (Qoršāh, 2000, pp. 242, 220-21, 255). The Safavid grand vizier Qāzi Jahān Seyfī-Qazvini (d. 1553) and descendants of the former Safavid *šadr* Mir Jamāl-al-din Astarābādi (d. 1525), whom Šāh Ṭāher asked to supervise his underage son at the royal college (Šāh Ṭāher, fols. 16a-b, 30a-31b), were also among Qoršāh’s close friends in Qazvin. In Rabi‘ I 954/May 1547, Qoršāh left Iran in the company of the Safavid envoy to the courts of the Shiite rulers of Hyderabad, Bijāpur, and Dowlatābād in the *Deccan*, the newly appointed royal couturier (*qayčāji*) Naqāwat al-omarā’ Adham Beg b. Div Solṭān Rumlu (Ṭabāṭabā’i Ḥasani, I, p. 290-91; Quzāni Ešfahāni, fol. 134a).

Studies on Qoršāh’s chronicle (Rieu, I, p. 107; Dānešpažuh, p. 964; Minorsky, pp. 50-51; Islam, p. 239; Monzavi, VI, p. 4103; Jalāli, p. 104; Rāzpuš, p. 416) commonly claim that he had spent “nineteen years” of his life in Safavid Iran before returning to Ahmadnagar in 1563-64, where he finished his universal chronicle. The first scholar to come up with this unfounded claim was Charles Rieu, whose conclusion is based on folio 45a of the British Library Ms. Add. 23,513, the point at which the second discourse (*goftār*) of the first chapter of the chronicle begins. Providing no textual evidence, Rieu just states that in 1563-64 Qoršāh “still” resided at the Safavid court. However, a close study of the unpublished parts of Qoršāh’s chronicle, based on a different manuscript, indicates that no reference at all has been made throughout the first chapter of the chronicle to either the dates in question or Qoršāh’s long residence in Safavid Iran. There are at least three references to the year 1563-64 in the sixth chapter of the chronicle (Qoršāh, 2000, pp. 115, 118, 186), but none hints at the author’s residence in Iran at that date. It should be noted that, when dealing with the arrival of a Safavid envoy at the court of the Qoṭbšāhi ruler Homāyun sub anno 1547-48, Qoršāh (2000, p. 115) makes it clear that at that time he lived in Ahmadnagar. And there is no evidence to suggest that Qoršāh did quit Ahmadnagar after 1547-48, the year in which Šāh Ṭāher’s son Šāh Ḥeydar returned hurriedly from Iran to the Deccan to succeed his father Šāh Ṭāher as spiritual leader of the Ismā‘ili community in Ahmadnagar (Ṭabāṭabā’i Ḥasani, I, pp. 338-39; cf. Dickson, Appendix II, p. li; Roemer, p. 170; Calmard, p. 365). As mentioned above, Šāh Ḥeydar had been sent to Iran by his father to



complete his studies at the Safavid royal colleges in Tabriz and Qazvin. According to an alumnus of this institution, it had been founded to educate provincial notables and their male descendants in the field of Shiite theology (Bedlisi, I, pp. 449-50).

WORK

Invariably titled the *Tāriḳ-e ilči-e Neẓām Šāh*, the *Tāriḳ-e Qoṭbšāhiyeh*, the *Tāriḳ-e Qoṭbi*, and/or the *Ḳolāṣat al-tavāriḳ*, Ḳoršāh's chronicle is a general history of major pre-Islamic and Islamic dynasties of Iran, Central Asia, Asia Minor, Arabia, Iraq, and India. The chronicle is organized into preamble (*dibāčeh*), introduction (*moqaddameh*), and seven chapters (*maqāleh*)—obviously a testimony to the author's belief in seven historical cycles as an integral part of the Ismā'ili religious worldview (Ḳoršāh, fols. 3b-4b; Nišāburi-Kanturi, III, no. 1330, p. 94; Storey-Bregel, I, pp. 406-7; Monzavi, VI, p. 4103; Dariāyati, IV, p. 931; Rieu, I, p. 107; Meredith-Owens, p. 14; Marshall 1967, no. 924, p. 262; idem 1996, p. 109). The preamble opens with the verses written in praise of 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb, the first Shiite imam. Then, Ḳoršāh points out that he aims to compose a universal history “free from bombast, digression, and verbosity” (Ḳoršāh, fols. 2b-3a). The myth of genesis along with the history of Abrahamic prophets from Adam to Noah is illuminated and discussed in the introduction (fols. 4b-14b).

The first chapter (Ḳoršāh, fols. 14b-98a) details the history of a number of pre-Islamic kings and conquerors. Central to Ḳoršāh's narrative in this first chapter are the Pišdādi kings of Iran, whom he treats as political heirs to the Abrahamic prophets. The lives and times of scores of Iranian mythical and historical rulers, the great Abrahamic prophets, and the ancient Greek philosophers are outlined in the first chapter. Drawing predominantly from [Ferdowsi's](#) *Shāhnāmeḥ* as well as from Ṭabari's chronicle, the first chapter does mainly follow a topical line of historical representation, but toward the end of it, Ḳoršāh narrows his focus on dynastic history of the Sāsānids, thus shifting to a chronological narrative line with special reference to the events and trends in Iran. The second chapter (Ḳoršāh, fols. 98a-152b) is devoted to the life of the Prophet Moḥammad and the reign of the first three rightly guided caliphs. This is followed by twelve biographical sections on the Shiite imams from 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb to Mahdi, wherein Ḳoršāh makes occasional references to the reigns of their adversaries from among the Omayyad and 'Abbasid caliphs. Entries on the Shiite imams often close with remarks on the migration and resettlement of their descendants in various parts of Iran,



extending more or less on the writings of the 15th-century genealogist and historian Jamāl al-din Aḥmad b. ‘Ali al-Mohannā also known as Ebn ‘Anba al-Aṣḡar (d. 1425). Interestingly, there is no mention of Ṭahmāsb I’s “Seyyed” ancestors throughout the biographical section (fols. 141a-42b) dedicated to the life of the seventh Shiite imam Musā al-Kāẓem, from whom the Safavids claimed descent. The third chapter (fols. 152b-252a) tells about the ruling dynasties of Iran from the Ṭāherids to the downfall of the caliphate in the mid-13th century. The fourth chapter (fols. 252a ff.) deals with the history of [Genghis Khan](#) and his successors in Iran and Central Asia.

The history of the Timurid and Uzbek khans of Central Asia and Khorasan is outlined in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter, as sketched out by Rieu (I, p. 109), is about the Timurids from the advent of Tamerlane to the year 1562-63, when a last attempt by the Timurid prince Mirān Mobārakšāh to recapture Samarqand was thwarted by the Uzbeks (Ḳoršāh, 1965). The sixth chapter of the chronicle explores the dynastic histories of the Turkmen rulers (Qara qoyunlu and [Aq qoyunlu](#)), the Safavids, local dynasties of Māzandarān, Gilān, and Shirvān, and the Ottomans. The closing chapter details the history of the Qoṭbšāhi rulers of Delhi, the Afghan dynasty of Delhi, the Ḳalajis of Bengal and Mandu, and five ruling dynasties of [Gujarat](#).

In the preamble, Ḳoršāh clarifies that since young age he had always thought of using his knowledge of Islamic history and historiography as a basis for the composition of a universal history. As it appears from the text of his narrative, Ḳoršāh had been working on various drafts of his chronicle for some two decades from October 1545—i.e., about a month after his arrival in Iran—and the days leading up to his demise (Ḳoršāh, 2000, pp. 115, 118, 153, 156, 158, 186, 265). So far as the Safavid history is concerned, Ḳoršāh’s chronicle is rated as “an independent source” authored by “a stranger” at the Safavid court (Dickson, Appendix II, p. li; Calmard, p. 366). However, a careful study of the contents of the Safavid section of the sixth chapter of his chronicle indicates that much of it (Ḳoršāh, 2000, pp. 1, 8, 19, 27, 48, 51, 63, 67-68, 81, 212) is but a reproduction of relevant sections of the works of the two early Safavid chroniclers, Ġiāṭ-al-din Ḳvāndmir (d. 1536) and Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd-al-Laṭif Seyfi Qazvini (d. 1542). Ḳoršāh’s narrative on the Safavids is also laden with extensive quotes from a number of contemporary Safavid poets, including Arjāsb Omidi Ṭehrāni (d. 1519), a protégé of the Safavid grand viziers Yār Aḥmad Ḳuzāni Eṣfahāni and Mirzā Šāh-Ḥoseyn Eṣfahāni, and Mir Qāsem Qāsemi Gonābādi (d. 1574), the poet laureate at the court of Ṭahmāsp I (for



quotes from Omidī Ṭehrānī's *divān* see Ḳoršāh, 2000, p. 56, 62/Omidī Ṭehrānī, fol. 66a; for quotes from Qāsemi Gonābādī, see Ḳoršāh, 2000, pp. 4, 9-10, 12, 15-16, 19, 21, 24, 26, 35, 52, 58-59, 61/Qāsemi Gonābādī, pp. 180 [vv. 884-86], 196-97 [vv. 1204, 1214-15, 1217], 202 [vv. 1319-21], 212 [vv. 1510, 1516], 237 [vv. 2015-16], 250 [vv. 2254-55, 2261], 242 [v. 2121], 284 [vv. 2916-18, 2923], 286 [vv. 2956-57, 2961-62], 302 [vv. 3272-73, 3275], 325 [v. 3700], 331 [3815, 3817-19], 336 [vv. 3923-24, 3927], 339 [v. 3974], 340 [vv. 3986-87]). Few poems attributed to Šāh Ṭāher and Ṭahmāsp I also appear here and there in Ḳoršāh's account (Ḳoršāh, 2000, pp. 80, 126, 200). As regards the reign of the first Safavid monarch, Ḳoršāh (2000, pp. 62, 77) also takes advantage of personal recollections of Šāh Ṭāher as well as Ṭahmāsp I. When it comes to the reign of Ṭahmāsp I, Ḳoršāh relies on two major sources, the first being the memoirs (*taḍkereh* or *vāredāt-e aḥvāl*) of Ṭahmāsp I, and the other the eyewitness narratives provided by bureaucratic authorities and provincial landed notables in Safavid Iran (Ḳoršāh, 2000, pp. 115, 121, 127-28, 160, 180). State archives in Iran and the Deccan constitute another major source on which Ḳoršāh's chronicle is based. The full text or abridged versions of at least eleven letters are reproduced throughout Ḳoršāh's chronicle (Ḳoršāh, 2000, pp. 38-46, 88-89, 115-17, 118, 120-21, 136, 147-48, 162-63, 165-66, 179, 194-96).

Ḳoršāh's chronicle has only partially been published. [Charles Schefer](#) published parts of the chronicle in his *Chrestomathie persane* (II, pp. 56-104). These parts are about the Shirvānšāhids, local rulers of Bieh-Pas (Rašt) and Bieh-Piš (Lāhijān) regions of Gilān, the Mar'āši Seyyeds of Māzandarān and their immediate successors under Esmā'il I, and the Seyyed rulers of Hezār-Jarib in eastern Māzandarān. The fifth chapter of the chronicle on the Timurids was published in 1965 in New Delhi. In 2000, an edited version of parts of the sixth and seventh chapters of the *Tāriḳ-e ilči-e NeẒāmšāh* was brought out in Tehran.

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