



MOḤIṬ AL-TAWĀRIḶ

MOḤIṬ AL-TAWĀRIḶ (The sea of chronicles), a 17th century historiographical work by Moḥammad-Amin b. Mirzā Zamān Boḳāri (Şufiāni). Three different titles have been given for Moḥammad-Amin's work, i.e., *Tāriḳ-e torkestān* (Blochet, I, p. 295); *Moḥiṭ al-tawāriḳ* (Semenov, I, p. 43; Bregel, II, p. 1143); and *Tāriḳ-e Sobḥān-qoli Kān* (Storey, I/1, p. 379). Nevertheless, in the *dibāĉa* (preface) of two of the extant manuscripts of the work, namely the Tashkent and the St. Petersburg manuscripts, the author clearly states that the title of his work is *Moḥiṭ al-tawāriḳ*.

The work is a general history in ten *bābs* (chapters), beginning with “On the Moḥammedan rejoicing light” and ending with the history of Bukhara under the Ashtarkhanids, in particular Sobḥān-qoli Khan. The most important part of this work is chapter ten, which begins with the accession of Sayyid Sobḥān-qoli Moḥammad Bahādor Khan to the throne on 15 Şawwāl 1092/28 October 1681 and ends with the events of 5 Jomādā II 1111/28 November 1699. The work was composed at the behest of Ebrāhim Quş-baygi (Moḥammad-Amin, ed. Fallahzadeh and Hashabeiky, p. 347), who was a high-ranking official at the court of the Ashtarkhanid khan Sobḥān-qoli. The name of the author's patron is mentioned once more in a passage in connection with the unrest in the city of Şahr-e Sabz in the year 1111/1699 along with mention of his appointment as the special envoy to negotiate with the rebels (Moḥammad-Amin, ed. Fallahzadeh and Hashabeiky, pp. 328–30), an appointment that also reveals the khan's confidence in him. Based on a marginal comment found in the St. Petersburg manuscript (p. 187), Ebrāhim Quş-baygi died in the last



month of the year 1112/May 1701. We do not know whether or how his death affected the composition of *Moḥiṭ al-tawāriḶ* and its author.

The first nine chapters of the work are compiled on the basis of 37 earlier sources which the author lists in his preface (Moḥammad-Amin, ed. Fallahzadeh and Hashabeiky, pp. 10–12). A few of the listed works by Moḥammad-Amin are still unknown, partly because they have been introduced incompletely, or referred to by other titles unknown to us, or because the names of the authors have been noted incorrectly, and partly because they have been lost or are neglected in private libraries somewhere. Among the earlier historiographical works mentioned by Moḥammad-Amin, four are used extensively from the preface to almost the end of the ninth chapter. These works are: *Moḍakker-e aḥbāb* by Sayyid Ḥasan K̄āja Naqīb-al-Ašraf (Neṭāri) Boḳāri (fl. 974/1566); *Rawżat al-ṣafā* by Mir Moḥammad Sayyid Borhān-al-Din Kāvandšāh, known as Mirk̄vānd (d. 903/1498); *Šaraf-nāma-ye šāhi* (given in the list under its common title, *‘Abd-Allāh-nāma*) by Ḥāfeẓ Taniš b. Mir Moḥammad Boḳāri (fl. 992/1584); and *Ḥabīb al-siar* by Ġiāt-al-Din b. Homām-al-Din al-Ḥosayni, known as K̄vāndamir (d. ca. 941/1535).

An interesting and to some extent odd feature of the ninth chapter and the work in general is the inclusion of a music treatise approximately in the middle of that chapter. The treatise appears between the sub-chapters on the accounts of the reigns of the Shaybanid rulers ‘Abd-Allāh Khan and ‘Abd-al-Mo’men Khan. Nevertheless, the treatise is in fact an abridgement of a longer and more comprehensive work, entitled *Toḥfat al-sorur*, by Darviš ‘Ali Čangi (11th/17th century).

To the question of what sources Moḥammad-Amin used to write the tenth chapter, we do not have a satisfactory answer. On many occasions, he relates an event with such precision that he must have been present on those occasions or used oral information from participants or eyewitnesses. His description of the khan’s correspondence with different persons and his battles with various dissidents and rebels are good examples of this (e.g., Moḥammad-Amin, ed. Fallahzadeh and Hashabeiky, pp. 235, 238). As mentioned, it is plausible that the tenth chapter is Moḥammad-Amin’s own composition. However, at the end of that chapter, there is a sub-chapter about *‘elm-e tāriḶ* (the science of history) where Moḥammad-Amin explains the *lafẓ* (word/term), *tāriḶ* (history), and its *ma’āni* (meanings). This sub-chapter is based on the *Rawżat al-ṣafā*, and a considerable part of it is taken from that work’s *moqaddama* (introduction) about the science of history and its *fā’eda*



(benefits).

Another peculiarity of the work relates to the information about the author and the work; this was shifted from the preface, the usual location in earlier works, to the end. In other words, the author only introduces himself and explains how he received the order from his patron Ebrāhim Quš-baygi to write a history about the khan and his time at the end of the work. It should be noted that Moḥammad-Amin used the preface of *Maṭlaʿ al-saʿdayn wa majmaʿ al-baḥrayn* by Kamāl-al-Din ʿAbd al-Razzāq Samarqandi (q.v.; d. 887/1482) as a model for composing that conclusive part about himself and his work.

The typology of historiographical writings is always problematic and dubious. However, if we try to categorize the *Moḥiṭ al-tawāriḶ*, we can put it partly in the category of the so called “universal” or “general” historiography in which the author “would usually begin with creation followed by a brief account of the prophets culminating in Mohammad, whose biography is followed by those of the first four caliphs (the Rāšedun); and the rest would typically be divided into chapters for each Islamic dynasty, in more or less chronological order” (Bregel, p. 396; see also Melville, 2012, p. 155; Storey, p. 61). To this, pre-Islamic Iranian dynasties and kings should also be added. Moḥammad-Amin rigorously follows this pattern in his work, as is clear in the table of contents of his work in the preface and throughout his work. Nevertheless, towards the end, the character of the work began to be changed to the so called “dynastic” or “local historiography” in which the main focus of the author is to give accounts of the events of one dynasty, leading up to the author’s contemporary ruler (Melville, 2012, p. 155; Melville, 2000, pp. 7–14).

Although there is another work, in the form of verses, entitled *Sobḥān-qolī-nāma* by Moḥammad Ṣalāḥ Siāhgerdi Balkī (Bregel, p. 1143; Storey, I/1, p. 378), Moḥammad-Amin’s *Moḥiṭ al-tawāriḶ* is indeed the only prose historiographical work written in Bukhara during the reign of Sobḥān-qolī Khan.

According to Bregel (p. 1144), there are five extant manuscripts of the work and an Uzbek/Chagatai translation of it, about two of which there are some uncertainties, namely the manuscripts in Bukhara and Medina. The other three manuscripts are in France, Uzbekistan, and Russia.

LINGUISTIC AND STYLISTIC FEATURES



Moḥiṭ al-tawāriḶ is a valuable source for the study not only of the historical developments during a certain period in Central Asia, but also of the New Persian of this period. It is a transitional period that links the New Persian of the 13th to 15th centuries with its modern variants of the 20th century. It is also a valuable source for synchronic studies of dialectal variations of the period to which the work belongs and of language changes due to language contact.

The period of the 16th to the 17th century, with the Safavids as one of the major political powers in the region, is an era during which linguistic evolution coincides with social and political changes. The later political and ideological separation of post-Safavid Iran from Central Asia and Afghanistan resulted in the subsequent emergence of modern nation-states using different varieties of Persian (Perry, p. 269). This growing separation of Central Asia from Iran, which had already begun in the 16th century, caused, for instance, spoken Tajik to evolve independently of the Persian of Iran, while the written language maintained the standard based on classical Persian until the early decades of the 20th century.

The language of *Moḥiṭ al-tawāriḶ* is different from modern Persian, but mainly at the stylistic level. It is written in rhymed prose with long complex sentences and an emblematic language. Compared to modern Persian, it also contains a greater number of words of Arabic and Turkish origin. The basic morphosyntactic structures, by contrast, are close to those of modern Persian. Although the co-existence of alternative morphosyntactic structures in this text indicate an ongoing language shift, the low frequency of classical forms indicates that the process of language change from classical Persian to modern Persian was nearing its completion by the time this work was composed. The orthography reflects phonological peculiarities which are more in line with the phonological features of classical Persian and Central Asian variants of New Persian than those of modern Persian. One feature of the orthography, which is of importance for manuscript studies, is the way of showing four specific Persian consonant letters. Except for the letter <𐭪>, which is consistently written as <𐭪>, the other three have stabilized and are written almost consistently as < 𐭪 𐭪 𐭪 >.

Moḥiṭ al-tawāriḶ shares stylistic features with other works written during the period and particularly the normative work, the *Šaraf-nāma-ye šāhi* of Ḥāfez Taniš (McChesney, pp. 508–14), with its extensive application of poems and particularly longer ones in the text; its application of an exaggerated



panegyric style which characterizes almost all directly or indirectly commissioned historical writings; its focus on the lives and deeds of individuals (the khan, warriors, artists, religious leaders); and loyalty to a landscape/region/city.

THE AUTHOR

The name of the author has been reported as Moḥammad-Amin b. Mirzā Zamān Boḳāri in the Paris manuscript, most likely in the handwriting of someone other than the scribe, and as Moḥammad-Amin b. Mirzā Moḥammad-Zamān Boḳāri Ṣufiāni in the St. Petersburg and Tashkent manuscripts. It is almost certain that the name of the author is Moḥammad-Amin, the son of Mirzā Moḥammad-Zamān. He was apparently born in Bukhara in the Ṣufiān district.

Concerning his family, or rather his father, Moḥammad-Amin offers two pieces of information to his readers, namely his actual name, which the author gives as Moḥammad-Zamān, and his title, that of Mirzā, which suggests that his father was either a *monši* or an official, or at least an educated man.

Regarding the author's date of birth, information based on the Paris manuscript (fol. 198b) indicates that the author was born at the end of the 1630s. This is supported by two other pieces of evidence. The first is when the author says in the Paris manuscript that the idea of writing the work came to him when he reached the age of sixty. The second piece of information, which is only found in the St. Petersburg manuscript (p. 197), regards the date of the completion of the work, which is 3 Ramaḏān 1110/5 March 1699. There is no direct confirmation of the accuracy of this information in the other two manuscripts. However, there is another piece of evidence in a passage in all three manuscripts, which can confirm the date given by manuscript in St. Petersburg to within one year. This passage concerns the unrest in the city of Šahr-e Sabz in the year 1111/1699 (Moḥammad-Amin, pp. 329–30). This passage can be found almost at the end of the work; with regard to the chronological structure of the work, it is most likely that it was completed not long after this date, perhaps a few months later. In other words, based on this piece of information, the work was completed sometime during 1699.

It is almost certain that the author had close relations with very highly ranked officials at the court of the khan and that he participated in their assemblies and feasts. On a number of occasions, he cites letters, sometimes in



astonishing detail, that the khan sent to different people, which suggests that he had access to the royal correspondence. Furthermore, based on the author's extensive knowledge of the royal library and atelier, which he puts to good use in the tenth chapter, where he presents the royal painters and calligraphers, he held an important official post and most likely was also in charge of the khan and his family's private treasury.

Judging by his work, Muḥammad-Amin was a highly educated person and had good knowledge of a variety of subjects, among them painting, music, and literature. As far as we know, he was the writer of at least this one book. However, C. A. Storey states that the name of the author of the *Moḥiṭ al-tawārik* is presumably identical to the writer of the *'Obayd-Allāh-nāma*, that is, Mir Moḥammad-Amin Bokhāri, "who on the accession of 'Ubaid Allāh Khān in 1131/1701 to the throne of his father Subḥān-Quli Kān, was instructed, in the absence of the Secretary of State, to draw up the *farmāns* announcing the change of government to the provincial governors" (Storey, p. 379).

The date of Moḥammad-Amin's death is unknown. Based on the information in the Paris manuscript (fol. 168b), which was most likely added by the author himself after he finished his work, he was still alive in 1114/1702.

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