



## SAYFI QAZVINI

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**SAYFI QAZVINI**, Nāṣer-al-din Mir Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd-al-laṭif (b. Qazvin, 19 Du‘l-qa‘da, 885/20 January 1481; d. Isfahan, 8 Rabi‘ I, 962/ 31 January 1555), commonly known as Mir Yaḥyā, a Persian historian best known for his *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, a chronicle dealing with the dynastic history of Iran from ancient times until the late 1540s.

### LIFE

Mir Yaḥyā was born in Qazvin, where he completed his studies in hagiographical and biographical traditions (*siar*) as well as Persian prose and poetry (Kāmi, *Nafā‘es*, fol. 266v; Sayfi, *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, p. 253). At that time, the Sayfis ranked among the landed notables of Qazvin and **Deylamān** in **Gilān**. They claimed descent from **Ḥasan b. ‘Ali**, a grandson of the Prophet and the second Shi‘ite imam. In the years leading up to the rise of Shah **Esmā‘il I** to power, a relative of Mir Yaḥyā named Mir ‘Abd-al-Malek or Mir Malek (d. 909/1503) is reported to have acted as commander-in-chief (*sepahsālār*) at the court of Kārkiā Mirzā ‘Ali, ruler of Gilan, leading local forces against various claimants to power in ‘**Erāq-e ‘Ajam** and Gilan (Monši Qazvini, fol. 275v; Ḥasan Rumlu, p. 885; Sayfi, *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, p. 257). In the latter part of the 15th century and beyond, the Sayfis along with the Jabali and the **Kāledi** families of Qazvin played an active part in the Naqšbandi propaganda activities in the city. Mir Yaḥyā had been initiated into the Naqšbandi Sufi order (*ṭariqa*) as a disciple of Ṣon‘-Allāh Kuzakonāni (d. 931/1525), the spiritual leader of the brotherhood in **Azarbaijan** and Kurdistan, which can be taken to imply a few years of residence in Tabriz early in the 16th century. Another prominent



Naqšbandi with whom Mir Yaḥyā studied in Qazvin was Shaikh Mir Sayyed ‘Ali ‘Ammādi, a leading Sunni cleric and mystic from Kurdistan, who in the summer of 924/1518 fled to Shiraz in the wake of the central authorities’ persecution of Sunni notables of Qazvin; but before making it to Fārs he was arrested by the Qezelbāš and executed shortly afterwards by the order of Durmeš Khan Šāmlu (d. 935/1529), brother-in-law of Shah Esmā‘il I and his deputy (*wakil*) in military and administrative affairs (Kāmi, *Nafā’es*, fol. 268r; *pace* Algar, p. 22).

Under Shah Ṭahmāsp I (r. 930-84/1524-76), the Safavid authorities intensified their clampdown on the Naqšbandi activities in Tabriz and Qazvin, forcing many of the leading affiliates of the order in both cities, including some of Mir Yaḥyā’s friends and close relatives, out of Iran to the Ottoman Empire and Mughal India (Algar, pp. 8-24). For several years, the presence of Qāzi Jahān Sayfi Qazvini at the Safavid court as grand vizier had shielded his close family members from religious discrimination and persecution, but, shortly after his death in 960/1553, the Sayfi *sayyeds* of Qazvin, who had long been known as devoted Sunnis, suffered the loss of their privileged status and subsequently many of them fell victim to sectarian intolerance. The pretext based on which the family had been targeted for maltreatment at this time was that, as long as they resided in Qazvin, it would be impossible for the Safavids to convert the city as a whole to Shi‘ite Islam so that it could be proclaimed as Ṭahmāsp I’s new capital (Kāmi, *Nafā’es*, fol. 266v; Šāhnavāz Khan, III, p. 813; Šafā, V, p. 1635). Therefore, in the summer of 1553, a Qezelbāš military chief (*qurčī*) from Salmās in Azarbaijan was assigned the task of relocating Mir Yaḥyā and his family from Qazvin to Isfahan as political exiles, where he spent the rest of his life as a prisoner (*moqayyad*). Less than two years later, he died at the age of seventy-seven in Isfahan on 8 Rabi‘ I 962/31 January 1555 (Kāmi, *Nafā’es*, fol. 267r; Rieu, I, p. 104).

Two sons of Mir Yaḥyā are known to have survived their father. They were Mir ‘Abd-al-Laṭif (d. 980-81/1572-73) and Mir ‘Alā’-al-Dawla, known as Kāmi Qazvini (fl. 998/1590), who both left Iran for India in 962-63/1555-56 and ended up at Emperor Akbar’s court in Agra (‘Allāmi, II, 19, tr. pp. 496-98; Kuzāni Eṣfahāni, fol. 167r).

## WORK

Sayfi’s most noted work is the *Lobb al-tawāriq*, an abridged history of the life and times of the Prophet Moḥammad, the twelve Shi‘ite imams, and the



dynasties that ruled in Iran from the time of the mythical Pišdādi and [Kayānid](#) kings to the Safavid Ṭahmāsp I. Contents and various manuscripts of this chronicle are outlined and discussed by Charles Rieu (I, pp. 104-05), [Edgard Blochet](#) (I, no. 327, p. 226), and Charles A. Storey (tr., I, no. 268, pp. 399-403), as well as by Mir Hāšem Moḥaddet, who has published the most recent edition of the work (Sayfi, *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, pp. 10-11). A general catalogue of the manuscripts kept in major libraries of Iran lists more than forty available manuscripts of the *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, a fact that attests to the wide circulation and readership it enjoyed in early modern Iran (Derāyati, VIII, nos. 235063-235103, col. 1006a-1007b).

Mir Yaḥyā wrote the *Lobb al-tawāriḳ* in the name of Prince Abu'l-Fatḥ Bahrām Mirzā, a younger brother of Ṭahmāsp I, with the objective of “propagating the good deeds and noble works” of the Safavid royal family (Sayfi, *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, pp. 20, 22, 290; Kāmi, *Nafā'es*, fol. 266v; Amin Aḥmad Rāzi, III, p. 176; cf. Blochet, I, no. 327, p. 226; Monzawi, VI, col. 4168b). The year 1549, in the autumn of which Bahrām Mirzā passed away (Ġaffāri Qazvini, p. 299; 'Abdi Beg Širāzi, p. 103; Ḳoršāh Ḥosayni, pp. 175-76), can be taken as the actual *terminus ante quem* for Mir Yaḥyā's history, even though there is evidence that he continued to work on parts of it for at least a year more (Sayfi, *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, p. 234). Sayfi's account on the ruling dynasties of Iran in Islamic period mainly draws from more than five post-Mongol Persian chronicles, including the works of [Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi](#), Šaraf-al-din 'Ali Yazdi, ['Abd-Allāh Bayzāvi](#), and Rašid-al-Din Faḏl-Allāh Hamadāni.

The *Lobb al-tawāriḳ* is organized into four parts (*qesm*). The first part (pp. 23-45) tells about the history of early Islam, including the lives and times of the Prophet and the twelve Shi'ite imams, with no mention of the Sunni rightly guided caliphs. The second part (pp. 46-77) is devoted to the history of the pre-Islamic dynasties of Iran from the Pišdādiān to the Sasanians. The third part (pp. 78-265) is divided into three chapters (*maqāla*) and six sections (*bāb*), each dealing with one of the dynasties that ruled in Iran over the course of the centuries that ensued following the Arab conquest of the country. The closing part (pp. 266-94) is devoted to the reigns of Shah [Esmā'il I](#) (r. 1501-30) and his son and successor Ṭahmāsp I (r. 1530-84).

The most important parts of his history are those dealing with the history of Iran under the Qarā Qoyunlu and the [Āq Qoyunlu](#) tribal confederations and the first two Safavid monarchs. Each section consists of a series of individual entries dedicated to the reign of a specific ruler. All entries are packed with



dates as well as brief descriptions of military campaigns and territorial conquests of each ruler. The sub-section (*faşl*) dedicated to the Āq Qoyunlu rulers of Azarbaijan, Kurdistan, and ‘Erāq-e ‘Ajam features a number of approving allusions to Uzun Ḥasan, whom Sayfi praises as champion of the *şari‘a* and administrative centralism (Sayfi, *Lobb al-tawāriḳ*, p. 249). These positive references can be found in almost all Safavid chronicles, so far as Uzun Ḥasan is concerned. Thus, contrary to what is claimed in modern scholarship (e.g., Woods, p. 221), they do not reflect Sayfi’s departure from the official Safavid line on the Āq Qoyunlu. The fourth part of the book is about the Safavids. Here the reign of Shah Esmā‘il I has received the lion’s share of attention. Unlike historians such as Ġiāt-al-Din K̄āndmir and Ṣadr-al-Din Ebrāhim Amini Heravi, whose accounts of the reign of Esmā‘il I often miss important dates, Sayfi’s narrative rests on a solid chronological foundation, a feature that makes it the precursor of annalistic historiography in Safavid Iran as exemplified in the works of such late 16th-century historians as Aḥmad Ġaffāri Qazvini, Ḥasan Rumlu, and Aḥmad Ḥosayni Qomi. Despite its relative narrative independence and chronological precision, compared with most of the major Safavid chronicles of the 16th century, Sayfi’s account of the reign of Shah Esmā‘il I is notably economical. In particular, he eschews the verbosity and digression that define the historiographical style of chroniclers such as K̄āndmir and Amini Heravi.

It is as a useful encyclopedic handbook on the history of Iran and Islam that the *Lobb al-tawāriḳ* has been of most interest to several generations of historians in Iran and abroad. Gilberto Gaulmine and Antonio Gallando prepared and published the first and only Latin translation of the work in 1690, which was reprinted in 1783. In 1848, [Boris A. Dorn](#) (pp. 3-14) published an edition of the sub-section III of section VI of the *Lobb al-tawāriḳ* in an article on the acquisitions of the Asiatic Museum of St. Petersburg in 1848. About a decade later, in 1859, Vladimir V. Vel’yaminov-Zernov (pp. 337-42, 368-69) published the Russian translation of the section dedicated to the history of the Shibaniid rulers of the Uzbek Khanate of Samarqand. The Persian text has also been the subject of various editions; the first one, prepared by Sayyed Jalāl-al-Din Ṭehrāni, was published in 1935, followed in 1984 by the edition prepared by Moḥammad-Bāqer Nirumand Šuštari. The most recent edition is the one published by Mir Hāšem Moḥaddeḡ in 2007.

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