



## SISTĀNI, MIRZĀ ŠĀH-ḤOSAYN

**SISTĀNI, MIRZĀ ŠĀH-ḤOSAYN** b. Ġiāt-al-Din Moḥammad Sistāni (سیدمحمد میرزا سید محمد سید محمد، b. Sarābān, 14 Šaʿbān 978/21 January 1571; d. after Šawwāl 1036/ June 1627), Persian historian, poet, and bureaucrat whose works include a local history of Sistān, titled *Ehyāʾ al-moluk*, from ancient times to the year 1028/1619, a biographical dictionary of poets titled *Tazkera-ye kayr al-bayān*, and two *maṭnawis*.

*Life.* Šāh-Ḥosayn was born in Sarābān (present-day Sarāvān), a rural fortress town in Sistan (Sistāni, 1965, p. 178). For more than four decades, from 907/1501 up until his death in Qazvin in 951/1544, Šāh-Ḥosayn's paternal grandfather, Šāh-Maḥmud (872-951/1467-1544), was hereditary ruler of Sistan and Nimruz (Sistāni, 1965, p. 159). Following the transfer of the [Safavid](#) capital from Tabriz to Qazvin, Shah Ṭahmāsp (r. 1524-76) ordered almost all landed and bureaucratic notables of eastern provinces of Khorasan and Sistan, including Šāh-Maḥmud Sistāni, to take up residence in Qazvin, unaccompanied by their families and retainers (Ḥosayni Qomi, pp. 580-81). Šāh-Ḥosayn's father remained in Qazvin for the rest of his life. During Šāh-Maḥmud's absence from Sistan, Shah Ṭahmāsp promoted a local *naqib* (head of the *sayyed* families) to the *kāšša* governor of Sarābān, a move that was intended to end the rule of the Kayāni *maleks* of Sistan and bring the province under the direct control of the *kāšša* (crown) sector of the Safavid bureaucracy (Sistāni, 1965, p. 187).

Šāh-Ḥosayn's clan claimed descent on the paternal side from Yaʿqub b. Layṭ (d. 265/879), the founder of the [Saffarid](#) dynasty, and through him from the



Sasanid kings of pre-Islamic Iran. It was based on such claims that Šāh-Ḥosayn and his forefathers called themselves *Kayāni* and used the royal epithet *malek* or king. Šāh-Ḥosayn's matrilineal ancestors were originally from Nawferest, a small village in Qohestān, and similarly traced their descent back to a Sasanid prince called Malek Baḡtafzun b. Ardašir (Sistani, 1965, pp. 427, 432-33). In the early part of the 16th century, Šāh-Ḥosayn's father, Ġiāṭ-al-Din Moḡammad (d. 989/1582), also known as Malek Moḡammad Kayāni, had spent a stint of bureaucratic service with Shah Ṭahmāsp's nephew, Prince Badi'-al-Zamān Mirzā (d. 985/1577) in Sistan and *Kandahar* (Sistāni, 1965, p. 177). While admitting that his father was illiterate, Šāh-Ḥosayn tells us that Malek Moḡammad Kayāni composed poetry and had an excellent knowledge of Iran's dynastic history (Sistāni, fol. 126v).

Šāh-Ḥosayn completed his elementary studies in Sarābān with two local scribes and poets called Mollā 'Abd-al-Mo'min and Mollā 'Abd-al-'Aziz Ṣolḡi, who were brothers (Sistāni, 1965, p. 454; idem, fol. 249r). Later on, he studied the basics of Twelver Shi'i jurisprudence as well as Arabic grammar and syntax with three Safavid religious scholars posted to Sistān, namely, Mollā Kalb-'Ali Jazāyeri, Mollā Moḡammad-Mo'min Jabali, and Amir Žiā'-al-Din Ṭabāṭabā'i Zavāra'i (Sistāni, 1965, pp. 289, 454-55). Additionally, Šāh-Ḥosayn studied Persian poetry and prose in an advanced level with Dust-Moḡammad Fotuḡi Sistāni (d. after 1036/1627) and Mirzā Moḡammad-Wali Dašt-Bayāzi (d. 1000/1592), two reputed poets of the time of Shah Ṭahmāsp and his immediate successors (Sistāni, 1965, pp. 455-56; idem, fols. 114r, 161v). Šāh-Ḥosayn composed poetry under the pen name Bahāri (Sistāni, fol. 173v). As a poet, he composed two *maṭnawis* titled the *Mehr o māh* and the *Fotuḡ al-ḡaramayn*.

Šāh-Ḥosayn started his bureaucratic career as governor of Qal'a-ye Faṭḡ, a military fortress in Sistan, playing an active part in border clashes with the Uzbeks. In 1003/1594-95, he took part in the battle of Band-e Mawdud against the Uzbeks (Sistāni, 1965, pp. 344-53). In the late summer of 1005/1596, the Uzbeks mounted a counterattack, forcing the Kayāni governors of Sistan, including Šāh-Ḥosayn, to leave Sistan for Kandahar (Sistāni, 1965, pp. 359-63). In the spring of 1006/1598, the Kayāni chiefs of Sistan decided to send two delegates to the Safavid and Mughal authorities in 'Erāq-e 'Ajam and Kandahar, asking for their military intervention in Sistan against the Uzbeks. The organizers of these delegates in Sistan had agreed among themselves to side with whichever imperial force that was ready to move in and protect Sistan from falling into the hands of the Uzbeks. Šāh-Ḥosayn headed the



delegate charged with the task of persuading the Safavids to assist local notables of Sistan in repelling the Uzbeks (Sistāni, 1965, pp. 386-87). Yet given Shah ‘Abbās’ presence in Khorasan on the occasion of his military campaign against the Uzbeks, Šāh-Ḥosayn postponed his travel to ‘Erāq-e ‘Ajam and withdrew to Kandahar (Sistāni, 1965, pp. 393-400). It was during one of his short stays in Banfahal (present-day [Bampur](#)) on his way from Sistan to [Kerman](#) in the spring of 1013/1604-5 that Šāh-Ḥosayn composed a *matnawi* entitled *Mehr o māh* modeling it after the *Nal o Daman*, the Persian version of a love story from the *Mahabharata* poeticized as a *matnawi* by the prominent Mughal poet, [Abu’l-Fayz Fayzi Dakani](#) (d. 1004/1595-96; Sistāni, 1965, p. 408).

It was during Šāh-Ḥosayn’s stay in Kandahar in 1006-7/1597-99 that Shah ‘Abbās defeated the Uzbeks and brought Khorasan under his undisputed control. As soon as the news of the Uzbek withdrawal from Khorasan reached Sistan, Šāh-Ḥosayn left Kandahar for [Herat](#) to pledge allegiance to the Safavids. He was admitted to Shah ‘Abbās’ presence in [Jām](#), a rural town midway between Mashhad and Herat, and then tagged along with the Safavid monarch from Jām to Mashhad, getting assurances from him that the Safavids would soon be posted to the province to restore calm and order there. Shortly thereafter, he was sent back to Kandahar to oversee the return to their native land of all refugees from Sistan, whose population, according to Šāh-Ḥosayn’s rough estimate, amounted to 5,000 households (Sistāni, 1965, pp. 404, 464). Shah ‘Abbās then promoted Ganj-‘Ali Khan Zik to governor of Kerman and Sistan, charging him with the task of bringing back both provinces under the effective control of the Safavid bureaucracy. Šāh-Ḥosayn returned to Sistan on 1 Moḥarram 1007/4 August 1598, the date on which the province was officially reintegrated into the Safavid system of *mamālek-e maḥrusa* or “well-protected dominions” (Sistāni, 1965, p. 406).

Between Jomādā I 1008/November-December 1599 and Rabi’ I 1028/February-March 1619, Šāh-Ḥosayn embarked on more than a dozen travels from Sistān to other parts of the Safavid realm, including Kandahar, Qazvin, Tabriz, southern [Georgia](#), Armenia, [Isfahan](#), Mazandaran, Mashhad, and Herat. His history, *Eḥyā’ al-moluk*, concludes with a detailed account of these travels (Sistāni, 1965, pp. 458-524). In 1017/1608-09, he traveled to the Hejaz as a hajj pilgrim via [Shiraz](#) and [Basra](#) (Sistāni, 1965, pp. 477-84) and composed a travelogue in verse titled the *Fotuḥ al-ḥaramayn* narrating his visit of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Excerpts from this travelogue are reproduced in his *Tazkera-ye Kayr al-bayān* (fols. 174r-v). In 1018/1609-10, he was made a



*tiyul*-holder in charge of a small village called Kana-Biša (present-day Kanavis) outside Mashhad. A year later, Shah ‘Abbās granted him the ownership of all the *soyurḡāl* lands in Farāh (Sistāni, 1965, p. 415). On 15 Ša‘bān 1023/20 September 1614, Šāh-Ḥosayn was appointed governor of two fortress towns in Kij and Makrān (Sistāni, 1965, p. 417; Eskandar Beg, p. 958; tr., Savory, p. 1179).

During this period, Šāh-Ḥosayn spent several months at the court of Shah ‘Abbās, either in Isfahan or during military campaigns in Azarbaijan, Georgia, and Khorasan. For much of the 1620s, however, he resided in Farāh, Kandahar, and Herat, where he worked as a protégé of the governor-general of Khorasan, Ḥosayn Khan Šāmlu (d. 1027/1619) and his son and successor Ḥasan Khan (d. 1050/1641). Based on the dates given in his *tazkera*, we know that Šāh-Ḥosayn was alive up until Ramazān 1036/May-June 1627, but the exact date of his death remains unknown (Sistāni, fol. 72r; Smirnova and Bradze, p. 417).

*Works.* (1) *Eḥyā’ al-moluk*. This is a local history of Sistan from ancient times up until the summer of 1031/1622. It took Šāh-Ḥosayn more than a decade, from 1018/1609 to 1031/1622, to finish the final draft of his history of Sistan (Smirnova and Bradze, pp. 426-31). It is structured into a preface (*dibāčā*), an introduction (*moqaddama*), three chapters (*faṣls*), and an epilogue (*kātema*; Rieu, p. 66). In the preface, Šāh-Ḥosayn clarifies that, in writing a history of Sistān, he followed the example of his maternal grandfather, who had once written a local history of the province. He then adds that, during his elementary studies in Sarābān, he had read parts of that local history of Sistan, but later on he found out that its unique manuscript was destroyed. It was with the objective of reviving the memory of his ancestors, who were kings of Sistan, that Šāh-Ḥosayn decided to write his history, hence the title *Eḥyā’ al-moluk* (Sistāni, 1965, p. 2). For the purpose of his history, Šāh-Ḥosayn had used and occasionally plagiarized six local histories of Sistan as well as more than twenty *divāns*, literary compilations, and universal histories.

In the introduction (pp. 4-22), Sistāni discusses and illuminates the merits of Sistan, the genealogy of its ruling dynasties, and their firm belief in monotheism long before the rise of Islam. The first chapter (pp. 23-54) deals with the mythical kings of Sistān from Kuhrang to Āzar-Barzin. The second chapter (pp. 55-108) chronicles the history of the province from the time of Ya‘qub b. Layṭ up until the reign of Šāh-e Šāhān b. Šāh Mas‘ud (d. 805/1403), whose rise to power coincided with Tamerlane’s conquest of Iran. The third



chapter (pp. 109-448) deals with the history of the province from the opening years of the 15th century till the reign of Shah ‘Abbās. The epilogue (pp. 449-524) includes an autobiographical account (pp. 449-58) followed by a detailed account of his travels from the spring of 1004/1596 up until 1028/1619 (pp. 458-524).

The importance of Šāh-Ḥosayn’s chronicle lies in its detailed coverage of the political history of Sistan and Kandahar over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries. Clashes with the Uzbeks of Khorasan and Transoxiana (Mā warā’ al-nahr), on the one hand, and the power relations that existed between the Kayāni household and the Safavid monarchs, on the other, have received the lion’s share of attention in the *Eḥyā’ al-moluk*. Given Šāh-Ḥosayn’s lengthy residence at the court of Shah ‘Abbās as well as his participation in military campaigns against the Uzbeks and Ottomans in Khorasan, Azarbaijan, and Georgia, his history is larded with important details on Shah ‘Abbās’s military and administrative policies. The political history of Farāh, where successive generations of the ancestors of Šāh-Ḥosayn’s wife lived and acted as local rulers (*maleks*), is also dealt with in some detail in the *Eḥyā’ al-moluk*. Parts of Šāh-Ḥosayn’s history are recycled in the works of contemporary chroniclers such as [Eskandar Beg Torkamān](#) (pp. 480, 483-84) and Fażli Beg Kuzāni Eṣfahāni (fol. 2v).

(2) *Tazkera-ye kayr al-bayān*. This is a biographical dictionary of Persian-language poets in two volumes. Šāh-Ḥosayn started the writing of the first draft of his *tazkera* in Herat on 10 Rabi’ II 1019/2 July 1610 and finished it in less than two months on 30 Jomādā I 1019/20 August 1610. This first edition of the *Tazkera-ye kayr al-bayān* is dedicated to the governor-general of Khorasan, Ḥosayn Khan Šāmlu (Sistāni, fol. 174v). In 1035-36/1625-27, he revised and augmented the first edition during his stays in Khorassan and Sistan in collaboration with the ex-poet laureate of the court of Shah ‘Abbās, Ša’ni Takkalu (d. after 1036/1627) and the Kayāni ruler of Sistān, Malek Jalāl-al-Dīn Maḥmud. In Herat, Šāh-Ḥosayn points out, Ša’ni Takkalu had offered to review the new edition of his *tazkera* (Sistāni, fol. 138v). During his time in Sistan, the Kayāni ruler of the province had supplied Šāh-Ḥosayn a list of the poets who left Iran for India via Sistan and Kandahar (Sistāni, folio 72r).

The *Tazkera-ye kayr al-bayān* is organized into a preface, two parts (*faṣls*), and an epilogue (Ranjbar, pp. 142-44; Rieu, p. 77). This volume is yet to be published, and one of the well-known manuscript copies of it is preserved in the Majles Library in Tehran (Darāyati, II, p. 1066). In the preface, Šāh-Ḥosayn



chronicles the lives and times of the Prophet Moḥammad, the twelve Shiʿi [Imams](#), the founding father of the Şafawiya Sufi order, and the dynastic phase of Safavid history. The first chapter, which constitutes the first volume of the *tazkera*, is dedicated to the lives and literary output of classical Persian-language poets. Each biographical entry starts with a short description of the poet’s life and times to be followed by often long excerpts from his *divān*. When dealing with classical poets, Šāh-Ḥosayn tries to portray almost all of them as firm believers in Twelver Shiʿism. Later additions to this first part of the *tazkera*, which come in the form of entries on a number of prominent Sufis and religious scholars, are provided at the end of the entry on K̄vāja ‘Abd-Allāh [Anşāri](#) (d. 481/1089).

The second part is divided into four chapters (*aşls*). The first chapter deals with the poets who were active during the reign of the Timurid ruler of Herat, Solţān [Ḥosayn Bāyqarā](#) (873-911/1469-1506). The second and third chapters focus on those poets who were alive and active under the first two Safavid monarchs and their immediate successors. The last chapter concerns the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 996-1038/1588-1629) and his contemporary poets. This last chapter is added to the first edition of the *tazkera* in 1035-36/1625-27. Many of the poets whose lives and poems are discussed in this last chapter were among Šāh-Ḥosayn’s close friends. Some of them are admitted to have provided Šāh-Ḥosayn with either excerpts from their “unpublished” *divāns* or details of their biographies. Selected parts of Šāh-Ḥosayn’s *tazkera* are published (Nawşāhi, pp. 32-69).

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