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TĀRIḴ-E SISTĀN

TĀRIḴ-E SISTĀN, an anonymous local history in Persian of the eastern Iranian region of Sistān, the region that straddles the modern Iran-Afghanistan border. It forms a notable example of the flourishing genre of local histories, dealing with towns and provinces, in the pre-modern Iranian lands.

The first and major part of the history, what may be termed "the core text," runs from the legendary, pre-Islamic history of the province up to 448/1062, when Sistān had just come within the orbit of the vigorous and expanding Saljuq empire; the author gives after the mention of the name of Ṭoḡrïl Beg (q.v.) the *tabqiya*, i.e. the formula "May God perpetuate his rule," implying that the Saljuq chief was still alive at the time of writing.

The opening pages of the history seem to have lacunae, but the first part of it, about one-seventh of the whole, deals with the pre-Islamic history of Sistān, emphasizing the special status vouchsafed to it by divine favor; at the outset, the author quotes from the *Ketāb-e Garšāsb* of the somewhat shadowy Samanid-period author Abu'l-Moʾayyad Balḵi (probably part of a now lost prose *Šāh-nāma* by him), and from a *Ketāb fażāʾel Sejestān* by an otherwise unknown local author, Helāl b. Yusof Uqi (*Tārīḵ-e Sistān*, pp. 1, 2, 35). It is presumably from this latter work that the author gives information on the geography and topography of Sistān; its fire temples; its revenue in early Islamic times; its superior virtues over all other regions of the world; and the notable persons emanating from it, starting with the Kayanid founder, Garšāsp (see KARŠĀSP), founder of the capital Zarang (q.v.) 4,000 years before

the advent of the Prophet Moḥammad as a refuge from the tyrant Żaḥḥāk. The author twice mentions the *Bundahišn* (*Tāriḵ-e Sistān*, pp. 16, 17), but there is no firm indication that the author actually knew Pahlavi. His viewpoint is strongly Islamic, with no nostalgia for an heroic past of Iran: Garšāsp and his descendants up to the time of Farāmarz, son of Rostam, maintained the pure monotheistic faith of Adam and the first men, rejecting such rival faiths as Zoroastrianism until the miraculous birth of the Prophet. Thus the inference is that, for the Sistānis, Moḥammad was reinvigorating the primeval faith that they had never ceased to believe in. There then follows a sketchy survey of early Islamic history, seen largely from a Sistān perspective, hence detailing *inter alia* the Arab-Islamic raids into Sistān, from ʿOṯmān's caliphate onwards, under such leaders as Rabiʿ b. Ziād and ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān b. Samora (see Bosworth, 1968, pp. 3ff, 13ff; Bosworth, 1994, pp. 3-66).

What makes the *Tāriḵ-e Sistān* especially valuable as a source for more general mediaeval Islamic history is, however, the author's subsequent concentration on events that were not only of local Sistāni importance but that also changed the course of Eastern Islamic history as the ʿAbbasid caliphate entered into its long decline. These include the prolonged Kharejite movement affecting Sistān and Khorasan of a local Sistāni, Ḥamza b. Āḏarak (see also KHAREJITES. IN PERSIA), but above all, the rise to power in the 9th century of two of Sistān's greatest sons, Yaʿqub and ʿAmr b. Layṯ Ṣaffār, of lowly origin and initially, it seems, first achieving local prominence as anti-Kharejite vigilantes, *ʿayyār*s or *motaṭawweʿa*. In the later part of that century they dominated the Eastern Islamic world, challenging the authority of the Tahirids and the ʿAbbasid caliphs, and building up a mighty, if evanescent, military empire. Members of this Layṯid family bounced back after a Samanid occupation of Sistān, and continued to rule there until the Ghaznavid conquest of the province in the opening years of the 11th century and the end of the Saffarid line. Given its detail, the history is accordingly the prime source for the Saffarid dynasty (see Bosworth, 1994, pp. 67-361; idem, 1996, pp. 172-73). Concerning the author's materials for the early Islamic period and then the Saffarids, it is clear that he depended on locally available sources and was apparently unaware of the standard, general ones for Eastern Islamic history, such as Ṭabari, Ṭabari-Balʿami, Masʿūdi, Sallami, etc., or of near-contemporary and contemporary Ghaznavid authors like ʿOtbi, Gardizi, and Abu'l-Faẓl Bayhaqi (see Bosworth, 1994, pp. 24-25).

This main section of the history closes with the coming of the Saljuqs to Sistān

after the Ghaznavid interlude, but continues in a much less detailed, sketchier form (see below) with the establishment there of two native lines of Maleks (Maliks) of Nimruz, the Naṣrids and the Mehrabānids, ending the story in the reign of Malek Noṣrat-al-Din or Nāser-al-Din Moḥammad (r. 718-31/1318-39; see Bosworth, 1996, pp. 211-12). Here it nevertheless provides, in conjunction with the other great local history of Sistān, the *Eḥyāʾ al-moluk* of Malekšāh Ḥosayn, the main source on how these distinctly obscure local lines managed to survive during the Saljuq and Mongol periods (see Bosworth, 1994, pp. 365-477).

The main part of the history, that going up to 448/1062, is written in a straightforward but varied Persian style, with a substantially Persian vocabulary and few Arabisms, and containing a significant number of archaic and dialectal words and expressions; Bahār places it stylistically and linguistically in the category of the earliest New Persian historical prose style, comparable, e.g., to Balʿami's Persian translation of the *Tārik̲* of Ṭabari and Gardizi's *Zayn al-aḵbār* (see Bahār's intro to *Tārik̲-e Sistān*, pp. *yāʾ-hāʾ* ff; Bahar, II, pp. 44-50; Lazard, pp. 74-5). However, the last pages of the history, dealing with the Maleks of Nimruz, are clearly by another hand. The subject matter is more parochial in its geographical coverage. The Persian style is palpably different from the main part of the history: sentences become shorter, the narrative is more note-like and less continuous, and the vocabulary more arabised, perhaps reflecting an age which produced such ornate historical styles as those Jovayni and Waṣṣāf. Thus there are clearly two authors involved in the compilation the *Tārik-e Sistān* as we now have it, but Julie Meisami has recently suggested (pp. 131-32) that a third author may have been at work when the narrative deals with the Saljuqs' appearance in Sistān in the 440s/1050s; the style here is different and the narration becomes adorned with astrological references and mentions of portents, before the author of the closing section on the Maleks of Nimruz takes over.

The manuscript tradition and the printing history of the work are somewhat confused, but have been skillfully elucidated by Ehsan Yarshater (in his Foreword to Gold's English translation, pp. xvii-xxi), whose analysis is followed here. The Persian text was first published in a Tehran newspaper in 1881-85. Then Malek al-Šoʿarāʾ Bahār acquired a manuscript, one based on a copy made not later than 864/1469, which became the basis of the *editio princeps*, his edited text of Tehran 1314/1935. Meanwhile, further ostensible manuscripts or quotations from manuscripts had turned up, including a Paris

manuscript, but these have been shown not to be parallel, independent documents (hence the mention of the B.N. ms. Blochet, IV, 2281, should be deleted from the entries on the history in Storey, I, p. 364, and Storey-Bregel, II, p. 1078. See Lazard, p. 75; Scarcia, pp. 277-80). However, a manuscripts copied in 1861 and now at Tbilisi, in the Georgian Republic, seems, so its discoverer Jemshid Giunashvili has surmised, to have been copied from a manuscripts now lost but closely parallel to the Tehran Bahār one (see Storey-Bregel, II, p. 1079; Giunašvili, pp. 345-46). The problems here have not fully been resolved, but for the present, it seems safest to treat the Tehran manuscripts as the main basis for our knowledge of the text.

Sections of the *Tārik-e Sistān* was translated in the Princeton doctoral theses of Yahya Armajani and R. Park Johnson (see Bosworth, 1994, pp. 26-27, for details), but the first complete English translation was published by Milton Gold in the series Literary and Historical Texts from Iran (Rome, 1976). This is a serviceable rather than outstanding piece of work and a translation by someone more conversant with the general background of early Islamic history and culture is a desideratum. A Russian translation was published by L. P. Smirnova (Moscow, 1971).

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