Khuzani Isfahani Fazli Beg, *A Chronicle of the Reign of Shah 'Abbas*

Ghereghlou Kioumars (ed.) with an Introduction by Kioumars Ghereghlou and Charles Melville
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This beautifully printed two volumes edition of the unique third manuscript volume of Fazli Beg Khuzani Isfahani's seventeenth century Safavid history, the *Afzal al-tavarikh*, is dedicated to the memory of A. H. 'Sandy' Morton. Sandy Morton, who wrote an important early essay on Safavid history using the *Afzal-al-tavarikh*, is remembered in the dedication as a "trustee of the Gibb Memorial Trust, mentor and friend." Yet it is also important to recall he was an exceptionally accomplished Persian textual scholar and a dedicated numismatist, who for many years was also the Assistant Director of the British Institute of Persian Studies in Tehran. He graciously presided over an informal hostel at the Institute, generously welcoming not only Iranian archeologists but also dozens of individuals with a variety of interests in Iranian studies. With Sandy in Tehran the Institute became a welcoming haven, as well serving as one of the most important institutional bases for Iranian and Persian language studies in Iran. A talented scholar, Sandy was also, indisputably, a gentleman.

Two general points ought to be considered when reviewing an edited work such as this: the editing itself and the value of the text. First then, regarding the editing process, it is a pleasure to report that this new Gibb Memorial Trust publication upholds the high scholarly and production values of earlier volumes in the series that is devoted to the memory and work of E. J. W. Gibb, the Ottoman literary scholar. The editor Kiomars Ghereghlou of Columbia University deserves great credit for his meticulous work on this unique and complex text. While Fazli Beg's history is largely written in easily legible *nastaliq* script, as Ghereghlou and Charles Melville point out in the Editors' Preface, reading the copy is a treacherous exercise. This is due to several factors: numerous worm holes, crossed out words, phrases and entire passages and the insertion of letters and documents in the margins, some parts of which have been deleted or rendered illegible by the later trimming of the manuscript. Questionable passages have been indicated by brackets and crossed out sections have been placed in footnotes as *khat-i khurdeh*, the recurring indication of the hundreds of such entries. That phrase and a number of minor textual changes, indicated by *matn*, comprise the two categories of footnotes found throughout these volumes, which, since it is a unique manuscript, cannot be compared to other extent copies of the work. Scholars who have their own questions about this copy are fortunate to have an especially valuable modern supplement of this Gibb Memorial volume, a DVD of the text, which will allow those who use Fazli Beg's work see the original text for themselves.

Apart from providing a guide to the problems of the copy, in their Preface the Editors have provided an exemplary introductory essay to the Fazli Beg's work. This includes a biographical sketch of the author's career, based partly on earlier articles by M. Haneda, A. H. Morton, C. Melville and S. Abrahams, a description of the peripatetic history of this unique copy, which Charles Melville of Cambridge University discovered in the Christ's College, Cambridge Library, an analysis of the relationship of Fazli Beg's work to the famous Safavid history of Iskandar Beg Munshi, the *Tarikh-i'alam-ara-yi 'abbasi* and an analysis of the historiographical importance of the *Afzal al-tavarikh*. Ghereghlou has also provided an unusually comprehensive index for scholars using these volumes. It consists of the following categories: references to personal and place names, the names or titles of tribes and peoples (*ilat u aqvam*), references to social groups, such as *a'yan,* and *sadat*, technical political, social and military terminology, such as *tufangchi*, *suyurghal*, *karkanejat*, and chronograms, verses written to commemorate accessions, deaths and military victories, such as the conquest of Tabriz and Baghdad, arrivals of important individuals, and political appointments. The first three of these verses commemorate the accession or coronation of Shah 'Abbas, the subject of this third volume of Fazli Beg's three volume history.

Fazli Beg, the author of the *Afzal al-tavarikh*, was descended on both his paternal and maternal sides from professional Iranian bureaucrats. His father's family had been active in mid-fifteenth century political struggles around Isfahan, where they held land in Khuzan District, located very near the city. Members of the Khuzani lineage supported the Qara Qoyunlu, the "Black Sheep" Turks against the Timurids, and early in the sixteenth century they joined the Safavid cause in their struggle with the Aq Qoyunlu, the "White Sheep" maternal relatives of Shah Isma'il. As a reward for their Safavid alliance they were given *tiyul* lands in their home district of Khuzan and later appointments in the Safavid state. The author's paternal grandfather Masih al-Din Ruh-Allah Khuzani Isfahani (d. 1570), served as vizier of Mashhad from 1533-1570, where he also acted as steward of the shrine of the eighth Shi'i Imam in the city for a number of years. Fazli Beg's father held modest middle level positions

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during most of his life, serving two minor Safavid princes in the later years of his career. Fazli Beg's mother's family, which included well-known officials and Turkic poets, enjoyed somewhat similar careers as Safavid officials in Fars and Azerbaijan. One of his maternal uncles served as vizier of Fars at the end of the sixteenth century, having actually taken over that office from one of Fazli Beg's paternal uncles![1] Two of Fazli Beg's elder brothers were also bureaucrats and in 1608 he joined one of them, Muhammad Beg, as a financial official in Qara Bagh in northeastern Azerbaijan at the age of sixteen.

Prior to this appointment the Khuzani family had been involved with the administration of Azerbaijan in the sixteenth century and Fazli Beg grew up in the region. He seems to refer to his Azeri childhood when in volume I of his history, he apologizes for his "lack of refinement and learning and professes his ignorance due to an early life and upbringing among the Turks."[2]. Not only were there Kurdish and Turkic populations in the region but Qara Bagh was a border district repeatedly fought over by Ottoman and Safavid forces and occupied by the Ottomans in 1588[3]. In 1617 Shah 'Abbas appointed Fazli as vizier to the governor of the region, apparently as a reward for his involvement with or command of Iranian Qizilbash Turkic troops in a successful attack and massacre of the Georgian settlement of Zakum, in which he was responsible for totaling the number of 2000 severed heads of the inhabitants[4]. He was subsequently appointed as vizier of the province of Kakheti, north of Tiflis in eastern Georgia, in 1619, where he remained until 1624. Later, in 1624, he briefly held a similar position in Kirman. Then sometime shortly after the death of Shah 'Abbas in January 1629 but before 1634 he migrated to India, where he seems to have joined Iranians already working for the Mughal regime[5]. Other Khuzani family members had preceded him to India as part of the stream of Iranians who gained positions with the wealthy Mughal Empire[6]. However, little is known about his career in India. He is not a well- known figure in the Deccan, the region of south-central India where the Shi'i Adil Shahi dynasty of Bijapur welcomed Iranians and recognized the Safavids as a paramount power, but the autograph colophon of the second volume was his history was signed in the Deccan[7].

The Afzal al-tavarikh

Fazli Beg reports that he decided to write his history in 1616/1617, that is roughly at the time Shah 'Abbas appointed him as vizier. Prior to this he had written a three volume biographical dictionary of members of the Qizilbash tribes who composed Turkish verse, perhaps stimulated by his mother's family's Turkic literary traditions but almost certainly reflecting also his upbringing in the area where the Azeri Turkish Shah Isma'il employed in his poetry was widely spoken[8]. He claims he read historical accounts from an early age, and had also been interested in the "nobility" of Iran[9]. He began writing the *Afzal*, just as Iskandar Beg Munshi was completing the second volume of his well known history of Shah 'Abbas's reign and was perhaps stimulated by Iskandar Beg's example. Indeed, he uses the historian's work in the opening folios of this volume three, which is the reason why in the past the *Afzal* was thought to be another of Iskandar Beg's works. Initially he quickly wrote an account of Shah 'Abbas's reign and circulated it to men who were presumably Safavid scholar-officials whom he knew. Subsequently he decided to compose a complete history of the Safavid dynasty through the reign of Shah 'Abbas. In his first volume he covered the origins of the Safavid family and concluded with the death of Shah Isma'il in 1524. Fazli Beg devoted the second volume to the reign of Shah Tahmasp (1524/25-1576/77) and the third volume chronicles the reign oh Shah 'Abbas, the original reason for compiling the entire history.

In technical historiographic terms Fazli Beg's is a typical annalistic history in a well-established Iranian tradition. Simin Abrahams in her detailed study of volume II of the *Afzal*, observes that it "belongs to the genre of Safavid court chronicles. The use of standard sources, choice of historical themes, the conventional structure of the narrative, and the number and range of official documents that it contains place *Afzal*

(1) Kiormars Ghereghlou and Charles Melville, "The Editors' Preface" in Kioumars Ghereghlou ed., *A Chronicle of the Reign of Shah 'Abbas*, Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2015, xiv.
(2) Simin Abrahams, "A Hitorical Study and Annotated Translation of Volume 2 of the *Afzâl al-*Tavârîkh by Fazlî Khûzânî al-Isfâhâni," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, the University of Edinburgh, 1999, 15.
(3) For this Ottoman occupation see Rhoads Murphy, "The Garrison and Its Hinterland in the Ottoman East, 1578-1605," in A.C.S Peacock ed., *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009, and map on p. 357.
(4) Abrahams, 17
(5) Gherghlou and Melville, 21 and Abrahams 22.
(6) Gherghlou and Melville, xxix-xxx. For an introduction to the enormous number of Iranian poets, often employed as administrators, who migrated to India see Gulchin-i Ma'ani, *Karvan-i Hind*, Tehran: Intisharat-i-quds-i-razavi, 1369/1970).
(7) Abrahams, 21.
(8) Ghereghlou and Melville, I, xxi.
(9) Abrahams, 15.

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in the mainstream of Safavid historiography."[10]. Nonetheless the work does have two distinct traits. First, Fazli Beg has provided readers with a table of contents expressly to make it easier for them to find information without having to read the entire work. Second, in the final folios of the third volume (566-578) he has included an index of his own, which names, but without folio references, *'ulama*, learned men, *hakim*-s, astrologers/astronomers, lists of more than five pages of Tajik or Persian poets – the longest entry, the descendants of Shaikh Safi al-Din and Mulana Husain, members of the major Qizilbash tribes, various troop units and commanders for each province, such as the entry for Qara Bagh, in which he gives a figure of six thousand, four hundred men and then lists the names of commanders – of one thousand, or five hundred etc.

The third volume of Fazli Beg's *Afzal* is valuable for scholars of Safavid Iran for a number of reasons, and Kiomars Ghereghlou and Charles Melville systematically highlight these reasons in their Preface. First, Fazli Beg has used a number of non-extant historical sources. In volume two he lists the eleven sources he used for the first two volumes, but does not repeat this for volume three. Second, Fazli Beg, who grew up in Azerbaijan and served in the region, writes knowledgably about events and individuals in these little known areas of Azerbaijan and Georgia. Third, when compared with the first two volumes of the *Afzal* this third volume covering Shah 'Abbas's reign is unusually rich source because the author was a contemporary of Shah 'Abbas and enjoyed a web of kinship connections, which provided him with first hand reports of events throughout Iran. Thus, the *Afzal* is not strictly or mainly a narrative of events at court or a detailed account of the Shah's principal military campaigns. Apart from the opening and early part of the text, which is taken from and or based on Iskender Beg's *Tarikh-i 'alam-ara-yi 'abbasi*, Khuzani Isfahani's text is principally of value to Safavid historians because, as the editors note, the second part of this work "takes on a more personal nature, relating to him and his family and to events in Georgia and Khurasan."[11]. He also offers personally informed testimony of some crucial events at court, such as the famous case of Shah 'Abbas's suppression of the Nuqtavi sect in 1593-94[12]. To illustrate the history's value Ghereghlou and Melville make a number valuable comparisons between the "factual richness" of Fazli Beg's accounts of certain events and the briefer, summaries of the same events or circumstances provided by Iskandar Beg Munshi. Finally, as the editors also note the *Afzal* offers valuable information about the system of *tiyul* land assignments, the institution which is so fundamental to the understanding the political and economic history of the Safavid regime.

A final observation about the value of the *Afzal* relates to its autobiographical content. Marc Bloch, the famous French scholar and *Annales* School historian, divided historical sources not only into primary and secondary categories, but insisted that scholars must understand the difference between intentional and unintentional evidence. He argued that all published works were intentional, whether openly or implicitly, and certainly believed that histories, especially personally informed texts such as Fazli Beg's work were in some manner autobiographical. In other words, they were rhetorical, making an argument, explicit or implicit, for the authors. The *Afzal*, particularly when it is combined with published information from other sources on Fazli Beg's immediate family and vast array of relatives in both Iran and India, offers readers the chance to compile a fairly rich biography of a middle level Safavid official. Iranian bureaucrats are rightly seen as a class unto themselves in the Safavid era, predating the dynasty and distinct from the *'ulama*, and Qizilbash tribes. A biographical essay on the history of Fazli Beg and his lineage would not only flesh out an abstract category – the Iranian bureaucracy –but it would also illumine the complex web of personal connections that sustained the Iranian bureaucratic class in Iran and in India. This was the class, after all, that nurtured and sustained Iranian cultural identity, as Fazli Beg did when he turned from the Azeri linguistic tradition of his Azeri childhood, composing Persian verse of his own while citing the work of so many others.

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(10) See Abrahams, 43, who has studied the themes and reliability of Volume II with great care.
(11) Ghereghlou and Melville, lv.
(12) *Ibid*, xlvii.

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