

Philip BOCKHOLT

Weltgeschichtsschreibung zwischen Schia und Sunna. Ḥwāndamīrs Ḥabīb as-siyar im Handschriftenzeitalter

Leyde, Brill, (Iran Studies, 20), 2021 xix, 463 p., ISBN: 9789004442221

Mots-clés : Timourides, Safavides, histoire, péninsule Indienne, période moderne, historiographie persane

Keywords: Timurids, Safavids, history, Indian peninsula, modern period, Persian historiography

Khwāndamīr's *Ḥabīb as-siyar* is a world history well known to students of Timurid and early Safavid history; these are the fields for which the book is commonly used, whereas it is presumed that the parts on earlier periods are more or less entirely taken from preceding authors, among them Khwāndamīr's grandfather Mīrkhwānd. Scholars mostly rely on an edition published in Tehran in 1954 by Jalāl ad-Dīn Humā'ī. It is astonishing that no one apparently ever tried to find out about the manuscript(s) behind this edition. Only very few scholars ever took the trouble to look at the manuscripts at all. Bockholt's study is overwhelming proof that we all should more frequently do just that: not trust the available printed versions blindly but check the manuscript tradition at least for the sources which are central for the goals we are pursuing at any given moment.

Khwāndamīr's book is one of the most intensely copied works of history in the Persian language. Bockholt tells us that today, about 600 copies of the work are known, and that he has managed to have a look at around 470 of them (p. 315). By the way, in the meantime he has published another study in which he minutiously retraces the spread of the work: *Ein Bestseller der islamischen Vormoderne: Ḥwāndamīrs Ḥabīb as-siyar von Anatolien bis auf den indischen Subkontinent*, Wien (Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften) 2022. Most of the copies were made in the seventeenth century, copying slackened after that (due to the lack of patronage in both Iran and India), but gained momentum again in the nineteenth century and continued until the end of the manuscript age; this was reached in the case of this work with the publication of two lithographed editions, in Tehran (1854-1855) and Bombay (1857) respectively. Another major result of Bockholt's investigation is that the printed edition (Tehran 1954) is no more than a copy of the Bombay lithograph.

But Bockholt has also identified the earliest versions of the work; some of these manuscripts were made under the supervision of the author and on his behalf as is evidenced by the colophons. The earliest manuscripts are listed in Appendix A.1 (p. 367-369) and discussed in Chapter 2. It is in this chapter that Bockholt shows that there is no single authorial version of the text, but three of them: the first (version A) was written at Herat and probably intended as an imperial chronicle for the emerging Safavids. The following version B was also made in Herat. It is the author himself who tells us that he finished the work *a second time* (p. 63). This cannot mean just a second (fair) copy since there are too many textual differences between the versions. These differences are "updates" in their majority and do not concern the general pro-Safavid and pro-Shiite outlook of this version. Major differences separate versions A and B from the latest one (C) written already at Bābūr's court in Northern India. Version C embarks on a thorough sunnization of the work and eradicates all pro-Shii proclivities which the earlier versions expose.

The story of the writing of these three versions is embedded in a biographico-historical narration of events in Iran, Central Asia and Northern India from the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries (Chapter 2, "Weltgeschichte auf zweieinhalbtausend Seiten"). In this context, Bockholt also discusses the date of Khwāndamīr's death which is disputed in scholarship; he settles on 942/1535-1536 (p. 95).

A comparative analysis of the earliest manuscripts shows not only that indeed there are three distinct versions, all of them authored by Khwāndamīr and "published" by him, but also how and at which points the author chose to make changes. Bockholt lets us have a look at Khwāndamīr's writing strategies: he chooses a number of historical events and circumstances where a difference in religious and political outlook would be most obvious. One of these is early Islamic history, and in particular the relative position of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the other Rightly Guided caliphs. Here, Bockholt checks the epithets, eulogies, and the narratives surrounding each of these, and also the sheer length of the stories transmitted. Unsurprisingly, versions A and B reserve the role of sole legitimate successor to the Prophet to 'Alī whereas C has a version compatible with Sunni memories of the events. A second field is contemporary history, and here Bockholt analyses the way Khwāndamīr treats the rise of the Safavids and their wars against the Uzbeks (victory at Marv in 1510) and against the Ottomans (defeat at Chaldiran in 1512). Here, the main question is who, out of the various dynastic rulers, is seen as

just (a positive model: *bonum exemplum*) and who serves to demonstrate, on the contrary, the negative features of rule. The Timurid ruler, Ḥusain Baiqarā, is a positive model in all versions; Muḥammad Shibānī Khān a negative one all along. Ismāʿīl the Safavid is treated a bit differently, the religious overtones are missing in version C. Above all, Bābur is attributed the most positive role in the latest version. Out of his observations, Bockholt concludes that previous scholarship has been a bit rash in seeing a reliable eyewitness in Khwāndamīr when it comes to his narration of contemporary events. On the contrary, again, we see that political and other agendas inform ways of framing the events.

Bockholt demonstrates that the considerations first introduced into historical science by Hayden White can be put to good use also in the field of Persian historiography. In the case of Khwāndamīr's *Ḥabīb as-siyar*, we are lucky to have such a large number of existing copies, among them quite a lot of very early ones. And we see that we cannot always presume that there is only one authorial version of a given work. In this respect, Bockholt's work is an eye-opener. Thus, he lays the ground for a reconsideration of not only this monument of Persian historiography, but for the field at large.

Jürgen Paul
Universität d'Hamburg