History of Shah 'Abbas the Great
(Tārīḵ-e ʿĀlamārā-ye ʿAbbāsī)

by

Eskandar Beg Monshi

Volume I

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The volumes in the Persian Heritage Series form part of the UNESCO COLLECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS.

Westview Press
Boulder, Colorado
Preface

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

Since a description of the qualities of the divine majesty, which lie beyond the realm of human reason and conjecture, is not compatible with the rank and status of mankind, or with the comprehension of human beings, and since praise of the seat of divine unity, which is beyond imagination and surmise, does not lie within the power of written expression and communication, therefore those who have had the temerity to set foot on this path have lost their way in a trackless desert and have wandered around in confusion, and have Foundered at their very first attempts at thanksgiving. They are distinguished by their ignorance, and are far removed from the world of intelligence and wisdom. Those who, in an effort to understand the eternal nature of God, have lit the candle of certain truth at the shrine of knowledge, have become entangled in arguments about creation and preexistence. Demonstrating the truth of the following utterance,

My intellect does not have the capacity for arriving at certain knowledge of You He who understands Your essential nature is himself identical with that nature

they have remained fettered by vain ideas.

It therefore seemed more appropriate, in view of inadequate intellect and general ignorance, not to let my thoughts run wildly to and fro, but to keep silent about these matters, and to keep quiet about things which cannot be contained within the narrow confines of human capacity—particularly the capacity of those who do not possess too great a stock of knowledge. So I determined, with a heart imbued with reverence, and asking forgiveness with deep humility, to give tongue to the following words of praise:

Wherever Your glory exists in full perfection, There is a fresh world from the ocean of Your grace; What limit can be set to our praising You, Since whatever praises we sing are but Your desert?

Again, praises of the dignity of the Prophet, and of the virtues and
illuminous acts of ‘Ali and the immaculate Imams, who adorn the throne of God and guide men on the path of salvation, constitute part of the divine attributes. Therefore it is better and more fitting, and more reverent, not to wander in the desert of perplexity and ignorance without the proper provisions and mount—namely, knowledge—but to turn back from such travels, and to make a start toward one’s intended goal.

My motive for drafting these discourses is as follows. This least of God’s servants, Eskandar known as Monshi, in my early youth, allowed myself to be diverted from the study of the customary sciences, with which I was familiar and toward which I was attracted by temperament, and, led astray by some short-sighted, materialistic persons, I conceived a desire to learn bookkeeping. For some time I busied myself with this unproductive and futile task. When, in my own inadequate estimation, I had achieved the highest degree of perfection in this science, and had devoted some of my valuable time to the affairs of government officials, my far-sighted intellect finally awoke me from the drunken stupor of imprudence. I said to myself, “this sordid job which you have chosen is keeping you a million miles away from the attainment of learning and excellence. Why should you, who have swum in the turbulent ocean of ideas, worship external forms like a fairground entertainer who gulls the public?” When I pondered on this well, I realized that my precious time had been spent in vain, and that my very nature had become allied to despair and regret. After I had spent some time in the beneficent company of a number of eminent men, who were endowed both with ability and talent, and were masters of the secretarial art (enšā’), my suppliant nature conceived a desire for this respected profession. During my association with them, I observed with admiration how they set down on the page of exposition, with the golden pen of thought, sweet and profitable words, and many-colored and alluring concretes, bejeweled with gems of both prose and poetry.

“That desire was conceived in my heart. . . .”

I gave up my employment, planted the seed of this desire in the fertile soil of my heart, and with enthusiasm attached myself to these masters. By this means, I entered the service of His Majesty Shah

'Abbas the Great, and my principal motive in writing these pages is to publish an account of the life and times of that monarch. I was enrolled as one of the secretaries of the court. Unfortunately, I was not able to labor at this worthy task night and day, as such an important occupation demanded, so that I did not succeed in making progress commensurate with my aspirations and compatible with my knowledge and innate sagacity. Greatly chastened, I descended from the lofty heights of my ambition, and busied myself with my job. At the same time, I lost no opportunity of studying biographical and historical works, because I wanted to achieve success in that noble branch of learning.

In short, I weighed on the scales of intellectual judgment the past history of this great king (‘Abbas I), and his praiseworthy deeds, which I have observed with my own eyes during the time I have spent in his service, and I compared these with the achievements of former rulers.

Learned scholars and eloquent historians have devoted their best endeavors to describing the virtues of these rulers, and to setting forth in detail the events and circumstances of their reigns, and they have compiled many voluminous works filled with strange metaphors and astonishing similes. Nevertheless, I did not find any renowned conqueror to be his equal. I reflected, “You have now entered the service of this eminent king. Do you want to be distinguished among other men of talent by the excellence of your learning? If so, why do you not put your talents to work, and write the history of this unequaled ruler of exalted lineage? Why do you not expend all your eloquence on this project? Even if you do not succeed by joining the ranks of the most eloquent and talented men of learning, at least, by completing this project, you will acquire distinction among your peers, and will have stolen a march on your contemporaries.”

From time to time, my far-sighted intellect would deliver an admonitory slap to the precocious child of my ambition, saying:

“You are still at the stage of learning the alphabet in the primary school of knowledge. How can you have the temerity to emulate the learned men of the age, and why do you vainly make yourself the laughingstock of those who possess real talent? The highest flights of speech are not to be attained by every aspirant, luckless fellow, and admittance to the inner sanctum of the finest writers is not
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granted to every unknown ignoramus."

Alas! Alas! How could one as lowly as I hope to compete with the greatest luminaries of the world of letters? "Just contrast," I said to myself, "your humble status with this half-baked ambition!" Since the voice of reason was right in trying to prevent me from pursuing this plan, I gave up this line of thought. At other times, however, the voice of ambition would proclaim to me loud and clear, "Even though you are lacking in ability and experience in writing eulogies, nevertheless the subject of your eulogy is a most worthy one; your attitude smacks of small-mindedness and lack of ambition. Why yield to this narrow vision and humble way of thinking? Why not give your nimble pen full rein? Many gentle souls are extremely keen on studying works of biography and history, the benefit of which is apparent to all—especially the study of recent history. The arena for writers is a wide one. Do not delay! Follow the dictates of your ambition, set your foot on the path of the search for knowledge, seek divine guidance, and be ready to receive it!"

I spent some time mulling it over in this fashion, torn between that side of my nature which was seeking an excuse to back out, and the ambitious side of my nature. Finally, I decided to set down in writing the events and circumstances of the reign of this monarch, without being restricted by any considerations such as smoothness of syntax, the choice of appropriate words, and embellishments of language and meaning. All this, of course, if I live long enough, and if I can obtain some relief from the chores of everyday life (which cannot be avoided by all who are inexorably bound to this world), in order to find the opportunity of writing.

If, therefore, my beneficent patron should encourage me to complete this work, with God’s help and the driving force of my own enthusiasm, the work will progress. Just as the achievements of this mighty king are the exemplar for the princes of the age, so the work of this humble author may become the model for accomplished and talented men.

Having received guidance, then, both from my rational intelligence and from my own aspirations, I began to write the history of the reign of Shah Abbas I, from the date of his birth until today, which is the year 1025/1616-17, the king being in his forty-seventh year and still enjoying youth, good fortune, and prosperity. Whatever information I had of my own knowledge, I have set down without adding or subtracting anything. In matters on which I had no personal information, I was obliged to consult reputable authorities, and I have reported what they have said without wrapping it up, as secretaries do, in obscure and unfamiliar phrases which are tedious and wearisome. In short, I have endeavored to present history and events in their simplest garb.

This has not been a hard and fast rule, however, because it is right that lyrical expression should be given its opportunity from time to time. To sum up, I have made do with whatever phrase came to hand, whether it were succulent or dry, and I have not felt bound to add appropriate poetical quotations. If you come across two or three lines of poetry here and there (and this is extremely rare), in most cases these are original verses which have sprung unbidden to mind as I was describing some particular historical event.

Although my basic intention has been to write a history of the reign of Shah Abbas I, from his birth until the present, when he is at the height of his power, I have also briefly described the terrible events connected with the death of Shah Tahmasp, and the accession of Shah Esma’il II and Sultan Mohammad Shah, together with some account of the other princes of the royal family. I have also given information on the Uzbegs and the Ottomans. My object in all this was to stoke the thirst of those who are avid for history, and also to preserve the unbroken thread of the narrative by including those matters which are relevant to the central theme.

I dare to hope that my royal patron will find the opportunity to go through this draft, episode by episode, and that, if he finds any error of fact, he will expunge it. Moreover, if he finds the treatment inadequate at any point, may I hope that he will bring it to my notice so that I may make the necessary amendments.

First of all, as a mark of piety, I shall give the genealogy of Shah Abbas, which can be traced back to the Prophet and to Ali. Then, having given a brief account, in the foreword to the book, of those praiseworthy traits and characteristics which distinguish him from the other princes of the world and rulers of the age, I shall begin the detailed history. My position as a servant of the Safavid royal house, and my natural inclination, and the debt of gratitude which I owe to the royal house for my material support, demand that I should follow
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the precedent set by eloquent panegyrists and historians, and heap hyperbole upon hyperbole and exaggerate the virtues of my patron one hundred percent, so as to leave an immoral record on the pages of time. However, since the ingenious and disinterested nature of the Shah does not look with favor on matters which are devoid of essential truth and contaminated by the embellishments of foolish scribes, I shall avoid that displeasing practice and restrain my pen from indulging in elaboration and ornament, or from recording anything which does not have the appearance of truth.

This royal chronicle consists of a foreword, two books (sahīfa), and a conclusion, and will be completed, God willing, in two or three volumes.

BOOK I

Discourse 1: The genealogy of Shah 'Abbas I, together with an account of his ancestors, and of the shaikhs who sat on the throne of spiritual governance and guidance; a description of the establishment of the Safavid state; and an account of the birth of Shah 'Abbas I, together with a brief account of his outstanding virtues. On the rulers and events of the age of 'Abbas; events connected with the death of Shah Tahmasp; an account of the reign of Shah Esma'il II and Sultan Mohammad Shah; the accession of Shah 'Abbas I.

Discourse 2: On the piety of Shah 'Abbas, and the qualities which he inherited from his ancestors.

Discourse 3: On his judgment, his divinely given wisdom, and on the excellence of his policies, which are in conformity with the divine will.

Discourse 4: On his good fortune.

Discourse 5: On his justice, concern for the welfare of his subjects, and concern for the security of the roads, which is the key to the prosperity of the country.

Discourse 6: On his authority, despotic behavior, and fiery temper, which are divine mysteries.

Discourse 7: On his policy-making and administration.

Discourse 8: On his simplicity of life, lack of ceremony, and some contrary qualities.

Discourse 9: On his concern for the rights of his servants, and his avoiding laying hands on possessions to which people have rightful claim, for the dispensation of justice is tantamount to fotouvah and morouva.

*1*le., the leaders of the Ṣafaviya Order of Sufis.
Book I
Discourse I

The Genealogy of Shah 'Abbas I, together with an Account of His Ancestors, and of the Shaikhs Who Sat on the Throne of Spiritual Governance and Guidance; a Description of the Establishment of the Safavid State; and an Account of the Birth of Shah 'Abbas I, together with a Brief Account of His Outstanding Virtues; on the Rulers and Events of the Age of Abbas; Events Connected with the Death of Shah Tahmasp; an Account of the Reign of Shah Esma'il and Sultan Mohammad Shah; the Accession of Shah 'Abbas I.
On the Genealogy of Shah 'Abbas I, and the Lofty Station of His Exalted Ancestors, Who Are Descended from the Family of the Prophet and 'Ali

It will not have remained concealed from the shrewd minds of perspicacious people that the lineage of this exalted family is derived from no less a person than the "Seal of the Prophets," Muhammad, and from Ali the "Approved" (of God), as follows:


Genealogists and historians are in agreement that 'Ali and the Prophet Muhammad are descended from Esma‘il. Moreover, there is no disagreement in regard to their descent from 'Adnān, but there are differences of opinion in regard to the chain of descent from 'Adnān to Adam. Expert genealogists, and those skilled in dynastic traditions, have constructed elaborate family trees showing the descent of the ancestors of the Safavids from the Prophet, have written treatises on their merits and virtues, and have described various strange events and wondrous signs and acts emanating from them and indicative of the fact that the Prophet's light shone upon them. The humble author of this history, in support and imitation of the practice of the master of this science, will content himself with a brief summary of these matters.

The Noble Ancestors of the Prophet

It is related on the authority of Abdollāh b. 'Abbās that the Prophet, when he was giving the details of his own genealogy and came to 'Adnān, stated as follows: "The genealogists have lied regarding the
generations after 'Adnān. 'Adnān had two sons.” Therefore the Prophet and Ali, by virtue of the “sound” tradition: “I and Ali are from the same light,” have shone forth and emitted their radiance from the same niche, and trace their descent from 'Adnān's younger son. According to the author of the Rowzat al-'Abbāb, Ma'add had eight sons, one of whom was Nezār, whose patronymic was Abū Rabī' and Abū Eyād. When Nezār was born, his father, in thanksgiving for that light which shone forth from his son's forehead, made a sacrifice and gave a feast. This same light was transmitted to Nezār's son Možar. Možar continued to obey God according to the faith of Abraham the Ḥanīfī and the religion of Esma'il, and that world-adorning light which shone forth from his auspicious brow transfigured him, and repulsed the darkness day and night. He possessed perfection of beauty. Among the Arabs, a large number of camels is attributed to him. That sunlike beauty was likewise visible in his son Elyās. Elyās was a believer in the unity of God, a pious and sober man. He was born when his father had reached an advanced age, and had despaired of having a son. Consequently, he was named Elyās, and he became the leader of his family and tribe, the most honored of the children of Abraham, and the most eminent of the descendants of Esma'il. It is related that whenever Elyās walked around the Ka'ba, he heard the sound of the words, “Here am I, at Your command” issuing from his loins, and he used to be astonished at this circumstance.

After him, the rays of that [divine] light were reflected in the perceptive beauty of his son 'Āmer, and after him in 'Āmer's son 'Ozeyma, and after him in 'Ozeyma's son Kenāna, whose patronymic was Abū Nažr. From Kenāna's son, Nažr, all the tribes of the Qoreyši are descended. After Nažr, his son Malek inherited the divine light, and after him Fehr, and Fehr's son Gālēb, by whom it was transmitted to Lo'eey, and thence to Ka'b. Of the many sons of Ka'b, Moṭra was selected from among his brothers to be his repository, and by him it was transmitted to Kelāb, a powerful chieftain of the Banū Qoreyš. From Kelāb it was handed down to his son Qoṣeyy, from among whose sons Abū Manāf was distinguished by being its recipient. Abū Manāf's successor was his son Hāšem (his name was 'Amr, and Hāšem was his sobriquet). Hāšem became a powerful chief of the Qoreyš, and under his leadership the Banū Hāšem acquired a position of influence among the Qoreyš. After Hāšem, Abū al-Moṭażeleb, whose personal name was Scyba, became the bearer of the [divine] light, and under his leadership the Banū Hāšem maintained their power and influence among the Qoreyš. He became known as Abū al-Moṭaželeb for the reason given in the histories. The key of the house of the Ka'ba was held by him, and the office of Keeper of the Veil (of the Ka'ba) devolved upon him. The digging of the well Zamzam took place in his time. By virtue of the good fortune inherent in the nature of the Light of Muhammad, every prayer which was offered to the throne of the Almighty was answered.

Abū al-Moṭaželeb had ten sons. According to the author of the Rowzat al-Safā wa Kolāṣat al-Akhrār, his eighth son, Abū Ḥallāḥ, the father of the Prophet. Now Abū Ḥallāḥ had vowed that, if he would be blessed with ten sons, he would sacrifice his favorite son to God. When God blessed him with this number, he prepared to fulfill his vow. Lots were drawn by his sons, and the lot fell upon Abū Ḥallāḥ. Abū Ḥallāḥ was overjoyed at this sign [of God's favor], and submitted his neck to the divine decree. Abū al-Moṭaželeb rejoiced at his son's submission to God's will, and went with his son to the place of sacrifice. The Qoreyš, hearing the news, followed them, and prevented Abū al-Moṭaželeb from carrying out his intention. They consulted a soothsayer, who was the most eminent of her kind at that time. The soothsayer opted for the payment of blood money, and instructed them to prepare a ransom of ten camels, one for each of the sons of Abū al-Moṭaželeb. They should then cast lots between the camels and Abū Ḥallāḥ. If the lot fell on Abū Ḥallāḥ, they should add ten camels, and again cast lots, until such time as the lot should fall on the camels. Abū al-Moṭaželeb did as instructed, and the lot fell upon Abū Ḥallāḥ. When the number of camels had reached a hundred, Almighty God accepted the blood money, and the lot fell upon the camels. This was repeated several times, until Abū Ḥallāḥ was satisfied. Then the hundred camels were sacrificed. This is the reason why the Muslim community fixed the perfect sacrifice at one hundred camels, and the Prophet's remark, “I am the son of two sacrificial victims,” refers to Abū Ḥallāḥ and Esma'il.

As is recorded in the chronicles, the Light of Mohammad shone forth from Abū Ḥallāḥ's brow, and the learned men of the Jews, out of rancor and envy, several times made an attempt on his life. Each time, he was aided by unseen forces, and his enemies were frustrated. All the women of Qoreyš were enamored of his beauty, which was the result of the radiance of the Light of Mohammad, and desired to marry him. That good fortune fell to the lot of Šamen, daughter of Waḥb, and her

A play on the word modreka. 'Āmer, the son of Elyās, was known as Modreka.
hopes were fulfilled. In the Year of the Elephant, she gave birth to Mohammed the "Seat of the Prophets," and the world of darkness was illumined by his world-adorning beauty.

Many wondrous events, secret signs, and supernatural occurrences took place during his mother's pregnancy, his birth, suckling, and growth, until the announcement of his prophetic mission. Such events, relating to the Prophet and his mother, are recorded in compilations of legends and traditions. In brief, Abdollâh died at Medina, at the age of twenty-five, before the birth of Mohammed; he was buried on the holy soil. Mohammed's mother, A'mâna, died when Mohammed was seven years old, and 'Abd al-Mu'tâleb was charged with the upbringing of Mohammed at Tûbâ and Medina. The following year, 'Abd al-Mu'tâleb died, and the orphan was placed in the care of one of his uncles, Abû Tâleb.

Abû Tâleb was the seventh son of 'Abd al-Mu'tâleb. His name was 'Omâran, and he possessed rank and station among the Quraysh. The Prophet Mohammed was brought up under the loving care of his uncle, Abû Tâleb, who did not die until the tenth year of Mohammed's prophetic mission. While he lived, Abû Tâleb devoted all his efforts to helping Mohammed. Kadhîa died in the same year as Abû Tâleb, and for this reason, Mohammed called the tenth year of his mission "the year of grief."

Abû Tâleb was the father of 'Ali, whose praises are sung by friend and foe alike, and who, after the Prophet himself, is the most noble of the sons of Adam. By virtue of the tradition, "My flesh is thy flesh, and my blood is thy blood," 'Ali is inextricably linked with the Prophet. 'Ali married the daughter of the Prophet, and the offspring of this union were the "two stars of prophethood," 'Hasan and 'Huseyn. Springing from this same fountain, in line of descent, were ten others like them—twelve imams in all, the first of them 'Ali, the last the Mahdi.

The object of this genealogical discourse is to show the descent of Shah 'Abbas the Great, and so I shall give some details of his noble ancestors. In brief, from Mohammed and 'Ali the chain of descent of this king, who is descended from Môsâ and is of the lineage of 'Hoseyn, is forged, noble link by noble link, until, as I indicated above, it is connected with the seventh of the twelve imams, Môsâ al-Kâzem.

I pass then from the imams to the ancestors of His Majesty. All gene-
was killed before him. Mohammad Khan Saru Sulag, brought from the house of Mohammad Sarif Beg Cauislâ, shared the fate of his fellow triumvirs. Ahmad Sultan Asayes oglu, who was not marked down for execution, was moved by his friendship for the triumvirs to draw his dagger and inflict wounds on two men, and for this act he too was slain. Finally, Rezaqoli Beg Inallâ, who had shared complicity with the barber Kodaverdi for the murder of Ilamza Mirza, was executed. The possessions of the executed men were confiscated. Shah Abbas then decreed an amnesty for the crimes of other emirs, but all guilty persons were heavily fined and the proceeds used to reward the emirs who had accompanied him from Khorasan.

I stated in the exordium that this volume of my history would include twelve discourses (maqâla). God be praised! I have now completed the first of these discourses, which has dealt with the history of the ancestors of Shah Abbas and events from his birth to the time of his accession. I must now fulfill my promise by composing the remaining discourses. These will describe the character and conduct of Shah Abbas and give a synopsis of the events of his reign, which will be related in much fuller detail in Book (sahifa) II. In this way, those readers who have studied Book I will have a foretaste of what is to come and will gain some idea of Shah Abbas's powers of innovation, his abilities as a ruler, and his other outstanding qualities, which enabled him with God's help to achieve such mighty victories, to improve the possibilities of advancement on the part of the officers of state, and to order the affairs of his people in such a way that both princes and their counselors will make this record their exemplar.

Discourse 2

On the Piety of Shah Abbas

The ancestors of Shah Abbas were distinguished by their descent from seyyeds and by their spiritual authority. These attributes, coupled with the poverty, self-discipline, and the inner struggle against the carnal soul which they made their rule of life, earned their acceptance among the mystics, shaikhs, and holy men of their day; supernatural phenomena were constantly associated with them. Shah Abbas inherited these great gifts. Despite his preoccupation with the material affairs that are inescapably linked with government and administration, and despite the lure of the trappings of kingship, which are a test of a man's character, many supernatural phenomena were observed to derive from him. But it would take too long to relate these in detail.

Shah Abbas was never remiss in seeking to approach God's throne; when he prayed, he was so absorbed in his devotions that he appeared to have left his material body. In all affairs of state, he would seek an augury from the Koran, and he would take no action in the realm of government without asking God's advice. If the text of the Koran expressly forbade something, he would respect God's wise counsel and refrain from taking that action, even though it was desirable in order to gain some material advantage.
Discourse 3

On Shah 'Abbas's Judgment, His Divinely Given Wisdom, and the Excellence of His Policies, Which Are in Conformity with the Divine Will

Without wishing to wax lyrical in praise of Shah 'Abbas, that monarch is endowed with an unusual degree of understanding, shrewdness, acumen, native sagacity, and learning, and possesses a sound judgment in the everyday problems of this life. When he came to the throne, he set a new standard among the princes of the world in administration, in the conduct of war, in the management of armies and tactics in battle, and in the dispensation of justice. His excellent decrees were accepted as a model by other princes. Although he has wise and experienced officers in his service, in all the battles, sieges, and conquests in which he has been involved from his youth up to the present time, his judgment has been superior to theirs, and it has been his wisdom which has, in the long run, solved all the knotty problems of state affairs. Any course of action on which he has decided has proved to be in conformity with the divine will. Policies his counselors have considered to be a mistake have in the long run been proved to be right. Therefore it is apparent to all that, in all matters affecting his subjects, both great and small, or inescapably associated with government and conquest, the Shah is guided by divine inspiration, and by that alone.

When Shah Abbas undertook the personal direction of affairs of state, despite his youth, the multiplicity of his enemies, and the paucity of his helpers, by the grace of God, by good fortune, and by the exercise of his own divinely given intelligence and mother-wit, he succeeded in restoring such order to the state that men stood in amazement at it. It should not be forgotten that Iran had been without a strong king for more than ten years. As a result, the ignorant military, the army officers and the leading men of the tribes, had formed two factions and blotted their scutcheon by treachery and mad ambition. Their actions rent the fabric of the state and gave their enemies the opportunity to attack Iran on two fronts; every year, some new province was lost.

Shah 'Abbas took steps to remedy the situation: first, he judged it
better to deal with his domestic foes. One by one, he got into his power and destroyed those seditious emirs and army officers who had risen to the rank of emir, sultan, or khan, whether by virtue of seniority or corrupt practices, and had then proceeded to stir up trouble between the qezelbāšt tribes. In their place, he appointed to the highest offices, and to the emirate, promising officers who owed their rise to himself alone. Gradually, as the former class of officer faded into oblivion, he managed to reduce the dissension among the qezelbāšt, and the king's commands were once more obeyed by the army. He was thus enabled to regain the territory that had been lost, and even to acquire some new. But this will be described in the proper place in Book II.

Discourse 4

On Shah 'Abbas's Good Fortune

It will not have escaped the notice of perspicacious persons that the title of sāheb-qerān (lord of the auspicious conjunction of planets) has, in the past, frequently been bestowed on princes by secretaries wishing to flatter their masters. In the case of Shah Abbas, however, it is verifiable by fact. From the time of his birth up to the present day, there has occurred the conjunction of various celestial bodies, the prognostications of which corroborate events in the life of Shah Abbas. According to the calculations of astrologers, each of these conjunctions foretells the appearance of a powerful and fortunate prince. Skilled astrologers, who have gone deeply into these matters, declare that the signs predict that his reign will be a stable one, and that his nature will reflect the influence of these conjunctions—particularly the conjunction of the planets which occurred in the station of Sagittarius, in the form of a fire, in the year 1012/1603-04.

The predictions astrologers have made in the past—for instance, those of Mowlānā Mohyi al-Dīn Anār-o-pīāzī,1 who was a master of the science of astrology—have come to pass in every particular. He predicted the appearance of a fortunate ruler, in whose reign there would be troubled times marked by the fluctuating fortunes of various religions; he predicted that some provinces would be devastated, and there would be killing and looting and taking prisoners.2 This prediction has been fulfilled in its entirety during the reign of Shah Abbas in Azerbaijan, Shirvān, and Georgia, where various vain religions that found currency in the course of time have been smitten by his shining sword. As a result of the passage of armies, some parts of the lands of Islam have been devastated, and many people, both Muslims and non-Muslims, have been displaced from their homes and scattered throughout other cities and regions. Finally, great slaughter and looting has taken place in Georgia, and many thousands of Georgian women and children, non-Muslims, have been taken prisoner and brought within the fold of Islam.

1Lit.: he of the pomegranate and onion! I assume that the Mowlānā used these articles in making his astrological predictions.

2Needless to say, the Mowlānā's "remarkable" prediction was sufficiently vague to be applicable to almost any period of history!
In the common parlance and fancy of the vulgar, any great crisis is called a calamity (they use the same word, qerān, as is used for “a conjunction of the planets.” According to them, Shah Abbas, from his infancy until the present time, has survived more “calamities” than any other ruler who is “lord of a conjunction of the planets.” They enumerate these major crises or calamities as follows:

1. For a child to be separated from its mother and father constitutes extreme hardship, and this calamity occurred to Shah Abbas early in life.

2. During the reign of Shah Esma‘īl II, the Shah’s sole ambition was to murder all the royal princes. ‘Abbās Mīrzā’s guardian, Sahqol Sultan Yakān, was murdered, and the prince was saved only by the timely death of the Shah himself—a clear indication of the working of providence.

3. The third crisis which Shah ‘Abbās survived—and this was the greatest crisis of all—occurred when Alīqol Khan Sāmlū arrived at Herat with orders from Shah Esma‘īl II (according to the popular and well-attested account—God alone knows the truth!) to slay the prince ‘Abbās. The Khan reached Herat during the month of Ramażān, and though filled with the greatest trepidation, delayed action until after the end of Ramażān. The very night on which he had decided to commit the murder, a courier arrived with the news of the Shah’s death. Without a doubt, this remarkable event demonstrates that ‘Abbās was born under a lucky star.

4. When Sultan Mohammad Shah and ʿAmza Mīrzā led the royal army to Khorasan to put an end to the division between the Iraq and the Khorasan emirs, a battle was fought at Tīr-e Pol, near Gortān, as has already been related, and the Khorasan army was defeated. The fact that ‘Abbās, then only a child, escaped safely from that battlefield, with just a few of his retainers to protect him, is again an indication of the hand of providence.

5. Had ‘Abbās Mīrzā remained at Herat, he would have been in grave danger, since the city was fated to fall to the Uzbeks, and its defenders to be slain or taken prisoner. It was therefore the divine will that a quarrel should develop between ‘Alīqol Khan and Morṣedqol Khan, hitherto firm friends, and that in the ensuing battle the Sāmlūs should be defeated. After this battle, ‘Abbās Mīrzā’s chain mail bore the marks of arrows and spear-thrusts, but fortified by the holy spirit of the Imam Rezā, he reached Maḥād safely and thus escaped a double danger.

6. By the grace of God, ‘Abbās recovered from a number of serious illnesses which afflicted him. At Shiraz, he fell from his horse and was confined to his bed for a while, but from this too he recovered.

7. After the battle with Jegal-qol, when the Ottoman prisoners were being paraded before Shah ‘Abbās, one of them, a tall, powerfully built Kurd of the Mokri tribe, snatched a dagger from his boot and hurled himself on the Shah. With God’s assistance, and the strength of his own right hand, the Shah grasped his assailant’s wrist and wrenched the knife from his grip, as will be related in detail later, God willing!
Discourse 5

On Shah 'Abbas's Justice, Concern for the Security of the Roads, and Concern for the Welfare of His Subjects

The greater part of governing is the preservation of stability within the kingdom and security on the roads. Prior to the accession of Shah Abbas, this peace and security had disappeared in Iran, and it had become extremely difficult for people to travel about the country. As soon as he came to the throne, Shah Abbas turned his attention to this problem. He called for the principal highway robbers in each province to be identified, and he then set about eliminating this class of people. Within a short space of time, most of their leaders had been arrested. Some of them, who had been driven by misfortune to adopt this way of life, were pardoned by Shah Abbas and their troubles solved by various forms of royal favor. Overwhelmed by this display of royal clemency, these men swore to serve the king and to behave as law-abiding citizens. Others, however, were handed over to the šahna (a police official) for punishment, and society was rid of this scourge. With security restored to the roads, merchants and tradesmen traveled to and from the Safavid empire.

The welfare of his people was always a prime concern of the Shah, and he was at pains to see that the people enjoyed peace and security, and that oppression by officialdom, the major cause of anxiety on the part of the common man, was totally stamped out in his kingdom. Substantial reductions were made in the taxes due to the divān: first, the tax on flocks in Iraq, amounting to nearly fifteen thousand Iraqi tomān, was remitted to the people of that province, and the population of Iraq, which is the flourishing heart of Iran and the seat of government, by this gift was preferred above the other provinces. Second, all divān levies were waived for all Shi'ites throughout the empire during the month of Ramaḍān. The total revenues for one month, which according to the computation of the divān officials amounted to some twenty thousand tomān, were given to the people as alms. The object was that they should be free from demands for taxes during this blessed month, which is a time to be devoted to the service and worship of God.
Discourse 6

On Shah 'Abbas's Authority and Despotic Behavior, Which are Divine Mysteries

From birth, the Shah has been inclined toward despotic behavior and has had a quick temper; he has never been slow to punish wrongdoers. The punishment of wrongdoers constitutes a major part of the command of armies, the government of empire, and ministry to one's people, and Shah 'Abbas has never been diverted, by worldly motives or by respect for rank, from inflicting punishment. The knowledge that this was the case has had a salutary effect from the early days of his reign. Reports of his sternness and severity have had a restraining influence on those who oppressed their subordinates, and have meant that his orders were carried out without delay. For example, if a father were commanded to slay his son, the order would be obeyed instantly; if the father procrastinated out of compassion, the order would be reversed; and if the son hesitated in his turn, another would be sent to put them both to death. His writ therefore became law, and no one dared to oppose his orders for an instant.

Before 'Abbas came to the throne, the qezelbâş tribes were frequently slow in answering a mobilization call, and many men drew their pay but stayed at home. If this was the case with the regular troops, it was more so with the irregulars. Shah 'Abbas therefore conducted an inquiry into the state of the army and issued orders that, whenever there was a call to arms, all men, whether regulars or irregulars, should report without delay out of zeal for their faith, and to save their honor and that of their tribe. If any one failed to answer a mobilization call, he would be put to death forthwith if he could not show cause for his absence, and his property would be made over to the person who reported him to the authorities. If his tribe took his side and concealed his offense, the whole tribe would be punished. After a few men had been executed and their property handed over to informers, mobilization orders were obeyed with alacrity.
Discourse 7

On Shah 'Abbas's Policy-making and Administration

If scholars consider Shah 'Abbas to be the founder of the laws of the realm and an example in this regard to the princes of the world, they have justification for this opinion, for he has been responsible for some weighty legislation in the field of administration.

One of his principal pieces of legislation has been his reform of the army. Because the rivalries of the qezelbāš tribes had led them to commit all sorts of enormities, and because their devotion to the Safavid royal house had been weakened by dissension, Shah 'Abbas decided (as the result of divine inspiration, which is vouchsafed to kings but not to ordinary mortals), to admit into the armed forces groups other than the qezelbāš. He enrolled in the armed forces large numbers of Georgian, Circassian, and other golāms, and created the office of gollar-āqāsī¹ (commander-in-chief of the golām regiments), which had not previously existed under the Safavid regime. Several thousand men were drafted into regiments of musketeers from the Çagatay² tribe, and from various Arab and Persian tribes in Khorasan, Azerbaijan, and Ṭabaristān. Into the regiments of musketeers, too, were drafted all the riff-raff from every province—sturdy, serviceable men who were unemployed and preyed on the lower classes of society. By this means the lower classes were given relief from their lawless activities, and the recruits made amends for their past sins by performing useful service in the army. All these men were placed on the golām muster rolls. Without question, they were an essential element in 'Abbas's conquests, and their employment had many advantages.

Shah 'Abbas tightened up provincial administration. Any emir or noble who was awarded a provincial governorship, or who was charged with the security of the highways, received his office on the understanding that he discharge his duties in a proper manner. If any merchant or traveler or resident were robbed, it was the duty of the governor to recover his money for him or replace it out of his own

¹See TM, p. 46. The gollar-āqāsī ranked second in importance to the qārībāš during the later Safavid period.
²See TM, pp. 16-17.
funds. This rule was enforced throughout the Safavid empire. As a result, property was secure, and people could travel without hindrance to and from Iran.

Another of Shah Abbas’s policies has been to demand a truthful reply whenever he asked anyone for information. Lying, he said, is forbidden and considered a sin by God, so why should it not be a sin to lie to him who is one’s king, one’s spiritual director, and one’s benefactor? Is not falsehood to such a one ingratitude? In the opinion of Shah Abbas, lying to one’s benefactor constituted the rankest ingratitude. If he detected anyone in a lie, he visited punishment upon him. The effects of this policy have been felt at all levels of society. For example, if someone has committed various acts that merit the death penalty and the king questions him on his conduct, the poor wretch has no option but to tell the truth. In fact, the opinion is commonly held that, if a person tells a lie to the Shah, the latter intuitively knows he is lying. The result is that the biggest scoundrel alive hesitates to allow even a small element of falsehood to creep into any story he is telling the Shah. The beneficial effects of this on government and the administration of justice need no elaboration.

Discourse 8

On His Simplicity of Life, Lack of Ceremony, and Some Contrary Qualities

The character of the Shah contains some contradictions; for instance, his fiery temper, his imperiousness, his majesty and regal splendor are matched by his mildness, leniency, his ascetic way of life, and his informality. He is equally at home on the dervish’s mat and the royal throne. When he is in a good temper, he mixes with the greatest informality with the members of his household, his close friends and retainers and others, and treats them like brothers. In contrast, when he is in a towering rage, his aspect is so terrifying that the same man who, shortly before, was his boon companion and was treated with all the informality of a close friend, dares not speak a word out of turn for fear of being accused of insolence or discourtesy. At such times, the emirs, sultans, and even the court wits and his boon companions keep silent, for fear of the consequences. The Shah, then, possesses these two contrasting natures, each of which is developed to the last degree.
Discourse 9

On Shah ‘Abbas’s Concern for the Rights of His Servants and His Avoiding Laying Hands on Their Possessions

One of the most agreeable qualities of this monarch is his compassionate treatment of his servants, which is coupled with a concern that faithful service should receive its just reward. His record in this regard is so outstanding that it is not matched by that of any other chivalrous prince. As long as his servants are constant in their loyalty, the royal favor is lavished upon them, nor is it withdrawn for any trifling offense committed out of ignorance or from negligence. If any of his servants dies from natural causes, or gives his life in battle in the defense of the faith and the state, the Shah is generous in his treatment of their dependents. In the case of officeholders, even if their sons are too young at the time of their father’s death to be fit for office, nevertheless, in order to resuscitate their families, he confers the same office on the sons out of his natural generosity and magnanimity.

Moreover, since the Shah considers the possessions and treasures of this world of little value, even if the deceased has left substantial sums of money, such is the Shah’s magnanimity and concern to follow the precepts of canon law that he (unlike the majority of princes) does not lay covetous eyes on the inheritance, but divides it among the heirs in the proportions ordained by God. This is regarded by some as his most praiseworthy characteristic, for most of the princes of the world consider it impossible for them to show greater appreciation for their servants than by following this practice, which brings with it heavenly rewards.

1Persian, arba’-e fatoosat. Fatoosat, strictly speaking, is “conduct worthy of a gentleman.”
Discourse 10

On Shah 'Abbas's Breadth of Vision, and His Knowledge of World Affairs and of the Classes of Society

After he has dealt with the affairs of state, Shah 'Abbas habitually relaxes. He has always been fond of conviviality and, since he is still a young man, he enjoys wine and the company of women. But this does not affect the scrupulous discharge of his duties, and he knows in minute detail what is going on in Iran and also in the world outside. He has a well-developed intelligence system, with the result that no one, even if he is sitting at home with his family, can express opinions which should not be expressed without running the risk of their being reported to the Shah. This has actually happened on numerous occasions.

As regards his knowledge of the outside world, he possesses information about the rulers (both Muslim and non-Muslim) of other countries, about the size and composition of their armies, about their religious faith and the organization of their kingdoms, about their highway systems, and about the prosperity or otherwise of their realms. He has cultivated diplomatic relations with most of the princes of the world, and the rulers of the most distant parts of Europe, Russia, and India are on friendly terms with him. Foreign ambassadors bearing gifts are never absent from his court, and the Shah's achievements in the field of foreign relations exceed those of his predecessors.

Shah 'Abbas mixes freely with all classes of society, and in most cases is able to converse with people in their own particular idiom. He is well versed in Persian poetry; he understands it well, indulges in poetic license, and sometimes utters verses himself. He is a skilled musician, an outstanding composer of rounds, rhapsodies, and part-songs; some of his compositions are famous. As a conversationalist, he is capable of elegant and witty speech.
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Glossary

ābdārbaṣī: keeper of the royal pantry.
aḥdās: night watch; officer under jurisdiction of the dārūga (see TM 82, 149).
aḥl-e eḥtesās: seven chosen companions who guarded Esma’īl I.
amīr al-qārābāsī: master of the royal stables.
amīr-e divān: an emir with administrative responsibilities in the central government.
amīr al-qārābāsī:
1) commander-in-chief of the qezelbāš troops;
2) military governor of a frontier province.
andarūs: women’s quarters of a house.
‘asārbāṣī: commander of the watch.
atālīq: tutor; guardian.
avārāja-novis: keeper of the registers of individual tax accounts.
bāst: a Persian technical term denoting “sanctuary.” Various locations were declared to constitute bāst at various times (EI, s.v.), and sanctuary at such places was sought especially by those who had incurred the wrath of the political or religious authorities of the day.
beg: lowest of the three Safavid military ranks.
beglerbeg: military governor-general of a major province.
bokācol: steward.
cālejībāšī: master of the royal musicians.
cārkībāšī: commander of the skirmishers.
cāṣnīgībāšī: chief taster.
cāpān-beg: levy on flocks.
qāṭarkānā: secretariat.
dār al- eslām (Abode of Islam): territory under Muslim rule.
dārūga: (1) town governor; (2) a police officer; (3) an official whose functions overlapped those of the mohlaseb, particularly as a superintendent of weights and measures and as guardian of public morals.
davātdār: keeper of the royal inkhorn.
divān-e a’lā, divān-e ‘ālī: the supreme Divan; the chancery.
divān-beg: highest civil magistrate; from time of Abbās I onward, one of the seven members of the supreme council of emirs.
divānkānā: court of justice.
dowlathkān: royal residence.
emīr: a Safavid officer of the highest rank.
History of Shah 'Abbas

esik-âqâsîbâš: (of the Supreme Divân): the holder of this office, called by Kaempfer supremus aulae Mareschallus, is first mentioned during the reign of Esma'il II; under Abbas I he became one of the six principal officers of the state. esik-âqâsîbâš-ye haram: an officer of lesser rank who was in charge of the various categories of officials whose duties lay at the entrance to, or outside, the haram.
e'temâd al-dowla (trusted support of the state): a title, not a rank; commonly conferred on viziers from time of Shah Tahmasp onward.
farman: an order issuable only by the shah.
Fatâhnama: a letter announcing a victory.
faqâ'a: a legal opinion issued by a moffi or other legal expert.
gâzi(s): "fighters for the (Islamic) faith" against the (Christian) infidel.
gerek-yarqân: surveyors.
golim (lit., "slave"): in Safavid times used as a technical term to denote a person of non-Muslim origin who entered either the Safavid military or civil establishment. The golams were mainly Armenians, Georgians, and Circassians.
hamâ-sâla: a form of draft (barât) permanently assigned on the same source of revenue.
haram: the women's quarters of a house.
Imam (in Sunni usage): leader, especially in prayer; (in Shi'ite usage): a descendant from Ali in the male line, endowed with unique characteristics such as infallibility, etc.
imamzada: shrine or mausoleum erected over grave of some local shaikh or holy man.
jabbadâr: director of the arsenal.
jârâbâš: chief herald.
jelewêdâr-bâš: an officer under the orders of the amir-ağorbâš.
jen: genies or spirits, not necessarily malevolent.
hâdembâš: comptroller of the attendants of the shrine of Imam Rezâ.
hâštân: a quilted vest worn under armor.
Bâja: title of respect accorded to members of the religious classes, men of letters, etc.
kâlitâr: mayor.
Bâljfât: 'successor to the Prophet Muhammad; (in Sufi usage): 'commissar' for Sufi affairs.
Bânejâb: Sufi convent.

GLOSSARY

bâssa: belonging to the crown, coming under the jurisdiction of the crown.
bâšib: the official charged with delivering the kotba, or formal address, on Fridays in the mosque.
berqa: Sufi mantle.
khan: (1) the highest of three regular ranks in the Safavid army; (2) tribal chief.
kotba: address delivered in mosques on Fridays.
lala: guardian, mentor.
lâskar-nevis: an officer concerned with army records.
mâde-e hâzr: technical term for a specific type of soyargâl, immunity from tax or special privilege of a financial nature (see TM, p. 183).
majles-nevis: secretary of state.
masnà: a poem of indefinite length composed in rhyming couplets.
mehmânâdâr: officer responsible for the care of state visitors, official guests, etc.
meydân: square, piazza.
mir-sêsâr: huntsman.
mokrâbâr: keeper of the seal.
mokhâseb: an official charged with the supervision of weights and measures, the maintenance of public morals, etc.
mokhâsâb al-nâmâlek: an official subordinate to the superintendent of the royal workshops.
motaja'ed: Shi'ite theologian of the highest rank.
mokhâb al-salânâ: occasionally used as a title of the vakil-e divân-e 'âlim.
momâyyez: auditor.
monsâ: secretary.
monsâ al-nâmâlek: state scribe.
mogârab: a title of two categories of officials distinguished by their close proximity to the throne. (1) mogârab al-kâqân, including palace eunuchs, royal physicians and astrologers, the controller of assay, etc.; (2) mogârab al-hatrat, including the esik-âqâsîbâš-ye haram, the heads of departments of the royal household, court ushers, etc. (see TM, pp. 56ff.).
morsûrûd, morsûrûd-e kâmâl: spiritual director of Sufis.
morsîf-e boyûtâb: overseer of the royal workshops.
moustoufî al-hâyâyû: comptroller of the arrears.
moustoufî-ye mây: see tâbet-nevis.
moustoufî al-nâmâlek: chief accountant, comptroller of finance.
moustoufî-ye qûrân: accountant of the household troops.
motaferreqâbâš: commander of the couriers known as motaferreqa.
motawāli: warden of a shrine.
naqīb: a municipal official subordinate to the kalāntar.
naqīb al-nogābā: chief naqīb.
nāsir: superintendent.
nāsir-e boyaštā: superintendent of the royal workshops.
nāsir-e dastarbān-yā homāyān: superintendent of the royal secretariat.
nešān: letter of appointment.
ottād: “stakes” or “pillars.” The five ottād and the abdāl “substitutes” (their number is variously given as 7, 40, and 300), take the third and fifth places, respectively, in the hierarchy of saints who, “unknown to the masses, participate by means of their powerful influence in the preservation of the order of the universe” (L. Goldziher, ABDĀL in Encyclopaedia of Islam, new edition, 1954, pp. 94–5).
pādešāh: king.
pāshā: Ottoman military title borne by officers of high rank.
qabaq-āndāz: the pastime of shooting at a ring or other target placed on top of a pole.
qapījābā: (Ottoman: qapijābā): chief doorkeeper.
qāsī-ye abdās: the magistrate who adjudicated in litigation arising from the activities of the abdās.
qāsī-ye mo'askar, qāsī ‘askar: military chaplain.
qezelbā: (Turkish ‘redhead’); pejorative term used by the Ottomans to denote supporters of the Safavid cause, subsequently adopted by the latter as a mark of pride. The term referred to the distinctive scarlet headdress worn by Safavid supporters.
qollār-qāsīs: Safavid usage, commander in chief of the gollāms (qollār): Ottoman usage, officer in charge of the gollār (“slaves”) of the Sultan.
qūrīs: the cream of the qezelbā troops, often used as royal bodyguards.
qūrībā: commander in chief of the qūrīs.
sadāqa: the office of sadri [q.v.].
sadri: head of the religious institution.
sāheb-toujāh: keeper of the ledgers, an official in the department of the chief accountant.
sāhī-ševas: those who love the Shah.
samālā: title of local rulers of Taiki near modern Petrovsk.
sharq-ehr: Ottoman governors-general of the provinces.
sar-kešk: officer of the watch at the Mashād shrine.
sarbādār: official in charge of sherbets, wines, and other drinks.
sarūqībā: head keeper of the royal turban.
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yasāvālān-e ẓokhat: gentlemen-in-waiting.
yasāvālābāš: chief yasāvāl.
yeničeri-āqāš: Ağā of the Janissaries.
yūzkāš: centurion.
zābej-nevis: an official in the revenue department of the chief accountant's office.
žarbzan: light cannon.
zargarbāš: head goldsmith.