

A Brief Introduction to the Book of Tarikh-I Vassaf and Its Author

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ABSTRACT

The present article with a literary history approach attempts to study and investigate the content of Tarikh-I Vassaf written by Sharaf al-Din Abdallahibn Faḍlallah Shīrāzī, known as Vassaf-al Hazrat, the poet and writer of 7 and 8 centuries (A.H.). The real name of this book is Tajziyat al-amṣārwa-tajziyat al-a'ṣār and reviews the historical events of Il-khanate in Iran and the story of the kings and rules around, from 656 -728 A.H. The book is organized in five volumes and among its peculiarities is that it covers a number of issues regarding the social situation at that time and the criticisms on poor living condition of the people which were due to the dominance of Il-khanate rulers. The writing style of the book is completely Technical (Masnou) with amazing exaggerations which makes this book an important source to investigate the literature of Il-khanate period.

KEYWORDS: Tarikh-iVassaf, Tajziyat al-amṣārwa-tajziyat al-a'ṣār, Vassaf-al Hazrat, Il-khanate, Technical Prose.

1. INTRODUCTION

To investigate the cultural situation of each nation, in every period of history special attention should be paid on government and political situations and events of that era, since in the time of welfare and convenience peoples and nations leave behind scientific, literary and artistic works but at the time of difficulty if they create a work it expresses their potential pains and sufferings. At first, the Mughal period was one of the darkest eras of Iran but over the years, the power and independence of Persian literature and culture, that much influenced these invaders that not only they became Muslim but also changed them to the incentives and commissioners who developed Iranian - Islamic culture and art. However, it was not possible except through the aid of ministers, advisers Iranian scientists who were at the court of Il-khanate. Great historians like Atâ-Malek Jovayni, Vassaf-al Hazrat and Rashīd al-Dīn Fadhl-allāh Hamadānī emerged in this period, whose books are the reliable sources for the events of that period and are also considered as the rich literary treasures. We need to know about the time and circumstances of that book to understand the written style and content of a work, so that e.g. we can judge about technical prose or the usage of foreign words in it. This paper attempts to introduce Vassaf-al Hazrat and his book Tarikh-iVassaf briefly.

Who was Vassaf-al Hazrat?

The author of Tarikh-iVassaf was Sharaf al-Din (Shahabud al-Din) Abdallahibn Faḍlallah Shīrāzī known as Vassaf-al Hazrat and his nom-de-plume was Sharaf al-Din Shīrāzī whom was born at Shiraz in 663 A.H. at Il-khanate period and acquired knowledge at that city then like his father served in the bureau (Vassaf-al Hazrat, 1269 A.H; Hedayat, 1957; Bahar, 1990). He himself asserts that his father Faḍlallah known as Ezedin died in the famine of Pars (today is known as Shiraz) on 23th of Dhu al-Qa'dah at 698A.H. (Vassaf-al Hazrat, 1269 A.H; Eghbal Ashtiyani, 1985; Ayati, 1993).

The interesting thing about the title of Vassaf is that Malekolshoaray Bahar prefers Sharaf al-Din Shīrāzī and writes that “the author Habib al-seir has written his name as Shahabud al-Din but undoubtedly his title was Sharaf al-Din also it is repeatedly stipulated in the history and the author of the Majma al-Fusaha also recognized the meaning and quoted it as Sharaf al-Din (Bahar, 1991). But some other authors including the deceased Eghbal in the Mughal Empire on page 487 cited it as Shahabud al-Din.

Vassaf got a position in the official bureau of the Pars gradually and became one of the closest relatives of Khajeh Sadriddin Ahmad Khaled Zanjani known as Sadre Jahan (top of the world) whom was the vice-president of Tghajar in the Pars. Vassaf has written many poems and panegyrics about him who later was appointed to the ministry of Gaykhatu. His contemporaries were Khajeh Rashid al-din Fadlullah Hamadani and his son Khajeh Ghiyathoddin Mohammad. Three years later the chief minister Sadriddin Zanjani was dismissed and Khajeh Rashid al-din Fadlullah Hamadani and Khajeh Sadedin Mahmoud Savojiunanimously appointed as minister by Ghazan Khan (Afrooz, 2008).

At this time vassaf was a tax collector (Dehkhoda, Dictionary) and his love to the family of Khajeh Rashid al-din Fadlullah made him the assistant of khajeh. He also was loved by Khajeh Sadedin Mahmoud Savoji (Vassaf-al

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Hazrat, 1269 A.H; EghbalAshtiyani, 1985). Vassaf was a learned and literary man and through studying his history one can understand that he had a wonderful memory and vast knowledge and information. Due to his job in bureau and his relationship with Il-Khanate minister Khajeh Rashid al-din Fadlullah, he may have seen many events or heard them from Il-Khanate court elders and probably had access to written documents.

He began to write his book in the year 699 A.H. when he had thirty six years old*. Five years later on Sunday Rajab 13th of the year 702 A.H. when Ghazan Khan was going to the Levant, at Aneh one of the houses near the Euphrates, Khajeh Rashid al-din Fadlullah Hamadani and Khajeh Sadedin Mahmoud Savoji introduced Vassaf to Ghazan and he presented a part of his book with an Qasida to him (Vassaf-al Hazrat, 1269 A.H).

In this meeting he was welcomed by Il-Khanate. After nine years at 24th of Muharam 712 A.H in Soltanieh offered another part of his work which consisted of four parts to Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh (Al jaytv) and he admired him. Vassaf completed the fifth section of his book after the death of Al jaytv (Vassaf-al Hazrat, 1269 A.H; Ayati, 1993; Bahar, 1991).

The year in which Vassaf died is not known exactly, but in many sources historical events about him just can be found to the year 728 A.H. (Probably) but according to the manuscript or handwritten version that are available in national library the year of his death is 730 A.H**. His tomb is located between TekyeKhaje Hafez and Tekye Chehel Tanan in Shiraz.

The Content of Tarikh-iVassaf

As Vassaf cited in the first page of his book, Tarikh-iVassaf is the continuation of Tarikh-iJahangushay-i Ata-Malik Juvaini the one who all the time praised and adored him. In this preface Vassaf as his style has used many bombastic and vicissitudinous phrases and written many panegyrics about Ata-Malik Juvaini e.g. called Tarikh-iJahangushay-iJuvaini as Jame Jahan Namaye Maani (Diwan of meanings)(Vassaf-al Hazrat, 1269 A.H) and while visiting Charandab Cemetery in Tabriz has composed plaintive poems about Ala Ad Din Ata-Malik Juvaini, Shams Ad Din Mohammad Juvaini the Sahib Diwan (owner of Diwan) and his family who were killed by the Arghun Khan.

Vassaf after praising the God about the beginning of his work has written that: At the time of Padshah-i Islam (Islamic Kingdom) of Sultan Mahmud Ghazan Khan (Vassaf-al Hazrat, 1269 A.H), I (AbdallahibnFaḍlallah) decided to write a history (Tarikh-i) about the events of these days (end of Sha'ban year 699 A.H) till the end of my life to not discrete the chain Then, after much hesitation stepped forward and named it Tajziyat al-amṣārwa-tazjiyat al-a'sār. Everything is written in these white papers at this place just the way they were (Ayati, 1993).

Tarikh-iVassaf consists of an introduction and five volumes on describing the events of Il- Khanate Mughal government from the death of Möngke Khan to the middle part of Abu Said Bahadur kingdom (years 656 to 723 A.H.), in deed Vassaf in his book began to narrate the events a few years before of his own birth, where Ata-Malik Juvayni in his Tarikh-iJahangushay-iJuvaini has finished his historical events namely conquest of Alamut and extinction of Ismā'īlism by Hülegü Khan(Ayati, 1993). Below is a brief description of the topics of the five volumes of Tarikh-iVassaf based on what has written in the book of Tahrir-iTarikh-iVassaf by Ayati:

Volume I – covers the beginning of the governance, wars and the loot of Mughal Emperors in Islamic countries and its subsequent events. The book starts with the death of Möngke Khan (Möngke Khan Son of Tolui Son of Genghis Khan) in the year 656 A.H. and narrates it briefly, then describes the attack of Hülegü Khan to Baghdad in detail, the end of Abbasid Caliphate and the murder of al-Mu'tasim bi-'llah, also Vassaf in this volume expresses the events political, military, bureaucratic and economic issues of Hülegü, Abaqa and Sultan Ahmad Tekuder governance. This volume describes the history of the Pars from Seljuq period to the year 689 A.H. and as gets closer to its own period narrates in detail also there is some information about Āl-eKart and Egypt governance after Ayyūbiyyūn (MoeiniJahromi, 1998) then continued to narrate the events of putting Sahib Diwan in chain and his murder.

Volume II – narrates the status of Arough Meymon in the generation of Genghis Khan, the events to the end of the Arghun Khan governance and describes the battles, military expeditions and the events of Arghun Khan Period in 690-684 A.H, also in this volume mentions about Solqori Dynasty or Atabakan of Pars and the status of the Pars governments and Atabakan-e-Lor and the Empire of Nawab Seljuqian.

Volume III- narrates the events that are related to the governance of Gaykhatu Khan, Baydu and a section of this volume is about the period of Ghazan Khan. In this volume Vassaf mentions the kings of Kerman Gaverdian and Gharakhatayian, India (Delhi), Egypt, Tabriz, and Kings of Khorezm postpones the rest of Ghazan Khan Kingdom to the fourth volume. He also mentions some geographical areas, such as Samarkand, Transoxiana and events of Nakhshab and Termez in this volume.

Volume IV - The rest of the events of Mahmud Ghazan reign and his relations with Egypt, history of Shabankar rulers and also part of the Al jaytv period and condition of Transoxiana, China and India (along with the

Aljaytv kingdom) is written in this volume (Moeini Jahromi, 1998) at the end of this volume occult accidents are mentioned.

Volume V – Vassaf begins this section with an introduction about the Mughal kings and princes and went on with discussion about the events of the Al jaytv period, his death and the beginning of Abu Sa'id Bahadur rule last Il-Khanate Mughal and the condition of Pars in that period. He describes the events to the middle part of Abu Said rule and at the end of the book has written about Ala ad-Din Muhammad II the king of Dehli and the end of his life after conquest of Moabbar (located in south India) in the year 715 A.H. and his death in the year 716 A.H. and finally continued with the events related to the beginning of Alagh Khan rule (son of Taghlag Khan) in the year 723 A.H.

There is a summary about the status of Tarikh-I Jahangushay-I Juvaini and whatever related to it between the volumes fourth and fifth which later named as the Tazbyl of book about the status of Jahangushay-i which includes the events of Mughal and Tatar tribes, the beginning of the Genghis Khan Empire, the status of Yasa and his conquests in Khurasan and Transoxiana and a summary on the history of Kharazmshahiy rule and Sultan Jalal al-Din. In this section the author has spoken about the attention of Hülegü to the west and his access to the library of the Ismailism and the ideas of Hassan-iSabbāhhis battles with the Seljuks (Ayati, 1993).

Writing style of Tarikh-iVassaf

Vassaf-al Hazrat liked the book and prose style of Tarikh-iJahangushay-iJuvaini (which was one of the famous books of 7th century in Persian Masnou prose) and thus Vassaf followed Juvaini's style except that he has used more especial and difficult Arabic words, Arabic compounds and terms than Juvaini he also has used successive phrases in Arabic. In addition to narrating historical events he also has brought some poems in Persian or Arabic which some are his own poems and others are belonged to famous and anonymous Arab or Persian poets. He also has written treatise like Madrasah-'isayyār, Osulelme Bayan and Treatise on Similes (Vassaf-al Hazrat, 1269 A.H; Ayati, 2010)

The prose of Tarikh-iVassaf is Technical, Mossaja'a, full of Phraseologies, synonyms, redundancies in narrating events, poems, Arabic proverbs and verses of Quran and Aḥādīth (Bahar,1991)Vassaf is also pioneer in bringing Mughalian words and the terms of court which were used in that period. Vassaf was the last author in technical prose style who has followed it seriously, since this type of prose is based on imitation of the Arabic and author by bringing too many words and symmetries and synonyms has just exaggerated this style in a way that authors after him such as Sharafad-DinAliYazdi (the author of Zafarnama) and Mirza MehdiKhan (the author of Naderi Valley) have also imitated his style (Mir Fakhraee, 2007).

Advantages and disadvantages of the Book

Ptrvshsky, one of the former Soviet Orientalists, in agriculture and agrarian relations of Iranian in Mughal era book according to the political views of authors divides the writings of Iranian history in three groups and puts Juvaini, Rashid al-din Fadlullah and Vassaf among the authors who have more or less reflect the pro-Mughal views (Dastranji, 2006) and do not consider him as an independent historian, perhaps it is not that much fair. The historians after Vassaf paid much more attention to Tarikh-iVassaf as Mīr-Khv'ānd and has also paid attention to the events of those years, even the same phrases can be found in the books Rawzataṣ-ṣafā' (garden of purity) and Habib Al Seir. Whatever Vassaf has narrated about all are reliable since he was working in the court of Il-Khanate and was acquainted and familiar with country and army elders thus he himself has witnessed the events or heard them from others. As he himself says "I just wrote whatever I heard, seen them or narrated by others about the status of county whether in their detailed or brief form" (Afrooz, 2008).

If we compare the contents of Tarikh-I Vassaf with the contents of Jāmi' al-tawārīkh (belonged to Khajeh Rashid al-din Fadlullah Hamadani), it can be concluded that there are many cases in Tarikh-iVassaf which can't be found in Jāmi' al-tawārīkh. For instance Vassaf has described the event related to the House of Inju (Il khanate Mughal specific property in the Gulf) before Amir Boga (Minister of Arghun Khan) in detail (Manzorolajdad,2010) or pointed out about Arghun Khan expedition to destruct the Ka'ba (Vassaf-al Hazrat, 1269 A.H) but Khajeh Rashid al-din didn't mention any of them(Moeini Jahromi,1998). Nowadays, whatever information we have about historical events of Bghdad conquest by Hülegü Khantill the middle of Abu Sa'id rule are mostly based on the content of Tarikh-iVassaf and Jāmi' al-tawārīkh, fortunately none of the authors of these two works did not adapt any information of one another and each has used separate sources.

Moreover, what can be understood of Vassaf book is that he was the one who always tried to adhere to fairness, accuracy and trustees, speak truth and be honest in history narrating, (Ayati, 2011). The deceased Baharinth is regard says that: "after Abul-Fazl Bayhaqī, Vassaf is the one who observed the righteous and justice to this degree" (Bahar, 1991)Vassaf had the same political view with what was mentioned in Jāmi' al-tawārīkh (belonged to Khajeh Rashid al-din) and like him beside praising and eulogizing Il- khanate Mughal narrated their Brutality and bullying and rapping on the masses of people. For example about the reformations made by Ghazan Khan, first he

speaks about the destructions of the pre-reformation, commands of reformations then analyze the result of post-reformations. Vassaf's accuracy in these analysis was in a way that even losses that were due to the abuse of the amendment by government agents were mentioned (Moeini Jahromi, 1998; Vassaf-al Hazrat, 1269 A.H).

The contents of *Tarikh-i Vassaf* is one of the valuable sources for studying the Story of local governments, which were under the supervision of Il-khanate, specially Pars rulers including Solqori Dynasty or Atabakan of Pars, Shabankar rulers, Pars islands, Kerman Gaverdian and Gharakhatayian and also the status of south islands of Iran and their trade with India. Vassaf tries to introduce his own homeland, thus pays more attention to Pars than other parts of Iran and writes about the customs and traditions of his day in Pars.

Unfortunately, unlike the smooth and simple essay of, Jāmi' al-tawārīkh Rashidi the book of Vassaf due to the boring phraseology, useless synonyms, redundant words, puns, technical Saj'a (rhymes), indulge in narrating events, Poems and Arabic verses is that much abnormal that the deceased Bahar says: "the reading of this book can be difficult and boring for every one even for those who are in loved with these types of writings and even if the reader aims to get some historical information out of it that would be much more difficult (Bahar, 1991).

Of course Vassaf was aware of his writing method and knew that using that much redundancy is not appropriate for historical contents, but he confess that his aim not only was to narrate the events but also was to show off his talent in using Rhetoric and Saj'a (rhymes) word making, this made him even pride of himself and he considered himself even better than Nasrallah Monshi in prose and better than Rudaki in poem, of course a comparison between *Tarikh-i Vassaf* and *Kalila Dimnaor* Vassaf's poems and Rudaki's will make everything clear (Mir Fakhraee, 2007). Vassaf has written some phrases about this in the introduction of his second volume (Ayati, 2011).

The content of book reveals that some of his contemporaries criticized him for his style of historical writings, thus sometimes he blamed them as envies that were free of grace and eloquence and complained about them. Vassaf in the part of occult accidents after giving some examples says that since those envy people could not find any other flaw with my work they tried to criticize my phraseologies (Vassaf assumed those phraseologies as the preferences of his book) (Ayati, 2011). Beside some difficulties in writing style which made it difficult to comprehend and use the content of the book, lack of discipline and unconformity between the proportion of components in narrating the historical event are among the major disadvantages of Vassaf's book.

Available versions of *Tarikh-I Vassaf*

In 1269 A.H. its handwritten copy Lithographed by Mohammad Mehdi Arbab Esfahani for the first time which still is the main reference for this book. In the year 1340 SH. (1962) the book was offsetted by the joint capital of Ibn Sina and Jafari Tabrizi libraries in Tehran and it has been repeatedly offsetted to this day. In the year 1272 A.H. (1855) Von Hammer – Purgstall translated the first part of it into Germany and published it in Vienna. Charles Pierre Henri Rieu summarized *Tarikh-I Vassaf* and published it along with the translation of Von Hammer – Purgstall. This book has been published several times in Iran, Paris and Beirut. Hussain Effendi Baghdadi also has written a description in Turkish named the Description of Vassaf. Also in 1346 SH. (1968) Abdol Mohammad Ayati published a new edition of his book named *Tahrir-I Tarikh-I Vassaf*, in Tehran which in the year 1372 SH. (1994) reprinted with some amendments. Ayati in the preface of his book (*Tahrir-I Tarikh-I Vassaf*) pointed out that there is an old version of *Tarikh-I Vassaf* which was written on 26th of Safar the year 871 A.H. and belongs to the central library-University of Tehran. Also recently Alireza Hajian Nejad with the effort of University of Tehran publication published the fourth volume of *Tarikh-I Vassaf* along with its preface, corrections and using Taliq-font according to its manuscript or handwritten version.

Conclusion

At the end, it can be said that *Tarikh-I Vassaf*, Jāmi' al-tawārīkh and *Tarikh-I Jahangushay-I Juvaini* are three valuable works which all contain comprehensive and especial information about the Il-Khanate period in Iran. It should be mentioned that *Tarikh-I Vassaf* not only includes historical events but also due to its Technical Prose is a rich source of Persian –Arabic poems, proverbs, Quran verses, Aḥādīth and customary court (Diwan) terms of those days. All these cases make this book as a treasure which should be investigated and corrected by researchers (much more research and investigations are needed to revive the original manuscript of this book).

Notes:

* however if we consider him thirty four years old (as cited in many sources) the year in which he started to write his book will be 697 A.H. also in Ayati's book (*Tahrir-I Tarikh-I Vassaf*) preface this year is mentioned as 697 A.H. but inside the book this year is written as 699 A.H.

** When referring to the national library the year 730 A.H is written but since some sources mentioned the finished date of book as 728 A.H. and the events of the book are up to the year 723 A.H and also Vassaf himself

has mentioned that he wants to write the events till the end of his life probably the year 723 A.H. is his year of death.

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