

6. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ROSTAM KHAN (English summary)

The present book consists of an edition of the Persian text and an Italian translation of the Ms British Library Add 7,655, a text completed in 1692, which is both a biography of Rostam Xān Saak'adze "the Elder" (d. 1643, a prominent Georgian *golām* officer of Šāh Šafi) and a short history of the latter's reign (1629–1642). The manuscript is written in the hand of the author, Bijan and is dedicated to Rostam Xān Saak'adze "the Younger" (the grandson of the above-mentioned Rostam Xān), who was also the person to commission the work. BL Add 7,655 has never been thoroughly investigated despite its clear importance: an earlier edition does exist, an appendix to the 1992 doctoral dissertation of Moḥammad Rezā Qannādi, but it is marred by many mistakes and omissions, and contains nearly no commentary.

The introduction analyzes the limited amount of information available so far on BL Add 7,655 and its author, and adds some new facts and hypotheses. The introduction begins with a brief description of BL Add 7,655, devoting particular attention to how the text has been subdivided into chapters (which does not match the table of contents compiled by Bijan at the beginning of the manuscript), to the additions written in the manuscript's margins, as well as to the language of the text and its orthographical mistakes. BL Add 7,655 was completed only a few weeks after the appointment of Rostam Xān "the Younger" to the high-ranking post of *sepahsālār*, which had been previously occupied by his grandfather, Rostam Xān "the Elder": this seems to strengthen the hypothesis (already put forward by A. H. Morton and later shared by Giorgio Rota) that BL Add 7,655 is, in fact, a first draft of the work, which in turn could also explain both the absence of a title and why the table of contents does not match the actual contents of the manuscript. Rota hypothesizes a meeting between Bijan and Mirzā Ḥātem Beyg Darjazini (whose father was the *vazir* of Rostam Xān "the Elder", and who was himself in the service of the Khan while a youth) after the completion of BL Add 7,655, which would explain the several additional notes written by Bijan in the margins of the manuscript.

The few facts known about the history of the manuscript are then discussed. Most probably it remained in the hands of the family of Rostam

Xān “the Younger” until the Ottoman conquest of Azerbaijan in the 1720’s, when it was acquired by an Ottoman civil or military official, who carried it to Bagdad. There it was later purchased by Claudius J. Rich, who eventually bequeathed it to the British Museum.

Finally, the various opinions that have been expressed so far on BL Add 7,655 by other scholars are summarized. In contrast to them, Rota considers the *Vita* to be both a biography of Rostam Xān “the Elder” (although not a biography in the modern Western sense of the word) and a narration of some of the main events of the reign of Šāh Šafi, under whom Rostam Xān “the Elder” served as Iran’s most important military commander. That the history of the reign of Šāh Šafi was not Bijan’s primary aim is confirmed, for instance, by the fact that, as far as the wars between the Safavids and the Uzbeks in Eastern Persia are concerned, only those episodes are included that saw the participation of members of the corps of slave soldiers (*gōlāms*), to which both Rostam Xāns belonged. Rota’s conclusion is that Bijan took a sort of intermediary position between storyteller (Bijan refers to himself here as *tārix-e šafavixwān*, which can be literally translated as “teller of the Safavid history”, and in another work of his as *qešše-ye šafavixwān*, that is, “teller of the Safavid stories”) and provincial historian in the service of a local governor: in the absence of direct information on Bijan himself or his actual role, Rota provides a few examples of both storytellers and provincial historians (taken from contemporaneous Persian and European sources) in order better to contextualize both Bijan and his work.

A large part of the introduction is devoted to an investigation of Bijan’s oral and written sources. Bijan himself mentions four written sources (*Aḥsano’t-tavārix*, *Tārix-e ‘ālamārā-ye ‘abbāsi* together with its “Continuation”, or *Zeyl*, *Xolāšato’s-siyar* and *‘Abbāsnāme*) to which Rota has added at least one more (*Qeššo’l-xāqāni*); it was impossible to establish whether two other important seventeenth-century historical works (*Zobdato’t-tavārix* and *Xold-e barin*) were consulted by Bijan or not. Rota devotes special attention to the investigation of yet another source, the recollections of Mirzā Hātem Beyg Darjazini, upon which all of the longer marginal notes in BL Add 7,655 are based. Mirzā Hātem Beyg, whose father had been the *vazir* of Rostam Xān “the Elder” and who himself maintained close contact with the Saak’adze family, was *vazir* of Kermān until a few months after the completion of BL Add 7,655. One can thus presume that Bijan met Mirzā Hātem Beyg in Western Persia shortly after the latter’s dismissal, which would explain why the information provided by the former

vazir was recorded in the margins and is not part of the main text. The memoirs of Mirzā Ḥātem Beyg were most probably available to Bijan in a written form, although no conclusive evidence for this could be found. On the basis of how Bijan employed his sources, BL Add 7,655 can be divided into two parts: a first part (fols. 10b-47a) mainly based on Eskandar Beyg Monši's *Tārix-e 'ālamārā-ye 'abbāsi* and its *Zeyl*, and a second part (fols. 47a-89b) mainly based on Moḥammad Ma'šum Eṣfahāni's *Xolāṣato 's-siyar*. Rota offers several instances of the position Bijan took towards his sources, which he chose and freely modified according to his own taste and necessities (the footnotes to the Italian translation provide systematic bibliographical references to the sources used by Bijan, together with further remarks on his adaptation of individual passages). However, and despite this "freedom", Bijan's considerable respect for Eskandar Beyg and his work is clearly detectable. The conclusions reached by Rota are summarized in the closing section of the introduction: Rota considers Bijan a reliable source, despite his role as a panegyrist and possibly (to some extent at least) as "entertainer".

The text of BL Add 7,655 opens with the customary praise of God, the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām 'Alī, followed by a long tribute to Rostam Xān "the Younger". Then the table of contents follows: three *qesms*, one *faṣl* (subdivided into several chapters, most of which indicated as *goftār*) and one *xāteme* (conclusion).

The *qesms* have an introductory role, recounting the genealogy of Rostam Xān "the Elder", the circumstances of the arrival of his family to Persia and the beginnings of his career under Šāh 'Abbās I (1587–1629). According to the table of contents, the second *qesm* was to narrate the career of Rostam Xān "the Elder" under Šāh 'Abbās I, and the third, the wars in sixteenth century Georgia. Since this would have interrupted both the chronological and the logical flow of the events, in the actual work Bijan has the contents of what was originally planned as the third *qesm* precede those of the second.

The *faṣl* represents the bulk of BL Add 7,655. It opens with Rostam Xān "the Elder" suppressing the restive Kurds of Azerbaijan immediately after the death of Šāh 'Abbās I in 1629, and then describes his first meeting with Šāh Šafī at the end of the same year or at the beginning of 1630. The *faṣl* continues by relating the developments in the career of Rostam Xān "the Elder" until his execution in 1643, shortly after the accession of Šāh 'Abbās II (1642–1666) to the throne. Most of the reign of Šāh Šafī was occupied by war against the Ottoman Empire, which lasted until 1639, and it is in the

context of this war that Rostam Xān “the Elder” rose to the uppermost ranks of the Safavid military and administrative hierarchy, cumulating at different points in time the posts of chief of the secular judicial system (*divānbeygi*, a position to which he was appointed sometime between 1626 and 1628), commander-in-chief of the Safavid field forces (*sepahsālār*, to which he was almost certainly appointed in 1631) and commander of the musketeers (*tofangčīāqāsi*, from 1631). In 1635 he was also appointed governor of Azerbaijan, at which time he was replaced as *divānbeygi* by one of his brothers. Among other feats of arms, Rostam Xān “the Elder” fought successfully against the Ottomans in present-day Iraq, where he conquered the city of Ḥilla (1631); invaded Georgia, where he suppressed a large-scale insurrection (1633); fought an undecided battle under the walls of Van, failing to take the fortress (1633); re-conquered the fortress of Erevan from the Ottomans (1636); but then failed to prevent them from taking Bagdad in 1638. Apart from episodes that saw the personal involvement of Rostam Xān “the Elder”, Bijan also relates events where the Khan was not present (such as the fall of Qandahār to the Mughals in 1638), although he neglects others that were equally important for the history of the period. For this, Rota offers the explanation that Bijan wanted to include in his narration not only episodes from the life of the grandfather of his patron, but also episodes that had seen the involvement of other members of the *golām* corps. Bijan also devotes considerable space to the purges of the years 1632–34, which led to the murder or blinding of almost all the male members of the Safavid royal family as well as of several trusted servants of Šāh ‘Abbās I. These purges (in which also Rostam Xān “the Elder” and his two brothers played an active role) were an event of major importance for the reign of Šāh Šafī and therefore have drawn the attention of a number of scholars. These have presented different interpretations of the extant evidence: Rota agrees in particular with Willem Floor, who does not see the *golāms* of Caucasian origin as a monolithic group pitted against an equally monolithic military class of Turkic tribal origin (*Qezelbās*), but rather sees their relations as an instable system of fleeting *ad hoc* alliances.

The *xāteme* explains the circumstances leading to the death sentence of Rostam Xān “the Elder” (that is, his rivalry with the Grand Vizier, Mirzā Taqī, and his attempt to reach Ešfahān after the accession of Šāh ‘Abbās II to the throne despite orders to the contrary), but his execution is only suggested and hinted at rather than narrated in any detail. The *xāteme* ends with a sort of summary of the life of Rostam Xān “the Elder”, and includes a few

episodes that are not actually included in Bijan's narration (as, for instance, his participation in the battle of Sarāb, 1618). The last marginal note to BL Add 7,655 is also quite interesting: it reports a few more anecdotes about the life of the Khan, including a sort of "ghost story", his apparition in a dream to a student of theology, that is used to underline the Khan's love for Imām 'Alī and his descendants.

The Italian translation of BL Add 7,655 is followed by a glossary, a bibliography (with a focus on the actual contents of the manuscript rather than on the period in general) and an index of names.

Finally, the edition of the Persian text of BL Add 7,655 (with its own apparatus of footnotes, detailing the textual differences with the edition presented by Qannādi as well as the few amendments to Bijan's text proposed by the editor) completes the volume.

