



# Writing History in Safavid Times: Khvāndamīr's (d. 1535/36) General History *Ḥabīb al-siyar* and Its Reception in the Premodern Period

Philip Bockholt



The Persian general history *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (Beloved of careers) by the Herati court secretary Ghiyās al-Dīn Khvāndamīr (written in 930/1524) was by far the most important historical work of the early Safavid and Moghul periods. Written at a time of transition, dramatic changes took place in historiography after the Sunni Timurids were replaced by the Shi'ite Safavids in Iran. However, until recently, works like the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* were regarded merely as a rich source of "facts" and have been mainly valued for the information they contain on political, economic, and social aspects of the Timurid and Safavid periods. Overcoming this rather positivistic method of research, Persian chronicles are today no longer regarded as records of the past, showing "what actually happened", but are seen as multifaceted documents that include a great variety of ideological and narrative elements, containing a view of the past mediated in the text. Taking up these new theoretical thoughts, I intend, in my PhD project, to analyse *Ḥabīb al-siyar* by combining source criticism with a narratological approach for the first time. By deconstructing this historical narrative, my objective is to examine the way in which history was written at that troubled time and to look at the narrative strategies that the work uses to present a meaningful vision of the past to its readers.

This includes three main steps: firstly, I analyse the sociocultural factors that influenced the writing of this historical text: the author, the conditions of writing, and its supposed audience. Taking up the narratological approach, I examine in detail the macro- and micro-structure of *Ḥabīb al-siyar* and the narrative devices used in the work. This looks at how Khvāndamīr understood the process of "writing history" and how he employed sources and authorities to prove his status as a reliable chronicler of the past.

In a second step, I locate *Ḥabīb al-siyar* in the context of the Persian historiography of its time by comparing it to other general or dynastic histories from the years 1498 to 1578, ranging from Mīrkhvānd's *Rawḍat al-ṣafā* to Ḥasan Beg Rumlū's *Aḥsan al-tavārikh*. By doing so, I address

questions as to how a single historian tried to legitimize the ruling Safavid dynasty, how he linked his own present with past epochs (e.g. Timurid, Mongol, or early Islamic times), how he used rhetorical devices (verses of the Qur'ān, poetry, topoi, etc.), and how he combined all this to present a coherent account of historical events to his readers.

In the third step of my analysis, I study the reception of *Ḥabīb al-siyar* by examining its extant manuscripts. This throws light on the actual usage of the work in later times, its geographical radius, and its varying readership. This part of the dissertation project includes intensive archival studies in Iran and India and contributes to the recently developed and innovative field of premodern knowledge transfer in the Islamic world. Tracing the reception of *Ḥabīb al-siyar* means understanding where, when, by whom, and how the chronicle was used by analysing notations of reading or studying, personal comments, and textual ownership marks. Perceiving manuscript studies as an integral part of studying the historiography of the premodern Islamic world, my dissertation sets out to contribute to this new field of research, for which virtually nothing has been done to date.

