

THE PROBLEM OF FILLING UP BLANKS (GAPS; LACUNA) IN Z.M.BABAR'S
"BABUR-NAMA" (MEMOIRS)

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Abstract: This article carries on notes on the Turki hiss of the Babar-nama, and all the translations agrees that Babar wrote the Memoirs late in life, and left the book incomplete, as we now possess them. Analysis show that the Turki and Persian versions are both alike defective and so the inference in unavoidable that the work was never completed.

Keywords: the gap, Lacuna, diary, accident, the blank, the blame

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The Babur-nama (memoirs) is by no means exclusively autobiographical, but contains much general information about matters that interested its author. Nor is it a continuous or uniform narrative, since it is broken by lacuna and is clean cut into two sections by changing of style.

Of course, various causes have been surmised to explain lacuna; on the plea of long intimacy with Babur's and Haidar's writings, can say that one and all appear to us result of accident. This opinion rests on observed correlations between the surviving and the lost record which demand complement - on the testimony of Haidar's extracts, and firmly on Babur's orderly and persistent bias of mind and on the prideful character of much of the lost record. Moreover, occasions of risk to Babur's papers are known.

Of these occasions the first was the destruction of his camp near Hisar in 1512 (918; p. 357) but no information about his papers survives; they may not have been in his tent but in the fort. The second was a case of recorded damage to 'book and sections' (p. 679) occurring in 1529 (935). Form signs of work done to the Ferghana section in Hindustan, the damage may be understood made good at the later date. To the third exposure to damage, namely, the attrition of hard travel and unsettled life during Humayun's 14 years of exile from rule in Hindustan (1441 - 1555) it is reasonable to attribute even the whole loss of text. For, assuming - as may well be done - that Babur left (1530) a complete autobiography, its volume would be safe so long as Humayun was in power but after the Timurid exodus (1441) his library would be exposed to the risks detailed in the admirable chronicles of Gul-badan, Jauhar and Bayazid (q.v.). He is known to have annotated his father's book in 1555

(p.466 n. 1) just before marching from Kabul to attempt the re-conquest of Hindustan. His Codex would return to Delhi which he entered in July 1555, and there would be safe from risk of further mutilation. Its condition in 1555 is likely to have remained what it was found when 'Abdu'r-rahim translated it into Persian by Akbar's orders (1589) for Abu'l-fazl's use in the *Akbar-Nama*. That Persian translation with its descendant the *Memoirs of Baber*, and the purely-Turki Haidarabad Codex with its descendant the *Babur-Nama in English*, contain identical contents and, so doing, carry the date of the mutilation of Babur's Turki text back through its years of safety, 1589 to 1555, to the period of Humayun's exile and its dangers for camel-borne or deserted libraries.

The Memoirs were more than once translated from Turki into Persian; notably, with scrupulous accuracy, by the illustrious Mirza' abdu-r-Rahim, son of Bairam Khan, in 1590, by the desire of the Emperor Akbar. The close agreement, even in trifling details, of the various Turki and Persian manuscripts preserved in several collections, shows that the original text has been faithfully respected, and such variations as exist do not affect the essential accuracy of the document. Even the gaps in the narrative unfortunately occur at the same places and for the same intervals in all the manuscripts, Turki and Persian, with the exception of two or three short but interesting passages which one Turki text alone presents.

This text was printed at Kazan by M. Ilminski in 1857, and was translated into French by M. Pavet de Courteillo in 1857. Long before this, a translation into vigorous English, by John Leyden and William Erskine, based upon a collation of Persian and Turki manuscripts, and enriched with a valuable introduction and copious notes, appeared in 1826, and has ever since held its place as the standard version. It represents the Persian more than the Turki text, but how little the two differ, and how trifling are the emendations (save in Turki words and names) to be gained from the Turki version, may be seen by a comparison of the French and English translations.

This comparison of two versions founded upon several manuscripts written in two languages brings us to the remarkable conclusion that Babar's Memoirs have come through the ordeals of translation and transcription practically unchanged. We possess, in effect, the *ipsissima verba* of an autobiography written early in the sixteenth century by one of the most interesting and famous men of all Asia. It is a literary fact of no little importance.

The memoirs contain the personal impressions and acute reflections of a cultivated man of the world, well read in Eastern literature, a close and curious observer, quick in perception, a discerning judge of persons and a devoted lover of nature; one, moreover, who was well able to express his thoughts and observations in clear and vigorous language. The shrewd comments and lively impressions

which break in upon the narrative give Baber's reminiscences a unique and penetrating flavor. The man's own character is so fresh and buoyant, so free from convention and cant, so rich in hope, courage, resolve, and at the same time so warm and friendly, so very human that it conquers one's admiring sympathy. The utter frankness of self-revelation, the unconscious portraiture of all his virtues and follies, his obvious truthfulness and fine sense of honor, give the Memoirs an authority which is equal to their charm. If ever there were a case when the testimony of a single historical document, unsupported by other evidence, should be accepted as sufficient proof, it is the case with Baber's Memoirs. No reader of this prince of autobiographers can doubt his honesty or his competence as witness and chronicler

Very little is known about the manner in which they were composed. That they were written at different dates, begun at one time and taken up again after long intervals as leisure or inclination suggested, is to be inferred from the sudden way in which they break off, generally at a peculiarly critical moment, to be resumed without a word of explanation at a point several years later. The style, moreover, of the later portions is markedly different from that of the earlier, whilst the earlier portions bear internal evidence of revision at a later date. The natural (though conjectural) inference is that the Memoirs were written at various dates; that the earlier part was revised and enlarged after Baber's invasion of India, though memory failed or time was wanting to fill the gaps; and that the later part remains in its original form of a rough diary because its author died before he had leisure or energy to revise it. The Memoirs were written in Turki, Baber's native tongue...

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He was not only fond of music, but was himself a composer; and several of his airs are said to have been in a pleasing style, and to have survived him.

Besides his Turki, he composed some Persian poetry; but, in the revolutions to which India has been subject since his time, little more than the names of his poetical productions have been preserved; though by the invariable consent of his countrymen, he still retains his place as the second Turkish poet.

As an appendage to literature, he had acquired great skill in penmanship, - an art held in high estimation in the East, where literary works are diffused only by the pen, and where it is generally considered as one of the fine arts, - a distinction which may seem to be justified by the uncommon style of elegance in which its productions are sometimes executed. Baber, we are told, wrote in great perfection

the different hands then in use, and invented one which was distinguished by his name.

But of all his literary works, his Commentaries are by much the most remarkable. The first part contains a continuous narrative of his early life and troubles; the latter portions consist of fragments of a journal, written from time to time, and often from day to day; some comprising accounts of his most celebrated exploits, other being merely short entries or jottings, as if to assist his future recollection, and frequently referring to the incidents of his private life. "His Memoirs" says the historian of India "are almost singular in their own nature, and perfectly so if we consider the circumstances of the writer. The style is plain and manly, as well as lively and picturesque; and, being the work of a man of genius and observation, it presents his countrymen and contemporaries in their appearance, manners, pursuits, and actions, as clearly as in a mirror. In this respect, it is almost the only specimen of real history in Asia; for the ordinary writers, though they give pompous accounts of the deeds and ceremonies of the great, are apt to omit the lives and manners even of that class; while everything beneath their level is left entirely out of sight. In Baber, the figures, dress, tastes, and habits, of each individual introduced are described with such minuteness and reality, that we seem to live among them, and to know their persons as well as we do their characters. His description of the countries he visited, their scenery, climate, productions, and works of art and industry are more full and accurate than will, perhaps, be found, in equal space, in any modern traveler; and, considering the circumstances in which they were compiled, are truly surprising.

"But the great charm of the work is in the character of the author, whom we find, after all the trials of a long life, retaining the same kind and affectionate heart, and the same easy and sociable temper, with which he set out on his career, and in whom the possession of power and grandeur had neither blunted the delicacy of his taste, nor diminished his sensibility to the enjoyments of nature and imagination. 'It is a relief,' says his translator, 'in the midst of the pompous coldness of Asiatic history, to find a king who can weep for days, and tell us that he wept, for the playmate of his boyhood.'

The Memoirs of Babar remained for a time unknown, until they were transposed from the Turki into more popular language of Persia. It is difficult to believe that they are the work of an Asiatic and a sovereign. Though copiously, and rather diffusely written, they are perfectly free from the ornamental verbosity, the eternal metaphor, and puerile exaggerations of most Oriental compositions; and though savoring so far of royalty as to abound in descriptions of dresses and ceremonies, they are yet occupied in the main with concerns greatly too rational and humble to be much in favor with monarchs. The English translation seems to

have imbibed the very spirit of the original. The style is singularly happy, strikingly characteristic, though perfectly natural and equally remote from the usual inflated language of the East and from the imitation of scriptural simplicity into which other translators of similar works have fallen.

This translation has been made direct from the Turki, or Jaghatai, language into French by M. Pavet de Courteille, of the college de France. The text employed was the edition published at Kasan in 1857 by M. Ilminski, M. de Courteille, rendering due justice to the English translation of the Memoirs, declares his sole motive for undertaking a new one was that the English version had been drawn more from the Persian translation than from the original Turki. Though the English translators possessed the original version, they had but a limited knowledge of its language, and they "relied principally on the Persian." Such being the case, M. de Courteille has rendered good service by supplying a new version direct from the language in which the illustrious author wrote, and thus dissipating all misgivings as to the accuracy of the Persian translation from which our English version was taken. The following extracts have been carefully compared, and in both versions they tell exactly same story. Some differences have been noted in the following pages, as well as some passages which are wanting in one or the other version, but these are differences which are attributable to the copyist rather than to the Persian translator. M. de Courteille agrees with English translators that Babar wrote The Memoirs late in life, and he also accords with them in believing that he left them incomplete, as we now possess them. Indeed, it is hardly possible to think otherwise. Such an important work, by such an exalted personage, is not likely to have fallen out of notice, and to have been mutilated in the short interval between the date of its completion and of its translation into Persian. But the Turki and Persian versions are both alike defective, and so the inference is unavoidable that the work was never completed. It is certain that, notwithstanding great search and inquiry, the missing years have never been found. Sir H. M. Elliot was encouraged in his researches by receiving an Extract purporting to be the history of 931, one of the missing years; it turns out, however, to be the narrative of the uneventful year 926 already published by Erskine.

The emperor's book, therefore, contains some fifteen years of biographical narrative and some five of diary, the first filling 217 folios of the Haydarabad Codex, the second 165.

As diaries fix their own dates, it is only necessary to consider at what time the narrative section was composed. Upon internal evidence Mr. Erskine assigned this to Babur's later years, and the testimony which has gathered since he wrote supports this view. There are varied grounds for the assignment: the general one, that the charm of autobiography most allures successful men and would most

allure Babar when, in 1527 (933 h.), he looked back along his life through the roseate mist of the signal success which realized a long desire; the particular ones, that the narrative section contains numerous references to incidents recorded in the diary later than September 1527 (933 h.)¹²²; that there is a references to incidents under date March 5th, 1529 (Jumada II, 5, 935 h.), to the *Waqi'* as being then in writing; and that Gul-badan describes a visit to Sikri, where she saw a building in which her father "used to write his book" (*mushaf*). The visit can have been made only late in 1529, because she came to Agra from Kabul with Maham Begam, arrived on June 27th, 1529 (Shawal 19, 935 h.), spent what she calls three months in the capital, and then first went to Sikri. The last entry of Babar's diary is dated September 7th, 1529 (Muharram 3, 936 h.). This leads to the opinion that even if his later entries were not made on or about the days of their dates - as they presumably were - the *mushaf* she saw her father write was the narrative and not his diary.

The gaps in Babar's record require consideration chiefly because inferences have been drawn from them which reflect upon his character as a frank and honest man.

It will be convenient to enumerate them in a form allowing easy reference and approximately in the order of their importance. They are as follows: -

A. From within 914 h. to the end of 926 h. (1508 to January 2nd, 1519) - a stretch of over nine years.

B. From early in Safar 926 h. to Safar 1, 932 h. (January 25th, 1520, to November 17th, 1525) - a period of almost six years.

C. From Muharram 3, 936 h. to Jumada I, 6, 937 h. (September 7th, 1529, to December 27th, 1530), the date of Babar's death - a length of almost sixteen months.

D. From about the middle to the end of 934 h. (April to September, 1528).

All the above occur after the end of the narrative section, and no material is known to fill their blanks.

E. Part of 908 h. and the whole of 909 h. (1503-04). This falls within the first section, and Babar's own doings are summarized elsewhere (text f. 3b).

The tenor of comment made upon the gaps which have been named above, is that as we have them, so Babar left them, and that at least one - the first in my list - was so left deliberately and with intention to suppress unwelcome matter.¹²³

Perhaps the blame attributed by several writers to Babar is the outcome of a dependent habit which, without return to the source of correct estimate, hands on

¹²² Cf. index *s.n.* Muh. Sl. *Bayqara*, the several sons of the Little Khan, [Ahmad *Chagatay*] Abu'l-fath *Turkman*, etc.

¹²³ As an example of this, a few words may be quoted from Dr. Reginald Stuart Poole's preface to the Catalogue of the Coins of the Shahs of Persia (xxix). Dr. Poole, having discussed a gold coin which indicates that Babar acknowledged the suzerainty of Shah Isma'il Safawi, adds: "We can now understand the omission in Babar's 'Memoirs' of the occurrences which fell between the beginning of 914 h. and that of 925 h."

slightly based notions through literature. Babar's book is presented usually as an autobiography from which he has omitted the record of certain years, it is criticized adversely, and blame is attributed as though it were a composed and considered book. This it certainly is not; it is, in truth, a group of three fragments, two of which are a diary and one a narrative. What stands first in all versions of the *Babar-nama*, and is the record of his earlier years, was written eight years later than the thirteen (lunar) months' fragment of his diary that follows it. The second length of diary partly coincides in date of composition with the narrative, is probably partly earlier, and breaks off some sixteen months before Babar's death – months during which there is good ground for believing he was occupied in the composition of the first section of the book (i.e. the narrative).

The Memoirs are in the form of an irregularly kept diary. The first part (a.h. 899 to 914) contains a continuous narrative of his early life and troubles, and was probably elaborated at a later date in India. The succeeding portions consist of fragments of a journal written from time to time and often day to day, rough drafts in fact, for an autobiography. The style of the later portion is generally inferior to that of the earlier, and bears evidence of a lack of revision, although certain passages, as for instance the detailed description of India, may have been written up, as Lane-Poole point out, 'during the comparative leisure of Babar's last year'. As Pavet de Courteille observes in the Preface to his translation, the fact that the first portion of the Memoirs was written, or revised, in India (1520-30) is proved by Babur's frequent allusion to events that occurred during his residence in Hindustan, and his use of expressions that were only current in the cis-Indus region, and were so little known trans-Indus that he has to explain them, e.g. words to denote measures of distance, time, etc. Babur was in the habit of recording rough notes of anything that struck his fancy, which were afterwards worked up in his Journal, as can be inferred from his remark on p. 245, vol. II, of the Memoirs that 'hereafter if I observe anything worthy of being described I shall take notice of it, and if I hear anything worth repeating I will insert it.'

Five gaps occur in the Memoirs, viz.:

- (a) From the end of 908 to the end of a.h. 909 (a.d. 1503-04).
- (b) From the beginning of 914 to the beginning of a.h. 925 (a.d. 1508-19).
- (c) From the beginning of 926 to the beginning of a.h. 932 (a.d. 1520-5).
- (d) A.H. 934 (April 2nd to September 18th, a.d. 1528).
- (e) A.H. 936-7 (a.d. 1529-30).

At the end of chapters, where two of these gaps occur (a and b), the narrative breaks off suddenly in the middle of a sentence. In one of these the hiatus is supplied by Pavet de Courteille's French translation of the Turki text, but the authenticity of this passage, which will be found in Appendix A, is open to doubt.

These blanks in Babur's narrative, which afford evidence of irregular manner in which the Journal was kept, have been partly filled by Erskine's historical supplements. Pavet de Courteille points out that these lacunae are as Babur left them, a conclusion which is confirmed by the fact that they occur in all existing texts both Turki and Persian, so that they cannot be attributed to the ravages of time, the negligence of copyist, or any other accident independent of the author's will. Babur has left no record of the last fifteen months of his life, about which is little known. Erskine in his concluding supplement has supplied almost all the available information on the subject, but this is necessarily meagre.

THE LIST OF USED BOOKS:

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by A. S. Beveridge, JRAS, 1906
2. Stanley Lane-Pool. Babar, London, 1899.
3. Elphinstone M., History of India, London, 1905.
4. Beveridge A.S. About MSS of Babar-nama, JRAS, London, 1908.
5. Beveridge A. S. Further notes on Babar-nama, JRAS, 1923.
6. Gul-Badam Begum. The history of Humayn, London, 1902
7. Memoirs of Z. M. Babar, translated by J. Leiden & W. Erskine, London,
1921.