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Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi

Many scholars regard the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) as the first firmly established Muslim kingdom on the Indian subcontinent. When researching this kingdom, Žiyāʾ al-Dīn Baranī’s Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī (‘History of Fīrūz Shāh’), assumed to have been completed shortly before the author’s death around 1357, cannot be ignored. As Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī, which examines the reigns of at least eight sultans, is the only existing historiographical text covering the period between 1266-1355, it has become the premise for all modern historical works on that topic. Baranī’s text has survived in several manuscripts, the oldest known copies dating back to the fifteenth century. Among these manuscripts, two recensions were identified, both differing from each other in several ways. While the second recension was edited in 1862 and partly translated into English, the first recension has remained unedited and untranslated until today. [1] This review focuses on two recent publications dealing with Baranī’s text: (1) Azizuddin Husain’s edition of its first recension (2013) and (2) Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli’s translation of its second recension, which represents the first time this work has been completely translated (2015).

(1) BARANĪ, Žiyāʾ al-Dīn: Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī, ed. by Azizuddin Husain (2013)

Azizuddin Husain's objective in editing the first recension of Baranī’s Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī was to bring the text into present times "[...] so that modern historians of medieval Indian history, could consult the first version of Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi, while working on Sultans of Delhi" [sic] (74). During his time as Director of the Rampur Raza Library, Husain was indeed in a position to do so, as one of the three known manuscripts of the first recension is preserved in this library. [2] In regard to his edition, however, it is important to know that it is a distinct type of facsimile-edition - and not an edition in the classic sense of the word. This facsimile is supplemented by a very short preface, a 70-page introduction and a very short bibliography, although the latter two sections are unfortunately not very informative and quite outdated. Nevertheless, Husain is able to achieve his aforementioned goal and makes available the first recension of Baranī's Tārīkh-i Fīrūz Shāhī in (re-)printed form for the first time.

However, there are several aspects of this work that could be improved upon. For example, Husain never mentions that his book is not, in fact, an edition, but instead a (slightly revised) facsimile-edition. His book is essentially a reproduction of the first recension manuscript preserved in Rampur. Therefore, all the expected components of a classical edition are missing - including a critical apparatus and a printed typeset. The editor also fails to name and describe the manuscript he reproduced. However, as far as I could infer, the editor likely used Ms. Persian 2053, as described in the library's printed catalogue. [3] Another weak aspect of Husain's work is the editing on the manuscript itself. It would not be
fitting to call it a mere facsimile, photographic reproduction, or scan, as several slight changes were made to the manuscript which can be seen when comparing the manuscript and its reproduction. The scans seem to have been edited in order to blank out the background of the original manuscript. More or less benign additions to the text are the added page numbers that substitute the corresponding folio numbers. Whereas the main body of the text seems to be untouched by any revisions, the marginal notes are often squeezed together. Therefore, they are so tiny that they are barely readable anymore. Furthermore, at least on the first fly-leaf of the manuscript, the original blue ink has been replaced with black ink. This is evident when examining one of the owner's marks on that page. A further technical issue is the material on which Husain chose to publish Baranī's text. On the one hand, by using hand-made thick, antique-looking paper in combination with a leather-stamped book cover, he was able to create a volume that adorns every bookshelf on which it is stored. On the other hand, however, Husain caused the manuscript to be less legible by choosing this style. Due to the dark background of the pages and the numerous visible particles that were pressed into the abrasive paper, the script is more difficult to decipher than necessary. Because of this, this edition is not much of an improvement to the original manuscript. Furthermore, the ink detaches from the paper on many of the pages, which also complicates the reading.

In addition to these technical issues, the editor's introduction also raises certain questions. There are many mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation as well as misspelled names and an inconsistent system of transcription. The main problem of the text, however, is that large sections of it deal with later periods in time rather than with Barani's text or its context. Discussing a theory of political Islam (5-10) seen in Indo-Persian texts that include later Mughal writings seems to be nonessential for this edition and a bit too broad. While mentioning the writings of Barani's predecessors and contemporaries may be useful, I don't see the value of the lengthy descriptions of Mughal texts written in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, three hundred years after Barani's death (30-40). The same applies to the discussion of many Sufis who were living long after Barani's time (11-20). However, at the end of his introduction, Husain finally returns to Barani and discusses his statements made in both his Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī and his Fatāwā-yi Jahāndārī, with a special focus on the described political system of the Delhi Sultanate in the author's time (40-70). Although he draws comparisons between the text of the first and the second recension that may be helpful for others in the future, he unfortunately recounts Barani's sayings quite indiscriminate and accepts him as a trustworthy historian. As others do not accept him to be such, this should at least be discussed in a book so recently published. As previously mentioned, Husain does not describe the manuscript used for his edition in his introduction or in the entire volume. The short bibliography also reveals that his introduction relies on outdated secondary literature.
Despite the drawbacks of the edition, the editor has nevertheless created something of value by making the first recension of Baranī’s *Tārīkh-i Firuz Shāhī* available in (re-)printed form for the first time. This is very helpful from a European perspective in particular: Whereas two of the three known manuscripts of the first recension belong to the Bodleian Library in Oxford and are quite easy to access (at least as scans), the third manuscript is preserved in Rampur Raza Library in India and has been difficult for foreign scholars to access in the past. This has now changed, making this book a valuable addition to any collection on the Delhi Sultanate.

(2) BARANĪ, Ziyā’ ad-Dīn: *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, transl. by Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli (2015)

Zilli’s English translation of Barani’s *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī* has further improved the manuscript's accessibility. Formerly a professor at Aligarh Muslim University, Zilli is now retired and the director of the Darul Musannefi Shibli Academy in Azamgarh. He, for the first time, translated Baranī’s text in its entirety: "It is indeed surprising that *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi* the most important history of the Delhi Sultanate, was never fully translated in English despite its immense relevance for students of medieval Indian history" [sic] (IX). Zilli further describes how his translation came into being by stating that as the number of scholars able to read Persian has decreased, he hopes that his translation would "be instrumental in stimulating interest in the history of Delhi Sultanate" [sic] (IX).

Zilli’s volume consists of a very short preface (IX-XIII) immediately followed by the translated text (1-369). The volume closes with a comprehensive index listing names, places and specific Persian terms (371-396). Zilli translated the latter in brackets following the transcribed Persian term, which is very helpful in bringing readers closer to the original text. In contrast to the reviewed edition above, Zilli is concise in his five-page preface. He gives a quick overview of the previously published editions and translations of Barani’s text as well as an introduction on what is known of his life. Further, he sums up Barani’s most important ideas according to his text and points out several stylistic peculiarities. In the last section of his introduction, which is regrettably very short, Zilli discusses his method of translation: "While translating the text, it has been my constant endeavour to keep it as literal as possible. There were, however, places where Barani in his exuberance has resorted to words and phrases which would defy literal translation while at other places a literal translation would not be perhaps proper. In any case an attempt has been made to remain as faithful to the text and its general sense as possible." (XIII, emphasis mine) Unfortunately, Zilli refrains from marking these problematic passages, meaning that they are hard to identify and examine in their Persian original. His use of footnotes or endnotes is quite minimal, as he uses them in the second of the seven chapters only. These notes are exclusively content-related. For example, they indicate phrases of Quranic origin or explain who the four Rightly Guided Caliphs were. While these basic annotations are helpful for non-specialists, Scholars would likely find additional annotations on
the above-mentioned problematic passages to be of greater relevance. A proper bibliography or at least a commented shortlist for further reading would also have been a helpful addition to this volume. An alternative possibility would have been to include more comprehensive research on Baranī, his text and perhaps the Delhi Sultanate in the preface. As it is, the only few available references, which are unfortunately outdated, are listed in the endnotes of Chapter 1.

The translation is based on Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s 1862 edition that contains the second recension of Baranī’s text. Zilli describes this edition in his preface but does not clearly mention that he used it as a basis for his translation. Although the use of this edition is evident when comparing both books, he should have mentioned this in his preface for those who are unfamiliar with the facts. The translated text is structured into the introduction and six chapters. It remains uncertain why Zilli chose to number only some of the section headings of the edition. For example, the account of the reign of Sultan Mu‘izz al-Dīn Kayqubād (r. 1286-1290) is included in the first chapter that Zilli labels as "The Great Sultan Ghiyas ud Dunya Wa’d Din". This causes some confusion: Even if an unnumbered subheading for Mu‘izz al-Din exists, it is complicated to locate as the subheadings are not included in the table of contents. Besides the problematic passages that are difficult to identify because of the missing annotations, the translation itself is mostly literal. It is also complete, including the lists of names that Baranī put in front of every chapter. Another helpful addition of Zilli’s is the italicization of specific Persian terms. In these cases, the translation follows in brackets, enabling the reader to receive an impression of the original text. For scholars working with both the edition and Zilli’s translation, it would have been helpful to have included the page numbers of the edition in the translated text by using square brackets or endnotes. Despite the otherwise well-done translation, one of the work’s significant flaws is that Zilli intermingles the English terms "Mughal" and "Mongol" throughout the entire text. Even though the Persian equivalent for both words is mughul (or its alternative form of spelling: mughūl), both translations refer to two very distinct groups. A careful differentiation in its English translation is very important. Whereas the Mongols were a contemporary threat to the Sultans of Delhi, as mentioned by Baranī, the Mughals created their realm in India only after the demise of the Sultanate of Delhi. Even though one could argue that the use of the term "Mughal" is very close to the Persian mughul, making Zilli’s translation very literal, the modern meaning of the English terms makes their conterminous use inappropriate and anachronistic. The Sultans of Delhi had to deal with the Mongols exclusively and at least an annotation (if not a paragraph in the preface) would have been necessary to clarify this point. However, the consequent use of the term "Mongol" would have been more helpful to non-specialists.

In spite of this, Zilli’s translation of the second recension of Baranī’s Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī is a very important contribution to the ongoing research on the Delhi Sultanate. The translation of the work in its entirety is unique, and the text reads well. Zilli’s translation is helpful for
those looking for quick access to one of the textual sources of that time. However, scholars working with this translation should be aware of its limits and are strongly recommended to only use it in combination with its underlying edition - or even better, together with one of the existing manuscripts.

Notes:
[ 2 ] Since then, he has left his position at Raza Library and is now a professor at the Department of History and Culture of India at Jamia Millia Islamia (National Islamic University), New Delhi.