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# **A Perso-Islamic universal chronicle in its historical context: Ghiyās al-Dīn Khwāndamīr's *Ḥabīb al-siyar***

Surveying current academic literature, interest in historiographical analysis covering long time periods and vast geographical regions appears very much on the rise. This trend has various manifestations: 'global' histories that vary vastly in terms of their topics as well as scope (cf. Moyn, Sartori 2013; Mazlish, Buultjens 1993); the notion of 'big history' that attempts to include evidence ranging between pre-historic geophysical data and the literary records traditionally used by historians (cf. Brown 2007; Christian 2004); the interest in 'interconnected' histories that attempt to correlate modern globalization to earlier eras in which far distant parts of the planet came into conjunction through the movement of goods and people (Subrahmanyam 2005); and the use of the environment as an agent that is thought to have a determining influence in the making of human histories over long periods (cf. Lieberman 2003/2009). Recent proponents of grand-scale history are often critical of other modern historiography for being too fragmentary and devoid of interest in determining universal patterns that can make human existence understandable across places and time periods. Such scholars' sense that they represent a new vanguard of history writing is expressed in statements such as the following: 'My wish/prediction is this: a major development in historical scholarship and teaching over the next fifty years will be the return of what was once called "universal history". But this will be a new form of universal history that is global in its practice and scientific in its spirit and methods' (Christian 2010, 7).

I begin this essay with this comment on contemporary scholarly trends in order to underscore the fact that all forms of *universal* history, as much as any other forms of historiography, are products of *particular* times and places. Scholarly works feeding into the movement for new universal histories that I have mentioned above are made possible by modes of knowledge based in new technologies and methods (statistics, databases, digital mapping, 'big' data, and so on). Self-proclamation of universality notwithstanding, these new universal histories represent an overall intellectual perspective that is particular to our times and represents a development out of (or perhaps a reaction to) the dominant way of academic history writing over the past century. What can be considered a viable historical narrative on a universal scale varies from context to context and is conditioned by the overall epistemological, ideological, and sociopolitical envi-

ronment in which it is born. Somewhat ironically, then, examining forms and contents of universal history in a given time and place has the potential to reveal a substantial amount about the local circumstances in which such narratives were produced.

In this article, I wish to present a celebrated Islamic universal chronicle composed in Persian in the first quarter of the sixteenth century CE. The work in question is entitled *Ḥabīb al-siyar fī akhbār-i afrād-i bashar* (*The beloved of biographies reporting on multitudes of people*), authored by a preeminent historian and prolific scholar named Ghiyās al-Dīn Muḥammad Khwāndamīr. The author was born circa 1475 in Herat (present-day Afghanistan) and died around 1535 in India. The *Ḥabīb al-siyar* is a massive work – about 2600 pages in small-print text in the modern published version – and builds on the author’s encyclopedic knowledge of earlier Persian and Arabic literature.<sup>1</sup> The author belonged to the prestigious mainstream of Islamic intellectual life of the times and served ministers and kings in three different dynasties that dominated Iran, Central Asia, and India in the period (Timūrids, Ṣafavids, Mughals). It is easy enough to write many monographs on a work of this scope (although none has actually appeared as of yet), and a short article such as the present discussion can only provide a synoptic and topically focused overview. I do so below in two sections: a brief description of the author’s career and the place of his work within the tradition of writing universal history in the Islamic context (1); and a consideration of the work’s structure and thematic content, which provides us a sense for primary facets of the author’s understanding of time (2). The two sections together can act as a brief introduction to a major venue of literary production regarding the past in Islamic societies.<sup>2</sup>

My secondary aim in this article is to contribute to the general discussion about the relationship between religion and historiography. This field has, to date, been concentrated almost exclusively on materials originating in Euro-American societies. Recent critical scholarship has provided details for the many ways in which we can correlate religious (particularly Christian) understandings of the past to the way modern academic historians undertake the tasks of the profession (cf. Levitin 2012; Rau 2002; Young 2000). The persistent

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1 The *Ḥabīb al-siyar* is available in print as a four-volume set, although this is not a critical edition (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984). For the large number of extant manuscripts, partial editions, and translations into other languages see Storey 1927, 104–9. The third volume of the work is available in English translation as well (Khwāndamīr/Thackston [transl.] 1994).

2 For an overall view of the chronicle tradition in Persian see Melville 2012. Chapters 4 and 5 in this edited volume are particularly helpful for appreciating the general scholarly environment within which Khwāndamīr composed his work.

but attenuated connections between religious and non-religious perspectives highlighted in these studies are related to the rise of the highly contested notion of ‘scientific’ historiography since the Enlightenment (cf. Grafton 2007; Lorenz 2009; Trevor-Roper 2010). While I do not have here the space to undertake a full-fledged comparison between Christian and Islamic forms of universal history and their modern transformations, I hope that scholars familiar with Euro-American materials will find my descriptions interesting for contrastive purposes. Like the case of Christian Europe before the eighteenth century, pre-modern universal chronicles written under Islamic auspices contain a triangulation between dynastic claims, religion, and the authority of the past to create legitimizing discourses. However, the Islamic paradigms differ significantly from European ones, reflecting distinctive rhetorical structures and arrangements of power. By providing a sense for a major genre of Islamic historiography, I aim to contribute to broadening the scope of the theoretical discussion about religion and history, leading eventually to better appreciation of particularities pertaining to different societies.<sup>3</sup>

## 1 The author and the tradition of Islamic universal history

Khwāndamīr’s career as the foremost chronicler of his generation writing in Persian was, at least in part, the fulfillment of familial destiny. His father served as a vizier in the Tīmūrid court of Samarqand, Central Asia, marking the family’s credentials as part of the class of learned administrators. More significantly, his maternal grandfather, who acted as Khwāndamīr’s mentor in early life, was the pre-eminent chronicler of his own generation. The significance of this fact is evident in the choice of the very name ‘Khwāndamīr’, a sobriquet that the author adopted in homage to the name of the grandfather, Khāwand Shah b. Maḥmūd ‘Mīrkhwānd’ (d. 1498).<sup>4</sup>

Khwāndamīr’s first major work was a relatively short universal history entitled *Khulāṣat al-akhbār fī bayān aḥvāl al-akhyār* (*Summary reports on the affairs*

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<sup>3</sup> For a brief but useful comparison between universal history written under Islamic and Christian auspices see Breisach 1994. On the Islamic side, this discussion is limited to Arabic narratives available in translations in European languages.

<sup>4</sup> Khwāndamīr’s biography has not been the subject of significant academic attention. For the most detailed treatment see Jalāl al-Dīn Humāyī’s introduction to the printed edition of *Ḥabīb al-siyar* (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984, I, 1–44). For a brief account in English see *sub voce* the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second Edition.

of those gone by) (cf. Storey 1927, 102–4). In this work, Khwāndamīr states that, right from the time of reaching the age of reason, he was absorbed by stories of the past. In the year 904 AH (1498–99 CE), he was brought to the attention of a great patron of scholars, the vizier ‘Alīshīr Navā’ī (d. 1501), who provided him free access to his own vast library of existing writings on the subject of history. After immersing himself in this material and absorbing all that he could from the work of his predecessors, he decided to write a summary universal chronicle that stretched from the beginning of creation to his own present time (Khwāndamīr, n.d., 2a-3a). The *Khulāṣat al-akhbār* can be seen as a kind of practice run for the author, composed more than two decades before he took up the task of writing the much more detailed and distinctive *Ḥabīb al-siyar*.

Khwāndamīr’s early education and initial professional forays took place in the context of the relatively stable political environment in Herat under the rule of the Timūrid king Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bāyqarā (d. 1506). His report on his beginnings as a chronicler mentions a second important authority, the powerful administrator and litterateur ‘Alīshīr Navā’ī, who presided over a kind of renaissance of arts and sciences in Herat during the last quarter of the fifteenth century (cf. Subtelny 2007). The patronage provided by the king and the vizier was critical for Khwāndamīr’s training as well as for shaping his view of the purposes of writing about the past. It socialized him in the world of scholar-administrators who had formed the backbone of bureaucratic practice in the dynastic polities that had dominated the eastern Islamic world for many centuries by this time. The fact that Khwāndamīr began his career with a universal chronicle was not an accident but a reflection of the pretensions of the courtly culture in which he had been born and raised. Irrespective of the actual size of his dominions, a ruler such as Bāyqarā espoused titles pretending universal kingship. The composition of universal chronicles by Mīrkhwānd (Khwāndamīr’s grandfather) and Khwāndamīr himself during Bāyqarā’s rule can be seen as a way of exerting authority over the known world through assimilating it within the knowledge base of contemporary society. The composition of such works also came in the centuries-old tradition through which earlier Muslim kings and dynasties had argued for their authority as legitimate rulers.<sup>5</sup>

‘Alīshīr Navā’ī, the emblematic figure of the celebrated Timūrid court in Herat, died in 1501, presaging the end of an era. In the beginning years of the sixteenth century, the king, Bāyqarā, was beset with internal revolts and a constant threat from his Uzbek rivals who had eliminated his consanguine Timūrid

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5 For the overall scope of the tradition of writing universal chronicles in Persian see the extensive list of works described in Storey’s bio-bibliographical survey (Storey 1927, 61–158).

courts in Central Asia. The king's death in 1506 resulted in contestation between his heirs and, eventually, the Uzbek conquest of the city of Herat in 1507. This event marked the demise of the sociopolitical order that had been Khwāndamīr's world since his birth. Although Khwāndamīr and other scholars in Herat found employment with the new rulers, the narrative in the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* indicates a lack of enthusiasm for the new regime in the local milieu (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984, IV, 376–83). But the Uzbek interlude was itself very short-lived because a new ruler, this time coming from Iran in the west rather than Central Asia in the east, captured Herat in 1510. This was Shāh Ismā'īl the Ṣafavid (d. 1524), the young descendent of Sufi masters who had crowned himself king of Iran in 1501 and declared his allegiance to the Twelver Shī'ī sect of Islam. The new Ṣafavid regime presented itself as an admirer and rightful successor to the court of Bāyqarā and assumed patronage over the city's scholar-administrators as much as its material assets. Khwāndamīr thus passed from being a chronicler trained in a Timūrid court to becoming one for Shāh Ismā'īl and the Ṣafavid dynasty (cf. Szuppe 1992).

The *Ḥabīb al-siyar* starts with an account of creation like other Islamic universal chronicles and ends with a description of the rule of Shāh Ismā'īl. The account of the most recent events provides the work with its specificity and we can safely assume that behind the author's descriptions of victorious and righteous kings over the ages stands the image of Shāh Ismā'īl as the representation of the prototype in the present period. Although the king as reigning sovereign was, in a sense, the ultimate patron of the universal chronicle, Khwāndamīr tells us that he was commissioned to write the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* by Ṣafavid viziers appointed in Herat. These men were, in effect, successors to 'Alīshīr Navā'ī, the chronicler's first patron. The work's preface tells two tales with respect to its sponsorship that provide us a sense for the relationship between patrons and scholars. The first of these is presented as a tragedy: Khwāndamīr reports that in the beginning of the year 927 AH (1520 CE) the vizier Amīr Muḥammad al-Ḥusayni requested him to write a universal chronicle, making available all material provisions necessary for the task. But this patron was soon murdered in the course of a political intrigue, an event that Khwāndamīr commemorates with the appearance of tulips, the symbol of martyrdom. The following verses, given after the account of the death, convey Khwāndamīr's personal despondence at this event as well as a sense for the relationship between patronage and the act of writing:

The collar of patience torn from that sorrow,  
reed pen on the ground, from grief, thrown away.  
The inkpot, in anger, turned one with soot;  
its mouth open with the intensity of grief.

It was overcome, becoming the picture of surprise,  
finger in its mouth, the pen a mark of dismay.

When the pen's tongue came out, un-moist,  
that pain had caused it to become dumb.

A tear dropped down and marked the page.

Tulips grew from eyes' blood,

adorning the blank surface, splayed.

Brides of speech rushed away, hiding behind veils,

boarding up doors of hope they had earlier faced. (Khwādamir/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984, I, 5)

Shortly after this event, Khwādamir acquired a new patron, Khwāja Ḥabībullah Sāvajī, who asked him to take up the pen once again in composition. His description of the resumption of his work is again encapsulated in a poetic hyperbole:

The sun's sphere was in the throes of sorrow,

the talkative nightingale become a prisoner.

Silenced by the autumn that was the oppression of fate,

it was speechless, separated from the beneficent rose.

Suddenly a spring wind began to blow,

and there arrived the fragrance of the garden, your grace.

Once the workshop turned into your rose garden,

the sad heart was gladdened,

losing the pricking thorn that was the cause of its pain.

Once again, it was accosted by the memory of speech,

it began to articulate words in your praise.

This wondrous speech is, I hold hope,

like a knot of pearls, brought to order.

It will aid in making manifest what is hidden,

presented to the skillful, those unmarred by flaws.

The measure of generosity is infinite grace;

it works to correct errors inscribed by the pen. (ibid., 9)

From these poetic citations, we get the sense of the chronicler's words being a creative form of speech whose purpose is to reveal hidden matters through virtuosity. The writing of the chronicle is thus an intellectual as well as political exercise, made possible by the intimate relationship between patrons and a scholar, who is an expert wordsmith as well as the possessor of knowledge about the past that can be linked to the concerns of the present. The flowing of ink from an author's pen is tied to the human relationships that connect him to those who possess financial means and political authority.

Reinstated after the intervention of the new patron, the task of writing the universal chronicle was completed in 1524, although Khwādamir added to the text to create further redactions that include an account of his journey to

India in the year 933/1527 (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984, I, 586). Khwāndamīr states that he chose the name *Ḥabīb al-siyar* for his work since it is concerned with the acts of those who follow ‘God’s beloved’ (*ḥabībullāh*), meaning Muḥammad (ibid., 9). However, we can be sure that the work’s title is also meant to refer to his patron, Ḥabībullāh Sāvajī.

Although Khwāndamīr seems to have been appreciated well enough as a scholar in Ṣafavid Herat, he eventually decided to migrate to India. This may have been in part to seek greener pastures and perhaps also because Bābur (d. 1530), a prince of the Timūrid dynasty, established himself as a new king in India in 1526. Khwāndamīr presented himself for service to Bābur (d. 1530) in 1527 and also served Humāyūn (d. 1556), the second ruler in the dynasty, as both an administrator and an author. His last major literary work is entitled *Qānūn-i Humāyūnī* (sometimes also called *Humāyūnnāma*) and is dedicated to this second Mughal ruler’s acts and ordinances (Khwāndamīr/Muḥaddiṣ [ed.] 1993). Khwāndamīr died in 1534 or 1535–36 and is buried in Delhi.

Khwāndamīr’s career reflects the opportunities as well as hazards of the times in which he lived his eventful life. This was a period of momentous political transformations, with armies marching all across the area where Persian was the dominant language of high culture (Iran, Central Asia, and India). While the political turmoil brought dislocations and disruption to ordinary life for most, it could be lucrative for people like Khwāndamīr as new rulers sought the services of administrators and scholars to write chronicles and other works to legitimize their claims. His reputation already established because of the fame of his ancestors and his existing work, Khwāndamīr was an attractive target for patronage by both the Ṣafavids and the Mughals. The writing of a universal chronicle such as the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* was the ultimate vindication of his abilities as a chronicler in the service of rulers who proclaimed themselves equal to the great conquerors and rulers of times past.

## 2 The structure and thematic content of *Ḥabīb al-siyar*

From the benedictions to God and Muḥammad in the preface to the myriad citations of the Qur’ān and other authoritative religious sources in the work’s body, the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* is an unmistakably ‘Islamic’ work. But this does not mean that Khwāndamīr espoused a naïve religious view of history in which time is simply the playing out of a providential myth. Rather, the work is a distinctive iteration within the larger genre of Persian universal history in which quantitative and

qualitative views of time are interwoven in a sophisticated manner. At the broadest level in this genre, we see time being understood simultaneously and inextricably as both an objective fact and a subjective experience representable through qualities associated with human lives. The objective side is reflected in the constant concern with dates, whenever these can be had and can be rationalized with moments that are taken to be most certain. The subjective side comes out in the fact that the story is not told through a straightforward movement from one year to the next but reflects forward and backward movement as the author attempts to include multiple strands of historical memory that were relevant for his context. Within this arrangement of time, the narrative is held together through recurrent topical attention to the roles of rulers and administrators. To appreciate these matters in greater measure, I will describe the arrangement of time that forms the infrastructure of the *Ḥabīb al-siyar*.

While Khwāndamīr's overall organization of time follows from the established tradition of writing works of universal history, the particular division into volumes and sections we see in the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* is the result of his own intention. Indeed, his own first universal history, the *Khulāṣat al-akhbār*, is arranged somewhat differently, being divided into the following parts: an introduction (on the creation of the world), ten chapters (biblical prophets, philosophers, pre-Islamic Iranian and Arab kings, Muḥammad, four caliphs and Shī'ī Imāms, Umayyads, 'Abbāsids, local dynasties concurrent with the 'Abbāsids, Genghis Khan and his descendants, Timūrids), and a conclusion (contemporary Herat and its scholars and nobility) (Khwāndamīr, n.d., 3a). In comparison, the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* is divided into three volumes, each of which has four parts (Figure 1).<sup>6</sup> The division of the work into twelve parts may reflect a reference to the Twelver Shī'ī creed of his patrons, the Ṣafavids, although this is not articulated in the work itself. Within the twelve sections, we can observe the interlacing together of three different strands of times that were relevant for the self-understanding of someone living in the eastern Islamic world in the beginning of the sixteenth century. These are: the Islamic religious view of time anchored in the Qur'ānic version of the biblical account of creation; the time represented in Persian mythology, concerned with ancient kings who had ruled until the Islamic conquest of Iran; and Mongol time as present in the history of Genghis Khan and his descendants. For all these three strands of time, the periods that fall before the rise of Islam are narrated without dates. The dated part of history is thus concomitant with the beginning of the Islamic calendar in 622 CE.

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<sup>6</sup> See below, 215.

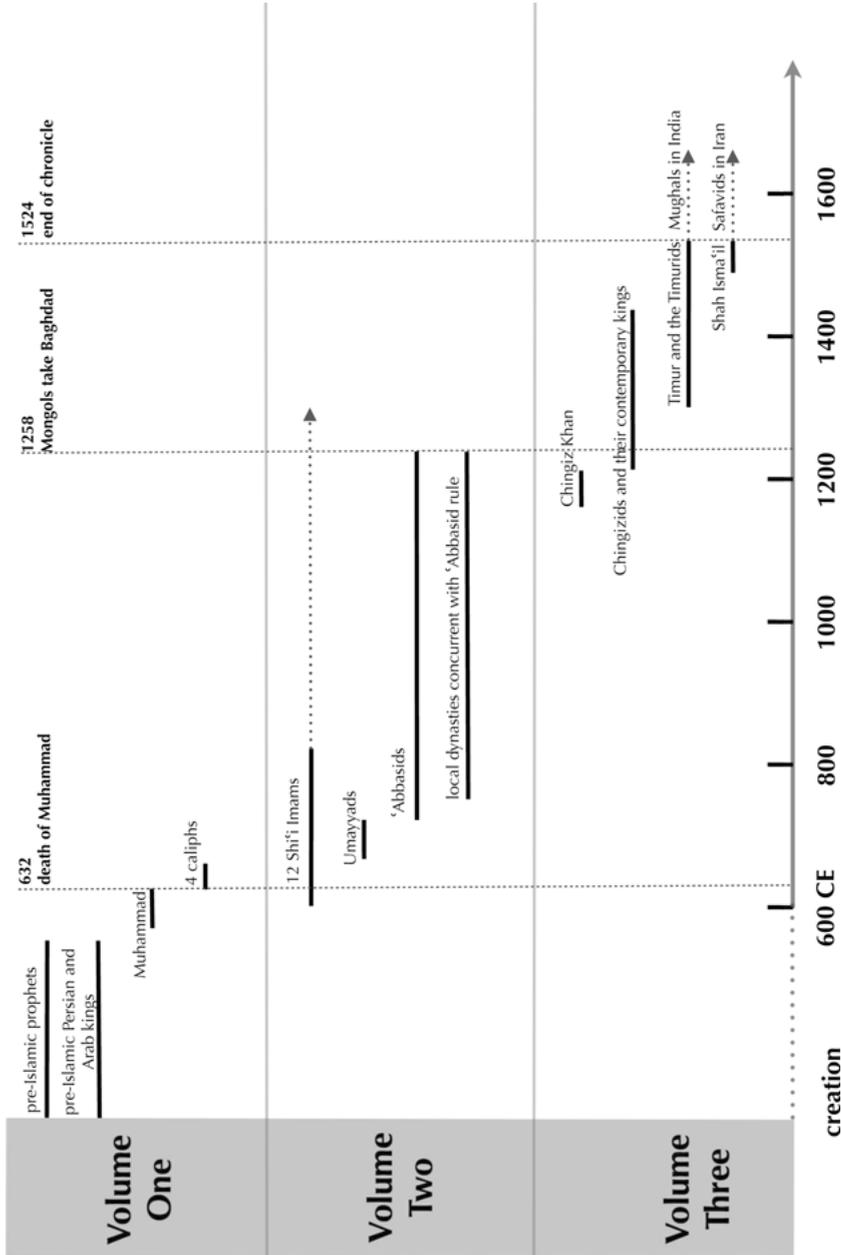


Fig. 1 Timelines in Khwandamir's *Habib as-siyar*

The first strand of time that runs through the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* may be called religious time in the limited sense in that it originates in statements in the Qur'ān and was part of the triumphalist religious rhetoric espoused by Muslim rulers who justified themselves in religious terms. This strand begins with the biblical story of creation in its Qur'ānic version, following the line of individuals regarded as prophets such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and so on (Volume I, Section 1). This history also includes the mention of Greek philosophers and Iranian sages (Pythagoras, Socrates, Jāmāsp, etc.) whose work had continued to influence intellectual life in the Islamic period. The life of Muḥammad (Volume 1, Section 3) represents the end point of prophetic time since he is regarded as the last prophet. The religious timeline continues after Muḥammad in the form of Muslim rulers who saw themselves as the prophet's legitimate successors. However, the strand is split into two based on the sectarian division between Sunnīs and Twelver Shī'īs. Khwāndamīr provides both the Sunnī version of early Islamic history in the form of the lives of the so-called 'rightly guided' caliphs (*khulafā' rāshidūn*) (Volume 1, Section 4) and the Twelver Shī'ī version through the lives of the Twelve Imāms (genealogical successors to Muḥammad) (Volume 2, Section 1).<sup>7</sup> The account of the Imāms includes an aspect of the future as well since the Twelfth Imām is supposed to have gone into an occultation in the year 874 CE. Khwāndamīr's narration of Shī'ī history ends with a description of prophecies about what will happen at the time this Imām returns to normal presence just before the apocalypse and the end of the world (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984, II, 111–3).

The question of Islamic sectarian affiliation was a burning matter in Khwāndamīr's own time. His first patrons, the Timūrids, were Sunnīs who nevertheless held 'Alī and other early Shī'ī notables in high esteem. However, Shāh Ismā'īl declared Twelver Shī'ism to be the religion of his domains upon his declaration of the Ṣafavid dynasty in 1501.<sup>8</sup> The Sunnī-Shī'ī differentiation is based very substantially on alternative understandings of early Islamic history. For Sunnīs, Muḥammad's first four successors represent the golden age of Islam, while Shī'īs regard this same period as having set a pattern of tragedy in which Muḥammad's legitimate heirs were denied their rights as rulers and religious guides of the Muslim community. In the *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, Khwāndamīr mentions the fact that the two versions of history represent alternatives (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.]

<sup>7</sup> The *Ḥabīb al-siyar* does not present versions of Islamic history espoused by non-Twelver Shī'īs such as Ismā'īlīs and Zaydīs. These groups find only occasional mention in the work, within accounts of events in which they represented a significant faction.

<sup>8</sup> The religious history of this period is quite complex and includes considerable fluidity between the dogmas of major Islamic sects. For details see Manz 2007 and Bashir 2003.

1984, I, 444 f.), but then narrates them separately so that the traditions are conveyed on their own terms rather than through adjudication between them. In other words, the chronicler does not champion one side of the conflict in an explicit manner. This pattern of representing alternative histories as independent streams of time is a general principle followed throughout the work.

After the early Islamic period, Khwāndamīr's narrative moves to the two Islamic dynasties that made up the period until the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. Khwāndamīr treats the Umayyads and the 'Abbāsids in succession, followed by accounts of local dynasties in the Iranian region that were, in effect, independent rulers even though they affirmed the 'Abbāsīd caliph as the nominal legitimate sovereign (Volume 2, Sections 2, 3, and 4). The dynastic kingship described in these sections rests on the amalgamation of two different timelines: one, the religious one I have described above, and two, the account of pre-Islamic Persian and Arab kings that Khwāndamīr provides following the narrative about biblical prophets (Volume 1, Section 2). Stories associated with pre-Islamic Persian kings in particular carried tremendous cultural prestige in the Iranian geographical area, commemorated in such celebrated works as Abū l-Qāsim Firdawsī's epic work *Shāhnāma* (*Book of kings*). This book was composed in Persian in the early eleventh century and had lasting influence on later perceptions (cf. Melville, van den Berg 2012). Values associated with Persian kingship fed into Khwāndamīr's work directly through the Iranian heritage of the region, where he worked, as well as in the form that these had been absorbed and naturalized in the ideals of Islamic kingship among the 'Abbāsids and the local dynasties that maintained allegiance to them. By the time Khwāndamīr was writing, Persian royal time was equal in significance to Islamic religious time, accounting for its salience in the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* and other similar works.

Islamic societies of Central Asia and Iran underwent a radical transformation in the thirteenth century CE with the arrival of the Mongols. Genghis Khan's descendants eliminated the 'Abbāsids from Baghdad as the titular heads of Islamic polities and inaugurated a new era in which Mongol royal descent was the marker of political legitimacy. With the conversion of the Mongol rulers to Islam in the late thirteenth century, Mongol descent became a prominent feature of Muslim ruling ideologies in combination with Islamic religious and Persian royal ideas of earlier periods (cf. Manz 2000). The Mongol past is the third strand of time reflected in Khwāndamīr's account of universal history, comprising sections on Genghis Khan and his descendants (Volume 3, Sections 1 and 2). Tamerlane and his descendants, the Timūrids, were a continuation of Mongol dominion in that they respected Mongol customs and prestige. But during the fifteenth century CE, the Timūrids increasingly derived their authority from Tamerlane's own prestige and synthesized a new royal culture that com-

bined Islamic religious, Persian, and Mongol understandings of the past (cf. Bernardini 2008). This was the milieu in which Khwāndamīr was born and raised, forming the background to his quite extensive account for the fifteenth century (Volume 3, Section 3). The last historical section of the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* describes the rise of Shāh Ismāʿīl and the establishment of the new dynasty, the Ṣafavids (Volume 3, Section 4). The work ends with a conclusion that contains a brief geography of the inhabited world.

As I have mentioned in the case of Khwāndamīr's presentation of Sunni and Shīʿī versions of early Islamic history, the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* presents alternative pasts on their own terms without consistent effort to rationalize them into a single timeline. This is quite clear from a visual representation of the work's narrative progression as I have provided in Figure 1.<sup>9</sup> This perspective is apparent in his treatment of the way the three strands of time I have described above come across in the narrative in matters such as his descriptions of the earliest periods of human history. Reflecting the religious timeline, his account of creation includes the familiar biblical narrative about Adam, which is placed at the head of the stream of prophets (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984, I, 17–23). When he comes to the representation of the Persian past, he mentions the mythological figure of Kayūmarṣ, whose genealogical origins are disputed. He indicates that Zoroastrians consider Kayūmarṣ to be the originator of the human species (that is, he is an alternative to Adam) while Muslim chroniclers regard him as either Adam's eldest son or a fourth generation descendent of the first man. Citing the work of his own grandfather, Khwāndamīr considers the last of these possibilities to be the truth (*ibid.*, 175). Following this partial attempt at correlation, he then moves on to describing royal Iranian and Arab genealogies that all issue forth from Kayūmarṣ and do not correlate directly with the lines of prophets he describes earlier in the work. Apart from the issue of the disputed relationship between Adam and Kayūmarṣ, Persian time appears quite separate from the biblical progression of prophets described in the work.

Later in the work, he follows the same pattern again by describing the Mongols and the Turks as descendants of Yāfaṣ (Japheth), a son of the biblical prophet Noah. However, his description of the Mongols' ultimate ancestors, Yāfaṣ's early descendants, reads like a genesis story in that they are shown discovering matters like the use of salt and honey in food and the utilization of animal skins to clothe their bodies. Apart from the initial connection, they seem to inhabit a genealogical evolution all their own for centuries. As in the case of the Persians, the narrative of the Mongol past continues as an independent stream from these

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<sup>9</sup> See above, 215.

early stories until it reaches the life of Genghis Khan and the arrival of his descendants in Islamic lands in the thirteenth century (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984, III, 4–16). The net result of this perspective is that time in general comes across as being multivalent by definition – a kind of repository of sedimentation of human experience in multiple strands – rather than being an un-stoppable sequence of moments.

My description of the work so far follows the author's own arrangement from the distant past to his present. This suggests a highly segmented narration of universal history. What happens when we regard the work as a symptom of the social imagination of its own time and place, going from the present to the past? This view highlights historiographical *topoi* that provide the work its narrative coherence. Among the significant human prototypes that run throughout the narrative in this regard are the righteous and religiously sanctioned king and the competent vizier who manages administrative affairs. Khwāndamīr's extensive descriptions of the acts of Ḥusayn Bāyqarā and Shāh Ismā'īl, the kings of his own times, resonate with references to earlier kings as well as aspects of the narratives about the prophets and the Imāms. Similarly, his eulogistic appraisals of 'Alishīr Navā'ī, Amīr Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, and Ḥabībullāh Sāvajī reflect a general investment in the capacity of learned administrators to run affairs of state as well as act as patrons for scholars like Khwāndamīr himself.<sup>10</sup>

Khwāndamīr's description of Shāh Ismā'īl's accession to the throne in the city of Tabriz in 1501 CE (906 AH) – which occurred when the author was about twenty-five years of age – provides a useful illustration for his work's thematic focus on kings and viziers. He begins the account by identifying Shāh Ismā'īl as one among the series of religious renewers whom God causes to be born in the world every hundred years. This idea has a long history in Islamic thought, though it is usually applied to religious scholars rather than kings. The very strong religious sanction evocated here for Ismā'īl is then redoubled by the report that he declared Twelver Shi'ism the religious persuasion of his domains. His soldiers were instructed to eliminate anyone who refused to obey the performance of public religious actions according to the rites deemed correct by this Islamic denomination. The overall effect of Ismā'īl's new royal dispensation is celebrated through verse:

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<sup>10</sup> Khwāndamīr's particular concern with viziers is reflected in two further works he wrote concerned specifically with this office: the *Makārim al-akhlāq*, dedicated to the person of 'Alishīr Navā'ī (Khwāndamīr/Ganjah'i [ed.] 1979), and the *Dastūr al-vuzarā'*, a compilation of stories and sayings of great Muslim viziers through time (Khwāndamīr/Nafīsī [ed.] 1938).

The king, sitting resplendent like Saturn, traveling like the moon,  
with Jupiter's nature and the sun's radiant mind.

When he occupied the throne to reign,

he issued the proclamation of justice and equity.

Putting out the flag of benevolence,

he extended his protecting hand over believers' heads.

He made his friends become laden with jewels,

seeming the way an orchard appears in spring.

His exercise of the sword in the path of jihad,

opened up wide wounds in the bodies of his enemies.

There remained, then, no trace of treasonous dissenters (*khavārij*),

save in the confines of the fires of hell. (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984, IV, 468)

Once enthroned, Ismā'īl proceeded to appoint men named Ḥusayn Bēg Lala, Amīr Zakarīya, and Qāzī Shams al-Dīn Jīlānī to administrative posts. The account then ends with noting that the king spent that winter season in Tabriz, making the environs of the city a place of justice reminiscent of the days of the pre-Islamic Sassanian king Anūshīrvān (d. 579), famous for his sense of equity (Khwāndamīr/Siyāqī [ed.] 1984, IV, 467 f.).

Khwāndamīr's description of Ismā'īl at one of the most poignant moments of his career is concerned to relate the event with generic characteristics associated with kings sanctioned by religion as well as royal mythology. Here and elsewhere, Khwāndamīr's models for kings and viziers are multivalent and easily accommodate not only Islamic exemplars but non-Islamic ones as well, who are placed both before and after Muḥammad. The fact that the pictures of the kings and viziers are topological does not mean that the chronicler was not vested in the specificity of events. Indeed he was, and the density of detail in representing events is highest for the periods closest to him. Universality over time and specificity in location coexist, with the explicit understanding that both are necessary for making sense of human experience in a chronological vein.

The length and scope of the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* are such that this short treatment can, at best, do it only partial justice.<sup>11</sup> By providing some details for Khwāndamīr's method and the work's structure I hope to have created an overall impression of the complexity of the universal chronicle as an Islamic literary genre. The work's narrative may be conceived as a vast net within which arrangements of time, *topoi* related to kings and administrators, and a concern with the contingency of particular events run as threads joining parts with each other. Enlarging this picture, we can regard the work as symptomatic of a social imagination in

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11 The tremendous extent of material covered in the *Ḥabīb al-siyar* is visible even from a simple concordance of names culled from the work (cf. Navā'ī 2000).

which the past was a matter of fundamental concern in the shaping of ideologies and the general sense of personal and communal identity in Islamic societies of the relevant period.

### 3 Conclusion

Khwāndamīr's *Ḥabīb al-siyar* provides us a window into the way a learned Muslim scholar from the early sixteenth century saw fit to portray the world's past. His view incorporated both the state of knowledge available to him and the social and political exigencies that pertained to elites in his society. As I hope to have shown, an author such as Khwāndamīr was an active producer of the past, well aware of the power of rhetoric and narrative construction as mechanisms for the generation of meaning. The wide circulation of his work from the sixteenth century to the present, in manuscripts and in print, indicates the overall extensive footprint of this form of universal history throughout societies where Persian was a major language of literary production.<sup>12</sup>

From its name to the sentiment expressed on most pages of its contents, *Ḥabīb al-siyar* is the work of an author who saw himself working within an Islamic tradition of scholarship. This work's perspectives on time and the past indicate the complexity of a historical imagination couched within Islamic terms and reflecting a longstanding literary tradition that parallels works of universal history in other traditions such as Christianity (cf. Breisach 1994). The story of Muḥammad's life certainly occupies a central place here, but the work is also shaped substantially by the author's concern for the histories of Persian kings and the Mongols. The chronicler's religious commitment thus does not amount to a permanently blinkered vision, incapable of incorporating information generated outside of the Islamic milieu. Where multiple versions of the same events or religion and logical causality seem to come into contradiction, this chronicler's preference seems to be to tell multiple stories in parallel rather than to attempt to adjudicate the matter to prove the primacy of one side. This inclination makes the work reflect perspectivism as a major methodological choice, which we can observe in the way the narrative represents historical investments particular to Sunnī Muslims, Shī'ī Muslims, upholders of the values of Persian kingship, and the Mongols, all largely on their own terms.

The very brief glimpses of a single voluminous text that I have presented in this article highlight a methodological point relevant to this volume as a whole.

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<sup>12</sup> For details regarding the work's popularity see sources cited in note 1 above.

As we become ever more cognizant of the fact that the ‘scientific’ history we ourselves do as modern academics derives from highly specific presumptions particular to our times, it makes sense to look at other modes of historicization as pre-eminent *loci* for understanding the social imagination of contexts we try to grasp through fragmentary evidence. I suggest that paying attention to issues such as arrangements of time can lead to better understandings of producers as well as readers of texts in the original contexts. The elements in Khwāndamīr’s work that I have highlighted – interdependency of objective and subjective time and the balance between *topos* and event in narrative projections – are issues that matter to our historiographical practice as much as they did for an author writing in Persian in the sixteenth century, although obviously in very different arrangements. Most significantly, the literary and intellectual tradition from which Khwāndamīr writes espouses no commitment to historiographical empiricism that has been a deterministic feature of modern practices. Nevertheless, the partial kinship between his and our ways of conceptualizing the past seems to me to be a far more interesting matter to explore than the oft-asserted difference between seemingly naïve religious pre-moderns and us modern scientific historians. Among other matters, appraising the universality of a different time and social context has the potential to highlight the particularities of our own practices.

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