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Shāhnāma and Other Manuscripts Calligraphed by Ādina Kāteb Bokhāri in Late 16th–Early 17th Century¹

Abstract

This short paper contributes to a larger field of text and skill transmission, as exemplified by editorial traditions linked to the *Shāhnāma* circulation in the Early Modern Central Asia. The analysis of the calligraphic work of a Bukharan professional known as Ādina Kāteb Bokhāri (end 15th/early 16th century) shows that he clearly specialized in the production of good quality copies of Persian literary texts, and especially the *Shāhnāma* epics. It also gives some insight into the organisation and circumstances of book production linked to professional copy workshops. The study of manuscript volumes signed by Ādina also brings to light such issues as specialisation, collaborative scribal work, larger editorial projects, but also literary trends and readership of literary texts.

Keywords: Persian manuscripts, *Shāhnāma*, Central Asia, Samarkand, Ādina Kāteb Bokhāri, Persian calligraphers, book production

Historical information on actual practices and organisation of the copying activities in post-Timurid Central Asia remains in general very fragmentary; this is particularly true for the politically troubled period at the turn of the 11th/17th century where the domination of the Bukhara royal court would be challenged by another cultural centre, i.e. Samarkand.² However, it is possible to significantly enrich and

¹ This paper benefited from learned and friendly advice of Karin Rührdanz and Francis Richard to whom I express all my gratitude. All the shortcomings remain mine.

² Samarkand was governed by the Astrakhānid Bāqī Moḥammad b. Jāni Beg in 1598–1599 (supreme khan in 1603–1605), then by Jāni Beg himself in 1599–1603 (supreme khan 1600–1603), then by his grandson Imām Qoli Khān in 1603–1611 (before he won the throne of Bukhara as Great Khan, r. 1611–1641). During this short period from 1598 to 1611, Samarkand practically functioned as an alternative princely court, in ‘competition’ with Bukhara (cf. A. Burton, *The Bukharans. A Dynastic, Diplomatic and Commercial History, 1550–1702*, Richmond 1997; K. Rührdanz, *The Samarqand Shahnamas in the context of dynastic change*, [in:] *The Reception of Firdausi’s Shahnama. Shahnama Studies*, vol. 2, eds. Ch. Melville, G. van den Berg, Leiden–Boston 2012, pp. 212–233).

diversify the available source material by analysing extant manuscripts and their colophons, but also the type of texts that were copied by particular calligraphers.

The *Shāhnāma* or Book of Kings (early 11th century) by Abu' l-Qāsem Ferdowsi, devoted to the legendary and semi-legendary history of Iranian kings and heroes, remains the largest epic text in the world literature ever composed by a single author. Not only it has been among the most widely circulated texts but also it has inspired a vivid and lasting literary and cultural as well as scholarly interest.³ The poem was recited, but it was frequently copied in a book form, too: numerous manuscripts of the epics are extant today to witness to the process of transmission and diffusion of Ferdowsi's *chef-d'oeuvre* across time and space.⁴ In the post-Mongol period, and especially following the 15th century, manuscript production was thriving in Transoxiana not only in main political and intellectual centres, but also in smaller cities and boroughs across the region.⁵ Some are luxuriously decorated prestige volumes, often sponsored by wealthy and influential patrons, including princes and rulers, while others, of lesser quality, were obviously destined for more modest readers.

In contrast to what was happening elsewhere, very few illustrated *Shāhnāma* were produced in 16th century Transoxiana. According to some, this situation might have been chiefly linked to the essentially non-centralised political organisation of the Sheybānid (Abu'l-Khayrid) power in Central Asia (r. ca. 1500–1598),⁶ indeed, it is only by the closing period of the Sheybānid khans and after the accession of

³ In Modern times, Shahnama Studies have now been long constituted in an independent field of research, with many scholarly contributions, among which Anna Krasnowolska's recent *Ferdowsi's Dāstān – An Autonomous Narrative Unit?* ([in:] *Ferdowsi's Shāhnāma. Millennial Perspectives*, eds. O.M. Davidson, M. Shreve Simpson, "Ilex Foundation Series", no. 13, Cambridge 2013, pp. 12–27), as well as her other studies drawing on the analysis of *Shāhnāma* materials; cf. *eadem*, *Some Key Figures of Iranian Calendar Mythology* (Kraków 1998) and *Mythes, croyances populaires et symbolique animale dans la littérature persane* (Paris 2013).

⁴ The earliest extant manuscript of Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāma* known today is kept at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. It is dated to the year 614/1217 (see A.M. Piemontese, *Catalogo dei manoscritti persiani conservati nelle Biblioteche d'Italia*, Roma 1989, n° 145, p. 113).

⁵ B.W. Robinson, *Persian Paintings in the India Office Library. A Descriptive Catalogue*, London 1976; *idem*, *A Survey of Persian painting (1350–1896)*, [in:] *Art et société dans le monde iranien*, ed. C. Adle, "Bibliothèque iranienne", no. 26, Paris 1982, pp. 13–89; B. Gray, *Persian Painting*, Rizzoli 1977; O.F. Akimuškin, A.A. Ivanov, *Une école artistique méconnue: Boxârâ au XVIIe siècle. Notes sur les calligraphes et les peintres de la Bibliothèque des Aštarxānides d'après Moḥammad-Amin Boxâri*, [in:] *Art et société dans le monde iranien*, ed. C. Adle, "Bibliothèque iranienne", no. 26, Paris 1982, pp. 127–139. More recently, O.F. Akimuškin, *Biblioteka Šibanidov v Buxare XVI veka*, [in:] *Bamberger Zentralasienstudien. Konferenzakten ESCAS IV Bamberg 8.–12. Oktober 1991*, eds. I. Baldauf, M. Friederich, Berlin 1994, pp. 325–341; Y. Porter, *Remarques sur la peinture à Boukhara au XVIe siècle*, "Cahiers d'Asie Centrale" 1998, no. 5/6 (*Dossier: Boukhara-la-Noble*), pp. 147–167; K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*; and their respective bibliographical references. Contemporary sources also mention book production and sometimes quote craftsmen's names. For example, Ahmad Qomi's *Golestān-e honar* (1007/1598, revised 1015/1607). More specifically for the 16th–17th century Central Asia, see Nesāri's *Mozakker al-aḥbāb* (974/1566–1567), Moṭrebi Samarqandi's, *Tazkerat al-sho'arā* (1013/1604), Malihā Samarqandi's, *Mozakker al-aḥbāb* (ca. 1100/1690), and others.

⁶ K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 212 ff for this aspect of the *Shāhnāma* copy production. Only one Sheybānid illustrated *Shāhnāma* is known today dating from the reign of 'Abdallāh Khān II (Topkapı Saray Museum, ms. H.1488, dated 972/1564). On the issue of Sheybānid legitimation policy, see

their rival Astrakhānid (Jānid) rulers (r. 1598–1747), we witness a significant rise in the local production of superior quality manuscripts of Persian classical literature, among which the *Shāhnāma* epics. Especially, the royal workshop for book production (*ketābkhāna*) in Bukhara was active under the Sheybānid ‘Abdallāh Khān II (r. as co-ruler 1561–1583, and independently 1583–1598), and then under the Astrakhānid Emām-Qoli Khān (r. 1611–1641), as attested by the extant manuscript volumes as well as by historical sources.⁷ Additionally, in the period ‘in-between’ of these two rulers, the city of Samarkand – a provincial capital – seems to have also been operating as an active centre of highly professional manuscript production.⁸

At the very turn of the 11th/17th century, a group of six similar style illustrated copies of Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāma* were produced in Samarkand within a period of just over four years, i.e. between Sha‘bān 1008 and Zu‘l-qa‘da 1012, i. e. February 1600 and April 1604.⁹ Three of these manuscripts were copied by one calligrapher who names himself as ‘Ādina Kāteb Bokhāri’ (see Fig. 1). Noticeably, a fourth *Shāhnāma* manuscript of this group was jointly transcribed by two calligraphers who cooperated together: the first half of this copy is signed by the same Ādina Bokhāri, while the other half by ‘Mir Māh b. Mir ‘Arab, paternal nephew (*barādar-zāda*) of Mir Ḥoseyn Kulangi Kāteb Bokhāri’.¹⁰ The practice of two (or more) copyists working in cooperation is not exceptional.¹¹ In our case, it might

Th. Welsford, *Four Types of Loyalty in Early Modern Central Asia. The Tūqāy-Timīrid Takeover of Greater Mā Warā al-Nahr, 1598–1605*, Brill 2013.

⁷ For example, the Ms. *Khuda Bakhsh*, I, n° 148 (pp. 226–227), an illustrated *maṣnavi* poem *Mehr-o-Moshitari*, copied 1017/1608. The painting on f. 44a bears an inscription indicating that it was produced in the royal workshop of Vali Moḥammad Khān b. Jāni Beg (r. 1605–1611) in Bukhara (*be-rasm-e ketābkhāna-ye khāqān al-a‘zam [...] vali moḥammad bahādor khān*). K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, pp. 229–230, details the paintings of this manuscript.

⁸ Cf. S. Sharma, *The Production of Mughal Shāhnāmas: Imperial, Sub-Imperial, and Provincial Manuscripts*, [in:] *Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāma. Millennial Perspectives*, eds. O.M. Davidson, M. Shreve Simpson, “Ilex Foundation Series”, no. 13, Cambridge 2013, pp. 86–107, and his typology of ‘Imperial’, ‘sub-Imperial’ and ‘provincial’ *Shāhnāma* manuscripts produced in Mughal India.

⁹ Data documented by *The Illustrated Shahnama Project* (Charles Melville, University of Cambridge, and Firuzā Abdullaeva-Melville, The Shahnama Project). See K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, pp. 215–221, for the list and a short description of these manuscripts. They can all be viewed at <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk> (access: 18.05.2019).

¹⁰ This Ms. is held at the Punjab University Library, Ms. O-15/7248. The colophon can be viewed at: <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/card/cemanuscript:-1112505709> (access: 18.05.2019). In addition, Mir Māh b. Mir ‘Arab copied a fifth of these early 17th century Samarkand *Shāhnāmas* (Princeton Univ. Libraries, ms. Garrett 59, dated to the end of Safar 1009/early September 1600; also, see K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, pp. 216–217). The sixth of these illustrated *Shāhnāmas*, attributed to the same Samarkand circle (K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, p. 217), was copied by Mirzā Moḥammad b. ‘Aziz al-Bokhāri in 1011/1602–1603 (National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg, Ms. PNS 90). A seventh manuscript could be mentioned but it is incomplete and has neither a colophon nor a precise date (British Library, Ms. Or.14403).

¹¹ For example: Mir Ḥoseyn Kulangi, the uncle of Mir Māh, co-signed a collection of Persian poetic works (*Majmu‘a-ye āṣār*) with a fellow copyist named Moḥammad ‘Ali al-Kāteb (Topkapi Saray, Ms. R. 1964, no date; described in Karatay, *Farsça*, n° 911; also see O.F. Akimuškin, *op. cit.*, p. 341, n° 15).

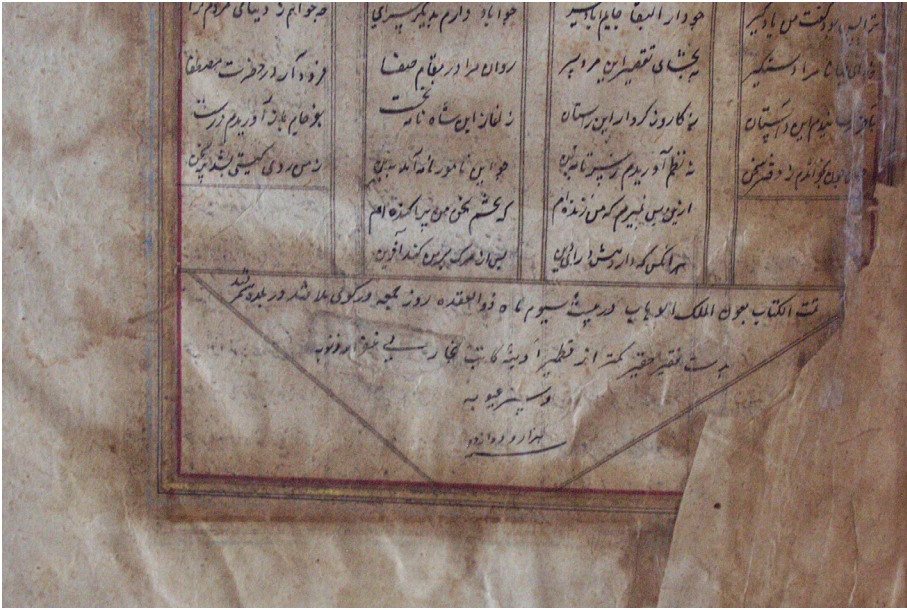


Fig. 1. Detail of Ms. Bailey Pers. 2.01.BD, *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsi. Colophon with the signature of Ādina Kāteb Bokhāri, dated 23rd Zu'l-qa'da 1012 [24 April 1604]. © Courtesy of the Library of the Ancient India and Iran Trust, Cambridge (UK) (photograph: Maria Szuppe)

point to the existence of a manuscript production workshop (*ketābkhāna*) of sorts in Samarkand.

Independent information available on Ādina Bokhāri remains meagre at this stage: contemporary chronicles or biographical repertoires seem to ignore him.¹² All the more important is the information that can be gathered from the analysis of the actual copies produced by the calligrapher, be it the *Shāhnāma* or other texts. Indeed, several literary manuscripts signed by him have been identified in the holdings of different world libraries.

In order to summarize the essential information on the extant work of Ādina Kāteb Bokhāri, as it is known today, it is necessary to list the *Shāhnāmas* copied by him in Samarkand, in chronological order, and to describe other manuscripts by his hand. As said above, Ādina produced three entire *Shāhnāma* copies as a sole calligrapher, and a half (*nesf*) of the fourth one in collaboration with Mir Māh:

1. *Shāhnāma*, dated 10 Sha'bān 1008 (25 February 1600), copied in Samarkand in the *ku-ye* (street of) Malāqand; illustrated; British Library, India Office (IO), Ms. 301.¹³

¹² Available chronicles remain generally vague, if not *quasi* silent, on the events of the short period of several years under the first Astrakhānid rulers, from 1598 to ca. 1608–1611; this appears to be so even in the case of Astrakhānid dynastic chronicles (cf. A. Burton, *op. cit.*, esp. her chapter on “Birthpangs of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty (1598–1605)”; also Th. Welsford, *op. cit.*).

¹³ Manuscript described in Ethé n° 873; also see B.W. Robinson, *Persian Paintings...*, n° 929–952; and K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, pp. 215–216.

2. *Shāhnāma*, dated 30 Rabi‘ I 1009 (9 October 1600), copied in Samarkand in the *ku-ye* Malāqand; illustrated; Punjab University Library, Ms. O-16/7249.¹⁴
3. *Shāhnāma* (the first half of the book), the volume is dated to year 1010 (July 1601 – June 1602); place of copy not indicated; illustrated; Punjab University Library, Ms. O-15/7248.¹⁵
4. *Shāhnāma*, dated 23rd Zu‘l-qa‘da 1012 (24 April 1604), copied in Samarkand in the *ku-ye* Malāqand; illustrated; The Ancient India and Iran Trust (AIIT), Cambridge, UK, Ms. Bailey Pers. 2.01 BD.¹⁶

Rarely it is possible to possess such a series of data on the work of one calligrapher with dates and places of copy precisely indicated. This information enables us to hazard some observations on the practice of transcription, and especially on the speed of the copy of one particular text of which we have here three, or even four, manuscripts in close succession. We do not know when exactly Ādina Bokhāri started to work on the first *Shāhnāma* manuscript of this series (India Office Ms. 301), but after it was finished on 10 Sha‘bān 1008 (25 February 1600), another copy of Ferdowsi’s poem was completed by Ādina just about eight months later, on 30 Rabi‘ I 1009 (9 October 1600) (Punjab Univ. Lib., Ms. O-16/7249). Assuming that the calligrapher started a new copy directly after finishing the previous one, and knowing that the text of the *Shāhnāma* averages 50,000 verses, we can estimate that, in this particular case, Ādina advanced his work by *ca.* 6,250 *beyts* per month, or *ca.* 200 *beyts* per day.

Another remarkable feature of this series of *Shāhnāma* manuscripts is the mention of the place where they all were copied, most probably a professional workshop: in the Malāqand (M.lā q.n.d / M.lā ‘.n.qā?) street (*ku*) in Samarkand.¹⁷ This supposition is corroborated by the fact that Ādina’s co-copyist, Mir Māh, was not only professionally established in Samarkand during this period,¹⁸ but also he calligraphed one *Shāhnāma* dated to Safar 1009/September 1600 (Princeton Univ. Lib., ms. Garrett 59), i.e. quasi simultaneously with Ādina’s copy n^o2 (in the above list), ‘in the *ku-ye* M.lā ‘anqā (Malāqand?), in the house (*manzel*) of Mir Artiq/Artuq’. Apparently, after completing a copy of a *Shāhnāma* each, both copyists then set to produce a collaborative manuscript, dated to the year 1010

¹⁴ Manuscript described in Kh.‘A. Naushahi, *A catalogue of Persian manuscripts in the Azir Collection of the Punjab University Library of Lahore*, Islamabad 1986, p. 270; K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

¹⁵ See Naushahi Kh.‘A., *op. cit.*, p. 270 (the information is incomplete and imprecise); K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

¹⁶ See M. Szuppe, *A Preliminary account of the Persian manuscripts in the collection of the late Sir Harold W. Bailey*, “Iran” 1997, no. 35, pp. 94–95; also K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

¹⁷ The reading ‘Malākand’ is proposed in K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, p. 216, in reference to Malakand town and region in present day Pakistan. In Samarkand, a smallish street named Marokand (Marākand) exists today, south of the central area of the Registan Square, in the direction of Gulistān. I do not argue that it is the same street, but note the similarity of the place name (l/r).

¹⁸ See M. Szuppe, *Family and professional circle of two Samarkand calligraphers of Persian belles-lettres around the year 1600 (1010H.)*, “Eurasian Studies”, vol. 15, no. 2, 2017 (special issue: *Channels of Transmission: Family and Professional Linedges in the Early Modern Middle East*, ed. S. Aube and M. Szuppe), pp. 320–349.

(between July 1601 and June 1602), of which the first part was transcribed by Ādina and the second part by Mir Māh (Punjab Univ. Lib., Ms. O-15/7248). This ‘joint’ manuscript does not specify the place of copy, but it was also most certainly made in Samarkand in the same workshop.¹⁹

In addition to the *Shāhnāma* manuscripts, two other works signed by the calligrapher Ādina of Bukhara are known to be extant today. Both are good quality copies, in Nasta‘liq style; each contains a different Persian text. The dates of copy point clearly to the same period of activity as his *Shāhnāma* production.

The first one is a copy of the *Fotuḥ al-Ḥaramayn*, a poem written in the early 16th century by Mohiy al-Din Lāri (d. 933/1526–1527) for the ruler of Gujarat Mozaffar b. Maḥmud-Shāh (r. 1511–1525/1526). It is dedicated to the two holy cities (*Ḥaramayn*), i.e. Mecca and Medina. This copy is kept today at the Tajik Academy of Sciences in Dushanbe as ms. 684.²⁰ The main text is inscribed within a decorated golden frame, and it has an illuminated frontispiece and two paintings (other illustrations were not made and only the empty spaces reserved for them remain). In the colophon, the calligrapher signed his name in its usual form, ‘Ādina Bokhāri’, and dated his work to the 1st of Jumādā II 1003/11 February 1595 (see Fig. 2). Thus, this is the earliest of all Ādina’s works known to us.

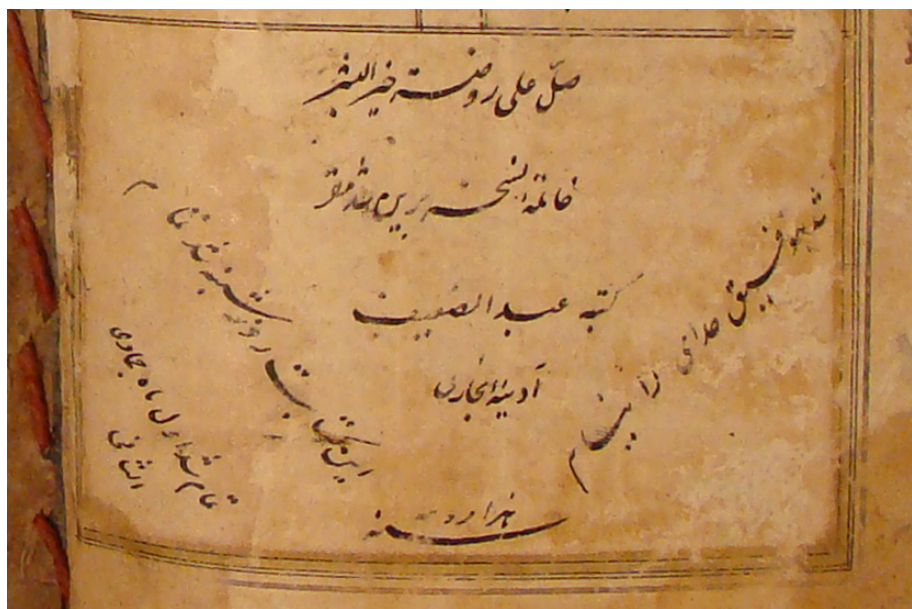


Fig. 2. Detail of ms. Dushanbe 684, f. 85b (*Fotuḥ al-Ḥaramayn*): the colophon in the hand of Ādina Bokhāri, 1st Jumādā II 1003 [11 February 1595]. © Courtesy of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, Dushanbe (photograph: Francis Richard)

¹⁹ K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*; also M. Szuppe, *Family and professional...*

²⁰ A. Mirzoev *et al.*, *Katalog vostochnykh rukopisej Akademii nauk Tadzhikskoj SSR*, vol. 1, Stal'nabad 1960, n° 210, p. 213. Also mentioned in K. Ruehrdanz, *op. cit.*, p. 216, footnote no. 11.

The second manuscript is a copy of an anonymous text entitled *Tafsir-e Taẓkerat al-anbiyā va 'l-omām* and belongs to the British Library's India Office collections, ms. 319.²¹ The text is a history of the prophets dedicated by its anonymous author to a person referred to as 'Kh^wāja Ḥasan'. The calligrapher is Ādina Bokhāri, and the copy bears the date of Sha'bān 1013/Dec. 1604 – Jan. 1605, i.e. about three months after he had finished the last one of his known *Shāhnāmas*.

Notwithstanding his good quality manuscripts, Ādina Kāteb Bokhāri remains rather mysterious to us, his full name or other elements of biography unknown, as it is the case of most calligraphers of the period. By his work he certainly is associated with Samarkand, and by his *nisba* with Bukhara although the nature of this association is vague. He has not been identified in independent historical writings. Our only sources of information are the volumes themselves as well as the repertoire of the literary texts that Ādina used to copy.

In this respect, his copy of the *Tafsir-e Taẓkerat al-anbiyā va 'l-omām* is intriguing, and a tentative guess could perhaps be made concerning the patron figure, Kh^wāja Ḥasan, to whom the anonymous author had dedicated the text. Considering the period of the copy, the turn of the 17th century, and the places associated with the calligrapher Ādina, i.e. Samarkand and Bukhara, it would be very tempting to identify here the renowned Naqshbandi Sufi master, Kh^wāja Ḥasan Neṣāri of Bukhara (d. 1004/1595–1596).²² He was one of the central literary and spiritual figures of Transoxiana, and people came from the far, including Iran and India, to meet him. A speculation, but which would place Ādina who copied this text within a larger circle of Central Asian Naqshbandi milieu. Naturally, it would be necessary to discover more works by Ādina Bokhāri extant in modern manuscript collections in order to really understand his professional circle and possible associations, as well as the span of his activity which might have been larger than the presently attested ten years, from February 1595 (or rather some year-an-a half earlier) to January 1605.²³

²¹ H. Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, vol. 1–2, Oxford 1903, n° 599, pp. 244–245. The catalogue description indicates that 'in some aspects the copy resembles a first sketch more than a complete and finished work'.

²² Preferably to Khwāja Tāj al-Din Ḥasan Juybāri (d. 1056/1646), a prominent Naqshbandi figure from Bukhara in the first half of the 17th century. For Khwāja Ḥasan Neṣāri's biographical information, after different sources, see Norik 2011, pp. 429–437; his date of death (1004 H.) is given by his follower Moṭrebi in his *Taẓkerat al-sho'arā* in form of a chronogram (*tārikh*); other sources indicate 1005/1596–1597, cf. B.V. Norik, *Biobibliografičeskij slovar' sredneaziatskoj poezii (XVI–pervaja tret' XVII v.) / A Bio-Bibliographical Dictionary of Poetry in Central Asia (XVI–first third XVII cent.)*, Moskva 2011, p. 437, footnote no. 1. Neṣāri was the author of the renowned *Taẓkera-ye Moẓakker al-aḥbāb* (first version 974/1566), a collection of biographies of ancient and contemporary poets, citing samples of their poetical works. It became a reference work in Central Asia, systematically quoted by all later *taẓkera* writers. See M. Szuppe, *A Glorious Past and an Outstanding Present: Writing a Collection of Biographies in Late Persianate Central Asia*, [in:] *The Rhetoric of Biography. Narrating Lives in Persianate Societies*, ed. L. Marlow, "Ilex Foundation Series", no. 4, Cambridge 2011, pp. 41–88.

²³ For now, Ādina Kāteb Bokhāri should be distinguished from Ādina Moḥammad b. Burghan b. Vali Abu'l-Ḥālī (?) who calligraphed in Naskh style a copy of the *Jāmi' al-rumūz* (an Arabic treatise on legal matters written by Shams al-Din Moḥammad al-Kohestāni al-Samalāni al-Khorāsāni, d. 962/1554); the copy is dated 990/1582 (IVRU ms. 8059; cf. *SVR* IV, n° 3135).

Information drawn from the extant manuscripts brings to light not only calligraphic professional circles, but also it gives some insight pertaining to circumstances and organisation of book production, and practical exercise of calligraphy by professional copyists. Among these, one issue is the ‘specialisation’ in particular types of text, viz. the *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsi, but also other authors of Persian literature that might be popular or fashionable at a particular time. Another issue is linked to the individual or collaborative scribal work for a workshop or for a particular editorial project. Finally, even the rhythm and speed of copying can sometimes be deduced, if successive dated manuscripts of the same text are available.

The manuscript analysis thus enables us to gain insight into the everyday practices of the copyist’s work in 16th–17th century Central Asia, but also it teaches us about literary trends and readership, book workshop activities in Samarkand, the patronage, as well as it hints at the existence of a local market for higher quality books, or skill transmission among professional calligraphers. The evidence of extant decorated manuscripts by Ādina Bokhari – the three-and-a-half *Shāhnāmas* and two other literary texts – testifies to intensive copying activity and the excellent standard of Central Asian production at the turn of the 11th/17th century, not only in Bukhara but in rival Samarkand as well.

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Collection Abbreviations

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 I.O. – India Office (now at the British Library), London
 IVRU – Biruni Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Tashkent

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