

ṬURSUN BEG

(b. 829/1426? - d. 896/1491?)

LIFE

Ṭ.B. gives his name as Ṭūr-ı Sīnā.¹ While Halil İnalçık notes that the court registers of Bursa provide some information on the author and his family,² most of what is known of Ṭ.B.'s life derives from his work entitled *Tārīḫ-i Ebü'l-feth* [Henceforth *Tārīḫ*]. Even though Ṭ.B. does not give his father's name and mentions only his uncle Cebe °Alī Beg (d. before 1491), the governor of Bursa, entries in court registers record his name as "Ṭursun Beg ibn Ḥamza Beg."³ Considering that the father of Ḥamza Beg (d. ?) and °Alī Beg, the governor of İznīq in 825/1422, was Fīrüz Beg (d. 825/1421), Ṭ.B.'s family appears to have played an important role in Ottoman affairs between the years 782-885/1380-1480. Thus it becomes clear why under Meḥmed II (r. 848-850/1444-1446 and 855-886/1451-1481) Ṭ.B. was entrusted with the most important and delicate missions which he relates in his history. His name is also mentioned in the court records of Bursa in 889/1484, 892-93/1487, and 896-97/1491.⁴

Ṭ.B.'s date of birth is unknown but must have been sometime after 829/1426.⁵ The fact that Bursa court registers refer to him as "mevlānā"⁶ suggests that he must have had a *medrese* education, which appears to have equipped him with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform the duties of a *münşī*. In his *Tārīḫ*, Ṭ.B. not only shows his knowledge of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, but also displays the subtleties of the literary arts, and his complete mastery of all the skills of a *münşī*.⁷ Ṭ.B. also maintains that during his forty years of service, he held the offices of the Secretary of the Council of State (*dīvān kātibi*), Chief Financial Officer of Anatolia (*Anaḍolı defterdāri*), Stewart of the Chief Financial Officer of Anatolia (*Anaḍolı Defter Kethüdālıḡı*), and states that he also served as scribe (*yazıcı*) in the registration of houses, fields, and vineyards of Constantinople after its conquest.⁸

While Ṭ.B.'s detailed description of the building of the Boğazkesen castle (*Rumeli ḫiṣāri*) suggests that he was present during its construction in 856/1452 as well as during the siege of Constantinople in 857/1453, the information he provides on Meḥmed II's 860/1456 Belgrade campaign suggests that he participated in that expedition as well.⁹ He also appears to have been present in the circumcision feast of princes Bāyezīd and Muṣṭafā in Edirne in 861/1457.¹⁰

Having entered Grand Vizier Maḥmūd Paşa's (d. 879/1474) service most probably in the years 861-862/1456-1457, Ṭ.B. participated in every campaign his master led until his dismissal from office in 872/1468. It is certain that he was with Maḥmūd Paşa on his Serbian campaign of 862/1457 and partook in Meḥmed II's Qastamonu campaign as secretary of council (*dīvān kātibi*) under Maḥmūd Paşa in 865/1460. After participating in the Wallachian campaign of 866/1461 and in the capture of the island of Lesbos (*Midilli*), he served Maḥmūd Paşa on the Bosnian campaign of 867/1462, Morean campaign of 869/1464, and on the Bosnian campaign against the

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Hungarians in 869/1464. Later he was present with the Sultan and his Grand Vizier on the first and second Albanian campaigns of 870-871/1466-1467.

In 872/1468, in the aftermath of the campaign against Qaramanoğlu Pîr Aḥmed (d. 878-879/1474), Maḥmūd Paşa was dismissed from office. Ṭ.B., however, was again in Maḥmūd Paşa's service in 874/1470 upon the latter's appointment to the office of High Admiral (*Qapudān-i Deryā*) when the Sultan set out to conquer the island and castle of Negroponte (Eğriboz). Ṭ.B. was also present in the 878/1473 Otluqbeli campaign. Following Maḥmūd Paşa's dismissal from office and his subsequent execution on the Sultan's order,¹¹ Ṭ.B. participated in the campaigns which were personally led by Mehmed II, namely, the Moldavian campaign in the summer of 881/1476, the Hungarian campaign in the following winter, and the Albanian campaign of 883/1478. The information Ṭ.B. provides on the conquest of °Alā'iye in 876/1471, the Crimean campaign of 879/1474, and the campaigns against Rhodes in 885/1480 is limited.¹²

Tārīḥ provides important insight on Ṭ.B.'s life after Mehmed II's death. In the introduction, Ṭ.B. states that he committed a sin and deserved to be killed but was forgiven by Bāyezīd II (r. 886-918/1481-1512).¹³ The famous Ottoman statesman and historian Kemālpaşazāde (d. 940/1534) sheds light on this particular matter stating that, when Mehmed II's princes Bāyezīd and Cem fought for the Ottoman sultanate, Ṭ.B. actually did not side with Prince Bāyezīd but served Prince Cem as Chief Financial Officer (*defterdār*). When Cem was defeated by Bāyezīd at the Battle of Yeñişehr (22 Rebī'ü'l-āḥir 886/20 June 1481), Ṭ.B. was captured with prominent members of Prince Cem's retinue. Kemālpaşazāde explains that Ṭ.B. was forgiven by the Sultan.¹⁴ The effects of this event can be seen in Ṭ.B.'s *Tārīḥ*.¹⁵

According to Victor Ménage, the last campaign Ṭ.B. attended was the expedition of 893/1488 against the Mamluks which culminated in the Ottoman defeat at the Battle of Ağaçayırı. *Tārīḥ* indeed ends suddenly with this event. According to the Ottoman historian Sa'adü'd-dīn (d. 1007/1599), after that battle, a number of officers alleged to have shown cowardice including "the *kethüdā* and the *defterdār* of Anatolia" were sent to Istanbul and imprisoned for a while. Considering that these were posts Ṭ.B. recorded among the offices he held during Mehmed II's reign, it is possible that the author was among the officers disgraced after the campaign, which may explain the abrupt ending of his *Tārīḥ*.¹⁶

WORK

① *Tārīḥ-i Ebü'l-feth*

Ṭ.B.'s major historical work, *Tārīḥ-i Ebü'l-feth*,¹⁷ is not a systematic chronicle of events but essentially a panegyric on the reigns of Mehmed II and of its dedicatee Bāyezīd II. It belongs to a genre of history writing with a literary pedigree that goes back to Juvaynī's (d. 681/1283) *Tārīḥ-i Cihāngūşā* and is the first example of its type in Ottoman Turkish. The introduction of the work can be placed in the tradition of *naşihatnāme* literature (°Mirrors for Princes'), in which an imperial servant, in this

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case Ṭ.B., offers advice on rulership to the reigning Ottoman sultan. The main section of *Tārīḥ* conforms to its Persian models in that Ṭ.B. uses the events he describes as exemplary incidents or occasions for eulogizing the Sultan. Hence his tendency to omit or gloss over events which, to the modern mind, might seem important, and to emphasize incidents which might appear trivial. For example, the most prominent incident in Ṭ.B.'s account of the first Qaraman campaign in 855/1451 is Meḥmed II's refusal to accede to the demands of the janissaries, which the author evidently selected as an exemplary instance of the sultan's *siyāset* (execution for the greater good of the state and order) necessary for the preservation of order. In other places, Ṭ.B. highlights events, notably the defeat of the Moldavians in 866 /1461-62,¹⁸ because they are exemplary illustrations of divine intervention in human affairs.

The most prominent element in *Tārīḥ* is panegyric. The specific models, which Ṭ.B. seems to have had in mind, were the panegyric histories of Tīmūr. This is suggested not simply by the literary style, which emulates Niẓāmaddīn Shāmī (d. 812 /1409) and Sharafaddīn Yazdī (d. 858/1454), but also by Ṭ.B.'s direct reference to Yazdī¹⁹ and his comments that Meḥmed II had waged more Holy Wars than Tīmūr. While this favorable comparison with Tīmūr is above all a panegyric device, it is possible that Ṭ.B. intended to hint that the Ottomans had thrown off the ignominy of the defeat of 804/1402.²⁰ The panegyric mode frequently determines the way in which Ṭ.B. presents events. Most obvious in this regard perhaps is the fact that the failed siege of Belgrade in 860/1456²¹ is presented as a victory. In this specific case, Ṭ.B. glosses over the scale of the Ottoman defeat entirely and uses the death of Yanqo (Janos Hunyadi) as evidence that the Sultan had achieved his end.²²

Ṭ.B. makes it clear that he used a variety of sources for his introduction although he does not, for the most part, specify them. In several cases Ṭ.B. refers to his sources simply as "*kütüb-i hikemiyye*," or uses phrases such as "*kütüb-i mu'teberede gördüğümüz üzere*," "*hükemādan menqūldur ki*," and "*hikāyeti taqrīr buyurdu*," "*hikāyet ederler ki*."²³ While most of these phrases indicate a plurality of sources (for instance, "philosophical books"), it is not clear whether these are to be taken literally or simply as devices used to add weight to Ṭ.B.'s own statements.

Ṭ.B. seems to have interwoven material from both oral and written sources with that drawn from his personal experiences. A source which he identifies by name and parts of which can be collated with passages in his introduction is Naṣīraddīn Ṭusī's (d. 672/1274) *Aḥlāq-ı Naṣīrī*.²⁴ A second identifiable source Ṭ.B. seems to have used but does not mention by name is the *Chahār Maqāla* of Niẓāmī-i °Arūdī of Samarqand (d. 552/1157).²⁵ Although Ṭ.B. himself does not acknowledge, it is certain that his written sources are not limited to those he used in his introduction. While Ṭ.B.'s skill in modifying his sources renders them hard to detect, it is clear that he used Neṣrī's *Cihān-nümā*, which disproves the commonly held idea that Ṭ.B. did not use written sources in the composition of his *Tārīḥ*.²⁶

Of the oral sources Ṭ.B. used in his introduction, the most important was Maḥmūd Paşa, the Grand Vizier of Meḥmed II, whom he mentions by name and to whom he

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devoted almost half of *Tārīḥ*'s foreword. Apart from Maḥmūd Paşa; Ṭ.B. sometimes implies that he quotes other people,²⁷ whom he does not identify.

Ṭ.B.'s *Tārīḥ*'s purpose, apart from being a history of his time, was also to guide and aid Bāyezīd II and justify his rule. This is evident above all in the "Introduction" to the book, where he follows the usual conventions of "Advice to Kings" literature. The historical events that the *Tārīḥ* includes are as follows: An introductory section praises the Ottoman dynasty and especially Murād II. Murād II's abdication and accession to throne for a second time in 848/1444. Meḥmed II's ascension to the throne in 855/1451. Meḥmed II's campaign to Qaraman; 855/1451. The construction of the Boğazkesen castle; 856/1452. The characteristics of the Boğazkesen castle. The conquest of Constantinople; 857/1453. The re-building of Constantinople. The conquest of the castles of Eynoz (Enez) and Taşoz (Thasos); 858/1454. The causes of the battle of Belgrade; 860/1456. The circumcision feast of the Sultan's sons; 861/1457. The battle of Mora (Morea) and Maḥmūd Pasha's mission to Serbia; 862/1458. A description of Mora. Maḥmūd Pasha's setting forth to the Serbian lands. The Sultan's expedition Mora; 863/1459. The Conquest of Semendire (Smederevo) and Amasra; 864/1459. The conquest of the province of İsfendiyar, Sinop and Qoylu-ḥişār; 865/1461, The Eflāk (Wallachia) expedition; 866/1462. The conquest of Midilli (Mitylene); 866/1462. The Conquest of Bosna (Bosnia); 867/1463. The death of Qaramanoğlu İbrāhīm Bey; 868/1464. The alliance of the crusaders, their attack on the Ottoman provinces and their defeat; 867/1463.

The second expedition to Bosnia; 868/1464. The Venetian siege of the castle of Midilli and the dispatch of Maḥmūd Pasha. The dispatch of Maḥmūd Pasha to the Balkans; 868/1464. The first Arnavud (Albanian) expedition and the construction of the fortress of İlbasan; 870/1466. The second Albanian expedition; 871/1467. The Qaraman expedition and the expulsion of Pır Aḥmed; 872/1468. The conquest of the castle of İgriboz (Negroponte); 874/1470. The expeditions to Qaraman; 875/1471. The conquest of Alā'iyye (Alanya); 876/1471. The Aqqoyunlu attack on the Ottoman lands; 877/1472. The defeat of Uzun Ḥasan; 878/1473. The conquest of the castle of Kefe (Caffa); 879/1475. The Qara Boğdan (Moldavia) expedition; 881/1476. The conquest of İskenderiyye (Shkodër) and Aqçaḥişār (Krujë); 883/1478. Gedük Aḥmed Pasha's expedition against the island of Pulya (Apulia); 884/1479 and Mesīḥ Pasha's expedition to the island of Rodos (Rhodes); 885/1480. The expedition on to the Mamluks and the death of Meḥmed II; 886/1481. The interregnum. The accession of Bāyezīd II to the Ottoman throne; 886/1481. The Qara Boğdan expedition and the conquest of Kili (Kilia) and Akkerman; 889/1484. The dispatch of Qaragöz Beg to the Arabian lands and the dispatch of °Alī Pasha to Qara Boğdan; 890/1485. °Alī Pasha and Admiral Hersezkāde Aḥmed Pasha's Arabian expedition; 893/1488.

Ṭ.B.'s *Tārīḥ* finishes abruptly with a *meşnevī* in which he prays for the ruling Sultan and for the Ottoman dynasty, expresses his thanks to God for granting him the facility to expound on the Sultan's holy wars, and finally states his intent to continue his *Tārīḥ* if his health and life allows. This suggests that Ṭ.B. unwillingly aban-

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done his history's composition. While it is possible that he was too unwell to continue his work, it is also possible that some unknown event forced him to abandon it. A comparison of T.B.'s introductory and concluding remarks suggests that the author anticipated writing a rather long and ornamented conclusion to his work. Thus, it seems reasonable to deduce that something possibly went awry for T.B. during °Alī Paşa's Arabian expedition in which the former was most probably present.²⁸

The inconsistencies and weakness in T.B.'s panegyric, together with the frequent clumsiness of his style, makes it difficult to judge his *Tārīh* as an unqualified literary success, which may account for the later neglect of the work. Only Kemālpāşazāde seems to have made use of it before the twentieth century. However, since it was the first work of its kind in Ottoman Turkish, some deficiencies in style can be considered inevitable.

T.B. evidently learned to write in this *inşā* style as a result of his employment in the Ottoman chancery. This chancery style, exemplified in the *inşā* manuals, was one in which Ottoman men of letters aspired to write,²⁹ and T.B.'s *Tārīh* is an early example of this genre.³⁰

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¹ He adds that he was also known as Tursun Beg (Tursun Bey *Târîh-i Ebü'l-Feth*. Ed. A. Mertol Tulum (Istanbul, 1977), 5). Sehî Beg also mentions in connection with T.B.'s name that the poet Hayâtî (before 918/1512) was killed because of a couplet which he composed for T.B. See *Heşt Bihîst: The Teðkire by Sehî Beg*, ed. Günay Kut (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978), 201; *Teðkire-i Sehî*, ed. Mehmed Şükrî (Istanbul, 1325/1907), 70.

² Halil İnalçık, "Tursun Beg, Historian of Mehmed the Conqueror's Time," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, LXIX (1977), 55-56.

³ İnalçık, "Tursun Beg, Historian of Mehmed the Conqueror's Time," 56.

⁴ İnalçık, "Tursun Beg, Historian of Mehmed the Conqueror's Time," 55.

⁵ According to Halil İnalçık, T.B.'s father Hamza Beg got married with the sister of Osman Celebi, of the Teke dynasty in 830/1426. It is most probable that this lady was T.B.'s mother. See Halil İnalçık, "Tursun Beg, Historian of Mehmed the Conqueror's Time," 59-60.

⁶ İnalçık, "Tursun Beg, Historian of Mehmed the Conqueror's Time," 56.

⁷ Halil İnalçık, "Tursun Beg, Historian of Mehmed the Conqueror's Time," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, LXIX (1977), 55-71. T.B. includes an example of his official epistolary style, namely a letter to İsfendiyârîğlı İsmâ'il (d. 884/1479), in the body of his work. See T.B., *Târîh-i Ebü'l-Feth*, ed. A. Mertol Tulum (Istanbul, 1977), 106 [Henceforth: T.B., *Târîh*].

⁸ T.B., *Târîh*, 5-6.

⁹ T.B., *Târîh*, 78-84.

¹⁰ T.B., *Târîh*, 84-91.

¹¹ For detailed information on the reasons of Maḥmūd Paşa's execution, see İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "Fatih Sultan Mehmed'in Vezir-i Azamlarından Mahmud Paşa ile Şehzade Mustafa'nın Araları Neden Açılmıştı," *Belleten*, XXVIII/112 (1964), 719-728.

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¹² T.B., *Tārīḥ*, 40-180.

¹³ T.B., *Tārīḥ*, 19.

¹⁴ Ibn Kemāl, *Tevārīḥ-i Al-i Osmân: VIII. Defter*, ed. Ahmet Uğur (Ankara, 1997), 20. See also İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi* (Ankara, 1983), vol. 4, 161-179.

¹⁵ Surprisingly, T.B. mentions Prince Cem only once in his *Tārīḥ* within the context of Meḥmed II's expedition against Aqqoyunlu Uzun Ḥasan (d. 883/1478), when the Ottoman ruler left Cem in Edirne to watch over Rumelia. See T.B., *Tārīḥ*, 158.

¹⁶ V.L. Ménage, "[A review of] H. İnalçık and R. Murphey: *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror by Tursun Bey*," *BSOAS*, XLIII (1980), 144-145. See also Sa'adü'd-dîn, *Tacü't-Tevārīḥ*, ed. İsmet Parmaksızoğlu, vol. 3 (Istanbul, 1979), 253-261.

¹⁷ For detailed descriptions of *Tārīḥ*'s manuscripts, see Agah Sırrı Levend, *Gazavât-nâmeler ve Mihaloğlu Ali Bey'in Gazavât-nâmesi* (Ankara, 1956), 16; *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror / by Tursun Beg*, ed. Halil İnalçık and Rhoads Murphey (Minneapolis, 1978), 27-29. *Tārīḥ* was most probably written after 895/1490. Tulum states that T.B. provides information on Mamluk affairs up until 895/1490, but not after this date, and suggests that he may have composed his work between the years 895/1490 and 900/1495. See T.B., *Tārīḥ*, XXIV.

¹⁸ T.B., *Tārīḥ*, 170-173.

¹⁹ In mentioning *Medh-i Timūr* ("The Praise of Timūr") of Sharaf al-dîn Yazdî, T.B. leaves no doubt that he had actually read or at least seen the work. T.B., *Tārīḥ*, 125.

²⁰ Ottoman historians' treatment of Timūr is usually very harsh as he dismembered the Ottoman State when he defeated Bāyezîd I (r. 791-804/1389-1402) at the Battle of Ankara in 804/1402. For early Ottoman chroniclers' approach to Timūr, see Feridun Emecen, "İlk Osmanlı Kroniklerinde Timur İmajı," *İlk Osmanlılar ve Batı Anadolu Beylikler Dünyası* (Istanbul, 2001), 161-173. Prominent Ottoman historian Muştafâ °Ālî (d. 1008/1600) has a different approach to Timūr's activities and claims that Bāyezîd should have submitted to Timūr as a vassal. For detailed information on Muştafâ °Ālî's approach to Ottoman-Timurid relations, see Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (New Jersey, 1986), 273-292.

²¹ T.B., *Tārīḥ*, 78-84.

²² "Çün maḥlûb-ı pâdişâh qat-i raqîb idi ve bî-ḥamdi'llâh müyesser oldu, pes vaşl-ı ḥabîb --ki nev-'arûs-ı pür-nâz-ı memleket-i Lâzdur-- taḥşiliniñ esbâbı ve tariqı mübâşereti için ..." T.B., *Tārīḥ*, 83. For detailed information on Janos Hunyadi's life, see Joseph Held, *Hunyadi: Legend and Reality* (Boulder, 1985).

²³ T.B., *Tārīḥ*, 10-29.

²⁴ The famous philosopher and astronomer was born in Ṭus in 507/1113 and died in Baghdad in 692/1293. Ṭusî mentions in his introduction that he composed his work at the request of Naşr al-dîn °Abd al-raḥîm b. Ebû Mañşûr, the ruler of Qūhistân. He entitled it after the name of his patron. See Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. 2, 441. For detailed information about Ṭusî's life and works, see Naşr al-dîn Ṭusî, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens (London, 1964).

²⁵ Aḥmad b. °Umar b. °Alî of Samarqand, poetically named Niẓāmî and entitled °Arūdî ("the prodigal") flourished in the 6th/12th c. and appears to have spent most of his life in Khorasan and Transoxania. A poet and courtier, he also performed astrology and medicine. His poetry is far inferior to his prose. It is by virtue of *Chahâr Maqâlah*, composed probably in the year 551/1156, that Niẓāmî of Samarqand deserves to be considered amongst the famous names of Persian literature. See Edward G. Browne, *Revised Translation of the Chahâr Maqâla ("Four Discourses") of Niẓāmî-i °Arūdî of Samarqand* (London, 1921), X-XII.

²⁶ The clearest and best example of his use of Neşrî can be found in his account of the Battle of Otluqbeli in 878/1473. See T.B., *Tārīḥ*, XXVII. For detailed information on *Tārīḥ*'s sources, see

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²⁷ T.B., *Târîh*, 12.

²⁸ On the reasons for T.B.'s sudden ending of his work, see V.L. Ménage, "[A review of] *H. İnalçık and R. Murphey: The History of Mehmed the Conqueror by Tursun Bey*," *BSOAS*, XLIII (1980), 144.

²⁹ T.B., *Târîh*, 7: "Hilye-i inşâ' ile mütezeyyin bir şûret taşvîr-ü-taqrîr idem"

³⁰ *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror / by Tursun Beg*, ed. Halil İnalçık and Rhoads Murphey (Minneapolis, 1978), 20.

Kenan İNAN

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