

Narrative of an Attack on the British Garrison of Doaba (Former Mohmand Agency) A Note from the Persian Manuscript of Durr-i-Maqāl

by ZARAWAR KHAN, SAYED MAQSOOD AHMAD

Il manoscritto persiano di Durr-i-Maqāl è un resoconto in versi delle spedizioni militari britanniche, intraprese contro i mujahidin indostani dell'ex provincia della frontiera nord-occidentale dell'India. Oltre alla narrazione della campagna di Ambela del 1863, il manoscritto incorpora la storia di un'invasione della roccaforte britannica di Doaba, guidata dal sultano Muhammad Mehmandi, figlio di Saadat Khan di Lalpura, provincia di Ningrahar in Afghanistan. Il tentativo aggressivo delle truppe musulmane fallì a causa dei rinforzi militari inviati al forte di Shabkadar e dell'interferenza di Amir Sheer Ali Khan di Kabul su istigazione del commissario della divisione di Peshawar. Il poema riportato nel manoscritto è forse l'unica fonte indigena di informazioni sugli eventi accaduti a Doaba (oggi parte del distretto di Charsadda nella provincia di Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan) e certamente aggiunge nuovi dati alla storia della lotta offensiva delle tribù Mohmand contro l'imperialismo britannico.

Introduction

The Persian manuscript (hereafter MS) of Durr-i-Maqāl is a voluminous versified account of the Hindustani Mujahidin Movement and the punitive expeditions launched by the British Indian Empire for its suppression in the former North-West Frontier Province of India. The MS was written by Mirza Abdul Haq Arvi of Bihar in year 1280 of the Hijri Era (1863-1864 CE).¹ The document narrates the incidents of various battles fought between the Hindustani Mujahidin and the British armed forces² in the Yousafzai, Chamla and Mohmand areas of the present Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan from 1858 to 1863 CE. The author has dedicated the MS to the Sahib of Saidu Sharif, alias the Akhund of Swat, in admiration of his spirituality and the role he played in the Ambela campaign of 1863 (Fig. 7).³

The MS remained an ancestral relic of the Miangul family of Swat State for several decades, but it was never mentioned in contemporary literature. At a certain period, the MS was owned by Mr. Attullah Khan, at the time Chief Secretary of the Swat State. Over time, its binding deteriorated and some of the folios, including the title page, were lost in mystery. However, in the 1990s, Mr. Ziaullah advocate, a son of the late Attaullah Khan, presented the MS to Domenico Faccenna, then Director of the Italian Archae-

¹ This date is recorded in couplet no. 15 on folio 142 of the MS (see Fig. 6).

² The Firangi Sipah of the MS (see Khan, Numani 2021: 188).

³ For more detail about the Ambela expedition, see Paget 1874; Hunter 1876; Nevill 1912; Mehr 1956.