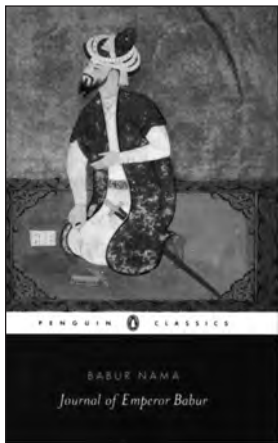


BABUR NAMA

Journal of Emperor Babur

TRANSLATED FROM TURKISH BY ANNETTE SUSANNAH BEVERIDGE
NEW DELHI: PENGUIN BOOKS, 2006
385 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0144001491, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Laxman D. Satya



Originally written in Turkish by Emperor Babur (1483–1530) and translated into Persian by his grandson, Emperor Akbar (1556–1605), *Babur Nama, Journal of Emperor Babur* is now available in English, complete with maps, tables of the family tree, glossary, list of main characters, an Islamic calendar, Babur's daily prayer, and endnotes that are not too overbearing. Dilip Hiro has done a marvelous job of editing this classic of the autobiographical

account of the founder of the Mughal Empire in India that lasted from 1526–1707. It was written in an elaborate style as a journal or daily diary and records the events in his life and times.

From page one, it is obvious that Babur was a highly cultured individual with a meticulous eye for recording details through observation. Even though he was from an elite class of rulers and sultans, in these memoirs he records the lives of ordinary folks like soldiers, acrobats, musicians, singers, wine drinkers, maajun eaters, weavers, water carriers, lamp keepers, boatmen, thieves, gatekeepers, rebels, dervishes (holy men), Sufis, scholars, youth, pastoralists, peasants, artisans, merchants, and traders. Strangely, there is very little mention of women and children other than his immediate family members—his mother, sister, aunts, or daughters—and they are always mentioned with great respect and reverence.

Babur was a religious person who meticulously observed prayers and fasting during Ramadan. He regularly donated to the poor (*zakat*) and for the construction of mosques. The amazing aspect of his belief was his tolerance towards Shi'a and Sufi practices. In fact, he even made an alliance with Shah Ismail Safavi of Iran in the early sixteenth century, defying the annoyance of his own Sunni Turkish and Afghan followers. He often visited the tombs of Sufi saints to pray and had conversations with Sufi dervishes and Sunni scholars. This was a reflection of the beliefs and practices of ordinary Muslims who seldom saw much difference between Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi—or any other religion, for that matter.

Babur was a lover of gardens, natural springs, fountains, and watercourses. Everywhere he went he laid out Persian and Turkish style gardens and orchards. He also commissioned the construction of many water tanks and short channels to irrigate these gardens. A great connoisseur of fruit. Babur wrote elaborate descriptions of every type of fruit in Central Asia and India, which he called Hindustan. For exam-

PŪRVA UTTARA
Past Forward
a series of unusual films on historical sites of India

Directed by
Shyam Benegal & Zafar Hai
Conceptualized by
Vidya Dehejia
DVD 1 & DVD 2

Each DVD contains 4 films
Each film: 23½ minutes
Language: English
US\$28.00 per set of two DVDs
(inclusive of air mail postage)

In this series, eight of India's most spectacular sites – **Sanchi, Konarak, Mamallapuram, Vijayanagara, Delhi, the Taj Mahal, Mewar, and Goa** – are examined in a thought-provoking manner in the context of the history of the time and the socio-economic milieu. The approach may best be summed up as "Art and the History of Ideas". It is hoped that glimpses of the India that was will provide insights into the India that is and will be.

ORDER FORM

Air mail _____ set/s of PURVA UTTARA: PAST FORWARD to
NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
E-MAIL _____ FAX _____

Payment

Cheque for US\$28.00 favouring NCPA (Marg Publications)
 Debit VISA / MASTER / AMEX credit card account
number _____
Card expiry date _____ for US\$ _____
Signature _____ Date _____



documenting the arts since 1946

Post this order form with your payment or fax it with your credit card details to the attention of The Sales & Marketing Department
Marg Publications, Army & Navy Building, 3rd Floor
148, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Mumbai 400 001, India.
Fax: 0091-22-22047102 Email: margpub@tata.com

EAA/PurvaUttara/0808

Pay online at www.marg-art.org

RESOURCES
BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

ple, crossing the Indus, he expresses great surprise at seeing mangos and bananas for the first time, and he left a detailed account of the cultivation, physical appearance, and taste of these two primary fruit trees from India. He also records the first time he watched colorful parrots in Indian gardens. Then there is mention of watermelons, muskmelons, pomegranates, apples, peaches, and grapes from Afghanistan, Iran, and Transoxiana. Even though there is no mention of the cultivation of fruit for the market, it may very well be that Babur's idea of growing fruit in gardens and plantations triggered commercial cultivation of fruit that later developed under the patronage of emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan in seventeenth century Mughal India.

There are elaborate descriptions of wine parties that Babur held in his garden and tent, where everyone drank heavily. In these parties, an intoxicant called *maajun* (a candy of crushed bhang—the leaf and flower of a female *Cannabis sativa* plant—milk, sugar, and spices) was also freely consumed. Interestingly, there is not much mention of feast or food consumed either at these parties or otherwise in day-to-day life. Babur was no doubt aware of the fact that the Quran forbade intoxication, especially consumption of wine and liquor. It was only in the capital city of Agra, India, later in life (1527), that he repented, stopped consuming alcohol, and issued a public renunciation throughout his Empire.

Even though Babur was a warrior and took more pride in his paternal Turkish origin than his maternal Mongol origin, there is not a shred of machismo in his attitude. Numerous entries describe how he fell sick, could not ride a horse, and had to be carried in a litter. Many illnesses and afflictions find mention in his memoirs, including fever, ague, headache, stomach trouble, earache, boils, broken bones, bodily pains, depression, nausea, and vomiting, that often knocked him out for weeks or months at a time. Nevertheless, he was a man of enormous energy for war and travel, constantly moving around Asia, from his birth in Andijan (Fergana, Uzbekistan) until his death in Agra (India).

Babur was, in modern parlance, a tourist who enjoyed sightseeing. Whenever he conquered a new territory or lost a battle (many), he made it a point to talk to the local people and see the exceptional sites of the region, even if just a visit to see an ordinary water well, a garden, an exotic tree, a beautiful flower, or a saint's tomb with supposedly miraculous powers. His journal is full of the names and descriptions of waterways, boat rides, gardens, mountains, valleys, villages, seasons, music, dance, songs, and poems. He was a writer and a poet par excellence, a rather unique combination with his warrior way of life.

In one sense, this book is about war. There are elaborate descriptions of war plans and strategies throughout. An entire world of late fifteenth and early sixteenth century Central Asia and North India is brought to life in these pages. This is an excellent resource to study the technology of the early modern era, when gunpowder and cannons played a leading role in making medieval forts obsolete during the process of state and empire building. In this context, the development in the Indian subcontinent was significant, because Babur employed the Ottoman military tactic of mobile defense and long-range artillery that made the millennia-old elephant cavalry charge obsolete. Employed by the Delhi Sultan Ibrahim Lodi in the decisive Battle of Panipat (1526), the elephant cavalry charge led to the establishment of the Mughal Empire in India. In fact, Babur was utterly stunned, like Alexander of Macedon two millennia earlier, the first time he saw the huge Indian war elephant. This interesting story is well captured in this autobiographical journal.

On the whole, this is a lively and entertaining book. Babur was a great master in the art of writing, recording events, describing what he saw, and poetry. During one twenty-six-day bout of illness, he composed a quatrain or two thus:

*Fever grows strong in my body by day,
Sleep quits my eyes as night gains;
Like my pain and my patience together weigh,
For a while one waxes and the other wanes. (303)*

中
国
图
片
库

GREATER CHINA
COVERAGE

NEWS AND PRESS

EDITORIAL AND
CORPORATE
ASSIGNMENT

IMAGINECHINA
CHINESE PHOTO AGENCY
WWW.IMAGINECHINA.COM



After handing over power to Humayun, Babur died on December 26, 1530. In mourning, Khwaja Kalan, a critical supporter of his who returned to Kabul after Babur's conquest of Delhi and Agra, cited the following ode of the famous poet Badayuni:

*Alas! That time and the changing heaven should exist
without you;*

Alas! Alas! That you should be gone while time still goes on.

This book is a great source for understanding not only Asian and Islamic history, but also to place it in the context of world history. It is a first rate primary source to use with students at a variety of levels. Even though the text is over 300 pages, the style is fast paced and action oriented and firmly holds the interest of the reader.

A book report assignment on Babur Nama has the potential to generate lively discussion. One key aspect, which could be brought out very effectively, is the significant role Central Asia, India, and Islam played in the transition from the medieval to the modern period. Reading books like this help students to better understand the power and dynamism of Asia throughout much of world history, thus moving away from the Eurocentric fixation with Columbus and the Atlantic world based theories of modernity, which still poignantly pervades much of Euro-American scholarship, even though recent research has quite successfully challenged it. ■

LAXMAN D. SATYA is Professor of History at Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania.

GET NOTICED!

ADVERTISE IN AAS PUBLICATIONS


and Reach Asian Studies Scholars,
Educators and Students

The Asian Studies Newsletter
News on grants and fellowships, study programs, employment opportunities, conferences and meetings, publications, and web resources.

Education About Asia (EAA)
EAA features articles on all areas of Asia, as well as guides to, and reviews of, resources for classroom use—films, videos, books, Web sites, curriculum guides, and software. Thousands of teachers and students have found EAA to be an exciting and highly practical resource.

The Journal of Asian Studies (JAS)
Long recognized as the most authoritative and prestigious publication in the field of Asian studies, JAS publishes the very best empirical and multidisciplinary work on Asia. Experts around the world turn to this quarterly journal for the latest in-depth scholarship on Asia, for its extensive book reviews, and for its state-of-the-field essays on established and emerging topics.

Advertising information is available at
www.asianst.org



LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

TEACHING ABOUT ASIA . . .

NEW—3RD EDITION!
Understanding Contemporary China
ROBERT E. GAMER, EDITOR

“A useful guide to deeper study as well as a rich resource for acquainting readers with China.”
—Mary Karen Solomon,
Education About Asia • pb \$26.50

Political Change in China: Comparisons with Taiwan
BRUCE GILLEY AND LARRY DIAMOND, EDITORS




“This volume will influence the thinking of specialists and generalists on China’s political future for years to come.”—Bruce Dickson,
George Washington University
hc \$65 • pb \$24.50

Understanding Contemporary Asia Pacific
KATHERINE PALMER KAUP, EDITOR

“An essential introduction to a dynamic and increasingly significant region.”—Guoli Liu,
College of Charleston • hc \$65 • pb \$26.50

Asia’s New Regionalism
ELLEN L. FROST

“This is an important and original argument. Engaging, compelling, and comprehensive, it provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of the changing dynamics of Asian regionalism.”—T.J. Pempel,
UC Berkeley • hc \$65 • pb \$25

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING
1800 30TH STREET • BOULDER, CO 80301
TEL: 303-444-6684 • FAX: 303-444-0824 • www.rienner.com