

*Culture and Civilization in the Middle East*

# **THREE EMPIRES AND PERSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

**THE THOUGHT OF MUŞLIḤ AL-DĪN LĀRĪ**

Nilab Saeedi

ROUTLEDGE



# Three Empires and Persian Historiography

*Three Empires and Persian Historiography: The Thought of Muṣliḥ al-dīn Lārī* uncovers the underexplored historical vision of a sixteenth-century scholar whose work spanned the Safavid, Timurid, and Ottoman worlds.

Centering on Lārī's universal chronicle [*Mir 'atu'l-Advār wa Mirḳātu'l-Aḥbār*], *The Mirror of Epochs and the Staircase of Historical Reports*, this book explores how a figure in philosophy, theology, and the sciences used history to navigate shifting imperial landscapes. Written in Persian and completed upon Sultan Selīm II's accession to the throne, Lārī's work offers a nuanced and often critical perspective on the Safavid dynasty, reverent accounts of the Timurid legacy, and a carefully constructed narrative of Ottoman rule. Through detailed textual analysis, the book demonstrates how Lārī positioned himself as both a cultural mediator and a political commentator, using historiography to reflect broader debates about legitimacy, identity, and intellectual authority in the early modern Islamic world.

A vital resource for scholars of Islamic historiography, Persianate studies, and Ottoman intellectual history, this book illuminates the enduring power of historical writing as a tool for negotiation, memory, and empire-making.

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# Three Empires and Persian Historiography

The Thought of Muṣliḥ al-dīn Lārī

**Nilab Saeedi**

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گر هیچ نشانه نیست اندر وادی  
بسیار امیدهاست در نومیدی  
مولانا

*To every student in Afghanistan whose life was taken before  
reaching the classroom—for every dream left unfinished,  
every diploma never received, every lesson never completed.*

*Though the night is long, the sun will rise again . . .*

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## Preface

This book explores the legacy of the sixteenth-century polymath Muşliḥ al-Dīn Lārī (d. 979/1572), with a particular emphasis on his historical work *Mir'atu'l-Advār wa Mirḳātu'l-Aḥbār* (*The Mirror of Epochs and the Staircase of Historical Reports*). While Lārī is most renowned for his contributions to philosophy, theology, and astronomy, his historical writings have received scant attention in academic discourse. This study posits that Lārī's composition of a universal history was not driven by the traditional aims of historical documentation but rather by his desire to leave a lasting intellectual legacy. In his later years, Lārī sought to compile and synthesize the knowledge he had accumulated throughout his life, with his historical work serving as a means of encapsulating his broader intellectual vision.

The primary aim of this study is to elucidate Lārī's role as a historian, with particular focus on his analyses of the Safavid, Timurid, and Ottoman realms during his extensive travels through these Islamic states. This investigation raises critical questions concerning Persian historiography, especially in relation to the classification of Timurid and Safavid Persian historiographic models, while positioning Lārī as a significant figure within this intellectual landscape. Additionally, by examining Lārī's decision to compose a universal history dedicated to the Ottoman Sultan later in his life, this study addresses the intricate interplay between history and literature, exploring whether his work serves as a rigorous historical narrative or a literary endeavor that reflects his command of stylistic expression. This study contributes to the emerging dialogue on Persian-influenced Ottoman historiography by situating Lārī within the context of sixteenth-century intellectual debates. While his work has received some scholarly attention, it has yet to be thoroughly analyzed in terms of its historiographical significance. Reflecting the experiences of a wandering scholar navigating the complex political and intellectual environments of his time, Lārī's writings offer valuable insights into the historiographical methods of the era. Through a critical examination of *Mir'atu'l-Advār wa Mirḳātu'l-Aḥbār* and its connections to Persian-Islamic literary traditions, this study highlights both the strengths and limitations of Lārī's historiographical approach, as well as its lasting impact on contemporary historical scholarship.

This research ultimately positions Lārī within the broader intellectual debates of the sixteenth century, thereby contributing to the field of Persian-influenced Ottoman historiography. While his role as a historian was secondary to his philosophical and theological pursuits, Lārī's historical writings stand as a testament to his broader intellectual aspirations and his desire to preserve and transmit the knowledge he had gathered over a lifetime.

# Acknowledgments

Growing up amidst war and hardship, I held onto three dreams. Born a war child and raised as a refugee, I knew from an early age that life would demand more from me than it gave. The first of my dreams was to one day see the title “Dr.” next to my name. The second was to publish a book. Today, standing at the intersection of both achievements, I am overwhelmed with gratitude. These are not just milestones—they are affirmations of resilience, faith, and purpose.

In the darkness of conflict, only the light of hope kept me moving forward. From the moment I became aware of my own heartbeat, I believed—deeply and unwaveringly—that education and knowledge were the only true paths to liberation from the brutality surrounding us. Education, I have learned, carries immense power: it brings light, nurtures hope, and instills resilience even in the face of relentless struggle. No matter how long or dark the night, the sun always rises again.

Allah, in His mercy, did not leave me to walk that path alone. He blessed me with remarkable guides whose wisdom and care shaped the course of my life. From my earliest days as a bachelor’s student to the completion of my PhD, I have been fortunate to learn under some of the most inspiring teachers and mentors—each of them a beacon of light along the way.

From my early years as a bachelor’s student, Dr. Ataullah Dashti and Dr. Shejauddin Tashmurad played a pivotal role in shaping my academic journey. Coming from a background and society where teachers were often strict, distant, and at times even harsh, these two gentlemen transformed my understanding of what a teacher could be. Their approach was different—kind, approachable, and deeply human. Later, when I received a scholarship to pursue my master’s in Turkey, I was fortunate to meet two more exceptional mentors: Dr. Kadir Yalınkılıç and Dr. Murat Delibaş. Their warmth and generosity reaffirmed a belief that had only just begun to take root—that kindness and teaching not only can coexist but, together, they become a powerful force for change. Prof. Yakup Poyraz was a guiding light during my master’s studies, softening the weight of my most difficult days with his calm presence and unwavering support. During my doctoral journey, I had the profound honor of studying under Prof. Suraiya Faroqhi—an experience I will treasure for the rest of my life. My supervisor, Asst. Prof. Mehmet Şakir Yılmaz, did more than guide my academic journey—he led me, with grace and insight, into the rich and layered world of Islamic intellectual history. In both word and spirit, he has been

the *mürşid* every *mürîd* prays to encounter: a teacher who teaches not only through knowledge, but through presence, humility, and example. This book is a fruit of his generous guidance, and a humble offering shaped by the path he helped me walk.

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There are people who may not have guided my life in the traditional sense, but whose presence brought laughter, comfort, and a breath of fresh air in my heaviest moments—my friends, the joy of life. Among the many I've crossed paths with, only a few can be named here, but each one holds a special place in my heart. Thank you, Salih, for being the most delightfully unpredictable friend—your humor and honesty have lifted me more times than I can count. To my dearest friend, Benay: your steady presence through all these years has been like a lighthouse in the fog. And Sundas, my favorite tea buddy—your warmth and care always found me when I needed them most.

And to all my friends—from school days to university years, from crowded dorm rooms to quiet corners of campus, from long lectures to late-night walks—thank you. Thank you for the laughter, the conversations, the distractions, and the simple joy of your company. You helped me carry the weight and reminded me, again and again, that there is more to life than footnotes and manuscripts. And to those dear friends who, perhaps inspired by me, chose the path of academia—I apologize . . . and I truly hope you're surviving.

And finally, to the truest light of my life—my family: nothing I've achieved would hold meaning without you.

I have spent much of my life in dormitories, often alone, but never unprotected—my mother's prayers have always surrounded me like invisible armor, shielding me through every hardship. My father holds an extraordinary place in my story. In a society where many men still struggle to prioritize their children's education, he stood apart. He became a refugee, walked through endless uncertainty, and endured brutal torture—not for himself, but for our future. Though I may not say it often, my siblings and I owe him everything. If he reads this, I hope he feels proud.

As a child, I watched my older brother work toward his PhD, and silently, I wished I could one day follow in his footsteps. While I know I can never be him, maybe—just maybe—I've managed to fulfill one part of that dream: I earned the PhD. To my younger brother—you are my heart. I will always shower you with love (and yes, with all the reels and daily texts that come with it). And to my sister—my one true star. You are my anchor, my constant, and the purest source of love in my life. I will always love you—more deeply than words can ever express.

Finally, I wish to express one heartfelt desire: that what I have written here will be read with patience and understanding. I hope that the considerable effort I have invested in this work will be met with constructive criticism—not to condemn me, but to help me grow and correct my mistakes. It is essential to recognize that students who come from difficult and challenging backgrounds deserve our support and encouragement. Life has already tested them in ways unimaginable, and those in positions of power should appreciate their resilience and effort, not dishearten them with ego or dismissive attitudes. Every opportunity given to these individuals is a chance for them to rise, to contribute, and to shine despite the hardships they have faced.

And as for the third dream . . . it remains quietly tucked away, waiting its turn. Until then.