CHAPTER 5

THE DATE OF THE H.M.H.

Neither of the Persian H.M.H. nor of its Malay adaptation do we know author or date. As the hikayat as a genre is characteristically anonymous, the problem of authorship will not further occupy us here. Hence this chapter is limited to a discussion of the possible date of its creation, something for which we depend mainly upon internal data.

Our aim will be to try to establish a terminus post quem. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the H.M.H. according to Rieu is 'of later date'. As the term 'later' is, of course, a relative one, I shall leave it to my readers to decide for themselves if this statement does in fact tally with the, admittedly very preliminary, results of my investigation.

A. The Date of the Persian H.M.H.

Our text must be dated after Ferdousi's Sāh-nāme. This work was completed in 1010. Aside from the fact that according to some scholars all popular romances in Persian are of a later date than the great National Epic, it is clear that the H.M.H. has undergone its influence.

One particular couplet from the Sāh-nāme (or rather from the Satire on Maḥmūd of Gazne appended to it) occurs in the H.M.H. (I 23, 15-16), the description of battle-scenes (as has been discussed in Chapter 3) bears a marked resemblance to that in the H.M.H., certain names (Pulād, Farhād, Toğān) are common to both texts, and the weapons mentioned in the two texts are basically the same. To the last point I shall come back presently. In II 21, 338-340, moreover, a couplet is quoted which Bausani has identified as written by the great Persian poet Sa'udi, who in all probability lived between 1213 and 1292. Though interpolation of this verse into the Malay H.M.H. remains a possibility, its occurrence here may also indicate that our text is no older than the thirteenth century. And this indication is lent additional force by the fact that Tabriz is mentioned as one of the capitals of M.H.'s allies. Tabriz first became the capital of Persia under Gazān Xān (1295-
1304). Gazân was a Turk; he was the first of his line to embrace Islam, in fact. It seems highly significant that in the H.M.H. Tabriz is the capital of two brothers bearing the names of Tughân Turk and Mughân Turk. According to Bausani, the establishment of the capital at Tabriz implied a rupture of the religious and political ties between the Turks of Persia and China. Is it purely accidental that the 'king' of China is represented as an enemy in the H.M.H., while Tughân Turk and Mughân Turk are referred to as allies of Ali?

If one takes into account the normal span of time that is needed for history to turn into legend (about two generations), the period around 1350 already suggests itself as a possible date of origin of the H.M.H., a date which, as will be seen, is corroborated by further evidence.

Even so it is true that Tabriz later served as capital for yet another Turco-Persian dynasty, namely the Qara-qoyunlu (Black Sheep) from 1422 onwards, and remained the capital of Persia until 1548, during the Safawid era. Nonetheless, the H.M.H. may well have been composed roughly between 1300 and 1500.

Further evidence for this date for our text is provided by a review of the arms mentioned in it. These are highly primitive and seem very similar to those listed by Nöldeke ³ for the Sâh-nâme. There is no mention of firearms, which provides an interesting contrast with the Hikayat Amir Hamzah.⁴ According to Van Ronkel cannons are first mentioned in Egypt in the year 1383; while Bausani (1965, p. 133) states that firearms first became known in Persia in 1387.⁵

It must furthermore not be overlooked that Ḥājî Šâdî, the author of the Turkish texts discussed by Mrs Melikoff (cf. Chapter 2), lived in the fourteenth century and that his maqtaš was written in 1362.

Direct influencing between the Turkish and Persian texts seems not very likely: the former is much more archaic in character than the latter; whilst according to it, strangely enough, the Prophet entrusted the little bottle filled with earth from Karbalâ to Xadijah rather than to Salamah, as the H.M.H. correctly has it.⁶ Nevertheless, it can be argued that the spiritual climate during these turbulent times was apparently conducive to the composition of both a Turkish and a Persian text which had as their main themes vengeance for and deliverance from suffering and persecution, whilst combining these with a clearly politico-religious message. Could there be a connection between our text and the Shi‘ah state of Sabzavar which existed in Persia during the middle of the fourteenth century?