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Babur

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Historians of Medieval India

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Babur

Pushpa Suri

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'From the eleventh year of my age till now', Babur wrote in 1527, 'I had never spent two festivals of the Ramazan in the same place. Last year's festival I had spent in Agra. In order to keep up the usage, on Sunday night, the thirtieth, I proceeded to Sikri to keep the feast there.'¹ This was the man who never claimed to be a historian, and yet the testimony of his Memoirs has not only been accepted as sufficient proof, as Lane Poole says,² but all the later historians, whether contemporary, British or modern, seem to have treated the *Babur-nama* as an indispensable source material. Mirza Haider Dughlat's *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* and Gulbadan Begam's *Humayun-nama* do throw some light on the lacunae occurring in Babur's Memoirs, but whatever he has recorded himself, with a very few exceptions,³ has stood the test of time as well as criticism. Beveridge has said: 'His autobiography is one of those priceless records which are for all time and is fit to rank with the confessions of St. Augustine and Rousseau and the Memoirs of Gibbon and Newton. In Asia it stands almost alone.'⁴ Babur was quite conscious of his standing. He knew that his records would be scrutinised by posterity. He writes: 'I have no intention, by what I have written, to reflect on anyone; all that I have said is only the plain truth...I have only spoken of things as they happened. In all that I have written, down to the present moment, I have in every word most scrupulously followed the truth. I have spoken of occurrences precisely as they

¹ *Memoirs of Zahir-ed-Din Muhammed Babur*, tr. Leyden and Erskine (London, 1921) Vol. II, 316-17. Henceforth referred to as Memoirs.

² Stanley Lane-Poole, *Rulers of India—Babur*, 13.

³ The most important one being his attitude towards Shaibani, and his efforts to gloss over the fact of his sister being given over to the same formidable adversary, 157.

⁴ H. Beveridge, *Calcutta Review*, 1897.

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