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A Short Historical Narrative of the Rise and Rapid Advancement of the Mahrattah State

James Kerr, a captain in the East India Company, translated this Persian text on the history of the Marathas in India. Published in 1782, it was one of the first English works to appear on the subject. Its content was compiled for Kerr by a Hindustani using Persian manuscripts and oral tradition. The Marathas had replaced the Mughal emperors as controllers of a large part of the sub-continent by the beginning of the eighteenth century, and it was inevitable that they would come into conflict with the East India Company. At the time of publication, the first of the three Anglo-Maratha wars had just ended, and interest in Indian affairs was great. Kerr denies any claim to be a historian, or to offer an analysis of his sources. The narrative outlines the growth of Maratha power from the seventeenth century, and concludes with a glossary of Indian terms.
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A Short Historical Narrative of the Rise and Rapid Advancement of the Mahrattah State

To the Present Strength and Consequence it has Acquired in the East

James Kerr
A SHORT
HISTORICAL NARRATIVE
OF THE
MAHRATTAH STATE.
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OF
THE RISE AND RAPID ADVANCEMENT
OF THE
MAHRATTAH STATE,
TO THE PRESENT
STRENGTH AND CONSEQUENCE
IT HAS ACQUIRED IN THE EAST.

Written Originally in Persian;
and translated into English by
AN OFFICER IN THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S SERVICE.

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MDCCLXXXII.
TO

LAURENCE SULLIVAN ESQUIRE

CHAIRMAN,

AND SIR WILLIAM JAMES BARONET

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN,

OF THE

COURT OF DIRECTORS

OF THE HON. UNITED

ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMPANY,

THIS

SHORT HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

IS

(WITH THEIR PERMISSION)

MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY

THEIR MOST OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT,

JAMES KERR.
[ v ]

P R E F A C E.

T H O U G H the Hindoo Government and Religion are known to have subsisted all over India from the earliest ages till the Mahometan invasions, and the Mahrattahs are only one of the various Tribes of the Hindoos; yet the power which is now understood by the Mahrattah Empire, and which has been so long formidable to others in the East, does not seem to be of very ancient origin.

What composes the following sheets is the substance of an account of its rise and progress given me above two years ago by a Mahometan native of Hindostan, whom I retained A in
in my pay as a teacher of the Persian Language. This man’s knowledge and readiness in the general history of his country induced me to give more credit to his information than to any other I had opportunities of receiving; and my opinion of him as a man of integrity, intelligence, and observation, was the more confirmed, from his having been frequently selected as such by some gentlemen who had long resided in that part of the country, and who like myself were anxious to have with them an intelligent native, whose situation and character in life gave them confidence in his relation either of the manners and customs, or the historical events, of India.
It was at my particular desire that this man wrote the Narrative I now offer to the public, though at that time I had no idea in translating it beyond my own improvement in the language, and information on the subject; otherwise it is probable the reader might have received likewise more information in perusing it than can now be well expected; as in that case the plan no doubt would originally have been more extensive, and the events composing it more circumstantially related.

He had however my strictest injunctions to be careful in not misleading me; and under my own inspection he collected what he could from
from Persian manuscripts*. Oral tradition and the best received accounts of the more recent times supplied the rest.

But, when the possibility ceases of reputable authors and authentic records being consulted, a narrative of this kind cannot be expected to be always very exact in the detail, either with regard to time, or the less important circumstances.

General notions are at most what under such disadvantages it can convey; but even that is useful, especially as a general knowledge of this subject seems wanted, and as the human

* The only Historical Guide to this subject; since the Mahrattahs themselves (as far as I have been able to find out) have no such of their own.
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ble attempt now made to communicate that knowledge may lead and induce to more minute researches others, whose opportunities of information have been or may be more favourable to success than such as I I pretend to.

Respecting the translation, I shall only observe, that though not a perfect adept in the Persian language, yet my knowledge of the author’s native tongue *(the Moors) which a residence of

* The translation was principally made when I had the immediate assistance of the writer of the original manuscript; an advantage I carefully availed myself of, well knowing the necessity in general of such a precaution; for, exclusive of every consideration respecting the language, there is but too frequently in the native inhabitants (from whom the best information might naturally be expected) a prevailing servility of spirit, in wishing at all events to
of near ten years in India, not a little application, and much intercourse with the natives, enabled me to acquire, sufficiently removed every inconvenience arising from deficiency in that point.

Yet, after all, I own it is with diffidence, and rather with reluctance, that I publish to the world what, notwithstanding my own belief of the facts, I never intended to have at any rate gone farther than the small circle of my intimates in India. But to please, with a dislike at the same time to betray their own ignorance; which is a very great bar to the satisfaction of the European enquirer, whose aim is truth. Those gentlemen who have resided any time in India, and made the disposition of the natives a part of their study, will, I believe, readily acknowledge the justice of this remark; which my own experience and repeated observation have long taught me to guard against.
the opinion of a few friends and respectable characters in the literary world here has induced me to believe that, even supposing the imperfections it may not be altogether exempted from, such a narrative at this time would not be unacceptable or uninteresting to the Public; and its being given solely for their information will, I trust, serve much to secure their candour for what errors in it they may now or hereafter discover.

Before I conclude the preface, I deem it an act of justice to the writer of the narrative (the original of which I have now before me) as well as for the satisfaction of the reader, to remark, that the History of the
the Mahometan Conquerors of Hindoostan, by Ferishta, is quoted by him as his authority for the first part of his account, viz. that of Rhumba and Sumba. Another Persian manuscript, which treats particularly of Allumgeer’s [Aurungzebe] conquests, he says, is his guide concerning what respects the second part, viz. that relative to Sewajie. And the last historical record which aided him in compiling this little work I find to be the history of Bahadar Shaw, son and successor to Aurungzebe.

JAMES KERR.

London,
Dec. 1, 1781.