The Monuments of Herat

The Athar-i Harat was published by its author, Khalil Allah Khalili, in Herat, Afghanistan in 1931. It was published for the second time in Tehran in 2004.

This book is made up of three parts. The first is about the historical and geographical conditions of Herat with a summary of the city’s built environment and monuments that testify to its past glories. Herat is described as a city that appreciates and promotes culture and identified as an ancient cultural centre.

The second part of the book discusses the city’s past poets, and points out that in Herat learning poetry is part of people’s upbringing. The works of Herat’s past poets were most often in the classic forms of quatrains or elegies (qaside). Throughout its history, Herat has held dear in its heart two types of poets: poets who were originally from Herat, and prolific poets who were not natives of Herat but spent their lives in this city.
The third part of the book focuses on Herat’s contemporary poets, most of whom write their poetry in the form of *ghazal*.

The book covers eras spanning from the Ghurid Dynasty to contemporary times. Contrary to current views, the book gives a positive assessment of the people of Herat and considers them as having culture and civilisation. In writing this book, the author has relied on various sources, including secondary and primary sources.

This work has captured the importance of a city’s culture and history through a focus on poetry. We also read that in addition to having great poets, Herat had a distinctive architecture. The book alludes to the different type of governments Herat has had in the past, not all of which have been good. It refers to the mass killings that have occurred in Herat. However, the author’s praises of Herat makes the book appear occasionally subjective.

This book is among the few that has linked various types of poetry to particular governments and articulated the importance of poetry in a city. It illustrates, for example, how until three centuries ago, quatrains or elegies were more common while in contemporary times the *ghazal* form has gained more popularity.

Fakhrallah Safari

Translated by Niki Akhavan