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THE
LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT
OF
BAHU BEGUM

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BY

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Printed by N. Mulherjee, B.A., at the Art Press,
1, Wellington Square, Calcutta.

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er personal allowances to help him after his flight to Faizabad from the field of Buxar(5) in 1764.

2. Bahu Begum whose full name was Ammat-z-Zahra was the "only legitimate daughter of the Nawab Mutaman-ud-Dowlah Muhammad Ishak Khan,(6) a Noble of the Court of the Emperor Muhammad Shah and distinguished by an extraordinary share of confidence and favour of that monarch whom she served in the capacity of Diwani Khalsa or Comptroller-General of the Public Revenues of the Empire—in an office in the civil department subordinate only to that of the Vazir". She was married to Shuja-ud-Dowlah in 1746, son of Abul Mansur, better known as Safdar Jang, who was the builder of the city of Faizabad. The Nawab Safdar Jang was also "at this time a person of considerable rank in the Empire and was in high favour with the Emperor Muhammad Shah as well as the confidential friend of Bahu Begum's father. By the desire of the aforesaid Emperor "an alliance between the son of Safdar Jang (Shuja-ud-Dowlah) and daughter of Mutaman-ud-Dowlah (Bahu Begum) was negotiated while the parties were yet in their infancy".

3. The father of Bahu Begum however died before the marriage of his daughter. Her elder brother Nawab Najm-ud-Dowlah, "who on the death of his father had adopted the Begum as his child, (having no legitimate children of his own) devoted the whole of his fortune to her marriage." The marriage(7) which

(5) *Ibid.*

(6) Secret Cons. 30 April, 1918. Letter from Capt. J. Baillie, Resident at Lucknow to J. Adam, Secy., dated Lucknow, 15th April, 1813 (paras 2 and 3).

(7) Secret Cons. 30 April, 1813. Letter from Capt. J. Baillie to Adam, Secy., dated Lucknow 15th April, 1813 (para 5).

took place in the year 1159 of the Hijira or 1746 A.D. was an occasion for the display of "uncommon splendour and extraordinary expense under the personal charge of the Emperor." Among the presents offered to the bride "there were a thousand cups of silver weighing each a hundred rupees". Moreover she was a recipient of a "*jagir* consisting of parganas of Salone etc. which yielded an annual income of nine lakhs of rupees". It is a fact(8) worthy of note that more than two crore of rupees were spent on her marriage.

4. After her marriage with Shuja-ud-Dowlah in 1746 she lived with her husband in Faizabad where she continued to live even after his death in 1775. Shuja-ud-Dowlah had so high a regard for her that no one dared utter before her the names of his inferior wives or the names of his other sons except Asaf-ud-Dowlah, his own-born. Shuja-ud-Dowlah went so far as to place the seals of his government in her custody and allowed her to enjoy a perquisite derived from "a tax of a twentieth fourth part of the yearly pay of every officer and soldier of cavalry." Further he granted her an additional *jagir* of the extensive district of Gonda for the payment of the establishments of "the Khas and Khurd Mahals."

5. On the death of Safdar Jang when Shuja-ud-Dowlah, her husband, became Nawab Vazir of Oude her great influence over him, according to Captain Baillie, "occasioned a very rapid increase of the provisions assigned to her brothers, who obtained *jagirs* in Oude in the first instance of three lakhs of rupees each per annum and had those *jagirs* occasionally increased in proportion to the increase of territorial acquisition

(8) *Ibid.*

by the Vazir (Shuja-ud-Dowlah), till at length about the period of Shuja-ud-Dowlah's death the *jagir* of each of the brothers afforded a clear revenue for his support of six lakhs of rupees per annum."

6. The next Nawab Vazir was Asaf-ud-Dowlah, (1775-97), her son. He quarrelled with his mother and left Faizabad, the head-quarters of his father, for Lucknow. But Bahu Begum continued to live at Faizabad till her death in 1816. This city had risen to a height of unparalleled magnificence under the rule of her husband almost rivalling Delhi. According to Mr. H. R. Nevill, I.C.S., "it was full of merchants from Persia, China and Europe and money flowed like water." After the death of Asaf-ud-Dowlah in 1797 his adopted son Wazir Ali succeeded him, whose reign terminated after four months. Nawab Yaminud-Dowlah Saadat Ali Khan, the son of Shuja-ud-Dowlah and the step-son of Bahu Begum next became Nawab Vazir of Oude in 1798. His name is intimately associated with her "will and testament." It was the want of cordiality and confidence between them which drove her to the protection of the British and led eventually to making them the "residuary legatees" of her will.

7. It appears from the records(9) that soon after his accession in 1799 Saadat Ali Khan entered into an agreement with Bahu Begum under the guarantee of the British in which he "promised to show her every degree of respect and attention and to do everything to promote her convenience and comfort." He further

(9) Letter from N. B. Edmonstone to the Resident at Lucknow, dated 17th August, 1808, (para 2).

consented to grant her "the Mahals of Oude, Puchumraut and Mangalees situated near Faizabad as *jagirs*". But the subsequent records of Government show that under the garb of friendship Saadat Ali had always kept a covetous eye on her property and that she, also, on her part was not less anxious to secure her property and jewelleries from his grasp. His other acts, such as, the "sequestration of the *jagir* of her nephew Bandah Ali Khan, the placing of soldiers in Faizabad under the pretext of guarding the city", the reduction of her daily ration allowance from Rs 400 to Rs 200, the removal of her old kitchen in Lucknow from the place where her son Asaf-ud-Dowlah had built it for her, and last, but not least, the grant of similar honours to his mother (Bahu Begum's co-wife) which were her own monopoly in the life-time of her husband, made her still more indignant.

8. Thus enraged the Begum wrote a letter to the Marquis of Wellesley, Governor-General, towards the close of 1799.⁽¹⁰⁾ In that she entreated him to issue instructions to the Resident at Lucknow (Mr. Lumsden) directing him "not to permit any of the relations of her house, except the English, to have any concern nor in any manner to interfere in her affairs." She, at the same time, sent for Mr. Lumsden at Lucknow, where she was then staying, and expressed to him her intention of "leaving all her wealth to the British Government" and further told him to inform the Council in London of this fact. She appeared before Mr. Lumsden in her "Sedan Chair" and spoke for herself using no medium as her spokesman and without allowing admittance to

(10) Letter from N. B. Edmonstone to the Resident at Lucknow, dated 17th August, 1808, (para 4).

any one except her Minister, Jawahir Ali Khan, whose death occurred in the same year. This boldness on the part of the Begum highly displeased Saadat Ali Khan. He told his step-mother that he was "extremely ashamed of this unusual proceeding on her part. No stranger had ever heard her voice as long as his father or her son Asaf-ud-Dowlah were living and he would like to know what extraordinary emergency had now arisen that she talked to a stranger with her own lips and not through another person." Bahu Begum retorted that "it was *his* accession that had driven her to this step and that she did not know how often it would be necessary for her to act in the same way. Moreover, she was her own mistress and he should have nothing to say to her." Thus the alienation between Saadat Ali and Bahu Begum became complete.

9. Mr. Lumsden informed the Governor-General about the Begum's desire and the Marquis of Wellesley sent a report to the Court of Directors in London. They replied that what the Begum had said "was only a verbal expression of her wishes, but in order to prove her sincerity she should furnish a 'will' duly sealed with a description of her property, money and jewelleryes and everything else in detail of quantity and value, with a corresponding list of the monthly allowances she desired to bequeath." When the Begum came to know of this she in the month of April of 1810(11) sent to Captain Baillie her "will" dated 14th Rabi-ul-awwal A. H. 1225, but with this no description of her pro-

(11) Secret Cons. 12 March, 1813. Letter from Capt. J. Baillie to F. Adam, Secy., dated 27th February, 1813.

perty was given. It appears from the records that Captain Baillie had kept this "will" with him till 1813.

The following is a short summary of the "will" under review :—

- (1) 3 lakhs of sicca rupees to be given from her personal money to her Minister, Darab Ali Khan, to erect a mausoleum over her grave.
- (2) I lakh of sicca rupees to be paid as donation to the shrines of Kerbala, Najaf-i-Ashraf and other holy places at the discretion of the above Minister.
- (3) Sicca rupees 10,000 the clear *jama* of the villages in the pargana of Puchumrath were assigned to defray the annual expenses of the above mausoleum and the surplus revenue of these villages to be given to the poor and religious men inhabiting the said mausoleum.

The following important names out of the several, who were the recipients of her favour, are mentioned in the "will" under review :—

- (a) Darab Ali Khan—her faithful and favourite eunuch Minister. He was a native of Rusulabad in the Salone district. He was reported to be a natural eunuch and was transferred to the Begum as a slave while still an infant.
- (b) Mirza Muhammad Taqi, who married the adopted daughter of the Begum, Bibi Sufyan or Lutfunnissa Begum.

- (c) Mirza Asghar Ali Khan and Mirza Akbar Ali Khan—the sons of the late Nawab Salar Jang, her youngest brother.
- (d) The children of Nawab Zafar-ud-Dowlah, her nephew.

It is further stated in her “will” that it was her wish that “after the fulfilment of her desires the whole of her property of every description should devolve on the British Government.”

10. In 1813 the Begum being seriously indisposed Captain Baillie sent to Lord Minto, Governor-General, her “will” on the 27th February⁽¹²⁾ of that year. On the 12th March next Lord Minto instructed Captain Baillie, according to the desire of the Court of Directors, to visit the Begum and to obtain from her an accurate statement of her personal property and the places of their deposit. He was further instructed to point out to her utility of “investing her money in the Company’s Fund or depositing it in one of the Company’s treasuries”. The meeting took place on the 18th July and the Begum talked with him from behind a screen. She “expressed an invincible repugnance” either to part with her property during her lifetime or to furnish a statement of it. Subsequently, however, as he convinced her that the terms of her “will” could not be carried out by the British Government unless a schedule and other particulars of her property were furnished, she was forced, with the utmost reluctance, to substitute a “deed of disposal, together with a statement of her property” in the place of her former

(12) Secret Cons. 12 March, 1813. Letter from Capt. J. Baillie to J. Adam Secy., dated the 27th February, 1813.

“will”. In this new ‘deed’ certain modifications were made in the allowances granted to her relatives and dependants. Darab Ali Khan, her faithful Minister, was also made to sign an “obligation” for the surrender of the Begum’s property to the British Government whenever required after her death. All these documents were executed⁽¹³⁾ on the 26th of Rajab 1228 Hijira or A.D. 25th July, 1813. When these documents reached the British Government they also executed a corresponding engagement with Bahu Begum, dated the 29th October, 1813, by which they “confirmed and guaranteed the disposal of the Begum’s personal property prescribed in her ‘deed of disposal’” and further promised “that on obtaining possession of that property the whole of the Begum’s directions in favour of her relations and dependants mentioned in the aforesaid ‘deed’ should, as far as depended on them, be carried into early and complete effect”. They also promised that they “would employ their utmost influence to obtain from the Nawab Vazir Saadat Ali Khan the grant in perpetuity of the villages in the Pargana of Puchmurath with a yearly *jama* of Rupees 10,000 in the name of Darab Ali Khan according to the Begum’s desire.”

From the schedule of the property submitted by Bahu Begum we find that in her treasury and palace called ‘Moti Bagh’ there was at that time 70 lakhs of rupees including ready-money and jewelleryes. Some of the money was placed in chests and was buried under the floor excavated for that purpose (1) in the cellar

(13) Secret Cons. 27 August, 1813. Letter from Capt. J. Baillie to Lord Minto, dated 31st July, 1813.

below "Bara-Dari" (2) in the small apartment adjoining the old "Kachahri" (3) in the hall of the old "Kachahri" and (4) in a small apartment of the palace. We also find that she deposited her jewels in a small room of the palace adjoining to that in which she slept and in a large room called "Toshakhana" or Wardrobe. Her utensils were kept in a room of the 'Chini Khana.' From her 'deed of deposit' it is gathered that "she gave in trust and deposit to the British Government the amount of 70 lakhs of rupees then in her possession together with what she might in future acquire, *i.e.*, from the date of the 'deed' till the day of her death; that with the exception of certain changes in the allowances granted to several dependants and menials, the important items of her original "will" remained unchanged; and that she appointed Darab Ali Khan to distribute the allowances among the persons mentioned in her 'deed'. For a detailed account of her 'deed', historical students are referred to the records of the Imperial Record Department.

II. It is further gathered from the papers⁽¹⁴⁾ of the above Department that on the death of the Begum in 1816 the British Government was called upon to determine what course should be followed to fulfil their agreement with the Begum. It was then determined that on Vazir (Saadat Ali Khan) agreeing to pay to the British Government such a sum as was required to enable it to fulfil the Begum's bequests, the whole of her property should be delivered up to him.

"The aggregate amount of the stipends being Rs 2,96,976 per annum to be paid by monthly instal-

(14) Mr Mackenzie's notes on "Lucknow Stipends".

ments, the sum of Rupees 50,11,469-12-8 was required to meet the charge. To this had to be added three lakhs for a mausoleum and one lakh as donation for the holy shrines; in all Rupees 54,11,469-12-8. The Resident, Mr. Strachey, appears to have made provision for the payment by lunar months and to have included in the arrangement certain allowances⁽¹⁵⁾ not originally contemplated; so that the sum paid by Saadat Ali Khan, the Vazir, was raised to—(left blank in the records), exclusive of the four lakhs required for the mausoleum and the shrines. The amount of the Begum's treasure was found to be Rupees 89,48,916 exclusive of jewelleryes and other property".

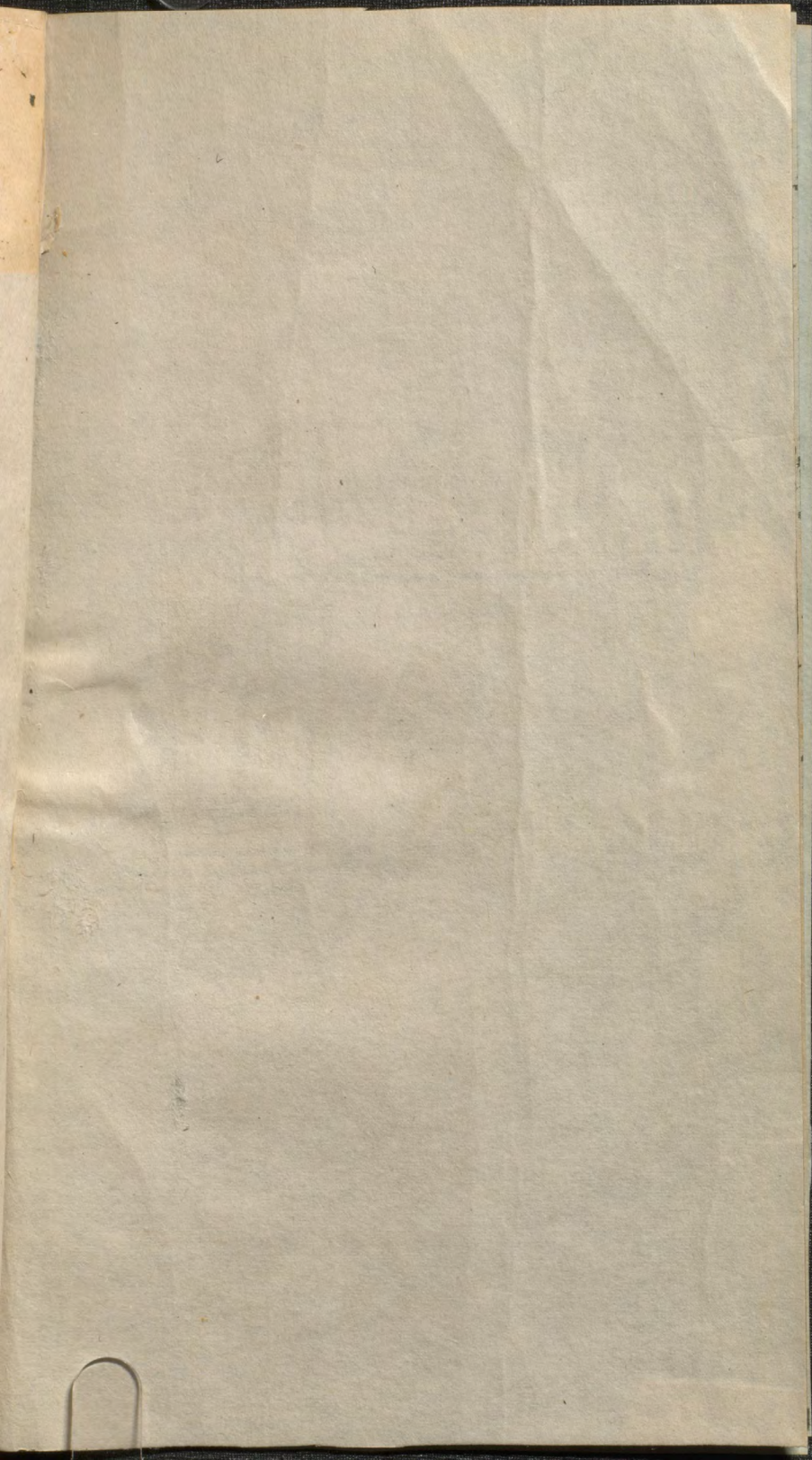
12. An account of the death of this exalted lady, Bahi Begum, as found in Mr. W. Hoey's translation of the "*Tarikh Farahbakhsh* of Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh," (from the original Persian) amply repays perusal:—About the year 1816 A.D. "this venerable lady" reached the age of 88 years. "She had declined in strength very gradually. She used to go each year to her nephew's house in the first ten days of Muharram to see the 'tazia' of Imam Hussain and return when she had recited the Fatiha." This year she prepared to go as usual but Darab Ali Khan tried to prevent her on account of the fear of a chill in the cold weather; but she was not desirous of breaking her yearly custom. "She went, but caught a cold when returning home and a slight fever ensued, which increased daily," "for the Lord of Death with icy breath had entered in to kill."

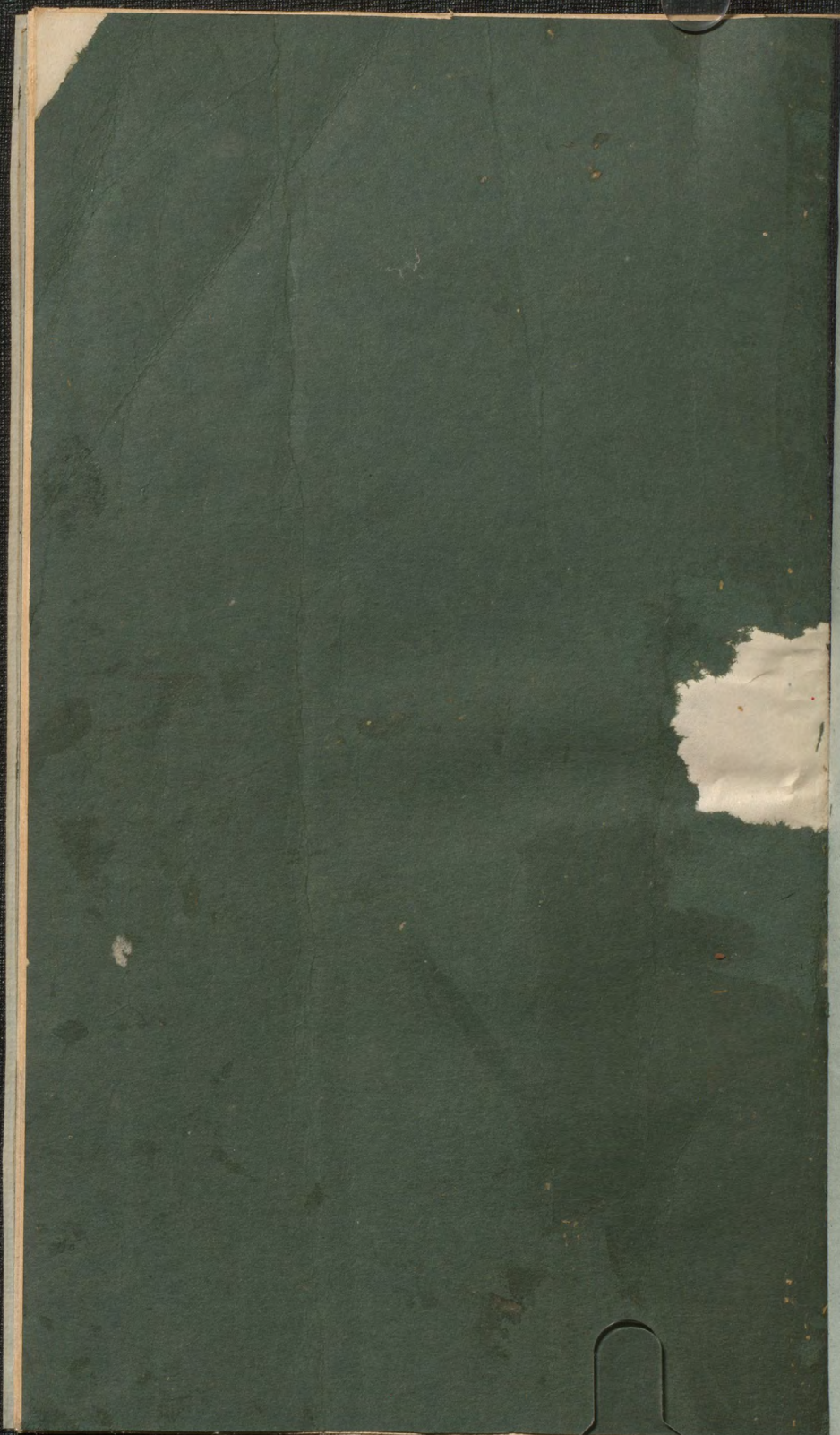
(15) To the families of Mirza Zaman	...	Rs.	950	monthly
Zafar-ud-Dowlah	...	"	1,000	"
Indigent connections	...	"	550	"
Total	...	"	2,500	"

"The day before she died she said that 'the great Nawab' (meaning Shuja-ud-Dowlah, her husband) had come to take her." She repeated these words before Darab Ali Khan who was near her and passed away calmly "amidst the tears and cries of her aged and sorrowing servants."

13. "Darab Ali Khan who enjoyed her perfect confidence carried her venerated corpse to the river and washed it." She was "borne with great respect and ceremony" to the Jawahir Bagh on the shoulders of the nobles of Faizabad; "around her bier walked servants scattering silver and gold for the repose of her soul with a lavish hand that enriched the needy and relieved the poor. Darab Ali Khan opened the earth in the 'baradari' at the very spot where she used to sit, spread below her some sacred dust which had been brought from Kerbala by pilgrims and laid her on it to rest, a thousand men sat all night reading the sacred texts of the *Koran* till the day dawned and the shadows fled." *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

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