

THE GHĀZĪ BACKGROUNDS OF THE SAFAVID STATE

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I

The rise of the Şafavid state in Irān around the year 1500 is the outcome of a variety of factors that should be sought in the preceding historical periods. It is only after a thorough study and investigation of the period before the *khurūj* of Shāh Isma'īl that the rise of the new state can be satisfactorily explained.

Some of these factors may be traced as far back as the Mongol invasion; and the fall of Baghdād to Hūlāgū in 1258, or better still, the destruction of the Isma'īlī (Assassin) fortresses at Alamūt two years before, may be taken as a convenient and not altogether arbitrary starting point.¹⁷⁰ Between the Mongols and Shah Isma'īl, the history of Irān roughly divides itself into: the fairly stable period of the Īl-khans; the highly confused period of the post-Mongol successor states; the attempted "settlement

¹⁷⁰ The fall of Baghdād to the Mongols was essentially a political event, and the so-called Il-khānid state established by Hūlāgū and his successors was in many ways a "continuation" of the 'Abbāsīd empire. However, the crushing blow which the Mongol armies dealt to the Isma'īlī (Assassin) fortresses at Alamūt and elsewhere was a major religious-social event, and was perhaps even more significant for Irānian history during the later Middle Ages. The question of "continuity" deserves a special investigation.

of the Near East question" by Timūr; and finally the fifteenth century with the Timūrids in Māvarā'annahr trying to keep a semblance of control over Western Irān where two federations of Turkmān tribes (the Qarā-Qoyūnlū and the Aq-Qoyūnlū) led more or less an independent existence until the rise of the Ṣafavids.

Geographically, a triangle of territory with Tabrīz, Qonya, and Baghdād forming its three geometrical apexes, will serve best the purposes of such an investigation. It is in this area, which comprises Āzerbāyjān, Irāqi 'Arab, and eastern Anatolia, where most of the action took place.

The factors to be considered for such a study are many:

- a) The *Sūfi-Shī'ī* backgrounds — i. e., the religious factor;
- b) The Turkmān domination of this area during the fifteenth century — i.e., the internal political factor;
- c) The "centralizing" policy of the Ottomans in the west and their ever-increasing encroachments against eastern Anatolia especially under Mehmed II — i.e., the Ottoman factor;
- d) The "decentralizing" policies of the Timūrids in the East — i.e., the Timūrīd factor;
- e) The age of the great discoveries (especially the discovery of the all-sea route to India and the FarEast) which coincided with the rise of the Safavid state — i.e., the international factor.

And there are other factors — political, social, or economic related in part or as a whole to the factors just mentioned. The

list could be extended further. Needless to say, most of these factors are interrelated.

Much groundwork has been done on these various aspects of the rise of the Şafavids.¹⁷¹ Other work is still in progress.¹⁷² But the picture is far from clear, and more research is needed in order to understand and explain this phenomenon which some contemporary Muslim chroniclers considered as being among the most unusual events that occurred at the beginning of the tenth Hijrah century.¹⁷³

One factor which has not yet been given full consideration in attempting to explain the rise of this dynasty is the subject of

¹⁷¹ See for example Jean Aubin, "Etudes Safavides I" in *JESHO*, 2 (1959), 37-81; V. Minorsky's articles in *BSOAS* (partially listed in *BSOAS*, 16 [1954], 271) and in the foreword to his *Persia in A.D. 1478-1490* (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1957); Ghulam Sarvar, *History of Shah Ismā'īl Şafavī* (Aligarh, 1939); H.R. Roemer, "Die Şafawīden" in *Saeculum*, 4 (1953); and R.M. Savory, "The Struggle for Supremacy in Persia after the Death of Timūr", *Der Islām*, 40 (1964), 35-65. For a thorough description of the manuscript sources of the Şafavid period, see M.B. Dickson, *Shāh T ahmāsb amd the U zbeks* (Princeton University Ph.D thesis, May 1958), Appendix II, "Sources and Bibliography", pp. xlv-lxiii.

¹⁷² Michel M. Mazzaoui, *The Origims of the Şafavids: Sh'ism,,Şaf'ism, amd the Gulāt, ca. 1250-1500*, Freiburger Islamstudien series, No. 3 (scheduled to appear in late 1971 or early 1972).

¹⁷³ Hasan-i Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-Tavārīkh*, edited by Storey (Baroda: Gaykhad Oriental Series, 1931-34), I, 61.

the present paper, namely the *ghāzī* backgrounds of the Şafavid state.

II

Students of Ottoman history are familiar with the Paul Wittek lectures on the rise of the Ottoman empire.¹⁷⁴ Professor Wittek's examination of the history of Anatolia during the period before the rise of the Ottomans led him to the conclusion that the rise of the state of Osmān should be sought in its *ghāzī* origins. Bands of warriors of the faith were fighting the unbelievers along the frontiers of Islām and carving out states for themselves and their followers. Byzantium crumbled and the Ottoman empire rose. Wittek's findings have been challenged but have not yet been seriously questioned.

It appears that a similar "experiment" was taking place at a later date along another frontier of Dār — this time against the Christians of the Caucasus region. It is here where the Şafavids began their *ghāzī* activity, and it was in the general direction of Bāb al-Abwāb or Darband that they lost and won their first battles.

With the Ottomans it was a gradual and continuous process extending along the westward-moving frontiers of Anatolia and across the Straits into the Balkans. With the Şafavids, on the

¹⁷⁴ Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain, 1938).

other hand, it appears to have been a sudden and spontaneous effort which began only half a century before Shāh Isma'īl.

III

A very quick review of the earlier history of the Ṣafavid *dadmān* will bring this problem to a sharper focus.

The *Sūfī* order at Ardabīl in Āzarbayjān, founded during the Mongol period by Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn (1252-1334), the eponymous leader of the dynasty, was a peaceful and contemplative order similar to countless other *Sūfī* orders which sprang up almost in every corner of the Muslim world. The life and *karāmāt* of Shaykh Safī al-Dīn, as related by his biographer Ibn Bazzāz in *Ṣafvat al-Ṣafa*¹⁷⁵ show him as a holy man who was honoured and sought out for his saintly deeds and miraculous powers. The Mongol rulers and their ministers placed the order and its leaders under generous protection. Followers of the order are described in the sources as having

¹⁷⁵ Ibn Bazzāz (Tavakkulī ibn Isma'īl ibn Hājī al-Ardabīlī), *Ṣafvat al-Ṣafa* (Bombay, lith. 1329/1911). This edition, written by Ahmad ibn Karīm Tabrīzī, ignores the serious problem of authorship of this work (which exists in two redactions: an original pre-Safavid, and a post-Safavid redaction with *Shī'ī* overtones). The present writer has been working on a definitive critical edition of this important work based on the twenty odd manuscripts now extant in several libraries and private collections.

been very numerous, and Ardabīl was soon becoming an important center of religious pilgrimage.¹⁷⁶

Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn (1334-1393), the son and successor of the founder of the order, lived for a very long period and managed the affairs of the order during the extremely troubled and confused time between the passing of the Mongol Īl-khāns and the arrival of Timūr upon the Irānian scene. He expanded the activities of the order into the Timūrid territories of Māvarā'annahr. The religious propaganda carried out by Shāh Qāsim al-Anvār, the famous Ṣūfī poet, in that area is one example of this activity.¹⁷⁷

Khwājah Alī (1392-1429), the third leader of the order, appears to have spread the message of the order into Syria where a tradition records his death in Jerusalem upon returning from the Pilgrimage.¹⁷⁸ He is also said to have obtained the

¹⁷⁶ 2 Hamd Allāh Mustawfī, *Tārīkh-i Guzīdah* (Tehrān, 1336/1958), p. 675; and Ḥusayn ibn Abdāl Zāhidī, *Silsilat al-Nasab*, (Berlin, 1343/1924), p. 38. See also the correspondence in *Mukātabai-i Rashīd'* by the Il-Khānid Minister Rashīd al-Dīn Faql Allāh, edited by Muḥammad Shaft' (Lahore, 1376/ 1947).

¹⁷⁷ On Shaykh Sadr al-Dīn see Khwāndamīr, Ḥabīb *al-Siyar* (Tehrān: Kitābkhāneh Khayām, 1333/1954-55), IV, 420-23. On Qāsim•i Anvār, see his *Kullīyāt*, edited by sā'id Nafīsī (Tehrān, 1337/1959), the long introduction.

¹⁷⁸ The story of the death of Khwājah 'Alī in Jerusalem is best preserved in Mujīr al-Dīn al-'Ulaymī, *Al-Uns al-Jalīl bi-Tārīkh al-Quds wa al-Khalīl*

freedom of some Turkish prisoners from Timūr (upon his return from the battle of Ankara) and sent them back to their people" to preach the word" in Shām and Rūm (i.e., in Syria and Anatolia).¹⁷⁹

Very little is recorded about his son and successor Shaykh Ibrāhīm (1429-1447), sometimes known as Shaykh Shāh.¹⁸⁰ His period of leadership of the order, which lasted for some two decades, gives one the decided impression of having been the lull before the storm.

For all of a sudden, the *murīds* of the order became the *ghuzāt-i sūfiyeh*,¹⁸¹ and under the next two leaders Junayd (1447-1460) and Ḥaydar (1460-1488), we see them fighting in large numbers against the remaining Christian enclave at Trebizund or the Georgians of the Caucasus. It is no more the heart of the Muslim world which attracts them; it is no more Rūm, Shām, or Māvarā'-annahr; it is no more the Dār al-Islām but the Dār al-Ḥarb. Overnight they have become *ghāzis* fighting the unbelievers along the Muslim frontiers of the north.

IV

(ahistorical and biographical work completed in 900/1494-95) (Cairo, 1283/186667), II, 510.

¹⁷⁹ V. Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* (London: Luzac & Co., 1943), p. 190 and n. 1.

¹⁸⁰ **Zāhidi**, *Silsilat al-Nasab*, pp. 65.66.

¹⁸¹ Iskandar Munshi, *Tārīkh-i Ālam Ārā-yi 'Abbāsī* (Tehrān, 1334-35/1956-57), 1, 18.

The frontiers along the Caucasus have always been a region of border fighting since the spread of Islām into that direction. For example, the author of *Hudūd al-'Alam* (composed in 372/982), in describing the area of Azarbāyjān, Armenia, and Arrān, says that this region "is the abode of merchants, fighters of the faith (*ghāzīyān*), and strangers coming from all parts;" and adds a little further down that "Tiflis is a frontier post (*thaghr*) against the infidels (*bar rū-ye kāfirān*)".¹⁸² The border fighting was two-sided, and other sources tell how at one time the Georgians pursued the Muslim *ghāzīs* as far south as Ardabīl itself, and Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn's grandfather (Shaykh Quṭb al-Dīn) received a severe wound in the neck during the fighting, which Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn remembered as a young boy.¹⁸³

The region was also the scene of large-scale military activity in the form of campaigns conducted by the conquerors (Mongols, Timūrids, etc.) and by locally established rulers. Uzūn Ḥasan, the leading figure among the Aq-Qoyūnlū Turkmāns, conducted no less than five such campaigns against the Georgians,¹⁸⁴ and his son and successor Sultān Ya'qūb

¹⁸² *Hūdūd al- 'Ālam*, edited by V. Minorsky (London: Luzac & Co., 1937),

p. 142.

¹⁸³ Ibn Bazzāz, *Safyat al-Safā*, India Office Ms. No. 1842, pp. 9a-9b; and Khwāndamīr, *Habīb al-Siyar*, IV, 411-12.

¹⁸⁴ E.G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge: the University Press, 1902-1924), III, 409 ff.

invaded the area on more than one occasion.¹⁸⁵ These organized military campaigns, however, should be differentiated from the unorganized activity of the *ghāzī* warriors under Junayd and Haydar.

V

Before concentrating his efforts against the Caucasus region, Shaykh Junayd conducted his *ghāzī* activity against the Byzantine enclave of Trebizund. The Byzantine sources, as well as the Ottoman sources, testify to a large-scale *ghazāh* in 861/1456 during the last years of Milo Joannes.¹⁸⁶ After winning initial victories against one of Joannes' leading men, Junayd encamped before the walls of the city which, however, remained impregnable.

This short-lived *ghazāh* against Trebizund came to an end when Mehmed II, as he was rounding off the Ottoman boundaries in the east, ultimately conquered the city in 1461. Shaykh Junayd had already directed his attention somewhere

¹⁸⁵ V. Minorsky, *Persia* (see index). This work is a comprehensive summary translation of Fadp Allāh ibn Rūzbehān Khunji's *Tārīkh-I 'Ālam Arā-yi Amīnī*. The original text is being prepared for publication by John E. Woods.

¹⁸⁶ . Miller, *Trebizond, the Last Greek Empire* (London, 1926), quoting from Cholcocondyles (d. 1464), pp. 83 ff.; and Ashiq-pāshā-zāde (1400-1484), *Tavārīkh-i Al-i Osmān*, edited by 'Alī Bey (Istanbul, 1332/1911-14), PP. 264 ff.

else, and later Safavid *ghāzī* activity was conducted against the ideally situated region of the Caucasus with its river valleys and mountainous terrain.

In 864/1459-60 Shaykh Junayd was already engaged in large scale operations against the Georgian Cherkes.¹⁸⁷ A year before, Uzūn Ḥasan had given his own sister in marriage to Junayd (and later on, Junayd's son Haydar married this same Turkmān Sultān's daughter, the future mother of Shāh Ismā'īl) and this made the Ṣafavid leaders "princes of the land". A contemporary authority (Fazl Allāh ibn Rūzbehān Khunji) remarks very pointedly:

Junayd's marriage became known even in the farthest corners of Rūm and Syria and, in view of this honor, the *khalifahs* of the earlier Shaykhs wanted to wait on him.

His followers (continues Khunji):

openly called him God (*ilāh*), and his son Son of God (Ibn Allāh)... In his praise they said: he is the Living One, there is no God but he.

And Khunjī adds:

¹⁸⁷ Khwāndamīr, *Ḥabib al-Siyar*, IV, 425-26; and Khunjī/Minorsky, *Persia*, p. 64.

When the boon of succession reached Junayd, he altered the way of life of his ancestors.... Every moment he strove to conquer a land or a region.¹⁸⁸

Shaykh Junayd, according to the chroniclers, combined in his person the formal sultanate (*saltanat-i suyarī*) with the spiritual sultanate (*saltanat-i ma'navī*); and on this basis he urged his *Safī* followers to carry on *ghazāh* and *jihad* against the unbelievers (*kuffār*), and called himself Sulṭān Junayd.¹⁸⁹ Shortly afterwards, with ten thousand, *Ṣūfīs*, he crossed the Aras river on a *jihād* against the Cherkes.¹⁹⁰

VI

About Shaykh Haydar and his role in the *ghāzī* activity of this period the sources are slightly more informative. We are told that he spent all his time making preparations for *ghazāh*. Rūzbehān Khunjī has left to us descriptions of these large-scale preparations that were going on in Ardabīl at this time. He must

¹⁸⁸ Khunji/Minorsky, *Persia*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁸⁹ The change from religious to temporal power was noted, rather cryptically, by several contemporary and later writers: Yaḥyā Qazvīni, *Lubb al-Tavārikh* (Tehran, 1314/1932), p. 238; Iskandar Munshi, *Tārīkh*, 1, 19; Qaḍī Aḥmad Ghaffārī, *Tārīkh-i Jahān-ārā* (Tehrān: Kitābfurūshī Hāfiz, 1343/1964), p. 261; Khwāndamīr, *Habib al—Siyar*, IV, 427; Qutb al-Din Nahrawālī, *Kitāb al-'Ilām*, (Cairo: Matba'at al-'Āmirah, 1303 A.H.), p. 223-24; and Aḥmad b. Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad Qaramānī, *Akhbār* p.:44 (based on Munajjim Bāshī's still unedited work, *Jāmi' al-Duwal*).

¹⁹⁰ See above footnote 4, p. 84, and Midi, *Silsilat al-Nasab*, 67; and Nasr Allāh Falsafī, *Zandagāni-yi Shāh 'Abbās Avval* (Tehrān: Dānishgāhi Tehrān, 1332/1953), I, 180.

have picked up the information from eyewitnesses."When the royal train reached Ardabīl, the author heard from trustworthy persons stories of the miserable ways of Haydar... I have heard that he (i.e., Shaykh Haydar) made several thousand pikes, coats of mail, swords, and shields... because he wished to teach his adepts (*murīds*) as their leader (*murshid*)."¹⁹¹ When the preparations were ready"he issued to them arms from his arsenal, and they were obedient to him — youths, robust and warlike, sword slashers in clever fighting."

Haydar had to clear his expeditions with the central authority in this case Suḷṭān Ya'qūb Āq-Qoyfinlū, son of Uzūn Ḥasan. His men, he wrote to the Suḷṭān from Ardabīl,"having exerted themselves (*ijtihād*) in various religious exercises and duly completed the great *jihād*, which is the assault of one's own soul, they now... claimed the right to distinguish themselves in the lesser *jihād*", which is to fight the infidels."Should the sovereign permit, they would begin the holy war against Cherkes..." Letters were despatched to the emīr of the border principality of Shirvdn to give Haydar and his men safe conduct in their march to the north.

This clearance was obtained in every one of Haydar's three expeditions. (For the third one he sent his own mother all the way to Qum, where the Sultān happened to be at the time, to

¹⁹¹ Khunjī/Minorsky, *Persia*, pp. 67-71 (for this reference and the next few quotations which all come from this work).

obtain the royal permission). After the permission was obtained, we are told that

the Shaykh with devilish haste, and together with the detachment that was in readiness, set forth from Ardabīl to Sharvān, ... and innumerable troops joined him.

These expeditions were not taken seriously at first by the central authority. Sultān Ya'qūb in fact is said to have remarked at one time, "What can happen from the campaigning of a shaykh, and what can a dervish do?"

These raids, however, were quite large. The well-informed Khunjī describes them as follows:

With some 10,000 men, the Shaykh passed through Darband on his way to the country of the infidel Cherkes.... Having wrought havoc and taken captives, he triumphantly returned to Ardabīl.... The kings of the outlying regions were astonished at his success (first expedition).... The Shaykh returned from his (second) raid... and brought with him some 6,000 captives.

These figures might have been slightly exaggerated in the sources, but they do give some idea of the extent of this *ghāzī* activity of Junayd and Haydar. Unfortunately, this activity did not materialize in the establishment of a state (both Junayd and Haydar having fallen martyrs in the fighting), and it was left for Shāh Ismail, Haydar's son, to achieve that a decade or so afterwards.

VII

Compared to the Ottomans, the Şafavid *ghāzīs* under Junayd and Ḥaydar were working against greater odds: a) To begin with, their field of operation lacked an established and permanent base located right on the frontier marshlands. For Ardabīl was far away, and the Şafavid leaders had to guide their men and carry whatever equipment they had across long stretches of land until they could come face to face with the Christian infidels and begin their *ghazāh*. Ardabīl was several hundred miles to the south from where the *ghāzīs* fought. Further, it should be remembered that the nature of the terrain was extremely hostile in the sense that this is a mountainous area — the confluence of the Zagros and Albarz ranges meeting in the Armenian knot. This was not the relatively open country which the Ottoman *ghāzīs* had at their disposal in their westward drive against Byzantium. b) Secondly, the Şafavid *ghāzīs* did not have a free movement of action. On the one hand they had to contend with a central authority that was still strong, namely the Āq-Qoyūnlū Turkmāns under Sultān Ya'qūb; and on the other, the Shirvān-Shāhs who controlled the area immediately bordering on Christian territory. And while the Safavids, as we have seen, could neutralize one of these two fronts — the Āq- Qoyūnlū, to whom they were related through strong marriage ties — they could at no time placate the suspicion of the rulers of Shirvān. The latter, were always wary of this *ghāzī* activity. Their country, as Rūzbehān Khunjī tells

us, was "a perpetual abode of peace".¹⁹² They allowed the *ghāzīs* to pass through to the north only after specific instructions were issued by and received from the central authority of the Aq-Qoyūnlū in Tabrīz. The Shirvān-Shāhs actually had all the reason to be afraid, for on both occasions (i.e., during Junayd and Ḥaydar) the Ṣafavid *ghāzīs* turned against Shirvān and were making preparations to conquer it. On the first occasion, the emīrs of Shirvān took care of the exigency on their own and were able to defeat Junayd and have him killed. On the second, the Shirvān-Shāh had to ask the assistance of Sultān Ya'qūb, when he (the ruler of Shirvān) was forced to evacuate his capital city of Shamākhī in order to escape the ruthless onslaught of the Ṣafavid *ghāzīs*. Ya'qūb himself, of course, finally realized that the free hand he had originally given to Ḥaydar was overreaching itself, and so he had to act to stop it and ultimately save his own crown. He, therefore, marched towards the north sending one of his generals ahead on a large contingent of imperial troops. Ḥaydar had to fight on both fronts; and as "the *Sufīs*... formed a circle round him and tried to repel and impede (the attackers)",¹⁹³ he died as a martyr on the slopes of Mt. Elburz.

It was natural for the *ghāzīs* to turn against Shirvān, because only by removing this impediment could they have the whole field free to themselves. And this was the first step taken by

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Shāh Ismāīl twelve years later. But by that time the central government of the Āq-Qoyūnlū was torn to pieces by internal succession struggles, and Ismāīl did not fear action from that side. Furthermore, he could claim that he was only trying to take revenge from the rulers of Shirvān for the death of his father and grandfather — both a good Mediaeval pretext and a convenient expedient. c) A third difference between the Ottoman and Safavid experiments was the fact that while Osmān, Orkhān, and the others were only the leaders of the *ghāzī* warriors in the battlefields, Junayd and Ḥaydar were both military commanders and religious heads of the *Sop* Order at Ardabīl. This dual capacity concentrated too much power into the hands of the Ṣafavid chiefs; and, tending to the religious needs of their followers, no doubt, detracted from the efficient execution of the *ghazāh* itself. And so, assuming divine powers in order to rally their followers behind them (as was described above) may have been actually a hindrance rather than a help to the success of the *ghāzī* operations themselves. (But this point involves us with the religious factor mentioned earlier, and carries us beyond the terms of reference of this paper).

VIII

Two points remain to be explained: one, why is it that this *ghāzī* activity took place at this time? And secondly, how did it assist in the establishment of the new state?

A tentative answer to the first of the two questions is perhaps to blame it all on the Turks! Mehmed II, as was mentioned above, had just rounded off the eastern boundaries of his empire. The centralizing might of the Ottomans was too much to be accepted by the "freedom-loving" Turkmāns (who, it must not be forgotten, were the devoted followers of the order at Ardabīl). These Turk-māns flocked towards the east, and Junayd and Ḥaydar simply gathered them together and led them against the infidel Georgians. *Ghazāh* was always an attractive pastime!

If this is true, then we have the interesting and rather curious situation whereby the Anatolian Turks who under Osmān and Orkhān were conducting *ghazāh* in the west against Byzantium, are now the Turkmāns who were engaging in similar *ghāzī* activity under Junayd and Ḥaydar against the Georgians in the Caucasus. But who were the Turks? and who the Turkmāns? Are we to assume that they are all accounted for so neatly by Zeki Velidi Togan's "two millions" who were pushed westwards by the invading Mongols two or three centuries earlier?¹⁹⁴

The second question, as to how this *ghāzi* activity helped in the ultimate foundation of the Ṣafavid state, need not pose such difficult problems. The Turkmān *ghāzīs* under Junayd and

¹⁹⁴ Z. V. Togan, "Rise of the Turkish Empire" in *Background of the Middle East*, edited by E. Jackh (New York: Cornell University Press, 1952) pp. 112113.

Ḥaydar received their "basic training", so to speak, during the few decades before Ismā'īl, so that when his *khurūj* occurred around 1500, they were the seasoned fighters of previous expeditions. The consummation of the act needed only good scouts to lead the way to the north. In true *ghāzī* fashion, Ismail conquered Bāku before turning to Tabrīz.