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THE PROBLEM OF THE DESCENT OF THE SAFAVIDS

Sources concerning Shaikh Safi ad-Din (b. 650 / 1252 - 3; d. 734 / 1334) are few. There are "Tarikh-i Guzida" 1) and "Nuzhat al-Qulub" 2) by Hamdallah Mustaufi Qazvini, the letters 3) of Rashid ad-Din Fazlallah (d. 718 / 1318), and the biography of Shaikh Ali Hamadani (714 - 787 / 1314 - 1385) which has been written by one of his pupils, Maulana Nur ad-Din Badakhshi 4). But the main source for Shaikh Safi ad-Din is the "Safwat as-Safa" or "Ma-wahib as-Saniya fi'l-Manaqib as-Safawiya" which has been written by Tavakkuli b. Ismail b. Hajj al-Ardabili, known as Ibn Bazzaz, who was a member of the Safavid order, about 761 / 1358.

The Safavids made Persia a shi'ite land but their ancestor Shaikh Safi was without any doubt a Sunni. 5) The order turned out to be a shi'ite one only under Khvaja Ali (head of the order from 794 - 830 / 1391 - 1427). In 907 / 1501, when Ismail I. ascended the throne in Tabris, he proclaimed Shi'ism as the state religion. He and his son Tahmasp I. (930 - 984 / 1524 - 1567) laid claim to their descent from Ali b. Abi Talib. Until now no one could really prove the contrary. Even the deadly enemies of the Safavids, the Özbeks and the Ottomans, on the whole accepted their claim to be Sayyids. But most of the respected scholars are of the opinion that the family tree of the Safavids has been falsified. Ahmad Kasravi 6) and Zeki Velidi Togan 7) are basing their doubts mainly on the "Safwat as-Safa". Obviously, the passage concerning the descent of the Safavids in the manuscripts written after 907 / 1501 has been altered. There are two manuscripts dating from 890 / 1485 8) and 897 / 1491 9) still existing. These trace the Safavid descent back to Firuz Shah Zarrinkulah only. In these two manuscripts he is clearly named Biruz al-Kurdi as-Sanjani. Whereas the later manuscripts only mention Firuz Shah b. Sayyid Muhammad. But to my mind this fact cannot be used to prove that the Safavids are of Kurdish descent, because there are some examples which prove that Arabs living in Iran had Persian "laqab's" 10). It does not exclude the possibility that Firuz Shah had Arab ancestors. The "Tarikh-i Abbasi" 11) by Jalal ad-Din Muhammad, Munajjim Yazdi, even gives a reasonable explanation: "Sayyid Firuz Shah Zarrinkulah left Yemen because Shams ad-Daula Turan Shah b. Ayyub

conquered this land; in 596/1173-4 the Sayyid settled in Rangin." 12) In fact Turan Shah took Yemen in 569/1173-4. 13) But it must be admitted that "Tarikh-i Abbasi" was completed in 1611 so that one may say that this passage has been written to back Safavid pretensions; nevertheless, it should be taken into account.

Professor Roemer 14) and Erika Glassen 15) belong to that small group of scholars who are backing the Safavid claim, to a certain extent, pointing to the following sentence which is to be found in a story reported in all manuscripts of the "Safwat as-Safa", i. e. Shaikh Sadr ad-Din was told by his father Shaikh Safi that they have connections with the Prophet's family. 16) This is perfectly right, but the text goes on, i. e. "I (Sadr ad-Din) did not ask whether 'alavi' or 'Sharifi' and so it remained unclear." In Persian:

سلطان المشايخ في العالمين شيخ صدرالدين ادام الله برکته فرمود که
 شيخ قدس الله مره فرمود که در نسب ما سيادت هست لکن سئال نکردم
 که علوی یا شریفی و همچنان مشتبه ماند. (15)

The statement of Shaikh Safi in my mind includes two possibilities. Either he knew exactly that he had connections with the Prophet's family, or the belief in such an exalted descent arose from his religious zeal so that he confounded reality with wishful thinking. If the second part of the story is taken into account it hardly serves to support the Safavid claim.

Hafiz Husain Tabrizi - known as Ibn Karbala'i - a Persian Sunni who emigrated to Damascus gives the family tree of the Safavids in his book "Rauzat al-Jinan" 18), written in 975/1567-8, with reference to the "Safwat as-Safa" and traces the genealogy back to Ali b. Abi Talib 19) without any criticism. Professor Roemer, therefore, concludes 20) that Ibn Karbala'i used a manuscript of the "Safwat as-Safa" which had been written before 907/1501 containing the full genealogy. This would fit Kasravi's 21) conjecture that the completion of the genealogy has to be seen in connection with Shaikh Sadr ad-Din's pilgrimage where he possibly got the information from the Sharif in Medina. As Togan 22) pointed out, this pilgrimage took place in 1368, so there is a space of 10 years between the first copies of the manuscript in question and the supposed completion of the family tree. This would explain the controversy of the genealogies in the different manuscripts without blaming the Safavids for having falsified it after proclaiming Shi'ism as the state religion. But this thesis can only be proved if such a copy, written before 1501, containing the full genealogy would appear.

Togan 23) asserts that Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp have made efforts to hush up their Kurdish descent. Whereas Roemer 24) means that the text variations are really clumsy. Instead of "Al-Kurdi as-Sanjani" it is written "al-Karavi as-Sanjani" and instead of "va chun nisbat-i Firuz ba kurd raft" we find "va chun nisbat-i Firuz Shahra dar zikr-i nasab raft". A real falsifier, says Roemer, would have done his work in a more professional way. So far, I agree with Roemer but in my mind these text alterations are due to the fact that the copyists, from the 16th century onwards, for whom the Safavids were Sayyid's, could not reconcile this with Kurdish ancestry and therefore tried to read this passage in another way, supposing that there was a clerical error, or just omitted the "laqab" for the same reason.

Togan's assertion 25) that the genealogical tree of Shaikh Safi has been completed under Shah Ismail, is backed by a Fatwa 26) issued by Abu as-Suud in Istanbul in the middle of the 16th century. It states that Shah Ismail I. forced the Sayyid's of Mashad to enrol his genealogy in the "bahr al-ansab". But this account dates from a time when the Ottomans argued controversially with the Safavids and is therefore of no great value. On the other hand, it seems to me to be of great importance to point out that some of the members of the family Kevakbizade, descendants of a son of Shaikh Ibrahim a brother of Shaikh Junaid, who lived as Sunnis in the Ottoman Empire, were several times in charge of the office of the "Naqib el-eshraf". 27) This proves that the descent of the Safavids from Ali has been accepted by the Ottomans.

Erika Glassen 28) grants the Safavids the right to make efforts to retrace their genealogy. Bina-Muthlagh 29) is even of the opinion that Shaikh Safi really was a Sayyid but did not call himself one because of his modesty, this is backed by Ibn Karbalai:

فاما حضرت مشارالیه در اظهار آن نمی کوشیدند، بعضی از احباء
از ایشان سوال کردند که شما را چرا خوش نمی آید از اظهار این
نسب عالی؟ فرمودند از روی هضم نفس که ما بکدام عمل شایسته و
بایسته خود را توانیم باین دودمان نامی گرامی نسبت داد. (30)

Shaikh Sadr ad-Din was more interested in his descent and made inquiries, says Bina-Muthlagh. If the result had been inserted into the "Safwat as-Safa", this gives no evidence of falsification because in their eyes it perhaps was a supplement only.

Until better proofs appear it cannot be decided which is right. In any case it is of no importance whether the Safavids were Sayyids or not. Their merit lies in the fact that they defended Iran's borders against the overwhelming Ottomans and the Özbek hordes and to have laid the foundations of a real national state.

- 1) Ed. by Browne and Nicholson, 2 vol., London and Leiden 1911-14 (Gibb Memorial Series XIV, 112)
- 2) Ed. by Muhammad Shafi, Lahore 1945
- 3) Mukatabat-i Rashid ad-Din Fazlallah, ed. by Muhammad Shafi, Lahore 1945
- 4) Johann Karl Teufel: Eine Lebensbeschreibung des Scheichs Ali Hamadani (d. 1385). Die Xulasat ul-manaqib des Maulana Nur ud-Din Ca'far-i Badaxshi, Leiden 1965
- 5) Cf. Laurence Lockhart, Inqiraz-i silsila-yi safaviya, trsl. by Mustafa Quli Imad, Tihiran 1343, p. 21
- 6) His essays on this problem have been published first under the title "Nizhad va tabar-i Safaviya" in the Tehran Journal Ayanda II (1305-6/1926-7) pp. 357-65, 489-97, and 801-12; the folder, which I used, was published under the title "Shaikh Safi va tabarash", Tihiran 1323, and 1342.
- 7) Sur l'origine des Safavides, Mélanges Louis Massignon, Tome III, Damas 1957
- 8) Ms. Leiden No. 2639
- 9) Ms. Aya Sofya No. 3099
- 10) Cf. Spuler, Berthold: Iran in Früh-Islamischer Zeit, Wiesbaden 1952, p. 38
- 11) Ms. Elliot 367 of the Bodleian Lib. Oxford
- 12) ibid. 2b
- 13) Ibn al-Atir, Al-Kamil fi'l-Tarikh, Ed. Beirut 1966, vol. II, p. 396
- 14) Roemer, Hans Robert: Scheich Safi von Ardabil, in Festgabe deutscher Iranisten zur 2500 Jahrfeier Irans, Stuttgart 1971, pp. 106-116
- 15) Glassen, Erika: Die frühen Safawiden nach Qazi Ahmad Qumi, Freiburg 1970, p. 12f

- 16) Roemer, op. cit. p. 112
- 17) I used a lithography of the library of the University of Isfahan of which the first pages are missing. On the last page (398) the date 1329 is written down, so it should be the Bombay - Edition.
- 18) Ed. by Ja' far Sultan al - Qura'i, Tihran 1344
- 19) Ibid. p. 225
- 20) Op. cit.p. 113
- 21) Cf. Roemer p. 113
- 22) Op. cit. p. 352
- 23) Ibid. p. 352
- 24) Op. cit p. 113
- 25) Op. cit. p. 347
- 26) Cf. Elke Eberhard: Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safaviden im 16. Jahrhundert nach arabischen Handschriften, Freiburg 1970
- 27) Hanna Sohrweide: Der Sieg der Safaviden und seine Rückwirkungen auf die Schiiten Anatoliens im 16. Jahrhundert, Der Islam 41, 1965, note 183 with reference to Gölpinarli, Kaygusuz Abdal - Hatayi - Kul Himmet, Istanbul 1953, p. 15
- 28) Op. cit. p. 22f
- 29) Mahmud Bina - Mothlagh: Scheich Safi von Ardabil, Diss. phil. Göttingen 1969, pp. 130 - 137
- 30) Op. cit. p. 225



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