Negotiating Power: Gilan and Its Gradual Incorporation into the Safavid Polity

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The term Gilan historically refers to a geographically isolated but economically valuable mountainous region south of the Caspian Sea, most of which is located in present-day Iran. In the era when the Safavid dynasty conquered and ruled Iran, Gilan went from being a semi-independent region ruled by two competing local dynasties, the Kiyayis and the Eshaqiyyeh, to being a fully-incorporated province of the Safavid polity. This thesis is a study of historical, political, and religious developments in Gilan from the late fourteenth to the early seventeenth century. It focuses on Gilan's relationship to the greater powers in the region like the Aq Qoyunlu, the Qara Qoyunlu, and finally the Safavids. This study shifts our focus from the Safavid center to the periphery by emphasizing Gilan's own historically particular periodization in the larger context of Iranian history, before examining the processes and policies through which this politically and religiously diverse region was incorporated into the Safavid polity.

RÉSUMÉ

Sur le plan historique, le terme Gilan fait référence à une région montagneuse géographiquement isolée mais économiquement de grande valeur située au sud de la mer Caspienne. Cette région appartient en grande majorité à l'Iran d'aujourd'hui. A l'époque où la dynastie des Safavides a conquis et régné en Iran, Gilan passa d'une région semi-indépendante dirigée par deux dynasties rivales les Kiyayis et les Eshaqiyyeh, à une province entièrement intégrée au système politique des Safavides. Cette thèse est une étude des développements historiques, politiques et religieuses dans Gilan de la fin du quatorzième siècle au début du dix-septième siècle. En particulier, elle met l'accent sur le lien de Gilan avec les plus grands pouvoirs dans la région comme les Aq Qoyunlus, les Qara Qoyunlus, et enfin les Safavides. Dans un premier temps, cette étude met l'accent sur les époques historiques propres à Gilan dans un contexte plus général lié à l'histoire de l'Iran. Dans un second temps, elle examine les processus et politiques qui ont permis à cette région diversifiée sur le plan politique et religieuse d'être intégrée au régime politique des Safavides.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Transliterating Persian, Arabic, and Turkish terms and names into English is not without its challenges. The task is more difficult since by now, some of these terms have come to have their own established and commonly-used English transliteration which might not necessarily fit the transliteration scheme chosen in any given work. As a general rule, since this study is conducted in the context of Persian and Iranian Studies, I have opted for a transliteration scheme that reflects the proper Persian pronunciation of words, with a few exceptions.

This study generally follows the transliteration scheme of the *Iranian Studies Journal*. When a common English transliteration exists I use it, unless it appears as part of a proper name. For example, sultan, sayyid, and Isfahan are used except when they appear as part of a proper name like Soltan Hasan or Esfahani. When an accepted English transliteration exists for the proper name of a well-known historical figure, I use that instead of the Persian transliteration: for example, Isma‘il and Ibrahim, unless as part of a modern Iranian name or the title of a Persian book, in which case I use Esma‘il and Ebrahim.

For Arabic and Turkish words in the context of Arabic and Turkish works, I use the IJMES transliteration scheme, except for Arabic names in Persian historical context. For such names, I use the Persian pronunciation: Mohammad and Hosseyn instead of Muhammad and Hussain.

Introduction

What most scholarly works on Safavid Iran (906/1501-1135/1736) have in common is their emphasis on the Safavid center and its ruling elite as the main subject of inquiry. Recently, however, scholars of Safavid history like Akihiko Yamaguchi,[1] Yukako Goto,[2] and Rula Abisaab[3] have begun exploring aspects of social and political history in Astarabad, Kurdistan, and the northern provinces of Mazandaran and Gilan, respectively. The works of these scholars have begun to shift our attention from the imperial "center" towards the province or "periphery." It is within the framework of this new historiographical trend that I investigate questions of power, local vs. imperial political authority, socio-economic relations, and religious conversion in Gilan. This study examines how different aspects of political, economic and religious life of Gilan were shaped by the Gilani elite's relationship to both the greater regional powers and their local rivals, before and after the rise to power of the Safavids. This study explores the historically contingent interrelations between the local and imperial as they shaped and transformed much of the political, economic, and religious life of Gilan from the 8th/14th to the early 11th/17th century.

[1] For example Akihiko Yamaguchi, "The Safavid Legacy as Viewed from the Periphery: The Formation of Iran and the Political Integration of a Kurdish Emirate," in *Mapping Safavid Iran: Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa*, ed. Nobuaki Kondo (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2015). Yamaguchi traces the historical evolution of the relationship between the Kurdish emirate and the Iranian dynasties between the sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth century.

[2] Yukako Goto provides a comprehensive study on the south Caspian provinces of Safavid Iran. Her work is a survey of the political history of Mazandaran and Gilan. However, Goto does not delve specifically into the political relations of Gilan's local provincial leaders with the court or into questions of social and religious transformations that I explore in this dissertation. Yukako Goto, *Die Südkaspischen Provinzen des Iran unter den Safawiden im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert: Eine Analyse der sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2011).

[3] See Rula Abisaab's recent work on the peasant uprisings in Astarabad, "Peasant Uprisings in Astarabad: The Siyāh Pūshān (wearers of black), the Sayyids, and the Safavid State," *Iranian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2016): 471-92.

Although it may at first glance seem more appropriate to begin the study with the rise to power of the Safavids, in fact including the historical background of Gilan for more than a century before the Safavids was unavoidable, as it is highly relevant to the study at hand. The dynamic of local relations of power before the Safavids, the rise to power of the Kiyayis[4] in Eastern Gilan (r. 770/1370-1000/1592) with their claim to sayyid status, their socio-political relationship with their Western Gilani neighbors and especially with the Eshaqiyyeh dynasty (r. approximately 7th/14th to 11th/16th century), and their relationship to other major external and local powers, are all important aspects of understanding the changes and continuities in the historical trajectory of Gilan and, by extension, of the region at large.

The study of pre-modern Gilan, however, is faced with a couple of major challenges that require further explanation and clarification. The first challenge is the conceptual difficulty involved in categorizing Gilan as a "periphery" and/or "province" of Iran. On the one hand, we need to understand the geographical demarcation of what constituted Gilan in the pre-modern era and before the borders of the province were drawn by the modern nation-state of Iran. This will be explored mostly in Chapter One. On the other hand, we also need to investigate Gilan's cultural, political, religious, and linguistic identity in relation to the rest of Iran. I will briefly delineate some of the concerns related to this challenge below.

The second major challenge is that of situating the material relevant to the study of Gilan. In general, the historians of pre-modern Iran and especially of the Safavid empire are faced with a scarcity of relevant archival sources. The court records that allow the Ottomanist to construct a rich social and economic history of the Ottoman empire are almost non-existent for the student of Safavid history. Such limitations at times determine the direction that historical studies take.

[4] The Kiyayis are also at times referred to as Malatis.

Be that as it may, a tradition of pre-modern historiography in Gilan has left us with a handful of valuable sources that serve to broaden our understanding of Gilan's history and culture. Aside from the local chronicles, other available sources for this study fall within the genres of Safavid historiography and European travelogues. While all of these sources can provide valuable information and insight, it is important to understand the limitations presented by them in reflecting actual events. These narratives were mostly produced by the male elite, and were at times the result of the patronage of certain political authorities, thus reflecting their political loyalties and exploring issues of importance to them. This leaves us with the important task of contextualizing these sources before evaluating the events they narrate.

How to Situate Gilan?

One of the main challenges I faced in materializing this study was the conceptualization of Gilan as a historical and geographical place in relation to its modern-day category as a province (*ostan*) of Iran, a nation-state.

In assessing the relationship between center and periphery in the pre-modern era in general, Abbas Amanat contends,

> Even when the structural deficiencies in the Persian model of government were to be overcome by the ruler or his ministers, there were marginal forces outside the state's immediate reach. Most prevalent, perhaps, were the tribal landlords – the khans – on the periphery of the kingdom who, taking advantage of the difficult Iranian terrain, resisted full control of the central authority. The expediency of coming to terms with peripheral powers… was generally acknowledged by the Persian central government, which, instead of costly and often ineffective methods of direct rule, resorted to granting khans of the periphery a semiautonomous status.[5]

This perspective, as commonly acknowledged and as widely held as it may be, only takes into consideration the view from the "center" as opposed to the view from the "periphery." As we

[5] Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 8-9.

shall see, the tradition of local dynastic rule in Gilan, especially during the period under study, makes the picture of center vs. periphery more complicated. While for the most part Gilan's local rulers never managed to control territories as large as what we would deem the "central" governments, nevertheless they continuously tested and contested those boundaries between what is deemed as center vs. periphery. There was definitely no historical continuity as such that could comfortably locate Gilan as a "province" or "periphery" of an uninterrupted political entity named "Iran" or *Iranzamin*. Gilan indeed followed its own particular historical trajectory. While at times Gilan was nothing short of a vassalage to the greater regional powers, there were also times that Gilan retained its autonomy, even in the face of greater powers. Therefore, our understanding of Gilan as a northern province of Iran, while it corresponds to its modern-day locus, does not necessarily fit neatly with its pre-modern reality. Gilan's distinctive local heritage is also evident in the works of its local historiography, where we can discern a particular attention to its tradition of local rule, culture, and societal norms. A quick overview of this historiographical tradition and its significance is provided below.

During the Sassanid era, Gilan was one of the semi-independent confederated polities constituting the empire. After the disintegration of the Sassanid empire, the administrative division of *ostan*s or *eyalat* that were in place became irrelevant as the region underwent frequent transformations. Gilan at that time became an independent region and was controlled by different local ruling dynasties.[6] More importantly, Gilan itself did not remain a homogenous region, and as we shall see its different parts witnessed divergent religious and political developments.

[6] Ebrahim Eslah 'Arabani, "Gilan Dar Taqsimat-e Keshvari," in *Ketab-e Gilan*, vol. 1, ed. Ebrahim Eslah 'Arabani (Tehran: Goruh-e Pazhuheshgaran-e Iran, 1374/1995), 34-35.

Therefore, one question that weighs on the mind of a student of Gilan is how the local vs. regional vs. imperial understandings of identity shaped the attitudes of those who lived in geographical areas we now know as Gilan. On the one hand, Gilan belonged to what Marshall Hodgson referred to as the "Persianate" world. According to Hodgson,

> The rise of Persian had more than purely literary consequences: it served to carry a new overall cultural orientation within Islamdom. ... Persian became, in an increasingly large part of Islamdom, the language of polite culture; it even invaded the realm of scholarship with increasing effect. … Most of the more local languages of high culture that later emerged among Muslims… depended upon Persian wholly or in part for their prime literary inspiration. We may call all these cultural traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration, 'Persianate' by extension.[7]

The Gilani rulers under study corresponded in Persian and conducted their affairs within the Persianate framework of administration, yet their own local flavoring and traditions remain evident in their particular tax systems, religious affiliations, and political projects. In general, loyalty to greater regional and imperial powers always remained precarious among the Gilanis.

Gilani identity, the Gilaki "dialect" or "language,"[8] particular food, music, clothes, and local traditions remain strong and distinctive from the rest of Iran even today. In popular and literary perceptions of identity, the Gilanis remain distinct from their Iranian counterparts on the other side of the Alborz mountains, as Christian Bromberger has clearly shown. Popular jokes and literature are filled with cultural stereotypes and representations of the Rashti or Gilani as the "other."[9] More relevant to this study, however, is the particular historical image of Gilan that has remained in the popular memory of both the local Gilani scholar and the Iranian nationalist. In historical imagery, Gilan became known as a land of refuge and dissidence, but also as a symbol

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[7] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2, *The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 293.
[8] After all, isn't the difference between a "dialect" and a "language" political? As the famous quote attributed to Max Weinreich states, "Language is a dialect with an army and navy." See the Wikipedia page on this adage, accessed July 30, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_language_is_a_dialect_with_an_army_and_navy
[9] *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. "Gilan xv. Popular and Literary Perceptions of Identity," by Christian Bromberger, accessed July 23, 2018. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gilan-xv-identity

of Iranism. Many historical events, such as the Gilanis' resistance to Arab invaders, the rebellion of Mazyar, the flourishing of the Zaydi and 'Alid rulers, the Eshaqiyyeh claim over Iranian ascendency (Ashkanid), or the Kiyayis' claim to sayyid status and the propagation of Zaydism, all enhanced the image of Gilan as a land of refuge and insubordination, "cradles of national Islam," as well as bearers of Iranism. Gilanis became the "symbol of the national cause and long-run continuity," at least to the historiographers and scholars of the mid-twentieth century.[10] However, as Christian Bromberger contends, "although intellectuals and historians agree on the image of Gilan as a hotbed of insubordination and as a 'standard-bearer for Iranism,' the facts they describe point to opposing perceptions of 'Iranity.'"[11] The question that needs to be answered is, can we really see Gilan as part of Iranian continuity, in spite of how often she had remained on its periphery or fully outside of it? The issue of how and why Gilan received these elaborations of a multifaceted Iranity, however, would have to await a different study.

In sum, competing identities and loyalties, social and political movements, had always existed in Gilan historically, and Gilan should not be viewed as a singular homogenized entity, nor should it be labeled as consistently a "province" of Iran. As this study will clearly show, a multitude of local and greater regional interests influenced the socio-political and religious movements in Gilan in the period under study.

A Note on Historiography

This work relies heavily, albeit not exclusively,[12] on the historical accounts of Persian chronicles in general, and local Gilani chronicles in particular. While it is not within the scope of

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Other primary sources used in this study include letters, *farman*s, documents relating to land purchases and vaqfs, and European travelogues.

this study to provide a comprehensive overview of Persian historiography, or even of Gilani historiography, it is necessary to point out some of the main themes and aspects of these chronicles as they pertain to the study at hand.[13] The main purpose of this overview is to juxtapose the differences between the local chronicles and the imperial chronicles (specifically the Safavid chronicles), delineate their audiences, and emphasize their respective views as they recount the narratives they cover.

Fortunately, "one of the more long-lived traditions of local historiography was carried on in the Caspian provinces."[14] This was, however, not a coincidence, as it reflects a concerted effort on the part of the local rulers who commissioned these works and those who composed them. The outward projection of an image that underscored the importance of the local ruling establishment within their districts was an important component of these historiographical works. These volumes usually "cover the characteristics, special merits (*fazâ'el*) and foundation legends of the districts concerned, together with dynastic history and contemporary affairs."[15] While the focal point of these local historical accounts is the local dynasties, as well as events surrounding their localities, these chroniclers clearly demonstrate that they were aware of broader regional events and transformations.[16] These works are valuable in that they not only fill a gap in our knowledge of their respective localities by including information not otherwise found in universal or dynastic histories of either the Aq Qoyunlu or Safavid imperial court, but they also offer divergent perspectives or counter-narratives on events recounted in these latter sources. Local historical accounts, moreover, offer information on particular local traditions, including

[13] For a comprehensive study of the historiography of Gilan, see 'Abbas Panahi, *Ketabshenasi-ye, Towsifi, Tahlili-ye Gilan dar 'Asr-e Safavi* (Rasht: Farhang-e Illiya, 1390).
[14] Charles Melville, "The Mongol and Timurid Periods, 1250-1500," in *A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 10, *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 182.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.,184.

cultural, social, and religious practices that are unique to their respective districts and which otherwise have not received much attention from the imperial historiographers.

Local chroniclers performed this task for divergent reasons, or at times for a combination of reasons, i.e. "love for their *vatan* [homeland],"[17] being officially commissioned by the local rulers, or even a local crisis that might have triggered their intellectual curiosity and desire to provide an eyewitness account.[18] The most important aspect in the process of the creation of historiographical works is indeed the role of patronage. As Charles Melville states, "much medieval history writing is political in intention and, one way or another, glorifies or justifies the reigning dynasty or its representative, by whom the work may have been commissioned, or to whom it may be dedicated."[19] Hence, propaganda on behalf of the ruling elite was part and parcel of historical accounts. The propaganda aspect, however, is more complicated in the case of local historical accounts, as at times the local historical accounts did not reflect the local elite's interest *per se*, but perhaps that of the imperial center.[20] Two out of three of the main historical chronicles relied on in this study were commissioned by local Gilani rulers, while one does not reference any particular patron and, with ties to the Safavids, it appears the author's sympathies rested more with the Safavids than with his countrymen in Gilan. The following overview shall shed more light on the intricacies of local and imperial historical accounts.

The first source under consideration in this short overview is Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi's *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*. Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi was a descendent of Mir Qavam al-Din

[17] Panahi, *Ketabshenasi-ye, Towsifi, Tahlili-ye Gilan dar 'Asr-e Safavi,* 23.
[18] Fumani, for instance, contends that it was Gharib Shah's rebellion that prompted him to write his history. 'Abdolfattah Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan: Dar Vaqye' Sal-ha-ye 923-1038 Hejri-ye Qamari,* ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh (Tehran: Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran, 1349/1970), 5.
[19] Charles Melville, "The Caspian Provinces: A World Apart Three Local Histories of Mazandaran," *Iranian Studies* 33, no. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 2000): 49.
[20] For example, Melville's own evaluation of Ebn Esfandiyar's *Tarikh-e Tabarestan* reveals that most likely his work was not written for a specific patron, nor is it dedicated to any one person. 'Abdolfattah Fumani's *Tarikh-e Gilan* is a prime example of a local historical account written by a local with ties to the Safavids.

Mar‘ashi, the founder of the Mar‘ashi dynasty of Mazandaran (r. 760/1359-990/1583). Sayyed Zahir al-Din was born in 815/1413 in Amol, a city in Mazandaran. His father had fought with his own brothers and nephews over the governorship of Mazandaran,[21] was eventually defeated at the hands of his family members, and along with his family took refuge with the Kiyayis in Gilan. Mir Zahir al-Din ultimately began working for the Kiyayi rulers in different capacities. Events described in Chapter One detail some of his involvement and important tasks he partook in at the behest of the Kiyayi rulers. Here it suffices to state that *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan* was commissioned by the Kiyayi rulers Soltan Mohammad Kiyayi (r. 851/1447-883/1478) and his son and heir to the throne, Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi (r. 883-909). According to Mar‘ashi, Soltan Mohammad Kiyayi and his son Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi had already gathered much of the historical material relevant to the history of Gilan before the rise of the Kiyayis and had asked Zahir al-Din Mar‘ashi to compose the work in a historiographical fashion.[22]

Mir Zahir al-Din began writing this book in 880/1476 and continued it until 892/1488. The book was written during the height of Kiyayi rule in Gilan, and is in fact the first of the series of local historical accounts of the southern Caspian littoral to deal directly with the events in Gilan (before this, however, there are works that cover the history of Mazandaran, Gilan’s neighbor).[23] Mir Zahir al-Din is also the author of a book on the history of Mazandaran named *Tarikh-e Tabarestan, Ruyan va Mazandaran*.[24] This book is dedicated to Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi, and the account focuses mostly on Eastern Gilan (Biyeh Pish), only dealing with Mazandaran or

[21] For the details of the quarrels and skirmishes between the Mar‘ashi brothers, see Zahir al-Din Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Tabarestan va Ruyan va Mazandaran*, ed. Mohammad Hosseyn Tasbihi (Tehran: Mo’assesseh-ye Matbu‘ati-ye Sharq, 1345/1966), 260-286.
[22] Zahir al-Din Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh (Tehran: Entesharat-e Ettela‘at, 1364/1985), 9.
[23] See Baha al-Din Mohammad b. Hasan, Ebn Esfandiyar, *Tarikh-e Tabarestan*, ed. ‘Abbas Eqbal (Tehran: Kalaleh Khavar, 1320/1941); Oliyaollah Amoli, *Tarikh-e Ruyan*, ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh (Tehran: Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran, 1348/1969).
[24] Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Tabarestan va Ruyan va Mazandaran.*

Western Gilan (Biyeh Pas) when necessary. The significance of the book lies in Mir Zahir al-Din's first-hand accounts of the events surrounding the Kiyayi rulers, especially during the time he was at their service. While these are first-hand accounts, we need to keep in mind that he was very close to the court of the Kiyayis and was personally involved in some of the events he chronicles.

Mir Zahir al-Din's work covers more than just events of political significance. In fact, the first chapter, which has unfortunately not survived, was supposedly dedicated to explaining the local expressions in the Gilaki language for the reader. This indicates that the author's and his patrons' expected audience went beyond Gilan's borders.[25] Throughout the book, there are references to local cultural and religious traditions, making it richer and more valuable as a source.

The second local history relevant to this study is 'Ali b. Shams al-Din Lahiji's *Tarikh-e Khani: Havades-e Chehelsaleh-ye Gilan az 880 ta 920 Hejri Qamari*. This book can be viewed as a continuation of Mar'ashi's *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*. Although there is some overlap in the years recorded, the two works each account for different events and the content is not the same. It may be that Lahiji intentionally avoided repetition in recounting the events of the years that overlapped with Mar'ashi's account, as he was clearly familiar with it.[26] Lahiji was also very close to the Kiyayi court, and although it is not clear in what capacity, he was at the service of the Kiyayi rulers. The work was commissioned by Khan Ahmad I (r. 911/1505-940/1534), the Kiyayi ruler contemporary to Shah Isma'il I. As Lahiji contends, not only did Khan Ahmad I commission the writing of this work, but he was also involved in editing and overseeing its completion. The significance of this book lies in its coverage of the events surrounding the rise

[25] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 10.
[26] 'Ali b. Shams al-Din Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani: Havades-e Chehelsaleh-ye Gilan az 880 ta 920 Hejri Qamari*, ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh (Tehran: Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran, 1352/1973), 5.

to power of the Safavids, its account surrounding Shah Isma'il I's stay in Gilan, and more importantly its coverage of Khan Ahmad I's first decade of rule.

The final local chronicle I shall touch upon here is 'Abdolfattah Fumani's *Tarikh-e Gilan*. This work is different from the first two for two main reasons. First, while the work covers the years 923-1038, its significance lies in its coverage of the events surrounding the conquest of Gilan by Shah 'Abbas I. Second, the author, 'Abdolfattah Fumani, was from Western Gilan, and hence he pays more attention to the plight of the Eshaqiyyeh rulers of Western Gilan or Biyeh Pas compared to the other two works, which focus mostly on the Kiyayis. The third significant difference is that although Fumani was a native of Gilan and recorded local Gilani events, he was working closely with the Safavid appointees in Gilan and had already been integrated into the Safavid administration. He claims to have been a farmer in his early days, leading a quiet life. Yet later, his own account points to him being involved with the Safavids' bureaucratic and financial concerns in Gilan. Fumani began working with Behzad Beyg, the Safavid-appointed vizier of Gilan, in 1021/1612, perhaps in some sort of financial or accounting capacity. Later he was appointed by Shah 'Abbas I to review the accounts of said Behzad Beyg after concerns were raised regarding his handling of the financial affairs of Gilan.[27]

Fumani's work is the final work related to the local history of Gilan in the Safavid period, and it signals Gilan's gradual integration into the empire as a province. While Fumani pays adequate attention to local politics and events that are significant for the history of Gilan, there is no doubt that his loyalties rested with the Safavids and not those rebellious Gilanis who wished to push them out, even if he at times sympathized with them.

Other significant works for this study fall within the genre of Safavid historiography. These sources, as Rudi Matthee states, "were commissioned by rulers and… all of them reflect

[27] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 204.

the universal rule of the Safavids and its idealized claims."[28] While this is true for most Safavid historiography, Sholeh Quinn and Charles Melville observe that by the time of Shah 'Abbas I, some historians began writing on their own initiative and without the patronage of the court. This was also the case with Fumani's local history, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* where we cannot locate a particular patron for his work, though we know he worked within the Safavid bureaucracy. Among Safavid historical accounts, Qazi Ahmad Qommi's *Kholasat al-Tavarikh* falls within this category as well.[29] Although Qazi Ahmad Qommi did not have a direct patron for his work, he was a servant of the court and at one point the appointed vizier of Qom. This was the case for most of the historians who in one way or another were attached to the Safavid court. It is important to note that many of these works were patronized by Safavid princes and not the shah himself.[30]

Charles Melville and Sholeh Quinn's overview of Safavid historiography provides us with an in-depth analysis of the form and content of these works, and also the way in which they evolved from one generation to another. By the time of Shah 'Abbas I, Safavid historiography was firmly established and flourishing compared to older generations. Another important categorization made in regards to the historiographical works during the Safavid era is the distinction between dynastic and universal histories. Most of the works that were produced before the reign of Shah 'Abbas I belong to the category of universal histories. These universal histories functioned as a tool for legitimizing the Safavid dynasty "as the latest in the succession of Islamic dynasties."[31] This, however, changes as the Safavids become more established during

[28] Rudi Matthee, "Historiography and Representation in Safavid and Afsharid Iran," *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 144.
[29] Sholeh Quinn and Charles Melville, "Safavid Historiography," in *A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 10, *Persian Historiography*, ed. Charles Melville (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 222.
[30] Ibid., 223.
[31] Ibid., 225.

the reign of Shah ‘Abbas I, and hence their historiography reflects the trend towards dynastic history, dedicated to the Safavid shahs alone.[32]

There is also a well-established modern scholarly tradition in Gilan devoted to “*Gilan shenasi*,” or the “study of Gilan,” that is still active today. Many periodicals and journals have been published in the past few decades with especial focus on different aspects of Gilan’s distinct history, geography, economy, culture, and literature. Noteworthy among these publications are *Gilehva*, *Gilan-e Ma*, and *Gilan Nameh*, to name a few. Of pioneers in the field, scholars such as Manuchehr Sotudeh, Fereydun Nowzad, and Mohammad Taqi Mir-‘Abolqasemi have contributed immensely to our knowledge of Gilan’s history, geography, and culture. Of course, L. H. Rabino’s contributions are well-known to Western and Iranian students of Iran alike.

In recent years, there has been a surge in scholarly activity related to Gilan, and especially Safavid Gilan. There are many works to account for here, but it suffices to say that in the Persian language, the articles published by ‘Abbas Panahi and Mohammad Shurmij, among others, are especially significant and are referenced throughout this work. Fereshteh ‘Abdollahi’s book, *Gilan dar Dowreh-ye Safaviyyeh*, is another major contribution to the field, focusing mostly on political and economic aspects of Gilan during the Safavid period.[33] In Western scholarship, as I noted earlier, Yukako Goto’s study of the Caspian littoral provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran stands out. Goto’s work, however, focuses mostly on political history and does not include a discussion of the religious aspects.

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[32] Ibid.

[33] ‘Abdollahi’s book is a large volume detailing much of Gilan’s history during the Safavid era. The book has many passages directly quoted from primary sources. While the collection of these quotes is very valuable, the book could benefit from reducing the percentage of direct quotes to make the author’s arguments more accessible to the reader. The volume focuses mainly on the political and economic history of Gilan during the Safavid era. Fereshteh ‘Abdollahi, *Jaygah va Naqsh-e Gilan dar Siyasat va Eqtesad-e ‘Asr-e Safavi* (Tehran: Ava-ye Kalar, 1391/2012).

Why Study Gilan?

Gilan, along with its neighbor Mazandaran, was a major center for silk production, and hence of critical importance for the economy of the region and beyond. It was, however, difficult to access from Iran's mainland, as it was hidden behind the northern Alborz mountains. This study is an exploration of Gilan's unique historical trajectory, especially in relation to the other major regional powers and to the Safavids.

Gilan's inaccessibility enhanced its independent tendencies in that region prior to and after the rise of the Safavids. Nevertheless, Gilan played an important role in the political developments of the surrounding polities, especially the Safavid empire. Gilan's distinct linguistic, socio-economic, and religious characteristics at times bound it to the northern Caucasus and northwestern Anatolia more than to the Iranian mainland. The Safavid shahs were well aware of the challenges of removing local dynasties marked by propertied and influential local dignitaries, including sayyids, with long historical roots. Yet the silk-producing province of Gilan was too important for the Safavid ruling elite to ignore. Despite the difficulties of reaching Gilan by land, the Safavids used a variety of approaches and tactics to bring the territory under their control. This took place in the year 1000/1592 after Shah 'Abbas I consolidated his power and accomplished his centralization plans. The process of integrating Gilan into the larger Safavid polity, however, was already underway at the time of Shah Isma'il I (r.1501-1524).

This work presents the general political, economic, and religious makeup of Gilan from the time of the Kiyayi dynasty's rise to power in the $8^{th}/14^{th}$ century to the time of Shah 'Abbas I, when he incorporated Gilan into his realm. Special attention is paid to the evolving relationship between Gilan's notables on the one hand, and the Safavid sovereigns and *Qizilbash* military

elite on the other. I will revisit the existing approaches to center/periphery relations, throwing new light on the local dynamics of Shah ‘Abbas I’s centralization policies and their implications for Gilan. Some of the major themes and questions include how the local notables and governors navigated the politics of the Safavid center, and how they along with the peasants recast their roles to the Safavid monarchs at a time when their province shifted from being quasi-independent to being a subjugated “periphery.”

Chapter One provides an account of the historical background to Gilan’s political and religious traditions prior to and during the rise to power of the Kiyayi family. The chapter explores the geopolitical divisions and religious makeup of the province while paying special attention to the Kiyayi dynasty and their relationship to the Isma‘ilis of Deylam in the post-Mongol era. One of the main topics explored in this chapter is the Kiyayis’ ascendency in the region and the conditions that allowed their success in maintaining their dynastic rule in the face of local and foreign adversaries. The Kiyayis’ relationship to their neighboring adversaries like the Eshaqiyyeh rulers, and also to greater adversaries such as the Aq Qoyunlu, Qara Qoyunlu, and Timurids, receives special attention.

Chapter Two focuses on the internal political dynamic of Gilan while contextualizing it within the broader regional transformations, such as the disintegration of the Qara Qoyunlu, the Aq Qoyunlu, and the remainder of Timurids. The rise to power of the Safavids and its transformative effects on Gilan will be assessed. An evaluation of the Kiyayi and Eshaqiyyeh rulers’ policies towards the rising Safavid empire constitute the mainstay of this chapter.

Chapter Three delves into the Safavid era, probing the methods of centralization utilized by the Safavids in general and in Gilan in particular. The policies, modes of negotiation, and diplomatic relations between the Safavids and the ruling elite of Gilan, as well as the local elite’s

responses to the growing power of the Safavids, are examined in this chapter. Some of the themes explored include the continuities and shifts in local vs. imperial understandings of legitimacy and political authority, the role of economic relations, land management, and trade in the gradual integration of Gilan, as well as the ways in which the Safavids gradually introduced and justified their presence and interference in Gilan.

Chapter Four deals with the reign of Shah ‘Abbas I and the conquest of Gilan by the Safavids, which effectively led to the demise of the local Gilani dynasties (both Kiyayi and Eshaqiyyeh) and to Gilan’s full integration into the Safavid polity. Was the eventual conquest of Gilan the result of failed negotiations between Shah ‘Abbas I and Gilan’s elite, or was it an inevitable outcome of almost a century of Safavid policies and efforts to that end? The first half of the chapter explores this main question, while the remainder offers a brief survey of the local responses and rebellions that were triggered as a result of the Safavid presence in Gilan. A classification and explanation of the make-up of these rebellions in terms of their aims, groups, and societal factions that took part in them, helps explain the successes and failures of these initiatives.

Finally, Chapter Five turns the gaze back on the religious configuration of Gilan, continuing the discussion on religion from Chapter One. After offering a survey of the religious makeup of Gilan, with special attention to Zaydism, the chapter explores the religious policies of the Safavids and the eventual conversion of the Zaydis in Gilan to Twelver Shi‘ism. The understanding of the process of the Gilanis’ (and especially the Eastern Gilanis’) conversion to Twelver Shi‘ism is part and parcel of understanding the process of the full integration of Gilan into the Safavid polity.

Chapter One

Historical Background: Gilan's Dynastic Rulers

Gilan: Geography and People

Gilan is a province located in northern Iran between the Caspian Sea and the Alborz Mountains. Gilan borders the province of Mazandaran in the east and the province of Ardebil[34] in the west. Bordering Gilan in the south are the provinces of Zanjan and Qazvin. *Encyclopedia Iranica* describes the geography of Gilan as follows:

> Gīlān includes the northwestern end of the Alborz chain and the western part of the Caspian lowlands of Persia. The mountainous belt is cut through by the deep transversal valley of the Safīdrūd between Manjīl and Emāmzāda Hāšem near Rašt. To the northwest, the □āleš highlands stretch a continuous watershed separating Gīlān and Azerbaijan. Except at their northern end, where the □ayrān pass at the top of the Āstārāčāy valley does not exceed 1600 m, they are over 2000 m high, with three spots over 3000 m, the Bāqrow Dā□ (3197 m), the □Ajam Dā□ (3009 m), and the Šāh Mo□allam or Māsūla Dā□ (3050 m). Their eastern and northeastern side is deeply carved by parallel streams flowing down towards the Caspian, resulting in a comb-shaped pattern. The western Alborz itself, to the east of the Safīdrūd valley, is wider and more intricate.[35]

Historical Gilan did not have fixed borders in the same way as it does now following the rise of the modern state. Its political borders fluctuated as the social and political conditions in the area changed. At its greatest extent, Gilan bordered Ardebil and Khalkhal in the west and Kalardasht in the east. In the north it reached the Caspian Sea and in the south it extended to

[34] The province of Ardebil was part of the province of Eastern Azarbaijan before 1993.
[35] *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gilan i. Geography and Ethnography," by Marcel Bazin, accessed July 22, 2018. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gilan-i-geography

Qazvin.[36]

According to Ahmad Kasravi, the area known today as Gilan was generally referred to as Deylam or Deylamestan during the Sassanid period. People who lived in this geographical area consisted of two groups, the Gil and the Deylam. Those referred to as the Gil were the inhabitants of the plains and shore areas of the Caspian Sea, with its main cities of Rasht and Lahijan. On the other hand, people inhabiting the mountainous areas (Rudbar, Alamut) were referred to as Deylam, and their land as Deylam, Deylaman or Deylamestan.[37] *Encyclopedia Iranica*'s entry on the Deylamites states that, "in antiquity the Deylamites (Gk. Dolomîtai and variants) were mountain tribes, usually identified by 10th-century Arab geographers with the inhabitants of Deylam, the highlands of Gīlān. A considerably broader distribution extending as far as southern Armenia and the Caucasus can be deduced, however."[38]

These distinctions among the inhabitants of Gilan were not absolute, and the geographical areas of Gilan and Deylam did not have fixed borders.[39] However, certain differences in occupation and geographical surroundings set them apart. Earlier sources use the term Deylamestan or Deylaman more frequently, and at times consider Gilan to be part of a greater area known as Deylam. Today, however, Deylam is only a small town within the larger province of Gilan.[40]

The two groups, Gil and Deylam, were considered closely related and were usually

[36] Ja'far Khomamizadeh, "Joghrafiya-ye Tarikhi" in *Ketab-e Gilan*, vol. 1, 480.
[37] Ahmad Kasravi, *Shahriyaran-e Gomnam* (Tabriz: Entesharat-e Aydin, 1388/2009), 1-2.
[38] *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Deylamites," by Felix Wolfgang and Wilfred Madelung, accessed June 22, 2018. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/deylamites
[39] Hasan Shari'ati Fukolayi, *Hokumat-e Shi'eh-ye Al-e Kiya dar Gilan* (Qom: Entesharat-e Shi'eh Shenasi, 1388/2009), 27.
[40] For a more in-depth discussion on the usage of the terms Gilan and Deylamestan and the historical geography of Gilan, see Khomamizadeh, "Joghrafiya-ye Tarikhi", 481-4.

mentioned together in historical accounts of the early Islamic centuries.[41] However, after the 8th/15th century we see the distinction between these two groups of people gradually fade away.[42] Especially after the rise of the Safavids in the 9th/16th century and the Safavids' centralization efforts, administratively, Deylaman became part of Gilan. These political developments gradually made the distinction between the two closely related people of Gil and Deylam obsolete.[43]

Gilan: Early Islamic History

The unknown author *of Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Mashriq ilā al-Maghrib*, which dates to the 4th/10th century, describes Gilan as follows:

> Gilan is a separate area between Deylaman, the mountains, Azarbaijan and the Caspian Sea. This is a plain situated in between sea and mountains, with much flowing water and a huge river, called Sefidrud, which passes in the middle of Gilan and flows into the Caspian Sea. Gilan has two parts: one part is between this river and the sea and is called "this side of the river," and the other part, which is between the river and the mountains, is called "that side of the river."[44]

Another major and continuous geographical and administrative distinction that is made in the sources is between Western Gilan and Eastern Gilan. Historically, this geographical area is divided into two parts: Biyeh Pas, or Western Gilan (west of the Sefidrud river) with Fuman (later relocated to Rasht) as its center, and Biyeh Pish, or Eastern Gilan with Lahijan as its

[41] *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. "Deylamites."
[42] Shari'ati Fukolayi, *Hokumat-e Shi'eh-ye*, 28.
[43] *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. "Deylamites."
[44] Anonymous, *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Mashriq ilā al-Maghrib*, ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh (Tehran: Ketabkhaneh-ye Tahuri, 1362/1983), 149. The translation from the Persian is my own. This book has also been published in English as Ḥudūd al-'Ālam: 'The Regions of The World': A Persian Geography, 372 A.H.-982 A.D., trans. V. Minorsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937).

center.[45] This natural barrier not only created a geographical boundary, but also contributed to the religious and political distinction between the two parts for centuries. Major historical towns in this northern province included Rasht, Lahijan, Fuman, Astara, Langerud, Rudsar, Shaft, and Masuleh.

The southern shores of the Caspian Sea, mainly Deylam, Gilan, and Tabarestan (roughly today's Gilan and Mazandaran), were among the most difficult territories for the Arab armies to conquer. The territories south of the Caspian Sea and adjacent to the Sefidrud, and on the northern hills of the Alborz Mountains, were mainly ruled by local amirs and notables after the dissolution of the Sassanid Empire and the beginning of the Arab conquest. The subjugation of these territories and their subsequent conversion to Islam proved more difficult for early Muslim conquerors compared to the rest of the Sassanid territories.[46] The Deylamites especially were notoriously viewed as "warlike and uncivilized," as well as having "held a reputation for independence, rebellion and heresy," due to their isolated geographical location.[47] A few attempts were made during the late Umayyad and early Abbasid eras to subjugate the northern territories, but most were unsuccessful.[48] It was not until 144/761 that the Arab army managed to take control of Tabarestan and Ruyan. However, Gilan still remained out of their reach and was ruled by local elites.[49] According to Wilferd Madelung, "Reports of Gīlān paying tribute to the

[45] Nasrollah Falsafi states that this division had taken place during the reign of Shah Isma'il I. Nasrollah Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah 'Abbas-e Avval*, vol. 3. (Tehran: Entesharat-e Daneshgah-e Tehran, 1353/1974), 131. This is doubtful since the distinction appears in historical chronicles as early as the fourth century and is repeated many times in various sources. For example, see Anonymous, *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam min al-Mashriq ilā al-Maghrib,* 149; and Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 20.
[46] Shari'ati Fukolayi, *Hokumat-e Shi'eh-ye,* 44-45.
[47] Christine D. Baker, "The Lost Origins of the Deylamites: The Construction of a New Ethnic Legacy for the Buyids," in *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Rebecca Futo Kennedy and Molly Jones-Lewis (New York: Routledge, 2016), 281. Hamdollah Mostowfi Qazvini, in his *Nozhat al-Qolub* also refers to the people of Deylam as "warlike" and "masculine." Hamdollah Mostowfi Qazvini, *Nozhat al-Qolub*, ed. Mohammad Dabir Siyaqi (Qazvin: Hadis-e Emrooz, 1381/2002), 65.
[48] M. S. Khan, "The Early History of Zaidi Shi'ism in Daylaman and Gilan," *Zeitshrafte Der Deutchen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 125 (1975): 302.
[49] *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* s.v. "Deylamites."

caliphal government in the early ‘Abbasid age most likely refer to western Gīlān; eastern Gīlān was effectively protected by the Deylamites occupying the mountains against Muslim penetration.”[50] During Umayyad and Abbasid times, many attempts were directed towards taking control of Deylam. However, the extent of the central caliph’s influence remained rather exiguous.

Early Religious Traditions and Political Resistance to the ‘Abbasid Caliphate (r. 132/750-656/1258)

We see the presence of Shi‘a ideology and religion in Gilan as early as the second half of the 2nd/8th century, during Abbasid rule. Gilan’s mountainous landscape and inaccessible terrain made it an attractive refuge for those who opposed the caliphate and wished to propagate Shi‘ism away from the pressure of the central government. The great grandson of Imam al-Hasan b. ‘Ali, Yahya b. ‘Abdollah, took refuge in Gilan during the reign of Harun al-Rashid in 176/792.[51] Yahya b. ‘Abdollah later called a truce with Harun al-Rashid and moved back to Baghdad, only to be executed by the caliph shortly thereafter.[52] It was during the lifetime of the Zaydi imam, Qasem b. Ebrahim Rassi (d. 246/860), that Zaydi Islam began to advance from Ruyan into Deylaman.[53] Those who followed Qasem’s branch of Zaydism came to be known as Qasemiyyeh.[54]

It is important to note that the major distinction between the Zaydis and the Twelvers is

[50] *Encyclopaedia Iranica* s.v. “Gilan iv. History in the Early Islamic Period,” by Wilferd Madelung, accessed June 23, 2018. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gilan-iv
[51] Khan, “The Early History of Zaidi Shi‘ism in Daylaman and Gilan,” 302; Shari‘ati Fukolayi, *Hokumat-e Shi‘eh-ye,* 47.
[52] Mohammad Taqi Mir ‘Abolqasemi, *Gilan az Aghaz ta Enqelab-e Mashrutiyyat* (Rasht: Entesharat-e Hedayat, 1369/1990), 65.
[53] *Encyclopedia Iranica,* s.v. “Deylamites.”
[54] In Chapter Five I discuss and elaborate more on the Zaydi tradition in northern Iran.

in their theory of the imamate. "The Zaydis did not recognize a hereditary line of Imams, nor did they attach any significance to the principle of designation, *nass*."[55] Yet, the imam had to belong to the descendants of the house of Fatimah, Prophet Muhammad's daughter. More importantly, in Zaydi Shi'ism an eligible contender for the imamate who wished to be recognized as such had to take up arms and rebel against the corrupt ruler of his time (an action referred to in Arabic as *khurūj bi al-sayf*), and except for the first three imams, Zaydi imams were not considered infallible (*ma'sum*).[56] The theory of *khurūj bi al-sayf* meant Zaydis rejected the theory of *taqiyyeh* (precautionary dissimulation)[57] which was accepted by the Twelvers.[58] It has been very difficult to establish a fixed list of Zaydi imams. While at times there were no Zaydi imams, at others there was more than one imam. The existence of two imams at the same time but in separate locations was acknowledged and even encouraged by some Zaydis in specific periods.[59] In Chapter Five I will explore the Zaydi tradition of northern Iran in more detail. Here it suffices to provide a general background of the inception of Zaydism in northern Iran.

The presence of Shi'ism in Eastern Gilan and in Deylam was once again renewed when Hasan b. Zayd, known as Da'i-ye Kabir, led a rebellion against the Tahirids. Hasan b. Zayd's uprising was a popular one, aided and supported by the local peasants and dissatisfied population.[60] The Deylamites were perhaps Hasan b. Zayd's "most effective, if not always

[55] Azim Nanji and Farhad Daftari, "What is Shi'ite Islam?" in *Voices of Islam*, vol. 1, ed. Vincent J. Cornell (Westport, Conn.: Preager Publishers, 2007), 240.
[56] Sayyed 'Ali Musavinezhad, "Ashnayi ba Zaydiyyeh," *Haft Aseman* 11 (1380/2001): 82; Azim Nanji and Farhad Daftari, "What is Shi'ite Islam?" 241.
[57] For a definition and explanation of *taqiyyeh*, see John L. Esposito, "Taqiyah," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[58] Sayyed Ehsan Sadeqiyan, "Baressi-ye Mafhum-e Emamat az Didgah-e Do Ferqeh-ye Zaydiyyeh va Imamiyyeh," *Kheradnameh* 7 (1390/2011): 85; Azim Nanji and Farhad Daftari, "What is Shi'ite Islam?" 240.
[59] Sadeqiyan, "Barresi-ye Mafhum-e Emamat," 86; Azim Nanji and Farhad Daftari, "What is Shi'ite Islam?" 240.
[60] Khan, "The Early History of Zaidi Shi'ism in Daylaman and Gilan," 304. Also see Sayyed 'Ali Musavinezhad, "Zaydiyyeh az Zohur ta Ta'sis-e Hokumat," *Tolu'* 13 & 14 (1384/2005): 255.

reliable, warrior supporters."[61] Hasan b. Zayd managed to establish his rule in Gilan and Tabarestan by 250/864. He later died in 270/884, and soon after his death his brother, Muhammad b. Zayd, succeeded him. Mohammad b. Zayd died in 287/900, and afterward another descendant of Imam Hosseyn, Hasan b. ʻAli, also known as Naser al-Haq or Naser al-Otrush, established his rule.[62]

Naser was a teacher and a learned scholar. However, there are differences in historical accounts with regard to his *mazhab* (religious sect), as some considered him an Imami while the majority point to him as a Zaydi imam whose presence and activities in Gilan were crucial in the spread of Zaydism among the population, some of whom had been introduced to Islam mainly through this brand of Shiʻism.[63] Consequently, these Zaydis were also referred to as Naseriyyeh, to mark the differences in the teachings of Naser al-Otrush from those of Qasem b. Ebrahim Rassi. Naser al-Otrush was considered an imam by his own followers; Qasemiyyeh Zaydis, however, did not consider him an imam. Naser's theological and juridical teachings differed from Qasem b. Ebrahim Rassi, who was also a significant figure in shaping Zaydism in both northern Iran and Yemen.[64] These two branches of Zaydism were often in religious and political competition with one another, and gradually the Qasemiyyeh became associated more with the Yemeni Zaydis, while the Naseriyyeh stronghold remained in northern Iran.[65]

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[61] *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Deylamites."
[62] Khan, "The Early History of Zaidi Shiʻism in Daylaman and Gilan," 304.
[63] Shariʻati Fukolayi, *Hokumat-e Shiʻeh-ye,* 54. Fukolayi contends that some later scholars, like Sheykh Bahaʻi, view Naser al-Otrush's efforts to prove the existence of the twelfth imam as proof of his adherence to Twelver Shiʻism. On the other hand, Sayyed ʻAli Musavinezhad contends that Naser al-Otrush was actually the first of the the above-mentioned Zaydi rulers to be considered an imam by the majority of the Zaydis. See Sayyed ʻAli Musavinezhad, "Zaydiyyeh az Zohur ta Ta'sis-e Hokumat," 256. Also see Sayyed Mohammad ʻEmadi Ha'eri, "Moqaddameh," in Abū Jaʻfar Muḥammad bin Ya'qūb Hausamī, *Kitāb-al- Ṣalāt, Kitab-al-Daʻāwī-va'l-Bayyināt, Kitāb-al-Siyar From Al-Ibāna,* along with Shamsuddīn Muhammad bin Salih Gīlānī, *Zawā'id-al-Ibāna*, ed. Sayyed Mohammad ʻEmadi Ha'eri (Tehran: Ketabkhaneh-ye Muzeh va Markaz-e Asnad-e Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami, 1389/2010), 9.
[64] ʻEmadi Ha'eri, "Moqaddameh," in *Al-Ibāna*, 9.
[65] Sayyed ʻAli Musavinezhad, "Zaydiyan-e Shomal-e Iran dar Qarn-e Hashtom-e Hejri bar Asas-e Noskheh-yi Tazeh Yab," *Haft Aseman* 38 (1387/2008): 115.

Two of the major dynasties that ruled over Gilan and Deylaman during this time were the Jostanians and the Mosaferians. In the beginning, the Jostanian rulers had Zaydi leanings and would ally themselves with the Zaydi leaders; however, later their allegiance shifted towards the Abbasids.[66] As the Mosaferians (also known as Kangarian, Langatian, and Salarian) came to power, Jostanian rule gradually came to an end. The Mosaferians had Isma'ili leanings. It is noteworthy that coins minted during their rule do not bear the name of the Abbasid caliph, and instead contain the name of the Isma'ili imam.[67]

The Zaydi presence was evident mainly in Eastern Gilan, but in Western Gilan Abu Ja□far Qasem b. Mohammad Tumi Tamimi, a Hanbali scholar from Amol, began proselytizing and managed to convert the population of Western Gilan to Sunni Islam, guided by the Hanbali legal school.[68] The religious schism between the Hanbali Sunnis of Western Gilan and the Zaydi Shi'a of Eastern Gilan lasted into the Safavid period. In the following chapters the political and cultural ramifications of this divide will be discussed in depth.

Among the important Islamic ruling dynasties of northern Iran, the Ziyarids (r. 318/931-483/1090) and the Buyids (r. 320/932-454/1062) are noteworthy. The rise to power of these dynasties signified the period in Iranian history that is referred to by Vladimir Minorsky as the "Iranian intermezzo," which he credited for the continuation of any "national" Iranian tradition.[69] This period is marked by the rise to power of ethnic Iranian dynasties like the Ziyarids and the Buyids in the period between the decline of the Abbasid caliphate and the rise to power of the Turkish dynasties of the following century. The Ziyarids ruled over parts of Gilan, Gorgan, and Tabarestan. Their rule coincided partly with that of the Samanids and the Buyids, but never

[66] Parvin Azar Torkamani, "Mazhab-e Deylamiyan dar Dowreh-ye Eslami," *Farhang* 56 (1384/2005): 5.
[67] Ibid., 7.
[68] *Encyclopaedia Iranica* s.v. "Gilan iv. History in the Early Islamic Period."
[69] Vladimir Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 110.

reached their level of dominance and importance.[70]

The Buyids, who set out from the northern territories of Deylam to establish their rule, managed to conquer much of the central and western Iranian lands. Moojan Momen contends that the Buyids, having come from the mostly Zaydi dominions, at first adhered to Zaydism; however, as they gained more prominence they tended to embrace Twelver Shi'ism, mainly for reasons of political legitimacy.[71] Buyid rule came to an end in 447/1055. The demise of the Iranian dynasties like the Buyids and the Samanids was paralleled with the gradual rise to power of the Turkish dynasties like the Ghaznavids, the Khwarazmids, and later the Great Saljuqs.

Another important religio-political development was that of the growth of Isma'ili *da'wa* in northern Iran. Isma'ili activities and *da'wa* had become entrenched in many parts of Iran by the end of the 3rd Islamic century.[72] While the Isma'ili activities in Deylam had preceded the Nizari-Musta'li schism of 487/1094, it was in the mountainous areas of Deylam that "Nizari Ismailis first appeared on the historical stage."[73] It was under the leadership of Hasan-e Sabbah (mid-440/1048-518/1124), a convert to Isma'ilism from Twelver Shi'ism, that the movement flourished.[74] At this time the Zaydis had a presence in northern Iran. However, their influence was to become somewhat negligible with the increase in activities of the Isma'ilis, until the rise to power of the Kiyayi house of Eastern Gilan, which managed to significantly curtail Isma'ili activities.

Before his arrival at the castle of Alamut in the region of Rudbar in Deylam, Hasan-e

[70] For more on the Ziyarids and other smaller dynasties that ruled in northern Iran, see W. Madelung, "The Minor Dynasties of Northern Iran," in *Cambridge History of Iran: From the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, vol. 4, ed. R.N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 198-203.
[71] Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 75-6.
[72] Farhad Daftary, *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Historical Introduction to an Islamic Community* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 125.
[73] Ibid., 124.
[74] Ibid., 127.

Sabbah had already begun proselytizing through his designated *da'i*s[75] and had managed to attract followers.[76] After the seizure of Alamut, the Isma'ilis continued their activities in Deylam and the rest of Iran, capturing and building castles and fortresses wherever they could. Taking over Alamut basically "signaled the initiation of the Persian Isma'ilis' revolt against the Saljuqs."[77] The Saljuqs (r. 429/1037-552/1194), who were Sunni Turks, were the target of Hasan-e Sabbah's oppositional activities for both religious and national/ethnic (their Turkish origin) reasons.[78]

The Isma'ilis' stronghold was Alamut and other similar fortresses and castles in the surrounding areas. The Zaydis of Gilan were not welcoming of the Isma'ilis' growth and influence. They viewed the Isma'ilis as their religio-political competition and made them the target of their hostility both directly and indirectly. A Zaydi leader named Abu Hashem al-'Alavi, for instance, would send out letters to rulers in the surrounding areas warning them of the growth of the Isma'ilis and encouraging them into hostility and confrontation with their followers and leaders.[79] It was in the year 526/1131 that Bozorg Omid, Hasan-e Sabbah's successor, after failing to settle his dispute peacefully with Abu Hashem al-'Alavi, sent his army to Gilan to capture him. Abu Hashem al-'Alavi was arrested and taken to Alamut, where he reportedly engaged in a theological debate with the Isma'ilis. He was defeated in that debate and accepted that his view of Isma'ilis as heretics was ill-informed. Eventually he met his

[75] The word *da'i* means "summoner" and was used by Muslim groups such as heterodox Shi'a, the Abbasids, the Zaydis, and especially the Isma'ilis to refer to those who carried out their religio-political missions and propaganda. The usage of this term was especially common among the Fatimids as their regional *da'i*s were instrumental in winning converts and spreading the Isma'ili message. The Isma'ili *da'i*s were also responsible for the religious education of new converts. For more on Ismai'li *da'wa*, *da'i*s, and the hierarchical structure associated with the role, see ibid., 70-76.
[76] Ibid., 129.
[77] Ibid., 130.
[78] Ibid., 131.
[79] Mohammd Mehdi Shoja' Shafi'i, *Tarikh-e Hezar Saleh-ye Eslam dar Navahi-ye Shomal-e Iran: (Ostan-ha-ye Golestan, Mazandaran, Gilan va Manateq-e Ruyan, Alamut, Taleqan va…) Az Qarn-e Dovvom ta Qarn-e Davazdahom-e Hejri* (Tehran: Nashr-e Eshareh,1377/1998), 195.

punishment, was executed, and his body was cremated.[80]

The Isma'ili presence in Deylam and other parts of Iran received a severe blow under the Mongol invasion. By 654/1256, Hulagu Khan's military attack, which entailed a large-scale massacre of the Isma'ilis and the destruction of their fortresses, considerably weakened the Isma'ili presence in the southern Caspian littoral.[81] Hulagu Khan's military success culminated in the establishment of the Ilkhanid dynasty. While Hulagu Khan managed to take over Alamut and restricted the Isma'ilis' influence in the northern mountainous areas of Alamut and Rudbar, Gilan for the most part remained independent and continued to be ruled by the local power holders.[82] It was not until under Oljayto in 706/1307 that the Mongols emerged narrowly victorious over Gilan. However, they suffered heavy losses and their efforts were not as successful as they had hoped.[83] By 735/1335, with the death of Oljayto's successor Abu Sa'id, the little control the Ilkhanids had over Gilan faded away and the lack of proper central rule in the region created a situation "that would have allowed any remaining Ismailis in the area a respite from the ravages of the previous decades."[84] Gradually, the Isma'ilis managed to reconsolidate their power, and the Kushayji family, led by Kiya Sayf al-Din, brought Deylam under their rule by 770/1368.[85] The rise to power of the Kushayjis, who were of Isma'ili leanings, was paralleled with the rise to power of two other sayyid families: the Kiyayis of Gilan, and the Mar'ashis of Mazandaran, both of whom were hostile towards the Isma'ilis and their

[80] Ibid., 195-196.
[81] For an account of the Isma'ili massacre during the Mongol invasion, see Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols: Nizārī Quhistānī and the Continuity of Ismaili Tradition in Persia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 44-53. For a corrective to the narrative that the fall of Alamut marks the end of Isma'ili influence in northern Iran, see Shafique N. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, a Search for Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 29-37.
[82] Hasan Haj Sayyed Javadi, "Gilan az Panjhezar Sal Pish ta Emruz," in *Ketab-e Gilan,* vol. 2, ed. Eslah 'Arabani, 65; Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 33.
[83] *Encyclopedia Iranica,* s.v., "Il-Khanids I. Dynastic History," by Reuven Amitai, accessed June 23, 2018. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/il-khanids-i-dynastic-history
[84] Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages,* 33.
[85] Ibid., 34.

activities in the region and legitimized their hostility towards the Isma'ilis by branding them as heretics.[86]

The Ilkhanids never managed to fully incorporate Gilan into their empire. When the last of the Ilkhanid rulers, Abu Sa'id, died unexpectedly in 736/1335, he had no sons to succeed him.[87] As Hafez Abru states, "the kingdom without a sultan became like a body without a soul and a flock without a shepherd."[88] Consequently, the discord and quarrels among the senior Mongol ruling elite led to the disintegration of the Ilkhanid kingdom.[89] The fragmentation of the Ilkhanid kingdom created a space for the emergence of local ruling dynasties like the Mar'ashi and Kiyayi sayyids in the South Caspian region.

The rise to power of the families of sayyid origin was also related to the more general trend of the increase in Shi'a activities in Iran. The Mongol invasion, the execution of the last Abbasid caliph in 656/1258, and eventually the embrace of the Shi'a element within Ilkhanid court circles, were all contributing factors to the rise to prominence of these sayyid families.[90] This period witnessed the growing production of Twelver Shi'a religious commentaries and texts by jurists and scholars such as Naser al-Din Tusi and 'Allameh al-Helli.[91] While these individuals represented the learned and educated elites of the Twelver Shi'a community, the Shi'a dynasties of northern Iran represented its populist and political manifestations. However, these developments were not solely religious in nature, and in fact the 'Alid movements in Gilan

[86] Goto, *Die Südkaspischen Provinzen*, 95.
[87] *Encyclopedia Iranica,* s.v., "Il-Khanids I. Dynastic History"; Patrick Wing, "The Decline of the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk Sultanate's Eastern Frontier," *Mamluk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 81.
[88] Cited in Patrick Wing, "The Decline of the Ilkhanate and the Mamluk Sultanate's Eastern Frontier," 81.
[89] *Encyclopedia Iranica,* s.v., "Il-Khanids I. Dynastic History."
[90] John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 4. See also Michel M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids: Šī'ism, Ṣūfism, and the Ġulāt* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1972), 38.
[91] For a discussion on these scholars and their work during this time period, see Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids,* 24-34.

and Mazandaran were not disassociated from that of the Sarbedars of Khorasan, which was a popular peasant uprising with the support of landowners as well as urban artisans.[92] These features complicate the religious and the socio-political landscape of northern Iran.

Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi names three sayyid families that came to power in Gilan, Mazandaran, and Hezar Jarib (eastern Mazandaran) in a span of ten years, namely the Mar'ashis of Mazandaran, the Kiyayis of Gilan, and the 'Emadis (with Mir 'Emad al-Din as their first ruler) of Hezar Jarib. These three families were descendants from separate family branches of sayyid lineage with two things in common: their reliance on their lineage as sayyids, and their rebellious and populist nature, which was inspired by the Sarbedari movement of Khorasan. The sayyids of Hezar Jarib and the Mar'ashis of Mazandaran both had Sufi leanings and were Twelver Shi'a, while the sayyids of Gilan were Zaydis.[93]

The first of these sayyid families to establish their rule in northern Iran was the lesser-known family of Mir 'Emad al-Din of Hezar Jarib. It is not exactly clear when Mir 'Emad al-Din managed to establish his position as ruler; however, based on Hafez Abru's account, he began his uprising against the Mazandarani ruler in 741/1340.[94]

The man who established Twelver Shi'a rule in the center of Mazandaran was no other than Mir Qavam al-Din Mar'ashi, also known as Mir-e Bozorg, the great ancestor of Mir Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi, author of *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*. According to Mir Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi's account, Mir Qavam al-Din Mar'ashi was from Amol. He was a pious and learned sayyid and a devotee of Sayyed 'Ezz al-Din Soghandi, a student of Sheykh Hasan-e Juri

[92] I. P. Petroshevsky, "The Socio-Economic Condition of Iran Under the Īl-Khāns," in *The Cambridge History of Iran,* vol. 5, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 483-484.
[93] Sayyed Mohammad 'Emadi Ha'eri, "Sadat-e Hezar Jarib: Selseleh-ye Shi'i dar Sharq-e Mazandaran," *Zamimeh-ye Ayineh-ye Miras* 18 (1388/2010): 5-6.
[94] Cited in ibid., 9. 'Emadi Ha'eri also provides a detailed account of Hezar Jarib family rule.

(successor of Sheykh Khalifeh, leader of the Shi‘a Sarbedars of Khorasan), whom he had come in contact with during his travels in Khorasan.[95] Once Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi returned to Mazandaran, he managed to gather followers in his circles and eventually defeated Kiya Afrasiyab, his opposition. His movement was modeled on the Sarbedar movement in Khorasan and took advantage of the grievances of the disaffected population in Mazandaran, which already entertained Shi‘a sensibilities. Yet Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi’s real appeal lay in his independence from the local elite and his populist message.[96]

Although at first glance it might appear as though Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi was not interested in a political career *per se*, a more critical evaluation of his career will prove otherwise.[97] As Mostafa Majd has pointed out, Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi consciously acted to maximize his chances at gaining and maintaining power in Mazandaran. For instance, he initially accepted Kiya Afrasiyab’s patronage and endorsement, which resulted in him attracting more followers, even though he had the acumen to know Kiya Afrasiyab’s endorsement was not genuine.[98] Eventually, after Kiya Afrasiyab betrayed Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi and imprisoned him, Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi and his supporters entered into direct military conflict with him. The result was the death of Kiya Afrasiyab and his two sons at the hands of Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi’s army, leading to Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi’s assumption of power in Mazandaran. Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi allocated political office to his sons, and they

[95] Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Tabarestan va Ruyan va Mazandaran*, 171-172; Molla Sheykh ‘Ali Gilani, *Tarikh-e Mazandaran dar Sal-e 1044 Qamari*, ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh (Tehran: Entesharat-e Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran, 1352/1973), 54. For more on Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi’s time in Khorasan and his encounter with Soghandi, see Mostafa Majd, *Zohur va Soqut-e Mar‘ashiyan,* 2nd ed. (Bandar ‘Abbas: Daneshgah-e Azad-e Eslami, 1388/2009), 83-87.
[96] Majd, *Zohur va Soqut-e Mar‘ashiyan*, 88.
[97] Goto, for instance, asserts that the rise to power of the Mar‘ashi family was more of a coincidence and that the first ruler was more interested in religiosity than temporal power. Goto, *Die Südkaspischen Provinzen,* 87.
[98] Later on, Kiya Afrasiyab imprisoned Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi. For a more detailed discussion on Kiya Afrasiyab and Mir Qavam al-Din Mar‘ashi’s relationship, see Majd, *Zohur va Soqut-e Mar‘ashiyan,* 88-94.

took control over Sari and Amol by 763/1362.[99]

After establishing their own rule, the Mar'ashis of Mazandaran were instrumental in aiding and abetting the Kiyayis in their quest for power. Before the Kiyayis came to power, Gilan was divided among and ruled by different families which were eventually brought under Kiyayi rule.

The Rise of The Kiyayis

As the Kiyayis began their pursuit of power in Gilan, they chose the title Kiya. Kiya literally means "great and splendid ruler,"[100] and was routinely used as an honorary title equivalent to the title "shah." As mentioned earlier, before Sayyed 'Ali Kiya began his campaign to establish his rule in Lahijan and other parts of Biyeh Pish (Eastern Gilan), Gilan's towns and villages were ruled by numerous local families. These local rulers did not all share equal level of political importance, and some possessed more power and influence than others. Lahijan in Eastern Gilan and Fuman (later Rasht) in Western Gilan were the main loci of power, and sometimes ruling families of other less significant towns and regions were subordinated to Lahijan and Fuman. Gaskar in Western Gilan was ruled by semi-independent rulers who at times fought with the Eshaqiyyeh family of Fuman.[101] In the same manner, Shaft had rulers that were subordinated to the rulers of Fuman.[102] Before the advent of the Kiyayis, the Naservand family ruled over Rankuh and Lahijan, while the Eshaqiyyeh family's stronghold was in Fuman.[103] Rasht was another important site located in Western Gilan, separated from Fuman by the

[99] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Tabarestan va Ruyan va Mazandaran*, 180-186.
[100] *Loghatnameh Dehkhoda.*
[101] H.L. Rabino, *Farmanravayan-e Gilan*, trans. M.P Jektaji and Reza Madani (Rasht: Nashr-e Gilakan, 1364/1985), 56.
[102] Ibid., 64.
[103] Shari'ati Fukolayi, *Hokumat-e Shi'eh-ye*, 67.

Pasikhan river, just as Western and Eastern Gilan were demarcated by the Sefidrud river. The Tajaspi (Tajasbi) family was ruling in Rasht at the time, the Anuzvand family was in control of Kuhdam, while the Isma'ilvand family ruled in Kuchesfehan.[104] In Western Gilan the most important town with the most powerful rulers was Fuman, while in Eastern Gilan it was Lahijan that held the most sway. Lashteh Nesha and Kuchesfehan were two important towns that became sources of contention between the Eastern and Western rulers. At times their quest for control over these two towns manifested itself in religious terms. The existence of multiple loci of power also meant that the process of bringing Gilan under Kiyayi rule was complex and multilateral. The story of the Kiyayi conquest of Gilan is not limited to the military expeditions, but also includes the processes of religious legitimation, formation of political alliances, incorporation of the religious classes in the process of decision-making, and incorporation of the local population in this socio-political transition.

The first Kiyayi leader who set out to oust Gilan's rulers was Sayyed Amir Kiya. However, he never managed to establish his rule and died in 763/1362. It was then in 765/1364 that his eldest son, Sayyed 'Ali Kiya, relocated to Mazandaran and set out to take over in Tonekabon. Sayyed 'Ali Kiya drew his legitimacy mainly from his acclaimed status as a Zaydi imam. As noted earlier, designation (*nass*) did not play a significant role in deciding the imam's identity. Moreover, the imamate was not located in a hereditary line or marked by impeccability or freedom from error.[105] The imam was expected to rise against an unjust ruler and change political reality by force. As such, two or more contenders to the imamate could be found during

[104] Ibid. For the Tajaspi family's rule in Rasht see Rabino, *Farmanravayan-e Gilan*, 66-68. The Tajaspi family of Rasht was completely absorbed by the Eshaqiyyeh of Fuman by 880/1475-6. For the Anuzvand family and Kuhdam's trajectory, also see Rabino, 68-71. Sayyed 'Ali Kiya managed to conquer Kuhdam in 766/1364-5, but later the family managed to regain control of Kuhdam for some time before losing it again to the Eshaqiyyeh and Kiyayi families.
[105] Nanji and Daftari, "What is Shi'ite Islam?" 240.

the same period. For instance, Naser al-Otrush had encouraged Zaydis to assist either him or Imam Yahya based on their ability and desire.[106] There were also periods of time during which there were no Zaydi imams present.[107]

As for the status of the Kiyayi ruler as an imam, his response to an inquiry by the ruler of Rankuh and Sayyed ʻAli Kiya's rival, Amireh Nopasha, is illuminating. Amireh Nopasha questioned the Kiyayi sayyid's true motives and demanded that he demonstrate miracles worthy of an imam. As quoted in Marʻashi's *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, Sayyed ʻAli Kiya responded,

> What more of a miracle are you looking for than what I have already demonstrated. I left the *madrasa* (school) in Malat, with nothing but the clothes on my back and a cane in my hand, and now I have already killed your father, taken over Tonekabon, and wherever I go there is victory and success for me. Now, I have made you the subject of my wrath.[108]

Based on the above passage, Tahereh ʻAzimzadeh has reached the conclusion that the Kiyayis themselves also laid claim to the imamate, while Qorbanʻali Kenarrudi and Soheyla Naʻimi contend that the passage is not enough to prove that they did.[109] Regardless of whether they themselves or their followers laid claim to the imamate, the early Kiyayis definitely took advantage of their status as religious leaders.[110] Historically the Zaydis had "often backed ʻAlid pretenders and rulers as summoners (*daʻi*s) or imams with restricted status, in distinction from full Imams (*sabiqun*)."[111] Earlier Kiyayi rulers definitely occupied such a space, but later their

[106] Mohammad ʻEmadi Ha'eri, "Moqaddameh," in Abolfazl b. Shahrdavir Deylami, *Tafsir-e Ketabollah*, ed. Mohammad ʻEmadi Ha'eri (Tehran: Ketabkhaneh-ye Muzeh va Markaz-e Asnad-e Majles-e Shora-ye Eslami, 1388/2009), 12 fn.
[107] Nanji and Daftari, "What is Shiʻite Islam?" 240.
[108] Marʻashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 36.
[109] Tahereh ʻAzimzadeh, "Sadat-e Kiya va Tashayyoʻ-e Emami," *Motaleʻat-e Eslami* 69 (Fall 1384/2005): 216; Qorbanʻali Kenarrudi and Soheyla Naʻimi, "'Elal-e Tadavom-e Hokumat-e Sadat-e Al-e Kiya dar Gilan," *Shiʻeh Shenasi* 34 (Summer 1390/2011): 165.
[110] The religious evolution of the Kiyayis is discussed in Chapter Five.
[111] Nanji and Daftari, "What is Shiʻite Islam?" 241.

claim over religious leadership gives way to a more temporal one.[112]

Earlier, Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya had set out to take over Tonekabon with the blessing of the Mazandaranis and Tonekabon’s Zaydi ruler, Sayyed Rekabzan Tonekaboni. Sayyed Rekabzan Tonekaboni was a descendent of Mo’ayyed Be’llah, one of the earliest Zaydi imams of northern Iran.[113] In a letter to Sayyed Rekabzan Tonekaboni, Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya petitioned him to allow them to relocate to Tonekabon, saying,

> What we share [with you] is our status as sayyids, as well as our agreement on the same mazhab [Zaydism], while the people of Mazandaran are Imamis, and are mostly poor and *darvish* [referring to their Sufi leanings], while our *ta’eban*[114] [penitents] have a different disposition. If you can find a place for our followers in your territory, we will relocate and be forever grateful.[115]

Sayyed Rekabzan Tonekaboni’s response was positive and he welcomed the Kiyayi leader and his entourage to relocate to Tonekabon. This political alliance, based on their mutual religious experience, was one of the major steps for the Kiyayis in the process of consolidating their power. This relocation was short-lived, however, and after an unsuccessful attempt to capture Rankuh, they were sent back to Mazandaran by Sayyed Rekabzan Tonekaboni, who could not uphold his position *vis-à-vis* the Naservand rulers of Rankuh and Lahijan. This short-lived relocation nevertheless planted the seeds of success for the Kiyayis.[116]

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[112] The process of conversion of the Kiyayi rulers to Twelver Shi‘ism is discussed in Chapter Five.
[113] Shoja‘ Shafi‘i, *Tarikh-e Hezar Saleh-ye Eslam dar Navahi-ye Shomal-e Iran*, 274.
[114] Shoja‘ Shafi‘i contends that *ta’eban*, meaning “penitents,” was the specific term the Zaydi followers of the Kiyayi contender used to refer to those who had accepted the call to Zaydism and had converted. Ibid., 274 fn. Wilferd Madelung, on the other hand, has reached the conclusion that the *ta’eban* were a Sufi order headed by the Kiyayi contender. I personally do not believe there is enough evidence to suggest that the term *ta’eban* referred to a Sufi group. As Madelung has also not found much information on this group beyond what is represented in Mar‘ashi’s *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, and Mar‘ashi’s account, aside from using the term to refer to allies of the Kiyayis, does not suggest they were Sufis. My impression is that *ta’eban* were simply the group of Zaydis that gathered around the Kiyayi contender and aided him through his rise to power. See Wilferd Madelung, “Zaydī Attitudes to Sufism,” in *Islamic History and Civilization*, vol. 29, *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, ed. Ulrich Haarmann and Wadad Kadi (Brill: Leiden, 1999), 127.
[115] Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 18.
[116] Ibid., 18-21.

After this initial defeat and return to Mazandaran, Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya was able to secure the support of the Mar‘ashis for his campaign in Gilan. This support was another important piece of the mosaic of movements, alliances, and political maneuvers that came to form the transition to power of the Kiyayis, who would remain the most powerful rulers of Gilan for the next couple of centuries. Building the foundation of their power went beyond simply launching military campaigns, and involved the integration of the local peasantry and regular folks into their support group. Commoners came in numbers to show their fealty and devotion, and the alliance of the religious classes was a crucial factor in their success. As Mar‘ashi states, “It was also not possible for the Kiyayis to achieve what they did without the cooperation of the class of religious dignitaries, the ulema, and the *foqaha*, with whom they consulted on matters of mutual interest.”[117]

Moreover, as the Kiyayis began establishing themselves as an important local ruling class in Gilan, the ties and alliances they forged through marriage were instrumental in reshaping local political relations to their favor. The role of women in politics and in institutions of sovereignty has been extensively discussed by scholars of pre-modern Islamic societies. Leslie Peirce has contributed immensely to the field by locating women as part and parcel of the political process in the Ottoman Empire.[118] Other scholars have explored the activities of women in different dynastic settings and within medieval society.[119] Farhat Hasan, in his study of Mughal India, also points to the important role women played “as makers of sovereignty,” for the household of a ruler was the main locus of politics and women were part of the networks of alliances that had to

[117] Ibid., 34.
[118] Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[119] See Gavin R.G. Hambly, ed., *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), and Maria Szuppe, “Status, Knowledge, and Politics: Women in Sixteenth-Century Safavid Iran,” in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Guity Nashat and Lois Beck (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

be maintained for amassing sovereignty.[120] A smaller local dynasty also functioned within similar socio-political frameworks to varying degrees.

An episode between the Kiyayis and the Naservand ruler Amireh Nopasha demonstrates the role political marriages played in the ever-evolving web of local political relations. To attract the support of Amireh Nopasha, the Kiyayis, in consultation with the ulema of Tonekabon, made the continuation of Amireh Nopasha's marriage contingent on his cooperation, acknowledgement of Kiyayi rule, and general conduct. The delegate sent to Amireh Nopasha informed him of the consequences of any transgression or deviation from the right path (no drinking, being just, following the Shari'a, and so forth), concluding that if he failed to comply with these conditions, his wife Tavus, who was a daughter of Amireh Sharaf al-Din of Rankuh, would be divorced from him with the corroboration of the local ulema. This move obviously informed the Naservand ruler of an already existent shift in alliance between his family and his wife's family. He could no longer enjoy the support and alliance of Tavus' family without bowing to the demands of the Kiyayis and becoming their subordinate. Shortly thereafter Amireh Nopasha, having felt threatened by this new arrangement, failed to follow the terms of his agreement, and at the instigation of other members of the local elite, set out to confront the Kiyayis in battle. However, his military campaign fell short and he arranged to leave Gilan with his wife. Based on Mar'ashi's account, as he approached the sea and was about to board a ship, his wife refused to follow him aboard and returned to Rankuh instead, indicating that her loyalty to her family of origin took precedence over her loyalty to her husband. Once in Rankuh, as the Kiyayis had pledged, she was divorced from Amireh Nopasha and married off to Sayyed Mehdi

[120] Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16.

Kiya, Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya’s brother.[121] This final move highlighted the transfer of power from the Naservand family to the Kiyayis. As Farhat Hasan has suitably pointed out in his study of Mughal India, “once a victorious ruler incorporated the women in the *seraglio* of the vanquished ruler into his harem, he annexed their political connections, their agnatic linkages, to his sovereignty. Sovereignty, after all, was a function of control over political alliances.”[122]

The practice of re-marrying off daughters and sisters to a new ally seems to have been a common practice at the time. In another political maneuver, Amireh Falak al-Din Rashti, after purposefully causing the death of his daughter’s husband at the hands of the husband’s brother, forged an alliance with said brother by marrying off his widowed daughter to him. By eliminating his first son-in-law and replacing him with his brother, Amireh Falak al-Din Rashti was able to take control over more territories.[123] In another case of diplomatic marriages, when the dispute between Sayyed Yahya Kiya and Sayyed Reza Kiya escalated, in order to ease the tension and smooth over the rocky relationship, Sayyed Reza Kiya married off his sister to Sayyed Yahya Kiya.[124]

After taking control of Rankuh, Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya took Lahijan and Lashteh Nesha. In Lahijan, he was welcomed by his followers and the local religious leaders, and he appears to have been recognized as their imam.[125] Sayyed Amir, ‘Ali Kiya’s father, was a learned scholar and teacher at a madrasa in Malat until he set out to establish his rule in Gilan. The town’s notables and religious leaders seemed to have reached a consensus: as Mar‘ashi noted, “all five

[121] Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 40.
[122] Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India,* 16.
[123] Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 98.
[124] Ibid., 118. There are other examples of political marriages in the later Safavid period as well. Those and their significance are discussed in the following chapter.
[125] Ibid., 41.

requirements for a Zaydi imam were present in him."[126] One of the implications of this development tied with the Zaydis' expectation that their imam, who must be a sayyid, descended from the house of Fatemeh al-Zahra, would take up arms (*khurūj bi al-sayf*) against oppressors. He would also be imbued with bravery (*shoja'at*), knowledge (*'elm*), and piety (*zohd*).[127] Religious authority, as such, became the primary source of the Kiyayis' legitimacy. Acquiring the status of imam signaled the formation of a spiritual-political authority recognized by Gilan's Zaydi population. This authority, in turn, helped secure for the Kiyayis stability and territorial access to areas with substantial Zaydi presence.

Similar to other ruling dynasties, which fabricated their lineage for reasons of political legitimacy, it is very likely that the Kiyayis' "sayyid" lineage was also forged to support their claim to religious and temporal rule.[128] Regardless of whether their lineage was fabricated or not, the Kiyayis were accepted by the Zaydi population of Gilan as legitimate religious leaders and hence enjoyed the political status that came along with it. More importantly, the Kiyayis enjoyed the full support of Sayyed Qavam al-Din Mar'ashi of Mazandaran, who allowed them to take refuge in his territory and supported them with his army to confront other local Gilani rulers. As was mentioned earlier, the Mar'ashis' movement was inspired by the Sarbedari movement of Khorasan. It is safe to assume that the Kiyayis also drew encouragement from the success of the Mar'ashis and their populist and religiously inspired movement in Mazandaran.

The Kiyayis' military and political activities encompassed, first, attempts to instigate revolts among the Zaydis against their Sunni governors in neighboring areas, and second,

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[126] Ibid.
[127] Shoja' Shafi'i, *Tarikh-e Hezar Saleh-ye Eslam dar Navahi-ye Shomal-e Iran*, 280.
[128] 'Abbas Panahi contends that the Kiyayis fabricated their sayyid lineage for political purposes. 'Abbas Panahi, "Tarikh Negari ya Tarikh Sazi," *Ketab-e Mah, Tarikh, va Joghrafya* 143 (March 1389/ 2010): 30. Shoja' Shafi'i also detects a discrepancy in their lineage as it appears in *Majales al-Mo'menin*, which places 11 generations in the span of 700 years. See Shoja' Shafi'i, *Tarikh-e Hezar Saleh-ye Eslam dar Navahi-ye Shomal-e Iran,* 273.

diplomatic and military pressure to convert the Isma'ilis and expand into some of their territories. Inevitably, some of their main military confrontations continued to be with their Sunni neighbors, the Eshaqiyyeh dynasty.

The Eshaqiyyeh (also referred to as Eshaqvand or Ishaqiyyeh) were one of the oldest ruling families in Gilan who remained in power until Shah 'Abbas I's conquest of Gilan in 1000/1592. It is believed that this family came to rule over parts of Western Gilan, especially Fuman, sometime in the 7th century. Their lineage is traced back either to the ancient Iranian dynasty of the Ashkanids, or to the Prophet Isaac (Eshaq/Ishaq).[129] The Eshaqiyyeh were followers of the Shafe'i *mazhab*.[130] The territory under their control included the towns of Masuleh, Fuman, and Tulam. Initially Rasht, another major town in Biyeh Pas (Western Gilan), was under the control of Amireh Mohammad Rashti.

After establishing their rule in Eastern Gilan, the Kiyayis began enticing the Zaydi population in the dominant Sunni regions of Western Gilan to rise against their rulers.[131] By creating, or perhaps by taking advantage of, domestic opposition to the Sunni rulers, they managed to take control over Lashteh Nesha. Lashteh Nesha was host to a mostly Zaydi population, yet it was situated in Western Gilan, a mainly Sunni area. Lashteh Nesha is relatively close to the Sefidrud river, the dividing line between Eastern and Western Gilan, and remained a disputed town between the rulers of Western and Eastern Gilan for a long time, just like

[129] Rabino, *Farmanravayan-e Gilan*, 141. For their lineage traced back to the prophet Isaac, see Eskandar Beyg Torkaman Monshi*, Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Entesharat-e Amir Kabir, 1382/2003), 110; Khurshah b. Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah: Tarikh-e Safaviyyeh az Aghaz ta Sal-e 972 Hejri-ye Qamari*, ed. Mohammad Reza Naseri-Ku'ichihaneda (Tehran: Anjoman-e Asar va Mafakher-e Farhangi, 1376/1997), 222. Also see Mohammad Taqi Mir-'Abolqasemi, *Gilan az Aghaz ta Enqelab-e Mashrutiyyat* (Tehran: Hedayat, 1366/1987), 9. For their lineage traced back to the ancient Iranian kings, see Mahmud b. Mas'ud Qotb al-Din Shirazi, *Dorrat al-Taj Leghorrat al-Dobbaj*, ed. Mohammad Mashkuh (Tehran: Hekmat,1369/1990), 96-97.

[130] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 128.

[131] Panahi, "Tarikh Negari ya Tarikh Sazi," 30.

Kuchesfehan. The Kiyayis managed to take control of Kuchesfehan and granted it to Naser Kiya, who had become Sayyed ʻAli Kiya's son-in-law.[132] Interestingly enough, Kuchesfehan also had a mostly Shafeʻi population.[133] The town had been destroyed during Oljayto's attack, but was later rebuilt by its ruler, Saʻluk of the Ismaʻilvand family.[134] Since then it had been well-known for its well-developed infrastructure and beauty, hence the name "*Kucheh Isfahan*," meaning "small Isfahan."[135] Shortly after capturing Kuchesfehan, the Kiyayis established their control over Kuhdam.[136] I shall return to discussing the Kiyayis' relationship with their Sunni neighbors in the early years of their rule in more detail after an overview of their military and diplomatic engagement with the Ismaʻilis of Deylam.

Eradicating the Competition: the Kiyayis and the Ismaʻilis of Deylam

After concluding his campaign in Eastern Gilan, Sayyed ʻAli Kiya turned his attention towards the Ismaʻilis of Deylam and the Hezar Aspi[137] family of Ashkevar.[138]After the disintegration of the Mongol Empire, the Ismaʻilis had recaptured some of their old fortresses and had re-established themselves in the region of Deylam. A striking contrast emerges in the way the Kiyayis conducted themselves *vis-à-vis* the Twelver Shiʻa sayyids of Mazandaran, or even the Sunnis of Western Gilan, as opposed to the Ismaʻilis. They showed respect towards the Marʻashis, and although at times the discussion of difference in their *mazhab* was brought up,

[132] Marʻashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 47.
[133] H.L. Rabino, *Velayat-e Dar al-Marz*, trans. Jaʻfar Khomamizadeh, 4th ed. (Rasht: Entesharat-e Taʻati, 1374/1995), 251.
[134] This family's rule in Kuchesfehan came to an end when the Kiyayis came to power. Saʻluk's son, Amir Masʻud b. Nopasha, was killed by the Kiyayi contender, Sayyed ʻAli Kiya, shortly after he came to power and took over Kuchesfehan. See Rabino, *Velayat-e Dar al-Marz*, 251.
[135] Marʻashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 47; Rabino, *Velayat-e Dar al-Marz*, 251.
[136] Rabino, *Farmanravayan-e Gilan*, 69.
[137] The Hezar Aspi family was the ruling family of Ashkevar in the 8th century. Their ruler, Amir Hendushah Ashkevari, had managed to avert the wrath of Oljayto's army by offering gifts and fealty. Kiya Malek was his descendent and a contemporary of Sayyed ʻAli Kiya. Shariʻati Fukolayi, *Hokumat-e Shiʻeh-ye,* 57-58.
[138] Marʻashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 58.

they remained allies. In fact, the Kiyayis were even open and welcoming to the settlement of the Mazandarani population in their territories.[139] The same was also true for the Mar'ashis, who held the Kiyayi sayyids in high esteem, maintained their alliance and friendship with them, and lent them their support in military expeditions. The Isma'ilis, on the other hand, were on the receiving end of the Kiyayis' hostilities from the very beginning. They were continuously referred to as heretics and heathens, and the Kiyayis showed much contempt towards them. They had no other intention but to put an end to their presence in Deylam and surrounding areas, either through conversion, military force, or encouraging other rulers to attack them. In fact, the Isma'ilis were not only a temporal and political threat to the Kiyayis, but also an ideological and a strategic one. Shafique Virani, in his study of the Isma'ilis of the Middle Ages, attributes three factors to the survival of Isma'ili communities in the middle of hostile environments: their practice of "taqiyya, or precautionary dissimulation, the activities of da'wa or summons, and the centrality in Ismaili thought of the soteriological dimension of the imamate."[140] Undoubtedly, these qualities strengthened the Isma'ilis and their *da'wa* activities, which made them in turn an all too real threat to the Kiyayis. Moreover, the territories and fortresses under their control were important strategic spots that surely the Kiyayis wanted to seize. The Kiyayis' military and political activities then encompassed, first, attempts to instigate revolts among the Zaydis against their Sunni governors in neighboring areas, and second, diplomatic and military pressure to convert the Isma'ilis and expand into some of their territories.

The first Isma'ili leader to confront the acrimony of the Kiyayis was Khodavand Mohammad, who had followers among the people of Deylam, Rudbar, Pad, Kushayjan, and

[139] Ibid., 57.
[140] Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 12.

Ashkevar.[141] Before resorting to military force, Sayyed ʻAli Kiya tried to recruit Khodavand Mohammad to confront another rival, Kiya Malek Hezar Aspi of Ashkevar. Since Khodavand Mohammad was an Ismaʻili imam, Sayyed ʻAli Kiya called upon him to repent and abandon the wrong ways of his ancestors, promising to grant him the governorship of Deylam in return. After receiving the consent of Khodavand Mohammad, Sayyed ʻAli Kiya appointed a party of ulema and judges to take Khodavand Mohammad through the ritual of repentance and administer his *hadd* punishment. Dispensing the *hadd* punishment - my understanding is that some kind of a lashing was administered - was symbolic. After this ceremonial ritual, which links religious practice to its socio-political function, was completed, Khodavand Mohammad was given a devotional certificate of conversion, a horse, a weapon, and a robe of honor, signaling his confirmation into the Kiyayis' circle.[142]

Yet, despite this ceremonial confirmation of Khodavand Mohammad into the Kiyayi circle, he was deceived by Sayyed ʻAli Kiya, who did not grant him the domain he had promised him after all. He then decided to join Kiya Malek Hezar Aspi, who had taken refuge in Alamut after having lost his territory to the Kiyayis. The two collaborated to take Ashkevar back from the Kiyayis and place Khodavand Mohammad in charge of the fortress of Alamut.[143] A battle broke out between the Kiyayis and the Kiya Malek Hezar Aspi/Khodavand Mohammad camp in 766/1374. The Kiyayi ruler's brother, Mehdi Kiya, was then captured and sent to the court of the Jalayerid ruler Soltan Oveys (757/1356-776/1374)[144] in Tabriz with an accompanying message alleging that he was a

[141] Marʻashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 54.
[142] Ibid., 55.
[143] Ibid., 59-60.
[144] The Jalayerid sultans were the descendants of the Mongolian tribe of Jalayer, which ruled parts of the former Ilkhanid territories in the middle of the fourteenth century. For more on the Jalayerids see Patrick Wing, *The Jalayirids: Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

rafezi.[145] Sayyed Mehdi Kiya was to remain in captivity in Tabriz for one and a half years, during which time his brother made no attempt to negotiate his release. As Mar'ashi informs us, Sayyed 'Ali Kiya was of the opinion that "once Soltan Oveys figures out what the real story is, he will release him, and there is no reason to ingratiate oneself with the Turkish *amir*s."[146] Soltan Oveys's rule represents the peak of Jalayerid power, and Sayyed 'Ali Kiya's response represents the certain "proto-nationalistic" attitude that was perhaps symptomatic of the post-Mongol era.[147] Eventually Sayyed Mehdi Kiya was released to the Kiyayis through the mediation of a local sayyid.[148] The conceited attitude of the Kiyayi ruler towards the Jalayerids showcases the fact that at this point they did not view themselves as a subordinate, but more as a dynasty on the rise and on par with them.

With the eventual return of Sayyed Mehdi Kiya, the fate of the Isma'ilis was sealed. The Kiyayis managed to take back Ashkevar and Alamut. They continued to persecute the Isma'ilis of the region, and in Mar'ashi's words "anywhere they found them, they sent them to the seventh stage of Hell."[149] The Kiyayis' persecution of the Isma'ilis of Deylam did not end with the capture of the fortresses of Alamut and Lamsar; soon they turned their attention to the Kushayji family. The Kushayji family were not very forthcoming about their Isma'ili faith.[150] Nevertheless, the Kiyayi ruler sent their leader, Kiya Sayf al-Din, an inimical and cautioning letter. In this letter the Kiyayis denounced the Isma'ilis as "heretics" and declared them worthy of persecution, at the same time as

[145] *Rafiza* (Arabic *rafida*) literally means "rejectors," "rejectionists," or "those who reject." See Wikipedia entry "Rafida." *Rafida* originally referred to the Kufan Shi'a who deserted Zayd b. 'Ali in his revolt against the Umayyads. This rejection stemmed from Zayd's position on the acceptance of Abubakr and 'Umar's imamate, on the basis that 'Ali himself accepted them as such. Also see Abdel S. al-Abdul Jader, "The Origin of Key Shi'ite Thought Patterns in Islamic History," in *Living Islamic History: Studies in Honor of Professor Carole Hillenbrand*, ed. Yasir Soleiman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 11. In this case it appears that the term Rafizi is used pejoratively to denigrate Sayyed Mehdi Kiya.
[146] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 60.
[147] For Soltan Oveys' rule, see Patrick Wing, *The Jalayirids*, 101-121.
[148] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 60-62.
[149] Ibid., 63.
[150] Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 34.

they indicated their willingness to forgive those who repented and followed the right path. The letter called upon the Kushayji ruler to eliminate any remaining Isma'ilis within their territories, and it was meant to be a stern warning to the remainder of the Isma'ilis of Deylam. Kiya Sayf al-Din's response was in turn unequivocal, as he openly declared his adherence to Isma'ilism and told the Kiyayi ruler that "we shall remain faithful to our own *mazhab*, and you to yours."[151] Eventually there followed a battle between the Kiyayi and Kushayji families in 779/1377. The results were catastrophic for the Kushayjis, for their leader, Kiya Sayf al-Din, was captured and beheaded. Many of the Isma'ilis then fled to Qazvin, which was inhabited by majority Sunni adherents. However, the Isma'ilis also had a sizeable presence in Qazvin and the areas surrounding it. The Kiyayis then targeted them in Qazvin and managed to take over Qazvin rather effortlessly, pushing the Isma'ilis out to Soleymaniyyeh. The Kiyayis retained control of Qazvin for seven years.[152]

The struggles between the Kiyayis and the Isma'ilis took a different turn when Timur massacred the Isma'ilis in Mazandaran in 794/1392 and shortly after in Anjudan.[153] With the Isma'ilis infinitely weakened in the region, the Kiyayis entered a different phase in their rule and were able to better establish themselves, yet the main threat to their rule, that of the Sunni rulers and larger Iranian ruling dynasties like the Timurids, the Qara and Aq Qoyunlu, and later the Safavids, remained and shaped their main military and diplomatic actions.

[151] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 66-67.
[152] Ibid., 69-70; Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages,* 35.
[153] For Timur's massacre of the Isma'ilis of Mazandaran see Nezam al-Din Shami, *Zafarnameh: Tarikh-e Fotutaht-e Amir Teymur Gurkani*, ed. Panahi Semnani (Tehran: Entesharat-e Bamdad, 1363/1984), 127-129. For more information on Isma'ilis and their continued presence in northern Iran see Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 35-39.

The Kiyayi Dynasty and Their Sunni Neighbors

For the Kiyayis, the defeat of the local ruling households of the Hezar Aspi, the Naservand, the Isma'ilvand, and the Isma'ilis of Deylam, was the first stepping stone in their rise to power. Once in control, the Kiyayis managed to either co-opt or completely wipe out most of the local elite in Eastern Gilan; however, they did not make such incursions into Western Gilan, except for the sporadic control they acquired over Lashteh Nesha and Kuchesfehan, or over Fuman for short periods of time during the Safavid period.[154]

The Eshaqiyyeh family of Western Gilan remained the Kiyayis' main adversaries, although their ever-evolving relationship was to witness episodes of cooperation and peacemaking as well. The Kiyayis' first confrontation with the amirs of Western Gilan came in 789/1387, when Amir Mohammad Rashti, in cahoots with Amir Dobbaj Fumani, the main ruler of the Eshaqiyyeh family, decided to attack the Kiyayis' interests in the town of Kuhdam.[155] The rulers of Western Gilan were in fact threatened by the rise to power of the Kiyayis. As was mentioned earlier, after the Kiyayis defeated most of the Isma'ilis in Deylam, they also conquered Qazvin and held on to it for 7 years while Timur engaged with Mongol and Uzbek insurgents in other parts of his expanding empire. According to Hafez Abru, "they brought news from Soltaniyeh that the army of Gilan has been causing damages in Qazvin, and they have closed the road to Khorasan."[156] As the Kiyayis held on to Qazvin, their power and prestige in the region increased and other local rulers avoided conflict with them. However, once Timur was relieved from his expeditions against other adversaries (mainly the Uzbeks and the remainder of the Mongols), he wrote a forceful letter to Sayyed 'Ali Kiya (Gilan's ruler at the time) inviting

[154] The circumstances of these periods of jurisdiction over Biyeh Pas are discussed in the following chapter.
[155] The *amir*s of Biyeh Pas wanted to return Kuhdam to its "rightful" ruler, namely Amireh Salar Kuhdami Anuzvad. Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 79.
[156] 'Abdollah b. Lotfollah Hafez-e Abru, *Zobdat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, ed. Sayyed Kamal Haj Sayyed Javadi (Tehran: Vezarat-e Farhang va Ershad-e Eslami, 1380/2001), 655.

him to accept his rule or face military removal like many other contemporary rulers who had failed to submit to him, some of whom, according to Timur, were even stronger and more established than Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya. In his response to Timur, Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya did not hold back, writing a harsh letter filled with condescending remarks towards him.[157] However, eventually Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya surrendered Qazvin to the Timurids and began paying tribute. This was a self-preserving move, but one that also cost them a great deal of power locally. Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya was forced to hand over Qazvin, Tarom, and their surrounding fortresses to the Timurids in the process.[158]

While this move shielded the Kiyayis from military attack by Timur, it opened them up to the wrath of other local rulers who were waiting for an opportunity to strike the Kiyayis in the moment of their weakness. The rulers of Biyeh Pas had hoped to weaken the Kiyayis’ stronghold in Kuhdam and to limit their increasing power and influence in the region. Amireh Mohammad of Rasht massacred many of the Kiyayi sayyids in Kuhdam, even though they had been promised safe passage. Amireh Mohammad Rashti also took the remaining sayyids as hostages and detained them in Rasht.[159] Once Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya was informed of the blow the sayyids had received in Kuhdam, he set out to confront the amirs of Biyeh Pas in Rasht. Amireh Dobbaj of Biyeh Pas banded together with one of the old adversaries of the Kiyayis, Saluk Mardavij, creating a costly and difficult ordeal for the Kiyayis, who lost much of their territory, and what is more, their most important personality, Sayyed ‘Ali Kiya, was killed in battle along with his brothers, sons, and other members of his family and entourage.[160] After this deadly and costly

[157] ‘Abdolhosseyn Nava’i, ed. *Asnad va Mokatebat-e Tarikhi-ye Iran: Az Teymur ta Shah Esma‘il* (Tehran: Bongah-e Tarjomeh va Nashr-e Ketab, 1341/1962), 58-63.
[158] Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 78.
[159] Ibid., 79-80.
[160] Ibid., 81-84.

battle, the Kiyayis retreated to Tonekabon and remained there for some time. The massacre of the sayyids in Rasht took place in 781/1379.[161]

Not long after this, though, Amireh Dobbaj of the Eshaqiyyeh family came to realize that not only had he damaged his reputation by killing and imprisoning the sayyids, but he had also inadvertently made his competition, Amireh Mohammad Rashti, a much more powerful man than he had intended. This realization led to Amireh Dobbaj shifting his alliance, so he proceeded to capture and imprison Amireh Mohammad Rashti and aided the Kiyayis in taking back their lost territory in Eastern Gilan.[162]

The Kiyayi Style of Rule: General Observations

The aim here is not to offer a comprehensive and positivistic history of the Kiyayis, but rather to highlight some of the important aspects of their rule. Sovereignty was shared among the male members of the Kiyayi household, especially in the early years of expansion and consolidation. Extended family members competed with one another for leadership, and the Kiyayis strengthened their position *vis-à-vis* their rivals by allocating certain districts, towns, and villages to trusted family members. This allowed them to slowly consolidate their territory and replace the rulers of important towns and districts with members of their extended family, including brothers, nephews, and sons-in-law. From the beginning the two most important towns and loci of power for the Kiyayis were Rankuh and Lahijan. When Sayyed ʻAli Kiya captured Rankuh, he entrusted it to his brother, Sayyed Mehdi Kiya, before he headed out to conquer Lahijan.[163] Sayyed ʻAli Kiya also assigned the affairs of Gukeh, Keysam, and surrounding

[161] Ibid., 101.
[162] Ibid., 90-95.
[163] Ibid., 40.

villages to his older brother, Sayyed Hasan Kiya, and Pashija to his nephew.[164] Later descendants of Sayyed ʻAli Kiya also followed the same policies. When in 837/1434 Kar Kiya Naser Kiya took over his father's court, he distributed the territory among his brothers.[165] In the early years of Kiyayi rule, especially right after the demise of Sayyed ʻAli Kiya, the weight of the family's legitimacy as a whole is in fact more evident as the descendants of Sayyed ʻAli Kiya and Sayyed Mehdi Kiya sorted out their respective territories. It appears that in the early period the seats of Rankuh and Lahijan carried the same weight; however, later only one Kiyayi ruler came to dominate.[166]

Keeping family members in positions of power, while initially a useful tool, did not always guarantee continuous family solidarity and cooperation. At times, internal disagreements and discord among high-ranking Kiyayi family members would lead to armed conflict, imprisonment, and community or self-imposed exiles. Fratricide or outright execution of family members was rare, and although it can be observed later in their rule, it was not a common practice among the early Kiyayi rulers.[167] While they did not hesitate to eliminate their external adversaries, they rarely resorted to the same sort of violence within their household in the early decades of their rule.[168] The sharing of power among the members of the Kiyayi family also meant that if the ruler was not well-received by the local population, other members of the family would step in and change the existing configuration of power in order to ensure the continuity of the family's rule as a whole. Usually, removal of rivals, exile, or imprisonment of

[164] Ibid., 44-45.
[165] Ibid., 181.
[166] When the Kiyayis conquered Rankuh, they built a big palace there. Goto suggests that having had multiple residences, and summer and winter quarters (Lahijan and Rankuh), helped the Kiyayis maintain more control over their territories. Goto, *Die Südkaspischen Provinzen*, 100-101.
[167] Later this pattern changed, as I discuss in the following chapter.
[168] Qorbanʻali Kenarrudi and Soheyla Naʻimi have also reached a similar conclusion when discussing the reasons for the success of the Kiyayis. See Qorbanʻali Kenarrudi and Soheyla Naʻimi, "'Elal-e Tadavom-e Hokumat-e Sadat-e Al-e Kiya dar Gilan," *Shiʻeh Shenasi* 34 (Summer 1390/2011): 160.

problematic members of the ruling family would suffice.

One explanation for this lenience towards family transgressors could be that the propriety of the execution of sayyids was in question, especially for the early Kiyayis, who relied heavily on that status for their legitimacy to rule.[169] In no other instance is such a policy more apparent than in the story of Sayyed Hosseyn Kiya, who was dismissed as the ruler in Lahijan for his ineptitude and inability to rule to the satisfaction of the general population of Lahijan. Sayyed Hosseyn Kiya became the *vali* of Lahijan in 789/1387, when he managed to take Lahijan back from his uncle, but it did not take long before he was forced to abdicate his throne in Lahijan in favor of his brother Sayyed Reza Kiya. Based on Mar'ashi's account, Sayyed Hosseyn Kiya was a devout religious man who had been approved as a Zaydi imam by the ulema of his time. However, apparently his mannerisms and characteristics were not suited for temporal rule. This clearly showcases that the pragmatic attributes of a contender were just as important as his spiritual worth. Especially for later Kiyayi rulers, that spiritual and religious status clearly gave way to more emphasis on their pragmatism and political capabilities. In this case, as the population's insistence on Sayyed Hosseyn Kiya's removal from Lahijan persisted, he was captured and imprisoned for a few years by the Kiyayi elders. Once the dust had settled, they released him, but now placed him in Pashija (originally the allocation of his brother Sayyed Reza Kiya) instead of Lahijan, which was a serious demotion for someone with his previous status.[170] In another similar scenario, Sayyed 'Ali Kiya had dismissed Sayyed Yahya Kiya from his post in Kuchesfehan and nominated another family member in his place.[171]

In the same way as the Kiyayis took to sharing power among family members, they also

[169] Kenarrudi and Na'imi argue that the Kiyayis did not want to break the taboo of killing sayyids. Kenarrudi and Na'imi, "'Elal-e Tadavom-e Hokumat-e Sadat-e Al-e Kiya dar Gilan," 173.
[170] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 110-118.
[171] Ibid., 76.

took their hereditary line of rule seriously. Once a domain was allocated to a certain family member, it was to stay within that particular nuclear family's line, especially in the early years with so many contenders present. When Sayyed Hadi Kiya, brother of the late Sayyed 'Ali Kiya, recaptured Biyeh Pish with the aid of Amireh Dobbaj after it had fallen into the hands of the Western Gilani rulers, he took Lahijan for himself and allocated Tonekabon to one of his sons. Sayyed 'Ali Kiya's children, however, were given less than desirable territories. Once Sayyed 'Ali Kiya's son, Sayyed Hosseyn Kiya, reached maturity he, in cahoots with his brothers, protested his uncle's move in usurping their hereditary right to rule over Lahijan. They set out to drive Sayyed Hadi Kiya out of Lahijan. Sayyed Hosseyn Kiya's claim was twofold: first, he claimed that his father was the legitimate ruler of Lahijan, hence he should inherit his rule; second, his father had been martyred defending his rule and territory, and to borrow Nadine Gordimer's words, "there is no moral authority like that of sacrifice."[172] Ironically, Sayyed Hosseyn Kiya used the ruler of Biyeh Pas, Amireh Dobbaj, one of the main culprits in his father's death, as an ally to take Lahijan back from his uncle. After this episode, Sayyed 'Ali Kiya's children divided the territory among themselves and their cousins, the sons of Sayyed Mehdi Kiya, another major martyr of the Rasht battle.[173]

The Kiyayis took two courses of action to ensure their continued rule: military force and diplomacy. While the Kiyayis took swift and vigorous action against their less powerful neighboring adversaries, they were very cautious and strategic in their dealings with more powerful rulers.[174] The Kiyayis were very much a local dynasty, without aspirations beyond their

[172] Nadine Gordimer, "The Essential Gesture: Writers and Responsibility," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values,* Delivered at the University of Michigan, October 12, 1984, available online at http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/g/gordimer85.pdf; Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 103.
[173] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 109.
[174] Kenarrudi and Na'imi, "'Elal-e Tadavom-e Hokumat-e Sadat-e Al-e Kiya dar Gilan," 159. The authors point to this strategy as one of the reasons for the success and survival of Kiyayi rule.

geographically- and religiously-demarcated areas. Although they showed interest and breached into Western Gilan at times, and stretched their territory as far away as Qazvin, they never really managed to flex their muscles much beyond Eastern Gilan and Deylam. In fact, they failed to unite the two Gilans as well. Indeed, their ability to remain a local dynasty, with limited power, hinged upon their ability to recognize the limits of that power, as well as to constantly negotiate the extent of that power and its sources of legitimacy. As was mentioned earlier, the Kiyayis' encounter with the Timurids showcases an example of them choosing negotiation over military confrontation. They were more successful in averting Timur's military invasion than their Mazandarani neighbors, whose first phase of rule in Mazandaran came to an end after Timur's attack in 794/1391.[175]

Despite the fact that Sayyed 'Ali Kiya had sent Timur a harsh letter earlier over Timur's territorial claim on Qazvin, Sayyed 'Ali Kiya's successor, Sayyed Reza Kiya, managed to avert a military disaster by successfully negotiating with Timur. Timur, who had expected *kharaj* (regular tribute) from the Gilanis, was unsatisfied with their mere diplomatic gift-giving and decided to send an expedition to Gilan around 806/1403.[176] As the Timurids approached Gilan, Sayyed Reza Kiya and Amireh Mohammad Rashti presented themselves to Timur for negotiations to prevent an outright occupation and war. Timur negotiated a deal with the Kiyayis. In the end, the Gilanis agreed to pay tribute in the amount of 10,000 *mann* of silk, 7,000 horses, and 3,000 cows.[177] As any successful negotiation and gift-giving would also demand a certain reciprocity, Timur forgave part

[175] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Tabarestan va Ruyan va Mazandaran,* 224-228.
[176] Rabino, *Velayat-e Dar al-Marz*, 475.
[177] Shami, *Zafarnameh,* 294-5. According to Khwandamir, they were to pay 15,000 *mann* of silk. Ghiyas al-Din b. Homam al-Din Khwandamir*, Habīb al-Siyar fī Akhbār-i Afrād-i Bashar,* vol 3., 4th ed. (Tehran: Entesharat-e Khayyam, 1380/2001), 521.

of the payable dues of both Sayyed Reza Kiya and Amireh Mohammad Rashti.[178] Gilan paid tribute as long as Timur was alive, but once he passed away in 807/1404 they ceased sending taxes as well.

However, when it came to local dissent and threats to their rule, the Kiyayi rulers crushed disobedience and subdued perpetrators rather swiftly. As was discussed earlier, the Kiyayis did not hesitate to use force against the Isma'ilis. Referring to the massacre of Isma'ilis, Mar'ashi states that "Sefidrud water turned red from the blood of those killed, and they threw them all into the water to become fish food, and they rid the province of Deylam of them."[179] Of course Mar'ashi justified these actions by describing the Isma'ili activities as "destructive" and "banditry."[180] In 789/1387, when the people of Layl harbored Sayyed Hosseyn Kiya against his brother Sayyed Reza Kiya (798/1396-829/1426), the latter set the town on fire. Mar'ashi states that the town remained a ruin for seven years, and it was only after that period of time had passed that the people of Layl (who were apparently of Arab ethnicity) were forgiven and their town was rebuilt. [181] A similar fate also came to an individual named Sayyed Mehdi Kamyarvand and his aide, a *faqih* known as Hamed from Siyakallehrud, who "set out" (*khoruj kard*) and began instigating the population of Deylam against the Kiyayis. Sayyed Mehdi Kamyarvand was thrown off a tower, and the *faqih* Hamed was killed and his body wrapped in a shroud and set on fire to set an example for any future transgressors.[182]

Looting and the redistribution of wealth through sharing of booty was a common practice as well, and necessary for the continuation of their rule. In 831/1428, the Kiyayis attacked Taleqan and took much "property and cattle" with them.[183] Then again, they continued attacking local

[178] Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar,* 521.
[179] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 129.
[180] Mar'ashi most certainly was biased towards the Isma'ilis.
[181] Ibid., 116.
[182] Ibid., 130-135; Kenarrudi and Na'imi, "'Elal-e Tadavom-e Hokumat-e Sadat-e Al-e Kiya dar Gilan," 167.
[183] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 147.

fortresses occupied by adversaries, taking whatever they could with them. When in Lamsar fortress they captured Malek Kiyumars, who had taken refuge there with much of his wealth, they distributed the spoils among the soldiers and took a portion of it for their treasury.[184]

Building infrastructure and ensuring prosperity and growth aided the Kiyayis' popularity among the population under their rule and was an important aspect of their longevity. Although they witnessed much internal and external opposition, in the early ninth century, after a long period of war and plunder, Sayyed Reza Kiya managed to bring most of Eastern Gilan and Deylam under his control. During this time, the Kiyayis began reconstructing and building Gilan. Mar'ashi informs us of this period of growth and prosperity as the Kiyayis began the construction of dams, lakes, gardens, mosques, mansions, caravanserais, bazars, shops, dormitories for their service men, soup kitchens, bathhouses, mausoleums, and so on. Rankuh and Ashkevar were the first towns that were given attention. They turned the *gurab*s (lands which were not suitable for farming) into centers of commerce, where they set up shops and workshops. In other places, when suitable they cultivated lands, mainly for growing rice. In Deylam, which was more suited for growing vines and trees, they established orchards. Moreover, to help the increase in the production of their orchards, vineyards, and agricultural lands, they set up dams, made lakes, and even diverted rivers.[185] In Malat, which was the town of the Kiyayis' origin and had great significance for their family, they built a mausoleum, a grand mosque, and a school. They also set up a soup kitchen to feed the poor every day. Rudsar was also revitalized during the Kiyayis' reconstruction efforts and benevolent work. At this time, in order to boost Rudsar's growth and prosperity as an emerging center of trade in Gilan, the Kiyayi rulers exempted it from paying certain taxes and offered a reduction in other

[184] Ibid., 152-9.
[185] Ibid., 140-143.

taxable areas. Apparently, Rudsar and its villages became so prosperous and well-off that people from surrounding areas, and especially from Mazandaran, came to settle there.[186]

The Aq Qoyunlu, and the Qara Qoyunlu Challenge

The Kiyayis' relationship to the Aq Qoyunlu and the Qara Qoyunlu was mostly characterized by indirect manipulation of local alliances and rivalries, diplomatic negotiations, as well as sporadic military skirmishes. The Kiyayis' relationship can be divided into two periods. One is the period of diplomatic negotiations, which resulted in the vassalization of the Kiyayis to the Aq Qoyunlu, who had emerged triumphant after a lengthy struggle for power among the Aq Qoyunlu, the Qara Qoyunlu, and Abu Sa'id Timurid. Even though the Kiyayis were forced to pay tribute to the Aq Qoyunlu, their cautious attitude, eagerness to resolve issues diplomatically, and appeasement of the Aq Qoyunlu and Qara Qoyunlu at opportune times played a direct role in the continuation of their local rule in Gilan. However, the second phase of the Kiyayis' relationship to the Aq Qoyunlu was characterized by military confrontation and a subsequent change of attitude on the part of the Kiyayis which led them to support the Safavid movement in opposition to the Aq Qoyunlu.[187] Before delving into the relationship between the local Gilani rulers, and especially the Kiyayis, with the Safavids in the following chapters, here I will highlight the noteworthy themes and threads in their relationship with the above-mentioned powers, especially the Qara Qoyunlu and the Aq Qoyunlu. How they navigated and negotiated their status *vis-à-vis* the region's greater powers was crucial in their ability to maintain power in Gilan.

Jahanshah's rule (r. 841/1438-872/1467) marked the zenith of the Qara Qoyunlu

[186] Ibid., 142-143.
[187] Parviz 'Adel, "Siyasat-e Al-e Kiya dar Qebal-e Aq Qoyunlu-ha: Daramadi bar Tashkil-e Dowlat-e Safavi," *Roshd-e Amuzesh-e Tarikh* 29 (Winter 1386/2007): 31.

confederacy. After the death of Shahrokh in 850/1446, Jahanshah had moved towards gaining his independence from the Timurids and had made advances towards the east.[188] Eventually, though, Jahanshah attacked the Aq Qoyunlu, a decision which led to his personal demise and subsequently to the gradual demise of his confederacy altogether. One of the first contacts between the Kiyayis and the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Jahanshah was in relation to the town of Taleqan. Jahanshah had granted the governorship of the town to a local contender, Malek Kiyumars's son,[189] leaving the Kiyayis, who had years earlier captured Taleqan and the fortress of Falsin from Malek Kiyumars, with a territorial claim over Taleqan. Taleqan had strategic importance for the Kiyayis because of its proximity to Qazvin. Moreover, the residents of Taleqan were followers of Zaydism, which meant that the Kiyayis could lay a legitimate religious claim over its fate as well.[190] The Kiyayi ruler, however, "based on the obedience and reverence" he held for Jahanshah, sent one of his men, named Sayyed Ruh al-Din Musa, to Jahanshah's camp along with marvels (*tohaf*) and gifts (*hadaya*), to request Taleqan be granted back to the Kiyayis. Gift-giving was an essential part of visiting a sultan and showcasing one's loyalty in medieval Islamic societies, but at times it also served a paramount and strategic purpose.[191] This diplomatic mission, which was constituted through the transaction of gifts and fealty, was successful, and the immediate result was that Jahanshah returned Taleqan and Falsin fortress to the Kiyayi ruler. Moreover, when the Mazandarani ruler, Kiyumars's son Bahman,

[188] H. R. Roemer, "The Türkmen Dynasties," in *Cambrige History of Iran*, vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods,* ed. Peter Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 163.
[189] Malek Kiyumars was the ruler of Rostamdar and Taleqan until the Kiyayis took Taleqan and the fortress of Falsin away from him and integrated them into their own domain. See Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,*160.
[190] Territorial claims based on shared religious tendencies are a recurring theme in northern Iran and its diverse religious landscape. As the province began to adopt Twelver Shi'ism during the Safavid era, this form of territorial entitlement also subsided. See Chapter 5 on the religious landscape of Gilan and the process of conversion during the Safavid era.
[191] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Practicing Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 17-18.

protested Jahanshah's move, he was arrested and exiled to an island in Iraq.[192] Of course, granting Taleqan back to the Kiyayis was a smart move on the part of Jahanshah, for he needed their cooperation and alliance to ensure order in the northern provinces. For example, when disagreements broke out between the two brothers, Malek Kavus and Malek Eskandar of Rostamdar, and Jahanshah was approached by groups of disgruntled Mazandaranis, he engaged the cooperation and aid of the Kiyayis to settle the issue.[193] After arbitration failed, a battle broke out between the two. It took much effort, and the Kiyayis enlisted the help of Mir Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi to ensure the two brothers kept the peace.[194] The Kiyayis, being the most powerful of the Caspian littoral's rulers at the time, were often left with the responsibility of keeping order in the northern territories beyond Gilan and their immediate sphere of influence. Larger regional powers took that role into account as they dealt with the Kiyayis' demands. They were the ones that policed the region, intervening when order was disrupted by local *vali*s and when the population voiced their grievances against those in the position of authority. When the ruler of the Alamut region passed away in 872/1468, Kar Kiya Mohammad once again made Mir Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi responsible to oversee the transition of power to the deceased ruler's son, Kar Kiya Yahya Jan, and to make sure that he submitted to the Kiyayi rulers peacefully.[195]

Turning to the Aq Qoyunlu, by 839/1435, after the long rule of Qara 'Osman, the Aq Qoyunlu had evolved into "an extensive semi sedentary autonomous territorial principality with a rudimentary Irano-Islamic bureaucratic state apparatus."[196] In the following years, they gradually emerged as an empire that expanded its territory considerably at the expense of the

[192] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 277.
[193] Ibid., 278.
[194] Ibid., 312-316. Episodic disagreements were to continue between the two brothers until Malek Kavus passed away.
[195] Ibid., 327-328.
[196] Woods, *The Aqquyunlu,* 54.

Qara Qoyunlu and the Timurid ruler Abu Sa‘id.[197]

The events surrounding the town of Qazvin illuminate the dynamics of power, and the way in which they interacted and influenced the Kiyayis in Gilan. In this period, Qazvin was a strategic town that connected east and west, as well as north and south, and was more often than not the target of greater regional powers. At times it would also fall prey to sporadic looting and violence. Although the extent of the Kiyayis' control over Qazvin is not clear, it appears that they were interested in holding on to Qazvin and its vicinity, at opportune times, as long as it did not put their overall position in Gilan in jeopardy. When Qazvin's elite and rulers felt threatened and vulnerable, they called upon the Kiyayis for protection. The Kiyayis had gradually emerged as a paramount force in the Caspian littoral region, yet they remained very cautious when it came to engaging directly with those stronger than themselves. In this period the power structure in much of the Iranian territories was shifting and in flux. This most certainly made it very difficult for the Kiyayis to determine the best course of action and to calculate the best possible outcome in any of the political and military episodes that directly or indirectly affected them and their neighboring territories.

In 872/1468, on the eve of Jahanshah's death at the hand of the Aq Qoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan, the Kiyayis were summoned to Qazvin by the city's elite to protect the town and secure their control in case of an Aq Qoyunlu intrusion. Kar Kiya Mohammad, the Kiyayi ruler, once again sent no other than his trusted Mir Zahir al-Din Mar‘ashi to Qazvin along with his troops. While there, Mir Zahir al-Din Mar‘ashi was informed that Jahanshah's son, Mirza Hasan ‘Ali, had taken over his father's seat in Tabriz and was preparing to send an expedition to Qazvin.[198] Upon Jahanshah's death, Mirza Hasan ‘Ali used his father's treasury to put together an army and

[197] Ibid., 98.
[198] Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 331.

began consolidating his power.[199] His quick expedition in and out of Qazvin suggests that he was after loot and perhaps was trying to send a message of strength in light of the growing Aq Qoyunlu power and influence.

Since Mir Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi did not have direct orders to confront Mirza Hasan 'Ali's expedition as they approached Qazvin, he then proceeded to leave Qazvin and remained on the outskirts of the town, while Mirza Hasan 'Ali's troops went through the town, took what they could, and left.[200] This episode neatly demonstrates the perplexity of the political atmosphere at the time, and the Kiyayis' cautious attitude and desire to avoid military confrontation. Once Mirza Hasan 'Ali's troops left, Mir Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi returned to Qazvin once again to take control of its affairs.[201]

The Kiyayis also came face to face with yet another major power, that of Soltan Abu Sa'id Timurid, who had managed to recapture Persian Iraq, which at that point was under Qara Qoyunlu control. Soltan Abu Sa'id was on his way to conquer Azerbaijan and oust the Aq Qoyunlu ruler when his expedition went through Qazvin. In this event the Kiyayis, faced with yet another uncertainty, not knowing what the outcome of the Timurids' expedition *vis-à-vis* the Aq Qoyunlu would be, proceeded with diplomacy. Once Soltan Abu Sa'id and his troops reached Qazvin, the Kiyayis refrained from any form of resistance, and in turn proceeded with a show of political goodwill. They promptly sent a delegate with marvels (*tohaf*) to declare their loyalty to the Timurid sultan and signal their subordination. Soltan Abu Sa'id reciprocated the Kiyayis' generosity by distributing gifts and charitable goods among the poor, as was the custom for the

[199] Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 98.
[200] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 331-332.
[201] Ibid., 331.

party of greater political might.[202]

At this point it was still evident that the Kiyayis were inclined towards recognizing the legitimacy of the house of Timur over that of the Aq Qoyunlu. However, soon the page turned for Soltan Abu Sa'id, his diplomatic negotiations with Uzun Hasan failed, and he was besieged and raided by the Aq Qoyunlu troops numerous times. The increased hardship in his camp led to his soldiers deserting him and fleeing their compound. Mar'ashi recounts the somber tale of the Timurid Chagatai soldiers wandering the northern villages with no food or clothes, asking for help from the villagers. The Kiyayi ruler, Kar Kiya Mohammad, appealed to his people to give a helping hand to the shattered soldiers before sending them on their way. Mar'ashi describes their plight as follows:

> Most of the Chagatai troops who had escaped death were then looted by the Tavalesh of Astara and surrounding areas, and sent on their way. They were then coming to Qazvin in large numbers. It was winter and very cold, so they asked for much needed clothes… They were also coming through the shores to Gilan. They were bare and naked. The Hazrat-e Soltani [Mirza Mohammad Kiya], since it was the right thing to do, ordered his people to give them bread, soup, and necessary clothes before sending them on their way.[203]

As his soldiers gradually abandoned Soltan Abu Sa'id, Uzun Hasan's sons, Soltan Khalil and Zeynal, managed to capture him, and soon he was handed over to an old adversary, Yadegar Mohammad Shahrokhi, who then executed him.[204] Uzun Hasan, who had already killed the Qara Qoyunlu ruler, Jahanshah, also succeeded in defeating Soltan 'Abu Sa'id, hence eradicating all major obstacles to his rule. With the last hindrance removed, soon Uzun Hasan expanded his territory beyond Azerbaijan to Persian Iraq, Fars, and Kerman. Moreover, although he did not conquer Gilan outright, he managed to bring the coastal Caspian region under his control and

[202] Ibid., 336; Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 99.
[203] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 337. My translation.
[204] Yadegar Mohammad Shahrokhi had held a grudge against Abu Sa'id over the murder of his great-grandmother, Gowhar Shad Tarkhan. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 99.

force the local rulers to pay tribute.[205]

After the defeat of Soltan Abu Sa‘id and Jahanshah at the hands of Uzun Hasan, the Kiyayi rulers found themselves in no position to resist Uzun Hasan's ascendency. In one short-lived military confrontation in 873/1469, for instance, the Kiyayis experienced heavy blows and changed their course of action towards the Aq Qoyunlu ruler. Hence, by 879/1474 they even aided Uzun Hasan in putting an end to the rebellion of an Ardebili governor from the Chakerlu family.[206]

In subsequent events, Uzun Hasan also relinquished the decision-making over the affairs of the local *vali*s of both Eastern and Western Gilan to the Kiyayis, on the condition that the Kiyayis foresee the payment of at least 40 *kharvar* (60 *mann* of Tabriz) of silk to the Aq Qoyunlu treasury from Western Gilan alone.[207] At this point, we see no interest on the part of the Aq Qoyunlu rulers to nominate Turcoman chiefs as *vali*s in Gilan or Mazandaran. In fact, the extent of their intervention in the northern territories ended with demanding *kharaj* and lending their support to more cooperative contenders as opposed to those who were defiant.

The Aq Qoyunlu ruler, Uzun Hasan, passed away in 883/1479. While the transformation of the Aq Qoyunlu from "principality to empire" had come to fruition during the reign of Uzun Hasan, after his death the dynasty witnessed serious internal dissention followed by foreign invasions.[208] After a relatively short-lived discord between Uzun Hasan's offspring, Sultan Khalil and Ya‘qub, Ya‘qub managed to take full control and ruled from 886/1481 to 896/1490.[209]

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[205] Ibid.
[206] Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan,* 353.
[207] Ibid., 376.
[208] John Woods describes the different phases of the Aq Qoyunlu polity's progression as "clan to principality" and "principality to empire." For details on the decline of the Aq Qoyunlu and their state of affairs after Uzun Hasan, see Woods, *The Aqquyunlu,* 125-172.
[209] Ibid., 125-131.

Following Ya'qub's success in overcoming internal issues, the dynasty was to experience a flourishing of cultural developments for the next ten years. Other simultaneous transformations, like the gradual process of political decay and decentralization, however, were to have a much more profound effect on the dynasty's survival as a whole. Soon after Ya'qub's death in 896/1490, certain "forces and events took a course that rapidly undermined the foundations of the Empire and eventually wrecked the structure of the confederation."[210]

While the Kiyayis had submitted to Aq Qoyunlu rule and had begun paying tribute during the reign of Uzun Hasan, Aq Qoyunlu control over the northern provinces was not without its challenges. The Caspian provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran were of great importance to the Aq Qoyunlu ruler, Ya'qub, for the economic preservation of his polity was dependent on the continuation of the Caspian-Mediterranean silk trade, as well as the flow of silk revenues from the northern provinces.[211] It was during Ya'qub's reign that Aq Qoyunlu control over these important centers and the flow of their imperial tribute was on occasion seriously threatened. For the most part, the involvement of the Aq Qoyunlu with the Kiyayis came in the form of manipulation of their position *vis-à-vis* other local contenders to keep the region divided and local rulers weak. When in 887/1482 Amireh Rostam of Kuhdam was defeated in Manjil by the Kiyayis, he promptly appealed to Ya'qub for protection. Ya'qub then did not hesitate to send his troops to aid the amir of Kuhdam, and to remind the Gilani rulers of his superior status.[212] Although the Kiyayis at first seemed ready for military confrontation, they soon realized their limitations and sent a delegate to negotiate a truce and reach a peace agreement with the Turcoman expedition.

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[210] Ibid., 125.
[211] Ibid., 134.
[212] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 20-21; Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 433-442; 'Adel, "Siyasat-e Al-e Kiya dar Qebal-e Aq Qoyunlu-ha: Daramadi bar Tashkil-e Dowlat-e Safavi," 30.

In the following year, Aq Qoyunlu efforts at establishing control and collecting a levy in the northern Caspian region were challenged once again, bringing their absolute ascendency over the northern provinces into question. In 888/1483, Ya'qub had recognized Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani's claim over Mazandaran and had sent him, along with a delegate named Amir Ebrahim Shah Beyg Bayramlu, to establish control and collect taxes. In 888/1483, however, Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani massacred Ya'qub's delegate in Sari along with 400 of his troops.[213] According to Mar'ashi, the Ya'qubid delegate, Amir Ebrahim Shah Beyg Bayramlu, was intent on establishing his own rule over Mazandaran, and hence was met with fierce opposition.[214] Ya'qub recognized Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani's rule in 889, but by 891 he had dismissed Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani and positioned his rival, Mir Zayn al-'Abedin, in charge of Mazandaran.[215] Once Mir Zayn al-'Abedin died in 892/1487, Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani, against the recommendations of the Kiyayi ruler, moved towards Mazandaran to reclaim his territory. Mir Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi expectedly paints a positive picture of Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani as a popular ruler whom the people of Sari were very fond of and eager to support.[216] In contrast, Ruzbahan Khonji, the Aq Qoyunlu chronicler, testifies to his perversity and corruption along with his followers.

At first, Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani managed to take over Sari; however, without the approval of Ya'qub, his time was short-lived. This brought the Gilanis into a political standoff with Ya'qub, who had sent his troops towards Gilan and threatened military invasion unless the Gilanis were to comply with his wishes and send Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani to Tabriz. Khonji's account points to the initial reluctance of Soltan 'Ali Mirza, the Kiyayi ruler, to

[213] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 443-444.
[214] Ibid., 444.
[215] Ibid., 457.
[216] Ibid., 463.

cooperate.[217] However, Soltan ‘Ali Mirza, whose survival was dependent on averting the crisis, soon sent several of his trusted statesmen and officials to negotiate with the Aq Qoyunlu. Mir ‘Abdolkarim Mazandarani was to also present himself to the Aq Qoyunlu representative, Soleyman Beyg.[218] In the process of negotiations, the Kiyayis were charged with a heavy restitution in the amount of 1,200 *tumans*, and Mir ‘Abdolkarim Mazandarani was extradited to Tabriz.[219] Eventually, however, the Kiyayis’ persistence in reducing their arrears resulted in its total forgiveness.[220]

After Ya‘qub’s death, with the weakening of the Aq Qoyunlu empire, the Gilanis also took advantage and attempted to take control over some lost territory in and around Qazvin. The Kiyayis’ military expedition strained their relationship with the Aq Qoyunlu and resulted in them losing a strategic fortress in Tarom.[221] After Rostam Beyg managed to ascend the throne in Tabriz in 897/1492, the strained relationship between the Kiyayis and the Aq Qoyunlu continued, and in 898/1493 Rostam Beyg sent an expedition headed by an individual named Ayebeh Soltan to invade Gilan. Many Gilanis lost their lives in this episode, and in Qazvini’s words “they made minarets out of the Gilanis’ heads.”[222] This massacre placed the Gilanis in the pro-Safavid camp, in opposition to the Aq Qoyunlu, for good.[223]

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[217] Fazlollah Ruzbahan Khonji Esfehani, *Tarikh-e‘Alam Ara-ye Amini: Sharh-e Hokmrani-ye Salatain-e Aq Qoyunlu va Zohur-e Safaviyan*, ed. Mohammad Akbar ‘Ashiq (Tehran: Miras-e Maktub, 1382/2003), 235-236.
[218] Slightly different variations on this account appear in Khonji Esfehani’s *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye Amini,* 235-238; Ahmad b. Nasrollah Tattavi and Asef Khan Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Alfi: Tarikh-e Hezar Saleh-ye Eslam*, ed. Gholamreza Tabataba‘i Majd, vol. 8 (Tehran: Entesharat-e ‘Elmi va Farhangi, 1382/2003), 5471; and Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 467. Mir Zahir al-Din Mar‘ashi contends that Mir ‘Abdolkarim Mazandarani presented himself to Mir Soleyman in Qazvin.
[219] Tattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Alfi,* vol. 8, 5471.
[220] Khonji Esfehani, *‘Alam Ara-ye Amini*, 240-241.
[221] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 77-78.
[222] Yahya b.‘Abdollatif Qazvini, *Lobb al-Tavarikh,* ed. Mir Hashem Mohaddes (Tehran: Anjoman-e Asar va Mafakher-e Farhangi, 1386/2007), 256. For a slightly different account see Budaq Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar: Bakhsh-e Tarikh-e Iran az Qara Qoyunlu ta Sal-e 984 Hejri,* ed. Mohsen Bahram Nezhad (Tehran: Miras-e Maktub, 1378/1999), 94.
[223] ‘Adel, “Siyasat-e Al-e Kiya dar Qebal-e Aq Qoyunlu-ha: Daramadi bar Tashkil-e Dowlat-e Safavi,” 31.

Conclusion

The rise of the Kiyayis to power and prominence in Gilan was indicative of several developments in the region at large. The first important point to emphasize is that Gilan's introduction to Islam had partially been through Shi'ism, and more specifically Zaydism, which usually manifested as dissident movements against the Caliphate and its politico-religious ascendency. These movements, and the Shi'a religious expressions from Isma'ilism to Zaydism and Twelver Shi'ism, shaped the religious tapestry of Gilan and Mazandaran, with ever-present pockets of Sunni adherents. Gilan was also the place where "proto-nationalist" political movements of the post-caliphate era, with their Shi'a flavoring and populist undertones, managed to flourish.

The Kiyayis were one of the main three sayyid families that came to power in a short span of time in the southern Caspian littoral. These smaller dynasties that rose to prominence in the post-Caliphal and post-Mongol periods were essential in decentering Sunnism and giving way to the ascendency of sayyids, and specifically Shi'ism, before the rise to power of the Safavids. The Kiyayis indeed took advantage of their sayyid status - whether fabricated or not - and came to slowly dominate the mostly Zaydi regions of Eastern Gilan by establishing themselves as legitimate representatives of Zaydism, going as far as labeling the early rulers as imams. While the Kiyayis tolerated and even took advantage of their Twelver allies, the Mar'ashis of Mazandaran, they relentlessly worked to eradicate the remainder of the Isma'ilis in the Deylam region in order to gain political and religious momentum. The Isma'ilis mainly posed an ideological threat to the Zaydis, especially though their *da'wa* activities, yet their proto-military actions often posed a threat to the stability of the region. These activities at times were

manifested in the form of looting and banditry, as they held on to important strategic fortresses in the Deylam region. The Kiyayis, then, looking to establish a homogenous and stable polity, followed by their need to control the Deylam region as a gateway to Gilan, pursued a stern course of action, resulting in the eradication of the Isma'ilis there altogether.

While the Kiyayi sayyid status and their Zaydi faith provided them with the legitimizing force they required, they also managed to established themselves locally through diplomatic marriages, manipulating local alliances, as well as selective use of force against adversaries when necessary. After the Isma'ilis, the Kiyayis' main local adversaries remained their Sunni neighbors, with whom they engaged in frequent skirmishes over territorial control of select important towns like Lashteh Nesha and Kuchesfehan. When dealing with greater regional powers in times of great instability before the rise of the Safavids, the Kiyayis utilized diligence and good diplomacy to keep foreign forces from invading Gilan. In hindsight, of course, their show of support to the Safavids as opposed to the Aq Qoyunlu was the most important decision they made at one of the most important junctures in their historical trajectory.

Chapter Two

The Aq Qoyunlu and the Unfolding of Safavid Rule:

Internal and External Political Dynamics in Gilan

During the last years of Aq Qoyunlu rule, and as Shah Isma'il I rose to power, critical shifts in the local conditions and larger political processes shaped Gilan. Aside from factionalism and family rivalries, which accentuated divisions and feuding between the Eastern and Western parts of Gilan, the military campaigns of the *Qizilbash* and political developments in the Caspian littoral in the formative years of the Safavid polity left an indelible mark on Gilan's internal affairs.

In Gilan, as the Aq Qoyunlu confederacy fell apart, the two main ruling families remained in control of their respective regions. Not only did the Kiyayis and Eshaqiyyeh manage to outlive the tumultuous times of the end of Aq Qoyunlu rule, the Kiyayis specifically managed to gain more territory and establish better control. However, at the same time, internal rivalries and competition between the two ruling families of Biyeh Pas and Biyeh Pish, despite their best efforts, created many occasions for battles and skirmishes that took their toll on the population of Gilan and led to the Eastern Gilanis' total bankruptcy and dwindling power. The limits of the Kiyayi ruler's ability to expand his power were seriously tested when Shah Isma'il I proved capable of controlling a wider geographical territory with decisive military and administrative capabilities that outweighed what his Aq Qoyunlu rivals were ever able to achieve.[224]

[224] The Safavid empire began as a confederation of different clans and never equaled the Ottomans or Mughals in terms of size, power, or wealth, but the Safavids had a significant impact on the religious makeup of the empire,

When Shah Isma'il I was confirmed as the new sovereign in various parts of Iran, the Kiyayis slowly began negotiating their space within the empire. Recognizing Shah Isma'il I's ambitions and strength was a key factor in the continuation of their rule, which remained intermittent for almost another century to come. Political exchanges and negotiations at this point in time were local, shaped by social and personal dynamics, but they gradually entered a more complex configuration in connection to the Safavid monarchs and their empire.

The Last Years of the Aq Qoyunlu: Main Developments

Two important developments in Gilan should be noted in the years leading up to the arrival of Shah Isma'il I in the region. First, Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi made an effort to repair his relationship with Amireh Eshaq of Biyeh Pas by giving his sister's hand in marriage to the Eshaqiyyeh ruler.[225] The two rulers met in 894/1489 to establish a peaceful accord between their families, and this reconciliation was celebrated by the exchange of gifts, watching of sports, as well as feasting on an assortments of foods.[226] The second noteworthy development, which later came to influence the outcome of the first one, was the decline of the Aq Qoyunlu polity. Aq Qoyunlu disintegration coincided with the increase of the Kiyayis' power and prosperity. As was mentioned towards the end of the first chapter, the power vacuum that was created after Ya'qub's passing in 896/1490 encouraged both the Kiyayis and the Eshaqiyyeh rulers to venture beyond their borders, aiming for Qazvin, Tarom, and the Shamiran fortress.[227] Amireh Eshaq

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which remains one of the most distinctive markers of Iranian identity today. Douglas E. Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 137-138.

[225] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 27-29; Rabino, *Velayat-e Dar al-Marz*, 486.

[226] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 29.

[227] Shamiran fortress is an ancient fortress situated on top of a hill close to the Sefidrud lake. This fortress had strategic significance for whomever wished to control Qazvin, and it was the center of Tarom. This fortress used to be the seat of Deylam's ruler Mohammad b. Mosafer in 331/942. During the Isma'ili presence in Deylam, it was in their possession. The Kiyayis knew bringing the fortress and its inhabitants over to their side was the first step towards any form of control over Qazvin. Also, the fortress played an important role as a place for securing precious

was the first to set out after Ya'qub's death. He went to Rahmat Abad to prepare for an offensive on Tarom and the fortress of Shamiran. This move alarmed the Kiyayis, who quickly proceeded to send a delegate to Amireh Eshaq informing him of the Kiyayis' claim over the fortress of Shamiran and the surrounding areas. The Kiyayi delegate managed to win over those in charge of the fortress and took full control.[228] This was the first step towards the Kiyayis' further expansion into Persian Iraq, while the Eshaqiyyeh family remained behind. These adventures, however, greatly tested the limits of the Kiyayis' power.

The Kiyayi ruler managed to take control of Qazvin and its surrounding areas, and even made inroads as far as Tehran, Varamin, and Ray in an unprecedented move in 897/1492. Previously, the Kiyayi rulers had periodically maneuvered into Qazvin, albeit very cautiously, but this time Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi, with the help of Mir 'Abd al-Malek, a very competent military commander, undertook an expedition beyond what any previous Kiyayi ruler had done. Mir 'Abd al-Malek, who was of the sayyid families of Qazvin, was at the service of the Kiyayi court[229] and was instrumental in bringing Qazvin and its surrounding areas under their control. This was a significant territorial gain for the Kiyayis, and was the furthest they ever expanded.[230] Mir 'Abd al-Malek remained in Qazvin for a year before appointing his nephew, Mir Ghiyas al-Din, as the sheriff (*darugheh*)[231]of Qazvin and returning to Gilan. Afterwards he also managed to capture the fortresses of Golkhandan and Firuzkuh, extending his territory up to Soltaniyeh,

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goods and armaments. This fortress has been referred to in the sources as Samiran, Shemiran, Samiram, Sham'-e Iran, Kangarian, Samivirum, and Salariyeh. For more information on this fortress see Vali Jahani, *Qal'eh-ha-ye Gilan* (Rasht: Daneshnameh-ye Farhang va Tamaddon-e Gilan, 1387/2008), 88-92.

[228] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 34.

[229] Qazvini, *Lobb al-Tavarikh,* 256.

[230] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 43.

[231] The *darugheh* was the official and representative of the ruler in towns and conquered territories. The *darugheh*'s responsibility was "to maintain law and order, collect and forward the revenues, organize corvées, maintain the postal service, compile the population registers, and mobilize and lead the local levies." Willem Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2001), 115.

Saveh, and Zanjan.[232] It would be useful here to devote a section to Gilan's fortresses (usually referred to in Safavid chronicles as *qal'eh*), their historical significance and role in the political development of the province.

Beyond Towns and Cities: The Fortresses of Northern Iran

Urbanization achieved limited development in pre-modern Iran. Willem Floor has estimated the urban population of Safavid Iran to be no more than 10-15 percent of the total population.[233] While Gilan certainly had geographical locations that warranted the label "city" (*shahr*), it was not particularly known for its large cities and towns. Lahijan was Gilan's most populated and urbanized town, and later on, after Shah 'Abbas I (r. 996/1588-1038/1629) came to power, Rasht became a prosperous center in Western Gilan, surpassing Fuman. Rasht underwent its greatest development after the Russian invasion of 1134/1722, when it became a hub of the silk trade following the fall of Isfahan. At that time, the northern trade route became even more renowned for its link to the sale of silk.[234] Fuman never really reached the same level of importance as Lahijan. Rasht also grew in importance after becoming the capital of Biyeh Pas under Jamshid Khan in 980/1573.[235] Under the Safavids as such, Eastern Gilan managed to create a better mechanism for absorbing the economic surplus due to a stable political base and the firm leadership of the Kiyayis. In contrast, in Western Gilan the Eshaqiyyeh had less control

[232] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 41-46. As long as Ya'qub, the Aq Qoyunlu ruler, was alive, he kept a firm grip on the Kiyayis. It is worth repeating how when the Kiyayis set out to aid Mir 'Abdolkarim of Mazandaran, Ya'qub sent his army in 891/1486 to confront the Kiyayis and penalized them with a levy called *na'l-e baha*, which literally means "horseshoe price." *Na'l-e baha* was a tax paid to the enemy's army to avert a military confrontation or invasion. Ya'qub also demanded that Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi send Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani to him along with the demanded sum. See Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 26-27; Khonji Esfehani, *Tarikh-e Alam Ara-ye Amini,* 237-239.
[233] Willem Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2000), 3. Ten percent accounts for population decline after major wars, and 15 percent for times of peace and prosperity.
[234] Naser 'Azimi Dobakhshari, *Tarikh-e Tahavolat-e Ejtema'i-Eqtesadi-ye Gilan: Negahi No* (Rasht: Nashr-e Gilakan, 1381/2002), 48-49.
[235] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 53.

and were forced to share power with some of the smaller power holders. Relatively speaking, then, Lahijan appears to have been the more urbanized and developed center in Gilan at the time.[236]

Along with cities and towns, which attracted socio-economic, religious, and cultural activities, the fortresses in Gilan had critical political, strategic, and military importance.[237] Fortresses were built on higher ground to properly serve their purpose of safeguarding the surrounding villages and towns and their important roads, intersections, and river crossings.[238] Among the prominent fortresses in the Alborz range are those built and/or occupied by the militant wing of the Nizari Isma'ilis. Wolfram Kleiss contends that "the Assassins' [Nizaris'] castles" were "in no sense residences for the gentry but were rather purely military installations with barracks for the garrisons."[239]

The various images of Gilan which come through from the pre-modern and early modern periods cannot be adequately reconstructed without taking into account the role of the numerous fortresses and castles. Vali Jahani, the archeology director at the Center for Iran's Cultural Heritage and the author of *Ghal'eh-ha-ye Gilan*, recognized seventy-five extant historical fortresses in Gilan and its surrounding areas. In his book he counts some ninety fortresses and provides a description of their geographical location, date of construction, and structure.[240] The sources focus on fortresses located on major roads and routes that connect the province to its

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[236] 'Azimi Dobakhshari argues that the more consistent and centralized system of rule, which was related to the more homogenous population (Western Gilan had more religious diversity, for example) in Eastern Gilan, lent itself to more urbanization and better ability to extract the surplus of production and concentrate it in Lahijan. See 'Azimi Dobakhshari, *Tarikh-e Tahavolat-e Ejtema'i-Eqtesadi-ye Gilan,* 51.

[237] During the Isma'ili activities, the fortresses were also the centers for *da'wa* operations and religious activities as well.

[238] *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Castles," by Wolfram Kleiss, accessed June 23, 2018. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/castles

[239] Ibid.

[240] See the interview conducted with the author here: http://www.artguilan.ir/Default.aspx?page=8227&section=litem&mid=31073&id=106862 , accessed January 24, 2017; Vali Jahani, *Qal'eh-ha-ye Gilan.*

surroundings, and towns and cities therein to one another. The fortress of Shenidan (bordering Gilan and Azerbaijan), the fortress of Rudkhan in Fuman, and Dizbon (also referred to as Dozbon or Dozdbon) in Lahijan appear to stand out in terms of their historical significance.[241] The fortress of Shamiran, near Qazvin in Tarom, was of importance to the Kiyayi rulers, especially during the period in which they controlled Qazvin.[242] The fortress of Rudkhan, which is also known as *Hesami* fortress after the name of Amireh Hesam al-Din, was rebuilt in 918-921/1512-1515. According to Manuchehr Sotudeh, this fortress is one of the "greatest and strongest" of fortresses he has ever seen.[243] The Dozdbon fortress in Lahijan was rebuilt by Sadid Shafti,[244] the vizier of Khan Ahmad I, in 912/1507 during the early years of Shah Isma'il I's reign, and its custodianship was granted to one of his slaves, Yunos. Sadid Shafti was planning a coup against Khan Ahmad I when he tried to rebuild the fortress to use it as a center to carry out his plans.[245]

Fortresses were mainly used by the provincial authorities and political figures for defensive and administrative purposes. They were often located strategically along important land routes and close to the main political and economic centers of the region.[246] Rulers of Gilan, Mazandaran, and Deylaman were specifically driven to build such fortresses to house their soldiers, horses, and armory during harsh winter conditions, especially in the more mountainous areas of northern Iran. Taking control over a region without having control over its main fortress(es) was not considered sufficient. The function of these fortresses, however, was not limited to military defense and offense. They also functioned as residential quarters and prison

[241] Vali Jahani, *Qal'eh-ha-ye Gilan*, 13.
[242] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 30, 77, 78, 88, 98, 99, 109, 187, 191, 239.
[243] Manuchehr Sotudeh, *Az Astara ta Estarbad*, vol. 1, *Asar va Bana-ha-ye Tarikhi-ye Gilan-e Biyeh Pas* (Tehran: Anjoman-e Asar va Mafakher-e Farhangi, 1349/1970), 158.
[244] The political career of this individual is discussed in more detail towards the end of this chapter.
[245] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 297.
[246] *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Castles."

complexes.[247] They housed the families of the soldiers and the custodians of the fortress. The latter, also referred to as the *kutval*, were usually appointed to the fortress by the ruler (*hakem*) of the area and asked to manage its affairs. Sometimes even *ro'aya* (civilians) resided in fortresses.[248]

The fortresses' secure construction made them suitable for housing refugees, political figures, and prisoners alike. The remnants of the Aq Qoyunlu *amir*s fleeing Shah Isma'il I had settled in the fortresses of Semnan and Mazandaran, namely the fortresses of Asta, Firuzkuh, and Golkhandan.[249] At times these prisoners were accompanied by their families and their entourage.[250]

Fortresses were also home to a considerable amount of wealth. Their secure structures made them an ideal place for safeguarding the treasuries of government officials and the elite. Moreover, they stored considerable amounts of food and resources, as well as arms, which helped the inhabitants survive and defend the fortress for long periods of time.[251] Hosseyn Kiya Cholavi, who was in control of the fortress of Asta in Mazandaran before being attacked by Shah Isma'il I's forces, apparently had some 1500 silver and 500 gold saddles in his possession.[252] Capturing a fortress was usually followed by looting and redistribution of wealth among commanders and soldiers alike.

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[247] In the chronicles, often there are mentions of women and children of the fortresses, and the "*ahali,*" which literally means the inhabitants. See also the example of the fortress of Lamsar being used as a prison. Lahiji refers to the young and the elders of the fortress of Asta, indicating that the inhabitants were more than just lone soldiers. See Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 80-81, 147, 158.

[248] Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah,* 25. Hosseyn Chelavi (also spelled Chalavi and Cholavi in different secondary sources), after having been surrounded by Shah Isma'il I's forces in Asta fortress, had his water supply cut off. He then forced the *ro'aya* and those with no use to him out of the fortress.

[249] Ibid. The fortress of Asta was occupied by Morad Beyg Aq Qoyunlu, his family and relatives.

[250] Ibid.

[251] For mentions of the amount of wealth having been gathered from the fortresses, see Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 78, 147. Shah Tahmasb kept a considerable amount of wealth in *Qahqaheh*. Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 2, 819.

[252] Amir Sadr al-Din Ibrahim Amini Heravi, *Fotuhat-e Shahi: Tarikh-e Safavi az Aghaz ta Sal-e 920 Hejri Qamari*, ed. Mohammad Reza Naseri (Tehran: Anjoman-e Asar va Mafakher-e Farhangi, 1383/2004), 224-225.

In general, control over fortresses was very important to the rulers of northern Iran, and many battles were fought over these constructions. Of course it is commonly known that most of the activities of the Isma'ilis in northern Iran were carried out from these fortresses as well. The most well-known of such Isma'ili fortresses are the fortresses of Lamsar and Alamut. Many more fortresses stood as important loci for political and military activities.

The Kiyayi Expansion: An Ultimately Failed Attempt

After the Kiyayis conquered Qazvin, the ulema and notables of Qazvin came to visit Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi while he was in Lamsar on a hunting trip. They came to pay their respects while bearing gifts, signaling the establishment and acceptance of the Kiyayi rulers in Qazvin.[253] Qazvin's notables also extended a formal invitation to Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi for an official visit to Qazvin, which he accepted. During his trip to Qazvin he stayed at the home of a local judge, Qazi Mir Hosseyn, and visited the famous shrine of Shahzadeh Imam Hosseyn.[254] The shrine of Shahzadeh Imam Hosseyn was one of the most important religious sites in Qazvin, and might have been frequented by Sunnis and Shi'as alike.[255] The local Qazvinids projected a certain level of ease and a welcoming attitude towards the Kiyayis. This was not the first time that the Kiyayis had come to manage the affairs of Qazvin during tumultuous times of transition and uncertainty. It is important to note that this welcoming attitude towards the Kiyayis can without a doubt and to a large extent be attributed to the Mar'ashi sayyids of Qazvin. The sayyids of Qazvin and the Kiyayis had a long tradition of cooperation. The Kiyayis' very own army commander, Mir 'Abd

[253] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 53.
[254] Ibid., 54. For the history and significance of this shrine, see Hosseyn Moddaresi Tabataba'i, *Bargi az Tarikh-e Qazvin:Tarikhcheh-yi az Astaneh-ye Shahzadeh Hosseyn va Dudman-e Sadat-e Mar'ashi-ye Qazvin* (Qom: Ketabkhaneh-ye 'Omumi-ye Hazrat-e Ayatollah al-'Ozma Najafi Mar'ashi, 1361/1982), 9-11. This shrine is attributed to one of the sons of Imam Reza, the eighth Twelver Shi'a Imam.
[255] Moddaresi Tabataba'i, *Bargi az Tarikh-e Qazvin*, 10.

al-Malek, who took control over Qazvin, belonged to a sayyid family from Qazvin.[256] When the Kiyayis had been faced with the threat of Aq Qoyunlu invasion in 891/1468, it was the sayyids and religious leaders of Qazvin who pleaded with the Aq Qoyunlu dignitary for leniency on their behalf.[257]

The Mar'ashi sayyids had their origins in Qazvin, and it was from there that they had set out to settle in other locations.[258] The Mar'ashi sayyids living in Qazvin were mainly the custodians (*motevalli)* of the Shahzadeh Imam Hosseyn *vaqf* (religious endowment). This post was a shared position bestowed on the entire family, and the family as a whole benefited from the revenues generated from the shrine's endowments.[259] Moreover, the Mar'ashis also occupied the post of the *mohtaseb* of Qazvin.[260] The office of *mohtaseb*, which in theoretical juridical works was related to the concept of *amr-e be ma'ruf va nahy-e az monkar*, was in practice just a market supervisor whose religious function was either neglected or remained secondary.[261] While these posts were not among the most prestigious, they carried a certain amount of social weight.

There are perhaps some reasons to consider for the Qazvinids' welcoming attitude towards the Kiyayis. First, it has been noted by historians that under the Sunni rulers the sayyids of Qazvin were most likely practicing *taqiyyeh* (dissimulation).[262] This alone would mean that freedom from a Sunni ruler's oversight, and the presence of a Shi'a ruler with strong ties to the sayyid families, was beneficial to the sayyids of Qazvin. Qazvin was a geopolitically important

[256] Qazvini, *Lobb al-Tavarikh*, 256.
[257] Khonji Esfehani, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye Amini*, 238-9. Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 26.
[258] The Mar'ashi *sadat* of Mazandaran were related to those in Qazvin and relocated from there to Mazandaran. Another group later relocated to Isfahan. Modaressi Tabataba'i, *Bargi az Tarikh-e Qazvin*, 56.
[259] Ibid., 54-55.
[260] Ibid., 58. For more information on the office of *mohtaseb* see Willem Floor, "The Office of Muhtasib in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 53-74.
[261] Willem Floor, "The Office of Muhtasib in Iran," 62.
[262] Qazi Nurollah Shushtari, *Majales al-Mo'menin*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Ketabforushi-ye Eslamiyyeh, 1354/1975), 148-149. Also cited in Modaressi Tabataba'i, *Bargi az Tarikh-e Qazvin*, 58-59.

town, connecting the eastern domain to the western one, and the Iranian mainland to the Caspian littoral region. This geographical location made Qazvin vulnerable to attack, which also meant it often switched hands among different contenders.[263] This trend was to continue to some extent, until the town's fortune changed in 955/1548 when Shah Tahmasb I (r. 930/1524-984/1576) established Qazvin as the capital of the Safavid empire.[264]

The second reason for the support of the Kiyayis was most likely a financial one. One of the first measures taken by Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi was to reduce the tax burden of the Qazvinids in general. Whereas the Aq Qoyunlu had imposed heavier levies on the population, a smaller local dynasty like the Kiyayis had the ability to reduce that burden for the local population. To begin with, the Kiyayis' revenue extraction capabilities were more limited, and moreover, since those revenues were not meant to serve and maintain a large imperial army, it was easier to reduce them. It is conceivable that the Qazvinids' grievance over high taxes was related to Ya'qub's (r. 883/1478-896/1490) specific tax reform policy, which was intended to create a more centralized monarchy.[265] After Ya'qub's death and the advancement of the Kiyayis into Qazvin, the Qazvinids were then able to avoid paying those heavier taxes while receiving some level of protection, however limited.

Overall, maintaining control over these newly incorporated territories was not without its challenges for the Kiyayis. Turcoman and regional political factions vied for control over Qazvin, Tarom, and the surrounding areas. Budaq Beyg set out to conquer Qazvin from Khorasan, but was soon met with the resistance of Mir 'Abd al-Malek, the Kiyayi commander. Another challenge presented itself from Satilmish Beyg, who had also set out for Qazvin, but his

[263] Hosseynqoli Sotudeh, "Tarikhcheh-ye Qazvin," *Barresi-ha-ye Tarikhi* 22 (1348/1969): 98.
[264] Ibid.
[265] On Ya'qub's tax policies, see *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Aq Qoyunlū," by R. Quiring-Zoche, accessed May 20, 2018. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/aq-qoyunlu-confederation

threat was soon nullified as well.[266] Rostam Beyg (r. 897/1492-902/1497), the Aq Qoyunlu ruler, sent an army led by Ayebeh Soltan, which made incursions into Rudbar and killed many of the Gilanis.[267] Uprisings and unrest also broke out in other areas. In Tarom, for instance, Mir Zayn al-'Abedin Taromi led a rebellion which was swiftly quashed.[268] Once Rostam Beyg Aq Qoyunlu managed to consolidate his power, he sent an expedition to take the fortress of Tarom back from the Kiyayis, and the Aq Qoyunlu *amir*s held on to the fortress until the end of Rostam's rule.[269] Mir 'Abd al-Malek managed to maintain control over Qazvin and in 897/1492, after expanding the Kiyayis' reach, he placed his own brother, Mir Ghiyas al-Din, in charge of Qazvin and returned to Gilan.[270]

The Aq Qoyunlu confederacy fell into disarray and factionalism in the last years of Rostam Beyg's rule. Rostam Beyg was eventually executed in 902/1497 by one of these opposing factions.[271] Afterwards, the Turcoman nomadic elite maintained little control as different protagonists fought periodically. Three contenders, namely Alvand Beyg (902/1497), Mohammadi (d. 905/1500), and Soltan Morad, fought over Aq Qoyunlu territories simultaneously.[272] Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi at one point aided Mohammadi in opposition to Alvand Beyg by sending Mir Ghiyas al-Din, the sheriff of Qazvin, to his aid.[273] By 906/1500, Alvand Beyg and Soltan Morad had partitioned the Aq Qoyunlu confederacy. While Alvand Beyg was afforded the rule over the northern and western territories, Soltan Morad took control of Persian Iraq, Kerman, Fars, and Arabian Iraq.[274] These territorial divisions considerably weakened the

[266] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 37-39.
[267] Ibid., 58. Qazvini, *Lobb al-Tavarikh*, 256.
[268] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 52-60.
[269] Ibid., 88. After Rostam Beyg's rule, Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi sent an expedition to take Tarom back.
[270] Hosseynqoli Sotudeh, "Tarikhcheh Qazvin," 172-173; Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 97.
[271] For more on the last years of the Aq Qoyunlu confederacy, see Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 149-172.
[272] Ibid., 159. See also H.R. Roemer, "The Türkmen Dynasties," 183.
[273] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 97.
[274] Woods, *The Aqquyunlu,* 161.

Aq Qoyunlu confederacy and eased the path for Shah Isma'il I as he pursued his undertakings in the period of the consolidation of his rule from 907/1501 to 914/1508.[275]

Taking Qazvin back from the Kiyayis was a challenge for the Aq Qoyunlu contenders. As Soltan Morad moved towards Qazvin, Mir Ghiyas al-Din had to flee to Lamsar. Once Soltan Morad reached Qazvin, he proceeded to appoint one of his own dignitaries as the *darugheh.* Without hesitation, Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi sent Mir 'Abd al-Malek to negotiate with Soltan Morad. When the two parties didn't reach an understanding, Mir Abd al-Malek dismissed Soltan Morad's appointed *darugheh* and took control over Qazvin himself. Some of the Turcoman military *amirs*, namely Ashraf Beyg, Qara Morad, and Khalil Beyg, remained in Qazvin and swore allegiance to Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi. This attests to the fluidity of political alliances at the time. Later on these *amir*s participated in a Kiyayi campaign against the Eshaqiyyeh family by providing their troops.[276]

The limitations to the Kiyayis' ability to expand much beyond Gilan became evident when they failed to exercise as much influence as they had previously in Mazandaran. While the Kiyayis managed to make advancements into the Iranian mainland, their efforts at manipulating the political situation in the neighboring province of Mazandaran in favor of their longtime ally, Mir 'Abdolkarim II of the Mar'ashi family, remained precarious. Mir 'Abdolkarim II had earlier lost his bid to become the ruler of Mazandaran. He owed his defeat to his young age, lack of endorsement from then Aq Qoyunlu ruler Ya'qub, as well as fierce opposition from other Mar'ashi pretenders, namely Mir Zayn al-'Abedin and his brother Mir Shams al-Din.[277] Now, with Ya'qub gone and the confederacy in turmoil, Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani was eager to

[275] Ibid., 163.
[276] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 100, 111; Hosseynqoli Sotudeh*,* "Tarikhcheh-ye Qazvin," 173.
[277] It was in 893/1488 that with the help of the Aq Qoyunlu, Mir Shams al-Din had been able to take control over Mazandaran, leaving Mir 'Abdolkarim Mazandarani no other choice but to take refuge with the Kiyayis. Ruzbahan Khonji Esfehani, *Tarikh-e Alam Ara-ye Amini*, 299; Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 27.

try his bid for rule in Mazandaran. He appealed to Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi for military aid, as was routinely done when one or the other of the allies was in need of military intervention. Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi obliged and sent his army along with Mir ‘Abdolkarim to Mazandaran to capture the Mar‘ashi seat of power for him in 897/1492.[278]

Despite some short-lived victories, this campaign ultimately ended in failure and resulted in the capture of the Kiyayi military commanders by Mir Shams al-Din, who then held on to the Kiyayi commanders for a year before initiating another round of negotiations. Mir Shams al-Din, unlike Mir ‘Abdolkarim Mazandarani, who had remained a Kiyayi ally and supporter, did not have a good relationship with the Kiyayis and wished to put an end to their interference in the affairs of Mazandaran. To add insult to injury, Mir Shams al-Din had the prisoners pay an indemnity called *zanjir baha*, as he kept them captive for a year and half.[279]

In 899/1494, Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi prepared for another offensive against the Mar‘ashi contender. This time, however, he called upon many local rulers and their armies from Deylam, Biyeh Pas, Rostamdar, Firuzkuh, and Astarabad, marking one of the few times the rulers of Biyeh Pas and Biyeh Pish allied themselves against another enemy. According to the chronicler, Shams al-Din Lahiji, some 40,000 men were gathered to attack Mazandaran (the number could be an exaggeration). The preparations for the attack were going well for the Kiyayis until the *sepahsalar* (military commander) of Biyeh Pas, ‘Abbas, began sabotaging their position. As ‘Abbas witnessed the progress of the Kiyayis and their allies into Mazandaran, he became alarmed about the future possibility of Biyeh Pas becoming the next casualty of the Kiyayis’ political hankering.[280] ‘Abbas, being an adept politician, began negotiating with Mir Shams al-Din and reached an agreement to have Mir Shams al-Din hold on to Sari and Amol, while giving

[278] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 48-49.
[279] Ibid., 51-52, 64.
[280] Ibid., 70.

Mir ‘Abdolkarim Mazandarani the town of Barforush Deh (the old name of the city of Babol).[281] This was a well-calculated decision on the part of ‘Abbas, working in the best interest of the Eshaqiyyeh to keep Mazandaran divided and not allow the Kiyayis to claim a significant victory there. The Kiyayis’ hand was forced in accepting these arrangements, as they were faced with a more pressing threat approaching their territories. A Turcoman army headed by Hosseyn Beyg ‘Ali Khan had arrived in Qazvin and was headed to Rudbar. Hence, they agreed to the terms of the negotiation among the Mazandaranis and turned their attention to Qazvin instead. The Kiyayi rulers lost control of Qazvin in this confrontation, but managed to stop the progress of Hosseyn Beyg ‘Ali Khan’s army into Rudbar.[282]

Another example of a challenge that the Kiyayis faced at this time, complicating their position and showcasing the complexity of regional political relations, was the non-cooperation of Malek Jahangir, the Baduspanid ruler of Nur. The Baduspanids were one of the older families ruling over Ruyan and Rostamdar (today roughly corresponding to Nur) in western Mazandaran since the 6th/13th century. The Kiyayis had become involved in their affairs in the middle of the 9th/16th century, when dispute over the throne had broken out between the two brothers Malek Kavus and Malek Eskandar. This resulted in the splitting of the Baduspanid domain into the two kingdoms of Nur and Kojur. This division continued, as Nur and Kojur were ruled by the descendants of Kavus and Eskandar until Shah ‘Abbas dissolved their rule.[283] The rulers of

[281] The city of Babol in Mazandaran today is one of the main urban centers in the province. At the time it constituted one of the major centers of commerce in Mazandaran (as its name suggests, Bar Forush literally means “seller of cargo”) along with Rostamdar (today’s Nur), Sari, Amol, and Mashhadsar (today’s Babolsar). In his travel account, Rabino also refers to Barforush as the center of commerce. H.L. Rabino, *Mazandaran va Astarabad*, trans. Gholam‘ali Vahid Mazandarani (Tehran: Entesharat-e ‘Elmi va Farhangi, 1336/1957), 34.
[282] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 72-74.
[283] *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. “Baduspanids,” by Wilferd Madelung, accessed April 10, 2018. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/baduspanids; Goto asserts that in the early times the Baduspanids acted as mediators between Bawandiyan and the Zaydis. See Goto, *Die Südkaspischen Provinzen*, 14-15, 68, 96-97.

Kojur remained close allies of the Kiyayis, while the rulers of Nur maintained a rebellious attitude towards the Kiyayi rulers.

In the late 9th/15th century, the conflict with Malek Jahangir of Nur and Rostamdar was especially troublesome for the Kiyayis. Malek Jahangir refused to join the Kiyayi campaign in Mazandaran in 897/1492, and he had helped Hosseyn Beyg Aq Qoyunlu's army instead of the Kiyayis, angering Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi, which then prompted him to attack Malek Jahangir. Four consecutive campaigns against Malek Jahangir ensued, and he was finally besieged in Nur. He then decided to make peace with the Kiyayis and sent his son, Malek Kavus, to the court of Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi to finalize the accord.[284]

Even though the Kiyayis had managed to consolidate more territory, and had developed a relatively (compared to other regional powers) advanced military apparatus, they never really managed to incorporate or absorb Western Gilan, and their political influence in other parts of the region, including Mazandaran, remained inconsistent. After the Kiyayis conquered Deylam in the middle of the 9th/15th century, the Deylamites and their army had given them a much needed boost.[285] Much of the Kiyayis' military superiority always relied on how successful they were in forming coalitions of different factions for their campaigns. They relied on the smaller power-holders in Deylam, Mazandaran, Rostamdar, and the surrounding areas. In their campaign in Mazandaran they even managed to draw Western Gilan into a temporary military alliance.[286] The religious differences between the two regions and the natural geographical boundaries were instrumental in allowing such divisions to continue. There is, however, no evidence that the Kiyayis actually had any uniform or continuous policy aimed at integrating Western Gilan into

[284] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 79-87.
[285] Goto argues that the Kiyayis had a centralized system of government at a certain point, but also recognizes the limits of their rule and their inability to incorporate all of the coastal areas under their rule. Goto, *Die Südkaspischen Provinzen,* 98-99.
[286] However, the Western Gilanis' involvement proved less favorable to the Kiyayis than they had hoped for.

their domains. Their efforts in Mazandaran were meant to keep their allies under control, but not much more. Even that was not without its challenges, and the rise to power of Rostam Ruzafsun, along with the divisions in the house of the Mar'ashis of Mazandaran, all created a complicated power dynamic that did not lend itself easily to uniformity and consolidation.

The next section will provide an overview of Isma'il's stay in Gilan and the shift in the Kiyayis' fortune in the years leading to Isma'il's rise to power. The hostility with the Eshaqiyyeh rulers was renewed as Isma'il prepared to leave Gilan. The ensuing battles weakened the Kiyayis substantially, leaving them bankrupt and devastated.

Shah Isma'il in Gilan

In 899/1494, following the death of his older brother, Isma'il managed to flee the wrath of the Aq Qoyunlu and began taking refuge in his followers' homes as he and his entourage made their way to Gilan.[287] Once in Gilan, they were first sent to the governor of Gaskar and then were brought to stay in Rasht under the supervision of Amireh Eshaq of Western Gilan.[288] Amireh Eshaq was a friend of the husband of Isma'il's paternal aunt Pasha Khatun. In *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, Hasan Rumlu asserts that Amireh Eshaq was one of the followers of the Safavid Order. This is not a very likely scenario, however, since by this time the Safavid Order was already demonstrating its distinctly Shi'a and *gholoww* characteristics, and it is unlikely that Amireh Eshaq, who adhered to Sunni Islam, would have been religiously inclined towards the Safavid Order.[289] Isma'il's stay in Rasht was short-lived, and soon he was moved to Lahijan.

[287] Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 21.
[288] Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*: *Tarikh-e Shah Esma'il: Ta'lif dar 948-955 H,* ed. Allah Ditta Muztar (Islamabad: Markaz-e Tahqiqat-e Farsi-ye Iran va Pakistan, 1984), 62; Gholam Sarwar, *History of Shah Ismā'īl Safawī* (Aligarh: Published by the Author, 1939), 31.
[289] Hasan Beyg Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, ed. 'Abdolhosseyn Nava'i (Tehran: Entesharat-e Babak, 1357/1378), 907; Hosseyn Mir Ja'fari, et al. " Naqd va Barresi-ye 'Elal va Payamad-e Eqamat-e Esma'il Mirza-ye Safavi Dar Gilan (Beyn-e Sal-ha-ye 898-905 H-Q)," *Pazhuhesh-ha-ye Tarikhi*-ye *Daneshkadeh-ye Adabiyyat va 'Olum-e*

Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi, a sayyid and an established and respected ruler with more capability to challenge and resist the Aq Qoyunlu intrusions, was a much more suitable host to Isma‘il and his entourage. Mir ‘Abd al-Malek, the Kiyayis’ commander, was also instrumental in keeping Isma‘il safe by encouraging Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi to send Rostam’s emissaries in pursuit of Isma‘il back empty-handed several times.[290]

Some Safavid scholars have argued that religious dimensions played a role in Shah Isma‘il and his entourage choosing Gilan as their place of refuge. This scholarship and the arguments it puts forth will be reviewed and discussed more extensively in Chapter Five. Here it suffices to state that the Safavids’ followers’ decision to go to Gilan was made first and foremost with practical and political considerations in mind, and that religious affiliation was a secondary consideration, one that mattered only as far as it had political ramifications. Worth mentioning here is the revisionist conclusion of Ali Anooshahr, based on his assessment of the account given in Amini Heravi’s *Fotuhat-e Shahi*, in which he locates a much more pragmatic and politically sound series of events in the journey to success of Isma‘il and his entourage. According to Anooshahr, “the rise of the Safavids did not occur as a wild apocalyptic explosion, but was a carefully planned and cautious campaign run by experienced commanders who kept a tight rein on the teenage Shah Isma‘il.”[291] Keeping this in mind, my own understanding is that Gilan’s attraction to the Safavids was also based more on pragmatic reasons rather than religious ones. Strategically, Gilan was located at a favorable distance from Ardebil. In addition, Gilan had

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Ensani-ye Daneshgah-e Esfehan 1 (Spring 1389/2011): 3. The anonymous author of the *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye Safavi* contends that the Kiyayi ruler was a follower of the Safavid Order; again, this is doubtful as well. Anonymous, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye Safavi*, ed. Yadollah Shokri (Tehran: Entesharat-e Ettela‘at, 1363/1984), 39.

[290] Qazvini, *Lobb al-Tavarikh*, 257.

[291] Ali Anooshahr, “The Rise of the Safavids According to their Old Veterans: Amini Heravi’s Futuhat-e Shahi,” *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 249.

continuously demonstrated a certain amount of resilience towards foreign influences, and this point was perhaps not lost on Isma'il's companions as they made their way to Gilan.[292]

Once Isma'il reached Lahijan, the Kiyayi ruler set up a house for him in the town's main square near a school named *Madreseh-ye Kiya Fereydun*. As Isma'il settled there, he was visited by his followers bearing gifts from surrounding areas, and as far away as Anatolia, Azarbaijan (Qaracheh Dagh, Tuman Meshkin), and so forth.[293] Reportedly, Shah Isma'il was assigned a teacher, namely Shams al-Din Gilani (also known as Lahiji), to train him in Arabic, Persian, and Qur'anic sciences.[294] Isma'il's relationship to his reported teacher, Shams al-Din Gilani, and Shams al-Din Gilani's influence on him, will be discussed in Chapter Five. Another important figure in Isma'il's life in Gilan was Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti. Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti became infatuated with Shah Isma'il early on and followed him from Gilan on his quest to conquer Persia. He became the very first Tajik appointed to the office of *vakil*.[295] His career and political influence will be discussed in an upcoming section.

Although the Kiyayis had frequently engaged in looting, warfare, and territorial dispute with other local rulers and elites, they entered a new phase of contention with the Eshaqiyyeh family after Shah Isma'il set out on his journey. Gradually, with the advancement of the *Qizilbash* and Shah Isma'il's army, the internal discord among the Kiyayi elite also grew stronger in the shadow of constant battles with the Western Gilanis.

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[292] Mir Ja'fari, et al., consider the following reasons as to why Gilan was a good refuge for Shah Isma'il and his order: the religious considerations and the connections to the Zahediyyeh order in Gilan, the strategic and geographic situation of Gilan, as well as its political rule. Mir Ja'fari, et al. "Naqd va Barresi-ye 'Elal va Payamad-e Eqamat-e Esma'il Mirza-ye Safavi dar Gilan," 3-4. Goto argues that Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi's acceptance of Shah Isma'il was for political considerations and to gain allies against the Aq Qoyunlu. She also argues that despite the fact that the Safavids had not yet declared themselves Shi'a, the Kiyayis had sympathy for them, as their similarities to Shi'ism were evident. Goto, *Die Südkaspischen Provinzen,* 121.
[293] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh,* 19-20.
[294] Hafez-e Abru, *Zobdat al-Tavarikh*, 48; Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 64; Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 20. On Isma'il's stay in Lahijan, also see Amini Heravi, *Fotuhat-e Shahi*, 69.
[295] Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, 9.

The dynamics of Kiyayi family politics entered a highly contentious period as battle with the Western Gilanis left them devastated. For the first time, they resorted to fratricide, breaking the tradition of high regard for their own family members' sayyid status. In Chapter One we saw that emphasis on the sayyid status from which they drew their legitimacy was one of the main characteristics of the early phase of Kiyayi rule. The special status of the sayyids in general, and the Kiyayi sayyids in particular, afforded them a great deal of political esteem. The Kiyayis' sayyid status and all the privileges that came along with it should be viewed in conjunction with the rise in status of sayyids and 'Alids in the broader Islamic world from the 8th/15th to the 12th/19th century. The ascension and greater appreciation of sayyids in the Islamic world was akin to the 'Alids emerging as "the First Family of Islam," and as a class distinctive from Shi'ism *per se*.[296] Sayyids had political and religious claims in Islamic societies which at times afforded them exemption from some of the rules enforced on the rest of society.[297]

To maintain the aura and special status associated with their sayyid lineage, the Kiyayis refrained from executing unruly and competing family members, instead maintaining order within their ranks by applying other pressure tactics and disciplinary actions, such as dethroning, exile, and imprisonment. Now, with the gradual disintegration of the Aq Qoyunlu and rise to power of Shah Isma'il, a shift also occurred in the internal Kiyayi dynastic dynamics which was reflective of the new political reality and the growing threat of subjugation and loss of power. The family members lost their protected status and became fair game in the internal struggles for power. Moreover, by this point the Kiyayis began to rely more on their political legitimacy and

[296] Teresa Bernheimer, "Geneology, Marriage, and the Drawing of Boundaries among the Alids (Eighth-Twelfth Centuries)," in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The Living Links to the Prophet*, ed. Kazuo Morimoto (London: Routledge, 2012), 76.
[297] Ibid.

claim to the throne and territory they ruled, as opposed to their religious legitimacy of the early years.

Advent of the Safavids: Local Politics in the Face of a Rising Empire

Not long after the future Shah Isma'il I left Lahijan in 905/1499[298] to set out and conquer his realm, discord between the Kiyayi and Eshaqiyyeh families heightened. Lahiji, in his account in *Tarikh-e Khani,* names 'Abbas, the *sepahsalar* of Biyeh Pas, as the main culprit in stirring up tensions between the two ruling families. Lahiji paints 'Abbas as a ruthless and capable politician who continuously configured and reshaped the political process in Western Gilan, and in doing so overshadowed the Eshaqiyyeh ruler himself. Lahiji, who was commissioned by the Kiyayi ruler, Khan Ahmad I (r. 911/1505-940/1533), and whose history of Gilan is written from the vantage point of the Kiyayis, consistently accuses 'Abbas of sabotaging the Kiyayis' relationship with their broader regional allies.[299] 'Abbas shaped alliances that went against the interests of the Kiyayis and provoked them by undermining their power and interests in the region. To begin with, he jeopardized the Kiyayis' influence in Mazandaran by undermining the Kiyayi-supported contender, suggesting the two Mazandarani pretenders should split the rule of Mazandaran. Another of these provocations was formed when the Eshaqiyyeh ruler aligned himself with Alvand Beyg, the Aq Qoyunlu pretender, followed by the interception of Isma'il's convoy on its way to Ardebil. Furthermore, 'Abbas had joined forces with the Mazandarani

[298] Before setting out, Isma'il asked for Mirza 'Ali's permission and blessings. See Amini Heravi, *Fotuhat-e Shahi*, 81. For other accounts of Isma'il's departure from Gilan, see Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 104; Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar,* vol. 4, 448; Qazi Ahmad Ghaffari Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara* (Tehran: Ketabforushi-ye Hafez, 1343/1964), 264; Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar,* 15; Qazvini, *Lobb al-Tavarikh*, 240.

[299] Lahiji himself mentions Khan Ahmad I as the patron of his work. Lahiji's book covers Gilan's history from 880/1475 until 920/1514. Some 12-13 years of the period overlap with Mar'ashi's *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, which covers the events until 893/1488. However, they each cover different events. There is very little that we know of Lahiji and his position at the Kiyayi court, but it is safe to assume that he was close to the events he describes. Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 48-54.

ruler, Mir Shams al-Din, to take over the fortress of Parastak, undermining the Kiyayis once more. These tactics, which were aimed at aggravating and sabotaging the Kiyayis' influence in Gilan and the region, riled up the Kiyayi ruler Mirza 'Ali. Prior to this renewed strain on their relationship, Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi had attempted to maintain positive relations with his neighbors by giving his sister's hand in marriage to Amireh Eshaq. However, 'Abbas' meddling in their familial affairs apparently had left Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi's sister quite unhappy and in despair as well.[300]

To avoid war and confrontation, the relationship between the two families was continuously being adjusted and renegotiated. The terms of their coexistence, in conjunction with the formation of new alliances in the ever-changing power relations in the broader region, also needed to be renegotiated on a regular basis. Inter-family marriages usually played a significant role in this regard. Concessions also had to be made on both sides to prolong the periods of peace. Once all these tactics aimed at keeping peace failed, however, then military conflict was inevitable.[301]

The Eshaqiyyeh, with their center of power in Fuman, had remained a weaker player in Gilan's political landscape compared to the Kiyayis. This was partly due to the existence of multiple smaller centers of power in Western Gilan and the lack of conformity among their populace in terms of religious leanings.[302] However, for a short while after the rise to power of Shah Isma'il I, the power balance was to tip towards the Eshaqiyyeh. After failed negotiations with the Eshaqiyyeh ruler, Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi set out to invade Biyeh Pas in 907/1501. He called upon his neighbors, the Mar'ashis of Mazandaran, and Aqa Rostam Ruzafsun, the powerful *sepahsalar* of Mir Shams al-Din Mar'ashi, who at the time wielded more power and influence in

[300] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 106-110.
[301] Ibid., 106-109.
[302] 'Azimi Dobakhshari, *Tarikh-e Tahavolat-e Ejtema'i,* 51-53.

Mazandaran than the Mar‘ashi sayyid himself, to join forces with him. Mir ‘Abdolkarim, the ruler of Rostamdar and Firuzkuh, also sent troops. From Qazvin, he summoned the *darugheh* Mir Ghiyas al-Din, and the Turcoman *amir*s Ashraf Beyg and Qara Morad, among others, who were at this time on Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi’s payroll.[303]

Lahiji estimated the army of Western Gilan to be 10-12,000 strong, which even the coalition of Eastern Gilanis with their Mazandarani allies and their Turcoman mercenaries was unable to defeat easily. The war and battles that ensued were bloody. Despite their every effort, the army of Biyeh Pish suffered grave losses. Nature seemed to have been in the Western Gilanis’ favor as well, as heavy rain leading to flooding on the Sefidrud did not help Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi’s cause. Per Lahiji’s account, they lost about a thousand men in the Sefidrud flood alone. The Kiyayis had no choice but to begin a new round of negotiations with the Eshaqiyyeh of Biyeh Pas. The negotiations then resulted in the Kiyayis handing over Kuchesfehan.[304] Kuchesfehan had been previously annexed from the Isma‘ilvand family during the formative years of the Kiyayi dynasty, and it had a mostly Shafe‘i population.[305]

Much of the efforts of the Kiyayis after the capture of Kuchesfehan went towards negotiating its return. The Western Gilanis’ arguments were that since the population of Kuchesfehan was Shafe‘i, it should remain under their rule. This was a devastating loss, and one that eventually sealed Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi’s fate. The loss left his brother Soltan Hasan without a territory, and Soltan Hasan’s contempt for Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi began to grow. To remedy the

[303] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 110-111. Earlier it was mentioned that some of the Turcomans from the defeated Aq Qoyunlu army had remained in Qazvin.
[304] Ibid., 116-129.
[305] Rabino, *Velayat-e Dar al-Marz*, 26; Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 46.

situation, Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi offered his brother a territory with lesser significance, namely Korjiyan.[306]

Another opportunity to negotiate for the return of Kuchesfehan presented itself within a few months of its initial loss, upon the death of Amireh Eshaq. After the Eshaqiyyeh ruler’s death, his older nephew Amireh ‘Ala’ al-Din replaced him. Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi then sent his brother, Kar Kiya Mohammad, along with the Kiyayi court doctor, Mowlana Ahmad Tabib, bearing valuable offerings, hoping to renegotiate a deal.[307] As Amireh ‘Ala’ al-Din came to an understanding with Kar Kiya Mohammad over Kuchesfehan, ‘Abbas, the longtime foe of the Kiyayis, contrived a plan to eliminate Amireh ‘Ala’ al-Din and instead replace him with his younger brother, who was also his own son-in-law, Amireh Hesam al-Din. Unbeknownst to Amireh Hesam al-Din, who was under the impression that ‘Abbas was simply going to dethrone his brother, Amireh ‘Ala’ al-Din was murdered. Amireh Hesam al-Din then replaced his brother as the ruler of Biyeh Pas. After the murder of Amireh ‘Ala’ al-Din, who had promised to return Kuchesfehan to the Kiyayis, the Kiyayis had no choice but to resume negotiations with his replacement. Their attempt was futile, and ‘Abbas made sure no agreement over Kuchesfehan was reached. Soon the Kiyayis set out to capture Kuchesfehan militarily, only to find themselves attacked in Lashteh Nesha and Lahijan by ‘Abbas and his army.[308]

The Kiyayis’ renewed hostility with the rulers of Biyeh Pas was very costly for them and weakened their position, as it devastated their region and diminished their resources. Their weakened position also led to internal family discord. Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi’s initial defeat was a serious blow to the status he had thus far been able to attain. This latest conflict revealed the

[306] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 128-129.
[307] He carried with him a golden sword, a horse with a golden saddle, and a goshawk, along with a robe of honor. Goshawks were a prominent feature of royal and court gift-giving. They were primarily used for hunting. Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 131.
[308] Ibid.*,* 131-133, 137-139.

limits of Kiyayi power. At this point they still nominally held on to Qazvin and had its *amir*s at their disposal, yet they were not able to defeat the Eshaqiyyeh. Mirza ʻAli Kiyayi, however, was unwilling to relent and ordered yet another offensive against Kuchesfehan against the advice of his prized commander, Mir ʻAbd al-Malek. Mir ʻAbd al-Malek was in Gukeh with a few of his men when ʻAbbas attacked, and the battle that ensued sealed his fate. ʻAbbas then sent Mir ʻAbd al-Malek's head to the Aq Qoyunlu ruler, Soltan Morad, in Isfahan, suggesting that he still believed Morad was a serious contender.[309]

The inability of the Kiyayis to absorb the Eshaqiyyeh, or vice versa, and thus to put an end to the fragmented nature of governance in the region, resulted in many wars and battles that bore steep consequences for its inhabitants. While for the most part the local rulers managed to keep foreign forces and intruders out of Gilan by paying tribute, or indemnities such as *naʻl-e baha*, they could not maintain a war-free zone or protect themselves against those in their immediate surroundings. These local wars, fought over territory and resources but cloaked at times in religious differences to enhance their legitimacy (i.e., when the Eshaqiyyeh took Kuchesfehan from the Kiyayis arguing its Shafeʻi population needed to live under their control, or when the Kiyayis put forth the same argument for the Zaydis in Lashteh Nesha), had the potential to overwhelm the defeated segment of the local population. From the initial slaughter of the Kiyayis in Western Gilan in 789/1387[310] to the bloody battle in 840/1437 where, according to Marʻashi, "the waters of Sefidrud turned red from the blood of those killed,"[311] and everything in between, these battles brought with them destruction and devastation for the local population. The battles not only brought loss of human life and displacement of the population, they also affected the future agricultural production that sustained these communities and thus had

[309] Ibid., 139-141.
[310] Marʻashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 78-81.
[311] Ibid., 215.

devastating economic effects. Many of these wars were followed by destruction of the territory's orchards, vineyards, and farms, which then threatened the livelihood of the survivors as well. In 860/1456, for example, the Kiyayi troops headed by Mir Zahir al-Din set fire to Malek Kavus' orchard and destroyed all that it contained.[312] In 881/1476, when the ruler of Kuhdam did not comply with the Eshaqiyyeh ruler's orders, they were faced with military attack and carnage. The bloodshed was also followed by the destruction of orchards and local vineyards.[313] In another incident, the Kiyayi rulers not only set fire to the residence of the local elite, but they also destroyed the local orchards and farmlands.[314] Destruction of agricultural lands was perpetrated to ensure reduction of the economic capabilities of the opposing party.[315] The main effects, however, were felt by the peasants, who with very little recourse would feel the brunt of the raids, and who stood to lose the most. Besides the initial human toll, such episodes would usually also be followed by a period of famine and disease.

At the same time, wars were also the means by which the regional dynasties managed to expand territory, maintain control, and survive the turbulent times. To remain in power, or to create a functioning ruling apparatus, these smaller local dynasties also needed to maintain a functioning army.[316] Creating an army for such local dynasties depended on forging alliances with the local elite, who could finance it and lend it the manpower it needed. These coalitions and alliances always shifted depending on which rival posed a higher risk to the existing power

[312] Ibid., 282.
[313] Ibid., 380-381. Also see Qader Najafzadeh, "Baztab-e Gerayesh-ha-ye Ejtema'i, Eqtesadi, va Mazhabi dar Manabe'-e Mahali-ye Gilan dar 'Asr-e Safavi," *Tarikhnameh-ye Khwarazmi* 6 (Winter 1393/2014): 120.
[314] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 75.
[315] Najafzadeh, "Baztab-e Gerayesh-ha-ye Ejtema'i, Eqtesadi," 120.
[316] Charles Tilly has put forth an extensive argument for the relationship between war and the creation of modern states in the context of early modern European state formation. This specific argument can be summarized in the following phrase, the title of his chapter "How War Made States, and Vice Versa." Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States AD 990-1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 68-70. Here I am not arguing that these local dynastic rulers managed to create a functioning state apparatus on par with the great empires of their time; however, to the limited extent that they managed to remain in power, they owed that to their military capabilities, as well as to their ability to forge alliances with other regional power holders and their main rivals.

structure of the region. When it came to rising against or for greater powers like the Aq Qoyunlu, the Kiyayi and Eshaqiyyeh rulers didn't always support the same contender. For example, the Kiyayis supported Mohammadi while the Eshaqiyyeh supported Alvand Beyg in the quarrels over the Aq Qoyunlu throne.[317] There was rarely a unified front presented in these situations.

Warfare had other functions as well, including the redistribution of wealth and providing employment for the country men when working on the land was not an option. As Dina Rizk Khoury has observed in the context of Mosul in the Ottoman Empire, "the business of violence played an important role in redistributing labor and capital across city and countryside."[318]

With the rise to power of the Safavids, and as the Safavid monarchs centralized their rule, one of the main policies they implemented was to limit the access to weapons by those outside of their own governing apparatus and to try to monopolize the means of coercion. According to Rudi Matthee, the Safavids "restricted the spread of firearms" in efforts to reduce subaltern power.[319] Gilanis did have access to firearms, although perhaps not as much as they wished. In his letter to Khan Ahmad II, Shah Tahmasb I accused him of purchasing gunpowder in secret.[320] While the Gilanis mostly relied on traditional weapons of war such as swords, daggers, and bows and arrows, they also used cannons.[321] The Kiyayis also gradually expanded their armed forces. For instance, Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi (r. 883/1478-910/1504) had 100 private soldiers guarding his residence, while later Khan Ahmad I (r. 911/1506-943/1537) had some 5000 regularly-paid soldiers at his disposal.[322]

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[317] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 97, 104.
[318] Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul*, 1540-1834 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 47.
[319] Rudi Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London: I.B Tauris, 2012), 144.
[320] Fereydun Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad-e Gilani (Nimeh-ye Dovvom-e Sadeh-ye Dahom-e Hejri)* (Tehran: Bonyad-e Mowqufat-e Doktor Mahmud Afshar,1373/1994), 67.
[321] Manuchehr Sotudeh, "Moqaddameh," in Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh, 15.
[322] Ibid., 17.

Returning our attention to the war between the Eshaqiyyeh and the Kiyayis over Kuchesfehan, it is safe to say that the Kiyayis suffered one of their most devastating defeats. This war literally bankrupted the Kiyayis and left them in ruin. The cost to the local population of Eastern Gilan was high, resulting in a substantial loss of wealth and power. After killing Mir 'Abd al-Malek, the commander in chief of the Eastern Gilanis' army, Western Gilan's army reached Lahijan and remained there for seven days. The troops looted the town and took what they could in terms of valuables and goods. Women's jewelry and cash reserves (the preferred method of saving for women was to hold onto cash and jewelry) were targeted, and then they went for the silk, horses, mules, copper and china dishes, and books and manuscripts. The Kiyayis' worst predicament was not what the Eshaqiyyeh took from them in terms of goods, but was them taking some 500 women and children as collateral, only to sell them back to their husbands and fathers at the market price for concubines and slaves.[323]

Taking Muslim women and children as concubines and slaves was a controversial issue, yet it was at times practiced in the medieval Islamic world against the sensibilities of the time. Joseph Rappoport, in his study of Mamluk women, points to this practice and the controversy surrounding it.[324] In this case, however, it does not appear that the captured women were actually sold as concubines during their captivity, but were simply kept as hostages to extort their families. Lahiji expresses his outrage at this practice, saying, "what nobody had done before in the abode of Islam, 'Abbas did to Biyeh Pish."[325] The devastation forced the Kiyayis to make

[323] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 68-69.
[324] Rappoport cites an inquiry sent to Taqi al-Din al-Subki, where a certain anonymous individual expresses doubt surrounding the legality of buying and selling slave girls who are known to be Muslims. For this interesting exchange and al-Subki's legal reasoning on the legality of such practice, see Yusof Rappoport, "Women and Gender in Mamluk Socity: An Overview," *Mamluk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 11-12.
[325] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 143.

peace with ‘Abbas and hand over even more territories to the ruler of Biyeh Pas.[326] The women were then returned home, and it appears they were left unharmed. Perhaps the sheer number of them was a factor, since in other similar cases at times when a wife of a ruler or a member of the nobility had been taken as a hostage, upon their return they would be killed to preserve the “honor” of the affected dignitary.[327]

The Kiyayi Fratricide: A New Chapter

After the death of his renowned *sepahsalar*, Mir ‘Abd al-Malek, Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi offered Kiya Fereydun, who was of the Deylamites of Ashkevar, the post of *sepahsalar* of Rankuh. Rankuh, as mentioned earlier, was the Kiyayi ruler’s second most important place of residence after Lahijan. Kiya Fereydun had been raised and trained at the court of the Kiyayis, and was trusted by Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi. It is possible that the *madreseh* (school) of Kiya Fereydun in Lahijan, which was near Isma‘il’s future residence, was named after this individual.[328] Once in power, Kiya Fereydun began sabotaging Mir Ghiyas al-Din, the *darugheh* of Qazvin who had earlier been appointed by Mir ‘Abd al-Malek. He then set out to purge him and his son-in-law, who held the fortress of Lamsar. Part of the reason for this hostility towards Mir Ghiyas al-Din was due to the Kiyayis’ desire to confiscate his estates and assets to raise much-needed funds. This was a measure intended to ameliorate the economic hardship of the Kiyayis and their officials in the aftermath of their defeat at the hands of the Eshaqiyyeh.[329]

[326] Ibid., 143. They had to hand over Jeyhan and Rahmat Abad, although it seems the people of Jeyhan were collaborating with the Eshaqiyyeh.
[327] All four wives of ‘Ali Beyg, who was de facto ruler of Gilan in 993/1585, were kidnapped by a contender named Shirzad Soltan, and upon recovering them ‘Ali Beyg strangled all four of them. Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 110.
[328] Hasan Rumlu refers to Madreseh-ye Kiya Fereydun. Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 19.
[329] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 146-147.

The Kiyayis' loss of territory and might coincided with the rise to power of Shah Isma'il, which closed even more doors to them. As the Kiyayis were headed to take control over Qazvin after the coup against Mir Ghiyas al-Din and his subsequent death, they were informed by Shah Isma'il's envoy of his victory over Soltan Morad in Hamadan in 908/1503.[330] Knowing the limits of their military potential and their considerable weakness at the time, the news of Shah Isma'il's advancement dissuaded them from making any moves on Qazvin.

After the loss of Kuchesfehan to the Eshaqiyyeh family, Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi's brother Soltan Hasan Kiyayi was confined to rule over Taleqan instead of the more lucrative town of Kuchesfehan. Unhappy with this outcome, he slowly set the stage to oust Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi without any bloodshed, and replaced him as the main ruler of Biyeh Pish. While Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi was still in power, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi set out to greet Shah Isma'il and his convoy at the fortress of Asta.[331] Shah Isma'il's trip to Asta in 909/1504 was part of an offensive to quash the forces of Hosseyn Kiya Cholavi, who had escaped Shah Isma'il's attack in Firuzkuh.[332] Shah Isma'il managed to defeat Hosseyn Kiya Cholavi and took control of Asta. After this victory, he met with some of the rulers of the northern region, namely Mohammad Hosseyn Mirza (son of the Ruler of Gorgan), Aqa Rostam Ruzafsun and 'Abdolkarim of Mazandaran, as well as Soltan Hasan Kiyayi.[333]

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[330] Ibid., 148.
[331] Ibid., 156-157; Amini Heravi, *Fotuhat-e Shahi*, 231. Some sources have referred to this as Osta fortress. See Manuchehr Parsadust, *Shah Esma'il-e Avval: Padeshahi ba Asar-ha-ye Dirpay dar Iran va Irani* (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahami-ye Enteshar, 1388/2009), 291.
[332] Hosseyn Kiya was a local ruler who ruled over parts of Mazandaran, Firuzkuh, Semnan, and Damavand. Qobad al-Hosseyni maintains that Chelavi was Shi'a, yet he allied himself with the Aq Qoyunlu *amir*s instead of Shah Isma'il. Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah,* 23-24. See other accounts in Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar*, vol. 4, 476-477; Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 203-205; Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 156-161; Sarwar, *History of Shah Ismā'īl Safawī*, 47-49; Hasan Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, 996.
[333] Sarwar, *History of Shah Ismā'īl Safawī*, 48-49; Hasan Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, 1000; Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 211.

Soltan Hasan Kiyayi most likely already had plans for his coup against Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi when he visited Shah Isma‘il at Asta. He received honorary gifts from Shah Isma‘il during this visit, but the encounter seems to have been rather brief and simple.[334] While Soltan Hasan Kiyayi was at Shah Isma‘il’s camp, he received a letter informing him of Kiya Fereydun’s collusion with Soltan Hashem Kiyayi, his younger brother. This of course was the last straw in a series of incidents, including Kiya Fereydun’s incompetence in dealing with the Eshaqiyyeh in Rasht, that prompted Soltan Hasan Kiyayi to carry out his coup against Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi and Kiya Fereydun sooner rather than later.[335]

At this point, the Kiyayis’ relationship to the Eshaqiyyeh family had also taken another turn after ‘Abbas was killed at the order of Amireh Hesam al-Din. Kiya Fereydun, seizing the opportunity presented by ‘Abbas’ death, attacked and looted Rahmat Abad, located in the southern part of Western Gilan. Amireh Hesam al-Din, who was under the impression that with ‘Abbas out of the picture the relationship between the two families would take a turn for better, became irate and demanded the cessation of hostilities.[336] The two families then, faced with other important issues, namely the rise to power of Shah Isma‘il, began working through diplomatic solutions to improve their damaged relationship. In 909/1503, however, the Eshaqiyyeh ruler sent his troops to Deylaman and caused yet another skirmish. The Kiyayis responded with a counterattack on Rasht after the Eshaqiyyeh troops had already set out for Deylaman. Their offensive on Rasht bore mixed results; at first they managed to loot Rasht and gather much-needed supplies, but in the end the troops of Biyeh Pish were unsuccessful in maintaining their

[334] Amini Heravi*, Fotuhat-e Shahi*, 230.
[335] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 160.
[336] Ibid., 151.

hold. Due to lack of leadership and organization, this military mission ended in the defeat of the army of Biyeh Pish as well.[337]

After this incident, dissonance between the Kiyayi brothers heightened. Soltan Hasan Kiyayi, who was set on disciplining Kiya Fereydun and Mirza ʻAli Kiyayi for their failure in the Rasht offensive, and for appointing Soltan Hashem Kiyayi as the crown prince, orchestrated a *coup* against Mirza ʻAli Kiyayi. After luring Kiya Fereydun to Deylaman, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi had him killed. Mirza ʻAli Kiyayi was forced to step down, and was confined to rule over Rankuh and Lamsar, as well as Samam, which was home to his late father's grave.[338] Soltan Hasan Kiyayi had made an agreement with Hesam al-Din before the coup; however, after the coup Hesam al-Din did not fulfill his end of the bargain and asked Mirza ʻAli Kiyayi to be sent to his court as a hostage.[339]

Once in power, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi tried to bring the old allies of the Kiyayi dynasty into his fold, but in this he was unsuccessful. He then took his first step towards setting up a good diplomatic relationship with Shah Ismaʻil I, especially since his efforts at reaching a peace agreement with the Eshaqiyyeh were futile.[340] The details of Soltan Hasan Kiyayi's relationship with Shah Ismaʻil I will be discussed in the next chapter.

As Soltan Hasan Kiyayi tried to consolidate his rule, he faced a plethora of internal and external issues. He was still faced with the unresolved territorial dispute with the Eshaqiyyeh, and he had an empty treasury. They had lost the lucrative Kuchesfehan, they had been extorted over the return of their wives and children, and the wealthy and notables had lost much of their

[337] Ibid., 167-173.
[338] Ibid., 78; Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh,* 116. Qobad al-Hosseyni, the author of *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah*, contends that Mirza ʻAli himself decided to resign and gave the throne to his brother after Kiya Fereydun's death. Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah,* 214.
[339] *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gīlān V. History Under the Safavids," by Manouchehr Kasheff, accessed September 14, 2017. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gilan-v
[340] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 184.

wealth in the looting that had followed the battles. To add to their misfortune, they had to withdraw from Qazvin in favor of Shah Isma'il I, and were seeing a constant decrease in their power. At this time Soltan Hasan Kiyayi, unable to pay his court's dues, resorted to borrowing money which he was also unable to repay.[341] Another issue facing him was the treachery of some of the notables, such as Sadid Shafti actively sabotaging him, as well as his two brothers: Soltan Hashem Kiyayi, who laid territorial claim over Gilan, and Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi, who still was troubled by the coup orchestrated by Soltan Hasan Kiyayi.[342]

Soltan Hashem Kiyayi's efforts at gaining control in Gilan were not successful. As will be discussed in the next chapter, he even enlisted the help of the Safavids, trying to negotiate a decree from Shah Isma'il I. As the tension between Soltan Hasan Kiyayi and Soltan Hashem Kiyayi escalated, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi appointed his son, Khan Ahmad I, as the crown prince in 911/1505 to help secure his own line of rule.[343] Soltan Hasan Kiyayi then set out to defeat Soltan Hashem Kiyayi and took control of Tonekabon, appointing a *hakem* and negotiating an alliance with the notables of Tonekabon.[344] Soltan Hashem Kiyayi then fled to the court of Aqa Rostam of Mazandaran and was eventually executed at the order of Sadid Shafti, the future *sepahsalar* of Khan Ahmad I.[345]

Soltan Hasan Kiyayi's unsuccessful attempt at resolving the territorial dispute with the Eshaqiyyeh had also created a climate of pending war with the Eshaqiyyeh family, but above all the Kiyayis also faced threats from their own court officials, namely Kaljar and Sadid Shafti. It was against this background that the internal family discord among the Kiyayis escalated to the

[341] Ibid., 198-199.
[342] Ibid., 200-201.
[343] Ibid., 207.
[344] Ibid., 211.
[345] Soltan Hashem was under the impression (based on the false promises of Sadid Shafti's men) that he could take the throne from his nephew, Khan Ahmad I. Hence, he was headed to Gilan to claim the throne when Sadid Shafti sent one of his men to execute him. Ibid., 296.

point that the Kiyayi brother resorted to fratricide. Taking advantage of Soltan Hasan Kiyayi's vulnerability in the absence of his son Khan Ahmad I and his forces, who were headed to Lahijan to join Shah Isma'il I's camp and his troops, Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi attacked his brother with a group of his entourage. It does not appear that Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi had much fervor for gaining back his lost privilege as a ruler himself. He had, however, completely lost his trust in Soltan Hasan Kiyayi, as he feared he would imprison him.

Different stories emerge in Safavid chronicles in relation to the events surrounding Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi's murder of his brother Soltan Hasan Kiyayi. The author of *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, for instance, does not subscribe to the same storyline as Lahiji in *Tarikh-e Khani*. He attributes the murder of both Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi and Soltan Hasan Kiyayi to a group of outlaws in Lahijan who set out to kill Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi first, and when Soltan Hasan Kiyayi found out about the attack, he rushed to save his brother's life. He too, however, was killed by the insurgent group.[346] It is very likely that *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*'s account is fictional, and is written in a manner to save face for the Kiyayi sayyids. Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi's murder of his sayyid brother was certainly a significant departure from the way the Kiyayis had conducted themselves up to that point.

After having Soltan Hasan Kiyayi murdered, Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi sent a letter to his youngest brother, Soltan Hashem Kiyayi in Mazandaran, asking him to take over the Kiyayi rule.[347] Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi, however, was soon met with the wrath of Soltan Hasan Kiyayi's supporters. Bu Sa'id Mir and Kaljar, among others, collaborated to eliminate Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi. Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi tried to gather support by promising Bu Sa'id the post of commander in chief

[346] Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 239. The only other source that in any way corresponds to the account in *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan* is the short mention in the account of the Safavid chronicler Qazi Ahmad Qommi, who asserts that Mirza 'Ali was killed by a group of rebels in Lahijan. See Qazi Ahmad b. Sharaf al-Din al-Hosseyn al-Hosseyni al-Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, ed. Ehsan Eshraqi (Tehran: Mo'assesseh-ye Entesharat va Chap-e Daneshgah-e Tehran, 1383/2004), 88.

[347] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 216-227. Qobad al-Hosseyni also writes that Soltan Hasan was killed by his brother's men, and then a group of Soltan Hasan's men avenged his death by killing Mirza 'Ali. Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah*, 32-33; also see Tattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Alfi*, vol. 8, 5484.

of Lahijan. However Bu Sa'id, whose loyalty to Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi was questionable, proceeded with plans to instead eliminate him by gathering the support of other notables of Gilan, as well as the *khalabar*[348] of Rankuh, 'Ala' al-Din Tolam, among others.[349] Qazi Mohammad, whose support of Soltan Hasan Kiyayi *vis-à-vis* his brother Soltan Hashem Kiyayi was mentioned earlier, played an important role in preserving the status of Soltan Hasan Kiyayi's house by making sure Bu Sa'id Mir, Kaljar, as well as other notables like the *khalabar*s of surrounding towns, would swear allegiance to Khan Ahmad I, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi's son and the crown prince of Biyeh Pish.[350] Bu Sa'id Mir then quickly shifted his allegiance from Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi to Khan Ahmad I, and along with Kaljar proceeded to gather his forces and head towards Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi's camp. A battle ensued between the forces of Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi and the opposing coalition, resulting in Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi's death at the hands of 'Ali Hesam al-Din, the *khalabar* of Lashteh Nesha.[351]

The news of the death of his father and uncle traveled to Khan Ahmad I while he was at the court of Shah Isma'il I. Shah Isma'il I granted the governorship of Gilan to him, signaling a new era for the local rulers as they soon began navigating the emerging empire.[352] Before being allowed to leave Shah Isma'il I's camp, Khan Ahmad I was pressured into making a payment in the amount of 1000 *tuman*s to some of the *Qizilbash amir*s. In return, he was given a golden sword belt and a jeweled crown, placing his rule as one sponsored and legitimized by Shah

[348] *Khalabar* is a term that refers to local soldiers and officials within the Kiyayi court. These servicemen had some military connection and were paid by the Kiyayi rulers. Manuchehr Sotudeh considers them the ruler's special soldiers. Rabino only refers to them as servicemen whose room and board was paid by the Kiyayis. Naser 'Azimi, "Goruh-ha-ye Ejtema'i va Shoghli-ye Gilan dar Qorun-e Vosta: Bakhsh-e Chaharom va Payani," in *Varg.* Last accessed September 14, 2017. http://v6rg.com/?p=5048

[349] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 227-229.

[350] Ibid., 229.

[351] Ibid., 231; Qobad al-Hosseyni*, Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah*, 23; Tattavi va Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Alfi*, vol. 8, 5484; 'Abdi Beyg Shirazi, *Takmelat al-Akhbar: Tarikh-e Safaviyyeh az Aghaz ta 978 Hejri Qamari* (Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 1369/1990), 136.

[352] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 248-366; Mohammad Yusof Hosseyn Valeh Esfehani, *Khold-e Barin: Iran dar Ruzegar-e Safaviyan*, ed. Mir Hashem Mohaddes (Tehran: Bonyad-e Moqufat-e Mahmud Afshar, 1372/1993), 155.

Isma'il I. Laleh Beyg, who was also Khan Ahmad I's father-in-law and Shah Isma'il I's very first *vakil*, sent mules and other offerings and gifts along with Khan Ahmad I to Gilan.[353]

Conclusion

In the transition period during which Aq Qoyunlu rule became fragmented and Ismail's faction began to overcome the regional adversaries, the Kiyayi rulers saw an opportunity to expand their territories momentarily. However, the greater political shifts in the region also influenced the status of the Kiyayis, leading the eager Kiyayi brothers to expand at first. However, they remained inefficient in maintaining their hold over their territorial expansions. In the end, the Kiyayis' ability to stretch their arms beyond Gilan was limited, as they were not able to end the fragmented nature of rule in Gilan itself. Their Sunni neighbors continued to be their main adversaries, and despite decades of both diplomatic and forceful tactics, neither of the families managed resolve the territorial issues or absorb the other within their respective polities. Religious differences and distinct local identities played a limiting role in that matter. Moreover, the local wars played a role in devastating the locals and emptying the treasury of the ruling families.

While Gilan remained mostly immune from foreign attacks, its internal political dynamic did not spare it from the devastation and destruction of war and forage orchestrated by the elite in positions of power. The outcome of these local skirmishes determined the balance of power between the two main dynastic rulers, the Eshaqiyyeh and the Kiyayis. This local political and religious division was useful to the regional contenders for power like the Aq Qoyunlu, the Qara Qoyunlu, the Timurids, and later the Safavids, who as we shall observe in the following chapter took advantage of it the best they could.

[353] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 248.

The shifts in power beyond the borders of Gilan and the stress of regional and local political tensions affected the way the Kiyayis managed their internal affairs as well. For example, as the tension began to run high with Shah Isma'il I's advancement into the Iranian mainland, competition for territory and the desire for preservation of the family's rule led to Kiyayi fratricide and family discord. Yet, in the end it was the Kiyayis' willingness to adapt to their changing circumstances, and their initial show of support for Shah Isma'il I, that allowed them to continue their rule despite the devastating effects of local wars and internal family discord.

Chapter Three

Sultans, Sayyids, and *Khan*s in the New Empire:

Gilan and the Safavids in the 16th Century

The historical conditions for the emergence of a strong central state in Iran did not materialize before the 20th century.[354] The process by which the Safavids, like other post-Mongol polities, consolidated their power within the fluid boundaries of Iranian territory was shaped by geopolitical, socio-economic, religious, and linguistic factors.[355] Various forms of political fragmentation had already unfolded when Shah Isma'il I came to power. The thrust for centralization which preoccupied Safavid sovereigns involved challenging and reconfiguring the pre-existing local networks of production and land management, as well as the authority of traditional political elites and religious leaders. These developments and aims were evident in the northern province of Gilan, but they were rife with difficulties and thus unfolded over a long period of time. It took the Safavids decades before they could administer Gilan through the agents of the Safavid center. In this and the following chapter, I examine a range of practices, policies, negotiations, and strategies which the Safavid sovereigns, assisted by their administrative-military elites, utilized to transform their polity and maintain stronger relations with various geographical units.

Safavid initiatives in Gilan unfolded through two main policies. The first policy involved concentrated efforts to incorporate Gilan's notables within the rank and file of the Safavid

[354] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 4.
[355] On "centrifugal forces" in Iran, see ibid., 4-13.

administration, and the second was the integration of the *Qizilbash* and Safavid administrators into Gilan's governing apparatus, hence blurring the lines between local and central on both fronts. The Safavid shahs strove to tie the local rulers to the center through marriage and to appease them through gift-giving, reaffirmation of their authority, and bestowal of robes of honor. Notwithstanding, the Safavids failed to secure the Gilani notables' unequivocal loyalty. Whenever local need and interest was in conflict with that of the center, the loyalties of Gilan's elite were to the former. These efforts, however, paved the way for the second phase, namely bringing Gilan into the fold of Safavid imperial designs by placing the court's agents in Gilan. This method was put in place during the reign of Shah Tahmasb I but was carried out more successfully during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I. It faced several challenges and led to bloodshed, but in the long run it put an end to local dynastic rule in the region. The next two chapters will look at different styles and policies which the Safavids pursued to achieve centralization, ranging from soft power to more direct forms of control, and directed towards Gilan and its ambitious ruling elite, an elite which continued to entertain forceful autonomous tendencies.

Before delving into the policies and processes through which the Safavids incorporated Gilan, administratively and politically, into their sphere of sovereignty and legitimacy, it is important to review the arguments pertaining to the nature of the Safavid polity.

The Safavid State

Safavid historians have long debated the nature of the Safavid polity. Of the notable pioneers in the field, Roger Savory argues that all the elements of a "state" were present during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and notes the sense of national identity among Iranians,

which points to the formation of a nation-state.[356] Andrew Newman has contested the idea of the Safavid polity as a "state," and has even gone so far as to refer to it as a "project," envisioned as a rebirth of the ancient Persian empire(s).[357] In contrast, others have contested this idea and question whether the Safavid state embodied a revival of the practices and traditions of ancient Persian empires. Douglas Streusand, for instance, contends, "the Safavid Empire was neither a revival of the ancient empires of the Achaemenians (the Persians who fought the Greeks) and Sasanians nor the beginning of the modern state of Iran."[358]

Marahsall Hodgson coined the term "gunpowder empires" to bring attention to the military use of gunpowder by Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires, which led to the reorganization of military forces as well as the ability to expand and consolidate power. These empires all experienced certain forms of power consolidation, geographical expansion, religious legitimacy, and administrative transformation.[359] In his comparative study of these three empires, Streusand objects to the way Hodgson has articulated "the gunpowder empires hypothesis" and instead clarifies that "the phrase 'gunpowder empires' in the title of his book refers to 'empires of gunpowder era' not 'empires created by gunpowder weapons.'"[360] Stephen Dale also questions whether the term "gunpowder" can explain much about the nature of these states - Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal - and especially the Safavids, "who never really warmed to the use of heavy artillery."[361] Ira Lapidus also asserts that while the "term gunpowder empires imputes a great importance to the innovative military technology of infantry armed with

[356] Roger Savory, "The Safavid State and Polity," *Iranian Studies* 7 (Winter-Spring, 1974): 208.
[357] Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).
[358] Douglas E. Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 137. Also see Rula Abisaab's review of *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* by Andrew Newman, *Shii Studies Review* 2, no.1-2 (2018): 400-406.
[359] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 3, *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times,* 17-18.
[360] Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 3.
[361] Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim Empire of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6.

muskets… that allowed the new empires to sweep away their rivals," it was also the "deeper structure of political institutions" that allowed them their success.[362]

Comparing the Safavid polity to its contemporary rivals, the Ottomans and the Mughals, Rudi Matthee argues that the Safavids were in fact capable of establishing an "empire," albeit one weaker than that of their neighbors.[363] Matthee is reluctant to use the term "empire" in connection to the Safavids, noting that it is a modern term applied retroactively, and adding that there is no equivalent Persian word for it in contemporary or even later sources. It is not clear to me, however, whether finding such an equivalent linguistic entity is useful for an assessment of the structural features of an empire. The term *Mamalek-e Mahruseh-ye Iran,* the "Guarded Domains" or "Protected Realms" of Iran, was most commonly used, and deconstructing this term shows that it did exhibit features of "empire" whose characteristics have been discussed and debated by modern historians.[364] Matthee then goes on to note that, "regardless of terminology, the whole idea of the pre-nineteenth-century empire is constructed, not by those who administered the composite states we call empires, but by twenty-first century scholars."[365] Yet these conceptual limitations in framing the Safavid polity[366] do not prevent Matthee from arguing that the Safavids managed to create a "centralized state" which ruled over an ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse population while aspiring for territorial expansion. The main aspect of their "imperial" rule was the role and status of the shah as the main source of power. In

[362] Ira M. Lapidus, "Sultanates and Gunpowder Empires: The Middle East" in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 347.
[363] Rudi Matthee, "Was Safavid Iran an Empire?" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1-2 (2010): 233-265.
[364] Rudi Matthee, "Relations Between the Center and the Periphery in Safavid Iran: The Western Borderlands V. The Eastern Frontier Zone," *The Historian* (2015): 433. For an overview of the usage of the term *Mamalek-e Mahruseh-ye Iran*, see Baqer Sadri Niya, "Pazhuheshi dar Bab-e Estelah-e Mamalek-e Mahruseh-ye Iran," *Iran Shenakht* 1 (1374/1995): 65-87. According to Baqer Sadri Niya, this term was in usage from the 7th/13th until the 14th/20th century, when it was abandoned.
[365] Matthee, "Relations Between the Center and the Periphery," 433-434. According to Matthee, Persian sources used terms such as *Mamalek-e Mahruseh* and *Mamalek-e Iran*.
[366] Fewer available resources, harsher geographical conditions, etc.

other words, Matthee sees the terms Safavid "state" and Safavid "empire" as interconnected, and insists that centralization was evident. Another major aspect of Safavid rule which marked its imperial character was the hegemony of Persian cultural, social, linguistic, and artistic norms.[367]

Abbas Amanat argues that the term *Mamalek-e Mahruseh-ye Iran* became a synonym for Iranian territories and the "title of the country" as early as the 7th/13th century. The idea of a "decentralized autonomy" over a culturally and ethnically diverse realm was also implicit in the term "*Mamalek-e Mahruseh*,"[368] a term which "implied the presence of contesting powers at the frontiers."[369] This argument also carries to the 19th century, where Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, in her work *Frontier Fictions*, sees the processes of nation formation in Iran to have started during the Qajar period and continued under the Pahlavis, through "the burgeoning debates about land, frontiers, and geography."[370] Meanwhile, Ali Ansari reminds us that the official title of the Qajar state was "The Guarded Domains of Iran" and that "the idea of Iran quite clearly predated the rise of a distinct nationalist ideology."[371] Yet we need to be cautious in how we understand and conceptualize the term *Mamalek-e Mahruseh-ye Iran*, *Iranzamin,* or *Iranshahr* in relation to local and regional affiliations, loyalties, understandings of identity, and territorial sovereignty. As Rula Abisaab states, instead of treating *Iranzamin* as an "inheritance," one should consider it "as a set of possibilities that could be affirmed or suppressed, 'remembered' or 'un-remembered' on the basis of new historical realities."[372]

Andrew Newman suggests using the term "project" for the Safavid polity instead of "state" to avoid conflating this pre-modern project with a modern nation-state, as a modern

[367] Matthee, "Relations Between the Center and the Periphery," 434.
[368] Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, 9.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1956* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 14.
[371] Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 19.
[372] Rula Jurdi Abisaab, Review of *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire,* by Andrew Newman*, Shii Studies Review* 2 (2018): 401.

nation-state monopolized the military within "a highly centralized administrative apparatus" to a totalitarian extent and created a homogeneous population with a single language and fixed international borders.[373] Even though Newman correctly questions "the absolutist connotations" tied to the shah, his assessment of the "Safavid project" and the role of the realm's heterogeneous discourses and constituencies in shaping this project appears to be vague.[374] As historians like Rudi Matthee argue, the Safavid shahs did not exercise absolute power.[375] Matthee was among the first to bring in this view. Willem Floor, on the other hand, is not completely consistent in his stand on this question, claiming that "justice in Safavid Persia was meted out by the Shah, who was the sole source of authority: civil, criminal, political, and, to some extent for part of the Safavid reign, religious."[376] However, in *Safavid Government Institutions*, Floor argues that different groups like the *Qizilbash*, the local notables, the ulema, and even the *gholam*s, offered a counter-balance to the power of the shahs.[377]

Pertinent to the study at hand is Timothy Mitchell's argument that most definitions of the state are "about distinguishing it from society, and the line between the two is difficult to draw."[378] Safavid historians have also questioned the usefulness of this term and its implications. On my part, I see the Safavid governing institutions as interdependent with societal arrangements. As such, the boundaries between state and society are not fixed or static. The political elites at the center do not stand outside the rubric of social and economic relationships,

[373] Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 123.
[374] Abisaab, Review of *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, 402.
[375] Rudolph P. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran: Silk for Silver 1600-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[376] Willem Floor, "The Secular Judicial System in Safavid Persia," in *Studia Iranica* (2000): 9-60.
[377] In addition, Willem Floor asserts that while the shah was the sole source of authority, he did delegate responsibility to provincial, local, and other leaders because of the high cost of maintaining an absolutist central rule and the lack of a developed communication system. Laurence Lockhart contends that the Safavid state developed into an absolute monarchy; however, he notes that the shah also shared authority with his ministers and officials to some extent. See Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*; Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavid Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (London, 1958), 12.
[378] Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991), 77.

provincially and locally. As such they are embedded in the fabric of society.[379] At the same time, I take for granted the status of the Safavids as an empire on the rise, without creating an absolute separation between forces of state formation and social forces that shape them. Keeping this in mind, the aim of the next two chapters is to explore the Safavid polity's modes of centralization through a close study of Gilan. I take this polity to be volatile and constantly developing. By recognizing the Safavids as an empire which lasted over two hundred years, I stress their ability "to combine and shift strategies," be it through planting enclaves or consolidating land, and I look at forms of indirect supervision of liaisons and forceful regulation of provincial and central affairs.[380] As the Safavids' legitimacy grew and their administrative-military capabilities became stronger, their strategies towards Gilan also changed. Many historians see the reign of Shah 'Abbas I as pivotal in decisively transforming the Safavid polity from "a tribal confederation into a bureaucratic empire."[381] I argue, however, that centralization was a process that began with the rise of the Safavids to power and was neither an event orchestrated by Shah 'Abbas I nor one that presented a radical shift away from patterns of rule under earlier Safavid sovereigns. The policies, negotiations, and reconfiguration of relations between center and periphery, and between the emerging empire and smaller regional powers, which took place before the time of Shah 'Abbas I was just as instrumental in bringing about the new and decisive shifts in social-religious integration and political administration as Shah 'Abbas I's own initiatives.

Policies and Styles of Centralization in Gilan

Local elite politics, religious divisions, and economic relations have shaped the history of the Safavid periphery as much as imperial economic policies and methods of political control at

[379] For more on the problems in defining the state, see Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State."
[380] Jane Burbank and Fredrick Cooper, *Empires in World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 16.
[381] Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 137.

the center. Gilan's governors and political elite actively participated in and shaped imperial policies by forging new alliances and requesting Safavid aid in settling local disputes. They wove strong political and cultural ties between their region, the growing empire, and its neighbors.

Empires often allowed for a multiplicity of political configurations within their realms, ruling certain parts from the center while allowing others to maintain some level of control and sovereignty.[382] No configuration of power was ever set in stone, and it changed as the empire itself did. Intra-elite discord, economic conditions, and fluctuating political prerogatives shaped the Gilani rulers' pursuit of power. Spheres of action at the local level may result in friendly or hostile relationships with the Safavids. Consequently, the center's strategies, approaches, and policies are reconfigured in ways that are not always conducive to its own self-perpetuation. Much of this interaction eventually lent itself to a more centralized and direct exercise of power from the center. During the early phase of Safavid rule in particular, the local rulers played as much a role in initiating and negotiating this dialectic of power as the Safavid elite themselves.

Prior to the Safavid era, the basis of contention and conflict in Gilan reflected internal competition over the control of territory and resources, mainly within the confines of the northern region. It exacerbated the territorial division between Eastern and Western Gilan, which took on cultural-ethnic-religious overtones, and which the Safavid rulers greatly exploited in the first decades of their rule.[383] Safavid centralization initiatives during the first few decades appeared to be similar to "the old style of divide-and-conquer" aimed at controlling conflict and

[382] Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 16.
[383] The presence of the first Safavid agents in Gilan came during Shah Tahmasb I's reign. This episode is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

managing crisis on a short-term basis.[384] In the succeeding phase, Safavid centralization efforts concentrated on long-term attempts at subordinating the local elite through infiltration by the center's agents and mediators, who became part of the region's ruling apparatus. These plans were usually carried out by a relatively strong "centralizing" state.[385] Their framework more closely resembles the policies and actions of Shah Tahmasb I in the late 16th century, and later Shah 'Abbas I in the early 17th century, in relation to Gilan specifically. Despite my reservations about depicting the Safavid polity as a strong centralizing state, I maintain that during the second half of the 16th and the early 17th century, the Safavids asserted their authority in Gilan through direct intervention. While Shah Tahmasb I's attempts were short-lived and less systematic, those of Shah 'Abbas I were successful and effective, thus recasting the internal system of governance in Gilan. Shah Tahmasb I failed to put into place strong institutions linking Gilan to the center that would ensure a continuation of practices and consolidations of alliances, yet his efforts were instrumental in paving the way for Shah 'Abbas I's policies. The *Qizilbash* presence in Gilan was cut short after Shah Tahmasb I's death. Shah 'Abbas I, in comparison, managed to establish such institutions, linked to him and operated from the center. They were resilient and continued to thrive after the monarch's death. Along with the institutionalization of this level of centralization, however, came challenges and local uprisings which will be discussed in the following chapter.

[384] In my discussion of styles of centralization in the Safavid Empire, I am influenced by the two main models of centralization Karen Barkey has noted in the context of the Ottoman Empire and France. One style, that of divide and rule, was mainly implemented during the first century of Safavid rule, while the second style more closely resembles Barkey's typology regarding France's style in the 17th century. This was a more direct style of centralization which led to more local uprisings and disturbances. The Safavids, in the case of Gilan, stationed their own agents in charge of the affairs of Gilan after Shah 'Abbas I came to power, and hence exercised more direct influence there. For Barkey's arguments, see Karen Barkey, "Rebellious Alliances: The State and Peasant Unrest in Early Twentieth-Century France and the Ottoman Empire," *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 6 (December 1991): 700.

[385] Barkey, "Rebellious Alliances," 700.

"Soft Power," Alliance Building, and Divide and Rule Policies in Center-Periphery Relations

The early Safavids used different tactics to prevent insubordinate factions from challenging their hegemony. Military power was a vital part of the state's exertion of its sovereignty, and remained the most important tool for subjugating and incorporating diverse groups into its realm. Beyond that, though, the Safavid shahs utilized "soft power" just as much, especially in keeping the frontier territories in check.[386] The Safavids utilized divergent processes in order to accommodate groups and factions with volatile loyalties, including co-opting local leaders and rebels, integrating them into the Safavid administration, and seeking to build new alliances with them. Building alliances with the local power holders and notables was done through intermarriage with the Safavid royal household, and sometimes through raising the offspring of those marriages at the court in order to turn them into devoted Safavid subjects. At times, the Safavids would also hold the sons of local rulers as hostages at the court to ensure the full cooperation of the local rulers.[387]

Major policies like changes in practices of land holding, rules and regulations regarding trade and movement of goods, as well as limitations on access to firearms, among others, played a significant role in increasing the power of the center *vis-à-vis* the peripheral sources.[388] While changes in landholdings were implemented as early as Shah Isma'il I's time, they were carried out to a greater extent under Shah 'Abbas I. The latter's famous move to turn Gilan and Mazandaran into *khasseh* lands, for example, transformed the socio-economic features of these regions through the control of their revenues. This plan was part of a process that aimed to

[386] Here I am referring to Rudi Mathee's use of the term "soft power" in reference to the tactics of Safavid shahs in their dealings with the periphery. See Matthee, "Relations Between the Center and the Periphery," 443.
[387] For more on forms of control used by the Safavids, also see Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 145-147.
[388] Ibid.

incorporate Gilan into the Safavid polity. It eventually changed the land arrangements within it to benefit the center. I discuss this process in more detail in the next chapter. In the following section, I provide an overview of some of the marriages of a strategic nature that reshaped and complicated the political interest of the elite in Gilan and tied them to the Safavids.

Marriage was one of the main ways through which rulers built alliances. Such alliances between the Safavid house and *Qizilbash* tribes such as the Mowsellu, Ostajlu, and Shamlu indicated the importance of these *Qizilbash* tribal elements in the making of the Safavid polity. Shah Isma'il I himself married into the Mowsellu tribe, but other tribes were to join the Safavid house through marriage, like the prominent Qaramanlu figure and the Kurdish chieftain who married two of Shah Isma'il I's sisters.[389] The marriages with the local ruling elite, on the other hand, were not necessarily signaling the importance of in-laws in the making of the polity, but were instead meant to ensure their cooperation and loyalty. Yet alliances formed through marriage, as they tied the families together and created complicated webs of kinship and loyalties, were not always sufficient to keep the political ambitions of competing forces at bay. After death, divorce, or even at times when marriage was still in effect, the sons-in-law could become rebellious.[390]

Political marriages were not just conceived between the Safavid house and other notables, but were also encouraged between different elite factions. These marriages were designed to form alliances and to strengthen center-periphery ties, but the inter-elite marriages most certainly made the configuration of power a more convoluted affair which could either weaken or strengthen these households' position *vis-à-vis* the Safavids and vice versa. Shah Isma'il I, for example, encouraged marriage between a *Qizilbash* amir's daughter and the son of

[389] Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 15; for important marriages during Shah 'Abbas I's reign, 53-54.
[390] An example of this is the marriage of the Eshaqiyyeh ruler to the daughter of Shah Tahmasb I. After her death, the Eshaqiyyeh ruler became rebellious and defied the Safavids.

Soltan Hasan Kiyayi, bonding an important *Qizilbash* family to the ruling family of Gilan. When Soltan Hasan, having been given the cold shoulder by his fellow Mazandarani and Gilani allies, sent his son, the future Kiyayi ruler Khan Ahmad I, to Shah Isma'il I's camp in Isfahan, Shah Isma'il I arranged for Laleh Beyg Shamlu's daughter to marry Khan Ahmad I, who later succeeded his father as the ruler of Biyeh Pish. Laleh Beyg Shamlu was Shah Isma'il I's very first *vakil* and *amir al-omara*, but was later replaced by Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti, whose position and political career will be discussed shortly.[391]

Another significant political marriage in Gilan was the marriage of Amireh Dobbaj, the Eshaqiyyeh ruler, to Shah Isma'il I's daughter. When Amir Hesam al-Din of Biyeh Pas passed away in 922/1516, his son Amireh Dobbaj replaced him.[392] Amireh Dobbaj did not move far from his father's general disdain for the Safavids, and began defying the Safavids not long after he came to power. In response to Amireh Dobbaj's provocation, Shah Isma'il I gathered some of his *Qizilbash* troops in 925/1519 and called upon the troops of Mazandaran, Rostamdar, and Lahijan to join forces with him. Amireh Dobbaj, knowing that he did not stand a chance against Shah Isma'il I's army, quickly sent a delegate to Shah Isma'il I's camp in Soltaniyeh in order to make amends. Meanwhile, Amireh Dobbaj also pleaded with Khan Ahmad I, who was already the ruler of Biyeh Pish, to intervene on his behalf. Shah Isma'il I imposed a mulct of 5000 *tuman* on him and had him pledge to pay his dues on time. A year later, he visited Shah Isma'il I's court again, during which time Shah Isma'il I bestowed the title of Mozaffar Soltan on him and granted him his daughter's hand in marriage.[393] This marriage, however, did not deter Amireh

[391] For the marriage of Laleh Beyg's daughter to Khan Ahmad I, see Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 186.
[392] Rabino, *Farmanravayan-e Gilan*, 35. Sayyed Mohammad Taqi Mir-'Abolqasemi puts the year of Amireh Eshaq's death at 921/1515, a year earlier. See Mir-'Abolqasemi, *Gilan az Aghaz ta Enqelab-e Mashrutiyyat*, 107.
[393] Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar*, vol. 4, 563; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 11-13; Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 575; Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar*, 182; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 141; *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gīlān V. History Under the Safavids."

Dobbaj for long, as he established contact with the Ottomans while he was married to the house of the Safavids, and after his wife's death he became even more defiant. In the end, his failed relationship with the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman cost him his life at the hands of Shah Tahmasb I.[394]

The Gilani elite's early contact with the Safavids was initiated through diplomatic missions designed to attract the attention of the monarch to their own local causes, usually revolving around territorial disputes. One of the first official contacts (obviously, establishing political contact with the Safavids was inevitable) was initiated by Soltan Hasan Kiyayi after he had removed his brother 'Ali Mirza Kiyayi from power, and it was done with the goal of utilizing the Safavids' collaboration for the purpose of recapturing lost territory, namely Kuchesfehan, from his Eshaqiyyeh neighbors. Previously, Shah Isma'il I had once summoned the Kiyayi ruler to his camp, where he had given Soltan Hasan Kiyayi, then the representative of his brother 'Ali Mirza Kiyayi, a robe of honor and celebratory gifts.[395] On the other hand, these seemingly positive contacts gradually paved the way for Safavid interference and influence in the region, as they also gradually shifted and brought into question the long-established understanding of legitimacy of rule at the local level. For example, after Soltan Hasan Kiyayi pleaded with Shah Isma'il I for aid in settling the territorial issues with the Eshaqiyyeh, Shah Isma'il I sent his commander Beyram Beyg along with Khan Ahmad I (who was already at Shah Isma'il I's camp) to launch an offensive against Biyeh Pas.[396] This was not a full-scale military intervention on the part of Shah Isma'il I, as he only sent a small number of cavalry to Gilan as a complementary aid to the Kiyayi campaign. Taking Biyeh Pas proved much more difficult than the Kiyayi ruler had anticipated. Shah Isma'il I's delegation was stalled in Lamsar on its way to

[394] The fate of Amireh Dobbaj is discussed in more detail below.
[395] This encounter is discussed in more detail in the previous chapter.
[396] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 186-187.

Biyeh Pas as the harsh winter passed, and the commanders and soldiers, who were not content with their limited stipend and the lack of booty, began looting Lamsar and the surrounding area at the instigation of a local contender, Mir Ghiyas al-Din, leaving it devastated.[397] Mir Ghiyas al-Din, a member of the local elite of Lamsar, had previously established a cordial relationship with the Safavids, and had begun sabotaging the Kiyayis' presence in Lamsar and Taleqan. His cozy relationship with the *Qizilbash* prevented the local elite from eliminating him, for they feared fierce backlash from his *Qizilbash* allies.[398]

In the end, the much-needed help from the *Qizilbash* turned into menace for Soltan Hasan Kiyayi who, instead of being able to acquire his lost territory, had to deal with the consequences of the *Qizilbash* presence, namely their looting and ravaging of Lamsar. Faced with a difficult situation like that, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi once again sent Khan Ahmad I back to Shah Isma'il I's court, hoping for Shah Isma'il I to intervene on their behalf and grant rule of Kuchesfehan to them. Shah Isma'il I sent a delegate to Amireh Eshaq to settle the territorial dispute. Amireh Eshaq, however, showed little interest in negotiations and disputed any territorial claim the Kiyayi ruler had over Kuchesfehan. Shah Isma'il I then enlisted the service of one of his trusted companions, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti, the future *vakil,* to negotiate between the Kiyayis and the Eshaqiyyeh. In these negotiations, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti allied himself with the rulers of Biyeh Pas, creating further division and contempt between the Gilani rulers. Following a divide and rule model of governance, the center usually creates conflict within the provincial elite and their command structure, "projecting a shifting rationale for provincial groups to remain loyal to the state."[399] In the case of Gilan, a rift within Gilan's political

[397] Ibid., 188.
[398] Ibid., 190.
[399] Barkey, "Rebellious Alliances," 700.

structure – between Eastern and Western Gilan – was already in place, and in fact the Safavids exploited it in their favor with the aid of the Gilani elite themselves.

Before turning to the political career of Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti and his role in exploiting the political divisions between the rulers of Gilan, a discussion of the shifting understanding of the legitimacy of the local rulers in relation to the Safavid shahs is in order.

Legitimacy, Local Rulers, and the Shah

The three Kiyayi brothers, namely, Soltan ʻAli Mirza Kiyayi, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi, and Soltan Hashem Kiyayi, competed for the throne of Lahijan as discussed earlier. The efforts of Soltan Hashem Kiyayi, and his ultimate failure to claim sovereignty for himself, illuminate some of the ways in which the notion of legitimacy of rule was understood in Gilan at the time, especially in relationship to the role of the Safavids in sanctioning the authority of the rulers in the provinces. How much influence and political power did the Safavid shahs exercise in the designation of the local rulers and their *eqtaʻ* territory in this early phase of their rule? Comparing Soltan Hashem Kiyayi's case to that of the Mazandarani contender Mohammad Ruzafsun will demonstrate that the Safavids' influence in legitimizing the local rulers was not even-handed across the board, and that it was indeed influenced by local politics and the ways in which the locals understood legitimacy of rule.

In the Kiyayis' model of rule, one main family member was bestowed with the title of *hakem* or *khan*, claiming sovereignty over all of Eastern Gilan's territories, while other male family members benefited from an appanage system that granted them a territory to rule and exploit in exchange for military support and taxes paid to the main ruler. The designated territories would then theoretically become the birthright of the male nominee's offspring, as

they would continue to rule over the territories they had inherited from their male family members. In practice, however, the picture was more complicated, and sometimes newly available territories, or loss of territory to their adjacent neighbors, would create rivalries and discord among family members.[400]

The struggles within the Kiyayi household shaped provincial politics during the early years of Safavid rule, when Soltan Hashem Kiyayi, the youngest Kiyayi brother, took advantage of the weakened position of his brother, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi, and began demanding more territory for himself. Sultan Hasan Kiyayi refused to comply with these demands, which drove Sultan Hashem Kiyayi to send a delegate to Shah Isma'il I's camp to request a royal decree offering him Korjiyan, a region near Tonekabon that he had his eyes on. His delegate was successful in obtaining a decree for Korjiyan, leading Soltan Hashem Kiyayi to take control of the region.[401] Soltan Hashem Kiyayi had been in control of Tonekabon since 891/1486, when the Kiyayis had successfully installed him there as the opportunity had presented itself. In the chaos of competition among the Kiyayi brothers and the rise to power of Shah Isma'il I, Soltan Hashem Kiyayi entertained the possibility of taking over the Kiyayi seat, or at the very least expanding his reach. He also began preparing for an offensive against Soltan Hasan Kiyayi.[402] Lahiji's account presents a glimpse into how he, and by extension his contemporary compatriots, understood and interpreted the notion of local sovereignty. Lahiji reserves some harsh words for Soltan Hashem Kiyayi, condemning him for attempting to pick up arms (*khoruj konad*) when the required circumstances – lack of a ruler, in conjunction with support from both the political elite and religious leaders – were not present. Lahiji's comments about Soltan Hashem Kiyayi and his acquisition of a royal decree are intriguing. He states, "He [Soltan Hashem Kiyayi] was oblivious

[400] This system is also discussed in more detail in Chapter One.
[401] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 201-202.
[402] Ibid., 201.

to this rule, that leading an uprising, and managing the affairs of governance, is not possible merely by a monarch's decree."[403] Lahiji's observation indicates that at that point simply relying on a royal decree from a more powerful monarch was not a sufficient legitimizing force for the local ruler. However, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi himself had sent a local judge, Qazi Mohammad, to obtain a decree from Shah Isma'il I for Korjiyan.[404] The fact that both of the Kiyayi brothers had managed to obtain such a decree from Shah Isma'il I for the same territory in a short period of time can be interpreted in two ways: either there was a lack of a coherent policy on the part of the Safavids towards Gilan at that point, or else the Safavids issued such contradictory ordinances to further create divisions and chaos within the provincial rank and file. At the same time, the Gilanis still had to come to terms with the idea of a royal decree being sufficient in dictating their territorial arrangements. Lahiji's reaction to Soltan Hashem Kiyayi's efforts brings to light that a more pressing need was providing support for the local notables, the religious leaders, and the population at large for the ruler to legitimately take advantage of such a "monarchical decree" (*hokm-e shahi*).

In a somewhat similar situation, Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan's son Aqa Mohammad of Mazandaran resorted to drawing his legitimacy from the Safavid shah in order to hold on to his territory in Mazandaran after his father's passing. Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan of Mazandaran had begun his political career as a military commander to Mir Shams al-Din Mar'ashi around 897/1492, and had later remained the trusted advisor of Mir Kamal al-Din, son of Mir Shams al-Din Mar'ashi. When discord between Mir Shams al-Din Mar'ashi and Mir 'Abdolkarim II of the Mar'ashi family presented itself, the Kiyayis took the side of Mir 'Abdolkarim II, while Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan aided Mir Shams al-Din Mar'ashi. Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan gradually

[403] Ibid., 202.
[404] Ibid., 204.

managed to attain a stronger position for himself within the administration of Mir Shams al-Din Mar‘ashi, and three years after the latter’s death he killed and replaced his son Mir Kamal al-Din in 912/1506. Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan struck coins in his own name and began controlling parts of Mazandaran (at first Savadkuh, then later Sari and surrounding areas) independent of the Mar‘ashi sayyids.[405] More importantly, Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan brought changes to the existing practices related to the *toyul* lands in Mazandaran by modifying the recipients of the hereditary *toyul*.[406] Mir Teymur states, “Even though most of the known figures [ma‘aref] of Mazandaran inherited property issued to them in the form of *toyul*, generation after generation, he [Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan] changed all that and gave the lands to undeserving people.”[407] In that sense, his power grab also revised the pre-existing order of land ownership in Mazandaran. Eventually, however, he allied himself with the Sheybanids, and legend had it that after Shah Isma‘il I killed Sheybak Khan and sent his hand to Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan, the utterly dismayed Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan perished from fear a few days following the incident. His son Aqa Mohammad then tried his bid for power at the court of Shah Isma‘il I.[408]

Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan’s son Aqa Mohammad was successful in retaining control, even though the population of Mazandaran did not view him favorably and he faced opposition from the Mazandaranis.[409] The Ruzafsuniyan rule in Mazandaran was viewed somewhat as an illegitimate usurpation of the Mar‘ashis’ right to full sovereignty. Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan was not of the sayyid family, but had gained his power from manipulating the political situation in

[405] Mir Teymur Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Khandan-e Mar‘ashi,* 72-76.
[406] *Toyul* (also referred to as *soyurghal* or *eqta*‘) was a concession of revenue or land to an individual. This form of land concession was largely practiced in medieval times throughout the Islamic world. It was closely linked to military duties.
[407] Mir Teymur Mar‘ashi, *Tarikh-e Khandan-e Mar‘ashi-ye Mazandaran*, ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh (Tehran: Entesharat-e Ettela‘at, 1364/1985), 56.
[408] Ghaffari Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara*, 90, 92; ‘Abdolhosseyn Nava’i, *Shah Esma‘il-e Safavi: Majmu‘eh-ye Asnad va Mokatebat-e Tarikhi Hamrah ba Yaddasht-ha-ye Tafsili* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Arghavan, 1368/1989), 319.
[409] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani,* 379.

Mazandaran and through his proximity to the ruling house of the Mar‘ashis. Consequently, his rule lacked that aura of legitimacy the Mar‘ashi sayyids enjoyed. Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan’s son then faced a crisis of legitimacy after his father’s death, and he sought the support of Shah Isma‘il I, hoping for a decree that would allow him to rule with the direct backing of the Safavids. Meanwhile, Mir ‘Abdolkarim II , who laid claim to Mazandaran as well, knowing the possibility of Aqa Mohammad jeopardizing his rule even further, also presented himself at the court of Shah Isma‘il I with sizable monetary offerings. Once there, the bidding over territorial control began and the competition between the two contenders became a great opportunity for the *Qizilbash amir*s to gain much financially, “to the extent that even intelligent faculties were unable to understand and estimate its limits.”[410] In the end, Shah Isma‘il I divided Mazandaran between the two contenders, and the *amir*s sent 100 men with each of the rulers to collect and bring the agreed sum to the court.[411] It was only under these circumstances that Aqa Mohammad managed to hold on to and continue his father’s rule in Mazandaran. The Safavids’ sanction of the two rulers in Mazandaran also opened the door to more control in Mazandaran on their part. Here the Safavids’ policy manifested itself in keeping the territories in Mazandaran divided between competing factions, the same policy they followed in Gilan.[412]

The narrative of Soltan Hashem Kiyayi’s quest for rule in Gilan ends with the closely-tied deaths of his two brothers, Soltan Hasan Kiyayi and Mirza ‘Ali Kiyayi, and the eventual

[410] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 379.
[411] Ibid.
[412] A few years later, Aqa Mohammad Ruzafsuniyan stopped paying his dues to the court and Shah Isma‘il I sent Durmish Khan to take control in Mazandaran. After a couple of attempts, Aqa Mohammad was eventually captured and imprisoned for the duration of Shah Isma‘il I’s reign. Shah Tahmasb I later released him and sent him back to Mazandaran (perhaps to balance the growing power of the Mar‘ashi family in Mazandaran). After ‘Abdolkarim II’s death (d. 932/1525), his son Mir Shahi had succeeded him. However, Aqa Mohammad decided to usurp his rule and instead appointed a grandson of ‘Abdolkarim II, Mir ‘Abdollah, to succeed him. Mir ‘Abdollah’s rule was overshadowed by Aqa Mohammad’s rule until his death in 945/1538. Aqa Mohammad’s son Sohrab had a much harder time gaining momentum in Mazandaran, and he is the last of the Ruzafsunyan dynastic rulers. Nava’i, *Shah Esma‘il-e Safavi*, 320-321. Ghaffari Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara*, 92.

ascension to power of Khan Ahmad I with the backing and support of Shah Isma'il I.[413] Soltan Hasan Kiyayi had officially appointed his son, Khan Ahmad I, as the crown prince in 911/1505 to help secure his line of rule amid Soltan Hashem Kiyayi's threats.[414] Soltan Hashem Kiyayi, who had fled to the court of Aqa Rostam Ruzafsuniyan of Mazandaran, was eventually executed at the order of Sadid Shafti, Khan Ahmad I's *sepahsalar*.[415]

Khan Ahmad I and Local Challenges to His Rule

Once Khan Ahmad I succeeded his father, despite having had the backing of the Safavid monarch, he found himself overshadowed by the influence of his *sepahsalar*, Sadid Shafti. This goes to show, yet again, that Safavid support was not always sufficient in strengthening one's power locally. Sadid Shafti had all along played a momentous role in stirring up discord among the Kiyayis, and after Khan Ahmad I came to power in Eastern Gilan, he orchestrated a serious purging and overhauling of the existing officials and elite in Eastern Gilan. Sadid Shafti granted the post of *sepahsalar* of Deylaman to his fidus Achates, Ali Jan Dekini. Later he appointed his own brother, Abu Nasr, to the office of *sepahsalar* of Korjiyan, the very territory the Kiyayi brothers had earlier quarreled over. He obtained a royal decree from Shah Isma'il I allowing him to kill anyone who went against Shah Isma'il I's interest, hoping to use that as a means to eliminate his opposition, including Khan Ahmad I if the occasion were to arise.[416] For Shah Isma'il I, this arrangement allowed a certain degree of control and a check on Khan Ahmad I's power. Sadid Shafti, moreover, negotiated with Amireh Hesam al-Din of Biyeh Pas in secret,

[413] As 'Abdollahi also points out, Khan Ahmad I was the first Kiyayi ruler to come to power with the direct support and backing of the Safavid Shah Isma'il I. 'Abdollahi, *Jaygah va Naqsh-e Gilan*, 116.
[414] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 207.
[415] Soltan Hashem Kiyayi was under the impression (based on the false propaganda of Sadid Shafti's men) that he could take the throne from his nephew Khan Ahmad I, and he was headed to Gilan to claim the throne when Sadid Shafti sent one of his men to execute him. See ibid., 296.
[416] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 250-255, 296-300.

asking for their cooperation in eliminating Khan Ahmad I in exchange for acknowledging their control over Biyeh Pas. Sadid Shafti also managed to establish a favorable relationship with Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti, who was Shah Isma'il I's appointed dignitary, to settle the territorial disputes in Gilan, hence posing a more serious and imminent threat to the house of the Kiyayis.[417]

Gradually Sadid Shafti's wrath reached many in sensitive positions all across Eastern Gilan, leading some high-ranking officials and notables, like the *khalabar*[418] and *rastar*[419] of Lahijan, adult sons of the *muhtaseb* of Lahijan, as well as the *khanadeh* (the person who delivers the orders of the *sepahsalar* to his troops) of Lahijan, to desert their posts and escape Sadid Shafti's plans. In his attempt to secure his position further, Sadid Shafti arranged a few marriages within his broader circle to ensure the loyalty of the newly-appointed dignitaries. He managed to gain enough power and influence that, in Lahiji's words, "the cursed ones' [Sadid Shafti and Ali Jan Dekini] uncanny goal was to enable them to take control in a way that all the commands and interdictions, dismissals and appointments were in their hands and connected to them, and no one else's."[420]

Khan Ahmad I was vulnerable and exposed to Sadid Shafti's agenda. Individuals like Sadid Shafti and their political aspirations were not to be taken lightly, as the case of the Ruzafsuniyan dynasty in Mazandaran demonstrates. The danger of being replaced by their close dignitaries and advisors was a possibility the local rulers had to be prepared for, especially in the midst of chaos and political transitions. At this point, not only was the broader region undergoing

[417] Ibid., 251-255, 259-261, 270-274, 282-286, 290, 293; Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh,* 116, 120.
[418] The exact meaning of the term *khalabar* is not clear. Without a doubt, the *khalabar* were high-ranking officials working for the ruler and were paid from the treasury. Naser 'Azimi, "Goruh-ha-ye Ejtema'i va Shoghli-ye Gilan dar Qorun-e Vosta."
[419] I was not able to find an exact definition for *rastar*, but my understanding is that *rastar*, similar to *khalabar*, were also employees of the ruler related to the military and were paid from the treasury.
[420] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 252, 287, 298-300.

significant political shifts and transition due to the continuous increase in power of the Safavid house, but the internal affairs of Gilan had been in disarray for some time as well. This situation created a difficult period for Khan Ahmad I, as the young ruler had to navigate the two political processes which were shaping up both internally and externally. To better understand the intersection of these two political processes, and the way the Safavids used the situation to their advantage, a look at the political career of Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti and his role as both a Persian element countering the growing power of the *Qizilbash*, and as the agent of the Safavids in charge of the political negotiations in Gilan, is important.

Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti: A Local Artisan at the Imperial Court

Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti was of the '*ayan* and *ashraf* (notables and aristocrats) of Rasht and a goldsmith.[421] The Safavid sources differ on their account of when and how the future Shah Isma'il I initially came into contact with Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti. Hasan Rumlu contends that the two met when Isma'il was in Rasht and was stationed close to Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti's workshop. According to Hasan Rumlu, a *Qizilbash* amir and historiographer of Shah Tahmasb I's era, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti offered Isma'il many gifts and became close to him. Eventually Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti either moved to Lahijan, or just frequented Lahijan in order to meet with the young Isma'il.[422] Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti was to become the very first Tajik *vakil* after Hosseyn Beyg Shamlu's career ended. Based on the account of Khwandamir, author of *Habib al-Seyr*, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti

[421] Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 269; Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar*, vol. 4, 491.
[422] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 908, 910.

at one point made a ring for Isma'il and sent it to him with an accompanying poem demonstrating his care and affection for him.[423]

Safavid sources contend that Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti adhered to Twelver Shi'ism and was devoted to the house of Heydar.[424] This notable's Shi'a leanings, in the mostly Sunni town of Rasht, were not without their challenges. In fact, his eager support of Shi'ism almost cost him his life. 'Abbas, the infamous commander in chief of the Eshaqiyyeh ruler and a zealous Sunni, had advocated for the execution of Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti.[425] Once Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti became aware of this plot against his life, however, he fled Gilan and joined Isma'il's camp, which had already left Gilan and was headed towards Shirvan at that point.[426] Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti's devotion to Shah Isma'il I was honored by the monarch when in 914/1508 he was granted the office of *vekalat-e nafs-e nafis-e homayun*.[427]

The office of *vakil*, or vice regent, and its significance has been discussed by Safavid scholars at length. Roger Savory argues for the importance of both the spiritual and temporal role of the *vakil*, while Jean Aubin considered the *vakil* the deputy of the shah, or his replacement without any attributed spiritual authority. Willem Floor, who has revisited the function of the office of the *vakil*, concludes that "the vakil indeed was nothing but the deputy of the shah, who derived his power and authority from the shah and not from the function itself."[428] He added that the *vakil*'s primary function was the management of the financial and non-military affairs of the kingdom. Nonetheless, these functions and roles were not set in stone, and hence military affairs

[423] Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan* also offers a similar story, 269. Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar*, vol. 4, 491.
[424] The author of *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan* also contends that Amir Najm al-Din was a devout Shi'a and a follower of the Safavid order before he met with Isma'il. Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 269.
[425] Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar*, vol. 4, 491; Valeh Esfehani, *Khold-e Barin,* 168.
[426] Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar*, vol. 4, 490-1.
[427] Ibid.; Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 269.
[428] Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, 7.

were at times entrusted to the *vakil*.[429] Shah Isma'il I entrusted the military and administrative function of the *vakil* to one person, but after the defeat at Chalderan (920/1514) he divided the office into two separate functions, military and administrative.[430] Prior to this modification and during the time when Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti held this office, the two functions were one and the same. Some Safavid sources even refer to Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti as *amir al-omara.*[431] Others, who only confer the title of *vakil* on him, also refer to his authority over other *amir*s, placing him in charge of the military affairs of the expanding empire.[432] Abdi Beg Shirazi writes, "The post of *vekalat* was granted to Mir Najm Zargar… his seal was placed over the seal of all other *amir*s… and he did not allow the Turkish *amir*s to interfere in the financial affairs, and took control of the administrative affairs as well."[433] Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti had replaced Hosseyn Beyg Laleh Shamlu in 913-14/1508 and was sent by Shah Isma'il I on an expedition to Lorestan along with Hosseyn Beyg Laleh Shamlu and Beyram Beyg, two *Qizilbash amir*s, who had also been part of Shah Isma'il I's retinue since Lahijan. This was the first time that Shah Isma'il I had chosen a non-military person, and a Tajik, to lead his army, and he had moreover made two of his most important commanders his subordinates.[434]

Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti's political career began before his appointment to the office of *vakil*, as he took the position of negotiating and overseeing the affairs of Gilan per Shah Isma'il I's orders. Before this task, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti was accorded the privilege

[429] Ibid., 6; Jean Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," *Moyen Orient & Océan Indien* 5 (1988): 112-116.
[430] Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, 10.
[431] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 258.
[432] Qobad al-Hosseyni and Khwandamir refer to Amir Najm's status simply as that of a *vakil*. Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah*, 37; Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar,* vol. 4, 491; Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, 9.
[433] 'Abdi Beyg Shirazi, *Takmelat al-Akhbar*, 46. Qommi also contends that Amir Najm placed his seal over that of the *omara* (military dignitaries), directly referring to his authority over the military/*Qizilbash amir*s. Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 96.
[434] Parsadust, *Shah Esma'il-e Avval*, 303.

of accompanying Shah Isma'il I on several of his campaigns, from which point his political career burgeoned. Through his mediation in 909/1504, Shah Isma'il I gave amnesty to all the inhabitants of Firuzkuh fortress after taking it. The importance of this intervention in favor of the locals becomes very clear once the earlier campaign against the fortress of Golkhandan is taken into consideration. Before arriving at Firuzkuh, Shah Isma'il I had most of the residents of the fortress of Golkhandan and later Asta massacred, including women and children, and took the rest as prisoners.[435] Some Safavid sources describe the massacre of the inhabitants of Asta in more detail, including ritual cannibalism that followed. The fear produced by this episode seems to have remained in the collective memory of the inhabitants of northern Iran for decades, fueling distrust and resentment of the *Qizilbash*.[436]

Once in charge of the affairs of Gilan, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti took on the important mission of guiding the negotiations between the Kiyayi and Eshaqiyyeh families, having relocated to Qazvin to fulfill this task.[437] One of his first moves was to send a delegate to Amireh Hesam al-Din, accompanied by a representative from Soltan Hasan Kiyayi, the Kiyayi ruler, to resume negotiations with the Eshaqiyyeh. Amireh Hesam al-Din responded by imprisoning both delegates.[438]

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[435] Ibid., 291. The fortress of Asta was in the possession of Hosseyn Kiya Chelavi, who had given refuge to Morad Beyg Jahanshah Aq Qoyunlu, along with their families and entourage. See Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah,* 25; Amini Heravi*, Fotuhat-e Shahi*, 225.

[436] For sources that describe the massacre and cannibalism of Asta fortress, see Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 158-159; Qazvini, *Lobb al-Tavarikh*, 274-275; Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah*, 26. Amini Heravi*, Fotuhat-e Shahi*, and Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar* do not describe the cannibalism; Shahzad Bashir has discussed the religious significance of cannibalism in the Safavid era, including the case of Morad Beyg Jahanshah Aq Qoyunlu, who was consumed and desecrated after the fortress of Asta fell into the hands of Shah Isma'il I and his troops. See Shahzad Bashir, "Shah Isma'il and the Qizilbash: Cannibalism in the Religious History of Early Safavid Iran," *History of Religions* 45, no. 3 (February 2006), 239-242. Years later, in a letter that Shah Tahmasb I sent to Khan Ahmad II, he refers to the false stories of *Qizilbash* cannibalism circulating in Gilan creating distrust and animosity towards the Safavid agents and the *Qizilbash*. Interestingly enough, Shah Isma'il I chose Tajlu Khanum as his wife from among the prisoners of Asta fortress, and she became his favorite. See Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah*, 27-28. For the letter, see Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad,* 62-70.

[437] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 197-198.

[438] Ibid.*,* 214.

Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti's efforts at subduing Amireh Hesam al-Din were futile, and eventually in the year 911/1506 Shah Isma'il I decided to attack Biyeh Pas. When the events of 911/1506 unfolded, Khan Ahmad I had already come to power, but was faced with a precarious situation at home as his advisor Sadid Shafti overshadowed his rule. Khan Ahmad I was hopeful that Shah Isma'il I's interference would help his situation, and could even lead to him taking back Kuchesfehan from the Eshaqiyyeh ruler. Shah Isma'il I's advancement into Western Gilan was slow, as he only managed to conquer Kuchesfehan before bad weather conditions deterred him from moving forward. Shah Isma'il I, who had much more than Western Gilan to attend to, left Laleh Beyg Shamlu in charge and returned to Tarom. Once Shah Isma'il I's troops managed to make some advances into Western Gilan, Amireh Hesam al-Din sent a delegate, his cousin, to Shah Isma'il I's camp and pleaded for his forgiveness. Eventually, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti also intervened on his behalf and dissuaded the young shah from moving forward with his plan to fully conquer Biyeh Pas.[439]

In the continuation of the negotiations between Amireh Hesam al-Din and Khan Ahmad I, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti leaned more towards Amireh Hesam al-Din, taking advantage of the pre-existing division between the Kiyayis and the Eshaqiyyeh to strengthen the position of the center. Khan Ahmad I's continuous courteous relationship towards Shah Isma'il I did not help him gain the favor of Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti. In fact, to the dismay of the Kiyayis, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti even promised Lashteh Nesha and its surrounding villages to the Eshaqiyyeh ruler.

Lahiji attributes Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti's political move to his identity as a "Rashti," but also contends that Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti feared for his life, as previously

[439] Ghaffari Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara*, 270; Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar*, vol. 4, 484; Tattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Alfi*, vol. 8, 5483; Valeh Esfehani, *Khold-e Barin*, 154; Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 237; Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 266; *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gīlān V. History Under the Safavids."

the Eshaqiyyeh ruler's infamous *sepahsalar*, 'Abbas, had made an attempt on his life for his religious inclination towards Shi'ism. While Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti's lenience towards Amireh Hesam al-Din could be attributed in part to their shared origin as Rashtis, it is difficult to overlook the existing antagonism between the two, fueled by their contrasting religious affiliations. It could be true, as Lahiji contends, that Amireh Hesam al-Din feared for his life. It seems also that various factors were at play, and as such, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti and Amireh Hesam al-Din's religious leanings and local interests shaped their loyalties and political actions differently in different contexts. Despite deep religious differences, the bonds of local affinity could remain strong. There is, however, another way to understand Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti's persistent opposition to Khan Ahmad I and his support of the Eshaqiyyeh, and that is to take into consideration his political motives as the agent of the Safavids who aimed at striking a balance between the two rulers and keeping their power and influence at bay. Khan Ahmad I's ambitions, as the heir to the traditionally more dominant dynastic family in Gilan, needed to be curtailed. There was, however, a shift in the Safavid attitude towards Khan Ahmad I after Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti's death, which means the personal motives of Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti did play a role in the outcome of these negotiations in favor of the Eshaqiyyeh. As long as Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti was alive, Khan Ahmad I had no other choice but to accept the terms of the peace deal drawn by Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti in favor of the Eshaqiyyeh ruler and hope for a better opportunity to continue negotiations over Kuchesfehan at a later date.[440]

Khan Ahmad I, long frustrated by Sadid Shafti, who had been acting as the de facto ruler, ultimately had one of his men kill him in 912/1506. Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti was informed of Sadid Shafti's demise through Khan Ahmad I's delegate to Shah Isma'il I's court,

[440] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 264-265; *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gīlān V. History Under the Safavids."

which he had sent for damage control while worrying precisely about how Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti would react. Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti, angered by Sadid Shafti's death, did not receive Khan Ahmad I's delegate well.[441] When Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti was appointed *vakil* in 914/1508, he once again sent a delegate to collect more taxes from Khan Ahmad I.[442]

Financial incentives were an important part of the negotiations between the center and the periphery. Amireh Hesam al-Din, having been emboldened by his alliance with Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti, for example, was eager to launch an assault on Biyeh Pish to take over the town of Lashteh Nesha, which had been promised to him by Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti. Before proceeding, however, he needed to first pay his dues to Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti.[443] In the same manner, Khan Ahmad I saw no other choice but to literally pay off Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti with gifts and valuable contributions to ease his antagonism. At this juncture, though, raising the necessary funds was difficult for Khan Ahmad I, who had to resort to borrowing money and goods from the local financiers and merchants. Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti, unmoved by Khan Ahmad I's gifts, not only insisted that Shah Isma'il I give Lashteh Nesha to Amireh Hesam al-Din, he also made arrangements for the surrounding territories to be granted to certain *Qizilbash amir*s, attempting to establish a *Qizilbash* presence in Gilan. This suggestion certainly angered Khan Ahmad I, who seemed to be losing the battle every step of the way.[444] Khan Ahmad I then asked his delegate, Qazi 'Abd-Allah, to do his best to obtain a decree for Lashteh Nesha directly from Shah Isma'il I. Khan Ahmad I's insistence on obtaining a decree suggests that, slowly but surely, the Safavids' sanction was becoming an

[441] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 312.
[442] Ibid., 317.
[443] Ibid., 318.
[444] Ibid., 317-319, 322.

important component of the locals' sovereignty over their ancestral territories. Khan Ahmad I's argument rested not only on his claim over Lashteh Nesha as his ancestral territory, but also on the religious nature of Lashteh Nesha as a town with a mostly Zaydi population. He embellished the superiority of his Shi'a religious status over that of a Sunni ruler, hence claiming more legitimacy in spreading his sovereignty over the mostly Shi'a inhabitants of Lashteh Nesha.[445] But as I will show shortly, explaining the activities of Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti on the basis of his religious convictions does not go far in offering a coherent or consistent assessment of his diverse military and administrative actions.

While Khan Ahmad I's delegate managed to get a royal decree to wrest Lashteh Nesha, the Eshaqiyyeh ruler did not recognize it, again bringing into question the effectiveness of such royal decrees in determining the actual political outcome.[446] To the Kiyayis' dismay, the Eshaqiyyeh attacked Lashteh Nesha the following year, leaving this important town devastated once more.[447]

When Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti died in 915/1509-10 in Tabriz, a new opportunity presented itself to Khan Ahmad I. Up to that point, Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti had kept the Kiyayi ambitions at bay by strengthening the rulers of Western Gilan instead and even granting them the rule over a mostly Shi'a town, albeit a Zaydi one. Upon his death, though, Khan Ahmad I moved to persuade his successor, Najm-e Sani, to grant him Lashteh Nesha.[448] At first Khan Ahmad I sent a delegate, which did not manage to win him his plea, as Najm-e Sani expected a proper court visit from the ruler himself. Eventually he made an elaborate visit to the court

[445] Ibid., 323.
[446] Ibid., 323-324.
[447] Ibid., 324-334.
[448] Ibid., 349. Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti didn't have any children, and Shah Isma'il I gave his post to Yar Ahmad Khuzani and gave him the title "Najm-e Sani" in honor of Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti. Anonymous, '*Alam Ara-ye Safavi*, 305.

bearing gifts in Safar/June of 916/1510, and in that year Shah Isma'il I granted him the governorship of all of the *Velayat-e Dar al-Marz*, from "Astara to Astarabad."[449] A year later, Shah Isma'il I decided to invade Biyeh Pas again, but Amireh Hesam al-Din apologetically sent his son Amireh Dobbaj to the shah, leading Shah Isma'il I to accept Amireh Hesam al-Din's apology and hold off on his offensive.[450]

Gilan at the Crossroads of *Qizilbash* Factionalism and Safavid Relations with Their Neighbors

Much of the relationship between the rulers of Gilan and the Safavids cannot be evaluated without taking into consideration the general political atmosphere of the time, including *Qizilbash* factionalism and the empire's relationship with its rival neighbors, more specifically the Uzbeks and Ottomans. Gilan's rulers inevitably became engaged in these broader political developments to differing degrees and based on their own unique situations.

After Amireh Hesam al-Din's death in 922/1516, his son Amireh Dobbaj succeeded him in Biyeh Pas. Amireh Dobbaj did not move far from his father's general disdain for the Safavids, and soon after his ascension in Western Gilan he began his dissent. Once again Shah Isma'il I was preparing for an attack on Amireh Dobbaj, and when Amireh Dobbaj sent a delegate to plead with Shah Isma'il I he even appealed to Khan Ahmad I to intervene on his behalf. Shah Isma'il I eventually forgave him after imposing a mulct of 5000 *tuman*s on him. As mentioned above, a year later, during a visit to Shah Isma'il I's court, the shah bestowed the title of Mozaffar Soltan on him and granted him his daughter's hand in marriage, tying this notable

[449] Before setting out to visit Shah Isma'il I, Khan Ahmad I sent a dignitary named Amireh Sasan to Amireh Hesam al-Din's court. Amireh Hesam al-Din responded by holding the delegate for 40 days. Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 350-353 and 353-365.
[450] Ibid., 378-379.

family of Western Gilan to the house of the Safavids.[451] This relationship, however, only secured Amireh Dobbaj's loyalty for a short time. After Shah Isma'il I's death, Amireh Dobbaj got caught up in *Qizilbash* factionalism and the struggles between the Safavids and Ottomans.

As for Eastern Gilan, the remainder of Khan Ahmad I's rule coincided with the reign of Shah Tahmasb I. Shah Tahmasb I came to power in 930/1524 and continued to head the house of the Safavids until 984/1576. Shah Tahmasb I's reign was off to a rocky start, with the challenge of *Qizilbash* factionalism leading to the very first *Qizilbash*-orchestrated civil war.[452] During Shah Tahmasb I's first decades of rule, Eastern Gilan remained relatively calm, while most of the contention between the Safavids and Gilan was directed towards the ruler of Biyeh Pas, Amireh Dobbaj. Amireh Dobbaj got caught in the middle of the *Qizilbash* factionalism. By 932/1526, when contentions broke out between the Takallu and Rumlu tribes on the one hand and the Ostajlu on the other, some of the Ostajlu *amir*s fled to Gilan and sought refuge at Amireh Dobbaj's court, dragging Amireh Dobbaj into the middle of their quarrels. This led to the presence of the *Qizilbash* in Gilan in the early years of Shah Tahmasb I's reign. The skirmishes that ensued between the Gilanis supporting the Ostajlu *amir*s and Shah Tahmasb I's camp were devastating for the population of Gilan.[453] The conflict continued two years later in 934/1528.[454] Amireh Dobbaj's transgression and support of the Ostajlu *amir*s did not help his relations with Shah Tahmasb I. Amireh Dobbaj exacerbated the situation by imprisoning Qazi Jahan, the vizier

[451] Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar*, vol. 4, 563; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 11-13; Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 575; Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar*, 182; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 141.
[452] For more details on the configurations of *Qizilbash* power and antagonism during this time, see Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 26-27; Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 50-53; H.R. Roemer, "The Safavid Period," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. Peter Jackson and Lawrence Lockhart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 233-235. Shah Tahmasb I's failure to rein in the unruly *Qizilbash* amirs has been attributed to his young age.
[453] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 253-254; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 162-163; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 47-48; Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi Nezam Shah*, 89-93; Abdi Beyg, *Takmelat al-Akhbar*, 62-63; Shah Tahmasb Safavi, *Tazkareh-ye Shah Tahmasb: Sharh-e Vaghaye' va Ahvalat-e Zendegani-ye Shah Tahmasb-e Safavi*, ed. 'Abdolshokur (Berlin: Kaviyani, 1364/1885), 11-12.
[454] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 47-48; Shah Tahmasb Safavi, *Tazkareh-ye Shah Tahmasb*, 10-12; Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar*, 182.

of Shah Tahmasb I, who had gone to Gilan to settle the dispute between the Ostajlu and the Takallu factions.[455] Qazi Jahan was imprisoned at the instigation of Shah Qavam al-Din b. Shah Shams al-Din b. Shah Qasem Nurbakhsh, the head of the Nurbakhshiyyeh order at the time.[456] In *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, Hasan Rumlu offers a short biographical entry on Qazi Jahan, describing his animosity towards the Nurbakhshiyyeh as well as Amireh Dobbaj's relationship to the order. He contends that Amireh Dobbaj was part of the Nurbakhshiyyeh order.[457]

The Ostajlu *amir*s did not remain in Gilan for long, and left for Shah Tahmasb I's camp in Qazvin in 934/1527. Shah Tahmasb I eventually forgave their misconduct and granted them governorship of certain other districts.[458] Amireh Dobbaj's aiding and abetting of the Ostajlu *amir*s was designed to take advantage of the internal turmoil at the Safavid court, continue the civil unrest, and undermine the young shah's grasp by becoming the political vassal for the growing Nurbakhshiyyeh order and the threat they posed to the Safavids.[459]

Amireh Dobbaj's adversarial attitude towards Shah Tahmasb I continued after the latter gained control over the affairs of state and at the end of a long episode of intra-*Qizilbash* fighting known as the interregnum. Amireh Dobbaj established contact with 'Obeyd Khan Uzbek in a

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[455] Hasan Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 481-482.

[456] Shah Qavam al-Din was the influential and powerful ruler of the Nurbakhshiyyeh Sufi order, and the Safavids gradually became suspicious of his growing power and influence in the region of Ray. On Shah Qavam al-Din's role in the imprisonment of Qazi Jahan and his growing power see Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 162, 273. Jean Aubin also states that Shah Qavam al-Din was investigated and later executed by the Safavids for his role in imprisoning Qazi Jahan. Jean Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," 93-94. For more details and the analysis of different accounts of the life of Shah Qavam al-Din presented in Safavid sources, see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya Between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina University Press, 2003), 189-192. Also see Hamid Algar, "Nurbakhsh, Sayyid Muhammad b. Muhammad b. 'Abd Allāh (1392-)," in *The Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: Central Asia and Middle East*, ed. N. Hanif (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2002), 363-368. For other Sufi groups, see the recent work of Ata Anzali, "*Mysticism" in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (Columbia, South Caroline: South Carolina University Press, 2017); Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2003).

[457] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 480-483. Also see 'Abdollahi, *Jaygah va Naqsh-e Gilan*, 133-134. The religious affiliations of the Gilani rulers are discussed in Chapter Five.

[458] Manuchehr Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval: Padeshahi Azmand, Zirak, ba Siyasat-e Mazhabi-ye Khass* (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahami-ye Enteshar, 1391/2012), 556; Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar,* 315.

[459] Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval*, 557.

series of letters, hoping to gain his support in undermining the Safavids.[460] To make matters worse, Amireh Dobbaj's wife – and Shah Tahmasb I's sister – passed away in Masuleh in 938/1532, severing his familial ties with the Safavids.[461] With his wife out of the picture, Amireh Dobbaj had very little to tie him to the Safavids, leading him to try his luck with the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman (r. 926-973/1520-1566) instead.

After Shah Isma'il I's death, the Safavids not only had to contend with heightened civil unrest at home, but they also had to confront the growing threat of the Ottomans on their western frontiers as well as the Uzbeks in the east. The Uzbeks continuously challenged the Safavids over Khorasan, while the Ottomans laid claim over Iraq, Kurdistan, and parts of Azerbaijan.[462] The Mughals, who ruled India southeast of the Safavid empire, maintained good diplomatic relations with the Safavids but at times clashed over the maintenance of Qandahar.[463]

The Ottomans' attempt to appeal to and appease the local rulers of the Caspian littoral was not without its potential gains. Loyalty remained rather flexible for tribal and local rulers, and at times even members of the Safavid house would defect to the Ottoman side. Fariba Zarinebaf notes the shifting loyalties of tribal leaders, local dignitaries, and princes on the Safavid and Ottoman sides.[464] Shah Tahmasb I's own brother defected to the Ottomans and led the way for Ottoman attacks on Safavid territory.[465] In this climate of ever-changing aims and evolving alliances, and in the quest for autonomy, Gilan's local rulers also tried their fortune with the Ottomans.

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[460] Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 255.
[461] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 16.
[462] Sholeh Quinn, *Shah 'Abbas: The King Who Refashioned Iran* (London: Oneworld, 2015), 8.
[463] Ibid., 14-15.
[464] Fariba Zarinebaf, "Rebels and Renegades on Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Porous Frontiers and Hybrid Identities," in *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farin Vejdani (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 82.
[465] For instance Alqas Mirza, brother of Shah Tahmasb I, defected to the Ottomans. Zarinebaf, "Rebels and Renegades," 82-85.

Safavid-Ottoman relations need to be understood not only against the backdrop of territorial expansionist tendencies, but also must take into account religious politics, ethnic divisions, and economic interests. It was the infamous battle of Chalderan, launched against the Safavids by Sultan Selim I (r. 1512-1520), that truly tested the ability of the Safavid monarch, Shah Isma'il I, to expand and maintain the borders of his growing territory. Sultan Selim I, who is also known in the sources as Selim the "Inexorable,"[466] had been the "prince-governor of Trabzon on the impoverished borderlands of the empire where the threat posed by the kizilbaş to the integrity of the Ottoman domains was most evident."[467] Sultan Selim I, enraged by his father's inertia in addressing the growing *Qizilbash* threat, launched an offensive against the Safavids in 920/1514, two years after he had managed to depose his father in 918/1512.[468] Anti-*Qizilbash* sentiment expressed by the Ottoman ruler was accompanied by other measures taken to curb the growing influence of their creed in Anatolia. One such measure was a religious propaganda war launched against the Safavids, followed by the massacre of some 40,000 *Qizilbash* residing in Anatolia.[469] Sultan Selim I also closed Ottoman-Safavid borders, denying merchants passage, and expelled Iranian merchants from Bursa in 918-9/1512-3.[470] The last straw came when Ottoman forces attacked Shah Isma'il I's camp, as they had settled north of Lake Van in an area known as Chalderan. The results were devastating for the Safavids, who lost the battle. The loss resulted in the Safavids relinquishing territory in Anatolia and created an overall sense of defeat for Shah Isma'il I, one from which he never fully recovered.

[466] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam,* vol. 3, 124.
[467] Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 98.
[468] Ibid., 98-102.
[469] Ibid., 105; Hashem Hejazi Fard, *Shah Esma'il Avval va Jang-e Chalderan* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Sazman-e Asnad-e Melli-ye Iran, 1374/1995), 85.
[470] Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 104-105.

Sultan Selim I had defeated Shah Isma'il I at Chalderan militarily, but this success was followed by other maneuvers designed to reinforce his position. Soon after he achieved his triumph over the Mamluks, he began establishing contact with peripheral provinces in Iran.[471] Sultan Selim I's intent in establishing such connections may have been to evaluate and garner potential support for his future military endeavors, or simply to wage a psychological war against the Safavids. Another possibility is that he did not carry one and the same aim in relation to each of these persons, as each dynasty and ruler could have served a separate purpose for the Ottomans. One of the first important contacts Sultan Selim I made was through a letter sent to Sheykh Ibrahim, also known as Sheykhshah, the ruler of Shirvan, in 923/1517. The Shervanshahi dynasty was still minting coins in the names of its rulers (including him), who acted as tributaries to the Safavids.[472] His father, Farrokh Yasar, was killed by Shah Isma'il I on the battlefield in 906/1500. The animosity between Sheykhshah and Shah Isma'il I dissipated over time and turned into a mutually beneficial relationship.[473] Sultan Selim I's first letter of victory (*fathnameh*) to Sheykhshah was sent from Cairo, announcing his victory over the Mamluks and encouraging Sheykhshah to fight the *Qizilbash* and Shah Isma'il I.[474] In his response to Sultan Selim I, Sheykhshah indicated that Shah Isma'il I was aware of the letter, and that he expected Sheykhshah to reconcile their differences as an intermediary.[475] In fact, Sheykhshah feared Sultan Selim I more, and knew that he could jeopardize his own position. Thus, he tried to diffuse the situation by making hyperbolic statements about the political might of Sultan Selim I. He stated that all the provinces, such as the two Gilans (meaning Biyeh Pas and Biyeh Pish),

[471] Parsadust, *Shah Esma'il-e Avval,* 542-543; Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 109-110.
[472] *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. " Šarvānšāhs" by C. E. Bosworth, accessed December 2017. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/servansahs
[473] Parsadust, *Shah Esma'il-e Avval*, 578-580.
[474] This rather long and detailed letter appears in Feridun Bey, *Monsha'at al-Salātīn*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Darüttıbattil'âmire, 1848-1857), 437-444. See also Parsadust's analysis in *Shah Esma'il-e Avval,* 544-546.
[475] Feridun Bey, *Monsha'at*, 444-445.

Mazandaran, Qahestan (southern Khorasan), Sistan, as well as the Kurdish *amir*s and the Georgians, were obedient to Sultan Selim I, and that all these areas were firmly in his hand. He argued that a Safavid military intervention would be futile, since the rulers of all these territories recognized Sultan Selim I as a supreme sultan.[476] While no direct results were achieved from these diplomatic exchanges, eventually a political shift took place in Shirvan during Shah Tahmasb I's reign. The rulers of Shirvan gradually lost ground and were replaced by a Safavid prince, Alqas Mirza, in 917/1538, bringing Shirvan more directly under Safavid control. Yet soon after, the Sunni leaders of Shirvan led a rebellion against the Safavids, supported by the Ottomans, and Alqas Mirza, in his attempt to take power away from his brother, joined them.[477]

In a similar manner, but perhaps with less persistence and intensity, Sultan Selim I sent a letter to the rulers of both Gilan and Mazandaran to draw them to his side. Sultan Selim I's letter was addressed to the "Governor of Gilan" and dated 27 Jumada II 923/16 January 1517. Although the letter did not specify which governor he was addressing, Safavid historians have speculated that it was most likely addressed to and received by none other than Amireh Dobbaj.[478] The letter opens with a lengthy introduction describing Sultan Selim I's military success over the Mamluks, and continues with an invitation to the Gilani ruler to gather support in the surrounding areas and be prepared for Sultan Selim I's victory.[479] Sultan Selim I's letter to the ruler of Mazandaran, sent almost eleven months later, in a similarly vague fashion was addressed to the "ruler of Mazandaran." At that point, Mazandaran was split between different rulers, namely Aqa Mohammad and the Mar'ashi ruler Mir 'Abdolkarim II.[480] It is more likely

[476] Ibid., 446-447; Parsadust, *Shah Esma'il-e Avval,* 548-549.
[477] Zarinebaf, "Rebels and Renegades," 84.
[478] Parsadust, *Shah Esma'il-e Avval*, 550; Nava'i, *Shah Esma'il-e Safavi*, 310.
[479] Nava'i, *Shah Esma'il-e Safavi*, 311-315.
[480] Ibid., 318; Feridun Bey, *Monsha'at*, vol. 1, 435.

that the letter was sent to Aqa Mohammad and not the Mar'ashi sayyids.[481] Sultan Selim I's aim was to get a sense of the attitudes of the non-*Qizilbash* elite and to gauge the level of anti-Safavid sentiment that he could exploit. In this specific letter, Sultan Selim I asks the Mazandarani ruler to prepare food and supplies for the event of his troops camping in Mazandaran.[482] These letters were most likely sent more as a tool for testing the waters, and not necessarily as a serious call for supplies and military action. They appear, nonetheless, to have been effective in encouraging the Eshaqiyyeh ruler to entertain an alliance with the Ottomans sometime later.

The Gilani ruler's relationship with the Ottoman sultans continued after Sultan Selim I's death and into Sultan Suleyman's (r. 1520-1566) reign. A letter from Sultan Suleyman to the Eshaqiyyeh ruler inquiring about the truth of Shah Isma'il I's death appears in Fereydun Beyg's *Monsha'at al-Salatin* collection.[483] The letter was sent in 930/1524, approximately ten years before Sultan Suleyman attacked Iran for the first time. Meanwhile, Sultan Suleyman remained occupied on the European front. Sultan Suleyman sent this letter as an inquiry to validate the news of Shah Isma'il I's passing. Unlike the previous letters sent by Sultan Selim I to the rulers of Gilan, which did not bear any specific ruler's name or title, this one was clearly addressed to Amireh Hesam al-Din, the ruler of Gilan or "*hakem-e* Gilan." However, there was no distinction made between Western and Eastern Gilan. The letter was addressed to Amireh Hesam al-Din, which indicates two points. First, Sultan Suleyman was oblivious to the fact that Amireh Hesam al-Din had passed and now his son Amireh Dobbaj was the ruler, perhaps not a very important point for Sultan Suleyman's intents and purposes. The second point is that at this point he did not

[481] Nava'i asserts that the Ottomans would not have established contact with the Mar'ashiyyan since they were sayyids and more inclined towards the Safavids than the Sunni Ottomans. On the other hand, the Ruzafsuniyan had an interest in aligning themselves with the Sunni Uzbeks on previous occasions. Nava'i, *Shah Esma'il-e Safavi,* 318.
[482] Ibid., 323-325.
[483] Feridun Bey, *Monsha'at,* vol. 1, 540-541.

intend to establish contact with the Kiyayi rulers in Eastern Gilan, and that his point of reference was specifically the Sunni rulers of Western Gilan.[484] In this letter, Sultan Suleyman mentions his desire to end the rule of the "son of Ardebil" and to strengthen the religion of Islam. Sultan Suleyman continues by encouraging the ruler of Gilan to kill and destroy the property of those "infidels and heretics" (*malahedeh* and *zanadeqeh*) to the best of his ability. In no uncertain terms, Sultan Suleyman invites Amireh Dobbaj to rebel against the Safavids, and continues by reassuring the ruler that once he invades Iran, he will grant him an elevated status and honor him accordingly.[485]

As mentioned earlier, Amireh Dobbaj's wife passed away in 938/1532, two years before Sultan Suleyman attacked and entered Tabriz on 18 Rabi'al-Avval 941/28 September 1534, marking the beginning of the 22-year war between the Safavids and the Ottomans. Amireh Dobbaj, having lost his familial ties with the Safavids, and confronted with the growing religious and political influence of the Safavids in Gilan, began his journey, along with 8000 of his men from Biyeh Pas, towards Sultan Suleyman's camp in Ojan of Tabriz.[486] Qazi Ahmad Qommi states that Amireh Dobbaj followed Sultan Suleyman up to Baghdad and there he was dismissed and returned home.[487] Sultan Suleyman did not really take Amireh Dobbaj and his offer of aid against Shah Tahmasb I seriously. Explanations in the Safavid chronicles for why Sultan Suleyman refused to take Amireh Dobbaj up on his offer are mostly sensationalist anecdotes.[488]

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[484] Obviously a ruler like Sultan Suleyman would not have occupied himself with such details as the death of a local ruler in Gilan.
[485] Ibid. See also Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval*, 133.
[486] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 17-18.
[487] Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh,* vol. 1, 255. Fumani does not mention Baghdad.
[488] Ibid. Qommi's explanation rests on an anecdote about an expensive jeweled robe he was wearing. Sultan Suleyman asked him where he had gotten the robe from, and Amireh Dobbaj responded that it was a gift from Shah Isma'il. According to Qommi, Sultan Suleyman then became leery of Amireh Dobbaj, for he believed that anyone who turns his back on someone who has treated him so well was not worthy of attention. Of course, Qommi is sympathetic to the Safavids. Similarly, Budaq Qazvini also states that once Sultan Suleyman realized that Amireh

These anecdotal commentaries, which signal Amireh Dobbaj's betrayal of the Safavids despite the good will of the Safavid shahs towards him as a reason for Sultan Suleyman's dismissal of him, are not sufficient or satisfactory. While Sultan Suleyman dismissed Amireh Dobbaj and had him return empty-handed to Gilan, he was eager to welcome Shah Tahmasb I's brother, Alqas Mirza, who defected to the Ottoman camp in 945/1547. The Safavid prince's welcome at the court of Sultan Suleyman was no match to the cold shoulder Amireh Dobbaj received. While Alqas Mirza was showered with expensive gifts, Amireh Dobbaj was literally extorted of what few possessions he had.[489] Alqas Mirza accompanied Sultan Suleyman on his campaign to Van and Shirvan in 955/1548. Sultan Suleyman even sent him on a separate campaign to Qom and Kashan.[490] So why did Sultan Suleyman turn Amireh Dobbaj, a local Gilani ruler, away at the time? For aside from controlling the silk-producing areas of Shirvan, Ganja, and Gilan, the Ottoman sultans strove to overcome the Safavids and punish the *Qizilbash*.[491] Manuchehr Parsadust asserts that Amireh Dobbaj's snobby and prideful behavior was to blame for Sultan Suleyman's dismissal of him.[492] Fereydun Shayesteh, on the other hand, suggests that Alqas Mirza and Amireh Dobbaj were both nothing more than pawns in Safavid-Ottoman relations, and that Sultan Suleyman never seriously contemplated the full invasion of Iran, but was only after scoring political points.[493] The divided nature of Gilan's rule, however, meant that even Amireh Dobbaj's full support would not have been sufficient for Sultan Suleyman. The power of the Eshaqiyyeh was once more dwindling *vis-à-vis* the Kiyayis, who at that point were more favored

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Dobbaj was related to the Safavid house through marriage (*Damad-e Padeshah*), he dismissed him. Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar*, 182.

[489] According to Monshi Qazvini, Ibrahim Pasha, the Ottoman vizier, took Amireh Dobbaj's jeweled belt that was granted to him by Shah Isma'il and in return gave him unworthy gifts. Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar*, 182-183.

[490] Zarinebaf, "Rebels and Renegades," 10; Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval*, 181.

[491] Zarinebaf, "Rebels and Renegades," 6.

[492] Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval,* 559.

[493] Fereydun Shayesteh, "Kohantarin Khandan-e Hokumat Gar: Ravabet-e Khandan-e Hokumati-ye Eshaqvand ba Darbar-ha-ye Hokumat-ha-ye Safavi va Osmani," *Roshd-e Amuzesh-e Tarikh* 45 (1390): 51.

by the Safavid Shah Tahmasb I and had even converted to Twelver Shi'ism (although perhaps only nominally) by that point. This gradual shift in the balance of power towards the Kiyayis was perhaps one of the main reasons why Amireh Dobbaj sought Sultan Suleyman in the first place. In the end, though, as Sultan Suleyman began making his way towards Zanjan, Shah Tahmasb I used the scorched earth policy to deter him.[494]

The relationship with the Ottomans was not just the prerogative of western Gilanis, though. In fact, when faced with few options, Khan Ahmad II (r. 943/1538-975/1568 and again 985/1578-1000/1592) also pursued the Ottoman angle to undermine Shah 'Abbas I's growing power. The relationship between Shah 'Abbas I and Khan Ahmad II is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The Demise of Amireh Dobbaj and the First Phase of Khan Ahmad II's Rule

Once Sultan Suleyman turned Amireh Dobbaj away, upon his return to Gilan he was confronted by a contender to his throne, a local named Amireh Hatam. Amireh Hatam emerged victorious in the battle that followed, and Amireh Dobbaj was left with no other choice but to flee Rasht. He then went to Kuchesfehan, hoping he could gather support and troops to strike back, but his efforts there were futile. The population of Kuchesfehan, which was a site of contention between the Eastern and Western Gilani rulers, did not respond to Amireh Dobbaj's plea and instead turned towards the Kiyayi ruler, Khan Ahmad I.[495] Eventually, Amireh Dobbaj

[494] Shah Tahmasb Safavi, *Tazkareh-ye Shah Tahmasb*, 25-30; Mirza Mohammad Taher Vahid Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, ed. Sayyed Sa'id Mir Mohammad Sadeq (Tehran: Pazhuheshgah-e 'Olum Ensani va Motale'at-e Farhangi, 1383/2004), 66-67; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 16-17; Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval*, 156-159.

[495] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 19-20; Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar*, 183; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 111.

fled to Shirvan where he took refuge with Sultan Khalil,[496] the ruler of Darband, who was Amireh Dobbaj's late Safavid wife's brother-in-law. When Sultan Khalil passed away,[497] Amireh Dobbaj decided to ask his wife's (the sister of Tahmasb and of Amireh Dobbaj's late wife) hand in marriage. Obviously, Amireh Dobbaj found no better way to save his worsening position but to re-establish his marital ties with the Safavid household. When he pursued Shah Tahmasb I's sister, she stalled him and sent a delegate to inform her brother of his presence in Shirvan.[498] Shah Tahmasb I ordered the governor of Moghan, Bayazid Soltan Shamlu, to capture him and bring him to his court.[499]

Meanwhile, in Gilan, Amireh Hatam had taken over the throne of Rasht and had minted coins in his own name. He had even asserted his victory over Amireh Dobbaj by marrying two of his wives, Hasan Ara and Jahan Ara.[500] However, Amireh Dobbaj's *sepahsalar* managed to defeat Amireh Hatam, capture him, and send him to Shah Tahmasb I's court.[501] At the same time, Amireh Dobbaj arrived in Tabriz where he was put in a metal cage hung in between the two minarets of Hasan Padishah's mosque and set on fire in 942/1535.[502] The gruesome death of Amireh Dobbaj and the public display of his body were intended to kindle fear in the heart of local contenders in Gilan and force them to acknowledge Safavid supremacy.

Meanwhile, the Kiyayi family had managed to maintain a cordial relationship with Shah Tahmasb I in Biyeh Pish, especially after Amir Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti had passed away in

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[496] Fumani refers to him as Soltan Mozaffar, while Vahid Qazvini and Monshi Qazvini both refer to him as Soltan Khalil. See Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 24; Vahid Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, 67; Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-Akhbar*, 183.
[497] Fumani asserts that when Amireh Dobbaj reached Shirvan, Soltan Khalil had already passed. See Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 25.
[498] Ibid., 24-25.
[499] Ibid., 25-26.
[500] Ibid., 22.
[501] Ibid., 23.
[502] Fumani dates Dobbaj's execution in 943/1564. Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 27; Vahid Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, 67; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 1, 111.

915/1509-10, for the remainder of Khan Ahmad I's rule. Once Khan Ahmad I passed away in 940/1534, he was succeeded by his son Kar Kiya Sayyed 'Ali. Kar Kiya Sayyed 'Ali's reign was short-lived, and soon he was killed by his brother Soltan Hasan in 941/1535. Soltan Hasan, however, also died in 943/1537 from the plague.[503] At this point Amir 'Abbas, a local dignitary who was in charge of the affairs of Gilan, declared Khan Ahmad II, who was only one year old, the ruler of Biyeh Pish.[504] At the same time, seizing the opportunity, Shah Tahmasb I appointed his own brother, Bahram Mirza, as the ruler of Gilan. Bahram Mirza was sent to Gilan accompanied by a group of *Qizilbash*.[505] Obviously, having the Kiyayi contender at the court, and at a young age, made Shah Tahmasb I hopeful that he would be able to fully integrate Gilan without any military action. However, local opposition to his brother grew, especially after he imprisoned Khur Kiya Taleqani, the *vakil* of the late Soltan Hasan. Soon the local population rebelled against Bahram Mirza. Bahram Mirza was left with no other choice but to flee Gilan.[506] This small uprising that resulted in Bahram Mirza's flight from Gilan was the beginning of the series of local uprisings that exemplified the relationship between the locals and the Safavids, even after Gilan's full integration under Shah 'Abbas I.

It is not very clear from the sources exactly when Khan Ahmad II made his way to Gilan as a ruler.[507] Eskandar Beyg Monshi, Shah 'Abbas I's court chronicler, states that he received education at Shah Tahmasb I's court until he reached the age of puberty.[508] As mentioned earlier,

[503] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 110; Shirazi, *Takmelat al-Akhbar,* 136-137; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 262.
[504] Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 262.
[505] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh,* 361-362; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 262.
[506] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh,* 361-362; Monshi Qazvini*, Javaher al-Akhbar*, 186-187.
[507] 'Abdolhosseyn Nava'i and Mir-'Abolqasemi both contend that Khan Ahmad was taken to Gilan right after his father's death. 'Abdolhosseyn Nava'i, "Sargozasht-e Khan Ahmad Khan," in Fereydun Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad-e Gilani (Nimeh-ye Dovvom-e Sadeh-ye Dahom-e Hejri)* (Tehran: Bonyad-e Mowqufat-e Doktor Mahmud Afshar, 1373/1994); Mir-'Abolqasemi, *Gilan az Aghaz ta Enqelab-e Mashrutiyyat*, 104. Monshi on the other hand asserts that he stayed at the court as long as he was a minor. Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 1, 110.
[508] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 1, 110.

raising the young local princes at the court was one of the ways by which the Safavid shahs built alliances with the local rulers and worked to integrate them within their system and ensure their loyalty.[509] The local rulers often sent their sons to the court as a demonstration of good faith. It is important to note that this was at times a mutually beneficial agreement. While the center was reassured of the provincial ruler's loyalty, the young future ruler would benefit from the courtly education and proximity to the center. Regardless of when Khan Ahmad II actually left Shah Tahmasb I's court, we know that he married the daughter of one of the *Qizilbash amir*s, Sarafraz Soltan Chopek, and had a son from her, whom Shah Tahmasb I named Soltan Hasan and referred to as "his own son."[510] Khan Ahmad II was certainly very close to the court of Shah Tahmasb I, and enjoyed his full support after Bahram Mirza was driven out of Gilan.[511] Shah Tahmasb I recognized Khan Ahmad II's rule officially at this point, and he even added Biyeh Pas to his domain in 945/1538.[512]

In the next couple of decades, though, Shah Tahmasb I's policy remained consistent in that he tried to maintain a balance of power between the two Gilans. To circumvent Khan Ahmad II's ambitions and growing interests in Biyeh Pas, the notables of Biyeh Pas came up with a replacement for Amireh Dobbaj in 950/1544 by the name of Amireh Shahrokh.[513] Although Amireh Dobbaj had a living son named Soltan Mahmud, Shah Tahmasb I refused to allow him the throne of Biyeh Pas, hoping to slowly put an end to Eshaqiyyeh rule in Biyeh Pas. Amireh Shahrokh ruled over Biyeh Pas for seven years and struck coins in the name of Shah Tahmasb I. At some point Amireh Shahrokh was summoned to the court of Shah Tahmasb I at

[509] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 146.
[510] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 1, 110.
[511] Bahram Mirza's unsuccessful attempt at capturing the rule of Biyeh Pish, and the population's questioning of his legitimacy, were another indicator that the Gilanis were not receptive to the Safavid presence in the province at this time.
[512] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 28-31. *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gīlān V. History Under the Safavids."
[513] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 20-30.

the instigation of Khan Ahmad II, but he could not manage the overly ambitious demands of the *Qizilbash amir*s and eventually left the court without permission. He was soon captured and returned to Tabriz where he was executed.[514]

After Amireh Shahrokh's death, Biyeh Pas fell into disarray.[515] Khan Ahmad II was nominally in control of Biyeh Pas at this point, but Shah Tahmasb I now decided to grant governorship of Biyeh Pas to Amireh Dobbaj's son, Soltan Mahmud, who was living with his aunt and uncle in Khalkhal after his father's demise.[516] Soltan Mahmud made his way to Rasht in 965/1577 and remained there as the ruler for five years, but his position was jeopardized when his *vakil*, Kar Kiya Ahmad Soltan Fumani, complained to Shah Tahmasb I about Soltan Mahmud's inadequate rule in an attempt to procure the rule of Western Gilan for himself. Shah Tahmasb I then summoned them to the court and decided to exile Soltan Mahmud to Shiraz.[517]

The exile of Soltan Mahmud to Shiraz opened a new opportunity for Khan Ahmad II, as Shah Tahmasb I granted Biyeh Pas to Khan Ahmad II's young son, Soltan Hasan, practically placing Khan Ahmad II in charge of all of Gilan.[518] Moreover, Khan Ahmad II obtained Gaskar and Kuhdam from their respective rulers, Amireh Sasan and Mirza Kamran, increasing his own power and influence considerably.[519] To ensure his position as the ruler of Biyeh Pas, he then plotted and had Soltan Mahmud killed in Shiraz.[520] According to Fumani, it was this move that

[514] Ibid.; *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gīlān V. History Under the Safavids"; Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval,* 562.
[515] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 34.
[516] The dates Fumani provides for events are sometimes confusing and may not be correct. Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 33-34; Rabino, *Velayat-e Dar al-Marz*, 500.
[517] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 34-35; Rabino, *Velayat-e Dar al-Marz*, 500; *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gīlān V. History Under the Safavids"; Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval,* 562-563.
[518] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 111; Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval*, 563.
[519] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 111.
[520] The young Soltan Mahmud was poisoned during his trip to the local bath. See Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 35-36; Parsadust, *Shah Tahmasb-e Avval*, 563-564.

made Shah Tahmasb I upset with Khan Ahmad II and eventually led to his capture and imprisonment.[521]

Shah Tahmasb I's policy towards Khan Ahmad II was one of cooptation up to that point, as he had been more concerned with the Eshaqiyyeh family after Amireh Dobbaj's collusion with Sultan Suleyman. With Soltan Mahmud now out of the picture, Shah Tahmasb I had to curb the growing power of Khan Ahmad II, so he offered Biyeh Pas to Jamshid Khan, Soltan Mahmud's son. Shah Tahmasb I also betrothed his own daughter to the young ruler, once again establishing familial ties to help ensure better future cooperation. Shah Tahmasb I then sent a convoy headed by Hosseyn Qoli Beyg Shamlu to ensure Khan Ahmad II's withdrawal from Biyeh Pas. Khan Ahmad II had his son prepare for an offensive instead; however, Khan Ahmad II's son Soltan Hasan fell ill and passed away soon after.[522] Khan Ahmad II eventually returned Biyeh Pas to Jamshid Khan, but refused to cede Kuchesfehan.[523]After sending two unsuccessful envoys to evict Khan Ahmad II, Shah Tahmasb I eventually sent Yulqoli Beyg Zolqadr in 974/1567 to ensure the return of all of Biyeh Pas and Kuchesfehan to Jamshid Khan, and to take Gaskar and Kuhdam back for their respective rulers as well. Khan Ahmad II then sent his own troops to Rasht and had Shah Tahmasb I's delegates killed.[524]

After this confrontation, Shah Tahmasb I, who was becoming more and more frustrated with Khan Ahmad II but was not too keen on military intervention quite yet, sent him a critical letter in Safar 975/September 1567.[525] Shah Tahmasb I recounts all of Khan Ahmad II's misdeeds, including his extravagant reception of artists and performers at his court, as well as his

[521] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 37.
[522] Ibid., 42-44. Only Bedlisi mentiones Tahmasb's daughter having been betrothed to Jamshid Khan. Sharaf al-Din b. Shams al-Din Bedlisi, *Sharafnameh*, vol. 2, ed. V. Véliamïnof-Zernof (St. Pétersbourg: Commussionnaires de L'Académie Impérial Des Science, 1862), 235.
[523] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, 111; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 39; Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 559-560.
[524] Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 1, 461-462; Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 560; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 43-44.
[525] 'Abdolhosseyn Nava'i, *Shah Tahmasb-e Safavi: Majmueh-ye Asnad va Mokatebat-e Tarikhi Hamrah ba Yaddasht-ha-ye Tafsili* (Entesharat-e Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran, 1350), 118-126.

mistreatment of Shah Tahmasb I's multiple envoys and the poisoning of Soltan Mahmud.[526] Moreover, Shah Tahmasb I was wary of the fact that Khan Ahmad II had failed to fulfill his important duty of paying his respect by visiting the monarch's court (which by this point was in Qazvin, a short distance from Lahijan) for nearly 20 years, as well as the fact that Khan Ahmad II at times had failed to pay his dues on time.[527] Khan Ahmad II's growing court and his lavish spending are indicative of the general growth and prosperity of Eastern Gilan at this time, a noteworthy fact since his family had been literally bankrupt just a few decades earlier. Obviously, such a display of wealth from a local ruler was not tolerable for the Safavids. For example, Khan Ahmad II had offered 400 *toman*s as a yearly stipend (or the town of Tolam as *toyul*) to Ostad Zeytun, a renowned musician at his court.[528] Considering that, according to Shah Tahmasb I, Khan Ahmad II's yearly dues to the Safavid court were no more than 700 *toman*s, a stipend of 400 *toman*s for just one musician was indeed an extravagant expense.[529]

Moreover, Shah Tahmasb I was alarmed by Khan Ahmad II's efforts to purchase gunpowder in secret.[530] The growing frustration of the shah with Khan Ahmad II led Shah Tahmasb I to offer Khan Ahmad II a *soyurghal* in any other province but Gilan for the amount of 500 *toman*s, and he threatened him with outright invasion in case he failed to comply.[531] Noteworthy in Shah Tahmasb I's letter is that he refers to Gilan as his *khasseh* land, and to Gilan's *ro'aya* and *sepahiyan* (peasants and soldiers) as his own *ro'aya* and *sepahiyan*,

[526] Nava'i, *Shah Tahmasb-e Safavi*, 118-126.
[527] Bedlisi, *Sharafnameh*, 235-236; Tattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Alfi*, vol. 8, 5808.
[528] It is not clear whether Zeytun had a stipend worth 400 plus the town of Tolam, or if Tolam's income for him amounted to that amount. Either way that is a considerable income. See Nava'i, *Shah Tahmasb-e Safavi,* 123.
[529] Nava'i, *Shah Tahmasb-e Safavi,* 123-124. Although the numbers on both sides must be exaggerated, there is no doubt that Khan Ahmad II had come a long way since the desperate times during the early years of his grandfather's rule.
[530] Nava'i, *Shah Tahmasb-e Safavi,* 123-125. Shah Tahmasb at first had thought the substance in question was opium, only to find out later that in fact it was gunpowder. As mentioned, the Safavids highly controlled and monitored the possession of firearms within their realm. See Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 144.
[531] Nava'i, *Shah Tahmasb-e Safavi,* 124-125.

degrading Khan Ahmad II's position as ruler to a mere figurehead under Safavid control. Khan Ahmad II of course sent his own elaborate and at times apologetic response, evoking his position as a sayyid and his ancestors' services to the Safavid house to harbor sympathy from Shah Tahmasb I, while making excuses for his failure to visit Shah Tahmasb I's court. In the end, he stayed firm in his assertion that Gilan as his ancestral land should remain under his rule.[532]

Shah Tahmasb I began arranging to invade Gilan in the same year, 975/1567. He negotiated with the landlords in Gilan, highlighting how important it was for the Safavids to ensure the local elite and landholders' cooperation.[533] Shah Tahmasb I then sent a large army headed by Ma'sum Beyg Safavi to attack Biyeh Pish. His army included troops from several provinces and regions. The author of *Sharafnameh*, who was among those participating in the offensive against Gilan, contends that Ma'sum Beyg Safavi managed to trick Khan Ahmad II into abandoning his troops, promising he would intervene on his behalf, but then he attacked Lahijan as Khan Ahmad II fled. Khan Ahmad II was wandering from home to home for a few months before he was finally captured and sent to the court of Shah Tahmasb I. When Ma'sum Beyg Safavi entered Lahijan, some of Khan Ahmad II's men surrendered to the *Qizilbash amir*s. As the *Qizilbash* took control over Biyeh Pish, they looted and devastated the local population.[534]

Khan Ahmad II's life was spared by Shah Tahmasb I and he was sent to be imprisoned in the fortress of Qahqaheh. However, since Shah Tahmasb I's brother Isma'il Mirza (the future Shah Isma'il II) was also there and Khan Ahmad II had become rather close to him, out of the

[532] Ibid., 127-132.
[533] Tattavi and Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Alfi*, vol. 8, 5807.
[534] Ibid., 5823; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 112-113; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 45-50; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, 470-478; Valeh Esfehani, *Khold-e Barin*, 351-355.

fear of collusion between the two Shah Tahmasb I relocated Khan Ahmad II to the fortress of Estakhr in Shiraz.[535]

After Khan Ahmad II was subdued, Shah Tahmasb I granted Gilan to a few of his *amir*s, making sure no one person was in charge of all of Gilan. Eskandar Beyg Afshar, Hamzeh Beyg Talesh, Zeynal Beyg Zolqadr, and Sharaf Khan Kord (the author of *Sharafnameh*) were all given a share in Gilan.[536] Hesam Beyg Qaramanlu was in charge of Ashkevar.[537] Meanwhile, Western Gilan was handed over to Jamshid Khan, but not without Safavid oversight. Dashdar Beyg Safavi was to oversee the affairs of Jamshid Khan, while Amir Mohsen became his tutor and *sadr*.[538] In 977/1569, Jamshid Khan married Shah Tahmasb I's daughter, Khadijeh Beygom.[539] After a period of chaos and hardship, now Biyeh Pas was to witness a period of peace and quiet.

Conclusion

The eventual incorporation of Gilan into the Safavid polity was a process that began from the very first interactions between the Gilani rulers and the Safavid monarchs. It involved many different strategies and policies, from "soft power" to threats of invasion and force. The interaction between the center and "periphery" constituted constant negotiations, and included both incorporating the local Gilani elite within the Safavid rank and file and gradually inserting the center's deputies in Gilan. The local rulers themselves were also responsible for opening the door to Safavid interference in their local affairs, as they tried to navigate their local and immediate interests alongside their long-term concerns in the face of growing pressure from the

[535] Bedlisi, *Sharafnameh*, 237-238; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 113; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 50-52.
[536] Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, 477.
[537] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 1, 113.
[538] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 53.
[539] Ibid., 55-56.

center to comply with its demands. Local rulers vied for the support of the shah to reinforce their own local legitimacy; however, the shah's support for one contender over another did not make him necessarily well-established locally. The importance of family rule remained accentuated at the local level and efforts were made to bring contenders from the same family or even those remotely tied to them to prevent the shake-up of family succession or local power dynamics. At this stage of center-periphery relations, the local understandings of legitimacy, hereditary rule, and territorial claims still remained strong, and the shah was not able to singlehandedly shape the local ruling configurations.

Marriage was a strategic tool for consolidating alliances between different factions and especially between the local elite and the Safavids. The center also held the offspring of these marriages as pawns and inserted its influence through complete control over their upbringing and education, conditioning them for long-term loyalty and service to the Safavids. However, neither of these tactics was always necessarily successful.

Ottoman-Safavid struggles were felt strongly at the local level. As loyalties in the age of empires were capricious and volatile, reaching out to the competing factions for support or just to test the waters was not uncommon. That being said, religious affiliation was only one of many factors shaping regional alliances and their outcomes.

The most vital strategy used by the Safavids in the early decades of their rule was creating a balance of power between the ruling families of Western and Eastern Gilan. The balance of power in Gilan shifted, as the shah favored one over the other periodically, but the aim was to keep each family in check. When, in the case of Kahn Ahmad II, his power and growing court apparatus alarmed Shah Tahmasb I, the shah resorted to removing him from power by force. Shah Tahmasb I then began the process of normalizing the *Qizilbash* presence in

Gilan when he removed Khan Ahmad II and installed the *Qizilbash amir*s in his place, however temporarily.

Chapter Four

From Khans to Provincial Viziers: Gilan's Conquest and Local Rebellions

Jean Chardin, the seventeenth-century French traveler, painted a picture of chaos and disorder in the Safavid Empire as Shah 'Abbas I came to power. According to Chardin, Shah 'Abbas I inherited "un empire tout délabré, et en piéces pour ainsi dire; car il étoit partageé entre plus de vingt princes," and he famously stated that Shah 'Abbas I had to conquer his own realm "comme si c'eût été un paus étranger."[540]

The idea that the Safavid state became more powerful and considerably stronger under Shah 'Abbas I rests on the assessment of several different processes that took place gradually but simultaneously during and prior to his reign. Scholars have long considered the seventeenth century as the heyday of the Safavid Empire, and Shah 'Abbas I as the monarch "that fashioned a new and innovative dynastic ethos."[541] Others have moved beyond the person of the shah to also attribute the empire's zenith to the "wider strategic and economic context in which Iran was embedded."[542] More recently, historians have also pointed out that some of the policies attributed

[540] Jean Chardin, *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin, en Perse, et autres Lieux de l'Orient,* vol. 5, *Suite De la Description des Sciences et des Arts Libéraux Persans*, ed. L. Langlès (Paris: Lenormant, Imprimeur-Libraire, 1811), 224. See also Vladimir Minorsky, trans. and ed. *Tadhkerat al-Molūk :A Manual of Ṣafavid Administration* (Cambridge: Wheffer and Sons, 1943), 16.
[541] Colin P. Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran: Power, Religion and Rhetoric* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 176.
[542] Bert Fragner, "The Safavid Empire and the Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Political and Strategic Balance of Power within the World System," in *Iran and the World in the Safavid Age: International Contact and Political Development in Early Modern Persia,* ed. Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 22.

to Shah ‘Abbas I were not necessarily his own unique innovations, but rather the continuation of pre-existing practices and policies.[543]

Shah ‘Abbas I has been celebrated as “the greatest autocrat that Safavid Iran would ever know,”[544] yet his reforms were at times a continuation of his predecessors’ initiatives. Shah ‘Abbas I did not come to power in a historical vacuum; indeed, he came to power after a relatively chaotic decade in the long history of the Safavids. However, he did not just inherit an empire in peril, he also inherited an empire that had set the stage slowly but surely for the normalization of Safavid interference and presence in important regions like Gilan. In fact, the transformation of the relationship between the Safavids and Gilan was a gradual one. The shifts in modes of governance, land management, and trade were all processes that took decades of gradual perseverance in balancing the Safavid presence and interest in Gilan with the interests of the traditional ruling elites. The change in the nature of the Safavid relationship with Gilan involved not only the political culture and structure of the polity, but also encompassed much of its economic, trade, and religious policies as well.

Once Shah ‘Abbas I came to power and conquered Gilan, he planted his own agents as viziers in the province, altering the configuration of power and modes of governance. However, he was not the first monarch to initiate such a change. Shah Tahmasb I had introduced the concept to Gilan in 975/1568, albeit only for a short time.[545] Shah Tahmasb I had certainly paved the way for such transformations by that point by bringing Gilan’s populace one step closer to the presence of Safavid agents in their region. This modification of the style of governance was

[543] See for example Floor on “*gholam* corps.” Previously attributed to Shah ‘Abbas I, scholars now argue that it existed before his reign and was “created by his grandfather Tahmasb I.” Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, 166; Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 52.
[544] Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics*, 176.
[545] ‘Abdollahi also points out that the early Safavid interference in Gilan was instrumental in shaping Gilan’s relationship to the center, from Shah Isma‘il I’s official appoinment of Khan Ahmad I to Shah Tahmab I’s more direct intereference. ‘Abdollahi, *Jaygah va Naqsh-e Gilan*, 206.

also closely related to a change in land management that was part and parcel of Shah ‘Abbas I’s reforms. Changes in land management were of course more than administrative. They were political and reflected changes in who controlled the output of the land as well, as “land is to rule.”[546]

Another important aspect of these transformations was religious. Clearly, religious conformity to the Safavids’ newly-established Twelver Shi‘ism was of the utmost importance in homogenizing the diverse territories they wished to rule. Gilan was religiously diverse, and the Safavids made sure to eliminate that diversity and create the hegemony of Twelver Shi‘ism in the region. The final chapter examines religious conversion and the policies of the Safavids in Gilan more closely.

These transformations were not without consequences. One of the main consequences of the policies of Shah ‘Abbas I was the local rebellions that followed. This chapter provides an overview and analysis of some of the most decisive modifications that took place in Gilan, from trade to land management and changes in forms of governance, as well as an analysis of local responses to these policies: i.e., local uprisings and other forms of resistance.

A Temporary Safavid Presence in Gilan

In the first decades of Safavid rule, the local elite worked as a bridge between the Safavids, the *Qizilbash* elite, and the local population. The local peasants and artisans, involved in silk cultivation, production, and trade, were the forces which generated much of the province’s revenues. The local elite enjoyed extravagant lifestyles by the middle of the sixteenth century, a

[546] Walter C. Neale, “Land Is to Rule,” in *Land Control and Social Structures in Indian History*, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 7. In assessing the meanings of land ownership in pre-British Indian society, Neal asserts that “Land… was one of the aspects of rulership, whether viewed in the person of a raja, in the body corporate of a bhaichara (brotherhood) village, or in the person of the zamindar [landowner], the closest approximation to the pater families.”

far cry from their utter bankruptcy of the earlier decades. Their growing wealth naturally came under the scrutiny of the shah. Shah Tahmasb I's furious rant over Khan Ahmad II's expanding court and excessive spending is an attestation to the limits of what the shah could tolerate from the local rulers.[547] Even before Shah 'Abbas I, the Safavid monarchs knew that the best way to deal with the local dynasties was to slowly but surely eliminate them altogether. The onset of the Safavids' direct control in Gilan then can be traced back to Shah Tahmasb I's reign. It was after Khan Ahmad II was captured and sent to Qahqaheh that Shah Tahmasb I granted Gilan to a few of his *Qizilbash amir*s, making sure to keep it divided. As recounted in the previous chapter, Shah Tahmasb I had made an even earlier attempt to grant Gilan to his own brother, Bahram Mirza, after Khan Ahmad II's father, Soltan Hasan, had passed away, but he was met with serious opposition from the Gilanis and Bahram Mirza was forced to retreat.[548] When Khan Ahmad II was captured, Shah Tahmasb I granted a few of his own deputies each a share in the form of *toyul* in Gilan.[549]

Meanwhile, Biyeh Pas was handed over to Jamshid Khan, a descendant of the Eshaqiyyeh ruling family, but not without Safavid oversight. Dashdar Beyg Safavi was to oversee the affairs of Jamshid Khan, while Amir Mohsen became his tutor and *sadr*.[550] In 977/1569 Jamshid Khan married Shah Tahmasb I's daughter, Khadijeh Beygom, tying the ruler to the Safavid house once again.[551] The results of this reunion were positive for Biyeh Pas, as a period of peace and prosperity followed in the region.[552]

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[547] Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad,* 62-70; Nava'i, *Shah Tahmasb-e Safavi*, 118-126.
[548] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 361-2. Iskandar Beyg Afshar, Hamzeh Beyg Talesh, Zaynal Beyg Zolqadr, and Sharaf Khan Kord (also known as Bedlisi, the author of *Sharafnameh*) all held a share. Moreover, Hesam Beyg Qaramanlu was in charge of Ashkevar. Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 113.
[549] Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, 477.
[550] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 53.
[551] Ibid., 55-56.
[552] Ibid., 56-57.

Shah Tahmasb I's efforts at controlling Gilan more directly were not without their challenges. Shah Tahmasb I himself was aware of the disdain the population of Gilan held towards the *Qizilbash.* In one of his letters to Khan Ahmad I, Shah Tahmasb I had clearly stated his frustration with the Kiyayi propaganda tactics, labeling the *Qizilbash* "cannibals" in an effort to turn public opinion against the *Qizilbash* presence in Gilan.[553] It is safe to say that it was not just the propaganda against the *Qizilbash* that had Gilan's population wary of accepting the Safavids' more direct rule, but the general disdain for outsiders.

In Biyeh Pish, Shah Tahmasb I granted the governorship of Lahijan to Soltan Mahmud Mirza in 977/1569 and appointed Allahqoli Soltan Ostajlu as his tutor. Allahqoli Soltan Ostajlu had been instrumental in the capture of Khan Ahmad II.[554] A year later, in 978/1570, an uprising broke out in Gilan. There are discrepancies in the primary sources as to the identity of the leader of this uprising. Fumani, the local chronicler, only refers to an individual named Amireh Dobbaj from Lashteh Nesha as the leader of this uprising, while Qommi, a Safavid court chronicler, mentions an individual named Sayyed Hosseyn.[555] Bedlisi also refers to an individual named Amireh Dobbaj (the namesake of one of the previous rulers of Biyeh Pas), while Hasan Rumlu and Eskandar Beyg Monshi both refer to the leader of the uprising as Sayyed Hosseyn, and his appointed *sepahsalar* as Amireh Dobbaj.[556] Rumlu and Monshi's accounts help us understand the discrepancy in the sources. It is possible that Sayyed Hosseyn represented the charismatic and religious leadership of the uprising, while Amireh Dobbaj represented the military wing,

[553] Nava'i, *Shah Tahmasb-e Safavi*, 125. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this sentiment was perhaps due to the memory of the episodes of cannibalism that took place after Shah Isma'il I captured the fortress of Asta. The episode of course does not indicate general anthropophagic inclinations on the part of the *Qizilbash*, but was rather at times an isolated ritual.
[554] Bedlisi, *Sharafnameh*, 240; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh,* 563.
[555] Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, 570; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 58.
[556] Bedlisi, *Sharafnameh*, vol. 2, 240-241. Bedlisi also refers to another shortlived uprising that happened prior to this one and was carried out by an individual named Hashem. See also Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 578-579; Monshi, *Tarikh-e'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 1, 113.

which is why in some sources only one or the other is mentioned. During the uprising Amireh Dobbaj managed to take control of Lahijan's castle and its surrounding areas, including Lashteh Nesha. Amireh Dobbaj proved to be particularly ruthless towards the *Qizilbash* and killed all inhabitants of the castle, including the women and children.[557] Amireh Dobbaj managed to hold on to power for over a year, until Shah Tahmasb I ordered Amireh Sasan of Gaskar and Ahmad Soltan, the *vakil* of Jamshid Khan, to attack Lahijan.[558] Amireh Dobbaj was eventually killed in a battle against the forces of Shah Tahmasb I, bringing the uprising to an end.[559]

Eskandar Beyg Monshi estimates the army of Amireh Dobbaj to have been somewhere around 20,000 strong. This number, as exaggerated as it may be, shows the popularity of the uprising among the Gilanis, and not just the elite. After the uprising, Allahqoli Soltan was dismissed from Gilan and Pireh Mohammad Khan Ostajlu, the tutor of one of the Safavid princes, Imam Qoli Mirza, was appointed in his place. Imam Qoli Mirza remained in Lahijan as long as Shah Tahmasb I was alive.[560]

When Shah Tahmasb I passed away in 984/1576, the *Qizilbash* left Gilan.[561] This is significant, for it is demonstrative of the precarious position of the *Qizilbash* in Gilan and indicates that no lasting provincial institutions connected to the center were established at this point. Even after being stationed in Gilan for ten years, the *Qizilbash* still had a difficult time integrating and establishing lasting alliances or institutions that could protect and represent the

[557] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 58; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, 570; Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 579; Bedlisi, *Sharafnameh*, 240-241; Monshi, *Tarikh-e'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 113; Sayyed Hasan b. Morteza Hosseyni Astarabadi, *Tarikh-e Soltani: Az Sheykh Safi ta Shah Safi*, ed. Ehsan Eshraqi (Tehran: Entesharat-e 'Elmi, 1366/1987), 84.
[558] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 59-60.
[559] Fumani does not refer to Shah Tahmasb I's army at all. However, other sources contend that after the defeat of Amireh Sasan, Shah Tahmasb I sent an army to Gilan to supress the rebellion. Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 579; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, 571; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 1, 114.
[560] Monshi, *Tarikh-e'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 114; Astarabadi, *Tarikh-e Soltani*, 84.
[561] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 62; Rabino, *Velayat-e Dar a-Marz*, 506.

interest of the center. Their control over Gilan remained rather precarious, dependent on the person of Shah Tahmasb I himself rather than on Safavid institutions.

After Shah Tahmasb I's death, his successor, Shah Isma'il II, ascended the throne for a short while. This marked the beginning of one of the bloodiest periods in the court affairs of the Safavids, due to accentuated factionalism and rivalries among the *Qizilbash*.[562] Shah Isma'il II had forged a relationship with Khan Ahmad II in the prison fortress of Qahqaheh, and had apparently promised the latter his freedom in the event of his own release. However, Shah Isma'il II did not carry out his promise to Khan Ahmad II.[563] Khan Ahmad II was not released until Shah Isma'il II's brother, Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh, succeeded him in 985/1578.[564] During the short reign of Shah Isma'il II, Jamshid Khan remained in control of Biyeh Pas, while the shah granted Biyeh Pish to Pireh Mohammad Khan.[565] Once in power, Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh released Khan Ahmad II from prison at the instigation of his Mazandarani wife, the de facto ruler at the time, Khayr al-Nesa Beygom, famously known as Mahd-e 'Olya.[566] After his release from Qahqaheh, Khan Ahmad II married a sister of Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh,

[562] The *Qizilbash* rivalries and factionalism resulted in the death of Shah Isma'il II, his sister Pari Khan Khanum, and later Mahd-e 'Olya, wife of Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh, as well as six royal princes. Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh, who succeeded Shah Isma'il II, was no more than a pawn in the hands of the *Qizilbash*, and was eventually overthrown in favor of his son, Shah 'Abbas I, who had by chance managed to escape the same fate. For more on the political career of Shah Isma'il II, see Shohreh Golsorkhi, "Ismail II and Mirza Makhdum Sharifi: An Interlude in Safavid History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): 477-488.
[563] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 64.
[564] For more on Shah Isma'il II's short-lived reign and his policies, see Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, 69-71; Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 41-47.
[565] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 630; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, 627.
[566] For the status of women in Safavid Iran, see Maria Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale à l'exercice du pouvoir en Iran safavide au XVIe siècle, Première partie: L'importance politique et sociale de la parenté matrilinéaire," *Studia Iranica* 23, no. 2 (1994): 211-258; Maria Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics: Women in Sixteenth-Century Safavid Iran," in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Guity Nashat and Lois Beck (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003): 140-169. For Khan Ahmad's release from Qahqaheh, see Molla Jalal al-Din Mohammad Monajjem Yazdi, *Tarikh-e 'Abbasi ya Ruznameh-ye Molla Jalal*, ed. Seyfollah Vahidniya (Tehran: Chap-e Emruz, 1366/1987), 42-43; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 113, 223; Mahmud b. Hedayatollah Afushteh-yi Natanzi, *Naqavat al-Asar fi Zekr al-Akhyar*, ed. Ehsan Eshraqi (Bongah-e Tarjome va Nashr-e Ketab, 1350/1971), 69.

Maryam Beygom.[567] Maryam Beygom was accompanied to Gilan by her tutor (*laleh*), Pir Qoli Beyg Chavoshlu.

Pir Mohammad Ostajlu, who was appointed by Shah Isma'il II as the ruler of Gilan, was now in the service of Mahd-e 'Olya. He was sent to Mazandaran to capture that realm from one of Mahd-e Olya's relatives and offer it to a more revered relative instead.[568]

The return of Khan Ahmad II and the departure of the Safavid *Qizilbash* showcases a special determination to preserve local privileges in Gilan even after decades of Safavid rule. What determined the Safavid influence in Gilan was not the Safavid policies alone. It was also, as we have observed thus far, the result of the local rulers' own way of handling local political crises by at times appealing to the Safavids for aid and intervention. Sometimes their appeal was as a last resort to maintain their own position, and at times it was to score short-term political points, without however taking into consideration the more long-term effects of Safavid interference at the local level. The more the Safavids were involved and were invited to interfere, the more they sowed the seeds of their future control of Gilan.

It appears that, at least in the beginning, as Safavid control became more direct, the uprisings became more frequent. While the uprisings both created hardship for the locals and temporarily threatened the Safavids' domination, they almost never amounted to anything concrete. In the end, lack of solidarity and the inability to reach meaningful alliances with other local contenders in opposition to the Safavids meant that the local rulers gradually lost their long-held position and gave way to direct Safavid domination.

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[567] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 135, 227; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, 664; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 65.

[568] Mahd-e 'Olya was the daughter of the late Mazandarani Mar'ashi ruler, Mir 'Abdollah Khan. During Shah Tahmasb I's reign, Mir 'Abdollah Khan was dismissed and the governorship of Mazandaran was granted to his cousin instead. Once in power, Mahd-e 'Olya wanted to dismiss said cousin's son and instead allow a more favorable relative to take his place. Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, 690-691.

Khan Ahmad II's Fleeting Return: Weakening of the Local Dynastic Households and Shifting Loyalties

Once Khan Ahmad II returned to Gilan, he had to re-establish his court and grant the official posts to persons of interest. Most of Khan Ahmad II's appointees belonged to the class of merchants and were guild members. A letter addressed to Khan Ahmad II, composed by a local merchant named Molla Aqa Jan, gives us an insight into the background of these officials, reminding us that those who participated in local politics did not necessarily belong to a separate class of aristocrats, but were part of the social fabric of Gilan as guild members, artisans, and merchants. The composer of this letter accuses Khan Ahmad II of selling the local official posts to the highest bidders. Khan Ahmad II of course denied the veracity of this claim, but what is noteworthy is the nature of the occupations of those who held these offices. The author of the letter is a merchant inquiring about the office of *mohrdar-e kuchak* (the small keeper of seals). According to the inquirer, most offices had already been granted to other merchants who were members of their respective guilds (*asnaf*). These offices included that of vizier or *vakil* of Khan Ahmad II, which was granted to Khwajeh Masih, a *zargar* (gold seller); the office of *sepahsalar* of Deylam, granted to Kiya Fereydun the carrot seller (*gazar forush*); the office of *sepahsalar* of Lahijan, granted to Talesh Kuli the *mast forush* (yogurt seller); the office of *amir al-omara*, granted to Khwajeh Hesam al-Din the *naft forush* (oil seller); the office of *mohrdar-e bozorg* (great keeper of seals), granted to Khwajeh Shams al-Din the *namak forush* (salt seller); the office of keeper of stables, granted to Khwajeh Hosseyn, who was a writer; and the office of *khazaneh dari* (keeper of the treasury), granted to the *karbas forush* (cloth seller). This insight into the background of the officials of the Kiyayi ruler is indicative of the power of the merchant

class at the local level, and of the extent of the influence they held in the local political landscape, directly binding the local merchants and artisans to the ruling class.

Once in Lahijan, Khan Ahmad II's eagerness to take over Western Gilan prompted him to launch an offensive against Biyeh Pas during the holy month of Ramadan, against the advice of his close consultants. As he was headed back to his homeland in Gilan, Khan Ahmad II was accompanied by *Qizilbash* troops. His eagerness to expand his power meant that he did not shy away from using his newly-found position as the royal son-in-law to take advantage of Safavid military aid.[569] He faced a devastating defeat, however, but nevertheless he tried to conquer Biyeh Pas several times.[570] During his years back in Gilan and until his subsequent flight after Shah 'Abbas I's invasion, Khan Ahmad II remained set on gaining control over the political affairs of Western Gilan by manipulating and controlling the local elite and the Safavid shah to his favor. The results were mixed for Khan Ahmad II, as he was not always capable of guiding the outcome to his advantage.

Meanwhile Jamshid Khan, the ruler of Biyeh Pas, who had come to power with the help of Shah Tahmasb I, was hoping to put an end to Khan Ahmad II's frequent attacks on his ancestral territory. Jamshid Khan found a temporary ally in Kamran Mirza, the governor of Kuhdam, one of the smaller loci of power situated between Biyeh Pas and Biyeh Pish. Kamran Mirza on occasion allied himself with the Kiyayis or with the Eshaqiyyeh, based on the concerns and imperatives of the time. Seeking his alliance in opposition to the Kiyayis, Jamshid Khan appointed Kamran Mirza as his *vakil* and granted him much authority.[571]

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[569] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 67.
[570] Ibid., 67-69; *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gīlān V. History Under the Safavids."
[571] Valeh Esfehani perhaps gives a clearer account of Kamran Mirza and his position in between the Kiyayi and Eshaqqiyyeh quarrels. Valeh Esfehani, *Khold-e Barin*, 626. Kamran Mirza was one of the semi-autonomous rulers of Kuhdam, which was situated somewhere between Biyeh Pas and Biyeh Pish. He was chased out of Kuhdam by Khan Ahmad I and took refuge at the court of Shah Tahmasb I. He returned to Kuhdam in 974/1567, after Khan

Once Kamran Mirza reached a secure position, he orchestrated a coup against Jamshid Khan, first removing him as ruler and later executing him. Kamran Mirza hoped to attain a decree from Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh allowing him to rule over Gilan. He began the negotiations by sending gifts to the court out of what he had obtained from Jamshid Khan's treasury. Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh caved in to the demands of Kamran Mirza, granted him the governorship of Biyeh Pas, and forbade Khan Ahmad II from interfering in the affairs of Biyeh Pas. Intimidated by Kamran Mirza's sudden rise to power, Khan Ahmad II decided to undermine him by encouraging Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh to send his *Qizilbash* officers from the center to take over the affairs of Biyeh Pas and oust Kamran Mirza. He soon regretted this move, as he saw a potential ally for himself in Shirzad Makalwani, who had initiated an uprising aiming for the throne of Biyeh Pas through a pretender named Mahmud, claiming he was the son of Jamshid Khan, the previous ruler of Biyeh Pas.[572] However, it was too late for Khan Ahmad II to turn the *Qizilbash* back, as the shah, who had a few *amir*s without any territory at his camp, took advantage of this opportunity and sent them to Biyeh Pas. Among those who left for Biyeh Pas, Salman Khan was the son-in-law of Jamshid Khan and the shah had granted him the throne of Rasht.[573]

The rebellion of Shirzad Makalwani, in the midst of Kamran Mirza's takeover of the seat of Biyeh Pas, attests to the precarious state of affairs in Western Gilan and the dwindling significance and power of its local dynastic house. As the pretender began to lay claim to the

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Ahmad's troubles with Shah Tahmasb, and retook control over his ancestral lands. Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 111; Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 304-305.

[572] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 79; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 267.

[573] In fact, it is not one hundred percent clear whether the rebellion was a response to potential *Qizilbash* ascension in Biyeh Pas, to the rise to power of Kamran Mirza, or to both. Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 69-80 (Fumani refers to him as Soleyman); Valeh Esfehani, *Khold-e Barin*, 626-629; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 265-267; Astarabadi, *Tarikh-e Soltani*, 115-116. During this time, there were a few letters exchanged between Khan Ahmad II and Kamran Mirza, and between Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh and Khan Ahmad II. For those see Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 75-78, and also Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 102-105, 192-193.

throne, the *Qizilbash* arrived to take back Biyeh Pas from Kamran Mirza, who had taken over the seat of the Eshaqiyyeh without establishing any real political legitimacy. Once the *Qizilbash* approached and Shirzad Makalwani's uprising gathered momentum, Kamran Mirza fled Rasht with the late Jamshid Khan's minor sons in tow. Shirzad Makalwani battled the *Qizilbash* forces headed by Salman Khan (also referred to as Soleyman Khan) as they approached Rasht. Though they suffered heavy losses, in the end the *Qizilbash* managed to arrest Shirzad Makalwani and entered Rasht triumphant.[574]

Shirzad Makalwani was executed shortly thereafter, as the *Qizilbash amir*s began facing serious opposition from the population of Western Gilan. The locals continued to harass the *amir*s and their men, even at times murdering some of them. According to Fumani, "wherever they went [to get food and supplies] people would kill them."[575] Monshi contends that many of the peasants left their lands, remained in the forests, and continued their opposition by planning attacks on the residences of the *amir*s. Eventually the *Qizilbash amir*s saw no advantage in remaining in Gilan, as the peasants who had fled their lands did not return.[576] Once the *Qizilbash amir*s decided to leave Gilan for Qazvin, Salman Khan took the younger son of Jamshid Khan, Ibrahim Khan, with him while leaving Jamshid Khan's older son Mohammad Amin Khan behind in Biyeh Pas.[577]

By 990/1582, Kamran Mirza of Kuhdam was finally defeated and killed by a coalition of some of the elite of Biyeh Pas (those who had taken refuge with Khan Ahmad II after Jamshid Khan's death), with the aid of Khan Ahmad II, as he tried to attack Lahijan.[578] After the defeat of

[574] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 82.
[575] Ibid., 80-83; Valeh Esfehani, *Khold-e Barin*, 630-633; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 1, 267-269.
[576] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 269.
[577] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 83-84; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 269.
[578] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 86-90.

Kamran Mirza and the pretender to the throne of Biyeh Pas, Soltan Mahmud,[579] Biyeh Pas was back in the hands of the son of Jamshid Khan who had remained in Gilan, Mohammad Amin Khan. Shirzad Soltan, one of the elite of Biyeh Pas who was instrumental in defeating Kamran Mirza, became the *sepahsalar* of Rasht, and Aqa Mohammad Fumani was appointed the *vakil* of Mohammad Amin Khan.[580] There was a relatively short period of peace in Biyeh Pas before another ambitious politician, ʻAli Beyg Soltan, the son of the former *vakil* of Jamshid Khan, Ahmad Soltan, arrived on the scene.

ʻAli Beyg Soltan, who had previously been imprisoned based on Kamran Mirza's smear campaign against him, had been released from Estakhr Fortress in Fars and had attracted Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh's attention to his cause with financial incentives. He received a decree from the shah which placed him as Mohammad Amin Khan's *vakil* and ordered the *amir* of Gaskar, Amireh Siyavosh Khan, to aid ʻAli Beyg Soltan in case of an attack on Biyeh Pas from Khan Ahmad II. Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh was clearly aware of the importance of keeping Gilan split, and knowing that Shirzad Soltan was an ally of Khan Ahmad II, he preferred to have a third person in charge of Biyeh Pas. By the time ʻAli Beyg Soltan made his way to Gilan to assume his new role, though, Shirzad Soltan had already assumed the function of Mohammad Amin Khan's lawyer after having his original *vakil*, Aqa Mohammad Fumani, killed.[581] In the first battle that ensued between ʻAli Beyg Soltan and Shirzad Soltan, Shirzad Soltan was triumphant, but eventually ʻAli Beyg Soltan managed to defeat Shirzad Soltan and place Mohammad Amin Khan on the throne in Fuman instead of Rasht.[582]

[579] Ibid., 92. The fake prince was eventually captured and killed by Kamran Mirza.
[580] Ibid., 91.
[581] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 94.
[582] Ibid., 95-102.

Meanwhile Khan Ahmad II, keen on turning the chaos of Biyeh Pas to his own advantage, decided to appoint the defeated Shirzad Soltan as the *sepahsalar* of Kuchesfehan, thinking this move would gradually pave the way to his control over Kuchesfehan. Khan Ahmad II also asked Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh to return the other son of Jamshid Khan, Ibrahim Khan, who had been taken to Qazvin by the *Qizilbash amir*s, hoping to gain control over the affairs of Biyeh Pas through the Eshaqiyyeh heir.

Khan Ahmad II then appointed Shirzad Soltan as Ibrahim Khan's *vakil* and sent them both to Biyeh Pas. 'Ali Beyg Soltan reacted by attacking Shirzad Soltan, and a series of skirmishes ensued between the two factions. After Shirzad Soltan asked for military aid from Khan Ahmad II for the third time, Khan Ahmad II decided to literally snatch Mohammad Amin Khan and bring him to Biyeh Pish, hoping he could gain control more easily if he had both of the Eshaqiyyeh sons under his supervision.[583] Once Shirzad Soltan found out that Khan Ahmad II had taken Mohammad Amin Khan, he became alarmed and tried to amend his relationship with 'Ali Beyg Soltan. At first 'Ali Beyg Soltan nominally agreed to divide Biyeh Pas between Mohammad Amin Khan in Fuman and Ibrahim Khan in Rasht. However, he then had Shirzad Soltan killed in 994/1586, took Ibrahim Khan, settled in Fuman, and ruled there for three years.[584] Meanwhile, Khan Ahmad II assigned another *vakil* for Mohammad Amin Khan and had him take over Rasht and the surrounding areas. Mohammad Amin Khan then remained there until 999/1591. Later, 'Ali Beyg Soltan attacked Mohammad Amin Khan in Fuman, prompting him to take refuge in Lahijan until a year later when Shah 'Abbas I attacked Gilan and Mohammad Amin Khan fled, accompanying Khan Ahmad II.[585]

[583] Ibid., 103-111.
[584] Ibid., 121-124.
[585] Ibid., 126.

When looking at the historical records of the last phase of Kiyayi rule in Gilan, at first glance one may conclude that the end of Kiyayi rule came about because of the failure of Khan Ahmad II and Shah ‘Abbas I to negotiate a peaceful conclusion to the renewed tensions between the two. It is, however, more likely that the negotiations between Shah ‘Abbas I and Khan Ahmad II were doomed to failure from the beginning. As the nature of the Safavid state was changing, space for Gilan’s rulers to maintain and preserve their previous prestige and power was disappearing. In the final years, the Eshaqiyyeh rulers had also turned into mere puppets in the hands of the ambitious elite like Shirzad Soltan and ‘Ali Beyg Soltan. The same was true of Khan Ahmad II’s position, as he had to dismiss his *vakil* Khwajeh Masih, a gold smith, since he had become too powerful.[586] At this point some of the local political elite, who were also the financial elite, began shifting their loyalties towards the Safavid center. Khwajeh Masih, for example, joined Shah ‘Abbas I’s court and began instigating him to conquer Gilan after he was dismissed by Khan Ahmad II.[587] These members of Gilan’s elite were part of the fabric of Gilani society and hence, once they began to shift their gaze towards the Safavids, maintaining a local rule separate from the Safavids become an uphill battle.

The following section offers a quick overview of the relationship between Shah ‘Abbas I and Khan Ahmad II, before moving on to assess the continuities and changes in land management, provincial governance, and trade in the sixteenth century. The changes that were implemented in these areas lend themselves to the more centralized exercise of power and the gradual decrease in relevance of autonomous local rulers like those of Gilan. It becomes clear that the underlying cause of the failure of negotiations had less to do with Shah ‘Abbas I or Khan Ahmad II *per se* than it did with the ever-evolving empire as a whole.

[586] Ibid.,129; Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 308.
[587] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 129-130.

Failed Negotiations: Khan Ahmad II and Shah 'Abbas I

Shah 'Abbas I eventually occupied Gilan and Mazandaran,[588] bringing an end to local dynastic rule in the region. The conquest took place in the year 1000/1592; however, the full integration of the Safavids in Gilan and *vice versa* took much longer. Local resistance and opposition to *Qizilbash* rule continued for a few more decades, off and on, taking many forms as it took time for Shah 'Abbas I to rearrange the basis and patterns of land ownership, modes of governance, and the overall provincial makeup of power and ties to the center.

Before the military conquest took place, Shah 'Abbas I tried different approaches to curtail Khan Ahmad II's power and curb his ambitions. His first confrontation with Khan Ahmad II came about when the Gilani ruler refused to hand over the Shamlu and Ostajlu *amir*s who had fled the capital and taken refuge in Gilan.[589] Shah 'Abbas I had made it clear that failure to comply would bear severe consequences for Khan Ahmad II. The defiant Khan Ahmad II, perceiving an edge in these negotiations, asked for clemency for the *Qizilbash amir*s but to no avail.[590]

The quarrel over the *Qizilbash amir*s, however, was taking place as Shah 'Abbas I was dealing with the Uzbek and Ottoman threats on his eastern and western borders. 'Abdullah Khan II's conquest of Herat in 997/1595 had created a serious issue for the Safavids, as the Uzbeks began to consider conquering Sistan and Qohestan as well.[591] Making matters worse for the new monarch, the Ottomans had also made serious inroads into the Safavid territories. In fact, Shah

[588] For more on Mazandaran see Goto, *Die Südkaspischen Provinzen*; Majd, *Zohur va Soqut-e Mar'ashiyan.*
[589] Afushteh-yi Natanzi, *Naqavat al-Asar*, 393-395.
[590] Ibid., 395. Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, 919; Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah 'Abbas-e Avval,* vol. 3, 133.
[591] Barat Dahmardeh, "The Shaybanid Uzbeks, Mughals and Safavids in Eastern Iran," in *Iran and the World in the Safavid Age: International Contact and Political Development in Early Modern Persia,* ed. Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 132.

'Abbas I was in the process of making a peace deal with the Ottomans when he attracted the critical attention of Khan Ahmad II. Khan Ahmad II voiced his concern over the shah sending one of his sons as a hostage to the Ottoman court.[592] Later, Shah 'Abbas I signed the peace treaty with the Ottomans in 999/1590 in Istanbul, granting the Ottomans Tabriz, parts of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Shakki, Shirvan, Georgia, Qarabagh, and parts of Lorestan.[593] The treaty, which is known as the treaty of Ferhad Pasha or the Peace of Istanbul, put an end to the Ottoman-Safavid wars of 1578-1590.[594] This peace treaty was meant "to free his [Shah 'Abbas I'] hands to deal with the domestic situation, and to restore the discipline and morale of the armed forces with a view to taking the offensive on the eastern front."[595] Although at the time it may have seemed like a great defeat for the Safavids (perhaps Khan Ahmad II also didn't have the foresight to understand the shah's move), in fact Shah 'Abbas I managed to recover all of the Safavids' lost territories in the next series of battles. The treaty of Nasuh Pasha, which was then signed in 1021/1612, granted the Safavids renewed control over the Caucasus.[596]

Despite having had harsh words for Shah 'Abbas I in his dealings with the Ottomans, Khan Ahmad II himself began negotiating with the Ottoman sultan. He sent his very own *vakil*, Khwajeh Hesam al-Din, to Istanbul and offered his assistance in the event the Ottomans wished to take over Gilan and Iraq, respectively. However, when the shah inquired about these rumors, Khan Ahmad II denied them and insisted that Khwajeh Hesam al-Din had gone to Mecca for

[592] See the letter Khan Ahmad II wrote to Shah 'Abbas I in Nasrollah Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah 'Abbas-e Avval*, vol. 3 (Tehran: Entesharat-e Daneshgah-e Tehran, 1353/1974), 133.
[593] Ibid., 201.
[594] Alexander Mikaberidze, "Ottoman-Safavid Wars," in *Conflict and Conquest in the Islamic World: A Historical Encyclopedia,* 2 vols., ed. Alexander Mikaberidze (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 698; Roemer, "The Safavid Period," 266.
[595] Savory, *Iran Under the Safaids,* 76.
[596] Ibid., 87-88.

pilgrimage instead.[597] However, these claims are corroborated by the extant letter sent from the Ottoman Sultan Murat III to Khan Ahmad II.[598] Sultan Murat III's letter clearly conveys the message that Khan Ahmad II had offered Biyeh Pas, with its Sunni inhabitants, to the Sunni Ottoman sultan, who reportedly had already designated it to an Ottoman named Ahmad Pasha. He had also requested his vizier in Shirvan (which at the time was under the control of the Ottomans) to send some 500 to 600 soldiers to secure Biyeh Pas.[599] In his letter, Sultan Murat III warns Khan Ahmad II to be careful and aware of the *Qizilbash*, and to inform him immediately in case of any transgressions on their part.[600]

Hoping to establish as many allies in the region as possible, Khan Ahmad II also sent a delegate to Russia, asking the Tsar to assist him against Shah 'Abbas I. By the time the Russian delegate was on his way back, Khan Ahmad II had already fled Gilan.[601] Khan Ahmad II's search for a foreign ally was perhaps indicative of his anxieties regarding the state of affairs in the later years of Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh and the early years of Shah 'Abbas II, a state of affairs which was "bordering on anarchy."[602] Moreover, Khan Ahmad II's ex-*vakil* Khwajeh Masih shifted his alliance to the Safavids and soon became the shah's whisperer against Khan Ahmad II and his interests in Gilan.[603]

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[597] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 2, 449. Monajjem also relays a similar story and contends that after hearing this, Shah 'Abbas I became serious about removing Khan Ahmad II from power. Monajjem, *Ruznameh-ye Molla Jalal*, 115-116. See also Qommi's account which contends that it was at the instigation of Amir Hesam al-Din, who had feared that Shah 'Abbas I was going to remove Khan Ahmad II, that Khan Ahmad II sent Amir Hesam al-Din to negotiate with the Ottomans and ask for their support. See Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, 1092.
[598] 'Abdolhosseyn Nava'i, ed. *Shah 'Abbas: Majmu'eh-ye Asnad va Mokatebat-e Tarikhi Hamrah ba Yaddasht-ha-ye Tafsili*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran, 1353/1974), 120-122.
[599] Ibid., 122.
[600] Ibid., 121.
[601] Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah 'Abbas,* vol. 3, 142.
[602] Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, 76.
[603] Fumani sees Khwajeh Masih as the culprit in bringing down the Kiyayi dynasty. See Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 129. Qommi, the Safavid court chronicler, suggest that Khwajeh Masih tried to persuade Khan Ahmad II to be more obedient towards Shah 'Abbas I, but instead Khan Ahmad II replaced him with Mir Hesam al-Din. Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, 1093.

Shah ‘Abbas I, who needed to buy time with Khan Ahmad II as he dealt with more pressing issues, tried to tame Khan Ahmad II temporarily by asking his daughter’s hand in marriage for his own son, Safi Mirza (Khan Ahmad II’s daughter was Safi Mirza’s second cousin). The marriage proposal was Khwajeh Masih’s idea. A concubine from the harem of the shah was sent to Gilan to ask for Khan Ahmad II’s daughter’s hand in marriage, but she was soon turned away. A historically significant exchange of letters between Khan Ahmad II and Shah ‘Abbas I following this incident gives us insight into these negotiations.[604]

In a letter to Shah ‘Abbas I, Khan Ahmad II rejected the marriage proposal, citing the young age of his daughter as the main reason, but also voicing his concern over a potential conflict of interest. Khan Ahmad II envisioned a scenario in which his future son-in-law could be manipulated to rebel against his own father, Shah ‘Abbas I, potentially jeopardizing Khan Ahmad II’s well-being.[605] Obviously Khan Ahmad II’s hypothetical scenario was a jab at the story of Shah ‘Abbas I and the circumstances of his rise to power.[606] Shah ‘Abbas I responded to Khan Ahmad II’s letter, rejecting his concerns and refusal to accept the marriage proposal as unfounded.[607] Meanwhile, Molla Jalal Monajjem Yazdi, the shah’s famous astrologer and author of the court chronicle *Ruznameh-ye Molla Jalal*, reminded the shah that sending a concubine to make a marriage proposal to someone like Khan Ahmad II’s daughter was beneath her, as after all she was related to the house of the Safavids. It is important to note that before joining Shah ‘Abbas I, Molla Jalal Monajjem Yazdi had at one point worked at the court of Khan Ahmad II

[604] See these letters in Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah ‘Abbas*, vol. 3, 1022-1023, 1024-1028, 1028-1030.
[605] Monajjem, *Ruznameh-ye Molla Jalal*, 107. The letter appears in Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 18.
[606] As a pawn in the hands of the competing *Qizilbash* factions, Shah ‘Abbas I himself had come to power through a coup against his father, Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh. For more see Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 73-75.
[607] For Khan Ahmad II’s letter see Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad,* 17-19. For Shah ‘Abbas I’s response see ibid., 20-24.

and that is where he had gained his reputation.[608] Shah ‘Abbas I then sent Molla Jalal Monajjem Yazdi to Gilan to offer a new marriage proposal. Eventually, Khan Ahmad II reluctantly agreed, but asserted his anxiety over the fact that he had vowed not to marry his daughter off before she reached puberty. Shah ‘Abbas I then invited Sheykh Baha al-Din Mohammad al-‘Amili, also known as Sheykh Baha’i, one of the greatest ulema of his realm, to weigh in on Khan Ahmad II’s vow and the religious consequences of breaking it. Sheykh Baha’i issued a fatwa asserting that Khan Ahmad II’s vow was not religiously binding.[609] The shah sent Molla Jalal Monajjem Yazdi, along with some high profile ulema including Sheykh Baha’i himself, to Gilan to oversee the marriage ceremony.[610] It is important to note that while *Kholasat al-Tavarikh* asserts that after the negotiations Khan Ahmad II agreed to his daughter’s betrothal to the shah’s son, in *Tarikh-e Gilan* Fumani states that the failure of the negotiations led to the shah sending Farhad Khan to occupy Gilan.[611]

Shah ‘Abbas I still insisted on the return of his *Qizilbash amir*s. Khan Ahmad II reluctantly agreed but asked the shah to show mercy. However, the shah executed the *amir*s as soon as they made it to Qazvin. Meanwhile, a letter arriving from the Ottoman ruler made it clear to the shah that Khan Ahmad II had indeed sent a delegate to the Ottoman court.[612] Shah ‘Abbas I asked Khan Ahmad II to show good faith by sending his daughter to the court, or by going to the court himself, but Khan Ahmad II refused. Shah ‘Abbas I eventually ordered one of his *amir*s, Farhad Khan Qaramanlu, who was the commander of the Azerbaijan army, to attack and conquer Gilan. The ruler of Gaskar and ‘Ali Beyg Soltan of Biyeh Pas joined forces with Farhad

[608] According to Nowzad, Monajjem also wrote a book on the subject of astrology and dedicated it to Khan Ahmad II. See Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 269-270.
[609] Monajjem, *Ruznameh-ye Molla Jalal,* 108-109; Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, 1086-1087.
[610] Ibid.
[611] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 131-132.
[612] Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 449.

Khan Qaramanlu as well. Khan Ahmad II fled Lahijan as soon as he heard of the defeat of his commanders.[613] The conquest was bloody and resulted in the massacre of inhabitants of surrounding towns, including women and children.[614] Khan Ahmad II and Mohammad Amin Khan fled Gilan via the Caspian Sea port city of Rudsar to Shirvan, eventually taking refuge in the Ottoman Empire. Khan Ahmad II was unable to take his wife and daughter, as his close advisor, Fereydun Beyg, betrayed him and handed them over to Shah ʻAbbas I's men instead. Fereydun Beyg was later promoted by Shah ʻAbbas I to the position of elder or *rish sefid* of all of Gilan in recognition of his services.[615]

The very first letter Shah ʻAbbas I sent to Khan Ahmad II was immediately after the latter fled the province. The letter is inscribed in a semi-apologetic tone, and appears to be an attempt at legitimizing the invasion of Gilan from the perspective of the Safavid shah. In no uncertain terms, Shah ʻAbbas I encourages Khan Ahmad II to submit to him so he can be forgiven and his territory returned to him.[616] The offer was perhaps no more than a ruse to bring Khan Ahmad II back to Gilan so he could be eliminated. Once in the Ottoman Empire, Khan Ahmad II and his fate became the subject of lengthy correspondence between Shah ʻAbbas I and Sultan Murat III, which in retrospect can shed light on the rhetoric surrounding concepts of sovereignty, authority, and conquest.

There was an exchange of letters between Khan Ahmad II, Shah ʻAbbas I, Sultan Murat III, and a couple of Sultan Murat III's dignitaries. These letters reflected Shah ʻAbbas I's attempt following the invasion of the territory to lure Khan Ahmad II back to the Safavid territories.[617]

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[613] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 132-133.
[614] [Uruch Beg], *Don Juan of Persia, A Shi'ah Catholic, 1560-1604*, trans. and ed. G. Le Stranhe (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1926), 214-215; *Encyclopedia Iranica* s.v. "Gīlān V. History Under the Safavids."
[615] Astarabadi, *Tarikh-e Soltani*, 154; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 2, 450-451; Vahid Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, 116.
[616] Nava'i, ed. *Shah 'Abbas,* vol. 2, 30-33.
[617] Ibid., 137-141.

In one of the first letters, which Shah ‘Abbas I sent to Sultan Murat III, he was keen on presenting “the invasion and incorporation of Gīlān within a historical framework, which could in turn permit a sustained, legal justification for his territorial expansion.”[618] Referencing Shah Tahmasb I’s control over Gilan while Khan Ahmad II was captured and imprisoned, Shah ‘Abbas I argued for the legitimacy of his control over Gilan, as historical precedent was a legitimizing factor.[619] Sultan Murat III’s response to Shah ‘Abbas I, in a similar manner, appealed to the historical precedence of the Kiyayi rulers negotiating with the Ottoman sultans, specifically bringing up the case of Amireh Dobbaj, who had decades earlier made his way to visit with the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman and pledged his allegiance to him. Sultan Murat III also made it clear to Shah ‘Abbas I that Khan Ahmad II had promised him Biyeh Pas, but assured him that pursuing that territory was indeed beneath him and that he hoped that Shah ‘Abbas I would “preserve the territory of Gilan, and caress Khan Ahmad.”[620]

Shah ‘Abbas I’s response clearly brought the independent sovereignty of Khan Ahmad II over Gilan into question. That being said, after the initial exchanges another important theme emerges in the correspondence, one that questions Khan Ahmad II’s ability to function as a capable and fair ruler. In the few letters Shah ‘Abbas I exchanged with the Ottoman sultan, his vizier and mufti, he insisted that Khan Ahmad II’s rule in Gilan had been cruel and prejudiced and had violated religious laws, the *Shari‘a*-derived rules (*qavanin-e shar‘i*). Furthermore, after discrediting Khan Ahmad II as a “tyrannical” ruler, Shah ‘Abbas I claimed that the population of Gilan was not interested in welcoming him back.[621] Two main issues that Shah ‘Abbas I’s scribe

[618] Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics*, 185. It is to Colin Mitchell that we owe our insight into the interplay of the Safavid epistolary tradition and production of rhetoric in the context of diplomatic relations and construction of the dynastic image of legitimacy.
[619] Nava’i, ed. *Shah ‘Abbas*, vol. 2, 123-126.
[620] Ibid., 137-141.
[621] Ibid., 150, 159. In at least two of his letters from Shah ‘Abbas I to Sultan Murat III, the scribe questions Khan Ahmad II’s fitness for rule in Gilan since the population were dissatisfied with him. Another letter to Sultan Murat

brought forth in these letters with regard to Khan Ahmad II's practices were his administering of the local tax known as *sareh zar* (which literally means "head gold") and the allegation that he allowed Muslim women to be taken as slaves and concubines.[622] From what can be gathered from the sources, *sareh zar* appears to have been some sort of tax levied on the local population in times of crisis, not on a continual basis. There is no mention of this particular levy in Fumani's *Tarikh-e Gilan*, which covers the reign of Khan Ahmad II. Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi credited Mirza 'Ali Kiyayi with abolishing certain un-Islamic local traditions during his reign, specifically *zaneh zar* (a tax payable to the local ruler upon marriage), as well as with making sure that women inherited their legal share according to Islamic legal traditions.[623] In the earlier sources, such as Lahiji's *Tarikh-e Khani*, *sareh zar* is mentioned twice. Once, according to Lahiji, after Shah Isma'il I conquered Khorasan he asked for a *moshtallaq* (a sum of money paid to the bearer of good news, in this case to Shah Isma'il I) from local rulers. When Khan Ahmad I failed to secure the 200 *toman*s, he instituted two separate taxes on his population, *sareh zar* and *gaveh zar* (cow gold), in order to gather the required amount.[624] This situation clearly constituted an emergency for the local ruler, though ironically it was to keep the Safavid Shah Isma'il I happy. Shah 'Abbas I, however, describes the tax in this letter as one similar to the *jezye* (capitation tax collected from non-Muslims), while however condemning its administration to Muslims as unjust.[625]

III's vizier follows the same tone and reasoning. For the letter to Sultan Murat III's vizier, see ibid., 161-165. For the letter to the *mufti*, Molla Sa'd al-Din, see ibid., 166-169 and 170-173.

[622] It is not very clear whether or not Khan Ahmad II had a practice of enslaving Muslim women. No other sources mention this in relation to Khan Ahmad II, and our only reference here is Shah 'Abbas I's letters. At times the local sources allude to certain women and children being taken as slaves during or after battles, as mentioned earlier, but whether or not the practice persisted in times of peace, or as a trade, is unclear.

[623] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 415.

[624] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 376-377.

[625] Nava'i, ed. *Shah 'Abbas*, vol. 2, 180.

In sum, while the initial letters tried to justify Safavid control over Gilan by appealing to historical precedence, the later ones were more focused on questioning Khan Ahmad II's conduct and legitimacy. Shah 'Abbas I had managed to gather some form of support from the elite of Gilan, but the uprisings that followed his conquest attest to the fact that the support of the population for the *Qizilbash* was precarious at best. To appease Sultan Murat III, Shah 'Abbas I offered Khan Ahmad II an allocation in any other part of his realm except in Gilan.[626] In the end, however, by portraying Khan Ahmad II as no more than an appointed ruler, and an unjust one at that, Shah 'Abbas I effectively tried to depict Gilan as no more than a "subsidiary province."[627] The sheer number of letters exchanged between the Safavids and the Ottomans concerning Khan Ahmad II suggests that the issue was an important one. As 'Abdolhosseyn Nava'i suggests, once Khan Ahmad II died Shah 'Abbas I was relieved, since Khan Ahmad II's presence in Baghdad and the protection he received from the Ottomans always carried a potential threat of Ottoman encroachment and fanning local resistance to the Safavids.[628]

Khan Ahmad II left for Baghdad in 1003/1595 and settled there until his death in 1005/1597. While there, he used his wealth to build caravanserais, bathhouses, schools, and shops to support himself and his entourage.[629] Khan Ahmad II's wife and daughter remained in Shah 'Abbas I's harem. His wife passed away in 1017/1608. Shah 'Abbas I eventually married Khan Ahmad II's daughter himself, as his son Safi Mirza refused to do so.[630]

Once in Gilan, Shah 'Abbas I made his victory public by ordering the release of the prisoners of war and by destroying Khan Ahmad II's residential garden, known as Pish Qal'eh.

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[626] Although the previous exchanges between Khan Ahmad II and Shah 'Abbas I have a rather harsh and condescending tone, it still appears as though the Safavid shah held some level of respect for the man his mother was very fond of, to say the least.
[627] Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics*, 185.
[628] Nava'i, ed. *Shah 'Abbas*, vol. 2, 219.
[629] Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah 'Abbas,* vol. 3, 153.
[630] Apparently Safi Mirza did not really like Khan Ahmad II's daughter. Nava'i, "Sargozasht-e Khan Ahmad Khan," np.

He ordered the garden to be turned into a square for the purpose of *chowgan,* a game resembling polo, and *qopoq-andazi*, an archery game on horseback.[631] This move was significant, for it marked the triumph of the Safavids over the Kiyayis before the eyes of the spectators. Squares of course played a significant role in the life of the inhabitants of a town, as they were the hub of large cities and towns in Safavid Iran.[632]

Continuity and Change: Safavid Intervention and Provincial Governance

Once in control of Gilan, Shah ‘Abbas I kept some of the local dignitaries and notables in positions of power while purging others. He had a diplomatic approach to this process, making sure not to alienate all of the local elite at once so as to ensure their gradual integration and incorporation into the Safavid system of rule. At first, Shah ‘Abbas I rewarded those commanders who had joined him in opposition to Khan Ahmad II.[633] Kiya Fereydun, who had betrayed Khan Ahmad II’s trust and handed over his wife and daughter to Shah ‘Abbas I instead of sending them to Khan Ahmad II, was rewarded. Others were to join the rank and file of Shah ‘Abbas I’s army. Shah ‘Abbas I appointed Mehdi Qoli Khan Shamlu as the *amir al-omara* (commander in chief) of Gilan, and Khwajeh Masih was designated the vizier of Gilan.[634] Eventually the post of vizier, appointed and monitored by the shah, came to replace the function of the local rulers as both Eshaqiyyeh and Kiyayi dynastic rule came to an end.

The shah ordered ‘Ali Beyg Soltan, the *vakil* of Ibrahim Khan, ruler of Biyeh Pas, to send the young ruler along with his mother, Khadijeh Beygom, to the court. Then Ibrahim Khan was

[631] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 135. *Chowgan* is a form of polo which was very popular among the aristocrocy and royalty of Safavid Iran. Shah ‘Abbas I was a fan of the game and created the Naqsh-e Jahan square in Isfahan for that purpose, among others. *Qopoq-andazi* held a similar status as a highly fashionable game among the courtiers of Safavid Iran.
[632] Stephen P. Blake, *Half the World: The Social Architecture of Safavid Isfahan, 1590-1722* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 175.
[633] Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah ‘Abbas,* vol. 3, 155.
[634] Astarabadi, *Tarikh-e Soltani*, 154.

sent away to Kerman to insure the descendants of the previous rulers of Biyeh Pas were not present in Gilan and were thus unable to lead any opposition or lay claim to their long-held positions. The shah then bestowed the title "*khan*" on ʻAli Beyg Soltan and kept him in charge of Biyeh Pas for six months before arresting him. After arresting ʻAli Beyg Soltan, Shah ʻAbbas I gave his cousin, Kar Kiya Shah Malek, the post of *sepahsalar* of Biyeh Pas.[635]

Once Shah ʻAbbas I captured Gilan and Kiyayi dynastic rule came to an end, Gilan became a direct domain of the Safavids and began to be administered by viziers instead of by local rulers. Shah ʻAbbas I turned Gilan and Mazandaran into *khasseh* land. The vizier, who was responsible for purchasing and collecting the silk for the royal treasury, was then supervised by the *mostowfi-ye khasseh,* who oversaw the flow of crown revenue.[636]

According to Monshi, after the conquest Shah ʻAbbas I "remained in Lahijan for a few days and attended to the needs and requests of the Gilanis; exempted [from tax] the *sadat*, ulema, and the custodians of shrines."[637] A *farman* from the shah also points to drastic changes in the administration of taxes in Gilan.[638] Tax reform and abolishment of certain local traditional taxes that were not viewed as *shar'i* (based on Islamic jurisprudence) had already taken place under Shah Tahmasb I. Shah Tahmasb I, for example, abolished a tax called *tamgha* which was levied on trade and mercantile activities. [639] According to Rohrborn, the idea behind Shah ʻAbbas I's decree was to make sure that taxes were standardized throughout his realm.[640] Be that as it may, it is however difficult not to take into consideration the propaganda aspect of issuing such a

[635] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 136-137.
[636] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade,* 45.
[637] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 2, 451. For more on the special status of the sayyids and their tax exempt status in other parts of the Islamic world, see Rüya Kiliç, "The Reflection of Islamic Tradition on Ottoman Social Structure," in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The Living Links to the Prophet*, ed. Kazuo Morimoto (London: Routledge, 2012), 132.
[638] For a list of taxes administered in Gilan see ʻAbdollahi, *Jaygah va Naqsh-e Gilan,* 261-272.
[639] Klaus Michael Rohrborn, *Nezam-e Eyalat dar Dowreh-ye Safaviyyeh,* trans. Keykavus Jahandari (Tehran: Entesharat-e ʻElmi va Farhangi, 1383/2004), 88.
[640] Ibid., 90.

decree attempting to convince the Gilanis that they would be paying less taxes under Safavid control, as opposed to their local rulers who levied arbitrary taxes such as *shahiyeh zar* (probably a tax paid for the maintenance of the local court), *teymureh zar* (it is not clear what this is), and so on. On the other hand, not all of the taxes that were abolished were levied on the Gilanis themselves, but on those who visited Gilan or traded there. For example, the *tamgha* tax levied on outsiders who entered Gilan was more like a road toll, and the *gharibeh zar* was a tax paid by visitors to Gilan.[641] Abolishing taxes such as these went hand in hand with the Safavid monarch's interest in promoting trade and commerce at this time. However, it is indeed unlikely that the changes in the taxes made much of a difference in the final amount the peasants had to pay. Some of the taxes abolished were also not just levied on the people of Gilan, but on those who traded with them or visited them. In fact, it was not until 1007/1599 that Shah 'Abbas I decided to reduce the tax burden of the peasants in his realm.[642] Shah 'Abbas I also invited the population of Gilan to take any grievances they may have with the local authorities to the shah himself, and promised to personally see to implementing appropriate punishment on those who transgressed. Again, this indicates that the decree was also a propaganda tool designed to attract the Gilanis' support and loyalty, not just a document with administrative and bureaucratic purpose.

After the conquest, Mehdi Qoli Shamlu became the *amir al-omara* of Gilan (or in other words the vizier of all of Gilan), and in order to appease the locals, Kiya Fereydun was labeled the *rish sefid* of all of Gilan. Lashteh Nesha was granted to Mir 'Abbas Soltan, who was the former *sepahsalar* of Khan Ahmad II. Tales-e Kuli, another local, was rewarded with the post of *sepahsalar* of Lahijan. However, Shah 'Abbas I gradually moved to purge Gilan of the old elite.

[641] For the complete list of the taxes mentioned and the whole decree see Nowzad, ed. *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 96-98.
[642] Rorhborn, *Nezam-e Eyalat,* 90.

For example, ‘Ali Beyg was replaced with Mostafa Soltan Qajar after about six months.[643] Increasingly, the old elite of Gilan gave way to the *Qizilbash* as they filled the important positions of power. However, some of the high-ranking officials of Gilan set out with Shah ‘Abbas I’s camp to join his rank and file.[644] Shah ‘Abbas I’s attempt to recruit these notables into his administrative network meant that they must sever their ties with their long-standing allies in their original political milieu. At the same time, such a move would offer these notables the potential to remain part of the ruling elite, hence minimizing their threat by turning them into loyal subjects of the Safavids.[645]

Land Management

The oft-discussed division of land during the Safavid era into *mamalek* (state land) and *khasseh* (crown land) is an important component of the Safavid ruler’s approach towards the administration and management of land, its most prized possession in the empire.[646] According to Vladimir Minorsky, the Russian scholar of Persian history and one of the pioneers of Safavid studies, most of the provinces which fell under the rubric of *mamalek* were placed under governors of different ranks, such as *beglerbegi* (governor-general), *khan* (governor), and *soltan* (deputy governor).[647] The *khasseh* lands, on the other hand, were the lands that were owned by

[643] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 137.
[644] Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi,* vol. 2, 451-452.
[645] Hafez F. Farmayan argues that after the “pacification of Persia,” Shah ‘Abbas I set out to slowly diminish the power of the *Qizilbash* while creating a new ruling class and that “the only requirements for entry into this class were individual ability and total loyalty to the Shah.” The same can be said about Shah ‘Abbas I’s efforts in abating or reworking the local elite. See Hafez F. Farmayan, *The Beginnings of Modernization in Iran: The Policies and Reforms of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629)* (Salt Lake City: Middle East Center University of Utah, 1969), 16.
[646] Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions,* 80.
[647] Minorsky, trans. and ed., *Tadhkerat al-Molūk*, 25. Minorsky bases his account on Chardin. See Chardin, *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin*, vol. 5, 255.

the royal household and administered by the *Divan-e Khasseh*, which was headed by the *Mostowfi-ye Khasseh*, the "treasurer who monitored the flow of the crown revenue."[648]

It is important to note that the crown lands existed from the very beginning, but later more provincial lands were converted to crown lands, especially under Shah 'Abbas I and Shah Safi I (r. 1038/1629-1051/1642).[649] This transformation in the division of land that took place gradually after Shah 'Abbas I also signaled the shift in the empire's status towards a more centralized, bureaucratic polity. It was also demonstrative of a period of stability and peace on the frontiers that compelled Saru Taqi, vizier of Shah Safi I and Shah 'Abbas II (r. 1051/1642-1077/1666), to bring into question the justification for maintaining provincial governors and their armed forces.[650] Before this transformation, the shah granted *toyul* land assignments to his leading *Qizilbash amir*s, or to the local rulers that had accepted his rule, and the income generated from these revenue assignments or *toyul* went to pay for the maintenance of an army, a local provincial court and its dignitary, while a portion of it was sent to the shah as dues. All these landholders, or *toyuldar*, who were also the governors of the provinces, had the important duty of providing an army at the shah's request.[651]

The income from crown (*khasseh*) lands, on the other hand, went directly to the treasury of the shah, while the state (*mamalek*) lands were controlled through their provincial *vali* or *hakem*. Gilan and Mazandaran came to be administered as *khasseh* land by viziers early during

[648] Matthee, *Politics of Trade*, 45; Minorsky, trans. and ed., *Tadhkerat al-Molūk*, 25.
[649] Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, 80.
[650] Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 90.
[651] Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, 80; Ann K.S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (Glasgow: Oxford University Press,1953), 106-107.

the reign of Shah ‘Abbas I. The vizier, who was also tasked with purchasing and collecting the silk for the royal treasury, was then supervised by the *mostowfi-ye khasseh*.[652]

Gilan’s rulers themselves had a system of land management in place. They would allocate land to the smaller local power holders, many of whom were simply their own family members or kin through marriage, as well as to the main aristocratic families of the northern region. Most of Gilan’s revenues were consumed at the local level, and in the early years of Safavid rule only a small amount was sent to the shah.[653] Although the Kiyayis, as the rulers, and their respective *toyul* holders were not initially appointed by the shah, the Safavids gradually claimed that power. No other example illuminates this more clearly than when, during the reign of Khan Ahmad II, Shah Tahmasb I asserts his will in appointing local Gilanis in a letter to Khan Ahmad II, stating “up until now we had designated Biyeh Pas, Gaskar, and Kuhdam as your *eqta‘*, but now… we will give Biyeh Pas to the son of Jamshid Khan… Gaskar to Amir Sasan, and Kuhdam to Kamran Khalifeh.”[654] Shah Tahmasb I’s words lay claim to his role in appointing local rulers, regardless of the fact that in reality the selection of these long-established local rulers was only being sanctioned by him. However, this rhetoric was important in the process of allowing the Safavids to become a necessary legitimizing force in local politics.

Besides these rhetorical constructs, ceremonies involving the bestowal of *khal‘at* (robes of honor) as well as crowns on local rulers played an important role in signifying the political power and status of the Safavid shahs over that of the local rulers. Khan Ahmad II, who was already an heir apparent to the throne of his father Soltan Hasan Kiyayi and who belonged to a long line of Kiyayi rulers, was declared a subordinate precisely in one such ceremony. Matthee

[652] Matthee, *Politics of Trade,* 45. For more detail for the hierarchy of the provincial governance, see Minorsky, *Tadhkerat al-Molūk*, 25.
[653] Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*, 107. Lambton discusses this as a norm for all provincial governments.
[654] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 42.

discusses the significance of such imperial gestures, and underscores the symbolic nature of *khal'at*, "since by granting it the shah declared the recipient his subject and incorporated him into his realm. By accepting it the recipient acknowledged subordination."[655]

Besides the *eqta'* land system in Gilan, there also existed *vaqf* land ownership as well as private landholdings. *Vaqf* lands were set up for charitable purposes, or for the benefit of certain individuals and their family, and were then handed down in a hereditary manner.[656] The Kiyayi family allocated much land to *vaqf*, especially Khan Ahmad I, whose *vaqf* lands are still in the hands of his descendants.[657] When it came to the centralizing policies of the Safavids - especially Shah 'Abbas I - through land reforms, *vaqf* lands in particular made for a more convoluted configuration and limited the ability of the shah to do with the land as he wished. It was certainly difficult to turn *vaqf*-administered lands into *khasseh*, *toyul*, or *soyurghal* at the whim of the shah, although it was not impossible.

It was then the power and influence of the ulema that at times put a stop to the arbitrary confiscation and transformation of certain lands and their revenue. This is best demonstrated in the case of the village of Sohan, which was located near Taleqan and was constituted as *vaqf* for an individual named 'Ala' al-Din, son of Amir Najm al-Din Mahmud Taleqani, and his male heirs, by Khan Ahmad I. After Khan Ahmad II fled Gilan in 1001/1593, Shah 'Abbas I began granting the newly occupied territory as *soyurghal*[658] and *toyul* to his own entourage. The village of Sohan, which had been *vaqf* land since 914/1508, was given to one of his "*gholaman-e*

[655] Encyclopedia Iranica, s.v. "Gifts and Gift-giving iv. in Safavid Persia," by Rudi Matthee, accessed June 15, 2018. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gift-giving-iv
[656] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamsestan*, 269.
[657] Sayyed Mohammad Taqi Mir-'Abolqasemi, "Vaqfnameh-ye Sohan," accessed May 20, 2018. http://www.rasekhoon.net/article/show-13929.aspx
[658] The *soyurghal* were lands granted in return for a certain number of troops ready to aid the shah. Suyurghal were immune from taxes and levies and "had a perpetual and hereditary character, and by its virtue, the area held by the grantee formed a kind of autonomous enclave within the state territory… in later times the *soyurghals* were often connected with religious endowments." Minorsky, *Tadhkerat al-Molūk*, 27.

khasseh sharifeh"[659] as *toyul*. Later the land had exchanged hands and by the year 1010/1601 it was the *toyul* of an individual named Oghurlu Beyg. A year before, however, two of the highest-ranking ulema of the land, Sheykh Baha'i and Mirdamad, had signed a declaration for the heirs of Mahmud Taleqani, declaring Khan Ahmad I's *vaqf* document legitimate and in good legal standing.[660] Shah 'Abbas I eventually issued a *farman* (decree) granting Sohan back to the heir of Mahmud Taleqani, namely Kamal al-Din Mahmud Taleqani. *Vaqf* documents obviously limited the options for exploitation by the shah, and the ulema kept a system of checks and balances on the shah's transgressions.[661]

Private land ownership also continued after the land reforms of Shah 'Abbas I in Gilan. Our understanding and knowledge of the intricacies of private land ownership is very limited. Recently, Manuchehr Sotudeh and 'Ali Amiri's collection of one hundred and eight documents from the town of Malfejan in Gilan dating from 1046/1636 to 1330/1912 has shed some light on private land ownership, however limited. Malfejan was one of the major sites of silk production, hence mulberry orchards and land allocated to the production of silkworms were common in this town and its surrounding villages.[662] The documents collected in this volume range from the list of properties to deeds of sale, settlements, deeds of rent, legal inquiries, corporate deeds, legal complaints, affidavits, and so on.[663]

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[659] *Gholaman-e khasseh-ye sharifeh*, also known as *qullar* (slaves), were the cavalry corps recuited and brought to the Safavid Empire from among the natives of the northern regions of the Caucasus, Georgia, and Armenia. Minorsky, *Tadhkerat al-Molūk*, 33. For more on the function of the *gholam* corps and its organization, see Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, 166-176.

[660] The text of this written statement by Mirdamad and Sheykh Baha'i appears in Mir-'Abolqasemi, "Vaqfnameh-ye Sohan."

[661] A copy of Shah 'Abbas I's *farman* was downloaded online: http://www.asnad.org/fa/document/204/, accessed May 20, 2018.

[662] The site of silkworm production was refered to as *talanbar*, and mulberry orchards were known as *tutzar*. See 'Ali Amiri, "Pishgoftar" in *Fehrest-e Asnad-e Tarikhi-ye Rusta-ye Malfejan (Az Tavabe'-e Siahkal-e Gilan): Az Dowreh-ye Safaviyyeh ta Dowreh-ye Qajariyyeh*, ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh and 'Ali Amiri (Qom: Majma'-e Zakha'er-e Eslami: Mo'assese-ye Tarikh-e 'Elm va Farhang, 1390/ 2011), 6.

[663] 'Ali Amiri, "Pishgoftar," 7.

Of the one hundred and eight documents in this collection, only ten are from the Safavid era. Due to the fact that the number of deeds available in this volume is very small, I cannot provide an adequate assessment of the percentage of *khasseh*, *mamalek*, *vaqf*, or privately-owned land. I can, however, draw out some observations about the commodities and the identity of their sellers. Nine out of ten of these documents are deeds of sale, and one is a deed of exchange. All but one pertain to the sale of land, and only one is a deed of sale for silk crops, for the purpose of *sha'ar bafi. Sha'ar bafi* refers to a special kind of cloth woven with silk or wool on a specific kind of loom.[664] Hence, silk suitable for this kind of fabric was also referred to as *sha'ar bafi* grade silk, a terminology that by the late seventeenth century was indicative of "shifts to distinguishing quality rather than provenance."[665] This was one of Iran's most important textile productions before and during the Safavid era. The industry reached its peak in Yazd, which attracted merchants interested in its purchase, especially from the Ottoman Empire, and in Shirvan.[666]

Of the ten deeds collected in this volume, eight involve only male participants, while two involve deeds regarding the property of two women. The first deed, dated 1040/1636, is drawn up between Parizad, the daughter of Mir Mahmud of Malfejan, and Hajji Mohammad Rafi', son of 'Abdolqader Lahijani. Parizad was the seller and Hajji Mohammad Rafi' the buyer. The land was what Parizad had inherited from her father, and it totaled 650 square meters divided into two plots.[667] The second deed that involved a female seller involved a woman named Fatemeh Soltan, daughter of Khwajeh Ahmad Naqqash Lahiji. Fatemeh Soltan was represented by her son

[664] With the advent of modern technology for textile production, this traditional mode of cloth production is disappearing in Iran.
[665] Edmund M. Herzig, "The Volume of Iranian Raw Silk Exports in the Safavid Period," *Iranian Studies* 25, no.1-2 (1992): 62.
[666] Ahmad b. Hosseyn b. 'Ali Kateb, *Tarikh-e Jadid-e Yazd*, ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Farhang-e Iranzamin: Amir Kabir, 1357/1978), 101. See also 'Ali Sharqi, "Barresi va Risheh Yabi-ye Vazheh-ye Sha'arbaf," *Yazda* 7 (1986): np. According to 'Ali Sharqi, *sha'ar* literally means animal fur.
[667] Sotudeh and Amiri, ed. *Fehrest-e Asnad-e Tarikhi-ye Rusta-ye Malfejan,* 12.

Badi‘ al-Zaman Khayyat (tailor). The interesting thing about this exchange is that Fatemeh Soltan’s son sold the land on his mother’s behalf to his own wife, indicating that women were not just sellers of their inherited property but were also buyers.[668] The importance of these deeds is the window they provide onto the private ownership of land in a province that, under Shah ‘Abbas I and later Shah Safi I, had begun the conversion of provincial lands into the shah’s *khasseh* lands. What is apparent and noteworthy is that private ownership of land continued to persist in Gilan despite the land reforms.

Land management became an important issue only when particular pieces of land produced something of value, and Gilan produced most of the empire’s silk, a highly-valued trade commodity of its time. Given the vital need for Gilan’s silk production, the Safavid monarchs could not afford to ignore Gilan’s political makeup and administrative arrangements. Silk from Gilan and Mazandaran provided much of the needed revenue for the imperial court, meaning that the Safavid center had to be directly involved in organizing its trade to ensure that profits from silk would be maximized.

Silk and Trade

Trade, including both the import and export of goods, was a major part of Iran’s economic activities in the early modern era. The main goods imported into Iran were textiles, sugar, pepper, spices, coffee, and metal, while the main exports were raw silk, goat hair, and dried fruit.[669] Most of the trade with the outside world took place with the Ottoman Empire, India, and Russia. The Russian trade was especially strengthened after Russia annexed Astrakhan

[668] Ibid.
[669] Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia*, 125.

in 963/1556.[670] Raw silk was the most important commodity that Gilan had to offer, but not the only one. According to Olearius,

> There is no Province of all Persia so fertile and so abundant with Silk, Oyl, Wine, Rice, Tobacco, Lemons, Orenges, Pomegranates, and other Fruits. The Vines there are excellent, and as big as a man at the Waste.[671]

While Gilan produced many desirable goods suited for trade with the outside world, it needed very little in return for its own subsistence. Olearius contends the Gilanis "need not much care for any Trading with their Neighbours, since they have at home whatever is necessary, as that the Countrey being in a manner inaccessible, they may easily avoid entertaining the Forces which might be quarter'd upon them."[672]

Yet Gilan's silk was mostly destined for export, as raw silk was the main cash crop. The export of Gilan's silk had begun long before the Safavid era: an account of Gilan put forth by Qazvini suggests that Gilan produced enough silk for export in the seventh/thirteenth century.[673] Scholars believe that silk was introduced to Gilan and Mazandaran through Marv sometime between the sixth and tenth century A.D., but it had already been introduced to Gorgan even before the sixth century.[674] Silk was also produced in other parts of Iran, but not in as large

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[670] Rudi Matthee, "Anti-Ottoman Politics and Transit Rights: the Seventeenth-Century Trade in Silk between Safavid Iran and Muscovy," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 35, no. 4 (1994): 742.
[671] Adam Olearius, *The voyages and travells of the ambassadors sent by Frederick, Duke of Holstein, to the Great Duke of Muscovy and the King of Persia: begun in the year M.DC.XXXIII. and finish'd in M.DC.XXXIX: containing a compleat history of Muscovy, Tartary, Persia, and other adjacent countries: with several publick transactions reaching near the present times: in VII. books. Whereto are added the Travels of John Albert de Mandelslo (a gentleman belonging to the embassy) from Persia into the East-Indies... in III. books... written originally by Adam Olearius, secretary to the embassy; faithfully rendered into English, by John Davies.* (London: John Starkey and Thomas Basset, 1669), 288.
[672] Olearius, *The voyages and travells*, 289.
[673] Mathee, *The Politics of Trade*, 15; Jahanbakhsh Savaqeb, "Abrisham-e Gilan," *Pazhuheshnameh-ye 'Olum-e Ensani* 34 (1381/2002): 148.
[674] Savaqeb, "Abrisham-e Gilan," 146-147. Mathee suggest that a popular legend puts the regular production of silk in Iran in the fifth century A.D., and that it was introduced to Iran through Yargand and Farghanah. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 15.

quantities as in Gilan.[675] Trading silk in Gilan was an important function for the Safavid state, which also very much informed their policies towards Gilan, especially during the era of Shah ‘Abbas I. It is with Shah ‘Abbas I that we can observe a concrete set of policies regarding silk and trade. Given the extensive existing literature on the silk trade and its importance during the Safavid era, I will offer a general overview of the silk trade as it relates to Gilan’s economy, politics, and relationship with its surrounding world.

When Shah ‘Abbas I conquered Gilan and Mazandaran, he was motivated to establish better control over these major silk-cultivating regions. After establishing better political control, he then turned his attention to land reform, as mentioned earlier. He transformed these regions into crown lands in order to funnel the surplus from silk production directly into his own treasury. Next, he introduced the Armenian merchants into the Safavid trade by resettling them in 1604-5 to (New) Julfa in Isfahan in order to employ their skills, resources, and contacts in the service of trade and commerce. The phases of Shah ‘Abbas I’s policies regarding the silk trade are assessed and discussed at length by Matthee.[676] Shah ‘Abbas I concluded his efforts by monopolizing the export of Iranian silk in 1028/1619.[677]

Safavid historians developed divergent views on the economic activities of the Safavid state. In his study of the economy of Safavid Iran, Willem Floor puts forth the argument that Safavid Persia was a pre-capitalistic agrarian economy with a patrimonial political system but no unified national economy.[678] Floor argues that it is not accurate to describe the Safavid economy as mercantilist or state capitalist, as Stephen Dale[679] has suggested. Dale’s position is that unlike

[675] For the amount and quality of silk produced in Iran during Safavid times, see Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia*, 254-257; Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 36-43; Herzig, “The Volume of Iranian Raw Sillk Exports.”
[676] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 74.
[677] Ibid.
[678] Willem Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia*, 327.
[679] Stephen Fredric Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

the Mughal rulers, who were able to maintain a *laissez faire* attitude towards trade, the Safavids developed state capitalism or mercantilism to protect their economy. According to Dale, this difference stemmed from the relative economic weakness of the Iranian state as opposed to the stronger economy of the Mughals.[680] However, Floor asserts that "many economic historians question whether pre-industrial states even had something that could be called "economic policy."[681] Rudi Matthee, on the other hand, argues that Safavid Iran cannot be characterized as a "mercantilist" or as an "antimercantile" agrarian state.[682] Moreover, Matthee uses the term "command polity" to describe the Safavid economy, illuminating critical features of it as he explains,

> The Safavid state was a command polity (at least in its ambition) that operated on the principles of reciprocity and redistribution. It did not "monopolize" trade as such, nor did all commercial (or manufacturing) activity occur in its orbit. It rather coexisted and interacted with an active mercantile economy of indigenous and foreign merchants operating on calculations of loss and gain.[683]

Shah 'Abbas I was the most successful monarch in centralizing the Safavid state and in "securing the flow of revenue" from silk production and trade by building caravanserais and exploring new trade routes. Despite all his efforts, though, the Safavid monarch fell just short of establishing a "concerted state-directed economic policy" or even controlling the silk[684]

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[680] Ibid., 32.
[681] Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia*, 328.
[682] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 89.
[683] Ibid., 8.
[684] Ibid., 233. For a different take see Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver: The Eurasian Trade of the Julfa Armenians in Safavid Iran and India (1530-1750)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999). McCabe argues that there was indeed a certain degree of planned economy in Safavid Iran, and that the relocation of the Armenians to Iran was part of that "political economy." McCabe's argument, however, has been criticized in the field. See for example Edmund Herzig, review of *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver: The Eurasian Trade of the Julfa Armenians in Safavid Iran and India (1530-1750)* by Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2004): 170-175; and Willem Floor, review of *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver: The Eurasian Trade of the Julfa Armenians in Safavid Iran and India (1530-1750)* by Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Published by *EH.net* (April 2001), available online: https://eh.net/book_reviews/the-shahs-silk-for-europes-silver-the-eurasian-trade-of-the-julfa-armenians-in-safavid-iran-and-india-1530-1750/, accessed April 20, 2018.

Gilan's importance, though, lay not just in silk production, but also in its proximity to the northern trade route. Three main trading directions existed during the Safavid era: "(a) the east and south (India); (b) the west (Ottoman Turkey); and (c) the north (Central Asia and Russia)."[685] After Chalderan, the Ottomans came to control "both silk markets and the silk-producing regions within Iran."[686] The Ottomans, however, were not in control of silk-producing areas such as Kashan, Yazd, Shiraz, and Khorasan. Yet they also blocked the western routes, which allowed the Indian route to become dominant in the export of silk.[687] While the Ottomans did not control Gilan, it was of course after Chalderan and the closure of the western routes that Amireh Dobbaj of Gilan, as was discussed earlier, tried to ally himself with the Ottomans and requested their protection.

An important development then reshaped the trade process in Iran when Russia annexed Astrakhan in 963/1556, and the Caucuses and the Caspian Sea became accessible via the Volga route.[688] This route was a favorable alternative for Iranian, Russian, and Indian merchants, as well as the British merchants who were faced with the Portuguese and Spanish monopolies and presence over the Strait of Hormuz and the Atlantic route.[689] The Muscovy Company (also known as the Russian Company), of British origin, was established in 962/1555 and soon set out on its first commercial expedition to Iran. With the relocation of the Safavid capital to Qazvin, the Astrakhan, Gilan, and Qazvin route at first glance seemed like a great opportunity for increased trade. The company continued its commercial activities through Iran's Caspian littoral

[685] Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia*, 198.
[686] MacCabe, *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver,* 31.
[687] Ibid.
[688] Matthee, "Anti-Ottoman Politics," 742. See also Ronald Ferrier, "Trade from the Mid-14th Century to the End of the Safavid Period," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. Peter Jackson and Lawrence Lockhart (Cambridge: Cambridge Univesity Press, 1986), 428-431.
[689] Mathee, *The Politics of Trade*, 31; Naser 'Azimi, "'Ivan-e Makhof' va 'Tahmasb-e Safavi,' 'Amelan-e Nahoshiyar-e Tarikh-e Gilan," *Ensanshenasi va Farhang* (1390/2011): 7.

route for fifteen years. However, since the route alongside the Caspian littoral was not secure from bandits and robberies, the Russian Company did not make much profit.[690]

Even though the Caspian route was scarcely used in the last decades of the sixteenth century, its establishment and the relocation of the Safavid capital from Tabriz to Qazvin shaped Shah Tahmasb I's policies towards Gilan. The latter's importance was not just in its great economic value as a silk-producing region, but with a direct route to Russia and its proximity to the newly-relocated Safavid capital in Qazvin, it had become geopolitically significant. This made its full incorporation an ever more crucial matter for the Safavids.

Shah 'Abbas I too was naturally interested in Gilan, as it was a major site of silk production and the European demand for Iranian silk had increased during the second half of the sixteenth century.[691] The Safavid state, being an agrarian-based economy, had to collect taxes in the form of raw agricultural products. The raw material then would be turned into cash through trade and mercantile activities.[692] Gilan and Mazandaran provided much of the Safavid state revenue, and therefore the Safavid royalty had a vested interest in the silk trade, a fact which led Shah 'Abbas I to declare an export monopoly on silk granted to the Armenian merchants of Julfa.[693]

During the reign of Shah 'Abbas I, Iran and Moscow enjoyed closer relations due to their anti-Ottoman sentiments, as well as their shared interest in increasing profit from commerce and trade.[694] Russia's significance for Iran, however, diminished slowly as Shah 'Abbas I sought other allies opposed to the Ottomans and Russia became preoccupied with its military expedition

[690] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 31.
[691] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade,* 22.
[692] Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia,* 55.
[693] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 45, 75.
[694] Matthee, "Anti-Ottoman Politics," 744.

against the Caucasus.[695] He then looked for a third trade outlet for the empire's silk (besides the traditional Ottoman, and later Russian, outlets) through the Persian Gulf.[696] Yet, the Russian involvement in the silk trade did not diminish, and as Matthee argues, it prompted an increase in the protection of Iranian merchants themselves in Iran.[697] Gilan remained an important hub for silk as Russian merchants reached it via the Caspian Sea, trading their goods for silk.[698]

A well-studied aspect of Shah Abbas I's rule is the forced migration of the Armenians of Julfa and their resettlement in Iran. Scholars have debated the underlying reasons for the migration of the Armenians of Julfa. While some have attributed this mass migration to Shah Abbas I's scorched-earth policies and viewed it as a provisional move, others have emphasized a well-planned, organized, and intentional policy of forced migration orchestrated by Shah 'Abbas I for political and economic reasons.[699]

The Armenians of Julfa were the first to trade with the north. They also played an important role in the transport of silk from Gilan to Europe via Russia in 1514-15, when the Ottomans imposed a commercial blockade on Iran.[700] Most of the Armenians of Julfa were

[695] Ibid., 747.
[696] Pietro della Valle informs us of the shah's excitement as the English envoy reached the Persian Gulf to negotiate silk trade routes. According to della Valle, the shah was eager to change his trade route and avoid the Ottoman territories to make sure the Ottomans did not profit from this trade. Pietro della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino*, vol. 1 (Brighton: G. Gancia, 1843), 545.
[697] Matthee, "Anti-Ottoman Politics," 748.
[698] Ibid.
[699] For forced migration and its relationship to scorched-earth policies, see John R. Perry, "Forced Migration in Iran during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Iranian Studies* 8, no. 4 (1975), 204, 209. For an argument for a well-planned policy on the part of the shah, see McCabe, *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver*. Edmund Herzig casts doubt on the planned character of this project and challenges McCabes' view. See Edmund Herzig, "Review of Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver," 170-175. Others have painted a more complicated picture, as in Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 84-85. Maeda Hirotake contends that "regional reorganization in the Caucasus was closely connected with that of the state order." Maeda Hirotake, "The Forced Migrations and Reorganization of the Regional Order in the Caucasus by Safavid Iran: Preconditions and Developments Described by Fazli Khuzani," *Slavic Eurasian Studies*, no. 10, *Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighboring Worlds*, eds. IEDA Osamu and UYAMA Tomohiko (Slavic Research Center, 2006), 256.
[700] Mathee, *The Politics of Trade*, 29; Matthee, "Anti-Ottoman Politics," 742.

resettled in Isfahan, in an area known as New Julfa.[701] However, not all the Armenians settled there - some were settled in other areas, notably in Gilan and Mazandaran. Those in Gilan and Mazandaran were specifically devoted to the production of silk.[702] Shah 'Abbas I's successor, Shah Safi I, changed some of the policies tied to silk, ending the court's export monopoly granted to the Armenians of Julfa and allowing merchants to bid for a concession to trade silk. He gave the merchants greater leeway and prevented Gilan's viziers, whom he himself appointed, from meddling in the silk trade. Merchants managed to flourish under these new conditions, which in turn caused an increase in silk production after its partial decline during the time of Shah 'Abbas I.[703]

Gilan's income from silk was very important for the Safavids and supported the growth of the shahs' treasury, as European travel accounts inform us of the high percentage of taxes and levies on the sale of silk both for internal consumption and for trade.[704] The income from silk, however, had very little direct impact on the local economy of Gilan after Shah 'Abbas I transformed Gilan into *khasseh* lands. Indeed, much of the surplus wealth produced by silk left Gilan. In the region, it was "only Rasht that grew under the influence of the silk trade."[705] The Safavids' intervention and the changes they implemented with regard to Gilan's silk production and trade did not improve the economic conditions of the province. Indeed, most of the uprisings which unfolded in Gilan following the Safavid conquest were tied to the deterioration in the

[701] For more information on the Armenians of New Julfa and their role in trade, see Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of Califonia Press, 2011).
[702] McCabe, *The Shah's Silk for Europe's Silver*, 54.
[703] While Ferrier has argued that silk production increased during the time of Shah 'Abbas I, Shurmij contends that it is not possible to verify this assertion since we have little data available on silk production from the time of Shah Isma'il I to the end of the reign of Shah 'Abbas I. Shurmij concludes that silk production did, however, increase under the reign of Shah Safi I and his successor, as Safi lifted the silk monopoly. Mohammad Shurmij, " Naqsh-e Abrisham-e Gilan dar Eqtesad-e 'Asr-e Safavi ta Payan-e Dowreh-ye Shah 'Abbas-e Avval," *Faslnameh-ye 'Elmi Pazhuheshi-ye Tarikh-e Eslam va Iran-e Daneshgah-e al-Zahra* 27 (1394/2015): 135; Ferrier, "Trade from the Mid-14th Century to the End of the Safavid Period," 441.
[704] Olearius, *The voyages and travells,* 272; Chardin, *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin*, vol. 5, 398.
[705] Shurmij, "Naqsh-e Abrisham-e Gilan," 140.

conditions of the peasants and the pressing need to resolve their economic grievances. Shah ‘Abbas I’s monopoly on the silk trade, which undermined local/provincial economic arrangements and interests, as well as the increase in the tax burden of the Gilanis, led to periodic expressions of class discontent and socio-political dissent. The following section will offer an overview of the major uprisings that ensued after the Safavid conquest of Gilan.

Local Resistance and Uprisings

Large-scale peasant uprisings were relatively rare in Iran, and Gilan was no exception. Before Gilan was conquered by Shah ‘Abbas I, and under his predecessors, uprisings were usually categorized as the Gilani ruler’s defiance of the Safavids and refusal to be subjugated. They were not so much spontaneous reactions to economic hardship alone, as they were meant to preserve the power and control of the local rulers over their respective territories. Prior to the time of Shah ‘Abbas I, the provincial elite, made up mostly of local ruling family members, their viziers, *sepahsalar*s and other high-ranking dignitaries in charge of the main productive areas, were the main instigators of any kind of resistance to Safavid rule. The ruling elite manipulated lower-class resistance to large landholders and rulers in their favor. The ruling elite, though, acted as intermediaries between the peasants and mightier rulers who threatened their interests and demanded the payment of tribute. When Shah ‘Abbas I rose to power, Gilan’s political scene was marked by elite discontent and internal competition, mostly as a response to the shifts in land management and modes of governance. As members of the old aristocratic elite lost their privileged positions, the shah used the ambitions of individual notables in order to divide and rule, thereby keeping their aspirations and power in check.

In his influential but controversial work *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, James Scott brings our attention to the often-neglected aspects of peasant resistance that do not occur within the framework of organized peasant uprisings and lower-class action that causes visible historical change.[706] The right conditions for peasant uprisings did not always come about, and thus, after the Safavids came to power, complex forms of resistance and negotiation with the center took place. Organized rebellions seemed to have been initiated and supported by the elite of the Kiyayi and Eshaqiyyeh dynasties, who were later purged as political actors by the Safavids. James Reed discusses three main forms of rebellions in Safavid Iran, namely "the qazāq revolts, rebellions by urban notables, and peasant revolts against the Safavid state or local notables."[707] Rula Abisaab's more recent article investigating the *Siyahpushan* rebellion of Astarabad also brings to light the role of peasant-pastoralist grievances in these uprisings against the Safavids and the alliances which peasant leaders forged with the notables. She discusses the multiple socio-economic and political motives for these uprisings and challenges the previously-held view that the *Siyahpushan* were a heterodox and messianic group.[708]

In another noteworthy assessment of the rebellions in Gilan after the conquest, Mohammad Shurmij recognizes two main sets of rebellions: those that were a response to the *Qizilbash* presence and an effort at bringing back the lost local rulers, and those that were a response to the taxation and fiscal policies of the Safavids.[709] Shurmij stresses the view that these uprisings included the elite as well as the peasants, but their desired goals were not always

[706] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
[707] James Reid, "Rebellion and Social Change in Astarabad, 1537-1744," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 1 (1981): 35.
[708] Abisaab, "Peasant Uprisings in Astarabad: The Siyāh Pūshān (wearers of black), the Sayyids, and the Safavid State," 472-473.
[709] Mohammad Shurmij, "Tahlili bar Shuresh-ha-ye Gilan Bad az Fath-e An dar Zaman-e Shah 'Abbas-e Avval-e Safavi," *Do Faslnameh Pazhuheshnameh Tarikh-ha-ye Mahalli-ye Iran* 2 (1392/2013): 93.

necessarily aligned.[710] To these uprisings I will add another category, and that is the uprising by the *Qizilbash* who were now losing their favored position at the Safavid court.[711] As Shah 'Abbas I turned his gaze more and more towards the slave army, he alienated the *Qizilbash*, who now were relegated to a lower status.[712] One of the uprisings in Gilan after the Safavid conquest was initiated by a member of the disenfranchised *Qizilbash*, taking advantage of Gilani hostility towards the Safavids to attract followers. This uprising appears to have been marked by a messianic religious fervor as well.[713]

After looking closely at the various sources depicting the uprisings in Gilan, I concur with Shurmij's assertion that the peasants' struggle with burdensome taxes was a key factor in the mounting restlessness of the peasants, which led in turn to the uprisings. In my assessment, however, the old elite of the Kiyayi and Eshaqiyyeh were involved in encouraging some of these uprisings, but they were not truly caused by their maneuvers and interests. These uprisings, however, often failed quickly as their capabilities could not match those of the Safavids. More importantly, their inability to create long-lasting alliances with viable political groups or form a unified front against the Safavids destined them to failure. In terms of their composition, some peasant uprisings were part of pre-organized movements with diverse demographic participation, as was the case with the uprising of Gharib Shah. The latter took place immediately after the death of Shah 'Abbas I. Other uprisings were spontaneous responses to immediate threats felt by the local elite or/and to the peasants' economic grievances.

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[710] Shurmij, "Tahlili bar Shuresh-ha-ye Gilan," 93.
[711] Shah 'Abbas I set out to curtail the power of the *Qizilbash* and bring them under his control as soon as he came to power. Farmayan, *The Beginnings of Modernization in Iran*, 9.
[712] For more on the incorporation of the slave army corps into the Safavid military institutions, see Sussan Babaie, Kathryn Babayan, Ina Baghdinantz-McCabe, and Massumeh Farhad, *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran,* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).
[713] For an analysis of messianic movements in Safavid Iran see Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs*.

The first series of uprisings in Gilan emerged in quick succession mainly in the first few years after the conquest. At least four uprisings materialized in the span of a few years following the conquest, between 1001/1593 to 1004/1596. Thereafter followed a period of calm before another uprising took place in the year 1011/1603-1012/1604. Most of these uprisings remained unsuccessful, as the descendants of the local Kiyayi and Eshaqiyyeh rulers never recovered earlier positions of power. Yet they may have determined the course of action taken by Shah ‘Abbas I in regards to turning Gilan’s land into *khasseh* and eradicating the *toyul* system.[714] The second phase of uprisings - those that emerged after the first decade - were fewer in number, but at least one of them, namely Gharib Shah’s rebellion, was much more forceful and organized than the earlier spontaneous uprising. I discuss the main aspects and features of these uprisings in the following sections.

After Khan Ahmad II fled, Shah ‘Abbas I himself paid a visit to Gilan.[715] Previously, each time *Qizilbash* elements had been introduced into Gilan, local disturbances had followed. This time was no different, for after the conquest Gilan began to see small-scale local uprisings aimed at the *Qizilbash* presence. Directly after the conquest, Shah ‘Abbas I had the desire to slowly unite the two parts of Gilan, but his advisors disagreed with this plan, suggesting that any disturbance in Biyeh Pas could then flame the fire of discontent in Biyeh Pish as well.[716]

Eventually, the first signs of aggravation within the newly-established order began to emerge. According to Fumani, it was ‘Ali Beyg’s entourage, and according to Afushteh-yi Natanzi, it was his brother that began instigating one of the first uprisings with the help of other

[714] Shurmij asserts that Shah ‘Abbas I’s decision to turn Gilan into *khasseh* land could have been informed by the inability of the local *toyul* holders to keep these uprisings in check. Shurmij, “Tahlili bar Shuresh-ha-ye Gilan,” 100.
[715] Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 451.
[716] Ibid., 460-461.

local dignitaries, including Malek Shah (‘Ali Beyg’s replacement and cousin).[717] Soon the uprising spread to other parts of Gilan, including Biyeh Pish, where Talesh Kuli of Lahijan, a former commander of Khan Ahmad II, also joined the forces of Biyeh Pas. The people of Lashteh Nesha also joined the rebellion. Bu Said Mir, the elder of the tribe of Azhdar, began participating as well.[718] During this uprising the two sides of the river, old-time enemies, came together to confront the *Qizilbash*. Their aim was to bring back both Khan Ahmad II and Mohammad Amin Khan (the son of the late Jamshid Khan of Biyeh Pas, who had fled along with Khan Ahmad II) to Gilan so they could rule over their respective territories, this time hoping to eliminate the divisions of Biyeh Pas and Biyeh Pish.[719] The make-up of the forces against the *Qizilbash* during this uprising is clearly demonstrative of its aristocratic nature, for it was not instigated at the grassroots levels but reflected the initiative of the elite and notables of Gilan hoping to regain their lost territory.[720]

Malek Shah’s uprising did not last long. Shah ‘Abbas I at first hoped to bring Ibrahim Khan, the other son of the late Jamshid Khan, back from Kerman and install him as governor, but his commander, Farhad Khan, suggested that Shah ‘Abbas I release ‘Ali Beyg from captivity and reinstate him instead.[721] In return, Shah ‘Abbas I asked for ‘Ali Beyg’s mother and two of his children, one daughter and one son, to be sent to the court to ensure his continued loyalty. ‘Ali Beyg, being a local politician, was able to subdue the rebellion. Malek Shah eventually surrendered himself to ‘Ali Beyg, and shortly thereafter he was killed and his head sent to Shah

[717] Monshi does not mention ‘Ali Beyg’s brother as the main culprit in stirring up the rebellion, but Afushteh-yi Natanzi considered him instrumental. See Afushteh-yi Natanzi, *Naqavat al-Asar,* 476-477.
[718] Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 461. In his collection of Khan Ahmad II’s letters, Nowzad includes a description of the historical figures. See Nowzad, ed. *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 272; Shurmij, “Tahlili bar Shuresh-ha-ye Gilan,” 96.
[719] Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 461; Nowzad, 272.
[720] Shurmij also reaches the same conclusion. Shurmij, “Tahlili bar Shuresh-ha-ye Gilan,” 96.
[721] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 138-139; Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 462; Nowzad, ed. *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 273.

‘Abbas I.[722] The use of a local politician to end the rebellion was an effective move on the part of the Safavids.

Meanwhile, another uprising in Astara, headed by Amir Hamzeh Khan Talesh, was raging against a *Qizilbash amir*, namely Zolfaqar Khan Qaramanlu, who was trying to extend his reach from Ardebil to Amireh Hamzeh Khan Talesh’s territory in Astara. Amireh Hamzeh Khan Talesh was the ruler of Astara who had been affirmed in his post by Shah ‘Abbas I following the conquest. However, he laid claim over Langar Kanan (Lankaran) and began his protest against the Safavids while taking sanctuary in the fortress of Shenidan.[723] The ruler of Ardebil, Zolfaqar Khan Qaramanlu, had tried unsuccessfully for nine months to capture the fortress, as well as Astara and Langar Kanan. Amir Hamzeh Khan Talesh then pleaded with the shah, claiming that he had reacted this way in response to Farhad Khan and his potential threat to his rule. Amir Hamzeh Khan Talesh asked the shah for clemency and safe passage. The shah allowed him and his family to go to Shirvan and granted his territory, including Astara, the fortress of Shenidan, and Langar Kanan to Zolfaqar Khan Qaramanlu.[724] Although Zolfaqar Khan Qaramanlu had his eye on parts of Amir Hamzeh Khan Talesh’s territory, it was Amir Hamzeh Khan Talesh’s own reaction that in the end cost him all of his territory. At times these small-scale rebellions in fact opened up opportunities for the agents of the center to further insert their own power, yielding the opposite of the intended results for the local rulers.

The next insurgency in Gilan was initiated by no other than ‘Ali Beyg, who had been returned to the seat of power in Biyeh Pas to quash the rebellion of Malek Shah for the

[722] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 139, 143; Nowzad, ed. *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad,* 274; Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 463.
[723] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 140-141; Afushteh-yi Natanzi, *Naqavat al-Asar*, 475-476. Afushteh-yi Natanzi refers to the fortress as “Shenekan.”
[724] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 140-141.

Safavids.[725] ‘Ali Beyg was a local, yet he had no legitimate claim over the seat of Biyeh Pas, having been only a high-ranking dignitary rather than heir to the seat of either of the ruling families. Shortly after capturing and executing Malek Shah, ‘Ali Beyg was summoned to the court of Shah ‘Abbas I. He refused to go, knowing full well that he would be at the very least imprisoned if not executed.[726]

A closer look at ‘Ali Beyg’s insurgency reveals the internal political dynamic of Gilan after the conquest. When Farhad Khan returned to Biyeh Pas to capture ‘Ali Beyg, not only did he have some of the elite of Biyeh Pish who still held high positions of power accompanying him, but he also had a few of the aristocrats of Biyeh Pas who were not content with ‘Ali Beyg among his entourage. Another group, consisting of some of the inhabitants of Kuhdam, also joined the Safavid efforts to subdue ‘Ali Beyg, indicating that the factionalism among the locals had indeed remained intense after the conquest and was the main reason why these uprisings did not bear the intended results for the Gilanis. The Gilanis, maintaining the fragmented political reality that was already in place, failed repeatedly to present a unified front. As ‘Ali Beyg marched his troops to Kuchesfehan, many of his men also joined the *Qizilbash* camp. Shah ‘Abbas I, who had returned ‘Ali Beyg back to Biyeh Pas in order to suppress the rebellion of Malek Shah, now had to contend with his insurgency. ‘Ali Beyg was eventually captured and executed a few months later in 1003/1594.[727]

A similar uprising also took place in Biyeh Pish, headed by the very military commanders who were instrumental in defeating Khan Ahmad II. Now regretting their decision to aid Shah ‘Abbas I, these commanders, namely Talesh Kuli, Soltan Chepek, and Kiya Jalal al-Din, began their opposition to the *Qizilbash* hoping to gain control of Biyeh Pish and restore

[725] Ibid., 144-147.
[726] He had already once been captured and imprisoned before.
[727] Ibid., 154-159.

Khan Ahmad II to power. Their efforts ended in failure, and they were eventually captured and executed. Shah ‘Abbas I made sure to employ both reward and punishment to help put an end to the rebellions in the early years after the conquest. In this case, for example, he rewarded Hosseyn Khan of Kuhdam for his services in capturing Talesh Kuli by granting him a suburb of Rasht as his *toyul*.[728]

Kar Kiya Amir Hamzeh of Lashteh Nesha was the leader of the next anti-Safavid uprising in 1004/1596. This uprising began with the murder of Khwajeh Mohammad, the Safavid-appointed *kalantar* of Lashteh Nesha. At the time Aqa Hosseyn Rostamdari, a Mazandarani native who had been instrumental in the capture of the fortress of Nur, had been appointed as the *hakem* of Lashteh Nesha by Shah ‘Abbas I. At the onset of the rebellion and after the assassination of the *kalantar,* Aqa Hosseyn Rostamdari fled to Lahijan. Kar Kiya Amir Hamzeh’s rebellion can be categorized more as a peasant uprising materializing through an alliance composed of peasants and notables alike.[729] The notables involved in the uprising were of one of the oldest families of Gilan, from the clans of Chepek and Azhdar. Some 10,000 people, equipped with everyday weapons such as sticks, hatchets, and scythes (pointing to their humble backgrounds), besieged and raided the Hesar fortress of Lahijan in an attempt to get Shah ‘Abbas I’s men out of the fortress. The inhabitants of the fortress were equipped with firearms, and when they ran out of bullets they turned whatever gold and jewelry the women had into bullets.[730]

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[728] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 63-67. Shurmij, “Tahlili bar Shuresh-ha-ye Gilan,” 98. Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 498-499.
[729] Vahid Qazvini also mentions this rebellion. His account, however, is much shorter than Fumani’s account. Vahid Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara-ye ‘Abbasi,* 132; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 169; Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 514.
[730] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 169.

By the time this latest rebellion went into effect, the Safavid response also intensified. An army was gathered from Biyeh Pas and headed to Lahijan to put an end to the uprising. Many were killed in the skirmishes that ensued. In the aftermath, harsh punishments were handed down to the culprits; for example, the nephew of a local sheykh was skinned alive in the square of Lahijan. However, the worst example was the decree from Shah ʻAbbas I ordering the massacre of the population of Lashteh Nesha.[731] The ruler of Lahijan gave the population of Lashteh Nesha three days to disperse before they entered to commence the massacre.[732] After the massacre, a *Qizilbash* named Oghurlu Soltan Chegini was assigned to Lashteh Nesha. Shah ʻAbbas I remained very hostile towards the Gilani clans that had instigated the uprising in Lashteh Nesha. Years later, when a band of opposition from the Chepek and Azhdar clans planned to kill Mirza Shafiʻ Khorasani, better known as Mirza-ye ʻAlamiyan, who was by then vizier of all of Gilan, Shah ʻAbbas I ordered a gruesome execution for the main perpetrator and then asked Behzad Beyg, who was in charge of the affairs of Biyeh Pas, to exile most of the population of Chepek and Azhdar from Lashteh Nesha. According to Fumani, Behzad Beyg bought their land "for its real price" and sent them on their way, but their elders were met with a much harsher reality, as they were captured and imprisoned.[733]

In 1007/1599 Farhad Khan, the vizier of Gilan, was killed and it is at this point that his vizier, Mirza-ye ʻAlamiyan, became the next vizier of all of Gilan. In the same year, Shah ʻAbbas I converted Gilan into *khasseh* lands. While Fumani praises Behzad Beyg, who was appointed by Mirza-ye ʻAlamiyan to tend to the affairs of Rasht, Kuchesfehan, Tolam, Masuleh, and Poshtkuh, he criticizes his counterpart in Fuman, Aslan Beyg. Fumani's appreciation for

[731] Ibid., 170; Monshi, *Tarikh-e ʻAlam Ara-ye ʻAbbasi*, vol. 2, 514.
[732] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 171; Monshi, *Tarikh-e ʻAlam Ara-ye ʻAbbasi,* vol. 2, 514.
[733] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 196-198.

Behzad Beyg included his treatment of the locals, as well as his efforts in rebuilding, increasing agricultural activities, and generally developing the area under his control.

Aslan Beyg, on the other hand, is met with much contempt, and according to Fumani, a group of disgruntled locals eventually took their cause to one of the local chieftains. Kar Kiya Fathi was a former military commander of ‘Ali Khan who had recently returned to Gilan after serving Shah ‘Abbas I for a few years.[734] The group of insurgents, along with Kar Kiya Fathi, raided Aslan Beyg’s home while he was away on a trip and took much of his belongings and money. There is no doubt that the main aim of this insurgency was to redistribute the wealth accumulated by Aslan Beyg, but they also managed to score political points as well.[735] The Safavid response to the insurgents was harsh and swift, promulgated in a public parading of the captured rebels that stretched from Fuman to Rasht to Lahijan and back. In the end, Kar Kiya Fathi, his son, brother, and eighteen others were publicly executed in the bazaar of Fuman.[736] After this incident, Aslan Beyg returned to his post until the vizier of Gilan, Mirza-ye ‘Alamiyan, paid him a visit and decided that it was best to dismiss Aslan Beyg. Aslan Beyg was then appointed to Qazvin and his counterpart, Behzad Beyg, was put in charge of Fuman.[737] To score points with the disaffected local Gilanis, Behzad Beyg released many of Aslan Beyg’s prisoners and put a Gilani named ‘Abd al-Vahab Rashti in charge of Fuman. Mirza-ye ‘Alamiyan then appointed a new vizier and *mostowfi* for Lahijan, but soon local protesters appealed to Behzad Beyg for their removal. Eventually Mirza-ye ‘Alamiyan appointed Behzad Beyg to handle the affairs of Biyeh Pish as well.

[734] Ibid., 174.
[735] Ibid., 174-178.
[736] Ibid., 177.
[737] Ibid., 177-178, 181.

As the agents of the center began establishing themselves in Gilan, Shah ‘Abbas I closely monitored their activities. Every so often he would order an audit of Gilan’s viziers’ accounts. Mirza-ye ‘Alamiyan and Behzad Beyg’s books were both audited, since accusations of fiscal mismanagement would often reach the shah’s ears.[738] After Aslan Beyg’s death, his son Mirza Isma‘il came to inherit his father’s post. His reign was short, and his dismissal orders (or, based on certain accounts, his flight) came as Gharib Shah began his rebellion.[739] Mirza Isma‘il’s books were then audited by the center as well and the reins of Biyeh Pas were then given to an individual named Mirza Taqi Khan.[740]

Before engaging with Gharib Shah’s rebellion in more detail, I will briefly discuss the rebellion of Sayyed Mohammad Sheykhavand in 1029/1619, with its messianic and religious zeal, and as part of the *Qizilbash* rebellion taking advantage of the indignation of the local Gilanis after the conquest. Sayyed Mohammad Sheykhavand belonged to the famous *Qizilbash* tribe of Sheykhavand,[741] and began his rebellion by declaring himself the representative of the Twelver messiah (the Twelfth Imam).[742] This particular uprising is not discussed in Gilani chronicler ‘Abdolfattah Fumani’s account, but is mentioned briefly in Monshi’s ‘*Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, as well as in the travel account of Pietro della Valle.[743] Sayyed Mohammad Sheykhavand’s rebellion was subdued once Shah ‘Abbas I called him to his court and executed

[738] Ibid., 199.
[739] While Fumani contends that he was dismissed by the center, other sources, such as *Kholasat al-Seyar*, for instance, report that he fled Gilan after his failure to resist the forces of Gharib Shah. Mohammad Ma’sum Khwajegi Esfehani, *Kholasat al-Seyar: Tarikh-e Ruzegar Shah Safi-ye Safavi,* ed. Iran Afshar (Tehran: Entesharat-e Elmi, 1368/1989), 50.
[740] Mirza Taqi Khan was also in charge of Mazandaran. Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 223.
[741] The Sheykhavand tribe’s lineage was traced back to Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili. For more information on this tribe, see Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah ‘Abbas*, vol. 1, 182.
[742] Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 952; Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah ‘Abbas,* vol. 3, 52; Pietro della Valle, vol. 2, 131.
[743] Pietro della Valle, vol. 2, 131. In Adam Olearius’ account the name mentioned is Reza.

him rather quietly.[744] This politically-inspired but religiously-laced uprising brings together an alliance of the pacified *Qizilbash* tribal leaders with the disenfranchised Gilani population to counter the hegemony of the new Safavid order in the age of Shah ‘Abbas I.

Gharib Shah’s Rebellion

Of all the rebellions after the Safavid conquest of Gilan, Gharib Shah’s rebellion in 1038/1629 was perhaps the most significant and the best organized. In the introduction to his *Tarikh-e Gilan*, Fumani states that,

> In the past fifty years… no uprising, revolution, attack or gathering of people... like that of Gharib Shah has ever been seen. I, ‘Abdolfattah Fumani, who was farming and living my life, decided to write a history of it as it happened.[745]

Gharib Shah’s rebellion erupted shortly after the death of Shah ‘Abbas I and the subsequent ascent to the throne of his grandson, Shah Safi I.[746] This period of transition from a strong ruler like Shah ‘Abbas I to one who had yet to prove his abilities meant the time was ripe for the potential success of such attempts. In the period of succession, the bargaining position of the ruler *vis-à-vis* the rebels is often weakened, hence the potential for uprisings increases.[747]

[744] Shah ‘Abbas I did not want to agitate the population of Gilan, especially as there was a religious and messianic dimension to this rebellion, so he at first pretended to accept Sayyed Mohammad’s messianic claims, but later executed him. Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah ‘Abbas*, vol. 3, 52-53.
[745] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 5.
[746] Newman, *Safavid Iran,* 73.
[747] Brustein and Levi argue that the weakening of the power of the ruler during wars and periods of succession provides the opportunity for the rebels to act. William Brustein and Margaret Levi, “The Geography of Rebellion: Rebels, Rulers, and Regions, 1500 to 1700,” *Theory and Societ*y 16, no. 4 (1987): 483-484.

The chosen leader of this uprising, Gharib Shah, also known as Kalanjar Soltan or ‘Adel Shah,[748] was supposedly a son of the late Jamshid Khan,[749] the former ruler of Biyeh Pas. According to Fumani, he led a modest life in anonymity with his mother before this revolt. All we know about his mother is that she was a follower of a local Gilani Sufi sheykh named Pir Shams Gol Gilwa’i. Gharib Shah’s rebellion was formed through inter-class alliances of different segments of the society.[750] The movement gathered momentum quickly and had a popular base, with participants from all walks of life, including leaseholders, accountants, heads of villages, and peasants, who appear to have assembled in secret at times before they decided to pick Gharib Shah as their leader. According to Fumani, people “found [Gharib Shah], took him and chose him as a ruler, gave him the title ‘Adel Shah... and beat drums in his name.”[751] The number of participants given by different chroniclers and travelogues ranges from 14,000 to 30,000.[752]

Gharib Shah’s uprising has been characterized as a “messianic” movement in secondary sources.[753] Rudi Matthee suggests that the movement was “in part messianic,” though he also clearly states that it was aimed at regaining autonomy and more than anything else had an

[748] Fumani refers to Gharib Shah as ‘Adel Shah, while the authors of *Khold-e Baran*, *Tarikh-e Rowzat al-Safa-ye Naseri,* and *Zayl-e Tarikh-e‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi* refer to him as Gharib Shah. They claim that ‘Adel Shah was the brother of Gharib Shah, who rebelled after Gharib Shah was put to death. Although it is possible that there were two individuals involved, Fumani’s account is probably more reliable since he was an eyewitness to the uprising. Fumani states that Gharib Shah was the title given to ‘Adel Shah by his *Qizilbash* enemies. In this regard Mahmud Payandeh also quotes Lahijani as stating that “people of Gilan called him ‘Adel Shah but the *Qizilbash* gave him the title of Gharib Shah.” See Mohammad Yusof Valeh Qazvini Esfehani, *Iran dar Zaman-e Shah Safi va Shah ‘Abbas-e Dovvom (1038-1071 H.Q) (Hadiqeh-ye Sheshom va Haftom az Rowzeh-ye Hashtom): Khold-e Barin*, ed. Mohammad Reza Naseri (Tehran: Anjoman-e Asar va Mafakher-e Farhangi, 1382/2003), 24; Reza Qoli Khan Hedayat, *Tarikh-e Rowzat al-Safa-ye Naseri*, vol. 8 (Tehran: Markazi, 1339/1960), 440; Eskandar Beyg Torkaman Monshi, *Zeyl-e Tarikh-e ‘Alam Ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, ed. Soheyl Khwansari (Tehran: Ketabforushi-ye Eslamiyyeh, 1317/1938), 18; Mahmud Payandeh, *Qiyam-e Gharib Shah Gilani Mashhur be ‘Adel Shah* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Sahar, 1357/1979), 67.

[749] Of course some had shed doubt on his actual kinship with Jamshid Khan. See for example Valeh Esfehani, *Iran dar Zaman-e Shah Safi va Shah ‘Abbas-e Dovvom*, 16. Also see Khwajegi Esfehani, *Kholasat al-Seyar*, 50.

[750] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 262.

[751] Ibid.

[752] Olearius, *The voyages and travells,* 289; Hedayat, *Tarikh-e Rowzat al-Safa-ye Naseri,* 439.

[753] Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 72.

economic aspect to it.[754] I argue that the movement was indeed a political movement, formed through inter-class alliances with clear political and economic aims. While it apparently benefited from the popular religious participation of a Sufi order, as the relationship to the Sufi Sheykh Pir Shams Gol Gilwa'i suggests, it also attracted the attention of higher-ranking religious notables like the judges and the *sadat*. The categorization of the movement as "messianic," however, is farfetched and probably stems from the chronicler Valeh Esfehani's account, which states "he [Gharib Shah] was hidden from the eyes" before the time of his uprising.[755] This, however, could simply be referencing the fact that people did not know Jamshid Khan had a son, and that this son was living under the radar of the Safavids. Otherwise, there is little other evidence to suggest that Gharib Shah was viewed as a religious leader or a "messianic" figure. On the contrary, he was the descendent of a temporal ruler whom his followers wished to put on the throne of his ancestor's kingdom. On the other hand, the Sufi organization to which Gharib Shah's mother - and perhaps he himself - belonged must have played a vital role in creating a place of gathering and social interactions, which could have facilitated the formation of the inter-class alliances that led to the rebellion.

As Gharib Shah set out on his mission to capture Gilan, some of the high-ranking officials, including the chief provost (*kalantar*) of Fuman, the Sheykh al-Islam, and the son of the chief military commander (*sepahsalar*), fled the city. Fumani, who at one time was associated with the vizier of Gilan and was the official accountant of western Gilan during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I, was also among those who fled the region. On the other hand, some of the city elite from diverse backgrounds, including judges, *sadat*, and religious scholars, had

[754] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 122.
[755] Valeh Esfehani, *Iran dar Zaman-e Shah Safi va Shah 'Abbas-e Dovvom*, 16.

joined Gharib Shah's camp; some may have done so out of fear.[756] Olearius informs us of a situation where Saru Khan (Saru Taqi),[757] the commander who defeated Gharib Shah's army, had to intervene on behalf of a wealthy merchant involved in Gharib Shah's rebellion. Apparently, the merchant was either actively involved in the rebellion but supposedly out of despair, or else had failed to inform the state officials of Gharib Shah's activities. Saru Khan had to intervene in order to save the life and wealth of this particular merchant.[758]

After Gharib Shah reached Rasht, his followers began looting the court's treasury and the households of the merchants and wealthy residents of the city.[759] Based on some estimates, the amount of silk lost from the royal treasury amounted to 30,000 *tuman*s. The initial looting encouraged others to join the movement.[760] Some of the leaders of the uprising, however, voiced their concern over such callous redistribution of the silk crops, reminding Gharib Shah that the silk would be useful for him to keep. Gharib Shah then ordered his troops to halt the looting.[761] After capturing Fuman, Gharib Shah did not remain there for long. Hearing the news that a *Qizilbash* army from Qazvin had arrived and taken over Lashteh Nesha, he set out for Lahijan.[762] There he began correspondence with the neighboring provinces, inviting them to join his cause.[763]

Although it seems that the rebels had thought of the transition and succession period after Shah 'Abbas I as an advantageous time for their revolt, they had miscalculated the ability of the

[756] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 266, 271.
[757] Saru Khan, also famously know as Saru Taqi, later served as the vizier of Shah Safi I and his successor Shah 'Abbas II, and wielded much power in the Safavid court.
[758] Olearius, *The voyages and travells,* 290.
[759] Valeh Esfehani, *Iran dar Zaman-e Shah Safi va Shah 'Abbas-e Dovvom,* 18.
[760] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan,* 263.
[761] Ibid., 265. Khwajegi Esfehani asserts the rebels stole from the Russian merchants as well. Khwajegi Esfehani, *Kholasat al-Seyar,* 51.
[762] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 267.
[763] Valeh Esfehani, *Iran dar Zaman-e Shah Safi va Shah 'Abbas-e Dovvom*, 19; Hedayat, *Tarikh-e Rowzat al-Safa-ye Naseri*, 440.

Safavid monarch who succeeded his grandfather. Soon after the outbreak of the rebellion in Gilan, Shah Safi I charged several of the provincial governors with the task of crushing the rebellion and appointed Saru Khan, the governor of Astara, as their commander in chief.[764] The rebellion was also spreading to the town of Tonekabon when the Safavids escalated their offensive. The fiercest battle began around the town of Lashteh Nesha, where the rebellion had started, and ended with the siege of the town by the Safavid army. According to Fumani, 7,870 people from the population of Pashija, Kuchesfehan, Lashteh Nesha, and Lahijan were killed and women and children were taken prisoner by the Safavid army. In the end, Gharib Shah and his entourage were taken prisoner and Saru Khan ordered the execution of the locals who had collaborated with the rebels, including Pir Shams Gol Gilwa'i, the head of the Sufi order that Gharib Shah may have belonged to.[765] Gharib Shah and some of his followers were brought to Isfahan where they were executed publicly in the great square.[766] The rebellion was successfully crushed by the Safavids, but it had devastating effects on the silk trade and the Safavid treasury.[767] Moreover, more restrictions were imposed on the Gilanis after the uprising, as they were disarmed and were forbidden to purchase arms (they were only permitted to own certain instruments like a "Hedg-bill"), as opposed to their Taleshi neighbors who had "the privilege of using all sorts of Arms" in return for their loyalty to the Safavids during the uprising.[768]

Conclusion

Once in power, Shah 'Abbas I's continuation of the Safavids' centralization policies focused on Gilan with its autonomous tendencies and its important status as a major producer of

[764] Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 268, 282-283.
[765] Ibid., 278-280.
[766] Ibid., 281; Olearius, *The voyages and travells,* 289.
[767] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 123.
[768] Olearius, *The voyages and travells,* 290.

silk. Although at first glance it might appear as though Shah ‘Abbas I was interested in negotiating with Khan Ahmad II, looking past the surface it is quite clear that the “negotiations” were just meant to set the stage and legitimize the final objective, that being the eventual conquest of Gilan. As soon as Shah ‘Abbas I set out to conquer Gilan, the local elite in both Eastern and Western Gilan became fragmented and began competing for power and influence within their respective factions. The pro-Safavid faction played an important role in facilitating the demise of the local rulers and the transition of power to the Safavids. After the conquest, Shah ‘Abbas I made sure the local Gilani rulers’ descendants were exiled from Gilan to prevent any contender from leading the opposition. Moreover, Shah ‘Abbas I purged certain members of the elite while incorporating others into his retinue. Meanwhile, he vigorously negotiated the extradition of Khan Ahmad II from the Ottoman lands, as he wished to eliminate Khan Ahmad II altogether and prevent any potential future threat. Eventually, the passing of Khan Ahmad II a few years later came as a relief to Shah ‘Abbas I.

Once Gilan was conquered, its system of administration and governance was to change to reflect the interest of the Safavid center. Gilan began to be administered by viziers. The main vizier or *vazir-e koll* oversaw the conduct of the appointed representatives who remained in Gilan and managed its affairs. Stationing Safavid deputies directly in Gilan, replacing the former *khan*s as governors, gradually led to the normalization of the Safavid presence in Gilan. An overhaul of the tax system was also in order, and Shah ‘Abbas I saw to the standardization of the tax system. Again, this was not an innovation of Shah ‘Abbas I, but with the displacement of the local rulers he managed to implement his tax policies more effectively. Turning Gilan into *khasseh* lands and intensifying the state’s role and involvement in the silk trade meant that

revenue from Gilan was directed towards the center's treasury more efficiently and systematically.

As the process of the assimilation of Gilan after the conquest began, the Safavids faced backlash from Gilan's population and their elite. Several uprisings took place shortly after the conquest. The first few uprisings were mostly orchestrated by the elite and high-ranking commanders of the Kiyayis, as their main objective was to re-establish the rule of previous local dynasties. These uprisings were not successful, as the old elite of Gilan were unable to shape long-lasting alliances amongst themselves, and they remained fragmented and in chaos.

Later uprisings were more of a response not just to the Safavids' presence in Gilan, but to their policies and newly-implemented modes of governance in general. These uprisings engaged the interest of more than just the elite, as multiple social classes, including the peasants, participated. In general, however, due to the peasants' dependence on the elite for support and resources, they were not able to mobilize and unify on their own.

Chapter Five

Religion and Conversion in Gilan

It is hardly possible to draw a comprehensive picture of Gilan's integration into the Safavid polity by the middle of 17th century without accounting for the process of religious conversion of the local rulers to Twelver Shi'ism. This process was an integral element of larger processes of governance and policies that led to the full subjugation of Gilan and the demise of its local political powers. Since the Safavids themselves also laid claim to a sayyid genealogy, drawing their legitimacy directly from that status, they needed to absorb, assimilate, or eliminate any other group which presented any kind of challenge to them through that same status.[769] In the same way as they tried to control and later suppress various Shi'a orders and activities, they also aimed at converting the Zaydis of Gilan to Twelver Shi'ism. The process of conversion, however, was subtle and gradual.

When Shah Isma'il I ascended the throne in 907/1501, he declared Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion. He then began the process of converting the mostly - but not exclusively - Sunni population of Iran to Twelver Shi'ism. Scholars have pointed out that the process of converting the diverse religious communities of the regions that came under Safavid rule was mostly involuntary, was carried out by force, and was at times accompanied by bloodshed.[770] Other studies have brought to light other aspects of this religious conversion, as force alone was

[769] Alberto Tiburcio Urquiola, "*Convert Literature, Interreligious Polemics, and the "Signs of Prophethood" Genre in Late Safavid Iran (1694-1722): the Work of 'Alī Qūlī Jadīd al-Īslam (d. Circa 1722)*" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2014), 143.
[770] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis,* 173-174.

not a sufficient policy. Rula Abisaab, for example, argues that not only did the Safavids need to convert the population at large, but they also needed to introduce their followers, who entertained a religiosity intermixed with certain folk and shamanistic elements, to a more legally and doctrinally standardized Shi'ism that was better suited to the centralizing tendencies of the Safavid polity. Therefore, Shah Isma'il I and his successors began the process by introducing the newly-established polity's ruling classes to a more "literate urban Shi'ite doctrine, which lends itself to legal regulations and state structure."[771] For this reason Shah Isma'il I, who himself did not have any proper Shi'a training, turned to foreign ulema, namely the ulema of Jabal 'Amil, to "institute a proper, court-sanctioned religious socialization for both educated and common Persians."[772] This process was then continued and intensified during the reign of his successor, Shah Tahmasb I.[773] The *gholoww* elements and heterodox religiosity, as well as the messianic fervor of the early Safavid period, were not suited for the dynasty's maintenance, and hence these movements came under Safavid scrutiny.[774] The Safavids' insistence on adherence to Shi'a legal doctrines in their realm affected the many active Sufi orders, whether we follow Nasr and his argument that a close tie between Sufism and Shi'ism existed even before the Safavids, or

[771] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 8.
[772] Ibid., 10. Andrew Newman has held an opposing view to that of Rula Abisaab, asserting that the migration of the Arab ulema from Jabal 'Amil to Safavid Iran is a myth. See Andrew J. Newman, "The Myth of Clerical Migration To Safawid Iran: Arab Shiite Opposition to 'Alī al-Karakī," *Die Welt Des Islams*, New Series 33, no. 1 (April 1993): 66-112. Jean Calmard also asserts there was no widespread migration of "Arab Twelver 'ulama to Iran." See Jean Calmard, "Shi'i Rituals and Power II. The Consolidation of Safavid Shi'ism: Folklore and Popular Religion," in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. Charles Melville, Pembroke Persia Papers 4 (London: I.B. Taruris, 2009), 140. Abisaab's study, based on her extensive archival research, has challenged this position held by Newman and Calmard.
[773] See Abisaab's discussion on the role of the ulema of Jabal 'Amil in bringing about a "state-operated Shi'ism in Safavid Iran." Abisaab, *Converting Persia,* 50-51.
[774] For the messianic fervor of the Safavid period, see Babayan*, Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs.*

Algar, who challenges Nasr's argument in this regard.[775] The consensus remains that "the Sufi orders in Iran were faced with an intolerant and 'totalitarian' state."[776]

Ata Anzali's study of mysticism in Iran does not attribute this demise to the suppression of these movements by the Safavids, as some scholars have assumed, but rather interprets it for the sixteenth century as being part and parcel of the process of the conversion of the population to Shi'ism. As Anzali explains,

> when the Safavid policy of religious coercion started in the sixteenth century with an emphasis on the two central pillars of *tavalla* (love for the family of the Prophet) and *tabarra* (disassociation from the enemies of the family of the Prophet especially the first three caliphs), many Sufi religious scholars who had no problem with the first pillar refused, as standard bearers of Sunni religiosity, to compromise on the second, which involved cursing revered companions of the Prophet whose legacy was central to that religiosity.[777]

This policy then led many of these Sufi orders to keep a low profile, or even to leave the empire for the Ottoman, Mughal, or Uzbek territories, while others gradually transitioned to Twelver Shi'ism.[778] Other orders which managed to remain active and even score favors from the Safavid court in the early years of the empire[779] by converting to Shi'ism, like the Ne'matollahis and the Nurbakhshiyyeh, either lost their distinctive status as Sufi orders in the case of the former, or completely disintegrated in the case of the latter. By the time of Shah 'Abbas I, the Ne'matollahis were reduced to a faction engaging in neighborhood strife with their counterpart the Heydariyyeh.[780] It is important to note that the decline of the Ne'matollahi Order was only

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[775] Hossein Nasr, "Religion in Safavid Persia," *Iranian Studies* 7, no. 1-2 (1974): 271-286; Hamid Algar, "Some Observations on Religion in Safavid Persia," *Iranian Studies* 7, no.1-2 (1974): 287-293.
[776] Lloyd Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-Futuwwat in Iran* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 123.
[777] Anzali, "*Mysticism" in Iran*, 27.
[778] Ibid., 28-29.
[779] Hamid Algar, "Naqshbandīs and Safavids: A contribution to the Religious History of Iran and Her Neighbors," in *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors*, ed. Michel Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 26-27.
[780] Quinn, *Shah 'Abbas*, 31-33. Apparantly Shah 'Abbas I also took a special interest in the rivalry between the two groups and at times encouraged it, maybe not just for political purposes but also for entertainment puposes. See Jean Calmard "Shi'i Rituals and Power II," 144-145.

partly shaped by Safavid policies, because the Order was in decline before the Safavids came to power.[781] This points to larger structural elements causing this decline, especially the division of all this geopolitical space between Ottomans (Sunnism) and Safavids (Shi'ism), which meant that in order to survive these religious groups had to align themselves with either one of them to some extent, but also to accept the increasing doctrinal and legal standardization carried out by the empires' religious spokespersons, the ulema. The demand for more homogeneity under "gunpowder empires" and the latter's ability to have more control over their populations, as opposed to the smaller dynasties in the earlier period, played an important role in weakening organized Sufism - in other words, the *tariqat* Sufism.[782] While Sunni Sufi orders like the Naqshbandiyyeh were especially at the receiving end of Safavid hostilities, perhaps more so for their Sunnism than for their Sufism,[783] Shi'a orders also had to conform to the newly established religious-legal culture.[784] The Safavid state, as Arjomand and Babayan both show, played a critical role in suppressing particular Sufi groups. Arjomand accurately notes that, "Isma'il did compromise with some of the Sufi sheykhs, notably those of the Ni'matullāhī order, but there can be no doubt about his relentless hostility toward the rival Sufi orders, a policy continued by his successors."[785] Shah 'Abbas I's desire to end the activities of the Sufi organizations is especially encapsulated in his persecution of the Noqtavi Sufis and their heterodox movement, which according to Kathryn Babayan was a turning point in Safavid policies towards heterodoxy within their realm.[786] It needs to be emphasized that *Qizilbash* dervishism and *fotovvat* also declined during this time, even though they were quite rooted in heterodox Shi'a traditions, as

[781] Anzali, "*Mysticism" in Iran*, 28.
[782] See Abisaab's Review of Anzali, *IJMES*, Forthcoming.
[783] Hamid Algar, "Naqshbandīs and Safavids," 27.
[784] Seminar Discussions with Rula Jurdi Abisaab.
[785] Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 112.
[786] For details of the Noqtavis' worldview and Safavid persecution of their movement, see Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs.*

Ridgeon has clearly shown.[787] Lewisohn regards the gradual destruction of Sufism as a result of both "a political act by the early Safavid Shahs, aimed at eradicating any opposition from their own folk Shi'ite-*ghazi* background," and the ulema's view of Sufism "as a type of *ghuluww*" destined for eradication.[788] I would note, however, that the legal scholars' attack on Sufism, in particular, was not new, and there is a longer history of anti-Sufi treatises and injunctions reaching back to the late medieval period. Evidently, internal social processes, shaped by common believers, and not merely the state and the intellectuals, pushed *tariqat* Sufism to the margins. Rula Jurdi Abisaab argues that Shi'a devotional rituals, particularly Moharram, facilitated the break with the Sufi *tariqat*s. Some of the transgressive features of Sufi practice were removed and others were redirected. For instance, values tied to *fotovvat* such as communitas were absorbed by Moharram spaces.[789]

The Shari'a functioned historically as a normative basis for political legitimacy, in ways that *tariqat* Sufism did not.[790] The competition between *pir* and sultan, and the volatile relationship between the two was reflected in the hagiographical narratives of the pre-Safavid Sufi period.[791] Twelver Shi'a jurists, inasmuch as they provided socio-legal discipline, were by far more congenial to the Safavid imperial formation than the Sufi masters, be they Shi'a or Sunni.

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[787] Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism,* 123-125.
[788] Leonard Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān: Taṣawwuf and 'Irfān in late Safavid Iran ('Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī and Fayd-i Kāshānī on the Relation of Taṣawwuf, Hikmat and 'Irfān," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 3, *Late Classical Persianate Sufism: The Safavid and Mughal Period (1501-1750)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 77.
[789] Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Sufi Habitus and *Shari'a* Practitioners in Late Safavid Iran," in *The Safavid World*, ed. Rudi Matthee (Routledge: forthcoming).
[790] Seminar Discussions with Rula Jurdi Abisaab.
[791] Beatrice Forbes Manz noted that the relationship between sultan and Sufi in Timurid Iran could always turn into a competition, and that between sultan and jurist into cooperation. Beatrice Forbes Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 192-194, 229-230.

In Gilan, however, the picture is more complex. The Zaydis of Gilan did not necessarily entertain Sufi elements, although as we shall see they too had among them those who were more inclined towards *gholoww*. Madelung suggests that the founder of the Kiyayi dynasty "was the leader of the Sufi movement of 'penitents' (*tā'ibān*)."[792] As mentioned briefly in Chapter One, scholars do not hold a consensus that the term *ta'eban* refers to a Sufi order necessarily. It might just simply be a reference to those who converted to Zaydism and joined the followers of the Kiyayi contender at the time.[793] As I also noted in Chapter One, Zaydism is one of the major branches of Shi'a Islam, named after the fourth Imam, Zayd b. 'Ali Zayn al-Abedin (d. 122/740). Religious exchanges between Zaydi and Imami scholars grew after the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, as the Twelvers became less concerned with Zaydi claims to the Imamate. The Zaydis of Iran were more intimately acquainted with Imami theological and juristic works than those in Yemen, who experienced some isolation.[794] They exchanged ideas with Imami scholars and debated critical questions tied to the Imamate and its requirements.[795] Evidently, the Zaydis accepted any member of the *ahl al-bayt* as an imam during the early period, but later they confined the imamate to the descendants of the Prophet through his grandsons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn.[796] The Zaydis did not recognize the doctrine of designation (*nass*), and they considered the rightful imam as one who is endowed with superior knowledge, piety and leadership and who would rise in rebellion against the unjust rulers of his times. It is important to note that not all the 'Alids who claimed to rule on behalf of the Zaydi community were recognized as "full imams."[797]

[792] Madelung, "Zaydi Attitudes to Sufism," 127.
[793] See my explanation in Chapter One, 34, fn. 114.
[794] Hasan Ansari Qommi, "Zaydiyyeh va Manabe'-e Maktub-e Imamiyyeh," '*Olum-e Hadis* 20 (1380/2001): 153.
[795] Ansari Qommi, "Zaydiyyeh va Manabe'-e Maktub-e Imamiyyeh," 149.
[796] Farhad Daftari, *A History of Shi'i Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 150.
[797] Ibid.

Today, most of the Zaydis live in northern Yemen, and their numbers are estimated at between 5 and 10 million.[798] Our knowledge about Zaydism, however, remains far from complete, given the fact that many Zaydi religious and theological works have either been destroyed or are understudied.[799] Among the local Zaydis of the Caspian region, ʻAlid figures who did not qualify fully for the imamate often became rulers, but did not occupy the superior rank of an imam.[800] Hence, these rulers were either identified as *daʻi*s having less religious clout than an imam, or were simply referred to as *amir*s with modest aspirations.

By exerting pressure on the Gilani Zaydis to convert to Twelver Shiʻism, the Safavids aimed to eliminate the threat posed to their rule by Zaydi religio-political theory. As such, the Safavids grew weary of their fellow Shiʻa who had long historical roots in this region, who expressed a confrontational political doctrine and who, like them, claimed a sayyid lineage.[801] Co-existing with influential Zaydi leaders just north of their capital in Qazvin was perhaps both doctrinally and geographically too close for comfort. This thrust toward religious-sectarian homogenization characterized other gunpowder empires as well and not only the Safavid.

The Safavids and the Other Shiʻa

The Safavid policy of converting the population at large to Twelver Shiʻism did not leave the Zaydis of Gilan immune. The religious configuration of Gilan before the advent of the

[798] Daftari, *A History of Shiʻi Islam*, 145.
[799] According to Daftari, much of the Zaydis' religious knowledge remains in manuscript form in private collections in Yemen, and unfortunately "in recent decades a Salafi campaign, supported by Saudi Arabia, has increasingly succeeded in obtaining and destroying the literary heritage of the Yamani Zaydis." Daftari, *A History of Shiʻi Islam*, 145.
[800] Ibid., For a similar argument also see Madelung, "The Alid Rulers of Tabaristān, Daylamān and Gīlān," 488.
[801] Scholars have raised multiple reasons for the eventual outcome of the decline of the Sufi orders during the Safavid era. Notable among them is Sajjad Rizvi, who argues that the Safavids supressed Sufi orders for three main reasons. First, they rivaled the Safavids; second, their adherence to Sunnism; and third, their claim to sayyid lineage which made Shah Ismaʻil I uncomfortable, as he himself was trying to assert his own claim to that status with its spiritual worth. Sajjad Rizvi, "A Sufi Theology Fit for a Shīʻī King: The *Gawhar-i Murād* of Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī (d. 1072/1661-2)" in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007): 84.

Safavids was not homogenous. Zaydi Shi‘ism was especially prevalent in the eastern parts of Gilan in and around Lahijan, while the population of the western parts of Gilan mostly adhered to Sunni Islam. In this chapter I provide an overview of the religious mosaic of Gilan prior to and during the Safavid era. Some of the previous assumptions about the role of Gilan, or more accurately the role of Lahijan, in relation to the religious activities of the Safavids' revered ancestor Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili and his mentor, Sheykh Zahed Gilani, will be reevaluated in light of new scholarship. I briefly delineate an overview of the Zaydi presence in Gilan and the production of Zaydi religious knowledge, before delving into the process through which the Zaydis of Gilan were gradually transitioned into Twelver Shi‘ism.

By the late $10^{th}/17^{th}$ century, the Safavids were able to effectively convert Eastern Gilan's population to Twelver Shi‘ism. On the other hand, while the conversion of the Western Gilanis does not seem as straightforward, it is likely that adherence to Sunni Islam slowly gave way to Shi‘a-flavored religiosity in Western Gilan as well.

The Religious Composition of Gilan

In Chapter One, a brief overview of some of the major religious traditions of Gilan was discussed, namely the presence of Shi‘a activities, and more specifically those of the Zaydis and Isma‘ilis. I also discussed the rise of Zaydism in Gilan and the efforts of the Kiyayis to put an end to the religious activities of the Isma‘ilis in Deylam. In fact, by the time the Safavids came to power, Isma‘ilis were no longer part of the religious landscape of the northern region, mostly due to rigorous campaigns carried out by the Kiyayi family in Gilan and Deylam following the Mongol invasion, which had already effectively limited Isma‘ili activities.[802] The Sunni rulers of

[802] See Chapter One.

Western Gilan remained in power until the end of the 10th/16th century, but they were also gradually consumed by the growing influence of the Safavids and their Twelver Shi'a creed.

The religious composition of Gilan, however, also included religious minorities of the Jewish and Christian faiths. Our information about these minority communities and their role in the social and economic life of Gilan is very limited, however. Persian chronicles only mention the Jewish communities in passing, if at all. However, Benjamin of Tudela, a Spanish traveler of Jewish descent, gives us a rare glimpse into the life of the Jewish communities of Deylam and Gilan. Benjamin of Tudela observes some "20,000 Israelites" in Rudbar, with "learned and rich men" among them, but he asserts that they lived there "under great oppression." While Benjamin of Tudela's account is very limited, the most significant insight he provides is the proximity of the Jewish communities to the Isma'ilis and the fact that these two communities at times allied themselves against their oppressors. Benjamin of Tudela's assessment of the Isma'ili faith is inaccurate and simplistic, but his account of their alliance with the Jewish communities of the mountainous area is interesting and offers a glimpse into alliances made between different religious groups. He writes,

> Thence it is four days to the land of Mulahid [Isma'ilis]. Here live a people who do not profess the Mohammedan religion, but live on high mountains, and worship the Old Man of the land of the Hashishim. And among them there are four communities of Israel who go forth with them in war time. They are not under the rule of the king of Persia, but reside in the high mountains, and descend from these mountains to pillage and to capture booty, and then return to the mountains, and none can overcome them. There are learned men amongst the Jews of their land.[803]

The presence of the Jewish households in Deylam is also corroborated by Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi's account, where he informs us in passing of the presence of a Jewish community in the

[803] Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, Critical text, translation and commentary by Marcus Nathan Alder (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), 53-54.

village of Chakan near Ashkevar in the 9th/15th century.[804] Of course, the presence of a Jewish community in Farahabad of Mazandaran during the reign of Shah ʻAbbas I has been established by scholars. This Jewish community was apparently resettled in Farahabad at the orders of Shah ʻAbbas I after having aided the shah during one of his campaigns in the Caucasus.[805] Vera Moreen contends that "Iranian Jews seem to have been artisans and petty merchants," and that "they were not involved in the lucrative occupation of the time, i.e., the silk trade and money changing."[806] The Jews in Farahabad, though, who were eventually converted en masse beginning in 1024/1615, were involved in silk production and trade and fared well economically.[807]

Besides the Jewish communities, there also existed a small community of Armenians in Gilan prior to the 10th/15th century, specifically in Rasht. These Armenians, although merely a small community of merchants, were numerous enough to have their own church and priest in the city of Rasht.[808] The Armenian presence in Gilan grew after Shah ʻAbbas I imposed his forced migration on the population of Julfa, settling most of them in Farahabad of Mazandaran and others in parts of Gilan, to engage them in the production and trade of silk. Many of the 27,000 Armenian families settled in Gilan perished after contracting local fevers (perhaps Malaria), and only about 6,000 of them remained.[809] When more sources about these

[804] Marʻashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Tabarestan*, 245.
[805] Mehrdad Amanat, *Jewish Identities in Iran: Resistance and Conversion to Islam and the Baha'i Faith* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 39.
[806] Vera B. Moreen, "The Status of Religious Minorites in Safavid Iran 1617-61," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40, no. 2 (April 1981): 124.
[807] Mehrdad Amanat, *Jewish Identities in Iran*, 39. Also see Tiburcio, "*Convert Literature, Interrreligious Polemics, and the "Signs of Prophethood*," 19.
[808] Faramarz Talebi, *Tarikh-e Armaniyan-e Gilan* (Rasht: Iliya, 1385/2006), 13. It is possible that before the forced migration of the Armenians to Gilan, those residing in Rasht were not permanent residents, but were engaged in trade and only remained there temporarily. The Armenians of Julfa played an important role in the transport of silk from Gilan to Europe.
[809] Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah 'Abbas-e Avval*, vol. 3, 206; Faramarz Talebi, *Tarikh-e Armaniyan-e Gilan*, 14.

communities emerge, one would be able to form a clearer idea of the nature of their associations and relations with other groups and with the Safavids.

The Production of Zaydi Religious Knowledge in the Caspian Region

An overview of the religious knowledge produced by the Zaydis in the Caspian region helps us understand critical dimensions of the Zaydi presence in Gilan and its eventual demise during the Safavid period. While the Zaydi movement initially emerged out of the rebellion of Imam Zayd b. ʻAli Zayn al-Abedin and grew for some time as a result of changes made by his descendants, by the 3rd century "the Zaydis confined their rebellious activities to the remote mountainous regions of Daylam… and to Yaman, removed from the reach of the centers of Abbasid power."[810] As mentioned in the first chapter, two main branches of Zaydism flourished in Gilan side by side for some time, the Qasemiyyeh and the Naseriyyeh branch. The followers of Imam Qasem b. Ibrahim Rassi, who lived and taught near Medina and died in 246/840, were known as Qasemiyyeh and were first concentrated in western Tabarestan, namely in Ostandaran (Ostandariyyeh), which included Ruyan, Kalar, and Chalus.[811]

Naser al-Otrush, whose followers came to be known as the Naseriyyeh, played the most significant role in establishing Zaydism in Gilan. Due to the proximity of his opinions to those of Imami jurists, al-Naser had sometimes even been labeled an Imami.[812] Al-Naser adopted mainstream Imami juristic opinions on matters concerning divorce, inheritance, and the ritual

[810] Farhad Daftari, *A History of Shi'i Islam*, 147.
[811] Wilferd Madelung, "The Alid Rulers of Tabaristān, Daylamān and Gīlān," in *Atti del terzo Congresso di studi arabi e islamici. Ravello, 1-6 settembre 1966* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1967): 486; Farhad Daftari, *A History of Shi'i Islam*, 153. See also Khan, "The Early History of Zaidi Shi'ism in Daylaman and Gilan."
[812] Musavinezhad, "Ashnayi ba Zaydiyyeh," 90. Mohammad Kazem Rahmati refers to Naser's proximity to Imami opinions in regards to *Bed'a* divorce, or *Talaq-e Bed'a*, as well as the issues of inheritance which he extended to the mother's relatives as well. See Mohammad Kazem Rahmati, *Zaydiyyeh dar Iran* (Tehran: Mazhuheshkadeh-ye Tarikh-e Eslam, 1392/2013), 84.

ablution of the feet.[813] These two branches of Zaydism were subject to inter-sectarian strife.[814] The Qasemiyyeh Zaydis had more of an established relationship with the Zaydis of Yemen, and at times followed the Yemeni imams, but the Naseriyyeh remained in Gilan. The animosity between the Qasemiyyeh and Naseriyyeh Zaydis in the Caspian region eventually subsided around the middle of the 4th/10th century after the Qasemiyyeh imam of Hawsam, Abu ʻAbd Allah Mohammad al-Mahdi li-Din Allah (d. 360/970), acknowledged both schools as equally valid.[815]

The Zaydis remained in the southern Caspian littoral for centuries, gaining power and territory, and at times losing them to others. By the 6th/12th century, Zaydi rule in Deylam had declined considerably, and the rise of the Isma'ilis was of course a contributing factor. There also seems to have been a lack of qualified candidates for the imamate, which was perhaps due to a general decline in the presence of ʻAlids suitable for political-military leadership.[816]

The political dynamic and animosity between the Zaydis and Isma'ilis who had settled and established themselves in Deylam was discussed in detail in Chapter One. While the Zaydis and Isma'ilis in the Caspian region competed over territorial and political control, doctrinal

[813] Daftari, *A History of Shi'i Islam,* 155; Rahmati, *Zaydiyyeh dar Iran,* 84.

[814] It appears that some Zaydi sources have stated that the Gil were followers of the Naseriyyeh while the Deylam were adherents of the Qasemiyyeh school of Zaydism. Madelung asserts that the strife between the two schools was enhanced by this ethnic division and the pre-existing antagonism between the two. In an earlier work, "The Alid Rulers of Tabaristān, Daylamān and Gīlān," Madelung recognizes that "this dividing line is certainly not quite correct, as it is known that many of the Deylam of the interior were also converted by al-Utrush." However, Madelung believes that perhaps some of the Deylam who adhered to the Naseriyyeh school became known as Gil eventually. Madelung concludes that "the presence of the two Zaydī schools in the Caspian provinces soon led to severe partisan strife between them. It was evidently enhanced by the traditional ethnic antagonism between the Daylamites and the Gīlites." Farhad Daftari also contends that the Qasemiyyeh branch's followers were mostly in western Tabarestan, and that those who followed the Naseriyyeh branch were located in eastern Gilan and Deylaman. Hence the ethnic divisions between Deylamites and Gilites does not necessarily correspond to the two schools of Zaydism, as it appears that Naser al-Otrush also had many followers among the Deylamites. In fact, according to Kazem Rahmati, Hawsam, an important town in Deylam, was one of Naser al-Otrush's main centers of activity and remained an important hub for the Nasseriyyeh Zaydis. See Madelung, "The Alid Rulers of Tabaristān, Daylamān and Gīlān," 487; Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran (Columbia Lectures on Ianian Studies; no.4)* (Albany: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 89; Daftari, *A History of Shi'i Islam*, 155; Rahmati, *Zaydiyyeh dar Iran*, 86.

[815] Daftari, *A History of Shi'i Islam*, 155.

[816] Madelung, "The Alid Rulers of Tabaristān, Daylamān and Gīlān," 491.

differences played a minor role in these competitions. Zaydis, for one, exerted much effort in refuting Isma'ili religious teachings, and attempted to eliminate their strongholds in the Caspian region.

The Zaydis remained close to the scholars of the Mo'tazeleh philosophical school. A few scholars who adhered to the positions taken by Qadi Abd al-Jabbar "including Abu'l-Qasem Isma'il al-Busti (d.420-1092), became Zaydis."[817] The close relationship between the Zaydis and the Mo'tazeleh in this period is juxtaposed with the ambivalent attitude of the Zaydis towards Sufism. Madelung argues that the Zaydis "vigorously condemned antinomian and laxist tendencies in Sufism," and explicitly forbade mystical practices like the "*samā*' [audition], singing, music, dancing, and gazing upon beautiful youths."[818] This attitude, however, was not unique to Zaydis. Yet Zaydis also found a common ground with certain aspects of Sufism, such as asceticism or rejection of this world.[819]

In the late 6th/12th century, a Zaydi with Sufi leanings in Gilan assumed the title of imam for himself, but not all Zaydis followed him because of his Sufi and heterodox leanings. Those Zaydis who followed a more legal-minded form of Zaydism became followers of 'Ali b. Mohammad Qaznavi, who was the ancestor of the future Kiyayi rulers. Wilferd Madelung contends that the arguments between the two groups weakened the position of Zaydis in the area at the time significantly, and the Sunni rulers managed to expand their territories at the expense of the Zaydis.[820] Hence, by 604/1208 the Zaydis in Gilan decided to recognize the Yemeni Imam al-Mansur.

[817] Daftari, *A History of Shi'i Islam*, 159.
[818] Madelung, "Zaydi attitides to Sufism," 124. Also see Daftari, *A History of Shi'i Islam*, 159.
[819] Madelung, "Zaydi attitides to Sufism," 124-126.
[820] Madelung, "The Alid Rulers of Tabaristān, Daylamān and Gīlān," 491.

The arguments within Zaydism, between the more heterodox factions who entertained *gholoww* and mystical practices and the more orthodox and legal-minded ones, was not limited to those in Gilan. In Yemen, a trend towards *gholoww* within the Zaydi religious community had already formed from the early years of its development. In the 5th/11th century especially, a group of Zaydis attributed the status of Mahdi (messiah) to the Zaydi Imam Hosseyn b. Qasem Rassi and refused to accept his death in 404/1014. They became known as the Hosseyniyyeh. Those who accepted the special status of the Imamate of Hosseyn b. Qasem Rassi were met with the disapproval and active repudiation of certain Zaydi imams. The Hosseyniyyeh faction continued to live on in Yemen for a few centuries, meanwhile drawing criticism from other Zaydi scholars and imams.[821] Mohelli, one of the Zaydi scholars of the 7th/13th century, wrote a treatise refuting four main beliefs of the Hosseyniyyeh faction related to the status of their imam, Hosseyn b. Qasem Rassi. The attributes of Hosseyn b. Qasem Rassi which Mohelli refutes in this *resaleh* are mainly the beliefs of the Hosseyniyyeh regarding the ascendency of Imam Hosseyn b. Qasem Rassi over the Prophet Mohammad, the supremacy of his word over God's word, his status as the Mahdi, as well as his immortality and subsequent status as imam in occultation.[822]

While the Qasemiyyeh Zaydis eventually relocated to Yemen and saved their Zaydi heritage, teachings and works, the Naseriyyeh remained in northern Iran only to be consumed by the growing presence of Twelver Shi'ism after the advent of the Safavids. Two of the prominent Zaydi scholars of the 5th/11th century, al-Hosseyn b. Harun al-Mo'ayyed be'llah (d. 411/1020) and his brother, Abu Taleb Yahya al-Naqri be'l-Haqq (d. ca. 424/1033), are credited for their role in the production of Zaydi religious scholarship in the Caspian region. Some of the major

[821] Sayyed 'Ali Musavinezhad, "al-Resalat al-Zajerat: Radiyyeh-yi bar Ghollow dar Mazhab-e Zaydiyyeh," *Haft Aseman* 29 (1385), 41.
[822] Ibid., 42.

works of these Qasemiyyeh Zaydi imams in theology and *fiqh* have been preserved by the Qasemiyyeh of Yemen.[823]

Compared to the Zaydi works of the scholars in Yemen, the extant works of the Naseriyyeh in northern Iran are few and far between. Yet Naser al-Otrush's work had attracted the attention of scholars who wrote and elaborated on his juridical works, mostly in the 5th/11th century.[824] One of the major works that has lately attracted the attention of scholars of Zaydi Shi'ism is the work entitled *al-Ibāna*, authored by Abu Ja'far Howsami (d. 455/1063), a judge at the local ruler's court. Abu Ja'far Howsami was referred to as "sheykh" among his contemporary Zaydi jurists, and his work had even attracted the attention of his rival school, the Qasemiyyeh of Yemen.[825] 'Emadi Ha'eri has recently published parts of this work, as well as a collection of commentaries written by Zaydi scholars, gathered and elaborated on by an early 7th/13th-century scholar named Shams al-Din Mohammad b. Saleh Gilani, entitled *Zawā'īd al-Ibāna*. These works and the commentaries surrounding them give us a glimpse into the traditional penned works of the Naseriyyeh Zaydis of northern Iran and their doctrinal opinions on matters of social and religious significance.

In 'Emadi Ha'eri's observations on the available manuscripts of *al-Ibāna*, there are two important factors discussed. First, these manuscripts were written and circulated in the 9th and 10th century in Gilan and Western Mazandaran; and second, some of the commentaries written in the margins of the manuscript contain sentences and phrases in local dialect.[826] The use of local Gilaki dialect in a Naseriyyeh Zaydi text is not unique to the commentaries in the margins of *al-*

[823] According to Dafteri, Imam al-Mo'ayyed's work has been considered to belong to a separate school of law, named after him as Mo'ayyediyyeh. Daftari, *A History of Shi'i Islam*, 159.
[824] 'Emadi Ha'eri "Moqaddameh," in *Al-Ibāna*, 9.
[825] There are five other works of Howsami known to scholars, as well as a commentry (*sharh*) on *al-Ibāna* by Howsami himself. 'Emadi Ha'eri, "Moqaddameh," in *Al-Ibāna*, 10.
[826] 'Emadi Ha'eri, "Moqaddameh," in *Al-Ibāna,* 13.

Ibāna manuscripts, or Howsami's own writings in the book. Another important Naseriyyeh book, authored by Abolfazl b. Shahrdavir Deylami about 150 years later and called *Tafsir-e Ketabollah*, also contains some similar language usage. The use and importance of the vernacular dialect in religious matters is also reflected in Howsami's fatwa on the permissibility of using God's Persian name while slaughtering an animal.[827] According to 'Emadi Ha'eri, *al-Ibāna* was a popular textbook for the Naseriyyeh scholars and students in northern Iran, and the commentaries and additions to the manuscripts attest to the wide circulation of the work in the region.[828]

Unfortunately, many of Naser al-Otrush's works have not survived, perhaps because of the lack of interest from the Zaydis of Yemen in the works of Zaydis abroad. It was in the 6th/12th century that some of the Iranian Zaydis accepted the imamate of Yemen's Zaydi imams, and in the next couple of centuries some of the works of the Iranian Zaydis were taken to Yemen and preserved there.[829]

Overall, the information about Zaydi activities in Gilan after the 7th /13th century is scant. We know the Kiyayis laid claim to the imamate, but there is very little to suggest that the rulers themselves were well-versed in Zaydi *fiqh* or pursued serious religious learning after the second generation. An 8th/14th century treatise written by a Zaydi scholar, although most probably dated before the rise to power of the Kiyayis, lays out some of the tensions between the religious expectations of the religious classes and temporal rule in Gilan. This treatise is written in Persian and its emphasis lies in the importance of *amr be ma'ruf va nahy az monkar* (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil), as it encourages the sayyids and rulers of Gilan to pursue this

[827] Ibid., 19.
[828] Ibid., 22.
[829] See Mohammad Kazem Rahmati for an account of the works of Iranian Zaydis which have been relocated to Yemen. Mohammad Kazem Rahmati, "Miras-e Farhangi-ye Zaydiyan-e Iran va Enteghal-e An be Yaman," *Tarikh-e Iran* 63 (Winter 2010): 73-101.

imperative. Part of the criticism put forth in this treatise is centered on the corruption of the sayyids and rulers of Gilan, who according to the author were pursuing worldly attainments in lieu of religious righteousness.[830]

While religiosity and the religious legitimacy of a learned Zaydi sayyid status initially played an integral role in the Kiyayi rulers' rise to power, after the first generation or so they grew more focused on temporal rule and left religious matters alone as they established their hold in Gilan. Among the later Kiyayi rulers, 'Ali Mirza Kiyayi (r. 883-910), who granted the future Shah Isma'il I refuge, was perhaps considerably more interested in religious matters.[831] 'Ali Mirza Kiyayi introduced certain legal and administrative reforms during his reign that were meant to align certain local practices more with Shari'a than *'orf* (customary law), and he encouraged conformity with Shar'i rule in general.[832] It is important to note that for the most part the Kiyayis represented the political front of Zaydi Shi'ism, and Zaydism survived as long as the Kiyayi rulers lent it their political power. Once the Kiyayi rulers converted to Twelver Shi'ism, Zaydism slowly disappeared from northern Iran.

The Emergence of the Safavid Order in Gilan and its Relations to the Zahediyyeh

Modern scholars have traced the relationship between the Safavids and Gilan back to Shah Isma'il I's Sufi ancestor, Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili (650-735), who was the *morid* (pupil) of Sheykh Zahed Gilani for 25 years. The presence of a certain tomb in Lahijan attributed to a Sheykh Zahed has led some historians to assume that the tomb was that of Sheykh Zahed Gilani, Shaykh Safi al-Din's religious mentor. The best available primary source on the life and career

[830] Rasul Ja'farian, "Resaleh-ye Darbareh-ye Gostaresh-e Fesad Dar Gilan-e Taht-e Seytareh-ye Omara-ye Zaydiyyeh," *Gozaresh-e Miras* (Abanmah, 1391/2012): 76.
[831] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 415-416.
[832] Ibid.

of Sheykh Zahed Gilani and Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili is Ebn Bazzaz's *Safvat al-Safa.* Relying on Ebn Bazzaz's account and the location of a tomb attributed to a Sheykh Zahed near Lahijan, scholars have assumed that this was Sheykh Zahed Gilani and that he lived somewhere around Lahijan. They have indicated two villages, one near Lahijan (in Biyeh Pish) named Sheykhanevar (also known as Sheykhanbar), where the tomb dedicated to Sheykh Zahed is located, and another near Fuman named Siyavarud, as the places of Sheykh Zahed's residence and initial burial.[833] Other scholars early on raised doubts about the tomb in Lahijan belonging to Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili's *morshed* and the founder of the Zahediyyeh Sufi order, although they had not offered an alternative location for Sheykh Zahed Gilani's residence and place of burial.[834] Overall, the accounts of Sheykh Zahed Gilani's whereabouts in the secondary sources are contradictory. However, the best account, and the most convincing, is that of 'Abbasqoli Ghaffarifard.[835]

Upon investigating Sheykh Zahed Gilani's life, place of residence, and burial, 'Abbasqoli Ghaffarifard concludes that Sheykh Zahed Gilani did not reside in the area corresponding to today's Gilan. Rather, he was a resident of Talesh, and more specifically northern Talesh, an area north of Astara and south of Lankaran, which is located in today's Republic of Azerbaijan.[836] In his effort to locate the place of Sheykh Zahed Gilani's birth and burial, Ghaffarifard's quest led

[833] See for instance Parsadust, *Shah Esma'il-e Avval*, 119. Manuchehr Sotudeh also locates Sheykh Zahed's tomb near Lahijan. See Manuchehr Sotudeh, *Az Astara ta Estarabad*, vol. 2, *Asar va Bana-ha-ye Tarikhi-ye Gilan-e Biyeh Pish*, 148-157. 'Abbas Panahi specifically says he was a resident of Siyavarud of Astara, yet in the footnotes he locates Siyavarud in Masuleh. Masuleh is 187 kilometers south of Astara, so they can't be the same village. 'Abbas Panahi, "Tariqat-e Zahediyeh-ye Gilan va Ta'sir-e An bar Jaryan-e Tasavvof-e Safaviyyeh," *Pazhuheshnameh-ye Tarikh* 20 (1389/2010), 14, 16: fn. 6.

[834] See for instance, Fereydun Nowzad, "Zahed-e Gilani," *Armaghan* 38, no. 5&6 (1348/1969): 347. Nowzad casts doubt on that tomb belonging to Sheykh Zahed Gilani, Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili's *morshed*. However, he does not offer an alternative location. Shurmij also briefly explains that the place of burial of Sheykh Zahed is in fact somewhere between Astara and Lankaran. See Mohammad Shurmij, "Ruykard-e Siyasi-ye Sheykh Zahed va Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili az Manzar-e Motun-e Tarikhi," *Tarikh va Farhang* 87 (1390/2011) fn, 93.

[835] 'Abbasqoli Ghaffarifard, "Khastgah-e Niyakan-e Sheykh Zahed va Mahal-e Komuni-ye Aramgah-e U" *Pazhuheshnameh-ye Tarikh* 12 (1387/2008): 65-81.

[836] While others, as mentioned above, have alluded to Sheykh Zahed's place of residence being in northern Talesh, to the best of my knowledge it is Ghaffarifard who actually located Sheykh Zahed's tomb there.

him to two villages in Azerbaijan named Sheykheh Karan (now known as Shiekeran), located near Lankaran, and Siyavarud (now probably known as Siyavar).[837]

According to Ebn Bazzaz, "Sheykh Zahed had two wives, one lived in Siyavarud [or Siavard] by the sea, and another in Hileh Karan,"[838] and when Safi al-Din Ardebili met him, he met him at his *zavieh* (convent, or order's headquarters) in Hileh Karan.[839] Obviously, those scholars who have located this village known as Siyavarud in Masuleh and Fuman, or near Lahijan, are not taking into account that Ebn Bazzaz specifically locates the village by the shore and not in the mountains, where Masuleh and Fuman are located.[840] Ebn Bazzaz also locates Sheykh Zahed's place of burial in Siyavarud. According to Ebn Bazzaz, when Sheykh Zahed got sick and was near death in Shirvan, Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili, honoring his request, brought him back to Gilan and his place of residence, Siyavarud. He then states that he is buried there.[841] In *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, among the events of the year 892/1487, Rumlu includes the story of Sheykh Heydar's dream, in which Sheykh Zahed asks him to move his body before it is overcome by the rising water of the sea. Sheykh Heydar then moves quickly to relocate Sheykh Zahed's body to another location.[842] Rumlu does not provide any specific place names, yet his account confirms that Siyavarud was by the sea and not in the mountainous areas near Masuleh

[837] Sheykhe Karan appears as Hile Karan in Ebn Bazzaz. Ghaffarifard contends that the name was perhaps changed after Sheykh Zahed's body was moved there for burial. Ghaffarifard does not say that Siyavar is the same as Siyavarud, but my search on Google maps led me to suspect that Siyavarud is the same as Siavar on the map. I have transliterated the names as they appear in Persian, and then provided the spelling that appears on Google maps in parentheses. Ebn Bazzaz Ardebili, *Safvat al-Safa*: *Dar Tarjomeh-ye Ahval va Aqval va Karamat-e Sheykh Safi al-Din Eshaq Ardebili*, ed. Gholamreza Majd Tabataba'i (Tehran: Nashr-e Zaryab, 1376/1997), 110.
[838] Ibid., 111.
[839] Ibid., 113.
[840] Manuchehr Sotudeh argues that the shore is probably the shore of Sefidrud, which has changed its course a few times. I find Sotudeh's explanations unlikely. For Sotudeh's explanation, see *Az Astara ta Estarabad*, vol. 2, 155-157.
[841] Ebn Bazzaz, *Safvat al-Safa*, 244-245. According to Ghaffarifard, the guardian of the tomb of Sheykh Zahed, an individual known as Sayyed Amir, contends that once Sheykh Heydar, and once Shah Isma'il, had repaired the Sheykh's mausoleum. Moreover, Ghaffarifard contends that the guardian's account of Sheykh Zahed's two wives and places of residence matches that of *Safvat al-Safa*, apparently without the guardian having been aware of *Safvat al-Safa*'s existence. Ghaffarifard, "Khastgah-e Niyakan-e Sheykh Zahed," 72-73.
[842] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, vol. 2, 864.

or Fuman. Hence, the understanding that Sheykh Zahed Gilani, the founder of the Zahediyyeh Order, was part of the religious landscape of Lahijan and Fuman is not correct. Sheykh Zahed Gilani's activities were centered in Talesh, and further away from Lahijan in fact than Ardebil.

The connection between the Zahediyyeh Order and the Safavid Order indeed culminated in the relationship between Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili, the founder of the Safavid order, and Sheykh Zahed Gilani himself. This relationship may even go further back to Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili's ancestor, Piruz al-Kordi al-Sanjani, known as Firuz Shah Zarrin Kolah, who was well known to Sheykh Zahed Gilani's ancestor Sheykh Bendar al-Kordi al-Sanjani, also from Kurdistan. Firuz Shah Zarrin Kolah was a wealthy man who had relocated to Gilan, specifically to the area known as Rangin,[843] in search of pasture for his flock. It is possible that Sheykh Zahed Gilani's ancestors were in the service of Firuz Shah Zarrin Kolah and had relocated to Gilan along with him. Firuz Shah Zarrin Kolah was the link between the people of Talesh and the Anatolian followers of the future Safavid order, and it appears that among Iranians, only those in Talesh were followers of Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili's order.[844] Sheykh Zahed Gilani gradually came to favor Safi al-Din over all other disciples and designated him as his successor to lead the Zahediyyeh Order, which subsequently became known as the Safavid Order. As Roger Savory has argued, designating Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili as the head of the Order was the beginning of the growth of the movement from a local movement to a more widespread one "whose influence was felt throughout Iran, Syria, and Asia Minor."[845] Eventually, Sheykh Zahed Gilani passed away in the year 700/1301 and Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili replaced him as the

[843] Ghaffarifard locates this area in Talesh and in the mountains between Ardebil and Astara. Ghaffarifard, "Khastgah-e Niyakan-e Sheykh Zahed," 76, fn. 7.
[844] Ghaffarifard, "Khastgah-e Niyakan-e Sheykh Zahed," 67-68. The Kurdish origins of Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili have been discussed by Safavid scholars. See Roger Savory, "Iran 1501-1629," in *History of Humanity: Scienific and Cultural Development,* vol. 5, *From the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Burke and Halil Inalcik (Routledge, 1994), 259.
[845] Roger Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, 8.

head of the Order.[846]

There are certain disagreements among Safavid scholars as to when the Sunni sheykhs of the Safavid Order began to embrace Shi‘ism. According to Roger Savory, the Shi‘a character of the Safavid Order began taking shape during Khwajeh ‘Ali’s leadership, while Rasul Ja‘fariyan argues that the Shi‘a characteristics of the Safavid Order were established by Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili himself in the 8th century and that the political movement was then initiated by Heydar.[847] Michel Mazzaoui, however, contends that the first four *sheykh*s of the Order, namely Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili, Sheykh Sadr, Khwajeh ‘Ali, and Sheykh Ibrahim, were all just simple Sufi *sheykh*s who did not entertain any form of Shi‘ism (neither a high version nor a popular folk version) beyond allocating a special place to the family of the Prophet, which was a characteristic of the “folk-Islam” of the time.[848] Rula Abisaab also points to the Safavids having accepted Shi‘ism in the late 14th century, albeit “a fervent but unrefined” form of Shi‘ism that bestowed “on their religious guides claims to prophetic ability and divine authority.”[849]

The Safavid Order was an important center for the spread and proliferation of Sufi teachings in Azerbaijan and surrounding areas. However, that was the extent of the Order’s activities until Sheykh Jonayd succeeded his father, Sheykh Ibrahim.[850] Once Sheykh Jonayd inherited his father’s status as the leader in 851/1447, the Safavid Order was ready for the next phase of its development.[851] It was under Sheykh Jonayd’s leadership that the Safavids and their many followers began initiating military campaigns in the surrounding areas against the

[846] Sarwar, *History of Shah Ismā‘īl Safawī*, 21.
[847] Rasul Ja‘fariyan, *Safaviyyeh dar ‘Arseh-ye Din, Farhang va Siyasat* (Qom: Pazhuheshkadeh-ye Howzeh va Daneshgah, 1379/2000), vol. 1, 19. Ja‘fariyan acknowledges the *gholoww* characteristic of Safavid Shi‘ism. Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, 15.
[848] Michel M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids: Šī‘ism, Ṣūfism, and the Gulāt* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1972), 71.
[849] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 8.
[850] Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids,* 71-72.
[851] Sarwar, *History of Shah Ismā‘īl Safawī*, 23-24; Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids,* 16.

"infidels." Sheykh Jonayd's activities did not go without notice. Soon the Qara Qoyunlu chief, Jahanshah, took note of his activities and sent him a threatening letter ordering him to disperse his followers and leave Ardebil or face the consequences.[852] This militant phase of the Safavid Order was to continue under Sheykh Jonayd's son Sheykh Heydar, as well as after Sheykh Heydar's death when his son 'Ali Mirza succeeded him.[853] Once 'Ali Mirza was killed in battle fighting the Aq Qoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan, his brothers Isma'il Mirza and Ibrahim Mirza fled and eventually ended up in Gilan. Isma'il Mirza, the future Shah Isma'il I, was chosen as the head of the Order, even though Ibrahim Mirza was older. Some scholars have argued that it is best to see Isma'il Mirza as representative of the militant *ghazi* faction of the Sufi Order, as opposed to its ascetic religious faction represented by Ibrahim Mirza.[854]

Safavid scholars have argued that Shah Isma'il I taking refuge in Gilan was in part due to the rise and flourishing of Sufi movements in Gilan in general and the connection to the Zahediyyeh Order. Colin Mitchell, for instance, contends that,

> Isma'īl spent the next six years in Lāhījān under the protection and tutelage of the Kār Kiyā dynasty that ruled intermittently over Gīlān, Deylam, and Māzandarān. The regions of Deylam and Tabaristān were host to a number of such heterodox groups, an unsurprising development given the strong presence of the esoteric Zaidī Shi'ite movement in the region since the ninth century.[855]

A closer look at the religious atmosphere of Gilan, however, may lead us to a different conclusion. The Safavids' followers' decision to go to Gilan was mostly made with practical and political considerations in mind. Although the sayyid status of the Kiyayi rulers perhaps played a role in that decision, it was Gilan's strategic location that made it an attractive hiding place for

[852] Sarwar, *History of Shah Ismā'īl Safawī,* 31.
[853] Mazzoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids*, 72; Sarwar, *History of Shah Ismā'īl Safawī*, 34.
[854] Mir Ja'fari et al., "Naqd va Barresi-ye 'Elal va Payamad-e Eqamat-e Isma'il Mirza-ye Safavi," 3.
[855] Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics,* 21.

the young Shah Isma'il I and his followers. Gilan was of a favorable distance from Ardebil, it was geographically difficult to attack, and had always remained resilient in the face of foreign influences. Also, the fact that the Kiyayi rulers and the Safavid refugees had a common enemy in the Aq Qoyunlu made their alliance a politically sound one.

As for the flourishing of Sufi movements in Gilan, it is important to say that Gilan was not necessarily more prone to the growth of Sufi organizations than other regions during that time. Similar to Mitchell's assertions, 'Abbas Panahi argues that "Al-e Kiya during Isma'il Mirza's stay in Lahijan had a great influence on Shah Isma'il's Shi'a leanings, and based on certain chroniclers' reports his Sufi and *gholoww* foundations reached their zenith during his stay in this land."[856] Panahi bases this assumption on the at times exaggerated account of *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*. Moreover, he links the development and flourishing of Sufi movements in Gilan between the 8th and the 10th century to the general growth of Shi'a movements and the rise to power of the Kiyayi Zaydis. As examples of such Sufi movements, Panahi refers to 'Abd al-Qader Gilani, the leader of the Qaderiyyeh Order, Sheykh Zahed Gilani, Mowlana Shams al-Din Lahiji, and Mahmud Pasikhani, founder of the Noqtavi movement.[857] These examples, provided as confirmation of the flourishing of Sufi activities in Gilan in general, are problematic and create a misguided idea about the religious milieu of Gilan and more precisely of Biyeh Pas and Biyeh Pish.[858] The religious landscape of Gilan needs to be evaluated, while keeping in mind the differences between the different parts of Gilan, namely Biyeh Pas, Biyeh Pish, and the Talesh area in the northwestern parts. As was discussed earlier, although Sheykh Zahed Gilani resided in the area that was known as Gilan at the time, his actual place of residence was farther

[856] Panahi, "Tarikh Negari ya Tarikh Sazi," 31.
[857] Ibid., 31-32.
[858] By this I mean the territories under Eshaqiyyeh and Kiyayi rule, not the northern Gilan and Talesh areas, which obviously at the time were also refered to as Gilan.

from eastern Gilan and Lahijan than it was from Ardebil. When looking at another example, that of ‘Abd al-Qader Gilani, master of the Qaderiyyeh order of the 5th/6th century, once again one is faced with the possibility that he may not have even been a native of Gilan. While some chronicles contend that he was indeed born in the province of Gilan, others assert that he was born in Gilan-e Gharb, a town near Kermanshah in Kurdistan, or in the village of Jilan near Baghdad.[859] In any event, even if ‘Abd al-Qader Gilani was born in Gilan, we know that he left Gilan once he reached puberty, or around the age of 18, and died in Baghdad around the age of 90. His Sufi order, the Qaderiyyeh Order, was not particularly successful in Gilan; rather, it gathered most of its following and support in Kurdistan and continues to do so. As for Mahmud Pasikhani, although a native of Gilan, his followers were mostly concentrated in Kashan, Qazvin, and Natanz, especially during the Safavid period.[860] Of the Sufi movements that have perhaps the most connection to Gilan, one can refer to the Nurbakhshiyyeh movement which, as mentioned earlier, allied themselves with the rulers of Biyeh Pas in opposition to the Safavids at one point. It is important to note that the relative proximity of Gilan to Ardebil made it attractive to Sufi followers of the Safavid Order, as they then managed to frequent the area while Isma‘il Mirza resided there. That, however, does not mean that Sufi orders necessarily flourished in Gilan more often than in other regions.[861]

Moreover, when making such general assumptions it is important to define Sufism in any given context, and to be careful not to equate it with just any esoteric Shi‘a movement, such as that of the Zaydis. In general, it seems the assumptions about the widespread Sufi movements in

[859] Jamshid Baqerzadeh and Sayyed Qalandar Sayyedzadeh Hashemi, “Zendegani, Shakhsiyyat va Asar-e ‘Abd al-Qader Gilani va Ta’sir-e Shakhsiyyat va Maktab-e U bar ‘Erfan va “‘Arefan-e Jahan-e Eslam,” *Hafez* 95 (1391/2013): 56-58.
[860] Karim Najafi Barzegar, “The Nuqtavī Movement and the Question of Its Exodus during the Ṣafavid Period (Sixteenth Century AD): A Historical Survey,” *Indian Historical Review* 40, no. 1 (2013): 48. For more on the Noqtavi movement and their belief system, see Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs*, 57-108.
[861] ‘Abdollahi, *Jaygah va Naqsh-e Gilan,* 106.

Gilan are exaggerated, as the examples often provided are of Sufi masters who either left Gilan for good or did not necessarily grow their movements successfully there, leaving us to wonder exactly how amiable Gilan's atmosphere was to such movements, especially under the Kiyayis. The Kiyayis in fact repelled such movements from their territory. Mar'ashi informs us of one such episode in the year 887/1482, when an individual he refers to simply as "Sufi" had set out to "deceive" and "dupe" people in the village of Malfejan near Lahijan. Sayyed Zahir al-Din then was accorded the task of bringing said individual to the presence of the Islamic judges and jurists, to demonstrate to him his wrong ways and deceit. After the confrontation with the religious scholars, he was then sent to exile in Korjiyan.[862] In fact, the influence of Gilan and the Kiyayis on the religious leanings of Shah Isma'il I, if any, was more likely based on a more legalistic outlook than a heterodox/Sufi one. The Kiyayi rulers tolerated the influx and passage of Safavid Sufi followers into their territory, yet they themselves were not always tolerant of Sufi orders in their domain.

The most common understanding among modern scholars is that once in Gilan, Shah Isma'il I was assigned a teacher, namely Shams al-Din Lahiji (also known as Gilani), to train him in Arabic, Persian, and Qur'anic sciences.[863] Shams al-Din Lahiji has been repeatedly mentioned in sources as Shah Isma'il I's teacher in Lahijan and referred to as a well-known local scholar, judge, and eventually Shah Isma'il I's very first appointed *sadr*, the most prestigious religious dignitary of his time.[864] In earlier secondary sources there was confusion over Shams al-Din Lahiji's identity. He was suspected to have been a follower of Muhammad Nurbakhsh, the

[862] Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan va Deylamestan*, 454-455.
[863] Hafez-e Abru, *Zobdat al-Tavarikh*, 48; Anonymous, *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan*, 64; Rumlu, *Ahsah al-Tavarikh*, 20.
[864] Khwandamir, *Habīb al-Siyar*, vol. 4, 468; Shirazi, *Takmelat al-Akhbar*, 40; Hafez-e Abru, *Zobdat al-Tavarikh,* 68.

leader of the Nurbakhshiyyeh Order.[865] The conflation of these two individuals was a result of similarities in their names. The well-known student of Nurbakhsh was an individual named Shams al-Din Muhammad Lahiji Nurbakhshi, also known as Gilani, who was the author of a commentary on *Golshan-e Raz*.[866] He was from Gilan; however, he lived in Shiraz most of his life. Shah Isma'il I once visited this individual in Shiraz.[867]

The confusion surrounding the identity of Shah Isma'il I's teacher in Lahijan has now been discussed and resolved.[868] In a recent article, 'Ali Salari Shadi casts doubt on the exact role Shams al-Din Lahiji played in the education and upbringing of Shah Isma'il I. Parsadust, for instance, contends that Shams al-Din Lahiji "introduced Isma'il to the *Ahkam* [commandments] and *Usul* [jurisprudence] of Shi'ism."[869] Salari Shadi, however, argues that there was little to no religious conformity between Shah Isma'il I's entourage and the inhabitants of Gilan at the time, and that it is unlikely that Shah Isma'il I's *Qizilbash* guardians would have delegated his education to those with a different religious identity. Other Safavid scholars, however, have drawn different conclusions. For instance, Colin Mitchell's take on Shams al-Din Lahiji and his beliefs is as follows:

> It would appear that Shams al-Dīn Lahījī adhered to a number of heterodox doctrines that had flourished in the Iranian and Anatolian hinterlands in the post-Mongol period of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, namely the Shi'ite-rooted doctrines of human infallibility (*'ismat)*, resurrection (*ma'ād*), and the belief in an imminent apocalyptic event (*sā'at al-sa'a*).[870]

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[865] See for example Roemer, "The Safavid Period," 197.
[866] Shushtari, *Majales al-Mo'menin*, vol. 1, 520 and vol. 2, 150-156.
[867] Ibid., vol. 2, 152-153.
[868] Even recently scholars have made the mistake of conflating the two. See for example Hamid Hajiyan Pour and Akbar Pour Hakimi, "Karkard-ha-ye Ejtema'i-ye Tariqat-e Nurbakhshiyyeh az Aghaz ta 'Asr-e Safavi," *Pazhuheshnameh-ye Tarikh-e Ejtema'i va Eqtesadi* 1, no. 1 (Spring and Summer 1391/2012), 37.
[869] Parsadust, *Shah Esma'il-e Avval*, 246.
[870] Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics,* 21-22. Also see 'Abdollahi, *Jaygah va Naqsh-e Gilan*, 106. 'Abdollahi also states that Shams al-Din Lahiji played an important role in the education and training of Shah Isma'il.

It appears that Mitchell is making these conclusions by projecting the religious beliefs of Shah Isma'il I and the Safavid followers back onto Lahiji. In fact, as Salari Shadi points out, our information on this individual is very scant and none of the primary sources discuss the particularities of his religious beliefs. Moreover, by tracing the accounts provided in the chronicles, Salari Shadi reaches the conclusion that the story of Lahiji and his role as Shah Isma'il I's teacher likely has been exaggerated, and that the earlier sources like *Fotuhat-e Shahi*, *Habib al-Seyr*, *Lubb al-Tavarikh*, and *Javaher al-Akhbar,* as well as the local chronicle *Tarikh-e Khani: Havades-e Chehel Saleh-ye Gilan*, do not even mention him as Shah Isma'il I's teacher. The only reference made by some of these sources is to him as the first *sadr* Shah Isma'il I designated, and to the fact that he was later either replaced by Qazi Mohammad Kashi or made to work in conjunction with him.[871] According to Salari Shadi, those sources that mention Shams al-Din Lahiji in the capacity of Isma'il Mirza's teacher, such as Hasan Rumlu's *Ahsan al-Tavarikh,* 'Abdi Beyg Shirazi's *Takmelat al-Akhbar*, and Eskandar Beyg Monshi's '*Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, all do so under the influence of the author of *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan,* which is not a very trusted work.[872] Sam Mirza Safavi's account in *Tohfeh-ye Sami,* interestingly enough, only refers to Shams al-Din Lahiji as the teacher of the Safavid princes, and not of Shah Isma'il I. Sam Mirza's identification of Shams al-Din Lahiji is as follows:

> Qazi Shams al-Din the teacher was born in Lahijan of Gilan, the same place where the blessed Saheb Qaran [Isma'il's epithet] was present. From there he set out with him to conquer the world… in the beginning of this dynasty's rule, he was the *sadr*… after a short while he left that post… Sometimes he would teach the princes, most but me, and at

[871] Qommi states, "Qazi Mohammad began sharing the office of *sadr* with Qazi Shams al-Din." See Qommi, *Kholasat al-Tavarikh,* vol. 1, 84. Qobad al-Hosseyni also only refers to Shams al-Din as the *sadr*, but not as Shah Isma'il I's teacher. Qobad al-Hosseyni, *Tarikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezam Shah,* 24; Ghaffari Qazvini, *Tarikh-e Jahan Ara*, 268.

[872] 'Ali Salari Shadi, "Shams al-Din Gilani Mo'alem-e Shah Esma'il-e Safavi Vaqe'iyyat ya Afsaneh," *Dofaslnameh-ye 'Elmi-Pazhuheshi: Tarikhnameh-ye Iran Ba'd az Eslam* 5 (1391/2012): 130. Most secondary sources agree that Shams al-Din Lahiji was Shah Isma'il I's teacher and played a role in his education. Salari Shadi, however, makes a compelling case against taking these assumption for granted.

present he is over ninety years old.[873]

Sam Mirza's account corroborates other accounts and points to Qazi Shams al-Din Lahiji's status as a *sadr* which, given that he was a *qazi* (judge), would make sense. However, he makes no mention of him having been Shah Isma'il I's teacher, only the teacher of other princes excluding himself. According to Salari Shadi, "if he [Qazi Shams al-Din] was really his [Sam Mirza's] father's teacher, it would have been a good thing for him to be a student of someone who had been his father's teacher. The fact that he excludes himself is noteworthy."[874]

Since the earlier and more credible sources do not refer to Shams al-Din Lahiji as Shah Isma'il I's teacher, it is possible that the author of *Jahangosha-ye Khaqan* forged this relationship in order to situate Isma'il Mirza within a more traditional Islamic educational milieu. Having done that indeed is an expression of the tensions surrounding the heterodox milieu Isma'il Mirza himself emerged from, and among at least the Iranian scholars and literati. Isma'il Mirza's entourage, the *Qizilbash* who accompanied him to Gilan, were most probably more interested in maintaining control over Shah Isma'il I's education and upbringing themselves, and wouldn't have been too keen on letting others take over such an important task. That being said, residing in Gilan must have had some kind of influence on Shah Isma'il I. After all, he did choose Shams al-Din Lahiji, a learned scholar and a judge from Gilan, to hold "the most important religious function in the Safavid state."[875] This indeed demonstrates Shah Isma'il I's awareness of the importance of Iranian religious authorities, to occupy the formal religious offices of his emerging empire.

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[873] Sam Mirza Safavi, *Tohfeh-ye Sami*, ed. Vahid Dastgerdi (Tehran: Armaghan, 1314/1935), 51.
[874] Salari Shadi, "Shams al-Din Gilani," 133.
[875] Willem Floor, "The 'Sadr' or head of the Safavid religious administration, judiciary and endowments and other members of the religious institution," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 150, no.2 (2000): 461-500.

Nevertheless, even if there was any conformity in religious leanings between the Safavids and Shams al-Din Lahiji, it stopped there and did not extend to the rulers of Gilan or the population at large. Hence, once Shah Isma'il I declared Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion, the population of Gilan, like the population of the rest of the territories under Shah Isma'il I's rule, were destined to be converted. Although most of the Safavid efforts at converting the population were geared towards the Sunni inhabitants, the Zaydis of Gilan did not remain immune, and as sayyids ruling on a similar legitimizing platform, they needed to be incorporated within the Twelver community along with their religious followers and base. The process of conversion was gradual, but vital to creating a homogenous population loyal to the Safavids. In the following section, I discuss this process as it pertains to the rulers and population of both Eastern and Western Gilan.

On the Path to Twelver Shi'ism

The process of conversion in Gilan began soon after Shah Isma'il I came to power but was never fully completed. Even today, parts of the population of the province of Gilan, mainly the town of Talesh, adhere to Sunnism.[876] There is very little information on the conversion of Sunnis in Western Gilan, which has prompted some scholars to conclude that the Western Gilanis converted to Twelver Shi'ism at a much later date than the Eastern Gilanis.[877] While there are more references made to the conversion of the Zaydis in Eastern Gilan, which makes it easier to trace the process, the evidence suggests that the religious characteristics of Western

[876] Also see Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 174 for discussion on the pockets of population in Safavid Iran that were not successfully converted.
[877] Mohammad Karim Yusof Jamali and 'Abbas Panahi, "Chegunegi-ye Taghyir-e Mazhab-e Mardom-e Gilan az Tashayyu'-e Zaydi be Tashayyu'-e Davazdah Imami dar 'Asr-e Safavi," *Majjaleh-ye Fekri va Farhangi-ye Payam-e Jangal* 2 (1390): 77. The authors contend that the Western Gilanis converted only after Shah 'Abbas I came to power and took control over all of Gilan.

Gilan and its rulers did not remain constant during the Safavid era, and most probably they too were gradually converted to Twelver Shi‘ism in the same time period.

The Safavid shahs began the gradual process of converting the provincial population by first converting the local rulers of Gilan, who then contributed to the integration and conversion of the masses. Using local rulers as their agents was an indispensible component of the larger Safavid policy of both exercising indirect political control in Gilan and at the same time implementing their policy of religious conversion. This was achieved specifically through raising and educating the sons of local rulers, and given the circumstances one has to assume this education consisted of Twelver Shi‘a teachings.[878] The conversion of the diverse religious groups in Gilan slowly achieved the goal of religious homogeneity desired by the Safavid center, which then paved the way for more central political control. By the time Shah ‘Abbas I took full control over all of Gilan, it seems that most of the population had already converted to Twelver Shi‘ism.

By their nature, the sources convey more information about the ruling classes. It seems that the Kiyayi rulers, motivated by political incentives, showed little resistance to conversion, even though their conversion may have lacked real conviction, especially in the early years. By the time Khan Ahmad II came to power, however, he had internalized Twelver Shi‘ism and demonstrated his true disdain for the Zaydis.

There are some discrepancies in the secondary sources when it comes to the time of conversion of the Kiyayi family. Rohrborn, quoting Rabino, dates the conversion to the time of

[878] The overall education at the time of the Safavids entailed religious education, especially Twelver Shi‘a teachings. See ‘Abdolhosseyn Nava’i and ‘Abbasqoli Ghaffarifard, *Tarikh-e Tahavvolat-e Siyasi, Ejtima‘i, Eqtisadi va Farhangi-ye Iran dar Dowran-e Safaviyyeh* (Tehran: Samt, 1381/2002), 388.

Khan Ahmad I,[879] while Manuchehr Sotudeh, for instance, dates their conversion to the time of Khan Ahmad II in 960.[880] Yusof Jamali and ʻAbbas Panahi also date the conversion to 932/1526, which is towards the end of Khan Ahmad I's rule.[881]

It is likewise difficult to draw an exact time frame for the conversion from the primary sources. The earliest clear reference to the conversion of northern Gilan's rulers that I have come across is in *ʻAlam Ara-ye Shah Esmaʻil.* This source claims that the uncle of Khan Ahmad I, Mirza ʻAli Kiyayi, who was the ruler of Eastern Gilan at the time, was converted by Shah Ismaʻil I during a raid in 909/1502. This is the only source that refers to the forced conversion of ʻAli Kiya and his troops. According to the source:

> Once *Navvab-e Giti Setan* [Shah Ismaʻil] captured the fortress of Firuzkuh, ʻAli Kiya went to kiss his feet and from among his army whoever had accepted the religion, [his life] was spared and became a Twelver. A few of the soldiers, however, ran away and went to Hasan Kiya and told him what had just happened. He was very surprised that his brother had converted to Twelver Shiʻism.[882]

Given the nature of the source, it is possible that the account of the conversion of ʻAli Kiya and his troops is somewhat exaggerated, especially since other chroniclers only mention him surrendering to Shah Ismaʻil I and do not elaborate on the forced conversion.

One of the ways in which the Safavid shahs built alliances with local rulers and sought to implement their policies in the provinces, as was discussed earlier, was through raising and training the young local princes at the court. As a way to retain some form of control, they kept "the sons of local rulers as hostages in the capital, conditioning them as loyal Safavid

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[879] Klaus Michael Rohrborn, *Nezam-e Eyalat dar Dowreh-ye Safaviyyeh,* trans. Keykavus Jahandari (Tehran: Entesharat-e ʻElmi va Farhangi, 1383/2004), 144.
[880] Manuchehr Sotudeh, *Az Astara ta Estarabad*, vol. 2, *Asar va Bana-ha-ye Tarikhi-ye Biyeh Pish* (Tehran: Anjoman-e Asar-e Melli, 1351), 78.
[881] Yusof Jamali and Panahi, "Chegunegi-ye Taghyir-e Mazhab-e Mardom-e Gilan," 72.
[882] Anonymous, *ʻAlam Ara-ye Shah Esmaʻil*, ed. Asghar Montazer Saheb (Tehran: Bongah-e Tarjomeh va Nashr-e Ketab, 1384/2005), 121.

subjects."[883] The local rulers often sent their sons to the court as a demonstration of good faith, and the shahs saw to their education and training. It is important to note that this was at times a mutually beneficial agreement. While this gave the shah a great deal of leverage over the provincial ruler, the young future ruler would benefit from the courtly education and proximity to the center. However, this practice did not always guarantee the future ruler's loyalty, nor did it mean that the local ruler did not have to fear military invasion. Depending on different contingencies and circumstances, this practice yielded different results.

In *Khold-e Barin*, Valeh Esfehani states that the young Khan Ahmad I was receiving education at the court of Shah Isma'il I when his father and uncle ('Ali Kiya) were both killed in Gilan during a local conflict with one another.[884] Although Esfehani does not specify the nature of the education Khan Ahmad I received at the court, it is safe to assume that he was receiving religious education among other things.[885] When Khan Ahmad I's father and uncle were killed in Gilan, Shah Isma'il I aided the young ruler to get to Gilan and sent his troops along with him to assure his success. Therefore, it is plausible that by that point he had already demonstrated his good faith by converting.

There is, however, more contradictory evidence to sort through regarding Khan Ahmad I's conversion. In *Tarikh-e Khani*, Hosseyn Lahiji states that in the year 914/1508-9 Khan Ahmad I was anxious to visit the shrine of al-Mo'ayyed be'llah, one of the famous Zaydi imams.[886] According to Lahiji, while he was there he "gave alms and made donations."[887] This story is an indication of Khan Ahmad I's devotion to Zaydism. However, another document from

[883] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 146.
[884] Valeh Esfehani, *Khold-e Barin*, 155.
[885] Tahere 'Azimzadeh contends that perhaps this was the time that Khan Ahmad I converted to Twelver Shi'ism. 'Azimzadeh, "Sadat-e Kiya va Tashayyu'-e Imamiyeh," 222.
[886] For more on al-Mo'ayyed be'llah and his religious career, see Rahmati, *Zaydiyyeh dar Iran*, 93-99.
[887] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 339.

the same year points to Khan Ahmad I's devotion to Twelver Shi'ism. This document is the *vaqfnameh* of Sohan, published by Muhammad Taqi Mir-'Abolqasemi in his article *Vaqfnameh-ye Sohan*.[888] This *vaqfnameh* is dated to the year 914/1508-9 and bears the proof of Khan Ahmad's conversion - or at least his nominal conversion - to Twelver Shi'ism. This *vaghfnameh* covers the village of Sohan, which was endowed by Khan Ahmad I in the name of Ala'addin son of Amir Najm al-Din Taleqani and his male descendants. The names of the twelve Imams are clearly stated in this document. Khan Ahmad I's confession to Islam and adherence to Twelver Shi'ism, and the importance of spreading the "true religion, Twelver Shi'ism," are all mentioned in the beginning of the document. In this *vaqfnameh*, Khan Ahmad I's devotion to Twelver Shi'ism was specifically addressed. However, there still remains the question, did he really convert to Twelver Shi'ism? How can we explain the discrepancy in the sources? One explanation is that perhaps he simply converted soon after he made the pilgrimage to the Zaydi shrine. However, a more likely explanation lies in the hypothesis that while Khan Ahmad I's conversion was most definitely welcomed and encouraged by the Safavid center, he perhaps risked alienating the Gilani population, who at that point still remained Zaydi. Therefore, he tried to maintain his religious legitimacy among the local population by making a pilgrimage to the shrine of the beloved Zaydi imam, and the audience for his conversion consisted only of the Safavids.[889] Another explanation is the fact that sometimes shrines and places of pilgrimage were shared amongst different religious groups, which means he could have visited the shrine habitually, and regardless of his devotion to Twelver Shi'ism.

[888] Mir Abolqasemi, "Vaqfnameh-ye Sohan."
[889] 'Azimzadeh, "Sadat-e Kiya va Tashayyu'-e Emamiyeh," 220. 'Azimzadeh explains the discrepancies in the dates given for the conversion of the Kiyayi family by stating that Khan Ahmad I kept his religion secret in Gilan, and that later Khan Ahmad II, along with the population of Gilan, reconverted to Twelver Shi'ism.

While Khan Ahmad I's real devotion to Twelver Shi'ism is questionable, there is little doubt that Khan Ahmad II took his devotion to Twelver Shi'ism seriously. The grandson of Khan Ahmad I, Khan Ahmad II was only one year old when he inherited the throne as ruler of Gilan. At the time of his father's death, he was also at the court of Shah Tahmasb I following the Safavid practice of holding on to the local ruler's sons mentioned earlier. During his residence at the court, Khan Ahmad II received education until he reached the age of puberty.[890] Khan Ahmad II was without a doubt a Twelver Shi'a, and Shah Tahmasb I in fact wished to stress this fact to his own advantage. In a letter sent to Khan Ahmad II on behalf of Shah Tahmasb I, written by Qazi Mohammad Varamini in the form of a *qasideh*, he stresses how Khan Ahmad II was chosen to spread Twelver Shi'ism in the name of the shah.[891] At the same time, he used Khan Ahmad II's lack of proper religiosity to undermine and challenge him. When it came to questioning Khan Ahmad II's legitimacy and religious conduct, Shah Tahmasb I sent the local ruler a confrontational letter emphasizing his improper behavior, accusing him of allowing adulterous practices to flourish in his realm, including permitting powerful men to hold onto young men as lovers. Moreover, he accused his appointed *sadr*, Molla 'Abd al-Razzaq, of playing music and gambling in his court gatherings.[892]

Despite failing to live up to the standards of religiosity expected of him by Shah Tahmasb I, Khan Ahmad II's devotion to Twelver Shi'ism manifested itself in different ways. During his rule, he reached out to high-ranking ulema of his time with legal and religious inquiries. For instance, he corresponded with *mojtahed*s like Sayyed Hosseyn Mojtahed Karaki (d. 1001/1592) and Shaykh Baha' al-Din (d. 1030/1621). Sayyed Hosseyn Mojtahid Karaki wrote at least three

[890] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 110.
[891] Nowzad, ed. *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 200.
[892] Ibid., 68.

treatises in response to Khan Ahmad II's inquiries.[893] In the same manner, the renowned Sheykh Baha' al-Din also wrote a treatise in response to Khan Ahmad II's legal questions.[894] Apart from interest in religious matters, it is important to note that Khan Ahmad II was also a great patron of the arts and sciences at his court. He supported the physician Hakim Kamal al-Din Hosseyn Shirazi,[895] the calligrapher Mowlana 'Abd al-Jabbar Astarabadi,[896] and the musicians Mohammad Mo'men and Zeytun.[897]

Moreover, Khan Ahmad II actively targeted the Zaydi population in the province. Unfortunately, it is difficult to ascertain whether any material considerations, such as control of economic resources or social control of *vaqf* properties, played a role in Khan Ahmad II's insistance on converting all of the remaining Zaydis. At the social and religious level, one particular letter from Khan Ahmad II, written in response to a local religious preacher named Mir Jalil, is especially illuminating. Mir Jalil had asked Khan Ahmad II to stop his mistreatment of the Zaydis in the province. In response, Khan Ahmad II declares his dislike for the Zaydis and curses Naser al-Haq and Imam Mo'ayyed be'llah, likening the Zaydis to "dogs."[898] The letter points to an overall religious tension between the Zaydi and Twelver population of the province. In the letter, Khan Ahmad II complains about two local religious figures named Molla Soleyman and Molla Mahmud, both of whom followed the Zaydi school of jurisprudence. The frustrated Khan Ahmad II wrote, "they tell of this Molla Soleyman who would remarry people's wives who have been married by a Twelver Shi'a judge, and that other cursed one, Molla Mahmud… who says that stating 'Ali Vali Allah in the *azan* (call to prayer) would make the *vozu* (ablution)

[893] Rasul Ja'farian, *Kavosh-ha-ye Tazeh dar Bab-e Ruzegar-e Safavi* (Qum: Nashr-e Adiyan, 1384/2005), 104.
[894] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, Appendix iii, 159.
[895] Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi,* vol. 1, 168.
[896] Ibid., 175.
[897] Nowzad, ed. *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 315, 321.
[898] Ibid., 185.

invalid."[899] Khan Ahmad II then continues to curse the Zaydis and state how killing them is necessary (*vajeb al-qatl*). This letter demonstrates that by the mid to late 10th century, Zaydism was still being practiced in Eastern Gilan, but that the Zaydis faced persecution and competition from the growing Twelver Shi'a community. In another letter in response to a local who requested that Khan Ahmad II pay attention to repairs and maintenance of the shrine of Sheykh Reza Kiya, who apparently was a Zaydi sayyid, Khan Ahmad II attacks Zaydi beliefs and states that not all sayyids are *ma'sum* (infallible), and that unless they adhere to the Twelver tenets, their mere genealogy as sayyids does not warrant them respect.[900]

Khan Ahmad II took active measures to insure the growth and normalization of Twelver Shi'ism in the province. He appointed *Sheykh al-Islam*s, *vaqf* administrators, prayer leaders, preachers, and religious leaders, encouraging the community to follow their lead in all religious matters. There are two extant decrees made by Khan Ahmad II for the office of *Sheykh al-Islam*. In the year 994/1586, he appointed a scholar known as Molla 'Abdollah as the *Sheykh al-Islam*. The decree lists the "promotion of good deeds and prohibition of bad deeds," (*amr-e be ma'ruf va nahy az monkar*) and "insuring the presence of the faithful in mosques and their proper adherence to religious norms and rituals" among the duties of the *Sheykh al-Islam.*[901] Moreover, the decree invites all other officials, including the *hokkam* (governors), *kalantar*s (chief provosts), and *kadkhoda*s (heads of the villages) to follow his "lead in implementing all religious decrees."[902]

The second decree by Khan Ahmad II was made for the appointment of Sheykh Karam Allah of Rankuh to the office of *Sheykh al-Islam*. In this decree, Khan Ahmad II states that for

[899] Ibid.
[900] Ibid., 136.
[901] Ibid., 157.
[902] Ibid.

responses to their religious questions and problems, people should refer to Sheykh Karam Allah, and they should follow his fatwas in all matters.[903]

It is important to note the importance of the office of *Sheykh al-Islam* in implementing religious policies. This office existed in Persian provinces as early as the 15th century under the Timurid rulers, where the *Sheykh al-Islam*s issued fatwas and were well-versed in Shi'a law.[904] Under the Safavids, the office of *Sheykh al-Islam* was of great importance, representing the highest religious authority.[905] The *Sheykh al-Islam* wielded great power both at the capital and in the provinces.[906] Usually it was the shah that appointed individuals to this office at the capital and in other major cities like Mashhad, Herat, Ardebil, and so forth.[907] In smaller towns and less significant provinces, however, the local governors would appoint the *Sheykh al-Islam*, as can be demonstrated by the two decrees made by Khan Ahmad II. The *Sheykh al-Islam*s, and the *mojtahed*s who occupied this office, played a significant role in the promulgation of Shi'a doctrine and practices among the population, facilitating the process of conversion.[908]

As for the rulers of Western Gilan and their role in propagating Twelver Shi'ism, there is little information available. However, from references in the sources it appears that Shah Tahmasb I followed the same policy of "educating" and "training" the sons of the Western Gilani rulers for future rule. After Shah Tahmasb I put an end to the rule of Amireh Dobbaj in Western Gilan, he allowed Khan Ahmad II to take control over all of Gilan, but only until Amireh Dobbaj's grandson, Jamshid Khan, who had been trained and educated by Dashdar Beg

[903] Ibid.,162.
[904] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 10.
[905] Devin Stewart, "The First Shaykh al-Islam of the Safavid Capital Qazvin," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 3 (1996): 387.
[906] Willem Floor, "The Sadr or head of the Safavid religious administration, judiciary and endowments and other members of the religious institution," *Zeitschrift Der DeutchenMorgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, Band 150 (2000): 486-487.
[907] Ibid.
[908] On the prominence and role of the *Sheykh al-Islam* of Herat, see Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 39-41.

Safavi on behalf of Shah Tahmasb I, was ready to take control.[909] Clearly the shah did not want Khan Ahmad II to become too powerful, and at the same time he would have naturally trained the future ruler, Jamshid Khan, within the Twelver Shi'a tradition.

Even more importantly, by 934/1527, even before Jamshid Khan was raised and trained at the court of Shah Tahmasb I, the Sunni affiliation of the Eshaqiyyeh family is questioned as we get a glimpse into Amireh Dobbaj's relationship to Shah Qavam al-Din Tarashti, the head of the Nurbakshiyyeh order at the time. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Amireh Dobbaj had formed an alliance with Shah Qavam al-Din Tarashti in opposition to Shah Tahmasb I and his vizier Qazi Jahan. Born out of the declining Kubraviyyeh Sufi order of Central Asia, the Nurbakhshiyyeh was a Sufi order led by Mohammad Nurbakhsh, informed by his claim to be God's chosen messiah.[910] Hasan Rumlu clearly states that Amireh Dobbaj was a follower of the Nurbakhshiyyeh which, while not an orthodox group, was certainly characterized as a Shi'a order.[911]

Conclusion

The southern Caspian littoral region had a heterogeneous religious population. Most of the inhabitants of Gilan and Deylam were late converts to Islam, and when they did convert they converted to Zaydi or Isma'ili Shi'ism. At the same time, pockets of Sunni communities also flourished in Western Gilan. Non-Muslim minorities, like Jewish and Armenian communities, made the religious tapestry of Gilan more complex, as also alliances and animosities among different groups shaped Gilan's socio-political realities. While the Zaydis of Gilan managed to

[909] Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 39-40; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'Alam Ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol.1, 111.
[910] For more on Mohammad Nurbakhsh's life, work, and his messianic order see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya Between Medieval and Modern Islam*.
[911] Rumlu, *Ahsan al-Tavarikh*, 480-483.

put an end to the remainder of Isma‘ili activities and for some time dominated the religious scene, they themselves began to be subsumed by the Twelver Shi‘as after the Safavids came to power.

While the Zaydis of Gilan also at times entertained more heterodox religious sentiments, they were not necessarily more prone to such ideas than other localities. In fact, the Kiyayi rulers tried to expel such groups from their territories, and they themselves more or less followed a legalistic Zaydi tradition that had flourished in Gilan even before they came to power. The recent evaluations of texts from the Zaydi traditions of northern Iran are attestation to the serious legalistic works that were composed and circulated in Gilan in the centuries prior to the Safavids' rise to power.

The Safavids, however, gradually managed to convert the Zaydis to Twelver Shi‘ism, and this was part of their larger efforts at acculturating and assimilating the diverse populations they wished to control. That being said, the Safavids' reasons for converting the Sunni population to Twelver Shi‘ism within their realm are clear, while it may not be as obvious why they would insist on the conversion of the Zaydis. Yet Zaydi political theory, with its emphasis on the superior individual qualities of the imam and the necessity of rebelling against unjust rulers, posed a major threat to the Safavids alongside the moral-religious significance of sayyid lineage among the Kiyayi rulers whose family had long roots in Iran.

Concluding Remarks

Many historical accounts dealing with the territory referred to as Iran or *Iranzamin* assume a certain continuity of Iranism and unified Iranian identity across the vast and diverse regions of what we today call Iran. Scholars have of course treated these modern discourses, articulated in the 20th century, an era of nation-building, with suspicion, and have challenged the attitudes, sensibilities, and practices believed to have been steadily tied to Iranism over time. At the same time, much scholarly attention has remained focused on the history of centers of power as they shifted and developed through the centuries. There is little attention paid to the stories and voices of those on the margins, including those on the geographical and political peripheries.

This study aimed to bring the political - and to some extent, the religious - history of Gilan to light, while also keeping the focus on the Safavids and their intricate and complex relationship to Gilan. One of the main objectives here was to show that it is possible to imagine a different periodization of history, as we shift our attention from the centers of power to their peripheral loci and look at historical developments from the provinces' perspective. While this study was not a local history *per se*, it inevitably traced Gilan's history on its own terms. Taking into account the particular ethnic and geographical divisions within Gilan, as well as the relevant movements of people, flow of ideas, and religious articulations, has allowed us to better understand the dynamic of political relations in Gilan's regional and trans-regional contexts. The rise of the 'Alid dynasties in the southern Caspian littoral, the continuation of local political dynastic rule, as well as Zaydi religious expressions, in conjunction with other Shi'a movements,

including that of the Isma‘ilis, have decisively shaped the political and religious history of Gilan and beyond.

Gilan’s geographical location played a great role in setting it apart from the rest of the Iranian plateau. Comfortably tucked away between the Alborz mountains and the Caspian Sea, Gilan was introduced to Islam at a later date than most of the Iranian mainland. It also became an attractive refuge for the ‘Alids and their religio-political movements, a fact which played a great role in decentering Sunnism and eventually modifying the religious composition of the greater region. Zaydism grew strong in Eastern Gilan, and for centuries it dominated its religious landscape while also vying for political dominance. Evidently, Zaydi political theory offered a mechanism for politico-religious dominance, as the imam had to set out by sword to claim that status. The local political culture remained distinct and persistent in Gilan. Both the Eshaqiyyeh and the Kiyayis, who were established long before the Safavids came to power, managed to thwart the full incorporation of the region by the previous powers, and only intermittently paid nominal tribute to Timurids, Aq Qoyunlu, and Qara Qoyunlu. After coming to power with the aid of their Mar‘ashi neighbors in Mazandaran, the Kiyayis surpassed their influence and power in the region and even at times managed to flex their muscles beyond their traditional territories, albeit for short periods of time. The Eshaqiyyeh, who supposedly traced their lineage back to the ancient Iranian kings and entertained Sunnism as opposed to the Zaydi faith of their neighbors, set themselves apart from the Kiyayis. These political and religious divisions between Eastern and Western Gilan shaped much of the internal political dynamic of Gilan and even informed their interactions with the outside world, as it became a great tool for, for example, the Safavids to exploit to keep these local dynasties in check.

The internal affairs and projects of these smaller local dynasties in many ways echoed those of the greater empires. To establish themselves locally, the rulers allocated local lands as *toyul* to their family members, established armies, promoted diplomatic marriages, manipulated local alliances, and engaged in warfare as the means for the control of resources and land. The Kiyayis, for example, established lavish courts and engaged in the patronage of religious knowledge as well as the arts and sciences. They also applied much vigor and care in their relationship with the greater regional powers in order to preserve themselves locally.

For most of their rule, the Kiyayis maintained a certain level of power and prestige locally; however, their status did not remain constant. At times their ambitions proved unachievable, as local divisions and skirmishes between the Kiyayis and their Eshaqiyyeh neighbors and other local contenders depleted their resources and left them vulnerable and unable to expand. As isolated and inaccessible as pre-modern Gilan might have been, it was still influenced by the shifts in power beyond its borders. The pressures of greater regional and local tensions were felt locally and influenced the local proceedings as well. As the Safavids came to power, some of the greatest changes and transformations were to take place for Gilan. Gilan's silk made it too attractive to the Safavids to let it continue as a mere vassalage.

The Safavids began the process of incorporating Gilan into their polity first through policies of a diplomatic nature, yet the threat of force and invasion always lurked nearby. The relationship between Gilan and the Safavids was marked by constant negotiations, which included efforts to both incorporate the local Gilani elite within the Safavid administration, as well as to gradually introduce Safavid representatives in Gilan. This, however, was not a simple task, as it involved renegotiating notions such as sovereignty and political authority at the local level. As the local rulers competed for power and influence, they at times inadvertently opened

the door to more Safavid intervention, gradually lending their intrusions an aura of legitimacy that was absent in the early years of Safavid rule. In the early decades of their rule, Safavid shahs were not able to singlehandedly influence the ruling configurations at the local level, as the local understandings of legitimacy, hereditary rule, and territorial claims remained firmly in place. Marriage as a means to consolidate political alliances with the local Gilani ruling elite remained an effective tool in the early decades, which then led to more complicated interfamilial relationships and tied the next generation of local rulers to the Safavid center, gradually blurring the line between the center and peripheral loyalties. The most effective mechanism of peripheral control in the early decades was to create a balance of power between the ruling families of Western and Eastern Gilan through the policies of divide and rule. The Safavids took advantage of the pre-existing political and geographical divisions to insert control and influence at the local level.

The very first Safavid military incursion into Gilan was arranged specifically in order to remove Khan Ahmad II from power, as his growing power was ultimately becoming potentially too perilous to the Safavids to ignore. Shah Tahmasb I's decision to remove Khan Ahmad II and replace him by appointing *Qizilbash* governors was an important juncture, as it began the process of normalizing the Safavid agents' direct presence in Gilan in the position of power and authority. Yet, as the actors at the Safavid court changed, and with the ascension to the throne of Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh following *Qizilbash* factionalism at the court, his Mazandarani wife Mahd-e 'Olya reinstated Khan Ahmad II to power in Gilan. Khan Ahmad II managed to regain control in Eastern Gilan, but was not able to overcome the Eshaqiyyeh threat completely.

Once Shah 'Abbas I ascended the throne, the building blocks of his famous centralizing policies were already in place, and he had only to initiate the last phase of Gilan's incorporation.

The first maneuver was to negotiate with Khan Ahmad II, however ostensibly, as the negotiations were only meant to prepare the grounds for the eventual conquest of Gilan. The failure of the local political elite and leaders to maintain a cohesive front in opposition to Shah ‘Abbas I’s intrusive policies was in fact the result of years of Safavid efforts at manipulating local politics, including a clear policy of divide and rule, followed by complicated familial ties at the local level through years of intermarriages and procreation. The local elite were at this point already fragmented and divided in their loyalties, as the pro-Safavid camp played an integral role in the demise of Khan Ahmad II and the Eshaqiyyeh rulers. Eventually the conquest was followed by more systemic changes in the modes of governance and administration of land, taxes, and trade in Gilan. At this point the vizier appointed by the center came to replace the traditional local ruler and political elite, who were either killed, exiled, or incorporated into the Safavid state apparatus.

The transformations in both the structure and modes of government in post-conquest Gilan were not without their challenges, as the opposition to the Safavids continued in sporadic uprisings. While the first few of these uprisings were mainly formed by the disgruntled elite hoping to bring back the displaced former rulers, the later ones bore the mark of a larger and more widespread resistance. The ensuing uprisings were primarily a reaction to the Safavids’ transformative policies, as well as the perceived or real corruption of the Safavid-appointed viziers. The worst of these uprisings came after Shah ‘Abbas I passed away and his successor, Shah Safi I, came to power. Shah Safi I had to resort to violence to quash the rebellion, yet his success in managing the rebellion attested to Shah ‘Abbas I’s ability to establish the Safavids’ influence and control locally.

Parallel to the political, economic and military developments that ultimately led to full Safavid control in Gilan was the process of religious transformation. With a heterogeneous religious population, Gilan was not a monolithic entity that could easily be adapted to the whims of the Safavids. Much of the eastern part of the province came to be dominated by the Zaydi *mazhab*, while most of the western parts remained faithful to Sunnism. Indeed, the Kiyayis came to power through the legitimizing force of their Zaydi *mazhab* and their sayyid status. To maintain their hegemony they confronted the remainder of the Isma'ilis of Deylam and gradually put an end to their presence in the region. On the other hand, they maintained a cordial relationship with their Mazandarani neighbors, who were also sayyids, but with a Twelver Shi'a leaning. The Kiyayis respected the Mar'ashis, as they had helped their transition to power in the first place, yet they set themselves apart from their "*dervish*" tendencies.

On the other hand, the manifestation of the Zaydi faith in Gilan was also not monolithic, as different schools of thought, including more heterodox religious sentiments as well as legalistic religious discourse, came to the fore. The main Zaydi religious expression in Gilan, which survived until the Safavids converted the population to Twelver Shi'ism, was Naseriyyeh Zaydism, with its dynamic production of religious knowledge that scholars have been uncovering as of late.

Some scholars have mischaracterized or misunderstood the religious influence of Gilan on the Safavid Shah Isma'il I through his supposed teacher and first appointed *sadr*, Shams al-Din Lahiji. This study showed that from the primary sources it is almost impossible to ascertain the real nature of any potential influence of Shams al-Din Lahiji on Shah Isma'il I's religious leanings. The most important point, though, is that the Safavids gradually pursued a religious policy of converting the Zaydis of Gilan to Twelver Shi'ism.

This process entailed a top-down approach, beginning with the rulers themselves. The sources do not give us a clear picture as to exactly when this process was initiated, yet the consensus is that Khan Ahmad II certainly adhered to Twelver Shi'ism and disdained the Zaydis, and perhaps his upbringing and education at the Safavid court was related to his religious convictions. Yet Eastern Gilan was not completely converted, even during Khan Ahmad II's reign. The extant letters from Khan Ahmad II give us an insight into the ongoing religious tensions there. The conversion of the Sunni population of Iran to Twelver Shi'ism has been a point of much scholarly attention, but the reasons for converting Zaydis to Twelver Shi'ism may not seem as obvious. Apart from the desired goal of attaining a religiously homogenous population, the Safavids needed to eradicate any potential doctrinal threat, especially one that was coupled with any political weight. The Zaydis, with their own tradition of dynastic political rule in Gilan and their reliance on their sayyid status for legitimacy, certainly had the potential to disrupt the Safavid formation. They therefore had to be integrated fully into the Safavid polity, something which could not have taken place without their conversion to Twelver Shi'ism. While evidence of conversion to Twelver Shi'ism among the Western Gilani Sunnis remains insufficient, from what little information we can gather, it appears that the Western Gilanis may have also already converted, especially their later rulers who were connected to the Safavid house both through marriage and through the upbringing of their offspring at the Safavid court. Gilan then gradually became more homogenized as after the conquest the division between Eastern and Western Gilan was deemphasized and the whole of what could from this point on be correctly referred to as a province came to be administered by Safavid-appointed viziers and officials.

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