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MUḤAMMAD KHĀN SHĪBĀNĪ IN TŪS (915/1509)

Abstract. This present article studies and contextualizes an unpublished appointment letter (nişāḥān) drafted on behalf of and sealed by the Uzbek ruler of Khurāsān, Muḥammad Khān Shībānī, in 915/1509. Issued in the name of a Sunnī judge from Mashhad, this appointment letter sheds light on the Uzbek ruler’s plans to build a new city on the ruins of Tūs, a rural town some 20 miles northwest of Mashhad, to be called Yādgār-i Khānī. Keywords: Muḥammad Khān Shībānī, Tūs, Khurāsān, Uzbeks, Mā warāʾ al-nahr, Şafavids, Iran

Introduction

Over the course of the 10th/16th century Khurāsān went through several decades of war and instability. Urban life in the province bore the brunt of depopulation and ruination amid the political chaos that came from the province’s dynastic transition following the downfall of the Timurid dynasty. Petitions drafted by various Qizilbash military chiefs stationed in Khurāsān in 916—917 / 1512—1513 indicate that cities like Shabargān, Balkh, and Qī’ in had almost completely been devastated owing to the outbreak of famine and natural disasters that occurred in the heat of the Şafavid-Uzbek wars in the opening quarter of the 10th/16th century [1]. Led by Shāh Ismā’īl (907—930 / 1501—1524) and Shāh Taḥmāsp (930—984 / 1524—1576), the Şafavids fought two successive rounds of war against the Abu al-Khayrīdīs of Mā warāʾ al-nahr over Khurāsān. The first major encounter occurred in 916/1510—11, the year in which Shāh Ismā’īl defeated and killed Abū al-Futūḥ Muḥammad Khān Shībānī outside Marv. Immediately after this victory, almost all major urban centers in the province, including Balkh, Herāt, Kh’āf, Abīward, Sarakhs, Turshūz, Jām, Nishāpūr, Sabzīwār, Isfarāyīn, and Mashhad, were enfeoffed with the Qizilbash military chiefs and tribal leaders before the short-lived restoration of the Timurid prince Bābur on 15 Rajab 917 / 18 October 1511 [2].

Herāt on the one hand and the Şafavids on the other have received the lion’s share of attention in modern scholarship in the history of early 10th/16th century Khurāsān. Martin B. Dickson pioneered the study of the Uzbek-Şafavid wars of the 10th/16th century, but his study tells us very little about Muḥammad Khān Shībānī’s rise to power and administrative policies in Khurāsān [3]. N. N. Tumanovich’s book, Herat in the 7th—18th Centuries, meticulously reconstructs the fall of the Timurids and the subsequent occupation of Khurāsān by the Uzbeks early in the 10th/16th century, but his account focuses almost entirely on Herāt to the exclusion of the trends and events that shaped the Uzbek takeover of other urban centers of the province. Recycling the conclusion reached at in A. A. Semenov’s study of the downfall of the Timurid dynasty in Khurāsān, Tumanovich closes his account of the fall of Herāt with remarks highlighting the oppressive nature of Muḥammad Khān Shībānī’s fiscal policies and the resultant widespread discontentment with the Uzbek regime in the province in the wake of the Qizilbash invasion in the autumn and winter of 916/1512 [4]. In 1992, Maria Szuppe published the revised version of her doctoral thesis on socio-political history of Herāt in the opening quarter of the 10th/16th century. So far as Muḥammad Khān Shībānī’s occupation of Herāt is concerned, Szuppe follows a completely different line of argument, concluding that the city’s Uzbek transition had a peaceful tempo and that by and large the Uzbeks received support from the local landed and learned notables [5].

This present article studies and contextualizes an unpublished appointment letter (nişāḥān) issued by Muḥammad Khān Shībānī, wherein he details his plans to re-urbanize Tūs, a largely ruined rural town some 20 miles northwest of Mashhad. The contents of this particular nişāḥān shed new light on the Uzbek ruler’s treatment of urban notables in Mashhad in the run-up to Shāh Ismā’īl’s invasion of Khurāsān.

Upon the death of the Timurid ruler, Sultan-Husayn Bâyqar on 11 Dhu al-hajja 911 / 5 May 1506, two of his sons Badi‘ al-Zamān Mirzā and Muhāfar-Husayn Mirzā settled on temporary suspension of hostilities to form a united front against the Uzbeks. The Uzbek confederate clans of Dasht-i Qipchak and Mā warā‘-al-nahr were then under the command of the Yādgārs and the Abu al-Khayrids [6]. Led by the Abu al-Khayrids of Tāshkent and Tārāz (also Talas), the Uzbekans of Mā warā‘-al-nahr who had already seized Sarmaqand and Bukhārā from the Timurids and Tuğluq-Timurid princes, took their offensive further afield to the south, where they plundered and captured Qunduz, Shabargān, and the Murghāb Valley [7]. The destruction wrought by the Uzbek invaders on Balkh is reported to have particularly been severe, raising alarm for the inhabitants of other cities in Khūrāsān to abandon the path of resistance and surrender straightforward to Muhammad Khan Shibānī [8]. Early in Muḥarram 912 / May—June 1506, i.e. less than a month after Sultan-Husayn Bâyqar’s death, Herāt fell to the green-capped (yishibhāsh) armies of Muhammad Khān.

At that time, Mashhad was an administrative appendage of Herāt. But the fall of Herāt did not lead to the straightforward Uzbek takeover of Mashhad. Shortly after the fall of Herāt, the Timurid prince Abu al-Muḥsin Mirzā and his younger brother, Muḥammad Muḥsin Mirzā, decided to stand up to the Uzbeks. Backed by his supporters in Masḥhād, Abu al-Muḥsin Mirzā had reportedly planned to use the fortress towns of Sarakhs and Kalāt, respectively some 110 and 120 miles northeast and northwest of Mashhad, as military bases for impending attacks against the Uzbeks in Khūrāsān. Yet the Uzbeks mounted a surprise attack against Mashhad. The main battle was fought in the spring of 913 / 1507 in Ṭuruq, a small village outside the city walls, during which the Uzbeks defeated and beheaded the Timurid prince along with his younger brother, Mīr Bābā Māhmūd, a local military chief whose father had served Sultan-Husayn Bâyqar as the keeper of royal seals (muḥrdrād), headed the pro-Timurid faction in Mashhād [9].

A similar pattern of a‘yān—amīr alliance underpinned anti-Uzbek resistance in Nishāpūr and Sabzivār. Around the time the Uzbeks managed to crush pro-Timurid elements in Mashhad, another Timurid prince called Ibn-i Ḥusayn Mirzā, who acted as governor of Qā‘īn, moved to Sabzivār, where he was joined by scores of pro-Timurid fugitives from Mashhad. In the ensuing battle, Ibn-i Ḥusayn Mirzā and his supporters first defeated the Uzbeks, but at the end of the day, the Uzbek troops imposed a crushing defeat on the Timurid army. Almost all pro-Timurid notables captured in Sabzivār were put to the sword and Ibn-i Ḥusayn Mirzā was forced to flee to the province of Persian ‘Irāq, where he eventually took refuge with Shāh Ismā‘īl [10]. This incident marked the end of the Timurid rule in central and western Khūrāsān.

Fadlallāh Khunjī Iṣḥāfānī (d. 927/1521) wrote one of the most important narrative sources on the last years of Muḥammad Khān Shibānī. He concludes his chronicle-cum-travelogue, the Miḥmān-nāma-yi Bukhārā (“A Fugitive’s Account of His Stay in Bukhārā”), with an account of Muḥammad Khan’s visit of the shrine of the eighth Shı‘ī imām, ‘Alī al-Ruḍā in Mashhad and the ruins of Tūs. According to Khunjī Iṣḥāfānī [11], the Uzbek Muḥammad Khān arrived at Tūs on 8 Safar 915 / 7 June 1509 on the last leg of his expedition against Burdūk Khān (r. 885—916 / 1480—1511), the Kazakh ruler of Sīnak, Suran, and Suzak. Started on 5 Shawwāl 914 / 6 February 1509, the military campaign against the Kazakh tribal confederation proved to be a strategic failure for the Uzbeks [12]. During his stopover in Tūs, the Uzbek khān went to see the ruins of the old city which had been left untouched for about three centuries after the Mongols razed it to the ground [13]. Muhammad Khān paid a visit to the old cemetery outside Tūs in a show of respect to the memory of the renowned Sunni scholars and mystics buried there. The Uzbek khān also toured the ruins of the convent (zāwiyā) founded in Tūs by the prominent Sunni theologian, jurist, and mystic, Imām Abū ‘Alī Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), a native of Tūs whose remains were claimed to have been buried inside the derelict convent. At the close of his account, Khunjī Iṣḥāfānī tells us about Muḥammad Khān’s plans to build a new city on the ruins of Tūs. This new city, Khunjī Iṣḥāfānī points out, was to be called Yādgār-i Khānī, i.e. [Muḥammad] Khān Memorial. Here, Khunjī Iṣḥāfānī changes the topic, leaving us in the dark over the actual steps taken by Muhammad Khān to revive and repopulate the ruined city of Tūs.

Muḥammad Khān Shibānī’s Nīshān

Provenance

While going over an unpublished Safīna (“A Compendium of Miscellanies”) volume in the National Library of Iran, Tehran, I came across the transcript (sāvād) of an appointment letter (nīshān) issued by Muḥammad Khān Shibānī in the name of a local judge in Mashhad. The recipient of the nīshān, a certain Shāh-Yahyā who at the time headed the judicial system in Mashhad, had been charged with the task of acting as shaykh al-islām as well as chief judge of the new city the Uzbek khān had planned to build in Tūs. This unpublished appointment letter complements Fadlallāh Khunjī Iṣḥāfānī’s somewhat vague account of Muḥammad Khān Shibānī’s visit of Mashhad and Tūs in 915/1509.

The Safīna volume in question is yet to be catalogued. It contains several other Timurid, Aqquyunlu, Uzbek, and Safavid state documents in the form of farāmān, maktūbāt, manshūr, and tawwīl. There are also several theological, polemical, and jurisprudential treatises in Persian and
Arabic as well as an assortment of judicial rulings and verdicts (ṣijjālāt u ḥakhām) and various religious and ritualistic sermons and homilies (khudba) bound in together with transcripts of the above-mentioned state documents. This volume has no shelf number and is given only an identification code, which is 1194423. The late Iranian scholar and poet, Jalāl al-Dīn Humā’ī (d. 1980) was the last private owner of this volume. He has written a descriptive note summarizing the contents of the volume [14]. This note establishes that the Safīnā volume had originally been owned by a certain Muhammad b. Muḥammad Shārīf Nasaṭī, a 10th/16th century Ḥanafī Sunnī judge from Qarshī (also Nasaṭī), a small town some 90 miles southwest of Šāmarrānq. Various dates, including 822/1419–20, 899/1493–94, 906/1500–01, 936/1529–30, 940/1533–34, and 1164/1750–51, are mentioned in the volume. The appointment letter issued by Muhammad K̲h̲án Shībānī is transcribed almost completely and comes between folios 134r—136v (for the text see Addenda and figs. 1—6).

**Organization and Content**

The main part of the appointment letter opens with a paragraph detailing the identity and credentials of its recipient. The sentence containing the name of the recipient, however, comes with a blank space, suggesting that the name of the recipient had been removed from the copy used for the purpose of this present transcription. Yet a marginal note, perhaps added by Shārīf Nasaṭī himself, identifies the recipient of the appointment letter. This note reads:

> This poor servant recollects that this royal decree (manshūr) had [originally] been issued in the name of Shāh-Yahyā, the powerful judge of the holy city of Ṣaḥḥād [15].

Neither Amīn Haravī, who on the maternal side of his family was closely related to the Raḍawī and ‘Arabshāhī sayyids of Ṣaḥḥād and Saḥṣīrār [16], nor Khānmandārī tells us who acted as the chief judge of Ṣaḥḥād under the later Timūrids and Muhammad K̲h̲án Shībānī. In his capacity as chief judge and ʃaʃϸ-y ʃaʃrī al-ʿilām of Ṣaḥḥād and Yâdgār-i K̲h̲ān, Shāh-Yahyā was expected to act as the sole bureaucratic authority in charge of endorsing and notarizing all state documents (parwīnargāt u ḥakhām) and other forms of ʃaʃrī-a-based contract agreements, including affidavits, land purchase deeds, marriage deeds, and bequests (ṣijjālāt, huṣaj, Ḡaβālajāt). All Uzbek military chiefs, including Muḥammad K̲h̲ān’s brothers and sons, had been ordered to acknowledge Shāh-Yahyā’s arbitration in all ʃaʃrī-a-related disputes. Shāh-Yahyā had also been allowed to act as a judge at large throughout the Uzbek territorial conquests in Ḳhurāsān and Māwār’-al-nahr.

It is stipulated in the appointment letter that starting in 916/1512, which is confirmed to be the Year of the Horse (Yūnt Yīl), Shāh-Yahyā was to be given lifetime tax exemption for four pieces of arable land with free workforce as well as a 15 jurīb (ca. 7.5 acres) orchard he owned in Ṣaḥḥād. The appointment letter closes with warnings to all bureaucratic and military dignitaries in Ḳhurāsān and Māwār’-al-nahr, forbidding them not to tamper with Shāh-Yahyā’s land properties in Ṣaḥḥād and the new city of Yâdgār-i K̲h̲ān.
Fig. 2
ک. گرچگلی. محمد کان شیبانی در تبریز (915/1509)
Brief Assessment and Concluding Remarks

Muhammad Khān Shbānī’s plans to revive the ruined city of Tūs is comparable with a similar episode from the reign of Sultān-Husayn Bayqara. According to a nīshān issued by the Timurid ruler, a group of architects and masons had been charged to bring the ruined city of Marw into life. Sultān-Husayn Bayqara’s nīshān closes with remarks confirming the lifetime tax exemption of those employees of the Timurid bureaucracy and judicial system in Khūrsān who had chosen to move to and repopulate the old city (shahr-i kuhna) of Marw [17].

Muhammad Khān Shbānī’s nīshān shows that in his capacity as chief judge and shaykh al-islām of Tūs, Shāh-Yahyā was permitted to adjudicate over all the Uzbek dominions in Khūrsān and Mā warā-al-nahr. There are other clauses in the appointment letter to suggest that by appointing him to chief judge of Tūs, the Uzbek ruler of Khūrsān had actually made Shāh-Yahyā the most authoritative chief judge in his realm. This can be taken to imply that perhaps in the long run Muhammad Khān Shbānī thought of transferring his capital from Mā warā-al-nahr to Khūrsān as a necessary primary move for his impending military expeditions in central and western Iran. The contents of the appointment letter issued in the name of Shāh-Yahyā further supports the argument previously put forward in M. Szuppe’s study of socio-political change in early 10th/16th century Herāt that the Uzbek takeover of Khūrsān did not go beyond a change of rulers.

Shāh Ismā‘īl’s invasion of Khūrsān in 916/1512, however, put an end to Muhammad Khān’s plans to revive the old city of Tūs as well as his measures to transfer his capital to a new imperial city in Khūrsān. The Safavid victories in Khūrsān in the 10th/16th and early 11th/17th centuries never resulted in the repopulation of the ruined cities of Tūs and Marw. So far as Tūs is concerned, early in the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp it was invaded once more by the Uzbeks led by ‘Ubaydallāh Khān. According to the Mashad-based author of an early 11th/17th-century tadhkira (biographical dictionary of poets), the Uzbek ruler ordered his troops to raze to the ground the old city and its semi-ruined buildings, including the mausoleum housing the tomb of the Persian poet Abu al-Qāsim Firdawsi (d. 411/1020) outside the city walls [18]. A new round of efforts was carried out in 1151/1378 by Nādir Shāh (1149—1160 / 1736—1747) to revive the ruined city of Marw, but they too came to naught [19].

A d d e n d a

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بر استان مادرت که سی با خشت نه می‌آید
امیده که یک بای نیز در یکی نه می‌آید

اهالی به دلیل وضعیت کشورهای عربی، عراق و عربستان سعودی که به همراه ایران و عراق، تلاش می‌کنند تا در عرصه مبارزه با کورونا، کمک کنند.

ب) در صورت عدم بررسی کامل وضعیت کشورهای عربی، عراق و عربستان سعودی، بایستی قبل از اتخاذ تصمیم ضروری در این حوزه، به هدایت و استمرار نظامی این کشورها، توجه داشته شود.

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Notes


2. For more on the assignment of major urban centers in Khorāsān as tīyāl to the Safavid military chiefs in 1971/1511, see ibid: 97—98. On the date of Bābur’s enthronement in Khorāsān as a Safavid puppet, see Dughštāl, 1996, vol. 1: 208, 217.


9. Khānānādārī, 1333/1954, vol. 4: 384—386. For a nishāḥ issued by Sultān-Husayn Bāyyqarā in the name of Mīr Bābā Mahmūd and his religious endowments in Mashhad, see Marwārī, 1952: 8v—9v; German tr.: 69—70.


13. For an account of the Mongol capture and destruction of Tūs and Fāz (Pāz) in the spring of 618/1221, see Juwāynī, 1387/2008, vol. 1: 239—240.


15. Ibid.: 135v.


26. Marginal note: the transcription of the name of Nūr al-Dīn Mūsā as the second name of his father makes the name almost unreadable. For a nishāḥ issued by Sultan Husayn Bayqara in the name of Mir Babā Mahmund and his religious endowments in Mashhad, see Marwārī, 1952: 8v—9v; German tr.: 69—70.


28. Aṣqānī, 1392.


References


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Illustrations


Fig. 2. The same MS, fol. 134v. Courtesy of the Library.

Fig. 3. The same MS, fol. 135r. Courtesy of the Library.

Fig. 4. The same MS, fol. 135v. Courtesy of the Library.

Fig. 5. The same MS, fol. 136r. Courtesy of the Library.

Fig. 6. The same MS, fol. 136v. Courtesy of the Library.