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# In the Name of Hosayn's Blood: The Memory of Karbala as Ideological Stimulus to the Safavid Revolution

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## Abstract

Over the past century, one of the most heavily debated topics within Safavid historiography has been the ideological sources of the Qezelbash zeal that carried the Safavid dynasty to the throne of Persia. By now, a near-consensus has been formed about Shah Esmā'il's personality as an incarnation of the Godhead armed with a messianic mission of salvation. This article partly challenges this long-entrenched conceptualization by calling attention to a heretofore overlooked mission that the shaykhs of the revolutionary period set for themselves. This was their desire to avenge the spilling of Hosayn's blood, a mission which was nothing but a reincarnation of the topos of *sāheb al-khorūj* or the "master of the uprising," a heroic typology cultivated via a particular corpus of Karbala-oriented epic literature. Based on the idea that the religiosity of the Turkish-speaking milieu that constituted the Safavid movement's grassroots was primarily shaped by this Karbala-oriented epic literature, this essay argues that Shaykh Jonayd, Shaykh Haydar, and especially Shah Esmā'il successfully reformulated the Safavid Sufi program to address the codes of popular piety, which already existed, nurtured by Sufism and some Shi'ite elements, a particular mode of Islamic piety that I call "Shi'ite-inflected popular Sufism."

## Keywords

Safavid revolution – Qezelbash – Mahdi – Karbala – Abu Muslim – *Maqtal*

## Introduction

The rise of Safavids to power in Iran under Shah Esmā'īl's messianic leadership marks a watershed in the history of the Islamic world. Such a brilliant political success was indeed more than might have been expected from a traditional family of shaykhs. As is well known, the driving force behind this unforeseen rise of the dynasty was the devotion and military efficacy of Qezelbash tribesmen from Anatolia, Azerbaijan, northern Syria, and western Iran. They were equally responsible for transforming the quietist Safavid Sufi order into a revolutionary-millenarian movement, a change which provided the necessary zeal and motivation to unite these militant tribesmen around a set of political goals (Mazzaoui; Aubin, 1959; idem, 1984; idem, 1988; Roemer, 1985; Sohrweide; Sümer; Yıldırım, 2008).

However, the question as to how and through which means, be it social or ideological, the Safavid Sufi leadership mobilized its tribal recruits for such a large-scale revolutionary movement is yet to be fully understood. A paucity of sources is in part responsible for this situation. Even in Safavid court chronicles, the formative part of the dynastic history gets short shrift (Quinn, 13-29), never mind the anti-Safavid sources produced in hostile milieus. In fact, the pre-state period of Safavid history, especially its revolutionary era, is somehow doomed to be written on the authority of external sources, which were produced either by sectarian enemies of the Safavids or by European observers. As far as Shah Esmā'īl's self-image is concerned, a source extensively used is his *Divan* by the *nom de plume* of Khatā'i.<sup>1</sup> A cluster of epic-legendary texts produced by the collective memory of the Turkish-speaking Anatolian masses is another source that has so far been ignored but that can shed much light on the question under investigation. These orally-grounded narratives that are linked to the memory of Karbala promise to contribute to our understanding of the spiritual and psychological background of the Qezelbash movement.

The faith of the Qezelbash in the charisma of the Safavid shaykhs, especially in the revolutionary era, has been long debated. Ruzbehān Khonji's contemporary account (Minorsky, 1992, 61-81), Venetian merchant reports (Brumett), and Minorsky's celebrated study of Shah Esmā'īl's poetry (Minorsky, 1939-42) set the tone of modern scholarship on the subject. It must be stated, however, that this debate is characterized by a number of clichés. The first and the foremost of these is the assertion that Shah Esmā'īl believed himself to be an

1 A number of scholarly and amateur publications of the *Divan* exist. For this study I have consulted Gandjei's edition (Gandjei). For a comprehensive discussion of issues surrounding Shah Esmā'īl's poetry, see Minorsky 1939-42; Gallagher 2004.

incarnation of the Godhead as well as the reincarnation of a series of towering religious figures such as Imam 'Ali and Mohammad the Mahdi (Minorsky, 1939-42, 1026a). Common wisdom also holds that his Qezelbash disciples unquestionably surrendered to the belief in the divinity of the Safavid shaykhs. Hans Roemer (1986), Roger Savory (1980, 23) and recently Amelia Gallagher exemplify this approach (Gallagher, 2004, 31-72; idem, 2011).<sup>2</sup> A different but rather marginalized perspective is that of Erika Glassen, who portrays Shah Esmā'il as a deputy-emissary of the Twelfth Imam rather than the Mahdi himself (Glassen, 61-69).

This study does not deny the excessive devotion of Qezelbash Sufis to their *morshed-e kāmel*. Nor does it underestimate the tenor of Shah Esmā'il's indulgent language which presented his spiritual self as an extension of the very divine essence that forms the Truth of Mohammad, 'Ali, the Twelve Imams, and even the Godhead (*Haqq*). Instead, it seeks to recalibrate the established view through an understanding of this emotion-laden transgression (of the boundaries established by orthodoxies) within the framework of "undisciplined extremist religiosity" (Arjomand, 1984, 82), in which the borderlines between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the mundane, and even the divine and the human are not clearly set. Equally, Shah Esmā'il's poetry should be analyzed within the parameters of the Sufi concept of the Unity of Being (*wahdat-e wujud*). Above all, the present study focuses on a hitherto underestimated dimension of Safavid charisma. It highlights the importance of the transformation in the conceptualization of the Safavid shaykh as *morshed-e kāmel* during the tenure of Shaykh Jonayd and Shaykh Haydar, when the concept of *morshed-e kāmel* gained an additional element of charisma: the champion of the eternal revenge-fight for the House of the Prophet. Henceforth the shaykh of the Safavid order was not only the spiritual master of disciples guiding them to the right path through revealing secrets of the Truth, but also their commander-in-chief leading them into actual battles against the Yazids of their own time. I argue that, more than anything, it was indeed this newly dressed mission, which rejuvenated apocalyptic-revolutionary spirituality, that made it possible to achieve such a large-scale mass mobilization.

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2 In a most recent paper presented at the conference "Turks and Islam" at Indiana University in 2010, Gallagher revisits the established view, including her own, arguing that the extravagant claims in Esmā'il's poetry should not be taken literally; instead they must be dealt with as conventional rhetorical devices of Sufi literature, "theophanic locutions" or mystical expressive technique of *shathiyāt*. I thank her for sharing with me this unpublished manuscript. For the commonly accepted extremist nature of the Qezelbash religion within the same perspective, also see Babayan 1994; Babayan 2002, pp. 121-292; Arjomand 2005.

The main ideological and emotional stimulus of Qezelbash aspiration that urged them to political and military action was, therefore, the latent mission of avenging the death of Hosayn.

### The Topoi of Revenge for Karbala in Shi'ite Traditions

Shi'ism during the first century of Islam started as a principally political movement centered in Iraq, focused on the house of 'Ali, and antagonistic to Umayyad-Syrian domination. It was neither an organized nor a uniform movement. Indeed, perhaps it is better to describe it as a sentiment than a movement. Towards the end of the century, however, it became attached to the type of theological speculation known under the label of *gholoww* (Momen, 70-71). Amir-Moezzi suggests making a clear-cut division between early suprarational esoteric Shi'ism (*gholāt*) and later theological-juridical-rational Imamism. One of the most conspicuous differences between the *gholāt* and rational Imami orthodoxy was the insistence of the former upon the political and military action against usurpers besides the Imami dissociation from worldly suzerainty until the return of the Twelfth Imam (Amir-Moezzi, 1994, 68-69). The main source of *gholāt*-Shi'ite inspiration for political appeal has always been the sense of retaliation against those oppressors who had usurped the rights of the House of the Prophet. Representing the culmination of religious usurpation and brutal oppression, the drama of Karbala became the symbol and also the principal stimulus for *gholāt* political action.

The notion of a just Imam with his prophetic knowledge and destiny to reinstate the true faith caught the imagination of the oppressed masses under Umayyad rule. The expectation of an incarnate savior became so well entrenched in popular piety that the claim of the Mahdi turned into the most efficient ideological instrument for mobilizing the masses into political action. Abdulaziz Sachedina observes that "messianic Shi'ism was a distinguishable feature of all early revolutions that took place in different regions of Islamic lands under different leaders" (Sachedina, p. 7). The most frequently used terms for the Mahdi's reappearance in early Shi'ite works are *qiyām* (rise), *zohur* (appearance, emergence), and *khoroj* (coming forth, uprising) (Sachedina, p. 150). Because the event of Karbala was perceived as the height of oppression, its vengeance became the central notion of the justice the future restorer would establish; hence the essential part of the Mahdi's mission (Sachedina, pp. 158-65).

As a result, revenge for Karbala constituted the core of the Shi'ite collective memory and sentiment from early times on. Especially in the *gholāt* milieu

this powerful and emotional memory always prompted political action whenever the circumstances were appropriate. Although Imami theology envisages political quietism until the Mahdi's return, a desire for retribution and the expectation of revenge never ceased among *gholāt* strands. Consequently, a series of retaliatory acts called *khoroj* are recorded. Those avengers who urged the oppressed masses to political action in Hosayn's name were called *sāheb al-khoroj* or the "master of the uprising." Another generic title attributed to the divinely guided savior-avenger is the "*qā'em*", literally "the one who rises," whose primary mission is the establishment of justice and equity on earth. He will also redress the wrongs committed by the *omma* against the *ahl al-bayt* (Sachedina, 62). It is important to note that the main implication of justice in this context is the revenge for Hosayn's blood upon the enemies of the *ahl al-bayt* (Amir-Moezzi, 119; Sachedina, 62).

### Societal Bases of the Safavid Revolution

The founding magnates of both the Ottoman and Safavid states were rooted in familial socio-cultural milieus. The famous fifteenth-century Ottoman chronicler Ashikpashazade lists the principal power groups that created the Ottoman principality as *ghāzis*, *akhis*, *abdāls*, and *bācis* (sisters) (Aşıkpaşazâde, 237). I discussed elsewhere that these groups were all associated with philo-'Alid inclinations in their interpretation and practice of Islam (Yıldırım, 2014). However, the 'Alid religious mood of the formative era gradually ebbed among the Ottoman ruling elite as the frontier principality transformed itself into a bureaucratic-rational state. Concomitantly, the founding magnates were dragged to the periphery (Yıldırım, 2008, 63-149; idem, 2011). The military and political achievements of the Safavids rested upon the fact that their propaganda successfully addressed this unhappy population that was alienated from the Ottoman regime. In this perspective, the following couplet attributed to Shah Esmā'il is quite meaningful: "Those who pledged to the son of Shah, happened to be *ghāzis*, *akhis*, and *abdāls*" (Gandjei, ed., 15). As a matter of fact, the principal audience of the Safavid *da'wa* during the revolutionary period was recruited from the same estranged socio-cultural milieu. It is no coincidence then that the metamorphosis of the Safavid quietist Sufi order into a militant-messianic movement occurred simultaneously with the transition of the Ottoman polity from a tribal confederation (*beylik*) to a bureaucratic-centralized empire (Yıldırım, 2008, 150-242).

As is well known, the Safavid order was split after the death of Shaykh Ebrāhim in 1447. If we are to believe Ruzbehan Khonji, Jahānshāh Qaraqoyunlu

suspected Shaykh Ebrāhim's son Jonayd of worldly ambitions and forced him to leave Ardabil, providing circumstances for Ja'far, the brother of Shaykh Ebrāhim, to assume the spiritual leadership of the order. With the support of Jahānshāh, Shaykh Ja'far managed to keep the Ardabil branch of the order under his leadership until his death in 1470. On the other hand, Jonayd took asylum among the Turcoman tribes of Anatolia and northern Syria. It was during his stay among these tribes that the Anatolian branch of the order gained an intense millenarian-political character and transformed into a militant *ghāzi* movement (Mazzaoui, 72). After Jonayd's death on the battlefield in 1460, his yet to be born son Haydar became the spiritual head of the Anatolian branch. When Haydar re-conquered Ardabil in 1470, the traditional quietist strand that was led by Shaykh Ja'far was gradually extinguished and militant chiliastic Sufism dominated within the order (Arjomand, 2005, 45).

It is important to note that from the time of Jonayd to the time of Esmā'il the revolutionary branch of the order was led by young or baby shaykhs. We do not know the exact age of Jonayd when he assumed his father's post in 1447, but we have good reasons to assume that he was still in his teens, if not younger.<sup>3</sup> Shaykh Haydar was unborn when he assumed the post of *morshed-e kāmel*. And when Shaykh Haydar was killed in 1488, his son Sultan 'Ali was pre-pubescent while Esmā'il was only one year old. This means that ever since the tenure of Shaykh Jonayd the actual leadership of the Safavid Order in fact devolved onto tutors of the young shaykhs, who were equally responsible for their education and training. In line with this argumentation, Ali Anooshahr has recently suggested, based on the *Fotuhāt-e Shāhi* of Amini Heravi, that the Safavid revolution was actually a result of a carefully planned campaign run by these tutors, the Qezelbash tribal leaders, who kept a tight control on the teenager Esmā'il (Anooshahr, 249-67).

An important detail to be noted here is that shaykhs of the revolutionary period did not have Sufi masters *per se* in its classical sense, but only their Qezelbash tutors (Shaykh Jonayd might be an exception for we do not know details of his childhood). Their spiritual charisma was not based on Sufi qualifications attained through standard training within the master-disciple relationship but merely on the concept of sacred genealogy. Therefore, the Sufi ideas of the young shaykhs were not self-developed intellectual products of the Safavid scions themselves but inculcated in them by the topmost Qezelbash cadre sur-

3 His only marriage was with Uzun Hasan's sister some ten years later. Given that the continuity of the order was utterly depended on the genealogy of the family, Shaykh Jonayd must have been married immediately after puberty.

rounding Jonayd, Haydar, Soltan 'Ali, and Esmā'il successively.<sup>4</sup> It was due to this new structure of leadership that the channels of transmission between the revolutionary branch and the traditional *dargāh*-based Sufi milieu of the order were weakened, if not severed. The result was the development of a new Sufi doctrine, a new set of values, and a new collective memory, all shaped within a particular type of religiosity. Such a change in the primary socio-cultural milieu of the order resulted in a doctrinal transformation from a traditional quietist Sufi order to an extremist-militant-millenarian movement.

At this point the crucial questions for the purpose of this study arise: what was the literary basis of this new religio-political synthesis replacing the traditional Sufi lore of the order? What were the sources of the Qezelbash religiosity? Considering the fact that the chief actors and agents of this new synthesis were Qezelbash leaders, the answer becomes obvious: it was the popular piety and the collective religious memory of the Turkish-speaking rural masses in Anatolia, Syria, and Azerbaijan which provided the grassroots of the order. Therefore, in order to draw an accurate picture of the spirituality and the religiosity that fashioned the Safavid revolution, it is useful to look at the Islamic perception and practice of the Turkish-speaking masses, which became the primary repository of Safavid *da'wa* in late medieval Anatolia.

### Religio-political Background of the Safavid Revolution: The Rise of the Shi'ite-inflected Popular Sufism

During the Mongol and post-Mongol era until the rise of the Safavids, one may talk about two distinct trajectories of Shi'ism. On the one hand, Imami Shi'ism remained an urban sect throughout this period. On the other hand, from the thirteenth century onwards, there appeared an independent religious phenomenon, popular Sufism, some branches of which conspicuously adopted a number of Shi'ite notions in the form of popular devotion to the House of the Prophet and the Twelve Imams (Arjomand, 1984, 31). It was in the crucible of this popular Sufism that some extremist Shi'ite notions, such as a

4 This became obvious especially by the time of Shaykh Haydar. We have every reason to believe that his Sufi training in the Aqqoyunlu palace was supervised by grand *khalifas* of Shaykh Jonayd. Likewise, following the premature death of Haydar, his sons were guided by Haydar's prominent *khalifas* and veterans. Indeed, Shah Esmā'il was educated and trained by those veterans of Haydar, whom Jean Aubin calls "the Sufis of Lahijan" (Aubin, 1984). As a result, it is plausible to argue that the Safavid revolution was above all the achievement of those Qezelbash *khalifas*.

Karbala-oriented political culture of revenge, expectation of a savior incarnate (Mahdi),<sup>5</sup> and millenarian yearning melded with vernacular-popular beliefs, giving rise to a new type of piety. Perhaps the most distinguishing trait of this piety was the idea that salvation could be attained by following the exemplary life of the charismatic spiritual guide as well as by establishing a particular spiritual bond with him. Adherence to an ethical code of conduct, which was established by orthodox scholars as the prerequisite of true religion, came only secondary as a means of salvation, if it was not disregarded altogether. As Cahen aptly remarked, this was a process of the inner Shi'itization of Sunnism as opposed to the spread of conscious Shi'ism (Cahen, 126). It was this peculiar amalgamation of popular Sufism and *gholāt* Shi'ism, that is a "Shi'ite-inflected popular Sufism," that fermented the Qezelbash religion.

The most informative sources on the religious and political history of the medieval Anatolian masses, hence on the above-mentioned popular piety, are arguably popular epics, hagiographies, and religious stories. As Fuat Köprülü rightly observes, the most popular epic or religious stories in currency amongst the medieval Turkish-speaking Muslim population were *Hız. Ali Cenkeri (the Expeditions of 'Ali ben Abi Taleb)*, *Maqal-e Hosayn*, *Abu Moslem-nāma*, *Battal-nāma*, *Saltuk-nāma*, *Dāneshmand-nāma*, and *Hamza-nāma* (Köprülü, 536). These religious-heroic epics actually form a cluster of orally-grounded narratives with familial affinity. As will be discussed shortly, it is more accurate to regard these texts as different facets of one and the same collective memory.

An examination of this religious-heroic epic literature would show that a clearly defined Islamic perception and political mood is embedded in these narratives. Above all, this particular piety is suffused with Sufism, heroism, and sentimental aspects of the religion at the cost of strict legalism. When examining the creedal content, one would immediately realize the foregrounding of 'Ali's image as the archetype of the ideal saint and warrior. The second conspicuous feature of this piety is a remarkable stress on the role of the House of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) as representatives and guides of true faith. According to this vision, 'Ali and his offspring were the loci of the rightful Islamic path after the Prophet. A close scrutiny even discloses that the true faith is identified with the Prophet and the *ahl al-bayt*. On the other hand, enmity to the

5 As stated by several scholars, perhaps the most conspicuous and basic tenet of extremist Shi'ism is the Mahdist tenet, which differs from the Twelver Shi'ite conceptualization with the idea that Mahdi could appear in the person of living men other than the Twelfth Imam. It is because of the fact that the history of *gholāt* Shi'ism is also a history of a series of *mahdis*. See, for example, Arjomand 1984, 68-69.



*ahl al-bayt* is deemed the gravest sin against the faith. It is the members of the Umayyad clan who appear as paragons of this aberrant strand. The names of Yazid and Marwan are particularly put forth as synonyms for the devil.

More importantly for the purpose of our study, this literature presents the whole of Islamic history as an eternal struggle between two parties centered around two families: the Friends of the House of the Prophet and the Friends of the Umayyad House. According to this vision, the Umayyad family overturned all the achievements of Islam, which were intrinsically tied to the Family of the Prophet. Therefore, their assumption of power under Mo'awiya is considered as a reversal of the revolutionary process that the Prophet started. As the archenemy of the Family of the Prophet, hence of Islam, deeds of the Umayyads and their followers are condemned as debauch and heretical.

It is interesting to note that the group siding with the Prophet's family is consistently referred to as "Sunni" in this popular literature. Meanwhile, the generic name of the second group, the enemies of the Prophet's family, appears as "Khāreji," "Yazidi" or "Marwāni." One should notice that in this context both "Sunni" and "Khāreji" have been stripped of their classical content; Sunni denotes the friends of the House of the Prophet (*mohebb-e khānadān-e rasul*), whereas Khāreji refers to the generic name for the aberrant enemies of this family (*doshmān-e āl-e rasul*). The event of Karbala, which marks the peak of Umayyad brutality against the Prophetic family, attains the central position in shaping religious perceptions. As a matter of fact, avenging Hosayn's blood is the most recurrent theme in all of these religious-heroic epics.

The above-summarized view of Islam is most apparent in a cluster of familial religious-heroic epics, which should be regarded as a cross-section of the collective memory as will be argued shortly. The most prominent among them are *Maqṭal-i Hosayn*, *Abu Moslem-nāma*, *Mosayyab-nāma*, *Jonayd-nāma*, *Battal-nāma*, *Dāneshmand-nāma*, and *Saltuk-nāma*. The scope of this study does not allow for a thorough content analysis of this literature. I will only highlight their central themes by way of examples.

To start with, *Maqṭal-i Hosayn*, written in Katamonu in 1362, is dominated by a dualistic view of Islamic history.<sup>6</sup> It presents the drama of Karbala as the

6 *Maqṭal* is a generic name for narratives of Hosayn bin 'Ali's tragic death in Karbala. The earliest known *maqṭal* was written by Abu Mihnaf in the mid-eighth century. Following Abu Mihnaf's work many *maqṭals* were written in several parts of the Islamic world. The text that I will use for this study was written by Maddah Shadi in Kastamonu, Turkey. Maddah Shadi's *maqṭal* seems to have achieved high popularity in the Ottoman world since we have many copies in different manuscript libraries. For a preliminary study of the piety embedded in popular *Maqṭal* literature, see Yıldırım 2012.

apex and the archetype of the eternal fight between true Muslims (Sunnis or *mohebbān-e khānadān-e rasul*) and oppressors (Khārejis-Yazidis-Marwānis or *doshmān-e khānadān-e rasul*) (*Maktel-i Hüseyin*, Milli Kütüphane, fols. 11a, 22a, 51b). Maddāh Shādi's vivid description of scenes from the battle of Karbala plainly reflects the overriding dual approach (*Maktel-i Hüseyin*, Milli Kütüphane, fols. 11a, 51b). When describing the battle of Hosayn, for example, the protagonist boasts of the virtues of his ancestors against the wickedness of the Umayyad clan. The whole narrative of the *Maqṭal* is indeed overwhelmed by the theme of struggle between the two clans over the leadership of the Islamic community (*omma*). Political claims of both parties are clearly voiced by Yazid and 'Ali ben Hosayn, the sole male survivor of the Karbala massacre, at the end of the narrative. On the one hand, Yazid boasts of avenging the blood of his ancestors by killing Mohammad's grandson. He also claims that God gave suzerainty to his family but not to the House of 'Ali ben Abi Tāleb (*Maktel-i Hüseyin*, Milli Kütüphane, fol. 87a; *Maktel-i Hüseyin*, Kemankeş, fols. 87a-87b). 'Ali's response to Yazid's arguments presents the crystallization of the two-fold perception that constitutes the leitmotif of the *Maqṭal* (*Maktel-i Hüseyin*, Milli Kütüphane, fols. 88b-89a; *Maktel-i Hüseyin*, Kemankeş, fols. 95b-96a):

My grandfather is Mohammad Mostafā, my father is 'Ali al-Mortazā, while you are the bastard of Hind... Gabriel came to us, and brought us prophethood. Everybody learned the faith from us. My mother is the daughter of the Prophet whereas your mother is a woman of market (i.e., a whore)<sup>7</sup>... Your grandfather was an infidel in the battles of Badr and Honeyn; he was worse than the Jews. The people of Mohammad (*Muhammed ümmeti*) found the Qur'an and *Sunnah* at our hands. The angels praised us.

One should note that apart from projecting Islamic history as an eternal conflict between the two families and their supporters, one overriding theme governing the whole narrative is yearning for the revenge of Hosayn's blood. As Mélikoff noted insightfully, unlike the classical Shi'ite culture of mourning for Karbala, it is more the notion of revenge and a strong expectation of an avenger than of grieving for Hosayn's suffering that sets the tone of the narrative (Mélikoff, 1966).

7 This is a widespread story circulated in several *maqṭals* and related popular religious texts. According to the story, Yazid was born into the marriage of Mo'awiya and a former prostitute of ninety years of age. For a full version of the story, see *Der Beyan-ı Sergüzeşt-i İmam-ı Hüseyin*, 97b-100a.

The *Abu Moslem-nāma* represents the culmination of the Karbala-oriented religious-heroic epic literature (Mélíkoﬀ, 1962, 91-94). Squarely concurrent with the *Maqta*'s Islamic vision, the skeleton of its narrative is structured on the mortal struggle between the supporters of the Umayyad family and the lovers of the family of Mohammad and 'Ali. The former is called Khāreji alongside Yazidi and Marwāni, while the latter is called Sunni as well as Torābi and *mohebb-e khānadān*. The epic starts with a narration of the murder of 'Ali ben Abu Tāleb and his famous miracle of burying his own corpse. According to the epic, after 'Ali's death, Mo'awiya killed Hasan by poisoning him and Yazid martyred Hosayn at Karbala. The Umayyads started to curse 'Ali from the Friday prayer pulpits. And it was through these crimes of the Umayyads that the entire world became *khāreji*.

As Kathryn Babayan observes, the event of the Karbala is the drama that truly sets the tone for the *Abu Moslem-nāma* (Babayan, 2002, 126). The whole career of the protagonist is nothing but avenging the blood of Hosayn spilled at Karbala. Accordingly a short account of Hosayn's death sets the opening scene of the epic. The narrative continues with the mention of heroes who arose to take revenge for Karbala (Mélíkoﬀ, 1962, 97-98). According to the *Abu Moslem-nāma*, following Hosayn's martyrdom, a number of heroes called *sāheb al-khoruj* revolted to avenge his murder. Malek Ajdar's daughter Safiya, 'Omar Ma'ad's son Karb Gazi, Asad b. Karb, Jonayd, Saleh, and Behzad ben Saleh all rose against Khāreji Umayyads for Hosayn's blood, but they ended up in failure and were all slaughtered brutally. This last statement of the *Abu Moslem-nāma* is of utmost importance for the purpose of our study for it plainly reflects the topos of *sāheb al-khoruj* in this literature, hence the vivid belief in the insistent expectation of a savior-avenger in the popular piety of medieval Anatolia, if not in all of the Islamic world.<sup>8</sup>

To show how Karbala-centered the whole narrative is, it suffices to examine the story relating Abu Moslem's investment with the *da'wa* and the symbolism embedded in his celebrated weapon. One night Abu Moslem dreams of the Prophet who puts a crown (*tāj*) on his head, dresses him in a shirt and girds him with a sash, saying: "Oh Abu Moslem! You are the one who will avenge my family; you will kill Marwānis, sons of Umayyads, and take my revenge. No one has been granted such a fortune and such symbols that I bestow upon you" (Mélíkoﬀ, 1962, 104). On hearing that Abu Moslem asks for a weapon. The Prophet shows a hatchet in Gabriel's hand, saying, "Look at it carefully, you will make an exact copy of this ax!" On waking up he finds a piece of paper on

8 As will be indicated below, the topos of *sāheb al-khoruj* is recurrent in other religious-heroic epics of this affinity group.

which the picture of the ax is drawn (Mélíkoﬀ, 1962, 104-05). It is this ax that would become the symbol of Abu Moslem's cause.

According to the instructions, Abu Moslem goes to Akhi Hurdek, the master blacksmith and the head of the *akhis* of Marw. The story narration refers to the source of iron supply for Abu Moslem's special weapon and establishes the essential bond between Abu Moslem's mission and the Karbala tragedy. According to this story, during his heavenly journey (*me'rāj*) the Prophet looks down from the sky and sees a plain filled with blood. Upon asking about this, Gabriel says his insubordinate people would kill Hosayn and his relatives there; that the blood is the blood of the Karbala martyrs. At that moment the Prophet exhales with great sorrow and his breath is captured by the angels at God's order, to be transformed into iron. Then they put this iron block into the Gulf of Oman to be used for the axe of Abu Moslem. At the same moment two drops of tears glide onto the plain of Karbala. The one that fell from the left eye was transformed into a tree, sprouting from the blood of Hosayn and other martyrs. This tree was to become the handle of Abu Moslem's axe (Mélíkoﬀ, 1962, 108-09).

Among orally grounded religious epics closely tied to the Karbala memory, one illuminative but lesser known example is the *Epic of Mosayyab Ghāzi* or *Mosayyab-nāma*. The epic seems rather like a fictive story of Karbala's revenge.<sup>9</sup> The protagonist, Mosayyab Ghāzi, is presented as the son of Mokhtar Ghāzi, the celebrated Mokhtār al-Thaqafi. The whole narrative centers on the theme of revenge for Hosayn's blood. Just like the *Maq̄tal* and the *Abu Moslem-nāma*, there are two rival parties fighting throughout the epic: the friends of the Family of the Prophet (Sunnis) and the enemies of the Family (Khārejis, led by Yazid and Marwan). The main representatives of both parties confront each other on several occasions, where the arguments of both sides are summarized repeatedly. Mosayyab is presented as Torābi (i.e., 'Alavi), "the lover of Hasan and Hosayn's progeny," and "the proof of 'Ali's family." On the other hand, his adversaries are declared "killers of the Prophet's sons," "those who removed

9 Although we have few extant copies of the epic, it is still popular among contemporary Alevi communities. A passage in *Saltuk-nāma*, which was compiled in 1480, reveals that this epic had been in circulation among *ghāzis* and Sufis in the middle ages. This relatively long passage of *Saltuk-nāma* is apparently extracted from *Mosayyab-nāma* (Ebu'l Hayr-ı Rūmî 2013, 152-57). The earliest extant copy of the epic was written before 1786, likely in the seventeenth century. This manuscript was published by Necati Demir (Demir 2007). The story and its hero Mosayyab Ghazi seem to be fiction. Throughout the narrative the sense of chronology is totally lost; figures from different times are brought together in the same battle scenes. In general, however, the deeds of Mosayyab Ghazi show noticeable resemblance to those of Mokhtar al-Saqafi.

'Ali's name from *khotba*," and "the friends of Yazid the bastard" (Demir, 2007, 71, 79, 81, 85, 109-10, 122).

Another important example from the series of Karbala-oriented religious-heroic epics is the *Jonayd-nāma*. The Turkish version was translated from the Persian<sup>10</sup> in 924/1518-19, and the extant Turkish manuscript, entitled *Qessa-ye Sayyed Joneyd ve Rashida-ye Arab ve Serguzesht-e Ishan* (Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Fatih 4354) was copied in 964/1556-57 (*Qessa-ye Sayyed Jonayd*, fol. 2b). The central theme of this epic is also the rivalry between the Family of the Prophet and the Umayyads (*Qessa-ye Sayyed Jonayd*, fol. 2b). In many aspects, the *Joneyd-nāma* stands as a prelude to the epic of Abu Moslem. The text is full of references both to Karbala and to the *Abu Moslem-nāma*. Above all, the main characters of the epic, both good and bad, are sons of the Karbala generation and grandfathers or fathers of the Abu Moslem generation (*Qessa-ye Sayyed Jonayd*, fols. 204b, 335b-36a). The protagonist himself is depicted as the grandfather of Abu Moslem. In fact, the end of this epic establishes a direct link to the *Abu Moslem-nāma*: "... And Kalima [Abu Moslem's mother] was pregnant. This story is in the epic of Abu Moslem. The rest will be told there by the will of Allāh" (*Qessa-ye Sayyed Jonayd*, fol. 337a).

In a similar vein, the *Battal-nāma* (Dedes; Demir and Erdem) depicts the protagonist as a *sayyed* and a passionate lover of the *ahl al-bayt*, who actually fights against the Khārejis of the time. Indeed, at the very beginning of the text, the Islamic perception governing the whole narrative is discernible. It says that after the martyrdom of 'Ali, "The Yazidis rebelled. They martyred Hasan and Hosayn. All the sons of 'Ali scattered. Yazid holds the caliphate by way of usurpation. [Yazidis] betrayed [Mohammad's religion] for seventy four years. They removed 'Ali's name from the *khotba* ... The world was filled with Khārejis" (Demir and Erdem, 67-68). Throughout the narrative, there are numerous references to this two-fold categorization of Muslims, as well as to Karbala and Abu Moslem (Demir and Erdem, 145, 316, 323, 342). The *Daneshmand-nāma* reflects a similar religious orientation. Apart from strong links to the *Saltuk-nāma* and the *Abu Moslem-nāma*, the protagonist is presented as a fervent friend of 'Ali and his family (Demir, 2004, pp. 60-63, 72-73, 88, 98-99, 174, 189; for another edition, see Demir, 2002).

The leitmotif of dualism within the Islamic community is echoed even more in the *Saltuk-nāma*.<sup>11</sup> In addition to strong references to (or more correctly

10 We do not know anything about the allegedly Persian original work.

11 This heroic-frontier epic is a legendary vita of the famous Turkoman chief Sari Saltuk who crossed to the Balkans in the second half of the thirteenth century. For a good summary of discussions on Sari Saltuk and his vita, see Ocak 2011.

overlapping with) the *Battal-nāma*, the *Mosayyab-nāma*, and the *Abu Moslem-nāma*, an *ahl al-bayt*-centered vision of Islam is unmistakably embedded in the narrative. Just like the above-summarized tradition, it presents the history of Islam as a fight between the friends of the House (*bayt*) and its enemies (Abu'l-khayr Rumi, 152-57, 177, 468-69). The concept of the *sāheb al-khoruj* as the avenger of Hosayn's blood is also reflected in the text. For example, after short references to 'Ali's fight against Mo'awiya and Hosayn's stand against Yazid, it says that a number of heroes, including Mosayyab and Abu Moslem, rose up in the name of Hosayn's blood. "Over them [Khārejis], God sent seventy-three *ashāb al-khoruj*, who slaughtered them and took revenge for the offspring (*awlād*) [of the Prophet]. [Finally Abu Moslem came and finished their rule]" (Abu'l-Khayr Rumi, p. 468).

Lastly, it should be noted that this vision is not exclusive to Karbala-oriented heroic epic literature but achieved a widespread currency amongst various segments of the late medieval Anatolian (as well as Balkan) society. For example, *The Anonymous History of the Ottoman Dynasty* calls those people who sympathize with the Umayyads as *Yazidi* (Azamat, 41). A *fatowwat-nāma* written in the mid-fourteenth century uses the same terminology: "Sunni" for true Muslims (friends of *ahl al-bayt*) and "*Marwāni*" for aberrant (enemies of the House) (Gölpınarlı, 1953-54, 147). Likewise, another fifteenth-century *fatowwat-nāma* divides Muslims into friends of the Dynasty and enemies of the Dynasty, calling the latter "*Yazidi*" (Gölpınarlı, 1955-56, 85). Similarly, the famous *Ketāb-e Dede Qorqud*, a compilation of Turkish-Oghuz short legends most probably transcribed from the oral tradition in the fifteenth century, makes a special reference to Imam 'Ali's sons Hasan and Hosayn as well as to the event of Karbala; following the well-entrenched tradition it refers to their enemies as *Yazidi* (Ergin, 75).

In that respect, one of the most interesting sources outside the Karbala-oriented epic literature is Eşrefoğlu/Ashrafoghli Rumî's (d. 874/1469) *Tarikat-nāma*. Being accepted as the second founder of the Qāderiya Sufi Order in the Ottoman realm, Ashrafoghli's testimony is particularly important if we want to observe the adoption of the *ahl al-bayt*-centered vision of Islamic history by the allegedly "Sunni" Sufi Orders. Ashrafoghli's view of early Islamic history shows no difference from the above-summarized collective memory. Above all, the Qāderi shaykh asserts that a Sufi master or shaykh must hold a sayyed lineage, the golden progeny sprouted from the marriage of 'Ali and Fatema. Otherwise his claim to be a spiritual guide is simply forgery. He insists that the best among the prophets (*anbiyā*) is Mohammad and the best among the saints (*awliyā*) is 'Ali. Those who oppose this are Khārejis; to murder them is legal, even better than the murder of unbelievers (Eşrefoğlu, p. 54). As a matter of fact, *Tarikat-nāma* clearly reflects the twofold vision of Muslim community

based upon the *ahl al-bayt*-Umayyad bipartition, more or less with the same nomenclature discussed above. It reads, for example (Eşrefoğlu, 13-14):

Earlier in the history, Yazid the cursed seized the supremacy and massacred the progeny of the Prophet. He ordered to curse upon 'Ali on pulpits, God save us! Those sons of the Imam (*emāmzadā*) [Hasan and Hosayn] were martyred at that time. Later on Abu Moslem, let God's consent be upon him, came forth and extirpated Yazids; he reinstated the name of Imam 'Ali in the Friday Sermon. From that time on this lineage has not been broken. Whenever the names of 'Ali or his sons were pronounced, those Khāreji groups who had attached themselves to Yazid and Marwān, may God's curse be upon them and their followers, talked about their own affiliation within their evil circles, but in weakness. On the other hand, those people who were friends of 'Ali and who attached themselves to 'Ali's progeny talked joyfully about their affinity to [the *ahl al-bayt*] whenever their [*Imams*'] names are pronounced and followed their [*ahl al-bayt's*] path. The zeal of the truth (*haqq*) comes out from amongst the second group.

### Collective Memory and Cyclical History

At this point it is necessary to ask whether these Karbala-oriented legendary sources reflect common vision. Each one of these epics mirrors different facets of a common lore of religious knowledge. The open-structured and transient nature of these texts (which becomes most obvious when observing that the same themes and narrative units are freely floating among different epics) allows us to conceptualize the whole literature as one great collective memory. Numerous cross-references among these texts further indicate an encompassing web of background knowledge. This is because these narratives rest on a long oral accumulation of knowledge before being committed to writing. The texts are not produced by a single mind at a specific moment. They rather resemble pebbles carried along and shaped through a long river. Committing these narratives to writing constitutes simply the last stage of this production process. The main course of the process of creation, preservation, and transmission of knowledge was realized through performative story-telling sections enacted by *maddāhs* or story-tellers.<sup>12</sup> It was this chain of performances that continuously re-created and transmitted units of stories, which were

12 We have evidence showing that *Maq̄tal* was read and performed in Sufi and *akhi* lodges during the first ten days of Muharram. See Mélikoff 1966, 134-36; and Yıldırım 2012, 353-58.

eventually collected, edited and written down by a compiler, reaching us as hagiographies, epics, or folk romances.

Studies on oral traditions show that performative story-telling is an intensely interactive activity. A story that is told by a *maddāh* or singer in a specific setting owes much to the audience. Keeping in mind that entertainment and popular approval were primary concerns of the singers who would have to please their audience, hence they adjusted stories according to the values, sentiments and expectations of their listeners. Furthermore, active interference by the audience within the flow of the story via questions, approval, or objection was common and expected. As a result, the audience became part of the authorship process. Indeed, we may talk about a “collective authorship” for these texts, which makes them a genuine mirror of the collective memory (Yıldırım, 2012, 347-53).

Given the fact that these orally accumulated legendary texts represent segments of the collective memory, one may conclude that mourning for Hosayn and yearning for his vengeance set the tone of popular piety in medieval Anatolia. Likewise, vengeance for Hosayn always deeply influenced and colored the perception and experience of Islam. The stereotypical heroes fighting to avenge Hosayn (*sāheb al-khoruj*), such as Abu Moslem, were thus not only perceived as heroes of the past but as ever-living prototypes continuously shaping the experience of faith.

The most important point here is that these epics were not only relating a past story but psychologically and emotionally regenerating it. For example, a person who was listening to the epic of Abu Moslem was also feeling himself caught up in the flow of events. As a general feature of this genre, perhaps of the time, the gap between past and present shrinks in the mind of the audience. The emotional links established with the heroes of epics create such a state of effervescence that the past and the present merge. Such an understanding of the past creates a consciousness of cyclical history, which implies that the successive cycles of the eternal fight between the ‘Alids and Umayyads repeatedly appear in time. As Kathryn Babayan observes in the case of the *Abu Moslem-nāma*, “The story woven around Abu Moslem’s life in the epics also reveals an experience of history that was cyclical, continually connecting the present with past aeons. What seems to the reader as anachronisms are in fact bridges that attempt to heal the aporia of time, emblematic of the ways in which the drama of ‘Alid history was remembered and acted out in lived time” (Babayan, 2002, 123).

This brings us to the most important fact: how powerful a political weapon these stories could be in cultivating a revolutionary mood. Commemorations and incessant remembrances transform a past event into living memory.



Recollecting a specific lot of the past in such an enthusiastic way blurs the time interval between the event and the present, resuscitating the past in the present. Embedded in recurrent cycles of the fight between evil and good, symbolized by the persons of Yazid and Hosayn, the audience looks around to identify the Yazid and the Hosayn of their own time. Such a lively connection with the past stimulates messianic expectations, hence creates a source of abundant energy to mobilize masses along revolutionary purposes. As will be shown shortly, the Safavid propaganda disseminated among Turcomans perfectly matched this chiliastic aspiration.

### Safavid Propaganda

Unfortunately, we have no reliable documentation of Shaykh Jonayd's and Shaykh Haydar's religious propaganda. For Shah Esmā'il, however, the situation is quite different. Thanks to the rich content of his *Divān*, we are able to develop a vision of Shah Esmā'il's self-perception and religious agenda. An examination of his poems alongside early Safavid chronicles permits a delineation of the central themes of Safavid religio-political propaganda. Such a study reveals that the Safavid Sufi leadership efficiently adjusted the order's mystical doctrine so that it perfectly addressed the above-mentioned codes of popular piety. Shah Esmā'il and his two predecessors competently identified themselves with the successive avengers of the Family of Mohammad-'Ali, that is, the *sāheb al-khoruj*, while portraying their enemies as the contemporary Yazid or Khārejīs. Minorsky rightfully deduces from autobiographical details in Shah Esmā'il's poetry that "the slogan of his personal action is revenge" (Minorsky, 1939-42, 1025a). Though the vendetta for his immediate ancestors was certainly part of his political motivation, the real success of the propaganda rested upon declaring himself the champion of the revenge of the Prophetic household and the claimant of Hosayn's blood in particular. On many occasions, Shah Esmā'il presents himself as the sword of the Family, *Dhu'l-feqār*, which is divinely ordained to extirpate the enemies of the Family from earth, and depicts his battle as a re-enactment of Karbala.

Given that these poems were obviously written for didactic purposes addressing Qezelbash disciples, they structured the religiosity of Qezelbash masses on the one hand and urged them to engage in collective political action on the other. The flow of contemporary events leaves no doubt that this specific mode of religio-political propaganda proved successful. Following the established tradition that we observe in Karbala-oriented legendary literatures, Shah Esmā'il's poetry divides people into two main groups along the

lines of a cosmic battle. On the one hand, there are real believers (*moḥebb-e khānadān*, *ahl al-haqq*, *ahl al-eqrār*, Sufis, the Qezelbash, *mawāli*, etc. . . .) who are marked with their excessive love for the House of the Prophet.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, we have the enemies of the House of the Prophet, who are referred to as Yazidi, Marwāni, Khāreji, *moshrek*, *monāfeq*. Shah Esmā'il presents himself as the champion of the eternal fight against the enemies of the House, a vision which inevitably dooms Esmā'il's enemies to the position of the second party. An examination of Shah Esmā'il's poems reveals how masterfully he employed a vocabulary and imagery that speaks to the sentiments of the above-discussed popular piety.

To start with, on many occasions Shah Esmā'il unequivocally expresses his religious, spiritual, and genealogical affiliation to Imam 'Ali, the *ahl al-bayt*, and the Twelve Imams. One of his poems exalts 'Ali as his Sultan and spiritual director (*pūr*; *morshed*) from Pre-Eternity, whose path he follows as a Hosayni of the time. The same poem pictures Shah Esmā'il as a slave of the Imams, whose destiny is to be martyred on their path, and a mystery of Imam 'Ali (Gandjei, 71). Another poem depicts him as God's mystery (*Hakk'in serri*), the son of Fatema and 'Ali, repository of the mystery of Holiness (*serr-e walāyat*), a follower of Mohammad's path, the Qambar and a servant of 'Ali, and the leader of *ghāzis* (Gandjei, 18). Elsewhere, Shah Esmā'il describes himself as the servant of the servant of 'Ali, an adherent of the Hosaynid sect, the guide of *mawāli*, the *pir* of *ghāzis*, the commander of *ghāzis*, and both the *pir* and the Sultan of the world (Minorsky, 1939-42, 1031a). In a similar vein, another poem depicts him as the one related to Mohammad and 'Ali, the one related to Hosayn-e Karbala, who entered the arena for the love of Hasan, and a beggar at the gate of the Mahdi (Gandjei, 23, 125).

When it comes to propagating his self-designed eternal mission, the twofold division of humanity becomes even more apparent. According to his vision, there are aberrant oppressors, the successors of Yazid and Marwan, who held sway for a while and persecuted true Muslims. The divine mission of Shah Esmā'il was to rise against those aberrant-oppressors (*khārejīs*) in the name of the *ahl al-bayt*; he was to extirpate them from this world, and to reinstate justice on earth. In other words, he was the *sāheb al-khorūj* of the time. In his own words, "I am intoxicated with love for the Shah . . . I am the friend of the Dynasty . . . I shall uproot Yazid and the polytheists . . . *Dhu'l-feqār* of the Shah is a sign in my hand . . . I shall exterminate the *khārejīs* from earth!" (Gandjei, 109). In a similar vein, he presents himself as "the God-sent calamity to smite with a

13 It is interesting to note that unlike the earlier Karbala-oriented legendary literature, Shah Khata'i never calls the good Muslims "Sunni". This important detail needs further discussion.

sword the soul of the hypocrite (*monāfeq*)” (Gandjei, 148-49), “death descended upon the Kharejis and calamity befallen the Yazids,” and “a Hosaynid who has curses for Yazid” (Gandjei, 18).

Shah Esmā'il does not only identify his mission with that of the House of the Prophet but also amalgamates his ancestral vendetta (with the Shirvānshāhs and the Aq Qoyunlu) with revenge for Karbala. He says, “There is a commandment in God's books: know for certain that it decrees blood for blood . . . The blood of Shah Haydar is (unavenged). Yazid still awaits a crushing defeat. Rise and march, o Khatā'i, make a journey; for (thy) paternal home is in the town of Ardabil” (Gandjei, 65-66). Elsewhere, he states that he recovered his father's blood from his enemies, whom he identifies with Yazid and describes as polytheists (*moshrek*), adepts of the accursed one, and hypocrites (*monāfeq*) (Gandjei, 18).

The following poem that so vividly describes the two parties, that is, Shah's followers and enemies, is worth being quoted in full (Gandjei, p. 10; Minorsky, 1939-42, p. 1042a):

That Sultan of generosity is the Master of Reason (*sāheb honar*); he is sanctity (*walāyat*) and the light of the eyes.  
 Should the *ghāzis* put on their swords and arms, fear of danger will invade the soul of hypocrites (*monāfeq*).  
 Let Yazid's host be one hundred thousand, one man from the host of sanctity (*walāyat lashkari*) is enough (to defeat them).  
 Should the Shah with a glance make a sign, before it all the *giaours* and Marwans will be scattered.  
 The moon-faced Shah can be recognized by the crown (*tāj*) on his head and the precious belt round his waist.  
 The one who does not find the Mystery of Sanctity (*walāyat serri*) is a blind man and an ignorant fool.  
 When the *ghāzis* enter the arena *khārejīs* will be utterly under their feet.  
 Know for certain: 'Ali is the Sea of Truth (*baḥr-e haqiqat*), he is the eternal life of honor.  
 The day the *ghāzis* (preceded by) the red pennons and banners, don their red *tāj*, will be the day of warning.<sup>14</sup>  
 Mo'awiya's host on seeing one *ghāzi* will grow worse than that sheep at which a wolf clutches.

14 A better translation of this couplet would be: “The day the ghazis (preceded by) the red pennons and banners, don their red *taj*, he [Ali] will be ready [with them].”

The *akhis* who recognize the *pir* are true pearls; those whose word is but one are true men.

In the Path of the Shah, Khatā'i sacrifices his soul, to say nothing of the kingdom, property, gold, and silver.

It is noteworthy that how masterfully the binary vocabulary and imagery is deployed in Shah Esmā'il's poetry. His interest in Karbala memory also shows itself as sponsoring the authorship of a Persian *maqṭal al-Hosayn* named *Mashhad al-Shohadā*. As declared in the text, the author Nadā'i Yazdi versified Hosayn Wā'ez Kāshifi's famous *Rawzat al-Shohadā* (*Meadow of Martyrs*) on Shah Esmā'il's order and presented his work to the Shah in 927/1521 or a few years earlier.<sup>15</sup> Although Nadā'i states that he simply versified *Rawzat al-Shohadā*, the long introduction before the main text and the *Manāqeb* of Mosayyab Ghāzi (fols. 222a-34a)<sup>16</sup> incorporated into the end of the Karbala narrative are apparently his own additions. The content and structure of the narrative especially in those sections authored by Nadā'i very closely resemble that of Shādi's above-mentioned Turkish *Maqṭal al-Hosayn*, a resemblance that encourages one to suppose that Nadā'i also drew upon the Turkish oral traditions or *maqṭal*-oriented literary corpus already widespread among the Qezelbash. His recurrent use of the phrase "the Shah of Turks" for Hosayn ben 'Ali, obviously anachronistic otherwise, buttresses this assumption. Moreover, the *Manāqeb* of Mosayyab Ghāzi, which he added at the end of his oeuvre (even though it is absent in *Rawzat al-Shohadā*), clearly shows the connection between his *maqṭal* and the larger "*maqṭal*-oriented epic literature." Following the established nomenclature, Nadā'i labels enemies of the *ahl al-bayt* as Yazidi or Khāreji, while calling the friends of the House, hence good Muslims, *mohebbān-e āl-e rasul* (Friends of the House of the Prophet), Shī'ite, and, *mawāli*.<sup>17</sup> A substantial difference in Nadā'i's terminology, however, is the loaded term "Sunni." Diametrically contrasting to the earlier Turkish literature, Nadā'i calls the enemies of the *ahl al-bayt* Sunnis, as opposed to the "Friends"

15 *Mashhad al-Shohadā* is analyzed in Husayn Kiya's PhD dissertation at Tehran University (2012). Emrah Özdemir also studied the same text as part of a PhD dissertation at Fatih University, Istanbul. I thank him for calling my attention to this important source.

16 Although showing certain similarities with the Turkish epic of Mosayyab, this *manaqeb* has substantial differentiations. The central theme, battling Karbala's Khariji antagonist to avenge Hosayn's blood, however, remains the same in both versions.

17 It should be stated that the same dual structure, i.e. the protagonists as friends of the *ahl al-bayt* and antagonists as the friends of the Umayyads (hence the enemies of the former), is overriding in Kashefi's work as well (Amanat 2003, 264).

or Shi'ites.<sup>18</sup> As for envisioning Shah Esmā'il and his mission, Nadā'i follows in the footsteps of the Shah's poems. According to him, Shah Esmā'il was the manifestation of the Mahdi's light, as well as his vicegerent (*nā'eb*); he was Haydar (Imam 'Ali) of the time, who was to demolish the "Sunni Church"<sup>19</sup> and to avenge Hosayn's blood from Yazidis (Nadā'i, fols. 9a-17b).

One concludes that, developing his political mission on the basis of the well-entrenched Karbala memory, Shah Esmā'il established a reputation as a protagonist of the perpetual cosmic battle against enemies of the *ahl al-bayt*. To show how this propaganda created an image that replicated the fight of earlier 'Alid *da'was*, one example suffices. The Anonymous History of Shah Esmā'il known as the *Ross Anonymous*<sup>20</sup> describes Esmā'il's investment by the Twelfth Imam the Mahdi with his divine mission just before his *khoroj* as follows (Ross, 331):

... a party of man had entered, bringing a boy of fourteen years of age, with red hair, a white face, and dark-grey eyes; on his head was a scarlet cap. Being entered he made a salutation and stood still; the veiled youth [Lord of the Age] then said to him: "Oh! Esmā'il, the hour of your 'coming' has now arrived." The other replied, "It is for your Holiness to command." The prince then said: "Come forward." He came forward, and his holiness taking his belt three times lifted it up and placed it on the ground again. He then, with his own blessed hands, fastened on the girdle, and taking (Esmā'il's) cap from his head, raised it and then replaced it. He wore a Kurdish belt-dagger; this His Holiness took from him threw to the dervish, saying: "Keep this, for it will stand you instead." His Holiness then told his servants to bring his own sword, which, when brought, he fastened with his own hands to the girdle of the child. Then he said: "you may now depart."<sup>21</sup>

18 Such a dramatic change in the meaning of "Sunni" is only natural when we consider that Shah Esmā'il had already adopted Twelver Shi'ism as the official sect in 1521.

19 As stated earlier, "Sunni" in this text means the enemy of the *ahl al-bayt*.

20 The date and authorship of this anonymous history became the subject of dispute among historians. According to Ross, it was written during the time of Shah Tahmasb (Ross, 250). Andrew H. Morton persuasively argues, on the other hand, that the chronicle must have been written in the seventeenth century (Morton). The important point for the purpose of our study is that unlike many other chronicles written by court historians, this work rather reflects the Qezelbash approach to early history of the Safavid state.

21 Elsewhere, the *Anonymous History* says that the *khoroj* of Shah Esmā'il was already foretold to Shaykh Haydar by Imam 'Ali through a dream encounter. In the same dream, Imam 'Ali also instructed him to prepare a special uniform for his soldiers, the twelve-gore red

This fictive account relating the start of Esmā'il's *khoroj* reveals how the Qezelbash collective memory identified the image of Esmā'il's with the well-established hero archetype, the *sāheb al-khoruj*. The symbolism, vocabulary, and imagery of this scene clearly mirror Abu Moslem's investment with the mission of *khoroj*. Indeed, a close scrutiny reveals that both stories are developed on the same narrative template. Abu Moslem is replaced by Esmā'il and the Prophet is replaced by the Mahdi. Donning the crown (*tāj*), girding a sash, and the investment with a special weapon remain the same in both stories as narrative tools. Also the verbal inculcation of the mission recurs in both stories, although the wording varies in detail.

The same tradition of Esmā'il's investment with the *khoroj* by the Mahdi finds a reflection in another Safavid source. A certain Hashem Najafi writes in his *Tariq al-ershād* that once he had a momentous dream in which he was transported to the abode of the Twelfth Imam. During the dream encounter, he was told that the twelve-gored crown was first put on 'Ali's head as a sign of his Imamate and *walāyat*; after 'Ali it was transmitted through the Imams until it reached the Twelfth Imam, who took it into occultation. This very same crown was put on Shah Esmā'il's head by the Mahdi, transmitting it from the *bāten* to the *zāher*, when Esmā'il rose up. It is because of this that Esmā'il was known as the deputy (*nā'eb*) of the Twelfth Imam and whoever wore it became a member of the Mahdi's army. Najafi also says that in the same dream encounter, he was commissioned to convey this knowledge to the larger world; hence he wrote the *Tariq al-ershād* to explain the importance and meaning of the twelve-gore crown (Bashir, 2014, 346-47).<sup>22</sup>

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*taj*, which would be the emblem of the revolution: "One night the Prince of the throne of Guidance and Sanctity, that is to say the Commander of the Faithful ('Ali), upon whom be the prayers of God, appeared in a vision to Soltan Haydar, and said to him: 'Oh my son, the time is now at hand when my children from among your descendants shall arise and sweep Infidelity from off the face of the Earth. It now behoves you to fashion a cap for the Sufis and your disciples, and you must take it of scarlet cloth.' So saying His Sanctity cut out with a pair of scissors which he had in his hand a pattern of a cap with twelve points [*tarāk*]." (Ross, 254-5). The story is also recorded with some variances by Eskandar Beg Monshi (Eskandar Beg Monshi, 31).

- 22 Although al-Najafi writes in the text that he wrote his book in 966/1559-60, Bashir argues the work must actually have been written in the second half of the seventeenth century, when the culture of storytelling different from works of learned historians became conspicuously popular (Bashir 2014, 350-351). Either way, it remains true that al-Najafi's account reflects the entrenched pattern of Shah Esmā'il's *khoroj* in Qezelbash collective memory, just as is the case for *Ross Anonymous*.

## Conclusion

Ever since the emergence of rational-juridical Imamism from the late eighth century onwards, it has been possible to speak of two different but interrelated strands of Shi'ism: rationalized-"orthodox" Imamism and suprarational *gholāt* Shi'ism. Contrary to the political quietism of the former, the latter has always been immersed in political aspirations. In the *gholāt* milieu, the revenge for Hosayn's blood has always become the principal stimulus of political action, which usually assumed a mode of chiliastic revolution. During the post-Mongol era, the intense revenge culture of Karbala and the millenarian-messianic aspirations of the *gholāt* Shi'ism filtered into popular Sufism. By the mid-fourteenth century, the confluence of these *gholāt* Shi'ite elements and Sufism gave rise to a peculiar type of 'Alid piety, which I call Shi'ite-inflected popular Sufism. The messianic-Sufi movements that appeared in fifteenth-century Iran such as the Nurbakhshiya (Bashir, 2003), the Moshā'sha' (Bashir, 2001), and even the Sarbadār uprising in fourteenth-century Khorasan (Smith) should be regarded as manifestations of this particular piety. The Safavid revolution, hence the Qezelbash synthesis, stands for the culmination of this post-Mongol phenomenon of Islamic religiosity.

This Shi'ite-inflected popular Sufism rested upon two doctrinal pillars: 1) the idea of apocalyptic salvation after divinely ordained messianic leaders, and 2) the Karbala-oriented interpretation of Islamic history and sectarian formations. Although these beliefs have deep roots in *gholāt* Shi'ism, now they were reinterpreted within the perimeters of Sufism. It is quite clear from Shah Esmā'il's poems and other sources that Shah Esmā'il and his immediate ancestors accommodated the Safavid Order's Sufi doctrine, especially the position of the *morshed-e kāmel* (perfect spiritual director), to the end that it perfectly matched the above-mentioned piety. Even a rough examination of his poetry leaves no doubt that Shah Esmā'il presented himself as the holder of the *da'wa* of the *ahl al-bayt*. Just like Abu Muslim, Mosayyab Ghāzi and others, he presented himself as the *sāheb al-khoruj*, a heroic archetype deeply imbedded in popular-religious culture. Since such a dual vision of history was deeply entrenched in the collective memory of the grassroots of the Order, Shah Esmā'il's call proved effective in fostering religious sentiment to mobilize large masses along already established messianic templates of religio-political action. In that sense, the Safavid revolution was presented and perceived as simply another cycle of the eternal fight against the oppressor enemies of the House of the Prophet; in many ways it was a replica of Abu Moslem's revolution.

As the Safavid state consolidated itself, the Shi'ite-inflected popular Sufism fell in decay, marking the demise of the movement's revolutionary zeal.

Instead, the Safavid state-building process was realized under the auspice of rational-judicial Imamism. One should note that these two forms of Islamic piety were not cooperative with each other, though both operated within the fold of Shi'ism. In fact, the Shi'ite-inflected popular Sufism was criticized and repudiated by Imami scholars, probably more than Sunni scholars, condemning them for their pantheism, antinomianism, and denial of God's transcendence. It is because of this, once the state was established on Imami jurisprudence, the revolutionary phase of the Safavid history became subject to criticism and was deliberately eclipsed. It is no coincidence then that the criticism of Imami scholars of the Shi'ite-inflected popular Sufism, which formed the ideological background of the revolution, manifested itself most unequivocally as the repudiation of Abu Muslim (Babayan, 2002, pp. 121-60; Abisaab, pp. 24-26). Remembering that the spirit of Shah Esmā'il's revolution is derived from a peculiar type of piety that rested upon the memory of Karbala and Abu Muslim, this reaction of Imami *ulama* (leading religious figures) was only normal.

One should note, however, that even orthodox Twelver *ulama* could not totally erase Shah Esmā'il's image as the *sāheb al-khoruj* but felt themselves compelled to interpret it in accordance with the orthodox view. To solve this problem, the Qā'em's temporal role was interpreted to accommodate Shah Esmā'il's achievements within the Qā'em's function. Eminent Shi'ite scholars of the seventeenth century, such as Mohammad-Baqer Majlesi, made interpretations identifying Shah Esmā'il with the Qā'em of the Family of the Prophet on the basis of traditions from Imam Ja'far al-Sādeq, which were likely fabricated (Sachedina, pp. 63-64). It is important to note, however, that the Qā'em in this context is not necessarily the same as the Mahdi. Majlesi purports that the Qā'em in the Shi'ite tradition refers to the person who will arise with the sword and this applies to all Imams, especially, of course, to the last Imam (Sachedina, p. 62).<sup>23</sup> Hence, the core meaning of the Qā'em is framed as the person who arises with the sword and fights those who have wronged the *ahl al-bayt*. The Mahdi with its eschatological significance, on the other hand, refers to a single person, namely the Twelfth Imam, who is the Qā'em *per se*. In that sense, Shah Esmā'il was seen as one of the Qā'em's who appeared throughout Shi'ite history, but apparently not as the Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam. As is clear enough, the Qā'em typology of Imami *ulama* is nothing but the return of the *sāheb al-khoruj* topos as described in the Karbala-oriented epic literature.

23 This interpretation has its roots in works of early Shi'ite doctors such as Shaykh al-Mofid (d. 1022) (Arjomad, 2000).



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