

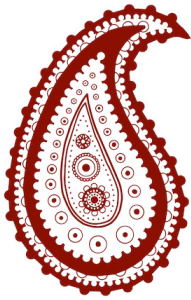
DĀNESH

THE OU UNDERGRADUATE
JOURNAL OF
IRANIAN STUDIES



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA
College of International Studies
Department of International and Area Studies

Volume 2 (2017)



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Volume 2 (2017)

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From the Faculty Advisor

This second volume of *DĀNESH* represents a significant expansion of the journal, both in terms of the scope of topics covered by the published articles, and by the growth of the journal's editorial team. Since its founding in 2016, *DĀNESH* has sought to provide a forum to showcase original research produced by Iranian Studies undergraduate students at the University of Oklahoma. This volume of the journal was produced through the able leadership of **Elizabeth "Libby" Ennenga** (BA, 2017), as the journal's editor-in-chief. Under Libby's editorial leadership *DĀNESH* has continued to thrive as a forum for the study of all aspects of the history, culture, society, and politics of Iran and the Persianate world.

This year also marks the maturing of OU's Iranian Studies program into the newly christened **Farzaneh Family Center for Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies**. As the program has grown, so too has the interest and dedication of OU students in the field of Iranian Studies. The publication of *DĀNESH*, a peer-reviewed journal published under the auspices of OU's Farzaneh Center and the OU College of International Studies, is also dedicated to highlighting the growing undergraduate program in Iranian Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

The name of the journal, *DĀNESH*, comes from the Persian word meaning *knowledge, learning, and wisdom*. We believe this is a fitting name for a journal that seeks to foster deep and compassionate understanding of one of the world's most culturally rich and historically complex civilizations. It is with this in mind that we present the second volume of *DĀNESH*.

Afshin Marashi

Farzaneh Family Chair in Modern Iranian History

Director, Farzaneh Family Center for Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies

From the Editor-in-Chief

I am honored to have been a part of the creation of Volume Two of *DĀNESH*. After an exceptionally successful inaugural edition of the journal, I have been more than impressed to see the quality of this new edition. This journal is made up of outstanding research examining the rich history, numerous religions, complex political climate, and vibrant culture of Iran. I believe in the transformative power of knowledge, and each article published in *DĀNESH* proves the academic dialogue on Iranian Studies is thriving at the University of Oklahoma.

Many students worked diligently to create the second edition of the journal. I would like to acknowledge and thank all of the associate editors who were consistently a positive hardworking team throughout this process. I would also like to recognize the authors of Volume Two; whose distinguished works are the reason the journal is possible. Each author remained professional, involved, and patient throughout the entire process — and for that I thank you. To the University of Oklahoma Libraries and Printing Services, thank you for your necessary assistance to help make *DĀNESH* accessible to readers both digitally and in physical copies.

The quality of work and endless support given to this journal is a direct reflection of the growth of the Iranian Studies Program at the University of Oklahoma. Thank you to the Farzaneh family for their generous donations that have allowed students to continue to pursue their interests in Iranian Studies. Most of all, my sincerest gratitude goes to Dr. Afshin Marashi. Neither this journal, nor the Iranian Studies Program would be possible without your continued support of the students and their work. Your guidance, assistance, and support have made all the difference.

Libby Ennenga (BA 2017)
Editor-in-Chief

The Spread of Shi'ism in Safavid Iran: Religion and Politics under Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp

Jack Bergum

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Although Shi'ism is oftentimes closely associated with Iran presently, it was not until the beginning of the Safavid dynasty in the 15th century that Shi'ism began the process of becoming the dominant religious sect in the region. However, the conversion of Iran's to Shi'ism was anything but a smooth process. Originating as the leaders of a Sufi sect in Iranian Azerbaijan, the early Safavid rulers promoted a millenarian apocalyptic vision that allowed them to consolidate leadership over a number of Turcoman tribes and eventually conquer Iran. Confronted with the challenge of governing its newly acquired territory, the Safavids distanced themselves from the millenarian ideology that they had previously embraced and began formally pronouncing Twelver Shi'ism as the official state religion and forcibly converting the people living in the empire.

The first two Safavid Shahs, Ismail and Tahmasp, are notable examples of this phenomenon and are often credited with installing Shi'ism into what is now, modern day Iran. Pressed with the need to consolidate control over an empire of disparate people, and directly opposed by the powerful empire of the Sunni Ottomans, Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp were motivated to convert Iran to orthodox Shi'ism due to the politically expedient needs of eliminating internal opposition and solidifying their rule in the context of the international order.

The Origins of the Safavids

Despite the crucial role that the Safavids play in Iranian history, they are of relatively humble origins. Furthermore, despite their later staunch support for the Iranian conversion to orthodox Shi'ism, the early Safavids were not adherents to anything resembling Twelver Shi'ism. Instead, the roots of the Safavids extend back to a Sunni-Sufi order founded by Sheikh

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Safi al-Din Ardabili, who lived in the late 13th and early 14th centuries.¹ The Safavids would continue their existence as a Sunni-Sufi sect, based primarily out of Iranian Azerbaijan, until the middle of the 14th century when the Safavid order split into two. The first group, under the leadership of Sheikh Jafar, remained around the city of Ardabil and continued its traditions, while another, led by Sheikh Junayd, moved its base to eastern Anatolia where it would become increasingly militaristic.² It was under Junayd's leadership that his followers, many of whom were recent Turcoman converts to Islam, began to adopt the millenarian, militant ideology that characterized the early reign of the Safavids in Iran.³

Haydar, Junayd's son and successor only furthered the process of the Safavid militarization, eventually conquering Ardabil and completing the transformation of the Turcoman converts into an extremist Shia group of warriors called the Qizilbash, due to their distinctive red headgear—Qizilbash literally means red hat in Turkish.⁴ The Safavids and Qizilbash, however, were still not followers of any mainstream branch of Shi'ism at this juncture in time. Instead, as Said Amir Amorjand asserts, "their Shi'ism was at best a secondary characteristic, while their primary defining features were those of popular Sufism," as was relatively common for a number of similar Sufi orders around the region.⁵ Thus, after a hundred years of existence, the Safavids had already undergone a fairly major ideological shift from Sunni-Sufism to extremist Shi'ism still infused with many elements of Sufism.

The ideology of the Qizilbash, as mentioned previously, differed somewhat significantly from the Sufism of Safi al-Din Ardabili; however, it still was a far cry from the Twelver Shi'ism that the first Safavid Shahs would promote. Haydar and Junayd preached a message of social justice and millenarian revolution that appealed strongly to members of Turcoman tribes caught between the powerful influences of the Ottoman Empire and the Aq Qoyunlu (a confederation of Turkic tribes that ruled across much of

¹ Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Medieval and Modern Iran*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 110.

² Said Amir Armojand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 79.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

the Iranian Plateau, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.)⁶ Policies enacted by both the Ottomans and the Aq Qoyunlu in the late 14th century greatly affected the Turcoman tribes living on the frontier of those empires.⁷ Ottoman financial reforms had the effect of impoverishing and angering the “frontier begs (lords)” and perhaps gave them some incentive to join Junayd as he began militarizing the Safavid order.⁸ Similarly, Aq Qoyunlu centralization policies in the name of Sharia also primed the Turcoman tribes to join the Safavid movement.⁹ Preaching that the messianic figure of the Mahdi was close to appearing, Junayd, Hudayr and Ismail managed to merge tenets of Shia teachings (the coming of the Mahdi meant the “annihilation” of all apostates, including Sunnis) with the interests of the Qizilbash.¹⁰ Disgruntled with centralized government and religious orthodoxy, it is understandable why Turcoman leadership in eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan began to join the Safavids and embraced the increasingly apocalyptic message of the order.¹¹ These early Safavids’ acceptance of this millenarian ideology was extremely politically expedient to them, regardless of their actual motive. Beset on all sides by powerful Sunni neighbors, the extremist Shia rhetoric of the Safavids helped to mobilize large numbers of disgruntled Turkic tribesmen to fight for their cause.

Furthermore, the Qizilbash had a number of other beliefs, besides the millenarianism that pervaded it, that decidedly do not fit within orthodox Shia thought. Firstly, starting with Junayd, the Safavids begin to develop a theology that regarded the first Imam, Ali, as the Godhead.¹² While recognizing the twelve Imams recognized by orthodox Twelver Shi'ism, the Safavids also promoted the idea that they were direct descendants of Ali thus making them divine in some way.¹³ The Safavid claim to a divine status is exemplified in the poetry of Ismail, in which Ismail describes

⁶ Colin P. Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran*, (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009), 20.

⁷ Ali Anooshahr, “Franz Babinger and the Legacy of the ‘German Counter-Revolution,’” in *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 43.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mitchell, *Practice of Politics*, 22.

¹¹ Ibid, 44.

¹² Ibid, 80.

¹³ Kathryn Babayan, “The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi'ism,” *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994): 136.

himself variously as Adam and Ali.¹⁴ Other decidedly non-orthodox beliefs included reincarnation (further solidifying the divinity of the Safavid rulers) and a belief that Allah's revelation had never stopped, thereby making Muhammad not the seal of the prophets.¹⁵ The non-orthodox components of this Safavid message were perfectly suited to the Qizilbash, that formed their base, and to the Safavid's initial desires of conquering territory. As stated by Arjomand, the "mahdistic tenet" promoted by the Safavids had the effect of channeling "ethically undisciplined extremist religiosity...into chiliastic action under charismatic leadership."¹⁶ The extremist Shi'ism practiced by the Qizilbash, promising a revolution to frontier tribesman upon hard times, differs significantly from the more orthodox Shi'ism that Shah Ismail began to promote during his reign. The millenarian ideology of the Qizilbash, although fortuitously well suited to consolidating support from different Turkic tribes and conquering a wide expanse of territory, would prove not to be especially well suited to governing a burgeoning empire.

Under Shah Ismail, the Safavids expanded from their millenarian roots and control over the Qizilbash to become rulers of an empire whose boundaries extended well beyond the borders of modern day Iran. It was also under Shah Ismail that Twelver Shi'ism became firmly rooted as the regions's dominant, most powerful religious sect. After Haydar's death fighting in the Caucasus, Soltan Ali, Ismail's older brother, became the leader of the Safavids.¹⁷ However, after his death in 1494 at the hands of the Aq Qoyunlu, seven-year-old Ismail ascended to a position of power.¹⁸ Residing in Lahijan as a youth, Ismail was tutored by a number of Shiites, thus giving him some exposure to the orthodox Twelver Shi'ism that would later form the spiritual backbone of the Safavid Empire.¹⁹ Ismail found himself thrust into major political and military action early in his life, leading the Qizilbash to victory against the Shirvanshah (the killers of Hudayr) and the capture of the city of Tabriz, which was to become his capital.²⁰ In 1501, when he was only fourteen, Ismail and his army defeated

¹⁴ Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 81.

¹⁵ Babayan, "Safavid Synthesis," 136.

¹⁶ Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 82.

¹⁷ Kataouzian, *Persians*, 111.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2006), 14.

²⁰ Katouzian, *Persians*, 111.

the Aq Qoyunlu—stricken by civil war—in the battle of Sharur, thereby making Ismail the ruler of the entirety of Iran.²¹ Ismail's rise to Shah was meteoric and ushered in a host of lasting changes to the region, helping to create the particularly unique Iranian identity seen in Iran today. The Twelver Shiite identity of much of Iran today, in particular, was created when Ismail began to convert (sometimes forcibly) the peoples of his empire. However, Ismail first needed to shift the ideology of the Safavids from the millenarianism so vigorously embraced by the Qizilbash to something approaching Shiite orthodoxy.

Shah Ismail I

Almost immediately after becoming Shah, Ismail began to promote Twelver Shi'ism, very publicly announcing this shift in official religious ideology in Tabriz in 1501—perhaps due to a need to stabilize his new regime.²² As he began to facilitate the conversion of Iran's conversion to orthodox Shi'ism, he quickly discovered that he faced a number of significant obstacles. Indeed, according to Arjomand “the spread of the Shiite doctrine among the population of Iran did not decisively change the religious outlook of the country until virtually after the completion of the first three processes under Abbas the Great.”²³ However, despite the fact that the majority of Iran was staunchly Sunni, Ismail benefitted from a “religiously promiscuous ambiance” that allowed a somewhat easier propagation of Shi'ism than might have been observed otherwise.²⁴ Not locked firmly into a Sunni identity, portions of the Iranian population proved to be susceptible to the conversion to Shi'ism. Despite a lack of firm Sunni identity in some segments of the Iranian population, many of Ismail's conversionary efforts were rooted in “fear, harsh punishment and persecution,” as illustrated by the Shah's personal proclamation in Tabriz in 1501 that he would personally kill anyone who refused to convert to Shi'ism.²⁵ In order to successfully convert, an individual would have to testify that Ali was the Vice-regent of God, add a phrase to the call for prayer and publicly curse Abu Bakr, Omar and Uthman—the first three Caliphs as recognized by Sunnis.²⁶ Twelver Shi'ism provided a better

²¹ Ibid.

²² Babayan, “Safavid Synthesis,” 137.

²³ Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 109.

²⁴ Ibid, 106.

²⁵ Katouzian, *Persians*, 115.

²⁶ Ibid.

means of rule than Qizilbash millenarianism because it lent itself to stability and a religious legal framework, thus prompting Ismail to embrace it at the expense of the previous Safavid religious ideology.

In order for this transition to occur, Ismail recognized the need for clerics. As a predominately Sunni region before the Safavid conquest, the Iran lacked any sort of Shi'a scholarship, making the institutionalization of Shi'ism extraordinarily difficult. In order solve this problem Ismail encouraged the emigration of a number of Shia scholars. One of the most notable of these individuals was Al-Muhaqqiq al-Karaki, an individual of Lebanese descent and Syrian religious education who aided significantly in the Safavid effort to promote Shiite orthodoxy.²⁷ Al-Karaki was one of a number of 'Amili scholars recruited to reside in Iran. These scholars all studied in the Syrian region of Jabal 'Amil, which by the sixteenth century was the preeminent center of Shiite scholarship.²⁸ Ismail, as well as his successors, recruited the 'Amilis for the express purpose of attempting to impose a "high tradition of Shi'ism" on the existing Iranian aristocracy, thereby deepening their hold on their fledgling empire.²⁹ Furthermore, the 'Amilis could engage in independent interpretations of Islamic tradition, usually in the Safavids' favor, legitimizing Safavid rule and the changes that the Shahs attempted to impose on Iran.³⁰ Citing Max Weber's argument that salvation religions have different functions to the ruling and lower classes, Arjomand describes how orthodox Shi'ism not only legitimized the rule of the Safavids, but also how its implementation managed to provide "compensation for the disprivileged groups, the bulk of the nation under its spiritual custody."³¹ Ismail's introduction of a number of 'Alimi scholars to Iran, although perhaps in part motivated by legitimate religious piety, was also in part a calculated move to institutionalize Twelver Shi'ism in Iran and to consolidate his rule.

Hand in hand with his introduction of Arab Shiite scholars to his empire was Ismail's gradual disassociation with the ideology of the Qizilbash. Although the Qizilbash would remain the core of the Safavid ruling apparatus until the reign of Shah Abbas I later in the 16th century, Ismail began to take some steps to distance Safavid rule from the millenarianism

²⁷ Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*, (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2004), 16.

²⁸ Ibid, 11.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 12.

³¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 164.

espoused by the Qizilbash.³² Firstly, Ismail made several efforts to centralize rule, efforts that were at odds with the tribal nature of the Qizilbash.³³ In fact, he directly attempted to use his newly acquired religious scholars to undermine the power that the Qizilbash possessed.³⁴ Although these efforts to end the prominent influence of the Qizilbash were largely unsuccessful, they did manage to pave the way for Ismail's successors to eventually completely disassociate themselves with the group.³⁵ As it happened, however, Ismail's slight reduction in the power of the Qizilbash was largely achieved not through his promulgation of Twelver Shi'ism—which the Qizilbash cautiously reconciled with—but rather through his incorporation of the Iranian nobility into the administrative apparatus of his new state.³⁶ In any case, Ismail's modest efforts to limit the Qizilbash appear to have been motivated primarily by the desire to effectively rule, a desire to which the radical extremism of the Qizilbash was not well suited. Although popularly depicted as a religious zealot, a great deal of practicality underscored the decisions of Ismail, even those regarding religion.

Another inherently practical reason that Ismail may have so readily embraced Twelver Shi'ism was the constant threat the powerful Ottoman Empire, a bastion of orthodox Sunnism, posed on the western border of Safavid territory. As previously mentioned, the tribes that would eventually unite to form the Qizilbash, and the early Safavid base of power, had a lengthy and contentious relationship with the Ottomans. The centralization of Ottoman rule in the early 15th century and the resulting institutionalization of Sunnism resulted in the persecution of fringe movements on the empire's periphery such as the religiously heterodox Turcoman tribes.³⁷ Moreover, the early Safavid movement succeeded to the extent that it did in large part due to the fact that it represented the "last bid for power by the Anatolian and Caspian regions" and the Turcoman tribes that resided there.³⁸ From its earliest moments as a Sufi movement in the hinterlands of Anatolia, the Safavids had always been categorized to

³² Ibid, 180.

³³ Babayan, "Safavid Synthesis," 143.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 110.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Babak Rahimi, "Between Chieftaincy and Knighthood: A Comparative Study of Ottoman and Safavid Origins," *Thesis Eleven*, 76 (2004): 92.

³⁸ Ibid, 93.

some extent by their opposition to the Ottomans. In fact, the very existence of the Qizilbash as “a dissident association with strong heretical tendencies” is put into much sharper focus by the pressures that Ottoman power placed on unorthodox religious movements resisting its rule.³⁹ Inherently opposed to the Ottomans, due to the historical shaping of the movement that gave him power, Ismail and his conversionary efforts can be contextualized, partially, as part of a greater struggle between the Ottomans and Safavids.

Shortly after Ismail's great triumph of the capture of Tabriz in 1501, tensions began to rise between the Safavids and Ottomans, which would not be completely resolved until the Safavid decline in the 18th century. There is a school of academic thought that suggests that because the Ottoman Empire posed a very real threat to Safavid rule, Ismail's conversionary efforts were motivated “to give Iran ideological distinction and identity” in opposition to the Ottomans.⁴⁰ In any case, the sectarian nature of the conflict between the two empires quickly became evident. After a number of Safavid conversionary efforts the Ottoman sultan, Bayazid II, deported a number of Shiite Turcoman tribes from Ottoman territory.⁴¹ Following the revolt of a group of Shi'a Turcoman in the 1511 Takkulu uprising and the death of Bayazid, Selim I became the new Ottoman sultan (despite attempted Safavid interference).⁴²

The tension between the Safavids and Ottomans came to a head in a direct conflict when in 1514 Selim led a massive army into eastern Anatolia. The resulting battle that occurred at Chaldiran, when the Ismail met Selim's forces with an army of his own, marked a massive defeat for the Safavids and the first setback for the previously undefeated Ismail.⁴³ Ottoman forces actually managed to capture the Safavid capital of Tabriz at one point during this campaign before withdrawing in the face of coming winter and wearying troops.⁴⁴ The battle at Chaldiran would delineate the end of the high-water mark of Ismail's rule. However, in the aftermath of Chaldiran, the Safavid establishment began to identify increasingly with

³⁹ Ibid, 94.

⁴⁰ Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 11.

⁴¹ Katouzian, *Persians*, 115.

⁴² Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 21.

⁴³ Katouzian, *Persians*, 116.

⁴⁴ Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 21.

Twelver Shi'ism.⁴⁵ This increased identification with orthodox Shi'ism may have been aided by the effect of defeat, stripping away some of the messianic glory that many Qizilbash had previously attributed to Ismail.⁴⁶ However, the Qizilbash largely remained uniform in their continued loyalty to Ismail following this setback. Moreover, the conflicts between the emerging Safavid Empire and the Ottomans only served to deepen the Safavid commitment to converting its populace to Shi'ism and thereby making an invasion of Safavid territory more difficult.⁴⁷ The powerful Ottoman Empire—as well as the Sunni Uzbeks to some extent—were a powerful motivation for Ismail to form a distinct Safavid identity that would be able to resist subversion and invasion attempts.

Shah Tahmasp

Ismail's successor, Shah Tahmasp, would continue to promote Twelver Shi'ism for reasons similar to his father, namely, to better establish political control over the newly formed empire and to keep powerful Sunni neighbors at bay. By all accounts, Tahmasp lacked some of the charisma and capability of Ismail; however, his rule did manage to more firmly entrench orthodox Shi'ism in Iran.⁴⁸ Ismail died in 1524 leaving Tahmasp, at ten years of age, the ruler of the entire extent of his father's empire.⁴⁹ Given Ismail's semi-divine status and Tahmasp's extreme youth, it is perhaps of no surprise that Tahmasp's first years of rule were marked by major turbulence. Soon after the beginning of Tahmasp's rule, Diw Sultan, a Qizilbash member of the Rumlu tribe, seized power and ruled the Safavid Empire alongside two other Qizilbash—Kopek Sultan and Chuha Sultan.⁵⁰ After some political wrangling—including the killings of Kopek Sultan and Diw Sultan—Chuha Sultan became the de facto ruler, with Tahmasp still technically the shah.⁵¹ As demonstrated by these events, despite Ismail's modest efforts to reduce the influence of the Qizilbash both ideologically and administratively, they still were the main force propping up Safavid power. Moreover, Tahmasp's problems were compounded by a

⁴⁵ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁶ Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 31.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁸ Paul A. Blaum, "Shah Tahmasp I: Making the Best of Bad Times," *The International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 12 (1998): 71.

⁴⁹ Katouzian, *Persians*, location 119.

⁵⁰ Blaum, "Shah Tahmasp I," 73.

⁵¹ Ibid, 73.

number of Uzbek invasions in the province of Khorasan and a degree of infighting between different Qizilbash tribal factions.⁵² Even after Tahmasp managed to wrest ruling power away from the Qizilbash, he still faced the challenge of repeated Ottoman and Uzbek invasions.⁵³ Although he did manage to hold the empire of his father largely together, he did lose some territory to the Ottomans, including most notably the city of Baghdad.⁵⁴ Here though, it would appear that Ismail's and Tahmasp's commitment to Shi'ism paid some dividends—Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the then ruler of the Ottomans, appears to have given up his desire to conquer the Safavids in part due to the fervor for Shi'ism and hatred of Sunnism expressed by the inhabitants of Safavid territory on the Ottoman frontier.⁵⁵ Although not as successful as his father or his grandson Abbas the Great, Tahmasp seems to have been a decent ruler and did manage to build on the conversionary efforts of his father.

Like Ismail, Tahmasp made some efforts to disassociate from the millenarianism of the Qizilbash in favor of a more mainstream Shi'ism. Although never venerated as thoroughly by the Qizilbash as his father, Tahmasp was still accorded something of a divine status by many of his followers.⁵⁶ Despite this veneration, Tahmasp, especially later in his reign, made efforts to downplay any possible "messiahship."⁵⁷ Unlike his father, who styled himself the literal reincarnation of Ali and a host of other religious figures, Tahmasp merely referred to himself as the shadow of God in his memoir and ultimately downgraded the religious role of Ismail, referring to him as the precursor to the Mahdi.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Tahmasp also deserves credit for beginning the process of shifting the Qizilbash further towards Shiite orthodoxy and experimenting with "breaking Qizilbash-Safavid corporate sovereignty and enforcing the sacred law."⁵⁹ Tahmasp, like his father, by no means ended the influence of the Qizilbash or successfully curbed their millenarian beliefs. He did however take a number of steps that managed to reduce impact of the apocalyptic

⁵² Ibid, 74.

⁵³ Katouzian, *Persians*, 119-20.

⁵⁴ Ibid, location 2795.

⁵⁵ Blaum, "Shah Tahmasp I," 84.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 88.

⁵⁷ Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 302.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 303.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 306.

Turcoman tribes and assert a gradually more orthodox Shiite identity for the Safavid Empire.

Some of the most notable of Tahmasp's actions regarding his commitment to Twelver Shi'ism involve his promotion of Shiite scholars like al-Karaki. Although Ismail had started the process of recruiting 'Amili ulama from the Arab Levant, it was Tahmasp that really began to implement the integration of the Shiite ulama into Safavid society. Taking part in some of Ismail's conversionary efforts, al-Karaki quickly assumed a prominent place in the regime of Tahmasp, making arguments using Sharia that briefly reduced the roles of some of the sadarat—members of the Iranian administrative apparatus.⁶⁰ Al-Karaki's influence during the early years of the reign of Tahmasp occurred through brief discreet alliances with some Qizilbash leaders, as both parties had reason to contest the role of Iranian administrators.⁶¹ However, even after Tahmasp began ruling in his own right, without the undue influence of the Qizilbash, he still promoted the role of the imported 'Amili scholars in the evolving Safavid order, as they had relatively few ties to other factions present in Safavid Iran.⁶² Interestingly enough, the Qizilbash did by and large support the 'Amili influenced Twelver Shiism during this time period. Perhaps this is because as members of the Safavid state, they too realized that a more orthodox state religion had a greater chance of unifying and successfully governing an empire.⁶³

Although the predominately Iranian sadarat still possessed a great deal of power over the administrative affairs of the Safavid Empire, under Tahmasp the 'Alimi began to increasingly assert themselves— setting the stage for the continued influence of Twelver Shi'ism in Iran. Appointing al-Karaki as the deputy of the Imam, Tahmasp created the first “Shiite hierocracy in Iran.”⁶⁴ Tahmasp's proclamation had the effect of granting al-Karaki the status of “seal of the mujtahids [interpreters of Islamic law]” and gave him the prerogative of institutionalizing Shi'ism in the Safavid administrative apparatus, a task in which al-Karaki was only partially successful.⁶⁵ Even though al-Karaki and his successors did manage to amass a fair amount of “moral, social and political weight” to the impact of

⁶⁰ Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 18.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 19.

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 20.

⁶⁴ Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 133.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 134.

their decisions, the power of 'Alimi scholars was limited mostly to non-administrative tasks.⁶⁶ Indeed, fierce resistance on the part of the sadarat created a long-term division between the actual governing apparatus of the Iranian state and religious authority.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Tahmasp's reign did see a fair amount of tolerance of heterodox Shiite thought—as seen by the continued acceptance of the Qizilbash—and by the toleration of certain members of the Iranian Sunni elite.⁶⁸ Tahmasp's promotion of Twelver Shi'ism seemed in part motivated by political expediency.

Conclusion

Ismail and Tahmasp, as the first two Safavid Shahs, managed to impose a lasting Twelver Shiite identity on Iran. Even though Tahmasp's son, Ismail II, would briefly experiment with state sanctioned Sunnism, and although orthodox Shi'ism would not be firmly established across the Safavid population until Abbas I, these first two monarchs managed to begin the conversionary process. Interestingly enough, both Ismail and Tahmasp seem to have been motivated by political utility, at least in part, for their decisions to embrace Twelver Shiism. Ismail, originating from the millenarian Qizilbash made a conscious decision to shift the Safavid state's religious identity to Twelver Shi'ism in order to better consolidate political control over his empire. By doing this, he was able to both lessen the future risk of internal dissent and alleviate, in part, the threat the Sunni Ottoman Empire posed.

Tahmasp continued Ismail's conversionary efforts for similar reasons. Widespread Shi'ism, already present in Safavid territory because of the efforts of Ismail, allowed Tahmasp to successfully resist invasion attempts by Suleiman the Magnificent. Furthermore, Twelver Shi'ism gave Tahmasp a greater opportunity to rule effectively than the millenarianism still embraced by the Qizilbash. Tahmasp's political calculus with religion is also evident in his treatment of both the Qizilbash and the Sunni elite, whom he allowed to avoid conversion to Twelver Shi'ism. When it was politically expedient for him not to pursue the conversion of certain groups of people, Tahmasp appears to have been more than happy to let them be. With roots in a Sunni-Sufi order that may have changed ideology in part to consolidate support among Turcoman tribesman, the early Safavid Shahs demonstrated a marked willingness to

⁶⁶ Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 29.

⁶⁷ Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 137.

⁶⁸ Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 40.

use religion as a political tool to build a sense of identity among their subjects.