

Jessamine Nazari

07 January 2018

## **The Shadow Government: Influence of Elite Safavid Women**

### **Introduction**

Until recently, the history of women in Safavid Iran has remained practically unexplored by scholars and historians. The lack of research done on women of the period can be mostly attributed to the scarcity of information available.<sup>1</sup> One cause of this lack of material is the political and religious climate of Safavid Iran, which naturally lent to Muslim historiographers chronicling a masculine view of history. And when women, almost always in the higher classes of society, were deemed important enough to penetrate the patriarchal records, their lives and aspirations were usually generalized as hopes to see their sons acquire power.<sup>2</sup>

Another factor is the decentralized structure of the judicial system of the Safavids, which has resulted in court records being scattered all over Iran.<sup>3</sup> Records like wills, marriage contracts, and trade documents are essential to the understanding of any culture.<sup>4</sup> The lack of these documents have left holes in the knowledge of daily Safavid life. Additionally, Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, a scholar of the Iranian and Ottoman empires, makes a separate point that “until Iran opens up for research and these collections become available,” historians are confined to limited evidence in other sources.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Maria Szuppe, “The ‘Jewels of Wonder’: Learned Ladies and Princesses Politicians in the Provinces of Early Safavid Iran,” in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. Gavin R. G. Hambly (St. Martins Press, 1998), 326.

<sup>2</sup> Emma Loosley, “Ladies who Lounge: Class, Religion and Social Interaction in Seventeenth-Century Isfahan,” *Gender and History* 23, no. 3 (November 2011): 615.

<sup>3</sup> Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, “Economic Activities of Safavid Women in the Shrine-City of Ardabil,” *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 248

<sup>4</sup> Maria Szuppe, “Status, Knowledge, and Politics: Women in Sixteenth-Century Safavid Iran,” in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Nashat Guity (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 140.

<sup>5</sup> Zarinebaf-Shahr, “Economic Activities,” 248

These sources include a limited number of archived documents, and the writings of foreign travellers who chronicled their stay in Persia, like Michele Membre, a Venetian envoy to the court of Shah Tahmasp I, and Jean Chardin, a French jeweler who visited the court of Shah Abbas II. Even so, the information these sources present about women regard almost exclusively those in the elite and royal classes,<sup>6</sup> and some scholars have expressed uncertainty over the validity of these foreign accounts, and their use as source material.<sup>7</sup>

Although, due to the recent scholarship of Maria Szuppe, Kathryn Babayan, Faribah Zarinebaf-Shahr and others, information on the lives of women under Safavid rule is greatly increasing.<sup>8</sup> Their work shows that elite Safavid women wielded great power and their influence can be seen in many spheres of Safavid life. First, a Safavid princess was given an education comparable to that of her brothers, which gave her the tools and knowledge necessary to exert her interests later on in life. Economically, women had a great deal of financial autonomy and were sometimes key players in the real estate market. Also, there is a lot evidence of women donating their wealth to charities and the state.

Women perhaps exerted their greatest influence in political activities. Marriage of a Safavid princess to a specific man of religious or political significance served to keep factions loyal and ultimately keep the empire stable. There are also many accounts of women participating in war, and even being responsible for battle victories. More significantly, sisters, mothers, or wives to the Shah would often serve as important advisers to the ruler.

---

<sup>6</sup> Szuppe, "The 'Jewels of Wonder'," 325.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald W. Ferrier, "Women in Safavid Iran: The Evidence of European Travelers," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed Gavin R. G. Hambly (St. Martins Press, 1998), 383.

<sup>8</sup> Loosley, "Ladies who Lounge," 615.

Female influence over Safavid Iran can be seen in all realms of the empire. From being a trusted counselor to the Shah, working as an emissary, or donating wealth back to the empire, women played important roles in society. The origins of the power invested in royal Safavid women is traced back to the Mongolian conquests of Iran in the thirteenth century, and the subsequent influence of tribalism on Persian culture.

### **Turko-Mongol Beginnings**

When the Mongols conquered Iran and demolished Baghdad in 1258, they consequently demolished the idea of a universal Sunni caliphate. From the ashes of destruction arose a new cultural synthesis between Iranian-Islamic traditions and Turko-Mongol nomadic ones.<sup>9</sup> Compared to the Iranian-Islamic culture, Turko-Mongol practices gave women more rights to participate in social and political affairs, which later became the foundation of female authority in Safavid Iran.<sup>10</sup>

The famous Iranian historian Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah, who had to apologize for including women in his book of world history, *Jami al-Tawarikh* (1304), attributed his faltering with traditional Islamic historiography to the Mongols, who treated the sexes equally.<sup>11</sup> This demonstrates both the seeping of Turko-Mongol beliefs into Persian society despite some Persian resistance.

Mongol women of the ruling class held high positions in society alongside their male counterparts. In addition to entitlement to a portion of the spoils, these elite women had the right to be in the *kurultai* (political and military counsel).<sup>12</sup> In some circumstances, women in the

---

<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Babayan. "The 'Aqa'id al-Nisa': A glimpse at Safavid Women in Local Isfahani Culture." In *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed Gavin R. G. Hambly (St. Martins Press, 1998), 351.

<sup>10</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 141.

<sup>11</sup> Babayan. "The 'Aqa'id al-Nisa'," 351

<sup>12</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 141.

Mongolian Empire could even ascend the throne. In 1260, Hulegu Khan, founder of the Ilkhanid dynasty, appointed the woman Abish Khatun to rule Salghurid when no male heir was apparent. In the Iranian province Fars, coins for her had been minted and the Friday sermon was read in her name.<sup>13</sup> Genghis Khan, founder of the Mongolian empire, believed that a Khan's first wife was his partner in governing and "it was Mongol custom that when a Khan died, the Khatun governed the realm until the time that the new successor was appointed at the [*kurultai*]." <sup>14</sup> The Safavids took this practice even further, allowing daughters and sisters, in addition to wives, to manage the throne while waiting for a successor.<sup>15</sup>

Three centuries after the establishment of Ilkhanid rule, Mongol ways of life were still visible in Iranian culture, especially concerning the involvement of royal women in politics. As for the Turko-Mongol tribes, women, for the most part, retained their high social status after islamization.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, the Safavids adopted the Mongolian belief that power was divinely invested amongst the whole royal family, so theoretically a princess had as much of a claim to the throne as her brothers. The legitimacy of this idea is seen later on in the seventeenth century, when royal women, in addition to the men, were blinded out of the Shah's fear of usurpation.<sup>17</sup>

### **Importance of Marriage Alliances**

One of the most common ways for a Shah to consolidate Safavid power was to marry off princesses to local and neighboring rulers or important social figures. The Turkoman Qizilbash amirs, were a prominent group with which the Safavids would intermarry. Marriages to the

---

<sup>13</sup> Babayan. "The 'Aqa'id al-Nisa'," 355.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 141.

<sup>17</sup> Babayan. "The 'Aqa'id al-Nisa'," 352.

Qizilbash enabled the Shah to keep control of local areas and enforce loyalty of amirs, which was later essential for military subjugation.<sup>18</sup> Shah Ismail's sisters married important Turkman amirs, and he himself had Turkman wives.<sup>19</sup>

There are many examples of the Safavids using marriage alliances to maintain influence over certain regions. For example, when Shah Ismail wanted to secure the Safavid northern borders, he gave the hand of one of his sisters to the local ruler of Shirvan, Shirvanshah Sultan Ibrahim, while Shah Ismail married the sister of the Shirvanshah.<sup>20</sup> But it wasn't just the marriage alliance itself that was essential for foreign and domestic diplomacy, Safavid princesses acted as agents for the state in their new home.

One of Shah Ismail's daughters, Pari Khan Khanum I (not to be mistaken with Pari Khan Khanum II, Shah Tahmasp's daughter) married to the Shirvanshah Khalilullah II, became a significant political player after her husband's death in 1535. Her first act was to return to the Safavids Muzaffar Khan, a Gilani refugee who rebelled against the Safavids and then fled to Shirvan where he was granted asylum. Later on, when the title Shirvanshah came down to two candidates, Pari Khan Khanum I supported Qalantar Begs, who falsely claimed to be a descendant of the ancient kings of Shirvan, over her husband's nephew Shah-Rukh Sultan, who had the majority of the amirs support. Szuppe suggests she did so because "it would be easier for the Safavids to keep control over an obscure pretender than over a ruler belonging to the reigning dynasty."<sup>21</sup> After Shah-Rukh Sultan won the throne, Pari Khan Khanum I returned home

---

<sup>18</sup> Nazak Birjandifar, "Royal Woman and Politics in Safavid Iran" (master thesis, McGill University, 2005), 28.

<sup>19</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 145.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>21</sup> Szuppe, "The 'Jewels of Wonder'," 333

encouraging the Shah to conquer Shirvan. In the end, the Shirvanshahs lost control over their own land.<sup>22</sup>

Using marriage as a tool to keep men loyal to the Safavids was, for the most part, effective. This is exemplified by the marriage between Pari Khan Khanum I and her second husband, Davish Muhammad Khan. Davish Muhammad Khan had been the ruler of Shakki and a supporter of Shah-Rukh Sultan before he surrendered to the Safavids and was appointed governor of Shakki. It was only after the death of his wife in 1551 that Davish Muhammad Khan defected.<sup>23</sup> Waiting until the passing of Pari Khan Khanum I to rebel suggests that it was only his fidelity to his Safavid wife that kept his allegiance to the Safavids.

Marriage alliances were not just for the benefit of the Safavids, the political ties were advantageous for the in-laws as well.<sup>24</sup> Being married to a Safavid princess meant prestige, an opportunity to ascend to high positions of office, and the incorporation of children to the Safavid royal family.<sup>25</sup>

Through marriage, Safavid princesses served as tools for forging foreign relations, as well as acting as advocates for Safavid interests. Although, some princess, like Shahzada Sultanum and Pari Khan Khanum II, stayed unmarried to pursue political lives alongside the Shah.

### **The Power of a Princesses Education**

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 29.

<sup>25</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 147.

The information scholars have on a Safavid princesses learning indicates that their level of education is tantamount to that of their prince brothers.<sup>26</sup> Princesses, like their brothers, were given *dadas* and *lalas* (tutors and nurses), almost always chosen from Qizilbash amirs.<sup>27</sup> *Dadas* were chosen for a princess at the time of her birth, while *lalas* seem to appear in a princess's life towards adulthood.<sup>28</sup> Princess Pari Khan Khanum II, daughter of Shah Tahmasp, was given the *dada*, Fathi Beg, an Afshar amir, just after her birth.<sup>29</sup> Later in life, during the reign of her father, she was given Khalil Khan Afshar for her *lala*, who was an important member of the Afshar tribe, and was at one point the governor of Kuhgiluyeh.<sup>30</sup>

Princesses had specific teachers, often masters of their craft, appointed for their education.<sup>31</sup> Shahzada Sultanum, prominent sister of Shah Tahmasp, was very well educated in Persian grammar, calligraphy and religious sciences.<sup>32</sup> She was taught Qur'anic science by the religious scholar Mawlana Imad al-Din Ali Astarabadi, who she brought in on her own volition to teach her advanced Qur'anic recitation.<sup>33</sup> She was also a student of Dust-Muhammad of Herat, a painter and famous master of calligraphy.<sup>34</sup>

Pari Khan Khanum II is another highly educated princess. Being exceptionally adorned by her father, Shah Tahmasp, she received an unrivaled education and was peerless in her studies, amongst both women and men.<sup>35</sup> At an early age she showed an interest in Islamic law,

---

<sup>26</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 32.

<sup>27</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 149.

<sup>28</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 32.

<sup>29</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 149.

<sup>30</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 32.

<sup>31</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 149.

<sup>32</sup> Szuppe, "The 'Jewels of Wonder';," 329.

<sup>33</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 34.

<sup>34</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 150.

<sup>35</sup> Heather Wallace, "Feminine Power in Safavid Iran: Space, Visibility, and Politics" (masters thesis, University of California Davis, 2015), 37.

jurisprudence, science, and poetry, “all of which she mastered.”<sup>36</sup> She once wrote in a letter to her brother Shah Ismail II, “I have studied the books of jurisprudence all my life, and have memorized more of the [Qur’anic] exegesis.”<sup>37</sup> She also expressed an interest in poetry and wrote under the pen name Haqiqi.<sup>38</sup> Pari Khan Khanum II even had poetry contests with an acclaimed poet of her time, Muhtasham Kashani.<sup>39</sup>

Female interest in poetry was not uncommon for the time, though mostly undocumented, the few sources available show that many women contributed to the arts, often under pen names. Fakhri Haravi, in the mid sixteenth century published *Javahir al-aja’yib* (Jewels of Wonder), a biographical anthology of contemporary female poets. He claims all the women mentioned in the book were famous authors at the time, and he himself read several of their works.<sup>40</sup> *Javahir al-aja’yib* illuminates the acceptance of women into intellectual and artistic communities.

Another important aspect of a princesses education was the teaching of militaristic arts like horseback riding, and the use of weaponry. Horseback riding was especially important to the Safavids,<sup>41</sup> and many European travellers made comments to the like that the women rode their horses like men. Antonio Tenreiro, who visited Iran in 1523, noted that the woman in Shah Ismail’s camp rode “on the best horses which their husbands have... riding on them as men do; and in their attire they not dress differently than the men,” with the exception of the head dress.<sup>42</sup> Royal women would participate in the Shah’s hunting expeditions, including Shahzada Sultanum

---

<sup>36</sup> Shohreh Gholsorhki, “Pari Khan Khanum: A Masterful Safavid Princess,” *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1995): 145.

<sup>37</sup> Birjandifar, “Royal Woman,” 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Szuppe, “Status, Knowledge, and Politics,” 150-151.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>42</sup> Rudi Matthee, “From the Battlefield to the Harem,” in *New Perspectives on Safavid Iran*, ed. Colin P. Mitchell (Iranian Studies, 2011), 100.



who would often accompany Shah Tahmasp.<sup>43</sup> Women themselves would hunt, and were trained to use bow and arrows, guns, and swords.<sup>44</sup>

A princesses education gave her the skills and knowledge to perform tasks in many areas of her life, especially in the political sphere. For example, the distinguished education of Pari Khan Khanum II earned her the position of advisor to her father Shah Tahmasp and gave her the intelligence and confidence necessary to one day rule the kingdom.<sup>45</sup> It was the same case for Pari Khan Khanum's aunt, Shahzada Sultanum whose intellect enabled her to become a respected figure in the inner circle of her brother Shah Tahmasp. Knowledge of artillery and horseback riding enabled women to participate in battles on behalf of the Safavids.

### **Economic Activity**

Elite women in Safavid Iran displayed an amount of financial autonomy that allowed them to live independent lives. Rich princesses, like Pari Khan Khanum II, would have homes outside the court which enabled them to even live independent of the harem.<sup>46</sup>

Women used their money for pious donations, the construction of monuments, and many other lasting ways that preserved their legacy. Most of a woman's wealth came from her inheritance. *Shari'ah* law dictated that a woman was to inherit half the share of her male counterparts, but she had the right to complete authority of her property. Women would obtain control over shares of "rural and urban real estate, such as villages, residential units, public

---

<sup>43</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 36.

<sup>44</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 151.

<sup>45</sup> Wallace, "Feminine Power in Safavid Iran" 37.

<sup>46</sup> Babayan. "The 'Aqa'id al-Nisa'" 353.

bath-houses (*hammam*), commercial units (*khans*), and shops (*dukkan*),”<sup>47</sup> along with orchards and gardens.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1660s a woman of the harem inherited land between Qazvin and Sultaniyah in which she had the right to collect taxes. She was seen patrolling her land on horseback with forty to fifty soldiers, ensuring its safety from highway robbers.<sup>49</sup>

In 1492, an imperial woman Khatun Jan Khatun, founded the tomb-complex, Blue Mosque in Tabriz.<sup>50</sup> The Blue Mosque had a mosque, a madrasah (educational institution) and a shrine. The endowed property of the complex consisted of twenty-three pieces of suburban land, seventy-nine villages, ten subterranean water canals, three caravansaries, and a bazaar. Khatun Jan Khatun then established her two sisters and their daughters as the custodians of the entire complex.<sup>51</sup> Khatun Jan Khatun’s Blue Mosque exemplifies the magnitude of what a woman's estate could be and testifies to the financial strength and independence of elite Safavid women.

Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr claims that “Safavid women contributed significantly to the the rise and success of the Safavid empire by financially supporting one of the most important religious orders for several centuries.”<sup>52</sup> The religious order being Shaykh Safi’s *tariqah* (sufi order), whose establishment Zarinebaf-Shahr claims to be the most important event in sixteenth century Middle East. The *tariqah* found its physical manifestation in the shrine complex of Shaykh Safi al-Din. Shrines were highly valuable to the Safavids, they served as places of

---

<sup>47</sup> Zarinebaf-Shahr, “Economic Activities,” 251.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>49</sup> Matthee, “From the Battlefield to the Harem,” 97.

<sup>50</sup> Arjomand, “Coffeehouses,” 37.

<sup>51</sup> Zarinebaf-Shahr, “Economic Activities,” 252.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

“visitation and contemplation and were important both locally and internationally.”<sup>53</sup> They also operated as “rest houses for those visiting those visiting the Shi’i pilgrimage site.”<sup>54</sup>

Women accounted for more than twenty percent of the financial and property contributions to the shrine of Shaykh Safi al-Din. In addition to donating to the shrine, women would also sell their land.<sup>55</sup> In the first half of the seventeenth century, women accounted for an incredible amount of sold property to the shrine. For example, women sold twenty-five percent of houses and fifty percent of shares in villages around Ardabil.<sup>56</sup>

Women were also very active in other charitable ventures. It was one way a woman could demonstrate personal importance and status.<sup>57</sup> Tajlu Khanum, a wife of Shah Ismail, was a wealthy woman famous for her charitable deeds. She endowed a village of hers, Hasan Abad in Varamin, to the poor Sayyids (descendants of the house of the prophet). She also gave land worth over 1000 *tumans* to the Shrine of Hazrat-i Ma’sumah, and paid for the construction of a building alongside it.<sup>58</sup> Tajlu Begum is also attributed with repairing a bridge, Dukhtar, in Azerbaijan,<sup>59</sup> and constructing the dome of *Jannat Sara* in the shrine of Ardabil.<sup>60</sup>

Shahzada Sultanum was also well known for her giving nature. Every year she would send money to the religious cities of “Karbala, Najaf, and Jabal ‘Amil,” “so much that it was difficult to keep track of.”<sup>61</sup> Additionally, her will dictated that many of her possessions were to

---

<sup>53</sup> Melis Taner, “Caught in a Whirlwind: Painting in Baghdad in the Late Sixteenth-Early Seventeenth Centuries” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016), 119.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>55</sup> Zarinebaf-Shahr, “Economic Activities,” 251.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>57</sup> Szuppe, “Status, Knowledge, and Politics,” 152.

<sup>58</sup> Birjandifar, “Royal Woman,” 38.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

be donated. At the time of her passing in 1562, all of her real estate, which was vast and in many regions of Iran, was turned into endowments.<sup>62</sup>

Safavid women were also known for funding public facilities and important buildings for congregation. Zaynab Begum, daughter of Shah Tahmasp, financed hospitals, caravanserais, roads, and bridges.<sup>63</sup> In 1715, the mother of the last Safavid ruler, Shah Sultan Husayn, endowed a royal college to be built in the city of Isfahan that had 150 chambers.<sup>64</sup>

Elite women would also patron the arts, and often had commissioned artists and authors to create works for them.<sup>65</sup> There's ample evidence suggesting women ordered clothing, carpets, and manuscripts.<sup>66</sup>

The many charitable and pious donations that Safavid women gave back to their country highlights the religious and political significance of women in Safavid society. The benefits of giving to the state was two-fold, women established their financial and political prowess, and built important relationships with “a network of administrators, local leaders... teachers and jurists,”<sup>67</sup> such relationships were helpful for a princesses political life. Additionally, female prevalence in the economy also demonstrates the great deal of visibility, autonomy, and power women had in Safavid Iran.

## **Women in War**

---

<sup>62</sup> Szuppe, “Status, Knowledge, and Politics,” 152.

<sup>63</sup> Birjandifar, “Royal Woman,” 39.

<sup>64</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, “Coffeehouses, Guilds and Oriental Despotism Government and Civil Society in Late 17th to Early 18th Century Istanbul and Isfahan, and as seen from Paris and London,” *European Journal of sociology* 45, no. 1 (2004): 37

<sup>65</sup> Loosley, “Ladies who Lounge,” 618.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 628.

<sup>67</sup> Birjandifar, “Royal Woman,” 40.

High-status Safavid women also proved their power on the battlefield. Their education in artillery, hunting, and horseback riding undoubtedly aided women in taking control of militaristic operations when their help was needed. The Battle of Chaldiran in 1514 is the most famous example of female participation in war in Safavid Iran. It is said that when the Ottomans captured Tabriz they found many princesses dressed like men engaged on the battlefield.<sup>68</sup> One or two of Shah Ismail's wives are noted to have even been captured.<sup>69</sup>

Famously, Shah Ismail's favorite wife, Tajlu Begum, fought in the Battle of Chaldiran. It is said that she was taken prisoner by the Ottomans,<sup>70</sup> managed to escape and was found wandering the desert wounded.<sup>71</sup> She was then taken back the shah in Tabriz.<sup>72</sup>

Another episode of female participation in battle takes place in Shirvan in 1553. Abdullah Khan Ustajalu, the Safavid governor of Shirvan, was in the process of being defeated by rebels when a woman in his family (either mother or wife) took action to save him. She ordered roughly 3,000 people to arm themselves and personally led them into battle. The rebels mistook her army to be regular Qizilbask troops, and their confusion led to her victory. In honor of her bravery she was awarded land.<sup>73</sup>

Khayr al-Nisa Begum (also known as Mahd-i Ulya), wife of Shah Muhammad Khudabandah, headed the Safavid army alongside her son Hamzah Mirza in a military raid against the Ottomans in 1578. Although her son was officially the commander of the army, she was the one making decisions with the Qizilbash amirs.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Zarinebaf-Shahr, "Economic Activities," 249.

<sup>69</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 41.

<sup>70</sup> Zarinebaf-Shahr, "Economic Activities," 249.

<sup>71</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 41.

<sup>72</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 154.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

There's also less direct evidence that show female participation in battle. For example, either a daughter or sister of Shah Ismail was awarded a village for "military action that has saved a battle" in the mid sixteenth century.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, Shahzada Sultanum's will mentions horses and military equipment.<sup>76</sup>

Empowered by training in weaponry and horseback riding, elite Safavid women were able to engage in battles and command armies. By doing so, they once again exhibit their sovereignty.

### **A Princesses Influence on Politics**

An education, financial independence, and Turko-Mongol influences empowered a Safavid princess to engage in politics. There are many cases of an elite woman being a crucial member of the Shahs inner circle, acting as an emissary, or in some circumstances, even running the empire. However, the acceptance of women with power decreased throughout the two centuries of Safavid rule, and the visibility of women deteriorated.<sup>77</sup> That does not mean women ceased to be influential. In the later half of Safavid Iran, women still found their voices while enclosed in the harem. Nevertheless, the consensus amongst historians is that the sixteenth century was the more fruitful time for women to exert their influence. Maria Szuppe says of the time that, "these were the days women of the Safavid elites were the most visible and more socially active than in the later period when they exercised their political power from behind the harem walls."<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>77</sup> Matthee, "From the Battlefield to the Harem," 98.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

Shah Tahmasp's mother, Tajlu Khanum, was a powerful player in Safavid politics before Tahmasp expelled her from the court in 1540.<sup>79</sup> Before she was thrown out, she was an aid to her husband, Shah Ismail I, and later counselor to her son. In 1534, amidst a conflict between Shah Tahmasp and Ibrahim Pasha in Baghdad, Tajlu Khanum sent an ambassador for peace negotiations.<sup>80</sup> After she was dismissed from the harem, her daughter, Shahzada Sultanum, quickly replaced her spot as adviser to the Shah.

In the early sixteenth century, Shahzada Sultanum was one of the most forceful figures to be reckoned with in the court of Shah Tahmasp. Shahzada Sultanum, known for her intelligence and graciousness, was a keen politician. Additionally, she had a strong bond with Shah Tahmasp,<sup>81</sup> giving her the advantage of having "the king's ear" which put her in an authoritative position. One chronicler wrote that Shah Tahmasp placed "all matters of state and finance to be contingent on her evaluation, and he would not act without her consultation, direction, and knowledge."<sup>82</sup> In addition to being an advisor to the Shah, she involved herself in diplomatic relations. Shahzada Sultanum famously exchanged letters with Hurrem Sultan, the wife of the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, discussing the importance of keeping peace between the two nations. She also sent precious Quranic scripts and carpets to an Ottoman mosque.<sup>83</sup>

Shahzada Sultanum especially played a large role in the success of Humayun of the Mughals regaining his kingdom.<sup>84</sup> After being deposed, Humayun took refuge with the Safavids and asked for military aid to win back his throne. Shah Tahmasp initially was not in favor of

---

<sup>79</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 156.

<sup>80</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 44.

<sup>81</sup> Hani Khafipour, "The Foundation of the Safavid State: Fealty, Patronage, and Ideals of Authority (1501-1576)." (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2013), 163.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 43.

<sup>84</sup> Khafipour, "The Foundation of the Safavid State," 163.

doing so, but Shahzada Sultanum ensured an army was formed, and sent Safavid troops on behalf of Humayun. In return for their help, Humayun secured the province Qandahar for the Safavids.<sup>85</sup>

In the later half of Safavid rule, as Turko-Mongol influences dwindled and Shi'i orthodoxy became increasingly prevalent in the culture, elite women were hidden from the public and secluded in the harem. By physically isolating women, the Shah sought to eliminate female influence in the court.<sup>86</sup> However, elite women soon adapted to their new circumstances, and found different ways to advance their agendas.

While a woman could not directly act to serve her interests, she could produce children that could do her bidding.<sup>87</sup> Having a daughter meant the girl could be married off to amirs and notables who would act to serve the mothers interests.<sup>88</sup> Giving birth to a healthy son gave a woman immediate prestige and power in the harem and meant she had the possibility of becoming a queen-mother, a highly influential role.<sup>89</sup>

Women in the harem would form political factions, each seeking out their own aspirations. Zubayda Begum, daughter of Shah Abbas I, and her faction attempted to poison Shah Safi in order for her son, Muhammad Khan Shaykhavand, to ascend the throne.<sup>90</sup> Though her plan was foiled, her story shows the power a harem union could potentially hold.

In 1590, Shah Abbas I instituted a "cage system" for his prince sons, secluding them in the harem along with their mothers.<sup>91</sup> The cage system strengthened the bond between mothers

---

<sup>85</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 156.

<sup>86</sup> Wallace, "Feminine Power in Safavid Iran" 34.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Kathryn Babayan, *Slaves of the Shah* (I.B. Tauris, 2003), 4.

<sup>90</sup> Babayan. "The 'Aqa'id al-Nisa'," 372.

<sup>91</sup> Babayan, *Slaves of the Shah*, 32-33.



and their sons, and led to the supremacy of the Shah's mother in Safavid politics.<sup>92</sup> After growing up isolated in the harem, Shah Sulayman "knew nothing of the art of ruling," so the queen-mother, Saru Taqi, soon took control of the Shah and ran the administration from the harem.<sup>93</sup> Jean Chardin, the French traveller, wrote that Shah Sulayman had "unlimited regard" for his mother and found "it appropriate that she intervenes in government."<sup>94</sup> Saru Taqi's ascension to power shows that despite attempts at restricting female control in politics, elite Safavid woman continued to have authoritative positions in society.

Elite women were central figures in Safavid politics. They acted as important counselors to the Shah and were sometimes themselves the real power behind the throne. When women experienced a steep decline in visibility in the seventeenth century, the role of queen-mother ascended to even higher level of prominence.

### **Pari Khan Khanum II and Khayr al-Nisa Begum**

Assuredly the most influential women in Safavid Iran was Pari Khan Khanum II. She lived a successful life in the Safavid court before her brutal assassination at thirty years of age.<sup>95</sup> She began her career in politics at the age of twenty-six,<sup>96</sup> and in her short years of power she put two Shah's on the throne, and briefly led the empire herself as a *de facto* ruler. Pari Khan Khanum's ascension to power illustrates the leadership capabilities and political prowess of women in Safavid Iran.

---

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>93</sup> Ferrier, "Women in Safavid Iran," 400.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>95</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 76.

<sup>96</sup> Wallace, "Feminine Power in Safavid Iran" 37.

Pari Khan Khanum was the second oldest daughter and the most beloved child of Shah Tahmasp.<sup>97</sup> As was noted earlier, she was distinctly studious and intelligent which impressed her father and demanded respect from notables and amirs.<sup>98</sup> The Shah admired Pari Khan Khanum's intellect to the extent that "in spite of talented, worthy young princes and princesses" he "would act according to her advice and approbation in affairs minor and major, financial and administrative... and nothing was done without her knowledge and consent."<sup>99</sup> It's thought that Pari Khan Khanum was inspired by her aunt, Shahzada Sultanum, and aspired to reach and surpass her high political standing.<sup>100</sup>

Her father's high regard for her gave Pari Khan Khanum authority over state matters even after his passing in 1576.<sup>101</sup> For two years prior to the Shah's death, court leaders and Qizilbash amirs fought over which of Shah Tahmasp's sons would succeed the throne; Haydar Mirza or Ismail Mirza. Pari Khan Khanum's support of her brother Ismail Mirza was instrumental to his eventual ascension of the throne.

Pari Khan Khanum and Haydar Mirza, were both present at Shah Tahmasp's deathbed, the latter planning to take the crown immediately. When Haydar Mirza told his sister of his plans (understanding her position of high authority), Pari Khan Khanum, masterfully manipulated her brother into believing she would support him. After leaving the court, she instantly gave the palace keys to a mob of Ismail supporters who killed the prince as soon as he was spotted (perhaps by Pari Khan Khanum).<sup>102</sup> Thus, the throne was open to her choice of king, Shah Ismail

---

<sup>97</sup> Gholsohrki, "Pari Khan Khanum," 145.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>99</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 51.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Gholsohrki, "Pari Khan Khanum," 147-148.

<sup>102</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 63.

II. While waiting for Ismail to get to court, Pari Khan Khanum took over the reins of government, and kept the state functioning in spite of the growing discontentment in the capital.

<sup>103</sup> Everyday after morning prayers Qizilbash amirs would report to the princess the “pressing administrative and financial problems. None dared to contravene here.”<sup>104</sup>

The princess expected her brother to be grateful for releasing him from prison (out of fear that Ismail Mirza might usurp him, Shah Tahmasp sent his son to prison where he spent twenty years) and putting him on throne. She anticipated he would see her loyalty, and entrust her with responsibilities even greater than those held by Shahzada Sultanum in Shah Tahmasp’s court.<sup>105</sup>

However, Shah Ismail II grew to distrust his sister and commented “have you not understood my friends, that interference in matters of state by women is demeaning to the king’s honor...?”<sup>106</sup>

The new Shah proceeded to isolate Pari Khan Khanum, and severed her ties with the court.<sup>107</sup>

Some believed Shah Ismail II was threatened by the power invested in Pari Khan Khanum and her loyal bases, the Qizilbash amirs and the harem.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, he stood on the platform that women didn’t have the right to rule so as to assert his own dominance.<sup>109</sup>

Pari Khan Khanum was rescued from political and social isolation following the mysterious death of Shah Ismail II nearly two years later. Some historians speculate she was the mastermind behind his assassination. The court historian, Iskander Beg Munshi, reported that “the physicians discovered indications of poison in the Shah’s body,” and one theory behind the

---

<sup>103</sup> Wallace, “Feminine Power in Safavid Iran” 38.

<sup>104</sup> Babayan. “The ‘Aqa’id al-Nisa’,” 354.

<sup>105</sup> Szuppe, “Status, Knowledge, and Politics,” 157.

<sup>106</sup> Gholsorhki, “Pari Khan Khanum,” 150.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>108</sup> Birjandifar, “Royal Woman,” 65.

<sup>109</sup> Babayan. “The ‘Aqa’id al-Nisa’,” 354.

murder was that Pari Khan Khanum “conspired with maidservants of the harem to arrange that poison be inserted in the electury mixture.”<sup>110</sup>

Some reports said a group of notables asked Pari Khan Khanum to take the throne, she declined asserting she couldn’t accept such an offer while her brother Muhammad Mirza was still alive.<sup>111</sup> Muhammad Khudabandah, Shah Tahmasp’s eldest son, was chosen to be the successor. Initially passed over for king due to his near-blindness, Pari Khan Khanum agreed to his nomination precisely because of his debilitation.<sup>112</sup> The princess had the intentions of letting her brother rule in name, while she would be the actual power behind the throne. In the two and a half months of waiting for her brother to arrive, Pari Khan Khanum took control of the empire for the second time.<sup>113</sup>

Pari Khan Khanum’s support of Muhammad Khudabandah ended up to be a mistake that cost her her life, as she did not account for her new political rival, Khayr al-Nisa Begum, Muhammad Khudabanda’s wife. Khayr al-Nisa Begum, was an ambitious woman herself and had her own intentions of being the power behind her husband. Advisors soon informed her of the threat posed by her sister-in-law to her rule,<sup>114</sup> and the fate of Pari Khan Khanum was decided. On the day of the inauguration, Pari Khan Khanum was strangled at the house of Khalil Khan Afshar, her old *lala*.<sup>115</sup>

With Pari Khan Khanum out of the way, Khayr al-Nisa Begum was free to rule the empire on her own. From February 1578 until her death in July 1579, she served as the *de facto*

---

<sup>110</sup> Gholsorhki, “Pari Khan Khanum,” 153.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Szuppe, “Status, Knowledge, and Politics,” 157.

<sup>113</sup> Babyan. “The ‘Aqa’id al-Nisa’,” 355-356.

<sup>114</sup> Birjandifar, “Royal Woman,” 74.

<sup>115</sup> Gholsorhki, “Pari Khan Khanum,” 155.

ruler of the Safavids.<sup>116</sup> From the beginning of Shah Muhammad Khudabandah's reign, Khayr al-Nisa Begum was responsible for decisions concerning "political, administrative, and military," affairs.<sup>117</sup> She was known as the "architect and organizer of the affairs of state" and the Shah "made no decisions without her counsel."<sup>118</sup>

Khayr al-Nisa Begum ensured control of central and regional districts by appointing relatives and allies to high positions of power.<sup>119</sup> For example, she made Mirza Salman, the adviser who had convinced her to execute Pari Khan Khanum, the *wazir* (high-ranking political consultant).<sup>120</sup>

Notables and Qizilbash amirs acknowledged Khayr al-Nisa Begum's high position of power, and everyday, would brief her on matters of the state just as they would the Shah.<sup>121</sup> However, Khayr al-Nisa Begum had notorious bad relations with the Qizilbash. A historian of the time wrote about her open "prejudice toward the Qizilbash and her desire to prevent amirs from interfering with political and administrative decisions."<sup>122</sup> The Qizilbash did not much care for the queen either. After a series of Khayr al-Nisa Begum's orders that angered and humiliated the amirs, the tribes banded together in opposition with the ultimate goal of removing her from power.<sup>123</sup>

The amirs sent the Shah a message saying that Khayr al-Nisa Begum "has always opposed us, the loyal servants of the crown... and has constantly attempted to humiliate and

---

<sup>116</sup> Szuppe, "The 'Jewels of Wonder'," 334.

<sup>117</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 159.

<sup>118</sup> Gholsorhki, "Pari Khan Khanum," 153.

<sup>119</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 159.

<sup>120</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 81.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>122</sup> Szuppe, "Status, Knowledge, and Politics," 159.

<sup>123</sup> Birjandifar, "Royal Woman," 93.

degrade us. We have not been safe from her actions even though up to the present time we have not been guilty of improper conduct,” they concluded by threatening that “if she is not removed from power, in all probability revolts will occur that will be to the detriment of both religion and the state.”<sup>124</sup> Shah Muhammad Khudabandah promised he would send his wife away from the capitol, but Khayr al-Nisa Begum was not intimidated by the Qizilbash, and refused to concede. She responded to the message proclaiming, “I am the mother of four sons. Killing me will destroy you. I have given in to my fate and to God’s will.”<sup>125</sup>

The historian Iskandar Beg Munshi observed that the amirs knew as long as Khayr al-Nisa Begum was alive she would never let go of her power,<sup>126</sup> so they made their decision to act. Her fate was similar to that of Pari Khan Khanum’s. Just under a year and a half of almost complete command of the Safavids, Khayr al-Nisa Begum was strangled in the royal harem.<sup>127</sup>

The incredible power held by these two women, Pari Khan Khanum and Khayr al-Nisa Begum, shows the ability of women in Safavid Iran to ascend to high political positions, even to the position of controlling the throne. Additionally, the advisors’ daily briefing of the women shows the social acceptance and legitimacy of the power they wielded. Though they were forced to act behind men, they were known as rulers and exercised their influence as the heads of state. Pari Khan Khanum single-handedly altered the course of her dynasty by ensuring the man of her choosing came to ascend the throne. The weight of their power cost both women their lives, however, their legacies demonstrate the enormous influence Safavid women were capable of having in the political sphere.

---

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>125</sup> Birjandifar, “Royal Woman,” 95.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>127</sup> Szuppe, “Status, Knowledge, and Politics,” 160

## Decline of Visibility

As was previously mentioned, women faced a decline of visibility throughout the rule of the Safavids. By the late seventeenth century, Turko-Mongol influences in Iran had dissolved and were replaced by Shi'ite ideologies that established new oppressive roles for women. The Shi'ite clergy "favoured women who took a traditional matriarchal role within the household and deferred in all matters to their husband."<sup>128</sup> During this period of change, women saw many of their freedoms taken away. The use of veils was enforced, and women weren't allowed to leave the harem unless granted permission by their male guardian.<sup>129</sup>

From the beginning of the Safavid empire, rulers attached to Islamic traditions had been attempting to suppress female influence in society. For instance, the founder of the dynasty, Shaykh Safi, desired to restrict the freedoms of Turko-Mongol women, and tried to apply stringent shari'ah laws to prevent gender mixing.<sup>130</sup> Although his attempt at instituting stricter religious codes was unsuccessful, it demonstrates the greater Safavid trend that the closer a ruler was to Islam, the more he sought to undermine the power of women.

The beginning of real change in gender dynamics took place during the reign of Shah Abbas I (1588 to 1629).<sup>131</sup> First, to consolidate his power, he removed the Qizilbash from their posts as regional leaders and replaced them with royal slaves.<sup>132</sup> Subsequently, he reduced the influence of Turkoman elements that gave Safavid women their legitimacy to power.<sup>133</sup> Second, he allied himself with the Shi'ite clergy, which already implied that women were to take a

---

<sup>128</sup> Loosley, "Ladies who Lounge," 619.

<sup>129</sup> Babayan. "The 'Aqa'id al-Nisa'e," 358.

<sup>130</sup> Matthee, "From the Battlefield to the Harem," 105.

<sup>131</sup> Szuppe, "The 'Jewels of Wonder'," 336-337

<sup>132</sup> Babayan, *Slaves of the Shah*, 31.

<sup>133</sup> Szuppe, "The 'Jewels of Wonder'," 337.

backseat role in society, but to prove his piousness, he greatly increased the restrictions on the royal women in his family as well. Loosley suggests that Shah Abbas isolated his female relatives to prove religious devotion because “guaranteeing the purity of women of the family [is] equated with honor.”<sup>134</sup> By limiting the power and influence of the Qizilbash and adopting orthodox religious practices, Shah Abbas I greatly restricted the freedoms of elite women.

However, it wasn't until the reign of the last Safavid ruler, Shah Sultan Husayn, that gender politics was severely imposed on the culture.<sup>135</sup> Matthee described the shah as an “exceedingly pious and gullible” man who was “under the spell” of Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, the Shaykh al-Islam (chief Islamic scholar).<sup>136</sup> Under the influence Majlisi, Shah Sultan Husayn vowed to enforce *shari-ah* law,<sup>137</sup> and ban unislmaic behavior which had far reaching social implications for women. This is when Safavid women experienced strict enforcement of proper attire and a significant decrease in mobility.<sup>138</sup> Majlisi documented his negatives attitude towards women in his book on correct *Imami Shi'i* behavior, *Hilyat al-Muttaqin* (1670). In the book he quoted a *hadith* (words and actions of the prophet Muhammad written after his death) that states Muhammad said “if a man obeyed his wife, Allah would condemn him to hell.”<sup>139</sup> Under the guidance of Majlisi's repressive ideas, Safavid Iran had reached its peak of female marginalization.

The increase of religious orthodoxy throughout Safavid Iran is directly correlated with the decrease of female visibility. However, as was noted earlier, women still exercised a great

---

<sup>134</sup> Loosley, “Ladies who Lounge,” 619.

<sup>135</sup> Babayan. “The ‘Aqa’id al-Nisa’,” 354.

<sup>136</sup> Matthee, “From the Battlefield to the Harem,” 98.

<sup>137</sup> Babayan, *Slaves of the Shah*, 18.

<sup>138</sup> Matthee, “From the Battlefield to the Harem,” 98.

<sup>139</sup> Babayan. “The ‘Aqa’id al-Nisa’: A glimpse at Safavid Women in Local Isfahani Culture,” 354.



deal of authority while confined in the harem. In spite of various oppressive regimes, Safavid women continued to prevail and work on behalf of their own interests.

### **Conclusion**

I argue that aristocratic Safavid women were immensely important and influential to Safavid society. Their lives, until recently, have remained a mystery to most. And for those that do know some of their stories, their accomplishments are rarely acknowledged. Elite Safavid women have been instrumental behind-the-harem players in economics, regional and international politics, and even war battles.

According to Turko-Mongol tradition, royal women were viewed as divine heirs alongside their brothers, and in the sixteenth century were visibly active in various parts of Safavid culture. Because royal men and women were viewed equals, to an extent, a princess got an extraordinary education from masters in all subjects of their studies. An education enabled some elite women to be poets, and be openly apart of Safavid Intellectual societies. A princesses education also later came to aid her in her diverse political roles, and in military combat.

Royal women used their wealth to build public facilities and lasting monuments. They donated to important shrines and funded roads, bridges, hospitals, and schools.

Safavid woman played their greatest roles in the politics. Princesses were married to men of important stature to ensure loyalty of the crown, and keep command of different regions. They also held authoritative positions within the court. Women, such as Pari Khan Khanum II, Shahzada Sultanum, and Tajlu Khanum, all acted as important and trusted counselors to the Shah. Some women were the power holders behind their Shah sons, brothers, fathers and husbands.

Pari Khan Khanum II and Khayr al-Nisa Begum, are arguably the most important Safavid women. They both transcended gender-conformative bounds, and independently ruled the empire. These two women are the epitome feminine perseverance as they met their large aspirations in a time when women were seen as feeble minded, foolish and unfit to rule. Pari Khan Khanum II is practically single handedly responsible for putting two Shahs on the throne.

Women were essential to the construction of the Safavid empire and its politics. Their capabilities and successes deserve more attention, both in research and studies. More research of powerful Safavid women is a necessary addition to society, for Iran and for the world. It is important to show people, especially young girls and boys, that women are capable of great power. That women can, and have, ruled empires. Additionally, more visibility of influential Safavid women will help knock down misconstructions of the female-role in Iran. It is a pervading belief, at least in American society, that women of Iran are entirely oppressed and powerless. However, the women of Persia's history demonstrate that women have held high positions for centuries. Even if they had to work as a shadow of a man, they held power, respect, and great influence.

## Bibliography

- Arjomand, Said Amir. "Coffeehouses, Guilds and Oriental Despotism Government and Civil Society in Late 17th to Early 18th Century Istanbul and Isfahan, and as seen from Paris and London." *European Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 1 (2004): 23-42.
- Babayan, Kathryn. "The 'Aqa'id al-Nisa': A glimpse at Safavid Women in Local Isfahani Culture." In *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, edited by Gavin R. G. Hambly, 348-381. St. Martins Press, 1998.
- Babayan, Kathryn. *Slaves of the Shah*. I.B. Tauris, 2003
- Birjandifar, Nazak. "Royal Women and Politics in Safavid Iran." Masters Thesis, McGill University, 2005.
- Ferrier, Ronald W. "Women in Safavid Iran: The Evidence of European Travelers." In *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, edited by Gavin R. G. Hambly, 383-405. St. Martins Press, 1998.
- Gholsorkhi, Shohreh. "Pari Khan Khanum: A Masterful Princess." *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 3-4 (Summer/Fall 1995): 143-156.
- Khafipour, Hani "The Foundation of the Safavid State: Fealty, Patronage, and Ideals of Authority (1501-1576)." PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2013
- Loosley, Emma. "Ladies who Lounge: Class, Religion and Social Interaction in Seventeenth-Century Isfahan." *Gender and History* 23, no. 3 (November 2011): 615-629.
- Matthee, Rudi. "From the Battlefield to the Harem." In *New Perspectives on Safavid Iran*, edited by Colin P. Mitchell, 97-120. Iranian Studies, 2011.
- Szuppe, Maria. "The 'Jewels of Wonder': Learned Ladies and Princesses Politicians in the Provinces of Early Safavid Iran." In *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, edited by Gavin R. G. Hambly, 326-347. St. Martins Press, 1998.
- Szuppe, Maria. "Status, Knowledge, and Politics: Women in Sixteenth-Century Safavid Iran." In *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, edited by Nashat Guity, 140-169. University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Taner, Melis. "Caught in a Whirlwind: Painting in Baghdad in the Late Sixteenth-Early Seventeenth Centuries." PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016.
- Wallace, Heather. "Feminine Power in Safavid Iran: Space, Visibility, and Politics." Master thesis, University of California Davis, 2015.

Zarinebaf-Shahr, Fariba. "Economic Activities of Safavid Women in the Shine-City of Ardabil."  
*Iranian Studies* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 248-260.