



GEORGIA VII. GEORGIANS IN THE SAFAVID ADMINISTRATION

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Safavid interaction with Georgia and its inhabitants dates from the inception of the state in the early 16th century, when Georgians fought alongside the Qezelbāš in Shah Esmā'īl I's army (Grey, ed., pp. 190, 193; Scarcia Amoretti, p. 61). Under Shah Ṭahmāsb I (930-84/1524-76), Georgians, taken captive during the shah's four expeditions into Georgia, began to be imported into Safavid territory. Ṭahmāsb's campaign in 961/1554 is said to have brought thirty thousand people from the Caucasus to Persia (Shah Ṭahmāsb, p. 72; Ḥasan Rūmlū, ed. Navā'ī, p. 492; Eskandar Beg, p. 88). For the most part women and children, these were taken to the harems of the shah and the elite.

Shah 'Abbās I further enlarged the pool of Georgians in Persia. Thousands were captured and taken south during his various campaigns in the Caucasus between 1023/1614 and 1025/1616. Fifteen thousand families, Muslims, Jews, and Armenians, are said to have been deported from the Georgian capital of Zagam, Šīrvān, and Qarabāg and resettled in Faraḥābād in Māzandarān, where they were put to work to develop the area (Eskandar Beg, p. 881, tr.



Savory, II, p. 1096; Della Valle, 1843, I, p. 598; Brosset, 1874-76, I, p. 488). According to the Georgian historian Parsadan Gorgidzhanidze and the Frenchman Jean Chardin, eighty thousand families, Georgians, Armenians, and Jews, were deported to Māzandarān and other areas (Gorgidzhanidze, p. 73; Chardin, II, p. 62). Eskandar Beg speaks of 130,000 as the number of Georgians taken to Persia during the campaign of 1025/1616, and Malekšāh Ḥosayn Sīstānī even claims the huge number of 200,000 captives (Eskandar Beg, pp. 900-901, tr. Savory, II, p. 1116; Malekšāh Ḥosayn, p. 509). Into the 19th century, concentrations of transplanted Georgians were still visible throughout Persia (Oberling and sources quoted therein).

The influence and power acquired by the Georgians in this period began in the royal harem, where women from the Caucasus, many of them of Georgian origin, became prominent. No less than four of Shah Ṭahmāsb's surviving sons were born to him by Georgian wives (Eskandar Beg, p. 133; tr. Savory I, pp. 215-17), and one of his daughters by a Georgian wife, the powerful Zaynab Begom, played an important role at the court of her nephew, Shah 'Abbās I. According to John Fryer (II, pp. 290-91), the queen mother in the 17th century was always a Georgian. In reality, she was usually Circassian, though the difference is not always clear. Georgian women played an important role in the court's marriage politics, and by the end of the Safavid reign a whole web of relations had been established (Krusinski, I, p. 122). Krusinski (I, pp. 128-29), *inter alia* insists that the influence of the Georgian harem women accounted for the Safavid tolerance for the country's Christian population. Writing in the early 17th century, Pietro Della Valle (1663, p. 8; q.v.) claimed that there was not a household in Persia that did not have its Georgian slaves.

Georgians entered the ranks of the army and the bureaucracy in great numbers as well, turning into the mainstay of *golāms*, or slave soldiers. Allāhverdī Khan (q.v.), an Armenian from Georgia, served as the army's commander-in-chief for more than fifteen years (1004-22/1595-1613). During the reign of Shah 'Abbās I, most of the soldiers equipped with firearms were Georgians, their integration into the army facilitated by the relative ease with which they apparently gave up their religion and converted to Islam (Della Valle, 1843, I, p. 760; Kaempfer, p. 273). A total of thirty thousand Georgians are said to have served in Shah 'Abbās's army (Della Valle, 1663, p. 8). Georgians soon occupied administrative positions of the highest rank. Shah 'Abbās in 998/1590 created the *qollar* (slave) corps, consisting of Circassians, Georgians, and Armenians, and its leader, the *qollar-āqāsī*, became one of the



principal state officials (Eskander Beg II, p. 1106, tr. I, p. 527; Jonābādī, p. 716; Savory, p. 419; *Tadkerat al-molūk*, tr. Minorsky, pp. 33, 46-47). Allāhverdī Khan was one of the first to hold this post. In the 1630s its incumbent was the equally powerful Ҷosrow Mīrzā (Rostam Khan), who has resided at the Safavid court since the days of Sultan Ҷodā-banda.

Many provinces also fell under Georgian control. The first Georgian to occupy the governorship of a major province was Allāhverdī Khan, who in 1003-4/1595-96 received Fārs (Kūhgīlūya was added to his domain a year later). His son, Emāmqolī Khan (q.v.), succeeded him as the governor (*beglerbegī*) of Fārs and ruled that province until Shah Şafī had him and his family executed in 1042/1632. Şīrvān/Şarvān was another of the provinces to which Georgian governors were appointed. In 1013/1605 Shah ‘Abbās sent Constantin (Konstandīl) Mīrzā, the son of the Georgian king Alexander, to head this region. Emāmqolī Khan’s brother, Dāwūd Beg, served as governor of Qarabāg between 1037/1627 and 1040/1630 (Moḥammad-Ma’şūm, p. 51; Eskander Beg and Wāla, p. 81; Mollā Jalāl-al-Dīn, pp. 275-76; Gorgidzhanidze, p. 85; Alonso, pp. 56, 105, 107). *Golāms* ruled Şūştār from 1042/1632 until the last days of the Safavids (Şūştārī, pp. 46-47). Şafīqolī Khan, the governor of Hamadān, was appointed *beglerbegī* of Baghdad following Shah ‘Abbās’s conquest of the city in 1033/1622-23 (Eskander Beg, p. 1004, tr. Savory II p. 1226-27). Georgia itself continued to be governed by a Georgian after the Safavid conquest, following an agreement between Shah ‘Abbās and Taimuraz (Ṭahmūrāt) Khan, its last independent ruler, whereby the latter submitted to Safavid rule in exchange for being allowed to rule as the region’s *wālī* and for having his son serve as *dārūgā* (city prefect) of Isfahan in perpetuity (Chardin, X, p. 29; Kaempfer, pp. 110-11). The first Georgian to hold the position of *dārūgā* of the capital since 1620 was Ҷosrow Mīrzā (Della Valle 1843, II, p. 176). Ҷosrow Mīrzā held the position until his death in 1658, though he mostly let himself be represented by a deputy (*nā’eb*). Georgians continued to occupy this position until the last days of the Safavid rule.

The position of the Georgian *golāms* was further strengthened under Shah Şafī and Shah ‘Abbās II. Eskandar Beg claims that at the time of Shah Abbās’s death, *golāms* (not all of them Georgian) held twenty-one of the ninety-two most powerful positions (Eskandar Beg, pp. 1084-89, tr. Savory II, pp. 1309-17). And of the thirty-seven great amirs appointed under Shah ‘Abbās II, at least twenty-three were *golāms* (Röhrborn, p. 33). Following the slaughter of a great many Qezelbāš, the Georgians under Shah Şafī consolidated their hold over



key positions in the inner palace, the bureaucracy, and the military. The shah's own chamberlain (*mehtar*) was a white eunuch of Georgian origin (Olearius, p. 571; *Taḍkerat al-molūk*, tr. Minorsky, pp. 127, 138). Aside from the positions of *qollar-āqāsī* and *dārūga* of Isfahan, they virtually monopolized the posts of *dīvānbeḡī* (q.v., chief justice) and *sepahsālār* (military commander). These and other positions tended to become hereditary, and one powerful functionary typically held more than one simultaneously. Thus Ḳosrow Mīrzā served as *dīvānbeḡī* and *dārūga* of Isfahan under Shah 'Abbās, played a crucial role in the accession of Shah Ṣafī in 1038/1629, and was made *qollar-āqāsī* the following year, on which occasion he was renamed Rostam Khan (Eskandar Beg, p. 1078, tr. p. 1302; Moḡammad-Ma'ṣūm, p. 46). In 1632, following a rebellion in Kartli, he became *wālī* of that part of Georgia (Eskander Beg and Wāla Eṣfahānī, pp. 114, 136; Moḡammad-Ma'ṣūm, p. 144). Having been appointed to all of Georgia in 1058/1648, he remained in power until his death in 1069/1658. He is not to be confused with another Rostam Beg, who was *dīvānbeḡī* in the last years of Shah 'Abbās I's reign, and served as *tofangčī-āqāsī* (rifleman commander), *sepahsālār*, and *beglerbeg* of Azarbaijan between 1040/1631 and his execution in 1053/1643. Rostam Beg's younger brother, 'Alīqolī Khan, had a remarkable career spanning fifty years, during which he served as *dīvānbeḡī* under Shah Ṣafī (Eskander Beg and Wāla Eṣfahānī, pp. 146, 166; Moḡammad-Ma'ṣūm, p. 197; Waḡīd Qazvīnī, p. 47; Olearius, p. 671), held the post of *sepahsālār* and the attendant position of *beglerbegī* of Azarbaijan between 1058/1648 and 1064/1654, fell out of favor, but was rehabilitated by Shah Solaymān, who reinstated him as *sepahsālār*. Chardin called him the effective ruler of the country at the time of his death in 1667 (Waḡīd Qazvīnī, pp. 138, 174-75; Tavernier, I, p. 638-43; Chardin, IX, pp. 555-63, X, p. 70). Rostam Beg's son, Ṣafīqolī Khan, was appointed *dīvānbeḡī* in 1067/1657 (Šāmlū, fol. 133v.; Algemeen Rijks Archief, VOC 1224, fol. 316 v.), and took up the governorship of Mašhad in 1074/1664 (Šāmlū, fol. 146v.). Ṣafīqolī Khan's son, Rostam Khan, was *dīvānbeḡī* under Shah Solaymān and also served as *tofangčī-āqāsī*, and in 1692 was appointed *sepahsālār* and *beglerbegī* of Tabrīz (Mašīzī, p. 626; Ḳātūnābādī, pp. 548, 550). The brother of Gorgīn Khan (Giorgi XI, the former king of Kartli), Levan (Leon), also known as Šāhqolī Khan, was appointed *dīvānbeḡī* of Isfahan in 1700 upon his victorious return from a campaign against the Baluch marauders in Kermān (Lockhart, p. 46; Lang, 1952, p. 527). Levan's son, Kay-ḳosrow (Ḳosrow Khan) similarly briefly served as *dīvānbeḡī* in 1709 and was rewarded with the position of *dārūga* of Isfahan for quelling a bread revolt, and in 1709 became *sepahsālār* and was also made *wālī* of Georgia (Algemeen Rijks Archief, VOC, 1753, fol. 293v.; Mostawfī, p. 116;



Lockhart, pp. 49-50). He was killed during an expedition in Afghanistan against the Ġilzī (q.v.) Afghans. The *sepahsālār* (and *beglarbegī* of Azarbaijan and *wālī* of Georgia) in 1716 was Ḥosaynqolī Khan (Wahtang VI), the brother of the *qollar-āqāsī*, Rostam Mīrzā. In 1717 he succeeded his brother as *qollar-āqāsī* (Bushev, pp. 181-82; Algemeen Rijks Archief, VOC 1897, fol. 271; Krusinski, I, pp. 190, 198-99).

As these examples show, the administrative and military power of Georgians continued right up to the end of the Safavid period. Fryer's claim (II, p. 291) that in 1677 Georgians contributed forty thousand soldiers to the Persian army, is surely exaggerated, but Engelbert Kaempfer (p. 204) may well have been right in his assertion that, by the 1680s, about twenty thousand Georgians (including Circassians and Daghestanis) were living in Isfahan. Shah Solaymān, who seemed to have favored Georgians, asked Šahnavāz Khan (Vakhtang V), the king of Kartli, to marry his daughter Anusa and made Šahanavāz's son, Alexander, the *dārūga* of Isfahan (Brosset, 1856, II/2, p. 9). It is also said that Shah Solaymān kept the Georgians content and forgetful of their origins by promoting them to high positions (Sanson, pp. 176-77). Their internal divisions, noted by Chardin (II, p. 42) and the fact that they never achieved full autonomy but had to compete with other groups, kept them from establishing supremacy in the administration. The Georgians, moreover, were not universally loved and their tremendous power gave rise to a great deal of friction and factionalism. Chardin tells the story of 'Alīqolī Khan, a Georgian, who was sent to Lorestān and caused a local revolt (Chardin, IX, p. 206). The same author (V, p. 228) further notes that older Persians loathed the Georgian newcomers, calling them *qara oġlū*, sons of blacks; he also remarks (II, pp. 42-43, 150) on the animosity that existed between Georgians and Armenians, another group that figured conspicuously in governmental circles. Others noted that the Georgians were feared in Persia (Carmelite Archives, O.C.D. 243 1 bis; Avril, p. 60). In late Safavid times an anti-Georgian faction consisting of the superintendant of the royal workshops (*nāzer-e boyūtāt*) and the grand vizier is reported (Lang, 1952, pp. 530-31). There surely was no love lost between the Qezelbāš and the Georgians in late Safavid times; while the Qezelbāš are said to have encouraged the Afghans to invade Persia to further their own cause against the Georgians, anti-Muslim sentiments seem to have prompted some of the latter to hope for a Russian invasion (Lang, 1957, p. 109; Lockhart, pp. 86, 89; Röhrborn, p. 38).

However that may be, the very demise of the Safavid state is entwined with



Georgian military leadership. Giorgi XI or Gorgīn Khan (Šahnavāz Khan III), was the ruler of Georgia who, having lost his throne, in 1699 was made governor of Kermān with the task of halting the Baluchi incursions that threatened the country's southeast. Four years later the need to repel invading Afghans prompted the shah to appoint him as *sepahsālār*, *beglerbegī* of Qandahār and, nominally, *wālī* of Kartli. In 1716 it was the turn of Ḥosaynqolī Khan (Vakhtang VI), Giorgi XI's regent in Georgia, to be appointed *sepahsālār* and charged with fighting the Afghans. Georgian troops, led by Rostam Khan, fought valiantly against the Afghans at the battle of Golnābād in 1134/1722, but their number was too small to keep the enemy from laying siege to Isfahan. A refusal on the part of Vakhtang VI, now again residing in Georgia, to send relief troops to Persia, finally made it impossible for the Safavids to save the city and their realm (Mostawfī, p. 129; Lang, 1957, pp. 104-13; Röhrborn, p. 89).

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