



# GIFT GIVING IV. IN THE SAFAVID PERIOD

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## GIFT GIVING

### iv. In The Safavid Period

The Frenchman Guillaume Olivier claimed at the turn of the 18th century that gift giving was more common in Persia than in the Ottoman Empire (V, p. 257). This may have been true, but it is hard to verify, because virtually all available information on the practice of gift giving in pre-modern Persia is limited to the political elite. It is clear, though, that offering gifts was a conspicuous part of traditional social and political life in Persia, including Safavid Persia, a society that set great store by a reputation of generosity and liberality, and that *pīškaš* was a considerable source of revenue, as well as an important source of expenditure, for the royal court.

As in all non-modern societies, the act of exchanging gifts in Safavid Persia differed fundamentally from modern notions of giving and receiving presents. In the contemporary West, gift giving represents a personal relationship between people and carries the pretense that gifts have no value and require nothing in return, that they are, in sum, voluntary and spontaneous. In Safavid Persia such pretense was largely absent, the symbolism of exchanging gifts revolving rather explicitly around notions of largesse, reciprocity, and power relations. The practice itself was decidedly non-voluntary, highly regulated in



terms of value, and ultimately part of a system of governance and social relations that was predicated upon tribute in return for patronage and in which payment was expected for all favors, privileges, and grants. It was on the royal household that the flow of tribute converged; the same institution also was the largest dispenser of patronage. Highly ritualized, gift giving was also an important aspect of tribute, and more often than not in effect a form of taxation.

The generic name of a gift given by a subordinate to a superior in the Safavid period was *pīškaš*. Also used were terms such as *toḥfa*, *hadīya*, *armaḡān*, *tansūq*, *savārī* (originally, homage, tribute), and *taṣaddoq* (alms). The throwing of coins meant as a gift was called *neṭār wa īṭār*, and putting presents down before the shah was known as *dastandāz*, *pāyandāz*, or *pīšandāz* (Minorsky, p. 950; Amīr Maḡmūd b. Ḳvāndamīr, pp. 270, 361; Wāla, pp. 143, 169, 184, 210; Jalāl-al-Dīn Monajjem, p. 148; Waḡīd Qazvīnī, pp. 84-85; Mīrzā Rafī‘ā, p. 309; Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, pp. 31-32). More specific terms were *salāmī*, “welcoming gift,” *īdī*, a present given on a (religious) holiday, and *nowrūzī*, a new year’s gift (*Taḡkerat al-molūk*, tr. Minorsky, p. 156). *En‘ām* was the general term for a gift from a superior to a person of inferior status. More specific was the *kel‘at*, the robe of honor. *Dūšlek*, or *dūšallek*, was the fee or commission to be paid on a present (*Taḡkerat al-molūk*, tr. Minorsky, pp. 87, 96, 157; Eskandar Beg, p. 361; tr. I, p. 500). Many forms of gift giving in the Safavid period were inherited from previous dynasties and some can be traced to the Sasanian era (see Lambton and Sancisi-Weerdenburg).

Gifts and donations came in multiple forms and were offered on many occasions. One common form was the exchange of presents on the diplomatic level. Foreign embassies were expected to bring rich gifts with them and to present these during their first official audience, when they were carried around the royal *meydān* in a procession. After they had been received, such gifts were as a rule deposited in the royal storage chamber, *jobba-kāna*, gathering dust and shorn of their valuable parts (Richard, II, p. 299). Foreign representatives visiting Persia tended to give specific presents. Thus Tatar and Arab envoys often presented horses (Goyau, p. 293). Dutch envoys representing the East India Company invariably included spices and sugar in their repertoire and, like other emissaries, routinely included a sum of money in their offerings as well (Speelman, pp. 146, 154, 160). The Russian tsar typically sent gerfalcons, sable fur, and hard liquor (Della Valle, I, pp. 835-36; Bushev, 1976, pp. 131, 254-55; Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, p. 179; Eskandar Beg, p.



940; Falsafī, V, p. 1835, where Shah ‘Abbās I requested gerfalcons and fur from the Russians). Following the example of the Aq Qoyunlu (q.v.), Safavid rulers were also interested in receiving dogs and live wild and exotic animals (Barbaro, pp. 53-54, Speelman, 146). In 1595 Tsar Fedor Ivanovich sent live bears as a present to Shah ‘Abbās I (Fekhner, p. 60; Bushev, 1976, p. 227). In 1664, an envoy from the pasha of Baṣra offered Shah ‘Abbās II an ostrich and a lion in addition to three Arabian horses (Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, p. 179). The Ethiopian envoy who visited Isfahan in the reign of Shah Solaymān offered the shah a zebra as a gift (Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, p. 45). The Dutch brought elephants with them on missions in 1666-67, 1690, and 1716, and Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn in 1694 received an elephant from prince Akbar, son of the Mughal ruler, Awrangzēb, as part of his accession present (Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, p. 131; Algermeen Rijks Archief, VOC 1259, 22 March 1666, fol. 3380, and VOC 1913, 31 March 1718, fol. 453; Villotte, pp. 161-62; Gemelli Careri, II, p. 155). Guns were also a favored gift (Dunlop, p. 126; Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, p. 194), and European paintings, books, and prints made their way to Persia as part of diplomatic presents (de Gouvea, tr., p. 120; Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, p. 193; Guillaume, p. 82). Foreign envoys also routinely offered sums of money, usually in the form of gold ducats, to the shah and his grandees (‘Abdī Beyg, pp. 120-21; Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, p. 493; Valentyn, V, p. 276). The gifts sent by Safavid shahs to foreign rulers varied, but usually included quantities of precious cloth, brocade, turbans, shawls, scimitars, and in the case of adjacent Ottoman and Mughal states, camels, horses, carpets, and richly decorated tents (Navā’ī, ed., pp. 46-48, 233; Alonso, p. 102; Bernier, p. 147; Reindl-Kiel, p. 186).

A combination of the presumed importance of the country, the weight of the issue to be negotiated, and the value of gifts previously received, determined the richness and value of the presents offered at diplomatic exchanges. Such gifts could reach enormous proportions. In 968-69/1560-61, a 700-man strong Ottoman delegation arrived in Qazvīn, bringing bejeweled swords and daggers, precious cloth, and horses (‘Abdī Beyg, pp. 117-18). Shah Ṭahmāsb in 975/1567 sent a delegation to Istanbul consisting of 320 officials and 400 merchants, with thirty-four camels laden with gifts including twenty silk carpets and a copy of the *Šāh-nāma* that had taken twenty years to complete (Ḥasan Rūmlū, ed. Navā’ī, p. 567; Sudavar, p. 164). Maḥdīqolī Khan Čavošlū, who in 998/1590 was dispatched as the Safavid ambassador to the Ottoman court, brought gifts that included 1,500 horses (Riāḥī, p. 39). The Indian ambassador who visited Isfahan in 1028/1619 was accompanied by twenty-nine camels laden with gifts, presumably consisting of precious cloth. His gifts



further included a large gilded pavilion or tent, a great number of bejeweled swords and other arms, more than a hundred baskets filled with turbans, a large tusk, and five bullock drawn carts (Della Valle, I, pp. 833-34). Antony Sherley claims to have received a thousand tomans and forty richly caparisoned horses, sixteen mules, and twelve camels laden with tents and furniture as a present from Shah 'Abbas I (Sherley, p. 72). The gifts that the Persian ambassador Moḥammad-Rezā Beg Qazvīnī presented to Louis XIV, on the other hand, were deemed below standard, causing some to speculate that their meager value was in response to the even less worthy presents that a previous French envoy had brought for the shah (Herbette, pp. 182-82). Even rich presents might be spurned, however. Shah 'Abbas II in 1663 rejected half of the lavish gift presented to him by the Mughal envoy who had come to Isfahan to lay claim to Qandahār for his master (Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, p. 491).

Another conspicuous form of gift giving was the flow of donations from the provinces and subordinated groups toward the capital and the royal court. Provincial governors and tribal leaders were obligated to send the royal court specific amounts of goods, the first fruits of the region, or the specialty of the area (Chardin, ed. Langlès, V, pp. 380, 394; Fryer, III, p. 23). This was called *enfād* or *enfād* (*Taḍkerat al-molūk*, tr. Minorsky, p. 156; Mīrzā Rafī'ā, p. 74). The rulers of Kartli and Kakheti (see GEORGIA) sent hawks, wine, and slaves to the Safavid court (Mīrzā Rafī'ā, p. 73; de Tournefort, III, p. 167). Fārs offered horses, mules, and camels for Nowrūz (Tavernier, I, p. 596; de Thevenot, III, p. 432); the Baḳtīārīs also sent mares and mules, in addition to falcons and saltpeter, rice, and lemons, while the governor (*wālī*) of Kūzestān was held to send stallions and mares of Arab blood as a *nowrūzī* (Mīrzā Rafī'ā, pp. 71, 74). Officials of all ranks, both those stationed in the provinces and those attached to the royal court, were expected to offer a *pīškaš* to the shah upon being appointed, and each time they were re-appointed. No one who wished to remain in esteem (and office), moreover, was free from the obligation to offer a *nowrūzī* to the shah on the occasion of the New Year, and an *īdī* on (religious) holidays. According to Mīrzā Rafī'ā (p. 77), the grand vizier was to offer a *nowrūzī* in the amount of one thousand gold coins and twelve stallions and mares. Naturally, competition caused the value to spiral. Shah 'Abbās' grand vizier, Ḥātem Beg Ordūbādī, in 1607 reportedly gave the ruler a 50,000-toman *nowrūzī* (Chick, ed., I, p. 159). The presents offered to the shah in 1619 by Emāmqolī Khan (q.v.), the governor of Fārs, included forty horses draped in silk and brocade, six or seven camels, precious stones, a large quantity of



turbans, and a great many horse-drawn carts laden with sugar (Della Valle, II, pp. 35-36). Moḥammad Sārū Taqī, Shah Ṣafī's grand vizier, is said to have given the shah great gifts each year, thereby forcing other courtiers to be liberal as well (Olearius, p. 670). How important *pīškaš* was to the court is illustrated in the fact that in 1063/1654 Shah 'Abbās II reserved one day a week for the reception of offerings (Waḥīd Qazvīnī, p. 175).

Gifts were offered on many other occasions as well, to the point where they were an integral part of virtually all forms of social and political interaction. Whenever a new high-ranking public official took up his post, a welcoming present, *salāmī*, was expected from his subordinates. The agents of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) and East India Company were required annually to send their *nowrūzī*, a sum of money in gold, in addition to cloth and spices, to the shah, but also to the various central and provincial officials with whom they had dealings. They paid *salāmī* whenever a new grand vizier was appointed in Isfahan, or when a new governor or harbor master, *šāh-bandar*, arrived in Bandar-e 'Abbās. In late Safavid times, the English and the Dutch annually paid fifty tomans each to the *šāh-bandar* and the khan of Bandar 'Abbās (India Office Record, E/3/60/7515, 24 March 1701). The accession of a shah called for an outburst of royal generosity designed to establish legitimacy and "buy" goodwill. When Shah Ṭahmāsb ascended the throne in 930/1524, his largesse was said to be so great that it almost depleted the royal treasury (Roemer, pp. 23-24). The enthronement of Shah Ṣafī a century later was followed by the bestowal of some 8,000 robes of honor (*kel'at*), the granting of a reported 20,000 tomans in gifts to courtiers (Moḥammad-Ma'šūm, pp. 41-47), and a considerable tax remission to peasants, amounting to 15,000 tomans (Eskandar Beg and Mowarrek, pp. 11-12). Messengers who announced the pending visit of the shah to a province counted on a gift (Chardin, ed. Langlès, IX, p. 359), and when the shah actually traveled through a region, the local authorities were expected to offer him *pīškaš*. When the shah honored an official with a personal visit, the latter was also supposed to give a present, usually in cash (Richard, I, p. 23). Auspicious events such as the shah's birthday, his recovery from an illness, or the removal of a rebellious official were cause for gift giving and accompanied by *tašaddoq*, the distribution of gifts to the poor (Gemelli Careri, II, pp. 123-24; Algemeen Rijks Archief, VOC 1152, 30 Nov. 1645, fols. 248-49). A visiting ambassador might hand out presents to the poor as well, as did the Ottoman envoy in 1109/1697 in Tabrīz on his way to Isfahan (Nāṣerī, p. 215). Part of the *pīškaš*, consisting of goods, food stuff, and garments, offered to the shah on his



birthday by the *qūrčī-bāšī* and other officials, was handed to the chief astrologer (*monajjem-bāšī*), who made sure it was distributed among the destitute. In later times this task was taken over by the chief cleric (*mollā-bāšī*; Mīrzā Rafī‘ā, pp. 79-80, 309; *Taḍkerat al-molūk*, tr. Minorsky, pp. 57-58). Instances are also known of governors doling out food and clothing to the poor and starving (Amīr Maḥmūd b. K̲vāndamīr, pp. 215-16). Shah Ṭahmāsb I customarily donated a cradle and a carpet whenever a royal baby was born (Eskandar Beg, p. 129). The successful outcome of a campaign and the return of the triumphant army to the capital was cause for a celebration that included the offering of gifts to the shah (Dunlop, 591-92, 617). A prominent Armenian converting to Islam could expect to receive a *kel’at* from the ruler (Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, p. 144).

Reciprocity was built into the institution of gift giving. According to Pietro Della Valle (q.v.), it was customary for the recipient of a gift to bestow one of greater value on the donor. Yet the same author elsewhere claims that inferiors tried to give little or nothing back, that people of similar ranks exchanged gifts on par, and that only superiors were expected to be more generous with their gifts than their underlings (Della Valle, I, pp. 442, 651). People of different rank indeed had different motives for giving gifts. For those of equal status and position exchanging presents was a matter of a challenge involving the honor of both the donor and the recipient (Bourdieu, p. 100). Subordinates presented gifts to their superiors to express their fealty or to propitiate them, acknowledging past favors and anticipating future ones. The gift giving of superiors, by contrast, was designed to secure their subordinates’ continued loyalty, but it also symbolized the munificence and magnanimity of the donor. The shah thus lavishly bestowed robes of honor on many occasions, to the envoys representing a foreign ruler, to a newly appointed official, or after receiving the Nowrūz *pīškaš* (Puturidze, I/2, doc. 9, p. 28). The significance of the *kel’at* was highly symbolic, since by granting it the shah declared the recipient his subject and incorporated him into his realm. By accepting it the recipient acknowledged subordination, a refusing it betokened rebelliousness (Buckler, pp. 242-43). According to Jean Chardin, the shah each year offered more than 8,000 *kel’ats* at a total cost of nearly 70,000 tomans (ed. Langlès, VII, p. 375). The *kel’at* generally consisted of more than an actual robe and included a number of items, such as a horse with a gold-trimmed rein and gold-threaded saddle, daggers and swords, and a sum of money (Olearius, p. 533; Waḥīd Qazvīnī, p. 23; Speelman, pp. 257-58; Mīrzā Rafī‘ā, p. 71; Nāṣerī, p. 92; Algemeen Rijks Archief, VOC 1901, fol. 1174; Bushev, 1978, p. 149). In



theory the shah offered a gift twice the value of the one he received (Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, pp. 196-98; Richard, I, p. 23; Kaempfer, p. 276). In practice, this was usually not the case (Chick, ed., I, p. 491).

Gift giving was a form of regular (*moqarrarī*) or occasional (*ḥokmī*) taxation and, as such, highly institutionalized (Lambton, pp. 147-48). In the Persian chronicles the term *pīškaš* is often accompanied by the terms *lāyeq* “appropriate,” *šāyesta* “suitable,” or *sazāvār* “worthy,” suggesting that the amount and value were flexible. It is true that gifts were often open to negotiation, and instances are known of recipients complaining about their value or even rejecting presents offered to them as being unworthy (Algemeen Rijks Archief, coll. Geleynsen de Jongh 298, 14 Oct. 1642, India Office Records, E/3/54/6618, 5 March 1699). Yet the fact that the annual *pīškaš* and other forms of tribute were often written into *farmāns* (q.v.) is strong evidence for the institutional quality of at least the fixed gifts (examples in Lambton, pp. 150-51). So is the fact that the *pīškaš* a governor relayed to the shah’s treasure was generally for a fixed amount (Röhrborn, p. 92). Other good examples are the tributary “gift” of 300 to 400 bales of silk that Shah ‘Abbās I agreed to send to the Ottoman sultan as part of the peace he concluded in 1613 (Della Valle, I, p. 651), the annual presents through which the shah prevented the tribes of Daghestan from conducting raids into his territory (Witsen, p. 565), and the monetary allowances the Safavids sent to Georgian rulers to keep them from switching their loyalty to the Ottomans (de Tournefort, III, p. 173). Examples of *pīškaš* offered or taken after conquest similarly suggest that *pīškaš* was a levy rather than a “spontaneous” gift; after the conquest of Gilān the inhabitants hastened to offer *pīškaš* to the shah and “*pīškaš* and *savārī*” were taken from the people of Baku after the town was occupied by Shah Esmā’īl I in 907/1501-2 (Amīr Maḥmūd b. K̄vāndamīr, pp. 109, 113). Conversely, tax exemptions granted to towns or groups of people during the Safavid period often include *pīškaš* and donations such as *īdī* and *nowrūzī* (Bāstānī Pārīzī, pp. 155-61). In 1695 a landowner offered a *pīškaš* of ten gold coins (*ašrafī*, q.v.) in exchange for tax exemption (Puturidze, I/2, doc. 22, p. 60).

A further aspect of bureaucratic organization is the fact that all gifts presented to the shah were recorded by the *pīškašnevīs*, who handed the register to the *ešīk-āqāsī-bāšī* (q.v.; *Taḍkerat al-molūk*, tr. Minorsky p. 47). They were also appraised for their value since this reflected both the standing of the offering party and the presumed status of the recipient, in addition to indicating the value of the counter gift to be proffered (Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, pp. 196-98).



A fee or commission, *dūšollek* or *dušlek*, had to be paid on each gift and was deducted from all gifts and grants, including royal *kel'ats*. According to the *Tadkerat al-molūk* (tr. Minorsky, p. 96), a tithe (*dah-yak*) was levied on the latter, which was distributed among the officials involved in receiving and recording gifts, and their subordinates (for discussion of the various commissions received by different officials, see Lambton, pp. 154-55). The donor of a gift to the shah, whether it concerned *pīškaš* or *enfād*, paid a 15-percent surcharge in cash above the assessed value (a sum that routinely went up to 25 percent, but sometimes only 5 percent was charged). Ten percent of this went to the *nāẓer*, a similar amount to the major-domo of the palace, the *ešik-āqāsī-bāšī*, while 5 percent was pocketed by the *pīškašnevīs* (Chick, ed., I, p. 130; Speelman, p. 269; Chardin, ed. Langlès, III, pp. 197-98, 221, V, pp. 359, 430; Kaempfer, p. 106; Algemeen Rijks Archief, VOC 1430, 5 July 1686, fol. 1548b). According to the *Tadkerat al-molūk* (tr. Minorsky, p. 93), the *pīškašnevīs* received 1 percent of the value of the gift. The proceeds of such fees amounted to considerable sums. Thus the income of the stable master (*amīr-aḳor-bāšī*) of more than 3,000 tomans was made up for the most part of the fees collected on horses presented to the shah (Chardin, ed. Langlès, V, p. 364). Chardin called this surcharge a tax on the wealthy, who after all received most of the royal gifts, even though the fee went to courtiers rather than to the royal treasure (V, p. 406). This surcharge, as Chardin noted, made it tempting for the donor to underestimate the value of his gift; the incentive to do so was offset, however, by the fact that the value also determined the nature of the counter present, which was supposed to be greater than that of the original (ed. Langlès, II, pp. 197-98). Such fees were rarely waved, and even foreign ambassadors generally had to pay them. There were exceptions, though, such as the Arab bedouin tribes, the Šarīf of Mecca, the inhabitants of the sacred places, the Šāh-sevanī, who were neither forced to pay *dūšollek* on gifts nor to pay it for grants they received (*Tadkerat al-molūk*, tr. Minorsky, p. 87), did not have to pay. They were also often included in the wavers from taxation granted by the shah (Dabīḥī and Sotūda, VI, doc. 20, p. 33).

Gift giving and bribery were separated but by a fine line, and offering presents routinely degenerated into forced gifts, bribery, and extortion. The cost of ceremonies organized to honor a new monarch, including the precious cloth that covered the street and the obligatory fire works, were often paid by the local populace and by foreign merchants who wanted to create some goodwill (Tavernier, I, pp. 577-59). Officials at Persia's borders sometimes forced travelers entering Safavid territory whom they suspected of carrying great



amounts of wealth to hand them a “present” (Boullaye-le Gouz, p.72). The pervasiveness of a culture of expecting gifts for any and all kinds of services, and the venality it produced was such that many visitors complained that nothing in Persia could be achieved without offering gifts and that gifts made anything possible (Chardin, ed. Langlès, V, p. 444, IX, p. 333; Aubin, p. 89). The high salaries enjoyed by some officials, such as the *dīvānbeḡī* (q.v.) and the *šayḡ-al-Eslām*, were explicitly designed to prevent peculation (Sanson, pp. 23,33; Waliqolī Šāmlū, fols. 133v-34), and some Safavid *olamā’* considered accepting gifts from the ruler objectionable (*makrūh*; Calder, p. 96). Yet neither a substantial state income nor clerical opprobrium was able to eliminate corruption. In practice, corruption short of excess was institutionalized and accepted practice, an integral part of a bureaucratic structure that made no distinction between private gain and public good. Officials were dependent on unregulated income (*madākel*) and a provincial magistrate was expected to use his (brief) period of tenure to recover that investment he had made to gain his post. In sum, to maximize one’s income by way of one’s position was considered perfectly legitimate. Taking gifts was an essential component of this system. Outright bribery and blackmail, as well as social relations in which no effort was undertaken or favor granted without a gift, were merely the logical outgrowth of the same system, even if egregious indulgence in these practices was formally punishable. Exchanging gifts was part and parcel of a political system that was built on insecurity of office and in which office holders routinely gave presents indistinguishable from bribes to placate their superiors in the hope of having their tenure extended, to propitiate their adversaries and prevent them from tarnishing their reputation with the shah, or to forestall complaints about their performance (Tavernier, I, p. 661; Kaempfer, pp. 104, 163).

Europeans operating in Persia did not always understand that *pīškaš* was not a matter of a gift to be given in return for services but really a form of taxation. This arose in part from the fact that the gifts they gave in addition to the yearly *pīškaš* in return for a *kel’at* were mostly bribes, offered in anticipation of future services and favors, and that such gifts were invariably open to negotiation. Misunderstanding would often arise over donations such as the annual *pīškaš* to the local authorities of Bandar-e ‘Abbās, which the incumbents tended to see as an automatic fee, a sum to which they were entitled regardless of their behavior, whereas the foreign traders regarded such expenses as contingent upon good past behavior and promises of future favors on the part of Safavid officials. The Hoogkamer embassy, representing



the Dutch East India Company, which visited Persia in 1701, is only one of many that became involved in acrimonious negotiations about the nature and magnitude of the presents offered to various officials in return for an advantageous silk contract (Valentyn, V, pp. 276-82). Other misunderstandings frequently arose as well. The Safavid custom of mixing gift giving with business, a practice already known in Mongol times (Allsen, pp. 120-21) was one such source of confusion. The best example is the shah's habit of sending sample commodities abroad, ostensibly to offer them as a gift to foreign rulers but really as a business transaction. A famous instance of such ambiguity is Shah 'Abbās I, who dispatched 100 bales of silk to the Spanish court, where the consignment was erroneously interpreted and received as a gift (de Gouvea, tr., pp. 456-59; Della Valle, II, pp. 169). In 1681 Shah Solymān similarly sent a number of bales of silk to Brandenburg, ostensibly as a present but in reality as vendible ware (Hundt, p. 13).

In later Safavid times the practice of gift giving seems to have become more pervasive and entrenched. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in the 1660s noted how, over time, gift giving had become more widespread and lavish as provincial governors had lost autonomy vis-à-vis the central state, explaining that, if they wished to remain in favor and power, local rulers were obliged to send ever richer gifts to Isfahan. They also paid off anyone who might complain about their rule. The money for all these gifts and bribes was extracted from the local population (Tavernier, I, p. 597). Yet other observers asserted that bribery had grown worse for the opposite reason, as a result of the loss of central control following the reign of Shah 'Abbās I. The Dutch, for instance, claimed that the need to give presents to Safavid officials had been much less under Shah 'Abbās than during the reign of Shah Ṣafī (Dunlop, p. 475). Conversely, Shah 'Abbās also appears to have been less liberal in giving than some of his successor (Chick, ed., I, p. 160). Diminishing central control indeed seems to have been the main reason for an increase in corruption, for there is abundant evidence that the weakening of the shah's power in the late 17th century gave subordinates, courtiers, and provincial officials ever greater room to extract gifts and demand bribes for every and any possible service and favor. This does not mean that all office holders were venal. Shaikh 'Alī Khan, Shah Solymān's grand vizier, was known for his incorruptibility. The Dutch said the same thing about Mīrzā Moḥammad-Rezā, the royal scribe, *waqā'e'nevīs*, in 1684-85 (Algemeen Rijks Archief, VOC 1416, 9 April 1685, fol. 1672), and a Persian source calls Mīrzā Sayyed Moḥammad, who in 1116/1704-05 was appointed *qāzī* of Isfahan, untainted by bribe-taking



(Kātūnābādī, p. 555). Yet corruption and venality became all-pervasive in the last decades of Safavid rule, to the point where it came close to paralyzing the administration of the realm (see Ja'farīān, pp. 46-48, for contemporary Persian observations and criticisms of the phenomenon). Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn himself took the lead in this, requiring state officials to give gifts once a month rather than once a year (Krusinski, I, pp. 86-87).

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