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GIFT GIVING V. IN THE QAJAR PERIOD

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The act of giving has not been an incidental, but rather a structural, institutionalized element of Persian society and polity that was based on patronage. Whereas as a social custom gifts served to solidify reciprocal social relationships and obligations, in the area of politics it was an asymmetric structural principle to redistribute or acquire wealth and protection, to underscore loyalties, and, what is more, to confirm the nature and the existence of the pecking order. Because the socio-political hierarchy was based on reciprocity and personal transactions, the judicious distribution of gifts was a natural instrument within this value system to serve as a reward for services rendered or gifts received, as well as an expression of the continued appreciation and the sustained confirmation of the system. Therefore, this habit of gift giving was part of the fabric of Persian life and held for all classes and ranks or social and ethnic groups (Sancisi-Weerdenburg, pp. 129-46; Lambton, pp. 145-58; Ebn Ḵaldūn, tr. II, p. 285).

The Persian language has many words to denote the concept of gifts. The terminology refering to gifts changed over time, although many of the same terms were used in the beginning of the Islamic period as around the 20th

century, albeit with some changes in connotation. For the early period data are scarce on the terminology used for gift giving, but the function itself was well established (Spuler, *Iran*, p. 368; idem, *Mongolen*4, p. 306 with many examples and details on the kinds of articles given as gifts). For the Ghaznavid period the term *hadīya* was normally used, although *pīškaš* also is mentioned (Bayhaqī, ed. Fayyāż, pp. 655, 679, 734-35, 789). Naṣīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī refers to *pīškaš wa toḥfa wa hadīa* as a source of revenue for the Saljuqid rulers (Minovi and Minorsky, p. 73). Under the Il-khanids and their successors the word *pīškaš* was seldom used. They rather used new words, in particular, *tūzqū* and *sāvorī*. Other terms used included *sowḡāt*, which was used to denote a present brought by a returning traveler; *sāčoq/sāčeq*, which was a wedding gift and might also refer to a fee levied on entertainment such as weddings, and *dūšallek/dūšlik*, a present given to government officials. In Qajar parlance *armaḡān*, *rahāvard* and *sowḡāt* signify any object which one brings back from a journey to give to one's friends at home. In the Timurid and Safavid times, however, these words referred to presents given to superiors or equals and were often used as a synonym of *pīškaš* (Naḵjavānī, I, p. 16; Yazdī, pp. 24, 36, 41, 59, 62; Floor, 1998, pp. 201-4). *Yādgār* is a memento to remind the owner of the absent friend by whom it was given, though in the Timurid and Safavid times the term *yādbūd* usually also referred to gifts made to superiors as a keepsake (Floor, 1998, p. 205). *Hadīya* and *toḥfa* are the general terms for any kind of present. Other terms such as *taʿārof*, *pīškaš*, and *enʿām* need a fuller explanation (Naḵjavānī, I, pp. 17, 33; Browne, p. 74; Lambton, pp. 145-50).

Generally, the gift that a social inferior gave to a superior was referred to as *pīškaš*, while a gift in the reverse direction was called an *enʿām* and *enʿām-e toḥaf* (Naḵjavānī, I, pp. 246, 251, 256). The latter was often given in money. An *enʿām* was given in return for a service rendered and would also include "gratuities to villagers in whose houses one puts up for the night, keepers of caravansaries and post-houses at which one alights, *šāgerd-čāpār*s who accompany one at each stage in posting to show the way and bring back the horses, servants in houses at which one stays, and, in short, anyone of humble rank who renders one a service" (Browne, p. 75). *Taʿārof* was usually a present given to someone of about the same social rank as the donor, while no return is expected, at any rate in money. "Sometimes, however, the term is used by one who, while desirous of receiving the monetary equivalent of that which he offers, does not wish to admit social inferiority to the person to whom the "present" is offered by using the term *pish-kesh*" (Browne, p. 74).

Any gift of an inferior to a superior was referred to as a *pīškaš*. The same term was also used to denote presents given at official occasions such as an embassy and other similar events. The significant point was that it was a gift from an inferior to a superior. This could be a governor to the shah, or a village headman to a district chief, as well as other combinations (Spuler, *Mongolen*4, p. 306; Yazdī, pp. 24, 68-69; Lambton, p. 145). The nature of the gift was not specified, it could be anything, even a bowl of yogurt, as long as it was appropriate (*lāyeq*). Emāmqolī Khan (q.v.), the governor of Fārs, gave Shah ʿAbbās I a *pīškaš* "in larrees the value of four hundred sixty and five thousand florins, forty-nine goblets of gold, seventy of silver, and such other rarities, as in all burdened three hundred camels: a royal present from a subject" (Herbert, p. 226). The Georgian kings sent boy and female slaves as well as wine to the Safavid court. *Pīškaš* was also given annually by, e.g., a landowner in lieu of tax exemption, while village chiefs gave their *pīškaš* to get their confirmation just like a governor would (Floor, 1998, pp. 116, 203, 263).

What was appropriate differed, of course, per situation. It was "generally regulated by usage: to fall short, is loss of office; and to exceed, is increase in favor" (Malcolm, II, p. 578). Therefore, in Safavid times, it was quite normal, though it shocked European sensibilities, to have presents that were presented to the shah valued and to have to bargain about the value of individual items. Usually, a commission consisting of the *malek-al-tojjār*, the *zargar-bāšī*, the *pīškašnevīs*, the *mehmāndār-bāšī*, and some other knowledgeable persons (such as master artisans from the royal workshops) would be involved in this. The presents were recorded by the *pīškašnevīs* (Floor, 1998, p. 206).

In addition to the words discussed above, there was a large number of other special terms which referred to the special nature, condition, or circumstance of the gift. In the Safavid era, other terms to denote presents given by inferiors to superiors include *barḵāna* or *yādbūd*, which were gifts in kind of the best and most reputed products of a province from the governor to the shah or a landowner to the governor. Presents were also given if normal routine payments were remitted, or if some other official business was transacted, in which case the gift was referred to as *taʿārof*. Other Timurid and Safavid terms denoting gifts to superiors include *nozūl*, *salāmatī*, and *sāvorī* (Naḵjavānī, I, p. 16; Yazdī, pp. 4, 36, 68; Floor, 1998, pp. 204-5; Lambton, p. 147).

Gifts were reciprocal in nature and the shah, or governor, or any other superior in return for a service rendered or for a gift received would return the favor. Apart from the *enʿām*, the most important royal gift was that of the

ḵelʿat. This term is usually translated as robe of honor, because that is the form that this gift often took. However, it took also many other forms. In Achaemenid times, the Median robe, the horse, and the golden *akinakès* were a standard set of gifts that the kings would give to friends and benefactors (Sancisi-Weerdenburg, p. 135). This ceremony continued to be practiced in the Islamic period, where rulers gave important visitors and meritorious persons the *ḵelʿat* (Spuler, *Iran*, p. 368; idem, *Mongolen*4, pp. 247, 283, 306, 308; Naḵjavānī, I, p. 227;Yazdī, p. 24). The robe of honor given by the Safavid shahs were usually made of rich fabrics and consisted of a *qabā* or *bālāpūš* (overcoat), usually also a *kamarband* (belt) and *mandīl* (turban), while in Qajar times it usually only was an overcoat. In the 16th century an aigrette, a mace, a dagger, a sword, or a horse with its trappings also might be given to princes and other high dignitaries. Also, depending on the rank of the receiving person (or rather the value of the *pīškaš* given) the nature and value of the robe of honor changed. In Khorasan during the 19th century, village chiefs received robes of honor made of blue board-cloth on confirmation of their office, while in some cases cash was also given (Floor, 1998, p. 263; idem, 1999, pp. 290-95).

Giving gifts often was expensive, for apart from its intrinsic cost, those officials handling the gifts had to be remunerated for their trouble. In Safavid Persia, the standard rate collected by officials for gifts to the shah was 10 percent to the *ešīk-āqāsī-bāšī* (q.v.) and 5 percent to other officials. In case of the grant of the *ḵelʿat* or payment of an *enʿām* the service fee was 10 percent (for a detailed discussion and bibliography, see Floor, 1998, chaps 5 and 9; idem, 1999, chap. 4).Though in Qajar times there appears not to have been such a formal evaluation process for gifts, there was nevertheless also a *pīškašnevīs*. Moreover, giving too little to a particular important person could be a social *faux pas*. “But also simple guides declined to accept the *enʿam* that they were given, because it was not commensurate with their standing” (Browne, p. 83).

“Persians do not make the smallest present, particularly to a stranger, without expectation of a greater return; frequently the most trifling thing is to be recompensed by its weight in gold. This renders traveling in Persia very expensive to those who go in a public capacity; and although the regular expense of my expedition was defrayed for me throughout, yet the extraordinary disbursements I was obliged to make would have sufficed so much the more easily for the whole cost of my journey” (Wilhelm and Frederika von Freygang, p. 308; O’Donovan, II, p. 7).

Thus, gifts could be a terrible nuisance. “The Turkomans asked for their *zat*

(present). In the East you can do nothing, nor accept anything, without a *zat* in return" (O'Donovan, II, p. 463). The Persian custom of offering presents, especially in the more frequented parts of Persia, was not always understood, and most certainly not appreciated, by visiting Europeans. First, the offer of an item often was just another way of saying that the person in question was willing to sell or exchange the article in question. Second, when the gift consisted of foodstuffs, which had a monetary value, one could hardly expect the poor peasant who often could ill afford such a present to supply the foreign traveler free of charge with necessaries of life. In case flowers were offered, this was partly the fault of Europeans who, in the past, had given money for what originally had been an act of courtesy to welcome a stranger for which no remuneration was expected. Edward G. Browne observed that in less traveled parts of Persia peasants would give him flowers "without once pausing or looking back in expectation of receiving a reward" (p. 75). Third, the gifts were a method to improve the income of an indigent donor or of a grandee's servants. "A local governor wishes to do you honor. He sends you a plate of fruit or sticky sweetmeats, value about sixpence. The servants—for the greater number who 'escort' the 'presents' the greater the honor—must receive each his 'anam,' or present, in the shape of a couple of shillings or more, according to the rank of the master. This kind of thing obtains from the highest to the lowest spheres, and is at the bottom of a great deal of demoralization of Persian society" (O'Donovan, I, p. 371; Lady Sheil, pp. 88-89, notes that the trays with sweet-meats were covered with embroidered silk, which had to be returned). A good deal of these high cost was owing to the fact that inferior officials were but miserably paid, servants occasionally receiving only their food from their employers, and being supposed to indemnify themselves by extracting fees and gratuities on every possible occasion. This also meant that what originally had been a courtesy had become a way of life. Also, what had been an incidental act became institutionalized and often acquired the nature of a fiscal fee.

In the latter case we have a class of gift which were considered to be a nuisance by the Persians themselves, because it concerned a reward to government officials who were doing their jobs. The shah's subjects, being grateful for the service rendered would gift the government official with money, food supplies, means of conveyance, combustibles, or any combination thereof to show their appreciation. These gifts were referred to by a variety of terms such as *šīrīnī* (offering), *ḵedmatāna* (service fee), *rešwa* (bribe), *ḥaqq al-zaḥma* (service fee; Floor, 1998, chap. 9).

Exchanging gifts was part of everyday social life. People gave presents on occasions such as visits, marriage, and holidays. These were known by various names. For instance, after the marriage contract had been signed, but the bride had not yet gone to the groom's house, the groom's family would send gifts such as clothes, fabrics, and footwear for the bride's wardrobe and that of her female relatives; these gifts were called *ḵarīd-e ʿarūsī*. Similarly, presents were given to the married couple after the wedding night, which was referred to as *čašm-rowšanī*. These gifts usually consisted of clothes, carpets, jewelry, furniture, etc. (Massé, *Croyances* I, p. 79). Presents did not always need to be expensive. Candy and fruit were the most common type of present given on the occasion of normal, day-to-day events. "In Persia when presents are required to be made on the occasion of fete days, visits, congratulations, and the arrival or departure of distinguished personages, sugar is the article most used for this purpose, and that made from beet-root is light and porous, consequently cheaper, besides which the French manufacturers make the loaves for the Persian market with a deep hollow underneath like a champagne bottle, and these from economical motives are most in request in Persia" (Accounts and Papers 29 (LXV) 1871, Report on Tabreez 1870, p. 239; see also Sadīd-al-Salṭana, p. 18).

On the occasion of holidays, in particular Nowrūz, those congratulating a superior (e.g., the shah, clan chief) were regaled with gifts (*nowrūzī*) such as shawls, but in particular with golden or silver coins in exchange for their valuable presents (for earlier periods see Spuler, *Iran*, p. 368; idem, *Mongolen*4, p. 306; Bayhaqī, pp. 655, 734-35, 789). These gifts have been referred to since the Safavid period as *ʿīdī*, in particular when applied to religious events, or by special terms such as *mawlūdī*. New Year gifts were also exchanged between less exalted persons, including within the extended family or clan (Šakūrzāda, p. 85; Polak, I, pp. 368-70; Floor, 1998, chap. 9).

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