



JĀNI BEG KHAN BIGDELI ŠĀMLU

JĀNI BEG KHAN BIGDELI ŠĀMLU (or JĀNI BEYG; d. 26 Ša‘bān 1055/15 October 1645), *išik-āqāsi-bāši* (master of ceremony) and *qurči-bāši* (head of the tribal guards) under the Safavid Shah Šafi I (r. 1629-42) and Shah ‘Abbās II (r. 1642-66). Little is known about Jāni Beg’s background. Adam Olearius (p. 671) called him “by origin a peasant’s son” who “at the time of Shah ‘Abbās was a humble servant from Šāmlu,” which would explain why the Persian sources from the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I are silent on his place in the Šāmlu genealogy and the early years of his public life. The sources call him a *gōlām-e kāšša*, suggesting that, even in the period after Shah ‘Abbās I, not all *gōlāms* were of Georgian, Armenian, and Circassian background, and list two brothers of his, Oloğ Khan and Qara Khan Beg (Eskandar Beg and Moḥammad-Ma‘šum, p. 200; Wāleh Ešfahāni, p. 117; Waḥid Qazvini, p. 68; Waziri, II, p. 638).

We first encounter Jāni Beg in an official capacity in 1625, when he served in the army of Zaynal Khan Šāmlu and was chosen as envoy to engage in peace talks concerning Baghdad with the Ottoman commander Ḥāfez Aḥmad Pasha (Eskandar Beg, p. 45, tr. Savory, p. 1266). His rise to high officialdom continued with his appointment as *yasāvōl-e šoḥbat* (aide-de-camp) in 1629, shortly after the accession of Shah Šafi I (Moḥammad-Ma‘šum, p. 43). In 1630-31 he left Persia on a diplomatic mission to the Ottoman court in Istanbul, returning in 1631-32 (Moḥammad-Ma‘šum Ešfahāni, pp. 124, 158; Wāleh Ešfahāni, p. 160). The following year he was sent to Ardabil to imprison Šarif Beg, the governor



of Ardabil and the superintendent (*motawalli*) of its shrine, whose injustice had generated many complaints among the populace (Wāleh Eşfahāni, pp. 118-19; Eskandar Beg and Wāleh Eşfahāni, p. 99). When later that same year news broke that the Ottoman general Kālil Pasha was threatening Van, Shah ‘Abbās II dispatched Jāni Beg to collect an army in Čoķur-e Sa’d and to raid and plunder the area around Van (Moħammad-Ma’şum, pp. 170-71).

Jāni Beg was made to keep a watchful eye on the northwestern frontier, for in the spring of 1635 the shah put him at the command of an army recruited from Qarabāğ, Šervān/Šarvān and Čoķūr-e Sa’d in order to confront the approaching Ottoman army (Moħammad-Ma’şum, p. 196; Wāleh Eşfahāni, p. 213; Eskandar Beg and Wāleh Eşfa-hāni, p. 165). During the siege of Erevan he was made işik-āqāsi-bāši (Moħammad-Ma’şum, p. 246; Eskandar Beg and Wāleh Eşfahāni, p. 199; Estrābādi, p. 252).

In the spring of 1637, Jāni Beg succeeded Amir Khan as head of the qurči regiments (qurči-bāši), a function that he would keep until his death in 1645 (Moħammad-Ma’şum, 246). With that promotion came an appointment as governor of Kermān in 1646 (Waziri, II, p. 635). He seems to have performed well in the latter function, for Moħammad-Sa’id Mašizi (pp. 207-9) speaks of the stability and prosperity of Kermān in this period and the good care Jāni Beg took of the peasants. He also founded a village, Jāniābād, near Kermān city (Bigdeli, I, p. 1107; Waziri, II, pp. 636-38). He is not likely to have resided much in Kermān, though, for he let himself be represented by his brother Oloğ Khan (Waziri, II, pp. 635-37). His other brother, Qara Khan Beg, by then an aide-de camp (*yasāvol-e şoħbat*), benefited from Jāni Beg’s promotion as well, for he became *ordubegi* in 1629 (Eskandar Beg and Wāleh Eşfahāni, p. 240). Shortly after his appointment in Kermān, Jāni Beg was summoned to assemble a contingent of musketeers (*tofangči*) from that town for the defense of Baghdad against a new Ottoman threat (Waziri, II, p. 635).

Already powerful owing to his important function, Jāni Beg moved into primary position at the court with the accession of Shah ‘Abbās II in 1642. In the first year of the adolescent shah’s reign, he was one of the three officials who effectively ruled the country (the other two were Mirzā Sāru Taqi and Moħammad-‘Ali Beg; see, in ARA, VOC 1144, Daghregister Hendrick Walckaert, fol. 561; VOC 1141, 20 Aug. 1642, fol. 547). His landed possessions were vast; pious endowments (*waqf*) in his name were located in places varying from Azarbaijan to Kermān, Isfahan, and Hamadān. His name is also attached to a *madrassa* in Qom (Bigdeli, I, pp. 1100-1101, II, pp. 808-12).



Jāni Beg's ultimate fate is entwined with the death of grand vizier Mirzā Moḥammad Sāru Taqī. In 1643 Jāni Beg became related to Mirzā Sāru Taqī when his daughter was married off to Mirzā Qāsem, a nephew of the grand vizier (Mollā Kamāl, p. 100). This appears to have been meant to solidify a family alliance that also included Shah 'Abbās II's mother, and that was designed to do away with a mutual rival, Rostam Khan, the *sepahsālār* (ARA, VOC 1144, 14 May 1643, fols. 488-94). This alliance does not seem to have outlived its immediate objective, for Jāni Beg would emerge as the main conspirator in the assassination of Mirzā Sāru Taqī. The reasons for the resentment that led to the conspiracy mostly involved disagreement over fiscal and military policy, with Jāni Beg favoring a strong military and Mirzā Sāru Taqī taking the side of the cash-strapped court. Mirzā Sāru Taqī's curtailing the salaries of the qurčis naturally created resentment among their ranks (ARA, VOC 1158, Daghregister Leonard Winnincx). He also insisted that 'Ali Mardān Khan, the governor of Kandahar (Qandahār), pay his dues to Isfahan or be summoned to court to be replaced. Jāni Beg, concerned about the simultaneous Ottoman threat to Baghdad, counseled the shah against replacing 'Ali Mardān Khan so as not to create turmoil on the eastern border (Falsafi, p. 297; Floor, p. 257).

The author of *'Abbās-nāma* (p. 4) claims that Jāni Beg resolved to remove the chief minister after he had been told that the latter was planning to kill him. According to various sources, Jāni Beg made great efforts to poison Shah 'Abbās II's mind against the grand vizier, pointing to his arrogance and insinuating that the grand vizier was driving the country to ruin and that he was a threat to the shah himself (ARA, VOC 1158, Daghregister Winnincx; Chardin, VII, pp. 308-9). Having received permission from the shah, Jāni Beg, on 22 Ša'bān 1055/11 October 1645, went to Mirzā Sāru Taqī's house and cut the senior grand vizier down (different interpretations of the circumstances and motives of the murder in Babayan, pp. 123-28, and Floor, pp. 258 ff.).

Following the murder of Mirzā Sāru Taqī, Jāni Beg himself was betrayed by the royal wine-maker (*širači-bāši*) Šafiqli Beg, who feared that the conspiracy would extend to the throne itself and that the objective was to overthrow the shah (especially since Jāni Beg had called up 30,000 troops). But it was the shah's mother, whose protégé Mirzā Sāru Taqī had been, who was instrumental in the terrible revenge that followed. Jāni Beg was assassinated on 15 October 1645, and with him a large number of his co-conspirators and members of his clan perished. Among the victims were Naqdi Khan, 'Arab



Khan Šāmlu, and Dāwud Khan Šāmlu, the governor of Gilān, who had been a principal enemy of Mirzā Sāru Taqī, because the latter had indicted him for embezzlement. Dāwud Beg's position was given to Šafīqoli Beg (Chardin, VII, pp. 306-7; ARA, VOC 1158, Daghtregister . . . Leonard Winnincx). His possessions in Kermān and Hamadān were confiscated, and the post of qurči-bāši devolved on Morteżāqoli Khan, who also took over as governor of Kermān. Jāni Beg's two brothers, Oloġ Khan, who had continued to represent Jāni Beg in Kermān, and Qara Khan, who was army commander (*sardār*) in Khorasan, were apprehended and lost their lives as well (Waḥid Qazvini, p. 68; Mašizi Bardsiri, p. 211; Waziri, II, p. 638; ARA, VOC 1152, Daghtregister . . . Willem Bastincq, fol. 248). The career of Jāni Beg's son, 'Abd al-Qāsem Khan, on the other hand, did not suffer in the wake of his father's demise. He would be superintendent of water distribution (*mirāb*) before becoming *divānbeġi* (q.v.), mayor of Qazvin, and later khan of Hamadān (Mašizi Bardsiri, pp. 373, 391; Chardin, IX, pp. 361, 571-72; Sanson, in Kroell, p. 40; Sanson, pp. 110-12).

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