



KIĀ (KĀR KIĀ)

KIĀ or **KĀR KIĀ**, a Zaydi family from the eastern flank (Bia-piš) of **Gilān** (q.v.), as well as the local dynasty founded by this family. The dynasty came to power in the 770s/1370s, a time when the worship of *sayyeds* and saints was becoming increasingly popular, and was dominant over east Gilān and Deylamestān until Shah ‘Abbās I (q.v.; r. 1588-1629) annexed the province in 1000/1592.

The genealogy of the first head of the family, Amir Kiā, is unknown. He studied at a *madrasa* in Malāṭ, nursed an ambition to assume secular power, and began competing with the native Sunnite rulers of Bia-piš. As a result of these power struggles, Amir Kiā and his family were forced to go into exile to Ruyān. Amir Kiā died during the family’s first exile. Afterwards, in 773/1371-72, his son ‘Ali Kiā, accompanied by the family and their followers, went further east to Māzandarān, where they were accepted by Sayyed Qawām-al-Din Mar‘āši, the founder of another *sayyed* dynasty in Māzandarān, the Mar‘āšis (Mar‘āši, ed. Sotuda, p. 16; idem, ed. Tasbiḥi, p. 196).

The family stayed in Māzandarān for a year and a half and eventually returned to Gilān (Mar‘āši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 16, 18-19; idem, ed. Tasbiḥi, pp. 196-97). Hearing of their return, the ruling *amirs* of Bia-piš soon forced the *sayyeds* into another exile in Māzandarān. It was not until the Mar‘āšis offered military support that the Kiās were finally able to return to Bia-piš and seize power there in the second half of the 770s/1370s (Mar‘āši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 28-29). The sympathy and the close relationship between these two *sayyed* families formed an essential base for the establishment of the Kiā dynasty



(Mar'aši, ed. Sotuda, p. 18; idem, *Tasbihi*, pp. 196-97). Also at play were the political division and struggles among the *amirs* in Gilān, which gave the Kiās an opportunity to defeat them and establish their own dynasty. The inhabitants' faith in the *sayyed* family was another important factor. In provinces on the southern Caspian coast, the inhabitants mainly belonged to Shi'ite sects: Twelver Shi'ism in Māzandarān, Zaydis in Bia-piš, and Isma'ilis in Deylamestān. Like the Mar'ašis, who were both Twelver Shi'ite *sayyeds* and founders of a mystical order, the Kiās could expect backing from the inhabitants. When the Kiās marched to Rānekuh and then to Lāhijān (qq.v.), the Zaydi inhabitants willingly swore loyalty to the family and recognized 'Alī Kiā as imam of their community (Mar'aši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 38, 41) and started taking part in military activities. 'Alī Kiā took up residence in Lāhijān and entrusted Rānekuh to his brother Mahdi Kiā. When the inhabitants of Lašt-e Nešā, a Zaydi city in Sunnite west Gilān (Bia-pas), requested the Kiās to release their city from its tyrannical Sunnite *amir*, Amir Mas'ud Esmā'ilrud, the *sayyeds* marched on the other flank of the Safidrud (Mar'aši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 45-46). After the Kiās conquered both Bia-piš and part of Bia-pas, they advanced into the highland, Deylamestān, on the pretext of subjugating the heretical Isma'ili inhabitants there. They reached as far as Qazvin, which was under their control for seven years (during 781-88/1379-86; Mar'aši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 76-78; Šāmi, II, p. 57).

Timur marched to the southern Caspian provinces on his way to a five-year campaign in West Asia, initially intending to punish the Mar'ašis for vague reasons and temporarily relocate them to Central Asia (between 794/1392 and 807/1405), but he preferred to dominate Gilān indirectly and let the Kiās and the *amirs* of Bia-pas keep their positions and pay tribute (806/1404; Mirkvānd, pp. 460-61; Yazdi, II, pp. 397-98). For nomadic rulers, this was a traditional and effective way to control the southern Caspian provinces, which were isolated from the Iranian plateau by mountains, but rich in valuable agrarian resources such as silk (Goto, pp. 117-20). Timur's visit was dangerous not only for the Mar'ašis, but also for the Kiā dynasty. The Kiās had to surrender Qazvin to Timur, and the *amirs* of Bia-pas saw this retreat as a chance to drive them out. As a result of the battles, 'Alī Kiā, his two brothers Mahdi Kiā and Ḥasan Kiā, and some other family members were martyred (791/1389; Mar'aši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 81-86). Another brother, Hādi Kiā, the first ruler of Tonekābon, survived the "martyrdom," settled in Lāhijān, and took over as head of the family. However, from this point on, the dynasty's territory was limited to Bia-piš.

When a son of ‘Ali Kiā, Ḥosayn, and a son of Mahdi Kiā, Amir Sayyed Moḥammad, grew up, they ousted Hādi Kiā from Lāhijān and inherited their fathers’ territory (Mar‘āši, ed. Sotūda, pp. 101-5). As the second generation assumed power, the dynasty again entered into a time of expansion. At first, Amir Sayyed Moḥammad (r. 797-833/1394-1430) in Rānekuh shared the sovereignty of Bia-piš with Ḥosayn in Lāhijān, but he ended ‘Ali Kiā’s lineage with the suppression of Ḥosayn’s resistance, which was allied with the inhabitants of Deylamestān (Mar‘āši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 169-76). This move meant that Amir Sayyed Moḥammad could bring Deylamestān under his control. With the integration of Deylamestān and Bia-piš, the conversion of the inhabitants from the Isma‘ili to the Zaydi sect seemed to be completed. A new military system, based on two main provincial divisions, was founded, of which the upland troops formed the main fighting force and contributed to the dynasty’s military successes. Each Gil and Deylam division was further divided into smaller contingents, which were stationed at each important region and city. To rule over the two provinces equally, the Kiās practiced moving seasonally between Gilān and Deylamestān (Goto, pp. 98-103). In winter, they would stay in Rānekuh or Lāhijān, and in summer, they would move between various sites in Deylamestān.

The reign of Nāṣer (r. 833-51/1430-48) was threatened with power struggles among his relatives. Nāṣer cooperated with his younger brother Aḥmad to deprive his father of the throne, later entrusting Deylamestān to him so as to share the political rule. After this, Aḥmad attempted to win over the inhabitants of Deylamestān still in revolt, leading to conflict between the two brothers. Other branch members of the family were wary of Nāṣer’s concentrated power as well. Instigated by Amir ‘Alā-al-Din Eshāqvand of [Fuman](#) (q.v.), a prominent ruler of Bia-pas, they rose in rebellion against Nāṣer. With support from another prominent *amir* of Bia-pas, Amir Moḥammad Tajāspi of Rašt, Nāṣer was able to expel his brother and shore up his sovereignty (845/1441-42; Mar‘āši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 242-46).

In the last half of the 15th century, during the reign of Nāṣer’s son, Solṭān-Moḥammad Mirzā (r. 851-83/1448-78), the Kiās were finally free from domestic struggles. They began to intervene in the affairs of the adjacent provinces (Goto, pp. 105-8). In Bia-pas, Solṭān-Moḥammad Mirzā supported the *amir* of Fuman, another Amir ‘Alā’-al-Din, in his annexation of Rašt (between 865/1461 and 867/1462-63; Mar‘āši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 287-93). In alliance with Amir ‘Alā’-al-Din, Solṭān-Moḥammad Mirzā marched against Amir Rostam of Kuhdom, an



upriver province of Safidrud, and occupied the eastern half of the province. Amir 'Alā'-al-Din obtained the western half. Amir Rostam went into exile in the court of Āq Qoyunlu Uzun Ḥasan (r. 857-82/1453-78) to seek a chance of return. Through this conflict and other interferences in affairs of the rulers (*moluk*) of Rostamdār and the Mar'ašis in Māzandarān, the Kiās became the paramount power of the southern Caspian provinces. At that time, the Āq Qoyunlu (q.v.) began to exercise interference in the internal affairs of the provinces, hoping to gain more tribute. In 881/1476, after the death of Amir 'Alā'-al-Din of Fuman, Amir Rostam suggested that Uzun Ḥasan enthrone a member of the former *amir* family of Rašt; he promised an annual tribute of 50 *karvār* silk (Mar'aši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 365-66). When Solṭān-Moḥammad Mirzā consulted Amir 'Alā'-al-Din's sons about this proposal, Amir Rostam slandered Solṭān-Moḥammad Mirzā, saying that he had failed to pay this tribute. Uzun Ḥasan then issued a decree entrusting the rule of Bia-pas to Amir Rostam. After Solṭān-Moḥammad Mirzā suppressed revolts initiated by Amir Rostam and accepted the increased tribute (which was eventually fixed at 40 *karvār*), Uzun Ḥasan delegated control of both parts of Gilān to him (Mar'aši, ed. Sotuda, pp. 375-76). His son, Ya'qub Āq Qoyunlu (r. 882-96/1478-90), followed his father's policy, but power struggles after his death caused a new phase in the history of the southern Caspian provinces.

The dynasty reached its zenith during the reign of Solṭān-Moḥammad Mirzā's son, Solṭān-'Alī Mirzā (r. 883-910/1478-1505), to the extent that Solṭān-'Alī Mirzā competed with the Āq Qoyunlu for Qazvin. It was during this time that Esmā'il Ṣafawi, later Shah Esmā'il (q.v.; r. 907-30/1501-24), sought refuge in Bia-piš. Esmā'il is said to have stayed in Lāhijān for five years (900-905/1494-99), during which time he received an appropriate education (Lāhiji, p. 103). After Shah Esmā'il's military successes against the Āq Qoyunlu, Solṭān-'Alī Mirzā showed his obedience and let his brother Solṭān-Ḥasan visit the shah during a castle siege in Firuzkuh (Lāhiji, pp. 156-61; Qāzi Aḥmad Qomi, p. 84; Qāzi Aḥmad Ġaffāri, p. 268; Rumlu, p. 110). Shortly afterward, Solṭān-'Alī Mirzā was dethroned by his brother, due to a series of unsuccessful and exhausting operations in Bia-pas. Solṭān-Ḥasan (r. 910-11/1505-6) ruled for only a year; his brother attempted a counter-coup, and both were murdered. Solṭān-Ḥasan's son, Solṭān-Aḥmad, who had been staying at Shah Esmā'il's court, returned to Bia-piš and ascended the throne.

In the early Safavid period, the Kiās enjoyed a privileged treatment as a semi-independent state, which was based in part on the close connection between

Solṭān-ʿAli Mirzā and Shah Esmāʿil. Further, the Safavid policy of conversion to Twelver Shiʿism and restraining the power of the Qezelbāš *amirs* led them to strengthen ties with local nobles and dynastic families through marriage (Szuppe, 1994, pp. 226-35). A geographic feature of Gilān was also a significant factor: Gilān, situated at the frontier between the Safavids and the Ottomans, functioned as a buffer state. The Safavids, granted a khan title, took control of the native rulers of marginal provinces (Röhrborn, pp. 73-75, 83-84) and periodically attempted to annex the South Caspian provinces. Solṭān-Aḥmad Khan (r. 911-40/1506-33) had to cope at an early stage in his reign both with oppression by the Safavid vizier, Shaikh Najm-al-Din, and power struggles with rivals both inside and outside of his domain. It was not until Shaikh Najm-al-Din’s death in 916/1510 and Solṭān-Aḥmad Khan’s fourth visit to the Safavid court that his rule over Gilān was stabilized and recognized by the Safavids (Lāhiji, p. 366). The reigns of both of Solṭān-Aḥmad Khan’s two sons, Solṭān-Kiā ʿAli (ca. 940-41/1533-34) and Solṭān-Ḥasan (941-ca. 44/1534-38) were short.

The next, and last, ruler, Khan Aḥmad Khan (r. ca. 941-1000/1537-92) was enthroned after his father’s sudden death. He was only a year old and held no real political power (Ḳoršāh, p. 218). Shah Ṭahmāsp I (q.v.; r. 1524-76) sent his brother, Bahrām Mirzā, to Gilān with the intention of conquering the province, but withdrew his claim when met with the inhabitants’ opposition (Qāzi Aḥmad Qomi, I, p. 262; Qāzi Aḥmad Ġaffari, p. 292; Rumlu, pp. 361-62; ʿAbdī Beg, p. 86; Budāq, pp. 185-89). In 940/1534, when the Ottoman Sultan Solaymān I campaigned in Azarbaijan, Moẓaffar-Solṭān of Bia-pas attempted to join him, but did not succeed (Fumani, pp. 17-18; Ḳoršāh, pp. 130-33, 233; Qāzi Aḥmad Qomi, I, pp. 254-55; Rumlu, pp. 355-56; ʿAbdi Beg, pp. 84-85). After Moẓaffar-Solṭān’s arrest and execution, Shah Ṭahmāsp sent troops to conquer Bia-pas, only to meet with strong resistance. The political vacuum in Bia-pas brought about intense struggles among the *amirs* as well as the distress of the province, and Khan Aḥmad Khan took advantage of this power game. In 965/1558, Shah Ṭahmāsp decided to install Moẓaffar-Solṭān’s son, Solṭān-Maḥmud, on the throne. He appointed Khan Aḥmad Khan as his regent. Later, Khan Aḥmad Khan promised Shah Ṭahmāsp that he would pay a certain tribute of Bia-pas, let Solṭān-Maḥmud be dethroned, and obtained the province as a fief (*eqṭāʿ*; Fumani, pp. 33-35). But his interventions in neighboring provinces went too far; Khan Aḥmad Khan was arrested and imprisoned for 10 years (976-86/1568-78; Fumani, pp. 45-47; Qāzi Aḥmad Qomi, I, pp. 469-77; Rumlu, pp. 558-66; ʿAbdi Beg, pp. 128-29; Budāq, pp. 226-30). He was set free by



the new shah, Solṭān-Moḥammad Ḳodābanda (985/1578; Fumani, pp. 64-65; Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 227-28, tr. Savory, I, pp. 219, 339; Mollā Jalāl, p. 43; Naṭanzi, pp. 464-66), who married him to Ṭahmāsp's daughter, Maryam Begom. The couple eventually had a daughter, Yaḳān Begom.

In 986/1578-79, Solṭān-Maḥmud's son, Jamšid Khan, was killed by one of his vassals. Internal conflicts over succession in Bia-pas ensued and, in spite of warnings by the Safavids, Khan Aḥmad Khan again interfered. He enthroned Moḥammad-Amin Khan in Rašt, while his brother Ebrāhim Khan sat on the throne in Fuman (Fumani, pp. 125-26). The split of Bia-pas offered Shah 'Abbās I (r. 996-1038/1588-1629) the opportunity to annex both parts of Gilān. Khan Aḥmad Khan's ex-vizier, Ḳvāja Masiḥ, who had been dismissed by him and had gone to the Safavid court, incited the shah to conquer Gilān. Shah 'Abbās demanded that Khan Aḥmad Khan send his sole living daughter to court in order to marry Ṣafi Mirzā, his son (Fumani, pp. 129-30; Mollā Jalāl, p. 217; Ḳuzāni, I, p. 95). Khan Aḥmad Khan's rejection is said to have been the cause of the great expedition lead by Farhād Khan Qarāmānlu in 1000/1592, in which most of the local dynasties of the southern Caspian provinces were overthrown. According to the Safavid chronicles, the expedition was undertaken due to Khan Aḥmad Khan's protection of political refugees and his intention to make contact with the Ottomans (Eskandar Beg, I, p. 499, tr. Savory, II, pp. 672-73; Ḳuzāni, I, p. 109; Don Juan, p. 214). Political reasons aside, there must have been an economic reason for seizing the southern Caspian coast. This was the province's center of silk production, the most important exported product in the Safavid period (Matthee, pp. 74-76). Accompanied by Moḥammad-Amin Khan, Khan Aḥmad Khan fled to Širvān by ship (Fumani, pp. 132-34; Eskandar Beg, I, pp. 449-51; Ḳuzāni, I, p. 112; Don Juan, p. 215) and left for Istanbul in order to ask the Ottomans for support. Moḥammad-Amin Khan died on the way and Khan Aḥmad Khan stayed at the Ottoman court until his death (Eskandar Beg, I, p. 529; Qāzi Aḥmad Ğaffāri, p. 138). The last family member, Yaḳān Begom, was sent to the Safavid court and married to Shah 'Abbās in 1011/1602 (Falsafi, II, 171-72; Szuppe, 1995, p. 118).

Few vestiges remain of the Kiā dynasty. In Lāhijān, there is a complex consisting of the mausoleums called Čahār Pādšāhān for 'Ali Kiā and some other martyred *sayyeds*. Despite little physical evidence remaining, the richly illustrated manuscript of the so-called "Big Head" *Šāh-nāma* in the Sackler Gallery and its book cover in the Türk ve Islam Eserleri Müzesi at Istanbul (no. 1978), produced in 899/1493-94, prove the high cultural level of Solṭān-'Ali

Mirzā's reign.

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