



PARIKĀN KĀNOM

PARIKĀN KĀNOM (b. near Ahar, Rajab 955/August 1548; d. Qazvin, 4 Du'l-ḥejja 985/12 February 1578), the second daughter of Shah Ṭahmāsp I (Qomi, p. 337), a politically influential and colorful figure at the Safavid court. After the death of his brother Bahrām Mirzā in 1549, Shah Ṭahmāsp I, who had been very fond of his brother, paid special attention to his nephews. He declared Badi'-al-Zamān Mirzā, the youngest of Bahrām Mirzā's sons, as his own son in 1557, made him the governor of Sistān, and offered him the ten-year-old Parikān Kānom as a bride. However, since she was his favorite daughter (Qomi, p. 397), he did not allow her to accompany her husband to Sistān. Badi'-al-Zamān was later murdered on the orders of Shah Esmā'il II on 26 March 1577, and Parikān Kānom continued to reside in Qazvin throughout this period.

Parikān Kānom was clever and politically astute (Eskandar Beg, p. 196; tr. Savory, p. 199) and since her father the Shah always sought her advice on important matters of the state, she was considered to be privy to the court's innermost secrets (Afušta'i Naṭanzi, p. 70; Vāleh Eşfahāni, p. 383). Her prestige at her father's court meant that many prominent leaders of the Qezelbāš sought her patronage and assistance (Eskandar Beg, p. 219; Savory, p. 218).

In 1557 Shah Ṭahmāsp I had his second son, Esmā'il Mirzā, incarcerated at the fortress of Qahqaha. In his absence, Ḥaydar Mirzā, the third son of Shah Ṭahmāsp I, who was now particularly favored by him, officially deputized for the shah in the regular court sessions (Alessandri, tr. Amiri, p. 442; Navā'i, p. 171). Like Parikān Kānom, Ḥaydar Mirzā was quick-witted and shrewd



(Alessandri, tr. Amiri, p. 437; Hinz, tr. Jahāndāri, p. 44) and played a major role in administering the affairs of the realm particularly in the final years of the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp when the king would often resort to him for guidance on matters that he could not resolve on his own (Eskandar Beg, p. 216).

Shah Ṭahmasp I fell ill on 2 Rajab 982/18 October 1574, and did not recover for two months. Twice his illness took him to the threshold of death and yet he did not choose a successor then or even later in his reign. Given the gravity of his condition, the main leaders of the Qezelbāš clans decided to confer about the succession. Some were in favor of Ḥaydar Mirzā as successor. These included the Estājlu clan, and the Šaykāvand clan (related to Šayk Šafi-al-Din Ardabili and hence to the royal family at large) and the Georgians (since Ḥaydar Mirzā's mother was Georgian). Other Qezelbāš clans, in particular Rumlu, Afšār, Qājār, and Torkmān, were disposed towards Esmā'īl Mirzā, imprisoned in Qahqaha castle. Pariḵān Kānom was also in favor of Esmā'īl Mirzā. There was rivalry in the royal harem between her mother, Solṭān-Āgā Kānom, a Circassian (see [ČARKAS](#)), and Ḥaydar Mirzā's Georgian mother, since both exerted some political influence on Ṭahmāsp I.

During Shah Ṭahmāsp's illness, Ḥaydar Mirzā's supporters wrote a letter to Kalifa Anšār Qaradāglu, the castellan of Qahqaha, himself a supporter of Ḥaydar Mirzā, requesting his assistance in the elimination of Esmā'īl Mirzā (Mollā Jalāl, p. 25). Pariḵān Kānom got wind of the plot and informed the king about the contents of the letter. Shah Ṭahmāsp I, who still harbored some affection for Esmā'īl Mirzā on account of his many deeds of bravery in the battles with the Ottoman Turks and did not want his life terminated, sent off a troop of Afšār musketeers—themselves staunch supporters of Esmā'īl—to the Qahqaha fortress to guard him closely and ensure his safety, a mission that they carried out with success.

Although Shah Ṭahmāsp I recovered from the serious illness he suffered in 1574, he died less than two years later on the evening of 15 Šafar 984/14 May 1576 in Qazvin. As the only son present at his father's deathbed, Ḥaydar Mirzā declared himself king the next morning by placing the crown upon his own head, without waiting for a formal enthronement ceremony. It was customary for a number of Qezelbāš clans to take it in turn to guard the royal palace (*dowlat-kāna*) and on that day the pre-designated guards were all musketeers from the Rumlu, Afšār, Qājār, Bayāt and Dorsāq clans (Rumlu, p. 466; Qomi, p. 601)—all staunch supporters of Esmā'īl and opposed to Ḥaydar Mirzā.



Realizing the gravity of the situation, Ḥaydar Mirzā took Pariḳān Kānom, who was residing in the palace at the time, into custody as a precautionary measure. Pariḳān Kānom resorted to ruse in order to win the day. She threw herself at her brother's feet in the presence of Ḥaydar's mother, and asked her to bear witness to the fact that she was the very first person to offer the new king her formal obeisance and greet his accession by prostrating herself on the floor and kissing his feet (Rumlu, p. 490; Eskandar Beg, p. 296). She swore on the Qur'ān that if she were allowed to leave the palace she would try to win over to the new king's side her full brother Solaymān Mirzā and her Circassian uncle Solṭān Šamḳāl, both opponents of Ḥaydar, and bring them to his presence. Ḥaydar was duped by her formal oath on the Qur'ān and allowed her to leave the palace. But after leaving the royal residence, Pariḳān Kānom broke her pledge and presented Šamḳāl with the keys to the entrance gates to the harem gardens so that, as described below, he and his followers could easily gain access to the women's quarters and finish off the defenseless king.

A large number of Ḥaydar Mirzā's supporters, realizing the imminent danger he was in, rushed to the royal residence in order to protect him. But the actual palace guards, who still opposed him in spite of his attempts to win them over through promises, closed the gates of the palace and for a time prevented Ḥaydar Mirzā's supporters from entering the grounds. Meanwhile, the enemies of Ḥaydar Mirzā, making use of the keys brought to them by Pariḳān Kānom, easily gained access to the inner palace, just ahead of his supporters who had also managed to break through and enter the palace grounds. They found Ḥaydar Mirzā, dressed in women's clothes in the inner harem. He was promptly seized and beheaded. His severed and still bleeding head was hurled down from the parapets of the harem into the midst of those who had come to rescue him. These now gave up their fight against Esmā'il's claim to the throne and his accession was secured.

In the interval between the murder of Ḥaydar Mirzā and the arrival of Esmā'il Mirzā from Qahqaha, Pariḳān Kānom became the de facto ruler of the realm. On her orders, all princes and top-ranking leaders of the Qezelbāš, assembled at Qazvin's main mosque (*Masjed-e jāme'*) on Friday 24 Šafar 984/23 May 1576, and Mir Maḳdum Šarifi, a famous preacher, read the *koṭba* in the name of Esmā'il Mirzā, thus affirming his kingship.

Esmā'il Mirzā, accompanied by thousands of Qezelbāš warriors, left Qahqaha castle and arrived in the suburbs of Qazvin on 16 Rabi' I 984/4 June 1576. During the 31 days since the death of Shah Ṭahmāsp I, the courtiers and



leaders of the Qezelbāš clans had attended the palace of Pariḳān Kānom everyday and “informed her of the urgent business of the realm be it fiscal or financial or to do with politics of the day and nobody had any inclination or dared to disobey her command” (Eskandar Beg, p. 304; Vāla-ye Eşfahāni, p. 503).

After arriving in Qazvin, Esmā’il Mirzā did not proceed to the royal palace straightaway since the astrologists had declared the time inauspicious. For fourteen days he stayed at the house of Ḥosayn-qoli Kōlafā, the chief of the Rumlu clan, and the *Kalifat al-Kōlafā*’ (administrator of Sufi affairs; Savory, p. 29, n. 21), in charge of all Qezelbāš kalifas and sufis. Despite the fact that Esmā’il Mirzā had the title of king, most of the Qezelbāš commanders and high-ranking officials continued to attend Pariḳān Kānom’s palace as usual. Pariḳān Kānom, meanwhile, had established an impressive court for herself where her attendants and ladies-in-waiting acted as if they were serving at a proper royal court (Eskandar Beg, p. 310).

Esmā’il Mirzā ascended to the throne under the title Shah Esmā’il II and after being imprisoned in Qahqaha castle for more than nineteen years he was not, understandably, prepared to tolerate displays of power by any other person at his own expense. He declared that it was forbidden for Qezelbāš clan leaders, commanders, and high-ranking officials to set foot in Pariḳān Kānom’s palace. He then terminated the services of her guards and her court attendants and confiscated a wide range of assets and properties belonging to her. Furthermore, he adopted a cold and distant demeanor when he granted her an audience.

Having tried so hard to place Esmā’il Mirzā on the throne, Pariḳān Kānom was now faced with a lack of appreciation from the new king. This rejection made her resentful towards the new king and she bided her time to take her revenge. On 13 Ramadan 985/25 November 1577, Shah Esmā’il II died suddenly and without any preliminary symptoms of illness (Qomi, p. 652). The court physicians, who examined the corpse, suspected poison (Eskandar Beg, p. 338; Ḥosayni Astarābādi, p. 101). The general consensus was that because Shah Esmā’il II had belittled and demeaned her (Eskandar Beg, p. 338), Pariḳān Kānom had decided to poison him with the aid of concubines of the inner harem.

With the sudden death of Shah Esmā’il II, Pariḳān Kānom regained her power and influence. All the state dignitaries, clan leaders, commanders and officials



obeyed the instructions brought by her envoys and acted according to her commands (Eskandar Beg, p. 339).

In order to resolve the succession crisis, Qezelbāš clan leaders decided to choose the future king after consultation with each other and then inform Parikān Kānom of their agreed choice. Initially, they debated the suggestion that Šojā‘-al-Din Moḥammad, the eight-month-old son of Shah Esmā‘il II, be given the title of the king while in practice state affairs would be under the full control of Parikān Kānom (Qomi, p. 656). This proposal, however, did not get the approval of the majority of the council since it would have tilted the balance of power between various Qezelbāš clans. Eventually the council agreed on nominating Moḥammad Mirzā (later known as Moḥammad Kōdābanda), the elder brother of Shah Esmā‘il II, who at that time was the governor of Fārs.

Parikān Kānom was promptly informed of their agreed choice and she approved of their nomination, not least because Moḥammad Mirzā was old and almost blind. This, and his hedonism made Moḥammad Mirzā, in Parikān Kānom’s eyes, the most suitable candidate, for he would not be able to rule himself and would have to allow her to have a free rein. She came to an accord with Qezelbāš clan leaders so that Moḥammad Mirzā, after ascending to the throne, would remain king solely in name and her envoys, for all practical purposes, would instead remain in charge of the kingdom’s affairs (Eskandar Beg, p. 340).

When Moḥammad Mirzā was declared king, the Safavid elite, commanders, and provincial rulers sought permission from Parikān Kānom to pay him a congratulatory visit. The power base, control, and influence of Parikān Kānom were so solid that nobody dared to go to Shiraz without her explicit consent (Eskandar Beg, p. 341).

From the day Moḥammad Mirzā was declared king, his wife Kayr-al-Nesā‘ Begum (Beygom), who had the title of Mahd-e ‘Olyā (The Cradle of Nobles), took charge. She was aware of her husband’s weaknesses and to compensate for his lack of integrity and character she had decided to become the effective ruler of the Safavid Empire.

Moḥammad Mirzā and Mahd-e ‘Olyā arrived at the suburbs of Qazvin on 4 Du‘l-ḥejja 985/12 February 1578. This brought to an end the episode, extending to two months and twenty days, during which Parikān Kānom had enjoyed



undisputed rule as a regent and took charge of all the important affairs of the state and monarchy (Eskandar Beg, p. 342). When Moḥammad Mirzā and Maḥd-e ‘Olyā approached the city, Pariḳān Kānom came to welcome them with great pomp and ceremony, sitting in a golden-woven *hodaj* (a domed litter for women) and escorted by four to five hundred, of her special guards, inner-harem personal aides and court attendants (Eskandar Beg, p. 347).

Maḥd-e ‘Olyā kept hearing about the extent of the influence and authority exercised by Pariḳān Kānom from welcoming parties in Qazvin, confirming what she had already heard from Salmān Mirzā, the Grand Vizier of Shah Esmā‘il II in Shiraz. She came to the conclusion that as long as Pariḳān Kānom was present, she would not be able to control the affairs of the state and become the effective ruler of the Safavid Empire. She therefore plotted to eliminate Pariḳān Kānom.

On the day that Moḥammad Mirzā and Maḥd-e ‘Olyā arrived at the suburbs of Qazvin, Ḳalil Khan Afšār, who during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp I, was tutor (*laleh*) to Pariḳān Kānom, was given the order to kill her. The order was carried out and Pariḳān Kānom was murdered on the same day, just short of her 30th birthday.

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