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Detail from above the entrance of Tehran's fire temple, 1286š/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad

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The Turkish Iranian emigration as perceived by the Maathir al-Umara (1544-1629)

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The main objective of this article is to show the living conditions, as well as the social and political situation of the Turkish Iranians during the reign of Tahmasp (1514-76) and the reign of his nephew Abbas (1571- 1629) through examining the Maathir al-Umara. This valuable document written by Samsam al-Dowla Shah Nawaz Khan and his son Abd al-Hayy, both civil servants of Tadjik origin in the court of the Mughal Emperor in the 18th Century, is formed of a biographical anthology of 738 nobles- all of which who served within the Mughal Empire. In many of the biographies which form the Maathir al-Umara, the origins of these nobles can be clearly recognized, which are often distant from the traditional Timurid area, and for this reason there are already a number of works surrounding the Mughal nobility of Iranian origin, and therefore I will focus my attention on this Turkish Iranian group.

One of the reasons why I have decided to focus my work around this Turkish Iranian group, a small minority in relation to the Tadjiks (of the 103 emigrants which I have counted only 17.5% were Turkish)¹, is because of their particular relationship with the governing dynasty- who were also of Turkish origin,

1- For a recount of all Iranian emigrants in the Maathir al-Umara, see Haneda (1997: 132-133).

sometimes dependent on them, but at other times when the sovereign was more powerful, their relationship becoming conflicting. Another reason is the nomadic character of these Turkish groups. In some cases the Turkish Iranian emigrant would have barely settled for more than a few years in the Safavid Empire. It was common for them to choose which dynasty they would serve depending on their own interests even if it caused a divide within their family.

Having emerged in Ardebil in the 14th Century, the religious Safavid brotherhood experienced a notable growth following the brief empire of Timur Lang in the Middle East- also benefitting other brotherhoods like the Naqshbandi- because of the improved networks of communication within the empire and the promotion of certain ideological schools like that of Herat, emerging during the chaotic period following the death of Timur as referees in the conflicts between certain Turkish leaders, who in the case of the Safavid, came to instigate marriages with the people of the Aq Quyunlu royal family. When Haydar, leader of the brotherhood, decided to head another strand of duodeciman shiism, he granted a mark of political legitimisation to a large number of Turkish Anatolian tribes, recognising the followers of the brotherhood as Quizilbash. When the head of the brotherhood, Ismael I, made himself Shah after taking Tabriz (1501) he owed everything to the ahl-i lkhtisas, which was lucky for the royal council which was formed of seven Turkish Quizilbash leaders, which meant that all government roles fell into their hands, as well as they were assigned the best provinces and teyuls² by the incipient state. The Turkish Iranians were known as “men of the sword” in contrast to the Tadjiks who were known as “men of the pen” which reaffirmed their dominant position in the Tabriz court following the major military disaster of the Shah in 1512 and 1514.

The son and successor of Ismael, Tahmasp, managed to re-establish the Shah’s authority following the convulsed confrontations among the Quizilbash during his younger years, confronting the formerly powerful Takkalu in 1530. Many of these had no doubts about putting themselves under Ottoman protection while others like Muhammed Khan Takkalu (grandfather of one of the emigrants of the Maathir al-Umara)³ did not make the same decision as their relatives, and in exchange for serving the Shah they were well compensated. After his death in 1576, the violence between the leaders resumed, each fighting for their favourite heir to the Safavid throne. After the instability of the reigns of Ismael II and Khodabanda in 1588, the head of the Ustalju proclaimed Abbas, a nephew of Tahmasp, as Shah. Conscious of the huge Quizilbash influence, Abbas made sure that all rites which served as a guide to the Quizilbash were eliminated, and decided to take control of the provinces and important roles in government away from the Turks in order to give them to the Ghulam, who were more loyal to the crown than Turkish clans.

When analysing the emigration for the Turkish Iranian people from the Safavid Empire it could be expected that their denominational religion would have influenced their decision to abandon their Shah and move to the Mughal, but in the Maathir al-Umara neither the religious dissidence with respect to duodeciman shiism of the Shah nor their allegiance to the Quizilbash military were highlighted (with the notable exception of Ali Quli Khan Zaman Shibani)⁴. When identifying the first generation Turkish Iranians, the Maathir al-Umara tends to emphasize the geographical area of the subject (see Turan

2- For more on Teyuls, see Floor (2001: 154).

3- In Maathir al-Umara (Vol. I), translation of H. Beveridge (721-722)

4- In Maathir al-Umara (Vol. I), translation of H. Beveridge (197-204).

and Iran) and in the case of the Turks outside of this area- focuses on their tribal connections (Dhulqadr, Ustajlu and others). Although Persian was the language of administration for both the Safavid and Mughal courts, as well as the language of the Safavid royal family (in the case of Shah Ismael) and certain groups of Turkish Iranians within the Mughal (Bairam Kham)⁵ it is known that they conserved in Turkish, as well as their own style of family organization. It should also be noted that while the biographies of the Tadjiks tend to emphasize their professions- who mostly left Iran to work for the Mughal, but the Turkish tended to be involved with the military and, except for a few exceptions, they left with their families, soldiers and servants.

Of the 18 subjects identified by the Maathir al-Umara between 1544 and 1629, some 12 correspond to the period between 1556 and 1629 for which reason we can assume that neither the benevolence of Akbar nor the severity of Abbas had much of an effect on the emigration of the Turkish Iranians. In cases like the Takkalu who left to the Ottoman empire and the Safavids of Kandahar⁶ would illustrate that this emigration was forced. However I have been able to determine that of these 18 subjects only 4 are seen to have been exiled while the other 12 seem to have left voluntarily. In spite of the Mughals extraordinary riches, the Safavid state would provide the Quzilbash with hereditary posts and possessions: for example the Dhulqadr were awarded for the Safavid conquest of Iran with the province of Fars and the role of mohrdar (guardian of the royal stamp); however one Dhulqadr branch⁷ would have accompanied the emperor Humayun to regain the Indian throne providing its own strengths and compensated by the Mughal for this, seems to be common between first generation emigrants and the Emperor.

One problem with the Maathir al-Umara its limitation in understanding the Turkish-Iranian emigration as a whole- as is focused its attention almost wholly on those emigrants who were nobles or who had a lot of authority- and ignoring their followers (well known poets like Anisi Shamlu were not included). Of the 18 emigrants identified in the Maathir al-Umara, 11 are Emirs with a large number of soldiers (between 3000 and 5000), 5 of these have a higher than average number of horsemen, while the other 6 have between 500 and 2500 soldiers. Of those who emigrated we know that the sons of 11 remained in India, and had government responsibilities although they seem to be less important than those of their parents No one has been recorded to have returned to Shah's Court.

Although the Maathir al-Umara is an important and interesting document in identifying the ease with which these particular Turkish Iranians moved from one empire to another, it seems necessary that there is further study into the *tazkiras* and other documents in both Persian and Turkish- in order to gain a true insight into the extent of the emigration and the effect it had on both the empire they left behind and the empire they moved to.

5- In Maathir al-Umara (Vol. I), translation of H. Beveridge (368-378).

6- In Maathir al-Umara (Vol. II), translation of H. Beveridge (350-354).

7- In Maathir al-Umara (Vol. I), translation of H. Beveridge (645-649).

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