

On the margins of minority life: Zoroastrians and the state in Safavid Iran¹

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Abstract

This article looks at the treatment of the Zoroastrians by central and provincial authorities in early modern Yazd, Kirman and Isfahan, emphasizing the institutional weaknesses of the central or *khāṣṣa* protection they were supposed to benefit from under the Safavids (907–1135/1501–1722). It is argued that the maltreatment the Zoroastrians endured under the Safavids had little to do with religious bigotry. Rather, it arose from rivalries between the central and the provincial services of the Safavid bureaucracy, putting Zoroastrians in Yazd, Kirman, Sistan and Isfahan at risk of over-taxation, extortion, forced labour and religious persecution. The argument developed in this article pivots on the material interest of the central and the provincial agents of the Safavid bureaucracy in the revenue and labour potentials of the Zoroastrians, and the way in which the conflict of interest between these two sectors led to such acts of persecution as over-taxation, forced labour, extortion and violence.

Keywords: Zoroastrians, Safavids, Religious minorities, Yazd, Kirman, Isfahan, Iran

For much of the Safavid period (907–1135/1501–1722), the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kirman, the two historical centres of *bihdīn* (Zoroastrian) population in Iran, lived under the supervision of the *khāṣṣa* (crown) services of the central bureaucracy. They contributed cash and free labour to the crown sector, in exchange for the protection that *khāṣṣa* authorities, including the shah and members of the royal family, were supposed to provide against maltreatment at the hands of local notables and non-*khāṣṣa* elements in Yazd and Kirman. The crown sector's protection, however, was fragile and had limits, exposing the Zoroastrians to occasional abuse and exploitation from the *mamālik* (provincial) bureaucracy. The unstable balance of power between the crown and provincial services of the Safavid bureaucracy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played a key role in shaping the status of Zoroastrians as a religious minority in early modern Iran.

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The themes of continued religious suppression and victimization predominate in modern scholarship on the history of Zoroastrianism in early modern Iran. This is largely because the existing literature tends to valorize European sources. It was as an easy target for proselytizing that Zoroastrians had been of most interest to European travellers, resulting in their being portrayed in almost every major Safavid-era European travelogue as a community of the oppressed with a good potential for conversion to Christianity. In terms of temporal scope, the emphasis has been on the opening quarter of the eighteenth century. During the devolution that engulfed the Safavid dynasty in the 1710s–20s, the Zoroastrians of Kirman, Isfahan, Sistan and Yazd were either displaced or forced to fight as slaves and mercenaries with the Afghan rebels of Qandahar in central and southern parts of the country. The few studies dealing with Zoroastrianism in early modern Iran tend to linearize and totalize the clampdown on Zoroastrians in the early eighteenth century as if it were a constituent part of life throughout the Safavid period.²

Secondary literature dismisses almost all internal primary sources, from court chronicles and local histories to religious writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Zoroastrian grandees of Yazd and Kirman. The only book-length study to examine the history of Zoroastrianism in early modern Iran simply pieces together the writings of a cohort of European travellers, including Gabriel de Chinon, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, André Daulier-Deslandes, Raphaël du Mans, Jean de Thévenot, Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri and Cornelis de Bruijn.³ But the works of these European observers and commentators offer only an absurdly distorted account of the ideological tenets of Zoroastrianism. Nor do they tell us much about the power relations between Zoroastrians and state authorities in Safavid Iran.

The present study examines the conditions under which the Zoroastrians of Yazd, Kirman and Isfahan interacted with successive generations of *khāṣṣa* and *mamālik* authorities in Safavid Iran, from the formative years of the dynasty under Shah Ismāʿīl (907–930/1501–24) and his immediate successors until the fall of Isfahan in the autumn of 1135/1722. I focus on the shifting dynamics of bureaucratic centralization in Safavid Iran in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to explore how the ebbs and flows of the *khāṣṣa* protection impacted the minority status of the Zoroastrians. The central contention of this article is that the maltreatment of Zoroastrians had little to do with religious bigotry but was rather because, under the Safavids, the administration of their fiscal affairs had become a major bone of contention between those at the helm of Safavid bureaucrats. The argument I seek to develop concerns the

2 Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Ṣafavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 72–3; Vera B. Moreen, “The status of religious minorities in Safavid Iran, 1617–61”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40/2, 1981, 133–4; Jamsheed K. Choksy, “Despite the Shahs and the Mollas: minority socio-politics in premodern and modern Iran”, *Journal of Asian History* 40/2, 2006, 135–41; Richard Foltz, “Zoroastrians in Iran: what future in the homeland?” *Middle East Journal* 65/1, 2011, 76; Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 48.

3 See Nora K. Firby, *European Travellers and Their Perceptions of Zoroastrians in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1988).

material interest of Safavid bureaucrats in the revenue and labour potentials of the Zoroastrians, and the way in which the conflicts of interest between the central and the provincial services of the Safavid bureaucracy gave rise to such acts of persecution as over-taxation, forced labour, extortion and violence.

1. Primary sources

The *ravāyat*

The Zoroastrian *ravāyats* (priestly statements), Safavid court chronicles and local histories of medieval and early modern Yazd and Kirman have attracted little notice in the existing literature on Zoroastrianism in Safavid Iran.⁴ The *ravāyats* typically take the form of letters written by Kirman- and Yazd-based *hīrbads* (priests) and *dastūrs* (high priests) and addressed to Parsee community leaders in Gujarat. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Parsee Zoroastrians of Gujarat had their own *anjumans* (congregations) in almost every major urban centre of the province, including Bharuch, Cambay, Navsari, Ankleshwar and the port city of Surat.⁵ As the most popular genre of religious writing among the *bīhdīn* clerics of Yazd and Kirman under the Safavids, the *ravāyat* originally aimed to spell out the ideological tenets of Zoroastrianism by amending the classical *shāyast na-shāyast* (proper and improper) literature, leading some scholars to conclude that the concept of *ravāyat* or *ravā nā-ravā* (permissible and impermissible) could be reckoned the Zoroastrian equivalent of the *sharīʿa*.⁶ The Safavid-era *ravāyats* abound with details of rituals and rites, as well as invocations of apocalypse and the coming of the *bīhdīn* saviour, Ūshīdar-i Zartusht. Yet a few extant *ravāyat* letters contain fragmentary references to mundane aspects of minority life in early modern Iran. These references are of historical value and, when contextualized, could broaden our

- 4 Exceptions are two publications on medieval and early modern Yazd and Kirman; see Īraj Afshār, *Yādgārḥā-yi Yazd*, 2 vols (Tehran: Anjuman-i āthār-i millī, 1348–54 sh/1969–75), 2: 813–23; Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Bāstānī Pārīzī, *Ganj-ʿAlī Khān* (Tehran: Asāfīr, 1362 sh/1983), 298–301. The relevant parts of Bāstānī Pārīzī’s book have recently been translated into English; see Touraj Daryaei, “Zoroastrians under Islamic rule”, in Michael Stausberg and Yuhan S.D. Vevaina (eds), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 116–7.
- 5 For more on the Parsee *anjumans* in early modern Gujarat, see John Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689, Giving a Large Account of That City, and Its Inhabitants, and of the English Factory There* (London, 1696), 374–83; cf. Dusabji F. Karaka, *History of the Parsis* (London, 1884), 39–43. As regards the Parsee Zoroastrians there are several published Mughal decrees and land grant edicts that shed light on various aspects of their life under emperor Akbar (963–1014/1556–1605) and his immediate successors; see Jivanji J. Modi, *The Parsees at the Court of Akbar and Dastūr Meherjee Rānā* (Bombay: Bombay Education Society, 1903); see also Altaf Hussain Langrial and Mirza Asif Baig, “Zoroastrians in Mughal court: a short study of Parsis and their rise in Mughal India”, *Al-Azwa* 42, 2014, 55–70.
- 6 See Jivanji J. Modi, “Introduction”, in Manockji R. Unvâla (ed.), *Dārâb Hormazyâr’s Rivāyat*, 2 vols (Bombay: British India Press, 1922), 1: 1–3; and Jivanji J. Modi, “The Persian Rivayats of the Pârsīs”, in Jivanji J. Modi (ed.), *Oriental Conference Papers* (Bombay: Fort Press, 1932), 255–7.

understanding of the status of Zoroastrians in Safavid Iran. A study of religious minorities in medieval and early modern Iran⁷ points to the historiographical significance of *ravāyats*, but as regards the dynamics of minority life among the Zoroastrians in Safavid Iran, it chooses to rely in a unidirectional manner on European travelogues.

A volume of Zoroastrian miscellanea in the Majlis Library in Tehran⁸ contains copies of several *ravāyats* drafted and signed by various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century *bīhdīn* religious dignitaries in Yazd and Kirman. The volume in question is catalogued under the title *Kitāb-i 'ulamā-yi islām* after the title of the oldest treatise bound in with early modern *ravāyats*. Some of the letters, historical *mathnavīs* and religious treatises in this *jung* volume are in ungrammatical Persian, which could easily lead to misunderstanding and wrong conclusions. A number of the *ravāyats* reproduced in this volume are translated into English by two early twentieth-century Zoroastrian religious scholars, Manockji R. Unvālā and Bamanji N. Dhabhar, and published in two major collections of Zoroastrian religious texts.

In 1990, a single volume of Zoroastrian *ravāyats* from Kirman was published in Tehran (see n. 32 below). Of the *ravāyat* letters included in this volume only two are from the Safavid period while the rest cover the history of the community under the Qajar dynasty (1796–1925). These two Safavid-era *ravāyat* letters contain brief references to the maltreatment of Zoroastrians in Kirman by local grandees shortly after the death of Shah 'Abbās (995–1038/1587–1629).

Court chronicles and local histories

References to Zoroastrians are few and far between in the Safavid dynastic chronicles. The early seventeenth-century historians Maḥmūd Āfūshta'ī Naṭanzī (fl. 1005/1596–97) and Faẓlī Beg Khūzānī Iṣfahānī (fl. 1049/1639–40) provide us with scant but important clues into the dynamics of community life among the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Isfahan under Shah 'Abbās. As for Kirman, the existing narrative evidence, provided mainly by the local historian Mīr Muḥammad Sa'īd Mashīzī Bardsīrī (fl. 1104/1692–93), dates from the late seventeenth century. Mashīzī's history details internal tensions between the *khāṣṣa* and the provincial services of the Safavid bureaucracy in Isfahan and Kirman over the tax and labour potentials of the Zoroastrians under the later Safavids.

Additionally, scattered information about the Zoroastrians of Yazd is found in the works of a number of local historians. Of special importance to this study is Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd Bāfqi's (fl. 1083/1672–73) *Jāmi'-i Muḥfīdī*, which contains biographical information about four high-ranking *khāṣṣa* bureaucrats who

7 Aptin Khanbaghi, *The Fire, the Star, and the Cross: Minority Religions in Medieval and Early Modern Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 100 ff.

8 Jung (ms. Majlis Library 17341); see 'Alī Ṣadrā'ī Khū'ī, *Fihrist-i nuskhahā-yi khatī-i Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shawrā-yi Islāmī*, vol. 37 (Qum: Daftar-i Tabliḡhāt-i Islāmī, 1377 sh/1998), 273. The polemical treatise *Kitāb-i 'ulamā'-yi islām* dates from 628/1230–31 and was first published in 1829; see Julius Mohl and Justus Olshausen, *Fragments relatifs à la religion de Zoroastre, extraits des manuscrits persans de la Bibliothèque du Roi* (Paris, 1829), 1–10.

spent periods of administrative service as vizier of Zoroastrians of Yazd under the later Safavids.⁹

A local history of Sistan from the reign of Shah 'Abbās by Malik Shāh Ḥusayn Sīstānī (fl. 1036/1627) tells us very little about Zoroastrians. The province was home to the largest population of *bīhdīns* in Safavid Iran, but the only reference in Sīstānī's narrative pertains to border clashes with a contingent of tribal bandits involving a group of Zoroastrian landed notables from rural suburbs of Farāh in the closing quarter of the fourteenth century.

2. Surviving the tides of political change, 1480s–1580s

Under Shah Ismā'īl a certain Marzbān-i Rustam-i Shah-Mardān (Marzbān b. Rustam b. Shah-Mardān) held the office of *das̄tūr* (high priest) in Yazd. Marzbān's years as high priest coincided with the Qizilbāsh conquest of the city and its subsequent assignment in the winter of 910/1505 as a *tiyūl* land grant to Ikhtiyār al-Dīn Ḥusayn Beg Shāmlū, the teenage shah's brother-in-law, guardian (*lala*) and deputy (*vakīl*).¹⁰ In the same year, Ḥusayn Beg's daughter, born of Shah Ismā'īl's sister, was married off to the Kārkā crown prince Khan Aḥmad b. Sultān Ḥasan of Lāhījān, the city known as a major producer of raw silk in the Caspian province of Gīlān.¹¹ Ḥusayn Beg's appointment to governor of Yazd, a hub of the silk trade in early modern Iran, was intended to help him and his close relatives make money from the lucrative trade in raw silk and silken fabrics.¹² The decision to give Yazd as *tiyūl* land assignment to the second man of the Safavid regime also indicates the importance the city enjoyed as a major administrative unit under the new regime: in less than half a century Yazd was to become incorporated into the *khāssa* sector of the Safavid bureaucracy. At the time of Ḥusayn Beg's arrival in Yazd a group of Zoroastrian landed notables were involved in the production of raw and processed silk. They owned farms and orchards in Na'imābād and Ahrīstān, two Zoroastrian-populated rural settlements outside the city walls on either side of the route to Bāfq, and ranked among the main suppliers of fresh white mulberry leaf for silkworm farms and silk-weaving workshops in Yazd.¹³ At the close of the fifteenth century, the Zoroastrian inhabitants of Ahrīstān and Na'imābād contributed cash and free

- 9 On Bāfq's history of Yazd, see Derek J. Mancini-Lander, "Memory on the boundaries of empire: narrating place in the early modern local historiography of Yazd", PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2012, 15–24.
- 10 Aḥmad Ghaffārī Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i jahān-ārā* (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-i Ḥāfīz, 1343 sh/1964), 296; cf. Roger M. Savory, "The consolidation of Ṣafawid power in Persia", *Der Islam* 41/1, 1965, 74–5.
- 11 'Alī b. Shams al-Dīn Lāhījī, *Tārīkh-i khānī*, ed. Manūchīhr Sutūda (Tehran: Bunyād-i farhang-i Īrān, 1352 sh/1973), 185–6.
- 12 Jean Aubin, "Révolution chiite et conservatisme: Les soufis de Lāhejān, 1500–1514 (Études safavides II.)", *Moyen Orient et Océan Indien* 1, 1984, 4–5. On silk production and trade in Yazd in the late fifteenth century, see Shihāb al-Dīn 'Abdallāh Kh'āfī, *Jughhrāfiya-yi Ḥāfīz-i Abrū*, ed. Šādiq Sajjādī, 3 vols (Tehran: Mīrāth-i maktūb, 1375–78/1996–99), 2: 110–1; cf. Jean Aubin, "Chiffres de population urbaine en Iran occidental autour de 1500", *Moyen Orient et Océan Indien* 3, 1986, 45.
- 13 Ja'far b. Muḥammad Ja'farī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tehran: Bungāh-i tarjuma u nashr-i kitāb, 1343 sh/1964), 172–3.

labour to the repair, maintenance and expansion of one of the major *qanāt* irrigation systems in Yazd.¹⁴ Na‘imābād and Ahristān were among “the most affluent and populated” neighbourhoods of Yazd under the early Safavids.¹⁵

The involvement of Zoroastrians in menial jobs such as *qanāt* digging and public latrine cleaning is noted in the writings of pre-modern local historians as well as European travellers, who read this as an indication of their indigence.¹⁶ For example, the Spanish–Portuguese ambassador to the court of ‘Abbās I, Don García de Silva y Figueroa, and the late seventeenth-century French missionary Nicolas Sanson described the Zoroastrians as an impoverished community, implying the likelihood of their easy conversion to Christianity.¹⁷ It was rumoured at the time that the *bihdīns* of Yazd and Kirman believed that their prophet Zoroaster was of “Frankish” descent, a baseless claim that made European visitors eager to learn more about their religious beliefs, notwithstanding the expressed reluctance of Zoroastrians to share details of their creed with outsiders.¹⁸ However, Jean Chardin noted that Zoroastrians had a keen interest in menial jobs simply because they considered such work not only beneficial to their own community but also spiritually transcending.¹⁹

The earliest contact between the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kirman and the Parsees of Gujarat took place in the closing quarter of the fifteenth century. There is evidence that under the Safavids the Parsee envoys would travel from eastern India to Iran overland, making their way to Yazd and Kirman from Gujarat and Agra via Qandahar and Sistan. An unpublished late fifteenth-century *ravāyat* underscores the relative safety of overland travel from India to Iran compared to the horrors and “impurities” of the sea voyage from Surat to the port city of Gumbrūn (later Bandar-i ‘Abbāsī).²⁰ Elephant ivory was the main export of the Parsee merchants from central and eastern India to Safavid

14 Ja‘far b. Ḥusayn Kātib Yazdī, *Tārīkh-i jadīd-i Yazd*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tehran: Farhang-i Īrān zamīn, 1345 sh/1966), 220; cf. Muḥammad Mufīd b. Maḥmūd Bāfqī, *Jāmi‘-i Mufīdī*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-i Asadī, 1340–42 sh/1960–63), 673.

15 Maḥmūd b. Hidāyatallāh Āfshūta‘ī Naṭanzī, *Nuqāvat al-āthār fī zikr al-akhyār* [sic], ed. Iḥsān Ishrāqī (Tehran: Bungāh-i tarjuma u nashr-i kitāb, 1350 sh/1971), 531.

16 Bāfqī, *Jāmi‘*, 725; Muḥammad Ja‘far Nā‘inī, *Jāmi‘-i Ja‘farī*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tehran: Anjuman-i āthār-i millī, 1353 sh/1974), 420.

17 Don García de Silva y Figueroa, *Commentarios de la embaxada al Rey Xa Abbas de Persia (1614–1624)*, ed. Rui Manuel Loureiro et al., 4 vols (Lisbon: Centro de História de Além-Mar Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2011), 1: 295–6; Nicolas Sanson, *Estat present du Royaume de Perse* (Paris, 1694), 264.

18 Gabriel de Chinon and Louis Moreri, *Relations nouvelles du Levant, ou traités de la religion, du gouvernement et coûtomes des Perses, des Arméniens, et des Gaures* (Paris, 1671), 430; Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Les six voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier Écuyer Baron d’Aubonne, qu’il a fait en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes* (Paris, 1676), 431; cf. Firby, *European Travellers*, 42. For disabusing remarks concerning this claim, see Jean de Thévenot, *The Travels of Monsieur de Thévenot into the Levant*, 3 vols (London, 1687), 2: 111.

19 Jean Chardin, *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l’Orient*, ed. Louis Langlès, 10 vols (Paris, 1811), 3: 290.

20 See Jung, 204r. On overland trade routes from Qandahar to central Iran, see Rüdiger Klein, “Caravan trade in Safavid Iran (first half of the 17th century)”, in Jean Calmard (ed.), *Etudes safavides* (Paris: Institut français de recherche en Iran, 1993), 310–11.

Yazd and Kirman.²¹ A number of these merchants acted as envoys, representing the Parsee community leaders with Zoroastrian religious dignitaries in Iran. In Yazd, almost all Parsee envoys were to visit Sharafābād (also Sharīfābād) and Turkābād, two villages in the districts of Rustāq and Ardakān – respectively 20 and 40 miles north-west of Yazd – where Zoroastrian priests and high priests presided over local fire temples.²²

One of the oldest early modern Zoroastrian *ravāyats* points to the arrival in Yazd of a Gujarati date merchant called Narīmān-i Hūshang (Narīmān b. Hūshang) of Bharuch.²³ The date given at the end of this *ravāyat* is 4 January 1487, and it is addressed to Bahrām-Shāh-i Changa-Shāh, the *sālār* (lay leader) of the Parsee *anjuman* of Navsari.²⁴ Narīmān's stay in Iran lasted about seven years, which suggests that he entered Yazd in 885–86/1480–81. Elsewhere it is claimed that he quit Iran within a year of his arrival in Yazd, which is not correct.²⁵ For several years Narīmān studied with a group of priests in Yazd. This relatively long stay in Iran helped Narīmān pick up some Persian and share more details about the religious beliefs and ritual practices of Parsee Zoroastrians with his *bīhdīn* interlocutors in Iran.²⁶

There was no high priest in Yazd when Narīmān left Iran in 892/1487. This is implicit in the fact that the *ravāyat* he had been assigned to take to Gujarat is signed by three prominent *hīrbads* called Garshāsp, Bahrām-i Isfandyār and Shahryār-i Māhvandād. Their *ravāyat* opens with complaints about the lack of regular communication between the Zoroastrians of Iran and the Parsee *bīhdīns* of Gujarat. They noted that “for many years Zoroastrians in Iran had awaited a word from *bīhdīns* abroad”, but, to their frustration, no Parsee community leader in Gujarat had ever tried to get in touch with them. They also expressed their shock and disbelief at the

21 Tavernier, *Voyages*, 431; see also Surendra Gopal, *Commerce and Crafts in Gujarat, 16th and 17th Centuries: A Study in the Impact of European Expansion on Precapitalist Economy* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1975), 132.

22 'Abbās Jāmi'ī, *Iran Village Gazetteer: The Yazd Province* (Tehran: Iran Statistical Centre, 1968), 38, 44; Ḥusayn-'Alī Razmārā (ed.), *Farhang-i juḡhrāfā'ī-i Īrān* (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi ārtish, 1332 sh/1953), 10: 40, 120; see also Mary Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism: Based on the Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, 1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

23 Jung, MS 17341, 211r. For a partial translation of this *ravāyat*, see Bamanji N. Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivāyats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others* (Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1932), 602–6; Mary Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 117–9.

24 The original date for this *ravāyat* is the day of *day-bīhdīn* (23rd) of the month *day* of the Zoroastrian or *Yazdigirdī* year 855, which corresponds to 8 Muḥarram 892 AH. For converting the *Yazdigirdī* dates I have used: Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-taḡhīm li'awā' il ṣanā' at al-tanjīm*, ed. Jalāl Humā'ī (Tehran: Anjuman-i āthār-i millī, 1351 sh/1972), 234; cf. Willy Hartner, “Old Iranian calendars”, in I. Gershevitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran, 2: The Median and Achaemenian Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 729. On Bahrām-Shāh's family background, see Mary Boyce and Feroze Kotwal, “Changa Asa”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 5, 2002, 362–3.

25 Dhabhar, *Hormazyar Framarz*, LII; Mario Vitalone, *The Persian Revāyats: A Bibliographic Reconnaissance* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1987), 6.

26 Jung, 208v.

news, shared with them by Narīmān, that none of the Zoroastrians in Gujarat were versed in the Pahlavi script, an indispensable requirement for the faultless administration of Zoroastrian religious rituals and services as practised in Iran. The three priests who signed the *ravāyat* in question also objected that, for much of the past two centuries, the Parsees of Gujarat had no *hīrbad* among them to oversee and administer their religious services, sharply adding that the indulgence of the Gujarati Zoroastrians in trade and pursuit of material gain had made “their soul, body, and even clothes polluted”.²⁷ It is worth noting here that in a catalogue of Zoroastrian *ravāyats* the complaints raised in this particular letter are mistaken for a depiction of the status quo in Yazd, leading the cataloguer to characterize the decades leading up to Shah Ismā‘īl’s rise to power as “one of the most difficult periods” in the history of Zoroastrianism in Iran.²⁸

Dastūr Marzbān is the author of the *ravāyat* dated 7 January 1511. Written in response to a letter submitted less than two years earlier by a Parsee merchant-cum-envoy called Īzadyār, this *ravāyat* is addressed to Narīmān-i Hūshang and other Parsee worthies of Bharuch, Cambay, Navsari, Ankelshwar and Surat. In his *ravāyat* letter, Marzbān insists on affirming that Zoroastrian religious authorities in Yazd had heard nothing from their Parsee co-religionists since Narīmān-i Hūshang left Yazd in 1487. Marzbān was particularly worried about what he saw as growing unorthodoxy and ignorance in religious matters among the Parsee Zoroastrians, urging them to send one or two of their “priests” to Yazd so that he could teach them the basics of Zoroastrian liturgy.

Marzbān’s *ravāyat* closes with his eulogy of Shah Ismā‘īl, whom he described as a “mighty and blessed king”. Following his conquest of Yazd in the winter of 910/1505, Marzbān admits, the Safavid monarch had been “fully charitable and supportive” (*shafaqat-i tamām u imdād namuda*) in his dealings with the Zoroastrian population of the city and its rural suburbs. The Zoroastrian high priest was so impressed by the youthful shah’s show of “respect and tolerance” that he saw in his rise to power and subsequent military victories over various claimants to power across the country the outset of a turning point in the history of Zoroastrianism. Marzbān had come to believe that Ismā‘īl’s ascent to the throne in 907/1501 represented one of the unmistakable signs of the impending advent of the Zoroastrian messiah, Ūshīdar-i Zartusht and the subsequent beginning of a millennium of Zoroastrian revival. Therefore, he urged the Parsees of Gujarat to look carefully through all religious texts in their possession and write back to him soon if they came across any explicit or implicit prophecy discussed in these texts with regard to Shah Ismā‘īl as precursor to the promised apocalypse. He reminded them that:

In our religion, as it is stated in the *ravāyat* sent with Narīmān-i Hūshang, there are a number of apocalyptic signs that portent the coming of

27 Jung, 209v.

28 Vitalone, *Persian Revāyats*, 7.

[Ūshīdar-i] Zartusht, Pashūtan-i Vīstāspān, and Bahrām-i Hamāvand. Of these signs one, which has come to pass as of late in an unmistakable manner, is the rise to power from the mountains of Azerbaijan (Turkistan) of a king who wears red cap (*tāj-i surkh*) as his royal emblem and seizes the province of 'Irāq-i 'Arab (Babylonia). Now nine years have passed since this mighty and blessed king ascended to the throne [and achieved all these accomplishments].²⁹

Marzbān's *ravāyat* closes with a list of signatories containing the names of the most prominent Zoroastrian worthies of Iran. Among them, he mentions the descendants of nine Zoroastrian *dastūrs* from Yazd, Sharafābād and Turkābād, where a population of 900 *bīhdīns* lived at the time of Shah Ismā'īl's capture of Yazd. Other notables referred to at the close of Marzbān's letter include a group of *bīhdīn* grandees representing 700 Zoroastrians from Kirman. Under Shah Ismā'īl, Marzbān pointed out, a total of 1,700 Zoroastrians lived in Khurāsān. According to him, the Zoroastrians of Khurāsān all claimed their descent from the last Sasanid king, Yazdigird III (632–51). The descendants of four priests are also named in Marzbān's *ravāyat*, who presided over the Zoroastrian congregation in Sistan, home to the largest *anjuman* in Iran under the early Safavids with a population of 2,700 *bīhdīns*.³⁰ In the late fourteenth century, several hundred Zoroastrian landed notables (*dīhqāns*) of Sistan, who had allied themselves with the Kart rulers of Herat and Farāh, were defeated and massacred during one of their many border clashes with tribal elements in south-eastern Khurāsān.³¹ Early in the eighteenth century, the unrelenting raids mounted by the Afghans from Qandahar forced the remaining Zoroastrian population of Sistan to move en masse to Kirman, where they settled down in Zarasp and Guvāshīr, two major neighborhoods of the city.³²

What makes Marzbān's rosy and at the same time apocalyptic reading of Shah Ismā'īl's rise to power more interesting is the fact that at that time there were many Shi'i Muslims in Iran who like him consider tended to the advent of the Safavids as a prelude to the apocalypse and the coming of their own promised saviour, al-Mahdī.³³ In the middle of the sixteenth century, 'Alī Ṭūsī al-Sharīf, a minor Shi'i mystic-cum-cleric of *sayyid* descent from Mashhad who attended the Safavid court in Tabriz and Qazvin, wrote and dedicated a treatise to Shah Ṭahmāsp on the same topic. Here, various esoteric, internalist (*bāṭinī*), astrological and numerological omens, signs and interpretations are

29 *Jung*, 210v–211r.

30 *Jung*, 211v. More than a century later, Tavernier claimed rather exaggeratedly that the Zoroastrian population of Kirman "exceeds ten thousand" souls; see Tavernier, *Voyages*, 431. This figure is accepted uncritically in secondary literature; see Ann K. S. Lambton, "Kirmān", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 5, 1986, 157.

31 Malik Shāh Ḥusayn Sīstānī, *Thyā' al-mulūk*, ed. Manūchīhr Sutūda (Tehran: Bungāh-i tarjuma u nashr-i kitāb, 1344 sh/1965), 80–1.

32 Jamshīd S. Sirawshīān, *Tārīkh-i Zartushtīān-i Kirmān* (Tehran: 'ilmī u farhangī, 1369 sh/1990), 18.

33 See, for instance, Aḥmad Ḥusaynī Qumī, *Khulāṣat al-tavārīkh*, ed. Iḥsān Ishrāqī (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tīhrān, 1383 sh/2004), 65.

put forward to underpin the author's claim that the Hidden Imam will return in 963/1555–56, the year in which he predicted the Safavids would achieve a number of strategically decisive victories against their enemies to the east and west of Iran.³⁴ Interestingly, at least one Zoroastrian *ravāyat*, datable to the first part of the sixteenth century, claims that the Hidden Imam was of *bihdīn* descent. The author of this *ravāyat* clarifies that the twelfth imam, al-Mahdī, who is called here *Ṣāhib al-zamān*, descended on the maternal side of his family from “a prominent Zoroastrian *dastūr* called Mihr-Āzmā the Orthodox (*pākdīn*)” and that his return was imminent.³⁵

The real importance of Marzbān's letter can be better understood when we read it in the context of the events that led to Shah Ismā'īl's invasion and occupation of Yazd in 910/1504–05. There is evidence that the capture of the city by the Safavids, early in the winter of 910/1505, had saved the local Zoroastrian population from an impending existential threat in the form of an inchoate Mahdist theocracy headed by a Nūrbakhshī *mutamahdī* (claimant to Mahdship) called Muḥammad Karra, a tribal leader from Kūhgīlūya and military governor of Yazd.³⁶ According to a sixteenth-century chronicle, prior to the Safavid ruler's invasion of Yazd, a group of Nūrbakhshī notables in Yazd and Isfahan, led by the Nūrbakhshī chief judge of the city, Ḥusayn Maybudī (d. 910/1505) had endorsed Karra's claim to Mahdship.³⁷ Unlike the Ni'matallāhī Sufi demagogues of Kirman and Yazd, who managed to shift their messianic focus from their own leaders to Shah Ismā'īl when it was expedient to do so, the Nūrbakhshī notables of Yazd and Isfahan failed to grasp the scope and seriousness of the Safavid regime's messianic claims and in due course paid a heavy price for it.³⁸ The Zoroastrians feared that the rule of a Nūrbakhshī Mahdī in Yazd might eventually lead to their forced conversion to Islam and even mass execution, if they chose to resist forced conversion. But the rise of the Safavids changed the political scene dramatically. Soon after he captured Yazd, Shah Ismā'īl ordered the execution of all leading Nūrbakhshī Mahdists, including Muḥammad Karra and Ḥusayn Maybudī in Yazd as well as four members of the Mīr-i Mīrān family of *naqībs* of Isfahan for their extremist views as well as for the injustices they had perpetrated on

34 See 'Alī Tūsī al-Sharīf, *Risāla-yi mubashshara-yi shāhīya*, folios 1r–64r of *Majmū'a* (ms. Majlis Library 21519), 42v–44r; at the close of his treatise, Tūsī introduces himself as “an old servant” of the Safavids.

35 *Jung*, 125r. On the contrary, a late Safavid Shī'i cleric claimed that the Hidden Imam's mother was a Byzantine princess descended from Jesus Christ; see Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Kitāb-i raj'at*, ed. Ḥasan Musavī (Qum: Intishārāt-i dalīl-i mā, 1382 sh/2003), 77–86.

36 On the Karra (also Jākī or Junakī) confederation of Shii tribes of Kūhgīlūya, see Muḥammad Ṭāhir Naṣrābādī, *Tazkira-yi Naṣrābādī*, ed. Muḥsin Nājī Naṣrābādī (Tehran: Asāfir, 1378 sh/1999), 803.

37 See Ḥayātī Tabrizī, *Tārīkh* (ms. National Library of Iran 15776), 187r. This manuscript is catalogued as an anonymous, seventeenth-century history of Shah Ismā'īl; see Muṣṭafā Darāyatī, *Fihristvāra-yi dast-nivishthā-yi Īrān*, 12 vols (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis, 1389 sh/2010), 2: 717. For more on Ḥayātī's chronicle see my “Chronicling a dynasty on the make: new light on the early Safavids in Ḥayātī Tabrizī's *Tārīkh* (961/1554)”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (forthcoming).

38 For an analysis of power relations between the Ni'matallāhīya *ṭarīqa* and the early Safavids, see Mancini-Lander, “Boundaries of empire”, 458–63.

the Muslim and Zoroastrian denizens of Yazd.³⁹ This incident contextualizes the optimistic assessment given in Marzbān's letter of Shah Ismā'īl's rise to power and his "fully charitable and supportive" treatment of the Zoroastrians.

Almost all sixteenth-century Persian chroniclers portray the Safavid conquest of Yazd as a bloody event during which many local allies and supporters of the Aqqyunlu were put to the sword.⁴⁰ Much of the killing seems to have taken place outside the city, far from its Zoroastrian-populated suburbs. In fact, Shah Ismā'īl's stay in Yazd in the winter of 910/1505 was cut short owing to the punitive campaigns against Abarkūh and Ṭabas to the south and north of Yazd.⁴¹ The early withdrawal of Safavid forces relieved the local population, including the Zoroastrians, from the fiscal burdens of the prolonged militarization of Yazd. On his return from Yazd to Isfahan, the Safavid ruler is reported to have stopped over in the mainly Zoroastrian district of Ardakān, where local notables, including *bihdīn* grandees and religious dignitaries, welcomed him warmly. During his visit, Shah Ismā'īl issued a handful of land grant edicts, including a cash endowment in the form of *suyurghāl* assigned to a family of Muslim landed notables of Ardakān, a move that bears out Marzbān's account of the peacefulness of this early phase of dynastic transition in Yazd under Shah Ismā'īl.⁴² Shortly thereafter, Muslim and Zoroastrian notables of Yazd began to supply the Safavid court with raw and processed silk products. A single camel-load of silk fabrics prepared and shipped from Yazd to Tabriz in the early 1520s is estimated in a late sixteenth-century Safavid chronicle to be worth 1,000 *tūmāns*.⁴³ In other words, the cash value of each of these consignments of

- 39 Ḥayātī Tabrīzī, *Tārīkh*, 192v. Ḥayātī Tabrīzī is the only Safavid chronicler who refers to Karra's Nūrbakhshī leanings and his claim to Mahdīship. The following two studies of the Nūrbakhshīya say nothing about the Mahdist clique in Yazd and Isfahan; see Alexandra W. Dunietz, "Qādī Ḥusayn Maybūdī of Yazd: representative of the Iranian provincial elite in the late fifteenth century", PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1990, 171–6; Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2003), 186–93.
- 40 Ghīyāth al-Dīn Kh'āndamīr, *Tārīkh-i ḥabīb al-siyar fī akhbār-i afrād-i bashar*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr-Sīyāqī, 4 vols (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Khayyām, 1333 sh/1954), 4: 480; Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Amīnī Haravī, *Futūḥāt-i shāhī*, ed. Muḥammad R. Naṣrī (Tehran: Anjuman-i āthār u mafākhir-i farhangī, 1383 sh/2004), 242–3; cf. Jean Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré (Études safavides III.)", *Moyen Orient et Ocean Indien* 5, 1988, 41, 93.
- 41 See, for instance, Khurshāh b. Qubād Ḥusaynī, *Tārīkh-i Īlchī-i Nizām-Shāh*, ed. Muḥammad R. Naṣrī and Koichi Haneda (Tehran: Anjuman-i āthār u mafākhir-i farhangī, 1379 sh/2000), 20–31. The Safavids reportedly killed several hundred villagers in Ṭabas in retaliation for the Timurid ruler, Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bāyqarā's hostile letter to Shah Ismā'īl, in which the Timurid ruler warned against meddling in the internal affairs of Khurāsān; see 'Abdallāh Marvārīd, *Šaraf-nāma*, (ms. Istanbul University F87), 30v; translated by Hans R. Roemer as *Staatsschreiben der Timuridenzeit: Das Šaraf-nāmā des 'Abdallāh Marwārīd in Kritischer Auswertung* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1952), 121; see also Kh'āndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 4: 480; Amīnī Haravī, *Futūḥāt*, 242–3.
- 42 Mīrzā 'Alī Mushtāq, "Tuḥfat al-fuqarā' (ed. Rukn al-Dīn Humāyūn Farrukh)", *Farhang-i Īrān Zamīn* 16–7, 1349 sh/1970, 130.
- 43 Budāq Munshī Qazvīnī, *Javāhir al-akhbār*, ed. Muḥammad R. Naṣrī and Koichi Haneda (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999), 46.

silk (*bārkhāna*) equalled the annual revenue to the Safavid central treasury from more than 80 rural and urban districts enfeoffed as *tiyūl* with military commanders and tribal chiefs across the country in the 1510s.⁴⁴

The first steps towards incorporating Yazd into the *khāṣṣa* sector were taken in the mid-sixteenth century. The first known *khāṣṣa* vizier of the city was a high-ranking bureaucrat from Tehra, Kh^vāja Muḥammad Sharīf Ṭīhrānī, who reached this position in 964/1557.⁴⁵ It was during Ṭīhrānī's years in Yazd that his family emigrated to India, where his daughter was married off to the Mughal prince (later emperor) Jahāngīr (r. 1014–37/1605–27).⁴⁶ Ṭīhrānī's appointment to *khāṣṣa* vizier of Yazd roughly coincided with Shah Ṭahmāsp's consenting to the marriage of his stepsister, princess Dil-Ārā, also known as Khānīsh Begum (d. 972/1565) to the Ni'matallāhī mystic and landed notable Nūr al-Dīn Ni'matallāh Bāqī (d. 972/1565) of Yazd. During her years in Yazd, Khānīsh Begum purchased vast estates, including a village called Ibrāhīmābād near Sharafābād in Maybud, as well as several other landed properties in Yazd and Taft. According to a *waqf* deed dated 27 Rabi' I 963/19 February 1556, shortly before her death she endowed all these landed properties to the shrine of the the third Shi'i imam Ḥusayn in Karbalā. The same deed shows that at the time several local Zoroastrian men and women worked for the Safavid princes as slaves.⁴⁷ The incorporation of Yazd into the *khāṣṣa* sector in the late 1550s ushered in a relatively long period of administrative stability, which, with a major interval of political tumult in the last decade of the sixteenth century, lasted several decades.⁴⁸

In the political chaos following the death of Shah Ṭahmāsp in spring 984/1576, the city suffered a famine. There are fleeting references to the unfolding

- 44 On the value of *tūmān* under Shah Ismā'īl, see Kioumars Ghereghlou, "Cashing in on land and privilege for the welfare of the shah: Monetisation of *Tiyūl* in early Safavid Iran and eastern Anatolia", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 68/1, 2015, 95.
- 45 Bāfqī, *Jāmi'*, 167; Iskandar Beg Munshī Turkmān, *Tārīkh-i ālam-ārā-yi 'Abbāsī*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1335 sh/1956), 165; translated by Roger M. Savory as *History of Shah 'Abbas the Great* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978), 260. Ṭīhrānī seems to have been appointed vizier of Yazd shortly after the death of Muḥammad Khan Takkalu (d. 964/1557), the Safavid governor of Herat, for whom he had worked as a bureaucratic deputy; see Qumī, *Khulāṣat*, 390–1.
- 46 On his family and descendants in Mughal India, see Ṣamṣām al-Dawla 'Abd al-Razzāq Ḥusaynī Kh^vāfi also known as Shahnavāz Khan, *Ma'āthir al-umarā'*, ed. Maulana 'Abdur-Rahim and Maulana M.A. 'Alī, 3 vols (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1888–92), 1: 129–31, 408–12.
- 47 Munshī Qazvīnī, *Javāhir*, 127; 'Abd al-Razzāq Kirmānī et al., *Matériaux pour la biographie de Shah Ni'matullāh Wali Kirmani*, ed. Jean Aubin (Tehran: Institut français d'Iranologie, 1983), 220; cf. Maria Szuppe, "La participation des femmes de la famille royale à l'exercice du pouvoir en Iran safavide au XVIe siècle (première partie)", *Studia Iranica* 23/2, 1994, 217. For the full-text of Khānīsh Begum's *waqf* deed, see Kāẓim Dihqāniān Naṣrābādī, *Guzīda-yi asnād-i mawqūfāt-i Shahrīstān-i Taft* (Yazd: Andishmandān-i Yazd, 1393/2014), 205–301. Her Zoroastrian slaves are named as Isfandyār, Manūchīhr, Suhrāb, Qubād, Parvīz, and Khusraw. I am grateful to Muhammad K. Rahmati for bringing this source to my attention.
- 48 Klaus-Michael Röhrborn, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1966), 119–20.

turmoil in Yazd in at least one unpublished *ravāyat* letter drafted and signed by a group of Zoroastrian notables. Addressed to a certain Sīt Manūcihr-i Bahman-Shāh of Gujarat, this *ravāyat* clarifies that “injustice and repression is so rampant here in Iran that this letter is no place for a thorough discussion of it”. The signatories then lamented the scarcity of cash and food in Yazd, ending their letter with prayers for the coming of the Zoroastrian saviour, Ūshīdar-i Zartusht.⁴⁹ There is evidence that Kirman had likewise suffered bouts of famine and temporary depopulation in the 1550s, and as a result local bureaucrats were unable to produce the annual taxes levied on the city.⁵⁰ Narrative evidence from one contemporary Persian chronicle largely corroborates the references made in this particular *ravāyat* to price inflation and outbreak of famine in Iran later in the reign of Ṭahmāsp. According to Qavām al-Dīn Ja’far Beg Āṣaf Qazvīnī (d. 1021/1612), who wrote his history in Mughal India shortly after leaving Iran in the late 1570s following a long stint of service as the *khāṣṣa* vizier of Kashan, the monetary crisis of the closing years of the reign of Ṭahmāsp I had such deleterious effects on the national economy that the Safavid ruler had to intervene personally to stop the damage. He is reported to have ordered all bureaucratic agents to collect and send to the Safavid court in Qazvin all the gold and silver coins and bullions they could find. The Safavid central mint was then expected to use these gold and silver supplies to stabilize markets by introducing a new coinage.⁵¹ Another early seventeenth-century Persian chronicle tells us that in the 1570s the Safavid authorities managed to stockpile in Qahqaha Castle in Qarājādāgh a stack of “six hundred” gold and silver bars (*khisht*), each weighting some 30 pounds (3,000 *mithqāl-i shar’ī*). This represented a preliminary step for monetary reform, but Ṭahmāsp’s death put a sudden end to the realization of this undertaking.⁵²

The references made in the above-mentioned Zoroastrian *ravāyat* to “injustice and oppression” imply a period of continued chaos in Yazd in the wake of Shah Ṭahmāsp’s death during which local authorities might have abused the Zoroastrian inhabitants of the city. Within a decade of Ṭahmāsp’s death, both Yazd and Kirman drifted into a bloody civil war between the Afshār warlord, Begtāsh Khan Ālplū, who acted as hereditary governor of Yazd and Kirman, and his local and regional opponents in Kirman and Fars led by Ya’qūb Khan Zu’l-Qadr, the governor of Shiraz. Begtāsh Khan soon ended the involvement

49 Jung, 212r.

50 For a brief discussion of famines in Kirman in the 1550s, see Fazlī Beg Khūzānī Iṣfahānī, *Afzal al-tavārīkh [Volume II]*, (ms. British Library Or.4678), 221v.

51 Aḥmad Tatavī and Qavām al-Dīn Ja’far Beg Āṣaf Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i alfī*, ed. Ghulām-Rizā Ṭabāṭabā’ī-Majid, 8 vols (Tehran: ‘Ilmī u farhangī, 1382 sh/2003), 8: 5909. Qazvīnī was a close relative of Ṭīhrānī, the first *khāṣṣa* vizier of Yazd; see Munshī Turkmān, *Ālam-ārā*, 165; tr., 260. He had a successful career as a poet, *Tazkira* writer and historian at the court of emperor Jahāngīr in Agra; see ‘Abd al-Nabī Fakhr al-Zamānī Qazvīnī, *Tazkira-yi maykhāna*, ed. Aḥmad Gulchīn-Ma’ānī (Tehran: Iqbāl, 1340 sh/1961), 158–60.

52 Sharaf Khan Bidlīsī, *Sharaf-nāma*, ed. V. Véliaminof-Zernof, 2 vols (St. Petersburg, 1860–62), 2: 243. Ṭahmāsp’s successor, Ismā’īl II (r. 984–985/1576–77) squandered all these gold and silver reserves on filling the pockets of his supporters; see Qumī, *Khulāṣat*, 654; Kioumars Ghereghlou, “Esmā’īl II”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, available online at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/esmail-02>.

of *khāṣṣa* authorities in the administrative affairs of Yazd and Kirman, but 'Alī-Qulī Khan b. Shāh-'Alī Beg Shāmlū (d. 1034/1625), head of the *khāṣṣa* bureaucracy in Yazd, refused to leave the city.⁵³ This short period of political decentralization and de facto *khāṣṣa* hiatus continued until Šafar 998/December 1589, the month in which Ya'qūb Khan defeated Begtāsh Khan and seized Yazd and Kirman. As the *khāṣṣa* prefect (*dārūgha*) of Yazd, 'Alī-Qulī Khan Shāmlū tried to resist Ya'qūb Khan's efforts to place the city under the jurisdiction of the *mamālik* sector, exciting his outrage and desire for revenge.⁵⁴ On his way back to Yazd from Bāfq, where Begtāsh Khan had saved his valuables, Ya'qūb Khan sacked all Zoroastrian-populated rural settlements outside the city walls, including Na'imābād, which was administratively controlled and protected by the *khāṣṣa* sector.⁵⁵ Five years later, in Jumādā II-Rajab 1002/February 1594, a spate of torrential rain and major floods caused the destruction and depopulation of Ahristān and Na'imābād, bringing the sixteenth century to a bitter end for the Zoroastrians of Yazd.⁵⁶

3. Under the *khāṣṣa* protection, 995–1038/1587–1629

According to an early seventeenth-century historical *ravāyat*, in 1007–08/1598–1600 a Yazd-based “chief high priest” (*dastūr-i a'zam*) was the religious leader of all *bihdīn* communities in Iran, suggesting a move towards the centralization of the Zoroastrian religious institution in Yazd.⁵⁷ Until then, the Zoroastrian communities of Kirman and Yazd each had their own local religious leaders. There is evidence that for much of the early seventeenth century the *khāṣṣa* services of the Safavid bureaucracy in Yazd were highly centralized, providing Zoroastrians with more protection against local authorities. That being the case, a Zoroastrian historical narrative in verse, dated 1027/1618 and authored by a certain Sīāvakhsh-i Minūchihr, praises Shah 'Abbās as a just ruler. Similarly, the seventeenth-century jurist Muḥammad-Taqī Majlisī (1003–70/1594–1659) tells us that under Shah 'Abbās all leading Shi'ī jurists in Isfahan had sealed a written statement in which they had officially been granted the status of Zoroastrians as a protected religious minority.⁵⁸ According to Sīāvakhsh, under Shah 'Abbās “the gate of tyranny was blocked” and Zoroastrians enjoyed an era of peace and order. What is more, he records the arrival in Isfahan of a Parsee envoy called Bahman-i Isfandyār early in the reign of Shah 'Abbās. Sīāvakhsh describes the transfer of a small group of Zoroastrians and their families to Isfahan, where state authorities granted them land and money to build a new suburban settlement called Gabrābād.⁵⁹ Making incentive payments to Zoroastrian new arrivals was a quite effective mechanism of state intervention

53 See Āfūshta'ī Naṭanzī, *Nuqāvat*, 326–7; cf. Munshī Turkmān, 'Ālamārā, 418–9; tr. 595–7.

54 On 'Alī-Qulī Khan Shāmlū's refusal to retire from his *khāṣṣa* post as prefect of Yazd and leave the city, see Fazlī Beg Khūzānī Iṣfahānī, *A Chronicle of the Reign of Shah 'Abbās*, ed. Kioumars Ghereghlou (Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2015), 73.

55 Āfūshta'ī Naṭanzī, *Nuqāvat*, 330.

56 Āfūshta'ī Naṭanzī, *Nuqāvat*, 531.

57 *Jung*, 249v.

58 Muḥammad-Taqī Majlisī, *Lavāmi'-i ṣāhibqirānī*, 8 vols (Qum: Ismā'īlīān, 1993), 6: 24–5.

59 *Jung*, 147v.

to stimulate urban repopulation. Several years later, when Shah ‘Abbās was planning to transfer his capital to the forested village of Ṭāhāna (later Farahābād) in Māzandarān, the Safavid authorities granted several hundred Georgian Jews land and cash (12,000 *dinārs* per person) so that they could build a new town for themselves in the vicinity of the shah’s new capital.⁶⁰

According to a late seventeenth-century Armenian chronicler, the resettlement of Zoroastrians in Isfahan had been effectuated before 1027/1618.⁶¹ Indeed, it must have taken place no sooner than 1006/1597–8, the year in which Isfahan was designated as the new Safavid capital.⁶² Shortly before that, in late February 1003/1594, seasonal flooding of the Zāyandarūd River had destroyed much of the arable and populated areas stretching along its southern and northern banks: the flooding sparked an epidemic of famine and plague, causing further depopulation.⁶³ It was with the objective of repopulating Isfahan that Shah ‘Abbās ordered the transfer of a group of Zoroastrians to his new capital. On arrival, the Zoroastrians were settled in Hizār-Jarīb, also known as Sa‘ādatābād, a small village on the southern bank of the Zāyandarūd, where they founded Gabrābād. In the 1610s, several dozen Armenian stonemasons moved to Gabrābād with their families, suggesting that the number of Zoroastrian new arrivals was not sufficient to populate Sa‘ādatābād.⁶⁴

One of the earliest descriptions of Gabrābād is penned by Pietro della Valle, who visited Safavid Iran in 1618–21.⁶⁵ According to della Valle, under Shah ‘Abbās the Zoroastrian denizens of Gabrābād worked mostly as shawl weavers,⁶⁶ indicating that they were originally from Kirman, a major centre of goat hair weaving in Iran. It may be that the Zoroastrian shawl weavers of Gabrābād were paid by the *buyūtāt* (royal workshops and warehouses), run as part of the *khāṣṣa* administration. The author of a seventeenth-century Zoroastrian historical *mathnavī* tells us that Shah ‘Abbās supervised the financial and bureaucratic affairs of Zoroastrians in Gabrābād in person.⁶⁷ The Zoroastrian population of Gabrābād was estimated at around 100 households in the 1670s.⁶⁸ Under

60 Khūzānī Isfahānī, *Chronicle*, 705.

61 Arak‘el of Tabriz, *Book of History*, tr. George A. Bournoutian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2010), 358.

62 In an anonymous chronological account of Safavid history (892–1042/1487–1632), 26 Zu‘l-ḥajja 1006/30 July 1598 is given as the date on which Isfahan was officially declared the new capital; see *Yāddāshthā-yi tārikhī* (ms. National Library of Iran 20197), 122v. On the transfer of capital from Qazvin to Isfahan, see Stephen R. Blake, “Shah ‘Abbās and the transfer of the Safavid capital from Qazvin to Isfahan”, in Andrew J. Newman (ed.), *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 145–64.

63 Āfūshta ‘ī Naṭanzī, *Nuqāvat*, 532–3.

64 Muḥammad Ṭāhir Vaḥīd Qazvīnī, *Tārikh-i jahān-ārā-yi ‘abbāsī*, ed. Sa‘īd M. M. Šādiq (Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh-i ‘ulūm-i insānī, 1383 sh/2004), 683; Arak‘el, *History*, 359.

65 Pietro della Valle, *Viaggi*, 2 vols (Brighton, 1843), 1: 463.

66 Figueroa, *Commentarios*, 1: 296.

67 Jung, 146v.

68 Pedros Bedik, *A Man of Two Worlds: Pedros Bedik in Iran, 1670–1675*, tr. Colette Ouahes and Willem Floor (Washington DC: Mage, 2014), 41; for brief references to Zoroastrians in Isfahan in 1674, see Ambrosio Bembo, *The Travels and Journal of Ambrosio Bembo*, Engl. tr. and ed. Clara Bargellini and Anthony Welch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 329, 359–60.

‘Abbās II (1055–77/1642–66), bureaucratic authorities in Isfahan ordered the Zoroastrians of Gabrābād to evacuate the riverside strip of Hizār-Jarīb, where a new royal residential compound called Sa‘ādatābād Palace was to be built on the ruins of their houses.⁶⁹ Under the later Safavids, Capuchin missionaries in Isfahan are reported to have concentrated their proselytizing activities on the *bihdīn* population of Gabrābād in the hope of converting the ghettoized community to Christianity.⁷⁰

Another *ravāyat* from the reign of Shah ‘Abbās, drafted and signed on 13 March 1628 by a group of Zoroastrian lay leaders and religious dignitaries of Turkābād, points to the arrival in Yazd from the port city of Bandar-i ‘Abbāsī of a Parsee envoy called Bahman-i Isfandyār on 7 January 1628. The *ravāyat* in question deals mainly with the issue of rites and rituals, concluding with warnings about the impending coming of Ūshīdar-i Zartusht, the Zoroastrian saviour. *Dastūr* Bahrām-i Ardashīr’s name stands atop the list of signatories. The other *bihdīn* worthies who signed this *ravāyat* include some 20 Zoroastrian notables from Yazd. Each name is followed by a residential address; some bear the title *ra’īs*, indicating that they held office as lay community leaders presiding over Zoroastrian communities in suburban Yazd, including Sūrḳ, a small village south of Ardakān, the Pusht-i Khān-‘Alī (also Khalaf-i Khān-‘Alī) neighbourhood of Yazd, the Yaghmābād neighbourhood of Ahrīstān, Bundārābād, a rural town in Rustāq district in Maybud, and the Maḥmūdābād neighbourhood of Taft. A Zoroastrian notable from Rāvar in Kirman is also among the signatories of this *ravāyat*; he too held the title *ra’īs* and lived in Yazd, bearing witness to even closer community ties between the Zoroastrians of Yazd and their co-religionists in Kirman under Shah ‘Abbās.⁷¹

The administration of the *khāṣṣa* sector in Yazd became more centralized during the reign of Shah ‘Abbās. ‘Alī-Qulī Khan Shāmlū, who held office for more than three decades as the *khāṣṣa* prefect of Yazd, played a key role in expediting bureaucratic centralization of the *khāṣṣa* services in the city. The political clout ‘Alī-Qulī Khan wielded at the Safavid court in Isfahan helped him cement the bureaucratic hold of the *khāṣṣa* sector over Yazd. For much of his career under Shah ‘Abbās, ‘Alī-Qulī Khan was inside the Safavid ruler’s circle of intimates and had the privilege of working for a while as chief secretary (*amīr-i dīvān*) at the grand vizier’s office in Isfahan. During his stay in Isfahan, he delegated his duties in Yazd to a local deputy affiliated with the crown sector. Shortly before his death, ‘Alī-Qulī Khan retired in Tehran, which together with Ray and a number of villages in Qum had been assigned as hereditary *tiyūl* to the Shāmlū emirs. In ‘Alī-Qulī Khan’s absence, a bureaucrat from Bāfq called Mīrzā Khalīlallāh Bihābādī acted as chief *khāṣṣa* supervisor in Yazd, taking care of administrative affairs of the city’s Zoroastrians. When ‘Alī-Qulī Khan passed away in Tehran in 1034/1625, Mīrzā Khalīlallāh was

69 See Luṭfallāh Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-yi āthār-i tārikhī-i Isfahān* (Isfahan: Kitābfurūshī-i Thaqāfi, 1344 sh/1965), 575.

70 Francis Richard, *Raphaël du Mans, missionnaire en Perse au XVIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Paris: Editions l’Harmattan, 1995), 1: 23, 35–6.

71 *Jung*, 153r–156r. On place names mentioned in this *ravāyat*, see Ja‘farī, *Tārikh*, 178; Afshār, *Yādgārhā*, 2: 784.

made vizier of the Zoroastrians of Yazd.⁷² Bihābādī's years in Yazd lasted until the final years of Shah Ṣafī's reign (1038–55/1629–42). A late seventeenth-century local history described Bihābādī's tenure as an era of relative peace and comfort for the Zoroastrians of Yazd. He is reported to have been sympathetic to Zoroastrians. Citing anecdotal evidence, the same local historian pointed out that Bihābādī was careful not to allow his bureaucratic subordinates in Yazd to mistreat the *bihdīns* on account of their non-Muslim status.⁷³

Early in the seventeenth century, Yazd and its northern suburbs, including the predominantly Zoroastrian Pusht-i Khān-ʿAlī neighbourhood, had become the target of occasional raids launched from Khurāsān by the Uzbeks. As clashes with the Uzbeks dragged on well into the second decade of the reign of Shah ʿAbbās, they mounted a series of surprise attacks against central Iran, bringing Yazd and its suburbs under attack. One seventeenth-century Safavid chronicler recorded an attack against Yazd in 1005/1596–97 during which the Uzbeks laid siege to the Zoroastrian neighbourhood of Pusht-i Khān-ʿAlī. Led by ʿAlī-Qulī Khan Shāmlū, the *khāṣṣa* authorities soon intervened, arming Zoroastrians and sending a contingent of *bihdīn* fighters to repel the Uzbeks and patrol northern suburbs of the city.⁷⁴ The involvement of Zoroastrians in military activities under the Safavids can be dated to the reign of Shah Ismāʿīl. In the 1520s, a Zoroastrian military commander from Yazd, Gabr Ishāq, ranked among deputies of the Safavid governor of Herat, Durmush Khan Shāmlū (d. 929/1523).⁷⁵

In the early seventeenth century, Shah ʿAbbās' influential paternal aunt, princess Zaynab Begum (d. 1049/1640), who remained a spinster all her life as honorary fiancée of the Hidden Imam, became closely involved in the *khāṣṣa* affairs of Yazd, Isfahan and Kashan.⁷⁶ For several decades, Zaynab Begum held office as *khāṣṣa* governor of Kashan. She is reported to have had a keen interest in funding the construction of public buildings in Kashan and Isfahan. She funded and supervised the construction of a small caravanserai called Gabrābād in Qamṣar, a rural town some 20 miles south of Kashan.⁷⁷ From a seventeenth-century Safavid chronicle, we know that under Shah ʿAbbas I the cash collected

72 On Bihābādī as vizier, see Bāfqī, *Jāmiʿ*, 190. On ʿAlī-Qulī Khan's career, see Khūzānī Iṣfahānī, *Chronicle*, 315; cf. Munshī Turkmān, *ʿĀlam-ārā*, 1040; tr., 1261. For more on *amīr-i dīvān*, a post normally given to members of the royal family, see ʿAlī-Qulī Naṣīrī, *Alqāb u mavājib-i dawra-yi salāṭīn-i ṣafavīya*, ed. Yūsif Raḥīmīlū (Mashhad: Dānīshgāh-i Firdawsī, 1371 sh/1992), 33.

73 Bāfqī, *Jāmiʿ*, 191.

74 Khūzānī Iṣfahānī, *Chronicle*, 225.

75 Khʿāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 4: 585. Under Nādir Shah (r. 1148–60/1736–47) a group of Zoroastrians from Kirman held office as middle-ranking military commanders (*yūzbāshī*) in his army; see Jahāngīr Ushīdārī, “Gabr maḥalla”, in Katāyūn Mazdāpūr (ed.), *Sirawsh-i Pūr-i Mughān: Yād-nāma-yi Jamshīd Sirawshīān* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i thurayyā, 1381 sh/2002), 100.

76 For anecdotal evidence of Zaynab Begum's political clout at court under Shah ʿAbbās and Shah Ṣafī, see Khūzānī Iṣfahānī, *Chronicle*, 622–4; Muḥammad Maʿṣūm b. Khʿājagī Iṣfahānī, *Khulāṣat al-siyar*, ed. ʿĪraj Afshār (Tehran: ʿIlmī, 1368 sh/1989), 43; cf. my “Zaynab Begum”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, available online at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zaynab-begum> (accessed 14 December 2016).

77 On its location, see Maxime Siroux, *Anciennes voies et monuments routiers de la région d'Isfahān* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1971), 215.

annually as poll tax, or *jizya*, from the *bihdīns* of Yazd belonged to Zaynab Begum, a fiscal source that enabled her to underwrite the construction of such public buildings as Gabrābād Caravanserai.⁷⁸ In Qamṣar, even the labour force seems to have been provided by a group of Zoroastrians. The *bihdīn* workers and their families camped a few miles north-east of Qamṣar, where they founded a Zoroastrian village called Gabrābād (later Ḥusaynābād). Enslaving Zoroastrians as unpaid labour to be put to work in state-funded construction projects was a well-established practice in Safavid Iran. Late in the reign of Shah ‘Abbās several dozen Zoroastrians worked as slaves in a variety of urban projects funded and supervised by the Safavid governor of Kirman, Ganj-‘Alī Khan Zīk (d. 1034/1624).⁷⁹ Relatedly, the construction of a Safavid-era caravanserai called Ḥalāl in Isfahan, dating from the reign of ‘Abbās II, was also funded by cash collected as poll tax from Zoroastrians and other non-Muslim denizens of the city. From a religious viewpoint, the money collected thus was considered the “purest” and accordingly the most legitimate source of cash for investment in public building projects. Local bureaucrats in Isfahan are reported to have leased the Ḥalāl Caravanserai to merchants trading with Baghdad so that the cash revenues accrued could be spent on the shah’s daily meals and clothes.⁸⁰

Even though 1068/1658 is commonly considered the year in which Kirman was put under the jurisdiction of the *khāṣṣa* sector,⁸¹ there is evidence that the incorporation of the province into the crown sector was initiated a quarter of a century earlier. Kirman’s *khāṣṣa* transition dated back to the 1620s, shortly before the appointment of Amīr Khan Suklan Zū’l-Qadr, the keeper of the royal seals (*muhrdār*), to governor of Kirman in the autumn of 1034/1625, a position he held mainly *in absentia* until his death in 1045/1634.⁸² Amīr Khan’s predecessor in Kirman, Ṭahmāsp-Qulī Khan Turkmān (d. 1034/1625), held the same post as *tarkhān* or recipient of life-long tax exemption, which implies that Kirman had been run as a *khāṣṣa* administrative unit since 1033/1624, the year in which Ṭahmāsp-Qulī Khan’s predecessor, Ganj-‘Alī Khan Zīk, the last non-*khāṣṣa* governor of the province, died.⁸³ Early in 1035/1626, Amīr Khan sent his younger brother Qarā Khan to be deputy-governor to Kirman. Qarā Khan’s short stay is marked by the arrest, torture, and execution of a number of local bureaucrats and landed notables based on purportedly unfounded allegations of tax fraud and embezzlement. Before long, a group of local worthies

78 Khūzānī Iṣfahānī, *Chronicle*, 300.

79 Aḥmad-‘Alī Vazīrī Kirmanī, “Jughrāfiā-yi Kirmān (ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Bāstānī Pārīzī)”, *Farhang-i Īrān Zamīn* 14, 1344 sh/1965, 64; cf. Bāstānī Pārīzī, *Ganj-‘Alī Khān*, 299.

80 Anonymous, “Kāravānsarāha-yi Iṣfahān dar dawra-yi Ṣafavī (ed. Īraj Afshār)”, *Mīrāth-i Islāmī-i Īrān* 5, 1376 sh/1997, 552; Stephen Blake, *Half the World: The Social Architecture of Safavid Isfahan, 1590–1722* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 121–2.

81 Röhrborn, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt*, 122.

82 Vaḥīd Qazvīnī, *Jahān-ārā*, 277; cf. Muḥammad Sa‘īd Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira-yi Ṣafavīya-yi Kirmān*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Bāstānī Pārīzī (Tehran: Nashr-i ‘ilm, 1369 sh/1990), 185–6.

83 For details of Ṭahmāsp-Qulī Khan’s life and career as governor of Kirman, see Munshī Turkmān, *‘Alam-ārā*, 1058; tr. 1281–82; Khūzānī Iṣfahānī, *Chronicle*, 801, 923.

petitioned the *khāṣṣa* authorities in Isfahan, urging them to conduct an investigation into Qarā Khan's "crimes". In late 1035/1626, Qarā Khan was taken into custody for his high-handed treatment of the landed notables of Kirman.⁸⁴ The *khāṣṣa* authorities in Isfahan then decided to appoint two local bureaucrats as Amīr Khan's deputies in Kirman, one of whom had the task of supervising the fiscal/scribal affairs of Zoroastrians, suggesting that under Shah 'Abbās I the Zoroastrians of Kirman, like their co-religionists in Yazd, had their own *khāṣṣa* vizier.⁸⁵

Under the Safavids, some of the major collections of Zoroastrian religious texts were kept in Kirman.⁸⁶ During Amīr Khan Zu'l-Qadr's years as the *khāṣṣa* governor of Kirman, at least one anti-Zoroastrian riot is reported to have broken out in the city. According to a Zoroastrian *ravāyat*, in 1038/1629, a group of Muslim "riffraff" attacked a Zoroastrian fire temple in Kirman, killing two *hīrbads* and destroying several dozen Zoroastrian manuscripts. Further details concerning this incident are given in another *ravāyat* composed a few years later.⁸⁷ Here, it is clarified that the anti-Zoroastrian riot of 1038/1629 took place immediately after the news of Shah 'Abbās' death in Faraḥābād reached Kirman. Perhaps a faction of local authorities, who expected the *khāṣṣa* sector's control of local bureaucracy to be either dissolved or relaxed soon, seized the opportunity to pressurize authorities at the helm of the crown sector in Isfahan into relenting their hold on Kirman. Under these circumstances Zoroastrians, who continued to be the main beneficiaries and supporters of the *khāṣṣa* bureaucracy in Kirman, were singled out for punishment. During the anti-Zoroastrian riot in Kirman following the death of Shah 'Abbās, the Zoroastrian neighbourhood of Zarasp (Zarasf), where former Safavid generalissimo (*sipahsālār*) and governor of Kirman, Ganj-'Alī Khan had built a major caravanserai, was raided. The rioters looted and destroyed a fire temple and its library.⁸⁸ This incident brings into sharper focus the fragility of the *khāṣṣa* protection of Zoroastrians in Kirman and the way in which local authorities could make life harder for them during periods of political instability and administrative chaos in Isfahan.

4. Zoroastrians under the later Safavids, 1038–1135/1629–1722

The reign of Shah 'Abbās ended with two incidents that badly affected the Zoroastrian community of Kirman. The anti-Zoroastrian riot of 1038/1629 was followed by the outbreak of famine in Kirman in 1040–41/1631–32. In one Zoroastrian *ravāyat* letter, there is a reference to the onset of famine in Kirman shortly after Shah 'Abbās' death, during which several dozen Zoroastrian families and businesses were to suffer loss of life and financial ruin.⁸⁹

84 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 188.

85 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 192.

86 *Jung*, 148v. Kirman was then considered the "Piraeus" or intellectual stronghold of Zoroastrianism in Iran; see Chardin, *Voyages*, 4: 260.

87 Sirawshīān, *Zartushīān*, 27.

88 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 196.

89 Sirawshīān, *Zartushīān*, 27.

Under Shah Ṣafī, the Zoroastrian high priest in Kirman, Nūshīravān of Zarasp represented the *bīhdīn* population of the city with the Safavid bureaucratic authorities in Isfahan. Perhaps he was co-opted by the *khāṣṣa* sector to act as vizier of the Zoroastrians in Kirman. Nūshīravān held the post of *dastūr* for about two decades starting in 1038/1629–30. He continued to look after the bureaucratic affairs of Kirman Zoroastrians until 1059–60/1649–50, the year in which Mīrzā Hāshim Khurāsānī of Herat was made *khāṣṣa* vizier.⁹⁰ During the 1630s–40s, Kirman saw a period of relative administrative stability, which helped the Zoroastrians, who mostly worked in agriculture, to prosper. Towards the end of Shah Ṣafī's reign, local authorities in Kirman had lowered taxes on foodstuffs in order to speed up recovery from the famine of 1040–41/1631–32.⁹¹ This in turn caused an influx of Zoroastrians from the famine-stricken provinces of Sistan and Makrān.⁹² The overpopulation and physical expansion of Zarasp that took place during these years prepared the way for its annexation in the latter part of the seventeenth century to Guvāshīr, the central, predominantly Muslim, neighbourhood of Kirman.

Khāṣṣa protection had still its own institutional weaknesses, making Zoroastrians vulnerable to fiscal abuses meted out by local authorities. In 1054/1644–45, the *khāṣṣa* prefect of the Zoroastrians of Yazd, Mīr Kamāl Bundarābādī, was dismissed and incarcerated on charges of fiscal fraud, extortion and maltreatment of the *bīhdīn* population of the city.⁹³ In Kirman too Zoroastrians were to endure over-taxation and other fiscal pressures at the hands of local bureaucrats. There was occasional disruption to the taxation process resulting in backlogs. Delays were mostly due to local bureaucrats' inaction, as temporary suspension of taxation gave them an opportunity to voice their discontent with the unwillingness of *khāṣṣa* authorities in Isfahan to turn over their bureaucratic powers to local grandees in Kirman. In 1066/1655, 'Abbās II ordered the *khāṣṣa* vizier of Kirman to work with an interim fiscal inspector appointed from Isfahan to investigate the slow stream of tax money from Kirman to Isfahan. The inspector was also charged with setting up a workable tax payment plan for Zoroastrians so they could pay off their overdue taxes in instalments.⁹⁴ Yet this move came to nothing due to lack of co-operation between the *khāṣṣa* inspector and local bureaucrats, who wanted the shah to loosen the centralized management of *khāṣṣa* services in Kirman, a move that enabled them to take a share of the taxes imposed on Zoroastrians for themselves.⁹⁵ Putting fiscal pressure on the Zoroastrian clients of the *khāṣṣa* services of the Safavid bureaucracy was one way for bureaucrats in Kirman to leverage their micromanagement powers. Moreover, the delayed levying of tax on Zoroastrians enabled them to send a symbolic message to the imperial administration that local agents could easily sabotage the revenue stream of the *khāṣṣa* sector.

90 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 217.

91 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 207–8.

92 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 278.

93 Bāfīqī, *Jāmi'*, 502–3.

94 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 242–3. During this period, bureaucrats in charge of collecting poll tax were normally Zoroastrian; see Sirawshīān, *Zartushtīān*, 22.

95 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 244–5.

During this period a number of *bihdīn* notables of Kirman were forced to convert to Islam. On at least one occasion in 1066/1655, the year of ‘Abbās II’s enthronement, a group of provincial bureaucrats held a major parade and public banquet celebrating with unprecedented fanfare the conversion to Islam of two prominent members of the Zoroastrian community in Kirman. This took place shortly after court officials in Isfahan had refused to decentralize the administration of fiscal services of the *khāṣṣa* sector, signalling local bureaucrats’ determination to use a combination of brute force and political campaigning to subvert the influence of *khāṣṣa* authorities and their allies in Kirman. By the end of the year, the young Safavid ruler gave in to local pressure and agreed to contract out the key *khāṣṣa* positions in Kirman to a cohort of provincial bureaucrats.⁹⁶ At that time, Ardashīr-i Nūshīravān of Zarasp held office as high priest in Kirman. In a *ravāyat* penned by him in 1061/1651, i.e. about four years before the forced conversion to Islam of the two above-mentioned *bihdīn* community leaders in Kirman, *dastūr* Ardashīr points to prevalent discontent and a sense of “anguished misery” among the Zoroastrians who “all are worried and looking forward anxiously to see better times”.⁹⁷

So far as Zoroastrians were concerned, the decision of the Safavid authorities in Isfahan, in 1066–67/1655–56, to limit their involvement in the *khāṣṣa* sector in Kirman proved a change for the worse, paving the way for a new round of systematic discrimination against the *bihdīns*. In the three years following the assignment of the *khāṣṣa* sector in Kirman to provincial bureaucrats, central authorities in Isfahan received hundreds of individual petitions from the *bihdīns*, all complaining about fiscal abuses and extractions from non-*khāṣṣa* contractors in Kirman. Before long, a group of Zoroastrians, led by a certain Suhrāb, travelled to Isfahan to submit their petitions to ‘Abbās II. This they managed to do during one of the royal outings in Sa‘ādātābād. But instead of conducting an independent investigation in Isfahan, court officials forwarded these petitions to provincial authorities in Kirman, asking them to give a verdict on the issue. This decision, and subsequent efforts by provincial bureaucrats to buy time and eventually kill the inquest, occasioned an anti-government demonstration in Kirman in summer 1068/1658, during which hundreds of Zoroastrian protesters swarmed the local governor’s office at Naẓar Garden in Guvāshīr, forcing him to call for the *Shaykh al-Islām* and the *Kalāntar* to sit down with the Zoroastrian grandees and find a way to lower the rate of their poll tax.⁹⁸

The grand vizier Muḥammad Beg’s (d. 1083/1672) campaign against religious minorities contextualized the plight of Zoroastrians in Kirman in the late 1650s. While Muḥammad Beg’s persecution of the Jews in Isfahan has received much attention,⁹⁹ the maltreatment of Zoroastrians during the same period has only briefly been noted in modern scholarship. In general, emphasis has

96 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 247–8.

97 Sirawshīān, *Zartushstīān*, 26.

98 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 251–2.

99 See Ezra Spicandler, “The persecution of the Jews of Isfahan under Shāh ‘Abbās II (1642–1666)”, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46, 1975, 331–56; and Vera B. Moreen, “The downfall of Muḥammad [‘Alī] Beg, grand vizier of Shah ‘Abbās II (reigned 1642–1666)”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72/2, 1981, 81–99.

been given to the religious and sectarian factors behind the state crackdown on religious minorities under Muḥammad Beg, which, as we will see in the case of Zoroastrians, were of inconsequential implications. The mounting fiscal pressures on Zoroastrians early in the 1650s coincided with the sharp debasement of Safavid coinage under ‘Abbās II. The monetary crisis of the 1650s bankrupted many business owners and merchants in Isfahan and other major urban centres, including Kirman.¹⁰⁰ The economic downturn is reported to have reached its pinnacle in 1065–66/1654–55, the years in which the Zoroastrians of Kirman had been subjected to over-taxation.

As regards status quo in Yazd during the seventeenth century, it took several decades for Ahristān to recover and repopulate following the devastating floods of the winter of 1002–03/1594. Early in the 1670s, it is described once again as a prosperous, predominantly Zoroastrian neighbourhood.¹⁰¹ In Sha‘ban 1077/January–February 1667, the former *khāṣṣa* prefect of Qazvin, Kamāl al-Dīn Allāh-Qulī Beg, was made vizier of Yazd. The appointment letter issued in his name, which is partially reproduced in a local history of Yazd, clarifies that he had at the same time been charged with working as vizier of Zoroastrians. Prior to his promotion to *khāṣṣa* vizier of Yazd, Allāh-Qulī Beg owned several *tiyūl* land grants in the vicinity of Ahristān and Na‘īmābād, suggesting that the Zoroastrians knew him personally and might have a say in his promotion to their vizier.¹⁰² Allāh-Qulī Beg’s appointment seems to have been made with the aim of further centralizing the *khāṣṣa* sector in Yazd, but increasing career instability among crown sector recruits in the closing quarter of the seventeenth century had already sapped the effectiveness of any attempt at administrative centralization. Following Allāh-Qulī Beg’s death in 1079/1669, his son Muḥammad Khalīl Beg took over his father’s post as vizier of the Zoroastrians. The latter is said to have worked as a deputy of the Queen Mother in Yazd,¹⁰³ implying that long after princess Zaynab Begum’s demise, female members of the royal family were still allocated a share of Zoroastrians’ poll tax. Less than two years after his appointment as vizier, however, on 17 Rajab 1081/20 November 1670, Muḥammad Khalīl Beg resigned and left for India via Basra.¹⁰⁴

The hold of the *khāṣṣa* sector on the fiscal/scrival affairs of Kirman was also about to unravel in the 1670s–80s. In 1087/1676, the local historian Muḥammad Sa‘īd Mashīzī Bardsīrī reports that for two consecutive fiscal years Zoroastrians had managed not to pay their poll taxes.¹⁰⁵ In the same year, however, they were coerced into paying the delayed taxes as a lump sum. A local tax collector then

100 For a brief narrative in verse on the monetary crisis under ‘Abbās II, see Īraj Afshār, “Inqilāb-i diram dar zamān-i Shāh ‘Abbās-i duvvum”, *Tārīkh* 1, 1355/1976, 267–74.

101 Bāfqī, *Jāmi‘*, 673.

102 Bāfqī, *Jāmi‘*, 206–15.

103 Bāfqī, *Jāmi‘*, 226, 759.

104 Bāfqī, *Jāmi‘*, 760.

105 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 452. It is reported that in the 1670s a group of Shi‘i religious dignitaries in Kirman banned Zoroastrians from living in the Muslim-populated neighbourhoods of the city, forcing them to take up residence in a new ghetto called Gabr-Maḥalla outside city walls; see Aḥmad-‘Alī Vazīrī, *Tārīkh-i Kirmān*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Bāstānī Parīzī (Tehran: ‘Ilmī, 1370 sh/1991), 27; cf. Ushīdarī, “Gabr maḥalla”, 98.

ordered an increase in the rate of the poll tax for the following year. The decision to increase poll tax rates soon excited outrage among the *bihdīns* of Kirman. They first prepared and signed a petition, protesting against the “abuses” from the new tax collector, a certain Aḥmad Āqā, who worked for non-*khāṣṣa* agents in Kirman. The *khāṣṣa* authorities in Isfahan threw their weight behind this petition in a bid to win the shah’s support and eventually take total control of the *khāṣṣa* sector in Kirman. In the summer of 1093/1682, the grand vizier, Shaykh ‘Alī Khan Zangana (d. 1100/1689) ordered provincial bureaucrats in Kirman to conduct an investigation into Aḥmad Āqā’s maltreatment of Zoroastrians. Provincial authorities were slow to respond to complaints from Zoroastrians. To counter the inaction of provincial authorities, the Zoroastrians accused Mahdī-Qulī Beg, an ally of Aḥmad Āqā and the non-*khāṣṣa* prefect of Kirman in charge of the investigation, of forcing an underage Zoroastrian girl to be married off to one of his Muslim subordinates, calling for the *khāṣṣa* authorities in Isfahan to pressurize him and his allies in Kirman into co-operating with Zoroastrians and working out a balanced poll tax plan for the coming fiscal year.¹⁰⁶ But all this was in vain. Next year, Shaykh ‘Alī Khan Zangana (d. 1101/1690) commanded one of his underlings in Isfahan, a *ghulām* called ‘Isā Beg, to travel to Kirman where he was supposed to arbitrate between the Zoroastrians and provincial non-*khāṣṣa* bureaucrats over the issue of poll tax.

‘Isā Beg had been instructed to conduct a cadastral land survey during his stay in Kirman based on official registers of the province. He also had orders to draft an updated report detailing all *khāliṣa* (state-owned landed properties) land tenure contracts issued in the name of the Zoroastrian worthies of Kirman since the opening decades of the seventeenth century. This report was intended to help the *khāṣṣa* authorities in Isfahan determine the exact amount of poll tax to be collected from Zoroastrians. Yet provincial, non-*khāṣṣa* authorities were intent on extracting more cash from the Zoroastrians in the form of high-rate poll tax. Therefore, they refused to allow ‘Isā Beg to see the official registers of the province, leaving him with no choice but to abandon his original plan of conducting a cadastral land survey. Eventually, ‘Isā Beg drafted a report drawing only on the available copies of land tenure contracts and royal edicts issued in the name of successive generations of Zoroastrian grandees of Kirman. ‘Isā Beg was an ally of the Zoroastrians, so in his report he recommended that poll tax rates be lowered considerably.¹⁰⁷ In the summer of 1095/1684, ‘Isā Beg submitted his report to Shah Sulaymān (1077–1105/1666–94) in Isfahan. The Safavid monarch praised him for the “services” he had rendered to the Safavid crown during his stay in Kirman, implying that a royal order was in the offing to decrease the poll tax rates imposed on the Zoroastrians of Kirman. Provincial bureaucrats from Kirman were quick to use their political clout at court to counter such a move. Eventually, they managed to persuade the shah to issue a royal edict permitting the extraction of high-rate poll tax from the Zoroastrians, an outcome that undid the reforms planned and initiated under grand vizier Shaykh ‘Alī Khan Zangana.

106 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkīra*, 490–91.

107 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkīra*, 499–501.

In the meantime, a group of Zoroastrian poll tax collectors in Kirman – known locally as *sar-kalla-gūr* – who had recently been urged by ‘Isā Beg to travel from Kirman to Isfahan to lobby the grand vizier and other court officials to persuade them to bring the Zoroastrians of Kirman back under the jurisdiction of the *khāṣṣa* sector, were stabbed to death in their beds by a gang of “thieves” at ‘Isā Beg’s house. These murders resulted in the *ad hoc* reversal of the decision, endorsed by the shah, that allowed provincial, non-*khāṣṣa* bureaucrats in Kirman to impose higher tax rates on Zoroastrians. Thus ‘Isā Beg was appointed chief *khāṣṣa* tax collector in Kirman and the Zoroastrians were instructed to pay their poll tax at a reduced, fixed rate.¹⁰⁸ Two years later, in 1097/1686, Sulaymān ordered court officials in Isfahan to return the right to collect poll tax from Zoroastrians to non-*khāṣṣa* authorities in Kirman, a decision that heralded the downfall of ‘Isā Beg.¹⁰⁹ For the Zoroastrians, the decentralization of the poll tax administration in Kirman meant the renewal of persecution and abuses from non-*khāṣṣa* authorities. This arrangement remained in place under the next grand vizier, Muḥammad Ṭāhīr Vaḥīd Qazvīnī (d. 1112/1700–01), and throughout the years leading up to the downfall of the Safavid dynasty in autumn 1135/1722. An early eighteenth-century European observer in Isfahan believed that the fiscal disputes over the Zoroastrians of Kirman boiled down to Shah Sulaymān’s desire to convert all *bīhdīns* in Iran to Islam.¹¹⁰ However, no Persian narrative source supports this claim.

The reign of Shah Sulṭān-Ḥusayn (1105–35/1694–1722) saw an unprecedented rise in the number and frequency of raids mounted by the Baluchi bandits of Sistan against Kirman and its outlying rural settlements. In Rajab 1100/April–May 1689, a group of these bandits sacked Rāvar, a rural town some 80 miles north of Kirman, and killed several dozen Zoroastrians.¹¹¹ Later the same year, a group of Abdālī marauders from Khurāsān invaded Rāvar. Subsequently, the roads from Kirman to Qandahar and Herat became unsafe and almost all long-distance trade caravans funded and organized by the Parsee and Hindu merchants stopped operating.¹¹² The raids reached the city of Kirman itself as early as 1100/1689. The invaders targeted local merchants and retailers, including the Parsee Zoroastrians and their Hindu counterparts who were active in overland trade between Kirman and Gujarat.¹¹³

Later in the reign of Sulṭān-Ḥusayn, provincial bureaucrats in Kirman, who had incurred huge losses due to unfolding chaos and instability in central and southern Iran, decided to increase once more the poll tax levied on the Zoroastrians. There were scattered protests against this decision, and a lay leader of the Zoroastrian community in Kirman called Rustam wrote a petition addressed to court authorities in Isfahan. But before he made it to Isfahan to submit his petition to the office of grand vizier, Rustam was abducted and then

108 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 510–12.

109 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 529.

110 Tadeusz Jan Krusiński, *The History of the Late Revolutions of Persia*, 2 vols (London, 1733), 2: 197.

111 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 547.

112 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 563, 565–7.

113 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 568–9.

murdered by a group of “Zoroastrian riffraff”, who were reportedly resentful of his rumoured conversion to Islam. On Rustam’s death, the Zoroastrian notables who had co-signed his petition began to flee from Kirman along with their families. A few months later, the provincial vizier of Kirman sent a report to the court in Isfahan, wherein he accused Zoroastrian “thugs” of abducting and murdering Rustam.¹¹⁴ The *khāṣṣa* authorities in Isfahan had barely begun to investigate Rustam’s murder when, in Zu’l-ḥajja 1101/September 1690, the Afghans of Qandahar launched their first major attack on Kirman, ushering in an era of unprecedented mayhem and anarchy that ended the effective control of the *khāṣṣa* authorities over the province, enabling local bureaucrats and military powerbrokers to bring the Zoroastrians under their total control.¹¹⁵

Shortly before the downfall of the Safavid dynasty, provincial authorities in Kirman enslaved all male Zoroastrian inhabitants of the city, forcing them to work on local fortifications.¹¹⁶ When Kirman eventually fell to the Afghans in Muḥarram 1132/November 1719, the invaders took hostage a group of Zoroastrian community leaders to force their relatives and co-religionists in Sistan and Yazd to fight with them as slaves and mercenaries against pro-Safavid forces in Isfahan.¹¹⁷ The plight of Zoroastrians under the Afghans was worse than anything they had experienced under the Safavids. Anecdotal evidence provided by Armenian, Muslim, and Zoroastrian agents of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) points to the violent treatment of the Zoroastrians of Kirman by the Afghans. Their eyewitness testimony calls into question the claim in an early eighteenth-century European travelogue that the Afghan invaders of Kirman and Isfahan were the liberators of the Zoroastrians from the yoke of the Safavids.¹¹⁸ Under the Afghans, the military governor of Kirman looted and set fire to Zarasp, destroying the houses and businesses of almost all *bīhdīn* denizens of the city. What is more, several dozen Zoroastrian prisoners-cum-mercenaries from Kirman were forced by the Afghans to take part in their marauding expeditions against rural settlements south of the city.¹¹⁹ The participation of the Zoroastrians in anti-Safavid military campaigns in central and southern Iran helped them appease the Afghan emirs, who as a reward for their collaboration, spared the lives of almost all *bīhdīns* in Yazd, Kirman and Isfahan.¹²⁰

5. Concluding remarks

Throughout the Safavid period the persecution of Zoroastrians had little to do with religious bigotry and sectarian intolerance, but was closely related to the fact that for much of this period the administration of fiscal affairs was a

114 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 575–7.

115 Mashīzī Bardsīrī, *Tazkira*, 578–83.

116 Willem Floor (ed.), *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia, 1721–1729* (Paris: Association pour l’avancement des études iraniennes, 1998), 43.

117 Floor, *Afghan Occupation*, 46.

118 Krusiński, *Revolutions*, 2: 197.

119 Floor, *Afghan Occupation*, 50.

120 Floor, *Afghan Occupation*, 57, 93, 227.

major bone of contention between the central and provincial services of the Safavid bureaucracy. In Yazd, the Safavid invasion of the city in 910/1505 saved Zoroastrians from the perils of living under the rule of a local claimant to Mahdīshīp backed by an influential clique of prominent Nūrbakhshī demagogues, landed notables and provincial bureaucrats.

Zoroastrians in Iran made their first contacts with their Parsee co-religionists in Gujarat under the early Safavids. The *ravāyat* letters sent from Yazd and Kirman to Gujarat during the early sixteenth century come with fragmentary references to the circumstances under which the Zoroastrians lived and were treated by state authorities in Iran. The *ravāyat* literature shows that in the 1510s–20s there was a friendly power relationship between Shah Ismā‘īl and the Zoroastrians of Yazd. It also sheds light on the travails they went through during the chaos that ensued following the death of Shah Ṭahmāsp in 984/1576, and shortly thereafter during the decades leading up to ‘Abbās’ rise to power in 995/1587.

While Yazd was incorporated into the *khāṣṣa* sector in the mid sixteenth century, the assignment of Kirman to *khāṣṣa* authorities began in the reign of Shah Ṣafī. More than any other period in Safavid history it was under Shah ‘Abbās and his immediate successors that the dynamics of *khāṣṣa* protection shaped the routine of daily life among the Zoroastrians of Yazd, Kirman, and Isfahan. Under Shah ‘Abbās, the *khāṣṣa* services of the Safavid bureaucracy in Yazd became more centralized. The *khāṣṣa* sector supervised the levying and collection of poll tax from the Zoroastrians. The *khāṣṣa* also appointed viziers of Zoroastrians in Yazd and Kirman, charging them with overseeing the community’s bureaucratic affairs locally. Under the Safavids, several female members of the royal family were closely involved in the administrative affairs of the Zoroastrian community in Yazd and benefitted from their cash and free labour.

The crown sector was supposed to supervise the year-by-year collection of poll tax from Zoroastrians in Yazd and Kirman, shielding them from the fiscal abuses of local notables and non-*khāṣṣa* bureaucrats in both provinces. In exchange for their protection, authorities in charge of the *khāṣṣa* sector enslaved Zoroastrians and spent the cash extracted from them as poll tax on the construction of public buildings such as caravanserais. Under Shah ‘Abbās, the crown sector also forced a small group of Zoroastrians to move, together with their families, to the southern outskirts of Isfahan. The Zoroastrian new arrivals were professional shawl weavers and worked for the royal workshops and warehouses in Isfahan.

The *khāṣṣa* protection was not sustainable and had its limits. For brief intervals during the late seventeenth century, the Zoroastrians of Kirman and Yazd were subject to systematic fiscal discrimination by non-*khāṣṣa* bureaucrats. In general, bureaucratic authorities at the helm of the crown sector in Isfahan sympathized with Zoroastrians and did what they could to ameliorate their living standards in the face of over-taxation and extortion by local authorities in Kirman and Yazd. Under the later Safavids, the *bihdīns* of Kirman wielded a level of political clout at the Safavid court that enabled them to challenge local authorities and non-*khāṣṣa* agents in Kirman. However, the intervention of the *khāṣṣa* authorities on behalf of Zoroastrians never took institutionalized

form, leaving the door open for local agents to keep Zoroastrians down and abuse them on a regular basis.

In the late seventeenth century, the lack of a centralized mechanism of supervision and intervention on the one hand, and the growing insecurity in central and eastern provinces of Iran on the other, exposed Zoroastrians to even harsher forms of abuse, extortion and violence at the hands of provincial authorities in Kirman and Yazd. The downfall of the Safavid dynasty early in the 1720s only worsened the plight of the Zoroastrians, leaving many of them with no choice but to fight against other Iranians as mercenaries in the service of the Afghan rebels of Qandahar.