A Murder in Medieval Yazd

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Abstract

Perhaps, appropriately, crime and criminality only enter the local histories of Yazd, the ʿTārīkh-i Yazd *and the* Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd, *by stealth.*[1] *The interests and concerns of the authors of the local histories lay elsewhere, in describing the topography of the city, its religious edifices and shrines, noting its pious, learned and great inhabitants and recording its history from earliest times; and indeed if the authors were writing about a city endowed with the title Dār al-ʿIbāda, the Abode of Piety, it is unsurprising that crimes or criminal acts are largely absent from the text and so, only one or two accounts of crime feature in the local histories. However, the ordering of society and the maintenance of this order constitute a central topic in medieval Persian writings, including the histories.*

This is not a hypothetical question. The practical provision for the poor by means of *waqf*s, the religious and other endowments, established by notables and great men of state, was part of the ordering of society, which they aimed to ensure by the establishment and support of a range of public institutions such as *madrasa*s, hospitals, *khanqah*s and *hamām*s. This can be seen in the *waqf* of one of the notables of Yazd, Rukh al-Dīn, who was a *sayyid* and the Shafiʿi *qāḍī* of Yazd. The *waqf* dates from the early 8th/14th century and amongst other things, provided for the feeding of the indigent on a daily basis.[2] The establishment of a beneficent society went alongside the proper punishment of criminals for their deeds, both elements of his role in society.

In the early 8th/14th century, the officers of law and order in cities throughout the Il Khanate were the governor (*wālī*, *ḥākim*), the *shiḥna* (sheriff or police chief), whose Mongol equivalent was the *dārūgha*, and the judge, the *qāḍī*.[3] How these offices and the individuals who held them operated, their effectiveness, and indeed whether some positions were occupied or left vacant, varied according to the conditions of time and place. Ultimately, the effectiveness of any individual holding one of these posts depended on his power in local

[1] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, (ed.) Iraj Afshar (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1960) and Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Kātib, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, (ed.) Iraj Afshar (Tehran, 1345 Sh./1966), both written in the post Il-Khanid period, the first in the late 9th/14th century and the second in the late 9th/15th century. Bafqī's history, the *Jāmiʿ-i Mufīdī*, being written in the latter half of the 10th/17th century, as regards the era of the Il Khanate is largely an expansion and commentary on the material in these two earlier works.

[2] Iraj Afshar, *Yādgar-hā-ye Yazd*, 2 vols (Tehran, 1354 Sh./1977), vol. 2, p. 407.

[3] A. K. S. Lambton, *Continuity and change in Medieval Persia* (New York, 1988), p. 73.

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terms as well as his relationship with the centre of power, which in the period discussed in this article, lay in Tabrīz, the capital of the Il Khanate, and at the court of the Il Khān.

The story of a crime discussed here, one of the rare instances of a crime recounted in the local histories of Yazd, the murder of a Christian *khwāja* and the role it played in the conflict between the family of the former rulers of Yazd, the Atābaks and Rukn al-Dīn, is important because it reflects a great deal of what was going on in the Il Khanate at the time. It demonstrates that the ordering of society and the observance of law were fragile even after the re-establishment of Islam in the empire, that the contest and conflicts at the centre of power had a marked effect on life in the regions, and indeed vice versa. It sheds a light, however brief, on the local conflicts in Yazd and so conveys a sense of the complexities of social structures in the late Il Khanate.

Initially in the Mongol period, from about the middle of the 7th/13th century onwards, Yazd was governed by hereditary rulers, the Atābaks who had taken control of the city from the Kakuyids, a Daylamī dynasty, in the late 6th/12th century.[4] At some point in the 640s/1240s, the Atābaks of Yazd had submitted to Ögödei, the successor to Chinggis Khan. As a result the Atābaks provided some stability for Yazd and seem to have protected it, first from attack and later from outright exploitation by the conquering Mongols. Elsewhere in the early decades of Mongol rule the general confusion and uncertainty arising out of the conquests and alien rule must have made it very difficult to know with any certainty who was actually in control. After the break-up of the Mongol Empire in the 660s/1260s, it was the presence of the Il Khān, his army, or his *amīr*s that demonstrated who was in control.[5] But as far as the Mongol *amīr*s were concerned, there is little evidence of interest in the details of ordering the settled society they had conquered beyond ensuring that they were unquestioningly obeyed and that whatever material goods they wanted were supplied.

This situation meant that Muslim officials ruling over cities and provinces throughout the empire were in the unhappy and precarious position of both seeking to keep their Mongol masters content through a sufficient supply of revenue and maintaining the norms of orderly life that would ensure the revenue demanded by the Mongols was produced and collected. According to the testimony of the great historian and Il Khanid vizier, Rashīd al-Dīn, the relationship between authority and society had radically changed. The role of religion, specifically of Islam, in defining the nature of society, of authority and its source, the relationship between God and humanity, that is the covenant in which was determined the rights of God (*ḥuqūq Allāh*) and the rights of man (*ḥuqūqī insānī*), had ceased to be of any practical judicial and political relevance. The lands of the Il Khanid Empire were no longer part of the *dār al-islām* or the *dār al-ʿadl*.[6]

The levelling of the Muslim population to subject status under the dominion by non-Muslims who generally adhered to Central Asian shamanistic beliefs but also converted to other faiths, such as Buddhism or Nestorian Christianity, was another product of Mongol domination. Their rule kindled resentment and friction which, although by no means

[4]S. C. Fairbanks, 'Atābakān-e Yazd', *EIr*; Jaʿfari, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 23.

[5]David O. Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 163–167, and his *Medieval Persia 1040–1797* (London and New York, 1988), pp. 67, 74–75. See also his encyclopaedia article, 'Mongols', *EI2*, vol. 7, pp. 230–235.

[6]See A. K. S. Lambton, 'Changing Concepts of Justice and Injustice from the 5th/11th Century to the 8th/14th Century in Persia: The Saljuq Empire and the Ilkhanate', *Studia Islamica*, 68 (1988), p. 31.

universal, nonetheless erupted at various times after the Mongols converted to Islam, for instance in the form of opportunistic attacks on Christians and Jews, such as the killing of Nestorian Christians at Irbīl, the centre of their church, in the reign of Abū Saʿīd, and perhaps also the attacks on Jews in Tabrīz after the execution of Rashīd al-Dīn, who was a convert from Judaism, in 718/1318, accused of poisoning the Il Khān Öljeitü.[7]

Throughout all this, the Atābaks of Yazd continued to rule the province and embellish the city, managing to accommodate themselves to Mongol rule so that, as loyal vassals of the Il Khāns, they enjoyed a considerable degree of independence. Indeed, Yazd seems to have prospered, particularly under the Atābak Tagā Shāh who died in 670/1271–1272.[8]

When the Atābaks' downfall occurred it seems to have been caused by a failure to appreciate the changes being introduced by Ghāzān Khān in the late 7th/13th century, or with the current Atābak, Yūsuf Shāh, a son of Tagā Shāh, failing to realise how much things were changing or finding no means of negotiating his way through the dilemmas they presented. He defied the *dārūgha*, Amīr Yasūdar, sent by Ghāzān Khān to Yazd to collect the arrears of the land tax, *kharāj*, and to summon him to the *ordo* apparently to be confirmed as governor of Yazd. He tried negotiation, using his mother as a mediator, but that was unsuccessful so he attacked the *dārūghā* in an ambush (*shabīkhūn*) and took hostages. Ghāzān then sent a force, according to the sources some 30,000 men, at any event a large contingent, under another Mongol *amīr* to reassert his authority over Yazd.[9] These events are a rather distorted reflection of Ghāzān's desire to introduce reforms, create ordered methods of government, and establish a series of defined *iqṭā*s, or land grants, as a basis for provincial government and payment of the military.[10]

The arrival of a Mongol force was followed by a complex series of events which various modern historians have attempted to untangle from the sources. Yūsuf Shāh fled, either to Sīstān or Khurāsān, the accounts in the sources vary. Yazd was now to be ruled by a *dārūgha* directly answerable to the central administration of the state. The notables and population of Yazd came out to meet the new governor and to make clear to him that they had had no part in the recent events.[11] However, Yūsuf Shāh seems to have been pardoned by Ghāzān and restored to some kind of position in Yazd. He had connections at court and links to some of the most powerful individuals there, built up over the years by his forebears. Eventually, for reasons not explained, he fell out of line again and was executed. His sons nonetheless remained in Yazd with some kind of diminished standing.[12]

[7]Christelle Jullien, 'Martyrs, Christian', *EIr*, Peter Jackson, 'Abū Saʿīd Bahādor Khān', *EIr* and Charles Melville, 'Čobān', *EIr*.

[8]S. C. Fairbanks, 'Atābakān-e Yazd', *EIr*; Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, pp. 23–26; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, pp. 66–74.

[9]S. C. Fairbanks, 'Atābakān-e Yazd', *EIr*; Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, pp. 26–27; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, pp. 74–76.

[10]See David O. Morgan, *The Mongols*, pp. 167–170; idem, *Medieval Persia 1040–1797*, pp. 74–76; and B. Manz, 'The rule of the infidels: the Mongols and the Islamic world', in ed. D. O. Morgan and A. Reid, 'The Eastern Islamic World Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries', *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 151–152.

[11]S. C. Fairbanks, 'Atābakān-e Yazd', *EIr*; Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, pp. 27–28; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, pp. 74–76.

[12]S. C. Fairbanks, *Ibid*.

In Öljeitü's reign, administrative control of central and southern Iran was given to the vizier Rashīd al-Dīn. During this period and in the early years of Abū Saʿīd's reign, the status of the family of the Atābaks seems to have been in a state of flux. There were now other individuals in Yazd who were influential, the *sayyid*s such as Rukn al-Dīn, who were descendents of a son of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, ʿAlī al-ʿArīdī, flourishing under a regime which favoured the establishment of civilian authority, represented by administrators such as Rashīd al-Dīn.[13] Rashīd al-Dīn's connection to Yazd is of particular importance – he came there as a young man, as a physician, though whether before or after his conversion to Islam is unclear. There was a Jewish community in Yazd where many of them worked as dyers. There were two Jewish districts in Yazd in the 20th century, and the richer district housed a community from Hamadān. Although one is here talking about events six hundred years earlier, nonetheless Hamadān was Rashīd al-Dīn's city of origin and the community in Yazd was one of the oldest in Iran, so though this may be purely coincidental, yet it may be this ancient Jewish community that initially drew him there, particularly since the Jews of Yazd were also noted for their learning.[14] Whatever was the case, once in Yazd he was befriended by at least one local dignitary. The local histories say that before he became a state functionary he travelled a great deal in pursuit of the study of medicine.[15] The physicians of the medieval world, who were not only expert in medicine but in philosophy and the natural sciences, constituted a broad community of learning that was inclusive and could disregard religious affiliations. In Yazd Rashīd al-Dīn encountered notables (*akābir*) greatly learned in medicine, in particular Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī and Shams al-Dīn Riḍā, *sayyid*s with whom he then stayed. When he was a vizier, Rashīd al-Dīn remembered their kindnesses and brought Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī to the Il Khānid court and gave him a position of authority. Another notable of Yazd also benefitted during his vizierate, the father of Rukn al-Dīn, Niẓām al-Dīn who was made *mufti al-mamalik*.[16]

At some point in the early 8th/14th century Rukn al-Dīn began building his *madrasa* complex in Yazd, of which only his mausoleum now remains.[17] However, this complex abutted onto, or stood next to, establishments erected by the Atābaks: first there was the *madrasa* of Mahmūd Shāh and they had put up another *madrasa* nearby as well, with tall minarets and a green-tiled dome which was, the *Tārīkh-i Yazd* implies, a response or challenge to Rukn al-Dīn.[18] Although by the first decades of the reign of Abū Saʿīd (r. 716–736//1316–1335), they no longer ran the city and province, nonetheless the family of the Atābaks was still of importance in Yazd. In the *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, it says that Yazd was in their possession: '*bidishān taʿālaq dasht*'.[19] Thus they were challenged during the building projects of Rukn al-Dīn and he presumably regarded them as contenders for social authority and pre-eminence in the

[13]See Jean Aubin, 'Patronage culturel sous les Ilkhans: Une Grande Famille de Yazd', *Le monde iranien et l'islam*, 3 (1975), pp. 107–118.

[14]Thamar E. Gindin, 'Yazd iv. The Jewish Dialect of Yazd', *EIr*; Walter J. Fischel [Amnon Netzer], 'Yezd', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, second edition.

[15]Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 88; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, p. 134.

[16]Jean Aubin, 'Patronage culturel sous les Ilkhans', p. 112.

[17]Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, pp. 83–84, and Iraj Afshar, *Yādgar-hā-yi Yazd*, 2 vols (Tehran 1354 Sh./1977), vol. 2 for the text of the *waqfnāma* for Rukn al-Dīn's endowment followed by that of his son in the *Jāmiʿ al-Khairat*.

[18]Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, pp. 81–82; see Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, pp. 125–126 which says that the Madrasa Maḥmūd Shāhī was restored, '*naw kard*'.

[19]Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 84; Jean Aubin, 'Patronage culturel sous les Ilkhans', pp. 112–113.

city. One may assume that these individuals included the sons of Yūsuf Shāh, ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla and Salghūr Shāh. But the *Tārīkh-i Yazd* is very cautious on this point, giving no names and simply using the title in the plural '*atābakān*', which implies the family as a whole, and also implies that it was still going by the same title. The *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, displaying its author's urge to expand on and tidy up the lacunae of the *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, gives the name Yūsuf Shāh.[20] It has been suggested by Derek Mancini-Lander that this could have been a standard name used by members of the family, a standard official name. It seems unlikely, given the time span, that it was the same Yūsuf Shāh who attacked the *dārūgha* and fell foul of Ghāzān Khān. At any event according to the *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, the family of the Atābaks began to make war on Rukn al-Dīn (*aghāz qasad sayyid kardand*).[21]

The appearance of a Christian *khwāja* in the city gave them an opportunity to attack him openly. This Christian came with considerable wealth '*mal-i bisyar*' and '*chandin hazār fulūrī talā*', several thousand gold florins, and he settled in Yazd establishing a garden and a mansion in a place which subsequently became known as Bāgh-i Tarsī, the Christian's Garden. One night he was attacked there by robbers, bandits, *ayyārān*, which might also imply vigilantes; the *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd* goes further and says that they were his friends, down and outs whom he entertained in his mansion, and that they stole a great deal of his goods and his gold and killed him.[22] The next day, the Atābaks accused Rukn al-Dīn of being behind this attack and said it was his men who had carried it out, and so he was arrested. His son Shams al-Dīn immediately went into hiding. The enemies of Rukn al-Dīn now ganged up on him and he was beaten, given a thousand blows with wooden staves or rods.[23] The meeting out of this sort of punishment is usually associated with the *dārūgha*, since the wooden rod seems to have been part of his equipment although other officials carried them as well.[24] Here, however, there is no indication of any official intervention by a *dārūgha*, so it is just as likely was carried out by the henchmen and supporters of the Atābaks. As the Atābaks had accused Rukn al-Dīn's men of murdering the Christian *khwāja*, those against Rukn al-Dīn or with the Atābaks now turned on him and there was open confrontation between two opposing factions in the city.

The beating of Rukn al-Dīn was a grim affair, as much designed to kill him as anything else according to the description of it in local histories. After the beating he was then paraded naked round the town on the back of a camel, dung was thrown at him and when he asked for water he was given a cup of urine.[25] This was the shaming or *tashhīr*, another common form of punishment in medieval times, which sometimes preceded an execution, not only in the Islamic world but also in Christian Europe. In the Islamic world where the injunction to cover up one's neighbours private affairs is strongly reiterated *tashhīr* indicates that whoever was subjected to it had either made their own shame public already, had passed beyond the state of honour as a result of their crimes, or had been guilty of some form of false testimony,

[20]Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 84; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, p. 125; Derek J. Mancini-Lander, 'Memory on the Boundaries of Empire: Narrating Place in the Early Modern Local Historiography of Yazd' (PhD, University of Michigan, Michigan, MI, 2012), p. 346.

[21]*Ibid.*; Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 84.

[22]*Ibid.*; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, p. 126.

[23]Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 84.

[24]Christian Lange, *Justice, Punishment and the Medieval Muslim Imagination* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 77.

[25]Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 84.

whether legal or more broadly theological.[26] It was apparently rare for *amīr*s and notables to be subjected to this form of punishment, as it was associated with the lowest stratum in society and Lange maintains that it was meted out upon notables usually only in times of revolution or general social disintegration. This would certainly fit the circumstances in the case discussed here. It was also a sign that the culprit had lost the honour accorded to his station in life. Furthermore, defiling the subject of the *tashhīr* meant that he was made unclean, and was part of the ritual process of destroying his dignity.[27] This was something that was meant to stay with him as a mark of religious uncleanness even after his death. These elements of ritual pollution and loss of honour indicate also that Rukn al-Dīn's punishment was an attempt on the part of the Atābaks to destroy him and his memory in the city once and for all. However, the description of and the reaction to his punishment in the histories and the implicit criticism of the perpetrators all reflect the fact that the punishment did not follow legal thinking on *tashhīr* which sought to circumscribe the event, for instances to exclude beating from the punishment.[28]

After this public shaming, Rukn al-Dīn was taken to the castle of Khurmīz and imprisoned in a pit there. Incarceration in this kind of dungeon was in effect a death sentence since it was imprisonment for life, that is to say, as long as a person could survive in such conditions.[29] This was a serious matter indeed and it was only through the intervention of his son Shams al-Dīn that Rukn al-Dīn was set free. Shams al-Dīn had been in hiding, concealed by a friend in his house in Kucheh Naw next to the fortress of Yazd, right under the noses of the authorities, although such authority as there was seems to have been weak or negligible. This last point would be another indication that a power struggle was taking place in which, for the moment, the Atābaks had the ascendency, and that it was also an attempt to discredit the family of Rukn al-Dīn through his *tashhīr*. Shams al-Dīn had his supporters too as the account makes clear, not only the friend who hid him despite the dangers involved, but at least one other individual. This was a merchant called Khwāja ʿAlī, an Astarabādī living in the same lane, side-street, or the same district '*hamsayigi*', and who provided Shams al-Dīn with a thousand dinars and a mount so he was able to escape from the city and ride to Tabrīz.[30] As described in the sources the motivation for Khwāja ʿAlī's action was a dream in which the prophet Muḥammad appeared to him and told him how to aid one of his descendants. Fittingly, along the route to Tabrīz Shams al-Dīn experienced further miracles. He was given water to drink when he took shelter in some ruined buildings in Naw Gunbād. In later years he had a caravanserai built there and established a village with a mosque and *hamām*. In this way the journey becomes in part an explanation for his own religious and charitable endowments on the route from Yazd to Tabrīz, which he established in later years, a reflection of this progress from despair to hope and recovery between Yazd and Tabrīz.[31]

[26] Christian Lange, *Justice, Punishment and the Medieval Muslim Imagination*, pp. 79-80, 237–239.

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 172–174, 233–234.

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 235–237, though Lange points out that in the course of time the writings on *tashhīr* came to reflect the reality of what occurred.

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91; Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 84.

[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

After ten days he reached Tabrīz and went to the vizier of Ṣulṭān Abū Saʿīd, Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn, the son of Rashīd al-Dīn, who was also the supreme judge and chief administrator of the *waqf* of the Il Khanate (*qāḍī qāḍatī wa awqāf tamām mamlakat bidu arzānī dasht*). There must have been a previous connection between these men given Rashīd al-Dīn's long-standing links with Yazd and, in particular, with the *sayyid*s of Yazd, as well as the fact that he had established a *waqf* consisting of a *madrasa* and other buildings there.[32] It has been suggested that Shams al-Dīn maintained the *waqf* of Rashīd al-Dīn in Yazd during the period following his downfall in the early years of Abū Saʿīd's reign, but there is no reference to any of this in the accounts of Rukn al-Dīn's disgrace in either local history.[33] Of course Rashīd al-Dīn, as discussed earlier, is mentioned elsewhere in the histories, but at this juncture his connections with Yazd seem to be subsumed. Once again, it is the intervention of the miraculous, in the form of a dream, which provides the *wendepunkt*. The night of the day that Shams al-Dīn arrived Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn saw the prophet in a dream and he too was told to help his descendent.[34] On seeing Shams al-Dīn that day he recalled his dream and that very day he sent an *īlchī* to Yazd with orders to have Rukn al-Dīn released and to put a stop to, place a hindrance upon (*zajar*), the Atābaks. What is more, it was apparently at this juncture that Rukn al-Dīn was made Chief Qāḍī of Yazd on Ghiyāth al-Dīn's orders. After Ghiyāth al-Dīn recounted his dream to Sulṭān Abū Saʿīd, the Il Khān approved of his actions.[35]

The *īlchī* went to Yazd and then to Khūrmīz, where he had Rukn al-Dīn taken out of the pit in the castle. They saw a black snake coiled up next to him but when they entered the pit there was no trace of it, yet another instance of the marvellous inserted in this story. They set Rukn al-Dīn on a horse, in contrast to the donkey on which he had been paraded around the city, and brought him back to Yazd, and it was at this point in the tale that the saintly qualities of Rukn al-Dīn were displayed: he was placed on the seat of justice in Yazd and there dispensed forgiveness to those who had wronged him, giving those who had beaten him a florin for each blow, showering those who had thrown sheep droppings at him with gold and putting the finest sweets made in the mouths of those who had given him urine to drink.[36]

So, conversely, in the accounts we have of the event there is a quality of saintly suffering in the description of his *tashhīr*, which presents a striking contrast to the usual understanding, as argued by Carl Lange, of the shaming and defiling of a person for false witness, for breaking the norms of Islam, or as a prelude to execution. One must assume that for Rukn al-Dīn to recover from his ordeal was an extremely unusual event, and perhaps his behaviour afterwards, as described by the histories, was also unusual. For such stories to be related he must have shown a conciliatory spirit and in his new position attempted to unite the city. These accounts seem to indicate that he realised, having been raised even higher than he was before the *tashhīr* to become Chief Qāḍī, personal grudges were best set aside.

[32]Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, pp. 88–89; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, pp. 134–135.

[33]Ilker Evrim Binbas, 'Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī (*ca.* 770s-859/*ca.* 1370s-1454): Prophecy, Politics and Historiography in Late Medieval Islamic History' (PhD, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 2009), pp. 22–23.

[34]Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 85.

[35]*Ibid.*, p. 86.

[36]*Ibid.*; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, p. 128.

Having reconciled himself and the city, and presumably confident in his position there, he then he set out on the *ḥajj* and the *ziyara* of the tomb of the Prophet, and dispensed alms in Mecca to the poor and also in Medina. He continued his good works on his return by supplying various public institutions and notable edifices in Yazd with water from the Taft *qanāt*. The building of Rukn al-Dīn's religious and charitable complex was finished in 725/1325 and he died in 732/1331–1332.[37]

Rukn al-Dīn's son Shams al-Dīn also built a religious and charitable complex in Yazd which was of considerable importance and embellished with magnificent faience mosaic and painting, as can be seen in what remains of it. It was completed in 727/1326–1327, soon after his father's.[38] In Tabrīz Shams al-Dīn worked as a deputy (*naʿīb*) of his brother-in-law Ghiyāth al-Dīn concerned with the administration of *awqāf*. Exactly when he married a daughter of Rashīd al-Dīn is not clear but it is possible that this happened before the murder of the Christian *khwāja* and the punishment and imprisonment of his father.[39] This is a story recorded and told only within the local communities but the sequence of events as given in the local histories has validity when set into the wider context of Persian history in this period and, in particular, the power struggles in the early years of the reign of Abū Saʿīd. Aubin refers to the problems other individuals faced when dealing with the Atābaks during these years. Another *qāḍī*, Adūd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abū Yaʿlā b. Mughṭaba was the *ḥākim* of Shīrāz in 716/1316 and in the wake of the death of Ūljaitū found himself in conflict with the Atābak family in the person of Ḥajjī Shāh b. Yūsuf Shāh.

It was with the support of Ghiyāth al-Dīn and their connections to the centre of power that Rukn al-Dīn and Shams al-Dīn not only survived their near fatal confrontation with the Atābaks but went on to prosper. The Atābaks seem to have tried to take advantage of the early years of Abū Saʿīd's reign, a time when there seems to have been a resurgence in the power of the Mongol *amīr*s in the person of Amīr Chūbān who dominated the Il Khanate, and after the fall from power and execution of their patron, Rashīd al-Dīn, the authority of men of the pen and notables in southern and central Iran seemed to be on the retreat.[40] Yet the sequence of events may demonstrate that things were not that simple.

Amīr Chūbān enjoyed unequalled power for some eleven years from 719/1319 and the provinces of the Il Khanate were divided amongst his family. His son Dimishq Khwāja held Azerbaijan, ʿIraq-i ʿArab and ʿIrāq-i ʿAjam, and after the death in 724/1324 of Tāj al-Dīn Alī Shāh he was also a vizier. One may therefore assume that Dimishq Khwāja governed ʿIrāq-i ʿAjam through deputies. He fell out of favour with the Il Khān and was executed on 5 Jumādā I 727/24 August 1327. There was a hiatus between this event and in Muḥarram 728/late 1327 the definitive downfall of the Chupanid family and the establishment of Abū Saʿīd's personal rule in which he was assisted by Ghiyāth al-Dīn. Whilst one cannot say for certain that the murder of the Christian *khwāja* took place at this juncture, since no actual date is given, the event should be seen in the general context of instability and conflict during

[37] *Ibid.*; Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, p. 87.

[38] Jaʿfarī, *Tārīkh-i Yazd*, pp. 88–89; Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn, *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, pp. 129–131.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 127–128, 131.

[40] However for an alternative understanding which questions the validity of narrative in the local histories see Derek J. Mancini-Lander, 'Memory on the Boundaries of Empire', Chapter 3. His approach is one of literary analysis and is largely concerned with the *Jāmiʿ-i Mufīdī*.

the overthrow of the most powerful *amīr* in the Il Khanate, and the dangerous intricacies of relationships not only at the centre of power but also spreading out into the regions.[41]

When Dimishq Khwāja was executed, those whom he had appointed throughout ʿIrāq-i ʿAjam lost their authority and that would seem to be reflected in this story too. There is no mention of a legal presence or a figure of authority from the central government, no *dārūgha* or governor capable of maintaining order and standing above local disputes and rivalries. As a *qāḍī* some of that responsibility would surely have been on the shoulders of Rukn al-Dīn but his position did not count for anything. Looking at the narrative presented in the local histories and considering the dates for the establishment of the *waqf*s of Rukn al-Dīn and his son, the behaviour of the Atābaks has all the appearance of a reaction to an opportunity by people who lacked effective power themselves, but who thought events were turning in their favour, rather than the actions of individuals firmly in control of affairs. But they made their challenge too late, and the restoration of the direct influence of Rashīd al-Dīn's family in the Il Khanate, in the person of his son Ghiyāth al-Dīn, wrong-footed them. The most prominent *ashrāf* of Yazd, the group which had clearly distanced itself from the activities of the last ruling Atābak Yūsuf Shāh, were unequivocally on the winning side. Nonetheless Rukn al-Dīn's restoration after his public disgrace and punishment was remarkable, if not entirely exceptional. The kind of punishment meted out to Rukn al-Dīn was such that most victims did not survive and it was all too easy to be on the losing side in a contest for power. All in all it is perhaps not surprising that the local histories saw his deliverance in miraculous terms. Of the Atābaks very little further is said, although apparently they continued living in Yazd in increasing destitution into the 9th/15th century.[42]

Similarly the shadowy figure of the Christian *khwāja* is an individual out of time and place. By the time of his death the status of Christians in the Il Khanate had definitely changed. Ghāzān Khān's adoption of Islam and the general conversion of the Mongol *amīr*s had apparently brought little enduring change to the status of the minority religions, at least according to the life of the Nestorian Catholicus Yabh Allaha, although there were some serious signs of the changes to come.[43] The oppression of the Nestorian church in his reign is ascribed to the wickedness of other individuals, notably Amīr Nawrūz 'that son of perdition', who was Ghāzān's influential supporter in his bid for the throne but who later rebelled against the Il Khān and, much to the joy of the Nestorian chronicler, was defeated.[44] Worse still, the Nestorian chronicler relates a massacre in the early years of Ghāzān's reign, at Marāgha where the court of the Il Khāns was often resident, perhaps a reaction to the news that the Il Khān had converted and a sense of revenge for injuries and offences endured previously by the Muslim populace, although the origins of it lay, according to the Nestorian source, in the actions of a Mongol *amīr* who wanted to force conversion on all Christians. But Ghāzān came to the defence of the Christians as did women of the ruling house and the ordered

[41]Charles Melville, 'Čobān', *EIr* and Peter Jackson, 'Abū Saʿīd Bahādor Khān', *EIr.*

[42]S. C. Fairbanks, 'Atābakān-e Yazd', *EIr.*

[43]Budge, E. A. Wallis, *The Monks of Kubilai Khan, or the history and life of Rabban Ṣawma etc., translated from the Syriac by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge*, with a new introduction by David Morgan (London, 2014), pp. 249–253; see also Fiey, J. M., 'Les communautés syriaques en Iran des premiers siècles à 1552', no. I in *Communautés syriaques en Iran et Irak des origins à 1552* (London, 1979), where a series of metropolitans are listed for Iran, including Kashān, for the year 715–716/1316.

[44]Budge, E. A. Wallis, *The Monks of Kubilai Khan*, pp. 231–233.

restitution for the looting.[45] From then on the Nestorian chronicle relates the decline in the fortunes of the Nestorian church under Ghāzān's successors and the struggles of the Catholicus Yabh Allaha to preserve its status and, for instance, to ensure exemption from the poll tax, clearly an exhausting process since immediately after securing the exemption the Catholicus fell ill.[46] However there were Mongol *amīr*s sympathetic to the Christians, in particular the 'Amīr of Amīrs' Chūbān who sought to intervene in the conflict between the Christians and the Muslims at Irbīl though without success.[47] The fluctuating fortunes of the Church, and its dealings with the court of the Il Khāns, surely reflects the situation of Christians more widely throughout the Il Khanate after the Mongol conversion to Islam. The appearance of the wealthy Christian in Yazd may also be indicative of the outlook in the early years of Abū Saʿīd's reign when Amīr Chūbān was in power and afforded protection to the Nestorians in the Il Khanate. However, the old pre-Mongol relationship between the *ahl al-kitāb* seems to have no longer applied, having been overturned by the Mongol conquests, and so perhaps, when the source of protection was removed the restraints it placed on peoples' actions went too. Our victim seems to have become the wrong kind of person in the wrong place at the wrong time. His murder reflects also a breakdown in law and order in Yazd, making anyone whose conduct or status lay outside established local relationships and connections acutely vulnerable. One may therefore reasonably accept that the murder took place in the aftermath of Amīr Chupān's downfall, a period before the new order had been fully established, when the Christians of the Il Khanate had lost a powerful protector and the Mongol authority in the city of Yazd was ineffective.

On the death of Abū Saʿīd and the break-up of the Il Khanate, control of Yazd lay in the hands of the chief of the *shurṭa*, Mubāriz al-Dīn Muẓaffar**,** whose father had worked for the Atābaks. Yet he now governed the city and province in association with two grandsons of Rukn al-Dīn, Majd al-Dīn Ḥasan who was the *qāḍī* of Yazd and is praised in the *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd* as a great scholar, and his brother Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī who worked in the vazirate (*dar ṣadad-i wuzārat būd*).[48] A new alignment of interests had arisen, with the wide-scale conversion of the Mongols to Islam, the retreat of nomadic power in favour of the organisation of a centralised state authority administered by the urban educated elite that sought to promote order and security. In Yazd, the local civilian elite, the *sayyid*s, happened to have a link to the centre of power as a result of their connection with Rashīd al-Dīn, based on his connection with one of their forebears. This meant that Rukn al-Dīn was caught up in a mixture of local and central power struggles; however, conversely, he was able not only to escape an extremely unpleasant fate but apparently to rise to an even higher position than that he had held before. Isamel2655@aol.com

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[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 226–230.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 257–258, 259–260, also pp. 263–266 which describes the prelude to the massacre of Christians at Irbīl. Yabh Allaha himself died in 1317. But according to Fiey 'Les communautés syriaques en Iran', within less than twenty years his grave at Marāgha was dug up and his remains disinterred. These dates do roughly fit with the events surrounding the murder of the Christian *khwāja*, if it is placed around the time of the downfall of Amīr Chupān.

[47] *Ibid.*, pp. 287–288, 303–304.

[48] *Tārīkh-i Jadīd-i Yazd*, p. 136.