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The Battle of Chālderān: Official History and Popular Memory

This article examines some manuscripts of the so-called “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā’il” with a view to answering the question: How did people in post-1514 Iran remember the Battle of Chālderān? After a brief examination of these manuscripts, the article focuses on three moments of the battle—the Safavid council of war, Esmā’il’s clash with Malqūch-oghli, and the Ottoman cannonade—to explore the ways in which popular memory embellished and altered the events we know from the official histories. Such changes reveal that the loss at Chālderān may have marked the end of Shah Esmā’il’s aura of invincibility, but not of his larger-than-life image in the minds of his countrymen.

Keywords: Safavids; Shah Esmā’il I; Chālderān; Historiography; Popular Literature

The Battle of Chālderān

The Battle of Chālderān in August 1514 was a turning point in the history of the Safavid dynasty.¹ Coming at the climax of years of escalating tension between the Safavids and the Ottomans, particularly after the accession of Sultan Selim I to the throne in 1512, it was a complete and utter rout that meant the permanent loss of Anatolia to the Ottomans. It also spelled the end of Shah Esmā’il’s unbroken series of victories over his enemies, and therewith the end of his aura of invincibility in the eyes of his Qezelbāsh devotees.² After Chālderān, Esmā’il never again led his men in battle, although he lived for ten more years.

The general outline of the battle itself, as reconstructed from the historical sources, may be summarized as follows.³ Determined to quash the meddlesome power to his east, the Ottoman Sultan Selim I led a vast army, including Janissaries and cannons, out of Istanbul and all the way across Anatolia in the height of the summer of 1514. This army was met by the Safavid forces at the plain of Chālderān, near Khoy, on 23 August. During his pre-battle council of war, it was suggested to Shah Esmā’il that he launch his attack immediately, before the Ottomans could take the time to set up their ranks and especially their lines of cannon. The shah, it is said, scoffed at this advice. The result of this cavalier attitude was a crushing defeat. Outnumbered from the beginning, the Safavids were decimated by the

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Ottoman cannons. Numerous Qezelbāsh commanders lost their lives, and Shah Esmā'il—despite several heroic sallies in which he advanced far enough to attack the very chains holding the Ottoman cannons together—barely escaped with his own life, narrowly escaping capture and at one point even getting stuck in a bog. In the wake of their victory, the Ottomans briefly occupied Tabriz before heading to Amasya for the winter and ultimately back to Istanbul. Although Shah Esmā'il had made it out of the battle alive, he did not lead any force in pursuit of the Ottomans, nor did he make any effort to reconquer Diyarbakır and eastern Anatolia when these fell to Sultan Selim's commanders in the weeks following Chālderān. Indeed Esmā'il never led his troops in battle again, and in fact from this point on displayed a marked conservatism in military matters which contrasted sharply with his earlier audacity.⁴

Memory and Manuscripts

Shah Esmā'il's fall from grace was thus spectacular and definitive. The once-dynamic, seemingly unstoppable force of nature gave way literally almost overnight to the passive, uninterested devotee of the hunt and the bottle. The Battle of Chālderān marked a sharp divide between these two phases of the life of the man the Qezelbāsh once referred to as their "Perfect Guide" (*morshed-e kāmel*). Given the all-too-usual fate of false messiahs throughout history, in fact, one must conclude that Shah Esmā'il had tremendous charisma indeed for the Qezelbāsh not to turn on him in all their disappointed millenarianism.

The hold Esmā'il clearly had on people's minds raises a question of broader significance: that of its effect on Iranian cultural memory. By this I mean commonly held beliefs about the relatively recent past of the land, with their attendant explanatory power for the present as well as their significance for the people's sense of identity. The Battle of Chālderān is the kind of pivotal historical event whose effect on cultural memory invites analysis. Shah Esmā'il had had a successful run of a decade and a half in which he was not only never defeated, but (if the sources are to be believed) never even wounded, which he let be known was the result of divine support—and then it all came to an end in one catastrophic, gunpowder-laced day. How, we should ask, did this epic rise and crash to earth reverberate in the collective memory of his countrymen? How were the battle, its loss and aftermath explained to and understood by subsequent generations? In other words, how did people in Safavid Iran answer the questions: What happened at Chālderān—and what did it *mean*?

In seeking answers to such questions, our window on the Safavid mind, as it were, is what people said about Chālderān, and this comes in two basic forms: official histories written at court and popular stories told in the public sphere. Each has a different value for our purposes. Official history is concerned to relate what really happened (granting the usual caveats about bias), and is valuable for the light it can shed on actual events. Yet by virtue of this basic reality-orientation, history is written under considerable conceptual constraints that do not apply to popular storytelling. The popular storyteller enjoys much more liberty than does the court historian to embel-

lish his material—and these embellishments can tell us a lot about the values and expectations of the people doing and enjoying the embellishing. In addition, popular storytelling is important for the sheer impact it has on the genesis and development of cultural memory. Few Iranians of the Safavid era would have gotten their notions of their own past from the stories told in official histories like those of Khvāndamir or Eskandar Monshi, but as we shall see, the tales told by professional storytellers would have had a wide influence. Thus, in much the same way as scholars tease apart official histories with a view to unpacking the ideological factors informing them, we can learn a lot about the cultural memory of Safavid society at large by noting how the facts of history fared in the hands of storytellers.

The early Safavid memory of Chālderān is preserved in few sources, official or otherwise. It is notable for its absence from the panegyric epic that Shah Esmā'il commissioned about himself, the *Shāhnāmeḥ-ye Esmā'il*. In that poem, the narrative skips the conflict with the Ottomans entirely, jumping straight from Esmā'il's final victory over the Uzbeks to his death from a fever over a decade later.⁵ In fact, as far as the memory of Chālderān at the early Safavid court is concerned, our knowledge is limited to some testimony from Esmā'il's son and successor Shah Tahmāsp (r. 1524–1576). Citing a letter he wrote in response to a taunt by Sultan Süleyman, Tahmāsp grouches in his so-called Memoirs that, at Chālderān, all the Qezelbāsh amirs had been drinking from dusk until dawn.⁶ On top of that, Esmā'il's lieutenant Durmesh Khan tricked him into going into battle. For this reason, Tahmāsp says, whenever the topic of Chālderān comes up, he curses Durmesh Khan.⁷

Outside the confines of the palace, the memory of Shah Esmā'il's dazzling career seems to have survived as a subject for popular storytelling. Less than thirty years after Chālderān, the Venetian merchant-diplomat Michele Membré, who visited Iran in 1539–42, reported seeing “mountebanks” sitting in public squares reading aloud from books, telling of the battles of various heroes including Shah Esmā'il.⁸ Unfortunately, none of these books seems to have survived, so we do not know what form the memory of Esmā'il in general, and Chālderān in particular, may have taken at that time.

This all changes in the late seventeenth century, when the tale of Shah Esmā'il and his downfall surfaces in a series of manuscripts that has received comparatively little attention to date, manuscripts with evident ties to popular oral tradition and thus to cultural memory more broadly. These are the so-called “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā'il.”⁹ The tales found in these manuscripts make up an alternative history of the formative years of the dynasty, parallel to but different from the official narrative penned by court historians. Some modern scholars dismiss the stories as “an altered and distorted tradition...essentially worthless as historical narrative...childish and credulous.”¹⁰ Others take a more positive view, seeing them as “an example of the voice of the people.”¹¹ These evaluations are, of course, not mutually exclusive.

How, though, does the “voice of the people” find its way into a group of manuscripts such as those of the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā'il”? A few words on mechanisms of transmission are in order.

Popular storytelling in Iran has a long history, but it seems really to have come into its own in the Safavid period.¹² Of particular importance, in this context, were the coffee-

houses of the land.¹³ These establishments were the main centers of public entertainment at least as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁴ People of all social levels mingled there to hear professional storytellers (*naqqālān*) ply their trade. Even the king was wont to drop in; Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 1587–1629) is said to have frequented coffeehouses and paid respect to the *naqqālān*.¹⁵ The tradition of public storytelling in coffeehouses continued, albeit in an attenuated form, right through the twentieth century; in the 1970s it was still possible to go to a coffeehouse in Tehran and listen to, among more famous tales, stories of the heroic deeds of Safavid kings.¹⁶

If, as seems likely, the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā‘il” did indeed undergo a period of popular circulation as coffeehouse tales, this helps us understand the processes by which the stories were altered over time. For the *naqqālān* of Iran did not merely transmit their stories verbatim, generation after generation. The art of storytelling required them to continually modify and update their repertoire in a constant and dynamic reworking of narratives.¹⁷ One reason for this was that they had to keep the audience interested; people were always free to go find another coffeehouse. Another reason was that the *naqqālān* understood their task to be more than just recitation. They also felt bound to educate and improve their audience by inserting anecdotes or asides relevant to the story in order to criticize bad behavior and encourage good.¹⁸ They also added the occasional interpretive digression and/or snippet of poetry to highlight their command of their cultural heritage and earn the respect of their audience.¹⁹ A period spent in the arena of public opinion, so to speak, would have leavened the stories of the “Anonymous Histories” with the kinds of value-expectations brought by the coffeehouse-going populace.

Oral tradition, furthermore, achieves concretization in the *tumār*.²⁰ This is a written outline consulted by a *naqqāl* in the process of his performance of a story, consisting of a collection of plots to remind the *naqqāl* of what to say (or make up).²¹ Every apprentice *naqqāl* receives one from his teacher, and he is expected to copy and memorize it. The tradition remains flexible and fluid, however, because storytellers are not bound to the outline verbatim, but are free to introduce their own variations extemporaneously in keeping with their audience’s preferences, as indicated above. Despite this capacity for change, the main lines of stories remain essentially similar, rooted as they are in what one scholar calls the “skeletal basis for the narratives” preserved in the *tumārs* that are copied and handed down from one storyteller to the next.²²

The *tumār* represents the vital link that I wish to highlight here between oral storytelling and manuscript culture. For the *tumār* (along with its cousin, the literal transcription) is the material vehicle by which the stories developed in the crucible of the *naqqāl*’s public performances are preserved and passed down. It is also the cultural practice that lets us integrate the disparate threads of evidence we have into a coherent theory about the stories in question. In short, for reasons that will become apparent, I view it as the most likely scenario that the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā‘il” are not the work of a single author at one time, but represent a preservation of Qezelbāsh family lore that migrated into the public realm as coffeehouse entertainment and was preserved in manuscript form by way of storytellers’ outlines and transcriptions. All of

this makes this group of manuscripts a most valuable index of the cultural memory of Safavid Iran, at least as regards the founding figures and events of the dynasty.

In what follows I will examine a group of these works and the form(s) the memory of Chālderān takes on in their pages. By examining the changes and embellishments visited on the historical facts by generations of storytellers, we can get a better idea of the lens of values and expectations through which people viewed this pivotal event in the past of their own country.²³

The “Anonymous Histories” and their Manuscripts

Eleven manuscripts of the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā‘il” are known to exist. They are listed in Table 1.²⁴ Of these, I have been able to examine all but three (Table 1, nos. 3, 4, and 9) in at least some detail. Before proceeding to introduce these manuscripts, however, we should consider one that is not, strictly speaking, one of the “Anonymous Histories” themselves, but nonetheless deserves to be considered alongside them owing not only to the powerful influence they apparently had on its

Table 1. Manuscripts of the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā‘il”

No.	Title given in MS	Date	Library and accession no.
1	<i>Tārikh-e Jahānārā</i>	1683	Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, MS Per. 278
2	<i>Ālamārā-ye Safavi</i>	1689	Tehran, Muzeh-ye Rezā ‘Abbāsi, MS 600
3	<i>Ālamārā-ye Safavi</i>	1126/1714	Private collection (Seyyed Mohammad Tāheri Shahāb)
4	<i>Ālamārā-ye Safavi</i>	1716–17 or 1794–95	Tehran, Ketābkhāneh-ye Sepāhsālār (Motahhari), MS 1514
5	<i>Tārikh-e Esmā‘il</i>	18th cent.?	London, British Library, MS IOL 1877
6	<i>Tārikh-e Shāh Esmā‘il-e Safavi</i>	18th cent.?	Tehran, Ketābkhāneh-ye Majles-e Shorā-ye Eslāmi, MS 9421
7	<i>Tārikh-e Shāh Esmā‘il-e Safavi</i>	18th cent.?	Tehran, Ketābkhāneh-ye Majles-e Shorā-ye Eslāmi, MS 635
8	<i>Ālamārā</i>	1234/1819	Tehran, Ketābkhāneh-ye Majles-e Shorā-ye Eslāmi, MS 761
9	(unknown)	1823–24	Private collection (Ahmad Khān-Malek Sāsāni)
10	<i>Ālamārā-ye Shāh Esmā‘il</i>	1825	Private collection (Asghar Montazer Sāheb)
11	<i>Ālamārā-ye Safaviyeh</i>	(effaced)	Private collection (the late Hoseyn Meftāh Farzand)

content, but also to the light it can shed on the early stage of the formation of the tales themselves. This is the manuscript formerly known as the “Ross Anonymous.”

British Library, MS Or. 3248. This manuscript, a history of Shah Esmā‘il beginning with his ancestors in Ardabil and continuing through to his death, was for decades known as the “Ross Anonymous,” because it was originally brought to the attention of scholars by E. Denison Ross in the late nineteenth century.²⁵ For years this manuscript was thought to be an early work, with most scholars dating it to somewhere in the 1540s, i.e. in the reign of Shah Tahmāsp.²⁶ A 1990 paper by A. H. Morton, however, established on the basis of internal evidence that the manuscript should instead be dated to the 1670s, i.e. to the period of Shah Soleymān.²⁷ Nor is the text anonymous, as the author’s name—Bijan—is found in a marginal note. Moreover, the text has a name: *Jahāngoshā‘i-ye Khāqān*.²⁸

As mentioned above, Or. 3248 is not a manuscript of the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā‘il” per se. Rather, it is a pastiche of various historical sources, some identifiable, some not. Bijan’s method was, in Morton’s words, “scissors and paste plus abbreviation,”²⁹ so the text turned out much in the mold of earlier histories: syntactically elaborate, studded with poetry for highlights, and derivative.³⁰ What makes the *Jahāngoshā‘i-ye Khāqān* interesting, though, is the apparent influence upon it of material clearly indebted (or identical) to the “Anonymous Histories.”³¹ Judging from the marginal notes in MS Or. 3248, the author does seem to have been under some pressure from outside to include tales he thought incredible (and thus felt obliged to disassociate himself from).³² Based on his analysis, Morton surmised that this pressure was coming from the *gholāms* of the palace, who foisted on Bijan an “incoherent manuscript” apparently brought from Rasht and containing stories clearly linked to the “Saga” of Shah Esmā‘il.³³

Morton’s work is invaluable for its re-assignment of the date of the “Ross Anonymous,” as well as for its provision of a context for its creation. A few emendations to Morton’s case are in order, however, and hopefully these will help to shed even more light on the creation of the Esmā‘il myth.

First, a minor point: Morton’s reading of “Rasht” is incorrect.³⁴ The facsimile of the *Jahāngoshā‘i-ye Khāqān* published by A. D. Muztar³⁵ shows the relevant marginal note in greater detail than Morton seems to have had access to, and the initial letter of the cut-off word Morton reconstructed as “Rasht” is clearly not *r* (i.e. *rā*). Just what it is, though, is unclear; it seems to be *nd* (i.e. *nun-dāl*). I am unable to reconstruct this word; hopefully one day a scholar of sufficient caliber will solve this mystery.³⁶

The question of the identity of Bijan’s obtrusive colleagues also needs revisiting. In building his case that Bijan was under pressure from some person(s) in the palace, Morton reconstructs one marginal note as “the insistent request of the *āqāyān*,” a term he takes to mean the court eunuchs.³⁷ The term *āqā*, however, need not mean “eunuch.” In fact, in the terminology of the Safavid government it seems to have meant a “middle echelon of court personnel” drawn from a certain class of land-owning military yeomanry.³⁸ More tantalizingly, it appears that *āqāyān* were neither

Georgians (as Bijan probably was) nor eunuchs, but all members of one or another Qezelbāsh tribe.³⁹

Understanding this lets us deepen our understanding of the environment in which Bijan compiled his work on the life of Shah Esmā'il. For it seems unlikely that, as Morton implies, the heroic stories of early Safavid times being bandied about the palace were told for the interest or benefit of the Georgians at court. The Georgians were no fans of the Qezelbāsh (nor vice versa),⁴⁰ and it seems unlikely that they would have been interested in hearing, let alone preserving for posterity, tales of the heroic deeds of the Qezelbāsh of old. It is, however, plausible that Qezelbāsh *āqāyān* would want to hear those tales, particularly in the context of the early years of Shah Soleymān's reign, when military pressure from east and west alike on a badly degraded Safavid army had to remind some people of the power they once wielded against their enemies.⁴¹ It does not seem implausible to posit that the germ of the "Anonymous Histories" lay in the experience of the Qezelbāsh *āqāyān*'s ancestors, men who had actually witnessed Shah Esmā'il in action, and whose repeated tellings of the stories grew into the narrative with which the palace in Bijan's day seems to have been abuzz.⁴²

If the "Anonymous Histories" do in fact originate with the family lore of the Qezelbāsh, this may allow us to make other connections with known facts. For example, as Morton points out in his paper, the re-dating of the "Ross Anonymous" means that the *Absan al-Tavārikh* of Hasan Beg Rumlu takes on new importance. Rumlu was himself a Qezelbāsh, the grandson of one of Shah Esmā'il's commanders, and as such would have been privy to "in-house" tales of the heady days of conquest in his grandfather's time. *Absan* also includes stories that appear in no work of Safavid history other than the "Anonymous Histories," in which the germ found in *Absan* has been expanded into a full-blown episode.⁴³ These include the story of the Ethiopian Mamluks who tangled with a Qezelbāsh hunting party on the border with Syria, an episode illustrated both in Or. 3248 and in the Chester Beatty Library manuscript (considered below).⁴⁴ Lastly, it may be worth noting that both Shokri and Montazer Sāheb, in their respective introductions to the manuscripts they published, note based on linguistic evidence that the author or compiler of the tales seems to have hailed from the north of Iran, particularly the region of Āzarbāyjān, or at least that he had lived there for a long time.⁴⁵ They also note that he appears to have been a commoner with zealous Shi'i leanings⁴⁶, even a member of a Sufi order of the family of Sheykh Safi.⁴⁷ The possibility that the scribe was a member of the Safavid Order with Azeri-influenced Persian makes it all the easier to conceive a link between these tales as transmitted and the family traditions of the Qezelbāsh.⁴⁸

As a final observation, the proposed connection to oral storytelling may explain Bijan's own complaint about an "incoherent (*nāmarbut*) manuscript" being pushed on him.⁴⁹ Perhaps Bijan's overhelpful colleagues were trying to get him to use a *naqqāl's tumār* as a source; a "serious" historian like Bijan would definitely have found the contents of such a document—which is, after all, just a collection of story plots—*nāmarbut*.⁵⁰

The *Jahāngoshā'i-ye Khāqān*, then, while not a manuscript of the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā'il” proper, has allowed modern scholars to shed a great deal of light on the possible origins of those tales. We can now turn to the manuscripts of the “Anonymous Histories” themselves.

Chester Beatty Library, MS Per. 278. The following is a summary; for a detailed look at this manuscript see my 2004 article in *Iranian Studies*.⁵¹

MS Per. 278 (Table 1, no. 1), which bears the title *Tārikh-e Jahānārā*, is erroneously described as “a summary history of the Safavids from the foundation of the dynasty to the end of the reign of Shah ‘Abbas II.”⁵² Analysis of the manuscript, though, reveals that it is in fact an illustrated copy of the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā'il.” The manuscript’s colophon is partly effaced, but the remaining legible lines indicate a date of completion in 1094/1683, or during the reign of Shah Soleymān.⁵³ In fact, the colophon specifically states that the work was begun in the name of “Shah Safi” and updated (*movāfeq ofīād*) when the royal name was changed to Soleymān—apparently a reference to Soleymān’s original regnal name of Safi II, which he changed to Soleymān when a run of bad luck in his first year on the throne convinced him that he needed to redo his own coronation at an astrologically more auspicious moment. A chronogram reading “The shah is a second Soleymān” (*Soleymān-e sāni bovad pādeshāh*) works out to 1077/1666–67, which is the year of Soleymān’s enthronement. It is unclear whether this is meant to be the date of the manuscript’s inception or merely praise of the shah. The close proximity in production of this manuscript and Bijan’s *Jahāngoshā'i-ye Khāqān* is surely significant.

Of particular interest here is the literary style of the Chester Beatty *Tārikh-e Jahānārā*. The overall linguistic register of the narrative is noticeably less formal and more conversational than the ornate *monshiyāneh* prose of official histories (including much of Bijan’s prose), and links the manuscript to the culture of *naqqāli*.⁵⁴ For example, in addition to its overall informality, the narration is regularly punctuated with little interjections used by *naqqālān* to change the scene or start a flashback; such interjections include “Now listen to two words about So-and-So,” “Now leave them to their hunting and hear about such-and-such,” “But we have not mentioned that ...,” and so on. Other tokens of oral storytelling culture are the use of proverbs and idioms, as well as the liberal use of curses (e.g. “dog,” “coward” [*nāmard*], “that bastard of a Sunni”).⁵⁵

In addition to making apparent the link between the “Anonymous Histories” and *naqqāli*, the Chester Beatty manuscript is also highly valuable for an enquiry into the development of the Esmā'il myth because it is the oldest extant copy of these tales.⁵⁶ As such, it makes us privy to the early versions of stories much elaborated by later storytellers. Unfortunately, the manuscript is missing several folios right in the middle of the Battle of Chālderān. The text is cut off as the Safavids are meeting in a council of war to decide how to fight the approaching Ottomans; the catchword at the bottom of that folio (217b) does not match the first word on the next page, and sure enough the story here jumps to events after the battle, namely the siege of the fortress of Varsāq.⁵⁷ Despite this considerable lacuna, the manuscript

remains an invaluable window on an earlier version of the tales of Shah Esmā'il, and as such will be included in the analysis here.

The “*Ālamārā-ye Safavi/Shāh Esmā'il*.” There are a number of manuscripts of the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā'il” later than the Chester Beatty *Tārikh-e Jahānārā* (Table 1, nos. 2–11). Many but not all bear the title *Ālamārā-ye Safavi*, a name often used to signify the whole corpus of Shah Esmā'il tales.⁵⁸ What follows is a brief overview of the manuscripts I have been able to examine, even if only in part.

To date, two versions of the “Anonymous Histories” have been published as books. Asghar Montazer Sāheb published the manuscript in his possession (Table 1, no. 10) under the title *Ālamārā-ye Shāh Esmā'il* in 1971,⁵⁹ followed closely by Yad Allāh Shokri's publication of *Ālamārā-ye Safavi* in the same year.⁶⁰ The latter (henceforth *AAS*) is an integration of two extant manuscripts of the “Anonymous Histories,” both in private hands (Table 1, nos. 8 and 11). Since the term *Ālamārā-ye Safavi* is used in the primary manuscript, which he thought to be the older one, Shokri chose this title for his edition.⁶¹ The *Ālamārā-ye Shāh Esmā'il* (henceforth *AASI*) is an edition of a manuscript dated 1240/1825 (Table 1, no. 10). *AASI* often tries to strike a more formal-sounding tone, using more polished language than *AAS*, but is clearly still the product of popular storytelling.⁶²

There are three manuscripts of the *Ālamārā* in the library of the Iranian Majles (Table 1, nos. 6–8).⁶³ Only one (no. 761) is dated, to 1234/1819; the other two are only broadly datable to the eighteenth century. Manuscript no. 761 was the second manuscript used by Shokri in his publication of *AAS*.⁶⁴ Manuscript no. 9421 closely follows *AAS*, at least in its description of the Battle of Chālderān. Manuscript no. 635 is interesting for its fifteen illustrations in a simple eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century style, including a charming doodle at the end of the text. The manuscript does not, however, appear to contain any description of the Battle of Chālderān. This possibly by design—the narrative seems to skip right over it, being focused almost entirely on the conflict with the Uzbeks.

India Office Library MS 1877 (Table 1, no. 5)⁶⁵ is an intriguing case. The text itself is unremarkable; it follows the *Ālamārā-ye Safavi* as published by Shokri, with minor differences. The India Office manuscript is odd in certain ways, though. It is clearly the work of several hands, as noted in the catalogue, but these several hands call attention to themselves in an unusually noticeable fashion. Some lines are written in a fair *nasta'liq* script, while others are written in a cramped but legible proto-*shekasteh*, and the script changes not only mid-page, but even mid-sentence. Also, some pages have their text in normal horizontal rows, while others have the text turned at a forty-five degree angle, so that the text begins in the top right corner, then “expands” and “contracts” as the text continues down the page to end in the bottom left corner.⁶⁶ Numerous pages have pious invocations (e.g. *Yā Emām Rezā*) written at the top,⁶⁷ and one page has a little calligraphic cartouche in the text that reads “Now listen to this about Shahi Beg.”⁶⁸ Clearly, this manuscript was not meant to be a presentation copy, but the deeper reason for such quirks of script and layout is unknown.⁶⁹

Finally, the Rezā ‘Abbāsi Museum in Tehran is in possession of a manuscript (Table 1, no. 2) which deserves special notice.⁷⁰ This manuscript, which is partly dispersed, was once in the collection of Vahid al-Molk Sheybāni, from which it migrated first to the Mahboubian Collection in New York and thence to Tehran. The text is illustrated with numerous paintings by the late-Safavid artist Mo‘in Mosavver or his school. What makes this manuscript interesting from the point of view of the current project is the fact that judging from the available evidence, the text of this version differs noticeably from those of *AAS* and *AASI*. For example, the story of the meeting between Shah Esmā‘il and his wife Tājlu Begom after the Battle of Chālderān has ended is conspicuously different from the story told in the two published versions.⁷¹ This author has only been able to work with the text of this manuscript as reproduced in other sources, such as a brief excerpt reproduced by Nasrallāh Falsafi⁷² and the lines of text visible on the illustrated pages reproduced on the persianpainting.net website.⁷³ More detailed work on this manuscript is a great desideratum for scholarship on the post-Chālderān memory of late Safavid times.

These manuscripts represent a later stage in the development of the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā‘il.” In their pages, the embryonic versions of the stories in the Chester Beatty manuscript have now gotten the full popular-romance treatment, right down to the opening invocation of “the tellers of tales and the transmitters of stories and the sugar-chewing parrots of fine discourse” (etc.), phraseology that was common as an opening flourish in popular tales of the nineteenth century such as *Hoseyn-e Kord* and *Amir Arsalān*.⁷⁴ The extent to which the stories found in the Chester Beatty manuscript have mushroomed into even taller tales may be seen in the various descriptions of the Battle of Chālderān, to which we now turn.

The “Anonymous Histories” contain a wealth of material describing events before, during, and after the Battle of Chālderān, some of it quite interesting, but in the interest of economy I will focus on three, which form the main structure of the battle-narrative. These are the pre-battle council of war, Esmā‘il’s clash with the Ottoman hero Malquch-oghli, and the Ottoman cannonade that sealed Esmā‘il’s fate.

The Safavid Council of War

It is mentioned in most official Safavid accounts that before the Battle of Chālderān began, Shah Esmā‘il met with his commanders to decide how to proceed against the gathering Ottoman army.⁷⁵ The sources generally agree that the first recommendation, made by commanders with experience fighting the Ottomans, was to attack immediately, before the enemy could organize their troops and artillery.⁷⁶ This was met with scorn from Esmā‘il’s trusted commander and brother-in-law Durmesh Khan, who urged instead that the Qezelbāsh wait for the Ottomans to complete their preparations and only then attack (this being the manly thing to do). His advice was accepted. Eskandar Monshi’s version is the most colorful; he writes that Shah Esmā‘il declared that “I am not a caravan-thief. Whatever is decreed by God, will occur.”⁷⁷

The descriptions of the council in the “Anonymous Histories” show interesting differences.

Bijan’s version of the council of war in the *Jahāngoshā’i-ye Khāqān* is essentially a more florid version of that found in other official histories. In his description, the first to speak is Khan Mohammad Khan, who gives a detailed explanation of Ottoman tactics. He describes how they chain together wagons and cannon-carriages, defending them with musketeers who “have such skill and power in firing cannons and muskets that they can hit a mote floating in a sunray a mile off and take aim with the arrows of the lines of their vision at an imaginary point a league’s distance away.”⁷⁸ Nur ‘Ali Khalifeh and others voice their agreement, suggesting that the way to victory is a surprise attack before the Ottomans have time to prepare their men and artillery.

Durmesh Khan then gives the ill-starred retort that “Your writ runs [only] in Diyarbakır (*kadkhodā’i-ye to dar Diyārbakr migozārad!*)” He declares instead that they should wait for the Ottomans to make all their preparations, so that the Qezelbāsh can “take the hand of bravery out of the sleeve of valor” and fight like men; with the help of God and the holy Emāms, victory will be theirs. This line of thinking is more in tune with Shah Esmā’il’s own, and he agrees to order a delay to let the Ottomans get ready.⁷⁹

The story of the pre-battle council of war as told in the “Anonymous Tales” is slightly different. Here, the alternative the Qezelbāsh understand themselves to be facing has changed. In the “orthodox” historical version as passed on by Bijan, the choice is “attack now/attack later,” whereas in the “Anonymous Tales” it has changed to “retreat/attack now.”

The version in the Chester Beatty Library manuscript, as usual, is shortest. The narrator informs us that all the Qezelbāsh commanders assembled in council, and while some argued for flight, Durmesh Khan said, “Who is the Qeysar that we should run away from him in fear? We’ll strive and fight so as to see to whom God gives [victory]!”⁸⁰

The discussion is given somewhat more specificity in the later manuscripts of the “Anonymous Tales.” In *AAS*, as in Bijan’s telling, Khan Mohammad Khan speaks first. He does not, however, describe Ottoman military tactics, but suggests that the Safavids do not have enough men for the battle, having only gathered 18,000 Qezelbāsh. His advice is to decamp to Mount Narkash⁸¹ for two months, allowing 70,000 men to assemble. At this point Shah Esmā’il asks if there are any other opinions, and Durmesh Khan, turning to look at Khan Mohammad Khan, sneers:

A hundred thousand pities on this name you have absurdly brought into the world. To think I thought of you as manly! Who is the Qeysar of Rum that we should turn our backs on him and steal away like thieves? Why don’t we hurl ourselves at his army like men? If fortune is his, [victory] will be his, and if—God willing—the Almighty gives it to our Perfect Guide, it will be ours.⁸²

Nur ʿAli Khalifeh now speaks up to concur with Durmesh Khan, and Shah Esmāʿil accepts their advice.⁸³ The die has been cast.⁸⁴

Malquch-oghli

The second major event of the clash at Chālderān was Shah Esmāʿil's encounter with, and gruesome dispatch of, the Ottoman champion Malquch-oghli. Virtually all the Safavid official sources mention this single combat and say that Esmāʿil struck a blow that split Malquch-oghli down in the middle.⁸⁵ In the manuscripts of the "Anonymous Tales," Malquch-oghli is invariably referred to as "Atak-oghli" (in the Chester Beatty manuscript) or "Owtak-oghli" (in *AAS* and *AASI*).⁸⁶ Following the precedent of the editors of *AAS* and *AASI*, I have consistently changed this name to "Malquch-oghli," since that is clearly who is being talked about.

In Bijan's *Jahāngoshā'i-ye Khāqān*, Malquch-oghli first appears in a brief list of Ottoman officers given as Sultan Selim is forming his ranks.⁸⁷ In this list he is named as "Atak Beg, known as Alquch-oghli." After this, Bijan switches to a description of Esmāʿil's formation of his own ranks. His Majesty then sets off for a leisurely quail hunt.⁸⁸

The battle gets under way, described in a florid prose style whose syntax and imagery are heavily indebted to Khvāndamir—in places almost verbatim (such as the Ottomans' musket-fire passing through men's armor and clothing "like an evening breeze through a silken garment").⁸⁹ The *qurchi-bāshi* Sāru Pireh leads an initial assault against the Ottoman vanguard, but is driven back close to the Safavid center. This kindles the wrath of Shah Esmāʿil, who charges forward to shift the tide of battle. This is when Malquch-oghli⁹⁰—"a crocodile in the sea of bravery and a lion on the field of valor"—appears on the front line and challenges Esmāʿil in verse:

*I am he who on the day of battle and wrath
Can throw the heavens down to the earth!
I can stitch an ant's eyes shut with an arrow
And open them again flawlessly with the next!
Should I cast my gaze at the enemy in anger
He gives up sweet life under that poisonous look!
My spear enters the side and comes out the navel!
This is no lie—now here is the battle!*⁹¹

Shah Esmāʿil spurs his steed forward and angrily rebukes the "ill-mannered" (*bi-adab*) Malquch-oghli for being all talk. Malquch-oghli is so stunned by the terribleness and majesty of the shah that he cannot even draw his sword or lift his spear. He barely manages to lift his shield over his head before Esmāʿil's "Zu'l-Feqār-like sword" crashes down on his head and splits him in two, right down to his belt, and he falls from his saddle "like a fragment falling off a mountain."⁹² At the sight of this feat, the likes of which no one has ever seen, the Ottomans are terrified and flee back toward the safety of their own ranks.

Malquch-oghli's name comes up again at the very end of Bijan's description of the Battle of Chālderān, when the Safavids have been defeated and Esmā'il himself has fled the battlefield. Bijan here invokes the "reliable sources" mentioned first by Khvāndamir.⁹³ These sources say that Malquch-oghli's corpse was brought before Sultan Selim, who exclaimed that "Other than one who is related by blood to the Manifestation-Place of Miracles [i.e. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib], no creature has the power to wield a sword thus." Bijan adds a morbid comment to the effect that Selim remained with the corpse until nightfall, continuously marveling at Shah Esmā'il's strength and power.⁹⁴

The "Anonymous Tales" have much more to say about Malquch-oghli. This is already seen in the earliest copy, the Chester Beatty Library manuscript, in which a new character is introduced to the Malquch-oghli narrative, namely Sultan Selim's mother.

Just as the storyteller has reached the eve of the battle, as the Safavids assemble in their council of war, he pauses to note that "we have not mentioned that" when Sultan Selim decided to wage war on Shah Esmā'il, his mother intervened. In the scene described, she suggests that if Selim wants to take care of "Sheykh-oghli" once and for all, he should call him out on the battlefield for personal combat. Selim demurs, saying he will send "Atak Sultan" to fight him; Atak Sultan will kill Esmā'il with one blow.⁹⁵

"Atak Sultan" then arrives from Europe (*Farang*) with 3,000 compatriots (thus indicating the teller's awareness that Atak Sultan, i.e. Malquch-oghli, is European).⁹⁶ Selim tells him that if he meets and defeats "Sheykh-oghli" in battle, "I will elevate [you] from nothing to a position of power and glory." Malquch-oghli accepts, on the condition that the sultan write an official mandate granting him supreme commandership. This Selim does, and Malquch-oghli ties it to his arm "like a talisman." The two men then proceed to the plain of Chālderān.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, the loss of several pages of this manuscript means we must miss out on Malquch-oghli's actual encounter with Shah Esmā'il in this version of the story.

Thankfully, *AAS* gives a very full description, in which the author builds up the details given in the earlier manuscript into a much more detailed story.

As before, the narrative shifts from the freshly-called Safavid council of war back to Selim's quarters, where the royal mother brings up "Sheykh-oghli" with much more expressive concern:

"O my son! It's as if you don't know what kind of warrior Sheykh-oghli is! When a padishah reaches for his sword and arrows and spear more than his army does, and plunges into the midst of his enemy's ranks amid arrows and muskets and spears and cannons without feeling any fear, and his men guard him more closely than anything—what kind of fight do you bring to this padishah? If you think any of your men is heroic or brave, send him to the battlefield to seek out [Sheykh-oghli]; perhaps he will come out to fight alone, and it will be possible to manage him."⁹⁸

In response, Selim replies that Malquch-oghli has come from Europe and converted to Islam. On the day of battle, Selim will send him to find Sheykh-oghli and “knock him off his horse with a single blow.” Selim’s mother agrees that this is a good idea.⁹⁹

Selim is en route to Iran when Malquch-oghli arrives “with three thousand newly converted European youths.” Selim asks him why he is late, and Malquch-oghli replies that he and his men were busy gathering weapons for the coming fight. Selim then offers to make him commander-in-chief of Rum and Iran and Turan if he finds and kills “Sheykh-oghli” on the battlefield. Malquch-oghli accepts, and ties the letter promoting him on his arm “so that my strength and power might increase” (making the letter a literal talisman).¹⁰⁰

The narrator of *AAS* switches at this point to the Safavid council of war, after which Shah Esmā’il gives the order that the battle-drums be sounded. Hearing this, both sides array their forces; the Ottomans are described as having 900,000 men on the field.¹⁰¹ Selim climbs up a nearby hill with 400 brave youths to watch the fighting (not, it should be noted, to participate in it).

Here the narrator of *AAS* interrupts himself again to add some background. It seems that as the battle was just about to begin, Sultan Selim declared that Malquch-oghli’s armor was not suitable. He thus ordered that someone go to his personal armory and bring back the sealed chest containing “the armor of my glorious grandfather, Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror.”

Since the time of the death of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, no one had arisen who could fit this armor; it was a coat of mail three royal cubits high and one-and-a-quarter cubits wide.¹⁰² When they gave it to Malquch-oghli and he put it on, it was a tight fit [*shāneh-hā-ye u tang bud az jehat-e u*]. He put on a jeweled helmet and jeweled dagger- and sword-belts, as well as a cuirass [*chahār ā’ineh*] and boots and gaiters. When he had put the armor on, the Qeysar [gave him] a steed that had no peer in his army for size and skill.¹⁰³

Having been decked out to his lord’s satisfaction, Malquch-oghli thunders onto the battlefield, roaring at the Qezelbāsh that he wants to fight no one but “Sheykh-oghli”—“Tell him to come, lest his great fame become great shame!”¹⁰⁴

As he is shouting his challenges, an armored figure wearing a leopard skin approaches. The figure’s face is veiled. Malquch-oghli says, “O Sheykh-oghli! Why have you put on a veil?” The figure replies, “So that your unlucky blue eye does not fall on my face, that’s why!”¹⁰⁵ Malquch-oghli says, “If you are Sheykh-oghli, tell me so that I may fight you. If not, go away so that I can look for him!”¹⁰⁶

Now Shah Esmā’il appears from the east, “like the blazing sun.” He waves the veiled figure away. Then his royal eye falls upon Malquch-oghli and he is pleased with what he sees. Malquch-oghli, too, is impressed with the young shah, a true jewel of youthful manhood whose divine magnificence and royal splendor are such as Malquch-oghli has never seen. The two begin to converse:¹⁰⁷

“I take it you are Sheykh-oghli!”

That majestic prince replied, “Yes. I am the weak and base slave of the noble and merciful God; I am he to whom you have come to give battle.”

Malquch-oghli said, “Great God, have mercy! O Sheykh-oghli, Sultan Selim wants you badly, and he has promised me that if I bring you to him alive, he will grant me command of all of Iran and Turan and Europe. It would be a pity if you were to be killed in the flower of your youth and majesty! Come, let me take you to the court of Sultan Selim; kiss his hand, and I will beseech him to grant you Iran. You too will send an easy yearly tribute to the Qeysar’s court and rule in peace of mind and contentment. In short, when I saw you I admired you, and for this reason I advise you thus. If you refuse out of ignorance or pride, gaze upon this blade of mine and pray for mercy on yourself and your youth.”¹⁰⁸

Shah Esmā’il just smiles at this and admits that he, too, appreciates the manliness of his opponent and wants to offer him advice out of affection. Abandon the Qeysar, he says, and come to my service; I will grant you the land from Üsküdar (*sic*) almost all the way to Tabriz; you need only call upon ‘Ali as the Friend of God—“Isn’t it a pity that a brave young man like yourself is sunk in unbelief and heresy?”¹⁰⁹

At that point, the narrator continues, “that bastard Malquch-oghli” (*sic!*) says, “That phrase settles it between us! My aim is to get you to drop that religion and sect, for it is an absurd innovation!” When these hair-raising words reach the ears of the shah, he snarls “O foul Ahriman!” and leaps from his place to begin the combat. At first the two men fight with spears as both Safavid and Ottoman armies watch. Shah Esmā’il finally knocks Malquch-oghli’s spear out of his hand, and as the astonished Malquch-oghli draws his sword to continue, Esmā’il snatches it from his hand and swings his own sword down on his head, splitting him right down to his belt.¹¹⁰ Sultan Selim and his men stand there like a wall, stunned. Then Shah Esmā’il cuts Malquch-oghli and his horse into four pieces (*chahār-pāreh sākht*) and returns to his own ranks.

It seems only fair to mention that, in reality, “Malquch-oghli” was the name of two brothers, who were indeed killed at Chālderān (although probably not in this way).¹¹¹ Much later, Malquch-oghli enjoyed a colorful afterlife as a mainstay of late 1960s Turkish action cinema—fighting the Byzantines, not the Safavids.

Selim’s Oath and the Cannonade

The Ottoman cannonade, of course, is what spelled Esmā’il’s defeat at Chālderān. As such, it is inherently destined to form a major part of any stories told about the battle. The official histories all say that the Ottomans used cannons to deadly effect, but do not give any indication as to when they began the firing itself.¹¹² The “Anonymous Histories,” however, turn the decision to fire into the climactic moment of the

battle. The purpose seems to have been twofold: to heighten the dramatic impact of the event, and to score a moral point against Selim.

Unlike other official historians, Bijan does describe the Ottoman decision to fire the cannons. The reason he gives is, however, prosaic: Sultan Selim sees that the battle is not going well for him, so he decides to use his heavy weapons.

“As Sultan Selim beheld such superiority, everywhere he looked became as dark as the night of separation and the days of abandonment. So he ordered the cannons and musketeers to get ready to fire.”¹¹³

Unfortunately, the Chester Beatty Library manuscript lacks this part of the story. In *AAS*, the story of the cannons begins immediately after the demise of Malquch-oghli. Having dispatched him, the narrator starts a flashback (“But we did not mention that ...”) noting that before the battle began, Sultan Selim had sent a messenger to Shah Esmā’il telling him to specify what sort of battle the two armies should wage, offering to fight in whatever manner Esmā’il deemed fit.

When His Majesty heard these words, he laughed and said [to the messenger], “Go tell Sultan Selim, ‘Even if I have no power or force or strength and cannot stand up to your army, I have the power and force and strength of the hand of him who took Kheybar, the Victorious Lion of God, Victor of Victors, the Manifestation-Place of Miracles, Viceregent of the Prophet and Emām of East and West, King of Men, Lion of God, Lord of Praise, Son-in-Law of the Apostle of the End Times, Light of Sun and Moon, Light of the Eyes of the People of Insight, Leader of the Kingdom of Justice, Valiant Rank-Breaking Heydar, Commander of the Faithful, Heydar ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb—peace be upon him!—and with these eighteen thousand men I have brought here, I stand before your nine hundred thousand. If you have any trace of the heroes of the world [in yourself], give orders that the cannons not be fired, so that the real men may be clearly distinguished from the cowards. We shall fight that way.’” The messenger went back to the Qaysar and passed on this message.¹¹⁴

Somewhat implausibly, Selim accepts this condition, and the Ottomans take an oath not to fire the cannons.¹¹⁵ Later, however, as the battle progresses, the sheer power of the Qezelbāsh proves too much for the army of the Qaysar, and thousands of Ottoman soldiers start to flee back toward the line of cannons. Selim’s grand vizier says, “The House of Osman is ruined!” and urges Selim to use his cannons. Selim protests that he swore an oath not to do so, and if he breaks his word, he will get a bad name among the rulers of the earth. The crafty vizier points out that *he* swore no such oath, blatantly implying that he is free to fire away. “You know best,” says the Sultan, and the slaughter begins:

The Grand Vizier gave orders that the cannons be fired, and twenty thousand Ottomans and seven thousand Qezelbāsh were carded like cotton and fell. Khan Mohammad Khan had just arrived with a thousand men to attack the Qeysar when the cannons started firing; he and three hundred others were hit and fell into the dust of annihilation.¹¹⁶

The version of this story in *AASI* differs slightly from the foregoing. The narrative begins just as Shah Esmā'il and Malquch-oghli are facing each other for the first time on the battlefield (not after Malquch-oghli has been killed). Sultan Selim is watching the whole thing from a nearby hill and thinks to himself, "What a strange man this Sheykh-oghli is, who has come with this [small] army to fight against so many thousands of horsemen and a padishah like myself." He is, in fact, struck with a feeling of pity, and he sends a messenger to Shah Esmā'il¹¹⁷ saying:

"What I have heard of your deeds is true—indeed you are a virile man, noble as a lion. The reason I thought of this is that [I reckoned that] you have surely gathered a great army and will fight against me. Now that I have looked over your forces, [though,] I have realized that you do not rely on the army [*kār-e shomā bā sepāh nist*], but rather on the help of God Almighty. We grant you permission to leave, and bestow the region of Iran on you. We are leaving to return to Istanbul."¹¹⁸

Shah Esmā'il's response is: "You can bestow Iran when you have conquered it!" He adds a quote from Ferdowsi for good measure, to the effect that Selim should not release the deer he hasn't captured.¹¹⁹ He then insists on battle, challenging Selim to "sort out the manly from the unmanly." The Ottoman emperor's response to this is to accept, but as in *AAS*, he leaves the choice of warfare up to Esmā'il, who says, "We will be satisfied with any kind of battle. If you have decided to see the unmanly sorted out from the manly, give orders that the cannons not be fired." This Selim does, sending a messenger with word of the agreement.¹²⁰

After this point the narrative returns to the fight between Esmā'il and Malquch-oghli, which seems to have been put on hold while Esmā'il and Selim exchanged messages, and the later breaking of the oath at the behest of the grand vizier is told in much the same way as in *AAS*.¹²¹

Explaining Chālderān

The popular narrative of the Battle of Chālderān, then, can be seen to have embellished and embroidered the facts of the battle in specific ways. The council of war is made out to have given Esmā'il a different alternative to choose from, retreat or attack—a decision clearly loaded in favor of the heroic choice. The fight with Malquch-oghli has been inflated to an epic scale, with the enemy clad in legendary armor and garnering both respect for his chivalry and hatred for his insult to Shi'ism. The fatal cannonade,

finally, is made out to be the result of treachery, enabling generations of Iranian storytellers to say, in effect, “We lost, but only because they cheated.”

This last point touches on an important issue, namely how the popular narrative explains or justifies the defeat of a figure like Shah Esmā‘il. What, in the popular mind, ultimately underlay the fall of so powerful a hero? Surely more than merely one double-cross was needed to ensure the downfall of a divinely supported conqueror like Esmā‘il.

The official histories, as we have seen, speak largely with one voice on the details of the battle itself, but differ in their evaluations of the loss at Chālderān. Some imply that it was not so much a loss as a delayed victory. Khvāndamir, for example, writes that Shah Esmā‘il simply executed a tactical retreat in order to lure the Ottomans out and gather more troops with which to exterminate them.¹²² Much later, Eskandar Monshi accepts that “the shah was forced to abandon the field” at the urgent insistence of his commanders, but still maintains that the royal intention was to gather more troops and attack again from a position of strength.¹²³

Others drily narrate the end of the battle with no explanation or justification. Thus Ghaffāri reports matter-of-factly that the Qezelbāsh were scattered by cannon-fire and that Esmā‘il led a number of men to safety,¹²⁴ while Hasan Beg Rumlu just narrates the close of the battle without giving any explanations.¹²⁵ Qazvini, in his *Lubb al-Tavārikh*, does much the same.¹²⁶

A handful of official histories do see a moral to the story. Mahmud ibn Khvāndamir chides Durmesh Khan for underestimating the enemy and Shah Esmā‘il for arrogance (*ghorur-e mowfur*) in listening to him.¹²⁷ *Takmilat* says the arrogance of Durmesh Khan and others brought down the evil eye on the Qezelbāsh.¹²⁸ The *Tārikh-e Ilchi-ye Nezāmshāh* is of two minds; the author first mentions critically that Esmā‘il was so confident in his own numbers that he discounted the enemy, but later highlights his common sense, saying that he decided to stop the battle when he realized that the Ottoman cannons were so securely fastened together as to be impassable.¹²⁹ Budāq Monshi Qazvini, for his part, inserts the lame excuse that the Safavids’ side of the battlefield was muddy.¹³⁰

Bijan follows Khvāndamir almost word for word:

When it became clear to the radiant royal mind that to further persist in fighting there would be the cause of the destruction of his own servants, he decided that in accordance with the saying “War is deception,” he would leave the battle and retreat a ways so that the Anatolians would get overconfident and come out from behind their cannons. Then he would attack them again and eliminate that obstinate people.¹³¹

The “Anonymous Histories,” for their part, find their own, more romanticized ways to explain (away) the crushing loss suffered by the “Perfect Guide” at Chālderān. The leitmotif of their explanations is Esmā‘il’s arrogance.

In the Chester Beatty Library manuscript, despite the loss of the folios containing the description of the battle proper, a clue is dropped beforehand as to why Shah Esmā'il lost. When it becomes clear that Sultan Selim is en route to Iran with the intent to wage war, Esmā'il sends out orders calling for the Qezelbāsh to assemble.¹³² His commanders try to stop him, pointing out that many kings of the earth have been unable to manage the Qeysar of Rum. "Why should I take any heed of him?" scoffs the shah. "I will kill him with contempt (*ba-zāri zār*)." Here the narrator inserts the observation that "Whenever His Majesty gave orders or spoke, he always said, 'God willing'; this time, though, the words 'God willing' did not pass his lips."¹³³ A similar moment occurs in *AAS*, when Esmā'il brushes off his amirs' warnings by saying, "If the sultan is a man, let him come so I can fight him and it can become a tale told forever." The author then adds that "Shah Esmā'il spoke these words without saying 'God willing.'"¹³⁴ The coming debacle is thus implicitly blamed on Esmā'il's failure to acknowledge the supremacy of the Divine will.

The author of *AAS* also says that upon arriving at the plain of Chālderān, instead of planning for the upcoming battle, Esmā'il and his men went hunting, adding that "All the Qezelbāsh were so swollen with pride (*maghrur*) that they did not think him [Selim] worthy of the slightest attention."¹³⁵ *AASI* adds that the shah and his men had the breeze of arrogance blowing through their brains, not realizing that this was not just some skirmish, but war with the emperor (*khvāndegār*) of Rum and his mighty army.¹³⁶

The battle eventually gets under way, and the narrator specifically points out that despite their best efforts, the Shah and the Qezelbāsh fail to achieve the victory to which they have become accustomed; the "whirlwinds and signs of victory" that normally appear during their battles fail to materialize.¹³⁷ The narrator also takes the opportunity to adduce two interesting, if not surprising, reasons for the Safavid defeat. One is that Shah Esmā'il had been proud (*khvodbini kardeh bud*). The second is that the Qezelbāsh were close to falling into error, always saying about their shah, *Hami özüdür* ("He is the Protector [i.e. 'Ali ibn Abi Taleb] himself"). Apparently they said things like this to explain why Esmā'il had never lost a battle or even ever been wounded.¹³⁸ Because of these transgressions, Fate had determined that Shah Esmā'il should lose the Battle of Chālderān.

Esmā'il himself admits defeat after rescuing a group of Qezelbāsh as the battle winds down. Commanding them to head for Tabriz, he adds that there may be another battle sometime, but as for this time, the Emāms had not come to his aid, and "It is certain that I will not accomplish anything else."¹³⁹ And shortly thereafter, trapped in a bog and fearful for his life, Esmā'il admits his mistake to God Himself, who accepts his repentance and allows him to be rescued.¹⁴⁰ The shah seems to have learned his lesson, for when he is finally reunited with a group of fleeing Qezelbāsh, Shah Esmā'il piously tells them, "Fate has brought it about—praise and gratitude be to God for his perpetual grace—that we have suffered this defeat."¹⁴¹ The author of *AASI* here has him add that "It was the evil eye that struck the army of the Qezelbāsh, but God willing, it will turn to good."¹⁴²

Conclusion

This analysis has highlighted the value of popular stories, such as I have argued the “Anonymous Histories of Shah Esmā‘il” to be, for the perspective they provide on the Safavid cultural memory of an event like the Battle of Chālderān. For all the value of official histories as sources of factual data and indices of ideological and other tendencies, popular stories—insofar as they capture what people *liked to think* happened in the past—are a treasure trove for the historian searching for a sense of the inner value-landscape of the Safavid mind. In the hands of the *naqqālān* of Iran, a handful of dry facts became a vividly entertaining and even edifying tale encoding a significant cultural memory. A critical event in the history of Iran was transformed from just a few lines in a book into a romance that sings of both super-human valor and duly punished arrogance, epic events placed against a moral backdrop in which the interest of God Himself in the protagonist played a key role. Understanding this transformation affords us insight into how a certain set of value-expectations could influence the content of a tale, shaping it over the course of its transmission in a process of mythopoesis fueled by commonly held cultural standards.

In the end, in fact, the Safavid storytellers’ dynamic reworking of the memory of the Battle of Chālderān may even have sanitized the defeat and made it seem legitimately heroic—heroic enough to be painted on the wall of the Chehel Sotun palace in Isfahan in the early years of the Qajar dynasty.¹⁴³ That Sultan Selim’s death-dealing cannons should be depicted on the wall of an Iranian ruler’s pleasure palace is surely testament to the power of storytelling, and of the transmutational effect of deeply held heroic values, to mold cultural memory.¹⁴⁴

Notes

1. For an overview of the historical context of the battle, see McCaffrey, “ÇĀLDERĀN” and Walsh, “Çāldirān.” The latter includes a rich list of primary source material, including Ottoman and European accounts of the encounter. A number of Safavid accounts are helpfully collected (in Turkish) in Genç, *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*.
2. Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 175 notes as well that Esmā‘il’s defeat at Chālderān was an early catalyst for the shift in the Qezelbāsh worldview from “a primordial semi-pagan universe in which heterodox beliefs and orgiastic ritual awkwardly mixed with an appeal to Islamic legitimation” to a more staid, institutionalized Twelver Shi‘ism, a process that continued under Shah Tahmāsp.
3. For a thorough analysis of the battle (including buildup and aftermath) from a military standpoint, see Farrokh and Khorasani, “Die Schlacht von Tschaldiran.” I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this reference.
4. Savory notes this change in Eskandar Monshi, *History*, 72.
5. Wood, “The *Shāhnāma-i Ismā‘il*,” 71–2. This poem was not finished until ten years after Esmā‘il’s death; the poet thus had ample time to work in the conflict with the Ottomans, but chose not to. For Qāsemi’s panegyric, see Wood, “The *Shāhnāma-i Ismā‘il*.”
6. Floor, citing Jean Aubin, says that this was a Turkic shamanistic ritual “rather than just getting plastered” (*Safavid Government Institutions*, 262).
7. *Tazkireh*, 29.

8. Membré, *Mission*, 52. Morton, "Early Years," 45 wonders whether the books they were reading were poetry (such as Qāsemi's epic, mentioned above) or more lowbrow material.
9. I take this term from Morton, "Date and Attribution," 187. These works are often collectively referred to as *Ālamārā-ye Safavi*, but not all the manuscripts carry that name (see below).
10. Morton, "Date and Attribution," 203.
11. Hanaway, "Iranian Identity," 150.
12. Calmard ("Popular Literature," 335) points out the growth of storytelling in the Safavid period, including the revision of old stories and the development of new themes, sometimes linking historical events with oral tales. The significance of the period for storytelling may be seen in the belief, common among modern Iranian storytellers, that Shah Esmā'il used professional storytellers to spread Twelver Shī'ism throughout Iran (Yamamoto, *Oral Background*, 20–21).
13. In addition to providing the public with a place to hear stories, the coffeehouse also encouraged the growth of longer and more complex stories by enabling storytellers to expand and ramify the tales they told over multiple sessions (Hanaway, "DĀSTĀN-SARĀ'Ī").
14. For storytelling culture in Safavid Iran, see Page, "Naqqāli and Ferdowsi," 19ff.
15. *Ibid.*, 21.
16. *Ibid.*, 29; Page, "Professional Storytelling in Iran," 213.
17. Page, "Professional Storytelling in Iran," 213.
18. *Ibid.*, 208–9.
19. Page, "Naqqāli and Ferdowsi," 227–28. Besides showing off their cultural prowess, storytellers insert verses into the narrative to enhance the drama, reveal characters' inner states, or sum up the story (Yamamoto, *Oral Background*, 28).
20. Page, "Professional Storytelling," 201. She notes that "If the tradition of *naqqāli* can be said to be text-dominated, that text is the *tumār*."
21. See Page, "Naqqāli and Ferdowsi," 142 and Page, "Professional Storytelling in Iran," 200–01. Additionally, Page, "Naqqāli and Ferdowsi," 123ff. contains an excerpt from a modern *tumār* and a comparison of a performed text to a written one. Another detailed analysis of a twentieth-century *tumār* may be found in Yamamoto, *Oral Background*, chapter 2.
22. Page, "Naqqāli and Ferdowsi," 142.
23. The "Anonymous Histories" are the subject of Musalī, *I Şah İsmayılın hakimiyyāti*, which collates a huge amount of information about the manuscripts and their contents, but whose worth is diminished somewhat by the author's Azeri-nationalist interpretation of the text. The American scholar Sholeh Quinn has also examined the "Anonymous Histories" with the specific aim of understanding the changing Safavid memory of the Nī'matullāhi Sufi order; see her "Rewriting Nī'matullāhi History in Safavid Chronicles," esp. pp. 210–15.
24. See Musalī, 26–39 for a detailed survey. Musalī overcounts the manuscripts as being 13. This is because he erroneously calls the single painting in Soudavar's collection a full manuscript, and because he counts a manuscript in the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad as a copy of the "Anonymous Histories," although this remains to be confirmed.
25. Ross, "The Early Years of Shah Esmā'il."
26. For example, Sarwar, *History* relies heavily on this text.
27. Morton, "Date and Attribution."
28. *Ibid.*, 179 (citing Or. 3248, fol. 306a). The British Library manuscript is not the only extant copy of Bijan's work. There are at least three others, including a dispersed illustrated copy; see Sims, "A Dispersed Late-Safavid Copy." For the purposes of this article, however, it is sufficient to confine my analysis to Or. 3248.
29. Morton, "Date and Attribution," 194.
30. In constructing his text in this way, Bijan is being fully consistent with the practice of the majority of Safavid historians, who engaged in what has been called "imitative writing" (Quinn, "HISTORIOGRAPHY"; see her *Historical Writing* for a book-length analysis of the phenomenon). Bijan just does it with less panache than many of his peers. For an overview of Bijan's other historical work

- (his account of the life and times of Rostam Khan), including observations on his methodology, see Rota, "Three Little-Known Persian Sources," 170–75.
31. Quinn, rightly in my view, explicitly includes Bijan's history in the group of "popular" chronicles including the *Ālamārā-ye Safavi and Ālamārā-ye Shāh Esmā'il* ("Rewriting Ni'matullāhi History," 210).
 32. Morton does point out that Bijan is not systematic about rejecting absurd material ("Date and Attribution," 202).
 33. The marginal note with the "incoherent manuscript" is on *ibid.*, 182. "Saga" is Morton's felicitous term.
 34. The reconstructed line is on *ibid.*, 194.
 35. Muztar, *Jahāngoshā-ye Khāqān*.
 36. The relevant folio is Or. 3248, fol. 228b.
 37. Morton, "Date and Attribution," 195.
 38. Floor, *Safavid Government Institutions*, 48, 106.
 39. *Ibid.*, 106.
 40. Rudi Mathee, "Georgians in the Safavid Administration." See also Mathee, *Persia in Crisis* for much information on competing groups in the Safavid government, which were not limited to Qezelbāsh and Georgians.
 41. Mathee, *Persia in Crisis*, 126–28. Mathee (*ibid.*, xxiv) also draws attention to the "nostalgia" behind the late Safavid interest in early Safavid history.
 42. For an interesting analysis of an early official history of the Safavids based on actual eyewitness testimony (Amini Haravi's *Fotuhāt-e Shāhi*, commissioned by Shah Esmā'il himself in 1521), see Anooshahr, "Rise of the Safavids." A comparison of the stories told by these "old veterans" as passed on by Amini with the stories I am arguing grew out of similar eyewitness testimony would be fruitful for our understanding of the development of the Esmā'il myth.
 43. Hasan Rumlu relates simply that one "Dalu Durāq" (Deli Durak) defeated three hundred slaves of Sultan Qānsowh (*Shah Ismail Tarihi*, 177). Bijan tells the (much expanded) story in Or. 3248, fols. 240a–242b; the same story appears in *Ālamārā-ye Shāh Esmā'il* (henceforth *AASI*), 235–40 and *Ālamārā-ye Safavi* (henceforth *AAS*), 152–57.
 44. Or. 3248, fol. 242a; Chester Beatty Library MS Per. 278, fol. 89b. For the latter see Wood, "The *Tārikh-i Jahānārā*," p. 99 and fig. 7.
 45. Shokri, editor's introduction to *AAS*, xx; Montazer Sāheb, editor's introduction to *AASI*, 16. For a detailed look at the (Azeri) Turkish words found in *AASI*, see Musalı, "Türkçe Kelimeler."
 46. *AASI*, 16; *AAS*, xx.
 47. *AAS*, xx.
 48. Nor is it difficult to imagine a palace story jumping the fence, as it were, into the world of the broader public. In the nineteenth century, the personal storyteller to the Qajar shah Nāser al-Din (r. 1848–1896) told a continuing story every night to help His Majesty fall asleep. One of the Shah's daughters overheard, and she enjoyed the story so much that she hid behind a door each night and transcribed the storyteller's words. This transcription wound up being published and became the popular coffeehouse standard *Amir Arsalān* (Page, "Naqqāli and Ferdowsi," 24; Hanaway, "Amir Arsalān," 55–56.)
 49. Morton, "Date and Attribution," 182, 188.
 50. The nature of Bijan's position as history-writer is something of an open question. He himself calls himself "Reciter of the Safavid Story" (Morton, "Date and Attribution," 183). Perhaps this was more akin to a storyteller (*naqqāl*) as I am describing here than to a "serious" court historian. This might explain a fact Morton (*ibid.*, 188) found puzzling, namely that the very line from which we ascertain the date of the *Ālamārā-ye Safavi/Shāh Esmā'il* contains an error which, as Morton puts it, would have been easy to refute "even in seventeenth-century Persia." An intended audience of serious historians would have cared and caught the error; an intended audience of people simply thirsty for entertainment would not.
 51. Wood, "The *Tārikh-i Jahānārā*."

52. Arberry et al., *The Chester Beatty Library*, vol. 3:50–51.
53. This is a tentative, albeit plausible reading of a number which is illegible except for its final “4”; see Wood, “The *Tārikh-i Jahānārā*,” note 9.
54. Wood, “The *Tārikh-i Jahānārā*,” 92, building on a point made by R. McChesney, “ĀLAMĀRĀ-YE ŠĀH ESMĀ‘ĪL.”
55. Marzolph, “A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative,” 294.
56. Though not the sole illustrated copy, as claimed in Wood, “The *Tārikh-i Jahānārā*.” See below and Musalī, *Šah Īsmayīlūn hakimīyyāti*, p. 35.
57. Cf. *AAS*, 505ff.
58. Though the *Encyclopædia Iranica* article on the manuscripts is not found under this name (R. McChesney, “ĀLAMĀRĀ-YE ŠĀH ESMĀ‘ĪL”).
59. Montazer Sāheb, *Ālamārā-ye Shāh Esmā‘il*.
60. Shokri, *Ālamārā-ye Safavi*.
61. *AAS*, xxii. The primary manuscript Shokri used was undated, but clearly older than the secondary manuscript, which was dated 1234/1819 (see below).
62. Morton, “Date and Attribution,” 192.
63. All three are available for download in PDF form at www.ical.ir.
64. *AAS*, xxx. It is designated as *noskheb* in Shokri’s editorial notes. He does not say that it is in the parliamentary library, which it may not have been in 1971, but it is clearly the same manuscript (e.g. the library seal he mentions is present, and the colophon he cites is identical).
65. Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts*, vol. 1:213 (cat. no. 536); the manuscript is discussed in some detail in Beveridge, “The Author.”
66. E.g. fols. 44a, 45b, 100b, 104b–105b, and 117a. The top half of fol. 278b is written this way, while the bottom half is written horizontally.
67. Beginning at fol. 184a and occurring fairly regularly after that.
68. Fol. 111b, line 9.
69. The image of a round-table of scribes passing the manuscript around is irresistible.
70. Musalī, *Šah Īsmayīlūn hakimīyyāti*, 30–32; see also Eng, “Manuscript M.”
71. The corpus of popular tales about early Safavid history is undoubtedly broader than what is presently to hand; Bijan, for example, uses a source for the (fictional) battle with Abu’l-Kheyr that has substantial differences from the available versions of the “Anonymous Histories” (Morton, “Date and Attribution,” 193–94).
72. Translated in Genç, *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 135–36.
73. <http://persianpainting.net/MoinMsM/index.html>.
74. Marzolph, “A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative,” 287. *AASI*, Majles MS 761, and Majles MS 635 all open with this formula. *AAS*, IOL 1877, and Majles MS 9421 are missing their opening pages, but it seems safe to assume, based on their probable date, that they opened with similar words.
75. Mahmud b. Khvāndamir, *Iran*, 161–2; Budāq Monshi Qazvini (transl. Genç), *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 40–1; ‘Abdi Beg Shirāzi, *Takmilat*, 54; Ghaffāri (transl. Genç), *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 45; Hasan Rumlu, *Şah Īsmail Tarihi*, 178–79; Eskandar Monshi, *History*, 68.
76. Budāq Monshi Qazvini (transl. Genç), *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 40–1) merely has Khan Mohammad Khan describe how difficult it will be to attack the Ottoman formations, without making a recommendation. For this Durmesh Khan accuses him of cowardice.
77. Eskandar Monshi, *History*, 68.
78. Or. 3248, fol. 246b.
79. *Ibid.*, fols. 246b–247a.
80. Chester Beatty Library MS Per. 278, fol. 217b. This, unfortunately, is exactly the point in this manuscript at which the relevant pages start to be missing.
81. *AAS*, 484. Kuh-e Narkash is a mountain east of Tehran, not that this place reference is to be taken seriously. In *AASI*, 520 the mountain’s name is spelled Sarkosh, which is also, possibly coincidentally, a real mountain, this one west of Kermanshah.

82. *AAS*, 484–85. In *AASI*, Durmesh Khan’s diatribe against Khan Mohammad Khan does not even allow for the possibility that God might give victory to the Ottomans: “However great his [the Qaysar’s] fortune may be, the Lord of the world has granted His own fortune to the Perfect Guide” (*AASI*, 521). In other words, for Durmesh Khan, there is no “if” about it.
83. *AAS*, 485; *AASI*, 521.
84. None of the manuscripts under consideration, perhaps understandably, mention the all-night drinking bout that Tahmāsp cites in his *Tazkireh* (see above, note 5).
85. Khvāndamir, *Habibu’s-Siyar*, 606; Mahmud b. Khvāndamir, *Iran*, 163; Budāq Monshi Qazvini (transl. Genç), *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 40; ‘Abdi Beg Shirāzi, *Takmilat*, 55; Ghaffāri (transl. Genç), *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 45; Ḥasan Rumlu, *Şah İsmail Tarihi*, 180; *Tārikk-e İlchi-ye Nizāmshāh* (transl. Genç), *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 58; Eskandar Monshi, *History*, 69.
86. *AAS*, 482 (editor’s note); *AASI*, 513. The names are spelled A.T.K. and A.W.T.K. respectively; my vocalization is just a guess. It has been suggested to me that the Qezelbāsh were poking fun at Malquch-oghli’s status as a “slave of the House [of Osman],” i.e. *ev-oghli*, and that “Owtak-oghli” is a corruption of Otāq-oghli (*otāq* standing in for *ev*). While this interpretation has its share of problems, it is the most plausible guess I am aware of. The etymology of “Malquch” is itself unclear.
87. Or. 3248, fol. 247a. Hasan Rumlu also names Malquch-oghli when enumerating the Ottoman officers (*Şah İsmail Tarihi*, 179).
88. The quail hunt, which Bijan may have taken from Ghaffāri (Genç, *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 45), is illustrated with a painting in Or. 3248, fol. 247b.
89. Or. 3248, fol. 248a; cf. Khvāndamir, *Habibu’s-Siyar*, 605.
90. Here, oddly enough, he is re-introduced as “Atak Beg, otherwise known as Balquch-oghli” (*sic*).
91. Or. 3248, fol. 248b. The poem also appears in *Ahsan al-Tavārikkh*, from which Bijan may have copied it.
92. Or. 3248, fols. 248b–249b (illustrated on 249a).
93. Khvāndamir, *Habibu’s-Siyar*, 606. Bijan’s version varies slightly.
94. Or. 3248, fol. 252b.
95. Chester Beatty Library MS Per. 278, fol. 217b.
96. In fact, he hailed from a family of Christian converts to Islam based in Bosnia (Leiser, “Mal’koč-Oghullari”).
97. Chester Beatty Library MS Per. 278, fol. 217b.
98. *AAS*, 483. In *AASI*, 513 Selim’s mother adds, perhaps not quite believably given her Sunnism, that “Sheikh-oghli” fights with the help of the Immaculate Emāms.
99. *AAS*, 483.
100. *Ibid.*, 483–84.
101. *Ibid.*, 485; *AASI*, 521.
102. Taking “royal cubit” (*zirā’-e shāh*) to mean the seventeenth-century Iranian *gaz-e shāhi* of 95 cm (cf. *EL*², s.v. “Dhirā’”), this would make the armor 2.85 m (more than 9 feet) high and 1.19 m (almost 4 feet) wide.
103. *AAS*, 486. The armor of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror is not mentioned in *AASI*. This incident is an interesting parallel to the description of Esmā’il Mirzā’s wedding feast in the *‘Ālamārā-ye Shāh Tahmāsp*, in which several items of clothing and accoutrements worn by Shah Tahmāsp and his son are said to have been owned by various famous people, such as the sword-belt that once belonged to Soltan Hoseyn Bāyqarā (Quinn, “Rewriting Ni‘matullāhi History,” 217).
104. *AAS*, 486.
105. This seems to be further confirmation that Malquch-oghli was remembered as a European.
106. *AAS*, 486–87. Later in the story it is strongly implied that the veiled figure was Esmā’il’s wife Tājlu Begom.
107. *AASI*, 523 only mentions in passing that Esmā’il and Malquch-oghli had some back-and-forth, and gives no quotations from either figure.
108. *AAS*, 487.

109. *Ibid.*, 488.
110. *Ibid.*; *AASI*, 523. The anatomical description of Esmā'il's sword-blow in IOL 1877 (fol. 252a) is painstakingly detailed.
111. Leiser, "Malğoç-Oğhulları."
112. Eskandar Monshi, *History*, 70 does imply that the cannon fire became more concentrated when the Janissaries responded to the Qezelbāsh advance as far as the gun carriages ("the Janissaries and artillerymen bent themselves to their task").
113. Or. 3248, fols. 249b–250a.
114. *AAS*, 489.
115. The term used is *zan-talāq*, implying that the oath-breaker's wife will be forbidden to him.
116. *AAS*, 491.
117. The narrator seems to have backtracked here, since it seems unlikely that Shah Esmā'il would have interrupted his showdown with Malquch-oghli to take a message from Sultan Selim.
118. *AASI*, 522.
119. *Ibid.* The *Shābnāme* quote is from the story of the Khaqan of China.
120. *AASI*, 522–23.
121. *Ibid.*, 524.
122. Khvādamir, *Habibu's-Siyar*, 606. The fact that Khvādamir was writing for Shah Esmā'il himself may explain this interpretation.
123. Eskandar Monshi, *History*, 70–1.
124. Geç, *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 46.
125. Hasan Rumlu, *Şah İsmail Tarihi*, 183.
126. Qazvini, *Lubb al-Tavārikh*, 417.
127. Mahmud b. Khvādamir, *Iran*, 162.
128. Shirazi, *Takmilat al-Akbbār*, 54.
129. Geç, *İranlı tarihçilerin kaleminden Çaldıran*, 57–58.
130. *Ibid.*, 41.
131. Or. 3248, fol. 252a. The wording is very close to Khvādamir's.
132. At the same point in the narrative, *AASI*, 515 adds that the Shah's blessed mind is a little perturbed because his army is unprepared—possibly another touch of foreshadowing to explain the upcoming defeat.
133. Chester Beatty Library MS Per. 278, fol. 216b.
134. *AAS*, 477.
135. *Ibid.* The quail hunt is mentioned in Bijan (and illustrated at Or. 3248, fol. 247b). Sarwar, *History*, 77 interprets this detail as meaning that Esmā'il wants to "demonstrate [his] unruffled temper" rather than as a criticism of him or his men for not paying sufficient attention to the Ottoman threat.
136. *AASI*, 520.
137. *AAS*, 490.
138. *Ibid.*, 491–92.
139. *Ibid.*, 494.
140. *Ibid.*, 496ff.; *AASI*, 527ff.
141. *AAS*, 498.
142. *AASI*, 529. The evil eye, of course, strikes only those who are proud or feel self-sufficient and impervious to the blows of this cruel world.
143. Babaie, "Shah 'Abbas II," 127.
144. An interesting coda to this story is provided by a manuscript at SOAS attributed to the Qajar historian Rostam al-Hokamā and dated 1255/1839. In his brief section on Shah Esmā'il, Rostam al-Hokamā writes (fol. 100b) that Esmā'il "fought a manly battle against Shah [*sic*] Selim and cut his vazir, who had broken his oath, in two with one blow of his sword"—thus showing how two details of the popular narrative had converged into a new story. The manuscript is cat. no. MS35511 in the Digital Archives and Special Collections, <http://digital.info.soas.ac.uk/10501/#page/203/mode/lup>.

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