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# Ottoman Policies Regarding Shah Ismāʿīl II as Seen through Ottoman Documents

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## Abstract

Relations between Iran and the Ottoman Empire during the Safavid era were never free of tension, even when there was peace between the two states. In peacetime, both powers secretly and closely monitored the other's movements, either in anticipation of or in preparation for attacks. Due to the destruction of Safavid archives, there is little documentary information in Iranian archives about Iranian-Ottoman relations in the period, forcing us to rely mainly on chronicles and travelogues. However, the Ottoman Mühimme Defterleri (Registers of Important Affairs), which contain a copy of all royal decrees and orders, are a very valuable source for the study of these tense and unstable relations from the Ottoman perspective. According to these registers, upon the coming to power of Shah Ismāʿīl II, the Ottoman government publicly upheld and respected the terms of the Amasya Peace Treaty, while secretly looking for a pretext to resume war against Iran. The question is, however, why the Ottomans did not attack Iran immediately after Ismāʿīl II's accession to the throne. Was it due, as some sources claim, to the bravery Shah Ismāʿīl had previously shown in action against the Ottomans? By examining and analyzing the Mühimme Registers of this period, the authors of the present paper demonstrate that the Ottomans had plans to invade Iran and occupy parts of its territory at the beginning of Ismāʿīl II's accession, but their military campaign was thwarted by the lack of opportunities during the short period of the Safavid king's rule.

**Keywords:** the Safavids; the Ottomans; Shah Ismāʿīl II; Sultan Morād III; Iran-Ottoman relations; *Mühimme Defterleri*

## Introduction

Safavid-Ottoman relations during the early modern era were tense and complicated. Having conquered both Muslim and Christian territories, the Ottomans did not tolerate a powerful rival at their borders, especially when the new state sought to spread the beliefs of a particular branch of Islam that clashed with the Sunnism espoused by the Ottoman ruling class, and which had many adherents in Ottoman territories. Shortly after the establishment of Safavid rule, many such adherents left Ottoman-held Anatolia for Iran, leading to an Ottoman ban on immigration and movement across borders.<sup>3</sup> The ban was only lifted for Safavid devotees who wished to make a pilgrimage to Shaykh Safi al-Din's mausoleum in Ardabil. This came about through an exchange of diplomatic correspondence and Shah

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<sup>3</sup> Sümer, *Safevi Devleti'nin Kuruluşu ve Gelişmesinde Anadolu Türklerinin Rolü (Şah İsmail ile Halifeleri ve Anadolu Türkleri)* (Ankara: Güven Matbası, 1976), 17–19, 25.

Ismā'īl's personal intervention requesting the Ottoman Sultan allow them to visit the holy shrine. However, the policies of the two governments underwent a drastic change upon the succession of Sultan Selīm I.<sup>4</sup> Taking advantage of internal unrest in Ottoman territories, Shah Ismā'īl I dispatched Nūr 'Alī Rūmlū and Muḥammad Ustājilū to Anatolia to rally Safavid devotees and sent a threatening letter along with women's attire to Sultan Selīm, infuriating the latter. This was one of the major factors leading to the Battle of Chaldiran.<sup>5</sup> The Ottomans won a decisive victory over the previously undefeated Shah Ismā'īl I. They did not, however, appear to gain much from the Iranian campaign and quickly left the occupied territories. Slow to recover from the scourge of defeat, the newly established Safavid state was not able to find allies among the rulers of the regions from Mesopotamia to Egypt, which were quickly annexed by the Ottomans. Shah Ismā'īl I also sought to enlist European assistance, but to no avail.<sup>6</sup>

The situation was aggravated by the death of Sultan Selīm and the coming to power of Sultan Sulaymān Qānūnī (known as Sulaymān the Magnificent in the West). When the new Ottoman sultan learned of Shah Ismā'īl's death and the subsequent accession of his ten-year-old son, Ṭahmāsb, he sent a threatening and insulting letter to the young shah, and thus congratulated him on his accession.<sup>7</sup> Sultan Sulaymān's preoccupation with Europe prevented him from invading Iran immediately, but after campaigns in the West, he turned his attention to the East. In addition to several cross-border expeditions, Sultan Sulaymān organized four major military campaigns against Iran, which finally led to the Amasya Peace Treaty in 1555/962. The armistice brought a period of relative peace to Iran, one that witnessed the exchange of envoys, ambassadors, and diplomatic gifts.<sup>8</sup> The most important outcome of the Treaty of Amasya was, arguably, that two confessionally opposed powers acknowledged each other's existence.<sup>9</sup> However, relations between the two states were uncertain and fragile.

The Safavids promoted Twelver Shiism as their state religion and thus considered control over the *'atabāt-i-'ālīyāt* (the holy Shi'a shrine cities of Iraq) as critical. These areas had previously been territories of the Āq Quyūnlū, with whom the Safavids claimed blood relations through maternal lineage and thus regarded themselves as legitimate heirs to the holy Shi'a cities. Therefore, when Morād fled from Baghdad, Barik Beg Purnak took control of the city as ruler. When Shah Ismā'īl I sent Khalil Yasavol with presents to Baghdad, he donned the Qizilbāsh hat and ordered all his adherents to do the same while bearing his gifts. But when news arrived that Shah Ismā'īl had left for Baghdad, Barik Beg Purnak feared for his life and fled to Aleppo. Shah Ismā'īl I entered Baghdad in 1508/914 and later visited the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf.<sup>10</sup>

The Ottoman government, which had been slowly annexing various regions from Anatolia and Europe since before the Safavids came to power in Iran, could not ignore the important and strategic regions on its eastern borders. The Safavids were also pursuing the expansion of their borders, creating grounds for confrontation between the two empires. Whenever the opportunity arose, the Ottomans tried to achieve their strategic objectives. These attacks not only depended on conditions such as war or peace with Western competitors, or internal unrest and rebellions in the Ottoman Empire, but also on political developments inside

<sup>4</sup> Sümer, *Safevi Devleti'nin Kuruluşu*, 345.

<sup>5</sup> Feridun Bey, *Münşeât-ı Selatin* (İstanbul, 1274/1875), 384–385; Sümer, *Safevi Devleti'nin Kuruluşu*, 34–39.

<sup>6</sup> Navā'ī, *Iran va Jahan az Moghol ta Ghajar* (Tehran: Homa, 1364/1985), 152–157.

<sup>7</sup> Feridun Bey, *Münşeât-ı Selatin*, 541.

<sup>8</sup> Qumī, *Khulāṣah al-Tawārīkh*, ed. Ehsan Eshraghi (Tehran: Daneshgah Tehran, 1383/2004), 460–477.

<sup>9</sup> Zahir Atçıl, "Warfare as a Tool of Diplomacy: Background of the First Ottoman-Safavid Treaty in 1555," *Turkish Historical Review* 10 (2019): 3–24; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Cilt 2, 4. Baskı (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1983), 361; Peace of Amasya, Encyclopaedia Iranica.

<sup>10</sup> Hasan Beg Rumlu, *Ahsan Al-Tavarikh*, ed. 'Abdol Hosain Navā'ī (Tehran: Asatir, 1384/2005), 1031–2; Qumī, *Khulāṣah al-Tawārīkh*, 93–94; Turkamān, *Tārīkh-i 'Ālamārāy-i 'Abbāsī*, ed. İraj Afshār (Tehran: Daneshgah, 1350/1971), 34.

Iran.<sup>11</sup> An example is the violation of the Amasya Peace Treaty by Sultan Morād III (1594–1574/1003–982), who invaded Iran during the rule of Sultan Moḥammad Khodābanda. The question is, however, why the Ottomans did not immediately invade Iran after the death of Shah Ṭahmāsb and the succession of Ismāʿīl II in 1576/984.

Ismāʿīl Mīrzā (Ismāʿīl II) was the second son of Shah Ṭahmāsb. As his older brother, Moḥammad Mīrzā, was almost completely blind, Ismāʿīl was more likely to become the crown prince, not the least on account of his valor and bravery. However, due to Ismāʿīl's alleged waywardness and his father's fear and concern about the consequences of his behavior, Ismāʿīl was imprisoned in Qahqahah Castle, where he languished for nineteen years and six months until his father's death. Still, fate had ordained that he would be king.<sup>12</sup>

Persian sources on the short period of Ismāʿīl II's rule, which lasted only fourteen months, are scarce and vague; it is the events of his death and what came after that dominate chroniclers' accounts.<sup>13</sup> A number of chroniclers eulogize Ismāʿīl II's valor and power, while others accuse him of harboring Sunni proclivities and as bearing responsibility for the massacre of many Safavid princes and notables.<sup>14</sup> However, these sources do not go into detail about the events of his life, his death still remaining a mystery. Researchers have also shown little interest in exploring this unique and unstable period. Walter Hinz's work probably remains the best source on the period today, as Pārsādūst's study is marred by fictionalizing.<sup>15</sup> Articles written about this period have paid little attention to Ottoman archival documents. Even articles written by Turkish scholars in Turkish are mainly based on chronicles and much less on Ottoman archives.<sup>16</sup> In this paper, therefore, we examine and analyze Shah Ismāʿīl's accession to the throne and relations with the Ottomans as reflected in Ottoman documents.

During the rule of Shah Ismāʿīl II, there was no war between the Safavids and Ottomans, possibly due to the shortness of his rule. Some historians attribute this to Ismāʿīl's previous successful skirmishes against the Ottomans, his reputation for bravery and boldness, Ottoman caution in assessing Iran's internal conditions, and the fact that the Ottomans had not forgotten the "previous battle with Ismāʿīl before his incarceration at Qahqahah."<sup>17</sup> Undoubtedly, all these factors could have influenced the Ottomans' decision not to engage in war with Ismāʿīl II. Our concern here, however, is examining the case from the Ottoman perspective based on Ottoman archival documents. Fortunately, the *Mühimme Defterleri* in the Ottoman archives shed light on the Ottoman view of Ismāʿīl II's rule, revealing their assessment of the situation and search for an opportunity to attack Iran.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> As it pertains to Western competitors, Hinz says that Iranians were waiting to see if Shah Ismail II would continue the peace with the Ottomans and be willing to pay the annual tribute. He claims that the Ottoman Sultan, upon receiving the tribute from Vienna, breathed a sigh of relief. Walter Hinz, *Schah Esma'il II: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Safaviden*, trans. Kaykāvūs Jahāndāri (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī va Farhangī, 1371/1992), 90–91.

<sup>12</sup> Qumī, *Khulāṣah al-Tawārīkh*, 615; Turkamān, *Tārīkh-i 'Ālamārāy-i 'Abbāsī*, 199.

<sup>13</sup> See Mehdi Kivani, Ismāʿīl II Safavi, <https://www.cgje.org.ir/>.

<sup>14</sup> See Jonabedi, *Rozat al-safavieh*, ed. Tabatabaee Majd (Tehran: Afshar, 1378/1999), 536–544.

<sup>15</sup> Hinz, *Schah Esma'il II*; Pārsādūst, *Shāh Ismāʿīl II: Shujāʿ-i tabāh shuda* (Tehran: Sahami, 1381/2002).

<sup>16</sup> Cihat Aydoğmuşoğlu, "Şah II. İsmail (1576–1577) Devri Siyasî ve Dinî Hâdiseleri," *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies* 48 (Summer II, 2016): 59–67; Mehmet Dağlar, "Safevi Devleti'nde Şah II. İsmail ve Muhammed Hudabende Dönemlerinde Kızılbaş Hâkimiyeti (1574–1587)," *Journal of Turkish History Researches* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 50–65.

<sup>17</sup> Navāʿī and Ghaffarī Fard, *Tārīkh-i Taḥavvulāt-i siyāsī, ijtimāʿī, iqtisādī va farhangī-i Irān dar dawrān-i Şafaviyya* (Tehran: Samt, 1381/2002), 150; Abdolreza Hoshang Mahdavi, *Tarikh-e Ravabet Khareji-e Iran* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1364/1985), 42–43.

<sup>18</sup> These documents are recorded in the *Mühimme Defterleri*, i.e., the registers in which copies of royal orders and decrees were recorded, specifically court orders issued with royal approval concerning the empire's important affairs. The name and use of such registers gained currency in the late seventeenth century. Previously, such registers were called "*Daftarhāy-i aḥkām-i mīrī*" or "*aḥkām-i mīrī*." Although the collection of *Mühimme Defterleri* is kept in

### Ismā‘īl II’s accession to the throne

Ismā‘īl II was not happy with the Amasya Peace Treaty agreed with the Ottomans, and it was apparently his lack of adherence to its terms that led to his imprisonment in Qahqahah for nearly two decades, an incarceration which likely had devastating effects on his mind and soul.<sup>19</sup> Soon after his accession to the throne, Ismā‘īl II took revenge on all those he considered responsible for his imprisonment. Ismā‘īl’s violence and the murders he ordered convinced his opponents that his death was necessary, leading to conspiracies to send him to his demise; a death whose details are still shrouded in mystery. Sources believe his powerful sister, Parī Khan Khānum, was involved in his murder.<sup>20</sup> However, reflecting on the events that transpired before Ismā‘īl’s death, we can imagine a larger conspiracy that included Qizilbāsh elements. For example, considering Ismā‘īl’s strict exigency of loyalty and obedience, it is difficult to explain ‘Alīqulī Khan Shāmlū’s delay in killing ‘Abbās Mīrzā after arriving in Herat, unless we presume ‘Alīqulī Khan’s awareness of the conspiracy to murder the Safavid king.

Ismā‘īl’s rise to power not only horrified Safavid princes and courtiers, but also made the Ottomans mindful of the Şafavid threat. Ismā‘īl II, known for his courage and bravery, may have reminded the Qizilbāsh and adherents of the Safavid Order of the ambitions of his grandfather, Ismā‘īl I. It is very likely that elements who did not endorse the policies of Shah Ṭahmāsb, and who favored territorial conquest and border expansion, sympathized with Ismā‘īl Mīrzā and wished for the day he was freed from Qahqahah and installed on the throne. During his incarceration, the future Ismā‘īl II apparently did not know much about events occurring outside the castle, beyond news that sparingly reached him, particularly through *qalandars* (wandering Sufis) who visited the castle to benefit from his donations.<sup>21</sup>

When Ismā‘īl II came to power, Morād III (1574–1594) had been on the Ottoman throne since the end of Shah Ṭahmāsb’s rule, holding it until his death at the beginning of Shah ‘Abbās’s rule. Morād III’s reign was marked by exhaustive wars on the western fronts, but, as evidenced by Ottoman archival documents, he was also not oblivious to Iran and Ismā‘īl II, whose movements he watched carefully.<sup>22</sup>

According to Ottoman documents, Ismā‘īl had sympathizers both within the borders of Safavid Iran and beyond. In Ottoman territories, Ismā‘īl had devotees who subscribed to anti-nomian (*ghālī*) Sufism or Shi‘a beliefs; beliefs intolerable to the Ottomans, who were determined to either punish or contain them. This was not merely a political position taken vis-à-vis a neighboring state, but a devotion to a system of beliefs that was increasingly expanding in their territory, sustained by a hierarchy of religious scholars integrated in the Ottoman bureaucracy.<sup>23</sup> This is why the Ottomans called Ismā‘īl sinful, vile, and an atheist, and his adherents became *rāfiḍī* or heretical.<sup>24</sup> This stands in contrast with accounts of Ismā‘īl II’s proclivity for Sunnism in some Persian sources, while the Ottomans accused Ismā‘īl of having extremist Shi‘a beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

It is worth mentioning that because the documents are copies of the original orders recorded in the *Mühimme Defterleri*, their dates likely correspond to the date of their registration in the registers; documents that bear the same date might have been issued on

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the Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister’s Office, the earliest dated register of *Mühimme Defterleri* is preserved at the Topkapı Palace. <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/muhimme-defteri>

<sup>19</sup> Turkamān, *Tārīkh-i ‘Ālamārāy-i ‘Abbāsi*, 132.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 218–219.

<sup>21</sup> Hinz, *Schah Esmā‘īl II*, 1–40.

<sup>22</sup> <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/murad-iii>

<sup>23</sup> See Baltacıoğlu-Brammer Ayşe, “Those Heretics Gathering Secretly ...: Qizilbash Rituals and Practices in the Ottoman Empire According to Early Modern Sources,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* (2019): 39–60.

<sup>24</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHM, 32/81; BOA, {DVNSMHM, 32/80.

<sup>25</sup> Turkamān, *Tārīkh-i ‘Ālamārāy-i ‘Abbāsi*, 132.

different days. Some of the documents are lengthy and detailed, while others are short and concise depending on the recipients' position and the subject of the order, but all relate to Safavid Iran during the rule of Shah Ismā'īl II.

Sultan Morād respected the Amasya Peace Treaty with Shah Ṭahmāsb, but when Ismā'īl II came to power, the sultan became increasingly concerned about the latter's intentions. Not only did Sultan Morād carefully watch all movements in the border areas, but he also monitored Iran's internal changes and developments with the help of spies and governors of the bordering regions. Although Morād himself did not participate in war as a soldier, he aspired to territorial conquests, especially on the eastern frontiers.<sup>26</sup> However, he launched no military campaigns against Iran in the last days of Shah Ṭahmāsb's rule or during that of Shah Ismā'īl II, only attacking the border areas on several fronts when Muḥammad Khudābanda acceded the Safavid throne.

When rumors of Shah Ismā'īl II's death reached the Ottomans, Sultan Morād issued several orders to the rulers and *beglerbegis* (governor-generals) of the border areas, instructing them to closely monitor Safavid Iran's internal developments and keep him informed until the news was verified.<sup>27</sup> However, this was not possible without an intelligence network. Morād, therefore, ordered the *beglerbegi* of Shahrizor to dispatch highly skilled spies to inform him regularly of the situation in Iran.<sup>28</sup>

Intelligence work and the use of spies in neighboring countries has always been part of what governments do. Thus, it was natural that—with the coming to power of Shah Ismā'īl II and the Ottomans' increasing concerns about his future actions—the Ottoman government should increase its espionage efforts. They especially watched those who departed for Iran from Ottoman territories, aiming to prevent the continuation of such migrations and recruit potential collaborators.

In an order issued to the governor of Shahrizor, the Ottoman sultan claimed that Ismā'īl II had cordially received several Ottoman subjects who had fled to Iran.<sup>29</sup> This constituted a violation of the Amasya Peace Treaty, according to which such subjects should have been extradited to Ottoman lands.<sup>30</sup> In the same order, the sultan instructs the governor to coax and win over the Kurds through concessions and favors (*istimālat*) in order to prevent departures from Shahrizor's *sanjāqs* (districts) to Safavid Iran, permitting the governor to use violence if such subjects attempted to cross the borders by force. He also ordered the governor to instruct the local regional administrators under his control "to seize those who fight and wage war, and send them to you. You must thereupon detain them and send them to me."<sup>31</sup> In a similar order issued to the governor of Van, the sultan referred to a spy named Āghā who claimed that the shah of Iran had appointed Mohammad Beg to be governor of Tabriz and the Kurd Sharaf Khan to be governor of Nakhichevan. The shah also received people who took refuge in Iran, and sent them to Qazvin.<sup>32</sup> The sultan then

<sup>26</sup> Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, Cilt 3, I. Kısım, 3. Baskı (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1983), 44.

<sup>27</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 32/72.

<sup>28</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 32/75.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> The content of this agreement, exchanged via letters between Shah Tahmasb and Sultan Sulaymān, addressed issues such as Iranians refraining from cursing the first three caliphs and ceding certain territories—including western Azerbaijan, parts of Kurdistan, Mesopotamia, and the northern part of Georgia—to the Ottoman Empire. In return, the Ottomans committed to keeping the Shia pilgrimage route to holy shrines open and pledged to support and protect them. Furthermore, the Ottomans undertook to recognize Armenia, Ardabil, Kartli, Kakheti, and eastern Azerbaijan as part of Iran in the context of this agreement.

In the sources, there is no explicit reference to the repatriation of refugees as a provision of this agreement. However, following this peace, Shah Tahmasb delivered Prince Bayazid, the son of Sultan Sulaymān, to his officials, establishing a precedent that both parties presumably adhered to during the peace era. `Abdol Hosain Navā'i, *Ravabet Siyasi va Eghtesadi Iran dar Doreh Safavi* (Tehran: Samt, 1377/1998), 22–25; Peçevi İbrahim Efendi, *Peçevi Tarihi*, Cilt 1, ed. Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, 1. Baskı (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1981), 238–239, 241.

<sup>31</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 32/75.

<sup>32</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 32/67.

mentioned the names of several people, referring to them as pathetic, who had fled to Ismā'īl's court. As most such refugees were from the Kurdish regions, this document's main significance is its highlighting of the fragile relationship between the Ottomans and Kurds.

In these documents, there is an insistence on emphasizing that the acceptance of refugees constituted a violation of the peace treaty between the two states. Chigīn Qāsim is mentioned in the previous order as one of those who took refuge in Iranian territories, and the Ottoman sultan considered Iran's acceptance of Chigīn Qāsim to be a violation of the peace agreement. Infuriated, the sultan emphasized to the governor of Baghdad that he should warmly receive anyone from Iran who took refuge in Ottoman territories. The governor of Van also received similar orders. What is remarkable in this document is the information imparted by the sultan: that Shah Rostam, the brother of the governor of Lorestan, entertained the thought of abandoning the Safavids and joining the Ottomans. The sultan ordered the *beglerbegi* of Baghdad to secretly dispatch a spy to inform Shah Rostam that the sultan "would offer assistance if he wished to join the Ottoman court." The Ottoman sultan then emphasized that the *beglerbegi* should accept people like Shah Rostam, if they wish to come over to the Ottomans, and orders the *beglerbegi* to keep him informed on such matters.<sup>33</sup>

In another order, Sultan Morād, referring to those who embraced the Ottomans, instructs:

Because the other side [Iran] has accepted the people who go from this side, acting inadvisably and contrary to the peace agreement, [you must] win over through concessions and favors, and offer assistance to, the people from that side who are inclined toward us and show subservience.<sup>34</sup>

Among other things, he mentions the son of the governor of Lorestan, Muḥammad Mīrzā, who had apparently expressed his obedience, but the Ottomans did not support him at the time.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, the sultan orders:

This time send a letter and a messenger to him and offer appropriate concessions and favors, so that, God willing, he will express his love for Islam; and instruct him to send a letter or a messenger, or personally come to us and offer his servitude.<sup>36</sup>

A point worth pondering in this text is its presentation of Mohammad Mirza's joining the Ottomans as him embracing Islam, indicative of their view of Safavid Shi'ism as beyond the pale of Islam. This matter demonstrates that, despite superficial friendships and the recognition of the Safavid government in the Amasya Peace Treaty, religious labels continued to undermine the Safavids.

Mohammad Mirza is not the only example of the desire to join the Ottomans. Evidence shows that, throughout the entire Safavid period, people from the Ottoman government took refuge in Iran for various reasons, just as people from Safavid Iran took refuge with the Ottomans. If these people were ordinary subjects, such as merchants, artists, writers, and physicians, who simply preferred to live in the neighboring country, it did not create much of a problem for the two sides. But when statesmen and military officials, especially princes, fled to another country for political reasons, political problems arose. There were usually diplomatic efforts to request their extradition, with any objection or resistance potentially having a direct impact on the fragile relations between the two countries, and consequently bringing the Amasya Peace Treaty into question. Of course, the internal

<sup>33</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 32/69.

<sup>34</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 32/75.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

dynamics of both countries greatly influenced whether refugee princes and political figures would be extradited or not, existing treaties notwithstanding.

As mentioned above, Sultan Morād had accused Shah Ismā‘īl II of supporting Ottoman refugees, which the sultan used as a pretext for retaliation. Since the Safavid archival documents have been destroyed and there is nothing in hand regarding Safavid policies on such issues, this Ottoman claim cannot be verified based on Safavid archives, nor can Shah Ismā‘īl be blamed as solely responsible for the violation of the peace accords. In particular, the Ottoman sultan’s desire to conquer parts of Safavid Iran, which he frequently refers to in his orders as important regions for his country, could itself have been a motivation for his support of Safavid fugitives and refugees, and he might have accused Ismā‘īl of violating the peace agreement to justify his own measures.

Ottoman subjects continued to take refuge in Shah Ismā‘īl II’s court until the last days of his life. In an order dated Ramaḍān 7, 985/November 28, 1577, addressed to the Sanjāqbeg of Soran, the sultan expresses his anger over the departure of Bahram, the brother of the governor of ‘Imādiya, to Iran with forty of his men, referring to him as “pathetic.” The sultan castigates the Sanjāqbeg of Soran for allowing such a thing to happen. Calling him a good servant of the government, the sultan instructs the Sanjāqbeg of Soran to capture—dead or alive—anyone who tries to cross the border from the district under his rule. The sultan also adds a religious dimension to the story, claiming that Bahram’s departure was regrettable because “he has chosen *rāfiḍī* (heresy) and become an apostate.”<sup>37</sup> This phrase emphasizes, once again, the instrumental use of religious beliefs as a tool for discrediting the enemy.

The Ottoman sultan was intent on preventing his subjects from seeking shelter in the Safavid court. On the same date, Ramaḍān 7, 985/November 28, 1577, an order was issued to the *beglergebi* of Van in which the sultan expressed his displeasure at the fact that Shah Qulī’s sons had sought refuge in the Safavid court due to a dispute with the governor of ‘Imādiya. “Their father had served my father and my ancestors,” he regretfully reminds the *beglergebi*. “It is not appropriate that they should choose *rāfiḍī* and apostasy and subjugate themselves to the above (Safavids) only because they had small differences with Zaynal Beg, while they were notable begs themselves.”<sup>38</sup> What is remarkable here, again, is the sultan’s emphasis on the religious aspect, accusing Shah Qulī’s sons of *rāfiḍī* and apostasy. These documents show that taking refuge in Safavid Iran was interpreted as leaving Islam and becoming a *rāfiḍī* (heretic). This becomes more meaningful when we know that one of the sultan’s main duties was to protect the faith of the people in Ottoman territories.

The sultan, then, gives strict orders to the *beglerbeg* to inform Shah Qulī’s sons, via a formal letter, of the sultan’s decision that the government of their father’s *sanjāq* shall be granted to them upon their return to the Ottomans. The sultan emphasizes that the *beglerbegi* should do something to turn them away from the Safavids and “abandon heresy with the Islamic zeal that is inherent in them and return [to their homeland],” and serve like their father.<sup>39</sup>

Such asylum-seeking and attitudes among Ottoman subjects towards Shah Ismā‘īl II and the Safavids could be a reason why Sultan Morād III, despite his interest in expanding his borders to the East, even using spies as well as enticing and attracting Safavid opponents, did not launch attacks on Iran during Shah Ismā‘īl II’s life and only engaged in military preparations.

<sup>37</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 32/72.

<sup>38</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 32/73. In Rabi al-Avval 967/January 1560, Prince Bayezid, the son of Sultan Sulaymān, crossed the Aras River and fought against the pursuing Ottoman army. He took refuge with Shah Qulī Sultan, the governor (*vali*) of Van. It is possible that the sons of Shah Qulī Sultan had also taken refuge with Bayezid at Shah Tahmasb’s court. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, 407.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

### Shah Ismā‘īl II in Ottoman documents

The documents available in the Ottoman archives on Shah Ismā‘īl II cover the period from his accession to after his death. The contents of these documents indicate that, upon Shah Ismā‘īl II’s ascension to the throne, the Ottomans carefully watched events unfold in Safavid Iran. Meanwhile, they slowly prepared for an attack and mobilized their forces. However, despite the Ottomans’ preparation for war, no organized or serious attack was launched against the Safavids until the Ottoman sultan was sure of Shah Ismā‘īl II’s death. The order issued to Mohammad Girāy Khan shows the sultan’s awareness of the troubled internal situation in Safavid Iran after the death of Shah Ismā‘īl II.

In a letter to Mohammad Girāy Khan, the sultan explains that Shah Ismā‘īl drank a poisonous mixture at the beginning of Ramaḍān and died, and his sister, Parī Khan Khānum, had taken his place on the throne. The sultan continues that the Khans, Sultans, Mirzas and their defeated army are divided into two groups: one favoring Hamza Mirza, son of Mohammad Khodabanda, in Shiraz, and the other following Badī‘ al-Zamān, son of Bahram Mirza, in Kandahar province, which intended to enthrone him as king instead of “the said heretic.”<sup>40</sup> The sultan was also well aware of the struggle between the Qizilbāsh tribes, which he likely took as propitious, as he continues: “By trusting in the help of God, the Prophet and his Four revered friends, God willing, at the beginning of spring, our royal attention will be directed towards the East.”<sup>41</sup> The utilization of internal upheaval within Safavid Iran presented Sultan Morād III with an opportunity to initiate an offensive, particularly in light of his recent triumphs in the western regions and the annexation of Transylvania amid discord among European monarchs.<sup>42</sup>

These orders were sent to the recipients using different methods, a detailed often mentioned in *Mühimme Defterleri*, according to the recipients’ position and standing. Some of these documents are accompanied by a note stating that they were submitted to Uzun Mustafa Chavosh. We have tried to determine which order was issued earlier based on the content of these documents.

The first document we examined based on its content relates to the time when Sultan Morād III received the news of Shah Ismā‘īl II’s death, but this document’s authenticity had yet to be verified. This clearly indicates the extent to which even important news, such as a king’s death, might have been spread as part of a disinformation campaign. After receiving the news of Shah Ismā‘īl’s death, the Ottoman sultan sent several orders to his governors and *beglerbegis* to verify the truth of the matter. Despite slight differences, a few points are repeated in all these orders. First, the sultan clearly expresses uncertainty regarding the authenticity of the news of Shah Ismā‘īl’s demise. Still, he loses no time in making preparations to attack Safavid Iran as soon as the news is verified. Second, the Ottoman sultan was already committed to a peace treaty with the Safavids, concluded during the rules of Sultan Sulaymān and Shah Tahmasb. As he did not wish to be known as the violator of previous treaties, he tried to accuse Shah Ismā‘īl II of breaching the peace agreement despite the Ottomans’ full observance, thus legitimizing his military campaign against Safavid Iran.

In a letter dated Shawwāl 22, 985/January 12, 1578, addressed to the Georgian Lavand Beg, who had secretly expressed his wish to join the sultan’s service, Morād claims that Ismā‘īl had “committed acts in breach of our agreement and treaty, so it was decided that he should be punished, and we were preparing for this when the reliable news of the death of the said heretic (i.e., Shah Ismā‘īl II) was communicated to us.”<sup>43</sup> This shows, on the one hand, that Morād had been pondering an attack on Iran all this time, and now, with the death of Shah

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Mahdavi, *Tarikh-e Ravabet Khareji-e Iran*, 44.

<sup>43</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHM, 32/83.



Ismā'īl, an opportunity had presented itself. On the other hand, it shows that the Ottomans were secretly in contact with Shah Ismā'īl's adversaries.

Third, the Ottoman sultan, referring to the peace treaty with Shah Tahmasb, complains that Shah Ismā'īl did not send an emissary to the Ottoman court after coming to power, calling out Shah Ismā'īl as a pervert and heretic:

Previously, there was peace between us and the said heretic's father, and we always received letters and envoys until he died.<sup>44</sup> When the said deviant came to power, he did not send letters and envoys to the threshold of our Felicitous Court, nor did he express friendship.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, the sultan considered Shah Ismā'īl's behavior as hostile and accused him of disbelief and heresy.

Shah Ismā'īl II's untimely death prepared the ground for the implementation of Sultan Morād's plans. He could not hide his pleasure after receiving confirmation of Shah Ismā'īl's death, and in an order responding to the letter from the governor of Van, the sultan called the year propitious: "Now you have sent a letter to our fortunate Felicitous Porte [Istanbul] informing me that Shah Ismā'īl died on the thirteenth of the holy month of Ramaḍān in this propitious year."<sup>46</sup> In another order, he calls the year a blessed one.<sup>47</sup>

Referring to the news he received in a letter, the sultan continues: "In Shiraz, Amir Hamza, son of Mohammad Khodābanda, has been installed in his place."<sup>48</sup> Then, he repeats the theme of Ismā'īl's disrespect of the Amasya Peace Treaty:

Previously, peace was concluded between us and Shah Ismā'īl's father, Shah Ṭahmāsb. After Tahmasb's death, his son Shah Ismā'īl, who became the king, did not adhere to his father's commitment to friendship and peace; nor did he send a letter or emissary to our Sublime Threshold.

The sultan then remarks:

Neither has he avowed friendship. Some Kurdish *begs* and their sons, who are subordinate to us, have turned away from the truth and, God forbid, proclaimed heresy and *rifā*. They have sought refuge with the above,<sup>49</sup> and he has granted lands to them in some *sanjāqs* (districts).<sup>50</sup>

With these explanations, the sultan arrives at his final point: the invasion of Iran. It is noteworthy that, by calling Shah Ismā'īl a heretic, the sultan precisely states that preparations for this military campaign had taken place before his death:

Regarding the preparation for [the punishment of] the violation of the treaty, several slaves were dispatched to the borders from our Felicitous Porte, and others were prepared to go. Now that we have received the news of the said heretic's death [Ismā'īl], my decision is that the provinces must be cleansed and purified from the unclean

<sup>44</sup> Mahdavi asserts that certain Qizilbāsh commanders proposed that the shah dispatch an ambassador to the Ottoman Empire as a preventive measure, to avoid disrupting of the Amasya Peace Treaty. However, the shah declined to entertain this suggestion. Mahdavi, *Tarikh-e Ravabet Khareji-e Iran*, 43.

<sup>45</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHH, 32/81. The order is issued to the ruler of Hakkari.

<sup>46</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHH, 32/80. The order is issued to the Beglerbegi of Van.

<sup>47</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHH, 32/81.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> This expression was used to refer to the Iranian Royal Court.

<sup>50</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHH, 32/80.

presence of unbelievers and heretics who have abandoned Islam (*rifd*) and become apostates.<sup>51</sup>

In this order, having stated the reasons for his decision to invade Iran, Sultan Morād tries to legitimize the military campaign by giving it a religious dimension. Phrases like this are found in other orders, as when he writes to Zaynal Beg:

Now, with the intention of destroying and wiping the evil existence of these heretics off the face of the earth, Trusting God, my decision is that we set off for the Eastern borders, God Willing, at the beginning of spring.<sup>52</sup>

### The death of Shah Ismā'īl II as reported in Ottoman documents

Shah Ismā'īl II was too young for anyone to expect him to die soon. But the internal divisions and differences between the Qizilbāsh and their arbitrariness, along with the oppressive behavior of the new monarch, whose murders were not limited to real or potential pretenders to the throne, caused the people around him to fear for their lives. All these prepared the ground for conspiracies for his murder. The news of Shah Ismā'īl's death did not displease the Ottoman sultan, especially since he was aware of Iran's internal conflicts and disputes, which provided suitable conditions for realizing the sultan's ambitions. However, according to available documents, when the news reached the Ottomans, the sultan did not take any radical measures until he was completely certain that Shah Ismā'īl had died.

There is an order dated Sha'bān 8, 984/November 10, 1576, in response to the *beglerbegi* of Van, which contains important information in this regard. The *beglerbegi* had sent a letter to the sultan, informing him that "a person named Mirza 'Alī Beg has killed Shah Ismā'īl, and his son Majnūn has come to Van in disguise."<sup>53</sup> The governor of Khoy had sent an agent with a letter to the *beglerbegi* demanding Majnun extradition. The *beglerbegi* replied that he was unaware of the arrival of such a person, but if such a person had come to Van, he had likely come in the guise of a merchant or ordinary person, not dressed as an army officer. However, the remainder of the letter includes information on the presence of a person named Majnūn in the region under the *beglerbegi*'s rule, which formed the motivation for the letter. The *beglerbegi* had written to the sultan seeking guidelines for the appropriate treatment of people who might flee Iran and take refuge in Ottoman territory. The *beglerbegi* had entrusted Majnūn to Zaynal Beg Hakkari pending the sultan's reply. Sultan Morād confirms his decision, writing: "You have replied appropriately. It demonstrates your thoughtfulness and shrewdness." Then he orders that such people, if they should take refuge in Van, be transferred to suitable places, and the same reply should be furnished to Iranians seeking their extradition.

In addition to its subject and content, the date of the letter is also significant, Sha'bān 8, 984/November 10, 1576. This is when, according to the reports, Shah Ismā'īl was killed in the month of Ramaḍān. The fact that such a rumor circulated before this date suggests several interpretations: that someone might have made an attempt on Shah Ismā'īl's life and then managed to escape, or someone might have spun the story to seek refuge with the Ottomans, or there might have been conspiracies to kill the shah, and this was an aborted one. The last and most likely explanation is that the date was incorrectly recorded in the *Mühimme Defterleri*.

Ismā'īl's untimely death did not end fear of his influence in the Ottoman Empire. People were still being punished for aligning with his side. An order dated 985/1577 from the Ottoman sultan to the governor of Shahrizor contains information of a letter written by

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHM, 32/81.

<sup>53</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHM, 28/804.

the *qadi* (judge) of Kirkuk to the governor, which he had then reported to the sultan. The letter spoke of some people—identified as Faraḥ and Naṣr al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn, ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Layl, and Rajab b. Shahāb and Ḥusayn—in “the village of Kandī in the suburb of Daqaq,” who had engaged in group sex “with each other’s wives and daughters, thus joining hands in manifesting *rifā*” since Shah Ismā‘īl had come to power.<sup>54</sup> The Ottomans used the derogatory term *rāfiḍī* to refer to Safavid Shi‘as and their Qizilbāsh adherents in Anatolia. Accusations of group sex to discredit opponents had a long history, so accusing the Shi‘as of such behavior was not surprising. As Rıza Yıldırım suggests, group sex was one of the general accusations the Ottomans used against the Qizilbāsh.<sup>55</sup> The reference to joining hands (between unrelated men and women) might have been related to their Sufi orientation. Of course, no revolts by Ismā‘īl’s adherents are reported in internal sources, but it is not possible to know for certain whether those identified in the letter were Twelver Shi‘as, adherents of the Safavid order, or had other convictions. Whatever their conviction, the governor of Shahrizor accused them of supporting the Qizilbāsh and demanded their punishment.

In his order, the Ottoman sultan repeats the contents of the governor’s letter, perhaps to emphasize the details and ensure no misunderstandings. The sultan had authorized Shahrizor’s governor to punish those people according to Sharia law upon receiving his order. But again, the sultan insists that the governor inform him privately if he can attest the truth of the matter.<sup>56</sup> It is interesting to note that the Ottoman sultan wished to be sure of these unlawful acts before punishing those responsible. For a sultan who viewed himself as the leader of the Islamic world, punishing innocent people based only on accusations was abhorrent.<sup>57</sup> If, on the other hand, their crime was proven, their punishment would be a great victory for him. It is also noteworthy that the document is dated after the death of Shah Ismā‘īl II, showing that the issue of Shah Ismā‘īl II and the Ottoman government did not end with his death.

Ismā‘īl’s death did not stop the Ottoman sultan from recruiting Safavid subjects, or at least did not stop him feeling the need to do so. An order was sent to Mohammad Mirza, the governor of Lorestan, on Shavvāl 20, 985/January 10, 1578, after Shah Ismā‘īl’s death, in which the sultan welcomed Mohammad Mirza’s servitude and promised to leave the lands and territories already under their control to him and his children. The sultan orders:

As long as you are faithful to the Perspicuous Religion of Islam, we shall treat your friends as our friends and your enemies as our enemies, and if anyone violates and attacks your territory, let our *Beglerbegis* in the border areas be informed, because we have given them royal orders to take care of your enemies.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion

Peace between the Safavids and Ottomans during the short rule of Shah Ismā‘īl II was like a fire under ashes, as both sides, each with a different motive, awaited an opportunity to wrest lands from the enemy. Despite his strong motivation for conquest, Morād III did not

<sup>54</sup> Accusations of unlawful sexual relations were common not only in the Ottoman Empire, but also in Iran. Such accusations were perhaps leveled against opponents to attract public attention and sanction the severely repressive measures taken by the government. Illicit sexual activities were a particularly frequent charge leveled at the Qizilbāsh in Anatolia.

<sup>55</sup> He mentions that they believed the Qizilbāsh engaged in “assembling mixed ritual gatherings at night during which they play musical instruments and engage in sexual promiscuity.” Rıza Yıldırım, “The Safavid-Qizilbash Ecumene and the Formation of the Qizilbash-Alevi Community in the Ottoman Empire C. 1500–C. 1700,” *Iranian Studies* 52 (2019): 449–483, 465.

<sup>56</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 3/188.

<sup>57</sup> See Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>58</sup> BOA, {DVNSMHHM, 32/79.

immediately organize a military campaign against Ismāʿīl II, although this cannot be attributed to Ismāʿīl's renowned bravery to which Safavid reports attest.<sup>59</sup> As Ottoman archival documents demonstrate, Morād continued to closely monitor developments in Iran during Ismāʿīl's short rule, sending spies and welcoming Iranian fugitives while preparing for attack. There is no sign of such caution in the archival documents, although it is quite natural that official letters and orders do not contain reference to matters such as fear of the enemy's courage. We must not forget, however, the fear of Safavid disciples in Ottoman territories. As Baltacıoğlu-Brammer has persuasively argued, the Qizilbāsh were always a potential threat to the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, she mentions Sheikh Bali Efendi's advice to Rustam Pasha, the Grand Vizier, that the Ottomans could solve this problem by reducing the Qizilbash population. However, the tone of these documents is indicative of Morād's continuous preparation for war during the period. Also, these documents confirm Baltacıoğlu-Brammer's claim about the anxiety around Safavid devotees in Ottoman territories. It is also natural that after a long period of peace, the Ottomans could not attack Iran abruptly and violate peace; they needed to prepare the ground for such attacks. One strategy the Ottomans used, according to Yıldırım, was the accusation of Qizilbāsh group sex. The continuous murders and disturbances that Shah Ismāʿīl himself was guilty of fueling, as well as his early death and the chaos and unrest that followed, provided the opportunity for Ottoman attacks. Due to their military preparation, and by recruiting local governors and giving them privileges, the Ottomans were able to immediately launch attacks on their targets and wrest large parts of Iran's western regions for an extended period of time.

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<sup>59</sup> According to Rhoads Murphy, the Ottomans thought twice before launching a campaign against the Safavids, because it was logistically much more costly and risky than a western campaign. Unlike the Balkans and Hungary, the territory of Eastern Anatolia and Iran had no East-West water connection to enable the shipping of supplies and troops. While western campaigns lasted approximately half a year, eastern ones would often last for two. Iranian campaigns were logistical nightmares. Cf. Rhoads Murphy, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500–1700* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

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