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The Hero of “the Noble Afshar People”: Reconsidering Nader Shah’s Claims to Lineage and Legitimacy

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Abstract

This essay examines Nader Shah Afshar’s attempts to legitimize his rule by dint of his Turkic background. Over the course of his rise to power and reign, Nader consistently argued that his Afshar and Turkman affiliations granted him the right to rule over Iranian territory as an equal to his Ottoman, Mughal, and Central Asian contemporaries. Aided by his chief secretary and court historian, Mīrzā Mahdī Astarābādī, Nader’s assertions paralleled those found in popular narratives about the history of Oghuz Turks in Islamic lands. This element of Nader’s political identity is often overlooked by historians because it did not outlive the brief Afsharid period, but it demonstrates how the Safavid collapse led to the circulation of dynamic new claims to Iranian and Islamic political power.

Keywords: Nader Shah; legitimacy; Iran; lineage; Turkman; Afshar

A lack of inbuilt legitimacy was always the greatest thorn in the side of Nader Shah (r. 1736–47), a local military officer of the Afshar tribe from the region of Khorasan who rose through the ranks to reconquer and reassemble the remains of the Safavid Empire (1501–1722) in the decades following its collapse. He deployed remarkable creativity to construct a new image of Iranian sovereignty which began to distance itself from the Safavid legacy. Nader’s most notorious innovations were his dogged contention that a few tweaks to religious policy could render Iran a friendly Sunni ally to its western neighbor, the Ottoman Empire, as well as his attempts to style himself in the vein of the fourteenth-century Eurasian conqueror Timur (d. 1405) via building projects, marriage alliances, and the discourse of his court historians.

Less well understood is one of Nader’s most original ideas: a claim to legitimacy by dint of his background as a Turkman of the Afshar tribe.¹ This notion surfaces regularly in Afsharid historiography as well as a range of other contemporary sources, suggesting that it was not, as the scholarship suggests, a far-fetched and irrelevant line of argument. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discourses on Turkman history and identity across Eurasia and around the Khorasan region in particular corroborate the notion that Nader’s vision of elevating his own, supposedly negligible, stock was a reasonable choice for his time. This insight should lead us to revise prevalent notions on the post-Safavid political climate in Eurasia to give more credence to new notions of legitimacy that competed with hegemonic political claims such as those of the Safavid and Timurid dynasties.

¹ The term Turkman is difficult in transliteration; here I have opted for a Turkish-leaning rendering, Turkman (pl. Turkmans). There are multiple forms of the term in regional languages, but this English spelling has the benefit of avoiding ambiguity in the plural.

Background and Scholarship

Over the course of nearly two and a half centuries of imperial rule, Safavid kings derived their political legitimacy as a family line descended from the charismatic saintly figure and founder of the Ṣafavī Sufi order, Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (ca. 1252–1334). Through him, they claimed descent from the seventh Shi‘ite Imam, Mūsā al-Kāzīm, and on this basis portrayed themselves as the defenders of Twelver Shi‘ism. But the legacy of the Safavid order also appealed to a wide range of tribal and rural factions on the basis of its historically militant ‘Ali-revering (often termed Alid) character which flourished outside of the bounds of urban religious and political establishments.² So effective was this political claim that the Safavid line retained its legitimacy well after it was unseated by an invading army of Ghalzay Afghans from the Kandahar region in 1722.³

In the ensuing scramble for power among Ottomans, Afghans, Russians, and members of the Safavid line, the Safavid prince Tahmāsp Mīrzā (d. 1740) began to find success by building a following among the Qajar Turkmans of Mazandaran along the southern Caspian coast. It was during his subsequent attempt to gather power that he first heard of “*Nāder qolī beg*”, a successful young “sergeant in arms” who had risen swiftly through the ranks of the Khorasan frontier administration. After meeting in Khorasan in 1726, Tahmāsp made Nader his principal military officer, and over the next decade the latter would lead the reconquest of all former Safavid territories.⁴ Nader gained renown as an audacious field commander fond of surprising his opponents in battle while also securing the loyalty of a standing army through the use of regular pay, building on a pattern that had already begun in the late Safavid era.⁵

Although Nader feigned devotion to the Safavid line and either took or was given the honorific *Tahmāsp qolī* (“Servant of Tahmāsp”), in 1736 he made the radical decision to sideline the Safavid dynasty, which had become an impediment to his military and political vision. In that year he crowned himself Shah in a lavish ceremony held in Azerbaijan’s vast Moghān Plain. Nader would then embark on ten more years of military campaigns well beyond former Safavid frontiers in Central Asia, the Ottoman borderlands in the Caucasus and Mesopotamia, and even Mughal India, famously culminating in the sacking of Delhi in 1739. Eventually, paranoia and brash behavior won Nader too many enemies, and he was killed in a nighttime mutiny by his own generals in the fall of 1747 while campaigning against Kurdish rebels in Khorasan. The Afsharid dynasty (1736–96) continued after his death as a Khorasani rump state, with the rival Zand and the Dorrānī dynasties ruling the rest of former Safavid territories until the Qajar dynasty (1796–1925) once more reunited these realms at the end of the century.

It has been convention for scholars to characterize the post-Safavid decades as a dark chapter in Iranian history preceding the nineteenth-century encounter with Europe. Over fifty years ago, Ann Lambton famously dubbed this period the “tribal resurgence,” and treated it as an interregnum, although she acknowledged the era’s dynamic character.⁶ The short-lived Afsharid and Zand dynasties of the era have attracted relatively little intellectual interest since, as most scholars rightly acknowledge the persistent legitimacy of the

² For the history of religious legitimacy in the Safavid period, see Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 160–71. The early Safavid movement of the fifteenth century was a charismatic military movement based on *ghazā* (raiding and warfare that mainly targeted the Christian populations of the region) and Alid piety, and in some ways differed significantly from the “Twelver Shi‘a” (*ithmā ‘ashari*) ideological apparatus constructed by the later Safavids. For the character of the early Safavid movement, see also Mazzaoui, *Origins of the Safavids*. See also Roemer, “The Safavid Period,” 190–209, for an overview of the early movement, and 203–4 for the concept of *ghazā*.

³ Perry, “The Last Ṣafavids.”

⁴ A useful overview of Nader’s early career can be found in Avery, “Nādir Shāh,” in which the author draws heavily from the Afsharid court historian Moḥammad Kāẓem Marvī. “Sergeant in arms” is his wording.

⁵ Axworthy, *Sword of Persia*, 85.

⁶ Lambton, “Tribal Resurgence,” 108.

Safavid line. However, scholarly activity in recent years suggest that there is a new trend towards better integrating the late and post-Safavid era into Iranian history.⁷

Most accounts still depict Nader's rule as an inexplicable burst of political energy in a landscape beset by malaise, a sort of heady flashback to the Chingissid or Timurid eras. In 2006, one prominent scholar in the field wistfully remarked that had it not been for Nader's "impossibly oppressive" final years, his rule might have brought about "Persian dominance in the Islamic world, in the long term perhaps even removal of the Shi'a/Sunni schism and an uneasy parity of development with the West." He added that "If Nader and his dynasty had succeeded, he might today be remembered as a figure in Iranian history to compare with Peter the Great in the history of Russia."⁸ Such musings bear stubborn echoes of early European views of Nader's horrifically awesome capabilities, such as that of the British merchant Jonas Hanway, who drew a revealing comparison with another infamous conqueror: "ALEXANDER and NADIR [sic], were actuated by the same predominant passion; an unbounded desire of conquest ... Both appear to us as objects of terror and astonishment; but whilst some mixture of love, or compassion, is due to ALEXANDER'S memory; NADIR can only excite our hatred."⁹

The story of Nader's life and rule has been detailed in three well-researched monographs. Laurence Lockhart produced the work that first assembled and examined the contemporary Persian sources in 1938.¹⁰ While Lockhart's research provided the basis for the later growth of the field, his was mainly a political history of events in an approach that has been critiqued for its reliance on a hierarchical ethno-religious classification of peoples to explain historical change.¹¹ In 2006, Michael Axworthy's book offered an updated and highly useful reference work on Nader's life, but featured another blow-by-blow narrative of political events.¹² Last, Ernest Tucker's slim volume from the same year was well-argued and innovative for its incorporation of Ottoman sources, and put forth stimulating ideas on Nader's approach to religion and diplomacy in his overall pursuit for legitimacy, but was rather brief and left much territory to be further explored.¹³ This article contributes to this body of work by expanding upon a critical but overlooked aspect of Nader's attempts to legitimize his rule.

A survey of this scholarship shows that scholars have correctly noted Nader's limited success vis-à-vis his contemporaries in positioning his own Turkic lineage within a broader Eurasian political legacy, a fact they have then used to simply conclude that such claims were implausible and unhinged to begin with. Lockhart and Axworthy only mention in passing Nader's tendency to emphasize his common Turkman roots with his Mughal and Ottoman contemporaries, allowing their readers to attribute such ideas to the man's supposedly eccentric character (insofar as they regularly resort to this mode of reasoning, both works, and in particular Lockhart's, are examples of "great man" history; Lockhart opens his book by declaring that "there can be no gainsaying that [Nader] was a very great man").¹⁴

⁷ A key example is Axworthy, ed., *Crisis, Collapse, Militarism and Civil War*, which builds mainly on a conference in Exeter in 2013 and draws upon another on Nader Shah in Vienna in 2016.

⁸ Axworthy, *Sword of Persia*, 284.

⁹ Hanway, *An Historical Account*, 2:353.

¹⁰ Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*.

¹¹ Dickson, "The Fall of the Šafavi Dynasty," 510–16. This article is a widely known critical review of Lockhart's study *The Fall of the Šafavi Dynasty* (1958), and in it, Dickson levels his judgments against Lockhart's entire body of scholarship and the broader school of Orientalism that it represented at the time.

¹² Axworthy, *Sword of Persia*.

¹³ Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest*.

¹⁴ Axworthy, *Sword of Persia*, 206; Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 141. In his doctoral dissertation from 1935, Lockhart went so far as to claim that, "Nādir himself, though he always took pride in his Turkish or Turcoman blood and thereby claimed affinity with the descendants of Timūr, never sought to magnify the status of his parents or ancestors." Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, 46.

Tucker is the only scholar to pay serious attention to the matter, and his work has established the basis for further study. But he portrays the notion of Turkman lineage as dubious by describing these ties as “ambiguous” and a part of Nader’s “invention of tradition,” drawing upon the work of Benedict Anderson.¹⁵ “Nādir imagined a community, a unified Muslim world under the sovereignty of various Turko-Mongol dynasties, which he depicted as the rediscovery of a Turko-Mongol past that in fact never existed.”¹⁶ In fact, in Nader’s time there was a well-established discourse on Turkman lineage and legitimacy. Tucker overlooks this context and portrays Nader’s Turkman claims as a failed innovation, instead devoting his attention to the ruler’s attempts to link himself to the Timurid legacy.¹⁷

Nader’s Solution to His Problematic Origins

Although contemporary authors tended to agree that Nader was a Turkman of the Afshar tribe of Khorasan, his origins provoked much discussion and little consensus. Most were aware that his newly gained political status was an aberration of sorts; a Kashmiri author who traveled through Iran with Nader noted sharply that Tahmāsp Mīrzā had conferred upon Nader the title of *khān* while he was originally no more than a common *beg*.¹⁸ Hanway, having supposedly consulted various authors, wrote that Nader’s father made “caps and sheep-skin coats, which is the apparel of the lowest of the common people in Persia,” although it seems Hanway was rather attached to a romantic notion of Nader’s humble origins.¹⁹ One Iranian author residing in India described Nader’s father as a high-ranking Afshar official (a *yaşek bāşī*) in the service of the “sultan” of the city of Abivard,²⁰ while an Armenian musician accompanying the Ottoman ambassador to Iran in the 1730s assured his readers, on the direct word of Nader’s own cousin, that Nader was a Kurd from Diyarbakır whose ancestors had been moved to Khorasan by Shah Abbas (r. 1588–1629).²¹ Clearly, Nader’s meteoric rise muddled common protocols; a chronicle from 1754 by an Isfahani author residing in India noted how officials at the Mughal capital of Shahjahanabad were terrified of responding to Nader’s letters as they did not know which title to give him.²²

Nader was aware of the liabilities posed by his nebulous background. The head of the Armenian Church (*catholicos*), Abraham of Crete, while in attendance at Nader’s coronation ceremony in the Moghān Plain in 1736, noted that the ruler’s first precondition for accepting the crown was that those in attendance should not support any future Safavid claimants to the throne.²³ Similarly, in 1743 at the Council of Najaf, called by Nader in hopes of resolving theological conflicts between Iran and its Sunni neighbors, an Ottoman religious official noted the ruler’s wish that the Ottoman sultan’s name be called before his own in the Friday prayer at the Kufa Mosque: “In reality and truth, he [i.e., the Ottoman sultan] is my elder and more noble than I, because he is a sultan and son of a sultan, whereas by birth neither my father nor my grandfather was a sultan.”²⁴ It is clear that Nader had a

¹⁵ Tucker, *Nadir Shah’s Quest*, 11; for the same argument, see also 64, 75.

¹⁶ Tucker, “Seeking a World Empire,” 340.

¹⁷ Tucker, *Nadir Shah’s Quest*, 13–14, 68; Tucker, “Seeking a World Empire,” 333–37.

¹⁸ Kashmiri, *Bayān-i Vāqē’*, 22.

¹⁹ Hanway, *An Historical Account*, 2:257. To Hanway’s credit, the main Afsharid chronicles corroborate a pastoralist background for Nader’s father, although they portray him as well-off and of good standing.

²⁰ Tehrānī, *Tārīkh-i Nādershāhī*, 4.

²¹ Tanburī Arutin, *Tahmas Kulu Han*, 37.

²² Moḥammad ‘Alī, *Tārīkh-e Ḥazīn*, 125.

²³ Abraham of Crete, *Chronicle of Abraham*, 90. Not all accounts confirm this detail, although the Afsharid court historian Moḥammad Kāẓem Marvī confirms that Nader spent days at the ceremony employing spies to suss out Safavid loyalists, and eventually required all attendees to sign an oath of fealty; Marvī, *‘Ālam-ārā-ye Nāderī*, 456.

²⁴ al-Suwaydī, *al-Ḥujaj*, 26: “*huwa al-akbar wa ajall minnī li-annahū sulṭān ibn sulṭān wa-ana ji’tu ilā al-dunyā wa-lā ab li sulṭān wa-lā jadd.*”

strong motive for examining his own lineage and elaborating it in a new and persuasive manner.

Let us first examine Nader's claim to the throne on the basis of being Turkman.²⁵ The sources clearly indicate that this was no fleeting, off-the-cuff assertion—in decrees, letters, and the words of his court historian, Nader was consistent in this matter from about 1733 until his death fourteen years later. A typical formulation in the Nader-era sources was to refer to his place among the “great Turkman people” (*il-e jalil-e torkamān*), as Nader did in a letter to the Ottoman grand vizier Silāḥdār Mehmet Pasha in 1736.²⁶

This notion did not rest on mere affiliation; it also entailed descent. For instance, during the 1743 Council of Najaf, religious authorities from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia signed a declaration which declared null the disagreements between Sunnis and Shi'is and described Nader as “the illuminator of the exalted Turkman dynasty” (*cherāgh-afrūz-e dūdmān-e raft' ol-sha'n-e torkmāniyye*).²⁷ The same language was used in the text of a 1746 peace treaty with the Ottomans emphasizing the common Turkman roots of both parties, while also staking Nader's claim to Iraq and Azerbaijan as the presumed inheritor of the Aḳ Ḳoyūnlū (1378–1501) and Ḳara Ḳoyūnlū (ca. 1380–1469) legacies. This treaty refers to the Ottoman sultan Mahmud (r. 1730–54) as “the guiding light of the Turkman dynasty” (*forūgh-e mash'al-e dūdmān-e torkmāniyye*), while calling the Aḳ Ḳoyūnlū and Ḳara Ḳoyūnlū rulers “the Turkman sultans” (*ṣalāṭin-e torkamān*), the latter an appellation already found in Safavid historiography.²⁸

Mīrzā Mahdī Astarābādī, Nader's court historian and a fervid proponent of his Turkman claims (and as we will see, potentially the original source for them), described Nader in the opening pages of his widely read history,²⁹ *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī*, completed at some point in the 1750s:

The one who honors the throne of nobility, the ornament of the banner of kingship, worthy of the crown and the throne of the great sovereign (*kā'ān*), the hero of the majestic Turkman line (*qahramān-e selsele-ye jalil-e torkamān*), the lion of his age, the warrior of his era, the greatest leader (*khāqān*) and the most magnanimous sovereign, the king of kings of the epoch, and the kingmaker of the realms of India and Tūrān.³⁰

The interesting choice of *selsele* (“chain”) echoes the language of Sufi genealogies, including that of the Safavids, and thus reinforces the notion of a lineage claim while also flirting with a charismatic and divinely ordained sense of sovereignty. It is the only term suggesting descent in the introduction to *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī*, as the others consist of generic Iranian and Mongol terms of rulership.

Shared descent was a major pillar in Nader's conception of Turkman political power. Tucker points to a fascinating 1733 letter, which by the reckoning of the Ottoman Raḡıp Paşa³¹ was penned personally by Nader in an Iranian dialect of Turkish and sent to the Ottoman field commander on the imperial frontier, Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa. In it, Nader elaborated his view of Turkman history:

²⁵ This term had been used since at least the tenth century to identify Turkish-speaking tribes of the Oghuz branch who had converted to Islam and had long been weighed down by connotations of unruliness and violence in the sources. For an overview of its history, see Karamustafa, “Who Were the *Türkmen*?”

²⁶ Navā'ī, *Nāder Shāh*, 284.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

²⁸ Shīrāzī, *Takmilat ol-Akhhbār*, 36, 38.

²⁹ *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. “Mahdī Khān Astarābādī,” accessed April 7, 2021, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4782.

³⁰ Astarābādī, *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī*, 2. Tūrān here denotes Central Asia and specifically the Uzbek realms which Nader invaded.

³¹ Raḡıp Paşa was a high-ranking Ottoman official in Baghdad from approximately 1728 to 1735 who would later go on to be grand vizier from 1756 to 1763.

In the time of Changīz Khān, the leaders of the Turkman tribes (*rū'esā-yi 'aṣā'ir-i türkmāniyye*), who had left the land of Tūrān and migrated to Iran and Anatolia, were all of one stock and one lineage. At that time, the exalted ancestor of the dynasty of the ever-increasing state [the Ottoman Empire] headed to Anatolia and our ancestor settled in the provinces of Iran. Since these lineages are interwoven and interconnected, it is hoped that when his royal highness learns of them, he will give royal consent to the establishment of peace between [us].³²

This letter emphasized a shared Central Asian ancestry later muddled by a long history of migration in order to argue—somewhat modestly—for equal status among the descendants of those migrants in their territorial disputes in eastern Anatolia. This same letter was reproduced in a slightly different form by an eighteenth-century Ottoman historian with the added detail that the Ottoman ancestor Ertuğrul was the brother of the ancestor of Iranian Turks, and that their father was named Süleyman Shah.³³

It was not only the Turkmans, but also the Afshars, a large subsection of the Turkmans, whom Nader foregrounded in his conception of royal status. A declaration produced at his coronation ceremony, which took place in the bitter cold of January 1736 in Azerbaijan, spuriously claimed that Iran had been in the hands of the Turkmans and Afshars prior to its seizure by Safavid forces.³⁴ The document added that Turkmans and Afshars had been Sunni before the Safavid Shah Esmail (r. 1501–24) imposed the cursing the first four caliphs and spoiled harmonious relations among Muslims. The framing of Afshar power as preceding Safavid power presumably would have been palatable to Nader's Sunni rivals.

Mīrzā Mahdī also used lofty language for the Afshars in his writings, referring to them collectively as “the state of the noble Afshar people”³⁵ and “the Afshar sultans.”³⁶ He also used a peculiar turn of phrase to describe the impact of Afshar rule:

The father of the sword, Sultan Nader, is the Afshar king (*pādeshāh*) whose generous hand distributes golden coins, and whose sun-like nature in nurturing every particle gained renown like the sun. The copper of the tribal fates was transformed into the gold of Afsharid rule by the elixir of his guidance and the alchemy of his holy light.³⁷

Interestingly, a similar metaphor of copper-to-gold was attributed to the medieval poet Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī by an anonymous author of a sixteenth-century Inner Asia chronicle in Chaghatai, referring to the poet's description of the Mongols' thirteenth-century conversion to Islam and the complete loss of their former (violent) Mongol nature.³⁸ Mīrzā Mahdī first employed an early version of this formula in a letter of fealty to Nader that he composed at the time of the latter's retaking of Isfahan from the Afghans in 1729, in which the scribe declared that “the [copper] currency of the Muhammadan nation which had disappeared from the markets of the world became current once more as the gold of

³² Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest*, 37. This quote is borrowed from Tucker with minor modifications. The first parenthesis is my additions and the latter two his. The original was also consulted in Koca Rağıp Paşa, *Tahkik ve Tefvik*, 25.

³³ Şem'dānī-zāde, *Mür'it-tevārih*, 60.

³⁴ “and after Shah Esmail became sultan, when he had taken the realms of Iran from the control of the Turkman and Afshar, who were Sunni”) *va ba'd az ānke Shāh Esmā'il moṭeşaddī-ye amr-e şaltanat shod, chūn mamālek-e irān rā az taşarraf-e torkmāniyye va afshār ke ahl-e sonnat būdand gerefteh būd*), Navā'ī, *Nāder Shāh*, 221. The document refers to the Aḳ Ḳoçūnlū state, which in fact drew legitimacy from the Bayandur branch of the Oghuz-Turkman people. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, 25.

³⁵ Astarābādī, *Dorre-ye Nāderī*, 176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

³⁷ Astarābādī, *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī*, 2. Mīrzā Mahdī plays with the phrase *dast afshār*, which can be read as either “pure gold” or “the gold of Afsharid rule.”

³⁸ DeWeese, “Islamization in the Mongol Empire,” 134.

Afsharid rule.”³⁹ The aforementioned 1735 declaration of Moghān echoes this language by calling Nader “the gold of Afsharid rule within the kingly mine.”⁴⁰ It appears that Mīrzā Mahdī sought to promote Turkman-Afsharid descent by giving it an alchemical boost.

Turkman and Afshar Lore

Nader’s ideas engaged with centuries-old discourses on the history and myth of the Turks, including the constant migration and displacement which characterized their political dominance across Eurasia. To our knowledge, first written by the Ilkhanid historian Rashīd al-Dīn (1247–1318), the *Oghūznāme* is the prevalent term among scholars for a corpus of narratives about the mythical Islamizing ancestor of the Oghuz Turks (also spelled Oğuz/Oghūz, who were those who also came to be called Turkman in western Asia).⁴¹ He was called Oghuz Khan, and the tradition relates the tales of his birth, conquests, and the spread of the Turkish and Mongol tribes through his progeny. In Azerbaijan and Anatolia, the Aḳ Ḳoyūnlū period (1378–1501) saw the circulation of a modified version of the tradition shorn of the Chingissid flourishes from the Mongol sources and eagerly adopted in Ottoman circles, while Timurid-inflected versions of the tradition circulated in Central Asian courts from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.⁴²

The *Oghūznāme* can generally be understood as an effort at bolstering Turkman legitimacy via a narrative of charismatic conquest and shared descent in the absence of an established set of ancestral, political, or religious claims. Elsewhere, I have argued that there is good reason to believe that Turkman identity underwent a rehabilitation of sorts beginning in the Aḳ Ḳoyūnlū period, and that in some contexts it came to take on strong anti-Safavid and anti-Ottoman connotations as demonstrated by the role of the Turkman hero in the Caucasus versions of the Kōroğlu epic in the seventeenth century.⁴³ The intellectual history of the Turkmans, a term originally used in Arabic and Persian to refer to newly Islamized Turkish tribes, has typically been obscured by the negative connotations of unruliness and violence that the term bears in most historical sources.⁴⁴

Numerous pieces of evidence substantiate a link between Nader’s ideas and those of the *Oghūznāme* corpus and prove that he engaged directly with this tradition. The clearest proof lies in the writings of his court historian Mīrzā Mahdī, who referenced the *Oghūznāme* on six occasions in a Chaghatai-Persian dictionary called *Sanglākh* which he composed in 1759 (eight occasions according to Clauson, although I was unable to confirm two of these references).⁴⁵ Since Mīrzā Mahdī’s references are fragmentary, and he uses them to elucidate questions of grammar or vocabulary, it is difficult to get a sense of which texts he cites, although Clauson and another scholar agree that at least one fragment bears remarkable similarities to an obscure thirteenth- or fourteenth-century *Oghūznāme*, perhaps from the Aral Sea region, of which the sole manuscript is found in Paris.⁴⁶ We can be sure that Mīrzā Mahdī had access to at least one written version of the text, since he uses the phrase *maštūr ast* (“it is written down”) to refer to information he gathers from the *Oghūznāme*, and in one entry regarding the “Tānḳlī” tribe he speculates on two divergent theories of the *mo’allef* (composer) of the text regarding the etymology of the name.⁴⁷

³⁹ Navā’ī, *Nāder Shāh*, 186.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 222: “Ṭalā-ye dast-e afshār-e ma’dan-e pādeshāhī.”

⁴¹ See note 25.

⁴² *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Oğuz Khan Narratives,” accessed April 5, 2020, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/oguz-khan-narratives.

⁴³ Karamustafa, “Who Were the *Türkmēn*?” 493–95.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 480–88.

⁴⁵ Astarābādī and Clauson, *Sanglax*, 158r, line 9; 180r, 1; 234r, 12; 265v, 3; 278r, 5; 336v, 16. The reference cited by the editor on 80v, 20, is not in the text, and another reference, 298r, 26, is located in a blurred and unreadable section of the text.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 (the fragment is found on 180r, 1); *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Oğuz Khan Narratives.”

⁴⁷ Astarābādī and Clauson, *Sanglax*, 278r, 5.

Mīrzā Mahdī was not only Nader's court historian, and but also his *monshī ol-mamālek*, or "head of the secretariat" as rendered by John Perry.⁴⁸ After having made a careful effort to ingratiate himself with Nader after the latter's recapture of Isfahan in 1729,⁴⁹ Mīrzā Mahdī served under him for seventeen years, and was the ruler's most important spokesperson. The approaches of the two men in asserting and elaborating Nader's Turkman lineage claims were consistent with one another and it is almost certain that Mīrzā Mahdī shared his knowledge of the *Oghūznāme* with his patron. It may not be coincidental, then, that Nader's earliest assertions of Turkman legitimacy are found only after Mīrzā Mahdī entered his service in 1729.

It is also possible that Nader was already well-exposed to the political narrative that he would later adopt, at least on the basis of one striking *Oghūznāme* text composed in 1659, only twenty-nine years before Nader's birth. This Chaghatai text, called *Shejere-i Terākime* (*The Genealogy of the Turkman*), was written by Abū al-Ghāzī Bahādur Khān, the Chingissid ruler of Khiva, a Khwarezmian city-state located just over 400 kilometers north of Nader's native city of Darre Gaz (or Dargaz) in Khorasan. Seven copies of the manuscript have been identified mainly in modern Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, suggesting a wide circulation and readership.⁵⁰

Of immediate relevance is the title of the work, which continued a centuries-old pattern of mythologizing of the Oghuz identity and foregrounding the Turkman identity in the narrative present.⁵¹ More interesting still is author's introductory note about the circulation of the tradition:

The *mollās*, *shaykhs*, and *big*s of the Turkmans had heard that I was well-versed in history.⁵² One day, they all came to me and said, "There exist among us many versions of the *Oghūznāme*, but none are good, they all contain errors, and no one is consistent with another. Each one is particular, and it would be nice if there was one that we could rely upon," and they asked me [to write their history].⁵³

This introduction makes clear that the *Oghūznāme* was already circulating widely in the region, likely orally and perhaps in written form as well, but also suggests that elites specifically (the above-mentioned *mollās*, *shaykhs*, and *big*s) harbored a strong interest in the topic. Later, Abū al-Ghāzī also adds that he wrote his history in simple Turkish without unnecessary Persian and Arabic flourishes so that it might be easily understood, and any literate person might transmit its contents orally to others. It is indisputable that this was an extensively consumed oral and written text.

We do not know if Nader or Mīrzā Mahdī had access to the *Shejere*, but during the Council of Najaf in 1743, a prayer was led in the name of Nader which called him "he by whom the Turkman genealogy was illuminated" (*man aḍa'at bihi al-shajara al-turkmāniyye*).⁵⁴ Abū al-Ghāzī's work shows how Nader's claims were likely crafted according to an established political and cultural discourse on Turkman history.

There were, however, some awkward contradictions in the meaning of "Turkman" during Nader's time. Abū al-Ghāzī defined the Turkmans as those residing in the Mangishlak Peninsula, the Balkan mountains on the Caspian coast, and along the Tejen River (or Hari River in Afghan nomenclature) to the west of Merv in the southeast of modern

⁴⁸ *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. "Mahdī Khān Astarābādī."

⁴⁹ Navā'ī, *Nāder Shāh*, 186, reproduces the letter that Mīrzā Mahdī sent to Nader in 1729.

⁵⁰ Ebūlgāzī, *Şecere-i Terākime*, 25.

⁵¹ Karamustafa, "Who Were the *Türkmen*?" 486.

⁵² These terms refer to religious (*mollā* and *shaykh*) and political (*big*) authorities, or notables and representatives, more generally.

⁵³ Ebūlgāzī, *Şecere-i Terākime*, 109.

⁵⁴ al-Suwaydī, *al-Ḥujaj*, 27. According to al-Suwaydī, this part of the prayer was carried out in Persian, while other parts were in Arabic.

Turkmenistan.⁵⁵ This constitutes a broad territory, but these groups correspond to the Oghuz tribes who had historically resided further north along the eastern Caspian coast, and were thus distinct in dialect and culture from the Turkmans of Ottoman and Safavid lands.⁵⁶ The former Turkmans were a perennial threat and a nuisance to the Safavids on their northeastern border and may have rendered Nader's reclamation of the term a rather fraught affair. For instance, Moḥammad Kāẓem Marvī, the other major Afsharid court historian and author of the *Ālam-ārā-ye Nāderī* (ca. 1750–51) who did not once acknowledge Nader's lineage claims, used the term Turkman in an exclusively pejorative sense. Nader's greatest advocate, Mīrzā Mahdī, confusingly vacillated between praising the great Turkman people and maligning another group of devious frontier Turkmans, whom he sometimes called the "Turkmans of the plain" (*torkmāniyye-ye dasht*).⁵⁷

However, shared oral traditions suggest that these Turkman populations were not always clearly distinguished from one another. The epic of *Kōroḡlu*, which began circulating in the Caucasus by the seventeenth century and soon after in Central Asia as well, suggests a close link between the Caucasus, Khorasan, and Turkmenistan through its common Turkman protagonist.⁵⁸ A manuscript written in Azerbaijani Turkish and likely composed near Tabriz in the nineteenth century has the hero residing in the Caucasus, while his origin story takes place between the southern Caspian region of Mazandaran and the frontier city of Merv.⁵⁹ The protagonist consistently identifies as a Teke Turkman, of which numerous branches existed across Ottoman, Safavid, and Central Asian lands, but also describes himself as a Yomut on several occasions (for instance, one of the hero's songs went, "My origins reach the Teke, Yomut, and Turkman / Kōroḡlu the Ram, I am Mirza Beg's son").⁶⁰ Teke and Yomut are two of the largest tribes of the Turkmans of the Karakum desert and surrounding regions in Turkmenistan, and are regularly mentioned as adversaries of the Afsharids in histories such as Mīrzā Mahdī's.⁶¹

Similarly, the versions of the *Kōroḡlu* epic that circulate in Turkmenistan frequently employ Azerbaijani toponyms and feature a Georgian setting.⁶² In both cases, the story the Turkman protagonist blurs the division between Safavid Turkmans and the "Turkmans of the plain," suggesting ambiguity in this division. Nor was the political border in Khorasan stable, and cities such as Merv were subject to the politics of Turkman power but oscillated between Safavid and Uzbek possession.⁶³ Nader himself had worked for and against various northern Turkman factions over the course of his career, as was common in the northeastern Iranian frontier.⁶⁴

Even in light of a potentially significant cultural fissure between historically Safavid-oriented Turkmans and those in more northerly regions along the Caspian

⁵⁵ Ebūlgāzī, *Şecere-i Terākime*, 108.

⁵⁶ *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. "Türkmen," accessed April 14, 2021, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1260.

⁵⁷ Astarābādī, *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī*, 95, 123.

⁵⁸ The title means "the blind man's son" in western Turkish dialects, but the tradition is called *Gōroḡlu* in the Turkman language of the Caspian coast and has a double meaning of "the son of the grave" (*gūr* means grave in Persian and eastern Turkish dialects).

⁵⁹ Anonymous, *Azerbaycan Folklor Külliyyatı*, 16:49. On this same page, the text makes clear that this connection between Ottoman lands in Anatolia (*Rum vilayati*) and the eastern Safavid frontier is due to forced migrations of the Turkmans at the hands of Shah Esmail and Nader Shah. For the dating of the oral circulation of the tradition to the seventeenth century, see Karamustafa, "Who Were the *Türkmen*?" 489. For a useful overview on the debates regarding the historical origins of *Kōroḡlu*, see Wilks, "Aspects," 9–36.

⁶⁰ Anonymous, *Azerbaycan Folklor Külliyyatı*, 16:85; a similar formulation is found in 15:224.

⁶¹ Astarābādī, *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī*, 39, 354, 378.

⁶² Gökçimen, "Kōroḡlu Destanı'nın Türkmen Varyantında Kafkas Coğrafyası"; Wilks, "Aspects," 34–35.

⁶³ *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. "Khurāsān," accessed April 8, 2021, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4335.

⁶⁴ Avery, "Nādir Shāh," 22–23, 54. Another relevant example is the Qajars of Astarabad enlisting the help of the Yomut Turkmans in a rebellion in 1744; Astarābādī, *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī*, 400; Yomut is spelled Yamūt.

coast—reflected, for instance, in persistent differences in dialect—Nader’s case for being of noble Turkman stock would have been strongly buoyed by his Afshar background, which made him rather well-suited to being inserted into such a genealogy. The Afshars were well-documented in the *Oghūznāme* tradition; the name is consistently listed as one of Oghuz Khan’s grandsons in the sources and is identified as one of the twenty-two Oghuz-Turkman tribes by the earliest document containing such a genealogy, which is Maḥmūd al-Kāshgārī’s Turkish-Arabic dictionary from 1071 composed in Baghdad.⁶⁵

Not only would Nader’s exposure to the tradition have been likely, but it would have been odd for him not to identify with it. It is also worth noting that Nader was not unfamiliar with the exercise of inventing genealogies after the Safavid collapse. In 1724–25, he had witnessed the rise of Malek Maḥmūd, a provincial ruler of Sistān who installed himself as sovereign in the holy city of Mashhad and justified his actions by conjuring up an ancient Iranian “Kayānid” lineage.⁶⁶ Shortly thereafter, Nader’s forces unseated him.

The Impact of Nader’s Claims

On the whole, Nader’s contemporaries did not adopt, and frequently even failed to acknowledge, the discourse that he propagated regarding his lineage and origins. The existing scholarship has already shown how a great many of Nader’s contemporaries were scandalized by his shunting aside of the more legitimate Safavids. Tucker has covered this topic in detail and has indisputably proved that Safavid legitimacy was often the main preoccupation of eighteenth-century writers in the empire’s former realms.⁶⁷

Still, there are signs that Nader’s efforts bore fruit in more subtle ways among contemporaries. At a minimum, attributions of some form of noble lineage to Nader became entrenched in Afsharid circles and can be found in writings produced in the years after his death. The best example is, of course, Mīrzā Maḥdī’s *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī*, which defended the ruler’s lineage around a decade after his death. Other more mundane documents after Nader’s time similarly reproduce this language; for instance, a letter to the Ottoman grand vizier composed in 1748 by Ebrāhīm Mīrzā, the brother of Karīm Khān Zand (r. 1751–79), referred to Nader’s Afshar supporters who had conspired to murder him as “the notables of the noble Afshar people” (*bozorgān-e il-e jalīl-e afshār*).⁶⁸

More interesting still is the impact of Nader’s ideas outside of Afsharid circles, and particularly its mark on Afghan historiography. The founding figure there was Maḥmūd al-Ḥusaynī al-Monshī, who in 1753–54 entered the service of Aḥmad Shāh Dorrānī, the post-Afsharid ruler of modern Khorasan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (r. 1747–72), and completed his *Tārīkh-e Aḥmadshāhī* between 1772 and 1776.⁶⁹ The author states that his patron held Mīrzā Maḥdī in particularly high esteem and desired a talented scribe from Nader’s time (*az monshīyān-e ayyām-e Nāder Shāh*) who could match the historian’s abilities. Al-Ḥusaynī then remarks that he was chosen for the job when an acquaintance of his reported to Aḥmad Shāh that “[al-Ḥusaynī] has passed some time with Mīrzā Maḥdī Khān, the writer of *Tārīkh-e Nāderī*, and spent a very long time with him traversing the pathways of companionship, and he acquired his fluency and eloquence of rhetoric, and perhaps writes even more skillfully and expressively than he.”⁷⁰

Mīrzā Maḥdī’s influence is clearly felt on the pages of *Tārīkh-e Aḥmadshāhī* on the level of both rhetoric and ideas. The author adopts the Afsharid alchemical formula to describe the

⁶⁵ al-Kāshgārī, *Compendium*, 1:101.

⁶⁶ Marvī, *Ālam-ārā-ye Nāderī*, 45–46.

⁶⁷ For a range of perspectives on Nader’s coronation that show evidence of the enduring Safavid legacy, see Tucker, *Nadir Shah’s Quest*, 42. Tucker also devotes an article to a discussion of Moḥammad Kāẓem Marvī’s persistent support for the Safavids in his history of Nader; see Tucker, “Explaining Nadir Shah,” 100–103.

⁶⁸ Navā’ī, *Nāder Shāh*, 506.

⁶⁹ Tarzi, “Tarikh-i Ahmad Shahi,” 80–84.

⁷⁰ al-Ḥusaynī, *Tārīkh-e Aḥmad Shāhī*, 51.

moment in which he meets Aḥmad Shāh and is charged with writing his history, fervently recording that “The copper of my deficient being was transformed into unadulterated gold and gilded Afshar rule.”⁷¹ He also replicates the formulation used in Nader-era documents by referring frequently to Aḥmad Shāh as one of “the noble Dorrani people” (*il-e jalil-e dorrāni*).⁷² Despite an unsurprising measure of respect for Nader, though, the text does not affirm the conqueror’s Turkman lineage.

Mughal and Ottoman sources from the period, on the other hand, show far less engagement with Afsharid discourse and attribute no weight to Nader’s origins. To the contrary, a survey of eighteenth-century Indian historical works suggests that Indian authors were not only highly critical of Nader’s pillaging and massacre at Delhi, but that as subjects of a Timurid dynasty they never entertained the idea that Nader was of similar standing to their line of sovereigns.⁷³ Ottoman historians from Nader’s time also ignored the ruler’s ideas on Turkman descent, and as such their works are generally absent from present-day scholarly speculations regarding Nader’s origins.⁷⁴

On occasion, and likely reflecting an awareness of the limited success of his pretensions to nobility, Nader and those around him sought to portray Turkman and Timurid lineage as equivalents. I have located this strategic deployment of the lineage claim in two instances—one is in a 1739 *farmān* (decree) regarding Nader’s invasion of India which describes the Mughal ruler Mohammad Shah as “of the noble Turkman people as well as a son of the Timurid line,”⁷⁵ suggesting a parity between these two lineages. The second comes in an extended poem written in the 1740s called *Shāhnāmeḥ-ye Nāderī*, commissioned by Nader for the poet known as Ferdowsī-ye Sānī (“The Second Ferdowsi”), in which one couplet described the Afsharid shah as such: “His descent Turkman, generation to generation / Reaching Timur, Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction” (*Nezhādāsh abā ‘an jad Torkamān / resad tā be Teymūr Sāhebqerān*).⁷⁶

Even so, acknowledgments by contemporaries of Nader’s similarity to Timur bore little relation to the Turkic background of the former and were instead based on historical parallels. The Ottoman scribe Sırrı Efendi, who documented Nader’s siege of the northeastern Anatolian city of Kars in 1744, wrote that “it is often said that the aforementioned shah [i.e., Nader] is indeed of a strong constitution, brave by nature, a courageous warrior, and a person capable of extraordinary feats, and during gatherings he has the Book of Timur (*Timūr-nāme*) recited.” Two pages later, the author dismissed Nader’s claims on the Sunni origins “of the noble Afshar Turkman” people on religious grounds, but neither acknowledged nor rejected the notion of descent.⁷⁷ In such cases is it difficult to demonstrate that Nader’s claims of descent, nobility, and lineage aided him in fostering an imagined connection to Timur.

Perhaps, though, Nader’s ideas had more success among ordinary people outside of official Ottoman and Mughal circles. Evidence for this resurfaces late in the *Oghūznāme* tradition, specifically in a Chaghatai text which may reflect the impact of Nader’s ideas of Afshar nobility. This manuscript, located in Kazan and bearing the title *Beyān-i Oghūznāme*, is similar to *Shejere-yi Terākime* in form and content and potentially based off of the latter work,⁷⁸ but incorporates several lengthy new sections including a detailed history of the mythical

⁷¹ Ibid., 52.

⁷² Ibid., 55.

⁷³ Elliot and Dowson’s nineteenth-century compilation of excerpts from Indian historical works proves a useful overview, as it allows for a large survey of sources from Nader’s time which demonstrate this pattern. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India*.

⁷⁴ As an example, see Ateş, *Osmanlı-İran Siyasi İlişkileri*, 34–37. The chief Ottoman court chronicle from the 1740s similarly covers Nader in detail without reference to his origins; Subhī Mehmet Efendi, *Subhī tarihi*.

⁷⁵ Navā’i, *Nāder Shāh*, 410.

⁷⁶ Ṭūsī, *Shāhnāmeḥ-ye Nāderī*, 35.

⁷⁷ Sırrı Efendi, *Risāletü’l-tarih-i Nadir Şāh*, 7, 9.

⁷⁸ Türkmen, “Kazan’dan yeni bir oğuzname nüshası üzerine.”

Afshār Khān. Namely, it includes an entirely new passage under the remarkable subheading “*beyān-i afṣār hān-i ṣāhib kirān [sic]*” which describes Afshār Khān and his progeny over the course of twelve pages (six folios). Not only is this pro-Afshar development noteworthy, but the title of *ṣāhib kirān* (“lord of the auspicious conjunction”) is also suggestive, as it was first used by Timur and remained associated with him such that Nader reclaimed the title in order to evoke the legacy of the former. The manuscript also portrays Afshār Khān as of higher status than in Abū al-Ghāzī’s text by seating him in the fourth tent among the children of Yılduz Khān rather than the fifth.⁷⁹

Little is known about the provenance of this text, nor is there widespread agreement on the date of production, although the vaguely anthologizing *beyān* in the title (“the account,” or presentation, of the *Oghūznāme*) and the author’s frequent reference to the tradition as a whole suggest a generally later date of production. Having consulted a facsimile of the original, Evrim Binbaş posits that this text was written around 1790 and that it likely circulated among the Afshars of Iran.⁸⁰ It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that the glorified portrayal of Afshār Khān and his progeny was a part of the legacy of Nader, and that this legacy may have seeped into popular historical narratives and genealogies.

Another obscure clue in a nineteenth-century chronicle from Qajar Iran suggests that the Afshar portion of the *Oghūznāme* cycle circulated widely after Nader’s time; while resident in Tabriz, Rezā Qolī Khān Hedāyat wrote in his *Rowzāt ol-Ṣafā-ye Nāserī* (1853–56) about the origins of the Javanshīr tribe in Karabagh that “the origins of this tribe is from Turkestan and they were from the clans of Ūshīr Khān, son of Yaldūr Khān, the fourth son of Oghūr Khān, and they call them Ūshār or Afshār.”⁸¹ Perhaps unwittingly, Hedāyat was transmitting a key element of Oghuz history. The variations in orthography (Yaldūr instead of Yaldūz; Oghūr instead of Oghūz) may suggest that variants of the *Oghūznāme* had circulated and been recopied a number of times into the Qajar era.

Conclusion

Nader’s claims to noble descent were comprehensive and consistent. They ran parallel to a widespread tradition of Turkman and Oghuz legitimacy which had popular appeal and was acknowledged in court historiographical traditions. It is unlikely that Nader would have bothered with such notions in the first place had they been as far-fetched as the scholarship has suggested. As a usurper of the Iranian throne from the hands of an esteemed dynastic line, asserting an inborn right to rule was a reasonable strategy for shoring up Afsharid political legitimacy. Even this is a cynical interpretation of Nader’s position—he may well have believed his own lineage claims, a justifiable conviction given the cultural context.

Among elites across the Persianate world, though, there was no widespread embrace of these claims outside of Nader’s own circles. Instead, it seems that a conception of the ruler’s humble origins prevailed among his contemporaries. Perhaps this was a consequence of his own mixed messaging; Hanway noted of Nader that, “As to himself, he sometimes boasted of the meanness of his extraction; at others, policy or caprice induced him to claim a relation to GINGIZ KHAN [*sic*], the great TURKUMAN conqueror, and also to TAMERLANE.”⁸² Accounting for Hanway’s clear bias regarding Nader’s irrational nature, the spirit of this observation remains instructive. Nader was a strategist, and perhaps deployed his claims to noble descent when circumstances appeared to favor such an approach.

The tepid reception of Nader’s Oghuz-Turkman political claims by writers defending Ottoman, Timurid, and Chingissid dynastic lines could also reflect a general decline in interest in lineage claims among the Eurasian imperial elite, who may have instead grown

⁷⁹ Demir and Aydoğdu, *Oguzname*, 138–42.

⁸⁰ *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Oğuz Khan Narratives.”

⁸¹ Hedāyat, *Rowzāt ol-Ṣafā*, 8416.

⁸² Hanway, *An Historical Account*, 2:256.

attached to religious or scientific discourses of political authority over the course of the preceding centuries. Royal descent—regularly embellished via genealogies, stories, and false claims—was frequently combined with claims to the throne based on charisma, sainthood, and science. Recent scholarship has shown how rulers, court historians, astronomers, and mathematicians in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal realms deployed a diverse array of arguments in support of dynastic sovereignty.⁸³ On the other hand, this does not exclude the possibility that Nader’s notion of Turkman legitimacy was aimed at a more popular audience, where it may well have taken hold, as reflected in a new pro-Afsharid slant in the *Oghūznāme* tradition as well as the widespread fascination he aroused among the authors of his time.

Nader’s conception of lineage was only one of several components in the political image that he promoted. Despite the use of genealogical terms such as *dūdmān* and *selsele* in Afsharid sources, Nader’s project may perhaps also be described as one of language, ethnicity, or kinship more broadly understood. He did not trace his descent to any specific individual, but rather to a vaguer array of Oghuz, Turkman, and Timurid antecedents. Perhaps the long-term survival of the Afsharid dynasty would have led to the sharpening of his ideas into a more exclusive genealogical structure or else to a more explicit pairing of genealogical and charismatic claims to rulership.

Nader’s attempts to gain legitimacy, in collaboration with the important figure of Mīrzā Mahdī Astarābādī, are an example of the way in which established Eurasian lineages were increasingly challenged in the wake of the Safavid collapse. Malek Maḥmūd’s invention of an ancient Iranian lineage in Mashhad, as well as Afghan Dorrānī assertions of their right to rule (the latter drawing directly from the Afsharid legacy), were other disruptions to the pantheon of post-Mongol dynasties. It may be that the frontier regions of Khurasan and Afghanistan were particularly fertile ground for defying Safavid, Timurid, and Chingissid hegemonies. That historians of Iran have tended to register this period as one of unproductive chaos is perhaps due to the weight of the pro-Safavid reactionary guard in the Iranian sources, as well as the continued dominance of pro-Timurid voices across the broader Persianate sphere. It appears, though, that the Safavid collapse ushered in a period of new lineage-based political claims.

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⁸³ Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*; Çıpa, *The Making of Selim*, 210–50; Melvin-Koushki, “Powers of One,” 187–88.

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