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The Tabarra'iyān and the Early Safavids

Safavid historians of the mid- to late-tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries attached considerable importance to Isma'īl I's entry into Tabriz in 907/1501. It is in this section of their books that they recount the momentous inception of Safavid rule and Isma'īl's historic innovations in Azarbayjan: the reinstatement of the pre-Islamic Pahlavi title "shah" symbolizing universal kingship and the institution of Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion of the realm.¹ According to Hasan Beg, the often-cited chronicler whose work *Ahsan al-tawarikh* was completed in 965/1577, Isma'īl, in his coronation address, demanded that the practices of the Sunnites immediately be discontinued and that transgression be punished with decapitation. Muslims throughout the realm were required to publicly renounce, by cursing and vilifying, the first three (Sunni) caliphs; to add the Shi'ite formula "hayya 'ala khayr al-'amal" to the required prayer; and to read the names of the rest of the Twelve Imams in the sermon (*khutba*).² A later source, which has been demoted to the status of popular romance history,³ takes the description of the event of Isma'īl's coronation further. The author, Bizan, recounts how the shah, after dividing the Aqqoyunlu Alvand's treasury among the Qizilbash in Tabriz and striking coins with the inscription "Ali is the friend of God," wanted to have the sermon read. However, the Qizilbash warned him to think twice about it because more than 200,000 people of Tabriz were Sunni and might not want a Shi'ite shah. To this Isma'īl replied that if the people said a word, he would draw his sword and kill them, leaving not a one alive. He then announced that he himself would deliver the Twelver Shi'ite sermon.⁴ The narrative then dramatizes the forced conversion of the people after Isma'īl, knowing that the Qizilbash are right in their warning, nevertheless gains their support for his

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¹All references to Shi'ism are to Twelver Shi'ism, unless stated otherwise.

²Hasan Bik Rumlu, *A Chronicle of the Early Safavids* being the *Ahsan al-tawarikh* of Hasan Rumlu, translated and edited by C. N. Seddon (Baroda, 1931-34) 2: 26-7, hereafter *AT*.

³This is the *'Alam ara-yi Safavi*, believed to be the work of a mid-eleventh/seventeenth century writer, Bizan. It is edited by Yadallah Shukri (Tehran: 1350 Sh./1971), hereafter *AAS*. For the dating of this work, which was for a long time believed by E. G. Browne and others to be an early Safavid source, see A.H. Morton, "The Date and Attribution of the Ross Anonymous. Notes on a Persian History of Shah Isma'īl I," in Charles Melville, ed., *Pembroke Papers I: Persian and Islamic Studies in Honour of P. W. Avery*, (Cambridge, 1990), 179-212. See also, R. McChesney's discussion of the content and style, "'Alamara-ye Shah Esma'īl," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 796-97, hereafter *EI*.

⁴*AAS*, 64.

intentions when he receives divine confirmation from ‘Ali in a dream. Bizan recounts that the shah assembled the inhabitants of Tabriz in the Friday mosque on the occasion of the sermon and instructed the Qizilbash to kill anyone who resisted. Faced with this threat, the people relented and rose for the sermon, at the end of which they were instructed to recite the *tabarra*.⁵ A third of the assembly answered loudly in unison, “May it be more, not less” (*bish bad u kam mabad*),⁶ while the other two thirds capitulated out of fear of the dagger and sword-wielding Qizilbash and a shah-appointed *tabarra’i*, who brandished a battle axe (*tabar/tabarz’in*).⁷

Bizan’s inflated conception of Isma‘il and his first official pronouncements can also be noted in more “serious” histories, but the narratives over time are uneven, for the most part becoming more hyperbolic in writings after *AT*.

This study explores the historiography of the coronation of Isma‘il as a means of developing a more nuanced understanding of the Safavid rhetoric centering on the practice of the ritual curse. Toward that end, it traces the early Safavid development of the practice itself, which became a hallmark of Safavid domestic and foreign policy. It also examines the Safavid origins and role of the *tabarra’iyan* for the years just before the Safavids came to power in 907/1501, up to the death of the third Safavid Shah, Isma‘il II in 1577.

The *tabarra’iyan* (“dissociaters,” or “disavowers”), were a group that became known for their roles as promoters and guardians of the ritual curse in Iranian society. They performed the dual function of overseeing the performance of the ritual curse in the neighborhoods and of spying on the faithful. As spies, they put public places under surveillance, reporting on those who attempted to carry on Sunnite practices, such as the Congregational prayer, which was abandoned under the early Safavids pending the return of the Hidden Imam, according to Imamate doctrine. Under Tahmasp, the *tabarra’iyan* also led the shah’s gatherings and his entourages whenever he traveled about. As might be expected, the *tabarra’iyan* became known for engaging in extortion and harassing rebellious Sunnites and others whom they might accuse of Sunnism for purposes of personal gain.⁸ Under Tahmasp, especially, *tabarra’iyan* formed a corporate

⁵*AA*, 64-5.

⁶This is the one response formula of the ritual curse that has come down to us from Mirza Makhdum Sharifi, who was an eyewitness to the practice. See *al-Nawaqid li bunyan al-ravafid* (British Museum, Or. 7991), f. 106a, hereafter *AN*. A detailed account of the practice of cursing during the time of Tahmasp (r. 1524-76) based on this source can be found in Rosemary Stanfield Johnson, “Sunni Survival in Safavid Iran: Anti-Sunni Activities during the Reign of Tahmasp I,” *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994): 123-33.

⁷*AA*, 65.

⁸Modern scholarship on this topic includes: A. A. Dihkhuda, *Lughatnamah*, s.v. “*Tabarra’i*,” “*Tabarra’iyan*,” hereafter *Lughatnamah*; Hamid Algar, “Caliphs and the Caliphate,” in *EI*; Jean Calmard, “Les Rituels Shiites et le Pouvoir. L’imposition du shiisme Safavide: eulogies et maledictions canoniques,” *Etudes Safavides*, ed. Jean Calmard (Paris-Tehran, 1993), 131-135 (hereafter “Rituels”); Rosemary Stanfield Johnson, “Sunni Survival,” 130-31. Other studies that have mentioned the *tabarra’iyan* include: K.M. Röhrborn, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, (Berlin, 1966); R.D. McChesney, “Waqf and Public Policy: The Waqfs of Shah Abbas, 1001-1023/1602-1614,” *Asian and African Studies* 15 (1981): 184.

organization supported by the shah himself. Enough sources mention them in connection with the *qalandaran*, an elusive group of indigent Sufis often described as the bohemians of society, for us to accept that the *tabarra'īyan* originated in popular culture. Little research has been done on this group, perhaps because of the paucity of sources on the popular elements of society, but also because of a lack of published works on popular culture in Iran in the sixteenth century.⁹

My interest in this topic stems from an earlier investigation of policies employed by Tahmasp to curb Sunnite practices in Qazvin, the Safavid capital from 955/1548-49 to 1007/1598.¹⁰ After noting *tabarra'īyan* activities in Qazvin, I subsequently sought to verify their existence in Persian histories for the period of Isma'īl I (r. 987/1501-931/1524), and noted that there is little recorded on this group for those years. For the years of Tahmasp, there are at least two detailed accounts and a number of shorter mentions. For Tahmasp's son and successor, Isma'īl II (r. 984/1576-985/1577), there are three detailed accounts, all of which expound the sectarian confrontation that took place during Isma'īl II's reign. Accounts of the *tabarra'īyan*, which will be discussed in detail below, include chronicles, letters, and religious polemics. The list consulted is far from exhaustive, however, and therefore this study is but a contribution to a subject that deserves further research.

Terminology

The terms employed in the Safavid discourse on the ritual curse usually are: *la'n*, *la'nat* (cursing, curse), *ta'n* (insult or vilification) and *sabb* (cursing, abusing), all loan words from Arabic construed with the Persian simple verbs *kardan* or *namudan*, and the term *tabarra'*. The word *tabarra'*, the Persian modification of *tabarru'* from the Arabic fifth form verbal noun meaning “disavowal” or “dissociation” from someone or something, has the sense of publicly asserting that disavowal. In the Safavid context, *tabarra'* refers to the assertion of the formula of disavowal, that is, to the language—slogan, or verse—in which the curse is embedded.¹¹ Technically speaking, one may dissociate oneself from someone or something without cursing that person

⁹See *Encyclopaedia of Islam* s.v. “Kalandariya;” see Mir ‘Abadini, Abu Talib and Mehran Afshari, *Ayin-i qalandaran* (Tehran: Sh. 1374/1995-96) for a study of doctrines and practices; also *Lughatnamah* s.v. “qalandar”. Hafiz Husayn Karbala’i (d. 997/1588) called the *qalandariya* an order, the doctrinal beliefs of which were close to the *Malamatiya*, cited in Hosayn Mirjafari, “The Haydari-Ni’mati Conflicts in Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 12 (1979): 141-42.

¹⁰Stanfield Johnson, “Sunni Survival.” For the date of the transfer of the capital from Tabriz to Qazvin, see Bidlisi, Sharaf al-Din, *Sharafnama*, ed. V. Veliamninof Zernof as *Scheref-Nameh of Histoire des Kourdes*, (St. Petersburg, 1860-62), 2: 234 and Michel Mazzaoui, “From Tabriz to Qazvin to Isfahan: Three Phases of Safavid History,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*. Supp. III, 1. XIX. *Deutscher Orientalistentag*. (Weisbaden, 1977), 514-522.

¹¹Kohlberg discusses the placement of the curse. The curse and dissociation were not permitted to occur within the five daily prayers, but could be incorporated into the supererogatory prayers (*du'a* or *ta'qib*), which are said at the conclusion of the *faridat*, or *qunnut*. See “Bara’a,” 152-53.

or thing. But this distinction is blurred in the Safavid historical sources, where the use of either of *la'na/t* or *tabarra'* may imply the other.

Tabarra' is often construed with its opposite, *tawalla'*, the latter meaning to proclaim one's drawing closer to someone or something, commonly done in the form of praise (*madh*).¹² Together, the two terms denote the Twelver Shi'ite practices of proclaiming the formula expressing dissociation from the enemies of 'Ali and the House of the Prophet (*abl-i bayt*), and proclaiming the formula expressing praise for 'Ali and the House of the Prophet. The Persian terms *tabarra'i* and *tabarra'iyan* are nouns construed to mean the person or persons who deliver the *tabarra'/tabarru'* to society as versifiers, and whose emphasis, as reflected in the sources, is dissociation (through cursing) rather than drawing close (through praise).

The Form of the Public Ritual Curse

The Harati writer, Vasifi, writing about the year 918/1511, as an eyewitness to the conquest of Harat by Isma'il I, makes the point that the ritual curse was written down in ten lines.¹³ Later writers, including Qadi Nurallah Shushtari and Sharifi, also mention a list.¹⁴ Sharifi's account especially rails against the loud ejaculatory formulas shouted by the *tabarra'i*, which were followed by a litany of names to which the people responded in affirmation. According to Sharifi, the list of accursed varied.

Dissociation and Dissimulation

Although the roots of ritual cursing and dissociation in Islamic history are older than Shi'ism, the practice most often recalls the Shi'ite practice of religious dissimulation (*taqiya*). Prior to the establishment of the Safavid house in Iran, Shi'ite doctrinal disavowal from the first three caliphs was a politically delicate matter in view of Sunnite political hegemony in the Dar al-Islam. Rather than publicly disavow themselves (*tabarra'* / v.n. *tabarru'*) from the caliphs, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman, Shi'ites practiced *taqiya* as advocated by their ulama, which required *tabarru'* to be pronounced in the heart. The Shi'ite predicament is evident in the Sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq's remark to his companions in the second/eighth century: "There is no difference between those who oppose you [i.e., the Sunnis] save that which is concealed (*al-mudmar*)."¹⁵ When asked the meaning of "that which is concealed," he answered, "that which you call *bara'a*."¹⁵ Approximately eight centuries later, in

¹²*Lughatnamah*, s.v. "*tabarra'*." Dihkhuda has cited instances of the use of these terms in the poetry of Nasir-i Khusraw, 'Attar and Khaqani, to name a few. See also s.v. "*tawalla'iyan*".

¹³*BW*, II: 249

¹⁴*MM*, I: 171; *AN* ff. 105b-106a.

¹⁵Quote taken from Etan Kohlberg, "Bara'a in Shi'i Doctrine," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (JSAL)*, 7 (1986): 174-75 (hereafter "*Bara'a*"), cited in al-Qadi al-Nu'man, *Da'a'im al-Islam*, ed. A. A. A. Fyzee (Cairo: 1370/1951-1379/1960), 2:116. The term *'adawwa* ("enmity") frequently used in similar contexts suggests the nature of the disavowal. The accepted date for Al-Sadiq's death is 114/ 732.

fourth/tenth century post-revolutionary Safavid Iran (940/1533-34), Shah Tahmasp Safavi (d. 984/1576), the second in the dynastic line responsible for the transformation of Sunnite Iran to an authentically Shi'ite state, was able to write boldly to his Ottoman Sunnite rival, Sulayman II, "We in the God-protected realms (*mamalik-i mahrusa*) have ordered that the ritual disavowers (*tabarra'yan*) and indigent darvishes (*qalandaran*) and the multitude of people who have been chanting the curse of the enemies of the family of the lord of the prophets (*sarwar-i anbia'*) and the sayyid of the guardians of the faith (*sayyid-i ansia'*) through cursing in the heart (*bi la`n-i khafti*) and aloud (*bi la`n-i jali*), from this day should count you and your followers among the accursed Bani `Umayya, Bani Marwan, Barmaka, and Bani `Abbas [whom they curse] in the markets, quarters, mosques, academies, and from the pulpits."¹⁶ Two features of Tahmasp's rhetoric stand out: first, the early Safavids took a stand (broadly speaking) on the practice of *taqiya*; and second, at least in the case of Tahmasp, Safavid protocol reached out to society's popular, often indigent and itinerant elements, fusing court and urban protocol to popular support.

The Pre-Safavid Period

Scholars of early Islam have discussed the long tradition in pre-Islamic and Islamic history of the public dissociation from sectarian enemies practiced by both the elite and popular classes.¹⁷ In the early Islamic period, *bara'a* was practiced in ruling circles and among the masses in both Shi'ite and Sunnite communities. One of the most symbolic occasions of cursing in the early Islamic period was recorded among the Muslim elite during the last quarter of the seventh century. This was the occasion of the hostility between Mu`awiya (d. 680) and `Ali (d. 661), and the *kharijites* (seceders) who rejected `Ali for his willingness to arbitrate with Mu`awiya. The *kharijites* appear to be the first to have incorporated *bara'a* as a major doctrinal tenet.¹⁸

For the medieval period, the *Kitab al-naqd*, a Shi'ite polemic, enumerates the nicknames and grades into which the popular practices of praising by sectarian eulogists were organized. These grades are set forth in terms of "praising" rather than "cursing," while the terms *tabarra'* and *tavalla'* are used to express the doctrine itself—in other words, there is a distinction between the use of the terms for doctrine versus persons. According to this source, Shi'ites and Sunnites alike engaged in the popular

¹⁶Shah Tahmasp-i Safavi, *Majmu`a-yi asnad wa mukhatibat tarikhi*, ed. A. H. Nava'i (Tehran, 1358-63Sh), 215 (hereafter *Asnad*). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

¹⁷See Kohlberg, "Bara'a" and "Sahaba". See also, Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies, no. 4, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Albany, 1988), For example, the eighth and ninth century Khurramiya, a popular revolutionary movement embodied an array of Persian and Islamic religious beliefs, which included *tabarra'* and *tavalla'* (p. 11). In the eleventh century Tughril Bik ordered that al-`Ashari be cursed from the pulpits in Khurasan (p. 33); and, later, under Mas`ud, the grandson of Tughril Bik, two prominent Shaf'ite scholars were forced to sign documents repudiating their Ash`arite doctrines and to curse al-Ash`ari (p. 34).

¹⁸Kohlberg, "Bara'a," 142.

pastime of publicly praising their respective religious champions. Shi'ite verse reciters nicknamed *manaqib-kh̄w̄anan* (reciters of merit) praised 'Ali publicly in the markets and streets, while casting imprecations on Sunnite heros.¹⁹ Their Sunnite counterparts, dubbed *fada'il-kh̄w̄anan* (reciters of virtues), sang praises of the Prophet Muhammad's Sunnite Companions and cursed 'Ali. It was not uncommon for the pre-Islamic Iranian champions, such as Rustam and Suhrab, to make their way into these verbal contests, on the part of the Sunnites, according to *Kitab al-naqd*,²⁰ and members of both groups were known to seek both prestige and a day's wage in these contests of sectarian poetry.²¹ While popular eulogy took on a variety of forms, usually it was conducted in simple verse recited in the vernacular. For the ninth/fifteenth and early tenth/sixteenth centuries, sources record a number of different grades of eulogizers and versifiers. Among these were the simple-verse eulogist (*maddah*), the higher-ranking prose eulogist (*gharra-kh̄w̄an*), water-carrier (*saqqa*), and encomiast (*kh̄havass-gū*), who were remnants of the earlier tradition.²²

The *Kitab al-naqd* does not refer to praise eulogizers as *tavalla'iyan* or to dissociating eulogizers as *tabarra'iyan*. A search for either term in the pre-Safavid histories leads (so far) to a single reference in the history of Kh̄wandmir. Kh̄wandmir recounts that the *tabarra'iyan* were accomplices of rabble-rousing *qalandaran* who, in 885/1480-81, gathered "chanting *dhikr* and shouting around a trumped-up shrine in the vicinity of Balkh, close to another shrine held to be the authentic tomb of 'Ali."²³ The context does not make it clear whether the *tabarra'iyan* and *qalandaran* are engaging with Sunnites in a sectarian spar. Kh̄wandmir's reference suggests that the sectarian *tabarra'iyan* publicly advanced their 'Alid views in the neighborhood of a predominately

¹⁹Modern scholars who have written about this subject have invariably referred to the twelfth century *Kitab al-naqd* of al-Razi. See, for example, A. Bausani, "Religion in the Saljuq Period," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968) 5:285-86; 290-96 (hereafter *CHIR*). See also, Mohammad Dja'far Mahdjub, "The Evolution of Popular Eulogy of the Imams Among the Shi'a," in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand, tr. and adapted by John Perry (Albany, 1988), 55-79 (hereafter "Popular Eulogy") and Mahdjub's introduction to Maulana Husayn Wa'iz-i Kashifi, *Futurvatnamab-yi Sultani*, ed. Mohammad Dja'far Mahdjub (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1969). According to Husayn Lisan, *manaqib-kh̄w̄ani* was a countervailing trend to the popular recitations of the *Shahnamah*, the emphasis shifting from pre-Islamic Iranian mythical heroes to Islamic historical figures, *Hunar va Mardum* (Tehran, 1976), 14:9. This view is consistent with some of the earlier observations published by Bausani, that the Sunnites, according to al-Razi, were imitators of the Shi'ites who, instead of singing of the righteous wars of 'Ali, fabricated wars and stories based on pre-Islamic mythical heros (*CHIR*, 5: 293-4). See also, P.N. Boratov, "Maddah," *EIP*. A study which utilizes al-Razi's work is Jean Calmard, "Le chi'isme imamite en Iran a l'epoque seldjoukide d'apres le *Kitab al-naqd*," *Le Monde Iranien et l'Islam* (1971) 1: 43-67.

²⁰A. Bausani, "Religion in the Saljuq Period," 293-94. Bausani mentions that a Sunnite response to the Shi'ite *manaqib-kh̄w̄anan* was to refute them with "unfounded stories concerning Rustam, Surab, Isfandiyar, Ka'us, Zal, etc....", 293-94.

²¹From *Kitab al-naqd* of al-Razi (no publishing information), cited in Mahdjub, "Popular Eulogy," 57.

²²Boratov, "Maddah," in *EIP*. "Popular Eulogy," 71. Calmard discusses the distinctions among these eulogists and the topic of the *tabarra'ian* for this period, as well. See "Rituals," 131-35.

²³*Habib al-siyar fi akhbār-i aḥrād-i bashar*, ed. Jalal Huma'i (Tehran, 1333Sh./1954), 4:273 (hereafter *HS*).

Sunnite city.²⁴ There is no question, however, of their affiliation with a royal court. Since the situation changes under the Safavids, under whom the eulogizer eventually becomes known as the *tabarra'i*, it may be possible to consider the development of the institution of public *tabarru* as a Safavid invention in which the use of the term directly contests the practice of *taqiya* by expanding the use of terms generally used to refer to religious duty. A possible reason that the terms *tabarra'i* and *tawalla'i* do not emerge prominently in the pre-Safavid literature is that, whereas on one hand *manaqib-kb'ani* and *fada'il kb'ani* supported the sectarian expression of both Shi'ites and Sunnites in a strongly Sunnite setting, *tabarra'i* and *tawalla'i*, on the other hand, are distinctly Shi'ite sectarian terms in this particular context, and they obviously could not easily be expressed socially. That is, cursing and dissociation could not be expressed in a nickname. As a text, *Kitab al-naqd*, originating in Saljuq (Sunnite) society, reflects the caution against the dangers of sectarian extremism on the part of the Shi'ites.²⁵

The Safavid Period

There is little mention of the *tabarra'yan* in the Persian chronicles for the years of Isma'il I, and no mention of *tabarra'i* corporate activities. Although historians recounting the inception of Safavid rule in Iran have pointed out that the requirement for the ritual curse was stipulated in the coronation *khubta*, a close reading of the coronation passages of writers before and after Hasan Beg reveal significant differences in the accounts: those written before Hasan Beg (completed 949/1542) do not mention the ritual curse at all, nor do they employ the terms *tabarra'* or *tabarra'yan*. Those written after 949/1542 do mention the curse, some with some relish. Similar passages recounting Isma'il's defeat of other Iranian cities mention the

²⁴Before the time of Isma'il I (r. 907/1501-931/1524), groups sharing 'Alid sentiments had incorporated *baru'a* into their own beliefs. Corporate entities having Shi'ite leanings, such as the Bektashis, who were tied to the Qizilbash movement which the Safavid family led in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, included *tabarru'* in their own rituals. The Bektashi practice certainly suggests that the pre-tenth/sixteenth century Safavids, who were originally Sunnite Sufis from Anatolia, among others, may have profited from the Bektashi synthesis of 'Alid ritual. For a discussion of the Turkish poet Hatip Oglu's translation in 1409 of *Maqalat*, an Arabic metrical poem attributed to Hajji Bektashi, in which the principles of *tabarra'* and *tavalla* are expressed, see Birge, John Kingsley, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (Luzac, 1994 reprint of 1937 edition), 44-45. For recent studies of darvish manuals in which the same principles are set out, see Mehran Afshari, *Futuwwat namah-ba va rasa'il-i khaksariya* (Tehran, 2003), especially 129 and 149. A close reading of these manuals could shed light on the diffusion of these principles in society.

²⁵The construction of the polemical debate in the *Kitab al-naqd* must be verified. Until that is done, one must view Kashifi's claims with some caution. It is not unheard of for authors to deliberately construct polemical debates with fictitious participants created to protect themselves from political reprisal. The tenth/sixteenth—early eleventh/seventeenth-century writer, Shushtari, admits this in his letter to Mir Yusuf Astarabadi, to whom he writes that, as a function of *taqiya*, he deliberately created an argument between a Hijazi and an Iraqi on doctrinal points he wished to debate in writing *Masa'ib al-namasib*. See S. A. A. Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India (7th to 16th Century A.D.)* (New Delhi, 1986), 1: 359, for a translation of this correspondence.

implementation of the ritual curse as a function of Qizilbash intimidation and humiliation during and after conquest. The Harati writer Vasifi, who was an eyewitness to the Qizilbash conquest of Harat in 918/1512, recounts that the requirement for the curse was a part of the Qizilbash victory address (*fathnamah*) prior to Isma‘il’s arrival in the city.²⁶ His account reveals the dual motives for the curse as both a condition of surrender and public humiliation of the Sunnites of the city. He writes that during the victory address the task of pronouncing the curse, which had been written down, fell to a local notable, Hafiz al-Din, who was killed by a group of Qizilbash who were enraged by his hesitation to recite it in full (it was more than ten lines long).²⁷ Before he was struck dead, a Sunnite crier at the foot of the minbar taunted Hafiz al-Din as he started to recite the curse by calling him Hafiz al-Din ‘Ali instead of his kunya Hafiz al-Din Abu Bakr.²⁸ After the Qizilbash killed Hafiz al-Din, it was the *madda*, not the *tabarra’i*, who led the curse.²⁹ Vasifi himself experienced the Qizilbash threat when a theology student and acquaintance he believed to be Sunnite tried to turn him in to the Qizilbash by publicly announcing that he was a seceder (*khariji*).³⁰ In recounting the initial brutality and post-invasion conditions attending the Qizilbash take-over of the city, Vasifi provides numerous other anecdotes depicting the sectarian aggression of the Qizilbash in Harat in 918/1512 and thereafter. In these cases, again it was the Qizilbash, not the *tabarra’iyan*, who demanded the curse from the populace. It is with his complaint of these oppressive conditions that Vasifi opens his work.³¹ The situation was so bad, he remarks, that one day he was of a mind to go out and get himself martyred because he was unable to stand for another moment cursing the Companions.³²

The public practice of cursing was no doubt a sign of post-conquest sectarian tension between Sunnites and Shi‘ites who may have tolerated each other in more peaceful circumstances. Vasifi mentions an incident during which a group of around fifty persons gathered and verbally attacked him and his companion as Sunnites. One of the group was a well-known Shi‘ite (*rafidi*) called Mir Shana-tarash (the head comb-maker), who began screaming curses of the Companions in a musical form known as *abang-i ‘Iraq*, causing at least 1,000 persons to gather.³³ As the cursing commenced, a

²⁶Zayn al-Din Mahmud Vasifi, *Badayi’ al-Vaqayi’*. ed. A.N. Boldyrev (Tehran, 1972), 2: 249 (hereafter *BW*) completed in 1538/9. For a discussion of this source and the author, see Maria Subtelny, “Scenes from the Literary Life of Timurid Herat,” in *Logos Islamikos: Studia Islamica in honorem of Georgii Michaelis Wickens*, eds. Roger Savory and Dionisius Agius (Toronto, 1984), 139. See also Maria Szuppe, *Entre Timourides, Uzbeks Et Safavides: Questions D’Histoire Politique Et Sociale De Heart Dans La Premiere Moitie Du XVIIe Siecle* (Paris, 1992), 51-53.

²⁷*BW* II: 248.

²⁸*BW*, II: 249.

²⁹The *madda* function of the *tabarra’i* is illustrated by Qazvini who writes of praise verse allegedly sung by the *tabarra’iyan* to honor Tahmasp at a military procession in 1529 (*KT*, I: 203)

³⁰*BW*, II: 250-4.

³¹*BW*, I: 3-4.

³²*BW*, I: 5.

³³This is the first reference to the style of recitation I have come across in both Persian and Arabic

larger crowd gathered. Together they headed to the shrine of Maulana 'Abd al-Rahman Jami. At this juncture, according to Vasifi, ten thousand people had gathered, collecting on a heap all of the doors, windows, chairs, and stools they could find and throwing them upon the tomb of Jami, and then setting the heap afire.³⁴ Vasifi and his companion were apparently safe enough to follow and observe the crowd, but they eventually stole away to avoid danger to their lives.

Vasifi is one writer who makes use of his links to the popular classes: to people of the trades and to individuals of the Sufi orders, who may be linked to the trades. He depicted the increased sectarian tension caused by the Qizilbash take-over of Herat, and his account reveals the post-conquest chaos that took shape on the streets. His observations suggest that, before it was given its corporate form, ritual cursing was encouraged to the extent that brawls occurred or were threatened.

From Vasifi we get an isolated mention of a *tabarrani*, (*tabarra'i*?) and the *madda* together in the context of an anecdote about a candle-maker who proclaimed in the *chahar suq* that people (Sunnites) should be happy that they are even alive because people like *Palang-i tabarrani* (should it be *tabarra'i*?), *Husami-yi madda* are now leading the way.³⁵ Rumlu, writing about the same year, mentions a *tabarra'i* in connection with the battle for Harat waged by the Qizilbash general, Najm al-din (d. 920/1514), against 'Ubayd Allah Khan the Uzbek (d. 918/1512). When the two sides clashed at Firuzabad, a certain Baba 'Ishqi-yi *Tabarra'i* fell into Uzbek hands and was killed. This is the extent of references to the *tabarra'yan* for Isma'il's reign. The comparative paucity of such references suggests that Isma'il did not rely on the *tabarra'* ritual at court, to the degree that his successor, Tahmasp, would do.

sources.

³⁴*BW*, II: 250. Dickson discusses Jami's tainted reputation as a Sunnite under Tahmasp I. After ordering the revered poet's tomb to be desecrated, Tahmasp sought to burn the author's works, but was dissuaded through the intervention of his grand vazir, Qadi-yi Jahan (d. 1553), who successfully consulted one of Jami's verses as an augury and then recited several other verses that honored 'Ali. Tahmasp subsequently ordered the tomb to be rebuilt. Vasifi's earlier reference to hostility toward Jami suggests his reputation and grave may have frequently been victims of factional brawls, especially if the instigator was a ruler. See Martin Dickson, "Shah Tahmasb and the Uzbeks (the Duel for Khurasan with Ubayd Khan) 930-946/1524-1540" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1958), 190. (Hereafter "Shah Tahmasb and the Uzbeks").

³⁵Calmard has mentioned the possibility of this term being a corruption of *tabarra'i*, which from the context seems most certainly to be, "Rituels," 130. The story is about the candle-maker (*sham'riz*) Maulana Darvish-i Divanah who entered the *chahar suq* of Harat and addressed the crowd that surrounded him, asking why they do not give thanks to God that they are alive in these times, as in former times their religious luminaries and guides included Junaydak Baghdadi, Bayazidak Bisami, Zindahpil, Ahmad Jami, and 'Abd Allah Ansari, whereas now the type of person who leads the way is (the likes of): *Palang-i tabarrani* (*tabarra'i*?), *Husami-yi madda* and Ashraf Astarabadi, who are the height of *rafd* and famous for their misfortune (*badbakhti*), unbelief (*kufr*), obscurity (*tiragi*), stupidity (*humq*), and ignorance (*jahl*). For a discussion of the differences between the *madda* and the *tabarra'i*, see Calmard, "Rituels," 131-35.

Shah Isma'il I: The institution of the Tabarra'

The coronation passages of the Safavid histories of the mid-to late-tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries provide us with the historians' representation of Isma'il's first proclamations as shah. The differences are revealing. Eight chronicles are examined: *Habib al-siyar*, completed in 936/1529; *Dhayl-i habib al-siyar*, completed in 957/1550;³⁶ *Lubb al-tavarikh*, which goes up to 949/1542;³⁷ *AT*, completed in 965/1577; *Khulasat al-tavarikh*, completed in 1001/1592;³⁸ *Rawdat al-safawiya*, which goes up to 1035/1625;³⁹ *TAAA*, completed in 1039/1629; and *Khuld-i barin*, composed in 1078/1667-68.

While the earliest chroniclers of Safavid history write of an impressive address by Isma'il I, they do not mention the institution of the public ritual curse. Indeed, they limit Isma'il's reach to Azarbayjan itself, not all of Iran. In *HS*, Khwandamir, whose account is repeated by Amir Mahmud in *ZHS*, reports that at the outset of his reign in 907/1501, Isma'il ordered that the sermon in Azarbayjan must be read in the name of the twelve imams; that all the prayer leaders when performing the prayer must abrogate the ritual practices (of the Sunnites) and the rest of their "contemptible, innovative customs"; that the callers to prayer must add "Ali is God's favorite" (*'Ali wali Allah*) to the call; and that if the ghazis (warriors of the faith) were to witness anyone committing any act against the pure faith, they should decapitate him. There is no mention of either cursing or the *tabarra'*.⁴⁰ Yahya Qazvini, a Sunnite writer who was arrested by Tahmasp and died in prison in 963/1555, wrote in his *LT* that Isma'il "descended upon the abode of authority, Tabriz, and the seat of authority of Azarbayjan (*sarir-i saltanat-i Azarbayjan*), was adorned with his royal magnificence (*bi shukub-i padishahi-yi ishan xib o xinat gereft*), and that he ennobled once again the preachers (*ru'asay-i manabir*) and the faces of the coins (*vujub-i dana'ir*), with the name of the ultimate guidance (*hidayat-i farjam*), their excellences, the Twelve Imams and the honorifics of the auspicious [king]; and the people entered the religion of the *ahl-i bayt*."⁴¹ Qazvini also omits to mention the curse or the *tabarra'* and, following

³⁶Amir Mahmud Khwandamir, *Dhayl-i habib al-siyar*, ed. M. Jarahi (Tehran, 1991-92) (hereafter *ZHS*).

³⁷Yahya Qazvini, *Lubb al-tavarikh*. copied by Zia' al-Din Shushtari (Tehran, 1367/1988) (hereafter *LT*).

³⁸Qazi Ahmad Qazvini, *Khulasat al-tavarikh*, 2 vols. ed. Ihsan Ishraqi (Tehran, 1359Sh./1980, 1363Sh./1984) (hereafter *KT*).

³⁹Junabadi, *Rawdat al-safawiya*, British Museum Library Ms. No. 3388 (hereafter *RS*).

⁴⁰*HS*, 4: 267; *ZHS*, 125.

⁴¹*LT*, 394-95. Qazvini's phrase "and the people entered in the religion of ahl-i bayt," (*va mardum bi madhhab-i ahl-i bayt dar amadand*) is a reminder of Khwandamir's comment on the conversion of the fifteenth-century Rustamdarian, whom he says converted to Shi'ism based on the proposition that people adhere to the religion of their kings: "It is said that the Rustamdaris were until that time Sunnite, but Kayumarth in a meeting in Shiraz promised that if he were once again to become ruler in his hereditary realm, he would embrace the noble Shi'ite faith. Whereupon, when he took control of that realm, he made the banner of the *'alawi* Shi'ites dominant and the Rustamdari community also converted on the principle of 'People follow the religion of their kings'. " (*"Guyand ki rustamdarian ta an ghayat sunni madhhab*

Kh^wandamir, depicts the shah's influence as limited to Azarbayjan.⁴² It is only with Hasan Beg, author of the *AT*, writing 48 years after Kh^wandamir, that Isma'il's proclamations are presented in more universal and far-reaching terms. Hasan Beg writes that Isma'il ordered that "preachers throughout the land (*kebutaba-yi mamalik*) must read the Friday sermon in the name of the imams and say "I testify that 'Ali is God's favorite" and "Hasten to the best of deeds" (*bayya 'ala kebayr al-amal*), and that everyone should speak out (*zaban bigushayand*) to vilify and curse Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman in the streets and squares and decapitate those who refuse."⁴³ To the extent that Hasan Beg's account represents an embellishment on earlier works, it suggests that the mythical aspects of the Safavids and especially of Isma'il have taken root in Safavid historiography.

Qazi Ahmad takes Hasan Beg's account further in his *KT* when he recounts that Isma'il ordered the prayer leaders to read the sermon in the name of the twelve imams; to add "Ali is God's favorite" and "hasten to the best of deeds" to the call to prayer; and, following the sermon (*az aqab-i kebutba*), to "pronounce the cursing of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and all the accursed bani 'Umayya and 'Abbasiyya from the pulpit." He adds that Isma'il "put these practices into law in the God-protected realms, and ordered that the *tabarra'īyan* also must vilify and curse the three accursed ones in the markets; and anyone who refused should be killed."⁴⁴ In the corresponding passage of the *RS*, Junabadi writes that Isma'il "ordered that the *mihrabs* and places of worship of *ahl-i Sunnat* and the sect of innovation be changed according to the rites of Twelver Shi'ism;⁴⁵ that the *shabada* must include "Ali is God's favorite"; that after 'hasten to prayer' (*bayya 'ala'l salat*) and 'hasten to salvation' (*bayya 'ala'l falah*), the two phrases 'hasten to the best of deeds' and 'Muhammad and 'Ali are the best of mankind' (*bayya 'ala kebayr al 'amal wa Mubammad wa 'Ali kebayr al-bashar*) must be repeated; and that anyone who practices the rites of Sunnism must be decapitated, his blood to serve as restitution (*baz keb'ast*)." He concludes that "the Sunnites, like the

budand va Kayumarth dar majlis-i Shiraz nazr karda bud ki agar karrat-i digar dar vilayat-i mawruth hakim gardad bi mazhab-i 'Aliya-i imamiya dar ayad; bana bar an, dar in waqt ki an mamlakat ra musakkar sakht, shi'ar-i shi'a-yi 'alaviya ra zabir gardand va sa'ir-i rustamdarian bi mujib-i kalama-yi "al-nass 'ala din-i mulukihim" an mazhab ra qabul namudand.") (*HS*, II: 48).

⁴²See C.A. Storey, *Persian Literature: a Bio-Bibliographical Survey*, (London: 1970 reprint of 1927-39 edition), I: 131. Qazvini was also a Sayfi sayyid. It has been suggested by modern scholars that the Sayfi sayyids were all Sunnites who practiced dissimulation under the Safavids in order to maintain their positions of wealth and power. See M. Dickson, "Shah Tahmasb and the Uzbeks," 192.

⁴³*AT*, I: 69.

⁴⁴*KT*, I: 73.

⁴⁵Under the Safavids, new *mihrabs* were constructed to reflect the Shi'ite position on the correct coordinates for the direction a believer should face when praying. This issue was debated in earnest under Tahmasp on the basis of a fatwa issued by 'Abd al-'Al (d. 982-83/1584-5) [Abd al-'Al], the son of the renowned mujtahid, al-Karaki (d. 941/1534). As a symbol of both royal and spiritual authority, the orientation of the *mihrab* was a concern to the new Shi'ite elite and was debated at the same time as the question of holding the Friday Prayer and congregational meeting was being debated. See *Asnad-i tarikhi*, 428-29. For general details, see *EI² s.v.* "Mihrab."

Majus (Zoroastrians) and the Jews were discredited and the renown of the imams and the prayer for the realm of the world-conquering shah ascended on the pulpits and the officials (*naẓīman*) of the Haydari (Shi'ite) religion (*maz̄hab-i Haydari*) spoke out in the quarters (*afaq*) of the Ja'fari faith, cursing and vilifying the enemies of religion and those who oppose the Twelver Shi'ite imams with the public proclamation of the formula (*ba'īlan- i kalama*) of the *tabarra*.'” Munshi, who completed his *TAAA* in 1039/1629, is the anomaly among the eleventh/seventeenth-century writers in this particular respect. After citing Isma'il's decrees on the sermon, the prayer, and the *shabada* in his coronation passage, he mentions that new coins were struck bearing the Twelver Shi'ite *shabada* and the names of the elect of the family of the Prophet. He is silent both on the issue of cursing and the *tabarra*'.⁴⁶ Finally, Mir Yusuf Walih, writing *Khuld-i barin* in the second half of the eleventh/seventeenth century in the rhetorical style befitting his position as a royal letter writer for Shah 'Abbas, recounts Isma'il's sweeping victory in Azarbayjan (not all of Iran). He recounts that the call to prayer was changed to the Shi'ite formula, and corrects Rumlu's mistaken estimation of the time lapse (900 years) between the demise of the Shi'ite call to prayer in Tughril Bek's time and its resurrection in 907/1501 under Isma'il I to 528 years. In other respects, his coronation passage reflects features similar to those of writers after the second half of the tenth/sixteenth century, that is, he points out that Isma'il ordered that the prayer leaders should repudiate (*tabarra' namayand*) the enemies of *abl-i bayt*, especially the “accursed three” and that criers should curse Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman in loud voices in the mosques, places of worship (*ma'abid*), markets (*asmaq*), and thoroughfares (*guzargah-ha*).⁴⁷

The textual discrepancies in the foregoing group of coronation passages raise some questions as to institution and institutionalizing of the ritual curse in early Safavid society. Although it is clear from Vasifi that the ritual curse had been instituted as a term of surrender and was being propagated as a function of post-conquest sectarian intimidation, it is unlikely that the requirement of public cursing was instituted as a Safavid corporate practice under the guardianship of agents known as the *tabarra'īyan*. The exaggeration of the eleventh/seventeenth-century writers, whose more highly rhetorical accounts of Isma'il's conquest depict sweeping dominion, rapid and complete suppression of Sunnism with an accompanying conversion to the true faith, and Isma'il's bold call upon an already-existing royal corps to take the lead in societal cursing, are in contrast to the more modest writings of Khwandamir, Amir Mahmud, and Yahya Qazvini, whose works were completed at a time when the survival of the Safavid state and the eventual triumph of Twelver Shi'ism could not have been foreseen. These disparities suggest that the later writings reflected the historians' preference for the mythical aspect of Isma'il's persona as the world-conqueror who brought the true faith of Twelver Shi'ism to all of Iran. The Isma'il coronation passage of the previously mentioned late-eleventh/seventeenth century popular romance

⁴⁶*TAAA*, I: 128.

⁴⁷*KB*, 122.

history, *AAS*, is a case in point.

Bizan's hyperbolic account is the only coronation narrative in which a *tabarra'i* bearing the *tabar* (*tabarẓin*) is portrayed as a participant in the conquest ceremony in Tabriz. This account is anachronistic. Nevertheless, similar passages in the *RS* and *KB*, though shorter, are not so different in tone, hyperbole and anachronism, although these are considered "serious" histories. In these later works, chronicle and popular romance history narratives alike have recast the entry of Isma'il into Tabriz in the form of dynastic legend, ignoring chronology in the service of Isma'il's image as a conqueror who instituted the true religion at a stroke, armed with all the symbolic institutions of Tahmasp's Safavid Iran, as we shall see. It is more likely that the rudiments of the Safavid court and societal ritual practice originated in Isma'il's conquest rhetoric and developed from them. A royal decree ordering the abandoning of *taqiya* in favor of the public enunciation of the *tabarru* most likely came about through the sanction of the Shi'ite 'ulama. This would have been in 917/1511, not in 907/1501, with the pivotal exposition of the legal basis of the ritual curse in the *Nafabat al-labut fi l'an al-jibt wa al-taghut* (commonly referred to as *al-La'niya*), which was commissioned by Isma'il from 'Ali al-Karaki (d. 941/1534). This work of the most powerful scholar in the time of Isma'il has yet to be studied. Al-Karaki immigrated to Iran from 'Iraq in 917/1511, three years after Isma'il conquered Baghdad.⁴⁸ His sanction of the curse, in addition to buttressing the Safavid ideological position and supporting Isma'il's military expeditions, invited the opinions of the scholarly community on the abandoning of *taqiya*. Al-Karaki's support of the ritual curse affected not only the Shi'ite scholars of Iran, but also those living outside of Iran. One such individual, Nur Allah Shushtari (d. 1019/1610), a Shi'ite scholar who lived and worked in India under Akbar (d. 1014/1605) and Jahangir (d. 1037/1627), wrote that it was al-Karaki who made public the order calling for the cursing of the enemies of *ahl-i bayt* in *al-La'niya*. He notes that, as a repudiation of the notion that the Shi'ites curse *all* the Companions, more than 20 were excluded from aspersions.⁴⁹ This suggests that a number at least as large was included, forming a litany of accursed that may have first been shaped for Safavid purposes by al-Karaki in 917/1511. Al-Karaki's sanction of public cursing signaled the intersection and overlapping of legal (elitist) and popular Islam because it allowed for the incorporation of popular elements of society into the state program.

Karaki's list at some point became part of a distinctly Safavid liturgical formula supporting Safavid ideological aims and relying on the public for dissemination. If we consider how comfortable with the language of the *tabarra'* the tenth/sixteenth-century source, *KT*, and the eleventh/seventeenth-century sources, *RS*, and *KB* were,

⁴⁸On al-Karaki see Arjomand, Said Amir, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago, 1984), 132-37; 141-42; 165-66, and elsewhere; Caroline Beeson, "The Origin of Conflicts in the Safavid Religious Institution" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1982); Rula Abisaab, "The Ulama of Jabal 'Amil in Safavid Iran: 1501-1736: Marginality, Migration and Social Change," *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994): 108; 118-19.

⁴⁹Qadi Nur Allah Shushtari, *Majalis al-mu'minin* (Tehran, 1365Sh./1986-87), I: 171 (hereafter *MM*).

it becomes apparent that the historians who wrote that these practices were in place during the inception of Isma'īl's reign were actually reflecting the practice as it was known in Tahmasp's time. As for the matter of *taqiya*, Qadi Nurallah Shushtari, and no doubt many others living outside the safety of Iran's borders, debated the safety of abandoning the practice. Shushtari's correspondence with Mir Yusuf Astarabadi is instructive as it indicates difference on the matter. After writing to Mir Yusuf that there was no need for *taqiya* under a just ruler (such as Akbar) and that, in any case, *taqiya* was not for the likes of him (Shushtari), who believed that dying for the true religion was a requisite of glorifying the faith,⁵⁰ Mir Yusuf reprimanded him, noting that Ahmad Thattawi (d.1587) was superior to Shushtari, and was killed when he abandoned *taqiya* with no resulting profit to himself or the religion. Mir Yusuf further pointed out that if Shushtari, was so against *taqiya*, then (as a Shi'ite) he should cease practicing Hanafi law (in a Sunnite state).⁵¹

On the basis of the above sources, it is possible to reach a tentative conclusion that the *tabarra'* in the form of the public ritual curse was instituted by Isma'īl I as a feature of military conquest, intimidation and humiliation, with doctrinal support gauged specifically to the Safavid situation appearing in 917/1511, through the work of al-Karaki. The practice could not have taken shape earlier as a feature of Safavid protocol at court, or Shi'ite gatherings, such as the Friday Prayer and congregational meeting, until it was instituted through religious sanction.⁵²

Tabmasp and the Incorporation of the Tabarra'īyan

Sources for the *tabarra'* and the *tabarra'īyan* from 837/1533 to 984/1576 are more plentiful, although still not prolific. In recent years details about the *tabarra'īyan* emerged from *al-Nawaqid li bunyan al-rawafid*, the anti-Shi'ite polemic of Mirza Makhdum Sharifi (d. 995/1586), who describes his encounters with the *tabarra'īyan* in Shah Tahmasp's majlises and during his own sermons in Qazvin;⁵³ Sharifi, a high-ranking official under Isma'īl II, was eventually imprisoned, released, and then exiled

⁵⁰A.A.A. Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History*, I: 358-63.

⁵¹The murder of Ahmad Thattawi in India is told by Shushtari in *MM*, I: 590-2, in Bada'uni, *Muntakhabu'l-tawarikh* 3 vols. (Calcutta, 1884-98); tr. vol. I, G. S. A. Ranking, 1895-99; vol. II, W.H. Lowe, 1884-98; vol. III, T.W. Haig, 1899-1925. See II: 317-18. A discussion of all these sources is presented by Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History*, I: 227-35. Shushtari himself attained martyrdom in 1019/1610 in India, ostensibly for his anti-Sunnite polemic *Ihqaq al-haqq*. In his attempt to protect himself from Jahangir's severe sentencing, he practiced *taqiya*, but was rejected and sentenced to be flogged, from which wounds he subsequently died. For this account, see Rizvi, I: 383; See also *EI²* s.v. "Jahangir."

⁵²Mutual cursing played a role in Ottoman/Safavid and Uzbek/Safavid relations, in which Ottoman cursing of the Safavids may have been a reaction to the Safavid practice. For example, in 1517, after they conquered the Mamluk empire, the Ottomans singled out Shah Isma'īl for a propaganda offensive by having him cursed in the Friday Prayer. See Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict (906- 962/1500 - 1555)* (Berlin, 1983), 128, citing Ibn Tulun, *Mufakabat al-khillan*, ed. Muhammad Mustafa (Cairo, 1962-4), 2:74-5.

⁵³Stanfield Johnson, "Sunnī Survival," 132-33.

from Iran. He later died in Mecca, where he completed his polemic. A study of other anti-Safavid polemics may reveal yet more details, but Sharifi's *AN* is especially useful because it is the account of a Sunnite whose rise to power occurred at a time when all office holders in the Safavid government were believed to be at least nominally Shi'ite.⁵⁴ The *'Alam ara-yi Abbasi* of Iskandar Beg Munshi supports Sharifi's account with details of the sectarian atmosphere at the court of Isma'īl II (r. 984/1576-77), who, together with Sharifi, was responsible for banning the ritual curse and attempting to disband the *tabarra'īyan*.⁵⁵ Sharifi's and Munshi's accounts of *tabarra'īyan* and their role in overseeing the ritual curse complement each other. Chronologically, one picks up where the other leaves off. Sharifi ends his account of the *tabarra'īyan* at the point when their activities are banned under Isma'īl II, thanks to Sharifi's own lobbying against them. Munshi begins his account with this incident. In other respects also the accounts complement each other. Munshi emphasizes both the Qizilbash reaction to Sharifi's influence on the shah and the initial caution employed by the Shi'ite ulama in reproaching the shah; Sharifi accepts the blame for his role in the incidents at court and in Qazvin and adds to his own role in their development. A third account, that of Jalal-i Munajjim, the writer of *Tarikh-i 'Abbasi*, narrates the Sharifi/*tabarra'īyan* encounter after the death of Isma'īl II. In this narrative, Sharifi avoided execution after the death of Isma'īl II, but not the *tabarra'īyan*'s taunting and torture. When in his trial Sharifi was declared innocent of charges, the *tabarra'īyan* prevented his release by taking him into their own custody and lowering him into a pit. Sharifi avoided death at the hands of the *tabarra'īyan* only because of the assistance of the Shi'ite 'ulama loyal to his mother. Sharifi's plight has been dealt with elsewhere, but it can be added that his and his family's relationship to the Shi'ite 'ulama and Safavid provincial dignitaries reinforces the notion that in 984/1576, Sunnites, or former Sunnites, could still affect political outcomes. Jalal-i Munajjim's account recalls the Safavid Sunnite/Shi'ite question, which is suggested in many of the sources, and adds to the material on the function of the *tabarra'īyan* during the post-Tahmasp period. Together, these three accounts provide the most detail about the practice of the *tabarra'īyan* at the end of the

⁵⁴For studies on Sharifi and his role in the Safavid government, see Elke Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden im 16. Jahrhundert nach arabischen Handschriften* (Freiburg, 1970), 56-60; Shohreh Golsorkhi, "Isma'īl II and Mirza Makhdum Sharifi: An Interlude in Safavid History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994): 477-88; Stanfield, "A Sixteenth-Century Sunni Sadr;" Stanfield, "Sunnite Survival." For the reign of Isma'īl II's reign, see Walter Hinz, "Schah Esma'īl II. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Safawiden," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für orientalische Sprachen* 36 (1933): 19-99; Roger Savory, "Isma'īl II, *EP*, 4:188; Hans Robert Roemer, "The Safavid Period," in *CHI* 6: 189-350, espec. 250-53; Hans Robert Roemer, *Persien auf dem Weg in die Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 1989), 295-98; For studies dealing with Isma'īl II's religious policies, see Michel Mazzaoui, "The Religious Policies of Shah Isma'īl II," in *Intellectual Studies on Islam*, eds. Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (Salt Lake City, 1990), 49-56; Devin J. Stewart, "The Lost Biography of Baha' al-Din al-'Amili and the Reign of Isma'īl II in Safavid Historiography," *Iranian Studies* 31 (1998): 177-206.

⁵⁵Iskandar Beg Munshi, *Tarikh-i 'alam ara-yi 'abbasi*. ed. Iraj Afshar, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1971) (hereafter *TAA*). Also Roger Savory, tr. *The History of Shah 'Abbas the Great* (Boulder, Colorado, 1979) (hereafter *Shah Abbas*).

tenth/sixteenth century. Other sources for the years of Tahmasp, though not as extensive, offer some further insight into the function of the *tabarra'īyan*.

There remains a gap in our understanding of how the *tabarra'īyan* became organized as a recognizable propagandist unit in Safavid history. But, if we trust the sources for the first decade of Tahmasp's reign, by this time the *tabarra'īyan* figured strongly in court and public life.

In addition to the earlier cited account from Tahmasp's correspondence with Sulayman, there are a number of other sources to note. Qadi Ahmad, for example, writes of a military procession that took place in 1529/936. It included the public musicians (*naggara kb'anba*) and 400 "pious *tabarra'īyan*" led by Kabaki Sabzavari.⁵⁶ In this instance, the *tabarra'īyan* are depicted as eulogizers.⁵⁷ It is possible that Sabzavari served as an officer in charge of the procession of *tabarra'īyan*. The *tabarra'īyan* also attended the Qizilbash in Harat during this period as a function of military protocol.⁵⁸ In 946-7/1539, the Venetian Membré spent nearly a year living among the Qizilbash and other high-ranking members of court society and observed the *tabarra'īyan* in their various functions in and outside of Tabriz.⁵⁹ He wrote that Tahmasp, then 26 years old, was surrounded by high-ranking Qizilbash dignitaries, *qurchis*, and *tabarra'īyan* whenever he appeared in public or conducted assemblies. *Tabarra'īyan* preceded the shah when he made an entrance, exit, or moved about in any way, crying out to a drumbeat "*sad hazar la'nat bar 'Umar, 'Uthman wa Abu Bakr*" ("A hundred thousand curses on 'Umar, 'Uthman and Abu Bakr").⁶⁰ Qizilbash notables each had their own *tabarra'i* who preceded them crying out curses on the Ottomans.⁶¹ According to Malik Shah Husayn Sistani, author of the *Ihya' al-muluk*, this practice was mandated. He writes that when the governor of Sistan, Mahmud Khan, visited India, the local Sunnite population took offence at the *tabarra'* and the *tabarra'i* who preceded Mahmud Khan, as required by law during Tahmasp's time. Mahmud Khan was forced to remove the *tabarra'i* from the front of his retinue to the rear and carry on his own recitation.⁶² The same *tabarra'* rituals were performed whenever the shah received notables from other parts of the country, and in the city's public places, the *tabarra'īyan* could be seen taking part in ceremonies and singing songs cursing the Ottomans, for all of which they were paid by the people.⁶³ In his last observation of this group,

⁵⁶KT, 203. See also K.M. Röhrborn, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1966), 46-47, citing KT, 198-204. These passages have been analyzed and amended by Masashi Haneda, "The Evolution of the Safavid Royal Guard," *Iranian Studies* 22 (1989): 104-109.

⁵⁷Hanedi, "Evolution," 203.

⁵⁸Qadi Ahmad mentions them sub anno 938/1531 in Harat together with "Shi'ian and ghazian" (Qizilbash), I: 220.

⁵⁹Michele Membré, *Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia (1539-1542)*, tr. with Introduction and Notes, A.H. Morton (London, 1993) (hereafter *Mission*).

⁶⁰*Mission*, 20, 24.

⁶¹*Mission*, 41.

⁶²Malik Shah Husayn, *Tarikh-i Ihya' al-muluk*, ed., Shukrallah Sutidah (Tehran, 1966), 158.

⁶³*Mission*, 52.

Membré says that he witnessed a *tabarra'i* grab an Ottoman merchant by the beard and pull while demanding that he curse the Ottomans. He pulled so hard that the Turk “cursed them a hundred times.” “So,” concludes Membré, “the Ottomans in Tabriz live with the Sophians as cats live with dogs.”⁶⁴ The extent to which the ritual curse had its place in Safavid anti-Ottoman propaganda is prominent in Membré’s report, although it appears that there were continuous commercial relations between the Ottomans and Safavids in Tabriz despite the political hostilities. To be sure, Tahmasp continued to generate anti-Ottoman polemic in his diplomatic correspondence. In his letter to Sultan Sulayman mentioned earlier, which was written in 940/1553-4, just before the peace treaty of Amasya was signed in 963/1555, Tahmasp warns the Ottomans that he will instigate sectarian unrest among them: “Witness, that from now on, we put into effect that the *tabarra'yan*, who are the fighters of ‘Ali with a free hand (*‘ala’l-tilaq*), will curse you silently and aloud in the wards and markets of the realms of Azarbayjan, Khurasan, and ‘Iraq, such that the Armenians (Christians) and Jews will inscribe your name and that of the enemy (Ottomans) on the sole of an animal’s foot.”⁶⁵ Interestingly, the *tabarra'yan* appear to have performed their activities unarmed; that is they were without swords, daggers, and pikes. They were sometimes accompanied by Qizilbash or armed *qurchis*, rather than traveling alone.⁶⁶

The practice of cursing in mosques and other public gathering places apparently was widely implemented throughout the provinces by 940/1533-34. The *tabarra'yan* were by this time fully integrated into court ritual, closely affiliated to the ruling elite, serving as societal monitors. If they had at one time been miscreants and seditionists, they were now dignified by their service to the court. Tahmasp’s attention to them suggests a willingness to recognize the importance of popular religious elements of society as important to the dispensing Shi‘ite propaganda throughout the realm. Given that attitudes to Sufism were changing during this period, affected by conservative views, both anti-extremist (*ghulat*) and anti-Sufi in the broad sense, Tahmasp’s willingness to recognize members of popular religious groups suggests that apprehending Sufi practice did not exclude co-option.

Sharifi’s report of *tabarra'i* activities in Qazvin is the source that rounds off the description of this group at court and in the streets. Sharifi arrived at the Safavid court from Shiraz in 976/1579, largely due to the influence of his father who served as *wazir* under Tahmasp.⁶⁷ He was active in Safavid politics in one way or another from that time until the fall of Isma‘il II in 1577/985. Munshi noted that although Sharifi was Sunnite, he was a good exegete and popular preacher to whom many flocked.⁶⁸ Sharifi

⁶⁴*Mission*, 52.

⁶⁵*Asnad*, 215. One of the Ottoman conditions for peace in the treaty of Amasya was the discontinuation of the ritual curse. See Hamid Algar, “Caliphs and the Caliphate,” in *EI*.

⁶⁶For details on *qurchis*, see Haneda, “Evolution,” 57-86.

⁶⁷Mirza Makhdum Sharifi, *Al-Nawaqid li bunyan al-rawafid* (British Museum, Or. 7991), 99a, hereafter NR.

⁶⁸*TAAA*, I:148.

maintains that due to the influence of one of the powerful Shi'ite scholars with whom he had an uneasy friendship, he was appointed as *qadi al-qudat* under Tahmasp, but there is no evidence of this in the Persian sources. His account reveals his strained relationship with Tahmasp, which is confirmed by Munshi.⁶⁹ Under Isma'il II, he was appointed to the office of *sadr*, the highest juridical position in the Safavid government.

According to Sharifi, the curse was recited in all of the public venues of Qazvin, including the mosques, the shah's *majlises*, the city streets and markets.⁷⁰ The *tabarra'iyān* were protected and supported by the shah and, in addition to serving as public criers, they were monitors and spies, with sufficient influence to intimidate the people of the city. Their activities included extortion, bribery, and harassment to the extent that Sunnites among the common people often had to pay protection fees to Shi'ites willing to vouch for their Shi'ism.⁷¹ The cursing of the Companions took different forms, ranging from impromptu to highly ritualized recitations. One occasion for ritualized cursing was the Shi'ite substitution of the Friday Prayer and congregational meeting in the formerly Sunnite mosques with an observance led by a Shi'ite preacher who vilified the Ten Companions to whom the Prophet had promised Heaven, the *'ashara al-mubashshara b'l-janna* (excluding 'Ali)⁷²; the Prophet's wives 'Aisha and Hafsa; and the four "Sunnite imams," Malik, Abu Hanifa, al-Shafi'i, and ibn-Hanbal.⁷³ The sermon was replaced by the *tabarru'*. In addition to the list of names read in the mosques, Tahmasp created his own list in which the curse was followed by a litany of ninety-nine personally selected individuals starting with Harun al-Rashid and ending with 'Abd al-Rahman Jami.⁷⁴ The established response of the people *bish bad u kam mabad* (may it be more, not less) ended the litany, and the ceremony itself was concluded when Tahmasp filled the mouths of the *tabarra'iyān* with silver.⁷⁵ The public *tabarra'*, in addition to attacking generations of Sunnite heroes, served as a method for publicly denouncing enemies of the regime, who included Sharifi, whose

⁶⁹TAAA, 1:148.

⁷⁰NR, ff.105b-107b. Also f. 152a, where Sharifi asserts that "from the dawn of Islam to the present, Shi'ites were weak and debased, but did not put into effect, until the present, the cursing of the Companions in the assemblies, gatherings and mosques."

⁷¹NR, f. 107a.

⁷²NR, f. 107b. According to Sunnites, this refers to "the Ten who are blessed with paradise." With some variation, they include Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali, Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas, Talha, Zubayr, 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Awf, Sa'd b. Zayd and Abu 'Ubayd b. al-Jarrah.

⁷³On the issue of the Friday Prayer as that problem was presented by Sharifi, see Stanfield Johnson, "Sunni Survival," 129, n. 32. According to Naraqī, the prayer was not reinstated until the Qajar period, when debates of the religious scholars resulted in the legalizing of the Prayer during the occultation, *Tarikh-i Kashan va Natanz*, (Tehran, 1348Sh. /1969), 428-9, including n. 1.

⁷⁴NR, f. 105b. Since Qadi-yi Jahan, who had encouraged the shah to reconsider his opinion of Jami, died in 1553, it appears that Tahmasp once again repudiated the poet. See above p. 13.

⁷⁵NR, ff. 106a-107b. This name coined for this litany was *jarr al-qitar*, which Sharifi defines as the "cursing of all the pious of the religion," continuously and successively. See Stanfield Johnson, "Sunni Survival," 130-31, for details on this ritual.

own name was added to the list of the accursed after his exile from Iran following the death of Isma'īl II. Sharifi's account for the second half of the sixteenth century echoes the observation by Membré that Tahmasp was always surrounded by *tabarra'īyan*. According to Sharifi, after Tahmasp died, it was the *tabarra'īyan* who guarded the shah's body before interment.⁷⁶

The Banning of the Tabarra' under Isma'īl II

During the reign of the second Isma'īl (1576-1577), the *tabarra'īyan* were on the losing end of royal patronage. Isma'īl II, during his brief reign and in collaboration with Sharifi, whom he had appointed *sadr*, reversed the policies and practices of his father and grandfather, and courted Sunnism. He came to power as the victor in a court struggle for succession after having spent almost 20 years under house arrest by order of Tahmasp. Soon after his coronation, he purged his real and perceived enemies. This included nine of the royal princes, through whose murder he practically destroyed the Safavid hereditary line, and, by extension, the custodial system of the Safavid heirs that was the exclusive domain of the Qizilbash provincial governors. At the same time he pursued policy reversals such as banning the ritual curse and dismantling the *tabarra'īyan*; censoring the Shi'ite scholars at court; planning to strike new coins which deleted references to 'Ali and the twelve imams; and the payment of awards of about 200 toman to anyone who could prove that he had never cursed the first three caliphs, or the wives of the Prophet, especially 'Aisha.

Both Munshi and Sharifi identify Sharifi as the instigator of the banning of the curse, which they said was brought about by Sharifi's complaint to the shah that the *tabarra'īyan* were disrupting his sermons.⁷⁷ According to this report, when a *tabarra'ī* attended Sharifi's next sermon and recited a verse cursing the enemies of 'Ali, Sharifi told Isma'īl that the *tabarra'ī* was alluding to the shah. Isma'īl, in a reversal of *qurchi/tabarra'īyan* relations, sent a group of *qurchis* to beat the *tabarra'ī*. Khwansari recounts that Sayyid Husayn al-Karaki, the grandson of the renowned 'Ali al-Karaki and the Mujtahid of the Age at this time, refused to sanction Isma'īl's decree against cursing;⁷⁸ Isfahani adds that the ban was put into effect by the shah's sending out thugs (*jalavazā*) to Sayyid Husayn's house to tell the latter to forbid the *tabarra'īyan* to go out riding. Sayyid Husayn refused, saying, "If you order my death, the people will say that the second Yazid has ordered the killing of the second Husayn."⁷⁹ Isma'īl may have planned to have the sermon read according to the Sunnite rite and, in this

⁷⁶NR, f. 124a.

⁷⁷TAAA, 1: 214; *Shah 'Abbas*, I:319.

⁷⁸Muhammad Baqir al-Khwansari, *Rawdat al-jannat* (Tehran, 1971), 2:73, hereafter RJ.

⁷⁹Mirza 'Abd Allah al-Isfahani *Riyad al-'ulama wa-biyad al-fudala'* (Qum, 1980), 2: 73, hereafter RU; RJ, 2: 322. See Devin Stewart, "The Lost Biography" for an in-depth study of the source for this account and for Stewart's excellent contribution to the analysis of sectarian events taking place in Isma'īl II's reign.

connection, intended to poison both Sayyid Husayn and ‘Abd al-‘Al.⁸⁰ At this point ‘Abd al-‘Al fled to Hamadan, leaving the more determined Sayyid Husayn to the politics of Qazvin.⁸¹ After a number of subsequent confrontations, Isma‘il imprisoned Sayyid Husayn, impounded his library and rented out his apartment. Soon after these incidents, Isma‘il died mysteriously, though it was commonly held his death was the outcome of a court conspiracy, and Sayyid Husayn was released and his books returned.⁸²

Following Isma‘il II’s death, Sharifi’s tense relations with the Shi‘ite court scholars and the Qizilbash amirs came to a head, resulting in his arrest and imprisonment. When Sharifi was finally released from prison he was accosted by the *tabarra’iyan*. Jalal-i Munajjim claims that Sharifi, having totally “exaggerated the propagation of the Shafi‘ite school of thought,” was brought to trial. He was tried but acquitted due to the intervention of the Shi‘ite scholar, Afdal Tarka.⁸³ After being found innocent, Sharifi was surrounded by the *tabarra’iyan* who demanded he be executed. Afdal Tarka intervened and they were prevented from beating or killing him.⁸⁴ The *tabarra’iyan*, not content with the decision to spare Sharifi, accosted him as he was being escorted out of Iran. They were prevented from executing him this time by the *qurchis*, probably on higher orders. Jalal-i Munajjim says that the *tabarra’iyan* relented and agreed to grant Sharifi reprieve only after he cursed the first three caliphs in the presence of all the Shi‘ite scholars in Maydan-i Asb in Qazvin. Sharifi’s speech was, perhaps, equivocal; for the *tabarra’iyan* who had congregated in the square protested that he had feigned and called for his death. Forming a mob, they ignored the religious authorities, took him into custody, and lowered him into a pit. After a few days, through the intervention of another dignitary, this time the governor of Shiraz, Vali Sultan,⁸⁵ Sharifi was raised from the pit and finally sent off on the road to Baghdad.⁸⁶ The account of Sharifi’s trial is the only instance in the sources of the *tabarra’iyan* ganging up on an individual with the intention of murder. It is also the only account that imputes to the *tabarra’iyan* enough influence to challenge higher authority.

With the death of Isma‘il II and exile of Sharifi, substantive reports of the *tabarra’* and *tabarra’iyan* come to an end. According to Dihkhuda, the *tabarra’iyan* disappeared during the reign of Tahmasp.⁸⁷ To be sure, they met with a crisis after the death of Tahmasp when Isma‘il II withdrew patronage. Sayyid Husayn’s attempt to prevent

⁸⁰RU, 2: 73; RJ, 2: 322-23.

⁸¹RU, 2: 73.

⁸²RU, 2: 73; RJ, 2: 323.

⁸³The implication possibly being that, while Sunnite practice had been “banned,” the Sunnite legal schools were considered legitimate.

⁸⁴*Tarikh-i ‘Abbasi*, British Library Add. 27, f. 20b. It was also mentioned that Sharifi was saved due to the regard for his mother, who was the daughter of Mirza Sharaf, the highly-regarded court poet. This particular point is not made in the manuscripts on which the published edition is based.

⁸⁵NR, f. 160b.

⁸⁶*Tarikh-i ‘Abbasi*, (f. 21b).

⁸⁷*Lughatnamah*, s.v., *Tabarra’*.

their disbanding indicates some support from the `ulama, although it is not unreasonable to suppose that they were not deemed important enough to maintain at court during the reign of Isma'il's successor, Muhammad Khudabandah (r. 985/1577-996/1587). The triumph over Isma'il II's effort to reinstate the Sunnite ulama at court was no doubt a watershed in Safavid politics, bringing to a close an era in which the Sunnite `ulama and population were seen as a threat to the future of the Shi'ite dispensation.

The ritual curse remained in use beyond the Safavid period and continued to be publicly recited, but without an official group of *tabarra'īyan*, who were required to return to their freelance status. Whether the `ulama under later shahs continued to support them is unknown; it seems likely that most of their activities were subsumed under other Shi'ite festivals, which were growing in popularity. In 1149/1736, Nadir Shah Afshar ordered that the curse be discontinued, but without much success.⁸⁸ Following the fall of the Pahlavi government, Ayatullah Khomeini referred to Abu Bakr and `Umar as men who "had adhered to the example of the Prophet in their outer lives" and the curse is now avoided in official discourse.⁸⁹

Conclusions

This review of the accounts of the *tabarra'* and the *tabarra'īyan* of the early Safavid period allows for a number of conclusions. The first is that Isma'il I required the ritual curse as a term of surrender to subdue the population. The "guardians" of the curse in Isma'il's day were the Qizilbash and, as time wore on, local eulogizers drawn from popular elements who were rewarded for their sectarian antagonisms of the Sunnite populations. And the formal role of the *tabarra'īyan* in the early part of Isma'il I's reign was exaggerated in the accounts of the late-sixteenth and seventeenth-century historians, whose narratives for the years of the first Isma'il, though focused on the conquest terms, were more linguistically suited to developments under Tahmasp. Second, it was Tahmasp who co-opted popular elements of society by creating, maintaining, and positioning with the *qurchis* in the cities, corps of *tabarra'īyan*. It remains an important issue to know how the *tabarra'īyan*, as well as other popular classes, functioned socially and economically. It appears that the *tabarra'īyan* were not directly an armed paramilitary corps. They are not portrayed as bearing arms. References to the *tabar*, a symbol of *futunmat*, suggest *tabarra'īyan* affiliations with popular brotherhoods rather than a serious role as armed guards. They did spy, threaten, and extort but, until we reach the account of Sharifi and his release from prison, we do not get accounts of violence; nor do we get any evidence of the *tabarra'īyan*, as long as they were at Tahmasp's court, being engaged in the kind of sectarian fighting that is characterized in the Haydari-Ni'mati contests under `Abbas

⁸⁸Algar, in "Caliphs and the Caliphate," *EI* does not discuss the circumstances of and venues for the practice of the ritual curse during this period.

⁸⁹Algar, "Caliphs and the Caliphate," in *EI*.

I.⁹⁰ According to Munshi, when Isma‘il banned the curse he claimed it was because he did not approve of their earning a living through cursing.⁹¹ This can only mean that the *tabarra’iyan* were gathering wages much in the tradition of street poets, who received contributions for their recitations.

It appears that under Isma‘il II the *tabarra’iyan*, having lost royal patronage, for a short time depended on the support of the Shi‘ite scholars, who continued to endorse their activities, but to what extent and for how long is not certain. In the case of Sharifi, the *tabarra’iyan* assumed themselves to be in a position to challenge religious authority (or, perhaps the Shi‘ite scholars, because they were in favor of Sharifi’s death, did not offer much resistance to the *tabarra’iyan*), but not the authority of the amirs.

That the term *tabarra’i* appears in *HS* for the pre-Safavid period suggests the presence in society of a sectarian character called “*tabarra’i*,” but it remains that the term is not common in the histories. Important interrelationships of popular groups are suggested by the use of terms such as “*tabarra’iyan*,” “*darvishan*,” and “*qalandaran*” appearing in context together. Safavid and post-Safavid sources yield names such as Baba‘Ishqi-yi Tabarra’i⁹² and Tabarra’i Darvish Qanbar.⁹³ The repeated inclusion of *tabarra’iyan* in the same context as *qalandaran* and *darvishan* suggests distinct but related functions and shared identities. These references reinforce the view that the *tabarra’i* had his roots in popular religion, namely, Sufism, as the nicknames “baba” and “darvish” indicate. Sources from Tahmasp’s period reinforce the *tabarra’iyan* association with the *qalandaran*.⁹⁴ Rida Quli Khan Hidayat, the author of the late nineteenth century *Rawdat al-safa-yi nasiri*, taking his account almost directly from the seventeenth-century *Tarikh-i ‘alam ara-yi ‘abbasi*, refers to *darvishan-i tabarra’i* indicating that he took for granted the overlap between the two groups.⁹⁵ Finally, in their paramilitary role as overseers of the curse in Safavid society, the *tabarra’iyan* recall the *futuwva/‘ayyari* tradition, particularly as some of their activities included monitoring mosques, wards and other public venues, and, less laudably, engaging in bribery and harassment.

The only certainty, then, regarding the early affiliation of the *tabarra’iyan* with the Safavids is that they were devoted to ‘Ali. And, while they may have originated in the popular classes, they did not originate in or from a homogeneous or unified culture.

⁹⁰See Hosein Mirjafari, “The Haydari-Ni‘mati Conflicts,” *Iranian Studies* 12 (1979), 135-62; John R. Perry, “Toward a Theory of Iranian Urban Moieties: The Haydariyyah and Ni‘matiyyah Revisited,” *Iranian Studies* 32 (1999), 51-70.

⁹¹TAAA, I: 214; *Shah Abbas*, I: 319.

⁹²AT, I: 134

⁹³TAAA, I: 214; *Shah Abbas*, I: 319.

⁹⁴*Asnad*, 214.

⁹⁵Rida Quli Khan Hidayat, *Rawdat al-safa-yi nasiri*, 10 vols. (vols. 8-10 written as a supplement to work of the same name by Mirkhwand) (Tehran, 1959-60). Reference is to 8:169.

This is suggested, too, by al-Razi's earlier account, which indicates that many of the *manaqib-kel'anan* were itinerants, others tradesmen in the markets.⁹⁶

In the Safavid case, when official propagating efforts aimed at homogenizing society religiously, threads of popular and learned thought and practice would have had to be synthesized into forms that would reflect and reinforce the values of the Twelver Shi'ite dispensation or, in any case, not present a serious threat to it. Babayan has investigated the trend of diminishing tolerance for the darvish cult on the part of the government and the scholarly religious classes in favor of purist Twelver Shi'ism and the concurrent decline of the Qizilbash movement, which was linked historically to Sufism.⁹⁷ Among the early signs of such decline was the suppression of the public recitation of the *Abu Muslim-namah*, the popular epic recounting the story of Abu Muslim's role in the establishment of the `Abbasids, because of its *ghulat* theology, which was perceived as dangerous to a consolidation of power by the more conservative members of the `ulama. Official reaction to popular forms of literary expression suggests that the same agencies had reservations that would have extended to other forms of popular recitation that in any way threatened government prerogatives. Conversely, there would have been the tendency to expand other expressions more compatible with the normative tenets of Twelver Shi'ism. A Safavid social policy of this nature is especially notable during Tahmasp's reign in which the shah and his powerful daughter Pari Khan Khanum patronized a large translation project that would popularize Shi'ite religious writings.⁹⁸ During this period also, the boundary between pre-Islamic myth and Twelver history and myth collapsed and conversion tales such as those in which the pre-Islamic Iranian hero Rostam meets

⁹⁶Recent research has provided a more nuanced understanding of the social values and economy of these groups. See Babayan's study, which analyzes the worldview and values of the *futuwvat* (communities of "devout lover of 'Ali"): Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs* (Cambridge, 2002), especially chapters 6 and 7. Babayan has eloquently explored the storytelling vocation and its bond with the crafts business of the Islamic Middle Ages through her analysis of the writings of Va'iz Kashifi (d. 1504). A significant point is that the guilds lose status in the seventeenth century, so that popular occupations, that of the storyteller among them, are degraded. Mehdi Keyvani, *Artisans and the Guild Life in the later Safavid Period. Contributions to the social-economic history of Persia* (Berlin, 1982), has examined the relationship of the guilds in relation to various sectors of society, including the elite. He deals with the *shabr-ashub* poets ("city-disturbing poets"), artisans, and tradesmen who wrote conventional poetry about the guilds and discusses guild connections both to the Sufi orders through the tradition of transmitted relationships, and to the Safavid court through services provided to court dignitaries, including the officers who collected and recorded merchant and guild taxes. His study encourages thoughts about the interrelationship of different segments of society and the issue of literacy. See also Ahmat T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period, 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City, 1994).

⁹⁷Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi'ism," *Iranian Studies* 27 no. 1-4 (1994): 135-161 (hereafter "Safavid Synthesis"), and more recently, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, especially chapter 5, and 6: 147-50.

⁹⁸See Said Amir Arjomand's introduction to the special issue "Religion and Statecraft in Pre-Modern Iran," *Iranian Studies*, 27, no. 1-4 (1994): 7, citing M.T. Danishpazhuh, "Yak pardah az zindigani-yi Shah Tahmasp-i Safavi," *Majallah-yi danishkadeh-yi adabiyat va `ulum-i insani-yi Mashhad* 7, no. 4 (1350Sh./1972).

and is converted by ‘Ali become common.⁹⁹ Given the forgoing, it makes sense that both Isma‘il I and Tahmasp promoted the ritual curse, a simplistic, formulaic recall of the basic tenet of Twelver Shi‘ism, namely, Ali’s right to succession, minus any allusion to *ghulat*. Clearly, both were aware of the need to modify the domain of public expression. As Babayan has shown, over time there was a move away from Qizilbash and Sufi culture which was fully achieved under Abbas I.¹⁰⁰ This distancing from Sufi culture is perhaps a clue to the absence of substantive references to the *tabarra’iyan* in the accounts of Khudabanda and ‘Abbas I.¹⁰¹ It is also easy to see why, in this changing spectrum of social norms, Shah Tahmasp was willing to acknowledge and utilize popular elements in the service of practices that strengthened moderate Twelver values. Generally speaking, such disparate elements close to the court would have had little opportunity to develop a significant resistance to Safavid sovereignty.¹⁰² The steps the new dynasty took in this early period appear to have incorporated a variety of elements necessary for modifying or reshaping public expression and diminishing perceived or real challenges to the regime.

This study invites an investigation on the extent to which such sectarian practices affected how Iran was perceived during this and subsequent periods. There are indications that contemporary writers may have begun to associate ethnicity with religion as early as the sixteenth century.¹⁰³ Possibly, around the same time, the practice of the *tabarra’* was taking root in Shi‘ite areas of India.¹⁰⁴ Yet, very little is known about how factors of culture, ethnicity, and religious orientation intersected. Modern scholars have reiterated that religious justification was often the pretext for

⁹⁹See S. Souroudi, “Islamization of the Iranian National Hero Rostam as Reflected in Persian Folktales,” *JSAI* 2 (1980): 365-83. See also, Zabih Safa, *Hamasa sara’i dar Iran* (Tehran, 1954), especially 373-75.

¹⁰⁰Babayan, “Safavid Synthesis.” For her elaboration and contextualization of the processes of this synthesis, see *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, chap. 10.

¹⁰¹An observation of Kathryn Babayan following personal correspondence.

¹⁰²The incident of the “false Isma‘il” following the death of Isma‘il II, however, indicates the ability of millenarian elements to organize in large numbers. See R. Savory, “A Curious Episode of Safavid History,” in *Iran and Islam: in Memory of the Late Vladimir Minorsky*, ed. C. E. Bosworth (Edinburgh, 1971), 463-73. This research supports Cohn’s thesis that “Revolutionary millenarianism drew its strength from a population living on the margin of society....” Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Oxford, 1970, revised from 1957 edition), 282. An in-depth study of these elements from a political economy perspective may reveal the ways in which they fitted into society economically, politically, and socially, becoming attached to sources of economic subsistence. (*Qalandaran*, for example, are mentioned in connection with Isma‘il II before his release from prison in 984/1576, which suggests their ability to attach themselves under various circumstances to the upper classes. Both Babayan (*Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*) and Keyvani (*Artisans and the Guild Life*) deal with this issue in different ways. See also Jurgen Paul, “The Histories of Herat,” *Iranian Studies* 33 (2000). Paul, in discussing the local histories of Herati nobles, has depicted the paramilitary formations—essentially popular elements, probably frequently unemployed and unskilled, who allied themselves with the notable families and their interests, suggesting economic dependence on the part of the paramilitary groups.

¹⁰³Bada‘uni, *MT*, 2: 137.

¹⁰⁴See *MT*; Hollister *The Shi‘a of India*; Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History*.

political action in this period.¹⁰⁵ In many ways the *tabarra'* in the early Safavid period fits into an arsenal of political propaganda contrived to challenge external claims to the military gains established by Isma'íl and his successor Tahmasp. Another topic of study is that of the (reciprocal) relationship between popular and elite levels of culture with respect to the *tabarra'*, the matter of cursing, and the degree of reciprocity between these different levels. This relationship might be uncovered through an analysis of the writings of the Shi'ite `ulama, in particular the treatise, *al-La'niya* of al-Karaki.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵Ahamd Kasravi *On Islam and Shi'ism*, tr. M. R. Ghanunparvar (Costa Mesa, 1990).

¹⁰⁶Anthropologists have indicated the need for studies that explore this relationship through a complementary examination of texts and practices. For an interesting discussion of this approach in a modern anthropological context, see Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, *Assaulting with Words. Popular Discourse and the Bridle of the Shari'ah* (Evanston, 1994), especially the introduction. With respect to popular eulogy and learned opinions on eulogy and cursing, it would be useful to examine popular practice in the context of doctrinal or legal literature.

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