The Early Safavids, 1450–1510: Embodiment and Disembodiment

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Introduction

Discussing the 1460 death of Shaykh Junayd, which occurred while fighting the Shirvanshahs, Jean Aubin, in his seminal "L'avenèment des Safavides reconsidéré," relates how Junayd's disciples refused to accept his death, and said that Junayd was not dead and had not been killed, but had taken a modified form; the Iranologist expands on this particular narrative by citing an Arabic source penned by one Mawlana Ahmad al-Bigiri: "[Junayd's followers] then elevated, like the Christians do with the Messiah, a facially-disfigured person named Jalāl as the *ḥakkāk*, or polisher, of the state. For other supporters, Junayd was not dead and that his life came back to his body somewhat changed; then he disappeared and these disciples attached themselves to his young son, named Ḥaydar."[1]

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[1] Jean Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré (Études safavides III)," *Moyen Orient & Océan Indien* 5 (1988): 1–130. Quote on p. 36. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

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What became of the mysterious Jalal is not known, but the transmission of spiritual authority (*wilayat*) to Haydar, at least in this case, would appear to have been as much a corporeal/atomistic process as it was a nominal one. As such, it reflects the kinds of doctrines—divine incarnation (*hulul*) and reincarnation (*tanasukh*), to name two—which have been considered to be popular among "extreme" (*ghuluw*) Shiʿite communities like the Safavids in the fifteenth century. This moment in early Safavid history is a telling one as it underscores the degree to which late-fifteenth-century rural and semi-urban communities living in the remarkably heterogeneous zone of the Caucasus, eastern Anatolia, and the Caspian littoral were active participants in rituals, belief systems, liturgies, and eschatologies which contained "all the aspects of what had always been a thorn in the flesh of the orthodox: belief in miracles, soothsaying, oneiromancy, worship of saints, popular pilgrimage centers, and mighty orders with mystical practices."[2]

Among historians and scholars of religious history, the study of the fifteenth-century Turco–Persianate world—comprising the bulk of the central and eastern Islamic lands from Anatolia across to Central Asia and south to the Indian Deccan—has always been vibrant, and all the more so in recent years. It is an arena of inquiry focused on issues of orthodoxy and confessional diversity, debates among philosophers in the wake of al-Ghazali and Sunni revivalism, and the degree to which scholars of the day were increasingly invested in the occultation and mathematization of reality; these ideas were concurrent with new and emerging conceptions of rulership in the post-Mongol world, which was being emmeshed with the language and notions of sacrality and millennial thought. Scholars interested in such trends also make note of emerging communities—the Hurufiyyah, the Ahl-i Haqq, the Yezidis, the Nurbakhshiyyah, the Nuqtaviyyah, and the Alevi Bektashiyyah, for instance—who were passionately seeking to redress social injustice while also laying claim to the keys of redemptive salvation in provocative, if not heterodox, ways.[3] In the wake of the Abbasid caliphal collapse, Sufi idealizations of both the individual and society had begun to be profoundly influential in medieval Muslim society and as such, started shaping politico-courtly spaces; by the mid-fifteenth century, Sufis and Sufi-minded intellectuals were actively producing treatises on notions of cosmic kingship, divine absolutism, and sacral sovereignty.[4]

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[2] Hans Robert Roemer, "The Qizilbash Turcomans: Founders and Victims of the Safavid Theocracy," in *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, ed. M. Mazzaoui and V. Moreen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 27–40. Quote on p. 31.

With such trends in mind, I am interested in exploring how contemporaries of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries depicted the Safavid movement with respect to the idea of the body. The period of 1450–1510 was a dynamic one, to say the very least, when we consider how the Safavids presented themselves in terms of legitimacy and authority. Approaching the idea of the corporeal presence of the Safavid "Sufi king," we encounter a mesmerizing array of rituals and habituated traditions borrowed from Sufism and Shiʿism, not to mention a disparate yet lively amalgamation of references, symbols, and tropes used by medieval Muslims to present sanctity in corporeal terms. Thus far, Shahzad Bashir and Azfar Moin have provided helpful contributions regarding aspects of Safavid corporeality.[5] There is, to be sure, an inherent "elasticity" regarding the body and its representation in both premodern and modern Islamic societies, and as Bashir has observed, we can view the body "as an artifact constructed at the conjunction of ideological and material factors significant for the lives of Muslims in various sociohistorical contexts."[6]

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[3] Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nurbakhshiya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003); and Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power: Ḥurūfī Teachings between Shiʿism and Sufism in Medieval Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

[4] The idea of cosmic kingship was coined by Francis Oakley, *Kingship: The Politics of Enchantment* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006). See also Azfar Moin, "Sovereign Violence: Temple Destruction in India and Shrine Desecration in Iran and Central Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57 (2015): 467–96.

[5] Shahzad Bashir, "Shāh Ismāʿīl and the Qizilbāsh: Cannibalism in the Religious History of Early Safavid Iran," *History of Religions* 45 (2006): 234–56; and Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 80–84.

[6] Shahzad Bashir, "Body," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal Elias (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 72–92. Quote on p. 73.

The focus of this article, however, endeavors to examine the shifts and changes in corporeal language regarding the Safavid shaykhs-cum-sultans as the Ardabili tariqa itself shifted and changed between 1450 and 1510. As we appreciate the multitude of traditions which came to influence early Safavid self-definition—normative and antinomian strands of Sufism, heterodox and orthodox Shiʿism, contemporary Timurid and Aq-Qoyunlu political ethics—we encounter diverse and constantly shifting strands of discourse which prioritize the role of the body, bodily practices, and the greater idea of the body politic. The esoteric environments surrounding early leaders like Junayd and Haydar, whose physical bodies were understood to be sites of divine emanation, also included a rich repository of Shiʿite corporeal traditions. Later, the inclusion and patronage of former Timurid and Aq-Qoyunlu administrators after Ismaʿil's expansion between 1501 and 1510 infused the fledgling Safavid state with those notions of corporeal sovereignty and sanctity which had been developed among philosophers, poets, and bureaucrats during the fifteenth century while discussing the enlightened reigns of rulers like Uzun Hasan (r. 1452–78) and Sultan Husayn Bayqara (r. 1469–1506). Objects of worship (*maʿbud*), spaces of theophany (*tajalli*), pure vessels of sinlessness (*ʿismat*), and repositories of divine glory (*farr*), the Safavid bodies of Junayd, Haydar, Sultan ʿAli, and Ismaʿil became indeed rich and complicated spaces of intersection between 1450 and 1510. At the same time, I am also keen to explore how sacro-kingly *dis*embodiment played a role in the early Safavid period. Interestingly, the Safavids developed a narrative which commemorates and memorializes body trauma to their ancestral family while at the same time demonstrating deliberate spectacles of violence against their opponents and rivals. It is abundantly clear that Shah Ismaʿil incorporated ritualized violence against rivals and subjugated populations; this demonstration of brutal force, spectacular in scope, can be read as part of a greater pattern of routinized degradation and dehumanization which, in turn, transforms arbitrary violence by state actors into something that is deemed necessary, natural, and justified.[7]

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[7] Christian Lange and Maribel Fierro, "Introduction: Spatial, Ritual and Representational Aspects of Public Violence in Islamic Societies (7th-19th Centuries CE)," in *Public Violence in Islamic*

This article, then, employs a dual approach, whereby embodied sanctity and divine charisma according to Sufi and Shiʿite doctrines and practices will be examined in conjunction with exploring the role of the body in the context of state violence and overt acts of disembodiment and eradication at an atomistic level. When we consider the fifteenth-century amalgamation of Sufi–Shiʿite ideals of corporeal purity with the discourse of violence and violation which grew under Junayd and Haydar,[8] and intensified with Ismaʿil, such a dual approach makes considerable sense. In proceeding this way, this current study is inspired by existing literature on corporeality from a variety of perspectives—historical, anthropological, sociological, and hermeneutic, to name the most relevant—but it should be noted that the study of the body in historical contexts is a profoundly large and interdisciplinary field of scholarship. This much is clear while reading Shahzad Bashir's treatment of Sufi corporeality in the late medieval period, entitled *Sufi Bodies*; for Bashir, the early work of French phenomenologists Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty is key as they posit that notions of embodiment in a society could be inscriptive, and thus operate beyond textual mediums to form a shared cultural notion, or habitus.[9] Sufi hagiographical texts are especially focused on understanding the cosmos through embodiment; the physical deprivation of a Sufi's body through asceticism is contraposed with the heightening of sensory spaces (*lata'if*) (heart, breast, liver, etc.) which allow for enlightened consciousness.[10] However, it should be noted

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Societies: Power, Discipline, and the Construction of the Public Sphere, 7th-19th Centuries CE, ed. Christian Lange and Maribel Fierro (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 1–23. Reference on p. 10. See also Roy Rappaport, "Liturgies and Lies," *International Yearbook for Sociology of Knowledge and Religions* 10 (1976): 75–104. Reference on p. 81.

[8] Michel Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids: Šīʿism, Ṣūfism, and the Ġulāt* (Wiesbaden: Franz Sterner Verlag, 1972), 74. Roemer notes a new meaning for *Sufi* for the Safavids, *Glaubenskämpfer*, which combines *Sufi* with *ghazi*. See Hans Robert Roemer, *Persien auf dem Weg in die Neuzeit: Iranische Geschichte von 1350-1750* (Beirut: Erlon Verlag, 2003), 237.

[9] Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 13–17. Some of his analysis, in turn, is based on Monika Langer, *Merleau-Ponty's "Phenomenology of Perception": A Guide and Commentary* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1989), and Sean Dorrance Kelly, "Merleau-Ponty on the Body," in *The Philosophy of the Body*, ed. Michael Proudfoot (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 62–76.

[10] See also Halime Ferhat, "Le saint et son corps : Une lutte constante," *Al-Qantara : Revista de Estudios Árabes*, no. 2 (2002): 457–70.

that much of what shaped early Safavid corporeal discourse was also based on extreme as well as orthodox Shiʿi traditions. To be sure, it is very difficult to disentangle Sufi and Shiʿite tropes, language, and doctrines amidst the fluorescence of heterogeneous sects and communities from the 1200s onward: the Ahl-i Haqq, the early Safavids, the Yezidis, the Hurufis, and the Nuqtavis; as Crone comments, many had gone "through an ʿAlid Shiʿite phase but all were the outcome of the activities of Sufis."[11] Moreover, as Jean Calmard points out, Imami Shiʿites coexisted with a panoply of "other" Shiʿite saintly and royal groups, the Sarbadars, the Marʿashis, and the Kar Kiyas across Gilan, Manzandaran, and Khurasan.[12] This notwithstanding, there is a relatively rich scholarly literature regarding how Ismaʿili and Imami Shiʿite communities approached and understood the saintly body and its manifestation and adoration by the pious; some of this prioritizes philosophy and theology on the basis of hermeneutics, while much of it comes from a place of interdisciplinarity between anthropology, history, and literature.[13] It should also be noted that the interconnection of sanctity and body in Shiʿism and Sufism necessitates acknowledging the significant scholarly field associated with relics, reliquaries, funerary spaces, mausoleums, and shrines in general.[14]

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[11] Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 473.

[12] Jean Calmard, "Les rituels shiites et le pouvoir : L'imposition du shiisme safavide – eulogies et malédictions canoniques," in *Études Safavides*, ed. J. Calmard (Paris: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1993), 109–150. Reference on p. 111.

[13] While not necessarily specific to Shiʿism, Finbarr Flood's work on notions of corporeality and Islamic identity is interwoven impressively in his *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). For "traditional" interpretations of corporeal Shiʿism, Daniel De Smet's work is worth noting, particularly "Scarabées, scorptions, cloportes et corps camphrés : Métamorphose, réincarnation et génération spontanée dans l'hétérodoxie chiite," in *O Ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture; In Honour of Remke Kruk*, ed. A. Vrolijk and J. Hogendijk (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 39–54, as is D.K. Crow's "The Death of al-Husayn b. ʿAli and Early Shiʿi Views of the Imamate," in *Shiʿism*, ed. E. Kohlberg (London: Routledge, 2003), 41–86. For Shiʿite shrines and veneration of the Imams, see Stephanie Mulder's excellent *The Shrines of the ʿAlids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shiʿis and the Architecture of Coexistence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), and Fahmida Suleman, ed., *People of the Prophet's House: Artistic and Ritual Expressions of Shiʿi Islam* (London: Azimuth Editions, 2015).

[14] Twelver Shiʿite ideas of corporeal sanctity and relics indeed defined the inaugural 2020 issue

Anthropology, not surprisingly, has laid much of the theoretical groundwork for ideas of "embodied charisma," as we note in the work of Victor Turner, Richard Werbner, and McKim Marriott.[15] Within an Islamic perspective, Werbner and Basu specifically have analyzed the enormous prestige and spiritual dominion which is granted to the "living" body of an entombed saint; in their words, "the bodies of Sufis are enormously powerful."[16] Regarding the medieval period, however, the idea of saintly authority (*wilayat*) and its incorporation in the body during both life and death was a fundamental feature of society across the Islamic world, but fascinatingly, this notion also coexisted with (and perhaps borrowed from) older Shiʿite doctrines regarding the pre-eternality of the Imams and the incorruptibility of their physical remains. As noted earlier, during the post-Mongol period we see a profound shift whereby dynastic sovereign rulers begin appropriating these corporealized notions of authority.

The idea of the royal body has a rich, albeit more European, historiographical presence. Beginning with foundational works like Marc Bloch's *Les rois thaumaturges* (1923) and Ernst Kantorowicz's *The*

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of the *Journal of Material Culture in the Muslim World*; therein, the work of Sepideh Parsapajouh ("The Topography of Corporal Relics in Twelver Shiʿism," 199–225) should be noted, while her other contemporary anthropological studies adopt a more gendered approach to the notion of the body and Shiʿite piety. See Sepideh Parsapajouh, "Les corps féminins et leurs expression dans les cérémonies chiites d'Ashoura à Téhéran," in *État-nation et fabrique du genre, des corps et des sexualités : Iran, Turquie, Afghanistan*, ed. Lucia Direnberger and Azadeh Hian (Aix-Marseille: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2019), 49–72; and "La châsse de l'Imam Husayn : Fabrique et parcours politique d'un objet religeux de Qom à Karbala," *Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions* 174 (2016): 49–74. See also Sabrina Mervin, "Les larmes et le sang des chiites : Corps et pratiques rituelles lors des célébrations de 'Âshûrâ' (Liban, Syrie)," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Mediterranée* 113–14 (2006): 153–66. In terms of the most recent contributions, see also Finbarr B. Flood's edited lectures appearing in *Technologies de dévotion dans les arts de l'Islam : Pèlerins, reliques, copies* (Paris: Hazan, 2019). See also Daphna Ephrat, *Sufi Masters and the Creation of Saintly Spheres in Medieval Syria* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021); and Daphna Ephrat, Ethel Sara Wolper, and Paulo G. Pinto, ed., *Saintly Spheres and Islamic Landscapes* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[15] Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu, "The Embodiment of Charisma," in *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*, ed. Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (London: Routledge, 1998), 3–29. Reference on p. 7.

[16] Werbner and Basu, "Embodiment of Charisma," 12.

King's Two Bodies (1956), historians have focused on those prescribed periods when royal bodies are profiled in performative and functional ways: births, deaths, accessions, investitures, successions, anointings, marriages, and so on.[17] Regarding the medieval Muslim world, Aziz al-Azmeh has focused on late antiquity to argue how both the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires underwent "imperial translations," which included, among other things, a growing notion of theomimesis for the emperor and an expanding "field of magical contiguity" between emperor and Christ; this sense of theomimesis, in turn, played a constitutive role in the later, shifting political ideology of the Islamic Caliphate in the seventh to tenth centuries.[18] Exciting work has been done regarding royal dynastic corporeality in the medieval and early modern Islamicate world, such as studies by al-Azmeh, Finbarr Flood, Nicolas Vatin, and Gilles Veinstein.[19]

Embodiments, 1450–1510: Incarnation and Dispensation

Belief in reincarnation—ascending in cyclical fashion toward perfection (*nasukhiyyah*) or descending toward lower forms such as animals and insects (*masukhiyyah*)—has a long and rich history with groups like the Kaysaniyyah and the Khurramdiniyyah in the eighth and ninth centuries. Influenced by Gnosticism, radical currents within early Shiʿism presented all prophets and the Twelve Imams as being spontaneously generated (no mother, no father) and as those whose earthly existence consisted of an innumerable series of transmigrations from body to body, with each body being more luminous than the previous, until finally escaping this cycle and assuming "the camphored body" (*jism-i kafūrī*) in a "temple of light" (*haykal-i nūrānī*). The luminous bodies of this "crème" (*zubdah*) of the human race were unaffected by the defects of their current material bodies and simply assumed another corporeal form after their "death."[20] As Crone notes, "the connection between divine immanence or incarnation and reincarnation was so close that sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between them."[21] Indeed, the doctrine of *hulul* (incarnation) held that the spirit of the Prophet or the Imam can be infused in a body, which is termed as being nothing other than a "sheath" (*ghilāf*), "shirt" (*qamīs*), or "image" (*shabah*).[22] This transitory and illusory emphasis on corporeality, not surprisingly, was shared by important medieval Sufi thinkers, but it was understood that *hulul* was first and foremost about the manifestation of the Divine and not necessarily specific Prophetic or Imami personalities.[23]

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[17] Michael J. Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons: The Origin of the Royal Anointing Ritual* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985); Janos Bak, ed., *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); Sergio Bertelli, *The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, trans. R. Burr Litchfield (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001); and Marion Steinicke and Stefan Weinfurter, ed., *Investitur- und Krönungsrituale: Herrschaftseinsetzungen im kulturellen Vergleich* (Bölau, Germany: Verlag Köln Weimar Wien, 2005). For a recent, excellent collection, see Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, ed., *Le corps du prince*, Micrologus XXII (Florence: Società Internazionale per lo Studio del Medioevo Latino, 2014).

[18] Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Monotheistic Kingship," in *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants*, ed. Aziz Al-Azmeh and Janos Bak (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 9–29. Reference on pp. 20–21.

[19] Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997); Finbarr Flood, "Bodies and Becoming: Mimesis, Mediation and the Ingestion of the Sacred in Christianity and Islam," in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. S. M. Promey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 459–93; and Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, *Le sérail ébranlé : Essai sur les morts, dépositions et avènements des sultans ottomans ; XIV^{e}-XIX^{es}* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

Connecting such doctrines and practices in a substantive way with this chiliastic lineage beginning in 1450 with Junayd is a challenge; some Safavid sources (Iskandar Beg Munshi, Khwandamir) are somewhat muted regarding the tariqa's leadership, while others (Ahmad al-Qummi, Amir Mahmud b. Khwandamir) fully endorse the shaykhs in divine symbolic terms (e.g., *maẓhar-i anvār-i subḥānī, manshā'-i karāmat, ḥazrat-i īzidiyyah*).[24] We also note that this period has been considerably more illuminated thanks to Kioumars Ghereghlou's editing and publishing of a newly discovered source, the *Tārīkh* (ca. 1550) of Qasim Beg Hayati Tabrizi, which provides many new details about the military adventures of Junayd, Haydar, Sultan ʿAli, and Ismaʿil (until 1508).[25] Sidelined by his uncle Jaʿfar and pressured to leave Ardabil by Jahanshah Qara-Qoyunlu, Junayd spent much of the 1450s meandering through Anatolia and Syria, a journey which has been carefully reconstructed by Rıza Yıldırım.[26] Shaykh Junayd was committed to recruiting clients and cultivating disciples to rival his uncles' prominence in Ardabil.[27] It was during this extended exile that Junayd's body of followers—and their mélange of belief systems—became increasingly eclectic and radicalized.[28] The Ottoman historian Idris Bitlisi describes in his *Hasht Bihisht* how Junayd et alia had turned away from the sacred path toward the profane world of politics; particularly, he also notes their *ghuluw* behavior and invocation of *hulul* by mentioning how they believed the Imam "to appear" among the family of Safavid shaykhs. Moreover, they openly expressed their affinity with the beliefs of the famous Sufi martyr, al-Hallaj.[29] Junayd and his growing number of adepts, disaffected ʿAlavis and former supporters of the rebel Shaykh Badr al-Din, moved through various central and eastern Anatolian regions, and at one point mounted a *ghaza* campaign against the Byzantine city of Trabzon, which Hayati Tabrizi describes with some detail.[30] Junayd subsequently allied with Uzun Hasan in Diyarbakr, married into the Aq-Qoyunlu family, and eventually decided to wage frontier war against Christian Daghestan to the north; it was during his march that he fell afoul of Amir Khalil Allah Shirvanshah and was killed in battle near Shammakhi in 1460.[31]

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[20] De Smet, "Scarabées, scorptions, cloportes et corps camphrés," 50–52.

[21] Crone, *Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 469.

[22] De Smet, "Scarabées, scorptions, cloportes et corps camphrés," 52.

[23] Crone, *Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 474.

[24] Amir Mahmud b. Khwandamir, *Īrān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl va Shāh Ṭahmāsp Ṣafavī*, ed. G. R. Tabatabaʾi (Tehran: Bunyad-i Mawqufat-i Duktur Mahmud Afshar, 1380), 59–63.

[25] Qasim Beg Hayati Tabrizi, *A Chronicle of the Early Safavids and the Reign of Shāh Ismāʿīl*

(*907-930/1501-1524*), ed. Kioumars Ghereghlou (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2018).

[26] Rıza Yıldırım, "Turcomans between Two Empires: The Origins of the Qizilbāsh Identity in Anatolia, 1447-1514," (PhD diss., Bilkent University, 2008), 168–217.

[27] Kazuo Morimoto, "The Earliest ʿAlid Genealogy for the Safavids: New Evidence for the Pre-dynastic Claim to *Sayyid* Status," *Iranian Studies* 43 (2010): 447–69, reference on p. 464; and Irène Mélikoff, "La divinisation d'Ali chez les Bektashis-Alevis," in *From History to Theology: Ali in Islamic Beliefs*, ed. Ahmet Yasar Ocak (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2005), 83–110, reference on p. 104.

[28] Rıza Yıldırım, "In the Name of Hosayn's Blood: The Memory of Karbala as Ideological Stimulus to the Safavid Revolution," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 8 (2015): 127–54. Reference on p. 132.

[29] Yıldırım, "Turcomans between Two Empires," 173.

[30] Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 130–32.

[31] Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict* (*906-962/1500-1555*) (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1983), 46–47. See also Ayfer Karakaya-Stump,

Militant belief in magic and divine incarnation/reincarnation certainly characterized how Safavid followers responded to Junayd's "death." Such convictions were undoubtedly inculcated and reinforced during Junayd's multi-year separation from Ardabil and the "traditional dargah-based Sufi milieu of the order"; moreover, as Yıldırım rightfully points out, the shaykhs of this "revolutionary branch" came to leadership roles at very young ages, and the Turkmen tribal chiefs and notables (*khulafa'*) inculcated in their charges "a particular type of religiosity."[32] Ghereghlou notes in his preface to the *Tārīkh* that there were at least two treatises written in the late fifteenth century condemning the Safavids for heretical beliefs.[33] As mentioned earlier, the shaykh's followers insisted that their leader had not been killed but had assumed a different form[34]; the Ottoman historian Ashiqpashazadah (d. 1518) notes that Haydar was not yet born at the time of his father's death, and it is likely that Junayd's devotees saw here the magic of metempsychosis at work.[35] Rhetorically, Khunji-Isfahani is perhaps obliquely referencing this belief when he writes, "at the time that wind blew out the lamplight of Junayd's life (*chirāgh-i ḥayāt-i Junayd*), the sparks of existence (*sharar-i wujūd*) of his son then caught flame in the city of Amid."[36]

Taking a closer look at Khunji-Isfahani, however hostile his tone against the Safavids might be, we can perhaps glean a sense of what Junayd and his followers believed in a similar way to how inquisitorial records left by ecclesiastics shed light on different heresies in medieval and early modern Europe. He notes that Junayd was openly (*mujāharat*) called God, and that his son was "the son of God" (*walad-ash-rā Ibn Allāh*

The Kizilbash-Alevis in Ottoman Anatolia: Sufism, Politics and Community (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

[32] Yıldırım, "In the Name of Hosayn's Blood," 133.

[33] Kioumars Ghereghlou, "Preface," in Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, vii–xxx. Reference on p. xxiii.

[34] Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse: State University of New York Press, 1998), 31.

[35] Yıldırım, "Turcomans between Two Empires," 216.

[36] Fazl b. Ruzbihan Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, ed. Muhammad Akbar ʿAshiq (Tehran: Miras Maktub 2003), 264.

guftand). Faced with Junayd’s mutilated corpse stuffed with dust and blood, his followers then incredulously praise him with Qurʾan 40:65: “He is the ever-living. There is no god except God.” Khunji-Isfahani observes that the Safavids were militant about defending their *hululi* practices: “Their stupidity and ignorance was of such an order that, if someone referred to the death of Shaykh Junayd, they themselves would be killed.” Indeed, he asserts that Junayd’s followers would eliminate anyone who dared to suggest that “even one grain of his existence was deficient.”[37] Khunji-Isfahani also specifically alleges the propagation of the “faith of libertinism” (*dīn-i ibāhat*) and the establishing of the “religious law of the Babaki Khurramis” amongst Junayd’s followers, a clear reference to *ibāhat al-nisā*’ (the communal sharing of women) which was a common heresiographical accusation in medieval Islamic culture.[38]

We know that particular epic traditions formed the basis of collective memory and cosmology among Safavid followers. As Khunji-Isfahani caustically remarks, “Instead of lessons on the stages of a mystic, [Haydar] reads ‘vainglorious stories about ancient Persia.’”[39] The most famous of these, of course, is Abu Tahir-i Tartusi’s *Abū Muslim nāma*, an early medieval (eleventh to twelfth century) fantastical epic about the miraculous life and deeds of Abu Muslim; ʿAlid mystical groups, most notably the Bektashis, recited the *Abū Muslim nāma* to celebrate Abu Muslim as a sworn enemy of Umayyad tyranny and a dedicated devotee to ʿAli and his progeny. This text and a number of other popular epics and poems in Persian and Turkish (*Maqtal-i Ḥusayn*, *Baṭṭāl nāma*, *Ṣāltuk nāma*, to name a few) were memorized, performed, and recited by the followers of Junayd, Haydar, Sultan ʿAli, and Ismaʿil.[40] To be sure, they were the foundation for what would become a corporate and collectively enforced memory about the tragedy of Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala which was abundantly rich with, among others, detailed plots, subplots, character traits, conversations, sermons, and trials by combat. This shared and ritualized memory of Karbala defined the ontology of the Safavid Qizilbash as a revolutionary movement.[41] One particular epic, the *Junayd nāma*, was arranged within the *Abū Muslim nāma* as a prequel to the life of Abu Muslim.[42] The central character of this epic is Abu Muslim's grandfather, Junayd, who is celebrated as not only one of the greatest champions (*pahlavān*) ever seen, but the forefather of the one who "will eradicate the curse of the purest line and return Islam to its original lustre," Abu Muslim.[43] Connecting Shaykh Junayd with his namesake in the *Junayd nāma* would not have been difficult for his Safavid Turkmen disciples, and they likely saw a symmetry between Junayd's progeny in the epic and Shaykh Junayd's own family; just as Junayd's grandson Abu Muslim was celebrated as a millenarian hero, Shaykh Junayd's own grandson Ismaʿil was likewise hailed. Interestingly, the mothers of both Abu Muslim and Ismaʿil were named Halima. As Babayan states, "Safavid adepts might have very well regarded [Ismaʿil] as the incarnation of Abū Muslim."[44]

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[37] “*danāh-’i az wujūd-ū nāqiṣ shud*.” Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 265.

[38] Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 265. For more on such trends, see Crone, *Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 391.

[39] “*bih jāy-i dars-i maqāmāt-i maʿnavi dastān-i ṭāmat-i pahlavī khwandī*.” Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 265.

[40] Kathryn Babayan, “The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbāsh Islam to Imāmīte Shiʿism,” *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994): 135–61, reference on pp. 145–46; and Yıldırım, “In the Name of Hosayn’s Blood,” 134. See also Ismet Çetin, “ʿAli in Turkish Folk Literature,” in *From History to Theology:*

The Ottoman historian Ashiqpashazadah states that Haydar was in utero when he was designated by Junayd as his successor shortly before his death in 1460, but Hayati Tabrizi states that at the time of the transfer of leadership, "the perfect guide was eight months old."[45] From his birth

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Ali in Islamic Beliefs, ed. Ahmet Yasar Ocak (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2005), 205–27. Reference on pp. 208–9.

[41] Yıldırım, "In the Name of Hosayn's Blood," 133.

[42] Abu Tahir-i Tartusi, *Abū Muslim nāma*, ed. Husayn Ismaʿili, vol. 1 (Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 2001), 199–517.

[43] Marina Gaillard, "Les origines d'Abu Moslem : De l'incertitude historique à la vraisemblance légendaire," *Studia Iranica* 44 (2015): 7–32. Quote on p. 22.

[44] Babayan, "Safavid Synthesis," 146.

[45] "*dar ān zamān murshid-i kāmil hasht māhah būd*." Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 144. For the reference to Āshiqpāshāzādah, see Rıza Yıldırım, "The Rise of the Safavids as a Political Dynasty: The Revolution of Shah Esmaʿil, the Founder of the Safavid State," in *Safavid World*, ed. Rudi Matthee (London: Routledge, 2021), 56–76. Reference on p. 74n38.

until his installation in Ardabil some thirteen years later, Haydar was raised in a semi-nomadic environment of open adulation and awed reverence; his later militarization and embrace of *ghaza* only underscores Haydar's lack of exposure to normative Sufi traditions in these early years. Khunji-Isfahani focuses on the *hululi* beliefs of the Safavid order: "[The Qizilbash] considered [Haydar] as their god (*maʿbūd*) [. . .] and knew that his exalted presence (*jānab-ash*) was the *qiblah* to which they genuflected (*masjūd*)."[46] How this divinity was manifested specifically is not commented on, but it is possible that Haydar felt directly inspired by Abu Muslim and his characterization in the *Abū Muslim nāma*. At one point in this epic tale, Abu Muslim dreams that he has been visited by the Prophet, who places a crown (*taj*) on his head and declares his destiny to avenge the martyrs of Karbala. An ax is then displayed by the angel Gabriel, and after waking, Abu Muslim discovers a picture of the weapon drawn on a piece of paper. Abu Muslim brings this drawing to one Akhi Hurdek, the master blacksmith of Marv, and tasks him with making the weapon he has seen Gabriel brandishing in his dream. Fascinatingly, the *Abū Muslim nāma* then accounts for the miraculous essence of this famous ax. During his *miʿraj*, the Prophet Muhammad was flying over the bloody plains of Karbala when he was informed by angels of the future fate of his grandson and his family; the Prophet sighed mournfully and shed two tears. Attending angels transformed the breath of the Prophet's sigh into a block of iron ore which was then sunk secretly into the Sea of Oman; his teardrops fell on the bloody ground, and a sturdy tree sprouted up. Together, the ore and wood were used to craft Abu Muslim's ax, which would become an iconic symbol of cosmic salvation and retribution.[47]

In keeping with this esoteric tradition, it is fascinating that Haydar announced his own decision to adopt the *taj-i Haydari*, a special red headpiece designed with twelve holes to commemorate the Twelve Imams, after himself having a dream in which he was commanded by

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[46] Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 267.

[47] Yıldırım, "In the Name of Hosayn's Blood," 138. See also Irène Mélikoff, *Abû Muslim, le "porte-hache" du Khorassan, dans la tradition épique turco-iranienne* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1962).

ʿAli to fashion a new style of cap as a signal for the upcoming judgment and punishment of the enemies of the Prophet's family. Perhaps more telling is the imagery of Abu Muslim's dream and subsequent fashioning of a divine ax in light of Haydar's enthusiastic embrace of weapon smithing and a new career of making spears, swords, shields, and chain mail while living in Ardabil. The *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī* is especially focused on Haydar's preclusion to violence and its promotion while hypocritically claiming to be a spiritual guide (*murshid*): "Instead of exercising his pen on the sacred book, he exercised his sword on the dogs of Ardabil [. . .] when venerable shaykhs greet one another with heart-burning and rending of breasts, [Haydar] was sowing shields and sharpening arrows."[48] News of his armory skills apparently became widespread enough that Khunji-Isfahani writes, "I myself heard that Ḥaydar had made several thousand pikes, coats of mail and shields without any help from craftsmen because he himself had made a vow to make them and because he wished to teach his adepts (*murīd*s) as their leader (*murshid*)."[49] Accordingly, he cannot deny the popularity of Haydar's militarization among the Turkmen groups, describing how "many people from Rūm, Tālish, and Siyāh-kūh (Qarādāgh) gathered to him." As inimical as he was to the Safavid cause, the Aq-Qoyunlu historian begrudgingly acknowledges Haydar's hero-like qualities: "It is true that by nature he was a brave man and acquired great proficiency in archery and the use of the sword [. . .] he was like Isfandiyār when he went in his robe of mail, which Zāl had made for Rustam, and also like Bijan when he overthrew Afrasiyāb."[50]

Supported tacitly by his Aq-Qoyunlu relations, Haydar enthusiastically embraced his reputation and public ethos as a fateful hero (*pahlavan*), spiritual guide (*pir*), and frontier warrior (*ghazi*) and led numerous campaigns into the Caucasus with thousands of Qizilbash followers during the late 1470s and 1480s. However, this martial adventurism, largely motivated by booty, came to a disastrous end in 1488 when the Aq-Qoyunlu removed their sponsorship and joined forces with the

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[48] Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 265.
[49] Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 267.
[50] Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 267.

Shirvanshahi king, Farrukh Yasar, to contain and destroy Haydar and his army while returning home from a *ghaza* campaign in Daghestan. Safavid sources present a narrative of the events in Tabarasan which would resonate in clear terms with a Shiʿite audience. Hearing news of Yaʿqub's betrayal and dispatching of four thousand troops—the same number sent by ʿUbayd Allah ibn Ziyad to surround Husayn at Karbala—Haydar prepared his army for battle and mounted his Duldul-like warhorse (*samand-duldul*), which is a clear reference to ʿAli's famous mule, which appeared at the Battles of the Camel and Siffin. Haydar looked to the sky (*raw sū-yi asmān kard*) and asked for perseverance against the enemies' blows (*ṭalab-i ṣabr nazd-i zarb-i dushman*) and encouraged his followers to set their feet forward in the spirit of "Our Lord! Shower us with perseverance, make our steps firm."[51] This partial Qurʾanic verse (2:250) alludes to the Prophet David as he was preparing to fight Goliath; fascinatingly, David, like Haydar, is well-known in the Qurʾan and the *qiṣāṣ al-anbiyā'* (prophetic hagiographies) for his ability to shape iron, as well as for his armor and weapon making.[52] On this "day of perdition" (*rūz-i halāk*), the *mujāhidīn* breached the "corporeal walls of this group and opened the gates to release their imprisoned spirits."[53] The Safavids nearly routed this satanic group (*hizb-i shayṭān*), but Haydar fell into single combat with Sulayman Bijan-ughlu, the commander of the Aq-Qoyunlu troops. A blow from Haydar's spear forced Bijan-ughlu to the ground, but the Safavid *pir*, realizing he was destined to die, extended a hand of forgiveness (*dast-i ʿafw*) to his enemy and pulled him up, knowing that one of the gates to heaven was reserved for virtuous ones who forgave people (*al-ʿāfīn ʿan al-nās*). The Aq-Qoyunlu seized this opportunity and pressed their attack; suddenly (*nā-gāh*), a powerful archer shot an arrow and Haydar joined "the ranks of martyrs" (*ṣufūf-i shuhadāʾ*). With this calamity

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[51] "*rabbanā afrigh ʿalaynā ṣabran va s̱abbit aqdāmanā.*" Qazi Ahmad ibn Sharaf al-Din al-Husayn al-Husayni al-Qummi, *Khulāṣat al-tavārīkh*, ed. I. Ishraq, vol. 1 (Tehran: Danishgah-i Tehran, 1980), 39; and Amir Mahmud, *Īrān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl*, 70.

[52] Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Quran and Muslim Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 36.

[53] "*jidār-i ajsām-i ān qawm va abvāb az-pāy-yi khurūj-i arvāḥ-i maḥbūsah-i īshān fatḥ namūd.*" Al-Qummi, *Khulāṣat al-tavārīkh*, 40; and Amir Mahmud, *Īrān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl*, 71.

(*muṣībah*), a drop of blood (*ashk-i khūnīn*) spilled from Haydar's eye on the plains of Tabarasan as he died.[54] Hayati Tabrizi, however, provides Haydar's death not only in Karbalian terms, but also as a cosmic, divine event. Surrounded by the enemy, Haydar felt God's presence in the form of 11:29: "I had a spirit of My own creation breathed into him" (*nafakhtu fīhī min rūḥī*). Now in a state of spiritual preparation, Haydar wanted his "content body" (*tan-i dardādah*) with its "hidden corporeal issues" (*taʿalluqāt-i kashāyif-i jismānī*) and "disturbing primordial matters" (*mukaddarāt-i mavādd-i hayulānī*) to return to the place of origin (*manshā'-i aṣl*) according to the command: "*minhu bada'a wa ilayhi yaʿu'udu*."[55] In turn, Khunji-Isfahani relates, somewhat sardonically, how Aq-Qoyunlu troops cut off Haydar's head, stuffed it with straw, and eventually delivered it to the care of his mother, Khadija (the implications of this decollation will be examined shortly).[56]

A similar narrative is associated with the demise of Haydar's successor, Sultan ʿAli, some five years later. After a lengthy imprisonment (1488–93) by the Aq-Qoyunlu, a teenaged Sultan ʿAli was permitted to return to Azerbaijan along with his mother and two brothers, Ibrahim and Ismaʿil. Sultan ʿAli, aged fifteen, was soon embroiled in local conflicts by the Aq-Qoyunlu, but they grew concerned with the young *pir*'s potential as a magnet for dissidents and rebels. Interestingly, Hayati Tabrizi does not generally attribute the decisions and movements of the Safavids to Sultan ʿAli as an individual but rather to both Sultan ʿAli and his brother Ismaʿil; hence, it is the *shāhzādahgān* ("princes") who define Hayati Tabrizi's sections on Sultan ʿAli, and very little agency is given to the shaykh himself.[57] With the imminent arrival of an Aq-Qoyunlu army, Sultan ʿAli absconded in the middle of the night to Ardabil, and Sufi supporters flocked to his camp at some point to bring vows and gifts for "that descendent of the King of Najaf [i.e., ʿAlī]."[58] With Aq-Qoyunlu forces—styled as "opponents of the faith"

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[54] Al-Qummi, *Khulāṣat al-tavārīkh*, 40; and Amir Mahmud, *Īrān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl*, 71.

[55] Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 176.

[56] Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 295.

[57] Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 179–200.

[58] "*ān ikhlāf-i shāh-i Najaf*." Al-Qummi, *Khulāṣat al-tavārīkh*, 43; and Amir Mahmud, *Īrān dar*

(*muʿānidān-i dīn*) and "enemies of the children of the descendants of the Prophet" (*dushmanān-i awlād-i amjād-i rusūl-i rabb al-ʿālamīn*)—now bearing down on them, the shaykh had a sudden "divine insight" (*irādah-i taqdīr*) and envisioned his own martyrdom; in what must have been a hasty and tense ritual, the teenaged Sultan ʿAli placed the "crown" (*tāj*) on the head of his six-year old brother Ismaʿil and then clad himself in armor to embrace his destiny and "taste the potion of martyrdom."[59] The majority of Safavid historians narrate that Sultan ʿAli was killed and buried in Ardabil, but Hayati Tabrizi provides some interesting embellishments. He states that Sultan ʿAli fell from his horse while fording a river; he was captured and decapitated. However, he then adds that another group related that they had seen Sultan ʿAli fall from his horse and then die after a volley of arrows; in turn, "a flying bird then plucked his noble soul from its corporeal cage" (*murgh rūḥ-i sharīf-ash az qafiṣ-i qālib parīdan girift*), who was ordered by God to transport it to paradise.[60]

Ismaʿil and his handlers disappeared into the forests and mountains of Gilan, thus beginning the great occultation (*ghaybah*) of the "Mahdi of the Age" (*mahdī al-zamān*).[61] A. H. Morton noted some time ago that this matter of succession between Ismaʿil and his brother Ibrahim might not have been as clear cut as most Safavid sources suggest.[62] ʿAbdi Beg Shirazi, however, narrates the early career of Ismaʿil and quotes in Arabic a number of predictions regarding the ultimate rise of the *ahl al-bayt*; one is from the Prophet Muhammad, and the other is from ʿAli. Interestingly, ʿAli's prediction appears to be quoted directly from al-Nuʿmani's (d. 971) *Kitāb al-ghaybat*, while ʿAbdi Beg notes that this particular prediction also became popular during the Mongol invasions

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rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl, 81.

[59] Al-Qummi, *Khulāṣat al-tavārīkh*, 44; and Amir Mahmud, *Īrān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl*, 82.

[60] Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 198–99.

[61] See the section "The Story of the Birth of the Illustrious Emperor, Sulṭān Shāh Ismāʿīl" (*zikr-i vilādat-i pādshāh-i jalīl-i Sulṭān Shāh Ismāʿīl*) in Amir Mahmud, *Īrān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl*, 64–67.

[62] A. H. Morton, "The Early Years of Shah Ismaʿil in the *Afzal al-tavarikh* and Elsewhere," in *Safavid Persia*, ed. C. Melville (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 27–51.

of Hulegu: “God [will] empower a severe man, who will rise from the place in which their people has been established. He will conquer every town he passes by. He will defeat every standing army against him. He will remove every ease and wealth. Woe be to him who resists. He will still do so until he triumphs. Then he will deliver his victory to a man from my progeny, who will say the Truth and will act according to the Truth.”[63]

We can better get a sense of the religious sensibilities of Shah Ismaʿil and his followers, thanks to his rich poetic output under the nom de plume Khataʾi (The Sinner). Debate has emerged regarding the degree to which the new Safavid leader used his poetry to propagandize and present himself not only as a divine incarnation but also as a reincarnation of a panoply of divinely illuminated personalities.[64] Ahmet Karamustafa is right to point out how Safavid scholarship has placed disproportional weight on a specific set of Ismaʿil’s poetry, as profiled by Vladimir Minorsky in his seminal 1940 article, and that we must reintegrate his *divan* and other poems into the greater Alevi lyric tradition.[65] Ismaʿil’s motifs nonetheless are clearly inspired by the accrued collective memory of the “Karbala paradigm”[66] and the eschatological appeal of the long-awaited Mahdi leading revolutionary forces against the wicked hypocrites who had long defiled the Shiʿite community. In terms of corporeal embodiment, Ismaʿil was cognizant of the beliefs of *hulul* and *tanasukh* among the Qizilbash, and thus, his choice of specific vocabulary was almost certainly deliberate and strategic; his self-designation as the *Mahdi* would have been no surprise to Ismaʿil's audience, while his act of invoking corporeally a cast of prophets, kings, and heroes would have been embraced and celebrated amongst his followers. He refers to his disciples explicitly as *Ahl-i Haqq* while characterizing ʿAli as "the divine light" (*nūr-i ilāhī*) and a "manifestation of God" (*maẓhar-i ḥaqq*); it is on account of such statements that Crone considers Shah Ismaʿil to be an *Ali Ilahi*, a popular term for those who support the Ahl-i Haqq doctrine.[67] Indeed, Irène Mélikoff acknowledged some time ago the difficulty of nomenclature and the application of terms like *qizilbash*, *ʿalevi*, and *Bektashi* to eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan in the fifteenth century.[68]

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[63] ʿAbdi Beg Shirazi, *Takmilat al-akhbār*, ed. Abd al-Husayn Navaʾi (Tehran: Nashr-i Nay, 1990), 34.

[64] Ahmet Karamustafa, “In His Own Voice: What Hatayi Tells Us about Şah Ismail’s Religious Views,” in *L’Ésotérisme shiʿite, ses racines et ses prolongements : Shiʿi Esotericism: Its Roots and Developments*, ed. M. A. Amir-Moezzi. M. De Cillis, D. De Smet, and O. Mir-Kasimov (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 601–11; Ferenc Csirkés, “Messianic Oeuvres in Interaction: Misattributed Poems by Shah Ismail and Nesimi,” *Journal of Persianate Studies* 8 (2015): 155–94; and Amelia Gallagher, “The Apocalypse of Ecstasy: The Poetry of Shah Ismā ʿīl Revisited,” *Iranian Studies* 51 (2018): 361–97.

[65] Karamustafa, “In His Own Voice,” 604–5. See also Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, “Who Really Were the Kizilbash?: A Rethinking of the Kizilbash Movement in Light of New Sources and Research,” in Matthee, *Safavid World*, 37–55, reference on pp. 39–40.

[66] I acknowledge that Michael Fischer first used this term to describe revolutionary politics in contemporary Iran. See Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

The idea of *hulul* is explicit when Ismaʿil writes: "Truth has appeared before you as Adam, do not prostrate before Satan! / Adam has put on a new gown, God has come! God has come!" Here, the term for "gown" (Turkish: *dūn*) is consistent with the vocabulary (*ghilāf* [sheath], *qamīs* [shirt]) used by the Ahl-i Haqq to describe the empty corporeal vessel which is infused with the Divine.[69] As van Bruinessen points out, "The human embodiment of the angelic spirit is called its *jāma* or *dūn* ('gown'), and the movement from one incarnation to another of ordinary human souls [. . .] is referred to as *dūna a dūn* (from gown to gown), suggesting the metaphor of changing clothes."[70] Mélikoff likewise points to a contemporary popular saying in Azerbaijan which is attributed to Shah Ismaʿil: "*Adam min bir defa dun dünya'ya gelir ve her defa behter gelir*" ("Adam returned a thousand and one times to earth in different gowns, and he is better each time").[71] The notion of supranatural embodiment is reinforced in another verse whereby Ismaʿil's body becomes the Kaʿbah in Mecca itself: "My very existence is God's House, know this for certain.

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[67] Crone, *Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 474.

[68] Irène Mélikoff, "Le problème kızılbaş," *Turcica* 6 (1975): 49–67, reference on pp. 49–57.

[69] De Smet, "Scarabées, scorptions, cloportes et corps camphrés," 52.

[70] Martin van Bruinessen, "Ahl-i Ḥaqq," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson, 2009, dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_22840.

[71] Mélikoff, "Le problème kızılbaş," 59.

Prostration before me is incumbent night and day."[72] It would be perhaps wrong to seek out the specific doctrine of *tanasukh* (reincarnation) in Shah Ismaʿil's verse since the Ahl-i Haqq, as well as many Sufis, believed that there is only one divine essence which is manifesting itself in such special figures; for ʿAlid groups like the Ahl-i Haqq and the early Safavids, the Imams were included in the greater prophetography (Noah, Abraham, Jesus, Moses) appearing in the Qurʾan. Thus, when Ismaʿil states, "I am the living Khizr (*Khizr-Zindah*) and Jesus, son of Mary. I am the Alexander of my contemporaries," he is alluding to these figures as simply "facades" for the eternal Divine, as is the case when he writes: "I was on the gibbet with Mansur; with Abraham in the fire, and with Moses on Mt. Sinai."[73] Scholars have also pointed out that certain verses were deliberately redacted from later copies of Ismaʿil's *Dīvān* on account of their extreme nature:[74]

> He opens the gate of Islam to the world
> Know him to be God, do not call him human.
> He was God come down from heaven to earth
> to show himself to the creatures of the world.
> He intercedes for the universe
> He stands to the prophet as [in the Hadith] 'your flesh is my flesh.'[75]

Regarding the embodiments of the original Shiʿite Imams, it was understood that this operated at a sanguineous and atomistic level, as Ismaʿil explains here: "I have recovered my father's [Husayn's] blood from Yazīd. It is certain that I am the essence of Ḥaydar."[76] On the latter point, Ismaʿil's claim is unassailable: he was indeed the issuance of Shaykh Haydar and the Safavid bloodline, but of course, his claim to embodiment was understood to be of a higher order. Interestingly, this essence could be profiled as a form of cosmic microsporic tillage: “Wherever you sow me, I will grow; whenever you call me, I will come up [from the ground].”[77] Echoing this motif of germination and manifestation, Shah Ismaʿil incorporates boldly the divine utterance (*hadith-i qudsi*) “I [i.e., God] was a hidden treasure” (*kuntu kanz-an makhfī-an*) within a strong Shiʿite context—a combination most Sufi thinkers would not have endorsed—in the following poetic verse:

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[72] Quoted in Vladimir Minorsky, "The Poetry of Shāh Ismāʿīl," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10 (1942): 1006a–53a. Quote on p. 1037a (Turkish original).

[73] Quoted in Crone, *Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, 475; and Minorsky, "Poetry of Shāh Ismāʿīl," 1032a (Turkish original).

[74] Ferenc Csirkés, "A Messiah Untamed: Notes on the Philology of Shah Ismāʿīl's Divan," *Iranian Studies* 52 (2019): 339–95.

[75] Quoted in Wheeler Thackston, "The Diwan of Khataʾi: Pictures for the Poetry of Shāh Ismāʿīl," *Asian Art*, no. 4 (1988): 37–63. Quote on p. 57.

[76] Quoted in Minorsky, "Poetry of Shāh Ismāʿīl," 1031a (Turkish original).

> [Ismaʿil] is the pre-eternal light of Muḥammad (*Muḥammad nūrı*)
> as well as [the spirit] of ‘I was a hidden treasure’ (*kuntu kanz-an*)
> Now he has manifested himself to the world wearing a red crown (*qirmizī tāj*)
> His name is Ismā`īl, and he shares the same qualities (*ham ẕāt*) as Amīr al-Mu’minīn.[78]

For Shiʿite theologians, prophecy (*nubuwwat*) and spiritual authority (*wilayat*) were pre-eternal qualities which manifested in the physical, extraordinary bodies of the Prophet’s family; as noted by Bashir, the body of a Shiʿite Imam “represents a concretization of the whole principle of the imamate that mediates God’s presence on earth.”[79] In this way, Ismaʿil’s references to and poetic embodiments of the Imams were in concert with a specific cosmology. Eschatological references to the occulted Twelfth Imam (i.e., the Mahdi) as apocalyptic harbinger, the end of days (*akhir al-zaman*), and the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyamat*) were deliberately chosen as strategies by the Safavid revolutionaries to mobilize the Qizilbash rank and file. As Ismaʿil writes in one verse: “Should my beauty sit cross-legged, groans will burst forth; if [my beauty] stands and sits down, the chaos of the end of time (*fitnah-i ākhir-i zamān*) will burst forth.”[80]

Shah Ismaʿil did indeed stand up, and the Safavid movement burst forth spectacularly. Starting with the fall of Tabriz in 1501, the speed and intensity with which the Safavids spread across the Caucasus, the Iranian Plateau, Iraq, and Khurasan—subjugating and brutalizing major cities like Baku, Erzinjan, Erzerum, Kashan, Isfahan, Yazd, Diyarbakr, Baghdad, Mashhad, Marv, and Herat—must have convinced contemporaries that the end of the world was indeed nigh. However, it was also during this period of 1500–10 that Ismaʿil's world view was being transformed, as the young shah patronized Persian and Arab administrators, jurists, bureaucrats, and literati at the expense of the "old guard" Qizilbash. Key to this development was the introduction of notions of corporeal sovereignty which had been endorsed and nurtured by the Timurids and Aq-Qoyunlu throughout the fifteenth century. Complicating matters for us here is the fact that Ismaʿil did not readily abandon his millenarian Shiʿite discourse and notions of sacred corporeality after assuming a sovereign identity in 1501; in this way, multiple notions of sacrality were now being expressed through the Safavid royal body. It should be noted that the Safavid spiritual bloodline was technically connected with the imperial Aq-Qoyunlu after Junayd's marriage to the sister of Uzun Hasan; as Ahmad al-Qummi noted about Shaykh Haydar, "the lustre of [Aq-Qoyunlu] sovereignty and [Safavid] guidance radiated from his august brow."[81] The mid-to-late-fifteenth-century landscape of ethico-political thought in the Aq-Qoyunlu and Timurid Empires is too broad and complex for a serious review here. However, thanks to the work of scholars like Markiewicz, Binbaş, Melvin-Koushki, and Moin, we have more nuanced appreciations for the interaction of sovereignty, sacrality, and corporeality.[82] Intellectual denizens of the day—

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[77] Quoted in Minorsky, “Poetry of Shāh Ismāʿīl,” 1032a (Turkish original).
[78] Quoted in Minorsky, “Poetry of Shāh Ismāʿīl,” 1038a (Turkish original).
[79] Bashir, “Body,” 89.
[80] Quoted in Minorsky, “Poetry of Shāh Ismāʿīl,” 1035a (Turkish original).

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[81] Quoted in John Woods, *The Aqquylunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 168.

[82] Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*; Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy," in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Islam*, ed. Armando Salvatore, Roberto Tottoli, and Babak Rahimi (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 353–75; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Astrology, Lettrism, Geomancy: The Occult-Scientific Methods of Post-Mongol Islamicate Imperialism," *Medieval History Journal* 19 (2016): 142–50; and Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

philosophers, historians, and chancery stylists like Jalal al-Din Davani, Sharaf al-Din Yazdi, and Husayn Vaʿiz Kashifi—actively incorporated language and ideas in their respective works, which presented kingship in increasingly millenarian and sacred terms. To what extent, we can then ask, did the Safavids seek out and incorporate these shifting cosmologies as the tariqa began its metamorphosis toward imperial dominion (*dawlat-i mahrusah*) under Shah Ismaʿil?

One contemporary text which sheds light on this question is a letter written by Ismaʿil's chancellery in 1509; the addressee is Muhammad Shibani Khan, Uzbek king and harbinger of the Timurids' destruction in Central Asia.[83] Hitherto, chancellery writing (*inshaʾ*) had prioritized Ismaʿil's status as an incarnation of the Mahdi; victory letters (*fath-namah*s) describing his defeats of Husayn Kiya Chulavi at Usta (1504) and ʿAla al-Dawlat Zu al-Qadar at Mardin (1507) reflected the powerful imagery of the Karbala paradigm and the shah's message that his rise to power constituted a reckoning for the descendants of the evil Umayyads. By 1509, however, chancellery priorities had shifted as a result of Ismaʿil's inclusion of former Aq-Qoyunlu administrative families like the Kujajis of Tabriz, the Daylamis of Qazvin, and the Savajis.[84] The letter in question was delivered to the Uzbek court by Shaykh Muhyi al-Din Ahmad Shirazi, known as Shaykhzadah Lahiji, who happened to be the son of a Nurbakhshiyyah scholar named Shams al-Din Muhammad Lahiji who, among other things, had produced a very popular commentary on Shabistari, the *Mafātiḥ al-iʿjāz fī sharḥ Gulshān-i rāz*. It is my contention, based on the contents, internal references, and overall style of the letter, that Shaykhzadah Lahiji was also its author. Lahiji had been an associate with Ismaʿil's first *vakīl* (vicegerent) Najm Masʿud Rasht and was considered "one of the most eminent and able men of his time."[85] His familial proximity to a significant Nurbakhshiyyah scholar in his father portrays Lahiji as an administrator and Shiʿi–Sufi intellectual who was well positioned to represent Shah Ismaʿil in the styles of discourse which had been in vogue in the Turco–Persianate world in the fifteenth century.

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[83] ʿAbd al-Husayn Navaʾi, ed., *Shāh Ismāʿīl Ṣafavī: Majmūʿah-i asnād va mukātibāt-i tārikhī-yi hamrāh bā yāddāshthā-yi tafṣīl* (Tehran: Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran, 1969), 45–49.

[84] Colin Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran: Power, Religion, and Rhetoric* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 28–29.

[85] Iskandar Beg Munshi, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi ʿAbbāsī*, ed. I. Afshar, vol. 1 (Tehran: Muʾassisah-i Intisharat-i Amir Kabir, 2003), 36.

Shaykhzadah Lahiji profiles Shah Ismaʿil as a "manifestation of divine lights" (*ẓuhūr-i ashʿah-i Muḥammadī*) who possesses authority in both the temporal and spiritual worlds (*ayālat-i vilāyat-i ṣūrī va vilāyat-i mamālik-i maʿnavī*).[86] Compellingly, the themes of manifestation, luminescence, and pre-eternality are consistent in this 1509 letter. We read how Ismaʿil emerged from hiding (*az makman*) and how this family of Prophecy and Imamate is now illuminating the world with the signs of the Qurʾanic verses "for God wills to perfect his light" (9:32) and "it is the fire kindled by God which penetrates the heart" (104:6–7).[87] Shaykhzadah Lahiji writes that when God recited the Qurʾanic verse "God mentioned in the Book of Ismaʿil" (19:54), the Safavid shah's "illustrious name" (*ism-i jalīl*) was written on the "pages of the book" (*bar ṣafāyiḥ-i ṣaḥāyif*), a clear reference to the *lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ* (God's book of decrees) as the pre-eternal record of all created beings in the universe. With the pre-eternal divine act of inscribing the word *Ismaʿil*, Lahiji explains, the age of rule by the lords and dominion over the world and humankind has been made forever splendorous.[88] This sovereignty, however, is definitively circumscribed by a Shiʿite eschatological program; on this matter, Lahiji quotes the Amir al-Muʾminin, ʿAli: "All peoples have a reign, and our reign will be at the end of time."[89] Ismaʿil's mandate is the same as the original intention of God (*maqsad-i asli*): to spread the commands of the "saved community" (*firqah-i najiyyah*) to the earthly realm.

Later Safavid historiography indeed confirms corporeal dimensions of Ismaʿil's dispensation as a Sufi master, Shiʿi Imami descendant, and divinely mandated Perso–Islamic ruler. Khwandamir, writing in the early 1520s, narrates how, during the birth of Ismaʿil, his father, Haydar, used his suprasensory abilities to detect "a beam of light shining out and upwards from [Ismaʿil's] forehead which had not been seen since the exalted Imams."[90] Ismaʿil's pre-eternality being expressed in corporeal terms was a popular topos for Safavid historians and chancellery officials. Khwandamir describes how when Haydar saw the "light of authority" (*nūr-i wilāyat*) shining forth from his son's forehead, he knew that God has meant for Ismaʿil's name to be registered (*raqam-zādah*) in "the office of heir-apparent" (*manṣab-i vilāyat-i ʿahd*), and likewise, Hayati Tabrizi notes that Ismaʿil's life had been preordained by God and recorded in the *lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ*.[91] Interestingly, Amir Mahmud b. Khwandamir identifies God's predestination for Ismaʿil a generation earlier. While narrating Junayd's earlier death in 1460 at the hands of the Shirvanshahs, Amir Mahmud adds the following: "It was then that God stitched the royal and imperial robe (*khilʿat-i jahānbānī va kishvaristānī*) of the highest stature and honour for Ismaʿil. He placed it in the 'chest of everything happens at its destined time' (*ṣandūq-i al-umūr marhūnahu bi-awqātihā*). And not a single person who was connected with the Safavid family could fit into that precious robe (*khilʿat-i girān-māya*)."[92]

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[86] Navaʾi, *Shāh Ismāʿīl Ṣafavī*, 46.

[87] Navaʾi, *Shāh Ismāʿīl Ṣafavī*, 46.

[88] Quoted in Navaʾi, *Shāh Ismāʿīl Ṣafavī*, 47.

[89] "*li-kull-i anas dawlat va dawlatnā fī ākhir al-zamān*." Quoted in Navaʾi, *Shāh Ismāʿīl Ṣafavī*, 46.

Medieval Muslim culture, in particular both the Sufi and Shiʿite traditions, makes powerful associations with the image of an Imam or a shaykh bestowing robes and cloaks on his successor. As such, we have an excellent example of how corporeality, in this case represented by Ismaʿil's symbolic royal robe, could be a site where authority (*wilayat*) had multiple valences. The habitus of the cloak/robe clearly extended into the realm of kings, princes, and courtiers, whereby obedience and submission could be expressed in sartorial gestures. Over his career, Shah Ismaʿil distributed innumerable robes of honor, embroidered head-gears (*taj*), and bejeweled belts and swords to new supporters; the semiotic significance of the personal gifting of such royal clothing and accoutrement has been noted by scholars like Finbarr Flood, Stewart Gordon, and Anthony Cutler.[93] Some historians, like Moin, point to a discernible theomimesis at the Abbasid court, and accordingly, a gifted material item associated with the caliph, such as a robe, would "imbue its wearer with sovereign charisma"; such gestures enabled Turkic frontier warlords like Mahmud of Ghazna to "partake of caliphal sacredness."[94] In the Safavid case, such gestures were invariably associated with the Sufi and Shiʿite traditions which saw the transfer of authority and blessing as a process of physical interaction between bestower and recipient. For example, in 1508/9, the armies of Shah Ismaʿil were approaching the city of Baghdad, which was governed by an Aq-Qoyunlu notable named Barik Purnak. Rather than personally mediate Purnak's submission, Ismaʿil sent an envoy with an ensemble of royal artifacts, including a robe and crown. Clearly, devotees and prospective notables understood the potential power of such objects; hearing news of the "coming of the royal dress of honour" (*āmadan-i khilʿat-i khāqānī*), Barik Purnak "hastened" to meet this imperial envoy and affirm his loyalty to the Safavids by donning the livery immediately on the outskirts of Baghdad.[95]

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[90] Ghiyas al-Din Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, ed. Jalal al-Din Humaʾi, vol. 4 (Tehran: Kitabkhana-yi Khayyam, 1954), 428.

[91] Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 428; and Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 200.

[92] Amir Mahmud, *Īrān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl Safavi*, 61; this is repeated word for word in Al-Qummi, *Khulāṣat al-tavārīkh*, 36.

Very recently, Ali Anooshahr has critiqued the application of Kantorowicz's model of embodied sovereignty to the early modern Middle East, arguing that any discursive association of kingship with the body was simply symbolic.[96] However, Nicolas Vatin, inspired by the work of Jean-Paul Roux (*La mort chez les peuples altaïques anciens*

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[93] Flood, *Objects of Translation*, 77–78; Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honour: The Medieval World of Investiture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); and Anthony Cutler, "The Emperor's Old Clothes: Actual and Virtual Vesting and the Transmission of Power in Byzantium and Islam," in *Byzance et le monde* ex*térieur*, ed. M. Balard and J. M. Spieser (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2005), 195–210.

[94] Moin, "Sovereign Violence," 472–73.

[95] Hasan Rumlu, *Aḥsan al-tavārīkh*, ed. ʿAbd al-Husayn Navaʾi (Tehran: Intisharat-i Babak, 1978), 136.

[96] Ali Anooshahr, "The Body Politic and Rise of the Safavids," in *Safavid Persia in the Age of Empires*, vol. 10, *The Idea of Iran Series*, ed. C. Melville (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021), 13–28. Reference on p. 23.

et médiévaux, 1963), argues quite successfully for the Ottoman context that subjects in Istanbul and elsewhere were genuinely in distress at the prospect of a sultan's death, or worse, during a prolonged period when there was no living sultan on the throne.[97] There is no shortage of incidents in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries where Ottoman administrators waited to announce a sultan's death until everything had been arranged at the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul for fear of societal unrest.[98] In Vatin's estimation, sufficient evidence exists to suggest that the sultan's physical presence, more specifically his actual body, was widely accepted as fundamental to the notion of imperium itself; thus, proximity to or, better yet, contact with the Ottoman sultan was considered a significant boon or a mark of fortune. These characteristics are applicable to the Safavids, and we could reasonably argue that Ismaʿil and his ancestors, on account of their history and pedigree as a heterodox ʿAlid Shiʿite movement, went beyond the idea of the body politic as a rhetorical tradition; in the eyes of their supporters, the bodies of Ismaʿil and his ancestors were imbued with *wilayat* at multiple levels.

Iskandar Beg Munshi, after narrating the death of Shaykh Junayd in Shirvan, notes how there were some discrepancies as to the location of his mausoleum, but describes how "that noble space" (*ān maqām-i sharīf*), which was "imbued with lights of favour and mercy" (*mahbiṭ-i anvār-i fay zva raḥmat*)," is now a "space of circumambulation (as in Mecca) for the people of that region (*maṭāf-i mardum-i ān vilāyat*)."[99] Likewise, Ahmad al-Qummi narrates how the "pure body" (*jasad-i muṭahhir*) of Haydar was buried in the environs of Tabarasan (we will be addressing the history of his decapitation later).[100] However, Iskandar Beg adds the observation that Shah Ismaʿil located this grave during his second campaign in Shirvan (ca. 1509–10) and had his father's body exhumed and relocated to Ardabil; Hasan Rumlu states that a group of elite Qizilbash (*zumrah-i khwāṣṣ*) were tasked with this duty and placed "the royal body of that Excellency onto a palanquin and buried him in the mausoleum of his great ancestors."[101] It was also observed that despite being buried for twenty-one years, Haydar's limbs had magically not yet decayed.[102]

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[97] Nicolas Vatin, "Le corps du sultan ottoman," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Mediterranée* 113–14 (2006): 213–27, journals.openedition.org/remmm/2981.

[98] Vatin, "Corps du sultan ottoman."

[99] Iskandar Beg Munshi, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi ʿAbbāsī*, 18.

[100] Al-Qummi, *Khulāṣat al-tavārīkh*, 40.

In 1505, Shah Ismaʿil visited the dilapidated shrine Imamzadah Sahl b. ʿAli near the city of Hamadan. He decreed that the basic structure be repaired, while also ordering architects and engineers to erect a dome (*gunbad*) over the tomb itself. This "soul-exalting edifice" (*binā'-i rūḥ-i azfā*) was built quickly, but it was the "footprint of the emperor" (*asar-i muqaddam-i pādshāh*) near the shrine which manifested suddenly a fresh spring of sweet water, a miracle akin to the holy well of Zamzam, which sprung at the arrival of Ishmael, son of the Patriarch Abraham, in ancient Mecca.[103] This particular story is interesting in that it reflects the importance of spaces where a physical impression (i.e., footprints) of a saintly body could be found. Compared with medieval Christian culture, in Muslim society relics and reliquaries are relatively absent,[104] but in their place, we see the emergence of organized worship of localized "traces" (*ās̱ār*) of sanctity—most notably footprints, but also handprints—indicating where a sacred figure once passed and the instant "sacralization of that space."[105] The additional motif here of a flourishing spring in proximity to a shrine is not new; there are numerous classical traditions and poetry in Arabic about water and irrigation being associated with the shrine of Husayn and the martyrs in Karbala.[106] As al-Sharif al-Murtaza wrote in the early eleventh century about the graves of the martyrs at Karbala, "May God irrigate [their] grave / With flowing sweet water."[107]

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[101] "*jasad-i sharīf-i ān ḥazrat-rā az khāk bīrūn āvardah bi miḥaffat nahādand va bih maqbarah-i ābā-yi ʿuẓẓām-ash dafn kardand*." Rumlu, *Aḥsan al-tavārīkh*, 144.

[102] Rumlu, *Aḥsan al-tavārīkh*, 145.

[103] Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 482–83.

[104] Josef Meri, "Relics of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam," *Past and Present*, no. S5 (2010): 97–120. Reference on p. 99.

[105] Michel Boivin, "The Polyvalent Qadamgāh Imām ʿAlī in Hyderabad, Sindh: A Preliminary Study in Relics, Political Power, and Community Setup," *Journal of Material Cultures in the Muslim World* 1 (2020): 248–67. Quotes on pp. 248–49.

[106] Khalid A. Sindawi, "The Cult of the Euphrates and Its Significance among the Imāmī Shiʿa," *Der Islam* 81 (2004): 249–69.

[107] Quoted in Khalid A. Sindawi, "Visit to the Tomb of Al-Husayn b. ʿAli in Shiite Poetry: First to Fifth Centuries A.H. (8th-11th Centuries)," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37 (2006): 230–58. Quote on pp. 253–54.

Disembodiments, 1450–1510: Commemoration and Punition

Azfar Moin's section "Making the Body of Iran Safavid" in *The Millennial Sovereign* helps us to navigate the interplay of power, violence, ritual, and corporeality during the reign of Ismaʿil; as he states, "[The] bodily rituals used to uphold Shāh Ismaʿil's sovereignty can be used to make sense of the larger pattern of social accommodation and annihilation that occurred in his reign."[108] The study of trauma and the body comprises a significant literature, initially framed by Foucault but expanded on by many others, which focuses on the interplay of the state, spectacle, and violence against the body. While much of this literature operates in historical European milieus (Scarry, Merback),[109] the work of scholars like Christian Lange, Maribel Fierro, István Kristó-Nagy, and Robert Gleave about the classical and medieval Muslim world is especially relevant.[110] In particular, Lange's study of public punishment and shifts in Islamic societal norms is valuable here;[111] Safavid authorities between 1500 and 1510 inflicted unspeakable violence against potential rivals and opponents as a defense of not just the empire, but also the very body of the Safavid "sacro-shah." It should be noted that this study does not examine the early state under Ismaʿil regarding its implementation of Shiʿite interpretations of the shariʿa and the pursuit and legal prosecution of its transgressors; the rationale for state violence in early Safavid Iran (until 1510) was based less on juridical frameworks and more on enforcing submission and pursuing retribution for perceived and imagined violations of both the Safavid tariqa itself and the Shiʿite historical community. The collectivized memories of ʿAlid groups and Twelver Shiʿites and how they regarded corporeal violence against the Imams and their supporters plays a significant role here. However, while the ritualized violence of Ismaʿil and his ancestors was to some extent a response to this discursive set of narratives and memories, we are curious about how corporeal punishment, and specifically the annihilation of the body in public spaces, is evidence of an "obsessive display of agency" which, in turn, speaks to what Scarry calls a "fiction of power."[112] In this way, the disassembly and atomization of these bodies—"a body effaced reduced to dust and thrown to the winds, a body destroyed by the infinite power of the sovereign"[113]—makes everyone aware of the unrestrained power of the king and thus reveals to the public "the truth of the ruler's claim to legitimacy."[114]

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[108] Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 80.

[109] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); and M. B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[110] Lange and Fierro, *Public Violence in Islamic Societies*; and Robert Gleave and István Kristó-Nagy, ed., *Violence in Islamic Thought*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016–20).

[111] Christian Lange, *Justice, Punishment, and Medieval Muslim Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

One of the first significant acts of disembodiment *against* the Safavid family was the decapitation of Junayd in 1460 by the Shirvanshahs. Interestingly, many Safavid sources make no mention of this—he simply "sipped from the cup of martyrdom" (*sharbat-i shahādat chashīd*)—and again, we must turn to Khunji-Isfahani for more details. He narrates how Shirvanshahi soldiers captured the shaykh, cut his head off, and then "placed the head of Junayd in a vessel before [the Shirvanshah ruler] (*sar-i Shaykh Junayd* [. . .] *dar ṭashtī pīsh-i amīr kashīdand*)." Twenty-eight years later, his son Haydar suffered similar indignities: "This carrion [i.e., skull] stuffed with straw" was displayed for a number of days and then sent to his mother.[115] Fascinatingly, Khunji-Isfahani embellishes these two decapitation narratives with the following quote of Arabic prose: "And see that their bodies are separated from their heads and their heads are filled with blood like goblets. Their gravediggers are the beaks of crows and their pilgrims are vultures and eagles. The hands of the north and west scatter dust over them and point out to them the traces of the blood in the evening and the morning."[116]

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[112] Scarry, *Body in Pain*, 18, 27–28.

[113] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 48.

[114] Lange, *Justice*, 9.

[115] Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 294.

[116] "*Fahā ajsādahum manzzʿat min al-ru'ūs wa ru'ūsuhum min al-dimā' matraʿ ka-al-ku'ūs*

Combined with two further quatrains (*rubaʾi*), one in Arabic and the other in Persian, about the eschatological impact and profound alienation which comes with decollation, this commentary by Khunji-Isfahani on the corporeal fates of Junayd and Haydar is no accident. Muslim doctrine and funerary culture are clear: the *complete* corpse must be properly prepared and buried (*tajhīz va takfīn*) for the soul to properly ascend to heaven. Moreover, jurists are generally in agreement that specific body parts must never be mutilated, such as the head, face, and genitals.[117] A medieval audience reading this particular text, regardless of confessional orientation, would have been uncomfortable, and likely compared it with the narrative of Karbala and the fate of the "head of Husayn" (*raʾs al-Husayn*). Khunji-Isfahani's description of Junayd's head in the Shirvanshah's royal dish (*ṭashtī*) is certainly reminiscent of Yazid's display of Husayn's on a gold plate in Damascus; Yazid taunted and teased Husayn's sister Zaynab before ordering a public procession with the skull on display.[118] Interestingly, at no point in his overall treatment of the Safavid order does Khunji-Isfahani make reference to their ʿAlid orientations or their genealogical claims to the Imamate; their beliefs are simply labeled as heretical and extreme. Given the noted "confessional ambiguity" of the fifteenth-century Perso–Turkoman world, it is possible that Khunji-Isfahani was hoping to celebrate the corporeal degradation of Junayd and Haydar without overtly offending Shiʿite sensibilities at the Aq-Qoyunlu court with explicit reference to the ubiquitous story of *raʾs al-Husayn*. As scholars like De Smet, Mulder, Crow, and Parsapajouh have noted, however, the cult of Husayn's head was especially powerful in the medieval Islamic world, especially so in Syria and Iraq following the Crusades in the thirteenth

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ḥaffārahum mināqīr al-gharyān wa zuwārahum al-rakhamu wa al-ʿuqbān yusiff ʿalayhum al-ʿasār āyadi al-shamāl wa al-dabūr wa yanum ʿalayhum ṭulūl al-damāʾ fī al-ʿashāyā wa al-bukūr." I would like to thank Theo Beers for his assistance with this particular translation. Khunji-Isfahani, *Tārīkh-i ʿālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, 295.

[117] Lange and Fierro, "Introduction," 7.

[118] Daniel De Smet, "La translation du *Raʾs al-Husayn* au Caire Fatimide," in *Proceedings of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 1992, 1993, and 1994*, ed. D. De Smet and U. Vermeulen, vol. 2, *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk Eras* (Leuven: Peeters Publishing, 1995), 29–44. Reference on p. 31.

and fourteenth centuries; indeed, the multiple locations of the head of Husayn and the body parts of the martyrs of Karbala led to different dynasties (Ayyubid, Fatimid) competing with one another as to whether the "real" head of Husayn was in Cairo, Damascus, or Karbala.[119]

Not surprisingly, the motif of saintly skulls was also extended to the Safavid leadership. Writing some decades later in 1550, Hayati Tabrizi describes how the "glorious head" (*sar-i mubārak*) of Haydar was, like his father, mounted on the door of the gates of Tabriz, but that it was secretly taken down in the night by a carpet seller named Mawlana Sufi-Kalibari who then buried it in the ʿAskariyyah neighborhood of Tabriz.[120] He specifically interred this blessed head underneath a stone which had a footprint (*as̱ar-i pāy*) of the Prophet Muhammad for protection; according to Hayati Tabrizi, this stone was from Jerusalem—suggesting that the footprint was from the site of Muhammad's ascent to heaven—and had been brought to Tabriz by the mother of Ur Khan, allegedly a brother to Mahmud Ghaznavi.[121] To this day (i.e., 1550), the historian states that this Tabrizi neighborhood is known as "Qadam-gāh." Later, during the reign of Ismaʿil, the head and body were disinterred from their respective locations and brought to Ardabil, where they were joined and reburied. However, Hayati Tabrizi does relate how a group of Qizilbash asked if they could see this "blessed head" and have it removed from Ardabil; at this time, he says, the head and body are not together, and it is on account of this special request.[122]

After his "manifestation" in 1500, Ismaʿil's first order of business was to address the memory of these particularly heinous crimes by the Shirvanshahs against his father and grandfather. Surrounded by thousands of Qizilbash acolytes who were driven by the desire to inflict revenge on the collective behalf of his family and the Imams, the Safavids met the Shirvanshahs. ʿAbdi Beg Shirazi, writing years later, cloaks the battle in Karbalian language and imagery: "The army of Farrukh Yasār equalled the number [i.e., twenty thousand] of those vile ones who had massacred Ḥusayn at Karbala; the sword of ʿAlī [Ẕū al-Faqār] had swung down on Farrukh Yasār, a descendant of Yazīd, that Umayyad caliph who had ordered the slaughter at Karbala. They made the blood of the Shīrvānīs flow in rivers, and heads and body parts rose in waves and foam."[123]

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[119] De Smet, "La translation du *Raʾs al-Husayn*"; Mulder, *Shrines of the ʿAlids in Medieval Syria*; D. K. Crow, "Death of al-Husayn b. ʿAli"; Parsapajouh, "La châsse de l'Imam Husayn"; and Parsapajouh, "Topography of Corporal Relics."

[120] Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 179.

[121] Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 179.

[122] Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 179.

The Safavid chronicler Hasan Beg Rumlu describes how Farrukh Yasar was pursued and killed by Safavid soldiers. Unaware of his identity, the Safavid troops carried back his decapitated head and his horse as trophies, only to learn from Shirvani prisoners that they were, in fact, carrying the head of the Shirvanshah. Immediately, the Safavid soldiers returned to the site and found his remains so they could "join his head again to the body" (*tark bar tārik mī-dūkht*) and burn him.[124] Fascinatingly, the Safavids did not put Farrukh Yasar's head on elaborate display to reciprocate for past crimes. Their response was much more direct and final: atomization and dispersal to the winds. It was one of Ismaʿil's trusted lieutenants, Khulafa Beg, who was given detailed instructions as to what to do next: after Khulafa Beg captured and looted the Shirvanshahi palace in Baku, Khwandamir describes how he located a sectioned cemetery and opened the "graves of some of the kings of that region" (*qubūr-i baʿzi az mulūk-i ān diyār*). Khulafa Beg then "burned their rotting bones with the fire of vengeance" while also smashing their mausoleums to pieces.[125] Indeed, this would be the beginning of a series of destructive acts against targeted funerary spaces. While Safavid chronicles attribute such activities to Ismaʿil's desire to avenge the Karbala-like martyrdoms of his father and grandfather, Calmard and Aubin point out the discernible influence of ancient Altaic practices.[126] After assuming the throne in 1501, Ismaʿil publicly repudiated the Aq-Qoyunlu and announced a new dispensation of authority in the name of the Safavid family; however, he was still technically a grandson of Uzun Hasan, and thus competing genealogically with the Bayandur clan. One of his first overt acts as sovereign was to order that the tombs of the Aq-Qoyunlu Bayandur clan be dug up and destroyed while ensuring that every pregnant Bayandur princess be located and executed.[127] The shrines of the famous legal Sunni scholar Abu Hanifa and Sufi shaykh ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Gilani were torn open by Safavid Qizilbash after they entered Baghdad in 1508; their bones were exhumed and incinerated.[128] One source in the sixteenth century describes how the Safavids "crushed all the *silsila*s (Sufi orders); the graves of their ancestors were destroyed, not to mention what befell their successors."[129] Likewise, in 1510, the bodies of two Kurdish tribal chiefs were burnt to ashes in the main square of Bitlis by the Qizilbash governor.[130]

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[123] Shirazi, *Takmilat al-akhbār*, 38.

[124] Rumlu, *Aḥsan al-tavārīkh*, 64.

[125] "*istikhwān-i pūsīdah-i īshān-rā bi-ātash-i intiqām bi-sūkht*." Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 461–62.

[126] Calmard, "Les rituels shiites et le pouvoir," 117; and Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," 90.

Ismaʿil's acts of violence against live bodies were committed along with the corporeal erasure and disempowerment of deceased ones. What we discover here is a sociopolitical culture, shaped to some extent by nomadic Turco–Mongolian traditions, which understood that if authority could be corporealized, the act of *decorporealizing* could be equally powerful.[131] Evidence from Safavid chronicles corroborates this notion that Ismaʿil and his followers were intent on delegitimizing particular familial dynasties on an atomistic level; rather than simply killing rival kings, they practiced systematic exhumation and incineration of bodily remains to remove any vestiges of *wilayat*. However, it should be noted that there are non-Altaic precedents for corporeal incineration. Andrew Marsham has noted that Umayyad forces were known to disinter and burn the bodies of ʿAlid martyrs, while revolutionaries were known to do the same to the bodies of caliphs; indeed, the punitive burning of executed corpses is well documented in late antiquity in the Christian Levant, and that it carried over into the Umayyad period, where the Umayyads used this practice to counter the "charismatic power of Alid rebels to survive beyond the grave."[132]

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[127] Woods, *Aqquylunlu*, 168.

[128] Elke Niewöhner-Eberhard, "Machtpolitische Aspekte des osmanisch-safawidischen Kampfes um Bagdad im 16/17. Jahrhundert," *Turcica* 6 (1975): 103–27. Reference on p. 116.

[129] Moin, "Sovereign Violence," 489; and Said Arjomand, "Religious Extremism (*ghuluww*), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran, 1501-1722," *Journal of Asian History* 15 (1981): 1–35, quote on p. 10.

[130] Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," 45; and Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 83.

[131] Jean-Paul Roux, *La mort chez les peuples altaïques anciens et médiévaux d'aprés les documents écrits* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1963).

Arguably one of the most infamous cases of corporeal violence and immolation took place in the spring and summer of 1504, as Shah Ismaʿil was conquering the swath of the Iranian Plateau which runs east–west along the southern reaches of the Alborz Mountains. Here, he besieged and conquered the cities of Firuzkuh, Gul-i Khandan, and Usta to eliminate the threat of Husayn Kiya Chulavi, who represented the Afrasiyab Dynasty, which had historically ruled over eastern Gilan and Mazandaran and had seized upon the recent collapse of the Aq-Qoyunlu to extend their sovereignty into central Iran.[133] The Afrasiyab line was accordingly deemed a threat by the Safavids, and Husayn Kiya Chulavi was captured after the successful siege of Usta. The shah had Husayn imprisoned in a cage which was then transported with the royal camp as it crisscrossed the Iranian Plateau. Meanwhile, Husayn Chulavi's wife, Tajlu Begum, an Aq-Qoyunlu princess, was installed in the shah's harem, where she became his "favorite" wife and the mother of the future shah Tahmasp and his brother Bahram; submission and eradication of rival lines could also involve aggressive, proprietary acts of sexual dominance. Khwandamir reports that after several months, Husayn Kiya died of "psychological and other disorders," but Jean Aubin suggests that he committed suicide after systematic torture;[134] Hayati Tabrizi mentions that he was killed right after the taking of Usta.[135] It was then that Ismaʿil apparently commanded his Qizilbash soldiers to cook and eat two senior Aq-Qoyunlu family members who had been captured, Murad Beg Jahanshahlu and Sayaltamash Beg, until "there was not a trace of meat or bone."[136] Shahzad Bashir has done the most extensive work on this and other episodes of alleged cannibalism, but he does suggest in a footnote the possibility that Murad Beg Jahanshahlu may have been a distant claimant to Aq-Qoyunlu sovereignty.[137] There are precedents for the caging, bestializing, and parading (*tashhir*) of vanquished opponents. A century earlier, Timur imprisoned the vanquished Ottoman sultan, Bayazid I, after he defeated the Ottomans at the Battle of Ankara in 1402, although this has been recently contested as an elaborate mischaracterization of the event.[138] Maribel Fierro has analyzed the Fatimid defeat of a Berber rebel named Abu Yazid in 947 who was initially caged, his skin flayed off, and his body split into two; the mutilated corpse was paraded through the streets and alleys of Kairouan for weeks. For Fierro, the timing of this was no accident as the defeat and decorporealization of Abu Yazid was celebrated as "a proof of the legitimacy of the Fatimid dynasty."[139]

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[132] Andrew Marsham, "Attitudes in the Use of Fire in Executions in Late Antiquity and Early Islam: The Burning of Heretics and Rebels in Late Umayyad Iraq," in *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Qur'an to the Mongols*, ed. I. Kristó-Nagy and R. Gleave (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 106–27. Quote on p. 122.

[133] Mitchell, *Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran*, 25.

[134] Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 478; and Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," 45.

[135] Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 206, 310.

Husayn Kiya's caging "like a bird"[140] and public profiling were deliberate acts of dehumanization wherein Shah Isma῾il, five years out of his coronation, was using the body as an edifying discourse; mutilation and disfigurement were designed as mnemonic strategies to underscore the legitimacy of the new Safavid state to rivals and the public alike.[141] At some point during this summer of cages and cannibalism, Muhammad Karrah, a notable from Luristan who had been based in Yazd, was likewise captured, fettered, and placed in an iron cage. Fascinatingly, Hayati Tabrizi casts new light on this individual, stating that one notable in Yazd had proclaimed him to be the Mahdi of the age, and as such, a direct threat to Ismaʿil's own chiliastic claims.[142] According to Hasan Beg Rumlu, his body "was rubbed with honey in order that great agony would come to this ignorant one from the stinging of wasps."[143] He stayed in this condition for a few days until the royal camp decided to relocate north to the city of Isfahan for the winter season in January of 1505. They arranged the two cages—one containing the rotting corpse of Husayn Kiya Chulavi, the other holding the wretched, wasp-stung Muhammad Karrah—in the middle of the hippodrome of Isfahan; such civic spaces were often used for entertainment and public executions. Firewood was collected and the two princely bodies were immolated in the presence of the Safavid court, which was hosting an Ottoman ambassadorial retinue recently sent by Bayazid II (r. 1481–1512). It is likely that Shah Ismaʿil had received news at some point in 1504 of this Ottoman envoy's arrival in the next few months, and that this showcase was, in fact, part of a planned and orchestrated display. Timur's infamous caging of Bayazid Yıldırım ("Bayazid the Thunderbolt") a century earlier may have been an inspiration for this particular courtly entertainment; indeed, while describing the public execution and immolation, Khwandamir refers to the reigning sultan as "Bāyazīd Ildïrïm" and describes how the Ottoman ambassador fled immediately back to Istanbul trembling in fear.[144]

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[136] Quoted in Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," 45. See also Shirazi, *Takmilat al-akhbār*, 43; Budaq Qazvini, *Javāhir al-akhbār*, ed. M. Bahramnezhad (Tehran: Miras Maktub, 2000), 122; and Mitchell, *Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran*, 25.

[137] Bashir, "Shāh Ismā῾īl and the Qizilbāsh," 239n17.

[138] Marcus Milwright and Evanthia Baboula, "Bayezid's Cage: A Re-examination of a Venerable Academic Controversy," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, no. 3 (2011): 239–60.

[139] Maribel Fierro, "Emulating Abraham: The Fatimid al-Qa᾿im and the Umayyad ῾Abd al-Rahman III," in Lange and Fierro, *Public Violence in Islamic Societies*, 130–55. Quote on p. 139.

[140] Iskandar Beg Munshi, *Tārīkh-i ῾ālam-ārā-yi ῾Abbāsī*, 30.

[141] For more on this idea of the display of violence and the state, see Fernando Rodríguez Mediano, "Justice, Crime and Punishment in 10th/16th Century Morocco," in Lange and Fierro, *Public Violence in Islamic Societies*, 179–200. Reference on pp. 180–81.

In addition to atomizing royal and saintly bodies, decollation was a popular practice and an effective symbolic tool in the Safavid repertoire. When faced with a rebellion from the Turkoman Zu al-Qadar based in Diyar Bakr in northern Syria, Ismaʿil ordered his chief military commander, Muhammad Beg Ustajlu, to eradicate them. The Zu al-Qadar local king, named ʿAla al-Dawla, sent his son Qasim at the head of an army to repel the Safavid force, but he was defeated, killed, and decapitated; his skull, along with many others, was sent to the shah's winter camp based in the city of Khoy.[145] ʿAla al-Dawla was so enraged that he dispatched his two other sons, Shahrukh and Ahmad Beg, but they too were defeated and decapitated; their skulls were also delivered to the shah's camp, which had moved on to the city of Hamadan. According to Hasan Beg Rumlu, ʿAla al-Dawla wept openly at the loss of his three sons and donned a coarse black cloak (*namad-i siyāh pūshīd*).[146] What Safavid sources do not tell us, however, is that two of ʿAla al-Dawla's grandchildren were also captured during this battle; they were allegedly killed, placed on hot, coal-like kabobs, and eaten with great eagerness by the Qizilbash.[147] This was soon followed by the killing of the last surviving Aq-Qoyunlu prince, Sultan Murad, by the Safavid governor Adrafah Qarachah Sultan Qajar. With the dispatching of Murad's skull along with his ring to the royal court, "the sultans of the Āq-Qoyūnlū came to an end," and at this juncture, Hasan Beg Rumlu lists every single Aq-Qoyunlu king in his chronicle to mark the conclusion of their reign of 101 years.[148]

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[142] Hayati Tabrizi, *Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, 319–20.

[143] Rumlu, *Aḥsan al-tavārīkh*, 113.

[144] Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 479.

Probably the most famous act of decollation took place in 1510 with the defeat of the Uzbek ruler, Muhammad Shibani Khan; he was trampled under horses' hooves while fighting Ismaʿil's army near Marv. News of the Uzbek's death reached the shah's camp, and Ismaʿil immediately ordered his royal servants to diligently comb the battlefield until they found his body "suffocated beneath so many rotting corpses."[149] Amir Mahmud, writing ca. 1550, provides an ensuing account of shocking cannibalism,[150] but Bashir casts doubt on this particular report, and points out how Iskandar Beg and others reported that Shibani Khan had, in fact, been dismembered and dispatched to different parts of the empire.[151] This segmenting and bodily dislocation is interesting in light of the previous acts of corporeal immolation against Aq-Qoyunlu royals and notables. Shah Ismaʿil may have been underwhelmed by the Uzbeks' lineage and claim to authority; in one letter to the Mamluks, Ismaʿil dismisses Shibani Khan as being "a branch from the impious Chingizid tree."[152] A branch of this body, a hand, was sent to a local king in the nearby province of Mazandaran, named Aqa Rustam, who had one year earlier expressed his loyalty to the Uzbeks. He had claimed that "his hand was on the skirt" of Shibani Khan, a common expression of fealty in medieval Persian. Ismaʿil arranged for one of his courtiers to amputate one of the Uzbek's hands, deliver it to Mazandaran, and present it to Aqa Rustam; the prince was so frightened that he took with fever and died three days later in a state of complete mental collapse.[153]

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[145] Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 489–90.

[146] Rumlu, *Aḥsan al-tavārīkh*, 140.

[147] Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," 46.

[148] Rumlu, *Aḥsan al-tavārīkh*, 198.

[149] Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 513.

[150] Amir Mahmud, *Īrān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl Ṣafavī*, 134; and Bashir, "Shāh Ismāʿīl and the Qizilbāsh," 243–44.

[151] Bashir, "Shāh Ismāʿīl and the Qizilbāsh," 245.

As regards the motif of decapitation, Safavid sources all agree that Shibani Khan's skull was hollowed out, plated in gold, bejewelled, and then used as a goblet (*qadḥī*) for drinking sessions (*suḥbat-i sharāb*).[154] Khwandamir caustically adds: "[Shibani Khan's] head had been so swelled with pride that it was not worthy of a crown."[155] When Shah Ismaʿil met a local religious notable by the name of Khwajah Mahmud Surkh and brandished his new drinking vessel, the *khwajah* replied: "There is still dominion in this head, and thus you have imperium in your hand."[156] Aubin points to a Turco–Mongol provenance regarding the use of skulls in such ways, and of course, the Altaic culture of viewing khans as sovereignty embodied is also worth noting here.[157] Some months later, in January 1511, a Safavid embassy arrived at the Mamluk court in Cairo; this goblet, along with other gifts, was presented to the Mamluk Sultan al-Ghawri, while the accompanying official letter contained an Arabic quatrain: "Our wine is the blood of our enemies / And our cup is the skull of a head."[158]

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[152] "*shaʻbah-ʻi az dirakht-i kufr-i Chingīzkhānī*." Quoted in Navaʾi, *Shāh Ismāʿīl Ṣafavī*, 94.

[153] Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 520.

[154] Amir Mahmud, *Īrān dar rūzgār-i Shāh Ismāʿīl Ṣafavī*, 135.

[155] Khwandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 513.

[156] "*hunūz dar īn sar dawlat ast kih hamchū tū pādshāhī dar dast dārad*." Quoted in Budaq Qazvini, *Javāhir al-akhbār*, 128.

[157] Aubin, "L'avènement des Safavides reconsidéré," 46.

[158] Quoted in Mitchell, *Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran*, 37–38.

Conclusion

The themes of embodiment and disembodiment continued to be important in the Safavid world after 1510. The sacrality of the shahs' sovereignty would become more modeled on the contemporary discourse which was shaping the post-Timurid world in the Ottoman west and the Mughal east, and thus, we see a distancing from the heterodox landscape of divine incarnations and reincarnations. This is not to deny the importance of Sufism and the strategic use of magic and the occult in the political world; as Moin, Binbaş, Melvin-Koushki, and others have argued, the notions of mysticism and millennialism circulating in the Timurid world were the very building blocks of Safavid and Mughal concepts of sovereignty from the sixteenth century onward.[159] However, the Safavids also included their status as descendants and defenders of the Shiʿite Imams, and this was an assignation that Ismaʿil's successors endorsed with firm and sincere confidence. As the Safavid Empire turned away from its Qizilbash roots, certain ideas associated with Qizilbash piety went by the wayside. However, vestiges of the "old world" continued to play a role well into the seventeenth century, especially with respect to ritual punishment and the body of the believer, as A. H. Morton has discussed.[160]

Likewise, the scale, intensity, and frequency of spectacular disembodiment (decapitations, atomization of bodily remains, etc.) seems to have lessened after 1510. This is not to imply that the state was somehow less inclined toward the idea of extreme punishment; the reigns of Tahmasp, Ismaʿil II, and ʿAbbas had their fair share of gruesome public executions in their attempts to use bodily violence to supplement their respective claims to authority. However, one significant difference between Ismaʿil's early rule and subsequent periods is the fact that from 1510 onward, we see an increasingly large and better-established culture of Shiʿi Imami legal scholarship. Arabic-speaking Shiʿi legal scholars, such as al-Karaki, answered the Safavid call and arrived in Iran from Jabal ʿAmal to join indigenous Shiʿite notables, such as the Marʿashi sayyids of Mazandaran and Khurasan, in creating a relatively robust juridical culture in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iran. The proximity of this emerging group of legal scholars with the Safavid court and its promotion of specific legal prohibitions of disembodiment and/or immolation of bodily remains may certainly have played a role.

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[159] Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*; Evrim Binbaş, "Condominial Sovereignty and Condominial Messianism in the Timurid Empire: Historiographical and Numismatic Evidence," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61 (2018): 177–202; and Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire."

[160] A. H. Morton, "The Chub-i ṭarīq and Qizilbash Ritual in Safavid Persia," in Calmard, *Études Safavides*, 225–45.

Indeed, the "Shiʿitizing" of Iran through institutions of orthodoxy like the Imami juridical class reflected a competition of cosmologies in the late medieval Turco–Persianate world. Shah Ismaʿil's atomization of the bodies of his rivals—technically an unlawful (*haram*) act in the eyes of Muslim jurists—is more often than not attributed to ancient Central Asian belief systems and their revival under the Mongols and Timur and his successors. Similar to the annihilation of bodily remains, the practice of using skulls for libation has been connected by Aubin to "archaic" Turco–Mongol culture; however, we note that the previously mentioned poem in Arabic ("Our wine is the blood of our enemies / And our cup is the skull of a head") is, in fact, attributed to ʿAli ibn Abu Talib, and we are forced to consider the possibility that what we see here is the fusion of traditions from both Altaic and Arabo–Islamic backgrounds. It is worth noting that legends and stories circulated in medieval Islamic culture about animated, decapitated skulls. The aforementioned tradition of *raʾs al-Husayn* was almost certainly aligned with the legend of St. John the Baptist (Yahya); De Smet argues for an important connection between the two, stating that the presumed presence of Husayn's head in the Great Mosque in Damascus is explained by its close association with the head of Yahya b. al-Zakariya, who Twelver Shiʿites consider to be not only an announcer of Jesus's divinity but also of the pre-eternality of the Imamate.[161] There is also the tradition of the *Jumjumah namah* by Farid al-Din ʿAttar, a poetic recounting of a much older, post-biblical legend about Jesus discovering a skull and bringing it back to life. The skull tells the tale that he had once been a vain and worldly king who had refused the prophetic warnings of Elijah and was cast, *sans tête*, into hell. This was a popular parable among Turco–Mongol converts to Islam and was later translated into Khwarazmian and Azeri Turkish.[162] In this regard, an excellent site of intersection between these two cosmologies—one Arabo–Islamic, the other Turco–Mongolian—is the shrine of Shah-i Zindah (The Living King) in Samarqand. Qusam ibn ʿAbbas, who was a cousin of the Prophet, traveled with Arab armies to Soghdiana to preach Islam. He was beheaded by hostile locals in the city of Samarqand, but local legend held that the prophet Khizr appeared to assist the martyr. Qusam ibn ʿAbbas descended, head in his hands, into a well where he dwells for eternity in an underground palace. The sanctity of the well was attributed to the Prophetic figure Khizr and the "Fountain of Life," but it is likely that this also had been a site of great importance in pre-Islamic Soghdian culture.[163] This shrine became the basis for an extensive necropolis in Samarqand from the thirteenth century onward. In fact, Ibn Battuta describes the complex at length and how the Mongols not only protected the site during their first invasions, but also contributed financially to the tomb's maintenance and upkeep. It is the "Tatars" who visit the shrine of this decapitated saint to regularly "make large votive offerings to it, bringing to it cattle, sheep, dirhams, and dinars."[164]

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[161] De Smet, "La translation du *Raʾs al-Husayn*," 32.

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[162] Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din ʿAttar*, trans. J. O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 103; Emmanouela Grypeou, "Talking Skulls: On Some Personal Accounts of Hell and Their Place in Apocalyptic Literature," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum/Journal of Ancient Christianity* 20 (2016): 109–26; and Mitchell, *Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran*, 38.

[163] For the historical development of this site, see Maria Adelaide Lala Comneno, "De la Samarcande pré-mongole à la Samarcande Timouride," *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Center* 1–2 (1997–99): 152–59.

[164] Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325-1354*, vol. III, ed. H. A. R. Gibb (London: Hakluyt Society, 1958), 567–68.

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