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## The Gharib Shah Rebellion of 1629

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### Abstract

The Gharib Shah Rebellion erupted in Gilan in 1629, shortly after the death of Shah ‘Abbas I and the ascension of Shah Safi I to the throne. A close engagement with Gilani chronicles reveals the uprising was motivated by anti-Safavid sentiment and a desire to restore autonomous rule in Gilan. The Gharib Shah Rebellion is best understood in the context of the series of post-conquest rebellions in Gilan, which had both political and economic motivations. It marked the final attempt to regain autonomy from the Safavids, nearly forty years after their conquest of the region. While messianism was not completely absent in Gilan in this period, it was not a factor in this rebellion and its role, in general, has been over-emphasized.

**Keywords:** Safavid; Gilan; Safavid Uprisings; Gharib Shah; Center-Periphery Relations

### Introduction

In the introduction to *Tarikh-e Gilan*, Fumani states:

In the past fifty years... no uprising, revolution, attack or gathering of people... like that of Gharib Shah has ever been seen. I, ‘Abdolfattah Fumani, who was farming and living my life, decided to write a history of it as it happened.<sup>1</sup>

The Gharib Shah Rebellion was indeed an important event in the seventeenth-century history of Gilan and Gilanis, as it marked the locals’ final effort to expel the Safavids and re-establish traditional local dynastic rule in Gilan. However, the uprising has not received in-depth treatment in Western scholarship, as it is referred to mostly in passing, isolated from previous uprisings in Gilan following the Safavid conquest. In his general account of Safavid history, Andrew Newman discusses the uprising briefly, representing it as a messianic movement and characterizing it as part of a “renewal of spiritual unrest.”<sup>2</sup> Rudi Matthee puts forth a brief but more nuanced analysis, describing the Gharib Shah Rebellion as “in part a messianic movement,” alongside mentioning the autonomous tendencies in Gilan. Matthee mainly considers the uprising a movement “against the heavy tax burden” imposed on Gilan after its conversion to crown land.<sup>3</sup> Yukako Goto provides a brief

<sup>1</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 74.

<sup>3</sup> Matthee, *Politics of Trade*, 122.

description of the rebellion, stating that it was the last opportunity for the Gilanis to assert their independence.<sup>4</sup>

Iranian academic accounts of the uprising are more varied. One of the earliest such accounts was composed by the late author, poet, and scholar Mahmud Payandeh (1931–98). Payandeh was born in Langarood, Gilan and authored many works on Gilaki language, culture, and history.<sup>5</sup> His account of the Gharib Shah Rebellion, published in 1978, is entitled *Qiyam-e Gharib Shah Gilani mashhur be 'Adel Shah: dar dowreh-ye Safaviyyeh 1038*. Payandeh begins the book with a four and a half-page letter to Gharib Shah, referring to him as “My dear Gharib Shah!” The letter is a tribute to Gharib Shah and his role in championing justice for the peasants and disenfranchised people of Gilan. Payandeh condemns the treatment Gharib Shah and his followers received from the “wolf-like” *khans*—i.e., the Safavids—and identifies with Gharib Shah’s “freedom-loving” attitude.<sup>6</sup> He closely empathizes with Gharib Shah as a compatriot and justice-seeking individual, despite being “centuries apart.” The tone expressed in the letter’s opening is striking, and is carried throughout the work. Payandeh’s outlook, by and large, centers around the oppressive nature of the “feudal” landlord-peasant relationship set up by the Safavids to the detriment of Gilanis, perhaps an indication of his Marxist ideological leanings. Payandeh’s narrative has a discernible sense of local Gilani identity embellished with a rhetoric of loyalty and fidelity to his homeland standing in opposition to the Safavid outsiders and usurpers.<sup>7</sup> While, in some ways, Payandeh’s work may come across as lacking academic objectivity, it is an important expression of his distinctly “Gilani” perspective carrying over to this twentieth-century historical narrative of a Safavid-era uprising.

Popular and literary notions of a distinct Gilani identity go beyond Payandeh’s work on Gharib Shah. For instance, the description of Gilan as “a land of refuge and dissidence” clearly evokes specific historical events and processes. Gilan’s resistance to being fully incorporated into organized states, including how it came to resist outright Arab invasion, informs such perceptions of Gilan. There are, however, other complementary or competing perceptions of Gilan, e.g., Gilan’s denotation as “the cradle of national Islam” signifies its centrality to the development of Shi‘ism.<sup>8</sup> These sentiments and more can, at times, be seen in popular and literary reverence for local/national heroes such as Mirza Kuchak Khan Jangali.<sup>9</sup>

Iranian scholars have conducted two other studies of the Gharib Shah Rebellion. Jahanbakhsh Savagheb argues that the uprising was the result of Gilan’s tradition of local rule and opposition to the Safavids. Savagheb sees the motivating factors behind the rebellion as differentiated along class lines, considering the desire for local autonomy to be the motivating factor for the Gilani aristocratic elite, and the heavy tax burden the source of frustration for the peasants and lower classes.<sup>10</sup> A more recent article on the rebellion by Mohsen Shanei, ‘Aliakbar Ja‘fari, and Asghar Foroughi-Abari questions Savagheb’s conclusions, criticizing the lack of emphasis he places on Safavid fiscal policies as the main source of Gilani antagonism. Shanei et al. focus mainly on the effects of the tax system on the rebellion, downplaying the political aspects of the movement.<sup>11</sup>

However, a holistic approach to the Gharib Shah Rebellion leads to a better understanding of the uprising’s circumstances, contextualizing the rebellion in relation to broader Safavid policies of centralization involving religious, political, and economic components. The

<sup>4</sup> Goto, *Die südkaspischen provinzen*, 180–82.

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia (Persian), s.v. “Mahmud Payandeh Langarudi,” [https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/محمود\\_پاینده\\_لنگرودی](https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/محمود_پاینده_لنگرودی) (accessed July 14, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Payandeh, *Qiyam-e Gharib Shah*, 5–9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

<sup>8</sup> Bromberger, “Gilan xv. Popular and Literary.”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Savagheb, “Zamineh-ha,” 84–85.

<sup>11</sup> Shanei, Ja‘fari, and Foroughi-Abari, “Negahi be ta’sir.”

Safavids pursued a gradual yet consistent process of weakening local rule in Gilan. For example, the oft-neglected aspect of religious conversion in Gilan, from Zaydism to Twelver Shi'ism, specifically weakened local rulers' legitimacy, which drew heavily on Zaydi notions of religio-political rule. This forced conversion took place decades earlier, and there is no indication this was a source of lingering grievance. At the same time, the characterization of the movement as messianic and an instance of the "renewal of spiritual unrest" is not supported by primary sources. Moreover, the binary notion that views peasant opposition to the Safavids as solely motivated by fiscal issues and elite opposition as solely motivated by political ambition is problematic, overlooking the integrated nature of these policies. While the goals of the elite and peasants were not always perfectly aligned, they certainly overlapped. Even though peasants may have been more immediately concerned with Safavid fiscal policies and burdensome taxes, they would not have been oblivious to political changes in their region. While Shanei et al. provide a more detailed account of Safavid fiscal policies, they overlook and downplay the political motives clearly present in the narrative of the rebellion.

Accounting for the Safavids' multifaceted centralization policies, implemented gradually yet progressively in Gilan from the time of Shah Isma'il I, leads us to a better understanding of the Gharib Shah Rebellion. Safavid centralization policies had substantive effects on religious, political, and economic facets of Gilani society. Eventually, even Gilan's mode of governance was altered considerably; while some benefited from this, negative consequences were also felt by a cross section of Gilani society. While the Safavids were focused on incorporating Gilan into their realm, Gilanis were interested in preserving at least some degree of independence.

The Gharib Shah Rebellion was the final manifestation of Gilani frustration with the process of centralization. It was also the most popular, indicating the far-reaching nature of the political and socio-economic effects of the process of centralization for the Gilani population. In order to best understand the Gharib Shah Rebellion, it is imperative to situate it within the context of previous Gilani resistance to and revolts against the Safavids.

### *Gilan: Religious and Political Background*

When the Safavid Shah Isma'il I came to power in 1501, Gilan was a semi-autonomous region in the southern Caspian littoral with two longstanding ruling families competing over resources and territorial control. Gilan was not a homogenous territory. It was home to two main groups: the Gil inhabited the plain and the Deylam lived in the mountainous areas. Religious diversity, including both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, further complicated Gilan's demographics. The main geographical division was between Western and Eastern Gilan, a division demarcated by the Sefidrud River, but which came to encompass a political, religious, and administrative divide by the thirteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, the inhabitants of Western and Eastern Gilan came to be ruled by two main local dynasties, the Eshaqiyyeh and the Kiyayis.

The distinction between the two Gilans was not just a matter of political boundaries, it was also underscored by religious differences. Although not neatly divided, the inhabitants of Western Gilan adhered to Sunni Islam, generally speaking, while the inhabitants of Eastern Gilan were Zaydi Shi'ites.<sup>13</sup> Gilan's mountainous region, known as Deylam, also had its own unique differences.<sup>14</sup> The Deylam region is well-known for its eleventh-century hosting of the Nizari Isma'ili *da'wa* and their politico-religious activities under the

<sup>12</sup> Nasrollah Falsafi states that this division took place during the reign of Shah Isma'il I. Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah 'Abbas-e avval*, vol. 3, 131. However, historical accounts as early as the tenth century mention this division. See *Hudud al-'alam*, 149; Lahiji, *Tarikh-e Khani*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> For the early history of Zaydism in Gilan, see Khan, "Early History of Zaidi Shi'ism," 301-14. For Sunnism in Western Gilan, see Madelung, "Gilan iv. History."

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang and Madelung, "Deylamites." For more on the people of Gilan and Deylam, see Kasravi, *Shahriyaran-e gommam*, 1-2.

leadership of Hasan-e Sabbah. Indeed, the Ismaʿilis were among the forces the Kiyayis had to contend with in the process of cementing their control over the region.

The Eshaqiyyeh family mainly ruled over the Biyeh Pas territory, or Western Gilan, while the Kiyayis ruled over Biyeh Pish, Eastern Gilan. The Eshaqiyyeh, also referred to as the Eshaqvand, were one of the oldest ruling families in Gilan. It is commonly noted that this family came to rule over parts of Western Gilan, especially the town of Fuman, sometime in the twelfth century. The Eshaqiyyeh lineage is traced back to either the ancient Iranian Ashkanid dynasty or the Prophet Isaac (Eshaq/Ishaq).<sup>15</sup> In terms of their religious affiliation, the Eshaqiyyeh adhered to the Shafiʿi *madhhab*.<sup>16</sup>

Originally followers of Zaydi Shiʿism, the Kiyayis came to power in the second half of the fourteenth century, around 1364. Sayyed ʿAli Kiya, the first of the Kiyayis to establish their rule in Gilan, drew legitimacy primarily from his status as a sayyid and Zaydi imam, or at the very least a Zaydi *daʿi*, an imam with restricted status.<sup>17</sup> Gilan’s political scene was even more fragmented before the Kiyayis’ consolidation of power. With the help and support of their Twelver Shiʿite allies, the Marʿashis of Mazandaran, the Kiyayis managed to either eradicate or incorporate most of their competition in the area, including the Ismaʿilis of Deylam. The Eshaqiyyeh and Kiyayi rulers remained the two leading political powers in Gilan for almost two centuries. Their relationship was at times marked by conflict and upheaval, and at times by cooperation and stability.<sup>18</sup>

Gilan’s geographical location set it apart from the rest of the Iranian plateau, as this region came to embrace Islam at a later date than most of the Iranian mainland. It also became an attractive refuge for the ʿalids (early Shiʿi precursors) and their religio-political movements. The Zaydi *madhhab* flourished in the region until the Safavids converted the population to Twelver Shiʿism.<sup>19</sup>

Locals considered Gilan’s autonomy to be inviolable for some time, even after the Safavids rose to power. Indeed, both Eshaqiyyeh and Kiyayi rulers had managed to maintain their positions and thwart all previous regional power efforts to fully incorporate Gilan, only paying intermittent tribute to the Safavid precursors, the Timurids, the Aq Qoyunlu, and the Qara Qoyunlu. This trend continued into the Safavid era. Although Gilanis certainly acknowledged Safavid supremacy, the Safavids could not always rely on Gilanis’ full compliance. The Safavids did not control Gilan until 1592, almost a century into their dynastic rule, when Shah ʿAbbas I conquered and gradually incorporated the region as a Safavid administrative unit.<sup>20</sup> Before Shah ʿAbbas I’s military campaign, Safavid rulers instituted various policies to keep Gilan in check, extract taxes, and postpone military confrontation. The reign of Shah ʿAbbas I is often viewed as the most important phase of both Safavid centralization policies and the process of decisively transforming the Safavid polity from “a tribal confederation into a bureaucratic empire.”<sup>21</sup> Scholars have also pointed to the continuation of centralization efforts after the reign of Shah ʿAbbas I.<sup>22</sup> While such efforts may have reached their apex under Shah ʿAbbas I, they had been set in motion prior to his reign, even as early as the reign of Shah Ismaʿil I.

<sup>15</sup> Rabino, *Farmanravayan-e Gilan*, 141. For their lineage traced back to the Prophet Isaac, see Monshi, *Tarikh-e ʿalam ara-ye ʿAbbasi*, vol. 1, 110; and Qobad al-Hosseyini, *Tarikh-e ilchi-ye nezam Shah*, 222. Also see Mir ʿAbolqasemi, *Gilan az aghaz*, 9. For their lineage traced back to the ancient Iranian kings, see Shirazi, *Dorrat al-taj*, 96-97.

<sup>16</sup> Lahiji, *Tarikh-e khani*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the difference between full imams (*sabiqun*) and imams with restricted status (*daʿis*) in the Zaydi tradition, see Nanji and Daftari, “What is Shiʿite Islam?” 241.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the Kiyayi rise to power, see Birjandifar, “Negotiating Power” and Goto, *Die südkaspischen provinzen*. For the Ismaʿilis of Deylam, see Virani, *Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 29-37.

<sup>19</sup> For the process of converting the Gilani Zaydis to Twelver Shiʿism, see Birjandifar, “Negotiating Power,” 211-48; ʿAzimzadeh, “Sadat-e Kiya.”

<sup>20</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 132-39.

<sup>21</sup> Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires*, 137.

<sup>22</sup> Matthee, “Relations,” 435.

In Gilan and neighboring Mazandaran, Shah Isma‘il I depended mostly on “soft” power policies and less on direct military intervention.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the fact that the Kiyayis had given Shah Isma‘il and his followers refuge in Gilan played a role in putting off an outright invasion. Moreover, at the time, the threat of more considerable external forces loomed over the Safavid realm, and stretching the military thin was not advisable. The Safavid monarchs, faced with superior adversaries—i.e., the Ottomans—had to maintain a balance of power among their main rivals, including the Mughals and Uzbeks, while trying to avoid a two-front war at any given time.<sup>24</sup> This dynamic influenced how they approached less powerful adversaries like the Gilani dynastic rulers.

When it came to centralization efforts, the Safavids employed various processes to win over groups and factions with volatile loyalties. Co-opting local notables, integrating them into the Safavid administration, and seeking to build alliances were good alternatives to direct military engagement. Gilan’s already fragmented political scene was also conducive to a divide-and-rule policy, which the Safavid monarchs utilized well, keeping the two Gilans separate.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, political marriages between the Safavid royal household and other competing power holders, including local dynastic households, were important to the Safavids and their political mission. The offspring of such marriages were often raised at the Safavid court, allowing the monarch to condition them into devoted subjects. However, this was not always done voluntarily, as the Safavids would also hold the sons of local rulers hostage to ensure such rulers’ full cooperation.<sup>26</sup>

It was not until the final decade of Shah Tahmasp I’s reign (r. 1524-76) that the Safavids began direct intervention in Gilan. In 1568, Shah Tahmasp I removed Khan Ahmad II (r. 1538-68 and 1578-92), the Kiyayi ruler, and imprisoned him in Qahqaha fortress for over a decade.<sup>27</sup> Shah Tahmasp I had earlier attempted to allocate Gilan to his brother, Bahram Mirza, but relentless Gilani resistance had forced Bahram Mirza to abandon his post there.<sup>28</sup> Upon Khan Ahmad II’s removal, Shah Tahmasp I divided Eastern Gilan among a few of his Qizilbash amirs.<sup>29</sup> This arrangement was short-lived, however, as once Shah Tahmasp I passed away, his appointed Qizilbash left Gilan.<sup>30</sup> As such, the Qizilbash’s short stay in Gilan can be attributed to Shah Tahmasp I’s failure to properly establish the center’s grip on the region. Khan Ahmad II was eventually reinstated to Gilan during the reign of Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh, as a result of the mediation of his Mazandarani wife, Khayr al-Nesa Beygom, also known as Mahd-e ‘Olya.<sup>31</sup>

### *Gilan and the Safavid Conquest*

The process of absorbing Gilan into the Safavid polity included a series of policy adoptions related to the religion, administration, economics, and politics of the region, which were set in motion before the outright conquest. From the early days of their rule, the Safavids began converting the population of Iran to Twelver Shi‘ism. The Zaydi population of Gilan, in

<sup>23</sup> Matthee uses the term “soft power” in reference to the Safavid shahs’ tactics in dealing with the periphery. Matthee, “Relations,” 443.

<sup>24</sup> Matthee, “Safavid Iran,” 515-17.

<sup>25</sup> For the divide-and-rule policy as a style of centralization, see Barkey, “Rebellious Alliances,” 700. An example of this policy can be found in Safavid agent Najm al-Din Zargar Rashti’s conduct in settling two Gilani territorial disputes. See Lahiji, *Tarikh-e khani*, 264-65.

<sup>26</sup> Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 145-47. The marriage of Amireh Dobbaj to Shah Isma‘il’s daughter is an example of a significant political marriage in Gilan. See Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 11-13.

<sup>27</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 50.

<sup>28</sup> Rumlu, *Ahsan al-tavarikh*, 361-62; and Monshi Qazvini, *Javaher al-akhbar*, 186-87.

<sup>29</sup> Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘alam ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 1, 113; and Qommi, *Kholasat al-tavarikh*, vol. 2, 477.

<sup>30</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 62; and Rabino, *Velayat-e dar al-marz*, 506.

<sup>31</sup> Monajjem Yazdi, *Tarikh-e ‘Abbasi*, 42-43; Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘alam ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 1, 113, 223; and Afushteh-yi Natanzi, *Naqavat al-‘asar*, 69.

particular, was a target of such Safavid conversion efforts. Gilan's religious landscape, however, also included a sizeable Sunni population and small pockets of Armenian Christians and Jewish tribal communities.<sup>32</sup>

The process of converting the Zaydis of Gilan to Twelver Shi'ism began during the reign of Shah Isma'il I. Sources discuss the possible conversion of Khan Ahmad I (r. 1506–34) to Twelver Shi'ism; however, evidence of the genuineness of this conversion—and his motives for converting—remains contradictory.<sup>33</sup> Khan Ahmad II, on the other hand, unequivocally embraced Twelver Shi'ism, even vehemently berating Gilan's remaining Zaydi residents.<sup>34</sup>

The Safavid insistence on converting Zaydis to Twelver Shi'ism stemmed from anxieties around any potential challenge to their legitimacy. In the context of the relationship between Sufi orders and the Safavids, Sajjad Rizvi raises the point that, among other factors, certain Sufi orders' claim to sayyid genealogy "made Shah Isma'il uneasy," which led to their suppression by the Safavids.<sup>35</sup> Similar to the situation Sufis faced, Kiyayi affirmation of their sayyid lineage, coupled with their adherence to Zaydi doctrines of religio-political authority, also made them the target of Safavid religious policies. While there is less primary information on the conversion of Western Gilanis to Twelver Shi'ism, it is likely they followed a similar path and eventually converted, albeit at a slower rate. By converting the Zaydi rulers of Gilan to Twelver Shi'ism, the Safavids effectively removed their religious authority and reduced local Kiyayi rulers to a status lacking the religious legitimacy of a Zaydi imam or *da'i*.

Once Shah 'Abbas I conquered Gilan in 1592, he began the process of altering its mode of governance, basically transferring power from the local nobility to Safavid-appointed officials. This was similar to what Shah Tahmasp I had done previously, i.e., removing Khan Ahmad II and installing a number of amirs, most of whom were Qizilbash, in his place. Once the local Eshaqiyyeh and Kiyayi rulers fled and took refuge in the Ottoman empire, Shah 'Abbas I began placing his own deputies in positions of authority in Gilan.<sup>36</sup> Following the conquest, Shah 'Abbas I either co-opted or purged the Gilani notables who had remained in the region. He conferred the title "khan" on 'Ali Beyg Soltan, the *vakil* of Ebrahim Khan, the deposed ruler of Biyeh Pas, leaving him in charge of Biyeh Pas for six months before detaining him. Later, the Shah gave Kar Kiya Shah Malek, 'Ali Beyg Soltan's cousin, the post of commander (*sepahsalar*) of Biyeh Pas.<sup>37</sup> Fereydun Beyg, one of Khan Ahmad II's trusted advisors, who betrayed him during the confrontation with the Safavids, was promoted by Shah 'Abbas I to the position of elder or *rish sefid* of all of Gilan in recognition of his service.<sup>38</sup> The most important posts, however, were assigned to the trusted Qizilbash dignitaries. Mehdi Qoli Khan Shamlu was appointed *amir al-omara* (commander in chief), while Khwajeh Masih was designated as the vizier of Gilan.<sup>39</sup> The Gilani elite who lent their loyalty to the Safavids were instrumental in facilitating the dissolution of local ruling dynasties and the transfer of power to the Safavids.

As the Safavids incorporated various territories, they dealt with local rulers on a case-by-case basis, but the general tendency towards centralization can be seen in all. In Lorestan, Shah 'Abbas I made similar efforts to end hereditary local rule. One of the longest-lasting local dynasties, the Atabakan of Lor-e Kuchak, also came to an end during the time of Shah 'Abbas I. Although at first Shah 'Abbas I engaged with the Atabakan of

<sup>32</sup> For references to Gilan's Jewish population, see Benjamin of Tudela, *Itinerary*, 53–54; and Mar'ashi, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 245. For the Armenian presence in Gilan, see Talebi, *Tarikh-e Armaniyān-e Gilan*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> According to Lahiji, for instance, Khan Ahmad I still visited the shrine of a late Zaydi imam, al-Mo'ayyed be'llah, in 1508–09, but the *Vaqfnameh-ye Sohan*, dated the same year, points to his devotion to Twelver Shi'ism. Lahiji, *Tarikh-e khani*, 339; and Mir 'Abolqasemi, "Vaqfnameh-ye Sohan."

<sup>34</sup> Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 185.

<sup>35</sup> Rizvi, "Sufi Theology," 84.

<sup>36</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 132.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–37.

<sup>38</sup> Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'alam ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 2, 450–51.

<sup>39</sup> Astarabadi, *Tarikh-e soltani*, 154.



Lor-e Kuchak diplomatically and tried to strengthen their relationship through inter-dynastic marriage, he soon changed course. With its strategic location on the porous frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, Lorestan had the potential to be a significant threat to the Safavids and their territorial integrity. While the particularities of Lorestan should be accounted for, this case also falls within the Safavid monarchs' general tendency to gradually eradicate hereditary rule in the peripheral regions.<sup>40</sup>

In contrast, the Ardalan family of the Kurdish region of Iran held on to their position until the end of Safavid rule. Shah 'Abbas I, however, still demanded that the Ardalan ruler, Halu Khan, swear his allegiance. To prove his loyalty, the Kurdish ruler sent his son, Khan Ahmad Khan I, to the Safavid court. The Ardalan rulers continued to send their young family members to be raised at the Safavid court. This practice was mutually beneficial: while the Safavids were ensured of the Ardalan ruler's loyalty, they enjoyed the benefits of proximity to the court in return. The Ardalan dynasty thus came to feel the effects of Safavid centralization policies more gradually.<sup>41</sup>

How the Safavids dealt with Gilan and Mazandaran was likely due to these territories' economic significance. As major hubs for the production of silk, Gilan and Mazandaran were crucial to the region's economy and the Safavid treasury. Generally speaking, Gilanis needed very little from the outside world. Olearius, the German traveler, contended that Gilanis

need not much care for any Trading with their Neighbours, since they have at home whatever is necessary, as that the Countrey [sic] being in a manner inaccessible, they may easily avoid entertaining the Forces which might be quarter'd upon them.<sup>42</sup>

Climatic conditions in Gilan were ripe for growing crops and produce. While raw silk was the most important commodity that Gilan had to offer, its other agricultural production enabled it to remain self-sufficient. Olearius described Gilan's production abilities as follows: "There is no Province of all Persia so fertile and so abundant with Silk, Oyl [sic], Wine, Rice, Tobacco, Lemons, Orenge[s] [sic], Pomegranates, and other Fruits. The Vines there are excellent, and as big as a man at the Waste."<sup>43</sup> Gilan's favorable climate coupled with its secluded geographic location meant that Gilanis were self-sufficient; they had nothing to gain from Safavid presence in their region or from Safavid rule.

Gilan had long maintained a certain level of autonomy over silk production and retained much of its revenue. However, when Shah 'Abbas I turned Gilan and Mazandaran into crown lands in 1599, the locals lost control of the silk revenue.<sup>44</sup> The income from crown lands went directly to the Shah's treasury. Turning Gilan into crown land had significant consequences for the local *toyul* holders as well, as they also lost their *toyul* privileges.<sup>45</sup> In addition, Shah 'Abbas I granted a silk export monopoly to the Armenian merchants of Julfa, who had been moved from Julfa to New Julfa in Isfahan, as well as to Gilan and Mazandaran.<sup>46</sup> Scholars have debated the reasons behind the Julfans' displacement from Old Julfa to New Julfa. While Baghdiantz McCabe argues that the Julfans were moved as a result of Shah 'Abbas I's policies around the silk trade, Aslanian contends the move was part of the Safavid scorched-earth policy in response to Ottoman advances.<sup>47</sup> Regardless of the reasons for the move, the introduction of Armenian merchants to Gilan limited the role and influence of local Gilani producers and merchants.

<sup>40</sup> Qasemi and Taheri, "Tahlil-e faraz va forud," 11-13.

<sup>41</sup> Yamaguchi, "Safavid Legacy," 135-37.

<sup>42</sup> Olearius, *Voyages and Travells*, 289.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>44</sup> Matthee, *Politics of Trade*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> Petrushevsky, *Ocherki feodalnikh*, 212.

<sup>46</sup> Matthee, *Politics of Trade*, 100.

<sup>47</sup> Baghdiantz McCabe, *Shah's Silk*, 54; and Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*, 34.

There were also clear and substantial changes to the system of taxation in Gilan. After Shah ‘Abbas I conquered the territory, he issued a decree on the administration of taxes. Röhrborn asserts that the Shah aimed to standardize tax administration throughout his realm.<sup>48</sup> This particular decree, however, was also meant to convince the Gilanis, soon after the conquest, that they would pay less taxes under Safavid administration. In the decree, Shah ‘Abbas I condemned the arbitrary and non-*shar‘i* taxes local rulers exacted—some of which had already been abolished—such as *shahiyeh zar* (most likely a tax paid for the maintenance of the local court) and *teymureh zar* (it is not clear what this is), among others. It is important to point out that not all the taxes Shah ‘Abbas I abolished were paid by Gilanis themselves. Some such taxes were, in fact, levied on Gilan’s external visitors as a way for locals to collect revenue. The *tamgha* tax exacted on outsiders who entered Gilan was similar to a road toll, and the *gharibeh zar* was another visitor tax paid by outsiders.<sup>49</sup> These taxes served the interests of locals but not the Safavid monarch, who wished to make Gilan more accessible to trade and commerce, as well as make the region his vacation destination. In the end, the tax burden on the Gilani population increased rather than diminished, counter to what the Shah’s decree had suggested.

Historical accounts often point to Safavid efforts to build roads and bridges, improving overall access to Gilan. While, taken at face value, these seem like important developments with the potential to improve the locals’ condition, in reality, Gilanis at the time felt they were nothing more than ways to facilitate further extraction of Gilan’s wealth and natural resources.

Safavid rule in Gilan brought the presence of Safavid officials, as members of the ruling elite and their entourage made Gilan their permanent home and the Shah made Gilan and Mazandaran his vacation and hunting destinations. Thus, the Gilanis now had to contend with increasing Safavid influence on local affairs. After the conquest, a network of power relations linking the co-opted local elite to Safavid officials, and ultimately the Shah, ensured greater control over the region.

Safavid expectations of Gilan and Gilanis took a financial, human, and environmental toll. Shah ‘Abbas I appropriated the local customary hunting trip, known as *shekar-e zangul*, as an official court custom.<sup>50</sup> These hunting trips, especially prearranged ones, employed local Gilani labor; most likely forced, unpaid labor, known as *bigari*. In the medieval and early modern periods, peasant conscription for unpaid labor was a common practice. Petrushevsky specifically discusses such conscription by “shahs and large feudal lords” for the purpose of hunting. These hunts often involved more than 10,000 people surrounding a large, designated area, creating an encircling barrier around animals and thus preventing their escape.<sup>51</sup> These hunting expeditions would, at times, result in the death of laborers. On one such occasion, Fumani asserts that some 30,000 local Gilanis were involved in facilitating a hunting trip for Shah ‘Abbas I, 2,700 of whom died in Rankuh’s cold winter weather; deaths Shah ‘Abbas I “did not pay much attention to.”<sup>52</sup> Fumani also informs us of the excessive number of animals hunted by the Shah, a fact likely resented by locals.<sup>53</sup>

Aside from the toll these hunting trips took on Gilan’s population, the taxes levied on them were also burdensome. The *tarh* and *tas‘ir* taxes were two particularly onerous ones. *Tarh* involved selling produce to the center at a reduced price, while *tas‘ir* was a tax levied on cereals and grains and was to be paid in cash. The price of cereals and grains was set by the central government and could fluctuate, and such fluctuations in *tas‘ir* could result in “excess payments extorted when the assessment in kind was converted into cash.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Röhrborn, *Nezam-e eyalat*, 90.

<sup>49</sup> See the list of taxes in Nowzad, *Nameh-ha-ye Khan Ahmad*, 96-98.

<sup>50</sup> Shanei, Ja‘fari, and Foroughi-Abari, “Negahi be ta’sir,” 184-85.

<sup>51</sup> Petrushevsky, *Ocherki feodalnikh*, 292.

<sup>52</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 216-17.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>54</sup> Lambton, *Continuity and Change*, 215.



In order to improve the economy and productivity of Iran's central regions, Shah 'Abbas I followed economic policies that enriched the center at the expense of outlying regions. For instance, Isfahan's population were exempt from paying taxes to the court for a year, and their agricultural tax was reduced. Gilan was afforded no such exemption.<sup>55</sup> On the contrary, Fumani points out how Behzad Beyk, the vizier of Gilan, in fact levied indemnities (*tarjoman*) on the region's population; a population whose repeated petitions of protest to the Shah went unheeded.<sup>56</sup> Petrushevsky contends that "similar methods of robbery" were practiced in other regions, such as Shamakhi, Georgia, and Lorestan.<sup>57</sup>

Shanei et al. also indicate other common taxes as a source of Gilani frustration with the Safavids, taxes such as *qatlagheh* (locals' responsibility to host state officials and foreign visitors staying in the region), *cherik* (a military tax), and multiple agricultural taxes exacted on farmers and peasants.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Gilan's population were to also pay the following taxes: *bazdid*, paid to crop inspectors; *mobasheraneh*, paid for the maintenance of Safavid officials (known as *mobashers*) tasked with managing the crown lands; and *mohasselaneh*, the tax paid to tax collectors for the task of collecting taxes.<sup>59</sup>

Hence, for Shanei et al., economic grievances were the main cause of the rebellion. However, acknowledging that the Gharib Shah Rebellion was triggered by economic concerns should not diminish the fact that it was also clearly aimed at altering modes of governance in Gilan. Indeed, the tax burden was the result of political changes in Gilan; a fact not lost on Gilanis. Thus, Shanei et al.'s argument that this rebellion was distinctive in its motivation and should be set apart from earlier uprisings with more political undertones leaves out a very important point: that Gilanis retained a collective memory of Gilan's past political reality, a memory present during this uprising. How Gilanis grasped this past contributed to how they saw themselves in relation to the Safavids. The desire to restore long-lost rulers to their past glory clearly manifested in their choice of leader: Gharib Shah was presented as the son of a former ruler, however much that lineage may have been fabricated.

The drastic alterations in Gilan's modes of governance did not go unnoticed by the local population. Indeed, a series of intermittent uprisings erupted shortly after the Safavid conquest. The Gharib Shah Rebellion, which followed the death of Shah 'Abbas I, was the most significant of these uprisings, signaling locals' deep dissatisfaction with Safavid policies and with the shifting of political and economic control in the region. An overview of some of the uprisings preceding the Gharib Shah Rebellion elucidates the dynamic of Safavid-Gilani relations following the conquest.

### *Gilani Resistance and Safavid Responses*

After the conquest, there were four uprisings in Gilan between 1593 and 1596. Mohammad Shurmij's overview argues that "the tension between the local notables and previous ruling aristocrats, and the agents of the central government," was one of the main reasons for these uprisings.<sup>60</sup> Shurmij identifies two key categories of rebellion following the conquest: those in response to the Safavid conquest that aimed to re-establish local rule, and those addressing the Safavids' taxation and fiscal policies in Gilan.<sup>61</sup> Complementing Shurmij's assessment, I contend that the uprisings did not necessarily belong to one category or the other; rather, political and fiscal motivations often overlapped.

<sup>55</sup> Petrushevsky, *Ocherki feodalnikh*, 82.

<sup>56</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 177.

<sup>57</sup> Petrushevsky, *Ocherki feodalnikh*, 82.

<sup>58</sup> Shanei, Ja'fari, and Foroughi-Abari, "Negahi be ta'sir," 188. Fereshteh 'Abdollahi also puts forth a more detailed list of taxes administered in Gilan before the Safavid tax reform. See 'Abdollahi, *Jaygah va naqsh-e Gilan*, 261-72.

<sup>59</sup> Shanei, Ja'fari, and Foroughi-Abari, "Negahi be ta'sir," 188.

<sup>60</sup> Shurmij, "Tahlili bar shuresh-ha-ye Gilan," 90.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

An analysis of Safavid responses also sheds light on the significance of these uprisings. Another way to categorize the anti-Safavid rebellions in Gilan is by looking at the different ways the Safavids responded to different rebellions. Shurmij's assessment views the elite as a monolithic group with common interests. In reality, however, some rebellions were clearly the work of specific members of the elite out for personal gain and self-preservation. In these cases, Safavid responses targeted the disgruntled individuals and their immediate followers. Other rebellions, regardless of their motivating factors, threatened the Safavids with more widespread popular resistance and were, hence, punished more severely.

In their effort to address Safavid intrusion in Gilan, some such rebellions led to strategic alliance adjustments among the Gilani elite. Initial rebellions were led by former members of the Kiyayi and Eshaqiyyeh rulers' entourage. The uprisings of Malek Shah and Talesh Kuli in 1593, for example, culminated in an alliance between old Western and Eastern Gilani rivals against the Qizilbash. Indeed, such strategic collaboration was not common before the conquest. The leaders of early rebellions anticipated the return of Khan Ahmad II and Mohammad Amin Khan (the son of the late Jamshid Khan, the Eshaqiyyeh ruler, who fled along with Khan Ahmad II) from their Ottoman refuge.<sup>62</sup>

Moving forward, we witness uprisings by high-ranking Gilani officials and commanders who, after initially working with the Safavids, fell out of favor and became hostile. At this point, the loyalty of local commanders and high-ranking officials to the Safavids remained dubious. The rebellion of Shah Malek Soltan, who was appointed commander in chief of Biyeh Pas by the Safavids, is an example of a rebellion resulting from shifting and precarious loyalties. 'Ali Beyg Soltan, Shah Malek Soltan's cousin, who was released from prison to aid the Safavids in hunting down his belligerent cousin, is another example of a Safavid ally becoming hostile.<sup>63</sup> The Safavids specifically targeted rebels such as Shah Malek Soltan, 'Ali Beyg Soltan, and their immediate followers while avoiding direct action against the population at large.

On the surface, the uprising of Talesh Kuli, another Gilani commander who initially cooperated with the Safavids, seems similar to the rebellions of Shah Malek Soltan and 'Ali Beyg Soltan. However, the Safavid response to Talesh Kuli's rebellion was very different from their response to the others. Talesh Kuli's opposition to the Safavids attracted diverse followers and led to alliances among different factions of Gilani society. Most importantly, we see notables from the Chapak joining Talesh Kuli and his efforts against the Safavids.<sup>64</sup> The Chapak and Azhdar, who often appear in the sources together, were indigenous to Gilan. Members of these families frequently served in various military and high-ranking official posts, such as the *sepahsalar* and *vakil* of the local rulers.<sup>65</sup> As the Qizilbash pursuit of Talesh Kuli and his followers in the forests of Gilan did not go as smoothly as expected, Shah 'Abbas I ordered the population in the surrounding areas be massacred, hoping to terrify locals into finding Talesh Kuli and his followers. Talesh Kuli's uprising marked the first instance of collective punishment handed down by the Safavids in post-conquest Gilan.<sup>66</sup>

Of the earlier uprisings, Kar Kiya Amir Hamzeh's rebellion in 1595 had a more grassroots base, again with the engagement of Chapak and Azhdar notables, who led this uprising. Some 10,000 participants, equipped with quotidian objects such as sticks, hatchets, and scythes, attacked the Hesar fortress of Lahijan expecting to expel the Qizilbash inhabitants.<sup>67</sup> This rebellion, which specifically targeted the Qizilbash, also provoked a more severe Safavid response, culminating in Shah 'Abbas I ordering the massacre of the population of Lashteh Nesha.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'alam ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 2, 461.

<sup>63</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 142-55.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-68.

<sup>65</sup> Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'alam ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 2, 461.

<sup>66</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 166.

<sup>67</sup> Vahid Qazvini, *Tarikh-e jahan ara-ye 'Abbasi*, 132; Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 169; Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'alam ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 2, 514.

<sup>68</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 169; and Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'alam ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 2, 514.

The Safavid-appointed governor of Lahijan, hoping to avoid bloodshed, gave the Lashteh Nesha population a few days to leave town.<sup>69</sup> Still, the Safavids massacred many, and the hostility between Shah ‘Abbas I and the Chapak and Azhdar continued. Eventually, following another instance of resistance from members of the above-mentioned groups, Shah ‘Abbas I exiled them from Lashteh Nesha and all surrounding villages. The Chapak and Azhdar inhabitants of Lashteh Nesha, including women and children, were forcefully resettled in Seyl Akhur and, according to Fumani, many perished in this displacement.<sup>70</sup> However, we still see people of Chapak lineage participating in the Gharib Shah Rebellion.

The next uprising took place in 1603 during the tenure of Aslan Beyg, the Safavid-appointed vizier of Western Gilan.<sup>71</sup> The rebels were led by a former Gilani military commander, Kar Kiya Fathi, who had joined and served Shah ‘Abbas I for a few years before returning to Gilan to engage in farming.<sup>72</sup> Fumani contends that this uprising was directed at the Safavid-appointed official in charge of Western Gilan, Aslan Beyg, and his unjust treatment of the people. Kar Kiya Fathi led the rebels on a raid on Aslan Beyg’s home, confiscating his belongings. The Safavid forces responded promptly and in a public spectacle shamed and punished the captured culprits, executing most of their leaders. Aslan Beyg returned to his “unjust” ways with Gilanis and was eventually dismissed.<sup>73</sup>

This rebellion, specifically, brings us to an evaluation of the kind of recourse for grievances available to Gilanis. Aslan Beyg’s removal came a few months after the rebellion and upon Mirza-ye ‘Alamiyan’s investigation into its causes. Delivering justice was an indispensable part of the Shah’s authority. Generally speaking, “the Shah’s justice (*‘adālat*) was to be manifest through social stability, the security of his subjects, and their goods and money. He was expected to curb excess and the arbitrary actions of state officials.”<sup>74</sup> In Gilan, Shah ‘Abbas I was keen on holding sessions for the population to air its grievances against local officials, but Gilanis had mixed responses to these sessions. In some instances, Fumani reports, not a single person came forward; in other instances, Gilanis approached the Shah with their petitions.<sup>75</sup> Behzad Beyg, the appointed vizier of Fuman, was removed from his post after the Shah held one such hearing of grievances against him. While, in general, Shah ‘Abbas I had a reputation of treating his subjects justly, it is important to note that political and fiscal considerations sometimes carried more weight. When the Shah removed Mirza-ye ‘Alamiyan from his post as the vizier of Gilan for his alleged mishandling 18,000 *tuman* in *tas‘ir* revenue from rice production, his official replacement collected that amount from the farmers a second time, re-burdening the population by making them pay for Mirza-ye ‘Alamiyan’s likely embezzlement.

Another uprising in Gilan over a decade later constitutes a distinct variety of rebellion. The short-lived uprising of Sayyed Mohammad Sheykhavand, of the tribe of Sheykhavand, erupted in 1619 and had two characteristics setting it apart from other similar uprisings.<sup>76</sup> First, Sayyed Mohammad Sheykhavand declared himself to be the representative (*na‘ib*) of the Twelver messiah (the Twelfth Imam).<sup>77</sup> Second, the rebellion was initiated by a Qizilbash residing in Gilan. While Fumani does not discuss this uprising, it is briefly mentioned in Eskandar Beyg Monshi’s *Tarikh-e ‘alam ara-ye ‘Abbasi* and Pietro della Valle’s travel account.<sup>78</sup> Monshi’s account

<sup>69</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 171; and Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘alam ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 514.

<sup>70</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 196–98.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>74</sup> Jurdi Abisaab, “Delivering Justice,” 4–5.

<sup>75</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 203; 206–207.

<sup>76</sup> The Sheykhavand tribe’s lineage is traced back to Sheykh Safi al-Din Ardebili. Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah ‘Abbas-e avval*, vol. 1, 178.

<sup>77</sup> Monshi, *Tarikh-e ‘alam ara-ye ‘Abbasi*, vol. 2, 952; Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah ‘Abbas-e avval*, vol. 3, 52; and Della Valle, *Viaggi*, vol. 2, 131.

<sup>78</sup> Della Valle, *Viaggi*, vol. 2, 131.

attributes the uprising to the “Sheykhān-e Gilan,” while della Valle specifies that the self-proclaimed messiah belonged to the Sheykhavand tribe.<sup>79</sup> The fact that Fumani never mentions the uprising can also be indicative of its lack of importance to Gilani interests. To understand this peculiar episode, it is critical to locate it within the broader context of the political circumstances of the time. By this point, the Qizilbash were slowly losing their previously-held position of privilege within the Safavid system.<sup>80</sup> Shah ‘Abbas I had turned his attention to strengthening the loyal slave army, gradually distancing himself from the previously-favored Qizilbash.<sup>81</sup> On a personal level, Falsafi, who also attributes this uprising to the Sheykhavand tribe, argues that Shah ‘Abbas I did not like the Sheykhavand due to their leader’s role in the murder of his mother, Mahd-e ‘Olya.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the Sheykhavand uprising had another important element: its messianic undertone. However, Sayyed Mohammad Sheykhavand’s rebellion was quietly and expeditiously quashed by Shah ‘Abbas I, and the messiah impersonator promptly summoned to the court and executed.<sup>83</sup>

It is within the context of the uprisings and developments following the Safavid conquest of Gilan that I engage with the Gharib Shah Rebellion and its treatment in both primary and secondary sources.

### *The Gharib Shah Rebellion*

Throughout his *Tarikh-e Gilan*, Fumani uses the titles Gharib Shah and ‘Adel Shah interchangeably. Gharib Shah literally means “Strange King,” while ‘Adel Shah means “Just King.” Fumani clarifies this discrepancy by mentioning that “Gharib Shah” was how his adversaries, namely the Qizilbash, referred to him.<sup>84</sup> I also use the title “Gharib Shah,” as it is the title most often used in both Iranian and Western academic sources. However, I acknowledge that the title reflects the Safavids’ adversarial point of view and not that of the Gilani participants themselves. The title “‘Adel Shah,” used by his followers, indicates the expectation and perception of the rebellion as an effort to achieve “justice.” In later chronicles, this discrepancy is resolved differently. Such sources mention two uprisings, that of Gharib Shah and another by his brother, ‘Adel Shah.<sup>85</sup> However, it is Fumani’s account that is generally accepted by historians, as he was an eyewitness to the events in question.

The Gharib Shah Rebellion erupted shortly after Shah Safi I ascended the throne following the death of his grandfather, Shah ‘Abbas I. Fumani states that the uprising was a direct response to the oppression and injustice Gilan’s inhabitants had faced under the Safavid-appointed viziers, especially in the last seventeen years of Shah ‘Abbas I’s reign.<sup>86</sup> The uprising took place during the period of succession and transition, as the ruler’s position was weakened during such times, making these periods more prone to instability and uprisings and providing a potential window of success for a rebellion.<sup>87</sup> Fumani states that a group of Gilanis, including leaseholders, heads of villages, financiers, and peasants, had been awaiting the right time to strike, confirming that the timing was indeed related to Shah ‘Abbas I’s death and the revolt the result of a strategic alliance among a diverse group of Gilanis.<sup>88</sup> The

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Farmayan, *Beginnings of Modernization*, 9.

<sup>81</sup> For more on the slave army corps, see Babaie et al., *Slaves of the Shah*.

<sup>82</sup> Falsafi, *Zendegani-ye Shah ‘Abbas-e avval*, vol. 1, 178.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 52-53.

<sup>84</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 261.

<sup>85</sup> Valeh Qazvini Esfehāni, *Iran dar zaman-e Shah Safi*, 24; Hedayat, *Tarikh-e rowzat al-safa*, vol. 8, 440; and Monshi, *Zeyl*, 18.

<sup>86</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 261.

<sup>87</sup> Brustein and Levi, “Geography of Rebellion,” 483-84.

<sup>88</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 261.

leaders of the uprising not only came from different professions, they also represented diverse lineages. Abu Sa'id Chapak, Muhammad Gukeh, Kuleh Mohammad Kuchesfehani, Shahmorad Gilwa'i and his son Mohammad, Shirzad Beyk Keysami, and Atash Baz Khoshkbejari are some of the leaders Fumani mentions by name.<sup>89</sup>

Gharib Shah's given name was Kalanjar Soltan; he was allegedly one of the remaining sons of the late Jamshid Khan, the former ruler of Biyeh Pas.<sup>90</sup> While there is very little information about Gharib Shah or his life before the revolt, it seems he had previously led a modest life with his mother in anonymity. Gharib Shah began his mission at the home of Pir Shams Gol Gilwa'i, the Sufi sheykh to whose order Gharib Shah, his mother, and his handlers belonged.<sup>91</sup> The sources give no information about this Sufi order or its sheykh beyond this brief mention and a mention of the sheykh's eventual execution, which seems to indicate they did not figure largely in the rebellion. Nevertheless, the planning of this uprising was carried out not by Gharib Shah himself, but by a group of local notables and their allies who chose him for his alleged rightful claim to the throne of Western Gilan.<sup>92</sup> As previously mentioned, some scholars argue that the Gharib Shah Rebellion was a messianic movement. Despite the involvement of a Sufi order, however, this rebellion was not a messianic one. Indeed, the choice of leader—the son of a former ruler—supports a very different conclusion.

The characterization of the Gharib Shah Rebellion as messianic can be attributed to the association of Iranian Shi'ism, and the Iranian religious milieu in general, with heterodoxy and messianism. Heterodox and Sufi movements, including the Safavid movement, that came to prevail in the religious landscapes of Iran and Anatolia engaged with aspects of pre-Islamic religious elements, such as the notion of cyclical time, in conjunction with certain Shi'i elements, like loyalty to the imams and messianism.<sup>93</sup> As they came to establish their rule, the Safavids distanced themselves from heterodox elements, opting instead for a more legalistic Twelver Shi'i tradition more conducive to state building.<sup>94</sup> While the prevailing understanding of Iran's religious milieu may explain certain socio-religious movements, it is not a satisfactory explanation for all.

More recently, scholars have started questioning earlier characterizations of certain Safavid-era uprisings as messianic in nature. For example, Rula Jurdi Abisaab points out that the generally-accepted messianism of the Siyah Pushan uprising in Astarabad is unfounded.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, while the Gharib Shah Rebellion was supported by a local Sufi order, the primary sources show no indication that his contemporaries viewed him as a messiah. While the Sheykhavand uprising, as previously mentioned, is clearly characterized as messianic in Monshi's *Tarikh-e 'alam ara-ye 'Abbasi*, no such designation is accorded to the Gharib Shah Rebellion.<sup>96</sup>

Gharib Shah's association with a local Sufi order should not be taken as evidence of messianism, as Sufi orders were part and parcel of the social fabric of Islamicate societies. In the absence of city halls and other similar venues, these brotherhoods provided space for popular gatherings and the expression of shared grievances.

Moreover, much of the history of Safavid Iran, including that of its peripheral regions, is written from the point of view of the center, i.e., the Safavids and their Qizilbash followers. This limits our understanding of local concerns. Even so, the southern Caspian littoral region of Gilan and Mazandaran had an enduring heritage of local historiography.<sup>97</sup> This tradition

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>90</sup> Kalanjar Soltan's kinship with Jamshid Khan is disputed by some Safavid sources. See Valeh Qazvini Esfehiani, *Iran dar zaman-e Shah Safi*, 16. Also see Khwajegi Esfehiani, *Kholasat al-seyar*, 50.

<sup>91</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 262.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> See Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs*.

<sup>94</sup> Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Jurdi Abisaab, "Peasant Uprisings."

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 6; and Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'alam ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 2, 952.

<sup>97</sup> Charles Melville, "Mongol and Timurid Periods," 182.

was partly derived from the region's long-lived custom of local rule, and such local chronicles usually "cover the characteristics, special merits (*fazâ'el*) and foundation legends of the districts concerned, together with dynastic history and contemporary affairs."<sup>98</sup> For the most part, local dynastic rulers commissioned the composition of these works, as they did not see themselves merely as "local rulers." Rather, like any other ruler, the possibility of expansion was a hallmark of their political positions. Still, Gilan's local historical accounts are valuable sources, regardless of their patronage. Not only do they complement universal or dynastic histories, they also offer different perspectives and even counter-narratives of affairs conveyed in imperial accounts.

Local historical accounts are often used sparingly, if at all. In recent years, however, more scholars have begun exploring such chronicles and incorporating local perspectives into their work.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, it is through engaging with Fumani's chronicle more closely that it becomes clear that the Gharib Shah Rebellion was neither an isolated event nor a messianic movement signifying the "renewal of spiritual unrest." Rather, this account makes apparent that this rebellion was the final effort in Gilan's forty-year struggle to expel the Safavids and re-establish local dynastic rule, alongside the considerable economic grievances intermeshed within it.

The Gharib Shah Rebellion broke out with an attack on the residence of the *kalantar* of Lahijan, Mir Morad Lashteh-Neshaei. Mir Morad, whose title suggests that he was a local Gilani, had been appointed to his position by Shah 'Abbas I and enjoyed the Shah's full support and respect. As a local official representing the center, Mir Morad was one of the rebellion's first targets, with the rebels looting an estimated 30,000 *tuman* from his residence. Following the attack on the *kalantar*'s house, the rebels took to the homes of the official financiers/merchants, two brothers who had just returned from a trip to Muscovy and were hence in possession of "some unmatched goods."<sup>100</sup> Looting was at the center of both this attack and the next, on the home of yet another *kalantar*, Mohammad Taleb.<sup>101</sup> These initial attacks prepared the rebels for a more substantial assault on the merchants and their belongings in the bazar of Kuchesfehan. As the rebels moved from one town to another, their movement gathered momentum and attracted diverse participants, who numbered between 14,000 to 30,000 according to different chronicles and travelogues.<sup>102</sup> In such skirmishes and raids, the number killed is estimated at about 7,870 people, most of whom were residents of Pashija, Kuchesfehan, Lashteh Nesha, and Lahijan.<sup>103</sup>

The rebels also targeted the official palace of Rasht, as many of the elite had abandoned their residences as the insurgents moved into town, creating favorable conditions for plunder. Gharib Shah's followers managed to redistribute 200 of the 300 *kharvar* (one *kharvar* is equivalent to 300 kilograms) of silk purchased and stored in Gilan, and destined for the Shah's treasury, before some notables convinced Gharib Shah that this was unwise as he might need the silk for future purposes.<sup>104</sup> Moving from Rasht to Fuman, the movement gathered more momentum. Those officials who remained loyal to the Safavids (including 'Abdolfattah Fumani) fled the town, while others, including *sadat*, judges, and scholars, joined the cause.<sup>105</sup>

During the rebellion, certain actors took advantage of the chaos to further their own interests. These rogue elements did not necessarily advance any particular collective cause, be it that of the center or the rebels. For example, Bahram Qoli Soltan Sufi, a trusted

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> There is a more established tradition of local historiography in contemporary Iranian academic circles, but we can also see this shift among Western historians.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Olearius, *Voyages and Travells*, 289; and Hedayat, *Tarikh-e rowzat al-safa*, 439.

<sup>103</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 279.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 266.



Safavid official, became a rogue agent during the uprising. As the Safavid-appointed *hakem* of Deylaman, he was at first involved in helping the Safavids quash the rebellion. However, he soon took advantage of the disarray and, while fleeing Gilan, began looting. His first target was the Lahijan fortress, which also held goods belonging to the recently-returned merchants of Muscovy and *Farang* (Europe).<sup>106</sup> Bahram Qoli Soltan Sufi and his followers then moved on to Deylaman and continued looting and pillaging villages around Rankuh until Safavid officials arrested him and confiscated his loot.<sup>107</sup>

Molla ‘Ali Kami’s tale is another example of shifting loyalties. Molla ‘Ali Kami was a Lahijan notable from a well-known family of scholars and physicians, and a close advisor to a high-ranking Gilan official, Mir Morad Kalantar. As the uprising ensued, Molla ‘Ali Kami counted on a close acquaintance and supporter in the town of Layl to protect him, his family, and his belongings against the rebels. In the anarchy following the uprising, however, his ally in Layl turned on him, executed him, and sent his head to Gharib Shah.<sup>108</sup>

Olearius informs us of another interesting tale, that of Saru Khan (also known as Saru Taqi), the commander in charge of defeating Gharib Shah’s army.<sup>109</sup> During the rebellion, Saru Khan interceded on behalf of a wealthy merchant to protect him from the wrath of the Safavids. The merchant had either gotten involved in the rebellion out of despair or had failed to advise Safavid officials of Gharib Shah’s activities. While there is a possibility that the merchant was indeed involved and lent his support to the rebels, it seems Saru Khan interceded due to his influential standing.<sup>110</sup>

Shah Safi I put Saru Khan, who was serving as governor of Astara at the time, in charge of several provincial governors and their efforts to quash the rebellion.<sup>111</sup> Saru Khan’s men slowly captured and executed most of the rebel leaders, including Pir Shams Gol Gilwa’i, the head of Gharib Shah’s Sufi order.<sup>112</sup> Later, Gharib Shah and some high-ranking followers were taken to Isfahan and executed publicly in the great square.<sup>113</sup>

The rebellion was ultimately a failure, but had devastating effects on the silk trade and the Safavid treasury.<sup>114</sup> For locals, the human cost of the rebellion was high, and they came to face more restrictions in its aftermath. The Safavids completely disarmed Gilan’s local population, forbidding them from owning or purchasing arms, with the exception of agricultural tools such as the hedge-bill. This ban on weaponry in Gilan stood in stark contrast to the Safavids’ lax attitude towards Taleshis, who retained “the privilege of using all sorts of weapons,” as they had remained loyal to the Safavids during the uprising.<sup>115</sup>

### *The Rebellion in Safavid Sources: The Ajamereh va Owbash*

Safavid sources refer to participants in the Gharib Shah Rebellion as *ajamereh va owbash* (hoodlums and riffraff) or *ronud va owbash* (knaves and riffraff).<sup>116</sup> The term *ajamereh va owbash* had at least two different connotations. It was often used to refer to those understood as career hoodlums and riffraff—usually marginalized and underprivileged inhabitants of urban centers. In times of crisis, such individuals were involved in instigating riots and looting, taking advantage of the disarray and anarchy that ensued in periods of social unrest.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 271–72.

<sup>109</sup> Saru Khan became a powerful vizier to Shah Safi I and his successor, Shah ‘Abbas II.

<sup>110</sup> Olearius, *Voyages and Travells*, 290.

<sup>111</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 268, 282–83.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 278–80.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 28; and Olearius, *Voyages and Travells*, 289.

<sup>114</sup> Matthee, *Politics of Trade*, 123.

<sup>115</sup> Olearius, *Voyages and Travells*, 290.

<sup>116</sup> See Valeh Esfehiani, *Khold-e barin*, 369.

<sup>117</sup> Raz Nahan and ‘Abedini Moghanaki, “Ajamereh va owbash,” 63.

The term was also used derogatively, as a negative construction in narratives delegitimizing opposition groups, regardless of their socio-economic class.

Another term used by chroniclers to refer to underprivileged and marginal groups is *le'am*, the plural form of the Arabic word *la'im*, which literally means a dishonorable, ignoble, or shabby person. The word *le'am* appears frequently in Safavid historical accounts. In Fumani's *Tarikh-e Gilan*, the term *le'am* is closely associated with the term *sepahi*, and they are often mentioned together. Fumani also refers to the *le'am* as a specific social class, or "*tabaqeh-ye le'am*."<sup>118</sup> In Monshi's *Tarikh-e 'alam ara-ye 'Abbasi*, *le'am* also accompanies the terms *owbash* and *sepahian*, mostly in reference to Safavid adversaries such as the rebels in Gilan.<sup>119</sup>

Different Gilani towns had their own groups of *le'am* and *sepahis*. *Le'am* were the under-class of able-bodied men who could serve as mercenaries in times of need. Such mercenaries sometimes belonged to well-organized and hierarchical groups the ruler could call upon to engage in battle. The *ro'asa-ye le'am* or *akaber-e le'am* were the leaders and chiefs in charge of coordinating and mobilizing subordinates. Goto refers to this group as a reserve army.<sup>120</sup> Whether the *le'am*'s use of force, as distinct from the official military corps, was legitimate or not depended on the context of engagement. Shah 'Abbas I, for example, kept a close eye on the *le'am* of Gilan. During his tenure as the vizier of Gilan, Behzad Beyg armed and organized a group of Gilani *le'am* in order to prepare them for an offensive on Astara to confront Khwajeh Mohammad Reza Saru Khwajeh, the vizier of Azerbaijan. Khwajeh Mohammad had initiated a takeover of Astara and Gaskar, territories considered by Gilanis to be part of Gilan. Thus, Behzad Beyg felt it necessary to react to this blatant disregard for Gilan's territorial integrity. Behzad Beyg's maneuver, however, came under fire from Morteza Qoli Khan, the *hakem* (governor) of Gaskar, and the above-mentioned vizier of Azerbaijan, who arrested Behzad Beyg's men as they reached Astara.<sup>121</sup> Yet, the main issue raised was not the offensive against the vizier of Azerbaijan, but the fact that Behzad Beyg had armed and mobilized Gilan's *le'am* without the Shah's permission.

When the story reached Shah 'Abbas I, he ordered Morteza Qoli Khan to confidentially gather and send the names of some 300 (now) armed Gilani *le'am*. Morteza Qoli Khan then tasked his advisor, who was apparently familiar with these men, to compile this information for the Shah. Once the Shah was in possession of the names, he sent a decree to Behzad Beyg requesting his presence at Soltaniyeh along with all 300 men. Behzad Beyg promptly responded, presenting himself and the 300 *le'am* in question to the Shah. Shah 'Abbas I then bestowed robes of honor on the *le'am* chiefs, after vetting them, and sent them back to Gilan, thereby legitimizing their possession of arms.<sup>122</sup> At the same time, the bestowal of this honor also represented the Shah's claim to these men's loyalty.

A more positive view of urban *ajamereh va owbash* emerges in the fictional figure of the incredible *pahlavan* (champion) or *javanmard* (chivalrous man) represented in Hosseyn Kurd Shabestari's epic tale, which circulated during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I.<sup>123</sup> The difference between *ajamereh va owbash* and *pahlavans* lies in whether such were legitimized by being brought into the Shah's fold or remained unsanctioned actors. Thus, several connected and contradictory representations of *ajamereh va owbash* can be discerned from the sources. Another conventional use of the term was as an adjective for the Safavids' domestic adversaries. For instance, when Fumani refers to Gharib Shah's followers as *ajamereh va owbash*, he is pointing not only to the urban underclasses, but to all the players, including high-ranking

<sup>118</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 191.

<sup>119</sup> Monshi, *Tarikh-e 'alam ara-ye 'Abbasi*, vol. 1, 112-13; vol. 3, 995.

<sup>120</sup> Goto, *Die südkaspischen provinzen*, 208.

<sup>121</sup> Fumani, *Tarikh-e Gilan*, 190-92.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-95.

<sup>123</sup> For Hosseyn Kurd Shabestari's story, see Marzolph, "Hosayn-e Kord-e Šabestari." On *javanmardi*, see Raz Nahan and 'Abedini Moghanaki, "Ajamereh va owbash," 73.

noblemen. In this way, the term denotes the author's intent to discredit the rebels as no more than hoodlums and riffraff, rather than dissidents with legitimate concerns.

There is no primary account of this uprising from the rebels' point of view. Even the local chronicler Fumani, who at times may have held slight sympathies for his Gilani compatriots, remained a pro-Safavid official, condemning the rebels and labelling them as nothing more than *ajamereh va owbash*.

## Conclusions

Gilan, with its autonomous tendencies and key status as a major silk producer, became the focus of Safavid centralization policies soon after Shah 'Abbas I took the throne. Once Gilan was conquered, its system of administration and governance was altered to serve the Safavid rulers' interests. In this context, the administration of Gilan fell to Safavid-appointed viziers with minimal ties to the region. Moreover, the Safavids also reformed the tax system to their benefit. Shah 'Abbas I saw to the standardization of the tax system, a reform detrimental to the local population. Turning Gilan into crown lands and intensifying the state's role and involvement in the silk trade meant that Gilan's revenue was more systematically and efficiently directed to the center's treasury.

As the process of Gilan's assimilation unfolded, the Safavids faced backlash from the region's population and elite. Several uprisings, mainly orchestrated by the elite, took place shortly after the conquest, with re-establishing the rule of previous local dynasties as their main objective. These uprisings were not successful, however, as Gilan's old elite remained highly fragmented, unable to build long-lasting alliances, divided along dynastic lines, and militarily inferior to the Safavid forces.

Later uprisings, like that of Gharib Shah, were responses not just to the Safavids' presence in Gilan, but also to their fiscal policies and newly-implemented modes of governance. These uprisings engaged the interests of more than just the elite, as multiple social classes, including peasants, participated. This was due to the fact that, by the time of the uprising, the effects of Safavid policies were being felt by a cross-section of society. In general, however, due to peasants' dependence on the elite for support and resources, they were unable to mobilize and unify on their own.

The Gharib Shah Rebellion is best understood in the context of previous uprisings, as a continuation of Gilan's struggle for autonomy. Changes in the region's fiscal policy were, after all, a result of the new political reality. While the sources indicate a connection to a Sufi order, they do not support the claim that the uprising was motivated by messianic religious fervor or unrest. Characterizing the movement as messianic undermines efforts to grasp the complexities of Gilanis' socio-political and economic lives in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The involvement of a Sufi order should not be taken as evidence of the uprising's religious character, as Sufi orders were an ever-present aspect of daily life in Islamic societies. It is pertinent to point out, however, that only Western secondary sources label the movement as messianic; no Iran-based scholars discuss the Sufi order's involvement or find it significant enough to even mention. Political intentions were accentuated in this last, futile attempt to dislodge the Safavids' hold on Gilan. Indeed, neither the political motivations nor the underlying economic grievances of this rebellion should be dismissed.

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