



The Role of Ibrahim Sheikh Shah Shirvani in the Relations between Ismail I Safavid and Selim I Ottoman (Based on Majmua-e Munshia`at Al-Salatin)

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Abstract

During the early years of the Safavid state's formation, the Qizilbash were actively engaged in various regions, creating unrest and interfering in Ottoman territories. At the same time, Prince Salim governed an Ottoman province adjacent to Safavid lands. Even then, he was determined to suppress the Qizilbash, whom he viewed as a destabilizing force. After ascending to the throne, he pursued this goal with even greater resolve, ultimately leading to the *Battle of Chaldiran*. Although Sultan Salim sought to continue his campaign against the Safavids in the following years, regional and local rulers, such as Ibrahim Sheikh Shah Shirvani, saw an opportunity to protect their own interests and establish a regional balance by mediating peace between the two empires. In fact, rulers like the Shirvanshah played a crucial role in facilitating diplomatic exchanges between the Ottomans and the Safavids. Sultan Salim's correspondence with the ruler of Shirvan, preserved in *The Origins of the Sultans*, highlights the significance of these diplomatic efforts. The main focus of this research is to examine the position and privileges that enabled Ibrahim Sheikh Shah Shirvani to mediate between the Ottomans and the Safavids, as well as the outcomes of his involvement. Why did Sultan Salim trust him and permit his intervention? This study, adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, aims to explore Shirvani's political and diplomatic role in shaping Ottoman-Safavid relations, as well as the progress and achievements of his mediation efforts.

Introduction

After the *Battle of Chaldiran*, the scope of Ottoman power and influence in the east—both in terms of alliances and hostilities—expanded significantly compared to the previous era. Among the regional rulers with whom Sultan Salim sought to establish relations were the Shirvanshahs, who themselves maintained an ambiguous and cautious stance toward the Safavid government. In examining the political relations of this period, a key question arises: Given the role of Sheikh Shah as a mediator between the Ottomans and the Safavids, why did Sultan Salim trust him and express a willingness to strengthen ties with him? This issue is particularly significant considering the

longstanding hostility and suspicion between the Shirvanshahs and the Safavids, which had deepened after Shah Ismail and the Qizilbash waged a fierce battle against the Shirvanshahs.

Given these tensions, any mediatory role played by the Shirvanshah between the Ottomans and the Safavids could be seen as a strategic move, potentially creating opportunities for the Safavid side, which was in a weakened position against the Ottomans—especially in the aftermath of Chaldiran. The critical question, then, is: Why did the Shirvanshah choose to engage in such a diplomatic effort amid the crisis between the Safavid and Ottoman governments between 920 AH and 930 AH? Additionally, what was his exact position in the power dynamics between these two rival empires?

Research method

To address the aforementioned questions and issues, the authors have adopted a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing upon historical evidence from both Turkish (Ottoman) and Persian sources. By analyzing relevant letters preserved in sultanate institutions and comparing historical accounts, this study aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on the triangular relations between the Safavid, Ottoman, and Shirvani rulers from 920 AH to 930 AH. Through this analysis, the underlying reasons and mechanisms behind Ibrahim Sheikh Shah Shirvani's political engagements—both with Sultan Selim and the Safavids—will become clearer.

Discussion and Conclusion

The beginning of Sultan Selim I's reign posed a significant threat to the Safavid government, primarily due to his deep-seated enmity toward the Qizilbash, which culminated in Shah Ismail's defeat at the *Battle of Chaldiran*. However, Sultan Selim was not content with this victory and sought to continue his military campaign against the Safavids. His ambitions, however, were hindered by multiple challenges, including conflicts with the Mamluks of Egypt and battles with the Amir Neshin Zul Qadr, which over the years left his troops fatigued and war-weary. Aware of his army's exhaustion, Sultan Selim was unable to immediately pursue further attacks against Shah Ismail and the Qizilbash.

On the other hand, following the *Battle of Chaldiran*, Shah Ismail adopted a more conciliatory stance toward Sultan Selim and actively sought reconciliation. The crucial task of mediation was cleverly undertaken by neighboring regional rulers, particularly the Shirvanshahs. At that time, Ibrahim Sheikh Shah did not share particularly friendly relations with the Safavid court, primarily due to previous Safavid invasions and destruction within his territory. However, given the fragile nature of his position, he carefully assessed the political landscape between the Ottoman and Safavid governments and, drawing upon his diplomatic ties and correspondence with Sultan Selim, positioned himself as a neutral mediator without provoking further hostilities.

Sultan Selim's trust in Sheikh Shah played a critical role in enabling him to assume a greater role beyond mere diplomatic correspondence. At a time of heightened tensions, Sheikh Shah possessed several key attributes that helped him gain Sultan Selim's



confidence. First, his history of conflict with the Safavids reassured Selim that he was not a covert agent of Shah Ismail. Second, Sheikh Shah's Sunni faith fostered a sense of religious affinity with Selim, further strengthening their bond. Recognizing this unique opportunity, Sheikh Shah sent Sunni religious scholars to deliver a verbal message of peace on his behalf. He also communicated with Shah Ismail, who was eager to embrace diplomatic efforts aimed at de-escalation. Ibrahim Sheikh Shah's calm, patient, and diplomatic approach ultimately had a positive impact on Sultan Selim, helping to ease tensions and even contributing to the withdrawal of non-Muslim forces. In the end, his mediation played a role in delaying Sultan Selim's plans for another military campaign, at least temporarily.

Keywords: Safavid, Ottoman, Chaldiran, Shirvan, diplomacy, Ibrahim Sheikh Shah Shirvani.

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