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The *Šarafnāma* and the Rūjikī rulers of Bidlīs in the 11th/17th century [DYNTRAN WORKING PAPER 8, January 2016]

by Sacha ALSANCAKLI

The *Šarafnāma* is a well-known history of Kurdish dynasties and ruling houses, written in Persian in 1005-7/1596-99 by Amīr Šaraf Xān Bidlīsī (949/1543-about 1009/1601), leader of the Rūjikī tribe and prince of Bidlīs in northern Kurdistan. The historical account starts with the dynasty of the Marwānids in the 5th/11th century and comprises many dynasties and events contemporaneous to the author, including a book (*sahīfa*) devoted to the author's own Rūjikī dynasty of Bidlīs.



View of Bidlīs (C.F. Lehmann-Haupt, Armenien Einst und Jetzt, 1926)

The political situation of the principality of Bidlīs at the time Šaraf Xān wrote the *Šarafnāma* remains unclear; furthermore, this situation seems to have quickly evolved in the very years when the different versions of the work were composed. We can only assert that Bidlīs was then nominally an Ottoman *yurtluk-ocaklık* (that is a semi-autonomous hereditary principality with specific privileges, notably regarding taxes; see Dankoff 1990: 14-15). Whether Šaraf Xān was still *de facto* ruler of the emirate cannot be determined at the moment.



View of Bidlīs (P. Müller-Simonis, Du Caucase au Golfe Persique, 1892)

Šaraf Xān was apparently killed in 1009/1601 by the Ottoman governor (*beylerbeyi*) of Vān Aḥmad Pāšā, who then proceeded to sack Bidlīs (Dehqan & Genç 2015). It remains unclear who succeeded Šaraf Xān, although his son Žiyā' al-Dīn Bēg eventually seems to have inherited the principality. The scarcity of information on his rule is to be contrasted with the latter part of the reign of his son and successor Abdāl Xān, which is known from different sources, most notably the *Sayāḥatnāma* of Evliya Çelebī (the sections on Bidlīs were edited by R. Dankoff in 1990).

Evliya Çelebî describes Abdāl Xān as a powerful, wealthy and independent-minded ruler, and his account vividly stresses the enlightened character of the prince and his patronage and practicing of various sciences and art forms (Dankoff 1990: 92-109). J.-B. Tavernier (1676: 273-75) also highlights the independent character of the Khan's rule, saying that Bidlīs is the “city of a Bey or Prince of the country, the most powerful and considerable of all, because he does not acknowledge the Sultan's authority nor that of the King of Persia, while other Beys all depend on one or the other”.

This independent set of mind eventually brought the same fate upon Abdāl Xān as it had upon his grand-father. Driven out of the city by Malak Aḥmad Pāšā, governor of Vān, in 1065/1655, before coming back upon the latter's dismissal in 1066/1656, Abdāl Xān himself was eventually dismissed by the Porte in 1076/1665 and replaced by his son Badr al-Dīn. The Khan was exiled to Istanbul, where it is said that he led a quiet life until he was unexpectedly murdered upon the orders of Sultan Meḥmed IV (r. 1058-99/1648-87) in 1078/1668 (Dankoff 1990: 11, n.2).



Kurdistan (G.E. Hubbard, From the Gulf to Ararat, 1917)

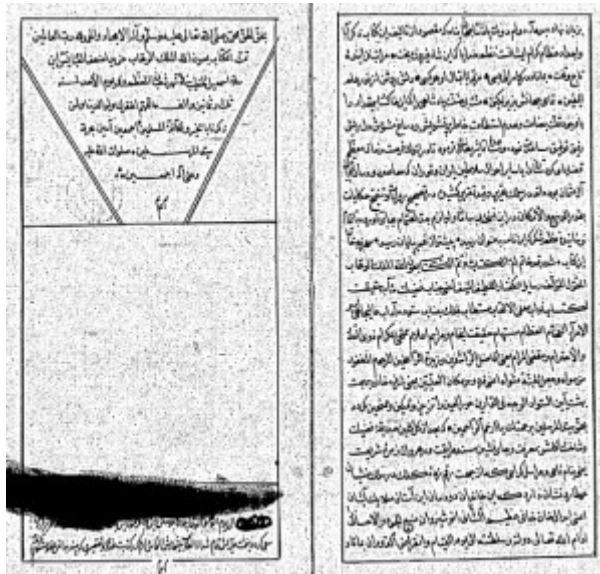
Badr al-Dīn must have not remained very long at the head of the *eyalet* of Bidlīs, for it appears that already in 1078/1668, after the Khan's execution, another one of Abdāl Xān's sons, Šaraf Xān III, had risen to power in Bidlīs. (While mentioned as Šaraf Xān II in the sources from Bidlīs, he was actually the third prince of the dynasty named Šaraf Xān. The “first” Šaraf Xān was the grandfather of the author of the *Šarafnāma*.) We are unaware of any rebellious activities on the part of this prince. However, he did seem to show a strong interest in the *Šarafnāma*, like his father had before him.

This interest in the Kurdish chronicle by both Abdāl Xān and his son Šaraf Xān III is reflected in several manuscripts of the work. One of these manuscripts is the Supplément Persan 238 (thereafter SP 238), one of three copies of the *Šarafnāma* kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). This copy contains a peculiar addition at the very end of the text, right before the colophon. This additions reads thus (ff. 242v, l. 11 – 243r, l. 1; here abridged for clarity):

va tamma al-kitāb bi ‘awn allāh (...) al-mu'allif (...) al-marḥūm al-maḡfūr (...) ya' nī šaraf xān-i bahjat-i bihišt-āyīn ki ba'd az gulgulīn-i ḥadīqa-yi faẓīlat va šāxsār-i gulšan-i ma'rifat va jāy-nišīn-i masnad-i tariqat va rah-rawān-i zumra-yi šari'at ya' nī (...) abdāl xān xānī 'aẓīm al-šānī

anūšīrwān manba‘ al-jūd va al-iḥsānī rā adāmāllāhu ta‘ālā dawlatahu wa salṭanatahu ilā yawm al-qiyām wa inqirāz al-dawrān bemānad

“The book was finished, with the help of God (...), by the author (...) whose elegance is reminiscent of Paradise, Šaraf Xān, may he rest in Peace, during the blossoming of the garden of virtue and the grove of the rose garden of knowledge, that is the rule of the occupant of the throne of the spiritual path and traveller of the way of the religious law, meaning Abdāl Xān the glorious Khan and Anushirwan, source of generosity and justice, may God Almighty extend the days of his State and Sultanate until the Day of Judgement and the coming of the end of times”



BnF, SP 238 (f. 242v-243r, detail)

This added text is interesting in several respects. It presents Abdāl Xān as an independent ruler and wishes for the continuation of his state and sultanate, and it also bestows great praise upon the author of the *Šarafnāma*, his ancestor Šaraf Xān. We are led to believe by the colophon of SP 238 that the manuscript was copied in 1083/1672, by a man named Yasīn b. Mullā Isma‘īl. However, our research indicates that Yasīn b. Mullā Isma‘īl merely produced a copy of the original 1083/1672 manuscript, probably around the turn of the 13th/19th century.

Furthermore, we have seen earlier that Abdāl Xān was forced to relinquish power in 1076/1665, and was murdered in 1078/1668. We can thus assert that the 1083/1672 manuscript that served as model for SP 238 was itself a copy of an earlier manuscript, which must have been produced before 1076/1665, when Abdāl Xān was still the ruler of the Bidlīs principality. This copy dated 1083/1672 must have been written at the request of Šaraf Xān III, the son of Abdāl Xān, who was at that time head of the principality.

Šaraf Xān III had already shown his interest in the *Šarafnāma* five years earlier, in 1078/1668 when, after his father’s execution by the Sultan, he had ordered a translation of the work into Turkish, which was realized by his cousin Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Bēg b. Žiyā’ al-Dīn b. Šaraf Xān (that is, a son of Abdāl Xān’s brother, Aḥmad Bēg, and great-grandson of Šaraf Xān, the author of the *Šarafnāma*) and completed in 1080/1669-70. This translation, of which several copies are extant, contains exactly the same text addition at the end, with one notable exception: here, Abdāl Xān’s name is replaced by the name of Šaraf Xān III (called Šaraf Xān II by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Bēg; we thus read *šaraf xān al-ṣānī aẓīm al-šān nūšīrwān al-ṣānī manba‘*

al-jud wa al-ihsān adāmallāhu ta'ālā dawlatahu wa salṭanatahu wa sa'ādatahu ilā yawm al-qiyām wa al-inqirāz al-dawrān; ms. BL Add. 7860, f. 332v, l. 14-17).

The similarity of both texts indicates that the 1080/1669-70 Turkish translation and the 1083/1672 Persian copy of the *Šarafnāma* were copied from the same manuscript, that is the manuscript produced during the reign of Abdāl Xān, where the added text was originally to be found. We are however left to wonder why the name of Abdāl Xān was replaced by the name of Šaraf Xān III in the 1080/1669-70 translation, but not in the Persian copy realized three years later. Of course, there is a sensible difference between translating and copying a text, and this fact is demonstrated by the number of abridgements and changes made to the Turkish translation. But is this a sufficient explanation?

It is, for now, impossible to say. Archival work into Ottoman documents, as well as other sources which might give us more information on the reign of Šaraf Xān III, will be needed to answer these questions. However, we can already see from these two manuscripts that as late as the closing decades of the 11th/17th century, almost a century after its composition, the *Šarafnāma* continued to play for the Rūjikī rulers of Bidlīs the role of a text legitimizing their dynastic power, the same role that it had played almost a century earlier when Šaraf Xān wrote it.

Sacha Alsancakli (January 2016)

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