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The Role of Copyists in the Transmission of Manuscripts: A Case Study on Šaraf Xān Bidlīsī's *Šarafnāma* (1005-1314/1597-1897) [DYNTRAN WORKING PAPER 23, April 2017]

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 (949-1009/1543-1600), leader of the Rōjikī tribe and prince of Bidlīs, southwest of Lake Van, in northern Kurdistan. It comprises four books on the history of various Kurdish dynasties, preceded by a *Muqaddima* (“Introduction”) on the origins and manners of the Kurds, and followed by an annalistic *Xātima* (“Conclusion”) on Ottoman and Safavid history.

In the course of my study of the *Šarafnāma*, I have worked with 36 different manuscripts of the text, covering a time period going from its composition (1005/1597) to the end of the 13th/19th century (the last dated manuscript, ms. 3934 of the Malik library in Tehran, was copied in 1314/1897). This work, focused on the processes of composition, transmission and reception of the text, has led me to question the role played by copyists in these processes. In this preliminary article, I will share a few remarks on the ways in which, through three centuries of manuscript transmission, copyists have relayed and interpreted the text of the *Šarafnāma* according to cultural context, political necessity and/or professional choices.

Stylistic and structural modifications

The first copies of the *Šarafnāma* were realized under Šaraf Xān’s supervision in the years 1006-7/1596-99. Evidence suggests that, after he wrote the draft manuscript of the work, which is extant (ms. Elliott 332, Bodleian Library of Oxford, completed in Zū al-Ḥijja 1005/August 1597), the Kurdish prince requested a copyist, possibly his court secretary, to produce a more polished version of the text. It appears that Šaraf Xān wished for this manuscript, which seems to have been lost, to be used as a normative model for future copies. Thus, the two extant manuscripts of the *Šarafnāma* produced in 1007/1599 under the supervision of Šaraf Xān (mss. Hunt. Don. 13, Bodleian Library and Dorn 306, National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg) are based on this “model manuscript”. Šaraf Xān died shortly thereafter, in 1009/1600, in the context of a conflict with the Porte.

In 1015/1606, a scribe from Kilīs named Ḥasan b. Nūr al-Dīn was responsible for the first known copy of the *Šarafnāma* to be produced after the author’s death (ms. Elliott 331, Bodleian Library). The recent nature of this event is hinted at in the colophon of the manuscript, where the author is called “the late Šaraf Xān, Rōjikid prince of Bidlīs” (شرف خان حاکم بتلیس المرحوم) (الروجکی; f. 327v, l. 21). It seems that this copy was realized at the request of ‘Alī Jānbūlād, ruler of Kilīs and Aleppo and nephew of Ḥusayn Jānbūlād, from the manuscript Hunt. Don. 13 mentioned above, hence the claim by Ḥasan b. Nūr al-Dīn to have made it from the text of an autograph (من خط مؤلفه و مصححه و منقحه). The objective here was apparently to produce a more readable copy of the work than HD 13, which was already in ‘Alī Jānbūlād’s possession.

To this end, Ḥasan b. Nūr al-Dīn integrated the numerous marginal annotations present in HD 13 into the text, as well as correcting mistakes in the manuscript, such as the date of Mehmed III’s accession to the throne. (HD 13, f. 261v, l. 2; E 331, f. 324v, l. 14) On occasions, he also adds bits of information, for example the title of three books by Lāmi‘ī Čelebī. (HD 13, f. 220v, ll. 2-4, and E 331, f. 263v, ll. 17-21) Ḥasan b. Nūr al-Dīn’s manuscript can thus be seen as a

continuation of Šaraf Xān's efforts to produce revised and corrected copies of his book, a feeling that is enhanced by the geographical, political and chronological proximity of E 331 with these earlier manuscripts. As in the case of the copies realized under the supervision of Šaraf Xān, Ḥasan b. Nūr al-Dīn also insists on the legitimacy and textual value of his manuscript, by stressing that his model was an autograph.

Socio-political adaptations

These are mostly stylistic and structural modifications, as well as minor corrections by Ḥasan b. Nūr al-Dīn, which were meant as improvements on perceived or actual shortcomings in the original text as he knew it. Beyond that, another important way in which copyists acted upon the text was through adapting it to their specific socio-political environment. A classic example of this attitude can be seen in the insertion, by several copyists who were also, probably, court secretaries, of panegyrics to their patrons and sponsors of the copy at the end of the work, in or before the colophon. Among such sponsors, we can mention Abdāl Xān, great-grandson of Šaraf Xān, his own son Šaraf Xān III, or Aḥmad Bēg b. 'Alī Bēg of the Maḥmūdī. (See mss. Or. 12 of the Royal library, Torino; Or. 1127 of the British Library, London and Farsça 223 of Istanbul University's library.)

In the copies produced at their request, these princes were all presented as independent rulers and, among other laudatory attributes, described as *xānī 'azīm al-šānī anūšīrwān* ("the glorious and Khusraw-like khān") or *zillullāhī* ("shadow of God on Earth"). These modifications are thus manifestations of a situation of *de facto* independence of these principalities at the time of copying, and such a situation is attested in the historical records.

However, such adaptations could go much further, and have an impact on the text as a whole. In the case of the *Šarafnāma*, the most notable instance of this approach is to be found in the two manuscripts produced by a man named Mīrakī b. Aḥmad Qahramānī Hamadānī, who was probably a court secretary to the Ardalān princes in the early 11th/17th century. It is in this position that he wrote two copies of the *Šarafnāma*, in 1017/1608 and 1027/1618, the latter at the request of Xān Aḥmad Xān Ardalān, ruler of the principality (mss. of the Golestan Palace, Tehran, and Browne H. 10, Cambridge University Library). Raised at the Safavid court in Iṣfahān and later married to Šāh 'Abbās' sister Sayyida Begum, known as Zarrīn Kolāh, Xān Aḥmad Xān remained a close ally of Šāh 'Abbās to the end of the latter's rule. (On Zarrīn Kolāh, see Bābānī 1366/1987, p. 42.) It is thus not surprising that the two *Šarafnāma* manuscripts produced at his behest display a markedly pro-Safavid and Shi'i stance.

Some examples of this political viewpoint include the deletion of marks of praise used for the Ottoman sultans, in particular when they refer to their status as caliphs or "holy warriors" (غازی), and the use of convoluted honorary titles in place of the names of the Safavid sovereigns (نواب همایونی, نواب اعلیٰ, etc.); the omission of the traditional religious formulas found after the names of Sunni figures, such as Imām Šāfi'ī, Mu'āwiyya, 'Umar al-Xaṭṭāb or even 'Abbās, uncle of the Prophet, and conversely, the addition of such formulas to the names of Shi'i figures; and even the rewriting of certain historical events, like the attribution to the "evil eye" (چشم زخم) of the Safavid defeat at Čaldirān. (See Browne H. 10, ff. 12r, l. 3; 14r, l. 5; 24r, l. 21; 39r, ll. 17 and 20; 58v, l. 24; 61r, l. 13; 62v, l. 8; and many other places.)

New perspectives on Kurdishness and dynasty politics

After a near-complete hiatus in the 12th/18th century, it is also primarily in the Ardalān region that, from the early 13th/19th century onwards, a resurgence in the production of manuscript copies of the *Šarafnāma* took place, which later spread to other principalities in south and southeast Kurdistan. This regain of interest in the work was associated with new perspectives on the idea of Kurdishness and connected in new ways to dynasty politics, which also reflected in the work of the copyists. Thus, the enumeration by Šaraf Xān of what he identified as the four major Kurdish groups – Kurmānjs, Lors, Kalhurs and Gūrāns –, preceded by the enigmatic assertion that “Kurmānjs are the best among them” (بهترین ایشان کرماج است), became a hot topic of contention, while it had previously seemed to be rather innocuous. The sentence was the subject of tempering in several copies produced in the (Gūrānī-speaking) Ardalān principality in the 13th/19th century, with a view to advancing an idea opposite to the original, namely that the Gūrāns were, in fact, the best among the Kurds. (See mss. Add. 22698, f. 6r, ll. 1-2; Add. 23532, f. 4v, ll. 19-20, and Or. 4836, f. 3v, ll. 10-11, all kept in the British Library in London.) It is worth mentioning that, at this time, the (Gūrān) Ardalāns and the (Kurmānj) Bābāns were in a continuous situation of rivalry, as is made plain by the experiences and anecdotes related by Claude J. Rich, who visited the region in 1820. (See Rich 1836: I, pp. 80-81, 151-53, 215 and 270.)

This new approach towards the *Šarafnāma* in the 13th/19th century is also reflected in the widespread use of the alternative title *Tārīx-i Akrād* or *Tārīx-i Kurdistān* to designate it; suggesting that the work had become known primarily as a “History of the Kurds and Kurdistan”, rather than as the “Book of Honour” of the Kurdish dynasties, a significant shift in focus. This new appropriation of the work by the Kurdish elites came along with an increased tendency to alter and manipulate it in various ways, such as the translation, production of *zayls* for specific chapters, or cutting and copying of particular sections, presented as stand-alone publications. Although this process had already started in the late 11th/17th century, with the production of two translations in Turkish (in Bidlīs and Pālū) and of two or three *zayls* (in Pālū, Agīl, and possibly Ġarzan), it became even more common in this period, which is exemplified by the impressive number of historiographical works, directly or indirectly linked with the *Šarafnāma*, produced in the Ardalān principality in the 13th/19th century.

The era of nationalism

In the northern Kurdish principalities, where knowledge of the Persian language had become very scarce, there was also a resurgence of copies of the Turkish translations of the *Šarafnāma*, including one manuscript containing a map of Kurdistan, not entirely congruent with the territory defined by Šaraf Xān, and including the delimitation of the international borders at the time (ms. Tarih 364, Millet library, Istanbul, p. 698). This manuscript is dated 1296/1879, a time by which all the Kurdish autonomous dynasties had been toppled, and a year only before the rebellion of Shaykh ‘Ubaydullāh (1880-81), considered the first Kurdish nationalist revolt. (On this rebellion, see Ateş 2015.) This is the earliest documented use of the *Šarafnāma* in the context of the emerging Kurdish national question, and the work continued to play a prominent role in the rhetoric of early Kurdish nationalists in the declining Ottoman empire. The history of the editions of the book in the 20th century is also markedly intertwined with political developments in Kurdistan. (On this topic, see Bajalan 2012.)

Conclusion

As can be gathered from these short considerations, there were numerous ways to copy a manuscript, and the approach adopted was determined by various factors, such as the degree of

professionalism of the copyist, his involvement in the work, the nature of his intended readership, his position towards the ideas developed in the book, etc. While some copyists chose to be as faithful to their model as possible, others felt a responsibility to adapt and interpret the text to better care for the needs and sensibilities of their potential readers. This article also shows that studying the processes of the transmission and reception of manuscripts, in which the figure of the copyist played a central part, might allow us to gain valuable insights into the cultural and political history of some of the less documented regions or time periods, such as, in the case of the *Šarafnāma*, Kurdistan in the modern era.

Sacha Alsancakli (April 2017)

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