

The Georgian of Shushtar at the Safavid Era (10421144 AH) (16201722 AD)

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The history of Georgian's ruling of Shushtar dates back to the reign of Shah Safi. During the reign of Shah Safi, one of his outstanding servants, Vakhashtu Khan was chosen to serve as the governor of Shushtar. This person's entering into Shushtar, who had promoted from being a special servant to the Biglarbeigi position, is considered as a turning point in the development of Shushtar. Vakhushti khan and his brothers were promoted in the Safavid court because of their loyalty to this dynasty. Therefore, Vakhashtu Khan was appointed as the governor of Shushtar, and his brother, Zulfiqar Khan, was appointed as the ruler of Kandahar. They could protect Shushtar and Kandahar very well using their tact so that the Georgians ruling of Shushtar lasted for 102 years. Finally, the ruling period of this clan was declined and disappeared by Nader Shah. This research aims at investigating the sociopolitical situation of Shushtar at the time of Vakhashtu Khan and his successors.

Keywords: Safavids, Georgians, Vakhashtu Khan clan, Shushtar.

During 946, 947, and 960 AH (1524, 1525, and 1538 AD), Shah Tahmasp I attacked the Caucasus under the pretext of jihad desiring to earn great wealth. After these fights, the Safavids earned a lot of trophies, and many Georgian women and children also came to Isfahan, the capital of the Safavid. These women and children established the basis of a "third force" that was later organized by Shah Abbas I. In order to reduce and balance the power of Tajik and Ghezelbash, Shah Abbas I made use of the "third force" element, which included Georgians, Circassians, and Armenians. The power of this element gradually increased at the time of Shah Abbas (I), so that Allahverdi Khan was one of the Georgian generals at the time of Shah Abbas. After the death of Shah Abbas and at the time of Shah Safi, the power of Georgians increased to the point that Shah Safi became suspicious of the Emam Gholi clan, who were the children of Allahverdi Khan, and ordered their massacre.

Another Georgian clan at the time of Shah Safi, which was given the Biglarbeigi position, was the Vakhushti Khan clan which had a significant effect on the development and prosperity of Shushtar. Here, the question is what roles the Georgians of Shushtar played in the social situation of Shushtar in 1042 1144 AH (1620-1722 AD). The hypothesis is that the Georgians of Shushtar had a significant effect on the prosperity, agricultural development, and the construction of public buildings in Shushtar.

There is no independent investigation on the Georgians clan of Shushtar, and the only source that referred to this clan is the biography of Shushtar. The sources of the Safavid period have provided only some rudimentary information in this regard.

The importance of the current study, which is a library research study using a descriptive-analytic method, is that it investigates the arrival of Georgians and their impact on the political and social situations of Shushtar. Furthermore, using the primary sources of the Safavid era and all the sources related to this era, this study attempts to examine the actions and services of the Georgian Vakhshu Khan clan, who were selected as the biglarbeigi of Shushtar by Shah Safi.

The literature on the arrival of Georgians at Shushtar

Shah Tahmasp I attacked the Caucasus four times under the pretext of jihad in 946, 947, and 960 AH (1524, 1525, and 1538 AD). Tahmasp's motive to send troops to the Caucasus may have been the same as those his ancestors Junaid, Ismail, and Haidar, who intended their armies to gain experience from the wars and earn trophies in this way. The majority of the captives brought to Iran from the Caucasus during the reign of Shah Tahmasp I were children or women. The descendants of these children and

women established the basis of the "third force" that was later organized by Shah Abbas I (Seyouri, 2007).

In order to reduce the power of Tajiks and Ghezelbash, whose power was rising and who were conflict with each other, Shah Abbas I sought a solution. His solution was to create the "third force" consisting of Circassians, Georgians, and Armenians who were first brought to Iran in the time of Shah Tahmasp (I). Later, they became known as the slaves of Shah. After accepting Islam, these slaves were employed in the army and other sections of the royal houses (Navaei and Ghaffari Fard, 2007).

Using Georgian, Circassians, and Armenian slaves, Shah Abbas created a permanent army that was always available. These slaves had only one purpose: to show loyalty to the king. The new regiments of slaves created by Shah Abbas included cavalry formations of up to 10,000-15,000 soldiers armed with ordinary guns and weapons. Shah Abbas also created an army composed of gunmen and gunners and increased the number of the royal soldiers – who were mainly chosen from the slaves – to 3,000 (Seyouri, 2007).

This "third force" gradually gained reputation at the time of Shah Abbas, and their power increased. However, the influence of this force in the Safavid dynasty was not limited to Shah Abbas's time alone. Their presence was also evident during the reigns of his successors.

Shah Abbas's grandson, Sam Mirza, the son of his eldest son – Mohammad Baqir who became known as Safi – succeeded the throne. Sam Mirza took his father's name, Safi, on the throne. During the reign of Shah Safi, some influential members of the Georgian clan like ImamQuli Khan and his sons were killed. ImamQuli Khan was the son of Allahverdi Khan, who was Shah Abbas' commander in chief. This action by Shah Safi reflected the great influence and power of Georgians, especially the ImamQuli Khan clan, had in the Safavid dynasty. This caused Shah Safi to order their deaths due to his fear of this clan, or as some said, because of his jealousy (Seyouri, 2007).

During the reign of Shah Safi, the Georgian element gained so much power that traces of it are still evident in the city of Shushtar in Khuzestan. The oldest sources that point to the presence of Georgians are the Jahan Ara history of Abbasids by Vahid Qazvini, the biography of Shushtar by Seyyed Abdullah Jazayeri Shushtari, and Tohfatal Alam by Mir Seyyed Abdul Latif Shushtari. In this regard, a detailed description of an influential clan of Shushtar named "Vakhashtu Khan" is written by the author of "biography of Shushtar."

One of the most famous Georgian clans of Shushtar was the "Vakhashtu Khan clan" who were considered as the special slaves of Shah Safi (1038-1052 AH) (1616-1630

AD) and promoted to the position of Biglarbeigi (AlHosseini Qomi, 2004; Vahid Qazvini, 2004). In public view, the members of this clan were known for their beauty. They were located in the vicinity of Salasel castle of Shushtar.

Social and political situation of Shushtar at the time of Vakhastu Khan

The Vakhastu Khan clan were the special slaves of Shah Safi from 1042 AH to 1144 AH (1620 AD to 1722 AD) who ruled Shushtar for 102 years. On the arrival of Vakhastu Khan at Shushtar, who possessed "Sheshpar Ghoorchi" ⁵ position, the elders, sadat (Marashi, Ghiri and....), scholars, and the elites of Shushtar rushed to welcome him (Kasrawi, 2010).

During Vakhastu Khan's ruling, the presence of their relatives and their devotees, including "Gorgin Beig" and "Eldorom Beig," increased in Shushtar. Gorgin Beig was later promoted to the status of "Mirshekari" (Imam Ahvazi, 2000; Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009). In the Safavid era, Mirshekari status was considered a second-rank position, comprising more than two hundred members responsible for maintaining birds of prey (goshawk). Birds of prey were used for hunting cranes, geese, and ducks (Navaei and Ghaffari Fard, 2007). Furthermore, "Mansour Khan" and "Zulfiqar Khan" were the brothers of Vakhastu Khan that Zulfiqar Khan Biglar Beigi later became the ruler of Kandahar (AlHosseini Qomi, 2004; Hosseini Monshi, 2006).

It can be implied from the sources of the Safavid era that "Vakhastu Khan" was very well-known for the development and prosperity of the agriculture and horticulture of Shushtar and for respecting the peasants. He developed Shushtar by planting trees and increasing agricultural productions (Vahid Qazvini, 2004).

Shah Safi did not disregard the actions taken by Vakhastu Khan in the province of Shushtar. Therefore, he was promoted by Shah Safi when he returned from Kandahar, where his brother was its ruler, and a fixed salary and pension was considered for him like the Khans (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009).

During the Safavid era, many battles happened between the kings of the Safavid dynasty and the Ottoman Empire. The first battle in 920 AH (1498 AD) was called the "Battle of Chaldiran." In the Safavids were defeated. The winner of this battle, Shah Suleiman Osmani, conquered Tabriz, the Safavid capital (Seyouri, 2007). These

⁵ "Sheshpar Ghoorchi": Ghoorchian: They were the special guards of the Safavid Shah. Their commander was called Ghoorchi Bashi. The title of almighty was exclusively used for these positions: The governors, Biglar Beigis, The Khans, The kings, the supreme minister, Ghoorchi Bashi and so on (Navaei, and Ghaffari Fard, 2007).

battles continued even during the successors of Shah Ismail, and each of the Safavid kings applied some particular military tactics in these battles, sometimes leading to their victory and other times to their defeat. At last, a peace treaty was signed between the Safavid and the Ottoman in 1048 AH (1626 AD), ending the relentless bloodshed. One of the main consequences of this peace treaty was the tranquility and peace of the people of Khuzestan, which led to the improvement of agriculture in this region (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009).

In addition to Vakhastu Khan, others, including his minister, Haji Mohammad Sharif Ibn Khaje Ghasem Ibn Khaje Ali led the development of Shushtar. One of the close relatives of this minister, Khaje Hedayatollah Ibn Khaje Nematollah, who had lived in India for several years, was not satisfied with life during the reign of Vakhastu Khan as he was blind (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009). Khaje Hedayatollah was one of the anonymous poets of Shushtar who wrote the Biography of Shushtar, which is a primary source of the Safavid era.

During the reign of Vakhastu Khan, "Haji Mohammad Taghi Kalantar," a very generous and good-natured man, held the Kalantar Bashi office (Sheriff). He and Vakhastu Khan founded the Najaf Abad village as well as the castles of "Papi" and "Fili" and "Afozuni" in 1042-1078 AH (1620-1656 AD). Haji Mohammad Taghi Kalantar made every attempt to settle the peasants in these places, providing them with agricultural tools and seeds. The author of the book "The Biography of Shushtar" wrote about a poet named "Molla Kasebi" who produced a poem about the village of Najaf Abad and was a contemporary of Vakhastu Khan.

Vakhastu Khan reigned for thirty-seven years. Fathali Bieg, Eselmes Beig (Aslan Khan), Kalbali Beig, Badadeh Beig and Aslan Beig his children. He had many servants, each of them was a great emir in their own positions (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009).

Sources of the Safavid era have referred to the actions taken by Zulfiqar Khan (the brother of Vakhastu Khan), who was the Beiglarbeigi of Kandahar. He repelled Aurang Zeib's attack on Kandahar, a provincial area contested by the Safavid and the Mughal of India in 1061 AH (1639 AD) (Qazvini, 1988). In fact, the power of Zulfiqar Khan in Kandahar province caused the Mughal kings of India to consider a military attack for seizing Kandahar as a last resort (Afshar Yazdi, 2001). Zulfiqar Khan passed away in 1071 AH (1639 AD) (Navaei, 1981; Vale Qazvini Isfahani, 2003).

The successors of Vakhashtu Khan

A) Fatali Khan

Fath Ali Khan was to govern Shushtar after the death of his father, Vakhashtu Khan. Fatali Khan ruled Shushtar from 1105 to 1178 AH (1683 to 1756 AD) and, like his father, respected Sadats and scholars and was the instructor of those who sought perfection. Eselmes Beig Khan (Aslan Khan), who was the governor of Shushtar on behalf of Fatali Khan, welcomed Seyyed Nematollah Jazayeri with great honor. Moreover, Aslan Khan procured the requirements for Seyyed Nematollah Jazayeri as if it deserved the lord of wisdom, also a home was provided for Seyyed in the vicinity of the grant mosque of Shushtar (Imam Ahvazi, 2000; Jazayeri, 1997; Marashi, 1986; Niroumand, 2005; Shushtari, 1984).

Fath Ali Khan, like his father, attempted to make Shushtar a prosperous and developed city. He also constructed many monuments, including Shah Abad, Ali Abad, Dolat Abad, Fath Abad places, Aghili gardens, Mahi Bazan dam, Hesam Abad mansion, and the Khan's bathroom. Furthermore, he reconstructed most of the mansions of Salasel castle and Kaiser bridge (Shadravan) that had been destroyed in the past (Kasrawi, 2010). While Fath Ali Khan was the ruler of Shushtar, he attempted to remove the silt from the Glougard aqueducts and Choubband lands from mud, but his efforts were fruitless. It should be mentioned that the Sadat clan, Marashi Sadat clan, and Jazayeri Sadat clan were respected well by Fatali Khan (Ibid, p. 139).

B) Kalb Ali Khan

Safavid Shah Soleiman died on Dhu al-Hijjah 1105 AH (September 1683 AD), and Shah Sultan Hussein came to the throne on Muharram 1106 AH (October 1684 AD). He sent Aslan Khan (Eselmes Beig) – the son of Vakhashtu Khan who was Gollar Agassi (the head of special servants) – to Kandahar and summoned Fath Ali Khan to Isfahan, the capital of the Safavids. In addition, he appointed the government of Shushtar to the other brother of Fath Ali Khan, i.e., Kalb Ali Khan, who entered the city of Shushtar in Jumada II 1106 AH (March 1683 AD). The Safavid king made benefit from the power of Vakhtashu Khan Georgian clan to solve external problems as well as to ameliorate the internal affairs, because the merit of this clan in controlling the affairs in Shushtar has been proven (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009; Kasrawi, 2010).

During the ruling of Kalb Ali Khan on Shushtar (about 1106 to 1111 AH) (1684 to 1689 AD), there was a flood and the gardens and crops in Shushtar were destroyed. This flood is considered an introduction to the destruction of Shushtar, because some parts of the Mizan dam and Magham dam (Ali position) were destroyed, causing much destruction in Shushtar (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009). Regarding Aslan Khan's

ruling on the province of Kandahar, there is not much detailed information in the resources of the Safavid era (Naeini, 1974; Nasiri, 1994). The selection of Aslan Khan for ruling Kandahar Province happened in 1106 AH (1684 AD), and he became the ruler of Kohgiluyeh in 1114 AH (1692 AD). Upon reaching Kohgiluyeh, he came to Shushtar and stayed in Khajeh garden. Although Abudllah, the son of Aslan Khan, was a jovial and luxurious person. Since he loved his father very much, he constantly traveled to Kohgiluyeh to visit his father. In this regard, when Aslan Khan became the ruler of Astarabad, his son quickly went to visit him. Another son of Aslan Khan, Mohammad Ali Beig (Khan), was the deputy of the ruler of Shushtar. Aslan Khan died in 1121 AH (1699 AD) in Astarabad (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009).

C) Isa Khan and Abdullah Khan:

From 1111 to 1113 AH (1689 to 1691 AD), Isa Khan, the son of Zulfiqar Khan (Vakhashtu's brother), was the ruler of Shushtar. He favored peasants and was also very interested in Shushtar and respecting the poor, but his reign was very short. In 1113 AH (1691 AD), Abdullah Khan, the son of Aslan Khan (Vakhashtu's son) became the ruler of Shushtar and was its ruler for eleven years (1113-1124 AH) (1691-1702 AD) (ibid, pp. 141-142).

D) Mehr Ali Khan

In 1129 AH (1707 AD), Mehr Ali Khan, the son of Kalb Ali Khan, became the ruler of Shushtar. His brother, Haji Muhammad Khan, became the deputy of the ruler of Shushtar. However, this appointment did not last long, and Abdullah Khan became the ruler again. These changes showed the weakness of the Georgian government in Shushtar, especially Abdullah Khan. On Jumada AlAwwal 1134 AH (February 1712 AD), the Soltani war began in Gloun Abad between the Safavid army and the troops of Afghan Mahmoud who defeated the Safavid army put Isfahan, the capital of the Safavid, under the siege. During the siege of Isfahan, Mehr Ali Khan, the son of Kalb Ali Khan, was appointed ruler (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009).

The End of the Vakhashtu Khan Clan

The quick ascent of the Vakhashtu Khan clan in administrative affairs was not very evident in the history of Iran. Mirza Tahmasp, the son of Shah Sultan Hussein, who survived the siege of Isfahan was crowned in Qazvin on Safar 1135 AH (November 1713 AD). Mohammad Ali Khan, the son of Aslan Khan, was appointed as his minister of the state (Imam Ahvazi, 2000; Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009; Kasrawi, 2010). The minister of state of a king who had no power would be without any authority as well.

From 1135 to 1144 AH (1713 to 1722 AD), Tahmasp Quli (Nader Shah) came to Isfahan and dethroned Shah Tahmasp II and appointed his young son, Abbas Mirza III as king. The government of Shushtar had been subjected to many seditions and rebellions. On the one side, the government of Shushtar was at the hands of Douragh and Hoveizeh Arab sheiks, and on the other side, Bakhtiari Khans were covetous towards Shushtar. Moreover, the ruling of the Vakhastu Khan clan also continued in a very weak manner (Jazayeri Shushtari, 2009). In addition to the three powers mentioned, there were disobedient Turks in the Safavid army. They were incompatible with the Georgian Vakhastu Khan clan and sometimes leaned towards Arab sheiks and sometimes tended towards Bakhtiari Khans (Ibid, p. 172).

Furthermore, the situation of Shushtar became more complicated and chaotic when the Heydari-Ne'mati disputes between Shushtarians was added to this chaotic situation. Heydari-Ne'mati are two contrasting sects which were in an ongoing and violent conflict with each other in the Safavid and Qajar eras in most cities of Iran, including Shushtar. The Heydari group followed to Qutb al-Din Heydar, one of the Safavid elders, and the Ne'mati group followed Shah Ne'mat Allah Vali. During Tasua and Ashura (martyrdom day of Imam Hossein), the conflicts between the two sects increased intensely so that Heydari and Ne'mati neighborhoods sometimes leaned towards Arab sheiks or Bakhtiari Khans, and sometimes tended towards Vakhastu Khan clan, and sometimes showed animosity and hatred towards Turkish Safavid army (Ravandi, 2003).

In general, the ruling intervals in that period brought numerous disasters for the people of Shushtar. Finally, with the coming of Nader Shah Afshar into power, no myth of the power of Arab sheiks remained, not a trace of Bakhtiari Khan's defiance. With the rise of Nader Shah Afshar, the Vakhastu Khan clan had no role in the government, and Georgian rule of Shushtar came to an end after a hundred and two years (1042-1144 AH) (1620-1722 AD) (Kasraw, 2010).

Conclusion

The first appearance and position of the Vakhastu Khan clan were as the special servants at the court of Shah Safi (1038-1052 AH) (1616-1630 AD), but their remarkable policies and tact led to their promotion to the position of Biglarbeigi. The Biglarbeigi of Kandahar province, which was the border of Iran and the Gorkani government of India in the Safavid era was of the utmost importance. In addition to the development and prosperity of Shushtar, the Vakhastu Khan clan also had the duty of guarding and preserving the Kandahar province. The political existence of the Vakhastu Khan clan was significant in three different aspects. First, this clan did

many services to the Safavid dynasty in their various positions for a long time. Second, the loyalty of this clan to the Safavid dynasty is praiseworthy because, for a hundred and two years of being the governor of Shushtar and being Biglarbeigi in the province of Kandahar, they never rose against the Safavids. Third, this clan was also present at the Safavid court holding the "Sheshpar Ghoorchi" position which remained in the Vakhastu Khan clan until the end of the Safavid dynasty.

It should be noted that this clan also paid attention to the agricultural prosperity and the development of Shushtar as well. Furthermore, new neighborhoods were built during their ruling, and agricultural tools were developed, which was an essential step toward the agricultural development and prosperity of Shushtar.

After the decline of the Safavid dynasty, this clan was involved in the conflicts of Arab sheiks and Bakhtiari. It was also involved in disputes between Heydari and Nem'mati neighborhoods gradually declined. Finally, with the arrival of Nadir Shah Afshar and the founding of the Afsharieh dynasty, the reign of this clan, which cared about the prosperity and development of Shushtar, ended after hundred and two years.

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