

KURDS AS SPIES: INFORMATION-GATHERING ON THE 16TH-CENTURY OTTOMAN–SAFAVID FRONTIER*

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Examining 16th-century Kurdish politics, particularly in the frontier districts between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, aptly serves as a starting point for understanding Kurdish regional semi-autonomy. This paper, dedicated to the activities of Kurdish individuals involved in information-gathering on behalf of both the Ottoman and the Safavid Empires, is the first of its kind. The findings presented here are the result of close exploration in the Ottoman archives as well as detailed reading of a number of materials from Ottoman and Safavid chronicles. The paper discusses three main subjects. The introductory section briefly explains the methods and potentials of Kurdish spying as well as some of the particulars of Ottoman–Safavid espionage. The second section provides an overview of two famous Kurdish intellectual historians and the role each played in information-gathering. The third section discusses cases of espionage throughout the political careers of several Kurdish frontier emirs.

Key words: Kurds, Ottomans, Safavids, information-gathering, spy, Kurdistan, 16th century.

I. Introduction

Little is known about the control of information in the 16th century, but it must have been quite considerable, especially in the Middle East. In the political arena of the time, information played a significant role and gave a certain advantage to those

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empires that developed their policies based on information provided by accurate sources. In a battle with the logistical difficulties of the 16th century, empires had to make investment in espionage networks which, albeit incapable and simple by modern criterions, still provided them with the most reliable information according to which they were to distribute their resources and create their policies. As might be expected, empires sought to make use of and control information in order to get advantage over their rivals¹.

Control of information is an important facet of 16th-century Ottoman–Safavid politics as well. The length and the scope of Ottoman–Safavid rivalry convinced both empires to establish some espionage networks that gathered information in a large frontier geography. Nevertheless, in the war of information between Ottomans and Safavids on their frontier territories, the success of both empires was essentially based on the Kurdish principalities and individuals.

The emergence of Safavid power – a special change in the eastern borders of the Ottoman Empire – introduced to keep a close eye on the military progress, tribal movements, and economic capability of the new Shiite rivals. At the very beginning of the 16th century the Safavids appeared on the political scene of the region with a new set of religious claims. Besides the very harsh religious answer that Safavids received from the Ottomans, another result was that Ottoman sensitivity became stronger than had originally been planned. Without a doubt, espionage made a significant mark on the Ottoman–Safavid relations since the beginning of this longstanding conflict. Initially, both empires relied by necessity on Kurdish espionage networks. The lack of information readily available to the Ottomans on Ismā‘īl I, for example, obliged them to gather information on Safavid activities much beyond the Euphrates (see Walsh 1962, p. 206).

In the 16th century, there was no assured way of effectively controlling Kurdish frontier tribes. Espionage was also the quickest way by which the Ottomans and Safavids could improve their situation in Kurdistan. In accordance with their “intelligence strategy”, Ottomans and Safavids engaged in a number of different activities such as information analysis, disinformation, bribery, propaganda, cryptanalysis, and counter-intelligence (see Gürkan 2012a).

No effort was made to analyse Kurdish spies and informants in the 16th century. The sources for the Ottoman and Safavid spies are hardly accessible even today. In his informative and invaluable PhD dissertation, Emrah Safa Gürkan made a major contribution especially to the study of Ottoman espionage on the western Ottoman frontiers (see Gürkan 2012b). No mention was, however, made about the Kurdish spies in the 16th century. The inclusion of the Safavid espionage is also very brief and superficial. On the subject of spies in the Safavid Empire, other than the spies and informants acted on the Ottoman frontier, our main source of information is the article by Vural Genç (forthcoming). The following pages aim to supplement these past researches and especially to make an important contribution to the neglected subject of Kurdish information-gathering. The potential to act as brokers of information was a

¹ For details, see Skilliter (1976, pp. 47–59).

source of Kurdish power and leverage, allowing them to exchange one patron for another. What we are dealing with here is also this strategic position of Kurdish frontier emirates as an excellent factor for negotiating with neighbouring empires.

II. Methods and Potentials of Kurdish Espionage

Specific terms are used in both Ottoman and Safavid documents to refer to and describe spies and information-gathering. The technical term for espionage in both Safavid and Ottoman texts is either the Persian *zabāngīrī* or the Turkish *dil almak*, the literal translation of which is ‘catching a tongue’.² The most ubiquitous term, however, is *jāsūsī* or *tecessūs*. The term *rasm-i zabāngīrī* should also be mentioned. It can be translated as either ‘espionage method’ or ‘espionage fashion’ (see Turkmān 2008, Vol. I, p. 509). While literature on espionage has alluded to uses of words like *rasm-i zabāngīrī*, the subject of terminology has received neither any detailed, nor even clear methodological attention.

It is true that the 16th-century authors rarely identify a specifically *Kurdish* approach to espionage, which is distinguishable from a characteristically Ottoman or Safavid approach. The standard understanding of Kurdish espionage is possibly hindered by a lack of understanding of what the term *Kurdish spy* may have referred to in the 16th century.

Non-Kurdish Safavid and Ottoman spies were probably considered more trustworthy because, unlike their Kurdish counterparts who had close ties with Kurdish emirs whose loyalty was extremely fluid, they did not have potentially competing loyalties. The *forms* in which the Kurdish spies appeared were many and varied. They normally came into imperial service as (i) frontier tribal agents, (ii) envoys, (iii) pilgrims, (iv) travellers, and (v) merchants. Often pursued by imperial authorities, they normally travelled in disguise (*tebdīl-i sûret*).

Influential Kurdish emirs and intellectuals were particularly interested in information-gathering. These emirs and their principalities were home to many tribal chieftains and local merchants, pilgrims, and agents that crossed the Ottoman–Safavid boundary regularly. For the imperial authorities, having a Kurdish emir in their service meant that they had widespread access to hundreds of tribal men, chieftains, and equipment.

Broader regional interests often influenced Kurdish interactions with both the Ottomans and the Safavids. The fact that Kurdish emirs had Kurdish allies on either

² In both Ottoman and Safavid traditions, the word *jāsūs* (sometimes as *ādam*) is often used to denote ‘spy, informant’. Common Persian and Arabic words (*mukhbir*, *ṣāhib al-khabar*, *munahhī*, *mushrif*) are not included. Interestingly, the Turkish word *dil* ‘tongue’ was occasionally used as a synonym for *jāsūs*. Compare Ispanaqchīpāshāzāda (2000, p. 177) and Ibn Manzūr (1986, Vol. II, p. 283). To our knowledge, Kurdish nouns and verbs for espionage (e.g. *destkīs*, *sīxur*, *cehş*, *cesisandin*, and *qīşirandin*) were not mentioned in any Ottoman–Safavid or Kurdish texts from the 16th century.

side of the border proved to be challenging for the imperial powers.³ Although no detailed account to this effect has been found to date, they seemed to have been very capable of simultaneously serving as spies for both powers without their duplicity being discovered.

Kurdish emirs sometimes even learned to be spies before they learned to be emirs. According to the archival reports, it is clear that spies of Kurdish emirs had connections to both the Sultan, and especially, the Shah. This provided them the opportunity to gather information from the centre unimpeded. It should be kept in mind, however, that Kurdish actions toward either empire could have been only a small part of a larger espionage project. A key to successful spying in the 16th century was to have an advantage in the politics of information. Kurdish espionage was not the only answer to the major queries that Ottoman–Safavid espionage engagement needed to ask. Kurdish emirs who co-operated with their Ottoman and Safavid overlords were strategic actors. As such, they sought to take advantage of political position on the frontier in order to achieve their personal objectives. This does not mean, however, that their objectives were predetermined by their Kurdishness. Additionally, the fact that Kurds provided services to both the Ottomans and the Safavids should not be considered treachery. It would be anachronistic to apply the concepts of nationhood and nationalism to the 16th century.

A. Kurdish Espionage and Bilingualism

The characteristics that set Kurdish spies apart from Ottoman and Safavid spies are their bilingualism and their frontier tribal affiliations.⁴ A substantial debate in Islamic sources on the capability of spies, emphasises the provision that the spy have excellent knowledge of the enemy's language which was the rival empire (see Qalqashandī 1963, Vol. I, p. 124). This helps explain why Ottomans and Safavids gave priority to Kurdish-speaking people in frontier areas. Throughout the 16th century, this attention to linguistic capabilities retained its priority for imperial agents seeking to employ spies (see Olearius 1984, p. 200). The geographical landscape of Kurdistan, being a mountainous borderland, explains both the preservation of the Kurdish language and the populations' practice of speaking neighbouring languages as well. This linguistic competence, also a contemporary characteristic of Kurdish populations, is likely to have made them quite attractive assets to both Ottoman and Safavid officials.

³ Some aspects of this capability were generally regarded as a 'problem' within the espionage duties. In his *Sīyāsāt-nāma*, Kh^wāja Nizām al-Mulk provides an ethical advice for the spies, encouraging them to be only the agents of the sultan and not the agents of others. See Nizām al-Mulk Ṭūsī (2003, pp. 74–75).

⁴ Both at the Ottoman and the Safavid courts, Turkish was spoken, though there were dialectal differences. It should be mentioned that knowledge of the Turkish language might have been more important for the espionage activities in the Ottoman–Safavid frontiers, but the capabilities of the Kurdish bilingual spies cannot be denied.

A good sample of Kurdish bilingualism and the role it played in information-gathering comes from the manuscript of the Persian collection of Jāmī's *Ash'at al-Luma'āt*, kept at the Majlis parliamentary collections in Tehran (see Jāmī n.d., fols 77r–78r). It is an undated copy of an espionage letter addressed to Süleymân I. Based on the context and the reference to Sulţān Ḥusayn Bayg, the Kurdish emir of 'Amādīyya, it is certain that the unnamed spy in question was himself originally from Kurdistan who gathered information as an intermediary between Safavids and Sulţān Ḥusayn Bayg⁵. It should be noted that the object of this letter is to investigate the political status of Safavids via the Safavid *hajj* caravan which was under the command of a pro-Safavid Kurd, that is Ḥājjī Bayg Dunbulī⁶, a symbol of Safavid power in some parts of Ādharbāyjan where there were some linguistic and religious differences from the western Ottoman regions. It is wise to accept that the Kurdish spy in question had safer ways of communicating with the Kurdish-Safavid *ṣāhib hajj* as he was able to speak Kurdish, Ottoman Turkish, and the Turkish dialect of Ādharbāyjan.

B. Kurdish Espionage and Religion

The frontier areas between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires were permeable, contributing to a rather fluid religious landscape.⁷ There is reason to assume, however, that religion played only a secondary role in the development of Kurdish espionage. A remarkable feature of the subject is the very large number of references to the term *tajassus*. As was mentioned above, Kurdish espionage was most often called *tecessūs etmek* or *tecessūs*, both of which bring to mind the Arabic legal term *tajassus*. Might the term be connected with Islamic *fiqh*? Despite the fact that both Sunnis and Shiites strongly objected to intra-family espionage ('*awrāt*), both communities ardently encouraged spying on the secret plans of rival countries and enemies (see, for example, Warrām n.d., Vol. I, p. 115; Kharshī 1997, Vol. IV, p. 28; Majlisī 1983, Vol. 64, pp. 312–313). It is interesting to note, however, that only the Shāfi'ite school (that of the Sunni Kurds) traditionally advocated tolerance toward captured spies, stating the need to refrain from making rushed judgements about them (see Anonymous 1986, Vol. X, p. 166). The inclusion of the term *düşmen-i bi-din* 'irreligious enemy' in reference to Iran (see, for example, BOA MD 38, khm. 376, dated 7 Jumādā II 987/1 August 1579) emphasised a religious role similar to the military one played by the active spies as

⁵ The demise of Sulţān Ḥusayn Bayg must date from shortly before 979/1571–1572 when Muşliḥ al-Dīn Muḥammad Lārī (d. 979/1571–1572) had dispatched a letter to Sulţān Ḥusayn Bayg, here known as the ruler of 'Amādīyya in Mosul (*al-marḥūm al-maghfir lahu sulālatu al-umarā'i Sulţān Ḥusayn ḥākimu al-'Amādīyya bi-Mawşili*). See Lārī (2014, Vol. II, pp. 965–966); compare also KK 1764, 111; Scheref (1860, Vol. I, pp. 276–278, 284–285).

⁶ Very possibly this Dunbulī *ṣāhib hajj* is Ḥājjī Bayg b. Ḥājjī Bayg. During the revolt of Bāyezīd (966/1559–969/1562) Tahmāsp I appointed Ḥājjī Bayg as the governor of Abaghāy where he governed for about twenty years. See Scheref (1860, I, pp. 312, 314–315).

⁷ For more details on the role of the religious element in the wars between the Ottomans and Safavids, see Matthee (2014, p. 19), and the references there.

Zaynal Bayg. It is interesting that the spying activities of the Kurdish emir are considered a religious matter.

The role that religious interests played in Kurdish espionage can even be attributed to a stronger sense of identity among the Safavids than among the Ottomans. With the rise of the Safavids and the propagation of the Shiite doctrine in Anatolia, the Ottomans were forced to be active in opposing the spread of Shiism in Anatolian districts. While there is no evidence that Kurds of a specific branch of Islam spied for the Safavids, information-gathering was a key target in the activities of Anatolian Safavid *halifes*, who may well have been in contact with the Alevi Kurdish communities inhabiting the area (see BOA MD 23, Nos 173, 186, 451, 452, 696, all date from 985/1577–1578).

The political engagement of Qubād Bayg of Kalhur, who controlled a vast area within Ottoman domains stretching from Dīnawar to Baghdad, can be related to religious espionage as well. It is certain that Qubād Bayg played a role in the spread of Shiism. Ottomans periodically conducted searches for *kizilbaş* heterodox practitioners within the frontier lands. According to the investigations of Baghdad's governor in 985/1577, the number of "heretic Shiites" in the province was extreme. This report shows that they found their leadership in the *bey* of the frontier *sancak* of Derne, i.e. Qubād Bayg, son of Mīr 'Umar (see BOA MD 31, khm. 141; MD 32, khm. 416, 418). He had prevented the passage of merchants between Iran and Baghdad and kept in touch with Iran via his spies. The governor of Baghdad once tried to imprison him, and encouraged the court to appoint a Sunni in his stead (see BOA MD 31, khm. 141).⁸

It is also important to mention 'Umar Bayg of Kalhur, the supreme commander of the allied Kalhur and the governor of Daratañg and Darna. According to Ottoman documents, he held a position in 979/1571, especially because of the active espionage affairs in which he was involved. Because of the Kalhur's Shiite trends, it is probable that some espionage effort of 'Umar Bayg has possibly gone into defending the Shiite Safavid Empire as well. A much more important witness is his position as a spy for the Ottomans in 979/1571 (see BOA MD 6, 187; MD 12, khm. 806; MD 30, khm. 247; MD 31, khm. 141, 777; MD 43 khm. 495; and Turkamān 2008, Vol. II, p. 650).

C. Strategic Position and Kurdish Espionage

The Ottoman and Safavid Empires came into contact with one another in the Kurdish localities around the frontier. Their conflict was a demonstration for all, layman and expert alike, of the strategic significance and importance of every piece of land in every corner of the frontier. Who had heard of the Kurdish villages on the frontier? Who was at all interested in the tribal life of the frontier? Obscure settlements on the Ādharbāyjān border, villages and towns on the eastern shores of Lake Vān, roads in

⁸ Given the harsh Ottoman statements denouncing him, he may be considered one of the Kurdish spies who was more consistently allied with the Safavids. See also Turkamān (2008, Vol. II, pp. 650, 660).

Kurdish territories – suddenly these became almost daily topics in the imperial news and the people of the area learned their importance and the particular reasons for their prominence.⁹

Because of its strategic importance as a frontier area, the Ottoman and Safavid emperors usually refrained from direct interfering in the military and political life of Kurdistan, an inaccessible mountainous region, which remained a stronghold of semi-independent trends. All of these geopolitical benefits have resulted in the establishment of the espionage networks in which Kurds played the basic role. Their strategic importance on the frontier meant that Kurdish emirs were in a mountainous position to avoid declaring loyalty to either of the imperial authorities, and that they had an edge over spies sent from the imperial capitals.

In an effort to subdue and stabilise these frontier areas, both empires sought to establish fortresses there which were to serve as both military and regional diplomatic centres. Baghdad, Shahrizur, Vān, Erzurum, Tabrīz, and the local networks under the direction of Kurdish emirs there, were the main espionage tools of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had adopted a more active policy of maintaining an imperial presence in the frontier areas, where the local communities often switched their allegiance from one power to the other. The Safavids similarly sought to turn Kurdish emirs and their networks into imperial assets, with the difference that the Safavid side was relatively weak.¹⁰ Nevertheless, in both cases, imperial gifts and bribes paid to the influential Kurds of the area were an essential factor (see, for example, BOA MD 38, khm. 376).

III. Ottoman and Safavid Interests in Kurdish Espionage

Kurdish spies were able to change their lords at will, as no Kurdish spy was related to any particular lord. While this was a basic phenomenon for espionage worldwide, it should be considered an especially important aspect of Kurdish spying activities. Imperial authorities exerted no direct control over Kurdish spies living in high mountains in inaccessible frontier principalities. The imperial powers gained access to the world of Kurdish spies first by luring Kurdish emirs into their service. It is interesting,

⁹ The strategic position of Kurdistan and the Ottoman policies towards the Kurds have been several times discussed in the secondary literature. See Bruinessen (1988, pp. 29–44); Murphey (2003, pp. 151–170); and Özoğlu (1996, pp. 5–27). For Ottoman–Safavid relations and the Kurdish tribes with a primary focus on the Safavid policy, see Nūrī–Nūrī (2011, pp. 272–281); and especially Yamaguchi (2012, pp. 101–132).

¹⁰ By weak, we mean that the Safavids were less successful in recruiting Kurdish spies than the Ottomans. The Anatolian Shiite communities must have strong espionage service skills and a good potential for Safavid interests. While Sunnism makes Kurds the focus of Ottomans, the Anatolian Shiism apparently act as a primary focus for the Safavids. See Allouche (1980, pp. 252–253) which is based on TSMA E. 5460. A letter from Ismāʿīl I to Mūsā Tūrghūd Oĝlu, dated 7 Rabīʿ I 918/23 May 1512, is presented here. In this letter, Ismāʿīl I requests the leader of the Tūrghūd tribe to contact the Safavid envoy to Anatolia, Aḥmad Āghā Qaramānlū, and to report in detail all important activities in the area.

however, that with the many problems that the Ottomans and Safavids had at any given time, they were consistently interested in Kurdish espionage. It appears that the reason imperial authorities tolerated a degree of fluidity in their relationship with Kurdish spies was because of their perceived value. Some samples of Ottoman–Safavid interests in Kurdish espionage may be somewhat helpful as we have very scanty evidence of involvement in such hidden activities.

First of all, we should remember that Kurdish espionage was most active during the reigns of Ṭahmāsp I (919/1515–984/1576) and Süleymân I (r. 926/1520–974/1566). What role did they play in the events that led to the division of Kurdistan between Safavid and Ottoman lands? What role did they play prior to the reign of these two Sultans? Though espionage is a very important example of a political method forming part of the rivalries between Ismā‘īl I (892/1487–930/1524) and Bâyezîd II (886/1481–918/1512), the same broad approach cannot be easily applied to the Kurdish emirs and their spying activities in the very early years of the century.

A. Ottoman Officials Involved in Espionage

The earliest Ottoman example known so far is the well-known Bıyıklı Mehmed Paşa. After the battle of Châldirân, Selîm I entrusted the conquest of Bâyburd and Kamâkh to Bıyıklı Mehmed Paşa (920/1514 and 921/1515) who played an important role in regional espionage. The regional positions that he held helped him shape an active espionage network in the Kurdish principalities of Dîyâr Bakr (see TSMA E. 6102, E. 6627, E. 8283; Ebû-l-Fazl n.d., fols 23r ff.; Rûmlü 2005, Vol. II, pp. 1097–1099; Bacqué-Grammont 1992, pp. 703–725).

Hüsrev Paşa (d. 951/1544), the ruler of Dîyâr Bakr, is another well-known Ottoman military commander who was engaged in spying activities. According to the intelligence report kept at Topkapı Palace archives, some active Kurdish spies were the employees of Hüsrev Paşa. He had explicitly ordered Kurdish emirs to dispatch trustworthy spies to Persia. At the end of an undated letter he mentions that if the spies of Kurdish emirs had returned from Persia, he would be able to send an accurate report to the court (see TSMA E. 7115).

B. Mamlūk and Safavid Governors Involved in Espionage

An interesting example is that of a Mamlūk case. Māmāy Bayg, the Mamlūk governor of Malatya, was spying for the Ottomans. On 3 Ramađān 918/21 November 1512, Māmāy Bayg had sent two spies to Persia in order to gather new information on Ismā‘īl I, particularly his military condition. The spies that Māmāy Bayg sent to central Persia could travel from Mamlūk territory to Persia only because they were accompanied by a Persian *çavuş*. It seems that the possibility of enemy agents' penetration to their lands agitated Safavids and convinced them to check their Mamlūk

border rather than the Ottoman border (see TSMA E. 8758; Scheref 1860, Vol. I, pp. 166–167; Bacqué-Grammont 1987, p. 39, note 67 and p. 42, note 68).

Safavid governors would sometimes exert a greater influence on the issue if they were considered in a special way. For instance, Amīr Khān Turkamān, the *amīr al-umarā* of Ādharbāyjān, played a significant role in matters of espionage. In the *Sharaf-nāma*, there is no clear reference to the role he played, but the extant evidence may still be helpful in determining his role in the Kurdish principalities of Salmās, Khuy, and Urmīya. What is given in the Turkish registers, on the other hand, may very easily direct us to his espionage services on behalf of the Ottomans. He was jailed and put to death by Shah Muḥammad Khudābanda in 992/1584, perhaps another sign of his unclear loyalties (see BOA MD 32, khm. 389, 507; MD 36, khm. 310; Selānikī 1999, Vol. I, pp. 118–120; Scheref 1860, Vol. I, pp. 112, 314, 332–333; Vol. II, p. 273).

IV. Circumspect Forefathers: Another Look

In the heartlands of Kurdistan there lived, aside from the aristocracy and the peasant population of different origins and status, a “higher class” consisting of people whose special knowledge, skill and services could not easily be dispensed with in the imperial states. These were artists and historians and other “personnel” whose spying activities were somewhat unclear. The most important of these figures are Idrīs Bidlīsī and Sharaf Khān.

Both spent several years of their lives in Tabrīz, Qazwīn, and Istanbul. They also both penned Ottoman and Persian histories. They interacted with local as well as regional powers, and were thoroughly bilingual or even trilingual. Due to their family and religious backgrounds, Kurdish emirs and intellectuals typically spoke of them with great respect. Their visits to the Sultan or Shah and the access they had to the influential officials were sources of acceptance in the Kurdish community.

No explicit espionage enterprise is referenced in the lives and works of the Kurdish forefathers. It is possible that as intellectual elites, they chose to exclude mention of prevailing political trends in their historical studies. Any open declaration of one’s espionage confessions would likely have proved dangerous in the context of a changing political and religious society. Perhaps they wisely preferred to remain anonymous, concealing their spying activities behind other roles.

A. Idrīs Bidlīsī

Idrīs is undoubtedly one of the most important intellectual figures in the 15th- and 16th-century Ottoman–Safavid world. It is certain that he established an espionage network to get information from the Safavids and their allies. In 920/1514, he accompanied the Ottoman Sultan on the Chāldirān campaign. According to the *Sharaf-nāma*, some twenty Kurdish emirs had already sent declarations of their submission to Selīm I before his campaign against the Safavids. According to Sharaf Khān, Idrīs

was responsible for obtaining these declarations (see Scheref 1860, Vol. I, pp. 132, 342–343, 415–416)

İdrīs did not leave Tabrīz in the autumn of 1514. As a privileged deputy of the Sultan, he stayed in Tabrīz. From Tabrīz he went to Urmīya where he tried to get local Kurdish emirs who had suffered violence at the hands of the Shah, to switch their allegiance from the Safavids to the Ottoman Sultan (see Genç 2015, pp. 43–75). Following the conquest of Āmid, the Ottoman Sultan, in a remarkable demonstration of his trust in İdrīs, sent him *farmāns* of investiture with the spaces left blank for him to fill in the names of the Kurdish recipients (see Ebû-l-Fazl(n.d., passim, esp. fols 24r–24v; TSMA E. 3165, 5675, 6627; 8333; Hoca Se‘dû-ddîn 1862, pp. 308–309; Hammer 1827–1835, Vol. I, p. 749; Vol. II, pp. 432–434).

Having no military or administrative rank within the Ottoman administration, nevertheless, İdrīs continued to bring more Kurds into the Ottoman fold until Rabī‘ I 922/April 1516. This voluntary mission included the crucial task of delivering Safavid intelligence to Selīm I. It is clear that the Persian reports that he forwarded to the Sultan a number of strategic accounts that responded to the queries of Selīm I. Prior to the conquest of Dīyār Bakr, for instance, one of his spies reported that the Safavid army was very weak at the time, having only fifteen equipped camels that they moved from Tabrīz to Ūjān. In the same report, the spy indicated that troop numbers were around 7000 men who had no military equipment (see TSMA E. 1019).

After the conquest of Dīyār Bakr, İdrīs continued his spying activities. A Kurdish spy, who was the employee of İdrīs in Tabrīz, Urmīya and Brādōst, reported that Ismā‘īl I was at the Eşkenber-Kelember summer pasture. According to this espionage report, the Shah had decided to march to Dīyār Bakr. For this purpose, he had dispatched one of his well-known commanders, named Dīv ‘Alī, to Chuqūr-i Sa‘d. İdrīs’s spy also mentioned that if the Sultan had reached that area, the Shah would evacuate all tribes from Chuqūr-i Sa‘d to Qarabāgh, Ganja and Barda‘ in order to prevent the Ottoman army from being able to stay until the spring (see TSMA E. 8333/1; TSMA E. 6610; TSMA E. 8333/2; TSMA E. 1019). It should also be noted that İdrīs sometimes delivered informative letters to the Ottoman court via his attendants Mevlana Mehmed Türkistanī and Yusuf Ağa (see TSMA E. 8333/3; TSMA E. 1019).

B. Sharaf Khān

Under Ṭahmāsp I, Ismā‘īl II, and Khudābanda, Sharaf Khān was engaged in several Safavid political affairs in Gīlān, Shīrwān and Nakhchiwān. The Ottomans succeeded in bringing him into their fold. After a meeting with the Ottoman general Hüsrev Paşa in 986/1578, Murād III installed Sharaf Khān as ruler of Bidlīs which his ancestors had previously ruled (see KK 262, 181; MD 32, khm. 543, dated 27 Dhū al-Qa‘da 986/3 February 1579).

Sharaf Khān’s changing political allegiances merit attention. His biography resembles that of İdrīs, as both were born in Iran, had contacts with contemporary Safavid rulers, and acquired a detailed knowledge of both the Iranian and the Kurdish

tribes of the Safavid Empire. Sharaf Khān's broad and varied knowledge of the Safavid government was one of the primary reasons that the Ottomans sought his services. We do not know, however, to what degree Sharaf Khān was sympathetic to either the Safavids or the Ottomans.

The Ottoman archive includes some correspondence with the provinces and statesmen on matters concerning Sharaf Khān and the Rōzhiki tribe. Of note is the favourable attitude of the Ottomans towards Sharaf Khān's tribe. The correspondence also reveals the Ottomans' intention to make Sharaf Khān and his obedient followers available to the Ottomans (see BOA A.DVN.MHM 32, No. 168, dated Muḥarram 986/April 1578; A.DVN.MHM 32, No. 556, dated 6 Dhī al-Ḥijja 986/12 February 1579; and A.DVN.MHM 38, No. 195, dated 23 Šafar 987/30 April 1579). In order to maintain Sharaf Khān's loyalty, the Ottomans established contacts with his friends, and installed him as governor of Bidlīs, where he would have influence over these friends. These friends provided general information on the political situation in Persian Kurdistan, the diplomats in Vān and Tabrīz, and many Rōzhikī officials and spies interested in the glory of the Ottomans.

Espionage had a past in Sharaf Khān's family. An interesting piece of evidence, for example, is a letter of Sharaf Khān, the grandfather of *Sharaf-nāma*'s author, to Bıyıqlı Mehmed Paşa in which he has provided detailed information on Ismā'īl I's campaign to Shīrwān and Nakhchiwān (see Bacqué-Grammont 1992, p. 709, based on TSMA E. 5858). The spy of Bidlīs's Kurdish emir was interestingly among the very close companions of Ismā'īl I. The main point here, however, is that it was his ancestors' participation in espionage that made such affairs familiar to Sharaf Khān.

There is evidence that reflects the familiarity of Sharaf Khān with Kurdish espionage, though he himself, according to those same documents, was sufficiently aware of the riskiness of such activities (see BOA MAD, 17951, dated 20 Dhī al-Ḥijja 988/4 February 1581). Upon the death of Amīr Shams al-Dīn, his father, Sharaf Khān found himself master of a tribal community that included many agents along both sides of the contested Ottoman–Safavid boundary. Very possibly there was no extensive personal spying activity; the body of roles played by the cautious Sharaf Khān should be related to a large network of Rōzhikī spies whose responsibility was to gather information for him. From the style and phrases used in BOA MD 48, No. 311 (written on 15 Ramaḍān 990/3 October 1582), it is clear that Sharaf Khān himself had close espionage relations with representatives of the Ottoman Empire. If Sharaf Khān was responsible for advising the governor of Vān in his spying activities, then it is likely that he also led a Kurdish network of spies, which were beyond the access of persons like Vān's governor.

The Sultan ordered the governor of Vān to use his spies and to write letters to other possible pro-Ottoman Kurdish officials in order to include them as part of the Ottoman side. What is mainly reflected is the idea that the Kurdish emirs (as Sharaf Khān) played a great role in information-gathering for Ottoman representatives in the area who themselves had no access to the local persons and equipment. Here the invocation is neither directly to the Turkish spies nor to the Kurdish spies, but to the Kurdish emirs as consultants. It is interesting that Sharaf Khān is named between

Zaynal Bayg of Ḥakkārī and Ḥasan Bayg of Maḥmūdī whose role in the Kurdish spying activities is certain.

V. Forthright Emirs: Making Friends by Having Enemies

Idrīs and Sharaf Khān were unique in many respects. Savvy thinking may explain why it is difficult to determine the extent to which they participated in spying activities. Due to the secret nature of spying activities, it is difficult to describe them with certainty, although certain Kurdish spies of somewhat lower classes might be mentioned. Several emirs can be seen as contributors to espionage, some of which held no dynastic label. For example, one may take the mention of the Kurdish emir Şevket Bayg (whose name is not mentioned in the *Sharaf-nāma*). On 10 Muḥarram 942/20 July 1535, Süleymān I executed him and his retinue during his second visit to Tabrīz for spying for the Safavids (see Ferīdūn Beg 1858, Vol. I, p. 595).

There are some completely unknown Kurdish spies who were experienced agents not only in the Ottoman–Safavid frontiers, but also in other districts of both empires. For example, the Kurds also played a very active role in Safavid spying activities at the northeastern frontiers of Iran. In 991/1583, some Kurds were dispatched to regions around Tāybād (near the Afghanistan border) in order to make *zabāngīrī* (see Qumī 1980, Vol. II, p. 737).

Closer frontier areas for Ottoman–Safavid relations were more important, as espionage by these principalities were much safer than by much internal regions. Ḍīyā' al-Dīn Bayg of Bidlīs, a son of Sharaf Khān, is a good sample of a Kurdish spy who heightened such a role of Kurdish principalities (see MD 78, khm. 1227, dated 1018/1609–1610). There was a limited distance over which Kurdish peasants were willing to transport livestock and grain by road to the other side of the frontier, and this created a common structure in which each Kurdish district was a local centre for making possibilities to gather information. Some Ottoman documents contain instructions about transporting livestock and grain to Iran. The fact that such frontier communications gave rise to Safavid spying activities indicates that the influence of frontier Kurds was far beyond the area of their habitation (see MD 44, khm. 298; Koca Nişancı 1981, p. 451a).

There are also a considerable number of written letters to the unnamed Kurdish emirs of Erciş, Namran, Müküs, and Gargar, requesting that they spy on Safavid territories. The formula *bir sureti* 'a copy' normally indicates those documents which have been sent to a group of Kurdish emirs especially including the secondary frontier emirs (see, for example, MD 32, khm. 67; MD 38, khm. 376).

Exceptions to these unidentified and less known Kurdish spies are emirs mentioned in the *Sharaf-nāma*. A very interesting example is given in the Ḥakkārī chapter. Accordingly, two brothers from the principality were involved in espionage, one for the Ottomans, and the other for the Safavids (see Scheref 1860, Vol. I, pp. 101–102). Although Bāyindir Bayg of Ḥakkārī sought asylum at the court of Ṭahmāsp I, the latter entertained no friendly relationship with him as an official Kurdish emir. From

the following paragraphs in which this name is mentioned one may conclude that Ṭahmāsp I wished to use him in his frontiers rather than at the court. When Zaynal Bayg, as an Ottoman agent, was dispatched to the Safavid borders in order to gather information, his brother Bāyindir Bayg was involved in the Shah's corresponding espionage mission. This is a very important example which indicates that the secret knowledge the Kurds possessed was very useful; it was highly strategic for Kurds themselves and made them able to improve their regional position by having their enemies as their friends.

A. Espionage for the Sultan

Several other Kurds, whose spying activity as self-governing Kurdish spies is a clear and related matter, should also be mentioned. The events related to Chāldirān where the Ottoman campaign was launched by Selīm I against Ismā'īl I, on the 23 Muḥarram 920/20 March 1514, should be regarded as a basic point for those Kurds who played a significant role in the espionage for Ottomans.

Early 16th Century

As a first step in the study of early 16th-century Kurdish spies who served Ottoman emperors, the name of Rustam Bayg of Mukrī or Rustam b. Bābā 'Umar should be mentioned. Apart from the ambiguous and very short account of him presented by Sharaf Khān (see Scheref 1860, Vol. I, p. 290), there is mention of him in the Ottoman *mūnše'āt*, where clear references are made to his spying activities.

The language of the letter makes it clear that Shiite movements were making progress in Ottoman lands and that Kurds gathered strategic intelligence for the Ottomans regarding the religious climate of the area. In a letter dated Rabī' II 908/October 1502, which Rustam Bayg wrote in response to Bāyezīd II's inquiry about the Āq-Quyūnlū, he indicates that the Safavids were preparing military equipment to be used against the Āq-Quyūnlū. The Safavids were expected to sign a peace treaty with the Charkas in Egypt, referring also to the massacre of Purnāks in Baghdad. The evidence indicates that Mukrīs also took a fierce polemical stand against early Safavid religious proclamations (see Ferīdūn Beg 1858, Vol. I, pp. 353–354; Thābitīyān 1964, p. 82; Nawā'ī 1977, pp. 710–711).

As the second important early Kurdish spy who was the ally of the Ottomans, one may note Mīr Sayyidī of Sōrān. He was an outstanding frontier agent for Selīm I, running a great network of spies in Safavid territories. According to a letter written by Mīr Sayyidī (dated c. 920/1514–1515), his spies had positions within the army of Ismā'īl I, especially during the Safavid campaign at Mount Lāchīn. It is interesting that many detailed facts are provided on the Safavid military situation and what happened during that particular battle. A unique theme introduced here is the captivity of Mīr Sayyidī's spies who had presented themselves as Dhu al-Qadr's spies. Should this professed allegiance to Dhu al-Qadr rather than the Safavid Shah be understood

as a reaction to Ismā‘īl I’s harsh treatment of the Kurds, or as a strategic response to their interrogators who may have shown tolerance towards the Dhulqadr’s? (See Fekete 1977, p. 320.)

Mention should also be made of Shāh-‘Alī Bayg of Jazīra. He shows a very dynamic regional policy in which not only military Jazīran expeditions against the Safavids, but also spying activity become noticeable. From the letter he addressed to Qāsim Bayg¹¹ (dated 924/1518–1519), it is clear that he provided very detailed reports regarding Safavid troops (see Fekete 1977, p. 324).

Late 16th Century

The late 16th century often has a stronger sense of espionage identity among the Kurds. In the sources written after the middle of the century, there are more abundant references that connect Kurds with espionage for the sultan.

Among the late Kurdish spies relating to the Ottoman side was Ḥasan Bayg of Maḥmūdī. The details provided by Ottoman sources on the districts belonging to Ḥasan Bayg, far from his own hereditary principality (Dizyân, Pırgut, Misâfir, Mikon, Temil, Dingalan, Köpeklu and many other districts at Rabat, in Qulp), show a very extensive Kurdish area under the control of the Maḥmūdī emir. He was also capable of controlling or at least having influence over key parts of Persian Kurdistan.¹² He was linked, for instance, with tribal chieftains on both the western and the eastern sides of the boundary, which helped him become a major representative of pro-Ottoman Kurdish espionage. The espionage role played by Ḥasan Bayg, mentioned in MD 21, khm. 660, would have to be interpreted rather uniquely. While there is no characteristic of Ḥasan Bayg to be found in this document, there is a clear stress on this Maḥmūdī emir as an Ottoman agent involved in espionage issues against the Safavids.

Jamshīd Bayg of Pālu is also mentioned as a pro-Ottoman Kurdish spy. Whereas Sharaf Khān typically devoted little attention to intelligence issues, in his description of Jamshīd Bayg there are some allusions to these activities. Jamshīd Bayg was consulted several times by Sultan Süleymân I and his commanders throughout the course of the Ottoman campaigns against Persia. Ottoman officials must have been highly impressed with Jamshīd Bayg’s spying activities, as he was one of the main advisers to Süleymân I during the eastern campaigns (cf. Scheref 1860, Vol. I, pp. 184–185).¹³ It is interesting that Jamshīd Bayg’s family inherited a great deal of Pālu espionage heritage. According to MD 38, khm. 376 (dated 7 Jumādā II 987/10

¹¹ It is hard to identify Qāsim Bayg. Possibly the reference is to Zulkadir Şahsüvaroğlı Kasım, the Ottoman *sancakbey* of Sultanönü. See Aköz–Solak (2004, pp. 9–29).

¹² See, for example, Rūmlū (2005, Vol. III, pp. 1327–1328); Qumī (1980, Vol. I, pp. 336, 352); Peçevî (1968, Vol. II, pp. 294, 326); BOA MD 12, khm. 1129; MD 25, khm. 666; MD 32, khm. 37, 390, 658, 660; MD 49, khm. 76; MD 70, 310; MD 86, 26; MD 87, khm. 397; BOA A.DVN.MHM 32, 67; TD 97, 1ff.; and Bizbirlik (1993, p. 144).

¹³ According to KK 1764, 126; BOA MD 2, khm. 43, 537; MD 3, khm. 336, 770; and MD 6, 769, it is possible to say that Jamshīd Bayg died in Shawwāl 975/April 1568.

August 1579), the Ottomans ordered Yūsuf Bayg, a grandson of Jamshīd Bayg, to gather intelligence from the Safavid territories.

A single archival document provides us some information on Murād Bayg of Suwaydī, his military responsibilities, and the role he played in the espionage for the sultan. On 15 Shawwāl 973/14 May 1566, Süleymân I managed to secure the tribal and boundary affairs via Murād Bayg and gave him reinforcement. It is clear that he had utilised Turkish military groups with the assistance of Kurdish irregulars, amongst which were unnamed Suwaydī officials. Although it can be interpreted mainly as an Ottoman attempt to unite the regional tribes against the Safavids, yet the Sultan had also ordered him to care for the Ottoman border lines with Iran. His duty was to monitor the treatment of Kurdish tribes working for the Safavids who were involved in various frontier struggles with Kurdish tribes working for the Ottoman side (see BOA A.DVN.MHM 5, khm. 1563).

Another important late 16th-century Kurdish spy, often in the service of the Ottoman sultan, is Şāru Khān Bayg of Ḥazzo. To be sure, the espionage phase of his political career was rather significant. There is no clear evidence that the Sultan relied on Şāru Khān Bayg, but he was one of the Kurdish emirs in contact with the governor of Vān (see MD 32, khm. 67, dated 20 Sha‘bān 985/11 November 1577). An account of Şāru Khān Bayg’s mission is also found in MD 38, khm. 376 (dated 7 Jumādā II 987/10 August 1579). Because of Ḥazzo’s strategic importance as a frontier district, the Ottoman Sultan ordered Şāru Khān Bayg, as the emir of Ḥazzo, to gather information on the Safavids. This figure appears to be the same Şāru Khān Bayg (described as *Hazzo hākimine*) for whom the imperial scribes produced a standard copy (*bir sureti*) of espionage orders.

However, the leading Kurdish spy of the late 16th century is Zaynal Bayg of Ḥakkārī. As stated above, when Zaynal Bayg, as an Ottoman agent, was dispatched to the Safavid borders, his brother Bāyindir Bayg was in the Shah’s service and precisely on a similar espionage mission. This first intelligence mission played an essential role in the promotion of Zaynal Bayg. After a fierce battle (c. 959/1552), Zaynal Bayg killed his brother and imprisoned his companions. The reward of this proof of loyalty to the Ottomans was Zaynal Bayg’s appointment over Ḥakkārī (see Scheref 1860, Vol. I, pp. 101–102).

There is some evidence that Zaynal Bayg continued to work in information-gathering very possibly till the end of his rule. The extensive border regions of Ḥakkārī were characterised by a concentration of settlements around Safavid checkpoints and fortresses. The descriptions by the spies of Zaynal Bayg in the lowlands surrounded by the Safavid villages were very helpful in forming successful Ottoman military expeditions. As Zaynal Bayg (d. 993/1585 or 994/1586)¹⁴ was the most influential Kurdish spy, it is appropriate to quote here a few sentences crucially relevant to the final stages of this essay.

¹⁴ For these dates, see Scheref (1860, Vol. I, pp. 102–103) and Qumī (1980, Vol. II, p. 778), respectively.

A significant knowledge of Zaynal Bayg's spying activity is to be gained from the MD 14, khm. 756 (dated 28 Jumādā II 978/27 November 1570). The following may serve as the key sentence of this order:

...*Yukaru Canib'den gelen casusun haberi hususu sıhhat üzre malum olmak için Zeynel dame azzehu'ya mektup gönderüp ol dahi Ağahan nam âdemin ol canibe gönderüp cem'i ahval ve etvarlarına vâkıf olup...*
 '...in order to measure the accuracy of information reported by a spy who recently came back from Iran, a letter has been sent to Zaynal Bayg, may his glory endure, who also sent his own spy named Āghā Khān to Iran; the latter gathered accurate information on their affairs and happenings...'

Due to the order of Vān governor, Zaynal Bayg sent Āghā Khān to Iran who successfully gathered Safavid information and came back to Ḥakkārī. It seems that when some pieces of information were suspect, especially when being spread for disinformation purposes,¹⁵ the Ottomans turned directly to Zaynal Bayg's mastery of espionage for confirmation, without trusting their own Turkish spies.

The document MD 29, khm. 81 (dated Shawwāl 984/December 1576) summarises what the Ottoman spies gathered from Iran regarding the Safavid Shah who was preparing for a new campaign against Baghdad. In his letter to the governors of Erzurum, Baghdad, Shahrazur, Diyār Bakr, Vān, and Ḥasan Bayg of Maḥmūdī, the Sultan made them aware of the Safavid threats. It is here ordered to Zaynal Bayg to be prepared for immediate military response to the Safavids and especially to use his experienced men in the Safavid Empire in order to obtain information.

Some very interesting details about the spying activities of Zaynal Bayg are provided in MD 33 khm. 438 (dated 8 Dhu al-Qa'da 985/20 January 1578). Here the Sultan ordered all Ottoman *kadis* along the long way from Ḥakkārī to Istanbul to support Zaynal Bayg. He emphasises that since the reign of Süleymān I and by order of that great emperor an imperial permission was granted to Zaynal Bayg in order to pass information on the Safavids to the Porte. "Then, the Sultan, continues, it is necessary for you to give permission to the men of Zaynal Bayg, open all the ways for them, and change their horses so that they be able to reach Istanbul easily."¹⁶ It is clear that this order was addressed to the Ottoman *kadis* after Zaynal Bayg had complained against them. According to BOA KK 210, 145 (dated 20 Jumādā I 960/4 May 1553), Istanbul even began to be used for Zaynal Bayg's espionage communication from a much earlier period, while the majority of other Kurdish emirs explicitly provided

¹⁵ This espionage tactics is occasionally mentioned in the available Ottoman–Safavid resources. Traces of the disinformation tactics, for example, are included in Muḥammad 'Ārif b. Muḥammad Sharīf Ispanaqchīpāshāzāda (2000, pp. 162–163).

¹⁶ It is easy to understand the reason for *Kadis*' concern. A method of Ottoman counter-intelligence was to close the borders with a state with which the Ottomans were in war. Any easy access to the capital was very dangerous. Travellers had to prove their identity as enemy spies tried to conceal their identities by travelling in disguise (see Gürkan 2012a, pp. 5–6). It should be mentioned that the counter-intelligence was a very old method used by Muslim countries and not a 16th-century development (see Kātīb 1954, p. 193).

their espionage reports for the Ottoman regional representatives, especially those in Baghdad, Vān and Erzurum.

Fully aware of the previous significant espionage services of Zaynal Bayg, the Ottoman Sultan has put emphasis on encouraging Zaynal Bayg so as to provide all the necessary intelligence on the Safavids (see MD 38, khm. 376, dated 7 Jumādā II 987/1 August 1579). The Sultan ordered Zaynal Bayg to consult the Ottoman neighbouring governor and placed more emphasis on the imperial gifts which would be distributed to him. From another order addressed by the Sultan to Zaynal Bayg (see MD 46 khm. 276, dated 13 Ramaḍān 989/11 October 1581), it is evident that the powerful Ḥakkārī emir had allied his capable espionage network with the Ottomans. As a result of his good espionage services, the Sultan has used gifts as means of promoting his situation. There is a single last sentence which alludes to the Ottoman continual encouragement to keep continual espionage on Iran; this can be thought to be the main goal of the Sultan's letter.

B. Espionage for the Shah

In comparison to Kurdish spies acted as Ottoman agents, the Safavids were somewhat unable to turn more number of Kurdish spies into Persian assets. As stated above, the Kurdish Sunnism was the main reason which normally made more Kurds the focus of Ottomans. This does not necessarily mean that the Safavids had no access to any Kurdish spies. In addition to those mentioned in the previous pages, especially the Kurdish emir Şevket Bayg who was killed by Süleymân I for spying for the Safavids, there are some other important ones, too.

The first one is Ḥājjī Rustam Bayg of Chamishgazak. It is clear that Ḥājjī Rustam had a long-standing desire of an alliance with the Safavids, as evidenced by his fighting alongside the Safavids in the battle of Chāldirān. The conversion of a Chamishgazak prince to Shiite Islam is unsurprising when considering the pro-Alevi feelings of the Kurdish population of Chamishgazak.

Despite the fact that Ḥājjī Rustam Bayg paid homage to the Ottomans after the Safavids were defeated at Chāldirān, Selīm I had him executed. He was certainly not a proponent of peaceful coexistence with the Ottomans, although he was obliged to recognise their impactful victory over Safavids. What was Selīm I's objective in murdering him? It appears that Ḥājjī Rustam Bayg understood the Ottomans' superiority to all other regional powers at the time, but the disgust of Selīm I for him was inspired firstly by his spying activities. It is clear from the archival documents that the Ottomans were aware that Ḥājjī Rustam Bayg was two-faced, serving both the Ottomans and the Safavids simultaneously. It is certain that he had intensified his secret contacts with the Safavids of which there was awareness on the part of Ottoman counter-intelligence (see TSMa E. 6672; E. 11839). This may have been one of the key reasons why Selīm I killed him on 2 Rajab 920/1 September 1514 (see Bacqué-Grammont 1987, pp. 174–175; 1992, p. 714, note 29).

The scarcely known father and son pair, Sayyid Muḥammad and Ya‘qūb Bayg of Ḥakkārī, are also the pro-Safavid Kurdish spies. They temporarily adopted the Safavid superiority, perhaps to differentiate themselves from the more prevalent Ottoman trends in the principality, and also possibly to avoid a secondary role in the political scene of the area. Both father and son were of crucial importance to the espionage service. There is a letter from Ṭahmāsp I (dated Rajab 957/July–August 1550) addressed to Sayyid Muḥammad in which the Shah persuaded Sayyid Muḥammad to be a Safavid emir and to spy on the Ottomans. Ṭahmāsp I emphasised that Sayyid Muḥammad had previously dispatched his representative to Qazwīn and paid homage to the Shah (see Fekete 1977, p. 402, based on TSMA E. 8352).

A feature of the interaction between the Safavids and the Ḥakkārī Kurds is revealed in a second letter (dated Rajab 957/July–August 1550) addressed to the son of Sayyid Muḥammad from the Shah. Here it is recounted what happened between him and his father, and then he is greatly encouraged to gather any important information on the Ottoman territories and to deliver it in detail to the Safavid Shah (see Fekete 1977, p. 406, based on TSMA E. 8930).

C. Double Agents

It is true that several Kurdish agents penetrated into the Ottoman or Safavid Empires and sent reports to their employers. The best example of this is the networks that the Kurdish spies established in frontier areas from the 1520s onwards. Yet, the efficiency of these networks is sometimes a matter of debate. Both the Ottomans and the Safavids were partly aware of the activities of these networks and may have intended to use them as double agents. For instance, it is clear that Safavids tried to employ some Kurdish agents as the middlemen between the Safavids and the Kurdish espionage networks. In one case, there is an interesting allusion to one of the attendants of Zaynal Bayg. Whatever the case, the Ottoman spy, named Āghā, provided a detailed report in which, among other things, it is indicated that a certain man of Zaynal Bayg, named Ḥusayn, was trying to bring Kurdish emirs and the Safavid Shah together. From the author’s language, it seems wise to accept also Safavid counter-intelligence policy and their collaboration with those Ḥakkārī Kurds who were close to Zaynal Bayg (see MD 32 khm. 67, dated 20 Sha‘bān 985/2 November 1577).

The most famous Kurdish double agent is Amīr Dā’ūd of Khīzān. Amīr Dā’ūd had a network of Kurdish spies operating in the Ottoman–Safavid border lands. He and his coterie worked for both the Ottoman and the Safavid authorities. It is possible to categorise Amīr Dā’ūd as a Kurdish emir who was himself involved in espionage. He personally engaged in espionage and also directed and supervised the activities of his network of Kurdish spies (see TSMA E. 6627/1; E. 8283; E. 8333).

Amīr Dā’ūd was not entirely faithful to the Ottomans. Unlike Sharaf Khān, who concealed details of the political contacts of the Kurds with Ismā‘īl I, perhaps in order to put a stop to the Ottomans’ severe policies against the Kurds at a time when he was trying to lead Kurdish chiefs to the Ottoman side, Bıyıklı Mehmed Paşa was

perfectly frank with the Sultan. According to him, while Amīr Dā'ūd declared loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan, he was secretly in contact with Ismā'īl I and reported Ottoman military plans to the Safavids. We also know that he was one of those Kurdish emirs who spied for the Ottomans as well. When Ismā'īl I moved to the Alādāgh summer pastures (north of Chāldirān), Amīr Dā'ūd dispatched his experienced spy, Mevlana Mehmed, to Tabrīz where he stayed for twenty-five days. When Amīr Dā'ūd's spy became aware of the Ūzbek invasion to Khurāsān, he decided to go to the new encampment of the Shah at the Ūjān summer pastures (southeast of Tabrīz) in order to confirm the accuracy of the information. He managed to get close access to the Shah, from whom he obtained particularly accurate and reliable information. Mevlana Mehmed spent five days in the encampment of the Shah, and then he left Ūjān for Khīzān where he gave his report to Amīr Dā'ūd (see Ebû-l-Fazl n.d., fols 30r–30v; TSMA E. 6627/1; Hoca Se'dü-ddîn 1862, Vol. I, pp. 307, 309, 317, 320).

Ḥasan Bayg of 'Amādīyya was also a spy for both the Ottomans and the Safavids. After the Āq-Quyūnlū decline, Ḥasan Bayg paid homage to the Safavids. As a commander in the battle against Amīr Bayg Mawşillū, he is also reported to have maintained good relations with the Ottomans (see TSMA E. 8333/1–2; Hoca Se'dü-ddîn 1862, p. 300). These interpretations can be simply based on the Kurdish frontier policy which was interested in both the Safavids and the Ottomans. But a reasonable explanation may also put Ḥasan Bayg in the circle of the double agents.

On 2 Sha'bān 922/9 September 1516 Ḥasan Bayg addressed a letter to Bıyıklı Mehmed Paşa, providing detailed information on the Safavid situation and the movements of the Shah. Two Kurdish spies in his service, Bayrām and Şāhsüvār, were tasked with providing strategic information on the Safavids (see TSMA E. 6627/1; E. 8318; Bacqué-Grammont–Adle 1982, pp. 29–37; Bacqué-Grammont 1991, p. 244). According to *Kanuni Sultan Süleymân Döneminde Ait İnamat Defteri*, KK 1764, 78, Ḥasan Bayg received a bonus from the Ottoman Sultan in Rabī' I 938/November 1531 while he was still the *mīr* of 'Amādīyya.

Finally, mention should be made of Pīr Ḥusayn Bayg of Chamishgazak. According to the reports of Bıyıklı Mehmed Paşa, Pīr Ḥusayn Bayg had maintained his contacts with Ismā'īl I despite having declared loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan. It is certain that Pīr Ḥusayn Bayg was a very active spy and provided the details of the Ottoman military operations to the Shah. It should be mentioned that a great deal of information came from operatives in the province of Chamishgazak. The Ottomans had to develop counter-intelligence practices for coping with such principalities, which shared Shiite trends with their Safavid enemies. Pīr Ḥusayn Bayg had struggled against the Safavids and played an essential role in the defeat of Qara Khān, but Bıyıklı Mehmed Paşa was correct in claiming that he was a double agent (see TSMA E. 3296; E. 4256; E. 6627; E. 8283; TD 64, 852; Ebû-l-Fazl n.d., fols 25r–25v, 30r–30v; Ünal 1999, pp. 2, 36–37).

VI. Appendix

In the following pages three unpublished documents are presented. The Ottoman orders dealing with espionage have a standard formula. The documents presented here try to reflect various kinds of material, not exclusively the ‘orders’ provided by *Mühimme Defter*s.

A. Post-regional Spy

The first document (TSMA D. 00749) includes a brief list of Ottoman Kurdish spies who played their espionage role in Egypt and the Levant. The document reproduced here indicates that the employment of Kurdish spies was a well-organised Ottoman policy. As stated above, this was almost precisely the method to help also the Safavids in spying the north-eastern districts of Iran.

Because of the archaic and less standardised form of *Āmid* (Kara Hamid), it is possible to assign early 16th century to the document. Besides the typological evidences, we have also a mention of the Ottoman general and administrator Bıyıklı Mehmed Paşa (d. 24 Muḥarram 928/24 December 1521) as the *beylerbeyi* of Dīyār Bakr (esp. fol. 5v). This reflects a dating from Rabī II 922/May 1516 to Muḥarram 928/24 December 1521.

Text

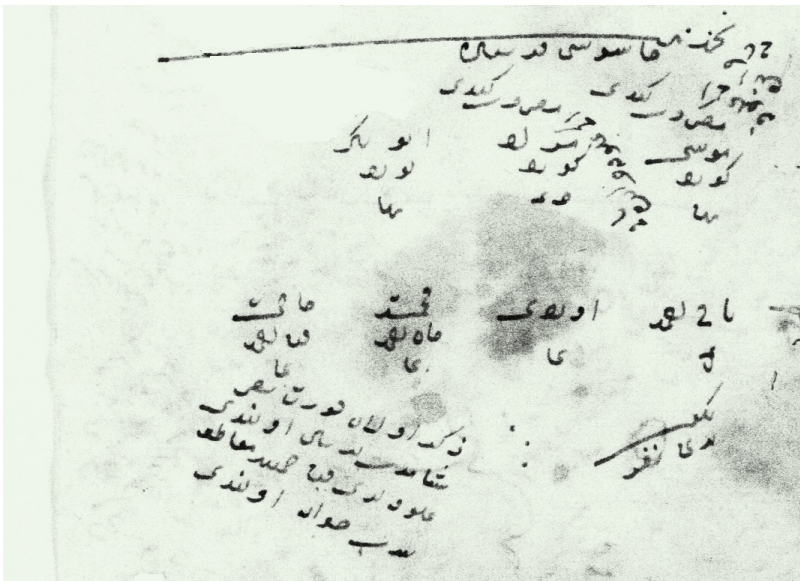


Figure 1. TSMA D. 00749

Be hıdmet-i casûsî ferestâde

Musa Kürd Mısır'dan gitti 8 İki 'ulûfesi hizânedede bâkî	Murad Kürd Mısır'dan gitti 15 İki 'ulûfe hizânedede bâkî	Ebubekir Kürd 8
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Bali Ahmed 12	Urđı 10	Muhammed Han Ahmed 10	Hacı Kara Ahmed 10
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Yekûn yedi nefer

Zikr olan dört nefer Şâm'dan irsâl olundu; 'ulûfeleri Kara Hamid mukataasından havâle olundu.

Translation

[Those who were] sent to the espionage service

Musa the Kurd Dispatched from Egypt 8 His two <i>ulufes</i> ¹⁷ remained in the imperial treasure	Murad the Kurd Dispatched from Egypt 15 His two <i>ulufes</i> remained in the imperial treasure	Ebubekir the Kurd 8
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Bali Ahmed 12	Urđı 10	Muhammed Han Ahmed 10	Hacı Kara Ahmed 10
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Total 7 individuals

Four of above-mentioned individuals have been dispatched from Syria; their *ulufes* were assigned from the *muqāṭa'a*¹⁸ of Kara Hamid.

¹⁷ This term indicates the wages of the soldiers, or the wage of a soldier in by-gone days.

¹⁸ This indicates a branch of the public revenue.

B. When Spy Meets Spy

Sometimes Kurds themselves were subjects of the espionage, especially when they hold a frontier or political position in the rival empire. The manuscript of the Persian collection of Jāmī (n.d.), *Ash‘at al-Luma‘āt* (No. 10557/4, fols 77r–78r), contains a Turkish letter. It is reasonable that this letter, which includes references to both Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayg and Ḥājjī Bayg of Dunbulī, the contemporaries of Süleymân I, dates from the period prior to 974/1566 or much earlier (i.e. 939/1533), when the Ottoman Empire was still in the process of establishing a great campaign against Iran.

Although the preserved linguistic differences ascribed to a spy from the eastern (or Safavid) Turkish communities may not be problem to doubt that the spy was an employee of Süleymân I and he was used as a local spy, the context raises the possibility of there having been some relations between the spy and Dunbulī Kurds, a family of the Kurdish Imāmī Shī‘as who were instrumental in the propagation of Shiism in Ādharbāyjān, especially around Sögman-Ābād, the hereditary fief of Dunbulī to the north-west of Khuy¹⁹. There are intimations in the name of ‘Alī of a possible Shī‘a origin of the spy. The name implies a religious connection with Ḥājjī Bayg, a symbol of Safavid power in some parts of Ādharbāyjān where the purport of the community was some linguistic and especially religious differences with the western Ottoman regions. Moreover, there are panegyric phrases in which our unknown spy praises the powerful troops of Ṭahmāsp I, his wealth, his good behaviour, and the military power which no Sultan was able to challenge. Regarding the Safavid soldiers, it is interesting that the spy in question emphasises their pledge of faith in Islam, religious law, prayer, and fast. In his view, the well-known sayings about the Qizilbāsh are merely accusations.

It is possible that the Safavids themselves did in fact provide such a kind of espionage account as ‘disinformation’, repenting Süleymân I to take a military expedition against Iran. It is impossible to accept all political propaganda and panegyric statements mentioned in the text. That our spy characterised Ṭahmāsp I as an open-handed or generous spirit, for example, is completely baseless because his character was indeed marked by miserliness and grasping meanness (see Qumī 1980, Vol. I, pp. 610–614; Scheref 1862, Vol. II, pp. 251–252).

Text

[77r] Sevâd-ı Mektûbi ki Câsûs-ı Hundgâr-ı Rûm be Efendi-yi Rûm Kalemi Nimûde dar Sâli ki ‘Ali-câh Hacı Beg Dunbulî be Ka’be-yi Mu’azzama Refte Bude

Sa’adettlü ve ‘izzettlü ve mürüvvettlü, şecâ’atlü, ifâdatlü, ifâzatlü efendimiz Hüseyin Hân Beg voyvoda-i müeyyed *zîde kadruhu* hisselerine dürer-i da’vât-ı vâfiyât ve gurur-i teslîmât-ı zâkiyât iblâğ ve irsâl olundukdañ sonra ma’lûm-ı hâtır-ı deryâ-

¹⁹ They were converted from Yezidism to Shiism many years before the rule of Ḥājjī Bayg (see Scheref 1860, Vol. I, pp. 310, 312).

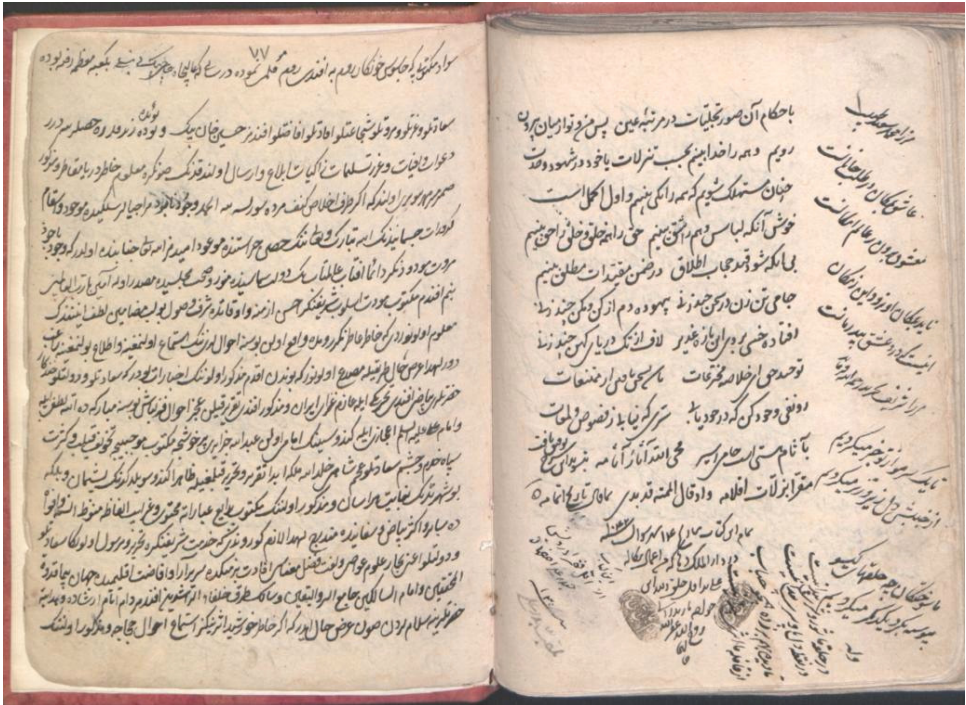


Figure 2. Majlis, No. 105574, fol. 77r

mekâtır ve mezkûr-ı zamîr-i münîr-i mihr-tenvîrî olundu ki eğer taraf-ı ihlâs-ı kenefimiz de sorulsa lillahilhamd vücûd-ı nâbûdumuz ecyâller silkinde mevcûd ve eskâm-ı kedûrât-ı cismânindeñ Allah tebârek ve teâlaniñ hisn-ı hırâsetinde mev'ûd. Ümîdimiz Allah Teâlâ cenâbından oldur ki vücûd-ı bâ-cûd-ı mürüvvet-mevdûduñuz daimâ âfîtab-ı 'alem-tâbnîñ devlet semâsında münevver ve sıhhat-i meclisinde musaddar ola. Âmin ya Rabbü'l-'Alemin.

Benim efendim mektûb-ı meveddet-üslûb-ı şerîfîñiz ahsen ezmine ve evkâtte şeref-i vusûl bulub mezâmîn-i lutf-ayîñindeñ ma'lûm olundu ki hâtır-ı 'âtırñız Rûm'da vâk'î olan bu sene ahvâlleriniñ istimâ' olunmağına ve ittîlâ' bulunmağına râğıbdur. Lihezâ 'arzuhâl tarîkiyle musaddî' olunur ki bundan akdem mezkûr olanınıñ ihbârât budur ki:

Sa'âdetlü ve devletlü Hundgâr hazretleri Beyaz Efendi tahrîki ile 'âzım-ı gazâyı İnan ve mezkûr efendi takrîr kılan 'acz-ı ahvâl-i Kızılbaş bu sene-i mübâreke de Allah lütfu ile ve İmam Ali aleyhisselâm i'câzı ile kendüsiniñ imam olan Abdullah Cezâyirî bir hoşça mektûb mucebince tahvîf kılub ve kesret-i sipâh-ı hadem ü haşem sa'âdetlü 'Acem şâhı halledallahu mülkuhu ebeden takrîr ve tahrîr kılmağla zâhiren kendü söylediğindeñ peşimân ve belki bu şöhretindeñ be-gayet hırâsân ve mezkûr olanınıñ mektûb-ı bedâyi'-ibârâta muhtevî ve garâyib elfâza menût elsine ve efvâhda sâir ve ekser beyâz ve sefâinde münderic. Lihezâ lâzım göründi ki hizmet-i şerîfîñize tahrîr ve mersûl oluna.

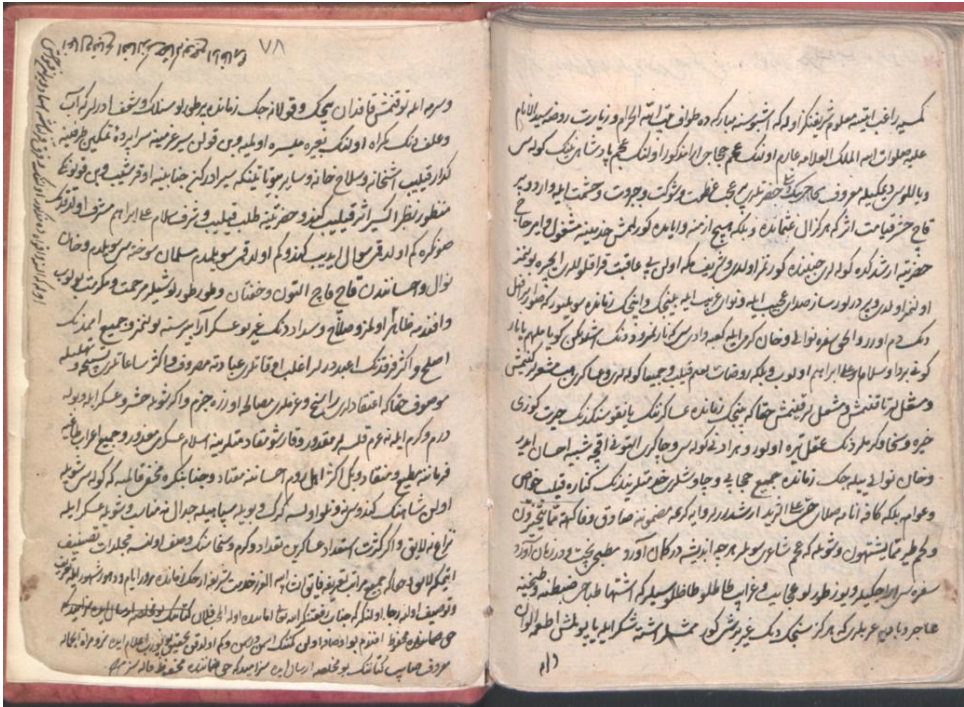


Figure 3. Majlis, No. 105574, fols 77v – 78r

Sa'âdetlü ve devletlü e'ani bihâr-ı 'ulûm gavnâsı ve lügat-i fazl ma'nası ifadet bezmiñde serîr-i ârâ ve ifâzat ikliminde cihân-peymâ kıldvetü'l-muhakkikîn ve imâmü's-sâlikîn câmi'ü'l-birr ve'l-yakîn ve sâlik-i turuk-ı Hulefâ-yı Râşidîn efendimiz, *dame eyyame irşâdihî ve hidâyetihî*, hazretlerine selâmlardan sonra 'arzuhal ider ki eğer hâtır-ı hûrşîd-eseriñiz istimâ'-ı ahvâl-i huccâca ve mezkûr olanınıñ [77v] kimseye rağîb itse ma'lûm-ı şerîfiñiz ola ki işbu sene-i mübârekede tavâf-ı Beytullahi'l-Harâm ve ziyâret-i ravza-i seyyidü'l-enâm *aleyhi's-salavâtullahi'l-meliki'l-âllâme* 'âzım olan 'Acem huccâcı ara mezkûr olanınıñ 'Acem pâdişâhınıñ kölesi ve yallısı dimekle maruf Hacı Beg Dunbulî hazretleri bir 'acîb 'uzmet ve şevket ve ceberût ve haşmet ile vârid ve birkaç haşr-ı kıyâmet-eser ki hergiz Âli Osman'da ve belki hiç ezmine ve eyyâmda görülmemiş hidmetine meşgûl ve emîr-i hac hazretine erişdikde köleleri cenbinde görünmez oldı ve şerîf-i Mekke olan bî'akîbet karakulları içre bulunmaz olunmaz oldı ve bir dürlü²⁰ sâz sadâ-yı 'acîb ile ve nevâ-yı garîb ile bincek ve incekk zamanda söylüyor ki Sûr-i İsrâfilden dem urur. Elhak sofra-yı nevâle ve hân-ı keremi ile Kabe vadisi ki nâr-ı Nemrûd'dañ işitdigin guya "kulnâ yâ nâru kûnî berden ve selâmen 'alâ İbrahim"²¹ olub ve belki ravazât-ı

²⁰ Text spells *dürlür*. It was emended to *dürlü*.

²¹ Qur'an 21/69.

naîm kılıb ve cemi'an köleleri ve 'asâkiri heb meş'erler²² giyinmiş, meş'aller takınmış ve meş'aller kayınmış. Hakka ki bincek zamanda 'asâkiriniñ yankusundañ hayret gözi hîre ve sehâ ve keremlerindeñ akıl tîre olur. Ve bir edna kölesi ve çâkeri altunı akçe şebîh ihsân ider ve hân-ı nevâle yeyilecek zamanda cem'i hüccâbı ve çavuşları hıdmetlerindeñ kenara kılıb havâss ve a'vâm, belki kâfe-i enâma salât-ı hakk ale't-tezyîd erişdirirler ve aye-i kerîme mazmûnuna sâdik "bi fakihetin ve lahmin tayr mimma yeştehun"²³ ve şöyle ki 'Acem şairi söyler "her çi endişe der goman averd, matbahi poht ve der miyan"²⁴ averd"²⁵.

Sofralar, ara çekilür ve yüz türlü 'acâyib ve garâyib tatlu ve tazlu şeyler ki iştiyhâ-yı tabbâhı zabtına ve tabhına aciz ve bâdiye 'Arabları ki hergiz sencekden²⁶ gayrı bir şey görmemişler işte şeker ile yapılmış et'ime-i elvân [78r] ve sürme ile tokunmuş kafdān yiecek ve kullanacak zamanda bir dürlü şenlik ve şa'af iderler ki âb u 'alafdañ gümrâh olanıñ ta'bire müyessere olmaya.

Ve ben kulun seyr-i 'azmine serâ-perde-i temkîn tarafına güzâr kılıb aşhâne ve silâhhâne vesâir büyüâtâñ seyr ederken cenâbına ukraşib ve ben kuluña manzûr-ı nazar-ı iksir-eser kılıb kendü hazretine tâleb kılıb ve şeref-i selâm 'ala İbrahim müşerref olduktan sonra kim olduğumu suâl edib kendü kim olduğumu söylemedim. Müslüman suhtesi söyledim ve hân-ı nevâl ve ihsânından kaç kaç altun ve haftan [kaftan] ve tür türlü şeyler merhamet ve mekremet bulub ve efendime zâhir ola ki elsine ve efvâhda mezkûr olanıñ ve fırak-ı Kızılbaş'a isnâd virilen fevâhiş i'mâl ve kabâih ef'alindeñ hakka ki bu cem'i ara zahir olmaz ve salah ve seddâddañ gayrı bu 'asker ara bir nesne bulunmaz ve cem'i ümemdeñ aslah ve ekser firakdañ a'buddurlar. Eğleb evkâtleri 'ibâdete masrûf ve ekser saatleri tesbîhe ve tehlîle mevsûf. Hakka ki i'tikâdleri râsih ve 'azmleri musâlaha üzre cezm ve eğer şöyle haşır u 'asker ile ve bö[y]le direm ve kerem ile ne 'azm kılsalar makdûr ve karşı mukavemetlerine İslam 'askeri ma'zûr ve cem'i 'Arab itaatına ve fermânına muti' ve münkâd ve belki ekser ehl-i Rûm ihsânına mu'tâd. Cenâbınıza mahfî kalmaya ki köleleri şöyle olan şâhıñ kendüsü ne denlü olsa gerek ve böyle sipâhiyla cidâl ne münâsib ve şöyle 'asker ile niz'a ne lâyük ve kesret-i isti'dâd-ı 'asâkirin ta'dâd ve kerem ve sehâsinin vasf olunsa mücellidât-ı tasnîf itmege lâyük ve hakka ki cem'i merâtib ta'rîfine fâik. İnşallahü'l-'aziz hıdmet-i şerîfe iricek zamanda mürûr-ı eyyâm ve duhûr-ı şuhûr ile ta'rîf ve tavsîf oluna. Recâ oluñur ki cenâb-ı rif'atıñiz Allahü Teâlâ emânında ola. Efendim²⁷ bu evsâfa olan kiminiñ ismin ve resmin ve kim

²² Reading is doubtful.

²³ Qur'ân 52/22, 56/21.

²⁴ Text spells *zaman*.

²⁵ The basic version of this poem will be found on *nishastan-i Bahrâm rûz-i Shanba dar gumbad-i sîyâh* (Nizâmî Ganjavî 2001, p. 163); here it runs as follows: *har chi andîsha dar gumân âward • maţbakhî raft u dar miyân âward*.

²⁶ The reading *sencek* is doubtful. It is certainly a kind of food. Occasionally, *sincik* is used in Kurdish dialects of Eastern Anatolia to mean a kind of pastry.

²⁷ There is a little confusion here. By drawing a line through, the scribe canceled "*kitabıñ bu muhlise ırsâl idesiz ümidir ki hakk zemânetinde*". It is superfluous.

olduğın tahkik buyurub i'lâm idesiz ve mir'atü'l-cemâle ma'rûf sâib kitâbetin bu muhlise irsâl idesiz. Ümüddir ki Hakk zemânetinde mahfûz kalasız. Sahh.²⁸

Translation

A Copy of the Letter written by Khundgâr-i Rûm's Spy to the Rûm's Efendi when the High Official Hâjjî Bayg of Dunbulî went to the Great Mecca.

After declaring and dispatching the pearls of abundant invocations and the gleams of pure greetings to the share of my prosperous, honourable, generous, brave, profit-giver, and effusive master Hûsayn Khân Bayg, the corroborative Voivode²⁹, may his value increase, it became clear for his mind, as a drop in the sea, and it was remembered by his shining and love-enlightener heart that if our sincerity would be questioned, our mortal existence, praise be to God, is present within the range of generations and promises of good protections by God, may He be blessed and exalted, against various bodily turbidities. We expect from His Excellency the God, exalted be He, that your generous and manliness-lovely existence permanently would be bright like a world-illuminating sun in the heavens of your government and would be sitting in front of [royal] assembly. Amen, Lord of the worlds.

Your Majesty, your cordial and honourable letter has been received at the best time and leisure. From its graceful contents it became clear that your fragrant mind is interested in hearing of and being informed about the events of Rûm in the present year. Therefore, the report, which is putting trouble to you, indicates that previous gathered information and runs as:

With the incitement of Beyaz Efendi, His Majesty Khundgâr, the prosperous and fortunate, is dispatched for the holy war against Iran. [In order to draw attention to the holy war in Iran and accelerate it], the foregoing master had written a report on the weakness of Qizilbâsh. But in this holy year with the grace of God and miracle of Imam 'Alî, upon whom be peace, his *imâm* 'Abd Allâh Jazâyirî³⁰ frightened him well through a correspondance. Apparently he was regretted what he said when the great quantity of army of prosperous Persian Shah, may God make perpetual his sovereignty,

²⁸ This is the abbreviated form of *sahih/sahi*, meaning 'it is finished, without any mistake'.

²⁹ This is a Slavic title, meaning literally 'military governor', or 'warlord'. Under the Ottomans, *voivode* was the title borne by the ruler of a province, whose power included security and administration. Gradually *voivode* used to indicate the governor of a province.

³⁰ The title *imâm* and Jazâyirî remind us of 'Alî b. Hilâl al-Jazâ'irî, the 'Âmilî *imâmî* Shiite scholar. It is interesting that Jazâ'irî was a master of Muhaqqiq al-Karakî who was a close *imâmî* scholar to Ismâ'îl I, especially from 910/1504–1505 onwards. During the reign of Tahmâsp I, he was still influential and helpful in defending early Safavid Shiism. For a variety of reasons and the text which here is in a clear script, it remains impossible to show whether the author provided a distortion: 'Abd Allâh instead of 'Alî. Or did the author only refer to another member of the same family? The name also reminds one of 'Abd Allâh, father of the well-known Shiite scholar Sayyid Ni'mat Allâh Jazâ'irî (b. 1050/1640–1641). For details, see Raḥmatî (2012, pp. 44, 65, 92); Afandî İřfahânî (1981, Vol. I, p. 190; Vol. III, pp. 17, 148; Vol. V, pp. 108, 253–256).

was confirmed, and even he was extremely afraid because of this reputation. The present letter which is composed of new phrases and strange words involves the aforementioned events, being notorious in the mouths and normally is mentioned in the papers and note-books. Therefore, it was necessary to write and deliver it to your honourable presence.

After greetings to my prosperous and fortunate master, that is, the diver of the seas of sciences, meaning of the words of learning, occupier of the throne in the assembly of education, traveller in the realm of effusion, leader of investigators, head of the disciples, owner of piety and certitude, and follower of the paths of Righteous Caliphs, may his reign of guidance and right way endure, [your servant] reports that: if your sun-alike mind is interested in hearing of the circumstances of pilgrims and the events occurred, it should be clear for your honourable [presence] that Persian pilgrims headed to the circumambulation of the garden of the Sacred House of God and to visit tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad, lord of the mankind, may God, the Owner and the King, send greetings to him, in this blessed year. Here is the account: with a huge crowd like doomsday crowd in his service, which neither seen in the Ottoman Empire nor even had seen in previous periods and cycles, the Persian monarch's servant and bondman, known as Majesty Ḥājī Bayg of Dunbulī, having a great hauteur, power, pomp and glory, came to the side of His Excellency the Chief of Pilgrims where he was disappeared among his servants; and [here] Ḥājī Bayg, the mortal *sharīf* of Mecca, disappeared among his guards. When they ride on and get off, they are playing a pearly instrument with a strange voice and unfamiliar tone, resembling trumpet of Israfil. With the dining table of victuals and tablecloth of generosity, the Valley of Kaaba, in fact, became like an address to the fire of Nemrud, "we (Allāh) said: O fire! Be you coolness and safety for Ibrāhīm!" and even make the gardens of heaven. All of his servants and soldiers were clothed in *meş'er*.³¹ In fact, everyone's eyes are amazed because of his soldier's echo at the riding time and the wisdom disappears in the darkness because of their munificence and generosity. One of his lowest slaves and servants beneficently confers gold as *akçe*, keeping all doorkeepers and sergeants, the elites and the laymen, away from their services at the time of victuals eating; even all of the people increasingly deliver God's prayer, according to the content of the verse of Qur'ān: "we shall provide them with fruit and meat of fowls as they desire"; the Persian poet says: "whatever the thought brought into assumption ▪ the cook baked it and presented it".

They open tablecloths, including hundred kinds of wonderful and strange sweet and salty foods, for which the cook cannot control his appetite and remains incapable of cooking. The Bedouin Arabs who have seen nothing except *sencek*, have fun when they taste these colourful foods made of sugar. It is impossible to explain but at the time of eating they behave like animals, which get lost among the water and fodder, when they dress the mail made of silver thread.

³¹ The translation is doubtful. *meş'erler* possibly comes from *meş'er*, 'the sacred place of sacrifice in the *hajj* ceremonies'. Both reading and translation will be strengthened with the verb 'to clothe' (*giyinmiş*). The author means a kind of vestment with a distinct style.

In order to continue his observation, this servant went to the side of imperial tent. He encountered His Excellency when he was observing the soup kitchen, armory and other premises. He looked at me with his elixirful look and requested me to come into his presence. After having been honoured with the honour of greetings to Ibrāhīm, he asked me who am I? I did not tell him who I am. I introduced myself to him as a Muslim *suhte*³². By way of favour and greatness, I was granted a few golden coins, mails and some kinds of things from his tablecloth of victuals and beneficence. It should be clear for my master that the spoken and oral mentions, regarding the shameful acts and obscene deeds ascribed to the sect of Qizilbāsh, are really not visible within the community. They do not have anything but righteousness and straight direction; they are the most pious [nation] of all nations and best worshipers of many number of sects. They mostly devote their times to worship and spend most of their hours with singing the praises of God and pronouncing the profession of God's unity. In fact, their creed is stable and their decision tenaciously established on peace. With such a population, army, wealth, and generosity, they have access to whatever they like. The Muslim army would be incapable to resist them. All Arabs are under his obedience and obey and follow his decree; and even most of the people of Rūm are accustomed to his beneficence. It should not be hidden from you that if the slaves of the Shah are like that, how would be the Shah himself? It is not convenient to fight against his army; and it is not suitable to quarrel against such an army. It would be worthy to write several volumes if I mention various abilities and the number of his army, his greatness, and generosity. It should be indeed described as superior to all [military] ranks. If God the Mighty wills, it will be described and depicted day by day and month by month when I reach to your honourable service. I hope that your eminent majesty may be under the protection of God, exalted be He. My master! You may quest and indicate name, reputation, and identity of those who carry these characteristics and send to this sincere servant your right correspondance, known as the mirror of beauty. I hope that you may be protected by God's security. It is correct.

C. Spy Disguised as Emir

The last document (BOA MD 48, No. 311) is a letter addressed to the *beylerbey* of Vān. It is written on 15 Ramaḍān 990/3 October 1582. Here the Safavid commander Maḡsūd Bayg is mentioned as a person who swore an oath of loyalty to the Ottoman monarch. The *beylerbey* of Vān is asked to speak to the court whether Maḡsūd Bayg and other Persian officials were loyal to the Sultan.³³

³² *suhte* literally means 'burned', and refers to the students of law and theology.

³³ Maḡsūd Bayg can be identified as Maḡsūd Khān, a former Safavid official who took refuge at the Ottoman court. He was later appointed a governor of Aleppo. In his Italian narrative, translated as *The War between the Turks and the Persians*, Giovanni Tomasso Minadoi (1548–1615) interestingly had consulted Maḡsūd Khān in order to collect Safavid information (see Matthee 2014, pp. 5–6).

Hasan Çavuş'a verilmiştir. Yazıldı.

Van beglerbegine hüküm ki bundan akdem elçiliğin tarfikiyle südde-i sa'adetime gelen Maksûd, *dâme izzuhu*, hâlâ oğlu ile 'atabe-i 'ulyama gelüb kemâl-i ihlâs ve sadâkat ile kendü ve oğulları ve sair tevâbi' ve levâhıkı izhâr-ı ihtisâs-ı 'ubudiyet idüb pâye-i serîr-i hüsrevâneme rûy-mâl şerefiyle müşerref oldukda envâ'i 'inâyet-i şâhâneme mazhar-ı vâk'î olub ve Yukarı Cânib'in ahvâline ve Emîr Han'ın vesâir efrâd-ı 'âyânının itaatlerine ve Tebriz'in fethine müteallik bazı husûsu i'lâm itmeğin senin ve Hakkâri hâkimi Zeynel Beg ve Bitlis hâkimi Şeref Hân ve Mahmudî Hasan *dâme 'uluvvihum* marifetleriyle 'amel olunmak için her birine ahkâm-ı şerîf ile müşârunileyh senin cânibine gönderölmek üzeredür. Bu husûsa sen mukaddem mukayyed olub, müşârunileyhim hâkimler ile haberleşüb dahi ahvâl neye müncer olur ise 'arz ve isâl eylemek lâzım olunmağın buyurdum ki vusûl buldukta bu bâbda onat muteber olub müşârunileyhim ile vesâir beglerbegine müttetik olan ashâb-ı iyâlet ile ve serhad begleri vesâir ehl-i vukûf ile müşâvere eyleyüb eğer Emîr Han'ın eğer sâir Kızılbaş ümerâ ve 'âyânının ve bi'l-cümle kabâil ve 'aşâirinin keyfiyet-i ahvâllerin tam tecessüs eyleyüb, fi'l-vâk'î müşârunileyh Maksûd *dâme izzuhunun* davası üzere Kızılbaş hânlarının ve a'yânlarının 'atabe-i 'aliyye-i şâhâneme müracaatları ve itaata meyl ve rağbetleri var mıdır? Ahvâlleri ne yüzdendür? Tebriz'in zabtı ve fethi ne vecihle müyesserdür? Ne tedbîr ve ne tedârik lâzımdur? Anun gibi bi-'inâyetullahi Teâlâ fethi müyesser oldukda ne vecihle hıfz olunur? Daimâ meftûn ve mahfûz olması ne tarikle mümkündür? Mukaddemce tahsîl-i 'ilm eyleyüb müşârunileyh varduğunda te'hîr lâzım gelmeyüb ne vecihle tedârik olunub ol cânibden ne makûle ahvâle ittîlâ' tahsîl olunduğu ve re'yiniz neye olunduğun mufassal ve meşrûh 'ale't-ta'cîl ulağım la südde-i saadetime 'arz eyleyüb ana göre bu cânibden dahi vakti ile iktiza ittüğü üzere tedârik ne ise göreler. Bu bâbda onat vecihle teemmül idüb el-iyazubillahi Teâlâ 'izzet-i nâmûs-ı saltanata muğayir vâz' sudûrundan ihtiyât idüb hiçbir husûsda musta'ib ve ...³⁴ komayub olan tarfikiyle olub anı dahi 'inâyetullahi Teâlâ neye müncer olacağının ...³⁵ idüb dahi sahih üzere yazub bildiresün.

Translation

It has been delivered to Hasan Çavuş. It has been written³⁶.

It is my order to the governor of Vān that Maqşûd, may his glory endure, who had previously come to My Threshold of Felicity through your embassy, has now come to My sublime [court], submitted his obedience, and paid homage [to me] with his

³⁴ It was impossible to complete the reading. Here we probably have an alternative reading of *musta'ib*.

³⁵ The word is incomplete. Though the document preserves a *bila*, it is impossible to give any meaning of these defective words.

³⁶ *yazıldı* 'it has been written' indicates that a finished copy based on the draft was indeed sent.

sons, siblings, and retinue with most loyalty and sincerity. When his face touched the base of My Imperial Throne and honoured with that, all kinds of My Imperial favours were bestowed upon him. He informed me of some matters including the circumstances of Iran, the obedience of Amīr Khān and his noble retinue, and the conquest of Tabrīz. The foregoing [Maqṣūd] is about to be dispatched to your side with My Honourable Imperial Orders to you and to the governor of Ḥakkārī, Zaynal Bayg, governor of Bidlīs, Sharaf Khān, and Ḥasan of Maḥmūdī, may their elevation endure. These Imperial Orders must be implemented by you and others. Be you careful of this subject and communicate with the foregoing governors. Moreover, it is necessary to inform us of what resulted. My command is that when My Noble Order arrives, do respect this subject properly and counsel with the foregoing governors, other governors and their allies, consisting of administrators, frontier governors and well-informed individuals. Do spy on Amīr Khān, Qizilbāsh governors, notables, and briefly their tribes and clans. Do Qizilbāsh governors and notables have in fact any inclination and trend to return and obey My Sublime Imperial Porte as asserted by the foregoing Maqṣūd, may his glory endure? How is their circumstance? Which way makes the confiscation and the conquest of Tabrīz possible? What kind of precaution and supplies do we need? If the conquest of Tabrīz, with the favour of God, exalted be He, is the case, how it can be retained? How is it possible to keep it permanently fascinated and protected? Primarily the information should be gathered. When the latter arrives it is unnecessary to delay; details of the provisions of that side (i.e. Iran), the kind and circumstance of the information gathered, and in order to take timely precaution, your detailed and comprehensive opinions on these issues should be promptly submitted to My Threshold of Felicity. Consider the necessary things in this regard; abstain from doing, God forbid, something against the excellence of the honour of the sultanate, leaving no shortcoming ... in any matters; report the events with bare fact; write and inform us about the results ... with the favour of God.

VII. Conclusion

While there are no extensive Turkish and Persian sources concerned exclusively with Kurdish spies, the field can be explored with the help of a number of unpublished Ottoman documents; there are only some very scanty related episodes in the chronicles of the time. The Kurds were able to use local potentials, and sometimes they were able to combine both Ottoman and Safavid interests.

It is somewhat hard to get a clear picture of Kurdish espionage activities in the political context of the area. But there can be little doubt that certain tactics were used by Kurdish emirs. Also it seems clear that secondary Kurdish spies (i.e. military and administrative officials, merchants, soldiers, pilgrims, tribal members, villagers, hawkers, etc.) were not more successful in carrying out this programme than were Kurdish emirs. The role played by Kurdish emirs was essentially a leadership role in Kurdish espionage networks extending along a vast Ottoman–Safavid frontier area.

A more general conclusion can also be drawn from the above. Unlike the Ottoman Empire's success in using many Kurdish spies abroad, Safavid Iran had probably few Kurdish spies on Ottoman territory. There are a number of Turkish and Persian sources providing details of Safavid spying activities, but there is a considerable silence on the Kurdish spies as Safavid agents. It does not mean, however, that Safavid intelligence did not have Kurdish spies in the Ottoman Empire. Much of the 16th-century Kurdish principalities were under the control of the Ottomans. Compared to the Ottomans, the Safavids had a weaker presence in parts of the Kurdish lands; thus a fewer number of potential Kurdish spies were available to them. The Safavids, of course, were likely to use a different sort of spies: people who were religiously motivated and found protection in heterodox communities still existing all over Anatolia.

Abbreviations

A.DVN.MHM – Bâb-ı Asafî, Divân-ı Hümâyûn Mühimme Kalemi
BOA – Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi
khm. – hüküm
KK – Kâmil Kepeci Tesnifi
MAD – Maliyeden Müdevver Defterler
MD – Mühimme Defteri
TD – Tahrir (Defter-i Hâkânî) Defteri
TSMA – Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi

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