

The Conquest of Baghdād by the Qezelbāsh; Bāyrak Solṭān Flees to Moṣul, and Shāh Esmā‘il Visits Najaf

When Shāh Esmā‘il got back to Tabriz, Solṭān Ebrāhim Mirzā’s wound was on the mend, and he was feeling better. His Majesty’s confidence returned, and he busied himself with administering justice to his subjects. But one night he had a dream in which the holy Commander of the Faithful said, “O my son, why are you remiss in conquering Baghdād?”

When His Majesty awoke, he related this dream to his commanders. Durmesh Khān was in the royal palace; Esmā‘il summoned him and ordered him to pack up the tents of state and march off to Baghdād. When the rank-and-file Qezelbāsh heard about this, they were overjoyed, and the next day that world-conquering army mounted their horses and set off in the direction of Baghdād.

They made haste, that magnificent sea-flood
In the wake of which mountain and plain are made level.
So many troops set out for Baghdād
That the whole earth became the royal road.

After a long journey, on the twenty-fifth of Jomādā 11 [of the year 914]¹, the Safavid army arrived at Māhidasht, on the outskirts of Baghdād.

When Bāyrak² Solṭān learned that the Qezelbāsh were bearing down on Baghdād, he was distraught. He decided to hole up in the citadel and hoard supplies, a rebel against the royal court.

Meanwhile, back at Māhidasht, Shāh Esmā‘il ordered Ḥosayn Beg Laleh to take six thousand men and go to Baghdād, thinking that they could coax Bāyrak Solṭān out of the citadel and thus avoid a battle. So they went, stopping outside Qarāpu. An emissary was sent to advise Bāyrak Solṭān with a brief letter which read: “Let Bāyrak Solṭān be informed that the majestic royal banners are coming to this region. It is not proper that you have shut yourself in the citadel and prepared for a defense; you must show obedience. Come out of the citadel, and as soon as you declare obedience to His Majesty, who is the propagator of the

¹ October 20, 1508.

² Montazer Ṣāheb points out (p. 161) that both Bijan and Khwāndamir refer to this individual as Bārik. He is also Bārik in the Chester Beatty Library manuscript.

religion of the Twelve Emāms, you will be made ruler of Arabian ‘Erāq. If not, prepare for battle. Whichever course you prefer is fine with us.”

Bāyrak Solṭān read Ḥosayn Beg Laleh’s message and said: “They are unjust, these Qezelbāsh, who took the whole of Iran from us; one sole Baghdādi remains in possession of the patrimony of the sons of Ḥasan Pādeshāh, and they can’t bear to see that? The response to their letter is war.” He explained his answer to the emissary.

Now Seyyed Moḥammad Kamuneh was present with Bāyrak Solṭān for this encounter. After the emissary left, he said to Bāyrak Solṭān: “You should treat the Pādeshāh of Iran with more courtesy.”

Bāyrak, that evil-natured one, replied, “You too speak as one with the Qezelbāsh; I know that you have always been a schismatic!”

He ordered that they seize Seyyed Moḥammad and throw him into prison, for he was a devotee of the noble House of the Commander of the Faithful.

Then the ignoramuses of that city approached Bāyrak Solṭān and said, “Let us take care of Ḥosayn Beg Laleh before Shaykh-oghli gets here; then, when Shaykh-oghli comes, he can be dealt with in no time.” The vile Bāyrak accepted this idea. He gathered his men and left the fortress to array his troops opposite the army of Ḥosayn Beg Laleh, who also mounted up along with his men and charged forth to join the battle. The fighting had been raging for a while when the dragon-headed banners of the world-conquering Shāh appeared from the plain. The Shi‘is of Baghdād saw the Shāh’s pennants from the city ramparts, and the servants and followers of Seyyed Moḥammad Kamuneh poured into Bāyrak’s prison, where they killed several guards and freed the Seyyed from his captivity.

Seyyed Moḥammad told them to show love for the Shāh and seal the gate of the fortress. Ḥosayn Beg Laleh was just giving a cry of manliness when Shāh Esmā‘il arrived; behind him came his renowned commanders, riding hard with their heads down in the manes of their horses. With all the dust and dirt in the air, Bāyrak did not see the banner reading “Help from God”; he only realized what was happening when he heard the sound of the Shāh’s royal trumpet rising from the gate of the city. Shaken to his core, Bāyrak ordered his troops to stop fighting and head for the city and its fortress. When they arrived at the gate, however, he saw Seyyed Moḥammad, and his heart sank. He said, “O Seyyed, open the gate! The Qezelbāsh are coming!”

“Wretch!” Seyyed Moḥammad replied, “His Majesty the Commander of the Faithful has deposed you from rule. Go wherever you wish!”

No matter how much Bāyrak pleaded, it was to no avail. The Seyyed said, “Shoot this villain with an arrow!” Then Bāyrak said, “O Seyyed, send my harem out to me.” The Seyyed replied, “Your harem and your possessions are now the

property of the Pādeshāh of Iran." Bāyrak saw that the Seyyed was not going to relent, so he turned and went down the road to Moṣul with some Pornāk followers.

Once Shāh Esmā'il realized that Bāyrak had fled, he ordered that the Pornāk be annihilated, and his lion-hunting ghāzis killed a great many of that clan. Seyyed Moḥammad Kamuneh came and kissed the royal foot. Esmā'il praised him highly and asked him about Bāyrak, and the Seyyed told him that he had fled toward Moṣul. "Keep abreast of Bāyrak's doings until we return," His Majesty told him. Then he set off with his victorious troops on the trail of Bāyrak and the Pornāk.

When they got to the bank of the Tigris, they saw that the bridge had been destroyed on the orders of Bāyrak. The Shāh cried, "Whoever is one of us, let them get in the water and follow me!" At once all the Qezelbāsh plunged into the water, and all twelve thousand of them made it out of the water safely. Then Esmā'il said, "Look closely; is there anyone the water did not support?" The Qezelbāsh looked, and it turned out that the river had indeed carried off one man. When they told the Shāh, he said, "He was not one of our troops; he was a Sunni for sure. Bring him here!" They brought the body, and upon investigation they discovered that he was from the army of Bāyrak; originally a Yazidi Kurd, in the midst of the battle he had gotten mixed up in the ranks of the Qezelbāsh and could not return to his own side. The hapless man had drowned when he entered the river. The Shāh and his men, though, had made it across safe and sound. They now continued their pursuit of Bāyrak.

Bāyrak, like the endlessly turning spheres, could find no rest. He and fifty lords of the Pornāk kept driving their horses with all speed toward Moṣul. After riding for twenty-four hours, they spent the night by the bank of the Euphrates.

But Shāh Esmā'il had also made camp by the riverbank, and when dawn broke he, along with Durmesh Khān, Amir Najm Rashti, Yār Aḥmad Khuzāni the superintendent of the expenses of the royal household, and five or six others saw Bāyrak and sixty other men on the bank of the river. Those men also saw the Shāh and his companions. Bāyrak said, "Somebody go and capture those men and bring them to us! Surely they have followed us!" Fifteen brave Pornāk mounted up and headed for the Shāh's party. Seeing this, His Majesty, charged as well and killed all those men on the first pass. The stunned Bāyrak said, "I suspect that that man is Shaykh-oghli!"

He and his sixty men then mounted up and attacked Shāh Esmā'il. His Majesty gave a cry of bravery and waged with those men such a battle that people would have forgotten the story of Rostam's seven deeds in Māzandarān. Then the Qezelbāsh army arrived and joined in the fray. Bāyrak sent his own army into battle, but he himself fled with ten men such that no one saw them.

Shortly the Pornāk army was defeated, but no matter how much Shāh Esmā‘il looked around, he could not spot any sign of Bāyrak. By the time evening came it was apparent that he had escaped. Out of those Pornāk, all those who with heart and soul became partisans of the holy Commander of the Faithful found security; the rest were killed.

Shāh Esmā‘il then returned to Baghdād, where Seyyed Moḥammad Kamuneh brought all the Shi‘is of the city out to greet him. His Majesty entered Baghdād in fortune and felicity, flush with conquest and victory, and when he dismounted, the *khoṭbeh* was proclaimed in the name of the Twelve Emāms, and the populace began to curse the first three Caliphs. Then the Shāh granted trusteeship over Najaf and part of Arabian ‘Erāq to Seyyed Moḥammad Kamuneh, who was one of the noble seyeds of the people of ‘Erāq; the government of Baghdād and its dependencies he bestowed upon Khādem Beg, the *amir-e divān*, and gave him the title *khalifeh al-kholafā*.³

Shortly thereafter, word reached the royal hearing that in those parts there was a forest inhabited by a fierce lion that was causing the people great suffering, as they could neither pass through that region nor put up any resistance. So Shāh Esmā‘il and the champions of the age girded themselves to repel that lion and set off after it. His Majesty himself encountered it, and when he approached that terrible beast he laid it low in the dust of annihilation with one arrow-shot.

A cry arose over the earth from the heavens:
“Praise his hand and arm a hundred times!”

When Esmā‘il had slain that lion, he proceeded to the desert around Sib, where he killed two more lions. He then went to the tomb of Salmān-e Fārsi. As he approached, he was told that yet another fierce lion was blocking the road, and no one could resist it. So Esmā‘il headed there. His leading officers had gone ahead of him, but when Esmā‘il saw the lion, he spurred his steed and charged past them.

All the officers fell to the ground and said, “In all our lives we have never seen such a lion! God forbid that the evil eye strike you!”

3 This was the administrative head or “chief Ṣufi” of the Safavid order, later incorporated into the Safavid government hierarchy. For the history and functions of this position, see Floor, “The *Khalifeh al-kholafā*,” 51–86. Khādem Beg Ṭālesh was indeed the first *khalifeh al-kholafā* of the Safavid state, as attested by Ḥasan Rumlu (Floor, “The *Khalifeh al-kholafā*,” 55).

“Don’t you worry,” replied the Shāh; “entrust us to the protection of the verse ‘The Hand of God is above their hands,’ for the Lord of Lords keeps his seventy-times merciful gaze on his servants at all times. Observe!”

When that lion saw Shāh Esmā’il, it came forth and made a motion with its head. His Majesty said, “O cat of the King of Men, you want me to pay a high-way-toll! I am happy to obey.” He looked back and summoned Durmesh Khān, telling him, “Have them prepare some ox-heads and mutton.”

When that was done, the Shāh said, “Take it to the entrance of the lion’s grove and leave it there, then come back.”

Durmesh Khān did so. As he went forth, he saw two more lions, one large and one small. When the first lion saw that someone had come and left ox-heads and mutton at the entrance of its grove, that wise beast bowed its head in obedience to the Shāh and turned back around. The other lions waited until the first one had returned to the forest, then all of them took the ox-heads and mutton and left together.

Shāh Esmā’il left that place and continued traveling until he reached that place which is the heavenly dome of the Victorious Lion of God, triumphant over all victors, the manifestation of miracles and wonders, Emām of East and West, son of the uncle of the Prophet and gateway of Shabbir and Shabbar,⁴ cupbearer of the fountain of Kawthar, His Majesty the Commander of the Faithful Ḥaydar ‘Ali b. Abi Ṭaleb. When His Majesty saw Najaf in the distance, he dismounted and put his face in the dust, crying with love and joy. All of the amirs and Qezelbāsh threw themselves to the ground, and after prostrating themselves, every Qezelbāsh, young and old, turned their minds and tongues to eloquent praise of Almighty God. Then they went with bare heads and feet toward the city. When they got to within two leagues’ distance of it, the resident seyeds and reciters brought out the banners of the King of Saints. Seeing them, Shāh Esmā’il fell to the ground and bowed his head; then he placed the blessed banner of the King of Saints on his shoulders and went forth with bare head and bare feet, saying, “O ‘Ali! O ‘Ali!”

When he approached the tomb at Najaf, His Majesty placed his head on the threshold, made his entreaty to God, and fell completely senseless for an hour. The door of the tomb was shut fast, and a crowd of people stood waiting in the hot sun until the Shāh regained consciousness. He then stood up and began walking through the city. He arrived at the tomb-complex of the Commander of the Faithful and Lord of the Believers, where he proceeded from one door to the next, rubbing the dust of each threshold on his eyes as the tutty of the hopeful.

4 I.e., Ḥosayn and Ḥasan.

Finally he came to the door of the blessed enclosure. "Stay here," he told Durmesh Khān, "and let no one in until I have explained my situation to our lord. When I come out, then I will permit people to come in." So Durmesh Khān stood watch with a jewelled scepter in his hand.

His Majesty entered the sacred enclosure of the Victorious Lion of God, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, closed the door, and fell at the foot of the blessed shrine. His amirs waited outside with great anticipation. Nearly three hours went by, but the Shāh had still not emerged. They began to think, "God forbid that someone was hiding in the enclosure and attacked His Majesty when he fell unconscious!" They said to Durmesh Khān, "Go inside and find out what's going on." Durmesh Khān was about to go inside and see when Seyyed Moḥammad Kamuneh said, "O friends, there is no need to feel anxious! Whenever someone is a guest in someone else's house, that person protects him. If he who has emerged to fight on behalf of the faith of the Twelve Emāms is a guest inside the sacred enclosure of his great ancestor the Lion of God and son-in-law of the Prophet, surely he is being kept under protection from the evil of his enemies."

Eventually, five hours had gone by with no sign of the Shāh. Durmesh Khān could endure no more; quietly he stepped over to the door and put his ear to it. He heard Esmā'il's voice making requests, asking questions, and hearing answers. Then the voice said, "Durmeh Khān, go back, for I will come out." Durmesh Khān went back and told the good news to his friends.

After three more hours, Shāh Esmā'il emerged from the sacred enclosure. When the eyes of the amirs beheld the beauty of that candle of the feast, they realized that he had received a blessing, and that his stature and authority had increased a hundred times. Bābā 'Eshqi the *tabarrā'i* recited in a loud voice an ode he had composed to the Shāh's majesty. He was rewarded with an imperial robe of honor and a hundred tumāns of gold.

The renowned amirs kissed the threshold of the holy King of Saints, and Esmā'il ordered that silken carpets with braided fringes be spread out and that rugs for sitting be set around that blessed and illumined tomb. They hung brocaded curtains and set up candlesticks of gold and silver and spent several days in that noble place, busying themselves with prayer and pilgrimage rites. Shāh Esmā'il granted the guardians of that threshold a pension and a fief.

After that, His Majesty departed and went to the tomb of Ḥosayn,⁵ where he performed the necessary rites of visitation and stayed for a day and a night. Having received a blessing, he went from there to Sāmarrā, where he performed the rites of pilgrimage and obedience and did many favors for the seyyeds there. From there he turned to Baghdād. As he was crossing the Tigris,

⁵ In nearby Karbalā.

he suddenly saw two mounted Qezelbāsh hurrying in his direction. When they reached him, they said, "Your Majesty has said that you would give a horse with saddle and trappings to whoever brought you news of a lion. Well, half a league from here, in a grove of tamarisk-trees, there live fifty lions!"

His Majesty left his companions and headed off to fight. Upon reaching the tamarisk-grove, he gave a shout, and a lion came out the likes of which had never been seen. Esmā'il spurred his horse forward but noticed that it was shying, even though it had seen many lions and had carried the Shāh into battle against fifteen of them. Given the horse's hesitation, there was no time to nock an arrow, and just then the lion leaped forward and landed at the feet of the horse. With another leap it landed its claws on Esmā'il's belt and saddle-pommel, intending to reach his head. His Majesty seized its neck with one hand and grasped his dagger-handle with the other, while his horse opened its mouth and bit the lion on the thigh so that it could not climb up any further. Esmā'il struck the lion's flank with his dagger so hard that it sank in to the hilt, and the beast fell to the ground. His Majesty's amirs raised their hands in prayer in praise of what they had just seen, saying, "Hail to the hands and arm of 'The Hand of God is above their hands!'"⁶ and pledging to give alms. His Majesty ordered that they skin the lion and stuff it with straw. Then he set off for Baghdād.

Now Shāh Esmā'il paid a visit to the shrine of Kāzemayn, where he made plans for a great building on that lofty dome. He also broke open the grave of Abu Ḥanifeh,⁷ exhumed his bones, and buried a dog in his place. After that, he turned the government of Baghdād over to Khādem Beg, the *khalīfeh al-kholafā*, and made him elder of twelve thousand Ṣufi households, thereby elevating him to the highest zenith. He was one of the seven Ṣufis who lay hidden in the forests of Gilān for seven years, until the emergence of His Majesty the Shāh.

Those seven men had, at the behest of Solṭān Ḥaydar and Solṭān 'Ali, taken the young Esmā'il from Ardabil to Gilān. All seven were close companions; on behalf of the Qezelbāsh they abandoned wives and children and property and placed themselves on that road, knowing that they would end up as martyrs and that on the morn of the Last Judgment they would be vindicated. Although those first loyal Ṣufis did achieve the status of martyrs, Shāh Esmā'il showed the utmost affection to their sons and elevated them to high rank. For example, he promoted Amir Ḥasan Beg, the son of Elyās Beg Ḥalvāchi-oghli, to three

⁶ Qor'ān 48: 10.

⁷ A prominent Sunni jurist (699–767), who founded the Ḥanafi school of Islamic law. The reason for Esmā'il's hostility to him, other than his Sunnism, is unclear.

high offices: viceregency of the *ishik-āqāsi-bāshi*,⁸ command of the *shekār-bāshi*,⁹ and master of ceremonies of the celestial court.¹⁰ He also promoted Rostam Beg, son of Qarāpari, to governor of Qarābāgh and its environs.

The names of the seven Şufis who were at the service of His Majesty during his emergence from Gilān and Lāhijān were as follows. First, Dadeh Beg. Second, Qarāpari. Third, Khādem Beg. Fourth, Abdāl Beg. Fifth, Bayrām Beg. Sixth, Sāru Qureh the *qurchi-bāshi*. Seventh, Ḥosayn Beg Laleh.

After these decisions regarding the superintendents of the holy shrines and governors of the city of Baghdād, Shāh Esmā'il left for 'Erāq.

8 Montazer Şāḥeb (p. 638): "The *ishik-aqasi-bashi* was head of all the attendants and ushers and doormen and heralds at the royal court, responsible for the organization of the Shāh's assemblies."

9 Montazer Şāḥeb (p. 639): "The holder of this rank was in charge of the Shāh's hunting affairs and was also called the *qushchi-bashi*. Under his command nearly a thousand men looked after the Shāh's hunting equipment and weapons and the training of his falcons, leopards and hunting dogs."

10 Montazer Şāḥeb (p. 639): "The master of ceremonies was chosen from among the most noble of the amirs, who never numbered more than eight or nine men. They carried out the duties of modern aides-de-camp."