

John R. Perry: Ethno-linguistic Markers of the Turco-Mongol Military and Persian Bureaucratic Castes in Pre-modern Iran and India.

in: Irene Schneider (Hg.): Militär und Staatlichkeit. Beiträge des Kolloquiums am 29. und 30.04.2002. Halle 2003 (Orientwissenschaftliche Hefte 12; Mitteilungen des SFB „Differenz und Integration“ 5) S. 111–125.

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Ethno-Linguistic Markers of the Turco-Mongol Military and Persian Bureaucratic Castes in Pre-modern Iran and India

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The Muslim states that emerged in southwest and South Asia after the establishment of Turkish ruling dynasties in Ghaznavid times (tenth century C. E.), and persisted until the nineteenth century in India and the early twentieth in Iran, exhibit the symbiosis of a ruling military elite of pastoral nomadic provenance from the Inner Asiatic steppes (hitherto of Turkic language and ethnicity) and a bureaucratic administration of urban Iranian (or Persianized Indian) extraction and Persian language and culture. In post-Mongol administrations of Iran and northern India this bipartite pattern became routinized under a virtual caste system, consolidated by appeals to genealogy and pre-Islamic traditions, and labeled by ethnolinguistic references respectively to Turks and Persians. Attempts to cross lines under this system, as recorded in Safavid times, were often resented and resisted.

The ethnolinguistic labeling was not confined to the conventional catchphrase *Turk-o Tāzīk* and to *Fachsprache* use of Turkish and Persian, but is discernable at a subconscious level in the noun phrase syntax of the onomastics and titlature of the classes and individuals on each side of the professional dichotomy. The paper will discuss the history and rationale of this sociolinguistic sub-system, and illustrate the ways in which it was integrated with other ethnic and professional markers and how it influenced the languages involved.

1. Surface structure: the Grammar of the System

Professional castes and functional specialization of ethno-linguistic groups are nothing new in Iran. The Achaemenian kings reserved Persian for ceremonial

use, relying on Aramaic and Aramaean scribes in the day-to-day administration of their far-flung empire. The interdependence of status, function, language and ethnicity has been a notable feature of Persianate societies throughout the Islamic period. Western observers are accustomed to spotting these relationships primarily through surface lexical clues (in the terms used for a class as a whole or typical of individual members of the class: sayyid, shaykh, mulla, khoja, mirza, khan, aqa, begum, etc.), which they readily assimilate into their own languages and treat as discrete labels. Sometimes, however, the linguistic clues are subtler, concealed in the syntax of onomastic phrases in a way that supersedes the etymological or primary signification of the pertinent terms and defies assimilation or translation. Such a case is that of the relations between ethnicity, class and profession (more precisely, ethno-linguistic affiliation and professional caste) among the élite (and would-be élite) components of the Turco-Persian and Indo-Turco-Persian polities that coalesced after successive waves of Turk and Mongol nomadic armies conquered the Perso-Islamic lands of South and Southwest Asia between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries. These socio-linguistic signposts are often more systematic than mere lexical labels in their delineation of both the idealized and the pragmatic relations between rulers and the military, bureaucratic, and religious élites of their realms.

In previous articles I have alluded to a systematically contrastive feature of word order (as it expresses noun phrase syntax) in Persian onomastic phrases (title and name) involving the terms *mīrzā* and *shāh*. I described the distinction as a marker of social class or caste, contrasting its referents in complex terms of ethnicity (Turk vs. Persian), profession (soldier vs. bureaucrat), and status (ruler vs. subject).¹ Here I propose to illustrate in greater detail the ramifications of this scheme and, so far as possible, outline its historical development.

It has long been remarked in passing that the Persian title *mīrzā*, when proposed as in, e.g., “*Mīrzā Ṣādiq Nāmī*,” denotes a court secretary or other civil servant, often with ambitions as a poet or historian and usually an ethnic Persian or Persianized (Shi‘i) Muslim Indian, Armenian, etc., whereas postposed *mīrzā*, as in “*Abbās Mīrzā*,” denotes a prince (the son of a ruler) of one of the Turkish (or Turco-Mongol, or Turkicized) dynasties that ruled in Iran, Central Asia, or India between the fifteenth and the nineteenth (in Iran, early twentieth) centuries. Since the latter usage means literally ‘born of a ruler’ and antedates the former, it has been taken as the original, the assumption being that the bureaucratic *Mīrzā Fulān* (to use the Persian universal pseudonym) was a devalued imitation of the autocratic *Fulān Mīrzā* by upwardly-mobile state function-

¹ See Perry, “*Mīrzā*”, 218–23, and “Historical Role”, 196–97.

aries, or was wished on them by those who noted their pretensions² – somewhat as an English youth with the surname “Clark” (cognate with the profession *clerk* and its doublet *cleric*) would be nicknamed “Nobby” (i.e., having pretensions to nobility) by his fellow soldiers or sailors.

A similar phenomenon, which has not (so far as I know) attracted any notice, is the fact that whereas the Safavid monarchs, from the accession of Shāh Ismā‘īl in 1501 to the death of Shāh Sulṭān-Ḥusayn in 1722 – or even, in the background, until the last of the Safavid puppets and pretenders left the stage in 1773 – used the royal title **before** their names, all the monarchs of subsequent Persian dynasties, from Nādir Shāh in 1736, through the Qajars, to Muḥammad Rizā Shāh ending in 1979, placed it after the name. This formulation was also adopted by the kings of Afghanistan, whose line began with Aḥmad Shāh Dur-rānī in 1747, the year of Nādir’s assassination.

The distinction of word order in both these cases is far from arbitrary, and may be explained in terms of Noun Phrase (NP) syntax. Essentially, a preposed title introduces a Persian onomastic phrase, and a postposed title marks a Turkish one. Linguistically speaking, in an onomastic noun phrase that includes an epithet, the epithet (or title, or honorific) is the head noun, i.e., the constant term, whereas the given name is the modifier, i.e., the variable: King John, King Charles, etc., answer the question: Which king? (For further precision, the name may then become the head noun and another epithet the modifier: Charles the Second answers the question: Which [King] Charles?) In Persian, NP syntax is right-branching, i.e., modifiers follow the head: *dukhtar-i zābā* ‘the beautiful girl’, *Kākā Rustam* ‘Uncle Rustam’, *Shāh ‘Abbās*. In Turkish, NP syntax is left-branching, i.e., modifiers precede the head: Persian phrases like those above appear in Turkish (and Turco-Persian of Iran) in mirror-image: as *güzel kız*, *ikinci Mehmet*, *Rüstem Paşa*, and *Faḥr-‘Alī Shāh*. This applies likewise to collocations such as the possessive *ezafeh*, as in servile names: thus, Persian *Ghulām(-i) Ḥusayn* vs. Turkish (strictly, Turco-Persian) *Ḥusayn Qul-i*, ‘Slave of Ḥusayn’.

The contrasting word order in both *shāh* and *mīrzā* phrases may thus be seen as manifestations respectively of Persian and of Turkish NP word order. Now, Turkish dialects have been (as they still are) widely spoken in Persia, especially by the ruling élites and their troops during the Turco-Mongol hegemony. Nevertheless, as even the Ilkhans, Timurids, Safavids, and Qajars acknowledged, the primary and official language of the realm – ceremonial, administrative, literary – was Persian. The selective and systematic (though unconscious)

² E.g., Ahmad, “The British Museum *Mīrzānāma*”, 100, 108–9.

flouting of normal grammatical rules, in this instance the use of the NP syntax of Turkish within the context of Persian, is sociologically significant. A contemporaneous and parallel phenomenon, the use of the “Persian *izafet*” in (Ottoman) Turkish (e.g., *bāb-i Ālī* ‘Sublime Porte’ – the converse of the Turkish NP construction, as seen, perversely, in the synonymous Safavid “Persian” phrase *Ālī qāpū*) was a marker of high, or literary, style. These collocations were, moreover, of comparatively widespread occurrence and instantly recognizable; whereas the use of a “Turkish *ezafet*” in Persian was virtually confined to onomastic phrases, and has gone unremarked.

This socio-linguistic distinction by syntactic rather than lexical means, as in Turco-Persian vs. Persian, has a close analogy in Anglo-Norman vs. English. After the Norman conquest of England in 1066 C.E., Franco-Norman political dominion introduced military and legal terms ordered in accordance with the right-branching NP syntax of French (head before modifier), which are still part of the English lexicon: *sergeant major*, *court martial*, *attorney general*, *notary public*, *letters patent*, *heir apparent*, *prince regent*, *queen mother*. Such frozen loans and calques (not all of them etymologically French) contrast not only in syntax but also in social register with the majority of left-branching Anglo-Saxon NPs (even where these include words of French origin) such as *private soldier*, *public house*, *junior clerk*. (And, incidentally, their aberrant syntax is as opaque and unremarkable to most modern English speakers as their Turco-Persian analogues are to Persian speakers.)

A closer look at the chronology and geography of these and similar usages reveals a complex underlying system that is intimately connected with the structure and evolution of Turco-Persian states and societies in South and Southwest Asia. Reference will be made to the Table, so as to illustrate the arguments below, in the following abbreviated form: P and T designate the columns exemplifying, respectively, Persian and Turkish syntactic formulations of onomastic phrases; the numbered lines proceed through historical examples (1–4) to an “inertial” instance (5), comprising dervishes’ names preserved only in shrines, and modern shahs deposed within living memory, and finally to modern variations on the theme (6–7). The symbols are used as follows: > indicates historical continuity of class reference (the referents are of the same social group, though in the case of *sultān* the term was progressively devalued); X denotes a differentiation in social class;/ denotes a context-sensitive difference in usage that is not necessarily class-exclusive. Names, as distinct from titles or epithets, begin with a capital.

Table: Syntactic Switches in Ethnolinguistic Class Markers

Persian (P)		Turkish-in-Persian (T)
Historical		
1. sultān Sanjar...	>	Rustam sultān...
2. (Shāh-i Shujā'), shāh 'Abbās...	>	Nādir shāh, Aḥmad shāh...
3. shāh mīr Ḥamza,	X	Muḥammad shāh,
4. mirzā Bedil, mīrzā Malkum(-khān)	X	Shāhrukh mīrzā, 'Abbās mīrzā...
Inertial		
5. shāh 'Abd al-'Aṭim, shāh Rizā...	X	Rizā shāh, Zāhir shāh
Modern		
6. āqā sayyid 'Alī, āqā Najafī...	X	
7. [āqā-yi/ khānum-i Tihirānī...]	/	Ḥasan āqā, Zhāla khānum...

2. Deep Structure: Historical Antecedents in Social Classes

Under the Sasanians, the functional classes or estates of the realm were traditionally four: Priests, Warriors, Cultivators and Artisans. In a later treatise (the "Letter of Tansar," ca. 6th century?) this division was modified to conflate Cultivators and Artisans and specify a class of Scribes (including administrators, poets and scholars) independently of Priests.³ Thenceforth Iranian societal theory was influenced successively by Arab-Islamic and Turco-Mongol notions of the components of society and their management.

Islam emphasized two salient components, "Men of the Sword" (*ahl al-sayf*) and "Men of the Pen" (*ahl al-qalam*), corresponding to Tansar's Warriors and Scribes. The Men of the Sword were ethnically heterogeneous, but in practice, beginning in the ninth century in the eastern caliphate (both in Baghdad and Samanid Bukhara) they came to be represented especially by the imported Turkish slave troops and their commanders. Both in Baghdad and in Ghazna, these commanders soon became supreme political as well as mere military

³ Shaki, "Class System", 656.

leaders. The Men of the Pen included both secular scholars and functionaries and the *‘ulamā*’ the latter in effect a priestly caste.

Islamic society was intrinsically more mobile than Sasanian society had been: the expanded scope of literacy went far to realize the Islamic ideal of a single community graded by degrees of piety rather than class distinctions. The traditional Iranian estates, too, had ideally constituted not a hierarchy, but a division of labor into categories of equal rank: farming and industry were acknowledged to be as essential and worthy occupations as the military or the priesthood. However, the categories were evidently conceived as self-perpetuating, functionally exclusive, and of unequal political power. Firdawsī’s description of the four estates, as established by the mythical culture-hero Jamshid, recapitulates the classic Sasanian (pre-Tansar) world view, adding “Thus he [*sc.* Jamshid] chose for each one a proper station (*pāyigāh*) and showed him the way/ So that each person might appreciate his own rank (*andāza*) and recognize those lesser and those greater.”⁴

This dual nature of the traditional classes – each enjoying equal theoretical value as functional components of the state, but the priestly-scribal and military-executive taking political precedence over the proletariat — continued into Islamic times, and was immediately complicated by a tendency for ethnic groups to identify themselves functionally with one or the other of the two upper classes. The Ghaznavid state contemporary with Firdawsī presented a social structure more like that of Tansar’s revision, but one already expressed to a great extent in ethnic terms: a Turkish executive and military élite, a Persian bureaucracy (scribal and priestly classes), and a third estate of cultivators-cum-artisans now formalized as the *ra‘iyyat*, the tax-paying proletariat of various Iranian and Indian peoples. From a modern scholarly perspective, the first class made history, the second class wrote about it, and the third class paid for it in silent anonymity.

Perhaps significantly, the formula for successful political economy known as the “Circle of Justice,” beloved by theorists of Persian government such as the celebrated Seljuk vizier Nizām al-Mulk, omits mention of the bureaucracy as a body from the five-fold causal chain of state stability: The Ruler is kept in power by the Army, which is paid from Revenue, which is derived as taxes from the Proletariat (*ra‘iyyat*), who are secured by Justice, which emanates from the Ruler. In the Ruler and his Army we at once recognize the military-executive class, and their explicit relationships with the cultivator-artisan class in the *ra‘iyyat*, but where are the Priests and Scribes? Hidden behind the re-

⁴ *Shāhnāma*, reign of Jamshid, vv. 17–32 approx.

maining abstractions, of course, as the *éminences grises* who oversee both the collection of taxes and appropriation of revenue, and the administration of justice, linking all three functioning sectors of the circuit they have devised.

3. Turk and Tajik: Caste and the Lexicon

The Iranian Samanid rulers (9th–10th century) bore the Arabic title *amīr* ‘commander’, as bestowed on them by the caliph. This became in informal and poetic usage the Persianized word *mīr*, as seen also in its compounds *mīrzāda/mīrzā*, *mīr-āb* ‘irrigation supervisor’, *mīr-ākhur* ‘master of the stables’; the same apheresis is seen in the onomastic *bū* (< Ar. *abū*), and was typical of spoken Persian (Dari) as distinct from written Pahlavī.⁵ However, their Turkish Ghaznavid and Seljuk successors (when not enjoying the new title of *sultān*), appear to have been addressed only by the more formal, Arabicate *amīr*. The Persian poets and secretaries of both *mīr* and *amīr* were addressed mostly as *ostād* or *khwāja*, both these being Persian terms for educated men of prestige in the secular realm, while their religious functionaries went usually by the Arabicate honorific *shaykh*. The Perso-Arabic honorifics (Khwāja Ḥasan, Ustād Ḥasan, Shaykh Ḥasan) were now balanced by Turco-Mongolian ones (Ḥasan Beg, Ḥasan Khān, Ḥasan Āqā), each reflecting the NP syntax of its respective language.

Pari passu with the functional distribution of titles there evolved collective designations for the two top classes on an overtly ethnic basis. The Arabs were known generically to the Sasanians and their Near Eastern neighbors by the name of one of their more turbulent tribes, the *Ṭayyī*’ (Syriac *tayyāye*, Middle Persian *tāzīg* ‘a tribesman of the *Ṭayy[i]’* – cf. *Rāzīg*, New Persian *rāzī* ‘a citizen of Rayy’). A variant form of this, *tājīk*, was later applied to Muslim Iranians and became the Persian term for Iranians, as distinct from Turks, much as the alliterative and assonant term *‘ajam* distinguished Iranians from *‘arab*, the A-rabs.⁶ From ca. 1300, the alliterative phrase *Turk-o Tāzīk/ Tājīk*, generally rhymed with *dūr-o nazdīk* ‘far and near’, is found frequently in histories of the Ilkhanids, Timurids, Safavids and so on. In itself *‘az Turk-o Tāzīk* means little

⁵ Other such doublets, of Persian words, are *Anāhīd/Nāhīd*, *Anūshīravān/Nūshīravān*, and the prepositions *abā/bā*, *abar/bar*.

⁶ The chronology and sociology of *tāzīk/ tājīk* is too complex to be debated here. See, e.g., Sundermann, “Early attestation”; Subtelny, “Symbiosis”, 48, dates it after the Arab Muslim conquest of Central Asia, which is certainly too late.

more than the English ‘every Tom, Dick and Harry’ or the German ‘Krethi und Plethi’, i.e., all and sundry. Beneath the cliché, however, lies an acknowledgement of the importance of the two most salient ethno-linguistic groups of the states ruled by Mongols or Mughals, Qizilbash or other Turkmans, and of the paramount societal functions that each had appropriated.

The symbiosis of Turk and Tajik in Iran reached its zenith in the early 1500s, when a Turkicized Sufi *ṭarīqat*-turned local ruling dynasty, the Safawiyya, with a Turkman tribal army (the Qizilbash), forcibly converted the Persian populace to Imami Shi‘ism, and ruled as yet another classic Turco-Mongol steppe oligarchy, administering its realms through co-optation of the age-old Persian bureaucracy, which (in its top echelons) was itself equally dynastic and self-conscious in its God-given function. The ideal division of labor advocated in Firdawsī’s dictum was not always achieved. Ethnic Mongols and Turks occasionally exercised functions that were more administrative or bureaucratic than military, and indulged in poetry and the arts;⁷ and Persians were sometimes appointed to high military command. In the latter case, at least, this “usurpation” was actively resented: when the first Safavid shah, Ismā‘il, persisted in appointing Persians to the post of *vakīl*, his personal viceregent, and even in sending these men on campaign in supreme command of his Turkman supporters, the humiliated Qizilbash amirs bridled. They deserted one such “Tajik” in a crucial battle against the Uzbeks, and murdered another.⁸

4. Kings and Beggars

It is often forgotten that under the “slave” dynasties of the Ghaznavids and the Delhi sultans, the ruling elites of northern India were Turkicized from the eleventh century, even before the Mongol invasions, and more thoroughly than in Iran. It was among these rulers that the New Persian form of the old title, *shāh*, was first assumed, four centuries before the Safavids formalized this titulature in Iran – and predominantly in Turkish, not Persian, syntactic form. In this newly conquered pagan land, class distinctions were established earlier and more emphatically than in Iran, between Turco-Muslim ruler (*pādshāh*) and Indian subject (*ra‘īyyat*), and between Turco-Mongol warrior (*khān*) and Indo-Persian scribe (*mīrzā*). The majority of Turkish rulers, from later Ghaznavid times (Bahram Shah and Khusraw Shah, 1118–1160), through the various dy-

⁷ See Savory, “Qizilbāsh”.

⁸ Savory, “Significance”, 185; *Iran under the Safavids*, 32.

nasties of Delhi sultans (Ārām Shāh, Tughluq Shāh, Muḥammad Shāh and twenty others (1210–1450) – all assumed the Persian title of *shāh*, but in a Turkish syntactic style. The sultans of Bengal (1336–1576) and of Gujarat (1403–1573, of Punjabi origin) virtually all followed suit, as did the non-Turkish Afghan Sūrī dynasty (Islām Shāh, Sikandar Shāh).⁹

In western Iran, from the post-Mongol period, regional rulers occasionally assumed (or were given) names incorporating the title *shāh*: such were the Muẓaffarids Shāh-i Shujāʿ, Shāh Yaḥyā, Shāh Maḥmūd and Shāh Maṣṣūr, between 1358 and 1393. Although these onomastics are Persian NPs and may appear to anticipate the Safavid assumption of the royal title, they remain individual names and not items in a systematic dynastic nomenclature (as is shown by the names of other Muẓaffarid rulers, Sulṭān Abū Ishāq and Sulṭān Muʿtaṣim – and by the fact that members of the family who did not accede to rulership bore names such as Shāh Muẓaffar and Sulṭān Uvays).

Of the few Mughal emperors who affected the title, surprisingly, only three names show the standard Turkish formulation (Aʿzam Shāh, Aḥmad Shāh and two Bahādur Shāhs); while four individuals have the Persian word order (two Shāh ʿĀlams and two Shāh Jahāns). But here, as with the Muẓaffarids, we must be careful. The last two examples are in essence common nouns in transparent Persian *ezāfeh* phrases meaning ‘king of the world’. Like many Persianate **regal** names in either Turkish or Persian syntax, they are **regnal** names, i.e., modes of address assumed on enthronement, not given names supplemented by a title. There are Jahānshāhs and ʿĀlamshāhs in other dynasties, which can be interpreted either as Turkish-style possessive NPs or Persian compound nouns of the type *sar-dard* ‘head-ache’, with preposed modifier; it therefore seems best to treat both these formulations as Persian collocations equivalent to given names. (There are a few exceptions on other grounds, such as *shāh-rukḥ*, which is the name of a chess move, and is simply a given name – as in Shāhrukh Mīrzā, the son of Nādir Shāh).

During the latter part of this same period (i.e., the Timurid era in Iran and India, before the Safavids, ca. 1400–1500), two complementary socio-linguistic changes occurred. First, some leaders of Sufī orders and prominent dervishes began to preface their names with titles appropriate to soldiers and rulers – *mīr* (usually this vernacular Persian form, be it noted, not the re-formalized *amīr* of the Turco-Mongol ruler) and *shāh* – in accordance with Persian syntax: Mīr Ḥaydar, Mīr Surkh, Mīr Niʿmat-ʿAlī, Mīr ʿĀlamshāh-i Hindī, Shāh Mīr (d. 1396), Shāh Niʿmatullāh Valī (d. 1431), Shāh Mīr Ḥamza. Most apparent ex-

⁹ For these and other dynasties mentioned, see Bosworth, *New Islamic Dynasties*.

ceptions to these formulations may be explained syntactically. Thus Mullā Shāh, an alternate designation of Shāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Aḥmad, an Indian Qādirī saint (d. 1661), is evidently the result of a superordinate (Persian-style) title *mullā* combining with a deleted given name, i.e., “Mullā Shāh(-Muḥammad).” So, too, it should be noted that the *shāh* postposed after the name ‘Alī in many dervishes’ names, as Mast ‘Alī-shāh, Mullā (for Mawlā-yī) ‘Alī-shāh ‘bondsman of ‘Alī the king’, is not an honorific of the bearer but a title belonging to the Imam ‘Alī, who is conventionally *shāh-i mardān* ‘king of men’ – admittedly in his Safavid-era **Turkish** royal syntax (‘Alī Shāh); but the whole phrase is thus a composite given name, not a titular phrase.

Secondly, many secretaries, poets (Mīrzā Bedil), painters (Mīrzā Bābā), and other courtiers began to affect the princely title *mīrzā* (Indo-Persian variant, *mīrzā*, with a short first vowel) before their names, likewise Persian style. Thus the Turco-Mongol rulers and the two classes with which they functioned most closely – their protégés and spiritual patrons the dervishes, and their court employees the clerks, ministers, poets and artists – were chiasmically contrasted by the syntax of their identical lexical labels (Table, rows 3 and 4).

The psychology, and even the chronology, of the early stages of this process are far from clear. In many cultures, the figures of King and Beggar are polar opposites, ripe for anecdotal and metaphorical reversal, and in Persia especially the Dervish as King is an established poetic trope. Turco-Mongol rulers, notably Timur (while often flouting the strictures of formal Islam) acknowledged certain dervishes as their patrons, acquiesced in being treated imperiously and took no umbrage as these ragged saints assumed the titles of *mīr* or *shāh*. It may indeed be fair to speculate that the assumption of the (Persian-style) title *shāh* by Ismā‘īl, head of the Ṣafavī Sufī order (and in hindsight king of Iran), was inspired by the recently established tradition of dervish “kings” rather than by political examples in contemporary Gujarat or long-ago Sasanian Iran.¹⁰ This view is supported by the fact that European travelers to Safavid Persia usually referred to the ruler (for upward of the first hundred years of Safavid rule) as the “Sophy” (a blend of *Ṣafavī* and *ṣūfī*), rather than the “Shah”; this last term, in fact, did not gain wide currency in European use until Qajar times.

The appropriation of the (etymologically Persian) title *mīrzā* in a syntactically Turkish onomastic by the hereditary Turkish-speaking rulers of *Irān-zamīn* can be seen as a subconscious expression of their ethno-linguistic solidarity while they continued to function within a Persianate society, a marker of their status as scions of a ruling élite and a warrior caste vis-à-vis the scribal

¹⁰ Cf. Algar, “Darvish”, 75.

class of urban, Persian-speaking administrators. Similarly, the historical switch in the *shāh* onomastic from Persian to Turkish word order appears to be a belated acknowledgement of this centuries-old scheme, a paradigmatic normalization by *Systemzwang*. The Arabicate title *sulṭān* had been similarly postposed in (Turco-)Persian by early Qajar times, and had additionally been devalued to the rank of a village headman (Table, row 1).¹¹ But it is also tempting, looking ahead, to see the delayed postposing of the title (precisely after the demise of the Safavid dynasty) as not merely an alignment with the inherited usage of *Fulān Mīrzā* but also an assertion of secular royalty, a break with the failed Safavid experiments in quasi-priest-kingship. That it was inaugurated by Nādir Shāh, notorious for his no-nonsense *Realpolitik* in matters of religion, lends substance to this view.

5. The Two Mīrzās: Caste and Syntax

The genesis of Persian-style *mīrzā* onomastics is even less clear, and its application far from absolute (Persian-style epithets *Mīr* and *Mīrzā* also preface the names of a few of the elite priestly caste of religious scholars, as Mīr Lawḥī). But whatever the historical dynamics, a synchronic perspective confirms that the appropriation of *mīrzā* and *shāh* in Turkish syntagmata marked the political dominance of Turco-Mongol military dynasts over the Persianate world; and that this circumscribed syntactic shift had left the way clear for the titles, first of *shāh*, then of *mīr* and *mīrzā*, to be used in Persian syntagmata, **metaphorically**, in the titlature of Sufi leaders (a new vernacular priestly caste) and bureaucrats, writers, and painters (the scribal caste), each of which represented social niches where Persians and other non-Turks retained cultural and quasi-political prominence.

If the ethno-syntactic differentiation of *shāh* NPs began in India, that of *mīrzā* NPs appears to have begun in Timurid-era Iran, and established itself rapidly under the early Safavids. The respective functions of the *mīrzās*, were often manipulated by royal politics. Thus Shāh Ismā‘īl established the new office of *ṣadr* (head of the religious establishment), generally headed by scholars of the Persian scribal caste such as Mīrzā Makhdūm Sharīfī, in a bid to bureaucratize the Shi‘i ulama, i.e., to amalgamate the clerical and scribal castes under royal control. The Safavid Queen Mother a few decades later, scheming

¹¹ See Malcolm, *History of Persia II*, 123–25; Perry, “*Mīrzā*”, 221–23.

to secure the succession for her son Ḥamza Mīrzā, had him appointed *vakīl* of the Supreme Divan, authorizing him to affix his seal to documents above that of the vizier, Mīrzā Salmān – posing a potential confrontation between the military-executive and scribal-secretarial castes.¹²

Over the course of the next two centuries, however, this syntactic chiasmus was not only established in Persia, but was carried by the periodic emigration of Persian *Mīrzā Fulāns* (and, in smaller numbers, of deposed or ignored *Fulān Mīrzās*) from their politically unstable homeland to the hospitable courts of Muslim India. Here the “preposed” Mīrza, much in demand and highly respected, established his collective credentials and burnished his mystique. He was a Persian (or Persianized native), not a Turk, who used Persian in his secretarial and poetical writing; an administrator following traditional practice, not an arbitrary executive; a civilian, not a soldier; an urban resident, not a steppe dweller; hence, civilized and urbane, not wild and boorish. To make these points (albeit in non-confrontational terms) and reinforce class solidarity, there evolved the literary genre of “manuals for Mīrzās” (*mīrzā-nāmā*), a bourgeois successor, as it were, to the Persian “mirrors for princes.” Significantly, this development took place in seventeenth-century Mughal India, where so many aspects of the Turco-Persian tradition became routinized and sophisticated, and where quasi-ethnic and professional castes had been institutionalized long before the advent of Islam. One of these works was penned by a Mīrzā Kāmṛān – not to be confused with the emperor Bābur’s son, Kāmṛān Mīrzā.¹³

It is probably a sociolinguistic universal that titles tend to be progressively devalued over time. By the end of the nineteenth century, in large part as a result of the proliferation of Qajar progeny and the Shahs’ indiscriminate bestowal of epithets, *khān* and (Persian-style) *mīrzā* were no longer worth their weight in paper, and no longer served to distinguish Men of the Sword from Men of the Pen (since many upwardly-mobile persons boasted both epithets). Even before their decline, these epithets underwent a shift of ethnic (though not so much linguistic) affiliation in Iran. Within a century of the establishment of Safavid power, as a result of the reforms of Shāh ‘Abbās, a new ethnic source of royal support – the Georgian and Armenian *ghulām* (‘slave’) class – had effectively displaced the Turkman Qizilbash in positions of military leadership, and was even selectively invading the purview of the Persian bureaucracy. Men such as the Georgian Allāh Verdī Khān and his son Imām Qulī Khān (ffl. 1595–1633) and the Armenian Muḥammad Beg (1640s–60s) served as military

¹² Cf. Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, respectively 30, 71.

¹³ See Ahmad, “The British Museum *Mīrzānāmā*”.

commanders, regional governors, ministers of state with the vizierate and other portfolios.

These Caucasians took Persian or Turkish or Arabicate names, were generally bi- or tri-lingual, and blurred the classic distinction between Turkish warrior and Persian scribal castes. Ultimately, however, they were assimilated into the bureaucracy rather than the military, and by early Qajar times (1800) were largely indistinguishable from their Persian colleagues. Typical is the name, and socio-professional status, of the Armenian *Mirzā Malkum Khān* (1815–1908), a “preposed,” i.e., Persianized bureaucratic *mīrzā*, enhanced by the erstwhile military and executive title *khān*, which was by his time ethnically and professionally neutral and suffering an inflationary decline in prestige.

6. Modern Developments

When the European-style surname was mandated under *Rizā Shāh* in 1930s Iran, the Turkish epithets *āqā* and *khānum* were syntactically Persianized, i. e., adapted to the right-branching *ezafeh* NP (Table, P7). Informal Persian usage, however, prefers the Turkish syntax of *ḥasan Āqā*, etc. (T7), to address the same people in a different social context.

Relics of the old system lingered on into the twentieth century, though no longer actively motivated by ethnicity or profession. “*Rizā Shāh*” was the king, even though not ethnically or linguistically Turkish (though indubitably of the military caste), whereas “*Shāh Rizā*” (*shahrizā*) was a dervish, no longer alive, but (like *Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīm* and *Shāh Mīr Ḥamza*) the saintly incumbent of a shrine, in the town of *Qumishah*. This distinction is no longer generally transparent to Iranians, who in the 1920s changed the town’s name to *Shahreza* in flattery of *Rizā Shāh*, then after the Islamic revolution changed it back to *Qumishah* in order to purge it of associations with the deposed *Pahlavis*. Ironically, *Qumishah* (with consonantal *h* – not *Qumishé*, as generally pronounced!) is etymologically *qawn-e shān*, the clan of some secular shah,¹⁴ whereas *Shāh Rizā* was a pious Sufi.

There is one arena where a subtle subroutine of onomastic syntax still defines status and function: between the secular and the clerical, on the “Persian” side of the Table (P6, P7). It is marked by variations of usage in yet another ti-

¹⁴ *Nawbān*, *Vajh*, 85–86.

tie, the only one to have developed a three-way syntactic contrast: Turkish *aqā* (*āqā*).

Historically, ulama and Sufis (both men of the cloth, but explicitly different cloth – *‘abā* and *khirqā*) have often been at daggers drawn; one eighteenth-century mullā earned the sobriquet *Şufi-kush* ‘the Sufi-slayer’. The dervishes’ lexico-syntactic bid for formal status as a clerical caste has since been trumped by the high clergy, the *rūḥāniūn* of pre-modern and modern Iran. Whereas the Sufi “shahs” and “mirs” are all in their graves, it has become customary for *mujtahids* and other prominent Shi‘i clerics to be addressed, and referred to, as *āqā*; and where this epithet is combined with a name, it is (a) preposed, Persian-style, but (b) without an explicit *ezafeh* syllable: *Āqā Najafī*, *Āqā Shaykh ‘Alī*, *Āqā Sayyid ‘Alī Mūsavī-yi Ḥusaynābādī*. This formula, *Āqā Fulān(i)*, thus contrasts with the modern formula *Āqā-yi Fulānī* for civil surnames (which, indeed, it antedates).

The Turco-Mongolian word *aqā* has a long history in the Turco-Persian realms.¹⁵ It has evolved semantically from ‘big brother’ (as a postposed epithet) to ‘court eunuch’ (an independent substantive) and hence ‘government functionary, authority figure’; it has been applied Persian-style to civil servants (of the *mīrzā* class, e.g. *Āqā Buzurg Tihirānī*), writers (*Āqā Tabrīzī*), artists (*Āqā Rizā Haravī*), and even dervishes (*Āqā Mīrzā ‘Alī Naqī*, who died in 1878), but is now primarily, though not exclusively, the mark of the elite priestly class. The relegation of the Turkish-style formula “Ḥasan *Āqā*” (Table, P7) to the familiar and vernacular registers echoes the vernacular lexical status of much Turkish vocabulary used in Persian.¹⁶ The symbiotic confrontation of Persian scribe-poet-dervish with Turkish warrior-king (encapsulated in the *shāh* and *mīrzā* chiasmus) has given way to an uneasy juxtaposition of priest-ruler and secular citizen (Table, P6 X P7), both identified by the same Turkish lexeme (*āqā*) construed in Persian syntagmata, but distinguished by a single syllable.

¹⁵ Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente I*, 133–40.

¹⁶ See Perry, “Historical Role”, 195–96.

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