

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

In my research on religious evolution under the Safavids, I came across materials that seemed to throw considerable light on the origins of the Haydari-Ni'mati factionalism in Iranian cities. In "Religious Extremism (Ghuluww), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501-1722" (*Journal of Asian Studies*, 15 [1981], pp. 1-35), I put forward the following account of the suppression of the Ni'matullahi sufis by Abbas the Great:

In the sixteenth century, the Ni'matullahis were very probably the most highly organized of the Sufi orders, which goes a long way towards explaining why their alliance with the Safavids lasted for over a century. Their *tekke* in Tabriz (in northwestern Iran, far from their center) is one of the two or three supra-local ones (as distinct from the local *khaniqahs*, usually associated with families of *sayyids* with landholdings in the area) mentioned by Karbala'i [the author of *Rawdat al-Jinan va Jannat al-Janan*]. They had *tekkes* in many other cities too. Circumstantial evidence suggests that 'Abbas I turned these *tekkes* increasingly over to the youth and recreational organizations of the city quarters they were located in. Fights between the city quarters were of course an old phenomenon. In Tabriz, where both the Ni'matullahis and the Haydaris had *tekkes*, such conflicts appear to have clustered around these respective *tekkes* in the latter part of Tahmasp's reign. There probably was some tendency for the pattern to repeat itself in other cities. Be that as it may, 'Abbas is known to have greatly encouraged and manipulated faction fights, and, specifically, as early as 1594-5/1003, in Qazvin, he is reported to have watched a fight between the Ni'matis (Ni'matullahis) and the Haydaris. With the

eclipse of the Ni'matullahiyya as a Sufi order, their tekkes were increasingly taken over as the headquarters of neighborhood organizations, and were used especially for the Muharram ceremonies of flagellant processions. Inter-factional conflicts occurring during the Muharram processions, starting from and returning to these tekkes, represented an extremely serious problem for the maintenance of law and order in cities in the late Safavid period, one which remained unsolved until the fall of the dynasty, and beyond.

Thus, once the cultural activity of the Ni'matullahiyya--the perpetuation of its mystical tradition--definitely shifted to India as a result of 'Abbas' religious policy, its organizational base was taken over by the city-quarter communes, and harnessed to a particularly destructive form of communal sport--faction fights--fused with the Muharram ceremonies mourning the martyrdom of the third Shi'ite Imam, Husayn.

This account was qualified by a footnote, stating: "I realize that the above is a bold hypothesis regarding an unexplored but crucially important issue in the social history of Iranian cities--i.e., the origins of the Ni'mati-Haydari feuding factions. As such it should be considered tentative."

It was, therefore, with great interest and pleasure that I turned to Hossein Mirjafari's article, "The Haydari-Ni'mati Conflicts in Iran," in *Iranian Studies* (XII [Summer-Autumn 1979], pp. 135-162); and I was richly rewarded. The results of Mirjafari's research, when complemented by and modified in the light of the findings reported in my article, enable us to go beyond tentative statements and to arrive at a fairly conclusive account of the *origins* of the Haydari-Ni'mati factions in the "secularization" of the urban sufi orders of the sixteenth century.

There can be little doubt about the eponymous origins of the sufi order that engendered the communal organizations of the Ni'mati city quarters. The origins of the Haydari organizations has, however, remained a matter of dispute. Although Mirjafari does not offer a fully satisfactory solu-

tion to the problem, the evidence he puts forward enables us to do so. Mirjafari, having reported Ibn Batuta's description of "the Haydariya cult, of the Shi'ite persuasion" in Khorasan in the fourteenth century (p. 138), then rejects, without any regard for consistency, Petrushevsky's characterization of the followers of Shaykh Qotb al-din Haydar Zava'i (d. 1221/618) as Shi'ite (p. 142). He does so to establish that the Haydari sufi order which vied with the Ni'matullahi order in the fifteenth century was in fact founded by Sultan Mir Haydar Tunî (d. 1426-7/830). This last point is established by Mirjafari. However, a more consistent and coherent sketch of the development of the Haydari order can and ought to be drawn than the one offered in the article.

Sultan Mir Haydar Tunî was born in Baku and buried in Tabriz where he had enjoyed the patronage of the Shi'ite Qaraqyunlu and founded the Haydari order in the early fifteenth century. Just as Sultan Mir Haydar of Baku must have found it convenient to style himself Tunî to suggest affiliation with the Shi'ite Qotb al-din Haydar of Zava (Turbati Haydariya), the Shi'ite affiliation and the identity of the names of Shaykh Haydar Safavi (d. 1488/893) and Sultan Mir Haydar Tunî must have greatly facilitated the takeover of the Haydari order by the partisans of the Safavids in the sixteenth century. This takeover hypothesis is supported by Chardin's description, in the seventeenth century, of the head gear of the Haydariya, which shows it to be a modification of the Qizilbash cap designed by Shaykh Haydar (cited by Mirjafari, p. 146).

After the formation of the Safavid empire, its rulers, knowing full well the political potential of sufi orders like their own, set out to suppress them while propagating Twelver Shi'ism. The Ni'matullahi order declared itself to be Shi'ite, and its leaders allied themselves to the Safavids and escaped suppression. The Haydari order, I am suggesting, did likewise, or was taken over by partisans of the Safavids, with the patronage of Shaykh Haydar Safavi being superimposed upon that of Sultan Mir Haydar. Tahmasp (1524-1576) and 'Abbas the Great (1587-1629) supported the Shi'ite ulama as the guardians of the religion of the state and curbed the rival religious activities of the sufi orders. The Haydari and Ni'mati orders were constrained to concen-

trate their activities around the officially sanctioned Shi'ite ceremonies of Muharram and were partially secularized by being transformed to rival communal associations of city quarters. We find the pattern replicated in the successive Safavid capitals of Tabriz, Qazvin, and Isfahan, and then we see it spread to other Iranian cities.

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To the Editor:

Mr. Hamid Naficy's interesting article entitled "Non-fiction Fiction: Documentaries on Iran," which appeared in your issue of Summer-Autumn 1979, has only now come to my attention. Nevertheless, late as it is, I would like to reply to some points raised by Mr. Naficy about the dramatized documentary series called "The Crossroads of Civilization" of which I was the Executive Producer with David Frost, and which I largely directed.

While it is true that the Iranian authorities circa 1975 authorized the funding of the largest part of this history--which covers the area of the world that is now centrally Iran--because they saw an opportunity for registration of it before a world television audience, it is also true that the series was made on the basis of the complete independence of the team that made the films. Thirty or so distinguished international historians played a vital part in the preparation of the scripts and provided the authoritative basis on which the series was made. Some of these academics no doubt approved of the regime, many others did not.

It is not true to say that the series was produced by the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Arts and David Frost. As those who have seen the films will have noted, they were produced by Mr. Frost's English company, while acknowledging the assistance of the Ministry of Culture and Arts, who pro-

vided many invaluable facilities. But no Iranian authority had the right, contractual or otherwise, to influence the editorial direction of the series--not even to view the films before transmission.

No one could deny that "The Crossroads of Civilisation" deals with various royal dynasties from the time of the Achaemenians to the Qajars and the Pahlavis. Since this was a historical series, it seemed apt to divide the programs generally according to dynastic chronology. However, to claim that the films manifest a "generalized tendency to represent monarchy as the only viable form of government for Iran" is misleading--a misinterpretation that could have been avoided had Hamid Naficy based his judgment on sight of the films, rather than reading the scripts only, which in any case were perhaps an early version and not the transmission scripts.

As far as I am concerned, the films deal consistently with the following themes:

The acquisition and maintenance of power in Iran has always been a painful and bloody process.

Throughout its history, Iran has had to contend with aggressive and often exploitative external forces.

Kingly rule has been a fact of life for the Iranian people for most of their history; it has provided a variety of experience from oppression, exploitation and instability, to glamour, centralization, stability, patronage, and neglect.

The people of Iran have often developed viable and secure systems of survival that are not dependent on monarchical rule--through Zoroastrianism, through Islam, through highly effective systems of agriculture and irrigation, and through nomadism.

Conflict of loyalty to God and King in Iran has often caused tension, and led to action, particularly from the seventeenth century onward.

Oppressive monarchical rule and lack of self-determination culminated in revolt that led to the constitutional movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One whole program is devoted to this subject.

But more than anything, the films are about ordinary people and their way of life--from the finest calligrapher at the shrine of Mashad to a summary tribal trial in the Zagros mountains; from a qanat digger in Fars to a political writer whose father was one of the early revolutionary leaders. Such qualities register, however, when they are seen in a film, not read.

Many of the creative team who worked on the series were profoundly aware of the misleading images projected by both Western and Iranian media. Many others were not, and vigorous argument about our perceptions played an important part during the making of the series. Many of us, too, were aware of the difficulties in maintaining an objective view while being funded under the auspices of an autocratic regime. But despite the inherent risks, most of us were inspired by the will to explore the history of a large and significant part of the world, not from the perspective of Western cultural prejudice, nor from the point of view of official Iranian politics, but guided by the long experience of the people of Iran. That the programs have shortcomings, as I am sure they do, is a sign of our cultural conditioning, rather than our political complicity. I suggest that such attempts, which are rare enough on Western television, at least merit a fair appraisal.

If Mr. Naficy, or any of your readers, wish to make their judgment of the series, "The Crossroads of Civilization" is available in the United States, on a rental basis, from: Philip Hobel, Document Associates, Inc., 211 East 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Anthony Mayer

To the Editor:

Shahrough Akhavi's excellent review of I. Rabinovich and H. Shaked (eds.), *The Middle East between 1967 and 1973*, published in *Iranian Studies*, XII (Summer-Autumn, 1979), contains an error that needs to be corrected. Akhavi maintains that "it was the government of Dr. Muhammad Musaddiq that extended *de facto* recognition to the state of Israel in the early 1950s" (p. 299). This is incorrect. The *de facto* recognition of Israel by Iran was granted by the government of prime minister Muhammad Sa'ed on Isfand 14, 1328 (March 5, 1950). The decision was arrived at by a unanimous vote of the cabinet on that date. This was somewhat more than a year before Musaddiq took office as prime minister. The issue was discussed publicly for the first time in a session of the Iranian Senate on May 20, 1950 and at another meeting a week later. Details of these discussions can be found in the proceedings of the Iranian Senate as well as in three issues of the semi-official newspaper, *Ittila'at* of Urdibihisht 26 (p. 1) and 28 (pp. 5, 8), and *Khurdad* 6 (pp. 1, 2), 1329.

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