

DARWĪSH MAḤMŪD: AN UNKNOWN SIXTEENTH CENTURY KURDISH NOTABLE*

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Abstract

The sixteenth century Kurds normally had no access to traditional accomplishments such as prose, poetry, historiography, calligraphy, and professional education. These accomplishments were the instruments of access to the rulers and the cause for higher appointments by the Ottoman and Safavid emperors. The first and most famous member of the Kurdish community to receive an influential bureaucratic position in Ottoman Empire was Idrīs of Bidlīs. In the days of Selim I (r.1512-1520), Idrīs's fortune rose to such a degree that many Kurdish potentates could only with his assistance and political support. The main point of the present paper is to demonstrate that Idrīs was not the only educated Kurd who, in the sixteenth century, rendered services to the Ottoman emperor, thus coming into his favor and grace. Specifically, it examines the case of Darwīsh Maḥmūd, a disciple of Idrīs of Bidlīs, who like his master, rose to prominence in service to the Ottomans.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Unlike Idrīs of Bidlīs, Darwīsh Maḥmūd's bureaucratic, administrative, and political activities are relatively poorly documented. For instance, we lack the kind of detailed information from chronicles and archival sources that have enabled us to reconstruct life and career of Idrīs, in particular with regard to diplomatic missions to Kurdistan¹. The main primary and principal source for the study of Darwīsh Maḥmūd, who was active during the reign of the most illustrious Ottoman ruler, Süleyman I (r.1520-1566), is undoubtedly the *Sharaf-nāma* chronicle, penned in the late sixteenth century by the Kurdish emir of Bidlīs, Sharaf Khān.

The value of Sharaf Khān as a source on which to draw for examining the role of Darwīsh Maḥmūd in sixteenth-century Kurdish affairs derives from the fact that he was both a contemporary historian as well as an eyewitness of the events he described. Hence, he was in an excellent position to write on Darwīsh Maḥmūd who was a native of Bidlīs. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Darwīsh Maḥmūd is only mentioned sporadically in *Sharaf-nāma* and so many of the most basic facts of his life and career are hard to ascertain. Therefore, we can do little more than speculate about the relationship between Idrīs of Bidlīs and Darwīsh Maḥmūd.

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¹ For the reconstruction of the life and career of Idrīs, based on newly-found documents, see (Genç 2015; 2016).

LIFE AND CAREER

Details of the life of Darwīsh Maḥmūd are very scanty. He was of Kalachīrī clan which was a subdivision of Bilbāsī tribe of the Rōzhikī confederation, the dominant group in Bidlīs². The exact dates of his life are not known, but scholars may estimate that he lived between 900/1494-95 and 975/1567-68. We read in the *Sharaf-nāma* that Sharaf Khān escaped from the Safavids before Ismā'īl I reached Khurāsān, so this must have been in early or mid-916. Darwīsh Maḥmūd took part in this escape and he was riding on horseback, so he must have been at least 15 years-old by then, probably older. Thus, he must have been born a little before or after c.900.

Unfortunately, nothing is known of his childhood and early education, although it is possibly he attended the *madrasa* of Bidlīs for his early years of primary education. The life and career of his master Idrīs suggest that Darwīsh Maḥmūd probably left the town of his birth, Bidlīs, travelling to Istanbul sometime after 922/1516, in order to receive instruction directly from Idrīs.

It is certain that Darwīsh Maḥmūd was active in the time of the Kurdish ruler of Bidlīs, Sharaf Khān (d.940/1534), grandfather of the author of *Sharaf-nāma*. He was

² For Kalachīrī tribe, see (Scheref 1860: 361). It is hard to accept that there is any significant relation between Kalachīrī and Kalagīr, a tribe of Persian Kurdistan. The latter of course reminds one of Kalachīrī especially when Rōzhikī found refuge in Persia. Compare (Anonymous 1980: 16; Charmoy 1868: *if*, 377).

a senior secretary and the chief of *inshā'* (chancellery) at the court of Bidlīs' ruling house³.

During Ulāma Sultān incident, Darwīsh Maḥmūd was firstly supportive of the Kurdish emirate of Bidlīs. In 938/1531-32, however, when Ulāma Sultān, the former governor of Safavid Ādharbāyjan, was appointed as *beylerbeyi* of Bidlīs and made a hard attack against the town⁴, Darwīsh Maḥmūd decided to abandon Sharaf Khān. It seems very interesting that contrary to the other Kurdish 'traitors' to his grandfather who went to the Ottoman court, the author of *Sharaf-nāma* shows no hostility against the decision of Darwīsh Maḥmūd. According to the autograph manuscript of *Sharaf-nāma*, written in Dhu al-Hijja 1005 AH, Darwīsh Maḥmūd had a son, named Hārūn, who also returned to Ulāma Sultān after he had taken control of the Bidlīs fortress in c. 940/1534⁵.

The fall of Bidlīs to Ulāma Sultān, however, did not terminate Darwīsh Maḥmūd career, but rather opened up new avenues for advancement. Sharaf Khān goes on to tell us of the progress of Darwīsh Maḥmūd in the Ottoman lands under the protection and patronage of Ottoman successive officials and even Sultan Süleyman I. Evidently, it was his professional education and administrative experience at the court of Sharaf Khān which allowed him to rise up the Ottoman hierarchy.

Although the early stages of Darwīsh Maḥmūd's post-Bidlīs career remain unknown to us, during the reign of Süleyman I, Darwīsh Maḥmūd received a number of important appointments within the Ottoman administration. Sharaf Khān notes, for instance, to have been a tutor of Mihrimāh Sultan, the daughter of Süleyman I⁶ and may well have held other bureaucratic posts as was common for those starting out in imperial service. Chronologically, it is likely that he accepted the position of tutor to Mihrimāh Sultan, in c. 939/1533 or 940/1534. Unfortunately, it is but an estimate. Still, according to the context given *Sharaf-nāma*, the beginning of the tutorship may come closer to some years before the vizierate of Rüstem Pasha (951/1544).

Following his tenure as Mihrimāh Sultan's tutor, Darwīsh Maḥmūd, known as *jāmi' al-ḥiythiyāt*⁷, was appointed director of the imperial library. As the sultan's senior librarian, Darwīsh Maḥmūd continued to gain administrative experience and access to upper echelons of the Ottoman elite. As the library director not only did

he have direct access to sultan⁸, he was also able to keep a close eye on the officials, bureaucrats, princes, viziers and all who were interested in the books and library affairs. Moreover, as the library served as an archive for the accumulation of important letters and imperial orders, Darwīsh Maḥmūd also gained detailed knowledge of Ottoman bureaucratic practices and political affairs.

Another important aspect of Darwīsh Maḥmūd's life and career alluded to in the *Sharaf-nāma*, his role as an advisor to Rüstem Pasha, especially with regard the Kurdish affairs⁹. He appears to have enjoyed Rüstem Pasha's confidence, in part due mainly to his abilities and in part due to his close relationship with Rüstem Pasha's wife, Mihrimāh Sultan. The relationship between Darwīsh Maḥmūd and Rüstem Pasha seems intensified from 951/1544 onwards when the latter promoted to the Grand Vizier. After the execution of Süleyman I's eldest son, Rüstem Pasha was dismissed (960/1553) and forced to retire for two years. However, the Sultan reappointed him to the vizierate, a position he held until his death in 968/1561. The primary sources do not put any date for the end of Darwīsh Maḥmūd's tenure but, according to the tone used in the *Sharaf-nāma*, it is possible to say that he held the position until the death of Rüstem Pasha.

Finally, it should be mentioned that according to the later additions to the text of *Sharaf-nāma*, Darwīsh Maḥmūd was possibly appointed as the *sancakbey* of Bidlīs¹⁰. In this regard, the complete silence of Sharaf Khān, who dedicated a large chapter of his chronicle to the Bidlīs rulers, is particularly striking. Nevertheless, in certain respects this should not be surprising. Besides the normal shortcomings that are the result of Sharaf Khān's personal intends¹¹, it is clear that his purpose was to decrease the legitimacy on Darwīsh Maḥmūd as a person who was appointed by sultan. The *sancakbey* of Bidlīs was a *yurtluk-ocaklık* principality and the position of its emir was to stay hereditary as before.

PARALLELS WITH IDRİS OF BIDLİS

Sharaf Khān mentions that Darwīsh Maḥmūd was the disciple of Idrīs. Sharaf Khān identifies him as *Āṣaf*

⁸ According to *Sharaf-nāma* (ibid), Süleyman I repeatedly was calling Darwīsh Maḥmūd to his private sessions and enjoyed him as a companion in conversation: ...*wa mukarraran wa mujaddadan Sultān Sulaymān dar majlis-i khāṣṣ wa bazm-i ikhtisāṣ-i khud ṭalabida bā ū ṣuḥbat-hā-yi mutiwātir mūdāshā...*

⁹ See (Scheref 1860: 132-33).

¹⁰ Compare (Baiazidi 1986: 57-58). Here there is a reference to the fact that Darwīsh Maḥmūd later became *wakīl* of Sharaf Khān, which is not in Zernof edition, but is found in manuscript H. 10, fol. 28r., which is presumably where Baiazidi took it from.

¹¹ For the shortcomings of the Bidlīs chapter, for example, see (Dehqan & Genç 2015a).

³ See (Scheref 1860: 132).

⁴ For the struggles between Ulāma Sultān and Sharaf Khān, see (Rümlü 2005: ii, 1200ff.; Qumī 1980: i, 215; Bacqué-Grammont 1991: 140 ff.).

⁵ See MS *Sharaf-nāma*, E 332, fol.147r.

⁶ See (Scheref 1860: 132).

⁷ See (Ibid., 512).

*Barkhīyā-yi thānī*¹² as well as *Idrīs-i thānī*¹³ the ‘second Idrīs’. There are several reasons for Sharaf Khān’s use of these epithets, especially the latter.

According to *Sharaf-nāma*, Idrīs and Darwīsh Maḥmūd both have a Kurdish origin and background. The point here is that whoever rises to greatness from such Kurdish beginnings first of all possesses special skills, and secondly have a connection to Bidlīs (as the home town of Sharaf Khān). Therefore, the Kurdish and Bidlīsī origins of Idrīs and Darwīsh Maḥmūd may indeed provide the first link between them.

The context of *Sharaf-nāma* also suggests social differentiations within the Kurdish population. Thus Sharaf Khān distinguishes between aristocracy and the common people (*ra’yat*). Accordingly, Idrīs and Darwīsh Maḥmūd as Kurdish aristocrats were persons who – either through their birth or wealth or on the basis of certain privileges, enjoyed special power and a special relationship with the local emirs. One main difference that should be mentioned here is that Idrīs was himself the son of a famous religious scholar, while Darwīsh Maḥmūd was a tribal member. Maybe this explains while Darwīsh Maḥmūd is not mentioned by Sharaf Khān in his list of the well-known literati of Bidlīs.

Another important similarity between Idrīs and Darwīsh Maḥmūd were that they were literate. As a relatively rare skill in the sixteenth century, the literacy served as a basis for the bond between the two men. Although Darwīsh Maḥmūd was a disciple of Idrīs, their common educational interests were a main reason of friendship. Students like Darwīsh Maḥmūd acquired a broad range of learning at the school, from basic literacy to more advanced knowledge of the Islamic exegetical tradition, the form of composition and debate, the philosophy, and the basic of the Aristotelian logic. In form and content these appear to be strongly influenced by Idrīs style and language¹⁴ and show some connection with literary priorities, but a much more important point is that these abilities connect Darwīsh Maḥmūd to the Kurdish intellectual world of sixteenth century.

Nevertheless, despite their close relationship Darwīsh Maḥmūd did not content himself with imitation of Idrīs’s style, but as his master, who is best remembered for his great prose works, especially the *Hasht Bihisht*, tried to provide elaborate works in prose and especially in poetry which can be described as a prolific author as Idrīs¹⁵.

¹² See (Scheref 1860: 132). The reference is actually to Āsaf, son of Barkhīyā, the smart and experienced vizier of King Solomon. This corresponds to the Hebrew Āsāf ben Bērkhīyā who became a very popular personality in Islamic tradition. Compare (Suyūfī 1974: iv, 104).

¹³ See (Scheref 1860: 516).

¹⁴ See (Ibid., 132).

¹⁵ Unfortunately, none of Darwīsh Maḥmūd’s works survived. We have only a Turkish *beyt* of his poetry: *sebze midir teblerinin durında*

Darwīsh Maḥmūd, as his master Idrīs, was a trilingual scholar who, besides his mother tongue Kurdish, has become fluent in the dominant languages of his homelands, be they Turkish, Arabic, and Persian¹⁶.

However, perhaps the most striking parallel between the master and his student were the similar roles they seem to have played in the affairs of Kurdistan.

BUREAUCRATIC EFFICIENCY

As already noted, our information about the beginnings of the bureaucratic career of Darwīsh Maḥmūd is very scanty, consisting mainly of passages found in the *Sharaf-nāma*. One such passage noted that:

... (Darwīsh Maḥmūd) became the teacher of Sultan Süleyman’s daughter who was the wife of Rüstem Pasha. Gradually his work rose to such a degree that most of Kurdish rulers consulted him and, because of this, Rüstem Pasha the Vizier became aware of the situation in Kurdistan and that resulted in changes in the rulers of there...¹⁷

The *Sharaf-nāma* clearly implies Darwīsh Maḥmūd played major role in shaping the decisions of Rüstem Pasha vis-a-vis the Kurdish emirates. We may firstly assume that the reason behind this role was Rüstem Pasha himself who was mainly an informed promoter of Ottoman interests than Kurdish ones¹⁸. Meanwhile, there were some infamies regarding the personality of Rüstem Pasha that made him unsuitable for making Kurdish policies. The memoirs of the Kurdish emir Ma’mūn Bayg of Ardalān include a report on his mismanagement of governmental responsibilities during the second Ottoman campaign against Persia. According to this detailed account, Ma’mūn Bayg brought an accusation against Rüstem Pasha. For instance, as a result of Rüstem Pasha’s conspiring with Sultān Ḥusayn Bayg of ‘Amādiyya, some Kurdish political scenes have changed in northern Iraq. Ma’mūn Bayg accuses Rüstem Pasha of accepting bribes from Sultān Ḥusayn Bayg in return for his support for Sultān Ḥusayn Bayg’s request for preeminence over the other Kurdish chieftains¹⁹. Such critical accounts may, however, have created a need for Rüstem Pasha to use someone from the region with good fame, strong inter-tribal ties and contacts in Kurdistan.

ya hattı ğubar • ya ayağı şehde batmış hasta arular mıdır (Ibid., 512-13; *Sharaf-nāma*, MS Browne H. 10, fol.174).

¹⁶ The letter given below presents an interesting example of his skill at Turkish, Arabic, and Persian.

¹⁷ See (Ibid., 132-33).

¹⁸ Compare (Celalzāde Muşafā 1981: fols. 298a., 391a., elsewhere; Peçevî 1968: i, 20).

¹⁹ See (Parmaksizoğlu 1973: 208ff, 212-14; Gökbilgin 1955).

Darwīsh Maḥmūd's bureaucratic policy in Kurdistan did not differ greatly from aims and methods of his predecessor Idrīs. Thus, within the context of the Ottoman-Safavid struggle over Kurdistan, leading Ottoman officials such as Rüstem Pasha had great need of advisers well versed in Kurdish affairs.

Idrīs's role as a liaison between the Ottoman Sultanate is well known and attested to in numerous sources. With the help of Idrīs, Selim I appointed local emirs as the hereditary governors of Kurdish areas. In his diplomatic affairs as the Ottoman representative, Idrīs visited the rulers of Bābān, Sōhrān, Brādōst, and Mukrī, and encouraged them to participate in the anti-Safavid activities in the Urmīa region. The rulers of 'Amādīyya and Jazīra accompanied Ottomans for attacking on Safavids as well. Idrīs also granted the rule of Kurdish emirates to almost all Kurdish rulers who had been deposed by the Safavids, including rulers of Şaşun, Is'ird, Hışn-Kayfā, Mayyāfārqīn, Pālu and Agīl²⁰. In comparison, our knowledge of Darwīsh Maḥmūd's activities is much vaguer due to the lack of sources. Nevertheless, it seems likely Idrīs and his missions had served as a model for Darwīsh Maḥmūd's activities. Sharaf Khān notes in the *Sharaf-nāma* that Darwīsh Maḥmūd (as the hidden policy maker) and Rüstem Pasha persuaded Nāşir Bayg of Jazīra to make a request for the rule of Jazīra and finally granted the rule of Jazīra to him²¹.

Last point: it has been rightly assumed that Sharaf Khān, the author of *Sharaf-nāma*, had supported Ṭahmāsp I in his frontier fights against Süleyman I. During his Persian phase, Sharaf Khān, the *amīr al-umarā'* of the Kurds and the most influential frontier Kurdish emir, played a very supportive and important role in the Safavid frontier politics²². Bear in mind that Darwīsh Maḥmūd was working almost one generation after Idrīs, and that he was roughly coincided with the Persian phase of Sharaf Khān as a Safavid Kurdish emir. Süleyman I could hardly have had any experienced Kurdish official providing unbiased and competent reports about the frontier events and Kurdish emirs involved; we may therefore expect his tolerance to use an experienced Rōjīkī Kurd like Darwīsh Maḥmūd as his daughter's tutor, his senior librarian, and particularly his main consultant in the Kurdish frontier zone where Ṭahmāsp I was enjoying the support of Sharaf Khān.

²⁰ Details of Idrīs's activities in Kurdistan are in (Ebū-l-fazil, *passim*, esp. fols.24v.-24r.; Hoca Se'dü-ddīn, 1862: 308-09, 322-23).

²¹ See (Scheref 1860: 133).

²² For the role played by Sharaf Khān and especially that he received due care and attention from both Safavids and Ottomans in their frontier zone, see (Dehqan & Genç 2015a and 2015b).

A LETTER BY DARWĪSH MAḤMŪD

A long hitherto unpublished letter by Darwīsh Maḥmūd, addressed to Iskender Pasha, the *beylerbeyi* of Diyarbekır, happily discovered in the sixteenth century collection of *munsha'āts* of the Ali Emiri Library, in Istanbul²³.

The letter is of an unknown date, estimate of course range from 960/1553 to 973/1566 when Iskender Pasha was the *beylerbeyi* of Diyarbekır. The letter is in Turkish with a title in Persian in which the author very interestingly acknowledged Darwīsh Maḥmūd as the disciple of Idrīs (*az münşaat-i Derviş Mahmud az şagirdan-i Molla İdris*). It can be a prime witness to the literary strength and high quality of the prose of Darwīsh Maḥmūd. In the small number of instances where the letter can be demonstrated to go back to a text that differs from an administrative text, it is possible to see Qurānic *āyats*, *hadīths*, and poetries.

The most important evidence for bureaucratic activity of Darwīsh Maḥmūd comes from the present letter. Interestingly Darwīsh Maḥmūd here is a person who offers advice to Iskender Pasha, the famous *beylerbeyi* and the high standing official in the eyes of the Ottomans. What was the motive that guided Darwīsh Maḥmūd in his dealing with Iskender Pasha as latter's adviser is clear in the text. The important point, however, is that the reader here is faced with the real image of Darwīsh Maḥmūd as a person who had such a power to 'advise' an influential Ottoman official like Iskender Pasha. This image also produces the impression that Darwīsh Maḥmūd was both extremely single-minded and polite in dealing with imperial matters.

We shall finally have a mention of the main point of the letter. According to Darwīsh Maḥmūd, Iskender Pasha had decided to strike coins (*...istiklalen darü'z-zarb dava-yı suride nakd-ı ma'nevîsiz sikke-i hass ile meskuk ola delü tasavvur idersiniz...*). As we know, the vassal rulers of the Ottoman Empire and even the *beylerbeys* had no right to strike coins. Although it is difficult to draw any meaningful historical conclusions, yet it is possible to say that the first meaning of such a task was the desire of independence. If we relate this letter to the Kurdish milieu of Diyarbekır, he must have had in mind the Kurdish principalities which were somewhat independent, and their *beylerbeyi* could be entitled to call itself 'independent'. Also, it would have been an act of rebellion for a *beylerbeyi* to strike coins in his own name, though the text does not say he proposed to strike them in his own name. Bad enough, though, for the *beylerbeyi* to strike them in the sultan's name but on his own initiative²⁴. Conceivably

²³ See (Anonymous, fols.10r.-11r.).

²⁴ For details on Ottoman coins, see (Damali 2014: vol.ii), where the reign of Süleyman I is covered.

Iskender was responding to a shortage of coin, which could have been occasioned by an unusual wave of imports from Iran – something of the sort. What is Darwĭsh Maĥmŭd's source? Is he just receiving reports, which may be wrong?

Our information is scant about that political situation in Diyarbekır during the *beylerbeyi* of Iskender Pasha, except the fact that he enjoyed a long and powerful period of governorship with the improvement in political techniques and progress in the subjugation of Kurds. These might be the reasons why Iskender Pasha intended to strike coins and perhaps he was also engaged in the negotiations with his Kurdish subjects in Diyarbekır aiming at a regional union. As we said, it is hard to make any conclusion. What is certain, however, is the role played by Darwĭsh Maĥmŭd as a Kurdish notable who became involved in the opposition to Iskender Pasha and the desire he (and his subjects) had in mind.

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