



WHAT IF? WHAT NEXT?

# **SPECULATIONS ON HISTORY'S FUTURES**

## **SESSION 4A**

### **THE COUNTERFACTUAL**

**What If? What Next? So What? Exploring the Historical Consequences of Choices**

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# **ONE HISTORY AND TWO NARRATIONS: CONTRASTING SAFAVID AND OTTOMAN HISTORIES OF TABRIZ AND AZERBAIJAN REGION**

Ali Rad Yousefnia | University of Queensland

*The cartographer and Miniaturist – Matrakci Nasuh and other historians were accompanying Suleiman the Magnificent and his army by recording details of the conquered landscapes and his campaigns. On August 23rd, 1514, in the battle of Chaldiran, Safavids experienced a strategic lost to the Ottomans on Persian lands. This lost diminished the glory of Safavids, and consequently a considerable loss of territories on Caucasus and Azerbaijan, including former Safavid capital, Tabriz in 1585. The fall of Tabriz became a turning point for the northwestern regions of late medieval Persia to witness two different reigns between two empires. Conditions were stable until the ruling years of Shah Abbas the Great (r.1588 – 1629). However, Shah Abbas adherence peace treaties with Ottomans, the wars among two sides ignited in later years of his ruling years. The Safavid army conquered lost territories between 1603 and 1618, including Tabriz. This time the history was written by the hands of Safavid historians who were the conquerors of the war. The observation of power transition also documented by independent travellers such as Chardin – traveller and painter – who visited Tabriz in 1673, enabling an additional reference to be included within the narration of the city.*

*Within this context, the proposed paper focuses on the contrasting differentiation in the historical narratives from diverse references, as mentioned above about Tabriz and Azerbaijan. It suggests a new narration emerging from the reconciliation of various records and illustrations of the time and space. The contradicting depiction of Nasuh's Tabriz miniature with descriptions of Ibrahim Rahimizadeh Chavush from Ghazan dome, oversimplification of Ark Alishah and its contradiction in Chardin's graver are among the two examples which will be discussed in this paper. Therefore, the contrasts of different narrations will be highlighted in order to draw a clear theme for this discussion.*

## Introduction

The relationship between ideology and territory played an essential role in the history of Persianate Iran. Religious ideology was among the main factors that shaped Iranian society. By the arrival of Islam, the previously Zoroastrian character of the Achaemenid and Sassanid Empires was replaced by governmental structures in allegiance with the new religion. While the Seljuq and Ilkhanid Empires were among the best examples, the Ilkhanids used the term 'Iran' for the first time after the Arab invasions of Persia in 651 CE.<sup>1</sup> In their usage of the term 'Iran', they recreated "... [a] self-awareness among the political and cultural elite of the geographical entity with distinct territorial and political implications."<sup>2</sup> Following the Ilkhanids were the Timurids (1370–1507 CE) who in turn splintered into smaller and local dynasties by the late fifteenth century. Therefore, ideology, identity and the sense of belonging redefined and changed, albeit under different religions and beliefs which were imposed by the governmental structures within the society. This standardisation of religion witnessed a new form by the time of Safavids. The zeal for Shia Islam and linking the religious ideology with relevant territories became one of the main agendas for the Safavid Empire during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Safavid state was the time and space in the history of Iran, in which political and religious territories were juxtaposed with each other. In other words, the borders of the empire included almost all the holy cities for the Shia sect of Islam in some periods and other religious groups such as Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians became as small and fragile minorities. More importantly, within Iranian territory, followers of the Sunni sect of Islam, which was the main religion during the previous Empires such as Seljuqs and Ilkhanids faced disastrous reaction from the Safavid army and conquerors. The conquest of Isfahan in 1503 by Shah Ismail involved the killing of five thousand Sunnis which refused to turn to Shia Islam.<sup>3</sup> In the same year and in another incident, four thousand members of Kaziruni Sufi sect were massacred in Fars region.<sup>4</sup> These radical acts created a potential contrast and conflict of interest between Sunni rulers of the Ottoman Empire, which considered themselves as the pivot of 'true Islam' and the saviour of Sunni Muslims.

Despite a harsh and radical reaction to their opponents, the Safavid state was prosperous in reunifying the eastern and western portions of the Iranian lands. This reunification included the western lands of Iran including Azerbaijan and Georgia, ruled by the Aq-Qoyunlu dynasty. It also included territories of Khorasan and Herat, ruled by descendants of the Timurid Empire on eastern parts of Persia. Indeed, it was under the Safavid rulers that vivid and salient boundaries of Persianate Iran emerged. Even today, it is possible to see the effects of this "Territorialisation of faith"<sup>5</sup> by the Safavid state, identified by scholars such as Matthee as the most significant political accomplishment of the Safavid Empire. The Safavid reign embodied essential elements of imperialism and universalism. The mechanism created by Safavid state unified people and elites of the country together.<sup>6</sup> The sense of a collective elite identity out of fragmentation and diversity is one of the most critical aspects of this era. These elements could qualify the Safavid state as an 'empire' even if they were unable to rally with the powerful empires in the region such as the Ottoman Empire and Mughal Empire, in terms of land, wealth and, population.

## Research Gap

The unbalanced level of power and territorial control were among the main reasons that Safavid rulers started the unconventional methods of penetrating to the lands of their rivals and neighbours, almost similar to the model of proxy wars which is an indirect intervention in the territories of the enemy. By the time of Shah Ismail, urban riots and unrests ignited in inner Anatolia by using religious motivations patronised by Safavid rulers. It was the time that Suleiman the magnificent (r.1520–1566) started his journey from Istanbul in order to suppress these riots. Considered himself as the true leader of the Islamic world, he wished to conquer the Persian territories which had initially belonged to the Sunni Muslims beforehand the Shia Safavids. He not only employed his military power and army for his campaign but was also accompanied by historians, miniaturists and cartographers including Matrakci Nasuh (1480–1564). In the battle of Chaldiran, Safavids lost strategic regions in Persia to the Ottomans. This loss not only separated Persian territories but also diminished the glory of Safavids by the occupation of the

capital city Tabriz. The Ottoman historiography created a substantial impact on the narrative of the landscape, and not only by cartography but also by employing the Ottoman imagination about these landscapes. The battle of Chaldiran had a central role in the confrontation of this military campaign. The Ottoman army marched into the Iranian territories but was unable to sustain their presence.<sup>7</sup> However, following writings and miniatures by Nasuh and others, this campaign had considerable resonance in the history of both Empires. It was the first time that an Ottoman sultan had marched within the Persianate landscape and proved his presence by documenting the cities and the built environment in the '*Bilad-i Acem*'<sup>8</sup>. In effect, these miniatures served as 'extra-diegetic' elements and became the ideological agencies for Sultan's campaign. This act not only captured the landscape of Persia in this transitory period of the Ottoman presence in Persian cities but also provided a 'wandering viewpoint' for the reader in future times. It also had a significant effect on the memory of the space and marginalised any other narration coming afterwards, disabled them to capture any attention. One of these examples is '*Tarih'i Osman Pasha*'<sup>9</sup>, which narrates the capture of Tabriz in 1585. This military report gives valuable information about the city of Tabriz described by the military officer Ibrahim Rahimizadeh Chavush. Within this context, the proposed paper aims to focus on the contrasting differentiation in the historical narratives searching to envisage new narrations emerging from the reconciliation of these seemingly contradictory illustrations of time and space.

## Methodology



**Figure 1.** Safavid Empire, neighbours and their territory. Source: <https://www.themaparchive.com/safavid-empire-c-1630.html>

The research will employ a 'Qualitative Case Study Methodology' specific to historical research in the humanities. A qualitative exploration of the argument will follow with the findings of the case study for cementing the discussions. Therefore, the article will engage with distinct aspects of research which include archival materials, analysis of relevant literature and examination of the visual materials. In effect, the 'Qualitative Case Study Methodology' will allow for a comprehensive examination of the visual and literary materials.<sup>10</sup> As referring to Guldi, when the historian focuses on a particular landscape, the opportunity acquired by the 'spatial turn' to question the "the impact of visual and architectural environments on social experience"<sup>11</sup> which allows the

changing modes of embodied interactions in space and flexibility of borders. It also enables the historian to “such diverse conversations next to each other, synthesising body politics and political boundaries into a new history of modern.”<sup>12</sup> The study scrutinised the available archival materials within the online libraries. It also relies on visual and literary materials which digitalised within various platforms in order to employ the relevant primary sources.

### Contradictions and New Narratives

The genesis of this paper stemmed from different narratives related to the same landscape and events during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The locus of these narratives heavily concentrated on Tabriz and the Azerbaijan region. These narratives are categorised as follows:

- First group refers to Ottoman historians, travellers and military officers who visited or reached Azerbaijan. Matrakci, Abubakr Ibn Abdollah, Ibrahim Rahimizadeh Chavush, Evliya Chelebi were among these names. Their written and visual materials and maps postulated their observations.
- Second group refers to the Safavid accounts by individuals such as Iskandar beg Turkaman Munshi (Tarikh alam araaye Abbasi), Hasan Beg Rumlu (Ahsan al-Tavarikh) and Hafez Hossein Karbalayi (Rozat al-Jenan).
- Third group refers to European travellers who wrote and illustrated visual materials about Tabriz and its surroundings. Travellers such as Romano, Tavernier, and Chardin, are among this group.

One of the main arguments related to these sources is the relationship between authorship and power. In the Ottoman and Safavid sources, almost all authors were politically patronised and biased, serving as ideological apparatuses for their patrons such as the Shah, Sultan or Pasha. Besides accompanying the military campaigns, these people named as *katib*<sup>13</sup> for the court. Therefore, it can be said that the contrasts and differentiation of these narrations emerged from the position of these people through the structure of power. While covering all contradictions will be beyond the scope of this discussion, the paper employs three main observations within the visual and literary sources and sheds light on these selected observations.

### Matrakci Nasuh's Miniature and Contradicting Literature



**Figure 2.** Matrakci Nasuh Miniature of Tabriz. Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matrak%C3%A7%C4%B1\\_Nasuh\\_Map\\_of\\_Tabriz.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matrak%C3%A7%C4%B1_Nasuh_Map_of_Tabriz.JPG).

Illustration of a continuous city wall for Tabriz around its urban fabric is one of the initial contradictions related to Tabriz miniature by Nasuh. In his travelogue, Domenico Romano<sup>14</sup>, who visited Tabriz during the same period mentioned, claimed the city did not have a particular wall for defensive purposes. This contradiction raises the question about the reliability of this source and also opens a discussion about the imaginative approach of Nasuh to reality vis a vis his act through the power relations.

Following the discussion, further contradictory information can be found in a seldom studied Ottoman source, *Tarih-i Osman Pasha*. The book includes three sections written by three different authors during the Ottoman-Safavid Wars in the late sixteen century. It describes the Ottoman conquest of the Caucasus and Azerbaijan regions commanded by Ozdemiroglu Osman Pasha (1526–1585). Indeed, these attacks were the main assaults and raids that allowed the Ottomans to invade Azerbaijan and Caucasus and take control of these lands. The last section of the book is a detailed report written by Ibrahim Rahimizadeh Chavush about the Ottoman invasion of Azerbaijan, and the city of Tabriz.<sup>15</sup> Rahimizadeh Chavush recorded all movements of the Ottoman campaign from Erzurum to Tabriz and mentioned several locations in details such as Khoy and the mausoleum of Shams Tabrizi. His meticulous observations validate his narrations and account from the city and built environment. In later parts, he highlights the destruction of Marand and tries to legitimise the slaughter and massacre of Tabrizi people by the Ottoman army because of their resistance. Despite a biased political position, the author had an objective position in narrating architectural artefacts of the city and did not undermine them in his description. This is almost missing in Nasuh's miniature, which is illustrated disproportionately in terms of size and scale. Rahimizadeh Chavush gave detailed information about the size and brickwork of Shamb Ghazan dome and stated:

It was such a lofty and high dome that the dome of *aflak* (sky) could not reach to its median. It is not possible to talk and write about the grandeur of the building. However, Haghia Sofia is the most magnificent building on earth, some parts and characteristics of this building worth to mention one hundred times (more than that). One of these characteristics is the eighty thousand bricks which have the name of *tohid* (god) on it. They are all bond harmoniously in the middle of the building.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 3.** The dome which titled as the Alishah mosque in the article titled "Balilan Asl, Lida. "THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF TABRIZ IN SHAH TAHMASP SAFAVID'S ERA BASED ON MATRAKCI MINIATURE." O.D.T.U Mimarlik Fakültesi Dergisi 36, no. 2 (2019): 165-193." However, as mentioned in the text, the location and characteristics of the building match with the Shamb Ghazan dome.

**Figure 4.** Similar representation of the ivan as seen in later illustrations without considering any references or scale to the size of Ali Shah mosque. This building categorised as an unknown religious building in the article mentioned above.

Rahimizadeh Chavush's account casts more doubt on Nasuh's miniature. It also amplifies the fact that the miniature served more as an ideological tool to prove the Ottoman conquer of Tabriz rather than its reliability as a visual document about what the city was. The miniature

immortalised the capture of Tabriz by Suleiman the magnificent, even though the conquer never lasted more than a couple of months. Indeed, this fact shows the strong impact of artistic work on the Ottoman historiography and in its successful service as an element providing the presence of the Ottomans in the Persianate landscape. However, several scholars such as Yurdaydin and Balilan relied on this miniature as 'the only evidence' from sixteen century Tabriz in order to resurrect the urban fabric of the city and reimagine sixteen century Tabriz, notwithstanding its defects within its representations. The simplistic form of representations in Nasuh's miniature created the misunderstanding that in her article, Balilan mistakenly named a mosque with precisely same characteristics that Rahimizadeh Chavush described and apparently is the dome of Ghazan instead of Ali Shah mosque. Neither the structure nor the location of this case is matching with city fabric and the neighbouring buildings. Therefore, the paper states that the earlier analysis of the Nasuh's miniature wrongly ascribed this particular architectural artefact which shows the narrow analysis employed by previous scholars in looking at it.

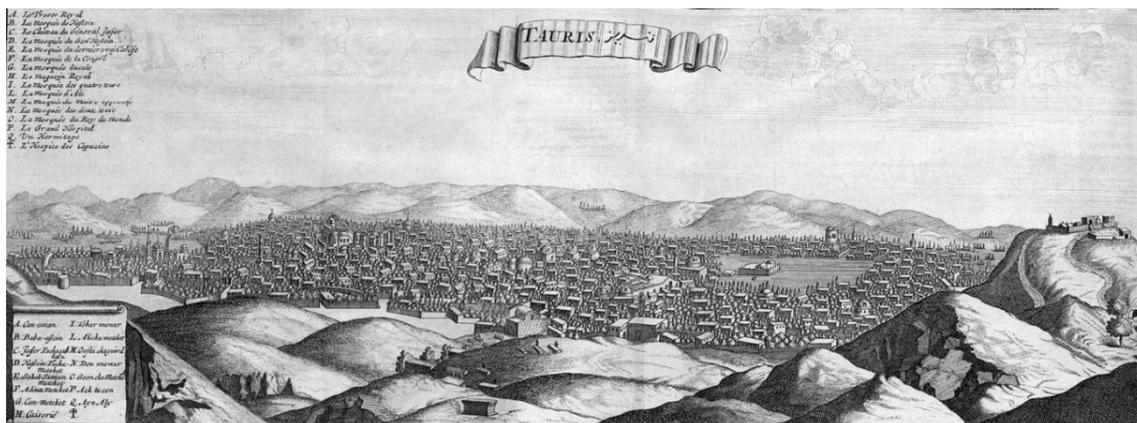
### The Unknown Battle of Sufiyan

Among all kings of the Safavid state, Shah Abbas carried Iran to its imperial heights by achieving territorial greatness for his reign. His forward-looking policies brought economic prosperity and international prominence to Iran. Military strength was optimised, and enemy forces were driven out from Iranian territories.<sup>17</sup> Azerbaijan and Caucasus were under the Ottoman rulers until the reign of Shah Abbas the Great. On November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1605, the battle of Sufiyan took place in Sufiyan plain. Despite the lower numbers of the Safavid army, the Ottomans faced one of their decisive debacles at the hands of the Safavids. "Many of the Ottoman commanders – governors of great cities and provinces of the empire – were either killed or taken prisoner."<sup>18</sup> The relationship of the Sufiyan battle with changing the face of the Ottoman Empire on the territory never found its path into an historical narrative of the landscape. There is a general underestimation about the battle of Sufiyan in history books written by either side, and it neglected by later historians as well. Again it shows how Suleiman's campaign was successful in terms of leaving a legacy behind itself. Following the discussion, several sources on the Safavid historian such as *rozat al-athar* and *Tarikh Alam araye Abbasi* mention the Ottoman destruction of Tabriz between 1578 and 1590. Iskandar Beg Turkaman Munshi noted that the Ottoman army damaged the central and governmental *maidan* known as Saheb Abad drastically. Consequently, the Ottoman army constructed a stronghold for the Ottoman Pashas and their soldiers at the city centre by damaging governmental buildings and Saheb Abad *maidan*.<sup>19</sup>

### Reiterations of the History

References of the literary documents and travelogues create the argument whether if those descriptions are coming from first-hand observations or reiteration of other sources about the city and built environment. Vague referencing is one of the concerns about the work of Evliya Celebi. Kupeli asserts that Celebi (1611–1682) relied on the prior information for his travelogue from another source titled 'Nuzhat al-Qulub' written by Hamdullah Mustawfi about the history of Tabriz. Therefore, it is almost impossible to distinguish the author's personal observations from the second-hand references used for his text. The other important name who visited Tabriz between 1673 and 1677 is Chardin. Chardin also described the characteristics of the built environment in Tabriz, and more importantly, he drew a panoramic view of the city. The illustration showed remnants of a defensive wall. However, Chardin himself claimed that Tabriz did not have a defensive wall during his visit.

It is essential to mention that the nature of Tabriz is the main reason for having all these speculations about its urban fabric. Earthquakes which took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries destroyed considerable parts of the city. The first destructive earthquake took place in 1640. The second one hit the city in 1650. Some accounts and travelogues such as Tavernier mentioned no more than two stores buildings existed and all large scale structures and buildings became as ruins.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 5.** Panoramic view of Tabriz illustrated by Chardin in 1673. Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/11\\_Chardin\\_Tabriz\\_1673.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/11_Chardin_Tabriz_1673.png).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper states that some of the well-established and well-known sources within the history of Tabriz and Azerbaijan such as manuscripts and miniatures by Nasuh seemingly simplified this complex encounter into the series of expeditions that was about the conquest of the city. It also seems to transmit the idea that the city was an intact landscape when it was conquered. However, Tabriz was already under the onslaught of destruction from prior centuries through the many earthquakes, and natural disasters that happened and the expedition, in fact, destroyed large parts of the city. Finally, Nasuh's miniature and the subsequent Ottoman historiography also pushes the prize of conquest in the eyes of history into the realm of the Ottomans versus the realm of the Safavids. This is even though subsequent expeditions between the Ottomans and the Safavids were not always decisive in favour of Ottomans as proven by the battle of Sufiyan. This manner of viewing cartographic literature alongside developing narratives of the Persian landscape is one of the main contributions of this paper, and it is part of a broader research methodology being followed.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Therefore, it can be said that there are six centuries of a gap in using the term 'Iran' between the Arab invasion and Ilkhanid Empire.
- <sup>2</sup> Matthee, Rudi. "Was Safavid Iran an Empire?" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1/2 (2010): 241.
- <sup>3</sup> Antonio Tenreiro, *Itinerários da Índia a Portugal por terra*, ed. Antonio Baiao (Coimbra: Impr. da Universidade, 1923): 20-1.
- <sup>4</sup> J. Aubin, "Sah Isma II et les notables de l'Iraq persan." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient!* (1959): 58.
- <sup>5</sup> Matthee, Rudi. "Was Safavid Iran an Empire?" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1/2 (2010): 241.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> This information can be found in the "Tarikh Alam Araye Abbasi" written by Iskandar Beg Turkaman Monshi (1560 – 1632). In his book, Monshi described how the people of Tabriz fought back to the Ottoman army and forced them to leave the city after their resistance.
- <sup>8</sup> Also known as Ajam, referred to the otherness of a nation or race. Ajam in Arabic means mute and refers to a person whose mother tongue is not Arabic but this terminology also used in the Ottoman Turkish for referring to other nations/races such as Persians.
- <sup>9</sup> The original text of the book translated to Turkish (rewritten to modern Turkish from the Ottoman Turkish in 2001, Ankara by Yunus Zeyrek). Later the book translated to Farsi and published in 2008, Tehran. 'Tarih'i

Osman Pasha' is a detailed description of Ottoman campaign between 1578 – 1580 through Caucaus and Azerbaijan. Last part of the book is about the capture of Tabriz in 1585.

<sup>10</sup> Gunn, Simon, Lucy. Faire, and ProQuest. *Research Methods for History. Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Guldi, J., 2012. In: S. Gunn and L. Faire, ed., *Research Methods for History*, 1st ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.66.

<sup>12</sup> ibid

<sup>13</sup> In Arabic, Farsi and the Ottoman Turkish, *katib* (*katip* in Turkish) means the person who writes and usually refers to clerks in governmental institutions who records daily routine and history for a specific Shah or Sultan.

<sup>14</sup> Detailed information can be found in: <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/italy-iv-travel-accounts-2>.

<sup>15</sup> Abubakr Ibn Abdullah, "Tarih-i Osman Pasha", Translation and publication works by Yunus Zeyrek and Nasrollah Salehi, Tahuri publications, Tehran, Iran, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> The text translated to English by the author from "Tarih-i Osman Pasha". Page 111.

<sup>17</sup> Matthee, Rudi. "Was Safavid Iran an Empire?" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 53, no. 1/2 (2010): 241.

<sup>18</sup> Blow, David. *Shah Abbas: The Ruthless King Who Became an Iranian Legend*. London; New York: New York: I.B. Tauris; Distributed in the U.S. by Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Pg 82.

<sup>19</sup> Iskandar Beg Turkaman Munshi (Pg. 238 – 242), Molla Hashri (Pg. 117) Tabrizi mentioned this structure at the original text of their books.

<sup>20</sup> Tavernier, J.-B. (2012). *Travels in India*. Cambridge University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139192118>.