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Research Paper

The role and position of the court organization in the foreign relations of Safavid government

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Abstract

Administrative system is one of the deep-rooted and ancient institutions of Iran. Administrative system or in other words court-administrative organization in any government is considered as one of the structures of a political system, which is very important and plays a significant role in the consistency of a government. The court-administrative organization of Safavid, which went through the three stages of formation, stabilization and peak along with the two elements of continuity and development, was one of the powerful administrative systems of post-Islamic Iran, which its examples became as a model for Iranian governments after Safavid. The fundamental desire of the present research is to examine the role and position of the court organization considering the foreign relations of Safavid. The research method in this study is based on the descriptive-analytical method and the method of collecting information is library. The results and achievements of the present research illustrated that that positions such as Monshi ol-Mamalek, Majless Nevis (events writer), Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī, Mehmandar Bashi, Yesavol Sohbat, Pishkesh Nevis and Nazer each played a role in issues related to Safavid foreign relations.

Keywords: Iran, Safavid, court organization, administrative system, foreign relations.

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Introduction

The establishment of Safavid government at the beginning of the 10th century AH / 16th AD, is considered a new era in the history of Iran. The formation of this government after centuries of political, cultural and economic rupture was an important historical event. Iran in Safavid era became the focus of European attention for political and economic reasons, and Iran emerged as a major political player in the region during this period, in addition European accepted Iran as an independent political system. However, regional and extra-regional developments have placed Iran in a new and serious situation during Safavid era and the diplomatic and foreign policy system of Safavid should have formed its foreign relations in such a way that it would provide the aims and interests of the country and play a role as a regional and extra-regional (global) actor. In this regard, a part of Safavid court organization was the executive arm of Safavid foreign relations, and each of these positions played a significant role in shaping foreign relations, which seems to have had little history in pre-Safavid Iran. Therefore, considering the aforementioned issues the current research deals with the position and role of each court position related to the foreign relations of Safavid government. *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, *Majless Nevis* (events writer), *Īshik Āghāsī Bāshī*, *Mehmandar Bashi*, *Yesavol Sohbat*, *Pishkesh Nevis* and *Nazer*, were among the most important court positions that played a role in this matter, besides, the position of minister of Isfahan and sheriff sometimes had duties in this regard.

However, there is not any appreciable research done on the research background of the subject. It is worth mentioning that, in an article entitled "Research on the career of *Monshi ol-Mamalek*" (1971), Qā'im'maqāmī only dealt with this position in general and did not mention the details and especially his position in the foreign relations of Safavid. Vahad (1974) in an article entitled "Dar al-Enshaa and ritual of Tarsol in Safavid era" has dealt more with the position of *Monshi ol-Mamalek* and the duties he had in general during this period. Minorsky (1989), in the book "Administrative Organization of Safavid Government" had references to the present issue which are insufficient. Floor (2009), in the book "*Safavid Government Institutions*"

only discussed the positions of *Monshi ol-Mamalek* and *Majless Nevis* and their role and position in the foreign relations of Safavid, and did not mention other positions in the court organization related to foreign relations. Floor (2018) in the book "Bureaucracy of Safavid Era" has also discussed *Majless Nevis* and *Monshi ol-Mamalek* and their duties in Safavid court structure. Considering these interpretations, the present research, apart from the above researches, emphasizes the role and influence of these court positions in the diplomacy and foreign relations of Safavid, which has received less attention from researchers. For more information about the evolution of this position from ancient times to the Safavid era, other references can be mentioned such as, Jahāngīr Qā'im'maqāmī, "Research on *Monshi ol-Mamalek's* career", historical surveys, Vol. 26, May and June 1970, pp. 183-192.

Monshi ol-Mamalek

As it is obvious from the title, the person who was assigned to this position was the head of the Diwan Resalat and Dar al-Enshaa and had other positions under his control, such as *Monshi*, *Kateb*, and *Dabir*. However, this position has existed in Iran since ancient times, and with changes, its legacy reached the Safavid period. *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, as the highest official of Dar al-Enshaa, performed his duties (Marchinkovsky, 2006, p. 407) and official government correspondence was controlled under the supervision of this court under the chairmanship of *Monshi ol-Mamalek*. (Floor, 2009: 75; Floor, 2008: 145) During the period of Turkoman and Safavid until the end of the 10th century of Hijri, the correspondence of foreign ambassadors and emissaries and all kinds of orders and decrees were the responsibilities of *Monshi ol-Mamalek*. (Busse, 1988: 97; Floor, 2009: 76)

In Tazkirat al-Molouk, the duty of *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, which is related to foreign relations, is not mentioned, and the mentioned duties are mostly dealt with inside the country. It is only stated that *Monshi ol-Mamalek* was "among the close friends of the court and the guests of special and public gatherings" (Tazkirat al-Molouk, 1989: 25), but in Dastoor al-Molouk, which gives a more detailed description of the position of *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, there are some things related to the

issues of foreign relations: "... and the aforementioned Mogarab al-Khagan was always close to the king and protected the secrets of the kingdom's writings, and the letter that came from the surrounding sultans was given to him to read and write an answer. Moreover, Ilchiyan who came to the court and had something to stated, first mentioned the issue to prime minister, Mogarab al-Khagan, in order to fulfill. (Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 116) The main difference between the two texts of Tazkirat al-Molouk and Dastoor al-Molouk is that, according to Mirza Rafi'a, writing the letters and answers that were sent to the sultans of other countries was the duty of *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, while the author of Tazkirat al-Molouk considered it the duty of *Majless Nevis*. (Tazkirat al-Molouk, 1989: 15) It has often been said that Shah Abbas I assigned part of the duties of *Monshi ol-Mamalek* to *Majless Nevis* (*events writer*), (Floor, 2018: 151; Busse, 1988: 97). However, it seems that this transformation took place during the period of Shah Tahmasab I. (Qā'im'maqāmī, 1970: 194) According to Qā'im'maqāmī, writing letters and answers to the sultans of other countries was one of the duties of *Monshi ol-Mamalek* of the country or *Majless Nevis*, which was transferred from him to the other? Perhaps it is more logical to think that during the reign of Turkoman, this task was the duty of the event writer, and it was assigned to *Monshi ol-Mamalek* from Safavid period. (Ibid.: 195) The correspondence of the kings and the letters and answers that they wrote, first was rewritten and after read in the holy service by *Monshi ol-Mamalek* and when the vote of the king was revealed, the letter writer... wrote it with great care and attention in a very beautiful Nastaliq script... (Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 226)

Although, it has been stated that *Monshi ol-Mamalek* was a member of Royal Council and as a result he should have influence and involvement in some foreign policy decisions that were made there (Minorsky, 1989: 118; Vahad, 1974: 942), but this matter is not mentioned in any of the sources, especially in Titles and Salaries of Safavid period, Tazkirat al-Molouk and Dastoor al-Molouk and Dastoor Shahyaran, which are valuable texts in the field of Safavid bureaucracy. It seems that *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, while writing letters and correspondences to the sultans of other countries, advised the king in the preparation of

the text of the letters and the titles and diplomatic customs of that time.

During the reign of Shah Safi, the text of the Zuhab treaty between Iran and Ottomans was written by Abdul Hossein *Monshi ol-Mamalek*. (Isfahani, 1989: 268) It is stated in Khaldbarin: "the text of the king's decree written by Mirza Abdul Hossein in a careful way was sent to Saru Khan." (Valeh Esfahani, 2001: 273)

Unfortunately, European travelers rarely mentioned *Monshi ol-Mamalek* in their travelogues and in the writings of Chardin, Kaempfer, Tavernier, Della Valle, Sanson and Du Mans, more than *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, they paid more attention to the position of *Majless Nevi* and his role in issues related to foreign relations has been highlighted. However, Floor has spoken about Mirza Yahiya *Monshi ol-Mamalek's* advice to Etimad al-Dawlah during the reign of Shah Sultan Hossein on issues related to the foreign policy of Safavid in the Persian Gulf. He writes that Mirza Yahiya *Monshi ol-Mamalek* wrote to Etimad al-Dawlah: "If French start trading in the Persian Gulf, Iranian court will be able to impose its will on Dutch and British." (Floor, 1986: 22).

Majless Nevis (Event Writer)

Majless Nevis was one of the important positions of Safavid court, which gained special importance especially from the era of Shah Abbas I. He was also called the left-hand minister, because he sat on the left side of the king in public meetings. There are several opinions regarding the fact that *Majless Nevis* sits on the left hand of the King in the public meetings and the Royal Council. Kaempfer mentions somewhere that the *Majless Nevi* sat on the left side of the king, and somewhere else he mentions that the prime minister sat on the left side of the king. (Kaempfer, 1984: 98 and 77) Chardin does not mention this issue, but he writes that because *Majless Nevis* performed Prime Minister's duties during his absence, he was called the left minister. (Chardin, 1995: 1214/3) In addition, Du Mans writes that he sat on the left side. (Du Mans, 1974: 156) Minorsky is also of the same opinion that he sat on the left side of the king in the councils. (Minorsky, 1989: 95) According to what is stated in Dastoor al-Molok, *Majless Nevis* sat on the left side after Amir-e Akhor Bashi in Royal Council. (Mirza Rafi'a, 2016: 205)

Majless Nevis was a member of the Royal Council due to his important position in the court, and of course he played a role in the foreign policy decisions made in this council. (Tazkirat al-Molouk, 1989: 5; Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 186; Nasiri, 1992: 31) Nasiri writes about the special ceremonies that prevailed in the royal council and the duty of Majless Nevis in addition to commenting: "... Majless Nevis writes a petition on behalf of the royal emirs who are recognized, and if one of the noble emirs disagrees with the other emirs, the vote of that emir is not sealed by Majless Nevis because he himself wrote the petition and is not aware of its content, and after that, the Prime Minister sealed the petition and gave it to *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* of the honorable shrine, he submitted it to the dean of the shrine, sent it to king, and the officials stopped for an hour in the place where they were sitting until the answer came. After the answer comes out, they act in any way that is decided..." (Nasiri, 1992: 31-32) He also writes about this position: "the aforementioned position was appointed by the last Shah Abbas, before this, the royal writings passed through the office of king, the lord of the office sealed it and it received the monogram of *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, and because in the time of Gitestani there was chaos and every hour a petition reached to the court from Guarded Domains; therefore, it was necessary that the answer should be written, and it took a long time to write it in the office, it had to be delayed for several days when the master of the office of king sealed it and it reached the monogram of *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, and after that, it reached the seal of king and this caused the affairs of the monarchy to be postponed."

For this reason, Navab Gitistani appointed this position and his goal was that the king would have a minister and that the affairs of the kingdom would not be delayed when he traveled somewhere. Therefore, there was a change in the positions of the Prime Minister, *Mustafia ol-Mamalek*, and *Monshi ol-Mamalek*, and they gave all of them to one person, and they named that person Majless Nevis..." (ibid.: 28) Therefore, according to Nasiri's writing, the duties and functions of this position were a combination of the duties of the Prime Minister, *Mustafia ol-Mamalek*, and *Monshi ol-Mamalek*. In general, the main duties of Majless Nevis were: 1- Presenting petitions to the king 2- Preparing the kingdom's

correspondence to governors of provinces or foreign rulers 3- Writing the name of the participants and private negotiations of the king. (Marchinkovsky, 2006: 393) Minorski has enumerated his duties as follows: 1- His job was to record and write the discussions of the meetings or prepare the minutes of the meeting. 2- He was responsible for making the sultan's orders appropriate, correct and clear. 3- Bringing the events and petitions to the Shah's attention, he read the governors' reports of two types of requests and news and announcements to the Sultan and recorded the Shah's answer. (Minorsky, 1989: 95-97) Most of the information about the duties and functions of this position is found in a few books such as Tazkirat al-Molouk and Dastoor al-Molouk and Titles and Salaries of Safavid, which deal with the administrative organization of Safavid, as well as the reports of European travelers and observers who were present in Iran during this period. It is stated in Tazkirat al-Molouk: "The description of the job of event writers is that he composes the answers to the letters written from the kings to the king of Iran... including the royal princes, close parties, special and general assemblies, petitions and letters of the princes, etc. The king sends all of them to Majliss Nevis, who read letters and petitions in the service of king in special and public assemblies, and write the answer of them. (Tazkirat al-Molouk, 1989: 15) Considering the writings of the author of Tazkirat al-Molouk stating that; "Among the master writers, apart from the prime minister, there is no other person with greater rank than event writers, and since ancient times, they have always sat in the service of the kings in public and special assemblies, and in the investigation of minor and general matters, the words of the event writers and their views are respected and valid", (Ibid.: 16) it can be concluded that he was an influential and important official that the king made him his confidant and advisor. Moreover, because he kept the reply letters of other sultans and recorded the political affairs, he was considered an effective authority in negotiations with foreign ambassadors. (Minorsky, 1989: 97) Mirza Rafi'a, also referring to the closeness of Majliss Nevis to Shah and his influential position, writes: "The aforementioned position is among the royal orders and writing summaries of orders and votes of each of them, is exclusive to him, and

has no relation to the other, and he was always among the members of special and public gatherings, and he made abstracts and writings clear for the king..." (Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 204) Nasiri also mentioned similar duties such as *Tazkirat al-Molouk* and *Dastoor al-Molouk* for *Majliss Nevis*. In addition to the duties of *Majliss Nevis*, he also talked about the qualities and characteristics that *Majliss Nevis* should have: "The holder of this position must be completely safe, faithful and honest, and protect secrets and documents and he should have all the skills of writing, office, property rules and regulations, poems and essays, and whatever the king orders him to write, he is not incapable and can write it" (Nasiri, 29: 1992).

Tourists and foreign observers have provided useful information about the connection of this institution with the foreign relations of Safavids. Tavernier writes about this: "The event writer is the greatest writer and secretary of the government, and due to its great importance, this position is only given to someone who is very close to the king, and this person reads all government petitions and writings in the presence of the king. (Tavernier, B: 576) Olearius, who refers to the event writer as "the king's special secretary and adviser", writes about his duty: "This person's duty is to write the king's letters and circulars containing the king's orders to the officials of the states and the like... and he has forty people under him. (Olearius, 1984: 324) In another sources, he mentions that *Majliss Nevis* informed the diplomatic delegation of Duck Holstein that Shah would negotiate with the ambassadors after translating the letters and knowing their contents. (Ibid.: 198) Accordingly, Chardin provides a more complete information of the duties of this position, especially in relation to foreign policy and its issues: "He is called the left minister because he performs the duties of the minister (prime minister) during his absence. In addition to his special duty, he is also an inspector of the minister's work and is responsible for reporting important events to the king and informing the ministers. He also wrote all the decrees and orders of the king. The event writer has a privileged position and rank; as the court consults him when important events occur in choosing how to deal with them. Additionally, in some cases, he comments on how to talk and behave with the ambassadors and envoys of foreign countries

and what method should be taken and what issues should be included in the contracts to conclude various agreements with friendly countries.

Therefore, all foreign envoys and officials who enter the country meet and talk with him. The event writer records their letters and credentials in the relevant book. Afterward, he writes the day of arrival and their destination and place of residence in the notebook. He takes from them the petitions that the chancellor should present to the king, and after presenting them to the king, he writes their answers in return. (Chardin, 1995: 1214/3) Kaempfer also stated that: "His duty is mostly to ensure that, all the decisions and orders of the king, as well as the letters containing congratulations and messages presented by the ambassador, with the decisions that the king takes in these cases and the answers he gives and important events that deserve to be remembered in the court and the neighboring countries are all written in the daily notebooks. (Kaempfer, 1984: 99) Sanson said about the duties of *Majliss Nevis*: "The event writer, who is the only secretary of the court, sits near the king because he writes down the king's orders and instructions. In addition to writing down all the orders of the king, he is responsible for writing all the letters he writes to foreign sultans. (Sanson, 1967: 51) It is also stated in Figueroa's travelogue that all foreign ambassadors who came to Safavid court also negotiated with *Majless Nevis*. (Figueroa, 1984: 322) According to Floor, one of the officials of Dutch Embassy during the period of Shah Abbas II, notes that *Majless Nevis* plays an important role in the negotiations and therefore they were more in touch with him. (Floor, 2009: 83; Floor, 2018: 153-154) *Majless Nevis* also supervised the translation of letters that foreign ambassadors brought with them. After translating the letter, he would present it to the king and he would write the answer in the margin of the letter and *Majless Nevis* would write the answer based on that margin.

Therefore, on the basis of these knowledges, *Majless Nevis* (event writer) was considered among the most prominent courtiers and dignitaries of Safavid era, and he was among the eunuchs and advisers of the king, and he played an important role in issues related to foreign policy and foreign relations of Safavid.

According to Rohr Born, he was aware of all the details and secrets of the government and had extensive organizations throughout the country. (Rohr Born, 2004: 149) Among the most prominent Majless Nevis of Safavid era, we can mention Mirza Taher Natanzi (Aghamir), Hassan Beyg, Mirza Taleb Khan Ordobadi, Mirza Masoom, Mirza Muhammad Tahir Qazvini, Mirza Mohammad Reza Ordobadi Nasiri, Muhammad Ibrahim ibn Zain Al Abedin Nasiri and Mirza Alinqi Nasiri.

Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī

Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī, another important position of Safavid court, according to foreign tourists, was the head of ceremonies. (Tavernier, BeTa: 576; Chardin, 1995: 1220/3; Sanson, 1967: 50; Careri, 2004: 145; Du Mans, 1974: 157) *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* was a member of Royal Council. (Tazkirat al-Molouk, 1989: 5; Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 186; Nasiri, 1992: 31) In addition to the fact that he commented on foreign policy decisions in the Royal Council, he also had an important role in the Shah's delegation to the ambassadors. It is stated in Tazkirat al-Molouk about the duties of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*: "The mentioned position was the dean of the chief of the general and the official of ceremonies, and the dean of *Īshīk Āghāsī* of diwan, Qapoochian, Yasavolan, and Jarchian of diwan, and the affairs and organization of the assembly from the members, and the arrangement of the sitting of the assembly members and from the highest to the lowest, belonged to *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* and if something happens against the rules in the arrangement of the parliament, *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* will be castigated" (Tazkirat al-Molouk, 1989: 88). Mirza Rafi'a also writes about these duties: "The mentioned position is among the four pillars of government and the close people of the court and dean of nobles and the speakers of the important state assembly, and *Īshīk Āghāsī* and Qapoochian of the high court and other Jarchian... and the order and structure of the assembly, the order of the sitting of nobles and the lords of Supreme Court, and the standing of the questioners and the armed men... sitting everyone to the appointed place in the assembly, and recording the list and details in the parliament is assigned to him..." (Mirza Rafi'a, 2004: 194-193). Therefore, one of his main duties in the gatherings of foreign ambassadors was to establish order among them. According

to Kaempfer, he was responsible for organizing the receptions magnificently and flawlessly. He personally guided the invited guests to their designated places. (Kaempfer, 1984: 100) In these assemblies, he "holds a jeweled golden wand and stares hard at the king to notice his gesture." (Ibid.) Olearius also writes: "In front of Shah Safi, *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*, who is one of the greatest government officials, was sitting at a little distance, and he was holding a cane that was covered in gold and had a round in his hand" (Olearius, 1984: 195)

Chardin writes about *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*: "After the position of supervisor, the position of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* is the most important and prestigious position. *Īshīk* was legally referred to as the head of the dignitaries and nobles of the court, which can be considered as the head of court ceremonies... *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*, with all the high ranks he has, stays in all the assemblies and gatherings where the king is present, even if some of his subordinates are there. All the documents that reach the court as a royal official are presented by him, and sometimes he opens and reads them on the command of the king..." (Chardin, 1995: 1221/3) In other meetings, the ambassadors, who have been led inside by Mehmandar Bashi, while *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* takes under their arm, are taken to the king's throne to show respect and provide politeness there. (Kaempfer, 1984: 100) In fact, he was responsible for guiding the ambassadors to the king. Sanson writes about this task of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*: "He stands in front of the king while leaning on his command wand; when the foreign officials and guests of the king come down to pay their respects and bow to the king, he takes their arm and guides them. (Sanson, 1967: 50; Careri, 2004: 145)

There are two examples of guiding the ambassadors and taking under their arm to the king below: Careri writes about the ceremony of foreign ambassadors' presence during the reign of King Sultan Hossein: "When we entered the hall, Mehmandar Bashi and *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* came forward. One by the right arm and the other by the left arm, they took the ambassador and led him near the king's throne. (Careri, 2004: 145) Ahmed Dürrî, the Ottoman ambassador at the court of Shah Sultan Hossein, wrote in his travelogue: "... the king ordered me and said: Sit down. To be polite I did not sit. *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* took my arm and forced me to sit... the king called me again.

Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī took my armpit and lifted and brought me to his presence..." (Riyahi, 1989: 75) Ian Smith, Dutch ambassador in Shah Safi's court, writes that *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* was the mediator of the exchange of ceremonial speeches and questions and answers. (Floor, 2536: 79) Ian Smith also writes: "He sent a message to the ruler of Shiraz... I requested that if possible, the letters of the Shah's response to Dutch Council of States should be arranged. The mentioned ruler guided me to write a letter about this to *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*, as the arrangement of such affairs is one of his duties. (ibid: 90-91) Therefore, it seems that sometimes *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* was also responsible for preparing the reply letters of foreign ambassadors and representatives. Among the other duties that *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* had, apparently, was to receive the letter from the ambassador and deliver it to the king in the reception meetings. For instance, in 913 AH/1507 AD, when Zul Qadr's ambassador had come to the court of Shah Ismail I, Durmish-Khan *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* took his letter and presented it to the king. (Tarikh-i Jahangusta-yi Khaqan, 1971: 249) Also, in one of the receptions assemblies of Shah Sultan Hossein to foreign ambassadors, it is expressed that: "the chief of ceremonies (*Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*) placed the letter on the ambassador's turban so that everyone could see that the ambassador had the honor of receiving the letter from the Shah of Iran." (Careri, 2004: 145) One of the other duties of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* was to place the gifts and offerings of foreign ambassadors in front of the king: "Placing the offering in the gatherings of officials, etc., according to the king's idea... is assigned to him. (Mirza Rafia, 2006: 194) Therefore, ten percent of the gifts and offerings that the foreign ambassadors and representatives brought to Iran and presented to Shah, was given to *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*. (Mirza Rafia, 2006: 195; Chardin, 1995: 1222/3; Kempfer, 1984: 100; Du Mans, 1974: 158) Therefore, *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* is dealing with two important issues of foreign policy, which are decision-making in foreign policy in the Royal Council and also in the implementation of diplomatic customs and ceremonies he played an important role.

Mehmandar Bashi

Mehmandar Bashi was responsible for accommodation of foreign ambassadors and

representatives, which was considered an important position, especially in connection with foreign relations. However, useful information about the duties of this official is provided in Dastoor al-Molouk: "His career was that from every province where an envoy and a guest arrived at the court, he, the minister and the Sheriff of Isfahan should determine the place for them to descend and welcome them and settled them there and estimate their expenses and count their number, and it is his duty to use the specified amount, whether it is cash or goods, for the purpose of hospitality and accommodation in that regard. (Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 248-249)

As mentioned earlier, a foreign ambassador who entered Iran was considered a guest of the king and was introduced to him by a person called *Mehmandar*. By announcing his presence to the ruler of that border city (the first city entering Iran), the ambassador was officially received by *Mehmandar*. (Floor, 2005: 91) Tourists and foreign observers provide more information about *Mehmandar Bashi*, his duties and tasks than domestic sources. Chardin writes about the duties of *Mehmandar Bashi*: "His duty is to prepare all the hospitality facilities for ambassadors, representatives and envoys of foreign countries. As the ambassador or representative of foreign countries approaches the capital, he should go to his escort and guide him with all respect to the houses that have been prepared for his stay; a special steward should be provided to serve him and if he is allowed to attend the presence of the king, he should achieve this happiness at the appointed time. He should visit the guest as soon as possible and provide his needs with politeness and speed of action and deliver his messages to the king and the ministers... he goes everywhere with the guest and try to serve him respectfully with the utmost care and attention and attend to carry out the king's orders about his desecration..." (Chardin, 1995: 1227-1228/3) Therefore, *Mehmandar Bashi*, as "the hospitality officer for ambassadors" (Careri, 2004: 193), was responsible for welcoming the ambassadors and providing them with accommodation (Della Valle, 2005: 46), and their supplies and needs. Kaempfer writes: "He is obliged to receive the guests of the king and the ambassadors of foreign kings with their companions and provide them with means of livelihood and life, support them and treat them

with courtesy and respect. He informs the wishes of the guests to the Prime Minister. (Kaempfer, 1984: 102) Olearius, who accompanied Duck Holstein's embassy, writes about the hospitality assigned to this embassy: "On the 29th of November, this person arrived at our camp while wearing expensive clothes and on a very clean horse, and in a friendly manner informed the ambassadors that Shamakhy Khan had appointed and sent him as a host to meet our needs for provisions, carts and horses and to be with us until Shamakhy. *Mehmandar Bashi* sent us five sheep, three jugs of wine and a few pomegranates..." (Olerius, 1984: 46) according to Chardin, the representative of French East India Company during the reign of King Suleiman, after staying in the house assigned to him, *Mehmandar Bashi* went to visit him to deliver the kitchen and stable equipment on behalf of the king. (Chardin, 1995: 608/2) Ahmed Dürrî, the Ottoman ambassador during the reign of Shah Sultan Hossein, writes: "On behalf of the Shah... Najaf Qoli Khan Bakhtiari... came to welcome us as the main host with a hundred horsemen and brought an order from the Shah to deliver daily necessities equal to 250 Ghorosh (piaster). (Riahi, 1989: 68) Della Valle has stated the appointment of an extraordinary host by Shah Abbas I for some guests: "The king has a habit of appointing an extraordinary *Mehmandar* for some of his guests, in addition to the regular *Mehmandar* who takes care of all the guests, and I don't know if he does this out of special respect for a guest or if he has some other purpose." (Della Valle, 2005: 149) The appointment of a special *Mehmandar* was for two reasons: 1- special respect for that guest, 2- monitoring him. (Hedayt, 1977: 73) Apparently, one of the duties of *Mehmandar* was to ask the foreign ambassadors and representatives who came to Iran, the details of their trip, as well as their intention to come to Iran and their real purpose in the embassy. (Della Valle, 2005: 150) Chardin pointed out that during the period of Shah Sulaiman, when the ambassador and representative of French East India Company came to Iran, *Mehmandar Bashi* was assigned to be there on behalf of the Prime Minister and during a meeting with the envoy of company and a conversation with him, gain accurate and correct information about the purpose and intention of his trip to Iran. (Chardin, 1995: 615/2) Della Valle writes

about the questions that *Mehmandar* asked him: "He asked me the details of my travels and asked me my intention to come... he asked how long I intend to stay in Iran. He asked me if I have my wife and children with me or not... I don't know on what occasion, he talked about the two fast of Christians and he asked me for explanations about the way of fasting and the foods that should be avoided during this period and various other issues". One of the mullahs who came with him was taking notes, and Takhteh Beyg (*Mehmandar*) said that he should present this information in detail to the king... Takhteh Beyg immediately went to the king to give his report. (Della Valle, 2005: 50)

He also mentions the steward as a mediator between the ambassadors and the king and writes: "*Mehmandar* facilitates their negotiations with the king. In fact, any kind of negotiation should be done through him, even if it is on behalf of the ambassador of the king of a foreign country and the topic of his negotiation is about the supreme interests of the country. (Ibid.: 148) *Mehmandar* had other duties as well, which was in the reception ceremony of the king to foreign ambassadors. Tavernier defines *Mehmandar Bashi* as someone who teaches the ambassadors how to honor the king orderly and guides them. (Tavernier, Be Ta: 576) Accordingly, he was responsible for introducing ambassadors to the king. Sanson describes him in reception ceremony as follows: "He has a crown on his head and a wand in his hand. His crown is a big hat covered with gold and one of its narrower corners is pulled up. The brim of the hat has several tassels, the lower part of the tassels is decorated with enameled gold and old jewels. In addition, the top part of the hat is made from the feathers of the Herons. (Sanson, 1967: 54)" Taking the arm of the ambassadors and leading them towards the king was sometimes done by *Mehmandar Bashi*. During the reception ceremony of foreign ambassadors, Careri mentioned that the ambassador was taken by the arm by *Mehmandar Bashi*. (Careri, 2004: 145) Della Valle had wrongly stated that *Mehmandar Bashi* decided on the seats of the guests in the ceremony, (Della Valle, 2005: 251) because as it was mentioned before, it was the responsibility of Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī to determine the seat of the guests. Chardin, who was present at one of the reception assemblies of King Suleiman to the ambassador of the

French East India Company, writes about the duty of *Mehmandar Bashi* in this ceremony: "*Mehmandar Bashi* does not eat or drink anything. When the guests insisted to him that he should eat food and drink like them, he replied that at this time, my main duty is to make sure that nothing is lacking in the catering equipment and I should not distract myself with eating or drinking. When the servants had gathered the dishes, he came to the envoy of the company and said that if he needs anything, tell him to bring it immediately. Then he came and introduced a *Mehmandar* to his service and said that he is there to be ready to serve at all hours..." (Chardin, 1995: 607/2) *Mehmandar* was obliged to accompany the ambassador to his residence after the ceremony. (Den Garcia, 1984: 273; Kaempfer, 1984: 103)

The rank of *Mehmandar Bashi* depended on the prestige of the guest and the amount of respect the king held for him. (Floor, 2005: 91) as an example; Shah Abbas I chose Hasan Beyg, the head of royal procurement, as Dan Garcia's *Mehmandar*. (Figueroa, 1984: 260) Also, Shah Abbas chose Qazi Khan Sadr to the position of *Mehmandar Bashi* for Qazi Effendi, Mufti and Ottoman ambassador in Iran (Monajjem Yazdi, 1987: 427), who had equal position to the ambassador. The selection of experienced *Mehmandar* who had previous hospitality experience was also one of the criteria for choosing them. Mirza Mohsen Mostofi Isfahani, *Mehmandar* of Jan Nisar Khan and Arslan Beyg, Indian ambassadors (Valeh Esfahani, 2001: 434) and Malik Hossein, *Mehmandar* of Fidalgo, the Portuguese ambassador (Fidalgo, 2537: 40) were among the experienced *Mehmandar Bashi* who had the experience of hospitality.

Chardin points out interesting points in the selection of *Mehmandar Bashi*. He stated that: "the king is careful and precise to appoint steward to the service of each ambassador who are suitable for his (the ambassador's) mood and expectations. Therefore, if his guest is the ambassador of one of the European countries, because he is used to drinking alcohol and having fun, he will ask someone to serve him who is not biased and bigoted and who does not avoid pleasure-seeking. In other words, religious restrictions should not make him cautious. (Chardin, 1995: 1228/3) When an ambassador left for his country after completing his mission in Iran, the host was

obliged to provide the means and necessities for the ambassador's return, and also accompany him to the border.

Yasavol-e Sohbat

The word "Yasavol" is derived from the Mongolian root "yasa" which means "law" or "order" and means the people and officials who executed the orders in the presence of the Sultan. (Minorsky, 1989: 120) Marchinkovsky mentioned that: "Gerhard Doerfer considered the root of this term to be Turkish and proposed two German language equivalent for it. One is Leibwache meaning protector and the other is ordner meaning guide or steward. (Marchinkovsky, 2006: 435-436) It is stated in Tazkirat al-Molouk in the statement of this position: "Yasavol-e Sohbat were no one other than children of emirs, and in the old days there were no more than eight or nine people. In the special assembly, he serves instead of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*, and in public assemblies, he stands before the king and *Īshīk Āghāsīan* serves in the assembly. (Tazkirat al-Molouk, 1989: 27) Mirza Rafi'a also writes about them: "Their job is that they should be present and in service when traveling, attending ceremonies, and... during the era of Shah Abbas I, when *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* was the High Deputy and served in private meetings... during the era of Shah Sultan Hossein they were thirty-five people and were present in turn to be on guard duty... and they were to be on guard duty all night and were assigned to other services and missions as well. (Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 261-260) Yasavol-e Sohbat served under the supervision of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*, Kaempfer writes about this position: "As a sign of his dignity, Yasavol-e Sohbat always had a wand in his hand in official parties, his place was immediately after *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*, and his career is complementary to *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*. (Kaempfer, 1984: 105) According to Du Mans, they were the junior officers of the ceremonies under the supervision of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*. He also writes about their duty: "They are always present in the king's assembly with a wand in hand to put everyone in their place. (Du Mans, 1974: 158) Chardin has provided a more detailed explanation about Yasavol-e Sohbat: "They work under the supervision of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*... when they serve, they carry Zarandod (golden) wand in their hands, and their leaders have a different kind of wand in

order to be recognized by others. Yasavol-e Sohbat take on the duties of officials of ceremonies and maintaining discipline and silence in every place where the king is present.... as the ambassadors, representatives and envoys of foreign countries are honored to see the king, Yasavol-e Sohbat go to guide them to the presence of the king and show the gifts that they have brought or sent by others to the king. (Chardin, 1995: 1223/3) Membere, the ambassador of the government of Venice in the court of Shah Tahmasab I, writes in this regard: "Next to the king, those who are called Yasavol-e Sohbat, stand upright and their job is to guard. They have two wands, two cubits long, with silver ends and a small golden colored handle... I know six or seven people among them... when the king wants to talk to someone, they go to summon him to come in and talk. Therefore, these six or seven people are called companion, which means dear friend of the king. (Membre, 2014: 17) Yasavol-e Sohbat was appointed to this position by Safavid kings. For example; Shah Abbas II while sitting in 1052 AH/1642 AD. Shahverdi Sultan and Shah Sultan Hussain honored Muhammad Ali Beyg with this position. (Vahid Qazvini, 2004: 347; Nasiri, 1994: 55) In addition to the duties they had in the court and especially in the gatherings of the king to welcome foreign ambassadors, Yasavol-e Sohbat was sometimes also chosen as *Mehmandar*. For example; in 1043 AH/1634 AD. when Safdar Khan, the ambassador of India, entered Iran, Shah Safi ordered Muhammad Beyg Yasavol to be his host. (Isfahani, 1989: 192)

Pishkesh Nevis

One of the other Safavid court positions that was related to foreign relations issues was *Pishkesh Nevis*. In *Tazkirat al-Molouk*, his duties are listed under the title of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*: He recorded and wrote down all the gifts offered to Shah during Nowruz or other events, except for the food items that were offered to him, and handed over the list to *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*. (*Tazkirat al-Molouk*, 1989: 9) In *Dastoor al-Molouk*, a similar duty is mentioned for this position: "He was in charge of the perpetual offerings of the nobles and other congregations, as well as non-perpetual offerings, and he submitted the list of offerings to *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* in the supreme assembly

of Safavid courtiers..." (Mirza Rafi'a, 2016: 271)

According to Chardin, "*Pishkesh Nevis* was obliged to record all the gifts that were sent to the king, whoever sent them and whatever the price was, before they were showed to the king." He is also the one who passes in front of the king as the first while presenting the gifts..." (Chardin, 1995: 1229-1230/3) *Pishkesh Nevis* was actually responsible for receiving the gifts. (Ibid., 635/2)

During the period of Shah Suleiman, when the ambassador and representative of French East India Company came to Iran, *Mehmandar Bashi* and *Pishkesh Nevis* went to meet the ambassador. *Pishkesh Nevis* visited and handled the gifts that the ambassador of the company had brought to the king and then received the gifts. (Ibid., 615-616/2) Thus, when the form of the ambassador's or representative's gifts, their weight and price were known and recorded, it was not possible to change or reduce it, and if when the gifts were delivered to the treasury, their number and price were not equal to the recorded list, the deficit had to be compensated. As an example; among the gifts that French East India Company sent to King Suleiman in 1084 AH/1673 AD, was a can of Ashhab ambergris, which its true weight was not recorded in the gift list for some unknown reason. At the time of evaluation, because they found that its weight was lower than what was recorded in the list, they demanded its deficit from the bringer, as he did not have Ashhab ambergris, he was forced to pay the price of the deficit, which was twenty-seven eco per ounce. (Ibid., 1230/3)

The equivalent of ten percent of the gifts and offerings that an ambassador or foreign representative presented to the king belonged to *Pishkesh Nevis*. (Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 271)

Nazer

Nazer was another important and influential Safavid official and a part of his duties related to foreign relations. His duties related to foreign policy are not mentioned in the internal references. It is only stated in *Dastoor al-Molouk* that he was responsible for delivering robes to those sent by the king, including foreign ambassadors: "Delivering the luxurious robes to everyone in the opinion of the king, from those who have been chosen by the king

himself. (Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 198) European tourists have given a more valuable report about this position. Chardin writes: "He is responsible for handling and taking care of the affairs of all foreigners who enter Iran by land or sea and start business. *Nazer* is obliged to pay for the hospitality of foreign ambassadors upon arrival and consider a suitable place for them to live and participate in the selection of gifts given to them by the king. (Chardin, 1995: 1215/3) According to European, one of the duties of *Nazer* was related to the reception assemblies of the kings to foreign ambassadors. Kaempfer wrote in this regard: "He is responsible for holding delighted banquet of the king." (Kaempfer, 1984: 97) Tavernier, who was present at the welcoming ceremony of Shah Abbas II to Uzbek ambassador, stated: The great *Nazer* and the chief of ceremonies brought in the majesty ambassador. *Nazer* went back and forth several times from the king to the ambassador and from the ambassador to the king. (Tavernier, Be Ta: 462-461) Also, in the reception ceremony of King Sultan Hossein to French ambassadors, Marie Petit and Michel, it was *Nazer* who guided everyone into the palace. (Gress, 1993: 251)

Among the other positions that were especially related to ambassadors and foreign representatives during Safavid era, was Vazier of Isfahan (minister of Isfahan), who was obliged to welcome and entertain foreign ambassadors and representatives and consider a place for them to stay. In this regard, it is stated in Dastoor al-Molouk: "Other services assigned to the mentioned job include welcoming Ilchiyan who enter Dar al-Sultaneh in Isfahan, and determining a house and place for them and paying their daily expenses, after estimating by *Mehmandar Bashi*, and informing the minister of the supreme court, from the sources of the country's export and preparation of food and their needs in the houses belonging to the Dar al-Sultaneh of Isfahan..." (Mirza Rafi'a, 2006: 232) There are documents in which the minister of Isfahan was ordered to prepare houses for a European ambassador or a religious missionary and foreign representative. There is a letter in which a decree from Shah Abbas I in 1018 AH/1609 AD has been issued to the minister of Isfahan, Mirza Mohammad, about giving two houses to the Karmali priests: "It is the king's order that Mohammad Vazir Dar al-Sultaneh of Isfahan should know that foreign priests want

to have a house with running water. Thus, two houses next to each other that have running water should be vacated for them, so that when they come there, they would be (probably guests) and they should be careful aware of it. (Falsafi, 1973: 293/3) It is also mentioned in Dan García's travelogue that during the stay of Spanish ambassador Dan García in Isfahan, the Minister of Isfahan visited him many times and talked with him. (Figueroa, 1984: 203)

The sheriff also sometimes had duties such as welcoming foreign ambassadors, providing accommodation for foreign ambassadors and representatives, among other positions such as *Nazer* and *Mehmandar Bashi*. (Marchinkovsky, 2006: 419) Perdolamaz, a French priest, who was present in Iran during Shah Sultan Hossein's period, considered the sheriff to be the agent of ceremonies (amazing letters from French priests during Safavid and Afshariya eras, 1991: 72). Accordingly, he writes about the reception of Zorabek, the Polish ambassador, during the reign of Shah Sultan Hossein, by Qom Sheriff: "The sheriff of Qom was a special friend of our ambassador and provided him with all possible respect and welcomed him for two days and organized a magnificent banquet for him. (Ibid.: 74-75)

Conclusion

Considering the emergence of Safavid government and the consolidation of their political power in Iran and the formation of regional and global political arrangements, Safavid government had to organize their foreign relations in such a way as to secure the goals and interests of the country. Accordingly, in order to establish diplomatic relations with the neighboring governments and like European, Safavid needed to systematize their foreign relations in different ways; therefore, to establish a new form of their foreign relations, they needed some judicial-administrative positions. The mentioned positions were either generally or specifically related to foreign relations of Safavid. *Monshi ol-Mamalek* and *Majless Nevis* were two positions that, although some of their duties were the same, such as writing letters to the sultans of other countries, but both were members of the Royal Council, in which some foreign policy decisions were made there. Moreover, according to some sources, *Majless Nevis* was sometimes assigned by Shah to negotiate with

foreign ambassadors. In addition, *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* was one of the other important positions of Safavid court, who was not only a member of the royal council and commented on some foreign policy decisions, rather, he was present at Safavid Shah's reception ceremony regarding foreign ambassadors and was aware of the negotiations between Shah and the ambassadors. Also, *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī* was sometimes responsible for preparing the reply letters of foreign ambassadors and representatives. *Mehmandar Bashi*, who was responsible for receiving foreign ambassadors and representatives, was one of the other important officials in connection with foreign relations of Safavid government. In addition to being in charge of welcoming and entertaining the ambassadors and providing their accommodation and needs, he generally had the secret duty of knowing the real purpose of the ambassador and his trip to Iran and informing the king about them. *Yasavol-e Sohbat* was another Safavid civil position that generally served under the supervision of *Īshīk Āghāsī Bāshī*. He was present in the court and especially in the reception gatherings of the king for ambassadors and foreign representatives, and when they received permission to see the king, he would welcome them and guide them to the presence of the king. *Pishkesh Nevis* was one of the other positions of the court, who was responsible for receiving, visiting and arranging the gifts that foreign ambassadors brought to the court of the Shah of Iran, and he showed these gifts to the king. Among other civil-administrative positions of Safavid government was *Nazer*. Although some of his duties were the same as *Mehmandar Bashi*, in addition to delivering the robes granted by the king to foreign ambassadors, he was present at the reception ceremonies of the king to foreign envoys, and in some periods, he was responsible for guiding the ambassadors into the palace and supervising this assembly. In addition to the above-mentioned positions, Isfahan Vazir and sherif were other officials whose duties during the Safavid era included welcoming foreign ambassadors and providing them with accommodation, which was related to the foreign relations of the Safavid government. As a result, the systematization of these organizations in Safavid era became a model

for Iranian governments after Safavid in this regard.

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