

OSMANLI ARAŐTIRMALARI
XV

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THE JOURNAL OF OTTOMAN STUDIES
XV

İstanbul - 1995

JAMALADDIN AFGHANI'S HONORABLE CONFINEMENT IN ISTANBUL AND IRAN'S DEMANDS FOR HIS EXTRADITION

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Many studies and book-length analyses have appeared over the last half century about the life and activities of Jamaladdin Al-Afghani and his impact upon the muslim world. One may note that the literature on Afghani has accumulated to such an extent that it has led to the preparation a special bibliography.⁽¹⁾ But his years in Istanbul (1892-1897) are still more or less obscure. Not much is known about his relations with the Sultan, Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) and also the question of his extradition to Iran. Now thanks to the newly opened Ottoman Archives in Istanbul more light can be shed upon these issues.

It is known that Afghani's first visit to Istanbul was in 1869, but here we will deal with his second visit in 1892, which took place at the invitation of Sultan Abdulhamid. Shortly before this visit (according to a draft report prepared by Cevdet Paşa) Afghani had declined an invitation of the Sultan with the excuse that he was extremely busy with Iranian affairs.⁽²⁾ Abdulhamid's insistence on seeing him in Istanbul seems to have been partly the re-

1 A.A. Kudzi Zadeh, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani: An Annotated Bibliography*, Leiden 1970. There are of course a number of studies which came out after the preparation of this bibliography. See for example, Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamaladdin al-Afghani: A Political Biography*, London 1970.

2 *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*, (BOA7, Yıldız Esas Evrakı (YEE), 18-553/586-2-93-38. This report mainly deals with Afghani's earlier life and his first visit to Istanbul in 1869. Here it may be noted that the Porte appeared to have followed the activities of Afghani in Europe. There are several indications to that effect. Afghani's article on 'Mandi' published in *L'intransigeant*, 8 Dec 1883, was translated in to Turkish and be found in *BOA*, YEE, 1/34/93/553-170. This translated article was wrongly regarded by some as a letter from Afghani to Abdulhamid II, but it was not. Article in French reproduced in E. Kedouri, *Afghani and Abduh*, London 1966, 74-87. On Afghani in Europe see also Ottoman Ambassador to Paris, Esad Paşa's note, *BOA*, *Yıldız Sadaret Hususi Maruzat (Y.A. Hus.)*, 180-63, 27. 11. 1884. Moreover the Porte also obtained an anti-Shah pamphlet signed by Afghani

sult of Afghani's letter to him from London in 1892 suggesting some subtle diplomatic ways to achieve the goal of Pan-Islamism by bringing about, at first, an alliance of the Ottoman state with Afghanistan, and then with Iran.⁽³⁾

Hence without further delay Afghani came to Istanbul. There, Abdulhamid initially treated him well offering a residence and monthly payment. He was even allowed to marry a girl if he wanted to, but Afghani declined. He used to pray his Friday prayers in the Hamidiye Mosque near Abdulhamid's Palace. His residence was visited by many and regular discussions, mostly political were held there. Among those who visited him, the Iranians were in the majority. But he also developed relationships with the Ottoman intellectuals. This soon brought him to the notice of the Sultan and he was kept under surveillance. His relations with some anti Caliph elements in Istanbul, especially with the Young Turks, and finally his secret meeting with Abbas Hilmi, the Khedive of Egypt, in 1895 were found to be intolerable. The Sultan suspected that the possibility of an Arab caliphate was being discussed by them. As a result, Afghani's remaining years in Istanbul were to pass in "honorable confinement", and his movements were restricted by various means such as by controlling his visitors and his letters.⁽⁴⁾ There were, of course other factors which encouraged the Sultan to take such drastic action despite Afghani's feelings of desperation and his lamentable appeals. These mainly

(all-Husaini) in 1891, calling the Iranians to act against their ruler and overthrow him and gave information to the Iranian Government. For the Turkish translation of this pamphlet, *BOA*, Y.A. Hus. 261-112, 14.11.1309 (1891). Judging from the tone of the pamphlet and the Porte's passing on information to Iran it may perhaps be assumed that by inviting Afghani and keeping him in Istanbul Abdulhamid II might have desired to prevent some kind of activities against himself. Besides according to the official documents of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Abdulhamid II was reported to have said to the Iranian Ambassador that "in order to prevent the incitement and trouble among the Arabs that he was accomplishing at the instigation of the British I invited him and brought him here... Be confident that I will not let him say or do anything against the interest of Iran" Sasanî *Siyasetgaran-i Daureh-yi Qajar*, Tehran 1138. 194. Quoted in Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din...* 376.

3 This letter is enclosed in French in *Foreign Office (FO)*, 78/4452, reprinted in J.M. Landau, "Al-Afghani's Pan-Islamic Project", *Islamic Culture*, XXVI, 1952, 50-54. English translation is in N.R. Keddie, "Pan-Islamic Appeal. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Oct. 3, 1966, 65 In his letter Afghani "guarantee Turkey the accomplishment of this achievement" if his advises were taken and he was charged with this mission. This was of course not his first letter to Abdulhamid II written in the same line. Earlier in the 1870's he had offered his services to the Sultan for bringing about the unity of Islam by extensive travels in India, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Although the letter is undated evidence suggests that it must have been written in 1876-1877. Nikki R. Keddie first suggested that it was written in the mid-1880's. Later she changed her opinion and argued that the date must have been 1877-1878. See. *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din...* 132.

4 There are a number of studies mostly memoirs that touch upon Afghani's Istanbul days. See, N. R. Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, IV, 3 Apr. 1962, 283-289, 292-295. For the Turkish accounts see, O. Keskiöglü, "Cemaleddin Efgani", *İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, X, Ankara 1963; A. Yalçınkaya, *Cemaleddin Afgani ve Türk Siyasi Hayatı Üzerindeki Etkileri*, İstanbul 1991; M. Kaya Bilgegil, "Cemaleddin Afgani ve Türkiye", *Kubbealtı Akademi Mecmuası*, VI, Temmuz 1977, III, 54-67 and IV, 53-66. For the view of an Official view, *BOA*, YEE, (Halil Rifat Paşa Evrakı), 31/1709/3/110/187. Also reproduced in F. Ç. Derin "Cemaleddin Efgani Hakkında İki Tarihi Vesika", *Tarih ve Toplum* XIV, 84 Aralık 1990, 55-56.

stemmed from the Pan-Islamic project in partnership with the Sultan and his relations with Iran.

The Ottoman documents suggest that when Afghani came to Istanbul, Abdulhamid II asked him to prepare a strictly confidential report about the possibility and the means of actual Shii-Sunni unity - a long cherished dream of the Sultan.⁽⁵⁾ In his *Irade* to Afghani, Abdulhamid II stated his reasons and needs for desiring such a unity. His main theme is as follows.

First he stated that there was a growing movement among the Christians especially the Orthodox Christians to unite with other sects which undoubtedly would work against the Muslims. Then he recorded several instances to justify his worries. He continued stating that in the face of this menace, unity (*Ittihad*) and alliance (*Ittifak*) in order to gain power and strength were obviously necessary and that since all Muslims were brethren and the direction of their prayers was the same, the unity of all Muslims, though they live in different places, could be achieved more easily than that of the Christians. Then he said that Sultan Selim the Grim fought the Iranians with the aim of realising this important goal, but that unfortunately it had not materialize at the time because of the misdeeds of some bad people. His next point was that the Iranians had, in order to live separate, always maintained *Rafiziism* and had tried to convert some illiterate Muslims in Bagdad and Irak by deceiving them.⁽⁶⁾ To counteract such attempts, some scholars and religious preachers were sent to the aforementioned regions. The local authorities, too, were ordered to do the same. In addition a number of Shii children were brought to Istanbul for education and training in the Sunni tradition with the hope that when they returned to their homes, they would "correct" the beliefs of their people. Abdulhamid II thought that unfortunately this endeavour had failed to meet the expectations for various reasons and that up to that time no effective result had been obtained.

In addition because of the difference in the "*Mezhebs*", the Iranians had been protecting the "seditious Armenians" who were committing crimes and escaping to Iran which was very unfortunate. It was clear that there was a strong need to find a solution and that this solution could only be found by clearing up the sectarian differences and bringing about the unity of Islam.

Also, according to Abdulhamid II, since Afghani having had travelled to most of the Muslim countries and had resided in Iran for some time, he knew the main points of the controversies and differences between the Sunnis and Shiis. The Sultan suggested that a society be formed by some Ottoman and Iranian ulema to handle the problem and counteract or perhaps put an end to the influence the Iranian mujtahids. Finally Abdulhamid II put forward a most fan-

5 *BOA*, YEE, I/156-XXV/3. Although Afghani's name was not stated as addressee, the evidence within the letter leaves no doubt that it was written to him.

6 As a matter of fact the Ottomans always complained that the Iranians were forcing the Sunnis to covert to Shiism. See also this new document, *BOA*, Y.A.Hus. 306-90, 16. 2. 1312 (1894)

tastic idea that "the Shahs, while they were ruling Iran, could leave the command of their army so that the desired union could be achieved".⁽⁷⁾

Having received the imperial request Afghani responded enthusiastically to the Sultan's "irade". This is how he felt at the time: "when I received the "irade-i Hilafetpenahi", asking my humble opinion as to how the unity of the Muslims could be realized, I was so happy as the eight doors of Paradise opened to me."⁽⁸⁾ He then immediately presented his views to the Sultan. Unfortunately his report back to the Sultan has not yet been uncovered, but the formation of a society of Iranians residing in Istanbul, in 1894 clearly suggests that Afghani proceeded in line with Abdulhamid II's views. It also suggests that Afghani's plans were appreciated by the Sultan because he allowed the formation of such a society.

In his inaugural speech to the society Afghani presented the members with an allegory saying that Islam was like a ship under the command of the Prophet with Muslims its passengers. Today, he said, this ship was caught in a storm and threatened by various internal and external forces. He then asked what the responsibilities of the passengers were. Should they save the ship first or help it to sink through discord and disagreement among themselves? This was, of course, a rhetorical question, and Afghani finally asked those in his audience to write to every acquaintance, especially the Shi'ite ulema in Iran, India and in the Arab lands about the need for unity and solidarity and its likely benefits to the Shi'ites. It was reported that about six hundred letters were written in all directions and that two hundred replies were received from interested Iranian and Arab ulema. Abdulhamid II was quite excited about these developments. However, for some reasons, he was later to disassociate himself from the scheme and refer it to his ministers saying, curiously, that he might be accused of converting to Shi'ism by some fanatics.⁽⁹⁾

However, before that with these initial encouraging results Abdulhamid II certainly did entertain high hopes. This is clearly evident from his memoirs. He stated that "Jamaladdin kindled a ray of hope for Shi'ite-Sunni unity... This would be an enormous accomplishment for Islam".⁽¹⁰⁾ But soon after the Sultan lost confidence in Afghani and hence Afghani's scheme was also to suffer serious set-backs. Various reasons were suggested as to why

7 BOA YEE, 1/156-XXV/157/3.

8 BOA, YEE, 14/1103-126/9. It seems that at this moment Abdulhamid II was still careful not to disturb Britain or directly aim at the British. A report from the British Embassy in Istanbul goes as follows: Jamal ad-Din Afghani together with one of his disciples, Abdullah Nedim, "drew up a very inflammatory indictment against the British treatment of Muslims... The document was submitted to the Sultan who before giving his sanction to its distribution, consulted some of his advisers... the latter came to the conclusion that its dissemination might entail consequences, the ultimate effect of which it was impossible to foresee and they therefore recommended that the matter should be laid aside, at any rate for the moment. The Sultan acquiesced in this view and the question has been dropped". Nicolson to Rosebery, 22 December 1893, *India Office Records*, L/P.S/3/107/1894.

9 Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din...* 380. The names of the individuals that constituted the Iranian circle of Afghani can be seen in Nikki R. Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion...", 292-295.

10 Sultan Abdulhamid, *Siyasi Hatratim*, (trans. S. Can) Istanbul 1984, 179.

the Sultan changed his attitude, which will be dealt with below. Regarding the Afghani's scheme, one of the main set backs was that since his society consisted, largely of anti-Shah revolutionary Iranians, their correspondence with the Shii ulema aroused the suspicion of the Iranian authorities. This came as a major blow because the Iranian government wrongly concluded that an anti-Shah plot was being organized. Hence, amidst diplomatic initiatives from Iran and internal difficulties, the society ceased to be effective in short while. This really disappointed Afghani⁽¹¹⁾ "I have unfortunately come to the conclusion". He wrote to Abdulhamid II,

that the project has been left to the corner of oblivion or it has been burnt by the fire of the enmity of malicious and ill-intended persons, or its contents have been misinterpreted by (some) who have convinced Your Highness, so that my report has been included among the literature of futile nature.⁽¹²⁾

Afghani's letter also suggests that he was exhausted in Istanbul because of the conditions and the environment in which he had to live and was desperate to leave. He begged the Sultan to allow him to go "for God's sake" and assured him that he would come back whenever he was asked for. He also promised to work for the "*urza-yi (sake of) Amir-ul-Muminin*" wherever he was. But as is obvious Afghani's assurances fell short of convincing the Sultan. Not only Afghani's own efforts but also appeals made on his behalf for his release proved to be fruitless.⁽¹³⁾ It may be pertinent to say that Afghani ready to do anything to leave Istanbul. He was even prepared to work as an informer for the British Embassy which reportedly he did just before his death in 1897.⁽¹⁴⁾ Unfortunately for him however he also failed to get any British support. In such circumstances, it was quite natural that Afghani lost all his enthusiasm. Consequently the stay in Istanbul, of such a dynamic person as Afghani was to pass almost unnoticed with no writings whatsoever.

As for Afghani's relations at this time with the Iranian affairs, in May 1896 one of his disciples, Mirza Rıza Kirman, shot and killed Nasiruddin Shah. The Iranian government held Afghani responsible for it and asked for his extradition along with that of three Iranians held in Trabzon jail. These three Iranians were handed over and immediately hanged in Iran allegedly

11 Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din...* 382.

12 *BOA*, YEE, 14/1103-126/9. The English translation of this letter is in Nikki R. Keddie, *op. cit.*, Appendix IV 444-447.

13 Among the collections of Istanbul University Library there is a 12 pages long petition in Arabic by some Egyptians addressed to Sultan Abdulhamid II appealing for the release of Afghani. See J. M. Landau "An Egyptian Petition to Abdulhamid II on behalf of Afghani" in M. Sharon (ed.) *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization*, Leiden 1986, 209-219.

14 The British Embassy Dragoman in Istanbul noted in 1898 that "this Sheikh (Afgani) turned informer and pretended to become an English partisan some months before his death." *National Archives of India*, Foreign Dept. Secret E, April 1898 no 165. Also Afghani's letter to Sir Philip Currie, 12 December 1895, FO 60/594. In E. Kedouri, *op. cit.*, 87-88.

without a trial.⁽¹⁵⁾ Hence, from then on Afghani's case became a diplomatic matter and even strained the relations between the Ottomans and the Iranians. The following petitions from the office of the Ottoman Prime Minister (Sadaret) to the Sultan is the summary of correspondence between the two governments and the attitude of the Ottomans. It also clearly reveals persistence of the Iranians to get Afghani.

The Iranian Ambassador has asked for the extradition of Afghani and said that British Embassy made it clear that they would not protect him. The Iranian Ambassador further said that if he were not extradited he might be assaulted or even be assassinated without the knowledge or the consent of Iranian Embassy and of Iranian the Government because the Iranian people hated him.⁽¹⁶⁾ Upon the claim of Afghani that he was not an Iranian but a British subject, the Iranians asked the case to the British Embassy in Istanbul. The British Embassy did not confirm this. Then the Iranian Embassy insisted on his extradition by the Porte.⁽¹⁷⁾

The Iranian Ambassador made it clear that if Afghani was not to be extradited he himself was ordered by his government to return home. But the Ambassador was told that this was not possible because the Porte (Ottoman Government) was not convinced that Afghani was an Iranian subject or not and that since Afghani was in Istanbul as a guest, the extradition of a guest would be of an inhuman behavior. In addition the Ambassador was reminded and shown a copy of an official document sent from the Russian Foreign Office to the Iranian Consulate in Petersburg stating that Afghani was not an Iranian subject. Finally The Ambassador was told not to insist upon the extradition of Afghani under the existing treaties between the two Governments.⁽¹⁸⁾

Lastly, here is the report of the Ottoman Ambassador in Tehran on his meetings with the Shah and the Iranian Prime Minister regarding the same matter.

On the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet, when I was in the presence of the Shah he wanted to talk about the extradition of Afghani. I said that so far the Iranian government had failed to comply with the agreement on the exchange of criminals between the two countries so much so that even the Armenian terrorists who had escaped to Iran were not extradited. Then I asked him how it could be possible to demand only us alone to comply with this treaty. The Iranian answer to this was that they could not extradite those who were refugees but those who were not accepted as refugees must be handed over. On another day the Iranian Prime Minister showed me a document, as proof that Iran had complied with the treaty stating that some people had been delivered to the Ottomans. I immediately checked their case with

16 BOA Y.A.Hus. 352-23, 5.12.1313.

17 BOA, Y.A.Hus. 352-111, 24.12.1313.

18 BOA, Y.A.Hus. 357-124, 14.3.1314.

our embassy records and it appeared that these people had left Iran on their own free will. Thus, when they realized that there was no way that we could observe a treaty which they themselves never had, I offered to options of solutions as a special gesture from the Sultan to the Shah. The first was that Afghani be put on trial either in Istanbul or in an agreed upon European court and act according to the ruling. The second was that he be confined in a place outside Istanbul. Unfortunately, the Iranians did not accept either of these two options. Hence I told the Iranian Prime Minister that they had no right to ask for the extradition of Afghani especially after the horrible treatment meted out to the three Iranians who had been handed over to them.⁽¹⁹⁾

In the light of above, it is certain that Afghani's stay in Istanbul was not a pleasant one pleasant one contrary to what he might have expected to find. So far mainly two reasons were suggested to explain why he was kept in "honorable confinement" and not allowed to leave or be handed over to Iran. These were that the Sultan suspected that Afghani was involved in an anti Caliph movement, ie., the question of an Arab Caliphate and that Afghani knew too much about his Pan-Islamic ambitions. No doubt these might hold some truth, but judging from the insistence of Iran on his extradition and apparent threats that Afghani might be assassinated it may also be added that the considerations for the safety of Afghani's life must have contributed to his confinement. Here especially the Ottoman offer of Afghani's trial in Istanbul or in an international court is very interesting. Evidently the Iranians did not accept this. Nevertheless it was reported that Afghani was put to a trial in the Yildiz Palace in Istanbul where he was found not guilty of the Iranian charges,⁽²⁰⁾ though this acquittal neither satisfied the Iranians nor relieved Afghani thereafter. On the other hand the Ottoman determination not to deliver Afghani is also noticable for the fact that if the Sultan had wished Afghani dead he would have given him to the Iranians. But this was not the case and Afghani died, some time later in 1897 of cancer in Istanbul.

19. *BOA*, Y.A.Hus. 363-108, 18.7.1314. Official Iranian sources claim that the Ottoman "Sultan finally agreed to deliver Afghani to Iran" telegram from the Iran Ambassador to the Prime Minister, 22 Aug. 1896, quoted in Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din...* 417. But Ottoman sources do not corroborate this information.

20. Ziaullah Khan, "Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838-1897)", *Grassroots*, Vol. XIII-XIV, 1988, University of Sind, 37.