

**GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS AND THE KHALIFAT AL-KHULAFIYA INSTITUTION IN THE SAFAVID EMPIRE IN THE XIII-XV CENTURIES****Received: 31 January 2026 | Accepted: 03 March 2026 | Published: 15 April 2026**

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**Abstract**

The research examines the governance mechanisms developed in the Safavid dynasty during the 13th–15th centuries and the essence of the institution of the caliph, one of the main institutional pillars of these mechanisms. Although early Safavidism is presented in historiography mainly as a religious-sectarian phenomenon, recent studies show that this dynasty had complex and multi-level governance structures already from the XIII century. The article systematically analyzes the governance models used by the Safavid dynasty, starting from the initial stage of its formation, and during its transition to a political-military organization and, finally, to the ideology of statehood in the XV century. The institution of the caliph is evaluated not only as a bearer of religious authority, but also as a means of regional organization, ideological control, and social mobilization. The caliph's role as a coordinating link between the central leadership of the Safavid and local communities of disciples highlights the practical administrative functions of this institution. The article interprets the criteria for the selection of the caliphs, their spheres of authority, and their forms of attachment to the sheikh on the basis of specific historical facts. The results of the research allow us to prove the formation of the ideological and institutional foundations of the Safavid state in earlier periods.

**Keywords:** Safavid dynasty, governance mechanisms, khalifat al-khulafa, Safavid order, state formation.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The XIII-XV centuries are characterized as a complex period with political, social, and ideological changes in the history of the Middle East and Western Asia. The classical state structures weakening that exist in the region after the Mongol invasions, the fragmentation of central power, and the crisis of political legitimacy created conditions for the emergence of new forms of organization. In these circumstances, Sufi orders became important actors both in religious life and in social and political relations. The Safavid order formed in this historical context and became a center of regional influence in a short period. In historiography, the early stage of the Safavids has long been associated mainly with mystical and religious activities, but in historiography, their political and administrative potential has been relegated. However, recent researches shows that the Safavid was not only a Sufi order from the XIII century onwards, but also a socio-political organization with certain management

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characteristic. These mechanisms included functions such as organizing disciple communities, collecting financial resources, ensuring ideological control, and expanding regional influence. One of the most important components of the Safavid court's governance system was the institution of the caliph. Although the caliphs acted as representatives of the sheikh in the classical Sufi tradition, their functions in the Safavid environment took on a broader and more multifaceted character. They were not only presenters of religious instructions, but also organizers of local disciple communities, guarantors of military mobilization, and leading figures in political propaganda. From this point of view, the institution of the caliph served as the essential position for creating balance between centralized governance and some regional autonomy in the Safavid court.

The governance mechanisms that emerged in the Safavid court in the 13th–15th centuries cannot be explained only by Sufi thought. Turkic-Mongol political traditions, tribal organization, and the principles of personal loyalty to the leader also effected in the formation of these issues. As a result, the governance model of the Safavid court reflected a synthesis of religious charisma and political pragmatism. The main purpose of this article is comprehensively examining the governance mechanisms in the Safavid dynasty in the 13th–15th centuries and the place of the khilafat-i sufi institution within these mechanisms. Main purpose is to approve the influence of the Safavid state and its religious, cultural and political heritage was not limited to the 16th and 18th centuries, but extended to the present day. In the same period, Iran met its ancient borders politically, and religiously, it had a fabric of faith that would give it a spirit of unity. Iran became a state connected to the khalifat al-khulafa with the Arab conquests, and this situation continued until the khalifat al-khulafa was overthrown by the Mongols in the 13th century.

The study analyzes the formation, functional characteristics of the khalifat al-khulafa institution and the transformation processes it underwent over time. At the same time, the role of this institution in the transition of the Safavid dynasty from the Sufi-sect stage to the stage of a political-military movement is particularly emphasized. Thus, the article aims to show that the ideological and institutional foundations of Safavid statehood were formed in earlier periods.

## **2. The formation of the Safavid governance and the historical roots of administrative traditions in the XIII-XV centuries**

The formation of the Safavid hearth is closely connected with the complex political and social processes that existed in the Middle East and the South Caucasus in the second half of the 13th century. The weakening of centralized power structures in the region after the Mongol invasions and the intensification of the search for security and social justice among the population created conditions for the growth of the public authority of Sufi orders. During this period, Sufi sheikhs acted not only as

religious leaders but also as leaders who maintained public order, resolved disputes, and organized communities of disciples. It caused that the Safavid court emerged and soon became a center of regional influence.

Sheikh Safiuddin Ishaq Ardabili (1252–1334), considered the founder of the Safavid order, was a figure belonging to the Sufi tradition. Some sources emphasize his spiritual connection with Sheikh Zahid Gilani, a representative of the Zahidiyya order. It was as a result of this connection that Sheikh Safiuddin not only acquired religious knowledge, but also mastered the practical aspects of Sufi organization. Researchers such as Jean Aubin and I. P. Petrushevsky note that Sheikh Safiuddin's activity was not limited to individual mystical practice, but was aimed at creating a systematic Shiite and administrative network (Petrushevsky, 1969, p. 36) .

Early governance mechanisms in the Safavid court were based on the classical Sufi hierarchy. At the center of this hierarchy was the sheikh. The sheikh was not only the religious leader, but also the main figure who controlled the order's material resources, land holdings, and the daily lives of his followers. The second important element of the governance mechanism was the caliphs. During the time of Sheikh Safiaddin, the institution of the caliph did not yet have a fully political character, but its organizational functions were already clearly visible. The caliphs were sent to various regions as trusted representatives of the sheikh, accepted disciples, collected donations and spread the ideological line of the sect. In this regard, the caliphs played a coordinating role between the center and local communities. This institution was one of the main instruments of the geographical expansion of the Safavid ruling system (Kaplan, 2008. p. 187).

The influence of Iranian administrative culture on the formation of Safavid administrative traditions was not small. The waqf system, economic support for religious institutions, and local forms of governance existing in the Ardabil region were integrated into the organization of the Safavid governance. I. P. Petrushevsky characterizes this process as “the reconciliation of the Sufi institute with local administrative practices.” As a result of this reconciliation, the Safavid ruling system functioned as a structure with economic and social influence (Petrushevsky, 1969, p. 38).

After Sheikh Safiuddin, during the reign of his successors - Sheikh Sadruddin Musa and Sheikh Khaja Ali, the management mechanisms were improved. Especially during the reign of Sheikh Sadruddin Musa, the material base of the sect was strengthened, the number of land properties and endowments increased. This necessitated the formation of more systematic administrative control mechanisms. The sources note an increase in the number of caliphs and the expansion of their powers during this period, which indicates a gradual centralization of management (Newman, 2006, p. 152).

During the period when Sheikh Junayd took over the leadership of the Safavid dynasty, the issue of leadership within the organization caused serious conflicts. He entered into a dispute with

Sheikh Jafar for leadership, and this conflict caused some separations in the internal structure of the Safavid dynasty. In that political situation, the Baharlu ruler Jahanshah supported Sheikh Jafar, and as a result, Sheikh Junayd was expelled from Ardabil along with his supporters. This incident shows that the central leadership in the Safavid dynasty caused the intervention of external political forces.

The exile of Sheikh Junayd reveals that the Safavid court was perceived as a political institution, not just religious, in terms of governance. Lead the court became a matter of interest to regional authorities, Early Safavid organizations mechanisms and governance were closely linked to political factors. Sheikh Junayd's contact with the Bayandurlu after the exile and his marriage to Bayandurlu Hasan's sister in 1456 indicate that the leadership of the Safavid court was trying to strengthen its position through political scenery. This marriage was not only personal or religious in nature, but also a political step that expanded the legitimacy and operational capabilities of the Safavid leadership (Walter, 1992, p. 14-22).

During the reign of Sheikh Junayd, a significant change occurred in the character of the Safavid leadership. At this stage, the Safavid family was presented for the first time as sayyids descended from the seventh imam (from twelve of them) of Shiism. These claims served to justify the legitimacy of the Safavid leadership not only in terms of religious authority, but also in terms of hereditary and sacred origin. During the period of Sheikh Junayd's activity, a change is also observed in the main goals of the Safavid court. At this stage, the court was not satisfied with only the claim of moral and spiritual leadership, but also included the idea of secular power and political domination in its directions of activity. This approach shows that the Safavid leadership began to act not only as a religious leader, but also as a claimant to political power (Walter, 1992, p. 14-22).

Thus, the governance mechanisms formed in the Safavid court in the 13th–15th centuries cannot be evaluated only within the religious-sectarian framework. These mechanisms performed functions such as social control, management of economic resources, and expansion of regional influence. The institution of the Caliph was one of the most important pillars of this system, creating an institutional basis for the Safavid movement to acquire a political-military character in later periods. It is precisely this early governance experience that can be assessed as one of the main reasons why the Safavid court in the 15th century moved away from the classical Sufi organization and made a claim to statehood.

As a result of this transformation, the concept of leadership within the Safavid court evolved towards a complex governance model that incorporated both spiritual and secular authority. Such a model of authority was preserved as a lasting feature of Safavid leadership in later periods.

### **3. The khalifat al-khulafa and its place in the Safavid dynasty**

During Safavid period, the institution of the khalifat al-khulafa was formed from an early period as a structure that was not limited to religious functions, but had a broad organizational and social meaning. Although in the classical Sufi tradition the concept of “khalifat al-khulafa” meant a representative authorized to spread the teachings of the sheikh and manage the communities of his disciples, in the Safavid environment the functional framework of this institution expanded significantly. This expansion was directly related to both the geographical spread of the sect and the transformation of its social base.

In historiography, the essence of the Safavid khalifat al-khulafa institution has been explained from various aspects. Researchers such as Roger Savory and Jean Aubin evaluate the khalifat al-khulafa institution as one of the main pillars of the organizational structure of the Safavid hearth, emphasizing its important role in the transition from a sect to a political movement. Faruk Sumer interprets this institution as an adaptation of leadership traditions formed in the Turkic tribal environment to the Sufi environment.

The establishment of the Khalifat al-khulafa institution in the Safavid was due to the need for Sufi orders to create regional networks in the 13th–14th centuries. In order to ensure the connection of disciples living in areas far from the Ardabil center with the leadership of the order, it was necessary to appoint authorized representatives by the sheikh. These representatives were institutionalized under the name of Caliph over time. The establishment of the khilafat-i sufi institution in the Safavid was due to the need for Sufi orders to create regional networks in the 13th–14th centuries. In order to ensure the connection of disciples living in areas far from the Ardabil center with the leadership of the order, it was necessary to appoint authorized representatives by the sheikh. These representatives were institutionalized under the name of Caliph over time (Tanriverdi, 2023, p. 612).

During the reign of Sheikh Safiaddin, the caliphs were mainly engaged in the transmission of religious instructions and the spiritual education of their followers. However, already during the reign of Sheikh Sadraddin Musa and Sheikh Khaja Ali, the functions of the caliphs expanded, and their participation in social and economic processes increased. According to Petrushevsky, this stage can be considered as the period when the Safavid khalifat al-khulafa institution moved away from the classical Sufi model and became a semi-administrative structure. The issue of the selection of caliphs was also of particular importance. As indicated in the sources, the caliphs were mainly selected from the circle close to the sheikh, from among the murids with high religious authority and organizational skills. In their selection, not only spiritual qualities, but also factors such as social status, tribal affiliation and local influence played an important role. This fact shows that the administration in the

Safavid hearth was reconciled not only with religious criteria, but also with political and social realities.

One of the most important features of the institution of the caliph in the Safavid dynasty was its regional character. Caliphs activated as persons who were responsible for certain geographical areas, representing the interests of the sect in those regions. Caliphs in various regions of Anatolia, Azerbaijan, Shirvan, Georgia and Iran were a major factor in expanding the sphere of influence of the Safavid dynasty (Savory, 1980, p. 286). According to the research of Faruk Sumer, the Safavid caliphs, especially those operating in Anatolia, played a decisive role in increasing the influence of the sect among the Turkic tribes. They carried out religious propaganda and they tried to establish relations with tribal leaders and ensured the military mobilization of their followers. As a result of this activity, the Safavid hearth gradually turned into a structure similar to a tribal confederation (Sumer, 1992).

The regional khalifat al-khulafas were closely linked to the central government. The caliphs reported to Ardabil at certain times, presented donations, and carried out the political-religious instructions of the sheikh. This system of relations indicates the formation of a centralized but flexible model of governance in the Safavid hearth. Jean Aubin characterizes this model as “a synthesis of centralized charismatic authority and regional networks.” The activities of the Khalifat al-khulafa institution were not limited to the religious sphere. They played important role in the social life of their followers communities, resolving conflicts, organizing social assistance, and coordinating collective activities. It is essential to note, the Caliphs served as both religious and social leaders for their local communities (Aubin, 1979, p. 32-34).

The economic activities of the caliphs were also political in nature. The resources collected were used not only for religious purposes, but also for organizing military campaigns and building political alliances. This fact indicates that the Safavid khalifat al-khulafa institution gradually acquired the characteristics of a political institution. These caliphs, who were the rulers of each tribe, controlled all religious and partly legal issues of community. The caliphs dealt not only with mystical issues based on the murshid-murid relationship, but also with issues that were included in the framework of sharia in classical Islamic societies. This led to the formation of religious and legal mechanisms in the Qizilbash society outside the central sharia structures, and as a result, the Qizilbash religious and social system created an alternative order that did not fully comply with sharia law, but had practical functions. Through the institution of the Khalifat al-khulafa, not only the Qizilbash army, but also the Qizilbash masses spread over a wide geography were kept under control (Yıldırım, 2023; p. 187-188). Caliphs provided religious instruction in their respective regions, resolved the problems of their followers, administered religious ceremonies, and adjudicated legal disputes. Their activities were carried out outside the sharia courts, which revealed a non-classical model of religious authority in the

Safavid system of governance. The caliphs were not content with religious propaganda alone, but also actively participated in guiding the Safavid supporters in the political tensions that started in the regions. The influence of caliphs is seen in the military campaigns carried out by Sheikh Heydar in the Caucasus and Shirvan. They mobilized the masses of followers, linked the Safavid ideology with the concept of "holy war", and created conditions for the formation of a broad social base (Tanrıverdi, 2023; p. 718). The institution of the khalifat al-khulafa played a crucial role in preserving the continuity of the Safavid order after the death of Sheikh Heydar. In particular, the caliphs and influential murids were main supports in the process of hiding and protecting Sultan Ali and later Shah Ismail. Shah Ismail's religious and ideological training during the Lahijan period was also possible as a result of the activities of caliphs (Yıldırım, 2019; p. 462). During the Safavid period, the caliphs were sometimes appointed from among the sayyids. Sources indicate that Caliph Asadullah, the son of Caliph Hidayat, one of the sayyids of Isfahan, was appointed caliph by Shah Ismail. This fact shows that the sayyids played an active role not only in religion, but also in administrative structures (Dağlar, 2020; p. 447). During the Safavid period, the appointment of a caliph was confirmed by an official document called a "shajarah". This document was issued by the khalifat al-khulafa al-khulafa office. Mirza Ali Naqi Nasiri's report from 1729–1732 states that Sufis from various regions who were capable of guidance would come to the presence of the shah and be appointed caliph, and these appointments were formalized by the shajarah document (Rahimli, 2019, p. 277). In addition to the factors, the main driving force of spread of Safavid sect was the propaganda activities carried out by the Safavid sheikhs. The Ardabil caliphs spread this ideology and instructed them to propagate the ideological foundations of the sect. Special Safavid caliphs operating in Anatolia were considered one of the most important factors in the establishment of the Safavid state. They formed a solid social base for the sect in the regions to which they were sent, collected financial resources, and sent these resources to the Ardabil Dargah through secret channels (Omid, 2024, p. 221). As a result of this process, the Ardabil Khanate had great financial power. The activities of the caliphs were not limited to religious propaganda, but also included political activities against the Ottoman rule. The sources mention that Hasan Caliph, who was from the Anatolian population, revolted against the Ottomans. Ottoman sources also state that the Nur Ali Khalifat al-khulafa rebellion in 1512 was also associated with the instigation of the Safavids. Ottoman archival materials state that one of the main tasks of the Safavid caliphs was to increase the loyalty of the Anatolian Turkmen population to the Ardabil lodge and to distribute books that instilled the ideology of the sect in them. In addition to having these books read, the caliphs also created conditions for the mass migration of murids to Ardabil over time (Veliyeva, 2007, p. 414). These migrations served to form the military and social base for the Safavids to use in the future establishment of the state.

Towards the 15th century, the functions of the khalifat al-khulafa institution in the Safavid dynasty expanded further. During the reign of Sheikh Junayd and Sheikh Haidar, the caliphs no longer acted as only religious, but also military leaders and political organizers. Recently, the caliphs' ties with tribal leaders have strengthened, and their military potential has increased. During the reign of Sheikh Junayd, the caliphs no longer functioned solely as religious leaders of their murid communities, but as political organizers and military leaders. Sources report that the caliphs gathered armed groups in various regions, formed alliances with tribal leaders, and disseminated Safavid ideology in the context of political struggle. Jean Aubin characterizes this phase as “the period in which the Safavid caliphs became political subjects” (Aubin, 1979, p. 43).

According to Faruk Sumer, during this period the institution of the caliph was no longer an element of the classical Sufi hierarchy, but became an organic part of tribal-political structures. This indicates that governance in the Safavid ruling took on an explicitly political character. During the reign of Sheikh Heydar (1460–1488), the transformation process of the Safavid system speeded further. At this stage, the ideology of the Qizilbash was formed, and the disciples were united around a single ideological identity through special symbolism and rituals. The caliphs acted as the main carriers and organizers of this ideology.

During the reign of Sheikh Heydar, the military functions of the caliphs expanded even further. They were not content only with gathering armed groups, but also directly led military campaigns. This fact indicates that the Safavid caliphs had already acquired the characteristics of a military aristocracy. Ogtay Efendiyev notes that at this stage, the khalifat al-khulafa actually took on the character of a “military-political rank” (Efendiyev, 2007).

Thus, in the Safavid period, the institution of the khalifat al-khulafa was not only the internal structure of a religious organization, but also a complex management mechanism that combined social, economic, and political functions. The activities of this institution played a decisive role in the transformation of the Safavid movement from a regional Sufi center into a center of political power.

#### **4. Governance mechanisms in the Safavids: religious, social, and military aspects**

The administrative system of the Safavid state was created on the basis of the state traditions of the Baharlu and Bayandurlu states. Shortly after Ismail I left Lahijjan, he created a palace organization at the suggestion of the Shamli Huseyn beys in order to implement his political goals and objectives in a planned manner. By the time Ismail came to power, the foundation of a new state apparatus had been laid thanks to the high military elite, and a form of local administration had been created in the conquered territories. The gradual transformation of the Safavid court from a regional Sufi center to a political-military powerhouse in the 13th–15th centuries was closely related to the multifaceted nature

of the governance mechanisms that formed within it. These mechanisms were not limited to religious leadership, but also included functions such as social control, management of economic resources, and military mobilization. It was this complex governance model that allowed the Safavid court to move beyond the framework of a classical Sufi organization in the 15th century and make political claims (Bayramli, 2015).

The state formed by the Safavid dynasty was in fact a combined form of religious and secular power. Shah Ismail I, in addition to being a secular leader, also controlled spiritual and moral organizations and held the position of murshid-i kamil. The Shah, possessing unlimited power, was considered the head of the country's religious institutions. The Safavid state of Azerbaijan was an absolute monarchy. The central government system also included a supreme council consisting of twelve people with consultative rights. However, the Shah had the final say and decisions were made based on his opinion. The Sadr was in charge of the management of religious institutions, that is, religious institutions. He was the head of the supreme religious administration. The Sadr had to work to spread Shiism and had to know Sharia and secular laws perfectly. Because the rulings and decisions issued on behalf of the state had to be justified by the Sadr in accordance with Sharia laws. Not only religious figures, but every person in the state had to give a correct answer when they turned to the Sadr in case of difficulty. The Sadr supervised the Sharia laws. The Dastur-ul-Amal (law), which consisted of 96 articles, was compiled in 1555-1556 by Mir Zeynaddin Seyidali, who served as Sadr (Çelenk, 2014, p. 23).

One of the important components of the governance mechanisms of the Safavid school was the organization and control of murid communities. The relationship of muridism created not only individual religious affiliation, but also a collective social structure. Murids had to adhere to certain rules of conduct and prioritize the interests of the sect over personal interests. Control over the implementation of these rules was mainly carried out through the caliphs and their local representatives. As shown in the research of Ogtay Efendiyev, Safavid murid communities functioned in a certain sense as an “alternative model of society.” Within these communities, there were mechanisms for social assistance, collective labor, and mutual defense. Such a structure was especially attractive to the masses during periods of political instability (Suleymanov, 2018).

The sustainability of management mechanisms was impossible without an economic base. The formation and management of economic resources in the Safavid court was carried out mainly at the expense of donations, vows and endowment income. The collection and distribution of these resources was carried out through the caliphs and their subordinates. I. P. Petrushevsky characterizes this system as a “semi-centralized model of economic management” (Petrushevsky, 1969, p. 38).

One of the most important and at the same time most dynamic aspects of the governance mechanisms in the Safavid dynasty was military organization. Although this aspect was not yet clearly visible in the 13th–14th centuries, by the 15th century military elements had become an integral part of governance. At the center of this process stood the Qizilbash tribes.

According to the research of Faruk Sumer, the Qizilbash tribes initially established ties with the Safavid dynasty based on religious loyalty, and over time this loyalty took the form of political and military loyalty (Sumer, 1992). The Qizilbash considered the sheikh not only a religious leader, but also a political leader and military leader. This significantly increased the military mobilization potential of the Safavid dynasty. Military organization was not based on a centralized command system. Instead, tribal chiefs and caliphs led local military forces, with overall strategic direction given by the sheikh. Jean Aubin characterizes this system as a “decentralized but ideologically centralized military model.” This model gave the Safavid dynasty both flexibility and influence over a wide area (Sajjad, 2010 p. 227).

The military-political character of the institution of the khalifat al-khulafa from the middle of the 15th century can be assessed as the beginning of a qualitatively new stage in the Safavid model of governance. Caliphs began to act not only as religious leaders of disciple communities, but also as organizers and leaders of armed groups. Faruk Sumer explains this process as the ideological framing of the Qizilbash tribal associations.

The expansion of military functions also led to changes in the internal structure of the khalifat al-khulafa. In the selection of caliphs, not only religious knowledge and moral qualities, but also military skill, tribal influence and organizational ability became one of the main criteria. This change indicates that governance in the Safavid dynasty took on a pragmatic character. One of the main factors ensuring the continuity of the governing mechanisms in the Safavid hearth was a strong ideological framework. The sheikh sanctity, the special status of the Safavid dynasty, and the ideology of muridism constituted the basis of the legitimacy of the government. The caliphs continued their activities as the bearers and disseminators of this ideology. As Ogtay Efendiyev noted, Safavid ideology was not just governance theoretical basis, but practical tool (Efendiyev, 2007, p. 289). Through this ideology, the loyalty of the murids was ensured, military mobilization was legitimized, and social control was exercised. This interaction between governance mechanisms and ideology was one of the essential factors that increased the power of the Safavid order. This governance model had already created a sufficient institutional basis for the claim to statehood by the end of the 15th century. Although these mechanisms were transformed into formal state structures with the rise to power of Shah Ismail, their essence clearly reflects the governance traditions formed in the early period of the Safavid home. Roger Savory and Petrushevsky point to this continuity as a key factor explaining the characteristics of governance in the early stages of the Safavid state (Babayan, 2002).

After 1501, as a result of increasing the position of caliph in ruling class and political life, the Safavid rule and the sectarian structure were combined, and the Shah gained the status of both secular ruler and religious leader. For this reason, state administration and religious leadership were closely intertwined. As it is mentioned, the Caliphate-student relationship began to take on a hereditary character from this time. It is clear from the sources that from the middle of the 16th century, it became common practice for the son of a deceased caliph to be appointed caliph over the same group of Qizilbash students.

Thus, although the governance mechanisms in the Safavid hearth originated within the framework of a religious sect, over time they evolved into a complex system that combined social, economic, and military functions. The institution of the caliph and the Qizilbash factor at the center of this system formed the basic conditions for the Safavid movement to become a regional power center, and later a state.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the analysis of the governance mechanisms and the institution of the caliph that developed in the Safavid hearth in the 13th–15th centuries shows that Safavidism is not a phenomenon that can be explained only within the framework of a mystical-religious sect. On the contrary, this system acted as an organizational model that performed complex social, economy. In addition to Sufi traditions, Turkic-Mongol political culture and Iranian administrative experience played an important role in the formation of governance mechanisms in the Safavid court. A governance model based on personal loyalty to the leader, tribal organization, and military units expanded the social base of the Safavid court. The form of governance that emerged as a result of this synthesis was neither a fully classical Sufi model nor a traditional state structure; it acted as a hybrid model that combined elements of both systems. This study also highlights the need to reconsider the role of the khalifat al-khulafa in the study of Safavid history. The institution of the khalifat al-khulafa should be viewed not only as a religious structure, but also as a key element of social and political governance. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the origins of Safavid statehood and a correct assessment of its ideological and institutional foundations. The research prove the caliphs, going beyond the function of a religious representative in the classical Sufi tradition, also assumed functions such as regional governance, social organization, and military mobilization. They played an important role between the central government and local communities of disciples, ensuring the geographical expansion and ideological unity of the Safavid hearth. This multifunctional activity of the khalifat al-khulafa institution allowed the Safavid movement to have a flexible and effective governance system.

In addition to Sufi traditions, Turkic-Mongol political culture and Iranian administrative experience played an crucial role in the formation of governance system and features in the Safavid court. A governance model based on personal loyalty to the leader, tribal organization, and military units expanded the social base of the Safavid court. The form of governance that emerged as a result of this synthesis was neither a fully classical Sufi model nor a traditional state structure; it acted as a hybrid model that combined elements of both systems. This study also notes the need to reconsider the role of the khalifat al-khulafa in the study of Safavid history. The institution of the khalifat al-khulafa should be viewed not only as a religious structure, but also as a key elements of social and political governance policy and system. This approach allows to understand deeply the origins of Safavid statehood and a correct assessment of its ideological and institutional foundations.

Consequently, the governance mechanisms and the institution of the caliph represent a model of transformation that is rare in the history of the region. This model enabled the transformation of the Sufi order into a political state based on the organic unity of religious charisma, social organization, and military mobilization. The Safavid experience demonstrates the scientific value of studying early governance structures for both historical comprehension and the explanation of state formation processes in the Middle East and the Caucasus.

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