

The Middle East

A History

SEVENTH EDITION

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THE MIDDLE EAST: A HISTORY, SEVENTH EDITION

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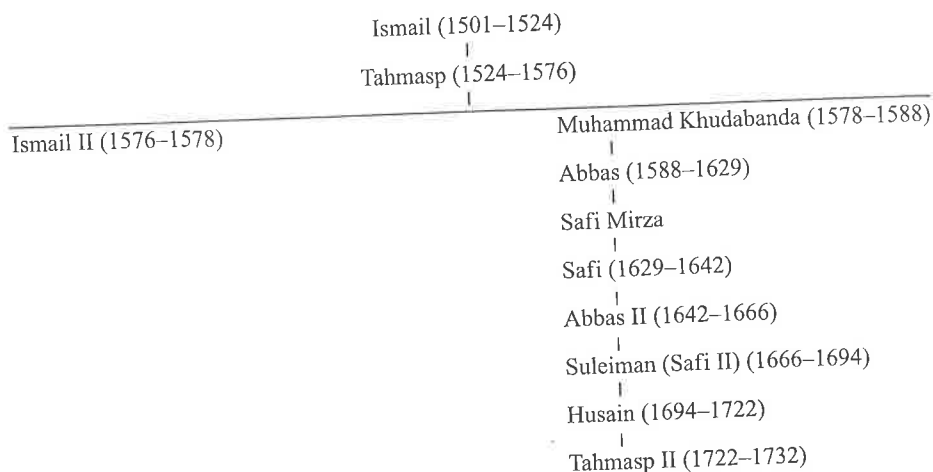
The Flowering and Collapse of Safavid Iran

*I*n the early modern period of Middle Eastern history the Shii Safavid dynasty dominated Iran, establishing a large empire beginning in 1501 that lasted for about 220 years. During this time Iran gained a religious and political identity separate from that of its Sunni neighbors—the Ottomans, the Mughals of India, and the Uzbeks of central Asia. Military competition with the larger Ottoman Empire strongly affected the Safavids, whose vigorous rulers such as Ismail and Abbas the Great often fought the sultans of Istanbul, even while interacting with them culturally. In the two centuries up to its abrupt demise in 1722, the Safavid state usually witnessed a capable administration, religious conversion on a large scale, economic prosperity, and cultural flowering.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SAFAVIDS IN IRAN

As the Mongol Il-Khan state declined in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, many Turkoman tribes became autonomous. At about the same time numerous independent Sufi orders appeared. Some of the Turkoman tribes and the Sufi orders converted to Shiism, as Sufi leadership became hereditary and combined religious and military roles along with a frontier heterodoxy.

After the Mongols destroyed the city of Ardabil in northwestern Iran in 1220, it subsequently revived but only as a small provincial town. A Sufi order in Ardabil was called Safavid after its first leader, Safi al-Din, a Sunni, who died in 1334. The tomb of the Safavid leader became a shrine, and the complex of buildings around it served as a place of pilgrimage. Political chaos, which disturbed northwestern Iran, enabled the Safavid family to maintain their local freedom and gain great wealth. They became Shii at some time after 1392 and by the 1450s were seeking political power as allies of the Aq Quyunlu Turkomans. Raids against Christian Georgia earned the Safavids the title of ghazi. Following the death in battle of the Safavid Haidar in 1488, his son took the title padishah (king or emperor), and in the late fifteenth century the charismatic Safavid rulers claimed to be the Hidden Imam of the Twelver Shiis, who came to that position



The Safavids

as a result of inheritance and not by designation of a predecessor. In time, powerful Turkoman clans and Sufi groups in western Iran and eastern Anatolia accepted and supported the Safavid order. (As mentioned earlier, the Sufis were called *qizilbash*, or “red head,” a term derived from their distinctive hat—a scarlet cone-shaped affair with twelve scallops, or gores, one for each of the twelve Shii imams.)

Ismail, a younger son of Haidar, became the leader of the Safavid dynasty. With the aid of Turkish-speaking *qizilbash* tribes and a small group of advisers, Ismail defeated his maternal relatives, the Aq Quyunlu, took Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1501, and, at the age of fourteen, was proclaimed shah in Tabriz.

As leader of the Safavid religious order, Ismail regarded himself in his poetry—and was accepted—as a divine reincarnation. He was worshiped during his lifetime as a saint who possessed supernatural attributes and who, consequently, was invincible; his subjects prostrated themselves before him as before God. His state was based on the principles of Twelver Shiism, and his task in Iran was to spread that sect. Wherever his edict reached, the choice was fixed: conversion to Shiism or death. Though most Iranians had been Sunni Muslims, Ismail’s cruelty, coupled with his policy of confiscating properties of Sunnis, expropriating endowments of Sunni Sufi orders, executing or exiling Sunni religious leaders, bringing into Iran Shii scholars from the Arab world (especially from southern Lebanon), and the already existing Shii sentiment in Qumm and Khurasan and among guilds, all changed Iran into a Shii state by the time of Ismail’s death in 1524. His power was based on the support of the Turkish clan leaders, held by a mystical allegiance and tied to urban populations who were devotees of the Safavids. The tribal and Sufi leaders together could be called a kind of religious fraternity. In return for soldiers and revenue, each *qizilbash* chief was given a province, with the power of life and death over its people and the obligation to convert all to Shiism.

Claiming descent from the prophet Muhammad, Ali, and the seventh Shii imam and also from Aq Quyunlu Turks and Byzantine emperors, Ismail united Iranians, Turks, and

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Shiis in devotion to his mystical being. Ismail established a theocratic state in western Iran with his principal strength in the north. Ismail gained control of central and southern Iran in 1503, and of Baghdad and southwest Iran in 1508. To the west, he seized most of the Tigris-Euphrates basin including Diyarbakir in 1507, and later he reached Dhu al-Qadr and the frontiers of the Ottomans. Expanding eastward, he successfully waged war against the Sunni Uzbegs of central Asia, killing Muhammad Shaibani, their chieftain, in 1510. Herat now became the second most important city in the state and the residence of the heir to the throne, despite the temporary resurgence of the Uzbegs in 1512.

Ismail sent religious-political agents to Anatolia, where they took advantage of the economic distress of the Turkoman tribes to urge revolt against the Ottomans. To overawe the Ottoman sultan Bayezid II, Ismail had the Uzbek chieftain's skin stuffed with straw and sent to him as a warning. (In an even more typically macabre gesture Ismail had that same victim's skull rimmed with gold and set with jewels, using it for a while as his drinking cup.)

A governing apparatus of three main divisions was formed: military, religious, and bureaucratic. At first, no sharp distinction in the ruling establishment existed between military and civilian officers: all were members of the monarch's household. (The only real distinction was that most of the military spoke Turkish and most of the civilians spoke Persian). As political centralization gained momentum, the reins of government were gathered into the hands of Ismail's associates and officials.

At the top of the somewhat fluid hierarchy stood the viceroy, who exercised both temporal and spiritual authority. He took a leading role in political affairs, acted as a military commander, and influenced the selection of officials. The viceroys spoke Persian, a fact deeply resented by the qizilbash Turkish leaders. In the midst of a battle against the Uzbegs in 1512, the qizilbash forces deserted, guaranteeing the defeat and death of the viceroy. After another viceroy was killed in the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, the position was limited to supervision of the bureaucracy and the civil administration. Next in line stood the commander in chief, a post that was originally held by the viceroy and that, in addition to controlling the military, had considerable influence in administrative and political matters. In 1509, Ismail chose an obscure officer for this post in an obvious move to weaken the power of the Turkoman leaders. Persian-speaking individuals also held the posts of supervisor of the ulama and vizir. Naturally there developed among these officials a great deal of rivalry for power and for Ismail's favor.

When Selim I seized the Ottoman throne in Istanbul in 1512, he became involved in the raging quarrel in Anatolia over the qizilbash tribes. Selim set out to destroy Ismail. At the battle of Chaldiran in 1514 the Ottomans outnumbered the Safavids; in addition, the Ottoman forces enjoyed the superiority of janissary muskets and Ottoman artillery over the Safavid swords, spears, and bows. (The Safavids had used cannons in sieges, but they were reluctant to use cannons and handguns, and had not as yet successfully integrated handguns and artillery into their military; the Ottomans, on the other hand, adapted their warfare to the new technology.) Most Turkoman qizilbash leaders and many high Iranian officials were killed. The Ottomans temporarily occupied the Safavid capital of Tabriz, but the long lines of transportation back to Anatolia, the opposition of the soldiers to such a distant campaign, and the bitter cold induced Selim to retreat. The Ottomans did, however, gain and keep Diyarbakir and most of eastern Anatolia.

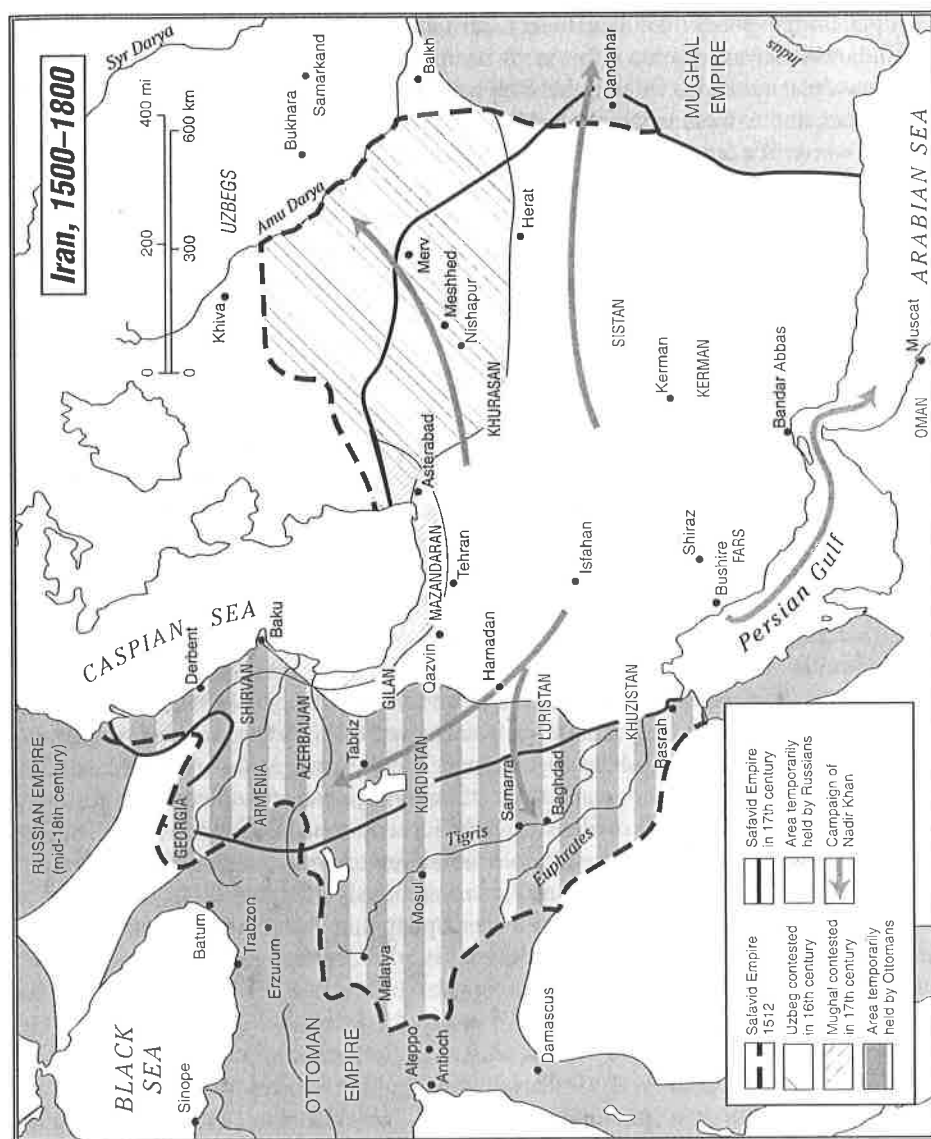
Ismail's spirit was crushed. It is said that he never smiled again, and he began to drink excessively. Henceforth the Turkoman leaders tended to doubt Ismail's claim of supernatural powers. But with Selim seizing Kurdistan and Diyarbakir, and wiping out qizilbash rebellion in Anatolia, the Turkoman qizilbash seemed to have had no choice but loyalty to Ismail. The shah never again led troops into battle. He tried to put civilians into positions of trust and power in order to break the might of the qizilbash leaders, although he could not control all the provinces, especially Khurasan. With his death in 1524 at the age of thirty-six, the full extent of the decline of the ruling institution became apparent.

SHAH TAHMASP I

Because when Ismail died his eldest son, Tahmasp, was only ten years old, Turkoman leaders were able to regain their power. Civil war among the Turkoman tribes kept the state in turmoil until Tahmasp subdued the rebellions and ended the strife by seizing power for himself and appointing an Iranian viceroy in 1533. Tahmasp then established his personal authority, civilian rule as set by Ismail became dominant, and the Safavid state survived. The Sufi organization was unsuccessful in penetrating or subverting the administrative system of the Safavid government. The Safavid family tended to marry prominent women and men from the Turkoman qizilbash tribes. During this period in Iran the main lines of monarchy were worked out, the capital was fixed first at Qazvin and later in Isfahan, and Shiism became the established official religion.

Despite this political turmoil, textiles, ceramics, calligraphy, and miniature painting flourished during Tahmasp's reign. The shah himself was a noted poet, calligrapher, and painter. Illustrations for Firdawsi's *Shahnamah* commissioned by Ismail and Tahmasp were especially splendid and they celebrated royal grandeur. Chroniclers, theologians, geographers, and astrologers flourished. Safavid-era madrasahs emphasized sciences such as medicine, logic, and scholastic theology, while royal patronage encouraged the study of religious law, hadith, and mathematics. In religious matters, Tahmasp did not regard himself as being semidivine; instead, he designated a leading cleric as the deputy of the Hidden Imam (a concept later called the mujtahid of the age).

External enemies threatened the Safavid lands. The Uzbeks took Khurasan but were defeated by Tahmasp in 1528, in large part thanks to cannons provided by the Portuguese. To the west, when the Ottoman sultan Suleiman I threatened Iran over its support of various Turkoman chiefs, Tahmasp in vain sent envoys to Charles V for aid. In 1534 the Ottomans invaded, sacking Tabriz and Gilan, and capturing Baghdad. (Central Iraq remained in Ottoman hands for ninety years.) Another campaign occurred in 1548 when Tahmasp's brother induced the Ottomans to send an invading army that seized Azerbaijan. Peace was arranged in 1555, but the shah lost Iraq to the Ottomans. Although a shortage of artillery and muskets was a disadvantage to Tahmasp, his scorched-earth strategy, distances from Istanbul, and difficult terrain stopped the Ottoman forces from permanent conquest. Thus, Tahmasp was able to enforce his rule from the Tigris to central Asia and from the Persian Gulf to both sides of the Caspian Sea. Border provinces lost their autonomy and were directly incorporated into the state.



Within the Safavid lands there was competition between the qizilbash Turkomans and Persian-speaking groups. Shah Tahmasp attempted, as his father had before him, to find an alternative to the power of unreliable Sufis and qizilbash. Nearly every province was held by one of their leaders, and their incomes and retainers gave them an independence difficult to offset. Between 1540 and 1544 Tahmasp sent four expeditions to Georgia, bringing back 30,000 prisoners, most of whom were boys who would be trained as ghulams—slaves to serve in his army or in administration. The girls served as concubines whose sons also entered the shah's service. This policy of creating a Georgian, Circassian, and Armenian counterweight to the qizilbash in the end proved disastrous, as civil war broke out between them in 1572 when Tahmasp grew old and feeble.

Tahmasp's mother competed for influence over the shah with her daughter, Mahin Banu (d. 1562), who played a substantial role in state matters. Mahin Banu, an excellent calligrapher, was actively engaged in writing about foreign relations with both the Ottomans and the Mughals. She was also a patron of Shii shrines and she established numerous charitable waqfs, including some that helped orphaned girls. Several later female members of the Safavid royal family also were prominent in government affairs, in part because of their being educated by tutors inside the imperial harem. Other elite urban women similarly contributed to Safavid and Shii shrines and were engaged in the economy through owning interests in homes, baths, caravansarais, shops, water wells, and land. Gender relations for most urban women seem to have been based on patterns of living derived from patriarchal values in society, gender segregation, shariah mandates, veiling, and arranged marriages.

The women of the royal family and their many sons began to intrigue for the succession to the throne toward the end of Tahmasp's life. Two leading candidates were Prince Ismail, whose mother was a Circassian, and Prince Haidar, whose mother was a Georgian. In the end the qizilbash declared they would support sons of Turkish or Circassian mothers only.

In 1576, Tahmasp was poisoned and the qizilbash had the power to put Ismail II on the throne. Having been incarcerated for twenty years by his father, he was brutal toward his royal relatives. He killed all the royal princes except Prince Muhammad Khudabanda, who was nearly blind and not considered a threat. The shah attempted to return Iran to Sunnism and executed many qizilbash and Sufi leaders who had supported his brothers. Ismail finally gave orders to have his sole remaining brother executed. Before the deed could be committed, however, the shah died mysteriously; it is possible he was poisoned.

Shah Muhammad Khudabanda ruled as a puppet in Turkoman hands for ten years until 1588. During this time of Safavid weakness the Ottomans began a war that lasted from 1578 to 1590 and resulted in their reconquest of Tabriz. Shah Muhammad was overthrown and killed by Turkoman leaders who seized Qazvin, the capital, and who put his sixteen-year-old son, Abbas, on the throne. Ruling for forty-one years, Abbas ushered in a new age in Iranian history. By 1587, religious zeal for Safavid rule had lessened, and over the century the shah's position as the head of a secular state dominated. There had been a gradual change and evolution under Tahmasp, with acceptance of the idea of a central government. He strengthened the state by moving the capital from Tabriz to Qazvin, which was safer from Ottoman assault. Moreover, Shii doctrinal unity had been achieved to a great extent, making religion much less of an emotional issue. One could now recognize the consolidation of Safavid Iran into a state of considerable permanence.

SHAH ABBAS THE GREAT OF ISFAHAN

Only about one-half of the Safavid Empire was still intact when Abbas came to the throne. After the qizilbash chieftains left Herat for Qazvin to install Abbas on the Safavid throne in 1588, the Sunni Uzbek tribes had invaded and captured Herat. Shah Abbas met them at Meshhed, but crucial rebellions of local princes in his western provinces demanded his immediate return. With combined forces of local qizilbash tribes and an army improvised from Georgian prisoners and held together by his personal leadership, Abbas was able to put down a serious uprising in Shiraz and soon had central Iran pacified. The Ottoman attack in the west could not be thwarted, however, and by the peace of 1590 with Murad III, Tabriz, some Caspian ports, and surrounding areas were ceded. In the same year Abbas moved the capital to Isfahan.

During the following seven years Abbas consolidated his position and power, his initial step being the weakening of qizilbash forces. Their leaders were killed and their provinces and lands confiscated. With the income from these holdings plus the funds of the royal household, Abbas formed a standing army of 10,000 horsemen from the qizilbash and Persian-speaking tribes and 12,000 foot soldiers from prisoners and slaves from Armenia and Georgia. In addition to this strengthening of manpower, Abbas significantly improved his firepower.

In 1598, Robert Sherley, along with other Englishmen, arrived in Isfahan, the new capital, to discuss trade and an alliance against the Ottomans and the Dutch. The Englishmen helped Abbas train musketeers and taught his men how to cast cannon. Abbas also bought weapons from Russia and Venice. Within a few years, Abbas had a force of 12,000 artillery men equipped with 500 brass and bronze cannons, with which he effectively challenged the Ottoman armies as well as internal dissidents. A new corps of 12,000 mounted musketeers was raised from the peasantry, and another 10,000 Georgian prisoners were added to the army. Throughout his reign Abbas continued the policy of turning prisoners of war into soldiers and administrators: on one occasion 20,000 Armenians were taken from the region of Erzurum and pressed into service; on another, an expedition into Georgia, tens of thousands of prisoners were taken and moved into his state in various areas and capacities.

By 1602, Abbas cleared the eastern frontiers of challengers. He drove the Uzbeks from Meshhed, Herat, and Khurasan and moved eastward to Balkh. Abbas attempted to stamp out Sunnism in eastern Iran. To defend Khurasan he transported thousands of Kurdish horsemen and their families to the frontier, establishing them so securely that many of their descendants still reside in that area. War against the Ottomans erupted in 1603, and Tabriz was recaptured. With the decline of Ottoman military force in eastern Anatolia, Abbas took Kurdistan and Shirvan from Ahmed I and in 1623 recaptured Baghdad, Mosul, and Diyarbakir, restoring to Iran the territories held at the time of Shah Ismail. On other fronts, Abbas defeated the Mughals of India, taking Qandahar (Kandahar) in Afghanistan; seized the Bahrain Islands in the Persian Gulf; and drove the Portuguese from Hormuz in 1622, founding the important Persian Gulf trading post of Bandar Abbas. When Shah Abbas died in 1629, his lands enjoyed peace and prosperity. In contrast, the Ottoman Empire had been defeated, Russia was recovering from its Time of Troubles, and the Mughals in India were beginning to lose hold of south Asia.

ADMINISTRATION AND TRADE UNDER ABBAS

By the year 1606, Shah Abbas had established his direct rule over most of the provinces of Iran. Warfare was relegated to the frontiers and was fought by professional soldiers as well as qizilbash. The administration of most of the provinces was overseen by governors subservient to the royal will. Like Allahverdi Khan, governor of Fars and one of Abbas's first appointees, many of these officials were slaves. Eventually more than a fifth of the central government came from the ghulam slave ranks. Still, a majority of the civil administration was drawn from Persian-speaking free people.

Over one-half of the population consisted of peasant farmers living in villages; the next largest economic group was made up of nomads and seminomads, organized usually into tribes; and the smallest category consisted of town and city dwellers. Most imperial revenues came from the tax on land. A village's harvest was divided into shares which were paid to its several owners, whether landlords, iqta holders, or managers of waqfs. Peasants were obliged to stay in the villages, whose land they farmed communally. Sometimes they fled when the burden of taxation or payments to landlords became too great. In theory the shah owned most of the land on behalf of the Hidden Imam. Iqtas or revocable grants of revenue constituted the chief form of payment for government officials and soldiers, along with exemptions from taxes. The central government set tax rates and procedures, but the actual collection of taxes was decentralized. Strong villages, guilds, landlords, and tribes made special arrangements, thereby pushing more of the tax burden onto weaker groups. Abbas and earlier shahs co-opted leaders into their service by giving them the right to collect taxes from the peasants. These leaders also were in charge of law and order locally and had to muster troops in the event of war. Often local elites held these privileges on a hereditary basis, thereby giving them a base of political power. From the beginning of the Safavid dynasty, a system of tax farming was also used, especially for collecting indirect taxes; special religious taxes were collected directly by the ulama. Guilds collected taxes from consumers. The numerous craft guilds met with city officials to debate taxes and matters of general concern; on occasion they protested government restrictions and oppression by officials.

The shah created numerous religious endowments as symbols of his commitment to Twelver Shiism. Abbas enhanced the post of *sadr*, an administrative official and head of the religious and judicial hierarchy, who gained in power by becoming charged with the administration of many waqfs. Madrasahs, courts, and mosques were flourishing, but they were not as efficiently organized and as subservient to imperial authority as in the Ottoman Empire. The shah ordered the compilation of a legal treatise that became the basis of law for the century. Shii ulama were brought to Iran from the Arab theological centers of southern Lebanon and Bahrain, and the shah persecuted most Sufi orders. The great philosopher and metaphysician Mullah Sadra Shirazi (d. 1640), writing in Arabic, espoused Gnostic views. As a result, he was strongly attacked by the Shii ulama.

Abbas had a special concern for commerce, both domestic and foreign. To connect all major cities, Abbas provided a network of roads that every 20 miles (30 km.) or so had a secure caravansarai where several caravans could spend the night safe from marauders. The shah and other prominent government officials traded on their own account.

Often elite figures would force merchants to buy or sell goods on highly beneficial terms, with government having the right of first purchase of a commercial shipment. Commerce was difficult in Iran because of the numerous mountains and deserts, as well as the relatively small and dispersed population, but Abbas and his successors helped organize a variety of merchant groups and trading routes to encourage trade. The shah showed initiative with regard to the important and highly profitable silk trade. Since Armenian communities were basic in the silk trade, with one of their centers at Julfa on the Aras River in Azerbaijan, Abbas imported 3000 Armenian families and created New Julfa for them on the outskirts of Isfahan. A monopoly over the silk export trade was established, with the Armenians running it for the shah. They prospered so greatly that some Armenian merchants lived in the style of the Safavid imperial court. Armenian religious manuscript illumination reached new heights, and the printing of Armenian secular works began in 1608.

To exploit European enthusiasm for fine porcelain from China, Abbas brought 300 Chinese potters to Isfahan to create pottery in the Chinese style. Not only was an additional export developed but an important tradition was established, for the most skillful and resourceful potters since the seventeenth century have been in Isfahan.

It was not long before Iranian artisanal goods were highly esteemed and their quality and artistry became legendary. Among the more important were silk and wool carpets and textiles of all types, porcelains, miniature paintings and albums, enamelwork, glassware, lacquered woods, bookbindings, leather goods, gold and silver plates, vases, and fine steel swords. Since many of these items were the product of court workshops, they were of a design and workmanship that were nearly always superb. As commercial relations with Europe and India increased in the seventeenth century, export goods declined somewhat in quality and were more influenced by foreign motifs.

Undoubtedly the best-known articles have been the Persian carpets. The finest of these carpets were made in court workshops for the court and the wealthiest patrons, few if any being exported. Only materials of the highest quality were employed in their manufacture. Sheep were specially bred for their delicate wool and were tended like children so that the wool would never be soiled or roughened. Even the water for washing the wool was important. Court painters designed the carpets, often using medallion patterns and also employing refined stylized motifs that incorporated gardens, animals, and pools. Rugs manufactured for export, though of a lesser quality, were nevertheless rich in color, design, and fabrication, most coming from workshops closely allied to the court. Outside the imperial capital the carpet weaving of nomads and villagers followed the old traditions and was often of high quality, particularly in the making of plain-weave, lightweight kilims used for travel.

Skills in other arts were also highly developed. Velvets, brocades, and embroideries were produced with the greatest care. Painting and the decorative arts were of a highly intricate style that displayed a keen sense of blending floral and geometric patterns to create a pleasing whole. Potters learned how to decorate their wares in many colors, often firing seven or more colors at once on large tiles. Shah Abbas was so fond of fine calligraphy that he is said to have personally held a candlestick so that his favorite artist could see better as he wrote.

THE SPLENDOR OF ISFAHAN

The internal stability established by Shah Abbas the Great encouraged a vast increase in trade, raised levels of production, opened wider avenues of opportunity for many, and ensured prosperity for much of the population. At the court in Isfahan the resulting wealth transformed the style of life to a degree of lavishness seldom seen. European visitors gave descriptions of the dazzling opulence: Abbas on his throne surrounded by several hundred courtiers clothed in gold and silver with an array of gray, scarlet, yellow, green, plum, blue, and maroon silks embroidered with the rarest of jewels.

In the center of the new, planned district of Isfahan, Abbas surrounded a great open square, 560 yards by 174 yards (512 m. by 159 m.), with magnificent buildings. The square was used for polo—the popular sport of the courtiers at that time—horse races, religious processions, fireworks displays, and executions. On one side of the square was the Ali Kapu, an entrance to the imperial palace, featuring a lovely pavilion in which Abbas liked to lounge with his courtiers and watch the festivities of the square. On another side was the imperial mosque, Masjid-i Shah, masterpiece of Safavid architecture. An impressive pointed archway more than 80 feet (24 m.) high led to an inner courtyard surrounded by a graceful two-storied arcade. Opposite the entrance was another portal leading to the mosque proper, whose walls carried a large dome, the exterior of which was covered by exquisite polychrome tiles with arabesque patterns in dark blue and green on a sky-blue background. On another side of the area was a great covered bazaar with a monumental arched entrance. The dome of the imperial mosque served as a landmark of the center of the heavily walled city, which eventually had 600,000 inhabitants and boasted 1802 caravansarais, 162 mosques, 273 public baths, 48 colleges and academies, and numerous coffeehouses. Isfahan, with its pools, bridges, and water-courses, was a flower lover's paradise, its gardens displaying roses, jasmine, lilies, irises, poppies, and many other flowers. Abbas himself laid out the gardens, planned the buildings, and even gave detailed instructions to the workmen.

UZBEG CENTRAL ASIA

At the time when the Safavids were accomplishing much in the cultural and military arenas, in the arid steppelands of central Asia the heirs of Timur were driven into India, where they subsequently created the Mughal Empire. In their place, the Shaibanid and Tuqay Timurid descendants of the Mongol conqueror Genghiz Khan established Sunni states based on Uzbek Turkish-Mongol tribes. Succession in the royal families to the position of khan or leader usually went to the senior male in the family, and military and fiscal power often was decentralized among various royal princes. The Turkish Uzbek and Persian Tajik nomadic, village, and urban populations also provided military and Sufi leaders. Administration was less formal and thorough than in the Safavid Empire; for instance, the rulers did not have a formal standing army. Holders of revocable grants played a large role in tax collection and provincial administration. The Hanafi rite of Islam dominated the shariah courts as supported by the political leadership.

Muhammad Shaibani Khan, the grandson of an earlier Uzbek leader, rose from a cavalry soldier to governor of Tashkent by 1494. He based his claim to power on descent from the Mongol conqueror Genghiz Khan. After Muhammad Shaibani's capture of Samarkand in 1501 he expanded the new Uzbek state to Herat in 1507, but following his defeat and execution by Shah Ismail the khanate was more limited geographically, including chiefly Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, and Balkh. Although the Shaibanids defended themselves against Mughal and Safavid attacks, internal divisions limited their military power. Civil wars between 1550 and 1582 ultimately resulted in the victory of one Shaibanid clan, which united all of the region. Abd Allah Khan (1583–1598) overcame the Safavids and seized Herat and most of Khurasan, but upon his death and the assassination of his heir, anarchy ensued. The Safavid Abbas the Great regained eastern Iran, while in central Asia the Shaibanid dynasty disappeared.

Rule over Uzbek central Asia fell into the hands of another group of descendants of Genghiz Khan, the Tuqay Timurid clan. They consolidated their power during the decade of the 1600s, gaining their capital Bukhara, as well as Samarkand and Balkh, but ultimately ceding Tashkent to the expanding power of the Kazakhs. The long and relatively peaceful reign of Imam Quli Khan (1612–1642) was followed by civil war and Mughal invasion, and finally the reestablishment of the Tuqay Timurids, who ruled from both Bukhara and Balkh. In the last half of the seventeenth century the Tuqay Timurids maintained their state against numerous foes, supported the ulama and Sufis, and fostered the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Both branches of the Genghiz Khan family, the Shaibanids and the Tuqay Timurids, built mosques, madrasahs, Sufi centers, and royal palaces in central Asia. The Tuqay Timurid khans endowed shrines with waqf properties to provide money for expenses. Literature written in eastern Turkish dialects and Persian poetry provided a basis for a common culture heavily influenced by Safavid Iran, and miniature painting modeled on the style of Herat flourished in Bukhara, which was the intellectual capital of Muslim central Asia.

In the first half of the eighteenth century central Asia experienced a general crisis, including political disintegration, economic decay, urban collapse, the enhancement of tribal power, and the decline of settled agriculture. Government revenues lessened as commerce decreased, while local groups successfully challenged the power of the various royal families. Samarkand was completely abandoned and devastated. The Tuqay Timurid khans in Bukhara lost all real power, although they remained symbols of legitimate rule. Kazakh tribes expanded their influence, while Turkmen groups moved into Khurasan and parts of central Asia. As a result, an ethnic and linguistic patchwork of settlements emerged, where widely varying groups of people lived side by side.

SHAHS SAFI AND ABBAS II

South of Uzbek central Asia in Iran, the last century of Safavid rule began with the relatively uneventful reigns of Shahs Safi and Abbas II, who preserved the basic institutions and boundaries of the empire between 1629 and 1666. Personally the shahs were capricious and cruel, and, as was perhaps to be expected, they could not maintain the

level of rule of Abbas the Great. During this time a transition took place from an expansionist military and foreign policy to a more internally oriented leadership; for most Safavid subjects the change was probably at first beneficial.

The empire was preserved intact by a multitude of factors: the widespread acceptance of Shiism as a common bond among the people, the strength of the administration, the quality of many officials, the vitality of commerce, the general peace, the internal tranquility, and the weakness of opponents beyond the frontiers. Without these, the dynasty and the state might well have become weak earlier than was actually the case.

A decline in the experience and ability of the rulers was caused by Abbas I. Because he feared the popularity of his own sons, he had his eldest executed and two others blinded, making them ineligible to rule. In addition, he instituted the practice of keeping the royal princes as prisoners within the palace, in the company of women and servants who satisfied their every sensual whim. The royal princes no longer governed provinces as training for possibly ascending to the throne. Instead, they were catapulted to power after years of polite imprisonment in Isfahan. Court officials, women of the harem, and slave retainers influenced them strongly. Queen mothers played an especially great role at court. Effective control of administration frequently fell into the hands of the grand vizir. The royal family now tended to arrange marriages of Safavid princesses with members of the ulama, bureaucrats, and descendants of the prophet Muhammad.

In 1629 Abbas was succeeded by his young grandson, Shah Safi, who murdered his mother, a sister, his favorite wife, army generals, provincial governors, and many of the court officials. Nevertheless, the government under Safi did have the strength and will to repel Uzbek incursions into Khurasan and suppress rebellions in Gilan, although the Mughals repossessed Qandahar and the Ottomans retook Baghdad in 1638. There ensued a peace treaty that ended the incessant Safavid-Ottoman wars—at the cost of Iraq becoming Ottoman. The shah was a noted patron of miniature painting, thus continuing Isfahan's reputation as the center for great successes in this art form.

Safi died from drinking too much and was followed in 1642 by his ten-year-old son, Abbas II, who started with real promise and at the age of sixteen showed vigor and flashes of his great-grandfather's character by leading an army in the recapture of Qandahar. Despite this success, Abbas II usually chose peace with his neighbors. During his reign an intellectual form of Sufism reached a high level. He appointed slave ghulams who were converts to Islam to high posts in the provincial governments, while the shah personally took a direct interest in the administration of justice. Still more lands were taken from the governance of notables and directly administered by the central authorities. The shah fostered the economic growth of Isfahan. Abbas II's rule was marred, however, when he turned to drink and personal indulgences, murdering many around him and forcing the conversion of Isfahan Jews to Islam.

Some cultural and artistic successes were achieved. In ceramics, textiles, miniature paintings, and drawings, works of considerable beauty were still being created. However, European styles began to influence painting by the late seventeenth century, and literature and poetry were in decay, despite new opportunities for poets and folktale reciters in coffeehouses. The ruling dynasties of India and the Ottoman Empire offered many inducements to Persian writers, prominent thinkers, and artists to leave Iran. The sciences in Iran were stagnant, except for limited advances in medicine and in the production of astrolabes.

THE DECLINE AND END OF SAFAVID RULE

In addition to a steady decline in the quality of the shahs, the power of the central government over distant regions weakened. The economy contracted as the value of exports fell, foreign competition increased, the plague killed thousands, silver flowed out to India, and insecurity on the trade routes worsened. Silk production decreased, although wool exports increased. Transportation of bulky goods continued to be so expensive that while grain surpluses existed in some areas, famines took place elsewhere. The government debased the coinage and reallocated spending away from the military so that close to one-half of expenditures went to the harem and the royal family. Customs collections were farmed out to tax collectors, a practice that in the long run contributed to budgetary woes. Most important of all, the number and effectiveness of tribal cavalry soldiers fell even as spending on the ghulam standing army was also cut.

Moreover, at the same time as this economic and military decline, Shiism became ever more widespread among the peoples of Iran. The shariah-minded Shii ulama gained more influence at court and among the faithful. At the instigation of the ulama many of the Sufi orders were repressed by the state and Sunnis were harassed. As the shahs lost legitimacy and backing, the Shii ulama gained support.

Upon the death of Abbas II in 1666, his seventeen-year-old son first took the title Safi II but because of disasters chose to take a new regnal name and was recrowned the following year as Shah Suleiman. He reigned for twenty-eight long years, dying in 1694. Shah Suleiman was a drunkard who loved peace and thought little about the state: once, when told that an attack was expected, he replied that it made no difference to him, as long as he could keep Isfahan. Perhaps inadvertently this policy of peace worked well, and Iran enjoyed years of respite from foreign wars.

In 1669 Shah Suleiman built the famous palace called "Eight Paradises," known for its pavilions and tile work. The shah had many government officials executed, leaving more of the administration to his ghulam palace cronies, although he employed an able grand vizir. When he died, he had already executed his eldest son and left the choice between his other sons to the eunuchs and courtiers of the palace. They chose Husain. Having been shut up in the harem of the palace for twenty-six years, Husain was ignorant, superstitious, and easily influenced—just the kind of shah the courtiers desired.

Husain inaugurated his reign by prohibiting the use of wine: he had all the wine jars in the palace broken and would not permit the Armenians who controlled the wine trade to sell in Isfahan. As a youth he had become a partisan of religious teachers and leaders, or mullahs, so much so that many jokingly called him Mullah Husain. Religious minorities—Christians, Jews, and Sunnis—were persecuted. An edict issued by the shah forbade music, dancing, coffeehouses, gambling, and chess. Women's activities were strictly limited. As the ulama gained more influence in Isfahan, the shariah was rigidly implemented and patriarchal values curbed a more open society. In 1706, the shah organized a pilgrimage to the holy shrine at Qumm, the site of the family tombs, accompanied by over 60,000 people. This venture proved so enjoyable that he went with an equal number of retainers on the 600-mile (around 950 km.) pilgrimage to Meshhed, remaining there a whole year. The extravagance of this expedition not only emptied the treasury but ruined all the provinces through which it passed.

Thanks to an aunt who prevailed upon him to permit her to drink in the palace, soon wine flowed freely everywhere. Husain became licentious, and his agents were constantly on the lookout for attractive faces to kidnap for his harem. Unable to curb his lavish habits and faced with the mounting cost of maintaining a standing army with cannon and muskets, the shah's ministers had to find additional income. Government officials created artificial bread shortages in the capital of Isfahan and then made fortunes selling grain at inflated prices. Another lucrative device was to squeeze more revenue from the provinces. Even before this, provincial administration had already suffered under Safi I and Abbas II, when many provinces had been transferred to the royal household and their governorships sold to court favorites, who reimbursed themselves by gouging the inhabitants. The right to collect revenue was sold more and more often, thereby also increasing the tax burden on the peasants. A general economic crisis affected Iran.

Upon the raiding of Qandahar by Baluchis, Shah Husain sent a Georgian general as the new governor in 1704, who adopted such severe measures against the Sunni Ghilzai Afghan inhabitants that they rose in revolt under Mir Vays in 1709. Shah Husain sent an army from Isfahan in 1711 to destroy Mir Vays, but being poorly paid and divided by jealousies among three different components, it was routed in front of the walls of Qandahar. Mir Vays thus became an independent ruler, calling himself regent of Qandahar.

In 1715 Mir Vays was succeeded by his sixteen-year-old son, Mahmud, an ambitious youth who began to attack the shah's kingdom, advancing to a point close to Isfahan. The battle for the Safavid capital was joined in 1722, with Mahmud occupying the Armenian suburb of New Julfa and investing the city. After a six-month siege that saw 60,000 inhabitants killed by starvation or epidemics and 20,000 killed in fighting, Husain surrendered. In a humiliating ceremony Husain went out to Mahmud's headquarters and there, with his own hands, took from his turban the imperial plume of heron's feathers set with jewels—the sign of sovereignty—placed it on Mahmud's head, and bade him rule. Safavid power had collapsed.

During the siege Tahmasp, one of Husain's older sons, escaped from Isfahan and made his way to Qazvin, where he was recognized as Shah Tahmasp II. Affairs were not, however, favorable to his candidacy for rule. The Ottomans seized Tiflis, Tabriz, and Hamadan. Peter the Great of Russia, outfitting a fleet on the Caspian Sea, took Shirvan and Gilan, and compelled Tahmasp II to sign a treaty in 1722, ceding to Russia Darband, Baku, Gilan, Astarabad, and Mazandaran in exchange for Peter's commitment to drive the Afghans from Isfahan. When Mahmud learned of the proposed Russian incursion to place Tahmasp II back on the throne in Isfahan, he had all the members of the Safavid family assembled in the palace courtyard; he and two of his friends then hacked them to death, except for Husain and two small children whom Husain shielded with his own body. Mahmud, who had rapidly grown insane, died in 1725, being succeeded by his cousin Ashraf. The Ottoman armies pressed forward into Iran, asserting that they planned to restore the Safavids to their rightful possessions. Ashraf thereupon had Husain executed and sent his head to the Ottoman commander to forestall his attack on Isfahan.

Meanwhile, Tahmasp II gathered an army in Mazandaran in 1727, being supported by two qizilbash tribal leaders: Fath Ali Khan, the chief of the Qajars, and Nadir Khan

of the Afshars, each bringing several thousand experienced soldiers. They marched into Khurasan and recaptured Meshhed and Herat from the Afghans in 1729; along the way Nadir Khan murdered his rival, Fath Ali, and thus became the sole commander of the royal army. Nadir routed the Afghans under Ashraf, expelling them from Isfahan and Shiraz. Tahmasp II returned as shah to Isfahan but gave most power to Nadir. In 1732 Nadir dethroned him and sent him as a prisoner to Khurasan, where he was later killed. Nadir put Tahmasp's infant son on the throne as Abbas III, but the child died in 1736 and Nadir assumed the title shah, the powers of which he had been holding for several years. Safavid rule had ended.

The Safavids left a profound legacy for Iran, as they determined its Shii religious identity, established many of its borders, encouraged a cultural flowering, and provided stable government. Notable Safavid shahs—Ismail, Tahmasp I, and Abbas the Great—arranged a balance of power among their backers so that qizilbash, ghulams, ulama, and bureaucrats functioned effectively. Isfahan during the reign of Abbas I was especially splendid. The collapse of the Safavids, however, ushered in a long era of chaos and catastrophes for the people of Iran. During the seventeenth century the Ottoman Empire faced many of the same challenges and opportunities encountered by the Safavids and the Uzbeks of central Asia, but the Ottomans were more successful in responding to changes. While the Safavid and Uzbek dynasties collapsed, the Ottomans endured for several more centuries.

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