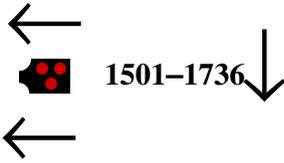


Safavid dynasty

Safavid Dynasty of Iran^[1] ^[2]

سلسله صفویان



Flag of the Safavids since 17th century.^[3] One of several state emblems since the early Safavid period.^[4]



A map of the Safavid empire-Imperii Persici (Persian Empire) drawn by Johann Homann.

Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tabriz (1501–55) • Qazvin (1555–98) • Esfahan (1598–1722)
Language(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persian (official,^[5] coinage,^[6] ^[7] civil administration,^[8] court (since Isfahan became capital),^[9] high literature,^[8] literary,^[6] ^[10] theological discourse,^[6] diplomatic correspondence, belles-lettres (adab), historiography,^[11] court-based religious posts^[12]) • Azerbaijani (court, religious dignitaries, military)^[11] ^[13] ^[14] ^[15]
Religion	Twelver Shia Islam (state religion) ^[16]
Government	Monarchy
Shah	
- 1501–24	Ismail I
- 1524–76	Tahmasp I

- 1587–1629	Abbas I
- 1694–1722	Soltan Hosein
- 1729–32	Tahmasp II
- 1732–36	Abbas III
- 1732–36	Nader Afshar
History	
- Establishment of the Safaviyya by Safi-ad-din Ardabili	1301
- Established	1501
- Hotaki Invasion	1722
- Reconquest under Nader Afshar	1726–29
- Disestablished	1736
- Nader Shah crowned	October 1, 1736
Area	2850000 km ² (1100391 sq mi)
Currency	Tuman, Abbasi, Shahi. ^[17] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Tuman = 50 Abbasi. • 1 Tuman = 50 French Livre. • 1 Tuman = £3 6s 8d.
Preceded by	Succeeded by
 Timurid dynasty	Hotaki dynasty 
Ak Koyunlu	Afsharid dynasty 
	Mosul Eyalet 
	Baghdad Eyalet 
	Basra Eyalet 
Today part of	

The **Safavid dynasty** (Persian: سلسله صفویان; Azerbaijani: صفویلر) was one of the most significant ruling dynasties of Iran. They ruled one of the greatest Persian empires since the Muslim conquest of Persia^{[18] [19] [20] [21]} and established the Twelver school of Shi'a Islam^[22] as the official religion of their empire, marking one of the most important turning points in Muslim history. The Safavids ruled from 1501 to 1722 (experiencing a brief restoration from 1729 to 1736) and at their height, they controlled all of modern Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Azerbaijan and Republic of Armenia, most of Iraq, Georgia, Afghanistan, and the Caucasus, as well as parts of Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Turkey. Safavid Iran was one of the Islamic "gunpowder empires", along with its neighbours, the Ottoman and Mughal empires.

The Safavid dynasty had its origin in the Safaviyya Sufi order, which was established in the city of Ardabil in the Azerbaijan region. It was of mixed ancestry (Kurdish^[23] and Azerbaijani,^[24] which included intermarriages with Georgian^[25] and Pontic Greek^[26] dignitaries). From their base in Ardabil, the Safavids established control over all of Greater Iran and reasserted the Iranian identity of the region,^[27] thus becoming the first native dynasty since the Sassanid Empire to establish a unified Iranian state.^[28]

Despite their demise in 1736, the legacy that they left behind was the revival of Persia as an economic stronghold between East and West, the establishment of an efficient state and bureaucracy based upon “checks and balances”, their architectural innovations and their patronage for fine arts. The Safavids have also left their mark down to the present era by spreading Shi'a Islam in Iran, as well as major parts of the Caucasus, South Asia, Central Asia, and Anatolia.

Genealogy – The Ancestors of The Safavids and its multi-cultural identity

The Safavid Kings themselves claimed to be Seyyeds,^[29] family descendants of the prophet Muhammad, although many scholars have cast doubt on this claim.^[30] There seems now to be a consensus among scholars that the Safavid family hailed from Persian Kurdistan,^[22] and later moved to Azerbaijan, finally settling in the 5th/11th century at Ardabil. Traditional pre-1501 Safavid manuscripts trace the lineage of the Safavids to Firuz Shah Zarin-Kulah.^[23]
[31]

According to some historians,^{[32] [33]} including Richard Frye, the Safavids were of Azeri (Turkish) origin:^[24]

The Turkish speakers of Azerbaijan are mainly descended from the earlier Iranian speakers, several pockets of whom still exist in the region. A massive migration of Oghuz Turks in the 11th and 12th centuries not only Turkified Azerbaijan but also Anatolia. Azeri Turks were the founders of Safavid dynasty.

Other historians, such as Vladimir Minorsky^[34] and Roger Savory, refute this idea.^[35]

From the evidence available at the present time, it is certain that the Safavid family was of indigeneous Iranian stock, and not of Turkish ancestry as it is sometimes claimed. It is probable that the family originated in Persian Kurdistan, and later moved to Azerbaijan, where they adopted the Azari form of Turkish spoken there, and eventually settled in the small town of Ardabil sometimes during the eleventh century.

By the time of the establishment of the Safavid empire, the members of the family were native Turkish-speaking and Turkicized,^{[13] [36]} and some of the Shahs composed poems in their native Turkish language. Concurrently, the Shahs themselves also supported Persian literature, poetry and art projects including the grand Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp,^{[37] [38]} while members of the family and some Shahs composed Persian poetry as well.^{[39] [40]} In terms of identity, it should be noted that the authority of the Safavids were religiously based and they based their legitimacy on being direct male descendants of the Ali,^[41] the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, and the first Shi'ite Imam.

Background – The Safavid Sufi Order

Safavid history begins with the establishment of the Safaviyya by its eponymous founder Safi-ad-din Ardabili (1252–1334). In 700/1301, Safi al-Din assumed the leadership of the Zahediyeh, a significant Sufi order in Gilan, from his spiritual master and father-in-law Zahed Gilani. Due to the great spiritual charisma of Safi al-Din, the order was later known as the Safaviyya. The Safavid order soon gained great influence in the city of Ardabil and Hamdullah Mustaufi noted that most of the people of Ardabil were followers of Safi al-Din.

Extant religious poetry from him, written in the Old Azari language^{[42] [43]} – a now-extinct Northwestern Iranian language – and accompanied by a paraphrase in Persian which helps their understanding, has survived to this day and has linguistic importance.^[42]

After Safi al-Din, the leadership of the Safaviyya passed onto Sadr al-Din Musa († 794/1391–92). The order at this time was transformed into a religious movement which conducted religious propaganda throughout Persia, Syria and Asia Minor, and most likely had maintained its Sunni Shafi'ite origin at that time. The leadership of the order passed on from Sadr ud-Din Musa to his son Khwāja Ali († 1429) and in turn to his son Ibrāhīm († 1429–47).

When Junayd Safavi, the son of Ibrāhīm, assumed the leadership of the Safaviyya in 1447, the history of the Safavid movement was radically changed. According to R.M. Savory, "Sheikh Junayd was not content with spiritual authority and he sought material power". At that time, the most powerful dynasty in Persia was that of the Kara Koyunlu, the "Black Sheep", whose ruler Jahan Shah ordered Junāyd to leave Ardabil or else he would bring

destruction and ruin upon the city.^[22] Junayd sought refuge with the rival of Kara Koyunlu Jahan Shah, the Ak Koyunlu Khan Uzun Hassan, and cemented his relationship by marrying Uzun Hassan's sister, Khadija Begum. Junayd was killed during an incursion into the territories of the Shirvanshah and was succeeded by his son Haydar Safavi. Haydar married Martha 'Alamshah Begom,^[26] Uzun Hassan's daughter, who gave birth to Ismail I, founder of the Safavid dynasty. Martha's mother Theodora – better known as Despina Khatun^[44] – was a Pontic Greek princess, the daughter of the Grand Komnenos John IV of Trebizond. She had been married to Uzun Hassan^[45] in exchange for protection of the Grand Komnenos from the Ottomans.

After Uzun Hassan's death, his son Ya'qub felt threatened by the growing Safavid religious influence. Ya'qub allied himself with the Shirvanshah and killed Haydar in 1488. By this time, the bulk of the Safaviyya were nomadic Oghuz Turkic-speaking clans from Asia Minor and Azerbaijan and were known as Qizilbash "Red Heads" because of their distinct red headgear. The Qizilbash were warriors, spiritual followers of Haydar, and a source of the Safavid military and political power.

After the death of Haydar, the Safaviyya gathered around his son Ali Mirza Safavi, who was also pursued and subsequently killed by Ya'qub. According to official Safavid history, before passing away, Ali had designated his young brother Ismail as the spiritual leader of the Safaviyya.^[22]

History

Founding of the dynasty by Shāh Ismā'il I

Persia prior to Ismā'il's rule

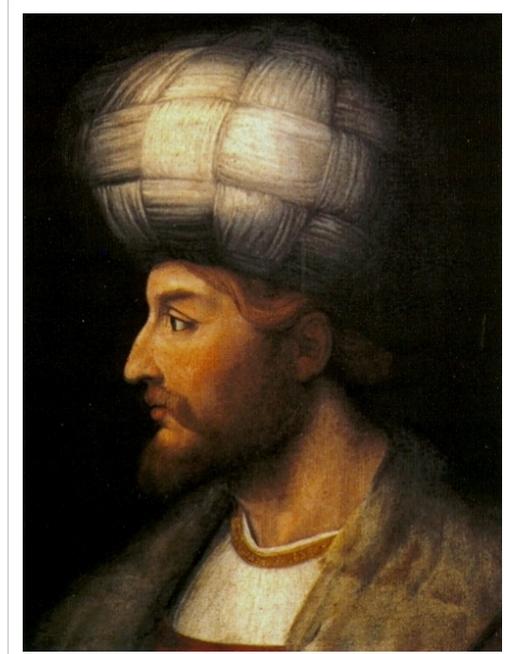
After the decline of the Timurid Empire (1370–1506), Persia was politically splintered, giving rise to a number of religious movements. The demise of Tamerlane's political authority created a space in which several religious communities, particularly Shi'i ones, could now come to the fore and gain prominence. Among these were a number of Sufi brotherhoods, the Hurufis, Nuqtawis and Musha'sha'. Of these various movements, the Safawid Qizilbash was the most politically resilient, and it was on account of its success that Shah Isma'il I gained political prominence in 1501 CE.^[46] There were many local states prior to the Iranian state established by Ismā'il.^[47] The most important local rulers about 1500 were:

- Huṣayn Bāyqarā, the Timurid ruler of Herāt
- Alwand Mīrzā, the Aq Qoyunlu Khan of Tabrīz
- Murad Beg, Aq Qoyunlu ruler of Irāq al-Ajam
- Farrokh Yaşar, the Shah of Şirvan
- Badi Alzamān Mīrzā, local ruler of Balkh
- Huṣayn Kīā Chalavī, the local ruler of Semnān
- Murād Beg Bayandar, local ruler of Yazd

Ismā'il was able to unite all these lands under the Iranian Empire he created.

Rise of Shāh Ismāil I

The Safavid dynasty was founded about 1501 by Shāh Ismāil I.^[48] Shah Ismail's background is disputed: the language he used is not identical with that of his "race" or "nationality" and he was bilingual from birth.^[49] Some scholars argue that Ismāil was of mixed Azeri, Kurdish, and Pontic Greek descent,^[24] although others argue that he was non-Azeri^[49] and was a direct descendant of Sheikh Safi al-Din. As such, he was the last in the line of hereditary Grand Masters of the Safaviyeh order, prior to its ascent to a ruling dynasty. Ismāil was known as a brave and charismatic youth, zealous with regards to his Shi'a faith, and believed himself to be of divine descent—practically worshipped by his Qizilbāsh followers. In 1500, Ismāil invaded neighboring Shirvan to avenge the death of his father, Sheik Haydar, who had been murdered in 1488 by the ruling Shirvanshah, Farrukh Yassar. Afterwards, Ismail went on a conquest campaign, capturing Tabriz in July 1501, where he enthroned himself the Shāh of Azerbaijan,^[50] ^[51] ^[52] proclaimed himself Shahanshah of Iran^[53] ^[54] ^[55] and minted coins in his name, proclaiming Shi'ism the official religion of his domain.^[22] The establishment of Shi'ism as the state religion led

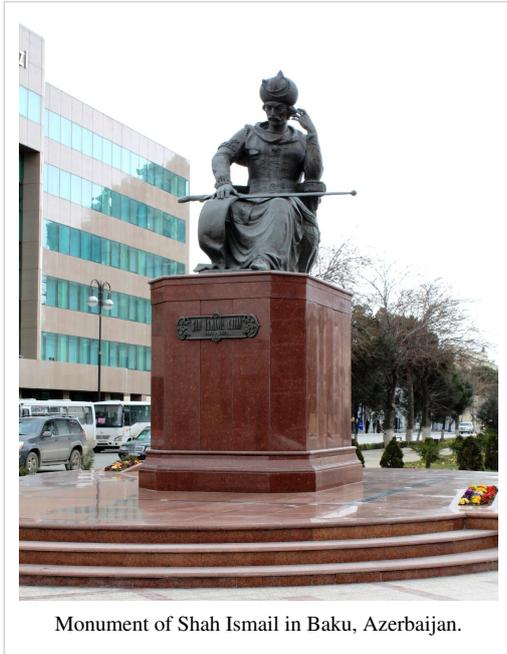


Shah Ismail I

to various Sufi orders openly declaring their Shi'i position, and others, to promptly assume Shi'ism. Among these, the founder of one of the most successful Sufi orders, Ni'matullah (d. 1431) traced his descent from the Ismaili Imam Muhammad b. Ismail, as evidenced in a poem as well as another unpublished literary composition. Though Nimatullah was apparently Sunni, the Ni'matullahi order soon declared his order to be Shi'I after the rise of the Safavid dynasty.^[56]

Although Ismail I initially gained mastery over Azerbaijan alone, the Safavids ultimately won the struggle for power in all of Persia which had been going on for nearly a century between various dynasties and political forces. A year after his victory in Tabriz, Ismāil claimed most of Persia as part of his territory,^[22] and within 10 years established a complete control over all of it. Ismail followed the line of Turkmen rulers prior to him by assumption of the title "Padishah-i-Iran", previously held by Uzun Hasan.^[57] The Ottoman sultans addressed him as *the king of Persian lands and the heir to Jamshid and Kaykhusraw*.^[58] Hamadan fell under his power in 1503, Shiraz and Kerman in 1504, Najaf and Karbala in 1507, Van in 1508, Baghdad in 1509, and Herat, as well as other parts of Khorasan, in 1510. By 1511, the Uzbeks in the north-east, led by their Khan Muhammad Shaybāni, were driven far to the north, across the Oxus River where they continued to attack the Safavids. Ismail's decisive victory over the Uzbeks, who had occupied most of Khorasan, ensured Iran's eastern borders, and the Uzbeks never since expanded beyond the Hindukush. Although the Uzbeks continued to make occasional raids to Khorasan, the Safavid empire was able to keep them at bay throughout its reign.

Clashes with the Ottomans

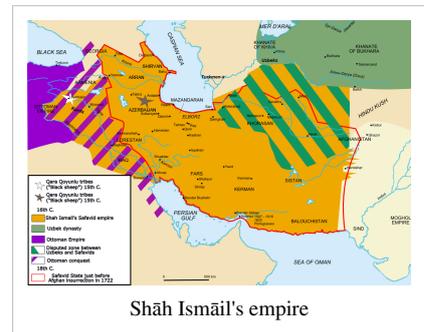


Monument of Shah Ismail in Baku, Azerbaijan.

More problematic for the Safavids was the powerful Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans, a Sunni dynasty, considered the active recruitment of Turkmen tribes of Anatolia for the Safavid cause as a major threat. To counter the rising Safavid power, in 1502, Sultan Bayezid II forcefully deported many Shi'as from Anatolia to other parts of the Ottoman realm. In 1514, Bayezid's son, Sultan Selim I marched through Anatolia and reached the plain of Chaldiran near the city of Khoy, and a decisive war was fought there (Battle of Chaldiran). Most sources agree that the Ottoman army was at least double the size of that of Ismāil,^[48] however, what gave the Ottomans the advantage was the artillery which the Safavid army lacked. According to R. M. Savory, *"Salim's plan was to winter at Tabriz and complete the conquest of Persia the following spring. However, a mutiny among his officers who refused to spend the winter at Tabriz forced him to withdraw across territory laid waste by the Safavid forces, eight days later"*.^[48] Although Ismāil was defeated and his capital was

captured, the Safavid empire survived. The war between the two powers continued under Ismāil's son, Shāh Tahmāsp I (q.v.), and the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman I, until Shāh Abbās (q.v.) retook the area lost to the Ottomans by 1602.

The consequences of the defeat at Chaldiran were also psychological for Ismāil: the defeat destroyed Ismāil's belief in his invincibility, based on his claimed divine status.^[22] His relationships with his Qizilbāsh followers were also fundamentally altered. The tribal rivalries between the Qizilbāsh, which temporarily ceased before the defeat at Chaldiran, resurfaced in intense form immediately after the death of Ismāil, and led to ten years of civil war (930-40/1524-33) until Shāh Tahmāsp regained control of the affairs of the state.



Shāh Ismāil's empire

Early Safavid power in Iran was based on the military power of the Qizilbāsh. Ismāil exploited the first element to seize power in Iran. But eschewing politics after his defeat in Chaldiran, he left the affairs of the government to the office of the Wakīl (q.v.). Ismāil's successors, and most ostensibly Shāh Abbās I successfully diminished the Qizilbāsh's influence on the affairs of the state.

Shāh Tahmāsp



Shah Tahmasp, fresco on the walls of the Chehel Sotoun Palace

Shāh Tahmāsp, the young *governor of Herat*, succeeded his father Ismāil in 1524, when he was ten years and three months old. He was the ward of the powerful Qizilbash *amir* Ali Beg Rūmlū (titled "*Div Soltān*") who saw himself as the de facto ruler of the state. The qizilbash, which still suffered under the legacy of the battle of Chaldiran, was engulfed in internal rivalries. The low morale within the military, and the decentralized structure of the government, with much power in the hands of local governors, eventually led to 10 years of civil war. Rival Qizilbāsh factions fought amongst themselves for the control of the empire until Shāh Tahmāsp came of age and reasserted his authority. Tahmasp reigned for 52 years, the longest reign in Safavid history.^[22]



Safavid Persian Empire, in 1598.

The Uzbeks, during the reign of Tahmāsp, attacked the eastern provinces of the kingdom five times and the Ottomans under Soleymān I initiated four invasions of Persia.^[59] Losing territory in Iraq and the north-west, Tahmāsp realized that his capital was not secure, and he was forced to move the capital from Tabriz to Qazvin. Tahmasp made the Peace of Amasya with the Ottomans in 1555, ending the war during his life.^[22]

Alliances to the East – The Mughal Emperor at the Shah's court



Map of Safavid Persia, in 1610.

Almost simultaneously with the emergence of the Safavid Empire, another Muslim society was developing in South-Asia. The Mughal Empire, which ruled a largely Hindu population, adhered to Sunni Islam. But a common foe, in the Uzbeks, would eventually lead the two empires closer together. During the reign of Tahmasp, Shah Humayun of Mughal Hindustan found himself in a desperate situation, with devastating wars being fought against the Afghans and the Uzbeks and Humayuns brother, Kamran, attempting a coup d'état.^[60] Having to flee from city to city, Humayun eventually sought refuge at the court of Tahmasp.

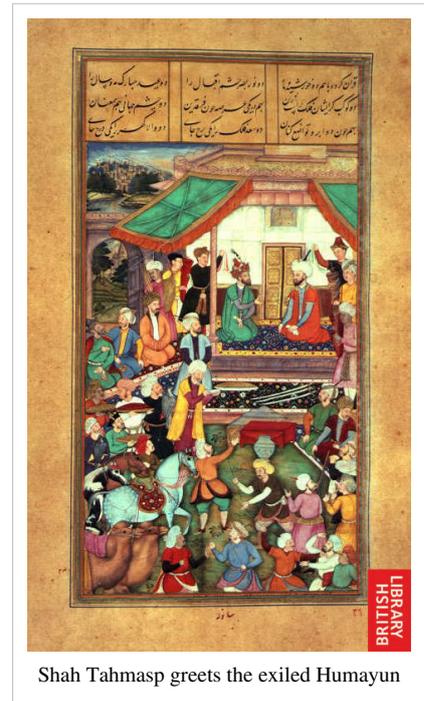
Tahmasp, who refused to hand him over to his brother, greeted Humayun at his court in Qazvin as the true emperor of the Mughal dynasty, despite the fact that Humayun had been living in exile for more than fifteen years.^[60] ^[61] After converting to Shia Islam,^[62] Tahmasp offered him military assistans to fight off the revolts in return for Kandahar, which had for long been a battle ground between the two empires, and a combined Persian-Mughal force managed to seize Kandahar and occupy Kabul.^[63] This eventually led to strong ties between the Safavids and the Mughals, and they persisted, almost unabated, throughout the history of the Safavid dynasty.

Legacy of Shah Tahmasp

When Shah Tahmasp entered the throne at a young age, Persia was in a dire state. But despite of a weak economy, a civil war and wars being fought on two fronts, Tahmasp had managed to maintain his position as the shah. During the first 30 years of his long reign, he had managed to suppress the internal divisions, slowly elevate the strength of the military to a level that finally led to the retreat of the Ottomans during the fourth war in 1533, and, in 1553, even wage a campaign against the Ottomans. This resulted in the peace treaty of Amasya, a treaty that favoured the Persians and secured Tabriz and the North-Western borders.^[64] Some years before, in 1528, he had also converted an unfavorable war against the Uzbeks, at the battle of Jam, into a victory by the Persians.^[65] When Shah Tahmasp's throne was overtaken by his successor, Persia was in a calm state, with secure borders and cordial relations with the neighbours to both east and west. What remained unchanged, was the decentralized power structure of the government, and that would not change until the throne was overtaken by his grandson, Shah Abbas.

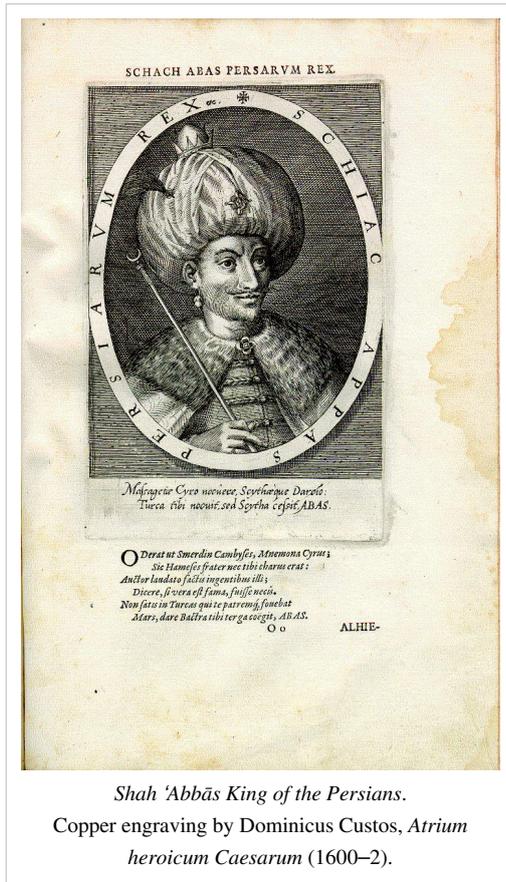
After the death of Tahmāsp in 984/1576, the struggle for a dominant position in the state flared up again and was complicated by rival groups and factions. Dominant political factions vied for power and support three different candidates. The mentally unstable Ismāil, the son of Tahmāsp and the purblind Muhammad Khudābanda were some of the candidates but did not get the support of all the Qizilbāsh chiefs. The Turkmen Ustājilū tribe, one of the most powerful tribes among the Qizilbāsh, threw its support behind Haydar, who was of a Georgian mother, but the majority of the Qizilbāsh chiefs saw this as a threat to their own, Turkmen-dominated power. Instead, they first placed Ismāil II. on the throne (1576–77) and after him Muhammad Shāh Khudābanda (1578–88).^[22]

In addition, Tahmasp must be credited for the revival of the fine arts, which flourished under his patronage and were brought to the pitch of perfection. Safavid culture is often admired for the large-scale city planning and architecture, achievements made during the reign of later shahs, but the arts of persian miniature, book-binding and calligraphy, in fact, never received as much attention as they did during his time.^[66]



Shah Tahmasp greets the exiled Humayun

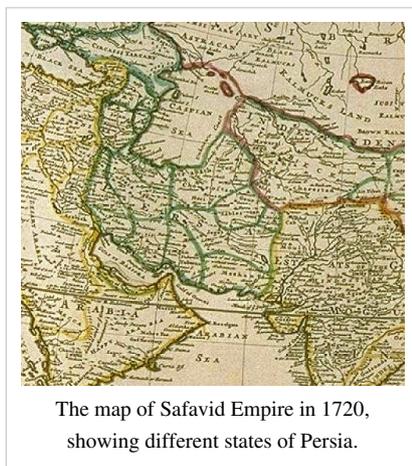
Shah Abbas



The greatest of the Safavid monarchs, Shah Abbas I (1587–1629) came to power in 1587 aged 16 following the forced abdication of his father, Shah Muhammad Khudābanda, having survived Qizilbashi court intrigues and murders. He recognized the ineffectualness of his army which was consistently being defeated by the Ottomans who had captured Georgia and Armenia and by Uzbeks who had captured Mashhad and Sistan in the east. First he sued for peace in 1590 with the Ottomans giving away territory in the north-west. Then two Englishmen, Robert Sherley and his brother Anthony, helped Abbas I to reorganize the Shah's soldiers into an officer-paid and well-trained standing army similar to a European model (which the Ottomans had already adopted). He wholeheartedly adopted the use of gunpowder (See Military history of Iran). The army divisions were: Ghulams غلام (crown servants,^[67] usually conscripted from Georgians and Circassians), Tofangchis (تفنگچی, musketeers), and Topchis (توپچی, artillery-men).

Abbas moved the capital to Isfahan, deeper into central Iran. Abbas I built a new city next to the ancient Persian one. From this time the state began to take on a more Persian character. The Safavids ultimately succeeded in establishing a new Persian national monarchy.

Abbas I first fought the Uzbeks, recapturing Herat and Mashhad in 1598. Then he turned against the Ottomans recapturing Baghdad, eastern Iraq and the Caucasian provinces by 1622. He also used his new force to dislodge the Portuguese from Bahrain (1602) and, with English help, from Hormuz (1622), in the Persian Gulf (a vital link in Portuguese trade with India). He expanded commercial links with the English East India Company and the Dutch East India Company. Thus Abbas I was able to break the dependence on the Qizilbash for military might and therefore was able to centralize control.



The Ottoman Turks and Safavids fought over the fertile plains of Iraq for more than 150 years. The capture of Baghdad by Ismail I in 1509 was only followed by its loss to the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman I in 1534. After subsequent campaigns, the Safavids recaptured Baghdad in 1623 yet lost it again to Murad IV in 1638. Henceforth a treaty, signed in Qasr-e Shirin, was established delineating a border between Iran and Turkey in 1639, a border which still stands in northwest Iran/southeast Turkey. The 150 year tug-of-war accentuated the Sunni and Shi'a rift in Iraq.

In 1609–10, a war broke out between Kurdish tribes and the Safavid Empire. After a long and bloody siege led by the Safavid grand vizier Hatem Beg, which lasted from November 1609 to the summer of 1610, the Kurdish stronghold of Dimdim was captured. Shah Abbas ordered a general massacre in Beradost and Mukriyan (Mahabad, reported by Eskandar Beg Monshi, Safavid Historian (1557–1642), in "Alam Ara Abbasi") and resettled the Turkic Afshar tribe in the region while deporting many Kurdish tribes to Khorasan.^[68] ^[69] Nowadays, there is a community of nearly 1.7 million people who are descendants of the tribes deported from Kurdistan to Khurasan (Northeastern Iran) by the Safavids.^[70]



Part of Safavid Persian Empire (on right) and middle east. Emanuel Bowen, 1744–52.

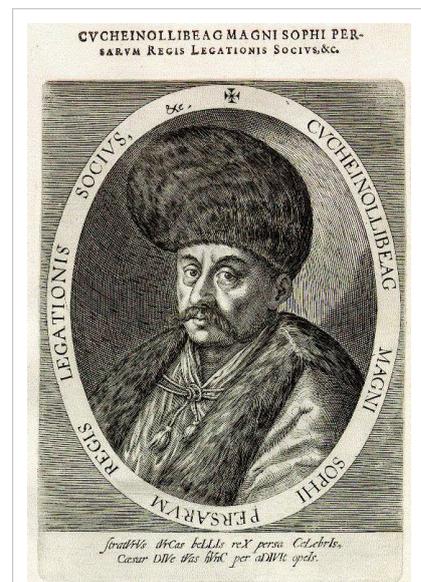
Due to his obsessive fear of assassination, Shah Abbas either put to death or blinded any member of his family who aroused his suspicion. One of his sons was executed and two blinded. Since two other sons had predeceased him, the result was personal tragedy for Shah Abbas. When he died on 19 January 1629, he had no son capable of succeeding him.^[71]

The beginning of the 17th century saw the power of the Qizilbash decline, the original militia that had helped Ismail I capture Tabriz and which had gained many administrative powers over the centuries. Power was shifting to a new class of merchants, many of them ethnic Armenians, Georgians and Indians.

At its zenith, during the long reign of Shah Abbas I the empire's reach comprised Iran, Iraq, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and parts of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Contacts with Europe during Abbas' reign

Abbas' tolerance towards Christians was part of his policy of establishing diplomatic links with European powers to try to enlist their help in the fight against their common enemy, the Ottoman Empire. The idea of such an anti-Ottoman alliance was not a new one — over a century before, Uzun Hassan, then ruler of part of Iran, had asked the Venetians for military aid — but none of the Safavids had made diplomatic overtures to Europe and Abbas' attitude was in marked contrast to that of his grandfather, Tahmasp I, who had expelled the English traveller Anthony Jenkinson from his court on hearing he was a Christian.^[72] For his part, Abbas declared that he "preferred the dust from the shoe soles of the lowest Christian to the highest Ottoman personage."^[73]



The ambassador Husain Ali Beg led the first Persian embassy to Europe (1599–1602).



Fresco in the Doge's Palace in Venice depicting Doge Mariano Grimani receiving the Persian Ambassadors, 1599

In 1599, Abbas sent his first diplomatic mission to Europe. The group crossed the Caspian Sea and spent the winter in Moscow, before proceeding through Norway, Germany (where it was received by Emperor Rudolf II) to Rome where Pope Clement VIII gave the travellers a long audience. They finally arrived at the court of Philip III of Spain in 1602. Although the expedition never managed to return to Iran, being shipwrecked on the journey around Africa, it marked an important new step in contacts between Iran and Europe and Europeans began to be fascinated by the Iranians and their culture — Shakespeare's 1601–2

Twelfth Night, for example, makes two references (at II.5 and III.4) to 'the Sophy', then the English term for the Shahs of Iran.^{[74] [75]} Henceforward, the number of diplomatic missions to and fro greatly increased.^[76]

The shah had set great store on an alliance with Spain, the chief opponent of the Ottomans in Europe. Abbas offered trading rights and the chance to preach Christianity in Iran in return for help against the Ottomans. But the stumbling block of Hormuz remained, a port which had fallen into Spanish hands when the King of Spain inherited the throne of Portugal in 1580. The Spanish demanded Abbas break off relations with the English East India Company before they would consider relinquishing the town. Abbas was unable to comply. Eventually Abbas became frustrated with Spain, as he did with the Holy Roman Empire, which wanted him to make his 170,000 Armenian subjects swear allegiance to the Pope but did not trouble to inform the shah when the Emperor Rudolf signed a peace treaty with the Ottomans. Contacts with the Pope, Poland and Moscow were no more fruitful.^[77]

More came of Abbas' contacts with the English, although England had little interest in fighting against the Ottomans. The Sherley brothers arrived in 1598 and helped reorganise the Iranian army. The English East India Company also began to take an interest in Iran and in 1622 four of its ships helped Abbas retake Hormuz from the Portuguese in the Capture of Ormuz (1622). It was the beginning of the East India Company's long-running interest in Iran.^[78]

Decline of the Safavid state



Shah Abbas the II holding a banquet for foreign dignitaries. Detail from a ceiling fresco at the Chehel Sotoun Palace in Isfahan.

In addition to fighting its perennial enemies, the Ottomans and Uzbeks, as the 17th century progressed Iran had to contend with the rise of two more neighbors. Russian Muscovy in the previous century had deposed two western Asian khanates of the Golden Horde and expanded its influence into the Caucasus Mountains and Central Asia. In the east, the Mughals of India had expanded into Khorasan (now Afghanistan) at the expense of Iranian control, taking Qandahar.

Furthermore, trade routes between the East and West had shifted away from Iran by the 17th century, causing a loss of commerce and trade. Moreover, Shah Abbas had a conversion to a ghulam-based military, though expedient in the short term.

Except for Shah Abbas II, the Safavid rulers after Abbas I were ineffectual. The end of the reign of Abbas II, 1666, marked the beginning of the end of the Safavid dynasty. Despite falling revenues and military threats, later shahs had lavish lifestyles. Soltan Hosein (1694–1722) in particular was known for his love of wine and disinterest in governance.^[79]

The country was repeatedly raided on its frontiers — Kerman by Baloch tribes in 1698, Khorasan by the Hotakis in 1717, constantly in Mesopotamia by peninsula Arabs. Sultan Hosein tried to forcibly convert his Afghan subjects in Qandahar from Sunni to the Shi'a sect of Islam. In response, a Ghilzai Afghan chieftain named Mir Wais Hotak revolted and killed Gurgin Khan, the Safavid governor of the region, along with his army. In 1722, an Afghan army led by Mir Wais' son Mahmud advanced on the heart of the empire and defeated the government forces at the Battle of Gulnabad. He then besieged the capital of Isfahan, until Shah Soltan Hosein abdicated and acknowledged him as the new king of Persia.^[80]



Map of Persia, c. 1700 by Johann Baptist Homann (1644–1724)

The tribal Afghans rode roughshod over their conquered territory for seven years but were prevented from making further gains by Nader Shah, a former slave who had risen to military leadership within the Afshar tribe in Khorasan, a vassal state of the Safavids. Nadir Shah defeated the Ghilzai Hotaki forces in the 1729 Battle of Damghan. He had removed them from power, and in 1738 conquered their last stronghold in Qandahar; in the same year he occupied Ghazni, Kabul, Lahore, and as far as Delhi in India. However, these cities were later inherited by his Abdali Afghan military commander, Ahmad Shah Durrani. Nadir had effective control under Shah Tahmasp II and then ruled as regent of the infant Abbas III until 1736 when he had himself crowned shah.

Immediately after Nadir Shah's assassination in 1747, the Safavids were re-appointed as shahs of Iran in order to lend legitimacy to the nascent Zand dynasty. However the brief puppet regime of Ismail III ended in 1760 when Karim Khan felt strong enough to take nominal power of the country as well and officially end the Safavid dynasty.

Shia Islam as the state religion

Even though Safavids were not the first Shia rulers in Iran, they played a crucial role in making Shia Islam the official religion in the whole of Iran. There were large Shia communities in some cities like Qom and Sabzevar as early as the 8th century. In the 10th and 11th centuries the Buwayhids, who were of the Zaidiyyah branch of Shia, ruled in Fars, Isfahan and Baghdad. As a result of the Mongol conquest and the relative religious tolerance of the Ilkhanids, Shia dynasties were re-established in Iran, Sarbedaran in Khorasan being the most important. The Ilkhanid ruler Öljaitü converted to Twelver Shiism in the 13th century.

Following his conquest of Iran, Ismail I made conversion mandatory for the largely Sunni population. The Sunni Ulema or clergy were either killed or exiled. Ismail I, despite his heterodox Alevi Shia beliefs (Momen, 1985), brought in mainstream Ithnā'ashariyyah Shi'a religious leaders and granted them land and money in return for loyalty. Later, during the Safavid and especially Qajar period, the Shia Ulema's power increased and they were able to exercise a role, independent of or compatible with the government. Despite the Safavid's Sufi origins, most Sufi groups were prohibited, except the Nimatullahi order.

Iran became a feudal theocracy: the Shah was held to be the divinely ordained head of state and religion. In the following centuries, this religious stance cemented both Iran's internal cohesion and national feelings and provoked attacks by its Sunni neighbors.



Shah Suleiman I and his courtiers, Isfahan, 1670. Painter is Ali Qoli Jabbar, and is kept at The St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies in Russia, ever since it was acquired by Tsar Nicholas II. Note the two Georgian figures with their names at the top left.

Military and the role of Qizilbash

The Qizilbash were a wide variety of Shi'ite (*ghulāt*) and mostly Turcoman militant groups who helped found the Safavid Empire. Their military power was essential during the reign of the Shahs Ismail and Tahmasp. The Qizilbash tribes were essential to the military of Iran until the rule of Shah Abbas I- their leaders were able to exercise enormous influence and participate in court intrigues (assassinating Shah Ismail II for example).

A major problem faced by Ismail I after the establishment of the Safavid state was how to bridge the gap between the two major ethnic groups in that state: the Qizilbash ("Redhead") Turcomans, the "men of sword" of classical Islamic society whose military prowess had brought him to power, and the Persian elements, the "men of the pen", who filled the ranks of the bureaucracy and the religious establishment in the Safavid state as they had done for centuries under previous rulers of Persia, be they Arabs, Mongols, or Turkmens. As Vladimir Minorsky put it, friction between these two groups was inevitable, because the Qizilbash "were no party to the national Persian tradition".

Between 1508 and 1524, the year of Ismail's death, the shah appointed five successive Persians to the office of *vakil*. When the second Persian *vakil* was placed in command of a Safavid army in Transoxiana, the Qizilbash, considering it a dishonor to be obliged to serve under him, deserted him on the battlefield with the result that he was slain. The fourth *vakil* was murdered by the Qizilbash, and the fifth was put to death by them.^[48]



Manikin of a safavid Qezelbash soldier, exhibited in Sa'dabad

Reforms in the military

Shah Abbas realized that in order to retain absolute control over his empire without antagonizing the Qizilbash, he needed to create reforms that reduced the dependency that the shah had on their military support. Part of these reforms was the creation of the 3rd force within the aristocracy, but even more important in undermining the authority of the Qizilbash was the introduction of the Royal Corps into the military. This military force would serve the shah only and eventually consisted of four separate branches:^[81]

- Shahsevans – these were 12 000 strong and built up from the small group of *qurchis* that Shah Abbas had inherited from his predecessor. The Shahsevans, or “Friends of the King”, were Qizilbash tribesmen who had forsaken their tribal allegiance for allegiance to the shah alone.^[82]
- Gulams – Tahmasp had started introducing Georgian, Armenian and Circassian slaves from the Caucasus, appointing them either in the harem or the royal household. Shah Abbas expanded this program significantly and eventually created a force of 15 000 ghulam cavalrymen.
- Musketers – realizing the advantages that the Ottomans had because of their firearms, Shah Abbas was at pains to equip both the *qurchi* and the *ghulam* soldiers with up-to-date weaponry. More importantly, for the first time in Iranian history, a substantial infantry corps of musketeers (*tofang-chis*), numbering 12 000, was created.
- Artillery Corps – with the help of Westerners, he also formed an artillery corps of 12 000 men, although this was the weakest element in his army. According to Sir Thomas Herbert, who accompanied the British embassy to Persia in 1628, the Persians relied heavily on support from the Europeans in manufacturing cannons.^[83] It wasn't until a century later, when Nadir Shah became the Commander in Chief of the military that sufficient effort was

put into modernizing the artillery corps and the Persians managed to excel and become self sufficient in the manufacturing of firearms.

Despite the reforms, the Qizilbash would remain the strongest and most effective element within the military, accounting for more than half of its total strength.^[83] But the creation of this large standing army, that, for the first time in Safavid history, was serving directly under the Shah, significantly reduced their influence, and perhaps any possibilities for the type of civil unrest that had caused havoc during the reign of the previous shahs.

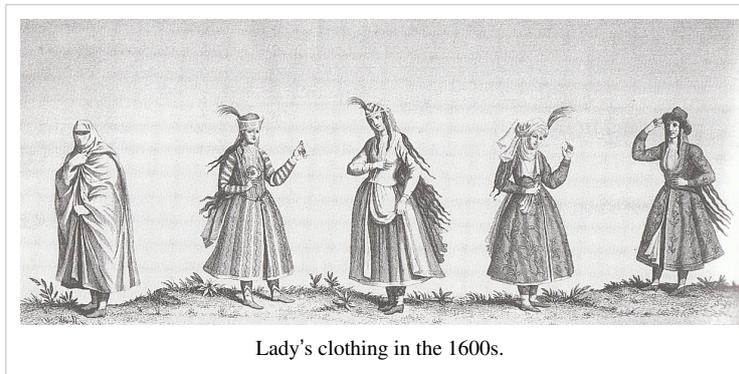
Society

A proper term for the Safavid society is what we today can call a *meritocracy*, meaning a society in which officials were appointed on the basis of worth and merit, and not on the basis of birth. It was certainly not an oligarchy, nor was it an aristocracy. Sons of nobles were considered for the succession of their fathers as a mark of respect, but they had to prove themselves worthy of the position. This system avoided an entrenched aristocracy or a cast society.^[84] There even are numerous recorded accounts of laymen that rose to high official posts, as a result of their merits.^[85]

Nevertheless, the Persian society during the Safavids was that of a hierarchy, with the Shah at the apex of the hierarchical pyramid, the common people, merchants and peasants at the base, and the aristocrats in between. The term *dowlat*, which in modern Persian means “government”, was then an abstract term meaning “bliss” or “felicity”, and it began to be used as concrete sense of the Safavid state, reflecting the view that the people had of their ruler, as someone elevated above humanity.^[86]

Also among the aristocracy, in the middle of the hierarchical pyramid, were the religious officials, who, mindful of the historic role of the religious classes as a buffer between the ruler and his subjects, usually did their best to shield the ordinary people from oppressive governments.^[86]

The customs and culture of the people



Lady's clothing in the 1600s.

Jean Chardin devoted a whole chapter in his book to describing the Persian character, which apparently fascinated him greatly. As he spent a large bulk of his life in Persia, he involved himself in, and took part in, their everyday rituals and habits, and eventually acquired intimate knowledge of their culture, customs and character. He admired their consideration towards foreigners, but he also stumbled upon characteristics that he found challenging. His descriptions of the public appearance, clothes and customs are corroborated by the miniatures, drawings and paintings from that time which have survived. As he describes them:^[87]

Their imagination is animated, quick and fruitful. Their memory is free and prolific. They are very favorably drawn to the sciences, the liberal and mechanical arts. Their temperament is open and leans towards sensual pleasure and self-indulgence, which makes them pay little attention to economy or business.

He then goes on:^[87]

They are very philosophical over the good and bad things in life and about expectations for the future. They are little tainted with avarice, desiring only to acquire in order to spend. They love to enjoy what is to hand and

they refuse nothing which contributes to it, having no anxiety about the future which they leave to providence and fate.

But as he also experienced:^[88]

...the Persians are dissembling, shamelessly deceitful and the greatest flatterers in the world, using great deception and insolence. They lack good faith in business dealings, in which they cheat so adeptly that one is always taken in. Hypocrisy is the usual disguise in which they proceed. They say their prayers and perform their rituals in the most devout manner. They hold the wisest and most pious conversation of which they are capable. And although they are naturally inclined to humanity, hospitality, mercy and other worldly goods, nevertheless, they do not cease feigning in order to give the semblance of being much better than they really are.

Character

It is however no question, from reading Chardin's descriptions of their manners, that he considered them to be a well educated and well behaved people, who certainly knew the strict etiquettes of social intercourse. As he describes them,^[89]



Anthony Shirley and Robert Shirley (pictured in 1622) helped modernize the Persian Army.

“The Persians are the most civilized of the peoples of the East, and what the French are to Europe, they are to the Orient... Their bearing and countenance is the best-composed, mild, serious, impressive, genial and welcoming as far as possible. They never fail to perform at once the appropriate gestures of politeness when meeting each other... They are the most wheedling people in the world, with the most engaging manners, the most supple spirits and a language that is gentle and flattering, and devoid of unpleasant terms but rather full of circumlocutions.”

Unlike Europeans, they much disliked physical activity, and were not in favor of exercise for its own sake, preferring the leisure of repose and luxuries that life could offer. Travelling was valued only for the specific purpose of getting from one place to another, not interesting them self in seeing new places and experiencing different cultures. It was perhaps this sort of attitude towards the rest of the world that accounted for the ignorance of Persians regarding other countries of the world. The exercises that they took part in were for keeping the body supple and sturdy and to acquire skills in handling of arms. Archery took first place. Second place was held by fencing, where the wrist had to be firm but flexible and movements agile. Thirdly there was horsemanship. A very strenuous form of exercise which the Persians greatly enjoyed was hunting.^[90]

Entertainment



A persian miniature depicting a polo-match.

Since pre-Islamic times, the sport of wrestling had been an integral part of the Iranian identity, and the professional wrestlers, who performed in Zurkhanehs, were considered important members of the society. Each town had their own troop of wrestlers, called Pahlavans. Their sport also provided the masses with entertainment and spectacle. Chardin described one such event:^[91]

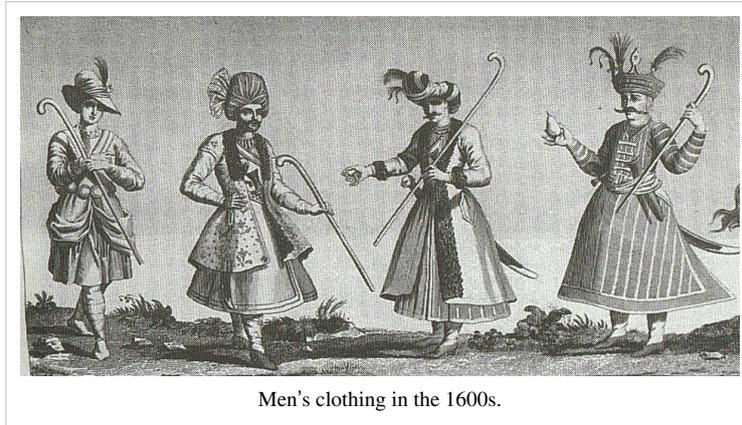
“The two wrestlers were covered in grease. They are present on the level ground, and a small drum is always playing during the contest for excitement. They swear to a good fight and shake hands. That done, they slap their thighs, buttocks and hips to the rhythm of the drum. That is for the women and to get themselves in good form. After that they join together in uttering a great cry and trying to overthrow each other.”

As well as wrestling, what gathered the masses was fencing, tightrope dancers, puppet-players and acrobats, performing in large squares, such as the Royal square. A leisurely form of amusement was to be found in the cabarets, particularly in certain districts, like those near the mausoleum of Harun-e Velayat. People met there to drink liqueurs or coffee, to smoke tobacco or opium, and to chat or listen to poetry.^[92]

Clothes and Appearances

As noted before, a key aspect of the Persian character was its love of luxury, particularly on keeping up appearances. They would adorn their clothes, wearing stones and decorate the harness of their horses. Men wore many rings on their fingers, almost as many as their wives. They also placed jewels on their arms, such as on daggers and swords. Daggers were worn at the waist. In describing the lady's clothing, he noted that Persian dress revealed more of the figure than did the European, but that women appeared differently depending on whether they were at home in the presence of friends and family, or if they were in the public. In private they usually wore a veil that only covered the hair and the back, but upon leaving the home, they would put on a large sheet, that concealed the whole of the body except from the face. They would often dye their feet and hands with henna. Their hairstyle was simple, the hair gathered back in tresses, often adorning the ends with pearls and clusters of jewels. Women with slender waists were regarded as more attractive than those with larger figures. Women from the provinces and slaves pierced their left nostrils with rings, but well-born Persian women would not do this.^[93]

The most precious accessory for men was the turban. Although they lasted a long time it was necessary to have changes for different occasions like weddings and the Nowruz, while men of status never wore the same turban two days running. Clothes that became soiled in any way were changed immediately.^[94]



Men's clothing in the 1600s.

The Turks and the Persians

One could say that, just as the administrative system was divided vertically into different branches of the society, it was also divided horizontally along ethnic lines between the two “founding” races of the Safavid society; the qizilbash Turks and the tajiki Persians (iranians), and the tensions between these two had been present from the very founding of the dynasty. As the former represented the “*people of the sword*” and the latter, “*the people of the pen*”, high-level official posts would naturally be reserved for the Persians. Indeed, this had been the situation throughout Persian history, even before the Safavids, ever since the Arab conquest.^[95] Shah Tahmasp introduced a change to this, when he, and later the other Safavid rulers as well, sought to blur the formerly defined lines between the two ethnic groups, by taking the sons of qizilbash officers into the royal household for their education. Consequently, they were slowly able to take on administrative jobs in areas which had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of the Iranians.^[96]

The third force

From 1540 and onwards, Shah Tahmasp initiated a transformation of the society by slowly constructing a new branch within the aristocracy. The campaigns that he waged against Georgia between 1540 and 1554 were primarily meant to uphold the morale and the fighting efficiency of the qizilbash military,^[97] but they brought home large numbers of Georgian, Armenian and Circassian slaves. The women came to occupy prominent positions in the harems of the Safavid elite, particularly the Shah's, while the men were given special training, on completion of which they were either enrolled in one of the newly created *ghulam* regiments, or employed in the royal household.^[64] Shah Abbas continued this program and greatly expanded the ghulam military corps from a few hundred to 15 000 highly trained cavalymen.^[98] He then went on to reduce the number of qizilbash provincial governorships and systematically moved qizilbash governors to other districts, thus disrupting their ties with the local community, and reducing their power. Many were replaced by a ghulam, and within short time, Georgians, Armenians and Circassians had been appointed to many of the highest offices of state. By 1595, Allahverdi Khan, a Georgian, became one of the most powerful men in the Safavid state, when he was appointed the Governor-General of Fars, one of the richest provinces in Persia. And his power reached its peak in 1598, when he became the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.^[99] Thus, this new group eventually came to constitute a powerful “third force” within the state, alongside the Tajik Persians and the Qizilbash Turks, and it only goes to prove the meritocratic society of the Safavids.

Emergence of a clerical aristocracy

An important feature of the Safavid society was the alliance that emerged between the ulama (the religious class) and the merchant community. The latter included merchants trading in the bazaars, the trade and artisan guilds (*asnāf*) and members of the quasi-religious organizations run by dervishes (*futuwwa*). Because of the relative insecurity of property ownership in Persia, many private landowners secured their lands by donating them to the clergy as so called *vaqf*. They would thus retain the official ownership and secure their land from being confiscated by royal commissioners or local governors, as long as a percentage of the revenues from the land went to the ulama. Increasingly, members of the religious class, particularly the mujtahids and the seyyeds, gained full ownership of these lands, and, according to contemporary historian Iskandar Munshi, Persia started to witness the emergence of a new and significant group of landowners.^[100]

State and government



The Ali Qapu Palace in Isfahan.

The Safavid state was one of checks and balance, both within the government and on a local level. At the apex of this system was the Shah, with total power over the state, legitimized by his bloodline as a seyyed, or descendant of the Prophet Mohammad. So absolute was his power, that the French merchant, and later ambassador to Persia, Jean Chardin thought the Safavid Shahs ruled their land with an iron fist and often in a despotic manner.^[101] To ensure transparency and avoid decisions being made that circumvented the Shah, a complex system of bureaucracy and departmental procedures had been put in place that prevented fraud. Every office had a deputy or superintendent, whose job was to keep records of all actions of the state officials

and report directly to the Shah. The Shah himself exercised his own measures for keeping his ministers under control by fostering an atmosphere of rivalry and competitive surveillance. And since the Safavid society was meritocratic, and successions seldom were made on the basis of heritage, this meant that government offices constantly felt the pressure of being under surveillance and had to make sure they governed in the best interest of their leader, and not merely their own.

The Government

There probably did not exist any parliament, as we know them today. But the Portuguese ambassador to the Safavids, De Gouvea, still mentions the *Council of State*^[102] in his records, which perhaps was a term for governmental gatherings of the time.

The highest level in the government was that of the Prime Minister, or Grand Vizier (*Etemad-e Dowlat*), who was always chosen from among doctors of law. He enjoyed tremendous power and control over national affairs as he was the immediate deputy of the Shah. No act of the Shah was valid without the counter seal of the Prime Minister. But even he stood accountable to a deputy (*vak'anevis*), who kept records of his decision-makings and notified the Shah. Second to the Prime Minister post were the General of the Revenues (*mostoufi-ye mamalek*), or finance minister,^[103] and the *Divanbegi*, Minister of Justice. The latter was the final appeal in civil and criminal cases, and his office stood next to the main entrance to the Ali Qapu palace. In earlier times, the Shah had been closely involved in judicial proceedings, but this part of the royal duty was neglected by Shah Safi and the later kings.^[104]

Next in authority were the generals: the General of the Royal Troops (the *Shahsevans*), General of the Musketeers, General of the Ghulams and The Master of Artillery. A separate official, the Commander-in-Chief, was appointed to be the head of these officials.^[104]

The Royal Court

As for the royal household, the highest post was that of the *Nazir*, Court Minister. He was perhaps the closest advisor to the Shah, and, as such, functioned as his eyes and ears within the Court. His primary job was to appoint and supervise all the officials of the household and to be their contact with the Shah. But his responsibilities also included that of being the treasurer of the Shahs properties. This meant that even the Prime Minister, who held the highest office in the state, had to work in association with the *Nazir* when it came to managing those transactions that directly related to the Shah.^[104]

The second most senior appointment was the Grand Steward (*Ichik Agasi bashi*), who would always accompany the Shah and was easily recognizable because of the great baton that he carried with him. He was responsible for introducing all guests, receiving petitions presented to the Shah and reading them if required. Next in line were the Master of the Royal Stables (*Mirakor bashi*) and the Master of the Hunt (*Mirshekar bashi*). The Shah had stables in all the principal towns, and Shah Abbas was said to have about 30 000 horses in studs around the country.^[105] In addition to these, there were separate officials appointed for the caretaking of royal banquets and for entertainment.

Chardin specifically noticed the rank of doctors and astrologers and the respect that the Shahs had for them. The Shah had a dozen of each in his service and would usually be accompanied by three doctors and three astrologers, who were authorized to sit by his side on various occasions.^[104] The Chief Physician (*Hakim-bashi*) was a highly considered member of the Royal court,^[106] and the most revered astrologer of the court was given the title *Munajjim-bashi* (Chief Astrologer).^[107]

During the first century of the dynasty, the primary court language remained Azeri,^[103] although this increasingly changed after the capital was moved to Isfahan.^[9]

Local governments

On a local level, the government was divided into public land and royal possessions. The public land was under the rule of local governors, or *Khans*. Since the earliest days of the Safavid dynasty, the Qizilbash generals had been appointed to most of these posts. They ruled their provinces like petty shahs and spent all their revenues on their own province, only presenting the Shah with the balance. In return, they had to keep ready a standing army at all times and provide the Shah with military assistance upon his request. It was also requested from them that they appoint a lawyer (*vakil*) to the Court who would inform them on matters pertaining to the provincial affairs.^[108] Shah Abbas I intended to decrease the power of the Qizilbash by bringing some of these provinces into his direct control, creating so called *Crown Provinces* (*Khassa*). But it was Shah Safi, under influence by his Prime Minister, Saru Taqi, that initiated the program of trying to increase the royal revenues by buying land from the governors and putting in place local commissioners.^[108] In time, this proved to become a burden to the people that were under the direct rule of the Shah, as these commissioners, unlike the former governors, had little knowledge about the local communities that



Frontpage on Jean Chardin's book on his journeys to Persia, published in 1739.

they controlled and were primarily interested in increasing the income of the Shah. And, while it was in the governors' own interest to increase the productivity and prosperity of their provinces, the commissioners received their income directly from the royal treasury and, as such, did not care so much about investing in agriculture and local industries. Thus, the majority of the people suffered from rapacity and corruption carried out in the name of the Shah.^[108]

Democratic institutions in a totalitarian society

In 16th and 17th century Iran, there existed a considerable number of local democratic institutions. Examples of such were the trade and artisan guilds, which had started to appear in Persia from the 1500s. Also, there were the quazi-religious fraternities called *futuvva*, which were run by local dervishes. Another official selected by the consensus of the local community was the *kadkhoda*, who functioned as a common law administrator.^[109] The local sheriff (*kalantar*), who was not elected by the people but directly appointed by the Shah, and whose function was to protect the people against injustices on the part of the local governors, supervised the *kadkhoda*.^[110]

Legal system

In Safavid Persia there was little distinction between theology and jurisprudence, or between divine justice and human justice, and it all went under *Islamic jurisprudence* (*fiqh*). The legal system was built up of two branches: civil law, which had its roots in sharia, *received wisdom*, and *urf*, meaning *traditional experience* and very similar to the Western form of common law. While the imams and judges of law applied civil law in their practice, *urf* was primarily exercised by the local commissioners, who inspected the villages on behalf of the Shah, and by the Minister of Justice (*Divanbegi*). The latter were all secular functionaries working on behalf of the Shah.^[111]

The highest level in the legal system was the Minister of Justice, and the law officers were divided into senior appointments, such as the magistrate (*darughah*), inspector (*visir*), and recorder (*vak'anevis*). The lesser officials were the qazi, corresponding a civil lieutenant, who ranked under the local governors and functioned as judges in the provinces.

According to Chardin:^[112]

There were no particular place assigned for the administration of justice. Each magistrate executes justice in his own house in a large room opening on to a courtyard or a garden which is raised two or three feet above the ground. The Judge is seated at one end of the room having a writer and a man of law by his side.

Chardin also noted that bringing cases into court in Persia was easier than in the West. The judge (qazi) was informed of relevant points involved and would decide whether or not to take up the case. Having agreed to do so, a sergeant would investigate and summon the defendant, who was then obliged to pay the fee of the sergeant. The two parties with their witnesses pleaded their respective cases, usually without any counsel, and the judge would pass his judgment after the first or second hearing.^[112]

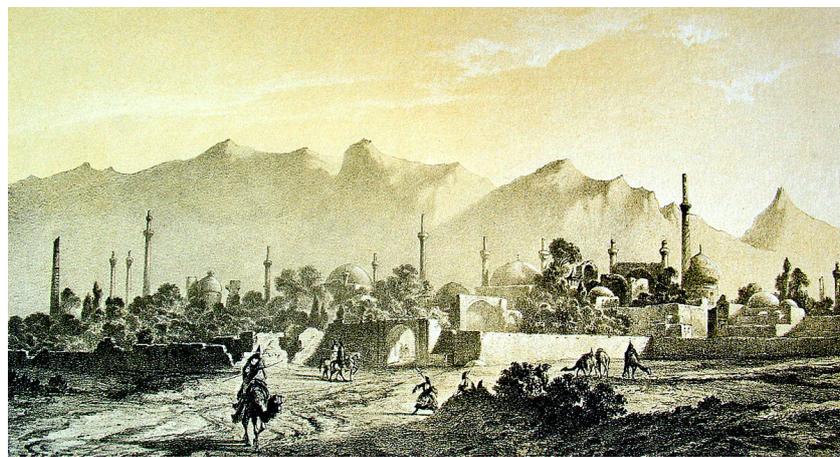
Criminal justice was entirely separate from civil law and was judged upon *common law* administered through the Minister of Justice, local governors and the Court minister (the *Nazir*). Despite being based on *urf*, it relied upon



certain sets of legal principles. Murder was punishable by death, and the penalty for bodily injuries was invariably the bastinado. Robbers had their right wrists amputated the first time, and sentenced to death on any subsequent occasion. State criminals were subjected to the *karkan*, a triangular wooden collar placed around the neck. On extraordinary occasions when the Shah took justice into his own hand, he would dress himself up in red for the importance of the event, according to ancient tradition.^[111]

Economy

What fueled the growth of Safavid economy was Iran's position between the burgeoning civilizations of Europe to its west and India and Islamic Central Asia to its east and north. The Silk Road which led through northern Iran to India revived in the 16th century. Abbas I also supported direct trade with Europe, particularly England and The Netherlands which sought Persian carpet, silk and textiles. Other exports were horses, goat hair, pearls and an inedible bitter almond hadam-talka used as a spice in India. The main imports were spice, textiles (woolens from Europe, cottons from Gujarat), metals, coffee, and sugar.



A 19th century drawing of Isfahan.

Agriculture

According to the historian Roger Savory, the twin bases of the domestic economy were pastoralism and agriculture. And, just as the higher levels of the social hierarchy was divided between the Turkish “men of the sword” and the Persian “men of the pen”; so were the lower level divided between the Turcoman tribes, who were cattle breeders and lived apart from the surrounding population, and the Persians, who were peasants and settled agriculturalists.^[113]

The Safavid economy was to a large extent based on agriculture and taxation of agricultural products. According to the French jeweller Jean Chardin, the variety in agricultural products in Persia was unrivaled in Europe and consisted of fruits and vegetables never even heard of in Europe. Chardin was present at some feasts in Isfahan where there were more than fifty different kinds of fruit. He thought that there was nothing like it in France or Italy:^[114]

“Tobacco grew all over the country and was as strong as that grown in Brazil. Saffron was the best in the world... Melons were regarded as excellent fruit, and there were more than 50 different sorts, the finest of which came from Khorasan. And in spite of being transported for more than thirty days, they were fresh when they reached Isfahan... After melons the finest fruits were grapes and dates, and the best dates were grown in Jahrom.”

Despite of this, he was disappointed when travelling the country and witnessing the abundance of land that was not irrigated, or the fertile plains that were not cultivated, something he thought was in stark contrast to Europe. He blamed this on misgovernment, the sparse population of the country, and lack of appreciation of agriculture amongst the Persians.^[115]

In the period prior to Shah Abbas I, most of the land was assigned to officials (civil, military and religious). From the time of Shah Abbas onwards, more land was brought under the direct control of the shah. And since agriculture accounted to the by far largest share of tax revenue, he took measures to expand it. What remained unchanged, was the “*crop-sharing agreement*” between whom ever was the landlord, and the peasant. This agreement consisted of five elements: land, water, plough-animals, seed and labour. Each element constituted 20 per cent of the crop production, and if, for instance, the peasant provided the labour force and the animals, he would be entitled to 40 per cent of the earnings.^[116] ^[117] According to contemporary historians, though, the landlord always had the worst of the bargain with the peasant in the crop-sharing agreements. In general, the peasants lived in comfort, and they were well paid and wore good clothes, although it was also noted that they were subject to forced labour and lived under heavy demands.^[118]

Travel and Caravanserais

Horses were the most important of all the domestic animals, and the best were brought in from Arabia and Central-Asia. They were costly because of the widespread trade in them, including to Turkey and India. The next most important mount, when travelling through Persia, was the mule. Also, the camel was a good investment for the merchant, as they cost nearly nothing to feed, carried a lot weight and could travel almost anywhere.^[119]

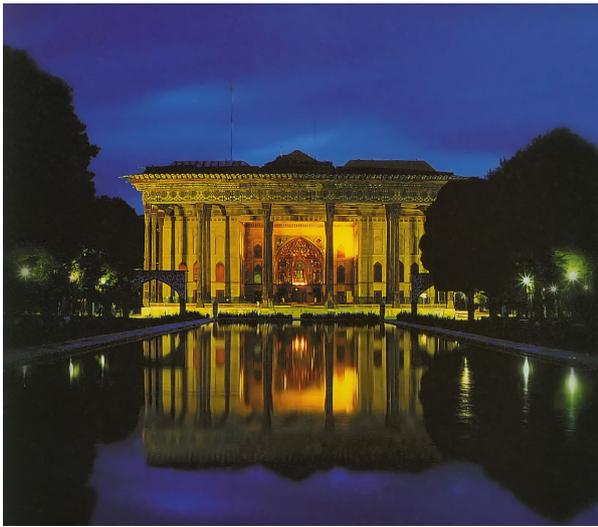
Under the governance of the strong shahs, especially during the first half of the 17th century, travelling through Persia was easy because of good roads and the caravanserais, that were strategically placed along the route. Thévenot and Tavernier commented that the Persian caravanserais were better built and cleaner than their Turkish counterparts.^[120] According to Chardin, they were also more abundant than in the Mughal or Ottoman Empires, where they were less frequent but larger.^[121] Caravanserais were designed especially to benefit poorer travellers, as they could stay there for as long as they wished, without payment for lodging. During the reign of Shah Abbas I, as he tried to upgrade the Silk route to improve the commercial prosperity of the Empire, an abundance of caravanserais, bridges, bazaars and roads were built, and this strategy was followed by wealthy merchants who also profitted from the increase in trade. To uphold the standard, another source of revenue was needed, and road toll, that were collected by guards (*rah-dars*), were stationed along the trading routes. They in turn provided for the safety of the travellers, and both Thevenot and Tavernier stressed the safety of travelling in 17th century Persia, and the courtesy and refinement of the policing guards.^[122] The Italian traveller Pietro Della Valle was impressed by an encounter with one of these road guards:^[123]



The Mothers Inn caravanserai in Isfahan, that was built during the reign of Shah Abass II, was a luxury resort meant for the wealthiest merchants and selected guests of the shah. Today it is a luxury hotel and goes under the name of Hotel Abassi.

“He examined our baggage, but in the most obliging manner possible, not opening our trunks or packages, and was satisfied with a small tax, which was his due...”

Foreign trade and The Silk Route



The Chehel Sotoun Palace in Isfahan was where the Shah would meet foreign dignitaries and embassies. It is famous for the frescos that cover its walls.

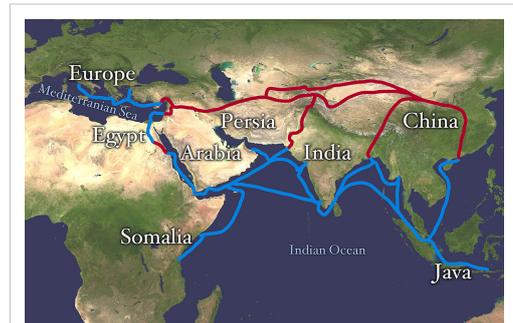
The Portuguese Empire and the discovery of the trading route around the Cape of Good Hope in 1487 not only hit a death blow to Venice as a trading nation, but it also hurt the trade that was going on along the Silk Route and especially the Persian Gulf. They correctly identified the three key points to control all seaborne trade between Asia and Europe; The Gulf of Aden, The Persian Gulf and the Straits of Malacca by cutting off and controlling these strategic locations with high taxation.^[124] In 1602 Shah Abbas I drove the Portuguese out of Bahrain, but he needed naval assistance from the newly arrived British East India Company to finally expel them from the Strait of Hormuz and regain control of this trading route.^[125] He convinced the British to assist him by allowing them to open factories in Shiraz, Isfahan and Jask.^[126] ^[127]

With the later end of the Portuguese Empire, the British, Dutch and French in particular gained easier access to Persian sea-born trade. Although they, unlike the Portuguese, did not arrive as colonisers, but as merchant adventurers. The terms of trade were not imposed on the Safavid shahs, but rather negotiated.

In the long term, however, the sea-born trade route was of less significance to the Persians than was the traditional Silk Route. Lack of investment in ship building and the navy, provided the Europeans with the opportunity to monopolize this trading route. The land-born trade would thus continue to provide the bulk of revenues to the Persian state. Much of the cash revenue came not so much from what could be sold abroad, as from the custom charges and transit dues levied on goods passing through the country.^[128] Shah Abbas was determined to greatly expand this trade, but faced the problem of having to deal with the Ottomans, who controlled the two most vital routes: the route across Arabia

to the Mediterranean ports, and the route through Anatolia and Istanbul. A third route was therefore devised which circumvented Ottoman territory. By travelling across the Caspian sea to the north, they would reach Russia. And with the assistance of the Muscovy Company they could cross over to Moscow, reaching Europe via Poland. This trading route proved to be of vital importance, especially during times of war with the Ottomans.^[129]

By the end of the 17th century, the Dutch had become dominant in the trade that went via The Persian Gulf, having won most trade agreements and managed to strike deals before the British or French were able to. They particularly established monopoly of the spice trade between the East Indies and Iran.^[130]



The Silk Routes.

The Armenian merchants and the trade of silk

The one valuable item, sought for in Europe, which Iran possessed and which could bring in silver in sufficient quantities was silk, which was produced in the northern provinces, along the Caspian coastline. The trade of this product was done by Turks and Persians to begin with, but during the 17th century the Christian Armenians became increasingly vital in the trade of this merchandise, as middlemen.^[131]

Whereas domestic trade was largely in the hands of Persian and Jewish merchants, by late 17th century, almost all foreign trade was controlled by the Armenians.^[132] They were even hired by wealthy Persian merchants to travel to Europe when they wanted to create commercial bases there, and the Armenians eventually established themselves in cities like Bursa, Aleppo, Venice,

Livorno, Marseilles and Amsterdam.^[131] Realizing this, Shah Abbas resettled large numbers of Armenians from the Caucasus to his capital city and provided them with loans.^[131] And as the shah realized the importance of doing trade with the Europeans, he assured that the Safavid society was one with religious tolerance. The Christian Armenians thus became a commercial elite in the Safavid society and managed to survive in the tough atmosphere of business being fought over by the British, Dutch, French, Indians and Persians, by always having large capital readily available and by managing to strike harder bargains ensuring cheaper prices than what, for instance, their British rivals ever were able to.^[133]



The Vank Cathedral. The Armenians moved into the Jolfa district of Isfahan and were free to build their prayer houses, eventually becoming an integral part of the society.

Culture

Persian Arts	
Visual Arts	
Painting	Miniatures
Calligraphy	
Decorative Arts	
Jewellery	Metalworks
Embroidery	Motifs
Tileworks	Handicrafts
Pottery	Mirrorworks
Literature	
Literature	Mythology
Folklore	Philosophy
Other	
Architecture	Cuisine
Carpets	Gardens
Performance Arts	

Dance	Music
Cinema	Theatre



Naqsh-e Jahan square in Isfahan is the epitome of 16th-century Iranian architecture. .

Culture within the Safavid family

The Safavid family was a literate family from its early origin. There are extant Tati and Persian poetry from Shaykh Safi ad-din Ardabili as well as extant Persian poetry from Shaykh Sadr ad-din. Most of the extant poetry of Shah Ismail I is in Azerbaijani pen-name of Khatai.^[49] Sam Mirza, the son of Shah Esmail as well as some later authors assert that Ismail composed poems both in Turkish and Persian but only a few specimens of his Persian verse have survived.^[48] A collection of his poems in Azeri were published as a Divan. Shah Tahmasp who has composed poetry in Persian was also a painter, while Shah Abbas II was known as a poet, writing Azerbaijani verses.^[134] Sam Mirza, the son of Ismail I was himself a poet and composed his poetry in Persian. He also compiled an anthology of contemporary poetry.^[135]

Culture within the empire

Shah Abbas I recognized the commercial benefit of promoting the arts - artisan products provided much of Iran's foreign trade. In this period, handicrafts such as tile making, pottery and textiles developed and great advances were made in miniature painting, bookbinding, decoration and calligraphy. In the 16th century, carpet weaving evolved from a nomadic and peasant craft to a well-executed industry with specialization of design and manufacturing. Tabriz was the center of this industry. The carpets of Ardabil were commissioned to commemorate the Safavid dynasty. The elegantly baroque yet famously 'Polonaise' carpets were made in Iran during the 17th century.



19th century painting of the Chahar Bagh School in Isfahan.

Using traditional forms and materials, Reza Abbasi (1565–1635) introduced new subjects to Persian painting — semi-nude women, youth, lovers. His painting and calligraphic style influenced Iranian artists for much of the Safavid period, which came to be known as the Isfahan school. Increased contact with distant cultures in the 17th century, especially Europe, provided a boost of inspiration to Iranian artists who adopted modeling, foreshortening, spatial recession, and the medium of oil painting (Shah Abbas II sent Zaman to study in Rome). The epic *Shahnameh* ("Book of Kings"), a stellar example of manuscript illumination and calligraphy, was made during Shah Tahmasp's

reign. (This book was written by Ferdousi in 1000 AD for Sultan Mahmood Ghaznawi) Another manuscript is the *Khamsa* by Nezami executed 1539-43 by Aqa Mirak and his school in Isfahan.

Isfahan bears the most prominent samples of the Safavid architecture, all constructed in the years after Shah Abbas I permanently moved the capital there in 1598: the Imperial Mosque, Masjid-e Shah, completed in 1630, the Imam Mosque (Masjid-e Imami) the Lutfallah Mosque and the Royal Palace.

According to William Cleveland and Martin Bunton,^[136] the establishment of Isfahan as the Great capital of Persia and the material splendor of the city attracted intellectual's from all corners of the world, which contributed to the cities rich cultural life. The impressive achievements of its 400 000 residents prompted the inhabitants to coin their famous boast, "Isfahan is half the world".

Poetry stagnated under the Safavids; the great medieval ghazal form languished in over-the-top lyricism. Poetry lacked the royal patronage of other arts and was hemmed in by religious prescriptions.

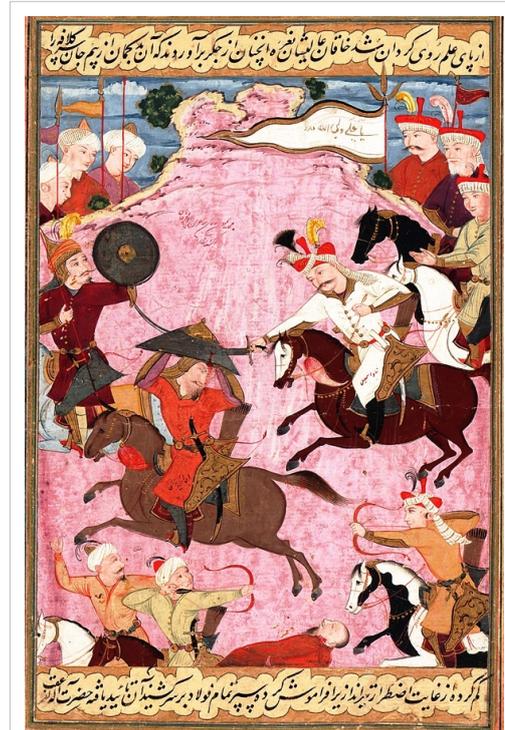
The arguably most renowned historian from this time was Iskandar Beg Munshi. His *History of Shah Abbas the Great* written a few years after its subject's death, achieved a nuanced depth of history and character.

The Isfahan School – Islamic philosophy revived

Islamic philosophy^[137] flourished in the Safavid era in what scholars commonly refer to the School of Isfahan. Mir Damad is considered the founder of this school. Among luminaries of this school of philosophy, the names of Iranian philosophers such as Mir Damad, Mir Fendereski, Shaykh Bahai and Mohsen Fayz Kashani stand out. The school reached its apogee with that of the Iranian philosopher Mulla Sadra who is arguably the most significant Islamic philosopher after Avicenna. Mulla Sadra has become the dominant philosopher of the Islamic East, and his approach to the nature of philosophy has been exceptionally influential up to this day.^[138] He wrote the *Al-Hikma al-muta'aliya fi-l-asfar al-'aqliyya al-arba'a* ("*The Transcendent Philosophy of the Four Journeys of the Intellect*"),^[139] a meditation on what he called 'meta philosophy' which brought to a synthesis the philosophical mysticism of Sufism, the theology of Shi'a Islam, and the Peripatetic and Illuminationist philosophies of Avicenna and Suhrawardi.

According to the Iranologist Richard Nelson Frye:^[140]

They were the continuers of the classical tradition of Islamic thought, which after Averroes died in the Arab west. The Persians schools of thought were the true heirs of the great Islamic thinkers of the golden age of Islam, whereas in the Ottoman empire there was an intellectual stagnation, as far as the traditions of Islamic philosophy were concerned.



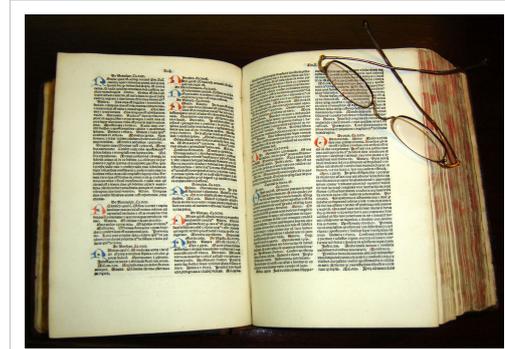
The Battle between Shah Ismail and Abul-khayr Khan.

Medicine

The status of physicians during the Safavids stood as high as ever. Whereas neither the ancient Greeks nor the Romans accorded high social status to their doctors, Iranians had from ancient times honored their physicians, who were often appointed counselors of the Shahs. This would not change with the Arab conquest of Iran, and it was primarily the Persians that took upon them the works of philosophy, logic, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, music and alchemy.^[141]

By the sixteenth century, Islamic science, which to a large extent meant Persian science, was resting on its laurels. The works of al-Razi (865-92) (known to the West as Razes) were still used in European universities as standard textbooks of alchemy, pharmacology and pediatrics. The Canon of Medicine by Avicenna (c. 980–1037) was still regarded as one of the primary textbooks in medicine throughout most of the civilized world.^[142] As such, the status of medicine in the Safavid period did not change much, and relied as much on these works as ever before. Physiology was still based on the four humours of ancient and mediaeval medicine, and bleeding and purging were still the principal forms of therapy by surgeons, something even Thevenot experienced during his visit to Persia.^[106]

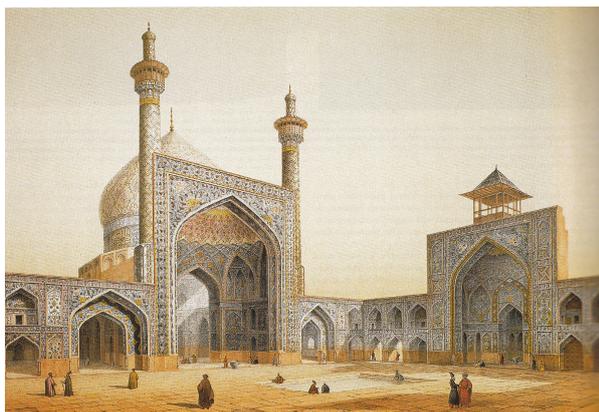
The only field within medicine where some progress were made was pharmacology, with the compilation of the "Tibb-e Shifa'i" in 1556. This book was translated into French in 1681 by Angulus de Saint, under the name "Pharmacopoea Persica".^[143]



A Latin copy of *The Canon of Medicine*, dated 1484, located at the P.I. Nixon Medical Historical Library of The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, USA.

Isfahan is Half the World

The architectural legacy of the Safavids



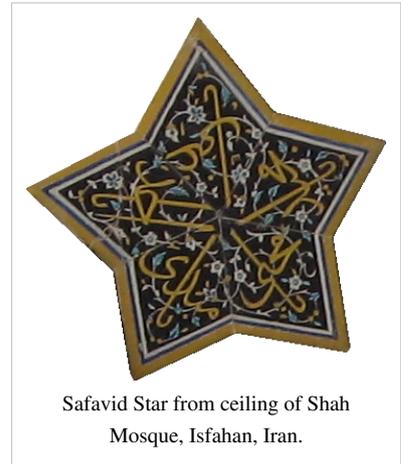
Painting by the French architect, Pascal Coste, visiting Persia in 1841 (from *Monuments modernes de la Perse*). In the Safavid era the Persian Architecture flourished again and saw many new monuments, such as the Masjed-e Shah, part of Naghsh-i Jahan Square which is the biggest historic plaza in the world.

A new age in Iranian architecture began with the rise of the Safavid dynasty. Economically robust and politically stable, this period saw a flourishing growth of theological sciences. Traditional architecture evolved in its patterns and methods leaving its impact on the architecture of the following periods.

Indeed, one of the greatest legacies of the Safavids is the architecture. In 1598, when Shah Abbas decided to move the capital of his Persian empire from the north-western city of Qazvin to the central city of Isfahan, he initiated what would become one of the greatest programmes in Persian history; the complete remaking of the city. By choosing the central city of Isfahan, fertilized by the Zāyande roud ("The life-giving river"), lying as an oasis of intense cultivation in the midst of a vast area of arid landscape,

he both distanced his capital from any future assaults

by the Ottomans and the Uzbeks, and at the same time gained more control over the Persian Gulf, which had recently become an important trading route for the Dutch and British East India Companies.^[144]



Safavid Star from ceiling of Shah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran.

The Chief architect of this colossal task of urban planning was Shaykh Bahai (Baha' ad-Din al-`Amili), who focused the programme on two key features of Shah Abbas's master plan: the Chahar Bagh avenue, flanked at either side by all the prominent institutions of the city, such as the residences of all foreign dignitaries. And the Naqsh-e Jahan Square ("*Exemplar of the World*").^[145] Prior to the Shah's ascent to power, Persia had a decentralized power-structure, in which different institutions battled for power, including both the military (the Qizilbash) and governors of the different provinces making up the empire. Shah Abbas wanted to undermine this political structure, and the recreation of Isfahan, as a Grand capital of Persia, was an important step in centralizing the power.^[146] The ingenuity of the



The 16th-century Chehel Sotun pavilion in Qazvin, Iran. It is the last remains of the palace of the second Safavid king, Shah Tahmasp; it was heavily restored by the Qajars in the 19th century.

square, or *Maidān*, was that, by building it, Shah Abbas would gather the three main components of power in Persia in his own backyard; the power of the clergy, represented by the Masjed-e Shah, the power of the merchants, represented by the Imperial Bazaar, and of course, the power of the Shah himself, residing in the Ali Qapu Palace.

Distinctive monuments like the Sheikh Lotfollah (1618), Hasht Behesht (Eight Paradise Palace) (1469) and the Chahar Bagh School(1714) appeared in Isfahan and other cities. This extensive development of architecture was rooted in Persian culture and took form in the design of schools, baths, houses, caravanserai and other urban spaces such as bazaars and squares. It continued until the end of the Qajar reign.^[147]

The languages of the court, military, administration and culture

The Safavids by the time of their rise were Azerbaijani-speaking although they also used Persian as a second language. The language chiefly used by the Safavid court and military establishment was Azerbaijani.^[11] ^[14] But the official^[148] language of the empire as well as the administrative language, language of correspondence, literature and historiography was Persian.^[11] The inscriptions on Safavid currency were also in Persian.^[149]

Safavids also used Persian as a cultural and administrative language throughout the empire and were bilingual in Persian.^[49] According to Arnold J. Toynbee,^[150]

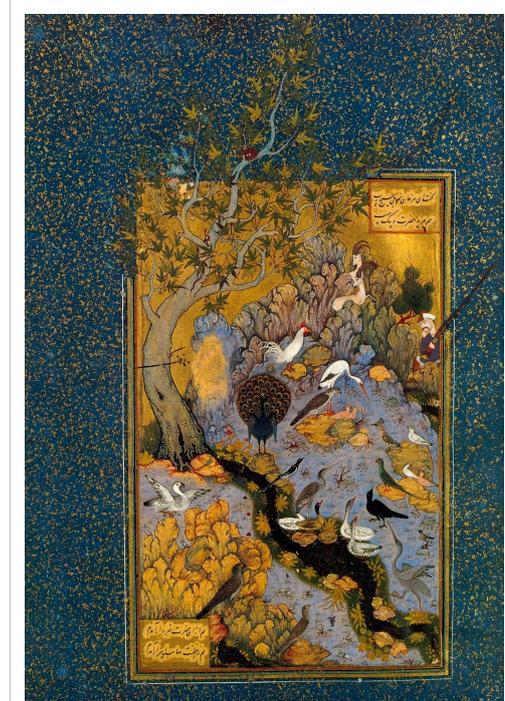
in the heyday of the Mughal, Safawi, and Ottoman regimes New Persian was being patronized as the language of literate humaniores by the ruling element over the whole of this huge realm, while it was also being employed as the official language of administration in those two-thirds of its realm that lay within the Safawi and the Mughal frontiers

According to John R. Perry,^[151]

In the 16th century, the Turcophone Safavid family of Ardabil in Azerbaijan, probably of Turkicized Iranian, origin, conquered Iran and established Turkic, the language of the court and the military, as a high-status vernacular and a widespread contact language, influencing spoken Persian, while written Persian, the language of high literature and civil administration, remained virtually unaffected in status and content.

According to Zabiollah Safa,^[14]

In day-to-day affairs, the language chiefly used at the Safavid court and by the great military and political officers, as well as the religious dignitaries, was Turkish, not Persian; and the last class of persons wrote their religious works mainly in Arabic. Those who wrote in Persian were either lacking in proper tuition in this tongue, or wrote outside Iran and hence at a distance from centers where Persian was the accepted vernacular, endued with that vitality and susceptibility to skill in its use which a language can have only in places where it truly belongs.



Scene from Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*, by Habibulla Meshedi (1600).



Prince Muhammad-Beik of Georgia by
Reza Abbasi (1620)

According to É. Á. Csató et al.,^[33]

A specific Turkic language was attested in Safavid Persia during the 16th and 17th centuries, a language that Europeans often called Persian Turkish ("Turc Agemi", "lingua turcica agemica"), which was a favourite language at the court and in the army because of the Turkic origins of the Safavid dynasty. The original name was just turki, and so a convenient name might be Turki-yi Acemi. This variety of Persian Turkish must have been also spoken in the Caucasian and Transcaucasian regions, which during the 16th century belonged to both the Ottomans and the Safavids, and were not fully integrated into the Safavid empire until 1606. Though that language might generally be identified as Middle Azerbaijanian, it's not yet possible to define exactly the limits of this language, both in linguistic and territorial respects. It was certainly not homogenous - maybe it was an Azerbaijanian-Ottoman mixed language, as Beltadze (1967:161) states for a translation of the gospels in Georgian script from the 18th century.

According to Rula Jurdi Abisaab,^[152]

Although the Arabic language was still the medium for religious scholastic expression, it was precisely under the Safavids that hadith complications and doctrinal works of all sorts were being translated to Persian. The 'Amili (Lebanese scholars of Shi'i faith) operating through the Court-based religious posts, were forced to master the

Persian language; their students translated their instructions into Persian. Persianization went hand in hand with the popularization of 'mainstream' Shi'i belief.

According to Cornelis Versteegh,^[153]

The Safavid dynasty under Shah Ismail (961/1501) adopted Persian and the Shi'ite form of Islam as the national language and religion.

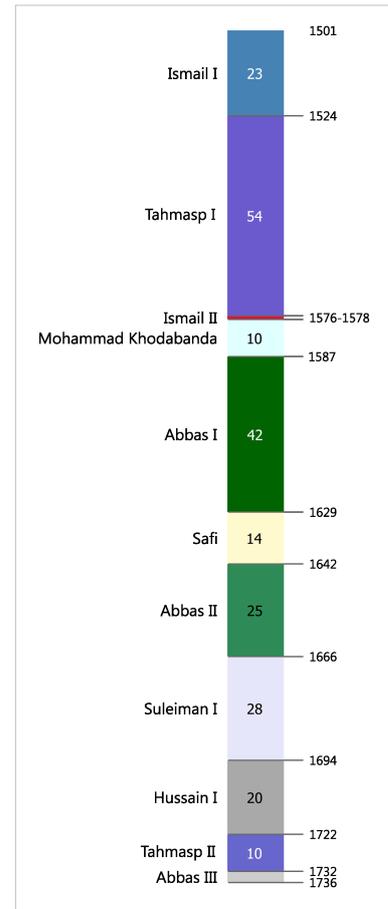
Legacy

It was the Safavids who made Iran the spiritual bastion of Shi'ism against the onslaughts of Sunni Islam, and the repository of Persian cultural traditions and self-awareness of Iranianhood, acting as a bridge to modern Iran. The founder of the dynasty, Shah Isma'il, adopted the title of "Persian Emperor" *Pādišah-ī Īrān*, with its implicit notion of an Iranian state stretching from Khorasan as far as Euphrates, and from the Oxus to the southern Territories of the Persian Gulf.^[154] According to Professor Roger Savory^{[155] [156]}:

In a number of ways the Safavids affected the development of the modern Iranian state: first, they ensured the continuance of various ancient and traditional Persian institutions, and transmitted these in a strengthened, or more 'national', form; second, by imposing Ithna 'Ashari Shi'a Islam on Iran as the official religion of the Safavid state, they enhanced the power of mujtahids. The Safavids thus set in train a struggle for power between the turban and the crown that is to say, between the proponents of secular government and the proponents of a theocratic government; third, they laid the foundation of alliance between the religious classes ('Ulama') and the bazaar which played an important role both in the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1906, and again in the Islamic Revolution of 1979; fourth the policies introduced by Shah Abbas I conduced to a more centralized administrative system.

Safavid Shahs of Iran

- Ismail I 1501–1524
- Tahmasp I 1524–1576
- Ismail II 1576–1578
- Mohammed Khodabanda 1578–1587
- Abbas I 1587–1629
- Safi 1629–1642
- Abbas II 1642–1666
- Suleiman I 1666–1694
- Sultan Hoseyn I 1694–1722
- Tahmasp II 1722–1732
- Abbas III 1732–1736



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- [3] *...the Order of the Lion and the Sun, a device which, since the 17 century at least, appeared on the national flag of the Safavids the lion representing 'Ali and the sun the glory of the Shi'i faith*, Mikhail Borisovich Piotrovskii, J. M. Rogers, Hermitage Rooms at Somerset House, Courtauld Institute of Art, *Heaven on earth: Art from Islamic Lands : Works from the State Hermitage Museum and the Khalili Collection*, Prestel, 2004, p. 178.
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- [5] Roemer, H. R. (1986). "The Safavid Period". *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 189–350. ISBN 0-521-20094-6, p. 331: "Depressing though the condition in the country may have been at the time of the fall of Safavids, they cannot be allowed to overshadow the achievements of the dynasty, which was in many respects to prove essential factors in the development of Persia in modern times. These include the maintenance of Persian as the official language and of the present-day boundaries of the country, adherence to the Twelve Shi'i, the monarchical system, the planning and architectural features of the urban centers, the centralised administration of the state, the alliance of the Shi'i Ulama with the merchant bazaars, and the symbiosis of the Persian-speaking population with important non-Persian, especially Turkish speaking minorities".
- [6] Rudi Matthee, "Safavids (<http://www.iranica.com/articles/safavids>)" in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed on April 4, 2010. "The Persian focus is also reflected in the fact that theological works also began to be composed in the Persian language and in that Persian verses replaced Arabic on the coins." "The political system that emerged under them had overlapping political and religious boundaries and a core language, Persian, which served as the literary tongue, and even began to replace Arabic as the vehicle for theological discourse".
- [7] Ronald W Ferrier, *The Arts of Persia*. Yale University Press. 1989, p. 9.
- [8] John R Perry, "Turkic-Iranian contacts", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, January 24, 2006: "...written Persian, the language of high literature and civil administration, remained virtually unaffected in status and content"
- [9] Cyril Glassé (ed.), *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, revised ed., 2003, ISBN 0759101906, p. 392: "Shah Abbas moved his capital from Qazvin to Isfahan. His reign marked the peak of Safavid dynasty's achievement in art, diplomacy, and commerce. It was probably around this time that the court, which originally spoke a Turkic language, began to use Persian"
- [10] Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, V, pp. 514-15. excerpt: "in the heyday of the Mughal, Safawi, and Ottoman regimes New Persian was being patronized as the language of *literae humaniores* by the ruling element over the whole of this huge realm, while it was also being employed as the official language of administration in those two-thirds of its realm that lay within the Safawi and the Mughal frontiers"
- [11] Mazzaoui, Michel B; Canfield, Robert (2002). "Islamic Culture and Literature in Iran and Central Asia in the early modern period" (<http://books.google.com/books?id=qwwoozMU0LMC&pg=PA86#PPA87,M1>). *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 86–7. ISBN 0521522919, ISBN 978-0-521-52291-5. . "Safavid power with its distinctive Persian-Shi'i culture, however, remained a middle ground between its two mighty Turkish neighbors. The Safavid state, which lasted at least until 1722, was essentially a "Turkish" dynasty, with Azeri Turkish (Azerbaijan being the family's home base) as the language of the rulers and the court as well as the Qizilbash military establishment. Shah Ismail wrote poetry in Turkish. The administration nevertheless was Persian, and the Persian language was the vehicle of diplomatic correspondence (insha'), of belles-lettres (adab), and of history (tarikh)."

- [12] Ruda Jurdi Abisaab. "Iran and Pre-Independence Lebanon" in Houchang Esfandiari Chehabi, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, IB Tauris 2006, p. 76: "Although the Arabic language was still the medium for religious scholastic expression, it was precisely under the Safavids that hadith complications and doctrinal works of all sorts were being translated to Persian. The 'Amili (Lebanese scholars of Shi'i faith) operating through the Court-based religious posts, were forced to master the Persian language; their students translated their instructions into Persian. Persianization went hand in hand with the popularization of 'mainstream' Shi'i belief."
- [13] Savory, Roger (2007). *Iran Under the Safavids* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=v4Yr4foWFFgC&pg=PA213>). Cambridge University Press. pp. 213. ISBN 0521042518, ISBN 978-0-521-04251-2. . "qizilbash normally spoke Azari brand of Turkish at court, as did the Safavid shahs themselves; lack of familiarity with the Persian language may have contributed to the decline from the pure classical standards of former times"
- [14] Zabiollah Safa (1986), "Persian Literature in the Safavid Period", *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ISBN 0-521-20094-6, pp. 948–65. P. 950: "In day-to-day affairs, the language chiefly used at the Safavid court and by the great military and political officers, as well as the religious dignitaries, was Turkish, not Persian; and the last class of persons wrote their religious works mainly in Arabic. Those who wrote in Persian were either lacking in proper tuition in this tongue, or wrote outside Iran and hence at a distance from centers where Persian was the accepted vernacular, endowed with that vitality and susceptibility to skill in its use which a language can have only in places where it truly belongs."
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- [16] *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, Ed. Cyril Glassé, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 449.
- [17] Ferrier, RW, *A Journey to Persia: Jean Chardin's Portrait of a Seventeenth-century Empire*, p. ix.
- [18] Helen Chapin Metz. *Iran, a Country study*. 1989. University of Michigan, p. 313.
- [19] Emory C. Bogle. *Islam: Origin and Belief*. University of Texas Press. 1989, p. 145.
- [20] Stanford Jay Shaw. *History of the Ottoman Empire*. Cambridge University Press. 1977, p. 77.
- [21] Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, IB Tauris (March 30, 2006).
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- [26] Anthony Bryer. "Greeks and Türkmens: The Pontic Exception", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 29 (1975), Appendix II - Genealogy of the Muslim Marriages of the Princesses of Trebizond
- [27] *Why is there such confusion about the origins of this important dynasty, which reasserted Iranian identity and established an independent Iranian state after eight and a half centuries of rule by foreign dynasties?* RM Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980), p. 3.
- [28] Alireza Shapur Shahbazi (2005), "The History of the Idea of Iran", in Vesta Curtis ed., *Birth of the Persian Empire*, IB Tauris, London, p. 108: "Similarly the collapse of Sassanian Eranshahr in AD 650 did not end Iranians' national idea. The name "Iran" disappeared from official records of the Saffarids, Samanids, Buyids, Saljuqs and their successor. But one unofficially used the name Iran, Eranshahr, and similar national designations, particularly Mamalek-e Iran or "Iranian lands", which exactly translated the old Avestan term Ariyanam Daihunam. On the other hand, when the Safavids (not Reza Shah, as is popularly assumed) revived a national state officially known as Iran, bureaucratic usage in the Ottoman empire and even Iran itself could still refer to it by other descriptive and traditional appellations".
- [29] In the pre-Safavid written work Safvat as-Safa (oldest manuscripts from 1485 and 1491), the origin of the Safavids is traced to Piruz Shah Zarin Kolah who is called a Kurd from Sanjan, while in the post-Safavid manuscripts, this portion has been excised and Piruz Shah Zarin Kollah is made a descendant of the Imams. R Savory, "Ebn Bazzaz" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. In the *Silsilat an-nasab-i Safawiya* (composed during the reign of Shah Suleiman, 1667–94), by Hussayn ibn Abdal Zahedi, the ancestry of the Safavid was purported to be tracing back to Hijaz and the first Shi'i Imam as follows: Shaykh Safi al-din Abul Fatah Eshaq ibn (son of) Shaykh Amin al-Din Jabrail ibn Qutb al-din ibn Salih ibn Muhammad al-Hafez ibn Awad ibn Firuz Shah Zarin Kulah ibn Majd ibn Sharafshah ibn Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn Seyyed Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Seyyed Ja'afar ibn Seyyed Muhammad ibn Seyyed Isma'il ibn Seyyed Muhammad ibn Seyyed Ahmad 'Arabi ibn Seyyed Qasim ibn Seyyed Abul Qasim Hamzah ibn Musa al-Kazim ibn Ja'far As-Sadiq ibn Muhammad al-Baqir ibn Imam Zayn ul-'Abidin ibn Hussein ibn Ali ibn Abi Taleb Alayha as-Salam. There are differences between this and the oldest manuscript of Safwat as-Safa. Seyyeds have been added from Piruz Shah Zarin Kulah up to the first Shi'i Imam and the nisba "Al-Kurdi" has been excised. The title/name "Abu Bakr" (also the name of the first Caliph and highly regarded by Sunnis) is deleted from Qutb ad-Din's name. 'Source: Husayn ibn Abdāl Zāhedī, 17th cent. *Silsilat al-nasab-i Safavīyah, nasabnāmah-i pādishāhān bā 'uzmat-i Safavī, ta'lif-i Shaykh Husayn pisar-i Shaykh Abdāl Pīr-zādah Zāhedī dar 'ahd-i Shāh-i Sulaymān-i Safavī*. Berlin, Chāpkhānah-i Īrānshahr, 1343 (1924), 116 pp. Original Persian: ابو شيخ صفی الدين ابو الفتح اسحق ابن شيخ امين الدين جبرائيل بن قطب الدين ابن صالح ابن محمد الحافظ ابن عوض ابن فيروز شاه زرين كلاله ابن محمد ابن شرف شاه ابن محمد ابن حسن ابن سيد محمد ابن ابراهيم ابن سيد جعفر بن سيد محمد ابن سيد اسمعيل بن سيد محمد بن سيد احمد اعرابي بن سيد قاسم بن سيد ابو القاسم حمزه بن موسى الكاظم ابن جعفر الصادق ابن محمد الباقر ابن امام زين العابدين بن حسين ابن علي ابن ابي طالب عليه السلام
- [30] R.M. Savory, "Safavid Persia" in: Ann Katherine Swynford Lambton, Peter Malcolm Holt, Bernard Lewis, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Cambridge University Press, 1977. p. 394: "They (Safavids after the establishment of the Safavid state) fabricated evidence to prove that the Safavids were Sayyids."

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- [43] Ehsan Yarshater, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Book 1, p. 240 (<http://www.iranica.com/articles/azerbaijan-vii>).
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- [49] V. Minorsky, "The Poetry of Shāh Ismā'īl I," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London 10/4 (1942): 1006–53.
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- [51] Lawrence Davidson, Arthur Goldschmid, "A Concise History of the Middle East", Westview Press, 2006, p. 153.
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