In the summer of 906-7/1501,1 after his victory over the Āq Quyūnlû, Ismā’īl entered the Türkmen capital Tabrīz, ascended the throne and took the title of Shah. He thereby founded the rule of the Safavid dynasty in Iran which was to last until 1148/1736. Thus after becoming Grand Master of the Ardabil order on the death of his brother Sultan ‘Alî, he finally attained the political power in pursuit of which his father and grandfather had already lost their lives.

Whether we think of this event as marking the beginning of modern Persian history or not, it certainly heralds a new era. The historical achievement of the Safavids was to establish a strong, enduring state in Iran after centuries of foreign rule and a lengthy period of political fragmentation. Although the preceding Türkmen dynasties, the Qarā Quyūnlû and the Āq Quyūnlû, created certain preconditions of this achievement and on the surface pursued similar aims for a short time – came near, indeed, to realising them – their success was only temporary. Despite all their military and political attainments in the late 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries – for example, the way in which they maintained their independence vis-à-vis such powerful neighbours as the Ottomans, the Mamlûks and the Timurids, or founded new states culminating in the kingdoms of Jahān Shāh and Uzun Hasan – not one of their rulers succeeded in establishing a lasting political structure. Though their rule extended deep into Persian territory, it represents from the point of view of the history of Persia merely peripheral formations beyond or on the frontiers of Iran. Not until the Safavid era did Iran witness the rise of a state similar in importance to the Ottoman empire or the empire of the Egyptian Mamlûks. For more than two centuries the Safavid kingdom prolonged the older political and cultural tradition of Persia and endowed the country and its peoples with a unique character of historic significance, which has in part endured even up to the present day. Its typical features include the revival of the monarchist tradition, the acquisition of historically justified territory, the creation of a new military and political structure, the spread of a

1 The date authoritatively established by Glassen, Die frühen Safawiden, p. 85.
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Shī'ī creed as the state religion, the Iranianisation of Persian Islam, the continued progress of modern Persian towards becoming the language of politics and administration in modern Iranian history, and the development of a specific culture which reached its peak in architecture (still visible today), but which also produced remarkable results in the intellectual life of the Persian nation. The importance of this dynasty is not confined to the national history of Persia: it was the Safavids who led Iran back on to the stage of world history. Their conflicts with the Ottomans and their policy of alliance with the Western powers have a world-historical interest and a direct relevance to the history of Western Europe.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE SAFAVIDS

Who was this Ismā'īl, who made such an impact on the Persia of his time and whose influence was still felt centuries later? His personality presents difficulties to the historian which cannot be resolved adequately by reference to either his biography or his career. Rather, they become clear and comprehensible only when one considers his origins and the strange intellectual climate which produced him. We have already met his father, Shaikh Haidar, and his grandfather Junaid as notably enterprising characters in Turkmen history, politically ambitious representatives of the Šafaviyya, a widespread ṣūfī order centred on Ardabil in the south-western coastal region of the Caspian Sea. The early history of this order differs little from that of other Islamic conventicles,1 but the political development in which it culminates is quite unique. The order is named after Shaikh Šafī al-Dīn Ishāq, whose lifespan (650–735/1252–1334) coincides almost exactly with the Persian Mongol empire of the Īl-Khāns, a circumstance which in several respects helped to determine his life and actions.

This era constitutes a special period in the history of Islam. With the destruction of the Caliphate by the Mongols and the decline of almost all the previous centres of power in the Islamic East, Islam was faced with a grave crisis, both political and religious; indeed, even its very existence seemed threatened. Moreover, after the numerous theological disputes and the endless wrangling between heretical sects in preceding

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1 See Kissling, "Aus der Geschichte des Chalvetijje-Ordens": the connection between the Šafaviyya and other orders is dealt with in Kissling’s table I.
centuries, the chance of a reconciliation of the warring factions and a reversion to the essential elements of the faith might have been found in this very crisis. It cannot be said that the opportunity was exploited: even at this point Islam did not undergo a genuine renaissance or reformation. However, in the territories under Mongol rule at least, certain differences were pushed into the background, for example, the split between the four schools of law and the violent opposition between the Sunna and the Shi'a, the origin of which – the question of the legitimate ruler of the Islamic world – had lost its immediate significance in the light of the Mongol victory. With the loss of the political background, the official theology, which had never been popular because of its rationalism, was deprived of much of its importance and influence. A popular religiosity became widespread, displaying several characteristics which had probably existed earlier but which had not prevailed owing to orthodox hostility. These included a marked willingness to believe in miracles, a cult of saints with the growth of much-frequented places of pilgrimage, and even the veneration of 'Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Muḥammad, an aspect fundamental to Shi'i belief but which does not necessarily have the same importance in Folk Islam since even devout Sunnis have venerated 'Ali as amīr al-mu'minīn. They also included Islamic mysticism, which had flowered long before the Mongol invasion but now underwent a great revival. At the same time the şūfī orders which practised it expanded to unprecedented dimensions. Their shaikhs were known and loved by the masses and the great respect commanded by certain masters of the religious chapters filled the scholarly theologians with envy and resentment.

In this respect Shaikh Šafī was a typical religious leader, a representative of Folk Islam far removed from the official theology, whose spokesmen viewed his career with grave suspicion. But in no other regard: for even his origins as a member of a respected family which had lived in Ardabil for generations, are by no means typical of the religious leaders of the time, who normally came from the lower classes. Although he was renowned for asceticism and piety, he displayed other qualities which for the most part accord ill with a propensity for the meditative existence of a recluse: self-confidence, enterprise, acquisitiveness and a militant activism. Shaikh Šafī is portrayed as a paradoxical personality in which the miracle worker and man of God combined with a sober, practical politician and a cunning merchant.
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His teacher, Tāj al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Gīlānī, known as Shaikh Zāhīd (b. 615/1218, d. 700/1301), a familiar figure in the history of Islamic religious orders, is said to have perceived his extraordinary gifts at their very first meeting and – according to the legend – to have realised even then that he was destined to become conqueror of the world. At all events, Shaikh Zāhīd allowed him to marry one of his daughters and appointed him as his successor.

Round about 1300, perhaps while his spiritual leader was still alive, Shaikh Šafī founded his own order in Ardabil, the Šafaviyya. He never in fact conquered the world, but Shaikh Zāhīd’s assessment of his other qualities proved accurate. As grand master of his order, as one of the holy men who in those days ruled alongside the political leaders, he achieved extraordinary success. Unless we are very much mistaken, his cell even became the focal point of a mass religious movement. He was friendly with the secular rulers and enjoyed remarkable esteem on their part; undoubtedly their attitude was determined by the size of his following and his influence over the people. He became the protector of the poor and the weak, while his convent at Ardabil became a refuge for the persecuted and the oppressed. In the last analysis he owed his popularity not merely to his reputation for sanctity, miracles and prophecies, but also to his political authority and to the wealth which he acquired in due course through the generous gifts of his supporters and admirers. His network of disciples and emissaries, so we are told, extended throughout the land from the Oxus to the Persian Gulf, from the Caucasus to Egypt. An emissary (khalīfa) of his is even said to have risen to a position of influence in Ceylon.

The intertwining of religion and politics in Islam, such as is seen in the history of the Prophet Muhammad himself, is also a characteristic feature of the Safavids which, as we can see, marks even the career of their founder. Although he was not very concerned with secular power, he certainly did not lack political influence. The integrity of his religious position is beyond question. Not only his good works and his asceticism, but also his missionary efforts to convert the Mongols, many of whom were not of the Islamic faith, and his influence on certain Turkish or Türkmen groups stamp him as a particularly conscientious Muslim. The theory that he dreamed of a renewal of Islam

1 Minorsky, “A Mongol Decree of 720/1320”.  
2 Glassen, Die frühen Safawiden, pp. 43, 130.  
3 Details ibid., p. 50, where a change in the meaning of the word “ṣūfī” to something like “committed, active Muslim” is mentioned.
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which would transcend the dogmatism of the theologians and the squabbling of the heretics is not without foundation. He certainly could not achieve so paramount a success during his lifetime, nor did the efforts of his activities, once this success materialised later, cover the whole Islamic oecumene. But the religious revival and unification of Persia which came about two centuries later are unthinkable without the brotherhood he founded — although there is no direct connection between them. Whether on the other hand Shaikh Ṣafī envisaged a Shīʿī Persia is quite a different question, with which we shall deal later.

Nevertheless, his rôle in the Ṣafaviyya was not confined to founding the order and giving it his name; he also established a firm basis for future development through the great number of supporters which he won for it and the prosperity with which he endowed it. The ancestors of the Safavid rulers are often depicted as unassuming monks, but this image does not really correspond to the historical facts even in the earliest phase. It is scarcely appropriate for the later period either. Although we have only meagre evidence about the immediate successors of Shaikh Ṣafī as masters of the Ardabil order, we can conclude simply from occasional references in the sources that they were highly esteemed — by the early Ottoman sultans, among others. How otherwise could one explain the ambitious plans and the political aspirations of Junaid and Shaikh Ḥaidar under the Türkmen princes of the latter half of the 9th/15th century — aspirations which were after all by no means entirely unfulfilled?

After his entry into Tabrīz, Shah Ismaʿīl immediately proceeded to institute the Shīʿī creed as the state religion. Until it is proved otherwise, we can assume that he took this decision out of religious conviction, not out of political expediency. The precise nature of Ismaʿīl’s commitment to the Shīʿī faith — to what extent he was familiar with and himself observed the precepts of the Shīʿa — remains to be seen. At present it will suffice to affirm that he desired to abolish the Sunna with

1 For endowments set up in Shaikh Ṣafī’s favour, see M.H.M. Nakhjuvānī, “Fārmānī az fārāmin-i daura-yi Mughāl”, Revue de la Faculté des Lettres de Tabrīz v/1 (1953), 40–8.
3 Political motives for his Shīʿī creed are imputed to Ismaʿīl by Efendiev, Obrazovanie, pp. 49, 51; E. Werner, Die Geburt einer Grossmacht — Die Osmanen (1300–1481) (Berlin, 1966), p. 303; and GusejnOV and Sumbatzade, Istoriya Azerbaidžhana 1, 210.
its veneration of the Orthodox Caliphs and to replace it with the belief in ‘Alī and the Twelve Imāms.

We know that Ismā‘īl’s advisers voiced grave reservations about his intention because the entirely Sunnī population of Tabrīz would be violently opposed to the Shi‘a. But Ismā‘īl would not be deterred, and in fact achieved success. The first phase of Safavid rule does not lack a certain grotesque trait, in as much as theologians who were fully conversant with the Shi‘a must have been few and far between at that time. Detailed information about Shi‘i precepts was hard to come by; indeed, there was a lack of books from which this might have been culled. In the search for appropriate texts there eventually came to light a solitary volume of the Ḥawd al-ahkām fī ma‘rifat al-bahāl wa‘l-harām of Ibn Mu‘āthhar al-Hillī (d. 726/1325), a famous Shi‘ī theologian of the Mongol period. Admittedly the book was in Arabic and therefore unsuitable for general use until it had been translated into Persian, for a knowledge of Arabic could by that time no longer be presupposed among the populace.

Given the tremendous importance of the introduction of the Shi‘a for Ismā‘īl’s future and for Persia, we must ask ourselves what made him take this decision. It is not easy to find an answer. We do not know for certain who was the first member of the future dynasty to profess the Shi‘ī faith. Was Ismā‘īl himself the first? Or were his father and grandfather adherents of the sect? Or must we go back even further, perhaps to Shaikh Khwāja ‘Alī, or even Shaikh Šafī in person? Circumstantial evidence of all kinds is adduced in this connection, but none is conclusive.

There are various reasons for our being still so much in the dark. First, there is the lack of evidence in the sources, or at least in the reliable ones; in this context we must certainly disregard most documents written under Safavid rule and many sources which originated among their enemies. The complex relationships within Folk Islam similarly constitute an obstacle to a clear understanding of the situation. This Shi‘ī–Sunnī syncretism, as it might be termed, occurs in Iran from the time of the Mongol invasion, and even in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries, after the decline of the Īl-Khāns, it continued to mould the religious outlook of the ordinary people. Finally, it is by no means impossible that if one or other of Ismā‘īl’s ancestors had been a Shi‘ī, he might have practised taqiyya, that is, he might have concealed his convictions; this is in fact prescribed by the Shi‘a whenever an open profession of the faith might be dangerous.
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All these considerations should not be allowed to obscure the fact
that even the question of what Shi'a and Sunna meant in the 9th/15th
century cannot at present be answered at all precisely. This would
require careful examination of the theological writings of the age, and
such an analysis we do not yet possess. For the time being we must be
content to surmise that at this period the well-known definitions of
earlier times were no longer entirely valid. Until we possess more
detailed knowledge, we cannot define more closely the religious ideas
of Isma'il's ancestors.

In order to characterise the situation, the following factors may be
emphasised. That Shaikh Safi was a Sunni is beyond all shadow of a
doubt. Yet the orthodoxy of his beliefs should not be judged too
rigidly since the mere ideas of the religious world in which he lived
cannot be entirely reconciled with orthodox tenets. Significantly he
belonged to the Shafi'i madhab, that is, to precisely that school of
religious law which is closest to the Shi'a and therefore normally
adopted by Shi'is who are masquerading as Sunnis. For the first
hundred years after his death we have so little information that we
can do no more than surmise that his successors adopted a similar
position. Shaikh Khwaja 'Ali (d. 832/1429) could be linked with the
Shi'a on account of his name and especially because he is said to have
seen 'Ali, the fourth Caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet, in a dream,
and sang his praises in verses which are still extant. Sunnis writers are
particularly distrustful of Junaid, the grandfather of Isma'il, because
he is alleged to have compromised himself round about 1450 in
Qonya in the presence of the famous theologian Shaikh 'Abd al-Latif
through a pro-Shi'i remark transmitted to us by a friend of the
shaikh, the Ottoman historian 'Ashiqpashazade. We are told also that
when Junaid died some of his followers began to call him God and
his son Haidar the Son of God. Admittedly this statement stems from
an embittered enemy of the Safavids, Fa'iz-Allah b. Ruzbihan Khunji,
the chronicler of Sultan Ya'qub Aq Quyunlu, who later fled from
Ismail to Transoxiana. Haidar too is reported to have seen 'Ali in a
dream. This is supposed to be the origin of the "Haidar cap", the red
hat of the Qizilbash, whose twelve gores are explained by reference
to the Twelve Imams.

We could certainly draw conclusions from these reports if we had
any certain knowledge of the dividing lines between Sunna and Shi'a in
the 9th/15th century. Since it is possible that these were no longer what
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they had been, we must be cautious. Yet it should be noted that not one of the relevant writers describes any ancestor of Ismā'īl unambiguously as a Shī'ī – not even those authors who attack their religious attitude. It is also significant, on the other hand, that an unbroken, direct Shī'ī tradition extending from Junaid via Ḥādīr to Ismā'īl is out of the question. Ḥādīr was not born until 864/1460, several weeks after his father’s death, and was brought up at the court of his uncle Uzun Hasan in Amid, in an environment which has so far not been suspected of sympathy towards the Shī'ī doctrine. Not until he was nine years old did he arrive in Ardabil where again it is unlikely that any marked Shī'ī atmosphere predominated under Shaikh Ja'far. If Ḥādīr was actually converted to the Shī'a later, he had no opportunity to introduce Ismā'īl to the creed, for Ismā'īl was born on 25 Rajab 892/17 July 1487, only a year before his father’s death. Ḥādīr could not have achieved this indirectly through Sultan ‘All, his eldest son, either, as the latter was still a child. In the next seven years which the sons of Shaikh Ḥādīr spent in the custody of the Aq Quyunlu, we cannot exclude completely the possibility that they were exposed to Shī'ī influence, for example on the part of their guardians, but neither can we impute this to them without further ado. Although we cannot speak of a direct transmission of ideas between those three generations, we must posit a certain virulence of Shī'ī thought in order to begin to grasp the course of events.

Perhaps the solution of the problem lies precisely in the fact that Shaikh Ṣafī and his descendants, possibly including Ismā'īl until shortly before his seizure of power, must be seen in the framework of Folk Islam without ever having consciously or overtly gone over to the Shī'a. In the case of adherents of a ṣūfī order such as they, this is a perfectly reasonable conjecture in the light of all that we know. We can pass over the question of whether the equation of tasavvuf (Sufism) with the Shi'a is justified or whether it oversteps the mark: what is certain is that the step from Sufism to heresy was a fairly small one. The Sunnī theologians had only too good a reason for their antipathy towards the dervishes and their religious brotherhoods. If it is permissible to link the Ardabil order from the outset with Folk Islam, certain Shī'ī features become clear. Though in Folk Islam these Shī'ī elements were stronger or weaker depending upon the area and the period, they were surely always present. Therefore certain Shī'ī affinities in the case of Shaikh Ṣafī and his successors (who at all events bear the stigma of...
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Sufism in the eyes of the distrustful orthodox theologians do not necessarily mean that they had abjured the Sunna and turned Shīʿī. Neither the name of Shaikh Khwāja ʿAlī, the second successor and grandson of Shaikh ʿṢafī, nor the manifestation of ʿAlī in dreams which he and later Shaikh Ḥādīdār are said to have had, nor his verses in praise of ʿAlī therefore constitute clear signs of a Shīʿī faith, and they are perhaps no more than features of Folk Islam.

If one examines Ismāʿīl’s notions against the Folk Islam background, it is quite possible that the worship of ʿAlī widespread in his environment grew more firmly rooted in him so that a tendency towards the Shīʿa became predominant. This accords well with his youthful capacity for enthusiasm (he was only fourteen years old when Tabrīz fell). We see his enthusiasm in his collection of Turkish poems, particularly where religious ideas are concerned, but also with regard to the heroes of Iranian legend. What is so disconcerting about the introduction of the Shīʿa is the violent hostility exhibited towards the Sunnīs, whereby the execution of the Caliph Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān is far more strongly emphasised than the Shīʿī additions to the shahīda, which is what really matters. Even if propaganda purposes played a part in this, there remains an impression of youthful protest, perhaps because Ismāʿīl had grown tired either of the compromises of Folk Islam or of the secretiveness of taqiyya.

We must not underestimate the importance for Ismāʿīl’s religious beliefs of his stay in Lāhijān which followed his escape from the soldiers of Sulṭān Rustam Āq Quyunlū. From 899/1494 onwards he spent five years there under the protection of Kārkiyā Mīrzā ʿAlī, the then ruler of Gīlān, who claimed to be a descendant of the Caliph ʿAlī and was a Shīʿī. He appointed one of the theologians in his kingdom, one Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī, to be Ismāʿīl’s teacher. This man must have influenced his pupil to a certain extent, since he occurs again, immediately after Ismāʿīl ascended the throne, as sadr, occupying the highest religious office in the realm; later we see him as tutor to the princes at court. There is scarcely any doubt that he was a Shīʿī. And this would be certain if he should be identical with a disciple of the same name of Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, who along with Muḥammad b. Falāḥ, the famous Mahdī, had been trained by the well-known Shīʿī theologian Aḥmad b. Fahd al-Hillī. Whatever the truth about the religion of his forebears, where Ismāʿīl himself is concerned we already have a valid explanation of the origin of his Shīʿī faith in the few years
he spent with his tutor in Lāhījān. This factor lends credence to the suggestion that his religious attitude was determined by inner conviction.

His collection of Turkish poems mentioned above provides an insight into his religious ideas. The Shi‘ī character of these verses is unmistakable. But clearly what we have here is not something that can be related to the High Shi‘a as delineated in Shi‘ī theology, but rather rabid fanaticism. The worship of ‘Alī expressed here betrays an extremism which cannot be reconciled with the normal Shi‘ī doctrine. ‘Alī is named before the Prophet Muḥammad and placed on a level with God. In these lines we see perhaps an unrestrained exaggeration of certain Shi‘ī ideas which also occur incipiently in Folk Islam. It is also significant that the particularly extreme passages are only to be found in the oldest extant versions of the collection: later manuscripts do not contain them, presumably because they derive from a version expurgated under the influence of Shi‘ī theologians. Anyway the creed which Ismā‘īl avowed on coming to power could not have been the Shi‘a of the theologians, no matter of what school. Even if he himself, lacking clear religious ideas, envisaged no more than changing from the Sunna to the Shi‘a, his poems proclaim very different notions. Nor can they be interpreted as a gradual transition from Folk Islam to the High Shi‘a. If one pursues Ismā‘īl’s thought to its conclusion and relates it to his political intentions, one realises that he is proclaiming a Shi‘ī theocracy with himself at its head as a god-king.

However Ismā‘īl’s attitude may be judged from the point of view of the official theology, his claim to be venerated as a god (sijda) did not prevent him from favouring the Ithnā‘ashariyya, the Twelver Shi‘a, among the manifold divisions of the Shi‘a existing at the time. This creed acknowledges not the Caliphs but only the Twelve Imāms as the legitimate successors of the Prophet Muḥammad; a succession commencing with ‘Alī and ending with the Mahdī Muḥammad Ḥujjat-Allāh who, his followers believe, did not die but was merely carried off on 24 July 874, to return once more at the end of the world.

It was on this theory of succession that the Safavids based their claim to be direct descendants of ‘Alī and thereby of the Prophet Muḥammad. It rests on a genealogy which links Shaikh Ṣafī via a line of twenty ancestors with Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799), the Seventh Imām.
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Clearly such a lineage lent great weight to Imsã‘îl’s bid for power in the legitimist atmosphere of the Shi‘is, perhaps also in the rather monarchist concepts of certain Iranian circles. However, this lineage has not gone unchallenged. It was attacked even during the Safavid period and likewise deemed a forgery in recent times by Persian and non-Persian scholars alike.  

It is indeed possible that the family tree of the Safavids cannot bear any closer analysis than many another table of this kind. The question still remains whether Imsã‘îl invoked it, knowing it to be false, or even undertook or commissioned the forgery himself as alleged by the Ottoman historian ‘Ali; or whether he acted in good faith, convinced of the authenticity of this genealogy. The answer to this question determines whether he began his extraordinary career in the honest, though biased, belief that he had a legitimate claim to the throne, or whether right from the outset he was prepared to stoop to anything, even outright forgery, to achieve his aim. Given his numerous embittered enemies, it is not surprising that he has indeed been accused of deliberate deception—unjustly, as far as one can tell. For even the Shirvân-Shâh Khalîl-Allâh addresses Junaid, Imsã‘îl’s grandfather, in a letter the text of which has been preserved, as a descendant of the Sayyids; and the Turkish Sultan Bâyezîd II applies to Shaikh Haidar epithets such as are only used for a scion of ‘Ali’s family. If therefore alien rulers who were opposed to the Safavids accepted this notion, why should not Imsã‘îl himself have believed in all honesty that he was descended from ‘Ali? This belief is also attested by the spontaneity and originality which characterise his divân, precisely at the points where he emphasises his ‘Alid blood. Finally, Imsã‘îl may also have been aware that Shaikh Šâfi himself had allegedly claimed to be related to the Prophet’s family.  

At least in childhood

1 Kasravî, Shaikh Šâfi, followed by Togan, “Sur l’origine”, who pointed to the different versions of the Šafuat al-safâ.  
2 Walsh, “Historiography”, p. 207; cf. also Togan, loc. cit. For a detailed study of anti-Safavid propaganda, see E. Eberhard, Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden (Freiburg i. Br., 1970).  
4 Shaikh Šâfi’s remark, dar nasab-i mâ siyâdat hast, which is included even in the earliest MSS and could not therefore have been added in the Safavid period, is passed over by Togan as being too vague. But Togan thereby ignores the fact that this expression corresponds exactly to the attitude of a Sunnî who, though a descendant of ‘Ali, does not wish to draw too much attention to himself. Togan nevertheless concedes the possibility that Shaikh Šâfi’s son, Šadr al-Dîn Mûsâ, as is claimed, could have ordered the sharîf, on the occasion of a hajj, to authenticate a genealogy going back to ‘Ali; given this, it is unfair to dismiss outright Imsã‘îl’s good faith as he does.

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and certainly at the time of his accession to the throne in Tabrīz, Ismā‘īl was convinced that his family tree reached back to Caliph ‘Alī. Whether he maintained this belief in later life, when perhaps he had access to more reliable sources of information, is another question.

Thus whether or not Ismā‘īl was the first of Shaikh Ṣafī’s descendants to embrace the Shī‘a, he was certainly the first whose Shi‘ī faith can be proved without a shadow of a doubt, and was viewed in this light by certain 10th/16th century writers. The political ambitions which he combined with his faith were after all not without precedent in his family. We saw that Shaikh Ṣafī enjoyed respect and influence among political leaders of his time, even though he did not himself pursue any political goals. That his successors were not entirely remote from the affairs of this world may be judged from Timūr’s legendary visit to Khwāja ‘Alī, and we meet his son İbrāhīm, described by a Christian eye-witness as the “cruel governor of Ardabil”, in the retinue of Jahān Shāh on a campaign in Georgia. We have fairly detailed knowledge of the military and political exploits of Junaid, Shah Ismā‘īl’s grandfather. Since up to his father’s death the leadership of the order had always passed from father to son, he could have inherited the office in 851/1447, and there is in fact a well-attested tradition which speaks of his accession in that year. Nevertheless, he might thereafter have lost the leadership again: this would not necessarily be recorded in the official history of the Safavids, which naturally sets out to portray Ismā‘īl’s grandfather in the appropriate light.

The point is that at this time not he, but one of his father’s brothers, Shaikh Ja‘far, was head of the order, while he himself was mostly away from Ardabil, not always of his own accord. It is of secondary importance whether Ja‘far functioned as his nephew’s guardian or representative, or whether he personally was invested with the office of grand master. What interests us is that Ja‘far too did not stay remote from and uninvolved in the political events of his age, for he mobilised against Junaid the powerful Jahān Shāh Qarā Quyunlū, who was the father-in-law of Ja‘far’s son Qāsim. Ja‘far also had contacts with the Timurid Abū Sa‘īd and went out to greet him when the latter reached Sulṭāniyya on his fatal campaign of 873/1469 to the Mughān steppe.

1 E.g., al-Nahrawī and al-Qaramānī: see Mazzaoui, Shi‘ism, p. 215, n.203.
2 Minorsky, “Thomas of Metsop’”, p. 25. 3 See above, p. 167.
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We also know about Ja'far's correspondence with the Shīrvān-Shāh Khalīl-Allāh, again to the detriment of his nephew.¹

There is no doubt that, soon after Shaikh Ibrāhīm's death, around 852/1448 a serious estrangement occurred between Shaikh Ja'far and Junaid which was still not resolved at the time of Junaid's death. But we have no such certainty concerning its cause. The motive is sought in diverging religious beliefs. According to this explanation Ja'far, who remained faithful to the Sunna, quarrelled with his nephew because of the latter's Shi'I proclivities. This is indeed possible, but finds no adequate support in contemporary sources; one cannot draw conclusions about Junaid's early years from records which refer to his behaviour in later life. In Fażl-Allāh Khunji's royal chronicle of the Āq Quyunlū, which is relevant here, we read that he diverged from the life of his forebears. This might of course allude to divergent religious beliefs, if the writer did not expressly state that he had something else in mind: he says that Junaid strove for secular power, was driven into alien lands by his lust for conquest, instigated revolts against individual provincial governors in Anatolia, and constantly suffered fresh onsets of folly. All this need not necessarily be connected with Shi'I heresy. There were probably sufficient grounds for the conflict in Junaid's militaristic tendencies alone, for we read that his multitudinous supporters occasionally gave Ardabil the appearance of an armed camp.

Junaid's career doubtless gave many of his contemporaries cause for admiration or criticism, especially those who clung to the pattern of a devout life as led by his famous ancestors. He was anything but the ideal religious leader whose life was composed of pious striving and progress along the path of mystic perfection. When first exiled from Ardabil, he wandered for seven years through Āzarbājān, Anatolia and northern Syria, probably in the manner of a travelling monk but without observing the limitations of this rôle. His ambition was political success and a military following that would help him attain it. His charismatic personality must have had a great impact especially on the adventurous elements among the Türkmen tribes which he visited. On the other hand, he rightly saw that his opportunity lay in the rivalry between the Qara Quyunlū and the Āq Quyunlū. The hostility of Jahān Shāh Qarā Quyunlū drove him to cultivate the latter's opponent.

¹ Hasan-i Rūmlū, quoted in Hinz, Iran Aufstieg, pp. 47f.
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in Amid and eventually in 861/1456 he succeeded in being received there. Uzun Hasan welcomed him and showed him such favour that Junaid enjoyed his hospitality for three whole years and, after some time, was even allowed to marry his sister. Although at that time Uzun Hasan was not the famous potentate he was later to become, this connection represented for the young Safavid a gain in prestige which gave many an observer food for thought in that twilight world between religion and politics.

Such events are by no means typical of the career of a member of a religious order at that period. They cannot be explained by Junaid’s eminent lineage nor by the sympathy which Uzun Hasan is supposed to have shown towards dervishes. It is more fruitful to suppose that the Turkmen potentate took this unusual step out of certain political expectations, for example, the hope of winning over along with Junaid the latter’s militant followers for his own cause. But such an assumption would only be reasonable if Junaid had been at this time a man of some importance or at least potentially a great military leader. And that indeed appears to have been the case. We have to postulate a change in the conception of a religious order, which seems to have occurred with Shaikh Safi’s descendants. There is some evidence that with Junaid this development reached its climax. In order to understand it, we must remember that even the founder of the order had been reproached for allowing his disciples to grow too numerous for him to be able to instruct them in the precepts of the mystic initiation. In fact, he must have modified the mystic practice (such as he himself had followed under his teacher Shaikh Zāhid) which he handed down to his disciples; thus the word ṣūfī, originally denoting an Islamic mystic, seems to have declined even during his lifetime to the meaning “active Muslim”, in accordance with the religious mass movement which in those days appears to have been centred on Ardabil. The esteem which the order continued to command under Šafī’s successors indicates that a similar situation also prevailed under their rule.

We can assume that during his stay in Anatolia and northern Syria Junaid exploited the contacts which the Ardabil order enjoyed there and which in many cases it had maintained for a long time. We may even suppose that he did his best to strengthen those relations and to influence them according to his lights. Here lies the explanation of statements to the effect that at this time he had a lively following which
increased during his years at the court of Āmid, and that from there he intensified recruitment by appointing new emissaries (khulafā').

His success with Uzun Hasan must have endowed his ideas with a peculiar attraction in precisely those circles which mattered to him. At all events it is clear that his exploits must be seen in relation to the Ardabil order; this is also indicated by the fact that he did not abandon the idea of returning to the home of the order, and in 863/1459 actually attempted to gain a footing in Ardabil again — but without success.

Although several aspects of Junaid’s personality remain at present obscure, there is no doubt that he gave military training to the adherents of the order who lived in his retinue and used them in military operations. Here lies the origin of the equating of the words šūfī and ghāzī (“soldier of the faith”) which is taken for granted in the Safavid chronicles thereafter. The change in meaning of the word šūfī, which occurs even in the early Şafaviyya, reaches a new and far more advanced stage round about this time. The change is not confined to the semantic history of one word, but has a prominent political significance. Members of a šūfī order, whose mystical rule was probably preserved only as a more or less faded memory, were converted to the ideals of a Holy War which are inherent in Islam, trained as fanatical warriors and, as we shall see, actually led into battle.

The ghāzī idea has another historical bearing which should be mentioned here. Defenders of the faith known by this name played an important part as early as the first third of the 8th/14th century in western Anatolia, on the Byzantine frontier of the Ottoman heartlands. From the collapse of the Saljūq empire onwards, when the pressure of Mongol power on western Asia Minor lessened, they contributed substantially to the protection and extension of the frontiers with Byzantium, while the Ottoman empire was being established. Recent research shows, however, that the ghāzī concept was not limited to western Asia Minor but also existed in eastern Anatolia, where they are credited with the attacks of the Āq Quyunlū on the Comnenian empire of Trebizond, which was discussed earlier. That had been about the middle of the 8th/14th century. But the ghāzī concept appears to have survived even after that and to have finally been taken over by Shah Ismā‘īl’s two predecessors. This theory is supported by the fact that the Safavid chronicles prefer to use the word ghāzī to denote the military

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followers of the master of the order – not exclusively, of course, but almost more frequently than Sufi or Qizilbash.

It remains to be seen whether in practice the Safavids were familiar with the Jihād, the Holy War, in this sense. In fact such seems to have been the case. A fairly conclusive instance of this is Junaid’s attempt to conquer Trebizond in 860–1/1456, that is, prior to his appearance at the court of Uzun Hasan, from where he could not very well have launched such a venture since after all it would have been directed against his host’s relatives. He was, moreover, on the point of conquering the city, but at the last moment had to relinquish his impending victory because the Turkish Sultan, seeing his interests in Trebizond threatened, despatched an armed force to the scene which would have proved too much for Junaid.

Other military adventures undertaken by Junaid can also be included under the ghazl heading; although it is clear that in Junaid’s case, just as elsewhere, other motives in addition to the ghazl concept were instrumental in the attacks on non-Muslim peoples – the problems of feeding and paying a large military retinue, and the thirst of Junaid’s adherents for adventure and plunder. We shall not examine these exploits in detail. The last was a campaign against the Circassians of Tabarsarān, which he decided to undertake in 863/1459 after again being banished from Ardabīl on the orders of Jahān Shāh. This exploit met with success, but he was then attacked by the Shīrvān-Shāh Khālīl-Allāh, through whose territory he had marched and to whom the defeated Circassians may have been tributary, and on 11 Jumādā I 864/4 March 1460 was killed in battle.

If we sum up Junaid’s life, we see an unruly spirit with political ambitions and military propensities, but not a religious reformer. Even if it is true that, as Khunjī claimed, he was worshipped as a god after his death, this betokens the unbridled fanaticism of his followers or those of his successor, rather than the nature of his own religious beliefs. Although as a member of the order he may have been susceptible to the ‘Ali-venerating or even Shiʿī tendencies in Folk Islam, he need not necessarily for that reason have been the wild Shiʿī fanatic which his enemies – especially Khunjī and ‘Aṣhiqpashāzade – make him out to be. Even the quarrel with Shaikh Jaʿfar, as we saw, need not

2 Minorsky, Persia in A.D. 1478–1490, p. 66.
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have been due to religious differences. It can easily be explained by the fact that after Ibrāhīm’s death two strong personalities whose political ambitions were irreconcilable clashed in Ardabīl: Junaid’s ambition may be gauged, after all, from the fact that he aspired to the headship of the order even though not his father’s eldest son but only his sixth. Finally, it must remain an open question whether during his wanderings in Anatolia Junaid came across such strong Shi‘ī tendencies among supporters of the Ardabīl order or among sections of the population which he hoped to win over, that he was compelled to profess the Shi‘a, either out of expediency or out of conviction.¹

However much recent scholars have concerned themselves with the rise of the Safavids, several features of this unusual phenomenon have yet to be satisfactorily explained. We know that Türkmen adherents of the Ardabīl order played an essential part, but how this participation came about cannot yet be elucidated in every detail. The question is vital not only because of the share of the Türkmen in founding the Safavid state, but also because during the first century of its existence the majority of its ruling class and, up to the time of ‘Abbās I, virtually all the officers and men in the army were in fact Türkmens. That the Safavids themselves cannot be called Türkmens, in spite of their close ties and the blood relationship with the Āq Quyunlū, simply makes the problem more complicated. How then did Türkmen tribes come to play such a crucial rôle?

Even their contemporaries in Persia probably racked their brains over this question. They searched for an explanation and found it — in a visit to Ardabīl by Timūr, a visit which he was supposed to have paid to the then head of the order, Khwāja ‘Alī. It is said that the latter’s miracles impressed him deeply, whereupon he made Khwāja ‘Alī a present, at his request, of 30,000 prisoners of war whom he had brought with him from Anatolia. These were the forefathers of the Türkmens who a century later played a prominent rôle in the foundation of the Safavid empire. Timūr’s visit to Ardabīl is likely to have occurred in the spring of 806/1404. That it was in honour of the Safavid leader, or that he even glimpsed the latter on this occasion, is not, it is true, out of the question, but neither is it anywhere attested. Moreover, the presentation of these Anatolian prisoners is pure myth,

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since the captive nomads deported from Anatolia by Timur were Qara Tatars and were subsequently settled not in Persia but in Transoxiana;\(^1\) and the story is apparently a home-grown attempt to account for the Türkmen part in the founding of the Safavid empire.

A plausible explanation for their rôle can be found in something I have already mentioned, the spread and popularity of Islamic religious communities in the 8th–9th/14th–15th centuries. As will be recalled, in addition to the focal point of the order at the seat of the master (murshid [-i kāmil] or pīr), they had a following scattered over a wide area which kept in touch with the centre through so-called representatives or emissaries (khulafā'). We know that this following included numerous Türkmens, if not whole tribes or tribal groups. This is true in general of all such orders but especially of the Safavid order, which even in the founder’s time had had Turkish or Türkmen supporters\(^2\) and which seems later to have enjoyed an increasing popularity among the Türkmens. This Türkmen following probably extended in the main through Azarbājān, Anatolia and northern Syria. It was thus not fortuitous that Junaid visited precisely these areas on his raids. Here he could be certain of support and assistance. On the other hand the presence of an enterprising, even fascinating, descendant of the great Ardabīl Shaikh Ṣafī could not have failed to win recruits for the local šūfī groups.

Although our knowledge of the early history of the Türkmen tribes, whose names occur very frequently in the sources, is in several respects incomplete, certain tribal names which can be construed with certainty confirm that they originated in the areas mentioned: the Shāmlū must have had their home in Syria (Ṣām), the Rūmlū in Anatolia or, to be more precise, in the province later known as Sīvās but which earlier had been called Rūm. The name Takkalū points to the province of Tekke in southern Anatolia, and Dulghadīr, corrupted to the Arabic form Dhu‘l-Qadr, had been since 1337 the name of a local Türkmen dynasty in Abūlustān, the region between Jaiḥān and the Euphrates.

The intellectual atmosphere to which Junaid owed his success among the Türkmens - possibly too the impression which his personality left on these simple people, who were always inclined to believe in the miraculous and the extraordinary – must have lasted a long time after his death, long enough anyway for his son Hādīr to slip effortlessly, or so it seems, into his father’s rôle. We do not know the exact

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\(^1\) See above, pp. 56, 80.  
\(^2\) Glassen, Die frühen Safawiden, p. 385.
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point when this happened, or when he assumed the leadership of the Safavid order. He came to Ardabil in 1470 when he was barely ten years old, from Amid, where his childhood had been spent at the court of Uzun Hasan. Perhaps his uncle sent him to the home of the order in order to neutralise Shaikh Ja’far, whose once powerful protectors, the Qarä Quyunlü Jahãn Shâh and the Timurid Abû Sa‘îd, were no longer alive.

It seems indeed that Ja‘far was loth to accept and tolerate his great-nephew in Ardabil. The man of religion, himself highly educated, appears to have consistently neglected to complete or at least improve Haidar’s religious training which had been totally overlooked in Amid. Perhaps the love of arms which Uzun Hasan had inspired in the boy, together with a corresponding natural bent, had already grown too strong. Perhaps too the advanced politicisation of the order stood in the way of any change of heart. Unless we are very much mistaken, Haidar’s self-image already suggested the son of a secular prince rather than the future head of a mystical order. “Instead of the school bench, he sat on a horse, instead of mystic treatises he read mythical tales”: in such words he is censured by Fazl-Allâh b. Rûzbihân Khunjî, who at the same time testifies to his great courage and mastery of the arts of war. It is not surprising that under his leadership the secularisation of the order proceeded apace and its militarisation neared a climax. An external sign of this development was Shaikh Haidar’s introduction of a uniform for members of his order. Its characteristic feature was a red turban with twelve gores, called tâj-i haidarī, the “Haidar cap”. Their enemies gave the wearers of this headgear the nickname qizilbâshlar (“Redheads”), a designation, however, which they soon proudly adopted as a title of honour.

The name Qizilbâsh for the followers of the Ardabil shaikhs undoubtedly goes back, together with the introduction of the red turban, to the time of Haidar. The word is not found in Ţihranî’s Kitâb-i Dyârbakriyya, completed in 1470, but it is used by Khunjî fifteen years later in a derogatory sense. But whether even at that period as later this was bound up with a religious motif, the accusation of Shi‘î heresy on the part of opponents or the public profession of the Shi‘a on the part of those concerned, or whether we have here the projection of subsequent conditions back to an earlier age, cannot be ascertained with

1 Minorsky, Persia in A.D. 1478–1490, p. 66.
certainty, whether or not one accepts the explanation that Haidar acted in accordance with a command given him by the Imām 'Alī in a vision. Were one to relate the twelve gores, as is usually done, to the Twelve Imāms, this does not necessarily indicate Shi‘ī convictions, since the Twelve Imāms also had a place in the Folk Islam of those times. Even a Sunnī sectarian like Fażl-Allāh Khunjī wrote a poem in praise of the Twelve Imāms which has been preserved.1

Thereby we come to the problem of Shaikh Haidar’s religious beliefs. Was he a Shi‘ī or not? As we have seen, in the first ten years of his life in Ardabīl he scarcely had any religious education at all, and certainly not a Shi‘ī one. In Ardabīl he came into contact with Shaikh Ja‘far, whose orthodoxy (not, of course, to be measured by the standards of Sunnī theology but rather against the more moderate conditions of Folk Islam) has never been disputed. Again, it is Khunjī alone who questions Haidar’s orthodoxy, and even he does not accuse him of subscribing to the Shi‘a, maintaining rather that his foolish followers worshipped Junaid as God and Haidar as the Son of God. It is difficult to accept this at its face value, especially in the case of someone with such an underdeveloped religious sensibility as Haidar. Normally, the influence exerted over him by his father’s followers when he lived in Ardabīl is the reason put forward for his supposed conversion to the Shi‘ī faith.

It is of course true that Türkmen supporters of the Safavids flocked to Ardabīl when it was learnt that the young shaikh was recruiting fighting men like his father before him, possibly in the aftermath of the collapse in 872/1467 of the Qara Quyiınlu confederation, whose elements may now have striven for a new relationship with the Ardabīl shaikhs. One can therefore quite reasonably reckon on a strong Türkmen influence on Haidar whereby religious zeal may have been a factor – but not necessarily the Shi‘ī creed. Folk Islamic ideas, with a greater or lesser Shi‘ī tinge, combined with the ghāzī concept, suffice to explain the process. And we may almost with certainty impute the ghāzī idea to a military mind like that of Shaikh Haidar.

He too carried the Holy War into the land of the Circassians. Twice, in 888/1483 and 892/1487, his campaigns went according to plan. The third time, in 893/1488, there was again no need for complications, because Haidar had obtained permission to march through Shīrvān.

But when he attacked the town of Shamākhī in order, we are told, to avenge his father, he came into conflict with Farrukh-Yasār, who had succeeded the Shīrvān-Shāh Khalīl-Allāh in 867/1462. With the support of troops of the Aq Quyunlū sent to his aid by Sultān Ya'qūb, the Shīrvān-Shāh was victorious. Shaikh Haidar fell in battle on 29 Rajab 893/9 July 1488 in Tabarsaran, not far from the spot where his father had been killed in 864/1460.1

As early as the Mongol period several Türkmen tribes had learnt to absent themselves from the arena of great events whenever danger threatened. In later times too this ability appears to have been shared by many Türkmen adherents of the Safavids, as when they vanished from the stage for many years after Junaid’s death. Following Haidar’s death, they again withdrew into obscurity for more than a decade and bided their time, leading the unobtrusive life of nomads.

Just as at the beginning of the 9th/15th century the leaders of the Aq Quyunlū and the Qara Quyunlū expended all their energies in attaining military power and acquiring territorial sovereignty, so Junaid and Haidar too were dedicated to the pursuit of political goals. Then as now the notion of warring for the faith appears to have figured as a welcome motive, if not as a pretext. Whether the two Safavids were driven by a more profound religious zeal, for instance by a desire to launch a Shi‘ī mission, cannot at present be established and in fact seems doubtful, although in their case too the ideas of Folk Islam certainly included a series of Shi‘ī features.

In Ismā‘īl’s case we are faced with different assumptions, inasmuch as he spent a lengthy period of his childhood in a Shi‘ī enivironment and was apparently given instruction in the Shi‘ī faith. Moreover, he must have had a well-defined religious sensibility, as can be seen from his divān. Here he calls ‘Alī a manifestation of God and proudly asserts that he himself is a descendant of ‘Alī and Fātimah who came into the world at ‘Ali’s behest. Of course such notions cannot be reconciled with the Shi‘a or the Shi‘ī theology; but they originate in the world of the Shi‘a rather than in that of Folk Islam.

1 Savory, “Haydar”, EP, concludes that in view of the help rendered by the Aq Quyunlū Haidar must have had stronger forces than his father, whom the Shīrvān-Shāh had defeated without outside assistance.
Although Isma'il's statements are somewhat vague, they at least convey a marked sense of mission. This makes more comprehensible his decision in the summer of 905/1499, that is, at the age of twelve, to leave his refuge in Lâhijân, despite the warnings of his protector Kar-kiyâ Mîrzâ 'All, in order to try to emulate the deeds of his father and grandfather. However strange this venture may seem, it was very well timed from a political point of view. The power of the Āq Quyunlû, in whose territory Isma'il lived, had been more or less paralysed by the dispute over the succession triggered off by the death of Sultan Ya'qûb in 896/1490. The rôle of the Timurids in Persia had been curtailed by the fall of Abû Sa'id. Both the Ottomans in the west and the Uzbek in the east were at this time unable - as yet, at least - to intervene in the affairs of Persia. And in Cairo, where the rule of the powerful Sultan Qâ'itbâi had ended in 901/1496, a grave crisis was simmering, characterised by a rapid succession of new rulers. Apart from a few local dynasties of little influence, there was a political vacuum in Persia.

Since the death of his brother Sultan 'AH in 899/1494, Isma'il had been grand master of the Ardabil order. It is not known whether he himself underwent the mystical initiation and conveyed it afterwards to novices; in fact this seems unlikely. His sufism seems rather to be confined to the extreme Shî'i ideas which occur in his poetry. Nevertheless, after leaving Lâhijân he made straight for Ardabil, the centre of the Safavid order. Emotional reasons may have influenced this choice, and probably too the hope that there he was most likely to attract the militant adherents of the order whom he now needed. This expectation was not in fact fulfilled, clearly because through the respect he commanded the local governor, who owed his appointment to the Āq Quyunlû, deterred members of the order from openly supporting Isma'il. And because of this same governor Isma'il could not remain in Ardabil. Uncertain what to do next, he decided - significantly - to lead a holy war (ghazâ-yi kāfîran) against Georgia.

The messianic spirit which inspired Isma'il had its pendant in the religious mood of the people. Many seem to have had an apocalyptic awareness at this time. Insecurity caused by war, anarchy, bandits, catastrophes, plagues and famine had given rise to religious expectations typified by the hope - shared by others besides the Shî'a - of the

1 That the Ardabil shaikhs down to Junaid had practised mysticism emerges from their influence on other dervish orders: see Kissling, “Aus der Geschichte des Chalvetije-Ordens” and “Bajramije”.

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return of the Mahdi, which would mark the end of the world. There was evidence of a connection between the young Isma‘il and the Mahdi; there were even those who saw in him the returning Imam or at least his harbinger. Typical of this was the scene when Isma‘il arrived at the summer camp of the Turkmen tribe of the Ustajlu. When news of his approach reached them, the whole tribe, led by the elders (rīshsafīdān), went to greet him, singing and dancing, and escorted him just as centuries earlier the old Companions (ansār) had welcomed the Prophet Muhammad in Medina when he arrived there on the Hijra from Mecca. In the stories of these Turkmen he was seen as the messenger of the Lord of Time (sāhib al-zamān).

Isma‘il’s physical appearance must also have had some effect when he entered public life. The testimony of an eye-witness depicts him as being of truly regal bearing, gentlemanly and with engaging features, a fair complexion and reddish hair. If one thinks of the enthusiasm with which even today the mostly dark-skinned Persians greet a fair-headed youth, it is easy to imagine the impact made by the young head of the order, about whom various anticipatory legends were circulating, in that period of intense religious awareness. Isma‘il’s descent from the shaikhs of Ardabil, his personal appearance, his religious ideas and his sense of mission corresponded almost perfectly with the expectations which an oppressed people might nourish in their religious daydreams. His youthfulness, which arouses scepticism in the rational mind of the modern observer, must in the circumstances have fostered his plans. The great influence of the Ardabil order, the propagandist and military endeavours undertaken by his father Haidar and particularly by his grandfather Junaid among the Turkmen, now bore abundant fruit. He had already brought with him a group of Turkmen companions from Lāhijān, and other members of these tribes joined him during his first winter camp in Arjuvān on the Caspian Sea. The intention of finding further reinforcements was certainly one of the motives behind a campaign against Arzinjān in eastern Anatolia, upon which he embarked in the middle of Sha‘bān 905/March 1500. Finally his army grew to 7,000 men and he launched the intended holy war.

The ghāzī troops again marched on Shīrvān. This time, in Jumādā I 906/December 1500, at the village of Jabānī near the Shīrvān capital of Shamākhī, they clashed at the outset with the Shīrvān-Shāh, the same Farrukh-Yasār who had defeated Isma‘il’s father twelve years previously. At that time he had been helped by the Āq Quyūnlū; on this
occasion he was unaided. In spite of his superiority of numbers he was 
vanquished and killed. Thereby Ismā'il not only avenged his father and 
grandfather, but also conquered a land which had enjoyed for long 
periods a certain independence under the family of the Shīrvān-Shāhs, 
although under different suzerains. Admittedly, he could not yet claim 
to have a firm grip on it, since several sons of Farrukh-Yasār had 
escaped and there were to be Shīrvān-Shāhs under Safavid suzerainty 
until 945/1538.

In the spring of 906/1501 Ismā'il initiated from his winter camp at 
Mâhmūdābād measures to complete the subjugation of Shīrvān. Mean-
while news reached him that Alvand, the sultan of the Āq Quyūnlū, 
like himself a grandson of Uzun Hasan, had been disquieted by Is-
mā'il's victory over the Shīrvān-Shāh and was mobilising against him; 
but that because of the disorderly circumstances in which Alvand 
lived, the time was ripe for a preventive blow. Ismā'il therefore inter-
rupted his enterprise in Shīrvān and for the time being also abandoned 
his plans for Georgia. Battle was joined at Sharūr in the Araxes valley 
and as a result Alvand took flight. This victory at the beginning of 
907/in July or August 1501, opened up for Ismā'il the way to Tabrīz, 
the Türkmen capital. His reign over Iran is usually dated from the 
occupation of that city, although the dynasty of the Āq Quyūnlū was 
not finally eliminated for some years, after the expulsion of Alvand, the 
victory over Murād at Hamadān on 24 Dhu’l-Ḥijja 908/20 June 1503 
and the fall of Mārdīn still later.

In the existing political and religious situation the appearance and 
early successes of Ismā'il must have had extraordinary results. I have 
already pointed to the way in which the activity of his father and 
grandfather stood him in good stead when he went among the Türk-
men tribes. The departure of the first tribal groups doubtless hastened 
the decision of many others to follow suit, for as a result of the decline 
and final collapse of the power of the Āq Quyūnlū they were faced with 
the necessity of finding new connections — upon which nomadic 
peoples at the time depended if only for the sake of self-preservation —
to replace their previous affiliation to the federation of the Āq 
Quyūnlū. Indeed many of them were only too willing to join Ismā'il 
after he had given impressive proof of his enterprise and military skill 
in the battles at Jabānī and Sharūr. His unequivocal support for the 
Shī'a, which may have aroused hostility in some instances, for example 
among the urban population, would not have been a serious obstacle
for these people, who subscribed to Folk Islam and were not interested in theological arguments.

A description of Ismā'īl's political career reveals how significant a part the Türkmen played in the founding of the Safavid state. In this his kinship with the Āq Quyunlū is naturally a pertinent factor; but at least as important is the fact that his military strength was based on his rapidly growing retinue of Türkmen tribesmen. It was on their leaders that he drew when he had to fill military posts at court, posts in the civil administration and, as his conquest grew, in the provinces. A certain Shams al-Dīn Zakariyā Kujujī, who had been vizier to the Āq Quyunlū, had earlier presented himself at the winter camp at Maḥmūd-ābād and encouraged Ismā'īl to undertake the successful campaign against Alvand by describing the confused situation at the court of his erstwhile masters. He then became Ismā'īl's first vizier. Thereby a firm link was forged with the Türkmen tradition of government and administration, whose institutions were undoubtedly taken over following the capture of the previous centre of government at Tabrīz.

What is true of the military posts in the earliest Safavid administration — namely, that they were filled by Türkmen notables — is by no means true of the civil posts, for example in the treasury, or of the extensive sphere of religious law ranging from the judiciary and the administration of the pious endowments to the charitable institutions. These posts were not occupied by Türkmens, any more than under the Āq Quyunlū or the Qarā Quyunlū. As members of the military aristocracy they did not lay claim to them — nor would they have been suitable candidates for the vacancies. For some time past this type of administrative post had been staffed by the native Iranian bureaucracy, irrespective of which dynasty happened to be reigning. The Zakariyā Kujujī mentioned above belonged to this civil servant class. To that extent Iranian personnel provided continuity between the Türkmen and the Safavid administrations.

The adoption of Türkmen institutions or the dependence on existing traditions does not, on the other hand, exclude the introduction of major changes. It was an innovation that the two groups of Türkmen soldiers and Iranian civil servants — the "lords of the sword" (arbāb-i saif) and the "lords of the pen" (arbāb-i qalam) — should be united even ethnically in the person of the Safavid ruler. In the Türkmen states discussed

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1 On his family, see Aubin, "Etudes Safavides I", pp. 60–3.
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earlier, the sultans had always been Türkmen: the Safavid Shah combined in himself the blood of both Türkmen and Iranian ancestors. It is irrelevant, therefore, whether the founder of the dynasty, Shaikh Šafī, was descended from Iranian dihqans, from ‘Alī, or from Kurds, since Ismā’īl himself was connected equally with the military and the administrative aristocracy. The consequences of this remarkable dualism will be seen later.

But the divergence from the pattern of Türkmen government did not stop there. Ismā’īl, who ascribed to himself divine qualities as the representative of the Twelve Imāms, was also the head of a theocracy, which had not been the case with either the Āq Quyūnlū or the Qarā Quyūnlū. He was therefore infallible and could command divine veneration. Moreover, the state which he founded perpetuated the Ardabil religious order. Ismā’īl was grand master (pīr, murṣīd, murṣīd-i kāmil) of the Ṣafavīyya. His adherents were therefore called murīd and ṣūfī or ghāzi. Their external appearance was again characterised by the tāj-i haidarī, the turban with twelve red gores which had been introduced by Haidar but which had grown less popular after his death. Thereby the name Qizilbash became common usage.

As far as can be ascertained, the overwhelming majority of Ismā’īl’s militant supporters belonged to Türkmen tribes. What was demanded of them was šūfīgarī, “conduct becoming to a šūfī”, though this can scarcely have meant the same duties as those normally incumbent upon members of an Islamic mystical order. We must leave unanswered the question of how far under Ismā’īl’s rule the Safavid ṣūfīs had to discharge the religious duties of prayer and worship belonging to the mystic path (tārīqa), asceticism and a retiring life, vigils and fasts, litanies and the invoking of God. On the other hand, there is no doubt that, just as with the members of a dervish community, absolute obedience to the murshid was demanded of them.

We know that the Qizilbāsh soldiers fulfilled this obligation; they even accepted the king’s claim to be venerated as a divine being. Their battle cry is significant:

Qurban oldīghīm pīrūm mūrṣīdīm!
(“My spiritual leader and master, for whom I sacrifice myself!”)

Reports of their fanatical conduct in battle indicate that this cry truly conveyed their inner conviction, that they cared nothing for their own safety in war, either because they believed themselves to be invulner-
able or because they positively longed for death as a direct access to paradise. The belief in Ismā'īl’s invincibility, repeatedly confirmed over the years, also contributed to the process of turning his hordes into an efficient fighting force. At that time, when the morale of almost every army was extremely low, a strong moral impulse and several intangible factors must have been necessary to organise a military force adequate to the task of conquering a country as large as Persia.

In order to understand further developments in the story, it is important to remember that the Türkmen tribesmen were grouped together in units or bands according to their tribe. Their tribal grouping also played a part in certain specialised units which were set up in due course. It was of particular importance when it came to allocating provinces to the amīrs. Each one would take all or some of his fellow tribesmen with him to his new place of residence, and employ them to help carry out his decrees: he was thus able to exercise an almost regal authority. The survival of tribal loyalties subsequently had serious repercussions for the Safavid state.

Of the tribes which played a part in founding the empire, we have already mentioned the Ustājlū, the Şāmlū, the Rūmlū, the Takkalū and the Dulghadīr. Also important are the Türkmān, the Afshār and the Qājār. Besides these there were smaller tribes which had little or no influence on events; and there were other tribal groups which formed subdivisions of or clans within the main tribes.

Apart from regarding himself as god-king, Ismā‘īl seems to have seen himself as the legitimate heir of his grandfather Uzun Hasan Āq Quyūnlū. His desecration of the graves of the Āq Quyūnlū rulers following his coronation does not necessarily contradict this. More pertinent are not only the fact that he preferred Tabrīz as his capital to other cities such as Ardabil, but also his acceptance of the Türkmen administration described above, and the important contribution made by Türkmen tribes to his success. The same can be seen in his decision not to press further eastwards after the final expulsion of Alvand and the victory over Murād Āq Quyūnlū which established his control over Hamadān with central and southern Iran; instead he turned his attention to the old heartlands of Uzun Hasan, Diyārbakr and the

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1 Cf. Röhrborn, Provinzen und Zentralgewalt, p. 49.
earlier capital, Amid. Here in eastern Anatolia he even advanced as far as Mar'ash and Abulustan, the home of the Dulghadîr tribe, only a section of which had hitherto been numbered among his adherents.

Thereby he had reached the eastern frontier of the Ottoman empire. But he was clever enough not to provoke his powerful neighbour further. Although certain tensions had existed between them, peaceful relations still appeared possible at this point, particularly since Sultan Bâyezîd II was known to be a friend and protector of dervishes and šûfîs. Shortly before, he had granted an annual pension to a Qizilbâsh leader in southern Anatolia named Hasan Khalîfa,¹ and he had hitherto set great store by the cultivation of the traditional friendly relations between his dynasty and the Ardabîl order.

After the conquest of Azarbâjîân and eastern Anatolia Ismâ‘îl turned his attention to Mesopotamia; its conquest began before 1507 with the capture of Mârdîn, the last bastion of the Āq Quyûnlû, and was completed the following year with the capture of Baghdad. We do not propose to describe these campaigns in detail, but must discuss a little more closely a remarkable exploit which followed the conquest of Baghdad. This was a campaign to the southern Persian province of Khûzistân, directed against ultra-Shî‘î sectarians who had lived there since 840/1436 under the name of Musha‘sha’². According to the testimony of a Safavid chronicler³ they had at that time a leader named Sayyid Fayyâz and professed the heretical belief that ‘Ali, the fourth Caliph, was God and that finally their leader Sayyid Fayyâz was also an incarnation of God. We are also told that at their prayer meetings they recited verses about ‘Ali İlahî and so on, thereby achieving invulnerability: if they then tried to thrust a sword into their bodies, it left no wound — on the contrary, the blade would bend like a bow.

Certain aspects of the teaching of these sects, of which we have more detailed knowledge, bring to mind notions which we know to have occupied Ismâ‘îl, above all the exaggerated adulation of ‘Ali. There seems to be further proof here that such ideas were in the air at the time. Naturally, it is easy to see that such extreme viewpoints could scarcely coexist harmoniously, the less so when they were linked with rival political claims. It is not surprising that Ismâ‘îl refused to tolerate in others religious demands similar to those which he voiced himself. The Khûzistân campaign ended the independence of the kingdom of

¹ Sohrweide, “Der Sieg der Safaviden”, p. 139.
² See above, pp. 136–7.
³ Iskandar Munshi, trans. Savory, p. 57.
Havīza. Sayyid Fayyāż was killed in battle. Soon, however, his brother Sayyid Falāḥ took his place. With him began a line of princes who were vassals of the Safavids except when they were prevented from fulfilling their allegiance by the Ottomans. Under their rule the border country of ‘Arabistān around Havīza formed a kind of buffer state between the Ottomans and the Safavids and rendered the Safavids in particular valuable services. We must not forget either the way in which the rulers of Havīza mediated between the Persian and Arabic cultures.

Before the Ottoman–Safavid conflict – which we have touched upon several times already – could be resolved, there was a clash with another enemy of the Safavids, the Uzbeks of eastern Iran, who had begun to rise to power in Transoxiana around 1495. Their ruler, Muḥammad Shaibānī Khān, was waiting for a chance to annex the territory of the Timurids together with their capital Herat. There, since the fall of Abū Saʿīd in 873/1469, power had been in the hands of Ḥusain Bāīqarā, who had turned his capital into a splendid centre of Islamic culture. When he died in 911/1506, two of his sons quarrelled over the succession, so that the following year Herat fell an easy prey to the Uzbek khan. Thereby the western part of Khurāsān was also threatened. The information which Ismāʿīl received about these events, and certainly too the personal appeal of Bāḏīʿ al-Zamān, Ḥusain Bāīqarā’s son and heir, who had sought asylum at Ismāʿīl’s court, led him to launch a campaign in the east. He defeated and slew the Uzbek ruler in battle at Marv at the beginning of the winter of 916/1510. Ismāʿīl captured Herat, appointed one of his amirs governor, and withdrew again.

The fall of Muḥammad Shaibānī Khān did not remove the Uzbek threat to the Safavids; on the contrary, it remained acute until the end of the 10th/16th century. Two years after the battle of Marv there was another Uzbek attack which overwhelmed the Safavid troops in Khurāsān. Reinforcements sent by Ismāʿīl under the leadership of the famous general Najm-i sānī proved no match for ‘Ubaid-Allāh Sulṭān, the new khan, even though they were supported by the Timurid Bābur, who later founded the Mughal empire in India. After the catastrophic defeat of his forces at Ghujduvān on 3 Ramādān 918/12 November 15121, Ismāʿīl had to go to Khurāsān in person the following spring, in order to save the situation. His arrival brought about the withdrawal of the Uzbeks without any battle being fought.

1 See above, pp. 126–7.
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In a relatively short period Ismā'īl had won control over both the territory of the Āq Quyunlū and the rest of Persia, with the exception of a few small areas. Apart from the Uzbek khan Muhammad Shaibanī, he had not come across any truly dangerous opponent. Admittedly he had not been greeted everywhere by a jubilant populace. There were cities like Kāshān and Qum with an old-established Shī‘ī population which clearly welcomed a Shī‘ī ruler. In several places, too, the propaganda which preceded his arrival and the reputation of his fascinating personality doubtless prepared the ground; similarly, the far-reaching intellectual climate of Folk Islam had favourable consequences for him. These circumstances doubtless facilitated for many their conversion to the new faith. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to think that in the course of the expansion of the Safavid state the population of Persia was converted overnight from the Sunna to the Shi‘a. The propagation of the Shi‘a was not accomplished uniformly or with unqualified success or without conflict. There are even grounds for supposing that decades after the commencement of Safavid rule, for instance, in Khurāsān (where there was to be no lack of Sunnīs at the time of the Uzbek conquest in 997/1589), and probably in other parts of the realm too, adherents of the Sunna continued to practise their creed in secret. But in the course of these conquests there were also fervent Sunnīs who refused to relinquish their religious principles and were not prepared even to make a pretence of being converted. In such cases – for example, in Baghdad or Herat – Ismā‘īl reacted with brutal severity, ruthlessly executing theologians, scholars and even poets who refused to accept the Shi‘ī faith.2

I have already alluded to the extensive spread of the Safavid order in Asia Minor. We also know that Ismā‘īl prepared for his seizure of power by despatching envoys to mobilise his supporters in Anatolia. It has been suggested that the purpose of his march to Arzinjān may have been to shorten the march of the Qızılbaș hastening to meet him from the west and thus to have them at his disposal at the earliest possible moment. It is true that many Anatolian Türkmens flocked to Ismā‘īl’s standard when he embarked on his first exploits. In the first ten years of his rule this influx grew year by year. The reason lay above all in his military successes, but also in his reputation for generosity in the

1 Iskandar Munshī, trans. Savory, pp. 559, 584, 1073.
2 Duri, “Baghdād”, EP. LHP iv, 63.
distribution of booty, news of which spread rapidly throughout the Near East. Adventurousness and religious zeal played their part. Although the desire to join Ismā'īl's army at an opportune moment before the final triumph of the Safavid movement may have been a contributory factor, it was not merely that kind of motive which drove so many Türkmen tribesmen into the Safavid camp. An additional reason was the persistent economic crisis among the population of Asia Minor at this time, following natural disasters, plagues and famines.

When one realises that many of these Türkmens — in fact, all those who came from the province of Rûm — were Ottoman subjects, one readily appreciates that this occurrence, a movement of population which the Ottoman authorities could not fail to notice, was viewed in Istanbul with suspicion and growing disquiet. It was seen as a confirmation of certain separatist tendencies which had been evinced in the province of Rûm for some time. Even a ruler sympathetic towards the dervishes like Sultan Bāyezīd II could not look on indifferently: at least since the attempt on his life in 897/1492 by an Islamic wandering mystic, he knew what to expect of political fanatics who had donned the cowl. Although the would-be assassin had been a qalandar dervish, not a Qizilbāş, the political aspirations of the Qizilbāş had been clear enough to the Sublime Porte since the time of Junaid. Thus when Ismā'īl appeared in Arzinjān, the Ottoman government feared an attack on the province of Rûm, which in the circumstances might only too easily result in the loss of this territory. It therefore made extensive military preparations, which were not abandoned until Ismā'īl had turned his attention to the regions further to the east. Although the expected attack had not materialised, there remained grave concern about the continuing flow of Anatolian mercenaries into Ismā'īl's armies.

In order to stem this massive emigration of able-bodied subjects and put an end to the reinforcement of a potential enemy, the sultan ordered in 907–8/1502 the first persecution of Qizilbāş in Anatolia. Every inhabitant who was known to have Safavid sympathies was branded on the face and deported to the west, usually to Modoni and Koroni in southern Greece. The amīrs on the eastern frontier were ordered to prevent Qizilbāş from crossing the border. However, these measures could have had little permanent effect in the conditions of the time, particularly in the case of a partly nomadic population whose religious and political loyalties were difficult to check. But the campaign was not a total failure either, as can be seen from Ottoman
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The sultans who record that Ismā'īl sent the sultan a written (and unsuccessful) appeal asking him not to forbid his adherents to cross the frontier.

Relations between the Ottomans and the Safavids worsened after Ismā'īl’s campaign of 913/1507 against the principality of the Dulghadīr, which lay within the Ottoman sphere of influence; though whether he also advanced into Ottoman territory proper is not known, since the sources contradict each other. In any case the Ottoman military were provoked into taking new defensive measures which in the event again proved unnecessary. The extent of the threat to the province of Rūm, if not to the whole Ottoman empire, of Ismā'īl’s rise to power and of the movement he led, was not seen until several years later — and then not as the result of a military attack but through a grave internal crisis.

When the sons of Sultan Bāyezīd II began to quarrel over the succession even while their father was still alive, Prince Sultān Qorqud secretly left his city of Antalya at the beginning of 1511 and headed for Manisa, a town closer to the capital, from where he could more easily observe the developments at court. His departure, which did not in fact pass unnoticed, gave rise to rumours of the death of the sultan, who had been in poor health for years. This totally unfounded news brought to a head the resentment which had been simmering among the Qizilbash, especially in the province of Teke-Ili, of which Antalya was the capital, ever since the persecutions mentioned above; the tension had been increased by their fear of deportation and their anger at not being allowed to cross into Persia. Led by a certain Qizilbash called Shāh Quli, who hailed from that area but whose origins are otherwise not completely clear, hordes of rebellious Türkmens, composed almost entirely of Qizilbash, roamed the region, murdering and looting. The rebels belonged to the landless rural classes who had nothing to lose but who believed themselves to be assured of paradise if they were killed. The economic distress in Anatolia should not be ignored as a motivating factor in the uprising. This social aspect combined with Shī’i extremism is clearly discernible.

Wherever the rebels appeared they spread fear and panic. Villages whose inhabitants refused to join them were razed to the ground, the people — even women and children — were massacred, and all the animals

1 Sohrweide, “Der Sieg der Šafaviden”, p. 142.
slaughtered. Even mosques and Islamic monasteries were not spared their lust for destruction. Regular forces which intercepted them were defeated, whether under the command of the governor of Anatolia or of Prince Sultan Qorqud, who did battle with them on the plain of Alashehir. In the end Sultan Bâyezîd had to despatch his Grand Vizier Khâdim 'Ali Pasha with a large army. The latter pursued Shâh Qulî and his bands, who had fled from him at Antalya, across wide stretches of Anatolia until finally on 2 July 1511 he caught up with them in the neighbourhood of Sîvas. The battle ended in catastrophe for both sides: the Grand Vizier was mortally wounded, and Shâh Qulî was killed either during or soon after the engagement. Despite heavy losses his adherents managed to escape across the Persian frontier. At Ray they joined Ismâ'îl, who was probably filled with suspicion by their misdeeds. At all events the leaders were executed on his orders for committing robbery on Persian soil, and the others distributed among the fighting units, obviously because he feared the consequences of accepting such troops into his ranks as a separate and unified force. Although Shâh Qulî had begun as a supporter of the Safavids, in the later stages of the revolt he had been worshipped as God, Prophet and Mahdî and had thus relinquished his support for Ismâ'îl. For this reason alone it is somewhat unlikely that the rebellion was instigated or assisted by the Safavids. Moreover, this is never suggested in the sources.

A very different situation prevailed subsequently. The revolt was not quelled by the battle of Sîvas and the death of Shâh Qulî. On the contrary, only after this did it break out properly in the province of Rûm. Here there are clear links between the rebels and the Safavids. The proximity of the Persian frontier allowed them in an emergency to evade their pursuers by withdrawing on to Safavid territory, there to plan fresh exploits. The rebellious Qizilbâsh even obtained support from members of the Ottoman royal house. Prince Shehîn Shâh, one of Bâyezîd's sons and governor of Qaramân, tried to reach an agreement with them but died suddenly before achieving anything. When his brother Ahmed, whom the sultan had in fact chosen as his successor, saw his hopes of ascending the throne fade and rebelled as a result, his son Murad, who had been deputising for him in his capital Amâsya, negotiated with the Qizilbâsh and allowed them to occupy Amâsya in the middle of April 1512. The history of the revolt in Rûm is characterised by atrocities just as terrible as those committed in western Anatolia by Shâh Qulî and his followers. Whether the conduct of the rebels met with Murâd's
The revolt of the Anatolian Qizilbāš contributed substantially to a turn of events which was highly unpropitious for the rebels: under pressure from his generals Sultan Bāyezīd abdicated in favour of his son Selīm, who ascended the throne on 7 Šafar 918/24 April 1512. The new sultan was not only energetic and determined, but was also a bitter enemy of Shah Ismā‘īl. He understood the true magnitude of the threat to his empire from the Qizilbāš, for as governor of Trebizond he had watched from relatively close range the rise of the young Ismā‘īl, the orphaned son of a religious fanatic and political adventurer, to become the invincible God-King of Persia. He had seen too the fanatical valour of Ismā‘īl’s warriors. He did not doubt that Ottoman rule, at least in the provinces of Asia Minor, was in jeopardy as long as the revolt of the Qizilbāš in Anatolia was allowed to continue.

The developments in Persia and their repercussions in the eastern territories of the Ottoman empire - for this is how the revolt must have appeared to Selīm - had already given him enough grounds for concern: now, about the time of his accession, further disquieting information reached him. The Persian intervention which Istanbul, erroneously, had expected earlier at the time of Ismā‘īl’s campaigns against Arzinjān in 905/1500 and Abulustān in 913/1507, had finally occurred. Not the shah in person, but his governor in Arzinjān, Nūr ‘Alī Khalīfa Rūmlū, had now invaded Ottoman territory on the orders of his master to assist the rebels in Rūm. He sacked several Ottoman towns and finally, together with Prince Murād, whom he had intercepted on his march towards Persia, the city of Ṭoqat. He inflicted a devastating defeat on an Ottoman general, Yūlar Qīsdī Sinān Pasha, who attacked him on his return march close to the frontier.

As soon as Selīm I had prevailed over his brothers, he ordered a pitiless repression of the Anatolian Qizilbāš. Anyone who was known or suspected to be a member of the movement was called to account. All ascertainable Qizilbāš were registered; some were executed, others imprisoned. On this occasion too the victims were nomadic Türkmen tribesmen or peasant villagers; townspeople as a rule showed little tendency to support extremist movements. The reason for the persecution was the repeated revolts of the Qizilbāš and their connection with the Safavids – not their Shi‘ī faith, even though this conflicted with the dominant Sunnī creed of the Ottoman empire. There
were other Shi‘ī groups who remained unscathed as long as they refrained from treasonable activities. It is possible that Selim saw in the rebellion of the Anatolian Qizilbash the culmination of certain separatist tendencies which had troubled the province of Rûm for decades. At all events he did not draw the line at internal measures, but on 20 March 1514 set out for a campaign against Persia. Both his military advisers and his troops were loth to undertake this campaign, a factor which subsequently proved of some consequence.

If we have hitherto examined the relations between the Safavids and their Türkmen adherents in Anatolia primarily from a religious point of view, it is because this is the prevailing interpretation. However, a recently elaborated thesis, according to which social and political factors outweighed religious motives, also deserves attention. According to this argument the Türkmen tribes of Asia Minor turned to Persia because they neither would nor could be integrated into Ottoman society. For one thing their own strong racial consciousness stood in the way of any integration (though in the event the Safavids too failed to bring about such an integration). For another, their leaders would have had no chance of promotion in the Ottoman army of this period because a Turkish military aristocracy had already been formed — whereas in Persia Türkmen amîrs had been offered a wide sphere of action not only in the conquest of territory but also in the political organisation and provincial administration of the empire.

This argument is not implausible, although its validity remains to be tested on some points, especially the idea that tribal interests overshadowed all other ties, even the religious ones, and that these Türkmens were in fact quite indifferent to the religious issue, being still close to the shamanistic faith of their forebears. Such assertions are not adequately supported by the sources discovered to date, and for the time being we must assume that the rise of Ismâ‘îl was inspired by strong religious motives which must have impinged on his Anatolian adherents. There, even if one attaches no great significance to the religious motives of his father and grandfather, the matter must rest, until the opposite is proved to be the case.

Whatever the details of events in Anatolia, Selim had of course good reason to view the development of the new Safavid state as a threat to

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the Ottoman empire. With the far-reaching plans which he had doubt-
less already conceived and which shortly afterwards he put into effect
with the conquest of Syria and Egypt in 922/1517, he could not accept
the risk of being attacked on the flank or from the rear. But as he
marched towards Persia in the spring and summer of 920/1514, he was
dogged by the worry that he might not be able to engage the shah in
battle. He could not be sure that Ismāʿīl would fight, in spite of the
provocation contained in the letters exchanged by the two rulers, the
texts of which have come down to us. Should Ismāʿīl seek to avoid
doing battle, the march eastwards could not be continued indefinitely
with troops who were already less than eager (there is a report of a
mutiny among the janissaries). Spending the winter in eastern Anatolia
was also out of the question, if only for climatic reasons. The whole
difficulty of the operation was brought home when the Safavid gover-
nor of Dīyārbakr retreated from his province as the enemy approached
and implemented a scorched-earth policy against his pursuers.

In the end this anxiety proved to be unfounded: Ismāʿīl did not
avoid doing battle, although he must have known that the sultan
commanded greatly superior forces. If certain sources can be relied
upon, he deliberately relinquished certain advantages which would
have accrued to him in his base in the mountains of Khūy in north-
west Āzarbājān, and instead marched down into the plain of Chāldir-
ān. Moreover, we are told that he refused to attack the enemy before
their troops had time to recover from the exertions of their long march
and could be deployed in battle order, the advice of two of his generals,
Muḥammad Khān Uṣṭājlū and Nūr ʿAlī Khalīfə, based upon their
experience of fighting Ottoman troops. Although such information
smacks slightly of the hindsight of participants, it is not impossible in
view of the good fortune which had hitherto smiled on Ismāʿīl’s mili-
tary ventures that he really did act in this way out of a feeling of
invincibility.

In the battle of Chāldirān on 2 Rajab 920/23 August 1514 the shah
suffered a shattering defeat. He himself managed to escape to his capital
Tabrīz with a small band of followers, but his army was beaten and
many of his generals were killed. The magnitude of the disaster may be
judged from the fact that the royal harem with two of Ismāʿīl’s wives
fell into the hands of the enemy. The reasons adduced for the Persian
defeat include not only those already mentioned, especially the numeri-
cal superiority of the Turkish army, but also its possession of artillery

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and firearms which the Persians lacked almost completely and which had a devastating effect on their cavalry, particularly on the plain. The brilliant solution of the logistical problem, the difficulties of which should not be underestimated, on such a long march mostly through loyal territory certainly contributed to the Turkish victory, although perhaps it did not play a decisive rôle.

However thorough Ismā‘īl’s defeat had been, the Turkish Sultan was in no position to exploit his victory properly. He pursued the shah and captured Tabrīz, but a week later, on 13 September, he had to withdraw again westwards after failing, despite their impressive victory, to persuade his officers to winter in Tabrīz, let alone advance on the Iranian highlands as would have been necessary if the pursuit of the shah was to be continued. Here we see a situation from which the Safavids were often to profit in their subsequent conflicts with the Ottomans; the extended lines of communication, the difficulties of transportation and the harsh climate of eastern Anatolia and Āzarbāijān. Cleverly exploiting these circumstances, they avoided a decisive battle with the Ottomans after Chāldirān and caused their offensives to dissipate themselves, in the certain expectation that the approach of winter would force them to turn back.

Shortly after Selīm’s withdrawal Ismā‘īl returned unopposed to Tabrīz. Yet he was unable to prevent the Turkish occupation and eventual annexation of the provinces of Arzinjān and Diyārbakr, losses which after 1517 were in fact never recovered.

For Shah Ismā‘īl Chāldirān did not mean merely the loss of a battle and of extensive tracts of land. In the eyes of his followers he had also lost the nimbus of invincibility, even if the defeat had done nothing to impair his reputation for sanctity. After all, the later Safavid monarchs were still considered sacred persons. However, his confidence must have been dealt a considerable blow. How else is one to explain the fact that thereafter in the ten years up to his death he never once summoned up the strength to take part in a military campaign, against either external or internal enemies? After Chāldirān there seems to have been little left of his old dynamism or of the boldness which he had still shown even on the battlefield of Chāldirān, although there was no lack of opportunity for military action, whether because of the revolt of

individual governors or because of attacks from outside, for example a
new Uzbek invasion in 927/1521 under 'Ubaid-Allâh Khân. Tasks such
as these he left to his officers. He himself appears to have lapsed into a
persistent passivity, at least as far as the military defence of his throne
and empire was concerned. Although he continued the customary
transfer of the royal court and headquarters from one province to
another, the alternation of summer and winter camps, he spent most of
his time in hunting, competitive games and carousing. In the spring of
930/1524, on a hunting trip to Georgia, the shah fell ill, but recovered
in Ardabil on the way back and continued his journey. However, he
developed a violent fever en route and succumbed to it in Tabrîz in the
month of Rajab/May.

Before we proceed to discuss the later history of the Safavid empire,
this is an appropriate point to assess Ismâ‘îl’s personality and historical
significance. Contemporary Italian reports convey a vivid picture of
the appearance of the first Safavid shah. This is supplemented by a
portrait which nowadays hangs in the Uffizi palace in Florence.1 The
Italian informants, who saw Ismâ‘îl with their own eyes, describe him
as of prepossessing appearance, not too tall but of adequate stature,
heavily built and broad-shouldered, with a fair complexion, clean-
shaven except for a reddish moustache, and with apparently thinning
hair.2

Ismâ‘îl is reputed to have been shrewd, to have had a lively mind
and a quick intelligence. His personality as deduced from the sources
does not lack positive features. The chronicles depict him as a just ruler
who had the interests of his subjects at heart. His poems bespeak an
unusual religious enthusiasm. Therein lies probably the key to his early
political and military success: his ability to inspire others with his zeal
— though the age was such that we may presuppose a certain suscepti-
bility on their part. Courage and boldness together with physical
strength and a masterly skill in the arts of war — he was said to be a
superb archer — distinguished him in battle. But elsewhere too he did
not lack courage, as is shown for instance by his decision to introduce
officially the Shi‘î faith in Tabrîz, a city which had been hitherto two
thirds Sunnî. These qualities characterise his conduct even at a very
early age. We hear that while out hunting as a boy he fearlessly faced

1 For a mediocre reproduction, see Falsâfî, Chand maqâila, facing p. 40.
2 Thus Ramusio, quoted in Hinz, Iranis Aufstieg, pp. 74ff.; also “The Travels of a Merchant in
bears, leopards and lions. He was famed for his boundless generosity, especially when it came to distributing booty: of course his behaviour may not have been influenced by altruism alone but also by the realisation that this was the quickest way to win recruits.

However unstinting the shah may have been towards his adherents, he also showed merciless severity, for example towards arbitrary acts on the part of his governors. Opponents who refused to submit were pursued with unrelenting vengefulness and terrifying cruelty. We recall the faithful Sunnī executed on his orders or the refined tortures which, according to the chronicles, he inflicted upon some delinquents. His hatred could outlast the death of his opponents; for instance, he had the skull of the Uzbek Muḥammad Shaibānī Khān fashioned into a drinking vessel for his own use, and ordered the desecration of graves and corpses. One’s revulsion at such horrors is scarcely mitigated by any allusion to the general barbarity of the age. A curious light is thrown on Ismā‘īl’s character by his passivity and his hedonism during the last ten years of his life. The transformation from a remarkable military and political ambitiousness to a life limited to the confines of the court and devoted to drinking bouts, hunting and contests, appears to have puzzled even his contemporaries. At all events their naive attempt to present the shah as the victim of the wiles of worthless courtiers such as the Grand Vizier Mīrzā Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusain (murdered in 1523) or other Iṣfahān notables, suggests that this was the case.

CHARACTER OF THE EARLY SAFAVID EMPIRE

Two sections of the population of the Safavid empire stand out in particular, the Turks and the Iranians. They are distinct not only in language and customs, but also in origin and culture. Whereas the Turkish element is composed of Türkmen tribesmen, for the most part nomadic herdsmen and warriors, the Iranian consists of the old-established peasantry and the urban mercantile and artisan classes. In the figure of Ismā‘īl the Turkish and the Iranian groups fused. It was not immediately apparent whether Ismā‘īl would cast in his lot with one or the other of these two sections of the population, and if so which one he would choose.

Although the sultan had not been able to exploit his victory to the full, the battle of Chāldirān had immense repercussions not only on
Shah Isma‘ıl’s personal conduct but also on the history of Persia. With the resulting loss of the Safavid territory in eastern Anatolia the capital Tabrız found itself deprived of its more or less central location and placed on the frontiers of the empire; the geographical centre of gravity of the Safavid realm was thereby well-nigh compulsorily transferred to the Iranian highlands. Despite all Isma‘ıl’s Iranian conquests as far as Khurāsān, it was by no means clear in the first phase of his rule whether his realm, whose western frontier with the Ottoman empire was marked by the upper stretches of the Euphrates, would develop into an Iranian state with a Turkish glacis to the west, or into a Turkish state with an Iranian perimeter to the east. Both were possible, although certain circumstances such as the inclusion of some Türkmen traditions in the administration and the army appeared to indicate a preference for the Turkish option. The defeat at Châldîrân did not indeed supply a final answer to this question, for Isma‘ıl still clung to Tabrız as his capital and the seat of government was not moved to Qazvín for another generation; but without doubt it caused Safavid policy to be directed towards the east, especially since Isma‘ıl accepted the new situation without endeavouring to reverse it.

It would be wrong to see in the distinction between Turks and Persians at this time something approaching a national bias, if only because nationalism in the modern sense came only much later from Europe to the Near East. On the other hand, the individual peoples were fully aware of the differences between themselves and others. In the Safavid empire discord and even violent antagonism deriving from the rivalry between Turks and Persians were not only common, they even exerted a strong influence on the internal development, at least in the 10th/16th century and, moreover, as early as Shah Isma‘ıl’s own reign. From the outset there were on the one hand Turkish soldiers who could claim credit for having laid the political foundations of the new state, and on the other hand members of the Iranian aristocracy who were proud of the part they had played in organising and administering the realm.

For generations certain Iranian families had furnished civil servants for the chancellery and the highest positions in the administration. These families belonged to the native Iranian aristocracy. Irrespective of whether their rulers were Qara Quyunlū, Timurids or Āq Quyunlū, the senior civil servants were always drawn from this Iranian aristocracy. Sometimes it can be ascertained that members of one and the
same family, and occasionally even the very same men, served several
dynasties. Ismāʿīl too when he came to power had no alternative but to
make use of the same class of experienced bureaucrats, just as earlier
rulers had done, for there were no other qualified candidates to fill
these posts, certainly none of Turkish or Turkmen origin.

We may ask ourselves whether, as is maintained, Ismāʿīl was really
the symbolic representative of the Iranian population through whom
they made their last and most successful attempt to win political
power. What is certain is that in his case the recourse to the native
aristocracy had quite different consequences than under earlier rulers
such as the Türkmen. Hitherto the influence of Iranian officials had
always been strictly limited by the interests of members of the royal
house and of the Türkmen military aristocracy, as instanced in the fate
of the reformer Qāzī Ṣafī al-Dīn Ṣavājī in 897/1492. With Ismāʿīl,
however, we see the effect of his own link with the Iranian feudal class
— to which, without prejudice to his Türkmen ancestry, he after all
belonged — in that he was no less sympathetic towards the Iranian
element than towards the Türkmen. To this must be added the over-
whelming influence of the Türkmen tribes who had helped him to
victory. The part played by their leaders especially in his early years
must have positively compelled him to be on the look-out for a counter-
balance; and almost inevitably this could only be found in the Iranian
aristocracy.

According to the traditional interpretation, there existed a sharp
distinction in the Safavid empire before Shah ‘Abbās I (995–1038/
1587–1629) between military posts which were reserved for the Türk-

ish tribal leaders, and civil and religious posts which were filled by
members of the native aristocracy, that is by Persians, often called
Tājik. More recent studies have revealed that such a summary account
does not adequately describe the position at the time. Even under
Shah Ismāʿīl numerous significant departures from this schema can be
ascertained. The bestowing of senior posts in the chancellery and of the
highest authority over the pious endowments (the office of ṣadr-i dīzām)
on Iranian notables is quite in line with the dichotomy described
above. But it is no longer consistent with this principle that a man like

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Turks, Iran and the Caucasus).
3 Braun, Ahval-e Sāh Ismāʿīl, passim. Aubin, “Études Safavides I”.
Qâzî Muḥammad Kâshî should have become simultaneously šadr and amîr. The abandonment of the principle becomes even clearer with the appointment of a deputy (vakîl) for the shah who had to combine in his own person the functions of commander-in-chief (amîr al-umârâ’) and grand vizier (vażîr-i d’zam). Even the first occupant of this office, Shaikh Najm al-Dîn Mas‘ūd Rashtî, was an Iranian, and the recruitment policy which he pursued in this high post was unequivocally directed towards the favouring of Iranian notables and the reduction of Turkish influence. On his death in 1509 another Persian, Yâr Aḥmad Khûzânî, better known as Najm-i şânî, was appointed as his successor, again with the double function, both military and civil. That he took the military section of his duties seriously is beyond all doubt, since in 918/1512 he led the royal armies against the Uzbeks and was killed in the battle of Ghujduvân. From 1509 to 1514 the appointment of commander-in-chief, or the more comprehensive office of vakîl, was in Iranian, not Turkish, hands. The position is illustrated by the examples cited, and one could quote many more. They show clearly that even under Ismâ’il I the highest military appointments and the military commands in the field were open to Iranian notables.

It can be shown that under Ismâ’il Iranian dignitaries used their influence to restrict the once well-nigh unlimited power of the Turkish amirs, something which would scarcely have been possible without the agreement or acquiescence of the ruler. We know too that Shah Ismâ’il heaped tokens of his favour on the Iranian notables already mentioned and on their fellows, so that several of them acquired immense wealth. It does not require much imagination to picture the indignation and resentment of the Türkmen aristocracy when they witnessed such favouritism and particularly the serious encroachments on their privileges, real or imagined. Here lies the origin of the strained relations between Turkish and Iranian dignitaries which lasted throughout the 10th/16th century and are even characteristic of this period of Safavid rule. They will recur frequently in the subsequent history of the dynasty.

Ismâ’il was undoubtedly aware of these effects of his Iranophile policies, at least to a certain extent. It is therefore plausible to suggest that he had some definite purpose in mind, if only the combattin the influence of the Turkish military, to whom can be imputed the desire to make him an instrument of their own ambitions. Be that as it may, the geographically determined Iranicisation of the Safavid
The Early Safavid Empire

empire, referred to above, was now compounded with the strengthening of the Iranian element or, to be more precise, the ruling class of the native population. For all the similarity with the previous empire of the Aq Quyunlu, which had also fostered a certain Iranicisation through transferring the capital from Amid to Tabriz, through Uzun Hasan’s defeat by the Ottomans in the battle of Bashkent in 878/1473 and through the appointment of Persian notables to posts in the government and the civil service, one observes under Isma’il’s régime signs of more or less deliberate measures. It cannot be proved that he consciously attempted to bring about an Iranicisation of the country; but one can certainly postulate that he was familiar with the problem, if only in vague terms. This conclusion is justified by a letter written to him by Sultan Bayezid II. For this letter urges Isma’il to regard himself as an Iranian ruler and to confine his activities to the affairs of the inhabitants of Iran.¹ Admittedly the recipient of this advice bequeathed to posterity a collection of poems written in Turkish; but according to the testimony of his son Sām Mirzā he also wrote Persian poems. We may credit him with an insight into the differences in culture and civilisation between the Persians and the Turks, differences which were probably not insignificant. However strong Isma’il’s Turkish connections may have been, however important the contribution of the Qizilbash to his political success, the state which he founded could scarcely have been intended to be a Turkish empire.

The Iranian aristocracy favoured by Shah Isma’il’s recruitment policy were essentially large landowners.² As everywhere else in the Near East, where latifundia and feudal-type institutions governed economic life, the territory annexed by Isma’il contained broad sections of population who lived in reduced circumstances, many in abject penury. This suggests that the religious movement which carried Isma’il to victory may have been inspired by social motives and aspirations, especially by a concern to remedy existing abuses. Before Isma’il’s appearance on the scene there had in fact been movements of this kind often enough in the Islamic world, for instance the communistic uprisings under Shaikh Badr al-Dīn b. Qāzī Samāvnā and Baba Bürklüje

¹ Cited in Falsafī, Chand maqāla, p. 7.
² An exception that proves the rule is the Grand Vizier Mirzā Kamāl al-Dīn Shāh Hussain, an architect by profession: he was appointed to the office for having found Isma’il’s favourite wife wandering about helplessly after Chaldiran and restored her to the shah. But he too acquired extensive areas of land through his position and the shah’s favour: Aubin, “Etudes Safavides I”, pp. 71f.
Muṣṭafā in western Anatolia at the beginning of the 9th/15th century. If Ismāʿīl originally showed some understanding of the social problem, he did not introduce any social reforms when he became shah. The favouritism shown towards Iranian notables indicates rather that he did not wish to tamper with existing social conditions. Of course, no reforms could be expected from the Iranian aristocrats themselves, and the less so the more powerful they grew. But such ideas were also foreign to the Türkmen leaders with whom they were at loggerheads: the Türkmen thought of nothing but the defence of their own privileges which could best be achieved by the preservation of the old feudal order, and certainly not by its curtailment or abolition. Although new men were appointed to posts of responsibility, nothing changed in the sphere of economic and social conditions. The burdens which Ismāʿīl’s subjects had to bear at this time are all too clearly revealed by the long lists of taxes and dues found in documents relating to tax exemptions and immunities.

The foundation of an empire whose frontiers corresponded approximately to those of present-day Persia, the political organisation of these lands, a certain internal consolidation, and protection from foreign enemies – such is Ismāʿīl’s incontestable achievement. The propagation of the Shīʿa as the state religion, however dubious the methods employed, can be seen in retrospect to have made a limited contribution towards the unification of the empire and its peoples. On the other hand it had little immediate effect upon the antagonism between the predominantly nomadic Türkmen and the Iranian town-dwellers. The new state did not display any particular national character. This notion occurs in the older literature, but it must be dismissed, if for no other reason than that nationalist ideas (in the modern sense) did not exist at that time. Shah Ismāʿīl I did not carry out any social or political reforms. The form of government which he adopted in his empire represents no advance upon that of preceding dynasties: it was an absolute monarchy, distinguished from other oriental political systems by its theocratic trappings.

2 See the view of Babinger, “Schejch Bedr ed-dīn”, pp. 87f.
Shah Tahmāsp I (930-84/1524-76), Ismā'īl’s eldest son, was only ten years old when he ascended the throne. At that age, clearly, he could not exercise any great influence on the government and to begin with other elements gained the upper hand with the result that it rapidly became evident on what weak foundations the Safavid empire still rested. The internal situation was marked by immense difficulties, among them the lust for power and the unbridled tribalism of the Qizilbāš, which was henceforth to remain the main problem of Safavid domestic politics for decades. Immediately after Tahmāsp’s accession, and again on successive occasions thereafter, disputes and intrigues among the Türkmen tribes crippled the military strength of the Safavids in the face of such powerful foes as the Ottomans in the west and the Uzbeks in the east. Historians usually pronounce a somewhat unfavourable verdict on the reign of the new shah, which lasted fifty-two years. However, if one considers the problems and perils which he had to face during this period – and which on the whole he overcame successfully – one cannot pass a purely negative judgment on his rule.

The first decade of his reign, the period from 930/1524 to 940/1533, has the appearance of an interregnum during which power was wielded not by the shah himself but by Qizilbāš amîrs. In addition, it was in a sense a reaction against the last phase of Ismā’īl’s rule. As will be recalled, the latter had lost much of his earlier self-confidence after his defeat at Chāldirān which deprived him of his aura of invincibility. Evidently in connection with this, there occurred a certain retreat from the theocratic system of government of the early years – and above all the attempt to circumscribe the power of the Türkmen by appointing Iranian dignitaries to the highest administrative and military posts. It is obvious that on Ismā’īl’s death this policy terminated for the time being, that the Türkmen leaders immediately undid what had been achieved and saw to it as long as they were able that similar tendencies did not prevail under the new shah. Tahmāsp’s tutor (ataheg), Dīv Sulṭān of the Rûmlû tribe, took over the direction of public affairs with the office of Great Amîr (amîr al-umara). His position did not go unchallenged, however, since the other Türkmen tribes and particu-
larly the strongest among them, the Ustājlū, who dwelt in Khurāsān and also in Tabrīz, were loth to accept this arrangement. Nevertheless, Dīv Sulṭān managed to assert his authority to the point of being able to enter the capital. But he had to make concessions: together with Köpek Sulṭān, an influential amīr of the Ustājlū tribe, and a leader of the Takkalu by the name of Chūha Sulṭān, he formed a triumvirate to rule the empire. In trying to oust his two co-regents, whom he regarded from the outset as his rivals, he came to grief or, rather, brought about conflicts in the course of which, from the spring of 932/1526 onwards, regular battles broke out between individual tribes. At first these were confined to north-west Persia, but later other parts of the country, above all Khurāsān, were also dragged into the strife. The result was civil war and chaos throughout the land, and fresh activity on the part of the Uzbekks in the east.

The Ustājlū suffered heavy losses in these battles and Köpek Sulṭān was killed. Thereupon Chūha Sulṭān Takkalu succeeded in winning the support of the shah and in poisoning his mind against Dīv Sulṭān Rūmlū, so that in the summer of 933/1527, before the assembled court, the shah shot an arrow at his atabeg, thereby giving the signal for his removal. The dominance of the Rūmlū tribe was now followed by that of the Takkalu, but only for three years. As early as 937/1530–1 there was a clash between the Takkalu and the Shāmlū, whose leader Ḥusain Khān, governor of Herat, went so far as to brawl with his opponents in the royal tent. Thereby Chūha Sulṭān met his death and Ḥusain Khān took his place. Just like the Ustājlū and the Rūmlū before them, the Takkalu were now ousted in favour of the Shāmlū. But Ḥusain Khān’s days were also numbered: three years later he was overthrown and executed, although he was related to the shah through his mother, a sister of Shah Ismāʿīl.

This brief outline of the Qizilbash interregnum must suffice. It is enough to illustrate the steady development of the Türkmen tribes into a kind of Safavid praetorian guard, an evolution characteristic of the 10th/16th century. It can readily be imagined how each of these coups brought with it an intrigue involving various individuals and the tribes to which they belonged or whose allies they were. The fall of a powerful amīr signified each time a severe blow for the government and the whole realm, because the situation at court had its repercussions in the provinces: each victorious amīr attempted to appoint fellow tribesmen or members of allied tribal groups to the most important positions
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both at court and in the provinces, naturally at the expense of the defeated faction. This process produced innumerable enmities.

The ousting of Husain Khān denoted a turning point in this development. The young shah knew now what to expect from the Türkmen amīrs and did not hesitate to draw the appropriate conclusions. He rode roughshod over the allocation of offices already decided by the amīrs, by entrusting the command of the Shāmlū contingent not to one of the amīrs of that tribe but to his brother Bahrām Mīrzā and by once again nominating a Persian as the shah’s viceroy (vakīl). This was Qā‘ī Jāhān Qazvīnī, who had already held this post earlier. For the time being the enormous perils confronting both throne and empire as a result of the ambitions and cabals of the Qizilbāsh amīrs had been checked, but they were by no means eliminated. From time to time they continued to loom up with varying degrees of ominousness. The latent threat remained the same as under Ismā‘īl. However, Ţahmāsp succeeded in asserting his authority for forty years from 940/1533 onwards, until a new rebellion, similar in extent to that which troubled the beginning of his reign, again rocked the empire.

Scarcely less devastating were the effects of the strife among the Qizilbāsh on the external political situation of the Safavid empire. The Uzbek danger which we encountered in the reign of Shah Ismā‘īl for a long time plagued his son in turn. It crystallised into five separate assaults, the first of which took place in the year of Ţahmāsp’s accession. It is unlikely that this initial attack was aimed at the conquest of Khurāsān, though mounted as it was by a strong force it was more than a mere raid in search of booty and indeed culminated in a prolonged but unsuccessful siege of Herat. On the other hand, this intention, which we have already observed in the case of the Uzbeks, is so clearly discernible behind the subsequent invasions that a modern writer has appropriately described the Persian–Uzbek conflicts between 930/1524 and 947/1540 as “the duel for Khurāsān”.¹ It is not certain whether the decision to launch the first of the five Uzbek attacks was taken in the light of the events enacted at the Persian court after Ţahmāsp’s accession, since the evidence of the sources is contradictory, some placing the outbreak of hostilities prior to Ismā‘īl’s

¹ The title of Dickson’s thesis: Shāh Tahmāsb and the Uzbeks (The Duel for Khurāsān with ‘Ubayd Khān …).
death; but it is undoubtedly the case that these events influenced the course of the conflict.

The governorship of Khurāsān province together with that of the capital Herat was at that time in the hands of Ṭahmāsp’s younger brother Sām Mirzā. In view of his youth, power was exercised on his behalf by his tutor, Durmish Khān Shāmlū. Letters exchanged by the Uzbek prince ʿUbaid-Allāh Khān, Muḥammad Shaibānī’s nephew, and the commandant of the fortress of Herat which he was investing, apparently during the winter of 932/1525–6, are still extant and convey a good impression of the situation. For in his summons to surrender, the Uzbek indicates that no assistance could be expected from the shah in view of the quarrelling among the Qizilbash amīrs. And indeed Dīv Sultān Rūmlū did not dare to weaken his army by despatching a force to relieve Herat. As it happened, there were no serious repercussions at this particular point because ʿUbaid-Allāh Khān was not prepared to prolong the siege until the enemy had been ground down. Some time later he withdrew empty-handed.

Shortly after that, however, he must have resolved to conquer Khurāsān, indubitably influenced by the unending squabbles among the amīrs of the shah, and perhaps too by news of the death of Durmish Khān. As early as 934/1528 he mounted a fresh attack, occupied Mashhad and Astarābād and appeared once again before the walls of Herat to begin a seven-month siege. This time a Persian relief force was organised and the shah accompanied it to Khurāsān. He intervened personally in the battle of Jām (10 Muḥarram 935/24 September 1528) and won a victory principally by methods which his amīrs had learnt from the Ottomans: for example, by the use of artillery, which was new to the Uzbeks. Unfortunately, the Safavid troops failed to exploit their victory, allowing the enemy to escape, and the following spring they marched westwards again in order to put down a revolt in Baghdad which had been instigated by Žuʾl-Faqr Beg Mauṣīlū.

Because of its connections with the Ottomans this uprising had a more than local significance for the shah. He considered it to be more dangerous than the Uzbeks, who would predictably return in the event of his own withdrawal. Indeed, he did not have to wait long for news of ʿUbaid-Allāh’s third attack. After conquering Mashhad, ʿUbaid-Allāh this time achieved the surrender of the fortress of Herat by Ḥusain Khān Shāmlū, the tutor of Sām Mirzā, in return for a guarantee of safe conduct out of the city. The reasons for this were firstly that
Herat had not yet recovered from the previous siege; and secondly that the court made no effort to go to the aid of Khurāsān, clearly because Chūha Sulṭān Takkalū had nothing to gain from assisting his enemy Husain Khān. On the face of it relief was perfectly possible, for the shah had been able to resolve the problem in Baghdad with unexpected rapidity. Žu’l-Faqār had been murdered and with the collapse of this revolt Baghdad had fallen to Ṭahmāsp on 3 Shawwāl 935/10 June 1529. But instead of then returning to Khurāsān, the shah set up a summer camp at Abhar, and on top of that spent the winter in Qazvīn. Not until the following summer did he march towards Khurāsān at the head of a strong army. At the news of his advance, ‘Ubaid-Allāh Khān’s governors took flight. ‘Ubaid-Allāh himself likewise retreated from Herat, tried to raise reinforcements in Marv and, when that failed, marched on to Bukhārā. The shah assigned Khurāsān to Prince Bahram Mīrzā and appointed Ghāzī Khān Takkalū as his tutor. In spite of the lateness of the season he left Khurāsān again in mid-Rabl’ I 937/at the beginning of November 1530, perhaps because the size of his army would have caused grave supply problems had he decided to winter there.

About this time the Persian court witnessed the fall of Chūha Sulṭān and the ousting of the Takkalū. The events connected with this were of such a spectacular nature that the Uzbeks must have learnt about them forthwith and conceived the idea of a fresh campaign against Khurāsān. An attack by the Ottomans on north-west Persia, with which we will deal later, was another contributory factor. As in 935/1528 the shah again reacted nervously to the Ottoman initiative and marched to Āzarbāijān, which not even a fresh Uzbek invasion in the spring of 938/1532 could induce him to leave. The reason for his different estimation of the foes on Persia’s western and eastern flanks lay probably not only in the greater military potential of the Ottomans and the obvious success of their expansionist policies, but also in the geopolitical situation. The remote province of Khurāsān is connected with the Safavid central provinces only by a small colonised strip between the southern face of the Alburz mountains and the northern edge of the desert; an enemy like the Uzbeks, who were essentially interested only in Khurāsān, would scarcely venture beyond that strip in any large-scale actions (though they occasionally raided further, as in 939/1533, when they reached Ray). In Āzarbāijān, on the other hand, with its tracts of agricultural land, vital interests were at stake, including several access routes to the country’s central provinces.
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The fourth Uzbek assault on Khurāsān thus coincided with the shah’s stay in Tabrīz. It led to the almost complete occupation of the province. Herat alone resisted the attack and a siege lasting a year and a half, which might still have achieved its aim had not ‘Ubaid-Allāh suddenly retreated in mid-Rabi‘ I 940/1533. His action may have been determined by internal events in his homeland of Transoxiana, but scarcely by news of Shah Ẓahmāsp’s advance, since the latter did not reach Khurāsān for another two months. The fact that the Herat garrison was equal to the hardships of a protracted siege is astonishing, the more so since the local Qizilbāsh had hitherto been dominated by the Takkalū, who had long since been ousted from the shah’s immediate circle. Nevertheless, the new constellation now had its impact on Herat. Sām Mīrzā was again appointed governor, as before with a tutor from the Shāmlū tribe, called Aghzīvār Sulṭān. This time the shah wintered in Herat. In preparation for a campaign against the Uzbeks he sent troops to Marv and the territory of Gharchistān on the sources of the Murghāb. In Dhu‘l-Hijja 940/June 1534 he himself departed for Balkh with the main force. There news reached him of an Ottoman raid on north-west Persia. He thereupon changed his plans and marched towards the west.

Before we discuss the events of the ensuing war in the context of Ottoman–Persian friction, we would do well to consider the course and temporary termination of the struggle against the Uzbeks. But we can record at this point that the Ottoman attack created the most dangerous crisis of Shah Ẓahmāsp’s reign, because it was connected not only chronologically but also inherently with the machinations of the Qizilbāsh touched on earlier. That ‘Ubaid-Allāh Khān made the most of the opportunity afforded him by the shah’s involvement in the west and by the crisis at the Persian court is scarcely surprising. But we must dismiss the notion that the Turkish sultan conceived of an alliance with the Uzbeks in order to trap the Safavids in a pincer movement, or that similar ideas existed in Bukhārā. The latter supposition is refuted by the mere fact that ‘Ubaid-Allāh did not mount his attack until the Ottomans had already begun to retreat.

It is quite another question whether ‘Ubaid-Allāh had some connection with the rebellion of the Qizilbāsh, in the course of which, as we saw, Ḥusain Khān Shāmlū was executed. The consequences of this uprising for Khurāsān began with an official edict (hukm) from the Herat authorities, permitting the Türkmens to plunder the civilian
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population. The revolt of Sām Mīrzā, his tutor and his amīrs was revealed when without the shah’s authorisation they undertook a campaign against Qandahār, which was part of the Mughal empire in India. The enmity existing between ‘Ubaid-Allāh Khān and the Mughals, together with the fact that ‘Ubaid-Allāh initially did not launch any offensive, but only minor thrusts against Herat, although the city had been left in a state of turmoil akin to civil war and entirely without any military protection – all this points to a secret understanding. It was undoubtedly known in Bukhārā that the Turkish sultan had already officially recognised Sām Mīrzā as shah in place of his brother Ṭahmāsp.

When in 942/at the end of 1535 ‘Ubaid-Allāh Khān mounted his fifth offensive against Khurāsān, a revolt of the population against the Qizilbash was under way in and around Herat in consequence of the ruthless plundering to which it had been subjected. The rebels were so strong and numerous that they were able to place Herat under a regular state of siege. They put themselves at the disposal of ‘Ubaid-Allāh, who was camped before Mashhad, and summoned him to Herat. Finally, treason on the part of Persian citizens delivered the town into the hands of the rebels and their Uzbek allies. With the conquest of Herat, ‘Ubaid-Allāh, who meanwhile had been elected supreme khan of the Uzbeks, might have seen himself at the summit of his ambition to enter upon the heritage of the Timurids in their famous capital, had not the collapse of discipline in his army become all too evident. When news reached him that the shah was approaching after a victory over the Ottoman sultan, his amīrs refused to risk a battle with the Qizilbāsh and insisted instead on returning to Bukhārā and abandoning their conquests in Khurāsān.

Thus it came about that Herat was evacuated in mid-Sha‘bān 943/ at the end of January 1537 and was occupied without a struggle by the new governor whom the shah had sent on in advance. He was Ṭahmāsp’s eldest son, the future Shah Muḥammad Khudābanda, accompanied by a tutor from the Takkalū tribe, Muḥammad Khān Sharaf al-Dīn-ughllī, who as governor of Baghdad during the rebellion of his tribe had remained faithful to the shah. Ṭahmāsp remained in Khurāsān for six months, waged a campaign against the Mughals, thereby conquering Qandahār (if only for a brief interval), and sent his troops into action against various Uzbek dominions. When in Rabī‘ II 944/September 1537 he began his return march towards Tabrīz, the
Uzbek threat had been dispelled for a long time to come. Tahmāsp’s prestige, founded on his triumphs over the Ottomans, Uzbeks and Mughals, but above all over his own Qizilbash amīrs, did not fail to have its effect.

The shah was now twenty-three years old, and had acquired experience from the events of his childhood and adolescence which, in conjunction with his political and military aptitude, had turned him into a ruler of considerable stature. He had survived with flying colours the long probation period of internal and external crises since his accession. The very circumspection of his reaction to the Uzbek attacks leads one to postulate a sound judgment in complicated situations. He may have known that ‘Ubaid-Allāh Khān’s aspirations in Khurasān, however serious, were limited by the lack of internal stability in Transoxiana. In fact ‘Ubaid-Allāh’s ideas could not by any means have been identical with the plans of his generals. Whereas he envisaged an extension of Uzbek territory – namely the revival of the former Timurid glory – his followers had perfectly concrete, more modest ends in mind, that is, forays and expeditions to Khurasān and what seemed to them to be the untold wealth of its settlements.

Tahmāsp was right: his most dangerous enemies were the Ottomans, not the Uzbeks. Naturally, he was not to know that his opponent Süleymn the Magnificent (926-74/1520-66) would go down in history as the most important sultan of the Ottoman empire. Whether the shah had adequate information right from the beginning of the conflict about the sultan’s military strength and his dealings with the western powers, we do not know. The mere memory of his father’s grave defeat at Chāldirān may have been sufficient to determine his estimate of the Ottoman threat. Although that battle had taken place as early as 920/1514, the year of Tahmāsp’s birth, eye-witness accounts which he heard as a child doubtless had their effect in later years.

As an indication of the fact that the shah was none too well informed of the Ottomans’ plans or at least exaggerated the potential danger, we might look at his reaction to the revolt of Zu’l-Faqār Sultan Mausillū Turkmān. It will be recalled that it was this uprising which, after the victory at Jām in the autumn of 935/1528, caused Tahmāsp to leave Khurasān again with the greatest speed. Since news of the rebellion had reached him even before the Khurasān campaign, the reason for his haste was probably that Zu’l-Faqār had recognised the authority of
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the Ottomans. Now the sultan had just returned from the conquest of Hungary and was preoccupied with a campaign against Austria, the attack which led to the siege of Vienna (27 September – 15 October 1529); he was thus scarcely in a position to pay much heed to the events in Baghdad, but this was clearly not so obvious from the point of view of the Persian court encamped in Jām.

Only with the Austrian ceasefire of 14 January 1533 and the peace treaty which quickly followed did a really serious situation arise for Persia, resulting in the first of three Turco-Persian wars waged during Ṭahmāsp’s reign. Sultan Süleymān could scarcely have been under any illusion concerning the danger which a strong Safavid empire might represent for him and his ambitious plans in the west and north-west of his realm. Moreover the revolts of the Anatolian Qizilbāš – especially that of Shāh Quli but also others that had followed1 - were still fresh in his mind. When the peace with Austria restored his freedom of action, he therefore proceeded to tackle this problem.

As will be recalled, the Takkalū had been ousted from their position of dominance in Persia in 937/1531. The ensuing persecution and harassment of the members of this tribe provoked one of their leaders, Ulāmā Sulṭān, a governor of the shah in Āzarbāijān who had earlier fled to Persia from Anatolia, to seek refuge at the Ottoman court. Describing the precarious position of the shah, exposed as he was to tribal strife at court and in the provinces and to Uzbek attacks on Khurāsān, he drew attention to the favourable conditions for an Ottoman initiative. The sultan readily took up this suggestion, hoping in such circumstances to abolish a potential danger in his rear which might have grown acute at a time when he was engaged in campaigns in Europe. He sent Ulāmā Sulṭān, who had meanwhile been given the rank of pasha, to Ḩīşn Kaifā as governor with the task of conquering Bīrli̇s and supporting the Turkish offensive against Persia. In Muḥarram 941/July 1534 the Turkish Grand Vizier Ibrāhīm Pasha occupied Tabrīz and two months later Süleymān himself arrived in the city. He marched via Hamadān on Baghdad, which surrendered to the Turks at the end of November without a struggle. The shah, who had broken off his campaign against the Uzbeks upon learning of the Ottoman invasion, and had hastened a distance of some 1,200 miles to meet it, found himself in desperate straits. In Khurāsān there had been an

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attempt to poison him. The Shāmlū were in revolt, and more and more Qizilbāš amīrs were leaving him in the lurch. This was the last of the great tribal feuds before the shah succeeded in asserting his authority and in taking over the government of the realm himself. Süleyman exploited this situation by making contact with the rebellious prince Sām in Khurāsān, whom he believed he could set on the Persian throne at the price of Azarbāījān. The Shāmlū, and perhaps also the Takkalū, seem to have been behind this project. Contact between the Khurāsān rebels and the sultan may have been established by Ghāzī Khān Takkalū, who had been tutor to Bahrām Mīrzā during his governorship of Herat and now paid a brief visit to the Ottoman winter headquarters at Baghdad.

Nevertheless, Tāhmāsp was able to reverse all of Süleyman’s gains as soon as the latter retreated into Mesopotamia. This led the sultan to launch a fresh campaign against Persia in the following spring. The shah again refused to fight a pitched battle — indeed he was probably not in a position to do so. He confined his activity to attacking the Turkish rearguards and involving them in skirmishes. When the sultan began the return march to Istanbul at the end of 1535, his conquests were again completely lost, with the sole exception of Baghdad, which remained permanently Turkish, apart from a Persian interlude in the 11th/17th century. Sultan Süleyman had failed to achieve his goal of freeing himself from the Persian threat to his rear. His failure was all the greater in that Tāhmāsp emerged strengthened from the grave crisis into which the Ottoman attack had plunged him. There is little doubt that the Turkish failure must once again be attributed to the rigours of the climate and to the extended lines of communication which presented the Ottoman armies with practically insoluble logistical problems. The Persian problem had been shelved, but not solved.

In the next fifteen years Safavid troops established several strong points along the Turkish frontier, yet without noticeably straining relations with the Ottomans. Not until Tāhmāsp’s brother Alqāṣī Mīrzā, who had once played a prominent part in the struggle against the Uzbeks and had been made governor of Shīrvān, rebelled against the shah and was granted asylum at the Porte did relations once more grow perilously tense. On this occasion too a recent peace treaty with

1 Alternative forms are Alqāṣī, Alqāṣ, Alqāṣb and Ilqās (for the last, see Röhrborn, Provinzen und Zentralgewalt, index).
Austria gave the sultan a free hand in any conflict with Persia. The encouragement of the Persian prince to this effect found a ready ear, especially since another refugee, a son of the last Shirvān-Shāh, was working along the same lines. In the spring of 955/1548 the sultan attacked Persia. Again a two-year campaign ensued, and again the Ottomans failed to win any decisive gains. Tabrız was captured, but only for a few days. With the sultan’s permission, Ḍaqāṣ Mīrzā launched a thrust towards Iṣfahān and other Persian towns, using not Turkish but irregular troops. Eventually, however, he fell into his brother’s hands and was imprisoned in a fortress, where he soon met his death. While Süleymān withdrew to a winter camp at Aleppo, Ṭahmāsp laid waste large areas of eastern Anatolia. Thereby he achieved his aim: although the Turks sent a force into Georgia, they would not risk an engagement with the shah and in the late autumn of 956/1549 they began their retreat.

The repeated capture of his capital by the Turks must have demonstrated to the shah its exposed location. He therefore decided in 955/1548 to transfer his seat to Qazvīn.¹ It was to remain there for half a century until finally Iṣfahān became the capital. One may also see in this change a token of the increasing Iranicisation of the Safavid empire, for which the Turkmen tradition linked with Tabrız had now lost its erstwhile importance.

That the second Persian campaign of Süleymān the Magnificent had likewise failed to fulfil its objective soon became apparent when shortly afterwards Ṭahmāsp’s second son Ismā‘īl Mīrzā invaded eastern Anatolia, invested various towns in the neighbourhood of Vān, captured Akhlāṭ and later Arjīsh, and defeated Iskandar Pasha, governor of Erzerum, before the gates of his own city. When similar exploits were repeated, the sultan decided on another campaign which initially he intended to entrust to one of his generals, but which in the event he led himself. In Jumādā II 961/May 1554 he left his winter camp in Aleppo for Āmid and advanced as far as the Armenian territory of Qarābāgh in the southern bend of the Araxes. But by the time he returned to Erzerum in Ramaḍān/August all that had been achieved was extensive pillaging and more or less insignificant skirmishes. Then a Persian envoy appeared and an armistice was negotiated. Clearly it

¹ The date given in Lockhart, Persian Cities (London, 1960), p. 69. The difficulty of tracing a record of the transfer in the sources may probably be ascribed to the fact that public affairs were dealt with mostly in the royal camp, i.e. in frequently changing locations.
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was in the interest of both sides to terminate hostilities. For after Ţahmāsp, whose pacific nature is often emphasised, had despatched another plenipotentiary the following spring, a peace treaty was concluded in the sultan’s camp at Amāsya on 8 Rajab 962/29 May 1555, the first official peace between the Safavids and the Ottomans. It was observed until after the deaths of both rulers – in fact, until 986/1578. Admittedly the Turkish attacks had deprived Ţahmāsp of Baghdad and Mesopotamia, together with the fortress of Vān. But he had been able to prevent any further loss of territory, above all the loss of Āzarbāijān. Confronted by a foe who was at the height of his power, whose exploits had been crowned with success far into Europe, the shah had acquitted himself not at all badly. Thereby one is of course overlooking the repercussions of three decades of war in the east and in the west, combined with the simultaneous internal strife amongst the Qizilbāsh tribes, for the Persian economy and the material circumstances of the population.

Alongside the conflict with the Uzbeks and the Ottomans, Ţahmāsp’s relations with the empire of the Indian Mughals, which had been founded shortly before the beginning of his reign by Zahir al-Dīn Muhammad Bābur, the famous descendant of Tīmūr, were of secondary importance. Though in 943/1537 the shah had occupied the Mughal city of Qandahār, he omitted to take any retaliatory measures when it was shortly afterwards recaptured from the governor he had appointed. Some years later, when Bābur’s successor Humāyūn sought refuge at his court, the shah placed at his disposal Persian troops, with whose help he retook the town. In fact, Qandahār did not revert into the shah’s possession until the accession of the Emperor Akbar (963–1014/1556–1605).1

The Safavid empire possessed numerous frontier areas like Qandahār. Some of them were ruled as vassal states by native governors, who occasionally bore the title of vālī. The territories were often remote and differed from the rest of Persia in the language, culture and religion of their populations. Sometimes they formed a kind of buffer state between Persia and her powerful neighbours. In the course of time they

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were integrated with the Persian state as provinces, thereby of course losing their special status. This tendency can be seen even in the reign of Tahmāsp I: in fact, from 943/1536–7, with the appointment of a governor in Lāhijān, where following the death of Ismā’īl’s benefactor Kārkiyā Mīrzā ‘Alī relations between the Safavid court and the ruler of east Gīlān had rapidly deteriorated; the appointment was short-lived, though another was made for a few years towards the end of the shah’s reign. Shīrvān lost its autonomy once and for all in 1538, Bākū followed some years later and Shakkl in 1551. Tahmāsp also appointed a governor over part of Māzandarān, but the latter could only maintain his position from 1569 to 1576. The rulers of ‘Arabistān, the Musha’-sha’, had remained loyal to the Safavids since their subjugation by Ismā’īl I. To be sure, Badrān b. Falāḥ found himself in a cleft stick when the Ottomans began their operations against Mesopotamia, and had no choice but to go to greet Süleymān the Magnificent on his advance from Hamadān towards Baghdad in 941/1534. Yet his son and heir Sajjād once again acknowledged the shah as his lord when Tahmāsp proceeded to Dīzful in 948/1541. On this occasion Sajjād was confirmed as governor (ḥākim) of Havīza.

Naturally there were also territories conquered by Ismā’īl I which were lost to his son; for example, Bitlīs on the Turkish frontier, which has already been mentioned, and Sīstān in the far south-east of Persia. Georgia – including the areas of Shīrvān and Shakkl – held a particular attraction for the Safavids, as indeed it did for the Ottomans and had also done for previous Muslim dynasties such as the Türkmen. Tahmāsp was following an established precedent, therefore, when he undertook no fewer than four Georgian campaigns, three of them in the period 947–61/1540–54. Great as was the attraction of this land for the Safavids, the difficulties confronting them there were no less daunting, both on account of its geography and because of the military prowess of the Georgians. Tahmāsp was not able to hold the capital Tiflis, although it had been captured several times by the Qizilbash, until he succeeded in establishing there as his governor the Bagratid David, a brother of King Simon I, who came to the Persian court, was converted to Islam and entered Tahmāsp’s service. This, however, did not by any means solve the Georgian problem. Nevertheless, the oper-

1 From 975/1567–8, according to Röhrborn, Provinzen und Zentralgewalt, p. 83. Minorsky, Tadbkirat al-Mulūk, p. 170, gives 1567.
iations of the Safavids in Georgia had a domestic significance which will be discussed below.

In order to elucidate the domestic repercussions of Safavid-Georgian relations, we must again recall the frequent revolts and mutinies of the Qizilbāsh amīrs, the civil wars unleashed by them at the beginning of Shah Ẓahmāsp’s reign, their unbridled tribalism, individual cases of desertion to the Ottomans, and their attempt to depose Shah Ẓahmāsp in favour of his brother Sām Mirzā — all alike basically the consequence of the failure of Ẓahmāsp, and still more of Ismā’īl I, to assimilate the old Safavid order, the Qizilbāsh, within the state. As has already been mentioned, such incidents had led occasionally under Ismā’īl, and all the more under Ẓahmāsp, to successive attempts either to oust the Qizilbāsh amīrs or to reduce their predominance. This was possible only if they could be dislodged from the most important military and administrative posts in the empire. We have seen what courses of action the two rulers adopted in order to attain this goal. They probably realised that although they could obtain partial success by playing off rival tribes or individuals one against the other, no definitive success could be achieved in this way. Shah Ismā’īl’s practice of appointing Iranian dignitaries to the highest military posts indicates his awareness that a fundamental change could only be brought about by recruiting non-Türkmen elements.

In these efforts not only Persians play a rôle, but even more so Georgians¹ and Circassians (in the then accepted sense of anyone living north of Darband²), who as a rule were recruited into the army as bodyguards (qūrchīs). The commander of the royal guard (qūrchī-bāšī) was already gaining more and more importance during the second half of Shah Ẓahmāsp’s reign, while the power and influence of the Great Amir (amīr al-umārā’) diminished. This process, which extended over several decades and eventually resulted in the undermining or even neutralisation of the Türkmen military aristocracy, the Qizilbāsh, did not, of course, escape the attention of the victims, even though to begin with it was not perhaps as apparent as the preference given to representatives of the Persian aristocracy under Shah Ismā’īl I. They were of course reluctant to accept this turn of events, and so repeated disturbances and

¹ In 1553—4 alone Ẓahmāsp brought back no fewer than 30,000 Georgian captives: Savory, “The Principal Offices .... during the reign of Ẓahmāsp I”, p. 84.
² Minorsky, Tadbkirat a/-Mul£A, p. 163.
rebellions ensued until Shah ‘Abbās I succeeded in finally quelling the Qizilbash.

Yet before this point was reached, the Safavid empire had to survive another grave internal crisis, so grave indeed that its very existence was in danger. The trouble began at the end of Shah Ṭahmāsp I’s long reign, when in October 1575 the aged ruler fell ill. Among the members of the royal family and the court, especially the chief amīrs of the Qizilbash, the question of the succession was inevitably debated. This matter was not governed by any set rules, any more than was the leadership of the Ardabil order, in which, although it had been customary for the leadership to be handed down from father to son, the eldest son had not always been chosen and the rule does not seem in any case to have been followed invariably.¹ Nor had the shah made any explicit disposition by nominating a crown prince. Although he had for some time past shown favour to Prince Sulṭān Ḥaider Mīrzā by inviting him to participate in affairs of state, he had nevertheless refrained from endowing him with any specific office.

Admittedly there were influential tribal leaders, among them amīrs of the Ustājlū and powerful Georgians, who looked upon Ḥaider as the future shah. His elder brother Muḥammad Khudābanda was not considered a serious contender because he suffered from a major eye complaint. Yet Prince Ḥaider was opposed by amīrs of the Rūmlū and Turkmān tribēs, for instance, who like Ḥaider’s influential sister Parī Khān Khānum had a quite different candidate in mind, namely Prince Ismā‘īl. The reasons for this choice are not very clear, for the prince in question had lived for eighteen years under close arrest in the fortress of Qahqaha, in the Savalān mountains west of Ardabil. Presumably little more than tribal particularism lay behind it. Perhaps, too, one may adduce the fame that Ismā‘īl had won through his victories over the Turks and which had never entirely faded, that very esteem combined with the common touch and a certain arrogance which may have induced Shah Ṭahmāsp to imprison Ismā‘īl after all his unpleasant experiences with his brothers Sām Mīrzā and Alqāṣ Mīrzā. We cannot, however, dismiss the possibility that in spite of everything his father still considered Ismā‘īl an eventual successor, since the shah sent a

¹ Hinz, *Iran Aufstieg*, p. 17. We can only assume that the traditions of the order were observed in the succession of the first Safavid shahs, since to date there has been no detailed study.
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reliable bodyguard to protect him from any attempts on his life that might have been instigated by the fortress commandant.

Initially it seemed as if the discussions at the court of Qazvīn about the succession had been premature. Shāh Tahmāsp recovered from his illness and devoted his attention as before to affairs of state. But the tensions among his entourage remained in spite of the king’s attempts to dispel them by making changes in the personnel surrounding him. The tensions still prevailed when he finally died six months later, as a result of poison, on 15 Šafar 984/14 May 1576. Whether this was by accident or design has never been established.

Tahmāsp’s death triggered off a series of dramatic events. Before proceeding to deal with these, however, we must dwell at least briefly on an assessment of his character and his fifty-two-year reign. In general the verdict of historians has tended to be adverse. They criticise his miserliness, his greed and his cowardice. They are also offended by the bigotry which he demonstrated at an early age, apparently following the failure of a poisoning attempt,1 and which not only affected his personal conduct and his immediate retinue but was also responsible for a series of narrow-minded ordinances imposed on the population as a whole. The notion that he refused to conclude any treaties with the Christian powers of Western Europe on religious grounds can no longer be sustained.2 But his bigotry is discernible in his stubborn attempts to convert the Great Mughal Humāyūn to the Shi‘i faith when the latter sought asylum at his court in 1541. A particularly repugnant act of treachery may be seen in his treatment of the Ottoman Prince Bāyezīd, who sought refuge in Persia in 1559 after rebelling against his father. The shāh could have been in no doubt as to the impending fate of the prince and his four sons when he handed them over to an Ottoman delegation after negotiations lasting two years. Even if political considerations were involved — Sūleymān had threatened military reprisals, in other words, the termination of the Peace of Amāsya — it is to Tahmāsp’s discredit that he accepted payment for his collaboration in gold coin and territorial concessions.3

Such misdeeds, errors and weaknesses throw a murky light on

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1 Dickson, Shāh Tahmāb and the Uzbek, pp. 261, 276ff., with the date 1534.
2 Cf. now Palombini, Bundnisverben, especially p. 119.

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Tahmāsp as a person and as a ruler. Yet a just appraisal of the shah cannot be reached on the basis of this evidence alone: we must also consider other factors together with his political achievements and behaviour. We should not forget that the first decade of Tahmāsp’s life – the whole period prior to his accession – coincided with that phase in the career of his father Ismā’īl I during which the latter, clearly disillusioned and discouraged by his defeat at Chāldīrān, could not bring himself to take any notable political or military initiative and therefore failed to inspire his son with any noble aspirations. On the other hand, we should not underestimate Tahmāsp’s achievement in personally taking over the reins of power within a space of ten years, after the land had been at the mercy of plotting tribal chieftains. If in the first decade of his reign he was a puppet in the hands of Türkmen amīrs, he certainly cannot be accused of weakness during the next forty years.

What is remarkable is not only the skill with which he freed himself from the tutelage of the Qizilbāsh leaders but also the courage with which he faced the Uzbeks, particularly in the battle of Jām, and then in 941/1534, even before the Uzbek danger had been averted, took the correct decision to withdraw from the fighting in the east and march to meet the greater threat posed by the Ottoman invasion. He adhered steadfastly to this policy despite the Ottoman successes and despite the conspiracy of his brother Sām and the defection of most of his Türkmen generals. Only in this way did he succeed eventually in asserting his authority, quelling several revolts on the part of the Qizilbāsh (nowadays we would describe them as civil wars), retaining Khurāsān with Herat and Mashhad in defiance of five Uzbek attacks and even emerging relatively unscathed from three wars against the Ottomans.

Persia was able to absorb the loss of Baghdad, and the surrender of eastern Anatolia gave an impetus to the Iranicisation (at least in a geographical sense) of the Safavid empire, for which both its Türkmen forebear Uzun Ḥasan and the latter’s son and heir Yaʿqūb had, so to speak, established certain preconditions. Another instance of this development was manifest from 955/1548 onwards, when the Safavid capital was transferred from Tabrīz, now standing on the boundaries of the empire, to Qazvīn. Although Tahmāsp and his advisers probably had no conscious thought other than to avoid the ever-present threat to the capital from the Ottomans, the idea of a Türkmen state with its centre at Tabrīz and its fulcrum in eastern Anatolia, Mesopotamia and north-west Persia was thereby abandoned in favour of an
empire centred on the Iranian highlands. At this time, therefore, arose roughly the same geopolitical situation that still prevails today. There is no reason to seek here the beginnings of a deliberate policy of Iranicisation. Yet the implications of the development are clear. At most one can speak of an involuntary Iranicisation that shows even fewer signs of being a conscious intention than the previously mentioned recruitment of non-Türkmen notables for the civil and military administration.

The shah’s character also appears in a rather more favourable light when we learn that in spite of his cupidity piety led him to forgo highly lucrative taxes on the grounds that they offended against religious law; thereby rejecting an income of some 30,000 tūmāns. The extant record of the speech he made on 19 July 1562 to the envoys of the Turkish sultan who had come to negotiate the extradition of Prince Bāyezid betokens his political skill, while his highly cultured mind, his scholarliness and his patronage of the arts ensure him a measure of sympathy. After all, under his aegis the art of book illumination attained between 1530 and 1545 a zenith of development that has never been surpassed.

Thus, if one carefully weighs up the positive and negative features that were combined in Tāhmāsp’s character, favourable qualities are by no means lacking. It must be counted a particular achievement that by the time of his death he had managed to preserve the essential fabric of his father’s empire in the face of grave internal and external dangers.

That same day the explosive nature of the domestic political situation in the Safavid empire became evident. It was revealed less by the immediately erupting dispute over the succession than by the peculiar character of the antagonisms that now came to the fore. It was not only a matter of a conflict between rival interests which grouped themselves around the two contenders, but also (and to a far greater extent) of a struggle between Türkmen and non-Türkmen. Admittedly, the picture does not appear so clear-cut at first sight. On the one hand we find

1 Kürükoglu, “Tahmasp I”, p. 647: following Hinz, “The Value of the Toman in the Middle Ages”, Yad-nāma-yi Trānī-yi Minorsky (Tehran, 1348/1969), pp. 90—1, this is equivalent to 1,730 kg of pure gold.
2 On this report, see Hinz, “Zur Frage der Denkwürdigkeiten”.
3 Stchoukine, Manuscrits Safavis pp. 189, 199ff.
Prince Haidar supported partly by the Türkmen Ustajlı tribe but mainly by the Georgian leaders at court; on the other hand the party of Prince Isma‘il, who was still imprisoned at Qahqaha—a group led by Princess Parī Khān Khānum and supported partly by her Circassian uncle Shamkhal Sultan but in the main by all the Türkmen tribes other than the Ustajlı.

Prince Haidar considered himself not without good reason as the heir appointed by Tahmāsp, but did not even get a chance to take power: he fell into the hands of his opponents and was immediately murdered. Thereafter the way was open for his brother to ascend the throne as Isma‘il II. The eighteen months of his rule constituted a reign of terror unusual even by oriental standards. That the party which had suffered a defeat over the succession should have been exposed to the revenge of the victors is not surprising. What is remarkable is the merciless cruelty with which the new shah exterminated his brothers. Only one of them, the almost blind Muhammad Khudābanda, eluded his assassin—and that only because Isma‘il died before the order could be carried out. This brutality is explained by the hypothesis that Isma‘il, whose health had been ravaged by the constant use of drugs during his long captivity, was on the verge of insanity when he succeeded to the throne and from then on acted purely out of paranoia. This theory may well be correct; but it is equally possible that he was deliberately imitating the example of the Ottoman court, where at this time, after several unfortunate experiences, the “superfluous” princes were systematically eliminated to ensure that the accession of the crown prince would not be threatened.1 It can be assumed that Isma‘il, remembering his earlier battles with the Turks, continued to show an interest in developments in the Ottoman empire even during his captivity. We even know that he could draw on certain sources of information at Qahqaha. Why should he therefore not have come to the same conclusions as had been drawn in Istanbul? Perhaps the distrust and fear that he showed reflected his own attitude towards his father; they were certainly dictated by his father’s bitter experience with his brothers Alqāṣ and Sām. There is no evidence that the murdered princes had given the new shah any concrete grounds for suspicion, with the exception of one of his cousins, Sulṭān Husain Mirzā, who set

1 Cf. F. Giese, “Das Seniorat im osmanischen Herrscherhause”, MOG II (1923—6), 248—56. That the Persian court was familiar with the Ottoman practice is clear from Sām Mīrzā’s Tuhfa-yī Sāmī, ed. Humāyūn Farrukh (Tehran, 1347/1969), p. 25.
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up an independent principality in the remote region of Qandahār and who perished early in 1577 without Ismā‘īl’s contrivance.

If one looks for positive features to alleviate the sinister picture of Ismā‘īl’s personality during his brief reign, there is very little to fall back on. One could probably point to the success with which he re-established law and order in the land. In the last eight years of Tāhmāsp’s reign, we are told, conditions in Persia had grown very insecure. It is alleged that thousands of Persians were killed by bandits or as a result of the raids of Türkmen soldiery. Ismā‘īl apparently succeeded in re-establishing law and order with relentless severity. One can also point to the glimmerings of Ismā‘īl’s military glory that may have preserved the country from attacks by foreign enemies, although news of events inside Persia, of the murder of the princes and especially of the strife between various Qizilbāsh tribes, which took a particularly violent turn in Khurāsān, might have been expected to arouse their interest and ever-present greed for plunder.

Even though Ismā‘īl II had to proceed cautiously in his relations with the Ottomans, one of the most extraordinary measures that he attempted to carry out shortly after assuming power, namely the re-introduction of the Sunnī faith, can scarcely be explained in terms of his respect for their religious susceptibilities (although such a notion was current in the capital) – not even in the light of the Ottoman demand in the Peace of Amāsyα of 962/1555 that the execration of the Caliphs Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān that dated back to Shah Ismā‘īl I should cease in Persia. What Ismā‘īl’s real motives for such a step may have been remains a mystery, at least in the present stage of knowledge. Naturally one can adduce his hatred for his merciless father and the corresponding endeavour always to do the very opposite of what Tāhmāsp had deemed fit; in this case, therefore, to abandon the typical Safavid credo which Tāhmāsp had maintained with such exaggerated piety. One could combine with this explanation the argument that a reaction against the previous Shī‘ī fanaticism was inevitable. It is possible, however, that the step was dictated by a sober political consideration: Ismā‘īl’s concern about the excessively powerful position of Shī‘ī dignitaries, which would have been undermined by a reintroduction of the Sunna.

Before the full repercussions of Ismā‘īl’s completely disastrous and aimless policies could be felt, he met his death on 13 Ramaḍān 985/24

1 Hinz, “Schah Esma‘īl II”, p. 80. See chapter 12 below.

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November 1577 in an unexpected and mysterious fashion. Some accounts claim that he died of an overdose of drugs, others that he was poisoned by his ambitious sister Parī Khān Khānum, who had been instrumental in ensuring his succession but who had earned only ingratitude for her pains. Others again relate that he was murdered by Qizilbash amirs who refused to tolerate his political measures, particularly the religious changes.

Some of Ismā‘īl’s relatives had escaped the systematic elimination of the royal princes. These included his eldest brother Muḥammad Khudābanda and four of his sons, the eldest, Sulṭān Ḥasan Mīrzā, having been murdered in Tehran shortly before on Ismā‘īl’s orders. In the council of the Qizilbash amirs at court who met to discuss the succession various suggestions were made. Shāh Shujā’, Ismā‘īl’s infant son, who was only a few weeks old; his eleven-year-old nephew, Sulṭān Ḥamza Mīrzā; and the latter’s father, Crown Prince Muḥammad Khudābanda, who had been passed over at the time of Tāḥmāsp’s death, were all mooted as successors. In each case Princess Parī Khān Khānum, who was at this time about thirty years old, hoped to be able to take over the regency – even when the choice finally fell on Muḥammad Khudābanda, for owing to an ophthalmic disease he was almost blind.

When he moved from Shīrāz, where he had escaped the fate of his brothers, to Qazvīn and ascended the throne on 3 Dhu’l-Hijja 985/11 February 1578, the land was delivered from a harrowing tyranny, but the ten years of his reign brought little joy to his people. What at first made him appear a mild ruler was the sheer contrast with Ismā‘īl’s cruelty. If one looks closer, his gentleness is seen to be really weakness, indifference and incompetence. Although his eye trouble was not conducive to an effective reign, it cannot explain completely his total lack of involvement in affairs of state. In these circumstances power soon passed into other hands. The shah lived so much in the background that some foreign observers evidently never became aware of his existence; this is the reason for Sulṭān Ḥamza Mīrzā being described more than once as a reigning monarch in the list of Safavid rulers – a position which in reality he never held.

1 Horst, “Der Ṣafawide Ḥamza Mīrzā”; Roemer, Niedergang, pp. 66ff.
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The principal feature of the new shah’s whole reign was the quarrelling and intrigues of the Qizilbash amirs that had gone on for decades and were only quelled when a particular ruler was able to counter them either by force or by cunning. Since Muhammad Khudabanda could do neither, their unruliness and jockeying for position reached a climax during his reign, until his son ‘Abbās succeeded in suppressing them. When news of Ismā‘īl’s death was received, bloody conflicts immediately broke out among the Qizilbash, with the Shāmlū and Ustājlū on the one side and the Turkmān and Takkalū on the other. Although the Grand Vizier, Mīrzā Salmān Jābirī, a member of an aristocratic family from Iṣfahān which had served the Safavids from an early date,1 managed to reconcile the warring parties for a time, these quarrels—sometimes amounting to serious rebellion and even civil war—were to remain the dominant factor in Persian politics for the next ten years. The mention of the grand vizier indicates that not only various factions among the Turkmen tribes, but also non-Turkmens such as members of the Iranian aristocracy took part in these clashes. This particular combination, which had already existed before even as early as the reign of Shah Ismā‘īl I, foreshadowed future developments. Admittedly it would be wrong to speak of a confrontation between Turkmen and non-Turkmens, or even between Turkmen and Iranian. On the contrary, one finds elements of both groups on either side at any given moment.

On the death of Ismā‘īl II the reins of power, as we have seen, were gathered together in the hands of Princess Parī Khān Khānum. She was supported by her Circassian uncle, Shamkhal Sultan, the lord of the seal. As at the time of her father’s death, the princess could muster considerable support among the Qizilbash and with their help was able to assert her claims. Thus it came about that the Grand Vizier Mīrzā Salmān, who had been appointed by the late shah in Rabi‘ I 985/June 1577 and did not find favour with the princess, soon left the capital ostensibly to pay his respects to the new shah but in fact prompted by a well-founded fear for his own safety. Here we see an alliance of interests that is worth noting. In the retinue of the new shah it was evidently known what was to be expected of his reign. The way that he had exercised previous functions, most recently in Shīrāz, permitted the drawing of fairly reliable conclusions: neither his eye ailment nor

1 Aubin, “Études Safavides I”, pp. 76ff.
the indifference towards public affairs that he had shown previously was likely to change. The rôle of the royal spouse Khair al-Nisā Begum, known as Mahd-i ‘Ulyā, would therefore be all the more important. She was an ambitious woman, born into the Māzandaranī nobility, and her enterprise and lust for power now found undreamed-of opportunities, after she had gone for months in constant fear of her life. When the grand vizier arrived in Shīrāz she must have welcomed him not only as a man fully conversant with the latest events in the capital, but also as a potential ally ideally suited to her purpose. He was familiar with the details of the administrative machinery and at the same time enjoyed no particular following among the Qizilbāş, since he belonged to a famous Iranian family. Thus he was not likely to find any better opportunity than an alliance with the queen of such a weak ruler as the new shah. All the same, he could not have been unaware of certain dangers inherent in this community of interests.

To begin with, Mīrzā Salmān’s calculations were apparently proved correct. He retained his high office even under the new ruler and saw his enemy Princess Pari Khān Khānum brought low when, along with her uncle Shamkhāl Sulṭān, she lost all influence shortly after the arrival of the court in Qazvīn and was murdered. Yet the grand vizier could scarcely have foreseen the extent to which the queen herself appropriated power, any more than had the Türkmen amirs, who had presumably voted for Muḥammad Khudābanda not least because of his weakness and inadequacy. She was by no means content to exercise a more or less indirect influence on affairs of state: instead, she openly carried out all essential functions herself, including the appointment of the chief officers of the realm. In place of the usual royal audience, these high dignitaries had to assemble each morning at the entrance to the women’s apartments in order to receive the Begum’s orders. On these occasions the royal edicts were drawn up and sealed. Political affairs continued to be dealt with in such a manner for well over a year. By that time the amirs were so infuriated by the regiment of women that they conspired against the queen, and openly demanded that the shah should remove her. They achieved their aim: the Begum was strangled in the harem on 1 Jumādā I 987/26 July 1579, on the pretext — whether justified or not, it is uncertain — of having entered into a love-affair with ‘Ādil Girai, a brother of the khan of the Crimea.

The queen’s murder was tantamount to the usurpation of power by the influential leaders of the Qizilbāş. First there occurred a violent
explosion of hatred against the Iranian aristocracy, particularly because of their entrenched positions of power in the central government and other branches of the administration. During the ensuing persecution of Iranians, especially the Māzandarānī supporters of the murdered consort, only those under the protection of powerful Türkmen āmīrs survived unscathed and unmolested. One such man was the Grand Vizier Mīrzhā Salmān Jābirī, who had joined the conspirators at an opportune moment even though he did not agree with them on every point. The difficulties that he had to face during the persecution of the Iranians may well have deceived the shah into overlooking his previous conduct. At all events the shah allowed him to remain in his high office.

The conspirators found it easy enough to persuade the shah to continue on the throne and to satisfy him with renewed protestations of their fealty. Naturally they emerged scot-free; for who could have called them to account? However, it is interesting that Muḥammad Khudābanda’s address to the āmīrs and the reproaches that he levelled at them contained clear allusions to the old relationship between the shah as ṣūfī master and the āmīrs as his disciples (ṣūfīgarī, ‘aṣīda-yī bātīnī). From this we may conclude that in theory the original basis of the Safavid empire was still adhered to, even though the religious bond with the shah had long since been dissolved, probably as early as the second half of the reign of Shah Ismā’īl I.

On this occasion Prince Hamza was proclaimed crown prince. Since he was only eleven years old the Qazīlbaš had nothing to fear from him for the moment. However, in time, as we have seen, he stepped into the limelight. He had a strong ally in the Grand Vizier Mīrzhā Salmān Jābirī, who soon achieved a position of prominence once more. Naturally, the increasing influence of the prince and the vizier earned them the suspicion and ultimately the enmity of the Qazīlbaš āmīrs. It is therefore not surprising that they both met a violent end.

In fact, they were not killed until 991/1583 and 994/1586 respectively. Before that the disputes and fighting among the Türkmen tribes grew so acute that the internal crisis of the Safavid empire, which had been simmering ever since Shah Ṭahmāsp’s death, began to have wider repercussions: both in the east and in the west Persia’s neighbours launched attacks on her. In the context of the present study a mere outline of the main events and their background will suffice.
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An attack by Uzbek bands in the spring of 986/1578 was repulsed by Murtażâ Qulî Sulṭân, the governor of Mashhad. This was perhaps a legacy of the Uzbek wars waged by Tahmâsp I, rather than a prelude to later Uzbek onslaughts of a greater magnitude. In the west the position was more serious. Whether one chooses to see the Turkish defeat at the hands of Don Juan of Austria at the battle of Lepanto in 1571 as a turning point in the history of Turkish power, or merely as one of many signs of incipient decline - perhaps even as an attempt to seek compensation in the east for reverses suffered in the west - the Ottomans still remained by far the greatest threat to the Safavids. Relations between the Ottomans and their western and north-western neighbours were just as important a factor in determining the fluctuating extent of the danger as the strength or weakness of particular Safavid rulers. The confusion surrounding the accession of Shah Muḥammad Khudābanda created ideal conditions for Sultan Murâd III (982–1003/1574–95) to mount military expeditions in the eastern part of his empire, because the Habsburg Rudolf II had shortly before paid him tribute and he could reasonably assume that he had nothing to fear from that quarter. The Grand Vizier Meḥmed Soqollû, who was inclined to accept the Persian offer to abide by the Peace of Amâsya, was unable to dissuade his monarch; the Sultan was bent on war. A series of uprisings in the Persian frontier areas among the Kurds and in Shîrvân, quarrels among the Georgian princes - some of whom inclined towards the Turks, others more to the Persians - favoured the Turkish plans. These tribesmen may well have had a presentiment of a new Ottoman-Safavid confrontation: indeed in some cases it was known that neighbouring Turkish governors were stirring up trouble on instructions from above.

The Turko-Persian war (986–98/1578–90) was launched by the Porte with the dispatch of the third vizier Muṣṭâfâ Pasha, known as Lâlâ Pasha. He gained victories in Georgia, and also defeated Persian troops on Lake Childir (some 30 miles north of Kârs) and invaded Shîrvân, but the decisive breakthrough into Persia eluded him. Although the khan of the Crimea also sent an expeditionary force into Shîrvân, there were no lasting gains to begin with, since the Safavids - despite great losses - harassed the initially victorious invaders, often

1 A contemporary view: Roemer, Niedergang, p. 90.
forcing them to withdraw. However, other Ottoman generals operated more successfully, with the result that ultimately Persia suffered considerable territorial losses not only in Transcaucasia but also in Kurdistan and Luristan and in 993/1585 she even lost Tabriz.

Nothing could be wider of the mark than to suppose that such military disasters would have helped to terminate the fateful strife between the different factions among the Qizilbash tribes, or at least to keep it within tolerable bounds. As before, dissenting tribal interests remained the guiding principle of the amirs’ actions. They were blind to the interests of the empire as a whole, in the foundation of which their forefathers had played such a large part and whose very existence was now at stake. Their attitude naturally had repercussions on the military developments and aggravated the situation to a marked extent.

Particularly dangerous was a rebellion in Khurasan that led in 989/1581 to this province temporarily seceding from the central government in Qazvin. In order to understand this event we must recall that within the Safavid administrative framework certain Qizilbash amirs, together with their tribes or individual groups of tribal followers, represented the central government in various provinces as viceroy (hákim, váli) and wielded political authority on its behalf. Certain provinces were placed in the charge of royal princes who entrusted the duties of their office to the Türkmen amirs attached to them as guardians or tutors. Thus we encountered Muhammad Khudábanda, before his accession, as governor of Shiraz. This post was bestowed on him eighteen months after the birth of his son ‘Abbás on 1 Ramadan 978/27 January 1571, while Herat, which he had governed hitherto, was allotted to the new-born prince.

Khürásán, which included parts of present-day Afghanistan, had two centres at this time, Mashhad and Herat. The importance of this land and the value placed upon it by the Safavids will be remembered from the earlier account of Shah Tahmásp’s Uzbek wars. It should be noted that Khürásán produced centrifugal tendencies more than once in the course of Persian history owing to its remoteness from the central areas of Iran and to the narrow corridor that was its sole link with them between the Alburz mountains and the Kavir desert. This separatism now manifested itself once again, as during the bloody strife between the Türkmen tribes the victory of any particular group was immediately countered by reprisals against the kinsfolk of the victors in another area. This escalation reached its peak when an alliance
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composed mainly of Turkmān and Takkalū triumphed over the more closely linked Shāmlū and Ustājlū at the royal court.

The man who had become tutor to Prince ‘Abbās was one ‘Alī Quṭī Khān Shāmlū, who had originally been made governor of Herat by Shah Ismā‘īl II and sent there with orders to eliminate the prince. However, he had not found the opportunity to carry out this commission when he learnt the news of the shah’s death, and this enabled him to take up office without fulfilling his instructions. Thereafter, before the demands of Queen Mahd-i ‘Ulyā that the prince be sent to the court could be met, she too perished. Thus in the dispute with the court, where his enemies were now all-powerful, and in the struggle with their representative in Mashhad, Murtaza Quṭī Khān, the governor still possessed an important pawn. He defeated his rival and retained the upper hand even when the latter was reinforced by troops sent from the capital. Then fresh reprisals were taken at court against his fellow tribesmen and in consultation with confederate amīrs he resolved to have the prince proclaimed shah. The accession took place at Herat in Rabi‘ I 989/April 1581. However, Shah Muḥammad Khudābanda advanced into Khurāsān in such strength that the ambitious ‘Alī Quṭī Khān was worsted at Ghūriyān, then forced to retreat and was finally surrounded at Herat. He thereupon surrendered. Nevertheless, he remained governor of his province and guardian of Prince ‘Abbās.

The motive force behind the counter-attack in Khurāsān had been the Grand Vizier Mīrzā Salmān Jābirī. He had gained more and more influence at court and even when the queen was murdered his career suffered no more than a temporary setback. In the perilous game in which he was involved he staked his fortunes on Prince Ḥamza, married off his daughter to him, made his eldest son Mīrzā ‘Abd-Allāh the prince’s vizier, and accompanied him on his campaign in Qarābāgh and Shīrvān. The grand vizier distinguished himself during this campaign, as also in the war against the Ottomans and in the battle against Ādīl Girāi Khān, the brother of the khan of the Crimea. The public token of this rise to power was the bestowal of the rank of governor or ijālat. Eventually Mīrzā Salmān enjoyed the same kind of authority as the shah’s viceroy (vakīl) in the days of Shah Ismā‘īl I,1 though he was never given this particular title. His success aroused the suspicion and jealousy of the Türkmen amīrs and finally inspired them with a grow-

1 See above, pp. 229–30.
ing hatred for him. They accused him of being hostile to the Qizilbāş and of plotting against them, of harbouring a lust for power and interfering in military affairs which in their view could never be the concern of a vizier, an Iranian. The Herat campaign brought things to a head and they demanded that he be handed over (991/1583). Such was the bitterness of the amīrs that the shah and Prince Ḥamzā had no choice but to abandon the grand vizier to his enemies.

His assassination demonstrates that in the eighty years since the beginning of Shah Ismāʿīl’s career the rift within the Safavid empire between Iranian and Turk had still not been healed. Shah Ismāʿīl’s plans to break the power of the Qizilbāş by uniting the supreme administrative and military authority in the hands of a non-Turkish, Iranian vakīl had been frustrated despite five successive attempts to tackle the problem. Shah Ṭahmāsp I’s endeavours had likewise met with little success. Although the office of viceroy existed during his reign, none of those appointed took a hand in military affairs after an initial attempt to do so had almost cost the vakīl his life. However, these experiences had left the Türkmen generals with an almost traumatic sensitivity towards possible military aspirations on the part of some leading Iranian even though no military rank had in this case been conferred. Since they felt it degrading to be under the command of an Iranian, they fought to defend their military privileges even when a political analysis would have revealed that their position could rather be strengthened by a unanimity to be displayed in the face of external enemies.

We have taken a somewhat closer look at the internal conflicts of the Safavid empire after the accession of Muḥammad Khudābanda in order to show the extent of the crisis caused by the advent of an incompetent ruler. The bloody quarrels among the amīrs, the murder of the queen and Mīrzā Salmān, and the attempted secession in Khurasān were all merely symptomatic of this crisis. The tribal self-seeking of the Türkmen amīrs continued to make itself felt even after the assassination of the grand vizier. But it would be pointless to unravel the details of the ensuing intrigues. What is more important is the effect that the obvious weakness of the Persian government had on its external foes. Events among the Safavids offered them a temptation which soon proved irresistible. One result was a new Ottoman attack on north-west Persia in 992/1584. Prince Ḥamza was dispatched at the
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head of inferior forces to confront ‘Osmān Pasha and Farhād Pasha, the commanders of the invading Turkish armies, but failed to recapture Tabrīz. Even in the face of the enemy he had to deal with quarrels among the Qizilbāsh. On 24 Dhu’l-Ḥijja 994/6 December 1586 he was assassinated in his camp in Āzarbājān. It has been claimed, though never proven, that the murderer, a barber by the name of Khudāvārdī, had been hired by a group of conspirators among his officers. This new assassination triggered off a development of vital significance. It brought about the accession of Prince ‘Abbās.

After the death of Prince Ḥamza amīrs of the Shāmlū and Ustājlū tribes at court managed to thwart the succession of the shah’s next son, Prince ‘Abbās, and instead had his younger brother Abū Ṭālib Mīrzā (b. 1574) proclaimed crown prince. This step led to immediate repercussions in Khurāsān, where by now the initiative no longer lay in the hands of ‘Alī Qulī Khān Shāmlū, the governor of Herat, but in those of the new governor of Mashhad, Murshid Qulī Khān Ustājlū, who had succeeded in spiriting Prince ‘Abbās off to Mashhad. He now proceeded to set in motion plans far more ambitious than those pursued by the governor of Herat in 989/1581 with his rebellion against the central government. He cleverly induced some Türkmen leaders in Khurāsān to lend him their support. In addition declarations of loyalty to Prince ‘Abbās arrived from other parts of the country. Since the shah had left the capital with the crown prince and his military retinue, Murshid Qulī Khān ventured to ride with ‘Abbās and a small escort – not more than a few hundred horsemen – to Qazvīn in order to make his ward shah in place of his father.

When he ascended the throne in Qazvīn on 16 October 1587, ‘Abbās became the fifth shah of the Safavid dynasty. Muḥammad Khudābanda did not challenge the usurper even after returning to the capital. He continued to live in Qazvīn for a time, but was then banished from court, a measure probably connected with an attempt to restore him to the throne. According to the accepted version of events, he was taken with Prince Abū Ṭālib to Alamūt, where his son Ṣāḥib Mīrzā was already being held: it is said that all three were blinded. Since, however, Iskandar Munshī records that Navvāb-i Sikandar-sha’n, as Khudābanda was known posthumously, died at Qazvīn in the ninth

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year of ‘Abbās’s reign (that is, between 21 July 1595 and 10 July 1596), his imprisonment, if there is any truth in the above story, cannot have lasted very long.

‘ABBĀS I

Murshid Qull Khān Ustājlū, whom Shah ‘Abbās appointed his viceroy (vakīl-i divān-i ālī), may well have counted on the sixteen-year-old ruler now giving him a free hand. This hope was rapidly dispelled. Before long the measures taken by the new government bore the hallmark of the young monarch himself.

The most urgent problems confronting him were the same as those which had constantly recurred in previous years. In the first place there was the internal problem of the Türkmen tribalism which had been fostered by the protracted weakness of the central government. From the beginning of the reign of the Safavids, all-powerful tribal princes had filled the military offices at court, while others held sway with their clans in the provinces as feudal lords, either as governors or as the guardians of princes who had not yet attained the age of majority. In some provinces it appears that certain tribes regarded it as their prescriptive right to hold the governorship and other administrative offices – for instance, the Dulghadir in Fārs and the Shāmlū in Kirmān. At about this time another problem arose with the renewed rise to power of certain previously subjugated local dynasties, mostly in the frontier regions of the empire. However, the external difficulties of the realm were almost more acute than the domestic situation. The enemies of the Safavids, especially the Ottomans in the west and the Uzbeks in the east, had overrun large areas, totalling well-nigh half the territory bequeathed by Shah Ṣahmāsp to his successors; and now they were making preparations for fresh attacks on Persia. Under such conditions trade and industry suffered and the living standards of the people were correspondingly wretched.

Through determined and consistently applied policies Shah ‘Abbās I overcame the crisis in which the country had found itself at the beginning of his reign. It took him many years and he repeatedly suffered grave setbacks. Yet his eventual success, like his personality, left a deep

1 Iskandar Munshi, trans. Savory, p. 692.
impression on his people. The memory of this particular shah survived in Iran for generations and even to this day it has not completely disappeared. What interests us, however, is the question of how he found for these problems the solutions which had eluded his predecessors for so long. The most urgent problem at the time of the shah's accession was the feuding of the Turkmen amirs, which had grown to the proportions of a civil war. As will be recalled, their power rested ultimately on the services rendered by their forefathers as soldiers of the Ardabil order at the time of the foundation and expansion of the Safavid empire. Of course, there could no longer be any question of the old relationship between the shah as grand master of the order and the Qizilbash as his disciples, nor is there any doubt that the theocratic ideas of Isma'il I had lost their validity for Shah 'Abbas. If, however, the strength of the former religious ties had declined, this is not to say that they had been completely forgotten or had dwindled into insignificance. The erosion of these old ties has been amply demonstrated by the above-mentioned activities of the amirs. But their decay is also demonstrated by 'Abbas's readiness to cast aside the old customs of the order whenever it was in his interest to do so. On the other hand he willingly obeyed or enforced them if it suited him. Naturally the conflict with the Qizilbash was in the first instance a political problem, but an element of the original religious relationship remained.¹

Apart from this religious aspect the history of the Safavid empire up to 'Abbas I is synonymous with the history of the rivalry between the two leading ethnic groups within the state, the Turkmen and the Iranian elements. One can also view it as a conflict between town and country, between nomads and settlers. There were plenty of attempts to achieve a solution. It is an open question whether we should lay greater emphasis on the endeavour to break the dominant power of the Turkmen amirs or on the effort to unite and reconcile Persian and Turk such as was represented in the person of individual members of the Safavid dynasty. Whichever view we take, the failure is obvious:

¹ Its foundations had already been undermined at Chaldiran, as pointed out by Savory, "The Principal Offices ....during the reign of Isma'il I"¹, p. 91. But this leaves open the question how far the Safavid monarchs were still seen as masters of the order or laid claim to that rôle. At any rate, as late as 'Abbas's death in 1038/1629 attempts were made to obtain the consent of all available members of the order regarding the succession, in the traditional manner: Braun, Das Erbe Schah 'Abbas I, p. 104; and below, p. 279. See also Savory, "The Office of Khalifat al-khulafa".
nobody succeeding in working out a compromise between these opposing elements.

The new shah tackled the Türkmen amîrs from the outset in a relentless and uncompromising fashion. He began by executing a group of tribal amîrs whom he held responsible for the murder of his brother Ḥamza. He continued by crushing savagely a conspiracy of tribal leaders who were plotting to depose him, and then eliminated his erstwhile guardian Murshid Qūl Khān Ustājlu, who had boycotted an expedition to relieve the siege of Herat by the Uzbeks because of his long-standing dispute with the city governor, ʻAlî Qūl Khān Shāmlû. There were several other examples over the years, but we need not go into detail at this point. The experiences of the shah’s youth, such as the assassination of his mother and his brother Ḥamza, undoubtedly helped to inspire his life-long suspicion of the Qizilbâsh. So ineradicable was this suspicion that he even removed an outstanding general for the sole reason that he considered him to have acquired too much power. In the end Shah ʻAbbâs succeeded in breaking the stranglehold of the Türkmen amîrs and in suppressing the constant squabbles among the tribes.

Shah ʻAbbâs’s reign saw the beginning of the end for the Türkmens, the decline of their military and political influence and the eclipse of their social status. The contempt and distrust with which they were regarded by the ruler resulted in their being squeezed out of the most important military commands. We witness in effect the disbanding of the praetorian guard into which the Qizilbâsh had developed after the accession of Shah ʻṬahmâsp I. This is not to say that they disappeared from the scene altogether: there were still Qizilbâsh units in Persia during the reign of Shah ʻAbbâs and even down to the collapse of his dynasty in the 12th/18th century. But henceforth they were no longer the sole military caste.

After they had been neutralised the structure of the Safavid empire was fundamentally transformed. Shah ʻAbbâs could only achieve a lasting success by creating a counterbalance to the Qizilbâsh on the one hand and by compensating for the loss of military striking power on the other. He employed various means to this end. One was a procedure associated with the term shāhîsavāni which aimed at polarising feeling among the Qizilbâsh. It took the form of a summons to “those loyal to the king”, the royalists. It seems that in this way reliable elements among the Qizilbâsh were identified and then probably reor-
ganised into fresh military units. However, we have no detailed know-
ledge of this.\footnote{Shâbisavani kardan is commonly used in docu-
ments dating back to Khudâbânda's reign. From the synonymous phrase šalâ-yi shâbisavani kardan it is clear that the meaning is not “to make Shah's friends”, as in Tapper, “Shâhevan”, p. 65, but rather “to proclaim: Let him who loves the Shah present himself at such and such a place”. Cf. further Minorsky, “La Perse au XVe siècle”, p. 326.}

We know a good deal more about the establishment of a new corps
in the Safavid army, the cavalry formation of royal squires (qullar or
ghulâmân-i khâssa-yi sharîfâ) whose commander bore the title of qullar-
dâqâsî. These royal squires, mostly Muslim converts descended from
Christians of diverse races, had either come to Persia as children or had
been born of Georgian, Circassian, Caucasian and Armenian parents,
often prisoners of war, who had already settled in Persia. This corps,
which was raised by Abbâs shortly after his accession, proved so
valuable that the Qizilbash formations were soon reduced to a half or
even less of their original establishment. As their first commander, a
Georgian convert to Islam by the name of Allâhvardî Khân, won great
esteem and was honoured with the title of Sultân. Qullar who proved
their worth could rise to high office: they were employed as governors
– Allâhvardî Khân himself succeeded in becoming governor of Fârs –
or were even appointed commanders of Türkmen troops when the
latter failed to produce suitable candidates for vacant positions from
among their own ranks. In time they came to occupy about a fifth of all
the key positions in the administration.

Among the royal squires there was a secondary troop, the corps of
musketeers (tufangchîyân) which had already existed in a more modest
way under Shah Tahmâsp I. It was composed of the most diverse
ethnic elements, among them representatives of the Persian peasantry,
Arabs and also Türkmens. In addition there was an artillery corps
(tüpbçîyân), a military arm of which the Persians were not particularly
enamoured. Although the Safavids exploited it readily enough in siege
situations, they did not make much use of artillery in the field. Sir
Robert Sherley, an English adventurer, is usually credited with the
introduction of artillery into Persia. He arrived at the Persian court in
1598 with his brother Sir Anthony and a group of other Europeans. It
is a fact that Shah Abbâs sought this man’s advice on the question of
military reforms and Allâhvardî Khân adopted his suggestions for the
reorganisation of the army. He also supervised the production of artill-
ery pieces. But he had nothing to do with the introduction of artillery
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into Persia, because the Persians had long since been familiar with it.¹ By the end of the 10th/16th century the number of troops at the shah’s disposal – in addition to the Qizilbāsh – amounted to 37,000 men. This total comprised the corps of royal squires (10,000), a bodyguard again formed by squires (3,000), and the corps of musketeers and artillery (12,000 each). The artillery was equipped with 500 cannons.²

The essential characteristic of these new formations was that they were not tied to any one tribal organisation and hence were not commanded by members of the Türkmen military aristocracy. Moreover they were paid directly out of the royal chest, not out of the military appropriations like the Qizilbāsh.

These military and administrative reforms took many years to complete and it was some time before they bore fruit. They were of no help in the military crises which confronted Shah ʿAbbās I at the beginning of his career. What was needed there above all was astute political decisions – in the first place peace with the Ottomans, which could not have been easy for the shah to accept. But since he had no hope of defeating them as long as several provinces were in revolt and the Uzbek were occupying Khūrasān, this was the only means open to him of securing a free hand to deal with his other, even more pressing problems.

Ottoman troops who had already invaded large areas of Persia in the reign of Muḥammad Khudābanda – parts of Āzarbāijān along with Tabrīz, parts of Georgia and Qarābāgh, the city of Erivan, Shīrvān and Khūzistān – extended their conquest of Persian territory still further after the accession of the new shah. Baghdad was lost to them in 995/1587 and shortly afterwards they took Ganja. Negotiations with the Porte led to the Peace of Istanbul on 21 March 1590. This put an end to twelve years of hostilities between the Ottomans and the Safavids. The conditions imposed on the shah were unusually harsh. They included the loss of Āzarbāijān and Qarābāgh together with Ganja, of Shīrvān and Dāghistān, of the Safavid possessions in Georgia, of parts of Kurdistān and Luristān, of Baghdad and Mesopotamia. Although Ardabil, the seat of the Safavid order, remained in Persian hands, the old capital of Tabrīz, where Shah Ismāʿīl I had founded

¹ Savory, “The Sherley Myth”.
² Figures from Savory, “Safavid Persia”, p. 418. See also Lockhart, “The Persian army”.

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his empire, had to be relinquished. A clause which decreed that the Persians should desist from anathematising the Orthodox Caliphs—a practice instigated by the founder of the empire—added a particularly humiliating note to the peace treaty, for it involved the original hallmark, as it were, of the Safavid state. The peace which was bought at such a price gave the shah a free hand to solve urgent internal problems and to confront his foreign enemies in the east. (We shall discuss these measures later.) Yet the fundamentally unacceptable terms militated against a final peace settlement, and relations with the Ottomans were to occupy ‘Abbās for the rest of his life.

To begin with, however, he turned his attention to the Uzbeks, who had been occupying Khūrāsān for the past ten years. Disputes concerning the succession in Transoxiana favoured his undertaking, and in 1007/1598-9 he reconquered Herat and Mashhad, also extending his control to include Balkh, Marv and Astarābād. But when, two years later, Bāqī Muhammad Khān, the new ruler of Transoxiana, re-occupied Balkh, the Safavid troops found they were no match for him and were finally not only forced to withdraw, but lost the greater part of their new artillery in the process (1011/1602-3). That, for the moment, was the end of the Safavid–Uzbek conflict. In spite of their eventual losses, the Persians had gained from it by the reconquest of western Khūrāsān, the area lying to the north of it and bordering the Türkmen desert and including Marv and Nasā, and eastern Khūrāsān, including Herat, Sabzavār and Farāh. Later—in 1031/1622—they also won back Qandahār, which the Mughal emperor Akbar had wrested from the Safavids in 1003/1594, when ‘Abbās had been in no position to put up an effective defence.

With the successes in the east the danger of a war on two fronts was checked, so that even by 1012/1603-4 the shah was able to risk a confrontation with the Ottomans. He now reconquered Āzarbājān, Nakhchivān and Erivan. The Turkish supreme commander Chighālezāde Pasha, preparing to strike back, suffered a crushing defeat at Tabrīz. Although a new peace agreement was drawn up in 1612 at Istanbul which re-established the old Turkish—Persian frontier, the sultan tried once again a few years later, albeit in vain, to recover control of the ceded Transcaucasian and Persian conquests by means of another military expedition. A Safavid campaign against Mesopotamia in 1033/1623-4 re-established Persian control over the Kurdish territories of Daqūq, Kirkūk and Shahrazūr, Karbalā and
The chaotic state of affairs at home at the beginning of the reign of 'Abbas seemed to herald the dissolution of the Safavid empire or, more correctly, the rump state that was left after the depredations of neighbouring powers. This, it seemed, was what was likely to happen, with the development of various opposing small states under Türkmen princes, roughly comparable to the petty princedoms (uc beylikleri) of Anatolia in the 8th/14th century. It is not inappropriate to describe the situation by saying that Shah 'Abbas had to reconquer his own land "from the Türkmens and other military leaders who had to all intents and purposes become autonomous". By throwing in his newly constituted forces, and by dint of an adroit policy at home, he managed to master this Sisyphean task. His perspicacity is particularly evident from the fact that in spite of the tough, even brutal measures he took, he did not allow himself to be swept into a rigid consistency of action which might have called forth a solid front on the part of the mutually disaffected tribal chieftains. Thus he not only preserved the old lifeguards (qârîchis) but, as we have seen, retained in addition to the new military formations contingents of the old Qizilbash amîrs; and he did not touch the possessions of the Türkmen lords provided they remained loyal. Indeed, new fiefs (tiyûl)2 were granted, and not only to Türkmen army officers but also to the non-Türkmen commanders of the new corps. His appeal to the old discipline of the order (şüfigari), to which reference has been made above, and the loyalty due to the shah as grand master of the order (shâhisavani) may well have reflected similar considerations.

2 Minorsky, "Tiyûl", EI; TMEN II, 667f.; see also below, chapter 9.
Nevertheless, during his reign of over forty years, the shah adhered consistently to the principle of centralisation for his state. Evidence for this is to be found not only in the reorganisation of the armed forces, with the creation of a standing army, the quashing of particularist tendencies on the part of the Qizilbash amirs and the abolition of practically independent tribal rularships such as those just mentioned, the Dulghadir in Fārs or those of the Afšār in Kirmān, but also the annexation of the former vassal states of Māzandarān (1003–6/1596–8), Gilān (1000/1592 Lāhijān, 1003/1595 Rasht) and Lār (1010/1601–2) and the resubjection or firmer attachment of independent areas such as the Georgian regions of Kakhetia (1029–30/1620–1) and Meskhetia (1032–3/1623–4) and the province of Makrān (1017/1608–9). The idea of centralisation is particularly in evidence in the way in which crown lands (khāsā or khāliṣa) were systematically increased. There had in fact been royal demesnes in the Safavid empire prior to this. But it was ‘Abbās I who began the process of incorporating whole provinces, indeed major provinces, into the crown lands, a practice to which his successors adhered. The implications of this can be assessed if we remember that between 996/1588 and 1014/1606 the provinces of Qazvīn, Kāshān, Iṣfahān, Kirmān (in part), Yazd, Qum, Māzandarān, Gilān, Astārā and Gaskar were finally, or at any rate for some considerable period, converted into royal demesne lands, so that their total revenue was reserved for the use of the shah, i.e. could neither be paid into the state treasury nor used for purposes of enfeoffment.

At the end of the 10th/16th and the beginning of the 11th/17th century, Shah ‘Abbās had mastered the crisis which had shaken his country at the time of his accession, in respect both of external enemies and of disruptive forces at home. Iran now enjoyed the greatest territorial extent it ever reached under the Safavids. After security had been restored in the country, ‘Abbās turned his attention to establishing an effective administration. In the development of transport routes, which he pursued with energy, particularly noteworthy is the network of caravansarais he created, many of which are still preserved today, either completely or in remarkable remains,¹ and take their place among the characteristic monuments of Persia. These and other measures invigorated trade and industry, so that the broad masses of the population also found that their standard of living was at first

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¹ Siroux, "Les caravanserais routiers Safavids".

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improved and ultimately reached a level never known up to that time. Whereas in other parts of the Islamic world around this period economic setbacks occurred, due to the recessions in Mediterranean trade and the extension of Atlantic trade, Persia — at any rate in this period — seems to have been spared these changes and the consequences of the decline of the Central Asian caravan routes, from which it was in any case largely cut off by its Uzbek neighbours.

İsfahân, which took the place of Qazvîn as the new capital of the country in 1006/1598 — Qazvîn having in its half a century as the metropolis undergone no significant development as a city — now became, as it were, the symbol of resurgence. 'Abbâs called on the services of architects, artists and craftsmen to develop it. Though basing their approaches on an older tradition in architecture, town planning and decorative style, they developed the specifically Safavid style to a point of such rare maturity that it still has power to captivate the observer of today. Some of its most beautiful monuments are grouped around the Royal Square (Maidân-i Shâh), which — according to the testimony of European travellers of the time — were without parallel anywhere, especially the Masjid-i Shâh, the Ālî Qâpû gatehouse and the Shaikh Luṭf-Allâh Mosque. With these, a new array of jewels was added to the rich treasury of brilliant architectural achievements left by the earlier dynasties in Persia, and such as represented a culmination of the aesthetic standards of a whole epoch. The artistic creativity of the Islamic world once more attained to a peak of achievement, represented in the popular punning phrase İsfahân nisf-i jahân: “İsfahân, half the world”.

The motives that led Shah ‘Abbâs to move his capital from Qazvîn to İsfahân are not as clearly discernible as those of his grandfather Tahmâsp fifty years earlier, when he chose Qazvîn in place of Tabrîz.¹ The decisive element at that time had been fear of the Ottomans and, connected with this, a certain tendency towards Iranianizing the Safavid empire, together with a mistrust of the Türkmen tribes and their influence (which was particularly strong in Âzarbâijân and Tabrîz). But it is possible that now, in changed circumstances, it was especially his desire for a centrally situated position within the reconstituted Persian empire that determined ‘Abbâs to make the change, and the

¹ For the background to the various Safavid changes of capital, see Roemer, “Das frühsafawidische Isfahan”.
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opportunities of developing the city according to his own ideas. And
of course we must not underplay his personal preference for Iṣfahān, to
which sources refer. It seems highly likely that another factor was the
climatic advantages of the area, its ample supply of water and the
fertility of the developed land in the vicinity, even though the popula-
tion had from time immemorial not enjoyed the best of reputations for
their tendency – attested by Khunjī, himself a native of the city – to
indulge in rumour-mongering and intrigues of every kind.¹

The shah succeeded in creating a position of parity for his new
capital among the famous Islamic metropolises. As a result not only of
its development architecturally, but also by virtue of its vigorous econ-
omic, social and political life, Iṣfahān was preserved from the odium
of provincialism that Qazvīn had never been able to shake off. With the
international repute that ‘Abbās won for himself, the diplomatic con-
tacts linking him to the potentates of his time also intensified. These
included, in addition to the contiguous powers such as the Great
Mughals of India, the khan of the Crimean Tartars and the Tsar of
Muscovy, as also many Western powers, and there are many contem-
porary descriptions of the magnificence attending the comings and
goings of emissaries from other countries. An associated factor was the
presence of Western merchants, artists and monks, who were free to
move around at will in the country provided they did not engage in
proselytising activities among the Muslims. We know of Carmelites,
Augustinians and Capuchins who paid visits to Iṣfahān and other
places in the land, and to some of these we owe highly informative
accounts of the shah’s court and of life in the country and among the
people, and accounts of events they witnessed at first hand.²

This period of distinction for Iṣfahān must be attributed in part no
doubt to the shah’s population policy, a matter we have already
touched on in connection with his reform of the armed forces. This fed
in elements, not only to the troops, but to the population at large,
whose energy and skills in various crafts and whose trading enterprise
benefited the economic life of the capital. It was particularly evident in
the transfer of three thousand Armenian families from the Āzarbāijānī
city of Jūfā to Iṣfahān, where they were settled beyond the Zāyandā-
rūd in a new part of the city which was then given the same name as
their old home town, a name it still preserves. Many Georgians, too,

¹ Minorsky, Persia in A.D. 1478–1490, p. 38. ² See below, chapter 7.
were brought into the country as prisoners of war and around the middle of the 11th/17th century numbered 20,000 souls in Isfahān alone. Unlike the Armenians and also, incidentally, the members of the old Jewish community,¹ both of which groups adhered doggedly to their separate linguistic and religious traditions, they were assimilated fairly easily into the indigenous population.

The Iran of the end of the 10th/16th and the first quarter of the 11th/17th century: the rebirth of the Safavid state out of chaos; the emergence of a state enjoying high regard abroad among the powers of the Near East which had already begun to expand into Persian territory; widespread revival of economic life; the development of an indigenous cultural style, accompanied by an admirable flowering of the arts—all this was the work of Shah ʿAbbās I. And though his historical significance has long been known there has as yet been no adequate appraisal in the West of ʿAbbās as a ruler—for he was the ruler without whom Persia’s transition to the modern age cannot be understood—in spite of the wealth of material available. In what follows we will attempt to trace out at least the most important features of his personality.

Robert Sherley, who of course knew the shah personally, speaks of him in the following terms: "His person is such as well-understanding nature would fit for the end proposed for his being—excellently well-shaped, of most well-proportioned stature, strong and active; his colour, somewhat inclined to a man-like blackness, is also more black by sun-burning; the furniture of his mind infinitely royal, wise, valiant, liberal, temperate, merciful; and an exceeding lover of justice, embracing royally other virtues as far from pride and vanity as from all unprincely sins or acts."² Of these qualities, it is his liberality of outlook which is especially striking in contrast with his bigoted father, Taḥmāsp I, not to mention other oriental potentates of the day. It was clearly evident in his tolerance towards Jews and Christians, for instance, not only in his permitting them to exercise their religion and to build churches, but in the fact that he himself even had a church built for the Armenians brought to New Julfā.

² Quoted in Welch, Shah ʿAbbās and the Arts, p. 17; for pictures of the shah, see, e.g., ibid., p. 123; Browne, LHP iv, frontispiece.
There was no question of his indulging in libertarian attitudes in questions of religion. He is, rather, described as a good Muslim, and in this connection there is a reference to a pilgrimage to Mashhad which he made on foot;¹ we hear, too, of the repair work he had carried out to the mausoleum of the Eighth Imam, damaged by the Uzbek, and his fondness for visiting the famous Shi‘i places of pilgrimage at Ardabil, Mashhad, Karbalā‘ and Najāf. It is significant that he insisted on keeping his rôle as master of the order of the Şafaviyya among the population, as can be seen on the occasion of his visits to Ardabil. This is consistent with his having regarded himself as a sayyid, that is to say, his claiming descent from ‘Ali, whose memory he held in honour along with that of the Twelve Imāms. In his personal life he kept in a high degree to the religious commandments except where he allowed himself to be driven into breaches of it by his fundamentally sensuous approach to life. Numerous pious foundations (ānuqāf) were the work of Shah ‘Abbās, such as grants of land from his demesnes in Āzarbā‘ijān, Qazvīn, Kāshān and Īsfahān; and he maintained close relations with many religious scholars (‘ulamā), especially those who eschewed worldly ambition.

In spite of his great tolerance towards non-Islamic confessions, there was a limit to his indulgence regarding the Sunnīs among his own subjects. Though he would go no further than to make unmistakeable allusions to his own Shi‘i faith in his dealings with the ambassadors of neighbouring Sunnī countries, his Sunnī subjects or Sunnī prisoners of war, especially theologians amongst them, could count on no consideration and clemency from him; far less the adherents of heretical movements, of which there were many at the time, e.g. the ahl-i nuqta, also known as the Nuqṭaviyyān, followers of Maḥmūd Pāšikhānī Gīlānī, who had proclaimed a doctrine with metempsychotic characteristics around the year 1400.² Enthusiasts for these and similar views, who were to be found in various Persian cities and in various social classes up to the highest strata of society, were persecuted on the orders of the shah, and where it was possible to arrest them or to trace them in his entourage, they were sentenced to death. Such movements were in fact not without a dangerous aspect, since they generally entailed political aims, as for instance in the case of Mullā Qāsim, a Nuqṭavi who challenged the

¹ Cf. also later authors such as Rīzā Qulī Khān Hīdāyat, Ranžīrat, al-ṣafā, viii (Tehran, 1339), 467.
² Kiya, “Nuqṭaviyyān”.

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shah’s right to the throne. This being so, the shah’s reaction was no different from those of his Sunnī opponents to the west and east of his empire in their attitude towards Shī‘ī tendencies.

Though the shah was in advance of his time in many ways, he remained a child of his age in other respects, especially in the superstitious notions he entertained. It is possible to find a religious explanation for his putting on a shirt embroidered with verses from the Qur’ān when marching into battle, but not for the respect he showed to astrological predictions and the dreams he had, and to which he paid heed in reaching decisions. Such facets of his character are of course of no consequence in estimating his personality.

Of more interest is his relationship to art, especially representational art of various kinds; and this, of course, touches on religious issues in a number of respects. We are referring not to sacred architecture or its décor, mentioned above, but particularly to painting, which clearly implies some attitude to the Islamic prohibition of visual representation. Reference has been made to Țahmāsp’s service to book miniatures: we should add that as he grew old, and under the influence of increasing bigotry, he turned more and more away from this interest. The case was quite different with Shah ʿAbbās. He seems to have shared neither the personal engagement of his grandfather nor his religious scruples. It is natural that a man who had spent the greater part of his youth among the productions and abiding stimuli of Timurid art in Herat and Mashhad was not without sensitivity to the artistic expressions of his time. Indeed we can still see in the Shaikh Luṭf-Allāh mosque, with its textual scrolls and lacy roof ornamentation, a personal involvement of the shah in architecture and its development similar to that of his grandfather in the sphere of art; and with the transfer of the capital from Qazvīn to Iṣfahān the workshops attached to the royal court also had to move, and the artists employed there along with them. Thus it came about that the great painter Rūzā-yi ʿAbbāsī was able in Iṣfahān to develop an entirely new style, differing from that of Qazvīn, in whose traditions he had grown up and worked hitherto. It is plain that this sort of thing did not take place without the active interest and encouragement of the ruler. The latter’s influence, however, hitherto a decisive factor in artistic developments, begins — precisely under Shah ʿAbbās I — to decline, and to decline in favour of commercial influences. This is most evident in the sphere of ceramics, textiles, and carpet designing, all of them up to this time
areas of largely individual creativity. With the introduction of workshops for export production – a departure for which the shah was responsible – their products lost their value as individual artistic achievements and sank to the level of industrial products. This change was also felt in book illustration. What was now produced in this sphere was no longer made for the ruler alone, or at any rate for governors of princely rank in the provincial capitals, but also for other customers, who included parties with a commercial interest.

Recent attempts to rescue the Safavids from the odium of indifference to creative writing,1 if not indeed of its neglect or suppression, show that Shah ʿAbbās took a positive attitude at all events to individual poets, for example to Sharaf al-Dīn Hasan Shīfāʾī (d. 1037/1628), whom he appointed poet laureate, or to Shāmī, whom he had weighed in gold as a sign of his recognition, and to Kamālī Sabzavārī (d. 1020/1611–12), who celebrated his exploits in a verse epic entitled Shāh-nāma or ʿAbbās-nāma.2 However, since relationships of this kind form the exception rather than the rule, they signify little. The criticism of Safavid poetry, whether justified or not, as lacking in originality, full of banalities and “endless verbal niceties” is not shaken by such evidence. Emigration of Persian poets, particularly to India, which had been going on at least since the time of Shah Ṭahmāsp, did not cease under ʿAbbās. Indian courts, at which the old interest in courtly poetry continued, offered at any rate better opportunities than Isfahan with its Safavid traditions, and not only for poets but for other artists such as calligraphers and miniature painters, whose success was largely dependent on the ruler’s attitudes to aesthetic matters.

The shah’s interest in the intellectual and artistic culture of his time is unmistakeably evident, sometimes in the form of unique works of art, and certainly also in the large number of artistic achievements that appeared. But it is also unmistakeably the case that this influence was exercised, if not exclusively, at any rate largely, to resuscitate an older heritage, that of the Timurids; in other words, it was not always based on original conceptions. And in addition, these reversions to the past, however impressive they may be when seen from a distance or at a casual glance, reveal on closer inspection a more or less hasty manner


of execution, a lesser degree of thoroughness than the originals, and the use of less costly materials.

Nevertheless, alongside the successes of the statesman, the general, and the far-sighted politician must be reckoned also the achievements of the builder of cities, the architect and the patron of the arts. Enterprise, energy, shrewdness and a degree of tolerance remarkable for his time went together in 'Abbās with intellectual curiosity, as is clear from his taste for conversations with Islamic and Christian theologians and with western diplomats and merchants, his aesthetic sensitivity and, albeit with certain limitations, his knowledgeability in artistic matters.

In spite of his many talents, the shah was unable to muster either the statesmanship or the personal qualities to contend with one momentous problem relating both to the political situation and to the personal sphere. This was the question of arranging the succession and the treatment of his sons; and here he may have been influenced by residual elements of the Turkish notion that authority did not reside exclusively in the reigning prince but was the property of the ruling family as a whole. Among the eleven children of the shah known to us, five were sons: (1) Muhammad Bāqir Mīrzā, usually called Šafi Mīrzā, (2) Ḥasan Mīrzā, (3) Sultān Muḥammad Mīrzā, also referred to as Rūzak Mīrzā or Muḥammad Khudābanda Mīrzā, after his grandfather, who died in the year of his birth (1006/1597–8), (4) Ismā'īl Mīrzā, and (5) Imām Qulī Mīrzā. Of these princes, Ḥasan Mīrzā and Ismā'īl Mīrzā died while still in childhood.

'Abbās was not only conscious of problems with princes that had come the way of his immediate predecessors – some during his own lifetime - and, before that, of most of his forebears who had occupied the throne; he had himself come to the throne as the result of a coup d'état, had deposed his own father and banished him from the capital together with his two surviving brothers, whom he had caused to be blinded. To these memories was added the fear of possible acts of vengeance on the part of malcontents among the aristocracy of the empire, especially the relatives of tribal chieftains he had eliminated or

1 See above, p. 99.
2 The most reliable details are given in Falsafi, Zindagānī, 170–207. In the genealogy provided by Röhrborn, Provinzen und Zentralgewalt, p. 138, "Sultān Husain Mīrzā" should be deleted and Ismā'īl Mīrzā included in the penultimate position. A further son, Tahmāsp Mīrzā, mentioned in some of the sources, is apparently identical with Ḥasan Mīrzā.
stripped of power among the generals of the Qizilbash. With these things in the background, he developed attitudes of suspicion and mistrust that stayed with him all his life. In his efforts to rule out conspiracies and coups d'état, he kept his courtiers, especially the military men, away from his sons as far as it lay in his power to do so, and expressly forbade them to have dealings with his offspring, in several instances punishing infringements of his orders with cruel penalties. The princes were largely banished to the harem, where their social relationships were restricted to the princesses, the ladies of the harem, and the eunuchs. They received no training in either statecraft or soldiering and were likewise excluded from participating in their father's campaigns.

As a result of the sanguinary means by which the shah had seized and secured power, and of his rigid conduct of state affairs, he had indeed made many enemies. A number of these entertained sympathies for his eldest son, the crown prince Ṣafī Mīrzā, and would have liked to see him ruling in his father's place, particularly as he had the reputation of good character and warm personal qualities. The very fact of the increasing popularity of the prince was a thorn in the flesh to the shah. When, in addition, he encountered plans to depose him in Ṣafī Mīrzā's favour, he resolved to remove him from the scene. Upon warnings given by one of the court astrologers and the advice of his closest counsellors, he was persuaded to do away with the prince. He met his end at the age of twenty-seven while on a visit to Rasht, where, in 1024/1615, he was stabbed to death on his father's orders while returning from his bath. All the evidence suggests that the prince was innocent, as 'Abbās seems to have realised afterwards. At all events, he never recovered, to his dying day, from the horrific memory of his evil decision. Nevertheless, his concern for the security of the throne and his own life had such a grip on him that some time later he had the eyes put out of Prince Sulṭān Muḥammad Mīrzā, his grandson Sulāimān Mīrzā, the eldest son of Ṣafī Mīrzā, and even – at the very end of his life – the crown prince Imām Qulī Mīrzā, thus eliminating them from the succession, which in accordance with Islamic ideas is barred to pretenders who are blind.

The murder of Ṣafī Mīrzā aroused an enormous sensation of disquiet and horror not only in the shah's entourage but also among the people. In Rasht even riots ensued. But since the circle of those who knew the true facts was a small one, such expressions of anger or
protest led to no further consequences. Persian historians, from whom the truth of these events was not hidden, have named Shah ‘Abbās “the Great”, and so he is known in Iran to this day. In view of his splendid achievements and the services he rendered his country it is a title which can hardly be challenged. Possibly his actions can be judged in a somewhat more lenient light in view of the circumstances of the time in which he lived.

It is too easy for the observer of history, impressed by the record of Shah ‘Abbās’s great achievements for his country, not only to be tempted to feel that the less spectacular ages which followed his reign were a period of decline, but to see his death as the beginning of the end of Safavid rule. This view is emphatically not justified. Apart from the outward and visible magnificence which continued under the later Safavids, there were in the remaining century of their rule in Iran still decades in which the empire maintained an impressive level of achievement and when large sections of the population were able to enjoy wealth or at least reasonable prosperity, even though the period of territorial expansion was over once and for all.

One fateful cause of the later decline of his dynasty and its power was indeed the work of Shah ‘Abbās himself, namely his neglect of the succession. The elimination of royal princes, whether by blinding them or immuring them in the harem, their exclusion from the affairs of state and from contact with the leading aristocracy of the empire and the generals, all the abuses of the princes’ education, which were nothing new but which became the normal practice with ‘Abbās at the court of Iṣfahān, effectively put a stop to the training of competent successors, that is to say, efficient princes prepared to meet the demands of ruling as kings. The result was that from then on the princes who came to the throne had from their earliest youth been ruined by living in the women’s quarters, by indulgence shown towards them by all around, by courtiers, eunuchs and concubines, and were not only quite useless in the performance of their duties but often totally uninterested.

When Shah ‘Abbās died at his summer palace at Ashraf in Māzandarān on 24 Jumādā I 1038/19 January 1629 none of his brothers and none of his sons was available to take on the succession. Those who were still
alive had been blinded and were thus unsuitable to rule. He had appointed his grandson Sām Mīrza, a son of the murdered Šafī Mīrza as his successor, although in a not entirely unambiguous fashion. The decision to have the prince come to Ashraf to prepare him to take over the throne came too late, and the negotiations about what was to happen after his death, which the shah conducted with various leading figures from his deathbed, achieved no results. As it proved impossible to keep the shah’s death a secret, and as the alternative possibility of unforeseeable developments such as the enthronement of another prince, local risings, or intervention by neighbouring powers, could not be ruled out, the leading figures in the empire who were present in Ashraf, especially the Grand Vizier (vażīr-i d’zam) Khalīfa Sultān and the commander of the guards (qārchi-hāšī) ʻĪsā Khān, made every effort to arrange for the succession of Sām Mīrza at the earliest possible moment. A document to this effect which was sent to Iṣfahān had the desired effect. Promptly on 28 January 1629, three weeks before the court entourage returned, he mounted the throne in accordance with the wishes of his grandfather, adopting the royal title Shah Šafī (I).

Reports on this change of rulers expressly stress the part played by members of the Safavid order and the fact that the observances of the order were fulfilled. According to these reports, the leading aristocrats of the empire had assured themselves of the agreement of this group at the Ashraf meeting, and in Iṣfahān the rules of the sūfis were observed at the enthronement. It may be legitimate to see in this regard a connection with the attitude of the dead shah, who repeatedly had attached the greatest importance to his position as pīr and murshid, i.e. master of the order and its spiritual leader. On the other hand, it is of some interest to note (especially in view of the observances of the order we have referred to, but of which we obtain no very precise details in the source materials), that Mīr Dāmād, equally famous as a philosopher and representative of “orthodox” Shi‘ī theology, took part in the solemn ceremonies at Iṣfahān.

The details we have about the character of the new ruler, who began his reign at the age of eighteen, seem at first sight to be contradictory. On the one hand he is praised for his lavish generosity, and on the other he is reproached with unbounded cruelty. Foreign observers

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1 Iskandar Munshi, quoted in Braun, Das Erbe Schab‘Abbas’ I, pp. 104, 106.

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who had personal contacts with him praise his charm and his uncomplicated character, which they contrast with the inscrutable and incalculable attitudes of his grandfather. Which of these estimates is correct? Was Shah Šafī a warm and generous ruler or a bloody despot? It is certainly the case that, for instance, at his enthronement he distributed lavish presents. But when we learn that so enormous a sum as 500,000 tumāns was spent for this purpose, and Imām Qulī Khān, the grand beg of Fārs, was remitted a whole year's instalment (60,000 tumāns) of the dues he owed, it is more appropriate to speak of wild extravagance than of generosity.

It can also not be denied that in the early years of his reign almost all the royal princes, including the sons of his predecessor's daughters and even the princes who in any case had been blinded, were systematically murdered and that, in addition, a large number of leading figures in the empire and servants of the court were done to death, for example – in 1630 – the commander-in-chief of the armed forces (sipāhsūlar-i kull-i sipāb) Zainal Khān Shāmlū, in 1632 the generals of the guards (qūrchī-bāshī) ʿTsā Khān, and Chirāgh Khān Ṣāhidī, in 1634 the Grand Vizier (vāzīr-i aʿẓām) Mīrzā Ṭālib Urūbādī, and the lord marshal (ishīk-āqāšt-bāshī) Ughurlii Khān Shāmlū. These are merely a few names, quoted as examples which may stand for many more besides. Even if one is disposed, in view of the circumstances of this period, to see the liquidation of royal rivals as an understandable protective measure and even to attribute the execution of undesirable dignitaries in the state and army to the exigencies of raison d'état; indeed, if one assumes it to have been probable that the shah was heavily influenced by individuals in his immediate entourage, it is still not possible to acquit Šafī of the charge of exceptional cruelty. ¹

The study of the actions and attitudes of the new shah reveals no sign of a more human dimension to his personality which would explain the positive comments of European observers; rather, it is the features of a moody despot that stand out, one who kept those around him in a state of fear and trembling by assassination and arbitrary death sentences. Moreover, the degree of interest he evinced for the business of state was only peripheral in character, if not non-existent, and it seems likely that he took not the slightest part in the intellectual and cultural life of his people; for in spite of a number of efforts to begin, he had not even

¹ On Šafī's cruelty, see Falsafi, "Dasthā-ī khūn-ālūd", Chand maqāla, pp. 211–22.
managed to attain a reasonable standard in reading and writing. If we add to this the fact that he indulged with increasing frequency a taste for wine and that it had been prescribed, we are told, to counteract certain effects of opium, to which he had apparently become addicted at quite an early age, we are left with a somewhat grim picture of the ruler and the thirteen years he occupied the throne before death from excessive drinking carried him off.

Although he received instruction from several experienced leading figures of the empire in affairs of state, starting shortly after he ascended the throne, little appears to have been achieved through these efforts to influence the shah to take more than the slightest interest—a reaction which is clearly the result of his upbringing in the harem. The decisions that had to be taken therefore became the responsibility of other important personages, however much they may have contrived to suggest to their master that they emanated from him. With a simple-minded, uncomplicated personality, as his is described, this can hardly have been a very difficult matter, for he was quite incapable of keeping himself immune from the intrigues and insinuations of his courtiers. This was especially serious when such machinations were aimed at competent and unexceptionable people, whose fate was then almost invariably sealed.

If we enquire who were the real rulers in the state, we find that in the early years of the new reign four outstanding personalities emerge: the lord marshal (ishik-āqāsī-bāshī) Ughurlū Khān Shāmlū; a Georgian named Rustam Beg, formerly imperial provost (dīvān-begī), and later in addition general commanding the musketeers (tufangchī-āqāsī) and commander-in-chief of the armed forces (sipāhsālār-i kull-i sipāh); Chirāgh Khān Zāhidī, who at first had no special office and later was appointed general of the guards (qūrčī-bāshī); and lastly another Georgian named Rustam Khān, who was town governor (dārūgha) of Iṣfahān and general of the royal squires (qullar-āqāsī) and had originally been known as Khusrau Mīrzā and also as Khusrau Khān. We may also assume that various ladies of the harem, for example the queen mother and, at least for a time, Zainab Begum, one of ʿAbbās I’s daughters, exercised some influence. We have already come across the names of two of the people mentioned above, Ughurlū Khān Shāmlū and Chirāgh Khān Zāhidī, in connection with the victims of Shah Ṣafī’s tyrannical rule. In 1630 Rustam Beg Dīvān-begī became grand beg (beglerbegī) of Āzarbājīān and his namesake.
Rustam Khān moved from Kartlia to Tiflis to become governor (vālī).

Mention should be made at this point of the elimination of the most powerful and wealthy man in Iran after the ruler, and his sons. This was Imām Qull Khan, the recipient of such munificence on the occasion of Šaft’s accession. He was not only grand beg of Fārs and Kūhgilüya, but also governor of Lār, Hurmuz (Jarūn), the Bahārîn islands, Gulpāğān and Tūysirkān. In these offices he had followed in the footsteps of his father, Allāhvārdī Khān, who had risen to high office under Shah ‘Abbās I. Shah ‘Abbās had even honoured him, a practice not unknown among the Safavids, by giving him one of his own wives in marriage. On the rather threadbare charge of conspiracy with insubordinate dignitaries in north-west Persia and Georgia, he and nearly all his numerous sons were put to death in 1632. The simultaneous conversion of the province of Fārs into crown lands was entirely in line with the policy of centralisation that Shah ‘Abbās had pursued on a grand scale by strengthening the shah’s position as the central authority at the expense of the provinces controlled by state governors.

Ultimately, the dominant influence at the court of Isfahān came to be that of the Grand Vizier (vażīr-i a’ẓam-i dīvān-i ālā) Mīrzā Muhammad Taqī, usually known as Mīrzā Taqī or Šārū Taqī (“Taqī of the fair hair”). Appointed in 1634, he had had a successful career in administration, where he had distinguished himself through services in the sphere of construction, including road building projects undertaken for ‘Abbās I in Māzandarān and the rebuilding of the sanctuary of Najaf on the orders of Šafī I, and through his activity as vizier of Māzandarān and of the whole of Gilān after the rising stirred up there by Gharīb Shāh.1 Šārū Taqī, who held office as grand vizier until the death of Šafī and for as long as three years afterwards, was not only an experienced specialist in administration but also a person of integrity, incorruptible and not at all intent on personal financial advantage. He so won the support and goodwill of the shah that he was able to get his way with all the authorities, in earlier years even including the military aristocracy. Efficient administrative measures, especially in finance, enabled him to raise revenues to a level never before known in Iran. He did indeed make use of a secret information service to this end, the

1 Braun, Das Erbe Schah ‘Abbās’ I, pp. 16f. Petrushevsky, “Narodnoe vosstanie”.

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activities of which, while it may have increased his popularity in some quarters, had quite the reverse effect elsewhere. In the course of time, moreover, he became so hardened and implacable, and so given to autocratic behaviour and contempt for others, that he not only played into the hands of his opponents but sometimes even offended against the interests of the state. Thus in 1638 his misplaced reluctance to compromise gave the impetus to the loss of Qandahār, when he insisted on withdrawing certain privileges in the payment of annual contributions to the Grand Divān from the local governor, ʿAlī Mardān Khān, which had been granted by his predecessors. Instead of obeying the summons to appear at court, the governor proceeded to place himself and his province under the jurisdiction of the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān.

This brings us to the question of Iran’s foreign relations under Šafī I. Even under normal circumstances a change of ruler in the Safavid empire always touched off increased interest and, all too easily, covetous aspirations among neighbouring powers. Since Shah Šafī revealed himself only too soon as a weak, insecure and impressionable character, his neighbours lost no time in making appropriate moves. In the reign of Shah Šafī hostilities started up on the frontiers with the Ottoman empire, in Georgia, with the Uzbeks and with India, and these resulted in territorial losses or at all events in the necessity for counter-measures. The fact that Iran escaped fairly lightly is hardly attributable to its ruler, but was due rather to other circumstances.

The first disorders that occurred after the death of Shah ʿAbbās were incursions on the part of Bedouin Arabs of the Banū Lām tribe into the area around Baghdad. These, however, had no significant effect upon the destinies of Iran; and even various conflicts among the Mushaʿshaʿ in the area of Ḥavīza (Ḥuvaiza), a tribe subject to the shah, which broke out after the murder of the governor of Shīrāz, Imām Quī Khān, had no particularly momentous consequences. This was because ʿAlī Pasha, the independent Turkish governor of Baṣra, who might have caused difficulties, was shrewd enough to avoid any involvement in these disputes.

Grave news, however, was arriving in Īsfahān from the west, where under the young Sultan Murād IV (1032–49/1623–40) an enterprising and ruthless grand vizier had come to power in the person of Khūsrev Pasha. The object of his planning was clearly to exploit the
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easement achieved as a result of the renewal of the Peace of Szöny recently negotiated between the Porte and the Emperor Ferdinand II by mounting a blow against Persia. At the news of his approach in the summer of 1038-9/1629, the Persians did not find themselves unprepared. Zainal Khān Begdelī Shāmlū, the newly appointed commander-in-chief, moved at the head of the Persian forces to Hamadān, where the shah was also encamped with his court. Khūsrev Pasha, who had temporarily given up his original objective, Baghdad, and had advanced in the direction of Hamadān, scored a victory on 4 May 1630 at Māḥidasht. Though Hamadān then fell into his hands, he resisted the temptation to press on further into the interior of Persia and turned his attention to his real objective, Mesopotamia and Baghdad. As the Baghdad contingent under Şafī Qulī Khān held out against the Ottoman assault following heavy artillery bombardment, Khūsrev Pasha regarded the venture as a failure, and withdrew. It seems likely that his decision was prompted in part by the thought of the approaching winter — the attack took place between 8 and 12 November 1630 — and no doubt by the associated thought of how vulnerable his lines of communication to the rear would be, having regard to their length and particular geographical location. It proved not too difficult for the Persians to clear out the garrisons left behind by the Ottomans in the central part of the Euphrates region, and to bring to heel the Kurds, who had largely sided with the enemy. Although it at first looked as if peace could be brought about between the Ottomans and the Safavids, these hopes were destined to be dashed because the new Turkish Grand Vizier, Tabanyası Meḥmed Pasha, observing the murder of the Persian princes and the Georgian resistance to the shah,1 did not regard Persia as a dangerous enemy and had no interest in concluding a peace. Hence the next four years saw no end to frontier skirmishes in which the initiative and the outcome alternated from one side to the other constantly.

The Ottoman conquest of the fortress of Erivan in 1045/1635, at which the Sultan Murād IV was present in person, was a more serious matter. So was the subsequent advance on Tabrīz, which was plundered and laid in ruins, but not occupied. Shah Şafī himself took part in the Persian counter-offensive in the following spring, which ended

1 See below, pp. 285-6.
with the reconquest of Erivan. Overtures of peace made by the Persians immediately afterwards were once more unavailing.

The reason for the Supreme Porte’s reluctance to make peace was no doubt that Istanbul had not given up the idea of reconquering Baghdad. In fact, in 1048/1638 the sultan again undertook a campaign into Mesopotamia, by means of which he achieved the desired result, for Baghdad fell into his hands in mid-Sha‘bān/the closing days of December without the Persians making any attempt to relieve their garrison in the city. From then until the First World War the city remained an Ottoman possession.

In spite of the atrocities that followed the conquest, the Persians entered into peace negotiations with the Ottomans. These resulted, on 14 Muḥarram 1049/17 May 1639 in the peace treaty of Żuhāb, as a consequence of which a settlement of frontiers was agreed that survived beyond the end of the Safavid empire and – apart from the northern sector, where a new situation was created by the advance of the Tsarist empire in the 12th/18th century – endured up to the present time. For Persia, it meant not only the loss of Baghdad, but also the final abandonment of the whole of Mesopotamia. Both parties abided by the terms of the treaty, and after this no more wars were fought between the Safavids and the Ottomans.

Nor were there any serious consequences from conflicts in the Transcaucasian petty states, especially the Georgian kingdoms and principalities, where Safavid and Ottoman interests overlapped. It will be remembered that Shah ‘Abbās I had not only undertaken campaigns of conquest into Georgia, but had transplanted very large numbers of Georgians to Persia, where many of them, in connection with the reorganisation of the army, were taken into the Iranian forces and not infrequently rose to the higher and even to the highest military and governmental positions. Stubbornly though the Georgians clung to their own national ways in their homeland, even under Muslim rule, to their language, and to their Christian faith especially, in Persia they were quickly assimilated and, alongside Iranians and Turks, formed the third ethnic element of modern Persian society. In this they contrasted markedly with their Armenian neighbours, whose treatment under Persian tutelage was entirely comparable.

Shah Șafī’s relations with Georgia have already been touched on in the context of the transfer of the governor of Iṣfahān, Rustam Khān. He held to the Islamic faith and had made his entire career in Persia up
to this point; but in 1634 he succeeded in defeating Theimuraz and seizing power in Tiflis in the name of the shah. His success determined the lords of Imeretia, Mingrelia and Guria, who strictly owed allegiance to the Ottoman state and its ruler, to declare their willingness to accept the shah’s authority. Even Theimuraz, who at first disappeared from the scene, but later managed to oust the Safavid governor of Kakhetia, finally placed himself under the Ișfahān government, which confirmed his rule over Kakhetia — clearly in order thus to create a rival to Rustam and prevent his gaining excessive power. Conflicts between the two viceroys, Rustam and Theimuraz, were not slow to develop, but did not assume very serious proportions. Thus Rustam Khān, who remained in office until his death in 1658, was able to give his country a long period of peace and reconstruction, of which it was sorely in need after the serious devastations and losses of population resulting from the campaigns of Shah ʿAbbās I. The exportation of Georgians to Persia, especially boys and girls, continued throughout the 11th/17th century, but it was no longer in the form of official, obligatory requisitions or forced deportations, as had formerly been the case, but was arranged by agents, who tackled the problem by means of bribes, persuasion, and cunning.1

There was more serious unrest on Iran’s north-east frontier. A reconciliation was effected with the neighbouring Türkmens after they had invaded from Khīva (Khwārazm), when its Yadgarid ruler Isfandiyār Khān (1032–52/1623–42) apologised for the attack and in 1039/1630 handed over to the shah his brother Abu’l-Ghāzī, on whose shoulders he put the blame. Abu’l-Ghāzī, later Isfandiyār’s successor and a celebrated historian, spent the next ten years at the shah’s court. In contrast, the Uzbeks of Transoxiana, now under the rule of the Janid dynasty, kept the Persians fully occupied. The most important figures here were Imām Qull Khān, the prince of Bukhārā (1020–51/1611–41), and his brother Nadr Muḥammad Khān, who was initially his governor in Balkh and was appointed by him as his successor in 1031/1641 when he himself had gone blind. Imām Qull Khān set off on a pilgrimage to Mecca and only just managed to escape into Persian territory from pursuers sent after him on the orders of his brother, who at the last moment had resolved to prevent his leaving. He was received

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there by the shah with the highest honours due to an eminent guest, and finally died in Arabian territory. Strangely enough, Nadr Muhammad Khan in turn at a later date (1056/1646) had to seek refuge in Persia, and he too was received with great ceremony. Nevertheless, it would be quite wrong, on the evidence of the reception accorded by Safavid rulers to Uzbek princes in difficulties, to conclude that good neighbourly relations existed between the two powers. The opposite was, in fact, the case. As they had from the very beginning of Safavid rule, Uzbek incursions and plundering raids into Persia continued unabated during the 11th/17th century, and in the reign of Shah Şafī they reached a climax, with no fewer than eleven Uzbek campaigns against Persia. Even though most of these were no more than forays, we find that such large forces were involved — numbers amounting to 20,000 or 30,000 Uzbek warriors are mentioned — that the possibility that the Uzbeks intended a conquest of Khurasan cannot simply be dismissed. Nevertheless, no significant results in this direction were achieved.

The tense relations between Shah Şafī and the Indian Mughals led, among other reasons, in 1636 to the severance of a strange Indo-Persian connection. ‘Abd-Allāh Qutb Shāh, the lord of the principality of Golkonda in the Deccan (1020–1083/1626–72), and the descendant of a Shi‘ī Qarā Quyūnlū refugee, had attached himself for religious reasons to Shah ‘Abbās I and thereafter had caused the name of the Persian shah to be incorporated in the official prayers (khūṭba) and adopted on the coinage. He now abandoned his association with Persia and placed himself under the Great Mughal Shah Jahān after the latter’s victory over his neighbour to the west, the prince of Bijāpūr.

When Shah Şafī died unexpectedly on 12 Safar 1052/12 May 1642 at the early age of thirty-one, he left behind him a country whose territory was quite considerably smaller than it had been at his success-ion, but which still embraced all the heartlands of Persia. From the point of view of the Iranisation of the Safavid empire, the loss of the Mesopotamian territories — and these were by far the most extensive — was in any case of no very great importance. More significant was the fact that at the time of his death the country was not threatened by any serious external dangers, and especially that it was no longer at risk

2 Braun, Das Erbe Schah ‘Abbās’ I, p. 117, says he died at Iṣfahān; Lüft, Iran unter Schah ‘Abbās II, p. 207, n. 192, at Kāshān, though the date he supplies is in error.
from the Ottoman empire. This fairly positive state of affairs, however, could hardly be credited to Shah Ṣafī, but rather to various dignitaries in his empire distinguished by special competence, particularly the Grand Vizier Šārū Taqī. In Ṣafī’s character we see clearly manifested some of the weak points in the structure of the Safavid empire which were to play a fateful rôle in its decline and final demise. These were especially the lack of preparation of the crown prince for the position of ruler and the unlimited power of a despotic monarch totally orientated on himself, and — since the time of Shah ‘Abbās I — further strengthened by the exclusion of the Qizilbāsh amīrs and the increasing centralisation of the state. A figure possessing the personal qualities of a Shah ‘Abbās could exploit such a position of omnipotence to the best advantage of Iran and its people. A man as weak as Ṣafī in mind and character — a man who was also physically weak — was not equal to the tasks involved in the office.

‘Abbās II

Though Ṣafī cannot be compared with his grandfather ‘Abbās in any respect, it is not proper to speak of the thirteen years of his reign as the beginning of the decline of Safavid power. It is true that the Safavid state at this time shows signs of ageing and also gives certain indications of decadence. But that it was still able to survive and guarantee its subjects good, if not outstandingly good, conditions in which to live, was evident under Ṣafī’s son and successor, Prince Sultān Muḥammad Mīrzā, who ascended the throne on 16 Šafar 1052/15 May 1642 with the name ‘Abbās II. Certainly there could be no question, to begin with, of his influencing the affairs of state, since the new shah was not quite ten years old at the time. ¹ Since Šārū Taqī remained in office as grand vizier, it was inevitable that his should be the authoritative voice in government. Less self-evident was the part the queen mother played in state affairs. In the case in question, the practicalities of carrying out joint rule were in fact fairly simple, because the grand vizier was a eunuch, so that he was not subject to the usual prohibitions on access to the ladies of the court.

If there had been indications under the rule of Shah Ṣafī that the

¹ For a discussion of his date of birth, see Braun, Das Erbe Schah ‘Abbās’ I, pp. 13ff.
shift in power from the Türkmen tribal leaders to the shah and the tight centralisation that 'Abbās I had carried through would become a permanency, this now became clearer still. The grandees of the empire (arkān-i daulat), who were no longer dependent on or challenged by the Qizilbāsh aristocracy, now looked simply to the ruler. Indeed to such an extent was this so that the latter, if ever he should be unwilling to take action or if he should be as yet not of age to rule, could be represented for years by an efficient chancellor of the imperial court or grand vizier without such persons needing — as Mīrzā Salmān Jābirī had once needed — to fear the intrigues of the Türkmen military. This is far from saying that he was proof against the conspiratorial activities of other members of the court, especially the palace eunuchs and the ladies of the harem.

Even though the ruler still possessed supernatural powers in the estimation of his subjects, his rôle as master of the order now no longer had any practical significance. Perversions of what remained of this rôle, his alleged incapacity for doing any wrong (so that religious commandments and prohibitions did not apply to him), could have fateful results. The observances that derived from the rule of the order had been replaced by an ingeniously devised court ceremonial which is described in much detail by European observers living in Isfahān at the time. When the Türkmen military aristocracy was stripped of power, the rôle of the provinces as epicentres of central government was — as we have seen — reduced almost to nothing. There were among the leading figures of the empire, the incumbents of high office in the court, still some Türkmen tribal princes, but they had no significant power to fall back on in the provinces; they had to be content with fairly small governorships which might be associated with the court offices for which they were responsible. They no longer derived their influence from the fact that they belonged to particular tribes or from the economic power of their office in the provinces, but — like all other servants of the court, such as Georgians, Armenians or Circassians — from the favour of the ruler and, at times, of the grand vizier, largely depending on the degree of loyalty and competence they had shown. All in all, these are the typical characteristics of a court aristocracy. A significant aspect of the situation was that the court offices, which in the 10th/16th century had been largely only titular, now increasingly entailed specific functions, which on the one hand made their incumbents, i.e. the leading men in the empire, into pillars of the state
(arkān-i daulat), and on the other invested them at particular times with considerable influence.

Although it is not intended here to examine the details of the Safavid governmental apparatus, it is worth casting a brief glance at the top échelons of the empire at the time of the new shah’s accession. The ruler held solemn court at unspecified intervals for particular purposes. At these, affairs of state were discussed, ambassadors of foreign powers were received, and the conferment of offices announced. One noteworthy additional authority was the court and imperial council, one of whose functions was to supervise the work of governors and senior officials. Since it was responsible for enquiring into complaints from the population about abuses of authority, oppression and arbitrary government, there may well have been some connection with the dīvān al-mazālim of earlier times. Any verdict it announced led to sentence being passed by the shah, who also had the right to exercise direct judicial power.

Among the members of the court and imperial council the grand vizier and the commander of the mounted guard (qūrchi-bāshī) occupied the first place. In addition, the commanders of the royal squires (qullar-āqāsi), of the musketeers (tufangchi-āqāsi) and of the artillery corps (ṭūpchi-bāshī) belonged to it, as did the dīvān-begī, the state privy clerk (wāqī’-a-nivī), the lord marshal (ishikh-āqāsi-bāshī), and sometimes the imperial sadr (sadr al-mamālik). At the head of the financial administration, with partial responsibility for administering crown lands, was the imperial director of finances (mustaufī al-mamālik). Court administration was under the care of a supreme major-domo or intendant-general (nāżir-i buwūtāt), who also had charge of the court workshops.

The Persian army, once the nucleus of Safavid power, had been weakened as a result of the tribal particularism and insubordination of the Qizilbāsh amīrs, but reformed both radically and effectively by Shah ʿAbbās I to represent a powerful striking force. Under Shah Ṣafī, in spite of the decimation of the generals, it had nevertheless so far contrived to preserve its strength that in 1058/1648 it proved itself a force to be reckoned with against the Indian invasion troops during the conflict over Qandahār. But quite soon afterwards the changed political situation began to take effect. The dangers which earlier on had threatened the existence of the state or its territorial integrity had either been averted or were no longer so menacing that they demanded
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trained troops in a constant high degree of readiness and in great numbers. As the government was no longer pursuing a policy of expansion, its military undertakings were confined to fairly small-scale punitive expeditions within the country or on the frontiers. The decline was first evident among the provincial contingents and not as yet among the main body of the royal army, which in 1654 was in fact increased by a small corps of bodyguard infantry, the jażā'īrī, consisting of 600 men to begin with, a number later increased to 2,000 men. The falling-off became plain among the artillery, which was the force least needed in long periods of peace and which had never been especially popular among the Persians with their marked preference for cavalry. As time went on, the typical extravagance, luxurious living and idleness of the court did not fail to have a demoralising effect on the royal troops. Corruption in the intendant’s office, inadequate provision for the lower ranks, casualness and neglect became the order of the day, and the shah’s lack of interest added the finishing touches. Thus it was possible for it to happen that, in 1666, at a parade of troops, the same soldiers were marched past the shah several times over. The result of such abuses was that discipline disintegrated and the strength of units was allowed to fall, so that it was eventually said of the army that it was quite useful for military parades but no use at all for war.

Such, then, were the instruments of power available for the government of Iran when the new shah ascended the throne. If his personal share in the affairs of state was still confined for the time being to representative functions only, he nevertheless learned to make it more effective a few years later. To begin with, he had to catch up on the education he had been denied hitherto; and he made such good progress in reading and writing that it was soon possible to introduce him to religious texts. The foundations of his lifelong interest in theological questions may well have been laid at this time, and this interest may have provided the stimulus for a new Persian translation of al-Kullīnī’s Uṣūl al-kāfī fī ʿilm al-dīn, the most important of the four books of the Shi‘ī tradition. In addition to his intellectual training, which was not

1 Against Chardin’s assertion, however, that the artillery corps was disbanded after the death of its commander Husain Qull Beg in 1655, Luft (Iran unter Schah ʿAbbās II, p. 37) draws attention to the formation of a new artillery detachment in that very year.
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confined merely to religious subjects, the shah also learned riding, archery, polo and other equestrian games.

Meanwhile, the real power lay in the hands of the trusted Grand Vizier Šarū Taqī, who did not shut himself off from the influence of the queen mother. He also willingly carried out ideas put forward by the Shi‘ī jurists, who were deeply concerned to eradicate the excesses of Shah Ṣafī’s reign that ran counter to the law. These included the tendency to wild extravagance at court and, in imitation of it, in the provincial capitals. The grand vizier insisted on the principle of economy and was able to curb the excessive drinking at court. However, the successes he achieved were not destined to last long, as in this respect ‘Abbās II later followed in his father’s footsteps.

After the accession had been carried through smoothly there were more important concerns to worry about than the lax observance of the religious law at court. Experience taught that the fluid situation created by a change of ruler meant a challenge for discontented elements, power-hungry individuals, and centrifugal forces. Šarū Taqī met the new dangers with the classic ploys of generous tax concessions for the provinces and by confirming almost all of the highly-placed officials at the court and in the provinces. This policy had the desired effect. There were no disturbances or revolts when the change of ruler took place – with one exception. This was the trial of strength with the imperial field-marshals (sipāhsālār) Rustam Khān. He opposed the order to remain in Mashhad on account of the threat from Indian troops, having gone there to prepare a campaign, already planned but later abandoned, against Qandahār. He now set off for Isfahān, clearly with the intention of bringing pressure to bear on state policy with the change of ruler. The grand vizier reacted to this act of insubordination by promptly arranging for sentence of death to be passed on him. This was carried out in Mashhad on 9 Dhu‘l–Hijja 1052/1 March 1643.

“Lord of the amirs, servant of the poor”, boasted Šarū Taqī in an inscription of 1053/1643 recording his foundation of a mosque he caused to be erected in Isfahān.¹ The death of Rustam Khān is not the only case in which he held to this principle. Integrity and incorruptibility were among the virtues for which he is remembered, and to which we have already referred. These alone made him many enemies. A compulsive urge to dominate, a contempt for people and the implac-

¹ Mihrābādī, p. 640. Cf. also Hunarfar, Ganjina, p. 549.
ABLE SEVERITY WITH WHICH HE PROCEEDED AGAINST CROOKED DEALINGS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF STATE AFFAIRS, AND ESPECIALLY THE SYSTEM OF SPIES EMPLOYED IN THE COLLECTION OF STATE TAXES — EACH PLAYED ITS OWN PART IN INCREASING THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE OPPOSED TO THE GRAND VIZIER, WHO IN ANY CASE DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY POPULAR EVEN AMONG THE HIGHEST DIGNITARIES IN THE LAND. NOT SURPRISINGLY, A PLOT WAS HATCHED AGAINST HIM, LED BY JĀNI KHĀN SHĀMLŪ, THE QURCHĪ-BĀSHĪ, WHO WITH FIVE OTHER CONSPIRATORS ATTACKED AND MURDERED HIM IN HIS HOME ON 20 SHA‘BĀN 1055/11 OCTOBER 1645.

IT WAS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN WHETHER WHAT LAY BEHIND THE MURDER WAS ONLY THE PENT-UP RESENTMENT OF A FAIRLY SMALL GROUP OF OFFICERS OR POSSIBLY — AND PERHAPS MORE PROBABLY — A MORE RAMIFIED CONSPIRACY OF TÜRKMEÑ TRIBAL CHEFTAINS, SUCH AS THOSE WHICH MAY STILL HAVE BEEN REMEMBERED FROM THE REMOTE PERIOD OF THE QIZILBĀŞH CONSPIRACIES, AIMED PERHAPS AT DETHRONING THE SHAH IN FAVOUR OF ANOTHER PRINCE. THE CRIME WAS CONSEQUENTLY FOLLOWED BY A PERIOD OF SOME DAYS IN WHICH BEWILDERMENT AND CONFUSION SWEEPED THE COURT. NOT UNTIL VARIOUS SENIOR OFFICERS AND OTHER DIGNITARIES MANIFESTED THEIR LOYALTY DID THE SHAH ISSUE THE ORDER TO PROCEED AGAINST THE MURDERERS AND HAVE THEM AND THEIR SUPPORTERS PUT TO DEATH. IT WAS AGAIN A SHĀMLŪ AMĪR, MURTAZA QULĪ KHĀN BĪJARĪ, WHO WAS APPOINTED TO THE POSITION OF QURCHĪ-BĀSHĪ. HE OCCUPIED THIS OFFICE FOR FOUR YEARS AND HIS PLACE WAS THEN TAKEN BY HUSAIN QULĪ KHĀN.

ṢĀRŪ TAQĪ’S SUCCESSOR WAS KHĀLĪFA SULTĀN, WHO HAD BEEN GRAND VIZIER ONCE BEFORE, FROM 1623 TO 1632, AND NOW REMAINED IN OFFICE UNTIL HIS DEATH (1064/1653–4). SHAH ṢAFĪ HAD HAD FOUR OF HIS SONS BLINDED AT THE TIME OF THE PERSECUTION OF THE PRINCES. HE WAS A PIÖUS MAN, CONCERNED TO SEE RESPECT PAID TO THE RELIGIOUS LAW, THOUGH HIS SUCCESSES IN THIS DIRECTION WERE AT BEST ONLY LIMITED. IT WOULD SEEM THAT WHAT HE WAS ABLE TO ACHIEVE IN THE MATTER OF PROHIBITING VISUAL REPRESENTATION — IN VIEW OF THE MANY EXAMPLES OF PORTRAITURE AND ESPECIALLY OF MINIATURE PAINTING AT THE TIME — WAS JUST AS MODEST AS IN THE MATTER OF DRINKING, WHICH WAS A WIDESPREAD HABIT, PARTICULARLY AT COURT, AND COULD BE SUPPRESSED ONLY OCCASIONALLY BY IMPOSING SHARP PENALTIES. IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT HE MADE AN EFFORT TO CURB PEDERASTY AND TO REDUCE PROSTITUTION BY MEASURES TAKEN AGAINST THE BROTHELS THAT EXISTED IN MANY OF THE TOWNS. IN SPITE OF HIS ZEAL IN THESE DIRECTIONS, HE SEEMS ON THE WHOLE — IN WELCOME CONTRAST TO THE SEVERITY, ABRUPTNESS, AND OVERBEARING WAYS OF HIS PREDECESSOR — TO HAVE BEEN A CONCILIATORY CHARACTER, DISPOSED TO
make allowances. Nevertheless, he was not without rivals at court. Since 1644 Allāhvārdī Khān, the son of the Armenian Khusrau Khān, had been master of the hunt (*amīr-shiḵār-bāšī*). He was hardly less successful in securing the favour of the ruler than his namesake of earlier days with Shah ‘Abbās I. He can be seen as almost the ideal embodiment of the courtier, and in his strategy as such he exploited especially the shah’s passion for hunting. His brilliantly arranged *bat-tus* secured him the shah’s affection and indeed also bore testimony to the organisational skills which brought him the office of qullar-āqāṣī when this position fell vacant; he held it until his death (c. 1663).

This high position, together with the unwavering goodwill of the shah, made it possible for him to manoeuvre one of his protégés into the position of grand vizier when Khalīfā Sultān died. This was Muḥammad Beg, a Tabrīz Armenian of modest origins, who up to that time had been intendant-general of the court (*nāzīr-i buyūṭāt*) and had made a name as an efficient administrative and financial specialist. The problems he was required to solve, however, were beyond his capabilities. He did not succeed in reducing the immoderate outlay on the court and the high military expenditure as the situation demanded, not even by taking the necessary measures to reduce the quality of the coinage, attempting to foster mining, and further increasing the crown lands. His high-handed manner, his dismissal of several governors, and the disputes he was involved in with the Isfahān city administration created many enemies for him, among them some very influential people. When he finally became involved even in differences with the powerful Allāhvārdī Khān, he was removed from office and compelled to take up permanent abode in Qum (18 Jumādā I 1071/19 January 1661).

The shah did not hurry to appoint his successor. The fact that ultimately Muẓaffā Muhammad Mahdī, scion of a highly respected family of theologians, who had been *şād-r-i mamālīk* for over ten years, was made grand vizier, may have been a concession to the Shi‘ī jurists. Trouble had been fermenting in their ranks for a long time, not only on account of the libertarianism at court (the stricter discipline introduced after Ṣafī’s death, with prohibition of wine and strict adherence to the other religious prescripts, had long since been allowed to go by the board), but also because of the magnanimity of the ruler towards Christians, and Christians only recently converted to Islam, who were able to attain to high office, indeed to the highest offices in the land.

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In contrast to his predecessor, ‘Abbās II took an active interest in the business of government, although he too had been raised in the seclusion of the harem and had received no preparation whatsoever for the throne. Exactly when he began to play an active rôle is impossible to determine, but it appears to have been at quite an early age, possibly in the period immediately following the assassination of Šārū Taqī, when he was scarcely more than fifteen years old. A distinctive feature of his reign was the consolidation of his power, which he achieved by pursuing policies of centralisation such as increasing the number of provinces belonging to the royal estates. In this respect he adhered firmly to the policy of Šārū Taqī who, under Shah Šafī, had already incorporated the province of Lār into the crown lands and who, only a year before his death, had also annexed the land of the Bakhtiyār, in consequence of a revolt against the local governor Khalīl Khān. Subsequently other territories such as Hamadān (1654), Ardabil (1656–7) and Kirmān (1658) were also incorporated in the royal estates. The increased revenues and the greater power of the monarch resulting from these measures did not necessarily make for an improvement in the lot of the population. In certain instances they even proved detrimental, because the administrators of the crown lands, as the immediate subordinates of the shah, were frequently in a position to disregard constraints to which the former governors had been subject. On the other hand, it was not unknown for the shah to intervene against his provincial officials on receiving complaints from peasants or other of his subjects that they had been dealt with too harshly. This explains why European observers are able to contrast the well-being of the rural population in Persia with the very much worse plight of the peasantry in the West. The relatively favourable living conditions, also of course attributable to the fact that Persia was spared any serious involvement in major wars during this period, in turn help to explain why, for most of the time, the country remained peaceful internally and the roads were safe. When disorders and rebellions did develop they were confined, like the uprising of the Bakhtiyārs mentioned above, to border areas or vassal territories.

This was the case with various dominions in Georgia and Dāghistān which were either under Persian tutelage or loosely subject to the shah. Reference has already been made to Rustam Khān, who ruled as governor or viceroy (vālī) in Tiflis, and to conflicts between him and Theimuraz. These conflicts continued under ‘Abbās II, in the first instance
shortly after his accession, then again in 1648. Even though Theimuraz was eventually excluded from power and sent to Astarābād, fresh disturbances occurred, despite – or even because of – an attempt to restore peace by means of a special policy of colonisation and construction of fortresses, directed from Īsfāhan. Hostilities bordering on civil war were not brought to a conclusion until the beginning of the 1070s/1660s under a new viceroy called Shāhnāvāz. Theimuraz himself, albeit in vain, had sought support from the government of the Tsar. His efforts were certainly not misplaced, for Cossacks had advanced as far as the river Terek around the year 1600. When, however, they proceeded to build fortifications commanding the approach routes to eastern Georgia, Persian troops were sent into action who destroyed their strongholds and put the garrisons to flight. To guard against renewed incursions by the Russians, or those of the Ottomans, any rebellions on the part of the princes of Dāghistān were quelled.

No account of the development of domestic politics under ʿAbbas II would be complete without a brief consideration of Western trading companies and their activities in Persia, although a later chapter will be devoted to a detailed discussion of this topic. By the beginning of the 11th/17th century, at the latest, these companies had become a significant factor not only in Persian history but also in the overseas history of various European powers, i.e. in the development of what nowadays would be termed Western imperialism and colonialism. We have already touched on the expulsion of the Portuguese with the aid of the English, who aimed at establishing secure trade relations with Persia. Other European powers now endeavoured in much the same way to forge economic links with Iran and to set up suitable trade bases in the country.

Portugal had still been granted minor rights by the shah in a treaty of 1625, but when Muscat was conquered by the imām of ʿUmnān in 1060/1650, she lost her foothold in the Persian Gulf and with it, simultaneously, her final opportunity for influence in Persia. It would, however, be quite wrong to conclude from their relations with the Portuguese that the rulers of Persia were in principle opposed to foreign trade delegations. They were in fact only too well aware of the benefits the country derived from the presence of Western trade representa-

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1 See above, p. 268, and below, chapters 7 and 8. For a brief recent survey, cf. Schuster-Walser, Das safavidsche Persien, pp. 6ff.
tives. These benefits were not confined solely to the economic sphere. Just how diverse they were can be gauged from two examples: the deployment of English ships in support of the Persian government, for instance, during the expulsion of the Portuguese, and the influence of Western art on that of Persia, which is of particular interest in view of the artistic inclinations of Shah 'Abbās II.

The English East India Company had been represented in Shīrāz and Iṣfahān since 1617. Later, in gratitude for the assistance it had given against the Portuguese, it was granted significant privileges by 'Abbās I and Ṣafī I, for example, a customs franchise in Bandar 'Abbās (Gombroon), which had replaced the Portuguese Hurmuz; representation by a permanent ambassador at the court; a guarantee of free trade throughout the country; independent legal authority; freedom of worship; the right to carry arms, and the pledge of greater supplies of silk. Despite all this it would be wrong to conceive of the activity of the company as being outstandingly successful. More often than not it encountered difficulties when seeking to exercise its privileges, and not infrequently it was obliged to relinquish them altogether. Moreover, the rôle of the company was dependent upon the prestige that the English homeland, about which they were quite well informed, enjoyed amongst the Persians; and this, particularly since the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, was not exactly high.

Not many years after the English, the Dutch had also founded a settlement in Bandar 'Abbās. The Dutch East India Company was more successful in defending its interests than its English rival because, unlike the latter, it could count on the support of its government and also enjoyed greater freedom to act on its own authority. The privileges conceded to it by 'Abbās I were endorsed by the governments of both Ṣafī and 'Abbās II, though in the latter case not before drastic pressure had been brought to bear by sending a Dutch fleet from Batavia to the Persian Gulf.¹ The principal Dutch imports to Persia were spices, sugar and textiles. They purchased various silks, such as brocade, taffeta, velvet and satin, in addition to raw silk. A trade agreement remained in force until the end of the dynasty, but from time to time it proved damaging or problematical to one or other of the parties as the result of a stipulation obliging the Dutch to take agreed quantities of Persian silk at a fixed price, which proved ruinous for them.

¹ See Johann von der Behr, Diarium, as quoted in Schuster-Walser, p. 88.
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French attempts to establish trade relations with the shah led to agreements, the contents of which were sanctioned by ʿAbbās II in a farman issued shortly before his death, but for the time being nothing came of them in practice.

Apart from the exchange of goods they facilitated, the activities of the Western trading companies contributed to a certain opening up of Iran towards the West. The companies brought large numbers of Europeans to Persia, amongst them men of great acumen and intellectual curiosity who made it their ambition to really get to know the country and its inhabitants in depth, men who recorded their observations and experiences and subsequently published them. Reports of this nature not only provided the contemporary Western world with reliable information on Persia, but constitute to this day indispensable source-material for certain areas of study. Through the agency of the trading companies, for instance by using their ships, Persian merchants also visited European countries and were able to inform themselves of cultural conditions there. Western ideas reached Persia, where their influence is clearly discernible, if not so much on intellectual life, then certainly in the field of art and in the increasing refinement of Persian culture.

In discussing the European trading companies we have already moved to the subject of external relations, which were, as has already been indicated, predominantly peaceful in the reign of ʿAbbās II. The treaty of 1049/1639 proved a reliable basis for relations with the Ottomans. In other respects the judicious restraint of the shah paid dividends. He was not tempted by such favourable opportunities to expand his territory as arose, for instance, in Transcaucasia, where the risk of war was so acute that the governor of the Turkish border provinces had even evacuated the civilian population in expectation of a Persian attack, or in Baṣra, where the shah’s aid had been sought to settle a struggle for the succession. Under these circumstances no danger threatened from the Ottomans, whether because the Porte was pursuing interests elsewhere – the conquest of Crete occurs in the period 1055–80/1645–69 – or because their desire for expansion was counterbalanced by considerable difficulties at home. A significant indication of the peaceful nature of relations between Persia and the Ottomans is the exchange of a number of legations.

Nor did any threat to peace emerge from the north-east, where in...
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Khiva a new ruler had ascended the throne in the same year as ‘Abbas II. This was Abu’l-Ghazî Khân, whom we have previously encountered as an exile in Isfahan. On the other hand, Persia was drawn into conflicts which arose amongst the Uzbeks of Bukhârâ. Here we have in mind not those incursions by nomadic Uzbek tribes which did occasionally still occur, though no longer as frequently or on so large a scale as under Shah Şâfî, but rather conflicts within the ruling dynasty. Just as Imâm Qulî Khân had in his day arrived in Isfahan as a refugee from his brother Nadr Muhammad Khân, so now this selfsame prince appeared seeking help at the Persian court after being banished from the throne by his son ‘Abd al-‘Azîz and having, if anything, further exacerbated the situation by asking the Great Mughal for military support. With Persian cooperation a settlement was arrived at between father and son, but it lasted only until the beginning of the fifties. The renewed strife, which had again led Nadr Muḥammad Khân to announce his arrival in Isfahan, was resolved by the latter’s death. From then on Persia seems to have had no further difficulties of any great significance with her Uzbek neighbours.

Nadr Muḥammad Khân’s request for aid had reached Shâh Jahân as he was beginning preparations for an attack on Transoxiana with the initial aim of securing the approach route across the Hindu Kush, across Badakhshân and Balkh, a situation of which the khan of Bukhârâ was completely unaware. Small wonder, then, that the Indian troops for whose support he was hoping had no other aim in mind than the annexation of his country. The Great Mughals, a Timurid dynasty, had consistently regarded the conquest and occupation of Central Asia as a hereditary commitment handed down from generation to generation, the legacy of their founder Zahir al-Dîn Bâbur, who, it will be recalled, had refused to give up the idea of a return to Samarqand even when it was a practical impossibility.

The Indian advance on Central Asia eventually ended in catastrophe. In Isfahan this led to a revival of the old plan to reconquer Qandahâr which had had to be abandoned on the death of Shah Şâfî. In the autumn of 1058/1648 the shah moved troops, supported by artillery, into Afghanistan and succeeded in conquering Qandahâr and the fortresses of the surrounding district before the arrival on the scene of an

Indian relief force under the command of Prince Aurangzib. A counter-attack by the Indians proved ineffectual and had to be abandoned. Even when, two years later, Shah Jahān himself advanced at the head of an army with elephants and cannon, victory was denied him, despite a siege which lasted ten weeks. The Crown Prince Dārā Shukūh, who tried his luck in 1653, also failed. His attack was repulsed by Autār Khān, who, as a former member of a diplomatic mission to the country, was well versed in Indian affairs and now turned his experience to account as the shah’s governor. Despite all efforts on the part of India, Qandahār remained in Persian hands even after the Safavid dynasty had come to an end, until the middle of the 12th/18th century, when it became a part of the emerging independent state of Afghanistan.

The illness of Shah Jahān in Dhu‘l-Qa‘da 1067/September 1657 gave rise to a war of succession among his sons, of whom Prince Dārā Shukūh attempted to gain military support for his cause from the shah. It may well be the case that some form of intervention was contemplated in Iṣfahān, for a smallish contingent of troops was detailed for this purpose. However, no measures of great significance were taken and the prince eventually fell into the hands of his brother Aurangzib, who had him executed in 1069/1659. It is possible that the prompt despatch of troops from Qandahār might have saved him.¹

In the course of his struggle for power, in 1065/1655 and 1067/1657 respectively, Aurangzib sent troops into the Deccan states of Gol-konda and Bijāpūr, both of which had previously been under Persian suzerainty. He allowed them, however, to retain a certain measure of independence and it is possible that in view of this the authorities in Iṣfahān conceived the idea of playing off the Shi‘ī princes of these states against the new Mughal emperor, himself a declared Sunni. The sending of a Persian ambassador to the states would appear to support this conjecture. If it is correct, however, the shah must very quickly have convinced himself of the futility of such a scheme, for only a short time after the coronation of Aurangzib, he resolved to recognise the Mughal’s sovereign authority. Aurangzib, whose position was still precarious, appears to have received this information with some sense of relief. If the shah’s decision was motivated by concern for the security of Qandahār, he was to be disappointed, for when ambassadors were exchanged it transpired that the Indian monarch by no

means considered this particular question closed. Subsequently tensions between Persia and India increased to such an extent that the shah, even in his last days, when he was suffering from the illness which eventually killed him, was making preparations for a campaign against India. It was not, however, destined to take place.

A dominant feature of the reign of ‘Abbās II is the indefatigable concern he personally showed for the affairs of state. This did not change even when, in 1073/1662, he displayed the first symptoms of what was to prove a long and painful illness, although his reactions to irregularities and maladministration on the part of individual dignitaries and officials became, from this point onwards, more severe and violent than in previous years. Executions for reasons of this nature were no longer a rarity. When a deterioration in the condition of the shah, who according to the descriptions of European reporters was probably suffering from syphilis,1 forced him to recuperate in Māzandarān, he still retained sufficient energy to take charge of state business even from there.

At the age of thirty-three, in the autumn of 1077/1666, probably during the night of 26 Rabī‘ II/25–6 October,2 ‘Abbās passed away in Khusrauābād, a small mountain castle between Dāmghān and Gurgān. His body was brought to Qum, where he was buried next to his father Šafī. Not without reason is his name often mentioned in the same breath as those of Ismā‘īl I and ‘Abbās I as the three outstanding ruling figures of the Safavids. Because he might otherwise have been just the man to prevent the downfall of the Safavid kingdom, there is no lack of expressions of regret at his untimely end, either in the primary sources, of which the accounts of Western visitors to Persia have the first if not the sole claim to credibility, or in the writings of historians. The validity of such speculation can best be judged by a consideration of his personality.

Surviving portraits show the shah to have been a finely proportioned young man of medium height with a longish face, sharply defined features and a wide, sweeping moustache of the kind fashion-

1 The testimony of Kaempfer, p. 56, as a physician, carries especial weight. Cf. also Chardin ix, 400.
able at the time. He was renowned for his skill in and enthusiasm for sporting activities such as riding and archery, as well as for his passionate interest in hunting.

‘Abbās II adhered to the traditional conception of the divine kingship and sacred status of the Safavids and did not hesitate to dispute the views of those theologians who argued that until the return of the departed Imām, i.e. the Mahdī, temporal power belonged by right not to the Safavid shah but to the mujtahid of the time. On the other hand, he was concerned to foster good relations with the Shi'ī jurists, which explains in part why he chose his sisters’ husbands from amongst their number. He did so also, of course, with the ulterior motive of precluding any issue eligible for succession to the throne, an eventuality he would have had to face had his brothers-in-law been members of the ruling dynasty or eminent military figures in the realm.

The desire to consolidate his own power, for decades the overriding concern of the Safavid monarchs, prompted ‘Abbās II to have his nephews killed and his four brothers blinded. Nor was he content to follow the practice hitherto customary at the court, of rendering the cornea opaque, but ordered the actual removal of their eyeballs. This fear of potential rivals did not, however, extend to his own two sons, in spite of certain misgivings concerning them in court circles. A propensity to cruelty can also be discerned in certain directives issued when ‘Abbās was in an inebriated condition. The prohibition imposed at the time of his accession by the Grand Vizier Şārū Taqī and representatives of the religious classes had been shortlived, and excessive consumption of alcohol, just as in the days of his father, had again become the order of the day at court. According to one chronicle, probably the only activity the young shah preferred to a bout of heavy drinking was watching a game of polo. Another passion he indulged was his love of the fair sex, and it would seem that his early death was not unconnected with his lack of restraint in this regard.

Although such characteristics tarnish the image of the ruler somewhat, he was by no means lacking in conspicuously good qualities which earned the praise of native and foreign observers alike. Foremost amongst these was a pronounced love of justice. He would inter-


2 Qazvīnī, *‘Abbās-nāma*, p. 315; see also Braun, *Das Erbe Schab‘Abbas* I, p. 137.
ABBAS II

vener quite ruthlessly whenever corruption or despotism, irregularities or malpractices came to his notice, irrespective of whether it was a question of the normal administration of justice or the surveillance of political and administrative bodies, both civil and military. He even went to the length of personally devoting several days a week to the administration of justice, amongst other things initiating measures to promote public safety and above all to suppress banditry and highway robbery. The energy and drive displayed by ‘Abbas in this and other areas of public life led not only to the eradication of particular abuses which had crept in since the death of his great-grandfather, but also to an overall reform of Safavid politics as such.

A clearer image of the ruler’s personality emerges when one considers his attitude towards things spiritual, intellectual and artistic, something which has already been alluded to in passing. He valued the company of intellectuals and scholars as well as that of dervishes, on whom, incidentally, he lavished considerable sums. At court he would organise discussions and debates with them on topics chosen from their sphere of interest. On occasions, moreover, committed leaders of the faith such as his Grand Vizier Khalīfa Sulṭān succeeded in inciting him in his religious zeal to attempt to convert the non-Islamic minorities of the realm. Whereas the Christians emerged relatively unscathed because they were not pursued with any great rigour or stringency, the fate of the Jews, above all the sizeable Jewish community in Isfahān, was much worse. All kinds of coercive measures and underhand practices were employed to convert them to Islam.

Measures of this nature, however, seem only marginally to have affected the general climate of religious affairs under ‘Abbas II, reliable accounts indicating as they do that, in contrast to other Islamic countries, religious discussions between Christians and Muslims were not merely permitted in Persia during this period, but actually took place frequently. Although the Islamic faith undoubtedly formed the undisputed basis of national and public life, there is ample evidence for the existence of liberal attitudes and, apart from the exceptions such as those just mentioned, the tolerance extolled by European observers of the time of ‘Abbas I seems to have reigned during this period also. This can be seen, for example, from cases in which the shah intervened against Islamic judges who in legal disputes between Christians and Muslims had unfairly favoured the latter.

The ruler’s attitude towards the fine arts shows him in a particularly
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sympathetic light. There was admittedly a long tradition of artistic inclination and aesthetic sensibility among the Safavids, but in ‘Abbās II, who was himself a practising artist, these qualities found quite outstanding expression. The painting of the time owes its charm not least to the traces of European and Indian influence detectable in it. These are the result not only of the increasing number of pictures which found their way to Persia from Europe and India but also of personal contacts between Persian artists and European and Indian masters. ‘Abbās II is himself the best example of this trend. After gaining experience of skilled craft-work in his early youth, he later received lessons in painting too, from European as well as Persian teachers.

The artistic interests of the ruler also extended to architecture and lengthy accounts of the buildings he erected in Iṣfahān are to be found in the sources. Apart from preservation and reconstruction work, however, no mention is made of the building of mosques, to which his great-grandfather owed his immortal renown as an architect. All the more significant and numerous, on the other hand, are his achievements in the field of secular architecture, such as caravansarais, bridges and palaces. Much that owed its inspiration to him has subsequently been destroyed, but to this day monuments have been preserved in the architecture of Iṣfahān which testify to his exquisite taste, such as, for instance, the most charming bridge Pul-i Khājū over the Zāyandarūd and above all the garden palace Chihil Sutūn, which in its combination of architecture and painting gives some impression of the radiance that adorned the royal household and the festivities of the shah.

ŞAFĪ II (SULAIMĀN)

With the death of ‘Abbās II, who for all his faults was a just and magnanimous – if not a liberal – monarch, Persia came once and for all to the end of a long period of peace and prosperity. Problems began to arise even on the question of the succession, for which the late shah had made no provision. Was the eldest son, the approximately nineteen-year-old Şafī Mīrzā to succeed his father in accordance with the established custom of the Safavids, even though he had not been on particularly good terms with ‘Abbās? Or would the throne fall to his favourite son Ḥamza Mīrzā, a mere seven-year-old? Despite initial support for Ḥamza Mīrzā’s claim on the part of the Grand Vizier Mīrzā
Muḥammad Mahdi, the leading figures of the realm, assembled where ‘Abbās had died, decided in favour of the older prince’s succession, merely on the basis of representations made to them by his personal tutor and confidant, the eunuch Mīrzā Āqā Mubārak. Subsequently he ascended the throne on 1 November 1666 with the title Ṣafī II.¹

The new shah, the son of a Circassian slave called Nakīḥat Khānum, had been raised, according to what by now had become the firmly established custom, in the wives’ quarters, that is in the sole company of the ladies of the harem and eunuchs, without the slightest preparation for the throne. He lacked not only experience and observation of the practice of government but also those excellent human qualities his father had possessed, although he shared with the latter such vices as excessive drinking, cruelty, principally when under the influence of alcohol, and a tendency towards immoderate sexual indulgence. To a fondness for pomp and circumstance, evinced also by his father, came in addition an inordinate extravagance, at least in the early part of his reign. Later on, admittedly, he was to swing to the opposite extreme of avarice and covetousness, two qualities that remained with him until the end of his days. Engelbert Kaempfer, a German doctor, who lived in Ḥisfahān in the years 1683—4, left behind an excellent account of the Safavid capital and of the administration of the court and country, including also a character sketch of the shah.² Alongside his more familiar faults and vices are listed irascibility, indolence and superstition, but a few good qualities also find mention: occasional acts of justice and clemency, piety, an unusual love of peace and winning social manners. Kaempfer testifies not only to the shah’s kindheartedness but also to his popularity with his subjects.

The very beginnings of Ṣafī II’s rule in Iran were anything but encouraging. The news from Mazandaran of his father’s death and his own appointment to the succession had found him, just like his grandfather before him, in a state of total unpreparedness. Never before having set foot outside the harem, he was seized with panic and responded to the invitation to appear in the throne room for his coronation only after a considerable show of reluctance, because he assumed that he was being lured there simply to be murdered or blinded. Shortly after he came to the throne, prices soared in the capital and

¹ This and the second coronation are discussed in detail by Chardin, Le couronnement de Solei-
maan Troisième [sic], roy de Perse (Paris, 1671), an account also included in his Voyages ix and x.
² Kaempfer, pp. 47—61.
there were outbreaks of famine and disease in the country. The province of Shirvan suffered a violent earthquake and in the following year the Caspian provinces had to endure the predatory raids of Stenka Razin’s Cossacks, whom the Persian forces were unable to subdue. Since all was not well with the ruler’s health either, presumably because of the dissolute life he led, one of the physicians who were striving in vain to cure him hit on the idea that all these misfortunes – not only the shah’s sickliness but all the untoward occurrences in the land – must stem from a miscalculation of the horoscope determining the date of his accession to the throne. It did not take long to find a court astrologer who confirmed this assumption, and the leading figures of the realm together with the shah duly concluded that the remedy to the situation lay in repeating the ceremony of accession.1 A new horoscope indicated 20 March 1668, at nine o’clock in the morning, as the most propitious time. The second coronation, which was again observed in every ceremonial detail, was supposed to betoken a completely fresh start. Thus, on this occasion, the shah ascended the throne under a new name also, that of Shah Sulaiman, by which he is known in history.2

However, neither the renewed accession to the throne nor the adoption of a new name by the sovereign made for an improvement in the fortunes of the Safavid kingdom. The ruler was simply not a man of substance. The qualities he had lacked previously – energy, courage, decisiveness, discipline, initiative and an eye for the national interest – all these he subsequently proved incapable of acquiring. His fundamental indifference towards the tasks of government was reinforced, as before, by his fondness for alcohol and women. As the years went by, the respective grand viziers – initially Mîrzâ Muḥammad Mahdî, who had served under ‘Abbās II, then after the latter’s death (c.1673) the Kurd Shaikh ‘Alî Zangâna until 1690, and finally Mîrzâ Muḥammad Ṭāhir Vaḥīd Qazvînî – were granted less and less frequently the morning audience with the shah which previously had been the custom. More and more he made the harem the focal point of his existence, and whilst there he was inaccessible even to his grand vizier. Thus it

1 On occasions one reads (cf. Stchoukine, Manuscrits Safavis, p. 32) that instead of Șafī II a self-appointed “usurper” ascended the throne at this time so that he could be the victim of the evil fate ordained in the stars. This is possibly connected with ancient eastern ideas: cf. K. Hecker, Die Institution des Ersatzkönigs im alten Zweistromland, probationary lecture in Freiburg, 9 Dec. 1970.

2 Occasionally he is entitled Sulaiman I, to distinguish him from the ephemeral Sulaiman II, who ruled in Mashhad in 1163/1749–50: see Lockhart, The Fall, p. 510; below, p. 329.
happened that, even when important decisions had to be made, the grand vizier was often left entirely to his own devices or, alternatively, the shah would discuss affairs of state with his wives and eunuchs and communicate through a servant of the harem any decision arrived at in this manner. Indeed, the shah even set up a privy council in the harem, to which the most important eunuchs belonged, a kind of private administration which effectively deprived the real organs of government, i.e. the council of State (divān) and the court assembly (majlis) as well as the grand vizier, of their functions. In practice state dignitaries were reduced to the level of mere executive organs of this privy council. Even when the shah condescended to participate in consultations outside the harem it was hardly ever possible to discuss in detail problems that had arisen, because he had neither the inclination nor the patience necessary to familiarise himself with the facts of a complex situation; and the leading figures of the realm had learned from bitter experience not to be too energetic in their efforts to arouse his interest. Sovereignty resided in the harem, where eunuchs, princesses and concubines intrigued constantly.

The shah's indifference, bordering on apathy, with regard to questions of political administration inevitably gave rise to grave abuses. In the absence of any effective control or sanction against oppression and exploitation, corruption was rife. In the circumstances, the practice of bestowing favours, widespread in Persia, rapidly led to bribery in public life. Sinister developments in the armed forces, of which there had been indications even under 'Abbās II, now became widespread. Oblivious of their military duties, soldiers came to regard their pay as little more than a gratuity, in exchange for which no effort was required on their part. Some contingents, indeed, existed only on paper.¹

Shah Sulaimān ruled for twenty-eight years, until 1105/1694. To judge from the observations of European travellers, the royal household was maintained with a pomp and splendour no less lavish than that which characterised earlier Safavid rulers. One reads, for example, of excursions organised by the shah with his estimated eight hundred ladies of the harem. At the beginning of his reign these took place once or twice a week, bringing the activities of whole areas of the city to a standstill,

¹ Minorsky, Tadhkīrat al-Mulūk, p. 35.
because all males, even boys and old men, were banned under penalty of death (qurūq) from the streets through which the royal procession was due to pass.\(^1\) The discrepancy between this outer veneer and the tawdry reality underneath becomes positively grotesque when one finds others, no doubt in all sincerity, reporting that the people revered this ruler and that life during his reign was not at all bad for them.\(^2\) As a matter of fact, dissatisfaction with conditions in the country did not find expression in uprisings of any significance. How is one to explain this? Undoubtedly the Persian government’s aggressive policy of centralisation since the reign of ʿAbbās I had in the meantime borne fruit. Quasi-autonomous provincial administrations had been systematically eradicated. At the same time, those elements most likely to constitute a threat to the shah, especially the Qizilbāsh and their leaders, had been divested of power and ultimately suppressed. However, this is not of itself an adequate explanation. It is doubtless also significant that, according to Malcolm,\(^3\) no events whatsoever of major importance occurred during the reign of Sulaimān. But what decisively influenced public verdict on the shah was probably the fact that he did not involve the country in war. His apathetic and nonchalant attitudes may well have been construed as a love of peace. In the judgement of the masses, reports of the dignified bearing and the external appearance of this blonde, blue-eyed man of great physical strength\(^4\) are likely to have outweighed any evidence of lack of initiative.

It is true that in the sphere of foreign policy Sulaimān avoided doing anything that might lead him into difficulties. Although the Ottomans, owing to wars with Austria, Poland and Venice, would scarcely have been capable of action on any large scale in the eastern parts of their empire, he steadfastly refused to violate the peace treaty which his grandfather had made with the Porte in 1049/1639; this despite, for instance, repeated offers from Mesopotamia (1684, 1685) and from Baṣra (1690) to re-establish Persian suzerainty there. In addition, he allowed the Dutch East India Company to establish a base on the island

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\(^1\) Details in Kaempfer, pp. 179–85.
\(^2\) Chardin, as cited in Minorsky, Tadbkirat al-Muluk, p. 23.
\(^3\) Quoted in Braun, Das Erbe Shāh ʿAbbās I, p. 159.
\(^4\) Braun, ibid., p. 156, refers to a miniature depicting Sulaimān in the Chester Beatty collection, which is reproduced in A Chronicle of the Carmelites 1, 405. The prohibition of illustrations of the shah referred to by Kaempfer, p. 48, cannot therefore have been as effective as Stchoukine, Manuscrits de Shāh ʿAbbās, p. 37, assumes.
of Kishm in the Persian Gulf. Similarly he shunned conflict with Russia when the Cossacks, in the course of their increasingly frequent incursions on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea after 1662, requested on more than one occasion that they might be placed under Persian suzerainty.

The Uzbeks were able to make plundering raids on eastern Persia without fear of vigorous reprisals. Such raids, always undertaken when the Persians least expected them, were, however, relatively small-scale actions carried out by tribes of rapacious nomads not fully integrated into the sphere of influence of the khan. At all events they did not mar the good relations the shah enjoyed with successive rulers of Bukhārā, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Khān and, after 1691/1680, the latter’s brother, Subḥān Quılı Khān. In 1685 ambassadors were exchanged in an attempt to settle existing differences diplomatically.

Another neighbouring people from the north, the Kalmucks, a Western Mongolian race from the Ust-Urt region between the Caspian and Aral Seas, had already attracted the attention of the government in Iṣfahān in the time of ‘Abbās II, at first because of an incursion into the province of Astarābād and later when a legation was sent to the Persian capital. The Kalmucks, clearly under the impression that Persia was militarily weak, made further attacks during Sulaimān’s reign. From time to time they also sent ambassadors to the Persian court again. It is, however, unlikely that they were held in any great esteem there.1

In contrast to earlier periods there were no difficulties of note with the Georgian lands. In Kakhetia the previously mentioned governor Shāhnāvāz had been succeeded in 1664 by his son Archil Khān and in 1675, for a short period, by Herakleios I (Erekle), a grandson of the famous Theimuraz. All subsequent administrators were Persians. In Kartlia, on the other hand, a native dynasty, the Mukhranids, remained under Persian suzerainty.

Because of the pomp and circumstance associated with the reception of foreign legations, detailed accounts of the diplomatic activity of the period are given both by Persian sources and by foreign travellers. European missions figure prominently, such as those from Sweden, Russia and France. Their object was usually the development of trade relations, Persian silk in particular being in great demand.

On 29 July 1694 Shah Sulaimān died in Iṣfahān at the age of forty-

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1 Kaempfer, p. 206.
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six. According to one version he suffered a stroke during a particularly heavy drinking bout.\(^1\) According to another the cause of death was gout, which had already confined him to bed for two years. Other authorities see his death as the outcome of decades of debauchery.\(^2\)

The brief sketch of his reign we have just drawn contains ample evidence of his failure as a ruler. The picture of Sulaimān the human being is no less shameful. Two instances of his insulting behaviour towards his Grand Vizier Shaikh ‘Alī Zangāna will suffice to make the point. On one occasion, after forcing the grand vizier to imbibe intoxicating liquor, he spent hours revelling at the sight of his pathetic condition. On another occasion, after ordering the removal of the grand vizier’s beard, he had the barber’s hand chopped off because he had not done the job thoroughly enough. These and other still worse atrocities of which he was guilty are grotesquely incompatible with the “saint-like” and “unblemished” status to which he laid claim and which was attributed even to this shah by his subjects.\(^3\)

Sulaimān’s only redeeming feature might perhaps be his appreciation of art, specifically painting and the work of miniaturists. He must be regarded as an outstanding connoisseur if, as is likely, it is true that as a patron he influenced directly or indirectly some of the most impressive works of the three greatest painters of the late 11th/17th century, ‘Alī Qulī Jabbadār, Muhammad Zamān and Muʿīn Muşāvvir. His promotion on the one hand of the traditional style found in Muʿīn Muşāvvir and, on the other hand, of the new tendencies inspired by Western painting which mark the work of ‘Alī Qulī Jabbadār and Muḥammad Zamān may well be evidence of an artistic taste that could, in more favourable circumstances, have led to the development of a new aesthetic sense.

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Intrigues in the harem, which had played a decisive rôle in so many of his political affairs, seem also to have determined the choice of Sulaimān’s successor. He himself had failed to nominate a crown prince. Instead, he is said to have advised the dignitaries gathered around his


\(^2\) For the last two versions, from Krusiński and the *Zahdat al-tāvārīkh* respectively, see Braun, *Das Erbe Schah ‘Abbās’ I*, p. 157.

\(^3\) Kaempfer, pp. 16f.
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sick-bed during his last hours that if they were concerned to maintain peace and quiet they should make his elder son, the twenty-six-year old Sultān Husain Mirzā his successor; if, on the other hand, they wished to strengthen royal power and expand the empire they should rather appoint the latter’s twenty-three-year old brother, ‘Abbās Mirzā. The ruler passed away at an unforeseen moment when no-one was present. His death was discovered by his aunt, Princess Maryam Begum, whose sympathies lay wholly with Prince Husain. She informed the influential eunuchs and it is unlikely that she had any difficulty in winning their support for her favourite.

His coronation on 14 Dhu’l-Hijja 1105/6 August 1694 meant the continuation of his father’s misrule, albeit in a somewhat different key. At the same time it was the prelude to the fall of the Safavid dynasty. Sultān Husain had, it is true, a reign of twenty-eight years before him, but not one, however, destined to bring happiness to the empire. He and his country, which for more than two centuries had withstood serious crises within and powerful enemies without, were to suffer a catastrophe at the hands of an opponent as unforeseen as he was basically insignificant, but whom the shah and his army were powerless to repulse. Before considering this, however, we need to discuss his character, his outlook on life and his conduct of government.

Shah Sulaimān’s statement concerning the choice of his successor, whether actually made or subsequently attributed to him, was well founded in the quite different personalities of his sons, the two eldest of a total of seven. Both had grown up in the seclusion of the harem and neither of them had received an education or preparation of any kind for the tasks which awaited a future monarch of Persia. Manliness, bellicosity, sobriety and adroitness were the main characteristics of Prince ‘Abbās. Sultān Husain was totally different: a placid, social personality, studious, abstemious and, even in his early years, pious to such a degree that he was given the nickname “Mulla Husain” by those around him. His indifference towards the governmental duties assigned to him – in this respect he was just like his father – found expression in another nickname he was given, Yakhshidir (“very well!”), which was his stock response whenever matters of government were expounded to him.

In the good intentions with which he began his reign the new shah had the support of the Shaikh al-Islām Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī
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(b. 1037/1627, d. 1111/1699), a famous theologian on whom Shah Sulaimān had already conferred office. Initially, it looked as though this man, who had girded on Ḥusain’s sword during the solemn investiture,\(^1\) would prevent the young monarch from following in the evil ways of his predecessors. He was the driving force behind Ḥusain’s first decrees, which forbade abuses of the religious code that had become widespread, such as unbridled consumption of alcohol. On his initiative too the ṣūfīs were banished from the capital, members of the very order of which the shah himself was master but with whom he no longer felt any affinity.

The influence exerted by Muḥammad Bāqir and his theologians inevitably roused the jealousy of the people of the harem, the eunuchs and the princesses. Anxious not to lose power, they did their utmost to counteract any attempts to weaken their position; and not without success, as shown by the fate of the ban on alcohol just mentioned. Cunningly exploiting the concept of moral infallibility associated with the office of shah, a Shi'i version of the maxim “the king can do no wrong”, they successfully tempted Ḥusain to indulge in wine drinking. Here again the Princess Maryam Begum, herself a hardened wine drinker, played a significant rôle.

Although at first sight these events appear to stem from a palace intrigue on the part of various pressure groups composed of court and state dignitaries, their real causes lie deeper. These will be dealt with in our concluding remarks, but at least some allusion to them is necessary at this point in the discussion. It will be recalled that Shah ‘Abbās I had not only destroyed the military might of the Qizilbāsh but also neutralised the more strongly religious elements of the group, the ṣūfīs proper – by that time the arms-bearing ghāzīs could probably no longer be regarded as actually identical with the practising members of the ṣūfī order. ‘Abbās I had put the latter firmly in their place in 998/1589–90 after a trial of strength to which they had challenged him. From then on he had suppressed their influence more and more, most effectively by a policy of ignoring them or treating them with contempt. After his death their standing suffered still further, especially when in the reign of Shah ‘Abbās II a group of well-versed theologians appeared on the

\(^1\) Lockhart, *The Fall*, p. 38, writes: “Sultān Ḥusain refused to let the Šūfīs gird him with the sword in the customary manner, and called upon the Shaikh al-Īslām to do so instead.” ŠāFI II (Sulaimān) had done the same at his coronation: Lambton, “Quis custodiet custodes?”, *SI* vi (1916), 141f.; Braun, *Das Erbe Schab ‘Abbās I*, p. 50.
scene who were no longer prepared to recognise “the mystic vagaries of the earlier period”. ¹ This group, the ‘ulamāʾ, with the mujtahid at their head, advanced unassailable Shiʿī doctrines to refute the religious concepts of the şūfīs and resolutely strove, for their own part, to win power over the shah. In the case of Shah Sulaimān and, as will now be seen, Shah Sulṭān Ḥusain, they succeeded. Of the ‘ulamāʾ, the group which thus greatly increased in strength, a prominent representative was Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī. As his theological writings prove, he was a man of great erudition, but this in no way diminished his interest in secular power. Nor, certainly, did it counteract a religious intolerance on his part from which not only Christians and Jews but also Sunnīs, the aforementioned şūfīs and even philosophers were made to suffer. The shah let him have his own way. Far from unifying the population of the country, this policy of intolerance, which was also pursued by Muḥammad Bāqir’s grandson and successor Mīr Muḥammad Ḥusain, tended to sow dissension because it encouraged people to denounce one another. It was one of the factors that subsequently, in the hour of need, rendered religious commitment ineffective as a stimulus to popular resolve to defend the country.

A truly paradoxical situation characterises the final phase of Safavid rule. A monarch, pious to the point of bigotry, submits to the demands of orthodox Shiʿī theologians, the adversaries of his ancestors who had won over the nation to Shiʿism and preserved it in that belief. Of course these ancestors, especially Ismāʿīl, the founder of the state, had held radically different views of Shiʿism from the theologians who now triumphed as power slipped from the hands of a weak and irresolute ruler. These did not use their power to the best advantage of the country, any more than did their rivals inside the harem, who with few exceptions were men of little ability. The decline in royal power, the indifference of the shah with regard to the affairs of state, his lack of initiative, energy and consistency ruled out all possibility of progress in the country, whether one considers trade and commerce, administration or agriculture, the national finances or the army. Nor were successes in foreign policy to be achieved in the prevailing circumstances. Nevertheless, the institutions of state continued to function, even if ominous signs of ossification and torpor became noticeable, for example, in the military sphere.

¹ See Minorsky, Tadbkirat al-Mulūk, p. 125.
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Even cultural life continued on its way, in some fields with considerable achievements. Examples of craftwork, such as ceramics, metalwork and textiles, testify to the uninterrupted activity at the monarch's court workshops. Their products nowadays enjoy immense popularity amongst collectors and museums throughout the world. Architecture, too, remained productive. The shah was responsible for the improvement and extension of his palace buildings and the Madrasa-yi Chahârbâgh, founded by his mother, is even one of the masterpieces of Safavid architecture. Contacts with Europe continued: we learn of legations from the courts of Louis XIV and Peter the Great in 1708, as well as a further legation from the Tsar in 1715. Persia herself sent diplomatic missions, for example to France. Although these exchanges were concerned primarily with specific problems of international trade, they were at the same time not without significance for the cultural and particularly the artistic development of the country. They brought aesthetic ideas from the West to Persia, European works of art such as paintings and even Western artists and craftsmen. Thus the already mentioned European influence on Persian art, especially painting, was enhanced. Clearly the shah himself did not stand in the way of this development, since he even agreed to pose for a Dutch portrait painter.¹ In this respect, at any rate, he had no religious scruples.

The religious policy just referred to, which was designed to impose Shi'I Islam as the sole confession in Persia, naturally created a good deal of bad blood because of the forcible conversion of Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians and relatively small groups of Shi'I sectarians, but it had positively devastating consequences for the more or less closed Sunnî sections of the population. If they lived near the borders, such communities reacted to the pressure of forcible conversion by developing separatist tendencies. This occurred in the Afghan areas of the Safavid empire, and it was there in the region of Zamîndâvar and Qandahâr that the storm gathered which was eventually to cause the downfall of the shah.

The warlike tribe of the Ghalzai² had penetrated into these areas,

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the population of which had been severely reduced during the reign of ʿAbbās I with the resettlement of the Abdālīs in Herat. The Ghalzai policy of playing off the Persian governor of Qandahār against the Mughal governor in Kābul had so far helped them to overcome considerable difficulties. Inveterate Sunnīs as they were, the Ghalzai now attempted to counter Persian religious pressures by treating with India. Initially they had no intention of rebelling against the Persians, towards whom, if anything, they were more favourably inclined than to the Mughals. But a sudden switch in policy occurred when, as a result of an attack by the Balūchīs which the commandant of Qandahār proved powerless to resist, Gurgīn Kān (i.e. the former King Giorgi XI of Kartlia) was appointed governor-general in May 1704 and dispatched together with his forces from Kirmān to Qandahār. Brutal treatment at the hands of the Georgians now provoked a revolt amongst the Ghalzai. Gurgīn Kān suppressed them, took prisoner their leader, the wealthy and influential Mīr Vais, and sent him to Iṣfahān. Although Gurgīn Kān had warned that his prisoner was a dangerous man, Mīr Vais managed to gain the favour of the shah and even to arouse his suspicion against the governor-general. A few years later he returned to Qandahār a free man and Gurgīn Kān was unable to take any action against him. During his long stay in the capital he had gained a deep insight into the abuses of the government and central administration.

In April 1709, when a large proportion of the Georgian troops had left on an expedition in the provinces, Mīr Vais staged a carefully planned coup. Surprising the governor-general in a camp outside the fortress, he overpowered and defeated him together with his followers. Later, when the expeditionary force returned, it was unable to retrieve the situation. The man sent to quell the rebellion, Kai-Khusrau, prefect of Iṣfahān and a nephew of Gurgīn Kān, proved unequal to the task. It took him more than a year and a half even to arrive on the scene although the forces at his disposal – Georgians and Qizilbash, who were joined in Herat by a group of the Abdālī tribe, hereditary foes of the Ghalzai – were numerically strong. Despite initial successes, he was brought to a standstill outside the walls of Qandahār, and lack of reinforcements as well as the outbreak of an epidemic amongst his troops forced him to raise the siege at the end of October 1711. As he retreated the pursuing Ghalzai inflicted a crushing defeat which also cost him his life. The next commander to be entrusted with the recon-
quest of Qandahār, the qūrchi-bāshī Muḥammad Zamān Khān Shāman, fell ill and died en route in Herat long before his forces could make contact with the enemy.

Whether these failures helped to persuade the authorities in Iṣfahān that nothing could be achieved against the Ghalzai with forces of the quality hitherto dispatched, or whether the indifference of the shah had now spread to those members of the government who had so far retained an inclination for decisive action, Mīr Vais suffered no further attacks from the central government in the years up to his death in 1127/1715. He subjected the whole territory of Qandahār to his control and ruled it as an independent prince, if only under the modest title of vakīl (“administrator”). The plans sometimes attributed to him of marching on Iṣfahān, dethroning the shah and assuming sovereign command in Persia seem to have scarcely any foundation in fact and are probably embellishments of the truth in the light of subsequent developments.1 The starting point of these developments may be discerned in the policies initiated by Mīr Vais, and he might even be regarded as a pioneer of Afghan independence, though not as its founder. Since his ambitions did not extend so far, that title is usually reserved for another tribal leader, Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī, who does not come to full historical prominence until thirty years later. One reason for this may be that the latter’s tribe has greater claims to be called Afghan than the Ghalzai, namely the Aḥḍālīs2 of Herat, whom we have just encountered as the hereditary foes of the Ghalzai and allies of the luckless Kai-Khusraw. The Aḥḍālīs, finding themselves in a plight similar to that of their adversaries in Qandahār, revolted against oppression and exploitation by representatives of the central government in Iṣfahān. The shah sent one force after another to suppress the uprising, but they all failed. Although the warlike spirit of the Afghans was a contributory factor, the lack of training and discipline on the part of the troops sent and the incompetence and inadequate fighting experience of their leaders was of greater account, as ample evidence from both Persian and Western sources shows.

In the face of such catastrophic information from the east of the

1 Lockhart, *The Fall*, p. 92, and appendix VI, especially p. 543.
2 Boldly speculative attempts are sometimes made to link the Aḥḍālī tribe with the Hephthalites of the 5th and 6th centuries A.D.. Later the Aḥḍālīs acquired the name Durrānī, by which they are still known today, after Durr al-durrān, an epithet attached to his name by the above mentioned Aḥmad Shāh. See Lockhart, “Aḥḍālī”; M.E. Yapp, “Durrānī”.

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country — to which may be added the news of the occupation of Bahraín and other islands of the Persian Gulf by Sulțan b. Saif II, the imām of ‘Umān — Princess Maryam Begum, who still had a certain influence over the shah, tried to stimulate him to a more effective course of action. As a result he transferred his court in the winter of 1129—30/1717—18 to Qazvīn, hoping that he might be able to raise more efficient fighting troops in the north-west. During the three years he spent there, however, not a single successful expedition was made against the Abdālīs or the Ghalzai. Opportunities for effective intervention doubtless arose; it was merely a question of choosing the right moment. But in practice Sulțan Ḥusain and his advisers allowed events in the east to take their course. During the turbulent period associated with the Abdālī uprising, which spread from Herat to Mashhad, events of vital interest to the shah were occurring, as it were, behind the scenes. For the brother and successor of the vakīl, ‘Abd al-‘Āzīz, intended in spite of all the opposition the idea aroused amongst his fellow tribesmen to announce his submission to Sultan Ḥusain. The intention proved fatal. In 1129/1717 it prompted Mīr Maḥmūd, a son of his late brother, to murder him and seize power. It seems that nobody at the Persian court was even aware of the opportunity that an arrangement with ‘Abd al-‘Āzīz might have offered. Similarly the Persians made little attempt to exploit the opportunities arising from the internal power struggles of the Abdālī leaders and failed to profit from the conflicts between the Abdālīs and the Ghalzai which soon developed. When Mīr Maḥmūd sent the shah the head of the Abdālī leader Asad-Allāh who had fallen in battle (1132/1719—20), the most obvious interpretation of the gesture — that it was a disarming ploy — never even occurred to him. Choosing instead to see it as a manifestation of loyalty, he appointed Mīr Maḥmūd governor-general with the title Ḥusain Qull Khān and sent him a royal robe of honour.

The death-blow to the Safavid kingdom did eventually come from the east, but it was impossible to foresee that it would happen as it did. Nor, initially, did the government locate the principal danger in that direction. Given the incursions from Russia mentioned earlier, Peter the Great’s interest in Persia should have given cause for alarm, and a Russian attack on the south-west coast of the Caspian Sea was in fact to occur in the summer of 1134/1722. By that time, however, Safavid
might was in any case at the last gasp, and the Russians achieved little more than the capture of Darband.¹

There was unrest amongst the Lezgians, a Sunnī people in the northwest of the country, even though one of their number was Grand Vizier. The Shīrvānīs, also Sunnī, were led by the intolerance of their Persian governors to appeal for aid to the Porte. This may have contributed to Durrī Efendi's being sent to Persia as ambassador, a move by which Istanbul probably hoped to gain a clearer picture of Persian affairs. In 1719 the Lezgians became involved in armed conflict, first with the Shīrvānīs, then with the Georgians under Vakhtang VI of Tiflis. The latter was just preparing to deal a final, crushing blow to the Lezgians when the government intervened to prevent him. Although the Lezgians were saved the future loyalty of the Georgian prince was forfeited. Rebellious Kurds occupied Hamadān and penetrated almost to the outskirts of Isfahān. In Khūzistān rivalry for the office of viceroy (vālī) led to unrest among the Musha‘sha‘. Balūchī tribes made plundering raids on Bam and Kirmān.

Since the government could not possibly contemplate dealing with all these potential threats simultaneously it chose to concentrate on what in its view was the most dangerous: the Arabs on the Persian Gulf and the imām of ‘Umān, who in occupying the Gulf islands had of course already encroached on Persian territory. The Grand Vizier (i‘timād al-daula) Fath ‘Alī Khān Dāghistānī entrusted the task to his nephew, Lutf ‘Alī Khān, the governor of Fārs, who assembled a force of 9,000 men which he intended to transport to ‘Umān in Portuguese ships. But the project was not destined to reach fruition.

It seemed as if the government’s attention was diverted from Qandahār as a result of this plan. There the young Maḥmūd — he was only eighteen years old when he seized power — was gaining the respect of his fellow tribesmen through his warlike bearing and his cunning. It suited his plans that the death of Aurangzīb in 1118/1707 had provoked a crisis in the Mughal empire, which meant that he was safe from surprise attacks on that flank. At the end of 1719 he gained an unqualified success when he advanced on Kirmān with 11,000 men. The startled governor took flight and the Ghalzai were able to occupy the city without difficulty. Soon, however, they were forced to march back to Qandahār because Maḥmūd’s position there was threatened.

¹ Lockhart, The Fall, pp. 176–89.
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The sudden attack on Kirmān must have caused Fath ‘Alī Khān to change his mind. At all events he endeavoured to divert the government’s interest from the Persian Gulf and to concentrate it instead on Qandahār. He urged that all the armed forces should be marched there, the shah himself and the government taking part in the campaign in order to lend the desired weight to the operation for the benefit of external observers. The assembled court did in fact set off for the east at the end of 1132/beginning of October 1720, but it advanced no further than Tehran.

The grand vizier’s standing at court was problematical, partly as he was a Lezgian and not a Persian proper, but above all because of his Sunnī beliefs which were considered unthinkable by those dignitaries still capable of reasoning in the old Safavid-Shī‘ī categories. Moreover, he could not rely on the shah, apathetic, irresolute and inconsistent as he was. In these circumstances every member of the government and court strove to realise his own particular aims — or at least each pressure group did — and to thwart the opposing plans of others. In this way the proposed Qandahār campaign had met with violent opposition. The chief opponents of the grand vizier were the mūllā-bāshī, Muḥammad Husain, and the royal physician (ḥakīm-bāshī), Raḥīm Khān, in this case because of the increased power and prestige a successful campaign might bring him. With the help of a forged letter to a Kurdish tribal chief they made accusations of high treason against him to the shah. Fath ‘Alī Khān was alleged to be part of a Sunnī conspiracy to depose the monarch and assume power himself. Without investigating the charge, Sultan Husain relieved him of his office and had him blinded and imprisoned. Luṭf ‘Alī Khān was likewise accused of complicity in the plot, enticed from Shīrāz to Isfahān and there thrown into prison.

Any continuation of the march to Qandahār was now out of the question. The court turned back to Isfahān, where it arrived at the end of April 1721. Those of Luṭf ‘Alī Khān’s troops who had not already dispersed, now the only remaining operational force of the shah, were dispatched under a different command against the Afghans. As a result of various conflicts on the way, however, they were almost totally wiped out long before their destination was reached. Although by no means all authors agree in their judgment of Fath ‘Alī Khān Dāghistānī,1 it is certain that in eliminating him and his nephew the shah had removed

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1 For the varying views, see ibid., p. 106; Muḥammad Ḥāshim, Rustam al-tawārīkh, ed. M. Mushīrī (Tehran, 1348), p. 91 and n. 1.
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the two strongest pillars of the now shaky edifice of his power. The
accounts of the Turkish ambassador Durri Efendi, who left Persia at this
time, confirm precisely what his Russian counterpart Volynsky had
reported to the Tsar two years earlier, namely that Safavid rule was on
the point of collapse because of a lack of talented personalities in the
government.

As a result of the fall of their tribesman Fath 'Ali Khan, unrest
among the Lezgians increased. Together with fellow-Sunnis from
Shirvan and other Transcaucasian areas they besieged and conquered
the capital of Shirvan, Shamakh, taking terrible revenge for earlier
Shi'i oppression and placing themselves and the city under the sover-
eignty of the Sultan of Turkey. In the meantime the government had
also lost its influence in the south and south-west of Iran, and chaos
had supervened.

The Safavid empire was in flames, but it still enjoyed a respite which
might have saved it from utter ruin – a respite, however, of which no
advantage was taken. Immediately after his return from Tehran, Sultan
Husain repaired to his favourite castle of Farahabad on the other side
of the Zayandarud and occupied himself with its further development,
seemingly oblivious of the reasons for the campaign that he had
intended to pursue only shortly before. Only when news arrived that
Mahmud was again about to enter Kirmán did the government in
Isfahán begin to appreciate the seriousness of the situation.

The Ghalzai had indeed arrived outside the city on 22 October 1721,
but after suffering heavy casualties during an unsuccessful attack on the
citadel Mahmud decided to forgo a renewed attempt, probably because
of the risk of further losses, and marched on. A similar situation
occurred in Yazd, where after an unsuccessful blockade Mahmud
raised the siege in exchange for the payment of a high tribute and
continued his march in the direction of Isfahán. Authorities there must
by this time have realised that Mahmud was out to clinch matters, if
reports are true that en route he was twice interrupted by messengers
of the shah who were to offer financial inducements to halt his advance.
Mahmud rejected such offers, rightly inferring that Sultan Husain's
preparations for defence could not be very strong.

In Sagzí, twenty-five miles east of Isfahán, he received intelligence
of a Persian force advancing against him. He then continued his march
only as far as the village of Muhammadrabad where he divided his
troops, positioning them on three hills where they had an uninterrupted view over a plain stretching some 4,000 yards or more to the next village, Gulnābād. The Ghalzai forces were not all that strong: probably 10,000 men, to which must be added the support troops of the Hazāras and Balūchīs. Although details of the numerical strength of the two sides vary considerably in the sources, it is in all unlikely that Māhmūd had more than 18,000 combatants at his disposal, and allowance must be made for the losses he had so far incurred: the abortive assault on the citadel of Kirmān alone had cost him 1,500 men.1

On 7 March 1722 the Persian forces arrived on the battlefield. Their army of 42,000 men was superior, numerically and in various other respects, to that of the Afghans. Although it contained a fairly large proportion of hastily assembled volunteers who were inadequately trained and armed, there were also experienced fighting troops such as the corps of royal squires (qullar), which included a four-hundred-strong guards unit under the command of the experienced Georgian general Rustam Khān; a 12,000 strong corps of Arab cavalry commanded by the vālī of ‘Arabistān, who is said to have been called Sayyid ‘Abd-Allāh; two Lorian contingents of mounted tribal warriors, one under the command of ‘Alī Mardān Khān Fālī, the other under ‘Alī Rīzā Khān from Kūhgilüya; and a detachment of artillery with twenty-four guns commanded by a Persian with the assistance of an experienced French master-gunner. When battle commenced the following afternoon, the Persians gained initial successes that very nearly reduced Māhmūd to a state of panic. It soon became apparent, however, that there was a total lack of coordination on the Persian side. There was no unified supreme command, responsibility being shared by two men who were, what is more, sworn enemies. They were the new Grand Vizier (i‘timād al-daula) Muḥammad Quṭb Khān Shāmlū and the vālī of ‘Arabistān. The latter owed his position to the special favour of the shah whilst the Grand Vizier, as a former general of the guards (qūrčī-bāshī), was expected to possess military ability — a totally unwarranted assumption. The Persians’ main asset, their heavy artillery, was scarcely of any account because the Afghans succeeded in eliminating it early in the battle. Whereas the absence of a clear hierarchy of command proved

1 For a survey of the different figures for the strength of the two sides found in the sources, see Lockhart, The Fall, p. 136.
fatal to the Persians, the superior coordination of their own forces enabled the Afghans to make the best of a bad job even in awkward situations. By the end of the day the Persian forces had collapsed and were retreating in undisciplined fashion into Iṣfahān. Their losses are estimated at 5,000 men, whereas the Afghans are said to have lost only a tenth of that number. Only fear of an ambush prevented the Afghans from pursuing the defeated Persians into the city.

It seems that Maḥmūd did not immediately realise the full extent of the Persian defeat and the demoralisation it entailed. The fact that he had neglected to take the citadels of both Kirmān and Yazd during the course of his advance may well suggest that a military engagement with the shah was his major aim, but it does not necessarily imply that he had in mind the destruction of Safavid rule from the very outset of his campaign. At any rate, the victory does not appear to have deprived him of the capacity for making a realistic assessment of the possibilities open to him. It is difficult otherwise to explain why he let three days go by before resuming his march on Iṣfahān, now only nineteen miles away. On reaching the area south of the Zāyandarūd, he came upon Sultān Ḥusain’s favourite castle of Farahābād. In spite of the existence of defence works, he was able to take it without a fight and set up his headquarters there. The Armenian suburb Julfā was then plundered and a tribute ruthlessly exacted from the inhabitants, to whom — rather than to Persian soldiers — it owed its defence. These actions suggest that the Afghan troops were still very much aware of the fact that they might suddenly have to retreat. Maḥmūd no doubt saw clearly that the victory of Gulnābād had been won to a large extent thanks to a combination of favourable circumstances; nor is he likely to have forgotten that at one moment during the battle he had been close to accepting defeat and retreating. Finally, he must have realised that in spite of the defeat the shah’s military resources were as yet by no means exhausted.

One thing, for the moment at least, that the Ghalzai leader could not be expected to know was the absurd state of affairs that the shah, whenever a decision was required of him, was more or less guaranteed to choose the alternative least favourable or even fatal to his cause. Despite repeated disasters, he remained stubbornly faithful to those counsellors whose advice had constantly proved detrimental, especially the mullā-bāshī, Mīr Muḥammad Ḥusain, grandson and successor of the famous theologian Muḥammad Bāqir Majlīsī, and the royal physician, Raḥīm Khān. Each of these men had, as we have seen, acted as
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evil genius to the ruler at an earlier stage. They were now joined by the vālī of ‘Arabistān, for whom the shah had a particularly high regard despite his failure in the battle of Gulnābād. He persisted in his opinion when rumours too loud to ignore indicated that the governor was conspiring with the enemy and even when incontrovertible evidence of the fact came to light.

First in a whole series of fatal mistakes made by the shah was his decision to remain in Iṣfahān instead of mobilising fresh troops in other parts of the country to combat the Afghans. His peace proposal, which probably reached the Afghans as they were advancing on the capital, may more than anything else have given the game away and confirmed them in their intentions. On two occasions he then rejected Maḥmūd’s offers of negotiation, one at the beginning of April, the other at the beginning of August 1722. He imposed a general ban on leaving the city and failed to evacuate the civilian population when it would still have been feasible. He successively dismissed the two royal princes Maḥmūd Mīrzā and Šafī Mīrzā from the position of crown prince and from their military functions, merely because of acts of intervention on their part of which his advisers disapproved.1 In addition, he dispatched to Kāshān and Qazvin the unreliable Prince Ṭahmāsp, who, instead of raising a relief force and returning with it to the sorely pressed capital as he had been commanded, engaged in dissolute pleasures. Finally, he even dismissed Ḥmād Āghā, the capable general of the royal squires (qullar-āqāṣī), because in the heat of the moment his troops had taken revenge on some of the vālī’s Arab cavalrymen who had left them in the lurch during a sortie.

At the beginning of April Maḥmūd succeeded in capturing a bridge in the ‘Abbasābād quarter and establishing a bridgehead. A little later he was able to link up with contingents based in the east and north, thus making it impossible to either leave or enter the city without risk. Given its size – Kaempfer set its circumference at 57 miles2 – the Afghan troops were unable to encircle the city completely, but Maḥmūd did establish powerful strong points, between which units of cavalry constantly patrolled.

In the circumstances, living conditions in the city became increasingly difficult. Supplies of food ceased, and to prevent their being

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2 Quoted in Lockhart, *The Fall*, p. 477.
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resumed in future Maḥmūd ordered all crops in the area to be destroyed. The shah made every effort to obtain relief. The most important fighting force, the Georgians, who could probably have dealt with the Afghans on their own, had to be ruled out when Vakhtang VI refused to come to the shah’s aid because he had not yet forgotten the latter’s intervention on behalf of the Lezgians. Other contingents such as the Bakhtiyār under Qāsim Khān, the Lurs of ‘Alī Mardān Khān or the 10,000 strong force advancing under the command of Malik Maḥmūd Sīstānī, the governor of Tūn and Ṭabas, were either repulsed by the Afghans or ultimately had second thoughts, in part convinced by Maḥmūd of the pointlessness of their enterprise.

From mid-June onwards there was famine in Iṣfahān. All attempts to depose the shah or to persuade him to abdicate were of no avail. At the end of August, when the famine was at its height and more and more people were dying of starvation and disease, despair spread throughout the city. Cannibalism was rife, the dead could no longer be buried and thousands lost their lives in hopeless attempts to escape. In the end the coffers of both government and crown were empty and troops could only be paid out of funds loaned to the shah against the security of the crown jewels by the Dutch and, to a lesser extent, the British East India Companies.

By the beginning of October even the shah was convinced that further resistance was pointless, and he capitulated to Maḥmūd. The latter was not, however, prepared to receive him before 23 October 1722. The meeting took place in the morning of that day in the castle of Farāhābād. The shah announced his abdication and the transfer of power to Maḥmūd, as a gesture of confirmation taking from his head the bejewelled tuft of heron’s feathers (jiqa), the symbol of monarchy, and affixing it to Maḥmūd’s turban with his own hands. Two days later Maḥmūd entered Iṣfahān in solemn triumph. Sultan Husain rode at his left hand and, on arrival in the audience chamber of the royal palace, was obliged to acknowledge Maḥmūd as his successor once more, this time before the assembled military dignitaries, the viziers and the nobles of the realm.

THE LAST SAFAVIDS

Ghalzai supremacy was to represent only a brief interlude in the history of Persia, coming to an end as early as 1730 with the fall of Ashraf,
Maḥmūd’s cousin and successor. Apart from the liquidation of the already tottering Safavid dynasty, it was scarcely of any significance. The Afghans were able neither to counteract Russian and Turkish incursions into Iranian territory nor to eradicate hotbeds of unrest in various parts of the country, whether these emerged before or after the fall of the Safavid empire. Least of all did they manage to restore the unity of Persia. They even proved incapable of reviving life in the sorely tried capital in which they now resided.¹

The seventy-five years leading up to the end of the 12th/18th century have been not inaccurately described by Perry as a morass of anarchy² in which three periods, those of the Afšārs, the Zands and the early Qājārs, stand out like islands. During each a strong and relatively sensible government was headed by a figure of significance: Nādīr Shāh, Karīm Khān Zand and Āghā Muḥammad respectively. The extent to which the traditions of the Safavids were taken over, preserved, adapted, diminished or enlarged by these rulers before they passed to the Qājārs and were finally handed down, via the 19th century, to the modern age, is a problem for the cultural historian. Within the narrower framework of Safavid history, our task is to investigate attempts to continue or resurrect the Safavid empire that were made either by members of the dynasty or with their assistance.

When the central government in Iṣfahān came to an end the Safavids were by no means totally eliminated. On the contrary, individual representatives of the dynasty were still to play a certain part in the political life of the country. Strictly speaking, there were Safavid puppet rulers and periods of partial Safavid rule until as late as 1187/1773, the year in which Ismā’īl III, last of the Safavid rois fainéants, died; and the efforts of genuine Safavid princes or impostors to gain power in various parts of Persia were of considerable significance.

No share in subsequent historical developments was granted to Sulṭān Husain, nor is it likely that he sought any. During his lifetime, Maḥmūd ensured that he was well treated although, like all Safavid princes resident in Iṣfahān, he was imprisoned. He remained in prison

¹ The Persian forces are said to have lost 20,000 men in the course of the siege, and civilian losses are put at 80,000. If the population was really 650,000 at the end of the Safavid period, an enormous migration must have occurred as a result of the siege and the capture of the city by the Afghans. A census of 1882 lists only 73,614 inhabitants, and an estimate made by Schindler in 1893 gives 82,000. Even the rise in population in the last few decades has not yet caught up with the Safavid figure: see Lambton, “Iṣfahān”, EP; Lockhart, The Fall, pp. 169, 476ff.

² Perry, “The last Safavids”, p. 59.
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until 1139/1726, when he was beheaded on the orders of Ashraf as a result of an insulting letter the latter had received from the Ottoman general Ahmed Pasha, then operating in Persia. He called Ashraf a usurper and informed him that he considered it his duty to reinstate the legitimate ruler of Iran whom the Afghans had deposed. Only a year before, probably in a fit of persecution mania, Mahmud Shâh had killed the majority of the princes imprisoned with Sultan Husain, some of them with his own hands.¹

For wide sections of the population in Iran the collapse of the Safavid empire that occurred when Sultan Husain relinquished the throne and power was assumed by Mahmud was a catastrophe greater than anything they could possibly have imagined. The result was an almost universal willingness to accept without question any sign of the continued existence of the dynasty or its possible revival — an ideal situation for pretenders! One source² lists eighteen of them in the Afghan period alone, and no less than twelve more are mentioned by chroniclers of the reigns of Nâdir Shâh and his immediate successors. A number of these claimants found support in widely differing areas of the country and managed to occupy or conquer cities and strongholds. Not infrequently they were able to defeat strong regular troops, including even Ottoman invasion forces. Sooner or later, however, they failed because their supporters proved inadequate in numbers or lacked perseverance when really put to the test.

The claims of these pretenders to be Safavid princes — no fewer than three Safi Mîrzâs and three Ismâ’îl Mîrzâs emerged — were at best dubious and as a rule totally without foundation. Yet genuine princes of the fallen dynasty did exist, as well as others whose claims, whilst doubtful, could not simply be rejected out of hand. As we have already seen, Tâhmâsp Mîrzâ (b. 1704), appointed crown prince by Sultan Husain, succeeded in breaking through the Afghan lines during the siege of Isfahân and managed to reach Qazvîn. There, as early as 30 Muḥarram 1135/10 November 1722, he had himself proclaimed shah, had the style of Shah Tahmâsp II included in official prayers and on the coinage, and issued decrees (arqâm) in all parts of the country, announcing his accession to the throne. Although his was only a nominal

¹ Lockhart, *The Fall*, table following p. 472, names fifteen, although sometimes the numbers given are considerably higher.
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rule, he reigned in fact for a good ten years. In addition to Ṭahmāsp, another prince, Mīrzā Sayyid Ahmad, son of Shah Sulaimān’s eldest daughter, had managed to escape. In 1139/1726 he rose to the level of ruler in Kirmān and proved to be a serious opponent in combats with the forces of both Ṭahmāsp II and the Afghans. He did indeed constitute a greater threat to the Afghans than Ṭahmāsp, and accordingly received more attention from them. Eventually he was defeated and brought as a prisoner to the Afghan chieftain, who had him executed in 1140/1728.

In foreign affairs, the greatest threat to Persia after the abdication of Sulṭān Ḥusain came from Russian and Ottoman designs on territory in the Caspian provinces and the north-west of the country respectively. Russian troops were already present in Darband and other places on the shores of the Caspian Sea. The Ottomans, for their part, were not slow to act. Sending a declaration of war in 1135/1723, they marched troops into Georgia and – via Kirmānshāh and Hamadān – into Persia itself. The policy of Ṭahmāsp II, who had been forced to withdraw from Qazvīn to Tabrīz by the Afghans, from there to Ardabil by the Turks and ultimately via Ray to Māzandarān, again by the Turks, was dictated by the notion that his position at home would be consolidated if only the Russians and Ottomans could be induced to recognise him as the legitimate ruler of Persia. With this in mind he had sent negotiators to Istanbul and St Petersburg. As a result the Porte changed its view in his favour, but in a treaty for the division of western Persia, concluded by the Sultan and the Tsar for 2 Shawwāl 1136/24 June 1724, the two powers merely expressed a desire to help the shah to achieve “his legitimate rights”. Moreover, he was to restrict himself to the territory in the west of the country, defined by the places Ardabil, Sultāniyya and Qazvīn.

Ṭahmāsp II’s first vakil al-daula was Fath ‘All Khan Qajar. He was followed by Nadr Qulī Beg Afshār, a particularly capable military commander who successfully fought the Afghans and the Turks on his behalf and subjugated Āzarbāijān, Georgia and most of Armenia. In other respects, too, he did everything to gain the shah’s favour. In 1138/1726 he had conferred upon him the title Tahmāsp Qulī (“servant of Ṭahmāsp”) and by driving out the Afghan Ashraf he even made it

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1 For official documents he issued, see Fragner, “Ardabil zwischen Sultan und Schah”.
2 Probably identical with the prince of the same name who is listed as a grandson of the princess in Lockhart’s table referred to in p. 326, n. 1, above.
possible for the shah to return to Isfahān. It became increasingly clear, however, that the weak and unreliable shah was incapable of being anything more than a puppet in the general’s hands, and when he suffered a heavy defeat in a battle with the Turks the latter’s patience came to an end. He exposed the shah publicly as a drunkard and dethroned him.

He clearly still thought it advisable, however, to take account of popular sympathy for the Safavids, otherwise he would scarcely have nominated a new Safavid shah, the deposed monarch’s eight-month-old son, who as ‘Abbās III was puppet king from 1144/1732 to 1148/1736. The general then deposed him as well and mounted the throne himself under the name Nādir Shāh. Tāhmāsp II and ‘Abbās III were imprisoned and executed in 1740 at Sabzavār together with Ismā‘īl, another son of Tāhmāsp.

Although it is true that the Afshār tribe to which he belonged was one of the Qizilbāsh tribes which had contributed in large measure to the rise of the Safavids,¹ Nādir Shāh’s general outlook by no means accorded with the Safavid conception of the state. Two things demonstrate this clearly: his religious policy, which involved a turning away from the Twelver Shī‘a, and his decision to transfer the capital to Mashhad. Although this city lay in the middle of his Khurasanian homeland, the main reason for the transfer was more probably its central position within the extensive territory that Nādir Shāh thought of as his empire, as is shown by his campaigns in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India. His conception was, therefore, an imperial one that had nothing in common with the Safavids’ idea of their realm, which was confined solely to Iranian lands. At any rate, Nādir’s outlook could be compared to that of Tīmūr. It might be thought that the successes he enjoyed in realising this conception would have caused the glory of the Safavids to fade somewhat in the eyes of the Persian people. But the situation soon changed. When, after the murder of Nādir, the princes of his family were systematically eliminated, one of his grandsons, Shāh Rukh by name (b. 1734), was spared. Now his mother was a daughter of Sultan Husain, and it was clearly the intention that a legitimate prince of Safavid descent should be available as puppet ruler in case renewed enthusiasm for the dynasty were to arise. At the time nobody could have foreseen that Shāh Rukh would rule over the

¹ F. Sümer, “Avşarlar’a dâir”; idem, Safevi devletinin kuruluşu, pp. 98–100, 143ff., 188–92.
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inheritance of Nādir Shāh, or what still remained of it, from 1161/1748 to 1210/1796, albeit with some interruptions.

In the conflicts that followed upon the fall of Nādir Shāh, Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad, curator of sacred relics (mutavalli) in Mashhad, was also involved. Like the above mentioned Mīrzā Sayyid Aḥmad, he was a son of Shah Sulaimān’s eldest daughter and was held in high regard. When, as the result of a mutiny, Shāh Rukh was deposed and blinded, he was the rebels’ choice as a successor. In 1163/1750 (or shortly before)1 he was elevated as shah in Mashhad with the style Sulaimān II. A move to Iṣfahān could not remotely be contemplated because quite different forces had in the meantime assumed effective control there. As it was, he fell victim to a conspiracy only a few weeks after his elevation to the throne, and Shāh Rukh, despite his blindness, returned to power in his place.

The concept of divine right, associated with the person of the shah in the thinking of the Safavids, cannot be ruled out as a significant factor in the stubborn survival of the dynasty. Developments in Iṣfahān and in central Persia generally at any rate suggest such an interpretation. Here, the downfall of Nādir Shāh left behind a vacuum into which streamed nomadic tribes from the Zagros mountains, e.g. Lurs, Bakhtiyārs, Kurds and also the Zands. Initially, the dominant figure in Iṣfahān was the Bakhtiyār leader ‘Alī Mardān Khān. He too seems to have regarded a Safavid figurehead as indispensable and found one in the person of the seventeen-year-old Prince Abū Turāb, the son of a marriage between Sayyid Murtaza and a daughter of Shah Sultān Husain. He was crowned in 1163/1750, receiving the name Ismā‘īl III.2 From then on ‘Alī Mardān himself bore the title of vakīl al-daula. It appears that the prince was not happy with the rôle assigned to him, but he had no other option.

In the battle of Chahār Maḥāl (spring 1165/1752), fought between the Bakhtiyār leader and Karīm Khān Zand, Ismā‘īl went over to the side of the Kurds with a section of the troops when he realised that his vakīl would be defeated. In subsequent conflicts between Karīm and

1 According to Lockhart, The Fall, appendix I, he reigned from Dec. 1749 to Jan. 1750. Perry, “The last Safavids”, pp. 65ff., says that he was crowned in Jan. 1750 and deposed and blinded in the following month.

2 Lockhart, The Fall, appendix I, says that Ismā‘īl III “ruled nominally in 1750 and again between 1752 and 1756”. Perry also speaks of an “unsuccessful pretender Sultān Husain II”. See, in addition to the sources he mentions, Mīrzā Mahdī Khān Āstārābādī, trans. T.H. Gadebusch, Geschichte des Nadir Schah (Greifswald, 1773), especially p. 423 (the only edition available to me).
Muḥammad Hasan Khān Qājār, he similarly chose to side with the stronger party, only to discover that the Qājār was eventually worsted. Handed over to Karim Khān, he was greeted with the words *shāh-i namak ba-ḥarām* ("ungrateful Shah") and interned in the fortress of Ābāda, half way between Shīrāz and Iṣfahān. Nevertheless, Karim was at first also content to be called vakīl al-daula. When in 1765 he opted for Shīrāz as capital city, he then changed his title to *vakīl al-raʿāyā* and occasionally *vakīl al-khāliq*, meaning roughly "Vice-regent of the people" and "Vice-regent of mankind" respectively. He would refuse to be addressed as "Shah", maintaining that the true shāh was in Ābāda and that he was merely his deputy (*kādkhudā*). When Ismāʿīl III passed away in 1187/1773, Karim Khān, who outlived him by eight years, neither installed a new phantom ruler nor made himself shāh.

The concept of the Safavid monarchy now ceased to exist. Although it had outlasted the fall of the Safavid empire by half a century, it had not been sufficiently strong to bring about a genuine restoration. The concept of monarchy as such was preserved in Iran. In the early 13th/late 18th century it was given a new lease of life by the Qajars, who were successfully to unite the fragmented country within the territorial boundaries of the Safavid empire, albeit without Safavid participation.

One of the most important reasons for the fall of the Safavids was their failure to groom successive members of the dynasty for the task of ruling. Of all people, it was Shah ‘Abbās I who abolished the original practice of assigning to the crown princes a large province in order to introduce them to the business of government, even if, until they attained their majority, they did nothing more than observe the governor at work and remained under the supervision of a tutor (*lālā*). ‘Abbās I was also responsible for the fatal policy of confining the princes to the harem, thus not only preventing them from learning the practice of government, but also barring them from all contact with the outside world, making it impossible for them to associate with the aristocracy of the realm and giving them no opportunity to come to terms with the conditions of life in general.

Naturally there were other reasons for the fall of the dynasty. Amongst the most significant may be cited the increasing inefficiency of central authority within a system organised on centralist lines; the concomitant strengthening of local authorities such as respected tribal...
leaders; the ruin of the economy, which has been covered in detail elsewhere in this volume, and especially the disintegration of the armed forces which ultimately caused the shah to succumb even to an enemy as insignificant as the Afghans. The disintegration of the religious foundations on which the empire had been built also had fatal consequences. And finally, within the ruling classes there was a marked decrease in the supply of able personalities.

Depressing though conditions in the country may have been at the time of the fall of the Safavids, they cannot be allowed to overshadow the achievements of the dynasty, which were 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 Twelver Shi'a, the monarchical system, the planning and architectural features of the urban centres, the centralised administration of the state, the alliance of the Shi'i ulama with the merchants of the bazaars, and the symbiosis of the Persian-speaking population with important non-Persian, especially Turkish-speaking, minorities.

A few of the most important factors - the peculiar antagonism between Persians and Turks, religious developments in so far as they were of political significance, and alterations in the monarchical system - will be considered in the following summary.

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From the 8th/14th to the 10th/16th century, three waves of returning Turkish emigrants gravitated from eastern Anatolia and northern Syria towards the highlands of Iran. Each of them belonged to a particular tribal confederation and the leaders of each devoted all their energies to the establishment of political and territorial sovereignty. All three confederations succeeded in this, but only the third of them, the Safavids, had lasting success. The first of these Turkmen confederations, the Qara Quyunlu, began their endeavours in the 8th/14th century, establishing a principality the capital of which eventually became the Persian metropolis Tabriz. In 872/1467, when at the height of their power, they were defeated in armed conflict by the rival Aq Quyunlu, who after their victory also transferred their capital to Tabriz. In 907/1501 the city then became the capital of the third confederation of Turkmen, the Safavids, after they had in turn overcome the Aq Quyunlu. Like their two
predecessors, the Safavids extended their domain to cover the whole of present-day Iran, an intervention in the fortunes of the country which proved of great significance for the whole development of Persia in the modern era.

How is one to explain these movements of population and the centuries-long interest of Turkish tribes in Iran, a country whose people were neither Turks nor Turkish speakers? True, the ancestors of the tribesmen in question had already been in Iran – during the course of the Oghuz migrations, mass movements of Turks into the Near East and Asia Minor – and come into contact with Iranian culture, some of them for the second time, since they had been exposed to the cultural influence of Iran in Central Asia even before their migration to the west. The state and court chancelleries of the confederations, as well as their chroniclers, used the Persian language, which in itself points to a certain degree of Iranicisation. This influence was, however, confined to a minute ruling class whose admiration for, and love of, Iran and its culture naturally cannot in themselves have triggered off migrations of whole tribes nor determined the particular direction of their movement. More important was the fact that, as a rule, the Türkmens in question had no access to the Ottoman army, any more than their leaders had to the Ottoman military aristocracy, which offered few real openings to them either before or after the battle of Ankara: The Qara Quyunlu leader Qara Yusuf was not even integrated into the Ottoman forces when he sought refuge with the Ottomans in flight from their mutual enemy Timur. At this time Ottoman power did not extend as far as eastern Anatolia, let alone Azarbājān or the Iranian highlands. In the power vacuum left behind after the death of Timur and the fall of his empire these areas offered good opportunities for politically motivated tribal leaders interested in establishing independent domains. To the broad masses of the nomads the prospects of rich spoils of war from the civilised country of Iran and extensive grazing grounds for their herds were unfailing attractions. Together with the restlessness and spirit of enterprise typical of nomadic life, they probably constituted sufficient motive for the eastward thrusts of Türkmen tribes and their federations, at any rate for the first two waves, those of the Qara Quyunlu and the Āq Quyunlu.

A quite different motive, however, underlay the third wave, that occurring under the Safavids. They were attracted by a şūfī order, the Ardabil Şafaviyya and by a religious concept which, at the end of the 9th/15th century or perhaps somewhat earlier, had developed from
vague beginnings in popular piety into a politico-religious ideology. This ideology aroused in its adherents enthusiasm, fanaticism and ultimately unconditional commitment – precisely those attitudes of mind associated with militant believers in Islam. The order’s centre in Ardabil had always attracted men of piety from near and far, including Türkmen tribesmen, long before the aspirations of its masters became unmistakeably political. But in the second half of the 9th/15th century the hitherto customary pilgrimages gave way to something quite different and the donations arriving in Ardabil at that time, far from being mere oblations as before, had probably been given with other purposes in mind.

What had changed? With the travels of Shaikh Junaid in Anatolia and Syria an intensive phase of Safavid propaganda had begun, and his marriage with the Bayindir princess, a sister of Uzun Hasan, had both increased his prestige and made him, to a certain extent, an acceptable ally of the Türkmen. The importance of these two facts for subsequent developments can scarcely be overestimated. On the one hand the order was intensifying contacts with the outside world; on the other it was effacing the dividing line between the two key national groupings in the region. As the descendants of a line of Gilani landowners, the Ardabil shaikhs were representatives of Persian agricultural life, and not Türkmen or nomads. Distinctions between nations of the kind familiar to us from later European nationalism were foreign to Islam and are scarcely applicable in this case. Yet the Persians and Turks incontestably sensed that they were essentially different, and this feeling frequently finds explicit expression in historical sources. Inter-marriage between the two, in so far as it occurred at all, was not common. Junaid’s marriage did not, however, remain the only example of a Tajik-Türkmen union, and these initial indications of a symbiosis might perhaps help to explain just why Turkish nomads should have chosen as their leader the Persian-born master of a religious order.¹ Be that as it may, the activities of Junaid to which we have referred were significant factors in the formation of the third great Türkmen federation.

A brief look at the early history of the Safavid order should help to clarify these developments. The motives behind the formation of the

fraternity were certainly religious in nature, but it also played a considerable rôle in economic and political life, even in the time of Shaikh Ṣafī, who gave the family its name. Landed property, revenues from religious foundations, donations and other sources of income brought him economic influence, and in politics he was able to establish wide-ranging contacts, even with one so eminent as the Mongol Īl-Khān. His descendants, amongst whom the position of master of the order was usually handed down from father to son, likewise went on to achieve distinction in public life. Without going into further detail, it can now be seen that Junaid’s intervention in politics did not represent a radically new departure. What was new was the way he, and afterwards his son and successor Shaikh Ḥāidār, set about militarising the order. The organisational measures and reforms they carried out must have been of lasting effect, for they remained in force until Ismā‘īl came to public prominence decades later, in Muḥarram 905/August 1499, this despite the fact that their two initiators, and after them Sulṭān ‘Alī, lost their lives on the battlefield – three masters of the order in the space of thirty-four years.

Recent research has thrown more light on these matters even if some questions still remain unanswered. We now have at least some notion of how the alliance between Ardabīl and its outposts worked, especially those in Anatolia and Syria that provided the main body of the forces which supported the Safavid seizure of power. Local cells existed under a headman, called a khalīfa. In individual cases, though not as a general rule, there was a supervisor, called a pīra, who was responsible for their coordination. At the head of the organisation was the khalīfat al-khulafā, who was also deputy of the master of the order (murshid-i kāmil). It has not yet been possible to ascertain exactly when this organisation was established, but it is known that there was a khalīfat al-khulafā as early as 1499, i.e. before Ismā‘īl’s accession to the throne. Once the decision to seize power had been taken, the organisation demonstrated its efficiency.

Assertions in some sources that the young Ismā‘īl personally made this decision cannot be accepted at face value. Although he became master of the order five years earlier in place of his brother Sulṭān ‘Alī, he was still merely twelve years old at the time of the march out of Gilān. Even if one assumes that he was abnormally gifted, it is still inconceivable that a boy of that age could have carried out the complex political and military planning and preparation that must have preceded the uprising.

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Who, if not Isma'īl, could have taken the momentous decision and begun to put the operation into effect? Some time ago, Soviet historians referred, if only in vague terms, to the existence of Türkmen confidential agents as advisers of Isma'īl.¹ More precise information has since come to light. They were in fact a group of leading Türkmen tribesmen, the ahl-i ikhtisās (“those endowed with a specific responsibility” or “those legally empowered to act”), a sort of “central committee” as they were recently described in modern terminology.² These were the people who sustained Isma'īl after the death of his brother, who made it possible for him to escape to Gīlān and kept him in hiding there, who took care of his education and ultimately persuaded him to march against the Āq Quyūnlū. In the light of this obviously convincing interpretation, the elaborate myth of Isma'īl the child prodigy becomes superfluous. Even so, the events associated with his public appearances remain extraordinary enough and messianic elements, evident even at the outset of his career, are now no longer mere surmise but have actually been proved to exist.³

The hundred and fifty years of the Safavid order that culminated in the accession to the throne of Shah Isma'īl not only have their place in the religious history of Islam but are from the outset of political significance. Although there had always been a certain influx of Türkmen into the order, it was not until the time of Shaikh Junaid that the strong links with Türkmen tribesmen were forged, that made for an increasingly tight-knit organisation. His years of propaganda in Anatolia, in Syria and, of course, also in Āzarbājān ultimately unleashed the third wave of Turkish emigrants returning to the Iranian uplands and created the conditions necessary for the formation of the third Türkmen federation, which may be called the “Safavid” or perhaps, more accurately, the Qizilbāsh federation. This migration persisted, as has recently emerged,⁴ right up to the death of Shah ‘Abbās I, a time when the Qizilbash had decades previously forfeited their privileged rôle.

Closely linked to these occurrences is a religious phenomenon the origins and earliest development of which, despite new information, have still not been adequately investigated. This is the decisive trans-

² Savory, “Some Reflections”.
³ Glassen, “Schah Isma'īl, ein Mahdī”.
⁴ Sümer, Saffet devletinin kuruluşu, p. 213.
formation due to the influence of the Shi'a. The fact that present-day Persian adherence to the Shi'a derives from the early Safavids, especially Shah Isma'īl I, might lead one in retrospect to conclude that a change of faith took place according to the principle *cuius regio eius religio*. But appearances are deceptive. In reality the transition was a lengthy and highly complex process, connected with the spread of certain Shi'i ideas via Folk Islam or Islamic popular piety – a process which cannot be discussed in detail here.

On his accession to the throne, Isma'īl did in fact proclaim Shi'ism the official religion, or state religion, as it might be called. As he extended his sphere of influence, he then proceeded to implement it throughout Persia with the aim, so it is claimed, of distinguishing Persia from the Ottoman empire. This may not, however, have been his sole intention or at all premeditated, but merely a more or less unconscious motive. What he proclaimed was ostensibly the Twelver Shi'a, a creed which certainly cannot be reconciled with his own personal religious views. These we know from what is a quite unimpeachable source of personal testimony, his own poems. In them he claims to be the reincarnation of 'Ali, an emanation of God and indeed God himself. Such notions have no place in the Shi'a, indeed they are sheer heresy from an orthodox Shi'i point of view, a fact which cannot be denied by arguing that they are perhaps merely the literary extravagances of a mystically impassioned youth, along the lines of such Sufi conceptions as *unio mystica*, union with God (*tahiđ*). In fact they were by no means merely obsessive mystical speculations but articles of faith which were widely held by the supporters of the Safavids and had powerful practical consequences. Isma'īl’s enthusiastic disciples (*muridān*) took them so seriously that they were firmly convinced of his invincibility. Imbued with such ideas, they marched into battle, going from triumph to triumph until the whole of Persia had been subjected to the sway of the Safavids. Admittedly the defeat at Chāldirān destroyed Isma'īl’s charisma, but even after this reverse he continued to be revered like a god by many of his subjects, and the same is also true, incidentally, of his son Ẓahmāsp.

The state founded by Isma'īl was a theocracy, comparable with the

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1 Lambton, “Quis custodiet custodes?”, *SI* vi (1956), 126. As against this view, it would be worth investigating whether the Ottomans, who were then on the brink of turning to Shi'ism, did not rather have rapid second thoughts when the Shi'a was raised to the level of state religion in Persia.
empire of the caliphs but based on Shi'i rather than on Sunnī principles. The distinction is important because it meant that Shi'i theories of the state and of succession, radically different from those of the Sunnīs, were to be authoritative. Instead of the elected caliph, the head of state was to be an imām descended from the Prophet Muḥammad, at any rate as long as such a person existed, i.e. until 260/873–4, the date of the disappearance of the Twelfth Imām. Subsequently the office passed to a vakīl whose entitlement did not depend on direct descent from the prophet, but rather on being nominated by a legitimate predecessor (nāṣṣ). This regulation remained in force until 329/940–1, when the vakīl Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Samarri passed away without having exercised his right to designate a successor. According to the doctrine of the Twelver Shi'a, from that point onwards until the return of the Mahdī – i.e. for the duration of the great ghaiba which still continues today – a given mujtahid was to be considered as the latter’s steward. The mujtahid is that singular dignitary who without being appointed, without either office or clearly defined responsibilities, has a commanding influence within the Shi'a community in matters of religious law and practice purely by virtue of his personal authority, based on his learning and his exemplary conduct. It must be emphasised that neither the vakīl nor the mujtahid is required to be a descendant of the Prophet.

Bearing in mind these considerations, how legitimate was the Safavids’ claim to sovereignty over Persia? Neither in Ismā'īl’s case nor in that of his father, grandfather or any other ancestor can there be any question of nāṣṣ, and indeed none of them claimed to have been designated ruler by a legitimate predecessor. Nor was any one of them a mujtahid. In these circumstances, how could they have become sovereigns? Can it really be the case that so fundamental a qualification for the post of steward of the imām was disregarded, perhaps, as has been suggested, on account of Safavid propaganda, deliberately designed to divert attention from it?1

To consider the matter of Ismā'īl’s accession in such a theoretical light is in all probability inappropriate. Because it was markedly religious in character it is of course tempting to judge it from a theological point of view. But this is surely a mistake. Obviously Ismā'īl was a personality with a pronounced sensitivity for things religious. For

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1 Savory, “The Emergence of the modern Persian State”, especially p. 20.
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some years he had received Shi'i religious instruction, but he had certainly not acquired any theological knowledge. Nor can one assume that those around him possessed any. Moreover, the Shi'a he caused to be proclaimed in Tabriz by no means accorded with the theology of the Twelver Shi'is. True, this neglect of theological considerations was not to last, but for the situation to change Shi'i theologians had to come from outside the country, a fact which in itself points to a certain paucity of theological knowledge at the outset of his reign. It would appear that the young Isma'il and his advisers were not even aware of the meaning of the concept of naṣṣ.1

Although initially the sharp distinctions of theological concepts may have been foreign to the young Isma'il's world of ideas, it by no means follows that he was totally ignorant of legitimist theories as such. He was probably just as familiar with general ideas of this kind as were his contemporaries. Whereas Sunnī theories of sovereignty allow for the recognition of a usurper, in Shi'i teaching the principle of legitimacy finds particularly strong expression. It is encountered also in popular thinking, a concrete example of which is the quasi-legendary tale in which the hidden Imām performs the investiture of Isma'il before the eyes of a dervish in a dream.2 Here the underlying idea of the necessity for the ruler to be designated in accordance with divine wish or approval is unmistakeable, even though the concept of naṣṣ is not mentioned. To that extent the tale does not necessarily contradict our supposition that Isma'il and his loyal supporters could scarcely have been familiar with so complex an idea.

Whether Isma'il, in emerging from Gilan, intended from the outset to win sovereignty over Iran remains debatable, however much subsequent reports suggest such an interpretation. Initially, of course, he had to establish himself as master of the Ardabil order. This may explain the military campaigns and predatory raids he carried out which were similar to those of his father and grandfather before him with their bands of ghāzīs. Like them, he was probably inspired by the ghāzī concept and perhaps by the idea of vendetta as well. The turning-point was probably not reached until the emergence of Shams al-Dīn Zakariyā Kujujī, a native of Tabriz who for many years had served the Āq Quyunlū as vizier. For this man, whom Isma'il made his own

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1 Glassen, "Schah Isma'il I und die Theologen", p. 264.
2 This story is analysed by Glassen, "Schah Isma'il, ein Mahdī".
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vizier, reported that his former masters were in a state of utter chaos.¹

At all events, his reports demonstrated just how favourable an
opportunity had arisen for seizing power. After all, Ismā'īl was the
grandson of Uzun Hasan. Why should he not ascend the throne of his
grandfather instead of his cousins? A clear indication that Safavid rule
was to represent a continuation of that of the Āq Quyunlū is the fact
that the Türkmen capital of Tabrīz was retained, whereas no mention
is made of Ardabīl, which might equally well have been chosen as the
royal residence. Further evidence of a desire to follow in the line of
Türkmen rulers is Ismā'īl’s assumption of the title Pādishāh-i Īrān, pre-
viously held by Uzun Hasan. At the same time it provides document-
ary proof of the Persian monarchs’ continued adherence to the con-
cept of divine right — khwarna, “regal majesty”, which under Islam was
changed to gīl Allāh, “the shadow of God [on earth]”.²

Ismā'īl’s assumption of power in Tabrīz in no way affected his
position as murshid-i kāmil, master of the order of the Şafaviyya. On
the contrary, this office — which was relevant only to members of the
order and not to his other subjects — had increased in significance as a
result of his military and political successes, for in addition to his
powers as sovereign it guaranteed him, by virtue of the pīr–murīd
relationship, the particular loyalty of his armed forces, the Qizilbāsh.
As we have seen, these were mostly Türkmen tribesmen from Anatolia,
Syria and Āzarbājān. Its importance was not to wane until the
defeat of Chāldirān later destroyed the messianic radiance and charisma
of the ruler, making him less sacrosanct in the eyes of his supporters.
Not surprisingly, the khilīfat al-khulāfa gained in influence, since he
had to deputise for the shah to a large extent in his duties as master of
the order. No outright confrontation between the two was to occur
until half a century later, in the reign of Shah Ismā'īl II, when members
of the order made no secret of the fact that they felt a greater obligation
to the khālīfa than to the monarch. This clear indication of the order’s
decline was followed by another confrontation, this time with ‘Abbās I
in 998/1589–90, which practically speaking put an end to its respected
status in the realm.

¹ Gruner, Die Geschichte Schah Ismā‘īls I. aus der Chronik “Takmilat-al-ahbār”, pp. 88–90, 125,
133; the extract she uses is printed in facsimile in Efendiev, Öbüzovanie.
² Most recently discussed by Savory, “The Şafavid State and Polity”, p. 184; cf. Roemer’s
comments ibid., p. 213, and Amin Banani in Savory, “The Emergence of the modern Persian
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More problematical than the two foundations of Safavid power we have discussed so far was its third basis, descent from the Prophet Muhammad, i.e. the sayyid status of the dynasty. With a touch of dry irony Aubin remarks that the Safavids did not become Sayyids until late on, probably just before the middle of the 9th/15th century. Since that other scion of the prophet, Sayyid Aḥmad Kasraḵān, made his violent attacks on the genealogy of the Safavids fifty years ago the arguments for and against their genuineness have constantly been the object of critical debate, but no clear-cut and definitive verdict has yet been reached. Without pursuing the argument further here, we may confine ourselves to the observation that in the absence of proof to the contrary there is no reason to doubt the young Ismā‘īl’s good faith with regard to his ancestry before he ascended the throne. That such a conviction cannot simply be dismissed as absurd is evident from the clearly unobjectionable testimony of a poet who, around the middle of the 8th/14th century, praises the then master of the Ardabîl order, Shaikh Ṣadr al-Dīn, as having emerged from the sea of the sayyids.

Since, according to the doctrine of the Twelver Shi‘a, what determines the legitimacy of a ruler is designation by a rightful predecessor (naṣṣ) and not so much his genealogy, no particular significance should really be attached to descent from ‘Alī. Whether he is a sayyid or not, the man who seizes power without either naṣṣ or ijtihād is a usurper. This is a theory which still has its supporters today. Whether it is in fact applicable to the case of Ismā‘īl is, however, open to discussion. If it were, one would be obliged to deny the legitimacy even of his subjective claim to assume power. In that case the great significance the Safavids attached to their descent from ‘Alī would matter only in terms of the respect it brought them, the great proximity to divine truth resulting from it and the justification of their claim to sinlessness (‘isma). This presupposes, however, that Ismā‘īl actually knew of the paramount importance of designation, which is probably the very opposite of the case. No evidence from the intellectual and spiritual

sphere in which he lived, familiar to us both from the chronicles and from his own divān, supports the assumption that he had so sublime a knowledge of Shi‘ī theory. In the long run, of course, with the increasingly dominant influence of theology, the Safavids must have discovered the existence of this doctrine. Exactly when they became acquainted with it remains to be investigated, but in this context it is not so important. Suffice it to say that no knowledge of it can be attributed to Ismā‘īl in the summer of 907/1501. The probability, rather, is that on the one hand he considered himself eligible to succeed by virtue of his descent from Uzun Hasan, and on the other hand he saw his ‘Alid lineage as giving him the advantage in legitimacy over his Āq Quyunlū cousins and other claimants.

These are the decisive criteria for judging whether Safavid rule was from the outset established on the basis of a fraudulent manoeuvre, the only mitigating circumstances for which would be the tender age of the dynasty’s founder and the unscrupulousness of his confidential advisers. Since Ismā‘īl’s character was not without its sinister traits – it is sufficient to recall the inconceivable cruelty with which he imposed his authority and his religious views – one is inclined to believe him capable of any other misdeed. Yet his ruthless treatment of genuine and potential adversaries has to be seen against the moral background of his time and his immediate environment, in which humanity, magnanimity and clemency could prove fatal and were of as little account as in the West during the same period. Clearly allowance has to be made for a different scale of moral values, although it would be going too far to assume a total absence of ethical norms.

These reflections do not, however, do full justice to Ismā‘īl’s seizure of power, because they leave out of account certain irrational factors that played a considerable rôle. A first-rate reliable source for these is, as has been mentioned, Khata‘ī’s divān, Khata‘ī being the pseudonym he used as a poet. This collection of poetry shows him to be a man of great religious ardour and strong mystical impulse, surely evidence of a centuries-old tradition of sufism prevalent in his family. This is certainly borne out by his first emergence as a public figure. The ecstatic fervour he exudes is striking and transmits itself in an even more intense form to his adherents. Recognisably messianic features find a lively echo in contemporary expectations of the return of the Mahdī. It no more occurs to this religious revivalist to enquire into the theological minutiae of Shi‘ī doctrine than to trouble himself with the details of
what is essentially an established theory of succession, even assuming that he was familiar with it. For him, descent from 'Alî, of which at this stage at any rate he may have been convinced, must have been the decisive factor in his entitlement to rule. If he knew anything at all about the concept of nass, one must suppose that he either equated or confused it with membership of the family of the Prophet (dâdman), in other words with descent from the Seventh Imam, Mûsâ al-Kâzîm, to which the Safavids laid claim. After all, when he ascended the throne, he had likewise not hesitated to make Shi'îsm the official religion of the state, in spite of the heretical notions expressed in his divân.

The young master of a religious order, of Iranian rural stock but with forebears in Türkmen and Byzantine dynasties, seizes power, with the aid of fervently religious Türkmens, in Iran, a Persian-speaking country. He establishes a theocracy and proclaims a new faith, the Twelver Shî'â, of which his knowledge is so superficial that he can equate it with his own quite personal belief which, precisely formulated, is a syncretism of metempsychotic Islam and Shamanism. Such is the situation at the outset of the Safavid empire, under the auspices of which Persia crosses the threshold of the modern era. Inevitably this start was associated with a plethora of complex political and religious problems. The dynasty was to have two and a half centuries in which to solve them. In view of the continued influence and effect of their achievements down to the present day, one can scarcely say that the Safavids and their subjects failed in this task, even if the disintegration and catastrophe that marked the end of their empire makes it impossible to speak of total success. It is probably more accurate to see the Safavid era as a significant phase in the struggle for their identity which the Persians had to undergo as they entered the modern age.

Let us now return to the main problems which concern us, the antagonism between Persians and Turks, the religious developments and the changes in the monarchical system that occurred in Persia during this period. Without doubt the foundation of the Safavid state would have been impossible without the military effectiveness of the Qizilbâsh. There were also Qizilbâsh of non-Turkish descent, for

1 Melikoff, "Le problème qizilbâš", p. 52, speaks of a Qizilbâsh variant of Shi'îsm in Anatolia which also existed, in a much more archaic form, in Iranian Azarbâijân. Cf. also the phenomena discussed by Aubin, "La politique religieuse des Safavides", p. 237.
example Persians and Kurds, but their numbers were small, probably even minute. The vast majority of the disciples who flocked to the Ardabîl order from the middle of the 9th/15th century onwards were members of nomadic Türkmen tribes or at times probably Türkmen peasants as well. Whether, as has been discussed above, these were ethnic groups which had no connection with the foregoing confederations, the Qarâ Quyûnlû and the Āq Quyûnlû, or whether on the contrary they comprised to a large extent their ethnic rump, is a question that need not concern us here. What is important is the fact that Ismâ‘îl’s state so clearly bore the stamp of his Türkmen adherents that at first it scarcely differed from the principalities which preceded it and has justifiably been described as a direct continuation of them.

Given the powerful impetus which animated the Qizilbash, their rise to political power ought in itself to have brought about a Turkicisation of Persia, but things took a different course. Even though fewer and fewer historians still maintain the view that the Safavid empire was a Persian national state, it is undeniably true that the state founded by Ismâ‘îl was from the outset exposed to strong Iranicising tendencies, which ultimately led to the integration of the Türkmens. At all events there can be no question of a Turkicisation of Iran at the hands of the Safavids. How is this to be explained?

To quote Minorsky, Türkmens and Persians, like oil and water, did not readily mix. According to him, the dualistic character of the population considerably affected both military and civil administration and can be seen, for example, in the dichotomy between Turkish “lords of the sword” and Persian “lords of the pen” which is mentioned in chronicles. His diagnosis is accurate. The worst manifestation of antagonism between Persians and Turks had been eradicated within a century, but it would be utterly mistaken to ascribe this success to a gradual convergence of the two peoples. Rather was it the result of a lengthy and bloody confrontation which made the first half of the

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1 Cf. Efendiev, “Le rôle des tribus”. An example is Ismâ‘îl I’s famous vakil, Najm-i īsâ. The Tâlis of north-west Persia referred to in Minorsky, Tadhkirat al-Mulûk, p. 14, as supporters of Ismâ‘îl, were probably Qizilbash too.
2 Sümêr, Safavî devletinin karûnu, p. 213.
3 Sümêr’s remark ibid. that Ismâ‘îl’s Türkmen helpers were “Anatolian Turks … completely distinct from the Qarâ Quyûnlû and Āq Quyûnlû confederations” cannot, of course, be taken to mean that elements belonging to these confederations were in no way involved in the foundation and rise of the Safavid empire. One has only to consider the Chepî, to whom he himself refers and who had been part of the Āq Quyûnlû confederation. Cf. Sohrweide, “Der Sieg der Safaviden”, p. 121; Babinger, “Der Islam in Kleinasiien”, pp. 65ff.; Efendiev, “Le rôle des tribus”.
4 Tadhkirat al-Mulûk, p. 188.
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Safavid era a time of ever recurring political crises both at home and abroad. These began immediately in the reign of Ismā'īl I with constantly abortive attempts to combat the omnipotence of the Qizilbāš generals by appointing an eminent Persian to the office of vakīl, the shah's deputy with regard to his political and military functions. They culminated in massive revolts on the part of the Qizilbāš during the reigns of Shah Ṭahmāsp I and Shah Muḥammad Khudābanda and in the murders of Queen Mahd-i 'Ūlyā (987/1579), mother of the subsequent Shah 'Abbas, and the Grand Vizier Mīrāzā Salmān Jābirī (991/1583).¹

The final chapter of these dramatic events saw the destruction of Türkmen supremacy by Shah ‘Abbas I in the course of a thorough reform of the armed forces carried out at the beginning of his reign. The Türkmen tribal aristocracy was stripped of all power, new types of weaponry were introduced and a regular corps established which can be regarded as the model and source of later efforts to create a standing army. One of the most significant consequences of the reform was the fact that members of the Georgian, Armenian and Circassian ethnic groups were now recruited to the armed forces and the highest offices of state. The reorganisation of the armed forces, completed by the end of the 10th/16th century, also involved administrative and financial reforms. Payment of troops from the funds of the royal household replaced the feudal system on which the army had previously been based. Increasing numbers of provincial governorships, until now in the hands of Türkmen military commanders, were transformed into crown lands, with the result that their levies and taxes accrued to the shah and could be used for the maintenance of the new contingents.

The destruction of Türkmen autonomy was not the only consequence of these measures. They also led to large-scale social change and restratification which still await closer investigation. Qizilbāš tribes continued to exist, and some of their leaders even retained their posts as governors, but all in all the reform of the army constituted an advance along the road towards the integration of the Türkmens with the Persian population. Even in the 12th/18th century, Türkmen tribes still supplied Persia with royal dynasties like the Qājārs whose rule

¹ See Savory, "The Significance of the Political Murder of Mīrāzā Salmān"; Roemer, Niedergang, passim.
came to an end a mere fifty years ago. Alliances between Turkish and Persian elements – the example of Ismā‘īl’s marriage was repeatedly followed by his successors – in the long run became a possibility for wider circles in the community. Even more important was the fact that just as Persian and other non-Turkish dignitaries could, from the end of the 16th century onwards, occupy military commands and offices of state, so Türkmen tribesmen were able in time to play an active part in various spheres of Persian cultural life. A few examples from the field of history alone will suffice: Şâdîqî Beg Afşâr and Hasan Rûmlû, both born shortly after 1530, and their younger contemporary, Iskandar Beg Turkmân, usually known as Iskandar Munshî, one of the greatest historians of Islamic Persia.

One final consequence of the reform of the army needs to be emphasised. The ensuing transformation into crown lands of provinces previously ruled by governors lasted for decades, indeed until the time of Shah ‘Abbâs II (1622-1666), and went hand in hand with a strong policy of centralisation, affecting the administration and other spheres of life. This was of enormous importance for subsequent developments, even up to the present day. Ultimately it put an end to the polycentric system, inherited from the days of Tîmûr, which might have been of significance, especially in terms of artistic and intellectual development. A further contributory factor may have been ‘Abbâs I’s decision to discontinue the practice of appointing the royal princes to governorships in particularly important provincial cities.

At the start of Safavid rule, religious fanaticism, as we have seen, played a far more prominent part than theological knowledge, which would have been useful in confrontations with established Sunnî theology. At that time Persia was a largely Sunnî country, with numerous theologians of that persuasion. In the circumstances, the advisers of the new shah, and presumably Ismā‘īl himself, must quickly have recognised the disadvantages of their theological ignorance. Significant evidence of this is the search – albeit not exactly successful – for specialist literature on the subject, which is mentioned in a chronicle of the period. Soon the situation changed as the call for Shî‘î theologians was answered. They came from areas in which there was a Shî‘î tradi-

1 Savory, "The qizilbâsh, education and the arts".
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tion, from Bahrain and from the Jabal ʿĀmila in southern Lebanon, and brought Safavid religious views, which bore the imprint partly of popular piety and partly of the extremist currents of the early period of the empire, into line with the official tenets of the Twelver Shi'a. The extent to which they became respected in Persia can be judged, for example, from the fact that Shah ʿAbbās the Great married the daughter of one of them, Shaikh Luṭf-Allāh Maisī from the Lebanese Mais al-Jabal, whose memory is kept alive this day in what is one of the gems of Persian architecture, the little mosque on the Maidān-i Shāh in Iṣfahān which is named after him.

However, not all the consequences of this increase in the influence of Shiʾī theology proved welcome to the Safavids. The concept of divine right, so important to the shah’s reputation, especially amongst large numbers of the common people, had no place in the doctrines of the Shiʾī theologians. They, of course, were familiar with the theory of nasṣ, according to which any representative of the departed Imām needed to be designated by a legitimate predecessor. They were only too aware that the Safavids had not been designated in this way and could not make up for this deficiency by claiming descent from the Prophet. The dynasty had thus usurped the power which rightfully belonged to the mujtahid of the time. At first the theologians probably acquiesced in this without too much difficulty since both they and, of course, the mujtahid enjoyed a better position under the Safavids than under any Sunnī régime, however magnanimous. As their activities gradually influenced the beliefs and religious practices of the population, and the official doctrines of the Twelver Shiʿa supplanted the heresy introduced by Ismāʿīl, so the shah lost the preeminent position he had held previously in religious matters. Eventually, by the end of the 11th/17th century, he retained only executive power, and the people showed a greater devotion to the mujtahid. There is therefore a certain parallel here with previously discussed developments within the Safavid order, in which the khalifat al-khulafāʾ was able to assert his superiority over the shah in his capacity as murshid-i kāmil. More than a century later, the Qājārs, who after decades of indecision finally resolved to grant the Shiʾī theologians (ʿulamāʾ) their former privileged status, thus hoping to give their rule the semblance of legitimacy, were also disappointed. The theologians could not change their fundamental beliefs. Monarchs, no matter whether they were Safavids or Qājārs, were and remained in their eyes usurpers. Instead of supporting those
to whom they owed a debt of gratitude, they contributed, in the case of both dynasties, to their downfall.

Shah ‘Abbās I may well have realised where things were leading. His ostentatious displays of religious devotion – from his visit to the shrine at Ardbīl to his pilgrimage to Mashhad – were primarily designed, although genuine religious motives cannot be ruled out, to establish a healthy relationship between monarchy and the Shi‘a. In vain: it fell to him not only to destroy the might of the Qizilbāsh; he was also the instigator of the most important measures of social discrimination against the ṣūfīs, which, according to the testimony of foreign travellers, had taken effect by the middle of the 11th/17th century. Within his own lifetime Shah ‘Abbās I was to witness the triumph in Persia of the representatives of Shi‘i orthodoxy, beginning with his famous contemporary Mīr Dāmād (d. 1630). The idea of the sanctity of the monarch had fallen into decay, the heretical beliefs of his great-grandfather had been banished and the Safavid order had declined.

One of the things modern-day Persia inherited from the Safavids had been the tradition of monarchy. Although initially it had taken the form of kingship by divine right, towards the end of the Safavid era the monarchy shed more and more of its supernatural aspects until ultimately it was completely devoid of them. Subsequent ruling dynasties held fast to the principle of monarchy but did not revive the idea of the shah as God incarnate. The Safavids, as we have seen, were obliged to pursue unconventional policies in order to achieve a reconciliation between the indigenous Iranians and the Türkmen their ancestors and they themselves had brought to the country, two ethnic groups with which they were, of course, linked by descent. Although they were unable to eradicate all antagonism between the two, they certainly managed to remove the most important obstacles to a reconciliation. Finally, it was as a result of their endeavours that Persia became a Shi‘i country, which it has remained to the present day. Two attempts to abolish the Shi‘a failed, the first under Shah Ismā‘īl II around 984/1576, the second a hundred and sixty years later under Nādir Shāh. The introduction of the Shi‘a to Iran is the most striking contribution of the Safavids to modern-day Persia because it is the factor that most clearly distinguishes the country from its neighbours.
**Table VI. The Safavids**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>907-930/1501-1524</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISMĀ‘ĪL I</td>
<td>907-929/1501-1524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TĀHMĀSP I</td>
<td>929-947/1524-1576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISMĀ‘ĪL II</td>
<td>947-984/1576-1577</td>
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<tr>
<td>MŪḤAMMAD KHUḌĀBANDA</td>
<td>984-997/1577-1587</td>
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<tr>
<td>'ABBĀS I</td>
<td>(989)995-1038/1581-1629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAFT I</td>
<td>1038-1052/1629-1642</td>
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<tr>
<td>'ABBĀS II</td>
<td>1052-1077/1642-1666</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1077(1078)-1105/1666(1668)-1694</td>
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<tr>
<td>SULTĀN HUSAIN</td>
<td>1105-1135/1694-1722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TĀHMĀSP II</td>
<td>1135-1144/1722-1732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'ABBĀS III</td>
<td>1144-1148/1732-1736</td>
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CHAPTER 6

THE SAFAVID ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

Before the principal phases in the development of the Safavid administrative system are discussed in detail, a brief outline of the Safavid administrative and social structure may be helpful. At the apex of this structure was the shah. Never was the Divine Right of Kings more fully developed than by the Safavid shahs. Shah Isma‘îl I, who established the Safavid dynasty in 907/1501-2, considered himself to be the living emanation of the godhead, the Shadow of God upon earth, and the representative of the Hidden Imâm by virtue of direct descent from the Seventh Imâm of the Twelver (Ithnâ‘ashariyya) Shî‘a, Mūsâ al-Kâzîm. It is axiomatic that such a ruler would command instant and unquestioning obedience from his subjects. Since the ruler was directly appointed by God, men were required to obey his commands whether just or unjust. Since the ruler, as the representative of the Hidden Imâm, was closer to the source of absolute truth than were other men, opposition to him was a sin. This led inevitably to an assumption of kingly infallibility. In other words, the Safavid shahs usurped the function which the Ithnâ‘asharî mujtâhîds had arrogated to themselves, namely, that of acting as the representative on earth of the Mahdî, the Ithnâ‘asharî messiah. The net result of these various Safavid theories of kingship was absolutism.\(^1\) In practice, however, there were well defined limits to this absolutism, even when the shah was a strong and capable ruler. Chardin declares emphatically that outside court circles there was no arbitrary exercise of power by the shah, and both Chardin and Malcolm assert that the awe in which the shah was held by the court and the nobility was the primary reason for the relative security and freedom from oppression enjoyed by the lower classes.

Minorsky has written: “It is a moot question how the idea of the State, if ever distinctly realised, was expressed in Safavid terminology”. Though the term dâulat was sometimes used as an abstract concept, he says, the nearest equivalent in a concrete sense was mamâlík-i mahrûsâ, the “divinely-protected dominions”.\(^2\) This rather extreme statement

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1 Lambton, “Quis custodiet custodes?”, *SI* vi (1916), 125ff.  
must now be modified. There is abundant evidence that, long before the end of the Safavid period, the concept of the territories under Safavid jurisdiction as a state had crystallised into a more concrete form. During the reign of Shah Sulaiman (1077–1105/1666–94), the term *mamlikat-i Trān* is found, but the historian Iskandar Beg Munshi, writing in 1021/1616–17, frequently uses terms of a similar nature with reference to the Safavid state at the time of Shah TIMERI (930–84/1524–76): *mulk-i Trān; mamālik-i Trān; ‘arsa-yi Trān* (the last of these perhaps more geographical than political). Even if Iskandar Beg Munshi’s use of these terms in regard to the reign of Shah Tahmāsp represents a case of prolepsis, it nevertheless indicates that, by the time of Shah ‘Abbās I at least, Safavid rule had led to the emergence of a more definite concept of a state operating within fairly well-defined boundaries. The meaning of *daulat*, now the ordinary word for state, gradually evolved from the rather abstract concept of the “bliss” or “felicity” of the ruler, the aura of beneficence which surrounded him and sheltered his subjects, and came to be used in a more concrete sense. Roemer has pointed out that the existence of Iran as an administrative entity was acknowledged by the Ottomans from the time of the establishment of the Safavid state. A letter to Shah Ismā‘īl I from the Ottoman sultan Bāyezīd II refers to him as *pādīshāh-i Trān*.¹

The administrative organisation of the Safavid state was divided both horizontally, along ethnic lines, and vertically, by Barthold’s classic “red thread”, namely, “the division of all the organs of administration into two main categories, the *dargāb* (palace) and *divān* (chancery)”.² On the ethnic plane, the Qizilbash, the Turkmen tribes which had been mainly responsible for bringing the Safavids to power, constituted the military aristocracy of the Safavid state, the “men of the sword” in traditional Islamic terms. The amirs, or chiefs of these tribes, were the military governors of most of the provinces of the Safavid empire during its early period. They filled the most important offices of state, and held a dominant position in political as well as in military affairs. This state of affairs they considered to be no more than their due in view of their services to the Safavid cause. Differing from

¹ Savory, “The Safavid State and Polity”, p. 214 for Roemer’s comments; *ibid.*, pp. 206–8, for further examples from Iskandar Munshi showing that Iran was viewed by that historian as a positive entity or state.
the Qizilbāš in race, language and culture were the Tājīks, or Persian elements of society, the descendants of those who had traditionally filled the ranks of the bureaucracy under a succession of alien Arab, Turkish, Mongol and Tartar rulers. From the Tājik elements were drawn not only the viziers and the numerous classes of officials in the royal secretariat, but also the accountants, the clerks, the tax-collectors and other officials of the financial administration, and, in general, the “men of the pen” of classical Islamic society. In addition, the majority of the members of the religious classes (‘ulamā): the mujtahids, the qādis, the sayyids, the khaṭībs, and other functionaries of the religious institution, were Persians. The few who were originally of Arab blood had become thoroughly assimilated in the course of time, and thought of themselves as Tājīks. The head of the religious institution, the šadr, was always a Persian.

The administrative organisation of the Safavid state remained fluid during the whole of the period prior to the accession of Shah ʿAbbas I (996/1588). Even when the actual administrative institutions assumed more rigid forms in the course of the administrative reorganisation carried out by ʿAbbas I, some lateral mobility still existed, and officials were able to cross the boundary between the religious institution and the political institution with comparative ease. During the early Safavid period, the dīvān, or mamālik, branch was predominant. From the time of Shah ʿAbbas I onwards, however, the power of that branch of the administration which was under the personal control of the ruler (in Safavid terminology: khaṣṣa) increased at the expense, and to the detriment, of the mamālik branch. Eventually (1077/1666–7), even the office of šadr was divided into a khaṣṣa and an ‘āmma (i.e., mamālik) branch.

The everyday business of the state was transacted by a council (dīvān; later: jāngī) of high-ranking amīrs (arkān-i daulat; umarā-yi ʿalījāb; etc.). The vizier (vaẓīr) was a member of this council. Later, other officials were nominated to it. They included an official known as the majlis-nivīs, or vaẓīr-a-nivīs, sometimes termed the vaẓīr-i chap, because he stood on the left of the shah, whereas the vizier proper stood on the shah’s right. This official had three functions: he was the official court historiographer; he was the shah’s private secretary; and, most important of all, he was a rapporteur to the shah.¹ In this last capacity he was

¹ Minorsky, Tadbkirat al-Muluk, pp. 121–2.
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in effect the head of a widespread intelligence system. The council of amīrs was presided over by the shah, or, in his absence, by the vakīl-i nafṣ-i nafṣ-i humāyūn (later, by the ʿtimād al-daula). The amīrs who were members of the council resided at court. If any of them held another office in addition, such as a provincial governorship, he would delegate that function to his son, or to another amīr from his own tribe.

The head of the bureaucracy was the vizier. He had at his command a large staff of viziers of lesser rank, secretaries, and other officials, each of whom was in charge of a branch of the vizier’s department, which was called the daftarkhānā-yi humāyūn, or royal secretariat. No letter of appointment to a post in the bureaucracy was valid without the vizier’s seal. The various branches of his department dealt with such matters as the authorisation of assignments on the revenue, grants, pensions and immunities of many different kinds; the payment of troops, and the keeping of muster-rolls and other military records; and the keeping of the archives.¹

Financial matters were ultimately the responsibility of the vizier, but the technical business of preparing and auditing the budget, assessing taxes (which were many and varied), and collecting the revenue – in short, the actual operation of the financial machine – was in the hands of a large staff of accountants, clerks, tax-collectors and financial agents under the control of the mustaufī al-mamālik, the comptroller of finance.² As the khāṣṣa side of the administration expanded, the office of istitāf-yi mamālik, like the ʿadār, was divided, and the financial business of the khāṣṣa branch was conducted by an official termed mustaufī-yi khāṣṣa. In the final analysis, however, the latter seems to have been inferior in rank to the mustaufī al-mamālik.

The administration of the royal household was carried on by a separate department, headed by the nāzir-i buyūtāt, or superintendent of the royal workshops (buyūtāt-i khāṣṣa-yi sharīfa), of which there were eventually about thirty-three.³ “The artisans in the Royal Workshops were organised in royal guilds”,⁴ which continued to provide some of the court’s needs. The royal workshops “made large profits for the ʿAṣfāvid Shahs; they not only produced goods such as textiles and rugs for the court, but also sent expensive silks and textiles to Europe and

¹ Ibid., pp. 44–6.
² Ibid., pp. 54–5.
³ Ibid., pp. 48–50. See further Keyvani, pp. 166ff.
⁴ Keyvani, p. 170.
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India, and paid the profits made in this way to the Shah".1 Each royal workshop was in the charge of a sahib-jam' and a mushrif, and the nazir-i buyütät had in addition many other subordinate officials who assisted him in the discharge of his multifarious duties. These included: the preparation of an estimate of the expenditure of the royal household (which was then submitted to the central vizier for approval); agreeing on the price of, and signing contracts for, foodstuffs and other goods supplied to the royal household; the supervision of the day-to-day expenditure of the various royal workshops; the payment of the workmen employed in the said workshops; the maintenance of all the buildings connected with the royal household; and the general supervision of the management of the royal stables and the arsenal. The administration of the harem (haram) and the private quarters of the shah did not come within the purview of the nazir-i buyütät, but constituted an entirely separate branch, the internal palace administration, staffed mainly by eunuchs. The latter were initially all black eunuchs, but from the time of Shah 'Abbās I a number of white eunuchs, Georgian ghulāms, were employed in the palace. Not all the staff of the internal palace administration were eunuchs. The exceptions were: the royal physician; the royal astrologer; the comptroller of assay and other officials of the royal mint; and the keepers of various seals. All the officials of the internal palace administration were known under the general title of muqarrab al-khadāqān. Officials whose duties lay at the entrance to, or outside, the harem and the private quarters of the shah, were classified as muqarrab al-hażrat. Included in this category were the officials of the department of the nazir-i buyütät, referred to above, and an extensive staff of doorkeepers, gentlemen-in-waiting, ushers, and the like.2

The administration of justice was a complicated affair. During the early Safavid period the šadr, as head of the religious institution, was ultimately responsible for the administration of canon law. The business of the courts, however, was in the hands of a number of other religious officials in addition to the šadr, including the qādī al-qudāt and the shaikh al-islām. As a result, there was a considerable degree of conflict of jurisdiction. At some point, not yet determined, a new post was created in an attempt to draw all these strands together under one overriding authority. The holder of this new office was termed

1 Ibid., p. 166.  2 Minorsky, Tadhkirat al-Muluk, pp. 355ff.

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the divan-begi. Although the sadr was supposed to possess superior authority in cases involving capital offences, the fact that such crimes were tried in the divan-begi's tribunal indicates that the supreme authority, in these as in other legal matters, in fact lay with the divan-begi. In addition, the divan-begi's court was the highest court of appeal. By the time of Phase Three (as defined below) of the development of Safavid administrative institutions, or possibly earlier, officials such as the mustaufi al-mamalik, the nazir-i buyūtāt, and the divan-begi, were classified as amirs of the highest rank, and consequently were admitted to membership of the council of amirs. By the end of the Safavid period, membership of this council stood at nineteen, but during the early period it was only about one-third of that size.

Safavid administrative institutions derived from two main sources: the administrative institutions of the Türkmens and the Timurids — rival dynasties which for a hundred years had disputed the succession to Timūr’s empire in Persia — and the basic süfī organisation of the Şafaviyya, the militant Shi‘ī order which brought about the establishment of the Safavid state in 907/1501. Thus in part the Safavids were the inheritors of a bureaucratic system which resembled the traditional bureaucracy of a Persian Muslim state. The existence of the tightly-knit süfī organisation of the Şafaviyya, however, constituted an essential point of difference between the Safavids and their predecessors. When Shah Ismā‘īl became the first ruler of the Safavid dynasty in 907/1501, he was faced with the problem of incorporating this süfī organisation in the administrative system of the Safavid state. In the event, the problem proved insuperable. As the Safavid administration system gradually evolved along more conventional lines, the remains of the original süfī organisation continued to exist as a system within a system, but as an organism devoid of any real function within the state.

There are three main phases in the development of Safavid administrative institutions: first, the period between the accession of Shah Ismā‘īl I and that of Shah ‘Abbās I (907–96/1501–88); second, the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I (996–1038/1588–1629); and third, the period from the accession of Shah Şafī to the overthrow of the Safavid dynasty (1038–1135/1629–1722). The first period was one of change and adjustment, during which the functions of the principal officers of state were not clearly defined. As a result, the powers of one official frequently clashed with those of another. During the second period, the administration of the Safavid state was reorganised on entirely new
bases by Shah 'Abbās I. The third period is one of gradual sclerosis and consequent decline.

At his accession, Shah Ismāʿīl, as mentioned above, was confronted by the problem of fusing very dissimilar elements into one harmonious administrative system. On the one hand were his Qizilbāsh followers, the sūfīs of the Safavid order who had brought him to power. These men accorded Shah Ismāʿīl adoration as a quasi-divine figure, since they regarded him as the Shadow of God upon earth and the representative of the Hidden Imām. He was also, as head of the Safavid order, their murshid, and they, as his murids, gave him unquestioning obedience. From the ranks of the Qizilbāsh were drawn the abl-i ikhtiṣāṣ, a small group of special staff officers, who maintained the Ṣafavīyya on an active service footing during the years that Ismāʿīl was in hiding in Gilān (899–905/1494–9). These officers included a lala ("tutor", "guardian"), an ḥādīl, a dādā, a khādīm and a khālīfāt al-khulāfā. On the other hand were the Persian bureaucrats and 'ulama, many of whom had held secular and religious posts respectively under the predecessors of the Safavids.

The task of combining a traditional mediaeval Muslim administrative system of the Persian type with what was in effect a theocratic organisation, would in any case have been a formidable one. It was rendered still more difficult by the fact that the elite of the Qizilbāsh fighting men were of Turkish stock, members of Türkmen tribes from eastern Anatolia and Syria, such as the Rūmlū, Dulghadīr, Takkālū, Ustājūlū, and Shāmlū. The mutual suspicion and hostility between the Turkish and Persian elements in the state split the Safavid administration irrevocably along ethnic lines.

What steps did Ismāʿīl take in his attempt to effect a synthesis of these disparate elements? In the first place, he created the new office of vakīl-i nafs-i nafis-i humayūn. This official was to be the viceroy of the shah and was to represent him both in his spiritual capacity (as murshid-i kāmil of the Ṣafaviyya) and his temporal capacity (as pādishāh). The powers of the vizier, traditionally the first minister and the head of the bureaucracy, were temporarily eclipsed by the overriding powers of this new official. The creation of this office clearly represented an attempt on the part of Ismāʿīl to bridge the gap between a theocratic form of govern-
ment and a bureaucratic one. It was only natural that the first incumbent should be one of the ahl-i ikhtiasās, referred to above, the Türkmen officer Ḥusain Beg Lālā Shamlū.

Secondly, Isma‘īl attempted through the office of ṣadr to forge a link between the political institution, which in the early Safavid period had a markedly military character and was dominated by the Türkmen aristocracy, and the religious institution, the Persian ‘ulamā. The office of ṣadr had been inherited from the administrative system of the Timurids and the Türkmen dynasties, but the scope and purpose of the office under the Safavids was quite different. The chief function of the Safavid ṣadr, who was, of course, always a Persian, was the imposition of doctrinal uniformity throughout the Safavid state, and, as a corollary, the extirpation of heresy. This goal had largely been achieved by the end of Isma‘īl’s reign in 930/1524. By establishing that the ṣadārāt was subordinate to the political institution, Isma‘īl hoped to prevent that separation of secular and religious powers which in fact occurred under his successors. The predominantly military character of the early Safavid state is again shown by the fact that the ṣadrs often held military rank and not infrequently military command. At the critical battle of Chaldirān in 920/1514, for instance, the entire Safavid centre was under the command of ṣadrs and other members of the religious classes.

The other principal offices of state during the early Safavid period were those of the amīr al-umarā, the qūrqūš-bāšī, and the vizier. The office of amīr al-umarā, or commander-in-chief of the Qizilbāš tribal forces, was considered by the Qizilbāš to be their prerogative. Apart from his military duties, this officer was one of the great amīrs of the supreme divān and played a considerable part in the affairs of state. Although, because of the predominantly military character of the Safavid state during this first phase, the terms “military” and “civil” cannot be used with precision in defining the functions of particular officials, it is clear that the amīr al-umarā was primarily a “military” officer who encroached on the prerogatives of the vizier and other top-ranking officials of the bureaucracy, to the extent permitted by the prevailing political situation. In the event that the shah was weak or a minor, the amīr al-umarā and the leading Qizilbāš amīrs assumed full control of the machinery of government. Another high-ranking military officer was the qūrqūš-bāšī, who later superseded the amīr al-umarā. During the early Safavid period, however, we hear little of
the qūrchi-bāšī, and his function, which was distinct from that of the amīr al-umarā, remains obscure. Finally, we have the vizier, whose powers were drastically diminished during the early Safavid period by the creation of the office of vakīl-i nafs-i nafīs-i humāyūn, by the interference of the amīr al-umarā in political affairs, and even by the activities of the ṣadr, who, by virtue of his special rōle in the Safavid administrative system, wielded greater power than did his predecessors in the Türkmen and Timurid administrations.

Almost from the start, however, there were indications that the Turco-Persian condominium was not working smoothly. It seems clear that Ismā‘īl made a mistake in allotting to one man, Ḥusain Beg Lālā Shāmlū, the two most important offices of state, that of vakīl-i nafs-i nafīs-i humāyūn and that of amīr al-umarā, so that too much power was concentrated in the hands of one individual. Ismā‘īl's realisation of this fact can be seen in his dismissal of Ḥusain Beg from the vikālat only six years after the establishment of the Safavid state. From then on Ismā‘īl, as a matter of deliberate policy, excluded the Qizilbāsh from the vikālat, and Ḥusain Beg was followed by a succession of five Persian vakīls between 913/1508 and 930/1524. But if Ismā‘īl thought to balance the power of a Persian vakīl against that of a Türkmen amīr al-umarā, he was mistaken again. There was an immediate and violent reaction on the part of the Qizilbāsh against the appointment of Persians to the vikālat. Of the five Persian vakīls mentioned above, two were murdered by the Qizilbāsh, a third met his death as the direct result of the hostility between himself and the Qizilbāsh, and the remaining two held office for only two years each.

The decisive defeat suffered by the Safavids at the hands of the Ottomans at Chaldirān in 920/1514 had far-reaching effects, not only on the character and behaviour of Ismā‘īl himself, but on his relations with the Qizilbāsh amīrs. This in turn affected the relative importance of the principal administrative offices, and the relations between the Persian and Turkish elements in the administration. Although the Qizilbāsh amīrs had suffered heavy losses at Chaldirān, Ismā‘īl’s virtual withdrawal from the conduct of both military and administrative affairs enabled the survivors to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the ruling institution, namely, the shah. An even more important effect of Chaldirān was the tacit assumption by the Qizilbāsh that their murshid’s reputation for infallibility and invincibility was now in ruins. From the time of Chaldirān onwards, the Qizilbāsh by their actions demonstrated incontrover-
tibly that they considered that they need no longer in practice accord the
shah the unquestioning obedience demanded of a murid by his murshid. More and more their behaviour resembled that of turbulent barons, and,
when Shah Isma'il I died in 930/1524 and was succeeded by Shah Tahmasp, who was only ten and a half years old, they took advantage of
the shah's youthfulness to assert their own power at the expense of the
monarch. In the course of their internecine struggles to determine which
tribe or coalition of tribes should rule the state, they showed so little
respect for the shah's person or position that there were armed clashes
between rival groups even in the presence of the shah, whose life was on
one occasion endangered. The fiction of their loyalty to their spiritual
director was maintained, however, and as late as 1629 Shah 'Abbas I was
still recognised in theory as the murshid-i kāmil.

By the end of the reign of Isma'il, important changes had taken place
in regard to three of the principal offices of state. First, after 920/1514,
the term vakil-i nafs-i nafis-i humayun was abandoned, and the vikālat
was referred to in terms more appropriate to the vizierate. There is no
doubt that this marks the failure of the attempt to create in the person
of the vakil-i nafs-i nafis-i humayun a superior authority who would be
able, because he was the alter ego of the shah both in his spiritual and in
his temporal capacity, to harmonise and co-ordinate the activities both
of the political institution and of the religious institution. It marks, fur-
ther, a decisive movement away from the concept of a theocratic state,
and towards that separation of religious and temporal powers which
became an accomplished fact under the later Safavids. Second, the task
of imposing doctrinal uniformity, which had been the justification for
the extraordinary powers wielded by the early Safavid sadrs, was virtu-
ally completed by the end of Isma'il's reign, and consequently there
was from then on a progressive decline in the authority of the sadr,
who had less and less influence in political matters. Third, Isma'il
himself had taken steps to curb the power of the amir al-umārā by
appointing to that office in 915/1509-10 an officer of inferior rank.
This proved effective, since the officer in question, although he held
the office for fifteen years, does not figure prominently in the events of
that period.

In 930/1524, the evolution of Safavid administrative institutions was
rudely interrupted when the Qizilbāsh amīrs seized control of the state
from the youthful Tahmāsp. For a period of ten years, different
Qizilbāsh tribes, ruling either separately or in alliance with others,
PHASE ONE (907-96/1501-88)

dominated the scene. The imposition of military government naturally had its effect on the Safavid administration. The Qizilbāš had always considered the vikālat to be their prerogative, and the new rulers of the state dubbed themselves vakīl (but not, be it noted, vakīl nafs-i nafls-i humāyūn) and/or amīr al-umarā. By vakīl they wished to indicate a rank superior to that of the vizier, who was a Persian and therefore, in their eyes, inferior and only fit to hold positions in the civil service. During this period, the fluidity of the administrative system was such that the sources often refer to two officials as vakīl simultaneously. This causes some confusion, but the military and political aspect of the vakīl’s function is always uppermost in the one, and the administrative and bureaucratic aspect is predominant in the other. The former is always a Türkmen and may also hold the office of amīr al-umarā. The latter is always a Persian, and his office may also be referred to as the vizierate or niẓārat-i dīvān-i ʿālī.

About 940/1533, Shah Ţahmāsp succeeded in imposing his authority on the Qizilbāš amīrs. The immediate effect of the shah’s assertion of himself as the ruling institution was the decline of the amīr al-umarā. In fact this officer disappears from the list of the officials of the central administration (although the title amīr al-umarā continued to be applied to the Qizilbāš military governors of important provinces, particularly in times of crisis, up to the end of the reign of Shah ʿAbbās I). His disappearance was accompanied by the rise of the qurčī-bāshī, a formerly subordinate officer, to the position of commander-in-chief of the Qizilbāš forces. Like the amīr al-umarā before him, the qurčī-bāshī exercised his authority in political as well as in military affairs. During a period of some forty years (955-95/1548-87) prior to the accession of Shah ʿAbbās I, the majority of the qurčī-bāshīs were drawn from the Afšār Türkmen tribe. In addition, a marked hereditary tendency became apparent in appointments to this office. At first sight, this might suggest that the power of the qurčī-bāshī was increasing. Although this may possibly be true in regard to individual qurčī-bāshīs, I would suggest that both these tendencies reflect a weakening of the position of the Qizilbāš as a whole within the state, and in their position relative to the shah. With the abandonment of the concept of the vakīl-i nafs-i nafls-i humāyūn, and the disappearance of the amīr al-umarā, the qurčī-bāshī had emerged as the most powerful military officer in the state. If the Qizilbāš were prepared to allow this office to be monopolised by one tribe, several conclusions may be drawn. First, during this
period the Qizilbash were not prepared to challenge the authority of the shah, a complete reversal of the position obtaining during the first decade of Ţahmāsp’s reign. Second, the Qizilbash tribes which had formerly been most prominent – the Shāmlū, the Ustajlū, the Takkalū and the Rūmlū – had either been weakened, or discredited, or both, by the decade of civil wars (930–40/1524–33). Thus the way had been opened for a hitherto less important tribe, the Afshār, to come to the fore. Third, the fact that the more powerful tribes acquiesced in the appointment of a succession of Afshārs to the office of qūrchī-bāshī again suggests that the shah’s will now prevailed.

Another significant trend during the reign of Ţahmāsp I (930–84/1524–76) was the continued decline in the power of the sadr. With the successful establishment of Ithnā‘asharī Shi‘ism as the “orthodox” form of Islam throughout the Safavid dominions, the special powers which had been conferred on the sadr at the inception of the Safavid state became less necessary. The sadrs ceased to play any significant part in political affairs and were largely preoccupied with routine religious matters, particularly the administration of the aqāf (bequests and endowments for pious purposes). Even their position as head of the religious institution was not secure, and there are certain portents during the latter part of Ţahmāsp’s reign of what became an established fact by the time of ‘Abbās I, namely the eclipse of the sadr by the powerful theologians known as mujtahids, who emerged as the exponents of Shi‘ī orthodoxy as it assumed more rigid doctrinal forms.

Finally, we may note the increased power and prestige of the vizier after the shah had brought the Qizilbash amirs to heel about 940/1533. During the preceding decade, the viziers had been mere tools in the hands of the “military” vakil/amīr al-umārā.

To sum up, we may recapitulate the following characteristics of the Safavid administrative system under Ţahmāsp I: a continued movement away from the theocratic form of government associated with Safavid origins; a greater separation of temporal and spiritual powers; an increase, after an initial setback, in the authority of the ruling institution (the shah) and a corresponding curtailment of the influence of the Qizilbash in political affairs. In the second half of Ţahmāsp’s reign, the introduction into the Safavid state of elements of different ethnic origin, namely Georgians and Circassians, also militated against the Qizilbash supremacy. This will be considered in the next section.
It was stated above that Shah 'Abbas the Great reorganised the Safavid state on entirely new bases. Why was it necessary to do this? Briefly, Shah 'Abbas was forced to take drastic action to preserve the fabric of the state. In 982/1574 Shah Tahmasp's physical powers began to fail, and this was the signal for the recrudescence of Qizilbash dissension. Tahmasp's death in 984/1576 was followed by more than a decade of disastrous government by Isma'il II and Muhammad Khudabanda, neither of whom was capable of effective rule. Various power groups took advantage of the situation to pursue their particular ends at the expense of the state, which was rent by their faction. The situation in 982/1574, however, differed from that obtaining in 932/1526 in one important respect. In 1526 the precarious balance between the Turkish and Persian elements in the administration had been upset when the Qizilbash seized control of the state, and the object of the civil wars which followed had been to decide which Qizilbash tribe, or tribal coalition, should dominate the rest. It was, so to speak, a domestic quarrel. In 1574 and subsequent years, however, the point at issue was whether the Qizilbash could maintain their privileged position in the state in the face of the threat posed by the new Georgian and Circassian elements which were beginning to oust them from administrative posts.

Where had these new elements come from? In the main, they were prisoners, or the offspring of prisoners, taken captive in four Caucasian campaigns fought by the Safavids between 947/1540-1 and 961/1553-4, and brought back to Persia. The rivalries of Georgian and Circassian women in the royal harem led to dynastic struggles based on ethnic considerations, of a type hitherto unknown in the Safavid state. Not all the Georgians were captives taken in battle. Some Georgian noblemen voluntarily entered Safavid service, and before the end of Tahmasp's reign we hear of one such who held a provincial governorship.

In addition to anarchy at home, Shah 'Abbas was faced at his accession by a war on two fronts against the arch-enemies of the Safavid state, the Ottomans and the Uzbeks. The former had taken advantage of Persia's internal weakness to occupy more Safavid territory in the north-west than ever before; the latter had overrun Khurasan in the north-east. 'Abbas had therefore to restore internal stability and then to expel the invaders from Persian soil.
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In order to do this, 'Abbās desperately needed troops on whose loyalty he could rely. After enduring more than a decade of Qizilbāsh plots, intrigue and treachery, he decided he could place no further trust in them. He therefore formed, from the ranks of the Georgians and Circassians referred to above, several regiments of a new standing army, owing allegiance only to himself, and paid direct from the royal treasury. These men were known as ghulāms, i.e. “slaves” of the shah. This decision meant that a new source of income had to be found for the royal treasury. Hitherto the Qizilbāsh troops, which had constituted the greater part of the Safavid armies, had been paid by their Türkmen chiefs, who formed the military aristocracy of the early Safavid state and held all the important provincial governorships. The provincial governments were largely alienated from the control of the central government, and the provincial governors held the land under their jurisdiction in the form of assignments of various types, known by the general term tīyāl. They consumed on the spot the greater part of the revenue which they derived from these assignments, and remitted only a small portion, in the form of dues of various kinds, to the central government. Even then these funds were not under the direct control of the shah but were administered by a special “ministry of state lands”. The shah’s main source of income was crown lands, the revenues from which were collected by the royal agents. The solution adopted by Shah 'Abbās was to increase the revenue remitted to the royal treasury by converting some mamālīk or “state” lands into khāṣṣa or crown lands. This policy was extended by his successors to such an extent that it became one of the principal causes of Safavid decline.1

Not all the ghulāms were trained for service in the newly-created regiments. Many were employed in the royal household and in the khāṣṣa administration in general. The latter necessarily expanded as it took over the administration of more and more state lands. Gradually the ghulāms made their presence felt at the higher levels of Safavid administration until they filled about one-fifth of the high administrative posts. Governorships of the khāṣṣa provinces went to ghulāms rather than to Qizilbāsh. Finally, in 1007/1598, a ghulām, Allāhvārdī Khān, was appointed commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The old dichotomy between Turk and Persian had been further complicated by

1 Lambton, Landlord and Peasant, pp. 107–9.
the emergence of the Caucasian elements as a powerful "third force". The numbers involved make it clear that Shah 'Abbas had, in fact, effected a social revolution. For instance, in 1013/1604 20,000 Armenians were enrolled in the ghulâms. In 1025/1616 130,000 Georgian prisoners were brought back to Persia. In addition, in order to weaken tribal cohesion and to break down rigid social patterns, 'Abbas moved large groups of Qizilbâsh tribesmen from one area to another and settled large groups of Caucasian immigrants in strategic areas.

As one would expect, this social revolution produced major changes in the administrative system. The abortive attempt by a Qizilbâsh amîr, at the beginning of the reign of Shah 'Abbas, to constitute himself an old-style vakîl represented the last bid by the Qizilbâsh to regain their former position of dominance in the administration. When Shah 'Abbas crushed this attempt, the title of vakîl lapsed, as to all intents and purposes did that of amîr al-umarâ in so far as it denoted an officer of the central administration. Instead of these titles, associated specifically with the period of Qizilbâsh supremacy, we find the commanders of two of the new regiments ranked among the six principal officers of state, namely the qullar-aqâsi and the tufangchi-aqâsi. The former commanded the regiment of qullar, or ghulâms, and the latter commanded the regiment of musketeers. The commander of the Qizilbâsh forces still retained the title of qurchi-bâshî, but since the Qizilbâsh constituted only one element of the Safavid army as reconstituted by Shah 'Abbas, his influence in military and political affairs was necessarily curtailed. At best, he was now primus inter pares. The greater centralisation of the administration under 'Abbas is reflected in the improved status of the vizier, the head of the bureaucracy and leader of the Persian elements in the administration. As a token of this new status, the vizier was commonly referred to as i'timâd al-daula ("trustey support of the state") or sadr-i a'zam ("exalted seat of honour"). The sadr (with whom the sadr-i a'zam should not be confused) remained the head of the religious institution, but his position, as we saw above, was increasingly challenged by the mujtahids. The sixth and last of the principal officers of the realigned administration was the isbik-aqâsi-bâshî-yi dîvân, who was naturally a Qizilbâsh amîr and whose duties as Grand Marshal were largely of a ceremonial nature.

The measure of the achievement of Shah 'Abbas I – and for this reason alone he is deservedly called "the Great" – is that the administrative system of the Safavid state, as reorganised by him, continued to
function for a century after his death, more or less under its own momentum because his successors, with the exception of 'Abbās II, were weak and incompetent rulers. One must point out, however, that the germs of future decay were present in this system. The pernicious effect of the extension of the khāṣṣa system has already been mentioned. The reasons why it was pernicious are not hard to seek. Granted that the old-style Qizilbāš military governors consumed the greater part of the provincial revenue in situ, and remitted little to the state coffers. But precisely because they enjoyed the use of this revenue it was in their own interests to maintain a flourishing economy in the area under their jurisdiction, and not so to tax the province that prosperity declined and the amount of revenue consequently decreased. In the khāṣṣa provinces, on the other hand, the taxes were farmed by the shah's agents or intendants, who had no material interest in the province in question, and whose sole concern was to increase the amount remitted to the royal treasury; by pleasing the shah in this way they ensured that they would retain their own jobs. The more rapacious the shah and his viziers, the harsher the burden of taxation imposed on the population of the khāṣṣa provinces. In contrast to the position obtaining in the mamālik provinces, little if any of the revenue collected from the khāṣṣa provinces was ever used to support the economy of those provinces.

The second major cause of subsequent decay was the growth of the haram system. In the first phase of Safavid development it had been the practice for the shah to appoint his sons to provincial governorships. While they were still minors, the royal princes were placed under the guardianship of a Qizilbāš amīr, termed lala (or, less commonly, atabeg, an echo of Saljūq practice). The lala was responsible for the moral and physical education of the prince committed to his charge, and the latter thus received a training which fitted him to take his place if need be, as ruler of the Safavid empire. In particular, he received first-hand training in the conduct of political and military affairs. The obvious danger inherent in this system was that an ambitious prince, or an overweening amīr, might seek to anticipate events by rebelling against the ruler. But when one observes the moral and physical degeneration of the dynasty which resulted from the practice, instituted by 'Abbās I, of confining the royal princes to the harem, and entrusting their training to the court eunuchs, one is bound to feel that the possibility of treachery was the lesser of two evils.
Almost a century elapsed between the death of Shah ‘Abbas I and the usurpation of the Safavid throne by the Afghans. It was a period of gradual but continuous decline. This decline was checked, but not stopped, by Shah ‘Abbās II (1052–77/1642–66). ‘Abbās II was a strong ruler, who asserted his authority as the ruling institution. During his reign, however, the policy of bringing state (mamālik) lands under the direct administration of the crown was not only continued but extended. It has already been pointed out that this policy contributed largely to Safavid decline. Apart from the harmful effects resulting from the impersonal and oppressive administration of the khās province by the shah’s intendants, the loss of each successive mamālik province meant a proportionate reduction in the number of the Qizilbāsh, and a consequent decline in Safavid military strength. Although the Georgian and other ghulām regiments were loyal to the shah – indeed, by the end of the 11th/17th century they were almost the only troops on whose loyalty he could rely as fighting men – they were not comparable to the Qizilbāsh. In many cases, too, the reduction in the Qizilbāsh strength was not made good by a corresponding increase in the numbers of the ghulāms.

During the first phase of Safavid administrative development, the whole administrative system had a pronounced military character, as we have seen, and bureaucrats who had no military function had little influence. In Phase Two, Shah ‘Abbās broke the power of the Qizilbāsh, and as a consequence of this, and of the increased centralization of government, the power of the bureaucracy grew. In Phase Three, the transformation was completed. The military arm was weakened to the point where it was no longer possible to check the incursions of marauding tribesmen from Baluchistān and Afghanistan. At the same time, the bureaucracy expanded in size, and became more rigid in its organisation and operation, until it resembled the complex and ponderous machine described in the Taḏḵirat al-mulūk, a manual of Safavid administration, unique of its kind among Persian historical records, completed about 1726. The vizier became the most powerful officer of state and, in conjunction with the court and the harem, exercised undue influence over a succession of weak and debauched shahs.

We have already noted, in Phase Two, an increasing tendency
THE SAFAVID ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

towards the separation of spiritual and temporal powers. In Phase Three, the separation between the political institution and the religious institution became complete. No longer subject to overriding political control, the religious classes tightened their grip on the nation, and their power reached its zenith during the reign of the two weakest Safavid shahs, Sulaimān and Sultan Husain, who together ruled for fifty-six years (1077–1135/1666–1722). Particularly during the reign of the latter, the mujtahids, who had only reluctantly conceded the claim of the Safavid shahs to be the representatives of the Hidden Imam, took advantage of the weakness of the political institution to reassert their independence of it and to regain their prerogative as the representatives of the Mahdī. Some sources even suggest a period of “direct religious rule by means of a concourse of mujtahids above the monarch”.¹ As E.G. Browne put it, the domination of the state by the “great ecclesiastics” “hardly made for either spiritual unity or national efficiency”.² The founder of the Safavid state, Ismāʾīl I, had recognised the potential dangers to the fabric of the state which would flow from unbridled intervention by the ‘ulamā in political, economic and military affairs. It was for this reason that he had made the sādr a political appointee, charged with ensuring that the religious classes remained subject to political direction. This system worked only as long as the shah maintained a strong hand at the helm. According to Sir John Malcolm, however, under Shah Sultān Ḥusain the “meekness and bigotry” of the shah “proved more destructive to his country than the vices of Soliman [Shah Sulaimān: 1077–1105/1666–1694]. So great was his pious zeal, that none but Moollahs [mullās], or holy Syuds [sayyids], were appointed to high stations ... High nobles gave place, with feelings of resentment, to eunuchs and priests; but their discontent was only vented in complaints.”³

Up to the time of Shah Sulaimān, the prosperous multicultural Safavid state, in which “strangers were encouraged and protected, and foreigners from every quarter of the globe, but particularly Europe, resorted to Persia”, continued to exist. Under Shah Sultān Ḥusain, however, the position of the Armenian merchants, whose commercial and financial expertise had contributed much to Safavid economic prosperity, declined greatly, since the shah was too weak to protect

² LHP iv, 120.
⁴ Ibid., p. 592.
PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

During the second half of the 17th century, the status of the šadr, an officer whose function was closely connected with the original concept of the Safavid state during Phase One, continued to decline. Shah Ābbās II had deliberately restricted the power of the šadr, and in 1077/1666–7 the šadārat had been divided into a khāṣṣa and an ‘āmma (mamālik) branch, a step which accurately reflected the current division of the Safavid administration and indicated that the šadr was no longer an official of the first importance. From the beginning of the reign of Sultān Husain (1105/1694) at least, and possibly earlier, the supreme religious official was the mulla-bashi. The šadrs, however, continued to be primarily responsible for the administration of the auqāf and also assisted the qādīs in various juridical functions.

PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

The provincial governments were, to a large extent, replicas in miniature of the central government. Some of the principal officers of the central government had their counterparts at the courts of provincial governors. Foremost among these were the vizier and the šadr. The provincial viziers and šadrs were, in general, appointed by the shah and not by the central vizier and central šadr respectively. If the provincial governor had more than one province under his jurisdiction, or if his province was of exceptional importance, the vizier who was in attendance at the seat of the provincial governor frequently controlled the activities of other viziers, subordinate to himself, who were resident at other large provincial centres. To denote the superior rank of the former, the term vazīr-i kull was used.

In appointing viziers and šadrs to the provincial administrations, the Safavids were once again following the practice of their predecessors, the Timurids, Qarā Quyunlu and Aq Quyunlu. Documentary evidence points to the continuity, at many levels, of the Persian bureaucratic tradition under a succession of Mongol and Türkmen rulers. In some instances the vazīr-i kull was hardly less influential than the vizier who was the organ of the central administration. In many cases the provincial vizierate was the stepping-stone to appointment to the central vizierate. Many families had a tradition of public service going back

1 Ibid., p. 627.  2 Minorsky, Tadbkirat al-Mulik, p. 110.

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for several generations, but the facility and frequency with which provincial viziers were transferred from one part of the country to another militated against the growth of family dynasties or bureaucratic empires in the provinces.

The provincial šadr controlled the religious institution in his province, just as the central šadr was the head of the religious institution overall. He had authority over all members of the religious classes, and was responsible for the administration of the auqāf and the conduct of all transactions connected with them. During Phase One of the development of the Safavid administrative system, the provincial šadr, again like his central counterpart, not infrequently held the military rank of amīr. That this was no token appointment is shown by the fact that as late as 955/1548 we have evidence of a provincial šadr being in command of an actual military operation. Such was the predominantly military character of the Safavid administration during this first phase that not only šadrs, but also qāḍīs and other members of the religious classes, took part in military operations, in particular the defence of cities. In such cases, when qāḍīs moved to protect the lives and property of the citizenry, they were fulfilling the traditional rôle of the Persian ʿulamāʾ as organisers of popular action. The lack of any clear boundary, during this first phase, between “political” and “religious”, between “civil” and “military”, is even more marked at the provincial level than in the central administration. Qāḍīs were frequently appointed to the vizierate and vice versa, and members of the religious classes often encroached on the preserves of temporal officials in regard to financial matters and the conduct of the business of the divān.

The remaining principal officers of state had no counterparts at the provincial government level. For instance, the amīr al-umārāʾi, or office of the supreme commander of the Qizilbāsh forces, had no provincial equivalent. The regional commanders of Qizilbāsh troops were, in the mamālik provinces, the military governors of the provinces concerned. These governors were termed indifferently amīr, ĥākim, and beglerbeg (-ē) (more rarely, dārūgha or tiyūldēr). In times of crisis, however, the governors of the strategically important frontier provinces – in particular Āzarbājān, Shāhān and Khūrāsān – were accorded the title of amīr al-umārā, in recognition of the fact that the military aspect of their office was all-important at such times.

From the time of ʿAbbās I onwards, an increasing number of mamālik provinces were converted to khāṣṣa and brought under the direct
CONCLUSION

administration of the shah. The administration of the khāṣṣa provinces was carried on in times of peace by viziers, drawn from the ranks of the ghulāms. If military officers were needed in the khāṣṣa provinces, they were furnished by one of the ghulām regiments. The number of provincial governors who were drawn from the ranks of the Qizilbāšh tribes was drastically reduced. As a result, the title of amīr al-umara became increasingly uncommon, and in fact is rarely, if ever, used after the death of ‘Abbās I (1038/1629).

We saw previously that during the reign of Shah Taḥmāsp the qūrcī-bāshī replaced the amīr al-umara as the principal military officer of the central administration. As had formerly been the case with the amīr al-umara, the qūrcī-bāshī did not have an equivalent in the provincial administrations, and for the same reason. When the term qūrcī-bāshī occurs in connection with provincial government, it denotes the commander of a local detachment of qūrcīs, or the commander of a small bodyguard of qūrcīs attached to the person of a royal prince, or has some other special connotation.

Finally, the vakīl-i nafs-i nafīs-i humāyūn (as he originally was), or the vakīl-i sultāna or plain vakīl (as he later became), naturally had no provincial counterpart. When the term vakīl occurs in the sources in relation to provincial government, it is used simply in the sense of “agent”, “deputy”, “representative”. Not infrequently it is used to denote an official who seems to be subordinate to the provincial vizier.

CONCLUSION

The Safavids went down to defeat ultimately because they failed to reconcile the irreconcilable: Turk and Persian; tribal organisation and urbanism; the pastoral-nomadic tradition and the sedentary life of the agriculturalist; revolutionary sufism and dogmatic Shi‘ism; theocracy and the complex bureaucracy required by an expanding empire; the “men of the sword” and the “men of the pen”; the claim of the mujtahids to constitute the only legitimate form of government in an Ithnā‘asharī Shī‘ī state, and the imperatives of a multi-cultural state. The measure of their success is that they had a greater degree of success in dealing with these problems than had the Saljuqs, the Mongols and the Türkmen who had preceded them. The dynasties which followed them – the Afghans, Afshārs, Qājārs and Pahlavīs, all of whom were confronted by at least some of the same problems – were also to
prove less successful in finding solutions to them. The Safavid administrative machine, with its complex system of checks and balances, worked with surprising efficiency, except when there was lack of effective direction from the centre. Life and property were secure; travel was safe; trade and commerce flourished; minorities were tolerated and protected; formidable foreign foes were kept at bay. Alone of all the countries of the Middle East, Iran resisted the most efficient military machine of its time, that of the Ottoman empire. The contrast with the position in the second half of the 18th century and the 19th century, after the breakdown of the Safavid administrative system, is startling: absence of effective central control; total lack of internal security; depopulation of the cities and economic decline; the unrestrained play of centrifugal forces; and the permanent annexation of Iranian territory by enemies in the north-west, north-east and east. In order to make a proper assessment of the merits and defects of the Safavid administrative system, one must take into account the ephemeral nature of the Türkmen dynasties which preceded it, and the chaos which followed its collapse. Despite the internal stresses and external pressures to which the system was subject, it gave Iran two and a quarter centuries of stable and prosperous government.
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The abbreviations used in the bibliographies and the footnotes are given below.

AA
Arts Asiatiques (Paris)

AAWL
Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur (Mainz)

Acta Iranica
Acta Iranica (Encyclopédie permanente des études iraniennes) (Tehran-Liège-Leiden)

Acta Orientalia
Acta Orientalia (ediderunt Societates Orientales Batava Danica Norvegica Svedica) (Copenhagen)

Acta Orientalia Hung.
Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae (Budapest)

AI
Ars Islamica = Ars Orientalis (Ann Arbor, Mich.)

AI(U)ON
Annali. Istituto (Universitare) Orientale di Napoli

AKM
Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes (Leipzig)

AMI
Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran (old series 9 vols 1929–38; new series 1968–) (Berlin)

AN
Akademija Nauk

Anatolia
Anatolia (Revue annuelle d’archéologie) (Ankara)

Anatolica
Anatolica (Annuaire international pour les civilisations de l’Asie antérieure) (Leiden)

AO
Ars Orientalis (continuation of Ars Islamica)

AOAW
Anzeiger der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Phil. Hist. Klasse) (Vienna)

Arabica
Arabica (Revue d'études arabes) (Leiden)

Armagbān
Armaghān (a monthly literary and historical magazine), 47 vols (Tehran 1298/1919–1357/1978)

ArOr
Archiv Orientální (quarterly journal of African, Asian and Latin American Studies) (Prague)

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Ayanda
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BAIPAA

Belleten
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BEO
Bulletin d'Études Orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas (Damascus)

BIFAO
Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (Cairo)

BMQ
British Museum Quarterly (London)

BSO(A)S
Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies (University of London)
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<td>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</td>
<td>Byzantion (Revue Internationale des Études Byzantines) (Leipzig)</td>
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<td>Byzantion</td>
<td>Byzantion (Brussels)</td>
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<td>CAJ</td>
<td>Central Asiatic Journal (The Hague – Wiesbaden)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHI</td>
<td>The Cambridge History of Iran</td>
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<td>DAN</td>
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<td>EI</td>
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<td>EI2</td>
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<td>EV</td>
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<td>FIS</td>
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<td>GETOV</td>
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<td>Izvestiya Akademii Nauk</td>
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<td>IC</td>
<td>Islamic Culture (Hyderabad)</td>
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<td>ICO</td>
<td>International Congress of Orientalists</td>
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<td>IDT</td>
<td>Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tīhhrān</td>
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<td>IJMES</td>
<td>International Journal of Middle East Studies (Los Angeles–Cambridge)</td>
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IQ The Islamic Quarterly (London)
Iran Iran (Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies) (London)
Iranica = (Journal of Iranian studies) (Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Tehran University)
IrSt Iranian Studies
IS Islamic Studies (Denver, Colorado)
Istis (International review devoted to the history of science) (Cambridge, Mass., etc.)
Islamica Islamica (dirāsāt islāmiyya) (Cairo)
Ist. Ans. Islam Ansiklopedisi
IU Islamkundliche Untersuchungen (Freiburg)
JA Journal Asiatique (Paris)
J.AH Journal of Asian History (Wiesbaden)
J.AOS Journal of the American Oriental Society (New York)
J.ASB Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Calcutta)
J.ASP Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan (Dacca)
JBORS Journal of the Bihar (and Orissa) Research Society (Patna)
JESHO Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient (Leiden)
JNES Journal of Near Eastern Studies (Chicago)
JPHS Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society (Karachi)
JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (London)
JRCAS Asian Affairs = Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society (London)
JRCI Journal of the Regional Cultural Institute
KO Kunst des Orients (Wiesbaden)
KSIIMK Kratkie soobshcheniya o dokladakh i polevykh issledovaniyakh Instituta istorii material'noi kultury AN SSSR
KSINA Kratkie soobshcheniya Instituta Narodov Azii
KSIV Kratkie soobshcheniya Instituta Vostokovedeniya AN SSSR
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MAIS Mémoires de l’Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. Petersburg
MII Le Monde Iranien et l’Islam
MM.AB The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin (New York)
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MSOS Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen, 3 vols (Berlin, 1898–1915)
MW The Muslim World (Hartford, Connecticut)
NAA Narody Azii i Afriki (Moscow)
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TA VO
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CHAPTER 6


Valuable information on the Safavid administrative system may be gleaned from the immensely rich and important European travel literature relating to Iran during the Safavid period. A useful summary of the available editions of the European travellers to Safavid Iran is contained in:


*Minorsky, Tadhkira al-Muluk, pp. 6–9, has brief assessments of the value of the main travel accounts.

Few Iranian scholars have devoted much attention to Safavid administrative institutions. An exception is:

*Falsafi, Zindaganî.

Works which contain a substantial amount of material on Safavid administrative institutions:


*Busse. Untersuchungen.
*Chardin.

EP:

"Därügha" (A. K. S. Lambton);
"Ghulām, ii. Persia" (C. E. Bosworth);
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